

World War I Engineers with the AEF

Until 1916 the U.S. Army had only three engineer battalions. The First Battalion consisted of Companies, A, B, C, and D, the Second Battalion of Companies, E, F, G, and H and the Third Battalion Companies I, K, L, and M. The National Defense Act of June 3, 1916, authorized many new units.

Insignia indicate this growth in the Corps of Engineers. Mid 1916 saw the initial organizations of engineer regiments and a limited number of Engineer Trains and mounted engineer battalions (squadrons). In the summer of 1916 the 1st Battalion was reorganized as the new 1st Regiment. The 2d Battalion became the new 2d Engineers Regiment while the 3d Battalion became the 3d Regiment. As a result of this expansion of the Corps and these 1916 redesignations, new enlisted collar insignia were made.

For the first seven regiments both the regimental number and company letter were wedged in at the top of the enlisted disk. Not all the numbers and letters were the same size, as shown by these two examples. Because of World War I many early regiments were sapper regiments, which means they were organized to be part of a division.



America's entry into World War I had a profound impact on the Corps of Engineers. Not since the Civil War had the army constructed and maintained railroads, run trains and repair engines and cars. In time many of these units were transferred to the newly created Transportation Corps. The army had to add many other new tasks to portfolio and a disproportionate number fell to the Corps: Build highways, create and man searchlight units, set up sound ranging units to locate enemy artillery, establish a regiment that later became the basis for the Chemical Warfare Service (now the Chemical Corps), and organize truck transportation regiments that later became the Motor Transport Corps. Many special engineer units were sent overseas including forestry regiments and battalions, water supply, general construction, camouflage, and a myriad of other skills that included two stevedore battalions.

The 10th through the 69th Engineer regiments were primarily WWI specialist regiments, which resulted in varied structures. Some included many battalions and often separate, specialized companies. The 10th Engineers was the next regiment organized after the 7th Regiment. Initially regiments with two digit designations had the number above the central turret, and the company letter on the castle door. An example insignia for the 16th Engineers, a railway construction regiment, is at the right.



Another specialized regiment is the 23d Engineers. It was the only highway regiment that repaired and built roads for the AEF in France. The unit was organized at Camp Meade, MD, in September 1917. One battalion arrived in France in mid-February 1918 and the rest in April. Insignia for units numbered in the 20s have a smaller castle. This smaller central insignia allows placement of the appropriate numbers and letters. A collar disk for Company H, 23d Engineers, is a sample of insignia worn by non standard organization. Company H did actual construction work, but Company A designed and planned road work. Its 260 men included 40% who had graduated from a technical college, 30% who had other college degrees, and 20% with at least 4 years of practical highway experience. Company A recruited men who answered "No Pick and Shovel" ads.



Two other interesting disks for the 23d Engineers are for a Wagon Company and a Truck Company. Like the other 23d Engineer insignia, the castle is smaller than on most enlisted engineer insignia. The 23d Engineers consisted of four battalions (each battalion had only three companies, so lettered regimental companies were A through M, minus J), plus 10 truck companies and 5 wagon companies. Each truck or wagon insignia has a company number in front of the W or T. The 5th Wagon Company had a 5W (as shown at the end of this article) for example. As it turns out, many engineer regiments had tailored organizations. The 22d had 5 battalions. The 21st included companies N and O. By the end of World War I, just 2-1/2 years after the engineers started to expand, over 160 engineer units served in France as part of the AEF.



The following table summarizes many engineer units sent to France.

Engineer Units in AEF

Unit.	Comment	Unit.	Comment	Unit	Comment
1 Rgt	Sappers, 1st Div	48Rgt	Railway maintenance. To Transportation Corps Sep 18	122Rgt	Railway construction
2 Rgt	Sapper for 2d Div, then 36 th Div then 3d Div	49Rgt		126Rgt	General construction
4 Rgt	4 th Div sappers	50Rgt		127Rgt	General construction
5 Rgt	Sappers 7 th Div	51Rgt	Support railway opns. To TC	128Rgt	General construction
6 Rgt	With British then 3d Div	52Rgt	Standard gage operations. To Transportation Corps Sep 1918.	129Rgt	General construction
7 Rgt	S.O.S. construction then sappers for 5 th Div	53Rgt		130Rgt	General construction
10 Rgt	Forestry, then absorbed by 20 th Regt	54Rgt		131Rgt	General construction
11 th	Std gauge railway	55Rgt	Railway construction.	132Rgt	Road work
12 Rgt	Std gauge railway & construction	56Rgt	Initially 1 st Div Engr trains. Became searchlight unit stationed throughout France	134Rgt	Road maintenance
13 Rgt	Std Gauge & operations	57Rgt	Inland waterways. To TC	135Rgt	Road work
14 Rgt	Lt railway construction & operations	58Rgt	Railway operations. To Trans Corps, Sep 1918.	136Rgt	Water supply
15 Rgt	Railway construction	59Rgt	Organized in France. To TC	137Rgt	Electrical & mechanical
16 Rgt	Railway construction	60Rgt	Railway operations. To Transportation Corps, Sep 1918.	301Rgt	Sappers, 76 th Div
17 Rgt	Railway construction	61Rgt		302Rgt	Sappers, 77 th Div
18 Rgt	Railway construction	62Rgt		303Rgt	Sappers 78 th Div
19 Rgt	Railway shop	63Rgt		304Rgt	Sappers, 79 th Div
20 Rgt	Forestry. Eventually had 14 Bn HQ and 49 companies	64Rgt	Organized in France. To Transportation Corps, September 1918.	305Rgt	Sappers, 80 th Div
21 Rgt	Lt Railway construction	65Rgt		306Rgt	Sappers, 81 st Div
22 Rgt	Light Railway operations	66Rgt	Railway opns. To TC	307Rgt	Sappers, 82 th Div
23 Rgt	Highway (see write up, pg 1)	67Rgt	Organized in France. To TC	308Rgt	Sappers. 83d Div
24 Rgt	Shop & supply	68Rgt	Railway opns. To Transportation Corps	309Rgt	Sappers. 84 th Div
25 Rgt	General construction	69Rgt		310Rgt	Sappers. 85 th Div
26 Rgt	Water supply	72Rgt	General & RR construction	311Rgt	Sappers, 86 th Div
27 Rgt	Mining	74Rgt	Flash & sound ranging	312Rgt	Sappers, 87 th Div
28 Rgt	Quarry	81Rgt	General RR work. To TC	313Rgt	Sappers, 88 th Div
29 Rgt	Survey & printing. Five cos. did flash & sound ranging	101Rgt	Sappers for 26 th Div	314Rgt	Sappers, 89 th Div
30 Rgt	1 st Gas Regt, on Aug 8, 1918	102Rgt	Sappers 27 th Div	315Rgt	Sappers, 90 th Div
31 st Rgt	Std Gauge railway opns	103Rgt	Sappers 28 th Div	316Rgt	Sapper, 91 st Div
32 Rgt	Railway construction	104Rgt	Sappers 29th Div	317Rgt	Sapper, 92d Div
33 Rgt	General construction	105Rgt	Sappers 30 th Div	318Rgt	Sapper, 6 th Div
34 Rgt	Shop & supply	106Rgt	Sapper 31 st Div	319Rgt	Sapper 8 th Div
35 Rgt	Railway opns. Transferred to Transportation Corps Sep 18	107Rgt	Sappers, 32d Div	442 to 463Rgts	Operated with & transferred to Motor Transport Corps.
36 Rgt		108Rgt	Sappers, 33d Div	501 & 502Svc Bns	General construction
37 Rgt	Electrical and mechanical	109Rgt	Sappers. 34 Div	503 Svc Bn	Forestry. Later to 20 th Engineers.
38 Rgt	Elect installatio& crane opns	110Rgt	Sappers 35 th Div	601Rgt	

	To Trans Corps Sep 1918				
39 Rgt	Railway opns. Transferred to Transportation Corps Sep 18	111Rgt	Sappers, 36 th Div	602Rgt	Each had only 1 st Bn active and functioned as Corps troops
40 Rgt	Camouflage	112Rgt	Sappers, 37 th Div	603Rgt	
41 Bn	Auxiliary Forestry Bns .	113Rgt	Sappers. 38 th Div	604Rgt	
42 Bn	Merged with 20th Regt Oct 1918	114Rgt	Sappers. Construction	605Rgt	
43 Bn		115Rgt	Sappers, 40 th Div	606Rgt	
44 Rgt	Attached to Transportation Corps to do construction	116Rgt	Sappers. 41 st Div. Became engineer replacement unit.	701 st Bn	Stevedore
45 Rgt	Railway maintenance. To Transportation Corps Sep 18	117Rgt	Sappers, 42d Div	702d Bn	Stevedore
46 Rgt		118Rgt	Railway Opns. To TC		
47 Rgt		121Rgt	Railway construction		



Above are three more enlisted collar insignia for engineer units that served in France. After the armistice some units stayed in the American zone in Germany, along the Rhine River, as part of the American Forces in Germany. This included some engineer units. By 1920 AFG troops were wearing cloth branch colored trim behind their collar insignia. One example of a U.S. insignia made in Germany, with an engineer background, is at the right.

Some early separate battalions had their insignia. The 9th Engineer Squadron, formed in 1916, stayed on the Mexican border. It had only Troops A, B and C, besides Headquarters Troop. A companion unit, 9th Engineer Trains, like the 9th Engineer, was formed in May 1917. An insignia for the 9th Engineer Trains (Mounted) has a T on the face. It also served on the Mexican border and did not go to France during World War I.

