

Naval Construction Maintenance Unit 571

Historical Information



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



ON BOARD

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>AUTHORITY</u>
1 Jul'44	5	266	MoR
1 Aug'44	5	261	MoR
1 Sep'44	5	257	MoR
1 Oct'44	5	256	MoR
1 Jan'45	4	244	MoR
1 Feb'45	4	238	MoR
1 Mar'45	5	267	MoR
1 Apr'45	6	266	MoR
1 May'45	6	261	MoR
1 Jun'45	6	226	MoR
1 Jul'45	6	250	BNP625 & R
1 Aug'45		251	BNP625
1 Sept'45	5	319	BNP625 & R
1 Oct'45	5	201	BNP625 & R
1 Nov'45	5	121	BNP625 & R
1 Dec'45	2	77	BNP625 & R
1 Jan'46	2		R

C.B.M.U. #571 (INACTIVATED)

CBMU 571

NCTC - Peary
 ABD - Gulfport
 Ready Date - 7 Jan'44
 Left ABD - 7 Feb'44
 Location - Russell-Is. Peleliu

LOG

- 11-24-43 - CNO orders transfer of CBMU 571 about 30 Nov. to ABD Gulfport. (CNO conf disp 241309 to Camp Peary dtd 24 Nov'43)
 2-19-44 - CBMU 571 left ABD 7 Feb'44. (WRK)
 5- 8-44 - 1 Apr'44 report of CBMU 571 - operating at Russells.
 7-19-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of CBMU 571 - operating at Russells.
 8-31-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of CBMU 571 - no info on location.
 9-19-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of CBMU 571 - no info on location.
 11-28-44 - Mullinix to be decommissioned early in Dec'44 and all activities at Buota Is. terminated. CBMU 571 to move to Guam. (Cincpoa conf disp to Commargil 6 Area 240914 NCR 2748 dtd 24 Nov'44)
 12-12-44 - CBMU 571 located at Peleliu. (IsComPeleliu Sec Disp to CNO 011016 dtd 9 Dec'44)
 12-18-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of CBMU 571 - Unit in transit during Sep'44.
 1-13-45 - CBMU 571 located at Peleliu. (IsCom Peleliu Sec Disp to CNO 030037 dtd 11 Jan'45)
 1-17-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of CBMU 571 - no info on location.
 1-30-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of CBMU 571 - no info on location.
 2-15-45 - CBMU 571 is located at Peleliu. (IsComPeleliu Sec Disp to CNO 020415 dtd 8 Feb'45)

- 5-9-45 - CBMU 571 is located at Peleliu. (Dirpacdoeks S.P. Sec Rep of 18 Apr'45)
- 5-17-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu.
- 5-18-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu.
- 5-22-45 - 1 May'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu.
- 5-30-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu.
- 6-19-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu.
- 7-18-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu.
- 8-23-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu.
- 10-1-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu.
- 10-26-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu. Report via 5th Brig.
- 11-30-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu. Report via 5th Brig.
- 12-7-45 - Comservpac reqs Commariansas to inactivate CBMU 571. Transfer all enl. pers. CBMU 503. (Comservpac 292142 Nov'45 dis to Commariansas).
- 1-11-46 - 1 Dec'45 report of CBMU 571 - located at Peleliu. Report via 5th Brig.
- 3-5-46 - CBMU 571 inactivated during period 31 January to 1 March 1946. Exact date not given. (Comservpac disp 022110 March 1946).

INACTIVATED

DECLASSIFIED

CBMU #571

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
6/13/44	-	Russell ss.	C.B. report 1 June	Left U.S. Feb 1944
9/11/44	-	" DIRK	Russell sec act disp. 012143 Sept.	
9/25	-	(U.S.)	Russell sec act disp. 180357 Sept.	Delete DIRK.
9/27	-	VAWS	190417 Sept	Departed 9 Sept - U.S.
11/20	-	VAWS	20 com Peleliu sec act disp. 050300 north Jan 030037.	Connection 180357 Departed 9 Sept to Vaux

A Chronology of "Can Do"

THE story of an outfit is often a story of the individual experiences of its men, but this narrative is a chronology of the collective achievements and adventures of men working in unison, primarily the men who formed the original complement of Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 571. The charter members of this Seabee crew hailed from all walks of life and went on to carve out a bright record of attainment on lonely tropical islands unheard of and unimportant until war made their possession and exploitation necessary. The final, complete story of CBMU 571 is not over, because CBMU 571 is, at this writing, still commissioned, still doing a job, still adding to a record. But to the men who formed it, who carried the knowledge, the brawn, the guts, and the equipment into the islands of the Pacific, this chapter of their careers as Seabees is completed. These men may go on to other naval organizations or they may already be civilians again, but their first love as servicemen will be CBMU 571.

It was only a little more than four months after we wound up our private affairs that we made that awesome and fateful climb up a gangplank to begin what some would term an adventure . . . certainly an outstanding chapter in our lives. We learned that the Pacific is a lot of water. We learned, the hard way, how torrid the equatorial sun can be when it beats on an unshielded steel deck day after day, week after week. We learned that tropical islands can have a strange allure when seen from the deck of a transport, but when we scrambled off our ship at Banika we discovered something else . . . the humid, sticky heat of the islands, and mud.

But it was on Banika, an emerald-like isle in the Russell group of the British Solomon archipelago which was our first Island X, where we be-

came men with a purpose. There was a job to be done. It wasn't heroic, nor was it spectacular. For most of us it developed into dull, routine monotony. But we did it, and did it well. It is the usual lot of a maintenance unit such as ours to assume a drab though important role in a titantic war. There is little glamour attached to an undertaking that, in the main, constituted an assignment of relieving a battalion, taking over a project that was completed, and keeping its operation smooth and efficient. Such was our initial job overseas. We were green as an organized outfit. We were bewildered by the complexities of an advanced naval base. But most of all we quickly realized that life in the tropics was a confused contrast to that in a temperate climate. Problems we hadn't been able to anticipate confronted us on all sides . . . at work as well as in our personal lives. But we were busy with our innumerable jobs and slowly we adjusted ourselves to this unaccustomed environment. We became acclimated, mentally and physically. Six months after the outfit shipped overseas it was well initiated into the intricacies of foreign duty. It was knitted into an efficient and self-sufficient mobile construction organization and it was ready for sterner stuff. Its major assignment, its toughest conditions, and its most brilliant production were wrapped up in one word . . . Peleliu.

While Marine line companies were squeezing the Japs into their last stand on Bloody Nose Ridge, while artillery, flame-throwing tanks and dive bombers concentrated a fury of hell on the hills of the island fortress, the men of 571 hit the beach, hacked a hole in the jungle for their first camp, and went to work on the roads, on the air strip, on the pontoons and LSTs . . . anywhere and everywhere they were needed. If they hadn't yet quite earned the right to be called veterans,

they wiped away all doubt on Peleliu, and they stayed to help transform that wilderness of carnage, the torn, blasted, seared landscape of Peleliu, into an outpost base of comparative luxury and convenience to keep pace with the ever-increasing effectiveness of America's war machine.

For the large majority of us our outfit had its embryonic inception in September of 1943. During that month, in every section of the coun-

And at the induction centers we got our first full contact with the service policy of herding men around. We lost our individualism with a not too gentle introduction into another world. Accepted and approved, most of us made our last fling as civilians on a seven-day inactive duty status leave. Then came the beginning of the real thing. We said our goodbyes and from 44 states of the Union streamed the men who were destined to

The Seabees? Well, what about the Seabees?

Let's dissect this lusty, roaring, working, sweating infant among the branches of the United States military services.

It's a well-known fact that Seabees are civilians, trained by Marines, dressed in Navy blues, issued Army field gear, who do skilled construction work at WPA wages. But the Seabees are more complex than that. They are heavy equipment operators, welders, riggers, divers, truck drivers, dock builders, shovel and drag line operators, carpenters, office workers, storekeepers, plumbers, electricians, cooks, barbers, tailors. The list could go on and on, but primarily they're builders.

They are of practically all ages, from the 17-year-old lad still too young to sprout a beard to grizzled veterans of hard work and World War I who are fathers and possibly grandfathers. They may have come from the great cities of a vast nation, from the little towns and hamlets, or from the farms and ranches. But together, welded into an efficient field crew, they tackled a stupendous assignment in all sections of the world, from lonely little islands of the Pacific to the blazing sands of North Africa; from the foggy isolation of the Aleutians to the far reaches of South America.

On the heels of the Pearl Harbor raid it became apparent to the Navy Department that a military organization of construction men was essential to make possible the long, slow drive back through the great stretches of the Pacific. Builders armed with guns who knew how to use them were necessary to the policy of island-hopping that paid off in victory. It was no job for civilians.

So the Bureau of Yards and Docks, with the approval of the Navy Department, created the Construction Battalions . . . the Seabees . . . and turned them over to the Civil Engineering Corps. What emerged from that union was a band of fighting builders who could and did perform miracles in transforming a strange and hostile wilderness into a base for yet another blow at our enemies. Their early achievements prompted the Navy to increase again and again the quota for the Seabees. They had caught the fancy of an enthusiastic public as well as a cautious high command. And they proved that the confidence placed in them was well deserved.

The Seabees can go back to their cities and towns and farms with pride in the knowledge they have done their job in the greatest of all wars, and have done it well. It is no longer necessary to boast of the famed slogan, "Can Do." Now that slogan is "Did!"

try, we were engaged in recruiting-office conferences and interviews. We were enthusiastic and optimistic. Yes, thrilled and proud of ourselves too, though we'd hardly admit it. "Build and Fight!" that enlistment slogan soaked into our souls. We hustled through the preliminaries of submitting letters, signing papers, and listening to the urgent salesmanship of the recruiter, who painted glowing pictures of adventure and danger and patriotism. It was an individual invitation to take a rugged job with Uncle Sam. We accepted.

become buddies . . . the mates of 571. The line of convoy trucks that flanked the tracks at Williamsburg, Va., carried an ominous warning of things to come, but we certainly were not prepared for the nightmare that was the induction center at Camp Peary. Suddenly and without ceremony we were thrust into a sprawling conglomeration of barracks and areas, a camp that offended eyes accustomed to natural or architectural beauty. Camp Peary had neither. It was a raw, hideous gash in the colorful canopy that

shielded a rolling Virginia countryside. Once again there were countless questions to answer, innumerable papers to sign, exhausting physical examinations, and unending confusion amid the catcalls of grinning initiates who yelled, "You'll be sor-ry." From all directions our issue of gear was flung at us, an amazing collection of miscellaneous items that ranged from soap and mattresses to pea coats. We staggered through mud and rain with our loot and dumped it on the stencil

the full meaning of regimentation. We drilled too, and how! We became acquainted with the universal pastime of a serviceman and quickly learned the finer details of the fine art of bitching. Yet the resentment faded while indoctrination worked its subtle effect. We came to accept the numbing chill of October weather, even though most of us, who came from the North and Far West, had expected Virginia to be Dixie, a drowsy, warm land of sunshine. Those grim, ugly

The island of Banika belongs to a far-flung series of archipelagos labeled Melanesia, but more specifically it is in the Russell group of the British Solomons. Prior to the war few of the Melanesian islands were considered of any importance, either from a military or commercial point of view. Banika was an exception a jungle-clad island that boasted of extensive coconut plantations reputedly owned and operated by various soap companies. Other than that, the value of its produce was negligible.

Banika belongs to the southernmost of two rows of islands that form the Solomon chain. It lies 9 degrees south of the equator due east of New Guinea and borders the Coral sea on the northeast. Its climate is hot and steamy, with a rainfall of about 120 inches a year. The mean temperature is 82 degrees. The native jungle growth is almost impenetrable and trees grow to giant size. There are no large mammals native to Banika, but there are rats in abundance. Other small animals include the cuscus and Phalangers which live in trees. Among the larger birds are the black and white hornbill, a great variety of parrots and pigeons, and a fowl similar to a small turkey. Crocodiles live along coastal waters and when full grown are dangerous to men as well as domestic animals.

The natives are considered to be Melanesians because of their frizzy hair and dark skin. They were, less than a century ago, described as "the most treacherous and bloodthirsty race on the face of the Pacific," but under fair treatment became friendly and docile. Native art and craftsmanship are crude, though they were noted for their elaborately decorated wooden tools and large sea-going canoes.

The history of all the islands of the Southwest Pacific is vague. They were claimed in the name of several nations, but none was willing to undertake the administrative expense of operating these remote and undeveloped areas. It wasn't until the start of the present century that the Melanesian islands were divided among European nations, and Britain took over control of those in the Solomon archipelago, including Banika. Exploitation has been confined almost exclusively to coconut plantations.

—Abridged from "The Pacific World."

counter to have our names printed on everything . . . that is, everything except the soap. "Keep your soap in your pockets, mates. We don't stencil soap," was the jeering comment of the station force boys who delighted in adding what they could to our confusion. We were shorn of our collective locks; we were mugged for our ID cards. We were boots.

Perhaps most of us, at the time, regarded boot camp as an ordeal. We were, for all practical purposes, prisoners. For a month we were isolated from the rest of the world, and we felt the impact of military discipline. We knew then

barracks offered little protection when cold blasts of wind would billow up through the great cracks in the deck, or sweep in through gaps around window casings. We got used to finding the swabbing mops frozen stiff in the gray light of early morning. Stoking those wood-hungry airtight heaters became automatic. The weather couldn't beat us. More difficult, however, was the task of mastering the military aspects of this strange, new life. Who can forget how foolish we felt when we stumbled through those first exasperating attempts at close order drill? What boundless patience our instructors must have had. With slow persistence, though, the workouts on

the parade ground, the inevitable "PT," the new regulated diet that offered vegetables in a wide array of dishes, the strictly enforced hours of sleep, took the kinks out of our bodies, put weight on some men, shaved it off others, and hardened all of us. At compulsory lectures we fidgeted while thousands of words of advice were hammered into our ears. Only few of them registered. We were taught how to salute and whom to salute. Few of us remained in the States long enough to

they were only more confused than we were, if that was possible. There was no social life, as we had known it; no contact with civilians, especially feminine civilians; no taverns or beer halls or movies or radios or dance floors. Filling in that big void fostered the process of picking our buddies, becoming acquainted with the men around us, swapping yarns, reminiscing. During our few off hours bull sessions became a habit and expanded to include the Navy's traditional

The Palau islands, of which Peleliu, Anguar and Koror are a part, are sometimes referred to as the Western Carolines and considered an appendage to the extensive Caroline group. Before and during the war they were of great military and commercial importance to Japan. Behind a veil of secrecy the Japs established and operated a major military base in these islands, used one of the best natural anchorages in the Pacific for their fleet, built up a supply base and had airfields and sea-plane bases. Palau resources include bauxite deposits in valuable quantity, lignite, and guano. The islands produced shell for buttons, large catches of fish, starch, copra, and pineapple.

The islands, believed to number more than 700 though few of that number are large enough to be of any worth, form a chain 20 miles wide running almost north and south for 77 miles. The Palaus are about 9 degrees north of the equator and more than 500 miles due east of the southern tip of the Philippines. The climate is influenced by winds from Asia to a greater degree than by the northeast trades, and average annual rainfall is 156 inches. Mean temperature is about 80 degrees though the mercury soars into high brackets under certain circumstances. The atmosphere is very humid.

A Spaniard discovered the islands in 1543. Next contact with the natives came 240 years later when a British ship was wrecked on a Palau reef, but not until the middle of the 19th century did traders begin to sift into the islands. Spain sold the islands to Germany following the Spanish-American war and when World War I broke out in 1914 it was easy for the Japs to move in.

The natives of the Palaus are of Micronesian stock, closely related to Malaysians. White men had little influence on their way of life but the Japs introduced their "culture" and their main success was in getting the natives to wear Japanese clothes in place of breechclout and grass skirt. The natives are artistically creative and their abilities are reflected in their textiles, woodwork, and tattooing. Native dances resemble the hula of Hawaii, and the Palauans love to sing.

Their homes are still built in the style of their ancestors. The Spanish, Germans, and Japanese all failed to influence their architecture, which is identified by high gabled roofs supported by corner pillars, the roof being either thatched or made of matting.

handle with a lack of self-consciousness this phase of military courtesy. Many of us were made sick and sore by our first big dose of medical shots. All in all, there was an abundance of innovations in the life of a boot. Each day was a series of little climaxes. The road to becoming a salty Seabee was methodically barricaded with small hurdles that must be crossed. Not the least of them was the complicated knack required in handling sailor gear. Boot chiefs, struggling and sweating over the matter of showing us how to roll clothes properly, accented our own ignorance. They were supposed to know all the answers and

and historic specialty . . . scuttlebutt. It was hardly new, merely another name for rumor and gossip, but in boot camp it was concentrated to an extent none of us had never known. Our language changed, too. We walked on a "deck," not a floor. Walls became "bulkheads." We slept in a "sack," instead of a bed; a bathroom was a "head;" we ate "chow" rather than meals; the dummy Liberty rifles we used for drill weren't rifles at all, they were "pieces." And so it went, for a month. Our schedules . . . we can't forget the work details, especially KP under a galley MAA who was a brute and a bully . . . were so

full we hardly had the time to realize we were lonesome and homesick. It was mail from home, the high spot of a day, that turned our thoughts back toward the life and the world and the people we had left behind. In due time the hectic experience of boot camp brought us to the all-important day. We were "graduated." When it was all over, we could agree that boot camp was a not unhappy interlude.

Breaking boot brought several changes. The majority of us are alumni of D-10 area and moved from there to A-1 to make up Company B of the newly-formed 18th Super Battalion. We shook off a few of the restrictions that apply to a boot and had access to a beer hall. We began to take on the aspects of a complete, closely-knitted organization. Here we had more interviews, and some of us were sent to schools . . . heavy equipment, steel erection, stevedore, stills and purifiers, malaria control, and weapons. But more important to us, the shift to A-1 meant our first liberty as Seabees. We donned jumpers and bell-bottomed trousers, the hallmark of the sailor, and felt odd and foolish and conspicuous as we swarmed into historic Williamsburg or Richmond. It was good to be among civilians again after living for more than a month on a compound that was strictly GI. We discovered that Williamsburg, the colonial town that had been restored to its splendor of Revolutionary days in an interesting and unique project, was filled with sightseeing attractions. It was a quaint town of friendly people. The conducted tours and the lectures regarding Williamsburg were lessons in history. During the days when the nation was struggling for its independence this little town of beautiful homes and impressive taverns and inns was important for its York river crossing. The entire Chesapeake Bay region is steeped in Colonial lore and legend. Remember Magruder? Located within the limits of Camp Peary it was just a name to us, but before we came, it was a quiet, peaceful little rural community basking in its past glory as a stop on the military road that wound from the York river to Williamsburg. George Washington rode the same pikes that we pounded with heavy feet on

many a gruelling boot march. Richmond, too, was an intriguing liberty town. To those of us who came from the North or West it was the first contact with a large southern city. We cursed Virginia's liquor laws that barred us from drinking anything except beer and wine, though we did a thorough job of it with the big mugs of brew that Williamsburg offered. Every fourth night we had our fun, bought souvenirs, and mingled with the civilians.

While we were in advanced training, we learned we were being trained for war as well as work. We drew carbines and went to the rifle range to fire for record. We practiced with bayonets, had gas mask drills, wielded wooden machetes, and listened to instructors emphasize the more important aspects of our training. We learned the fundamentals of judo; we tried our hand at skirmishing and following the hand signals of a squad leader. We had a little bit of everything tossed at us, and out of the confusion we gradually began to learn the principles, at least, of the methods of warfare. Meanwhile, we took our turn at KP, fire watch, and guard duty. We were waiting, and not too patiently, for our embarkation leaves. That great day arrived on 17 November, 1943. Those of us who lived in the North, East and South were turned loose with our passes and tickets in order and our appearance given a final approval by the OOD. With dire warnings about the penalties of being AOL still ringing in our ears, we scattered to our homes. What occurred during those 10 days is an individual story for each man in the outfit, but it's safe to assert that collectively we enjoyed ourselves. It was our last taste of real freedom before shipping overseas, and we were conscious of that fact as we crowded weeks and months of fun into those few precious days. Most of us were able to spend Thanksgiving at home, and we knew that many holidays would come and go before we could be back with our own people again. So we made the most of it.

We returned to Peary to discover that we had new quarters, in B-6 area. The men who had stayed behind, those who were to take their em-

barkation leaves from our next base, had moved us, lock, stock and barrel. But the training camp's barracks were much alike, the bunks being all about as uncomfortable, so it really made little difference. Then, on 28 November, we were informed the 18th Super Battalion was decommissioned. Our training period was over, and we were considered ready for our real assignment as Seabees. We were due to move out . . . that much was certain. But there was nothing certain about our destination, and scuttlebutt flew thick and fast regarding not only our jumping-off base but our ultimate Island X. It seemed evident to us that we were destined for tropical duty, most likely in the Pacific. By process of elimination we had narrowed our next base down to two possibilities . . . Gulfport, Miss., and Port Hueneme, Calif. Shortly after, Company B of the old 18th Super was recommissioned as Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 571. We were ordered aboard a sealed troop train to move south, leaving Peary 7 December, two years to the day after the Pearl Harbor raid. From Virginia's Tidewater region we crossed the Carolinas with their rolling hills and wooded countryside, and nosed onto a siding at a naval base in Savannah, Ga., where we got off for chow. We were getting into the Deep South here, and since there were many things of interest for us to see, we welcomed the next stop, at Columbus, Ga., where we hiked in the early morning darkness to a night club for breakfast. In our dress blues we were a curiosity to the factory workers who were just starting their day shift. It was the last break in our trip. We pulled into Mobile, Ala., and waited for hours on a siding next to a big shipyard, got our clearance papers, and our direction shifted west. Just before dawn on 10 December we rolled into Gulfport, piled off our train and climbed aboard convoy trucks. We caught our first glimpse of Camp Hollyday in the gray pre-dawn light of a winter morning.

Camp Hollyday, we discovered, was a smaller base than Peary. It was an Armed Guard boot camp as well as a shipping out point for Seabees. But, compared with the one we had just left, this camp was luxurious. The big, airy, comfortable double-decker barracks with walls of glass, front and back, and the clean, well-kept grounds gave the camp a settled appearance. It was convenient. The weather was balmy and more like a northerner's conception of Dixie climate. This was a winter resort section and the Gulf Coast offered many new attractions. Gulfport and

nearby Biloxi proved to be good liberty towns, and New Orleans wasn't beyond reach. This was a good setup and we settled down to enjoy the easiest two months of our service life. Because Hollyday was an advanced base receiving depot we were more or less marking time. The men who hadn't taken their embarkation leaves from Peary went home for Christmas. The rest of us kept busy . . . a little drilling to keep us in shape, a good-sized dose of extended order maneuvers, more lectures, advanced schools for the heavy equipment, barge, and diving specialists, and frequent liberties. The wives of many of our men came down to Gulfport to visit, and they, too, found the Coast towns and the sparkling Gulf of Mexico absorbing diversions.

Not such a leisurely and enjoyable interlude, however, was the trip to the rifle range. A spell of numbingly cold weather caught us at that rough and crude camp, and there we had no fan-blown heat or hot showers. Who will ever forget that long, bone-wearying march, the 30-mile trek that brought out a crop of blisters and left us completely fagged? Or how heavy a Springfield can get? When we got down to the business of firing we quickly learned to have respect for the wallop a Springfield packs. This was not the light, gentle weapon we had found the carbine to be. Shoulders were pounded into swollen chunks of meat bruised black and blue. Once the firing was over we discovered the hike back was an endurance test too, even though we had a break at the bivouac camp. But soon the rifle range was history for us, and we settled down once more to the business of waiting.

With the holidays behind us and a new year started, we wondered what was in store for us. We drew our overseas gear . . . all tropical. We posed for our company and platoon pictures. We were advised to send our wives home. We were getting close to embarkation, and the big day finally came on 7 February, 1944, when we got our stand-by orders. So we wrote our last Stateside letters; we checked our personal gear and our GI equipment. There was a nervous tension all day as we hung around the barracks which were already barren and stripped of everything except the two-decker steel cots. The order, "Fall in!" launched us into a new state of confusion. Loaded down with full packs, rifles, and steel helmets, we pushed and milled around the compound trying to get into alphabetical order; and when we accom-

plished that feat, we began moving out of Camp Hollyday to the strains of martial music played by a battalion band. For once we were able to get through the main gates of the camp without liberty chits, and we felt then that we had seen the last of Hollyday. It was a long march we had ahead of us, and it was dark by the time we reached the city of Gulfport. Along the route we were joined by a few of the wives of the men, lingering on at Gulfport because they were reluctant to leave before we shipped out. These women were determined to hang on to those last few treasured minutes, but the dock gates marked the end of the journey for them. They were turned back by the shore patrols, and we went on alone, down that immense pier that seemed endless that night. The transport *Jean La Fitte* looked enormous, too, when we caught our first view of her towering sides. In the vast sheds and warehouses there was more confusion and more waiting. When our turn finally came to go up the gang-plank there was another checking of the roster. We staggered up and onto the main deck, stumbled over unexpected deck coamings and rings, and had considerable difficulty trying to manage the steep steps that took us down into the bowels of the big ship. We were assigned to our section of the troops' quarters and became lost in the maze of bunks . . . narrow, close together and in tiers of five. But we were weary enough to want to hit the sack, and we settled down to our first night aboard a troop ship. It was a strange feeling. It seemed unreal. This ship, we knew, was to carry us to our first Island X and no one, among the men, had any idea where that was.

We were still at the dock early the next morning but got under way quickly. We followed the twisting, buoy-marked course that brought us out of the shallow coastal waters of the Gulf into the open sea. All day we skirted the Mississippi and Louisiana coasts and towards evening took aboard a pilot who was to guide the ship into one of the many channels that make up the delta of the great Mississippi river. We were scheduled for a stop at New Orleans and that night we sailed up-river between shadowy shores where lights winked and blinked in a black void. There was last-minute work to be done to the ship, and supplies to be loaded . . . a task that was finished by our men when regular stevedores were unable to complete it on schedule. The following day, which was 9 February, we steamed slowly along the sprawling, crowded waterfront of New Orleans. From the

foot of Canal street the teeming southern metropolis spread out before us. We could look directly into the heart of the business district, but we couldn't get off, so we watched with mixed emotions as the last continental American city we were to see for many months slipped out of vision. We retraced, in daylight, the course we had followed the night before, and for miles and miles sailed through the network of land fingers that marked off the lanes of navigable water. When we entered once more the deep, blue waters of the Gulf we were finally on our way.

In company with two other transports we steamed south as a convoy. Five sub-chasers watched over us like mother hens with strange, over-sized offspring, ranging far ahead and on our flanks, for these were dangerous waters. The Gulf and the Caribbean were favorite hunting grounds for German U-boats at that stage of the war. They were stormy waters, too. The choppy Caribbean kicked up a rough sea that gave to the *La Fitte* a three-way corkscrew movement . . . up and down, a wide sweeping roll from side to side while she plowed her way forward with a steady, consistent speed. Seasickness took its toll and there were many of our men who learned the agonizing, helpless feeling produced by a stomach that rebels at the unaccustomed motion. We came to know the monotony of shipboard life as it's lived by men jammed into a transport as human cargo. We watched the curl of bow waves by the hour; we saw our first porpoises and flying fish. We talked, read, wrote innumerable letters, played cards, and loafed in the bright sunshine on a tropical sea. We quickly learned to have respect for that sunshine, too, as it burned deep into tender skin. The ship itself could become almost unbearably hot as the temperature of sizzling steel decks worked its way into the three decks of living quarters below. The holds were stifling, yet we were herded below each night, locked in as the ship observed a rigid blackout. The twice-a-day chow line was an experience, and so was the chow itself. We had become familiar with the traditional service problem of bucking a line, but we didn't believe it was possible for men to eat that chow day after day and get enough out of it to keep going. Mess duty on the *La Fitte* was a nightmare of sweat. Even eating, standing at those high tables, was something that was done as quickly as possible so we could emerge, gasping for fresh air, onto the open deck again. Gradually we became familiar with the ship that was

to be our floating home for 33 days. She was a brand new Liberty ship, reconverted from a freighter into a transport even before this, her maiden voyage. So she was clean, at least to begin with. Scuttlebutt that we were headed for Havana broke out in full force the day after we had a submarine scare and changed courses, but on the morning of 14 February we met four of our own subs heading for the Atlantic, and by noon we had slipped through the submarine nets guarding the entrance to the Panama Canal and had dropped anchor off the city of Colon. From this vantage point in the quiet waters inside the great breakwater we saw spread before us a modern city and an array of barracks and the buildings of a permanent military base.

It was late that afternoon when we began the run through the series of locks that lifted us from the Atlantic level, over the spine of land that forms the Isthmus of Panama, and down the other side to the Pacific. Gatun lake gave us an opportunity for a fresh water shower and we took full advantage of it, when we finally could resist the temptation to stay on deck to see our first real closeup of an exotic, tropical landscape. The shores here were almost near enough to be touched. We saw alligators, strange trees and vegetation, and above us the big, soaring frigate birds. The mammoth locks and gates were an imposing sight. This was a highlight of our trip, most interesting single experience of a long voyage. It was dark when we made the descent to the level of the Pacific and reached Panama City, and daylight the following morning revealed to us the broad, placid expanse of the greatest of all oceans. When the dim, blue coastline of Panama faded out at last, we had seen our final headland for 19 days.

For those 19 days there was practically nothing to mark one from the other. Once or twice we saw a patrol plane, once our lookout sighted a lifeboat, but our ship kept on, fearing a trap. Another time we caught sight of a lone ship hull down on the horizon. For the rest we were completely alone, without convoy, with nothing but sea and sky around us. At intervals we set our watches back an hour as the La Fitte steamed ever westward. We watched a whale spout its geyser of water off the starboard bow, and several times we saw the wicked-looking fins of sharks slice the water. There was an attempt to initiate physical exercise, but the decks were

too crowded and the steel too hot. The days, beautiful, serene, and warm, followed each other uneventfully. There were no storms as the Pacific lived up to its name. For the most part we stretched out on the hatch covers soaking up sunshine, reading, writing letters, playing cards, shooting dice, talking, talking, talking. We came to know a lot about our mates in those endless bull sessions. Men would recall incidents of their civilian lives, which already seemed remote, that would start a chain of story swapping. Because we lived so close to the men around us, because our social life was restricted to just those men, and because time seemed to have stopped, we came to know our mates pretty thoroughly.

The big break in the dull monotony came on 19 February when we went through the ceremony of crossing the equator, becoming initiated into the deep, dark mysteries of the Order of Shellbacks. On the forward hatch Neptune held his stern court. Charges were filed against each Pollywog, and Neptune meted out aquatic justice. But it was his assistant, armed with clippers, who did the damage. "Bulkhead" haircuts clipped short the hair on one side of an initiate's head; round spots cut to the scalp represented the sun and the moon; the equator was represented by a swath cut across the head from ear to ear, and a similar one from the front to back indicated the poles. The results were weird and fantastic, but that wasn't all. We were daubed with red and we were sprayed and drenched with a deck fire hose that spouted sea water in hard and solid streams. When it was all over, we were no longer Pollywogs. We were Shellbacks and had our rightful places among Neptune's select. We were salty veterans of the deep and rolling main. Without benefit of ceremony, we crossed the international date line on 1 March and dropped 24 hours out of our lives. Four days later we heard the first excited cry of "Land!" Far off the starboard bow there appeared a dark smudge that slowly took on the outlines of an island. Soon we passed another, comparatively close. It was a bare cone that thrust its steep slopes from the ocean without the semblance of a shore. The jagged crest was wreathed in clouds, but there was no smoke. It was a dead volcano. Other islands appeared on all sides of us, and dead ahead we saw the faint pin-pricks of light that indicated a blinker signal. We were being met by an escort ship that brought us into the quiet anchorage of Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides.

Here we had our first sample of an Island X, one of the mysterious destinations of Seabees. From the decks of our transport there was an aura of glamour about it. The great coconut plantations made an orderly, green pattern in the darker green of the native jungle foliage. Here, in a war zone, there was no pretense at blackouts. Unlike the land we had left, untouched by war, this spot in the Pacific was agleam with lights of all sorts. The Quonset huts that were warehouses or living quarters were brilliant beacons in the blackness of a moonless night. Trucks and jeeps poked their headlights through the screen of trees that flanked the shore road, and on the docks men were at work under powerful flood lights. There was a bustle about the atmosphere that indicated events; there had an urgency about them. The anchorage was crowded with ships of every size and shape, including warships bristling with guns. The ships, too, including our own, ignored blackout precautions here. We could range the open deck at all hours and we could smoke when and where we pleased. Quite a few of us had our first experience of swimming in the Pacific when we used the deck of a flat water barge as a diving board and found ourselves caught in the strong current that swept through the Espiritu Santo channel. We were anxious, though, to go on. This wasn't our destination, but for the first time we began to hear mention of the Russell Islands and of Banika, mere names to us. They began to take on some significance, though, as we started up once more the gristmill of scuttlebutt. The Russells were part of the British Solomons, we learned, and not far away, as we had come to judge distances. So when we upped anchor and nosed our way out of the crescent-shaped harbor at Espiritu Santo we welcomed the return to blackouts and the restricted, herded, regimented life as it exists on a transport under way. Once more we were in waters considered hazardous and we were convoyed by a camouflaged destroyer that zig-zagged ahead of us. On 9 March we sighted Guadalcanal, at that time the most famous of the battlegrounds of the Pacific. Already the 'Canal was a military legend. It was here the Marines halted the onslaught of the Japanese sweep, and from the ship we could see the broad hillside that had been the scene of the bloodiest sort of fighting. It was here that the Americans, overcoming the handicaps of being outnumbered and sorely lacking in some equipment and arms, beat the Japs at their own game and began the long, slow

march back through the islands of the Pacific. Guadalcanal was an island of rugged and contrasting beauty. Its northwestern tip, which escaped entirely the ravages of a fierce war, was dominated by a craggy spine of mountains that came directly up out of the sea. It was spectacular and awesome natural scenery to look upon as we steamed past. We left the 'Canal and its historic battle areas behind us and headed up the Solomon archipelago that led to the Russells. We threaded our way through countless chunks of land that ranged in size from a rock just big enough to support a single palm tree to large land masses too large for us to estimate at a glance. We finally dropped anchor in a land-guarded channel only a few hours after we left Guadalcanal. On shore we could see the docks, the warehouses, the trucks, and the inevitable jeeps. Stevedore crews were unloading big cargo ships tied to the pontoon docks. Others were busy on ships which like ours, were moored in the channel and disgorging their freight onto flat, square pontoon barges. The place was a beehive of activity. From our ship Banika looked, like the other islands of the Southwest Pacific, to be a lush, attractive haven, cool under its canopy of green. Of course, we were keenly interested in Banika. This was to be our home for many months. And it was here, in Sunlight Channel, that we got our greatest thrill of the entire trip . . . our first overseas mail call. Bag after bag of letters from home came aboard, and we all spent some happy hours reading the first news in more than a month of those people back there who meant everything to us. The gap of thousands of miles had been bridged and once more we felt as though we had a place in the world.

The next day, 11 March, we got our orders to land. We scrambled into packs, picked up helmets and rifles, and somehow managed to maneuver ourselves down swaying rope steps onto a barge. It was hot, the sticky, humid heat that will always be identified with our months on Banika. Ashore we discovered mud . . . thick, slippery goo that was tricky to negotiate. Physically soft after weeks of shipboard inactivity, we paid for our vacation from PT, for we found that march to Quonset Village, the receiving center for Banika, sheer torture. Sweat ran off us in rivulets. Packs ate into flesh that was writhing at this sudden abuse. We gasped for air in the heavy, dead atmosphere. Not a wisp of a breeze stirred the fronds of the palms that lined our route

of march. We slipped and slid in the mud, cursed the heat and the sweat that blinded us, and wondered if we could manage the next step. We made it, finally, and dumped our gear onto the decks of half-completed Quonset huts. We were too weary and exhausted to wonder about chow for the first few hours; too tired to care about our surroundings. We wanted only to be left alone, sitting on our packs and trying to catch our breath again. Hunger eventually altered the situation to the extent we were glad to hit the road down Oregon Boulevard to the chow hall of the 11th Battalion. The food tasted wonderful after the stuff we had become used to aboard the La Fitte. Feeling pepped up on full stomachs, we began to look around us. This entire section of Banika was scattered among rows and rows of a coconut plantation that, according to planting dates, was about 35 years old. We were to sleep in these unfinished Quonsets that nestled under a roof of palm fronds. They boasted a deck and the now familiar round roof. Both ends were wide open. There were no windows, there were no cots. Some of us unrolled our bedding onto the deck in spite of the mud that was beginning to cake over the plywood. There were no lights, but that didn't matter. We talked in the dark, some of us in the sack and some still restless and moving around in the blackness. A chief came in and ordered us to break out our mosquito netting because in this part of the world mosquitos meant the danger of malaria. Some of the men fumbled for their netting. Some others ignored the orders, the netting, and the mosquitos, and went to sleep.

Out of all the chaos we soon had a suggestion of order. Work details were called together. First order of work was erecting our own tent city, once a campsite had been selected. It didn't take long. Rows of coconut palms came down and rows of tents went up. Equipment that was being brought up from our ship was stored under canvas, if possible, or stacked in the open. We built our own galley and chow hall. Soon we had the showers in operation. The first rush to get ourselves established was over, and work details began to take over the assignment that was ours . . . to maintain the island's roads. We inherited a coral pit. Our trucks and heavy equipment went into action. Back in camp, to indicate how "civilized" we were, we had our radio in operation and started publication of our own weekly mimeographed newspaper, The Maintainer.

When the 11th Battalion moved out, we transferred our campsite into part of its old area. We had learned many lessons about erecting a camp, and the second layout we built on Banika was better, roomier, more convenient and decidedly comfortable by comparison. Tents were framed in, the galley and chow hall had concrete decks. We had two Quonsets for recreation halls, and in one of them we even had a bar where we could drink our beer and "coke" issue. We put up our own theater in record time and wound up with a camp laid out like a town, with the officers' country and the crew's quarters clustered around the administration center. It was a good camp, as overseas camps go . . . one of the best on Banika. We got squared away again and settled down to the routine of work. Our men took on more and more maintenance work on the island. We handled the roads, we took care of the fighter strip, and we ran the coral pit, which was a matter of using wagon drills, blasting and bulldozing, scooping up the loose coral with the big shovels, and trucking it in an endless stream to all parts of the island. There were new roads to build, and gradually our work became more diversified. We tackled the job of building a battery of big storage reefers. We began and completed a big-scale malaria survey for the drainage of three swamps on the island. We constructed a large signal tower on Lever Point and installed the electrical system. There was a water system to be put in for the Staging Area, and we did that job too. We undertook dock construction, both at White Beach and at Green Beach. For Quonset Village we erected a chapel and remodeled its galley, and for the Red Cross, at White Beach, we provided recreational facilities, including the construction of Elms Park, a big sports arena. We took over operation of the tank farm which kept smaller ships of the United Nations supplied with fuel, and we did a commendable rush order repair job on an LST. We also had a crew working with a pontoon assembly depot. On top of all that there was always some sort of construction going on in our own camp. Life took on a familiar pattern. Scuttlebutt flared and died.

There wasn't much in the wind that morning near the end of August 1944 when we got the electrifying word we were to move. Where to this time? No one knew. The feverish activity that accompanies the breaking of a camp when time is at a premium claimed our full attention for more than a week. Equipment had to be dismantled

and packed. Rolling stock needed to be put into shape for a new assignment that would be rough. Men's gear had to be checked and replaced if missing. We packed our sea bags once more and stood by on the afternoon of 8 September, a few days short of six months from the time we had first set foot on Banika. Although a few of our men, plus the bulk of heavy equipment, had gone aboard the Navy ship *Lesuth* a few days before, and a few others, with supplies, had boarded the *Cape San Martin*, the majority of us were scheduled to move up on the *Mormacport*, a veteran, dirty, rusty transport that had seen many months of tough going in the Pacific. Already she was jammed with men and equipment, but somehow she had to take on more. It was our job to squeeze ourselves into crowded compartments. We heaved field packs onto our backs once more, slung rifles, and slapped helmets onto our heads. We had sea bags to lug, too, and were issued a half-dozen K rations each, to be used when we hit the beach of our new Island X. Thus loaded down we stumbled and staggered down the hill to White Beach in the dark, and by some miracle climbed aboard, half fell and half slid down the steps that were more like ladders into the holds. Although most of the ship's mass of passengers was topside watching a movie when we came aboard, it was plain to see that bunks were scarce articles. However, we shifted and hunted around until we got situated. There were some who preferred the open deck to the hot, dirty holds and slept there through rain and beautiful tropical nights. There were blackout restrictions aboard this ship, too, but we were permitted topside as long as there were no lights or cigarettes after dark or before dawn. Standing in crowded formations on the deck or hatches, always in the Mae West life jackets, we had submarine alerts at dawn and sunset, the two most dangerous periods of a day for attack. There still was no inkling of our destination, even after we had moved out of the Solomons and had paused at Manus, a huge advanced base in the Admiralty islands. There we found a tremendous concentration of shipping, and occasionally we'd catch sight of big battlewagons, cruisers, flat tops and destroyers, all going about their business in a grim, deadly sort of way. Planes were thick and there was a buzz of activity all around us. Our first sight of combat came when our escort ships dumped "ash cans" on a suspected sub and the blasts tossed solid pillars of water high into the air with a dull roar. Even so, we knew we

were still a long way from our second Island X, wherever it might be.

On 15 September the First Marines struck Peleliu, in the Palau chain of islands. News of that gave us fuel for scuttlebutt. We were headed in that general direction. The Palaus were 530 miles east of Davao in the southern Philippines. When intelligence officers aboard the *Mormacport* began to brief us about the Palaus over the public address system, we were pretty sure of our destination. They painted a black and gloomy picture. These islands, they said, were filled with disease and poisonous vegetation. The waters around them were alive with deadly marine life. Drinking water on shore was practically non-existent, the climate was terrible, and the sun shone only one full day out of the year. We'd live, for awhile, more like animals than men. That was our mental vision of our new Island X as we zig-zagged across the equator after leaving Manus and finally turned north for a steady but slow run for the Palaus. News from Peleliu wasn't encouraging. The island was a natural fortress and was developing into an extremely tough nut to crack. The 81st Army division had hit Anguar, southernmost of the Palaus and only six miles from Peleliu. On both islands it was a savage battle that line Marines admitted later was their hardest and bloodiest in the Pacific.

The *Mormacport* and the rest of our convoy came at last to an anchorage and found berths among many other ships. A fleet of seaplanes rested on the water here. Once in a while, in the distance, we'd see the familiar silhouette of a battleship. Big carriers were on the prowl, and heavy cruisers skirted our anchorage. Other than that, there was no indication of a war. The island that was a dark green blur only a few miles from us was Japanese-held Babelthaup, largest of the Palau islands. But there was no indication of activity off Babelthaup; Peleliu and Anguar were many miles to the south. We were not molested by enemy aircraft though we went through the normal precautions of a ship in hostile waters. Day after day we rode at anchor, sweltering in the terrific heat that came the moment we lost the sea breeze that is created by a ship under way.

On 25 September we began the cautious move down the island chain. We passed, at a respectful distance, a cruiser pumping shells into Koror, another large island connected by a causeway with Babelthaup, and in a few hours caught

the sound of other big guns. We could pick out Peleliu, identified by the ragged peaks of Bloody Nose Ridge and the flanking swamps and flatlands. Dive bombers plunged at their targets in the hills, flattened out, and raced away, leaving behind them the plume of an exploding bomb that began to dissipate before the booming blast could reach our ship. The planes were making the shortest bombing run in history . . . from the Peleliu airstrip, won at such bitter cost by the Marines, to Bloody Nose, about 1,000 yards away. On one tip of the irregularly shaped island heavy artillery blazed away at the hills, and the entrenched Japs were lobbing over mortar shells to answer our concentrated barrage. Off to one side a cruiser was hurling shell after shell into the sharply-broken limestone formations that were honey-combed with the elaborate system of caves from which the Japs fought like rats to the finish. The entire ridge had been stripped of vegetation by the holocaust that engulfed it and carried the naked appearance of desolation that goes with No Man's Land. Impatiently we watched from the deck, a ringside seat to a first class battle. Usually we were under way, cruising slowly up and down the shore, waiting for the word to come in. Some of our men and officers went ashore on the 26th and several stayed. On the 28th and 29th a few work parties hit the beach, detailed to do the preliminary work of establishing a camp, and on the 29th we all got orders to go over the side. We hauled up sea bags and stood around the open deck long enough to get drenched in a sudden downpour; then the orders were cancelled. The following day, on 30 September, loaded down with the usual sea bags, packs and rifles, we swarmed like monkeys down the landing nets onto the deck of an LST, the ship that was to take us ashore. Bombs and shells were still making a hellish racket on Peleliu, but the Marines were slowly bottling the Japs into a corner of the island and driving them deeper into their network of barricaded caves. We were parked on the open deck of the LST and it began to rain, one of those terrific torrents that are typical of the tropics. We remembered what intelligence had said about the Peleliu climate and began to think it was an understatement. In record time we were soaked to the skin; our bed rolls and sea bags were likewise waterlogged; water ran through our rifles. No one cared about that or anything else. The rain was cold and the wind that accompanied it felt sharp. We were completely miserable, until we

were ordered below and served hot coffee. It was hours before the LST could get her orders to come in. Peleliu is an island that offers no deep, protected harbors. When our LST swung her blunt nose toward the shore she scraped and ground her way over the barrier coral reef, but she made it, and soon was tied up to the stubby pontoon dock that jutted out into the shallow, surf-beaten water.

It was late afternoon when we found ourselves on a strange beach, an area of churned coral sand, a helter-skelter of tents and 'dozers, tanks, trucks, and "ducks." We piled our sea bags in a heap, hauled out our K rations, or C rations if we could find any on the debris-strewn sands, and waited some more. Peleliu was a prime example of chaos and confusion. Equipment and men, like us, were coming off the LSTs and littering the beaches. Line Marines were coming in from the hills, dirty, haggard and dazed after too many days and nights of combat. The beach we were on became a mass of milling men. Sitting there on a log or splintered stump we watched, fascinated by a scene we knew was historic. We couldn't help but kindle a feeling of pride in these Marines, many of them youngsters who suddenly took on the appearances of old men. If we had any desire to feel sorry for ourselves and gripe about our plight, that urge vanished when we looked at file after file of line troops stumbling and shuffling back from the hell that was still going on along Bloody Nose Ridge. Their ranks were pitifully riddled. We talked to some of those boys, who answered our many questions in a detached sort of way. They were like automatons, not human beings. A few carried a part of a machine gun carelessly over one shoulder; some clutched battle prizes . . . Samurai swords, or pistols, or rifles or Nipponese battle banners. These they wouldn't sell for any amount of money, but did we have any cigars?

Despite all this, however, we were reminded we had work to do. We couldn't squat there on the beach trying, with eyes and ears, to satisfy an enormous curiosity. It was getting dark. Some of our men had already left in the convoy trucks for that rough clearing that was hemmed in by a dense jungle growing out of a serrated coral and limestone floor. We were in a strange island wilderness, and we had a camp to pitch. Even though the Marines were slowly wresting control of this rock, less than three by six miles in size, from the Japs, it still was a hostile land. This was

no time to go wandering about, indulging in an urge for sightseeing; so we dug into the job of putting up pup tents anywhere we could find a bare spot large enough to permit it. Attempting to drive tent pegs into that coral was next to an impossibility, but somehow we accomplished that too. Bedding, which had been soaked on the LST, was unrolled. Once more we were warned about mosquitos but this time scorpions and centipedes, both poisonous, were added to the list of natural enemies we had to guard against; so some of us made an effort to find netting in packs or sea bags. We crawled into those tiny uncomfortable and inadequate tents for our first sleep on Peleliu. It was little enough. Chunks of coral became apparent as they punched through to bruise backs, shoulders and hips. It was a restless night. All around us there was a feeling of danger, and this was the first full contact we had had with the perils of warfare. The air we breathed was putrid with the stench of maggot-infested Jap bodies, which we stumbled onto in the jungles around our campsite. The brilliant flares that the Marines fired to illuminate the hills with a glaring light helped to keep the Nips pinned down, but they also interfered with our sleep.

Daybreak revealed a camp laid out in a pattern of crazy angles. Without thought or regard for a sense of order, tents had been pitched in haphazard fashion. Our first thought was wash-water, so we could get rid of the dirt of Peleliu as well as the grime of the transport. We found it, in a natural water hole the Japs had converted into a bomb shelter. Although the water had a rotten smell to it, the odor of decayed vegetation, we found we could stand it, and we felt refreshed in spite of it. Our first "head" was a bomb crater close to the edge of our camp. That, and the bodies still lying where they had fallen, attracted big, blue-green flies by the millions. There was no escaping them, and when we turned our attention to K ration chow for breakfast we learned to be quick about eating or the flies would get more of the food than we did. Dysentery was common and perhaps our greatest menace. The chow improved, and the flies decreased once aerial spraying of the island got under way. We were introduced to 10-in-1 rations, and it was a day to remember when the cooks surprised us with hotcakes. The galley crew did a splendid job for us under the worst sort of conditions. We began to grow accustomed to other conditions too. The blasts of

the gun batteries behind us no longer made jittery nerves jump, and when a lone Jap plane skimmed over our camp to drop a pair of bombs just beyond us only a handful of men would get out of their tents or jungle hammocks. We were becoming battle hardened. Even though we were not in combat, we certainly were living under combat conditions. Yet camp improvements became apparent. The galley was a frame and canvas affair, thrown together in a hurry. An office tent and a sick bay were added. Officers' tents and supply tents went up and the men added what touches of comfort they could to their own welfare. The jungle hammocks were popular with some, but to others they were swinging coffins, and they wanted no part of them. It was a Jap trick to slip up on a man sleeping in a hammock and knife him from below. Along with all this, the rains came in a series of deluges.

Meanwhile, from the first day ashore, work details were assembled and we scattered all over the island on a wide variety of jobs. Most urgent at the time was the unloading of LSTs with their cargoes of ammunition, aviation gasoline, food, and equipment. When we finally had time to think of a permanent camp for ourselves, a site was selected just a few hundred feet from the spot where we came ashore on Purple Beach. It was along a ragged coastline that faced the endless span of the Pacific, offering some relief from the oppressive heat of our hole in the jungle. During the time our campsite was being cleared and the tents erected, a detachment was sent to neighboring Anguar island to build a dock for the Army, and when those boys came back they had a new camp in which to live. Pyramid tents were a sign of progress, but we were confronted with a new nuisance . . . land crabs. By the thousands these hideous looking creatures swarmed over the camp. It was foolhardy to swing out of a cot at night before searching the bare ground with a light. In time, though, we drove them out even while we were getting used to having them in our midst. The camp layout was revised and tents moved in more orderly rows with raised wooden decks in them, and we began to feel comfortable and luxurious again. Some Quonset huts went up to house the personnel office, the galley, and the officers' mess and ward room. Soon after that we obtained huts in sufficient quantity to house the entire crew, and it was then our camp began to look like a small city.

Our work assignment, too, began to settle down to a permanent basis. We took over operation of the coral pit, which in reality wasn't a pit at all. Our men were shaving down a mountain of coral. As on Banika, our primary responsibility was construction and maintenance of roads, but other projects became more complex. An urgent job was operating the pontoon docks at Purple Beach, tying up LSTs that bucked and plunged in the pounding surf, and assembling again pontoon units scattered by storms. We did the carpentry work on the temporary Gropac Nine hospital in the early days on Peleliu, surveyed the East Coast road, installed gun mounts, helped grade and re-surface the air strip, erected the permanent huts and built the furniture for the Navy's Base Hospital 20, built the housing for a Marine air fighter squadron as well as for Naval Base. We cleared the Boat Pool area and built a series of theaters for various outfits on the island, including our own Purple Beach theater, which was the most imposing on Peleliu. We constructed pill boxes for the Army, built a Fleet recreation center, repaired the battered Jap administration building, put up ammunition storage huts in the hills, and made crosses and caskets for the cemetery. We made about everything from a bread rack for the island bakery to a volleyball court for the admiral's camp. Searchlight towers, sentry boxes, a camp for a battalion, a stone chapel that was a work of beauty, blasting shut old caves, warehouses . . . all these and a hundred other jobs were taken on and completed by the men of 571. We manned generator and reefer watches all over the island. We sent a crew to the cargo ships to operate the winches. We built monuments and ball fields, took over a dredging job and an underwater repair project. There wasn't anything someone in our outfit couldn't do, and the strangest assignment of all, a disagreeable and nauseating piece of work, was burying Jap dead with a bulldozer. We also constructed a compound to take care of those few Nips who were taken alive in the vicious fighting that raged until the end of November.

Time passed with surprising speed those first few months on Peleliu. While we worked and sweated on an amazing array of jobs, the Marines and the Army drove the Japs to extermination. Fighting continued for weeks after we landed but gradually tapered off into sporadic drag-net hunts for strays. The famous caves of Bloody Nose Ridge and the China Wall drew us, as sightseers, to the crags that were still a smoking battleground to

watch our combat troops in action. Some of the boys of 571 found themselves helping as ammunition and food carriers, as well as stretcher bearers. A few were pinned down by sniper fire or machine gun cross fire, but we had no casualties. Seventy-three days after D-day the island was declared secure, yet it was in January that we had our biggest scare. Japs, presumably from other islands in the Palau chain, landed one black, overcast night. A general quarters alarm jerked us out of our cots and we were told they were on the beach only a few hundred yards from our camp. We scrambled into clothes and tore packs and sea bags apart trying to locate cartridge belts, helmets, and canteens that had, we thought, been put away for good. Rifles had been secured in the armory, but somehow we managed to get them and reach our perimeter guard posts in quick time. For a couple of hours we waited and listened. Random firing that could be heard when we first took our stations died out, and when a gray, wet dawn broke, it was deadly quiet. We were called in for breakfast as combat troops took over the task of combing our end of the island. It brought results. Those Nips who weren't killed or captured committed suicide with hand grenades, and the "invasion" was over.

Our months of overseas duty were piling up. In February we celebrated a year out of the States and civilization with a banquet. As we launched our second year our losses in complement became increasingly obvious. One of our men had been killed in an accident, several had been hospitalized and sent back to rear areas or to the States and eventual discharges. Others went home on emergency leaves. We were below strength, and in March we received our first batch of replacements . . . men from the 33rd Battalion who didn't have sufficient overseas duty to their credit when the outfit went home for a rehabilitation leave. By the time May rolled around, with its V-E day, we began to think of our own prospects of getting back to the "old country," and it was then that a draft of our veterans was transferred out of 571 to rear area replacement centers for reassignment to other outfits. A few made it home on sick or emergency leaves. In June we added another group of replacements, mostly men from reserve pools and not long out of the States. The complexion of the unit was changing. Familiar faces were missing and new faces appeared in the huts, on the jobs, and in the chow hall, but the newcomers fitted into the scheme of things quickly

enough. The first mass exodus for rehabilitation leaves came in August, when the men who had come to us from the 33rd left for Stateside. When that day would come for the rest of us was the object of scuttlebutt for several days.

The whole outfit indulged in a show of spontaneous celebrating the day Japan told the world she had had enough and was ready to quit. It was the news we had been waiting so long to hear, and the following cessation of hostilities and capitulation to the ultimatum of unconditional surrender served merely as anti-climaxes. Something new to talk about was almost immediately forthcoming, however, when the Navy announced a point system for discharge. A few left soon after that, and when the credit for overseas duty was announced, another batch was ready to go. Meanwhile, there was a job to do on Koror, one of the Palau islands the Japs had held throughout the war. Thirty-one men and two officers left us for an assignment of undetermined size and period of time. For them it was like making a beach head all over again. The city of Koror, with a normal population of 10,000 and Japan's administrative capital for all its mandated islands, was entirely wrecked by the constant aerial blows that had been dealt it by Peleliu based planes. Buildings were blown to pieces, homes had been burned out or had collapsed from bomb concussion. Roads were pock-

marked with big bomb craters. Causeways were broken, and the harbors and inlets around the island were filled with sunken shipping. Beyond the city itself and its waterfront, the island was practically untouched. The rolling, cultivated hinterland was a marked contrast to the dead town, a strange combination of destruction and beautiful flowers. Throughout the bombings the profusion of flowering bushes and perennial plants persisted. Our men moved into a battered and shot-up hotel, and being veterans at this sort of life soon made themselves comfortable amid the rubble and debris of a ruined city. They took their equipment onto the roads and along the causeways, their first work being to fill craters and restore vital roads and facilities.

Back on Peleliu the rest of the outfit was still on the job in October 1945 putting the finishing touches on a big operation started more than a year before. We had jumped into a war and stayed to see that war hammer its way toward the inevitable victory. Even though we were still on Peleliu, still members of the now famous Seabees, our thoughts and plans and hopes became more and more civilian. The war was behind us, and for most of us our military careers were nearing an end. The important question mark for us was concerned with our civilian roles in a peace-time world.



Colors on Peleliu

DECLASSIFIED

ITINERARY OF CONSTRUCTION BATTALISE MAINTENANCE UNIT 571

Formed at Camp Peary, Virginia.

- 1 Dec 1943 - Transferred from Camp Peary to ABD, Gulfport.**
- 7 Feb 1944 - Departed ABD Gulfport for overseas.**
- 1 Apr 1944 - Operating at Russell's Islands.**
- Sep 1944 - In transit to Peleliu.**
- 11 Jan 1945 - Located at Peleliu.**
- 1 Aug 1945 - Still located at Peleliu.**

To Facilitate
Administrative Handling
Classification changed
from:

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIED

RESTRICTED

Level 3 Exemption
Comdr. CEC-V(S), USNR

Signature

NOTE: This itinerary is based on records in C.B. Operations and Personnel Section of Bureau of Naval Personnel.

Date: 4 September 1945.



571

**CONSTRUCTION
BATTALION
MAINTENANCE
UNIT**

CAMP LIVELY

