

77th Naval Construction Battalion

*Historical
Information*



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



77th G.B.

NCTC - Davisville
ABD - Hueneme
Ready Date - 24 Apr'43
Left ABD - 2 Aug'43
Location - Acorn 11 Bougainville Emirau Brisbane
Manila

LOG

- 5-30-43 - Arrived from Davisville 30 May to Port Hueneme. (Conf. disp. 302202 NCR 7085)
8-13-43 - 77th CB departed ABD Hueneme 2 Aug'43 - destination Acorn 11.
2-17-44 - 1 Jan'44 report of 77th CB - Batt left Pyre 8 Dec'43 and arrived at Cherry Blossom 10 Dec'43.
3-20-44 - 1 Feb'44 report of 77th CB - operating on YOKE strip at Bougainville.
4- 8-44 - 1 Mar'44 report of 77th CB - operating at Bougainville.
6-14-44 - 1 May'44 report of 77th CB - stopped operations at Bougainville 8 Apr'44 and began operations at Emirau 14 Apr'44.
7-19-44 - 1 Jun'44 report of 77th CB - operating at Emirau with 18th Reg.
8- 3-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 77th CB - operating at Emirau.
8-25-44 - 77th CB operating at Emirau - Following info from Data of SoPac as of 7/1/44:
Aug'43 - Arrived Noumea
Aug'43 - " Guadalcanal
Sep'43 - " Vella Lavella
Dec'43 - " Bougainville
Apr'44 - " Emirau
Under orders to move to SoWesPac 7/1/44.

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- 8-29-44 - 77th CB assigned to Brisbane. (Comserfor7flt Sec. Disp. 220627 NCR 2110 to CNB Emirau 22 Aug'44)
9-19-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 77th CB - located at Emirau. 2nd endorsement by Comseronsopac states that transportation to new location will be available in near future. Estimated completion date of assignment in Emirau is 10 Aug'44. This batt has been overseas 12 mos. and has been actively engaged on 4 islands - Guadalcanal, Vella LaVella, Bougainville, and Emirau.
9-26-44 - 77th CB is located at Emirau. (Sec. Disp. 172238 NCR 13659 dtd 24 Sep'44 from CNB Emirau to Comseronsopac)
10- 3-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 77th CB - located at Emirau. Crating and preparing battalion gear for shipment.
10- 5-44 - 77th CB ordered to report to 19th Reg. by letter upon arrival at Brisbane. (Rest. Disp. 261003 NCR 39380 from Comserv7thflt to CNB Biak and CNB Milne)
10-30-44 - 77th CB is located at Brisbane. (Comserfor7flt Sec. disp 130349 NCR 12037 to CNO dtd 25 Oct'44).
11-3-44 -- The 77th CB is located at Emirau. (CNB Emirau Sec. disp to Comseronsopac 180012 NCR 13541 dtd 31 Oct'44 - Note this conflicts with entry above)
11-8-44 - 77th CB is at Emirau - awaiting transportation to Brisbane for temp. duty. (Comserfor7flt Sec. ltr A9-4 over Ser BP-001882 to Budocks dtd 12 Oct'44 monthly report for Sep'44)
11-11-44 -- The 77th CB is located at Emirau. (CNB Emirau Sec. disp to Comseronsopac 012114 NCR 15171 dtd 9 Nov'44).
11-29-44 -- The 77th CB is located at Emirau. (CNB Emirau Sec. disp to Comseronsopac 15 Nov'44 NCR 19061 dtd 26 Nov'44).

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- 12-2-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of 77th CB - operating at Emirau.
- 12-14-44 - The 77th CB is located at Emirau. (CMB Emirau Sec. disp to Comseronsopac dtd 11 Dec 1944).
- 12-28-44 - The 77th CB is at Emirau awaiting transportation to Brisbane to join the 19th Reg. upon arrival. (Comserfor7flt Sec. report for Oct'44 dtd 20 Nov'44).
- 1-4-45 - The 77th CB has departed for Brisbane, leaving only a rear Ech to follow. (CMB Emirau Sec. disp to Comseronsopac 160402 dtd 28 Dec'44).
- 1-13-45 - The 77th CB at Emirau - going to Brisbane - to move forward after the "roll up" at Brisbane; in the 19th Regiment. (Comserfor7flt Sec Report for Nov'44 dtd 15 Dec'44)
- 1-16-45 - The 77th CB rear echelon is still at Emirau. (CMB Emirau Sec Disp to Comseronsopac 020216 dtd 13 Jan'45)
- 1-30-45 -- The 77th CB rear echelon is located at Emirau. (CMB Emirau Sec. disp to Comseronsopac 152102 dtd 26 Jan'45).
- 2- 2-45 - 1 Nov'44 report of the 77th CB - Batt has completed 15 mos. overseas duty at the following locations:
- Enroute from U.S. - - - - - 2 Aug'43 - 3 Sep'43
 - Guadalcanal, S.I. - - - - - 3 Sep'43 - 23 Sep'43
 - Vella LaVella, S.I. - - - - - 25 Sep'43 - 7 Dec'43
 - Bougainville, S.I. - - - - - 10 Dec'43 - 11 Apr'44
 - Emirau, Bismark Archipelago- 14 Apr'44 - present.
- 2- 2-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of the 77th CB - located at Emirau - Crating and preparing gear for shipment.

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- 2- 8-45 - The 77th CB now at Emirau to be shipped to Subic Bay vice Leyte. Authorized to transfer one-half of the 77th CB with gear to Co, NABU 6 at Subic Bay for duty. (ComServ7flt Sec Disp to Comserv7flt SubordCom 040037 dtd 4 Feb'45)
- 2-10-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 77th CB - located at Brisbane. The main body of the batt, comprised of 27 off. and 810 men, left Emirau for duty at Brisbane on 16 Dec'44. Arrived Brisbane 22 Dec'44. A rear echelon, comprised of 2 off. and 101 men, was left at Emirau to conduct roll-up work at that base. 294 men now on leave.
- 2-15-45 -- Comser7flt restr disp to Subordcomd Aust Poi 270809 Jan'45 - SSGSF7 has authorized transfer 100 men with Ch.Carp. V.T. Bendorf(OinC) 77th CB Detachment to proceed and report CNAB Leyte Gulf for temp add. duty from Emirau - upon completion report to 77th CB for duty.
- 2-15-45 -- The 77th CB is located at Brisbane(3/4). (Comser7flt Sec. disp to CNO 020659 dtd 9 Feb'45).
- 2-15-45 -- The 77th CB(rear Ech.) is located at Emirau. (CMB Emirau Sec. disp to Comseronsopa 010028 Dtd 14 Feb'45).
- 2-20-45 -- Comserfor7flt Subordcom requests that the full 77th CB be retained at Brisbane to roll up that base. (Comserfor7flt Subordcom sec. disp to Comserv7flt 150655 dtd 15 Feb'45).
- 3-15-45 -- Comserfor7flt conf. spdltr Ser. 0332 to Comserfor7flt Subordcomd, Australia dtd 23 Feb'45 - Canell my 040037 Feb except portion relative to reoutfitting. Ur 150655 Feb. refers. One co. of 77th CB to include 100 men being transf. Brisbane from Emirau shall remain Brisbane. Balance of batt to proceed to Manila when transp. is available about 1 Apr'45 - report to CMB Manila for duty involving const. of Acorn 48. To report to 24th Reg. by ltr for administrative purposes only.

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5-8-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of 77th CB - In accord with ComSerFor7thFlt conf. spdltr 0332 of 23 Feb'45 after 1 Apr'45 when shipping is avlabl main body of 77th CB is to report to CNB Manila. Rear echelon consisting of 2 officers & 100 men now at Emirau to be moved to Brisbane and to remain there.

Location - Brisbane, Manila

77th C.B.

- 3-27-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of the 77th CB - located at Brisbane as of 1 Feb. End. by Comserfor7flt states that dest. of this Batt has been changed from Leyte to Manila where the Batt will report to CNB Manila and to the 24th Reg. for adm. purposes. The det. now at Emirau will be moved to Brisbane to comprise a part of one co. to remain at Brisbane to complete roll-up of Naval facilities. As of 1 Feb, the rear echelon, consisting of 2 off. and 100 men, are at Emirau, conducting roll-up work. This echelon has been functioning under the direction of CNB since 16 Dec'44 at which time the main body of the 77th CB was moved to Brisbane.
- 4-10-45 -- The 77th CB 1st Sec. is located at Manila with Acorn 45. The 77th CB 2nd Sec. is at Subic. (Com7flt Sec. disp to Cominch 250756 Mar'45).
- 4-10-45 -- Com7flt Sec. disp to Cominch 300346 Mar'45 - Correct my 250756 Mar'45 - The 2nd Section of the 77th CB proposed location is Manila.
- 4-30-45 - Comserfor7flt Sec Rep of 1 Apr'45 shows 4 Cos of the 77th CB to go to Manila. 1 Co. (2 off. and 100 men) to remain to roll up Brisbane.
- 5-4-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of 77th CB - 2 officers & 100 men of the 77th CB will move from Emirau to Brisbane to complete roll up of ABCD. Remainder of battalion at Brisbane awaiting transportation to Manila. (This info from end by Comserfor7flt to report dtd 15 Apr'45) Main body of batt moved to Brisbane on 16 Dec'44.
- 5- 7-45 - This revises my spdltr 0332 of 23 Feb'45. 77th CB heredet 24th Reg. Report to CNB Manila for both adm and operational purposes. (Comserfor7flt Conf Spdltr Ser BP-0980 to CinC 77th CB)
- 5- 8-45 - The 77th CB is shown located at Manila with 1 Co. at Brisbane on the Dirpadocks S.F. Sec Rep of 15 Apr'45.
- 5-11-45 - 22 men of the 77th CB arrived Parks from overseas 5 May'45. (Parks TWX 072105 May'45 to Bupers)

Location - Brisbane, Manila 77th C.B.

- 5-12-45 - 1 May'45 report of the 77th CB - located at Brisbane as of 1 May'45. Batt has been ordered to report to CNB Manila for duty leaving 1 Co. at Brisbane. The rear echelon, now at Emirau, to be moved to Brisbane and will comprise part of the Co. to remain at Brisbane. A ship has been assigned and it is estimated the main body of the Batt will depart from Brisbane the first part of May. 3 off. and 10 men preceded batt to Manila.
- 5-22-45 - On or about this date you will take charge of approx 60 personnel and will proceed via air transp to Manila. To report to the location where the CinC 77th CB may be, reporting to him for duty. (Naval Base Brisbane conf ltr ser 0888 dtd 7 May to Lt (jg) R.U.White)
- 6-19-45 - 77th CB Detachment at Brisbane, 4 off. and 202 men to move forwd after ABCD roll-up (Comserfor7flt sec cb Location Schedule 7th Flt dtd 5 June)
- 7-12-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 77th CB - 1 off. and 30 men arrived at Sangley Point (Cavite, P.I.) by air on 5 June and reported to the CinC of the 77th CB. This group augmented the 5 off. and 100 men who had prev reported. The main body of the batt, consisting of 13 off. and 529 men, arrived by surface vessel on 13 June. By authority contained in Comserfor7flt sec disp to CTG 72.2 220341, arrangements are being made to transport by air to Sangley Point the 4 off. and 167 men remaining as a rear echelon at Brisbane. Also, a request has been made to return 6 men now on temp add duty with CNB Sydney. These men are on duty with Pontoon Shipping Unit, located at Newcastle. Report via 3rd Reg and 3rd Brg.
- 7-27-45 - The 77th CB is attached to the 3rd Reg and 3rd Brg. Located at Sangley Pt., near Manila, constructing aviation facilities. (CCT 7th Flt Sec rep of June)
- 8-6-45 - CCT 7th Flt Sec CB Loc Sched dtd 15 July shows the 77th CB Det at Brisbane, 4 off and 202 men ordered to Manila. Transp via air beginning 7 July.

Location - Manila 77th C.B.

- 8-14-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 77th CB - located at Manila. In accord with the authority contained in ComSerFor7Flt sec disp to CTG 72.2, 2 off. and 154 men were transported by air from the Rear Echelon, Brisbane, to join the main body of the Batt at Sangley Point, Cavite, P.I. There now remains 2 off. and 8 men with the Rear Echelon whose ETA Sangley Point is the first week in August. 70 men were transfd to this activity from the 63rd CB --these men assigned TAD with the 35th CB located at Manila. Report via the 3rd Reg and 3rd Brg.
- 8-18-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 3rd Brig states that the 77th CB has been assigned the bldg of the Naval Air Facility on Sangley Point and is furnishing supervision for the construction of the Naval Facilities at Cavite, and is attached to the 3rd Reg and 3rd Brig.
- 9-21-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 77th CB. No info as to location. Report via 3rd Reg & 3rd Brig. Transfer of rear echelon completed, 2 off & 8 men were transported by air from Brisbane to join the main body of the batt. at Sangley Point, Cavite, Phil. Is. 66 men transferred to other units. 60 men transferred to U.S. for discharge under Alnav 196-45.
- 10-17-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 3rd Reg. 3rd Reg. report states that the 77th CB is located at Sangley Point, P.I.
- 10-24-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 77th CB - location not stated. Report via 3rd Reg. & 3rd Brig. Entire batt. is located at Sangley Pt., P.I.
- 11-26-45 - 77th CB was inactivated on 15 Oct'45. (Comphilseafron restr ltr ser 7982 dtd 3 Nov'45 to Comservpac).

INACTIVATED



Dedication ceremonies at Camp Endicott

As bells were ringing out the old year, 1942, the 77th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion was originated at Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Va. The Battalion complement was 28 officers and 1,200 enlisted men. It took no more than the end of the week of Navy life to convince us we were not at Williamsburg to see the sights or go whistling through a war. We were there to learn the grim business of waging war. We were learning the best methods of destruction so that we could proceed with construction. The speed with which we received our physical examinations, clothing, gear, haircuts, and those unforgettable shots with the square needle amazed us. Little did we know of the life that was in store for us for the next weeks—no, months that developed into years.

Life at Peary was not easy as we went through that All-American torture period prescribed for a "Boot's" first three months in the Navy. Close

order drill, extended order drill, instruction in the use of weapons, military manners, camp details; and the wet, cold climate with the oozy, slimy mist that was Camp Peary, soon had the mates in tip-top shape and ready for advanced military training.

On March 31, 1943 the battalion shoved off for Camp Endicott, Davisville, R. I., and arrived in the early hours of a windy morning, tired, but squared away for the tasks that lay ahead. While there we had the honor of participating in the dedication ceremonies of Camp Endicott. And then, finally, before a vast crowd of onlookers who had gathered on the parade ground for the special occasion, the 77th was officially commissioned and we received our standards. We had learned much, and because he felt that we would best indicate the caliber of training Seabees were receiving, the base commander chose us as the battalion to be reviewed by a group of high Navy and Congressional leaders the

week after our commissioning. This was the first of many honors for the officers and men of the 77th.

The advanced military training program drew rapidly to a close as we moved into the last week of May in 1943, and preparations were in order for our shipment to Port Hueneme, Calif., our embarkation point for new worlds to conquer and rebuild. We looked forward to the trip. "California, Here We Come"—the "Golden land of opportunity" was to be ours for a while!

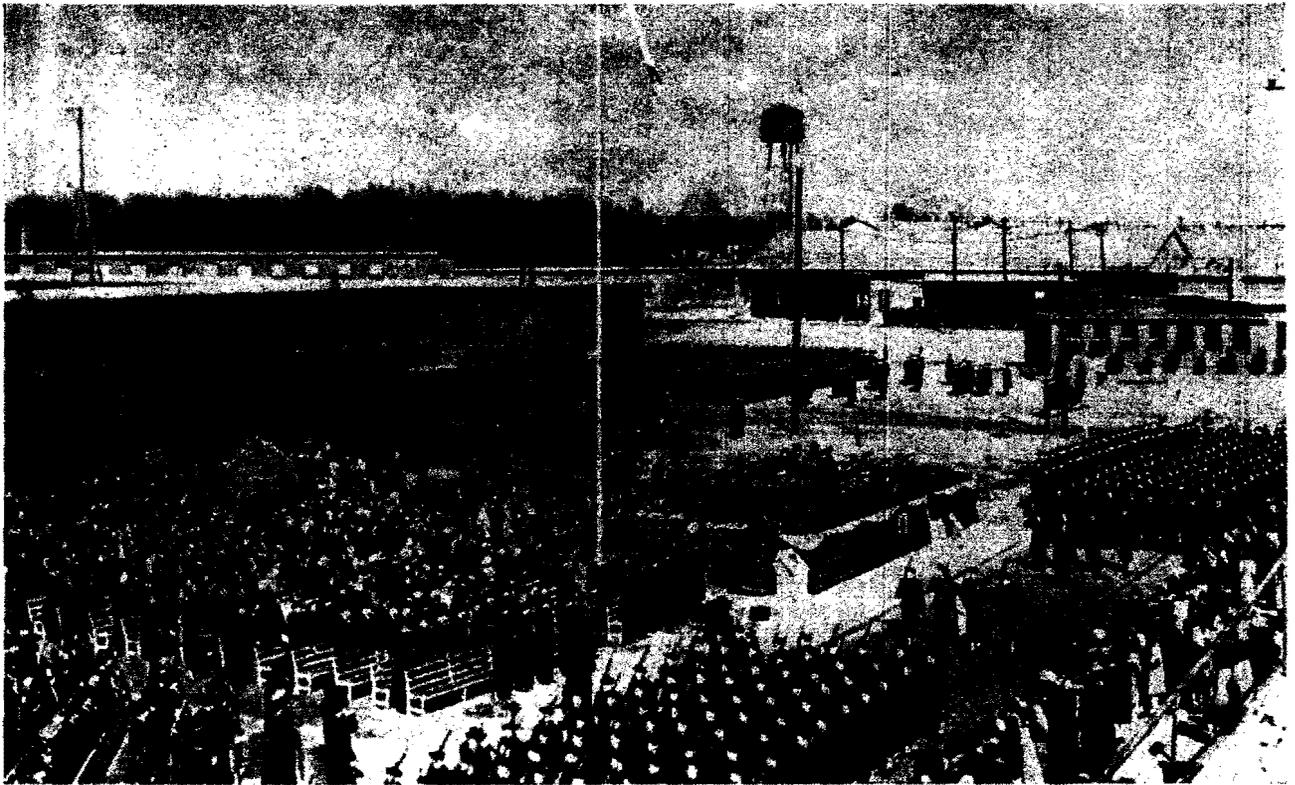
We arrived, how and by what route was a military secret. Some of the mates traveled in practically all the states in the Union, but we finally arrived after only a full week. "The lost platoon" of Company B made history when it missed the train and was left stranded in one of the small towns of Illinois. An alert train conductor discovered the loss in time, the train was stopped, backed

into the station, and a lot of "Yes, Sir," "No, Sir," "No excuse, Sir" was saved.

California didn't offer as many opportunities as the Mates had planned for. We were too busy. Military training, schools, procurement of supplies and equipment occupied most of our hours, and we were not given time to speculate on how soon we would be shoving off for the work ahead.

By the end of July 1943, the scuttlebutt began to fly: We would be sailing within the coming week. It proved right (for a wonder)! On August 2 we said farewell to old and new loved ones, boarded ship, and took a long loving look at sunny California. That evening our ship lifted anchor and quietly slipped out into the vast blue Pacific. The time had come and we were on our way to Island X. There was much sweat and labor ahead, and many months of hard fighting and hard building before we were to ship back to the USA.

Eyes Right



T H E 7 7 T H A T S E A

On the Sea, on the Sea, on the Beautiful Sea. . . . But, Mate, most of us didn't find it too beautiful those first nights and days afloat. We were sick, but good. That was one period when the Seabees were as tame as kittens and as unwilling to eat as a baby after two bottles of milk. However, everything ends, and so did our bout with mal de mer. Once we got used to being swayed, we ate, but ravenously. The skipper quit worrying that we wouldn't be worth much when we arrived at—well wherever it was we were going.

Our days did not lag. Most of us had never seen the ocean, and each day brought new experiences. Just before dusk each evening our orchestra, full of talented mates, kept us highly entertained. Then there were the bridge games and poker games ad infinitum—the rich got richer and the poor. . .

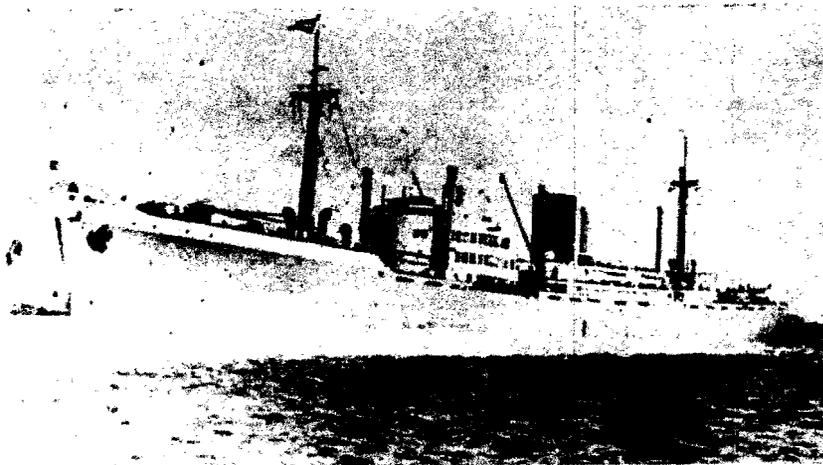
At night the ship was completely blacked out above deck, and for the first time we experienced the luminous wonder of phosphorescent water. At times the entire surface of the water around the ship was lighted with marine life. When lights were out in the wash rooms, the sea water glowed and shimmered in the wash bowls. Mate, you can laugh now, but did you ever expect an enemy submarine to come in sight at any minute and then see a

whale go by—good fun after its over, but we land-lubber sailors laughed out of the other sides of our mouths when it happened that first trip out.

155 degrees Longitude, West. Ask one of the 77th mates and they'll tell you that that's the point at which, on August 10th, we crossed the equator. Oh happy day, happy place, now we could become Shellbacks, full-fledged members of the domain of Neptuneus Rex. No longer would we be lowly Pollywogs.

The initiation ceremonies began early. Amidship a throne was erected and occupied by King Neptune (in person) and his lovely bride. Old Neptune looked as if he had been called but couldn't go—dead for years and just too tired to lie down. The bride was the last thing in pin-ups, with her yellow rope hair, her flopping breasts, and legs which one can find only on a knob-kneed Duncan Phyfe table. This handsome, loving couple presided at the ceremonies. They were accompanied by their bouncing baby boy, the fattest man on the ship, draped in a diaper. Davey Jones, the other member of the royal court sat at the king's right.

A judge and jury tried each case, very formally. King Neptune appointed the prosecuting attorney, and we had a special attorney appointed to defend



U.S.S. Waltervreden

us (to no avail). Our lawyer was a dandy—he more often helped the prosecution! Approved apparel for appearance before the court consisted of shorts. We found, after several of the mates had tried it, that to attempt a pair of dungarees was most distasteful to the King, and instead of easing the wear and tear, only hurt us more in the end.

Each man appeared with his summons before the court for being a Pollywog. The sentences varied, but the favorite was "The Works," as the jury so blandly put it.

"The Works" meant a long ordeal. The first step was to make the King's baby laugh by kissing him on the rump. As we stooped over to carry out this command, the paddles descended on our rears. If the kiss didn't tickle enough to make Baby titter, over we went again to repeat the procedure.

Each Pollywog had to be examined by the King's personal physician. While the tongue was held out, a tongue depressor piled high with horseradish mixed with a vile concoction was placed in the mouth. This morsel we were forced to swallow. During the physical we were given an overall coating of gentian violet by the doctor's assistants (se-

lected, we think, for their ability to wield a hefty paint brush).

Next came the stockade and the brig, where we were liberally saturated with the nectar of Neptune's realm—water to you, mate. Released from the brig, we were met by a mild-looking fellow, the King's barber. On the way our fannies were again toasted with paddlies. The barber placed us in his chair and proceeded to shear our heads—quite frantically. At the same time, the barber's assistant applied lather, made of flour, to our face with a four-inch stucco brush. Just as soon as the barber finished, the chair was tilted backward and we landed in a tank of water five feet deep. Each time we came up we were ducked. But all was not over, for the paddles, ever ready, made coming out of that tank an ordeal not to be forgotten. At one time the ceremony was delayed when one of the officers lost his false teeth in the tank. Fortunately, they were retrieved by our salvage divers.

And so we became Shellbacks. It took several days to wash off the paint and several months for the shorn locks to grow back, but we took it in stride, and, in the tradition of Neptune's realm we were acclaimed true and loyal sons.



3 September 1948 . . . a date not to be forgotten by the men of the 77th Battalion. 3 September, arrived, Guadalcanal. The name itself was portentous, it had leaped at us from newspaper headlines for months; we had pored over the stories of fierce sea battles that had raged off these shores and the bloody struggles of our marine comrades in arms to secure this unheard of piece of land, Guadalcanal the first great name on the bloody road back—and now we were there.

To be sure, we had stopped at Noumea, New Caledonia, but only for a brief pause enroute. We needed that pause. We had left Hueneme on August 2nd with Lt. Commander L. F. Hammond in charge, and we had come the whole way on the Dutch Freighter, *Weitevreden*, making her maiden voyage as a transport. Thirty-one days at sea is no mean voyage, and we were ready to get ashore.

GUADALCANAL! Magic Name! Work lay ashore, and we were ready for it, mate. HENDERSON FIELD, airfield that the Japs had built, only to be forced off and see American aircraft taking off laden with flaming death for their brothers. We stood on deck straining our eyes to see through the darkness . . . we were below gathering our field packs, sweating, grumbling, swearing as someone stepped on a hand or a foot . . . finally getting squared away and getting back on deck.

Through the milky dawn, we could see a coastline blanketed in wooly green with mountainous terrain inland. As the ship nosed into shallower waters, details of the coast became more clear. It

was a green blanket of palm fronds with the trunks of coconut trees for supports. We could now make out a road along the beach with military traffic moving on its inexorable way. The diesels stopped. Anchors dropped, their chains clattering out of the chain lockers. The 77th had arrived!

After 31 days at sea the time spent waiting for the 6th Special Battalion to come out and ferry us ashore seemed interminable. Except for a few members of the personnel detailed to remain aboard, we hit the beach with *Acorn 11*, our fellow passengers.

This was KOKUMBONA BEACH; we knew it as MAGGOT BEACH, so named because of the countless bloated Jap corpses bobbing in this surf and on the sands. It was the site of the last stand the Japs made on Guadal, the scene of one of the most bloody struggles in the SOLOMONS. Maggot Beach stank from rotting human flesh. Later our bulldozers, working along the beach, were to turn up decomposing bodies that had been ground down into the sand. Cool breezes coming across the beach often were laden with the odor of death. That's one of the things the combat soldier in the forward areas doesn't forget, and can't describe—we were being initiated to the smell of war.

The scene ashore was confusion. Supplies finally began to trickle in from our ship and were being hustled along to the compound. Water was prepared. The cooks set up a galley of sorts and prepared to feed the hungry mob. Our first meal, however, was necessarily C rations.

On Guadalcanal Beach



Tents could not be brought ashore that night, so each of us broke open his field pack, found a mate, buttoned the two shelter halves together and set up light housekeeping. The coconut grove in which we bivouacked was pocked with abandoned foxholes and the ground was strewn with spilled, unfired ammunition, American and Japanese. When darkness came to halt the work, we sauntered over to the adjacent Marine camp for some fresh scuttlebutt. From these veterans we learned that the red-tipped cartridges were tracers that fitted our Springfields. Fourth of July on the third of September—we fouled up the MAA's sleep as we fired the tracers. This new form of diversion soon wore off (or the shells gave out).

D plus one we set up our 16 by 16 pyramid tents according to camp layout. Foxholes had to be filled in, our predecessors had dug them in the wrong places for our purposes; new ones had to be dug. One group of the Acorn men accidentally dug into what had evidently been a Japanese officer's cache. They discovered two seabags and a box containing clothing, starred helmet, bayonet, two pistols, medical supplies, radio, batteries, and binoculars. That did it. Our private treasure hunt was on.

By this time the work of unloading the Sea Bass was on in earnest. Day and night the barges shuttled between the beach and the ship. Trucks dug their way through the sand between the beach and the compound. Dozers were set to work repairing the unpaved trails and ramps as fast as the trucks ground them up; swing cranes were picking up and spitting out supplies at either end of the trail; generators were set humming all night providing power for the flood lights at beach and compound, stopping only for "Washing Machine Charlie's" warning wail and starting again as soon as the "all clear" came. The 77th had started work—we were on the road to Tokyo.

Did you ever see a good sized freighter unloaded? You can hardly believe so much can come out of one. We worked around the clock (with no time and a half), we worked hard, and we worked 24 hours getting our supplies off the Sea Bass, but the official report had this to say when we had completed the work: "Our tonnage unloaded September ninth established a new high for one ship for naval units staging at Guadalcanal."

Problem one was met and solved with typical Seabee Can Do spirit. The beach road passed through our camp, and traffic on it promised to snarl up our unloading operations. We fixed that, and quickly, by cutting a road around back of our camp, between the jungle and the grove we occupied, allowing traffic to by-pass us.

The jungle beyond this back road was interesting—too interesting. Guards were posted within sight of one another along this road to keep any stray Japs from infiltrating into our camp, and to keep souvenir hunters and curiosity-consumed bees of the 77th from trying to infiltrate the jungle. In this tangled mass of vegetation were a thousand abandoned Jap bivouacs, foxholes, and lair-like hiding places beneath the roots of trees, Jap gunpowder covered with hungry ants, blasted and burned-out tanks and trucks, Jap mess gear from which you could cut out the engraved lettering for a souvenir bracelet, Jap canteens and helmets, shallow graves where wild boars had rooted up the

bones, Jap skulls bleached white, bangalore torpedoes, land mines, booby trap detonators, flares, and countless yards of thin, spaghetti-sized Japanese telephone wire. We were told to keep out of there. A few days before a Marine patrol had found two American bodies back in the hills. Who? We couldn't tell. They'd been decapitated. We stayed out.

And then we met the natives. Every morning they would file down our back road on their way from the village to the bush. Each adult carried a long knife. Pa was at the head of the procession, followed by the women, then the older children, then the youngsters. When they came back, around noon, each carried bananas or a bundle of edible leaves or roots on his head. As they passed one of us they "smiled big" waved, and said, "Hello" or "good morning." You got that "good morning" at any time of the day. The chief of the village spoke understandable English, but most of the villagers got by with only the two greetings.

The native village, on the road about a hundred yards north of our camp, had a few thatched-roof huts built of poles covered with leaves gathered in the bush and secured with thorns. Set on a knoll worn bare and hard packed by the tread of the natives' unshod feet, it was surrounded by unkempt patches of yams, pineapples, and whatever else edible they had tucked away in that green confusion. Here they lived—slept, ate, and sat down to wait for Americans to come and buy souvenirs or trade. They were always in the market for pipes or musical instruments.

The chief had a large can well stuffed with American dollars. One of the mates asked him what he was going to do with so much money. "Someday," he said, "American Captain open big store here. Then I buy many things for my people."

We had noticed from the very first that these natives were different from any dark-skinned race we had ever seen. In answer to our questions, the Chief told us that they were "Melanesians." Being Melanesian is something deeper than speaking a like language or have the same mores and folkways. It was a part of their build, their features, the way they walked, and in their composite personalities.

They were lovably simple. One of them who had come from his village "two days away" approached the guard on the back road, thrust out his arm with a battered wrist watch strapped on it and asked, "You make watch walk?"

On opening the back the mechanism was found full of mud and water. The guard replaced the back and handed it back to the native, saying, "Too much water . . . Too much dirt . . . Watch never walk again."

The black man strapped on the watch, shook his head mournfully and said: "Bad deal, bad deal!" and walked on.

There was enough novelty in their appearance to capture our attention. They were a shiny jet black and they stood proudly erect. They walked with the grace of people who have never been touched by barbaric modes of dress developed by western culture. Many of the men bleached their tight-curling black hair with lime juice, turning it blonde. The women were close-shorn. Most proud males had their faces tattooed. They loved bright colored combs, and as many as could find them

wore them proudly, in their hair. Almost all wore something around their necks—a string of shark teeth, a shell necklace, cross and chain—the sign of western missionaries—or a G. I. dog tag. The adults, men and women alike wore loin cloths, while the children wore no clothing at all. In their village they slept on folding canvas cots, picked up at abandoned camps and they carried water in battered G. I. buckets.

We were at Guadalcanal a scant month, yet a great deal was accomplished. We stopped there mainly for staging purposes. In addition to the work of unloading the Sea Bass and preparing for the expedition to VELLA LA VELLA, we helped considerably in building up the island. Our men can feel proud that they had a part in the building of Henderson Field. We had several details at work on facilities there through a good many raids to which this field was being subjected nightly at that time. We had a road building job at DOMO COVE near SAVO ISLAND, just below POINT ESPERANCE. This locality was fairly saturated with some 40,000 Japs who were the first to splash up against the rising tide of American might. It was off these shores that America had lost three cruisers and Australia lost the Canberra in an historic sea fight.

We did have fun at Guadalcanal. The band, under the direction of Wilbert Klein, provided some price-less entertainment. They would pile into a truck in the evening near the new Ship's Service and play numbers we had danced to and sung so recently in the States. Some evenings a part of the band would get together in one of the company streets for a jam session and a crowd would soon surround them. As an organization the band played for the MOB 8 show and for the patients at MOB 8 Hospital. They put on a special show for the casualties from the first wave of the Vella La Vella Expedition. And they made us all sing, and forget that this was a pin point on an island, thousands of miles from the Stork Club or the Blue Moon or the Dew Drop Inn.

The 'Canal was a land of firsts for us. First work overseas, first outdoor movie in the rain, first acquaintance with the friendly little green lizards (probably the truest aborigines of the Solomon Islands). First Chapel—We set it up, our first overseas chapel, and Chaplain Goff of the 77th and Chaplain Rice of Acorn 11 officiated at Protestant and Catholic Divine services respectively. It was a 20 by 50 hospital tent set high with the side walls flared out, pitched near the water where it was cool. The front of the tent was decorated with green palm fronds and we sat facing the sea. A

field organ was used in the services, and a good choir was organized with the help of J. W. Raf-fensperger. Who is to say that this chapel was not the scene of greater and more devout worship than any of us had previously experienced?

Here we built our first mess hall—don't think we didn't want THAT first—good chow makes good soldiers.

Here, for the first time, we saw planes shot down. It was an epic night, that night when those seven planes came over to raid Henderson Field. We sat near our foxholes to watch the show, ever ready to dive below ground if the action came too close. We saw the red flash of the flak shells bursting in the sky, the fiery streak of tracers reaching up into the night, and, then, like a comet, a Jap plane bursting into flame and spinning down into the sea. The silver fingers of the searchlights sweeping back and forth through the blackness feeling, probing for another—finding him—holding him in the clear crossed beams of light like a tiny, shining cross, and then, suddenly, the decisive show of tracers spitting across the sky and finding the target and then the scream of the dying ship hurtling to its death.

Lieutenant John Miegs, Army Air Force pilot from New York City, was up that night in a P-38. He brought down two of the seven planes and the AA batteries accounted for two more. A few days later Lt. Miegs came to our camp and told us how it felt "up there" first hand. When we found out, later, that Lt. Miegs had been killed in a crash over Bougainville we felt that we had lost a "mate."

But none of these firsts has so fresh a memory for us as that first bomb! On the 19th of September the tropical night was like a picture in a travelogue—clear and moonlit—and perfect for bombing. The hum of Washing Machine Charlie broke out. We had become used to air alerts. Only a few got up and headed for the foxhole, most of us were reluctant to leave the comfort of our cots. Then we heard that sibilant swoosh of a falling bomb. Matey, we went for those holes! Mosquito bars, tent stakes, and our best friends were obstructions too inconsequential for consideration in the mad rush to get below ground. "WHOOOMP!" The bomb found earth a few feet offshore. Sharpnel tore through the tents, but no one was hit; however, in the morning there was a long line of foxhole casualties at the sick bay waiting to have barked shins and skinned noses patched up.

Yes, Guadalcanal was the first, but at this point we realize that here we received an indoctrination to battle which no stateside lecture could possibly have achieved. We were ready to push on.





Hospital Sign

Working in an area cleared of Japs was finished—for awhile at least. We were headed for VELLA LA VELLA. On 23 September, 20 days after we had landed on Guadalcanal, the first wave for Vella La Vella was ready. Our equipment and supplies were loaded aboard two LSTs, and at 0400 of the 24th the men of the 77th shoved off.

The purpose of this expedition, carefully planned, was to build roads, bridges, hospitals, and bivouac areas for Marine forces and set up saw mills on the island. Consider the position of Vella La Vella and the difficulty of this task becomes more painfully clear.

KOLOMBANGARA, an island approximately 10 miles to the northwest was occupied by an estimated 10,000 Japs. CHOISEUL, 20 miles northwest, was in Japanese hands, as was the nearby island of GIZA. At that time BOUGAINVILLE, and its outlying islands in the Solomons, was a Nipponese stronghold of about 60,000 and the notorious Jap airdromes of KAHILI, BUNA and a Bougainville strip were within 30 minutes flying distance.

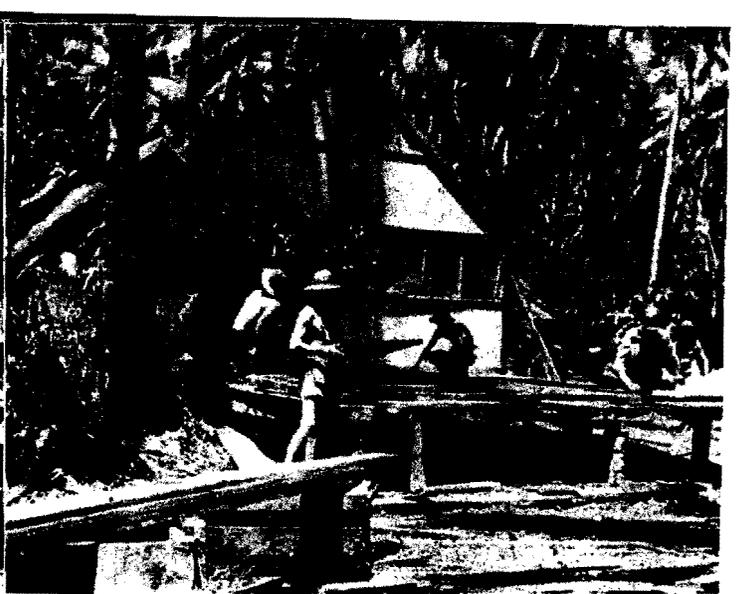
All told, there were 30 enemy airfields nearby in full operation. The infamous Tokyo Express was making six or eight runs nightly through this region. Our own fighter strip on Vella was not to be in operation to give us protection for another month. On Vella La Vella, within six miles of the points where we landed and set up our camp, there were 600 to 800 well-equipped Japs. When we landed, they were being harassed by a small detachment of New Zealanders. The precariousness of our position is attested to by the fact that the 300 Seabees in this first wave were given 500 Marines for protection.

Within three hours after beaching at virgin landing points, the two LSTs carrying 77th personnel were bombed and strafed. One suffered two direct hits and eventually burned beyond usefulness while our men continued to unload her. There were over 75 casualties in this action of whom 25 died. The 77th merited its first Purple Hearts this day.

Fortunately, most of our men were at the beach instead of on the ship when the bombs fell. An



Setting foundation blocks for hospital



Laying deck

attack a few minutes earlier or later could have meant a heavy toll of lives. A few minutes difference could have meant that the 77th chow line would have stood on the very section of the deck that was pierced by a bomb. The five bombers that wrought this havoc were eventually brought down.

We are privileged to take the following excerpts from Lieutenant Clark's report on the First Wave:

"The convoy, which included LST 167 and 484, left Guadalcanal at 0400, 24 September 1943, arrived in Vella Gulf the next morning.

"LST 167 hit beach at RURAVALI about 0730 on opposite of bay to planned landing. A very successful landing at slow speed onto the coral shelf was made. Twenty minutes after beaching, the first 'cat' was run out. Ramps were built and access roads to dispersal areas were started, trucks rolling off within 25 minutes after landing of 'cats.'

"A motorized detachment of New Zealanders using about 10 trucks proved to be a valuable factor in speeding up the unloading.

"A light upset in continuity of unloading was occasioned by an air-raid alarm about 0930 which proved of no importance. The slight confusion was dissipated quickly.

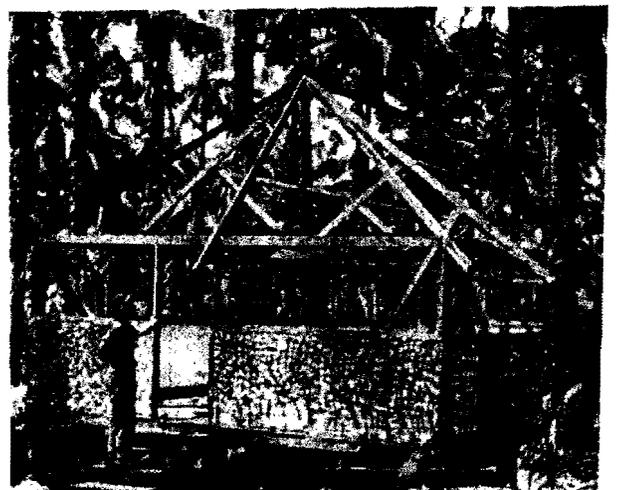
"At the JUNO RIVER landing, LST 484 occasioned considerable delay through a minor beaching on a reef. Finally, a poor landing was made. The LST landed in such shallow water that a ramp approximately 200 feet had to be constructed.

"At the Ruravai unloading, work was progress-

ing rapidly. Suddenly, at about 1100 an air-raid warning was sounded, followed by an attack by an estimated flight of five Jap planes. The gun crews went into action immediately and shot down two of the attacking planes. However, two bombs hit LST 167, one the forward port corner of the bridge and the other forward. There were many casualties. Lt. M. J. Kornis carried out his work for over an hour with only the services of his corpsmen. His efforts were heroic. A call for medical aid was responded to as soon as possible and medicos from LST 484, LST 168, New Zealander's Hospital, and Marine forces arrived in time to give valuable aid. The 77th Battalion had only three men injured.

"After the confusion arising from the vicious attack had been put under control, all hands set to making camp, which included setting up tents, getting adequate water supply, making foxholes, helped by bulldozers and draglines. During the night, the camp was kept in a nervous state by

Ready for tarpaulins





Excavation for underground surgery

several air raid warnings and one bombing during the early morning. The ship burned all night making a clear target. Our situation was further accentuated by continuous explosions of munitions on board LST 167.

"During the early morning of the 26th of September, we moved down to the vicinity of Juno River. We struck camp immediately and rebuilt at Juno, incorporating the two landing parties into one camp. The Marine units set up their camps surrounding ours on a prearranged plan.

"By the 27th, all work was in some form of progress, including road crews, bridge crews, lumbering gang, four LST landings, a temporary bridge across Juno River to allow for crossing of four 90-mm. AA guns placed at Naravaii. During the next few days crews and equipment were loaned to both Marine and Army units to facilitate in building gun emplacements and camp roads.

"The road construction was in full progress by

the fourth day. A continuous line of new duties was added until the balance of the battalion arrived. A fine working morale was built up in spite of nightly alarms, both from air attack and adjacent sea battles. A rugged but efficient camp was established, due in large credit to Lieutenant S. Mank, whose tireless energy allowed for a very efficient construction organization as well."

The 77th proved itself prepared to overcome battle emergencies by the manner in which they handled the chaos resultant from the attack. The Ship's Company personnel was badly disorganized by their losses and the Marines were busy ashore setting up defenses, so responsibility was laid squarely on the Bees. A few of the many heroic actions of our men have been officially recognized by citations and bronze stars. Undoubtedly there were many other unrecognized instances, and of unheralded heroism. During that first hectic week the First Wave had started all projects outlined in the original orders in spite of the loss of much material and most of the food supplies.

During the expedition to Vella our government employed Mr. Gill, an Australian planter, to accompany the 77th. This man was the owner of the largest coconut plantation on Vella and also the Lambeti Plantation, now famous in the story of the South Pacific because it is the site of the original landing of the Marines when they captured the strategic airfield on Munda. Mr. Gill's 30 years' experience on the islands fitted him for his duties as guide, advisor, and liaison agent.

Framing underground surgery



Interior underground surgery



The rescue of approximately 165 survivors from the stricken U. S. Cruiser HELENA by the natives of Vella was publicized in newspapers and magazines in the States. This rescue occurred shortly before our landing on the island.

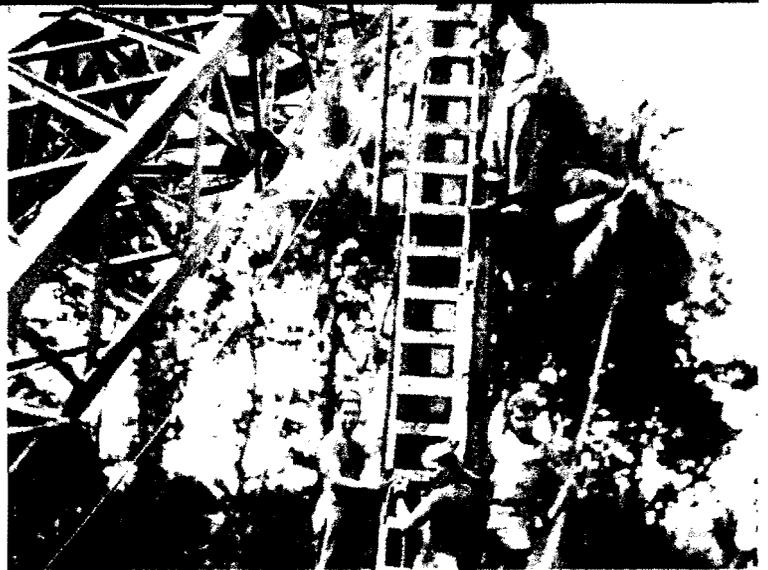
The Second Wave of the 77th shoved off from Guadalcanal for Vella La Vella on the 29th of September 1943, one week after the first. This Wave was composed of the main contingent of our battalion. We shipped out aboard three LSTs and three small troop transports.

The landing of the Second Wave on Vella La Vella was a re-enactment of the first but because of the larger number of troops involved, the bombings were more disastrous and the casualty list larger. The men aboard the small transports got ashore without mishap and in record time. In one instance, the men from one ship were ashore with their personal gear and the ship was under way only 17 minutes after she had pulled up.

The bombers came over to harass the LSTs soon after they were beached and while unloading was in swift progress. The LST at Naravaii River landing was hit. The bomb pierced the upper deck and exploded inside the ship. Seventy men were killed, 25 injured, and the ship and her cargo were set afire. While she was burning, the Scabees continued to unload her. Later, the fire-hollowed hull of the ship was towed, still smoking, out to sea; a row of charred bodies and scorched cargo remained on the beach. Today this beach is marked with a monument erected in honor of 15 men whose names were on the list of dead. They were members of a New Zealand gun crew of 17.

The LST that beached at Ruravai River escaped destruction only because a bomb that penetrated her decks was a dud; another bomb, definitely not a dud, was a near miss. The third of our LSTs was strafed, but there were no casualties.

And so the First and Second Waves were in; the troops of the two outfits were consolidated in the new camp site located in a coconut plantation just below Juno River. Now, security was of prime importance in camp building. The underbrush had grown high in the neglected groves and we tucked



Reading from top to bottom: Improvised piledriver . . .
hammer hits . . . they're down!



Reading from top to bottom: Knee deep . . . Tractor crane placing logs in position—Biporo River . . . Road between Biporo and Ruravei Rivers.

our drab green tents in among the foliage cutting only as much of the vegetation as was necessary, avoiding any tell-tale order.

Each tent group dug a foxhole; Vella was a coral island and the rock was but thinly covered with top soil. The pick handles stung our hands as we chipped out small pieces of coral. The sweat poured into our eyes and coursed down our backs as we worked, for we were not yet fully acclimated to the heavy damp, tropic heat, but we got those holes down!

We needed those holes . . . we spent most of each night in them; trying to avoid the dangers of from six to eight air raids a night was no picnic. An unbroken night's sleep was a blessing we were not to enjoy for many weeks. We sat in our holes with our heads stuck out like gophers through many dark hours watching the bright sprays of tracers, listening to the chatter of the 50s, and the heavy bark of the 90-mm., waiting for the earth-shaking "CRUMP" of the bombs. Ordinarily, we just got up a little before daylight and went to work, taking our sleepy eyes along with us.

Sometimes the vibrations of guns and bombs would cause a shower of ripe, ready-to-fall coconuts in our grove. There were always some falling, day or night, and many men wore their steel helmets at all times. A coconut falling from a 50-foot palm deals a nasty blow! The ground was strewn with fallen coconuts, some sprouting, some decaying.

Often, when a man left his tent in the unrelieved darkness of our complete blackouts, he would come upon a coconut in the wet grass so loaded with phosphorous that it glowed like a silver ball. Or he might find a weed or spray of grass that made a weirdly beautiful bouquet—another phenomena for our memories of the south seas.

Rain, hard driving, constant, unending rain—and much rain meant much mud. This was a new sort of mud; stiff gooey mud that stuck to our feet and made them grow to the size of watermelons, so heavy we could hardly lift them. The dozers pushed the mud off the roads in camp and the trucks following churned up more mud. Finally, the roads



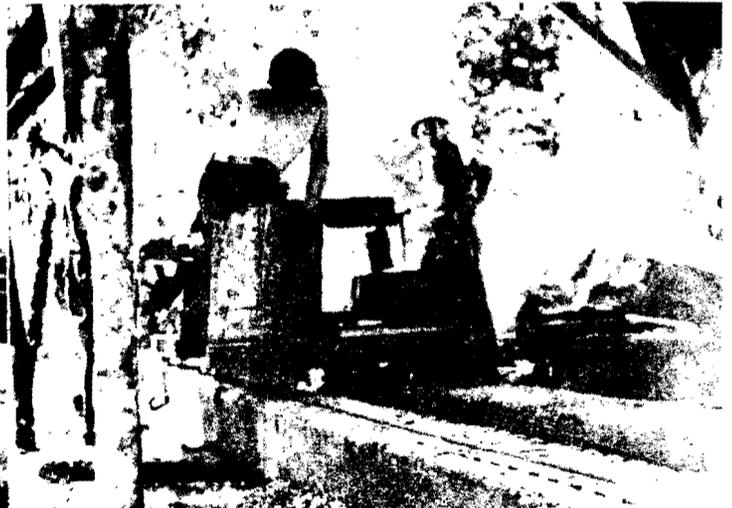
At left, reading from top to bottom: Temporary bridge—Biporo River. Beginning second bridge. Below, left: Open to traffic; right: Sawmill on Juno River.

went down three and four feet to solid rock and the truck wheels and dozer blades could cut no deeper, then the mud ran in from the sides and the roads were like canals holding a sluggish flow of mud. Always mud!

Nothing, not war nor mud, nor rain, nor being away from home could wet-blanket the morale of the Bees of the 77th; we had a good time. We were not fortunate enough to obtain a movie projector of our own, but trucks were provided to transport as many of our men as cared to go to movies at the New Zealand camp. Our own band was kept busy playing for us and other groups, and one fine memorable evening a New Zealand concert group gave an excellent show for us.

A man in the stateside areas may forget to go to chapel services but overseas in a forward area a man likes to be close to his God. Our chapel was first set up in a green clearing inland from camp, but later we were able to have it more centrally located. Chaplain Goff met and became friendly with a New Zealand Chaplain who had been a missionary to the natives of Vella and Bougainville before the war. This man held Sunday services for the native groups, and many of us attended. What a thrill it was to hear those clear, full Melanesian voices singing the old familiar hymns in their native tongue.

But all was not work, fighting, and religion, we were too typically yankee for that. We are souvenir hunters first last and always, and we were hard at it on Vella. No Jap aircraft crashed but what we



quickly dismantled it and set to work making aluminum crosses and hearts—native wood could be polished and carved into wonderful gifts, and what could be better than ashtrays, lamps, and letter openers made from empty shell casings? Sea shells were collected from the reefs and strung for necklaces and bracelets or turned into brooches. We were busy as bees—seabees.

But oh, those work schedules—how we did work—all of the original schedules were met by the prescribed date or before. A stateside construction man always feels the thrill of creation when he looks at a road or a bridge or a dam or a house which his labor and ingenuity have made possible, but our thrill over there was much greater. We had turned a coral island into a humming military post. We had built that clean, smooth road which was carrying the men and materials of war. We built each bridge along that road, built them of mahogany and coconut felled in the jungle by our own men; our 'cat skimmers snaked those trees to the location, our swing cranes swung them into position, and our builders built the unit, conceived by our officers, and dedicated to the force that was fighting to free men. We were a part of the team.

We cut the timber and operated saw mills that turned out hundreds of thousands of feet of lumber used in the Bougainville campaign. A part of this lumber was used by our men who built the hospitals

on Vella. We built three of them, and before we moved on we saw them housing the first casualties from Bougainville and Choiseul. We were a part of the team.

We were beginning to show the spirit and usefulness of our Battalion, but the individuals were coming to the fore; and we learned anew that what makes the American armed forces superior is the fact that while each man works as a cog, no man forgets that he has a mind of his own which should be used. We earned several individual commendations.

While on Vella La Vella, on 17 November 1943, Commander C. T. Wende came from the 1008th Construction Battalion Detachment and relieved Lt. Commander Hammond as "Skipper" of the 77th. Much of the fine reputation and excellent *esprit de corps* the 77th now enjoys can be accredited to Commander Wende's firm, efficient leadership and ingenuity.

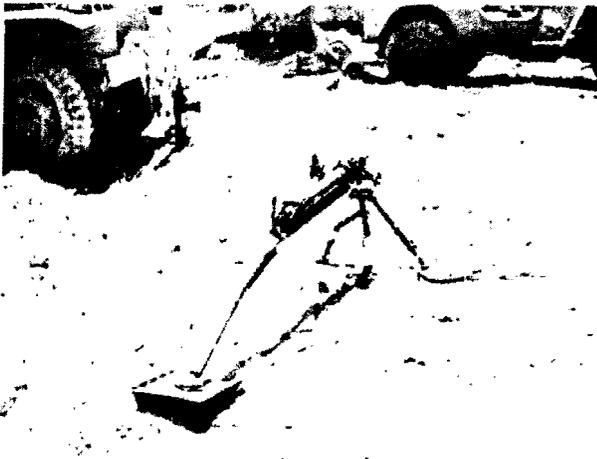
Seabee ingenuity came to the fore on Vella. Due to the shortage of building material, many unorthodox construction methods were instituted to complete facilities within the short D-Day demands. For example, only 30 bags of cement were available to take care of the floors for the scullery, galleys, and the underground operating rooms at the hospitals. These 30 bags were stretched to cover all needs by laying floors as thin as three quarters of

Coming Through



Finished Timber





Mounts Built for Mortar

an inch in depth with mixes of coral sand aggregate mixed at a ratio of 11 to one.

Here we watched the testing of a low trajectory mortar set on mounts made by the 77th, a system since found useful in jungle warfare.

On Vella our men were in charge of Malaria Control. Their job was by no means an easy one. They hacked their way into the almost impenetrable depths of the jungle, cut paths to and around every pool of stagnant water, and sprayed them with mosquito-laying oil, wherever possible cutting channels and draining off swamps. Their job was well done.

We worked with and for the Marines most of the time on this island, and it was here, in so far as the 77th is concerned, that the feelings of mutual admiration and comradeship between Seabees and Leathernecks was born. Each was glad to find in the other an organization that filled all demands made of it. Witness the Marine sign on Bougainville:

"When we reach the Isle of Japan,
With our caps at a jaunty tilt,
We'll enter the City of Tokyo
On the roads the Seabees built."

After we had done the bulk of our work for others, we turned our attention to our own camp.



Firing

One of Commander Wende's first orders was for a better enlisted men's mess hall. A fine building quickly went up and was finished just in time for our 1943 Thanksgiving Day dinner. Until that time many of our meals had been K and C rations. This Thanksgiving Day we left our clanking mess gear in our tents, strolled up to our new mess hall, picked up trays and ate like kings—turkey, olives, cranberry sauce—the works!

We had just finished work on our first overseas laundry, and were beginning to feel quite like state-side citizens when the orders came to move on. We struck camp and prepared to embark for BOUGAINVILLE.

Explosion at Sea



A Seabee raised his eyes and scanned the skies above the coconut trees, checking carefully the fringes of overhanging clouds. Any one of those clouds might have contained a Jap Zero, for there were plenty of Jap aircraft in this vicinity. The 77th had just filed aboard ship, stowed packs and personal gear, and many of the men were standing about on deck. Most of us took a last look at Vella La Vella. There were no regrets—life on Vella had been no picnic.

The battalion equipment, bulldozers, trucks, motor patrols, boom cranes, and galley equipment had been loaded on LSTs while most of the personnel boarded LCIs. Uneventfully, the ships put to sea for BOUGAINVILLE.

Never a dull moment for the 77th—that night a storm came up, tossing the light LCIs like corks at sea. They rolled and bobbed, and at times on the crest of high sharp waves they shuddered and groaned (and so did we), as though they would break in two. The ships were better off than we were—they didn't get sea sick.

Our first sight of Bougainville was a hazy protrusion of grey-green land above a misty sea on the morning of December 10. The sky was filled with P-38s and Corsairs, circling busily above EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY keeping a protective eye on our convoy, alert for the sight of Jap planes.

We landed at Bougainville that morning. Any-

thing was possible. There were 40,000 Japs on the island, and we knew that we might expect to fight. We had seen enough low-level bombing and strafing at Vella and we were prepared. Our rifles and carbines were handy. The Marines had already established their beachhead on 15 November and enlarged the perimeter to an approximate three miles by three miles. The area included mostly swampy, wet, soggy jungle. MT. BAGANA, one of the two active volcanoes on Bougainville, protruded like a Roman nose from the mountain range surrounding the perimeter.

The LSTs beached near TOROKINA POINT and the nearly complete TOROKINA AIRSTRIP which the 71st Battalion had constructed was already being used by our fighter planes. Unloading operations of heavy equipment and supplies began immediately.

A 77th Seabee from the LST farthest up the beach decided to walk up the beach a couple of hundred yards for a "leg stretch." He saw a Marine guard standing beside a small trail leading inland. Paying little attention to the Marine, the Seabee started to go up the trail.

Marine: "Where you going, Buddy?"

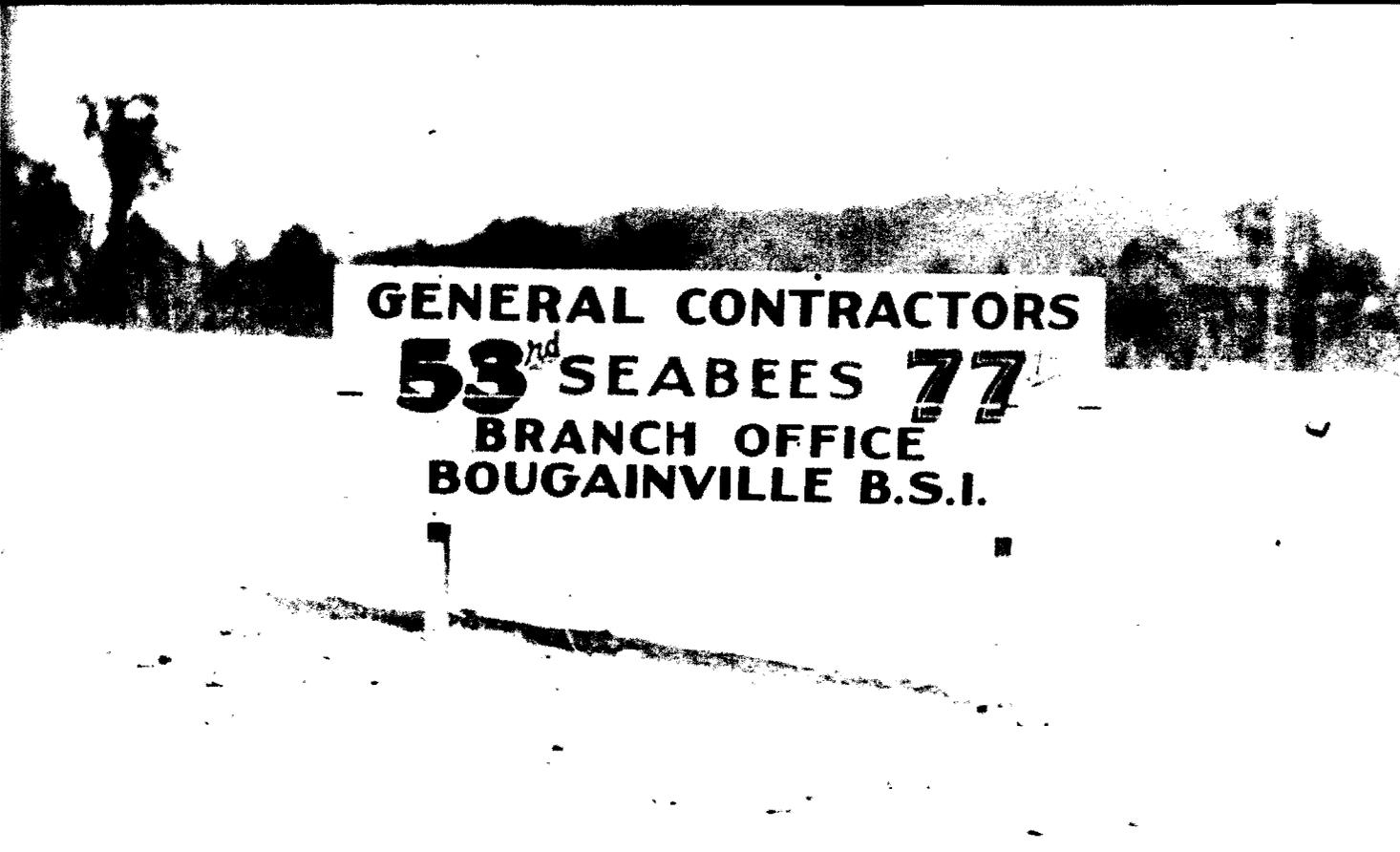
77th Mate: "To have a look around."

Marine: "Want to see the front line?"

77th Mate: "Well, I dunno. Where is the front line?"

Marine Drive from Camp Road





GENERAL CONTRACTORS

53rd SEABEES 77th

**BRANCH OFFICE
BOUGAINVILLE B.S.I.**

Enough Said

Marine: See that clump of bushes over there? Well, that's the front line."

Our mate, wide-eyed, decided he had to help unload an LST upshore.

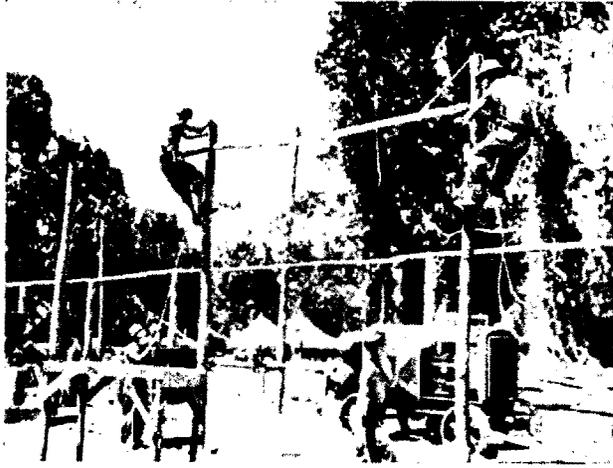
All the battalion, except heavy equipment operators and special details assigned to unloading the ships, marched up the muddy road which the 25th Battalion had recently cut through the jungle and swamps for about three miles. In one of the swampy, heaviest jungle growths of the perimeter near the site of the airstrip to be built, we began making camp in a heavy downpour of rain. The 77th was at work again.

A galley building was erected and ready for use within 24 hours. In the meantime we ate C and K rations. Our first night on Bougainville was under wet, soggy tents. Some of the men were fortunate in having jungle hammocks procured from Marines on Vella. A few had managed to get their bedding and cots. Many of the men, however, just made out as best they could, sleeping in their wet clothes on shelter halves or bare cots.

D plus two found us in better shape. Our supplies had started flowing in, hot coffee and food were prepared for us, and we ate well. It tasted plenty good after 36 hours of incessant tropical rain. We could see that things wouldn't really get dry until we got stateside again—ah, for that California sunshine!

It was so quiet we began to think the Japs had forgotten there was a war on. Even with our experience of falling bombs on Vella, there was hardly a foxhole dug during those first two days. Some of the men remarked that things were too quiet. We began to listen for sounds which simply were not there. The expected finally came on the second night. About 2300 the siren let loose a blood-curdling warning of three undulations. Everybody dived for the deck or the nearest low places. We built foxholes!

Just as we had given up hope for the sun it came out and steamed things up a bit. It is marvelous how quickly excess water dries off in the tropics (and how quickly you get wet again from sweat). The survey crews and equipment were out on the PIVA fighter strip early and the clearing of the jungle and earth moving began at once. We divided the building of the fighter strip with the 53d. Crews were immediately assigned to this task. The work went on night and day. At night earth-moving equipment worked by light supplied by movable generators and floodlights. It was sometimes hard for the operators to hear the air raid signals. Operators often jumped off their machines and crawled under them for protection when they did not have time to find a depression in the ground. All of us worked on the strip. Cooks, messmen, yeomen, carpenters, electricians, all of us. The strip had to be finished.



Framing 77th Machine Shop

The 77th camp was located near the west end of the Piva strip. When the strip and taxiways were completed, many of the tents were actually on the very edge of the clearings, and when planes were warming up, they nearly blew the tents over. The camp site was right in the target when the Japs got around to bombing and shelling.

After the second night of our arrival, the Nips did get around to raiding us, almost nightly. Between the wails of our own sirens and those of the various camps in the perimeter, which were sounded in consecutive order, we slept only two or three hours many nights. We often had two or three raids a night, and it was a favorite stunt of the Japs to pull in close enough to draw fire from our anti-aircraft batteries and then pull just far enough out of reach of the perimeter to be safe, simply for the nuisance value. Some mates swore their hair stood on end during the course of a falling Jap bomb, others said it made cold chills run up and down their spines like a window blind. Every man feels for an instant as though that particular bomb has his name written on it, and no man likes the feeling.

77th Machine Shop



The Nips were pretty poor shots with their bombs, as not a single one landed in our camp area although many landed near it. We did not complain about it—in fact, we were grateful, plenty grateful, that we were the boys with the know-how backing them up.

The airstrips were completed well ahead of schedule. Many other projects were carried on at the same time, and completed after the strips were finished. Other projects included the clearing of wrecked amphibious craft from beaches, which the Marines had left on their landing at D-Day; the building of roads, water systems, fortifications; the repair and maintenance of refrigeration and other equipment of neighboring units.

During this time the air strips were being constantly used in operations against the Japs at Rabaul and Kavieng, and maintenance and repair crews were kept busy keeping them in operation at all times.

A captured Japanese prisoner gave the first hint of the planned Jap offensive against our perimeter about 1 March 1944. The 77th prepared to defend a specified portion of the air strips. Machine gun emplacements were completed, slit trenches dug, and complete military organization of the area was set up. Everything was made ready for any eventuality.

In order to keep the wheels rolling on the construction projects, morning chow was at 0515, starting just before daybreak. On the morning of 8 March many of the men were in the mess hall eating while others were carrying their mess gear noisily up the jungle trails from the far corners of the camp on their way to breakfast. Our artillery had been letting the Japs have it at regular intervals ever since the day we landed, so we were used to a lot of noise. There were gun positions on all sides of our camp and their heavy blasts as they shelled Jap positions had ceased to be startling, so a few extra "pops" out in the direction of the strip that morning went almost unnoticed. For a few of us, the first sign of anything out of the rou-

"Grease Rack?"





Apron Under Construction

tine was a dog rounding a bend on the trail at top speed, feet flying, tongue out, leaving a trail of dust in his wake—and followed closely by a group of Seabees moving at top speed, feet flying, tongues out, leaving a trail of dust in their wake. A large, ground shaking explosion at the taxiway end of camp, followed by another and another at spaced distances needed no explanation. They were Jap shells coming our way, and close! The swish of one was heard across the road from camp. For about two hours they peppered the strip that morning from one end to the other. A good number of our planes nonchalantly took to the air as the shelling progressed.

There was a lot of personal work done on foxholes when the shelling let up. Those little slit trenches seemed so small and useless as protection against artillery.

The Marines seemed to like Seabee chow and Seabees in general. At almost every meal about 250 Marines from the nearby front lines used to have chow with us. It is interesting to note that on the first morning of the shelling all Seabees, cooks and KPs hit their foxholes during the meal. About two hours later when the Bees started meandering back for breakfast they found that the veteran Marines, who never seek cover until they see the Jap planes overhead in an air raid, and never dive for a foxhole until they hear the shells whistling through

the air, had helped themselves to all the food in sight. The Seabees took the hint and very few ever missed a meal after that.

During the first three days we were shelled for about an hour and a half incessantly, early in the morning, and then on the hour throughout the day with about an hour and a half of unceasing fire again just after dusk.

The sick ward and sick bay foxholes were enlarged and reinforced by bringing in empty oil drums, filling them with sand and dumping truck loads of sand around these. We also did special construction jobs of cutting logs for roof timbers and covering these with sand up to two feet in thickness. This offered protection against our own ack-ack shrapnel as well as shrapnel thrown by the enemy. Although ordinarily conceded to be of no use against a direct hit, the soundness of the protection theory was upheld when a 77-mm. shell landed on one of these foxholes in C Company, penetrating no deeper than six inches. F. L. Henry, who was shaving no more than 30 feet away was seriously wounded. At the same time, H. W. Lewis and D. Cummings were wounded. There were six men inside the foxhole at the time, none of whom were hurt. Five men were wounded when a shell whizzed the full length of the camp to drop in a tent in D Company. The third shell exploded a truck tire right in the center of camp. The truck



"Hoist Away"

was parked near a searchlight located about midway in the camp but the shell itself was a dud and did not explode.

On the first morning of the shelling a Marine was just coming into the crossroads at the gate to our camp when the Nips dropped a shell near him. The Marine was mortally wounded. Shrapnel from this shell penetrated our recreation tent pitched beside the road, shredded a mosquito net under which one of our men was sleeping, left two holes in the seat of his pants which were hanging on the edge of the bed, perforated some of the band instruments in the building and left him totally unscathed.

At chapel services, attendance held up well despite the shelling. Our chapel was used not only for Divine Services, but also for battalion shows, band concerts, and musicals. The chapel was a large storage tent with rough planks for seats. A raised platform at the front served as rostrum and stage. The sides were open, which did not make for great comfort during the heavy tropical rains to which we were subjected.

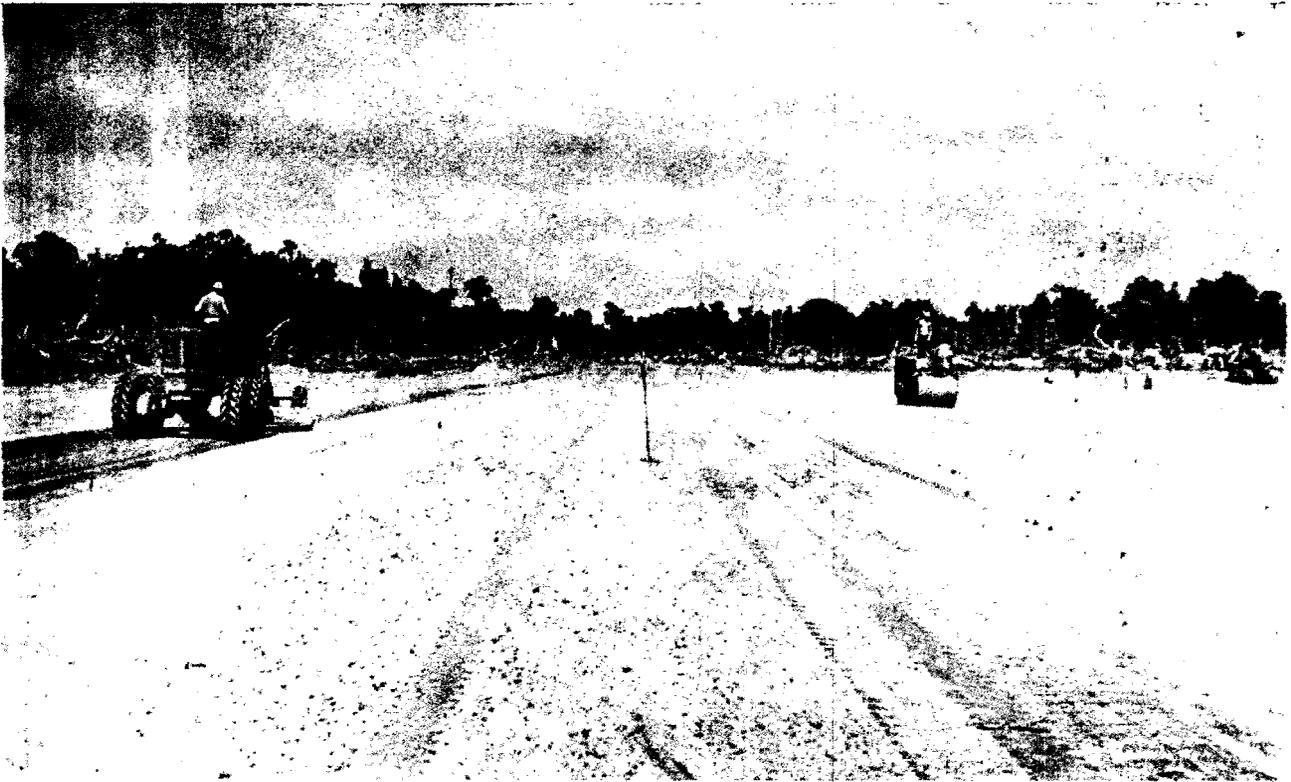
More than a thousand Japanese shells landed near our camp during the three weeks shelling period. The nervous strain was too much for some of our men, and they required evacuation. During the period the 77th officers kept 24-hour patrols on the strip and taxiways, for observations of dam-

age, and to expedite the work of keeping Piva in a usable state.

For many of us, our stay on the island introduced us to the phenomenon of earthquakes. The first impression of a 'quake is one of dizziness as the ground starts to undulate and the tree tops start swaying, slowly at first and then almost violently. We witnessed a total of 17 earthquakes on Bougainville. Don't let anyone tell you, mate, that it isn't a horrible experience to be in a foxhole during an air raid and suddenly have the earth start jumping under you.

It was quite a thrill to see our own P-38s, Corsairs, Venturas, and Liberators taking off the Piva strips to wreak havoc on the Jap ports and installations at Rabaul, Kavieng, and on Bougainville itself. It was a thrilling experience to stand and watch squadron after squadron of Allied planes over our camp on a beautiful day, flying toward Jap targets. One morning, in particular, more than 200 planes from Guadalcanal, Munda and the Bougainville strips flew over in a steady parade. Air power displayed where it could do the most good, and did.

An interesting show was put on for us during the period when the Japs were attempting their "extermination push" against the Allied perimeter. Our TBF and Corsair dive bombers took off from



Rolling and Grading Extension

the Piva strip and made runs along the hillside about two miles up from our camp. Many of us stood on little hillocks, or oil drums, and watched the spectacle. Our dive bombers made their runs methodically and power-dived onto the Jap positions. We could see the bombs leave the planes and the explosions, fire, and smoke when a hit was made. After having been on the receiving end for several days, we just stood and cheered with every hit.

Following the work of the dive bombers our artillery opened up on the enemy. Every gun that could reach the spot of Jap troop concentration for that "extermination push" was trained and opened up with a deafening roar and a ground vibration which did not let up for hours. U. S. cruisers, standing off shore in Empress Augusta Bay, opened up each night and sent barrage after barrage into the Jap positions. We were going after them—and we got them.

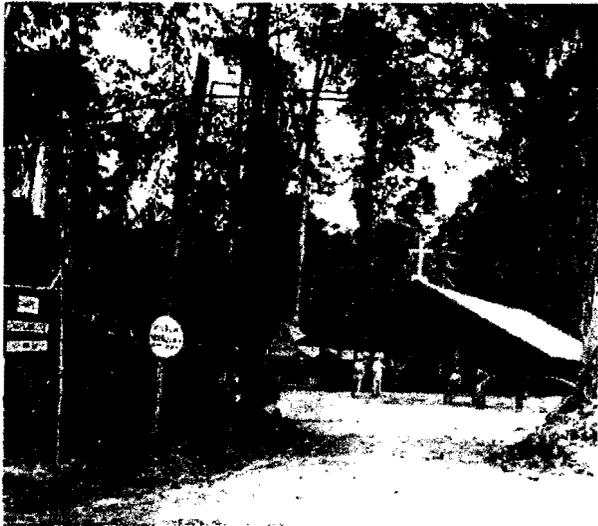
During the last few weeks of our stay on Bougainville, we had no more air raids. However, the day we boarded ship to leave Bougainville for Emirau in the Bismarck Archipelago, the Japs dropped shells on the Torokina strip, the Piva strip, and in our old camp site. From ship deck we saw the dust kicked up on Torokina strip from exploding shells.

Gradually, many of the men built comfortable and even luxurious living quarters. The average

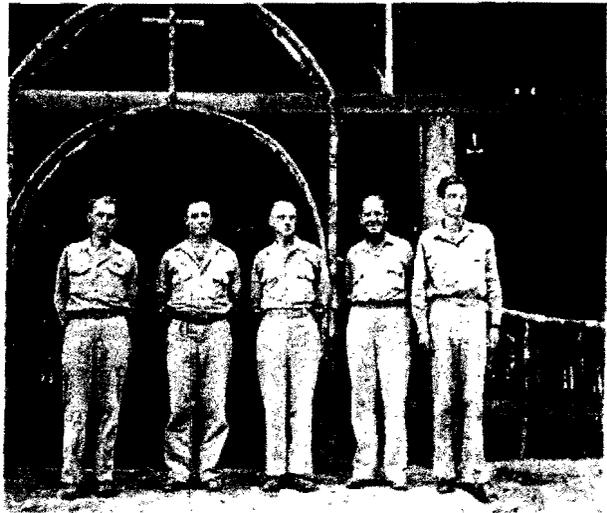
tent had accommodations for five or six men. Some had more or less, depending on circumstances. The tents contained cots, bedding, and personal effects of each individual. There were no floors or accessories such as chairs, tables, or hat racks, but we called them home, and we were well off.

Seabee field dress on Bougainville was the marvel of marvels. The men were issued Marine field jackets and trousers. We already had fabric jungle hats and the usual Navy white hats, dungarees, and blue shirts. From the Army we got field khakis. From the New Zealanders some managed to get heavy field shoes. Because of the steaming tropical weather, some men trimmed the legs off their trousers and made shorts. Most men worked without shirts during the day. We wore combinations of any or all of these, and a more motley looking bunch would have been hard to find. We looked rugged—truly we *were* rugged.

A great pastime of the Seabees, besides playing poker and black jack, was hobby-lobbying in the first degree. Some were accomplished at making rings from downed Zero plane propellers or wrecked Corsair blades. Others made bracelets from bits of aluminum taken from Jap planes. Some vied to see who could make the best looking knife handle from clear or vari-colored plexi-glass. A few made picture frames from rare tropical woods; others captured and made collections of tropical insects



Approach to MAG 24 Chapel



Dedicating Officers

and lizards. Each new island was bringing with it new things to be made.

Battalion pets included about six native dogs and two stateside dogs. The top of the lot was a chow named King, belonging to H. J. Moberly. In addition to being master, he was the island Romeo. Butch, a little short-tailed dog of mixed pedigree, which belonged to G. J. Hayes was known as the smiling dog. He was proud to ride the dozer with his master and was a friend of all the mates. The native dogs were quite lazy, looking like blood hounds with stiff, pointed ears. They were good scrappers and generally itching for a fight.

We had many famous visitors at the 77th camp. Admiral W. F. Halsey visited Bougainville while we were there and inspected some of our work; Major Torgerson, the man who sealed the Japs in caves at Guadalcanal, was another. Major Torgerson's feats were noted in "Guadalcanal Diary." Captain Ernie Nevers, Major Marion Carl, bagger of 19 Jap planes, Major Stub, and Major Ernie King, Marine ace, all, visited us, as did an Australian Colonel in command of a Fijian battalion.

The 77th Battalion received considerable publicity for its work on Bougainville. In addition to receiving mention in the Seabee book, "Can Do," by William B. Huie, the story of the battalion's work under shellfire, mention of some of our living conditions, and our invention of an ice cream freezer were published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Chicago Daily News*, and other newspapers throughout the country. Reproductions of V-Mail greetings fashioned in the jungle by men of the 77th were reproduced in a Minneapolis newspaper and in several trade publications. Write-ups of the battalion were made in various Seabee newspapers. A picture of the battalion sign appeared in "Bee Lines," Camp Peary, Virginia. At various times

"Seabee News Service" carried items on battalion accomplishments.

A work of special art and careful construction was the Marine Air Group Chapel on Bougainville. It was a spacious structure made of jungle timbers and poles, artistically designed and finished with rostrum, choir loft, and palm tree poles simulating organ pipes. A rose window and stained-glass window imitations were painted by Seabee artists on Engineers' tracing linen. An interesting thing about the windows is the fact that they were blown from the casings twice—once by concussion of Jap bombs, once by concussion of Jap mortars. Being cloth, they were unharmed and were replaced in their frames.

And so once again we were ready to move on—to leave again the temporary comfort of homes we had built and to go on to scenes of other conflicts.

Dedication Ceremonies





Massau

The same men who pooled their skills, stamina, and courage with such success throughout the entire Solomon campaign were again called upon for a repeat performance. When future historians are writing about the present war, when they examine all the records of accomplishment, of effort, of morale, of contributions to military success, the exploits of an outfit of this caliber will be deserving of high acclaim.

Our men, having had an active part in the desperately bloody struggle waged by our forces on Guadalcanal, Vella La Vella, and Bougainville, experienced certain misgivings about the contemplated move to Emirau. For the first time we were being sent to an island that had no sacred battlefields, no history of epic military successes. To the majority of us it was simply an unknown, unheard of spot in the Pacific—we didn't like it much.

We left Bougainville on 11 April aboard three LSTs and three LCIs, aware that we were again facing the dragging monotony that is life on a troopship. The entire trip was without incident

and typical of the boredom we had expected. Each day came quietly, sun, sea, and sky, the ships of the convoy, and occasionally a flying fish. Life belts were issued and worn the first day, but as the heat increased they were merely carried or sat on. We probably would have left them elsewhere, but regulations required that they be within reach. There were the endless chow lines, the recurrent calls to quarters. At night the situation was no better. The deck was lined with sleeping Seabees, and only the use of the touch system would bring the venturesome sailor safely back to his bunk. During the day, the regulation dungarees and shirt were discarded as everyone became more aware of the heat and less concerned about "fancy" dress.

As the little convoy approached the southern shores of Emirau on the 14th of April, a driving rain whipped along the decks. The land before us appeared to be slate-grey and partially concealed by the heavy mist.

The vessels were beached, and efficient landings effected with no enemy action. The landing details



Administration Area

were facilitated by carefully planned loading, supplemented by the fact that the entire cargo was on wheels.

Now that we were in a position to take stock of what we were up against, the picture became more drab and depressing, a little more slate-grey than the island had looked. There was no dock space, no warehouses, no nothing—just jungle, and water, and heat, and cargo sitting in the rain as it spilled from the yawning mouths of the LSTs. The most vital equipment was bucked back to the campsite. The blazed trails we had made were turned into a mire of mud by the heavy rainfall, and created unforeseen difficulties in the transportation of personnel and equipment.

Arms wielding picks, shovel, machetes, aided by our bulldozers, worked hard to clear the jungle and level the building sites. Crews were busy construct-

Enlisted Men's Mess Hall



ing the tent area, the course of roads, and vital buildings. By nightfall, over 150 tents were up and every man in the battalion under cover. The men didn't talk much during these primary tasks; the work was too urgent to be done to the tune of idle scuttlebutt. Our only tune was the clatter of hammers and the screaming of saws that caused crates of building materials to melt away from their ugly heaps along the roadside. The speed of these Seabees, working individually and as a team, proved the efficiency of American working methods. We did it despite heat and mud and boredom; we did it notwithstanding the physical and climatic strains we were subjected to. That day we wallowed in mud up to our ankles, tangled with jungle vines and endured deluges of driving rains. Following a meager meal of rations, and a variety of expletives to properly convey our outraged feelings, we had just enough energy to reach our tents and flop into damp, soggy bunks.

We learned in the following days just how much Emirau was to figure in the prosecution of the war. The island, at the time of our landing, was the most northerly outpost in the steam-roller American drive to Nippon. It was strategically situated 70 miles northwest of Kavieng, 210 miles northwest of Rabaul, both in Jap hands, and 600 miles southwest of the formidable Japanese naval base of Truk. The attempt to nullify these strongholds through concentrated aerial strikes was the immediate object, and a Master Plan was devised calling for two strips, three parallel taxiways and connecting roads, a tank farm, a complete road system, a base hospital, flight personnel camp facilities, defense installations, and a communication system. In addition, facilities for a PT base were to be constructed. All requirements of the Master Plan and its collateral items were completed well within the specified time limits in a manner highly praised. Other construction battalions participating on the island of Emirau were the 27th, 61st, 63rd, and 88th.

That slate-grey impression we got of Emirau was certainly not agreeable, but our hasty conclusions



Laundry and Showers

were completely altered. We learned of scenery here that might have come out of a travel folder. It was not long before we began to know this place. A little exploration disclosed the tropical beauty of Emirau. Along the perimeter of the island were sheer cliffs rising from the sea, the tops lush with green jungle foliage. Under the cliffs were caverns where the sun's rays filtered through natural apertures in lofty ceilings, giving the intruder the feeling that he had suddenly stepped into a world of fantasy. Tall, leaning coconut trees lined the beaches. The green backgrounds of the lower valleys were studded with brilliant flowers. Banana, papaya, and mango trees were everywhere, yet not in the symmetrical rows of the orchards of the new world. Fruit was in profusion, and we Bees were not the ones to resist it.

Work started on the facilities and installation of MAG 12 almost immediately upon arrival. It is impossible to enumerate all the projects connected with the building of a Marine Air Group, but we can elaborate somewhat on the extensiveness of the task. In addition to the two 7,000-foot coral

strips there were full-length taxiways and connecting roads, operational towers and communications facilities, warm-up areas and hardstands, and such field requirements as dispensaries, ammunition buildings, bomb dumps, aviation gas dumps, shop areas, service group shops, administration areas, and field personnel camps. Simultaneously, we built the camp areas for the officers, pilots, and enlisted men of Acorn Seven.

We built water storage units to chlorinate the well-water which supplied drinking water for ourselves and other activities. We built fuel supply facilities consisting of three 10,000-barrel tanks and 19 1,000-barrel tanks with connecting pipelines, unloading stations, and circulating pump stations. These tank farms were located at Hamburg and Thomas Bays. The laying of the pipeline from the latter tanker mooring to control stations was an especially commendable job. By far the most hazardous jobs were the diving operations on the tank farm, for treacherous barracuda and shark were ever present in the waters. We dynamited the area, and our men proceeded. Seabees just do not stop because of hazards.



Pipeline Along Shore

Welding Sea Line



night games, and there were regular contests scheduled between the fives of the 77th and neighboring units. Baseball, however, was the most popular sport, and our games drew big crowds. We didn't play as well as the Cards, or the Yanks, or even the A's, but we argued as much as the Dodgers, and that is what makes baseball what it is.

On 2 August we celebrated our first overseas anniversary with a sports tournament which featured an exciting softball game between the officers and chiefs of the battalion. The officers won, but the chiefs vowed "they was robbed." The other event of the day was a three-legged race which was won by the Headquarters Company team.

The Commander sought relief from his exacting job by commissioning J. G. Fraumeni to build a sailboat which could be used for fishing trips and excursions in the waters off Emirau. Fraumeni built the craft according to specifications with an overall length of 21 feet and a 5-foot, 10-inch beam. The mast was capable of carrying 200 square feet of canvas. The only mishap in its career occurred on 22 June when she was cast on a reef during a storm. "The Skipper" was quickly patched up and again made seaworthy.

On 25 May, the battalion together with other units on the island, gathered on the fighter strip to witness the arrival of Admiral "Bull" Halsey in a B-24 bomber. The admiral thanked the officers and men of all units for their cooperation and accomplishments, and as a parting note added that he would see us again "on the road to Tokyo."

On 9 July, General Boyd and his staff reviewed the Army, Navy, and Marine units on Emirau, who paraded before him arrayed in full military gear. The exceptions to the foregoing were the mates of the 77th who appeared in their natural state—wearing the clothes of every corps in the service. It was an auspicious occasion as Commander C. T. Wende received a Bronze Star for skillful leadership and personal supervision in repairing the Bougainville strip under fire. R. E. Cocron was honored with a Navy and Marine Corps Medal for heroism in rescuing a pilot who had crashed into the sea. The ceremony was carried out during a drenching tropical rain, but the men of the 77th didn't mind a bit. They were used to being wet.

We were again ready to move on, but this trip was going to be different. We were headed southwest for AUSTRALIA.



Reading from top to bottom: Ringer . . . Three-Legged Race . . .
"Get Set! Go!"



Liberty Corner

After passing through the historic CORAL SEA and the GREAT BARRIER REEF, one of the most interesting coral formations in the world, we sighted AUSTRALIA. We arrived in Brisbane on 23 December and were immediately transported to Camp Seabee, our home during the Australian interlude.

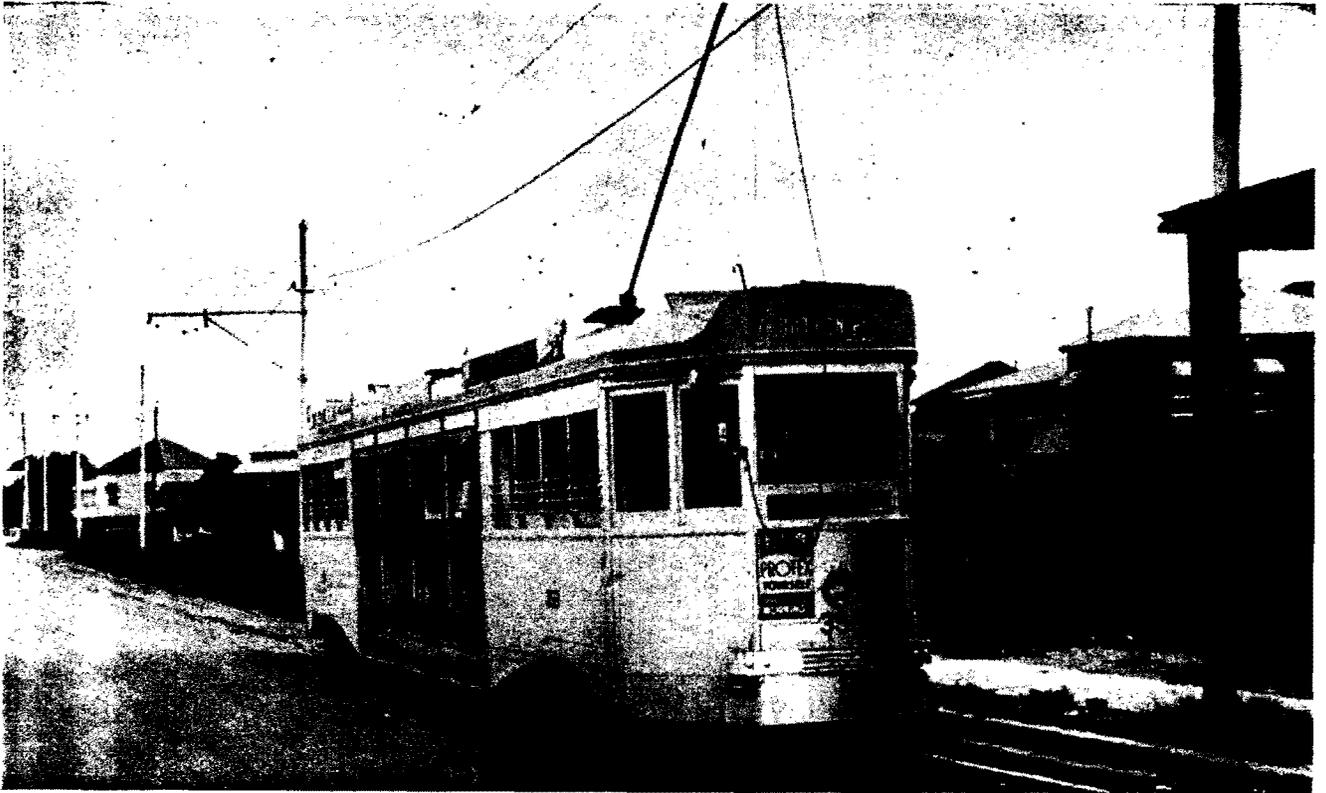
Camp Seabee had been in operation for about 18 months and was conveniently located only a few miles from the center of Brisbane, capitol of Queensland. Brisbane was the service center of the Navy during the entire South Pacific campaign, and contained many installations of great significance.

The purpose of sending the 77th to Brisbane was three-fold: to use its services to roll up naval installations; to operate naval facilities; and to give a degree of rehabilitation to the troops of the 77th. Within a few hours after our arrival we began putting each of the three purposes into effect. We began to roll up MOB 109; we began to operate

Camp Seabee as a receiving station; and we instituted work to send about 300 mates to the rest camps at TOOWOMBA, a mountain resort, and COOLANGATTA, a seaside resort.

Work was a definite part of the battalion's stay in Australia. To roll up the hospital we had to make and fill some 15,000 cases, in addition it was necessary that we disassemble hundreds of steel buildings, unusually large reefers and cold storage plants, X-ray facilities, large laundries, steam plants, and many other important installations, as well as the necessary work of loading all this material on to trucks, and finally we had to assist in loading the ship and storing the surplus material in designated warehouses. This job, as usual, was completed before the required date, and the battalion left the hospital grounds ship-shape.

The next largest work projects included the ship repair base, the submarine repair base, and the submarine torpedo repair unit. Each of these installa-



Australian Tram

tions contained many large machine shop units, some requiring crates as large as small bungalows. Again the versatile 77th showed its skill by meeting D-Dates.

The 77th rendered special service in the instance of the submarine repair base in a consultant capacity, and has been highly commended for this by the commander of the unit. Other services included suggested designs for their hospital installations in the new forward areas, recommendations for specified building materials, and recommendations for a large number of construction machinery units. We are particularly proud of these contributions, since the submarine repair units, through their maintenance of bases for the many subs plying the dangerous forward areas, performed one of the more valuable services of the war.

This was only one of the many instances of Seabee cooperation. We believe that the 77th has been particularly diligent in this direction, and our feeling in the matter is substantiated by various letters of commendation received from commanders of various units for whom we have worked throughout the Pacific.

The "Australian Episode" will be remembered by each of us as a wonderful experience because of the friendly attitude of the folks "down under," and because of the beauty of the country. The vacation periods which we enjoyed at the beaches and in the mountains, the pleasant interludes in the cities, all of these meant that the personnel of the 77th could go back to the forward areas refreshed and ready for new assignments. It was with regret that we saw the time for departure approaching, but Bees must move up, and we were ready.

The movement forward started when the engineering crews under Lt. (jg) Lester and CWO Bendorff were flown by a special plane into the Philippine area. This group was followed by smaller groups which included the skipper, Commander C. T. Wende, who was called upon for reconnaissance and consultant work in the forward areas.

On May 4, the rear echelon arrived by ship from Emirau with Lt. (jg) Carson in charge, assisted by CWO McLoughlin with the 77th equipment.

As the rear echelon moved into Australia, four fleet utility planes were assigned to pick up 60 special men of the 77th because of the great need

for construction skill at the forward area. This was the vanguard of a movement by air of the 77th Seabee troops eventually totalling more than 300, which was probably one of the largest airborne troop movements in the history of the Seabees. We moved out over a long and hazardous track of 4,000 miles, which fact attests to the value of the 77th personnel—we were needed where the going was rough and requirements tough.

On May 15, the main body of the battalion consisting of over 600 troops with Lieutenant C. E. Duncan, our executive officer, in charge departed from Brisbane aboard the *Venus*. The trip aboard the *Venus* was a challenge for the 77th. We had met a new foe—the unconverted freighter, converted, on paper only, into a troopship. There was barely room for our gear, and no room at all for our bodies. We had no facilities for cooking, bathing, drinking, or living, but we worked at correcting that situation. We built our own galleys, set up our reefers, constructed a head on the fan tail of the ship, set up bunks in every conceivable place, generated our own electricity, piped in and purified our own drinking water, and even rigged up salt water showers. Food was of such outstanding qual-

ity at our improvised mess that before we reached our destination the men of ship's company were leaving their chow lines to come stand in ours. We were on the sea for approximately 30 days, and though none of us will tell you the trip was wonderful, it was far from the worst time we spent on tour.

While we were getting to the Philippines, the rear echelon was rolling up the rest camps at Too-woomba and Coolangatta. Lieutenant Clark, as officer-in-charge, had to sandwich in the rehabilitation periods for his men between various roll-ups. Among its other duties, the rear echelon group lent a hand and serviced the units of its neighbors at ABCD.

About 1 July, after completing all necessary jobs, the remaining body of the rear echelon was divided into 11 groups and, as fast as the planes could be furnished, were carried forward by plane to their new home in the Philippines.

The "Australian Episode" will go down in Battalion history as a rest period definitely earned after some 18 months of strenuous jungle life. But now we were ready to work again, and the Philippines were going to take the best we had to offer.

Riding Academy—Tweed's Head



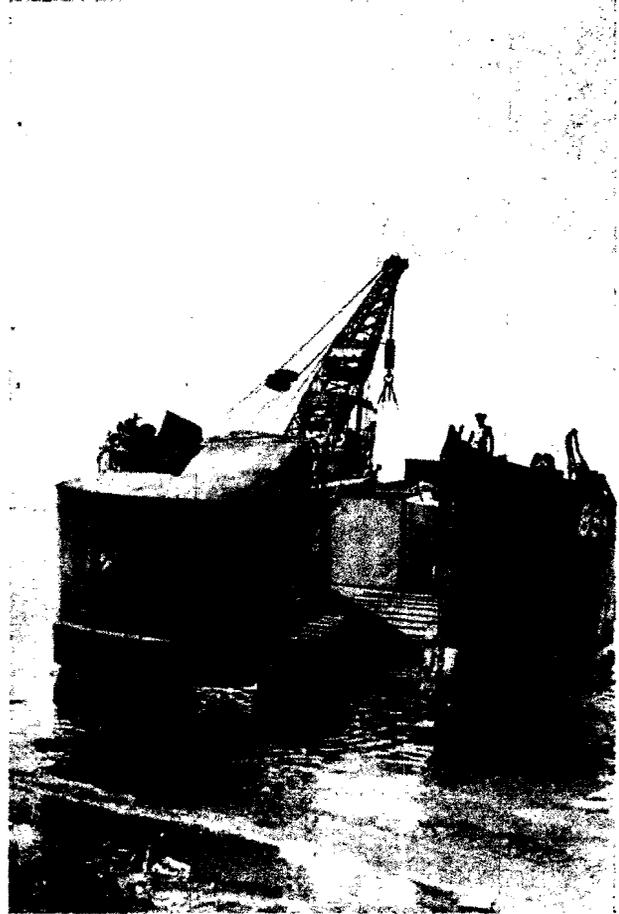


Reception Committee, New Guinea

"Veictory, Joe!" was what we heard as we came in wearily at SANGLEY POINT, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS on 13 June 1945. It marked the end of existence aboard AK 135 after 30 days. The "six knot" Venus, known to its crew and to us as the "Galloping Ghost of the Guinea Coast," had finally made it, and so the main body of the battalion, 13 officers and 530 men had arrived. On the way eight days had been spent in MILNE BAY with several excursions for sightseeing, and four days went by in the harbor of HOLLANDIA with a church party and a liberty group going ashore.

It was glorious to be on land after the days on the ill-named, inglorious Venus with her three-inch elbow allowance per man, her fantail heads and her dogged, cautious, backtracking course.

All hands heaved to immediately for about a week's unloading of the tightly packed, equipment-



Ship . . . LCT to Shore

filled holds of the Venus, via LCTs. The camp was on Sangley Point, LUZON, only a few blocks from CAVITE CITY and just across the bay from MANILA. A 10-minute walk took the men to the half dozen blocks of shops which made up Cavite's business section, but a drenching in a landing craft or a jolting in a truck over a washboard road was the price to be paid for a visit to the battle-scared and bomb-blasted capital of the Philippines.

Filipino youngsters "from knee-size up" became a familiar sight with their fingers spread in the popular "V." This took on a new meaning for us, for we thought surely "right after this job, we will go home."

For the first time we had sufficient building materials available, and we built ourselves quite a fine camp. Our homes were neatly squared-off rows of framed, screened, electrically-wired, decked, pyra-

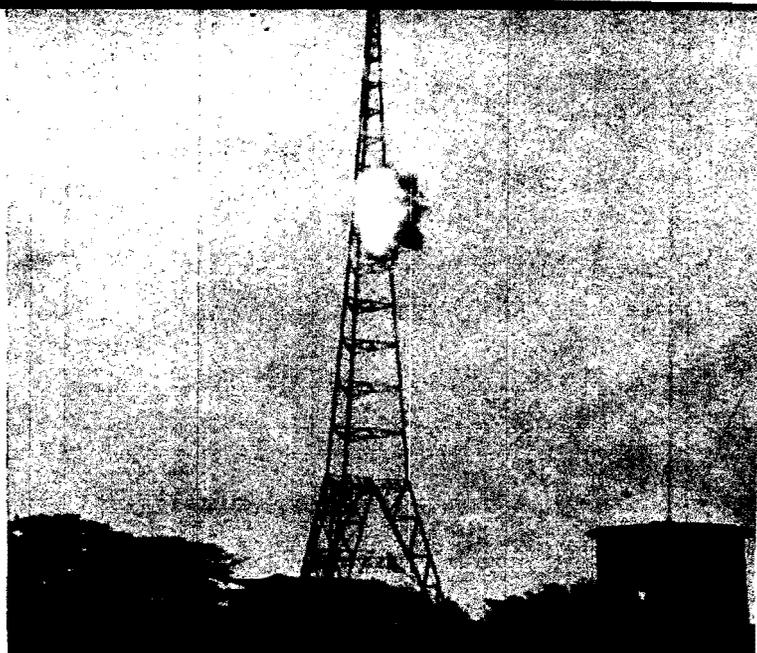
midal tents. Ship-type automatic heads were additional luxuries. A clean, cheerful officers' mess hall and wardroom, painted cream with buff trim and decorated with gold corps insignia plaques was the highlight of construction for the battalion's own use.

The first contingent of the 77th to land in the Philippines not only did surveying for the work to be done when the bulk of the battalion arrived, but also built two Bailey bridges between Cavite and Manila, as the Japs had blown up every bridge on the route.

All construction on Sangley Point was done by the 77th and the battalion personnel also supervised work done by Filipino labor at Cavite. One of the most interesting and novel jobs turned in at the Point was the demolition of two structural steel radio towers over 600 feet high, equivalent to the height of a 55 story building. Consensus on the base was that the job could not be done the way our lads proposed it, so interest ran high as did the bets. Seventy-eight pounds of TNT were placed at each of two points on one leg of the tower about two-thirds of the way from the ground. The anchor bolts of another leg were cut so that the greater mass of steel would twist clear of the nearby cemetery and road. When the charge was set off it blew out a section of the leg and the tower collapsed like a paper bag. The results on both of the towers were virtually identical. The effect of the charges had been so well-gauged and the preparations so well-made that, aside from a few rivets, no part of the towers fell further than 60 feet from the bases of the structure. Our Skipper's slogan again rang true: "No job too big, no job too small."

While building facilities for the Sangley Point Naval Air Base and the Cavite Naval Base, the personnel of the 77th heard the news. The War Was Over! It had been a long haul between that first bomb at Guadalcanal on 19 September 1943, and V-J day, 15 August 1945, heralded by siren in the Philippines.

At right, reading from top to bottom: Charge Going Off . . . On the Way Down . . . Last Crumble.



V-J came and went, but the work never stopped. We had projects to finish and new work to start. Prisoners of war would be coming in, and they needed facilities. There was no time off for the 77th.

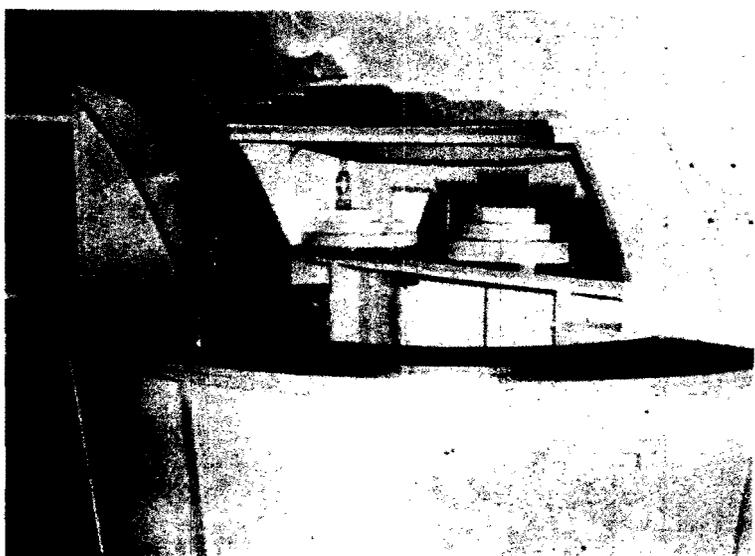
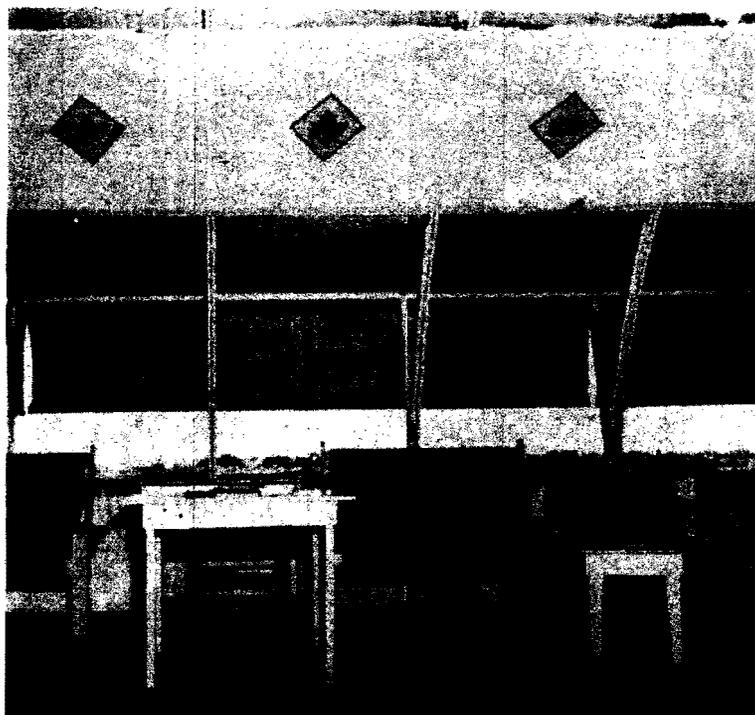
The chief project on Sangley Point was the establishment of the Naval Air Base, a program which called for a 5,000-foot strip, Naval Air Transport Service Terminal, and seaplane base. Huge, steel-reinforced, concrete Jap pillboxes and other structures had to be blasted and cleared from the site of the air strip, as well as elsewhere, and a break-water erected, since the strip lay immediately adjacent to the sea. The warning scream of the siren preceding each blasting was observed since the work was close by and was frequently followed by a rain of falling stone and debris in all directions. In addition to the strip, which was 150 feet wide, more pierced planking was laid almost the entire length of the strip for a taxiway and parking.

Work at the seaplane base included pouring concrete for a large apron and ramp, as well as a fabricated steel nose hangar, warehouses, and shops. The NATS terminal included two large warehouses connected with a wooden structure.

Other facilities built by the 77th were a tank farm, boat pool area, radio transmitter, housing facilities for all personnel of the Naval Air Base, recreation areas, transportation pool, utilities, and supply area.

And then, with the end of the war, a need for quarters for prisoners of war being flown to the Point on their release from prisons further north. We felt good. This was doing something specific for the men who had gone out front, been in the thick, and then suffered the hell of Jap prisons; we were helping them take the trip home.

A contingent of 55 of our men spent six weeks at CORREGIDOR building facilities for the harbor entrance control post, while daily scouting parties still hunted down Japs in the extensive cave systems and surrounding areas. With this group on



At right, reading from top to bottom: Coffee Hour . . . Officers' Wardroom . . . "Cole?"



Hospital Ruins on Corregidor With Bataan Background

Corregidor and a rear echelon group on its way up from Australia, the celebration of the battalion's second anniversary overseas was postponed. Interest in the event had faded out with the end of the war.

Jobs with top priorities, which were under supervision of the 77th at the Cavite Naval Base, were a receiving station and Base Hospital Number 14. Both projects required a large number of Quonset huts since the NAB was scheduled to house 2,000 men and 800 officers and the latter was a 300-bed unit. Additional jobs at the base were the erection of an administration area, enlisted men's camp, storage and supply warehouses, shops, boat and motor pool facilities, and a dock area. All the work at Cavite was under the supervision of Lt. (jg) J. A. Russel, later temporarily assigned to us. He began the work prior to our arrival with Filipino labor and very little equipment, tools, or materials. His accomplishments were outstanding.

On the lighter side, the 77th Seabee Band increased in popularity and acclaim with the presen-

tation of many excellent musical programs and dances for our men, neighboring units, and Filipino groups. An entertainment group led by Kay Kyser and supported by the Swingphibians was enjoyed by most of our personnel. Movies were on hand every night at the Naval Air Base Theater.

In the field of sports, the 77th Seabee Basketball Team reached its heights by winning the third and deciding game to annex the Sangley Point basketball championship when the Fighting Irish went down to us 24-22 in a thrill-filled game.

In the Philippines, scuttlebutt was more frequent and wild than ever before. Nobody wanted to talk about anything except, "When will we go home?" Or "How many points do you have?" No one really knew, but everyone had a guess about when the battalion was scheduled to go stateside. The optimists had us going home in 30 days or less, while the pessimists pictured us as barely making Christmas 1945. Now you know who was right, but as this was being written, the item of topflight interest was strictly unknown.

77th Naval Construction Battalion

Chronology

31 Dec 1942 Formed at NCTC, Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Va.
31 Mar 1943 Transferred to NCTC, Davisville, R.I.
01 Apr 1943 Arrived NCTC, Davisville, R.I.
24 May 1943 Departed NCTC, Davisville.
30 May 1943 Arrived ABD, Port Huneme, California.
02 Aug 1943 Departed ABD, Port Hueneme, for overseas.
03 Sept 1943 Arrived Guadalcanal.
23 Sept 1943 First Echelon consisting of 6 officers and 314 men departed Guadalcanal.
25 Sept 1943 First Echelon arrived Vella LaVella.
29 Sept 1943 Second Echelon (Main body) consisting of 19 officers and 690 men departed Guadalcanal. Rear Echelon of 3 officers and 29 men remained at Guadalcanal.
01 Oct 1943 Second Echelon (Main body) arrived Vella LaVella.
07 Nov 1943 Third Echelon consisting of 18 men departed Guadalcanal (This included men who were evacuated and returned).
10 Nov 1943 Third Echelon arrived Vella LaVella.
08 Dec 1943 First Echelon (Main body) consisting of 23 officers and 886 men departed Vella LaVella. Second Echelon consisting of 1 officer and 65 men remained at Vella LaVella.
10 Dec 1943 First Echelon (Main body) arrived Bougainville.
17 Jan 1944 Second Echelon consisting of 1 officer and 60 men departed Vella LaVella. Third Echelon consisting of 5 men remained at Vella LaVella.
19 Jan 1944 Second Echelon arrived Bougainville.
16 Feb 1944 Third Echelon departed Vella LaVella.
18 Feb 1944 Third Echelon arrived Bougainville.
27 Mar 1944 Rear Echelon consisting of 2 officers and 22 men departed Guadalcanal.
29 Mar 1944 Rear Echelon arrived Bougainville.
11 Apr 1944 Entire Battalion departed Bougainville.
14 Apr 1944 Entire Battalion arrived Emirau.
16 Dec 1944 Forward Echelon (Main body) consisting of 27 officers and 810 men departed Emirau. Rear Echelon of 2 officers and 101 men remained at Emirau.
22 Dec 1944 Forward Echelon (Main body) arrived Brisbane, Australia.
04 Apr 1945 First Echelon consisting of 2 officers and 2 men departed Brisbane.
08 Apr 1945 First Echelon arrived Sangley Point (Cavite, P.I.)
17 Apr 1945 Second Echelon consisting of 8 men departed Brisbane.

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ITINERARY OF THE 77TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

- 31 Dec 1942 - Formed at NCTC, Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Va.
- 31 Mar 1943 - Transferred to NCTC, Davisville, R.I.
- 1 Apr 1943 - Arrived NCTC, Davisville, R.I.
- 24 May 1943 - Departed NCTC, Davisville.
- 30 May 1943 - Arrived ABD, Port Hueneme, California.
- 2 Aug 1943 - Departed ABD, Port Hueneme, for overseas.
- 3 Sep 1943 - Arrived Guadalcanal.
- 23 Sep 1943 - First Echelon consisting of 6 officers and 314 men departed Guadalcanal.
- 25 Sep 1943 - First Echelon arrived Vella LaVella.
- 29 Sep 1943 - Second Echelon (Main body) consisting of 19 officers and 690 men departed Guadalcanal. Rear Echelon of 3 officers and 29 men remained at Guadalcanal.
- 1 Oct 1943 - Second Echelon (Main body) arrived Vella LaVella.
- 7 Nov 1943 - Third Echelon consisting of 18 men departed Guadalcanal (This included men who were evacuated and returned).
- 10 Nov 1943 - Third Echelon arrived Vella LaVella.
- 8 Dec 1943 - First Echelon (Main body) consisting of 23 officers and 886 men departed Vella LaVella. Second Echelon consisting of 1 officer and 65 men remained at Vella LaVella.
- 10 Dec 1943 - First Echelon (Main body) arrived Bougainville.
- 17 Jan 1944 - Second Echelon consisting of 1 officer and 60 men departed Vella LaVella. Third Echelon consisting of 5 men remained at Vella LaVella.
- 19 Jan 1944 - Second Echelon arrived Bougainville.
- 16 Feb 1944 - Third Echelon departed Vella LaVella.
- 18 Feb 1944 - Third Echelon arrived Bougainville.

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ITINERARY OF 77TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION (Continued).

- 27 Mar 1944 - Rear Echelon consisting of 2 officers and 22 men departed Guadalcanal.
- 29 Mar 1944 - Rear Echelon arrived Bougainville.
- 11 Apr 1944 - Entire Battalion departed Bougainville.
- 14 Apr 1944 - Entire Battalion arrived Emirau.
- 16 Dec 1944 - Forward Echelon (Main body) consisting of 27 officers and 810 men departed Emirau. Rear Echelon of 2 officers and 101 men remained at Emirau.
- 22 Dec 1944 - Forward Echelon (Main body) arrived Brisbane, Australia.
- 4 Apr 1945 - First Echelon consisting of 2 officers and 2 men departed Brisbane.
- 8 Apr 1945 - First Echelon arrived Sangley Point (Cavite, P.I.)
- 17 Apr 1945 - Second Echelon consisting of 8 men departed Brisbane.
- 23 Apr 1945 - Second Echelon arrived Sangley Point.
- 24 Apr 1945 - The Officer-in-Charge, Comdr. C. T. Wende, departed Brisbane.
- 25 Apr 1945 - Rear Echelon departed Emirau.
- 29 Apr 1945 - Comdr. C. T. Wende arrived Sangley Point.
- 2 May 1945 - Rear Echelon arrived Brisbane.
- 13 May 1945 - Third Echelon consisting of 1 officer and 60 men departed Brisbane.
- 15 May 1945 - Fourth Echelon (Main body) consisting of 15 officers and 590 men departed Brisbane. Rear Echelon consisting of 4 officers and 201 men remained Brisbane.
- 15 May 1945 - Third Echelon arrived Sangley Point.
- 21 May 1945 - Two Echelons, Fifth & Sixth respectively, disembarked from ship at Milne Bay to fly to Sangley Pt.; consisting of 1 officer and 50 men each. Fourth Echelon (Main body), then consisting of 15 officers and 530 men remained aboard ship enroute to Sangley Point.

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ITINERARY OF 77TH NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION (Continued).

- 27 May 1945 - Fifth Echelon departed Milne Bay.
- 29 May 1945 - Fifth Echelon arrived Sangley Point.
- 3 Jun 1945 - Sixth Echelon departed Milne Bay.
- 5 Jun 1945 - Sixth Echelon arrived Sangley Point.
- 13 Jun 1945 - Fourth Echelon (Main body) arrived Sangley Point.
- 7 Jul 1945 - First flight of Rear Echelon left Brisbane. Movement of Rear Echelon, consisting of 4 officers and 169 men, was made by air in eleven flights.
- 6 Aug 1945 - Flight eleven of the Rear Echelon arrived Sangley Point.

U.S. NAVY

77th



CONSTRUCTION
BATTALION



U.S. NAVY

77th



CONSTRUCTION
BATTALION













CAMP SEALIFE



77 DE ARIZONA
GARDEN CENTER
WATER
WATER
WATER