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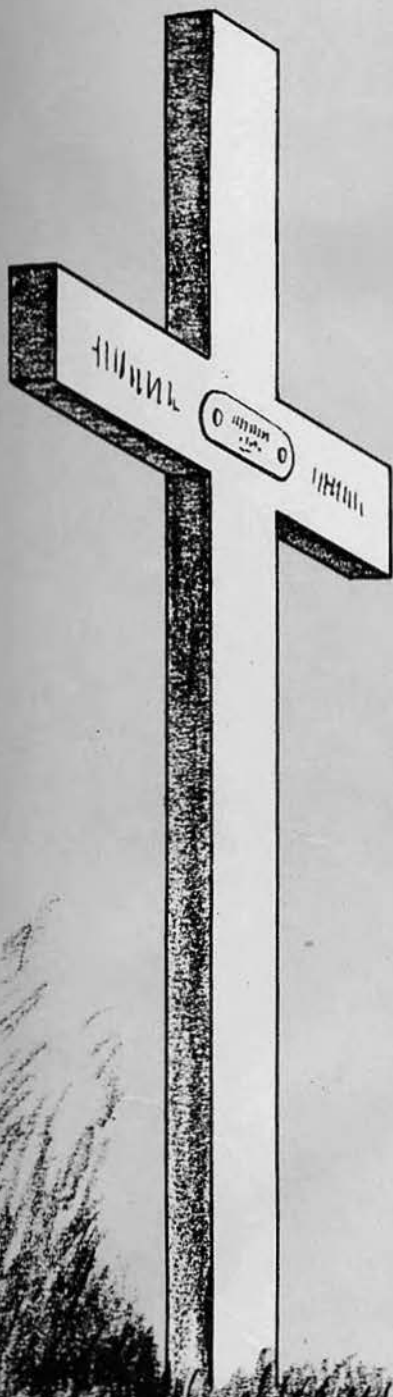
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SOPAC SAGA

57th SEABEES 1942 * 1945



HUMBLY DEDICATED
TO OUR LOST COMRADES

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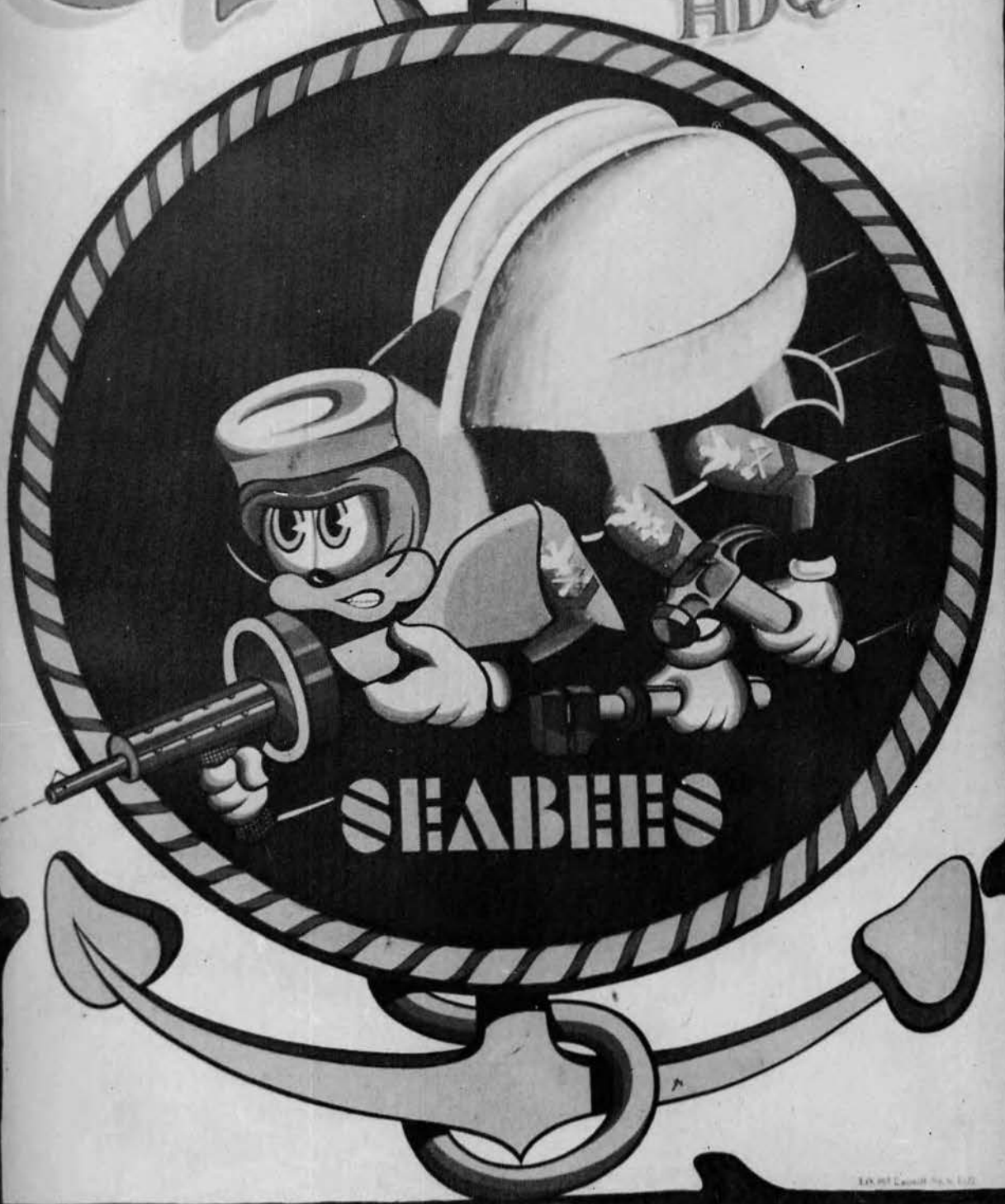
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57th BATTALION
HDQTRS.



SEABEES



LESTER M. MARX

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FOREWORD

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The United States was at war. Guam, Wake Island, the Philippines fell. American bases in the far Pacific were in enemy hands, and Pearl Harbor was badly damaged. This was a problem which had never been met by either the Army or Navy. To carry the war to the enemy, huge quantities of supplies were needed. To handle these supplies, extensive shore stations were needed. And these installations, with hundreds of great warehouses, hundreds of miles of roads, airfields and docks must be carved from the raw, jungle-covered Pacific islands in a hurry. To meet these staggering problems, something new in the realm of warfare had to be devised. From the Navy's Bureau of Yards and Docks came the answer: Construction Battalions—the Seabees.

Out of the Louisiana swamplands, from the Kansas plains, from roads, dams, mines and roaring factories, from towering steel and caisson sand, came the builders of America. Men to whom the roar and clatter of a bulldozer was music, men who had hung ponderous steel for lofty buildings, in whose hands machines would perform the last ounce of capability; men who could build anything, anywhere.

Their uniforms changed from overalls to Navy blue, but their tools were those they had known a lifetime. The Seabees have been compared with the Army's engineers. That is a comparison of opposites. The soldier is trained to fight; he is taught to build and becomes an engineer. These men knew how to build; the Navy taught them to fight and they became Seabees.

Through recruiting stations all over the nation the construction men poured into training camps. Six weeks of training in the use of their rifles and light arms; drill and a thin gloss of military training, and they were ready to sail for the embattled outposts where America fought for life. Short on discipline, perhaps, and awkward with salutes, but they were men who worked miracles of construction on the road to victory.

On November 23, 1942, twelve hundred of these men from forty-six states poured into Camp Endicott at Davisville, Rhode Island, to become the 57th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion.

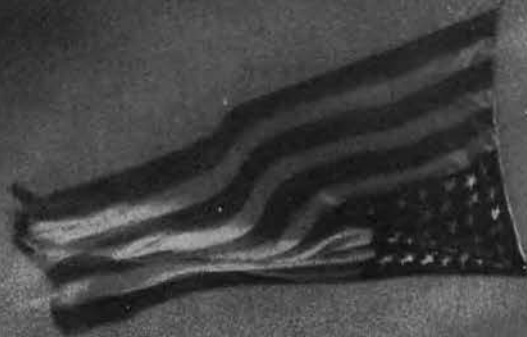


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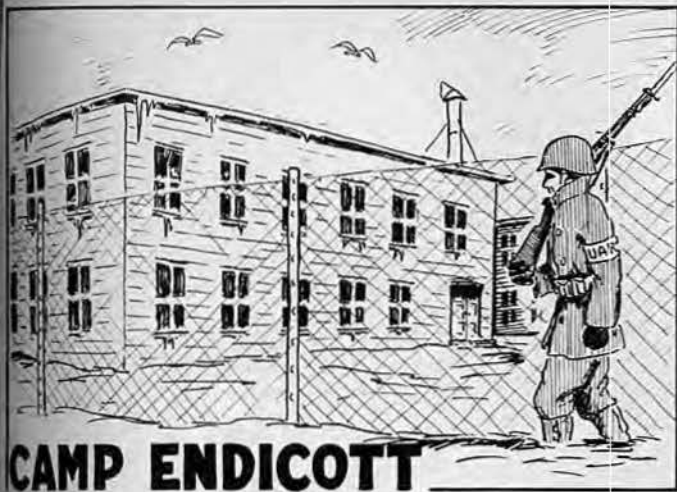
“Sir, the Battalion is Formed”





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

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.

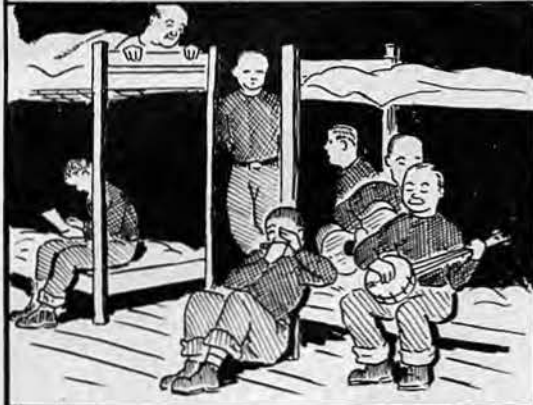
There more instructors and some old salts among our number taught us to roll jumpers and trousers and peacoats and properly stow three bushels of them in a two-bushel canvas seabag, at the cost of broken fingernails, skinned knuckles, and strangely knotted clothes-tops.

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 . . . assignments 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,

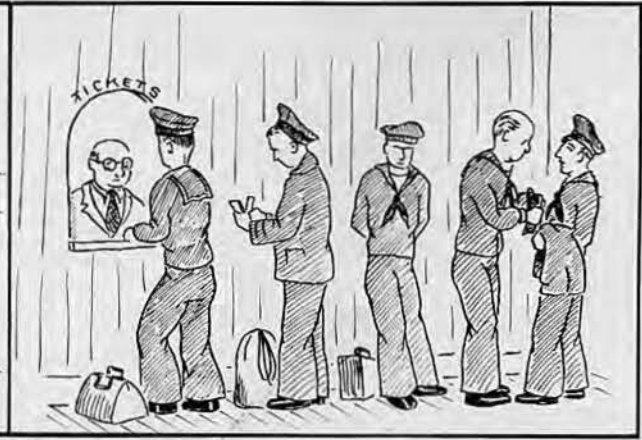


and there were always our letters to write. But when Taps sounded, bed was welcome to our weary bodies.

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.



Life was a little easier in our new area, where we were under the direction of the officers who were to go with us overseas. Drill slacked off a little, and instead there were interviews with our company commanders in which they catalogued our skills and abilities for future reference. Messenger duty, guard duty, K. P. duty, cleanup detail—firearms instruction and more drill—we were ready to move on somewhere, and scuttlebutt finally settled on either Mississippi or California.

Finally came the hour when at general assembly we were told we would leave the next day, January 29, and by the following evening we were rolling south in crowded day coaches. Sardines had nothing on us. For seventy-two hours we watched the countryside roll by as we sat, stretched, and tangled legs and elbows trying to sleep on the uncomfortable seats.

We rolled into Mississippi and Gulfport on February 2; back in the land of green grass and balmy breezes. And presto! Almost the moment we had tossed our seabags on the bunks in our new barracks, our officers appeared—we were to start our nine days' leave tomorrow!

We furiously delved through our gear to select the articles we would need at home. Making up the payroll, the Disbursing Officer and his staff

worked all through the night, while all available yeomen were grinding out our leave papers. The next day, the little railroad station was crowded with our blue uniforms in long lines at the ticket windows. Going home—the last time we would see our homes for two years.

Nine days later we were back at Gulfport again, and on February 15 we again boarded trains; this time heading west. Pullman cars! It was a nice trip. . . . Over the Mississippi, the plains of Texas . . . the deserts of the west . . . the Rockies . . . the groves and mountains of California—by the time we reached Port Hueneme, our destination, we had passed through 25 states since shedding our civvies.

We were stationed in Camp Rousseau, and on liberty nights we stepped out to the famed California hospitality, sightseeing, night-clubbing, visiting the "Canteen" at Hollywood. Other times we drilled, and quickly shook ourselves down into a well-knit organization.

More equipment was issued, and we knew it wouldn't be long now. We were given carbines, those deadly little guns that we knew were made for jungle fighting, and we got packs and canteens, mess kits, first-aid pouches, sun helmets, and mosquito nets.





Some of us were selected for technical training schools and rushed through concentrated courses in earthmoving, small boat handling, camouflage, small arms, pontoon assembly, and other kindred subjects. We grouched when caught for labor parties or guard duty, and learned to know each other thereby. We decided we were as tough as any other outfit, and from the chips on our shoulders we built our esprit de corps.

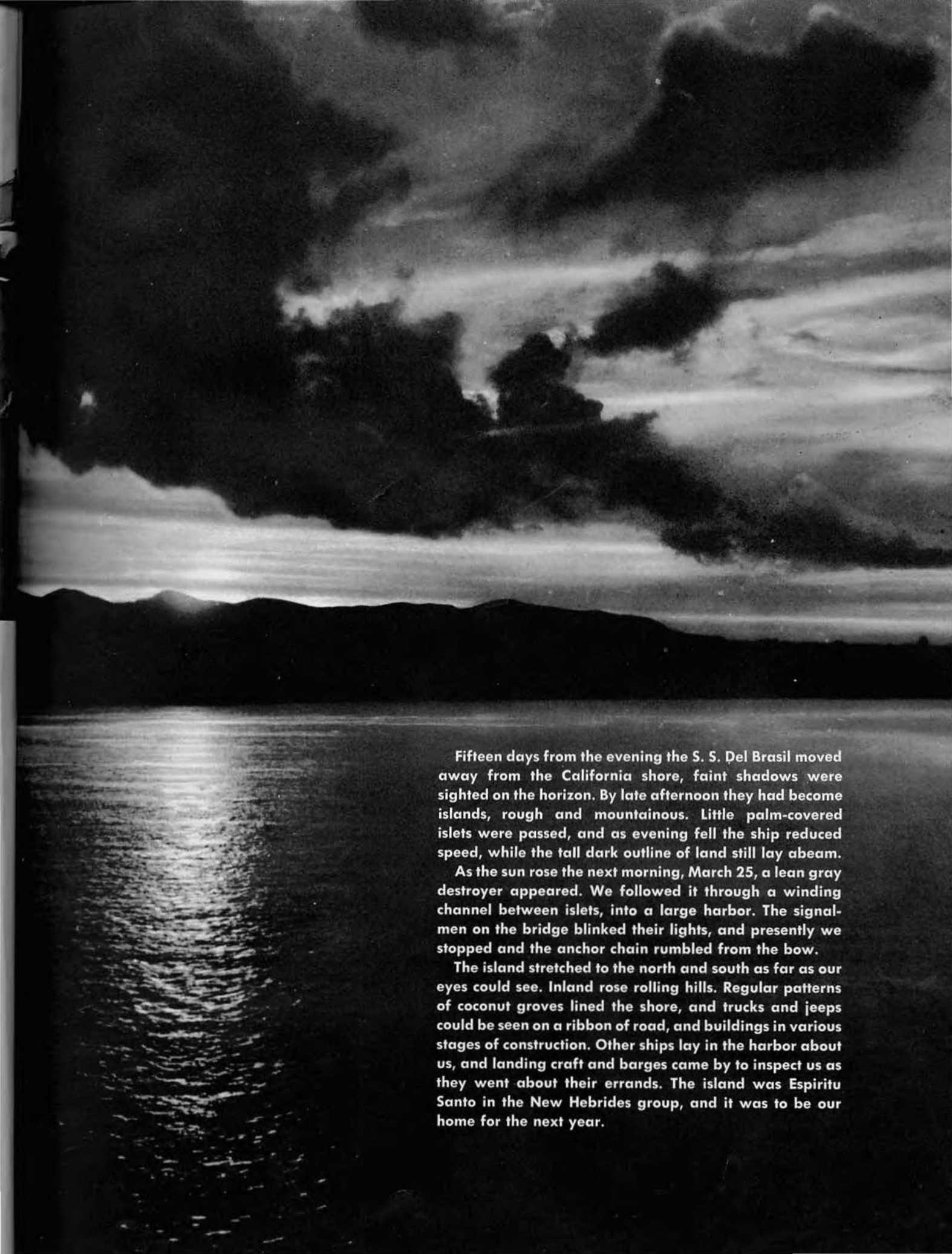
Then on March 9, 1943, with steel helmets dangling from the packs on our backs and our duffle-bags on our shoulders, carrying our carbines, we straggled across the dock at Port Hueneme, and as our names were checked off the muster lists, plodded on up the long gangway and aboard the S. S. Del Brasil.

Another battalion was already aboard, and altogether there were twenty-three hundred of us crowded into the holds, where we found three tiers of metal-framed canvas bunks in closely crowded rows. On these bunks it was necessary to put ourselves, our packs, carbines, duffle bags, and ditty bags. It couldn't be done, and topside (the upper deck) became a popular resort.

We lined the rail and waited; we had been told we would pull out at 2:30 P. M. All of us were eager to get under way. We waited—and at 5:30 P. M., after a delayed journey to Los Angeles, the Disbursing Officer came

aboard with the Battalion's pay. The ship's crew cast off the lines, and with a little tug foaming at our bow we swung away from the dock and out through the narrow channel into the wide Pacific. Silently we lined the rails, watching the mountain peaks of California fade away into the dark and distance.

We had a long voyage ahead of us, and soon settled down into the routine of the ship. Two meals a day, falling into long lines to the call of "57th Seabees—Chow down!" . . . long hours of sitting or standing by the rail, watching mile after mile of the unchanging, rolling water slide by . . . card games and reading . . . for some of us unhappy seasickness . . . the familiar call "Sweepers, man your brooms—clean sweep down fore and aft" . . . black-out every evening at sundown . . . harmonicas . . . an impromptu orchestra on deck at night. . . . The weather grew warmer until the crowded holds were stifling ovens. By day the sun beat down brilliantly on blue waves through which skittered swift flying-fish. The decks at night were crowded with our motionless figures, sleeping in the open to escape the heat of the hold. One day the word was passed over the ship's speakers—"Here it is—we're going over!" and we all became Shellbacks by virtue of having crossed the equator. We were seeing the world indeed, even though this part of it consisted of fathomless sea and empty horizon.



Fifteen days from the evening the S. S. Del Brasil moved away from the California shore, faint shadows were sighted on the horizon. By late afternoon they had become islands, rough and mountainous. Little palm-covered islets were passed, and as evening fell the ship reduced speed, while the tall dark outline of land still lay abeam.

As the sun rose the next morning, March 25, a lean gray destroyer appeared. We followed it through a winding channel between islets, into a large harbor. The signalmen on the bridge blinked their lights, and presently we stopped and the anchor chain rumbled from the bow.

The island stretched to the north and south as far as our eyes could see. Inland rose rolling hills. Regular patterns of coconut groves lined the shore, and trucks and jeeps could be seen on a ribbon of road, and buildings in various stages of construction. Other ships lay in the harbor about us, and landing craft and barges came by to inspect us as they went about their errands. The island was Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides group, and it was to be our home for the next year.



WE BUILD OUR HOMES

As quickly as possible the cargo booms were rigged out, and we started assembly of two pontoon barges. The ship was to be unloaded with these, as no docks were available. The pontoons, seven-foot cubes of steel, had been carried as deck cargo to aid in rapid construction of the barges. Those of us who had received training in this work far back in Davisville were now called upon. Working alongside the ship, they guided the pontoons into place, bolting them to corner-beams which made up the frame of the barge. The work continued through the night, with our pontoon men wrestling tons of metal for 72 hours, while the steel rafts pitched and tossed on choppy waves.

Unloading of the ship started immediately. We gathered our equipment and filed down the gangway into landing craft from the harbor's Boat Pool. The unloading lasted from March 27 to April 20, as it was necessary to have shelter for the groups leaving the ship, and until we were all ashore the holds could not be opened.

On April 14 the S. S. Theodore Dwight Weld arrived in the harbor with three officers and 25 men who had been left behind to supervise the loading of the bulk of the Battalion's equipment at Port Hueneme. The equipment did not travel with them, however, but instead arrived with the S. S. Peter Donahue on April 19. Over a thousand tons of necessary tools and materials were aboard the S. S. Peter Donahue. A delay in the unloading was encountered, as the two pontoon barges used in unloading the S. S. Del Brasil had been taken over by the Base Boat Pool. This necessary equipment was finally unloaded by a Special Battalion starting on May 9.

Clambering ashore at a small log dock, we were led up a steep hill through the coconut

grove just inside the beach flats, and found that our campsite was located in this plantation. We got our first introduction to true tropic heat as we tramped up this hill, loaded with packs and bags, drenched in perspiration.

Our surveying crews were among the first ashore, and quickly produced sketches for two camp sites, ours and that of the Special Battalion which had accompanied us. The coconut trees were spaced approximately 30 feet apart, making a convenient grid on which the tent and Quonset hut locations could be plotted.

At the same time that we were building our own camp, we worked on our first assignment, constructing the camp for the Special Battalion. Their campsite adjoined ours, and there we built Quonset huts for their quarters, throwing up sixty-seven huts in hardly two weeks, to provide accommodations for their thousand officers and men. We also built their three-wing mess hall, numerous heads and other facilities.

Some tents and cots were obtained, and the first crews ashore set about erection of the camp, with the tents springing up in apparent confusion beneath the coconut palms.

The two barges, each seven pontoon sections in length and three pontoons wide, carried approximately 350 tons of cargo ashore. The major part of this, however, did not arrive ashore until after the camp had been well established by using tents and cots borrowed from other units already installed on the island. We returned all of this borrowed material when our ship was finally unloaded.

Galley equipment was not at first available, and for some days our meals were obtained at the galley of a neighboring battalion located about a quarter-mile distant. Intermittent showers deluged our camp with a startling amount of rain, so that our boys from the Mississippi basin looked uneasily about for rising flood waters. The constant traffic through the camp soon introduced us all to the South Pacific mud. The soil was porous, and quickly made a luscious thick gumbo of glue-like consistency, often a foot or more deep.

For a while we paid considerable attention to the coconut palms and nuts. Our only water supply was the Lister bags placed about the camp area, and the tepid sweet milk of the coconuts offered welcome relief from the strongly medicated taste of the water. This promoted an epidemic of mild dysentery. The novelty soon wore off, and interest in coconuts became the mark of new arrivals in the South Seas.

By this time we were fairly well established,

with our own repair shops for trucks and heavy equipment, a tin shop, a sign painter, carpenter shop, laundry, tailor shop, barber shop, and shoe shop. As the days went by, we were progressing in all our tasks on the island, building roads, and putting in generators for our lights and refrigeration boxes. A pipe-line had replaced our Lister bags, and we even had showers to wash away the perspiration of the day.

In the off-duty investigations of our new home, we soon found that the beach area and the coconut plantations fringing the shore were the only cleared areas in the neighborhood. Beyond the plantations, inland, we found dense impassable jungle growth, lush with strange broad-leaved plants and a tangled web of lianas. Banyan trees with immense trunks of root-clusters reaching a thickness of fifty feet or more towered over the jungle undergrowth; there were trees with huge buttressed stems like the partitions of a house, and many other indigenous varieties, while the earth beneath them, shaded by the thick leaves and never touched by the sun, was covered with a mat of decaying vegetation. Lizards and insects moved everywhere in the jungle, and we stumbled on occasional pig tracks, and were told of big boars in the jungle fastnesses with eight-inch tusks.

Inland, the rolling hills became more irregular, and the interior was almost entirely composed of rugged, precipitous mountain ranges up to 5,500 feet above sea level, with peaks usually hidden in the clouds.

Espiritu Santo is approximately 45 miles wide, east and west, and 75 miles long to the north and south. The northern portion consists of two peninsulas enclosing Sts. Philip and James Bay, which is 20 miles wide to the east and west and extends 30 miles south into the island proper. The terrain in this northern sector of the island is faced with high bluffs, and for this reason there were no extensive military installations in that area, the major development being confined to the more gentle topography of the southeastern shore. This shoreline faces on Segond Channel, on the opposite side of which is Aore Island, roughly five miles in diameter. The channel is about 15 miles wide, and affords an excellent anchorage.

We Seabees soon met numbers of the natives of the island, and mutual admiration was questionable. The natives of the New Hebrides group are predominantly Melanesian; small in stature, very black, and semi-savage. The usual garment is a loin-cloth or "lap-lap"; scabrous bodies are tattooed and scarred in crude designs, and noses

are often pierced to carry a sliver of carved bone. Pygmy tribes were on the island in small numbers, remaining in the remote slopes of the mountains; however, some were occasionally seen by us. We were interested to know that the natives in the not-too-distant past were well-known for their local sport of head-hunting, and there were cases where "long pig"—man—had been eaten.

We most frequently saw the Tonkinese laborers who had been imported from French Indo-China by the plantation owners. Of small stature and yellow-skinned, their most outstanding feature was their blackened teeth, caused by constant chewing of lime and betel-nut.

The white population consisted of a number of French and English families owning or operating the coconut and coffee plantations. Most of these plantations were concentrated along the south shore of Espiritu Santo, though others were scattered on various islands of the group. Villages were few in number, the largest being Luganville, which was centered about an old French mission. Several other mission compounds were located on the island.

The high temperatures and high humidity made the climate very oppressive to us, having come direct from training in sub-zero temperatures. The annual rainfall was about 120 inches, most of it occurring in the six months from November to April.

At the time we landed, the Japanese invasion had carried as far as the Solomon Islands, where the Nipponese were too busily engaged to proceed further south to the New Hebrides. Thus there was no enemy action taking place on the island, other than threatened air raids. Before the outbreak of the war, small detachments of Japanese had held land maneuvers in this area, and had built several structures of minor importance, such as narrow roads and small foot-bridges.

Such was the island which we came to know familiarly, but not affectionately, as "Santos".

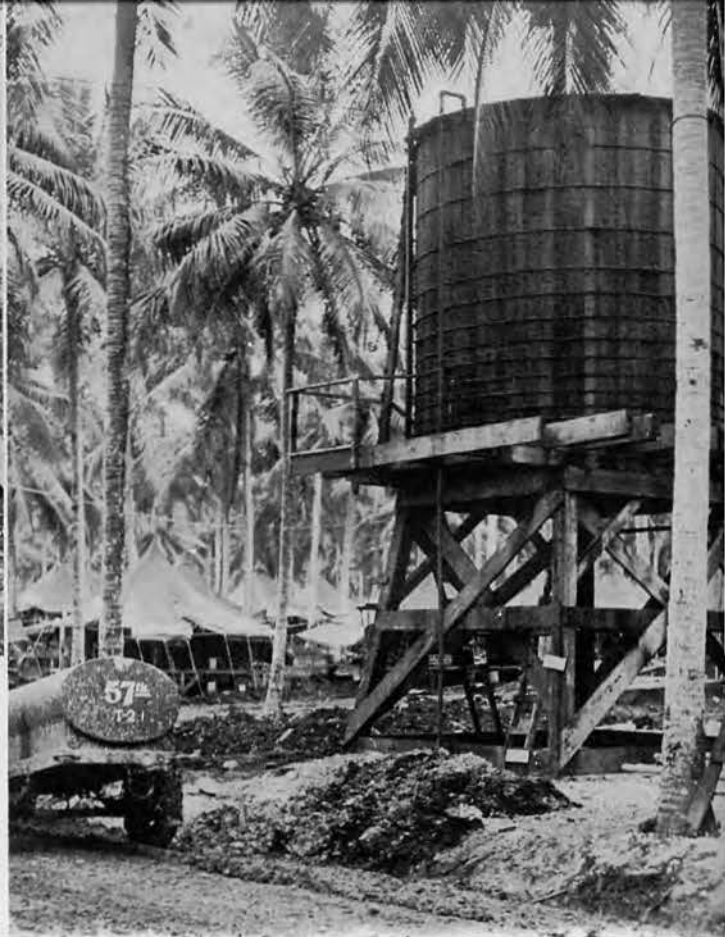
Our Camp Area at Santos





Blasting Heads

15,000 Gallons
of Fresh Water



Completed Mess Hall



GSK Issue Tent



GSK Interior



Sheet Metal Crew

Carpenter Shop



Coral Surfacing
Heavy Equipment Area



8 yards at a crack





Charlie's Foxhole



What could this be?

"Shorty" and the Bell





▲ Third Special Battalion Mess Hall

▼ Third Special Battalion Quonset Hut



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.

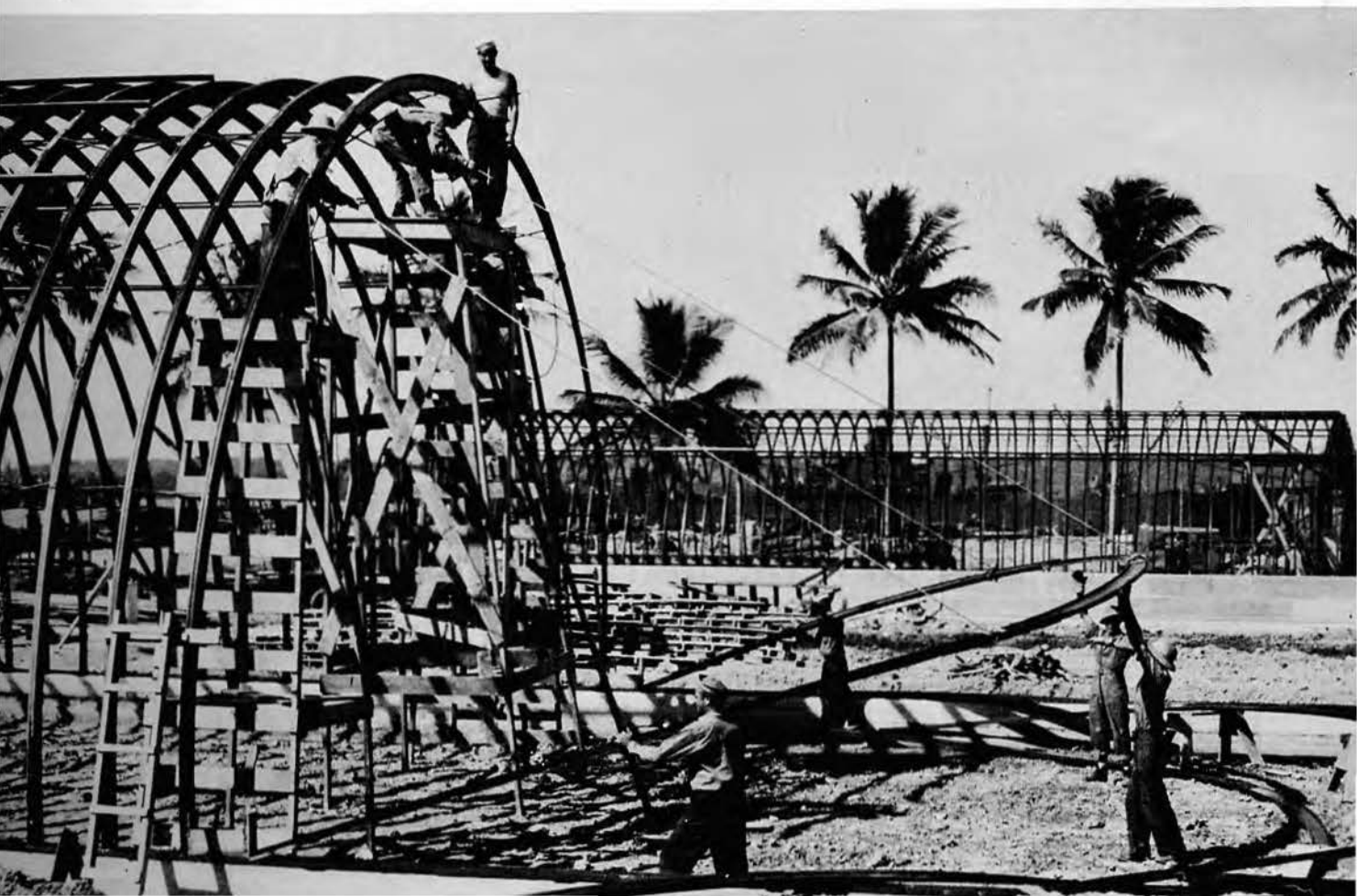
A favorite method of disposing of trees and stumps cleared from the area was to push them off to one side into the adjoining space. Fate caught up with us at last, however, and we ended up with an incredible amount of trash at one end of our warehouse area, with the buildings built up all around. Security 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. . . .





▲ Aligning Footing Forms

▼ Erecting the Steel Ribs



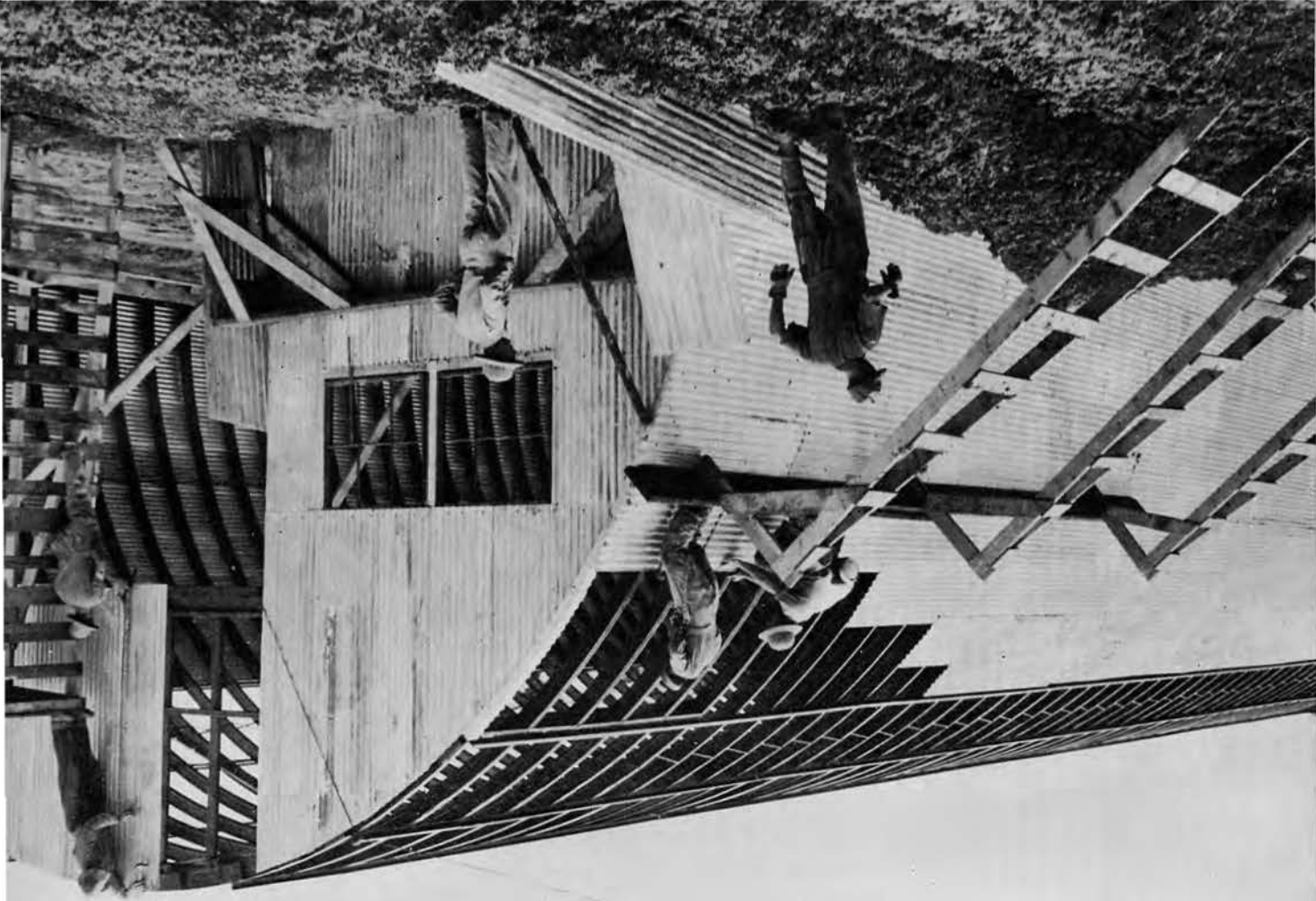
Mixing the Concrete



Pouring the Deck



Sheeting





▲ Completed Quonset Warehouse . . .

▼ . . . and Ammunition Magazines partially complete





▲ Setting Reefer Panels ...

▼ ... in Reefer Sh





TANK FARMS



Preparing location for 10,000 barrel Tank



While our GSK project was still under way, we took off on a new project that gave us a different type of work to perform. We were assigned to the job of building an Aviation Gas Tank Farm ("Tank Farm" indicates a large tank dispersal area); a Motor Gas Tank Farm, and a Diesel Storage group, totaling to forty tanks of 1,000-barrel capacity each, and two tanks of 10,000-barrel capacity. In addition, we laid over 52,800 feet of pipe ranging from four inches to eight inches in diameter to connect the tank systems, and six complete pumping stations.

Many of us were steel workers of long experience, well acquainted with this type of work, and we soon had several good "pushers" or job foremen picked out, and the crews shook down into smooth-working units. Sometimes we worked in the shade of tall palm trees, and sometimes we worked on open flats under the full weight of the tropic sun. Frequently there was rain (of course). The tank foundations were of sand, hauled from the distant beaches, and the rough grading for these foundations met everything from soft mud to solid rock. But in three months the tanks were in use and supplying fuel to the fleet and its aircraft.



Laying the Deck

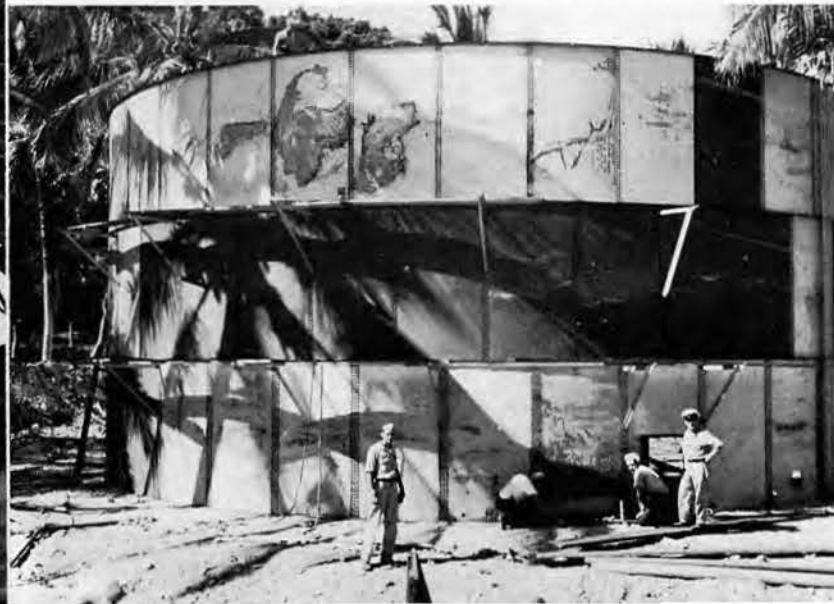


Erecting Staves

Setting Rafters for
the Roof Plates



Completed Tank





Pipe Ditching - by hand



A Wagon Drill was also used



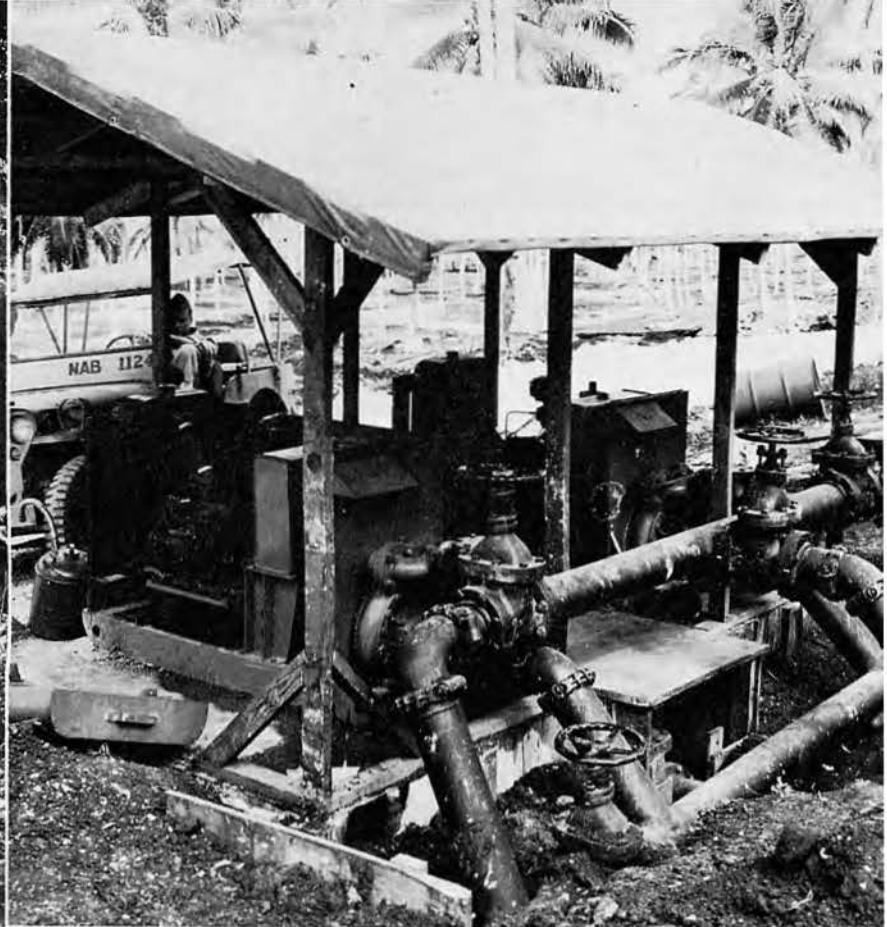
Quick-coupling Pipe ...



... was rapidly laid ...



d supported across ravines by Suspension Bridges



The Pumping Station . . .



. . . and First Tanker unloading



NAD ANNEX

The Naval Ammunition Dump Annex project was the largest excavation and road job we had on Santos. We took this work over shortly after another Battalion had started it. This storage area for the bombs and shells used to blast the Japs from the southwest Pacific was very badly needed, and we set to work with a will.

We had 15 miles of roads to build, and our bulldozers chewed their way along the path the surveyors had marked on the trees, clearing the jungle from the roadway at a rate of about one mile a week. The grading and coral dumping on the roads traveled close behind the clearing crews, and altogether we had some nineteen bulldozers operating on this job at one time, as we cleared the jungle, laid the coral, operated a huge coral pit, and put dirt fill over the magazines we erected. The clearing and grading of the roads through the jungle could be done only during the daytime, but otherwise we worked on two nine-hour shifts.

Our equipment included a one-and-one-half and a two-and-one-half yard shovel for loading coral, a three-quarter yard shovel loading dirt to cover the magazines, and a three-eighth yard dragline placing the dirt fill over the magazines, as well as from 25 to 30 trucks, including twelve monsters of seven-yard capacity.

The coral in the pit was hard to dig, and we used a number of methods before we found a good one. We found we couldn't dig into the bank, and were unable to provide men and equipment to drill and blast fast enough. Rooting and pushing with the bulldozers was unsuccessful, but we finally struck on the solution of loading the coral into pans with push-cats, then

piling the loosened material into stockpiles for the shovels.

On two sections of roads, we made short extensions to each side and coralled 41 triangular areas to be used for storage of aerial bombs. These revetments filled up as rapidly as they were constructed, and on several occasions when we had air raid alarms, those of us who were working in that area were somewhat worried at the countless tons of explosives about us.

We floored bomb storage revetments with coral, and they rapidly were filled until tons of explosives were piled around us. Our magazine crews used a truck-crane and compressed air wrenches to assemble their heavy steel buildings, which were then covered over with dirt fill, and after hitting their stride, they turned out a complete magazine every day.

Under each magazine we put a coral base one foot thick, and inside the magazines put a sand floor six inches thick, hauling the sand from a beach 10 miles away.

The rainy season was upon us before we were well along, but we plugged on through the bad working conditions, for the magazines were badly needed, and were filling up with vital munitions as fast as they were built.

Out in the jungle, the under-growth about us abounded with wild chickens. In fact, some of our chiefs were anxious to work on the night shift, in order that they might try to trap the fowl and obtain fresh eggs for breakfast. Some of our ambitious people managed to snare a pig that would have made a nice barbecue, except that they caught it over the weekend and did not find it for two days . . . that was a very dead pig.

Panning coral . . .



. . . and trucking coral . . .

. . . for roads like this



A Visit to Aore Island

We had our first experience with a large-scale beach landing at Aore island, just 15 miles across the channel from our main camp on Santos. In fact, it turned out to be a complete Seabee occupation in miniature, with the building of a complete military establishment from the ground up.

The beach landing was carried out with our usual fine technique. The first contingent of 60 men and Lieutenants Strohm and Wegweiser crossed the channel in two landing boats. We all carried our carbines and ammunition, and the men in the first lighter were also equipped with axes and machetes. With a bulldozer aboard, the first boat ran straight into the shore. A fringe of jungle rose from the edge of the water, and when the ramp was lowered the bulldozer charged into the undergrowth, breaking a path for the axemen. We quickly cut a rough road through the jungle growth for about a hundred feet, opened the way into a coconut grove.

The second boat with another 60 men and tents and cots for the camp then pulled in and the supplies were quickly unloaded and muscled over the road to the camp site. By evening our tents were erected, and a lighter had brought over the "rolling galley", a structure mounted on a truck chassis and carrying all the kitchen necessities for the camp, from which the first meal on the new location was served at suppertime.

Our crew at peak numbered about 250 men and was made up of workmen in various trades who were drawn from the different companies, with Company C providing the largest delegation.

The palm grove was an ideal camp location except for one thing. The soil was sandy in texture and even in rain did not form the thick mud we were accustomed to on Santos. Mosquitoes, however, were very plentiful, rising in clouds from the countless coconut shells lying beneath the palms. Immediately after our camp was established, malaria control work started. We cleaned up the coconut shells, drained the water pools and marshy spots; constantly sprayed all ruts and puddles in which water collected.

We had reason to be proud of our record on malaria, too. An anti-aircraft gun crew was located in a small camp on a hill about 2 miles from our site, and almost thirty per cent of their men had caught malaria. We were on the island for three months, and in all that time didn't have a single case. To help out in prevention of the disease we were fed atabrine tablets—the little yellow pills that combat malaria. We took three of them a day for the first twenty-one days and

then continued taking one pill a day for the rest of our stay. The result was that malaria did not show up, but we did—the drug turned our skins a nice yellow color that served as a trade-mark on our visits back to the main camp, showing our mates that we belonged to the Aore crew. Later our jaundiced skins faded to normal when we returned to Santos, which was just as well.

We played softball with the anti-aircraft gun crew and built small handy gadgets for them, such as ping-pong tables and paddles, and on alternate nights we attended each other's shows. And it was a pleasant feeling at night to know that in case of an air raid, those fellows were out there with their rapid-fire guns, ready and waiting.

During our stay our camp functioned as a complete unit. It was a miniature of the battalion camp, complete with transportation, supply, and heavy equipment departments housed in 16x50 tents, and our theatre with a 16-millimeter projector, where pictures were shown every other night.

That theatre is deserving of honorable mention. The sand at the beach where we had landed made a natural amphitheatre, so we set up a screen made of two poles and a bedsheet a few feet in from the surf, and our own chairs and benches arranged on the sloping shore provided the seating. The base recreational facilities on Santos sent over a projector, operator, and films three times a week, using one of our small boats for transportation. The operator, by the way, was a gent named Phil Reed, a CPO attached to the base. Before entering the service, Phil Reed had been a movie actor—and while on the island had the curious pleasure of showing a picture in which he had been starred—"Song of the Islands" with Dottie Lamour!

When we were getting ready to leave, the anti-aircraft gun crew came down and gave us a stage show. We threw up a sixteen-foot-square stage at our "beach theatre" for the occasion. They had a band that included such instruments as a gallon water-jug, helmets, a set of drums, a guitar, and harmonicas, and made unexpectedly good music. There were singing and dancing and comedy acts, and before it was over we were getting volunteers from the audience to give them a stage show too at the same time. One of the events of the evening was when one of our group gave a recitation of a ditty named "Christopher Columbo" in the unexpurgated edition. After that we went back to Santos. . . .



Landing at the beach



Bulldozer at work
on beach road



Rolling Galley

Excavating for Grease Rack

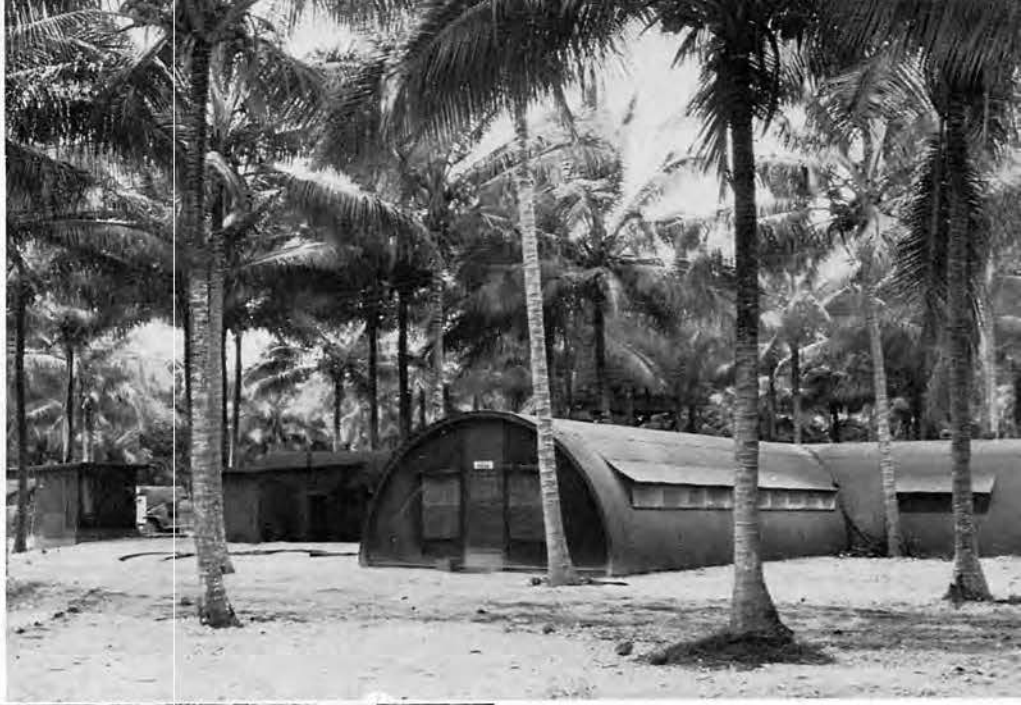


Completed Improved
Grease Rack -
Temporary Mess Hall
at left rear

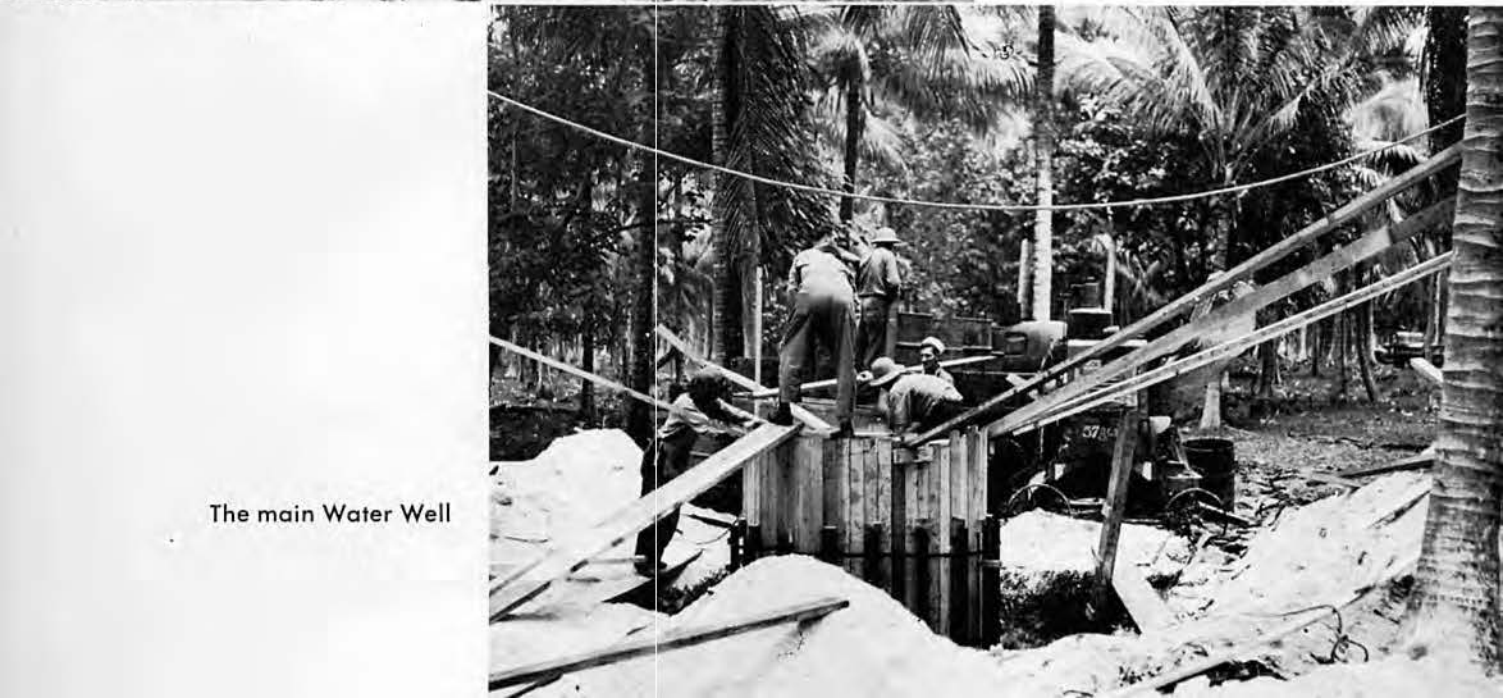
Mess Hall
under construction



Completed Mess Hall



Recreation Building



The main Water Well



We built roads like this . . .



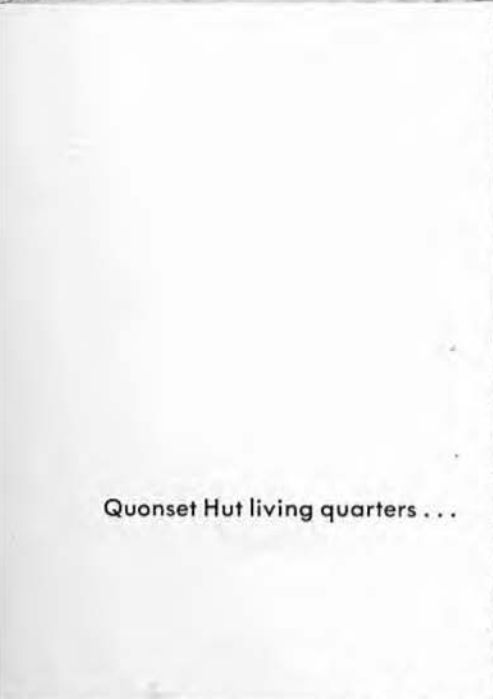
. . . Ammunition Magazines like this . . .



. . . Mine Warehouses with
Revetments like this



Rows of Warehouses for Shops
and Storage like this . . .



Quonset Hut living quarters . . .



. . . In long streets like this . . .

... Drainage Ditches
for Malarial Control ...



... and Pontoon Docks ...

... Culverts made from
discarded oil barrels



Tank decks were laid
on graded sand bases . . .



. . . sides were erected
with A-frames and
Gin-poles . . .



. . . three staves high



▲ ... Seams were caulked ...

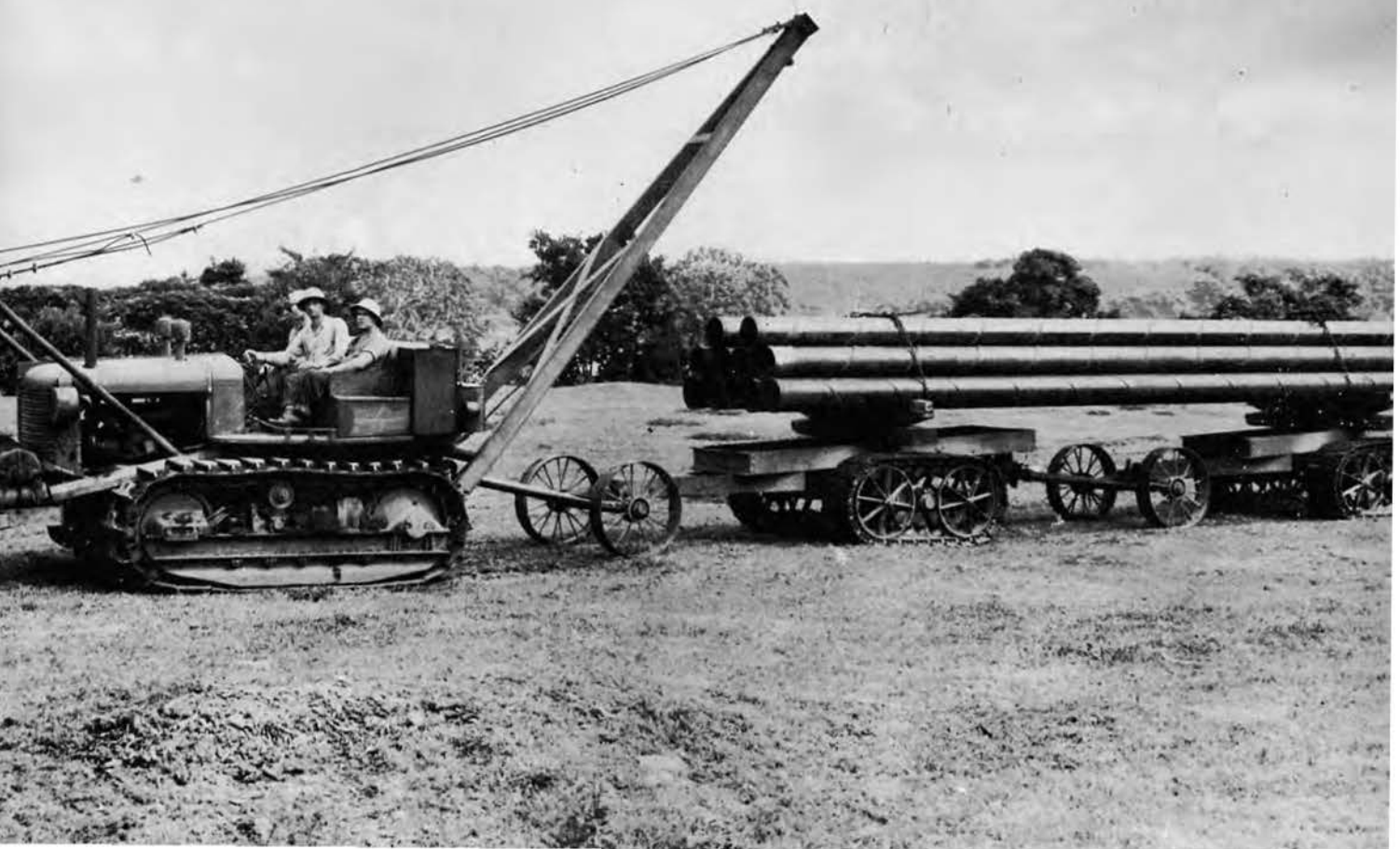
▼ ... and the Tank completed



Ditch Digger churning
Pipe Trenches . . .



. . . while Tractors
brought Pipe
to the job





Seaplane leaving mail
at Pontoon Dock

Our electricians proved themselves versatile indeed when they went to work on the Cruiser Drydock, for there they took over the wiring of an intricate system of lights and pumps. We provided carpenters too, and all hands did so well at this unusual work that they received high praise from the officers in charge.

At the Seaplane Base, we did an all-around job, building almost everything but the seaplanes. Almost a half-mile of sewer lines were laid, and six buildings erected there. Coral roads and parking areas were built, and the installations even included a barber shop and a laundry.

Cruiser Drydock



Laying Pipe



Valve and Pump
installation

Tank Farm



BOMBER ONE-FIGHTER ONE-BOMBER THREE



Surfacing Bomber One

At Bomber One we made our acquaintance with Marsden Mat, that metal jigsaw puzzle which every Seabee battalion should know. In fact, our job included re-laying a thousand linear feet of the steel matting on the field's runway, after regrading that section and laying a new coral surface.

We also made the ditching and pipe for a complete new drainage system. We got clever with this part of the work, by the way, and used the material we removed from the ditches as fill on another location to provide a 2400-seat theater area for the airfield personnel.

We also cleared and surfaced a large airplane parking area, and as usual, the major part of our earthmoving was done in the rainy season.

During all the time we were working, the field was in daily and heavy use. Navy patrol and training flights were flown from the flight strip, and the taxi areas and parking spaces were aswarm with planes . . . sometimes we felt just a bit out of place, with our lumbering heavy equipment, and sometimes such items as a two and one-half yard shovel, a one and one-half yard dragline, or any one of from 8 to 10 tractors might be found rambling nonchalantly down a taxiway between the graceful planes. We used 20 trucks on this job, too, and sometimes the boys took advantage of those nice, smooth taxi lanes . . . several were told they should draw flying pay or slow down . . . there was at least one case where one of our speed demons started out



Grading Bomber One

empty from a dumping spot just opposite a dive bomber that was taking off . . . they were still traveling neck-and-neck when the bomber took to the air.

The planes flew 24 hours a day except for one period of two days when we laid a series of conduits across the width of the flight strip.

The rain whimsically blew a parrot to the ground where it was captured and added to our zoo.



▲ Acres of Marsden Mat were laid

▼ Concrete Crews poured foundations for Hangars





Finishing a Plane Parking Area



Red Cross Buildings at the Strip



Degaussing Station on Bogacio Island

Our work on Bogasia Island was bathed in a pioneer spirit, for 15 of our men traveled to the uninhabited islet to do a complete job of setting up facilities and living quarters for a Degaussing station. This was the first Battalion project finished; understandably so as it consisted only of two Quonset huts, a well, a water system, a shower and a head, providing accommodations for about 25 men.

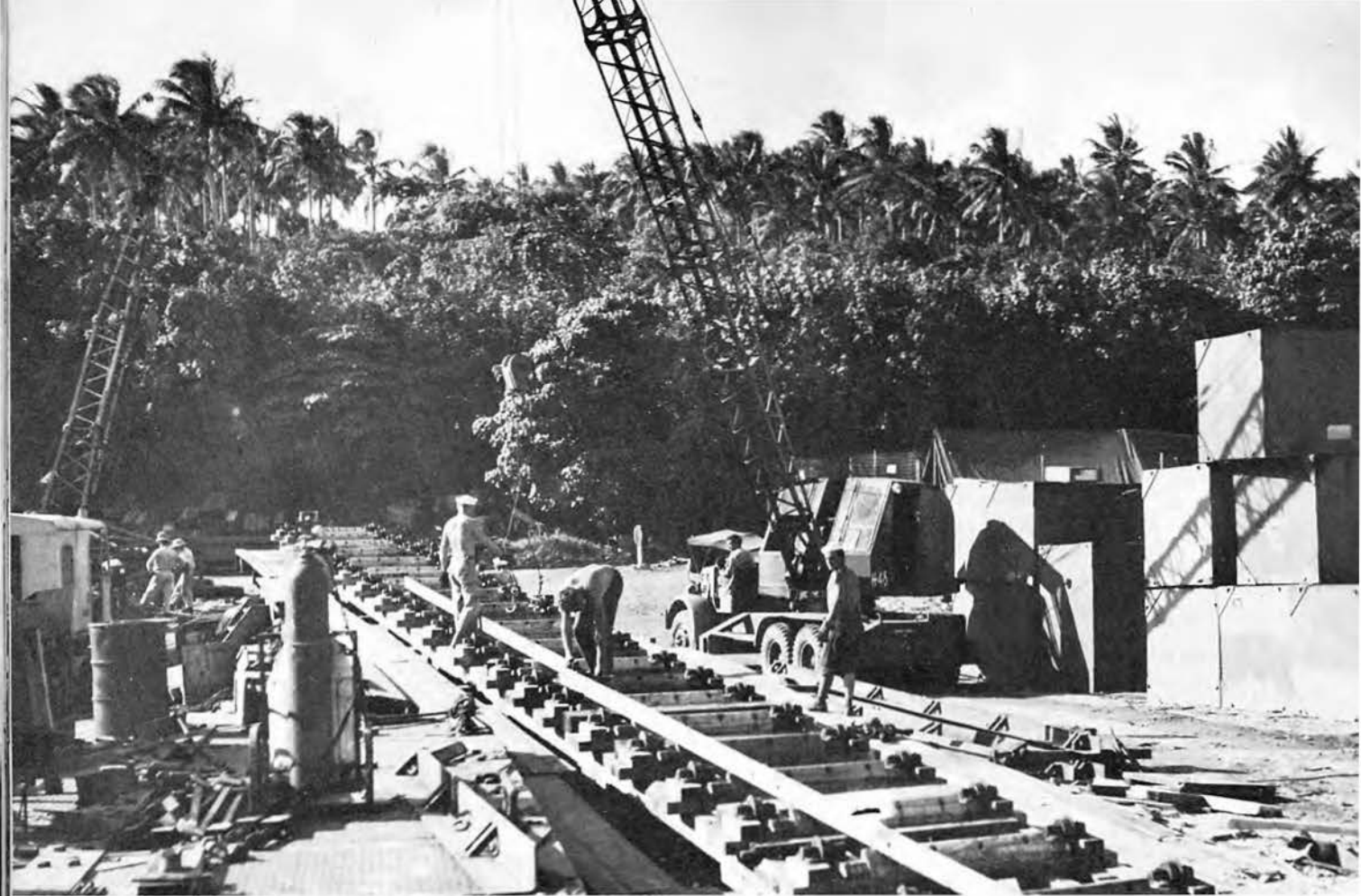
No equipment was taken on this job, and all the clearing of the jungle on the site of the project—a space of about an acre—was done by hand. Altogether, the job took just three weeks.

It was a pleasant life with some interesting incidents for our 15 men. Bogasia, well outside the harbor, is a little poker-chip of an island, about two-thirds of a mile in diameter and almost round. Soon it was discovered that the "uninhabited" island had pigs—large numbers of which came into the camp at night. There were also rats—wood rats, nice clean little fellows, who were extremely tame. They moved into the tents shortly after the Seabees. Fishing, however, according to one of our corpsmen, "Junior" Harvill, was not too good. Having little to do in the medical line, he fished for 21 days and succeeded in catching just one fish.

And as usual, we did a little extra. Smitzes, our professional diver, was along on this project, and helped the officer in charge of the station in laying the Degaussing coils under water.

PONTOON ASSEMBLY





▲ Pontoons are assembled in strings on a Launching Way

▼ Assembled string ready for launching



Maneuvering pontoons
into position . . .

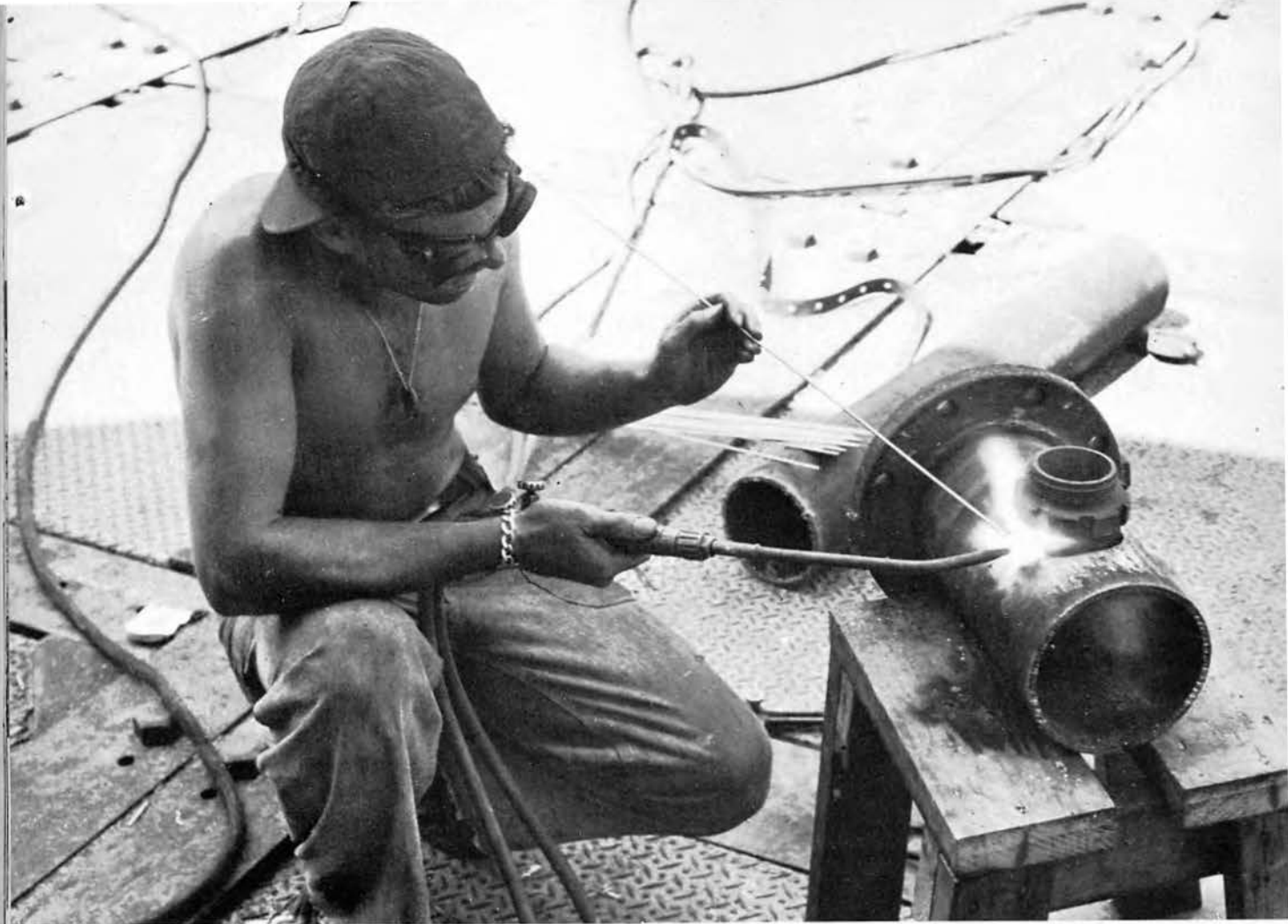


. . . tying the strings
together . . .



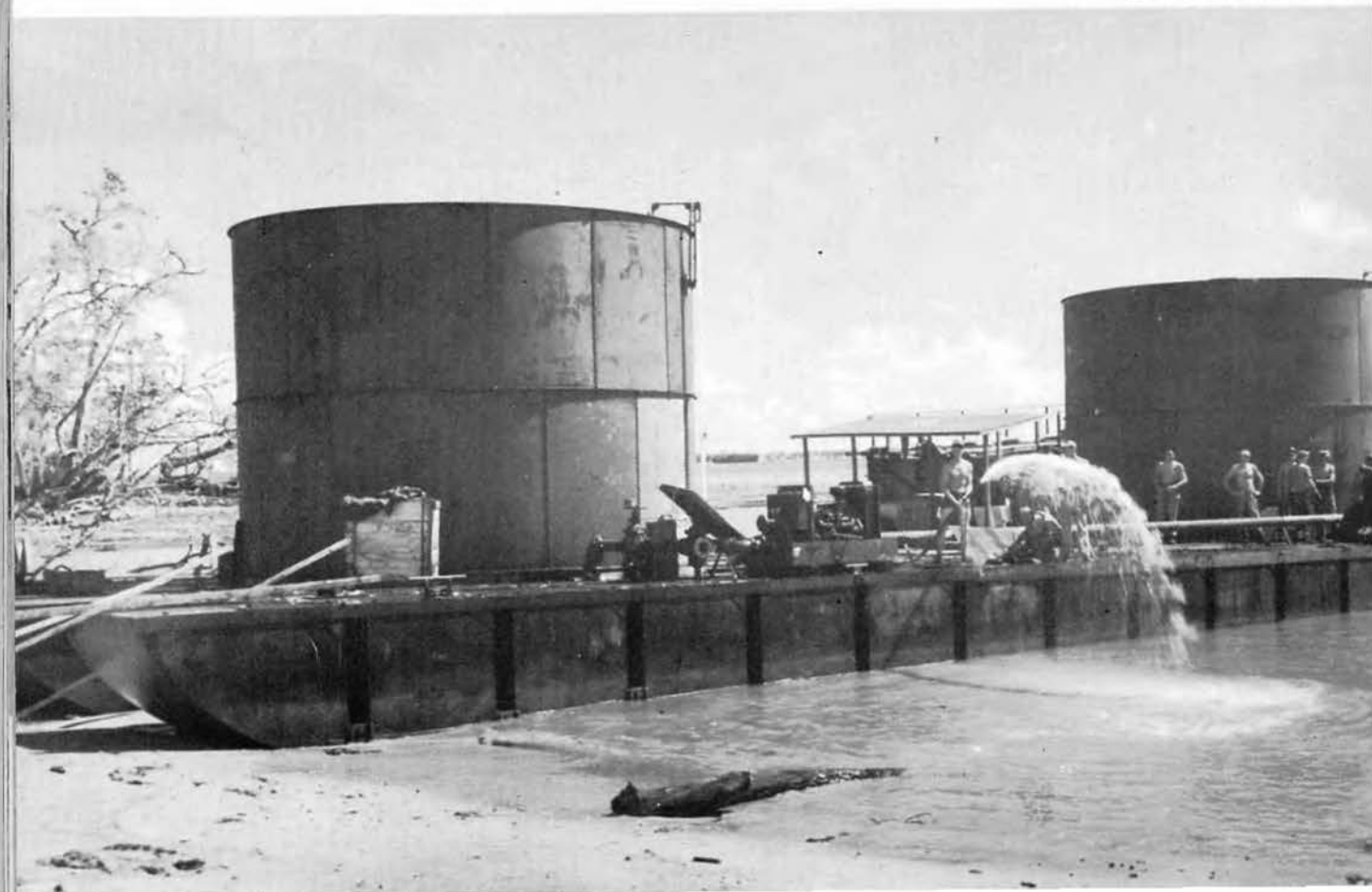
and final Barge
Assembly





▲ Welding fitting for a Water Barge

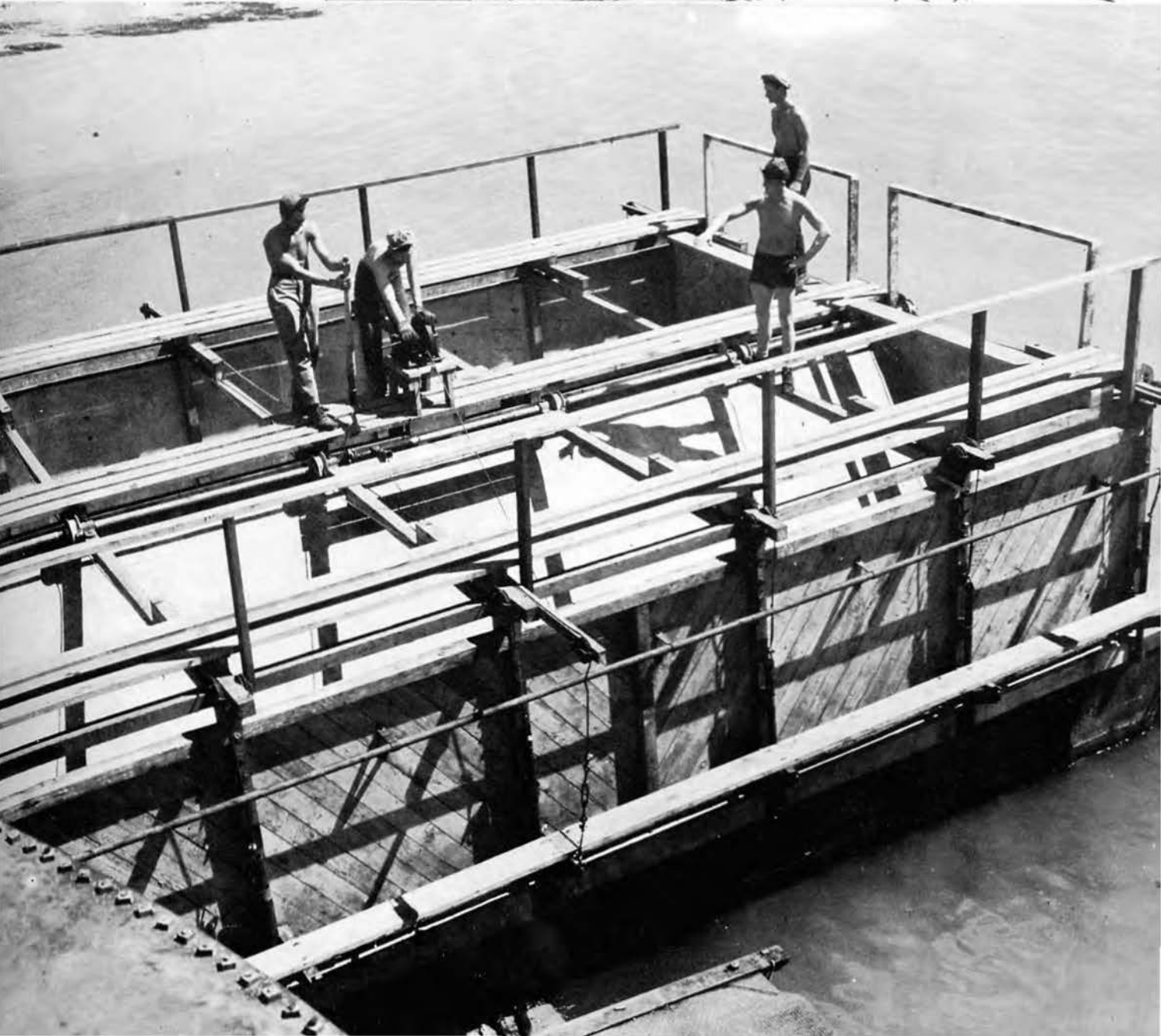
▼ Testing Water Barge connect

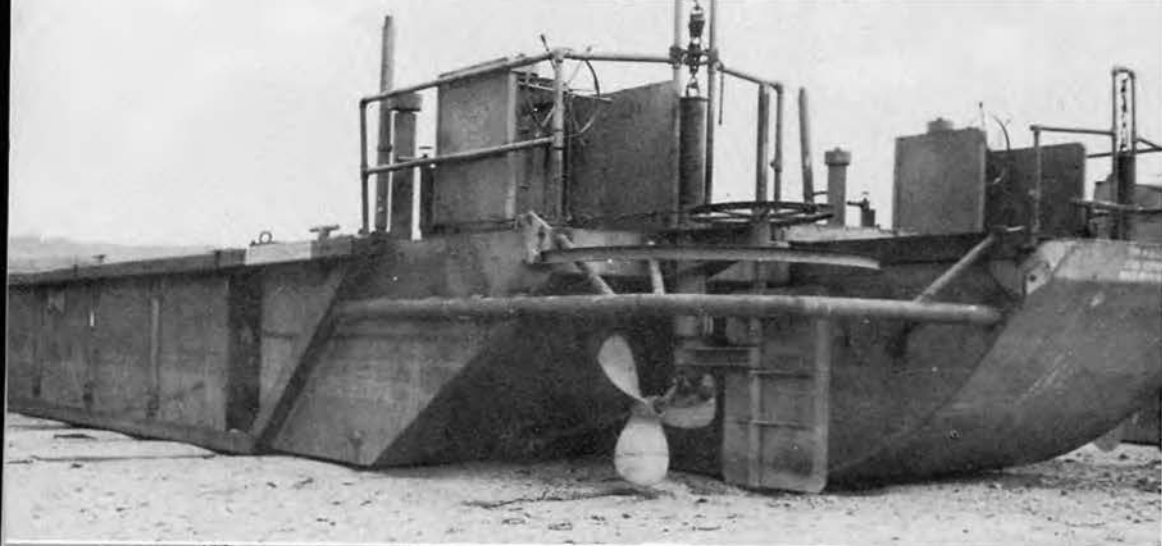


Pontoons were also
used for Floating
Stiff-legged
Cranes and . . .



Garbage Scows with
Mechanical Hoppers





The rugged
Propulsion Unit
that drove
the Barges

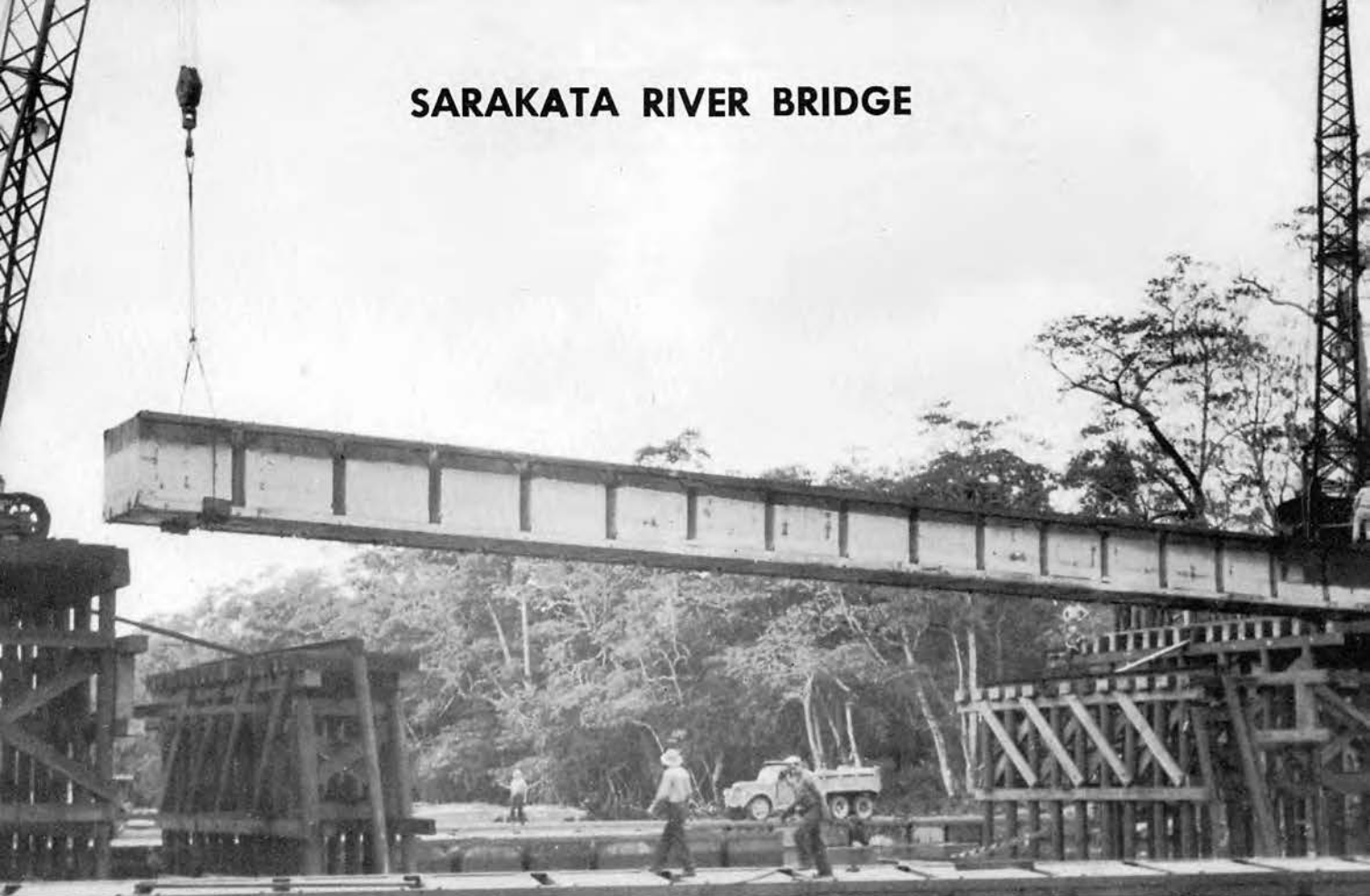


Temporary
Pontoon Bridges
were rapidly
constructed

Interior of
Pontoon Workshop



SARAKATA RIVER BRIDGE



The Sarakata Bridge was built by the 57th and 44th Battalions. These pictures show the placement of the Pontoon Strings



100 TON FLOATING CRANE



▲ Laying the Deck Plates

When the Battalion left Santos, the 100-ton floating, revolving crane was only 25 percent completed, and to carry on the work, we left three men and an officer behind. For some time after we had departed on our way to the new "Island X", no one was assigned from the Santos base to work with our steel experts, so our "Crane Detachment" took charge of some minor work for the CB Maintenance Units for about a month. Then on May 15, the MU's provided some help, and 100 Seabees were pulled from a Casual Draft, and work was resumed.

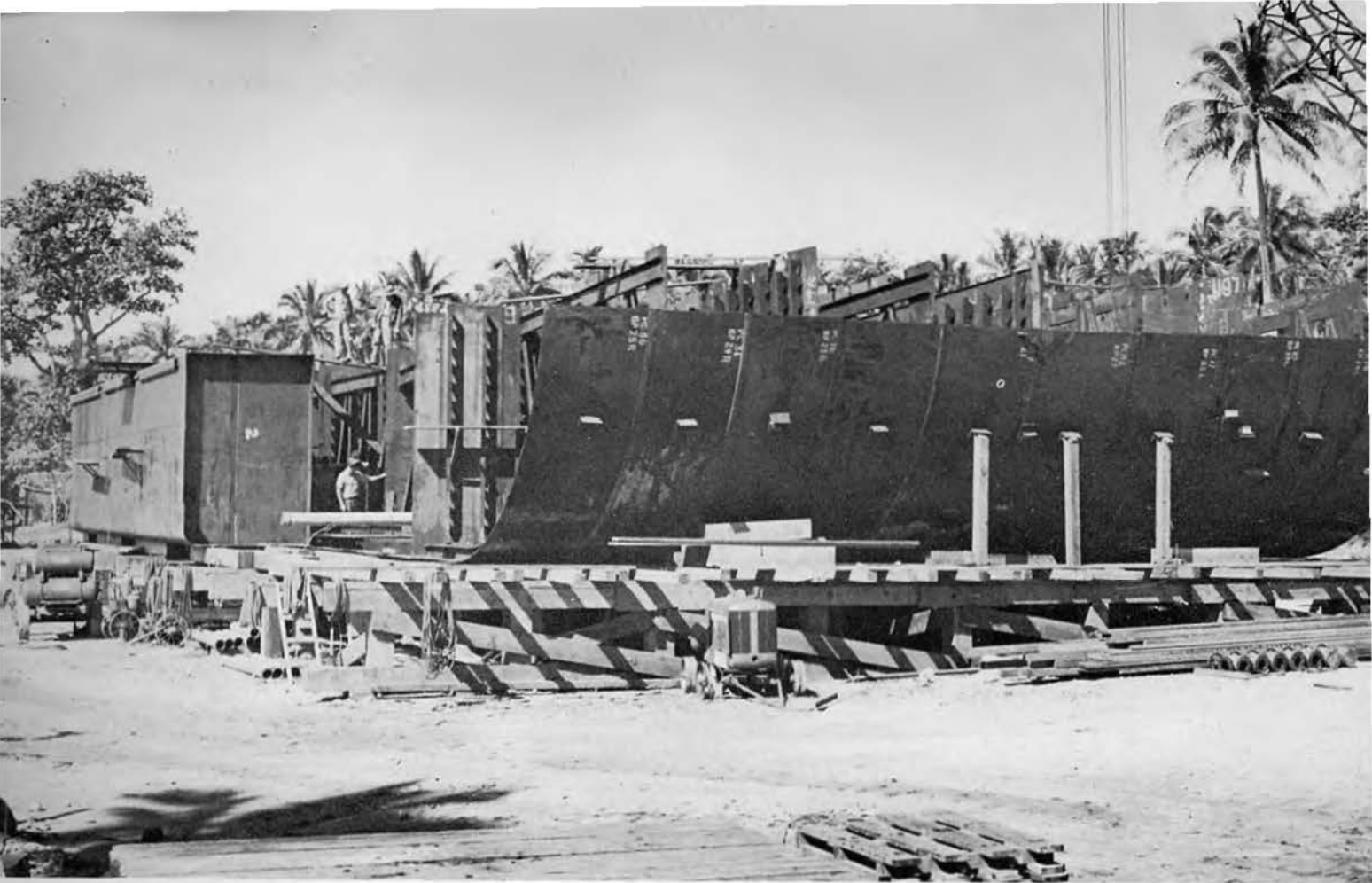
The hull of the crane was our job, and made up about three-quarters of the total framing involved. While our whole battalion was still at Santos, we had as many as 50 men working on it, and after our battalion had left, our four men left behind took on the roles of rigging foreman, general foreman, and welding foreman, and our officer remained in charge of the work. None of us saw the result of our work, however. When the crane was launched on August 4, our last four men had left to rejoin us.

▼ Barge Bow Assembly



The Casual Draft men who worked with the crane were later formed into a special detachment to work at such projects.

Our little "Crane Detachment" finally caught up with us by various routes. Our officer was able to catch a ride with an escort aircraft carrier, and the men traveled by LCI, stopped at various places, and changed ships several times.



▲ Hull as we left it

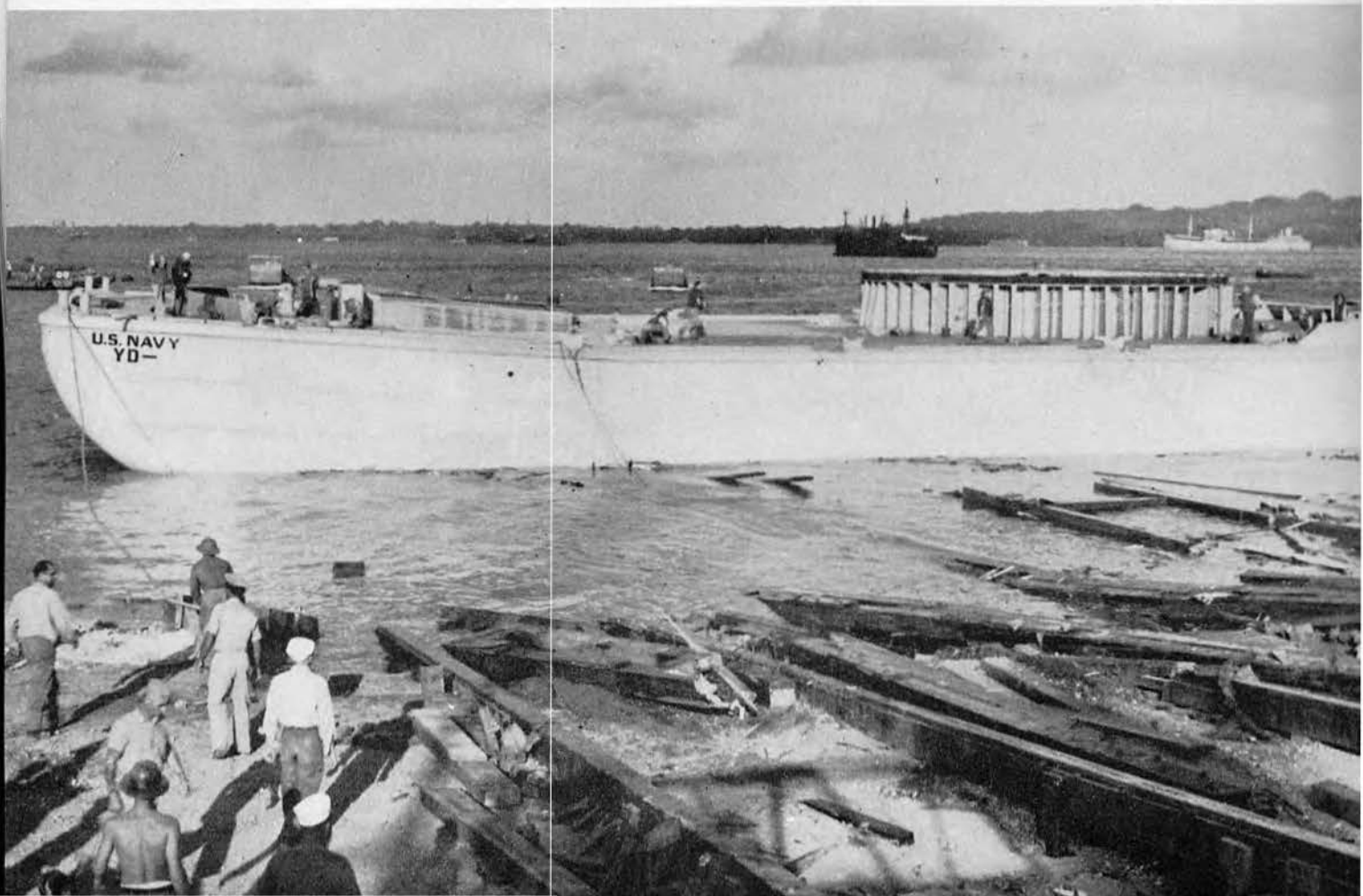
▼ Three months later, ready for launching





▲ There she goes

▼ Ready for outfitting



Rigging the Boom



Passing her final test





▲ These are the Commandos

▼ The Commandos build a Foot Bridge



By this time we knew that when we moved again, we would be going up the line—north, to establish a Navy base nearer to Japan. And by this time, our work schedules began to give us a little time in which to prepare for our move.

We didn't know what the situation would be, but we decided to be ready. Some of us were assigned to the "Commandos"—our specially trained landing force group. We figured we might need a fighting group when we first went in on our beach-head.

Our Commandos were picked for their physical stamina and previously-shown ability on the rifle ranges. They drilled in the usual parade formations—and also went out into the jungles to skirmish under battle conditions. Long marches and maneuvers in the jungle; instruction and

practice in the use of all types of light arms, from pistols to tommy-guns, light machine guns, and mortars, and they were ready to take care of themselves and guard the battalion under the unknown conditions that we would encounter to the north. They built bridges and set up picket lines in the night, and practiced at setting up guarded camps on over-night trips. Of course there were some amusing errors—like the time a perimeter guard was first tried, and they tried to take the relief men out to the guard posts in the middle of the night. To lead the way through the jungle, wires had been strung to the posts—but the guard detail lost its wire, and wandered off through the jungle, almost into a river . . . but those kind of errors were ironed out as time went on.



Going North

It was another rainy day when we again climbed the gangway of our transport. Instead of carbines we now carried rifles, but there was the old familiar setting—gray skies, and puddles on the dock, and the towering gray sides and big flat stack of the *Del Brasil*. The ship had been taken over by the Navy and renamed U. S. S. Robert S. Elliott. We embarked on March 28, 1944, exactly a year, to the very day, from the date some of us had left the transport to go ashore at Santos. We regarded the low, swift ship with proprietary interest—on the gangway someone remarked "We must have a lease on this thing!"

Another Construction Battalion and a detachment from a third unit were aboard, and we were all heading for an unknown destination somewhere closer to Japan. On March 30 lines were cast off and picking up two destroyer-escorts on the way, we passed through the submarine nets

and headed to sea. The departure was made in the morning, and by the sun it could be seen we were moving due east, which caused loud speculation. Aore and Tutubi islands were passed, and then the course swung southward past Malo, then to the west, and finally northward, and the New Hebrides slowly disappeared over the horizon.

The first day passed uneventfully, but as evening fell the skies became overcast and the wind began to pick up. Shortly after dark, men who had been sleeping topside hurriedly gathered their mattresses and blankets and scurried below as hard-driven rain spattered the decks, and a short time later the others on deck were ordered to lay below; we soon found we were in one of the sudden Coral Sea storms. The ship pitched and rolled heavily in the heaving seas, and the men below decks watched the angles of the beams tilt steeply as they rolled from one side of

their bunks to the other. . . . There was considerable unrestrained seasickness.

Number Five hold aft spent an especially interesting night. It was located directly under the galley, and during the night a large quantity of assorted crockery and tin mess trays got loose. As the ship rolled, there came sounds of a metallic avalanche, piling up with a crash against a bulkhead, pursued by stamping feet of cursing messmen, with the whole uproar repeated again and again as the ship rolled. A few cups and bowls hurled down the companionway to crash on the deck below, and one section of bunks was slowly saturated with coffee dripping through a deck seam. . . . A Seabee who that night was standing watch on a 20-millimeter gun in a tower high above the deck claimed that on the deeper rolls he was dodging flying-fish. . . .

The next days passed pleasantly enough, and then on April 2 the pale outline of land was seen on the horizon, and a two-engined plane with British markings came swooping out of the sky to look us over. By early afternoon the ship was slipping between small islands and into the harbor at Milne Bay, New Guinea.

The scenery of the bay was one of the most magnificent sights of the Pacific. The bay was so wide that ships were invisible in the distance, and on all sides rose great mountain peaks veiled and outlined in clouds and mist. White threads of waterfalls laced the steep slopes, and rainbows arched perpetually into the canyons.

For four days we anchored there, then on the afternoon of April 6 we again got under way. This time our two small escorts were left behind, being replaced by one tall-stacked corvette that plowed sedately along ahead of us. We ran close inshore, between small islands, with the peaks of New Guinea always on the port beam. The sea was glassy smooth, and that night a bright moon silvered the mountains and the still water to make a scene of unearthly beauty. But we had little appreciation for the scene—it was a "bomber's moon".

Early the next morning the transport and its

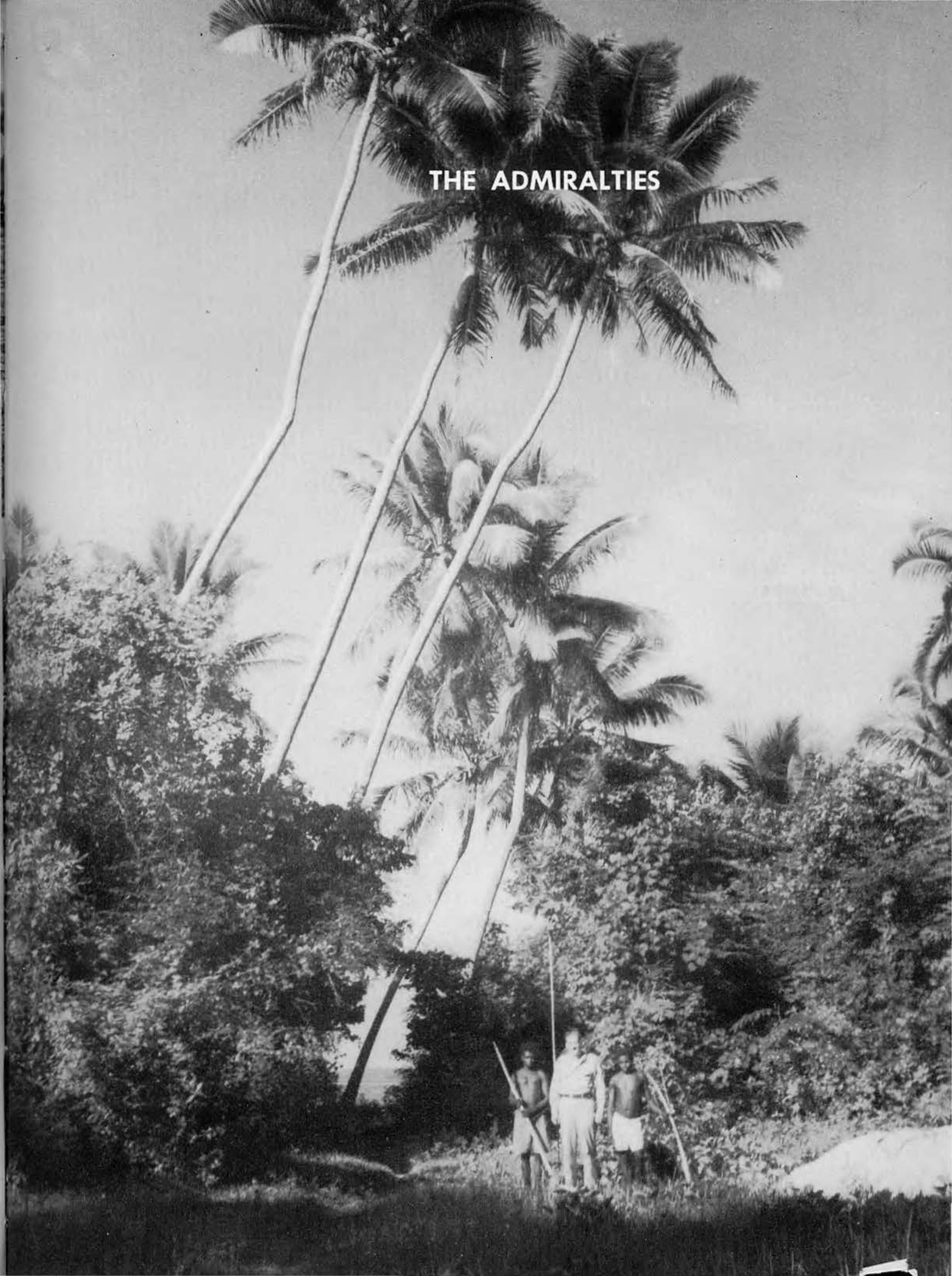
escort worked in close to land and dropped anchor at Buna. All that could be seen there were small, flat, palm-fringed islands offshore, and ragged palm groves edging the hills of the mainland. Other ships were at anchor, but no indication of a shore base could be seen.

We laid over there for two days, sailing again in the evening of April 9. Again it was only an overnight run, and early in the morning of April 10 the transport worked its way slowly into the snug little harbor at Finschaffien. There a tug edged it to the dock beside a Liberty ship, the ammunition ship U. S. S. Mount Hood.

We left Finschaffien on the evening of April 13. Those who had been following the course mentally made rough estimates of speed and the distances traveled, and grew decidedly uneasy during the following two days. At Finschaffien we had picked up two small escort craft, and our tiny convoy was moving north through the narrow strait between the Bismarcks and New Guinea. In the afternoon of April 15 the transport worked its way through offshore reefs and small islets and came to anchor in the lagoon between Los Negros and Manus Islands in the Admiralty group.

From the ship, Manus looked low and flat, its shore-line rising in sullen, dark jungle from the edge of the sea. A naval base was to be built there. It was to become an advanced base—the advanced base of the South Pacific. It was to be the cork in the bottle, cutting off the Japanese garrisons in the Bismarcks and Solomons. Enemy bases surrounded us on all sides, and at that time, though battered, were still active. We were 210 miles from Madang, a flight of only an hour and a half for a bomber. Wewak was 240 miles away, and Rabaul lay just 330 miles over to the southeast horizon. Kavieng was 220 miles to the east, and Hollandia 390 miles to the west. To the north only 610 miles of open sea lay between us and the mighty Jap naval base of Truk. Only the ocean and the United States Navy . . . the 57th Battalion was not disturbed during its stay on Manus.

THE ADMIRALTIES





Beachhead after the invasion of Manus Island

Manus Island, for the first time in our experience, placed us in territory which had been held by the Japanese. In fact, troops of the First and Seventh Cavalry divisions had made their assaults only a short time before we arrived. We landed before the island was officially reported secured, and were considered a part of the invasion forces. When we came ashore hundreds of Japanese troops were still holding out in the jungle fastnesses inland, and Army patrols were in daily action. All camps were kept well-guarded.

We gathered our packs, rifles, and ammunition and donned our steel helmets and went down the gangway into landing craft for the trip to the beach. The first wave of the Battalion to go ashore was made up of the picked men of the "Commandos" who had been trained as landing troops on Santos. Armed with rifles, sub-machine guns, and automatic rifles, they quickly set up a guard area around the beach for protection of the landing of the rest of us.

The beach where we made our landing was a small strip of sand available only through a narrow channel in the offshore coral reefs. Immediately behind the beach rose the jungle, dense and impenetrable, growing from a deep swamp.

Our second section came ashore immediately after the landing party had dispersed to guard positions, and laying their packs aside started at once to unload the supplies being brought in by the landing craft. Gasoline and oil drums were rolled down the ramps, through the surf, and piled at the edge of the jungle; crates and boxes of rations were passed from hand to hand and stacked at the rear of the sandy beach. There the first actual impact of war came to us; for as one stack of supplies was being started, a tumbled wad of rags was uncovered in the

bushes; it was a dead Jap. Others were found in the undergrowth along the beach. It had been a number of days since they had died in the tropic heat . . . there was little resemblance to anything human.

Too, here at the landing beach, we received a direct answer to the belief that all Japanese are small in stature. One of us foraging for souvenirs returned with a rubber raincoat which hung loosely from his shoulders, in spite of the fact that he was over six feet in height and large in proportion.

As new groups came ashore, our first unloading crews were relieved and left the landing to set up a temporary camp. We turned southward along the beach, splashing through the surf and skirting the jungle edge. A couple of hundred yards from the landing we passed an abandoned supply dump, piled with cases and cans of food bearing Japanese markings, swarming with flies and lizards and reeking of rapid decay. A little further along the beach were other scraps of evidence of the enemy's presence; discarded gas masks and canteens, and a log-covered pillbox caved in by a bomb or shell. Sickening stench were in the air, but we soon became inured to them.

Then we debouched onto the flats of an abandoned Japanese airstrip, and pitched our pup-tents between the shell and bomb craters for a temporary camp.

The coral surface of the airstrip was pocked and torn with holes left by heavy bombardment. On the inland side, deep revetments had been cut into the hillside bordering the field, designed to shelter the aircraft used there. In one of these was the charred skeleton of a two-engined Japanese bombing plane.

Palm trees on the high ground behind the re-



We established ourselves on Lorengau Airstrip

vetments had been lashed by a hail of steel. Splintered stumps and trunks stripped of fronds stood stark against the sky.

The airstrip itself, and the beach, were littered with discarded equipment; shoes and bits of packs, clips of ammunition of all sorts, gas mask canisters, unexploded hand grenades, and shell fragments and cases. In a clump of bushes overlooking the beach stood a disabled Japanese 37-millimeter gun. Along the beach were a number of dugouts, roofed with logs and covered with coral rock so as to be almost invisible. There were flimsy shelters of sticks and palm leaves hugging the protection of a slight rise of land immediately behind the sand. Scattered through the jungles behind the shore were later found the remains of numerous small supply dumps, and the ground was full of deep dugouts and fox-holes. It was a rich hunting-ground for souvenirs. . . .

Shortly after the unloading started, a bulldozer was brought ashore in a lighter and used to shove the underbrush back to the edge of the swamp to make room for the piling of the supplies which were being hurried ashore in an unending stream. Even with this enlargement of the tiny beach, however, the landing area rapidly became congested with bales of tents, piles of food cases, equipment parts and wire spools, and all the paraphernalia of a Construction Battalion.

With the bomb-pocked airstrip designated as a temporary camp, the bulldozer went to work to cut a usable road along the shoreline in order that trucks could be brought in and used to carry the supplies to the camp and relieve the congestion at the beach. It was soon aided by others carried ashore on pontoon barges which our pontoon men again assembled at the side of the ship.

The road—simply a clearing of underbrush

from the route—skirted the beach, and in one place the easiest track for the trucks was along the beach sand with two wheels in the surf, while a little further along it swung in among trees and forded a small stream.

A small tractor-crane—"cherry picker"—and a light P & H crane had meantime been brought ashore to relieve our straining muscles, for we had been dragging and shoving crates and boxes weighing up to 500 pounds. Several cargo trucks and jeeps had been landed, and the cranes aided in loading these as the supplies started to roll to the dumps in the camp area.

Meanwhile, rain had begun to fall in showers, and the hastily-constructed road was soon churned to foot-deep mud, through which the bulldozers often pushed stalled trucks. Some vehicles, such as trailer units, were simply parked at the roadside, as it would have been impossible to move them over the road.

The supplies continued to pour ashore. Covered from head to foot with black muck and struggling in the soft sand, soaked with rain, we sweatingly and profanely kept the trucks rolling enough to keep the beach at least partially cleared.

The electricians hauled their portable generators into location and hacked their way up into the trees to rig a floodlighting system. The unloading was to carry on day and night until all supplies were ashore, and when darkness fell fresh crews were at work.

Starting shortly after midnight, the rain began to pour steadily in torrential quantities. Through it all the night crew worked, and when they returned to the airstrip they found themselves confronted with a drowned camp.

The flats of the airstrip had collected water to a depth of from three to six inches, and in almost all of the tents our blankets and personal ditty-



"General Mud" gumming up the road

bags, rifles and packs were under water.

By this time some of the large pyramidal tents had started to come ashore, together with cots, and it was decided to move the bulk of the camp to a hill behind the airstrip. The only access to this hill was a bare muddy slope that rose at a forty-five degree angle, in which was cut holes for steps. Between the airstrip coral and the hill was a hundred-yard stretch of bog in which men sank and slid in hip-deep slimy muck.

We loaded our sodden, heavy packs on our backs and fought our way through the mud and up the hill. Baled tents with pegs and poles, weighing 100 pounds each were carried on poles by two men from the beach landing, a distance of perhaps a mile, with an extra burden of cots.

The new camp area was on the usual type of island soil, soon trampled to thick mud. The pyramidal tents were quickly erected, and those who had obtained cots moved into shelter from the rain. Those without cots laid boards to sleep upon, where obtainable, for even the interiors of the tents were deep with mud.

Some of the pyramidal tents and the larger tents used for storekeeping and officers were put up on the drier portions of the airstrip below to provide temporary office arrangements and shelter for the more easily damaged items, and to house the crews working on the dumps of supplies.

The unloading of the ship proceeded slowly, due to the congestion of the small beach, of which only about one hundred feet was open to the landing craft through the reefs. The last supplies were finally brought ashore.

Heavy equipment items were brought in on the pontoon barge, and additional bulldozers cut the temporary road to a more usable condition, and a wooden bridge was built over the small stream which up to then had been forded

by the trucks. Through necessity, the supplies carried over the road were dumped in the best available spots but without preparation of the ground, and during the heavy rains considerable material suffered damage or destruction.

Tools to build our galley did not come ashore for several days, and at first the only food available was the "K" rations, which we had carried in our packs when we came ashore. It was presently arranged for us to be fed at the galley of a small advance base unit located a half-mile down the airstrip, and we were surprised to find how good tinned corned beef hash could taste when served hot—and after a diet of cold "K" ration.

When the tools came ashore, we built our temporary galley under a canvas roof at the northern end of the airstrip. Placed centrally to accommodate the "hill camp", the camp on the airstrip, and the crews working in the beach area, the galley and the stores tents were almost a quarter-mile from the other units. To connect the wide-spread units of our camp, we built log steps into the slope leading to the hill unit, and constructed a boardwalk across the bog to connect up with the unit located near the seaward side of the airstrip.

It was under these conditions, floundering in bottomless mud, in a disjointed, sprawling camp, that we set to work on our projects. Pontoon assembly, properly speaking, started at shipside the day the transport anchored. Between that day and May 1, even before work was started on our permanent camp, we were working at electrical distribution and telephone wiring while others of us carved roads through the mud. On May 1 work was started on our permanent camp, and that same day we also started work on one of the largest projects of the island, the building of the Naval Advance Base installations.



▲ A captured Jap battle flag

▼ The Armory Staff





▲ Jap Souvenirs

▼ Shell crater at Lorengau





▲ Main Street

▼ Army Anti-aircraft gun crew



Constructing road
through our
permanent Camp



The completed road,
Chapel and
Recreation Building





Here we went
to the movies

Hilltop view
of our Camp





CONCRETE CONSUMPTION was high on Manus Island. The NSD Warehouse job needed huge quantities of concrete, and to meet the need we came up with the idea of building a mixing plant, using a battery of ordinary two-bag mixers. With this system, a clamshell was used to feed the hoppers of the mixers from the big stockpiles of coral, and cement was loaded by hand into the mixers from the central storage house. Our two mixers poured forth a steady stream of ready-mixed concrete. Our regular dump-trucks could back into the loading ramp and carry a load of several yards of concrete to the places where the warehouse decks were being poured. Chugging away for 10 hours a day, our plant could produce 280 cubic yards of concrete.

A nearby stream furnished water, and we used a 3-inch pump and pontoon to provide a supply of water under pressure.

N S D



▲ Carryall discharging coral fill for NSD Warehouses

▼ Rough grading the Open Storage Area



Numerous 40x100 warehouses were built for the Naval Supply Depot, utilizing the concrete plant previously described for the placing of concrete decks.

Many of these warehouses were modifications of the standard design. One group in particular consisted of 12 of these warehouses, which were built in a double row with adjoining ends and sides, making one continuous building 200 feet deep and 240 feet long.

When the warehouses were to be constructed on the standard type, our crews were set upon a quick-production basis, one doing the fine grading for the base, one crew setting the concrete forms, and others setting anchor bolts, pouring concrete, erecting the steel skeleton, and putting on the sheet metal coverings. When these crews were at full speed, the warehouses went up with unbelievable speed, as many as two a day being erected at a sustained speed.

In working at this project, a notable accomplishment was the filling of the swampy areas on which warehouses were to be built. From three to four feet of fill was needed over the whole area to raise it a safe distance above sea

level. The area filled in this manner was approximately two miles long and one-half mile wide. The roads necessary were built as the buildings were constructed.

In addition to the warehouse area a personnel camp was built, including numerous Quonset huts and other facilities, and adjacent to the warehouses proper we built over 250,000 cubic feet of refrigeration storage units, with the necessary covering for protection from the weather. All of these facilities were in use within two short work-crammed months.

Pouring concrete deck for 40'x100' Warehouse



Erecting Ribs and assembling Bulkhead





▲ Design in Steel

▼ Grading in the Spud Locker



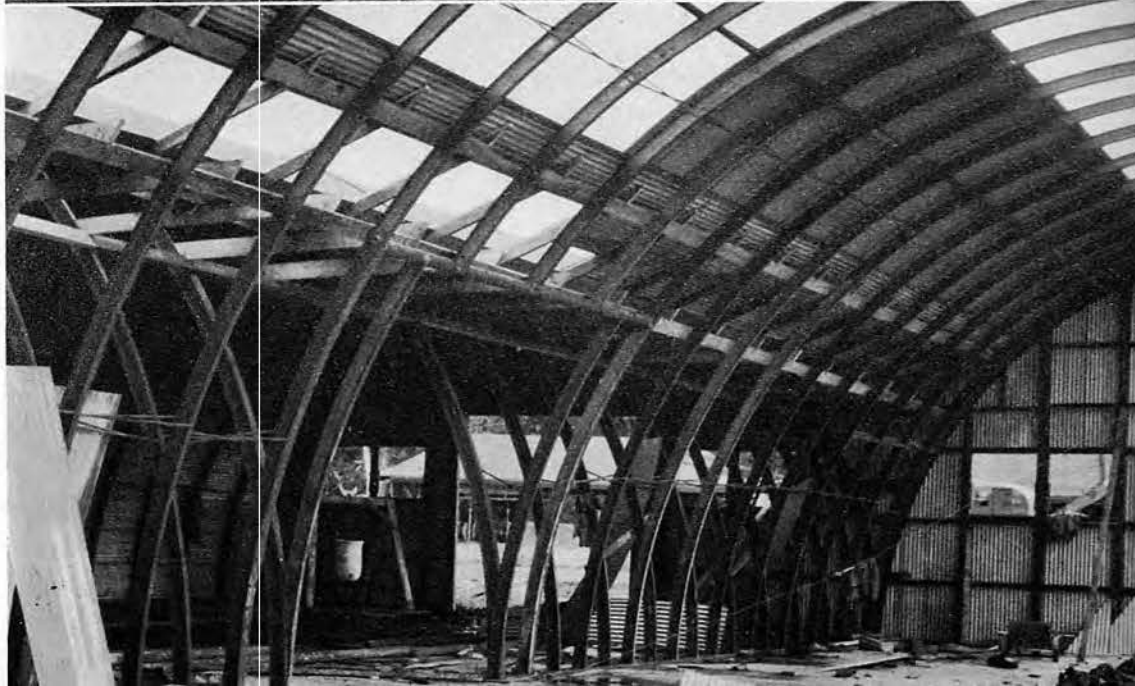
Warehouse Row



48,000 square feet
of floor area
under one roof
for Spare Parts
Distribution Center



Interior view
under construction



Installing power lines to Reefers



300,000 cubic feet of Refrigeration being installed





▲ Personnel Living Quarters under construction

▼ Finishing interior of 20'x48' Quonset Hut





▲ Completed Personnel Camp Area

▼ Aerial view of NSD Area





▲ Base Recreation Center—Theatre seated 6,000

▼ Bulldozer cutting Victory Highway



BASE POWER PLANT

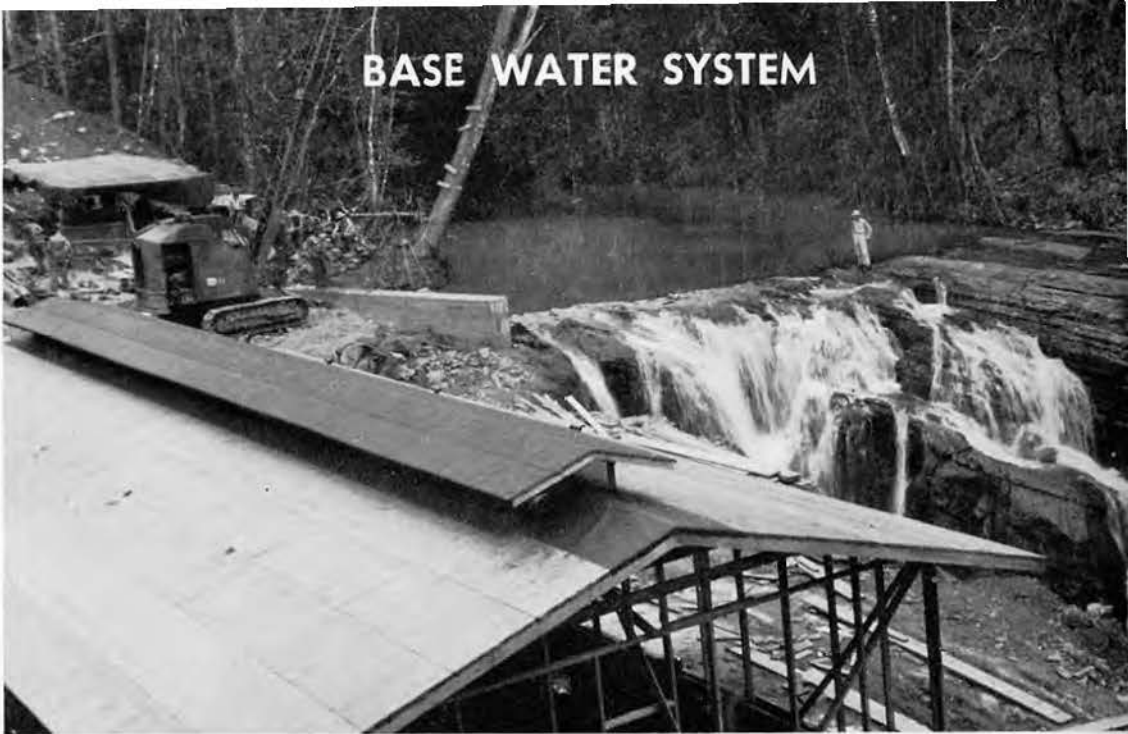


▲ 52 yards of concrete were poured in each of these Generator Footings

▼ Installing the Generators



BASE WATER SYSTEM



Lorengau Falls
and Pumping Station

The only source of fresh water at the time of our landing on Manus was the ground water draining from the hills, which was put through purification and filtration before it was used. The supply of this water was dependent on the rainfall, but proved to be sufficient for our small units. As the number of personnel on the island increased, many of the small streams became contaminated by drainage from the latrines and galleys, and it was necessary to find a source of

water large enough to supply the entire base, and also water the ships brought into the docks.

A large river was located in the hills, and a water plant was designed, capable of filtering and chlorinating 1,500,000 gallons of water a day. The work on this big project was assigned to three Seabee units, including the 57th. We got the job of providing all storage facilities, while the pumping stations, pipe line and filtering units were assigned to the other outfits.



Deck Layout for
Water Storage Tank

Progress shots
of Water Tank
construction



First we built a road to the river to get material for the various parts of the work on the job site, and then we went to work on the actual tank construction.

We had to build six steel tanks, each holding 450,000 gallons, and two steel tanks each holding 50,000 gallons. The tanks we built were of the ordinary bolted type used extensively in Seabee work, except for the sedimentation tank. This tank had to be arranged so as to change

the direction of the water flow to allow the maximum amount of sedimentation. The water was delivered by a flume from an aeration tower, and soda ash and alum were added to the water as it entered the agitation unit built in the center column. The water was then directed toward the bottom of the tank, and forced to the outside walls by baffle plates. The design was very effective.



FLOATING MAGAZINES

In the building of two units of a floating ammunition component, we were faced with the necessity of producing these units in a very short time, so we cleared a beach and blasted a channel through the coral reefs so we could bring in enough barges to work on at the same time in an assembly-line fashion.

The pontoon assembly group furnished the barges which were placed on the beach four at a time. With one crew erecting and fastening down the wooden deck, another erecting the magazines, another lining them with masonite and insulation, another building the steel frames for stowage of the ammunition, and a final crew painting the barges, the completed barges were turned out at a rate of one a day.

Each of the units consisted of ten barges with 20x50 foot magazines, complete with an exterior loading deck, and one barge was made up with a 20x48 Quonset hut, electrified and screened, to be used as a workshop. Two barges were hinged together to be used as a galley, mess hall, and personnel quarters, including showers, heads, washrooms, sleeping quarters, a galley complete with reefers, refrigeration units, oil ranges, hot water heaters, sinks, bake-ovens, and a water pressure system.

Working at the sides of the docks, our builders soon found that it would take the stomach of a tin-can (destroyer) sailor to stand the rolling and pitching of the barges—so perhaps they rushed through the job to get away from seasickness.



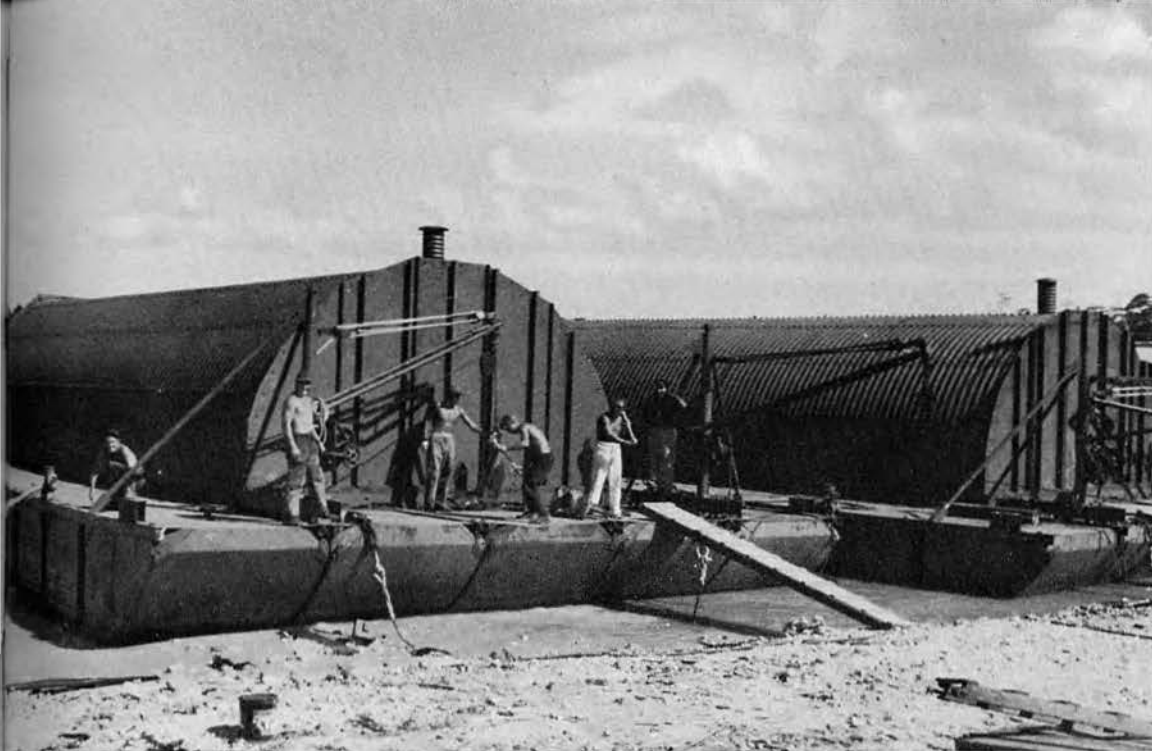
Pontoon Barge with timber for Magazine Foundations



Setting the steel

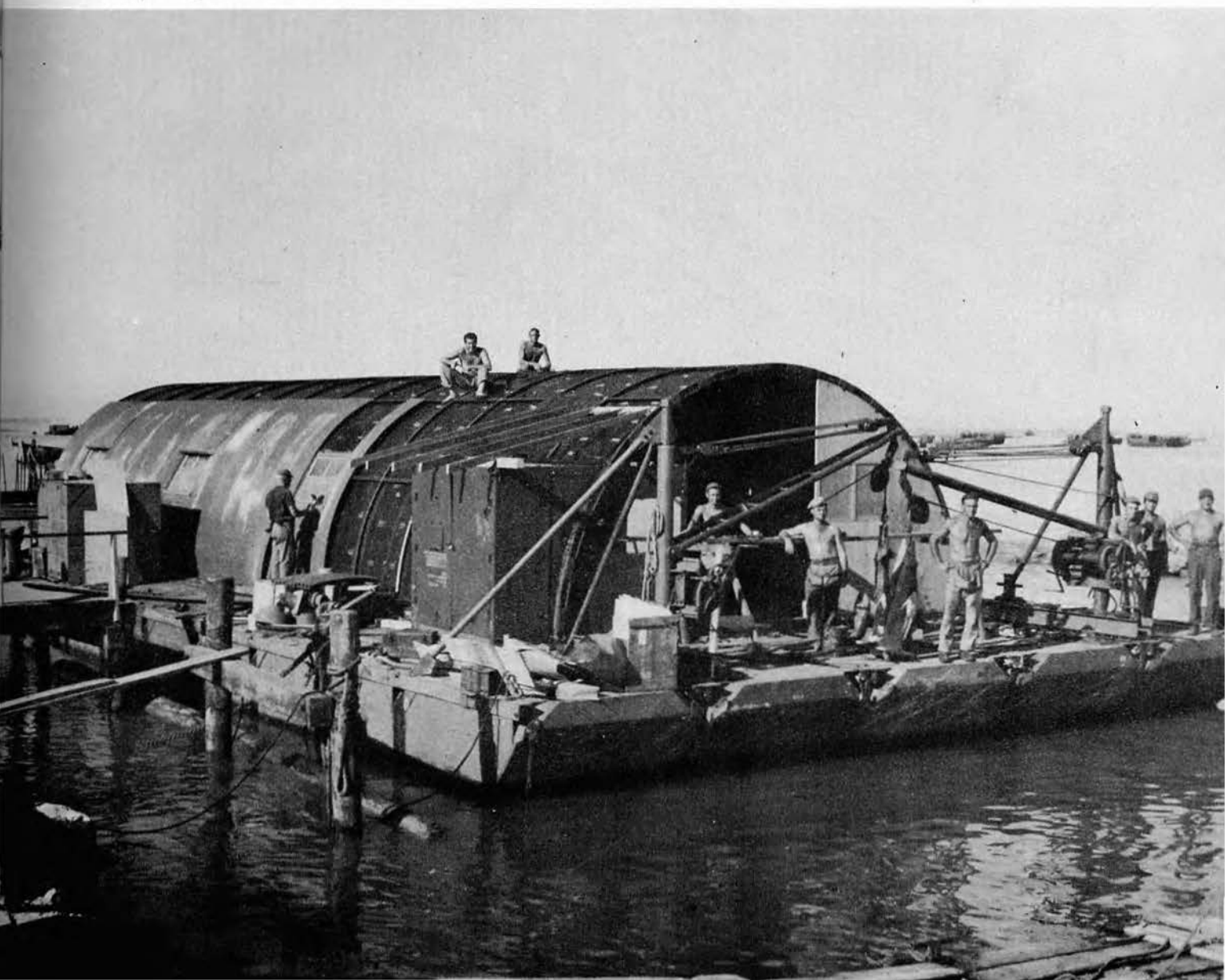


Caulking the joints



The completed
Ammunition Barges

A Galley Barge with Reefer



LONIU PASSAGE ROAD



Side hill cuts . . .



. . . and valley fills . . .



. . . Kept equipment rolling 24 hours a day

The Loniu Passage Road, constructed in part by us, connected Los Negros and Manus, providing complete land communication between the two islands. The Manus portion, on which we worked, was a 24-foot coral-surfaced highway, cut through the dense jungle and extremely mountainous terrain. Most of the grade of the road was side-hill cuts, following the ridges of the hills to avoid the swamp areas. The cut sand fills ran to as much as forty to fifty feet through soft shale, red clay, and volcanic rock. The coral surface was about one foot thick. All of the coral used was dredged from the reefs along the coast-line. The Manus portion of the road was about four and one-half miles long.



The Loniu Passage Bridge connected Manus and Los Negros Islands



After drilling in the tide flats . . .

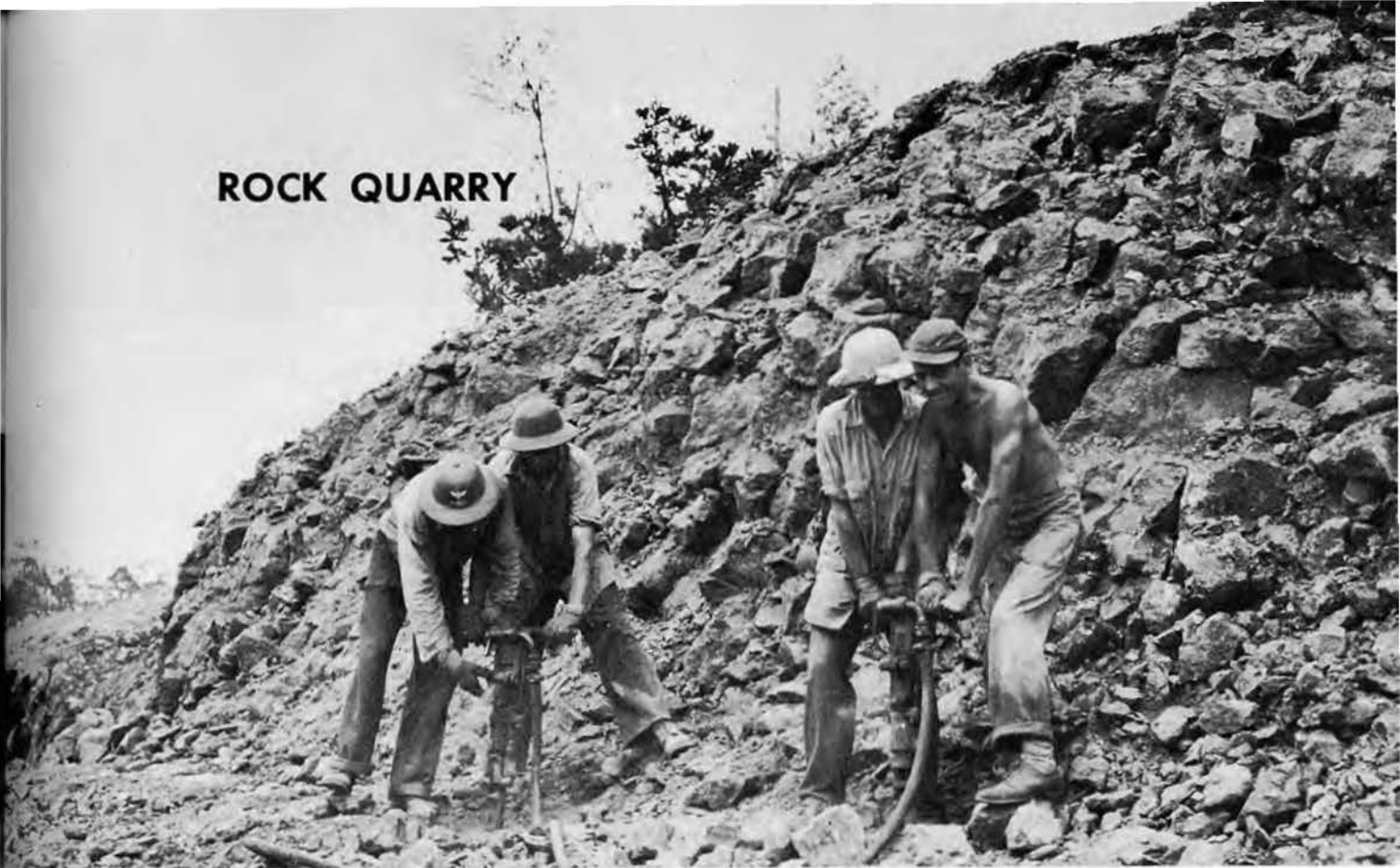


. . . and blasting coral . . .

. . . the Dragline
started a
stock pile
on the beach



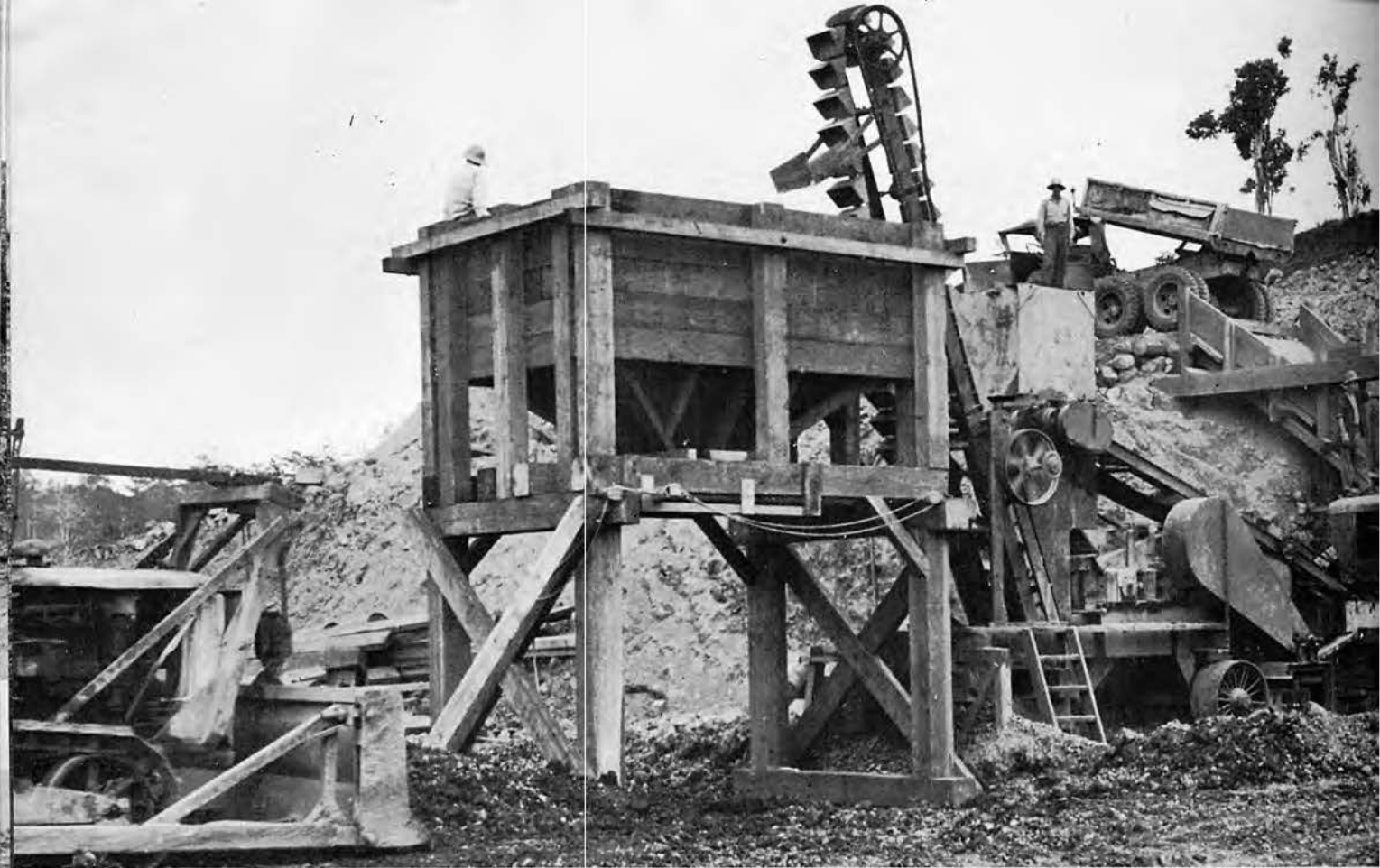
ROCK QUARRY



▲ Drilling rock

▼ Dragline loading rock for transportation to Crusher





▲ Rock Crusher during the early stages of operation

▼ General view of Quarry and Crusher



SAWMILL



▲ Logs were cut by hand . . .

▼ . . . snaked to the Sawmill . . .

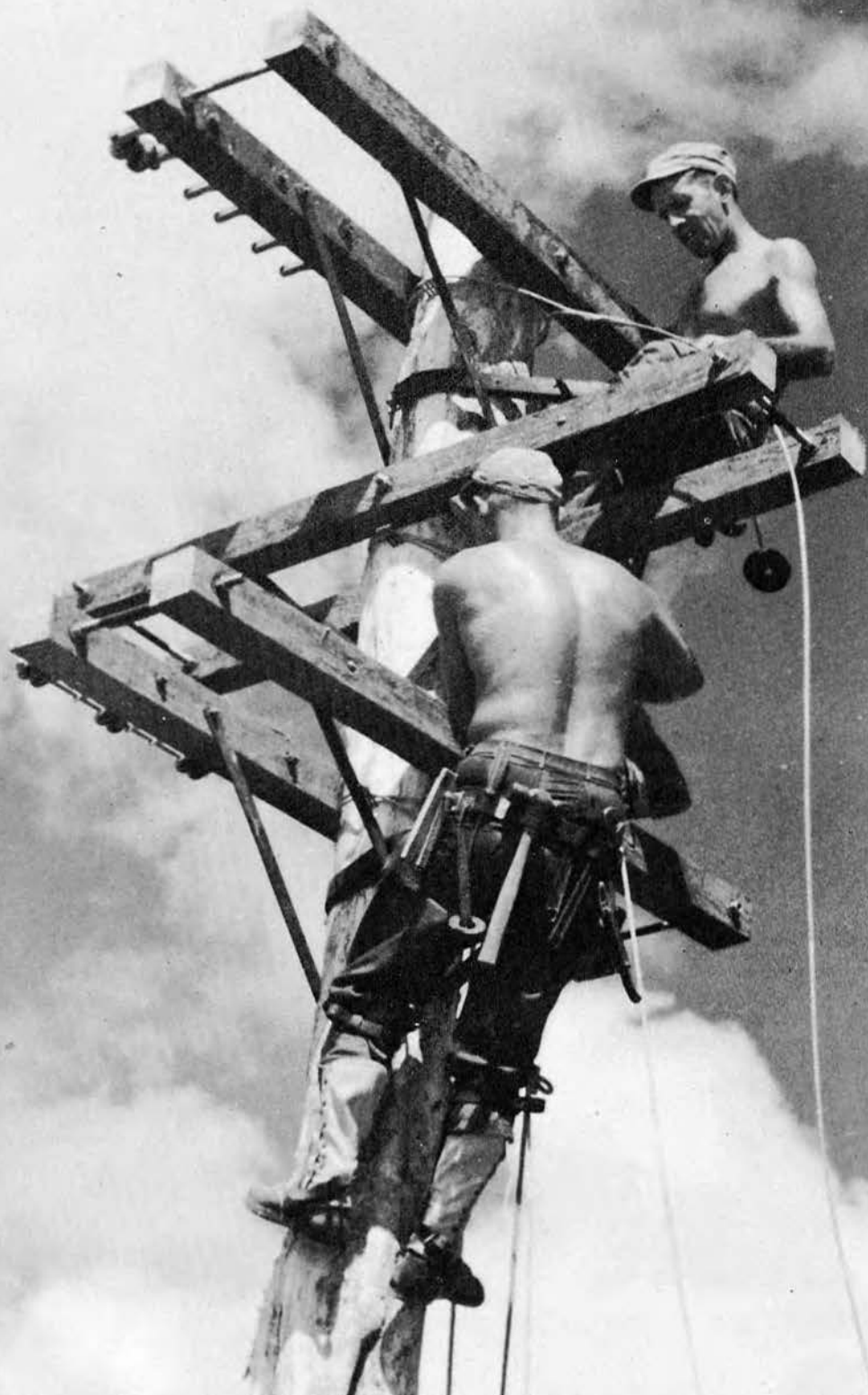




▲ ... and stockpiled ...

▼ ... ready for cutting





ELECTRIC WIRING AND TELEPHONES



On Manus Island, our telephone men and electricians took the spotlight in a big way. Much of the communications system for the entire base was installed by the 57th crews, including three switchboards and 173 telephones for the base use, and 170 miles of telephone circuits.

Highlighting the work of the wire men was the laying of submarine cable—over fifty thousand feet of it. With their work on the submarine cables came one great dramatic moment—

Our tired cable men had just turned in after a grueling day's work when an emergency call was received. Something had gone wrong with the connections that carried the communications from the shore installations to the ships in the harbor. Vitaly important messages were being held up. . . .

The telephone men wearily piled into their trucks and raced to work. Long hours later, in early morning, they returned to camp, their mission accomplished, communications between ship and shore were again established. And just a few days later those ships that lay in the harbor that night carried out the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines.

The electrical wiremen worked in crews separate from the telephone men, and also gave a good account of themselves, doing all the wiring for the base area and the Naval Supply Depot Refrigeration Area, and completely wiring three camps, as well as other smaller projects.

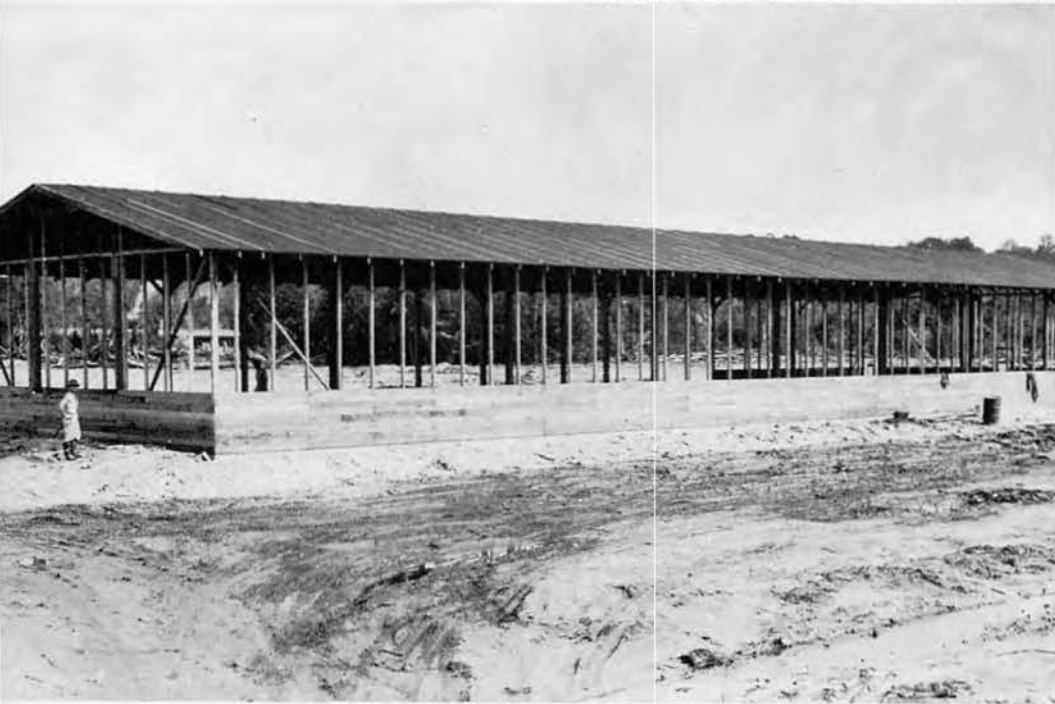


▲ Base Chapel

▼ NAB Fire Station



Base Dispensary
under construction



ABCD Storage Warehouse

L. S. T. Landing



Broadcasting Room,
Base Radio Station



Base Officers' Club

Commodore Boak's Quarters





▲ Partially completed NSD Warehouse Area

▼ Murzim Dock and Approach



Departments

A Construction Battalion's setup is similar to that of a construction company, but it has in addition to the usual departments of a construction company, a number of others, because it is necessary to feed and house all personnel, caring for their needs 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This necessitates a large commissary department, which is one of the supply functions coming under the Supply Officer, who is a staff member. Under the Supply Department also comes the Ship's Service shops, including the barber shop, laundry, tailor shop, cobbler shop, and the watchmaker, as well as GSK or the general supply warehouse, and the Ship's store.

While money is of little importance or use on Island X, it is necessary to maintain a Disbursing Office where the Battalion's pay accounts are kept.

Personnel records, and the more general office routine and yeomanry (stenography to the civilian) is taken care of by the Personnel Department.

Another important branch of the offices is the Engineering Department, which is responsible for the design and layout of the projects we build.

Project Control is another of the smaller but important branches of the Battalion Executive Office. It is responsible for the proper distribution of men on the Battalion's projects, for the shifting of men from one project to another, and through a system of daily reports is responsible for the construction records and the numerous reports necessary for the proper functioning of the Battalion.

The Post Office is another of the smaller departments whose importance cannot be judged by its size. Both incoming and outgoing mail is an important morale builder in any military outfit away from home. Efficient handling of the work in the Post Office is therefore of great importance.

Another of the smaller but important departments is Recreation, because it has much to do with the morale of our men. Baseball, basketball, softball, football, volleyball, ping-pong, horseshoes, and many indoor games are among the sports handled by this department, and in addition, that which has been voted the most popular pastime of all, the movies, is under the supervision of this department.

The spiritual and moral welfare of the men is looked after by the Chaplain. Regular general services were held at all times, and whenever

possible special services for the various denominations were also conducted. When a man thinks he has a problem which, because of its intimate personal nature, he does not care to discuss with his company officer, he can in many instances obtain needed advice by strictly confidential chats with the Chaplain.

All of the military gear and paraphernalia is in charge of the Chief Armorer, who with several assistants is responsible for the maintenance and issue of all of this type of equipment. This department reports to the Executive Officer through the military training officer, who is responsible for all military training programs.

The MAA's office is under the Security Officer, and has charge of the discipline of the Battalion. It is, in fact, the police force of the camp.

The O. O. D.'s office maintains a 24-hour duty watch. Its chiefs and messengers are under the direct supervision of the Executive Office.

The Medical Department, under the supervision of two Medical Doctors and one Dentist, has charge of the general health of the Personnel and the sanitation of the camp. Daily sick call is held, and a small dispensary maintained, which includes facilities for minor operations, mild cases of confinement, and a complete dental office.

The purpose of a Construction Battalion is to do construction work. Only about 25% of the Battalion personnel is used in the administrative and service branches which have been outlined above, and approximately 75% of the Battalion personnel is directly connected with that most important item of actually constructing. The work is divided into two main groups, Building Construction, consisting of buildings, wharfs, docks, etc., and Earthmoving, consisting of work on roads, airports, etc. Collateral branches with these are the various shops: Heavy Equipment, Transportation, Garage, Tire Repair, Welding, Carpenter Shop, Plumbing, Electrical, Metal, Paint, and the Sail Loft.

A great many of the items of construction are prefabricated in the shops and taken to the job site for erection, so that the amount of personnel either in the shops or on the job varies considerably with the type of work being done.

The Executive Office plans, administers, and coordinates the work of all the departments, and is the focal point for the administration and control of all the functions of the Battalion.



Post Office Crew



Generator Watch



Tim Charles' Gang



Tailor, Typewriter Repairman and Cobblers



Dougllesby's Barber Shop



Drafting Room



The Kingfish at work



Project Control



Supply and Disbursing



Censors and Mail Clerks



Recreation Center



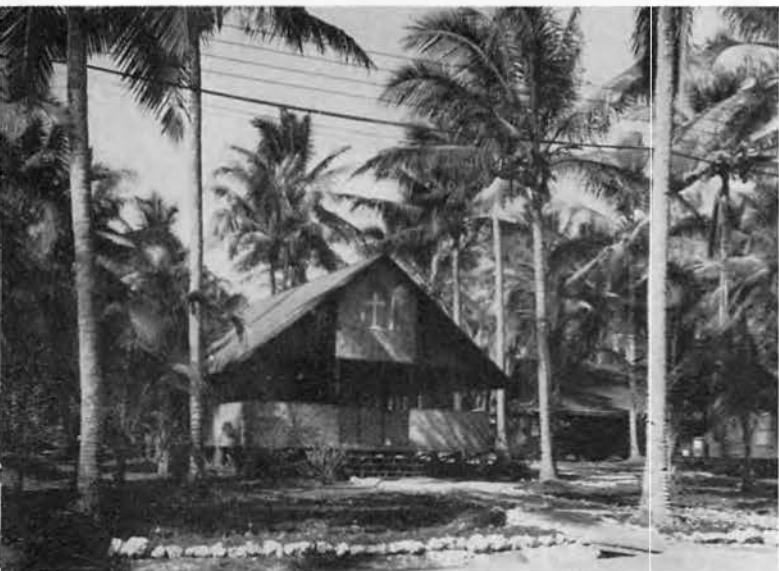
Inside the Chapel



Movie Operators



Cleaning Rifles



The Chapel at Espiritu Santo



... Inside the Armory



Master-at-Arms



... and Operating Room



Our Dispensary . . .



"Painless Parker"



. . . Sick Bay . . .



The Shop Area



Transportation Grease Rack



The Executive Office



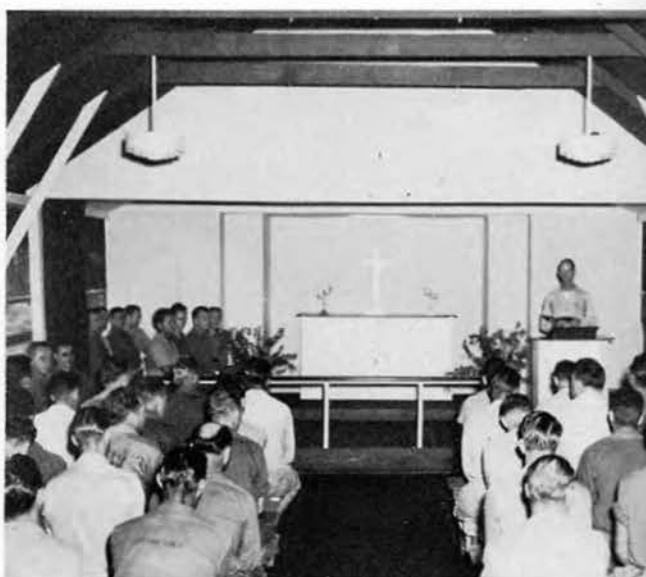
Utility Shops



Executive Yeomen and Personnel Officer



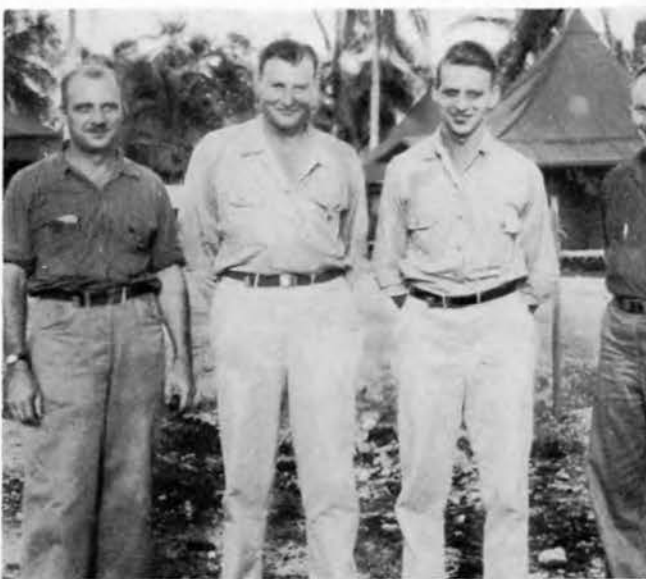
Carpenter Shop



Inside the Chapel at Manus



Officers' Messmen



Supply Department

Back to the U. S. A.

The days of hardship on Santos had returned some of our men to the States, and to fill the gap in our roster we had received a detachment of replacements on March 7, 1944. These new men had quickly fitted into the routine of the Battalion and "pulled their weight" very ably. But for some weeks during our final days on Manus, unhappy rumors had filled their ears, and finally the official word came through—our replacements were not to return to the States with us, as they had not been "out" long enough. Then on January 25, 1945, our "new men" packed up their gear, loaded onto trucks, and rolled out of the camp, to go into the base's receiving station for transfer into other units. The departure of the replacements was a good omen for the rest of us, however. It could only mean that the Battalion was going to move somewhere . . .

When our orders finally came it was with breath-taking suddenness. On January 29, in the afternoon, guards suddenly appeared on the camp road and told us we were not to leave the camp area without permission. That night at the theatre, Commander Marx appeared on the stage and gave us the word—we were going HOME! And on February 1 we filed down the hill overlooking the harbor, loaded into landing craft and were ferried out to the transport waiting for us. Before evening we were on our way—HOMEWARD BOUND.

Burdened only with our records and typewriters we arrived at Camp Parks, California, and the

offices burst into a flurry of action, churning out our leave papers and travel orders and getting things ready for a hasty pay-day. Three days later, with money in our pockets and furlough papers in hands, our first groups trooped through the camp gates, on the way to their homes and loved ones after two years overseas. As quickly as transportation was arranged other groups followed, until the camp was almost deserted.

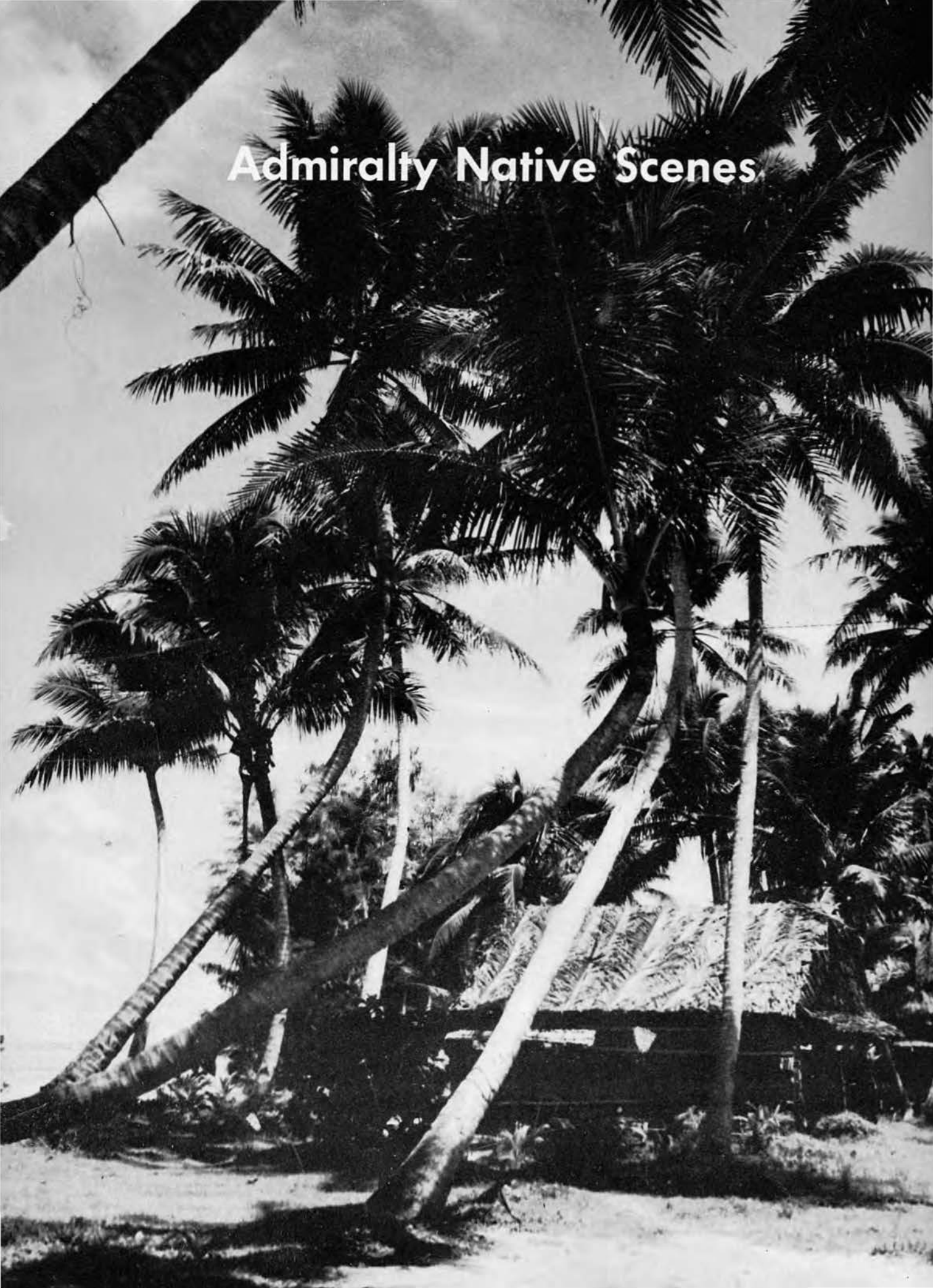
Thirty days at home . . . The full story of all that took place in those thirty days will never be known. For some it was wine, women, and song; for others it was happy reunion. . . But we all later agreed that it had been the shortest thirty days we had ever known.

Toward the end of March, there began to appear in receiving stations and camps all over the country numbers of blue-uniformed men wearing "Seabee" shoulder patches. It was the 57th Battalion returning from its leave. From these scattered stations we traveled in small groups back to Camp Parks, and our Pullman cars echoed with tales and reminiscing as old friends joined us on the way.

Back at Camp Parks we received a shock. The Battalion was being broken up, and we were to go as replacements to other units. Some of us were already gone while others were just arriving, and new destinations were voiced—Okinawa, Alaska . . .

But these far places would never be seen by the 57th Seabees.

Admiralty Native Scenes



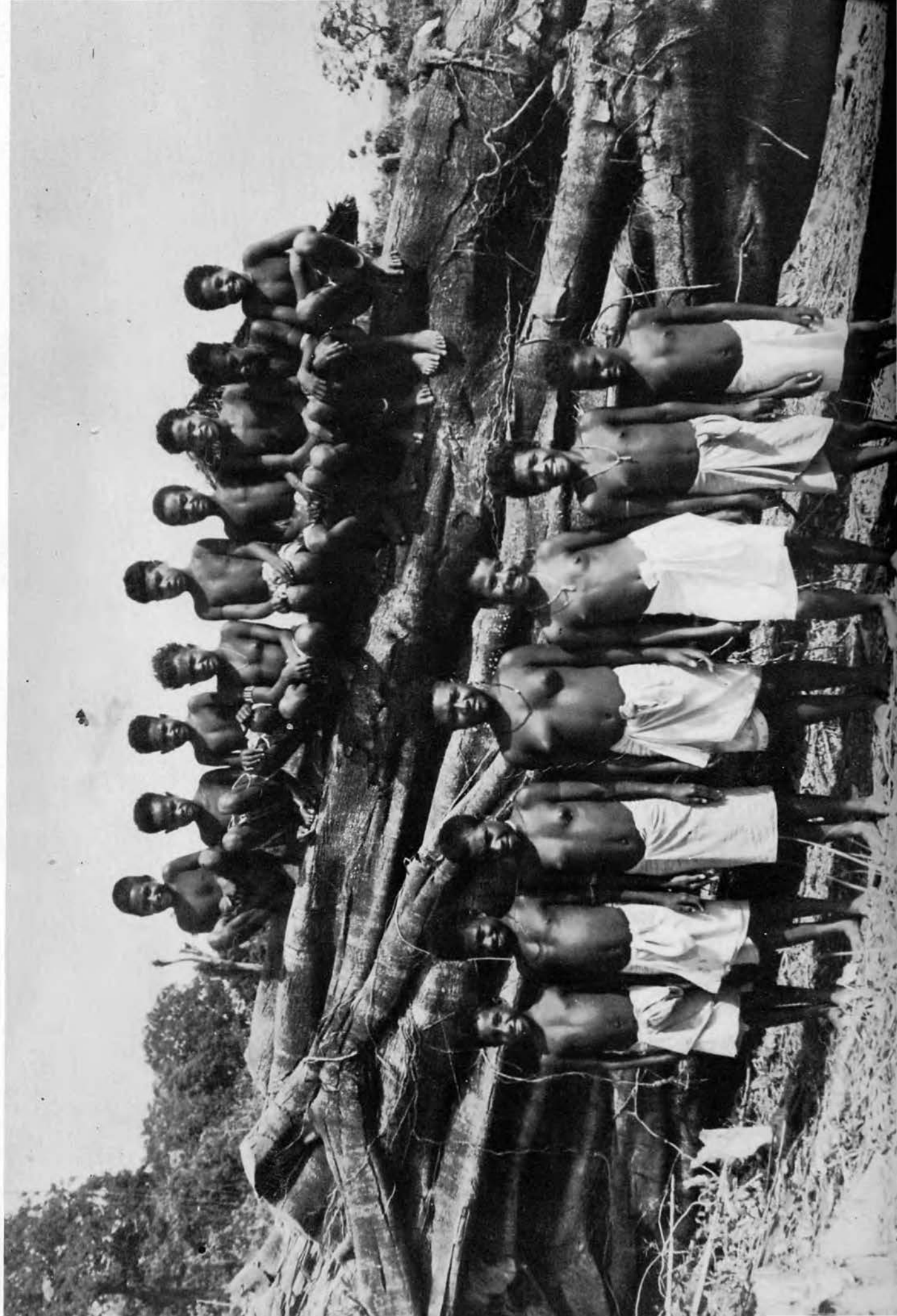


▲ Native Outriggers . . .

▼ . . . Approaching the village



Native children





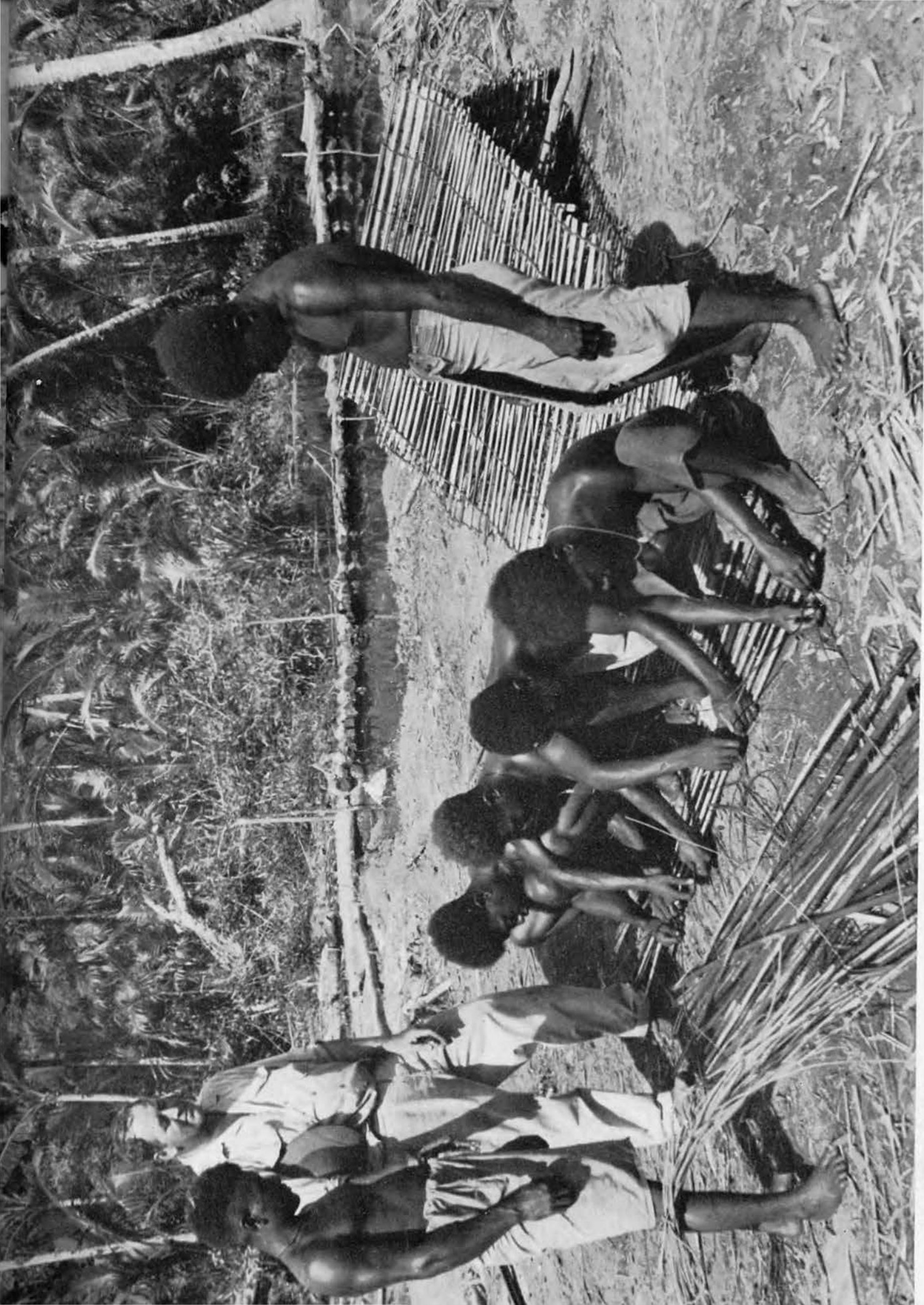
▲ Tilling the soil

▼ Native Huts on stilts over the water



Native Troops





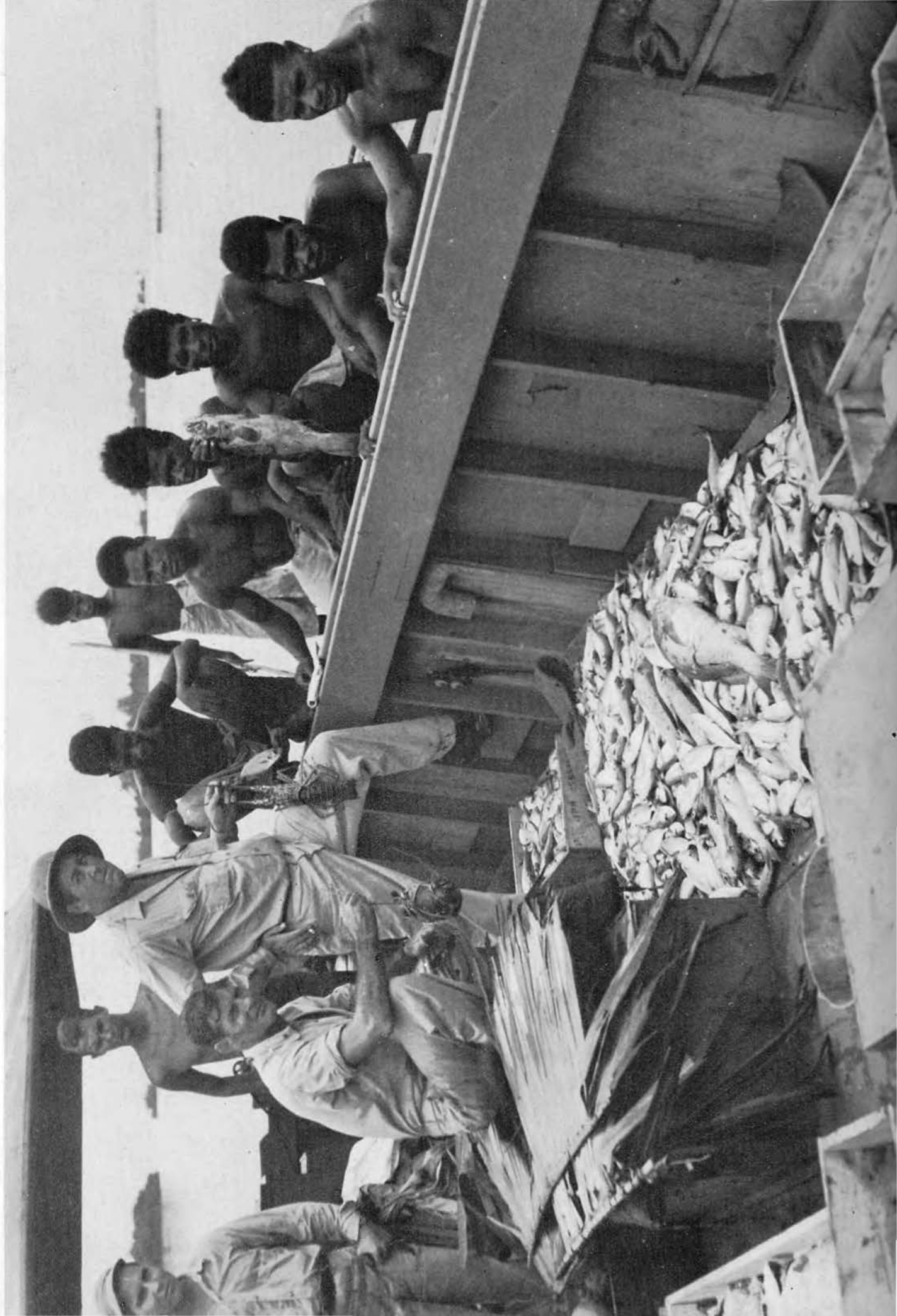
Weaving a Fish Trap

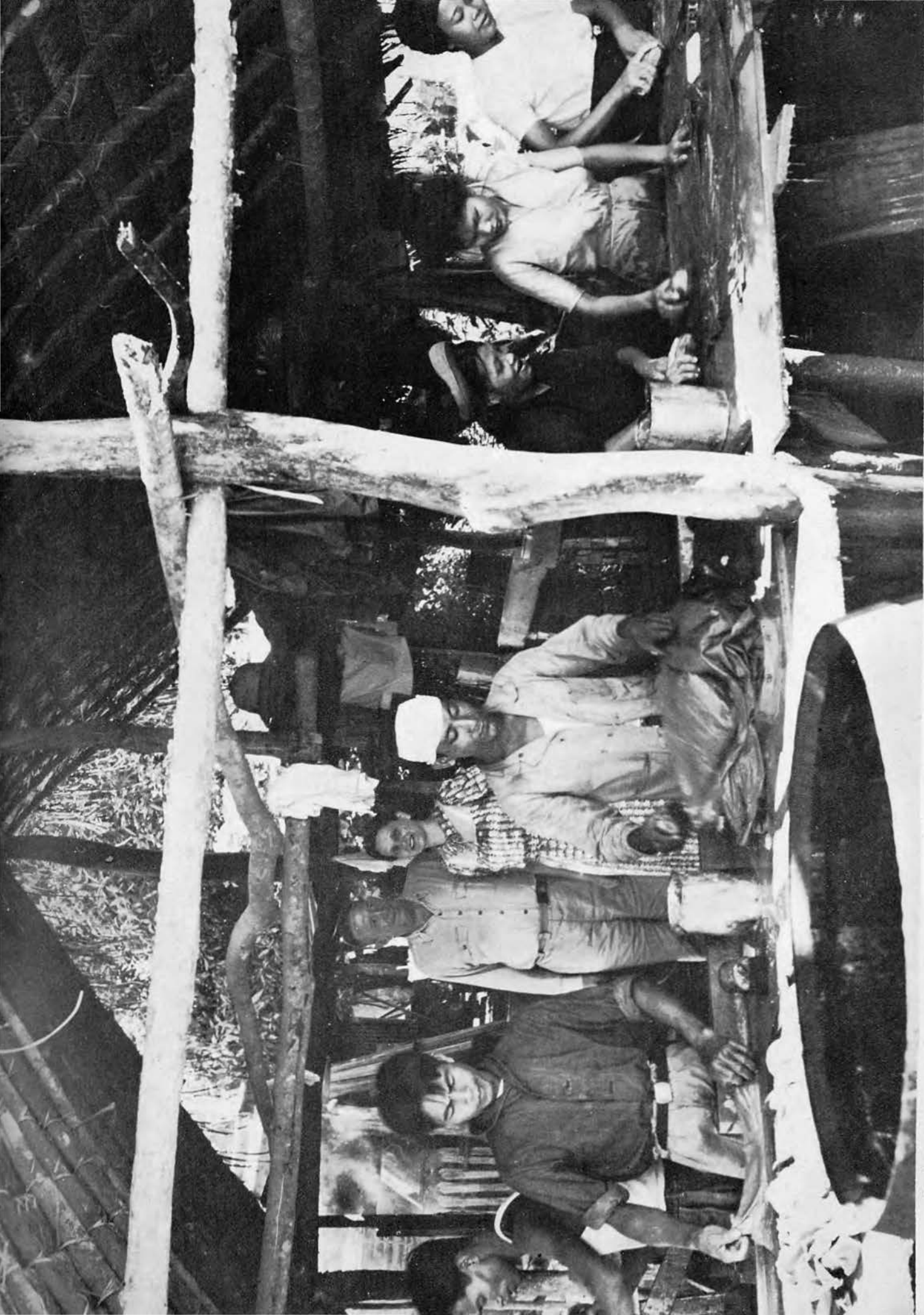
Fish Trap set on a coral reef . . .





View of catch at one Fish Trap





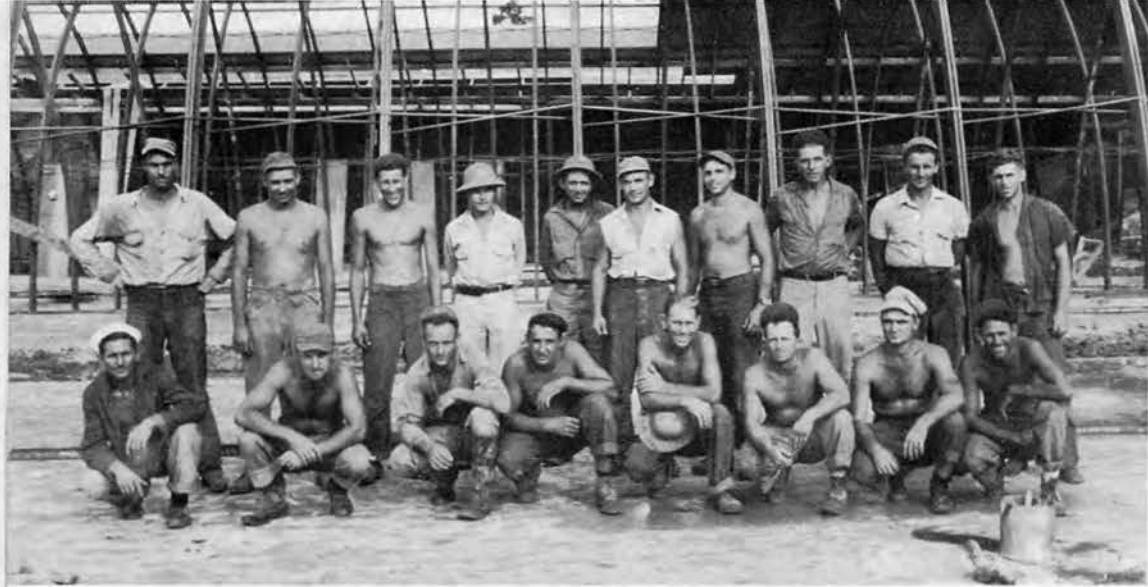
Tonkinese Laundry, Espiritu Santo

FAMILY ALBUM















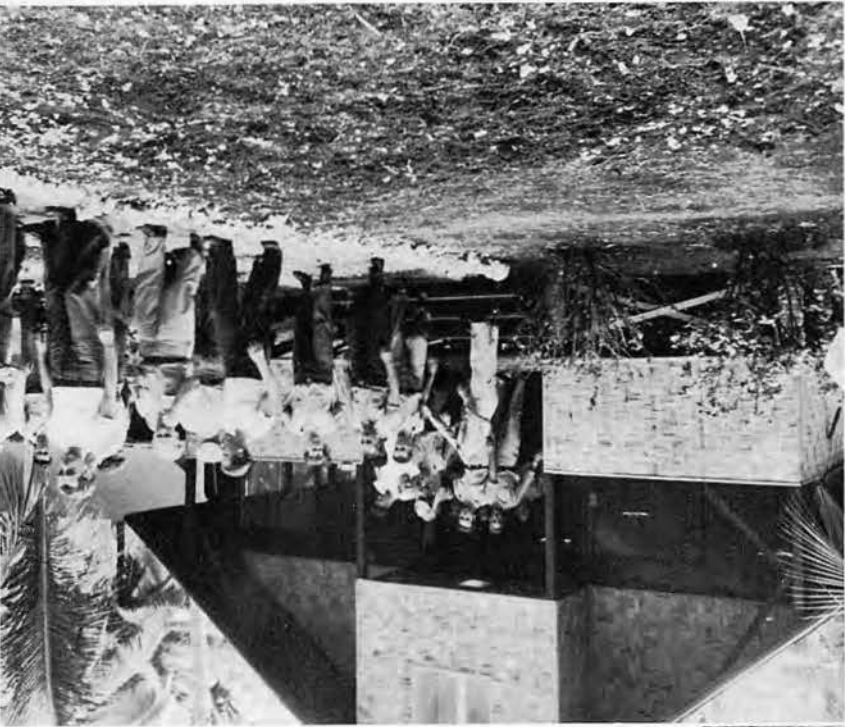






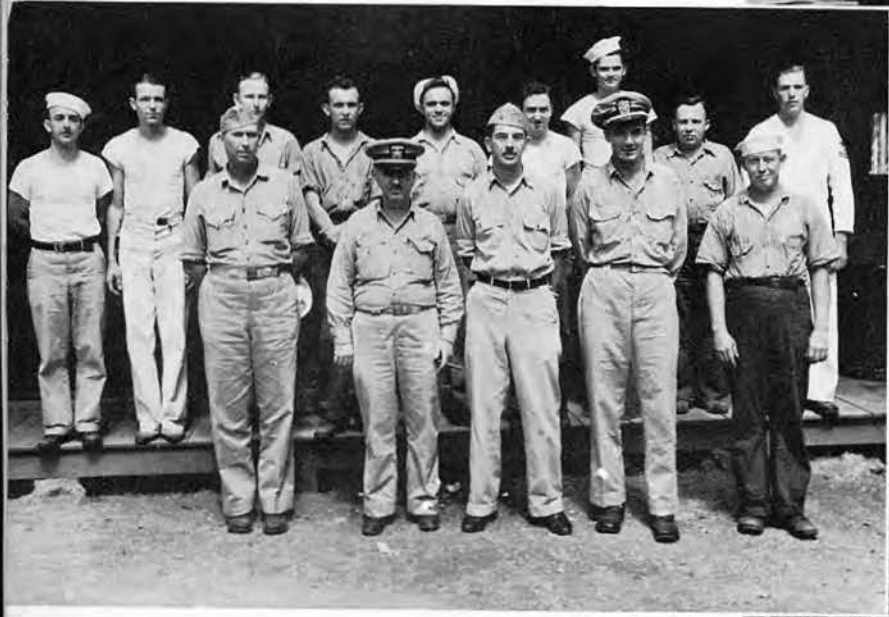
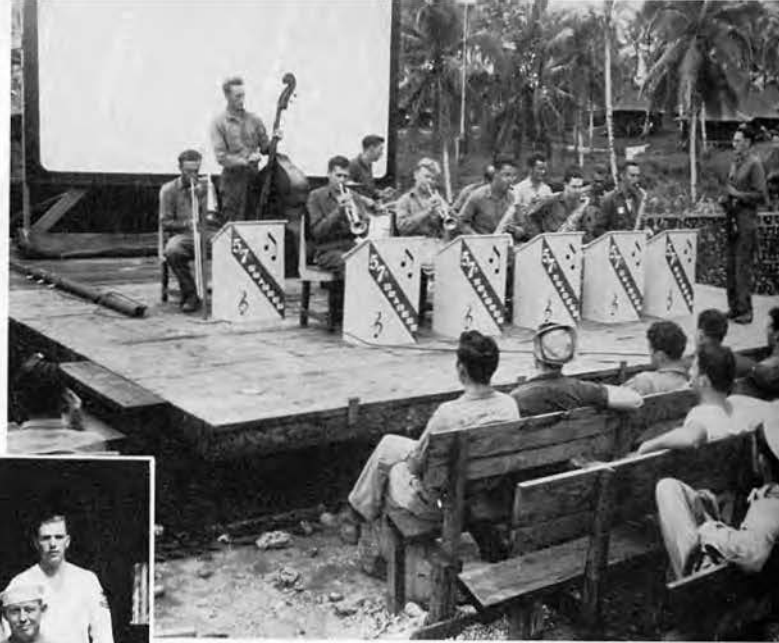








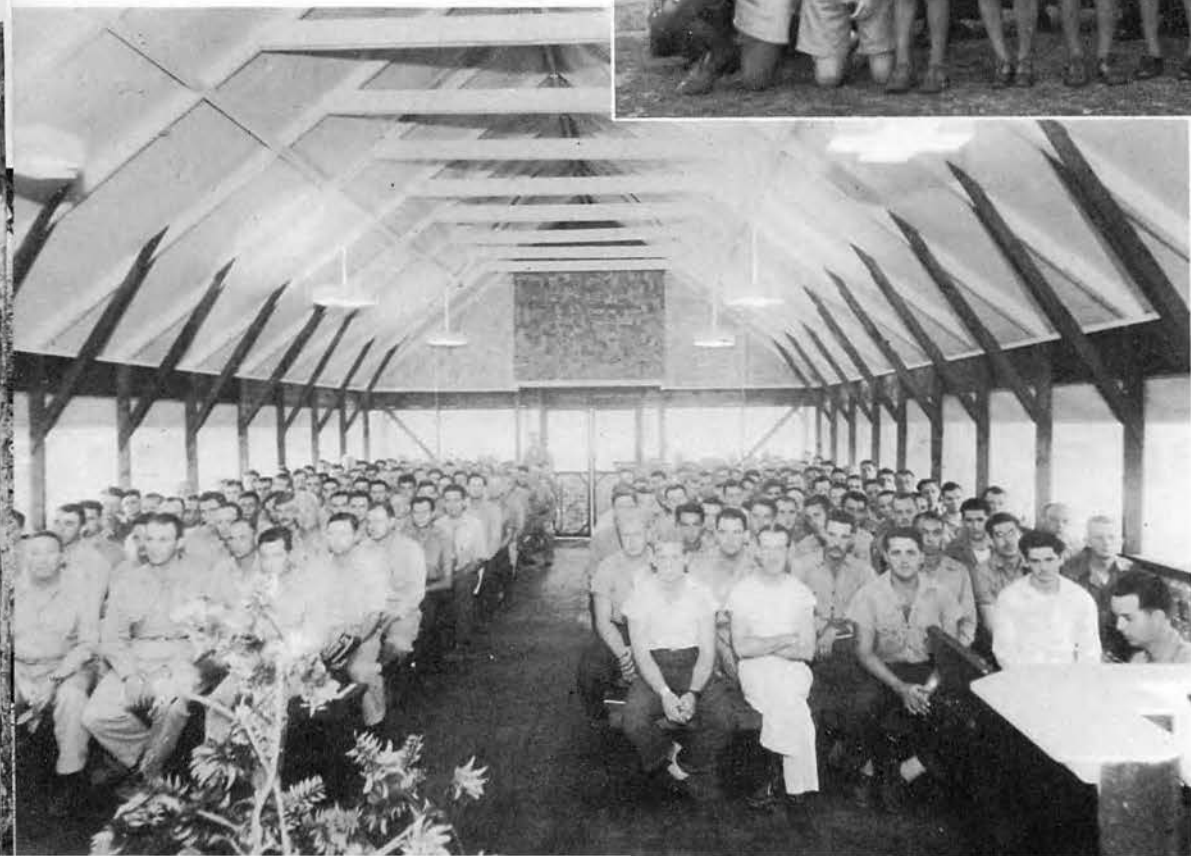




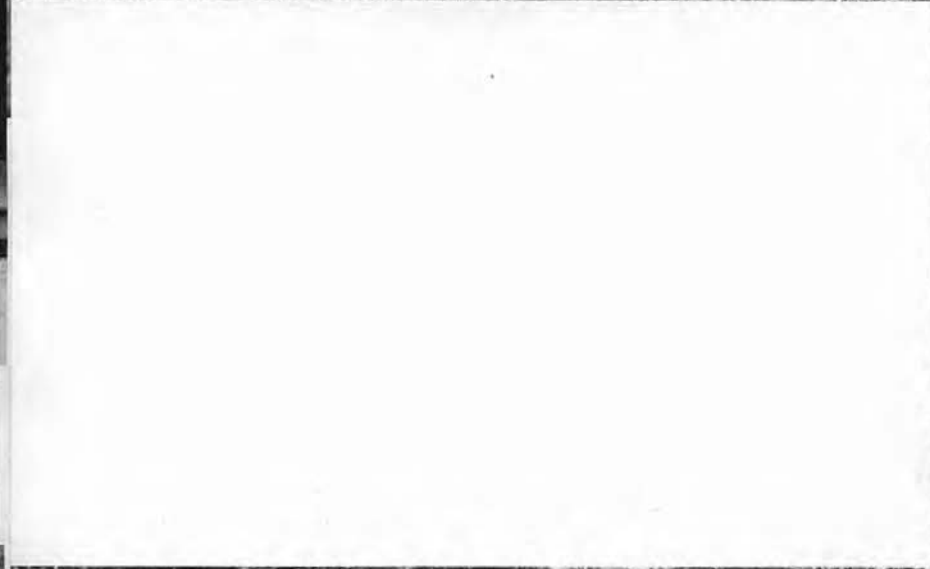






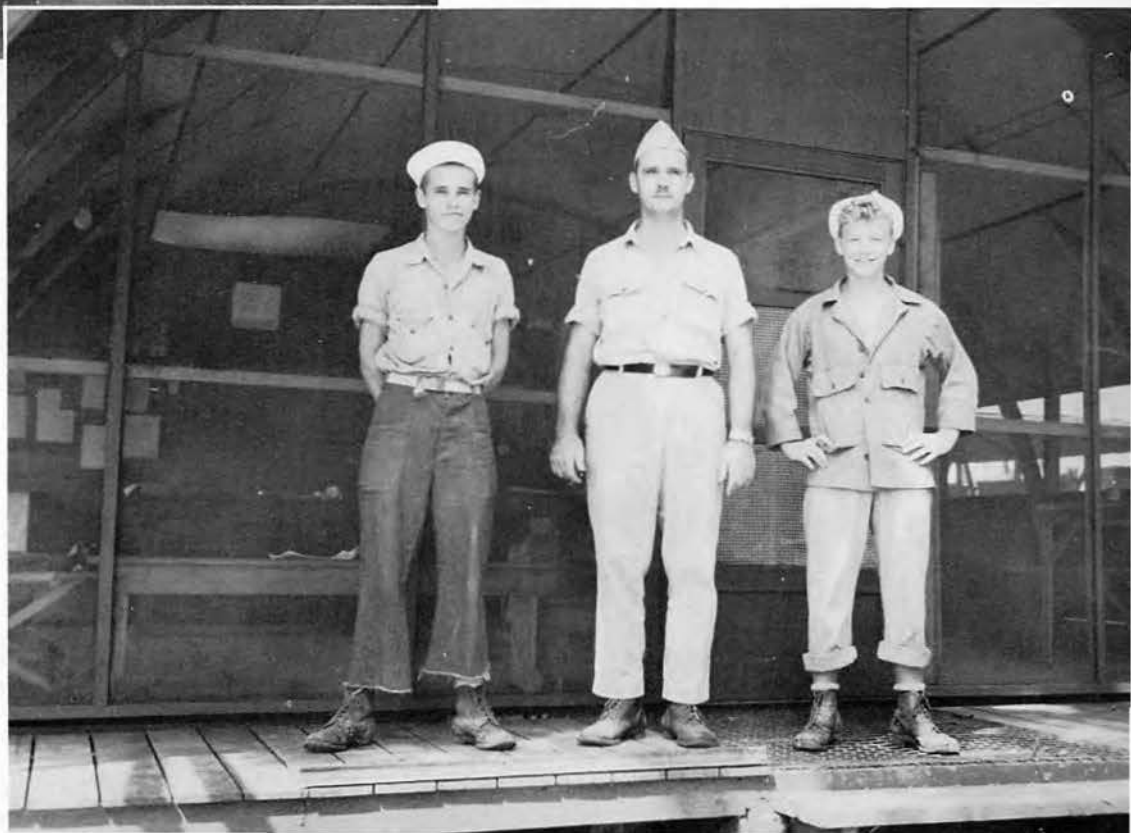
























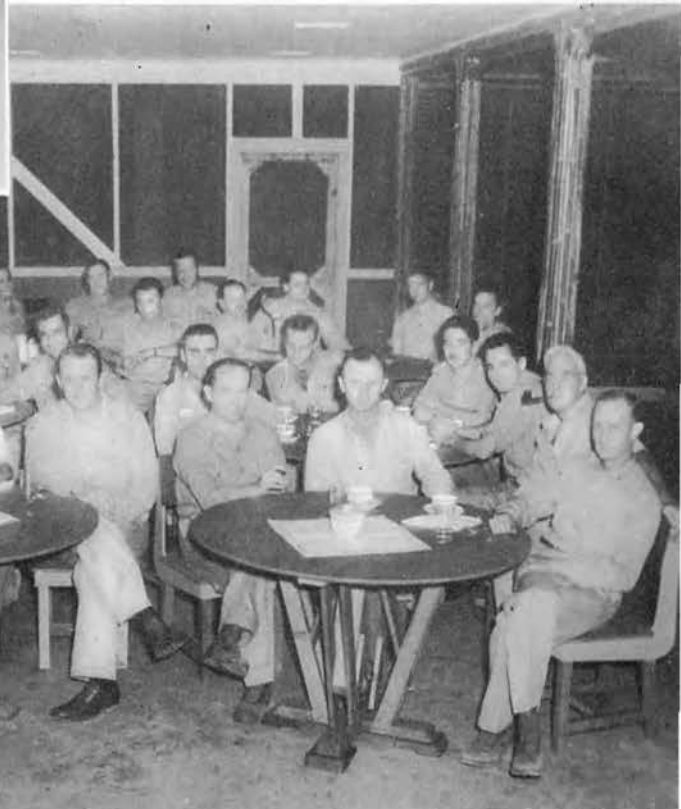
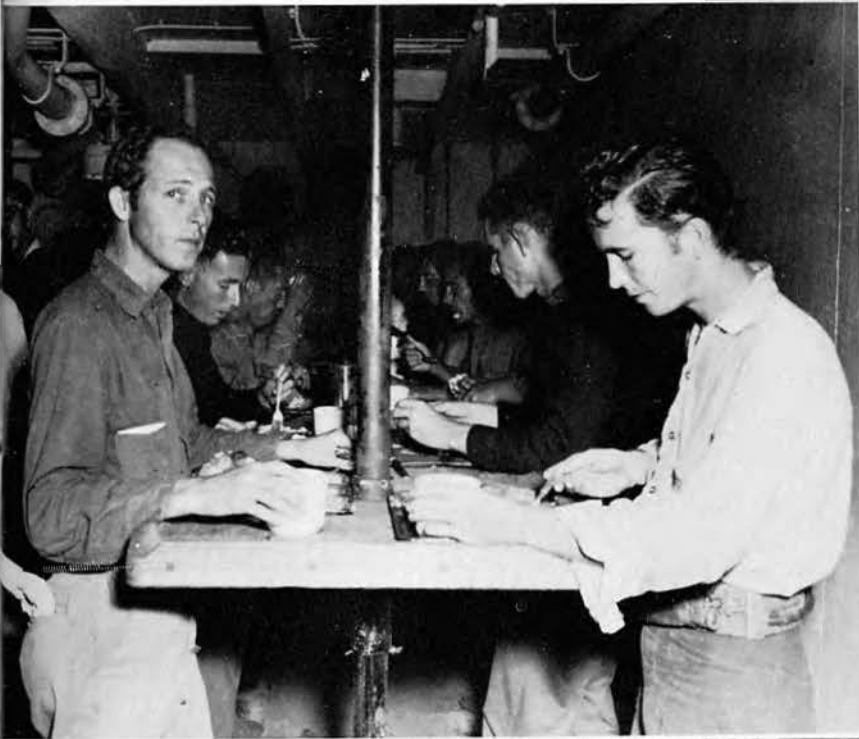
















LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

The 57th is no more, but only the name is gone. Some of us will be out there again, fighting the mud and the heat and the jungles or the white frozen wastes of the northlands. Some of us may see Japan or the coast of China. We may even be around Tokyo when the little yellow man on the white horse lays down his sword to the Stars and Stripes. Wherever we go, we'll carry with us memories of the men we knew on Santos and Manus, the mates with whom we toiled shoulder to shoulder on the Islands. The job isn't over yet, and though OUR Battalion's proud banner is furled—WE'RE going on.



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