

143rd Naval Construction Battalion

*Historical
Information*



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



143rd C.B.

NCTC - Davisville
ABD - Hueneme
Ready Date -
Left ABD -
Location - Leyte-Samar

LOG

- 12-12-44 - The 143rd CB (ABCD) consisting of 16 officers and 600 men approved by CNO for the operation of ABD OSSO. Will be made ready at Hueneme 12 Feb'45. (CNO Sec. ltr Op30-2CK12-UOT over (SC)P16-5 over Ser 0141230 to Com7flt, Com 12, Bopers, and Budocks dtd 5 Dec'44)
- 1-20-45 - Davisville ordered to transfer the 143rd CB to Hueneme on 29 Jan'45. (CNO conf. disp to NCTC Davisville 131715 dtd 14 Jan'45). The 143rd CB is assigned to OSSO.
- 2-13-45 - 143rd CB departed Davisville 30 Jan'45 with 15 officers and 567 men. (NCTC Davisville TWX 312131 Jan'45).
- 2-15-45 - The 143rd CB arrived Hueneme 4 Feb'45 with 15 officers and 568 men. (Hueneme TWX 071938 Feb'45 to Bopers).
- 4- 4-45 - 143rd CB left for OSSO with 17 off. and 595 men. (Conf Disp 272246 from Com12 to Comserfor7flt dtd 28 Mar'45)
- 4- 7-45 - The 143rd CB departed Hueneme 21 Mar'45 by rail to San Fran for embarkation with 176 rated and 420 non-rated (total 596) and 16 off. (Hueneme conf disp 222222 Mar'45 to Bopers)
- 4-20-45 - 143rd CB Muster Roll of the Crew dated 16th December'44 states commissioning date 16 December 1944.
- 5- 1-45 - ABCD ULOD to be operated by 143rd CB. (Dirpacdock S.F. Sec Rep of 1 Apr'45)

Location - Samar

143rd C.B.

- 5- 8-45 - The 143rd CB is located at Samar. (Dirpacdock S.F. Sec Rep of 15 Apr'45)
- 5-19-45 - 1 May'45 report of 143rd CB - Operating ABCD ULOD at Samar. Three weeks in Apr'45 spent enroute to destination.
- 5-28-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 143rd CB - Operating ABCD ULOD at Samar.
- 7- 6-45 - CNO has no objection to an increase in the complement of CB 143 at the ABCD ULOD providing such increase is compensated by the corresponding reduction elsewhere in order that total authorized ceiling complement overseas as established will not be exceeded. It is requested that you advise Comserv7flt if qualified off. and men to augment CB 143 are available from the ABCD FRAY or other area sources including CDs now being sent to the area. (CNO restr ltr ser 396430 dtd 26 June to Comservpac)
- 7-20-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 143rd CB - located at Leyte-Samar. Recd 175 men.
- 7-23-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 32nd(Sp) - 24 men from the 32nd(Sp) were transferred to the 143rd CB and 13 men from the 143rd CB were transferred into the 32nd(Sp) during Jun'45.
- 8-18-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 143rd CB - located in Samar area. 131 men were transferred into the 143rd CB from other Batts in the Samar area and from the RecSta Samar during Jul'45 to be used in ABCD operations.
- 9-20-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 143rd CB - located in Samar area. 315 men were transferred to 143rd CB from RecSta, Samar area & 217 men from CBMU 623.
- 10-18-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 143rd CB - located at Leyte-Samar. 101 men transferred to U.S. for discharge under the point system.
- 11-6-45 - 143rd CB inactivated as of 17 Oct'45. (Comservpac restr ltr ser 1338-1-61 dtd 17 Oct'45 to BuPers).

Location - Samar

143rd CB.

- 11-30-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 143rd CB - located in Samar. 50 men transferred to U.S. for discharge.
1-31-46 - 1 Jan'46 report of 143rd CB - located in Samar. Report via 34th Reg. & 7th Brig.
2-13-46 - 1 Feb 46 report of 143rd CB - located at Samar. Report via 34th Reg. & 7th Brig.
3-11-46 - 1 Mar 46 report of 143rd CB - Located at Samar. Report via 34th Reg. & 7th Brig.
5-22-46 - Comservpac directs 7th Brig. to inactivate 143rd CB. (Comservpac disp 202110
May to 7th Brig.)
6-3-46 1 May report- Unit operating at Lryte-Samar shipping surplus frpm Nsd(ABCD)
Annex- Services of all officers req'd. (Unit 1 May report)
8-5-46 - 143rd CB inactivated June 18 1946. (OinD 7th Naval Construction Brigade ltr. serial
0656 dtd. 1 July 46 to DirWesPacDocks)

(1)

<u>DATE</u>	<u>ON BOARD</u>		<u>AUTHORITY</u>
	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	
1 Feb'45		571	BNP625
1 Mar'45		571	BNP625
1 Apr'45		596	BNP625
1 May'45	18	594	MoR
1 Jun'45	19	5916	BNP625 & R
1 Jul'45	22	758 + 233 TRANSIENT	BNP625 & R
1 Aug'45	23	853 + 712 TRANSIENT	BNP625 & R
1 Sept'45	40	1565	BNP625 & R
1 Oct'45	36	1329	BNP625 & R
1 Nov'45	29	1487	BNP625 & R
1 Dec'45	46		R
1 Jan'46	48	1117	BNP625 & R
1 Feb 46	36	941	BNP 625 & R
1 Mar 46	33	504	BNP 625 & R

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
<i>Inactivated</i>				
12/13	-	Hueneme	9930 ex serial 01410200 of 5 Dec	joined with 2nd batt at Hueneme 12/13 for OSSO.
12/14	" (OS50)	Camp Elliott	Con sec diag 131705 Dec.	Assid OS50 - ready 2/12/45.
12/15	-	Camp Elliott	Bullock memo 12/9	ready Hueneme 2/12/45 - Com 2d set being reactivated
1/17	(Hueneme)		Con cons diag. 131715 Jan.	Feb. priority. Lavaville, Transfer to Hueneme 1/17 Assid OS50.
1/24	-	-	Bullock memo Jan 20.	Assigned Leyte (OS50) Hueneme - probable Feb 24/45.

143rd C.B.

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Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
3/12	-	(xpld.)	Bullock memo 2 March.	Ready 2/12/45 Hueneme - per table March 5 1945. Assid ready.
3/13	-	"	Com 2d Sea from sec. 101717 Mar.	Vessels # 699, 700, 704 ETD 3/26, 4/1, 3/26 - to load 143rd Batt.
3/21	-	"	Airpac Dock SF Con. 161836 Mar.	personnel will move in April.

Aug. report shows OS50-143rd. (A@C.D.)



OUR history goes back to December 1944. At that time two new Seabee Battalions were established in Sun Valley Reservation, an outlying section of Camp Endicott, R. I. These new battalions were not conventional construction outfits, but were set up to answer a need which BuDocks had recognized for supply organizations for the Seabees in the Pacific area. In these organizations, there was a nucleus of seasoned construction men. However, in addition, storekeepers, once a dime a dozen, were also in great demand.

The two new supply outfits born in December 1944 were first known as Provisional A and Provisional B. Our story concerns Provisional B for it was the group that later became the 143rd NCB (ABCD).

Our first group memories were of arduous military training in the rigors of an old-fashioned New England winter. During this strenuous program, we soon became convinced that the name Sun Valley Reservation was a misnomer. First of all, Sun Valley was not sunny. In the second place, the topographical lay of the land did not conform to our idea of a valley. However, we all agreed that it was a reservation.

Days passed while we continued with our columns right and to the rear, march. The

rifle range and training schools in military weapons became almost daily sights.

Our chow wasn't too bad although it may have suffered from an overabundance of apricot pie. Such experiences as returning from a day at the range and finding our Quonset huts as cold as the frozen outdoors didn't help matters. Nor was the nightly vigil of maintaining the stove a pleasant occupation.

The subject of liberties is always a happy one. The Battalion's liberty bounds lost no time in discovering the Frenchtown USO, a short distance down the highway. Providence had many attractions also, and was considered a good liberty town by those who "knew." The younger lads soon developed a head for "figures"—the girls in Providence were pretty good, considering the shape they were in.

Christmas at Sun Valley carries a pleasant memory for us. We had a Battalion dance at the Hostess House, a building adjoining our area. A log fire lent a cozy atmosphere to the occasion. Also there was a Christmas party at the nearby Frenchtown USO, and a detail of volunteers from the battalion joined the USO girls in gathering laurel and greens for the event.

Around January 10th rumors were spread that the Battalion was soon to return to the main area of Camp Endicott. Sure enough,





this event came about three days later. The six mile hike over icy paths was difficult enough, but the atmosphere was made even worse by the prevalent belief that we were not to receive embarkation leaves. In due course, the trying journey was completed, and we were getting settled in our new home. Suddenly, over the P.A. System in typical Navy vernacular came these words: "Here it is. All men in the 143rd Battalion living west of the Mississippi report to the OOD's office for leave papers." It is not difficult to imagine the bedlam which this announcement created. That afternoon, we were all off on our last leaves.

As is always the case, these days of freedom rapidly flew by. All too soon, it was Endicott again, and drill, drill, drill! This time, we were practicing for our formal commissioning. The day, January 27th, arrived at last, and we marched in review for Capt. Fred F. Rogers, Station Commandant, our officers, and our guests. Now we were officially the 143rd NCB (ABCD).

Just three days later, our bags were packed, and we were marching again, this, our last time at Endicott, for our battalion was to travel across the country to Port Hueneme, California. The afternoon of our departure was warmer than previous ones. In fact, the thermometer had risen above zero. The station band led us, and we had a warm feeling as the passers-by waved to us.

At the station, our group was divided into three sections, each boarding a separate train. To see us off, Volunteer Red Cross workers, headed by Mrs. Fred F. Rogers, fed us coffee and doughnuts, and soon we were on our way.

Once the trains were underway, each group was entirely separate. Each train had its own route, and none of the men knew by which road they would reach their destination. It should be mentioned though that trains No. 1 and No. 3 met unexpectedly on adjoining platforms in the Pennsylvania Station in Indianapolis. Buddies poured out on the platform to greet their friends on the other train.





GM

Our Battalion was composed predominantly of Easterners, few of whom had been west of the Mississippi before. The vast plains, the towering Rockies, and the bright clear western air made a profound impression on us. Another amazing sight was the beauty of the Southern California countryside. Green from copious winter rains, the land seemed enchanted with its orange trees heavy with fruit, its blooming flowers, and its snow-capped peaks peering through the haze.

On February 4th, five days after our departure, trains No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3 converged within a few hours of each other at Port Hueneme, California, and the Battalion was reunited in its new home in Camp Rousseau. Men talked far into the night exchanging their experiences in crossing our great land.

At Hueneme, the Battalion lost no time in getting to work. First, infantry gear was issued to all hands. Military training was continued, and the men were given the opportunity of firing their own pieces. In addition to combat training, a large number of men were assigned to the Advance Base Depot for preparation for the Battalion's work overseas.

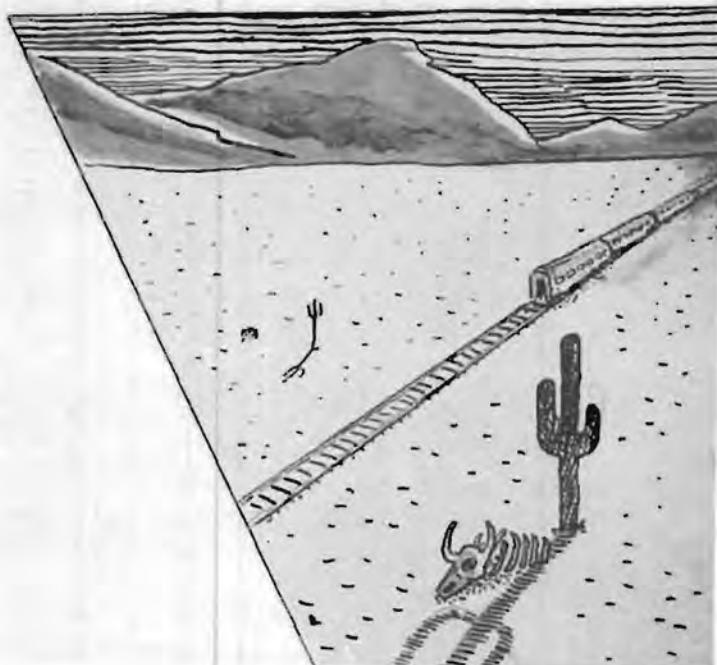
All was not work at Camp Rousseau. On the liberty week-ends, the men explored the countryside ranging from Santa Barbara on the North to San Diego on the South. Natu-

rally, the big mecca was Hollywood. Many a man boasted of his visits to the Hollywood Canteen where he met this or that picture star. We were never able to discover whether these glowing accounts were truth or fiction. However, the general consensus was that L. A. and environs represented a Grade A liberty town *after one got there*.

Our final battalion social event was the dance at Rousseau on March 3rd. The committee on arrangements did a bang-up job. One of the large recreation halls was secured, and the station dance band furnished the music. Arthur Lake, who plays the part of Dagwood in the "Blondie" movies, was there in person. Only one thing was lacking—women. Apparently our Eastern battalion had not made out very well with the local girls because there were only a handful present compared to the 400 men. However, this was good preparation for overseas duty where American women were to become objects of curiosity.

During the closing weeks, our Battalion marched in review as it had at Endicott. Also, expert riflemen medals, won at Sun Valley, were issued.

With the passing days, there was increasing interest in the Battalion's overseas destination. This was heightened when the word was passed that our code number had been changed from Oss 23 to Ulod 166. The dope seemed to be that we were going to either



the Philippines or the coast of China. The final immunization shots given, typhus, cholera and plague, had a definite oriental sound. Gradually, the idea of the China coast seemed to fade out, and attention was shifted to the Philippines. The last word, said to be derived from civilian workers handling our cargo, was that we were going to Samar. This leaked out at the very end.

All too soon, we found ourselves packing with one bag designated, "Ship's Hold." The battalion men might well have hung a similar tag around their own necks.

the way into Oxnard. This had meaning for all of us. The other event occurred as we were skirting the narrow shelf between the mountains and the sea beyond Ventura. At this point, the sun came out from behind clouds just before dipping into the Pacific. This was an augury for the future.

Daylight the next morning found our sleepy train load entering San Francisco's suburbs. It was a dismal, rainy day in which little could be seen beyond the immediate railroad right-of-way. Our train by-passed the terminal at San Francisco and proceeded up a water-



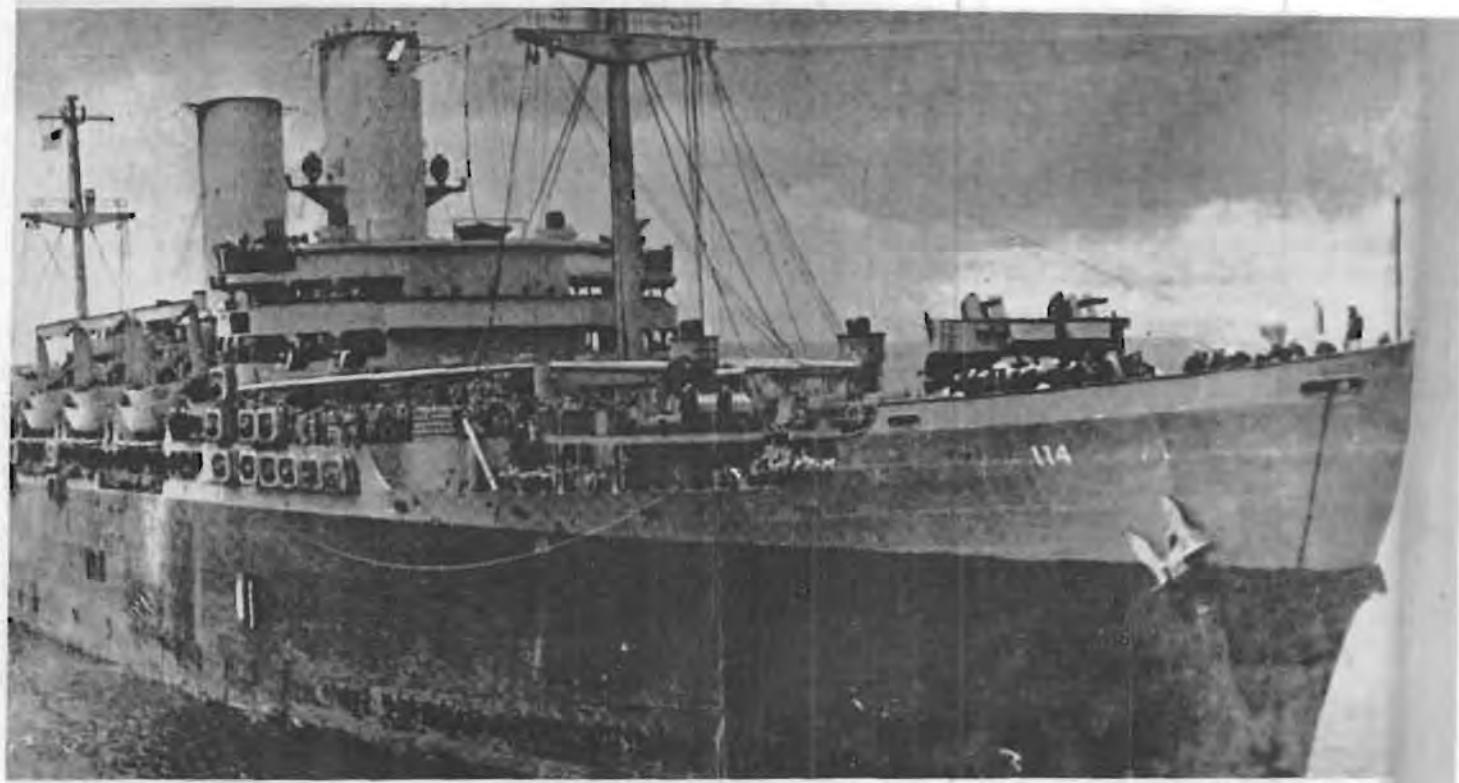
"Excuse me but are you planning to go on the boat ride?"

On the afternoon of March 21st, assembly was sounded, and the men shouldered packs and gear and staggered out into the street, there to muster by companies for the final journey before boarding ship. As we waited on our packs, no one said much except, "Well, I guess this is it."

We recall two incidents as our train was getting under way. One was the sight of a certain battalion member's girl friend waving wildly to him as we crossed the highway on

front street, the Embarcadero, a name which the 143rd thought most appropriate. Soon, we saw ships, mostly freighters, and then a large transport came into view. This was the *USS General William Mitchell*, and soon we all came to know it better.

There followed a long period in which we found ourselves in the street trying to assemble our respective belongings. At this stage, we became miserably wet. Some of us thought the civilians, dry and secure in pass-



ing busses, might have given us a more enthusiastic send-off than the feeble waves of acknowledgment. But then, the weather might have affected them too.

Finally, when our baggage was assembled, we marched off in a single file as heavily laden a crew as you could imagine. Another wait occurred in the barren dock enclosure. Then, the men filed up the steep gang plank at which time their names were checked off, and they were issued individual meal tickets for two meals a day.

At this point, a few words should be used to describe the hybrid known as the *William Mitchell*. We have heard recently about pro-

posals to combine the armed services. If such a step were taken, a good spot to begin this operation would be aboard this ship. The *Billy Mitchell* is manned by the Coast Guard. Ordinarily it carries Army personnel, and there are Army personnel aboard to control the human cargo. In addition, the guards aboard the ship are Marines while the passengers on this trip were mainly Navy.

The 143rd Battalion was the first unit to board the *Mitchell*, and our hosts, the Coast Guard, immediately showed their hospitality by assigning our hapless men to such details as mess cooking, garbage disposal and sanitation. The only bright feature of an other-



wise trying picture was that our men were issued an extra meal ticket for noon chow which the ordinary passengers did not rate. The object of this extra meal ticket was to give us strength for our ordeal.

Regarding quarters, the 143rd men drew the bottom compartment of an aft hold, and part of the compartment above. It seemed that there was hardly room for the group and its baggage in the space assigned. In this cramped area, the job of getting from one spot to another was a herculean one. It was much like finding your way through a maze. You would work your way over assorted card



players to a ladder only to have an MAA tap you on the shoulder and tell you that this was a down ladder while you were headed topside. You would then start to move to another ladder only to find your way blocked by piles of gear, or crowds of shipmates. Finally, you would shove your way through to your destination after stepping on numerous buddies, and using a grid-iron straight-arm on others. Undoubtedly, the object of the designer of the *Mitchell* was to get as many men in a given space as possible. He succeeded admirably.

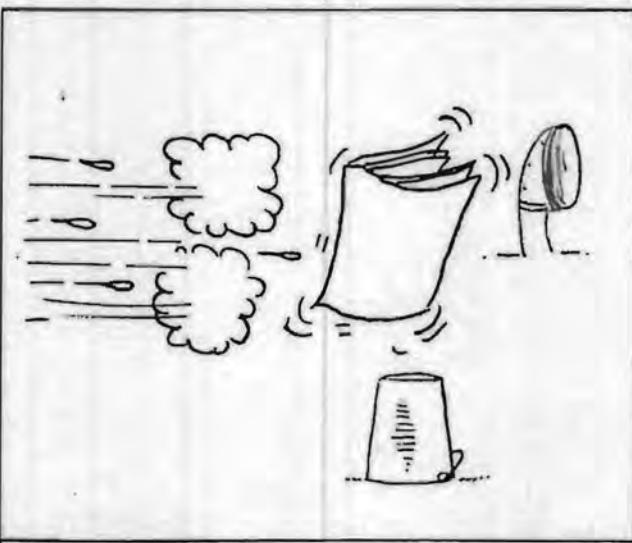
On the evening of March 23rd, the *Mitchell* slipped its lines, and was off. Some men were above decks to see the Golden Gate Bridge pass overhead. Other remained below, not having the heart for this.

The first days at sea were moderately rough, and some of our men were seen feeding the fishes. But most proved good sailors, and, in a day or two, the seas calmed, and the weather warmed. About five days out, the announcement came over the loudspeaker that Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides was to be our first stop. Some of us, who had hoped to catch a glimpse of Hawaii, were disappointed.

With our arrival in the Tropics, life in the aft hold became increasingly irksome. The ventilating system proved inadequate, and the combination of heat, close quarters, and lack of air was a bad one. In addition, fresh water hours were cut almost to the vanishing point, and the only recourse for showers and laundry was salt water.

As our ship proceeded day after day, the warnings of the Shellbacks to the hapless polliwogs became increasingly ominous. Finally on March 30, a large list of summons were served on innocent polliwogs accusing them of varied sins of commission and omission. Our Skipper and Exec headed the list.

The next morning, the lambs were led to the slaughter. For several hours, King Neptune's boys ran roughshod pouring out vile tasting medicine, giving bizarre haircuts and axle grease shampoos, and finishing off with a ducking. Worst of all, however, was passing the gauntlet of swing paddles. The *Pacific Press*, the following morning, summed up the





results by stating that, while there had been no reports of serious casualties, numerous cases of "rump fever" had developed.

The day after crossing the Equator was Easter Sunday, and this was observed aboard ship with appropriate religious services. Easter Monday was quietly removed from the calendar as we crossed the International Date Line.

The first indication that we were nearing land came on our tenth day out when distant coconut islands were sighted. The following day, April 4th, numerous islands came into view and, that afternoon, we came into the harbor of Espiritu Santo. This was the first of several stops which we made along the way. At Espiritu, we had our first good view of coconut trees which were to become so much a part of our world in the days ahead.

The following morning, we were off again,

and the second afternoon, we arrived at Guadalcanal. This island made a profound impression on us. At least two battalion men had served on the island when the going was tough, and they were able to point out such immortal places as Henderson Field and Bloody Ridge.

Again, we were off, and our next stop brought us to the large naval base at Manus Island in the Admiralties. Here we saw ships in great profusion, and we, at last, felt we were getting to the real thing.

Our final stop before reaching the Philippines was at Peleliu. Here, the *Mitchell* waited in mid-stream quietly for two days while a convoy assembled. On noon of the second day, we were again underway, but this time we had 20 or 25 ships along as company.

On April 18th, our convoy skirted the undeveloped shores of Homonhon Island, and



was in the broad waters of Leyte Gulf. By then, our battalion was becoming much interested in the surroundings for we were approaching our destination.

In the afternoon, we reached San Pedro Bay off Tacloban, Leyte, and were greatly impressed by the huge number of ships, particularly warships. The country was beautiful with its sharp hills in the foreground and higher mountains behind.

Our last lap was mostly in reverse as our ship headed by Guinan, Samar. We arrived here, April 20th.

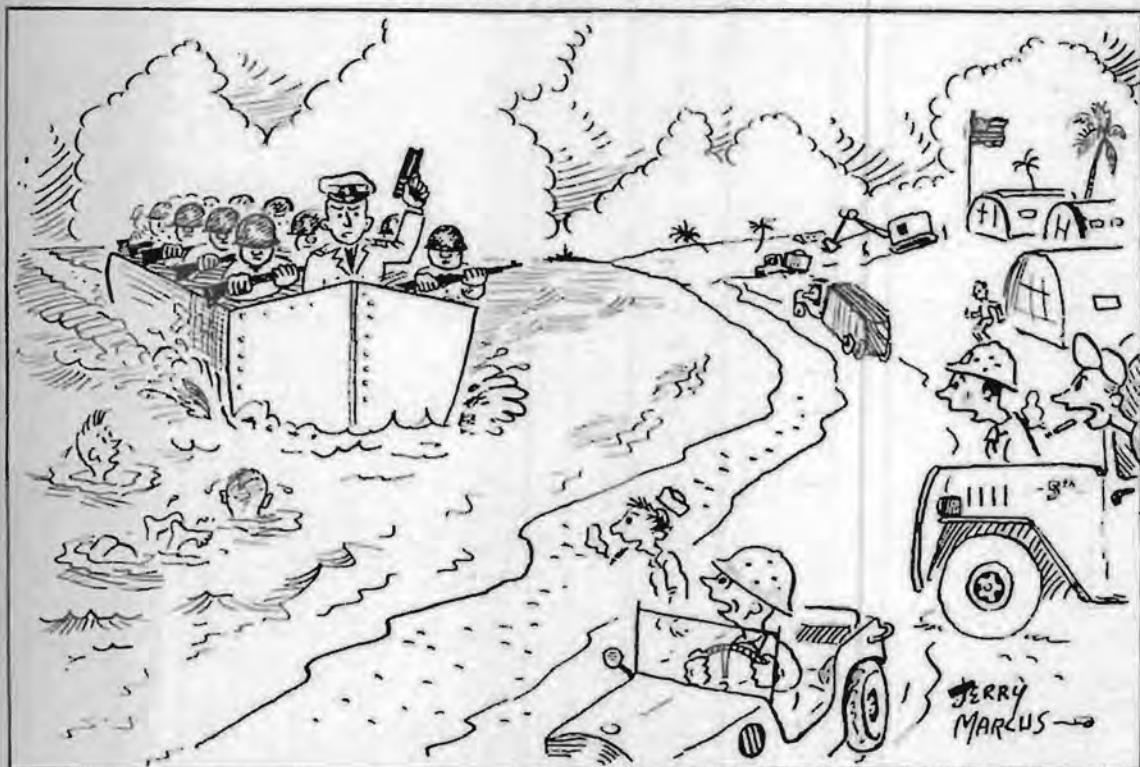
The following morning, the word was is-

where Seabees were vigorously building docks. And thus, shortly after noon on April 21st, our Battalion went ashore on Calicoan. For it happened that our permanent home was not on Samar proper.

At that time, Calicoan was only in the first stages of its present development. Trucks were on hand to take us to the two large Quonset warehouses which were to be our home for several days until the temporary camp area could be completed.

Undoubtedly, our most vivid impression of that first trip was that our driver kept to the left side of the road instead of to the right as in the States. This driving to the left was a

143rd INVADES CALICOAN



"This is it, Men"

sued to pack gear, and stand-by for debarkation. Confusion reigned supreme as we all gathered into the tight space to assemble our gear, pack up, and get ready to leave. In some fashion, what had to be done was done, and the men with their gear entered an LCT which was tied up alongside.

After a brief stop at the Guinan jetty from which we could see the large old Spanish Church dominating the town, we traveled down a wild coast several miles to a point

hard feature for our men to become accustomed to; and, just as it was beginning to be second nature, a decree of the Philippine Government became effective changing to driving on the right as in the States. This took place June 1st.

The warehouses which we occupied the first few nights were in the huge area being developed as the ABCD. Some materials had already arrived then, but most of the area consisted of exposed coral rock.



On the morning after coming ashore, the 143rd was divided into two 12 hour shifts, and work was started on the temporary camp area. This area adjoining the depot occupied a beautiful stretch on a low coral bluff overlooking a broad stretch of the Philippine Sea. The camp was in a coconut grove.

These first few days were not easy. Our men had to travel in trucks three miles to chow at the 111th NCB. On the new campsite, it was soon found that coral rock is not the best material for driving tent pegs into. In the course of the work, an eight foot python was discovered and disposed of. Those whose duties kept them in the ABCD area were harassed by violent dynamite blasts which made

them think they were much closer to combat than was the case. Water for drinking was rationed by the canteen full, and personal cleanliness depended pretty largely on the elements.

The Battalion soon learned what the neighboring outfits had to offer in the way of water, food, and entertainment. Thus, while our own water was rationed, it was learned that the 5th Battalion and the 5th Special had taps of ice water. And while our Battalion menu was alternating between Spam and corn beef hash, the word quickly spread that certain other outfits had steak at one meal and ice cream at another. And when a USO show appeared in the vicinity, it could be sure of a good



representation from us. Thus, our men quickly became acquainted with our Calicoan neighbors.

On April 26th, the tent area was completed, and the ABCD warehouses reverted to the purpose for which they were built. At this point, the Battalion in conjunction with small groups from other units took over the operation of the Depot. The 29th Battalion simultaneously began building our permanent camp. First on the program was the master galley and chow hall for 2,000 men. When this was finished, the time consuming trips to the 111th became no longer necessary. Then over a period of weeks, new Quonset huts

on a permanent basis. One whole unit, CBMU #623, was absorbed by the Battalion, on August 10, 1945. Thus the original group of 600 who arrived on the *William Mitchell* became a distinct minority in the newer and larger Battalion.

The first word of the Japanese offer to accept conditional surrender arrived on Calicoan by radio at 2100 on August 10th. The 143rd immediately went wild. One of the patients in Sickbay with a serious leg injury was said to have jumped out of bed and rushed into the street throwing his crutches far into the air.

Official V-J Day was celebrated September



replaced the original tents, and our washing facilities improved to the point where we had running water for all purposes, including showers.

As the Depot grew in size, additional personnel were added to our unit. Some of these were on temporary assignment from either the Naval Station or the Receiving Ship while other men were transferred into the Battalion

3rd. In contrast to the noise and excitement of the evening of the first news, this day was quiet and peaceful. It was the Battalion's first holiday after a feverish 24 hour a day, seven days a week, schedule of operation. There was a great feeling of pride and self-satisfaction. We felt that we had earned that day of rest, and that, from that point onward, the 143rd could rightfully take it easier.

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ITINERARY OF 143RD NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

16 Dec 1944 Commissioned.
30 Jan 1945 Transferred from NCTC, Davieville, R. I. to
 ABD, Port Hueneme, California.
4 Feb 1945 Arrived ABD, Port Hueneme, California.
31 Mar 1945 Departed ABD, Port Hueneme, California by
 rail for San Francisco, California for
 embarkation.
15 Apr 1945 On or about this date arrived Samar.
1 Sept 1945 Located at Samar.

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

23 September 1945.

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