

# 33<sup>rd</sup> Naval Construction Battalion

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*Historical  
Information*



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



NCTC - Norfolk  
 ABD - Gulfport  
           Hueneme  
 Ready Date - 1 Dec'42  
 Left ABD - 18 Dec'42  
 Destination - Acorn #3 Green Is. -Russells Peleliu

LOG

- 11-12-42 - 33rd CB scheduled to depart Norfolk on 16 Nov'42 for Gulfport. (TWX121425-11-42)  
 11-27-42 - Arrived Gulfport 18 Nov'42 and departed 26 Nov'42. (OinC ltr to Budocks)  
 12- 3-42 - Arrived Hueneme 30 Nov'42. (Memo to Lt. Comdr. Fay from Capt. Thibault) *Expansion 12 Oct.*  
 12-18-42 - 33rd CB reported for duty at Acorn #3.(Red)  
 1-20-43 - Acorn 3 at White Poppy - Const. Mazona air field and overhaul facilities.  
 5-11-43 - The 33rd CB is located at Russell Is. (Acorn #3). (ComNavBasesSoPac area to ComSoPac Sec. ltr dtd 5-11-43)  
 6- 5-43 - Report Feb. to Apr'43:  
           14 Feb'43 - 1st Echelon, consisting of 18 officers and 650 men, sailed from Noumea and arrived Koli Point 18 Feb'43. 2nd Echelon, consisting of 2 officers and 99 men, to Koli Point 24 Feb'43. 3rd Echelon, consisting of 3 officers and 257 men, to Koli Point 28 Feb'43. Loading detail, 2 officers and 10 men, to Koli Point 11 Mar'43. Battalion started leaving Koli Pt. 20 Feb.'43 and all arrived Russell Is. by 16 Apr'43.  
 6-16-43 - Acorn 3 dissolved. 33rd CB ordered to Base OUCH for duty (pencil memo from Lt. Jeremiah 6/15/43)

33rd C.B.

- 7-14-43 - 1 Jun'43 report of 33rd CB - operating at Benikca Is., Russells.  
 12- 4-43 - 1 Nov'43 report of 33rd CB - This batt was detached from Russell Is. about 19 Nov'43 and ordered to Auckland, N.Z. for rehabilitation. (RHD)  
 3-23-44 - 33rd CB operating at Green Is. according to unofficial report (Yeo. Wolf newspaper reports)  
 3-27-44 - 1 Feb'44 report of 33rd CB - Left Auckland, N.Z. 9 Jan'44 and arrived at Russell Is. 23 Jan'44. (1 Feb'44 report)  
 5- 6-44 - 23rd Reg. 1 Feb'44 report - 33rd CB staging at Russells pending movement to Green Is.  
 5- 8-44 - 1 Mar'44 report of 33rd C.B. - Location not indicated except with 23rd Reg.  
 5-17-44 - Located at Green Is. (AES 5/15/44)  
 5-27-44 - 1 Apr'44 report of 33rd CB - operating at Green Is.  
 6-14-44 - 1 May'44 report of 33rd CB - operating at Green Is. Estimated completion date is 15 May'44.  
 7-11-44 - 1 Jun'44 report of 33rd CB - operating at Green Is.  
 8- 3-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 33rd CB - operating at Green Is. According to Comseronsopac for 2nd End. dtd 20 Jul'44 the 33rd CB has recently been ordered to the 1st Mar Div for operational control, and as replacement for the 19th CB.  
 8-25-44 - 33rd CB located at Green Is. - Arrived Noumea Jan'43  
   "          Russells Feb'43  
   "          Auckland Nov'43  
   "          Russells Jan'44  
   "          Green Is. Jan'44

(Data of SoPac as of 1 Jul'44)

33rd C.B.

- 8-29-44 - 33rd CB arrived Russells from Green Is. 31 Jul'44. (CMB Russells Airmailgram 150147 NCR 14207 dtd 21 Aug'44 to Comseronsopac - Sed.)
- 9- 6-44 - 33rd CB report dtd 1 Aug'44 - operations at Green Is. secured 23 Jul'44. Left Green Is. 28 Jul'44 and arrived at Russells 31 Jul'44. This batt has been assigned to the 1st MarDiv for operational control in a forthcoming forward move.
- 10-27-44 - OinC of the 33rd CB requests the estimated time of departure of the rear echelon at Pavuvu, Russells - consists of 4 officers and 177 men. (Sec. Disp. to Comservpac 172346 NCR 7898 dtd 19 Oct'44)
- 11-18-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 33rd CB - Report on Enlisted Personnel was not submitted due to the fact that the records and a rear echelon ( 4 off. and 177 men) were left at the staging base when the Batt left on its assignment 28 Aug'44.
- 11-21-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of 33rd CB - located at Peleliu. The rear echelon of 4 officers and 177 men are still at the rear base staging area. Batt was attached to the 1st MarDiv and contact with the enemy was continuous from D-Day (16 Sep'44) to date of report.
- 11-21-44 -- The 33rd CB is located at Peleliu. (Is. Com Peleliu Sec. disp to CNO 050300 NCR 17368 dtd 17 Nov'44).
- 12- 8-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of 33rd CB - located at Peleliu. Rear Echelon of Batt still at the rear base staging area. Estimated date of completion of all presently assigned tasks is 30 Nov'44. Report endorsed by 38th Regiment.
- 12-13-44 - 33rd CB located at Peleliu. (IsComPeleliu Sec. Disp. to CNO 011016 dtd 9 Dec'44)
- 1-5-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of the 33rd CB - location not stated. Report endorsed by the 38th Regiment. All organized enemy resistance ceased on 27 Nov'44.
- 1-13-45 - 33rd CB located at Peleliu. (IsCom Peleliu Sec Disp to CNO 030037 dtd 11 Jan'45)

33rd CB

- 1-16-45 - 1 Nov'44 report of the 38th Regiment - 33rd CB has been in the South and Central Pacific since Dec'42. Copies of letters of commendation to 9 men of the 33rd CB from the Hdqtrs First MarDiv commends the work of the men during the period 15 Sep'44 to 27 Sep'44 while the Marines were engaged with enemy Japanese forces on Peleliu Is., Palau Is.
- 1-23-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of the 38th Reg. - As of 1 Dec'44, the rear echelon of the 33rd CB, comprised of 3 off. and 189 men, had not arrived on the base. OinC of the Reg. strongly recommends that the 33rd CB be returned to the States for rest and rehabilitation. Batt has been overseas a period of 23 months, having left the U.S. on 18 Dec'42. They have had a continuous record of construction in forward and combat areas. They participated in the invasion of the Russell Islands. After approx 12 mos, the unit was withdrawn to New Zealand for a period of rest and recuperation. In Feb'44, they landed with the assault forces at Green Is. and again in Sep'44, while attached to the 1st MarDiv, they participated in the assault of Peleliu Is.
- 2-7-45 - 33rd CB return to the U.S. approved - all personnel who will have had 24 months duty or more will return. Those less than 20 months(?) will be transferred to Comservpac for further assignment to other Cenpac CB's. Return to be effected upon completion of work after no new major projects are authorized which requires the services of this CB. Comservpac directed to take necessary steps to effect the return of the 33rd CB subject to the foregoing qualifications. (Cincpacflt & Pca conf. ltr Ser. 0476 dtd 18 Jan'45 to Comserforpacflt).
- 2-12-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 38th Reg. - The rear echelons of the 33rd and 73rd CB's rejoined the main body of the batta at Peleliu on 10 Dec'44. This echelon consisted of 4 off. and 347 men. Arrival was 86 days after "D" Day.

- 2-15-45 - The 33rd CB is located at Peleliu. (IsComPeleliu Sec. disp to CNO 020415 dtd 8 Feb'45).
- 2-15-45 - Conserforpacflt conf. 5th Bnd. (on OinC 38th Reg. ltr dtd 30 Nov'44) Ser. 0397 dtd 26 Jan'45 - requests that all enlisted personnel of the 33rd CB with less than 20 months continuous overseas duty be transferred to the 5th Brg. for reassignment.
- 2-21-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 33rd CB - location not stated. Report endorsed by 38th Reg.
- 3-16-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of the 33rd CB - location not stated. Estimated date of completion of projects is 25 Feb'45. Report endorsed by the 38th Reg. As of this date, two offs. and 13 men have been attached to this batt for duty in connection with the tailor-made sparte parts sub-depot now being operated by the batt. It is understood that approx. 40 men are enroute to operate this depot. Requests that a separate CB Detachment be commissioned out of this Sub-depot, to report to CMB Peleliu.
- 3-22-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of the 38th Reg. - 33rd CB located at Peleliu. Est. compl date is 1 Mar'45 - to be ret'd to States. OinC 38th Reg. has recommended that the non-rated personnel with less than 20 mos. service be trf'd to the CBMU's at Peleliu. The ACESPD Peleliu at present attached to the 33rd CB. In view of the possible departure of the 33rd, it is recommended that the personnel of the ACESPD be formed into a CB Detachment and ordered to report to the NB Peleliu.
- 3-23-45 - The 33rd CB has departed Peleliu enroute to U.S. (JanCommGen, Peleliu 182203 Mar'45 to Bupers)
- 4-9-45 - 33rd CB scheduled to arrived Parks from overseas on or about 8 Apr'45. (Parks Sec report of draft movements dtd 29 Mar'45 to Bupers)
- 4-11-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of 51st CB - 31 enlisted men transferred from the 33rd CB, joined 53rd CB on 17 Mar'45.

33rd C.B.

- 4-20-45 - 33rd CB consisting of 15 off. and 775 men arrived Parks from overseas 15 Apr'45. Parks TWX 162040 Apr'45 to Bupers)
- 5- 3-45 - The 33rd CB inactivated 1 May'45. (Parks TWX 012230 May'45 to Bupers)
- 5-17-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of CBMU 503 - 41 men from the 33rd CB were transferred to CBMU 503 during Feb'45.
- 5-23-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of the 33rd CB - Embarked from Peleliu for U.S. on 3 Mar'45.

INACTIVATED

# STATESIDE

The 33rd Battalion was officially entered on Naval Records when it received its colors from Mrs. J. G. Ware, wife of the base commandant on the afternoon of October 18, 1942, on the parade grounds of Camp Bradford, Virginia. But the story does not begin there. It begins in a hundred recruiting offices, mostly in the Northeastern United States where a thousand men were interviewed, examined and screened, and a small note "33rd Batt" marked beside their names.

These men were called to active duty in September of 1942 most of whom traveled en masse from New York to Cape Charles on a jerking milk train, across the Chesapeake Bay and thence to Camp Allen where they were transformed, in appearance at least, from civilians to sailors. From Allen they were herded to Camp Bradford and placed behind a wire mesh fence to serve the customary three weeks of detention and indoctrination—three weeks of lectures, close order drill, inoculations and waiting. At the end of the detention period they moved again, this time into the city of pyramidal tents across the road.

After the colors were received and the 33rd was a complete, independent unit, the battalion went through the three-week advanced training program set up at Bradford which was of dubious value from a technical training standpoint, but was a good start toward acquainting men and officers and to get the feel of working together.

Early in November, a five-day leave was granted to all hands, but it was over, it seemed, almost before it started. On November 13th three trains of dirty coaches carrying the battalion left the Diamond Springs siding near Camp Bradford and arrived four days later in Gulfport, Mississippi.

Living conditions at Gulfport were a considerable improvement over those at Bradford so that the stay in Camp Halliday was reasonably comfortable and pleasant but it was cut short on Thanksgiving Day when the 33rd again received orders—this time to California.

Six days of solid comfort aboard Pullmans with all the trimmings across Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona brought the battalion, on December 1, into Port Hueneme, a bustling, expanding, but practically unknown port of embarkation from where the 33rd was to ship out on the first leg of its excursion of the Pacific. Liberty was granted every other night, the nearby town of Oxnard being a good place to see a show or get a beer, but Los Angeles, about 30 miles to the south, was the feature attraction. Everyone knew that his days in the States were few, and needless to say, made the most of those liberties.

The inevitable orders came and were published about December 15th, but there was little for the men to do save pack personal gear, say good-by to a few friends and board a ship they could hardly pronounce the name of, not knowing where they were going, what they were going to do, or when they would be back.

# M. S. Sommelsdyke

Port Hueneme, California, was the jumping-off point for the 33rd Construction Battalion. Boarding the *Motor Ship Sommelsdyke*, a Dutch cargo ship converted into a troop transport at the beginning of the war, and the *U.S.S. Hercules*, the battalion sailed on December 18, 1942. The *Sommelsdyke* bore the majority of the officers and men of the battalion and some equipment, while the *Hercules* was loaded with the bulk of the equipment and about ten men.

The weather was cool and the ocean reasonably calm for the first few days, but as the ships approached the equator the heat became more intense. Ventilation in the lower holds was poor so that the men stayed topside most of the time where they washed clothes, read, "shot the breeze" lost or won in crap games, wrote letters, slept and took salt water showers to pass the monotonous days.

Christmas day was gloomy, for thoughts of home and loved ones came back to everyone, but a good turkey dinner and devotional services conducted by Chaplain M. DeWitt Safford helped pull the spirits at least a little out of the depths.

The ship crossed the equator on December 26, when the veteran shellbacks whacked the rest of the gloom out of the pollywog members of the battalion. The traditional ceremony was one of weird haircuts, gruesome operations, salty grease ball appetizers, hefty wallops on posteriors, and dousings in a salt water tank. When Davy Jones, King Neptune and his Royal Court finished their handiwork, a thousand more crusty shellbacks were members of the Dominion of the Deep.

The days slipped uneventfully by and, coincident with the crossing of the International Date line,

leaped into 1943. The New Year's eve celebration on December 31 was lost when December 30 emerged into January 1 at the date line. Nature, however, decided not to let the coming of the New Year pass unnoticed and sent a hurricane of no small proportion to greet it. The storm rose in magnitude during the night and all hands were ordered below

decks for their own safety. Late in the afternoon of the first, mountainous waves forced the *Hercules* out of view. The storm gained momentum through the night, reaching its peak about 1000 the following morning when two 40-foot launches, which had been secured to the forward deck, broke their lashings and crashed through the railings into the sea. A number of life rafts were also ripped from their moorings, but in late afternoon the sea calmed down, the sun came out and the hurricane was over.

During the storm several cases of spinal meningitis had appeared, resulting in one death so that immediate precautions were taken by the ship's medical department to prevent the spread of the disease, but no further cases appeared.

The distant hills of New Caledonia appeared dim and gray on the horizon about noon on January 3 and in the late afternoon the *Sommelsdyke* dropped the hook in Noumea's outer harbor. Not more than half hour later the missing *Hercules* also pulled in, much to everyone's relief, since it had been feared by many that she may have been lost in the storm.

After two days at anchorage in the harbor the two ships moved around the point to Magenta Bay where the battalion was to unload and set up camp.



King Neptune, Ruler of the Deep.

The Band Practices.



O'Leary Supervises the "Horse Races."



# NEW CALEDONIA

The Magenta camp was set up about six miles from Noumea and adjacent to a small U. S. operated airfield which had at one time been a fashionable horse racing track. The site itself, located in one of the many small ravines, was covered with short scrubby trees which provided a little shade from the sun that seemed unbearably hot for the first few weeks.

Unloading was slow, for the small dock, about four miles from the camp, was large enough to receive only one tank lighter or pontoon barge at a time. Once the equipment was ashore, however, the entire battalion turned to concentrated work on the camp area and in a few short weeks, the camp was fairly livable, except for the mosquitoes, which ranked just above the dysentery in nuisance value.

While the battalion waited in New Caledonia for the orders that would send it on its first major assignment, minor projects were undertaken. Several steel warehouses were erected at Point Chalieux near Noumea, repairs were made on the nearby air strip and an old race track grandstand was converted into an air operations building. The work was of considerable help in orientating the battalion to operate as a unit.

Liberty was permitted in Noumea, but one visit was

enough to see the town and all its sights. New Caledonia was Vichy French, and Allied troops were not too welcome by the majority of the natives. Some shopkeepers were reluctant to sell their merchandise and, if they did, charged exorbitant prices for what little they had.

Everyone in the battalion knew a move was pending, but no one had any idea where it would be or when. Soon after the two ships had been unloaded, however, Captain Jesse Johnson told the battalion that it would soon be under way and that "we will not stop at Guadalcanal." Guadalcanal was then the only island in the Solomons that was in U. S. hands and the news that the battalion was to move up even further meant participation in an invasion.

On February 14, 1943, about 650 men and officers of the 33rd boarded the U.S.S. *Crescent City* and headed northward in convoy for the Solomons. The other members of the battalion remained at Magenta to bring the battalion's equipment as transportation became available.

Tension was high as the U.S.S. *Crescent City* as the convoy proceeded northward through dangerous waters patrolled then by Japanese submarines and



# Guadalcanal

planes. No small amount of Allied shipping already lay on the bottom in this same area.

Three days out of Noumea, in the fading dusk, a number of parachute flares, probably fired by a submarine, burst over the convoy. As they sizzled down over the ships, 12 Jap torpedo bombers streaked down for an attack. A heavy concentration of anti-aircraft fire threw a protecting curtain around the ships, and, though the Japs came in from all angles, not one could get close enough to drop his tin fish.

One Jap, attempting to attack a nearby tanker, crossed about 50 yards astern of the *Crescent City*. The five-inch gun on the ship's fantail fired one salvo, struck the Jap dead center and the plane exploded in mid-air into a thousand pieces. The sky and sea battle continued for 30 minutes. When the remaining Japs decided to head for home, the score was: Japs—five planes destroyed, three probably destroyed; U. S. convoy—no hits, no losses, no damage.

*Unloading Gear at Koli Point.*



*Reloading for the Russell Invasion.*

The convoy arrived at Guadalcanal the following morning and anchored off Koli Point. A camp site was quickly assigned on the beach and unloading began immediately. Since the "Canal" was only a staging point all gear was put into a large supply yard close to the beach where it would be handy for reloading into the LCT's which were to transport the battalion and its equipment to the final destination—the Russell Islands—some 60 miles to the northwest.

The men worked in the most humid, hottest, most miserable place yet encountered in the Pacific. Guadalcanal was all this and more. Malaria was rampant and a few weeks after arriving on the island the first victims of this disease were reported. Fungus infection and other tropical ailments hit the men in the battalion as badly.

An introduction to "Washing Machine Charlie," the Jap night owl, who made regular bombing runs over Henderson Field, 15 miles from the 33rd's camp, came soon after the battalion's arrival on Guadalcanal. The introduction served also to acquaint the men in one lesson on how to get into a fox hole, but quick.

On February 20, 1943, ten officers and 226 men left Guadalcanal aboard LCTs bound for the Russells, and soon after men and equipment were being sent up almost daily in a small but steady stream. The last of the battalion arrived from Magenta March 11 and on April 14 the final LCT bearing the 33rd left Guadalcanal for Banika.

*Jap Ship Beached Near Lunga Point.*



# RUSSELL ISLANDS

On 21 February, 1943, Army infantrymen and the 33rd Seabees landed on Banika Island, one of the Russell Islands group located about 60 miles northwest of Guadalcanal. The 33rd landed at Wernem Cove, known then as Yellow beach, where they immediately set up a temporary camp and proceeded to unload the small amount of equipment which had been brought up with the invasion convoy from the Canal.

A quick reconnaissance was made immediately upon arrival and the location of the airstrip established, so that as quickly as the construction

equipment was unloaded, it was put to work on the field. In those days, Munda, some 100 miles away was still a strong Jap base, sending down fighters and bombers almost as they pleased. During the first week, the men working on the strip were caught by surprise to be strafed and bombed several times, but these attacks were light and the 33rd fortunately lost no men although a number were injured.

Meanwhile, the permanent camp site had been selected and was being erected on a more or less temporary basis since all of the equipment was being used on the strip. Consequently, with no roads and frequent rains, the jeep and truck lanes quickly became veritable quagmires.

Men and equipment arrived from Guadalcanal regularly, but in small quantities since all had to be brought up by LCT or towed on barges at night. Greatest problem was to sort out the urgent items from the supply yard at Guadalcanal and send them on up.

The parts for the sawmill eventually arrived and it was soon set up and in operation. Logs were obtained from the larger trees in the nearby jungle as the coconut trees were found too hard and too small for economical cutting. The 33rd mill was practically the only source of lumber on the island for many months and was kept busy 12 hours a day on priority work for all units on the island. Its capacity was about 6,000 board feet per day, sawing over a million feet in six months. Logging operations became more and more difficult as the nearby timber was cut until

*Cocoa nut Factory Bombed by Japs.*



*Services on Banika.*



*The 33rd's 9-Hole Golf Course.*

in the last few months, logs were trucked in over five miles of road.

A number of other construction projects were started as soon as material for them arrived, among them being an aviation gasoline tank farm, a base hospital, and numerous installations and buildings essential to the operation of the airfield.

Adverse weather conditions, lack of proper equipment and spare parts, and sickness of battalion personnel held up progress on the field, but on 13 April enough runway was finished to accommodate an emergency landing. From then on it was simply a case of the usual air base development including taxiways, hardstands, repair areas, and warm-up areas. Drainage was the most serious problem for unstable topsoil and continual rain is a tough combination in any constructor's language. The only salvation was the plentiful coral deposits found from two to ten feet below the surface, which was used extensively in the surfacing of the field and roads.

A plentiful supply of fresh water came from an 80-foot drilled well near the camp which, by means of a home-made pump, provided water for all units on the island for many months.

For the first two months on the island, Jap air interference was confined to daylight attacks on installations in the vicinity of the airfield, but in April, Nip bombers started coming down from Munda with increasing regularity, but at night only. One man of the battalion, Raymond Clawson, was killed in one of the heaviest of the attacks and several were injured.

The island of Banika consisted of about two-thirds coconut grove and one-third dense jungle, and although Lever Brothers employees had evacuated when the Japs moved in early in the war, the place looked neat and well kept. A large herd of beef cattle of mixed breeds roamed the island at will, keeping the grass in the coconut groves neatly mowed and fertilized. Other local wild life consisted of land crabs, frogs, lizards, various birds, a few flies and non-malarial mosquitoes, although none were present in sufficient numbers to offer any serious problem.

When work on the airfield had advanced to such a point as to allow it, some equipment was

diverted to the camp to build roads. Eventually, the battalion was brought out of the mud, galleys and offices erected, decks put in the men's tents, and a general improvement in living conditions brought about. In the later months, a nine-hole golf course and a two-diamond ball field were made for the recreation of all hands. A good supply of fresh meat was provided by the herds of cattle through the work of a group of experienced cowhands who "rounded up the dogies" as if they were on the plains of Texas.

In May, Comdr. C. L. McGinnis was evacuated and Lt. Comdr. I Sandberg assumed command of the battalion, Lt. B. Rabnowitz taking over as executive officer.

The months dragged on and on, the tide of scuttlebutt rising and falling on such subjects as a Jap task force heading in our direction, or that the battalion would definitely be in the U. S. by Christmas (that was 1943). Then one day out of a clear sky came orders for the battalion to pack up its household gear and stand by for immediate transportation for a "rehabilitation" leave in New Zealand. So on November 19 all hands again boarded the *Crescent City* (the same ship that carried the battalion to Guadalcanal) and were on their way again wondering what was ahead.

Blue Beach.



New Georgia Just Over the Horizon.



Steak for Supper.

# NEW ZEALAND



The food aboard the *Crescent City* was good. Living conditions were not too crowded and tension not so high as it was during the voyage to Guadalcanal aboard the same ship earlier in the year.

At Tulagi a convoy was made up and proceeded south, stopping at New Caledonia where a few former members of the battalion rejoined the outfit.

On December 1, the ship pulled into Auckland harbor. Camp was set up in Waikairaki Park near Onehunga, a suburb about six miles from Auckland. A seven-foot stone fence surrounded the camp area but it was ineffectual in keeping either the 33rd inside or visiting youngsters outside. Liberty was granted three out of four days, the daily muster at 0800 being the only restriction.

The New Zealanders opened their homes and their hearts to the "Yanks." Invitations to shows, dances, "tea" (which was found to be a New Zealand term for dinner), were given the

men of the 33rd by the highly hospitable "Kiwis." The female population maintained the same friendliness and hospitality, but in the interests of keeping peace on the home front, this subject will be discussed no further at this time.

Long remembered will be Queen Street, Grafton Road, Government House, Rotorua, Hamilton, Piha Beach, One Tree Hill, the Civic and the bar at the corner in Onehunga. Also pounds, and shilling, warm beer, steak and "iges," the horse races, driving on the left, the Mauris and their customs, trams, "goodo," Cheerio," and "Are you Theah?"

Late in December the battalion rented the Civic Theatre ballroom for a night and staged a \$3,000 party that will go down in battalion history and probably in New Zealand history. Corsages were provided for the dates, beer was plentiful to float down the chicken, and good music and floor shows offered the entertainment background.

It was in New Zealand that the first volume of *The Log* was printed but the book did not reach the battalion until the following August.

The anticipated orders to return to duty came again and the battalion was packed and ready to leave on January 5, but the *U.S.S. David Shanks*, the transport slated to carry the battalion back to the Russells, was several days late in arriving. However, the 33rd made good use of this delay by sponsoring a series of nightly good-bye parties that were quite in keeping with the battalion's New Zealand reputation.

*Aboard the Crescent City.*



*Queen Street, Auckland.*





The return trip from New Zealand back to Banika was likened to leaving a bright past for a dark future. Another major job for the battalion was in prospect and soon after its return to Banika the 33rd began preparing for the move.

The immediate target was Nissan Island in the Green Island group—a tiny, practically unheard-of spot about midway between Buka and New Ireland—which the Japs were not holding in force, but were using as an evacuation staging point. With it in Allied hands, all remaining Japs in the Solomons would be completely cut off, and the powerful enemy bases at Rabaul and Kavieng could be more easily neutralized.

New Zealand infantry was to go in first, secure the beachheads so that the Seabees could get their equipment ashore, and then proceed in securing the entire island. Three U. S. Naval Construction Battalions—the 33rd, 37th and 93rd of the 22nd Construction Regiment, were to handle all construction work on the island. Part of the 15th battalion was also there for about a month to help on the airfield.

New equipment was issued and old equipment repaired, new clothing and combat gear was given to each man, and each company devoted one day to practice on the rifle range and a review of combat principles.

A few weeks after the return to the Russells,

*The Kiwis Wade Ashore.*



Lt. Comdr. I. Sandberg was relieved as officer in charge and Lt. Comdr. Benjamin Rabnowitz of his duties as executive officer. Commander A. L. Slaton assumed command of the 33rd and Lieutenant C. R. Herlan became the executive officer. The battalion was strengthened by the addition of 360 replacements only two months out of the States. However, 100 of these men were assigned to the battalion merely for transporta-



*LST in Convoy.*

tion to the new base and were transferred to the two other battalions. Most of these men were seamen, although some were rated men who had seen duty with the 12th and 13th Seabees in the Aleutians.

The first echelon, composed of 200 men and eight officers shoved off from the Russells on February 11, 1944, aboard LST 70 for Nissan. The second echelon, which left four days later, brought the majority of the remaining members of the battalion, although a few were left with the non-essential gear to come later in small groups.

An uneventful four-day trip brought the invasion convoy to Nissan Island. Shortly before H hour on D-day, February 15, a plane was sighted skimming over the water toward the convoy, and a few seconds behind came a swarm of other low-flying planes, quickly identified to

# Green Islands . . .



Above: Coral Pit at Night. Below: 1 1/2-Yard Shovel loading coral. Lower: Finished grade on a taxiway.



be Jap torpedo bombers. One chose the LST bearing the 33rd personnel as a target and leveled into its bombing run. Every gun on the ship opened up but the Jap streaked in, dropped one bomb, swerved up to avoid hitting the barrage balloon cable and then dropped a second. The first bomb struck about 100 feet ahead of the ship and the other dropped slightly astern. In making his run on the ship, the Jap had run the gauntlet of a veritable wall of 20 and 40-mm. AA fire thrown up from the LST and came out apparently unscathed. However, a destroyer in the convoy later reported that it had seen the plane drop into the sea a short time afterwards.

The whole attack was over quickly with no damage done and the invasion proceeded according to plan. The LSTs waited just off the island, while New Zealand troops secured the beachhead. An hour after the "Kiwis" landed the LSTs passed through the narrow channel between Nissan and Barahun islands, past tiny Hon island and headed for the jungled beach. The ship was unloaded in four hours and immediately pulled away from the beach to rejoin the convoy outside the atoll.

Then with bulldozers, power shovels and hand shovels, the battalion dug trenches and fox holes as protection against a possible Banzai charge as well as the Jap bombers that were certain to come. About 200 Japs were estimated to be on the island but most of them were found on the southern end, about four miles from the 33rd camp. Jap planes came over the island continually the first night but usually only one at a time so that little damage resulted from the raids.

The next morning, while the "Kiwis" sought out the remaining Japs, the Seabees, according to plans, began construction of a road adjacent to the lagoon which was to connect the camp sites assigned to the various units. At favorable points along the road landing ramps were to be built to accommodate the LSTs which would bring the second echelon. A rough survey of the site selected for the airfield was also started.



Unloading Supplies.

The second echelon arrived on schedule on D plus 4 with considerable construction equipment and the next morning the three Seabee battalions set to work jointly to construct the fighter strip. The 37th battalion was assigned the northern half of the strip; the 93rd the southern half, and the 33rd drew the job of building a taxiway with adjoining hardstands. At the same time, all battalions contributed enough equipment to maintain a steady road building program.

Thirteen days after construction began, an F4U made an emergency landing on the strip, and the next day the strip was officially opened to traffic. Soon after, the 33rd took over the job of supplying, laying, grading, and finishing the coral for the field while the 37th and 93rd were to prepare all sub-grades.

As on every island, improvements came slowly. The battalion's lumber mill was set up on the edge of an 80-foot cliff overlooking the open sea and was soon providing lumber for the entire island, but some of this was diverted for the battalion's own use and a large galley was erected, replacing the customary first weeks of eating out of doors.

Japs were few after the New Zealanders cleaned them out, but one morning (1000) word came that three were seen in the vicinity of the battalion camp. A perimeter guard was immediately set up, but only one Jap was seen which was killed by Jose G. Vasquez.

Early in April Commander Slaton was relieved of his command and was succeeded by Lt. Comdr. P. Corradi who skippered the battalion until its return to the States.

As the fighter strip and its taxiways were completed, work shifted to the construction of the bomber strip parallel to and longer than the fighter strip. Here, too, work went on 24 hours a day and Liberator bombers were soon staging on the field for the 600-mile hop to the stronghold of Truk. TBFs, SBDs and F4Us also took off daily for strikes on the Jap bases of Rabaul and Kavieng until those threats to the Allied advance were throttled. The five airfields surrounding Rabaul were reduced to rubble by the constant fighter pounding and, in time, the Bismarck Archipelago, formerly under constant Japanese patrol, was secure to Allied shipping.

Almost before rollers and graders put the finishing touches on taxiways and hardstands, planes landed and moved in at the heels of the Seabees, but with the 24-hour schedule, the three battalions finally reached the point where they could meet their schedules with two six-hour shifts, six days a week. In addition to working on the airfield itself, the battalion erected towers, air operations offices and completed numerous camp projects.

Since the island was hardly one-half mile wide, water drawn from drilled wells contained about one per cent salt and this salt water was used for washing and showers while fresh water for drinking and cooking had to be distilled. The

battalion showers were strictly stateside, with concrete decks, dressing room, and hot and cold water.

The island was shaped like a thin horse-shoe, and the sheltered lagoon in the center made a good spot for sailing and fishing. A moderate breeze, blowing most of the time, brought relief from the heat and made the nights cool, but the moisture in the dense jungle was very heavy. Many natives were evacuated from the island soon after the invasion. Those who remained gazed in awe at construction machinery and accepted rides in jeeps and trucks just for the pleasure of riding, not minding the walk back from the ride. Wild pigs roamed the camp area and one called "Joe" became everybody's pet.

From July 1 to July 8 the battalion participated in the Independence Day War Bond drive, and to its own surprise, purchased the total of \$104,825—nearly \$100 a man. Over \$40,000 worth was sold in the last five hours of the drive.

Early in July the battalion was told that it was to go on another job, one that would take the battalion out of the Southwest Pacific into a new theatre. The 33rd was to be attached to the Third Marine Amphibious Corps, and it was learned unofficially, that the battalion was to operate with the First Marine Division. Though it was disappointing to be sent on another operation and not back to the States, it was indeed an honor to be teamed up with veterans of Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester.



# Peleliu

July, 1944, was another moving month for the battalion and the move was a welcome change.

Boarding the *U.S.S. Rotanin* in a choppy sea off the Green Islands, the battalion sailed off to the south. Aboard the ship with the personnel was personal gear and construction equipment considered fit enough for another operation, but a troopship is a troopship, no matter how much or how little gear is aboard. A man did well to have a few feet of deck space to himself and an early spot in the chow line.

After a comparatively short trip the move from ship to a new island camp was made. There, for the first time overseas, the battalion moved into a

ready-made camp—and a ready-made battlefield.

Close to the camp was the First Marine Division's rifle and machine gun range where the Marines were polishing their invasion technique. This daily firing, the intensive repair work on the battalion's equipment and the inflow of new equipment was the basis of no small amount of scuttlebutt.

Then, one night before the movie, a Marine intelligence officer outlined the invasion plans by which Peleliu Island would be taken. That ended the scuttlebutt.

Infantry gear was drawn, the usual needling in the arm by battalion pharmacists' mates was

*Loading the Invasion Convoy.*



*Crap Games Help Pass the Time.*



*Deck of LST in Convoy.*





*Smoke Rising From Orange Beach.*



*Wrecked Amtracs.*

given, last-minute letters home were written and, in less than a month after arriving on the island, the battalion was on the move again. Except for approximately 180 men left behind in the rear echelon, the majority of the battalion went aboard LSTs 222, 272, and 487, although a few scattered groups stayed with battalion equipment loaded aboard transports.

Forced to sleep "top side" by crowded conditions below deck, the men stretched canvas tarps over two-by-four frames. The canvas kept out some of the rain and most of the sun but to the escort vessels, done up in proper Navy rig, the LSTs in the convoy must have looked like the Chinese Navy.

In between naps under the tarps, the battalion ate as it hasn't eaten since. Steaks, chops, hams, fresh potatoes, fresh fruits and fresh eggs flowed from the galley. Except for the meals and a few condition reds, the trip was uneventful—just another sea voyage. It was an excursion to another island where the excitement would begin, and the excitement was scheduled to start on September 15—D-day.

The plan, in general, was this: For three days prior to D-day naval warships were to shell the island. Soon after dawn on D-day, planes from a carrier task force were to sweep over the invasion beaches and important Japanese defense positions to strafe and bomb for two hours. At H-hour, 0830. First Marine Division men of the First, Third and Fifth Marine infantry regiments were to storm Peleliu's southwestern coast. Amphibious tanks, trucks and tractors were to carry the Marines and their supplies from the LSTs, attack transports and Higgins boats to the beach about 500 yards past the coral reef. Cranes, operating on pontoon barges, were to transfer cargo from the Higgins boats and LCTs to the amphibious craft. The three Marine regiments were first to capture the airfield and then drive to the east coast to cut the enemy's garrison force in two. The entire operation was expected to take three days, though a few skeptics predicted it would take seven.

Long before dawn on D-day, as the convoy approached Peleliu, all hands were up, hanging from the rail, watching the pre-invasion show. Battleships and cruisers were silhouetted in their own gun flashes in the otherwise pitch darkness. As the shells burst on the island the flaring light threw the island outline momentarily into view which in the first light of dawn the outline resembled a low, dark cloud on the horizon.

The convoy maneuvered with the clock. Soon after the sun came up, the convoy split in two—one-half formed a line straight for the Peleliu

beachhead, and the other half, of which the 33rd was a part, headed south to veer later for the beach.

The LSTs in the first group stopped a half mile off shore. Their huge bow mouths opened and fully loaded amphibian tanks and tractors rolled from their stomachs, maneuvering into place to await the signal to attack.

The sea on the west side of the island was covered with ships and boats of every size as far as the eye could see. Battleships, cruisers, destroyers, transports, cargo vessels, LSTs, small boats and amphibious craft milled about in what looked like utter confusion. Some of the LSTs bore fully loaded LCTs on their decks and the smaller Landing Craft-Tanks slid off into the sea as the LSTs listed over on one side. Other LSTs carried standard pontoon barges and pon-



*Orange Beach.*

toon causeway sections on either side of the ship. These were launched by cutting steel lashings holding the pontoons in place.

Then it started. Twenty LCIs, normally used to land infantry troops on beaches wherever possible, formed a battleline parallel to the invasion beach and cautiously headed in. Five hundred yards from the beach the LCIs fired a volley of rockets point blank into Japanese defenses along the shore. The rockets spat and wooshed and flared into the invasion beach as amphibious craft astern of the LCIs formed into waves.

Circling overhead were swarms of TBFs, F6Fs, SB2Cs and SBDs awaiting the order to attack from their carriers hidden over the horizon. When the order came the fireworks began in earnest. Diving steeply, the planes blasted at Jap entrenchments with rockets and machine guns and swung away in screaming turns to come back for more. Some planes skirted close

Top to Bottom: Marines awaiting orders to attack; an FBU drops a bomb on Bloody Nose; looking north from the airfield.



## Peleliu . . .

to the ground, just above the already shredded coconut trees, to draw enemy fire, while other planes followed closely to knock out the enemy exposing their positions.

The fighters and dive bombers, coming straight for the ground from 10,000 feet, dropped their bomb loads on pin-point targets and were away before the bomb concussion hit their planes.

By 0800 the southern end of the island was obscured in smoke from this terrific air and naval bombardment. In the meantime, amphibious craft, loaded with the first waves of Marines, churned and bobbed through the heavy surf toward the coral reef under the umbrella of fire. The LVTs clanked over the reef, the men in the boats ducking low, and entered the calm, dangerous 500-yard stretch of lagoon between reef and shore. The Naval barrage did not lift until the amphibians were within 200 yards of the shore.

The first two waves of Marines swarmed out on the beach a few minutes after 0830 and pushed rapidly into the scrub brush and undergrowth for several yards. The second wave followed quickly, but the third wave did not fare as well. Apparently coming out of their underground fortifications where they had taken refuge during the aerial and Naval bombardment, the Japs opened up on the third wave as it approached the beach.

Machine guns and mortars sought the boatloads of Marines and their supplies heading relentlessly toward the shore. Mortar shells lobbed down from the hills and dropped into the lagoon close to the LVTs, sometimes scoring direct hits. Geysers of sand and water shot up into the air to surround the small boats and tractors like a forest of giant trees. Machine gun slugs, pattering through the water near the landing craft, puffed the lagoon into a bed of frothy flowers.

On the ships, though the men watched intently, it was difficult to tell how the battle progressed. Spouts of water and smoke from bursting mortar shells and the occasional orange string of a Marine flamethrower were the only visible indications of activity on the beachhead. Dribbles of information sometimes came from a coxswain whose boat pulled up alongside. It was evident, however, that the Marines were making headway, for it was possible to see men and supplies un-load on the beach and disappear into the scrub.

The shore party of the 33rd Battalion, consisting of about 200 men and two officers, were alerted at 0800 but it was mid-afternoon before the Higgins boat moved alongside to take them

*The Causeway at Orange Beach.*



ashore. The shore party was to follow assault troops ashore to handle food and ammunition as it was brought to the beach. A solid three-inch orange circle, painted on their green dungarees and helmet, was the shore party's insignia and contrasted to the diamond in a rectangle painted on the dungarees of others in the first echelon.

Considered a part of the shore party were four special groups of eight men each whose job it was to man cranes mounted on pontoon barges. The cranes transferred cargo from Higgins boats and LCTs to amphibious trucks and tractors at the edge of the reef and were under Jap mortar and artillery fire spasmodically. Later, each crane operator and oiler received personal commendations from General Rupertus, commanding the First Marine Division, while the remainder of the shore party received a joint commendation. Also highly praised were men of the 17th Special Construction Battalion who landed at H-hour plus two and worked at the front lines with Marines for several days.

Only a third of the shore party reached the beach the first day. The rest hovered around the reef in Higgins boats during the night or returned to the LST which brought them, for the shortage of amphibious trucks and tractors, many of which were knocked out by the intense Japanese fire during the day, made transportation scarce from the reef to the beach.

The battle raged through the night. The airfield, captured by the Marines early in the day, was lost in the late afternoon when the Japs counter attacked and squeezed the American forces into a long beach strip barely 100 yards wide. All night Japanese mortar and artillery shells sought the crowded Marines who were by now entrenched in small shallow coral foxholes.

D plus one found the Marines reorganized and the airstrip, the main prize of the island, was quickly recaptured. It was evident now that the job of taking the island was not to be the push-over predicted by some.

The remainder of the shore party landed on Peleliu on the morning of D plus one and immediately began unloading and distributing food, water and ammunition. In the next four days, however, they assumed additional duties. Casualties were so heavy that several groups of the 33rd shore party were assigned to act as grave digging and stretcher bearer details. It was not an easy job, but they did it well. Give them credit.

On the reef, in the meantime, attempts were made to beach the laden LSTs. If beached, amphibious craft could enter the bow of the landing ship, load up with supplies and then drive off to the beach, but the coral reef was so jagged and uneven that it was decided to wait until cause-



*Typical Terrain.*



# Peleliu . . .

way sections could be placed and anchored so as to form a continuous steel roadway from the reef to the beach. While this was being done a small amount of essential equipment was unloaded at sea onto pontoon barges or causeway sections and ferried to a temporary landing during favorable tides.

It was on D plus three that an LST was finally able to pull up to the end of the causeway to discharge cargo. Though only one LST at a time could unload on the causeway it took only three days for the 33rd to get most of its equipment ashore and in operation.

The battalion's bivouac area was at the southern end of the airfield, from where the progress of fighting in the hills to the north of the airfield could be seen. Most of the fighting was concentrated in the central and northern end of the island, although a few isolated Japanese groups held out close to the 33rd camp until D plus 5.

To the south and west of the 33rd area several batteries of 105 and 155-mm. howitzers fired from positions in the now leafless and shattered undergrowth, but the noise of the batteries were pop-gun reports compared to the blast and swish



*Peleliu's Price Was High.*

of shells from 155-mm. "Long Tom" rifles set up only 50 yards behind the camp area.

Bulldozers dug trenches three feet deep, 12 feet wide and 80 feet long and rows of pyramidal tents, each tent attached to the next, were pitched over the trenches. This gave the men living quarters below the surface of the earth as a precaution against surprise raids. Jungle hammocks, shelter halves and tarpaulins were scattered throughout the camp area, serving for sleeping quarters in addition to the tents. The galley, a long "circus" tent was set up in record time and served hot meals and cold drinks on D plus six. A makeshift shower was also placed in operation.

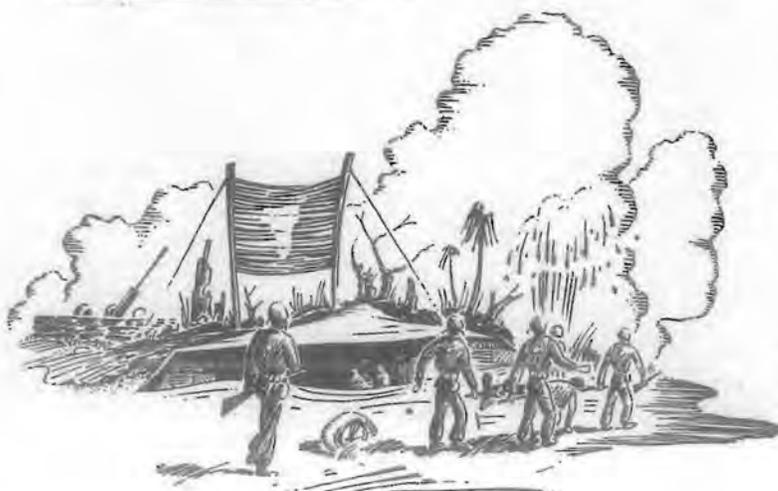
The Marines continued to drive the enemy away from the airstrip and to push them relentlessly into the hills. By D plus seven the Marines held the foothills to the craggy ridges running up the center of the island, but the Japs still held the ridges and were burrowed deep into the natural and hand-dug caves that honey-combed the limestone and coral cliffs. The caves, enlarged by the Japanese for 25 years from the natural caves found in the ridges, were interconnected, some constructed on several levels and were well stocked with enough food and water to withstand a long siege.

Many of the caves were in the face of sheer cliffs and flame throwers and TNT were the main weapons used to dislodge the enemy from these positions. The flame throwers' searing, orange flame, fired at the mouths of caves, filled the cave runways, swung around corners, reaching Japs who could not be touched by bullets. TNT, set off at entrances, closed the caves' mouths. Bulldozers often followed each TNT blast to pile up additional coral and rock to insure a complete seal of the opening.

It was a tough, grinding battle. The Marines could only crawl ahead from rock to rock, exposing themselves to Japanese machine gunners hidden in the cliff crags. Tanks were often of little aid; they could not go far in the rocky terrain and they could not get close to most of the caves. From a distance, however, the tanks stood off and pounded shell after shell into Japanese positions.

By day the Marines attacked using flame

*Wrecked Planes.*



*Stretcher Party.*



*Right Through the Nose!*

throwers, machine guns, mortars, tanks, heavy artillery—every weapon at their command, to crowd the enemy into a smaller and smaller area. At night, they dug in and with the aid of parachute flares lighting the area, attempted to keep the Japs in their caves. The Japs, in the meantime, fought fanatically to hold their caves and often went out the back door as Marines closed front entrances.

Out of the battle came the wounded and dead and name: "Bloody Nose Ridge," that tells the story for them.

While the battle of Peleliu was being fought, the Army's 81st Infantry Division attacked and secured the island of Angaur, a few miles south of Peleliu. Light Japanese resistance was encountered on September 16, when the Army attacked the island, and it was only a few weeks until all resistance was wiped out. The Army division then moved to Peleliu in late October to relieve the Marines and from then on it was the Army's show.

For weeks the Army and Japs hammered at one another in "Death Valley," along the "China Wall," up and down the crags of "Prostitute's Ridge," in an out the valleys among the peaks of the "Three Brothers" and the "Five Sisters." Finally, on November 24, 1944, the Army cleaned out the last of the enemy's strongholds and the island was declared officially secure. Live Japs, however, were found in isolated caves as late as January of 1945.

Final casualty figures were: Marines: 1,022 killed, 280 missing, 6,115 wounded; Japanese: 13,768 killed, 187 captured.

The wreckage of Japanese installations and equipment was everywhere. Close to 140 planes, not one without a few bullet or shrapnel holes, were counted on the island. Almost all of the heavy bombers were found destroyed by either U. S. fire or Jap demolition crews but two Zeroes and one dive bomber, the best of the lot, were crated and sent to air intelligence for study. It was evident from the number and types of planes as well as the great amount of equipment and supplies that the airfield had been a major one.

Anti-aircraft guns of every calibre surrounded the field while radar units and large searchlights were spotted at strategic locations. Bomb dumps,

torpedo maintenance shops, plane hangars, ammunition magazines, spare parts warehouses and fuel tanks, all the necessary facilities for a major air base were found.

A casual inspection of a few of the island's main defenses made one understand why the Marines found this island "worse than Guadalcanal." The area north and west of the airfield was covered with defense installations of every description and size. Reinforced concrete bomb shelters, of two or three standard types, stood amid the ruins of the former Japanese barracks area and the town. Concrete pill boxes, some buried deeply in the coral with only slits for machine guns and rifles showing above the ground, were in strategic positions. Foxholes and trenches were integrated among the pillboxes, completing the defense system.

The radio and administration buildings near the airfield were evidently recent structures. Built above ground, they were made of heavily reinforced concrete walls up to five feet in thickness with one-inch steel shutters on the windows. Six to eight feet of earth and rubble were on top of the buildings to provide more protection against

*Upper: Jap Zero; lower, Not a plane was found undamaged.*



# Peleliu . . .

bombs. It took a concentration of naval and heavy artillery fire to finally knock out the buildings; and flame throwers, at close range, to clean them up. Along the coast, heavy pillboxes covered every possible invasion point. These pillboxes, in which several 20-mm. guns were mounted, were divided into compartments so that the complete pillbox would not be lost if one section were knocked out.

A great deal of material used by the battalion in its projects was procured by salvage crews or, as some called them, scavengers. Lumber, paint, nails, bomb carts, sheet metal, electrical equipment and a Japanese roller were among the loot.

The roller was put in operation on the air strip as soon as the battalion began work repairing and extending the runways.

When American forces took the island there were two air strips in the form of a cross, each arm of the cross about 4,000 feet long and 300 feet wide. Though topped with asphalt, there was little crown or slope to the runway, nor was there a drainage system, so that after each rain, and rains were frequent on the island, large pools of water accumulated on the field surface.

A few days after the air strip was captured, reconstruction of the runways, extension of the bomber strip and construction of several taxiways was begun. The Jap fighter strip was first temporarily repaired and used while the bomber strip was being rebuilt and additional taxiways constructed.

Taxiway "C" was completed in about three days, after which most of the battalion concentrated its work on the bomber strip. Sniper fire along the north end of the strip and near the coral pit made the work hazardous at the start, but the job of laying coral, leveling it off, and grading and rolling continued without interruption. Directing the work on the strip was Lieutenant H. H. Auch whose men made it one of the major U. S. airfields in the Pacific.

While part of the battalion worked on the airfield another portion, under the supervision of Lieutenant A. L. Betz, constructed a base hospital on the island. Tents were first set up for temporary use while Quonset huts for wards, laboratories, operating and consultation rooms and mess halls were under construction. The 100 men working at the hospital were also bothered by Jap snipers. They had to pass along "Sniper's Row," a section of road parallel to the coral cliffs in which snipers were concealed. Fortunately no one in the battalion was injured but other outfits reported some of their men killed and injured there.

At the same time that work on the major projects progressed, several carpenter and labor crews improved the new camp area. The camp, complete with new mess hall, showers, heads and movie, was occupied about the middle of October, when the temporary camp was abandoned and the move made to the new area. A Jap well in the center of the camp supplied water for washing and showers but was too salty for cooking and drinking. Two large evaporators were set up beside the well to furnish fresh water.



*More Wreckage.*



*Grading*

*In Service Again.*

As the weeks passed and supplies reached the island an ice plant was established, electric lights installed in all tents, and the movie theatre, later named "The Coral Playhouse," played host to men from outfits all over the island.

Early in October, a typhoon struck the island, and while it wasn't as severe as the one encountered coming across the Pacific from the U. S., it was bad enough. Half of the structures and tents in the camp, including the sick bay and several offices, were blown down. Constant work during the typhoon prevented more damage.

On December 10, the rear echelon who were left behind at the staging area, arrived on LST 124. With them came the sea and duffle bags, four tons of fresh meat, ice cream freezers and mix, a considerable amount of beer and other luxury items.

From then on it was a down-hill pull. The

emergency work had been completed so that Peleliu Island could be used as a major base for the Philippine invasion and also to neutralize the 60,000 Japs still in the Northern Palaus and on Yap. Bomber and fighter strikes took off daily to harass the enemy where they could find him.

Work on the airfield had been carried on around the clock, but in November was cut to a two eight-hour shift basis and later to a single shift, with one day off per week for all hands. It was also in November that work on the hospital and nearly all of the other projects was cut from a two-shift to a one-shift basis.

By the first of the year, living conditions had hit a new high. The battalion's 35-mm. projectors were showing top-notch features almost every night to capacity audiences; fresh meat and vegetables were being served daily; beer and

soft drinks were being issued every other day; the laundry was put into full operation; and recreation facilities of every type were available at the large new recreation hall erected in the center of camp.

Christmas and New Years held varying degrees of emotion and celebration for everyone, but in general, both passed without event other than the usual divine services and thoughts of home, and hope that the next holiday season might be spent in the U. S.

Construction had by then shifted over to work on projects of a semi-permanent nature, with a considerable number of steel warehouses, Quonset huts and other permanent structures being erected, all with concrete decks. Roads, dock facilities, water systems, and camp sites were also assigned to the 33rd, but the end was in sight. It was just a case of how much the powers that be figured should be done before they wanted to let the battalion go.

Shortly after midnight on January 18, two Jap barges which had sneaked down from Babelthaupt, succeeded in beaching and putting ashore about 60 Nips who had instructions to do what damage they could in the vicinity of the airfield. Most of them were killed the following day, but the two who were captured had a strange story to tell. It seemed that all 60 of the raiding party were naval personnel who were on Peleliu when the Marines came ashore on D-Day, but had, by various means, escaped to the north. They were told that they had deserted their post and were being sent back to fulfill their mission, many of them without so much as a rifle since they had left them on Peleliu before.

That raid, with the exception of a single float plane which had dropped two bombs one night, was the only attack of any type on the island from the outside since D-Day. The 60,000 Japs still left in the northern Palaus have turned to farming, completely isolated from their homeland yet too bound by their training and religion to surrender.

Camp life in the 33rd, by then, had settled to a daily routine of work, eat, sleep and play not unlike stateside conditions except for one or two missing factors. Inspection of quarters was being held every Saturday by the exec and an inspection of arms and personnel muster every Wednesday afternoon.

In February, Commander Corradi was awarded the Bronze Star for leading the battalion and directing operations in the construction of the airfield on Peleliu, and a short time later, S. H. Impelliteri, battalion armorer, was awarded the Silver Star for his work in bomb and mine disposal in connection with the strip and taxiway construction.

The scuttlebutt rose and fell with the tides, mostly centered around the subject of going home, but late in February it became particularly strong, for there were beginning to be many material indications that something was in the wind. Then at the regular Wednesday afternoon muster on February 21, the companies assembled in the movie area to hear a talk by Commander Corradi. In ten minutes he had told the story which was briefly this: The battalion was going home "very

soon," but only those men who would have served 20 months of continuous overseas duty by March 1 would be eligible to return with it. This excluded the 250 men who had joined the outfit in February the previous year, since they had completed only 14 months. These men were to be transferred to other units.

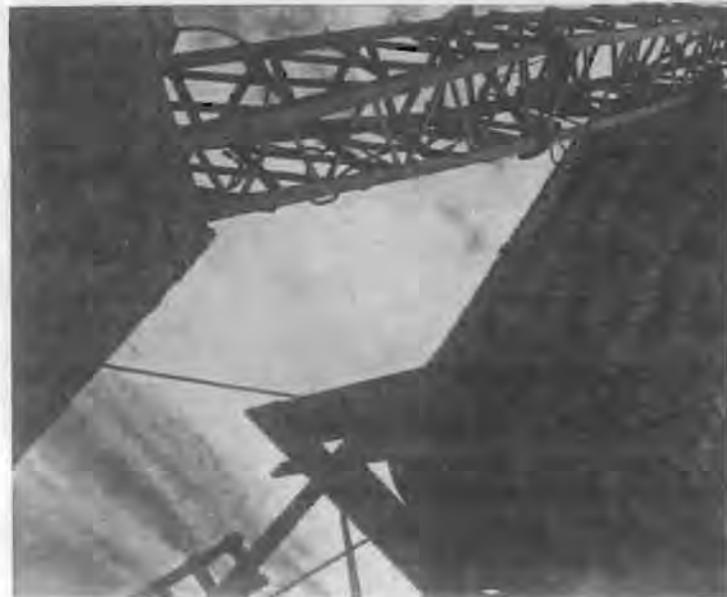
The 20-month policy apparently applied to officers as well as enlisted men, for by February 26 there were only 15 officers left in the battalion, all the others having been transferred to various other units. And of these 15, there were but six of the original 26 officers that left the States with the battalion.

But even though the official word was out, it was the general opinion that it would be a matter of weeks before the final orders to break camp would come through as shipping was very uncertain. However, on March 1, the order went up to pack up and get ready to go—but quick. Only personal gear and office records were to be taken so that by the afternoon of the third the 33rd battalion was aboard the *U.S.S. President Johnson* taking their last look (they hoped) at Peleliu Island.

The great day had finally come.

When the men boarded the *Johnson*, they were told to prepare for a journey of from two to three weeks which was considered a logical length of time to get to the U. S., but it was over six weeks before the ship finally pulled into San Francisco Bay.

The *S.S. President Johnson*, 15,000-ton super luxury liner—mighty queen of the Pacific—in 1904!! About the only thing good ever said about the ship during the whole voyage was that she was headed in the right direction. She stopped at every harbor and milk station between Peleliu and San Francisco that was on her charts and had to have at least three or four days' rest at each one before making her mad dash for the next. Only two meals a day were served with an inevitable spam sandwich at noon. The holds were hot and had little or no ventilation; fresh water was rationed even for drinking and was turned on only two hours a day; straight sea water was the only thing available for shaving and washing. But despite the discomforts, the men were in good spirits, for the fact that they would soon be home was uppermost in their minds.





Golden Gate Bridge Was a Mighty Welcome Sight!



San Francisco Harbor.

## Home Again

On the morning of Sunday, April 15, the men of the 33rd lined the rails of the *President Johnson* peering through a thick fog that chilled their blood thinned by 28 months in the tropics. But they didn't mind the cold, for in that fog lay the hills of California—the United States of America. Slowly, the hills took shape, then the towers of the golden gate bridge, and finally the tall, beautiful buildings of San Francisco itself.

Commander Corradi and His Executive Officer, Lt. Herlan.



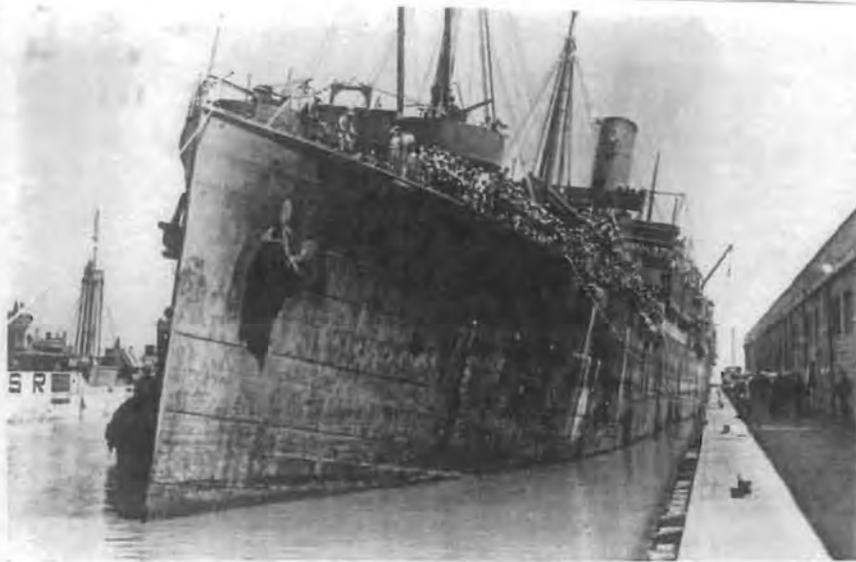
The *Johnson* lay in the bay for an hour or so, while the health inspectors, port authorities, customs inspectors, and representatives of the Army, Navy and Marines looked the ship over for the usual inspection of incoming ships. Then aided by tugs, the *Johnson* maneuvered into one of the San Francisco docks and began immediately to discharge the troops aboard. The 33rd, as usual, was the last to debark, getting off about 1500 and was taken in busses to Camp Parks about 30 miles East of San Francisco.

The battalion was assigned to a Quonset hut area and the men lost no time in getting fresh water showers, un-dehydrated milk, and a few ice cold beers at the camp beer garden.

The following morning, Commander Corradi called the battalion together and broke the news that the 33rd was to be decommissioned. It's a matter of conjecture of how the news struck the men, perhaps the anticipation of going home didn't leave room for many thoughts on the subject, but there must have been very, very few that did not feel just a little twinge of regret in hearing that the outfit that had made a proud name for itself would soon be just a number in the "dead" files of the Navy.

Thursday was set as the tentative date for the men's departure on leave, so it was a busy week of buying clothes, making out leave papers, calling home, buying plane and train tickets, packing and segregating personal gear, getting paid, seeing friends, and saying last-minute good-byes.

All hands received 30 days' leave plus travel time, and, upon expiration of their leave were to report in to major Naval Activities close to their homes for further transfer to Camp Endicott if they lived east of the Mississippi, and transfer back to Camp Parks if they lived west of the Mississippi. By Friday, the area was deserted except for the officers, the yeomen, storekeepers, and a small clean-up detail.



*The Johnson lists to the port as all hands try to get their first look at some real American women on the dock.*

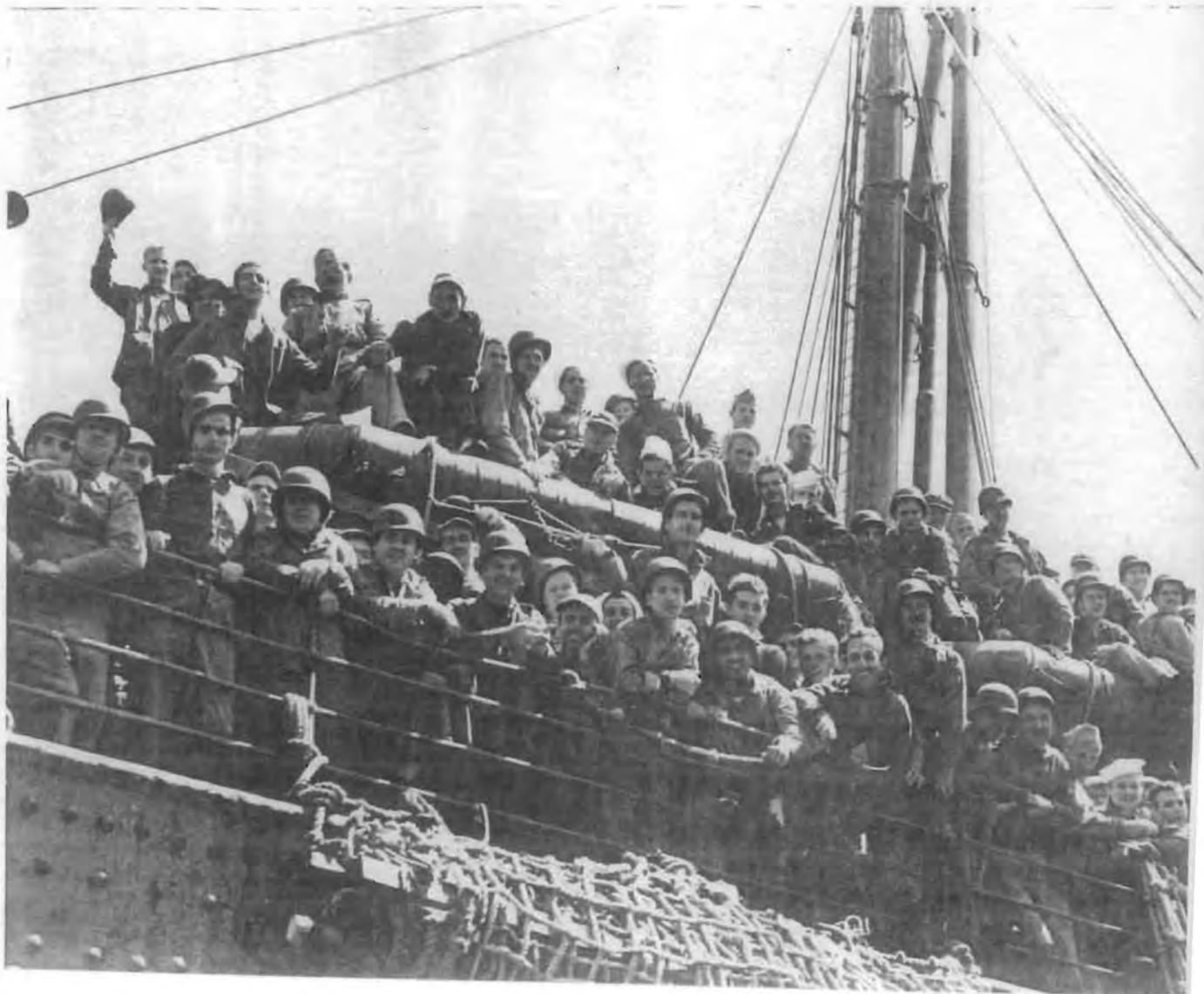


*The Battalion's Officers on arrival in San Francisco.*

May 1 had been set as a tentative date for actual decommissioning, leaving only 10 days to complete all the paper work on the battalion and prepare the 33rd for a decent burial. Especially busy during those ten days were the six personnel yeomen who had to complete transfers on all

779 of the men which is no small job. However, knowing that they could not go on leave until the job was finished, the paper work and all the details were finally completed on April 30, and Commander Corradi signed the papers notifying the Navy Department that the 33rd Construction Battalion was inactivated.

*A Shipload of Happy Seabees.*



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

### Chronology

18 Dec 1942 Departed overseas from Port Hueneme, California.  
6 Jan 1943 Arrived Magenta Bay, New Caledonia.  
14 Feb 1943 1<sup>st</sup> echelon of 33<sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 18 officers and 650 men, left Noumea.  
18 Feb 1943 1<sup>st</sup> echelon arrived Koli Point, Guadalcanal.  
2<sup>nd</sup> echelon, consisting of 7 officers and 99 men, left Noumea.  
24 Feb 1943 3<sup>rd</sup> echelon, consisting of 3 officers and 257 men, departed from Noumea, leaving 2 officers and 10 men.  
28 Feb 1943 3<sup>rd</sup> echelon arrived at Koli Point, Guadalcanal.  
20 Feb 1943 1<sup>st</sup> echelon, consisting of 9 officers and 226 men, left Koli Point for Russell Islands.  
21 Feb 1943 1<sup>st</sup> echelon arrived Russell Islands.  
22 Feb-16 Apr 1943 Remaining officers and men, consisting of 16 officers and 788 men, moved from Guadalcanal to Russell islands, completing movement to Russells.  
  
19 Nov 1943 All personnel departed Banika Island.  
01 Dec 1943 Arrived Auckland, New Zealand, for rest and rehabilitation.  
12 Jan 1944 Departed from Auckland to return to Banika Island for staging.  
23 Jan 1944 Arrived at Banika Island.  
12 Feb 1944 1<sup>st</sup> echelon of 33<sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 10 officers and 233 men, left Banika Island for Green Island.  
15 Feb 1944 1<sup>st</sup> echelon arrived Green Island.  
17 Feb 1944 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon of 33<sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 11 officers and 798 men left Banika Island for Green Island.  
20 Feb 1944 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon arrived Green Island.  
22 Feb 1944 3<sup>rd</sup> echelon of 33<sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 1 officer and 43 men, left Banika Island for Green Island.  
25 Feb 1944 3<sup>rd</sup> echelon arrived Green Island.  
27 Feb 1944 4<sup>th</sup> echelon of 33<sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 2 officers and 72 men, left Banika Island for Green Island.  
01 Mar 1944 4<sup>th</sup> echelon arrived Green Island.  
03 Mar 1944 5<sup>th</sup> echelon of 33<sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 1 officer and 7 men, left Banika Island for Green Island.  
28 Jul 1944 1<sup>st</sup> echelon 33<sup>rd</sup> CB departed Green Island and returned to Russells, leaving rear echelon of 1 officer and 18 men.  
31 Jul 1944 1<sup>st</sup> echelon arrived Russell Islands.  
02 Aug 1944 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon 33<sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 1 officer and 18 men, left Green island for Russell Islands.  
05 Aug 1944 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon arrived Russell Islands, completing movement to Ruessells.

28 Aug 1944	1 <sup>st</sup> echelon of 33 <sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 24 officers and 859 men, left Russells for assignment with First marine Division.
28 Aug-15 Sep 1944	1 <sup>st</sup> echelon enroute from Russells to Peleliu.
15 Sept 1944	1 <sup>st</sup> echelon arrived Peleliu.
17 Nov 1944	2 <sup>nd</sup> echelon of 33 <sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 1 officer and 10 men, left Russell islands for Peleliu.
18 Nov 1944	2 <sup>nd</sup> echelon arrived Peleliu.
25 Nov 1944	3 <sup>rd</sup> echelon of 33 <sup>rd</sup> CB, consisting of 2 officers and 167 men, left Russell Islands for Peleliu.
10 Dec 1944	3 <sup>rd</sup> echelon arrived Peleliu, completing movement from Russell Islands to Peleliu.
01 Feb 1945	33 <sup>rd</sup> CB still operating at Peleliu, but men with more than 20 months of overseas service scheduled to return to United States.

1942 — 1945

In Memoriam  
to the memory of  
those men who have  
paid the full Sacrifice  
World War II  
This Tablet is  
Dedicated

WILLIAM SEYMOUR BRIDGMAN

DAVID MENDEL 3RD

EDWARD JAY WILCOX

GARLAND OMAR H. WOOD

THOMAS JAMES BRIDGMAN

HARRY DRYDEN FULTON

ALFRED BENJAMIN STRASSE

ERNEST HARRIS HEDGECOCK

WILLIS BELL

GEORGE WILLIAM DARTLET

US Naval Construction Battalion







No. 5, Feb. 6, 1943, Magenta Bay, New Caledonia  
Pontoon assembly and road construction. Comdr.  
G. L. Mc Ginnis to the right in khaki.



