Nine From Aberdeen

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Nine from Aberdeen

  - Fascinated by stories of the Royal Engineers in WWII.
  - Undiscovered wealth of information on U.S. Army.
  - Project enlarged into my first publication in 2012.
- Primary Resources and Document Collections.
  - Bob Leiendecker and the National EOD Association.
  - Royal Engineers Association (United Kingdom)
  - Aberdeen Proving Ground Ordnance Museum.
  - NARA’s extensive World War II collection.
  - Private collections from living veterans & families.
The forerunner of our modern-day Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) profession.

All major service branches had B.D. units in WWII, but the Army had the largest.

Over 2,000 men served in Army B.D. units, suffering 10% casualties in Europe alone.

B.D. squads participated in every theater, but received very little media coverage.

Their story begins with the London Blitz.
Lt. Robert Davies removes a 1,200 lb. UXB endangering St. Paul’s Cathedral.
Royal Engineers Bomb Disposal
Bomb Disposal U.S.A.

• By 1941, U.S. recognized German UXBs as threat.
  ○ Ordnance Corps given responsibility for military affairs.
  ○ Conflict with the new Office of Civilian Defense (OCD).
  ○ Arguments not resolved until shortly after Pearl Harbor.
  ○ Military became senior partner in bomb disposal tasks.

• U.S. Army Ordnance Bomb Disposal School.
  ○ Located at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.
  ○ Maj. Thomas J. Kane chosen as the first commandant.
  ○ Kane and eight candidates went to U.K. in January 1942.

• This is the birth of U.S. Army & Air Force EOD.
Maj. Kane (at right) with Joseph C. Pilcher & Richard E. Metress
B.D. in the Mediterranean Theater

- **North Africa (Spring 1943)**
  - Ordnance lacked B.D. units in Algeria & Tunisia.
  - Two B.D. companies arrived in April-May 1943.
  - Top brass dissatisfied with companies’ performance.

- **Sicily (Summer 1943)**
  - Last hurrah for B.D. companies; replaced by squads.
  - Mystery of Capt. F. H. Dillon’s disappearance.

- **Italy (Autumn 1943 to Spring 1945)**
  - B.D. secured enemy airbases & ammunition dumps.
  - Supported three Mediterranean amphibious landings.
12th Ord. Bomb Disposal Squad
Capt. Ronald Felton
European Theater (1944-45)

- **Allied Preparations for D-Day at Normandy:**
  - Importance of Ordnance Bomb Reconnaissance School.
  - Bomb Squads assigned to U.S. Special Engineer Brigades.

- **The U.S. Army Ordnance Bomb Disposal Center**
  - Col. Kane became Director of Bomb Disposal in the ETO.
  - Communication Zone squads disposed of enemy munitions.
  - 9th Air Force B.D. secured airbases in France & Germany.
  - Infantry divisions used B.D. squads as troubleshooters.

- **Evolution of Bomb Disposal into modern EOD:**
  - B.D. handled more than UXBs; mines, shells, and rockets.
  - Post-war partnerships with British & French organizations.
Bomb Reconnaissance School
17th Ord. Bomb Disposal Squad
Capt. Joseph C. Pilcher at War’s End
Pacific Theater (1942-45)

- Two Army B.D. companies went to PTO in 1942.
  - One company went to Hawaii, the other to Guadalcanal.
  - Both companies disbanded into squads in November 1943.

- Unique challenges of the Pacific Theater:
  - Squads covered long distances in island-hopping campaigns.
  - Constant work and jungle climate affected record-keeping.
  - Army personnel were expected to handle naval ordnance.

- Japanese equaled the Germans for ingenuity.
  - Tenacious defense of islands, including mines & booby-traps.
  - Heavy casualties from the Aleutian Islands to Okinawa.
  - More B.D. squads were required to liberate the Philippines.
In November 1945, the Ordnance Bomb Disposal School finished its mission.

Ammunition and Bomb Disposal services were combined into one EOD directive.

Joint-service training corrected the errors of WWII -- just in time for the Korean War.

Col. Thomas J. Kane retired from the Army in 1955, and passed away in 1965.

However, his legacy will not be forgotten.
12th Ord. Bomb Disposal Squad
Dedication of Kane Hall (2004)
Dedication of Kane Hall (2013)

Col. Kane’s 113th Birthday at Fort Campbell, KY