

# NO TASK TOO GREAT IN THE PACIFIC



## CHAPTER II OF THE HISTORY OF THE 97<sup>TH</sup> ENGINEER BATTALION (CONSTRUCTION)

*Updated 1 September 2014 by Donald M. Ricks, Webmaster,  
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97<sup>th</sup> Engineer General Service Battalion, 1946-47*

The 97<sup>th</sup> Engineer General Service Regiment returned to the United States from Alaska just as they had come, by sailing from Valdes to Fort Lewis, Washington. After four intensive months of training the prepared 97<sup>th</sup> Engineers reported to San Francisco, California. Leaving the United States from that port, the Regiment travelled directly to Finschhafen, a town located 50 miles east of Lae on the Huon Peninsula in Morobe Province of Papua New Guinea. This locale had been recaptured from the Japanese on 22 September 1943, and was part of the growing chain of bases where engineers were busy constructing roads, airfields, and camp facilities necessary to carry the Pacific War effort ever northward. Here the men of the 97<sup>th</sup> stayed to contribute their experience and manpower until the close of WWII. For their wartime accomplishments, the 97<sup>th</sup> Engineers were awarded the Meritorious Unit Streamer for the American Pacific Theater.

After the cessation of hostilities with Japan on 8 September 1945, the 97<sup>th</sup> reorganized on 30 June 1946 as the 97<sup>th</sup> Engineer General Services Battalion. In accordance with Special Orders Number 1, 97<sup>th</sup> Engineer Service Battalion, APO 75, **1LT Edward F. Bishop**, Infantry, assumed command on 26 April 1946. The length of his service is unknown. By the date of his command, the battalion had moved to San Francisco, Del Monte, Luzon, Philippines, Army Post Office (APO) 75. **MAJ Robert C. Holmes, Jr.**, 01104857, Corps of Engineers (CE), assumed command on 25 September 1946, while the battalion was at APO 75, and after a short period of construction projects that included completion of a swimming pool the battalion started moving on 2 February 1947 to Angeles, Pampanga, Luzon, Philippine Islands, APO 74. The unit completed the move by vehicle on 1 March 1947.

The 97<sup>th</sup> Engineers set about its major task of constructing the mess hall, supply, quarters, headquarters and motor pool facilities of the new post with its traditional enthusiasm and professionalism, between 2–16 March. Sometime just before or during this activity, the 97<sup>th</sup> Engineers were assigned to Philippines-Ryukyus Command (PHILRYCOM). Camp Angeles, located about 35 miles north of Manila, was in the making about two miles south of Clark Field, a hotly contested airstrip in WWII:



PHILRYCOM patch worn by the 97<sup>th</sup> Engineer General Service Battalion

On 17 March 1947, MAJ Holmes returned to the Zone of the Interior. MAJ Robert C. Coffin, 01112622, CE, assumed command on 18 March 1947 and served until 24 March. On that day MAJ John E. Veatch, 032047, CE, previously Chief of Operations, Engineer Services, PHILRYCOM, APO 727, assumed command of the 97<sup>th</sup> Engineers. During April 1947 replacements and filler personnel received were non-engineer troops and required training in engineer duties, at a time when the unit completed ninety percent of the tent floors and improved their areas in general. A chaplain and a doctor were assigned to the unit on 23 April. During May 1947 the unit moved its motor pool to a more advantageous location near the battalion headquarters. One of its final assignments was the construction of the PHILRYCOM Ordnance Depot, which continued into early 1948.

In June 1947 the battalion's basketball team continued its winning streak, winning 16 and losing 1. A football team, *The 97<sup>th</sup> Bulldozers*, was organized and in August the team won 3 of 4 games played at Rizal Stadium in Manila, the national football stadium of the Philippines, and was runner up in the Sweat Bowl League. The boxing team distinguished itself by winning the Intramuros (Manila) USA League Tournament and receiving a commendation for flawless sportsmanship. The boxing team also won first place in the lightweight class and second place in the welterweight class in the Inter-command championship bouts.

All enlisted men of the battalion were awarded the Victory Medal for World War II on 12 & 13 November 1947 at a ceremony in their company areas. Master Sergeant Jackson Benjamin, the Battalion Sergeant Major, received the Bronze Star medal for outstanding activities during World War II.

On 23 December 1947, Company C received stand-down orders and inactivated the first of the year. The rest of the battalion of 615 men followed suit on 15 March 1948 while still stationed in the Philippine Islands. Thus, almost seven years after activation, the story written by the 97<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion ended with 2,846 days of continuous distinguished service on the history books.

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