"A STONE'S THROW FROM TOKYO"

A Pictorial Overseas History
of the 101st SEABEES
This book was compiled and edited during two busy periods and in each, haste was dictated by the sparing amount of time left. One period was the last few busy days before leaving Saipan, the other, immediately following the war's end so an Okinawa chapter could be added to the book. It lays no claims to pretentiousness . . . it's mission is to present a simple pictorial story of our Pacific experiences with just enough script to provide a small thread of continuity to the adventure.

Names of individuals have been scrupulously avoided, for the scope of this album would not permit an even and fair recognition of all battalion personnel.

Credit for the book goes to our first OinC, Commander N. B. Bederman, who, as a civilian, has guided the publication through all of its devious and tortuous paths during the printing, on his own initiative.

In a photograph album such as this, most of the credit, also, must go to members of the art department . . . To Jack Stermer for his original sketches and drawings . . . To Lerwell Lucas for the majority of the pictures in this volume, pictures of camp life, recreation, work, ruins and scenery . . . To Bill Soskin for pictures of our first few days on Saipan . . . To Paul Smith and Jewel Harrison for long hours spent in the darkroom . . . To Swain Arnason and Smith Reeves for their assistance on makeup.

To these men, who have contributed their time and talent while carrying on with their regular jobs, a word of thanks!

The Editors

A. L. Peterson
John Newell, Jr.
Dear __________,

Well, I'm finally getting around to that long letter I'd promised you about my life in the Pacific.

We've been so busy and pictures have been so hard to get that I haven't been able to write this letter until now .... when the war is over.

Anyway, here is the story as complete as I'm able to write it ......
Under a hot Hawaiian sun in September, 1944, we loaded aboard ship. We were pretty sure of where we were going . . . but there was always a question . . .
We sailed aboard a Dutch ship with a Javanese crew. It was neat and clean... but not exactly elegant.

You should have seen the tables and dishes fly when the ship got caught in the backwash of a typhoon... did you ever eat at a 45 degree angle?
The Sad Shack
In early October we pulled up to a pontoon causeway, loaded aboard trucks and were dumped off at the doorstep of our new home . . . in the middle of this cane field.

I wonder where the "pup" tent got its name? . . . even a self respecting dog wouldn't live in one.

Yes, it was great to get ashore . . . but after one night in pup tents we were ready to go aboard again.
After a couple of days in the dog house we moved into the comparative luxury of a six man pyramid tent. Our cots sank deep into the mud... but they lifted us out of it.
It didn't rain all of the time during the rainy season ... some days our "shirts" almost dried on our backs between showers.

While some tried to build an island in the sea of mud for a temporary galley, others of us planned a campaign to trap the pesky black flies.
Some of the cloud formations were breathtakingly beautiful . . . even a drab stack of lumber couldn't mar the effect.

We worked 'round the clock to get all of our supplies off the ship.

While many of us went to work immediately building roads and whatnot, the rest of us started to work on our permanent home.
Every steel rib—every sheet of metal roofing had to be packed on our shoulders from the supply yard up the slippery, gooey hill to the building site.

With "C" rations to spur us on we turned to with a will to build a real galley and messhall. Until we completed it, ice cream, steaks and pie were out of this world.

Working from dawn until twilight, we began to see the results of our labors.
The finished product... our new home... we moved in just 17 days after landing—the first outfit on the island to discard their tents.

Thirty roommates didn't give us much privacy... but a roof overhead, electric lights, locker space and writing desks were blessings from heaven.
The view from our barracks out over the administration area was indescribable... the barrier reef a half mile off shore gave the ocean a two-tone effect.
Our "101 City"... and only a few months before on this same plain occurred one of the fiercest Japanese banzai attacks of the whole Pacific war.
The Bob Hall was jam-packed every night... but when a USO show appeared in was jam-jam-packed.
We waited six months for our first USO show . . . but when it did come we had a float ready to meet the plane.

Some ingenious work went into the construction of a complete set of portable footlights, overhead spots and other stage props . . . as you can well see.
What Girl Crazy lacked in finesse and talent it made up in that which 5000 men came to see . . . Nan Holliday.
We joined the cast in coffee and cookies after the show... the exercise was stimulating.

Three's A Family—a three act comedy straight from Broadway starring Charley Butterworth... played in our "little theatre some distance off Times Square."
Flash bulbs in the Pacific . . . even Louella Gere was surprised during this intimate scene . . . supposedly in dim-out.
Time For Fun ... not a big name in the cast ... but one of the best shows that came to the island.
The fishing was good the night of the Time For Fun show . . .

... ten suckers hooked on one line.

The USO didn't hold a monopoly on the entertainment though . . . the Island Follies of 1945, featuring local talent, proved one of the hits of the season.
These Kanaka Dancers (originally from the Caroline Islands) gave some of their native dances—stick dance, Yap war dance, Marshallese and spear dance . . . little Victoria stole the show.

We didn't realize just how far we were from Hollywood—until we saw the native women dance . . . Dorothy Lamour???
Our own Swingbees established quite a reputation on the island... appearing in island theatres three or four times a week they won numerous commendations.
If anyone had told us a year ago that we'd sit out in the rain to see a show we'd have said they were crazy.
We had a big farewell party for our departing skipper, Commander Bederman, at which time Lt. Commander Register took over the helm.
This was one of our few daylight air raids ... usually we were siren'd out at night ... Fourth of July celebrations were anemic by comparison.

Our whole day was always divided into two periods . . . A M and B M . . . After Mailcall and Before Mailcall.
When we enlisted they handed us a line . . . we've been in it ever since . . .
chow, beer, showers, pay, store . . .

Hips, hips, hurray! . . . shortages even hit our wardrobe
so we were issued WAVE britches.
Our Christmas looked pretty barren until we planned a party for native children... they came in six trucks... 250 of them.
They arrived faces scrubbed, hair combed, Sunday clothes and best shoes...the Nylon shortage was apparent.

Hearing children’s voices in Christmas carols made the day more meaningful. The Spanish Padre had served these people under many flags.
We each became "father for a day" . . . our job was to see that our tot had plenty of fun . . . had plenty to eat . . . saw Santa.

The kids were crazy about their first ice cream . . . our battery acid (synthetic lemonade) was much too bitter . . . it was hard to tell who had the most fun—sponsor or sponsored.
For weeks we'd saved bits of candy and whatnot to fill our homemade, mosquito net stockings ... while the rest of us wore as little as possible Santa had to sweat it out.

After seeing the tots depart our reaction was universal ... "kids is kids" ... there isn't anything like them.
Our first service . . . no pews, no church, no spires, no choir . . . nothing but a deep rooted desire to worship God.

Ten weeks later we held the first services in our new Chapel . . . for the Protestants a candlelight service on Christmas eve . . . for the Catholics a Holy Mass on Christmas morning.
The Chapel couldn't hold the crowd for our Easter Mass ... we had to move into the amphitheater for the occasion.

We were proud of our completed Chapel ... it was our spiritual home for many months ... both Catholic and Protestant.
Our flag flew half mast for thirty days . . . we were stunned by news of the loss of our Commander in Chief.
An island without roads is as useless as spaghetti without a fork . . . no sooner had we pitched our tents that some of us began work on assigned projects.

Fire in the hole! Before we took over this project right near camp we spent half of our time dodging rock blasted from this cut.
One of the roads we built wound up and over a mountain . . . it would have broken a snake's back . . . we called it Burma Road.

Coral! . . . the one indispensable ingredient in every Seabee recipe . . . it built roads, air fields, camp sites.
Day and night work on Burma Road was pushed forward through Jap infested territory... we carried arms at all times.

Sometimes our roads followed old, rutted Jap cart trails... usually we broke through virgin territory.
One of our most important jobs was to get an adequate supply of water . . . we found a spring back in the hills that could be harnessed.
Totin' cement back into the hills we capped the spring... the area was littered with discarded Jap war equipment.

From the spring, down the mountain, through the jungle and cane fields, over the swamp... we ran our pipeline three miles into camp.
Each morning near our spring we found Jap footprints, breakfast remains . . . a constant security patrol protected workers and installations—discouraged "visitors."
So we diverted nature to serve our purpose . . . lots of work . . . but well worth it.
Like a heart pumping life through its arteries so our tanks provided water for drinking, cooking, showers, laundry.
Pioneering all Seabee projects are the surveyors... from their visions whole valleys, hills, plateaus change their appearance.

Our outfit was primarily a heavy equipment battalion... there were some jobs for which there was no substitute for sweat, sweat and more sweat.
Turning these storage huts out by mass production meant the use of every time saving scheme we could think of.
Our main construction obstacles were three... time-rich, gooey mud-hard coral layers lurking just beneath the ooze. Everything took either a bucket or a blast.

It gave us a feeling of triumph to overcome these obstacles... to see our finished work and know that it was well done.
A shortage of pipe and a surplus of empty drums ... we devised a quick, safe method of cutting out drum ends, saving days of tedious hard labor.

We used our "drumpipe" in place of sewerage tile ... just the use of flush toilets made our camp much more of a home.
With a couple of short dry seasons wedged in between perpetual rains, special precautions had to be taken to drain the roads.
Health precautions demanded an immediate means of refuse disposal ... our homemade incinerator was ready within three days after landing.
Later we needed a larger place to dispose of our garbage... the ocean seemed large enough.
An ugly scar on the face of a beautiful scene ... but soon the whole North end of the island was using our refuse chute.

Two huge floating cranes capable of lifting 150 tons were needed ... an invasion awaited ... we got the job ... and we got it done on time.
We worked day and night on the cranes... gold braid in the spectators gallery were a dime a dozen, from Generals and Admirals on down.

Our finished crane reared its head like a skyscraper, dwarfing everything in the vicinity into insignificance.
Another waterfront job with a hard-to-meet deadline was this permanent pier to be used in loading war ships.
Like a giant piston our pile driver's hammer drove home the pier foundation ... before we were finished small craft were already using the dock.

This war's No. 1 invention ... the much publicized pontoon ... we used them to construct a floating dock.
Upon completion the dock was turned over to native fishermen whose fleet of small boats supplied the island with fresh fish.

We drilled lots of wells on the island, but "dug" only one ... this was the first attempt to mine for water in the Pacific.
Alternate layers of hard coral and mud made progress on the job slow and dangerous.
Infinite safety precautions had to be taken in shoring up the tunnel...we had to survey the job once in a while to check slope and direction.
One morning we awoke with an especially high priority job...a tent hospital for convalescents from the front lines.
Tents mushroomed overnight ... we finished the job in a hurry ... but this was one project we hoped would be little used.

Of course there were always a large number of warehouses and whatnot in our "spare" time ... yes, never a dull moment.
They say that cleanliness is next to Godliness . . . if this is true there is a good deal of hope for this island in the future . . . we built a 10,000 man laundry.

When we finished, the laundry was so complete that it would take the shirt off your back, wash, dry, iron and sew buttons on in ten minutes . . . you had to dress yourself, however.
When the tide of battle had swept over the island it left in its wake some 17,000 Japanese, Korean and Chamorro civilians who had to be fed, housed and clothed.
The island was scoured for scraps to use in building temporary community huts.

These huts, sometimes housing as many as twenty, consisted of little more than a roof overhead and a floor beneath.
Soup bowl haircuts look the same all over the world . . . one of the foremost Japanese principles proved to be cleanliness.
Situated at regular intervals through Camp Susupe, these watering places were a hive of continual activity—washing clothes, bathing.

In spite of all their cleanliness, tropical fungus and skin diseases were rampant among little children.
Civilian families drew their ready cooked food from community kitchens. ... other items, such as these peanuts, were divided equally between families.

Mr. and Mrs. Moto sit down for a quiet afternoon of cards.
What's a trip away from home without souvenirs ... these kimono clad dolls were pegged at sixty cents ... the black market charged more.

Three Korean women turn their hand to weaving purses out of native grasses.
Within a few months a large share of the adults found jobs to keep them occupied . . . they earned up to fifty cents a day.

Turning the potters wheel with his left foot, this Japanese artisan practices his ancient trade with skill and concentration.
Turning out the highly prized Japanese equivalent of our "candy"...

a little steamed cake made of beans, molasses and flour paste.

Native Beau Brummels come in out of the rain for their morning shave and exchange of gossip.
Oxen and carts are still prevalent as a means of transportation ... but a number of Japanese right hand drive trucks have been reconditioned for their use.
After patrolling the water for hours a school of bonito is found... 700 pounds of fish were hauled aboard within five minutes.
And then breakfast... on an open fire is built in the stern of the sampan... menu, fish, beans and rice... knife-spoon-fork, chopsticks.

The fishing fleet leaves before daylight, gets back around noon... then comes the job of unloading, weighing and distribution to the community kitchens.
Some of us were assigned to the Military Government ... we strawbossed crews of native workmen while building their permanent homes.

As soon as was practicable this comparatively little damaged sugar refinery town of Charon-Kanoa was turned over to 3,000 native Chamorros.
The Chamorros were an interesting race of people, showing definitely their strain of Spanish ancestry.
The first American words the native children learned were "hello", "goodbye", "$!?xxcczz?! ... schools soon tried to rectify this deficiency in their vocabulary.
ROOSEVELT, NIMITZ, MACARTHUR VISIT DISCLOSED

PARSONS GREETING BRANCH FOR BIBLIES
BOLTS & BULLETS
U.S. NAVY SEABEES
WE BUILD & FIGHT

Saturday, August 19, 1944
Somewhere in the Pacific

Vol. 2, No. 7

PRESIDENT ADDRESSES 101ST, OTHERS
Noted Military, Civil Figures Here With Commander In Chief

By NORMAN R. RAINE

ASSIGN 101ST NEW
SECRET PROJECT

A secret project at a top command location, has been assigned to the 101st, and work is already
underway. Lt. Com. C. F. Register has announced.

Several projects are now in advanced stages, including various weapon systems and many radio
sounding devices. The Executive Officer said.

Propose FDR Mike
Be Sent To Buds

Since the Commanding General's address here was
published last week, there has been a steady
rise to an audience of over one thousand people.

Chaplain Petersen
Bolts and Bullets

CHIEF OF STAFF HICKEY

CHRISTMAS PARTY TO BE
JOYOUS ONE

On December 25th the OSS celebrates the
birthday of the OSS in the United States. On this
day OSS men will participate children for
Christmas parties, for the first time. The

The children will be introduced to Mickey

Mous, the popular character, and other

refurbishments will be

in the entertainment.

WORLD PREMIER

POSTER

TO COMMANDER BEDERMAN
ON BEHALF OF THE MEN

IN CHARGE

TO THE COMMANDING OFFICER

"We published a newspaper, thought you might like to see a few samples of it."
We saw the collision of the Orient and Occident on our island . . . the Orient—ruins . . . the Occident—building.
To the Japanese, the entrance to a sacred shrine ... to the Americans, a ready made telephone pole.
The main city of the island, Garapan, had a pre-war population of over 20,000... its wartime native population, zero.

In taking Saipan, Garapan became the center of resistance... our artillery opened fire.
Whole blocks of buildings were leveled to nothing but heaps of rubble.

Not a habitable building remained in the entire city.
When the shells began to drop, solid walls developed new "windows", old windows became doors.
Stone walls reduced the fire hazard . . . but frame roofs offered no protection at all.
Nature threw a blanket of luxuriant vegetation over the dismal scene.

If I had the wings of an Angel, or not, through these prison walls I could flit.
The city was congested . . . streets bisecting the blocks were mere narrow, rubble strewn alleys.

To allow our huge truck convoys through, whole rows of buildings had to be razed.
The most modern of the buildings were constructed of brick veneer over a coral cement base.

A Japanese tea garden... without the tea... or the Japanese... or the garden.
Even the richest and most recently constructed homes took a terrible beating.
By the time we left the island, but two buildings of the city remained ... in their place, warehouses, supply yards.
We've never seen the damage in the European theatre . . . could it be much worse?—
two buildings left in a city of 20,000.

Even the churches on the island were ruined . . . every stone building had become a fort
which had to be reduced.
In building their Catholic chapels, the Chamorros were guided by their Spanish heritage ... the interiors were beautifully decorated with bright colors.
A small, narrow road, a light, narrow gauge track, a few inadequate machines... these were the installations at a Jap pumice pit.

Getting sugar cane to the mill was the task of these diminutive locomotives... a little too large for souvenirs, they remained when we left.
The islands one important industry was the refining of a low grade of sugar. . . .
the mill was ruined beyond repair.
Taken shortly after H-hour, the little village for sugar mill employees came through the battle almost unscathed.
Virtually undamaged was the statue of the Baron ... big shot of the island ... owner and founder of the local sugar refinery.
Hidden back in the hills of the native farming section was the produce center ... green lawns, beautiful palms, decorative benches ... a veritable country club.

Roads, roads, roads ... from a distance it looked as though a huge spider had spun his web over the whole plateau.
Snails abounded everywhere . . . on the beaches, near the springs, under vegetation . . . in fact, wherever there was plenty of moisture—which was everywhere.

You couldn't buy these coral tree blossoms in the States—you couldn't find any . . . you couldn't "buy" them out here either—they grew everywhere.
Tucked back in the nooks and crannies of the island were the remnants of a conquered civilization... old ox carts, wooden plows, grass shacks.

And on all sides of us the great "peaceful" Pacific... continually eating its way into this upstart volcanic island which stood in its path.
One of the beauty spots of the island ... the shallow water over the coral bottom reflected a rainbow of colors.

There were some grand swimming beaches on the island ... this wasn't one of them.
Driven across the huge plateau at the North end of the island, many Japanese choose suicide over this cliff rather than capture by "us furriners."

Much of the island was too rugged for use by the Japanese... it still remains untouched.
Coves, big caves, little caves, hidden caves, open caves... each of the many Japanese soldiers who had to be bombed, blasted and burned out.
You couldn't take a vacation on Saipan... if you did you'd have to hack a path to your home... vegetation blanketed the island.
The natural bridge of the Marianas... one of nature's engineering projects which we inherited.
Marianas Islands, 1945—“Hundreds of Marianas based B-29’s staged a devastating raid on Tokyo yesterday.” . . . our island hit the headlines continually.

Tokyo Rose posed against an unfinished Japanese hanger background . . . we got to know many of the men who visited Japan regularly.
We were builders first—fighters only in an emergency ... yet, the continuous sight of planes leaving the island gave us a thrill ... we too were fighters through building.

On leaving our second island home, we too could look back with pride and say ... "Mission Completed."
OKINAWA
Scuttlebutt ran rampant as to our next assignment—when?—how?—where? . . .
June 19th found us loading aboard LST’s . . . destination unknown.

Efficiency, born of experience, formed our 47 ship convoy rapidly . . . terrier-like patrol craft formed a bristling fence around our ship.
For the third time we were headed into the vast expanse of the Pacific ... Okinawa - Ie Shima - Miyako - Japan ... we guessed them all, but Okinawa sounded like the best bet.

A life of ease - Pacific cruise - good food ... it was usually just the opposite, but this time we had really hit the jackpot.
Land Ho! June 26th found our ships threading their way through the mines and reefs of Buckner Bay... by this time we knew it was to be Okinawa.

A strange and foreign shore is always interesting—the thought of terra firma better. This was our first view of the terraced farmlands so common to this part of the world.
From ship to small boat, from small boat to dock . . . always an unpleasant task, but we were old hands at it by this time—or were we?

Unloading our ships was the immediate and major task. It started as soon as the ramps hit the dock . . . 24 hours a day . . . speed was the watchword.
Nobody seemed to know exactly where we were to go—in fact, nobody knew approximately where we were supposed to go... we hoped this was the right island at least.
"...We made our camp as comfortable as possible..."
After a morning of waiting at the beach, we were relieved to learn that a camp site had been assigned to us. A few miles over narrow, dust laden roads brought us "home."
Okinawa weather greeted us much more pleasantly than Saipan's had... warm sun and dry earth. On the second day swimming in a nearby pool was prohibited by the doctors... the first day we had all enjoyed it... including the doctors.
Dawn of the third day found us firmly entrenched on "land of the rising sun." Familiar instruments of torture began to appear ... P.A. system ... OOD office ... air raid siren ... assignment office.

Profiting by previous experience, our plumbing gang had prefabricated showers before leaving Saipan. Once the material arrived from the ship it was set up in less than a day.
Nostalgic memories of Saipan came vividly to our minds, and once again K-rations dropped heavily on our stomachs.

When is a line not a line? Answer—At the first beer and coke issue. The cool amber stuff and the "pause that refreshes" acted as magnets...all we wanted up to two cans.
Our temporary camp site sprawled over hill and terrace. At first some of the native curiosities around us drew a lot of attention, but as time passed we no longer considered them oddities.

For the most part materials for our camp site had to be shouldered from the road into the tent area. Lower terrace dwellers complained about being cut off from the breeze ... until the breeze's big brother came along ...
During the movies one night the skies suddenly blazed without warning as cherry-red tracers blanketed the island. With mixed emotions we heard that the Japs had fallen... wished—hoped—prayed that it was true.

Our mess hall and galley was a honey... we waited a couple of weeks for MacArthur to declare official V-J Day, but tired of that so we celebrated a week early—ice cream and cake.
We wanted an outdoor theatre, but labor and material just weren't available. It seemed hopeless ... until the Military Government gave us some native labor to fill the sand bag seats.

The theatre wasn't elaborate by Stateside standards, but compared with the best on the island. The stage was attractive—strong too ... it lasted through 1—typhoons.
You do not go through a typhoon—it goes through you. At first the breeze freshens and sort of billows your tent out—from that point on circumstances alter cases.

Sometimes the shelter just comes down kerplunk! you can salvage quite a bit of material from that type.
In other cases the tent takes off, never to be seen again—if this happens you might as well start in from the ground and work up.

Officers Country was actually all over the country. The entire 101st area suffered considerably but those of us on the higher terraces caught the wind from all quarters.
There had been some visiting officers quartered in the area. The "big breeze" didn't exactly evict the guests from the premises . . . it took the premises away from them.

Even the steel quonset huts were torn up. After the first typhoon the officers wardroom presented quite a reconstruction problem . . . after the second blow there wasn't any problem because there wasn't any wardroom.
During the storm our library experienced the greatest circulation of its history ... the tricky typhoon isn't just a straight, hard wind—its gusts weaken your structures in one direction, then circle around and wallop you from the other.

Limitless effort was expended to make our living area as comfortable as the terrain and war conditions would allow. The aerial view was taken "B.T." (Before Typhoon).
"...the differences between Eastern and Western modes became apparent..."
Building roads over the soft, rolling terrain of Okinawa was an easy task after having to hack them out of the hard coral rock of Saipan.
It was on Okinawa that the tremendous differences between Eastern and Western modes became startlingly apparent. At first the natives were awed by the size and amount of our heavy equipment, but later they became used to it.
One of the major problems of road building was to lay road beds over seemingly bottomless rice paddies. The "salty" dock building crew sometimes had to move inland to give a hand.
Our major project on Okinawa was to build a complete small boat base ... quarters, roads, causeways, docks and boat repair basin.
As the long finger-like causeways were pushed out into deep water other work within the section base kept pace. Some of the Japs most daring Kamikaze attacks were staged against ships in that anchorage.

The repair basin alone called for a huge dock, crane, marine railway and repair sheds. This crane plucked a 50 ton boat from the water as easily as you can lift your little finger.
From the air the entire gigantic project appeared as a miniature masterpiece. The heavy red mud had disappeared under shining white ribbons and blankets of coral.

Unlike Saipan, Okinawa had very few deposits of coral and what could be found was of very poor quality. In addition to the normal routine of blasting, gouging and dozing, we had to set up a huge rock crushing plant.
Fire in the hole! When the blasters went to work, everything was on the up and up — mud, rocks, sweet potatoes and rice paddies — you should have seen the photographer after this action shot.

The largest mess hall we ever built was for a local seaplane base. Basic materials were quonset hut parts enlarged to forty feet in width and two hundred twenty-five feet in length.
"...the natives were friendly, but shy about talking to strangers..."
Interrmarriage and association with immigrants from China, Korea, Formosa, and more recently Japan, over thousands of years has changed the native Okinawan and made the island a virtual "melting pot of the East."
Each morning long lines of workers thread their way out of the villages and go into the fields. Farming is done on a community basis, each family sharing the work and the harvest.

Toward dusk each day the workers could be seen wending their way back to the villages... as in America, the women do most of the work.
The natives were shy about talking to us, but even more reticent when it came to letting us take pictures of them. Photographing them required tact, speed, daring... surprise was the major element in the success of a cameraman.

Meat was rarely included in the native meals, but occasionally a family held “butchering day.” Depending on the family’s prosperity, the victim was either a goat, pig, or dog... not a single part of the carcass was wasted.
Main street in the local village was just about the same as any other village throughout the world—shoppers paused to talk, kids scampered around and loungers lazily watched their world pass in review.

Of interest among the native animals were the wiry little horses. All-important in their position as native heavy equipment, they usually received better care than the owner gave himself . . . the native saddle was not built for comfort.
For thousands of years tireless hands have labored to erect bulwarks against the sea around Okinawa—to prevent erosion of their precious soil... even our heavy naval shelling did little more than surface damage to the great seawalls.
"Ruin were everywhere...."
Local landmarks were of endless variety and of constant interest to the American "tourists." Here, for the first time, were laid bare the results of modern, hard hitting land, sea and air forces fighting on an island teeming with people.

Naha was the island's largest city—70,000 inhabitants—paved streets—street cars—movies... before the Marines went through it. We wanted to spare Naha, but the Japs insisted on using it as a fortress.
Less than a month after the city had been destroyed, wreckage and rubble had been leveled and channels had been dredged. In place of the buildings of city-fortress Naha, huge American cranes worked ceaselessly in the new Port of Naha.
Only a few buildings survived the tide of battle in the island's largest city... among them was a Christian church established by missionaries.

The railroad station had been completely demolished, but it really didn't matter because so had the railroads. Only five buildings in the city were considered worth saving.
A few of the buildings were massive four story structures, but two story buildings were the general rule in this land of sunshine and gentle breezes... rain, earthquakes and typhoons.

The Bank of Naha was a neat, modern building. Even after the shelling it looked fairly sound... from the front...

... However, investigation behind the bank's front revealed that the lack of proper support had caused the institution to go broke.
The Naha freight yard had never in its history resembled the huge yards at Chicago... but after being bombed by our planes it was scattered over just as big an area.

Any energetic company can probably purchase the local "Toonerville Trolley" at a very reasonable figure. Locating the equipment would be very simple... every Seabee outfit on the island had "acquired" parts of it.
The very real and powerful force in the life of a Japanese is his devotion to Emperor-God and religion... Shintoism. Each morning he pays homage before the shrine.

One of the most ornate buildings that remained standing had once been a community house, similar to our town halls. It later became the command post of Marines attacking Naha.
One of the two Christian churches was irreparably damaged. Worn stone stair treads gave evidence that its missionary builders had constructed souls as well as a church.

Far above the coastal plains lay the ancient capital city of Shuri. Formerly a city of 30,000 people, houses, walls, schools and castles the entire area is now simply a desolate ruin.
Shuri University was the only remaining thing that even resembled a building. Perched high on top of a mountain, it had been clearly exposed to the shells of both armies.

Mute testimony that hard, fast and all encompassing war had passed over Mount Shuri was evident in every tree, shrub and even the earth itself.
Many miles of the roads are bordered with strong retaining walls to prevent typhoon driven rains from washing precious top soil off the fields. Close examination reveals the stone blocks to be cut and laid with painstaking attention.

Many parts of the island were completely untouched by war. The primitive methods and machinery continued to serve their daily task as they had for probably a hundred years or more.

Predominantly agricultural, Okinawa nevertheless supported several thriving businesses, some of which are world renown . . . pongee fabric, fine lacquerware, low priced Panama hats. The war had killed all industry but our military government planned on rebuilding it.
Lying about half way out Katchin Peninsula, our camp was on a plateau overlooking the coast and waters of Chimu-Wan harbor. Reduced to miniature, the scene below reflected almost unbelievable tranquility.

When we first saw the native huts and the way they were placed close together, many of us were inclined to laugh at the low, frail looking homes . . . until the first typhoon zoomed our way.
Our camp water system featured an imposing array of tanks, chemicals, test tubes and technicians... the native system featured a bucket, rope, pole and water hole.

At first, many a jay-walking Yank spurned the narrow ridge paths winding around terraced rice paddies and struck across country in the reckless American manner... a muddy baptism was the result.
Of all things native on Okinawa, Stateside papers publicized the tomb vaults most. In reality they weren't any more strange than mausoleums to be found in America.

About the only real difference between their method of burial and ours is that after two years the bones of the deceased are removed from the coffin and placed in ornate urns.
Noted for its frantic efforts in search of a successful suicide attack weapon Japan's foremost step along those lines was a humanly piloted, rocket propelled "Baka Bomb" ... strictly a one way ticket to ancestorland.

When the Jap army forces on Okinawa finally capitulated to the triple threat offense of American land, sea and air forces it was their first mass surrender of the entire Pacific war.
America sought Okinawa as its major air base for the final assault on Japan itself. The skies were filled with aircraft . . . not least important among them were the valiant transport planes doing everything from spraying D.D.T. to dropping supplies for POW's.
A few hours after the end of the war had been announced, airborne troops began loading aboard huge C-54's to make the initial landings on Japanese soil. Lined up as they waited for their turn, the sky giants soared into the blue at the rate of one every two minutes.
...... well, comes the end of the letter. I hope it has given you a little better picture of what our life overseas was like.

Wish I could bring this personally, but ... 

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