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SAGA OF THE SEABEES

Three weeks following the disastrous attack on Pearl Harbor, the Seabees were born, when the initial construction regiment was authorized, consisting of three battalions comprising three hundred officers and three thousand enlisted men.

Surprisingly enough, this embryo which in so short a time grew to mammoth proportions and deserved notoriety and fame had its inception some ninety-nine years before, when the Civil Engineering Corps of the Navy was established in 1842 for the purpose of planning and contracting for shore installations as authorized by Congress and approved by the Secretary of the Navy.

Such work was completed through private contractors and individual workmen, proving satisfactory until the sad experiences of Wake and Guam very forcibly revealed to the Navy the weakness of this system; particularly in waging war across thousands of miles of sea lanes, where the need for supply bases, including airstrips, docks, warehouses, living quarters, etc., was paramount.

The responsibility of organizing this vital group was assigned to Vice-Admiral Ben Moreell, Officer-in-Charge of the Bureau of Yards and Docks and the result of his ability is evident in the history-making deeds this offspring has accomplished.

The official roster mushroomed from 126 officers in the 30's to 8,000 by 1944, and the enlistment of rated men reached one quarter million trained specialists. Such skilled artisans and tradesmen, supplemented by the added advantage of military training and adequate tools of warfare, created a body of men destined for miraculous construction accomplishments and fame.

These typical American workmen, the ones who were project managers, superintendents, foremen; for the most part, men who could have avoided military service because of their families, entered with one compelling idea and that to "get this damned war over with as quickly as possible" in order to return to home and family. For this reason they have no patience for red tape, doing all in their power to unravel Snafu and Tarfu. They have asked little, given much, which is best ex-
emphized by one Seabee, who, when asked by his Chaplain what could be done to better the conditions of the men, responded with: "We got in this, to give, not to get."

With this emblematic attitude of doing a job and doing it well, which their record-breaking feats substantiate, the statement credited to the Seabees: "The difficult we do immediately, while the impossible takes a bit longer," is justified in every sense of the word.

Waging a war far distant from the homeland requires numerous and well established depots to shorten the lines of supply, with airfields as a prime requisite, which must not only be constructed and maintained, but in many cases taken away from the enemy. In these activities, the Seabees have gained renown. Not so much in the European theatre, for with established bases close to the center of conflict, there was comparatively little use for the Seabees, except in the invasions of North Africa, Normandy and Italy, where monumental work and merited praise was earned.

In the South Pacific, however, where bases had to be taken and supply units and airstrips constructed faster than the retreating "squints" could recover from delivered blows, thus keeping them constantly off balance, the Seabees won immortal fame, for not only speedy and skillful work, but the ingenuity displayed in creating special machinery and equipment from scrap piles; "of doing the impossible, quickly," all of which has played a powerful part in the progress made so far in this war.

The necessary roads to Tokyo, via Munda, Guadalcanal, Rendova, Bougainville, to name a few in the South Pacific, and Adak, Amchitka, Dutch Harbor and Kiska in the Aleutians, have been constructed through blood and sweat and brawn and brain.

Small wonder from the marvelous deeds performed, such superlative praise, as: "It is easy to accomplish construction miracles with men like the Seabees. They are the world's finest; courage is innate with them," and "It has been a constant source of wonder how one unit—the Seabees—could possess so many skills and accomplish such a huge amount and variety of work."

When this present conflict is successfully terminated, the Seabees can look with the satisfaction of free men who have voluntarily done a big job and done it well.

Truly they have adhered to their creed: "CAN DO, WILL DO."
85TH N. C. B. LOG

6 February, 1943. Following in the footsteps of 84 groups ahead of them, 27 officers and 1,079 enlisted men who had been through an initial three weeks' training period, paraded in ceremonial review, and also the thick mud of Virginia, with the group officially named the 85th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion and the battalion standard presented to the Officer-in-Charge, Comdr. Frederick C. Ray, by Comdr. A. G. Hillberg, CEC, USNR, who was the Military Training Officer at Camps Allen and Bradford.

8 February, 1943. Entrained for a six weeks' period of advance training at Camp Endicott, Davisville, R. I., after crossing the Chesapeake Bay from Little Creek to Cape Charles on the streamlined ferry, Princess Anne, with the cocktail bar secured for the trip.

9 February, 1943. Arrived at Camp Endicott on a clear, cold day and assigned to barracks. The succeeding two months were filled with specialized courses, including judo, commando tactics, chemical warfare, rifle marksmanship, machine gun, long hikes and the officers and chiefs had a week's training under Marine Lieut. Collins. A fire destroyed BOQ and most of the officers suffered the loss of their clothing and other personal effects. The worst weather in ten years was experienced, with the thermometer more than twenty degrees below zero. A personnel inspection by Capt. Rogers resulted in his comment to the effect that, "the 85th represented the neatest and cleanest battalion it has been my privilege to review," and on April 5 our Battalion was part of the parade reviewed by Secretary of the Navy Knox. Many other experiences at this base, and last, but not least, the hospitality displayed by the people of Rhode Island and the high times at the Biltmore and Narragansett and Crown and the Chinese Clipper and Port Arthur.

13 April, 1943. In three sections the Battalion departed for Camp Holliday, Gulfport, Miss., with no extraordinary developments experienced on the trip.

16 April, 1943. Dirty and tired from two days and three nights in day coaches, two sections arrived at Camp Holliday just after dawn, and the character and initiative of the commissary was evidenced by their ability to furnish an excellent breakfast within an hour's time. Shortly before midnight, the third section of the Battalion arrived on the base.

17 April, 1943. Ninety per cent of the Battalion, officers included, stormed the little town of Gulfport with leave papers in hand and the determination to be the first aboard any train heading in the direction of home, causing the city fathers no little consternation and a call to the Camp for reserves to quell the near riot. Eventually sufficient trains, busses and taxis were called into service and the town receded to its customary quiet tempo, but not without a deep and lasting recollection of the 85th.

1 May, 1943. Again in three sections, the Battalion embarked on a five-day train trip to
Camp Rousseau, Port Hueneme, Calif., which proved uneventful, except for one man who de-barked, leaving the train for parts unknown, and another who was taken off in New Mexico with an attack of appendicitis. One section arrived in camp nearly a full day ahead of the rest of the others and did much toward getting living conditions in hand for the balance of the Battalion which arrived after midnight.

6 May, 1943. At Camp Rousseau, the remaining 10 per cent of the Battalion took their embarkation leaves, while those staying aboard received an issue of carbines, foul weather gear, gas masks, etc. Company "B" was detached to form the separate 509th BMU under command of Lieut. Neidelmann, and the last two days in camp found the men restricted to the battalion area.

20 May, 1943. Camp Rousseau was left with a degree of mixed feelings, for it represented the last permanent residence in this country, and what the future held in store was as yet a mystery. Again the train trip was without incident, with the exception of another man who decided the scenic beauties of Oregon were irresistible and decamped without thought of the consequences.

22 May, 1943. Early morning found the Battalion within the confines of the inner harbor of Seattle. Following a box lunch for breakfast, and before noon, all were safely quartered in the holds of the U. S. S. Chaumont. Space was utilized to the nth degree, and probably for the first time in their lives, those from Texas could sympathize with the steers they'd herded into cattle cars in years gone by. Even the officers were somewhat dismayed by the cramped space in their staterooms.

23 May, 1943. One-half the Battalion was granted liberty until midnight, with word to the shore patrol to pass men in undress blues and GI shoes—a sight which took Seattle slightly by surprise. Those involved enjoyed the release and were loud in their praise of the city's virtues and beauty, which did in no manner add to the pleasure of the rest of the men when informed that liberty for them had been cancelled.

25 May, 1943. At 0900 the Chaumont slipped from her dock and headed out through Puget Sound, with a short stop for lifeboat drill and then later in the day, target practice with the three-inchers, creating a wave of excitement for the men. The rest of the trip was without incident, except for the USO performances, the anti-aircraft practice with the ship's Oerlikons, and the sight of the first whale. Unforgettable was the almost continuous chow-line, eating below decks without benefit of seats, and the ship's MAA who so considerably kept his voice to only a bellow when calling mess detail in the early morning hours.

30 May, 1943. The afternoon found the ship at an increased tempo of rolling, pitching and bucking, much like a restive horse fighting the bit. As the hours passed an occasional glimpse of jagged rock, marking the coastline, was discerned through the deep fog, and about 1930 the quiet waters of Dutch Harbor were entered. By 2000 the ship had been docked, with the transfer of men and personal gear begun immediately. It must have been at this particular moment, that the
scuttlebutt of the Battalion's being home by Christmas, was started.

1 June, 1943. The big task of understanding the operations of the base and assigning the men to jobs was begun, and it was a week or more before the Battalion hit its full stride as a working unit. Meanwhile permanent quarters were established for the men and improvements in living conditions and sanitary facilities completed as fast as humanly possible.

13 June, 1943. The first casualty of the Battalion cast its sombre shadow over the men, with the death of John Q. Green, while in the line of duty. Emotions were released somewhat by the voluntary and generous contribution to a fund for the widow and three children.

15 June, 1943. Another disheartening blow was when the death of Donald C. Jolley, who had suffered a short illness, was reported. Again the men responded freely in contributing for the benefit of the widow and two children.

21 June, 1943. Our first practice alert began at 0430, with several hours spent in the wet, cold and muddy fox-holes. Realistic and impressive with the planes taking off the field to intercept enemy bombers, the chemical machines belching artificial fog and the light touch of tear gas which was sprayed about the fox-holes.

4 July, 1943. It was recalled that this day was being celebrated in the States, with surcease from work, picnics and other social gatherings. No such luck on Island X.

7 August, 1943. The first of a series of personnel inspections was held by the Base Commandant, Captain C. W. Crawford, with half the Battalion participating.

20 August, 1943. Lt. Comdr. Frederick C. Ray was advised of his appointment to that of Commander, and Lieut. Thomas J. Lewis was informed of his appointment to Lieutenant Commander.

8 September, 1943. Experienced the first williwaw of the season, finding it not nearly as bad as pictured. Some slight damage to living quarters and other buildings.

25 October, 1943. Commander Ray was transferred from the Battalion, and Lt. Comdr. T. J. Lewis appointed Officer-in-Charge.

27 October, 1943. Reveille changed from 0500 to 0600 and chow from 0515 to 0615; heartily welcomed by all concerned.

1 November, 1943. Two hundred sixty men, under the direction of four officers, with Lieut Julian R. Fleischmann as Officer-in-Charge, were taken aboard and installed as Company "B" of the 85th.

11 November, 1943. A day of celebration in the States, but just another work-day in the Aleutians.

12 November, 1943. Lieut. W. E. Pantle was assigned the position of Executive Officer, and Ensign R. H. Kemter arrived to assume the duties of Lieutenent (jg) Hartje who was detached from the Battalion for return to the States.

18 November, 1943. An alert which lasted two hours, with all men in fox-holes.

25 November, 1943. Thanksgiving Day and the Navy furnished a bountiful dinner, supple-
mented by candy, cigarettes and cigars from the Welfare Fund. Work as usual.

7 December, 1943. Pearl Harbor Day with War Bonds purchased, exceeding the quota by 66 per cent.

22 December, 1943. A crew of 22 men direct from the States, was received aboard.

25 December, 1943. Christmas Day. For the majority, it being the first away from home. Work was secured and a special dinner furnished by the commissary, with smokes and candy from welfare. A theatre had been commandeered and a special program given the men, including presentation of War Bonds as prizes.

1 January, 1944. Work was secured for the day, with another special dinner and the distribution of Red Cross parcels, which had been scheduled for Christmas, but delayed en route.

1 March, 1944. Two hundred thirty-two men under Lt. J. R. Fleischmann and three junior officers were detached and embarked for completion of a job far to-the west.

10 April, 1944. Ensign C. I. Coy was taken aboard to replace Lt. (jg) Fay who was detached for new duties in the States.

15 April, 1944. The third fatality of the Battalion occurred when James W. Munsey, Jr., was accidentally killed, while in the line of duty.

30 May, 1944. The anniversary of our first year on Island X was commemorated with work secured at 1130, a special dinner and a softball game in the afternoon.

21 June, 1944. Physical fitness program begun, with calisthenics, drill and hikes, which brought on many sore and aching muscles, following the softening process of the winter.

4 July, 1944. Work secured and drill teams participated in competitive exhibitions, with a field day of sports, and an eleven-card prize fight completing the day.

30 August, 1944. That long-awaited day finally arrived, and half the Battalion embarked for a nine-day cruise on the Carl Schurz to the States, leaving the "key" men in possession of the island. An uneventful trip, except for several days of exceptionally rough weather, which was soon forgotten. But the one moment that shall forever remain in the memory of the men, was the first view of the Golden Gate Bridge. Never has a scene made a more profound impression.

1 October, 1944. The more than 500 "key" men who’d been held over on Island X, finally had their desires fulfilled, when the Schurz docked and they were allowed to go aboard. Their nine-day cruise was also without incident, except that rougher water was encountered. They too have an indelible picture of the Golden Gate, which to many is as symbolic of home as the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor.

The cruise ended with a fitting commendation from the Commander of the Base, Lannie Conn, which is in part quoted:

"The officers and enlisted men of the 85th Naval Construction Battalion have established an outstanding record in the discharge of their many and varied assignments. The Battalion has displayed exceptional industry, initiative, and judgment at all times, evincing complete loyalty and cooperation.

"On the termination of the Battalion’s tenure of duty, the Commander, NOB, commends each officer and man for a job well done."
FROM THE SKIPPER

Upon the completion of our first tour of duty as the 85th Naval Construction Battalion, it is fitting and proper that some tangible record be kept of the men and the activities with which they were concerned during this period.

For the above reason it was decided that this yearbook be prepared and presented to each and every member of the Battalion who has served outside the continental limits of the United States. It was felt that this record of their associates and accomplishments would be of much interest in later years and be an invaluable aid when attempting to recall certain names, faces or facts in connection with this tour of duty, and I feel sure that each of you will treasure this book more and more as the years go by.

It has been my pleasure as Executive Officer and as Officer-in-Charge to be associated with you from the commissioning of the Battalion on February 6, 1943, to date, and I can assure you that it has not only been a pleasure but an honor to have been assigned to duty with a group of men who are so highly skilled in the various trades and who have in fact demonstrated their capabilities in the field.

On several previous occasions, I have taken the opportunity to commend the Battalion as a whole, and in part, for your fine work and cooperation in accomplishing certain tasks that were given us to do. Now that we have completed the first "hitch" of our history as a Battalion and as I look back over the work assignments and the manner in which you accomplished them, I can say without fear of contradiction that "the men of the 85th Naval Construction Battalion are to be highly commended for a job well done. They have truly upheld the high standards which have been and are being established by the Seabees of the Navy." The above statement is substantiated by letters from both Army and Navy Officers in command who felt so highly of your work that they expressed their opinions in writing.

To those who were detached from the Battalion upon our return from overseas duty, let me say that those of us remaining with the 85th Battalion wish you "Good luck" and "God speed." We feel confident that you will give a good account of yourselves wherever you may be.

To the balance of you who are still attached to the Battalion: "Let us set our sights high and aim for a spot in the sun, so that when the present conflict is over, we may look with pride at our records and feel confident that whoever may review it will say without hesitation, "Well done."

THOMAS J. LEWIS, Officer-in-Charge
LT. WALTER E. PANTLE
CEC, USNR
Executive Officer of the 85th Naval Construction Battalion from October, 1943, prior to which he held the position of "A" Company Commander.

LT. COMDR. THOMAS J. LEWIS
CEC, USNR
Officer in Charge of the 85th Naval Construction Battalion from October, 1943, prior to which he held the position of Executive Officer of the Battalion.
LET THEIR NAMES BE FOREVER HELD IN PROUD REMEMBRANCE

JOHN QUINCY GREEN
DONALD CHESTER JOLLEY
JAMES WILLIAM MUNSEY, JR.
To: DEVER, George W., Bkr2c (CB), 642-99-16, V6, USNR
   LOVING, Walter A., Slc (CB), 357-15-40, V6, USNR

Via: Commander Unalaska Sector.


1. The Commandant, Seventeenth Naval District, has been advised of your courageous and timely action which to a large measure was responsible for saving the life of T/4 Lloyd H. Rider, 36075356, U.S. Army.

2. T/4 Rider, while climbing down an icy ladder from a dock to the deck of an Army vessel, slipped and fell into the water between the boat and the pier, striking them in his fall and thus becoming unconscious. You and LOVING, Walter A., Slc (CB), 357-15-40, V6, USNR, immediately and without hesitation jumped into the water, swam to the unconscious man, and brought him to the edge of the boat where he was then pulled on deck. I commend you highly for your prompt action and disregard of personal safety which were in the best traditions of the Naval service.

3. The Commander Unalaska Sector is directed to present this letter to you with appropriate ceremony.

4. By copies of this letter the Chief of Naval Personnel and your commanding officer are requested to include this correspondence in your service record.

/s/ F. E. M. WHITING
F. E. M. WHITING
Commandant
Religion On Island "X"
OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE
85TH BATTALION

My heart rejoices every time I think of you and the fine times of association with you. I can say with the Apostle of old, "You are my first love in the Navy." As we let our minds wander back over our "tour of duty" we are happy to raise our voices in one united prayer of thanksgiving for God's care and protection over us. Our safe return home was a direct blessing of God. Each one of us should be a better man after such an experience. Your fine spirit of patriotism, cooperation, and loyalty to the better things of life has encouraged my heart. May I express a wish for each and every one, that God may richly bless, keep, protect, and use you wherever you are called upon to serve. I shall never forget my "tour of duty" with you.

Happy tours of duty to all of you not only in the Navy, but in the cruise of life, and may you enjoy rich heavenly blessings while on earth and so reach the other shore safely.

JAY D. TOLLESON
Chaplain
MAIL CALL
ONE YEAR ON ISLAND "X"
EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES

BARBER SHOP

THE TAILORS

THE MEDICINE MEN

SHOE, SHOE BABY
RECREATION

SCENES AROUND THE ISLAND
ATHLETICS

LEATHER PUSHERS

HARDWOOD SQUAD

LEWISITES

PIN SPLITTERS
TRANSPORTATION
OFFICERS

COMPANY D

MEN
HEADQUARTERS COMPANY

PLATOON ONE

(Reading from Left to Right)


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON TWO

HEADQUARTERS COMPANY


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON FOUR

HEADQUARTERS COMPANY
OFFICERS

COMPANY A

MEN
COMPANY COMMANDER
LT. JAMES L. SCOTT
CEC, USNR

CARP. ROY H. POTTER
CEC, USNR

CARP. WILLIAM A. JONAS
CEC, USNR

LT. (jg) THOMAS L. SNEED
CEC, USNR


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON TWO

COMPANY A


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON FOUR

COMPANY A


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON SIX

COMPANY A
OFFICERS

COMPANY C

MEN
COMPANY COMMANDER
LT. JOHN E. McCauley
CEC, USNR

LT. MARTIN M. Denn
CEC, USNR

LT. FRANK E. Lucas
CEC, USNR

SARP. WOODROW W. STOCKSTILL
CEC, USNR


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON TWO

COMPANY C
PLATOON THREE

(Reading from Left to Right)


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON FOUR

COMPANY C


OFFICERS

HEADQUARTERS COMPANY MEN
COMPANY COMMANDER
LT. WILLIAM J. SMITH
CEC, USNR

LT. (jg) JOSEPH E. PARLER
CEC, USNR

CARP. CLYDE F. STONEY
CEC, USNR


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON TWO

COMPANY D


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON FOUR

COMPANY D
COMPANY D

PLATOON FIVE

(Reading from Left to Right)


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON SIX

COMPANY D
OFFICERS

COMPANY B

MEN
COMPANY B

HEADQUARTERS PLATOON

(Reading from Left to Right)


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON ONE

COMPANY B


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON THREE

COMPANY B


(Reading from Left to Right)


PLATOON FIVE

COMPANY B


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This book is produced in full compliance with government wartime regulations regarding the conservation of paper and other materials.