

# 31<sup>st</sup> Naval Construction Battalion

---

*Historical  
Information*



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



31st C.B.

1st Embarkation  
 NCTC - Davisville  
 ABD - Davisville  
 Ready Date - 24 Nov'42  
 Left ABD - 1st Wave - 1 Dec'42  
                   2nd Wave - 2 Dec'42  
 Destination - Bermuda

2nd Embarkation  
 NCTC - Davisville  
 ABD - Davisville - Hueneme  
 Ready Date - 15 Sep'44  
 Left ABD - 2 Oct'44  
 Location - ~~Pearl Harbor~~  
                   Iwo Jima

LOG

- 11-18-42 - 31st CB to arrive Norfolk 24 Nov from ABD Davisville. (TWX 180830-11-42 from Lt. Comdr. Fay to Lt. Comdr. Ransford)  
 12- 1-42 - 1st Wave, comprised of 17 officers and 513 men, departed ABD for Bermuda.  
 12-2- 42 - 2nd Wave, comprised of 8 officers and 513 men, departed ABD for Bermuda.  
 1 Jan'43 report - Arrived Bermuda 5 Dec'42.  
 10-22-43 - First Echelon of 31st CB arrived 13 Oct'43 from overseas at NCTC Davisville. (WRK)  
 10-23-43 - Second Echelon of 31st CB arrived in U.S. 20 Oct'43. (WRK)  
 5-17-44 - 31st CB arrived ~~ABDRB~~ Davisville 24 Apr'44. (25TWX0903 Apr'44 from Camp Thomas)  
 6-15-44 - 31st CB ordered from Thomas to Hueneme. (ABDRB Davisville ltr NT4-55/(60)epw over Ser 774 to OinC 31st CB dtd 5 May'44)  
 10-10-44 - 31st CB departed Port Hueneme for FRAY 2 Oct'44. (ABDRB Davisville Conf. Disp. to CNO 032121 NCR 5022 dtd 4 Oct'44)  
 11-3-44 - 31st CB is assigned to the 41st Reg. (CNO conf. ltr Op30-2CK15-UOT over (SC)P16-5 over Ser. 01348230 to Bupers and Cincpoa dtd 27 Oct'44).

Location - Iwo Jima31st C.B.

- 11-8-44 - 31st CB is temporarily attached to the 5th Marine Division effective as of 9 Oct'44 for administration and operational control. (Hdqtrs 5th MarDiv ltr 1990-30-20 over LAT-wjg - Div. Order #183-1944 dtd 22 Oct'44)  
 11-15-44 - The 31st CB is assigned with HANCE at present, now on TAD with 5th Phib Corps awaiting assignment by Cincpoa to the 41st Reg. in the 9th Brg. (Comserforpacflt Sec. ltr 65-CKW/apk over Ser. 001008 to CNO dtd 4 Nov'44).  
 12-13-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of 31st CB - report endorsed by 5th MarDiv. No info on location.  
 12-16-44 - 31st CB located at Pearl Harbor and is in the Hawaiian Area Brigade. (Com 14 Sec. Disp. to CNO 072103 dtd 13 Dec'44)  
 2- 7-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 31st CB - no info on location. Report endorsed by the 5th MarDiv and H.A.B.  
 3-27-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of the 31st CB - location not stated. During Feb this batt was assigned to the Shore Party Reg. of the 5th MarDiv. Total personnel of the combat echelon reaching the target consists of 26 off. and 961 men. Landed at target area from D-Day and each day following to D plus 10. Report on Combat Activities shows enemy contact beginning 19 Feb'45.  
 4-11-45 - Following info from OinC 31st CB conf ltr CB 31/A9 over DJE:ajm over ser 481 dtd 9 Mar'45 to Co Gen 5th MarDiv:  
     2 Oct'44 - left U.S.  
     8 Oct'44 - arrived Hilo.  
     - 26 off. and 961 men landed with Combat echelon.  
     7 Mar'45 - 2 off. and 42 men landed with 1st Echelon.  
     9 Mar'45 - Detached from 5th MarDiv.  
 5- 8-45 - The 31st CB is located at Iwo Jima. (Dirpacdocks S.F. S<sub>c</sub> Rep of 15 Apr'45)

- 5-22-45 - 1 May'45 report of the 41st Reg. - 31st CB attached to 43rd Reg. On 16 Apr'45 the 31st CB with 29 officers & 993 men on board moved to their permanent camp area TA 234 on Iwo Jima. 2
- 5-29-45 - 1 May'45 report of 31st CB - location not stated. The batt remained bivouaced in foxholes on the West Beach, TA 165 until 15 Apr'45. On 16 Apr'45 the batt moved to a permanent camp area, TA 234. Report routed via the 41st Reg and 9th Brg.
- 6-1-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of the 31st CB - located at Iwo Jima. Report routed via the 41st Reg and 9th Brg.
- 6-1-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of the 41st Reg - Batt (31st) was detached from the 5th MarDiv on 9 Mar'45 and reported to the 9th Brg for duty with the Army Garrison Forces.
- 6-6-45 - The 31st CB is located at Iwo Jima. (IsCom Iwo Jima sec disp 031027Z Jun to CNO)
- 6-12-45 - The 31st CB expected availability date at Iwo Jima is 15 Sep'45. (OinC 9th Brg sec ltr 00137 dtd 28 May'45 to Comservpac)
- 6-18-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 41st Reg. - 1 off. and 3 men in the rear ech on the 31st CB reported on board 17 May'45. The bal of the 3 men of rear ech reported on board 31 May. All personnel are now at Iwo Jima.
- 6-21-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 31st CB - located at Iwo Jima. Same comments as in 41st Reg report above. Report via 41st Reg and 9th Brg.
- 7-20-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 31st CB - located at Iwo Jima. Report via 41st Reg and 9th Brg.
- 8-21-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 31st CB - located at Iwo Jima. Report via 41st Reg & 9th Brig.
- 9-13-45 - 31st CB scheduled forward move. (Direastpacdocks sec location report dtd 20 Aug'45)

## Location - Iwo Jima

## 31st CB

- 9-26-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 31st CB - located at Iwo Jima. Report via 41st Reg. & 9th Brig
- 10-19-45 - Iscom, Iwo Jima authorizes 9th Brig. to transfer 31st CB to Omura for such duty as may be assigned. (Iscom, AGF, APO 86 sec ltr dtd 9 Oct'45 to OinC, 9th Brig).
- 10-24-45 - Effective upon departure of 41st Reg. from Iwo Jima on or about 29 Sept'45 the 8, 31 & 133 CBs are detached from 41st Reg. & will act as independent units pending attachment to higher construction battalion units. (9th Brig sec ltr ser 0303 dtd 28 Sept'45 to 8, 31 & 133 CBs).
- 10-31-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 31st CB - located at Iwo Jima.
- 11-29-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 31st CB - located at Sasebo, Japan. 31st CB left Iwo Jima on 17 Oct'45 & arrived Sasebo, Kyushu, Japan on 19 Oct'45.
- 12-28-45 - 1 Dec'45 report of 31st CB - location not stated.
- 1-31-46 - 1 Jan'46 report of 31st CB - location not stated.
- 3-14-46 - Comservpac states early inactivation of 31st CB and 1st(Sp) considered essential and requests CG 2nd MarDiv to advise earliest dates units can be inactivated. (Comservpac disp 122101/Mar to CG 2nd MarDiv).
- 3-28-46 - 1 Mar 46 report of 31st CB - located at Sasebo, Japan.
- 5-28-46 - Comservpac directs CG 2nd MarDiv to inactivate 31st CB on or about 1 July 46. (Comservpac disp 230302 May to CG 2nd MarDiv).
- 7-1-46 - Inactivation of 31st CB completed 30 June 1946. (Rearech 2nd MarDiv Naval message serial 290421Z to comservpac)
- 7-17-46 - Final report on inactivation. Officers transferred to U S, USNR for separation and USN for leave and reassignment. Enlisted men transferred to U S for disciplinary reasons, leave and reassignment, or discharge. Remainder of enlistedmen were transferred to the 5th Brigade for duty.

8-5-46 - Comservepac directs CB 3I on or about 1 July. Trans. U.S.N.R. enl. pers. to U.S.,  
U.S.N. enl. pers. to 5th NC Brigade. Advise Comservepac when inactivation com-  
pleted. (Comservepac disp. to CG 2nd MARDIV)

*The 31<sup>ST</sup> Spearhead*

*Naval Construction*

*Battalion*





*The Skipper*  
Commander W. C. G. Church.  
CEC. USN



*and The Executive Officer*  
Lt. Commander W. J. Koenig. CEC. USNR

FORMER OFFICERS IN CHARGE

Commander H. H. Micou, CEC, USNR

Lt. Commander R. C. Greer, CEC, USNR

Commander D. J. Ermilio, CEC, USNR

FORMER EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Lt. Commander R. A. Smith, CEC, USNR

Lieutenant E. J. McGinnis, CEC, USNR

Lieutenant M. B. Kite, CEC, USNR

# BOOT TRAINING

**B**Y LATE SUMMER OF 1942 practically every run on the N. Y. N. H. and Hartford stopped long enough at Providence to disgorge a swarm of train-weary, summer-clad civilians who were shepherded with a 'hup-right, hup' to waiting busses bound for Camp Endicott. Their arrival was somewhat in advance of the GI clothing which is the bane and blessing of every serviceman. So the indoctrination of Endicott's first 'boots' into the mysteries of a 'military manner' began with polite disregard of the blue jeans, corduroy pants, plaid knickers, and colored shirts which shivered, sub. at early morning muster. This leaning to nondescript garb has persisted with the old 31st'ers lo. until now. Camp Endicott has given the last polish to the majority of Construction Battalions with its Advance Military Training program. But training the men of the 31st was its first experiment with raw recruits.

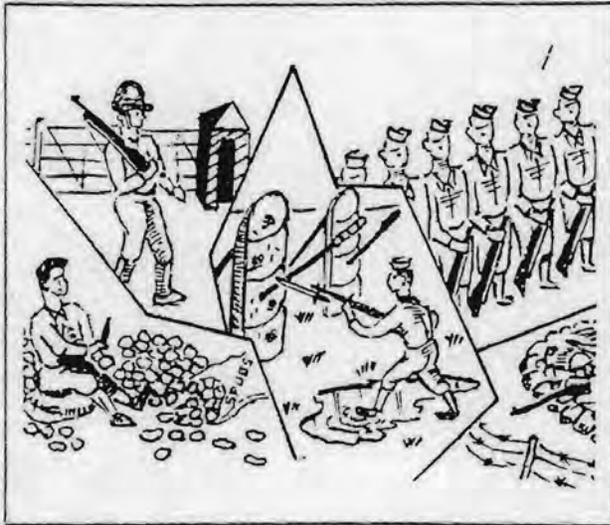
Endicott at this time was not much more than a mudhole, complicated by yawning excavations and pipe ditching. It was an obstacle course all its own. From barracks to shower room, especially at night, was a neat problem. Many a man made part of the trip with a triumphant leap, and turning to laugh at his less fortunate buddy, fell up to his ears in the next gully.

Boot is like nothing you have ever gone through before, and you hope never will again. It is a turning point in your life, and quite abrupt. Take from

Socrates his ability to orate, confine him to a guarded yard with a Samson—from whom you have already shorn the hair that guaranteed him strength. Then tell them both that they no longer have names, that from here on in they will be known as numbers, that their thinking will be done for them—and you have an idea of the first impact of boot camp on the average patriotic American. Their entry into the ways of a disciplined Navy kept them speechless and powerless for a solid month. The record in this book will show that they recovered their power. And, take it from us, their speech came back as well.

Boot was a continuous orgy of drilling, bayonet practice, KP and guard duty, inspections and vaccinations, during which their hopes receded daily into ethereal space. Through it all ran the theme—a devilish thing with the sting of a thousand pitchforks and a terrible finality from which there is no





appeal—"ours not to question why, ours but to do or die." Slowly we fit the mold. Slowly we caught on that there are three ways to do a job—the right way, the wrong way, and the Navy way.

We were not ordinary boots. Those in command recognized this, and for the first time in the history of our Navy (we tell ourselves) men in boot camp were placed on Regimental Guard duty (an honor and a privilege). This was unquestionably something—dangerously like turning a yeoman loose on a bulldozer, if you get what we mean. But picked men of the 31st (they learned early to volunteer for nothing) stood these posts and stood them well, and Camp Endicott remained unsullied, amply protected from any enemy saboteur. One conscientious Texan was put on post twelve and forgotten. Forty-eight hours later the post was rediscovered, and the guard, still challenging would-be liberty hounds, finally

relieved. This devotion to duty, sir, is typical of our fine American manhood not alone in Texas, sir, but all over these United States.

Toward the end of the training, a series of three realistic air-raids, courtesy of Quonset airmen, aroused the camp. Flares, explosions, dive-bombing, and screaming whistles gave you no time to wonder if —! And the helmet became a popular headdress. More realism was added as the idea of a mock invasion was developed to go with the next outburst. The 31st battalion was designated to invade. When the time and the hour arrived, the commandos of the outfit had, within thirty minutes, disarmed all the Marine Guards, cut their Colonel's telephone wires, routed out of his home and arrested Captain Fred Rogers, commanding officer of Endicott. The supply yard two miles away at West Davisville was also taken without trouble. There were no casual-



ties—but plenty of signal mortars lit the skies, and dynamite explosions were heard for miles. Perhaps it was then we were tagged for the Iwo job.

The month which had done so much to initiate many of us to a new way of life ended up on a typical note as it introduced us to the art and headache of moving. Lock, stock and barrel we packed ourselves clear across the drillfield to H. Unit. A more spectacular event was the dress review. Usually this is the kind of affair which makes the civilian want to get in the Navy, and the Seabee want to get out. But on 9 October 1942 it was different. This was the commissioning ceremony of the Thirty-

First United States Naval Construction Battalion. Boys in blue, a right good crew, passed in review. Captain Rogers presented the colors to our first commanding officer, Commander H. H. Micou. In Navy terms we were now a "ship" all set for the "shakedown cruise" of advance training, and then the long voyage.

Before that trip, though, there was another to take—wherever we wanted to go so long as we returned at the end of five days. You can see by the tabulation where most of the boys were from, but, believe it or not, a lot of them made it to Texas and back. Good, *fast* boys!

---

TEXAS .....	21.4	NEW YORK .....	4.5
OKLAHOMA .....	9.3	WASHINGTON .....	4.3
CALIFORNIA .....	9.3	PENNSYLVANIA .....	4.0
ARKANSAS .....	7.1	ALABAMA .....	3.8
LOUISIANA .....	6.9	OREGON .....	3.1
TENNESSEE .....	4.5	FLORIDA .....	2.9

Representing a total of 81.1% from 12 states, leaving 18.9% from 23 other states. 1 man from Canal Zone—8 Washington, D. C.

The 31st Spearhead Naval Construction Battalion.

---

# BERMUDA

**I**F, IN SEPTEMBER OF '42 we were boots—the rawest of civilians, by December of that same year we were still boots—the rawest of Seabees. BuDock's baby was as yet more in the idea stage than it was on the pages of current history. We knew from that wise old sage, the recruiting officer, and from press releases of 'things to come,' that the 'Bees were destined to play an important role in the war. But the record was not yet written. We were issued weapons and given uniforms, but eight or ten weeks probably did not transform us into the smoothest of Uncle Sam's military units. Still, we were game, maybe eager, for this venture into the unknown frontiers of the war to perform a vague though highly important task. So, with more enthusiasm than cadence, we marched from the ABD Hut Area in Camp Thomas through a drizzling rain to board day coaches for the first leg of the journey.

Anybody's scuttlebutt was good. For all we knew we might cross country to sail from a west coast port, or board ship at New York to sail in almost any possible direction. Guessing where was one of the games that occupied us on that trip from which we had no guarantee there would be a returning. Other games were played, too. Sure, we thought about leaving home. In a New York tunnel our train was delayed by the very interurban that used to carry one of us to work. In Washington we stood on a siding for a half hour, only five minutes from another guy's home. Then, when we reached Norfolk and had filed through a huge, cold shed to the waiting ship from which we waved a bleak good-bye to an empty dock, as our vessel slid out of the bay a mate pointed out the white house on the shore that was his home. That, and thinking about the five-day leave that did not let some of us get home, made you feel odd to say the least.

But now, at least, we knew where we were going. Civilians workers aboard, headed there, too, were able to tell us that. Bermuda, eh? A hell of a ways from the war that was! Oh, well, we'd see. Meanwhile, the rough waters of the Middle Atlantic, and the drills, and the blackouts at night, and the talk

about submarines gave you something else to think about.

Sighting land after even a two day voyage has its thrill. Slowly the speck on the horizon took on size and shape and color. The green hills, the colored gardens, the dazzling whiteness of the beaches and buildings of this near, yet foreign, land, and the harbors of clear, opal tinted water was our introduction to a place of slow tempo and strange customs. 'A bit of old world,' or 'horse and buggy'—depending on how you looked at it.

The narrow roads accommodated their buggies and bicycles; only the doctor had an automobile. Every house had its own water catchment, for its only source of the precious liquid was the rain. A scattering of coral islands with many people, much fishing, garden truck, the famous onions, potatoes, lilies, but neither snake nor apple, the smallest drawbridge in the world, and four o'clock tea. This was Bermuda which, with our help, was to turn from vacation land into an important frontier base on the road to North Africa and the turn of the Axis.

Our jobs here? Forgetting the gripes and confusion and the kidding we took as "Honeymooners," plenty that we did was important. No list would be complete. But there were the underground fuel tanks—the marginal wharf—the large fleet warehouse, the gun mounts, the ammo dumps, the gunnery schools built; the maintenance work, the painting, the wiring, the ship repairs, the stevedoring (a ship unloaded every five days); the hospital, the golf course, the officers' club, and the Admiral's fish pond.

The closer the connection we could see between the job we did and the winning of the war, the more satisfaction we took in our work. The planes that landed there with bullet holes in their wings, and the ships, in whose holds we shifted cargo so that repairs could be made closer to the battle front than anywhere else, reminded us that even though it was a long way off, the war was still going on and much of our efforts on the island of coral and cedar *did* support the big job. With this we had to be content.

# A NEW 31st

**T**HE RETURN TO THE STATES in two echelons a week apart brought one group directly to Camp Endicott by ship and the other group to Norfolk for another coach ride. A few days after re-assembling, the eagerly awaited overseas leave came through. To all corners of the country, but to the Southwest, mostly, scattered the thousand and more men for a brief month's holiday and a joyful homecoming.

But, the United States then being in a state of war, all good things soon came to an end. The end of November '43 found us back at camp with bets high on how soon we would move out again. The process of rejuvenating the battalion had already begun. Commander Micou had been transferred during his leave to the Pacific to assume command of a regiment. General Service—or the prospect of sea duty—opened up for some rates, a hope which was later frosted for many. But not until almost 400 men of the 31st had transferred out. Their places were taken by drafts of men from Camp Peary, from the 3901 and 3003 detachments, and from other battalions. Only five of the original officers remained. For a brief while Lieut. Cmdr. R. C. Greer, Jr. commanded the outfit, but soon he turned over the reins to his executive officer, Lt. E. J. McGinnis, who carried on for two months until Lieut. Cmdr. D. J. Ermilio appeared on the scene to take over the battalion.

With a full complement again the 31st set out to make the best of their indefinite stay at Endicott. Small detachments went to Nantucket and to Charlestown, R. I. to put in some constructive licks, while those who remained behind found work and military training to keep them busy. Here, also, under Lt. McGinnis, the recreational program of the 31st hit its highest stride. In inter-battalion basketball not a game was lost; in track events we claimed the trophy; our boxers were acknowledged the best in the neighborhood; in archery both Robin Hood and Dan Cupid were found among us; and in Providence Commando tactics, the title was ours.

With the blush of spring came the move to Sun Valley, a five mile hike, for extensive military train-

ing and maneuvers in the field. Included was a week spent at the range in rehearsal for the great day of firing "for the record," when daddy became an 'Expert Rifleman,' a 'Sharpshooter,' or a 'Marksman.'

This over, the next stop was Camp Thomas where, shortly, we were confined to camp—more particularly the guest house—at which many a 31st'er bravely comforted his (1) wife—or (2) girl—or (3) somebody else's wife, with a cheery, "Oh, don't worry a bit. It won't be for long." It wasn't. Some of them were on hand to welcome us to the west coast.

To the tune of "California, Here I Come," our three sections began their diverse routes to the west over country that was new to many. In the course of five days there was opened to us the panorama for which we were fighting: America, with all her deserts and plains, her mountains and lakes, her farms and her cities.

The week's end found us at Port Huene—our home for the next four and one-half months. Without delay we began 'sighting-in' our new carbines, and our tears flowed like wine as we learned the hard way to adjust our gas masks. Suddenly combat training was broken off to permit a move to a nearby Camp Bedilion and, then, those coveted pre-embarkation leaves we had wondered about.

At leave's end the imminence of our departure had faded away. So we settled down to 'left, right, left,' and carpenter details, and liberty! Hollywood, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Ocean Park—we made them all, and the Ventura USO to boot. We'll mention Ojai later; but as August of '44 rolled around the refrain, "We'll never leave the States," increased as two sizeable detachments were sent to San Clemente and San Nicholas Island for construction duty.

Within a scant month they were all back, and we were confined to an embarkation area at Camp Rousseau where a feverish last-month of preparation, of transfers in and out, of dispatching wives home—got under way. Then, it really happened. We left the States.

# IWO INVASION

**W**HEN THE BATTLE BREAKS OUT you no longer ask questions, you do not indulge in petty griping. You simply do your job for all you are worth. You are scared to death, and, at the same time, you think you ought to be on the front lines along with those other guys who are doing more than their share. Yet you know that somebody has to work behind the lines, and that they cannot carry on without you.

Most of us never really saw the front lines, though they were not very far away. Those who did would like to forget some things about it. With some exceptions we have no brags to make. All we did during the beginning stages of the invasion was to get supplies off the ships so they could be used where they would do the most good, and so those ships could take wounded aboard and get out of there.

Hundreds of thousands of tons were in the holds of those ships: munitions, food, water, gasoline, medical supplies, ambulances, tanks, trucks, jeeps, heavy equipment, all manner of stuff vital to the invasion. From the thirteen APA's and AKA's which carried the Fifth Division, and the countless LSM's and LST's this stuff had to be put ashore. 31st Seabees, working with Pioneers and replacements of the Fifth Division and small boat crews of the ships themselves, did it. LSM's and LST's unloaded directly on the beaches. The cargo from larger vessels had to be hoisted from the holds and placed in small boats, to begin with, to be sped under fire to the shore. Later LST's were used to ferry this stuff in, after they had unloaded their original cargo. Whether in the holds jockeying cumbersome equipment from far corners, securing slings, or on deck running winches, or holding 'steady' lines to prevent disastrous swinging of the load as it went over the side into small boats, or riding the boats themselves to help unload ammunition or gasoline—each of us did his job. Some of it was done under dangerous conditions, but it was not front line stuff. It was damned important work, upon which the assault depended. Knowing that, we gave it the best we had. That's all we did.

More was required of some than of others. Part of the demolition crew was ashore with the fifth wave

at 0922. The photographer and Lt. Williams joined them soon after. Farther up the beach, shortly after noon some of our heavy equipment men drove onto the beach from LSM's with wonderful targets: bulldozers, cranes, caterpillar tractors. Almost immediately Ben Massey was wounded. The others, oblivious to danger, made themselves useful cutting down an embankment, making a road, dozing a trench for a temporary first-aid station, pulling heavy cargo and wheeled vehicles to designated spots, serving as inspiration to Marines and Seabees. Later on, one man was decorated, another forgotten. Jobe was wounded.

The following afternoon brought Ensign Pierce and his 42 commandos, with CWO Dreher and Dr. Neal ashore. It was too early to work on the strip. They made themselves as useful as possible, especially the medics. Each day more men from our outfit hit the beach. Bill DeRamus was wounded. On D plus 4 a detail was clearing shrapnel from No. 1 strip under fire. Steed was wounded. A few nights later the ammunition dump was hit, injuring Bobbitt. Not everyone who deserved it or who was recommended was decorated. Medals are nice, but more important is the personal satisfaction and the esteem of those who know.

Against the background of this experience, of being tied in with an invasion, of seeing the great cost in life, the work to which we turned took on a significance to us which men arriving later on the scene could never hope to understand. We had to make good the purchase in blood and life of Iwo Jima. In the pages that follow this story is told—at least in part. Not every job is covered. Not everyone is given the credit he has coming. Not everyone's picture is to be found here. Five of our men lost their lives here! Reaves, Grove, Schueler, Meeker, Knerr. Others were wounded by explosives long after the battle was over. The work was long and gruelling and tedious. There were lighter moments, too, later on. Before ever we left the island our common effort had its crown of success: Germany's surrender in May, Japan's in August. Now, most of us are home. This that follows is the story of how our passage back was earned.



## THE ROAD THAT COULDN'T BE BUILT

Wherever Iwo Jima is remembered, there will be remembered also Mount Suribachi. And with it there will be remembered the men of the 28th Marine Regiment who took that hill, and our own men who built the road up its side. Contrary to reports appearing in some unreliable stateside papers, this road was strictly a Seabee job, to be more precise a 31st job. This was our start in turning what had been taken by our Marines at a dear price into a military advantage. The purpose of taking the island in the first place was not only to silence their harassing air attacks on the Marianas but even more to secure a closer base to the mainland of Japan for our own air activity as well as a haven for the emergency landing of returning bombers. Coupled with the successful operation of any airfield is the need for the best possible weather intelligence. Suribachi

would serve our offense as the place to locate our weather observation post. It would serve our defense as the place to locate our main radar station. To get this equipment to the top of Suribachi and to keep it serviced required the building of the road. The construction was assigned to Lt. DeWitt's dirt pushers of Company C, and came under the supervision of capable CWO Purcell. The building of this road has had publicity because, as far as the Japs were concerned, it was a road that couldn't be built, and because it was built in a relatively short time. The lower part of it required dynamiting to get huge boulders out of the way before the dozers could work it. The blasting crews drilled and planted their dynamite at night while the rest of the gang, working their equipment up over the solid rock, used every minute of daylight to whip the

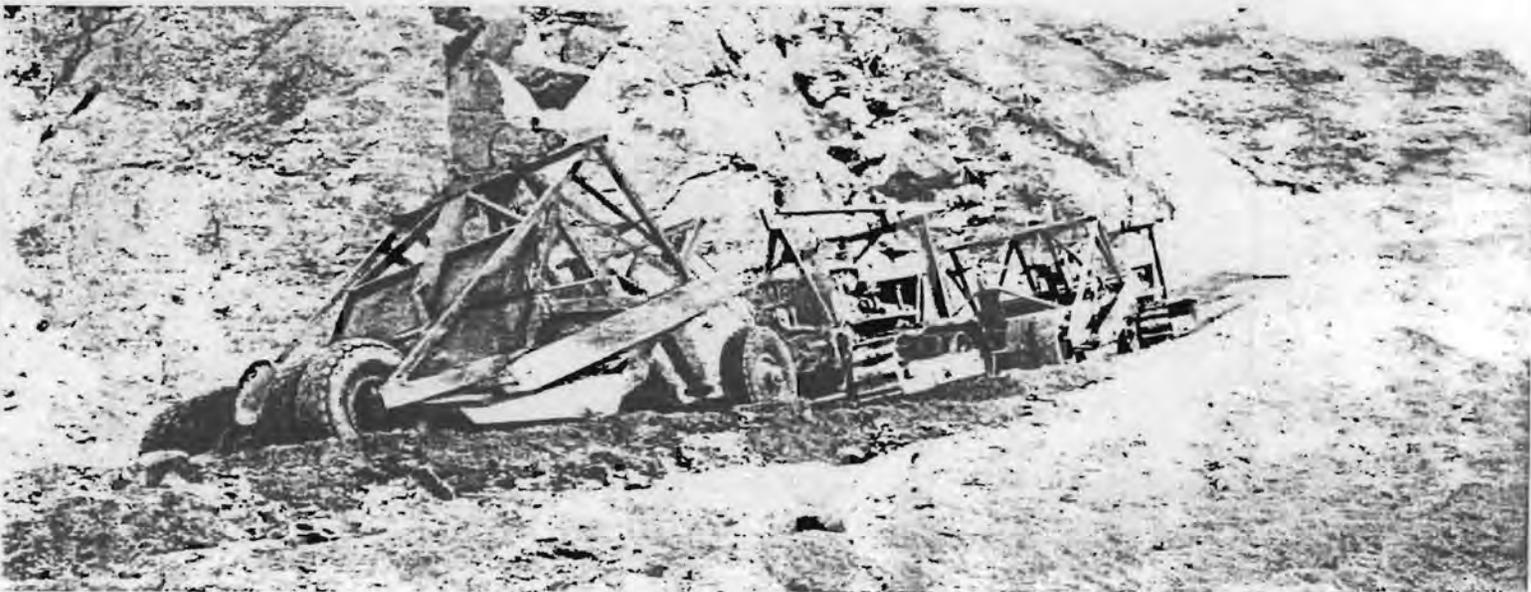


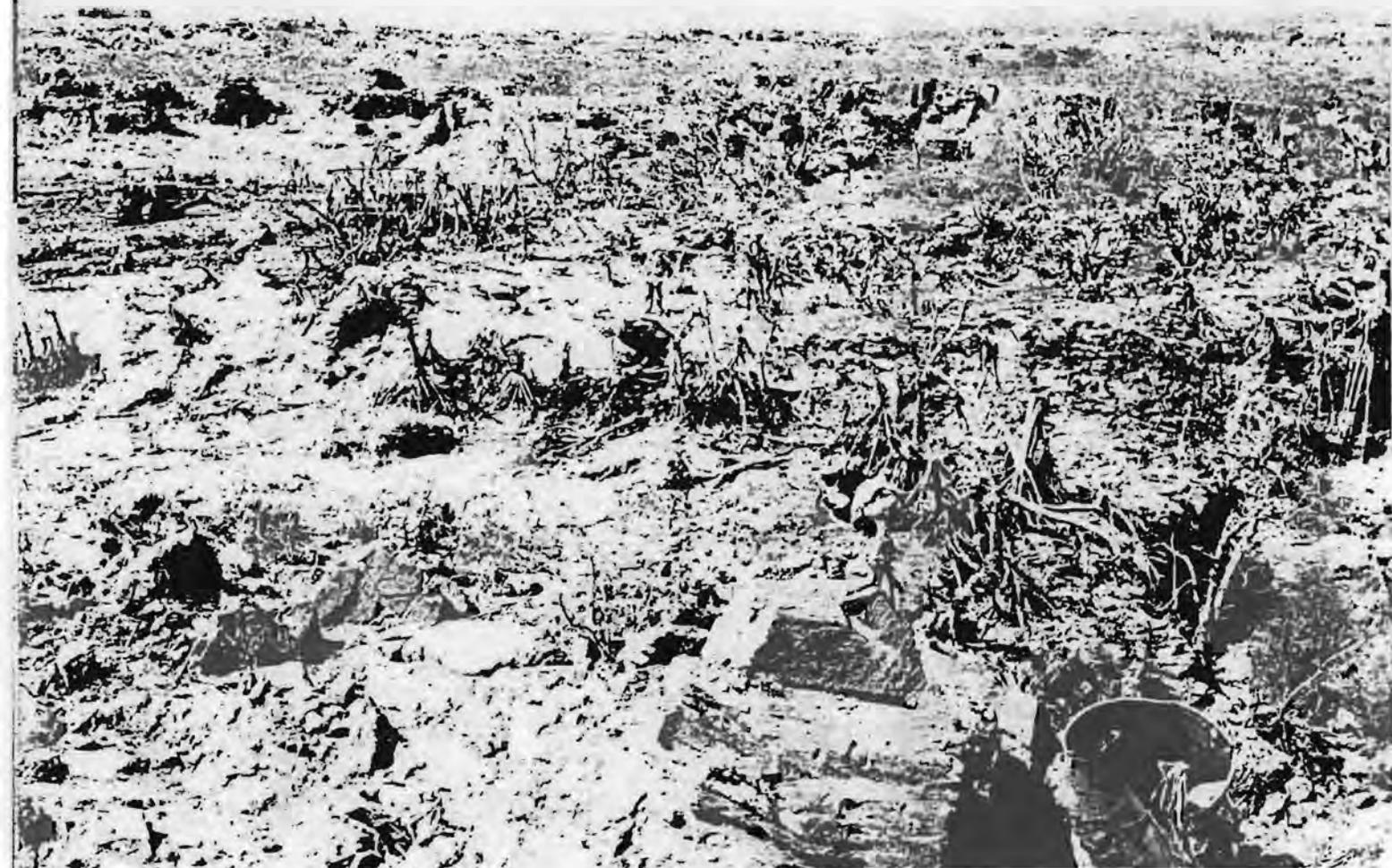


upper part of the road into shape first. On the third day after work began the pioneering dozers were atop the mountain. Then followed quickly the widening, grading for drainage, fine grading of the steep, winding highway. Can do. Will do. Did.



*The pictures on these three pages give you some idea of how 556 foot Suribachi looked at close hand before, during, and after the road was built. Plenty of Japs were holed up in crevasses and caves, interested in stealing water and food at night rather than in giving further trouble. More worrisome were the booby-traps, duds, grenades, laying around in abundance, and the fear of dropping suddenly into some unsuspected, ample-sized cave. Luckily, the only casualty was a dozer which took a sudden notion to slide 50 or 60 feet down the sheer side of the hill.*





## THE NORTH AIRSTRIP

Nature did not intend for Iwo Jima to be much of an air base. It has been variously described as looking like a pork chop from the air, like the crescent moon, and like an Egyptian mummy. The latter description, though a bit far-fetched, took into account the contour of the island in general, labelling Suribachi the head of the mummy and other hills the knees, fists, arms and toes. Well, from the assault beaches, and those on the opposite side, the island does rise to a kind of ridge or backbone which widens and rises higher as it extends toward the northern and wider part of the island. The ridge becomes more of a plateau. But it was a plateau which Nature left interrupted by peaks of varying heights and a series of eroded valleys, deepening as they reached toward the ocean.

Given years of control, equipment and methods none too modern, and a supply of Korean slave labor,

the former tenants of the bleak territory had been able to construct two small airstrips and to attempt a third which was abandoned. We concurred with the Japanese in one thing: we, too, wanted a third airstrip. The difference was that we got it. This is the story of its getting. The terrain over which it was to be built resembled nothing more than the pictures you see of the archaeological remains of a partly unearthed, ruined city. It was crevassed, full of rock, marked with frequent walls which only Nature built. The picture above, and the top four on the opposite page, show the place in the rough.

A deadline of thirty days was given. A week later the course of the strip was altered a few degrees. At the end of the month, the strip was ready for its asphalt topping. During that time the surveyors were kept busy tramping over dangerous, booby-trapped ground to stake out the course: then, retrace



ing their steps, they set the needed markers to bring the strip down to a fine grade. Bulldozer operators working on day and night shifts, as did everyone, battled sandstone-like rocks and walls and hills, while carry-alls followed at a great clip, to scoop up their loads where there was too much dirt and to carry them to the considerable stretches of the 6,300 foot strip where fill was needed.

Demolition men were not alone in keeping their eyes open for land mines, duds, booby-traps, and the nests of Japanese aerial bombs or other ammunition such as you see at the right. That no one was killed or seriously injured in this construction is a tribute to the sober alertness of men who knew that their lives depended upon this alertness, for there were plenty of deadly missiles laying around. The night crews had the doubtful entertainment of sniper activity which was harassing but not effective.





For some distance the edge of the strip ran onto hot, steam-spitting sulphur ground, with its rotten egg smell. Jap planes, disabled tanks, Japanese gun mounts, and other junk had to be hauled away. Dynamiters were called in to blast away a stubborn hill. When the deadline came, the beautifully levelled strip was ready to turn over to the Army Engineers for the job of topping, allowing us to move on to more of the same kind of territory, only more sulfurous, to build taxiways and heart stands. But we had the satisfaction of seeing a squadron of P-51's land on our new airstrip before we gave it up.

*P-51 Squadron Landed In 30 Days.*



## AIRFIELD NO. 1

It has already been mentioned that a detail of 31st'sers was at work clearing shrapnel from the first airstrip while it was still under fire. As the progress of battle permitted, more extensive work was undertaken by another battalion to make that strip usable. Within a couple of weeks, though, we were back at this strip again, to widen, lengthen, and pave it. Much of the Jap asphalt had to be ripped out. To meet specifications set forth, both cutting and filling were required. This field was in the ash-end of the island. Clay had to be hauled to give a solid base to the topping. Much of the more than 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  million cubic yards of earth moved by the 31st was in connection with the work



on No. 1 airstrip. Crews under CWO Wolfe and CWO Dreher worked 7 days a week on 12 hour day and night shifts to accomplish a rapid completion of an up-to-standard strip. The strip was in use while work was underway.

Occasional crack-ups had to be hauled off the field, and when much rain came dozers were begged to pull good planes out of the clay mud. Otherwise it was a merry race of dozers, motor patrols, trucks, shovels, rollers, graders day in and day out. The ditchdigger was called on for drainage work and for laying electric cable.

War's end found a 6,400 foot strip complete, several parking areas, and considerable progress made on a second strip V-ing to the south end of No. 1 field.

# JAPAN

**A** S IT HAPPENS, this page is being written on December the seventh, four years after Pearl Harbor was treacherously attacked by the Japanese. It is being written in Japan, in every important corner of which are to be found the occupational forces of the U. S. A small indication of the work and the cost that was required to bring this event to pass is exhibited in the pages of this book.

In the wake of this war, there are now going on trials in Manila and Tokyo and Nuremberg to determine the war guilt of the many military and civil leaders of Axis forces, and to mete out punishment which cannot hope to be in proportion to the consequences of their acts. In Washington, Congressional investigations are in progress to assess the degree of responsibility of our own military and governmental leaders for the unpreparedness which greeted the Pearl Harbor attack. Particular men will likely be judged for their individual errors of judgment, command, and diplomacy. But the sense of the share of responsibility which rightfully belongs to all of our American people may have been forgotten in the flush of victory. Four years ago we believed we could live apart from the rest of the world, relying upon our vast economic resources. Believing this, we were not ourselves prepared for Pearl Harbor. We were like a man living in a cyclone belt but refusing to build himself the protection of a cellar or to plan ahead for the possibility of his own destitution.

Now, there is going on in the councils of all Allied and friendly nations not only an earnest planning for that possibility but also a great effort so to reconstruct our international relationships that such a destitution may be averted. There are two rocks with which this effort must contend and upon which it may founder: the pressure of national and economic self-interests, and our own indifference. So long as we refuse to consider what is good for mankind, just so long do we condemn our next generations to die in the civil warfare of mankind divided.

It can be told now that this Battalion was definitely scheduled for the invasion of Japan. It is often the reward of doing a good job that you are expected to do another just as well. Knowing this, you may be sure the only tears shed on V-J Day among us were tears of joy. We had been through one invasion. It ranked with the toughest. And, as a unit, we had been doggedly lucky. The loss or the injury of the men to whom this book is dedicated can never be recompensed. We can only be thankful there

were not many more from our numbers to join them. Had we been obliged to share in the original plan, it is certain according to the law of averages that some of you would have joined Reaves and Grove and Schueler and Meeker and Knerr. And to others would have fallen the lot of Jobe, Steed, Roddy, Bobbitt, Massey, Fry, Boles, Massa, and Lynn. Remember this whenever you see a "Gold Star" home, and whenever a wounded veteran requires the hand and the understanding of a brother.

As it was, we did not have to judge the terrain of these islands with a military eye; whether it would be hard to take, where to set up command posts, how best to transport supplies, what natural defense and foxhole facilities there were.

Except that it was not home, we could lift up our eyes unto the hills and delight them with the view of magnificent mountains. We could give more than a speculative fisherman's glance at the bays and inlets and rivers. We could see nature's incessant effort to lend beauty to squalor in the roses and little chrysanthemums that still bloomed when we arrived. And we could declare field day for our repressed, human curiosity about strange people, strange places, strange customs.

In the pages that follow we have tried to show you a little bit of what we saw. We found ourselves in a land that was densely crowded, among a people whose living standards could hardly come up even to the worst America has to offer. There seemed to be few if any middle class. A few were well-off. The rest we would call destitute. Wherever there were servicemen, curious children gathered in droves to beg chocolate, cigarettos, chewing gum when they needed more than anything stockings for their bare feet and handkerchiefs for their running noses. It did not appear that Japan was bothered with a declining birth rate so much as with the problem of keeping alive and healthy the people they had. Their effort to conquer must have intensified this problem no end. But the grizzled, weatherbeaten farmers and their cronies and kids worked at it with the crudest of implements, laboriously. And the shopkeepers did their best to garner the spending money of willing, souvenir-hunting Americanos. And the populace in general, who may very well have wanted no war and who certainly wanted no defeat, bowed liked hobbling dolls and smilingly offered the ingratiating cup of ceremonial tea (or sake) to the occupational forces of a people whom, four years earlier, they had hoped to defeat.

## 31<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Battalion

### Chronology

09 Oct 1942	Commissioned at NCTC, Davisville, R.I.
13 Nov 1942	Transferred to ABD, Davisville, R.I.
01 Dec 1942	25 officers and 513 men departed ABD, Davisville, R.I. for Norfolk, VA.
03 Dec 1942	Departed Norfolk, VA, for Bermuda and arrived 05 Dec 1942.
11 Oct 1943	1 <sup>st</sup> Echelon of 10 officers and 484 men departed Bermuda.
13 Oct 1943	1 <sup>st</sup> Echelon arrived NCTC, Davisville, R.I.
17 Oct 1943	2 <sup>nd</sup> Echelon of 11 officers and 519 men departed Bermuda.
19 Oct 1943	2 <sup>nd</sup> Echelon arrived Norfolk, VA and departed for NCTC, Davisville, R.I.
20 Oct 1943	2 <sup>nd</sup> Echelon arrived NCTC, Davisville, R.I.

### Second Tour of Duty

24 Apr 1944	Transferred from NCTC, Davisville, R.I. to ABDRB, Davisville, R.I.
08 May 1944	Departed ABDRB, Davisville, R.I. to ABRB, Port Hueneme, California.
13 May 1944	Arrived ABRB, Port Hueneme, California.
25 May 1944	Detached ABRB, Port Hueneme, California, AATD, Port Hueneme, California.
28 Sept 1944	Detached AATD, Port Hueneme, California, ABRB, Port Hueneme, California.
02 Oct 1944	Departed ABD, Port Hueneme, California, for overseas.
08 Oct 1944	Arrived Hilo, Hawaii.
09 Oct 1944	Attached to the 5 <sup>th</sup> Marine Division for temporary duty.
24 Dec 1944 –	Battalion boarded Various ships of convoy for transfer to target area.
07 Jan 1945	
19 Feb 1945	Arrived Iwo Jima, Assault Echelon, 24 officers, 961 men.
09 Mar 1945	Arrived Iwo Jima, 1 <sup>st</sup> Echelon, 2 officers, 42 men.
17 May 1945	Arrived Iwo Jima, Rear Echelon, 1 officer, 3 men.
12 June 1945	Arrived Iwo Jima, 8 <sup>th</sup> Echelon, 0 officer, 4 men.
09 Mar 1945	Detached from 5 <sup>th</sup> Marine Division, Iwo Jima.
	Attached to 41 <sup>st</sup> naval Construction Regiment of the 9 <sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Brigade, Iwo Jima.
17 Oct 1945	Departed for Sasebo, Kyushu, Japan.
19 Oct 1945	Arrived Sasebo Harbor, Kyushu, Japan.
30 June 1946	31 <sup>st</sup> Naval Construction Battalion inactivated at Sasebo.

DECLASSIFIED  
CONFIDENTIAL

520 7, 27 Sept. 1953

THIRTY-FIRST U.S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION  
c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California.

- 9 Oct. 1942 Commissioned at NCTC, Davisville, R. I.
- 13 Nov. 1942 Transferred to ABD, Davisville, R. I.
- 1 Dec. 1942 17 Officers and 513 men departed ABD, Davisville, R. I. for Norfolk, Va.
- 1 Dec. 1942 8 Officers and 513 men departed ABD, Davisville, R. I. for Norfolk, Va.
- 3 Dec. 1942 Departed Norfolk, Va., for Bermuda.
- 5 Dec. 1942 Arrived Bermuda.
- 11 Oct. 1943 1st Echelon of 10 officers and 484 men departed Bermuda.
- 13 Oct. 1943 1st Echelon arrived NCTC, Davisville, R. I.
- 17 Oct. 1943 2nd Echelon of 11 officers and 519 men departed Bermuda.
- 19 Oct. 1943 2nd Echelon arrived Norfolk, Va. and departed for NCTC, Davisville, R. I.
- 20 Oct. 1943 2nd Echelon arrived NCTC, Davisville, R. I.

2nd TOUR OF DUTY

- 24 Apr. 1944 Transferred from NCTC, Davisville, R. I. to ABDRB, Davisville, R. I.
- 8 May 1944 Departed ABDRB, Davisville, R. I. to ABRB, Port Hueneme, Calif.
- 15 May 1944 Arrived ABRB, Port Hueneme, Calif.
- 25 May 1944 Detached ABRB, Port Hueneme, Calif., and attached to AATD, Port Hueneme, Calif.
- 28 Sept 1944 Detached AATD, Port Hueneme, Calif., and attached to ABRB, Port Hueneme, Calif.
- 2 Oct. 1944 Departed ABD, Port Hueneme, Calif., for overseas.
- 8 Oct. 1944 Arrived Hilo, Hawaii.
- 9 Oct. 1944 Attached to the 5th Marine Division for temporary duty.
- 24 Dec. 1944 Battalion boarded various ships of convoy for transfer to target area.
- 7 Jan. 1945

To Facilitate  
and attached to  
Classification changed  
from:  
and attached to  
CONFIDENTIAL

Signature  
[Stamp]

CONFIDENTIAL

THIRTY-FIRST U. S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION  
c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California.

DECLASSIFIED CONFIDENTIAL 17 Sept. 1958

2nd TOUR OF DUTY (Continued)

19 Feb. 1945	Arrived Iwo Jima, Assault Echelon, 24 Officers, 961 men.
9 Mar. 1945	Arrived Iwo Jima, 1st Echelon, 2 " 42 "
17 May 1945	Arrived Iwo Jima, Rear Echelon, 1 " 3 "
12 June 1945	Arrived Iwo Jima, 8th Echelon, 0 " 4 "
9 Mar. 1945	Detached from 5th Marine Division, Iwo Jima.
9 Mar. 1945	Attached to 41st Naval Construction Regiment of the 9th Naval Construction Brigade, Iwo Jima.
6 July 1945	Still on Iwo Jima.

To Facilitate  
Administrative Handling  
Classification changed  
from

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

To: RESTRICTED  
Wm. S. Thompson  
Comdr. CECAF 1st  
Spring

DECLASSIFIED-000

CONFIDENTIAL



**U S NAVAL  
CONSTRUCTION  
BATTALION**



OFFICERS & COPIES  
AT HEAD OF LINE  
GIVE  
MEN WAITING  
AT A TIME

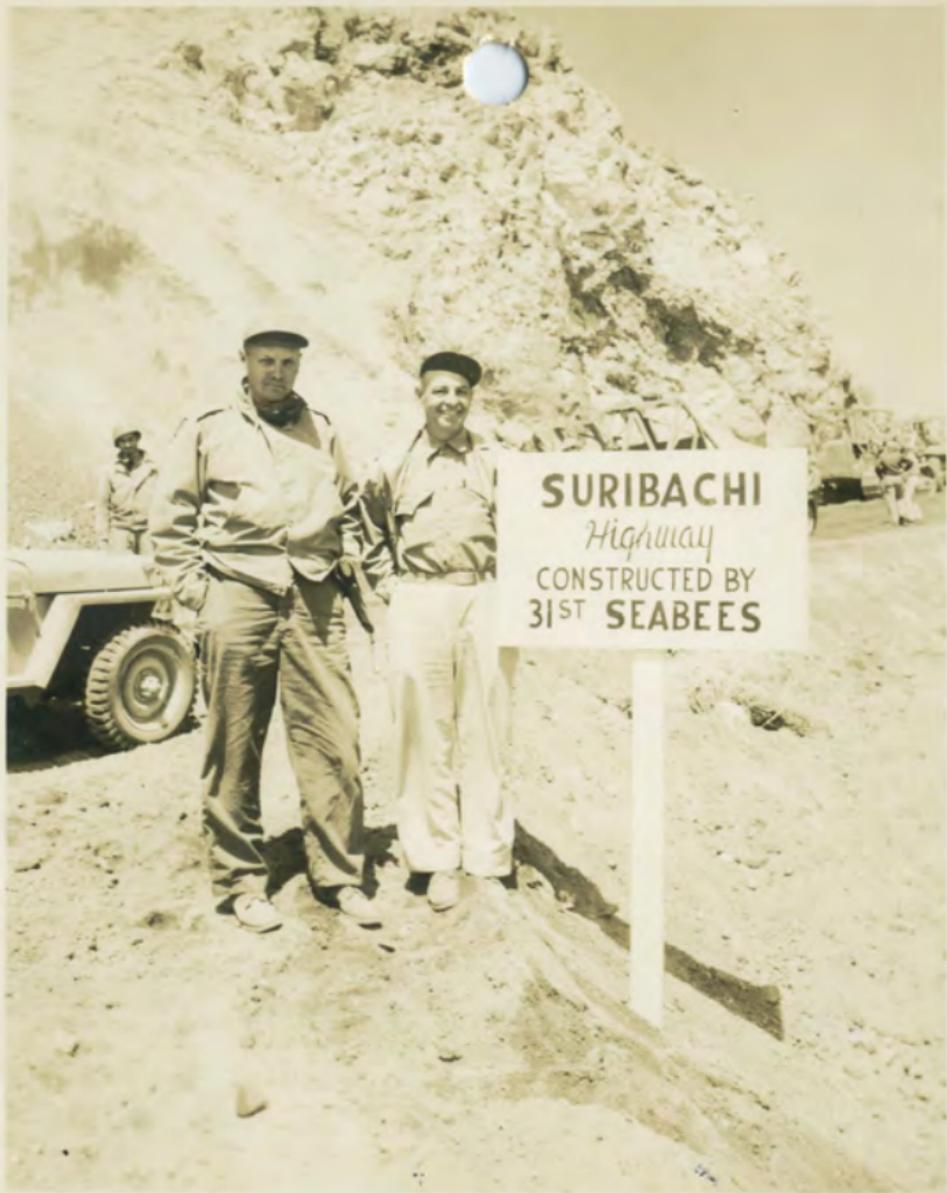
113

3/ 10 10 0









**SURIBACHI**  
*Highway*  
CONSTRUCTED BY  
**31ST SEABEES**