

Misc
Issue No. 2
1 October 1943

SEABEE NEWS SERVICE

This second issue of the Seabee News Service comes to you with the reminder that its purpose is primarily to aid the editors of battalion newspapers in informing their readers of the activities of other Seabee battalions and units. For those battalions which have not yet begun to publish a paper, it is suggested the Seabee News Service be distributed to various units and placed on a prominent bulletin board.

It will continue to be issued twice each month. Editors may re-write any of the News Service stories to fit space limitations, or use them in any other way to suit their purposes.

Battalions whose activities have news possibilities should send in detailed accounts to the Bureau for use by the News Service.

----30----

ODD JOBS--\$500,000!

Undaunted by the Nazi bombs which had blasted away their assigned job of moving equipment to shore by means of pontoons, 300 resourceful Navy Seabees looked about the Sicilian beaches for something else to do. That they found a job is evidenced by their rescue of nearly half a million dollars worth of small landing craft from the surf.

Just returned from Sicily, Lt. Jack B. Baines, Civil Engineer Corps, USNR, of 6109 Majestic Avenue, Oakland, California, told how the Seabees whirled their bulldozers into the heavy surf to nose the abandoned craft out to the safety of deeper water. Some could be rescued before they had swamped while with others it was necessary to pump out the water before they could be pushed out and salvaged.

The salvaging of the small craft was only a sidelight of the Seabees' activity during the Sicilian invasion. Their principal job, which the Nazi bombs halted only temporarily, was the unloading of some 10,000 pieces of equipment, according to Lt. Baines. It proved not only necessary to get the trucks, guns, etc., to the beach, but the Seabees were called upon to use the 'dozers in dragging the heavy stuff through soft sand up to solid ground.

The men worked in platoons of 24, including two officers and two chiefs, on six-hour shifts 'round the clock. And when the "heat" was really on, many of the boys worked more than 30 hours in a stretch--that was when word reached them that the Nazis were breaking through and heavy artillery was needed immediately.

NAVDOKS
6815673

"The Seabees rank 'tops' with the other services," said Lt. Baines. "In fact, they're generally trying to borrow the Seabees for any one of a thousand jobs."

None of the Seabees who took part in the initial invasion was wounded, according to the lieutenant. It was after the beach-heads were well established and the Seabees were engaged in getting equipment ashore that shrapnel from bombs "clipped a few of the boys". But, all in all, he said, casualties among the Seabees were very light.

Seabee ingenuity eked out the regular "C" and "K" rations with Sicilian garden produce and several hams that were rescued from bomb battered supply shipments. And excellent Italian vino was procured as the result of some judicious trades on the part of the Seabees. In other words, according to Lt. Baines, the chow wasn't anything to kick about.

----30----

WHY NOT RIDE?

The Seabees brought back this story from Sicily.

It seems that a wounded Italian was being carried on a stretcher to the beach where a boat was to take him to safety. However, at that moment a Nazi bomber came roaring over the dunes. The wounded Italian jumped off the stretcher and ran like a deer to the nearest foxhole where he landed on top of two Gold-Braids sheltered there. The bombing attack lasted but a few minutes whereupon the Italian calmly walked back to the stretcher and resumed his position, complete with groans.

----30----

TWO NEW PAPERS LAUNCHED

Congratulations and good luck to two new battalion newspapers: "C-Beam" published by the 115th and "Seabeecon" by the 75th. Both sheets appear to have gotten off to a good start.

With the commanding officers of both battalions as publishers, the staffs have managed to come up with lively news columns and commendable art. And incidentally, two more good titles have been claimed. Soon the supply of titles based on Seabee will be exhausted, so the battalions who haven't started newspapers yet had better get going.

The staff of "C-Beam" is headed by Ensign O. T. Lyon, CEC, USNR, as managing editor; J. G. Rank, S2c is editor; N. Zill, S2c, assistant editor; and H. S. Zimmerman, art editor.

Chaplain Charles S. Van Winkle is Editor-in-Chief of "Seabeecon", with Edward A. Otterman, managing editor; J. J. Kasap, associate editor; and Ralph H. Johnson, circulation manager.

----30----

DEADLINE MET BY "CAN DO"

Seabees of the 52nd and the 5th Special battalions were told they had 96 hours to unload approximately 2,000 tons of cargo and to load 1,300 on the U.S.S. Vega. That was a stiff assignment, but the boys were ready.

They waited--and waited. Seventeen hours after she was due in, the Vega docked. Seventeen precious hours had been chopped off the time available before the deadline. What the boys did in the face of this problem brought forth a letter of commendation from Rear Admiral J. W. Reeves, Jr., USN.

"I have noted with gratification the excellent job performed by various Naval units in the matter of unloading and loading the U.S.S. Vega," wrote the Admiral. "The speed with which the job was accomplished under adverse conditions is indicative of the high degree of co-operation attained. The Vega was delayed 17 hours in arriving, but regardless of the adverse conditions encountered and the limited time remaining, the officers and men 'turned to' and met the deadline."

Commenting on this performance, Commander S. E. Mittler, CEC, USNR, who took a leading part in the organization and training of the Seabee Specials, said: "They did a remarkable job. Their speed would have been unusual even at the best-equipped ports in this country."

Singled out for special mention in the commendation by Admiral Reeves was Lt. (j.g.) J. W. Cobb, CEC, USNR, "for his successful correlation of the various units involved in the operation".

----30----

RISK EXPLOSION TO SAVE BUDDIES

Training can teach Seabees most of what is necessary in the heat of battle, but the quality of courage that enabled four Seabees and an Army sergeant to defy fire, bombs, and machine gun bullets to rescue some 90 of their mates from the heavy surf of Sicily comes only from the character of the men themselves.

Nazi planes commenced a particularly heavy bombing and strafing attack, and one of the bombs crashed through the aft hatch of an LST boat which was loaded with gasoline, tanks, and ammunition. The burning gasoline combined with the effects of the bomb explosion caused explosions of ammunition aboard the cargo of half-track tanks aboard. It was certain that only seconds remained before the bow magazine of the ship would explode. Men dived into the water to escape the scorching heat despite the fact that the blazing fuel was soon to spread even out into the waves.

Four Seabees realized instantly what the situation was and unmindful of the imminent explosion piloted a small amphibious "duck" alongside the ship and picked up survivors. With their small boat filled, they disembarked the survivors at a nearby ship. Then, without orders and with complete disregard for their own safety, they went back into the inferno to pick up more. The official record says they made "repeated trips" to bring in survivors--just how many was forgotten in the excitement, but enough to save approximately 90 men. And one of the Seabees in the little rescue party, Chief Carpenter's Mate Albert F. Unkenholz, 33, whose wife lives at 400 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn, found time to leap overboard and attach a line around a badly burned soldier so that he could be hauled to safety.

The other three Seabees, who together with Unkenholz were engaged in this rescue work, were Coxswain Thomas L. Coakley, 26, whose wife lives at 14 Rosedale Avenue, Madison, New Jersey; Charles W. Woodmancy, Carpenter's Mate Second Class, 35, of No. 6, Mirror Lake, New Hampshire, and William K. Parrish, Seaman, second class, 17, of 1825 Claiborne Street, Richmond, Virginia. These men were commended by their commanding officer for "outstanding bravery and initiative, at the risk of their own lives above and beyond the call of duty".

With this task completed, these four Seabees joined the rest of their mates in hauling the heavy stuff ashore--the less glamorous but equally important job assigned to the Navy's Fighting Builders.

----30----

WILLIWAU PLAYS TRICKS

This will sound strange to the boys down on the islands, but two Seabees just returned from the Aleutians assure us that gale-blown snows up in those parts play strange tricks.

"The snow comes at you so hard that it blows up your pants and out your neck instead of down your neck and out your pants," they declare.

The two men, James A. McMullin, 20, BM2c, and Joseph P. Smith, 21, Slc, both of Richmond, Virginia, spent a year and a day at Dutch Harbor where their outfit battled rain, fog, and wind (one day it averaged 72 knots, they say) to build vital harbor and base installations.

Asked where they would like to go on their next assignment, both agreed that Italy or Australia would be fine--"anywhere where it's warm", they said.

----30----

BEAT SCHEDULE THREE WEEKS

It was a tough assignment--Project No. 4, Dry Dock No. 4, but the "Can Do" of the 62nd Battalion accomplished the job well ahead of schedule and won the praise of Captain G. D. Wetsel, CEC, USN.

In a letter of commendation, Captain Wetsel wrote:

"The Officers and men of the Construction Battalions who were assigned to the project have completed their work. Through their efforts in co-operation with the Contractors, this important docking facility will be ready to receive ships three weeks ahead of schedule.

"The District Public Works Officer wishes to congratulate all officers and men of the 62nd Construction Battalion, who were concerned with the project, on the excellence of their work and the dispatch with which the assignment was carried out."

In forwarding Captain Wetsel's commendation, Commander R. Y. Taggart, CEC, USNR, added: "It is very gratifying to see the excellent work of the 62nd Battalion gain such well-deserved recognition."

----30----

RESCUE JOB WINS PRAISE

When the fire in the furnace goes out, it's no great catastrophe unless--the building is in Alaska--the building is a hospital--and the building is filled with patients whose lives are put in danger.

That was the situation when the flues of Griffin Memorial Hospital at Kodiak went haywire. The Seabees were called in to help out. And here's what Dr. A. Holmes Johnson, the hospital's medical officer had to say:

"On behalf of the patients and staff of the Griffith Memorial Hospital, as well as the community, I want to thank you for the work of the Seabees who helped us out during the recent emergency when the furnace failed to function. As we had some quite seriously ill patients at the time, the continued work of these men until repairs were completed may have had much to do with the satisfactory progress of these patients.

"There being no one in our city who has either the knowledge or the materials for this work makes us realize--even in these affairs--the indispensability of the United States Navy.

"I would like especially to mention the following men who worked night and day to repair the flues: S. R. Martin, CMM; L. Stahura, Slc; O. M. Barnes, Flc; A. Oliver, SF3c; and the following who rewired and repaired the electrical end of the job: Paul Kern, CEM; Lester Berman, EMLc; and Fred Pratt, EMLc.

"No better service could have been given nor more competent and thorough work done by anyone, and, believe me, it is thoroughly appreciated by all."

-----30-----

SHOOT DOWN PLANE

The 25th Battalion didn't give any of the details, but here is a laconic item taken from its monthly report:

"Three trucks were sent up into the combat zone, during which trip two Japanese planes were shot down, the first being credited to this Battalion. This was verified by the Captain of the LTC on which they were at the time, and is probably the first plane shot down by any personnel in this division."

Looks like the boys are doing all right.

-----30-----

SEABEES RUN

"We can build and we can fight--and we can RUN!!"

This sounds like a strange motto for the Seabees but one of the battalions up in the Aleutians area has earned the right to use it as the result of piling up 15 points in a track meet in which Marines, Navy, and other Seabee units were competitors. The winners beat out the next highest scorers by three points.

-----30-----

LARGEST SWIMMING POOL AT ENDICOTT

Camp Endicott's "Bulldozer" advises that plans are nearing completion for construction of what it believes will be the largest indoor swimming pool in the world. It is expected the pool, which will be 75 feet in width by 246 feet in length, will be ready for use by late Spring. It will be located at Eleventh and D Streets in E area on a site now used as a softball field.

-----30-----

WIND, WEATHER ATTACK BUT SEABEES WIN

Not rain, nor heat, nor cold--but terrific and unabating wind is the principal problem facing Seabee units who have built a vital jump-off base in the granite bare hills of Newfoundland.

At one nearby weather station the wind averages 70 knots and rarely falls below 30 knots. And the highest recorded during the last year was a howling gale of 140 knots. During one heavy blow, birds were seen flapping their wings at top speed but not fast enough because they progressed slowly--backward.

Commander Victor W. Buhr, CEC, USNR, of Snow Hill, Maryland, is our authority for the foregoing, and also for the fact that the Seabees made possible a permanent and adequate water supply for the whole base by constructing one large and two small dams at a nearby lake.

Maintaining morale is no easy job in that barren wind-swept country, particularly when the added disagreeable elements of rain, fog, and clouds are added. (Last July, Commander Buhr recalls, the sun came out twice for brief periods.) "Hard work and the knowledge that that work is important help morale more than anything else," Commander Buhr said.

And offering as proof that morale is good, Commander Buhr points to a commendation from Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf, USN, given after the latter had reviewed the Seabees. It read:

"The splendid review which I just had the pleasure of taking adds measurably to my already high admiration of your regiment. It is obvious that men who can work and march as yours do can also fight with credit to themselves and discomfort to the enemy. Please extend to all hands my hearty congratulations. Well done!"

----30----

HE'S GOT SOMETHING HERE

Proof that morale springs from work well done as well as from rate boosts, recreation, letters from home, and good chow is found in an excerpt from the report of the Commanding Officer of one of the battalions in the South Pacific.

"With more supplies and equipment," it says, "it is very doubtful that the ingenuity of our technicians would have been so taxed, and as a consequence, morale would have been lower. Due to the shortage of this article or that piece of equipment, the Seabees have risen to the occasion and have done things inconceivable had they been with their companies and corporations back in the States.

"Heavy equipment has been built, Jap motors from wrecked tanks repaired, and placed to other use, battle-scarred tanks, wagons, and trucks have been brought back to life after a period of twelve months of disuse; the art of metallurgy has been improvised, bearings cast, allows melted-- to such an extent as unheard of in the States by a field organization.

"This continued improvisation has improved the morale of this organization more than any one thing. The men are proud of their jobs and proud of their ability to get along with little; and to develop a dependence upon shipments from the States, or overstocking of certain materials, would not have developed this splendid morale."

----30----

HOLD PHILLIES TO SCORELESS TIE

Camp Endicott Seabees played the Philadelphia Phillies to a scoreless tie in a seven inning exhibition game at Davisville in mid-September. Pitcher Gene Nichols of the Seabees held the National Leaguers to five hits, all singles, while the Seabees gathered two off of Wasdell. Nichols's biggest problem was Schoolboy Rowe, who singled in the first and fourth.

----30----

BUILD BASE DESPITE BOMBINGS

How more than 80 Jap bombings failed to prevent the men of a Seabee battalion from converting a jungle island into an important air base was vividly described in a report from Lt. Cdr. Andrew D. Lewis, CEC, USNR.

Time after time, the Japs struck at the beach-head and miraculously their bombs failed to cause casualties during the initial landings.

Forshadowing things to come was the experience of a reconnaissance party who visited the island in P-T boats. The only excitement was that their boats were bombed and strafed for two and a half hours. "The men in the party could do nothing but lie on the decks under the torpedo tubes and pray," said the report. "Fortunately, all escaped."

The next taste of what was to come occurred as the first wave prepared to take off. "The tropical moon was full and the sky above had a few scattered clouds--an ideal night for a bombing attack. It came. The alert sounded. Approximately fifteen minutes later, the first Jap planes appeared high above. Soon planes came in from a low altitude dropping flares and were followed immediately by dive bombers and strafing planes. The entire attack lasted two and a half hours. None in the battalion was hit."

Moving in on the "peaceful" island, the unloading operation proceeded smoothly, thanks to previous rehearsals. It was after the unloading was practically complete that all hell broke loose. "Planes seemed to be screaming down from all sides, strafing, and bombing....The attack lasted only about five minutes....in a few minutes the Japs were back and the murderous fire broke loose again. Through some miracle none of the personnel of the 58th Battalion was wounded," the report related.

The same day, despite three more bombing attacks, the battalion went to roughing out a nine-mile road along the beach and into the jungle as well as in helping with unloading. Again all Seabee personnel escaped.

After the ships were unloaded, and the Seabees had moved inland, Jap bombers really laid it on. That night 13 more bombings and strafing were experienced. Such an ordeal will make anybody jittery, but nevertheless the men pitched in to work the next morning, moving supplies, digging fox-holes, and building roads.

The second night, after only one heavy attack during the day, the much-bombed battalion withstood 10 more bombing attacks. "No casualties."

The other waves of the battalion followed later, and they, too, were given bomb blasts for a welcome.

Casualties were extremely light, and the work continued at a rapid pace with the result that today the men have added another springboard for the offensive when our bombers will more than even the score.

----30----

AUSTRALIANS DESCRIBE SEABEES

Evidence that the courage and ability of the Seabees has impressed the Australians is found in an article written by J. Fairfax, war correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald, which was reprinted in the "Beach-comber" by the Guadalcanal Seabees. Excerpts from Fairfax's story follow.

"There is the story of the aircraft carrier which caught fire in action. A squad of Seabees were put aboard and they fought the flames while the bombing and the shelling continued and the planes still rose and landed from the carrier's decks.

"At the landing of Vella Lavella a Texan Seabee, who had lost a brother at Pearl Harbor, went ashore with his carbine and disappeared. He was seeking revenge in the hills.

"At Vella Lavella, too, a Seabee drove his bulldozer all day and all through the dozen air raids which took place. He drove it off the ship in the morning and built a coral ramp and then went into the jungle constructing roads.

"On the shore near Munda a Seabee, he was a very young Seabee, lay smoking a cigarette and joking with his mates. His hand was blown off and his leg was shattered. The Jap dive bombers screamed down towards the group and the boy insisted that they leave him where he was and seek shelter for themselves. He lived through that bombing but he died later.

"At Munda a forward patrol saw some unarmed men clad variously in blue slacks and singlets.

"What are you doing here?" they were asked.

"Is this not the front line? We are looking for souvenirs."

"This is not the front line," they were firmly told. "This is in front of the front line. Clear out!"

"The Seabees are polite and courteous hosts and it was pleasant to sit and yarn with the "Chiefs" of a veteran battalion, Quinn and Cunningham, Lewis, Moshane, and Bill Butler.

"Lewis told me of a Seabee who had a bad rash over his body which had also got into his eyes and bunged them up. The doctors could give him nothing to relieve him but a native offered to cure him. He rubbed ointment over the man's body and in two days he was healed. But the native would not give away the secret of the ointment.

"I was hospitably entertained at the camp of a Seabee Special Battalion. We had turkey and ice cream for lunch! I talked with the Editor and Managing Editor of the Unit newspaper, a very creditable daily which is mimeographed and contains a cartoon drawn by the Editor."

----30----

WIN HIGH PRAISE IN AFRICA

Maybe the headlines overlook the Seabees, but there's no doubt about the high opinion that brother services have of our work. The latest pat on the back from the Amphibious Forces was directed to the job Company "C" of a Seabee battalion in North Africa did at an amphibious training base.

The base commander had this to say in a letter of commendation to Company "C":

"All of you are volunteers, most of you were exempt from military service, many among you left comfortable and profitable berths in civil employment or businesses to contribute your share to our country's cause. For this each and every one of you deserve praise.

"You are worthy of far greater commendation for the way you have done your jobs. Through your skill, your craftsmanship, your devotion to duty and long hours of work you have transformed this spot of ancient North Africa into a living example of what can be done by the American spirit and the American will-to-win. You have accomplished wonders.

"You have been good shipmates. You have lived up to the best and finest traditions of the service. We hate to see you go. That, however, is one of the laws of the Navy. Those of us whom you are leaving behind have the satisfaction of knowing that you will do a good job no matter where you go.

"There is one flag signal hoist in the Navy for which every fighting man-of-warman will willingly die in order to deserve. That signal is "Well done". You deserve it. To you the officers and men of Company "C", the Eastern Bases in Algeria hoists the signal "Well done"."

The commendation was signed by Commander H. H. Jalbert, D-V(G), USNR.

----30----