52nd Naval Construction Battalion

Historical Information

"Construimus, Batuimus"
"We Build, We Fight"

NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND

52nd C.B.

NCTC - Davisville
ABD - Hueneme
Ready Date - 6 Feb'43
Left ABD - 10 Feb'43
Location - ~~Sitka~~ Sand Bay and Adak

2nd Embarkation
ABD - Parks
Ready Date - 20 Oct'44
Left ABD - 14 Oct'44
Location - ~~Pearl Harbor~~ Guam

LOG

.-10-43 - Transferred to Gulfport FFT Hueneme.
.-13-43 - Arrived ABD Gulfport.
.-27-43 - Arrived Port Hueneme.
.-30-43 - Comdt Alsec advises 52nd CB leaving Seattle about 8 Feb.
-10-43 - Entrained for Seattle FFT Alsec
-31-43 - 1 Apr'43 report of 52nd CB - arrived Dutch Harbor 17 Feb'43 with 51st CB - quartered on Unalaska Is.
-30-43 - 1st Brig. reports that 1/3 of the 52nd CB is at Dutch Harbor and 1 detachment at Adak NAS.
- 1-43 - 1 May'44 report of 52nd CB - to be moved from Unalaska to Dutch Harbor.
- 1-43 - 52nd CB is at Adak. (Com 13 to ComAlSec dtd 6-21-43 Sec. Disp.)
-14-43 - 1 Jun'44 report of 52nd CB - At Sand Bay, Great Sitkin Is., except 1 off. and 75 men on detached duty with regimental hdqtrs. at Adak.)
.-25-44 - 52nd CB scheduled to return to U.S. 29 Apr'44. (AlSec Conf. report dtd 15 Jan'44)
-24-44 - 1 Feb'44 report of 52nd CB - operating at Sand Bay and Adak.

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-16-44 - 1 Mar'44 report of 1st Brig. - 52nd CB located at NAS, Adak, NOB Adak and Sand Bay. Scheduled to return to U.S. in Mar-Jun'44.
-19-44 - 52nd CB scheduled to return to U.S. 15 May'44. (1st Brig. Alsec report dtd 15 Apr 1944)
-18-44 - 52nd CB arrived Parks 12 May'44 with 27 officers and 950 men. (WRK)
-27-44 - 52nd CB embarked from Alaska 26 Apr'44 and arrived Parks 12 May'44. (1 May'44 rep.)

)-18-44 - 52nd CB consisting of 29 officers and 1052 men departed Parks for overseas 14 Oct '44(Parks Conf. disp. 151920 NCR 4821 to Bupers dtd 16 Oct'44).
.-15-44 - The 52nd CB is assigned to the 37th Reg.(Comserforpacflt Sec. ltr 55-CKW/apk over Ser. 001008 to CNO dtd 4 Nov'44).
-16-44 - The 52nd CB is located at Pearl Hbr.(Com 14 Sec. disp to CNO 062243 NCR 15886 dtd 11 Nov'44).
-8-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of 52nd CB - Batt was in training at Camp Parks from 12 May to 14 Oct'44. Report endorsed by 37th Regiment.
-11-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of 52nd CB - located at Pearl Harbor. Report endorsed by 8th Brig.
7-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 52nd CB - location not stated. Report endorsed by the 37th Regiment.
17-45 -- The 52nd CB is located at Pearl Hbr.(Com 14 Sec. disp to CNO 081016 dtd 13 Feb'45).
27-45 -- The 52nd CB assigned temp duty with MarCorps for a future Cenpac operation. Upon completion of assualt duties to report when directed by 10th Army to ComConstTroops for further assignment.(Comservpac Sec. disp to Cincpoa 231911 Feb'45 - Ref: Cincpoa 150005).

Location - Pearl Harbor 52nd C.B.

3- 6-45 - Comservpac requests shipping allocation for the 52nd CB mounting at P.H. to arrive Guam about 1 May. (Conf Disp 240207 from Comservpac to Cincpoa Pearl)

3-9-45 -- The 52nd CB ordered detached from the 37th Reg. to report to the 7th Reg. for duty effective 1 Mar'45.(8th Brg. conf. ltr Ser. 0126 to OinC 52nd CB dtd 26 Feb'45).

3-9-45 -- The 52nd CB reported to the 7th Reg. 1 Mar'45 for duty.(7th Reg.(2nd End. on 8th Brg. ltr above)Ser. 0454 dtd 1 Mar'45).

3-23-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of the 52nd CB - no info on location.

4-17-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of the 52nd CB - This battalion secured from construction activities on 1 Mar'45 and preparing for forward movement. No info re location.

5- 8-45 - The 52nd CB is located with the 5th Amph Corps. (Temp duty with Fleet Marines) Assigned Okinawa. (Dirpacdocks S.F. Sec Rep of 15 Apr'45)

5-17-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of 37th Reg.- The 52nd CB was transferred to the 7th Reg from the 37th Reg. on 1 Mar'45.

5-18-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of the 7th Reg - 52nd CB report to the 7th Reg for forward mvmnt.

5-18-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of the 52nd CB - location not given. Secured from work projects on 28 Feb'45. Report end. by 37th Reg & 8th Brig.

5-19-45 - 1 May'45 report of 8th Brig states that 52nd CB located at Hilo.

5-21-45 - 1 May'45 report of 7th Reg - 52nd CB enroute to Guam where they will stage for forward movement.

6-4-45 - 1 May'45 report of 52nd CB - located at Guam. On 31 Mar'45 the 52nd CB was ready & standing by for forward Movement. On 17 Apr'45 left Pearl Harbor & on 30 Apr'45 arrived Guam reporting for duty with the 3rd MarDiv. Report routed via 7th Reg & 8th Brig.

6-13-45 - Dirpacdocks SF sec rep of 15 May shows the 52nd CB at Okinawa - temp duty with Flt Marines.

Location - Guam 52nd C.B.

6-18-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 52nd CB - location not given. Report via 7th Reg and 8th Brg.

7-16-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 52nd CB - location not given. Report via 7th Reg.

7-27-45 - Dirpacdocks P. Sec Rep of 10 July shows the 52nd CB located at Guam with the 6th MarDiv.

8-14-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 52nd CB - Batt is under oper control of the 3rd MarDiv. Constructing camp for the Batt in the 3rd MarDiv area. Camp was operationally complete on 15 Jul and the batt was moved in drafts from the old Pioneer Camp in 6th Marines from 15 Jul to 18 July. Batt is evidently located at Guam as gathered from the following job description: "Extension to FMF Camp. By agreement between C.G., 3rd MarDiv and CO, FMF, Mariannas area, this Batt is furnishing nucleus crews and technical assistance for the constr of new units in Marine Transient Center Area, alloted to the FMF Marianas Hdqtrs". Report via 7th Reg.

9-13-45 - 52nd CB tempdu with 5th Phib Force. (Direastpacdocks sec location rpt dtd 20Aug'45).

9-18-45 - Comservpac requests Commarianas to arrange to ship 52nd CB from Saipan to Guam. 52nd CB to report to 40th Reg on arrival Guam. 52nd CB to undertake work as assigned on Guam but remain prepared to be reassigned to 3rdMarDiv. (Comservpac conf disp 132351 Sept'45 to Commarianas Area).

9-20-45 - Comservpac is cancelling their 132351 Sept'45 disp. Order 52nd CB to report to 40th Reg to undertake work as assigned on Guam but remain prepared to be reassigned to 3rd MarDiv. (Comservpac conf disp 151937 Sept'45 to Commarianas).

9-28-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 52nd CB - no info as to location. Report via 7th Reg. 143 men transferred to RecShip at Guam for discharge under the point system.

Location - 52nd CB

10-2-45 - 25th CB nominated to replace 52nd CB when necessary. (Commarianas conf disp 270327 Sept'45 to Comservpac).

10-8-45 - Comservpac directs OinC, 5th Brig to inactivate immediately 52nd CB. Advise Comservpac when inactivation is completed. (Comservpac conf spdltr ser 05420 dtd 26 Sept'45 to 5th Brig).

10-24-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 52nd CB - location not stated. Report via 40th Reg. & 5th Brg.

10-30-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 7th Reg. - 7th Reg. report states the the 52nd CB was detached from the 7th Reg. on 15 Sept'45 & was attached to the 5th Brig. at Guam.

11-27-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 40th Reg. states that the 52nd CB was inactivated in accordance with OinC, 5th Brig. conf ltr ser 001345 dtd 4 Oct'45. Inactivation took place on 6 Oct'45.

INACTIVATED

CHAPTER ONE

Boot Training

Some of us may remember from our history books that on 12 October, 1492, Columbus discovered America; some few of us may remember that on 21 December, 1620, the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock; some of our Southern mates may recall that enlightening day in their lives when they learned that "Dam Yankee" was two words. But all of us of the Fifty-Second Seabees will remember that eventful period in the march of time, between 8 November and 15 November 1942, when, leaving our peaceful homes, our loved ones and the sheriff behind, we set forth for Davisville, R. I., for indoctrination into the Navy's Seabees. We shall remember our hesitancy and bewilderment upon arriving at Camp Endicott, we shall remember the sly leerings and the cat calls of, "You'll be sorry," and we shall remember our confused thoughts about the future.

After having blankets and a mattress thrown at us by a supply clerk, who would have been more in his element as a hot dog vender at a circus, we were herded into an enclosure of barracks known as the "Pest House Area," where we were confined for the next few days. Nights were spent dreaming of home with all its comforts, only to be awakened by that inevitable, "Hit the deck," at 0545. Days were occupied in receiving G. I. gear, G. I. haircuts, G. I. this, and G. I. that, as we were formally introduced into Navy life. Shall we ever forget that standing in line, with only light clothing, in the cold New England weather, and how we wished we were back in the Sunny South again?

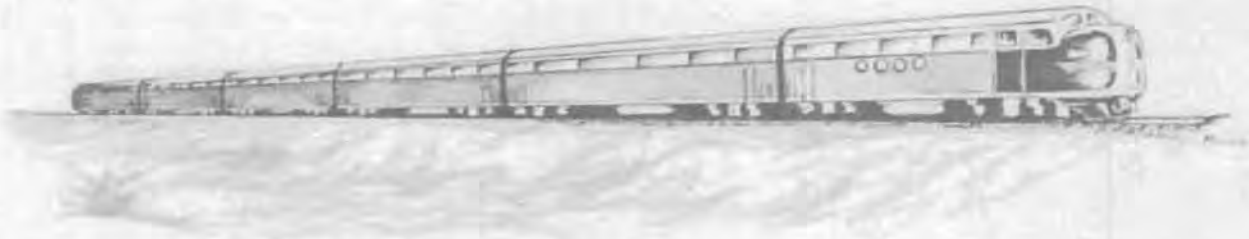
At the end of our time in the Pest House, we were taken to another detention area, and assigned to companies and platoons, under chief petty officers, for boot training. Unused as we were to military discipline and restrictions, the term "boot training" seemed to us a most fitting description, for we felt as though we were being booted around everywhere by everyone. Actually we were getting military lectures and drills, and some of us were getting technical training, but at the time it seemed as though the training mostly consisted of marching, standing in line for hours, shots in the arm, marching, standing in line, shots in the arm—over and over again. Our mental pictures of Navy life aboard a proud battleship, and shore leaves with a girl on each arm, were shattered by ten-mile hikes, commando runs, fenced-in restricted areas and armed guards. All this, together with G. I. haircuts and 'Klassy Kut Koveralls', made us a sight that should have caused the gods to sigh with pity. The only thing that kept our spirits alive was a dim light gleaming through the fog of confusion—a light of hope, a hope coming from the knowledge that this ordeal could not possibly last forever. And true enough it was soon over, much to our surprise and delight. It was then we had our first liberty night in Providence and Greenwich; perhaps it would be just as well, for the sake of posterity, to skip the details of that night of nights.

In the meantime, our destined leaders were undergoing their indoctrination in the Seabee Officers' Training School at Camp Allen, Virginia, and from all accounts the going there was just about as rough as we had encountered in boot camp.

Then came the day of days—9 December 1942; having passed through the embryonic stage—boot camp—we emerged as a full-fledged battalion. Led by our newly-arrived officers, we passed in review before the Commandant of the Station, Captain Fred F. Rogers, U. S. N., (Ret.), who, with his staff, in a brief ceremony presented us with our Colors and the Battalion Standard. Thus we became commissioned the Fifty-Second Naval Construction Battalion.

All during our review, a mild blizzard prevailed—could this have been prophetic?

After the review, we were ordered transferred to "G" area. And, of course, the move **would** have to take place at night and in a snow storm. Here a battalion organization was set up, and we were reassigned to officers



and companies. Then, under our new officers and in our new companies, we continued our military and technical training throughout December.

We now had more liberty nights, provided we were in good standing and had not committed any breach of rules, such as one member of the Battalion who was AOL five hours. When asked for an explanation by Commander Gerold, the guilty party remarked "Some ensign, whom I don't know, told me to stand by in the bus terminal in Providence last night at 2400, and wait until he returned. I stood by until 1000 this morning, and he had not returned." We do not know whether or not his explanation was accepted by the Commander, but we do know that he spent his next three liberty nights sitting in the barracks reading "Alice in Wonderland."

Then came 31 December, the day we had all been looking forward to since the time of our arrival—the end of our indoctrination period and the beginning of a five-day leave. Many were not able to reach their homes in the allotted time, but the mental and physical relaxation of this leave readied all of us for the more important and rigorous events to follow. There were a few (?) AOLs, such as one mate who blazed a path from Texas to Rhode Island with telegrams that read, "Coming, hold everything." He arrived three days late.

When we returned from leave we learned of the untimely death of our Junior Medical Officer, Dr. Henry H. Connolly. He had died of spinal meningitis, contracted in line of duty. We will long remember Dr. Connolly for his fine personality, his kindness and the sympathetic treatment he gave us during our delirious boot camp days. Many months later, when our Battalion built one of the finest theatres in the Aleutians, the name Connolly Hall was suggested by the men and was given to the theatre.

We also lost Fred Carter, MM2c, who died of a heart attack aboard the train while on his way back from leave.

CHAPTER TWO

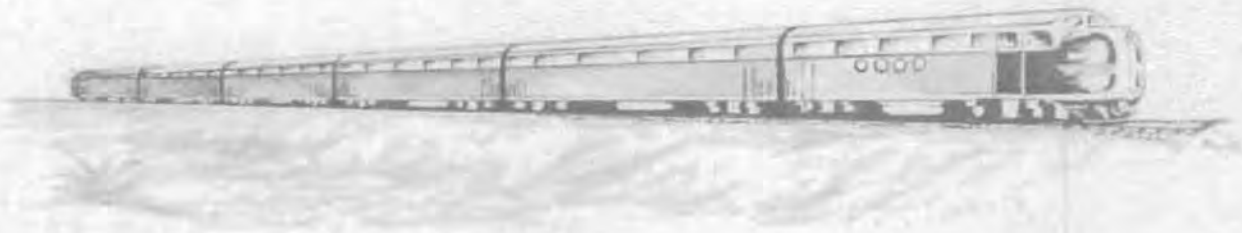
Davisville to Gulfport

9 January 1943, saw us busy in preparation for shoving off to a point of embarkation. There was the hustle and confusion of packing, train musters, last minute farewells and letters home. Our address was changed to Navy 8305, c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California, and a new high in scuttlebutt was reached as to our ultimate destination. Bets could be had on any place from South America to Australia, but it is doubtful if any were placed on the Aleutians.

We marched to the train on 10 January, in silence. It was not a silence imposed by regulations; it was a silence resulting from the tenseness of our thoughts about our homes, about our loved ones, and questions that arose in our minds as to where were we going and would we be coming back?

The first train section* left at 2100 and the other two sections followed within a few hours. We all retired early that night, tired from the excitement and strain of a full day. Diners were picked up at Harrisburg during

*The Battalion, when moving by rail, always traveled in three sections. The train experiences described in this history are those of the first section. While the other sections did not always follow the same route, their experiences were quite similar.



the night and in the morning we learned that we were moving westward. However, the topic of conversation at that time was not, "Where are we going?" but, "When do we eat?" After a long and tiresome wait we had a good breakfast and then relaxed to enjoy the scenic splendors of Pennsylvania. In Altoona two engines were added for the long, hard pull over the mountains. One of the many impressive scenes here was "Horseshoe Curve," where the train almost doubles back on itself. As we passed through Pittsburgh we were greeted with cheers of, "Good luck", by the good citizens of the Smoky City and then we continued westward over the Ohio River. An old "Sternwheeler" laboriously chugging up the Ohio added a contrasting touch to this huge and very modern industrial area. By this time many maps were in evidence and the bets on Gulfport or California as our destination were about equally divided. However, upon arriving in Indianapolis, the train turned southward, which could only mean that we were Gulfport bound.

The following day, 13 January, found us in Gulfport, with the rest of the Battalion, where we were introduced to the rain and mud of Camp Hollyday. After getting squared away, we noticed our quarters were nicely located among long-leaf yellow pines and surrounded by newly-developed lawns. The weather soon cleared and became a welcome change from the snow and cold of a New England winter.

Without further delay each Company started receiving its training and instruction on commando runs and the use of military weapons. Much to the enjoyment of the enlisted men, officers were now compelled to take daily physical exercises, under direction of Ensign Burkavage.

On 16 January Companies A and B left for the rifle range near Saucier, Mississippi. After an hour of confusion, due to the trucks arriving late, the convoy proceeded to five miles beyond Saucier, where the men disembarked and marched six and one-half miles to camp. The barracks at the rifle range were cold and damp, but fires were soon started and work parties established.

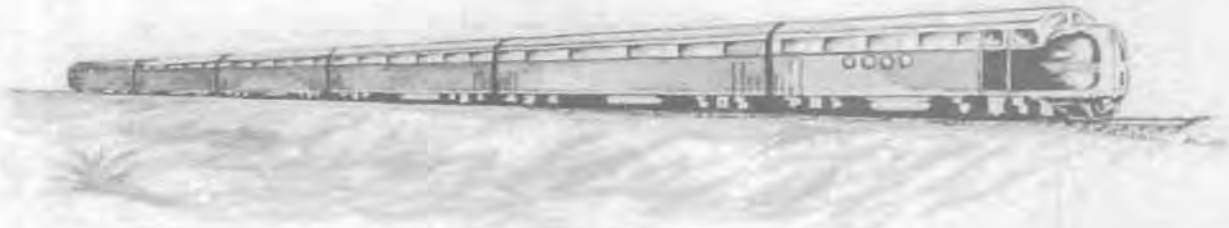
Among the highlights of events that occurred during the four days at the range were: Chief Harkey's disappointment upon learning that the still he set up was only for drinking water; Cook Wright and company who did such a grand job with so little, and discovered that coffee could be brewed from pine cones (or was it coffee?); Warrant Officer Bederman, who sprained his arm while instructing in the proper art of throwing a hand grenade; the graciousness and charm of Mrs. Gerold and Mrs. Owens who, accompanied by the Commander and Lieut. Owens were guests at a noonday lunch; the shack about five miles down the road where, it was rumored, a panther lurked in the shadows, and how, after a visit to the shack, one would gladly meet up with, and fight, the panther; Ensign Whitaker giving the "experts" a lesson in target shooting; our Bow and Arrow Man, "Chief" Fulton, setting sights at 1200 yards on a 200-yard range, which caused an airport several miles away to report they were under fire; the freezing barracks, freezing "heads", freezing water, freezing men and freezing weather; and the reticence of Southland mates to engage in weather pleasantries during those days.

While Companies A and B were at the rifle range, Companies C and D went through the routine of military training and enjoyed the night life of neighboring towns and villages, including New Orleans.

CHAPTER THREE

Gulfport to Port Hueneme

On 20 January, orders were received to move. The destination was unannounced, of course, which gave rise to the usual epidemic of scuttlebutt and bets. Also there ensued the usual confusion of packing, stowing and ship-



ping of gear and arranging of train musters. An announcement that we were not going to be paid before our departure created a howl that could be heard in Biloxi, ten miles away.

The following day all was shipshape and the first contingent entrained at 1800. Like our previous travels, eating on schedule was a problem. We had box lunches and many were so hungry it is believed they ate even the boxes. We awoke the next morning expecting that we would be well on our way, but were surprised to find that we were no further than New Orleans. There was further delay and finally the train was switched to a single-track road to Baton Rouge, which required frequent side-trackings to allow other trains to pass. By mid-morning we were in Baton Rouge where there was a five-hour delay before crossing the Mississippi River. By nightfall we were in Texas and when we arrived at Houston at 0100, at least 100 wives and sweethearts were waiting at the station to greet us. Despite the fact that the Battalion was traveling under secret orders, the train never slowed down or stopped in any town in Texas but what it was greeted by wives or sweethearts of men aboard.

The next two days were spent in crossing that grandiose State of amazing things and amazing peoples. These were by no means dull days. There was the disappointment of the "Damyankees" in not seeing a train robbery or a cattle rustler, or the Lone Ranger; there was the tranquility and romance of a technicolor sunset in a land where Kit Carson, Sam Houston, and David Crockett wrote living chapters of history. At Lubbock where we spent all day Sunday, with time heavy on our hands, there was the problem of restroom facilities which was finally solved by moving the entire train load of us out into the uninhabited country side.

The morning of 25 January found us in Albuquerque, New Mexico, viewing the quaint adobe huts and the Spanish architecture, to the complete indifference of the Indians. There was only Arizona and the great Continental Divide to cross before reaching our destination. This was a series of steep climbs to an elevation of 7000 feet, climbs that slowed the four giant compound locomotives to a crawl; and then rapid descents, with ears ringing, to just a few hundred feet above sea level. There was the oppressing heat of the desert crossing with only visual relief in the background of snow-capped mountains. There was the treacherous Cajon Pass and then the beautiful San Bernardino Valley with its endless and orderly rows of citrus groves. The Battalion here embarrassed the Californians by arriving in the midst of all the flood damage created by the heaviest rainfall in the Nation's history. This storm we learned was the cause of our 12-hour delay in Lubbock, Texas.

After a short stop-over in Los Angeles for late supper, we arrived at Camp Rosseau, Port Hueneme, during a rainstorm, early in the morning of 26 January. We were completely exhausted upon reaching quarters at 0300, and "hit the sack" without so much as the formality of undressing, but we were up again for reveille at 0530, with the rest of the Battalion.

The following two days were spent in the usual squaring-away of men, gear and quarters and then we fell into the regular routine of advanced military training. There was a much needed payday and on the first week-end half of the Battalion enjoyed a liberty in Los Angeles and nearby towns. Those of the Battalion not on liberty were entertained by a U. S. O. show starring Kay Kayser and a bevy of Hollywood's loveliest damsels.

Chaplain Curry joined the Battalion and outlined a program of religious, welfare and recreational activities for the men. The Chaplain got away to a flying start by immediately staging the Battalion's one and only dance, which was more than a success inasmuch as the girls well outnumbered the men.

The Chaplain further brought us inside information from an unimpeachable source that our destination was New Caledonia. Dr. Sandler had also been studying tropical diseases for the past month. However, the sheep skin coats and arctic clothing that were being issued did not portend the tropics.

A voluntary collection of $785.00 bought a variety of musical instruments, which served us well in the lonely and dreary days to come.

The Battalion remained intact during this period with the exception of some fifteen officers and enlisted men who took a five-day gunnery course at San Diego.

A bag inspection on 6 February, was the forerunner of orders received on the following day to prepare for entrainment on 9 February, which started the last lap of our travels in the United States.

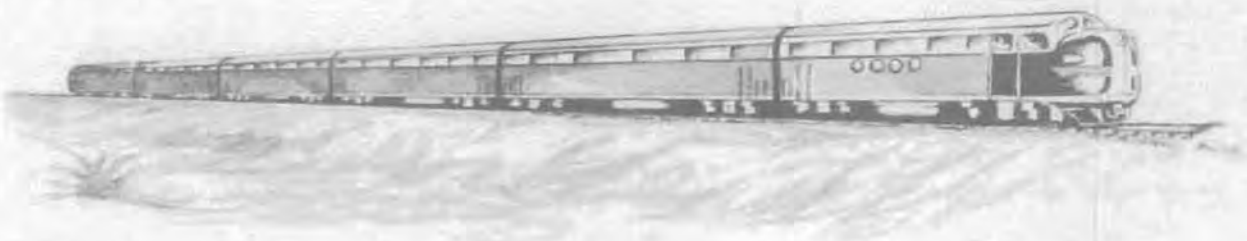
CHAPTER FOUR

Port Hueneme to Dutch Harbor

The two day trip to the embarkation port was a scenic panorama of the blue Pacific, early Spanish Missions, citrus groves and fertile truck farms. Skirting the east side of San Francisco Bay, we could barely distinguish in the distance the dimly lighted outlines of the Golden Gate and San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridges. We followed the trail of the Santa Margarita and Cascade Mountains, a trail of long winding curves, endless tunnels and deep gorges, with always in the distance the picture-postcard beauty of magnificent Mt. Shasta. Arriving in port, we went to the pier where we boarded our transport. After squaring away we "hit the sack" early in anticipation of sailing on the morrow. With all hands crowding the top side for a last glimpse of the good old U. S. A., we put to sea on the morning of 12 February. The ship, with two Battalions aboard, was crowded to capacity and there were endless hours of waiting in tortuous lines to reach the ship's mess, which now had to accommodate several times its normal capacity. Everyone wore life belts and was assigned to life boat or life raft; thereafter we were put through abandon-ship drills. Each one of us unconsciously appointed himself a lookout for periscopes.

On the second day out, rough weather caused the usual amount of seasickness, which one Cowboy Copass should never forget. The third and fourth days of the voyage were enjoyed with refreshing hours on deck and in listening to the music of our own and the ship's musicians. The last day was one of blizzards and gales.

On the 17 February, we dropped anchor in Dutch Harbor, which was an awe-inspiring sight. Rising above the harbor shore line were towering snow covered mountains, their peaks obliterated by a snowstorm in the fury of a "williwaw". Halfway up the side of a mountain we could see the top of a power shovel, the rest being buried in a snow drift. That night there were periods of clear weather, which permitted a full moon to shine and present us with perhaps the most magnificently grand display of rugged country most of us will ever see. The stories we had read and heard about the Aleutians had seemed exaggerated, but now we knew that any written or word-of-mouth description would be an inadequate portrayal of these bleak outposts.



CHAPTER FIVE

Dutch Harbor

We disembarked early the next afternoon in the very middle of a howling blizzard. At this moment we got our first view of Seabees in action; despite the high wind and blinding snow, Seabees, actually lashed to the building for safety, were putting on the roof of a large warehouse. We were eventually loaded aboard trucks and were hauled some miles up into the mountains of Unalaska, to a location we were later to know as Tent City. This so-called city consisted of many tents dispersed on the snow-clad mountain side, and reminded one for all the world of the pictures of mining camps in the Klondike in the Gold Rush Days of '98. Some tents were so completely buried in the snow that we were not aware of their existence until they began to emerge in the thaw that occurred some weeks later. It was a very discouraging sight, and became more so as we found the tents (and even the stoves) full of snow, the coal piles buried in snow and ourselves waist-deep in snow. Among the hazards were the snow-filled fox holes; every so often a mate would drop out of sight into one of these hidden holes. However, after starting fires and thawing out the tents, and locating a head that actually had hot water and showers, the scene took on an aspect not quite so cheerless. It was rapidly becoming dark, and we had no lights of any kind, so Seabee ingenuity had its first opportunity to show itself, by improvising lamps consisting of small tin cans or bottles, with cords for wicks, and hair oil or lighter fluid for fuel.

The prepartion of food was handicapped by frozen water lines, poor equipment and inadequate supplies, but nevertheless the cooks under Chief Cressionie did a swell job. Some of us, rather than wait in the long chow lines those first few days, walked or hitch-hiked several miles into the village of Unalaska, to the restaurant (let us dignify it as such, for lack of a better word) where, for $1.50, a plate of bacon and eggs could be had. Also we bought, at corresponding prices, a limited supply of groceries and prepared some meals in our tents over our little pot-bellied stoves.

The soldiers gleefully kidded us about wading through snow in undress blues, but these same soldiers later were most helpful and cooperative in helping us to obtain supplies and transportation.

There were several civilian-operated establishments in Unalaska including the Northern Commercial Store, where, for the very modest sum of $1,250.00 one could purchase a dubious pedigreed Indian bow and arrow; or Blacky's Tavern where for one hour nightly, questionable whiskey was sold at $1.00 a shot, or six bottles of beer could be had for $2.00.

Black's service was unique. Under the guidance of MPs, hundreds of service men formed lines outside of his establishment, whiskey glasses were lined up and filled on the bar, and at a given signal one rushed in, plunked down a dollar, tossed off his drink, rushed out the back door, around the building and back into line. Barring accidents, one could make several trips around in the allotted time. The next thing to do was grab the first truck going to Tent City, and upon arriving there, jump off, run up the hill to your tent, crawl into the sack and wait for the drinks to hit you all at once. It was always a good idea to hang on to the sides of the cot.

By now the companies and men were assigned to work projects which included the construction of roads, water mains, power lines, storage facilities, service and recreational buildings, machine and maintenance shops and the organizational activities of the disbursing, supply and engineering offices. All this work was done under the most trying conditions; in storms and freezing weather, and with limited materials and improvised equipment. But the work was done with such thoroughness and speed that the Battalion, for this reason, was later selected to go Westward on its own and establish a brand new base for the Navy.

CHAPTER SIX

Arrival at Island "X"

In early April a small detachment under the command of Lieutenant Huttleston and Ensign Whitaker left Dutch Harbor to make preliminary preparations for establishing an advance base several hundred miles west of Dutch Harbor. This was no mean assignment and entailed all the hardships of pioneering on an uninhabited and little known-about island. It was this unit that first established a location on what was to become our Island X—and home for many months to come. On the same day another small detachment shoved off for the same destination, but were stopped at an already established base at another Island.

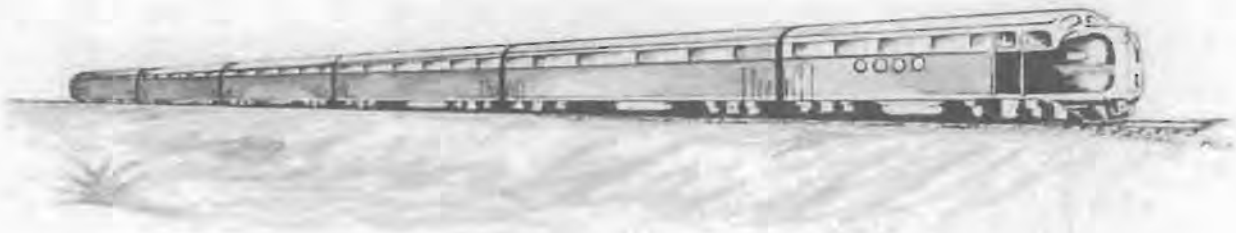
Some days later the major portion of the Battalion sailed Westward, leaving Lt. Owens as Officer in Charge of the detachment remaining at Dutch Harbor, and in due time anchored off our Island X location, on the evening of a beautiful day. A great snowcapped mountain peak looked down on twin valleys, which sloped to the shore line, and were still largely covered with snow. These great, treeless valleys and mountains were truly awe inspiring, but looked coldly inhospitable to those of us who were about to set up our homes thereon. The only note of comfort was the sight of Lt. Huttleston and his advance guard waiting for us on the beach.

At the time, this Island could be considered among one of the most desolate and remote U. S. outposts. The Fifty-Second was one of the few Battalions in the Navy fortunate enough to secure a genuine Island X all to itself, and thus to become a real pioneer.

The weather was perfect and fairly warm. The full moon reflecting off the cold waters was of great help to us in our landing operations, but it would have been of just as much help to an enemy. Men, gear and supplies went over the side in true amphibious landing style; the men, fully equipped with rifle, gas mask, cartridge belt, helmet and all the rest of their infantry gear, climbed down the ship's side on the cargo nets and into the landing barges which ran them ashore. In the very middle of our unloading it was announced over the ship's speaker system that a submarine had just been reported and all hands were put on the alert. Just at daybreak, the last landing barges started ashore. Our transport weighed anchor immediately and was soon lost to view below the horizon.

We were on our own.

Quarters for the first night were any place one wanted to lie down in his sleeping bag—for what time there was for those fortunate enough to get some sleep. The morning found sea bags, lockers, ordnance, mess supplies, tools, camping equipment—all piled helter-skelter along the beach. Just to look at the pile and try to imagine where one's own gear might be gave one a first-class headache.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Early Days on Island "X"

The first day was not without its mishaps, and started by the tent galley burning to the ground during breakfast. A new one was improvised of scrap lumber and tarpaulins. When mess call was sounded (who can ever forget Bugler Fisk and his fifteen mess calls every day?), everyone took his mess kit to the galley serving line, and then sat on the nearest hummock of tundra to eat, or when it was raining or snowing or blowing too hard, he went back to his tent. Needless to say that warm meals were pretty few in those days. Mess kits were washed, usually with sand for soap, and rinsed in the stream that flowed through the camp.

There was much to be done and the first few days were spent in erecting tents for quarters, sick bay, post office, engineering office, heads and so forth. A mess hall and provision store room were added to the galley, and were of similar construction; the mess hall for the men consisted solely of long board counters on which to rest the trays, while the chiefs and officers had a couple of tables with benches in one end of the store room.

Gear, supplies and materials were hauled by coolie methods until stone boats were made and tractors took over the hauling.

The first few weeks were lonely weeks. We felt forgotten. Shortage of food and coal gave us cause for concern. The sight of a vessel would bring all hands down to the beach, looking for supplies and mail. Sometimes these vessels came in, but more often they passed us by. We felt as the Pilgrims probably felt, when they went to the shore and watched for the return of the Mayflower. The only thing that never stopped was the wind. Rain and snow alternated, but the wind was perpetual, and there was no escaping its maddening effect, either inside or outside the tents.

These first few weeks also probably cured most of us of any latent desires for "roughing it". We lived in our tents, "furnished" with earth floors, coal stoves, kerosene lamps, sleeping bags on cots; we washed and bathed (a by no means regular habit) in our helmets, heating water in refuse cans salvaged from the galley. It was a problem to keep things dry under these conditions. This camping experience, following that at Unalaska, causes us to feel that even though we have not earned any combat medals, we have qualified for the Boy Scout Merit Badge in Camping.

The utter newness of our situation helped keep us from thinking too much of our hardships. The Japanese were still close enough to have caused us trouble, and at night there was a feeling of uneasiness, despite our sentries. Tame but cautious blue foxes soon learned to look for food, while flocks of black ravens circled inquiringly and noisily above us. Probably for the first time in our lives we could drink freely from a flowing stream, and know that it was absolutely pure.

We felt that we were pioneering indeed.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Life on Island "X"

Patches of straw-colored tundra were showing through the snow when we first landed. Gradually the snow line moved upwards, leaving the valleys and mountain sides a dreary-looking sight with their carpet of light brown tundra. Slowly this color changed, until, during the two short summer months, it looked as though our Island was covered with a gorgeous, green, velvet carpet, unmarred by trees or shrubs, but interspersed, high up in the deep ravines, with a few patches of snow which never quite disappeared. Much against our wishes we were to see this brilliant green color slowly fade back to brown, and then our landscape was rapidly covered with an unblemished mantle of pure white.

Although day followed day with monotonous regularity, none of us ever complained of the weather becoming monotonous—unless its constant changing could be called monotonous. Rain, snow, sunshine, fog, williwaw, calm—it sometimes seemed as though all of these would occur within an hour. Double rainbows—beautiful ones—at angles to each other—were not uncommon. Sunsets and dawns could be as glorious as anywhere on earth—but unfortunately were usually bleak. Snow and rain could be seen traveling horizontally, or up a mountainside. Our lowest temperatures were not far below freezing, much to our surprise and good fortune. Once during the summer we experienced a "drought"—for several days the sun shone all day long, there wasn't a drop of rain, and our temperature reached 70 degrees.

Our days lengthened until in June, daylight lasted from 0400 to 2300. Of course, in December we were on the other end; daylight would last only from 0900 to 1700.

Another phenomena that never failed to interest and amaze us were the flowers, both by their variety, beauty, fragrance and profusion. On a calm, warm day (none too plentiful) the fragrance in the valleys was truly powerful as in a florist shop. Flowers and seeds were gathered by a great many of us, and sent home.

The tundra was beautiful to look upon, but extremely fatiguing to walk through. However, there were no snakes, bees, mosquitoes or other insects to worry about; nothing but a few pale butterflies and some innocuous sand flies were to be seen. Rats had been a terrible problem at Dutch Harbor, but our Island fortunately remained free of them.

In trudging through the tundra, one would often be startled by a ptarmigan taking off, with a loud whir, from beneath one's very feet. Eagles had high nests up in the sheerest parts of the cliffs. The ravens, with their "Hi, Doc" and other calls which sounded almost human, reminded us in looks and actions of over-grown crows.

And of course, there was that never failing source of interest—the foxes. Two of them in particular became quite tame, and were soon named Oscar and Louie. They quickly learned to know the purpose of a galley, and what were the best hours for calling. One of these foxes, Oscar, got as many eggs from our galley as we did, or so it seemed; but to watch a fox call for an egg and go bury it, and then fight off the ravens who immediately attempted to dig it up, perhaps gave us as much pleasure as eating the egg ourselves. These foxes also learned what fishing meant. One of them, Louie—usually—would be quite sure to show up around a fellow fishing in the streams, and wait for an offering. (Ask Chaplain Curry—he knows.) But perhaps as good a morale booster as we had on our Island was the daily skylarking between our collie dog Scuttlebutt and Oscar; these two fellows would romp and play for hours like a couple of pups. If it weren't for the foxes and the dogs, most of us would have been at a loss for something to write home about—this was about the only topic that seemed to have no military significance.

Then there were the fish and the crabs. Large halibut, salmon, codfish and other species of salt water fish were caught off the dock. One barricuda was caught near our Island, and another one at Dutch Harbor, at about the same time; how these tropical fish ever reached our cold waters always remained a mystery. Dolly Varden and other trout were caught in large numbers in our mountain streams. Fishing—especially trout fishing—was almost the only sport available, and during the long summer evenings the stream banks would be alive with officers and men trying their luck. Our Island acquired fame as a fisherman's paradise, and many official visitors, as well as visiting ships' crews, came ashore with their fishing tackle. We usually managed to have on ice a stock of fish for the enjoyment of distinguished visitors. And, of course, everybody who ever caught more than three fish on a single trip, or one fish over six inches long, wanted his picture taken.

In our early weeks we caught large crabs, which were a welcome addition to our bill of fare, but for some unknown reason they suddenly disappeared, and never returned.

Seals were another source of interest to us. One of our Texas mates probably had ten years scared off his life, when, one day, having gone out from the beach some distance on the rocks, he chanced to look around and saw a bewhiskered face staring at him with its large eyes; this mate thought of everything from mermaids to Jap one-man submarines and almost broke his neck dashing back to shore over the rocks.

Outside of the natural scenic wonders of the Island, points of interest were naturally almost nil. However, we were not long in discovering, over the mountain on another part of the Island, on abandoned trapper's cabin. Prior to the war, we learned, this island, like some others, had been leased by the Government to an individual for about $25.00 annually, for fox raising purposes. This party would turn his foxes loose on the island, to live on birds and by scavenging along the beach. He would build himself a small shack, where he would live for a few weeks each year during the trapping season. Our trapper's cabin had evidently been abandoned quite unexpectedly, as we found it furnished with a bunk and bedding, stove, cooking utensils, food; also, traps and trapping gear, snow shoes, rowboat, one or two hides, and, of course, even the foxes themselves had been abandoned.

There were at least two bara-baras on the Island. They were underground dugouts, and were the natural dwellings of Aleuts. Anyone who has been haunted by weeks of continuous winds, will give the former natives credit for having the right idea of a dwelling best adapted to the elements of the Aleutians.

A couple of almost undiscernible mounds, marked by some iron rods and wooden boards, were a source of mystery. Rumor had it that they were Japanese graves, and well they might be as the Japs for many years were far more familiar and numerous throughout the islands than were Americans.

Most of us experienced our first earthquakes on our new Island. However, after a year in the Islands, earthquakes, tremors, and volcanic eruptions worried us less than the williwaws—these latter attained official records of well over 100 miles per hour.

The health of the Battalion was always fine. Occasionally a ship would come in, bringing a few germs, and there would be a mild epidemic of colds and catarrhal fever. Then, of course, there was the occasional appendicitis operation. With a thousand men in camp, there were usually less than five of them in sick bay. Most of us put on a good deal of weight, even the hardest workers among us; this seemed to be nature's way of protecting us in this raw country. Rheumatism was quite prevalent, but when our solarium began operations much of the suffering from this cause was alleviated. As mean and raw and lacking in sunshine as our climate was, those of us who knew something of the tropics and jungles could not help but admit that we were undoubtedly better off than our mates down below.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

The Battalion has been out of the States for over a year now, and there are many events of those months that we would like to include in our Yearbook, but, war being what it is, such is impossible. The Battalion has not always been intact, and many of the activities of the detachments have not been included.

Lt. Owens, with his detachment, rejoined the Battalion at Island X at the end of May. The Battalion then enjoyed for five months that seldom realized hope of all battalions—it operated as a complete unit on its very own island. In November, Lt. Owens and Lt. Forrest, with their respective companies, C and B, were ordered to a large base at another island, the former as Officer in Charge of the detachment and in charge of construction, while the latter became Battalion procurement officer. This detachment carried on large building and waterfront projects. Then early in 1944, Battalion Headquarters and Company D left Island X for an outlying project on the above mentioned base, with Lt. Collin as Officer in Charge of construction. Lt. Huttleston, with A company, was left as Officer in Charge of our old Island X project, which was nearing completion, assisted by part of Headquarters company under Lt. (jg) Robinson.

The Battalion published its own weekly paper, The Sea Beecon, for some months, thanks to the purely voluntary efforts of a few of the men, who did all the work on their own time. This paper was edited for mailing, and many homes were kept informed, by this means, of some of our activities.

We would like to tell you what we built, how we built it, and why it was built. We would like to tell you the location of our Island X, and tell you more of its unusual scenic attractions. We would like to tell you about every little tragedy and humor in our daily lives, and how grateful we are for having remained healthy and strong—but most of all, we want to tell you how very proud we are of a job, "WELL DONE".

The Fifty-Second Naval Construction Battalion is a mobile unit whose activities at this time cannot be made public. Therefore, many of its most thrilling experiences and major feats of construction must remain unwritten. However, the Fifty-Second Naval Construction Battalion has, it hopes, by fortitude and skill, written an important chapter in the World War II History of the Aleutian Islands, and contributed its part in the building of the Northern Highway to Victory.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE 52ND U.S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION,
DECEMBER 1942 - OCTOBER 1945

6 December 1942 -- The 52nd NCB was commissioned at the Naval Construction Training Center, Davisville, Rhode Island. Commander Harold F. Gerold, CEC, USNR, was the officer in charge. During December this unit underwent military and technical training.

10 January 1943 -- The battalion left Davisville by train.

13 January 1943 -- The battalion arrived at the Advance Base Depot, Gulfport, Mississippi. At Gulfport the unit underwent further military training.

21 January 1943 -- The battalion boarded trains again, this time heading west.

27 January 1943 -- The 52nd NCB arrived at the Advance Base Depot, Port Hueneme, California. At Port Hueneme the battalion took advanced military training and received specialized cold weather gear.

9 February 1943 -- The battalion entrained for Seattle, Washington, its embarkation port.

11 February 1943 -- The battalion arrived in Seattle and immediately boarded a ship.

12 February 1943 -- The 52nd NCB sailed for Alaska.

17 February 1943 -- The battalion arrived at Dutch Harbor, Alaska. At this location it was quartered on Unalaska Island and undertook the construction of roads, utilities, storage buildings, troop facilities, and shops.

9 April 1943 -- A detachment of 2 officers and 40 enlisted men under Lieutenant Leonard L. Huttleston, CEC, USNR, left Dutch Harbor to make preparations for the establishment of an advance base at Sand Bay, Great Sitkin Island, 21 miles northeast of Adak.

19 April 1943 -- The entire battalion, with the exception of Company C and about 25 men from Headquarters Company, set sail for Sand Bay.

20 April 1943 -- The main body of the 52nd NCB arrived at Sand Bay.

29 May 1943 -- Company C and the detachment from Headquarters Company, under Lieutenant William E. Owens, CEC, USNR, left Dutch Harbor for Sand Bay.

31 May 1943 -- Company C arrived at Sand Bay.

31 May to 31 October 1943 -- The 52nd NCB was located at Sand Bay, Great Sitkin Island. At this site it constructed facilities for a naval advance fueling station and a naval net depot.

31 October 1943 -- Company C and a detachment of 25 men from Headquarters Company, under LT Owens, left Sand Bay for Adak.

2 November 1943 -- Company B, under Lieutenant Kyle Forrest, CEC, USNR, departed for Adak.

3 November 1943 to 9 February 1944 -- Companies B and C, with LT Owens as officer in charge, were located at the Naval Operating Base, Adak, where they carried out building construction and waterfront projects. The main body of the battalion continued to work on facilities at Sand Bay.

9 February 1944 -- Company D, Headquarters Company, and the battalion administration departed from Sand Bay for Adak, leaving Company A and a small detachment of Head-

quarters Company on Great Sitkin Island to finish the battalion's projects there. LT Huttleston was officer in charge of this detachment.

26 April 1944 -- Company A rejoined the main body of the battalion at Adak.

28 April 1944 -- The 52nd NCB boarded a ship to return to the continental United States.

10 May 1944 -- The battalion arrived at Seattle and immediately entrained for California.

12 May 1944 -- The 52nd NCB, consisting of 27 officers and 950 enlisted men, arrived at the Construction Battalion Replacement Depot (Camp Parks), Pleasanton, California. After a period of leave, the battalion began training for its second overseas deployment.

14 October 1944 -- The 52nd NCB, consisting of 29 officers and 1052 enlisted men, departed from Camp Parks for its second tour of duty.

18 October 1944 -- The battalion set sail from San Francisco for the Pacific Theater of Operations.

24 October 1944 -- The battalion arrived at Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, and was assigned to the 37th Naval Construction Regiment.

25 October 1944 to 28 February 1945 -- The battalion was located at Pearl Harbor. Its principal duty was constructing roads, railroad facilities, and housing at the Lualualei Naval Ammunition Depot.

1 March 1945 -- The battalion secured from construction activities and began preparing for forward movement.

17 April 1945 -- The 52nd NCB, consisting of 29 officers and 1010 enlisted men, sailed from Pearl Harbor.

30 April 1945 -- The battalion arrived at Guam, the Mariana Islands, and reported for duty with the 3rd Marine Division.

1 May to 20 September 1945 -- The 52nd NCB was engaged in constructing camp facilities for the Fleet Marine Forces, Marianas.

6 October 1945 -- The 52nd NCB was inactivated on Guam. On 1 October, 24 officers and 824 enlisted men remained on board.

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NCB

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