

1st NCB

HISTORY OF THE 1ST BATT^{N.} OF CB^S

PRELIMINARY EFFORT APR. 1966
FOR THE REUNION
APRIL 15 & 16
HOTEL TAFT
NEW YORK, N.Y.

BY TRUE FIFE

NOW, HEAR THIS ~ KNOCK OFF SHIP'S WORK! SWEEPERS
MAN YOUR BROOMS; CLEAN SWEEP FORE AND AFT.



ANY ONE KNOWING DATES, ROUTES, SITES OF WORK,
OR OF "SHOES AND SHIPS -- AND CABBAGES AND
KINGS" IS REQUESTED TO SUPPLY SAME IF INCORR-
ECT OR LACKING HEREIN FOR LACK OF TIME,
THE YARN IS INCOMPLETE, BUT SAMPLES ARE
GIVEN FOR YOUR TASTING. PLEASE KEEP
THIS MESS, BUT, KNOW YE IT WILL FADE
WITH AGE EVEN AS OUR MEMORIES...

Hugh B. Holman, Yic, Hdqtrs Co., First C. Battalion
Walter B. Rushton C.M. 1/2 C.O. - First Batt - 1942 + 1944

Charles Asselstine C.M. 1/2 — 1942-1944 - 2-9-77
Edward R. Mackey — 1942+1947, 620 E. Sooked Blvd.
Moumouia Calif

Forest M. Newton MM 1/2 P.O. Box 1233 Teber, Cal. 92243
Jan. 1943 - July 1943 9-6-79

Martin Tonnesen MM 1/2 (Bobcats = Bora Bora) ~~1785 KING WAY~~ 1319 Vanderbeck St
WOODBURN OREGON 97071

J. Arthur Judd MM 1/2 1942-1944 Holiday Fla. 5/16/8

Frank Tolad June 3-1943 - CSK - State Island. 75



ALL ONE KNOWING DATES, ROUTES, TITLES OF WORK
OF THE BATTALION AND SHIPS -- AND CAPTAINS AND
IT IS REQUESTED TO SUPPLY SAME IF WORK
IS LACKING HEREIN FOR LACK OF TIME
THE WORK IS INCOMPLETE, BUT SAMPLES ARE
GIVEN FOR YOUR TASTING. PLEASE KEEP
THESE IN MIND, KNOW YE IT WILL FADE
WITH AGE EVEN AT OUR MEMORIES.

Extra copies of the Appendix, with Maps, are supplied for your notations. Please return them to True Fife for incorporation in the Final History.

"Don't shoot the pianist, he's doing his damndest" (Forward, Bk. #8*)

"A warm body is at least a man with one arm and two fingers--" (Bk. #14)

"Bos'n's mates never run out of chipping irons, but they do run out of paint." (Bk. #14)

"I am worried", said Jonas Astorg, "and, when I worry, I hate to worry alone. I share my problems with my associates" -- "he was such a louse (not Jonas) that his parents must have been lice, otherwise, his heritage became inconceivable."
Page 4; Fast Company

"Give every poor family a barr'l of grits, a barr'l of salt pork, a barr'l of herr'n, a barr'l of salt, a barr'l of pepper - stop dammit! - that's TOO MUCH PEPPER" (Prayer of a deserving American, Trad:)

"--Seabees are proving themselves to be one of our most important military units in this life-and-death struggle throughout the world" Capt. Edward V. Rickenbacker (Bk. #6, Pg. 89)

"We are trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored --" (Battle Hymn of the Republic)

*Quotes come from books numbered in Appendix IV, unless otherwise identified.

HISTORY OF THE FIRST CONSTRUCTION BATTALION (SEABEES)

The Beginning

Our story seriously began on a grey morning in Apr. 1942 when our Navy Transport (for "Bleacher") stood out to sea to join its convoy off Hampton Roads, Virginia, in the submarine infested water of the Atlantic.

The grey mist became fog, and, although this tended to make us even more melancholy, we were in luck, because the fog made poor hunting for Germans.

The fog hid the shores of the States from us quickly, and the last thing we saw for some time was a heavy destroyer slowly heading in for repairs; the bow shattered by an explosion.

Preparation preceeding our departure was not nearly so dramatic. A pioneer Battalion of Seabees, some of us had been plucked from regular Navy Reserves, but mostly we were volunteer construction men. A few older men even sported hash marks from World War 1. No one at that time knew what Seabees were, or how to train us; in fact "Seabee" was a name yet to be coined. Nevertheless we were officially commissioned as The First Naval Construction Battalion.

We had enlisted, or were commissioned, at regular Navy recruiting Stations with no facilities ready to receive us, and were therefore sent to whatever place had temporary bunks and chow; this with a princely disregard for anyone's personal comfort. We all stayed too long in quarantine because our records got lost, and the Navy was determined to inoculate us thoroughly, no matter the number of times, nor the number of hypodermic needles broken.

ADMIRAL NIMITZ AND WORLD WAR II IN THE PACIFIC

No one paid any particular attention to the handsome, silver-haired traveler who boarded the train in Washington that mid-December day in 1941. His ticket had been issued in the name of a Mr. Wainwright and, with his somber civilian suit and soft-spoken manner, he might easily have passed for a moderately successful banker or stockbroker off on a business trip to the West Coast. Mr. Wainwright's luggage was as unexceptionable as the man, except for one item he had packed into his valise at the last moment--his wife's sewing bag.

Such was the manner in which Rear Adm. Chester W. Nimitz left Washington, outward bound to take command of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. The country was still afflicted with an acute case of spy-fever and invasion jitters; many expected Japanese landings almost hourly on the West Coast. Tucked in his compartment aboard the train, Nimitz took out his wife's sewing bag and opened up the reading material he had placed in it: top-secret reports on the actual extent of the vast damage the Japanese attack had wrought at Pearl Harbor.

In a real sense, Nimitz's quiet, calculated departure from Washington was a measure of the man. Of all the top U.S. naval commanders of World War II, the calm, self-effacing Texan was easily the least flamboyant. And once in Pearl Harbor, he calmly, methodically set about rebuilding the fleet. Then, on May 8, 1942, came the Battle of the Coral Sea, the first major sea engagement since

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Pearl Harbor, and the first naval battle in history fought entirely from the air, with the contending surface vessels never coming within sight of one another. Though the Battle of the Coral Sea was a tactical defeat for the U.S., it was marked down as a strategic victory because it halted the Japanese drive for Australia and, perhaps more important, forced Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto and Imperial Fleet to turn their attentions north--to the U.S. base at Midway.

Midway may be truly said to have been the turning point of the war in the Pacific; the U.S. victory came directly as a result of the kind of decision that showed Nimitz at his best. Allied Navy cryptographers had broken the Japanese naval code, and their intercepts showed that Yamamoto planned to launch two thrusts, one a diversionary feint at Alaska, the other a major strike at the island of Midway. But powerful voices in Washington argued against accepting this intelligence; they said that the intercepts were plants designed to trick U.S. strategists.

At his Pearl Harbor headquarters, Nimitz weighed the arguments in the dispute and decided that the intercepted enemy messages were authentic. He made his fleet dispositions accordingly. The result was the Battle of Midway (June 4-6, 1942), at the conclusion of which the crippled Imperial main fleet straggled off for home, and Admiral Yamamoto went to bed with a nervous breakdown. From Midway on, Japan was reduced to fighting a defensive war.

Throughout the war Nimitz remained at the helm of U.S.

Pacific strategy, and despite the volatile temperaments of many of his colleagues, he never clashed with them, not even with the grandiose figure of Douglas MacArthur. He was also, in the words of naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison, a staunch advocate of the principle: "Give every dog two bites." If a commander made a mistake, Nimitz was almost certain to give him a second chance--an attitude that stemmed, in part at least, from the fact that he himself many years earlier had run his destroyer aground and been given an admonition--and a second chance--by a court-martial.

Newsweek, March 7, 1966

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I FIRST BATTALION DIARY OUTLINE

1940

OCT. SELECTIVE SERVICE. NAVY RES.
TRAINED UNITS INTO ACTIVE SERVICE.

1941

MAR. U.S.N.R. V-6 INTO ACTIVE TRAINING.
DEC. 7 JAPS BOMBED PEARL HARBOR.

1942

JAN. 27 "BOBCATS" (WORKING STIFFS FOR
BU DOCKS) ASSEMBLED AT NEWPORT,
AND ALMOST WITHOUT TRAINING, WENT
OVERSEAS.

JAN. & FEB. FIRST BATTALION, U.S.N. CO'ST.
CORPS, ASSEMBLED: NEWPORT, THEN
N.A.S. QUONSET PT., R.I.: LONG
QUARANTINE FOR SHOTS; CLOSE ORDER
DRILL; SOME TRAINING IN ADVANCE
BASE CONSTRUCTION. BARRACKS WERE
INTENDED FOR FLIGHT CADETS (FANCY)
& NO PLACE FOR SEABEES WHEN THE
GENTLEMEN ARRIVED.

FEB. 1st SEABEES LEFT QUONSET FOR NAT-
IONAL YOUTH ADMINIST. ^{N.Y.A.} CAMPS BY
RAILROAD, SEVERALLY: (ONLY SHELTER
AVAILABLE.)

others ?

AUBURN, N.Y. (EX-THEOLOGICAL
 BLDGS.) IN A TOWN WHERE SAILORS
 WERE STILL WELCOME. CLOSE ORDER
 DRILL BY N.C.O. MARINES; TARGET
 PRACTICE WITH PRIVATELY PUR-
 CHASED 22 CAL. SHELLS; GOOD
 INSTRUCTION IN THE SHOPS. SNOWED
 EVERY DAY BUT TWO: OPEN THE
 DOOR RICHARD (BYRD THAT IS) A
 MUTUAL RESPECT & CONGENEALITY:
 SEABEES & MARINES BEGAN HERE.
 LT. LAUTERS (UNCLE LOUIS) THE C.O.

FEB. 15 SINGAPORE SURRENDERED.

MAR. 1st SEABEES ASSEMBLED AT CAMP
 ALLEN, NORFOLK, VA. (LATER A P.O.W.
 CAMP.) PLASTER IN THE BARRACK
 STILL GREEN, & MUD WHERE THE ROADS
 WERE TO BE.

MAR. 6 1st SEABEES COMMISSIONED ON A
 CORNFIELD WHICH BEEN SCYTHED INTO
 A PARADE GROUND BY CLOSE ORDER
 DRILL.

APR. 8 CORRECTOR FELL.
1st SEABEES DIVIDED; "BLEACHER"-
 COMPANIES A & B; "ROSE"-COMPANIES
 C & D PLUS ONE HALF HDQTRS EACH.

(APPROX. 500 MEN & OFFICERS EACH.)

WERE DEPLOYED THUS.

OFFICIALLY: "BOBCATS" WAS 1st DETACHMENT. "BLEACHER" WAS 2nd DETACHMENT & "ROSE" WAS 3rd DETACHMENT.

APR. 8 "ROSE" LEFT NORFOLK BY RAILROAD FOR THE WEST COAST.

APR. 10 "BLEACHER" LEFT NORFOLK ON U.S.S. NEVILLE (FORMERLY CITY OF NORFOLK) FOR THE CANAL VIA THE MONA PASSAGE.

APR. 12 "ROSE" LEFT CALIF. ON U.S.S.

APR. "BLEACHER" IN CANAL ZONE.

16-17

APR. 18 DOOLITTLE BOMBED JAPAN.

KING NEPTUNE'S DOMAIN: POLY-
WOGS BECAME SHELLBACKS - AT THE
EQUATOR.

"ROSE".

"BLEACHER"

THE DATE LINE CROSSED.

"ROSE"

"BLEACHER"

"ROSE" IN DOMAIN OF THE GOLDEN
DRAGON & THEREAFTER ENTITLED TO
WEAR A GOLDEN EARRING THE BETTER
TO HEAR HIS MAJESTY.

MAY 4 "ROSE" ARRIVES AT VILA, EPATE,
NEW HEBRIDES IS.

- MAY 4 JAPS ON GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON IS.
- MAY 8 THE BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA.
"FULL FATHOM DEEP THY FATHER LIES
OF HIS BONES ARE CORAL MADE."
- MAY 9 "BLEACHER" ARRIVES NIKUALOFA,
TONGA TABU IS. (ISLE OF THE SACRED
SOUTH "OFA ATU")
- MAY 15 2nd SEABEES IN SAMOAN IS.
(WALLIS?) LATER AT FUNAFUTI,
ELLICE ISLANDS.
- MAY ? 3rd SEABEES IN FIJI ISLANDS.
(BOBCATS LATER WITH MARINES AT
ENIWETOCK RETURNED TO STATES AS
PART OF 3rd SEABEES.
- MAY "UNION" ENCAMPED AT MAOFANGA,
TONGA.
- JUNE THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY.
4-6
- JUNE THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY DEPLOYMENT.
4-6
- JUNE 1 SEP SPLIT: H'LP TO HAVANA
HARBOR FROM VILLA, NEW HEBRIDES.
- JUNE 28 "USS" "ER" EXPEDITION TO SANTA *
CRUZ IS. & ESPIRITU SANTO.
- JULY 8 1st SEABEES STARTED AIR STRIP
AT ESPIRITO SANTOS.
- JULY 28 AIR STRIP AT ESPIRITO SANTO
READY FOR FIRST PLANES TO LAND.
- AUG. 7 GUADALCANAL INVADED BY U.S.M.C.

* CITATION

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AUG. 20 6th SEABEES ASHORE AT GUADALCANAL.

SEPT. "BLEACHER" SPLIT: THE TANK FARM CREW, SMALL, (LATER "EDIT") REMAINING WITH THE BASE AT MAOFANGA, THE REST TO CAMP AT ^HWAVELU NEARER TO THE SITE OF THE ARMY BASE HOSPITAL AT HOMA.

NOV. "BLEACHER" SAILED FROM TONGA TABU ON DUTCH M/S SOMMESDYK TO JOIN "ROSE" IN THE NEW HEBRIDES. "EDIT" REMAINED AT MAOFANGA.

NOV. BATTLE OF SAVO IS.

*

1943

FEB. Cargo of wreck of ship, Turtle Island near Fiji, salvaged by "EDIT", GUADALCANAL SECURED.

AUG. "EDIT" LEFT TONGA FOR WALLIS IS. ON AUGMENTED BY SOME FROM CBMU.

NOV. TARAWA BEACH LANDING.

DEC. "EDIT" LEFT WALLIS ON LIBERTY SHIP JOINING "ROSE" & "BLEACHER" IN THE NEW HEBRIDES; THE 1st SEABEES REUNITED.

1944

FEB.1 KWAJALEIN.

FEB. 1st SEABEES SAILED FOR THE STATES ON DUTCH M/S NOORDHAM STOPPING AT PANGO PANGO, AMER. SAMOA FOR 2nd SEABEES.

* CITATION

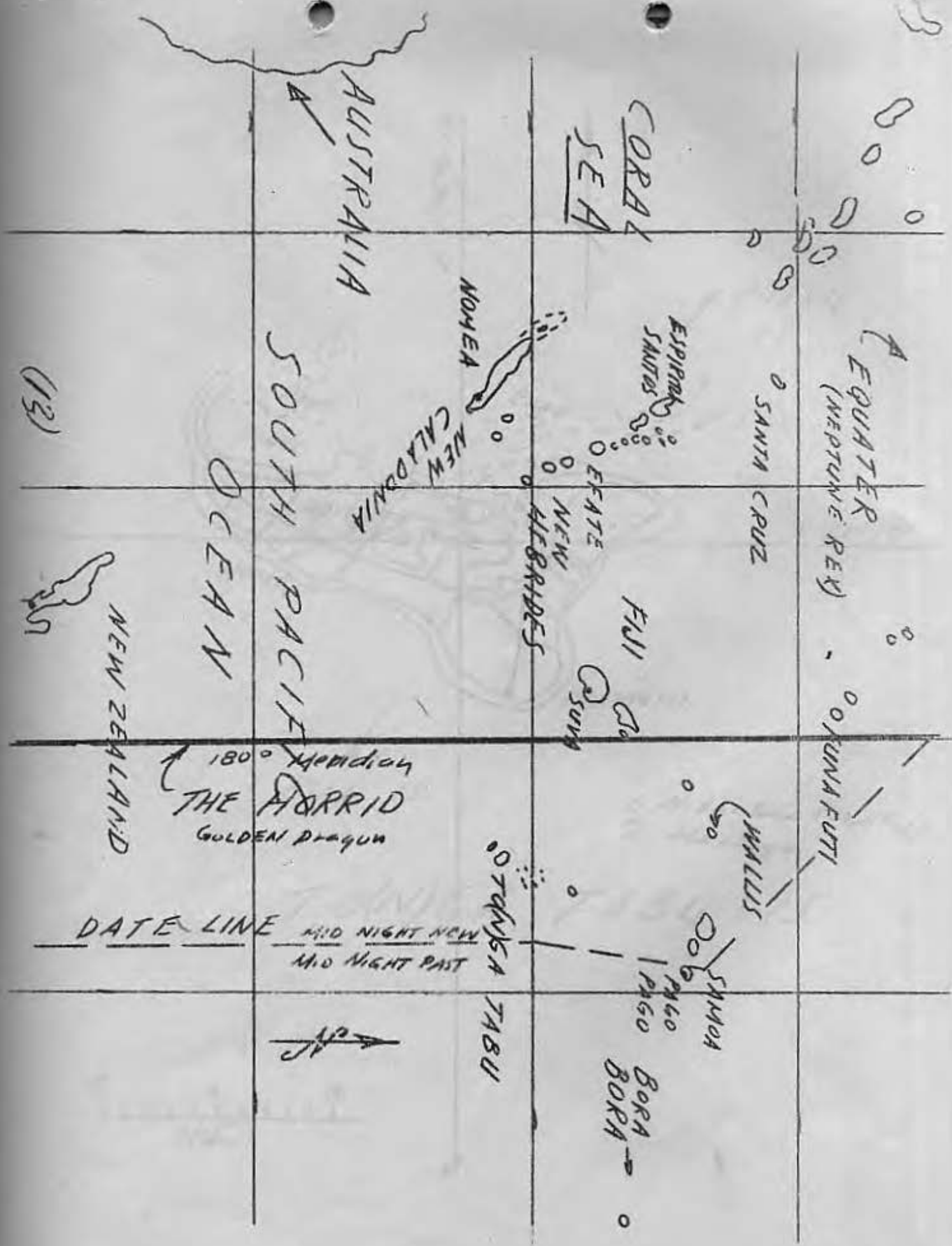
11.

1944

MAR 1 1st SEABEES ARRIVED IN SAN FRANCISCO, & WENT TO CAMP PARKS, PLEASANTON, CALIF.

MAR 13 1st SEABEES WENT HOME ON 30 DAYS OVERSEAS RETURN LEAVE.

JUNE 1st SEABEES DEFEATED BY THE NAVY; WAS DECOMMISSIONED, & THE LAST MEN PAYED OFF.



AUSTRALIA

CORAL SEA

EQUATOR (MERIDIANE REX)

SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN

NOMEA
NEW CALEDONIA

ESPIRITO SANTOS

SANTA CRUZ

NEW HEBRIDES

FILII SUNA

OKUNAFUTI

180° Meridian
THE HORRID GOLDEN DRAGON

WALLIS

DATE LINE MID NIGHT NEW MID NIGHT PAST

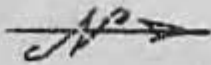
TOKELAU TABU

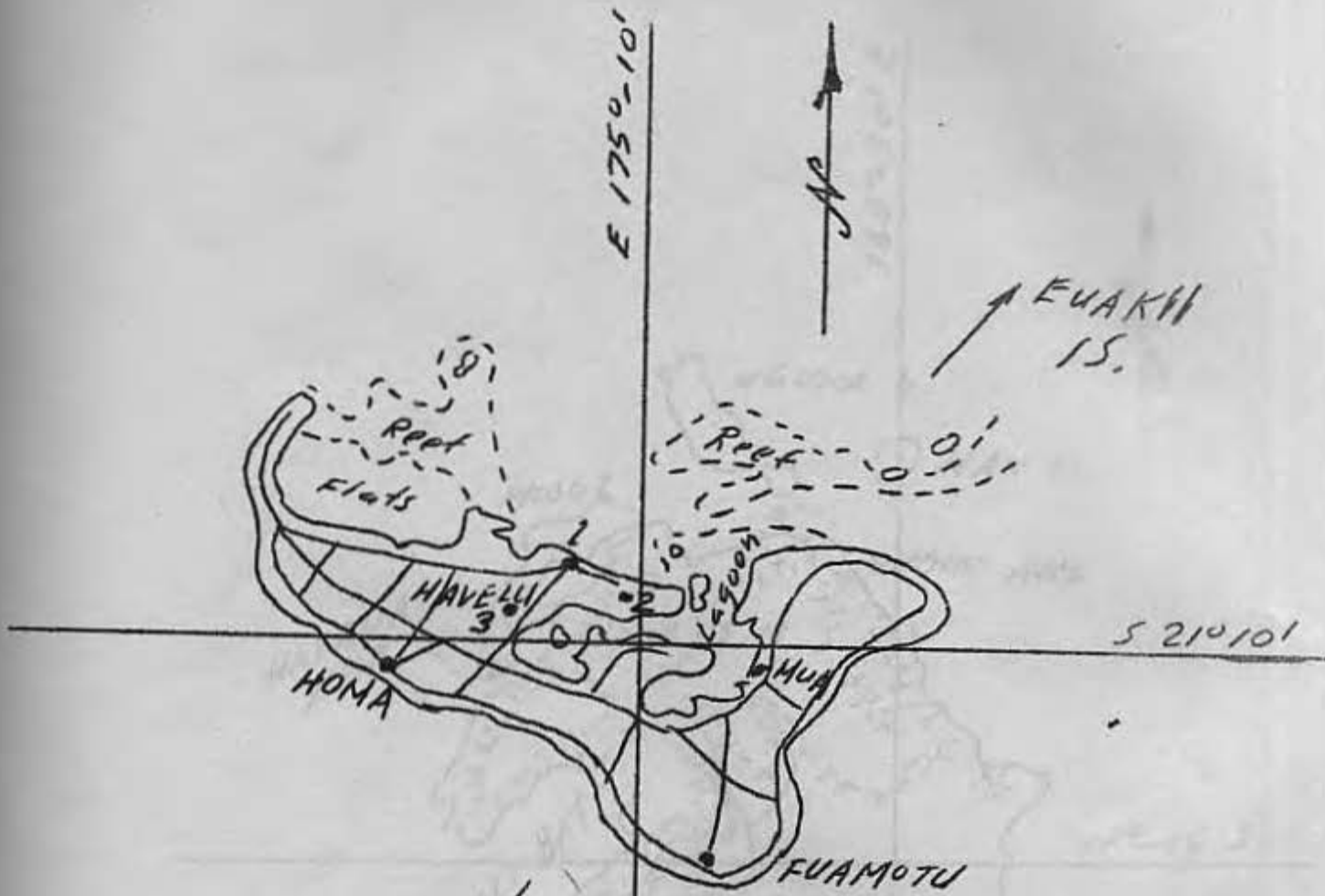
PHILO PHLO SAMOA

BORRA BORRA

(13)

NEW ZEALAND

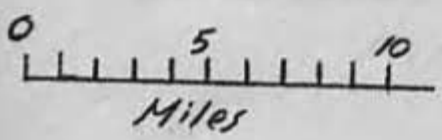




EUA IS.

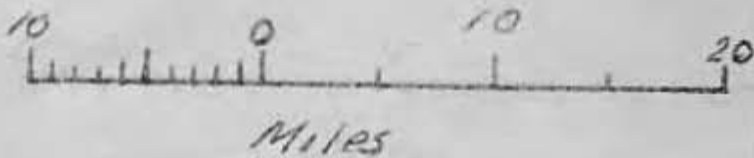
- 1. N. Kua'ulofa (CAPITAL)
- 2. Maofoga

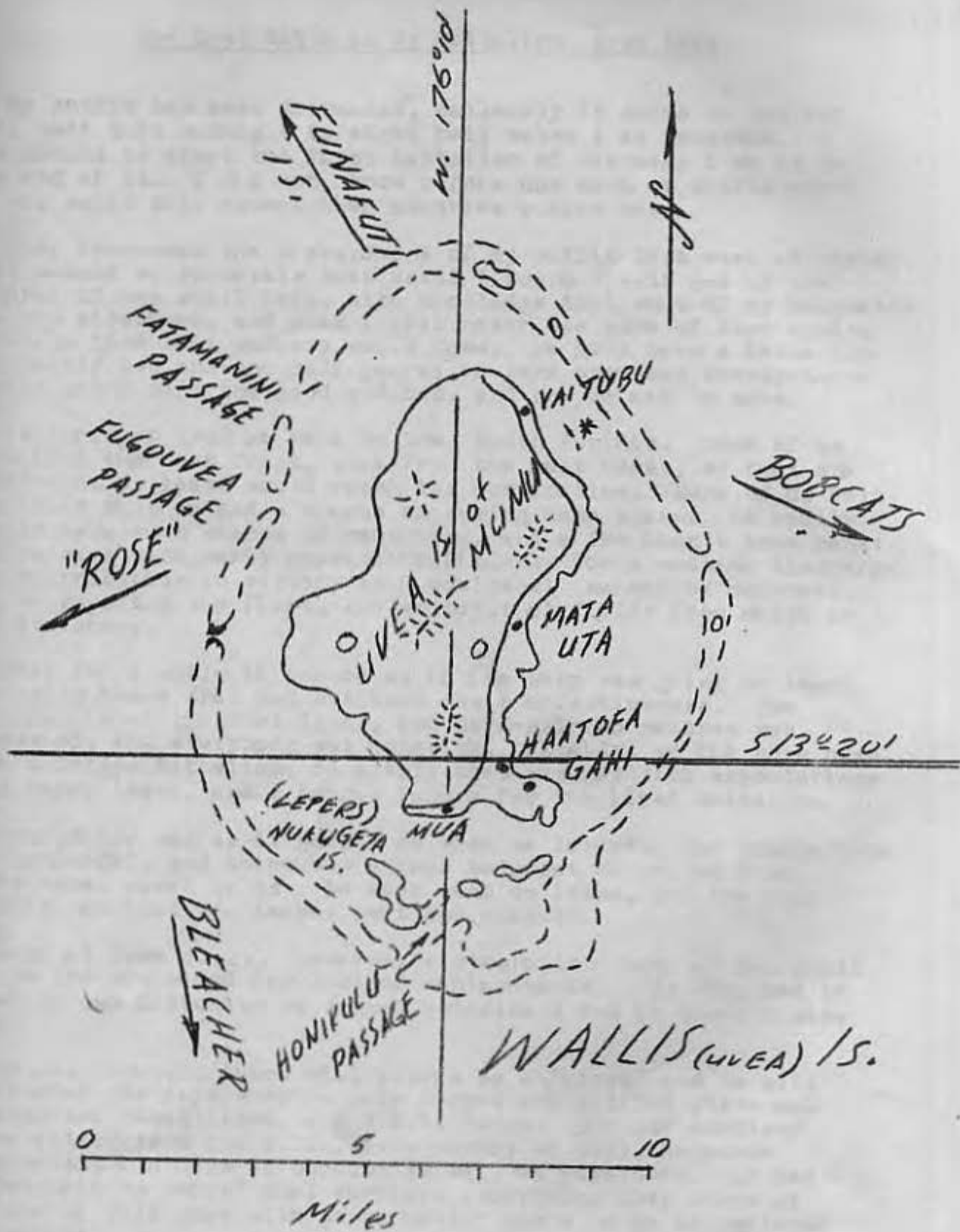
TONGA TABU IS.





E FATE ISLAND





The Last Watch in My Battalion June 1944

My outfit has been disbanded, callously it seems to us, and as I wait thru midnight to eight bell watch I am lonesome. I was around to start the First Battalion of Seabees; I am in on the end of it. I did not know before how much my outfit meant to me, until this moment when memories plague me.

They announced the disbandment of my outfit last week at muster. This seemed so fantastic that until I found myself one of the handful of men still left, with knowledge that most of my shipmates are now elsewhere, and that I will never see some of them again, I had no idea what sadness would come. We have been a battalion for nearly two and one half years; we were overseas twenty-three months going thru the good and bad, and now we are no more.

In April of 1942 we went to the South Pacific. Some of us left from the West Coast, some from the East Coast, so that one detachment at least would reach its destination. None of us felt confident that we had a chance of seeing home again. We really didn't have much chance of returning, and a few didn't come back; others came back early physically fit only for a medical discharge. Our contribution to victory in Guadalcanal cannot be measured, but we supplied the fleet, and we built air fields from which to hit the enemy.

Then for a while it seemed as if the Navy was going to leave us rot on bases that had outlived their effectiveness. The jungles of tropical lands, and dark-skinned natives was exhausted, and everybody was homesick. Finally, we did come home, with a fellow Battalion, on a trip that was gay with expectations of a happy leave, and a bright future for The First Battalion.

Everything was as it should be when we landed. The Golden Gate was wonderful, and there was a band to greet us on the dock. White women waved to us. We soon went on leave, and the only trouble was that the leaves went too quickly.

Back at Camp Parks, however, a stagnation came to us, until now we are disbanded for lack of replacements. Why they had to break up our Battalion we cannot understand and it doesn't seem fair.

To us, however, there will always be a "First" and we will not forget the days when we were formed and drilled piecemeal in assorted Naval Bases, and N.Y.A. camps. Nor our emotions as we sailed from the U.S.A. into months of toil, homemade amusements, and days of boredom as well as adventure. We had an "esprit de corps" that survived everything they threw at us, and it will stay with us no matter where we go in whatever new outfit.

Toga Tabu

1944

A decisive point in winning the war is the ability of American Service Men to make friends with the natives where ever they go. On jungle covered, savage islands, under the equator, native enemies would be a serious handicap. Fortunately, we made friends of them and they are loyal allies.

We were not the sole givers of good things. The natives made thatched huts for us which were inconceivably more comfortable than tents. They showed us which coconuts may safely be used for drinking, and their feasts of yam and roast pig have saved the minds of men who were going mad at the thought of more G.I. rations. Moreover it's mighty comforting when you are lost in the jungle to have a native friend unhesitatingly find you, and lead you back to camp.

The people of the island were great navigators before Columbus was born. In the thirteenth century they were the dominant race of the South Pacific Ocean, even the proud warriors of savage Fiji payed them tribute. But for the last century the history of the island has been one of peace and increasing civilization.

Now the native drums are booming out their ancient messages of war, and a native army drills under white officers. Specially picked natives have served with distinction side by side, if not actually ahead of us as scouts, in the Solomons, and New Guinea.

In establishing bases on these Islands a tremendous amount of sweating labor is required before badly needed airfields, supply bases, hospitals, and ship repair docks are in operation. If the natives did not furnish this labor, either more Americans would be needed, or our advance would be slower.

Usually we pay them small wages, but frequently a whole village shows its loyalty by giving two weeks labor of every man in the village. They have little money, but they can work, although leisure is as important to them as a bank account is to us.

A THIRSTY BUSINESS

Suva, Fiji Islands 1943. Triumphant but weary after a twenty-five day fight with the ocean when they salvaged the valuable cargo of a wrecked ship, fifteen Seabees arrived in port this morning. With a bearded Boatswains Mate first class in command, everybody in the detachment won a commendation for completing a perilous mission with skill and bravery.

The ship went aground on a reef near Turtle Island, and a detachment of the First Battalion of the Seabees was sent to remove the cargo. They lived on the wreck while working the clock around despite the near danger that the ship would slide off the reef and sink into the deep. In the course of duty the men were faced with bad weather, tremendous seas, and finally a hurricane. The wreck was abandoned just before the hurricane, but not until four million dollars worth of invaluable war material was safely on barges headed for Suva.

With typical ingenuity the Seabees operated the winches of the ship by compressed air, since the boilers were under water. Every load over the side was a menace because of the way the wreck rolled in the heavy swells. In the course of the salvage work one Navy tug was lost; it was ripped open on a reef and sank immediately, but no lives were lost.

Upon arrival in Suva the men scattered over the city in search of recreation, well earned by their exploits. John Rose, the man in charge winked at this irregular liberty, "they rate it," he said. "I'll expect them back only when they've spent their money," he continued, and then headed for a saloon himself.

MELE

She wore a red flower over her left ear. If it had been the left ear, Machinists Mate MacGregor would have been out of luck, but he didn't know this then. All he knew was that he had found a pretty girl on a South Sea Island, and that the faded print dress she wore did not hide her slender body, for she had recently been swimming and the print cotton clung to her body.

They were on a shore road of the Island when they first saw each other, an English built road of gleaming white coral. MacGregor wondered if the sun on the coral had not blinded him, here many miles from home he found something he had been looking for.

"Malolelei", she said to him in the best native manner, and he replied in good American, "Hello yourself".

Fortunately the problem of language was not important because, although he spoke only American, she was able to speak a fluent English. A day later he had found out the words for "pretty girl" in Polynesian, and this remained the extent of his native vocabulary, except for cuss words, but this was sufficient for Mele; she never tired of hearing him tell her that she was a pretty girl.

Her name, Mele, he was not able to understand until she wrote it for him in the sand with her toe.

"Oh, Mary" he said, "that's a fine name. You can call me Doug."

"Dug" she said, "that is not a pretty name. I will call you Keli, the red one".

"Kelly is not the proper name for a Scots-American," he retorted, "but it doesn't make any difference on this Island, so Kelly it is."

TOGAN DANCING

"Togans are noted for their sitting down dances", is a statement in most books on the South Seas Islands, although having spent more than a year with gay natives as one of the First Seabees, I think they should be famous merely for dancing.

Although they would be better off if they didn't do it, the Togans are quite easily adapted to the ways of white men, or "Europeans". Therefore I was on the Island of Toga Tabu for five months before I saw a sitting dance, or any other dance except an ordinary dance hall hula.

The only noteworthy thing about solo hulas was the costume, which consisted of a wide brassiere of seashells woven into tapa cloth, and a dense grass skirt supported from an elaborate belt of the same kind of shells that adorned the brassiere. The dancers were barefoot, but the girls always wore pants, below the skirt, and frequently their seductiveness was spoiled by a glimpse of red flannel.

The music for these ordinary dances was invariably made by guitar, with an accordian, and sometimes a piano. I have seen pianos in jungle huts to which no piano manufacturer ever conceived his instrument could go.

I once said to a friend that it was odd that natives with such a feeling for rythm did not use drums at their dances. To his answer should be added that the only native drums we had seen up to that time were drums made from logs five to twelve feet long. He answered that it would be difficult for a drummer to carry a drum weighing half a ton.

The wooden drums were not made for music. In the old days the drums were used for signals during wars. Now they are used instead of bells for church call by the various missions. The drummers were usually honored men, well trained, with the same standing as a sexton at home. It was quite obvious, however, that they did considerably more drum beating than necessary. I never got over a creepy feeling from the incessant booming, and I did weary of it. The drums were housed in small thatched huts serving for bell towers.

The talkative drummers, and some of them would discuss their craft loquaciously, even giving away trade secrets about splashing a quart of water weekly into a drum for it to drink (otherwise it would crack), never admitted that they could send more than the most rudimentary signals. They could do so however, because Naval Intelligence was always behind the native gossip when it came to information on ship movements, and essential dope: whether or not there was likker in the cargo.

After five months of drum signals, and the sad sound of native bands murdering You Al My Sunline, I was pleased to hear a tom-tom midst the organ like tone of natives having a song fest. If four Togan get together; have a well matched quartet. Almost any South Sea Native can sing parts from bass to the falsetto (which is their soprano). They need no practice; singing is the chief recreation of the long tropical nights, and the main reason they are such regular church goers. Something new had been added, however, in the tom-tom.

The source was not hard to find, In a large clearing, I came to a dance rehearsal. Although it was dimly lit with four kerosene lanterns; this was nothing like a rehearsal room in New York, it was nevertheless the same as a rehearsal any place. Sitting cross-legged in a double row were thirty or more Togan; facing them were an old man with a tom-tom made out of a gasoline drum and rawhide, also the "dance master" who, in this case was a young girl, Molilka. She was young in years, but somehow she had learned to be an authority on Togan dancing, and no choreographer in Russia ever commanded such respect. As usual at a rehearsal the performers, who were not on stage at that moment, were sprawled around, gossiping, telling dirty stories, and smoking native tobacco rolled in dry banana leaves.

Although Molilka was a prodigy in the art of the dance, I found out later that she was hardly the best. The leading dance-masters not only directed dances; they also composed original music and new routines for any important occasion, whereas Molilka was merely a channel through which flowed the conventional dances of her people. Nevertheless a dance rehearsal by Molilka's troupe was a good introduction to Togan Classical Dancing. I use the word classical, because their dances, even original ones, followed a pattern that was of ancient origin.

South Sea Island dances are not dances in our meaning of the word. Rather they are similar to the first Greek Dramas, or opera.

Togan dances may be scrambled into four loosely defined groups. The most common dance is one which tells the story of some event either new or old and closely related to the former is one which tells about a love affair of the nobility. The second most common kind is a war dance in which the story is unimportant, with a skillful rhythmic imitation of warfare with clubs and spears is the game. The funniest is a "hula-fakata" or "clown dance"! The last and dullest dance, is one in which a warrior is honored by a lengthy song of his exploits with little dancing. (Until missionaries came with a Latin alphabet, dances were the record of native history taking Kings and Queens, back to battles between nobles, temporal and celestial. Queen Salote traces back to both, far earlier than any other ruler.)

The most exciting dance is the war dance in which two opposing groups of dancers go through very realistic maneuvers of striking each other. In such a dance little singing is done, more than a few war cries, and impromptu grunts of "Ho" or "Fakapo" of which "Ho" means the same as it does in English, and "Fakapo" means "What a sensation." The spectator has the sensation as he would in watching a lacrosse game done to a fast polka. The dance is so cleverly done, however, that heads are never broken, but it takes a rugged man to go through the whole routine without becoming winded, and of course is no dance for women.

The significant form of dance, or opera, of the Togan is the one in which the story is important, and the music, rhythm, dancing, and words are mere tools for story telling, and of equal importance. Usually, these dances are done by a large chorus, the men standing in a rear line, the women seated cross-legged in the front row. In occidental thinking it is difficult to imagine how a dance can be performed sitting down. The Togan dance with their arms, so being seated is no bother to them.

All movements of the arms are a graceful wave-like movement which is familiar in the common hula dance. This is no easy motion when properly done, for it is a simous movement starting at the shoulders and rippling to an end at the finger tips. Togan Dancers start dancing when they are not over eight years of age, and will dance until they are infirm with age. Noone is considered good before well into teens, and the older they are the better is their technique considered.

These movements are not meaningless because the Togan use a sign-language of the dance to accompany the words, sometimes the movements are traditional and sometimes they are improvised, but either way they are immediately obvious to other Togan no matter how obscure they might be to a European. The two fundamental movements are a horizontal wave-like-motion which represents the sea, and a vertical wave-like-motion which represents the swaying coconut palm; understandably they should be, for the sea and the palm are to Polynesians the two things necessary to life, and art.

APPENDIX V

SEABEL INFO

EARLIEST OUTFITS

"Bobcat" (1st Detachment) Jan. 1942 to Mar. 1945 Bora Bora, Tutuila, Wari Kwajalen, and Eniwetok. (some "Bobcats" returned with 3rd Seabees).

First Battalion Mar. 1942 to June 1944 Toga, (Turks/Fiji), Wallis, Efate, Espiritu Santos (and Santa Cruz).

Second Battalion Mar. 1942 to Apr. 1944 Upolu, Fanafuti, Tutuila and Wallis.

Third Battalion May 1942 to July 1944 Noumea, Fiji, (Bora Bora/Bobcats) and Wallis.

Associated Battalions to 1st Seabees
In Espiritu Santos: 6th, 7th, 15th, 34th, 36th, 40th, 44th, 57th, 61st.

Associated CBMU's to 1st Seabees
504 Wallis Mar. 43 to Sept. 45

511 Toga ? to Apr. 46 some in Edit to Wallis and Efate

519 Bora Bora ? to Jan. 45

Espiritu Santos 534, 535, 538, 541, 542 and 550

WALLIS ISLAND

Waiting for favorable tide and wind to make passage through the only useful channel to Mua harbor, the "Edie" detachment was enchanted by a paradise island. In the middle of an atoll "Land" (not much of it, but more than we had seen for several days), and a peaceful landing was to be ours soon.

When our ship slowly moved into the entrance, we did not know that to port was a "leper isolation island," symbolic of an evil, loathsome place. Soon to port also was a cliff of coral with a cross of wood painted white, set there by the French; the cross was shattered by bullets, the farewell demonic act of men leaving Wallis (or Uveas) Island, maddened by too long a stay there.

No one I have talked to who was in Wallis had any liking for it, only horror. Wallis has great natural beauty, more good soil than ordinary atolls, and Uveans were close kin of Toggans, who are magnificent people still; on Wallis, man only is vile. Everyone there hated everyone else, and it was a cesspool of disease and malignant attitudes.

Americans of any religion, or none, considered the destruction of the cross to be a fitting way of expressing our universal rejection of what happened in Wallis when certain white men took possession of it.

Wallis Island is a volcanic island with a circular lagoon protected by a reef of coral, plunging to great depths on the seaward side. The island is not more than ten miles long nor more than three miles wide, and is so isolated from other islands, and normal trade routes, that it became important in history only once; in 1943 it was an American arsenal for planes bombing Japanese at Tarawa. Wallis supplied ammunition and a refuge for bombers; by refueling at Fuaafuti the planes could hurt the enemy, and return to a safe base.

The bomber strip was at one end of Wallis, the fighter strip at the other. They were connected by a wide taxiway, in case one field was destroyed by the enemy, but ordinarily the taxiways were used as highways. The taxiway was impressive by any standards of 1943, and was the first wide road seen by "Edie" since leaving Norfolk.

"Edie" thought it had come to Wallis to put up ave-gas tanks (also put up, taken down, and crated at Tonga). Not so, there was no reason for us to be there on Wallis, no room for us, and only dirty work to do. We went back to atavodoring and to chores no one wanted. Also we found ourselves orphans trying to find food and shelter, reminiscent of what we had had in training.

Everybody on Wallis had bum chow - mostly spam or corned Willie. The one good meal was on Friday noon when we had quantities of dynamited fresh fish, made into fillets by our expert fisherman. We fed ourselves. Once when a V.I.P. visited Wallis we were issued ice cream - that was quite a party.

We were not long on Wallis before we found it to be one of the sickest places in the world. Filoriosis (incipient elephantiasis) was our worst fear, greater even than the fear of leprosy which was also common. After about four months on Wallis, half of "Edie" had filoriosis on their medical records, indicated by a swelling of lymph glands in the crotch. Elephantiasis we had seen in Toga, but it was not so frightening in Toga as it became on Wallis. A togan might be confined to his home by a swollen leg but he had friends nearby to help him, or in for a "sing" at night. An Uvean would have

Rev.
May 66 pg 25 (Apr. 66 pgs 25-26)

Shortly before coming back to the United States, the Marine support for an equal small number of Seabees was stupefied when the Seabees said that "the only reason in returning to the United States was to find a more magnificent dinner". For this banquet a palm tree had been cut down (costing, twenty-five dollars) to make a palm salad. It was delicious. We had sufficient cordials to place bets on the time required to make a flying insect drunk by immersion in triple-sec. The unfortunate creature drowned and, in a friendly agreement, the bets were declared void. After which we sang ribald songs.

So far as I know there is no Seabee hymn, but wherever Marines went in World War II the Seabees went also, and Seabees would be pleased to have their own words to the "Halls of Montezuma".

In an earlier problem of "Rose" warfare in the New Hebrides, I have only the memory later of two men I knew who were mistreated by seemingly patriotic Americans. One, with me, had been earlier an enlisted draftsman/technician in the U.S.N.R. at Newport. The other had been a competent surveyor in the mid-west.

"Rose" had a very junior ensign (his B.S. and commission still wet) dump my friends in marshy boon docks ten miles from the camp. He warned them not to return without locating an airfield, and supplied them with a ham sandwich each for a week, and no mustard. No transit, rod, chain, and also no mosquito netting. Two years later the surveyor was with me in Jan Joquin Valley, California, and I was attempting to avoid "nervousness in the service" myself, so I avoided him; but occasionally in the noonday heat of 120 degrees Fahrenheit. I saw that he was shivering from the malarial chills, and heard him say "Mustard? Where is the mustard?"

The airfield, of course, was not built near the site they were to locate. The site selected, however, was in a low area, marshy, swarming with snaphelaes mosquitoes, and having a dozen banyon trees on the center line, each with an acre of roots 100' high, complete with a Tonk "Bloody Mary" in the shrubbery, having a grass skirt and screaming "Yankee Dolla."

BACK TO THE STATES

The first Seabees returned to San Francisco from "Rose" on the splendid M/S HOORDAM, taking aboard the Second Seabees at Pago Pago. Their history had been much like ours; normal condition, MURAR!

Out of a thousand men in each battalion originally, in the first Seabees, only eight hundred returned as a unit. Men of "Rose" had a yellow complexion from taking atrobin for malaria; "Edit" men worried about their testicles, and we were all painted someplace with a scarlet medication supposed to arrest "jungle rot", but which was useless.

We should have been in a condition to say "drop dead", but we were so delighted to be going state-side we acted almost like human beings.

*Shipmates, I have run out of typists, typewriters, paper,
and time! Your help is essential for the legend of Rose, &
I can't think straight about Edit at Wallis*

Ah Finish!

4/12/66

Tom Fife

Rev. 66 66 27 1 Nov 66 22 22 01

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4/12/66

The File

Rev. 66 to 27 1 Nov 66 200000

The above was written before the Reunion, April, 1966. Late Saturday night Capt. Frank Walsh read from his copy of an official report to Washington, which he prepared in 1943 - 44 as Commanding Officer of the First Battalion of Seabees on Efate Island. The information in the report plus comments from Captain Walsh explained our returning state-side, and the End of the Battalion, not known previously to enlisted men, only guessed at.

At Pearl Harbor, en route to take command, Captain Walsh had been warned that the First Battalion of Seabees was the most fouled up outfit in the South Pacific, but from no fault in the men; we had been poorly trained, poorly supplied, and poorly staffed.

He found this briefing to be inadequate: on Efate conditions were worse than anticipated, and morale at low ebb.

From him, however, the men of First Seabees received their first portion of understanding, and encouragement as honorable volunteers. Morale became better as symbolized by the official "Pioneer Battalion" insignia. More recreation was provided without hindering any necessary construction.

Furthermore, he arranged to get us state-side, even if he could not return with us. In his report to Washington he noted that we needed leave for recuperation, but he did not recommend Australia. Ingeniously, he pointed out that ships empty of troops were returning frequently to California, sometimes in ballast.

We did get home.

In the States, perhaps for lack of Frank Walsh, we again became fouled up; administratively, the easiest solution was to abandon the First Battalion and disperse the men.

Where the men went, and what they did thereafter is stuff for sea stories, but not this History.

Nov May 66

Page 28 (for Apr 29, 30)

(May 29 & 30 are lacking)

APPENDIX III

INVENTORY FIRST SEABEES

(All quantities approximate)

I BASE BLEACHER

A. Personnel

1. Seabees: Companies A, B & half Hdqtrs 20 officers, 25 CPOs
455 POs and men
2. Base: 20 Officers or Warrents, 15 CPOs and 175 POs or Seamen
3. Support
 - a. Uncle Sam
 - Navy Air Patrol Squadron
 - Mine Layers
 - Army
 - Engineers
 - Regular
 - National Guard
 - Negro Anti-aircraft
 - b. Local
 - Togan Militia
 - Anzaos
4. Officers
 - a. Base C.O.
 - b. 1st CB C.O.
 - c. Co. A C.O. Lt. Lauters
 - d. Co. B C.O.
 - e. Hdqtrs C.O.
 - f. C.P.O.s:
 - Sylvester, Peterson, Cowan, *James!*
 - g. Men of distinction (whatever reason)
 - *Mackinney !! (dead soon, alas)
 - Rose

others
Jordan
Blades
Doctr's

B. Construction

1. Subsistence
 - a. Early
 - 110 - tent floors 16' x 16'
 - 6 - grass thatched structures
(Galley, warehouses, etc)
 - 31 30' x 60' (1 burned down, 2 blew down)

b. Maofoga

Quonsets 20' x 50'

- 35 - barracks
- 8 - galley/mess hall/CPO
- 3 - sickbay with chem. toil.
- 10 - BOQ (Early BOQ in rented Togan dwellings)
- 50 - Air squadron

c. Nikualofa

Officers' club 36,000 SF with flush toilet

d. Havelu

? Quonset Huts or tents - barracks

Quonset Huts 20' x 50'

- 6 - galley, etc.
- 3 - sickbay
- 10 - BOQ

2. Tank, Maofoga

Prime objective (when Bleacher moved to Havelu to be near Homá, the Tank Crew stayed at Maofoga, the nucleus of Edit)

- a. 20 - 500 BBL Av-gas
- b. 20 - 10,000 BBL Fuel oil
- c. 2 - 10,000 BBL Diesel oil
- d. 10 mi 8"/12" steel pipeline, welded (for lack of arrival of quick intentions - the ship carrying roller-grip fittings was delayed by engine trouble, and abandoned Mid-Pacific. Too late it came with the roller-grip fittings below a layer of blown beer)
- e. Earthen berms for tanks ("Bleacher")

3. Army "Base Hospital", Homá
(Earlier in tents on a mud flat)

- a. Timber standard Army 22' x 60'
 - 24 wards
 - 10 surgical
 - 10 subsistence
- b. 1-100' elevated water tank 2 mi assorted water pipe
- c. $\frac{1}{2}$ mile 8" sewer pipe, some places ditched in coral cut 20" for gravity flow with manholes

4. Warehouses, steel Butler 50' x 150'
 - 1 - machine shop, blacksmith, welding, and vehicle maintenance, Maofoga
 - 6 - stock, Havelu Havelu
 - 6 - refrigerators Havelu
5. Naval Air Squadron, Maofoga
 - Sea plane ramp
 - Nose hangar 50' x 50' x 30'H
6. 30 Ammo magazines, earth covered above ground, 25' x 50', Maofoga
7. Electric
 - a. 4-twin 10,000 Kw diesel generators under cover 5 miles overhead power
 - b. 5 telephone switch boards
 - 100 phones
 - 50 miles overhead telephone wire
8. Wells incoral
 - 2 - drilled 150', Homa
 - 4 - dug with jack hammer 10' - 25' deep pumps and chlorinators for above
9. Evaporators, 2 set up and tested but not required
10. 2 quarries. In one of them a 50' hill disappeared. Coral rock was used for millions of yards of fill, coral road and airfield paving (otherwise all roads were turf, and in rainy season, were mud) and for thousands of yards of concrete.
11. Headquarters
 - a. Surveying for above, including 4 sq miles of Topo at Homa, and advice on gravity sewer. Also precise mile traverse around lagoon for 4 mi of 4" pipe in lagoon Maofoga to airfield which was not installed for lack of pipe (Airfield was made by Army, on level open country)
 - b. Supply, stock keeping and clerical (with advice on all subjects mostly unwanted) Materials and ammo for Fleet in Solomons, for above construction, storing and keeping inventory.

II "EDIT" at Toga/Bleacher

A 1) Personnel: about 100 stayed from "Bleacher" the rest went to "Rose", about 700 to the New Hebrides (or $500 + 400 = 900$ at "Rose")
"Edit" C.O. in Toga: "Uncle Louis"

others?

2) Support: Anzani & Togan militia?

B Construction 1.) Sub-lines to tanker mooring 1000 L.F. eq. 12", 8", 6" steel pipe + 200'± rubber hose. Floated out by the logic of Kelliker (I watched a 12" pipe whip a barge around, almost lassoing it, then in transit. "Pretzels for breakfast?" The pipe presumed to be sunk near the spot intended when filled with water. What a day! Not near so "laffy" as when a liberty party got sprayed with "bums", alas. (A "LASS?" or "Lalini?") 2.) Completion of Seaplane compass ^{not N.H.} compass rose 3.) Camouflaging tank farm by paint, then by nets, we did have them 4.) 40' x 100' warehouse, timber, for Seaplane Squadron. 5.) Repairs to ship with 40' W x 10' hi gash in starboard bow (from hitting dock on starboard side) by welding cut up pontoon plate, & 2'-3' Reinf. conc. 6.) Signal for a 20' sq; 50' hi, 12" p. pipe. 7.) dismantled hat "Bleacher" & used it. 8.) Sawmill moved Havelu to Maotoga for cutting. Oh! Three pumping stations for tank farm in 40' x 100' timber bldgs., mostly submerged in rainy season.

In your info, re "Rose" or "Edit" photo follow my format, PLENTY. I, 2, A, a, etc. "Hatch, sub 2, 3, 4" Abdipol with T. 14

APPENDIX IV

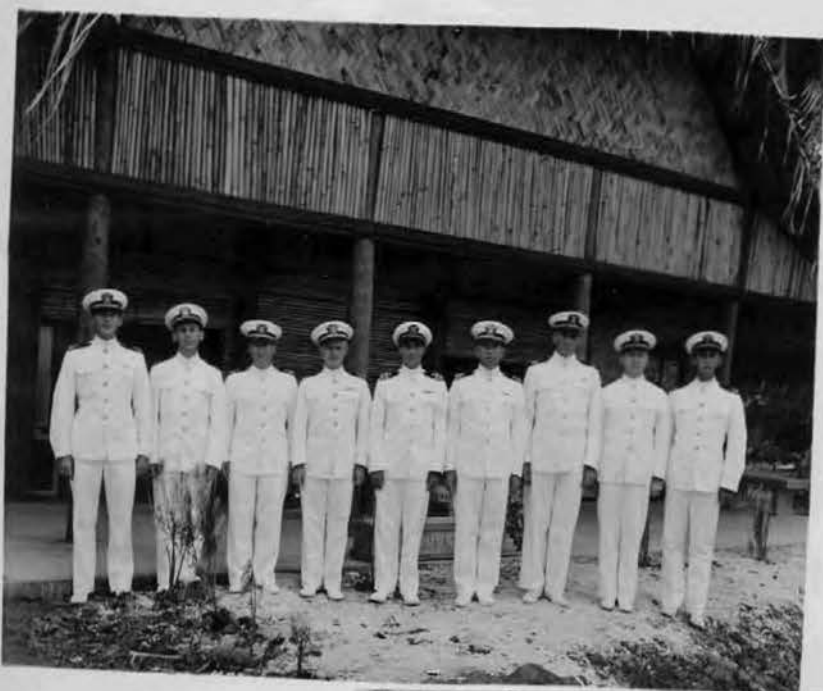
PARTIAL LIST OF BOOKS

(Publication dates are approximate)

1. BUDOCKS; U. S. Navy; Building The Navy's Bases in W.W. II;
(Vol II: Chapt. 24 and Appendix) 1947
2. Callahan, A.C.; Geography for Grown-ups; 1946
3. Dana; Two Years Before The Mast; 1850
4. Dumond, D. L.; America in Our Time - 1896 to 1946; 1947 edition
5. Encyclopedia Britannica (because Oceania was more important to Britain than America until W.W. II, the information in any edition of The Britannica is better about Oceania than in other encyclopedias.)
6. Gatly, H; The Raft Book; 1940 (navigation for survival by Wiley Post's navigator, with charts, and poetic, lucid observations about the methods of Polynesians - the greatest of early navigators.)
7. Huie, B. (LTjg, CEC, USNR); Can do; 1944 (accent the author's last name; he left out "Base Bleacher" entirely).
8. Lambert; Yankee Doctor in Paradise; 1944? (If the Navy in 1942 had had the dope Dr. Lambert acquired in the nineteen-twenties about diseases in Polynesia and Melanasia, and their control, much suffering and loss of manhours to jungle-rot, filiaris, malaria, dengue fever, nervousness in the service, etc. could have been avoided in W.W. II)
9. Lawrence, D. H.; Studies in Classic American Literature;
Melville and Dana; 1930 (an explanation of why almost no Americans remained in, or returned to, Oceania after W.W. II, by a witty Englishman who understands Occidentals)
10. London, J.; Son of The Sun; 1911 (See also Bk. 9)
11. Mariner; Account of The Togan Islands; 1810 (This book has long been out of print, but has been available at "Rare Books" in The Boston Public Library for many years. In 1810 thinkers in London, England, knew more about Toga Tabu than did American engineers who spent two weeks with bottles at a Nikuetofa boarding house in 1941 and then located "Bleacher Tanker Farm" in a swamp. Mariner's book is complete with phonetic spelling of a Sophisticated Language unknown to Europeans before Capt. Cook.)



VEH 1









HISTORY OF THE FIRST CONSTRUCTION BATTALION.

CONTENTS

- I Training period
- II Story of the Second Detachment.
- III Story of the Edit Detachment.
- IV Story of the Third Detachment.
- V The First Battalion reassembled on Efate.
- VI Appendix
 - (A) C.B.I Diary
 - (B) C.B.I Breakdown of Personnel and analysis.
 - (C) Commendations of C.B.I
 - (D) Work accomplishments.
 - (E) Official dates of C.B.I

HISTORY OF THE FIRST CONST. BATT'N.

Training period.

Naval construction battalions, similiar to the Army engineers in purpose, had been planned during the first World War, but the Armistice prevented them from becoming a reality. Nevertheless when war was officially declared in Dec. 1941 the idea of Navy men building shore installations for the fleet was still merely an idea, and something new for the Navy. During the days of hard work, and sweat since Pearl Harbor, the Construction Battalions have become a fullfledged corp of the Navy, although they are the youngest corps, they have earned and won the respect of all our armed forces.

The global scope of World War II made every theatre of war a scene of combined and amphibious operations, and the Navy could no longer depend on civilians, working under BuYd to build its bases except in areas far from the scene of action. There was an imperative need for new naval bases quickly in places so remote as to be unknown in America. These bases had to be built by officers and men of the Navy.

Through lend lease a number of bases essential to the defense of continental America had been established, and much had been done and learned in the West Indies, and by T.A.F. in Canada and in Iceland. This information combined with World War I plans was the basis for the new essential branch of the Navy. It was little enough to go on. In the German Army the engineers are called "Pioneers"; the early construction battalions were truly pioneers, and none more so than the first.

The skills and experiences of normal fleet personnel were inadequate for land construction, and a program for recruiting men skilled in construction work was started, with an attempt to interest older men so that they might contribute their skills and experience.

Personnel officers at training stations scrutinised the records to find men with trades, and men who had enlisted in the early excitement of the war to get a speedy crack at the Japs were pulled out of their sacks at two A.M. and told to move to another barracks, and not to ask so damned many questions. Some of them still are wondering what caught them and "Who done it!" Nearly all the non rated men in the first battalion were plucked out of general service. Fleet rates did not adequately designate the duties of men in the construction battalions but were used, and later readjustments were made, although in the confusion and rush of forming the construction Battalions ratings were given out or withheld which seemed without justice to men involved.

The earliest Detachment of Construction Battalions was recruited so rapidly, and sent overseas so hastily that they still had hypodermic

needles sticking in them from detention period, when they found themselves on shipboard. They were called "the Bobcats" and were bound for the Burma Road so it was rumored. Regular officers and Chiefs at training stations were so swamped with the deluge of boot training that they left the Bobcats strictly alone, and scuttlebutt flowed wildly. They left the States on Jan. 27, 1942.

Officers, like the men, found that life in a Navy that was giving birth to a new corps could be very confusing. They had been called to active service before the war to assist in building up the defense program, and as civil, mechanical, and electrical engineers, mostly reservists, they were available for construction officers.

By the end of January 1942 enough men had been recruited to start training men for construction battalions. They went through regular boot training at Great Lakes, Norfolk, and Newport although some of them had little more indoctrination than three weeks of detention. Few groups had the same sequence of training. All of them, however, spent some time after boot training in at boot camp at both Quonset Point, and at various N.Y.A. camps.

At Quonset Point the men were given training at the Temporary advanced training school. Classes were held in welding, Quonset hut construction, water purification and evaporation, plumbing, diesel generators, and out doors in field machinery barge assembly, and tank erection. The classes were conducted by civilians from the contractors working at the Point.

In Davisville near the Airport The Merrit Chapman and Scott Co. were manufacturing Quonset huts, and tours were made through the factory, and through the village of huts of all types so that their construction and use could be seen.

Also at Davisville, the Navy operated a motor pool for storing all types of mobile equipment before shipment overseas.

Lectures were given on possible problems in foreign lands under action. Every effort was made to impress the men with the seriousness of their undertaking, and to acquaint them with the establishment, and operation of Naval advanced base.

The men who came first to Quonset had luxurious quarters in the brick barracks connected to the gleaming mess hall by covered walkways. The walkways were handy protection against the dreary cold for which Quonset will always be remembered by Southerners. The men who came early, however, were always in some sort of quarantine, and seldom had a chance to use the recreation hall with its beer garden. The men who came later lived in frame barracks constantly dodging the breezes that came through the cracks, but they did get a few trips to Providence, and the use of the beer garden.

In January a contest was held to get a distinctive name and insignia for the embryonic construction battalions. The name Seabees (CBs) was officially adopted, and the insignia became the now familiar angry bee in a bluejackets uniform, clutching the tools of construction and war in its mitts. A draftsman at Quonset submitted the name and insignia.

The men were sent either before or after Quonset to N.Y.A. camps on the East Coast or Middle West. One officer had charge of from 100 to 300 men and chiefs. At N.Y.A. camps the men drilled half the time under marine instructors. The rest of the time they worked in the shops of the N.Y.A. camps and studied their trades.

At the N.Y.A. camps the good comradeship between marines and seabees was first established. The marine instructors gave drills in close order marching and where possible in open order combat. Lectures were given on military customs, small arms, camp sanitation, and first aid. Some practice was given in indoor ranges with 22 caliber rifles.

The N.Y.A. shops were unusually well equipped for instructing welders, machinists, metalsmiths, and motor machinists; there were also shops for forging foundry and woodworking.

N.Y.A. camps varied considerably as to location and living conditions. Some of them were located in towns, others were out in the country. In some the Navy men moved in with a minimum of trouble; in others a major job of cleaning and painting had to be done before the quarters reached a Navy standard of cleanliness. The slovenly way N.Y.A. students were content to live led to antagonism between Seabees and the students.

In every town, however, the towns people and the seabees were on cordial terms. The men who stayed a full month in any N.Y.A. camp where liberty was granted generously regard that period of their training as the happiest time they have had in the Navy.

The public was now informed about the Seabees, and the duties expected of them. Early in March the Seabees had sufficient men with primary training, and experience in working and living together as a military construction organization to form the First Battalion.

On March 13, 1942 all units at N.Y.A. Camps or Quonset Point were entrained for Norfolk where camp Allen was under construction on land between Norfolk Country Club and N.O.B. That week end the units arrived from the Cape Charles Ferry by busses with cries of "Are we Trail Blazers" and "Look at the mud." At that time the entrance to Camp Allen was the back door through the woods, and the rains had turned the area into a swamp of mud. Buildings were only partially finished, plaster was still green and the heating and plumbing quite confused.

That weekend was raw and chilly and the only warm places in camp were the galley or the temporary shed over the field boiler. Drinking fountains dripped warm water, while the showers had cold water only. The radiators were not hooked up at all.

On Monday morning, however, intensive close order drill was started on the parade grounds which had lately been a corn field, and where the corn stubble was still standing. Men and officers too, found that a buzzing sound accompanied them to bed; it went "Dreep, two three four your left". It was a considerably different sound than the "Hip hip," of a Navy Boot camp, or the "Hut, Hut," of the Army. It was the marching cadence of the Marines and Seabees.

During the week bulldozers came to the field to assist the feet of the Seabees in smoothing out the corn field, and on Saturday morning, March 21 Camp Allen was formally commissioned with a dress parade during a pelting rainstorm.

Camp Allen was too new for the First Battalion to derive the benefits that Battalions received from training there. It was then more of a formation center and final supply base for men going over seas.

Drills and lectures were a continuation of those given at other camps. This period, however, gave a heeded discipline, and opportunity for formation of companies. Personnel problems were worked over; men exchanged as needed by different companies; and a complement of rates established. Personal gear was inspected and more gear was issued.

The First Battalion was divided into four Companies and a headquarters company. Companies A and B with half of Headquarters made up the Second Detachment, and Companies C and D with the rest of Headquarters made up the Third Detachment. There was no First Detachment.

Very few men remember Camp Allen with any fondness, nor Norfolk. The camp life was rather unpleasant because of confusion and mud and unfinished buildings. A trip to Norfolk was a chore, and the city offered little in the way of recreation. Getting back to camp was a problem at first, because practically nobody knew anything about Camp Allen or its location including street car conductors and taxi-cab drivers. It was almost necessary the first few days in Camp Allen to blaze a trail to town so that you could find your way back.

Liberty was very spasmodic, and guard duty flourished like a weed. Some of the men kept themselves so well hidden that they missed the drilling and were seen only at chow time or in the liberty line. A few others didn't show up for a week.

Weekend liberty was finally granted the weekend before Easter, and men had a chance to see their families for the first time since they joined the Navy. For men in the Third Detachment this would also be the last time they had liberty in the States, for they were to leave on Easter Sunday (four months to the day after Pearl Harbor) on the start of their long trip to Base Roses, and shortly after that the Second Detachment sailed for Base Bleacher.

THE STORY OF THE SECOND DETACHMENT

The Second Detachment of the First Construction Battalion left Camp Allen by bus and boarded the U.S.S. Neville at the docks of Norfolk N.O.B. on the morning of April 8th, 1942, the Wednesday after Easter, four months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Inasmuch as the gangway was at the stern and the troop quarters were in the forward holds, considerable effort and time was wasted getting men and gear through the passageways to the forecastle. Considering the crowded, cheerless aspect of the rank holds, and the prospect of having to live like cattle for a long time, the noon meal on board was surprisingly good.

The Neville moved from the dock in the afternoon and anchored in Hampton Roads. She was not ready to go to sea, and the ship's company was hustling to finish securing the tank lighters and crash boats which made up a clumsy deck load. To run these small boats the ship had a large complement of Coast Guard Surfmen on board, which made the scene a mixed one of regular Navy men, reserves, coastguardsmen, Seabees, base force, army, and even one marine as a master at arms.

At dawn April 10th the Neville weighed anchor to join the convoy forming in Chesapeake Bay. Because of the danger from enemy submarines then most active along the Atlantic Coast the convoy of nearly 30 ships headed straight out to sea for two hundred miles or more, before turning south. Instead of using the Windward Passage, the Mona Passage into the Caribbean was used for secrecy so that, in the week it took to reach Colon, land was seen but once when going past Mona Island and Porto Rico.

A routine was reached on board and life became endurable. The Neville was not an ideal transport, but she was efficiently run. As she plowed into the Caribbean the heat in the holds became almost unbearable, and the men who could find sleeping space topsides slept in the open despite the prospect of rain squalls every night. Below decks the holds filled with bunks sometimes five tier high and so close together that a man could not roll over or sleep on his side, and permeated with the smell of sweat and heads, were hardly a happy home, but the ship's crew lived in conditions almost as bad so nobody could squawk. The food remained surprisingly good, but the heat in the hold which was the mess hall made meals an ordeal, and mess duty a torture.

Immediately after going to sea, security watches and cleaning details were posted. Seabees volunteered to go on gun watches, which turned out to be relatively good duty, for the gun nests were the only spots on board where a man could find a place to sit down without waiting in line. The usual daily abandon ship drills were held.

The Neville left Norfolk in a dreary foggy morning and all the first day the weather was foggy and the storm increased. The seas off Hatters are famous and a good portion of the men on board were sick. After two days, however, the ocean calmed down, and with warmer weather life became comfortable topsides and the men found their sea-legs. Soon flying fishes were skimming over the water and the Southern Cross appeared above the horizon. At dawn on April 18th the mountains of Panama were to be seen of the starboard bow. During the morning the convoy entered the Port of Colon, and left the battleships and destroyers escorting it. By noon-time the first ships were threading their way into the canal. On board the Neville everybody topsides wore whites, and the chiefs had their first chance to dress up.

Along with flying fish and the Southern Cross this was the first time most of the men had seen the Panama Canal, and all afternoon long the Seabees kept remarking about the engineering accomplishment of the big ditch with its many locks and man-made Gatun Lake. Late in the afternoon the Neville reached Balboa, and was tied up alongside the Government dock just at dusk.

Only a few officers were allowed to go ashore so the men had to be content with merely looking at what could be seen of Balboa from the deck. That night fresh provisions of bananas, lemons, and cabbage were hoisted aboard.

In the morning a native boy hawked newspapers on the dock and boat and from the half-English, half-Spanish newspapers the Seabees learned that Tokio had been bombed the day they passed through the Canal.

The heat in Panama was the worst yet encountered and the morning was spent trying to get cool. Since the Neville was connected to water lines on the dock, fresh water was ample to be had for the only time of the voyage, so a great many baths were taken, and much laundry washed. Whites were the uniform of the day every day for the enlisted passengers, and next to the problem of finding room on deck to sit or sleep, the problem on how to wash whites was the worst. The boat deck had a certain area for scrubbing clothes, and a few clothes lines were rigged, but there was never sufficient space, and fresh water was measured out with almost eyedropper frugality.

At noon on April 19th the convoy left the Canal and was escorted out of Balboa for a hundred miles by racing PT boats. For the rest of the trip the convoy was protected by numerous tin-cans, and two old four-stacker cruisers.

From Balboa the conboy headed for the Equator just beyond the Galapagoes Islands, and then cruised along the Equator to a spot just north of the Marquesas Islands after which it made a line for Base Bleacher, (Tongatabu), with of course a great deal of zig-zagging in convoy fashion.

The trip across the Pacific settled into a monotonous routine broken only by crossing the Equator, and by a side trip for the Neville to Bora Bora. Curiously the weather along the Equator was quite comfortable by comparison with the heat of Panama.

Very little time was devoted to the ceremony of making shellbacks out of the pollywogs when the line was crossed. Some few victims took most of the hazing and although the Capt. realized the importance of making shellbacks out of pollywogs he did not permit it to interfere with the operation of the ship in a war zone.

One night after a day in which there had been much blinking to and from the bridges of ships in the convoy, the Neville began to vibrate as more steam was forced into the turbines, and broke away from the conboy together with a Dutch ship and a tincan. All night long the three ships sped on with no zig-zagging, and turning over the knots as if they were thoroughbreds out for an airing. Early next morning the houble peaked Mountain of Bora Bora came into sight and at a little after 0900 the ships were in the beautiful harbor. Replacements and their gear were disembarked for the Bobcats, and by 1100 the Neville and the other ships were again underway, speeding back to join the convoy. Just at dusk the convoy was sighted by the lookout, and in a short time the Neville was at its old place in the convoy slowly steaming along as the leading ship. This side trip to Bora Bora was an example of expert navigation and timing.

At about this time a group of ships broke off from the convoy, presumably to form another task force. Also at about this time news of the Coral Sea Battle was released by the ships news.

The last week of the voyage field equipment was issued. Rifles, packs, canteens, and ponchos added to the bulk of personal gear, and for a while the holds were crowded with men learning how to roll field packs, and oily with the cosmoline that oozed from the rifles. The rifles were old O3s, and so many springs went sailing over the ship's side that orders were given not to clean any more bolts.

The Chiefs went into a conference with the Officers and came back with the news that the Second Detachment was to land on Tonga Tabu, and that Field packs were to be ready for use. Little more information was given except that the Tonga was large flat island, and had a remarkably fine health record.

On May 9th the Island of Tonga Tabu was sighted in the afternoon with the blue hill of Eua seemingly a part of it. Just before nightfall the leadsman called out the number of fathoms at the spot in Tonga Harbor where the Neville was assigned to moor, and the chain roared out of the Hawse pipe. The Neville was anchored after a voyage of thirty days in which she crossed the date line and lost a calendar day.

From the ship Tonga was lovely to see after so long a trip, and Nukualofa the capital of the group resembled a summer resort in the States. White houses with red roofs, and a number of Australian pines made a strange contrast with the background of palm-trees. The Queens palace and a small dock gave the impression that the convoy had come to some favorite spot of the gay nineties.

Except for the senior officers nobody went ashore that night. In the morning a small detail went ashore to stay at a vacant house that had been selected for Navy B.O.Q. and prepare it for quarters. Unloading parties were sent out to different ships, but little was accomplished because there was no gear ready.

For the next few days the man lived on board the Neville and operated from the ship. The Neville while waiting its turn at the dock unloaded by means of tank lighters and lightened the depth of water it was drawing. Eventually the Neville was docked and an amazing quantity of ammunition, mines, and bombs began to swing over the side; if one enemy torpedo had hit the Neville there would have been a wonderful explosion.

Considering that a survey ship had been in the harbor for six weeks, and that a task force with the Lexington had been in two weeks before the Seabee convoy arrived, the misinformation about Tonga was colossal, and the information given by BuYD terrible meagre. Moreover a Navy patrol squadron, and the mine laying detachment had all ready set up a happy home when the convoy landed.

Tonga Tabu is flat, it is true, but it has not been a howling wilderness unknown to whiteman for a century or more, and the natives who sailed all over the Pacific had, by the time Captain Cook discovered

Tonga near the end of the 18th Century, developed a high type of civilization and the land was carefully cultivated. Queen Salote, the present ruler and famously huge Queen of Tonga, belongs to one of the oldest dynastic lines still in power. Although Tonga is under New Zealand protection and foreign affairs are acted upon only with the advice of the British Consul, it is the one Island in the South Pacific which still has its own government and is free.

The natives are Polynesians, although there are numerous half-castes and large colony of Europeans. There is practically no illiteracy, and many of the Tongans speak English as well as their own language. Living conditions are so easy that Tongans might be considered indolent, but if they can see a reason for working they are intelligent, and sometimes skillful workers.

Tonga is a flat coral island with extensive reefs around it; it has a large harbor, and many lagoons, but no rivers or lakes. Drinking water is usually rainwater collected in cisterns, but wells may be dug which have good water in most cases. A large portion of the island is carefully cultivated, copra and bananas being the chief exports, and the natives live off the land except for clothing and luxuries like sugar and tinnybeef. There are lots of pigs on the island which run wild, and quite a few horses.

Along the waterfront the Americans found a good small concrete dock for ships not drawing more than 22 feet of water, a coral causway to water deep enough for small ships and barges, and a part-causway part trestle structure extending to water deep enough for barges with a narrow gauge railroad for mine carriages. The two caaseways were prepared by the Tongan Defense Force; this organization composed of native troops trained under New Zealand officers was previously the only defense of the island. It had rounded up enemy aliens, evacuated European women to Auckland, and on edict from Queen Salote had evacuated natives to the bush from Nikualofa except for traders and government employaes. There was a network of roads sufficient for a start.

The initial unloading of ships was done by tank lighters, except for the ships which had time to come up to the dock. Unfortunatly all the things needed first such as pontoons and barge parts, mechanics tools, drafting equipment etc., were stowed in the bottom of the holds. Day after day men would report to different ships for unloading details, and in twelve hours would unload a tank lighter load of fruit juices in a place where malaria and dengue fever were unknown. Or they might not even

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unload a case of fruit juices if no tank lighter were available. They might spend an evening on a waterless dutch ship waiting for a shore boat back to a supperless camp.

Eventually pontoons were available for barges; indeed shortly later there seemed to be enough pontoons floating around Tonga to make a bridge back to America. Like the Jeep the Navy pontoon is a versatile little cuss; it is useful not only for barges, it is also useful for water tanks and native cisterns. As soon as the barges were assembled, and a routine established at the piers the Seabees really began to shove cargo shore, especially as soon as the riggers had made up slings and other gear that had been missing to start with.

The first material to come ashore from nearly all ships was a fearful collection of ammunition. This was all taken back in the bush where not even a Tongan had been before. Nobody wanted to carry a 500 pound bomb around in his hip pocket; the men unloading the holds were in a sweat to get rid of the explosives around them, and the men in the bush were equally anxious to get rid of the explosives, and even more anxious to get out of the jungle where the vines and damp made a mans outlook on life rather despondent.

Similar to the miasmatic conditions of the jungle was the order of command on the Island. The Army fought the Navy, and the Base force squabbled with the Seabees. Inasmuch as the colonel of the Army personnel outranked, the Commander of the Base and the C.O. of the Base outranked the Lt. Commdr. of the Seabees the order of command was a sorry one for the First Construction Battalion.

After two nights at the dock the Neville was unloaded and ready to put to sea again, so the Seabees were put ashore. The only trouble was that nobody with any taste, or even the ability to pay attention to a lecture in camp sanitation, had prepared a camp site. The army having come ashore first had grabbed all the choice spots and left an area of swamps and marshes for the navy bivouac, one mile from the dock in Naofanga. There was no excuse, however for placing the navy galley next to a hog wallow and less than a hundred feet from a latrine.

With the old song, "We're tenting tonight on the old camp grounds" in the mind the Seabees pitched their ponchos and the one or two available tents in the coconut grove that was part of the Catholic mission, and, after a hearty meal of cold ration "C" prepared for sleep midst the underbrush. Since nobody was the least bit sleepy, the hundred or more Tongans who had rallied around with lanterns, tangerine, and a willingness to teach the tongan words for "hello" and "pretty girl" were a welcome diversion. Very seldom after that was Seabee without a native friend, and Tongans will never lack friends in America.

On the water front as the procedure for unloading was improved more and more men were released for construction work, although for the first two months in Tonga at least half of the men were engaged in unloading ships, and storing materials in the bush or in the various warehouses the Americans had leased from local owners. There was no one storage area but material was stored in many places near town with camouflage given as much consideration as segregation or ultimate use. The big warehouse formerly a Burns Philips store and recently a movie which was called Red Barn became the center of all supplies and was under the Base Bleacher Supply Department. Navy headquarters for both the Base and Seabees was established at Army S.O.S. at Nikualofa in a large residence near Red Pier.

Next to unloading ships, fortification of the island was of most importance to prepare for the time when the fleet would not be in the harbor. The Seabee made foundations for three pairs of big naval guns and mounted them, although the army was to man them.

About two weeks after Camp Maofanga was opened the "Incident of Maofanga" occurred. An unidentified plane appeared in the sky, and in the harbor several of the ships began banging away with their three inch guns. Nobody at Headquarters knew what it was all about, and neither did most of the army apparently. The anti-aircraft batteries did, because they did nothing. The plane was finally discovered to be a New Zealand plane, and the pilot was a trifle annoyed about his reception although nothing happened to him except that he had a bumpy end to his flight. While it lasted, however, the excitement was intense. Natives went streaking by to find their foxholes in the bush. Half-tracks went someplace only to come right back again, and at Camp Maofanga everyone was running around trying to get rifles which had been put in the armory. The most fun came from ducking bullets from a B.A.R. which had become jammed and kept on firing until its magazine was empty.

In the early days of the base at Tonga there was considerable activity from the fleet in Nikualofa Harbor. A hospital ship, a repair ship, minesweeper, net tender, tug and attendant ships stayed in the harbor for months. Nearly all the capital ships in the South Pacific came into Tonga for supplies at one time or another; one aircraft carrier came for repairs after a direct bomb hit at Guadalcanal and several other flat tops came in for fresh loads of bombs. Part of the task force that attacked Guadalcanal was formed in Tonga, and marines had their last liberty in Nikualofa before going into action.

The most intimate contact with the fleet came however, when survivors of the old Lex were brought into Tonga a week after Tonga was occupied. They were destitute and Seabees and Bleachers dug down into their seabags to give them a change of clothing. They brought vivid accounts of the Coral Seas and Midway battles. Eventually some of them were assigned to duty at Base Bleacher.

The defense of the island was the job of the Army but the Harbor was in the hands of the Navy. A mine laying detachment was in Tonga when the convoy arrived and as soon as barges had been assembled Seabees helped to lighter the mines from the mine depot to the mine laying ship. Also Navy was the V.O.S. patrol squadron which had its base in the Maofanga Catholic College, and a temporary ramp just below Camp Maofanga.

Camp Maofanga was split into several divisions. Company A and Headquarters Company stayed under the palms at the Catholic Plantation. Company B moved out in the bush near the gas tanks, while the Base Bleacher camp was still further out in the bush at a place nicknamed "Monkey Bottom". The tent camps were improved by issuing more tents, more cots, and by adding wooden floors, and improving the galleys. Eventually thatched sheds were put up for messhalls. For bathing the men dug shallow wells behind their tents.

B.O.Q was a rather crowded establishment, at first even after two Quonset Huts had been added. Eventually some of the officers moved into houses rented in Nikualofa, or to camps at Maofanga or Havelu, and only a few officers remained at old B.O.Q. The officers had their first club in a house in Nikualofa belonging to the estate of a wealthy trader. Later an officers club was built out of two army huts with a wing connecting them for the bar; it was a pleasant place, attractively painted, and decorated with mermaid murals by an artist off of a visiting tanker.

In biblical fashion it rained for forty days and forty nights starting the week after the convoy arrived, and this turned everyplace into a sea of mud. The rain and mud made the camp cheerless, and as blackouts were carefully observed the nights were long. Army rations were the only food for a long time and this combined with indiscriminate eating of old coconuts fallen on the ground combined to give everybody a mild case of dysentery.

The most important work to be done on Tonga by Seabees was the tank farm, warehouses and magazines, and later on army hospital.

Work began on the warehouses, and magazines as soon as material had come shore. The men on the tank crew were kept on unloading details much longer than anyone else except those men who became permanent riggers and

barge operators; finally however, there was enough material ashore for the tanks and work was started on them. Carpenters were busy from the start on putting up huts, temporary warehouses, towers, and radio masts, and the surveyors went crazy trying to keep ahead of the work or in catching up to it as the case might be.

Except for Naval Headquarters, engineering coordination rested at the small house near the camp which was used by the surveyors for a drafting room. A great deal of work was done solely in the field as conditions arose rather than being worked out first in the office.

Life at Maofanga slipped into a routine of working from "can see" to "can't see". Recreation had to be devised by the men themselves except for a rare jittery movie provided by Red Cross or an evening of recordings from the Red Cross truck. Buchwhacking became the most popular sport, and some of the men learned to speak Tongan. Native dances were soon forbidden, but before they got stopped they were popular too. Nikualofa was out of bounds, but since restrictions were loosely held, the so-called coffee shops downtown became popular, and Nielsen's Boarding house was so rushed it turned trade away. Best of all when it could be coaxed into making a trip through the mud was the bank of the 147th Infantry.

Late in June work started on a new camp for the Seabees at Havelu about two miles inland from Nikualofa. It was planned for a permanent camp and quonset huts were put up for the galley, officers, and recreation, but tents were used for the men. Washrooms with showers were erected and put an end to the bucket baths. It was heavily wooded area with many hardwood trees and excellent shelter from the air.

A well was dug at Havelu which became the principal watering point for the Navy, water being transported to other camps by trucks. Heretofore water had been obtained from evaporators or from the Tongan well at Agricultural Farm. Soon after this, use of evaporators was abandoned except at Red Pier. In addition to wells at Havelu and the Hospital, the Seabees made five more wells less frequently used.

About the middle of July the Seabees moved to Havelu after a weekend of tropical rain had delayed them. The men working on tanks, and barge operators stayed at Maofanga so that they would be living near their work. One reason for the camp at Havelu was that in the future most of the Seabee projects would be nearer to Havelu than Maofanga. Also having separate camps eased a great deal of the friction between Seabees and the Bleachers.

Camp Maofanga was well built up before the Seabees left so that everybody in Maofanga lived in Quonset huts. The camp area was cleaned out and eventually Camp Maofanga became an ideal camp, instead of a morass. The chow became better from the beginning than the chow in the Seabee galley, and soon as good as any to be found in the South Pacific, particularly when green vegetables were to be had from the army garden. Chow at the Seabee camp never was very good and frequently was downright bad.

The latter part of July it became necessary to do some road building. A net work of roads had been made by the Tongan government, but very little of the total mileage had been surfaced, and none of the roads were good enough to stand up under military traffic. At times during the rains it became necessary to stop all trucks for nothing could keep moving in the worst of the mud. Eventually the important roads were surfaced with coral either by Seabees or by the Army, and the Seabees built thirty miles of new road in addition to the hundred miles of old roads which they maintained. To get coral for surfacing roads and for concrete the Seabees operated two large quarries, and a stone crusher. They also set up another crusher and operated it for a short time before turning it over to the Army.

More and more natives were used in the quarries, for unloading ships, and for general laborers until more than a thousand were on the Navy payroll. They were recruited from as far away as Vavao. Ordinarily they were used as laborers, but some of them earned ratings as skilled workman or native foremen and received better wages. Eventually the lazy natives were weeded out, and the ones who kept on working were proud of becoming junior seabees. They loved the war cry "Get on the ball" and frequently used it on themselves.

Work on the tank farm progressed rapidly considering the difficulty of getting material through the marsh where the tank farm was located, and the way tank parts were strewn all over the island. In nearly all the work first done in Tonga all earth work had to be moved with hickory boom shovels, and the leveling of the sites for the tanks, and the trenches for the pipe was hard work. A great deal of time and unnecessary sweat could have been saved with a few pieces of heavy equipment. As soon as the 26 five hundred bbl. tanks had been erected the pipeline was started, and the tank crew moved on to the 20 ten thousand bbl. tanks for fuel oil, and the two ten thousand bbl. tanks for diesel oil.

The warehouse crews were also handicapped by not having any heavy equipment for moving dirt, and all grading had to be done by hand. The warehouses were of flat curved roof type, and in all 26 warehouses were erected, 7 of them being built for the Army.

The Magazine crews had one of the worst and most disagreeable jobs, for the magazines were located in the thickest jungle to hide them from the sky, and the men were pestered by mosquitoes. Every part of the erection of the magazines was hard, physical labor and the men had to work and sweat in the middle of a steaming, insect loaded jungle.

By the end of September, the tank farm was well along with its pipe line, and all the tanks were up. The warehouse and magazines were over half completed, and the nose hanger was finished at Naofanga, and there was a lull in building Quonset huts. Enough men were free to start the army hospital rolling on a production basis.

Ever since the middle of July the proposed area for a hospital at Houma near the blowholes on the west side of the island, had been surveyed and studied for the best arrangement of the proposed fifty ward hospital. Due to a topography that sloped the wrong way, consideration had to be given first to the sewer line so that the sewer could be installed with out unnecessary cutting. Finally the hospital was planned as a semicircle which involved considerable work for the surveyors; the bush was so thick that a major error might easily have gone undetected, but when the project was completed everything came out as it had been planned.

About the middle of August work had been started on buildings at the hospital, where a well had been driven. In building the first frame building of the hospital, trouble was encountered because of the poorly drawn army plans in which dimensions were badly estimated, and the trusses designed with a humorous disregard for engineering practice. This building was cut by hand, and worked over until the wrinkles had been ironed out and a safe basis had been established for production. For the rest of the buildings all the cutting was done at the sawmill, erected on a production basis by crews specialising in one phase of procedure. At the mill which was composed of all available skillsaws, and a homemade heavy duty circular saw powered by a model T engine, the material was cut by jigs. Whenever possible, material for doors, trusses, etc., were assembled by jigs. In the field there were crews for each phase of erection like foundation crew, floor laying crew, etc. Towards the end of the work a record of starting and completing a 20' by 160' building in a day was established.

This would have been an excellent record in the States; it was a record to be even more pleased about where so many difficulties of supply were encountered. For instance a shortage of nails appeared, and it was necessary to use 16d nails for sheathing on the last buildings to be built, which necessarily made it impossible to salvage them in event the buildings were torn down. Also there were no good hammers,

and an inadequate supply of poor ones. Plumbing fixtures had to be made out of black sheet iron, which gave a short life expectancy to the urinals and wasted solder prodigiously. Originally the roofs were to have been made of sheathing covered with celotex and the whole water-proofed with tarpaper; unfortunately so much sheathing had been used for tent decks and other purposes that there was hardly enough for the sides. With but celotex underneath the tar-paper it was no job at all for a palm tree to bomb the devil out of a roof, and it was necessary to send natives into the trees and castrate all the palms within bombing distance.

On the hospital job more natives than ever before were used, mostly as laborers, but sometimes as carpenters.

Everybody who worked on the hospital was pleased with the speed with which everything was organized and accomplished. This feeling of pride was short lived, however, for the army hospital was never used as an evacuating hospital. The successful battle of Salvo Island in the Solomons completed the victories of the Coral Sea, and Midway; Tonga, before its projects were complete, was obsolete and out of the war zone.

Except for the men on the island few patients ever had a chance to use the facilities of the hospital which as it neared completion in November included 30 wards, surgical ward and laboratory, two mess halls, two warehouses, 10 quarters for personnel including nurses, and five buildings for administration and facilities. A water tower with a water line, sewage line, three generators and overhead wires, and a covered walkway from messhalls to surgical wards gave complete service.

The hospital has never been much used and it is not economical to salvage it. One may add that it was there ready to be used if the tide of war had not turned in our favor, and a more ideal spot for convalescents is hard to imagine.

Camp life at Havelu grew into a catch as catch can sort of existence, and was great for men who did not wish to be disturbed at their hobbies, which took forms of interest making music on the bazooka (a nail keg bass fiddle) to watching drops fall from a copper coil. Once in a while there was a raid somewhat reminiscent of prohibition days but usually the tent camp was enlisted men's territory and officers knew no more about it than they did the lost city of Atlantis.

Occasionally an inspection was held on Sunday, but the officers did not inspect your teeth and look at your hooves for stone bruises the way you were inspected at Maofanga where things were more military.

Bushwhacking was perhaps the most favorite sport at Havelu, and some of the men became as proficient as the natives; they could come back from a kava circle over two miles of native paths through the bush when it was pitch black, and reach their tent without stumbling over one tent peg. Some men never left camp except to go to work, but most Seabees had more than a casual acquaintance with Tongan ways, although only few went native completely.

There was a brisk trade in souvenirs. Nearly everybody had some tortoise shell jewelry. Acres of fau trees were cut down by Tongans to make grass skirts, and mats. Some men became adept at opening coconuts, as useful accomplishment on the job where coconut milk was frequently the only safe drink to be had.

Although the tank farm, warehouses, magazines, and hospital were the more obvious projects on Tonga, there were other jobs which totaled almost as much work as the more noticeable things. In all 600 Quonset huts were erected; perhaps half of them were built for the Army in which case soldiers did some of the work under Seabee supervision. Besides the main camps at Havelu and Maofanga there were numerous small camps for radio, sono-buoy etc; one big camp was built for a seaplane base for which over 80 huts were erected near Maofanga complete with galley and services. The seaplane camp was eventually torn down without being used.

A great deal of work was done for the army. Showers with water tanks on towers were built for several army camps. Seabee painters with crews of soldiers did camouflage work and surveyors tested the range of the artillery. Another side job was making four-holer latrines for all the army; the poor fellow who cut holes for several thousand rear ends deserves a special medal for completing what must eventually have become a monotonous and uninspiring job subject to all the dull wit of his shipmates.

Inasmuch as the base at Tonga was primarily a fleet supply base a considerable crew of men worked from almost the beginning at erecting and maintaining refrigerators. At first this was done for the army quartermasters with 80 outdoor one hundred-fifty foot refrigerators in Nikualofa. As the warehouses were completed a pair of 6,800 cu. ft. refers were installed in five of the warehouses, and outdoor refers were taken out of use. Seabees maintained all the refrigeration on the island not only storage but for the various camps of both navy and army, and had a crew who held continuous watch over the big storage refers. In all 72,000 cu ft of refrigeration was installed, and eventually 58,000 cu ft was dismantled and shipped out; eighty 150 cu ft outdoor refers were used and shipped out.

Closely connected with the refrigeration crews were the electricians, a large portion of their work was done with the refrigeration crew. They of course wired up many camps and areas for power and light. Except at the hospital all wiring was layed underground. Approximately 30 miles of cable was run and 30 large diesel generators were installed not counting portable generators.

The abortive seaplane camp has all ready been mentioned; as part of the seaplane base a ramp and parking area was started for PBVs but never finished. It was planned to make a wide ramp out to the edge of the shore reef but only 300 feet of ramp was filled when the trucks were put on other work.

Next to the material hauled for roadbuilding, the earthwork hauled for berms around the tanks in the tank farm was the biggest job of earth-moving. The berms were built in a reasonable length of time only because in October some heavy equipment and Mack dump trucks became available; this equipment had been delayed because of a balky ship. Once work on the berms was started it was carried on continuously 24 hours a day, and one of the few small hills of which Nikualofa boasted was nearly demolished by the shovel operators and the quarry crew.

Tonga because it was so flat was an ideal place for an airport. The large airport in the middle of the island which was started by the New Zealanders was completed by American Civilian engineers and the Army. Some Seabees, however, worked at the airport as operators and lived there while working.

It was planned to have a pipeline bring gas to the airport from the tank farm 11 miles away. After a surveying crew had spent several weeks making a study of the best route which would still have crossed two wide lagoons the pipeline was abandoned. The airport never became active and it was possible to supply its needs by tank trucks.

The last Naval battle of the Solomons changed things no end in Tonga. The Army hospital was never used. 375 of the quonset huts were torn down. The week that the last of 51 ammunition magazines were being finished orders came to tear down 30 magazines. All but 14,000 cu.ft. of refrigeration was torn down. A laundry had been started but was abandoned almost as soon as the foundation was poured.

From the middle of December until the Second Detachment left Tonga the biggest part of the work was tearing down the things it had built, and crating them for shipment. Only the tank farm was left intact.

The outstanding feat of this period was accomplished by a salvage detail which unloaded a wrecked ship which had run on a reef near Turtle Island halfway between Tonga and Fiji. On December 4th a crew of 14 men under a first class Boatswain Mate was ordered to the wreck; they left so hurriedly that no one was equipped either with clothes or money for a long stay.

The ship on the reef was apt to go to pieces (which eventually it did) with all its valuable cargo. With much labor and danger because of the exposed position of the wreck the crew salvaged four million dollars worth of equipment. During the salvage work one navy tug was lost on the reef, and one of the two barges brought from Tonga was broken. The winches were worked by compressed air since there was no steam on board. Every load over the side was dangerous because of the heavy swells.

The crew worked continuously for 25 days even on Christmas day, and lived on board the wreck which was listing and apt to fall off the reef and sink in deep water. Their only recreation was one night ashore to visit the natives of Turtle Island who were a primitive, almost savage people, nearly unknown to white men. On December 29th, the wreck had to be abandoned because of hurricane warnings, but by that time nearly everything of importance had been salvaged. The salvage ships rode out the hurricane at Fulaga on the way to Fiji. After the storm they continued on to Suva where the men welcomed an opportunity to cut loose in the manner of sailors who have been working hard and living dangerously for a month. It took three days to round them up after they hit the beach, and all that brought them back was a collection of empty pocket books. On January 15th, 1943 the salvage returned to Tonga on a mine sweeper.

The last few months the Second Detachment was in Tonga was spent with considerably less work than before. Shorter working hours were permitted, and more attention was given to recreation. Serious attention was given to outfitting the detachment for moving to another base. As part of the apparel of a well dressed Seabee a handmade sheath Knife was considered essential, and it is not possible to estimate the number of files, hides of leather, or sheets of plastoglass, and man-hours that were consumed in making knives.

Because of the victory of Naval Battles in the Solomons, black-outs were not made complete, and the ban on night life in Nikualofa ceased. Natives who had been evacuated to the bush flocked back to their town houses.

Legal liberty was granted in port and starboard watches. For a while this caused a surfeit of Native dances; every other hut blazed with light of a borrowed Coleman lantern, and rocked with the wierd rythms of native jazz as played by two ukeleles and a banjo. There was all ready a brisk business in coffee shops, and the number of shops increased, they sold a horrible liquid, but it was not the coffee that made them popular. Success could be measured in geometric proportion to the number of "Tahinis Fakaofa" (or pretty girls) waiting on the table.

For a man with no inhibitions about going for a roll on a mat with a brown skinned taahini, Tonga was a magnificent place to be. Although Tonga has a well advanced native civilization it is not fettered by any European ideas or morals; the only trouble with the law comes when love is sold. It is legal to give love, but not to sell it. Of course it was not considered nice to get a venereal disease and a girl who gets such a disease is locked up until she is cured, but that was not really lasting trouble in Tonga where a few months are insignificant, and a girl might meet the best of company while taking a cure.

There are few tropical diseases in Tonga and no malaria. Yaws is the most common affliction of the natives, and this fortunately acts as a lasting inoculation against syphilis. Americans had trouble with "Tongan Rot" a fungus growth, and heat rash, but this was not serious in most cases. Doctors later found that it was possible to contract filarisis in Tonga, but the mild climate kept filarisis in a dormant state, and it was not a problem in Tonga although it might show up elsewhere. One reason for the good health record of Tonga is the program of instruction in hygiene, and the clinics given free by the government. Tongans are relatively clean, bathing frequently, and keeping their homes free from filth. Medical and dental care is provided free to all Tongans in good standing.

As part of the program of recreation several Saturday night dances were held in a warehouse, and all available native girls were rounded up. Signs reading "Taahinis for the yan eaters ball, 15 cents, with shoes on one dollar", were posted and no greater consideration could have been given a formal back in the states. Dancing with a Tongan girl was quite a struggle at first, but fortunately whether she wore shoes or not she didn't care if her feet were stepped on which was a sensible attitude to take. Gradually compromises were worked out until a combination of Hula-jitterbug was in full swing. The native string bands which furnished the music were no help, but they did give the affairs more tone than a juke box.

Dances at Victoria Hall in Nukua lofa were in a class by themselves, and some notice of them must be given by a historian. Nowhere in the world has a more oddly assorted gathering been seen. Sailors, merchant seamen, Javanese from dutch ships, Anzacs, and all the flotsam that a World War could bring to an isolated island danced with and gawped at the island's collection of nobles, half-castes, beach-combers, whores, perverts, and plain ordinary natives. Perhaps Greenwich Village, or Montmartre used to have a bohemian atmosphere as Victoria Hall, but no place ever has such a collection of strange people mingling cordially with no restraint.

Every dance had a hula solo performed by a girl in a grass skirt; America could teach the Tongans a lot about what it expects in a hula, but the Tongans assumed that they knew all ready, and gave it that way. On the other hand the concert hulas done with a chorus of both men and women which was the Tongan form of opera was a distinctive art formed with more precision than a bunch of peroxide blondes on a burlesque ramp.

Nearly everybody who wanted to want to a native feast which is not unlike a clam bake in New England. If you didn't get finich, and rolled up your sleeves to the elbow a native feast was fun, and the roast pig and jam was considerably more tasty than spam or dehydrated potatoes.

In the Navy, however, pleasant things are not guaranteed to last, in fact they never do last, and on January, 1943 orders came for the Second Detachment to leave Tonga. Immediately the rusty cogs of the military creaked away, and everybody started to dye mosquito nets a bilious green although the rumor was that the outfit was going to New Caledonia, and not on a search for Dr. Livingston. This excitement died down next day when it was discovered that it is one thing to get orders to leave and quite another thing to find transportation.

Inasmuch as the tank farm was not finished a group of men out of the Second Detachment was to be left on Tonga. The nucleus of this group to be left was the tank farm crew but more men had to stay to take care of maintenance of this base. It was quite a problem to decide who to leave, as certainly as they were told to stay men would object, and vice versa. The first list made out pleased no one, least of all the Captain of the base. Finally after much swapping a list was made which satisfied the requirements for ratings, and made the fewest possible number of people mad.

Although the tank farm crew had concentrated on the tank work, it was a versatile crew with a particularly fine gang of welders. Besides building the tank farm it had to its credit the construction of the big signal tower, and the building and tearing down of the seaplane camp. Because the tank farm men lived at Haofanga they were strangers to the men from Havelu and staying behind in Tonga had benefits of unknown value.

Finally the Bosch Fontein, a Dutch ship, remodeled into an army transport came into Tonga Tabu, and for a week the Seabees who were to leave were busy loading ship, and making a last round of their favorite spots in Tonga. They boarded ship Sunday, February , but did not sail until February 24th, 1943 so the Seabees came ashore to take fresh water baths and have another round of goodbyes. It was all very sad, and the Tongan girls cried and said that they would wait for their sailor sweethearts to come back to Tonga; which in some cases is apt to be a long wait.

The Bosch Fontein was a clean ship with almost luxurious accommodations for troops if living in a hold can ever be luxurious. The heads had tiled floors, and after the pig-pens that had been the heads on the Neville a fellow thought he was dreaming when he saw tiled floors. Seabee cooks did the cooking in special galleys, and the ration from the ship was generous and good.

The short voyage was pleasant, and over almost too soon. The first day out the Bosch Fontein raced along, but the second day she circled around like a coon dog that had lost the trail. Apparently the Second Detachment actually were supposed to go to Noumea from Tonga, but orders came while they were at sea for them to go to Efate and join the rest of the outfit. On the way to Efate members of the Second Detachment became Golden Dragons when they crossed the 180th Meridian, but no fuss was made over the occasion.

On Sunday February the 28th the Bosch Fontein arrived in Havannah Harbor, Efate, New Hebrides Islands. Considerable discussion took place among the officers, and finally half the Second Detachment came ashore for duty in Havannah or at Quoin Hill. The rest of the Second Detachment stayed on the ship, and on March 9th, they were taken around by water to Vila for duty on the old side of the island.

THE STORY OF THE EDIT DETACHMENT C.B.I.

After the main body of men of the Second Detachment left Tonga to join the third detachment, the men left on Tonga were called the Edit Detachment. There were approximately 130 men and 4 officers including two doctors. Camp Havelu was abandoned and all Nave men lived at Camp Maofanga which had been enlarged to take care of them.

At first the men from Havelu were disgruntled at being left behind with the tank farm men who they regarded almost as aliens to the Seabees. The camp turned out to be such a pleasant place to live in, and the food so good that they soon lost the uncouth ways of the bush around Havelu, and became resigned to the camp run in navy style with inspections and muster at dawn.

The main work to be done on Tonga by the Edit men was the completion of the sea-lines from the tank farm to buroys in the Harbor, and the installation of pumps on the lines. Equipment was on its way from the States with which to finish the job. In addition to the tank farm there was routine maintenance, change of operational facilities so that everything was concentrated at Maofanga, and the unloading of ships.

Except for one large wooden warehouse for N.A.T.S. at Maofanga no new work was done.

The gasoline and fuel-oil pipelines were completed in April, and the diesel-oil line was completed in June.

The sealines were installed by welding the pipe together stretched along the beach, and floating it out with its cargo hose until it was over its surveyed position when it was allowed to fill with water and sink into position. The twelve inch line supported an eight inch line when they were tied together; it was necessary to support the eight inch diesel line every hundred feet with an empty gasoline drum. In this way an apparently difficult task was done with ease. In all over eight miles of big pipe had been installed.

In May the av-gas tanks had been filled with gas out of drums. Early in July orders were given to tear down and crate 15 of the 500 bbl. tanks for shipment. The gasoline was pumped out to a tanker through the sealine, and the fifteen tanks were safely torn down despite the residue of Ave-Gas.

The last two weeks the Edit Detachment was in Tonga a tanker arrived with bunker fuel oil. At first no oil could be forced through the sea-line, but finally a back pressure of compressed air blew out the plug in the line (and at the same time brought the sealine to the surface with a great deal of oil spewing around on the tanker and the water) and eventually with the addition of oil from a second tanker the tanks were filled.

In May a liberty ship was torn open above the waterline and had to be repaired. A young ensign had long wanted to be a pilot in the harbor, and on his first trip ran the ship into a corner of Red Pier, which cut a big gash in the side of the ship as if a giant can-opener had been used. The welders went on two-twelve shifts hours, and patched up the hole with plates cut from pontoons; then the carpenters poured a two foot bulkhead of cement to reinforce the thin patch. The Ensign was exonerated in the court of inquiry; the wind stopped blowing.

The C. O. of the base force left, and was succeeded by the old exec. He announced that henceforth Tonga would be considered out of the danger zone and that material would be leaving, not coming into Tonga. The most memorable feature of this command was the granting of liberal liberty, and for the first time it was possible to get overnight and weekend liberty. Considerable tension left the air when the Base changed C.O.s and the men liked the firm but just regulations.

Tonga remained the same pleasant place it had always been before the second detachment left it, and did not change much. Although there were relatively few Americans left on the island prices remained high because so many New Zealand garrison troops arrived to fill up the empty camps.

Dances flourished at Victoria Hall, and bazars were held by the Tongan Red Cross. As a result of overnight liberty the Fairfield Boarding house became a lively hostelry. Unfortunately the island steam ship brought in less and less liquid refreshments, and the jungle gin became worse liquid than ever. Several racing meets were held by the Anzacw with a parimutual system that no American was able to beat.

In July the Seabee B.M.U. 511 arrived in Tonga. They were foolish enough to announce when they came in the harbor that they were a specialist unit, not stevedores, and that they did not intend to unload their gear. Consequently they were received coldly by the Edit men when they arrived in camp. After working with them, and showing them around for several weeks, and letting them see what had been done on Tonga, the man of the Edit Detachment decided to forgive the foolish remarks of these greenhorns, and the men lived together peacefully. Maintenance of the base was turned over to B.M.U. 511 in August.

As soon as B.M.U. 511 came to Tonga, plans were started for leaving the Island, and orders to leave were not a surprise.

The last two weeks on Tonga the men were given a number of feasts or picnics by the natives, and everybody enjoyed themselves, or went around saying goodbye to Tongan friends and not enjoying it.

The week before the Edit Detachment was to leave, a liberty ship off Tonga was torpedoed through the engine room, and was finally towed into Nukualofa by a tanker. That night a working party was sent out to unload perishable stores from the Stewards ice-box in which refrigeration had stopped. For once the men in a working party had a good time. In addition to salvaging all the perishable foods everybody came ashore with a private loot of hams, eggs, perhaps a loin of beef, and enough linen goods to go around the camp. Next day every hut had a fire behind it and the men contentedly gorged themselves with fresh eggs.

The former C.O. of the Edit Detachment had orders to return to the States, but before he left he spoke to the men prophesying that the Edit Detachment would build a tank farm at the next base, after which they would head back to the States.

On August 20th, 1943, the Edit Detachment with men and two officers plus forty men from B.M.U. 511 left Tonga for Wallis Island on the Kit Carson, a liberty ship, which had passenger accommodations in number three hold. The chow was excellent.

The Kit Carson, a tanker, and a sub chaser made up the small convoy which left Tonga by the unusual passage of the Narrows and out past Sua to avoid the submarines known to be laying off Tonga. The tanker was bound for Samoa.

The voyage was uneventful, and remarkable only for the way the Kit Carson zig-zagged across the date-line. The weather had been comfortable when the ship left Tonga, but it was noticeable warmer as the ship approached Pango and then turned west to Wallis.

The night of the third day the ship lay off Wallis waiting for passage on the morning tide; the passage through the reef surrounding Wallis is so narrow and dangerous that it is made only at low water. The men left the ship by barge in the afternoon and were quartered at Camp Acorn, a good camp near the bomber field on the north end of the Island.

The Seabees on the Island was the B.M.U 504 which had relieved the Fifth Detachment of the Third Battalion. Upon consultation with the officers of the B. M. U. 504 it was discovered that the Edit Detachment was not to build the tank farm as it had expected to do and for which it was equipped, but that a detachment of tank farm specialists were expected for this work. No one was quite sure why the Edit Detachment was sent to Wallis, but since they were there it was decided to have them help on the construction of a large taxi-way at the Bomber Field with several hundred revetments for B-17s.

Wallis Island at that time was not far removed from the scene of action, and was a relief base for Funa-Futi in the Ellis Group which was being bombed regularly by the enemy, as Funa-Futi was very active as a base for planes which were bombing other islands of the Ellis Group and also the Gilberts in preparation for the American advance which was then being prepared.

Wallis Island was also an important stop for NATS as it was on the direct southern run from Pearl Harbor to comSoPac. Evidently the value of Wallis has always been its position rather than its natural resources. Its harbor is poor for large ships, and consequently its position is important for air routes.

Although it expected to do maintenance work only B.M.U. 504 found it necessary to do a great deal of construction work, and needed help. The equipment left by the Second Battalion was in bad shape, and considerable work was necessary to keep it running. All Edit machinists and truckdrivers worked at the motel pool.

The carpenters were kept busy building at various camps or on warehouses. The welders and electricians made a bunch of markers for N.A.T.S. to put on the reefs.

Wallis was extremely short on refrigeration (one reason for the seige of corned-willy and spam) so the Edit men worked at putting up two large refrigerators. This job was annoying to everybody concerned as nothing went right; the only aggregate available was a coral sludge, the cement mixer had the hiccups, and the sections of the refrigerators were out of shape when they left the factory. When they were finished B.M.U. took the credit.

The taxi-way at the airport would have been alright but the engineer couldn't make up his mind what grades he wanted and everyday the grades would change. The heavy machinery operators cursed the surveyors, and the surveyors kept trying to keep with the engineers grades and wore out the supply of keel. Everybody was happy when it was decided not to run the taxi-way around the north side of the field as had been planned originally.

About a week after the Edit Detachment came to Wallis a detachment of the Third Battalion arrived to make the tank farm. It did not help the ego of the Edit men to find that these tank specialists had actually erected fewer tanks than had been erected in Tonga. The Edit men and men of the Third Battalion always remained on the best of terms, however, which could not be said of the other outfits on the island.

The most disheartening aspect of Wallis, however, was the fact that it was undoubtedly one of the most diseased and unhealthy islands in the South Pacific. In front of one out of ten native huts was a sign "keep out, leprosy and tuberculosis". An epidemic of dengue fever was raging. But worst of all the mumu, or filarisis, was filling the sickbays and hospitals, and leaving the various forces extremely short handed. Conditions were so bad that men who desperately needed to be sent to a temperate climate to help their glands were held for duty.

The Wallis group is now Free French, but was Vichy up to the day the Americans landed. Normally it is a part of the Samoan Group, but for practical reasons it is politically lumped with Fortuna Island and governed from New Caledonia.

A French Resident, who is also expected to act as physician at the French hospital, is in complete charge of the island. Under his is a native king and his court of chiefs from different villages. The ancient system of Wallisian government has been continued for convenience, but has become an honorable system of graft in which the French are payed by the king, the king by the chiefs, the chiefs by their villages, and consequently the average native is practically a serf.

Wallis is a small island group with the largest island in the center with a barrier reef around it. There are several passages through the reef, none of which is any good for big ships. When first seen from the sea the island appears to be very rugged and well covered with palms. It definitely is of volcanic formation with several craters filled with water; it is quite hilly although 300 ft. is the maximum elevation. There is no dock for ships and everything must be unloaded by barges of which there is not a sufficient number.

Wallis is a supply and repair base for planes and has two good landing strips, and a fine network of roads which may be used as taxi-ways for small planes. Most of the work done on the island was done by the Second Construction Battalion.

An Easterly trade wind is the prevailing breeze and as the climate is extremely warm, native villages are to be found only on the eastern shore of the island. The main village is the old French Village which has the one store on the island, and where the French Resident and the King live. Except for several huge churches, and a few old houses built by convicts there is no civilization on the island. Wallis was once a French Penal Colony, and it seems like prison to many Americans still there.

The soil is a red volcanic soil suitable only for tropical plants and not very good for them. Breadfruit, plaintains, and cocoanuts are the staple foods of the natives, and as even the cocoanut trees are spindly things the natives do not have sufficient food. They are poor workers, and in working for the Americans the date line caused trouble; Americans went by the time used in Pange while the Wallisians used time west of the date line; thus the natives had two Sundays, their Sunday and the American Sunday.

Copra (which amounts to a government monopoly) and pearls are the only exports, and due to a systematic looting by whitemen the natives are poverty stricken, and miserable. Except for religious teachings the natives are left to shift for themselves. They are for the most part and unhappy people living in filth, and beset by diseases. Except for mats and large outrigger canoes, for which they are famous, there is no native skill worth mentioning. They are a poor example of polynesians, at least since whitemen came to oppress them.

The Edit Detachment became very pessimistic about ever leaving Wallis. Orders were received for the Detachment to join the rest of the First Battalion at Efate, and over a month went by before transportation was secured. A wing of a Marine flying squadron came into camp acorn, and after living on the Edit Detachment for a week, became so numerous that the Edit Detachment had to leave the camp. The Marines were sorry to see the Edit men go for on an island where food was poor with most meals either spam or corned will, the Edit Detachment fed as well as anybody.

The Edit Detachment moved down to NATS at the southern end of the island where most of the men slept in a stran-steel warehouse. The warehouse was a miserable barracks, and although ventilation was improved the were far from happy. The base men at NATS were not hospitable either which made the situation worse.

Finally a ship arrived to take the Edit Detachment to Efate. Unfortunately several bearings were out of line in the engine room as the result of the ships having gone aground on a reef, and it was necessary for the engine room crew to make some repairs.

The Edit Detachment got quite used to packing aboard ship and then unpacking to wait another day. Once some gear actually went out on board and a few men had to bum cots to sleep on until they left Wallis. The crowning injury came when the galley gear went out it was discovered that the ship would not sail for several days. The Third Battalion at this time very hospitably invited the Edit men to eat with them. So far as the Edit men are concerned the Third is aces.

On the night of December 3, 1943, the Edit Detachment boarded the Richard Harding Davis, a liberty ship, and sailed from Wallis on the morning of December 4th. The accommodations for passengers consisted of number four hold empty and unswept, the use of the galley at night, and two deckhouses which were used by sickbay and chiefs. Most of the men slept topside on the hatches under tarps rigged for awnings. Two meals a day were all the cooks had time to prepare. The chiefs and some of the men managed to sneak into the crews mess. It was not the most pleasant way to travel, but it was good to see the last of Wallis Island. During the trip to Efate the Edit men became Golden Dragons but with so little ceremony that the exact time of crossing the 180th meridian was not announced. The last day of the trip some rough water was encountered but few got sick, although it made a number of them dizzy to see what the waves were doing to the escorting sub chaser.

The Richard Harding Davis sailed into Vila harbor on December 8th, 1943, and some of the old officers came out on the Picket boat to welcome men and officers of the Edit Detachment back. That night an informal reunion took place for the First Battalion at Camp Malapos. Shipmates saw each other for the first time since the Third Detachment left Camp Allen over twenty months before.

THE STORY OF THE THIRD DETACHMENT

The Third Detachment of the First Battalion of Seabees left Camp Allen on Easter Sunday, April 5th, 1942; the detachment went by ferry across Hampton Roads to Newport News where two trains awaited it. Each train of 12 pullmans carried a company and a part of Headquarters company, a chief for each car, and an officer in charge. A junior officer and a medical officer completed the complement of each train.

The trip West was uneventful with many side runs on lesser tracks because of heavy traffic on the main lines. After Kansas City the main lines. After Kansas City the main route of the Santa Fe was followed and the monotony was broken by meals at Harvey Houses along the line. Several times a day the men were taken off the train for a period of exercise.

On the morning of April 10th, the Detachment arrived in Oakland, California, and were taken by bus to the Goat Island receiving ship. Here baggage was sorted, and the men checked for a full course of inoculations. Tetanus and typhoid shots were given to those who had failed to get them before, but not without protest.

No provision had been made for the housing of the Detachment, and after tiring themselves by packing their gear long distances the men were dumped in Treasure Island Naval Station with no proper quarters.

The next day they were taken by harbor boat to the Oakland pier. Here the final loading was being done on the ships that were to make up the convoy. The men were mustered on board the President Tyler after hours of orderly confusion and stowed in the dirty troop quarters below decks like any other cargo.

At noon on Sunday, April the 12th, the President Tyler sailed through the Golden Gate to form a part of the waiting convoy, the flagship being the USS St. Louis. The whole ship carried an atmosphere of tenseness; it was not the operatic movie version of men off to war. It was the real thing.

The President Tyler was a large ship and had been a luxury liner, but life in the dingy holds where the troops were quartered was far from being luxurious. Double rows of bunks supported by jackstays rose in tiers of four, and the ventilation and head facilities were makeshift, temporary sort. On nearing the equator the heat made the crowded holds even more uncomfortable, and there was an acute water shortage. The ships crew had their mess separate from that of the passengers, and consequently only the crew ate well.

A constant alert was carried out with daily drills for abandon ship. Security watches were carried on in the holds and some Seabees went on gunwatches.

In the following month, land was sighted but once, and little happened to change the routine of shipboard life from day to day. The time passed quietly, except the crossing the line. Then the pollywogs became shellbacks, with the traditional initiation, and high jinks customary to crossing the Equator for the first time. Later everybody became Golden Dragons when they crossed the 180th Meridian, a voyage in which both Shellbacks and Golden Dragons are made is rather unusual.

Medical lectures were given on tropical conditions and on relations with natives. Since little was known about the Island where Base Roses was to be built, these lectures were not specific, and so general as to be of little value.

Very little information had been gathered by BuYD about the island to which the convoy was headed. The island turned out to be Efate in the New Hebrides. Much valuable time could have been saved if topographical charts, reports on the climate and health conditions, and the development on the island by white planters and traders had been included in the master plan.

Attempts were made while on board to prepare for landing, but since nearly all questions of docking and storage, and locations for base operations were left to reconnaissance, no plans were definite. More breakdowns of personnel were made with crews assigned to each chief with particular duties. Crews were to unload ships, others were to store and check material, etc.

As the convoy stood off Samoa, escort of the convoy was turned over to two New Zealand Naval ships. Unknown to the men on board, the Battle of the Coral Sea was then being fought a short distance away.

At noon on the 4th of May, the convoy steamed into Vila Bay, Efate Island, and dropped anchor. The beauty of the Harbor itself, and the size and serenity of Port Vila were a pleasant surprise and comparison to what was expected by most of the crew. Instead of an enemy-held cannibal island completely covered by jungle, there was a friendly harbor, a pleasant town with commercial, and government establishments, and private residences on the hills sloping down to the water. Beyond the town of Vila were miles of copra, coffee, and cocoa plantations. As the Seabees were soon to find out, a great deal of Efate is covered with dense jungle, but by no means all of the land is wild.

Contact was made with the shore by officers. Because of the possible danger of attack on the ships by the enemy, at midnight it was decided to disembark the men. For some peculiar reason, however, only the Seabees were disembarked while the rest of the passengers stayed snugly on board. They were landed on Iririki Island with no gear and had to sleep on the beach or ground. During the night the tide came in and the men on the beach had to move away from the water. The little personal gear brought ashore was lost. At dawn they were awakened by a tropical rain against which there was no shelter; moreover there was no food or drinking water.

Iririki Island is a small island in Vila Harbor which is occupied by the British Residency. In the next few days a camp was

established on Iririki which became the central camp for all early operation on Efate. Tents were put up, a temporary galley erected, and boats ferried parties to the mainland. No camping party ever had a rougher style of livingⁱⁿ the States than the Navy had on Iririki during the early days of Base Roses.

Efate is one of the most southernly of the New Hebrides Group and Port Vila its chief settlement is the capital of the Group. After early days of blackbirding the New Hebrides were settled by both British and French planters. The Islands were at first very savage, and some of them still are. No islands in the South Pacific have had a more turbulent history and it was necessary in the early 20th century to keep order by use of British and French Naval Forces. This led to the condominium Government in 1907, a unique combined government in which the Island affairs and disputes between Nationals are settled in a joint court, while problems affecting only British or French are settled in British or French courts.

Owing to the shortage of native Melanesian labor the French have imported Tonkinese coolies from Indo-China, and as the British have not had access to the Tonkinese the importance of British interest has dwindled. Noumea has been most influential in the New Hebrides, but considerable trading has been done with Australia. New Hebrides' economy is dependent on agriculture with copra, cocoa, and coffee being the principal crops. The Islands are very fertile but all manufactured goods are imported.

Efate is a fairly mountainous island and only the platteaus near the coast have been developed. There are numerous swamps and malaria is prevalent. Several streams offer ample water supply, but are not navigable although several estuaries offer landings for small boats. In addition to the deep water ports of Vila and Havannah.

After looking over the Vila area, a site was selected not far from town for a storage area which was divided into sections corresponding with the code authorized by BuYD for marking crates. This helped to make a constant check and a running inventory on all types of material. Tarpaulins were used as protection against the constant rains, and to support camouflage.

There was no dock where ships might moor. Upon arrival a small pier with a stationary boom was taken over by the Navy. This continued to be the unloading dock of nearly all shipping. In its original form, it was about 20 feet wide and extended out to where the water was six feet deep. The old boom was a primitive affair which never worked well, and as soon as a motor crane came ashore, it was put to work at the dock. A temporary ramp was arranged on which mobile equipment was driven ashore from barges. For the first few weeks this dock and the storage areas were the main points of interest for the Seabees.

Every available form of craft was used for the initial unloading including barges owned by Burns Phillip and other trading companies. Time was a definite factor in the success or failure of the establishment of the base.

Pontoons had been sent, but were stowed underneath other kinds of gear. Two strings of pontoons were assembled on the deck of the ship under very adverse conditions; then it was decided to assemble the remaining pontoons on shore where they could be sorted. A timber ramp was constructed alongside the dock, and as barge equipment came ashore it was sorted and assembled, and the barges were launched at high tide. The propulsion units were installed at the side of the ship as they were unloaded.

Meanwhile the Naval Base Headquarters, Communications, and Port Director were established in a residence near the waterfront at Vila. The Commander of Base Operations was skipper of all naval units, including the Saabees. Because of the confused and crowded conditions in this building (at least 20 officers also had their quarters and mess here) a house was taken in Vila and converted into headquarters for the Construction Battalion. Here the officer in charge of construction had his office. A drafting room was set up for all planning and recording of jobs, and all arrival and disbursement of construction equipment and supplies were checked through this office. In this way the Construction Battalion had a center for the regulation of all work and of problems of construction personnel.

The job with number one priority was the bomber field at Male. The Marines, who had landed six weeks before the Navy, had cleared about 1800 feet of the strip and roughly graded some of it. The site was very level, partly coconut grove, and mostly wooded with heavy underbrush. Male is a half moon of a beach about five miles north of Vila and the terrain for several miles inland is quite flat. A northwest direction had been chosen for the strip because of the prevailing wind.

On the 20th of May an officer, one medical officer, and seventy-five enlisted men established a Navy Camp at the edge of the runway. This was a tent camp set in the cover of a coconut grove, and was only temporary. Although life was pretty rough at the Airfield, it probably was no worse than life at other places on the island. This camp, however, had the highest record for illness. Malaria and other fevers were prevalent, as it was in mosquito country. As high as a quarter of the men were at onetime or another in sick-bay because of the fever. In most cases the fever cleared up later. As soon as the project was finished, all the men went to Camp Malapoa where there was little malaria, but some of the men had contracted chronic malaria, and the fever continues to come back to them regularly.

Material and equipment was taken from the dock and put to work at the airport as soon as anything came ashore. A garage of palm logs and camouflage netting was erected which soon became the repair center for island equipment. By July 8th the field was in a condition to receive fighter planes as well as providing hides for twenty of them. On this same date a cross-runway was started, and bomber hides cleared. By August 1st the field, and dispersal areas, housing and operations, with the exception of gasoline storage were completed and in use. The housing consisted of Quonset Huts for quarters and storage as well as for field offices for Marines.

When the first B-17 bombers landed a sense of security and accomplishment was felt. Although never bombed, the nearness of Efate

to the enemy and the hasty assembly of the Island's defenses made everyone aware of the constant danger.

Throughout the construction of the landing strip the Seabees were augmented by native labor, and Army engineers. During the dry months of July and August the field was constantly watered by tank trucks to keep the surface from blowing away. In September, 500 feet of Karston mat was layed at the north end of the runway for a turn around for the planes. Maintenance was kept up by Seabees until October when the Army took over operation, expansion and maintenance.

Not all life at the field camp was illness and anticipation of attack. Most of the men look back at the old airport days as the most pleasant on Efate. Then friendliness and esprit De corps of the Marine V.H.F. 212 was infectious. Clothes were traded between Marines and seabees, food was shared and the short time allotted for amusement were thoroughly enjoyed by all. Everybody felt a sense of accomplishment and purpose that sadly enough has now been nearly lost.

At this time the coral strip was 6000 feet long with an average width of 350 feet. There were also 30 dispersed fighter hides, 20 bomber revetments, and unloading apron. A taxiway for 200 fighters on the west side of the field, was added by the Army engineers. With the exception of the cleared approach zone at each end of the strip which were added this year by the Navy, and the taxiway, the field is approximately the same as when the Navy originally left it.

The part this field played in taking and holding Guadal canal can only be judged in the future in the cala after the war. The spirit of the men who were connected with its initial operations was exemplified in Lt. Col. Harold Bauer whose life was lost at Tulagi, and whose name the field now bears.

Considerable numbers of natives were used in constructing the airfield, and on all other projects where unskilled labor could be used. The natives on the New Hebrides are Melanesians which is to say that their coloring is similar to our negroes, although they tend to be rather small in stature, and have more aquiline features than most negroes. There are only a few natives on Efate Island who would work, so a great deal of them had to be recruited from other islands in the group, mostly from Tanna, Epi, or Ambryn. A labor pool was made by the Army and the Navy drew natives from the pool as needed. A native compound was established in the Vila area and later in Havannah where the natives were housed; food was a part of their pay which amounted to about thirty cents a day.

The natives are a very primitive people; indeed on Malakula Island the natives are the inferior and are quite savage, and reputedly are still head-hunters. They have practically no skill at crafts, but are reasonably good laborers. A big problem with native labor was how to keep them alive. For awhile they died like flies. In the first year eight natives died, mostly from pneumonia. Finally a Seabee went to live at a native camp, and in addition to acting as overseer he became a doctor of parts and was more successful in treating the natives than

the regular doctors had been, which no doubt was the result of their considering that the natives needed a veterinarian instead of a doctor.

At the time the airfield was started, ground was broken for a Navy hospital. Plans had been formed in Washington as suggestions for a layout, and on board ship, consideration had been given to the requirements, but the real planning and development were done in the drafting room at Efate and in the field after reconnaissance. On the first week after arrival a sight was chosen at Bellvue, a plantation on the Bouffa Road, approximately three miles inland from Vila. Because of expecting bombings it was desirable to get away from the harbor and its concentration of shipping.

Thirty-seven officers of the Medical Corp and 316 Corpsmen had come to Efate in the same convoy as the Seabees. On arrival they immediately took over the French Hospital in Vila and several other buildings in town for their facilities and hospitalization was available from the start.

One hundred eighty-six Quonset Huts were authorized for division among barracks, galley, messhall, storage, maintenance and wards, and medical operation. The site was entirely a coconut grove with good drainage and quite an elevation making it free from malaria. A temporary tent camp was set up for construction personnel with one officer, a doctor, and eventually forty-seven men; when a final plan had been made after many medical suggestions and changes, a surveying party laid out the buildings.

About four days after the convoy arrived, 12 men had gone out to Bougga to establish a camp for the crew that was to build the hospital. They went out in a half-track truck in order to get through the mud which the constant rains had left for roads. On unloading the half groves, half a bushel of fruit had been knocked off the trees and stayed in the half-track.

A camp was built, and later enlarged to house the corpsmen who were able to leave the hospital in Vila, and work on the hospital. For a water supply a rough wood flume was run a thousand feet up to the Buffa River where a small dam was built to give head for the flume. Eventually the camp became quite comfortable and running water was quite a convenience.

In building the hospital concrete piers were used for the hut foundations which was an advantage over wood posts in damp tropical soil. Early in September the first patients were received, and the hospital was formally commissioned on September 15th.

Many changes and improvements had been made on the original plans. The galley, preparation space, scullery, and enlisted men's mess hall had been completely rearranged for better circulation. The surgical rooms had been built in an H shape combining them with the sterilizer and creating a workable plan that has since been adopted by several other hospitals in the South Pacific area. In spite of the insulation in the huts most of them were too hot for comfort. A system of raising the hut walls was devised for ventilation. A clear-story was erected on buildings like laboratories and surgeries that could not have open sides. Many buildings required concrete decks for heavy equipment or for scrubbing and the whole compound

from bogging down. Quonset huts were put in the storage area for dispersing and storing dry-stores. Refrigeration was set up in locally owned buildings for cold storage foods brought in by supply ships.

A priority project upon first landing was the construction of a seaplane base. Little information was given the BuYD plans for the island concerning a seaplane base. Although the layout and selection of the site was left to reconnaissance, the ramp was tentatively spotted on the map in a position found to be already occupied by a hotel and other buildings in Vila. It was immediately seen that neither the spot indicated nor any other location in Vila Harbor would do for a seaplane base.

A small seaplane base had been built by the Royal Australian Air Force on the south end of Vila Harbor and was used after the convoy arrived by a VCS squadron. Four plane buoys and a small coral ramp with plane hides were added to the existing base, but this was a temporary affair only and was later turned over to the Army for a hospital area.

A reconnaissance party explored the shores of the island for a likely site for a seaplane base. It was quite an expedition lasting for several days. While in the morning they might be investigating a wild beach where no man had ever been before, they might in the afternoon be asked by an isolated planter to have tea with him at his fairly civilized home. The party chose White Sands Beach at Havannah Harbor as a likely spot for a seaplane base. Havannah Harbor later also proved to be one of the best of deep water harbors for the fleet in the area, a harbor easily defended and sheltered in all storms.

Another reconnaissance party was one which was dropped off at South Bay with a couple of cheese sandwiches and told to find a place for an airfield. The party hacked its way through the bush for days, ate the sandwiches, and beans, and had dysentery, slept in the rain without shelter, and laid out two reconnaissance base lines of 6000 feet each. They were completely disgusted when all their work and troubles were ignored and no airport was built.

The seaplane base at Havannah slowly got underway on June 6th when an officer with 24 Seabees left Vila and went around by barge to Havannah Harbor. Camp equipment and some gear was taken on the barge, but heavy equipment was carried over to Havannah by the muddy horseback road which was hardly more than a trail around the island by way of Devil's Point. On the initial trip a half-track was bogged down beyond repair. To go by Devil's Point took three days of hard going for a bulldozer, and the road was nearly impassable for a jeep. Later when the northwest 15 ton capacity shovels arrived, a shovel was laboriously inched over to Havannah up the mountain. This was attempted at a time before any road except the native trail went over the pass, and it took nine days to go the 18 miles of the trip, during which a bridge had to be built, and a great deal of cutting done to make passage for the big arm of the shovel. At times it almost seemed that the shovel would have to be abandoned on the mountain.

Due to the activity at Bauer Field little equipment could be spared for some time for the seaplane base at Havannah as much jungle

The shore below Malapoa was one of the best places in the Harbor for a dock. Although rather exposed to a southerly storm this part of the Harbor is free from extensive coral reefs, and the bottom dropped suddenly from the narrow reef to a good depth of water not far from shore. A coral causeway about three hundred feet long was made. At the end of the coral a concrete bulkhead was poured, and from this pontoons were anchored extending to deep water. Pipelines from the tank farm were later laid on the dock.

The tank farm was constructed at approximately the same time as the dock and the camp. Sites were chosen for 7-1000 bbl. gasoline tanks, and two 10,000 barrel tanks for diesel oil. Care was given to locating the tanks so that they were well-dispersed, and concealed from the air by natural cover. The tanks were finished, and put to use in September; earth berms enclosed them and they were piped to the dock.

In the first part of July when Bauer Field was nearly ready to be put to use, an order was received to construct a landing field at Espiritu Santos. This is the largest, and most northerly island of the New Hebrides Group. At that date it was definitely a part of the front lines and subject to enemy pounding. After Army and Navy reconnaissance a site was chosen on the southwest shore of Falikulo Bay. A crew of thirty-eight men was chosen from the men working on Bauer Field. Before making a decision on men to be sent they were given a chance to volunteer on the task which, it was explained to them, might be extremely hazardous. Only one man withdrew; he was then on the sick list.

At Vila all heavy equipment and other gear that could be spared from Bauer Field was loaded on the Paul Jones. Lumber for tent decks, and ration of 30 days went on a tuna boat. The tuna boats also towed a fifty-ton pontoon barge equipped with a propulsion unit. There was little sleep at any time during the expedition and none at all at first. The twelve men who went on the tuna boat were kept busy day and night securing the barge which broke its tow several times. The rest of the men went on the Paul Jones and reached Espiritu Santos first, making a landing at Segund Channel on July 8th.

Great difficulty was encountered getting equipment ashore at Santos, but work began on the field immediately, and setting up camp was left until later. The first 7 days of labor was fruitless because the Army kept changing its mind about the location of the field; one start of 1000 feet was abandoned for a second start of 2000 feet of runway. The third and final location was by this time entirely clogged up with debris from the first two attempts.

The value of the Army and natives in building the field was sometimes detrimental, for when trees were felled by axes, a mat of trees resembling a jack-straw puzzle actually handicapped the bulldozer operators.

Twelve days after starting the final location, however, a Gruman fighter landed on the more than 3000 feet of runway, and the next day, July 28th, a B-17 landed. The B-17 refueled and took off for a reconnaissance flight over Guadal canal where the Japs were

building an airfield (later Henderson Field). As a result of this reconnaissance made possible by the speed with which the field had been built, bombers came to the field on its 14th day of construction, refueled, and went to bomb the Solomons as the first American move in the campaign for Guadal canal.

When finished, the field at Santos was 6000 feet long by 250 feet. The soil being finger coral and sand made a fair surface when kept moist by sprinkling from water trucks. The last part of their stay on Santos the crew built 60 revetments for bombers and installed an underground gasoline storage system.

As only the equipment that could be spared from Bauer Field was to be had at Santos. The remarkably short time of completion was due solely to the push and stamina of the men and officers. Equipment was in operation 24 hours a day; and in spite of the position being exposed to the enemy, blackouts were ignored and field flood-lighted at night so that the work could continue. A Jap bomber dumped a load of bombs on Santos to the north of the field, and when an Army officer asked why the Seabees were not digging into their foxholes, they said, "Hell, we haven't got time to mess around that way."

One operator stayed on his bulldozer until he had internal bleeding and had to be strapped up by the doctor. Next day despite the doctor's orders he cut the tape that bound him stiff and crawled back on his machine so that it would not be idle.

Only Seabees operated machines after an Army operator ruined a tractor in a few short hours. Colored soldiers who had been on the other side of the island capturing Jap outposts came over to the airfield and were used for cutting down trees and supervising natives. Marines came to defend the position but were not used for construction.

In spite of the danger and long hours most of the men enjoyed the period of construction. It was a real accomplishment to build a field in so short a time that would serve to hold the enemy and be so vital in taking Guadal canal.

For the most part the men remained in a surprisingly healthy condition considering their exhausting work, the poor facilities at the camp, and the malaria prevalent in Santos. Not until the air strip was nearly finished did the camp become adequate because all attention had been concentrated constructing the field. A makoshift galley was erected and also a radio station immediately after landing, but for several nights the men slept in the rain without tents. One night they had the amusing experience to wake up and find the tide closing in on them.

Upon the arrival of the marines with no rations the food situation became critical for both Seabees and Marines. The plantation owner on whose copra and tangerine groves the field was being built was hostile to the American forces. A more distant planter, however, a French veteran of the last war, was most hospitable to the Seabees and furnished them with eggs, chickens, pigs and seafood, and was in general a good comrade in arms. This gentleman also gave several welcome meals to his new friends and allowed

them the pleasant association with his family.

The natives used as laborers on the job were brought in by the Army from Malakula Island, which is one of the most wild localities in the world; if they were not headhunters they were sons of headhunters. They wore a wooden belt the size of which denoted their position in their tribe, with a tassel of hair for a breast clout, and that was all they wore.

An order came from ComSoPac for the crew at Santos to stand by for transportation after six weeks on the island. Either through misdirected orders or misinterpretation of orders the men were told that they were to be sent back to the States. Their disappointment was great when they found themselves back on Efate, at Havannah. The greatest irony of all was that they were brought back on the President Tyler which although it had been cleaned up a little since they were on it before was a ship of bitter memories to them. On this trip, however, they were well fed to make up for the six weeks of hardship they had undergone.

Two more airfields were needed on Efate, and this crew with help from others was the crew chosen to build the fields. Landing was made at White Sand Point on September 4th, and for the first time the men from Santos had Quonset huts.

Work was immediately begun on the fighter strip at Port Havannah, New Hebrides. This strip started at the waters edge and went inland 3000 feet to the edge of a small river. It was to be used by fighter planes from carriers.

This field was ready for operation on October 15th and the same equipment and enlarged crews were put to work on the seaplane ramp which had been sadly neglected or sent to Quoin Hill.

The first week of August, while the field at Santos was being completed another field was sought in the Santa Cruz Group. Aerial reconnaissance was made near the end of July by several officers, but the orders from ComSoPac were to locate a suitable position for a landing strip on Trevanion Island.

Trevanion Island is a small, dark, mosquito-infested island off the Island of Santa Cruz. The reconnaissance party of two officers, one doctor, and 19 men from base and the Seabees made a complete reconnaissance, and staked out a center line traverse for one location for a field which would fit the prevailing wind. This traverse was short because of natural obstacles and showed a profile which would have necessitated considerable cutting and filling to give a grade of not more than 2.5%.

There were evidences that Japanese had explored the Island some time before (evidences of the Japs are to be found in most of the islands of the New Hebrides also) and apparently the Japanese concurred with the Americans that Trevanion Island was an impossible place for an airfield and uninhabitable. Also Santa Cruz Islands at that time were a salient in enemy-held waters. It was estimated that an airfield could have been built there in somewhat over a month,

but the cost in men would have been severe.

While on the week of reconnaissance the men and officers lived on board ship. But despite this convenience one man contracted the fever, and the rest of the men had daily doses of quinine and atabrine, as a precaution.

On Travanion Island an army outpost was discovered; it was, so to speak, a "lost", not to say "abandoned" detachment. When located, four of the five men were critically ill, and one of them died after being transferred to the base hospital. In less than three months of adverse living conditions four men barely survived, and one of them died as a result of hardships. All planters and missionaries had abandoned Travanion Island because of its notorious unhealthiness.

"Down Under" spring or rather the beginning of the hot season had come, and the Christmas Holidays were only a few weeks away. The Americans were well-established on Efate. A ring of coast defense with big guns at strategic points surrounded the Island and soldiers watched every possible landing point. Two bomber strips, a fighter strip, and a seaplane ramp were under operation. A complete navy hospital was receiving wounded men from the battlefields of the Solomons; smaller installations such as the tank farm and the Navy docks were operating smoothly. It seemed that the work was finished, and that the Battalion would move up to Guadal canal where the destruction of taking and holding the Solomon Islands required the work of a construction battalion.

Slips were passed to each man asking him to sign whether he preferred to stay in Efate as a member of the maintenance crew or if he wanted to go to an advanced base. Approximately 85% of the men requested to leave for new work nearer the front.

Orders were changed, however, and the detachment was told to stay on Efate for a big job. Havannah Harbor was to become the fleet supply base of the area with all the housing, fuel storage, warehouses, refrigeration, boat repair, etc., that would accompany the installation of a Naval Base. In January material began to arrive and a large part of the detachment went to Havannah to be part of the program of expansion.

During the first year in Efate all activity had centered in Vila. Havannah had crews working on the seaplane base and the fighter strip, but that side of the island had always been the orphan child in mail, chow, and entertainment. Suddenly the harbor was filled with all types of naval craft, and the shore was alive with activity associated with building a base. Construction, base, and aircraft maintenance crews were busy all day long, and men from the fleet came ashore on liberty parties to stretch their legs.

Base operations moved from Vila to Havannah, and so did the construction command. All the men who could be spared from Vila were sent to the other side of the island for construction.

Several docks were built, one being quite elaborate which became the center for ship to shore use. Several complete camps were erected with galleys, plumbing, huts, power, refrigeration, and all the necessary facilities for a semi-permanent camp. Also a large recreation hall

was built for the enlisted men of the ships when they were on liberty parties. Later on a large outdoor theatre was built for movies with a stage for smokers.

The airfield which was too short to make easy landings was increased a thousand feet in length by crossing the small river over a big concrete culvert. The finished field was 4000 feet long.

During the first year of occupation of the Island the old horse trail around Devil's Point had been used by half-tracks to transport supplies to Havannah from Vila, or material was sent by water on barges or boats.

Of course a great quantity of material was unloaded from ships at Havannah, but material also had to be taken by truck along the road the Army had cut through over the mountain.

The road rose from the Hale Lama (or lowland plateau around Vila) to another plateau on the top of the mountain by a series of switch-backs with steep grades. It then cut across the jungle to the open areas on the other side of the summit, and descended even more abruptly to Creek Ai on the Havannah side.

Though simply a military road built to carry supplies it presents some of the most spectacular scenery and mountain driving in the South Pacific. At the top of the mountain on the Havannah side before descending to Creek Ai the view of Havannah Harbor with its surrounding small islands is unobstructed by jungle, and on a clear day the view to the North with the distant cone-shaped volcanoes of the northern islands of the New Hebrides is like a postcard scene.

During the rainy weather the road over the mountain reached a precarious condition, and the road from Creek Ai to White Sands Point became a quagmire of unbelievable depths. Even in a ten-wheeler truck the trip was one full of thrills, and a trip over the mountain on this so-called "little Burma Road," became a permanent topic of conversation. One wit remarked that the Army had not intended to use trucks on that trail; it had to be designed for P-40s.

On February 28th the Second Detachment less the Edit Detachment which had been left in Tonga Tabu arrived in Havannah. For weeks they had been expected, and for weeks they had expected to leave Tonga, but they were surprised when they arrived in Efate. After remaining on ship board for several days, plans were made to distribute them among the crews of the Third Detachment. Approximately half of them remained at Havannah Harbor or Quoin Hill, while the remainder were brought over to Vila by the ship.

More hands were welcome in all parts of the Island. In spite of the concentration of activity at Havannah, the Vila area was still expanding. The housing was increased at Bauer Field to take care of several hundred more men and officers. The strip was under the jurisdiction of the Army, and accommodations were needed for bomber crews. A new water system was developed with wooden tanks above the Lacolle River. At the same time the Army engineers were developing an elaborate taxi-way stretching from one end of the field to the

other with hardstands for several hundred planes.

The Vila Construction Headquarters were moved about this time, to share a building with Naval Operations in Vila. For a year Construction Headquarters has occupied a house in Vila that had been the nucleus of all planning and operation for the Battalion. The larger quarters with Naval Operations were a welcome change, although the usual question of who directed the Seabees arose as it always had before when Operations came too close to Construction.

Meanwhile work was underway at the far end of the island to carve a bomber strip out of the jungle. From the very earliest days on the Island notice had been taken of Quoin Hill as a possible site for an airfield which may account for the abortion of the surveyed field at South Bay. The strip had been shelved, however, in favor of other priority jobs. Quoin Hill is in the opposite corner of the island from Vila, and seemed to be the ideal spot for an airport; as a second field it would have some distance between it and Bauer Field in case of an air raid by the Japs. At that time it was almost untouched by white man and was the nearest thing on Efate to "picture book" South Seas.

The north side of the Island has great stretches of grazing land and lacks the jungle growth of the Vila Area. About 3000 feet of the proposed strip was of turf surface naturally cleared. An attempt was made to save the turf, but it soon turned into a quagmire. When the crew which had returned from Santos to build the Havannah fighter strip were free, part of the crew was sent to Quoin Hill. They started work the second week in October, 1942.

Through most of the construction period the road from Havannah Harbor was practically impassable, isolating the crew as if they were on another island. An example of this came during the blackouts in December starting after Guadal canal setbacks. At this time it was next to impossible to warn Quoin Hill of the alert. Most of the men enjoyed the freedom of the outpost surroundings, the visits to a nearby native island, the hunting in the hills, and the tent camp close to the beach which had a resort atmosphere.

By the middle of January 1943 an airstrip 6000 feet long was completed and placed in operation. Some of the men stayed on for maintenance of the field but most of them returned to Havannah. The Marines took over the operation of the strip, and later their housing program lined the beach for well over a mile. The water front was divided into sections for squadrons, each having its own galley, mess hall, showers, and latrines. The erection of these camps, shops, and offices for operations kept a small crew busy for several months.

In the summer of 1943 the Battalion again sent an airport crew to Quoin Hill to construct a Drone field or triangular field for the radio controlled planes used for machine gun and anti aircraft practice. This field was surfaced with coral and shaped in the form of a triangle so that the target planes could fly whatever direction the wind was coming from. Not until Thanksgiving Day did work on the field and camps reach completion.

At the Base Hospital in Vila the material for the expansion program arrived, and all crews were sent to work at the hospital. Wards were erected, and the capacity doubled on most facilities. This expansion brought the capacity of the hospital up to a thousand beds with room for more if necessary. Covered walks were built connecting all the wards. The old chemical closets were abandoned, and the first South Pacific Isla flush-type sewage system was installed in the Eraker Lagoon. Some of this line was steel pipe, but it was largely a concrete trough covered with half cylinders of corrugated iron which was invented by the Battalion and called "cast-in-place concrete pipe." The laying of this line took several weeks of clearing, ditching, and pouring concrete on the site. Flush toilets, urinals, and wash basins were installed in all the wards as well as in the officers and nurses quarters.

An elaborate recreation hall for the enlisted men was completed. The recreation hall was constructed out of two stran-steel warehouses with a specially devised flight deck hanger effect to provide ventilation. One end was partitioned off for a ship service and soda fountain. The other end was made into a movie theatre. The intermediate rooms were furnished as a library and a barber shop. Unfortunately for this expansion program, the front lines at this time were pushed farther north and most of it has had little use.

Dovetailing with the work at the hospital was the expansion of the housing facilities at Bauer Field. A marine air wing had completely taken over the operation of the field, and plans were set up for a marine training center, quarters, galleys, services, and latrines were provided for 2400 enlisted men and 300 officers. The camp area was divided into three camps making a total of 242 huts.

The Seabees again began to work on the maintaining the airfield itself, resurfacing the strip and working on the drainage which was not satisfactory during heavy rains.

In October a new commander arrived for the Battalion, and it was generally understood that the outfit was to go home with him soon. In the meantime the men felt better over the meritorious way rates were given out and because more consideration was given to the entertainment and morale of the men in general. A program of field drill and practice on the rifle range was started, which was entered into cheerfully by the men as a possible indication that the First Battalion was preparing to go some place.

A contest was held to select an insignia for the Battalion from those entered by various artists. The official selection turned out to be one in keeping with the now famous Seabees "Bac", although it had more a Crazy Kat slant than towards Disney.

Also a Battalion paper was founded called the "Pioneer," which has since come out once a week, and is censored so that it may be sent to the folks back home.

On the 8th of December the Edit Detachment arrived at Vila after having been separated from the rest of the Battalion by staying to

complete the base at Tonga, and by several months duty at Wallis Island. After the poor island of Wallis it was a pleasant change to see the green hill of Efate, and to have some fresh food once more.

At the time the Edit Detachment arrived in Vila it was estimated that all authorized work could be complete before Christmas, and, since the Battalion was together once more at one place, it was hoped that orders would come to go State-side. The commander went to Noumea to find out from ComSoPac when the Battalion was to go home, on his return to Efate, he had to tell the men that he could not, as he had hoped, tell them as a Christmas present that they were going home. ComSoPac said "No," but the Commander hoped that the powers to be would change their mind.

All projects were brought to an end just in time for a "Blue Christmas" or "Another year on the rock." On Christmas Eve with a clear tropical sky above the Malapoa movie theatre, the Marine band poured out their jive tunes, the colored boys from the dock crew sang negro spirituals, and the corpsmen's choir blended in singing the old carols. Eight hundred Seabees on Efate thought of their families and homes, and of the third year of separation they were starting.

Since Christmas, work has continued on surfacing Bauer Field and its drainage system, and work has been done on the shop area of the field. Otherwise maintenance with some improvements on existing installations has been the only work.

A camp was made at the mouth of the Rentabau River way out past South Bay to which small groups of men are allowed to go for a few days of recreation and hunting. It has proven to be quite popular although "roughing it" is no great sport after almost two years of camp life. A recreation camp has also established up on the mountain for men in the Havannah Area.

FINIS

This history ends after the 1st arrived in the States on the Dutch ship SS SOMALSDYJK and reported to Camp Parks after 30 days leave. Everyone was reassigned and many went back to overseas duty again.

