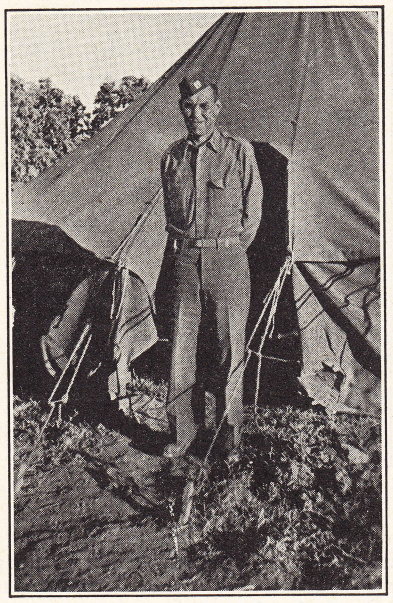
Holt Commands Engineer Battalion in the Speedy Rebuilding of the Capua Bridge, Italy

Enemy demolition of bridges in the early days of the Italian campaign was a triumph of efficiency, according to an article in the August 1944 issue of *Civil Engineering*. At the river Volturno the



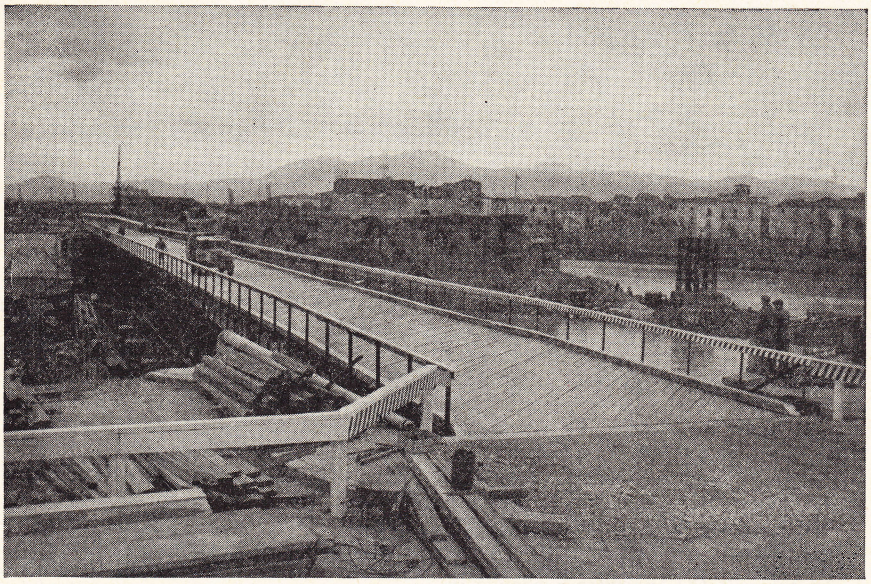
MAJOR HOLT (THEN CAPTAIN) STANDING IN FRONT OF HIS TENT DURING THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN.

enemy achieved the peak of destruction, not leaving anything from bank to bank. Pontoon bridges were thrown across for immediate use, but something of a more permanent nature was needed. The army ordered the reconstruction of two bridges. One of these was at Capua—scene of the bloodiest engagement of the Italian campaign—and Brother Thomas E. Holt—Cn'27CE—a major in the Corps of Engineers, commanded the 1st Battalion of the 343rd Engineer Regiment, which did the construction work in the remarkable time of 20 days. Being veterans of the African and Sicilian campaigns, they were well prepared in the art of rapid bridge building.

This bridge at Capua is on Route 6—the famous Via Appia, the main highway to Rome. The site of the new bridge was selected immediately upstream and parallel to the demolished structure. The preliminary survey was made in full view of enemy patrols and machine gun fire. It revealed that the stream was 360 ft. wide and 10 ft. deep. The design called for a bridge 375 ft. long, 32 ft. above the current water level, and two lanes of traffic.

Daybreak of October 19, 1943 found materials and equipment arriving at the job, only two days after the order was issued for the construction of the bridge. By noon the concentration of men and materials drew heavy artillery fire from the enemy and work had to be stopped. By October 21 conditions had improved and work was started.

On November 9, twenty days after the actual starting date, the Capua Bridge was officially opened to traffic. Just short of 50,000 man-hours were expended in completion of the structure, a daily average of 250 men being employed for the 20-day period. A traffic count taken during the first two months of operation revealed that an average of 10,000 vehicles per day were using the bridge. At the end of the first six months well over a million vehicles had crossed into forward areas. "Not only is the Capua Bridge the most traveled structure built by army engineers, but in size it outranks any similiar project in the European



Cut courtesy *Civil Engineering* Magazine

CAPUA BRIDGE—OPEN TO TRAFFIC

Theater of Operations," according to the story in *Civil Engineering*.

"When the early spring rains started," concludes the story, "every other bridge on the Volturno River either failed or was closed to traffic during the flood stage. In ten hours the stream rose 18 ft. bringing down washed out bridges and debris in hazardous quantities, and failure of the other bridges added to the traffic burden of the Capua Bridge. Army commanders looked with grave concern at their last remaining contact with the front. But despite the incessant pounding of tanks, artillery, and heavily loaded lorries, and the lashing and battering of its high slender substructure by the flood-angry Volturno, the Capua Bridge stood, and stands today, a lasting tribute to the ingenuity and skill of the U.S. Army Engineers."

Tom in letters mentions that the bridge was completely under water three times before he left the territory and that it withstood each flood. For the benefit of those who may read the story in *Civil Engineering* Brother Holt is at the left in the picture at the bottom of page 330. Colonel Dunbar is in the center and Capt. Harrison on the right.

Brother Holt entered the service April 28, 1942 at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana; reached England July 19, 1942; Oran, Africa November 11, 1942; Sicily in August 1943; and Italy in September, 1943. A letter to his business partner, Brother E. Paul Reichard—Cn'27CE—written June 26, 1944 indicates that he had been in the hospital from April 17 to May 17. "For a while," he writes, "we moved up every day—in fact too fast, we had no time to work. Jerry left in such a hurry, he didn't have time, many times, to lay mine fields or blow up bridges. However, now for some time we've been up where we bombed out the bridges behind him and what we didn't get, he blew up as he left."