

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

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## *Historical Information*



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



96th C.B.

		<u>End Embarkation</u>
NCTC	- Peary	NCTC - Davisville
ABD	- Davisville	ABD - Hueneme
Ready Date	- 10 Aug'43	Ready Date - 5 Dec'44
Left ABD	- 31 Dec'43 (14 off. and 538 men)	Left ABD - 27 Jan'45
Location	- Cub 8 - Terceira, Azores	Location - Samar, Leyte

LOG

- 6- 5-43 - Budocks requests 96th CB to be transferred from Peary on 12 Jun'43 to Davisville. (Budocks ltr to CNO 6/5/43)
- 7- 8-43 - 96th CB scheduled to depart Davisville on 15 Jul for Gulfport. (TWX 081755-7-43 to CinC ABD Gulfport)
- 1- 4-44 - 14 off. and 538 men departed ABD 31 Dec'43. (WRK)
- 2-15-44 - 1 Feb'44 report of 96th CB Section at Azores - CinC and 2 off. arrived at Lagens Field Terceira, Azores on 31 Dec'43. 13 officers and 462 men arrived 9 Jan'44.
- 5-27-44 - 1 May'44 report of 96th CB - operating at Camp Santa Ritta, Praia Dock, Lagens Field (Azores).
- 6-29-44 - 1 Jun'44 report of 96th CB - operating at Azores.
- 7-14-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 96th CB - operating at Azores.
- 8-15-44 - 96th CB reported 4 Aug'44 at NCTC Davisville from overseas with 11 off. and 345 men. (TWX051440 8-44 from NCTC Davisville to WA Seabees A-8)
- 9- 8-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 96th CB - Departed Terceira, Azores, 27 Jul'44. Upon arrival in U.S. this batt was given leave and returned to duty 25 Aug.

96th CB

- 10-28-44 - 96th CB assigned to Cub 16. (CNO Sec. disp to Com7flt 211501 NCR 1046 dtd 21 Oct'44).
- 11- 9-44 - CNO orders transfer of the 96th CB about 10 Nov'44 to Hueneme. Assigned Cub 16. (Conf. Disp. 042011 NCR 3389 from CNO to NCTC Davisville dtd 5 Nov'44)
- 11-27-44 - The 96th CB arrived Hueneme from Davisville 21 Nov'44. (Hueneme conf. disp to CNO 221900 NCR 811 dtd 22 Nov'44).
- 12-18-44 - 29th CB assigned to AcornTraDet for temp duty instead of the 96th CB. (CNO conf. disp to AcornTraDet and Hueneme 141845 dtd 14 Dec'44).
- 1-24-45 - The 96th CB is to report to CNB UL0D - deleted from Cub 16 and assigned to Comserv 7th flt. (CNO conf. disp to Hueneme 181415 dtd 19 Jan'45).
- 1-31-45 - The 96th CB is booked from Hueneme 27 Jan'45 for AVID. (Hueneme Sec. disp to CNO 172341 dtd 10 Jan'45).
- 2-7-45 -- The 96th CB is loaded and awaiting orders. (ComWesSeaFron Sec. disp to CNO 260124 dtd 26 Jan'45).
- 2-7-45 -- The 96th CB departed Hueneme 27 Jan'45 for overseas with 28 officers and 1081 men. (Hueneme conf. disp to Bupers 292311 dtd 30 Jan'45).
- 2- 9-45 - 96th CB loaded for AVID with 28 officers and 1081 men. (Com 12 Conf Disp to Comserv7flt 012252 dtd 2 Feb'45)
- 2-13-45 - The 96th CB is assigned to Samar. (CNO Ser. cltr to distribution list Ser. 0039230 dtd 3 Feb'45).
- 4-10-45 - The 96th CB is located at Samar according to Dirpadocks SanFran Sec Rep for 15 Mar.
- 4-14-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of the 96th CB - In-transit status during entire month.
- 4-30-45 - The 96th CB is located at Manicani Is. in Leyte-Samar area. (Comserv7flt Sec Rep of 1 Apr'45)
- 5- 8-45 - The 96th CB is located at Samar. (Dirpadocks S.F. Sec Rep of 15 Apr'45)
- 5-18-45 - 1 May'45 report of 96th CB - located at Samar. Report routed via 19th Reg & 3rd Brg.

Location - Samar

96th CB

- 5-29-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of the 19th Reg - As of 1-Apr'45 the 96th CB was under administrative control of the 19th Reg.
- 6-4-45 - 1 May'45 report of the 2nd Brig - The 96th CB was transferred during Apr'45 to the operational control of the 2nd Brig pending arrival of the Batts assigned to the 2nd Brig.
- 6-9-45 - According to 3rd Brigs 2nd end. to 1 Apr'45 report of 96th CB the 96th is under the administrative control of the 3rd Brig & the operational control of the 2nd Brig. The 96th unloaded at new location on 13 Mar'45.
- 6-19-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 96th CB - located in the Leyte-Samar area--engaged in constr activities on Manicani Is. Report via 31st Reg and 2nd Brg.
- 7-29-45 - The 96th CB is attached to the 31st Reg and 2nd Brg. Located at Guiuan, Samar, constructing camp site, ABSD and YED #64 at Manicani, ship repair fac and West Is. road. (CCT 7th Flt Sec rep for June)
- 8-13-45 - The 96th CB is assigned to the Olympic Operation. (Com7flt conf report on CB organization in Leyte-Samar area ser 04296 dtd 26 July to CNO)
- 8-14-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 96th CB - located at Leyte-Samar. Operating at Ship Repair Base, Samar. Report via 31st Reg and 2nd Brg.
- 8-31-45 - CBs 30, 64 & 122 report by disp for operational control to Marairwing. CBs 83 & 96, 28th Sp report to respective Gropacs when designation is established. (Conservpac sec disp 280455 Aug'45 to 2nd & 7th Brigs).
- 9-19-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 96th CB. Located at Samar area. Report via 31st Reg & 2nd Brig.
- 10-18-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 96th CB - location not stated. Report via 2nd Brig. 228 men rec'd as replacements.

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Location - Samar China

96th CB

- 12-14-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 96th CB - location not stated. Report via 33rd Reg. 92 men & 2 off. are aboard AKA-77(TOWNER). 1021 men & 29 off. are aboard APA-26(CHASE). These ships weighed anchor in Guiuan Roadstead, 25 Oct'45. 10 men & 1 off. are on Manicani Is. Approx. 400 men rec'd from other units. 350 men eligible for discharge were transferred to other units to await transportation.
- 12-19-45 - 1 Dec'45 report of 96th CB - location not stated. Report via 33rd Reg.
- 1-3-46 - 96th CB now in the Tsingtao area. (C.H. Cotter's memo dtd 18 Nov'45 to ComGen, III AmpCorps).
- 1-31-46 - 1 Jan'46 report of 96th CB - located in Tsingtao, China.
- 3-5-46 - 1 Feb 46 report of 96th CB - located in Tsingtao, China.
- 4-10-46 - 1 Mar report of 96th CB - located in Tsingtao, China.
- 5-20-46 - Conservpac directs CB 3rd PhibCorps to inactivate 96th CB. (Conservpac donf disp 072032 May to CG 3rd PhibCorps).
- 8-1-46 - 96th NCB INACTIVATED (TWX from 4th Marines, disp 100429Z dtd. 10 Aug. 46.

Det. 1048

NCTC - (CBMU 589)/formerly/  
ABD - Davisville  
Ready Date - 20 Mar '44  
Left ABD - 5 Apr '44  
Location - Comnavu

LOG

- 3-1-44 - Lt. Hesselden assigned from CBMU 589 as OinC(Budoeks ltr to Bupers dated 28 Feb'44).
- 3-1-44 - Lt.(jg) Elliott, Ens. Eicher, Carp. Cates and Muller assigned from CBMU 589.(Budoeks ltr to Bupers dated 28 Feb'44).
- 4-15-44 - CBD 1048 left ABD 5 Apr'44.(WRK)

CBD 1048 combined into 111th CB at Plymouth.

INACTIVATED

*CBMU 589*

CBMU 589

NCTC - (96th CB)  
ABD - Davisville  
Ready Date -  
Left ABD -  
Location -

LOG

- 2-9-44 - Lt. Hesselden, Lt.(jg) Elliott, Ens. Eicher and Carp. Muller assigned from the 96th CB(Budoeks(A-8) ltr to Bupers dated 4 Feb'44).
- 2-9-44 - Carp. Wolf assigned from Peary(Budoeks ltr to Bupers dated 7 Feb'44).
- 3-1-44 - Lt. Hesselden detached to Det. 1048 as OinC(Budoeks ltr to Bupers dated 28 Feb'44).
- 3-1-44 - Lt.(jg) Elliott, Ens. Eicher, Carp. Cates and Muller detached to Det. 1048(Budoeks ltr to Bupers dated 28 Feb'44).

INACTIVATED

OinC - Lt. Louis G. Hesselden  
 Lt. (jg) John F. Elliott  
 Ans. James M. Eicher  
 Corp. Henry F. Muller  
 Corp. William E. Gates

CEC USNR  
 CEC USNR  
 CEC USNR  
 CEC USNR  
 CEC USNR

On Board  
 Off. Men Total Auth.

This CBMU was redesignated as Detachment 1048.

C.B.M.U. 589 (INACTIVATED)

Date	Organization	Location	Remarks	DECLASSIFIED
6/3/44	-	Azores	-	Left U.S. Dec. 1943.
7/15/44	-	-	End sec diag 111438 July	Return to U.S.
8/11/44	-	U.S.	End sec diag July 311401	Eta Norfolk 4 August - should be transferred Danville
9/18/44	-	Danville	See Poeh memo 12 Sept. 44	Returned U.S. 9/4/44.
1/22	-	"	23 Sept	Ready nor 20. - as ma be referred.
2/11	-	"	act 2.	Ready nor. 15-20
7/25	-	(Cub 16)	End sec diag 811501 act.	replacements Cub 16. ready 15 november
11/7	Cub 16	(Guantanamo)	End cony diag 042011 nov.	about 10 nov. Danville transp to Guantanamo. Ser 01345930 7 26 oct assigns

46th CB.  
 11/23 CUB 16 Huenehene Huenehene conf Arrived from <sup>SEITE!</sup>   
 deep. 221900   
 Nov.   
 12/13 - " Acomtradet. CNO sec 131315 assign tender into   
 to Dec.   
 Acomtradet while   
 12/15 - Huenehene CNO cong awaiting overseas   
 141845 Dec shipment Jan.   
 29th asid tender   
 Acomtradet vice 26th   
 1/19 - Huenehene sec personnel now berthed   
 172341 Jan. from Huenehene 27 Jan   
 on H-596 for asid.   
 1/19 - CNO cong diop. report 4lod. deleted   
 181415 Jan. CUB 16 - asid 24 jet.   
 1/30 - (4lod) Huenehene cong departed overseas 27 Jan.   
 diop. 992311 Jan.   
 3/29 - \* Leyte self Combeswith jet \* present location   
 (Navata Samar) sec 260558 Mar & assignment.   
 8/5 -

ON BOARD

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>AUTHORITY</u>
1 Jul '44	17	446	MoR
1 Aug '44	12	345	MoR
1 Dec '44		1074	BNP625
1 Jan '45		1085	BNP625
1 Feb '45		1079	BNP625
1 Apr '45	30	1078	MoR
1 May '45	28	1073	MoR
1 Jun '45	30	1061	BNP625 & MoR
1 Jul '45		1036	BNP625
1 Aug '45	30	1012	BNP625 & R
1 Sept '45		961	BNP625
1 Oct '45	28	964	BNP625 & R
1 Nov '45	25		R
1 Dec '45	26	1088	BNP625 & R
1 Jan '46	23	1141	BNP625 & R
1 Feb '46	33	1524	BNP 625 & R
1 Mar '46	32	1261	BNP 625 & R

96th Construction Battalion (INACTIVATED)

Departed Guiwan 25 Oct 45 in convoy of 5 ships

Laid anchor ca 24 hours at Okinawa.

1020 men, 79 officers, 1100 tons cargo arrived Tringtas area 1 Nov, docked  
6 Nov, & were unloaded 10 Nov

90 men, 2 officers, 3300 tons of gear arrived Tringtas 1 Nov, docked  
2 Nov, unloaded 8 Nov.

180 men & 5 officers quartered near Tringtas airfield.

Stencore,

Maintains & quite small boat pool

Construction - having & missing facilities, mostly reconditioning existing  
structures & installing improvements, including water supply

# Birth of a Battalion

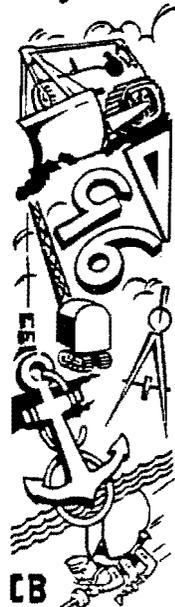
At the Naval Construction Training Center, Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Virginia, on the first day of June, 1943, E. H. Honnen, then a Lieutenant Commander, on orders from the base Executive Officer, set up headquarters in Area B-8, and began the formation of the 96th Naval Construction Battalion. In a few days, officers and drafts of men, most of them recently out of basic training, began arriving in the area.

Those were busy days. Medicals records had to be checked, and all those who had not been previously inoculated were given treatments. Misfit clothing caused some inconvenience. Then there were those experience cards for 1,100 men . . . organization charts . . . war bonds . . . and miscellaneous details which, coupled with three of the hottest, most sultry days yet experienced that summer in Virginia, made the week an unpleasant memory. However, the newness of the job, the contrast with routine "boot" work, and the sincere desire of everyone to "get going" as soon as possible, all contributed sufficient impetus to cope with the job at hand.

June 12th saw the Battalion "shoving off" for Davisville, Rhode Island, in two sections. Box lunches were waiting at Richmond. The combination of box lunches and dirty, old-fashioned, day coaches still didn't dampen the ardor of the men.

## Endicott

The cool climate of Rhode Island was a pleasant contrast to the heat and humidity of Virginia's summer. The six-week program of military and technical training carried on at Camp Endicott did much to round out the 96th, both as a military and a construction outfit. Courses in extended order, camouflage, chemical warfare, etc., equipped the men for combat duties. The technical training program was excellent as far as extensiveness of subjects was concerned. Refrigeration, hut construction, soil stabilization, and diving were some of the courses studied.





The red-letter day during this period was June 19th. On that day, the Battalion formed on the drill field, was reviewed by Capt. Rogers, received its colors, and became a commissioned unit of the United States Navy.

The days turned by the pages in a book. There was the march from Endicott to Sun Valley—the days on the range—the march back, with fewer sore feet this time, as the men were slowly becoming conditioned. Immediately upon the return to Endicott, everyone had to "turn to" and pack his gear—for the 96th was Gulfport bound. This was a three-day coach ride—dirty, uncomfortable and slow. One of the three sections leaving Rhode Island was routed via Buffalo, New York, through Florida to Gulfport. Because of this ride, the Battalion became known as the "Traveling 96th."

## Gulfport

The Battalion arrived at Camp Hollyday, Advance Base Depot, Gulfport, Mississippi, July 18, 1943. A 10-day embarkation leave was granted to the personnel from July 20th to July 30th, and upon return of the men, a military training program was resumed. August 2, 1943, the "Traveling 96th" again boarded coaches bound for Advance Base Depot, Davisville, Rhode Island.

## Thomas

Early on August 5, 1943, the third and last section of the Battalion arrived in Davisville from Gulfport. Again the the military training program, including a week spent at Sun Valley on the rifle range in the latter part of August. Upon return from the rifle range, the 96th was assigned to an extensive construction and maintenance program at Advance Base Depot through the remaining months of 1943. Toward the end of this period, through the efforts of Commander Honnen, a five-day leave was granted the Battalion. About 180 men were A.O.L., and very shortly, approximately 180 "boot" haircuts appeared. The Commander earned for himself the sobriquet "Clipper Packing Skipper"—a title which became legend, even in the South Pacific.

Shortly after Christmas, the long awaited word came—the outfit was restricted, and the ship was being loaded. After five months of readiness, the Battalion was headed for "Island X."

# Battalion Divided

But it was only half of the Battalion that boarded the S.S. "Abraham Lincoln" in that last day of 1943. The navy had seen fit to split the organization three ways. Company B and part of Headquarters Company were detached, and became CBMU 589. These men, under four officers, left Davisville, in February, 1944, and were eventually attached to the 111th Battalion as Company E. Company C of the 96th, and part of Headquarters, with three officers, were formed into CBMU 590, and also shipped out in February, 1944. Their eventual destination was the Marshall Islands. So it was that the outgoing 96th Battalion consisted only of Company A, Company D, and what was left of Headquarters Company.



# The Azores

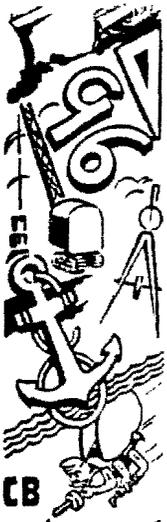
The "Abraham Lincoln" did not travel in convoy, but was escorted for the entire voyage by two destroyers. The trip was uneventful, but extremely rough. High seas were encountered practically every day and night, and many of the officers and men suffered seasickness. Aside from this and the discomfort of cramped quarters, the voyage was pleasant, and was enjoyed by the officers and men, most of whom were at sea for the first time. The last few days, when the seas became calmer and seasickness wore off, were the most enjoyable.

After nine days at sea, on the morning of January 9, 1944, the "Abraham Lincoln" dropped anchor in the picturesque harbor of Angra do Heroismo, largest town on the island of Terceira, in the Azores group. The closely clustered stone and stucco buildings with their red tile roofs, the two-century-old forts which flanked the town and harbor entrance, and the background of smooth, green mountainsides criss-crossed by low stone fences, presented a beautiful picture to the land-hungry Seabees who crowded the ship's rail.

Commander Honnen, who had preceded the Battalion on special flight orders, came aboard and welcomed his officers and men. After he had informed them as to the conditions on the island and outlined the immediate tasks to be accomplished, the outfit prepared to disembark. Two American LCMs which had been brought over on the deck of the "Lincoln" were launched over the side. These, together with two British LCMs, which were waiting in the harbor, transferred the officers and men to the Quay.

After a muster by companies, a group of men, mostly storekeepers and yeomen, were detailed to remain at the port to check cargo coming ashore,





and were quartered in and about Fort Sao Sebastiao, one of the old Portuguese forts that had been taken over by the British. The balance of the outfit marched up through the town to the storage dump at Vinha Brava.

As the men marched through the narrow streets of Angra, the local citizens stared with friendly curiosity from vantage points on balconies, in windows, and on the crowded sidewalks. It was Sunday morning, a fine, warm day, and the whole town had turned out to witness the landing. From early morning they had lined the streets and roads overlooking the harbor, and now, viewing the smart-appearing Americans at closer range, they smiled, waved, and shouted greetings and words of welcome. Many of the natives had lived in the United States and had relatives still there; as a consequence, speakers of English were not too rare among them. One woman sitting in a window, kept repeating in halting, labored English, "Allo! Allo! I'm glad—the Americans—are here. I like—Americans." Meanwhile, barefoot urchins scampered along at the side of the columns of Seabees, holding out their hands and pleading with the four words of English they found most profitable, and had therefore learned: "Zeegarette! Gumma! Candee! Monee!"

The Seabees were no less fascinated by this bizarre and interesting people. The barefoot men, the senhoritas peeping from window and balcony, the tiny shops, the home-made two-wheel oxcarts, all seemed to be part of a new and wonderful world.

Arriving at the dump-site at Vinha Brava, the men, under the direction of Chief Petty Officers, pitched their shelter-halves and prepared for the night. Chow was furnished by the British, since "K" rations, the only food in the "Lincoln's" cargo, had been stowed deep in the hold and were not immediately available. In fact, no regular food stores had been sent with the Battal-

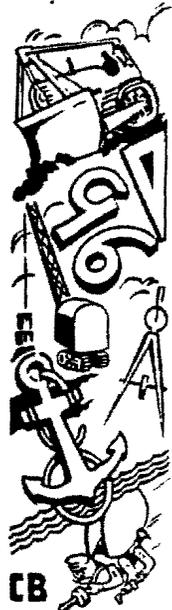
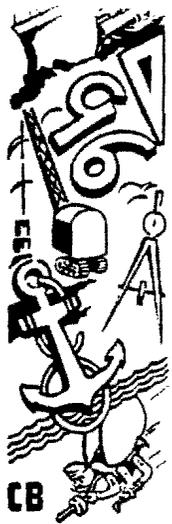
ion, and although the American galley was in operation after the first day, British rations were used for about three months.

Ship offloading operations on the "Lincoln" required nine days. Cargo was brought ashore by American and British LCMs, and Portuguese-towed lighters, known as "bumboats," operating frequently under extreme difficulty due to heavy seas. On several occasions the weather was rough enough to require the "Lincoln" to weigh anchor and go to sea, but by January 18th offloading of the ship was completed.

On Monday morning, January 10, 24 hours after the "Lincoln" dropped anchor, Commander Honnen mustered the Battalion at the Vinha Brava Dump, and assigned officers and men to their duties. After crews had been assigned for stevedoring, security, transportation, stock-piling, camp maintenance, and all other duties connected with port, ship, and the dump, the remainder of the Battalion, numbering about 160 officers and men, was sent to Lagens to begin the building of a permanent camp for occupancy by a Liberator squadron. This was the original assignment for which the Battalion was sent overseas.

The complete muster now, the Battalion having been joined by the Advance Party under flight orders, consisted of 463 enlisted men and 16 officers. This was the first American armed force on the Azores.

The first days at the Dump and at Lagens were a bit rough. The sun and warmth which greeted the landing disappeared the next day, and heavy rains, high winds, and chilly nights followed. A 60-mile gale blew away pup tents and brought the galley tent at Lagens crashing down about the heads of the cooks. Mud was knee-deep everywhere. Nevertheless, the spirit of the men was high. The inconveniences encountered were slight compared to those suffered by our armed forces in other parts of the world, and the men knew





this. Besides, the whole experience was new and fresh, and the men responded enthusiastically to the welcome change from six months of the doldrums at Davisville. At last they were overseas, doing something—the thing for which they had waited so long.

Within a few days the camp at the Dump was in livable condition, and routine had been established. Pyramidal or "squad" tents for personnel were up and fitted with wood and canvas cots; generators were in operation furnishing electricity for floodlights and tent illumination; the galley was operating, if not to the satisfaction of the men, at least as well as conditions permitted; equipment and stores were arriving, being serviced and piled night and day; the sick bay was set up and functioning.

At Lagens too, work was going ahead on the permanent camp. The removal of the ubiquitous stone fences, clearing away of other obstructions, and preliminary grading were begun the first day. Here too, as at the Dump, the men lived first under pup tents, and later erected pyramidal. Here too, the men were standing knee-deep in mud, eating British rations. Here too, the sick bay was functioning. Quonset huts for galleys, B.O.Q., and Battalion Headquarters were quickly erected, as well as warehouse and mess hall tents. Facilities for repair of mechanical equipment were installed.

By February 17th, approximately six weeks after the Battalion left the United States, all erection work was complete on about 100 huts of various sizes, and the camp was ready for occupancy, with all essential appurtenances. As equipment and stores kept coming over the mountains to Lagens, filling the newly constructed warehouse huts, stock piles at the Dump became smaller, and personnel were transferred in small groups almost daily to the Lagens camp. Finally, on March 27th, the last item of material came over, the Dump was abandoned, and remaining personnel logged in at Lagens.

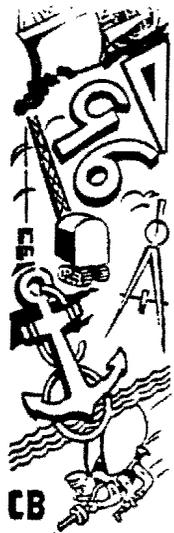




After the essential work at the Lagens Camp was completed, the Battalion began adding refinements. The entire camp was landscaped, roads were graded and surfaced with lava cinders, culverts were installed and drainage perfected, sod was laid and grass was sowed, huts were given a second coat of paint. A drill field and rifle range were laid out and completed, and a baseball diamond marked off and outfitted. Tennis, handball, basketball, and badminton courts were provided, as well as horseshoe, shuffle-board, boxing and wrestling facilities. Open house was held April 5th, by which time the camp, with its exact geometric pattern, straight red roads against the background of new green grass and regularly arranged huts was one of the show spots of the island. It was named Camp Santa Ritta, after one of the picturesque villages nearby.

The remainder of this tour of duty was taken up by sundry assignments. Work on dock and harbor facilities at Vila de Praia de Victoria resulted in making Praia a port capable of handling the unloading of all supply ships. The quay was improved and enlarged; a small craft basin created; and approaches to the quay and basin dredged. With these improved facilities, the dock crew turned its attention to stevedore work. Ships which would have anchored at Angra now came to Praia, and during its stay on the island the 96th Battalion stevedore crew unloaded 40,000 tons of cargo, much of it in record time. Commander Honnen, Lt. J. A. Egan, and Chief F. F. Sternisa received individual letters of commendation for their work in harbor improvement and ship unloading. A tanker anchorage was installed, and repair and expansion of the airfield at Lagens continued intermittently over several months.

On May 23rd, Commander Honnen received orders taking him away from the island on temporary duty. For the remainder of the Battalion's stay on



Terceira, and for the movement back to the United States, Lieut. Michael A. Dandry fulfilled the duties of Acting Officer-in-Charge.

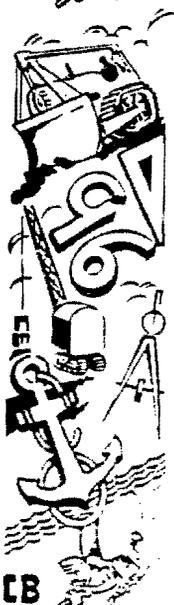
Early in July, 1944, word was received that the major portion of the Battalion was to move, and that the remaining men were to be made into a CBMU to maintain the island base. Accordingly, current jobs were rushed to completion, the camp was put in order, and approximately 100 men, including seven Chief Petty Officers and four officers, were transferred to the newly formed CBMU 613 as of July 15, 1944.

### Return of the 96<sup>th</sup>

Early in the morning of July 27th, men and gear were taken to the dock. Promptly at 1100 the U.S.S. Ariel, Naval Supply Ship, dropped anchor, and 345 enlisted men and 11 officers went aboard. The Ariel up-anchored at 1700, and after seven days of placid sailing through sunny days and moonlit nights, tied up at Bayonne, New Jersey. The sea was calm throughout the voyage, and the convoy of 17 ships, protected by 10 escort vessels, made good time. Shortly after coming ashore, officers and men boarded a waiting train and made the trip to NCTC, Camp Endicott, Davisville, Rhode Island, arriving just before dawn, August 4, 1944, one year from the date the Battalion arrived at ABD Davisville, after the famous Gulfport junket.

Two days later enlisted men of the Battalion departed from Camp Endicott for a well-earned 18-day leave. The officers departed one day later for a nine-day leave, plus travel time.

Upon return from leave late in August, and through the ensuing month, the Battalion was engaged in Technical Training Projects and Public Works Projects—and awaited word as to its destiny.



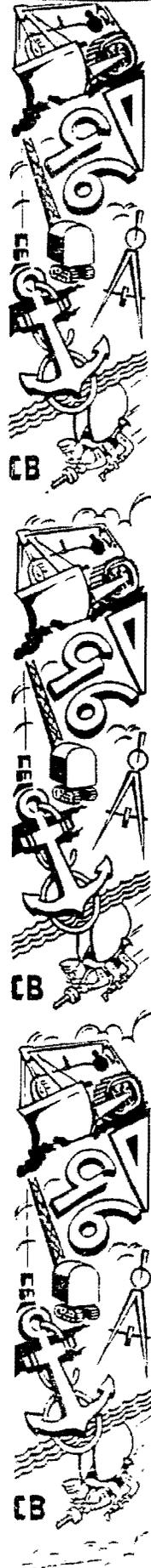
## A Sketch of 3050

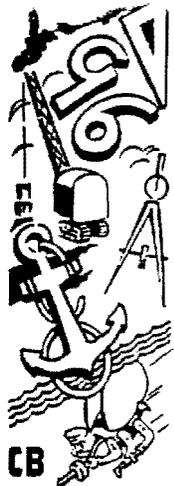
About the time the 96th Battalion was preparing to "shove off" for the Azores, there was forming in Camp Peary a group of men who were later destined to play a vital role in the future of the 96th. This group, known as CB Detachment 3050, was formed from carefully selected petroleum and waterfront experts, and was intended to serve as a pool of highly skilled personnel to form special detachments for the exploration and development of Navy Petroleum Reserves. There were oil drillers, pipe-line men, waterfront men, refinery experts, general construction workers, and every other technician necessary to the accomplishment of their purpose. In March, 1944, the organization was considered complete, and was ordered to leave Camp Peary.

On the first of April, CBD 3050 stepped off the train at Camp Lee-Stephenson, Quoddy Village, Maine, after a day-coach ride which followed the usual pattern of box lunches and sleeping as best one could.

At Quoddy Village, the Detachment was assigned to certain public works projects and various maintenance training projects. It left an indelible stamp on the entire camp by its accomplishments, which included the building of a large drill hall, a huge warehouse, installation of sewer lines, general remodeling and repair of most buildings, and other minor jobs too numerous to be catalogued.

It became increasingly evident that the men of 3050, for many reasons (political and international), could never be used for the purpose they were intended; and late in September, 1944, the Detachment was ordered to Davisville to join and become a part of the the 96th Battalion which was then at Davisville to be reorganized and brought up to full Battalion strength once again. So, in early October, 3050 debarked from the train at Camp Endicott, and discarded their symbol of the oil well and refinery for the eagle and anchor shield of the 96th NCB.



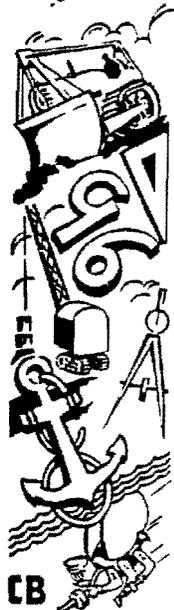


## The 96<sup>th</sup> - 1944 Edition

Early morning of October 2, 1944, the two sections carrying CBD 3050 rolled into Endicott, marched to F area, housing the 96th, and were officially taken aboard. The Acting Officer-in-Charge had been detached, and Commander Honnen had returned from temporary assignment and resumed his duties as Officer-in-Charge. Officers and enlisted personnel gathered in FG-4 Theater for the "get acquainted talk" and to hear future plans for the revised roster of the 96th.

Then followed an orgy of interviews, screenings, and transfers to the end that the 96th would be a physically-fit, compact unit of willing men capable of undertaking any assignment.

The old familiar military training was the Battalion's fate during the remainder of October, including another week at the Sun Valley Rifle Range. The military program completed and a 10-day embarkation leave accomplished, the Battalion entrained in three sections on November 15, 1944, for the long-cross-country ride to Port Hueneme, California.



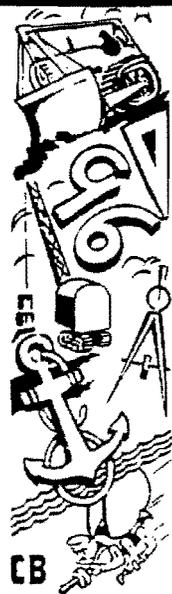
# Hueneme

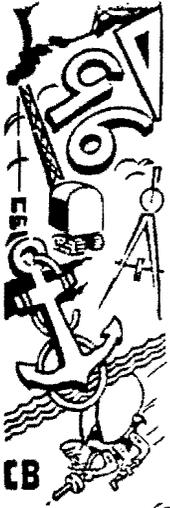
The movement west was the most pleasant yet experienced in the history of the 96th — comfortable pullmans, good food, scenic beauty, and ideal weather.

On November 22nd through the 23rd the Battalion arrived and was billeted in Area O of Camp Rousseau, Port Hueneme, California. No California sunshine greeted the first arrivals on the 22nd. It was bitterly cold, and most of the early morning hours after detraining were spent in drinking hot coffee and walking around in an effort to keep warm. However, California soon redeemed itself with bright, warm sun, and the work of settling down in a new temporary home was begun.

Again the round of military training, schools, rifle range, marches, etc. An expanded recreational program swung into high gear. The military band was busy with practices and reviews. The dance orchestra played in the camp and throughout the countryside for navy personnel and their enamorata. The "Trailblazer" gave the daily news and chit-chat of camp life. The Hobby Shop was the haven of leather workers, wood carvers, and the metal artists. Volley ball, basketball, and softball were in vogue, and each Battalion artist, craftsman or sportsman could find the time and material to pursue his hobby. Liberty was good—from peaceful, beautiful Santa Barbara, through the San Fernando Valley, to the klieg lights and night life of Los Angeles and Hollywood, and the boys drank their fill of the California sunshine and sundries.

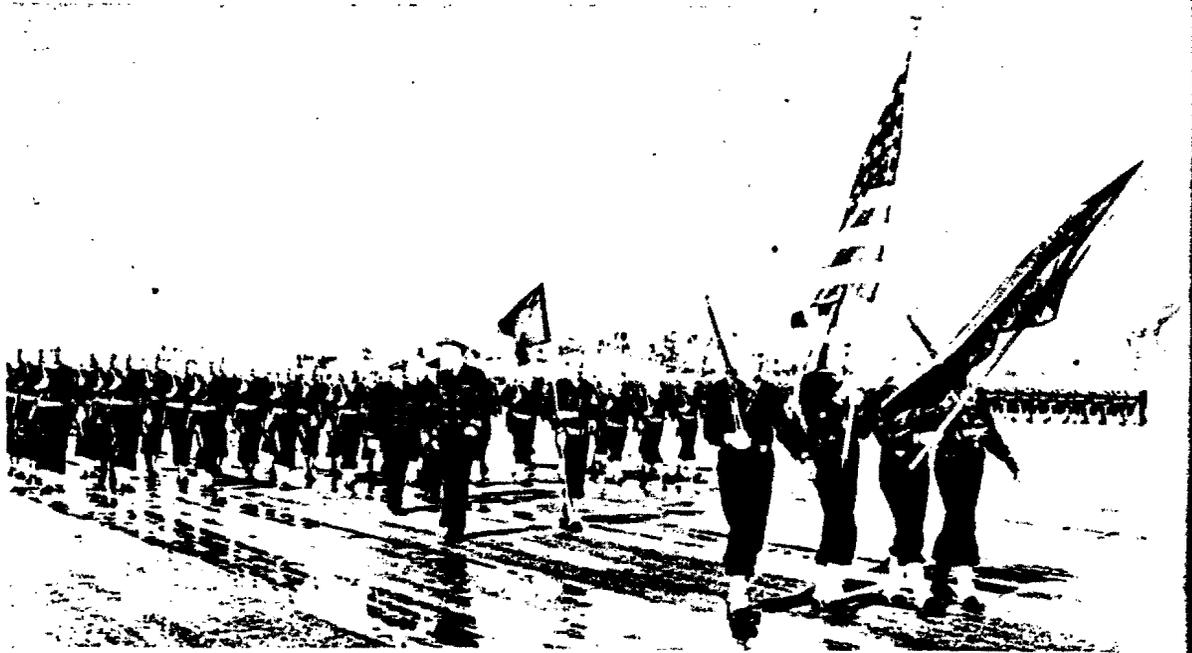
However, the Battalion had its share of work assigned to be done concurrently with the military and school projects. Assignments included rebuilding the U.S.O. at Ventura, which was almost completely destroyed by fire, im-





portant interior remodeling, building and repair of the Oxnard Brig, Ventura Civic Auditorium, Ventura Jail, Colored Recreation Center in Ventura, and Aspiration Club, Ventura. The men were also given the opportunity to increment their navy pay by helping relieve the acute shortage of labor in essential services and food production. They were employed as express men, tree fumigators, pepper pickers, turkey farmers, etc. The food was good, living quarters comfortable, and morale was high. In retrospect, service life at Hueneme was indeed pleasant.

However, it was not the purpose or the desire of the 96th to succumb to the easy roles of a shore-based craft. The skills and experience-years of this Battalion cried for accomplishment in the actual war effort. These men would never be happy in mere work for the sake of work. So, there were few sad faces when the personnel of the Battalion boarded the S.S. "Sea Scamp" and headed for open sea on January 22, 1945.



PASS IN REVIEW!

# The Sea Scamp

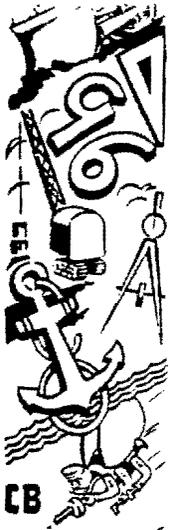
Long will be remembered the voyage on the "Sea Scamp." The transport was operated by Merchant Marine personnel—the passengers were under army command. More than 700 were crowded into a hold. What a rugged man the old-time sailor must have been to have survived the clipper holds—without ventilation, blowers, or modern sanitary facilities. For that matter, what a rugged group was the 96th, with all of these. The heat was terrific traveling along the equatorial zone. Life jackets and safety lights were to be worn at all times. These, in short order, got dirty and sticky, and added no little to the heat and general discomfort. Where is the source of all the dirt, thousands of miles at sea?

The day started with the endless chow (such as it was) line—moving inch by inch. Breakfast over—all to the holds for the decks to be washed down. Then—all up to the deck for the holds to be cleaned. A muster and physical exercise having been attempted, it was time to form for noon chow (when we had any). Early afternoon brought the atabrine line—generally followed by a ship's drill of some sort. All day long it was down to the hold—up on deck—down to the hold—up on deck. Intermittently Donald Duck would squawk, "Now hear this. Now hear this." Somehow the major part of the day would be survived, and it was time for the evening chow line to form. The lucky man who had found a place to sit on the hatch cover or hard deck was comparatively rested. Darkened ship was in order shortly after evening chow—no lights, no smoking. The choice was the humid, stifling hold, or the crowded, darkened deck. There was temporary relief in the salt-water showers. But about 30 minutes after a shower, one had the feeling that he was completely covered with a thin layer of elderberry jelly.

However, the trip had its brighter side. The sea was calm, and there was very little sickness. Pacific sunrise, sunset, the bright moon on the waters, flying fish, and porpoise schools were nature's show on this Pacific safari.

Every effort was made to relieve the deadly monotony. During the morning a record program was played on deck through a portable amplifying system. In early afternoon the military band played a program which was broadcast throughout the ship. A request record program was broadcast over Donald Duck for an hour in the later afternoon. "Rum and Coca-Cola" and "One Meat Ball" will always strike a chord in the memory of a 96th man. Movies





were shown in the mess hall in the evening. If a movie program was not scheduled, the dance orchestra played an evening session. Variety shows were organized and presented. The "Hatch Cover," a daily paper for and about passenger personnel, was looked forward to each day. This entire morale-building program was built around talent, experience, and skills from the 96th, although the Battalion represented less than a third of the enlisted complement on board. The library and recreation office were staffed by 96th men and ship's crew was augmented by other 96th men.

The mess hall annex had tables and benches to accommodate a small fraction of the passengers, but was "out of bounds" except in the evenings. The ship's Chaplain held a hymn service there in the early evenings. The morale value of the service is a matter for discussion, for as the last note died away, the first card from dozens of decks would hit the tables. Sitting through the song service was the only sure way to get and hold a seat for the card service.

The general route from Hueneme was south of the Hawaiian group. February 6, 1945, the King Neptune ceremony took place—a time-honored tradition in crossing the equator—making the men "Shellbacks" in the process. The next day the International Date Line was crossed, giving life membership in the "Order of the Golden Dragon" to all on board, and costing a day in each life. Several of the boys whose birthdays fell on the eighth are still confused.

February 12th, San Cristobal and Guadalcanal were sighted—and did land look good! The transport docked near Finschafen, New Guinea, February 14th to take on water, and proceeded to Lorengay Harbor, in Seader Bay, Manus, thence to Hollandia, New Guinea, where it docked February 23rd. Under way again February 25th we joined a large, slow-moving convoy headed northwest—coming into the Leyte-Samar area March 3rd. Anchor was dropped March 4th in the harbor at Guiuan.

Lying at anchor awaiting news of assignment and debarkation schedule was disheartening. There two night alerts while lying at anchor. During the first the Japs dropped their bombs about 20 minutes away at Tacloban. Bombs were dropped in our vicinity during the second alert, but not close enough to be alarming.

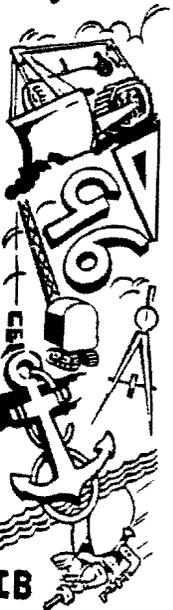
March 8th, the first party went ashore on Manicani Island in the harbor to clear away jungle and brush for a temporary camp site. Debarkation was completed March 13th at what is now known as LST Jetty, Northwest Cove, Manicani Island.

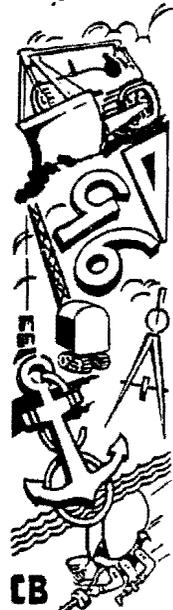
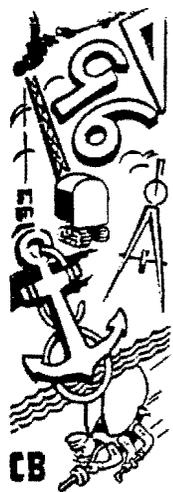
**Manicani** is a small island about five miles in circumference, lying near the eastern entrance to Leyte Gulf. It is in the municipality of Guiuan which includes the entire southeastern peninsula of Samar and many of the nearby islands. To the west lies the main body of water comprising the Leyte Gulf; to the north, the town also called Guiuan; to the east, the island of Calicoan connected to the island of Samar by a causeway; and to the south, the historic island of Homonhon where Magellan first landed in the Philippines, and the first American invasion forces landed as they entered Leyte Gulf. This was the locale of the second overseas mission of the 96th.

Figuratively, the Battalion clung to the site by its toenails. The rain came in torrents through the day and through the night. Everything was a sea of mud. However, the journey in the "Sea Scamp" had made the men so happy to see and be on land once more that these immediate discomforts were incidental. The temporary camp took rapid shape. The equipment and supply ship, the "John Ball," which had left Hueneme one day after the "Sea Scamp," had not arrived, and we were greatly handicapped by the lack of tools, supplies and equipment. To the good fortune of the 96th, the 91st NCB had arrived on the island shortly before, and had been able to get under cover and start essential services running. Their messing facilities were extended to the 96th, and although it was quite a little hike up the beach to their encampment, this courtesy saved the necessity of temporarily subsisting on box rations until equipment was on hand to build a mess. Incidentally, the courteous consideration of the 91st and the cordial relations between the two Battalions will not soon be forgotten.

With borrowed water purification facilities and a few generators, life began to take on civilized aspects. Showers were constructed over the streams, and safe drinking water became plentiful. Sanitation and malaria squads began drainage of swamps and low spots. Nightly movies, native laundry service, loudspeakers throughout the area to amplify radio broadcasts and record programs, Ship's Store and other services—all contributed greatly to the immediate comfort and entertainment of the men.

With arrival of the cargo ship work began in earnest. The permanent camp site was selected, and grading and clearing went apace.





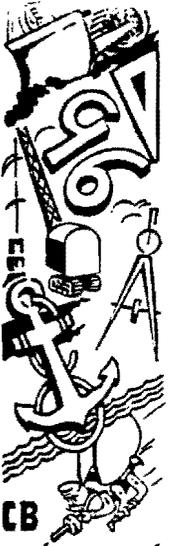
parent; which made for a restful night after the day's heat under the Philippine sun.

In mid-April the permanent camp was far enough along to start moving, and it was occupied as rapidly as quonsets and tents were erected. Malaria control had done well, and a mosquito was a rarity on the island. In the higher camp site, the men were not plagued with the land crabs, scorpions, snakes, and the miscellaneous assortment of irritants that were endured at the shore camp. Mess hall and services were finished and smoothly running. Theater, Chapel, library, sick bay, shops, and warehouses were completed and functioning.

However, this was all incidental to the around-the-clock work toward the accomplishment of our end. Being alive and utilizing the means of civilized comfort (however ingeniously acquired) to further our efficiency was a duty toward that end—which was to make this island a great repair base for the fleet. The great timber wharf was under way. Units of the Battalion were engaged in stevedoring, diving, and salvage. Harbor improvement, dredging, and erection of machine shops, office buildings, power plants, ordnance buildings, communication buildings, service shops, Ship Service facilities, and all other buildings and shops that make for efficient operations of an installation of this kind challenged the best experience, skills, and efforts of the Battalion.

The accomplishments of the 96th Battalion on Manicani Island make a most impressive list. In all, nearly 250 acres of jungle were cleared and graded; over five miles of excellent, wide roads were built; 80 quonset huts, 40'x100' and 63 quonsets 20'x56' were erected. In addition to the quonset huts, various other buildings, totaling more than 150,000 square feet of floor space were constructed. The plumbing department laid over 33,000 feet of pipe; three 126,000-gallon tanks were erected; and a salt-water pumping station was put into operation, capable of delivering 7,000 gallons a minute. In the construction of over 135,000 square feet of docks, it was necessary to drive over 5,000 pilings of various lengths, from 40 feet to 95 feet.

In early June, 1945, Commander Honnen, who had been at the helm for two years, left the Battalion on orders to command a higher echelon. Lt. M. Myers took over as Officer-in-Charge.



In the latter part of July, 1945, we were notified that the Battalion was alerted for movement in August. Conjecture ran high, for this certainly meant taking part in landing operations on enemy soil.

On the screen Judy Garland was saying good-bye to her soldier-boy in a moving picture called "The Clock." Suddenly breaking into the dialogue came, "Stand by for an important announcement," The voice continued, "Japan has offered to surrender according to the terms of the Potsdam Ultimatum." The conditional clause of the surrender fell on deaf ears, and Judy and her boy friend had their final clinch in complete privacy as the import of those few words dawned on the listening men. Searchlights tore the black sky to ribbons as they stabbed at the stars. Red, blue, and green rockets cascaded upward to sputter, flash, and sink back into the green Pacific. Gunfire crackled and rumbled from the ships in the harbor. Reaction came during the ensuing days of negotiations. From the seething emotions of this night, the Battalion emerged with thoughts, not of a beach-head or of a repair base, but of home, wife, children, and everything that these connoted.

The alert was lifted, and work continued in an efficient fashion—to the everlasting credit of the men. Navy indoctrination and the spirit of accomplishment was imbedded too deeply for a slackening of pace until the word would be given.

During the summer, the Battalion had been losing men. A few went with Commander Honnen to Cebu. The 42-year-old discharge Alnav had started personnel on their way home. And with the announcement of the point system, greater numbers were leaving. By early September, 1945, seamen and firement had begun to be added to the Battalion to fill the gaps left by our losses.

Then on October 22, all high-point men were transferred out of the Battalion and replaced with low-point men from Battalions being decommissioned. This necessitated a far-reaching program of reorganization. However, the reorganizing was cut short by the receipt of sailing orders. The Battalion's mission on Manicani Island was completed, and two days later, on the evening of October 24, 1945, the Battalion boarded the U.S.S. "Samuel Chase." Our destination was Tsingtao, China.

# With The Marines

On the morning of October 25, the U.S.S. "Chase" weighed anchor and headed north. Three days later we sighted Okinawa where we spent two days. Mail was put off, and arrangements were made for an escort to guide us through the mine-infested East China Sea and Yellow Sea.

The voyage on the "Chase" was a pleasant one for everyone. The food was good, and the relationships between the Seabees and the Coast Guard crew were very congenial. As we sailed northward the men began adding more and more clothing each day. Where they were once bare to the waist and in shorts, they wore shirts and full-length trousers, then the fur-lined jackets and extra blankets came out of the seabags. The seas became increasingly rough, so the quiet water of Tsingtao Bay was a welcome sight.

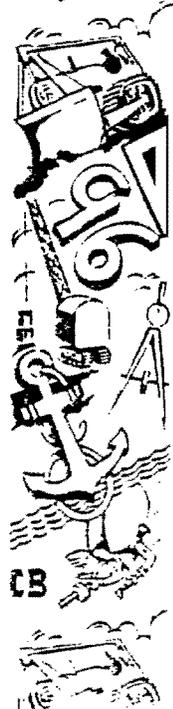
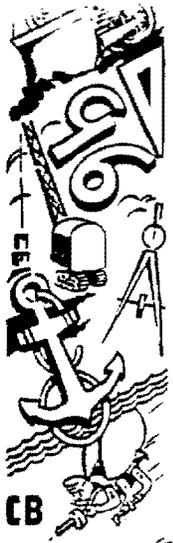
On the morning of November 1, the "Chase" dropped anchor, and we had our first glimpse of the ancient far-eastern civilization. Almost immediately the harbor became filled with native bumboats, coming out to trade and sell. There was a booming "over-the-side" business in kimonos, silks, opium pipes, hats, Chinese violins, and, much to the surprise of everyone, the natives had wrist watches, alarm clocks, cigarette lighters, and cameras, offered for sale in quantities the Americans had not seen since the war began.

Arranging for quarters for the Battalion in this city presented quite a problem, so the men remained aboard ship while preparations were made. Meanwhile, the offloading of supplies from both our personnel ship and the cargo ship continued without a pause, so that on November 10, when the Battalion finally debarked, both ships were completely offloaded.

It was like stepping out into a different world after all the long months away from civilization, here was a city of 800,000 with modern buildings, factories, railroads, paved streets, a few automobiles, night clubs, restaurants and shops. The Germans had built it up with all the facilities of a modern city when it was their port, but everything was now badly in need of repair as the years of neglect during the war had left its mark on the entire city.

The Battalion was quartered in schools, apartments and houses scattered throughout the city. Some of the buildings presented a truly magnificent appearance from the outside, but inside much to our disappointment, we discovered that they were badly damaged, the plumbing did not function, the heating and electricity were out of order, and everything required a thorough cleaning.

However, before the first night was over, in true Seabee fashion a few of the essentials were in operation.



The chow hall, which had been set up by an advance party off the ship, was serving highly satisfactory meals.

From then on it was only a short time until heating systems were installed, plumbing and sanitary facilities available, and power plants in operation. Every Seabee set about to make himself as comfortable as possible in his temporary home.

A liberty schedule was quickly set up and Seabees were seen riding rickshas everywhere. They had heard of many points of interest, so grabbed their cameras and set out for such places as the Modern International Settlement with its large stone villas, along the finest beach in the East, the colorful temples of oriental architecture housing strange religions, the race track where no one could figure out the odds on the pari-mutual, the stadium where various Marine units were having football games and the downtown shopping district where one had to elbow his way through Swabbies and Marines to get in the small, dinky shops. The demand for eats, drinks and souvenirs was tremendous, so new places opened up overnight and prices zoomed beyond reason.

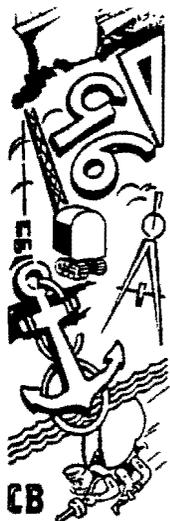
China's justly famed inflation was confusing and a source of much amusement. Three types of money were prevalent: Chinese National Currency (current legal tender) Federal Reserve Bank (Japanese Puppet Government money) and the good American "buck." C.N.C. fluctuated from 940 to 960 for one American dollar. F.R.B. fluctuated from 3,000 to 5,000 in exchange for one of our dollars. Never before had we spent "\$100,000" on a liberty.

Children, beggars and merchants lined the streets constantly in an effort to get the "Yankee Dollar." We had heard the phrase "the teeming orient" and this was it in full bloom.

The demobilization system was in full swing and small drafts of high-point men were already beginning to make that final voyage back to the homeland they served so well. The Battalion personnel was in constant flux as men would leave and replacements come in.

Lt. Comdr. Myers was among the early fortunates, and bid us adieu December 1st. Lieut. V. Kjellman took over as officer-in-charge, with Lieut. Wojta as executive officer.

Early in December word was received that the 96th would construct airfields in Tsingtao and Chinwangtao. Supplies and equipment were ordered in from Shanghai and Okinawa, both of which were available in the Pacific, but it was men that were needed in depleted Battalion. To bring the Battalion to strength, all the Naval Construction Battalions in China were inactivated, and the low-point men sent to the 96th. Thus the Battalion goes ahead on its assignment amidst an international melting-pot, and the proximity of a civil hot-bed.



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

### Chronology

#### First Tour of Duty

	Battalion formed at NCTC, Camp Peary.
12 Jun 1943	Transferred to ABD, Davisville.
15 Jul 1943	Departed ABD, Davisville for ABD, Gulfport.
31 Dec 1943	The Officer-in-Charge and 2 officers arrived Lagens Field, Terceira, Azores.
31 Dec 1943	96 <sup>th</sup> CB departed ABD Gulfport for overseas duty.
09 Jan 1944	Arrived Terceira, Azores. The battalion operated at Camp Santa Ritta, Praia Dock, Lagens Field (Azores).
27 Jul 1944	Battalion departed Terceira, Azores.
04 Aug 1944	Battalion arrived NCTC, Davisville from overseas.

#### Second Tour of Duty

22 Nov 1944	Arrived ABD Port Hueneme from NCTC, Davisville.
30 Jan 1945	Departed ABD Port Hueneme for embarkation point.
02 Feb 1945	Embarked for Leyte-Samar area.
01 Apr 1945	Report of the battalion stated it was in transit status the entire month of March. (This is doubtful. Dirpadocks Pearl secret report showed battalion located at Samar as of 15 March.)

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ITINERARY OF THE 96TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

PRINTED AT THE  
NAVY BUREAU OF PRINTING

Eric S. Hennison  
Commander (USN) USNR

The 96th C.B. began its formation at Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Va., on 1 June 1943. The battalion was commissioned 12 June 1943.

- 12 June 1943 Transferred to NCTC, Davisville, R. I.
- 13 June 1943 Arrived at destination.
- 15 July 1943 Departed NCTC, Davisville to ABD, Gulfport.
- 18 July 1943 Arrived at destination.
- 2 Aug 1943 Departed ABD, Gulfport to ABD, Davisville, R. I.
- 4 Aug 1943 Arrived at destination.
- 31 Dec 1943 The OinC, two officers and one enlisted man arrived at Lagens Field, Terceira, Azores, via air.
- 31 Dec 1943 Battalion departed ABD, Davisville, R. I. for overseas destination - 13 officers and 452 men.
- 9 Jan 1944 Arrived and docked in harbor of Angra de Heroismo, Terceira, Azores. Santa Rita camp was built. Work was done at the Praia docks and Lagens airfield, Terceira, Azores.
- 27 July 1944 Battalion departed Terceira, Azores for the States.
- 3 Aug 1944 Arrived in port at Bayonne, New Jersey.
- 4 Aug 1944 Battalion arrived at NCTC, Davisville, R. I. from overseas - 11 officers and 345 men.
- 2 Oct 1944 Battalion re-organized for second tour of duty.
- 15 Nov 1944 Departed NCTC, Davisville, R. I.
- 22 Nov 1944 Arrived ABD, Port Hueneque, Calif. - 27 officers and 1075 men.
- 27 Jan 1945 Battalion departed ABD, Port Hueneque for overseas destination.
- 13 Mar 1945 Battalion arrived at destination, Manicora Island,

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ITINERARY OF THE 96TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

Samar Area, Philippine Islands - 1078 men and  
30 officers.

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NOTE \* This itinerary has been checked and authenticated by the  
Officer-in-Charge of the 96th Naval Construction Battalion.

12 July 1945

FIGHT

BUILD

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U.S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION











