55th Naval Construction Battalion

Historical Information

"Construimus, Batuimus"
"We Build, We Fight"

NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND

55a C.B.

55th C.B.

NCTC - Davisville
ABD - Hueneme
Ready Date - 16 Feb'43
Left ABD - 6 Mar'43
Location - ~~Brisbane~~ Biak Is.(Woendi)

LOG

1-14-43 - To Gulfport FFT.
2- 3-43 - Enroute Hueneme from Gulfport.
2-11-43 - Arrived Hueneme from Gulfport.
3- 6-43 - Departed from Hueneme.
5- 3-43 - Arrived Brisbane 24 Mar'43. Co. D being sent to Milne Bay, New Guinea to constfuct P.T. operating base 6.
½ Co. A to Merauke, Dutch Guinea.
½ Co. A & Co. C stays in Brisbane.
Co. B retained as relief in Brisbane. Apr 8 Comdr. 7th flt requested an additional CB be assigned to this area. 84th CB tentatively assigned.
6- 8-43 - April Monthly secret report - 55th CB arrived 25 Mar'43 at Brisbane.
Co. A, 4 off. and 233 men, assigned Meracke, Dutch Guinea
Co. D, 4 off. and 219 men, assigned Milne Bay, New Guinea
Co. C & B, 18 off. and 564 men, assigned Brisbane.
7-14-43 - May Secret Report - 55th CB operating at Brisbane, Australia with detachments at Meracke, Dutch Guinea and Milne Bay, New Guinea. Another detachment at Palm Is., near Queensland, Australia.

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7-23-43 - Secret Report 6-13-43 PWC 7th flt to Budocks -
Co. A engaged in work at Merauke, Dutch New Guinea
Co. B at Brisbane - Queensland, 2 platoons at Port Moresby.
Co. C at Brisbane Queensland - Palm Island.
Co. D at Milne Bay, New Guinea.
8-14-43 - Secret Report dtd 12 Jul Com7flt to Budocks:
Co. A at Merauke, New Guinea
Co. C at Palm Island
Co. B at Portmouths and Brisbane
Co. D at Milne Bay (Dana Kopa) New Guinea.
9-16-43 - 1 Aug'43 report -
Co. A at Merauke, Dutch New Guinea
Co. B at Port Mousby
Co. C at Palm Is.
Co. D arrived Milne Bay 8 Jul'43.
12-29-43 - Distribution of 55th CB from Secret NB166/A1-1 - 5455 (Com7flt to Budocks dtd 11-43
Hdqtrs Co. at Brisbane
Co. A at Cairns
Co. B at Port Mousby and Brisbane
Co. C at Townsville
Co. D at Brisbane.
3-10-44 - 1 Feb'44 report of 55th CB - Detachments operating at Cairns, Brisbane, Port Mousby, New Guinea.
4-22-44 - 1 Mar'44 report of 55th CB - operating at Port Moresby, Cairns, Brisbane and Palm Island, Queensland.

55th CB

4-26-44 - 55th CB detached from 12th Reg. and assigned to 24th Reg. temporarily. (Comserfor-ltr P15-3 Ser 0838 to 55th CB dtd 10 Apr'44)

6-16-44 - 55th CB detached from 24th Reg. and asigned to 19th Reg. for duty on construction facilities for NABU 2. (Comserfor7flt Conf. Spdltr to CNB Hollandia File P16-3 over Ser 01191 dtd 6 Jun'44)

6-26-44 - 55th CB is located at Hollandia as of 31 May'44. (Comservfor7flt Sec ltr A-9 over Ser BP 001407 to Dirpacdocks dtd 8 Jun'44)

7- 7-44 - 55th CB is located at Hollandia. (transferred to 19th Reg. from 24th Reg. 8 Jun'44) Preparing to move to Biak Is. (ComSerFor7flt Sec. ltr. A-9-4 over Ser. 00673 to Budocks dtd 14 Jun'44)

8-23-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 55th CB - operating at Biak. Moved during May & June'44.

9-13-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 55th CB - operating at Biak. Battalion movement completed 15 J Jul.

9-30-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 19th Reg. - 55th CB operating at Biak. End. by Comserfor7flt recommends the return of the 55th to the U.S. for rest and rehabilitation.

10-5-44 - 55th CB ordered detached from the 19th Reg. and to report to CNB Biak for duty. (Rest. Disp. 261003 NCR 39380 from Comserv7flt to CNB Biak and CNB Milne)

10-24-44 -- 55th CB is located at Woendi Is. - due to depart for Hollandia late in Sep'44. (Comserfor7flt monthly report for Aug'44 to Budocks Ser. BP001815 Secret dtd 12 Sep'44).

10-26-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of the 19th Reg. - Endorsement by Comservfor7flt recommends that the 55th CB be returned to the U.S. for rehabilitation leave, reoutfitting, and retraining.

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10-27-44 - 55th CB to be returned to U.S. in Jan'45. Men in less than 12 months to be transferred to other units. (CNO Sec. ltr Op302CK14-UOT over (SC)P16-5 over Ser 01320530 over Doc. 138245 to Com7flt, Supers, Budocks dtd 14 Oct'44)

10-30-44 -- The 55th CB is located at Woendi.(Comserfor7flt Sec. disp 130349 NCR 12037 to CNO dtd 25 Odt'44).

11-8-44 - 55th CB located on Woendi Is. On 26 Sep'44 was detached from the 19th Reg. and assigned to CNB Biak. (Comserfor7flt Sec. ltr A9-4 over Ser BP-001883 to Budocks dtd 12 Oct'44 monthly report for Sep'44)

11-18-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 55th CB - During Aug., was located at Biak. Comserfor7flt states that a majority of the 55th CB will be transferred from this batt in the near future for duty at a less advanced base. Report endorsed by 19th Regiment.

11-30-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of 55th CB - operating at Biak.

12-28-44 - One company of the 55th CB is with the 24th Reg. temporarily at Hollandia. Balance of batt located at Woendi. The 55th CB is assigned to CNB Biak. This batt is expected to return to the U.S. in Jan'45.(Comserfor7flt Sec. report for Oct'44 dtd 20 Nov'44).

1-4-45 -- Comser7flt expects an early assigned vessell to load the 55th CB for shipment to the US. Upon arrival 55th CB detached Woendi and ordered to report to Com 12 FPA Parks. Extra equipment assigned to CBD NUDE for future distribution.(Comserfor7flt Sec. disp to CNB Woendi 190441 dtd 27 Dec'44).

1-13-45 - One Co. of the 55th CB (temp) at Hollandia - the return of the 55th CB to the U.S. in Jan'45 has been approved by CNO. (Comserfor7flt Sec. report for Nov'44 dtd 15 Dec'44)

1-13-45 - 55th CB in the 3rd Brg. (not attached to a regiment) located at Woendi with Co. "C" at Hollandia. (Comserfor7flt Sec report for Nov'44 dtd 15 Dec'44)

55th CB

1-15-45 - Officers and men of the 55th CB detached from duty upon receipt of orders dtd 31 Dec'44 - to proceed to Camp Parks. (CO Naval Base Manus ltr NB/P16-4/00 over Ser 1350 dtd 31 Dec'44 to OinC 55th CB)

1-23-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of the 55th CB - located at Biak during Nov'44.

1-31-45 - 55th CB, consisting of 22 officers and 793 men, arrived Parks from overseas 21 Jan'45 (TWX 222049 from Parks to BuPers dtd 22 Jan'45)

2- 9-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 55th CB - Boarded ship on 1 Jan'45 for U.S. The Co. "C" detachment of men at Hollandia joined the Batt on 31 Dec'44.

3-5-45 -- Parks directed to inactivate the 55th CB upon their return from rehabilitation leave. Personnel will be used for formation of new units and as replacements for Comservpac.(Bupers Conf. ltr Pers-2122D-CEC/lm to Parks dtd 1 Mar'45).

3-20-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of CBMU 605 - The 55th CB was detached from Biak on 1 Jan'45 for return to U.S. The 108 men left behind to be trf'd to PAD #1.

4-5-45 -- In accordance with Bupers conf. ltr dtd 1 Mar'45 the 55th CB decommissioned effective 6 Apr'45.(55th CB ltr to Bupers dtd 26 Mar'45).

5- 3-45 - The 55th CB inactivated on 14 Apr'45. (Parks TWX 012230 May'45 to Bupers)

INACTIVATED

	ON BOARD		
DATE	OFFICERS	MEN	AUTHORITY
1 Apr'44	26	1014	MoR
30 Jun'44	27	997	Recap.
1 Aug'44	27	990	MoR
1 Oct'44	30	978	Comserfor7flt Rep. for Sep'44
30 Sep'44	24	957	Recap & MoR
1 Nov'44	25	909	MoR
1 Dec'44	24	903	MoR
1 Jan'45	23	923	MoR
1 Feb'45		760	BNP625
1 Mar'45		753	BNP625
1 Apr'45		91	BNP625

55th Construction Battalion (INACTIVATED)

55th C. B.

DECLASSIFIED

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
5/31/44	-	Brisbane	—	Left U.S. March 1943.
6/12/44	-	Woolandia	BuDocks C B report 1 May	
7/3/44	-	Biak Is.	BuDocks C B report 1 June.	Temp. assignment from 12th Reg'mt.
7/25	-	TRIM (Woolandia)	Comsenoth fet sec act. disp. 110844 July.	
9/8	-	NUDE (Biak Is.)	Comsenoth fet sec act disp 090824 aug.	Delete TRIM (110844 July) Add NUDE
10/21			OP 30456 serial 013205 30 14 OCT.	Cno approved - [illegible]
10/25	-	PIDA (Waendi)	Comsenoth fet sec act disp 130349 oct.	Change name activities to PIDA.
11/25	-	PIDA	Comsenoth fet sec act disp. 150133.	

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DECLASSIFIED

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
12/28	-	Waendi (US)	Comsenoth fet sec disp. 190441 dec.	Expects early return US.
2/12/45	-	-	Comsenoth fet sec. 020659 feb.	delete P.D.A.
2/23/45	-	U.S. (Barb)	BuDocks memo 9/28.	Returned US 1/21. Ten. ready date 5/1/45. No assignment.
3/15	-	"	BuDocks memo 3/9.	Returned US 1/21. Being activated.

Aug report shows inactivated

FROM RHODE ISLAND SNOW TO EQUATORIAL SUNSHINE

The 55th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion was commissioned on December 12, 1942. On this date the battalion broke boot in a cold New England camp in the midst of a reclaimed swamp surrounded by thickets of pale birches and hardy maples. A thousand men, sore of muscle from extended order and close order, weary from cat fever and coughing, aching from a half dozen shots in the arm, were everywhere across a frozen field carrying two cumbersome seabags filled with GI wardrobe. Then there was the casting off of boots, the picking up of the first liberty cards, and the waiting in line for crowded busses to East Greenwich and Providence, to the first dances, liquor, and women in over a month. The cocoon of boot camp had opened, and the 55th Battalion was beginning to strengthen its wings for its maiden flight into the unknown. We were at last a distinct unit with a whole month of history behind us. Now we could yell, "You'll be sorry, Mac," to fresh batches of recruits. We were oldtimers educated by boot chiefs and scuttlebutt.

Then came days of organization, officers meeting men, men meeting officers, chiefs feeling important with actual responsibility, seamen feeling unimportant but hopeful, a hurried whipping together before the most important event of our short career—five-day leave. Westerners toured and drank their way through the East while Easterners went home. There were willingness and cooperation. Every man was trying to find his niche. There were nights of shivering beneath piles of pea coats, sweaters, coveralls, and seabags piled on top of two blankets that seemed gauze-thin.

There were long scuttlebutt bull sessions about where we would go for advanced training. Then, suddenly, the five-day leave was over, our gear was packed, we were marching in rain and the night to three trains that were to take us to the sunny south to Gulfport, Mississippi. There were rhythm and determination, expectancy and pride, in the beat and scrape of our unified feet on the dirt of a Camp Endicott back alley. We were an army advancing.

At last we were on our way, sweeping the New England countryside, tunnelling through New York, climbing through the mountains of Pennsylvania, down to the fertile Ohio Valley and out into the Indiana plains. Then we were hungry and soot-covered. We had failed to meet with our dining car. Some of us got ice cream and sandwiches at momentary stops at strange stations until finally our diner was hooked on and we began to file into it to eat as we crossed the mouth of the Ohio River, glimpsed the Mississippi, and headed straight south across a cottonfield and swamp tip of Kentucky. We were entertained by Negro children dancing alongside the train for pennies at Fulton; then we were in Tennessee, down toward Memphis in the dark. We slept; then we awoke to sunshine and acres of pine trees tapped for turpentine.

Davisville, Rhode Island

The battalion broke boot in a cold New England camp.

Mississippi

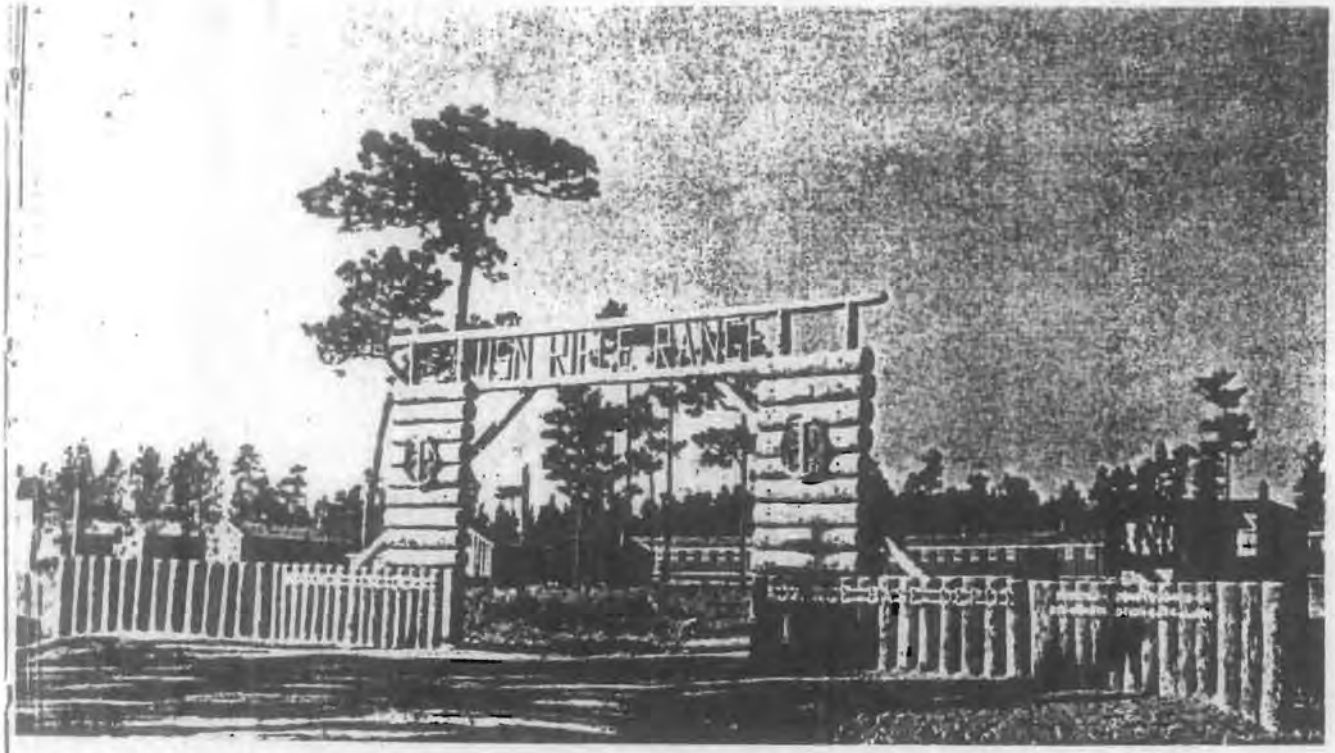
It was not long until we were on a siding moving into our advance base depot at Gulfport. The cold snow of New England was gone, and we were saying they could blow it out their bugle. We were delighted with the South despite a brisk breeze that cut into us as we left the train. We were pleased with sunshine and the freshness of green grass and sand. And already we were ready for more scuttlebutt as to where we would be going next. Would we shove off here, or would we go west? You could have had money on either.

Then again there were liberty, women, and liquor, more organization, more shifting of personnel, a pleasant holiday trip to a rifle range in a pine forest. The enjoyment of this trip was overshadowed by the knowledge that it could not last. We knew we must move on. But in the meantime we smelled the salt air of the Gulf of Mexico, heard the soft, easy drawl of the South, saw tall-columned homes, and experienced southern hospitality.

Again it came time to move, once more in the rain and the night, but this time everybody had a pullman berth in cars that had no resemblance to the "cattle cars" that brought us from Davisville.

During the night we rushed through New Orleans and across the Mississippi and awoke next morning amid bayous and swamps deep with jungle mystery. We saw palmettos. We saw hundreds of live-oaks, bearded and gray with Spanish moss. Then we were out of the swamps and climbing northwest toward Texas. At Shreveport a young girl gave some of the boys her address when the train stopped. She wanted letters from overseas.

Texas was monotonous and vast, olive tan and gray with sagebrush, cactus, and dry earth. Texas was cotton country, English walnut and pecan country, oil country with derricks mushrooming out of acre after acre of land. Texas was wild and civilized with wide thoroughfared cities seemingly hewn from sunbaked earth and stone. Dallas, Fort Worth, and El Paso; then a nighttime trip of New Mexico, and on into Arizona; glorious sunshine, palm trees, and stucco at Tuscon, huge yellow oranges at Phoenix; then Yuma and a glimpse into Mexico. At last for the Californians there was home soil, desert and barren though it was. There was disappointment for men of the East expecting a Chamber of Commerce California. Then came daylight and breakfast in Los Angeles. We were in California. We were in the semi-tropical paradise of the West, the artificial front gardens of a coastline. Easterners were no longer disappointed. Oranges were growing, yellow and beautiful. Trees were green. Orchards stretched for miles across irrigated valley after irrigated valley. Snow-capped mountains rose up in the east, and we were reminded of the magnificent sunsets and sunrises in the barren hills of Texas and Arizona.



Entrance to USN rifle range in a Mississippi pine forest.

Port Hueneme, Calif.

At last we were at that unpronouncable place, Port Hueneme, and we were ready for life in those glorified culverts, the Quonset huts, surrounded by stately rows of eucalyptus trees foreboding our next destination. Eucalyptus trees are indigenous to Australia.

Then came a mad rush for liberty, for leave so the Californians could visit their families. Californians argued that they should have leave because they were close to home. Easterners and Mid-westerners argued just as logically that if Californians got it, they, too, should have it because they had never seen California. All of us got it for thirty-eight hours. We saw Hollywood and the movie stars, the Pacific, the orchards and valleys of California, the stuccoed cities and sandy beaches.

Back in camp again we waited. We took sneak trips down to the docks to look at Liberty ships and wonder which would take us across the Pacific to some undisclosed island, Island X. We lost one officer and gained another. We received fifty-one new men from Camp Peary, Virginia, and lost two who were AOL and missed the boat. We acquired new gear and guessed what direction we would take. There were no sheepskins; so we knew we were not going to Alaska, and we were glad.

Finally, we boarded a Dutch cargo ship manned by a Dutch and Javanese crew. It was early in March, 1943. Our tour of overseas duty had begun. Amid fears of seasickness, submarines, sharks, and the first awesome mystery of the deep blue Pacific, we headed westward. In broad daylight we watched the tanned shore of California pull away from us, and gradually we knew we were on our way. Advance training was over. We had our assignment.

The ship plowed along, and some few stomachs became unsettled. Men were crowded into the holds to get settled in folding bunks, five high. There was adjustment to life belts and two meals a day. There was waiting for the Dutch voice to say, "The cluck vill be set beck tonight twelf minutes." There was the grunting and snorting of "Susanna's a Funny Old Man" over the loud speaker. There were long hours of sitting in the blistering sun at the rails watching flying fish sail into the whitecaps of bluing blue waves, royal blue waves. There was wonder at the constant squirm of the sea, the mystery and vastness of it, the inky blackness of it at night, the soul-stirring sunsets, the loneliness of windbeaten nights, the smell of salt air, and the peacefulness stretching to the circle of horizon.

There was excitement when the first whales spouted and the schools of porpoise bobbed like finned sea serpents. There was excitement with anti-aircraft practice and the deafening roar of the guns. There were homesickness and desire for companionship at night sessions with the battalion band. Remembering our families, we wrote letters that would not be mailed for days.

There was much commotion when ribald ceremony changed hundreds of pollywogs to shellbacks, following the ancient tradition of the sea as we crossed the equator. There was hanging from every vantage point when the first palm-studded tropical islands, were sighted and passed. There were excitement and expectancy when our ship circled for a day; there was scuttlebutt of prowling submarines.

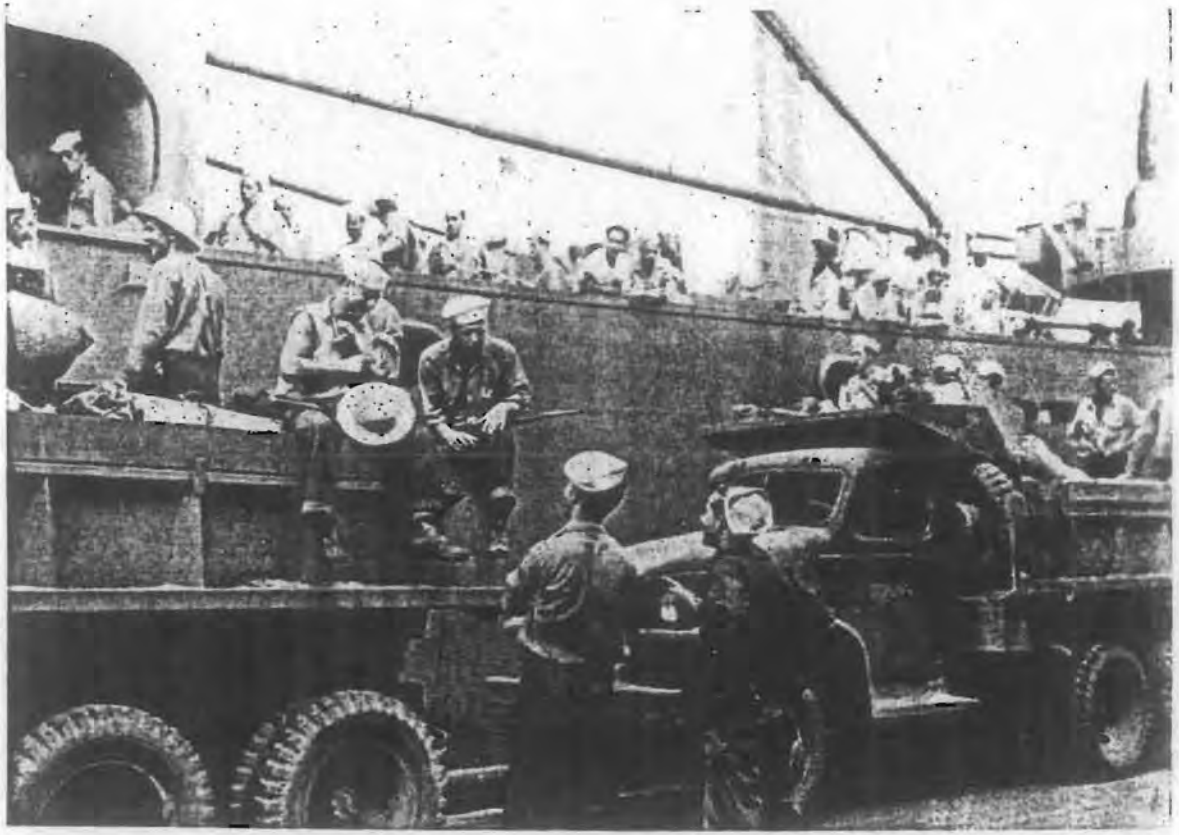
• • • THE COAST OF AUSTRALIA WAS SIGHTED

And finally the greatest excitement of all came when the coast of Australia was sighted. All of us were topside peering toward land, beautiful land, welcome land. A long journey was over. At last we were nearing Brisbane, our first stopping place.

After lying all night just outside the mouth of the Brisbane River, we were topside again as we sailed up the river and to port. Land never looked more beautiful. Trees were green and blossoming with their roots deep in solid earth. The strangeness and newness of Australia were inviting us to explore them and make them a part of our knowing of the world.

At the dock, American cigarettes were tossed to wharfmen in exchange for Australian pennies, big as half dollars.

Packs did not seem too heavy when we landed and marched to Doomben Race Track for our first staging, our first experience in tents, our first experience with Queensland monsoons, our first experience with army chow.



Docking in Brisbane. Land never looked more beautiful.

AUSTRALIA

Almost at once we were busy building our camp, Camp Seabee, on Eagle Farm Road, beyond the American Army stockade and the Australian CCC Camp. Our camp was ready within ten days, and we moved into it. Our first actual work was done, standing visibly a prelude to greater work to come. Artisans were at their trades and happy.

Then there was the first liberty and the adjustment to left-sided travel in the country down under. There were new customs and new slang to learn. We had to learn to say, "Right-O" or "Good on you" instead of "O.K." There were new people to meet, people much like ourselves with an English accent, pioneering people like we had been, people with vast areas of undeveloped country. There were tropical trees, poincianas, eucalypts, and the strangest of marsupials, koala bears, kangaroos, wallabies, platypuses, ringtail opossums.

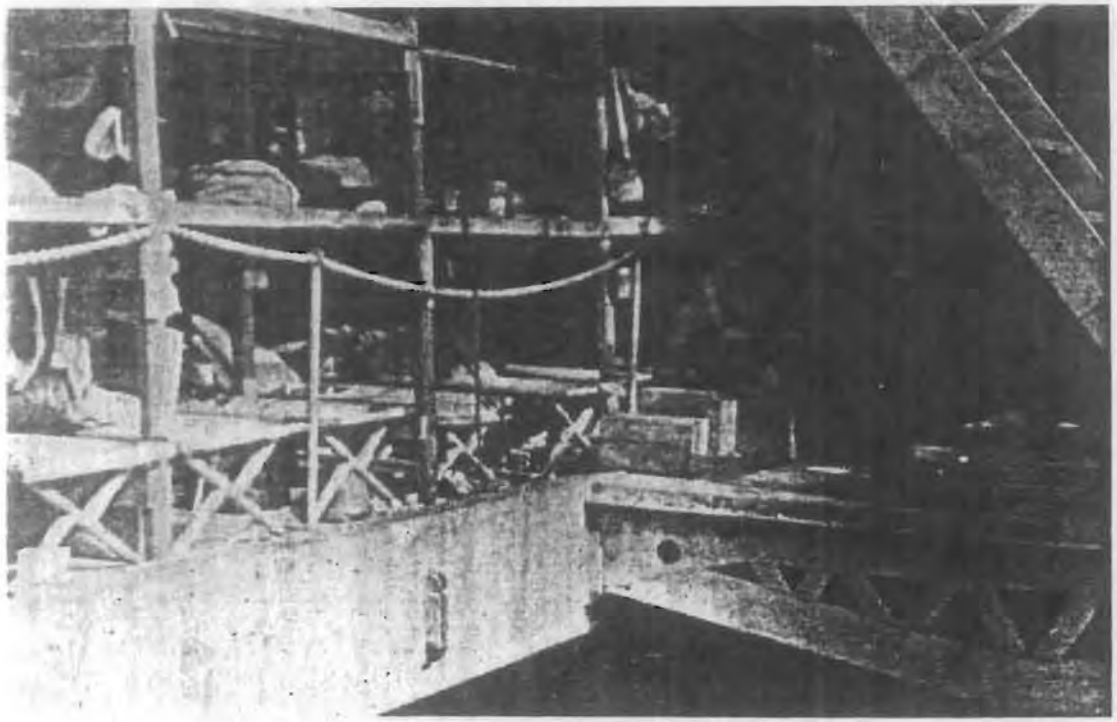
We took boat trips to Lone Pine, train and bus trips to Red Cliff, Sandgate, Ipswich, Coolangatta, Toowoomba, Gympie, Sydney, and we were delighted that we could pronounce the words derived from the language of the aboriginies. We met Aussie girls and Diggers. We danced at the Trocadero, Coconut Grove, City Hall, Cantwell's. We learned the Jolly Miller and the Gypsie Tap. We crowded the pubs and milk bars. We found sly grog markets and the streets of midnight amusements. Many of us visited the Russian's. We bought monsterio deliscios, pawpaws, pineapples, passion fruit. We went to horse races and watched the horses run clockwise instead of counter-clockwise.

We built an advance base depot, a mine depot, a hospital, worked a sawmill, and built many warehouses in and around Brisbane. We became Brisbane commandos, fighting the battle of Brisbane.

Then came the days when Company A left for Merauke, Dutch New Guinea; Company D left for Milne Bay; the lost platoon of Company B left for Port Moresby; and finally Company C left for Palm Island just out from Townsville. We were building docks, radio stations, PT boat bases, seaplane bases, hospitals, mine depots, supply bases. Company A was being bombed; Company D was in mud, rain, malaria country; the lost platoon of Company B was being forgotten; Company C was in sunshine; records were being established to be bragged about when the companies got together again. Company A had been to Merauke; Company C had learned how to play baseball; Company D had learned how to work in spite of malaria; Company B was split up and confused; Headquarters was the scapegoat of all the companies.

Projects were completed, and all companies returned to Camp Seabee with souvenirs and tall tales. Even the lost platoon was remembered and taken off its station force duties. Everyone got seven-day leave. Most of us went to Sydney, to King's Cross, and Bondi Beach, and came back bragging about how much more we had done and seen than anyone else had. Sydney was a city as fine as our own cities. The people were friendly.

Finally, after weeks of speculation and scuttlebutt, we surrendered Camp Seabee and Brisbane with its memories and broken hearts to the CBMU unit and our relief. We boarded two Liberty ships and sailed northward out beyond the Great Barrier Reef and into the Coral Sea.



NEW GUINEA BOUND

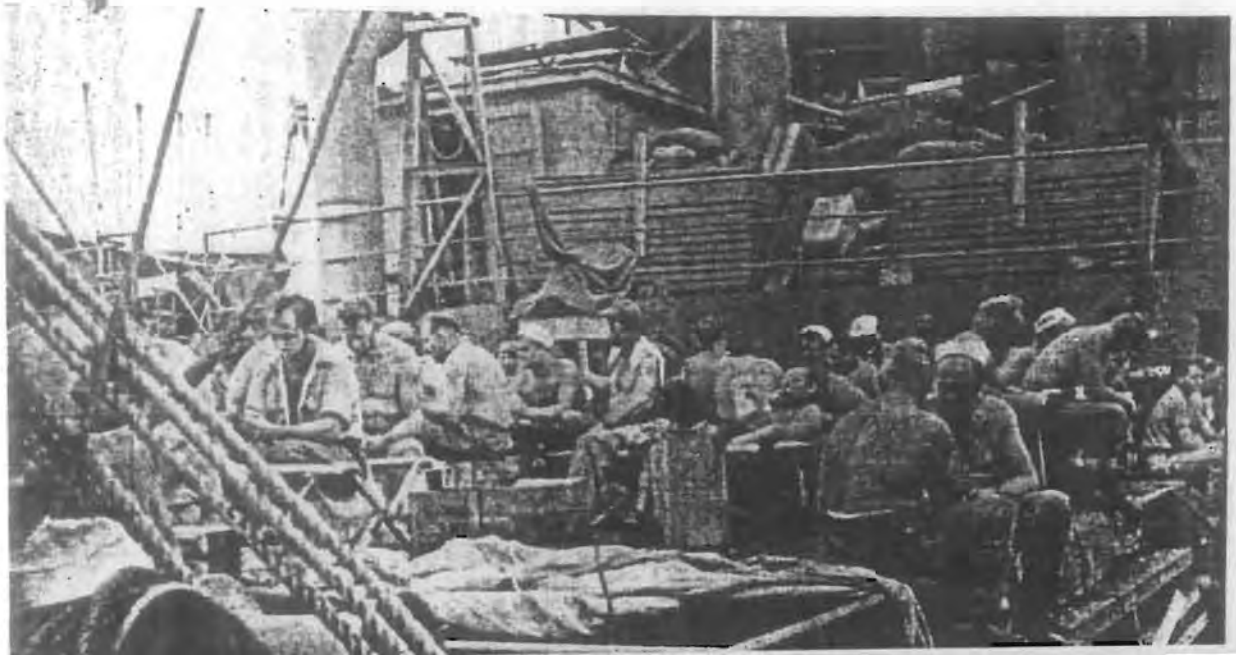
Again we were aboard ship watching the flying fish, blistering in the sun, wondering where we were going. Finally, we knew we were supposed to be going to Jautefa Bay at Humboldt Bay. We knew fighting and danger were there, at Hollandia, Cyclops, and Sentani Lake. We were excited. We were eager to get there.

But plans go awry, and journeys lengthen. We passed through the China Straits, passed Milne Bay and got a distant view of Company D's job of Kana Kopa. We went on to Oro Bay where we thought we were joining our convoy; then there were nineteen long and monotonous days of lying at anchor. Clothes got dirty, beards grew long, trousers lost their legs, skins tanned or turned yellow with atabrine, dispositions soured, reading material became exhausted. What the hell had happened? Why did we not move?

China Straits

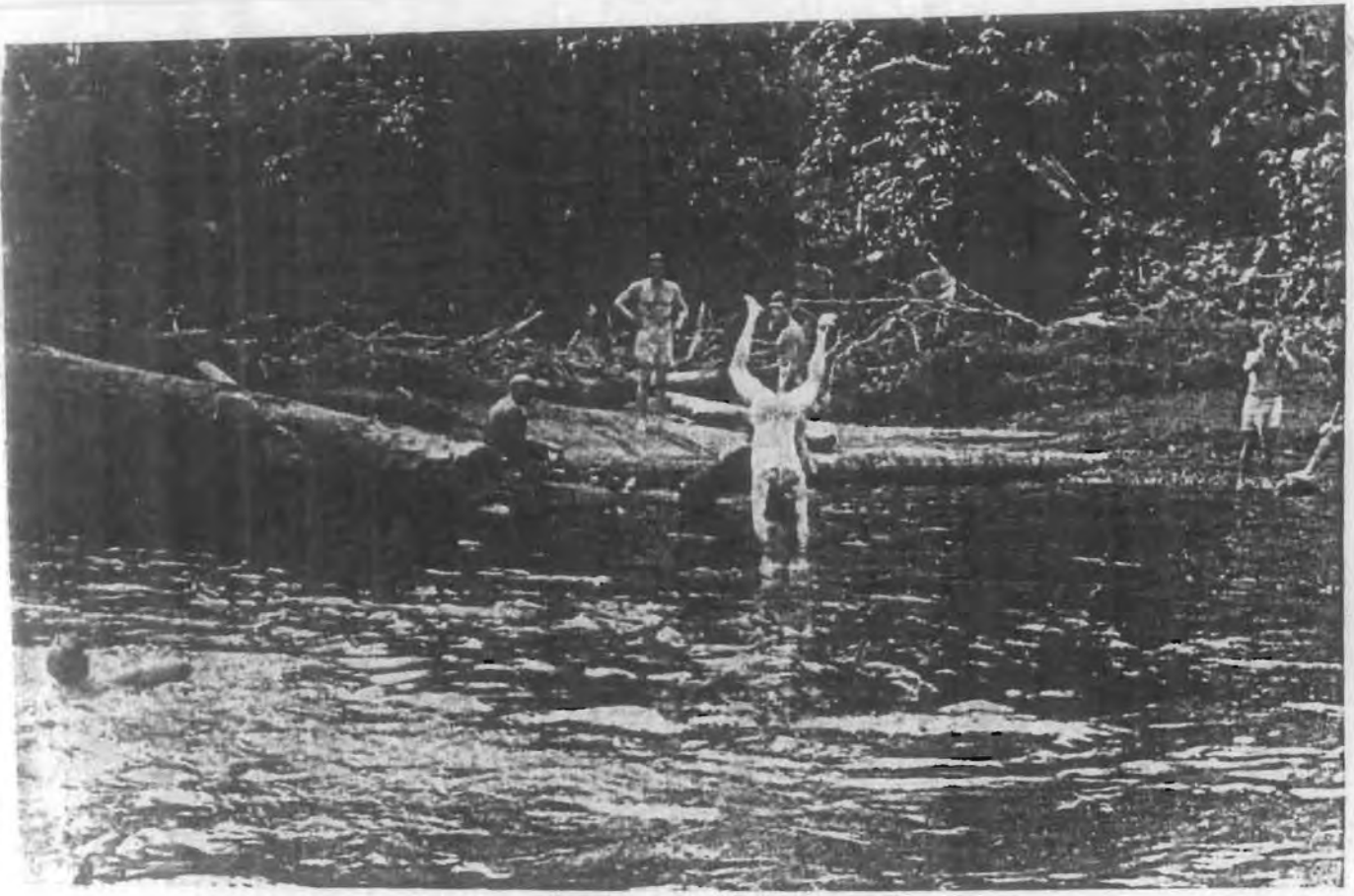
Then the Army sent a fleet of ducks out to take us ashore. We got away from the monotony of watching amateur fishermen catch sharks, barracuda, sea bass, catfish. We got away from our own staled thoughts, away to the beach and the coconut trees. We saw Yankee women, Red Cross women, who fed us punch, crackers, and donuts. [redacted] We took truck rides through fog-thick dust to Buna, out the Kokoda and Santananta Trails. We saw great fields of tall kunai grass and jungle laced together with clinging vines. We saw bomb craters, deserted foxholes and pillboxes. We saw the waste of Maggot Beach. We saw beheaded palm trees and found the lacework of jungle trails where fighting and death had been. We saw rows of white wooden crosses marking American graves. We were following in the wake of war.

The Army sent a fleet of ducks out to take us ashore.



At last we moved forward again. We circled out from Wewak, alert to danger. Humboldt we saw as a bay full of ships, a bay walled in by mountains. Shortly, we learned that our job had been changed. We were to unload our Liberty ships onto four LST's and go on to the Schouten Islands, the foremost front of the Southwest Pacific war. We knew that stiff fighting was going on at Biak. We were given a deadline for unloading, and every man was assigned to long hours of duty, emptying the holds, barging materials and supplies to the shore. Then we were given a day ashore.

We hitch-hiked or just plain hiked over to Hollandia or the airstrip. We saw piles of abandoned Japanese supplies. We smelled the musty odor of decaying rice and dried fish. We saw hillsides pockmarked with foxholes and ravaged by gunfire. We saw Seabees already at work while fighting was still



First fresh water bath in a month.

We saw Yankee women, Red Cross women who fed us punch, crackers, and donuts.

ON TO HUMBOLDT BAY

going on just over the hills. We knew our first red alert of the journey. We saw the small and friendly natives among the ruins of Hollandia

When our LSTs came we made our deadline loading them; then Companies A and B with sections of Headquarters went on to the Schoutens. While the other companies sat in the bay, Noah's record of forty days and forty nights on water was exceeded. We watched eagerly and avidly for news bulletins which told the story of progress in the Schoutens.

ARRIVAL AT MIOS WOENDI

Finally, after forty-six days on the way, we were all on Mios Woendi in the Paidido Group of the Schoutens. Our island was a mere flyspeck on the Pacific, well protected by coral reef. First impressions were the typical romantic ones developed in the Dorothy Lamour movies. But ashore, romance was lost among centipedes, land crabs, spiders, lizards, hermit crabs, and skin diseases, among rain and mud, long chow lines in the rain while we fed what seemed to be the whole Navy.

There were days when rain stopped and the sun came out making us wish it would rain again to smother the heat. We searched the jungle for personal belongings piled hurriedly everywhere because boats had to meet a deadline of eight hours and get out of port. We found materials and supplies scattered and broken but mostly usable. Tents were hurriedly set up in sand, under coconut trees.

Bulldozers began scraping up roads on a seashell base. Wells were dug, a sick bay was set up. Offices lined Inland Road at the corner of Back Bay Drive. BOQs went up along the beach of Back Bay Drive. Foxholes were dug and used occasionally during nightly alerts. The sounds of fighting on Biak mingled with the sounds of construction on Mios Woendi.

Gradually, as the jobs assigned to each company were in progress, our own conveniences began to appear, showers, screened-in heads, tent decks, scrub decks, a screened-in galley and mess trays, ice water, movies, occasionally beer and coca colas.

There were days when we had time o
to visit Pia, Auki, Biak, and Owi and se
battlegrounds, and barter with the natives
We waded out to the rim of the reef an
found seashells and cateyes and mad
jewelry. We bathed in the salt water an
sat along the beach in the moonlight a
nights. We came to know the beauty o
the island despite our reason for inhabit
ing it. We visited the thatched-hut vil
lages of the natives and brought bac
drums, carvings, stirring paddles, wove
mats, coconut ladles, Japanese invasio
money, and we often left the natives bet
ter dressed in GI issue than we were.

[redacted]

Civilization came to the island with us. We built the evidences of it ourselves: great thoroughfares crossing the island, rows of tents, warehouses, stores, offices, living quarters, docks, ramps, parking areas for planes, towers, radio stations, a hospital, a jetty, PT finger docks, all naval base facilities. Development of the island was our job, and we worked hurriedly because we expected to go home when the job was finished.

At nights we could see ack-ack bursting around Japanese planes caught in searchlights on Owi and Biak. Twice we saw the planes fall. Several times we heard enemy planes over our own island and waited for the bombs which never fell. We went out with PT patrols and knew excitement of hunting for trouble, the shelling of enemy shores, the actual killing of Japs. We got dysentery, dengue, and stubborn skin rashes. We knew occupational fatigue. And all the time our work went on, keeping ahead of schedule.

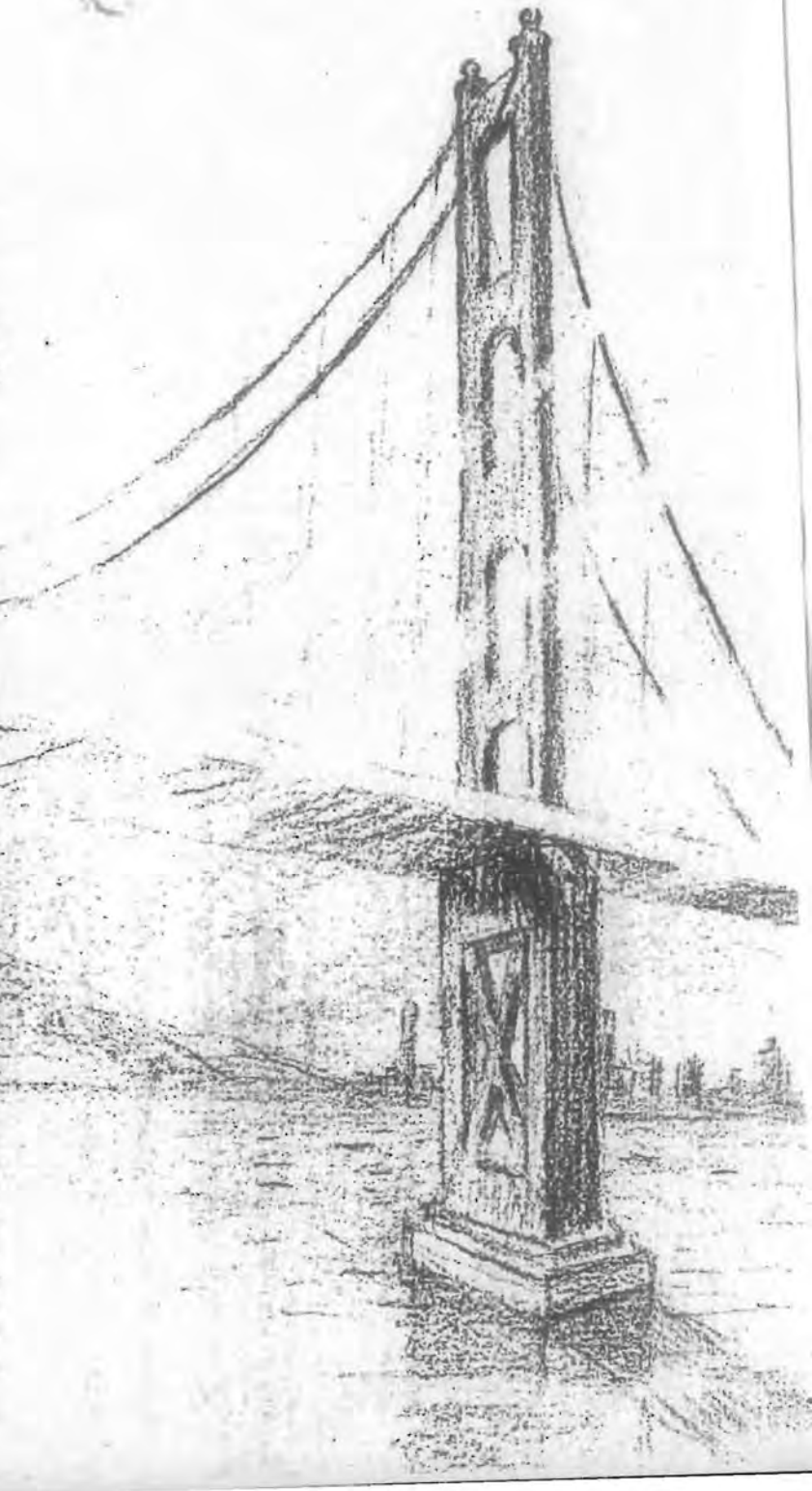
Chow line in the mud. We seemed to be feeding the whole Navy.

Two months and a half after we arrived on the island our job was completed, but before it was done, scuttlebutt became widespread that we were not going home after all. For weeks we were depressed waiting for the answer, but the job was only one for Company C at Hollandia. While the C Company boys were away, the rest of us did odd jobs about the island and were responsible for stevedoring after the Specialist Seabees left.

Christmas came with its packages from home. An artificial Christmas tree was raised among the cocoanut trees. Christmas lights blinked for a time, and legal and illegal brews helped us to forget that this was still another Christmas which we were not spending at home.

Then came New Year's, January 1, 1945, and with it our ship at last. Our fastest record for loading was established, and we moved out of the anchorage of our island. The island was alive with rugged Yankee civilization: electric lights, refrigerators, radios, movies, graded roads, automobiles, all alien to the fictional romance of the islands. We had built it, this base from which invasions were started, this base at which war ships and war planes licked their wounds and rested. With few regrets we left it in the hands of others.

We will remember those long days and nights aboard the Norwegian converted transport which was leased to the American Army. We will remember a cold and rough sea which seemed to fight against our homecoming. And we will remember the calm which came just before we were welcomed by the gulls out from Frisco. The Golden Gate Bridge rose red and beautiful in the early morning as we came into the bay. There was no fog over Frisco on this morning of January 21, 1945. The windows of Frisco were golden in the sunlight. In silence the town welcomed us, but we liked the silence. We liked the peacefulness of it. We were back home after twenty-three months away. Now we were nervous, anxious, and expectant, ready for thirty days at home. A Seabee cycle was ending. The Fifty-Fifth Battalion had shipped out, done its job, and come home.

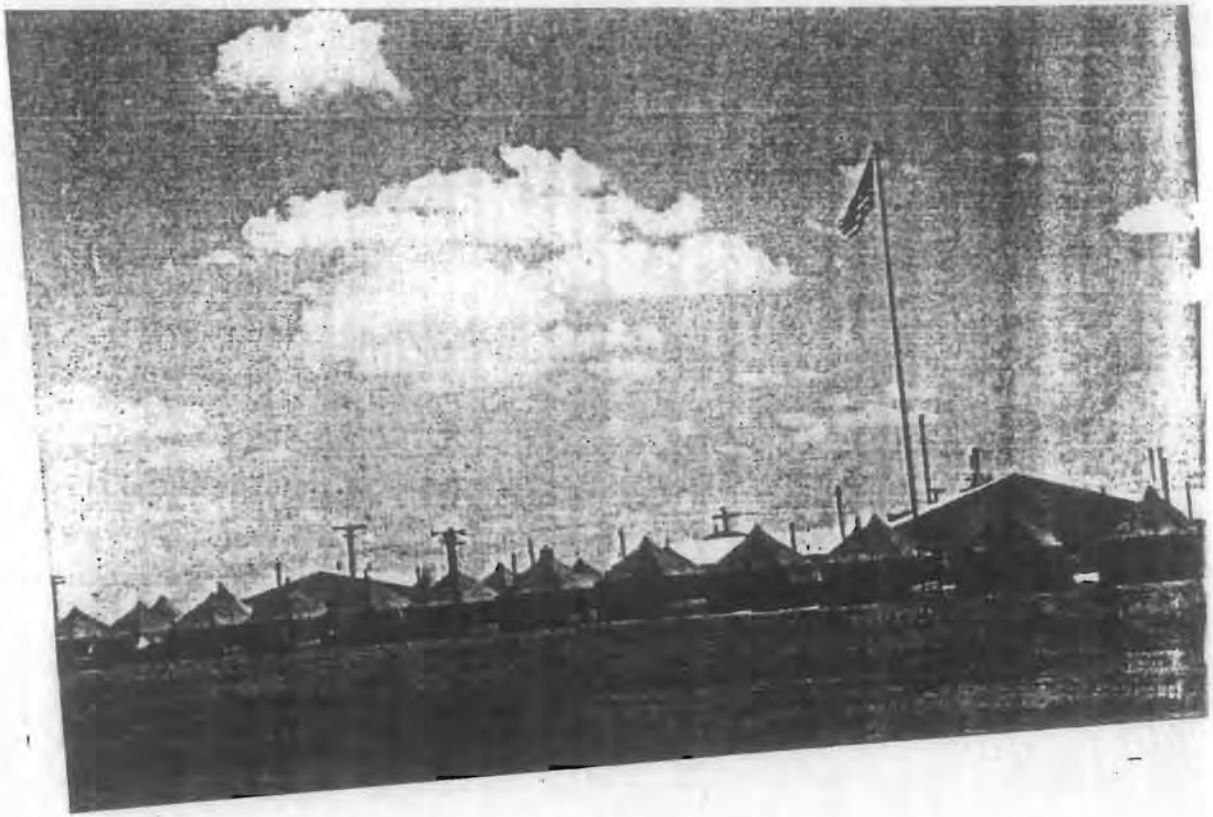


HEADQUARTERS COMPANY

Headquarters Company has had the problem of furnishing personnel for all companies on detached duty in addition to carrying on the necessary duties of battalion headquarters. When the companies went to the forward areas, Headquarters sent cooks, bakers, survey parties, clerical workers, and hospital corpsmen along with them so they could work as independent units.

Headquarters has been responsible for administrative duties, for procuring and distributing supplies, for maintaining battalion records and reports, for mail service, for ship's service and ship's store duties, for running the transportation department and maintaining equipment, for feeding the men, for safeguarding health, for maintaining telephone and public address systems, for planning and designing construction work, for handling a library and recreation hall, for clerical work, and for all the necessary service duties of a military and construction organization.

Headquarters remained in Brisbane for thirteen months and became the "Brisbane Commandos" to the other companies.



HEADQUARTERS OFFICES, CAMP SEABEE
BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

D. Abbott

M. Alpert

G. Andrews

A. Averyt

E. Bartlow

H. Bennight

H. Berger

C. Borgstedt

COMPANY A

Company A was first to go on detached duty. When the company arrived at its job site, Merauke, Dutch New Guinea, Japanese planes greeted the men with bombs. Recreation equipment, ammunition, tent decks, and a truck were hit, but none of the men was injured. While awaiting the arrival of dock materials, the company constructed an airstrip in eight days, for which they earned the praise of army officials. One man earned a citation for action in which a boat was saved from burning and endangering the lives of men.

When materials did arrive, a large dock was completed; then after one more bombing, the company moved on to Cairns, Queensland, Australia, and constructed an escort base before returning to Brisbane for rest leave.

On the battalion's most recent assignment Company A's major assignment was the construction of a dock and a jetty, finger piers, road construction, erection of steel and arch rib buildings, and erection of a fuel tank farm.

The dock at Merauke.

W. Adamson

G. Ade

J. Allmon

J. Archibald

A. Ayala

F. Badger

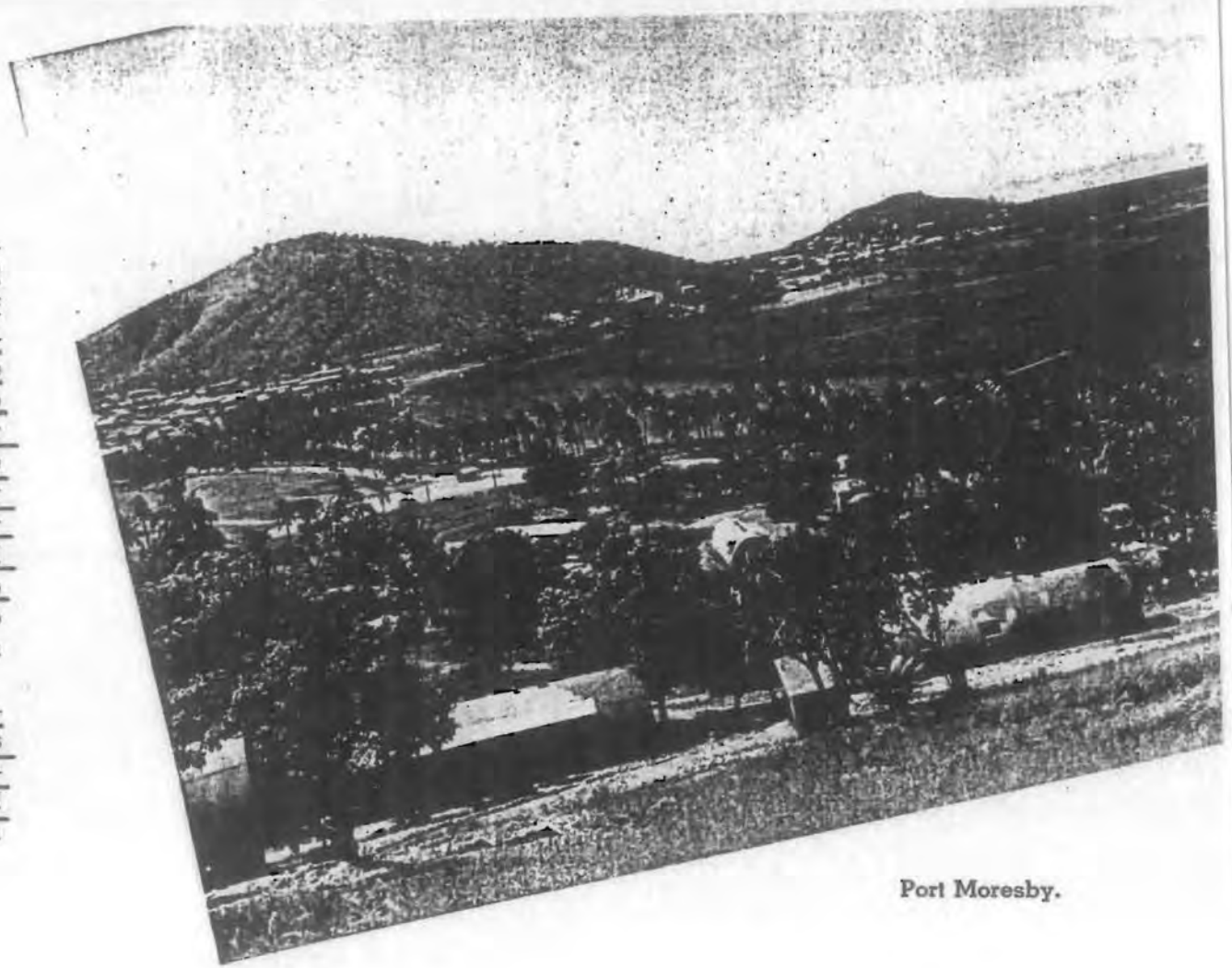
B. Bahls

L. Bain

COMPANY B

For over a year scattered locations of projects necessitated almost continuous shifting of Company B personnel. Shortly after arrival in Australia, one group of men was assigned to operate a sawmill at Yandina, Queensland. Another group constructed a mine depot at Brisbane. The "lost platoon" built a radio station and port director facilities at Port Moresby, New Guinea. The major portion of Company B remained in Brisbane several months helping to complete Camp Seabee and to establish an advanced base depot. Later, this group of men moved to Cairns, Queensland, and built an ammunition depot.

On the project just completed, Company B constructed the housing facilities for the Amphibious Repair Base and the Naval Advance Base Unit personnel and constructed a major portion of the steel arch rib storehouses. This company was active on various other small jobs on the base.



Port Moresby.

L. Anderson

H. Bates

M. Gates

R. Hotzel

G. Kruse

L. Bosley

G. Bowden

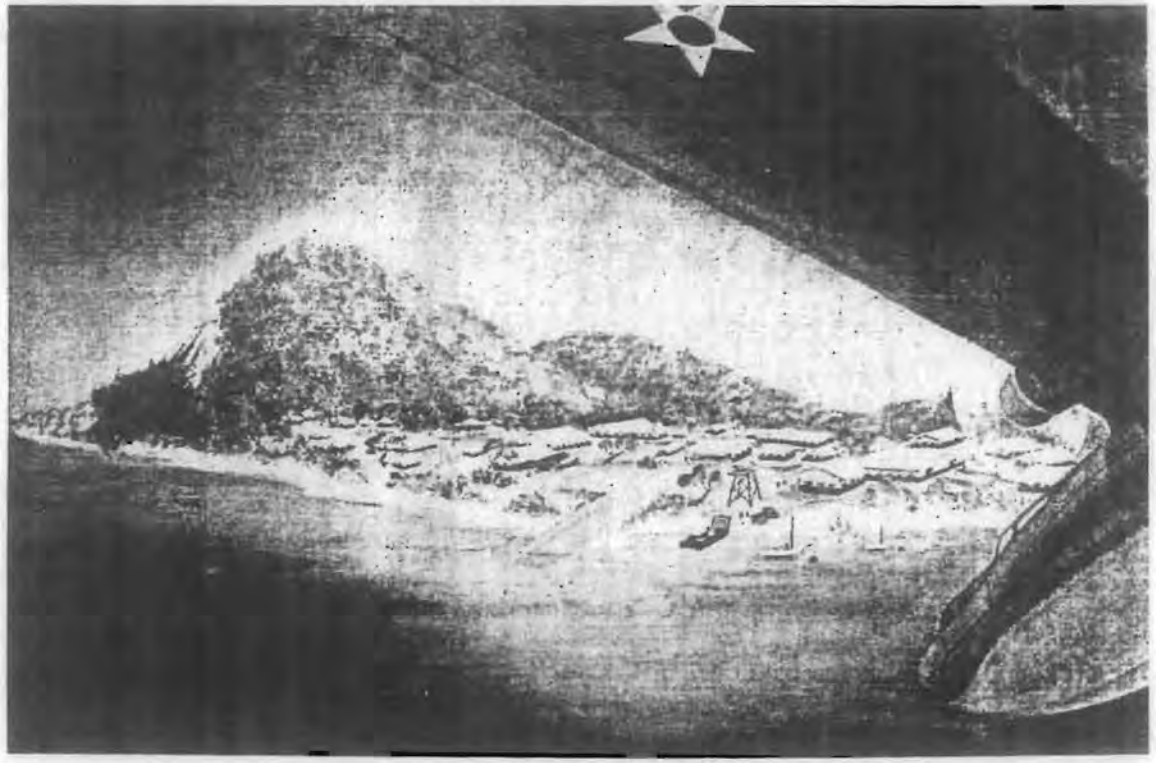
G. Brentner

COMPANY C

After completing several buildings at Camp Seabee and assisting with construction of a mobile hospital at Camp Hill, Company C went forward to Townsville, Queensland, and Palm Island. The major project, a seaplane base, was constructed at Palm Island, and a hospital was built in Townsville. Both jobs were completed in record time, and the company returned to Brisbane for rest leave. The Palm Island assignment was the choicest af all battalion assignments.

At the battalion's last job location, Company C had diversified jobs including construction of a seaplane base, a hospital, a recreation hall, and a theater in collaboration with Company A. In addition, the company supplied supervision for the battalion armory and the camp guards. After the completion of these projects Company C was sent back to Hollandia to aid other construction battalions on projects there.

Company C has been outstanding in athletics. It was awarded the winner's trophy in the Battalion softball tournament.



The seaplane base at Palm Island. From an original painting by a member of Company C.

L. Adolph

M. Allen

A. Anderson

R. Anderson

J. Anderson

E. Anderson

S. Ardbaum

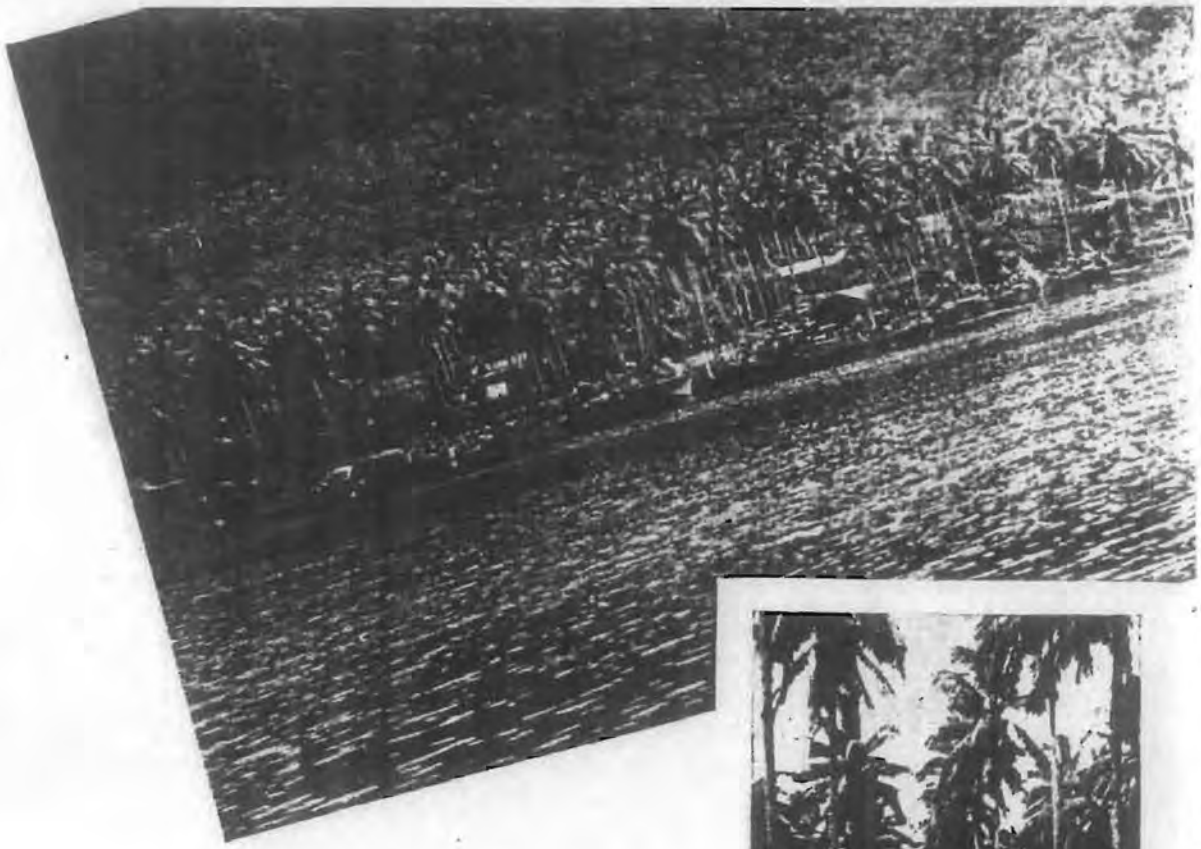
R. Aubrey

COMPANY D

Company D arrived at its first job site at Kana Kopa on Milne Bay only a few days after the Battle of Milne Bay. From the very beginning, the company encountered difficulties of rain, mud, alerts, and malaria. This was the worst of all job sites assigned to the battalion, and Company D had more cases of malaria than all the other companies put together.

Company D completed a Motor Torpedo Boat base at Milne Bay and completed an addition to a similar base at Morobe, New Guinea, before returning to Camp Seabee for much needed rest leave. Time was needed for recuperation before going out on the next assignment.

On the job just completed, in addition to miscellaneous odd jobs, Company D constructed another Motor Torpedo Boat base and assisted with the Naval Advance Base Unit job. A small detail of men was sent to a nearby island to build port director facilities.



Company D's camp at Kana Kopa, Milne Bay.

R. Allen

H. Anderson

O. Arms

J. Arzanto

E. Ashley

M. Atterbury

D. Barnard

J. Bell

55th Naval Construction Battalion

Chronology

12 Dec 1942	The 55th U.S. Naval Construction Battalion was commissioned at the Naval Construction Training Center (Camp Endicott), Davisville, Rhode Island. Commander Jay S. Leland, CEC, USNR, was officer in charge.
16 Jan 1943	The battalion departed from Davisville by train.
19 Jan 1943	The 55th NCB arrived at the Advance Base Depot (ABD), Gulfport, Mississippi. At Gulfport the unit underwent advanced military training.
06 Feb 1943	The battalion entrained for California.
09 Feb 1943	The 55th NCB arrived at the ABD, Port Hueneme, California. At Hueneme the battalion underwent further training and was outfitted for its overseas assignment.
05 March 1943	The 55th NCB, consisting of 26 officers and 1019 enlisted men, boarded the Dutch cargo ship S.S. Sommelsdyk in Hueneme harbor and set sail for the Pacific Theater of Operations.
24 Mar 1943	The battalion arrived at Brisbane, Australia. Almost immediately after debarking, it moved to Eagle Farm, about 5 miles northeast of Brisbane, and began to build its camp, appropriately named "Camp Seabee." This camp was later used as a staging area for other construction battalions in the Soutwest Pacific.
01 May 1943	Company A, consisting of 4 officers and 233 enlisted men, left Brisbane for Merauke, Dutch New Guinea.
08 May 1943	Company A arrived at Merauke. Its principal duty there was to construct a PT-Boat base.
11 May 1943	Company D, consisting of 4 officers and 219 enlisted men, left Brisbane for Milne Bay, British New Guinea.
23 May 1943	Company D arrived at Kana Dopa on the south side of Milne Bay to construct PT Advance Base Six.
10 June 1943	A detachment of Company B, consisting of one officer 70 enlisted men, departed from Brisbane for Port Moresby, British New Guinea.
20 Jun 1943	The detachment of Company B arrived at Port Moresby to build a radio station and port director's facilities.
02 Jul 1943	Company C, consisting of 4 officers and 235 enlisted men, departed from Brisbane for Townsville, Australia, and nearby Palm Island. About half the company stopped at Twonsville to unload, store, and then transship the company's construction supplies.
06 Jul 1943	A detachment of 2 officers and 122 enlisted men from Company C arrived at Palm Island to construct a seaplane base.

Mar 1943-Apr 1944	Battalion headquarters remained at Brisbane. Most of Company B also remained in the Brisbane area, where these Seabees constructed a mine depot, a naval hospital, additional barracks at Camp Seabee, and an advance-base construction depot, along with smaller projects.
24 Sept 1943	A detachment of Company D, consisting of one officer and 45 enlisted men, left Kana Kopa, New Guinea, for Port Moresby.
26 Sept 1943	The detachment of Company D arrived at Port Moresby to assist the detachment of Company B with the projects under construction there.
02 Oct 1943	Company A left Merauke, Dutch New Guinea, for Cairns, Australia.
06 Oct 1943	Company A arrived at Cairns to build Escort Base One.
25 Oct 1943	The detachment of Company C at Palm island began rejoining shipmates at Townsville, where Company C was initiating constructionof two naval hospitals.
28 Oct 1943	The main body of Company D departed from Kana Kopa, New Guinea, for Australia.
02 Nov 1943	Company D arrived back at Brisbane for rest and recuperation.
11 Dec 1943	The detachment departed, taking 20 men from Company B with it.
16 Dec 1943	This group arrived back at Brisbane.
17 Dec 1943	Company C, having finished construction of two naval hospitals, departed from Townsville, Australia.
19 Dec 1943	Company C arrived back at Brisbane for rest leave.
27 Dec 1943	A detachment of Company B, consisting of 2 officers and 49 enlisted men, left Brisbane for Cairns, Australia, where it was assigned to build ammunition storage facilities.
03 Feb 1944	Company A departed from Cairns.
06 Feb 1944	Company A arrived back at Brisbane for rest leave.
19 Mar 1944	The detachment of Company B at Cairns, having completed its assignment, departed for Brisbane.
23 Mar 1944	The detachment of Company B arrived back at Brisbane for rest leave.
05 Apr 1944	The 40 men from Company B at Port Moresby, New Guinea, set sail for Australia.
07 Apr 1944	The detachment of Company B arrived back in Brisbane for rest leave.
28 Apr 1944	The 55th NCB, consisting of 26 officers and 989 enlisted men, boarded several liberty ships and set sail from Brisbane, Australia, for a forward area of Dutch New Guinea.
31 May 1944	The battalion arrived at Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea.
08 Jun 1944	Companies A and B with part of Headquarters Company, consisting of 16 officers and 485 enlisted men, left Hollandia on LST's for Mios Woendi Island, near Biak in the Schouten Islands.

11 Jun 1944	Companies C and D with the remainder of Headquarters Company, consisting 11 officers and 500 enlisted men, left Hollandia on LST's for Mios Woendi.
12 Jun 1944	The battalion's first echelon arrived at Mios Woendi.
14 June 1944	The second echelon arrived at Mios Woendi.
Jun – Dec 1944	Most of the battalion remained at Mios Woendi, constructing operating and repair bases for PT boats, repair facilities for landing craft, a seaplane base, and a naval hospital.
25 Sept 1944	Company C, consisting of 3 officers and 175 enlisted men, departed from Mios Woendi.
27 Sept 1944	Company C arrived at Hollandia to assist construction battalions stationed there with projects.
30 Dec 1944	Company C left Hollandia.
31 Dec 1944	Company C arrived back at Mios Woendi and rejoined the battalion's main body.
01 Jan 1945	The 55th NCB, consisting of 22 officers and 794 enlisted men, boarded the Norwegian transport S.S. Torrens for return to the continental United States.
21 Jan 1945	The battalion arrived at the Construction Battalion Replacement Depot (Camp Parks), Pleasanton, California.
14 Apr 1945	The 55th Naval Construction Battalion was decommissioned at Camp Parks.

55
USNCB

MAIN GATE
8-25-43
U.S. NAVY
CAMP SEABEE
BATTALION
55