

# 87<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Battalion

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*Historical  
Information*



*“Construimus, Batuimus”  
“We Build, We Fight”*



ON BOARD

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>AUTHORITY</u>
1 Jul'44	30	985	BNP625
1 Aug'44	30	989	R & BNP625
1 Sep'44	27	990	R & BNP625
1 Oct'44	27	1055	BNP625 & MoR
1 Nov'44	27	1060	R & MoR
1 Dec'44	31	1053	MoR
1 Jan'45	30	1051	MoR
1 Mar'45	30	1078	MoR
1 Apr'45	33	1078	MoR
1 May'45		1068	BNP625
1 Jun'45	30	1055	BNP625 & R
1 Jul'45	29	963	BNP625 & R
1 Aug'45	29	904	BNP625 & R
1 Sept'45		900	BNP625
1 Oct'45	24	767	BNP625 & R
1 Nov'45	21	378	BNP625 & R

87th Construction Battalion (INACTIVATED)

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87th C.B.

NCTC - Magruder, Davisville  
ABD - Davisville, Hueneme  
Ready Date -  
Left ABD - 29 Aug'43  
Location - ~~Acorn-12 Treasury Noumea~~ Okinawa

LOG

- 6- 5-43 - 87th is to go to ABD Davisville 9 Jun'43.
- 9- 1-43 - 87th left ABD 29 Aug'43 for destination - Acorn 12.
- 1- 8-43 - 6 off. and 225 men temporarily detached to the 8th New Zealand Brig. (Conf. ltr. from OinC 87th CB to Lt. Turnbull dtd 17 Oct'43 - file CB87/P16-4/(RE:jk) over 00/Turnbull, C.E., 242594)
- 2- 6-43 - 1 Nov'43 report of 87th CB - Arrived Banika, Russell Is. 20 Sep'43.
- 3- 8-44 - 1 Feb'44 report of 87th CB - operating at Stirling Is., Treasury Group.
- 4-20-44 - 1 Mar'44 report of 87th CB - operating at Treasury.
- 5-12-44 - 1 Apr'44 report of 87th CB - operating at Treasury. Estimated completion date is 1 May'44.
- 5-24-44 - 1 Dec'43 and 1 Jan'44 report of 87th CB - Left Russells 26 Nov'43 and arrived Treasury 28 Nov'43. Co. A left Batt 18 Sep'43 for the Treasury assault.
- 6- 2-44 - 1 May'44 report of 87th CB - operating at Treasury. Estimated completion date is 15 May.
- 6-30-44 - 1 Jun'44 report of 87th CB - operating at Treasury.
- 7-31-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 87th CB - Completed assignment at Treasury 1 Jul'44 and went into staging status.

87th C.B.

- 8-25-44 - 87th CB located at Treasury - Following info from Data of SoPac as of 7/1/44:  
Arrived Noumea Sep'43  
" Russells Sep'43  
" Treasury Nov'43.  
Staging at Cub 12 Jul'44
- 9- 8-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 87th CB - operating at Treasury; entered a staging status on 1 Jul when the CBMU's took over maintenance.
- 10-13-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 87th CB - Staged during Aug. at Treasury.
- 10-28-44 - 18th Reg. dissolved. The 82nd and 87th CB's attached to the 18th Reg. is to report to the 17th Reg. for duty (Comsopac Sec. disp. 230036 NCR 246 dtd 23 Oct'44 to Comseronsopac and CMB Noumea).
- 11-16-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of 87th CB - Batt departed from Stirling Is. in the Treasury Group on 5 Sep'44 and arrived at New Caledonia on 10 Sep'44. Unloading at Monte d'Or was completed on 14 Sep. Batt has been assigned road widening and relocation project between Bourail and Nepoui in the northern part of the island. The rear echelon of 50 men and 1 officer left Stirling Is. arrived 30 Sep'44 at Monte d'Or along with the rear echelon of the 82nd CB. Draft of 85 replacements from the 40th CB were rec'd during Sep. Report endorsed by 18th Reg.
- 1-21-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of 18th Reg. - 87th CB reported to the Regiment on 15 Sep'44.
- 2- 2-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of 87th CB - operating at Noumea. Report endorsed by 17th Reg.
- 12-18-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of the 17th Reg. - On arrival of the 17th Reg. at Noumea, the 82nd and 87th CB's were detached from the 18th Reg. and attached to the 17th.
- 12-28-44 -- The 87th CB located at Noumea as of 1 Dec'44. (CMB Noumea Sec. disp to Comseronsopac Sec. disp 070540 dtd 16 Dec'44).

Location - ~~Noumea~~ ~~Saipan~~ Okinawa 87th CB

- 1-3-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of 87th CB - located at Noumea. Report endorsed by 17th Regiment.
- 1-16-45 - The 17th Regiment ordered to detach the 87th CB when transportation is available and report to the IsCom Saipan for staging and further assignment to the 43rd Reg. (Comseronsopac Sec Disp to 17th Reg. 060055 dtd 13 Jan'45)
- 31-45 -- The 87th CB is to leave Noumea for Saipan. (Comservpac Sec. disp to CNO 212311 dtd 22 Jan'45).
- 2- 7-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 87th CB - located at Noumea during Dec'44. Report endorsed by 17th Regiment.
- 2-20-45 - The 87th CB is enroute to Saipan. (Comseronsopac Sec. report dtd 4 Feb'45 for Jan'45)
- 4-6-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of 87th CB - First echelon of 344 men & 6 officers arrived Saipan 27 Jan'45. Second echelon arrived 17 Feb'45. A rear echelon of 3 officers & 25 men scheduled to arrive within few days of date of this report. Report endorsed by 43rd Reg.
- 4-10-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of 87th CB - No information regarding location. Third and last echelon of 3 officers and 25 men arrived early in March.
- 5-12-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 87th CB - Batt moved from Saipan to Okinawa in May in 2 echelons: 1st echelon, consisting of 22 off. and 741 men, departed from Saipan on 20 Apr'45 and arrived Okinawa on 27 Apr'45. 2nd echelon, consisting of 5 off. and 327 men, left Saipan 7 May'45 and arrived Okinawa 14 May'45. An average of 190 men have been engaged in ship unloading at Awashi, Nakagusuku Wan. A complete detachment camp is maintained there. Report endorsed by 43rd Reg and 10th Brg.
- 7-11-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 87th CB. Located at Okinawa. Report routed via 43rd Reg and 10th Brig. 67 men departed for U.S. 40 men to be discharged detached on rotation.
- 8-3-45 - The 87th CB is assigned to the 10th Brg and 43rd Reg. effective 10 July. (CCT APO 331 sec report on assignment of CB units ser 897 dtd 10 July)

Location - Okinawa

87th C.B.

- 8-13-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 87th CB - located at Okinawa. Report via 43rd Reg and 10th Brg.
- 9-11-45 - Inactivation of following CB units approved Comservpac disps 291935, 290051 & 290007 all Aug:-4,6,7,17,20,66,74,78 & 87 CBs - Okinawa. (Cincpoa conf spltr ser 032559 dtd 4 Sept'45 to Comservpac).
- 9-15-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of the 87th CB. Located at Okinawa. Report via 43rd Reg & 10th Brg.
- 9-29-45 - Comservpac directs to inactivate the following CBs 4, 6, 7, 17, 20, 66, 74, 78 & 87. Inform Comservpac when inactivations are completed. (Comservpac conf spltr ser 05174 dtd 11 Sept'45 to Comdt., NOB, Okinawa).
- 10-18-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 87th CB - located at Okinawa. Report via 17th Reg. & 8th Brig. Comments on Item 4 classified as Secret & forwarded under separate cover.
- 11-7-45 - 87th CB to be inactivated. Enlisted pers. to be transferred to 112th CB. (8th Brg. conf ltr ser 0293 dtd 18 Oct'45 to OinC, 87th CB).
- 11-13-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 87th CB - located at Okinawa. Report via 17th Reg. & 8th Brig. Comments re personnel classified as secret & forwarded under separate cover.
- 12-5-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 8th Brig. states that the 87th CB was inactivated on 7 Nov'45.
- 1-5-46 - 87th CB reported inactivated since 20 Dec'45. (Comservpac, Pearl disp 022103 Jan'46 to BuPers).

INACTIVATED

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**87th Construction Battalion (INACTIVATED)**

87th C. B.

DECLASSIFIED

<u>Date</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Notes</u>
6/3/44	-	Increasing		Left U.S. Aug. 1943.
6/6/44	Cub 12	COST "	Comdozac sec. disp. 150024 May.	
9/29	-	✓ Epic (Nooumea)	Com Nav Base Nooumea sec disp 192249 Sept.	Add Epic 17th regt
9/29	-	✓ Cost	Increasing rest disp 150014 Sept.	Reas echelons only.
12/18	-	Epic (Nooumea)	Com Nav Base Nooumea sec act disp. 070540 Dec.	(Reassigned to 17th regt)
1/15	-	(Saipan)	Comdozonozac sec disp. 060055 Jan.	proceed and report Saipan for staging and further assignment 48th regt
2/23	-	Hode	Saipan sec act disp. 0204312 Mar.	
3/12	-	-	Nooumea sec 152200 Mar.	delete Epic.
3/29	-	-		

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
5/22	D	Naha	Saipan Sec div delete 0308002 May	Hode



LIBERTY, discussed and dreamed of for past six weeks, becomes an exciting reality for these future 87th warriors entraining at tiny Williamsburg station for Richmond and other points in early April, 1943. This fabulous 48-hour week-end liberty was first time off for

these boot "graduates" since they first encountered Peary's mud on or about 20 February. The 87th had not yet been formed. Easily recognized are: Ben Seeger, Nick Volpe, Dale Riggins, Jim Ferron and "Barney" Greenwood.

## BOOTS READY FOR ANYTHING AFTER PEARY MUD

Toward the end of February, 1943, octopus-like Camp Peary, situated in the heart of Virginia's swamplands, was the sole remaining boot camp for all incoming Seabees.

To the green ex-civilians who first entered "Swamp Peary," the induction area was a nightmare of knee-deep mud, confusing orders, shouts and the incessant cry—**YOU'LL BE SORRY!!!**—from every dungaree-clad, would-be old timer. A hectic day of processing was the unhappy lot of all fledgling Seabees. Everything was strictly "on the double" from daybreak to "Taps."

The first item was the issuance of gear—a sack full of clothes, bedding and miscellaneous items, which had to be stenciled before leaving Small Stores. A haircut—right to the bone—was followed by a gruesome ID photo. A final physical check-up and the cutting of the last link with home—cramping civvies into a cardboard box for mailing.

The business of allowances, allotments and government insurance was then taken care of with almost alarming dispatch, along with an interview regarding qualifications and experience. This roughly comprised the first day in service.

The now official boots were moved into a new area where the mud was even deeper. Each platoon of 25 men was assigned an instructor—their guide and mentor for the six week boot period.

Two platoons were crowded into each wood-and-tarpaper barracks, which was heated by two pot-boiled stoves. Those having bunks near the stoves sweltered from the almost unbearable heat; all others froze, notwithstanding the pea-coats, watch caps and two sets of heavy woolies they wore to bed.

The first item of military training was close-order drill, carrying dummy rifles made of gas-pipe. The initial efforts in these maneuvers were largely comical, many learning for the first time the difference between their left and right foot.

Extended-order drills through the snowy woods of Virginia was another grueling test. After the first few mud-baths, the men learned the trick of choosing a soft, dry spot when the command—**HIT THE DECK!!!**—was given.

Technical training courses and lectures on first-aid, hygiene and special weapons afforded many a tired boot an opportunity to catch up on sleep lost on guard duty or fire-watch.

The men were slowly picking up new nautical expressions to be used for years to come: mates, decks, bulkheads, chow-down, gear, secure the detail, etc. Slowly, but surely, they were growing salty!

Sick Bay did a land-office business handing out arm-paralyzing shots of various descriptions. These only added to the already perilously low physical condition of the frequently fever-ridden mates. Eventually, long rows of barracks were quarantined when cases of scarlet fever and smallpox began cropping up.

There was a duty day every fourth day when men took over various camp details. Irrespective of age or rating, they were assigned to such sundry tasks as KP, guard duty, head-cleaning, hauling coal for the barracks stoves, or the most dreaded detail of all—swamp-clearing "Captain's Party!"

It wasn't long before the boots began to sense the full importance of mail in their daily lives. Letters were read hungrily for news of the outside world, which only so recently had been HOME.

Soon, the forthcoming 60-hour week-end liberty became the main topic of conversation. When the "Great Day" finally arrived and the fed-up boots were privileged to flee the stifling confines of Captain Ware's "university," the majority took a special train to historical Richmond.

Others roamed around beautiful Colonial Williamsburg or excursioned to nearby shrines like Jamestown or Yorktown. A few of the more daring made flying visits home, going as far north as New York and Connecticut.

Back at Peary, the "refreshed" men awaited assignment. On 13 April, the 87th Battalion was formed in B-8 area. The station paper, **BEELINES**, announced the news.

After three of the most tumultuous days in any man's experience, during which orders, bulletins and scuttlebutt raced with equal confusion through the hectic area, the men found themselves at the railway station of the brand-new spur-track leading out of camp. Station Force band turned out in full strength to give the first outfit to use the spur an official send-off.

Once aboard the rickety day coaches, with still no definite clue as to their destination, the men, at least, knew they were no longer "boots." They were now the 87th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion—and on their way!!



A BATTALION IS LAUNCHED at Camp Endicott on 14 May 1943 when Capt. Fred Rogers, commanding officer of NCTC, Davisville, presents 87th Seabees with their colors at a full dress review. Here, the ranking official and reviewing party (including

Skipper Robert Easterly—third in file) march between opened ranks as bolts are smartly opened and closed. Although formed at Camp Peary, the 87th left Virginia before this formal ceremony could be arranged. This was another important milestone.

## CAMP ENDICOTT INTERLUDE HIGHLIGHTED BY COMMISSIONING

The exhausted men rubbed their sleepy eyes as the crummy day coaches pulled into Davisville, Rhode Island. Tired and hungry from their 18-hour trip from Virginia, the travelers showed only meager interest in Camp Endicott. It was 17 April 1943.

The most noticeable change from Camp Peary were the huge two-story barracks. These warm buildings, plus the asphalt roads and grassy plots, made the camp seem like a paradise compared to mud-packed "Swamp-Peary."

Assigned barracks in FG area, the men were immediately turned over for advanced military training. Long hikes over the rolling countryside, extended order, bayonet and weapons were topped off by the commando course, reputedly the toughest anywhere.

Newly issued '03s were zeroed in at Sun Valley Range. Many returned with titles of marksman, sharpshooter and expert. Others sported puffed lips and bruised shoulders.

Technical training men took up advanced courses. Groups of 20-mm. AA trainees shot hell out of the sleeves at Newport, returning with tall tales of their exploits.

On 14 May, the battalion was reviewed and officially commissioned by Captain Fred F. Rogers, Commanding Officer of Camp Endicott.

Liberty every fourth day and a 36-hour pass every other week-end found the men prowling far and wide. Nearby cities like East Greenwich, Providence and Pawtucket attracted most sightseers.

Excellent stage presentations such as "Junior Miss" and Ada Leonard's Girl Revue and performers like Akim Tamiroff vied with a wide choice of movies as entertainment.

Ship's Stores offered anything from beer to a fancy pair of earrings. These large buildings also housed bowling alleys, pool and ping-pong tables, canteens, gymnasiums and libraries.

THE BULLDOZER announced the first 87th death, John Hurley, CM1c, died 22 May of scarlet fever. THE PEEPSIGHT, first and only 87th newsheet, was born, survived several issues and collapsed.

The long-awaited nine-day embarkation leave began 27 May and found everyone east of the Mississippi scurrying for home. Everyone welcomed the brief respite from Camp Endicott's grating public address system. The 87th never had another one.

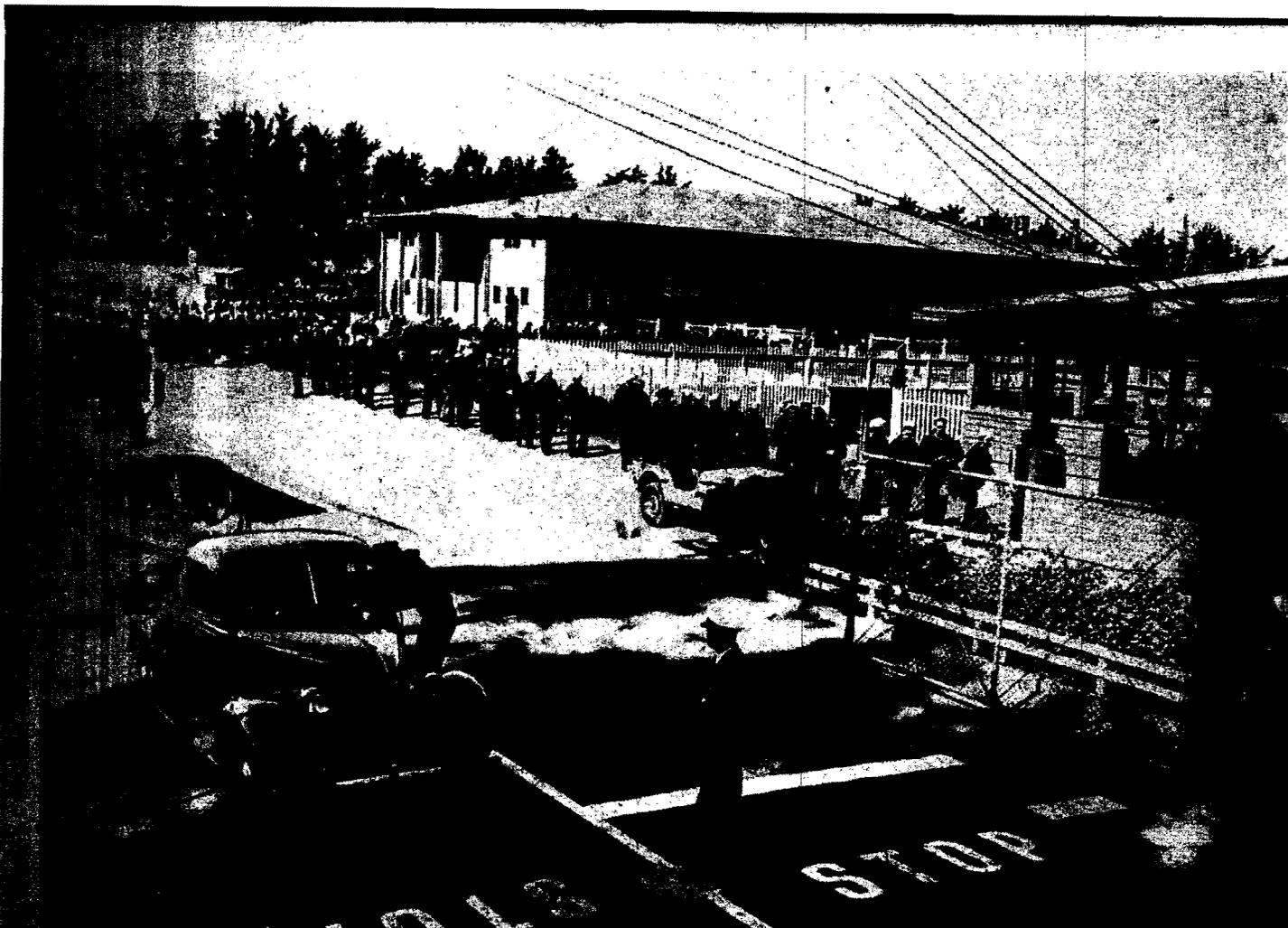
Westerners took the long chance and held their fire, hoping the scuttlebutt concerning North Africa was wrong. It was! All hands returned from leave 6 June.

On 13 June, the battalion was marched through the crowded camp streets to the waiting Pullmans.

Now, California and the Pacific war didn't seem nearly so far away!



THE MOMENT, Lt. Comdr. Robert Easterly hands Albert Prinz the battalion colors, which have just been passed to him by Mrs. Easterly. She received them from Capt. Rogers. The battalion stands at "Present, Arms!" as history is made.



CALIFORNIA, HERE WE COME! The crowded GREYHOUND bus marked LOS ANGELES is loaded with 87th Seabees primed for their final Stateside fling prior to embarking on their 27-month tour of the Pacific. Other than buying and packing for the voy-

age, the main concern of all hands during the gay Hueneme period was LIBERTY. Nothing else really mattered and the men—partially guessing the future—fore out for L. A., Hollywood and other equally outlandish fun centers at every opportunity.

## HUENEME IS SPRINGBOARD FOR FINAL STATESIDE FLING

"Sunny" California greeted the rail-weary 87th a bit soberly as the long trains from the East slid into Camp Rousseau, Port Hueneme, June 1943. It was, in fact, one of those days filled with what the local chamber of commerce excuses as "heavy precipitation!" The weather, however, was incidental.

As the men filed stiffly into their area, they were momentarily cheered by the presence of snug quonset huts, which were to house only ten men each, thus affording comparative privacy after the ramming barracks of Peary and Endicott.

The trans-continental ride from Rhode Island to California was managed in smooth style. It seemed more like a cross-country, sight-seeing tour than a troop movement as the three sections wandered through 14 states. At St. Louis and Kansas City, the men had seen the awesome effect of raging flood waters. The Rockies and the Great Salt Lake, the colorful deserts, huge cities and tiny hamlets—all the vast, sweeping panorama of America—had kept the men rubber-tapping between endless card and crap games.

To relieve the cramping monotony, the men were periodically allowed to leave the trains and stretch their limbs at odd water-stops. However, due to close guarding by battalion chiefs and SPs, the men were often mistaken for German prisoners of war!

In some cities, magazines, books and newspapers were hoisted aboard by sympathetic townspeople. Many publications were inscribed with the names and addresses of the donors and pen-pals were thereby enabled.

Food served in dining cars was of excellent quality, but nowhere in quantity to which Seabees are accustomed. Despite the life on wheels, the men were bored and eager to reach California. Six days on Pullman are too much.

The California summer climate proved a revelation to most who expected a semi-tropical atmosphere. Nights were cool and everyone slept under blankets.

A rapid re-introduction to military training was given by Marine instructors. The hard-baked clay of Ventura County proved unyielding when the men were on field problems. A new firing range provided a variety of targets for all weapons from pistols to mortars. AA men traveled to San Diego to fire at moving targets.

"The Battle of Mugu" found the attacking 87th shooting hell out of the imaginary enemy—and themselves, too!—with blank ammunition. The pseudo-beachhead ended in a hilarious fiasco, necessitating a repeat performance a few days later.

A test invasion alert and blackout routed the men out of the warm bunks at 0300 one morning to take up defensive positions in their assigned sector. Next noon found some "defenders" still sleeping soundly in the fields!

When the battalion's equipment was drawn and set up in a motor pool, a nucleus of transportation men was formed to maintain the machines.

The palletizing detail hammered for a month, crating the supplies in warehouses for shipment overseas.

The liberty-hounds were, at last, in their element. Los Angeles and Hollywood were only a short ride by bus. The famous Hollywood Canteen and night clubs and dance halls—like the Palladium, Florentine Gardens and Earl Carroll's—provided just about everything.

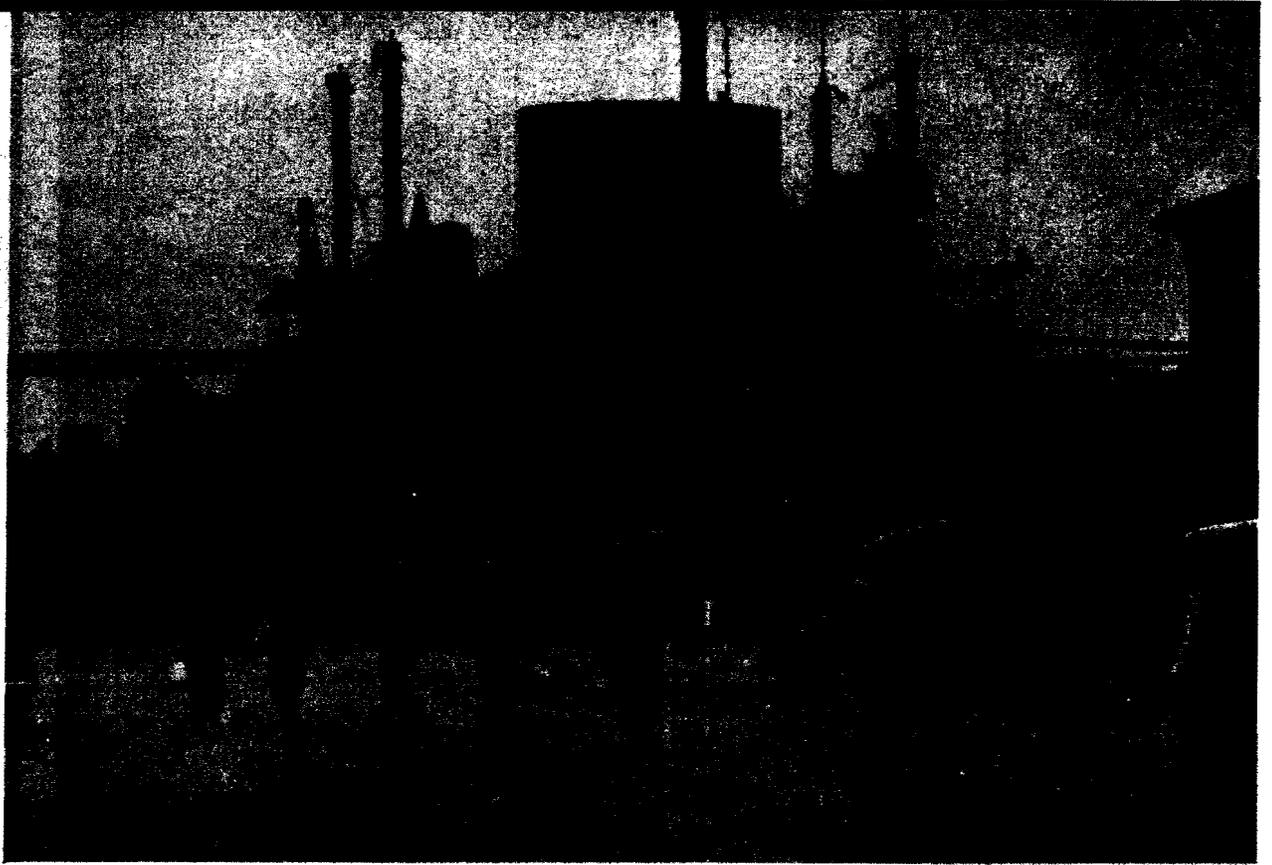
Santa Monica, Long Beach and Ocean Park afforded bathing facilities and amusement parks. Name bands like Kay Kyser and Alvino Ray gave sparkling performances right on the base.

Nature lovers even journeyed to distant Sequoia National Park to view California's famed giant redwood trees. Hitch-hiking was easy. There were ample cars and gas in California despite stringent rationing elsewhere!

The first increase in ratings were announced effective 1 July. Eighteen new chiefs were created. The battalion was "wedded" to ACORN 12 on 3 July. The "happy" occasion was celebrated at a barn party and toasted with beer.

Units were continually moving in and out of Hueneme while the 87th restlessly marked time. Finally, on 23 August, the battalion was secured. The men, at last, were shocked out of their Stateside lethargy when it became known that the S.S. ROBIN WENTLEY and the S.S. COMET were at the dock and being loaded around the clock. [None of this news made the Camp Rousseau newspaper, SEABEE COVER-ALL!]

All hands knew the 10-week California lark was suddenly at an end. Soon, they would be leaving "The Land of Make-Believe" for the realistic Pacific world where no quarter was asked and none was given.



"THAT FREEDOM SHALL NOT PERISH . . ." There was no turning back at this stage of embarkation. Figuratively, the fabulous South Pacific lay just over the horizon. The long-dreaded twenty per cent (overseas "bonus" pay) was no further away than the mouth of Port Mueneme's harbor. Loaded in pack-mule fashion,

mates determinedly stumble toward cheerless S. S. ROBIN WENTLEY as 1670 hour for departure nears. Well over two eventful years were to elapse before these men would re-enter "The Land of Plenty."

## 28 AUGUST 1943—A DAY TO REMEMBER!

Eyes, heavy with sleep, and in many cases looking grotesquely misplaced under shaved skulls, focused with extreme difficulty on timepieces, which read in the general vicinity of 0400.

Scattered shouts went ripping through the area to the effect that someone should kill the blanket-blank bugler, and most heads were hastily withdrawn into the delicious warmth of well-tustled sacks. Came depressing realization! The bugle was proclaiming the arrival of **EMBARKATION DAY—28 August 1943!**

The day anticipated with mingled dread and excitement for the past six months had finally materialized. Then, the flurry of last minute packing. No matter how carefully a fellow's field-pack had been put together the night before, it still had to be repacked; otherwise, the confusion would have been incomplete!

The gill-worm beds had to be rolled and coaxed into duffelbags that apparently were designed for carrying handkerchiefs, and then rushed to various loading points in the camp area where they were soon picked up by Station Force trucks and hauled to the Port Mueneme dock.

Hurriedly-gulped breakfasts! The inevitable and eternal hut-policing! Detachment of eight men who the night before had been involved in a regrettable rumpus in the 87th area. And through it all raced the staff of all military life—**SCUTTLEBUTT!**

Then, loaded beyond human belief, the men were formed by companies to await the battalion's own well-rehearsed band, which escorted them by units to the dock—"The Last Mile"!!!

The day had begun gray and somber, but before arriving dockside all hands were completely miserable beneath the scorching California sun. The mates were truly dragging bottom.

At the dock, more confusion presented itself in the form of a Naval dispatch, which ordered five battalion officers detached. It took more than a bit of Seabee ingenuity to have that order rescinded. The old "Can Do" spirit really buzzed across the country to Washington via telephone before the order was finally cancelled.

With groans—and before the amused, lucky few who were to sail the following day on the S. S. COMET—duffelbags were heaped upon

already overburdened backs to be carried up the WENTLEY's gangway. Sympathy radiated from the ACORN 12 and Casual Draft personnel who stood by awaiting their turns to go aboard.

Camp Rousseau Station Force personnel added their sadistic bit to the situation by holding up the line while they checked each man off the muster. They apparently wanted to make certain that no one would be inadvertently—or otherwise—left behind to possibly crowd them out of their comfortable Stateside billets.

The famed "obstacle course" at Camp Endicott was mild compared to the WENTLEY's gangway. Many required helping hands before reaching the top. Just how diminutive chaps like Zane Reudibaugh and Joe Beaver ever made it will remain a mystery for all time.

**NOW HEAR THIS! NOW HEAR THIS!!** was the preliminary greeting offered as weary bodies were urged across the unfamiliar decks and down ladders into the depressing bowels of the ship. **GO BELOW AND STAY BELOW!!!**

The rest of the time before sailing was spent in stretching aching muscles, trading for the best bunks, unpacking bedrolls, acknowledging the presence of the pang of hungry, cursing the fact that the ship's heads were not to be used in port, rehashing last night's telephone conversation with the little lady across the nation, and indulging in a bit of secret speculation—Where?—Why?—How long?

Bewildered dogs were furtively released from ingenious hiding places—Archie ("Rod") Reynolds' "Devil" and her squirming family of three from a ventilated handbag—Jack Alexander's frisky fox terrier, "Whistey," made it aboard somehow—"Tippy," who had succeeded "Shadow" as official battalion mascot for foreign duty, was left behind to sail next day on the COMET. The first casualty of the embarkation occurred when one of "Devil's" puppies lost its life in the titanic struggle of being smuggled aboard ship.

At approximately 1630, the word was excitedly passed that the gangway had finally been secured and some of the more venturesome mates sneaked topside for a farewell, nostalgic glimpse of the "Land of the Free" before the great ship was given to the sea.



"OH, GIVE ME LAND, LOTS OF LAND . . ." First 87th group to pay visit to legendary SHANGRI-LA TERRACE crosses Seabee-built footbridge across ocean inlet en route to popular Navy Playground. Chief Commissary Steward "Jack" Smaltzer, Des Moines,

Iowa, examines sign pointing toward recreation area as shipmates hurry past. Black native shepherds, attending grazing flocks along slope of nearby hills, are first foreigners most mates have seen outside the States.

## NEW CALEDONIA IS BATTALION'S FIRST FOREIGN LAND

Noumea, the lazy, colorful capital of Free French New Caledonia, was the first port of call for the war-bound 87th Seabees.

Raft space, more so than ever, was at a premium as the sea-weary 87th struggled for a better view of bustling Noumea harbor with its intricate military installations. The anchor was scarcely taut before Skipper Easterly and aides were en route ashore to learn the destiny of the outfit. It was 14 September 1943.

Meanwhile, there was nothing for the men to do aboard ship except repeat the monotonous pattern of the previous 17 days at sea. The blistering heat from the semi-tropical sun immediately became a major problem. All hands sweated from a lack of sea-breeze and the sun-blinding reflections of the sun from the iron decks.

The first day was singularly uneventful. The monotony, however, was momentarily relieved by the arrival of Noumea's port director, who welcomed the WENTLEY and her perspiring human cargo to New Caledonia.

The first shore party for Shangri-la Terrace, the Navy's famed Coral Sea playground, was hurriedly formed the next day and shoved off amid record confusion.

Accumulated mail was taken ashore and battalion mailmen eventually returned with the first letters received overseas. Jubilant one moment, the men were equally crestfallen the next when it was learned there was no mail from home—only a few inter-island letters from GI friends in the South Pacific.

Suddenly, the battalion became souvenir-conscious. Everyone went about for any kind of memento to mail home. An urgent call swept the ship for those with a speaking knowledge of French. Soon Chief Gunner J. Deroche and Rosairo ("Frenchy") Tarroux were en route to Noumea as official souvenir "procurers."

The Jeam returned loaded with such items as French coins, post cards, picture folders, silk handkerchiefs, etc. The "cache" was raided through Ship's Store, but demand so exceeded supply that additional excursions were promptly ordered.

The battalion's cargo ship, the COMET, carrying four officers, four enlisted men and "Tippy," arrived. Meanwhile, all hands were given a flat \$5.00 to boost morale. It was a great sub-score tale the COMET gang related when they taxied over for pay.

With the officers and chiefs going ashore virtually every day, the mates began to clamor for a visit to "The Enchanted City." Eventually, inspection parties were arranged that took sizeable groups into Noumea and out among the various Seabee battalions encamped near the city.

Others saw the sights as members of the touring 87th military band, which played three well-received engagements. The Malaria Control group got ashore by attending a specialty school. Finally, in sheer desperation, all hands who had otherwise missed, began seeking a berth on Ensign R. J. Seugling's daily garbage-disposal detail which passed through the fabulous city twice each day. Never before or since had this odorous job been held in such esteem!

Those who got into Noumea found an amazing melting pot of all nationalities, dirty and almost unbelievably crowded with the servicemen of all Allied nations, native Kanakas, immigrant Javanese and assorted Orientals. One trip, as a rule, was sufficient!

Soon, unrelieved monotony set in aboard ship as Shangri-la Terrace became less appealing and the inspection trips were permanently cancelled due to one man's questionable conduct in town. The bored, restless men fished and watched passing ships from the rail by day and gazed in starry-eyed disbelief at Noumea's brilliantly-lighted skyline far into the night. This all-out illumination was in stark contrast to West Coast regulations. Not even passing battlewagons or carriers jam-packed with warplanes stirred the men to any noticeable extent. The harbor was literally a maze of all types of warships, all awaiting convoy orders for the raging Solomons.

Suddenly, without warning, everything seemed to happen. Comdrs. Easterly and Darron, the unit skippers, left Noumea by plane for the initial destination. The ditch-digger, "Old Faithful," was hoisted aboard and the otherwise indifferent man correctly envisioned slit trenches and foxholes just ahead. All hands were ordered to commence taking the repulsive, yellow atabrine tablets after their meals. And when the Malaria Control boys began lecturing in each hold, everyone knew it was to be the Solomons!

On the twelfth day in harbor, 26 September, just as many were beginning to suspect the outfit might spend most of the war in New Caledonia, the anchor was weighed, the great engines quickened their tempo and the S.S. ROBIN WENTLEY joined up with a convoy bristling with armed might and headed for trouble.

**CLEAN 'EM UP!** One of the many problems confronting the fledgling 87th during its early staging period on Banika was the necessity of keeping mess gear clean. Lack of proper sterilization caused many unnecessary cases of dysentery. To offset this condition,

blacksmiths and welders displayed typical ingenuity in converting 55-gallon drums into hot water washing tubs. Later battalion mess halls had built-in sculleries. Above, men stand in the long line to wash gear for next meal.

## BATTALION STAGES AT BANIKA FOR INVASION

As the setting sun slid behind the wooded mountains of Pavuvu, the men aboard the WENTLEY were confident there would be no beachhead on Banika that night. To their chagrin, however, a fleet of LCMs chugged alongside and all hands were ordered to clamber aboard—gear and all. The loaded WENTLEY apparently offered too good a target for roving Jap bombers.

Ashore, at last, the men felt their way gingerly along the pitch-black road. A heavy scent of lush tropical vegetation surrounded them. They were finally in the heart of the fabled Solomons!

The long line of burdened men were led off the main road into a huge coconut plantation. This was the bivouac area. Coconuts strawn over the grassy plot provided supper that night and dysentery in the morning. Wild cows wandered through the area all night, parakeets screeched and toads hopped from body to body. Consequently, no one slept.

The first morning ashore featured K rations for breakfast. This was the beginning of a long series of rations—some hot, some cold—all equally unpalatable.

Unloading of the WENTLEY began immediately and continued around the clock. As the lone dock was occupied, the transport remained in mid-stream and was laboriously unloaded with pontoon barges. The first night ashore had emphasized the previously unsuspected virtues of life aboard ship and all who could slept and ate there.

The COMET arrived on schedule with the bulk of the equipment and the remainder of the men. Fortunately, she was able to tie up of the pier where the rolling stock was unloaded, serviced and put to work immediately.

Ten days after landing, the main camp area was completed. The site was near the end of the bomber strip and overlooked picturesque Renard Sound. The set-up was strictly a temporary one—installations as makeshift as practical. Sand provided a deck for the show hall; the men's tents were set on bare grass.

For a month tropical downpours provided the only bathing facilities. The climate was most oppressive—hot, damp and still. All hands suffered from heat-rash. Flies infested the camp by day; mosquitoes took over at night. The mosquito bar became every man's best friend.

The ditching machine picked up at New Caledonia speedily dug fox-

holes all over the new camp area. Although alerts were frequent and long, action was so light that the men soon disregarded the siren entirely and acquired the highly-dangerous habit of sleeping through everything.

The battalion set to work building a badly-needed highway around Renard Sound, thereby gaining first-hand knowledge of the two main features of Pacific construction—mud and coral.

Then, 18 October brought news that aroused the entire camp. Company A and the engineering unit of Headquarters Company had been suddenly alerted, issued Marine combat gear and were being moved back to Guadalcanal. The camp was agog with rumors and speculation for weeks.

The task of whipping the remaining bulk of the battalion into shape continued unabated. To make for a more flexible working unit in forward areas, the old company system was junked and the battalion was reorganized into divisions according to job specialties.

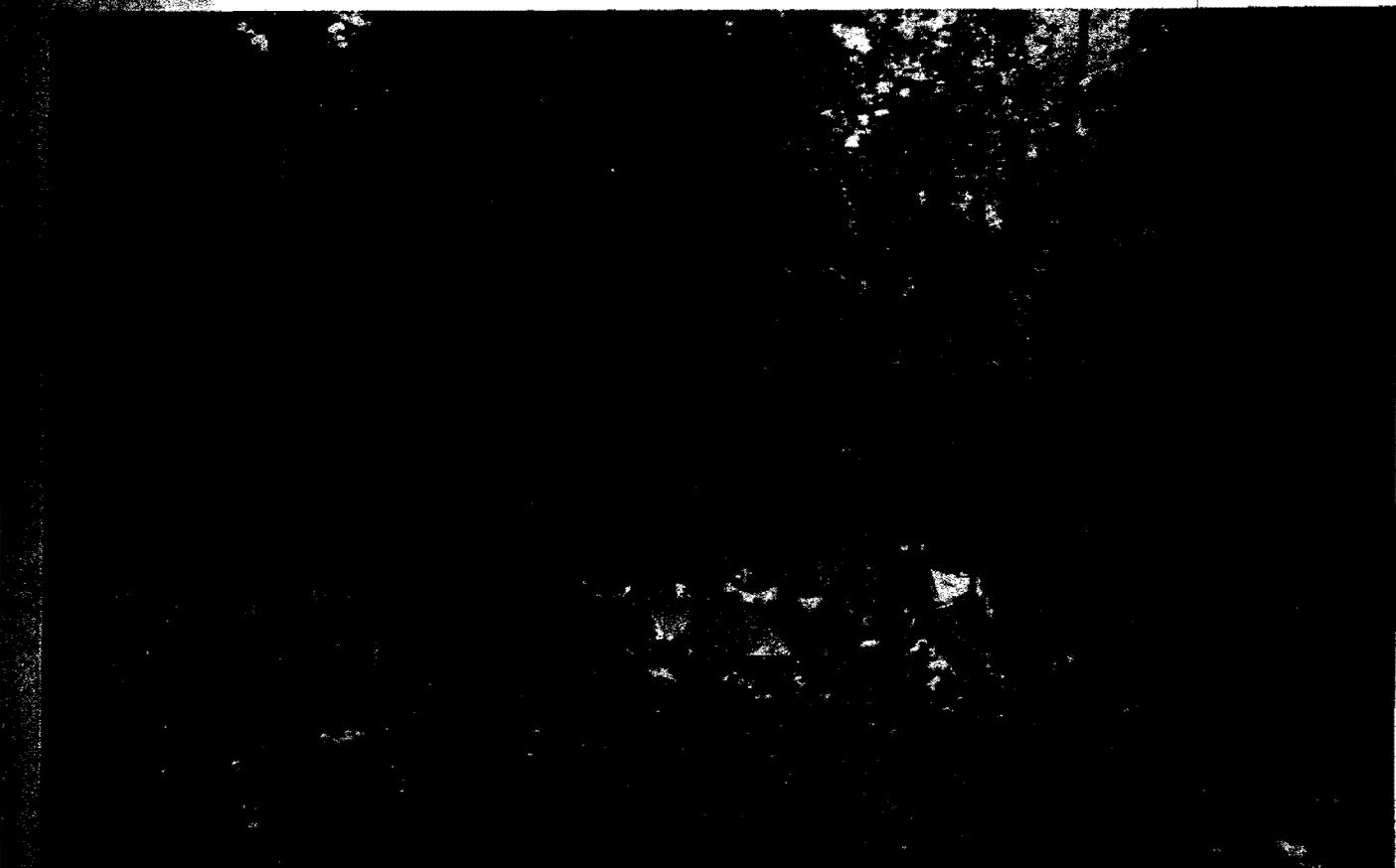
Soon the men began searching the island for amusement. The 35th Seabees operated a movie; the Marines would trade anything for coveralls; the natives wanted only United States cash for their cheap grass-skirts and trinkets. The nearby airstrip from which MAG 21 was sending its Ventura bombers to soften up Vella LaVella, Munda and Bougainville for invasion was a constant source of diversion.

The newsworthy invasion report from Lieut. C. E. Turnbull, OinC of Company A, to Comdr. Easterly had a sobering effect, yet it gave the men a new feeling of pride in their outfit. Tassone had buried a pillbox and a dozen Japs, Ostman was missing in action, Bodine had been severely wounded, food was scarce and wearing apparel was badly needed. The 87th, at least, in part, was finally in the thick of the fight.

When word came to secure, the men were ready. Three LSTs were quickly loaded to capacity. A Thanksgiving dinner of turkey provided a most welcome respite from the tasteless rations.

A rear echelon of 50 men and four officers—slated to shove off along with the ACORN 12 days later—was dockside to see the bulk of the 87th depart.

At sunset, on 26 November, the heavy LST ramps went up, the "box-cars" backed slowly out into the stream and the convoy headed north from OUCH (operation code name for Banika) into the gathering darkness.



"BUSHWHACK." Company A bivouac area was set up a half-mile from the unloading beaches. Weary mates changed name to "bushwhack" after they had hacked at underbrush and vines to clear space for living quarters. Most paired off in two-man pup-

tents, but some constructed lean-tos (left) by lashing shelter halves and ponchos together. Mud, damp clothing and towering trees that shut out sunlight made this most depressing, cheerless camp. Company A lived here over a month.

## 87TH BLOODED IN TREASURY ISLANDS INVASION

The electrifying news raced through the 87th's staging camp on Tanika. It was 18 October 1943. Company A and a part of Headquarters Company were being detached from the battalion and moved back to the Canal.

The detached unit consisted of 224 men and six officers with Lieut. Charles E. Turnbull as OinC. Arriving at Guadalcanal, they joined several assault companies of the 8th New Zealand Brigade.

On 26 October, the combined forces departed from Guadalcanal for the Northern Solomons. The objective was to neutralize the Treasury Islands group, 30 miles below Bougainville.

The attacking force embarked in a fleet of eleven warships. They approached Blanche Harbor between Stirling and Mono before dawn of 29 October. The first indication many had of this being the real

was the murderous barrage from the cruisers and destroyers of Force 31 as they blasted the Falamai beachhead vicinity.

Heavy aerial bombardment preceded the landing craft. The warships poured more tons of steel into mountain-gun emplacements. Small craft headed shoreward. The retorting flashes ashore gradually diminished one by one. Soon only Jap mortars and machine-guns remained to spray the beach.

As soon as the small boats hit the invasion sector, New Zealand paratroopers dispersed into the jungle. Pillboxes were quickly annihilated. Bayonets flashed. Cries and screams intermingled with hand-to-hand blows. Enemy machine-gun chatter soon ceased altogether.

However, the Jap's specialty—his deadly mortar—made more and more trouble. Projectiles patterned the beach with uncanny precision. The New Zealand squads disappeared into the jungle. The remaining mortar-guns were finally put out of action by the incessant shelling from offshore ships. The Japs were soon forced to retreat.

Enemy mortar fire, however, continued to be deadly accurate. One shell landed directly on a pile of ammunition just unloaded. It was here the 87th suffered its first casualty. Herbert Bodine, one of the battalion armorers, was seriously wounded and burned by a nearby explosion. Hospital corpsmen removed him, still unconscious, to an unloaded LST ready to return to the Canal.

Another Jap mortar shell struck the food supplies being stacked ashore. Several more exploded on the deck of another LST. The beached LSTs could not depress their guns enough to bear on pill-

boxes ashore, so New Zealand assault troops attacked whenever a hidden gun opened fire. The fury of the pitched battle moved deeper into the jungle. It was at this point that Aurelio Tassone, 87th bulldozer operator, very effectively silenced an annoying pillbox that was hampering unloading operations.

Meanwhile, equipment continued pouring out of the LSTs. Rolling stock began carrying supplies off the unprotected beach area. Everyone seemed to be carrying something ashore or moving something further up the narrow strip of sand.

One dozer began knocking a road out of the thick undergrowth. Others started clearing space for parking equipment. A pit was gashed in the solid coral for a direction finder. This trench was 90 feet long, 9 feet deep and 14 feet wide. For some unknown reason, the gears on the dozers operated by Sam Rajala and Dewey White refused to function. With only hand tools and a world of guts, Leonard Friedman rode unprotected on the hoods and kept the big machines on the job.

A LCM was sent around Mono with a bulldozer aboard. This carried Ensign John R. Bevyer and crew. His special detail had been aboard the last ship in the attacking force. They had left the convoy at dawn and struck on the opposite side of Mono. Their assignment was to set up vital radar equipment atop a high precipice at Soanatalu. Joe Canada and Grady Thompson performed a masterful job on their dozers as they cut a road through solid jungle on a sharp 45-degree slope.

Edwin ("Swede") Ostman was reported missing in action the night of 29 October and was never found. Clair Charles and Odell Bob Hayes, Jr. were both slightly wounded by shrapnel from Jap grenades.

By sunset of the initial day, Mono and Stirling were definitely in Allied hands. Remnants of the Jap garrison scattered in the jungle were being hunted down by New Zealand patrols. Enemy air activity continued throughout the night, but it was not too effective.

The tired mates dug hasty slit trenches, set up pup-tents, placed a guard at every foxhole and attempted to catch a bit of sleep. Ten days later organized resistance was declared at an end. The Treasuries had been wrested from the enemy, but Tokyo still seemed in another world.

# JUNGLE YIELDS STIRLING FIELD

As the 87th Seabees and New Zealand assault troops hit the Treasury Islands beach that memorable 27 October, the prospects for an airfield on Mono or Stirling Islands seemed quite remote.

The battalion's engineer reconnaissance group, attached to Company A, was not scheduled to arrive for another 10 days, at which time possible sites for a fighter strip were to be investigated. Apparently, Treasury was an alternate site for a field planned in the Treasury-Bougainville operation.

Soon after the initial landings, however, it became increasingly evident that tiny Stirling had good possibilities as an air base such as flat terrain, workable coral, excellent water supply and good landing beaches.

Therefore, the reconnaissance crew was ordered forward ahead of schedule, arriving from Guadalcanal the morning of 1 November (D-day on Bougainville), and on 5 November this group submitted a favorable report on the location of a proposed fighter strip.

A few days later, orders were received to make additional surveys and report location and size of a bomber field that could be built on Stirling. On the basis of this report, Bougainville bomber strip "W" was moved to Stirling.

At 0800, 29 November, the first bulldozer was put to work clearing for the runway, and by nightfall the following day, a heavily-timbered area—300 by 2,000 feet—had been cleared. Most of the heavy clearing was done by dozers. Hand-clearing and logging crews cut out much of the small growth, trimmed and sawed the larger trees, and hauled them to the nearby sawmill.

After the clearing came the stripping. Over the coral formation that was the island, there was a blanket of about a foot of dark, humus soil, composed largely of vegetable matter in various stages of decay. Since this material was very unstable when wet, it had to be completely removed and wasted before the grading of the underlying coral could commence.

Not much of the coral required blasting. Most of it was soft enough to be broken up by rooters and the bulk of it could be moved by the pans without rooting. The cuts and fills were relatively light. Therefore, the rough-grading stages of the work proceeded rapidly.

As the graders and rollers brought the surface to smooth finish, salt water was applied by sprinklers, causing the surface to set up like concrete.

The tactical plan called for a usable 4,000-foot strip by 10 January 1944. It was made ready the preceding Christmas Day. A 6,000-foot bomber strip had to be ready for operation by 1 February. It was in use 2 January.

Taxiways, hardstands, warm-up aprons, repair areas, operations tower, camps for aviation personnel and other field facilities assigned to the 87th were all completed well within the time allotted.

And after more urgent facilities had been provided, the original strip was extended to a length of 7,000 feet. The jungle had been licked. The Jap was next!



**HITCH-HIKERS.** A "snatch-cat" tows a huge stump and carries a couple of passengers. The small tractors had been used previously to drag logs out of the rough and up to the loading pits. It has been raining again!



**AND THEY CARRIED THEM AWAY TO THE MILL.** Lumber for pilot housing was sawed from timber cleared from the Strip. Here, Bos'n's Mate Meredith Walls and crew load out a few. A 'dozer ditch' accommodates the trucks and eliminates uphill pull.



**COME HELL OR HIGH WATER,** the gang was in there pitching. Frequent cloudbursts were a considerable inconvenience, but work continued just the same. That glum look on Clyde Pemberton's face is probably the result of a very damp "drift."



**AND DAMN THE TORPEDOES!** Typical of the several early "super-highways" leading into washed Camp Ostman was this obstacle course, which tested the mettle of even the stoutest truckdrivers throughout the memorable months following the invasion. "Pilots" of heavy-duty trucks approached such dilemmas with considerable

misgiving as the depth of such uncharted "later" naturally varied with the amount of rainfall. However, "T" Division was "on the ball" and kept 'em rolling day and night. It was Man vs. Nature.

## LIFE AT CAMP OSTMAN WAS STERILE EXISTENCE

To an isolated few, "Island X" was "Home, Sweet Home." To all others, however, it was the 87th's "Devil's Island." To one and all, "The Rock" represented an 11-month interlude spent like degraded castaways on a 1x3 coral landspock in the lonely Pacific. Why Stirling's operational code name was GOODTIME was never learned.

From the first days of the mud-drenched bivouac in October and November, 1943 until the day of departure in September, 1944, the men lived in the crudest and most primitive manner imaginable. Propriety and customs were soon all but discarded.

Sleep was virtually impossible in the bivouac area. It was, in fact, a hellish nightmare of jagged coral, swarms of persistent insects and hordes of such monsters as giant iguanas, scorpions, land-crabs, centipedes and the deadly coral snake.

Pup-tents were small protection against the incessant rains. Throughout the long, restless nights, the eerie wailing of air-raid sirens and the deep barking of AA guns were interspersed with weird jungle noises. Attacks of dysentery added to the general misery. It was invariably a hollow-eyed, water-soaked crew reporting for early duty.

Once the top-priority air strip was begun, each division commenced clearing its own area in the main camp. Armed with axes and machetes, crews first hacked out clearings for tents. Then, 'dozers cleared narrow roads between rows of tents and the camp began to shape up.

Soil removed in 'dozing weakened the foundation of the towering trees by further exposing the already shallow roots. During the worst windstorms, the wary men usually evacuated their tents in favor of cleared areas like the rifle range. Inevitably, tents were destroyed by crashing jungle monarchs until eventually this menace superseded the Jap threat.

As the vast island-development program expanded, chigger bites caused the most lost men-hours. Other prevalent afflictions were jungle rot, fungus, ulcers and heat rash. Lacerations became infected overnight. The men gulped daily doses of atabrine, salt tablets and vitamin pills to stay on their feet.

Throughout those early, trying months, money, as such, had absolutely no value. Cigarettes, candy and toilet articles were free. The Solomons medium of exchange was barter, but there was little to bargain for.

The 87th quickly cultivated neighboring New Zealanders. The con-

nection was usually good for tea or beer. However, the Kiwis generally contrived to get back more than they gave.

Early island chow consisted largely of warmed-over field rations. When fresh meat made its infrequent appearance on holidays like Christmas and New Year's, the mates were unable to do it justice.

Procuring food from visiting merchant ships became the most highly developed of many cutthroat arts in the forward area. It was every outfit for itself with no holds barred!

Liquor could be had at \$35 to \$50 a fifth. Crude stills, hidden under trunks of trees, produced potent "Jungle Juice" from handy items like raisins, fruit bars, canned corn or apricots. Only after many had become violently ill did Island Command clamp down.

Most men experienced their first real earthquake on 24 December 1943. Many in breakfast chow-line were hurled to the ground. Lesser quakes and tremors occurred periodically. Other than air-mailed clippings, the men depended upon THE MITCHELL and THE DAILY MAIL (two-page mimeographed newsheets) for current news.

Scuttlebutt became rife that once the Strip was completed the battalion would get a 30-day leave in New Zealand. The abortive Kavieng push collapsed, but it was in the making just long enough to blast the visit "Down Under."

Stirling was strictly a womanless world. Except for an occasional flight nurse, the only white women the men saw were those with Bob Hope and Jack Benny.

The mates resorted to almost every pastime to speed the dragging days. Hunting catayas solved the problem for many. Souvenir-making turned the trick for some. Others resorted to fishing trips in the MISSEABEE, swimming at Falamai or hikes to the native villages. The planned recreation program included basketball, volleyball, softball, boxing, wrestling, horseshoe pitching and, finally, ping pong! Five battalion officers were lucky in a restricted lottery and flew to Australia for a leave. They rejoined the outfit at New Cal.

Morale was tremendously improved when the battalion was awarded its first battle star for the Treasury-Bougainville operation.

But all wasn't work and boredom on Stirling. Twice the bug-eyed men watched a mighty task force shelling nearby Shortland Islands. Black alerts were not infrequent.

When the jungle-battered outfit left Stirling in September, 1944, the men had absorbed their fill of the tropics. The next destination—no matter where—would certainly be an improvement!



**TAKE FIVE, BOYS!** Where there was a lough job ahead, there was always a seasoned Seabee outfit to do it. And wherever Seabees went, mountains of equipment and materials had to accompany the "know-how" boys. The Japs are alleged to have feared this hard-to-beat combination almost

as much as they dreaded the Marines. Here, 87th stevadores take advantage of a "breather" as they wave off still another barge-load of pallets and pipe headed for the ROTANIN.

## ORDERED FORWARD AGAIN AFTER 17 MONTHS OVERSEAS

The announcement each man had been dreading for the past four months came with dramatic suddenness. It was early January, 1945. The battalion was in the midst of extended-order drill in the scrub-woods at the base of Monte D'Or when orders to secure all military training and return to camp were received.

All hands immediately assumed the fatal day was close at hand. Instead of returning to the States at the end of 18 months, the battalion's mythical luck had apparently run out. Now, it looked like back to the forward areas again.

In camp, bulletin boards already blazed with orders concerning the 12 January departure of the first echelon. The old, familiar tension again gripped the camp. Now that the matter had finally been decided, the men waited with impatience to get on with the inevitable.

In amazingly short order, the initial group of 344 men and six officers were loaded onto long trailers, driven to the Noumea docks and put aboard the already jampacked S. S. PRINCE GEORGE. Their itinerary included Tulagi, where all remaining space was jampacked with dynamite; Eniwetok, where, as anticipated, time was lost; and finally Saipan on 27 January.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the battalion was busy loading the U. S. S. ROTANIN (AK-108) with pontoon barges. Eventually, even the ship slated to transport the rear echelon showed up and commenced taking on cargo.

On 31 January, when the 87th Seabees had ticked off slightly over 17 months of foreign service, including a solid year in the torrid Solomons, the second echelon of 717 men and 22 officers climbed aboard the ROTANIN via the wildly-swinging cargo nets and sailed.

Life aboard the ROTANIN was typical of all crowded Navy troopships. Shade, as always, was at a premium on the scorching steel decks. When the pensive men weren't doing the usual things, they could be found fooling around with the battalion dogs in their pen or simply gazing off into meaningless space along the rail.

Chow was eaten while standing in the steaming holds next to the ship's engines and each meal was an ordeal. Divine Services were held both Sundays. Fresh water was soon rationed and the mood of the entire unit swerved sharply downward as guards were posted at each spigot.

The fourth day at sea and 1,000 miles out of New Cal, found the

men once more gazing at Guadalcanal, hardly recognizable now with its neat rows of quonsets and huge docks. The war had unmistakably moved away from the Canal since 1942-43.

The next morning found the ROTANIN on the high seas again, this time with a tiny Australian corvette as its lone escort. The ship headed due north across the Equator, obviously toward the Marshalls—1,420 miles from the Canal. It was the 87th's second crossing of "The Line."

A sub alarm at sunset caused everyone to don life-jackets while the lumbering ship lurched at crazy angles. After a few anxious moments, the corvette signalled reassuring news—a school of porpoises had excited the radar! However, the stubby escort was taking no chances. The transport was then quite near Truk and the Caroline Islands—still Jap-held!

The corvette was eventually relieved by a small American gunboat, which took over the watchdog duties for the remaining few days to Eniwetok.

The first indication of land came in the form of hundreds of short chimneys jutting out of the horizon and somewhat resembling a factory town. Slowly, the breath-taking scene unrolled and the men gaped at the unprecedented sight.

Here, enclosed within a barren, horseshoe-shaped strip of land were hundreds and hundreds of ships of all types—battlegoons, flat-tops, cruisers, destroyers, LSTs and pontoon barges—all crowding one another in the huge, land-locked harbor right there in the middle of nowhere! This was Eniwetok in February, 1945, the first—and thank God!—the only island of the Marshalls visited by the 87th.

While waiting for the next convoy, the men were taken on a shore party for a refreshing swim, a few bottles of beverage and a first-hand view of the battlegrounds.

At sea, once more, now the flagship of a 14-ship convoy, the ROTANIN covered the remaining five days and 1,430 additional miles to the Marianas uneventfully.

The men knew the long journey was nearing completion when they began to see flight after flight of huge B-29s passing in the distance. It was, however, with a genuine sigh of relief that the men greeted the rocky crags of Saipan after 17 tedious days of the sea. The 3,850-mile voyage from New Cal. to Saipan had exhausted all hands.



**JOB VARIETY.** A guard stands solitary watch as John Bell guides motor grader over rough coral road within staging camp perimeter. Dazzling coral surface gave off constant clouds of powdery dust and men and tents became coated with grimy skim of dirt. De-

spite sustained adverse conditions, American vehicles kept right on rolling over roads once traveled by the Sons of Heaven. Many Jap soldiers (and some civilians) had somehow managed to elude dragnet and were living in hills like animals.

## SAIPAN WAS STAGING AREA FOR OKINAWA PUSH

In early 1945, Saipan was a front page punchline in the news of the world. As the battalion's advance echelon arrived there on 27 January, they were already reading of the huge B-29 armadas taking off from the Marianas for the Jap homeland. Again, the seasoned 87th was moving into a front seat!

As the second echelon rolled in on 16 February, they were treated to the stirring sight of a huge convoy of 56 PA ships—loaded to the gunwales with Marines—heading for the all-out assault against bloody Iwo Jima.

The staging camp had been pitched in a cleared sugar cane field at the base of a tall, jagged, shell-pocked mountain cliff. Tents had been thrown up hastily with no thought of permanence.

By far the most persistent gripe of the men was the sustained scarcity of fresh water. Mates waited in long, tiresome lines for a ration of one-third of a bucket of the precious necessity three times a day. Eventually, salt-water showers were installed in order to furnish at least rudimentary bathing facilities.

Due to the extremely poor living conditions, morale was not at its best. Food again reverted to the almost forgotten GI rations. Beer, although usually issued twice a week, was lukewarm and anything but refreshing.

However, with the 29 March change of command, certain essential changes began to occur. Ice water, for example, was served at chow; iced beer was sold in the newly erected beer garden; and ice cream—of all things!—again appeared on the menu. "The Forgotten Battalion" naturally began to perk up!

Construction took a brief respite on Saipan. A few carpenter crews threw together some large quonsets at the 39th General Hospital and later erected a few long wooden structures for the natives in Garapan.

The Allied Military Government borrowed an 87th survey party to lay out various housing projects in the native area, while Chief Andy Competiello rubbed elbows with Jap civilian draftsmen at Camp Susupe. This, and the clearing of adjacent areas for incoming Seabees, comprised the battalion's construction program on HODE.

Reliable scuttlebutt had the 87th joining the huge, recently-formed Tenth Army. Wild rumors foretold an all-out push in the near future. The next beachhead would probably be Formosa, the China coast or Japan proper! Meanwhile, the battalion sweated through another series of lectures and refresher courses covering all phases of military science and tactics.

The neighboring 24th Infantry Regiment permitted 87th officers and men to accompany them on night patrols. Various "volunteers" cut legitimate notches on their rifle-stocks after patrolling the Jap-infested hills with this veteran colored outfit.

In spite of a constant vigil by a cordon of guards, the battalion supply dump time and again displayed evidence of enemy thievery. The guard was doubled and ordered to shoot any moving object after sundown.

One wild night, shortly before midnight, a terrific barrage of rifle fire awakened the slumbering camp. Guns of all descriptions joined the fray from the obviously excited O. O. D. and M. A. A. offices.

Word spread that Japs were trapped and pinned down by at least 40 would-be heroes wielding '03s, BARs and even two machine-guns. The entire camp was naturally kept on edge all night by the nearby sustained, crackling gunfire.

Finally, dawn came and all hands hurried to the supply dump to gaze upon the carnage. However, to everyone's amazement, no bodies lay strewn about the shell-pocked area. Nor had any of the alleged Japs surrendered! In fact, there weren't any Japs around at all. There were only the crestfallen "Gestapo" whose faces will doubtless always crimson whenever the incident is mentioned.

Later, almost the entire battalion witnessed a prime example of Saipan's savage warfare as waged in the Spring of 1945. The men stood in noon chow-line and watched a 24th Infantry patrol, high on a towering, shell-scarred ledge, mow down three cornered Japs at point-blank range and then throw the bodies over the precipice for further disposition.

After a few months of this, the battalion was mentally geared for the move against BIVE.



**OUTDOOR CAFETERIA.** Continuous mud and no chow hall didn't deter work-hungry men from standing in long lines for the dreaded C-rations. Dehydrated food was standard chow for the first few weeks until Comdr. Cook got fed up with unrelieved rations, too.

All hands, including officers and chiefs, stood in chow lines with the mates until the second echelon arrived at Bolo on 14 May. Then, things quickly reverted to normal as the "pushers" resumed their old tricks.

## OVERSEAS TOUR REACHES SMASHING CLIMAX AT OKINAWA

The Okinawa campaign was an apparently endless series of rough assignments for the veteran 87th Seabees—a mad pace that began on 27 April and didn't let up until the battalion was finally inactivated on 7 November. The unit was involved in many important construction projects south of Bolo Point.

Among these were two major operations—Yontan Airfield, the first American-built bomber strip on Okinawa, and Bolo Airfield, the mammoth B-29 strip near Camp Bolo. The battalion also helped build Awasha Airfield where the 36th Seabees required the assistance of 150 operators and mechanics for 45 days.

Every conceivable type of aerial warfare was witnessed by the 87th ringsiders. The never-ending roar from the death struggle around Nahe and Shuri was audible day and night. Artillery concussion and continuous flares over the flaming battlefield frequently resulted in lost sleep at Bolo.

Kamikaze planes, sometimes eluding the famed "Picket Line" around Okinawa in broad daylight, constantly tried for Allied shipping in the nearby crowded harbor. Frequently, a withering curtain of flak would box in the fanatical invaders and fascinated onlookers would cheer lustily as the "Meatballers" exploded in mid-air.

At night, searchlights held enemy planes in their radar-controlled beams until 90-mm. gunfire erased the "Bogies." Flak dropped all over with a fearsome sound. Then, everyone hit the foxholes—but never for long! The show was too big, gruesome and fascinating to be missed underground. Fortunately, the battalion's fabulous luck under fire continued.

General alarms were circulated virtually every night after the Japs' suicidal airborne invasion of Yontan Airfield in May. After that nightmare, mates slept beside loaded pieces, ammunition, knives and gas masks. Less than two miles from Yontan and Kadena and expecting the worse, Camp Bolo was ringed with machine-gun pillboxes and the guard was doubled.

Soon after General Buckner's shocking death, the island was secured on 21 June—82 days after Easter D-Day—but enemy raids continued until the end. There had been 281 Jap raids up to that time.

The Okinawa operation gave the 87th its second battle star, one Legion of Merit, two Bronze Stars and five Commendation Ribbons before the Pacific tour ended.

And then one never-to-be-forgotten night—10 August—as the mates sighed over a torrid cinema love scene, all the island seemed to explode into a scintillation fireworks exhibition. The sky was miraculously ablaze with madly whirling searchlights. Colored tracers of all calibers streaked wildly in every direction. Many made a scrambled rush for foxholes. This could be nothing less than the all-out air-borne invasion so often promised by Radio Tokyo!

Then, loudspeakers blared the astounding news: "THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT ARE READY TO ACCEPT . . ." Like an all-engulfing tidal wave, the stunned men surged out of foxholes with hysterical shouts: THE WAR IS OVER! THE WAR IS OVER! Few had expected the end for another six months—if then! Surrender seemed incredible! Lurching in blind circles, the men were drunk with mad, delirious joy.

Next day, the still excited men were astounded to learn that six had been killed and 30 wounded during the previous night's premature celebration—and that the war was still on!

Then, on 2 September, the inevitable peace became official aboard the U. S. S. MISSOURI in Tokyo harbor. Like a lump of sugar in the rain, the 87th began slowly, but surely, to dissolve. More over 42 had been flown home in June, along with the excess personnel. Two small rotation groups arrived, releasing 27 men.

The 44-point discharge system became operative amid loud squawks from veterans long overseas who were receiving no credit for foreign service. Simultaneously, rotation and the five per cent deal apparently ceased.

In late September, the battalion moved from Bolo Point to Baten-Ko. On 9 October, the worst typhoon in 20 years leveled Okinawa and the 87th camp.

Finally, in their twenty-seventh month of foreign service—on 7 November—the remaining 361 veterans left for the States.

The hardened 87th—with more than two years overseas—had occupied a ringside seat for the titanic Pacific struggle from the Solomons campaign to the resounding atomic end at Hirohito's own doorstep.

ITINERARY OF THE 87TH U. S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

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To:

*Confidential*

- 23 February 1943 - Formed at NCTC, Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Va. (Date  
Officer in Charge reported to battalion *[Signature]*  
Signature
- 16 April 1943 - Battalion transferred to NCTC, Camp Endicott, Davis-  
ville, Rhode Island. 31 Officers, and 1080 Men.
- 17 April 1943 - Arrived at NCTC, Camp Endicott, Davisville, R.I.
- 13 June 1943 - Transferred by three troop trains to ASD, Fort Huene-  
me, California. 30 Officers, and 1061 Men.
- 19 June 1943 - Arrived at Camp Rousseau, Fort Hueneame, California.
- 28 August 1943 - Troop ship departed ASD, Fort Hueneame, California for  
overseas. 25 Officers, and 1012 Men.
- 29 August 1943 - Supply Ship departed ASD, Fort Hueneame, California for  
overseas. 4 Officers, and 9 men.
- 14 September 1943 - Troop Ship Arrived Noumea, New Caledonia.
- 16 September 1943 - Supply Ship Arrived Noumea, New Caledonia.
- 26 September 1943 - Troop Ship departed Noumea, New Caledonia.
- 30 September 1943 - Troop Ship arrived Banika, Russell Islands.
- 1 October 1943 - Supply Ship departed Noumea, New Caledonia.
- 5 October 1943 - Supply Ship arrived Banika, Russell Islands.
- 18 October 1943 - Company "A", plus miscellaneous ratings from head-  
quarters Company, detached from battalion and departed  
Banika, Russell Islands, as first echelon on forward  
movement. 5 Officers, and 224 Men.
- 27 October 1943 - First Echelon arrived with assault forces (8th New  
Zealand Brigade) at Lona and Sterling, Treasury Is-  
lands.
- 26 November 1943 - Second Echelon departed Banika, Russell Islands.  
25 Officers, and 720 Men.
- 28 November 1943 - Second Echelon arrived Sterling, Treasury Islands.
- 8 December 1943 - Third Echelon departed Banika, Russell Islands. 3  
Officers, and 51 Men.
- 11 December 1943 - Third Echelon arrived Sterling, Treasury Islands.

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Irvin S. Rosam  
Comdr. CEC-VIS  
*[Signature]*

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- 5 September 1944 - First Echelon departed Sterling, Treasury Islands. 26 Officers, and 1028 Men.
- 10 September 1944 - First Echelon arrived Noumea, New Caledonia.
- 25 September 1944 - Second Echelon departed Sterling, Treasury Islands. 1 Officer, and 50 men.
- 30 September 1944 - Second Echelon arrived Noumea, New Caledonia.
- 11 January 1945 - First Echelon departed Noumea, New Caledonia. 3 Officers, and 344 Men.
- 27 January 1945 - First Echelon arrived Saipan, Mariana Islands.
- 31 January 1945 - Second Echelon departed Noumea, New Caledonia. 22 Officers, and 717 Men.
- 17 February 1945 - Second Echelon arrived Saipan, Mariana Islands.
- 11 February 1945 - Third Echelon departed Noumea, New Caledonia. 3 Officers, 25 Men.
- 3 March 1945 - Third Echelon arrived Saipan, Mariana Islands.
- 29 March 1945 - Commander Robert WASHBURN, CEC(S), USMC, relieved of duty as Officer in Charge by Commander ROBERT H. COCK, CEC, USMC.
- 20 April 1945 - First Echelon departed Saipan, Mariana Islands. 27 Officers, and 741 Men.
- 27 April 1945 - First Echelon arrived Okinawa Shima, Ryukyu Retto.
- 7 May 1945 - Second Echelon departed Saipan, Mariana Islands. 5 Officers, and 327 men.
- 14 May 1945 - Second Echelon arrived Okinawa Shima, Ryukyu Retto.

CONFIDENTIAL

*E. A. Flynn*  
E. A. FLYNN, Lt. Comdr., CEC, USMC.

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*Irvin S. Rosmus*

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Irvin S. Rosmus  
Comdr. CEC-1(C) USMC

Signature











