

For NEA--Second of two stories requested on combat engineers.

COMBAT ENGINEERS-1

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hotchkiss

WITH THE FIFTH ARMY IN ITALY, June 00--Crossing rivers before they come to them is one of the specialties of the combat engineers over here and the tens of thousands of American and French troops who poured over the Garigliano last month to launch the final drive on Rome can vouch for it.

At present the Garigliano ~~XXXXX~~ is in the back areas, once more a quiet, peaceful stream, flowing placidly through a green valley to empty into the Tyrrhenian Sea just below Minturno. A wide, smooth permanent bridge carries Highway 7 over the river and up past Minturno, Formia, and Terracina through the Pontine Marshes and into Rome.

A little over a month ago, however, the valley of the Garigliano was a place of peril and sudden death. Highway 7 was under direct observation and our front lines were on the outer edge of Minturno. The Minturno bridge was ~~a pair of Bailey's floated on pontoons and~~ shrouded 24 hours a day in chemical smoke to blind Jerry's artillery observers.

Jerry had the Minturno crossing pretty well taped and lobbed over 170s and 88s day and night. The ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~, who maintained the bridges, combat engineers/and chemical warfare crews, who operated the hissing smoke generators, knew death well ~~and~~ and lived in sandbagged dugouts and abandoned Jerry pillboxes. Sometimes Jerry hit the bridge and then the ~~engineers - the 10th~~ Combat Engineers, II Corps, Fifth Army - would pour out of their ~~XXXXXXXX~~ shelters and tote and chop and pound and get the crossing back in service in jig time.

Sometimes the kraut shells would damage the anchor cribs or abutments under water and then GI engineers like ~~E~~ Pvt. Ola Olsen, the "Big Swede" from Brooklyn, N.Y., or swarthy, peppery Pvt. Filiberto Flores, of Pueblo, Colorado, and ^{quiet, efficient} Cpl. Emil P. Nord, of Ferdinand, Ind., would do