20th Special Naval Construction Battalion

Historical Information

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

NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND

20th CB Special

DECLASSIFIED

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
6/19/44	- [illegible]	Manus	C. B. report 1 June.	Left U.S. April 1944
10/16	—	Manus (4th Brig.)	C. B. report 1 October.	
11/25	—	Manus	Comserv7th Jet sec act disp. no 150133.	

20th C.B. (Special)

NCTC - Peary
ABD - Hueneme
Ready Date - 1 Feb'44
Left ABD - 1 Apr'44 (1 Apr'45 report of 20 (Sp) states Batt. left U.S. 24 Mar'44
Location - ~~Lien-4~~ Manus

LOG

2-23-43 - CNO orders transfer of the 20th (Sp) on 5 Jan'44 to ABD Hueneme. (Conf. Disp. 221925 NCR 7691 dtd 23 Dec'43 from CNO to Peary)
4-28-44 - 20th (Sp) left ABD 1 Apr'44. (WRK)
6-29-44 - 20th (Sp) is located at Manus as of 31 May'44. (Comserfor7flt Sec. ltr A-9 over Ser BP-001407 to Dirpacdocks dtd 8 Jun'44)
7- 7-44 - 20th (Sp) is located at Lorengau. (Comserfor7flt Sec. ltr A-9-4 over Ser 00673 to Budocks dtd 14 Jun'44)
8-17-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 20th (Sp) - no info on location.
9-13-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 20th (Sp) - located at Manus.
1- 8-44 - 20th (Sp) is located at Manus. (Comserfor7flt Sec. ltr A9-4 over Ser BP-001882 to Budocks dtd 12 Oct'44 monthly report for Sep'44)
1-21-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 20th (Sp) - located at Manus.
1-29-44 - 20th (Sp) located at Manus. (Comserv7flt Sec. Disp. to CNO 150133 NCR 18921 dtd 24 Nov'44)
2-9-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of 20th (Sp) - no info on location.
12-28-44 - 20th (Sp) located at Manus.(Comserfor7flt Sec. report for Oct'44 dtd 20 Nov'44).

Location - Manus

20th C.B. (Special)

12-30-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of the 20th (Sp) - located at Manus.
1-1-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of the 20th (Sp) - located at Manus. 71.5 of Batt employed in stevedoring activities.
1-13-45 - 20th (Sp) located at Manus. (Comserfor7flt Sec. report of Nov'44 dtd 15 Dec'44)
2-13-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 20th (Sp) - located at Manus. 10 men on detached duty with Base Police, Manus and 8 men on det. duty with the 21st (Sp).
2-19-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of the 20th (Sp) - no info as to location.
3-21-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of the 20th (Sp) - Arrived at present location during Apr'44. No info as to location. (report routed with confidentials)
4-19-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of20th (Sp) - located at Manus. Report states that 20th CB left United States on 24 Mar'44.
5- 1-45 - The 20th (Sp) is located at Manus. (Comserfor7flt Sec Rep of 1 Apr'45)
5-16-45 - 1 May'45 report of the 20th (Sp) - located at Manus.
6-4-45 - ComSerFor7thFlts 3rd end. dated 26 May'45 to 20th (Sp) conf. report dtd 1 May'45 states that the 20th (Sp) has been ordered to a forward area.
6-15-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of 20th (Sp) - location not given. Batt will have served 15 months overseas on 24 Jul'45.
7-20-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 20th (Sp) - no info on location. 17 men transfd for discharge. 50 men from Base Cos billeted in batt's camp.
7-27-45 - The 20th (Sp) is located at Manus. Attached to 3rd Brg. (CCC 7th Flt Sec Rep for June)
8-21-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 20th(Sp) - located at Manus. 8 men were transferred back to the U.S. for leave and reassignment during Jul'45.
9-14-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 20th(Sp). No info as to location.

Location - Manus

20th CB(Special)

10-17-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 20th(Sp) - located at Manus. 162 men transferred to U.S. for discharge under the point system.
11-16-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 20th(Sp) - located at Manus. 20th(Sp) is in the process of inactivation.
11-19-45 - 20th(Sp) is requested to be inactivated by Comservpac. Inform Comservpac when inactivation is completed. (Comservpac ltr ser 5721 dtd 5 Nov'45 to Comphilsea-fron).
12-3-45 - 20th(Sp) was inactivated(date not given). (Comservpac restr ltr ser-61 undtd to BuPers).

INACTIVATED

DATE	ON BOARD OFFICERS	ON BOARD MEN	AUTHORITY
1 Jul'44	31	983	BNP 625
1 Aug'44	30	979	MoR
1 Oct'44	30	975	Comserfor7fit Rep. for Sept'44
30 Sep'44		968	Recap
1 Nov'44	31	955	MoR
1 Dec'44	30	938	MoR
1 Jan'45	28	918	MoR
1 Feb'45	25	914	BNP625 & R.
1 Mar'45	26	909	MoR
1 Apr'45	25	901	MoR
1 May'45	25	894	MoR
1 Jun'45	29		BNP625
1 Jul'45	30	870	BNP625 & R
1 Aug'45	29	851	BNP625 & R
1 Sept'45	29	148	BNP625 & R
1 Oct'45	29	674	BNP625 & R
1 Nov'45	18		R

20th Construction Battalion (Special) (*NACTIVATED)

THE 20TH SPECIAL

1943-1945

On November 22, 1943, the 20th Special U. S. Naval Construction Battalion first gave indications of life. On that date 1,116 men and 25 officers reported aboard to Lt. Commander C. A. Graves, Officer in Charge, at Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Va.

The first few weeks were a mixture of orientation, military training, and stevedoring instruction. This was followed by the first red letter day on the 20th Special calendar, when on December 8, 1943, the battalion review was highlighted by the presentation of the battalion colors. This ceremony officially designated the 20th Special as an independent, self-supporting organization.

By December 23rd, the battalion finished its required training and all hands were granted pre-embarkation leave. At the expiration of this leave the battalion reformed at Camp Peary, and on January 7, 1944, it left in three sections for a cross-country trip to Port Hueneme, Calif.

Arriving at Hueneme on January 12th, the battalion began advanced military and intensive stevedoring training. By the end of January the stevedoring gangs were put to work on actual ships, loading tons of supplies and equipment for operations in the Pacific.

During the stay at Hueneme, the battalion was taken over by Commander Fred C. Seibert.

As March 1944 began, rumors of the 20th Special's prospective move overseas became prevalent. Guess as to the ultimate destination of the battalion ranged from Britain to New Britain. Finally on the 24th of March, the battalion went aboard the U. S. Army Transport SEA FLASHER for the journey overseas to Island X.

Life aboard ship was hot, crowded, and boring. The transport was nothing more than a converted cargo ship, with men for its cargo. For the most part the trip was quiet and uneventful. In spite of thousands of searching eyes, not one enemy ship, sub, or plane was seen on the entire trip.

The continual increase of temperature as the ship proceeded westward convinced most of the personnel that Island X was not going to be Alaska. This theory was further confirmed on April 3rd when everyone was informed that the equator was being crossed.

To celebrate this gala occasion all hands took part in King Neptune's party for the purpose of initiating a large group of Pollywogs into the royal order of the Shellbacks.

On April 11th, after seemingly endless days at sea, the SEA FLASHER entered the harbor of Noumea for

the first stop on the journey to Island X. The second stop came at Milne Bay, New Guinea, and the third at Finschaven, New Guinea.

On April 26th, the SEA FLASHER, escorted by two destroyers, set sail on the last leg of the journey through the historic Bismarck Sea. Shortly after noon on April 27th, the first glimpse of Island X, the newly conquered Admiralty Islands, was seen.

As the ship entered large Seeadler Harbor everyone was impressed with the sight of a great number of fighting and cargo ships, but was equally appalled at the sight of a land without a solitary building other than a few scattered tents.

At 0600, April 28th, the entire battalion began the dual task of unloading tons of supplies and equipment, and building ashore on Manus, a temporary living camp. Before the latter could be completed it was necessary to bury the bodies of numerous enemy dead who were scattered over the campsite. The area had to be carefully examined to remove any booby traps and unexploded bombs; many shell holes had to be filled with the aid of bulldozers. Overcoming these handicaps as well as those of continual rain and endless seas of mud, the temporary camp was completed by the first week of May.

During this entire period, cargo unloaded by the 20th Special, kept pouring ashore to help in making Manus one of the United States' most advanced naval bases.

On July 3, the battalion moved into a new and partially completed camp which was destined to be "home" for over 17 months. As before the job of completing, modernizing, and beautifying the camp fell to the officers and men of the battalion. That they were successful in building and maintaining a neat and impressive camp is evidenced by the commendation of Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, which referred to the 20th Special Camp as one of the finest in the Pacific.

Meanwhile the unending task of loading and unloading cargo continued at a brisk pace. In the course of 20 months overseas the 20th handled every conceivable type of cargo from eggs to two-ton bombs. By late July 1945, the battalion had handled well over one-half million tons of cargo. For their continual good work under adverse conditions, the 20th Special received numerous commendations from high ranking Naval Officials.

Following the end of the war, an increasing number of men of the battalion began the long-awaited trip to the United States. On October, 22, 1945, the battalion received the welcome orders to begin inactivation. On November 3, 1945, the battalion was officially decommissioned.

To help recall the days on Manus the battalion is publishing this book. On this and following pages you will find many pictures which record far better than words, the humor, thrills and boredom shared by all during duty with the 20th Special Battalion. Every effort has been made to minimize the amount of copy and captions, in order that each man may relate his own personal story for every picture.

—So, proceed, Mr. Civilian, the history of the 20th Special U. S. N. C. B. lies in your hands.

CAMP PEARY

Camp Peary was near Williamsburg, Virginia. It was built in a swampy area and was developed specifically for the basic training of men for the Seabees. There were many rumors concerning the original ownership of the site and its selection for development as a training facility. There was also much criticism regarding the conditions at the base. Most have long since been refuted. Later in this Log Book is a Tab with the heading "*News & Sources*". Included therein is a brief discussion of Camp Peary and its founding by Captain J. G. Ware.

Most of the men in the 25th Special Battalion were inducted into the Navy at Camp Peary and received their Basic Training there. The first four weeks were called "Boot Camp" and were conducted by Line Navy or Seabee trainers. It was the same for everyone and the same as received by non-Seabee Navy recruits. The induction process began with the issue of clothing, sea bags and related gear. The second step was a GI hair cut which meant clipping it as short as an electric clipper could go. Each of the barbers tried to convince his recruit victim into tipping a quarter in advance. Presumably, this would result in a cut that was not quite as short. As a result, the recruit would look less like a recruit on his first liberty four weeks hence. It was a false promise, but it did produce a lot of quarters for the pirating barbers. Since the length of hair was an indication of the length of service, the recruits were often greeted with shouts of, "You'll be sorry" by anyone having hair longer than their own.

The assignment of recruits into battalions or other units occurred after boot training. The selection and organization process took time so there could be days or weeks between the end of boot training and the assignment into a Seabee Unit. In the case of the men of the 25th Special, this time probably averaged about four weeks. It was taken up with more training and amounted to a sort of second boot camp.

Even though the 25th Special was not officially commissioned until the 25th of February in 1944, it was being put together by Lt. Commander Mason in Mid-December of 1943. At that point, the men were beginning more advanced military training and some training in stevedoring. The training was conducted by Marines and by experienced Seabees.

The men were permitted to go on liberty occasionally following the four weeks of boot camp. The options were quite limited because the camp area was quite remote and the surrounding area was inundated with military personnel. The civilians in the area generally tried to be supportive but their patience had long since been tested by military persons since the area had various types of military installations. It was in Norfolk that we first encountered the sign "Dogs And Sailors, Keep Off The Grass".

THE 25TH SPECIAL SEABEES

The period of January and February of 1944 was filled with speculation regarding our next assignment. At first it was as broad as wondering whether it would be Europe, The Pacific or some other place. That speculation began to clear up in February when we were given a seven-day leave. An option was extended to choose between a liberty from Camp Peary or to wait until we got to the West Coast. For the Seabees, the West Coast meant Port Hueneme in California. An assignment to Port Hueneme was usually followed by an assignment to Island X in the Pacific.

The Camp Peary site is no longer a military base but remains as a government facility. It is reported to be the Headquarters for the Central Intelligence Agency. The name on the gate suggests that it is some sort of a specialized weapons training facility. Access to the base is tightly controlled. Several years ago there was a small statue erected in memory of the Seabees about 150 feet outside the main entrance. Visitors in the area are instructed by the guard at the gate to not take a picture of the memorial even with the camera pointed away from the base. Given the opportunity, it would seem unlikely ex-Seabees would strictly abide by such a restriction and we have proof positive of at least one who did not.

THE 25TH SPECIAL SEABEES

FROM CAMP PEARY TO PORT HUENEME

THE TRAIN TRIP

In March of 1944 the 25th Special Battalion was divided into three Sections in preparation for the trip to Port Hueneme, California. The troops of the 25th together with a Battalion Maintenance Unit (CBMU) were taken by truck to the train station. On March 24, the three Sections boarded separate trains which then began separate routes toward their common destination. The following pages make up the logs for those trips. These pages are copies of materials found in the library at Port Hueneme except for some re-typing that was required because of the very poor quality of the original documents.

Although the documents represent the "official" logs, there is at least one item missing. Somewhere in one of the Western States, one of the trains had a close encounter with an automobile at a remote intersection. The train stopped so that a check could be made of the condition of the elderly couple in the automobile. It was determined that the encounter was either the slightest possible touch or the closest possible miss. The occupants of the automobile were visibly shaken but otherwise unhurt. The troops took the occasion to stretch their legs during the investigation.

The logs also make no mention of the accommodations aboard the trains. They apparently differed widely between the three sections. Section Two had provisions for meals on the train part of the time. Section One did not. There were no bunks in some of the cars, only hard bench seats. There was sufficient space for the men to lie down but there were no blankets or pillows. The cars were all old and very dirty, largely because they were powered by coal and the soot leaked in around the windows. That was about the norm for troop travel within the States at the time. Also, note the difference in the quality of the reporting and the typing between the copies.

Since the following pages cover the trips in detail, there is little else to add. It is worth noting however, that the trip was very boring to all concerned. At the time, the men were still getting acquainted with each other. In addition, there was practically nothing to do. Card playing, reading, smoking and sleeping took up most of the time. Even the card playing was restricted by the fact that the Mates who had elected to take their post-training leaves from the East had little remaining money with which to gamble. Those who were waiting to leave from the West had better uses for their limited funds.

PORT HUENEME

All Sections of the 25th Special transporters arrived in Port Hueneme on March 9, 1944. The camp was in every way a sharp contrast with Camp Peary. The weather was hot and dry versus cold and damp. The Seabee facility was adjacent to an established port facility versus having been carved from new real estate. The area was desert-like versus swampy. The barracks were roomy and comfortable, the food was good and the opportunities for off-base recreation were more available and desirable, at least to most of the Mates. Oxnard and Ventura were the closest towns and the Greater Los Angeles Area was accessible to the Mates given a two-day pass. We took advantage of all of these opportunities during our six weeks there.

The function of Port Hueneme was simple. It was to prepare us for our work on Island X and to have us ready to go there when our assignment came through. We continued with our training with more emphasis on stevedoring and less on the military. We got additional shots and got enough exercise to keep us in shape. We also did useful work primarily in off-loading cargo from railroad cars and putting it aboard ships. The schedules for the stevedore assignments seemed to be somewhat erratic to the point that we never quite knew what to expect. Experience taught us that when not working, get out of sight, hopefully off the base. One Easter Sunday, a few of us were required to handle bags of cement for 19 hours almost without break. Food was brought to us at dockside in order to minimize the time away from the task at hand. The pressure was on the few workers because the many had cleared the area beforehand. The next morning we were awakened on schedule so that we could line up with the other Mates for our shots. We spent several days after that trying to clear our lungs of cement dust.

Because there was a question at the time regarding the continuation of the Seabees after the war, there was undoubtedly also a question regarding the permanence of Port Hueneme as a base. The Seabees survived as an organization and Port Hueneme survived as a large and well-established military camp and port facility. The shipping facility at Hueneme has gone on to reportedly be the largest shipping facility on the West Coast, at least for some fresh produce, some European automobiles and other items.

The 25th Special departed Hueneme on the evening of the 26th of April, 1944, by train and arrived dockside in San Francisco the next morning. Food in the form of sandwiches had been loaded on the train with us and was available later in the evening. At least some of it had becomes somewhat tainted and caused a great deal of illness the next day. We waited in line with all of our gear for hours while trying to board the U.S.S. Monticello for our journey overseas. For parts of the Battalion, it was not a fit crew that went aboard the Monticello.

THE TRIP OVER

The Monticello

The U.S.S. Monticello was a U.S. Army troop carrier. She was to be our transportation to Island X. In the early 1940's, it was the Italian passenger liner Compte de Grande, the seventh largest passenger ship at that time. At the outbreak of WWII, it was impounded by the British in a South American port. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, it was leased to the United States and converted into a troop carrier. Its sister ship was the Compte de Savoia, believed to have been sunk in the Mediterranean Sea. After WWII, the Monticello was returned to the British and then back to the Italians.

The Monticello was loaded with troops of all descriptions and several different nationalities, numbering in the thousands. She was loaded starting from the top down and the men of the 25th Special were among the last to load. We got aboard and started down. The decks were labeled from the top starting with "A". The water line was between "D" and 'E". We were loaded on "E" and "F". The engine room was amidships. We were immediately adjacent aft. It was almost unbearably hot and crowded.

On April 28th, we cast off and sailed for Island X, under the Golden Gate Bridge, past Alcatraz and into the beautiful Blue Pacific. We were fed twice per day, once mid-morning and once mid-afternoon. The time between the afternoon meal and the next morning meal was usually about seventeen hours. There was no other food available. We were scheduled to have an hour per day out on deck but it rarely worked out that way. The trip up usually ate into our allotted time even to the extent that on one occasion we were stopped on the way up and forced back down.

We had a light Naval escort from San Francisco to Hawaii where we had a brief stop in Pearl Harbor. After Pearl Harbor we had no escort. We made slight alterations in our direction every few minutes in order to lessen the chances for an enemy submarine to draw a bead on us. The large number of troops on the Monticello would have made her a prime target, but the U.S. Navy had by that time achieved sufficient control over that part of the Pacific to ease any possible concern on the part of the authorities. One of the most discomforting parts of living below the water line was the fact that there was only one hatch into and out of the hold we were in. That hatch was equipped with a water tight door and was manned by an armed guard who had orders to close and lock the hatch in case of trouble.

On the 13th of May we dropped anchor in the Bay outside Noumea, New Caledonia. We discharged some of the other troops, off-loaded some of the refuse, took on some supplies and sent two or three of the Mates from the 25th Special to the local hospital. On the 15th of May we sailed again on the trip to Island X which was finally being identified as NavBase # 717 in Milne Bay, New Guinea.

The specific area was known to the Australians who controlled the area and the natives who lived there as Gamadodo. For reporting purposes we were assigned to the Seventh Fleet. We arrived on the 19th of May, 1944. We were about 12 degrees below the Equator at approxiamately the 152nd Meridian. This means that we had passed the Equator some where along the way. This should have caused some sort of celebration and an initiation by those who had done it before. In our case, those who had were out numbered by those who hadn't by approximately 100 to one. We were issued a commemorative card and the celebration was forgotten.

Disembarking from the Monticello was accomplished from out in the Bay. We departed from a hatch on "B" deck down a long gang plank from which we jumped the last six or so feet into a landing craft. The seas were choppy that day so there was some difficulty getting into the landing craft but we otherwise disembarked without serious incident.

The trip over on the Monticello was certainly one of the more unpleasant experiences for the men of the 25th Special. More than one of them has observed that he would elect to repeat all of the rest of his tour of duty rather than expereiencing that trip again.

THE 25TH SPECIAL SEABEES

MILNE BAY--GAMADODO--NEW GUINEA

New Guinea is well remembered for a number of things during WWII. Among these is the fact that it marked the furthermost point of the Japanese advancement on their way to attacking Australia, a major objective in their early plans. Milne Bay is at the extreme lower end of New Guinea. It is about forty miles long and is typically wide at the ocean inlet end and tapers to the jungle end. Gamadodo is about two thirds or three fourths of the way in from the ocean end. Phonetically "Milne" was pronounced as "Mill Knee" by the Americans but "Miln" as in "kiln" by the locals. The locals consisted of the Natives, Australian Overseers, a few missionaries representing at least two different denominations and an occasional trader who explored the possibilities for business in the area. In our immediate area, there had been a very minor business in coconuts at one time. We were told that one of the soap companies had bought the coconuts for the oil. Near our area were several native huts that had been converted to coconut drying facilities. The coconuts were split in half and placed on the floor. A small fire was maintained under the hut for drying the coconuts. When dried, the meat parts were sent away to be processed. Occasionally, an Australian caretaker would wander through our area and was always happy to have a little companionship and a drink of fresh water.

A few of the Natives of the area worked for the missionaries or Australians and lived in housing near the waterfront. These could usually be distinguished by cloth skirts for the women and cloth shorts for the men. Occasionally, one of these would have a shirt top of some sort such as a T-shirt. When the Native women wore the T-shirts, they usually cut two holes in them which were strategically designed for comfort and convenience in the case of nursing mothers. Most of the Natives lived in small camps scattered around in the hills up from the waterfront. They lived in open structures built on posts two or three feet from the ground. The roofs were thatched palm fronds. The camps in the area were made up of approximately twenty persons.

When we arrived in Gamadodo, our camp site was already in place. In the Seabees there were battalions that specialized in building campsites. Ours may have been occupied for a short while before we moved in. It consisted of parallel rows of tents that were raised off the ground four or five feet. Except for the type of materials used, these were much like the Native structures. Each tent was designed to accommodate eight cots if pressed to the limit. We had sufficient numbers of tents so that each usually accommodated five or six. We occupied the tents with the men of a given company in adjacent rows but the selection of tent mates beyond that was left to the men. By that time, the Mates had begun to form friendships and affiliations according to age, mutual likes and dislikes, ethnic or religious background, previous area of residence and just plain chance. Since the tents were open and the mosquitoes were abundant, we had mosquito netting mounted above our cots and were careful to tuck the bottom of the netting around the mattress each night.

Most of the facilities were in place such as Headquarters buildings, sick bay, chow hall, officers quarters, etc. When we first occupied our quarters, there were no sidewalks for

much of the area and it rained every day for the first month or so. Mud was a problem and it was difficult to keep our quarters clean. After a while, we had sidewalks made of teak or mahogany that was harvested from trees in the area. We also had to place a second tent a foot or so above the first in order to control the leakage.

At one point, our mess hall burned so we became the guests of other Seabee units in the area. Later we built our own chow hall and a number of other structures such as a shower area, a laundry facility, a hot water production facility, a hobby shop, an ice (actually heavy snow) making system, etc. Some of the creature comforts were more or less "regulation". Others such as our central laundry derived purely from the ingenuity of one or more of the Mates. The central laundry dryer, according to the builder, was constructed from junk. Our living quarters were then quite comfortable.

During the first several weeks in New Guinea, some of the Mates were not able to adjust. The constant rains, the mud, the heat, the work schedules, the adjustment to new people, the early awakening each morning by the noise of the creatures in the nearby jungle and other disturbances were too much for a few to handle. The Medical Staff had to deal with the problem but it didn't persist for very long. While recognizing the problem, we should note that some of the Mates joined the Navy immediately after graduating from high school or even before graduating.

Including the 25th Special Battalion, there were eleven Seabee Units in the Milne Bay area at one time or another. This included the area directly across Milne Bay from us which also had other American and Australian military units. Examples of those who arrived before us were:

- The 105th which arrived in Milne Bay of January 3, 1944.
- The 24th Special which arrived shortly before we did and stayed a very short while.
- The 118th which left Gulfport on February 25 and arrived in Milne Bay in March of 1944.

THE WORK WE DID

NavBase #717 at Milne Bay was a supply base. Materials were shipped in to be warehoused until needed. Materials were taken from the warehouses and open storage areas and shipped out as needed. All of that was the work of the 25th Special Battalion. The four companies "A", "B", "C" and "D" were the Stevedore units. The Headquarters Company was responsible for all facilities, equipment and administrative services for the Battalion. Shipment by waterway was the only option.

We had one wooden pier to which a ship could be tied on either side. Otherwise, we worked from pontoon barges away from the shore. During the period from mid-1944 to mid-1945, the battalion was generally very busy. We worked around the clock in four shifts of six hours each and seven days per week when necessary. A six-hour shift was generally without interruption. The assignment of crews to shifts was changed each week.

The 25th Special stevedores were in charge of the activities from the time a ship came in until it again sailed. That included securing it to the dock, rigging the booms for loading and unloading, operating the boom equipment, cargo handling between the dock and the ship, keeping count of the cargo movement, hauling cargo to and from the dock area, securing the ship's holds and equipment when finished and releasing the ship from the dock when it was ready to leave.

There was a road structure within our camp area and between some of the other military camps in the area. It was a well planned and well developed system that would have been all but impassible during the rainy season except for the surface that had been added. It consisted of coral that had been scooped from the area along the coastline and then spread and packed onto the roads. These surfaces were generally referred to as "coral rock". Obviously, it was not rock at all but it became as hard as rock and stood up very well under the truck traffic.

The physical effort required by the Mates was quite demanding at times but the constant need for changing shifts and the six-hour uninterrupted shifts probably placed the greatest demands on us. The work, combined with our movement between the camp area and the dock area made up a seven or eight hour shift. That required that our meal schedules changed each week and were sometimes at odd hours. Those schedules also placed unusual demands on the chow hall staff. Added to the work schedules were the requirements for looking after our personal needs such as the scrubbing of clothing and the policing of our living quarters. There was a significant period of settling in after arriving in Gamadodo before the men began to enjoy any free time. As the major focus of the war continued to move toward Japan, the work effort began to ease and free time became more available.

THE SHIPS WE WORKED

The 25th Special worked many different types of vessels while in New Guinea. They varied from small, island-hopping boats to Liberty and "C" class cargo ships. The number of ships and boats worked was in favor of the small craft that roamed the general area, LCIs, LSTs, etc. However, in terms of tonnage, the numbers favored the Liberty and "C" class cargo ships and the later version known as Victory ships. We also serviced a few non-US ships including Australian and Dutch. We found no records of having serviced any U.S. Navy Military vessels other than LSTs which were essentially cargo ships as we saw them.

Many of the cargo ships carried a Merchant Marine crew. The gun crew was U.S. Navy. The difference in compensation, conditions and work assignments was a source of irritation between the two groups. Presumably, there was to be a correction when the benefits of service were granted after the end of the war. For a while that was the case. Then the Merchant Marines successfully campaigned for being included under the GI Bill of Rights.

On the following pages, there are listings of some of the ships we worked and some information regarding Liberty ships.

THE SHIPS WE WORKED -- ACTIVITY LISTINGS

This Section of the Battalion history is a record of the ships and barges of all types that the 25th Special worked. Most of the records were re-typed from monthly reports found in the historical library at Hueneme. Emphasis was placed on recording the names of the vessels rather than all of the details. In some cases, these were obtained from sources other than the monthly reports including the personal records of some of the mates. In addition to the names of the vessels, other details were added such as dates, tonnage, manpower utilized and whether cargo was being discharged or loaded. As a result, the names of ships were repeated for each activity such as loading and discharging cargo or simply laying out in the harbor for short periods between successive activities.

It should be again noted that the record of our stevedoring activity is not complete. The time we spent in the library at Hueneme and later was not sufficient for us to record and verify all of the available data. Some of the data were not readable. Also, the original methods used for recording of data were not consistent as to format and identification of vessels.

We believe that the alphabetic designations which precede the names of the ships are interpreted as follows:

"SS" for "Steam Ship" and were the Merchant Liberties
"USS" for "United States Ship" which carried a "K" for "cargo" designation
"KA" for "Kargo Attach" which were either Liberty or "C" class cargo ships
"F" for Army coastal ships, small two-hold vessels

The first listing below is in order by date of activity. The "00" s represent unknown dates. Blank spaces represent unknown data. Following the first list is another which attempts to purge every item of data except the name of the ship and to eliminate duplication in the names. It is in alpha/numeric order by ship designation. There may be duplication regardless because of the already-mentioned lack of consistency in designation. There is no record of the ships we worked in Hueneme prior to our arriving in New Guinea.

Vessel Name Or Number	Start Date	End Date	Gang Hours	Net Tons	Men/ Gang	Tons/ Gang Hr.	Disposition
Barge # 24	00/00/00	00/00/00					
Dalles	00/00/00	00/00/00					
F. S. # 11	00/00/00	00/00/00					
F. S. # 172	00/00/00	00/00/00					
F. S. # 194	00/00/00	00/00/00					
Frederick Ives	00/00/00	00/00/00					
H. T. Andrews	00/00/00	00/00/00					
L. C. I. # 608	00/00/00	00/00/00					
Prentiss	00/00/00	00/00/00					
S. S. Venus	00/00/00	00/00/00					
S. S. Woodrow	00/00/00	00/00/00					
Wm. W. Campbell	00/00/00	00/00/00					
Y. P. # 223	00/00/00	00/00/00					
Y. P. # 78	00/00/00	00/00/00					

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ITINERARY OF THE 20TH(SP) NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

5 Jan 1943 - Transferred from Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Va. to ABD Port Hueneme, Cali:

24 Mar 1944 - Left U. S. for overseas destination.

24 Apr 1944 - Arrived Manus.

1 Aug 1945 - Located at Manus

PLAIN

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

6 September 1945.

Vir Quisque
Vir Est
20th
SPECIAL BATT.
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OUR
WORTH

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CENTER
20TH SPEC. U.S.N.C.B.
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SHIPS
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