

117th Naval Construction Battalion

Historical Information



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



NCRS - Peary
 ABD - Gulfport
 Ready Date - 25 Feb'44
 Left ABD - 27 Feb'44
 Location - ~~Recd Harbor~~ Saipan

LOG

- 9-21-43 - CNO orders transfer of the 117th CB about 26 Sep'43 to ABD Gulfport. (Conf. Disp. 201405 NCR 1950 from CNO to Peary dtd 21 Sep'43)
 2-25-44 - 117th CB left ABD 23 Feb'44. (HCE)
 5-12-44 - 1 Apr'44 report of 117th CB - operating at Ford Is. and Pearl City.
 6-16-44 - 1 May'44 report of 117th CB - operating at Ford Is., Pearl City, and Red Hill.
 7- 5-44 - 1 Jun'44 report of 117th CB - operating at Ford Is., Pearl City, Waipio, Red Hill.
 8-11-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 117th CB - operating at Ford Is., Pearl City, Waipio, Red Hill, and minor 14ND projects.
 8-28-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 117th CB - operating at Oahu (Ford Is., Pearl City, Waipio and Red Hill)
 10-16-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 117th CB - operating at Oahu (NAS Ford Is., Storage Facilities, Pearl City, Waipio, and Red Hill). Report endorsed by 8th Regiment.
 10-27-44 - Upon embarkation to a point in the Central Pacific area, the 117th CB is detached from the 8th Reg. and 2nd Brig. and will report to the OinC of the 39th Reg. for duty. (Hawaiian Area NC Brigs conf. ltr HAB-06-HCB/fnf over Ply-4/00/11M over Ser 6088 to the 117th CB dtd 27 Sep'44)
 1- 2-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of the 117th CB - Batt was secured from all work projects on

Location - Saipan

117th C.B.

2 Sep'44 with the exception of clean-up and completion of the work on Ford Island which continued through the following week. Balance of month spent in making preparations for forward movement. Report endorsed by 8th Reg.

- 11-17-44 - The 117th CB is located at Saipan. (IsComSaipan Sec to CIO Sec. Also COMSOPAC 1031 16454 dtd 14 Nov'44).
- 11-21-44 - The 117th CB is located at Saipan. (IsComSaipan Sec. disp to CIO 110211Z NOV 17595 dtd 19 Nov'44).
- 12-8-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of 117th CB - no info on location - Batt enroute to forward area during Oct'44. Report endorsed by 39th Regiment.
- 1-3-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of 117th CB - no info on location. Report endorsed by 39th Reg.
- 1-27-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 117th CB - no info on location. Bombing by enemy 26 Dec'44.
- 3- 5-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of the 117th CB - location not given. 31 men on temp det. duty, 22 of which are detailed to the Army.
- 3-16-45 - ComFdarea nominates 117th and 135th CBs for mounting estimated 26 May; 13th CB for mounting estimated 26 June. Pending Cincpoa approval, these 3 CBs authorized release from present duties 3 wks prior to mounting date for rehabilitation and refitting. (ComFdarea Sec Disp 130943 Mar'45 to Cincpoa & Comservpac)
- 3-17-45 - IsComSaipan Sec. disp to ComFdArea 150609Z Mar'45 - Ref. ComFdarea 130943 - Strongly recommend the 51st CB be moved rather than the 117th.
- 4-19-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of the 117th CB - located at Saipan. Report routed via 39th Reg.
- 4-28-45 - 117th CB listed as scheduled for BIVE. Approx ETD April. (Comservpac Sec ltr Ser 001581 dtd 11 Apr to ComFdareacompac)
- 5- 8-45 - The 117th CB is located at Saipan, assigned Okinawa. (Dirpaddock's S.F. Sec Rep of 15 Apr'45)
- 5-22-45 - 1 May'45 report of 117th CB - location not given. Report routed via 39th Reg.

117th C.B.

NAS Ford, Island which con

Location - Reifen.

117th C.B.

- 6-7-45 - Upon departure 39th Reg from Saipan. 117th CB detached from 39th Reg. Report via IsCom Saipan. (Comservpac conf also 060035 Jun'45 to IsCom Saipan)
- 6-15-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 117th CB - located at Saipan. Batt sailed from cont U.S. on 26 Feb'44 for Hawaii where it spent 7 months. Unit then embarked for Saipan and arrived on Saipan in Nov'44. Batt was alerted several months ago for forward movement but approx 20 May, it was informed that its movement to a forward area was cancelled. Report via 39th Reg.
- 8-21-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 117th CB - located at Saipan.
- 9-10-45 - 52nd Reg is composed of the following units in addition to the Regt. Staff:- 39, 51, 117, 121 CBs, CBMUs 505, 510, 595, 614, 616 & CBD 1093. Adv Conservpac of the effective date of establishment. (Comservpac conf ltr ser 05014 dtd 30 Aug'45 to Iscom, Saipan).
- 9-19-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 117th CB. Located at Saipan.
- 10-18-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 117th CB - located at Saipan. Report via 52nd Reg.
- 11-16-45 - 117th CB was inactivated on 3 Nov'45. (117th CB ltr dtd 3 Nov'45).
- 11-30-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 117th CB - location not stated. Report via 52nd Reg. & 5th Brg.

INACTIVATED

117th CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

- 26 Sept. 43 NCTC, CAMP PEARY to ABD, GULFPORT.
- 23 Feb. 44 Left ABD, Gulfport en route Pearl Harbor.
- 1 May 44 Operating at Ford Island, Pearl City, Red Hill.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>ON BOARD</u>		<u>AUTHORITY</u>
	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	
30 Jun '44	29	1016	Recap.
1 Aug '44	29	1030	MoR
1 Sep '44	30	1027	MoR
1 Oct '44	30	1012	MoR
30 Sep '44		985	Recap
1 Nov '44		1006	MoR
1 Dec '44	29	1003	MoR
1 Jan '45	31	999	MoR
1 Feb '45	31	1047	MoR
1 Apr '45	29	1001	MoR
1 May '45	29	986	BNP625 & R
1 Jun '45	30	988	BNP625 & R
1 Jul '45	25	984	BNP625 & R
1 Aug '45	24	936	BNP625 & R
1 Sept '45	26	908	BNP625 & R
1 Oct '45	25	651	BNP625 & R
1 Nov '45	21	61	BNP 625 & R

117th Construction Battalion (INACTIVATED)

SECRET AND
DECLASSIFIED
RESTRICTED

ITINERARY OF 117TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

25 Sept 1943 Transferred from Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Virginia to ABD, Gulfport, Mississippi.

25 Feb. 1944 Left for overseas destination.

1 May 1944 Operating in Hawaiian Area. Ford Island, Pearl City, Red Hill, Waikele. Exact date of arrival not known.

2 Sept 1944 Battalion secured from all work projects. Balance of month spent in preparation for further movement.

Nov. 1944 Location Saipan. Exact date of arrival unknown.

25 Dec. 1944 Bombing by enemy.

1 Feb. 1945 31 men on temporary detached duty, 22 of which are detailed to the Army.

13 Mar. 1945 Scheduled for Okinawa.

20 May 1945 Movement to Okinawa cancelled.

30 Aug. 1945 Located Saipan.

NOTE: This itinerary based on records available in O.B. Operations and Personnel Section of Bureau of Naval Personnel.

Date: 13 September 1945.

To facilitate
Administrative handling
Classification changed
from:

FOR RELEASE

Signature

117th C.B.

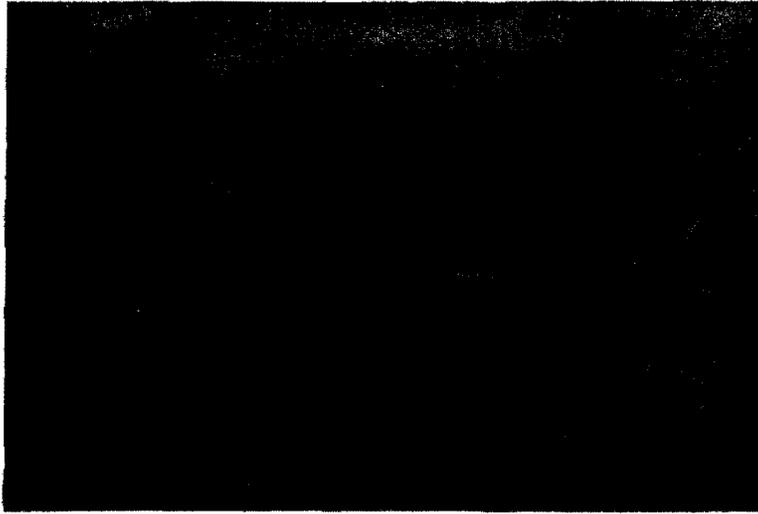
Page 9

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
5/17	-	Cdr, Burke	note	alerted to Bine by 070029
6/11				

147th C.B.

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
6/3/44	-	Pearl Harbor cabin FRAY	-	Left U.S. Feb. 1944 Com 14 rec. act disp 060609 July. Compan in charge Sept. 1944 Attachment all the way to maximum.
11/13	-	440DE (Saipan)	Saipan rec act disp. 040700Z Nov.	
3/13	-	(Bine)	Com 149000 rec 11023 Mar. and Com 14 area rec. 130943 Mar.	Nominations for alerted for Bine. for mounting est. 26 May
3/20	-	"	20 Saipan rec. 150609Z Mar.	re-130493. Recommend more ch 5, at rather than 117.
1/21	130945 Mar-rec.	"	Com 14 area rec 170517 Mar.	Current indications 51 May not be reunited for mounting date - original recommendation stand.

nominates 13,117 6/35
as substitutes for 43,52
698-Bine.



WE SAILED *The Ocean* BLUE

(Excerpts from an unpublished manuscript,
"NOTHING HAPPENED, THANK GOD")

By HENRY SENBER. Y2c

TODAY we are at sea. As Commander Burke stated in the last Gulfport issue of THE REVIEW, we are on our way to do our part. We have been a long time getting here. The months we stood by in Mississippi seemed interminable. Now, as we stand on the deck of the U.S.S. (Censored) looking down upon blue water and white foam seething past the side of our vessel, the long, weary weeks of waiting are forgotten. We are on our way. We know that beneath the placid sea are men whose grim purpose it is to prevent us from getting there.

Less than a week ago we came aboard this vessel at our embarkation point. The sight of a ship ever has acted as a stimulant to the adventurous spirit of man, and the mates were susceptible. As soon as our packs were stowed in our tiered bunks, every man of us was up on deck watching, wide-eyed, the intricate process of stowing cargo. The compact versatility of the gear aboard the ship fascinated all of us. The ship, to us, was like an intriguing new toy, and we pried into every accessible nook and cranny on individual voyages of discovery.

In the harbor we saw many vessels of various types, but what seemed to make the greatest impression on many men were the bustling, powerful, little tugboats. I suddenly realized that this was the first time many of us had seen salt water, let alone sail on it.

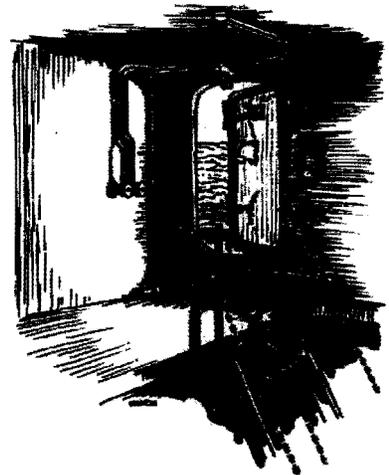
We had been aboard the ship for nearly a week before we embarked. One morning we began to feel a slight vibration. Then came a slight roll, about equal to that of a small sailboat on Long Island Sound. Someone called out, "We're under way." Someone else muttered, "It's about time." I thought of the scores of sailings I had covered as a reporter occasionally assigned to ship's news. They were hectic, frenzied affairs, with last minute telegrams rushed aboard while milling throngs waved to friends on decks. There had been a theatrical quality to these departures, carefully nourished, I suspect, by expert

publicity departments bent on injecting an air of glamor. To the best of my knowledge there only was one press agent around as we set out to sea. He was deep down in the hold with a couple of hundred other G.I.'s; a forlorn man without a craft, or, at any rate, with a professional experience for getting things in the papers that definitely was not in demand by his present employers.

* * *

Next to the question of "Where are we going?" the most important query in our minds as we set out was "Will we get seasick?" We soon found out. The roll of the ship increased, and our insides kept pace. Only those who have known the tortures of seasickness aboard a troopship fully can appreciate it. You lie on a hard slab of canvas that might be a bucking bronco. Your tummy does somersaults. You can take that, but when it comes to back flips!!! The slightest indication of movement, such as a field pack weaving, pendulum-like, before your eyes is apt to produce a violent reaction. You keep your helmet handy, make a half dozen trips up two steep ladders to the "head", and seriously debate whether life is worth the agony. Chief Broughton, an old salt from Marblehead, Massachusetts, tells me there was less seasickness in the "old" Navy because men slept in swinging hammocks rather than bunks. However, I have my doubts.

In our Battalion there were five distinct groups. At one end of the scale there were those who never missed a meal, or claimed that they hadn't. Then there were those who were stricken a few minutes after we were under way. Then there were





We Sailed The Ocean Blue

(Continued from page 7)

sick—it was just the heat in the laundry that got me." And T. L. Treeza came in for a considerable share of the ribbing. On our first day out he had purchased a paper dish of ice cream at Ship's Service. Some one warned him about upsetting his stomach. "Go on", he retorted, "ice cream will keep you from being sea—ooooooooh" and he dashed to the rail.

Sunday saw our first excitement aboard. Late in the afternoon a shrill siren began shrieking. We scanned the horizon for the sight of a periscope, the skies for hostile airplanes. The shrieking continued and we were sure something big was up. Finally, the Voice of the Vessel, coming over the public address system, announced that all was well. The siren had gotten itself stuck. We breathed easier.

Today is Monday. We've been at sea for a bit more than 48 hours but we've settled down to a calm acceptance of the seafaring life, barring more rough seas, anyway! In the morning the anti-aircraft guns had a workout. We worried when the first balloon was missed, even though the shots were near enough to hit anything larger. The second balloon was shot to tatters and we cheered. This afternoon some heavier armament was given a chance. The deep boom was a contrast to the staccato of the morning's gunnery, and while none

of the shells landed on the tiny can, they came close enough to make us feel we can do battle with any cigar-shaped marauder that comes within range.

Our destination has been secret. There was a chance of our shooting across the Atlantic, but most of us seemed to think we were heading for the Canal. Today, the Voice of the Vessel, which heretofore had shunted us below decks in business-like tone, became quite confidential. In the tones of a Burton Holmes travelogue, we were told that we were going through the Canal, that we would pass such and such an island, that we would be near the spot where Columbus first sighted land. The Voice also gave us a history of the Canal project. Some of us wondered how akin the builders of the Canal were to the present-day Scabees.

After chow last night we sighted San Salvador. It was our first glimpse of land since leaving port, and even if no more than a dim, murky outline was visible, it was a welcome sight, reassuring us that somewhere in this vast expanse of water there was land. The Voice had reminded us that this was the first view of land afforded to a Spanish convoy back in 1492, and we thought of the conquests and conflicts that began in this hemisphere with the arrival of what is known as civilization.

The sunset was nothing short of

glorious. Low gray clouds hung over the island, and behind them sank the sun, oozing liquid fire over and under them. A Haitian has written of the "bleeding" sunsets of that region. I think I know what he means, now. Against this brilliant background was the sleek black silhouette of our destroyer.

While some of us were entranced by the combination of scenic beauty and historical interest, not all of us were lost in the same kind of reverie. One of our younger and more irrepressible cooks, John J. Sagula, SC3c, sighed: "Gee, I betcha they got dames on that island!"

The Powers-That-Be on the ship were kind to the G. I.'s last night, permitting us to stay on deck long after the ship was darkened. We certainly appreciated the boon. It was a lovely evening. Low, dark tufts of clouds which might have been made of cotton and suspended by string, floated under a purplish sky. The clouds were so low that we felt a man in the crow's nest surely could touch them.

This morning's sunrise also was something to see. Again there were clouds. This time they made a purple canopy through which the sun's rays poured. If there was one thought running through most of our minds, it was that some day we might make this voyage again, with our wives at our side. At least a dozen men around me expressed this hope. One's wife, a deck chair, and a tall cool drink, and life would be perfect! A far cry from the rugged reality of a troopship, but it's not against regulations to dream a bit.

After this trip we'll have a sympathy for the sardine. We're packed in pretty tight down below. It's hot, and the smell of mankind is sometimes almost overpowering. We sleep in bunks five tiers high. Above me is Ray Metcalf, who weighs some 200 pounds. When he sinks into his bunk the canvas sags so that it is perilous for me to raise my head. . . . The heat and humidity were stifling last night. Paul Falk had remarked about our being in the most dangerous waters of the entire trip and for the first time I began to think about submarines. I touched my life belt, made mental note of the position of my trousers and shoes. I don't think I'd ever have fallen asleep but I happened to think of Mabel Stuart Curry's poem, "The Crossing", which Clarence A. Day had submitted to us for publication in the last American edition of *The Review*. It had a calming effect, and when I awoke, the ship still was aloft.

The first lap of our voyage is over. We are docking at the Atlantic entrance to the Canal. The Voice is calling instructions to the crew.

This morning the Battalion added another unforgettable picture to our album of memories. After washing some clothes and taking a shower I came on deck to find that the convoy no longer was scattered in its ocean formation, but was cruising in a single line, just like in the newsreels. Our ship being the flagship, we were in the lead. To port we saw a symphony of gray, a gray sea, a gray mist which broke off sharply to disclose a deep

gray shore line and above it a pearly gray, luminous sky, broken by irregular opaque gray clouds. As we came closer to land we could see patches of a rusty, tired brown, then spots of bright green. There was one picture I would have liked to have painted; a long, low green shed along the water's edge with palm trees jutting behind it. As we came to the pier we noticed several vessels flying the flags of our Allies, including a small British aircraft carrier with its crew in white shorts. Also on view was a picturesque white two masted schooner which looked as if it had come out of a painting by Winslow Homer.

Today was an historic one for the Panama Canal. In all the years it has been in operation, never did a ship pass through its waters with a more excited, interested and enthusiastic group of passengers than those aboard our vessel.

"Ever since I've been old enough to read", one man said, "I've been reading about the Panama Canal. I never dreamed I'd ever see it. Gosh! Look how fast that water is rising on those rungs!"

A dozen Atlases appeared on deck as the mates traced the course of the Big Ditch and discussed its history. Chief Welborn gazed on the canal with a deep reverence. "I sure would have liked to have been on this project from the start, with the first survey crew, and kept on it until it was finished", he said quietly.

Even chow, usually the most important thing on the ship, could not compete with the Canal. The harassed M. A. A.s, who usually stand as a barrier between the mates and the chow hall, herding them into line, etc., had a new problem on their hands tonight; to get the gang down to eat. One of the M. A. A.s was imploring: "Any of you fellows want to eat now?" After the long, long chow lines which stretched around the ship, this was even a greater miracle than the Canal, and for the first time I walked along an unobstructed passage right into the Chow Hall.

I returned to the deck before we had gone very far through the first set of locks and soon witnessed the only competition offered the Canal that day. As we were entering the lake between the locks, we saw a group of Army men, and with them creatures garbed in strange attire—skirts! We couldn't believe our eyes. Yes, they were women. Real, live, female women! Men rushed to the port side for a glimpse of this almost forgotten rarity in our wholly masculine world. Officers on the bridge swung their binoculars as one man. We all waved madly and the girls waved back with commendable enthusiasm. Women! Even the beauty of the mountain lake failed to erase the memory completely.

Taking advantage of the abundant supply of fresh water, the decks were washed with vigor. The crew had plenty of assistance from the Seabeas, who turned out in bathing trunks or just waded in completely dressed to have a turn at handling the hose and sweeping down the deck. Quite inadvertently, of course, one hose crew occasionally would splash a stream of

water on the other, and quite by accident (of course!), the other crew would return the favor.

It was grand, good-natured horse-play while it lasted.

Oh yes, we saw another woman. A trim speedboat passed and she was in the stern, a magazine advertising vision in a crisp white skirt that whipped in the breeze as she stood and waved to us.

Later in the evening Dean Prowse took me up to the signal bridge, the



highest point on the ship except for the crow's nest. I could see the guide lights of the narrow end of the lake as they approached the Pacific locks, and, in the distance, what appeared to be the lights of a city.

A city! Lights, the sound of a woman's laughter, people walking on a paved street; a restaurant where you could sit down to eat; a drug store with a fountain that serves chocolate sodas; or a hotel lobby with music off in the distance and a Scotch and water in a small bar off to one side of the lobby. A city! I wonder when we'll be seeing one again!

From the picture in the Grade Six History book, I always had conceived of the Canal as a long series of locks flanked by gleaming white concrete. It was a surprise to find only a few locks at one end, a big, beautiful mountain lake, then a few locks at the other.

Although we left the Canal several days ago, I learned this morning that we still are not as far West as San Francisco. This came to us as we listened to a San Francisco radio station which had the time as five after six when our watches were consider-

ably later. Lt. Baxter tells me that by the time we are due South of San Francisco half of our voyage in the Pacific will be completed; also that the Panama Canal is East of Florida, not directly South of it as I always had imagined. Why didn't I pay any attention during geography lessons?

We learned this morning that we were going to (Censored), for a while, anyway. Lt. Kilpatrick, our company commander, called a meeting of the men in the hold and asked for better cooperation in keeping our quarters clean. There was a hint of a twinkle in his eye as he said that if the entire company was put on report it might mean the loss of our first liberty in (Censored). Such is the way we receive official confirmation of our own scuttlebutt!

The officers have a ward room which serves as their dining room, conference room and club room. Our club room is the Chow Hall after supper. The open deck is a great gathering place but for the men who want to play cards, write a letter, or join in the evening's musicale after the ship is darkened, the Chow Hall is the place. One of the main attractions is Robert Payne, one of the Negro Marines aboard, who used to play the piano in night clubs in and around Cincinnati. He is a little fellow with the kind of an innocent smile that makes you want to grin all over when you see it on the faces of little colored children. He's a whiz at the keyboard, and from his night club experience has acquired a repertory that is astounding. How he can breathe with the mob that always is around him is a mystery, but perhaps the night club training also is the answer to that. Payne plays popular stuff from the time the Chow Hall opens for revelry until taps is sounded. Then, as his fellow-Marines and most of our men go to their holds, he starts working on his own arrangements and compositions. He has composed a song entitled "Dreams Are Such Wonderful Things", and for my money it's as good as anything on the hit parade. He also has been working on an arrangement of "Stardust" for our band, which has been giving concerts aboard.

Editor's Note:

Robert Payne, Marine mentioned in this article, is a member of the Marine Company mentioned in the following dispatch recently printed in YANK:

SAIPAN—The first Negro marines to see combat are members of an ammunition company which hit the beach here on D-Day under the heaviest artillery and mortar concentration ever to meet American invasion forces in the Pacific.

Originally scheduled to move ammunition from the beach to dumps a short distance inland, many of them delivered their cargo to within a few yards of the Japs and one, Pfc. John M. Jenkins of Norline, N. C., destroyed a Jap machine gun nest with a grenade. One man was killed in action and several wounded by shell fragments.

Leo Mann, professional boxer of Houston, Tex., who once defeated Lew Jenkins, is a sergeant in the

ammo company. Pfc. Robert L. Payne, Jr., formerly was an orchestra leader in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Pfc. Fred E. Washington was a licensed Baptist minister in Los Angeles who conducts services for the men, assisted by Pfc. August C. Witcher of Charlottesville, Va. Sgt. Ernest W. Coney of Lake City, Fla., now a clerk, was topkick of a CCC outfit for three years.

Commanding officer of the company is Captain Louis P. Shine of Osage, W. Va.

—YANK Staff Correspondent.

Sleeping on deck is now legal and not half as much fun.

The officers have devised a new form of physical training known as abandon ship drill. You go to your compartment, wait for the signal, then dash up two steep flights of stairs (or ladders, to be nautical about it) and go out on deck until the game is called off. We can clear the hold in a few minutes. It is a necessary precaution and not too boring.

As another precaution we always wear our life belts, rubber tubes which may be blown up by mouth or inflated by Sparklet-type siphon cartridges. They add to the heat and are a necessary nuisance. Every now and then I find myself without the belt and I hurriedly retrace my steps to find the darned thing. It is a court martial offense to be without one but no one has noticed my occasional derelictions.

The clouds were so low this morning that the sea seems lifted to the top of the universe. One mate said that the sea had a "swollen" appearance; another said it reminded him of a sunrise in Wyoming viewed from a mountain top on a clear day. As the sun cleared the horizon we watched it cast a path of gold over a silvery sea which appeared as smooth as glass. In one respect we have been fortunate thus far. Except for the day we left port, our journey has been on truly pacific waters. The comparison with the Staten Island Ferry still goes.

Yesterday we had gun practice and one crew hit the target, a small can floating well away from the ship, on the first round. Actually, to hit the water anywhere near the tiny can would win the "Good Shooting" commendation from the Voice, on the theory that an enemy craft would be hit by a shell which came that close. To sink the can target is said to be a rare feat and we were proud of the ship's gunners.

We sent our clothes to the ship's laundry the other day and it was returned today in a confused jumble. We had quite a time sorting over all the stuff, calling out the owner's name as we read the stencil on each garment. Our underwear had acquired a dun color that was christened "battleship gray."

This morning at about seven o'clock, things began to happen up in the bow, where the dogs are quartered in their boxes on deck. Queenie,

a German shepherd belonging to F. B. Roberts, became a mother, and how! By noon she had given birth to a litter of thirteen squirming puppies, and from all over the ship officers and men were making a pilgrimage to see the new additions to our muster roll. One of the boys in Co. B was scratching the tired Queenie's ear as a gesture of comfort while a dozen (one had been born dead) blind puppies all attempted to suckle, a mathematical impossibility. To further complicate matters, early in the afternoon two more puppies arrived, making a grand total of fifteen born, fourteen alive, which we believed established some new kind of maritime record.

Although Queenie is a shepherd there is some reason to believe that the father was not. The puppies provide a wide variety of coloring.

F. B. Roberts, titular owner of Queenie, looked as wan as any father who ever paced a hospital corridor. The mates suggested that with such a large family he could now apply for an increase in his dependency allotment. Harold Willis, owner of Pat, Co. A's cocker spaniel mascot had an explanation for the large litter. He blamed it on the fact that Queenie was quartered under one of the machine gun emplacements and just had acquired the habit.

Big event of the day was the refueling of the destroyer which is escorting our convoy. We were cruising along slowly when the destroyer shot up from our stern. A light line was shot across, and the crew on the destroyer systematically used it to pull over the heavier rope and finally a heavy hawser. Several other lines were hauled over by the same system and finally the oil line, suspended from a boom, was sent over.

These operations completed, we had a chance to inspect the destroyer at close range. It was a long, slender affair, looking like an overgrown submarine to which parts of a battleship had been superimposed. Guns bristled from every inch of its deck. . . . The crew of the destroyer seemed very

much at home and were drinking coffee on deck.

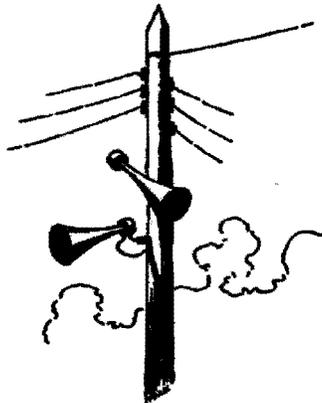
To keep both vessels under control a good headway was maintained during the operation, a very tricky one it seemed to us.

Seeing the destroyer reminded me of the first paragraph of Marcus Goodrich's account of life aboard one, "Delliah." Read it sometime.

Thanks to the Council on Books in Wartime, a non-profit organization of American publishers, librarians and booksellers, we have a rich library of handy, pocket-sized volumes. The titles, for the most part, represent a cavalcade of best sellers of the past decade or two, and have been selected with authority, intelligence and consideration for the variability of taste. Many of us here renewed the reading habit on board ship. Our main trouble has been to find a place to read. The deck is crowded and we aren't permitted to go to the holds during the day as the Captain of the ship thinks we should get some sunshine. (We gripe about this, but we'd gripe more if we weren't allowed as much freedom of the deck as we've been enjoying.) Just as you get settled and after you do find a place to roost, someone decides it's time to wash down the deck again, and you have to move. The only sacred corner of the vessel is the small triangle of deck where Queenie is ensconced with her puppies. The crew purposely ignores this maternity ward. The fourteen tiny pups are doing well, and this afternoon the Mess Hall M.A.A. was arranging a system of feeding shifts, complete with early chow passes.

Before the ship left port, the Battalion's metalmiths were salvaging old lockers on the dock and rebuilding them into shelving for the signal bridge. The men designed and constructed a bronze gear rest for the dental office, made gear lockers for landing boats, installed a ship-to-shore telephone and a ten-station inter-ship communications system, repaired Jacob's ladders, made and installed leather cushions for a Commodore's gig, repaired evaporators to increase their capacity 25%, rearranged ventilating systems, welded bulkheads, cleaned and repaired guns; stood watch in the engine room, at the guns, on the Signal Bridge and in the radio room.

The Battalion's cooks helped in the galley to prepare meals for ship's crew and other military units aboard as well as the 117th's enlisted personnel. Our men constructed coffee urns for the Main Galley, tore down an electric oven in the bakery and redesigned brick work and shelving for more efficient operation, installed emergency chutes for life rafts, made numerous copper vessels such as urinal cans and instrument trays for the sick bay. We redesigned brackets and made general repairs to blinker lights, stripped down and completely rebuilt an officer's stateroom and head, rewound motors, made electrical repairs and improvements throughout the ship, painted some 600 signs throughout the ship and seven decorative murals topside. Our Band was busy, too, playing six concerts during the voyage.



Before we left the ship we found we didn't have a monopoly on confusion. We chuckled when we recalled the officer who asked us to rebuild his stateroom so as to even up the deck. It was quite a job, ripping up welded furniture, installing new beams, etc. Just as the boys were about to put it together again, a higher officer came by and wanted to know what was going on. "Harrumph," he harrumphed when told, "stuff and nonsense. A deck isn't made to be level and if he can't walk on it the way it was built he ought to be assigned to shore duty."

We disembarked with a new perspective, a new pride in ourselves and our outfit.

* * *

Here we are on Island X.

Yesterday, at sea, our eyes strained for the sight of land. Suddenly one man pointed ahead and said: "There's a lighthouse. See the flashes!"

It wasn't a mirage, but it wasn't a lighthouse, either. Soon we saw smoke blossoms against the sky and we realized it was a ship firing anti-aircraft shells. Unperturbed, a plane hovered by.

Bits of driftwood floated by and someone said he had heard a ship had been sunk in that vicinity a few days before.

It was not until we came up from the mess compartment after noon chow that we saw the dim outline of mountains off starboard. Soon we zig-zagged and made for this promised land which ran in rocky ridges from the sea to the clouds where its shape was lost in mist.

Soon, over the blue water we could make out a strip of beach and a fringe of foliage. As we came into a narrow channel a man was spearing fish. We looked back toward the ocean and the water took on a variety of hues. Against the ship it seemed a dark, neutral color. A little further away it was yellowish, then a deeper green, and against the horizon a deep blue.

As we entered the harbor the mountains seemed to open up for us and above the piers and sheds we could see large expanses of green fields and strips of red earth arranged in casual pattern on the slopes leading to the hills.

It was an unaccustomed picture for us. We were not used to seeing the skeletons of cranes rising above palm trees, captain's gig with white uniformed seamen standing smartly in the stern, and camouflaged LCTs. All this helped to give the scene the quality of a Coca-Cola advertisement.

We passed through hallowed waters. We saw a recently-raised vessel with its ensign flying proudly astern, signifying that it still was in the fight. And in a scrap pile ashore, we saw parts of ships that would fight no more.

Soon we were tied up at a pier. Someone brought a few copies of the local newspaper aboard, and there was a mad scramble for them. Officers on the upper decks trained their binoculars on the headlines and read them aloud. Somehow, when newspapers came aboard we knew we were back on terra firma, that our journey

was over, for the time being, at least.

Within an hour we were clambering aboard trucks and on our way up a hilly road. There was a lot of traffic. We went through ravines of reddish earth, covered with green foliage, and we saw plenty of cactus. "Looks like California to me," one man said. "Looks like Oklahoma to me," said our M.A.A. Harold McDowell. And Davey Huber said the green hills reminded him of Kentucky.

As we climbed the hills we had a splendid view of the panorama of sea and shore. We eventually came to a small village of Quonset huts built against a red-soiled hilltop, and at what seemed the peak, the trucks stopped conveniently close to a beer line.

Just as it happened at Peary and Gulfport, and, as I suppose it would happen if a group of Seabees were suddenly to land in Heaven, we were soon besieged with questions "Anyone from Texas . . . anyone from West Virginia . . . New Hampshire . . . Ohio . . . Connecticut?"

"Is there a guy named Joe Parker in your outfit?"

We were equally curious. We wanted to know about the beer line, the liberty situation, the living conditions. The sight of doubledecker bunks, many with springs, was almost too much for us after five months on camp cots at Gulfport and nearly a month on pipe berths at sea. We were amused to find pineapples growing in orderly rows in the red dirt behind the huts. We had not satisfied our curiosity when a loud speaker announced that a neighboring battalion's chow hall was ready to serve us. Down the hilly, narrow path between the huts the Battalion stampeded, giving a good imitation of the Gold Rush or the opening of the Cherokee Strip. The food was good, but the sight of tables and benches was better, for we had stood for meals on the voyage. After chow we found a ship's service store where we bought ice cream, milk shakes, cans of pineapple juice and coco-colas. We were intrigued by attractively printed books and souvenirs such as grass skirts. Some of the mates said they were made in Brooklyn.

As night fell on the camp, the lights of the city below twinkled invitingly, but we were glad to turn into our

bunks. We missed the gentle rocking motion of the ship. The reaction of being on shore was too much for some of us. Joe Del Orfano, a cook who had been uneasy during the entire voyage, was so relieved to be on land that he kept chattering long after lights out. He was genuinely amusing and we laughed, a bit too loudly perhaps, for the OOD soon came over and told us to pipe down.

* * *

We were lined up for muster this morning when Roberts and another mate came along. They were carrying Queenie's box. There was a look on Roberts' face that made me feel something was wrong.

"How's Queenie?" someone asked. He didn't answer for a minute. Then, in a toneless voice, he murmured, "Queenie's dead."

A moanful sigh, as heartfelt as it was brief, went up from every one of us.

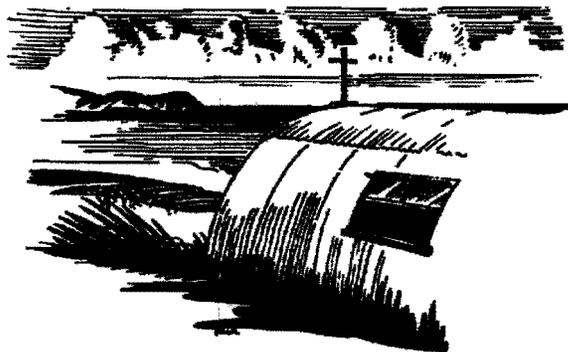
* * *

This afternoon we received our mail, our first word from home in what seemed like years. The folks had been writing every day and almost everyone of us had at least a score of letters. We read them avidly and eagerly shared choice paragraphs with the fellow in the next bunk.

Not all of the letters were cheerful. I learned of the death of a friend back in Redding Ridge and Paul Huskins, one of our cooks, learned of the death of his mother. I tried to tell him I was sorry, but I don't know whether he heard me.

This morning Chief Witmyer took our company for a hike into the hills beyond the camp. We walked along a narrow path on a ridge, looked down into deep green valleys covered with a carpet-like shrubbery, thick, but dwarfed. We noted a small blue flower, but we didn't know its name.

On our way back we passed Commander Burke and Lt. Commander Anderson standing together, looking over the camp and the vista below. In Gulfport we usually saw them only in the grayish offices. Now, in the sunlight, they seemed to take on added stature. They were on the job. The sight of them standing there together so calmly gave me a feeling of confidence. I imagined that they were looking over the scene of our Battalion's future activity and were pleased with the prospects.





WHAT WE CAME TO DO

By LARRY T. BROOKS

SEABEES, by the very nature of their organization, constitute construction companies with the ability and equipment necessary in time of war to build and if necessary assist in the defense of the projects they build. Some of the units have even been used as forward echelons to aid in the assault on new bases but for the most part their duties have been the reconstruction and construction of forward supply depots which are being used to continue the flow of materials and equipment to the place of immediate need in the quickest and most efficient manner. The 117th Battalion's history at the moment falls under the latter category.

With this in mind, a brief history of our Battalion's accomplishments and an outline of our set-up on our present Island X should be of particular interest to the folks back home and a subject for future reminiscence by the fireside long after the sparks of conflict have died away.

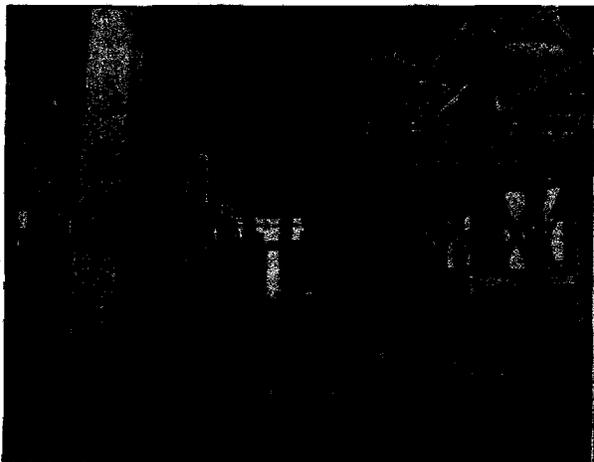
Until our arrival on this Island X most of the work performed was along the line of training and the attempt at classification in relation to the men's fitness and dex-

terity in certain branches. This we found to be of vital importance in knowing the right man for the right job at the right time. This information has also been invaluable in the successful and spontaneous manner in which we were able to take hold of the many and varied types of construction problems assigned to us.

The diversity and ability of our personnel can best be summarized with the knowledge of the scope of our work which is including such details of construction as the drafting of the plans, surveys and layouts, sewers and water lines, road building, power lines, pile driving, welding, heavy equipment maintenance and operation; in other words the complete project from beginning to end.

Interesting to note is the fact that we have among our Battalion personnel experts in the lines of Carpentry, Stone and Brick Masonry, Surveyors, Draftsmen, Artists, Cooks and Bakers, Musicians, Plumbers, Electricians, Cement Finishers, Plasterers, Steel and Sheet Metal Workers, Sand Blasters, Fingerprint Experts, Shipfitters, Watchmakers, Riggers, Sailmakers, Automotive and Heavy Equipment Mechanics and Operators, Powder men

(Continued on page 32)



WHAT WE CAME TO DO

(Continued from page 8)

Welders and in addition to these and many others of the skilled trades, the young men just out of school skilled in no particular craft but with stout hearts and strong hands willing to do any job assigned to them.

These men under the supervision of well qualified Officers working in groups have constructed or have under construction work which would be comparable in the States to a contract of approximately Three Million Dollars valuation. In comparison the amount of materials used would completely build a village of some one hundred-sixty average size five room modern frame residences including the Paving, Plumbing and Electrical work.

A breakdown on our work would reveal such structures as eighteen enormous warehouses, thirteen Frame Barracks, Second story addition to an important Administration Building, many one story, and five of the latest two story prefabricated Quonset Huts,

Post Office, Officers Recreational Facilities and Tennis Club, Dyke and Spillway. To perform this work we have assigned to us such equipment as Dump, Cargo, Water and Pick-up Trucks, Weapon Carriers, Recon, Jeeps, Sedans, Trailers, Motor Graders, Tandem and Sheepfoot Rollers, Sampan, Busses, Generators, Tractors, Cranes, Shovels, Ditchers, Ambulance, Concrete Mixers, Compressors, Welding Machines, Bulldozers, etc.

Speed and efficiency is our war cry. With the Pacific Campaign now reaching a fever pitch many of the projects being built are being brought into use long before the final doors are hung. In many instances the two story Barracks are being occupied downstairs while the upstairs is still under construction and the warehouses are half filled before they are palated. Great quantities of foodstuff and materials of war are being warehoused so that our Boys in the thick of the fight may

have the most when they need it, and incidentally they are getting it; which to Hirohito should serve as sufficient warning: his days are numbered.

Linked with this immense construction program is the ever present problem of morale which is being taken care of by the incidental construction of recreational facilities within our own camp area.

Rest assured, folks back home, that your boys are fully on the job and doing a great piece of work as is evidenced by many letters of commendation and praise for their achievements from high ranking Naval and Marine Officials and in addition by their dirty, sweaty, smiling faces as they return each evening from their day's work. I think I can speak for each of them when I say they go about their daily grind with the one thought of hurrying to finish this mountainous mess and the return to you back there.

CAMP PEARY, WINTER STYLE

By HAROLD E. KIDDER, S2c

I SUPPOSE that to the majority of the Battalion who went through boot in the Summer, Camp Peary recalls the picture of a steaming swampland on the South Bank of the York River in what is sometimes referred to as beautiful and historic Virginia.

To some of the rest of us, namely the Seamen from the Special Drafts, 3000 to 3004, mention of Peary evokes a somewhat different memory. We were among the last men to go through Peary before it was converted into a regular Navy Training Station. When we arrived, in October and November of 1943, men were coming in at a terrific rate. Peary was packed to the gills with men sleeping in the drill halls and even outside of them.

The lucky ones of us had barracks where we had fire watch all night to keep the stoves going. The mates next to the stoves always got roasted while the ones at the ends of the barracks froze. Then, too, it was not unusual for someone to let the fire go out.

Due to the shortage of coal we had to use wood. There was never a duty day but what some of us got caught on a wood detail. I, for one, have many fond (???) memories of pulling logs out of Virginia swamps.

Like all Seabees before us and, I suppose, like the few after us, we had to visit that place called the obstacle course, and some of the fellows took

a ducking at the water hurdle. They can testify to the temperature of the water, which, incidentally, had a skim of ice over it every morning. The cold water did away with washing the board sidewalks in the morning, be-

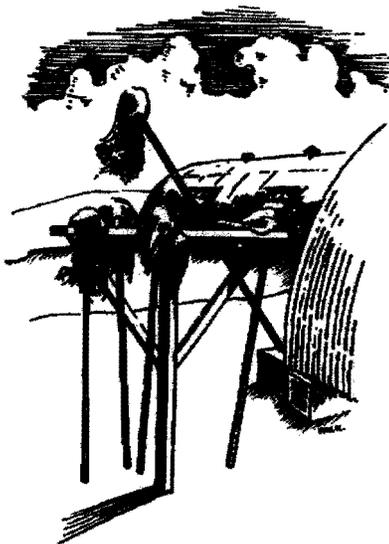
cause any water that was thrown on the walks froze, with often embarrassing results.

There are some things I don't think anyone who was in Special Draft 3000 ever will forget. There were those days at the rifle range when the dress of the day went something like this: Long underwear, blue jersey, duagaree shirt and pants covered by utility greens, then pea coats. The bravest took off their pea coats when on the firing line, but the brave were not too numerous.

Another thing to remember was the Battle of Seabee Hill. This was an embankment at the Pistol Range in A-1. One company would establish itself at the top of the embankment and three other companies would attack and try to dislodge the defenders. It was a game of King of the Mountain on a large scale.

Then there was the time we loaded all of our bags into a truck at 0600 to move and then unloaded them at 1000 and returned to the same bunk in which we had been sleeping.

The rest of this story is known to you all. How in December and January we came to Gulfport and joined the 117th Battalion, which was badly in need of new blood to bring back its waning strength. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Hear the man ravel!) Honest, fellows, we couldn't help it because none of you were strong enough to be Messmen and feed yourselves.



The First Year's The Hardest

By BARNEY O'DONNELL and N. R. WATSON

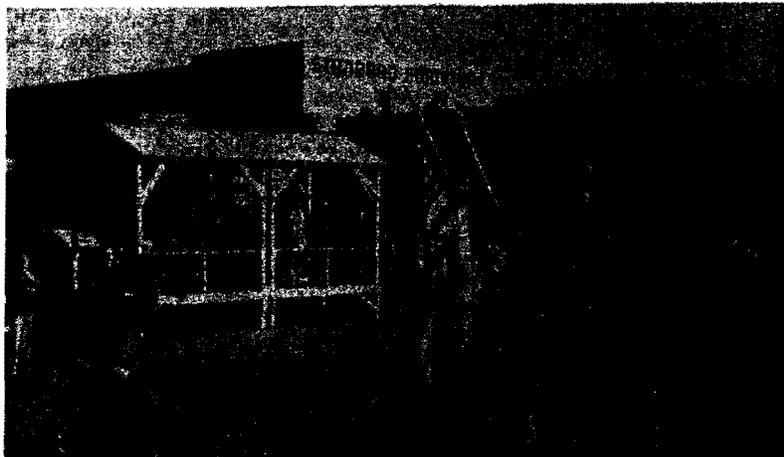
DURING the second week of August, 1943, in the Battalion Formation Office at Camp Peary, the United States Naval Training Center at Williamsburg, Va., a yeoman fed more than a thousand perforated cards to an I.B.M. machine, which in turn, automatically typed a score of mimeographed stencils entitled "MUSTER SHEET, 117TH USNCB."

On Saturday, August 14, a group of officers of the Navy's rapidly expanding Civil Engineering Corps gathered in Area A-7 to meet Commander Michael J. Burke, Officer-in-Charge of the 117th. Copies of the muster were distributed, and as the officers glanced over the long lists, they probably wondered what these men looked like, these men who shortly were to join them for advanced training and overseas duty in the service of our country.

The men gathered the following day. They came from Area D-7, where some sixty per cent of the Battalion, who entered the Navy in July, had undergone boot training. A high percentage was drawn from Replacement Area, where, for a variety of reasons they had been languishing until their names appeared on the magical assignment bulletin board with the cryptic symbol, 117 CB.

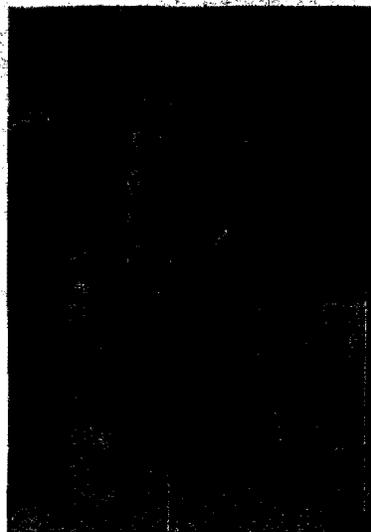
Before moving into their barracks, the men who were to become the 117th did a thing that was to be typical of many a future action. They held a field day, scrubbing every inch of deck and bulkhead until it gleamed, disinfecting every nook and cranny of barracks and head, until they were spotless. Not until the job had been completed did they unpack their mattress and gear, eat chow and settle down for a well-earned night's rest in the excitement of new surroundings, new companions and a new organization.

Within a few days preliminary interviews had been completed and the Battalion was in the throes of advanced military training. We drilled under the direction of Marines and our ears still echo with the "hup tloop trip . . . reep for your lep, your lep, your lep, reep lep"—not a foreign language, but as closely as can be reproduced in print, the Marine dialect for counting cadence. Nor shall we forget the admonitions: "Don't stomp those



Passing Reviewing Stand—Gulfport Parade

Four



Mrs. A. E. Strasser Presents Battalion Colors to Lt. Comdr. Anderson

pieces on the deck!" . . . "Eyes front!" . . . "Don't look at me, I'm not in love with you!" Or, during the lectures, when the boys became drowsy from heat, "Hold that piece over your head and double time around that tree! Now, is there anyone else who would like to take a little run?"

Another indelible memory of A-7 are those hikes. We had hikes, plain and fancy. On the plain hikes we marched or double-timed along the alleged road. On the fancy hikes we deployed through woods and fields, sometimes erect, sometimes simulating a cat stalking a bird. On one of the more elaborately staged forays, we encircled the countryside to get to a bivouac area, marching fifteen miles to arrive at a point less than five miles from our starting point. It was on this hike that double-time seemed a pleasure compared with the 240 steps per minute cadence. Many a Seabee dropped by the roadside on that scorching day. A score landed in Station Hospital before the day was over. We had the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the Marines had taken over in relays, and at least one of them had passed out too. It was a tired, bushed outfit that returned to camp after that grueling hike. Some of the mates weren't exhausted sufficiently to prevent their taking the liberty bus to Richmond, 56 miles away, that very evening, returning to camp the next morning at 0700, just in time for the second of the two-day hiking orgy.

It was at Peary, after many weeks in the Navy, that we old salts saw our first ship, a dummy scaffolding which we used for mock "abandon ship"

drill, and a dummy landing barge, from which we made some terrific beach invasions across an arid drill field. We were nearly convinced that our training was for the Arizona Navy, but one morning we were given a taste of the real thing—real landing barges and a real landing on the York River.

Taps had sounded one night in Peary when Commander Burke received a telephone call. Within a record time he mobilized several hundred men, carpenters, divers, welders, electricians and other specialists and a platoon of riflemen, and we were on our way to the dock area. It was all in practice, but it gave us an idea of the type of emergency we might meet and the need for organization, for knowing what men could do the best job in any given situation.

Remember the rifle range? There was the dry firing up near the beer hall where we learned our stance. Then we went down to the range itself, where the cry was "Ready on the Left, Ready on the Right, Ready on the Firing Line. . . Fire at Will". This was followed by the clatter of some fifty pieces, and the echo of firing from adjoining ranges. Remember "Maggie's Drawers," the flag which indicated a complete miss? It didn't fly very often, for most of the men qualified as marksmen, sharpshooter or expert. And who could forget pulling butts? That crack of bullets as they passed overhead, through or around the targets?

Remember the obstacle course? At any rate, we proved the theory of evolution. After climbing those rope ladders, pulling ourselves up a perpendicular log embankment, swinging across ditches and crawling across that cat-walk, there was no doubt that we were descended from something, but we weren't sure whether it was an ape or an antelope, although we have never seen an antelope swing on a rope bridge.

Next on the agenda was a concentrated period of platoon drill, company drill and, finally, close order Battalion drill. We were preparing for the great day, our commissioning and the presentation of our colors. That momentous day came on Saturday, August 28. It marked a climax in our training period. It was the day on which we received our diplomas.

A single-sheet forerunner of the 117TH REVIEW was THE STINGAREE, which survived only one issue. The only description of our commission-

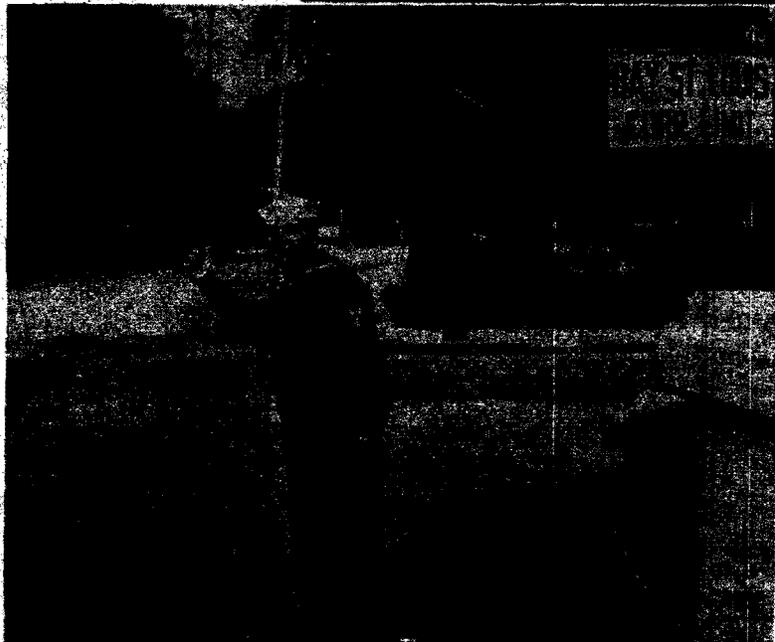
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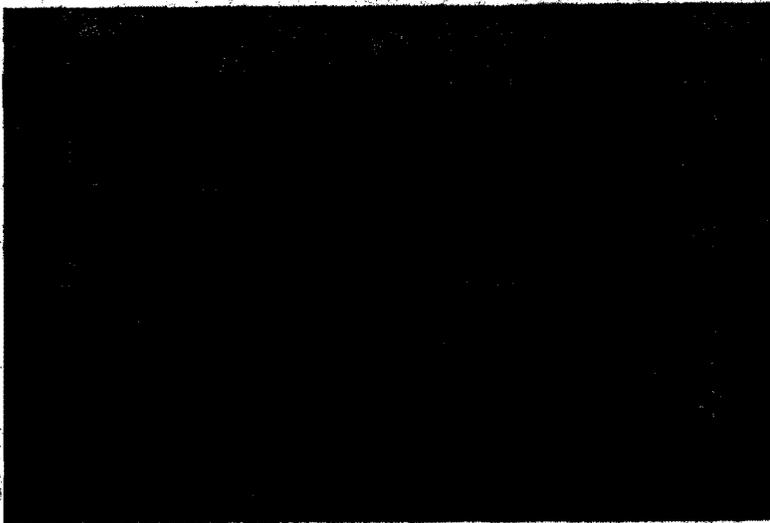


Upper
Cat Island Maneuvers

Center:
Monsoon Season. Gulfport

Lower:
"Going My Way"





WE SAILED *The Ocean* BLUE

(Excerpts from an unpublished manuscript,
"NOTHING HAPPENED, THANK GOD")

By HENRY SENBER, YZc

TODAY we are at sea. As Commander Burke stated in the last Gulfport issue of THE REVIEW, we are on our way to do our part. We have been a long time getting here. The months we stood by in Mississippi seemed interminable. Now, as we stand on the deck of the U.S.S. (Censored) looking down upon blue water and white foam seething past the side of our vessel, the long, weary weeks of waiting are forgotten. We are on our way. We know that beneath the placid sea are men whose grim purpose it is to prevent us from getting there.

Less than a week ago we came aboard this vessel at our embarkation point. The sight of a ship ever has acted as a stimulant to the adventurous spirit of man, and the mates were susceptible. As soon as our packs were stowed in our tiered bunks, every man of us was up on deck watching, wide-eyed, the intricate process of stowing cargo. The compact versatility of the gear aboard the ship fascinated all of us. The ship, to us, was like an intriguing new toy, and we pried into every accessible nook and cranny on individual voyages of discovery.

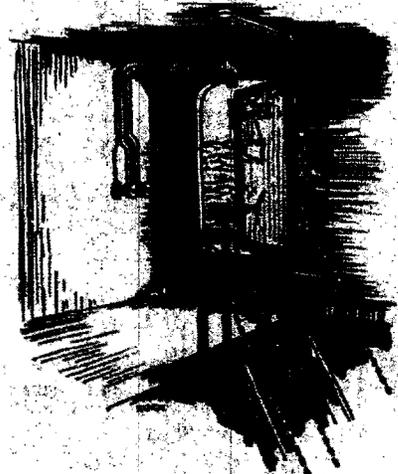
In the harbor we saw many vessels of various types, but what seemed to make the greatest impression on many men were the bustling, powerful, little tugboats. I suddenly realized that this was the first time many of us had seen salt water, let alone sail on it.

We had been aboard the ship for nearly a week before we embarked. One morning we began to feel a slight vibration. Then came a slight roll, about equal to that of a small sailboat on Long Island Sound. Someone called out, "We're under way." Someone else muttered, "It's about time." I thought of the scores of sailings I had covered as a reporter occasionally assigned to ship's news. They were hectic, frenzied affairs, with last minute telegrams rushed aboard while milling throngs waved to friends on decks. There had been a theatrical quality to these departures, carefully nourished, I suspect, by expert

publicity departments bent on injecting an air of glamor. To the best of my knowledge there only was one press agent around as we set out to sea. He was deep down in the hold with a couple of hundred other G.I.'s; a forlorn man without a craft, or, at any rate, with a professional experience for getting things in the papers that definitely was not in demand by his present employers.

Next to the question of "Where are we going?" the most important query in our minds as we set out was "Will we get seasick?" We soon found out. The roll of the ship increased, and our insides kept pace. Only those who have known the tortures of seasickness aboard a troopship fully can appreciate it. You lie on a hard slab of canvas that might be a bucking bronco. Your tummy does somersaults. You can take that, but when it comes to back flips!!! The slightest indication of movement, such as a field pack weaving, pendulum-like, before your eyes is apt to produce a violent reaction. You keep your helmet handy, make a half dozen trips up two steep ladders to the "head", and seriously debate whether life is worth the agony. Chief Broughton, an old salt from Marblehead, Massachusetts, tells me there was less seasickness in the "old" Navy because men slept in swinging hammocks rather than bunks. However, I have my doubts.

In our Battalion there were five distinct groups. At one end of the scale there were those who never missed a meal, or claimed that they hadn't. Then there were those who were stricken a few minutes after we were under way. Then there were



those who held out a few hours. Then came those, who waited until evening. And then there was that unfortunate group to which your correspondent belonged, the ones who didn't up-chuck, but oh, how they tried. . . . Even the sickest of us couldn't suppress a grin when word went round the ship that several of the boys had been in such a hurry that they forgot to remove their false teeth, which went merrily down the drain, slipperily eluding the unsteady grasps of those who tried to rescue them en-route. And there was a satisfaction in knowing that the ailment was a democratic one, no respecter of ranks or rates. Several of our officers looked green around the gills, and one ship's officer cheered us considerably when he nonchalantly let go over the side. We felt that perhaps we weren't such bad sailors after all. . . . not that anyone gave a damn that night.

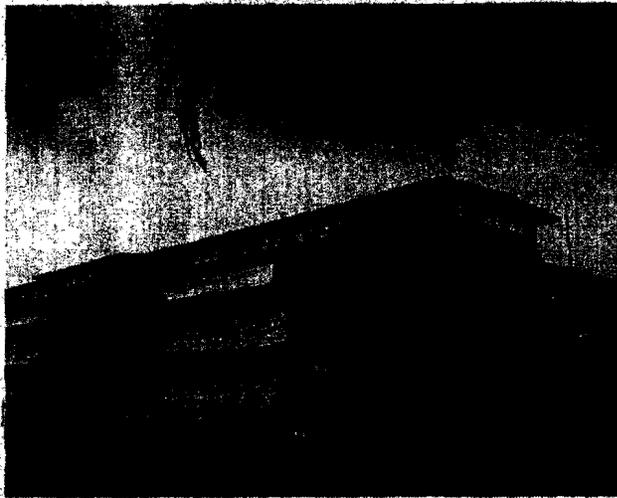
The next day was only our second at sea, but it seemed a lot longer. As the ship sailed along with no more of a roll than you would expect from the Staten Island Ferry, we counted noses and found that the most violently ill of the preceding day were up and about, gaily exchanging tales of their adventures. We heard some memorable "last words". There was Mike Fuszo's bland "I'm ashore at sea."

(Continued on page 28)

Right "Troop Quarters." Sketch by Paul M. Falk

Below: Chaplain Toomey Conducts Divine Service





WHAT WE CAME TO DO

By LARRY T. BROOKS

SEA BEES, by the very nature of their organization, constitute construction companies with the ability and equipment necessary to build or to build and if necessary, assist in the defense of the projects they build. Some of the units have even been used as forward echelons to aid in the assault on new bases but for the most part their duties have been the reconstruction and construction of forward supply depots. They have been required to continue the flow of materials and equipment to the place of immediate need in the quietest and most efficient manner. The 17th Battalion's duties as a construction unit have been:

accomplishments and an outline of our set-up on our present Island X should be of particular interest to the folks back home and a subject for future reminiscence by the fireside long after the smoke of conflict have died away.

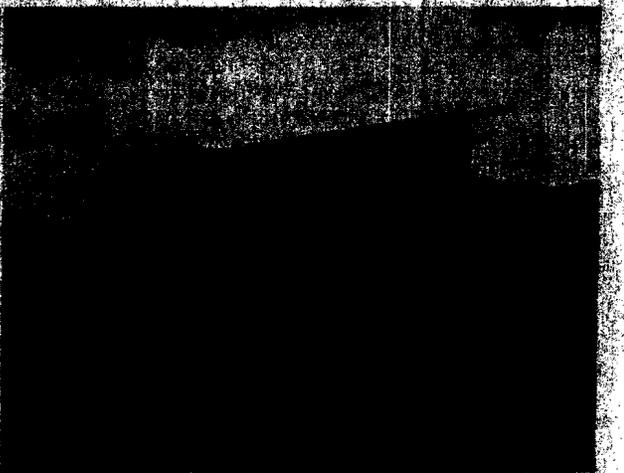
Until our arrival on this Island X most of the work performed was along the line of training and the attempt at classification in relation to the men's fitness and dex-

terity in certain branches. This we found to be of vital importance in knowing the right man for the right job at the right time. This information has also been invaluable in the successful and spontaneous manner in which we were able to take hold of the many uncharted types of construction problems presented to us.

The diversity and ability of our personnel can best be summarized with the knowledge of the scope of our work which is including such details of construction as the building of the plans, surveys and layout, sewers and other small road building, power lines, etc. Other work has been general maintenance and repair of all other types of complete projects from beginning to end.

According to both of the above we have assigned our personnel to the following trades: Masonry, Brick, Stone and Brick Masonry, Surveyors, Draftsmen, Artists, Cooks and Bakers, Musicians, Plumbers, Electricians, Cement Finishers, Plasterers, Steel and Sheet Metal Workers, Sand Blasters, Fingerprint Experts, Shipfitters, Watchmakers, Riggers, Sailmakers, Automotive and Heavy Equipment Mechanics and Operators, Powder men

(Continued on page 32)





Island X Vista



Looking For Seashells

First Year (Continued)

ing day which survives is the lead article of THE STINGAREE, which says:

"... but the brightest memory of all is that of the day the 117th was commissioned, the day we received our colors. Anyone who was present will never forget the thrill of pride that surged through participants and spectators alike as the Battalion, in immaculate whites, paraded against a background of green trees under a white-clouded blue sky. After each company commander reported his company 'present or accounted for', there was the dramatic climax when the Adjutant, Ensign Lieberman, reported to Lt. Commander Burke, 'Sir, the 117th Battalion is all present or accounted for!'"

Nor shall we forget Captain Ware's inspection, man by man, or the presentation of colors by Mrs. Albert E. Strausser, wife of our Company A commander.

Many wives had come to Williamsburg for the occasion, and after the parade there was a rush to the Personnel Office where "special liberty" passes were made out in wholesale. It was a gala day and a memorable evening in town.

The next two weeks found us assigned to special training schools, Marine Wiring, Huts and Tents, Heavy Equipment, Diving, B.A.R., etc. Excitement rose as we awaited our ten day pre-embarkation leave. On Monday evening, September 13, a convoy of trucks carrying 90% of the Battalion's personnel left for Richmond, Va., first lap of the trip home. It was the journey we had been waiting for, a ten-day respite from G.I. routine we had been talking about since our first days in boot. It was a happy cargo the trucks bore that night. The memories of that ten day leave live within each man.

Some hundred men remained behind. These were those from the West Coast who planned to take their ten day leave from Port Huonema when we arrived there. They moved into Area B-2, part of Replacement, where they led a reasonably quiet ten days.

After the hustle and bustle of the full Battalion, it was a peaceful interlude for the West Coast men. Toward the end of this period they began assorting gear for the men who were away, placing the duffie and sea bags in the allotted bunks in B-2.

Not all the mates took their complete ten days. At the end of the seventh they began to trickle back into camp and toward the 24th of September the trickle became an all-night roar. There were far fewer AOL's than had been expected.

On the morning of September 28 a representation from the Camp Peary band wheezed away at the camp railway station. A convoy of trucks rolled up. The band switched into "California, Here We Come." We'd practiced assembling by car number for two days, so we got aboard with no confusion. A man from station force checked each car to make sure we were all there, and the train finally started.

(Continued on page 16)

INNOCENTS ABROAD

By "POP" CONKLIN

Are you an optimist or a pessimist regarding the probable duration of the war? Take your pick of the following, or submit your own:

- Win the War in Forty-Four.
- Home Alive in Forty-Five.
- We'll Stow Our Picks in Forty-Six.
- Home and Heaven in Forty-Seven.
- The Golden Gate in Forty-Eight.
- The miners got to California in '49 and so will the 117th.

Add post-war plans: Knock that 4F in the head.

Hollywood Starlet:—"And did you see action in the Pacific?"

Jack Hirsch—"Yeah, I was in two bond shoots."

Seabee Medley

Sweet (CENSORED) moonlight fair
 (This red dirt gets in my hair)
 Bask on the sands of (CENSORED)
 (Call the guard at half past three)
 Pineapple, sugar cane, mongoose, banana
 (Working party for (CENSORED))
 Beautiful flowers and all kinds of fruit
 (Square that hat and salute, you boot)
 See that lofty coconut tree
 (Ten mile hike for Platoon three)
 Hula girl may lose srrong
 (Liquid sunshine all day long)
 Shall we see a hula show
 Or go and watch DiMaggio
 No mainland Scotch or rye with coke-Hell
 ("Whisky, rum and gin, all local")
 What a lovely sandy beach
 (Souvenirs five dollars each)
 In this Paradise each gal's a vamp
 (Taxi costs six bucks to camp)
 Yaka, hiki, hiki dula
 (Having fun costs plenty moolah)
 Down here where the trade winds play
YOU PAY AND PAY AND PAY AND PAY.

Bye Bay Bunting; Pa Seabee's gone a hunting,
 He's got a five, four, trey and ace
 Now he's hunting for a deuce
 If he draws and hits pay dirt
 He'll bring you home a nice grass skirt.

Don't you remember Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt,
 Sweet Alice, whose eyes were so brown?
 She drank the Kanake juice you gave her, Ben Bolt,
 Now Sweet Alice lies under the ground.

Carry me back to old Virginny
 (That's the only way you'll ever get me there)

First Year (Continued)

We didn't know where we were going. The scuttlebutt had it that we were originally scheduled for Huebeme, but for some reason our destination had been changed. It hardly seemed likely that we were going across the country in day coaches, so we figured the possibilities of Maine, Mississippi, or the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Soon we realized we were headed South and the boys who had bet on Maine paid off.

It was a hot, sooty ride to Gulfport. What little water had been aboard soon ran out. Our train seemed to be taking the most indirect route possible. We stopped at every white-washed fence, travelled for miles on single-track road, side-tracking, it seemed, for every passing handcar. It got hotter and dirtier. We rearranged seats in every way but sleep was out of the question for most of us. Finally, some few hours short of two days, we pulled into Gulfport, each of the two sections arriving during the night. We had boarded the train in dress blues, switched to coveralls, but at Mobile we donned the heavy dress blues again, probably to make a good impression on the citizenry of Gulfport who were all asleep anyway.

When the sun rose over the Gulf of Mexico, it shone down upon a hungry, dirty bunch. We dashed for the showers to attempt to remove the accumulated dirt and cinders. Some men took three showers in succession without complete success.

Somewhat cleaner, we began to inspect our surroundings. The trim, streamlined two story barracks were encouraging after the rudimentary accommodations of Peary, but all we got was the view. We moved into the Quonset huts around these skycrapers. These huts, designed for eighteen men, and occupied by twenty-two, were richly furnished with the Victory model Simmons ever-spring-less camp cots. They sagged in such a manner as to leave little support for our bustle boundaries, and the fifteen minute morning "P.T." was a prerequisite to normal, upright posture. Our gear, for the most part, was left in duffie bags, for we were to remain but a few days before embarking for Island X, an actually to be realized some five months in the future.

We continued our military training with advanced courses in camouflage, military tactics, first aid, disease control, and other essentials. Inter-company baseball and basketball teams were formed. Organized drill and a variety of competitive drill were sponsored to keep us in shape. We also had dances in our show hall, attended by the local belles and visiting wives.

The liberty bounds had their first real taste of variety, visiting the nearby hamlets and cities for local entertainment, Bay St. Louis, Biloxi, Pascagoula, Bogalusa, Jackson, Hattiesburg and Pass Christian, for the less timorous souls and for weekend pass holders, and others, Mobile and New Orleans where sight-seeing and other forms of entertainment were available. When accommodations were scarce or non-existent, many slept in hospitals or hotel lobbies.

The local esoteric bistros like the Embassy Club, Leo's, the Silver Moon and Pud's soon came to know the 117th

and acknowledged it to be the best destruction battalion extant.

Railroad tickets were difficult to secure at Gulfport without a special pass, but the Battalion tourists soon found there were ways and means, such as purchasing their round trip tickets at the New Orleans end. It entailed a little extra expense, but it worked.

On October 18th we had our first long hike in the sunny Southland, nineteen miles of it, to the bivouac area. We were met a mile from the gate by the 117th Band which played us into camp, where we were billeted in wooden deck tents, dusty and stifling hot upon our arrival, furnished kerosene lamps and cross ventilation which circulated the air not one bit. There was a lovely swimming pool patronized by all, and natural springs of water which exhaled horrendous odors and proved to be health-giving (say the medica) springs of sulphur water. The iodine-flavored water from the Lister bags was the only alternative.

The first night was a congealing experience. From hot dry air we were plunged into cold mists, which, by morning, had turned to a heavy frost. Many and varied were the methods used to keep warm after that first experience.

Extended order, led by Commander Burke, was frequent and covered much terrain nearby, sometimes along the banks of the river, sometimes in the woods. Sports, of course, were organized, and the more enthusiastic Isaac Waltona beat the streams to a froth with their lines while some of us laved our undies or went coon hunting.

October 22 we had a short fourteen mile jaunt to the rifle range for mock warfare and slight prevarications about individual scores on the target range ensued. Beards and other growths made their initial appearance. We had our first advance and charge with live ammunition and simulated land mines. There were no casualties other than ruffled dignity.

After a week we left the range at noon, stopped at the bivouac area for chow, and then swung into a real bunion derby covering the total thirty-three miles to Gulfport before midnight.

Chow at the bivouac area and the range was good because we had enthusiastic cooks who were willing and able to produce the best.

Few of the men failed to march the entire distance, although many finished on cushions of blisters. We were a hardier crew than at Peary.

Another liberty in New Orleans.

Two weeks later, November 15, all hands recovered from the after-effects of the long march and the New Orleans weekend, the 117th undertook the invasion of Cat Island in the Gulf of Mexico. We made the beachhead with some opposition being staged by part of our Battalion and then settled down to a three day preview of Island X conditions, living in pup tents, eating from mess kits and digesting large quantities of sand. By way of relaxing, we built a few Quonset huts, an incinerator, an air strip by the light of the moon, and also managed

Among the messages of congratulation received by the Battalion on its Anniversary was a birthday card from Anne Ryan, Sweetheart of the 117th. Miss Ryan inscribed the card with the following note:

"Hello Boys:

Certainly wish I could be present for your birthday party. Bet you'll have a grand time.

Eat a piece of cake for me.

Best wishes to all,

Your Battalion Sweetheart,
ANNE RYAN."

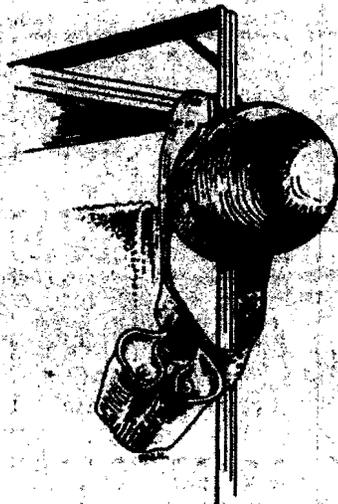
to fish and hunt for oysters. It was here a Brooklynite first saw a small herd of cattle and drove them through the tent area. Probably thought they were the Dodgers. Another of the lads discovered that a large bonfire should not be built in a pup tent. The loss by fire was negligible, but it was disconcerting to have three in a tent even for one night.

After the Cat Island cataclysm, a hundred men returned to the Rifle Range by truck for work projects. Additional barracks were erected to increase facilities for Battalions to come. We built roads, felled trees for lumber and firewood, cleared swamps, and lived in tents without heat or benefit of decks other than those furnished by Mother Nature. It was here a corpsman was seen cutting firewood. Mr. Ripley has been informed.

We had liberty every night and weekends off. A good deal for married men whose wives were in Gulfport.

Thanksgiving Dinner was a gala affair, with Chief Watkins and his crew serving a feast fit for a king. Printed menus enhanced the meal.

It was at Gulfport that "Pop" Conklin christened the outfit the Millionaire Battalion, and we lived up to the name. Through the efforts of Dr. Hunter and Dr. Wolff, the best band then appearing on the Gulf Coast.



Tony Di Pardo, was brought out to the Seabee Theatre for a special 117th Battalion Happy Hour. Mr. Di Pardo and his band played a return engagement at which the songstress of the organization, Miss Anne Ryan, formally was made Battalion Sweetheart. It was also through the auspices of Dr. Wolff and Dr. Hunter that the Battalion took over the Community House in Gulfport for a dance which remains as the high spot in Battalion social functions.

December 1 brought a casual draft which swept away some of our mates. They are now on a dozen Island X's doing sterling duty and we miss them. Almost on their heels, the Battalion suffered another loss of personnel in the form of a Pontoon Assembly unit, headed by Lieutenant Smith, Warrant Officer Schwartz and Chief Scotty Talby, who were given a great send-off.

Christmas season on the base was heralded by serious emergencies in all parts of the country. Mortality rates threatened to rise to enormous proportions. It was like the opening of baseball season when the box offices are deluged with requests for tickets. The Red Cross was flooded with telegrams and requests from grandmothers—they may be grandmothers in thirty years—on death's grim stoop for a last look at John and Eddie. Reasons were varied and not lacking in imagination. It seemed that half the Battalion went home on "emergency" leaves. We who remained in Gulfport swallowed our disappointment and a most palatable Christmas Dinner and had a pleasant though wishful day. Father Toomey inspired the building of a crèche and a Santa Claus going down the chimney of the Chow Hall. A large gaily lighted tree and many indoor decorations beautified the Mess Hall and added to our nostalgia.

New Year's Eve was the signal for the release of many artful telegrams requesting extension of leave. Some of the reasons given were priceless and have been published in service papers the world over.

With the departure of the holiday season, Saint Nick and Father Time shoved off to make room aboard for Old King Scattisbut. We once more took up military training and rumors were rampant. We were about to sail for Burma, China, Italy, Africa, England, the South Pacific, the Aleutians, even perhaps, Tokyo, to welcome the Marines. Bombard was rash enough to predict Camp Peary. His bets were promptly covered and he was removed silently and quickly into the psychopathic ward for observation.

Finally on February 20th we entrained with full packs and rode into our port of embarkation on Washington's Birthday. This time, being the Millionaire Battalion, we had Pullman cars and not a care in the world. We stepped off the train onto the gangplank of a ship built in Passagoula. And, here we are:

We came, we saw, we conquered.
Not the way we thought we would.
But by using brains and muscles

Where they'd do the most darned good.

We shan't be classed as heroes,
When the war's done, by and by.
But the Millionaire Battalion
Has a spirit which won't die.

B.O.Q (Continued)

to Mexico; one of our really handsome Officers and Battalion social secretary; post war plans indefinite.

Ensign Raymond W. Lyon, Company Executive; his bright eyes first opened in Sac City, Iowa; attended Iowa State College where he was an outstanding polevaulter and basketball man; a fellow who's a natural in any kind of athletics; was structural engineer with Albert Kahn, Inc. before entering the C B's; usually quiet and sleepy; has no post war plans.

C. W. O. Don W. White, born in Logan, West Virginia and after finishing High School was Field Supt. for the Hoosier Engineering Company until he entered the service; has all the answers on outside-line and transformer work; intends to return to electrical contracting and pole work after the war; a bridge player of note and an all around good fellow; a swell looker when his hair is long.

C. W. O. Herman P. Hohl, Born Rochester, Penn., was a football player and ten second track man at Thiel College and University of Pittsburgh; after college he entered the construction field and was Superintendent of Construction for Booth and Flinn Construction Company, Rochester before entering the Navy; likes the beach and tennis; has a hearty laugh, works hard; Mrs. Hohl is doing her bit as a member of the Ration Board.

Lieut. (jg.) Morris S. Lieberman, Company Exec and Military Officer, born in Pittsburgh, Pa.; played softball, football and basketball at Carnegie Institute of Technology from which he graduated; administrator in war department Ordnance before entering the Navy; another of our Bachelors, but the hard-to-get kind; intends to get into Metal work after it's over; Blond and Fat.

C. W. O. A. F. Dennis, Jr.; Wilmington, Del. was the place, although he's a Pennsylvanian now; after going through Spring Garden Institute went for building and his own construction company; was going big when he entered the service; says he wasn't athletically inclined as a youth, but does a lot of tennis playing now; genial, fat and bald, and is going to start where he left off when—

C. W. O. Larry T. Brooks, Born in Columbus, Georgia, Sub-reared in Birmingham, Alabama and studied with LaSalle Extension University, Chicago; was an auditor for some years; in order to enter the service it was necessary for him to discontinue his own contracting business in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which he had operated successfully for nineteen years; an authority on concrete; is head of the 117th Band and Review; a good fellow you can't make mad.

C. W. O. John M. Houston, Armorer Officer from the Keystone State; Pitts-

WE'RE THE 117th (Continued)

Between the States—but we can work like the devil all day to make sure that the United States of America and her Allies win this one.

We're Democrats and Republicans, yes, and Farmer-Laborites and anything else you can mention. We can argue for hours about politics and we can disagree strongly with each other's views, but we acknowledge each other's right to have that view.

We've owned our own businesses, we've worked for other people. We've been shining lights in Chambers of Commerce and we've been organizers of labor unions. We've been riggers, truck drivers, mechanics, farmers, clerks, electricians, bankers, bricklayers, newspaper men, bulldozer operators, printers, policemen, high school students, plant foreman, helpers, draftsmen, engineers, insurance salesmen, surveyors, laborers, cooks,



burgh was the birth place; attended Indiana (Pa.) State Teachers College where he was an outstanding tennis player; was a successful building contractor for many years before entering the Navy; has a son in the 4th Marines; knows his guns and mortars; our earliest riser.

Lieut. (jg.) Freeman W. Lehr, Company Executive and Mess Officer; born in Orange, N. J. and attended Swarthmore College where he was an expert tennis player and swimmer; before entering the service was operator of a Coke plant; has specialized in diving since being in the Navy and after hostilities cease intends to form a Marine Diving Corporation; a good bridge and pool player and an expert sack artist.

C. W. O. O'Neill Quinlan, Born in Portland, Oregon; went on to Chicago, Illinois when a mere lad; attended Loyola University where he was an outstanding center on the football team; having a hankering for pipes and wrenches, he learned their use and was operating his own plumbing and heating business when he entered the service; a hard worker and knows his stuff.

W. O. John M. Thompson, an Everett, Mass. product; attended Northeastern University where he was a soccer player of note; served four years in the Marine Corps Reserve (Aviation) and entered the Navy in February, 1942; prior to that date was Jr. Civil Engineer with Mass. Dept. of Public Works; a swell guy; popular with everyone.

metalmiths, stenographers, riveters and high school music teachers.

We've had to go to work before finishing grammar school, or we've been granted degrees from small colleges and large universities. Regardless of what we did, or who or what we were in civilian life, right now we're doing the best we can on the jobs that need to be done here so that we can go home and continue our civilian careers.

We're the best grippers in the service. We can gripe—we use a franker word—about anything and everything, but we can go out and turn in a day's work with the best of them. And if you want to hear some real griping, just tune in on us when we run out of work.

We salute our officers as a token of acknowledgment of the fact that we are bound together in a common task. Our BOQ is "officers' country" but more than one enlisted man, sons and relatives of our officers, has stopped over there on his way to the front. One of them, a son-in-law of one of our officers, won't come back. He was killed on Saipan.

We salute our officers as a mark of respect to their responsibilities, but we know that in the good old American way we wouldn't be surprised to be working for them minus the salute after the war—and they wouldn't be surprised to be working for us.

We don't go in much for flag-waving, but we're an intensely patriotic crew. We express our love of our country by working for it.

We are the inheritors of a great, if but recent, tradition established by earlier Battalions of fighting artisans who have developed a new kind of warfare in a new kind of war.

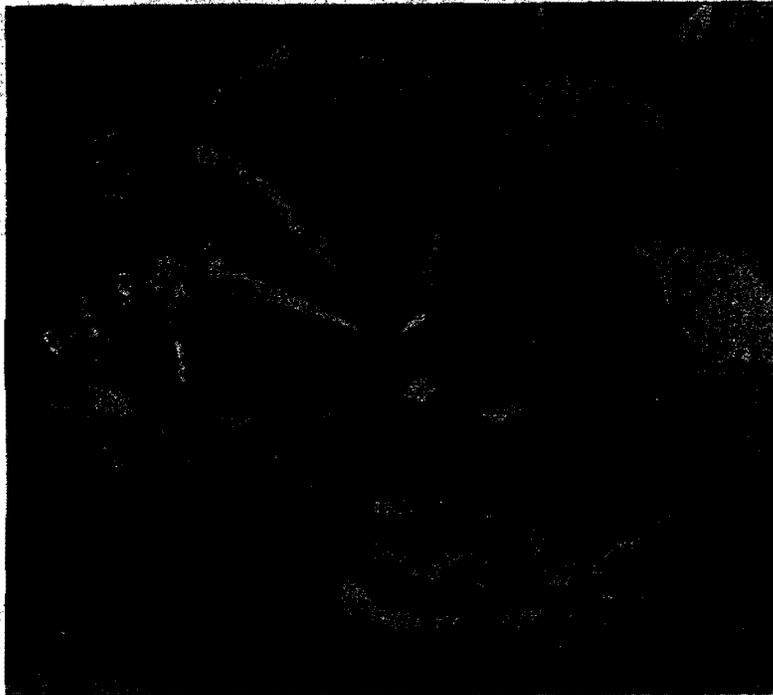
We haven't been in an actual engagement, but we've been in places where we've taken our risks.

Some of our younger lads are itching for action. Some of us have seen it in World War I, and we're not volunteering for anything, but if "The Man" tells us to go in, we're going in. And while we haven't had the training of a Marine, we've done plenty of hunting. Many of us knew how to handle a rifle before the present generation of Marines was born, and the majority of us have qualified as marksmen, sharpshooters or experts.

We've come a long way together, in more than a geographical sense. We've trained together, lived together, worked together, and if necessary, we'll fight together. We've learned that you can't tell a man by a tag. We've learned that no matter what part of the country a man comes from, his main idea is about the same as his bunk mate's. He wants to get this war over with and return home; home to the love of his wife and children, home to his job.

And we're all going home together in the hope that some of the things we've learned while being away from home will make us appreciate America, and our fellow-Americans, ever so much more.

Henry Sember



We Sailed The Ocean Blue

(Continued from page 7)

sick—it was just the heat in the laundry that got me." And T. L. Treeza came in for a considerable share of the ribbing. On our first day out he had purchased a paper dish of ice cream at Ship's Service. Some one warned him about upsetting his stomach. "Go on," he retorted, "ice cream will keep you from being sea—ooooooh" and he dashed to the rail.

Sunday saw our first excitement aboard. Late in the afternoon a shrill siren began shrieking. We scanned the horizon for the sight of a periscope, the skies for hostile airplanes. The shrieking continued and we were sure something big was up. Finally, the Voice of the Vessel, coming over the public address system, announced that all was well. The siren had gotten itself stuck. We breathed easier.

Today is Monday. We've been at sea for a bit more than 48 hours but we've settled down to a calm acceptance of the seafaring life, barring more rough seas, anyway! In the morning the anti-aircraft guns had a workout. We worried when the first balloon was missed, even though the shots were near enough to hit anything larger. The second balloon was shot to tatters and we cheered. This afternoon some heavier armament was given a chance. The deep boom was a contrast to the staccato of the morning's gunnery, and while none

of the shells landed on the tiny can, they came close enough to make us feel we can do battle with any cigar-shaped marauder that comes within range.

Our destination has been secret. There was a chance of our shooting across the Atlantic, but most of us seemed to think we were heading for the Canal. Today, the Voice of the Vessel, which heretofore had shunted us below decks in business-like tone, became quite confidential. In the tones of a Burton Holmes travelogue, we were told that we were going through the Canal, that we would pass such and such an island, that we would be near the spot where Columbus first sighted land. The Voice also gave us a history of the Canal project. Some of us wondered how akin the builders of the Canal were to the present-day Seabees.

After chow last night we sighted San Salvador. It was our first glimpse of land since leaving port, and even if no more than a dim, murky outline was visible, it was a welcome sight, reassuring us that somewhere in this vast expanse of water there was land. The Voice had reminded us that this was the first view of land afforded to a Spanish convoy back in 1492, and we thought of the conquests and conflicts that began in this hemisphere with the arrival of what is known as civilization. The sunset was nothing short of

glorious. Low gray clouds hung over the island, and behind them sank the sun, coating liquid fire over and under them. A Haitian has written of the "bleeding" sunsets of that region. I think I know what he means, now. Against this brilliant background was the sleek black silhouette of our destroyer.

While some of us were entranced by the combination of scenic beauty and historical interest, not all of us were lost in the same kind of reverie. One of our younger and more irrepressible cooks, John J. Saguis, SC3c, sighed: "Gee, I betcha they got dames on that island!"

The Powers That Be on the ship were kind to the G. I.'s last night, permitting us to stay on deck long after the ship was darkened. We certainly appreciated the boon. It was a lovely evening. Low, dark tufts of clouds which might have been made of cotton and suspended by string, floated under a purplish sky. The clouds were so low that we felt a man in the crow's nest surely could touch them.

This morning's sunrise also was something to see. Again there were clouds. This time they made a purple canopy through which the sun's rays poured. If there was one thought running through most of our minds, it was that some day we might make this voyage again, with our wives at our side. At least a dozen men around me expressed this hope. One's wife, a deck chair, and a tall cool drink, and life would be perfect! A far cry from the rugged reality of a troopship, but it's not against regulations to dream a bit.

After this trip we'll have a sympathy for the sardine. We're packed in pretty tight down below. It's hot, and the smell of mankind is sometimes almost overpowering. We sleep in bunks five tiers high. Above me is Ray Metcalf, who weighs some 200 pounds. When he sinks into his bunk the canvas sags so that it is perilous for me to raise my head. . . . The heat and humidity were stifling last night. Paul Falk had remarked about our being in the most dangerous waters of the entire trip and for the first time I began to think about submarines. I touched my life belt, made mental note of the position of my trousers and shoes. I don't think I'd ever have fallen asleep but I happened to think of Mabel Stuart Curry's poem, "The Crossing", which Clarence A. Day had submitted to us for publication in the last American edition of *The Review*. It had a calming effect, and when I awoke, the ship still was afloat.

The first lap of our voyage is over. We are docking at the Atlantic entrance to the Canal. The Voice is calling instructions to the crew.

This morning the Battalion added another unforgettable picture to our album of memories. After washing some clothes and taking a shower I came on deck to find that the convoy no longer was scattered in its ocean formation, but was cruising in a single line, just like in the newscasts. Our ship being the flagship, we were in the lead. To port we saw a symphony of gray, a gray sea, a gray mist which broke off sharply to disclose a deep

gray shore line and above it a pearly gray, luminous sky, broken by irregular opaque gray clouds. As we came closer to land we could see patches of a rusty, tired brown, then spots of bright green. There was one picture I would have liked to have painted; a long, low green shed along the water's edge with palm trees jutting behind it. As we came to the pier we noticed several vessels flying the flags of our Allies, including a small British aircraft carrier with its crew in white shorts. Also on view was a picturesque white two masted schooner which looked as if it had come out of a painting by Winslow Homer.

Today was an historic one for the Panama Canal. In all the years it has been in operation, never did a ship pass through its waters with a more excited, interested and enthusiastic group of passengers than those aboard our vessel.

"Ever since I've been old enough to read", one man said, "I've been reading about the Panama Canal. I never dreamed I'd ever see it. Gosh! Look how fast that water is rising on those rungs!"

A dozen Atlases appeared on deck as the mates traced the course of the Big Ditch and discussed its history. Chief Weiborn gazed on the canal with a deep reverence. "I sure would have liked to have been on this project from the start, with the first survey crew, and kept on it until it was finished", he said quietly.

Even chow, usually the most important thing on the ship, could not compete with the Canal. The harassed M. A. A.s, who usually stand as a barrier between the mates and the chow hall, herding them into line, etc., had a new problem on their hands tonight; to get the gang down to eat. One of the M. A. A.s was imploring: "Any of you fellows want to eat now?" After the long, long chow lines which stretched around the ship, this was even a greater miracle than the Canal, and for the first time I walked along an unobstructed passage right into the Chow Hall.

I returned to the deck before we had gone very far through the first set of locks and soon witnessed the only competition offered the Canal that day. As we were entering the lake between the locks, we saw a group of Army men, and with them creatures garbed in strange attire—skirts! We couldn't believe our eyes. Yes, they were women. Real, live, female women! Men rushed to the port side for a glimpse of this almost forgotten rarity in our wholly masculine world. Officers on the bridge swung their binoculars as one man. We all waved madly and the girls waved back with commendable enthusiasm. Women! Even the beauty of the mountain lake failed to erase the memory completely.

Taking advantage of the abundant supply of fresh water, the decks were washed with vigor. The crew had plenty of assistance from the Seabees, who turned out in bathing trunks or just waded in completely dressed to have a turn at handling the hose and sweeping down the deck. Quite inadvertently, of course, one hose crew occasionally would splash a stream of

water on the other, and quite by accident (of course!), the other crew would return the favor.

It was grand, good-natured horse-play while it lasted.

Oh yes, we saw another woman. A trim speedboat passed and she was in the stern, a magazine advertising vision in a crisp white skirt that whipped in the breeze as she stood and waved to us.

Later in the evening Dean Prowse took me up to the signal bridge, the



highest point on the ship except for the crew's nest. I could see the guide lights of the narrow end of the lake as they approached the Pacific locks, and, in the distance, what appeared to be the lights of a city.

A city! Lights, the sound of a woman's laughter, people walking on a paved street; a restaurant where you could sit down to eat; a drug store with a fountain that serves chocolate sodas; or a hotel lobby with music off in the distance and a Scotch and water in a small bar off to one side of the lobby. A city! I wonder when we'll be seeing one again!

From the picture in the Grade Six History book, I always had conceived of the Canal as a long series of locks flanked by gleaming white concrete. It was a surprise to find only a few locks at one end, a big, beautiful mountain lake, then a few locks at the other.

Although we left the Canal several days ago, I learned this morning that we still are not as far West as San Francisco. This came to us as we listened to a San Francisco radio station which had the time as five after six when our watches were consider-

ably later. Lt. Baxter tells me that by the time we are due South of San Francisco half of our voyage in the Pacific will be completed; also that the Panama Canal is East of Florida, not directly South of it as I always had imagined. Why didn't I pay any attention during geography lessons?

We learned this morning that we were going to (Censored), for a while, anyway. Lt. Kilpatrick, our company commander, called a meeting of the men in the hold and asked for better cooperation in keeping our quarters clean. There was a hint of a twinkle in his eye as he said that if the entire company was put on report it might mean the loss of our first liberty in (Censored). Such is the way we receive official confirmation of our own scuttlebutt!

The officers have a ward room which serves as their dining room, conference room and club room. Our club room is the Chow Hall after supper. The open deck is a great gathering place but for the men who want to play cards, write a letter, or join in the evening's musicale after the ship is darkened, the Chow Hall is the place. One of the main attractions is Robert Payne, one of the Negro Marines aboard, who used to play the piano in night clubs in and around Cincinnati. He is a little fellow with the kind of an innocent smile that makes you want to grin all over when you see it on the faces of little colored children. He's a whiz at the keyboard, and from his night club experience has acquired a repertory that is astounding. How he can breathe with the mob that always is around him is a mystery, but perhaps the night club training also is the answer to that. Payne plays popular stuff from the time the Chow Hall opens for revelry until taps is sounded. Then, as his fellow-Marines and most of our men go to their holds, he starts working on his own arrangements and compositions. He has composed a song entitled "Dreams Are Such Wonderful Things", and for my money it's as good as anything on the hit parade. He also has been working on an arrangement of "Stardust" for our band, which has been giving concerts aboard.

Editor's Note:

Robert Payne, Marine mentioned in this article, is a member of the Marine Company mentioned in the following dispatch recently printed in YANK:

SAIPAN—The first Negro marines to see combat are members of an ammunition company which hit the beach here on D-Day under the heaviest artillery and mortar concentration ever to meet American invasion forces in the Pacific.

Originally scheduled to move ammunition from the beach to dumps a short distance inland, many of them delivered their cargo to within a few yards of the Japs and one, Pfc. John M. Jenkins of Norfolk, N. C., destroyed a Jap machine gun nest with a grenade. One man was killed in action and several wounded by shell fragments.

Leo Mann, professional boxer of Houston, Tex., who once defeated Lew Jenkins, is a sergeant in the

ammo company. Pfc. Robert L. Payne, Jr., formerly was an orchestra leader in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Pfc. Fred E. Washington was a licensed Baptist minister in Los Angeles who conducts services for the men, assisted by Pfc. August C. Witcher of Charlottesville, Va. Sgt. Ernest W. Conroy of Lake City, Fla., now a clerk, was topkick of a CCC outfit for three years.

Commanding officer of the company is Captain Louis P. Shine of Osage, W. Va.

—YANK Staff Correspondent.

Sleeping on deck is now legal and not half as much fun.

The officers have devised a new form of physical training known as abandon ship drill. You go to your compartment, wait for the signal, then dash up two steep flights of stairs (or ladders, to be nautical about it) and go out on deck until the game is called off. We can clear the hold in a few minutes. It is a necessary precaution and not too boring.

As another precaution we always wear our life belts, rubber tubes which may be blown up by mouth or inflated by Sparklet-type siphon cartridges. They add to the heat and are a necessary nuisance. Every now and then I find myself without the belt and I hurriedly retrace my steps to find the darned thing. It is a court martial offense to be without one but no one has noticed my occasional derelictions.

The clouds were so low this morning that the sea seems lifted to the top of the universe. One mate said that the sea had a "swollen" appearance; another said it reminded him of a sunrise in Wyoming viewed from a mountain top on a clear day. As the sun cleared the horizon we watched it cast a path of gold over a silvery sea which appeared as smooth as glass. In one respect we have been fortunate thus far. Except for the day we left port, our journey has been on truly pacific waters. The comparison with the Staten Island Ferry still goes.

Yesterday we had gun practice and one crew hit the target, a small can floating well away from the ship, on the first round. Actually, to hit the water anywhere near the tiny can would win the "Good Shooting" commendation from the Voice, on the theory that an enemy craft would be hit by a shell which came that close. To sink the can target is said to be a rare feat and we were proud of the ship's gunners.

We sent our clothes to the ship's laundry the other day and it was returned today in a confused jumble. We had quite a time sorting over all the stuff, calling out the owner's name as we read the stencil on each garment. Our underwear had acquired a dun color that was christened "battleship gray."

This morning at about seven o'clock, things began to happen up in the bow, where the dogs are quartered in their boxes on deck. Queenie,

a German shepherd belonging to F. B. Roberts, became a mother, and how! By noon she had given birth to a litter of thirteen squirming puppies, and from all over the ship officers and men were making a pilgrimage to see the new additions to our muster roll. One of the boys in Co. B was scratching the tired Queenie's ear as a gesture of comfort while a dozen (one had been born dead) blind puppies all attempted to suckle, a mathematical impossibility. To further complicate matters, early in the afternoon two more puppies arrived, making a grand total of fifteen born, fourteen alive, which we believed established some new kind of maritime record.

Although Queenie is a shepherd there is some reason to believe that the father was not. The puppies provide a wide variety of coloring.

F. B. Roberts, titular owner of Queenie, looked as wan as any father who ever paced a hospital corridor. The mates suggested that with such a large family he could now apply for an increase in his dependency allotment. Harold Willis, owner of Pat, Co. A's cocker spaniel mascot had an explanation for the large litter. He blamed it on the fact that Queenie was quartered under one of the machine gun emplacements and just had acquired the habit.

Big event of the day was the refueling of the destroyer which is escorting our convoy. We were cruising along slowly when the destroyer shot up from our stern. A light line was shot across, and the crew on the destroyer systematically used it to pull over the heavier rope and finally a heavy hawser. Several other lines were hauled over by the same system and finally the oil line, suspended from a boom, was sent over.

These operations completed, we had a chance to inspect the destroyer at close range. It was a long, slender affair, looking like an overgrown submarine to which parts of a battleship had been superimposed. Guna bristled from every inch of its deck. . . . The crew of the destroyer seemed very

much at home and were drinking coffee on deck.

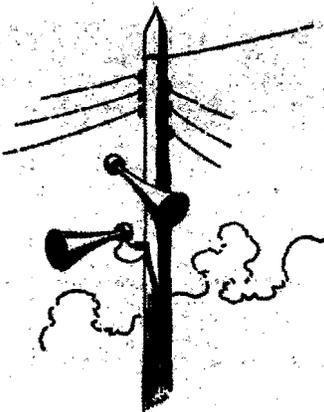
To keep both vessels under control a good headway was maintained during the operation, a very tricky one it seemed to us.

Seeing the destroyer reminded me of the first paragraph of Marcus Goodrich's account of life aboard one, "Deiliah." Read it sometime.

Thanks to the Council on Books in Wartime, a non-profit organization of American publishers, librarians and booksellers, we have a rich library of handy, pocket-sized volumes. The titles, for the most part represent a cavalcade of best sellers of the past decade or two, and have been selected with authority, intelligence and consideration for the variability of taste. Many of us here renewed the reading habit on board ship. Our main trouble has been to find a place to read. The deck is crowded and we aren't permitted to go to the holds during the day as the Captain of the ship thinks we should get some sunshine. (We gripe about this, but we'd gripe more if we weren't allowed as much freedom of the deck as we've been enjoying.) Just as you get settled and after you do find a place to roost, someone decides it's time to wash down the deck again, and you have to move. The only sacred corner of the vessel is the small triangle of deck where Queenie is ensconced with her puppies. The crew purposely ignores this maternity ward. The fourteen tiny pups are doing well, and this afternoon the Mess Hall M.A.A. was arranging a system of feeding shifts, complete with early chow passes.

Before the ship left port, the Battalion's metalmiths were salvaging old lockers on the dock and rebuilding them into shelving for the signal bridge. The men designed and constructed a bronze head rest for the dental office, made gear lockers for landing boats, installed a ship-to-shore telephone and a ten-station inter-ship communications system, repaired Jacob's ladders, made and installed leather cushions for a Commodore's gig, repaired evaporators to increase their capacity 25%, rearranged ventilating systems, welded bulkheads, cleaned and repaired guns; stood watch in the engine room, at the guns, on the Signal Bridge and in the radio room.

The Battalion's cooks helped in the galley to prepare meals for ship's crew and other military units aboard as well as the 117th's enlisted personnel. Our men constructed coffee urns for the Main Galley, tore down an electric oven in the bakery and redesigned brick work and shelving for more efficient operation, installed emergency chutes for life rafts, made numerous copper vessels such as urinal cans and instrument trays for the sick bay. We redesigned brackets and made general repairs to blinker lights, stripped down and completely rebuilt an officer's stateroom and head, rewound motors, made electrical repairs and improvements throughout the ship, painted some 600 signs throughout the ship and seven decorative murals topside. Our Band was busy, too, playing six concerts during the voyage.



Before we left the ship we found we didn't have a monopoly on confusion. We chuckled when we recalled the officer who asked us to rebuild his stateroom so as to even up the deck. It was quite a job, ripping up welded furniture, installing new beams, etc. Just as the boys were about to put it together again, a higher officer came by and wanted to know what was going on. "Harrumph," he harrumphed when told, "stuff and nonsense. A deck isn't made to be level and if he can't walk on it the way it was built he ought to be assigned to shore duty."

We disembarked with a new perspective, a new pride in ourselves and our outfit.

Here we are on Island X.

Yesterday, at sea, our eyes strained for the sight of land. Suddenly one man pointed ahead and said: "There's a lighthouse. See the flashes!"

It wasn't a mirage, but it wasn't a lighthouse, either. Soon we saw smoke blossoms against the sky and we realized it was a ship firing anti-aircraft shells. Unperturbed, a plane hovered by.

Bits of driftwood floated by and someone said he had heard a ship had been sunk in that vicinity a few days before.

It was not until we came up from the mess compartment after noon chow that we saw the dim outline of mountains off starboard. Soon we zig-zagged and made for this promised land which ran in rocky ridges from the sea to the clouds where its shape was lost in mist.

Soon, over the blue water we could make out a strip of beach and a fringe of foliage. As we came into a narrow channel a man was spearing fish. We looked back toward the ocean and the water took on a variety of hues. Against the ship it seemed a dark, neutral color. A little further away it was yellowish, then a deeper green, and against the horizon a deep blue.

As we entered the harbor the mountains seemed to open up for us and above the piers and sheds we could see large expanses of green fields and strips of red earth arranged in casual pattern on the slopes leading to the hills.

It was an unaccustomed picture for us. We were not used to seeing the skeletons of cranes rising above palm trees, captain's gig with white uniformed seamen standing smartly in the stern, and camouflaged LCTs. All this helped to give the scene the quality of a Coca-Cola advertisement.

We passed through hallowed waters. We saw a recently-raised vessel with its ensign flying proudly astern, signifying that it still was in the fight. And in a scrap pile ashore, we saw parts of ships that would fight no more.

Soon we were tied up at a pier. Someone brought a few copies of the local newspaper aboard, and there was a mad scramble for them. Officers on the upper decks trained their binoculars on the headlines and read them aloud. Somehow, when newspapers came aboard we knew we were back on terra firma, that our journey

was over, for the time being, at least.

Within an hour we were clambering aboard trucks and on our way up a hilly road. There was a lot of traffic. We went through ravines of reddish earth, covered with green foliage, and we saw plenty of cactus. "Looks like California to me," one man said, "Looks like Oklahoma to me," said our M.A.A. Harold McDowell. And Davey Huber said the green hills reminded him of Kentucky.

As we climbed the hills we had a splendid view of the panorama of sea and shore. We eventually came to a small village of Quonset huts built against a red-soiled hilltop, and at what seemed the peak, the trucks stopped conveniently close to a beer line.

Just as it happened at Peary and Gulfport, and, as I suppose it would happen if a group of Seabees were suddenly to land in Heaven, we were soon besieged with questions "Anyone from Texas . . . anyone from West Virginia . . . New Hampshire . . . Ohio . . . Connecticut?" "Is there a guy named Joe Parker in your outfit?"

We were equally curious. We wanted to know about the beer line, the liberty situation, the living conditions. The sight of doubledecker bunks, many with springs, was almost too much for us after five months on camp cots at Gulfport and nearly a month on pipe berths at sea. We were amused to find pineapples growing in orderly rows in the red dirt behind the huts. We had not satisfied our curiosity when a loud speaker announced that a neighboring battalion's chow hall was ready to serve us. Down the hilly, narrow path between the huts the Battalion stampeded, giving a good imitation of the Gold Rush or the opening of the Cherokee Strip. The food was good, but the sight of tables and benches was better, for we had stood for meals on the voyage. After chow we found a ship's service store where we bought ice cream, milk shakes, cans of pineapple juice and coco-colas. We were intrigued by attractively printed books and souvenirs such as grass skirts. Some of the mates said they were made in Brooklyn.

As night fell on the camp, the lights of the city below twinkled invitingly, but we were glad to turn into our

bunks. We missed the gentle rocking motion of the ship. The reaction of being on shore was too much for some of us. Joe Del Orfano, a cook who had been uneasy during the entire voyage, was so relieved to be on land that he kept chattering long after lights out. He was genuinely amusing and we laughed, a bit too loudly perhaps, for the GOD soon came over and told us to pipe down.

We were lined up for muster this morning when Roberts and another mate came along. They were carrying Queenie's box. There was a look on Roberts' face that made me feel something was wrong.

"How's Queenie?" someone asked. He didn't answer for a minute. Then, in a toneless voice, he murmured, "Queenie's dead."

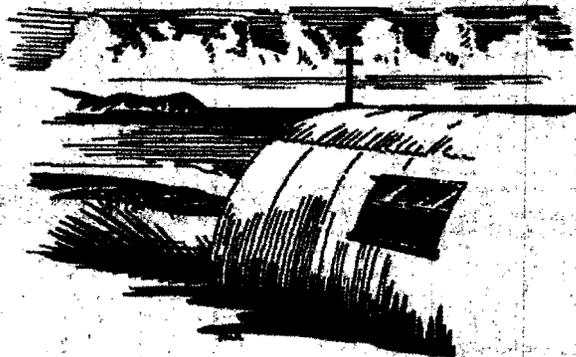
A mournful sigh, as heartfelt as it was brief, went up from every one of us.

This afternoon we received our mail, our first word from home in what seemed like years. The folks had been writing every day and almost everyone of us had at least a score of letters. We read them avidly and eagerly shared choice paragraphs with the fellow in the next bunk.

Not all of the letters were cheerful. I learned of the death of a friend back in Redding Ridge and Paul Huskins, one of our cooks, learned of the death of his mother. I tried to tell him I was sorry, but I don't know whether he heard me.

This morning Chief Wittmeyer took our company for a hike into the hills beyond the camp. We walked along a narrow path on a ridge, looked down into deep green valleys covered with a carpet-like shrubbery, thick, but dwarfed. We noted a small blue flower, but we didn't know its name.

On our way back we passed Commander Burke and Lt. Commander Anderson standing together, looking over the camp and the vista below. In Gulfport we usually saw them only in the grayish offices. Now, in the sunlight, they seemed to take on added stature. They were on the job. The sight of them standing there together so calmly gave me a feeling of confidence. I imagined that they were looking over the scene of our Battalion's future activity and were pleased with the prospects.



~~RESTRICTED~~
~~RESTRICTED~~

PLAIN

ITINERARY OF 117TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

26 Sept 1943 Transferred from Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Virginia to ABD, Gulfport, Mississippi.

23 Feb. 1944 Left for overseas destination.

1 May 1944 Operating in Hawaiian Area, Ford Island, Pearl City, Red Hill, Waipia. Exact date of arrival not known.

2 Sept 1944 Battalion secured from all work projects. Balance of month spent in preparation for further movement.

Nov. 1944 Location Saipan. Exact date of arrival unknown.

26 Dec. 1944 Bombing by enemy.

1 Feb. 1945 31 men on temporary detached duty, 23 of which are detailed to the Army.

13 Mar. 1945 Scheduled for Okinawa.

20 May 1945 Movement to Okinawa cancelled.

20 Aug. 1945 Located Saipan.

NOTE: This itinerary based on records available in G.R. Operations and Personnel Section of Bureau of Naval Personnel.

Date: 18 September 1945.

To Facilitate
Administrative Handling
Classification changed
from:

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
~~RESTRICTED~~

To: RESTRICTED

Irvin S. Rosmusson
Comdr. CEC-V(3), USNR
Signature

THE 117 TH

WORK



FIGHT

BATTALION









