121st Naval Construction Battalion

Historical Information

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

NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND

121st C.B.

Marine Designation 3rd Batt, 20th Reg., 4th Marine Division

Camp LeJeune
Left U.S. - 8 Jan'44
Location - ~~3rd Batt--20th Reg.--4th Mar. Div.--Kwajalein--Maui~~ ~~Tinian~~ Saipan

LOG

5- 3-43 - Original officers of this batt were detached from FMF Replacement Group, New River, N.C. (19th Replace. Group)
7-15-43 - 1 Jul'43 report of 121st CB - Now with the 3rd Batt, 20th Reg., 4th Marine Div. New River, N.C.
9- 1-43 - 121st CB moved from New River to Camp Pendleton 17 Aug'43.
10- 5-43 - 121st CB completed movement from New River to Camp Pendleton on 22 Aug'43 (RMD)
2- 4-44 - 121st CB left U.S. 8 Jan'44. (Op20M)
4-20-44 - 121st CB located at Kwajalein during Feb'44 according to 109th CB "Activities Report" to Budocks dtd 7 Mar'44.
4-22-44 - Jan. & Feb. Report of 121st CB - Sailed from San Diego for Kwajalein. On 31 Jan. and 1 Feb'44, joined in the assault landings on Roi-Namur Islands. Employed here until 13 Feb'44, then left for Camp Maui, T.H. - last of batt arriving 25 Feb'44.
6-22-44 - 121st CB assigned to 30th Reg. (See kardex card under 30th Reg. - same date)
9-25-44 - Rear Echelon of 121st CB, consisting of 2 officers and 20 men, embarked 29 Jul'44 at Maui, T.H. and sailed 24 Jul. (destination not stated). (Sec. embarkation roster)
10-24-44 - According to the 1 Aug'44 report of 18th CB - the 121st CB is at Tinian.
6- 7-44 - 1 May'44 report of 121st CB - operating at Maui, T.H.

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11- 1-44 - The Rear Echelon of 1 officer and 40 men of the 121st CB sailed from P.H. 29 Aug'44 and reported to the 121st CB 22 Sep'44. (ComGen Hdqtrs 4th MarDiv Sec. ltr 0023144 to Lt. Spencer dtd 18 Aug'44 and the 1st and 2nd endorsement thereon)

11-30-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of 121st CB - located at Tinian. Report endorsed by 30th Reg.
Summary of operations from 1 May'44 to 1 Oct'44:
Shore party for Combat Team #23 4th MarDiv on Beaches
Blue One and Two, Saipan Island - - - - - - - - - -15 Jun to 19 Jun'44
Airfield, Railroad, and Road Repair, Saipan - - - - -19 Jun to 20 Jul'44
Preparing for Tinian Invasion - - - - - - - - - - - -20 Jul to 26 Jul'44
Now operating on Tinian.
Report of Combat Activities:
Assault on Saipan Is.,Mariannas - - 15 Jun - 9 Jul'44
Assault on Tinian Is., Mariannas- - 26 Jul - 1 Aug'44

11-30-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of 121st CB - operating at Tinian.
1-5-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of 121st CB - no info on location. Report endorsed by 30th Reg. Enemy activity during Nov.
1-10-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of the 30th Reg. - During Nov, 354 men reported to the 121st CB.
2-10-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 121st CB - No info on location. Report endorsed by 30th Regiment.
3-29-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of the 121st CB - located at Tinian. Report end. by 30th Reg.
4-17-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of 121st CB - located at Tinian. Endorsed by 30th Reg & 6th Brig.
4-25-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of the 30th Reg. - The 121st CB came ashore on Tinian on 27 Jul 1944.
5- 8-45 - The 121st CB is located at Tinian. (Dirpacdocks S.F. Sec Rep of 15 Apr'45)

Location - ~~Tinian~~ Saipan **121st C.B.**

5-22-45 - 1 May'45 report of 121st CB - located at Tinian.

6- 5-45 - The 121st CB has been assigned adv base ARTU by CNO for airfield const. (Comservpac sec ltr ser 002038 dtd 8 May'45 to CNO)

6-15-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 121st CB - located at Tinian. 7 men retd to States for rehabilitation. During the month of May the 121st CB took over the direction of the work of completing the North Airfield, Tinian and was associated with the 13th, 67th, and 135th CBs on this field. Report via 30th Reg and 6th Brg.

7-16-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 121st CB - On 15 June orders were recd from ComMarianas to transfer the 121st CB to Saipn on or about 1 Jul'45. The batt was secured ~~xx~~ from duty on Tinian on 30 Jun'45 and the movement to Saipan is now under way. The batt's duty on Saipan will consist of general construction, and repair work under the direction of the IsCom Saipan. 49 men retd to States. 33 men recd into Batt. 20 men awaiting transp for rehab leave.

7-23-45 - ? 121st CB detached from the 30th Reg and 6th Brg on 5 July. Ordered to proceed to CCT Okinawa. (6th Brg conf orders ser (0159) dtd 5 July to OinC 121st CB and end thereto)

7-26-45 - Re your 180103Z proposed Regiment should also include 121st CB now on Saipan, also ACEPSD Saipan known as CBD 1093. (IsCom Saipan Conf Dispatch 190156Z Jul'45 to Comservpac)

7-30-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 121st CB - located at Tinian as of 1 July. Report via 30th Reg and 6th Brg.

8- 1-45- 1 Jul'45 report of Det 1080 - The constr and operation of the ABCD Outfitting Yard was done by personnel of the 121st CB under supervision of Det 1080.

Location - Saipan **121st C.B.**

8-18-45 - 1 Aug '45 report of 121st CB. On 30 June '45 the 121st CB was detached from the 6th Brig on Tinian Island with orders to report to the Island Comdr., Saipan, for duty. Number of officers and men, dates of arrival and departure of each echelon:

6 officers and 217 enlisted men moved on 1 July '45
12 officers and 363 enlisted men moved on 7 July '45
12 officers and 375 enlisted men moved on 9 July '45
1 officer and 15 enlisted men moved on 16 July '45

As of this date the entire battalion is on Saipan with the exception of 1 officer and 10 enlisted men on detached duty with the 6th Brig on Tinian. 28 enlisted men were returned to the states during the month, for rehabilitation.

8-28-45 - Remove from alerted status my 091943 July of higher classification, CBs 23, 72, 92, 107, 110 & 121. (Comservpac Sec disp 242213 to Commarianas).

9-10-45 - 52nd Reg is composed of the following units in addition to the Reg. Staff:- 39, 51, 117, 121 CBs, CBMUs 505, 510, 595, 614, 616 & CBD 1093. Adv Comservpac of the effective date of establishment. (Comservpac of the effective date of establishment).

9-17-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 121st CB. 10 men reported on board from tendu with 6th Brig. 14 men reported on board for duty from RecSta, Navy #128. No info as to location.

10-18-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 121st CB - location not stated. 357 men transferred to U.S. for discharge under the point system. 109 men rec'd as replacements.

12-11-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 121st CB - location not stated. 112 men transferred to U.S. for discharge under the point system. 113 men rec'd from CBMU 505. 378 men rec'd from 117th CB. 88 men rec'd from 51st CB. On 25 Oct'45, 2 officers & 32 men were sent to Marcus Is. as a special detachment to assist the 51st CB.

Location - Saipan

121st CB

1-5-46 - 1 Dec'45 of 121st CB - located in Saipan. Report via 52nd Reg. & 5th Brig. 121st CB departed Tinian in July'45.

1-10-46 - Upon the inactivation of 52nd Reg. on 15 Dec'45, OinC of the 121st CB will report to the OinC, 5th Brig for admin. control & to the Comdt.. NOB, Saipan for oper. control. (OinC, 52nd Reg. ltr ser 657 dtd 15 Dec'45 to OinC, 121st CB).

1-29-46 - 1 Jan'46 report of 121st CB - located at Saipan. Report via 5th Brig.

3-1-46 - 1 Feb 46 report of 121st CB - located at Saipan. Report via 5th Brig.

3-28-46 - 1 Mar 46 report of 121st CB - located at Saipan. Report via 5th Brig.

12-19-47 - Inactivation of 121st CB (1st End on Com Marianas Rest ltr ser.22894 dtd 19 Dec 47) Request for. Ltr filed in 121 CB

12-31-47-- Officer and Enlisted Personnel and equipment were transferred to CBD 1504

12-31-47 - INACTIVATED 121stCB of this date. activation of 1504th CB.

DECLASSIFIED

121st C.B.

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Date
6/3/44	-	Maui	-	Left U.S. Jan. 1944
10/10	-	Tinian (LIRP)	(Cdr. Burke) C.B. report 1 October.	
4/10	-	LIRP (Tinian)	2d. Tinian sec act disp. nov 010521.	
5/1	-	HODE	Saipan sec act disp. 3123232 August.	added

ON BOARD

DATE	OFFICERS	MEN	AUTHORITY
1 May'44	27	809	MoR
30 Sep'44		742	Rec$_{ep}$p
1 Oct'44	25	742	MoR
1 Nov'44	33	741	MoR
1 Dec'44	31	1082	MoR
1 Jan'45	33	1081	MoR
1 Feb'45	32	1066	MoR
1 Mar'45	30	1057	MoR
1 Apr'45	29	1052	MoR
1 May'45	29	1034	BNP625 & R
1 Jun'45	32	1022	BNP625 & R
1 Jul'45	32	999	BNP625 & R
1 Aug'45	33	962	BNP625 & R
1 Sept'45		971	BNP625
1 Oct'45		704	BNP625
1 Nov'45	28	1154	BNP625 & R
1 Dec'45	47	1362	BNP625 & R
1 Jan'46	44	2282	BNP625 & R
1 Feb 46		2085	BNP 625 & R
1 Mar 46	40	1420	BNP 625 & R
1 Sep 46	5	137	Roster & BNP 625
1 Oct 46	5	330	BNP 625 & Roster
1 Dec. 46	5	365	BNP 625 & Roster
1 Nan. 47	6	361	BNP 625 & Roster
1 Feb. 47	9	477	BNP 625 & Roster

(over)

121st Construction Battalion

On Board

Date	Officers	Men	Authority
1 Mar. 47	9	477	BNP 625 & Roster

IS COMMISSIONED

UNDER a broiling September sun, thirty officers and more than 1,000 men stood stiffly at attention on Bolles Field, along the banks of the James River. It was "commissioning" day at Camp Peary, Virginia, and the men who only a few short months ago had been cat skinners and clerks, linemen and bus boys, Park Avenue socialites and factory hands, were being fused into the 122nd U. S. Naval Construction Battalion.

Row upon row of men, resplendent in their white uniforms, stretched the length of the parade grounds. The inspecting party, led by Comdr. Ransford, the Camp executive officer, passed by each man, and only the click of the bolts, as the pieces were brought to "inspection arms," broke the summer silence. The sun beat down and sweat glistened on the foreheads—sun and sweat, which were to be constant companions in the many months ahead in the tropics. Finally the inspection was over—and the band broke out in a brisk martial air. The columns started forward in practiced formation, past the reviewing stand. There Captain and Mrs. Ware and other dignitaries, including the top ranking Battalion officers, witnessed the men on parade. Miss Agnes Troy and Mrs. L. M. Van Doren presented the colors to Lieut. Cates (later Lt. Comdr.), the Officer in Charge, and Lieut. Glunt, the Executive Officer. The Battalion was formed. Many wives and relatives were on hand to greet the men as they milled about when the review was over. It had been a hot and tiring, yet an impressive day. For most of the men assembled it was a beginning and an end—the beginning of a long association that was to carry them through the mud and jungles of New Guinea and the Philippines, and it was the end of the awkward days of boot camp. . . .

BOOT DAYS Many of the men who participated in the commissioning review were construction men in civilian life, who had enlisted in the Naval Reserve; others were right out of school or from a variety of occupations, inducted into the Navy and assigned to the Seabees. Some were only 17 or 18 years old, and others were in their forties. Many left wives and children behind when they boarded the train for Camp Peary to begin their Navy life.

It was a hot stuffy July day when most of them for the first time saw Camp Peary, stretching out with its dreary rows of barracks. The first stop was the "detention area," completely surrounded by a high fence, and suggesting a concentration camp. From the old-timers came cries of "You'll be sorry," as the erstwhile civilians raggedly marched to the barracks. It was a discouraging beginning, made none the more heartening after an hour's wait for chow, and a taste of the warm, chlorinated solution that passed for drinking water.

The boot at Peary passed through a nightmare during the few first days, being herded from building to building, having a physical examination, discarding civvies, and getting Navy issue. The tiring and discouraging process of being outfitted was climaxed by the indignity of getting a "boot" hair cut. Then each man, clad in dungarees and minus his curly locks, was photographed, and the resulting convict-like picture made a permanent part of his identification card. Any resemblance between the picture and the person was purely coincidental.

Then began boot training, a sun-up to sun-down routine of drilling and lectures, with time out only for a quick meal, a hastily written letter, and a session with the scrub brush in the laundry. There was a lot to be

learned in a few short weeks when the transition had to be made from a carefree civilian to a snappy sailor. The program called for instruction in military courtesy, Navy regulations, chemical warfare, camouflage, infantry tactics, signalling, and scores of other basic military subjects.

Before long everyone discovered that he didn't stand on a floor, but a deck, and that to "square your hat" meant to jam it down on your eyebrows in correct Navy style. The all-powerful fellow who bellowed out orders was found to be a chief petty officer, and not an Admiral. The "port" side of the barracks turned out to be the left side, only it wasn't a "side" but a "bulkhead." The "smoking lamp" proved to be as imaginary as the equator, and the honor of being appointed "Captain of the Head" a dubious one which involved cleaning out toilet bowls and other distasteful tasks.

The training began in the heat of a southern summer sun, which taxed the resources of even the hardiest. Before long it dawned on most that to be a Seabee one not only had to be a sailor, but a marine, and a construction man too. It was quite an order to pack all this training in a few weeks. Day after day of practice in infantry infiltration tactics, the use of the machete, close order drill, hand grenade throwing, and extended order in the woods, made everyone conscious that the transition from civilian to "Fighting Builder" was not easy.

More than anything, boot training meant standing in line. There was a line for chow, a line to buy a coke, a line to the laundry, and worst of all the shot line. Had they but known, they would have been aware that all during their Navy careers they would be standing in line. When the first shots were given, the old legend of the "square needle" was first heard. The gullible boots were told that their first shot series would include one given with a square needle. So there were white-faced shaking men standing outside Sick Bay waiting for the square needle, which never materialized, just as they would be standing in shot-lines periodically all through the war. Odd, how a man who can face danger without a shudder, flinches at the mention of the needle!

Boot camp was a time of restriction. No one could stray from the immediate area in which he lived during all the weeks of training. Just to be able to go down to the beer garden for a tall cool glass of brew would have seemed like paradise after drilling for hours at 100° in the shade. The day when they would "break boot" became for them almost the main goal of life. Later they would always be impatiently awaiting some other goal—the embarkation leave—boarding the transport—moving from island to island—arriving back in the States. Always a goal in sight, and always a lot of hard work to be done before accomplishing it.

Finally the drudgery and restriction of boot camp was over, and the assignment lists were posted. Most of the men found that they were assigned to the 122nd Construction Battalion, which on August 22, 1943, assembled for advanced training in Area A-6. From then on the men ceased being individual recruits and became part of a well rounded team that would soon be ready for whatever came its way.

ADVANCED TRAINING

There was a sense of freedom when boot days were over. There was liberty every fourth night, and the run of the camp during other free time. The beer garden and nightly movies at camp were popular, but not sufficient to keep the men from excursions to Williamsburg and Richmond on liberty nights for their first public appearances in their "monkey suits," as the enlisted man's uniform was called. But most of the time was spent in more training and more schooling.

The marines were in charge of the military training. Close order drill still was a daily feature, with a snappy marine sergeant cracking the whip. Gradually more intricate maneuvers were learned in anticipation of the commissioning review. There was a series of lectures on "security on the march," extended order formation, construction of fox holes, maintenance of contact under battle conditions, camouflage, etc. With each lecture went practice under simulated battle conditions in the field. Frequently an observer could find men crawling on their bellies through the underbrush, in squad formation, using hand signals. One day there was a memorable forced march when all hands turned to, fully equipped with infantry pack, canteen, mess gear, and rifle for a long trek. After an entire day of rugged going, hundreds of weary men trudged back, wondering if they were really in the Navy, or through some mischance in the infantry. But that wasn't all in the day's program. The obstacle course came next—a diabolical instrument of torture, through which the men had to crawl and climb, jump and stagger. Most of them got through somehow, but others not so fortunate fell into a pond from an overhanging rope or dropped out somewhere along the line. Before long this "commando course" was a familiar part of the routine.

In the newly formed Battalion, the men were beginning to know their officers. The Officer in Charge, Lieut. Cates, had long been aide to the Executive Officer of the camp. Lieut. Glunt, the Battalion Executive Officer, had been in charge of the technical train-

ing; and Lieut. Van Doren (later Executive Officer) had been base operations officer. With them from Ship's Company came many hand picked men who had long served at the camp in a variety of responsibilities. Most of the officers, like the men, had just finished their indoctrination training, and Navy life was as new to them as to the men.

Of great importance to an organization as versatile as the Seabees was the technical training received during this period. The courses covered practically every phase of work that would be encountered overseas, including welding, fire-fighting, seamanship, rigging, malaria control, water supply, and many others. In all more than thirty subjects were taught in these classes, which involved not only lectures, but also actual work in the field. The class in marine pipe laying broke the camp record for the speed with which they laid a line during their training period.

Most thorough of all instruction was that in the use of rifles and automatic weapons. Each man went through an intensive course with the Springfield 3.03 rifle, culminating when he fired for score on the range. Classes were held on the firing of anti-aircraft guns, mortars, machine guns, Thompson sub-machine guns, and the Browning automatic rifle. To prepare for some possible D-day a practice landing was made from Higgins Boats under mock combat conditions.

Each morning the Battalion lined up on the drill field for colors. A fledgling band began to play for these occasions, at which muster was taken and the Company Commanders reported to the Officer in Charge. Battalion inspections began, and the 122nd tradition for neatness and cleanliness was founded during the first few weeks of its existence. The first smoker was staged, with the singers, musicians and entertainers giving their first performance. In short the conglomerate mass of individuals was beginning to round itself out into a team that could build, fight, if necessary, and amuse itself during its long months on remote Pacific islands.

Uppermost in everyone's minds was the approaching embarkation leave—ten days away from the service, for most the last visit with the folks before going overseas. Late in September these leaves began, and only a few short days after they were over, the Battalion embarked by train for California for more training and eventual departure for overseas. The 4th of October, 1943, was the day the trains pulled out—and that day is recorded as the official date of the commissioning of the 122nd U. S. Naval Construction Battalion.

California—HERE WE COME

LIGHT-HEARTED and cheerful over the prospect of seeing California before embarkation, the Battalion boarded the three sections of the train headed west. For some it was the first trans-continental trip, and even for those who had been west, the glimpses of the Rocky Gorge, the Salt Flats of Utah, and the Feather River Canyon couldn't fail to be inspiring. In the five days and nights there was time for a good rest, and a surfeit of reading and card playing, as well as simply gazing out the window.

The end of the trip proved to be Camp Parks at Shoemaker, California, within a few hours ride of San Francisco, Oakland and other of the State's famous cities. The camp itself seemed luxurious after Peary. The large two-story barracks, automatically heated, with heads and showers in each, were a happy contrast to the dismal tarpaper shacks of boot days. The ship's service stores, with their thick malted milks and juke boxes were always popular, and the elaborate theaters enabled men to pass their evenings in camp pleasantly.

Each morning the Battalion formed and marched to the parade grounds for the daily ceremony of colors. There all men stationed at the camp lined up in the chill foggy morning, as the band played and the flag was raised. On Saturdays began the routine of the dress parade, where the familiar commands "Battalion, Company, Platoon" rang out to the accompaniment of the Battalion military band. It was then that the legend began that when the unit went overseas it should go by aircraft carrier, to have room for weekly dress parades.

On Saturdays began the routine of dress parades at Camp Parks

For the first time the Battalion really began to function as a self-contained unit, with its own galley and mess hall, its own offices, sick bay and library.

A recreation program was inaugurated, with basketball, football and baseball highlighting the sports program. A Photo Lab was set up, where each man could have his picture taken in dress clothes or battle garb, to send to his one and only. The band and orchestra practiced and performed for the men and for dances held in neighboring USOs. Company smokers gathered together the home talent in an occasional evening show.

The Battalion area was fortunately located near the main liberty gate, and every evening and weekend found hundreds of "liberty hounds" headed toward town. Nearby Hayward was popular with some, but others went regularly to San Francisco, Oakland, and Sacramento. To a man the 122nd has the fondest memories of northern California, whose bars, restaurants, night clubs, and dance halls, as well as hospitable civilians, provided the best liberty most of them have ever had in the service.

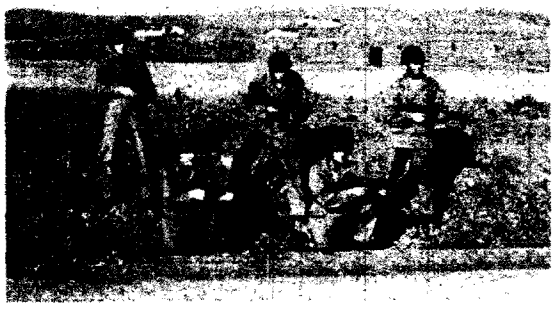
It wasn't all fun, though. The daily routine at camp consisted of both military and technical training. Emphasis was placed on Judo, hand-to-hand combat with the machete and bolo, and the everpresent obstacle course. A memorable mock battle was held on a cliff, with one group storming up the side, and the other doing its best to keep them down. "Anything Goes" might well have been the name of the engagement.

Hikes were almost daily features of the program, designed to toughen everyone for that rapidly approaching day when a landing would be made on an unknown "Island X." The Mount Diablo hike, a tough up-hill trip of some thirty miles, made with full infantry equipment, brought back the grueling hoodays. For the first (and it was hoped, vainly, the last time) K rations were eaten. Mount Diablo proved to be appropriately named. At the bivouac area pup tents were set up in which to get a night's rest; but no sooner was the first snore heard than the devil broke loose. A mock battle began and continued through most of the night, with rough and tumble fighting, ambushing and infiltration. Then before dawn the return trip was begun. It was a ragged, footsore group that returned to camp that afternoon; and that night for probably the first and only time, no one seemed to want to go on liberty.

It was at Parks that the Battalion undertook its first construction work. Several homes, a number of quonsets, and a road were constructed. This was the first opportunity to learn what the men could do on an actual job, and proved invaluable in lining up the crews that would handle the many large projects to be tackled overseas.

The technical training begun at Peary was continued here. Once again the classes got together to refresh their knowledge of such subjects as tank erection, heavy equipment operation, welding, communications, demolition and dozens of other operations of importance to the Seabees.

Thanksgiving and Christmas days were celebrated during this period, for which occasions the commissary department provided meals unequalled before or since in the service. The time spent at Camp Parks was one of good food, excellent living conditions, and the best



Camp Parks Obstacle Course

M. TIESS, PTR 3 C

of liberty towns. It was the experience everyone remembered fondly when overseas, and hoped would be his lot when he returned.

The make-up of the Battalion changed somewhat during this interlude. About fifty men were transferred directly overseas to other activities, and about seventy-five others went into general service for duty with the fleet. Replacements were received from casual drafts direct from Camp Peary; and quite a number of the men who were to play a large part in the Battalion's overseas effort were received aboard at this time.

Mid-way between Christmas and New Year, another move developed. To the strains of the band, the men regretfully hoisted their gear and entrained for Port Hueneme, some 60 miles north of Los Angeles. It rained when the train pulled out, and when it arrived in Hueneme it poured, beginning the long tradition that whenever the 122nd moved it rained. With few exceptions this held true throughout the career of the Battalion.

Port Hueneme was a let-down after Parks. Seen in a downpour at dawn, the dreary rows of quonsets looked bleak indeed in comparison with the comfortable barracks that had been left behind. But it was to be "home" for about two months, and before long all hands had accustomed themselves to their new environment.

During this period the City of Los Angeles organized a big Army-Navy show at the Coliseum, and it fell to the 122nd to play a large part in this show. A

Movie Star Kay Francis adopted the Unit at a special dress parade held in her honor

couple of weeks before the opening, a construction crew was sent to town on detached duty to build the sets. An entire "Island X" in miniature was constructed as part of the set. In its spare time while in town, the carpenters made alterations to the Hollywood Guild Canteen, where so many servicemen lived while on liberty.

Practically all of the Battalion participated in the show. Before an audience of many thousands, the 122nd Military Band joined with the Station Band, with the Battalion drum major at the head. Following the band came platoons, each dressed in a different uniform and carrying various weapons, from rifles, automatic weapons and machetes, to brush hooks and shovels. Due to a dramatic build-up and the excellence of the band, the Seabee part of the show, in which the 122nd figured prominently, was the hit of the evening.

Back in camp the Battalion "went Hollywood." On one memorable occasion, Movie Star Kay Francis was guest of honor, and "adopted" the unit at a special dress parade held in her honor. On another occasion, Monty Wooley made a special visit to the Battalion for an afternoon's session with the fellows. Another time, some of Santa Barbara's important families sponsored a ball, the proceeds of which went to the Battalion Welfare Fund. On all of these occasions and others, the military band and dance orchestra participated.

With only a few short weeks of Stateside duty remaining, liberty became ever more important, and very few missed their weekends in Hollywood and their overnight liberties in Ventura and Oxnard. There were final good-byes to families, and the frenzied last good times in the night spots of the film capital. The memories of these liberties had to last a long time, for there wouldn't be much merriment to be found in the jungles and mud of the Southwest Pacific.

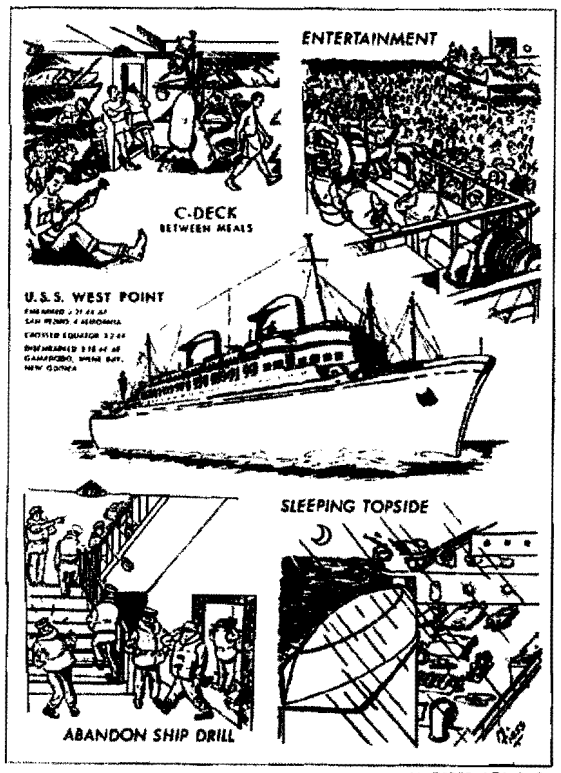
As usual during the time spent at Hueneme, military and technical training took the spotlight, but with increased emphasis, because this was the last stop before embarkation. The training was largely done with rifles, gas masks, and equipment which each man would carry with him on the big adventure. This was the last opportunity to put the finishing touches on the training that had begun five months before in boot camp. The overture was practically over; the curtain would soon rise on the real thing.

At last the eventful day arrived. In the early dawn of February 21, 1943, the battalion trudged wearily under the loads of sea bags, packs, rifles, gas masks, and ditty bags to the train siding. As usual it rained relentlessly. That and the weight of the gear that had to be carried made the departure an inauspicious one. The train turned out to be unheated and obsolete, and the miserable, slow trip from Hueneme to San Pedro was made without enthusiasm. Just before arriving at the dock, the last car of the train jumped track, making it necessary for everyone to walk a little further with their loads. When finally after a tortuous journey the length of the dock and through the many companionways of the transport, a bunk in an overcrowded compartment was found, most just fell in with their gear to rest. It was an unspectacular and almost somber experience when the 122nd Battalion, along with thousands of others packed into the tremendous hulk of the U. S. S. West Point for the long voyage across. There was no glamour and flag-waving in the embarkation. It was simply a tiring procession aboard ship, headed for parts unknown.

Overseas

THE "West Point" had been the pride of the American Merchant Marine, a luxury liner for vacation cruises; but converted for war and bearing 10,000 passengers, it had little semblance of its former self. Whatever thrill there may have been from making a first Trans-Pacific crossing was more than offset by the hot and crowded conditions. Still, however uncomfortable, there was satisfaction in gazing at the ever-changing ocean, and lying on the deck at night watching the stars rotate as the ship bobbed up and down in the swell. Best of all, it was a fast ship, traveling unescorted, and the trip was not long. Very little land was sighted until entering the bay at Noumea, New Caledonia, where some passengers were discharged and others boarded before setting sail on a northwesterly course, headed for New Guinea.

The 16-day voyage ended March 10, 1944, in Milne



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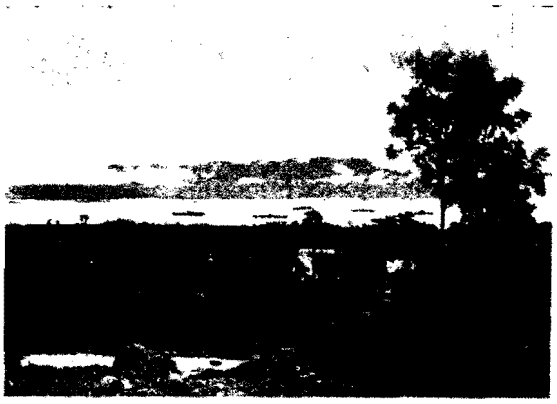


Milne Bay, New Guinea

Bay, then only a few hundred miles from Jap bases at Rabaul and Wewak. It was a hot, stuffy day when the first sight was caught of the dense jungles and mountains skirting the bay. Apparently this was to be home, at least temporarily.

Disembarkation turned out to be an easier job than loading. Trucks were on hand to pick up the men and their gear and haul them to their barracks, which were newly constructed, and provided better shelter than had been expected.

The jungle offered many new and interesting diversions. The unlimited supply of coconuts was the first attraction, but proved short-lived, when it was found that they induced diarrhea. The natives, bushy-haired and delicate, provided amusement when they came in camp to trade. The more intrepid souls were soon setting off for the jungles to explore the creeks, the waterfalls, and the jungle paths.

First things came first, however, and laundry was of utmost importance after the trip across. Confronted with only cold water for washing purposes, the men soon rigged up oil drums, lit fires, and began boiling their clothes. It began to shower a bit each afternoon, and that served only to settle the dust and cool things off a bit. However, within a couple of weeks the showers turned into torrential downpours, which lasted all day and night. From then on the brief stay at Gamadodo was one of rain and mud. For weeks at a time it continued to rain, making it impossible to dry clothes, or to keep dry. Rubber boots and sou'easters were found the most acceptable clothing in that wettest corner of the world. On one occasion it rained so hard the creeks overflowed, dams broke, and parts of the road and some tents were washed away. The course of an entire jungle stream, and a 100-foot waterfall were changed during this deluge.

Milne Bay was the staging area for the 122nd, where

it awaited its materials from the States, gathered together other supplies, and lined up its organization in preparation for the first big job. There was much work to be done there, however, and a couple of days after the landing the Battalion "turned to" at a variety of occupations. Because it was a big supply base, stevedoring was an essential task, and six gangs were provided for this work, along with longshoremen, truck drivers and riggers. One gang established a record for rapid unloading.

Truck drivers, cat operators, mechanics and others worked at their trades, and found manipulating their rigs through the mud and rain no small job. A logging and saw mill crew was set up, and before long the jungles were ringing with the axes of 122nd lumberjacks, and the whizz of the saws in the portable saw mill was evidence of the thousands of board feet of mahogany and other woods being cut for local construction purposes. Among the rare and precious woods in the area were ebony, black palm, sandalwood, and rosewood, from which numerous souvenirs were made.

The first construction job at Gamadodo was the erection of eight two-story barracks, entirely out of native lumber. The jungle was cleared on a hill a short distance from the main camp, and soon the concrete mixers were set up and work commenced. The site was an unbelievable abyss of mud. One misstep would send a man hip-deep in the sticky slime. It rained and rained and rained. The newly cut green mahogany became soaked and even more difficult to work with. But somehow the buildings went up, despite the difficulties—and the Battalion moved in as the first occupants. Until walks could be constructed, no one left the barracks for the head or chow without wondering whether he would be able to walk back, or would have to be pulled back through the sticky mud by a bulldozer.

Other construction went on at the same time. A number of Quonset warehouses and steel frame sheds were erected. A limited amount of road work was done, and a fledgling small boat crew began to acquire and operate a small fleet of LCMs and pontoon barges.

Before long the first of the two liberty ships carrying the Battalion's equipment from the States arrived, had to be unloaded, and then re-loaded. Due to a change in orders, the equipment had to be transferred from one ship to another in midstream. Limited dock facilities made it necessary to do much of the work in the Bay from barges.

The period spent at Milne Bay, despite all the work done there, was a period of waiting, of living in receiving barracks and eating with other outfits. There was no opportunity to set up as a self-sustaining unit, and there were no large projects assigned to the Battalion. Everyone was eager to be on the move, whatever difficulties and dangers might be involved. So when after three months there, they boarded ship in the rain, spirits were high. Finally the 122nd would begin to show what it could do as a unit.

It took two liberty ships to transport the Battalion, but practically all of the personnel, and much of the equipment traveled on the S. S. Walter Williams. To make the trip as comfortable as possible, bunks were built below decks, and a temporary galley constructed on deck. On June 15, to the strains of "Anchors Aweigh," played by the military band, the ship moved out of the bay in the early hours of the morning.

Just outside Milne Bay are some of the most extensive coral reef formations in the world. Watching over the side one could see reef after reef just under water, as the ship tortuously made its way through the safe channel. About eight o'clock the first morning out

. . . an army tug struggled through the night and only succeeded in getting stuck itself

The band and orchestra gave concerts and natives came aboard the ship to trade

those watching saw the ship approach perilously close to a large reef, and then heard the crunching noise as the big hull rammed onto it and went aground. At first it was thought that it could be easily extricated by the propellers, but repeated efforts proved unsuccessful.

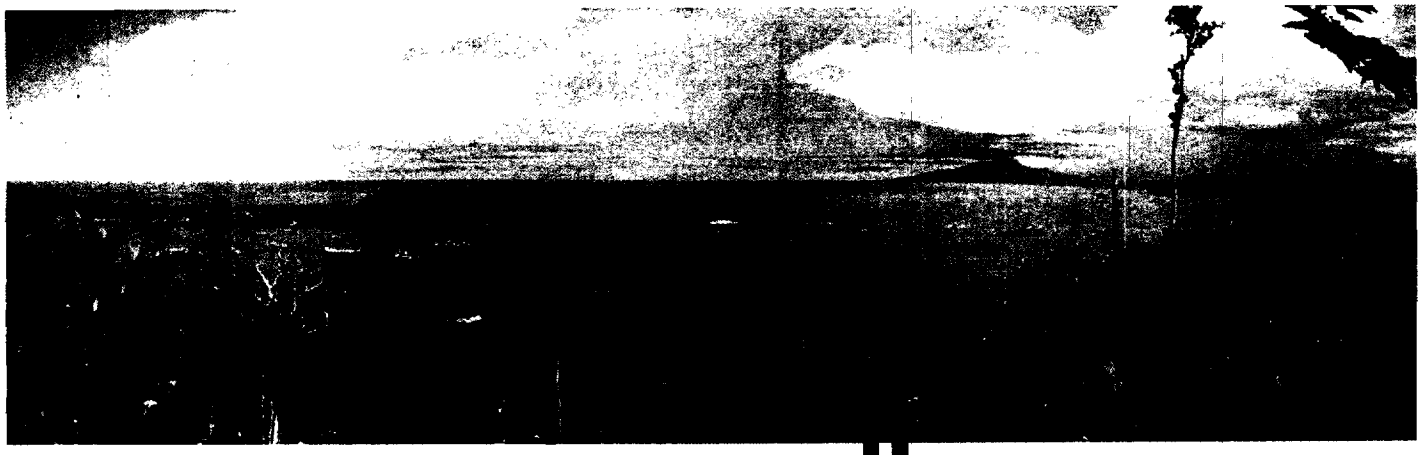
For the 122nd, the episode on the reef is the all-time favorite story. Perhaps they should have been worried over the possibility of the ship breaking up in the swell, or of an enemy air attack while stuck helplessly. Paradoxically the days spent on the reef were light-hearted, jubilant times. For one thing the sun was shining brilliantly, and after months in rain soaked Gamadodo, it was great to be able to stretch out in the sun. The band and the orchestra gave concerts, and natives came aboard in their outriggers to trade.

Some amusing attempts were made to float the ship by having the men run to and fro from side to side; and by having them assemble at the stern and jump up and down. Then came an army tug, which struggled without success through the night, and only succeeded in getting stuck itself. When it finally steamed away, it began to look as though a grounded ship would be "Island X" for the 122nd.

Later an Australian tug arrived, which tenaciously pulled for hour after hour, without even a slack in the line, and eventually had its perseverance rewarded as the ship swung free.

It was then necessary to return to harbor; but finally one week after first setting out, the "Walter Williams" and its passengers sailed out the neck of Milne Bay, up the coast of New Guinea, past Japanese occupied positions, to Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea, which only a short time before had been invaded.

One of the ship's company sketched his impression of the grounding of the S. S. Walter Williams



Hollandia

IT WAS the 28th of June, 1944, when the ship pulled into the broad reaches and deep anchorages of Humboldt Bay. Less than a year after most of the men had joined the service, they were standing offshore anxious to get started on their first big job.

The topography at Hollandia was very different from that at Milne Bay. The region is one of mountains and hills, with numerous coves and bays. The site allocated for the camp was some distance up a steep road into the hills, midway between Pancake Hill, scene of one of the initial landings, and the village of Hollandia. Only along the shore were there real evidences of jungle. Up in the hills there were tall timber and steep inclines, resembling more the north woods back home than a New Guinea jungle. But the heat, the mud, and the rains wouldn't let one carry the illusion too far.

An advance surveying party had been sent up shortly before, and they had the camp staked out when the bulk of the battalion arrived. Working from the ship, parties went ashore daily to clear the ground of timber and underbrush and make it ready for the construction crews. Armed guards were sent with them for protection against snipers. As the work went on at the campsite, three detachments were made up to go to Wadke, Aitape, and Hollekang, to build radio transmitter stations and Port Director facilities. These parties left before everyone had gotten ashore.

Every Seabee in the Southwest Pacific goes through another "boot" period every time he makes a new landing. This is the rubber boot period, when the freshly turned earth turns to deep mud under the impact of the rains. In the first weeks at Hollandia there was no assurance even with boots that a false step wouldn't cause one to sink above his knees in mud.

Without water in the camp area, the men daily made a late afternoon exodus by truck to a creek in Hollandia Village to wash themselves and scrub clothes, and then returning on the dusty road would get grimy again.

New Guinea is remarkably free of wild life, but the occasional python that wandered into camp caused some excitement. On occasion in the middle of the night a shot would ring out, and those who were awakened by it would know another python had hit the dust. One night a man was awakened by something poking at his mosquito netting. He was startled to see the head of a big python trying to crawl in bed with him. Without a second's hesitation he decided to leave the cot to the snake, while he lit out for the opposite end of the camp "on the double."

Until fresh supplies started coming in and a galley and mess hall was built, everyone ate out of mess gear at a temporary galley, whose menu consisted of bully beef, vienna sausage, asparagus, and dehydrated potatoes and eggs. These "choice meals" were eaten out in the open on whatever stump or rock was handy.

During the first few weeks there was scarcely time to write a letter. Between working and standing in chow lines, the daylight hours were used up, and until electricity was installed this meant going to bed in the dark right after supper. At first a gruelling 7-day week schedule was worked, but when the first emergency was over, Sundays began to be holidays again.

During the six months spent at Hollandia almost forty projects were completed by the Battalion. Largest of these was a 500-bed hospital in upper Hollandia Valley, consisting of a large number of Quonset huts, barracks, tents, heads, a chow hall, recreation building,

chapel, officers' country, nurses quarters, etc. This huge installation was located in a canyon 250′ wide. A prodigious amount of grading was necessary before work could begin, and a stream had to be diverted to a new bed. In all, 78 separate structures with a total floor area of 104,700 sq. ft. were erected, for which 85,000 cu. yds. of fill had to be made, and 4600 feet of access roads constructed.

When the job was first contemplated, it was estimated that it would take 90 days to complete. Due to a change in overall plans, however, it was found necessary to complete the project in only 30 days. Working alone, the 122nd had it finished in the required month, and was commended by the Captain of the Base for the accomplishment.

Among the other construction jobs completed during the stay at Hollandia were the complete housing facilities and galley setup for the Naval Base Headquarters; similar accommodations for the Destroyer Repair Base, extensive communications and water supply installations for the entire area; the Base officers quarters, mess and wine mess; and warehouses, shops and miscellaneous installations. In these few months, the evidence of the work of the 122nd could be found for miles around at the main base, and in subsidiary installations at Leimok Hill some 25 miles away, across the bay at Hollekang, and at far-away Aitape and Wadke, where the work was done within sound of battle.

The Battalion was proud of its camp, which it considered the best in the Southwest Pacific. In spare time, and when the pressure of jobs let up, the men worked hard to make the camp the closest thing to home that could be built in New Guinea. Laid out on hills and in valleys, it made an attractive sight. Up the 144 steps to Chapel Hill were the native chapel and the hobby shop, from which one could get a bird's eye view of the camp. In a canyon between two steep rocky cliffs was the theater, whose stage visiting artists commended as the best place in the area. A recreation hall, with ping pong tables, dance floor, head, library, and easy chairs, helped make things pleasant in offtime.

A portion of the Hollandia Hospital

The Battalion was proud of its camp

There was plenty of scope for travel in the Hollandia area. Some twenty miles away beautiful Lake Sentani nestled in the hills. Elsewhere along the shore were ocean beaches. Native villages were popular, too. Even the climate turned out to be satisfactory. It was hot—but not the intense heat which would be experienced in the Philippines, and the rains were moderate. In short, Hollandia proved to be a busy but pleasant chapter in the overseas history of the 122nd.

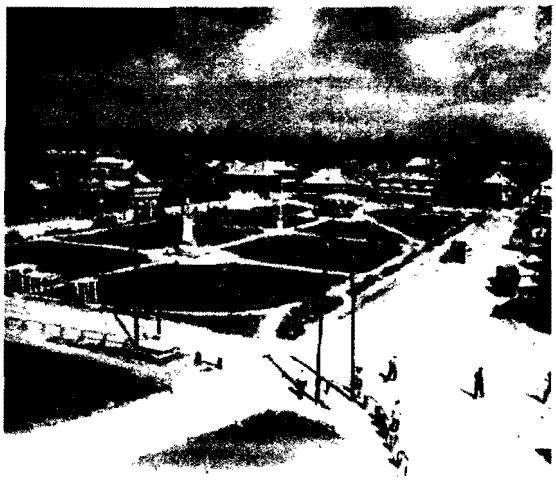
The order to move came with only two days' notice. Immediately everyone went into high gear in a frantic around-the-clock effort to pack up, load the LSTs and embark. Never before nor afterwards was there so much to do in so little time. Few got any sleep during this hectic period, so when the ships pulled out on schedule, it was a tired bunch of Seabees who lounged about on the decks to rest up after the strenuous days behind. Only one officer and twenty-five men had to remain ashore to assemble loose ends, and bring what it had been necessary to leave behind in the rush.

The ten-day trip from Hollandia to the Philippines proved to be the pleasantest move made by the Battalion. The men and equipment were distributed on five LSTs, allowing more room than is usual in overseas movements during wartime. The weather was good and the seas fairly calm. At night, when the ships were blacked out, most of the men could be found lying about on deck under the tropical sky.

As a whole the trip was uneventful, but as it neared the end an unidentified plane swooped down over the convoy, and anti-aircraft guns opened fire. Arriving in Leyte Gulf, it was necessary to lay down a smoke screen to escape observation by roaming enemy planes.

Christmas Day was celebrated aboard ship. A big turkey dinner was served, but otherwise the holiday passed like any other day. For most, it was the second Christmas spent in the service away from home, and in everyone's hearts was a prayer it would be the last.

IN THE Philippines



Philippine "liberty" town

AFTER a brief lay-over in Leyte Gulf, the convoy headed out to sea again and finally reached its destination. There were frequent alerts, and one ship in the harbor was badly damaged by a torpedo from a Jap plane, but the 122nd had good luck and remained unscathed.

The last days of 1944 were marked by the beginning of unloading operations. New Year's eve found some men bogged down in mud ashore, while others were still aboard ship. There was no celebration anywhere; in fact many even forgot what day it was. The first weeks ashore were rough. Heavy rains turned the region into a seemingly bottomless lake of mud. Often even heavy trucks could not negotiate what passed for roads, and bulldozers would have to pull them. On occasion even the dozers would get stuck. No vehicle except the tractor could get through the camp area. A heavy guard was posted to secure against roving bands of the enemy and possible parachute attack. Each night there were four or five air raid alerts, and soon they became so common as to pass almost unnoticed.

Only a small supply of heavily chlorinated water was available— rationed at half a helmetful a day. For bathing and washing, there was nothing but rain water. The only food was ten-in-one rations. Having left the last base so hurriedly, it had been impossible to secure adequate supplies, and there was a lack even of tents. For the most part men crowded under our stretched tarps strung among the coconut trees. There was almost no lumber with which to build a camp.

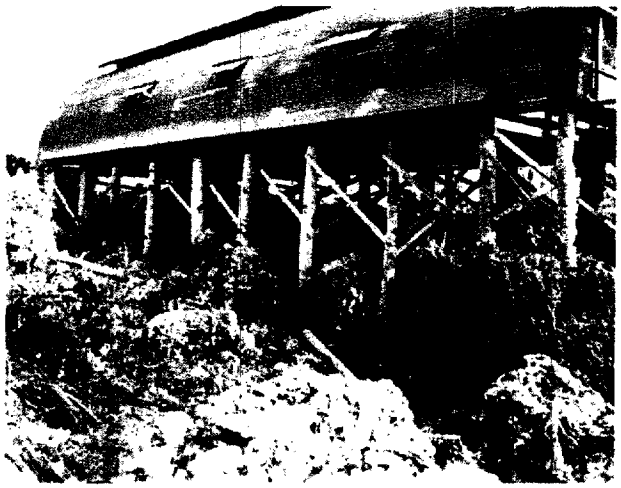
The Filipinos were a prime attraction. Children abounded everywhere, clad only in brief shirts. Their first greeting was the V sign with their fingers and a "Hello Joe, Veectory." Later they changed this for "Merry Christmas—gimme candy." The native women did the Battalion's laundry in the primitive manner of pounding it on the rocks in a creek. Hundreds of native men and boys were hired to clear the camp site and to assist on the first construction jobs. A big business was conducted in bartering for native mats, baskets and bolos. The native potables, "tuba" and rice whiskey, enjoyed a limited popularity on the black market. Stocks of Jap occupation currency and guerilla money were accumulated by souvenir hunters.

No sooner had the first groups set foot ashore than work was begun on projects. A broad highway had to be built where there was only a muddy path. A storage yard, sorting dock and warehouses had to be constructed to accommodate the limited supplies that began to trickle in. Much of this early work had to be done with native poles due to lack of materials. A 300 ft. warehouse at what was later to be the Naval Base headquarters was so constructed, as was an equally long Battalion Transportation shed. With only odd sized lumber and masonite and a couple of Quonsets, the mess hall and galley began to go up.

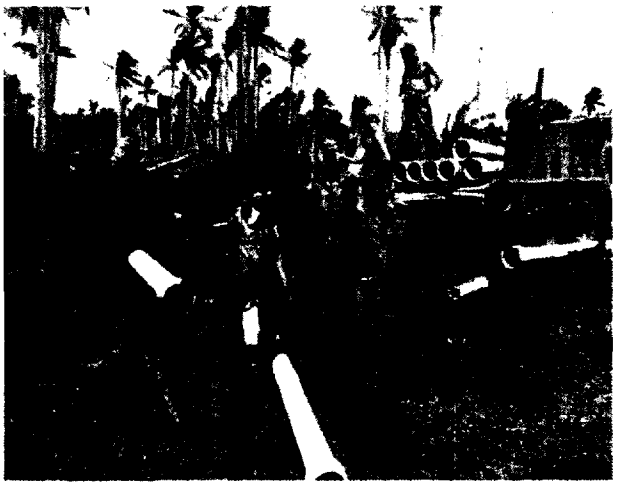
Meanwhile the rains came more frequently and heavier, accompanied by strong winds. A large part of the native towns had already been destroyed by typhoons, and although nothing of that intensity was recorded after the Battalion arrived, the driving rains caused considerable discomfort. Work went on around the clock, although the rains and the nightly round of air raid alerts and blackouts hampered operations seriously. The biggest enemy was mud, that bogged down men and machines alike.

While the majority of the Battalion were struggling

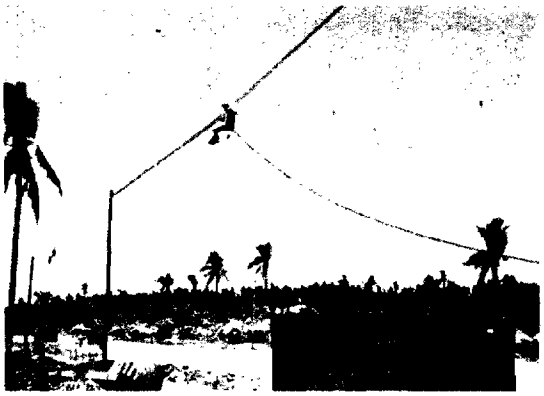
Heavy rains turned the region into a seemingly bottomless lake of mud



The terrain was a great obstacle to construction



The pipe crews laid miles of water main



Telephone linemen at work

The coral pits were busy day and night

with the elements, a detachment had gone ahead with the invasion force which landed at Lingayen Gulf in the first operation on Luzon. Landing on D-Day, these men worked with a Seabee Pontoon Detachment, facilitating the first landings by LSTs. After an exciting experience, they returned to the main body, which by then had begun the arduous job of transforming into a modern naval base the vast reaches of coconut trees, mud, and coral heads that made up the terrain of the peninsula on which the 122nd was located.

Because of the acute lumber shortage, the 122nd lumberjacks set to work on a nearby Island. Back at Hollandia they had cut almost three-quarters of a million board feet of lumber, working under the most difficult conditions. In the Philippines, they operated only six weeks, and cut almost 200,000 board feet during that time.

During the months spent in the Philippines, a prodigious amount of construction work of all kinds was done. Miles of highways and roads were built, involving the movement of hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of earth. Along the waterfront, thousands of feet of jetties and piers were completed, and a bridge constructed leading to a nearby island.

The communications crew formed the nucleus of a Navy Land Lines Unit, and played a major part in one of the largest naval shore communications projects in the Pacific. Pipe lines were laid, water tanks and a signal tower were erected. The construction crews built the entire Naval Base Headquarters area, involving hundreds of Quonsets, a galley and mess hall capable of serving 4,000 men, a large administration building, officers and Red Cross Women's quarters. This was the largest single project ever undertaken by the 122nd Battalion, and was completed well ahead of schedule.

A Company Street in Camp

Meantime the many specialists of the Battalion carried on their work. The divers salvaged materials and mapped out and blasted reefs. The riggers and surveyors, the painters and welders—and all the varied craftsmen that make up the Battalion were busily engaged making their contributions to the work. The Battalion accomplished what it did only because it was a closely integrated group, all cooperating, with no thought but to get the job done well to speed the day when they would again set foot on home soil.

This part of the Philippines offered few advantages. It lacked the beaches, scenery, and opportunity for excursions which Hollandia had boasted. So a recreation program was evolved to amuse the men in camp. First, of course, came the theater, which was in operation within two weeks of landing. The nightly series of alerts and blackouts played havoc with the shows in the early days, and only rarely was a picture completed in one evening. Later an attractive blue and gold stage, complete with curtains, backdrop and spotlights, was erected for the numerous USO shows which came along. The theater served several thousand visitors as well as men from the Battalion.

A regulation basketball court was built, and enthusiastic league play developed. In addition to a keen rivalry among teams within the organization, the Battalion squad took a heavy toll of visiting army, navy, and marine quintets. Softball, baseball, volley ball and horseshoes also proved popular. A large Quonset recreation hall housing a boxing ring, punching bags, ping pong tables and lounge chairs packed in the men in free time. An adjoining library with thousands of volumes provided reading matter for leisure hours.

The rainy season made way in a few months for a period of perpetual heat, when from dawn 'til well into the night it was stifling, with the heat and humidity at unvarying high levels. It became an effort to work, and even to exist under the blistering sun; but the projects continued without let-up.

During the overseas tour of the Battalion, there had been numerous men evacuated to hospitals because of illness or minor accidents. But not until April, 1945, did the first casualty occur. Then, Tony Costa, CM1c, drowned in the undertow while attempting to save the life of a mate. Following his death, a fund was created for his wife and baby. More than $4,000 was donated voluntarily and sent to his family.

As more than one hundred men were lost to illness and transfers, replacements began to trickle in during the Philippines stay. These men, arriving late in the Battalion's history, nevertheless took their places, and will carry on after the original members of the Battalion are no longer with them.

United States Naval Construction Battalion 121

On 10 May 1943, United States Naval Construction Battalion 121 was activated at the Marine Corps base at Camp Lejeune, New River, North Carolina. Lieutenant Commander William G. Byrne, CEC, USNR, was appointed Officer in Charge. The battalion was redesignated and assigned to duty as the 3rd Battalion, 20th Marines, 4th Marine Division. The battalion trained and worked on various construction projects at New River until 5 August 1943, when the first echelon departed by rail for Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, California. The second and third echelons departed on 16 and 17 August respectively.

The advance party arrived at Camp Pendleton on 11 August 1943, and the second and third echelons arrived on the 21st and 22nd of the month. At Camp Pendleton, the battalion underwent military and construction training, and while there constructed a 500-tent camp and five 500-man galleys, extended the camp water supply system, and built showers and heads for 2,500 men.

The 4th Marine Division was formed at Camp Pendleton and all units, including the Seabees, began extensive training in assault landings. The Seabee battalion was divided into ten separate units for tactical deployment, and all were integrated with Marine units. On 13 January 1944, the battalion sailed from San Diego, California, on the USS Bolivar with the

other elements of the 4th Marine Division. The convoy reached the Hawaiian Islands on 21 January and the next day joined the task force sailing for the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

On D-day, 31 January 1944, the battalion, which had been divided among the Landing Teams of the Marines, landed on Jacob, Ivan, Allen, and Albert Islands of the atoll. On these islands, the Seabees went to work removing duds that had failed to explode during the shelling of the island and blasting coconut trees to clear space for artillery emplacements.

On the second day of the invasion, 1 February 1944, landings were made on Abraham Island, and the Seabees began unloading ammunition and carrying it to the front lines. Three Seabees were wounded by Japanese artillery fire during this operation.

Also on that day, landings were made on Roi and Namur Islands. Seabees immediately went to work unloading supplies and delivering them to the troops on the front line. Four days later, the battalion, in company with the 190th Naval Construction Battalion, began repairing the airfield. While on Roi and Namur, the 121st Naval Construction Battalion repaired masonry walls, repaired the 300-yard causeway connecting the two islands, repaired the airfield using captured Japanese cement, unloaded ships, and cleaned up battle debris.

During the entire campaign in the Marshalls, two Seabees of the 121st Battalion were killed in action and 59 were wounded. The battalion left Roi and Namur Islands in two echelons on 10 February and 13 February

The two echelons of the battalion arrived on Maui, in the Hawaiian Islands, on 21 and 25 February 1944. There the battalion worked on several projects. As a major project, its Seabees built a 1,050-foot by 75-foot airstrip. It also did maintenance work at the 4th Marine Division camp.

After two and a half months on Maui, the 4th Marine Division was on the march again. Somewhere out in the vast Pacific was an island that the United States Army and Navy had been showing a great deal of interest in lately , an island called Saipan. The island was occupied by strongly entrenched Japanese forces.

On 8 May 1944, the main body of the Seabee battalion departed with Marines from Maui. On 15 June 1944, the battalion invaded Saipan, Mariana Islands, with the 4th Marine Division assault force. The 121st Seabees were the basic element of the shore party for Combat Team 23 and operated as the beach security force during the action. During the initial phases of the assault, they also acted as infantry and then participated in combat patrols.

In the assault action, 10 Seabees of the battalion were killed and 69 Seabees were wounded. In later stages of this campaign, when the battalion underwent about 15 heavy Japanese air attacks, another Seabee was killed and eight more were wounded. Still another two Seabees were wounded while on combat patrol.

On 19 June, the 121st Battalion began repairing the Aslito airfield. Because they had not been able to bring any heavy construction equipment to the airfield immediately, the Seabees began the job by using Japanese pushcarts and oxless oxcarts and a "liberated" Japanese roller. At the end of the first day, the battalion had two airstrips operational, and at the end of the second day a third was operational. Much of the work was accomplished during combat operations and consisted of clearing runways of debris and filling and compacting bomb and shell holes.

After the airfield project was completed on Saipan, the 121st Naval Construction Battalion repaired a Japanese narrow-gage railroad and repaired roads between the beaches and the airfield. The Seabees also built roads and causeways for the contemplated invasion of the nearby island of Tinian.

The Tinian invasion began on 24 July 1944, and an advanced party of the 121st Seabees landed with the assault troops to install landing ramps. On 27 July 1944, the remainder of the battalion landed on Tinian at 0830 and began working on North Airfield, and by 1700 of the same day it had cleared and repaired an airstrip 150 feet wide and 1,300 feet long. During the initial operations three Seabees of the battalion were wounded.

From then until the beginning of August, the battalion built roads and then continued with work on airfields, especially on long runways that were needed for the Army Air Force's long-range and heavy B-29 bombers. Some of these runways were 500 feet wide and 8,500 feet long.

On 1 August 1944, the 121st Naval Construction Battalion was assigned to the Sixth Naval Construction Brigade, Thirtieth Naval Construction Regiment and continued to work on Tinian airfields. Several other B-29 bomber airstrips were built and also taxiways, hardstands, service aprons, buildings, and a control tower. The battalion installed a 900-foot submarine aviation gasoline pipeline, pumps, and a tank farm. The battalion's construction work on Tinian for the United States Army Air Force continued through July 1945.

On 25 February 1945, one of the highlights of the stay on Tinian occurred. As part of the 4th Marine Division, the 121st Battalion was presented the Presidential Unit Citation for valor and distinguished service in the Saipan and Tinian campaigns. The ceremonies took place on North Field and Rear Admiral Lewis B. Combs, Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, placed the streamer indicating the award on the battalion flag. The battalion then passed in review to the strains of an Army band before high Army, Navy, and Marine Officers.

Between 1 July and 1 August 1945, the 121st Battalion left Tinian and returned to Saipan in five echelons. Within a few days after the return, Army Air Force bombers took off from the Tinian runways, which the battalion had helped to build, and dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then came the cessation of hostilities and the signing of the peace treaty with Japan on 2 September 1945.

During the second tour on Saipan, the 121st Seabees built camps for the 23rd Replacement Group, the 497th and 498th Bombardment Groups, and the 73rd Bombardment Wing. In addition, the battalion maintained the island's water supply and built roads, warehouses, and a rain water collection and storage facility.

With the end of the war, demobilization of the United States Armed Forces in the Mariana Islands proceeded at a rapid pace. However, the 121st Battalion was not among them in 1945. As part of the many reorganizations required by the rapid demobilization, the battalion, on 6 September 1945, was assigned to the Fifty-second Naval Construction Regiment of the Fifth Naval Construction Brigade. The brigade headquarters was on Guam. When the regiment was inactivated on 15 December 1945, the battalion was assigned directly to the brigade headquarters.

From then on, the 121st Battalion operated on Saipan under the auspices of the Base Public Works Department. It was primarily engaged in maintenance and renovation work, including such things as rehabilitating a seaplane ramp, constructing a coral dam, and operating and maintaining public utility systems. While performing these tasks, the battalion was under the Fifth Brigade for administrative control and under the Island Commander of Saipan for operational control.

The battalion remained on Saipan performing these duties through December 1947. By that time, the Seabees assigned to the battalion had dwindled to just a few over 100. This small complement did not warrant

the maintenance of a battalion organization. Consequently, on 31 December 1947, by order of the Chief of Naval Operations, United States Naval Construction Battalion 121 was redesignated as Construction Battalion Detachment 1504. Thus ended more than four and a half years of glorious fighting and building achievement.

United States Naval Construction Battalion 121

Officers in Charge

Lieutenant Commander William G. Byrne	10 May 43	Oct 45
Commander Jerome N. Lawlor (acting)	Oct 45	29 Nov 45
Commander Jerome N. Lawlor	29 Nov 45	20 Mar 46
Lieutenant Commander Louis N. Saunders, Jr.	20 Mar 46	11 Jan 47
Commander Thomas E. Barnett	11 Jan 47	31 Dec 47

DECLASSIFIED I:

ITINERARY OF THE 121st NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

10 May 1943 - 121st Naval Construction Battalion commissioned this date at Camp Lejeune, New River, N. C. Original officers and enlisted men were detached from Naval Construction Battalion Replacement Group, Fleet Marine Force, New River, N. C.

5 August 1943 - Approximately 2 officers and 75 enlisted men, forward echelon of 121st Naval Construction Battalion, departed from New River, N. C. this date and arrived at Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, Oceanside, California, on 11 August 1943.

16 August 1943 - Approximately 10 officers and 400 enlisted men departed from New River, N. C. this date and arrived at Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, Oceanside, California, on 21 August 1943.

17 August 1943 - Approximately 14 officers and 325 enlisted men departed from New River, N. C. this date and arrived at Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, Oceanside, California, on 22 August 1943.

13 January 1944 - Approximately 25 officers and 790 enlisted men sailed from the United States via San Diego, California, this date.

31 January 1944 - Joined in assault landings on Roi-Namur Islands, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands.

5 February 1944 - 1 officer and approximately 20 enlisted men, the rear echelon of the 121st Naval Construction Battalion, sailed from the United States via San Diego, California, this date and arrived at Maui, T. H. on 12 February 1944.

10 February 1944 - Approximately 4 officers and 220 enlisted men departed from Roi-Namur Islands, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands, this date and arrived at Maui, T. H. on 21 February 1944.

13 February 1944 - Approximately 21 officers and 568 enlisted men departed from Roi-Namur Islands, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands, this date and arrived at Maui, T. H. on 25 February 1944.

7 May 1944 - Approximately 23 officers and 790 enlisted men sailed from Maui, T. H. this date and arrived at Saipan Island, The Marianas, on 15 June 1944.

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ITINERARY OF THE 121st NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION, CONTINUED.

15 June to 9 July 1944	- Assault on Saipan Island, The Marianas.
23 July 1944	- Approximately 3 officers and 50 enlisted men, rear echelon of the 121st Naval Construction Battalion, sailed from Maui, T. H. this date and arrived at Tinian Island, The Marianas, on 9 September 1944.
26 July 1944 to 1 August 1944	- Assault on Tinian Island, The Marianas.
1 July 1945	- 6 officers and 217 enlisted men departed from Tinian Island, The Marianas, this date and arrived at Saipan Island, The Marianas, on 1 July 1945.
7 July 1945	- 12 officers and 383 enlisted men departed from Tinian Island, The Marianas, this date and arrived at Saipan Island, The Marianas, on 8 July 1945.
9 July 1945	- 12 officers and 375 enlisted men departed from Tinian Island, The Marianas, this date and arrived at Saipan Island, The Marianas, on 9 July 1945.
16 July 1945	- 1 officer and 15 enlisted men departed from Tinian Island, The Marianas, this date and arrived at Saipan Island, The Marianas, on 16 July 1945.
1 August 1945	- 10 enlisted men departed from Tinian Island, The Marianas, this date and arrived at Saipan Island, The Marianas, on 1 August 1945.
27 August 1945	- Serving on Saipan Island, The Marianas.

The foregoing is certified to be the correct itinerary of the 121st Naval Construction Battalion from the battalion's date of commissioning, 10 May 1943, to the present date.

27 August 1945

W. G. Byne
W. G. BYNE
Commander, CEC, USNR
Officer-in-Charge
121st Naval Construction Battalion

RESTRICTED

Chronology

United States Naval Construction Battalion 121

10 May 43	United States Naval Construction Battalion 121 was commissioned at Camp Lejeune, New River, North Carolina, and also it was designated as the 3rd Battalion, 20th Marines, 4th Marine Division.
5 Aug 43	Approximately 2 officers and 75 enlisted men, forward echelon of the 121st Naval Construction Battalion, departed from New River, North Carolina, and arrived at Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, Oceanside, California, on 11 August 1943.
16 Aug 43	Approximately 10 officers and 400 enlisted men of the battalion departed from New River, North Carolina, and arrived at Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, Oceanside, California, on 21 August 1943.
17 Aug 43	Approximately 14 officers and 325 enlisted men of the battalion departed from New River, North Carolina, and arrived at Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, Oceanside, California, on 22 August 1943. While at Camp Pendleton, the Seabees erected approximately 500 tents for the 25th Marine Regiment Camp; built five 500-man galleys and showers and heads for 2,500 men; and extended the camp water supply system.
13 Jan 44	Approximately 25 officers and 790 enlisted men sailed rom the United States via San Diego, California.
21 Jan 44	The battalion arrived in the Hawaiian Islands.

10 Feb 44	Approximately 4 officers and 220 enlisted men of the battalion departed from the Roi-Namur Islands, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands.
13 Feb 44	The remainder of the battalion, approximately 21 officers and 568 enlisted men departed from the Roi-Namur Islands.
21 Feb 44	The first contingent, 4 officers and 220 enlisted men, arrived at Maui, Territory of Hawaii.
25 Feb 44	The second contingent, consisting of 21 officers and 568 enlisted men, arrived at Maui.
Feb-May 44	In Hawaii the battalion built an airstrip, 1050 feet long by 75 feet wide, repaired access roads, and maintained the water and electrical systems.
7 May 44	The battalion except for a rear echelon of 3 officers and 50 enlisted men, sailed from Maui.
15 Jun 44	The 121st Seabees landed on Saipan, in the Marianas, participating in the initial landings on the island.
Jun-Jul 44	When the landings were secured the battalion began work on Saipan, repairing runways and clearing debris at Aslito Airfield. The Seabees made repairs to a narrow gauge railroad and operated the railroad until they turned it over to the United States Army. The battalion also improved and repaired roads and causeways on the island.
23 Jul 44	The rear echelon sailed from Maui, Hawaii.

24 Jul 44	An advance party of the battalion from Saipan landed on Tinian with the assault troops to install landing ramps.
26 Jul 44	The balance of the 121st Seabees departed from Saipan.
27 Jul 44	Main body of 121st Naval Construction Battalion landed on Tinian and began work on airfields including very long runways for B-29 bombers.
1 Aug 44	The 121st Naval Construction Battalion was attached to the Sixth Naval Construction Brigade, Thirtieth Naval Construction Regiment. The battalion continued to work on Tinian airfields.
9 Sep 44	The rear echelon from Maui arrived on Tinian.
11 Sep 44 to 30 Jun 45	The entire battalion remained on Tinian working on bomber strips and airfield facilities for the United States Army Air Force.
1 Jul 45 to 1 Aug 45	The battalion left Tinian in five echelons headed for Saipan. The trip took one day, the various echelons landed on Saipan the same day they left Tinian.
Aug 45	The 121st Naval Construction Battalion was working on Saipan. On Saipan the battalion built roads and other facilities.
6 Sep 45	The battalion was attached to the 52nd Naval Construction Regiment, Fifth Naval Construction Brigade.

15 Dec 45 to 30 Dec 47	The 52nd Naval Construction Regiment was inactivated and the battalion attached directly to the 5th Naval Construction Brigade. After the cessation of hostilities the battalion became a skeleton force due to personnel discharges and was primarily a maintenace force working under the Public Works Officer on Saipan.
31 Dec 47	The 121st Naval Construction Battalion was inactivated with its remaining personnel organized as Construction Battalion Detachment 1504.

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