

57th Naval Construction Battalion

*Historical
Information*



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



NOTC - Davisville
 ABD - Hueneme
 Ready Date - 5 Mar'43
 Left ABD - 9 Mar'43
 Location - Ebon Com7flt Manus

LOG

- 1-26-43 - Ordered ABD Gulfport FFT Hueneme.
 2- 1-43 - Arrived Gulfport FFT Hueneme.
 2-11-43 - Ordered transferred from Gulfport to Hueneme 15 Feb'43 FFT Lion 1 Echelon 3.
 2-19-43 - Arrived Hueneme.
 3- 9-43 - 57th Embarked from Hueneme for Ebon.
 5-11-43 - Located at Espiritu Santo. (ComNavBasesSoPac area to ComSoPac Sec ltr dtd 5-11-43)
 8-13-43 - 1 Jul'43 report of 57th CB - Arrived at Base Ebon 25 Mar'43.
 5- 5-44 - 1 Apr'44 report of 57th CB - Batt has been transferred as a part of the 5th Reg. to the 4th Brig. in the SoWesPac. Ceased operations at Espiritu Santo 18 Mar'44.
 5-18-44 - 57th CB is at Manus. (AES 5/16/44)
 6-26-44 - 57th CB is located at Manus as of 31 May'44 (Comserfor7flt Sec ltr A-9 over Ser. BP-001407 to Dirpadocks dtd 8 Jun'44)
 7- 7-44 - 57th CB is located at Loringau, Manus. (Comserfor7flt Sec ltr A-9-4 over Ser 00673 to Budocks dtd 14 Jun'44)
 8-15-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 57th CB - operating at Manus.
 8-19-44 - Comserfor7flt and Com7flt recommends that the 57th CB be returned to U.S. for

57th C.B.

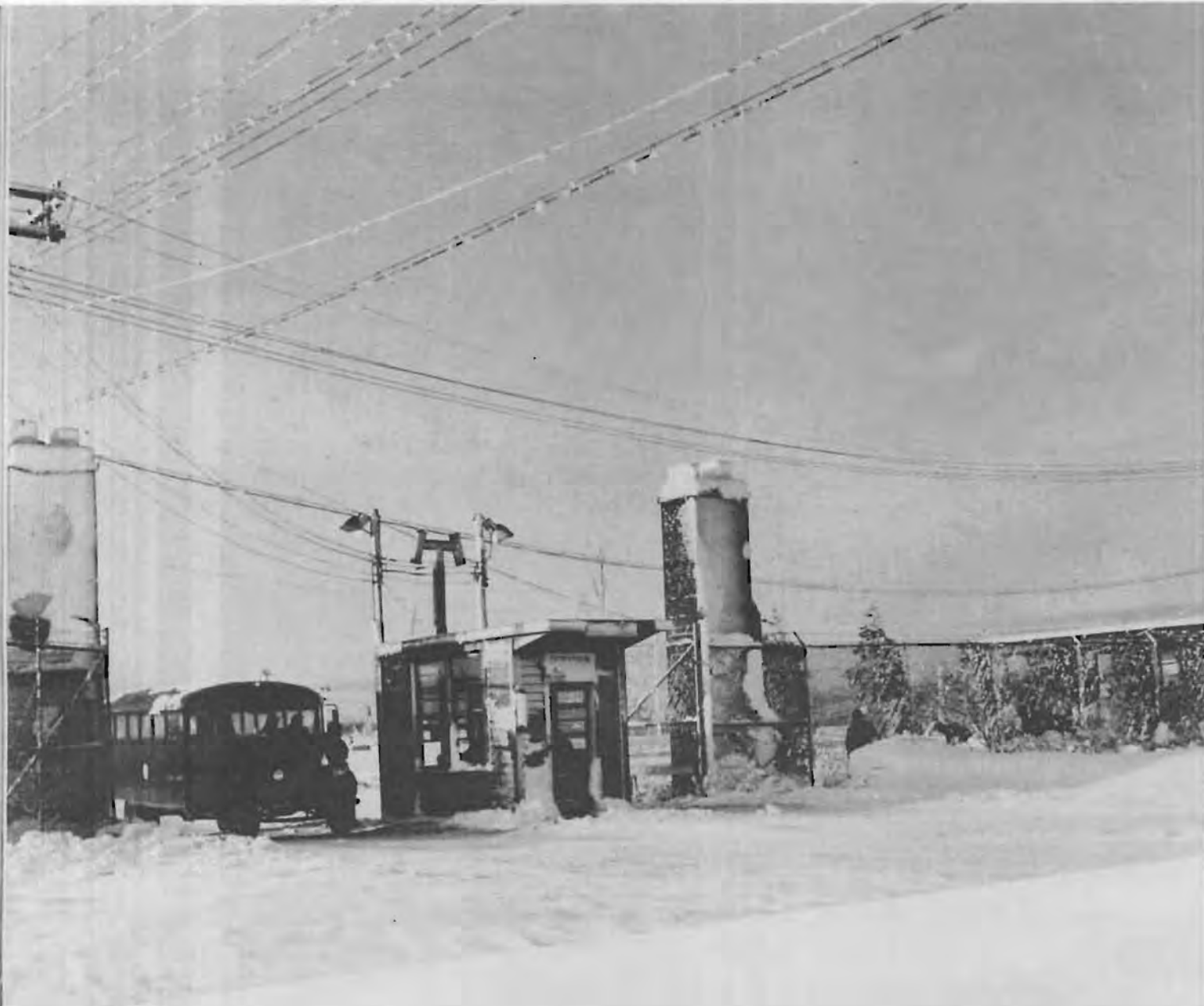
rehabilitation when they have completed 18 months service overseas. (5th Reg. monthly report for May'44) End. dtd 18 Jul and 31 Jul'44 respectively. Com7thflt takes no action because this batt has been functioning in the Southwest Pacific Area on a temporary loan basis from ComSoPac.

- 8-25-44 - 57th CB located at Manus. Following data of SoPac as of 1 Jul'44:
 Arrived Espiritu Santo Mar'43
 " Manus Apr'44
- 8-29-44 - Scheduled return date of 57th CB to U.S. changed to 1 Dec'44. (Com7flt sec disp 210103 NCR 951 to Cincpac dtd 21 Aug'44)
 9- 6-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 57th CB - operating at Manus.
 10-21-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 57th CB - operating at Manus. Endorsement by Comserfor7flt states that the batts of the 4th Brig. are to return to the SoPac Command upon completion of the present assignment at Manus. Report also endorsed by 5th Reg.
 10-24-44 - 57th CB is located at Lorengau, Manus Is. - due to return to Sopac about 1 Dec'44. (Comserfor7flt mon.rep. for Aug'44 to Budocks Ser.BP001815 Sec. dtd 12 Sep'44).
 11-8-44 - 57th CB is located at Lorengau and is in the 5th Reg. It is estimated that the 57th CB will be released 15 Nov'44 to return to the SoPac area. (Comserfor7flt Sec. ltr A9-4 over Ser BP-001882 to Budocks dtd 12 Oct'44 monthly report for Sep'44.
 11-29-44 - 57th CB is located at Manus. (comserv7flt Sec Disp to CNO 150133 NCR 18921 dtd 24 Nov'44)
 12-29-44 - The 57th CB is located at Manus. Estimated to be released early in Nov'44 for return to the Sopac area. (Comserfor7flt Sec. report for Oct'44 dtd 20 Nov'44).
 1-3-45 - 1 Oct'44 report of 57th CB - located at Manus. Report endorsed by 5th Regiment.
 1-11-45 - 1 Nov'44 report of 57th CB - located at Manus. Report endorsed by 5th Regiment.

*57th CB

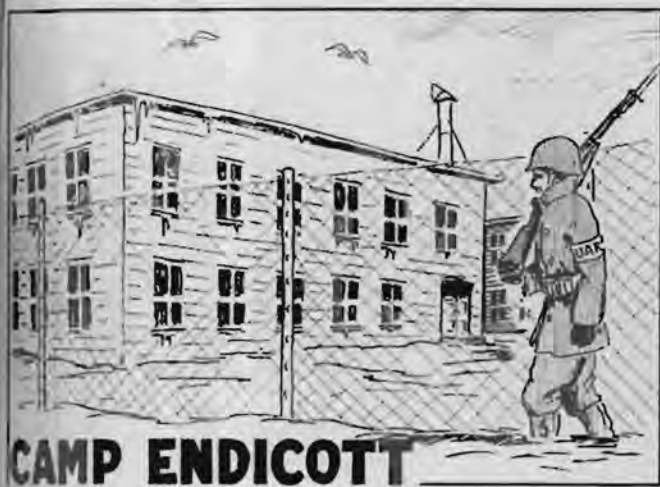
- 1-12-45 - CMB Manus requested to order the 44th, 46th and 57th CB's to proceed and report to Noumea and to the 17th Reg. for staging. Request that this entire movement be expedited. (Comsopac Sec. disp to Com7flt and CMB Manus 080326 dtd 8 Jan'45).
- 1-30-45 - Steps will be taken to obtain one regular and one special batt from the West Coast to permit the return of the 44th, 46th and 57th CB's for rehabilitation. (Cincpoa Sec. disp to Comsopac 180059 dtd 18 Jan'45).
- 1-30-45 - Orders which assigned the 44th, 46th and 57th CB's to the 17th Reg. modified as follows: CMB Manus requested to transfer the 46th and 57th CB's to U.S. direct. Men with 57th CB who departed U.S. subsequent 31 Jan'44 to be assigned to the 17th Reg. for further assignment. (Comsopac Sec. disp to 44th CB, CMB Manus and CinC 17th Reg. 220544 dtd 22 Jan'45).
- 2- 2-45 - The 57th CB was detached from the 5th Reg. on 2 Dec'44. (1 Jan'45 report of the 5th Reg.)
- 2-13-45 - 57th CB ordered detached from Manus to proceed to U.S. To carry any member of the 44th CB remaining at Manus. (CMB Manus Sec. ltr 00245 to CinC 57th CB dtd 31 Jan'45).
- 2-21-45 - The 57th CB consisting of 19 officers and 804 men arrived Parks 18 Feb'45 from overseas. (Parks TWX192226 Feb'45 to Bupers).
- 2-28-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 57th CB - then at Manus.
- 3-5-45 - Parks directed to inactivate the 57th CB upon their return from rehabilitation leave. Personnel will be used to form new units and as replacements for Comservpac. (Bupers conf. ltr Pers-2122D-CEC/lm to Parks dtd 1 Mar'45).
- 5- 3-45 - The 57th CB inactivated on 1 May'45. (Parks TWX 012230 May'45 to Bupers)

INACTIVATED



Changing us from civilians to Seabees was an endless and tiresome grind from our point of view, yet in actual time the change was swift. Only three weeks after entering the gates of Camp Endicott we rose one morning and put on our dress blue uniforms, flat hats and peacoats, and marched to the drill hall. The camp band blared as we swung around the sides of the big hall, and formed into straight ranks before the reviewing stand, company by company, at rigid attention. Our new Officer-in-Charge, Lieutenant Commander Dwight H. Hardman, saluted Captain Fred Rogers: "Sir, the Battalion is formed."

Our colors were presented to us, and we passed in review around the drill hall, then down the snowy road to our barracks. We sat down on our bunks and stripped off our canvas leggings. Our boot days were over. The next day we moved to "J" area.



Camp Endicott, at Davisville, Rhode Island, was harsh and cold. The train trip had been a long one, for many of us came from as far south as Florida, and when we poured off the train to the platform our legs were stiff and cramped. A dreary rain was falling as an omen of the weather we were to meet in three Stateside camps and overseas. We were crowded into busses by bustling men dressed in uniforms we could not yet decipher, and away on a long ride over slick black roads until we turned through wide, brightly-lighted gates into the wire-fenced camp. We stumbled out into an unfinished, muddy road for a rollcall, then followed someone to a large two-storied barracks filled with two-storied bunks, drafty and barnlike. Then out over muddy roads we went to stand in long lines at a mess hall, with the constant greeting of "You'll be sorry!" from "veterans" along the way. After a meal for which few of us had appetites, we followed a master-at-arms to a cavernous warehouse where we were heaped with mattresses and blankets; then we tramped back to the barracks to make up our beds for the night. Our parting words from the training chiefs were that reveille would be at 5:45 A. M.

"Hit the deck!" came the blithe call in the dark before the dawn, and we were off on our second day. We made up our bunks and cleaned the barracks for inspection, then fell in to get our physical examinations. We stripped and shivered while we were thoroughly checked from tooth to fetlock, then passed down a long row of counters like parimutuel booths and were laden with a mountain of cloth and leather. We crammed our beloved zoot-suits and pinstripes into cardboard boxes to be sent home, and tried on garment after garment under the watchful eye and raucous voice of an instructor: "If it fits, put it in the bag." Then in our nice new dungarees with our booty dumped into a mattress cover, staggering under the burden like wealthy hoboes, we tramped

through the mud to our barracks.

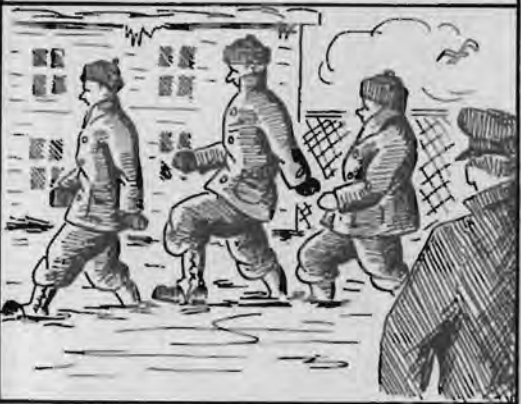
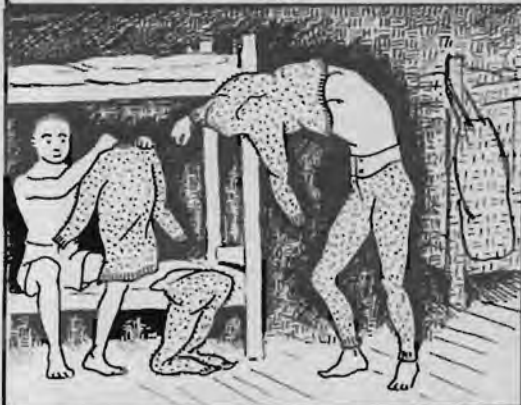
There more instructors and some old salts among our number taught us to roll jumpers and trousers and peacoats and properly stow three bushels of them in a two-bushel canvas seabag, at the cost of broken fingernails, skinned knuckles, and strangely knotted clothes-tops.

The next morning we moved to another barracks, where we were to finish our "boot" training. The canvas leggings from which this preliminary training gets its name soon became our trademark. We tramped some twelve blocks with our assorted gear and into Unit "C", where we were surrounded by an eight-foot wire fence. The battalion was formed into companies, and each company was quartered in a separate barrack in the unit. We stowed our gear in lockers and got better acquainted with our neighbors, asking and answering questions, getting help from ex-service men, forming cliques. Numbers and orders, dogtags and shots, long lines for chow, sudden communal life in rows of identical bunks, wearing the same kind of clothes, complete lack of privacy—all these contributed to the difficult change from being an individual to being a unit in a platoon and company.

OUR DAY: Up in the morning at 5:30 to the shrill blast of a whistle . . . a shivering creep from warm blankets, breath steaming in the cold air . . . a dash to the head for a splashing of freezing water that shocked us wide awake . . . then out into the snow or mud for muster . . . assignment of a company M. A. A., clerk, mail man and boiler watch . . . men for K. P. . . . cleanup detail . . . to chow, a long slow-moving line in the rain . . . into a long building full of tables and benches, where at a counter nonchalant mess cooks dumped food on our tin trays in confused profusion. . . .

Drill in an open court at the center of the barracks area . . . shivering in irregular lines . . . marching and counter-marching to the hoarse bark of the training chief, our heels trampled, legs tired and aching, hands and faces numb and cold . . . an occasional welcome break to smoke a cigarette . . . an occasional march out into the camp roads and past wire-fenced barracks where other battalions lived . . . chow . . . muster . . . drill . . . muster . . . chow. . . .

After supper, back to the barracks we'd go for a hurried look at the bulletin board to see the lists posted for guard or fire watch, which meant another four hours' duty. Then the remainder of the evening was free. Sometimes a surreptitious poker game would spring up in a corner, a harmonica or treasured banjo would give us music,



and there were always our letters to write. But when Taps sounded, bed was welcome to our weary bodies.

The weather turned cold, and then colder. By the time we left, a new below-zero record had been set for the New England states. Georgia and Florida were far, far away.

Dressing for a day in the cold and deep snow was a major business. Southerners who had never dreamed of such an event gladly climbed into their long heavy woolies. In the first few days of milder weather heavy cotton coveralls or dungarees with the black woolen sweater made up the uniform, but when the weather turned to paralyzing cold we were issued "winter greens", apparently salvaged from the C. C. C. These consisted of green woolen trousers and a heavy mackinaw coat made of cloth almost one-eighth of an inch thick. With the temperature below zero on arising in early morn—having slept in our woolies—we pulled on dungaree trousers, blue shirt, and sweater; over these came the heavy green trousers and coat. Some of us needed coveralls on top of all this. There were also two pairs of socks in heavy field shoes, canvas leggings, watch-cap and gloves, and perhaps a dry towel for a muffler. Then we were ready to go out to fight a losing battle with the weather.

Slowly the days went by, and by the second week we were finding a certain pride in our drill, a spirit of cooperation in the straightness of our lines and the snappy cadence of our step; a satisfaction in looking just a little better than the platoon just behind.

GOING TO WORK: GSK



After we had our camp in a livable condition, we were assigned to a job from which we learned many things. The project was General Store-keeping Warehouses, and we were to build 120 large steel warehouses, complete with roads, and a few other odds and ends in a section fronting on the bay. In a short time we came to make so many references to this job—profane and otherwise—that we shortened it, for convenience, to “GSK”.

It was our first experience in an excavation project of any large size. In this case, the work involved better than 100,000 cubic yards of excavation, and in effect we removed a small hill, making cuts up to 25 feet deep and transporting the material to a nearby swampy area to be used as fill. It was also our first experience at handling large quantities of clay in a place where there were half-a-dozen rains a day, totaling to several inches.

We fought the mud—bottomless mud—tooth and nail. We, who were truck drivers and bulldozer operators, learned to operate our machines under nightmare conditions. Almost every truck used in the excavation work had to be pushed or pulled past the shovel, and into and out of the dumping spot. We used seven bulldozers on this job to cut the network of streets that connected up the warehouses and to grade the sites for the big buildings. There were some occasions when all seven bulldozers were stuck in the mud at the same time, and we had to borrow equipment to pull out one of our machines and start “salvage” operations.

The warehouses and storage areas were put to use as rapidly as they were completed. Storekeepers working in the completed parts of the area wore hip-boots, and could be seen reaching elbow-deep into the soft mud, searching for articles stored beneath the surface.

It was a rush job all the way. Close behind our earthmoving men and road builders came the concrete crews and the builders, and they in turn were hard-pressed by the base’s storekeepers, who actually filled some of the buildings before the last nail had been driven.

The crowding and constant pressure from behind led to some confusion and sulphurous comment.

There were a number of heads to be built, and the digging of the pits reached into the hard coral. The blasting crew managed to throw a considerable quantity of rock through the tops and sides of the warehouses, at the same time that our inexperienced bulldozer operators were ripping their blades through the bottoms as they tried to negotiate narrow corners. At one time it looked like the excavation crews would nullify the work of the building crews.

To cope with the rains, we used a step-by-step system on the warehouses. First would come the concrete crews to pour the sills for the foundation. After these had set up, the steel crews would erect the arched ribs of the building, and they were followed by the sheet-metal men who nailed on the “skin”. With the building itself erected, the floor inside was protected from the weather, and under the shelter thus provided the concrete crews could pour the big concrete deck without fear of interference from the rain. However, because of the exceedingly wet weather and the constant rush, it was not always possible to have the inside of the warehouse dry by the time the concrete crews arrived to pour the deck—at one time there were two bulldozers stuck inside the buildings just ahead of the concrete crews—the concrete men themselves often bogged down in the muck inside the buildings—some of them may still be there. . .

Our roads unrolled like ribbons after our technique had been smoothed out. While motor patrols and graders were still shaping the subgrade at one end of the street, the trucks would be dumping coral at the other. We used oil drums as pipes for culverts under the roads, welding them together in long strings after the tops and bottoms had been cut out. But that wasn't enough, so we made our own pre-formed concrete culverts. The forms for these concrete arches were built right at the work site, and coral aggregate was used in the casting. We would pour the concrete one day, and by the next day the forms would be stripped, the culverts placed and covered, and traffic passing over them, all within 24 hours.

As the warehouse area expanded, we went to work clearing off new portions of the land. One section was thickly overgrown with the usual jungle vegetation, and when one of the paint crews which had been covering tanks on another project asked for a change, they were put to work at clearing this area . . . after a few hours with axe and machete among the vines and teak trees, they could be heard yearning for the scent of red lead and turpentine . . . later, for their virtues, they got a trailer and power-spray rig with



which to pursue their trade, and used it in the latter stages of the project, painting the buildings with dull-hued camouflage paint.

After we had beavered our way through 120 big warehouses, each 40 feet by 100 feet, at the lower end of the area, we tossed up six utility buildings of the same size, and installed in them twelve refrigeration units, each of over six thousand cubic feet capacity. Five heavy steel magazine buildings also went up and were covered with dirt fill, and to connect everything we set up a fifty-pole power distribution system. Other little odds and ends included five heads, two small Quonset huts, and 12 screened and floored tents.

A favorite method of disposing of trees and stumps cleared from the area was to push them off to one side into the adjoining space. Fate caught up with us at last, however, and we ended up with an incredible amount of trash at one end of our warehouse area, with the buildings built up all around. Security reasons prevented large fires at night, so we had to cut up and haul out a large quantity of stumps and trees. . . We used a three-quarter yard clamshell to load the trucks, and the machine and five trucks worked 24 hours a day for five weeks getting rid of our mess. . . .



RESTRICTED

ITINERARY OF THE 57TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

18 Dec 42 Battalion formed at NCTC, Davisville, R. I.

29 Jan 43 Departed Davisville for ABD, Gulfport, Miss.

1 Feb 43 Arrived ABD, Gulfport, Miss.

14 Feb 43 Departed Gulfport, Miss.

19 Feb 43 Arrived ABD, Port Hueneme, Calif.

9 Mar 43 First echelon of 24 Officers and 1015 men embarked for
Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides.

20 Mar 43 Second Echelon of 3 officers and 25 men embarked for Espiritu
Santo, New Hebrides.

25 Mar 43 First Echelon arrived Espiritu Santo.

11 Apr 43 Second Echelon arrived Espiritu Santo.

18 Mar 44 Ceased operations at Espiritu Santo. During period from 18 Mar
to 25 Mar "cleanup" work performed on various projects.

29 Mar 44 57th NCB transferred to SoWesPac with Fourth Construction
Brigade. First Echelon of about 950 men embarked at Espiritu
Santo for Manus, Admiralty Islands.

5 Apr 44 Second Echelon of about 100 men embarked for Manus.

15 Apr 44 First Echelon arrived Manus.

18 Apr 44 Second Echelon arrived Manus.

31 Jan 45 Battalion detached from Manus for return to U. S.

1 Feb 45 Embarked at Manus for return to U. S. (20 officers and 804 men).

18 Feb 45 Arrived Camp Parks, California.

1 May 45 Inactivated.

NOTE: This itinerary has been checked and authenticated by the Officer-in-Charge
of the 57th Naval Construction Battalion.

15 October 1945.

SOUTH SEAS



1942

1945

Naval
Construction
Battalion





