21st Naval Construction Regiment

Historical Information

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

NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND

~~21st REGIMENT~~ 82nd, 87th, and 88th CB's. 21st C. Regiment

1-13-44 - Comdr. Harris assigned as OinC from 53rd C.B.(Budocks ltr to Bupers dated 6 Jan'44
1-13-44 - Lt. Comdr. Corradi assigned from 5th Reg.(Budocks ltr to Bupers dated 6 Jan'44).
1-15-44 - Lt.(jg) Saliske, Yaklish and Ens. Healy assigned from the 128th C.B.(Budocks ltr to Bupers dated 12 Jan'44).
1-15-44 - Ens. Waring assigned from 131st C.B.(Budocks ltr to Bupers dated 12 Jan'44).
1-18-44 - Lt. Comdr. Cook, Lt. Smith and Lt.(jg) Wise assigned from Peary(Budocks ltr to Bupers dated 14 Jan'44).

* 12-4-44 - 21st Const. Regiment established to consist of 82nd, 87th and 88th CB's effective 15 January 1944.(CNO ltr(conf) Op30-K35-UOT over (SC) P16-5 over Ser. 0825130 dated 17 Jan'44 to ComSoPacFor).
3-27-44 -Lt.(jg) McLaughlin, SC, is with the 21st Regiment from 53rd CB(53rd CB monthly report for Feb'44).
4-5-44 --Lt.(jg) Grow and Ens. Eden assigned from 6th CB 9 Mar'44(BNP352 from OinC 6th CB dated 9 Mar'44).
4-15-44--Lt. Hoffman assigned from 77th CB(BNP352 from OinC 77th CB dated 20 Mar'44).
4-23-44--Officer roster checked with 1 Mar'44 report - Comdr. Harris, Lt. Corradi, and Lt.(j McLaughlin only officers listed.- operating at Treasury.
5-13-44-Officer roster checked with 1 Apr'44 report - Added Lt. Comdr. Klemm, MC. Ens. Healy, Waring, Lt.(jg) Wise not listed. 21st Reg. operating at Treasury consisting of the 82nd and 87th CB's.
5-19-44--Lt.Comdr. Corradi detached to 33rd CB as OinC(BNP352 from 33rd CB dated 12 Apr'44).
6-13-44--INACTIVATED. (CNO Conf Dispatch to Comsopac 292011 May)
6-14-44--Officer roster checked with 1 May'44 report and OK - added Ens. Bentson.

21st Reg.

6-20-44 - Lt. Smith detached to CNB Forward Area(Comsopac ltr P16-4/00/(60) over Ser. 10441p to subj. officer dtd 13 May'44).
6-20-44 - Comdr. Harris, Lt. Comdr. Cook, Lt. Hoffman, Lt.(jg) Grow, Yaklish, Wise, Ens. Healy and Benton detached to Cincpoa for further assignment(Comsopac restr. disp. 142326 NCR 30296 16 June'44 to OinC 21st Reg).
6-20-44 - Lt. Saliske detached to Comserforwflt(Comsopac disp. restr. 160324 NCR 30395 16 Jun'44 to OinC 21st CB).
7-26-44 - Officer roster checked with 1 Jul'44 report - detached Comdr. Klemm, MC and Lt.(jg) McLaughlin, SC. Ens. Waring and Eden detached to 63rd CB. 21st Reg. being dissolved as of 1 Jul'44. 82nd and 87th CB remains at present location at Treasury for staging. CBMU 587 will continue to operate under the PWO at Treasury.

INACTIVATED

21st Regiment

DECLASSIFIED

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
6/22	—	Inactivated	C. B. report 1 June	
8/7/44	—	"	ComSoPac see disp. 020536 aug.	

				On Board Off.	On Board Men	Total	Auth.
OinC -	~~Comdr. Roy M. Harris~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~					
EAEC -	~~Lt. Comdr. Peter Corradi~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~					
	~~Lt.([redacted]) Frank R. Saliske~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~	1 Apr'44	11	0		MoR
	~~Lt.(jg) John P. Yaklish~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~	1 May'44	14	0		MoR
	~~Ens. John H. Healy~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~	1 Jun'44	13	0		MoR
	~~Ens. Edward J. Waring~~	~~CEC USNR~~	1 Jul'44	21	0		MoR
	~~Lt. Comdr. John W. Cook, Jr.~~	CEC USNR					
	~~Lt. Edward W. Smith~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~					
	~~Lt.(jg) Edward T. Wise~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~					
	~~Lt.(jg) Drew McLaughlin, Jr.~~	SC USNR					
	~~Lt.(jg) Virgil B. Grow, Jr.~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~					
	~~Ens. Edwin W. Eden, Jr.~~	~~CEC USNR~~					
	~~Lt. S. E. Hoffman, Jr.~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~					
	~~[redacted]. Comdr. Ralph A. Klemm~~	~~MC USNR~~					
	~~Ens. Nathan L. Bentsen~~ sit	~~CEC USNR~~					
	~~Lt Cdr. John W. Cook Jr~~						

6-13-44 INACTIVATED. (CNO Conf Dispatch to Comsopac 292011 May)

DECLASSIFIED

21st Regiment

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
6/22	—	Inactivated	C. B. report 1 June.	
8/7/44	—	"	ComSoPac see disp. 020526 Aug.	

				On Board			
				Off.	Men	Total	Auth.
OinC - Comdr. Roy M. Harris	CEC USNR						
XO - Lt. Comdr. Peter Corradi	CEC USNR						
Lt.(jg) Frank R. Saliske	CEC USNR	1 Apr'44		11	0		MoR
Lt.(jg) John P. Yaklich	CEC USNR	1 May'44		14	0		MoR
Ens. John H. Healy	CEC USNR	1 Jun'44		13	0		MoR
Ens. Edward J. Waring	CEC USNR	1 Jul'44		2	0		MoR
Lt. Comdr. John W. Cook, Jr.	CEC USNR						
Lt. Edward W. Smith	CEC USNR						
Lt.(jg) Edward T. Wise	CEC USNR						
Lt.(jg) Drew McLaughlin, Jr.	SC USNR						
Lt.(jg) Virgil B. Crow, Jr.	CEC USNR						
Ens. Edwin W. Eden, Jr.	CEC USNR						
Lt. S. E. Hoffman, Jr.	CEC USNR						
[redacted]. Comdr. Ralph A. Klemm	MC USNR						
Ens. Nathan L. Benteen	CEC USNR						
Lt Cdr. John W. Cook Jr							

6-13-44INACTIVATED. (CNO Conf Dispatch to Comsopac 292011 May)

21st Const. Regiment (INACTIVATED)

History of the

Twenty-first United States Naval Construction Regiment

The Twenty-first United States Naval Construction Regiment was established on January 15, 1944, by the Chief of Naval Operations for assignment to the Treasury Islands, a two-island group in the northern Solomon Islands, situated in the Solomon Sea 28 miles south of Bougainville. On February 12, the regiment's first Officer in Charge, Commander Roy M. Harris, CEC, USNR, arrived to assume command. That day, three naval construction battalions, the 82nd, 87th, and 88th, whose echelons had arrived in the Treasuries between October, 1943, and January, 1944, reported to the new regiment. The Twenty-first Regiment's work force stood on February 12 at approximately 3,000 officers and men.

War plans in late 1943 had fixed tropical, heavily forested Treasury Group as the site of an advanced air and naval base to neutralize Japanese strongholds on New Britian, New Georgia, and Bougainville. The small group consisted of Mono Island, also called Treasury Island, steep-sided, oval in shape, and six and one-half miles long, and Stirling Island, relatively flat, narrow and angular, three miles long, and separated from Mono Island by the partially sheltered waters of Blanche Harbor. It was on Stirling Island's more suitable terrain that the Seabees built the Treasury advanced base.

Elements of the Eighth New Zealand Infantry, Brigade of the Third New Zealand Division invaded the Treasury Islands on October 27, 1943, and against light Japanese resistance occupied the whole of the islands by November 6. The first echelon of the 87th Naval Construction Battalion landed with the New Zealanders on D-day to bulldoze beaches for landing craft, to construct a PT-boat pier, and to build the Treasuries' first roads. On November 28, the battalion's second echelon arrived and began constructing a 7,000-foot medium bomber strip on Stirling Island. The

The remainder of the 87th Battalion and the 82nd Battalion in three echelons reached Stirling during December, 1943. In January, 1944, the last of the trio, the 88th Battalion (also in three echelons) sailed into Blanche Harbor.

Construction proceeded at a rapid pace through December and January. In consequence of a sustained, three-shift workday, with night crews working under the glare of floodlights mounted on 25-foot towers, the basic features of the advanced base were completed when the Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment assumed direction of construction on February 12.

The most important task at hand was the medium bomber airstrip begun on November 28 by Naval Construction Battalion 87. Excavating the hard but workable coral of Stirling Island, the battalion in a round-the-clock effort completed 4,000 feet of the bomber strip by Christmas Day and 6,000 feet by January 2. Frequent Japanese air raids in December and January did not seriously hamper progress on the airstrip but did inflict several casualties. On the night of January 12-13, bombing attacks killed four Seabees of the 87th Battalion.

Other facilities completed before the regiment's arrival consisted of two taxiways replete with hardstands and warm-up and service areas, an anchored pontoon dock 43 by 428 feet for cargo vessels, a dock for motor torpedo boats, and five 1,000-barrel tanks for aviation gasoline. In December, the 82nd Battalion took over taxiway construction from the 87th Battalion, and upon its arrival in January, the 88th Battalion joined this project and others. During these weeks, the battalions also commenced construction of an additional three taxiways, camps, and utilities systems.

Although by mid-Febraury the battalions' efforts had already put the Treasury base into operation, much remained to be done when the regiment began to direct construction. Indicative of this was the continuation of the same round-the-clock pace of work during the two months and a half following February 12. Not until May 1 did the pressure of work lessen and a single-shift work schedule prevail.

Under regimental direction, the Seabees extended the bomber runway to 7,000 feet during February, 1944, and widened it, from 200 feet to 300 feet, the following month. Pooling battalion construction equipment,

Field. Equipped with warm-up pads and service areas and with hardstands jutting from their sides, the five taxiways, all coral paved, measured over 27,000 feet in total length. The completed airfield complex stretched in the form of an extended, obtuse S down most of the length of Stirling Island.

The Seabees constructed Treasury Field and its miles of taxiways under difficult conditions of weather and terrain. The islands' wet tropical climate assured the Seabees a miry underfooting and plagued them with malaria and other tropical diseases. However, in short order the Seabees' road system lifted Stirling out of the muck, and the clearing and filling of the shoreline of an island lake, Lake Soala, together with enforcement of proper garbage disposal, eliminated malaria as a serious threat.

Stirling Island's terrain required radical construction measures. Logging crews cleared out the jungle undergrowth and chopped down trees that reached 100 feet in height. A thick unstable layer of dark humus soil overlaid the island's coral base. The Seabees had to strip this away completely. The last step to level, grade and compact the coral to form the runway and taxiways.

At either end of the Treasury Field complex, the regiment constructed the remaining facilities of the advanced base. Erecting quonset huts and screened and decked tents, the Seabees built camps for all military units on the island, including the Naval Base Headquarters, U.S. Marine and Army bomber squadrons, the 42nd Bombardment Group, Acorn 12, the construction battalions and a construction battalion maintenance unit, and engineering, signal, ordnance, and coast artillery units.

Besides building four miles of road on Mono Island, Seabees of the' Twenty-first Regiment also built 21 miles of road on Stirling Island, a fuel pier, three pontoon drydocks, and support structures for the PT-base. For the Naval Base, the regiment installed a crash boat pier and a small boat pier. Miscellaneous activity included sawmill operation, preparation of a Tank Landing Ship landing beach, construction of bomb dumps and three ammunition magazines, erection of five stran steel warehouses at the pontoon dock, and construction of a 100-bed hospital at the Naval Base and a hospital and medical storage buildings for the Acorn 12 camp.

Scarcely a month after the regiment's arrival, the 88th Naval Construction Battalion was, on March 19, 1944, detached and assigned to the Eighteenth Naval Construction Regiment on Emirau Island, Saint Matthias Group. The transfer reduced the Twenty-first Regiment's work force by one-third to approxmiately 2,000 officers and men. However, on May 3, Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 587, numbering approximately 270 officers and men, arrived on Stirling Island, and on May 6,was assigned to the Twenty-first Regiment. The 587th took over maintenance of base roads. The maintenance unit also operated and maintained island waterworks stations, and maintained and repaired the pontoon dock, piers and other harbor works.

The arrival of Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 587 in May, 1944 signalled the completion of all major construction on Stirling Island, and that month the Twenty-first Regiment cut down the work schedule to one shift daily. The Treasury base, like many others, would soon be left behind by the forward movement of the war. By April, 1944, United States military power "ringed around" Rabaul, the great Japanese base on New Britian, breaking the Bismarcks' barrier to advance along the New Guinea coast to the Philippines.

The course of the war in mid-year of 1944 destined the Twenty-first Regiment for early inactivation. On June 18, Commander Harris was detached as Officer in Charge and was succeeded by the regiment's Executive and Operations Officer, Lieutenant Commander John W. Cook, Jr., CEC, USNR, as acting Officer in Charge. In the following eight days, 12 of the 14 regimental staff officers were detached and reassigned. Finally, on June 30, 1944 the Commander, South Pacific, acting on an earlier instruction from the Chief of Naval Operations, inactivated the Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment. On that date the 82nd and 87th Naval Construction Battalions and the 587th Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit were detached from the regiment. The 82nd and 87th Battalions remained on Stirling Island in a staging status until transferred to New Caledonia in August and September, 1944 respectively. The maintenance unit continued its operations under the direct supervision of the Public Works Officer

attached to the staff of the Commander, Naval Base, Treasury, until March, 1945, when it was transferred to Manus Island in the Admiralties.

Only five and one-half months in duration, the record of the Twenty-first Regiment was one of the most abbreviated of the 54 Naval Construction Regiments of World War II. Of 49 Seabee regiments activated before July, 1945, only two were shorter lived than the Twenty-first, and no other construction regiment was assigned to an island as small as Stirling.

The Twenty-first's record was unusual too in that basic advanced base construction was already completed when the regiment arrived. The rapid movement of the war in the Southwest Pacific in late 1943 and early 1944 made these first facilities more important than those constructed later under the regiment's direction. Thus the PT-boat base and small boat pool facilities on Stirling Island played a part in securing the beachhead at Cape Torokina following the invasion of Bougainville on November 1, 1943. Secondly, the Treasury Field, which supported bombing missions by early January, 1944, was instrumental in the reduction of Rabaul by the following April.

The major significance of the Twenty-first Regiment was that it took over development of the Treasury advanced base in mid-course and hastened the completion of naval and air facilities for use in a theatre of war in which the most rapid development of such faciltities was at all times imperative.

The second, lesser significance of the Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment, irrelevant to the progress of the war, was the Seabees' impact, a virtually total impact, on this small, isolated island of the Southwest Pacific. Like many a small island during World War II, Stirling experienced more change in a few short months than in all the annals of its past.

Chronology

Twenty-first United States Naval Construction Regiment

15 Jan 44 — The Chief of Naval Operations established the Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment

12 Feb 44 — Commander Roy M. Harris, CEC, USNR, arrived at Stirling Island, Treasury Islands and assumed command of the Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment as its first Officer in Charge.
Naval Construction Battalions 82, 87, and 88 were assigned to the regiment and continued construction of the Treasury medium bomber field, PT-boat base, camps, roads, and utility systems that constituted the Treasury advanced base.

19 Mar 44 — Naval Construction Battalion 88 was detached from the Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment and assigned to the Eighteenth Naval Construction Regiment on Emirau Island, Saint Matthias Islands.

3 May 44 — Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 587 arrived at Stirling Island, Treasury Islands.

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6 May 44 — Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 587 was assigned to the Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment.

18 Jun 44 — Commander Harris was detached as Officer in Charge of the Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment. Lieutenant Commander John W. Cook, Jr., CEC, USNR, Executive and Operations Officer of the Regiment, was appointed acting Officer in Charge.

30 Jun 44 The Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment was inactivated on Stirling Island, and Naval Construction Battalions 82 and 87 and Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 587 were detached.

CHRONOLOGY

TWENTY-FIRST NAVAL CONSTRUCTION REGIMENT

15 Jan 44 — Chief of Naval Operations established the Twenty-First Naval Construction Regiment.

12 Feb 44 — Commander Roy M. Harris, CEC, USNR, reported for duty to Treasury Island and assumed command of the Twenty-First Naval Construction Regiment as the first Officer-in-Charge.

On that date the Officers-in-Charge of the 82nd, 87th, and 88th Naval Construction Battalions reported to the regiment for duty.

24 Mar 44 — The 88th Naval Construction Battalion was detached from the Twenty-First Regiment and assigned to the Eighteenth Naval Construction Regiment on Emirau Island.

3 May 44 — Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 587 arrived at the Treasury Islands.

6 May 44 — CBMU 587 reported for duty to the Twenty-First Regiment for duty.

18 Jun 44 — Commander Harris was detached as Officer-in-Charge of the Twenty-First Regiment. Lieutenant Commander John W. Cook, Executive Officer of the Twenty-First Regiment, was appointed acting Officer-in-Charge.

1 Jul 44 — The Twenty-First Naval Construction Regiment was inactivated on Treasury Island. On that date the 82nd and 87th Naval Construction Battalions and the 587th CBMU were detached.

The two battalions remained at their Treasury Island locations in a "staging status." The 587th CBMU continued its operations under the direct supervision of the Public Works Officer attached to the staff of the Command Naval Base, Treasury.

NOTE: For detailed information of the work performed by the battalions, see pages 242, 267, and 268 in Building the Navy's Bases in World War II, Volume II.

NO LOGO AVAILABLE

NO PHOTOS AVAILABLE