

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

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*Historical  
Information*



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



60th C.B.

60th C.B.

NCTC - Davisville  
ABD - Hueneme  
Ready Date - 18 Mar'43  
Left ABD - 25 Mar'43  
Location - Acorn-5 Finschafen Brisbane - BiakWoendi

LOG

LEFT ENDICOTT 11 FEB 42  
ARRV. PARKS 17 MAR 43  
LEFT PARKS 8 MAR 43 IN TO SHIP  
ARRV HUENEME 9 MAR 43 END WACHTS  
LEFT U.S. 25 MAR 43

- 2- 8-43 - Tentative assignment - Midway replacement.  
2-11-43 - Transferred Pleasonton FFT Hueneme - ?  
3- 8-43 - Arrived Honolulu from Camp Parks.  
3-26-43 - 60th CB embarked for Acorn 5.  
7-23-43 - Secret report 13 Jun'43 - PWO 7th fleet to Budocks states that 60th is at Acorn 5.  
5-11-43 - The 60th CB is located in Australia. (ComNavBasesSoPac area to ComSoPac Sec. ltr. dtd 5-11-43)  
8- 4-43 - 1 Jul'43 report of 60th CB - Batt left U.S. 25 Mar'43, Brisbane, Australia, 25 April'43, left 6 June for Townsville, Australia, present location Acorn 5.  
9-16-43 - 1 Aug'43 report of 60th CB - located at Woodlark, New Guinea.  
10-22-43 - 1 Sep'43 report of 60th CB - operating intact at Woodlark- the remainder of the batt having arrived from Townsville during August.  
12-16-43 - 1 Nov'43 report of 60th CB - to move to Diminish about 2 Nov., except one company to remain at Mantleshelf.  
12-22-43 - 60th CB divided into two units at widely separate locations - advance section at Diminish and rear section at Mantleshelf. (Sec. Pl6-5 - 5356 dtd 12-1-43)

60th C.B.

- 1-29-43 - Distribution of 60th CB - Co. A is at Woodlark, Co's B, C, D. at Finschafen. (Com7flt to Budocks dtd Nov'43)  
1-19-44 - 1 Dec'43 report of 60th CB - 19 officers and 658 men proceeded to Finschafen 2 Nov'43 leaving 7 officers and 309 men at Woodlark.  
2-18-44 - 1 Jan'44 report of 60th CB - Remainder of batt, consisting of 5 officers and 274 men, arrived from Woodlark.  
4- 3-44 - 1 Mar'44 report of 60th CB - CNAB, Finschafen detached the 60th CB from the 17th Reg. and appointed Comdr. Tate as PWO of the Naval Base. 2nd End. on subject report by Com7Flt states that 60th CB to be sent to Brisbane for recuperation sometime before 15 Apr'44.  
5- 9-44 - 1 Apr'44 report of 60th CB - operating at Finschafen. Endorsed by 24th Reg.  
6-16-44 - 1st Echelon of 19th Reg. consisting of 55th and 60th CB's detached to NAEU #2 (Comserfor7flt spdltr to Navy 134 Ser. 00639 of June'44)  
6-19-44 - 1 May'44 report of 60th CB - operating at Finschafen. Endorsed by 19th Reg.  
6-26-44 - 60th CB is located at Brisbane as of 31 May'44. (Comservfor7flt Sec. ltr A-9 over Ser BP 001407 to Dirpacdock dtd 8 Jun'44) Preparing to go to Biak Is.  
7-12-44 - 1 Jun'44 report of 60th CB - Left Finschafen 13 May'44 for Brisbane for rest.  
9- 4-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 60th CB - 60th CB returned from Brisbane to Finshhaven 17 Jun'44. The batt left Finshafen 26 Jun'44 and arrived at Biak 8 Jul'44.  
9-21-44 - 60th CB report for 1 Aug'44 - operating at NUDE. A detachment of 25 men are at TABLE TENNIS - this project at TABLE TENNIS to be completed about 10 Aug'44.  
9-30-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 60th CB 19th Reg. - 60th CB departed Brisbane for Advance Base 8 Jun'44. End. by Comserfor7flt recommends the return of the 60th to the U.S. for rest and rehabilitation. 100 general service Seamen were ordered to the 60th CB on 25 Jul'44.

60th C.B.

- 10-5-44 - 60th CB ordered detached from the 19th Reg. and to report to CNB Biak for duty. (Rest. Disp. 261003 NGR 39380 from Comserv7flt to CNB Biak and CNO Milne)
- 10-24-44 -- The 60th CB is located at Owi Is. A detachment of 25 men completed some work at Noemfoor Is. and returned to Owi Is. on 13 Aug'44. A detachment of 26 men left Owi Is. on 15 Aug'44 for Cape Sansapor. (Comserfor7flt monthly report for Aug'44 to Budocks Ser. BP001815 Secret dtd 12 Sep'44).
- 10-26-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 19th Reg. - Endorsement by Comservfor7flt recommends that the 60th CB be returned to the U.S. for rehabilitation, recutting and reassignment.
- 10-27-44 - 60th CB to be returned to U.S. in Nov'44. Men in less than 13 months will be transferred to other units. (CNO Sec. ltr Op302CK14-UOT over (SC)P16-5 over Ser. 01320530 over Doc. 138245 to Com7flt, Bupers, Budocks dtd 14 Oct'44)
- 10-30-44 - The 60th CB is located at Woendi. (Comserfor7flt Sec. disp. 130349 NGR 12037 to CNO dtd 25 Oct'44).
- 11- 8-44 - 60th CB located on Owi Is. A detachment of 26 men was at Amsterdam Is. off of Cape Sansapor. This detachment returned to Owi Is. 13 Sep'44. On 26 Sep'44 the 60th CB was detached from the 19th Reg. and assigned to CNB Biak. (Comserfor7flt Sec. ltr A9-4 over Ser BP-001882 to Budocks dtd 12 Oct'44 monthly report for Sep'44)
- 11-16-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 60th CB - During Aug'44, 80% of batt operated on Owi Island where it landed on 8 Jul'44. Subjected to 2 bombing attacks during Aug. Report endorsed by 19th Reg.
- 11-29-44 - 60th CB is located at Biak. (Comserv7flt Sec. Disp. to CNO 150133 NGR 18921 dtd 24 Nov'44)
- 2-14-44 -- Upon arrival of transportation the 60th CB hereby detached CNB Biak and ordered to report to Com 12 for further assignment to Camp Parks. (AdComServ7flt Sec. Adm to CNB Biak 110601 dtd 11 Dec'44).

60th CB

- 2-28-44 - The 60th CB - 3rd Brg. is located at Owi. This batt is assigned to CNB Biak and and is expected to return to the U.S. in Dec'44. (Comserfor7flt Sec. report for Oct'44 dtd 20 Nov'44).
- 1-1-45 - 1 Oct'44 report of 60th CB - located at Biak.
- 1-2-45 - 60th CB detached from Naval Base Biak and ordered to proceed to U.S. (CO NB Biak ltr NB/P16-4/00 over Ser 1219 dtd 16 Dec'44 to OinC 60th CB)
- 1-4-45 - When the 60th CB receives orders to return to the U.S. Lt. Davis is to assume duties as OinC of a C.B. Detachment to be known as Const. Batt. Det. NUDE. This detachment to be formed from the personnel not returning to the U.S. with the 60th CB. This detachment will be dissolved upon distribution of the personnel, supplies and equipment thereto. The primary duty of this detachment will be to take charge of supplies, material and equip. placed in its custody and prepare the same for issuance to CB's as directed by Comserfor7flt. (Comserfor7flt Sec. ltr P16-4 over Ser. 001253 to Lt. H.F. Davis, CEC dtd 2 Dec'44).
- 1-4-45 - CB(Sp) Det. TRIM and CBD NUDE will be assigned a number if to exist longer than 4 months. Number given by request from CNO. (CNO conf. ltr Op30-2CK14-rc over (SC)P16-5/QR9 over Doc. 146249 over Ser. 01435130 to Com7flt dtd 21 Dec'44).
- 1-5-45 - Lt. Davis detached from the 60th CB this date to assume command of CBD Biak instead of CBD NUDE - 3 officers (not including the OinC) and 181 men are attached to this unit. (60th CB Sec. 2nd End. to Comserfor ltr P16-4 Ser 001253 of 2 Dec'44 to Lt. Davis dtd 15 Dec'44)
- 1-12-45 - The 60th CB is no longer located at Biak. (Comserfor7flt Sec. disp to CNO 231053 dtd 5 Jan'45).
- 1-13-45 - CNO approves return of the 60th CB to U.S. in Dec'44. (Comserfor7flt Sec report for Nov'44 dtd 15 Dec'44)

60th CB

- 1-13-45 - The 60th CB arrived San Francisco 10 Jan'45. (Dirpac docks conf. disp to Bupers 112102 dtd 12 Jan'44).
- 1-20-45 - The 60th CB departed for the U.S. 17 Dec'44. (Cominopac&pos conf. ltr Ser. 0198 dtd 6 Jan'45).
- 1-26-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of the 60th CB - located at Biak during Nov'44.
- 1-26-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 60th CB - Tie detachment of 1 off. and 40 men which was constructing Army Air Force buildings at Leyte returned to the base on 5 Dec'44. All work was secured on 15 Dec'44 preparatory to batt's return to the U.S. Sailed on 18 Dec'44 and as of 1 Jan'45, was still on way to U.S. Construction Battalion Detachment, Biak, was formed consisting of 4 off. and 176 men of the batt who had been overseas less than 12 mos., plus 5 men in the hospital unable to travel with the battalion. All equipment, supplies and material on hand were transferred to this detachment and receipt obtained. The OinC of this unit will dispose of the equipment as further directed by the Comservfor7flt.
- 3-5-45 -- Parks directed to inactivate the 60th CB upon their return from rehabilitation leave. Personnel will be used to form new units and as replacements for Comservpac. (Bupers conf. ltr Pers-2122D-CEC/lm to Parks dtd 1 Mar'45).
- 3-31-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of the 113th CB - 75 men from the 60th CB to be trf'd to the 113th.
- 4-24-45 - 60th CB decommissioned 6 Apr'45. All men transferred to other activities. (Muster roll of the crew dtd 31 Mar'45)
- 5- 2-45 - The 60th CB inactivated on 11 Apr'45. (Parks TWX 012230 May'45 to Bupers)

INACTIVATED

*CB Detachment Biak*

C.B. Detachment - Biak

- 1-26-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 60th CB - Batt was secured on 15 Dec'44 preparatory to returning to U.S. In accordance with orders from Comserfor7flt, a detachment known as Construction Battalion Detachment, Biak, was formed consisting of 4 officers and 176 men of the 60th CB who had been overseas less than 12 mos., plus 5 men in the hospital unable to travel with the battalion. All equipment, supplies and material on hand were transferred to this detachment and receipt obtained. The OinC of this unit will dispose of the equipment as further directed by the Comservfor7flt.
- 2-27-45 -- Comserf7flt Conf. ltr Ser. 0320 to CNO dtd 3 Feb'45 - Construction Battalion Detachment NUDE is changed to "Construction Battalion Detachment". Mail will be addressed to this unit in c/o FPO Navy 3505. Due to the temporary nature of this unit it is not considered feasible to have a special number assigned for a short period.
- 5- 1-45 - Comserfor7flt Sec Rep of 1 Apr'45 shows the CB Detachment at Woendi ordered disbanded.
- 6-25-45 - In accordance with Comserfor7flt instructions contained in Par. 5 of Ref a (Comserfor7flt sec ltr ser 001253 to Lt Davis dtd 2 Dec'44) and request made by Ref b (OinC CED 3505 conf ltr ser 39-45 to Comserfor7flt dtd 11 May) CB Detachment Biak is hereby dissolved. It is directed that all records and files of CED be forwarded to OinC 3rd Brdg for disposition. (Comserfor7flt conf ltr ser 01390 dtd 6 June to OinC CB Det Biak)

INACTIVATED

ON BOARD

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>AUTHORITY</u>
1 Jan'45	4	182	R & BNP625
1 Feb'45		169	BNP625
1 Mar'45		95	BNP625
1 Apr'45		29	BNP625
1 May'45		28	BNP625
1 Jun'45	1	2	BNP625 & R

C.B. Detachment - NUDE (Not official - from 60th CB left at Biak) (INACTIVATED)

ON BOARD

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>AUTHORITY</u>
1 Jun'44	22		MoR
30 Jun'44	21	835	Recap.
1 Aug'44	22	845	MOR
1 Sep'44	23	927	MoR
30 Sep'44		917	Recap
1 Oct'44	26	918	MoR
1 Nov'44	26	903	MoR
1 Dec'44	22	923	MoR
31 Dec'44		728	Recap.
1 Feb'45		559	BNP625
1 Mar'45		563	BNP625
1 Apr'45		93	BNP625

60th Construction Battalion (INACTIVATED)

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
5/31/44	-	Funchafen	-	Left U.S. March 1943.
7/19	-	Riak	C.B. report 1 July.	
7/25	-	UROM (Funchafen)	ComSecW7th Jet sec act disp. 110844 July.	
9/8	-	NUDE (Riak 2d.)	ComSecW7th Jet sec act disp 090824 Aug.	added.
10/8/1	-		OP 30 sec. serial 01390530 Oct.	all notes 268 in W. C.B. app.
10/25	-	PIDA (Waendi N. Guinea)	ComSecW7th Jet sec act. disp. Oct 130349	change all nude activities to PIDA
11/25	-	NUDE	ComSecW7th Jet sec act disp. Nov 150133.	
12/13	-	(us)	Ad ComSecW7th Jet 110601 upon arrival upon delid bank between cano banks	and ship per ref to 268

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
1/9	-	(us)	ComSecW7th Jet sec act disp. dec. 231053.	Delete NUDE
1/13	-	San Fran	Pipe docks Com.	Arrived San Fran Jan 10.
1/17	-	Banks	C-B. memo 1/13.	Returned 2d 1/10 - Gen. ready date 4/15 - no assignment.
3/15	-	"	BuDocks memo 3/9.	Returned 2d 1/10. Being activated.

Aug report shown unacted

# GUADALCANAL

## *British Solomon Islands*

On December 1, 1942, a group of civilian craftsmen, from every walk of life, assembled at Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Virginia. These men came from every section of the country; however, such States as Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, Texas, and New York seemed to have the most representatives. Upon their arrival, the formation of the 61st U. S. Naval Construction Battalion began. A primary training schedule, in detention, was endured until January 3, 1943, and on that date, the Battalion was given its colors and the officers were formally given their respective commands. This primary training was a period of indoctrination during which the "boots" were familiarized with the ways of Seabee life and received inoculations for the prevention of various diseases.

Following the 30 days of "boot," an Advanced Training schedule was set up for the Battalion to follow. This training included such activities as extended order drills, close order drills, guard duty, manual of arms, military lectures, lectures on hygiene, work projects on the base, and the assignment of qualified men for the many specialist schools. During this period, several hundred men were transferred from our complement which, at that time was considered oversized. However, on January 9, 1943, 52 men were transferred from the 65th Battalion into ours.

Well-remembered incidents in our life in Camp Peary were such incidents as the cold weather, lack of clothing during the early weeks, the oceans of mud, the "shots," cutting fire wood, "Goldie's" extended order drills, Captain Ware's inspection, the week-end liberty to Richmond, the final dress parade, and the embarkation for Gulfport.

Our stay at Gulfport was brief. We arrived there the last day of February, the night of which the ill-famed "Battle of Leave Tickets" took place. The second of March was the scene of a mad scramble when 1,100 men tried to board a

single train to start a nine days "pre-embarkation" leave. Following this leave, the Battalion once again boarded the three trains "convoy" at Gulfport to go to Hueneme, California. This trip took us through the great American Southwest and, although it was allegedly "hush-hush" throughout, a flock of girls managed to meet the trains at some stops. We arrived in Hueneme at night during a drizzle and spent several hours hunting our seabags and getting set in our quarters.

Our stay in Hueneme, California, was filled with activities in preparation for our embarkation for overseas duties. We drilled regularly, attended lectures, acquired and checked equipment and supplies. Regular liberties were granted to the personnel who took advantage of them to go to Los Angeles, Hollywood, Ventura, Santa Monica, and numerous other places. The 61st saw movies, movie stars, stage shows, golf matches, and enjoyed all the facilities of the many vacation-land resorts whenever possible. However, these pleasures were interrupted by a slight incident that occurred on April 14, 1943. The 61st Seabees embarked to start a trip that was to take them overseas into unknown combat areas.

During our voyage overseas aboard the Dutch freighter-transport, the *M.S. Brastagi*, scuttlebutt and shipboard excitement reached new heights. On April 22, 1943, we crossed the equator and the whole Battalion was initiated into the Shellback organization of Neptunus Rex. This turned out to be a riotous affair as officers and men alike had their heads shaved and were forced to walk the plank. On April 26, after a continuous voyage in a southwesterly direction, we became members of the Golden Dragon upon crossing the 180th Meridian. We finally reached our first port, after weeks of voyage, which turned out to be Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides Islands. However, we didn't land there. We lay in that harbor for

approximately 11 days before making the final leg of our voyage. While in the New Hebrides, Commander Studdert announced that our destination was Guadalecanal. We arrived in Sealark Channel, off Guadalecanal, Solomon Islands, on May 15, 1943.

"Guadalecanal off the port bow!" That was the call that was heard on the morning of May, 1943. The tremors and thrills that passed through the men were beyond description. It was the first time overseas for most, and for all it was their first taste of war in unknown territories.

We dropped anchor at 1500 and by 1530 the camp construction men went ashore to locate and lay out two camp sites. The first at Teneru River and the second at Koli Point. These two camps were approximately 12 miles apart. The next morning, the rest of the Battalion went ashore. Palm-studded coast lines and, further inland, groves of palms stood at attention in close order.

While unloading crews struggled to get all our supplies and equipment ashore, the crews ashore threw up pup tents as temporary quarters until the camps could be built. The first considerations were given to the construction of foxholes and, within a matter of hours, pits, pot-holes, slit trenches, ditches, and covered caverns were ready. During this early period of camp erection, the men at Teneru were furnished chow at the 16th Seabees' Camp and those at Koli by the 14th Seabees Camp. The Teneru Camp, across Alligator Creek (misnamed the Ilu River) from Fighter Strip No. 1 and less than a mile from the famed Henderson Field, was the first to be cleared and completely erected. While the Teneru Camp had been comparatively easy to clear, being in a coconut grove, the Koli Camp had to be hacked out of the jungle of heavy tropical underbrush and hardwood trees.

Although there had been several air raid alerts during the first few days on Guadalecanal, the



61st Seabees Teneru Camp, Guadalecanal, B.S.I., as seen from the main road leading towards Fighter No. 1 Airfield



Entrance to the 61st Camp, Koli Point, Guadalcanal, B.S.I.

61st saw their first Japanese planes shot down during the night of May 19. Two Jap bombers were picked up by Marine searchlights and then shot down by "night fighters." Their downfall seemed symbolic of our faith in the right. They were implements of the Rising Sun but, as they fell, they became flaming crosses, an emblem of our faith.

On May 24th the 61st men at Teneru Camp ate their first meal in their own chow hall. The next day project work began in earnest as survey parties were sent out to make a topograph of Henderson Field, and Commander Studdert conferred with Marine Aviation Engineers concerning the construction of a bomber field at Koli Point. Upon this same day 61st began using fresh water from their own wells. Our water wells sunk at our two camps were the first developed on Guadalcanal. All other water on the island, used by other units, had been drawn from nearby rivers infested with fungus growths.

By the middle of June, the 61st Battalion, from the standpoint of sanitation, location, and management, had the best camps on the island. Although, heavy rains plagued most of the crews,

record-breaking progress was maintained on all jobs. During the same period, the Battalion had its first pay day since they left the States.

Although continuous rains made travel impractical, many of the men spent their spare time making sight-seeing trips into the interior and up and down the coasts. They explored native villages and learned startling facts about the Solomon Islanders, of whom there are less than 100,000 in the whole island chain. The vocation of these natives seems to be agriculture and the construction of boat craft. The chief exports were ivory nuts and copra. Like most native populations that are to be found throughout the Pacific, the absence of meat, other than fish, didn't seem to endanger their physical powers. The abundance of fruit, along with the cultivation of sweet potatoes, corn, and other vegetables, insured them of a well-balanced diet. The one exception to this, was the habit of chewing Betel nut, that caused the evident rapid decay of their teeth. Up to the present generation, the Melanesians were head hunters. However, this was inter-tribal and the occasion was rare whenever the head of a white man was acquired. Usually

one tribe inhabited a complete island, and in order to get the heads of other tribes, they had to make invasions by sea. Thus, the Solomon Islanders naturally became excellent boat builders and were able to cover incredible distances in these small crafts. Many of the 61st Seabees visited various native villages to view their houses and boats, both of which were gaudily decorated with tribal designs and were extraordinarily sturdy. More than one 61st Seabee were amazed at the fact that these natives were so friendly and Christianized. However, the education of these people was still in primary stage, although a few could read expertly from the Bible.



Teneru River, site of gravel pit, Guadalcanal

The 61st men bargained frequently with the Melanesian natives, whom they found to be reserved and primitive. Most native men usually had one wife, who was more or less an addition to him, a necessary part of his social life. In many instances the wife was bought with so many pigs or other usable property. She was the beast of burden and did all the work of the household. An example of this was best illustrated in travel. The wife carried all loads on her back, secured by a head strap. Even though her tired legs would tremble under the strain, she plodded on while her husband walked alongside without a thought of assisting her. Although marriage

was sacred, no sentiment was ever exhibited between husband and wife. Seabees discovered that most natives married when young. Single girls wore the only hair of the tribe. Married women, like all men, had cropped hair. All native costumes, male or female, consisted solely of a "G" string. Contrary to their appearance of filth, all natives bathed daily. At night they threw dirt over their bodies to ward off insects.

To the dismay of most Seabees, these natives proved to be more shrewd in their bargaining than they themselves. Despite this, a multitude of Yankee gadgets and food were exchanged for native war clubs, miniature boats and statues, ornamented wooden combs, ivory nut rings, and mother of pearl. Several Seabees witnessed native song fests and dances and even religious services read by a native, from the Bible. In this connection, Chief McDouglass preached a sermon to them on one occasion and in return a native gave a sermon to the 61st men in pidgin English.



Alligator Creek, misnamed the Ilu River, as seen from the 61st Teneru Camp

Among the points of interest, visited by the sight-seeing Seabees were the battle sights of Bloody Knoll, Matanakau River, Kokumbona, and lower Henderson Field. Kokumbona Beach was littered with smashed Jap barges and beached Japanese freighters. Many of the men salvaged parts and souvenirs from these hulks. Matanakau River, sight of one of the bloodiest battles on Guadalcanal, was littered with discarded Jap equipment and its banks strewn with personal belongings and bones of Japanese dead. Bloody Knoll, like the Kokumbona area, was also littered with Japanese equipment. However, the trees atop Bloody Knoll, that weren't blown down, were all bullet-scarred and ribbed from artillery fire. The 61st Seabees collected many souvenirs from these areas but always exercised extreme caution due to the possibilities of undiscovered land mines and booby traps.

One of the constant sources of amazement, scenic beauty, and irritation were the numerous

streams and rivers that flowed down from cloud-cloaked mountains, of great heights, across the flat, muddy plains and forest lands of the northern coast of Guadalcanal. Frequent heavy rains in the mountains caused the rivers to overflow their banks on numerous occasions and wash out bridges. Thus, Seabees were forced to rebuild many of the bridges to maintain communications on the island. No matter how cool, clean, and inviting these streams appeared, bathing and swimming were not practical. All fresh water streams contained fungus growths, leeches, and crocodiles. Most of the bathing and swimming was done on the seacoast. Several 61sters constructed boats in which they fished and traveled up and down the coast. All the beaches of Guadalcanal were of black volcanic sand.

The mountain ranges of Guadalcanal were visible from both camps, the peaks of which were hidden by low hanging tropical rain clouds. Very few 61st Seabees were able to penetrate into the

heart of the range. Nine of the peaks were over 7,000 feet high, the highest being Mt. Popomansui of 8,005 feet, with Mt. Yellow Scar being close second at 7,552 feet. New Zealand's forces, camped along a trail in the heart of those mountains, informed us that it rained every day of the year in these mountains, and in many of these areas, the jungle thicket was impenetrable.

As the air raids continued regularly, the Battalion became inured to this particular danger. However, this complacency was shattered on June 16, 1943, at 1345, at which time the Japanese air force made the largest air raid of the war on Guadalcanal. One hundred and twenty-five Jap airplanes struck at the American airfields, shipping, and dumps of the island. First figures, issued by the intelligence, indicated that 74 Japanese planes had been shot down during the attack. This figure, at later date, was revised upwards to 113 planes. Our losses of six planes, one LST,

and two barges was considered negligible. Throughout this attack, the men of our Battalion were secured in their foxholes. Although none of our men were injured by Japanese action, several foxhole casualties were occasioned, one of which was best illustrated by our commanding officer. It took Commander Studdert a whole week to lose that "shiner." More common casualties among the men, were acquired by such actions as head-on collisions at entrances of foxholes, and track meets over rough ground. Following this raid, during which two U. S. vessels sustained damage to their side plates, 61st welding units and operators repaired ship damage in record time.

On June 30, news was flashed that Marine Raiders landed on New Georgia Island and, as if in commemoration of the event, the erection and operation of all administration buildings of the 61st was completed.

Japanese ship beached during Guadalcanal Campaign





### Lunga Estate plan of coconut plantings on the north coast of Guadalcanal

On July 10, George Miller Hunter, S1c, of Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts, died of malaria. He was the first 61st man to lose his life. He was buried, with full honors, in the Guadalcanal Cemetery. A firing squad, composed of his friends, fired three volleys over his grave. On July 20, a Japanese attack on Henderson Field damaged several Quonset huts built by the 61st. Although Japanese air attacks continued, the size of these attacks diminished.

Throughout our tour of duty on Guadalcanal, work projects were accomplished in record time. However, all efforts were made to ease the hardships of overseas life. Tent decks were installed in living quarters, showers were built, recreational facilities such as a library, a movie area, and a sports field was built. The men soon became ardent movie-goers. At times, air raids forced some pictures to such an extent that, in some cases, it took three nights to see a complete single picture. When attending these shows and an air raid warning was sounded, the men usually had minutes in which to seek cover. Nevertheless, surprise attacks caught them flat-seated. The harum-scarum confusion that usually occurred,

though sometimes painful, were hilarious affairs of overland races and scenes of lightning excavations.

Monday morning, December 20, 1943, a physical muster of the entire crew was called at 6:45, and the Battalion was assembled at the theater to hear Commander W. W. Studdert read his orders relieving him of duty with the 61st Battalion and assuming the duty of officer-in-charge of the 18th USNC Regiment. Following this, Lt. Harold Koopman read his orders to take over the duty of officer-in-charge of the 61st.

On December 24, a group of Seabees made a trek inland to obtain an Australian Pine for use as a Christmas tree to be placed in front of the Battalion Chapel. The afternoon of the same day painters, carpenters, plumbers, and electricians put their heads together on the problem of decorations. Ornaments consisted of ivory nuts, medicine bottles, beer bottles, and pine cones dipped in paint of different colors. Tinted light bulbs were placed strategically in the tree that was placed in a special stand built by the carpenters.

Christmas Day, 1943, was our first overseas and second in the service. Our thoughts were of home naturally, but our spirits were high.

Church services were held for all men and a special Christmas dinner of turkey and all the trimmings was the order of the day. The complement of the Battalion at the time was 898 men.

The latter months of 1943 saw the creation of the Battalion's first publication. This was the Battalion newspaper, the first issue of which appeared on the 13th of November. Commander Studdert felt that the speed with which the men completed projects should be noted. Therefore the title of *The Workers Wallop* was the new masthead. This paper contained stories and drawings of things current in the lives of the 61st Seabees.

On January 15, 1944, considerable damage was done to our pontoon yard and floating docks by rough seas and a storm. Upon the same day a coconut palm tree fell upon one of the tents on Sixth Street in our camp. But to top all this, the entire Battalion was given typhoid and Tetanus booster shots. However, the pain of this was

eased by a posted bulletin that notified all personnel of the 61st to expect a trip to Auckland, New Zealand.

On January 19, considerable excitement was caused in our camp by the appearance of an American nurse attending our movies. She was the first white woman the Seabees had seen on Guadalcanal.

Floods washed out several bridges over the Metapona, the Malimbu, and the Mantanakau rivers, thus tying up both men and heavy equipment. Bridge crews worked night and day to restore highway communications.

On June 30, Commander Bradford M. Bowker arrived from the United States of America to assume command of the 61st. He was the former commander of the 124th Construction Battalion at Gulfport, Mississippi. Shortly thereafter a battalion inspection was held, followed by close order drill and bag inspection.

On February 5, Vice Admiral Ben Moreel,

Bullet-riddled palm trees on the Kukum battle site, Guadalcanal





Lunga Lagoon, near NOB, Guadalcanal

Chief of the Seabees; Rear Admiral Cotter and Commodore Quigley, visited our Battalion. A banquet was held for them, after which time plans were discussed for future movement of the 61st. A few days later Commander Bowker addressed all CPOs concerning plans for our coming trip to New Zealand. This speech was supplemented on February 14 by Lieut. Maynard, of the New Zealand forces, who addressed the battalion at our theater. He gave a history of his country and answered all questions, put to him by the men, concerning customs, amusements, and places to go and things to do.

Prior to going to New Zealand, the men indulged in pig hunting. The results of these hunts afforded many pleasant barbecues. Young pigs were butchered, scalded, and scraped and hung in the galley refrigerator. Barbecued hams, sliced from the exhumed carcasses, from these colder regions, were the source of many after-hour

feasts. Among other after-hour activities were the meetings of such clubs known as the Pizzie Winkums, the Con-Fed-For-Sou-Pac's, and the "190" Club. Membership in these particular organizations assured extra-curricular bull sessions and occasional snorts.

One of the most common, but ever amusing, sights that occurred every evening on Guadalcanal was the modes of transportation used to go to a movie. It was not unusual to see twenty aboard one jeep, the driver of which always thought he was on the Indianapolis track. Manipulating curves at high speeds always forced to a halt several hundred yards beyond, while the dismounted picked themselves up off the road and remounted.

In civilian life, an assortment of pets usually consisted of domestic animals. Such being the case, the 61st Seabees brought a mascot overseas from the States. Our official mascot was

named Mr. Confused Bee, a Boston Bull Terrier. A Californian by birth, Mr. Confused Bee was released by the Womens Voluntary Service, at Santa Barbara, and sent to Hueneme to be inducted into the 61st Seabees. Upon his arrival there, the doctors put him through a tough physical and gave him shots for rabies. He was sworn in by Commander Studdert and then sent to the clothes issue room where the ship's tailor gave him a blue jacket with the 61st insignia on it. Unlike his mates in the 61st, who left their love life behind, Mr. Confused Bee put on the dog with a ship board romance and, by the time Guadalcanal was reached, he was the proud father of eight sea-going pups. While on Guadalcanal he was wounded in action against a 23-inch lizard and, in time received an advance in rating. However, he was broken to an apprentice seaman when caught in an illicit love affair with a 'possum. Mr. Confused Bee was an integral part of

the everyday life of the 61sters. It was a sad day for all when he was pronounced missing in action. Since that time we have had no official mascot in the Battalion. Although a collection of pets, such as parrots, cockatoos, pigs, lizards, and stray dogs, graced the various canvas caves of "enlisted men's country."

Speaking of animal life, our greatest problem and nuisance were rats, some of whom grew to tremendous sizes. These rats were extremely bold and would steal food from under your nose. Several Seabees complained that they ran across them while they were asleep. One humorous incident evolved from the rodent family was when several men of the sanitation crew discovered a nest of baby rats, one of the men gathered them up and struck them under a blanket in a mate's sack and tucked the mosquito netting firmly around the cot. This mate, upon returning from late work shift, benignly hit the sack and after

Japanese ship beached during Guadalcanal campaign





Overlooking SClark Channel from atop Bloody Knoll, Guadalcanal, towards Florida Island

reclining for perhaps an hour, he was awakened by the nausea of having that furry crawlly feeling. Reaching down beneath the blanket, he felt a series of live furry objects, and with a scream that would curl the enamel from false teeth, he bounded out of the tent but forgot to lift up the mosquito net in doing so. The contortions he evoked did credit to a burlesque show's finest performance of "The Dance of the Seven Veils."

Despite the pressing urgency of work projects and the time consumed by them, the majority of 61st Seabees found time to be amazed by the multitude of the species of plant and forest life. We had heard of many of the hardwoods, but it was the first time we saw such trees growing as ebony, teak, mahogany, and tropical red wood. Other varieties of tropical trees that interested the Seabees were the Lineana and the ivory nut trees. These particular trees grew fruit that could be made into souvenirs. There were also

various flowering trees, the blossoms of which were every color of the spectrum. Then too, there were innumerable flowering bushes. To the surprise of the Florida men, one of these flowering bushes turned out to be the well-known red Hibiscus.

Very little fresh water fishing was done on Guadalcanal. Nevertheless, salt water fishing was in great evidence. The men rigged up their own tackle, in most cases, and in many instances dynamite was used to obtain catches. In this connection, one of these men, Patrick McGouirk, lost his life. McGouirk, like Bordley, was buried in the Guadalcanal cemetery with full honors.

Not satisfied with the scenery of Guadalcanal alone, not a few of the 61st Seabees took sightseeing trips to nearby islands of Savo, Tulagi, Gavuitu, Florida, Santa Ysabel, and Malaita aboard the various barge ferries. These trips

afforded new fields for the souvenir hunters. canal all the above-named islands were visible to the naked eye.

During the last months of our stay on Guadalcanal, more than a dozen of our men transferred into the 18th Regiment to work with Commander Studdert. During the same period several 61st construction crews erected quarters and offices of the Regiment.

The personnel of the Battalion gradually diminished, due to surveys, transfers, and men receiving commissions going Stateside for officers training. Continuous hard work, plus bad weather and air raid alerts, found the men rather tired and physically run down. Nevertheless, they never faltered in any task, and the word "shirking" was not in the Seabee vocabulary. The 61st Battalion got its first fame on Guadalcanal and laid a great foundation of a series of

accomplishments to be known as the "famous firsts of the 61st." A few noteworthy "firsts" were: they sunk the first fresh water wells on Guadalcanal; they served the first ice cream on a regular chow menu; made some of the first surveys of some of the sections of Guadalcanal; they maintained the first camp to have tent decking in the enlisted men's country; and had the first Solomon Island Championship Baseball Club. At one time, the 61st Battalion had more projects in operation simultaneously than was believed possible for any engineering outfit to maintain. Regardless of this overwhelming burden of work, the Battalion established an enviable speed record in the construction of the Koli Point Bomber Field. Upon one occasion, in order to maintain our speed record, we enlisted the services of native Solomon Islanders to help us lay matting on the air field.

*Wrecked Japanese barges at Kokumbona Beach, Guadalcanal*



# MALAITA

## *British Solomon Islands*

Our tour of duty on Guadalcanal was noteworthy in many respects, but the story would not be complete without a commentary on the detachment that was dispatched to nearby Malaita Island to construct roads and a radar station for the Royal New Zealand Air Force. This detachment was sent to Malaita on July 28 and was under the command of Lieut. Maier. They landed from their vessel in a lagoon on the southwestern part of Malaita. Unlike the Canal, Malaita had

no broad coastal plains. The mountains there, though rugged, were not as big or precipitous as those of Guadalcanal. Low hanging clouds constantly shrouded even the lowest hills and gave the general appearance of fog. Men of this detachment reported that very few clear days were experienced. While constructing buildings and station roads, the 61stters were protected by the New Zealand Army forces from attack on the island. Several men stated that there were

*Native canoes near the 61st Seabees' landing site, Malaita, B.S.I.*





Canoeing off the jungle-infested coast of Malaita

Jap patrols in some of the nearby valleys. Upon completion of these projects the men returned to Guadalcanal and were cited for their work by the New Zealand Army officials.

On February 14, 1944, all Guadalcanal projects were secured and all equipment was brought into the 61st transportation yard to be serviced and parked for storage as the Battalion prepared for their forthcoming holiday in New Zealand. All supplies were inventoried, and the men were given time to check over their personal gear prior to boarding the ship. The resultant confusion that usually reigns in the expectancy of a pleasant but entertaining interlude was a sight, with newly washed dress blues and stacks of trading articles for romantic purposes, all mixed together.

On the 18th of February, 1944, 1,000 men and officers, several thousand sea bags and foot lockers and untold thousands of cartons of cigarettes boarded the *U.S.S. Pinkney* bound for New Zealand. Early the next morning, the bulging craft lifted her hook and sailed, flaunting her prow southward.

The voyage aboard the *U.S.S. Pinkney*, for the main part, was uneventful. The ship, although speedy, rolled and tossed like an unsaddled nightmare. Many of the men leaned over the rail and disillusioned the entrepreneurs of shark-fin soup.

On February 23, the *U.S.S. Pinkney*, with a thousand wolves aboard, arrived in an Auckland harbor, New Zealand. It took a better part of two hours for the ship to traverse the length of the harbor to the lower Queenstreet docks.

# NEW ZEALAND

Auckland! This was the end of our journey of anticipation! As our ship docked on that 23rd day of February of 1944, the 61sters grabbed their gear and disembarked. They then were loaded upon trucks, driven by CBMUs, across Auckland, to Waikaraka Park, in the Onehunga section of the city. While en route to Waikaraka, interesting feminine topography was in great evidence, and the covered trucks soon became uncovered. The whistles emitted therefrom would have put the shipping in New York harbor to shame. Enough wind was expended, in ap-

preciative remarks, to cool the blushes of a whole feminine rose garden. Upon arrival at Waikaraka, the men donned their dress blues and stowed their gear in record time. The first night saw most of the Battalion take liberty prior to leave. On February 24 the majority of the men started their leave. A system of leave had been set up by the Battalion that one company was to maintain the Waikaraka Camp each week of our stay in New Zealand. All other weeks were free for leave.

The city of Auckland, in many respects, was

Aerial view of downtown Auckland, New Zealand





Downtown Queen Street, Auckland, N. Z., looking towards the Harbor Ferry

modern as an American city. However, customs, communication systems, and domestic fixtures were twenty years behind ours. This city, 197,000, was inured to the sight of American service men. Yet, its citizens extended unrestrained hospitality at all times. Some of the sights that seemed rather odd to the 61st Seabees were: all traffic drove on the left hand side, pedestrians walked to the left, choicest and highest priced theater seats were always in the balcony, the popularity of the American movies, the amount of handsome people and the complete civilization of the Maori people. The names of stores and items were always a source of confusion to the Seabees. Examples of these were: "tobacconist" for a combination cigar store and

barber shop, "wireless shop" for a radio store, "cream bar" for a soda fountain, "tinkers" sheet metal shop and hardwood stores, "stationers" for office supply stores, "tyre shop" for filling stations and an "accessory inn" for gift shops, trams for street cars, "tourist cars" for buses, "apparel shops" for department stores, "bush lands" for forests and "tea" as the name for all meals.

The great majority of the 61st Seabees, after receiving their leave papers, did not remain in the vicinity of Auckland. They bought tickets to cities and towns heretofore unknown. They wanted to see the whole of New Zealand. Such cities and towns as Whangarei, Hamilton, Te Awamutu, Roto Rua, Waihi, Tauranga, Taupo, Gisborne, Wanganui, New Plymouth, Palmerston

North, Dannevirke, Napier, Masterton, Wellington, Nelson, Blenheim, Christ Church, Gray-mouth, Lyttletown, Timaru, Oamaru, Dunedin, and Invercargill were visited. The odd circumstances the men encountered in their travels were, riding narrow gauge railroads, all conveyances stopping for tea, and low fares.

The New Zealand people, both Caucasian and Maori, greeted the Seabees with "open arms" hospitality everywhere they went. The scenic beauty of New Zealand was so grand and awe-inspiring that it didn't seem real. Snow-capped mountains, glaciers, sheep stations, gold mines, giant fisheries, horse ranches, dairy farms, great forests, and crystal clear streams were to be

found in every section. New Zealand has been called the land of ferns, some of which grow to heights of thirty feet. Another unusual growth is the Kaori Gum tree. The gum from this tree is of crystal clear amber color and its texture resembles resin.

There were many Seabees who spent a few days of companionship with the Maoris of New Zealand, and it is only fitting that we give a brief history and description of them here.

The present stories that are being told of the ancient doings of these friendly people have their subject-source from the word of mouth system passed on from generation to generation. However, the stories of their amazing canoe voyages

*The Main Harbor, as seen from the top of Mt. Eden, Auckland, N. Z.*





The foot of Queen Street, Auckland, N. Z., as seen from the Ferry Building; Government Post Office second building on the left

to New Zealand has been substantiated. The actual names of the early Maoris and of their craft, in which they set out from far-off Hawaii, are matters of ancient world history. When those first crews cast their gazes hungrily at the loom of Ao-Te-Roa, the Pohutukawa-clothed shores of the new land seemed to beckon them with a promise of sunshine and plenty. The name Ao-Te-Roa, simply means, "the long daylight." Some accounts say that it was Kupe's wife who first sighted New Zealand and gave it its new name. Kupe, who came from Ra'iataea, in Tahiti, in 950, is credited as being the first Maori in New Zealand. According to tradition though, the main Maori migration didn't begin until two centuries later. Be this as it may, the fact still

remains that the Maori safely made these voyages, arriving with sufficient vigor to overpower the inhabitants and take advantage of the abundant forest and prolific fishing grounds. There were two pre-Maori races in New Zealand ere the advent of the Maoris. The Maorioris, of Polynesian stock, and Mouriuri who were believed to have been Melanesian. Both of these races are now extinct, but the Maori race is increasing.

Before the arrival of Capt. Cook, in 1760, it was believed that any crews that were so unfortunate as to set foot on New Zealand soil were slain. In these earlier days, the various "Pas" and tribes of Maoris were constantly at war with one another. Although they were accredited with being extremely blood thirsty, these warriors were

known to have been exceptionally good sports and believed in fair play.

The Maori people of today are well educated and a very dignified people. They have fair skin and a proud bearing. The majority of Maori women are beautiful and take great pride and delight in wearing the latest fashions in clothes from the United States. They are ardent movie fans and swing record collectors. Dancing and singing are their main recreations, as the Seabees soon found out. The Maoris have assumed their rightful place of importance in the affairs of government and social life in New Zealand.

On March 13, 1944, via wireless broadcasts throughout New Zealand, the 61st Seabees had their leaves cut short and were called into camp.

That night a farewell dance was given at the Auckland Town Hall. This dance was a closed formal affair. The hall was decorated with balloons, flags of all nations, and potted plants. Hanging from the balcony, at the end of the dance floor, was a large "thank you" sign which read, "To our friends and hosts of New Zealand, we, the members of the 61st, thank you for your kind and unstinted hospitality." During the dance a floorshow was given and all music was furnished by a swing band from the United States Navy Base. This affair ended at 0100, March 14.

The late morning of March 14, 1944, the 61st Battalion left the Waikaraka Camp in Onehunga and boarded the U.S.S. *Pinkney* for a return trip to the Solomon Islands.

View of the outer harbor, Auckland, N. Z., as seen from Mt. Eden

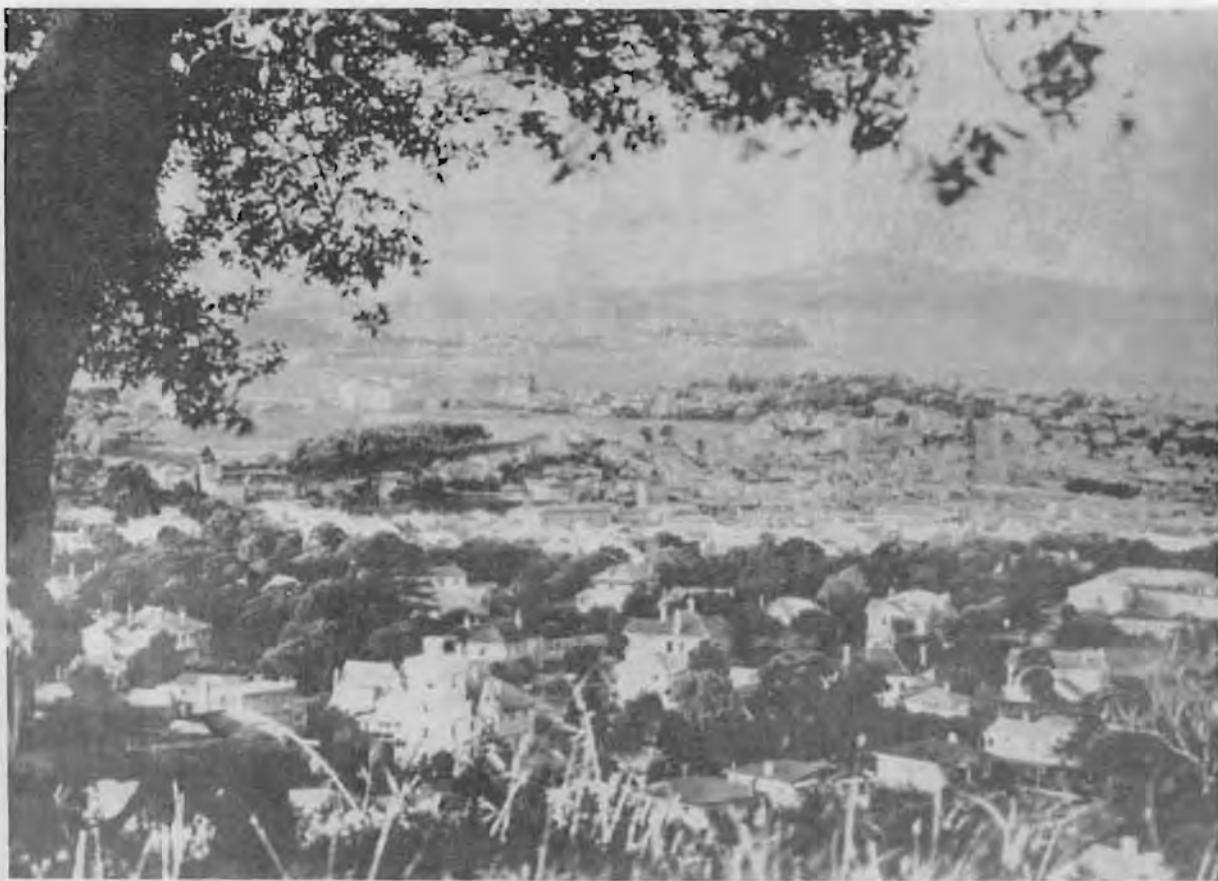


# NEW CALEDONIA

March 15, 1944, we left Auckland harbor bound north, and after several days of uneventful voyaging, other than rough water, we sighted a huge mountainous island, the shores of which were protected by forbidding coral reefs. At first, we didn't know where we were. However, we sighted coastal freighters flying the French flag and thereupon knew it to be New Caledonia. Following this, we threaded through a myriad of under-sea reefy catacombs to enter a harbor of emerald

water. As we dropped anchor, to our starboard, we could see the ill-famed Ile Nou, former prison island, and to the port we could see the city of Noumea, capital of New Caledonia. We also noticed several smelters smoking in the distance and were informed that they were producing nickel. Our stay at New Caledonia was for a brief twenty-four hours, after which we made an uneventful trip back to Guadalcanal, where we re-occupied our old quarters—temporarily.

*View of town and harbor at Noumea, New Caledonia; Ile Nou, former prison island in the distance.*



# EMIRAU

## *St. Mathais Group, Bismark Archipelago*

On March 25, after several days of feverish preparation, the Battalion boarded two LCI's and three LST's with the exception of fifty men in the rear echelon, who were left behind to transport additional crated equipment. Once aboard these craft, we understood why our New Zealand leave was cut short. We were told that we were to invade Emirau Island, St. Matthias group, in the Bismarck Archipelago.

En route to Emirau, during a five-day trip, we passed such islands as Savo, Tetivari, Rendova, Kolombangara, Ganongga, Vella Lavella, Treasury Islands, Bougainville, Buka, Green Islands, Tanga, New Ireland, New Hanover, and finally Emirau. On the third additional LST's and LCI's joined our convoy at Green Islands. The majority of the 61st Seabees agreed that this voyage was the most pleasant that they had experienced

Looking west along the 61st Camp beach, Emirau Island, St. Mathias Group, Bismarck Archipelago, in the Bismarck Sea





*Looking east on the same beach (Emirau Island)*

to date. Shipboard chow and topside siestas were really enjoyed. However, the dark hours before dawn, on March 30, caused some apprehension—H-Hour usually does.

During the first daylight hours of March 30, the 61st and other Seabee Battalions landed and started unloading their gear and moving it inland. The Marines landed there before us. Camp construction crews, preceded by bulldozers that cut paths through the tropical underbrush, left Black Beach bound for a beach area on a point of land three miles away. Upon arrival there, tents and other temporary installations were immediately erected. By night fall, the situation was well in

hand, and the men set out to explore their new home. Emirau Island was the nearest thing to a tropical paradise pictured by the Hollywood "Fakers." The beaches at our camp site were broad and of white sand. The water was clear and warm. The landscape was picturesque with its unusual trees, and the obvious lack of mud. The men soon took advantage of the natural facilities and bathed along the beaches.

The first week on Emirau was consumed in the establishment of permanent camp facilities and living quarters, as well as the construction of roads. For the first time our primary construction projects were not hampered by foul weather.

The 61st Battalion started its major project, the Baker airstrip, on Wednesday, April 5, 1944. Engineers, heavy equipment operators, and shovel men reported the island ideal for an airstrip. The natural coral was in evidence everywhere and eased the problem of foundations and surfacing for air strips and roads. Round the clock work shifts were set up and climatic conditions allowed adequate rest.

By the middle of April, all our camp facilities were functioning. During the same period, the Army arrived and the Marines departed. By the end of the month, the 61st took advantage of the great quantities of hardwood timber and set up

sawmill operations. The sizes of these hardwood trees were immense and some reached the height of 150 feet. The lumbermen, upon many occasions, had great difficulty hacking their way through the dense tropical underbrush to snake out desired logs. Typical of all South Pacific Islands, Emirau Island had its usual quota of coconut groves for the insatiable copra and soap industries.

The 61st were no exception to typical Seabee ingenuity. They knew there were unlimited amounts of seafood for the taking in the waters around Emirau. Thus it was that a great unofficial fishing industry arose in our Battalion.

*Infra-red photo of Cape Tietjens as seen from the Emirau Airstrip*





Landing site and dispersal point of the 61st Seabees, Emirau Island

With the acquisition of native outriggers and the construction of home-made craft of questionable class, fishing parties carried home-made tackle, spears, harpoons, and dynamite out to sea. As the innumerable fish fries that could be seen throughout the camp every night will attest the catches were prolific. There were so many varieties of fish caught that the appellations of them taxed the knowledge of the few veteran fishermen of tropical waters that were in the Battalion. The appearance of some of these fish defied the eating, even though they were assured that they were edible. One hardened old salt remarked that there had been so many dynamite blasts set off along the shores that a cross-section view of

Emirau Island would resemble a toad stool. Upon one occasion, 1,300 fish were brought in a single catch. Some of the fish caught were octopus, Giant Rays, Amber Jacks, Grouper, Angel fish, Sculpin, Zebra fish, Jew fish, Mullet, Sea perch, Barracuda, puff fish and the Blue runners.

While on Emirau, the cooks and bakers instituted a system by which the enlisted men of the 61st Battalion were honored on their birthdays. The last Sunday of each month was set aside as the particular luncheon day for all men having birthdays in that month; besides the special feast, each man received an official Battalion birthday card signed by the officer in charge. The variety of delicacies that were placed before the men

seemed unbelievable after the GI menu day after day. There were long tables, covered with white cloths, with all the food arranged artistically on trays and placed symmetrically down its length. The banqueteers each month were addressed by the officer in charge, who wished them happy birthdays. A typical example of one of the menus read like this: roast chicken, brown gravy, mashed potatoes, buttered June peas, buttered yam jewels, bread, peach jam, creamery butter, chocolate ice cream, silver layer cake, mint dainties, coffee and lemonade.

For the first time, the 61sters took advantage of the Armed Forces Institute Educational

courses. One hundred and forty men enrolled in these correspondence courses which covered seventy subjects. The cost of them was negligible, and it was possible for the men to earn credits toward diplomas and degrees through this medium.

On June 22, 1944, the rear echelon of fifty-one arrived at Emirau, from Guadalcanal. These men brought all the material we left behind. The addition of these men eased the pressure upon the working complement. During this same month rain fell heavily but did not hamper the work schedules as all the roads had been built and the stripping of forestland for the air fields had been

Native hut at Blue Beach, Emirau Island





*Looking across a lagoon at an Emirau native village, near Blue Beach*

completed. The rain packed the exposed coral surface into a smooth cement-like surface. Working incessantly in all types of weather, the crew of Seabees were enthusiastic in their jobs, as they felt that the work accomplished on Emirau as the ultimate example for all engineering forces to follow. In spite of occasional difficulties that sometimes seemed insurmountable, the 61sters were not discouraged but felt that they were adding new teeth to the cog that would turn the wheels of victory. Not only our officers, but the air force men, felt a pride in the work that was being done here. We had established a precedent on Guadalcanal, by accomplishing construction

tasks that were then believed impossible, and here on Emirau, we were bettering this previous record and were gaining the name of being airfield construction wizards. These jobs, so vital to the life of Advanced Bases, employed equipment operators, dynamite men, mechanics, truck drivers, electricians, carpenters, engineers, fuel and grease men, tire crews, and manual laborers.

As we neared an end to our current tasks of this Advanced Base, various high naval officials visited the island and all were lavish in their praise. This accumulation of high approval led to the awarding of the Bronze Medal to the 18th Regimental Commander which was a commenda-

tion to construction battalions thereunder, of which the 61st Battalion was one. The day of the award, all units involved were represented by one or more companies of men who paraded by the reviewing stand that had been erected on an airfield hardstand near the "Charlie" strip. The ceremony was carried out in the highest military tradition with only a "slight rain" to mar its perfection.

Sixty-first Seabees, not actually working on the airstrip, were engaged in various necessary projects over the island, such as dock construction for PT Base and general drainage. In passing, we would like to note that our water purification

men sank several wells in camp that served for drinking water as well as for showers. This water was the clearest and purest that we had encountered in the Pacific. It was so cool that many of the men, in jest, complained that they would have enjoyed taking shower baths if it weren't for having to scale off icy films and icicles from their bodies.

In the early part of July, Admiral Halsey, Commander of the United States Third Fleet, of whom we were a part, arrived, escorted by Mitchel Bombers. He addressed all the Seabees on the island in an informal gathering. 61sters appeared at the gathering in all manner of attire,

Main street of a native village at Blue Beach, Emirau Island





Admiral Halsey pays the Seabees a visit on Emirau Island; Commander W. W. Studdert, former 61st Officer-in-Charge, in the right foreground.

ranging from underwear shorts to dress white. The Admiral seemed pleased with what he saw. He informed the men that he was going to new fields and hoped that we would join him again, farther up the line. His speech was recorded in Stateside newspapers and the accounts described a feat of the 61st Battalion by quoting a part of Halsey's citation to the Seabees, which said: "Given forty-four days in which to build a strip and complete an advanced base, the 61st did the job in thirty days."

Several of our officers, when asked by correspondents, what esteem they held for their crews, replied that all men had shown interest and de-

votion to their jobs as well as loyalty to the 61st and patriotism to their country. These men have proven themselves to be tops in every task they have undertaken to do.

With the completion of all work projects necessary for an advanced base on the Emirau Island, the 61sters occupied themselves by an extensive sports program and the creation of souvenirs from the native hardwoods. Several men went into boat building on a large scale but never had time to finish the projects they started. In July the entire Battalion engaged in rifle, carbine, and machine gun practice on the rifle range for a period of three days. Typical of Seabees, much

money changed hands as the result of bets made on their individual prowess.

The Commander informed the Battalion that they were due for another move and thereupon dispatched an officer and several men to locate and secure a camp site for the Battalion in the Russells.

July 18, the Liberty Ship, *Mintaka*, AK-94,

arrived in Hamburg Bay near Cape Tietjens.

For the next several days, equipment and gear for the 61st were loaded aboard the ship, and on the morning of the 20th the men went aboard. The ship got underway at 1845, and after an uneventful voyage, arrived in the Russell Islands five days later.

Cave at base of cliff at the end of the Emirau Airstrip



# BANIKA

## *Russell Group, British Solomon Islands*

Here we were back in the Solomon Islands, but this time we were on Banika Island instead of Guadalcanal. Standing on the beaches of Banika, we could see the great mountain peaks of our first overseas home rearing their ugly heads above the haze. Banika Island was one of the main bases of the Russells group and differed little from Guadalcanal other than having fewer and smaller mountains.

We found, and to our great amazement, a very few work projects to be done here. We were told that this was a staging base for forward movements. At that time we didn't know where our next move would be but we could hear the rumble of a boiling pot of invasion. Officers and men alike took advantage of this lull in activities to engage in an all-out educational and athletic program. Classes were held in courses ranging from

*View of Banika Island, Russell Islands, B.S.I.*





Company office in "Enlisted Men's Country," Russell Islands

Mathematics to Japanese. Fifty per cent of the personnel took these active class courses. New men were given experienced training in the operation of heavy equipment. For the first time, an inter-company sports program was introduced, consisting of softball, volleyball, and badminton.

Although we had no specific work projects assigned to us on Banika Island, the following details were carried out:

Picking up and guarding pipe from the PT Base; laying new pipe lines and installing pumps to new water pool; transporting patients from ships to hospitals; loading material aboard ships for the movement of the First Marines. Loading details for Gr.-Pac.; guarding the 75th Seabee

Camp; the dismantling of the 17th Special Seabees galley; Installing a ramp assembly on a barge at PAD; dismantling the 75th mess hall; building decks for commissary warehouses at Base Four.

September 28, 1944, was the day that the 61st Seabees boarded the *U.S.S. Sabik* and the *U.S.S. Cassiopeia* for their most important destination of all their voyages. However, they were to make several stops en route. The men had no inkling, at the time, that it was to be other than one of former routine tasks. The work of packing, crating, and loading the ships was done by the 61st. When all the pre-embarkation tasks were completed, all personnel shouldered their packs,

grabbed their weapons, and boarded ship. Berths were assigned to all but a few men, who had to sleep on deck on cots. The quarters aboard, and in the hold, were usually clean; in fact, some of the men seemed to think that there was entirely too much to that "clean, sweep down fore and aft" stuff to allow them a good long game of cards topside. Each time they would get settled in one spot a hose crew would start a field day. Facilities for bathing, washing, and shaving were the best we had encountered aboard any ship up to that time. For men sweltering topside all day long, the fresh water shower proved to be the great attraction.

September 29 at sunup, we hoisted anchor and

pulled out to sea. But only for a few hours that day. This short leg of our journey was not without interest. We passed the famed Savo Island where so many warships, both of the United States and Japan, had been sunk in various sea battles around it. It was also home of the most famous head hunters in the Solomons. Although it isn't particularly large, having an approximate area of thirty square miles, Savo Island has the largest native population per square mile of any island in the Solomons. Its general appearance is round with several sugar-loaf peaks on it.

Upon arriving at Tulagi Harbor, a view of Florida Island showed us some of the toughest

"Officers' Country," Banika, Russell Islands.





61st Seabees' swimming and fishing pier, Banika, Russell Islands

terrain we had seen to date. Regardless of the fact that there are no high mountains around Tulagi, it was easily understood why that particular area wasn't heavily populated. As far as the eye could see, there were series of low craggy hills, between which there were no valleys of any appreciable size. Also, the jungle was extremely heavy and constantly shrouded with mist and rains.

Laying overnight in Tulagi, we sailed westward towards Guadalcanal, after a false start several hours earlier. Naturally, we were all somewhat mystified as to why we should stop at the "Canal." Scuttlebutt was soon out that there had been a change in our orders and we were to pick

up new sailing orders at Lunga Beach, Guadalcanal. Thus, on the morning of September 30, and after several hours' sailing, we reached Lunga Beach, and once again viewed the lofty peaks towering above the clouds over familiar terrain which we felt to be home grounds. Yes, we were once again viewing our first Island X, where we spent more than ten months in '43. This stopover lasted three days, and on October 2, 1944, we hoisted anchor, sailing away from Guadalcanal, under a bright moon. Our course took us by Savo Island once again, after which we sailed around the southern end of Santo Ysabel and headed northeast into the open sea.

# *Admiralty Islands*

After several days of sailing without a landrise, we sighted Emirau off the starboard bow during the early hours of October 6, but we didn't pause there. We steamed the northwest course for several hours, as new ships trailed into our convoy, and then turned due west, north of Massau Island, and sailed at moderate speed until early the next morning when a new land fall was in sight. It was the Admiralty Islands.

The harbor area of Manus Island, in the Admiralties, was filled with every type of warship and auxiliary. There were more ships there than we had ever seen in any one location heretofore.

Although we hadn't been told officially, we knew that we had become a part of that giant armada that was to invade the Philippine Islands. All the men lined the rails in discussion of various types of ships surrounding their own. The very air they breathed seemed charged with the shock of expectancy for new beachheads. On October 9, liberty parties boarded barges and went ashore to Liberty Island. This island was partially man-made; a Seabee Battalion had dredged up harbor bottom to enlarge a small, sandy island that stood off-shore from Manus. This island contained all types of recreational equipment and athletic fields.

Pitelu Island, off Manus Island, in the Admiralty Islands





61st Seabees' shore party returning to their ship in the Admiralties

Beer was also made available in sufficient quantities to satisfy the men, and under the heat of the sun, many of them had their top gallants luffing to starboard.

The days seemed to drag, as we lay at anchor in the Admiralties. Our impatience to get on with it and to secure a new beachhead grew by the hour. After what seemed centuries, our ship lifted its hook and steamed out to sea about 1700 on October 13, 1944. The next morning we were surprised to find that we held a forward position in a large convoy bound due west. Other than idle speculation among the men, no untoward incidents occurred.

In the early dawn hours of October 15, 1944, a new land rise was sighted, and as we drew near it, a shore of rugged misty peaks, whose shore-sides had been sheared by time, formed a

wall of forboding cliffs. As if some god had pulled the tab of a giant zipper, a harbor entrance appeared. We knew we had reached New Guinea, although we knew not where. As we rounded a rocky point, another great armada met our eyes. We soon learned that we had reached Hollandia, Netherlands New Guinea, and were anchored in Humboldt Baai. This harbor was quite picturesque with its red tiled city, high mountain peaks and emerald-smooth lagoons.

October 18, as we left Hollandia at 0530 in a large convoy, Commander Bowker issued a ship-board news bulletin, announcing the Philippines as our destination. On the 20th we received news of first American launching. On October 22, ammunition and rations were passed out to all men and additional shots were given by the medical department.

# LEYTE

## *Philippine Islands*

On the night of October 23, 1944, the 61st Battalion arrived in Leyte Gulf, near Tacloban, in the Philippine Islands, and while anchored offshore we watched American planes dive-bomb Japanese beach positions; destroyers and cruisers shell inland positions and our guns shoot down marauding Japanese aircraft. There wasn't a daylight hour while at anchor off Leyte Island, that we weren't engaged in action against air attacks.

For the next few days, the 61st engaged in unloading. The 61st Seabees have the distinction of being the first complete Naval Construction battalion to land on the Philippines. Withstanding the bombing raids on shipping and the strafing while moving inland, the 61st reached their plotted camp site near a former Jap air strip. Roads were cut out of a sea of mud, and the stream of supplies seemed endless as they rolled from the beach to our camp. A few men were left

LST's during the 61st's invasion of Leyte Island, Philippines, near D-Day





A movement of 61st equipment on the Leyte Invasion beach, near Dulag

aboardship to do stevedoring on around-the-clock schedules. Winchmen, hatch bosses, and the stevedores kept the important lifts going over the side, even though Jap bombs were landing in the immediate vicinity.

Several of our men were reported as "missing" due to the Japanese combat action. Others were turned in as "wounded." Fortunately, none of the 61sters were killed in action.

Our camp site was located on the southeastern end of the Japanese airfield. The airfield itself ran through the middle of a rice paddy. Naturally we couldn't pitch our tents on the airstrip, and, as a consequence, our new canvas homes straddled mud that was knee deep, and in some cases, housed quiet limpid pools of clear water. The Seabees took old tin cans and set the legs of their cots on top of them to get above the water

line. During the early days of our encampment, we thought the water would recede, but our wishes were doomed by a rainfall of 23 inches in 26 days. The men attempted to dig foxholes but found that they filled with water and became swimming pools for frogs. Thus, the ingenuity of the 61st was taxed, the result being sandbag revetments above ground. Nevertheless, in the hectic moments of Japanese air attacks many a perfect swan-dive was made into water-filled foxholes. In fact, the men were not the least bit choosey in their selection of protection. Several men even dived under a water buffalo. Another jumped into a drainage ditch and sprawled flat on his stomach atop a fair sized lizard. The lizard wiggled furiously, but the man never moved. After about ten minutes of this the Seabee exclaimed, "Keep quiet, you damned liz-

ard; do you want to get us both shot?" Another chap dove into the culvert pipe and, after the raid was over, it took three men to haul him out, but yards of skin were lost.

It can be truthfully said that the few months of our Philippine invasion were well watered. Some men called it the "Slime and Grime" campaign. No man, regardless of how many pairs of shoes he had, had his feet dry for more than a five-minute period per day. Through all this slush, the 61st Battalion endured the most desperate air attacks the Japanese could muster. The men went through hell with a calm fortitude that could have only been maintained by hardened veterans. Meanwhile the work went on. Men acted as visual air-raid spotters and during attack, the construction men only took cover when Japanese planes actually appeared overhead and,

as soon as they passed over, resumed their jobs. Each new day seemed a repetition of the one previous. Build and fight, build and fight again, and this ritual was never altered.

As if we hadn't endured enough, in these early days, our camp site was visited by a bit of a breeze, a Philippine Typhoon. Yes, we 61st Seabees lost the struggle with that breeze. It might have been said, that a Seabee had once sought refuge within, or behind, yards and yards of sheer canvas when threatened by capricious breezes dancing about in damp abandon. But not so this time. The men spent a bewildering night under flattened tents. After twelve or so hours of this and after the sun had risen, the men viewed the sight of tents deflated like a newly removed pair of spinster's bloomers. It was an experience never to be forgotten and left

Ruins of the Dulag Church, Leyte Islands, P. I.





Ruins of the Dulag Municipal School, Leyte Island, P. I.

the men with the thought, "A strong rope is better than a mere stitch."

The day of December 6, 1944, began as a nice day for a change. Not too much rain or too much sun. An uneventful day until 1700, when an air raid signal was sounded. Within a few minutes, large flights flew overhead with all American guns taking pot shots at them. Not much fire was thrown up from our area, as most of our anti-aircraft protection had been withdrawn several days before. We couldn't understand the object of the Japanese planes, but with the appearance of large flights of low-flying Japanese transports overhead, hundreds of Jap paratroopers bailed out. Their parachutes looked orange in the flaming light of the sunset. The

61st Seabees, upon viewing this sight, grabbed their guns and took up perimeter defense positions with lightning-like speed that would have been the envy of any assault troops. There was little or no confusion. It became apparent to all that the objectives of the Jap paratroopers were: the 61st camp site, and its equipment, the airfield, and the planes and ammunition dumps. This was later verified by maps taken from the bodies of the Japs. The 61st Seabees took to this action like veterans, and for seventy-two hours, or until approximately 350 Japs were pocketed and disposed of, the men kept on the firing line. There were many individual and collective acts of heroism. Judging from the number of Japanese bodies in the area, Seabee marksmanship was quite good.



Doctor Sidney Berman, MC, Senior Medical Officer of the 61st,  
standing in a typical camp street on Leyte, P. I.

To say the 61st took advantage of the embarrassing defeat of the Japanese paratroopers is to put it mildly. Parachutes and other equipment that the Japanese abandoned were soon acquired by the enterprising Bees. Evidences of these souvenirs were seen soon after in both the United States and in camp by such items as silk dresses,

fancy shirts, handkerchiefs, pillow cases, and hula skirts, the latter being made from the chute rip-cords.

This paratroop action involved many amusing incidents of human interest. Probably the most outstanding was the harboring and protection of Filipino civilians. At one time the Seabees were



Drums of 61st gasoline dumped at Japanese revetment, Leyte, P. I.

doing a little grass cutting with tommy guns and as one chap yelled, "Tallyho," three Filipino girls popped out of the high grass. The belligerent Seabees vociferously berated one another for not knowing the difference between pretty Filipino girls and Japs. Another incident involved several Bees, who had lonely vigils at perimeter outposts near a creek after flaunting their carcasses in the myriad of eerie sounds in the night, one exclaimed, "I don't mind fighting Japs, but I would have preferred scuttling twin-engine frogs that patrolled the creek." Another Seabee outpost guard was relieved from a parapet watch and slumped to the muddy bottom of the foxhole. Shortly thereafter he heard a "plop." As he bawled out his mate for tossing rocks at him while reaching for the alleged stone, he was horrified to find that it was a Jap grenade. Needless to say, he tossed it out and hit the deck.

When the 61st Battalion took part in the early stages of the Leyte operation, it had its own civilian labor group of Filipino men and boys of all ages. Some two hundred men were hired by the 61st. They were dressed in various nondescript apparel, such as sack cloth dungarees and homespun hemp outfits. Their hats were of everything from Chinese straw to jaunty GI toppers. These Filipinos seemed overjoyed to work for us, and every morning and evening one could see them lined up at the civilian labor office set up by the Battalion. These civilians were picked up in their villages by Battalion trucks and brought to work each morning. Their work consisted of sorting gravel for the air strip, cutting down bushes and grass, unloading supplies, and other minor jobs to relieve important Seabee workers for major tasks. The first payday found the civilians lined up at the disbursing office to be paid

for their work in the new Filipino victory currency. The wage scale ran in accordance to the skill of the worker, top wage being two pesos and twenty-five centavos. Ordinary laborers received one peso and twenty-five centavos. Many Seabees had their laundry done by civilians and were amazed when it was returned to them nicely pressed. It did seem unusual to see a GI stroll nonchalantly down a muddy company street with a razor-edged crease in his dungarees. Yeah, in fact, it was quite a sight!

Contrary to all previous amphibious landings made by the 61st Seabees, we were assigned to work regularly with the Army and its engineers. Heretofore all operations had been carried out in conjunction with the United States Marine Corps. However, this assignment with the Army on Leyte was for only the first part of our stay in

the Philippine Invasion. Seabees and soldiers worked side-by-side, battling the mud, in the construction of and reconversion of Japanese air-fields for our airplanes. In this connection, Lt. Col. M. S. Webb and Capt. McCall of the 6th United States Army were quartered in our camp to act as liaison officers.

Dulag was our seaport for incoming supplies and materials, and our camp was some seventeen kilometers inland from that port. When we first invaded the beaches at Dulag, the municipal school building, an old Spanish Church, and the majority of the homes had been leveled by naval shelling and aerial bombardments of the American Fleet. Everything was rush-rush as we came ashore. Filipino civilians stood wide eyed as they watched the might of American arms pouring inland. Whenever possible, the Filipinos assisted on beach

Filipino family, their carabao and home near the 61st Camp on Leyte





Interior of typical Filipino home on Leyte Island

operations, and as we pushed inland, men, women, and children lined along the path, holding up two fingers in a victory sign and yelling at the Seabees, "Victory." The only discordant feature in this trek was the presence of dead Jap bodies and the pungent odors that went with them. It is entirely possible that the nonchalance displayed by the Seabees in ignoring the Japanese dead would seem hard and thick-skinned to Statesiders. The truth of the matter was that the Seabees had neither the time nor inclination to dispose of these bodies. As we traveled along, combat patrols operated on the flanks in search for snipers.

On November 18, 1944, representatives of the 12th United States Naval Construction Regiment met with our project officers. Lt Elsperman and a crew of approximately 200 men were assigned to build a fleet headquarters at Tolosa, Leyte.

This crew performed outstanding work in the erection of Quonset huts and general fleet installations at Tolosa. A noteworthy incident occurred when a large flotilla of LCI's were due to start an invasion mission to the north. It was discovered that there was no way for these craft to replenish their water supply in time to maintain their schedule. When the 61st Seabees of Tolosa Detachment heard of this, they immediately pitched in to alleviate this situation by running a pipe line from their well to the beach and pumped water from there to the LCI's. This bit of "Can Do" was hailed by the Commander of the Philippine Sea Frontier, who cited our men thusly: "The Commander of the Philippine Sea Frontier wishes to express his appreciation for the excellent effort of the 61st Seabees in being able to accomplish the watering of the ships of

LCI(L) Flotilla No. ..... in so prompt and efficient manner. Without this water, these ships would have been delayed in partaking in certain important pending operations, thus postponing these operations for a later date."

Not only the Quonset huts were built at Tolosa, three bridges were built, radio antennas erected, pipe line laid, and communications installed. The Tolosa detachment did a fast and complete job on all assignments.

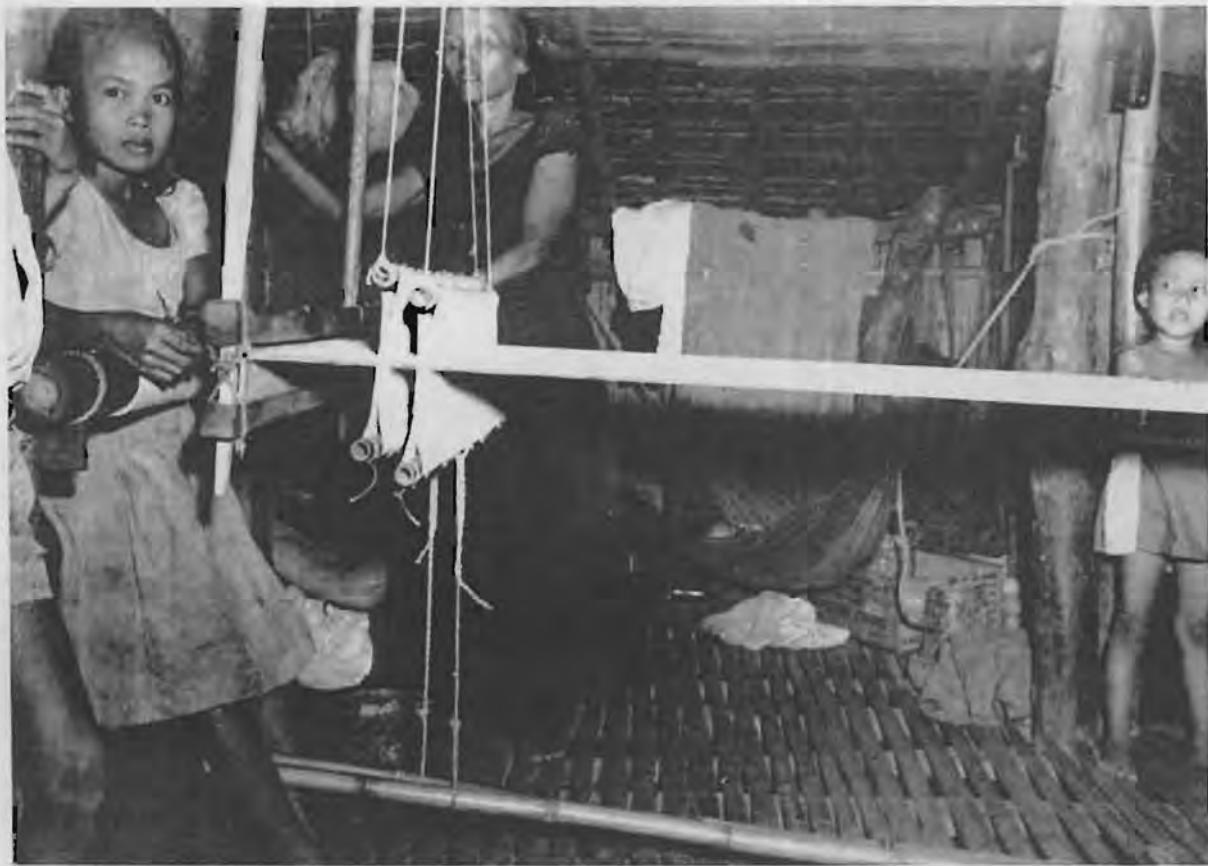
On December 11, Army Intelligence sent a memorandum to the Seabees concerning the final survey of our action against Japanese paratroopers. This report stated that the Jap paratroopers carried new ordnance equipment and special A/B equipment such as medicines and uniforms. Extra material was dropped in equipment chutes included demolition and incendiary grenades. This

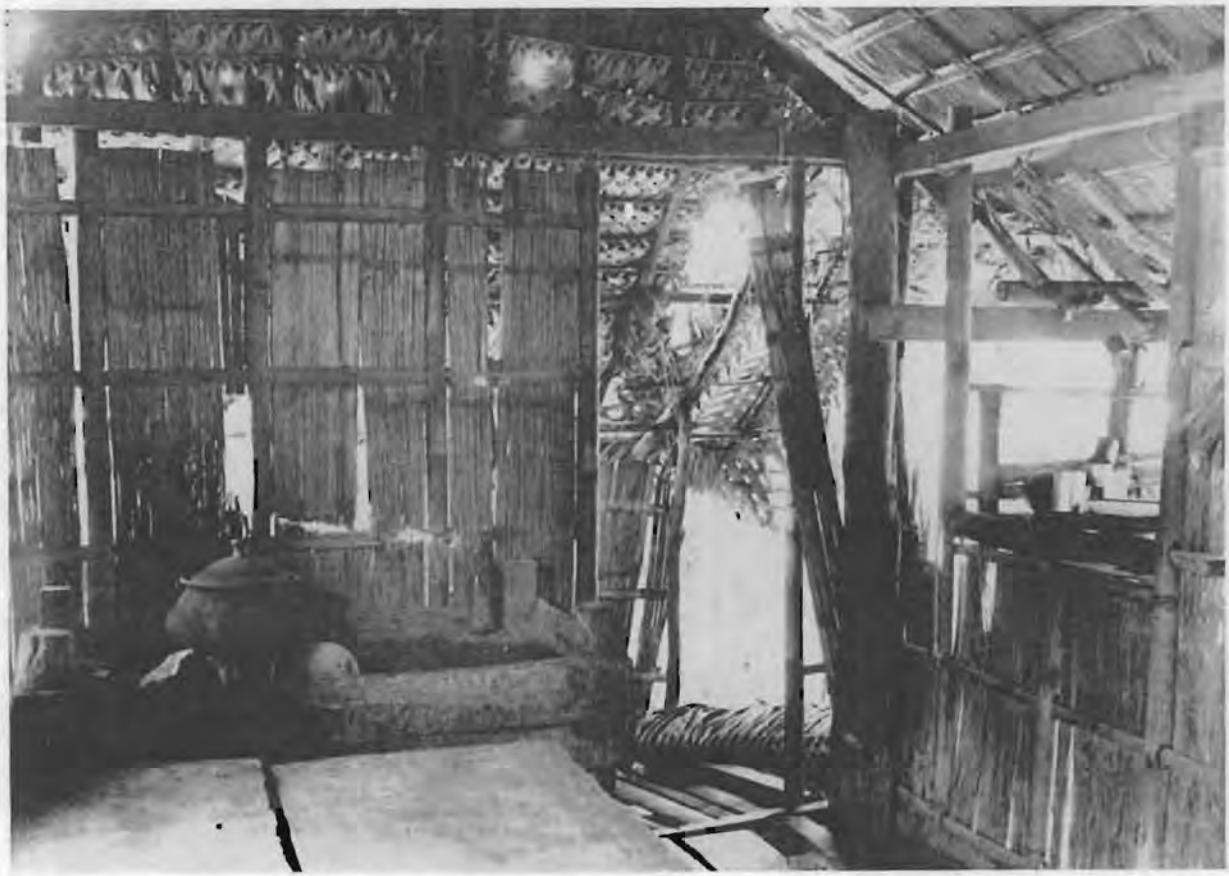
airborne attack was apparently coordinated with a small break-through in the vicinity of Buri.

It was also reported that some 35 Japanese had sought cover in the village of Maliquenabat across the airstrip, while the inhabitants of that village ran for their lives to the village of Calbasag. The 61st Seabees captured several dozen parachutes, all of which were white but in two sizes. In spite of the danger, a few men thoughtlessly sought souvenirs.

Shortly after the episode of the paratroopers, the bulk of the Battalion embarked for another island, Samar, that had been previously determined as an ideal area for new construction. This trip, however short, was one that men would never forget. Both from the standpoint of the greeting they received on their arrival and, after living in mud for months, having their feet on dry

Home industry, Filipino family, near 61st Camp on Leyte, weaving cloth for the household





Filipino kitchen, Calbasag, Leyte, P. I.

ground and wearing dry shoes again. The erection of a camp site there proved to be an easier task than that on Leyte.

The Filipino people, as we soon learned, were very hospitable and extremely courteous. Their appearance was short, well developed, muscular, yellow-brown in color, black eyed, and coal-black hair. They walked in a very erect and straight posture; this was especially true of the women. The litesome grace with which the most ordinary belle walked down the dirt road would be the envy of any debutante. The grace in posture, so natural to the Filipino, is acquired through the life-long habit of carrying everything on the top of their heads instead of in their hands. The sight of men, women, and children balancing tremendous loads atop their heads, while their hands swung freely, was a sight that never failed to awe

the hardened Seabees. One Seabee remarked, "Gosh, they carry everything but the kitchen sink up there."

Not only the people, but the scenery as well, was extremely interesting. The Seabees saw the timbered wealth of the Philippines. Wild life ran rampant in both the cool rain forest of the high mist-shrouded mountain peaks and the very dense lowland forest of gigantic hardwood trees. These forests contained over 150 hardwoods of commercial value—everything from mahogany to the finest teakwood.

There were enough animals in the forests to make it seem as if we were in a natural zoo. The men saw such things as small wildebeest, known as the Civet, Flying Fox Batt, the unbelievable Tasiar monkey with enormous deer-like eyes and the usual variety of varied colored lizards. We

also saw birds of many colors, most of which we couldn't identify. However, our old feathered companions, Parakeets, Parrots, and Cockatoos were very much in evidence.

Many of the men took advantage of their spare time, after things had quieted down, to make sight-seeing trips. They visited picturesque little villages nestled deep in the mountains near crystal-clear streams and beautiful waterfalls. The men found that these villages were, however, more picturesque from a distance than at close hand. As could be expected of the Seabees, they returned from these trips laden with souvenirs, everything from Jap swords to Filipino cooking pots.

Three villages were in the neighborhood of our San Pablo camp on Leyte. They were Malaquenat, Calbasag, and Julita. The inhabitants of

these villages made it a point to become acquainted individually with the members of the 61st. They invited the Seabees to dinners, parties, and dances. The dinners consisted of such items as Carabao steaks, baked camotes, young corn on the cob, fresh coconut milk, and fried banana fritters. The parties were usually small meetings with a Filipino family, during which time refreshments were served. The dances were usually held in either the municipal school or a city hall with a wornout phonograph serving as an orchestra. The first time the men went to one of these dances very weird music greeted their ears as the records, in most cases, were of ancient vintage plus a few Japanese records. The very next time, the 61sters were invited to attend a Filipino dance, our musicians carried their instruments on their backs and waded through the

Wash day on Leyte, near the Tolosa 61st Camp





The town of Tolosa, Leyte, P. I.; Old Spanish Fort shown on top of distant hill.

rice paddies. The Filipinos were so pleased at our thoughtfulness, they laughed, giggled and shouted their approval and thanks.

With the exception of the Seabees stationed at Tolosa, the entire Battalion prepared to move to Samar Island in the Philippines. It had rained so much that all existing roads leading to the main highway to the beach had become ribbons of glue-like quagmires. Therefore the road construction crews were forced to build new roads in order to get our equipment out to the Leyte beaches. The men packed their gear, struck their tents, and loaded aboard trucks. Upon reaching the beaches, they grouped together to await transportation across Leyte Gulf aboard LCT's. After several hours' delay, we drove our equipment and trucks up the lowered ramps into the yawning mouths of the LCT's after dark.

Each LCT, upon being fully loaded, pulled off the beach to anchor 500 yards off-shore to await further orders. After many hours of this monotony, interrupted briefly by an air raid, the LCT lifted her hook and got underway just before dawn. The open-water crossing to Samar was uneventful, other than the usual complaints of appalling lack of food.

Many of the men en route to Samar never descended from the trucks until their destination was reached. They endured both the sweltering heat of the sun and chilly rains of the night. They dozed in their full combat dress, wearing helmets, cartridge belts filled with ammunition, and with guns in their hands.

When the first LCT neared the coastline of Samar, the weary Seabees discovered that they were to land at the town of Guiuan, which was

located at the tip end of the finger-like peninsula. As they neared the town, hundreds of Filipino outrigger canoes swarmed out from the shoreline to surround our craft. It seems that the entire populace of Guiuan had mysteriously received word of our proposed landing there. So many outriggers jammed around our craft that it took two hours of frantic signaling, palavering, and yelling before we could clear the water enough to get inshore. No sooner had the ramp been lowered than swarms of civilians came aboard, girls and men alike threw their arms around the necks of the Seabees in joyous greetings. All the Filipinos were anxious to assist in anything we had to do, but so many were jammed aboard the ship that they hindered rather than helped us. After some effort, our equipment rolled ashore and started towards our camp site.

Our path of travel through the town of Guiuan was lined on either side by cheering civilians who held their fingers up in "V for victory" sign.

When we arrived at our proposed camp site, the mayor of Guiuan had arrived there ahead of us with a brass band. The Seabees were amazed as they could not understand from whence came the musical instruments. Upon being questioned, the mayor told us that they had buried the instruments during the Japanese occupation and brought them out when they heard of our proposed landing on Samar.

Our Samar camp site was situated in a coconut grove in which several Filipino thatched houses were located. There were also extensive plantings of camotes. By necessity, the Filipinos were evacuated and the bulldozers cleared the camote patches. One aged Filipino woman, although

61st Seabees' chow hall, Tolosa Camp, Leyte, P. I.





Provincial Capitol Building of Leyte Island, at Tacloban

she had been fully paid for all her assets, stood by and wept profusely as the bulldozers destroyed the camote crop. The dozer operator was so deeply touched that he stopped, got off his machine, and went over, placed his arms around the little old lady to try to give some solace.

In the construction of the camp, hundreds of Filipino laborers were hired to do the job and, for the first time, several Filipino clerical workers were engaged and proved to be quite proficient. As the camp began to assimilate the appearance of permanency, Lt. Commander Koopman and Lieutenant McCann put the wheels of airfield construction into motion. Round-the-clock schedules were established, and the crews were split up into three shifts. In order not to lose time traveling to and from camp for meals, lunches and coffee were sent out to the airfield crews on the job.

Our old equipment, at the time, was in deplorable condition and called for our repair crews to work day and night to keep them rolling. The combination of shifts and constant repairs enabled our Battalion to maintain a pace ahead of schedule. Officers from outside units often asked how it was possible to turn out so much work with such wornout equipment.

Following our arrival on Samar, the 61st Battalion set several precedents, one of which was the re-establishment of Masonry back in the Philippines. During the latter part of December, 1944, a group of 61st Seabees, all of whom were Masons, got together to form a nucleus of an organization that would be instrumental in the return of Masonry to these islands. Officers were elected, club laws were presented, discussed,

and adopted; and regular meeting times were established. Governor Earl Warren, of the State of California, was made the first honorary member of the Samar Club.

Another "first" by the 61st Seabees startled but pleased Filipinos and service forces alike. In the town of Guiuan stands an old Spanish church approximately 310 years old. This old church was named the Immaculate Conception and had withstood the travails of both war and weather. It was built of natural stone, and the stained windows were hand-pared sea shells of many colors. The interior was large and somewhat musty. The altar was a masterpiece of statuary and of old Spanish architecture. The Seabees found that they couldn't hear mass when the church was full on account of the poor acoustics. thereupon they conceived the idea of installing a

public address system in the church and, since it was Christmastime, install loud speakers in the belfry. When this extra-curricular project was completed, the 61sters played electrical transcriptions of Christmas Carols, the music of which could be heard all over town. The surprised and mystified Filipinos, at first, couldn't figure out from just where the music was emanating, but they were pleased nevertheless.

Adjacent to Samar, in Leyte Gulf, lies the island of Homonhon. This island was the first sighted by Magellan on March 16, 1551, when he was sailing around the world. Several of his crew died and a few were too sick to continue the voyage, thus those men were left there. Today, there are several rocks there to commemorate this landing spot.

Street scene, Tacloban, Leyte Island, P. I.; Mercedes Theater, second building on left



# S A M A R

## *Philippine Islands*

On December 25, the 61st Battalion celebrated another Christmas overseas. A party was held at 2000 in the chow hall. Our Christmas tree embellished the front of the hall. This tree was a Backhan tree, native to the Philippines. It had short leaves and many suitable branches for ornaments. It was thoroughly decorated and featured

a hand-drawn Santa Claus in front of it. The chow hall rafters were decorated with crepe paper. The singing of Christmas Carols and serving refreshments were a source of entertainment, reminiscent of the Christmas spent in the Solomons.

Shortly after Christmastime, six men of the

61st Seabees land on Samar Island, P. I., near the town of Guiuan. Entire civil populace lines the shore in celebration of their liberation by the Seabees.



61st Battalion were awarded purple heart medals and citations through Commander B. M. Bowker at special exercise held in the 61st theater area. Commander Bowker was assisted by Lt. Commander Koopman and Chaplain Scott in making these awards. These were forwarded to the men with congratulations and expression of full appreciation for the sacrifices made for their country. The six men receiving the awards were: S. G. Autrey, CM3c; R. A. Shannon, Ptr1c; H. Kohler, CCM(PA); J. L. Donavon, Cox.; C. M. Stunz, CCM(T); and J. R. Whaley, CM1c.

Saturday, 14 April 1945, held a special significance for the 61st Battalion in that it was the second anniversary of overseas service for the Battalion. The date also had the distinction of

being the day on which the Samar airstrip project surpassed one million total yards of excavation moved. This amount far exceeded the yardage of any previous 61st Seabee Battalion job. The totals from the period from 6 December 1944, to 14 April 1945, are as follows:

Cubic yards of excavation moved, 1,000,000.

Acres of heavy clearing \_\_\_\_\_ 360

Acres of hard coral surfacing \_\_\_\_\_ 90

This large amount of heavy construction work was completed in less than four months, despite unusually heavy rainfall and handicaps of old equipment, most of which had seen two years of continuous service.

Lieut. McCann extended another "well done" to heavy equipment operators, truck drivers,

Town square of Guiuan, Samar, P. I.





Municipal School Building, Guiuan, Samar, near the town square

dynamite and clearing groups, engineering, surveyors, mechanics and welders in both field and shop, supervisors and checkers, maintenance, tire, fuel, and greasemen, light tower operators, galley service, Filipino civilian labor, and all others that helped in this work.

Hard work, close cooperation, able supervision, courage, and intestinal fortitude were the things that made possible such accomplishments.

Fourteen April 1945 was also a day of celebration, a day filled with various activities honoring our second anniversary overseas. Free beer was issued to the men, sporting events were held during the afternoon. A USO show of four clever feminine artists was presented on a newly constructed stage. This stage, by the way, was unique both architecturally and in the way it was con-

ceived. The plans, material and actual construction were products of ingenuity of a half dozen enlisted men.

Quonset hut material was converted into a modern type stage. It called for radical usage of such material, even though architecturally a Stateside job. The finished product resembled a streamlined stage of a movie house. The screen was placed above the shell-like stage and both were flanked by modernistic wing panels. They started with black at the top and were followed down with yellow, green, and maroon respectively. The interior of the shell was a soft gray.

Customary, to veteran Seabee tradition, the 61sters began their third year by hard and grueling work. Nevertheless, as the days and months seemed to roll on, nostalgic looks were visible in many eyes.

Summing up two years overseas, plus an approximate five months in the States, the 61st veteran Seabees have endured about all the different experiences that troops could in wartime. Everything from mud, hard work, and heat to monotonous hours endured in foxholes during air raids and their share of combat. At the present writing, those who remain, of the original complement of men that came overseas in April, 1943, are turning their thoughts of the future towards home rather than another job. This, of course, springs from vague murmurings of a rotation plan that may send the "old timers" Stateside for a leave.

It is fitting that some chronological and pic-

torial tribute should be made in due homage to the fighting Seabees of the 61st. No publication, no matter how sincere the effort, can fully grasp the spirit with which these men carried out their duties, nor can it illustrate the thousands of personal sacrifices made by the men. We know that several years of back-breaking duty, mud-wading, Jap baiting, the endless hours of heat and the experiencing of such discomforts as bombing attacks, strafing, typhoons, and floods have not been in vain.

There have been too many individual accomplishments to list them all, or even in a greater part, in these several hundred pages, but the generalization of the over-all is our tribute to their very magnificence.

Camp site of the 61st Seabees prior to the erection of living quarters



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

### Chronology

- 24 Dec 1942 Officers reported from Camp Allen, Norfolk, Virginia to Camp Endicott, Davisville, R.I. to take charge of enlisted men who broke boot training this day.
- 11 Feb 1943 Left N.C.T.C., Camp Endicott, Davisville, R.I.
- 17 Feb 1943 Arrived Camp Parks, Shoemaker, California.
- 06 Mar 1943 Left Camp Parks, Shoemaker, California.
- 07 Mar 1943 Arrived ABD, Camp Rousseau, Port Hueneme, California.
- 25 Mar 1943 Left U.S.A.
- 25 Apr 1943 Arrived Brisbane, Australia.
- 06 Jun 1943 First echelon left Brisbane, Australia for Townsville, Australia with 2 officers and 72 enlisted men aboard LST, arriving Townsville, 9 June 1943.
- 08 Jun 1943 Second echelon left Brisbane, Australia with 3 officers and 119 enlisted men aboard 2 LSTs, arriving Townsville, 12 June 1943.
- 11 Jun 1943 Third Echelon left Brisbane, Australia with 5 officers and 191 enlisted men aboard LST, arriving, Townsville, Australia, 15 June 1943.
- 13 Jun 1943 Fourth echelon left Brisbane, Australia with 12 officers and 385 enlisted men aboard 2 LSTs, arriving Townsville, Australia, 18 June 1943.
- 15 Jun 1943 Fifth echelon left Brisbane, Australia by rail with 3 officers and 229 enlisted men arriving Townsville, Australia, 17 June 1943.
- 27 Jun 1943 Six officers and 140 enlisted men sailed aboard LST from Townsville, Australia on first echelon, arriving Woodlark Island, 1 July 1943.
- 07 Jul 1943 Four officers and 305 enlisted men left Townsville, Australia aboard LST on second echelon arriving, Woodlark Island, 11 July 1943.
- 09 Jul 1943 Five officers and 112 enlisted men left Townsville, Australia aboard LST on third echelon arriving, Woodlark Island, 13 July 1943.
- 20 July 1943 Fourth echelon left Townsville, Australia with four officers and 113 enlisted men aboard 3 LSTs, arriving Woodlark Island, 24 July 1943.
- 29 July 1943 Fifth echelon left Townsville, Australia with seven officers and 316 enlisted men aboard 4 LSTs arriving Woodlark Island, 2 August 1943.

ITINERARY OF THE 60TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

- 24 Dec. 1942 Officers reported from Camp Allen, Norfall, Virginia to Camp Endicott, Davisville, R. I. to take charge of enlisted men who broke boot training this day.
- 11 Feb. 1943 Left N.C.T.C., Camp Endicott, Davisville, R. I.
- 17 Feb. 1943 Arrived Camp Parks, Shoemaker, California.
- 6 Mar. 1943 Left Camp Parks, Shoemaker, California.
- 7 Mar. 1943 Arrived ABD, Camp Rousseau, Port Hueneme, California.
- 25 Mar. 1943 Left U.S.A.
- 25 Apr. 1943 Arrived Brisbane, Australia.
- 6 June 1943 First echelon left Brisbane, Australia for Townsville, Australia with 2 officers and 72 enlisted men aboard LST, arriving Townsville, 9 June 1943.
- 8 June 1943 Second echelon left Brisbane, Australia with 3 officers and 119 enlisted men aboard 2 LSTs, arriving Townsville, 12 June 1943.
- 11 June 1943 Third Echelon left Brisbane, Australia with 5 officers and 191 enlisted men aboard LST, arriving, Townsville, Australia, 15 June 1943.
- 16 June 1943 Fourth echelon left Brisbane, Australia with 12 officers and 385 enlisted men aboard 2 LSTs, arriving Townsville, Australia, 18 June 1943
- 15 June 1943 Fifth echelon left Brisbane, Australia by rail with 3 officers and 229 enlisted men, arriving Townsville, Australia, 17 June 1943.
- 27 June 1943 Six officers and 140 enlisted men sailed aboard LST from Townsville, Australia on first echelon, arriving Woodlark Island, 1 July, 1943.

Irvin S. Patterson

Commander  
Sgt. Major

ITINERARY OF THE 60TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION (CONT)

- 7 July 1943 Four officers and 305 enlisted men left Townsville, Australia aboard LST on second echelon arriving, Woodlark Island, 11 July 1943.
- 9 July 1943 Five officers and 112 enlisted men left Townsville, Australia aboard LST on third echelon arriving, Woodlark Island, 13 July 1943.
- 20 July 1943 Fourth echelon left Townsville, Australia with four officers and 113 enlisted men aboard 3 LSTs, arriving Woodlark Island, 24 July 1943.
- 29 July 1943 Fifth echelon left Townsville, Australia with seven officers and 316 enlisted men aboard 4 LSTs arriving Woodlark Island, 2 August 1943.
- 1 Nov. 1943 Nineteen officers and 658 enlisted men left Woodlark Island aboard 3 LSTs and arrived at Finschhafen, New Guinea, 5 November 1943. Seven officers and 309 enlisted men remained at Woodlark as maintenance company.
- 3 Dec. 1943 Officers and men left at Woodlark arrived Finschhafen, New Guinea.
- 13 May 1944 Battalion left Finschhafen for recuperation leave at Brisbane, Australia.
- 17 June 1944 Battalion returned to Finschhafen, New Guinea.
- 26 June 1944 Battalion left Finschhafen, New Guinea aboard liberty ship.
- 8 July 1944 Battalion arrived Owi Island, Netherlands East Indies.
- 19 July 1944 One officer and 25 men left Owi Island for Moemfoor Island.  
To Facility  
Administrative Plan  
Classification changed
- 13 Aug. 1944 Moemfoor detachment returned to Owi.
- 16 Aug. 1944 One officer and 26 men left Owi Island for Amsterdam Island off Cape Sansapor, Dutch New Guinea.  
To: PESMUS  
Irvin S. Recommission
- 13 Sept. 1944 Amsterdam detachment returned to Owi.

Signature

ITINERARY OF THE 60TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION (CONT'D)

- 19 Nov. 1944 One officer and 40 enlisted men left Owi Island by air for Leyte, Philippine Islands.
- 5 Dec. 1944 Leyte detachment returned to Owi by air.
- 18 Dec. 1944 Battalion sailed for United States.
- 10 Jan. 1945 Battalion arrived San Francisco, California.
- 10 Jan. 1945 Battalion moved to CBRD, Camp Parks, California.
- 13 Mar. 1945 Battalion received orders to decommission effective 6 April 1945.
- 30 Mar. 1945 Battalion at CBRD, Camp Parks, California, in process of decommissioning.

I hereby certify that the foregoing has been compiled from the files and records of the Sixtieth Naval Construction Battalion and is a true itinerary thereof.

*W.W. Worthington*

W. W. WORTHINGTON  
Lieut. CEC, USNR.  
60th USNCB.

Note attached hereto etc.

15 Oct 1945

To Pacific  
Administrative Hand  
Classification chart  
from:  
**CONFIDENTIAL**

To: DESTINATION  
Irvin S. Baumgardt  
Comdg. CECOM's USMC  
Signature:







60<sup>th</sup> U.S. Naval Construction Battalion  
Woodlark Island

Natives Sailing Outrigger At Sea.  
Sept. 15, 1943

MERRY XMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR  
TO ALL BOAT AND BASE PERSONNEL  
A MESSAGE TO TOJO FROM ALL HANDS FOLLOWS:  
OUR SCORE FOR MOROBE AND DREGER,  
SINCE SEPTEMBER 27, 1943

104 BARGES SUNK OR DESTROYED  
26 BARGES DAMAGED  
1 JAP PT. SUNK  
1 BOMBER (BETTY), DESTROYED  
2 PROBABLE TORPEDO HITS ON SUBS  
8 FOOD RAFTS DESTROYED

COMDR. MUMMA COMDR. BOWLING  
LT. COMDR. HARLLEE LT. SWIFT

SPECIAL LATE BULLETIN - TOJO:

 1 MIDGET SUB DESTROYED  
1 PICKET BOAT DESTROYED  
1 MORE BARGE DESTROYED  
MR. SAD SACK

60th Naval Construction Battalion  
Finschhafen, NG. - 25 Dec. 1943  
PT Boats Score 27 Sept. to 25 Dec. 1943



60th Naval Construction Battalion  
Finschhafen, N.G. - 17 Nov. 1943  
Unloading LST's on Langemak Beach



60th Naval Construction Battalion  
Finschhafen, N.G. - 6 Nov. 1943  
New Guinea Super Highway