

SEABEE NEWS SERVICE

File

Permission has been obtained to use Battalion designations in stories contained in the Seabee News Service provided the location is not given. Conversely, the general location may be given provided the Battalion designation is omitted. Whichever is most important to the meaning of the story has been used in this, the third issue of the News Service.

If your Battalion has not yet been mentioned in these stories, it is only because we have not yet received sufficiently newsworthy material from you. Send it along to the "Seabee News Service", Room 2415, Bureau of Yards and Docks, Navy Building, Washington, 25, D. C., and we'll do our best to include it.

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IT'S ALL IN KNOWING HOW

"How come", asked the commanding officer of an Army unit, "that the Seabees' trucks are working and ours are falling apart?"

"The Seabees got a machine shop up in the hills."

"The hell they have! Where'd they get the tools?"

"I dunno, but they got 'em."

"Well, see if they can't fix our trucks."

So, the Fifteenth Battalion fixed up the Army's trucks in the machine shop they had built and equipped with a display of ingenuity that's a record even for the Seabees.

The story, as related by Lt. Cdr. William G. Messimer, CEC, USNR, or San Francisco, goes back to the early days on the island when the need for repair facilities demanded that something be done. Warrant Officer Robert C. Straub, of Charleston, N. C., had once sold machinery on the West Coast and his customers included New Zealanders, so he ventured to suggest that maybe they might tell him where some could be found. He was accordingly sent down to New Zealand and there to his surprise, he found that his former customers had no use for the machinery he had sold them because of material shortages.

Straub then went to New Zealand authorities and obtained permission to buy machine tools if he could find any. The authorities granted his request but were frankly doubtful that any could be found. But Straub had already located what he wanted, so he proceeded to find a way to pay for them. A Supply Corps officer arranged for their purchase through Reverse Lend Lease and in a few days Straub was headed back with his mission accomplished.

That was just the beginning, according to Lt. Cdr. Messimer. The boys of the Fifteenth had something to bargain with now that their machinery had arrived. They began doing jobs for other outfits and for ships that docked at the island, and the gratitude of those served expressed by gifts of more machine tools.

Soon the shop--with its lathes, its milling machines, key seaters, and welding equipment--began to get a wide reputation as the best machine shop in those parts. The Air Corps found out about it and soon the shop was doing considerable airplane engine overhaul work. Ships putting in to port availed themselves of its facilities and Army trucks began putting in for repairs.

"The shop has become an institution," said Lt. Cdr. Messimer, "and the Seabees' reputation has been boosted even higher. It was a swell piece of work by the Fifteenth."

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"WELL DONE"

Before the smoke of a bombing and strafing attack had cleared away, Seabees of a South Pacific Battalion--without need of any orders--rushed in to fill the stations of the fallen gun crews of a tank landing ship while mates continued to discharge cargo without interruption. A second strafing attack caught the Seabees at the guns and inflicted casualties, but their defense of the ship helped save her and her precious cargo.

In a letter of commendation from Rear Admiral T. S. Wilkinson, USN, stated in part:

"Such exemplary conduct by members of the Construction Battalion is most highly appreciated, and it is considered that the initiative, devotion to duty, and disregard for personal safety displayed are in keeping with the best standards of Naval Service."

In a report on the action Lt. B. W. Robb, D-V(G), USNR, commander of the ship, declared: "The calm words of an action report are inadequate to express this command's admiration of the working and fighting qualities of the Battalion."

The report describes how enemy planes came in fast, straight at the LST's.

"Six planes released their bombs at about 300 feet on this ship. One plane in flames veered off to crash in the jungle. Fifteen bombs landed near the ship; none farther than one hundred yards. The deck was covered with coral fragments which were two inches deep in some places and extended in size from pebbles to chunks weighing one hundred pounds and over. All men were downed on the main deck. Eight guns were out of commission with the other guns so filled with coral dust that it is doubtful if they could have been fired.

"While the dust and smoke of the explosions still covered us, the Seabees came aboard to assist us. No orders were given them and no orders were necessary. Gray-headed veterans of the last war manned gun stations, cleaned guns, and cared for the wounded. On the cargo deck the Seabees continued to discharge cargo without interruption... The ship and crew were ready and waiting for further enemy contact within ten minutes of the last attack. Neither man nor material failed us until actually knocked out.

"No man can be singled out as having performed his duty with more merit than his fellows. All officers and men...carried their duties in accordance with the highest traditions of the Naval Service."

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ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Because they were greeted with Jap bombs on their arrival at a South Pacific island, a Seabee Battalion decided no time should be wasted in getting settled in their new home. Just how much they accomplished that first day--despite four more heavy bombing attacks--is evident from the fact that by night fall, they had:

Unloaded all their construction equipment and supplies on the beach.

Set up supply dumps.

Roughed out approximately nine miles of roads and dragged the more vital equipment across them to supply dumps.

Set up a temporary camp complete with foxholes.

Packed some of their gear and supplies to the camp.

Helped haul the heavy guns to shore and towed them to the emplacements and revetments which their bulldozers had built.

And dropped into exhausted sleep interrupted only by the disquieting magin of the tropic moon--and thirteen more bombing attacks.

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SO, IT CAN'T BE DONE, HUH?

How the ingenuity of a Seabee Special resulted in the mysterious midnight trip of two 32-foot water towers through the streets of a South Sea island city whose telephone wires hung only 15 feet above the street level was related today by the Seabees' commanding officer, Lt. Cdr. Robert Arthur, DM-USNR, of Oaklyn, N. J.

The two tanks, Lt. Cdr. Arthur explained, had been landed at the port and orders came to the Seabees to cut them up and transport them to a hillside on the other side of the town where they were to be put together again and installed. The reason the tanks had to be torn down was that the clusters of telephone wires at each street corner permitted clearance of only fifteen feet.

But to the boss's practical mind, it seemed much easier to cut the wires. "The order didn't make sense," he said simply, "so we started thinking. The time we would waste cutting the tanks down just didn't seem reasonable."

At nightfall, the problem was explained confidentially to a dozen Seabees who were experienced electricians. Then when the streets were quiet and the town asleep, they loaded the tanks on low bed trailers and proceeded into town. A half dozen wire snipping Seabees perched on the for'ard tank, while another half dozen wire-splicing Seabees sat on the tank aft. And down the streets they went. Before dawn broke, the 32-foot tanks were in place on the hill-sides.

"We followed our orders to get the tanks set up, said Lt. Cdr. Arthur innocently. "And as far as we know nobody was ever the wiser. Oh, maybe a few phone subscribers wondered why they kept getting wrong numbers the next day."

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YELLS, DIVES, AND SAVES BUDDY

When he heard cries for help below a deserted deck, Alfred Finck, SF1c, of the Seventeenth Battalion, let loose a few yells for help himself and dived into the ice water to rescue one of his buddies.

Finck, who hails from Davenport, Iowa, has just received a letter of commendation from the Chief of Naval Personnel which states in part:

"Reports of the near tragedy reveal that you were on duty alone completing a gasoline fueling operation when, hearing cries from below the deserted deck, you rushed aboard a nearby vessel, notified the crew, who were secured to quarters at the time, obtained a life jacket, and dashed back to the scene.

"Despite the fact that you knew full well that it might take considerable time for additional help to arrive, you nevertheless leaped into the freezing water with utter disregard for your own safety in order to assist whoever might be in trouble.

"Upon finding the struggling sailor, you kept his head above the surface and held him there until you both were raised to safety, and, suffering from exhaustion and exposure, were carried to the hospital.

"Your outstanding courage and presence of mind on the above occasion were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

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MARKET NEWS

They may smell pretty bad, but the sticks of twisted native tobacco used by the islanders off Australia are used as currency, and Seabees down in those parts advise that: one stick is good for twenty oranges or forty bananas; three sticks will buy a bush pig; and from two to three sticks will buy a grass skirt. Tsk, tsk.

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CHANGE MINDS ABOUT SEABEES

How the first Seabee Detachment to leave this country was transformed from a dissatisfied outfit of general service men "who enlisted for sea duty" to an enthusiastic unit of capable Seabees was described by Lieutenant (jg) Charles R. Gallagher, CEC, USNR, of Ojai, California.

"Of the two hundred and fifty men who embarked, all but a hundred were general service men who were howling at the idea of being cheated out of going to sea," said Lieut. Gallagher. "But once we got set, the boys began to catch on to how important a job the Seabees do.

"The hundred 'rates' we had with us began to teach these men how to run the 'cats', the motor patrol graders and rollers, the carry-alls and the jack hammers, and first thing we knew they began to get interested. More than that, they became increasingly proficient as the days went by. One of the yeomen, for example, became a first class shovel operator."

Lieutenant Gallagher said the boys not only had the job of learning Seabee "Can Do," but they also were greeted at their destination by very skeptical regular navy men. "The skepticism didn't last long, though," explained the lieutenant. "As soon as the regular navy found out how much the Seabees could do and how willing they were to work, its attitude changed until now the Seabees stand 'tops' with all the other services."

Pride in their accomplishment has been such that Lieutenant Gallagher now estimates that fully 75 percent of the men who once wanted nothing but sea duty are completely sold on remaining Seabees.

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ICE TO SPARE IN THE TROPICS

One of the Battalions on a particularly steamy island in the South Pacific is doing a man sized job of cooling things off.

The total ice production during August amounted to 81,743 pounds, of which 28,983 pounds was supplied to other units. Incidentally, the same Seabee outfit has a water purification plant that put out nearly 2,500,000 gallons -- which suggests the boys must have had plenty of ice water. All right, all right -- but it's better than warm water.

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OWED TOJO -- ONE BRIDGE

If Mr. Tojo knew how the boys from the Twenty-Sixth battalion build a bridge over a certain jungle stream, he'd send them a bill for materials.

According to an account brought back by Lieut. (jg) Sidney Elkman, CEC, USNR, of 6233 Pine St., Philadelphia, the Seabees were assigned the bridge building job within shooting distance of the Japs up-river. The Japs didn't bother the boys much, but the lack of building materials did. So---

A captured Japanese saw was used to cut mahogany planking and timbers. Sections of a destroyed Japanese hangar were used for trusses. A Jap winch was used for power, and Jap trucks were used to haul material for the grade.

The work was just about completed when another Jap contribution almost undid all the work. Jap bombs struck on either side of the structure and covered it and the Seabees with river bottom mud, but a little elbow grease soon had the bridge back to normal.

Curiously, according to Lieutenant Elkman, it was American bombs that poised the greatest threat to the structure. One of our planes had been shot down near by, and when it was removed, one of its bombs, still unexploded, was left behind. There it lay until a carry-all picked it up with a load of dirt and deposited it on the bridge's approach. Fortunately, there it was spotted and gingerly hauled away. The carry-all operator has been adjudged a man who must have been good to his mother.

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WINS DECISION IN THE SECOND

(Here's an item contributed by Emmett Maun, SK2c, the editor of the 12th Special Battalion's bi-monthly newspaper "Boxcar Special,")

"Pay off, Pop!"

Attractive Miss Jean McPhee of the WACS wrote that to Philip J. McPhee, SK3c, of the 12th Special Battalion early in July. She'd made a bet when they enlisted that she would get the first promotion. Her corporal's chevron came on July 2. McPhee began mailing her a check for \$5, per the wager. Then it hit him -- he'd been promoted to SK3c, himself, but didn't recall the effective date. Checking, he found out it had been July 1. He won!

In Round 2, however, daughter Jean gained revenge. She wrote recently she had been boosted to sergeant. Okay, Pop, pay off!

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KEEP YOUR TIN HAT ON, MATE

Twenty-seven men of a Seabee detachment that participated in the Sicilian invasion have been recommended for the Purple Heart award, but strange as it seems -- not one of the men in the entire outfit suffered injuries by enemy weapons despite the fact that many times they were strafed and bombed by axis aircraft.

The answer is that practically all of the injuries were caused by flake fragments thrown up by Allied guns during the air raids.

A score or so of the men got bunged up during the unloading operations, but what with the rough seas and the need for fast work, such accidents were inevitable. And there's no doubt about the fast work. The boys maintained a regular "ferry service" between North Africa and Sicily, and despite the fact that many of the cargoes contained provisions and other cargo that had to be manhandled ashore, the average time for unloading ships (LST's) was only two and a half hours.

All apart from the danger of machine gun bullets and bombs, life was no picnic ashore. One of the men suffered "an acute attack of sand fleas."

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JUST A TEMPORARY JOB --- BUT

Two electrician Mates from the Twenty-Third battalion were given the job of repairing damages aboard a mine sweeper caused by an electrical fire. They were told to make temporary repairs, but they did their work so well, the mine sweeper's skipper got out his pen and wrote:

"Such repairs were to be purely temporary pending arrival of spare parts, but the two men performed such efficient repairs that replacement will be unnecessary. It is requested that the gratitude of this command be conveyed to the men."

The two Seabees are Claude T. Scrimsher, CEM, of Bristol, Conn., and John M. Marzalek, EM2c, of 12 South Walnut St., Wauregan, Conn.

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PALMS BRIDGE WAY TO ATTACK

"Feather merchants" take a lot of ribbing, but if you don't think yeomen are good for anything but poking typewriters, listen to the story of Chief Yeoman Herbert F. Minster a former court reporter of Coeur d'Alane, Idaho.

When the Seabees landed with assault forces at Vella Lavella, it was no picnic. Jap bombers were playing havoc with the unloading operations by strafing and bombing the men.

During this melee a beaching ship loaded with men and essential equipment found itself unable to land sufficiently close to permit unloading of the equipment. It lay at a tantalizing distance from the beach, a perfect target for the bombers.

Sizing up the situation, Chief Minster, who years ago used to work in a logging camp in the northwest, reasoned that the tall palm trees at the water's edge could be felled so they would make a bridge out to the ramp of the landing craft. His idea was immediately translated into action as the Seabees, including Chief Minster and the other yeomen, went to work with axes.

With the coconut trunks forming a bridge, a bulldozer was brought ashore. It, then, was used to fill in the structure with coral, so that the rest of the equipment could be brought ashore.

In recognition of his quick thinking, Chief Minster was commended for his conduct and display of courage and leadership.

"All of these acts were accomplished between intermittent strafing and bombing by enemy air craft," said the commendation, "and Mr. Minster, because of such leadership and courage has distinguished himself among his officers and mates and is entitled to much commendation."

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"SEABEES' DAY" PROGRAM THRILLS SAN FRANCISCANS

Seabee judo experts from Camp Parks put on an exhibition of flying tackles and dives at their "Jap" mates that had more than 500 luncheon guests at San Francisco's Palace hotel roaring for more. The judo exhibition was a feature of a "Seabees' Day" program sponsored by Islam Shrine Luncheon Club, September 30.

Rear Admiral L. B. Combs, CEC, USN, assistant Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, in the principal speech at the luncheon, praised San Francisco's contribution of some 9,000 men to the Seabees and paid tribute to the cooperation of the American Federation of Labor in the Seabee procurement program.

Commander E. J. Spaulding, CEC, USNR, chief of the Seabee Procurement program, said the Camp Parks band and the judo experts combined in presenting a program "such as I've never seen before in my life."

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FAST WORK DOES IT!

Fast work by a Seabee battalion in repairing damage caused by the crash landing of a Liberator bomber on a narrow South Pacific island air strip enabled other returning planes of the flight to land safely before their gasoline supply ran out.

A report from Commander Thomas F. Reilly, Jr., CEC, USNR, of New Brighton, New York, described how, during a Jap air raid, the American Liberator whose under carriage mechanism had been damaged by a shell was forced to make a crash landing. The crumpled plane and the six sheets of steel matting on the field which were torn up offered a perilous obstacle to the other planes attempting to land.

Disregarding the "condition red", the Seabees raced out on the field, replaced the matting, and removed the plane from the runway. --- Thirty-five minutes after the crash, the other bombers were landing.

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BATUIMUS

A detachment of one Seabee battalion in the South Pacific discovered at the very outset that the Seabee motto of "Construimus Batuimus" is literally correct, and that the "Batuimus" (We Fight) was not put there just as a come-on to recruits.

Due to the evacuation of some elements of combat troops, a sector of the main defense line on the island was assigned to the Seabee detachment three days after the boys landed. For the next three weeks a fourth of the Seabees was assigned to man and fortify the line.

A swath approximately 100 feet wide was cleared through the jungle immediately in front of the line, and machine gun emplacements and rifle pits were constructed and camouflaged. Extensive barbed wire entanglements were strung in front of the line and booby traps were set in front of the entanglements.

During this period limited patrols were made in the area immediately outside the defense line, and on one such patrol Warrant Officer E. R. Banks, Jr., of Savannah, Ga., and Elmer W. Ramsey, CCM, of Charlottesville, Va., got "one known fatal casualty."

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LOSES THUMB - SORRY IT INTERRUPTS WORK

"I'm sure sorry it happened at this time because I have so much work I wanted to finish."

These were the words spoken by Chief Shipfitter Roy W. Douglas of the Sixth battalion when he reported to a company officer that he had lost his thumb in line of duty.

Because those simply expressed words revealed the character of Chief Douglas as exemplifying the courage and determination which has made the Seabees so respected throughout the world, Rear Admiral C. H. Cobb, U.S.N., commander of the South Pacific Force Service Squadron, highly commended him.

"This extemporaneous remark," wrote the Admiral, "immediately following a serious accident and irreparable wound exemplified an outstanding devotion to duty and places Chief Shipfitter Douglas at the top of the list of those outstanding officers and Chief Petty Officers of the Sixth Construction battalion who have so valiantly proved themselves during the last five months."

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SIDELINE BECOME MAJOR ACTIVITY

The Fourteenth Battalion's assignments called for a considerable amount of lumber, so the boys took on the lumber business as a sideline.

How well they succeeded is evidenced by the fact that during August their mill averaged more than 5,500 board feet per day for a monthly total of 171,878 board feet of varied stocks and sizes. The record day was August 28 when they sawed 10,231 board feet. Lumber distributed during the month amounted to 161,455 board feet, of which 23,223 feet was distributed during a single day.

Two new improvements made at the mill increased production. A chain and bucket type conveyor was installed to remove sawdust from the mill. Directly attached to the mill unit, the conveyor improvement freed two men for other use. The second improvement was the extension by six feet of the cutting conveyor rails to enable the longer length cuts to be made more easily, and to provide extra space for log handling.

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SET UP TIRE REPAIR SHOP

Tires on trucks and other wheeled equipment weren't faring too well under their rugged use in the Aleutians, so one Seabee outfit took a look at the rubber situation.

They didn't try to start a rubber plantation on the snowy tundra, but they did the next best. They improvised a tire repair shop and mended an average of some 175 tires daily.

"This shop has been big business in the saving of expense," said the battalion report. "Tires that would ordinarily have been thrown away have given excellent service after being rebuilt and repaired.

"In addition," the report continues, "the chief in charge has been able to repair rain gear and diving suits. He has also made moulds and re-soled rubber boots and mine-pacs that had been worn out."

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HAIL THE NEWCOMERS

Two more battalions have joined the growing list of those who now are publishing newspapers. Congratulations and a lot of luck to the newcomers.

One is the "Trailblazer," published by the Ninety-Sixth, and eight-page mimeographed sheet, the paper that gives excellent coverage of the battalion's activities. With Commander E. H. Honnen as publisher and Chaplain W. W. Darsie as advisor, the editorial staff consists of: G. T. Woods, Flc, editor; J. W. Petty, CM3c, associated editor; A. R. Trudeau, CM2c, sports; and J. M. Ethridge, CSFA, and R.J. Kelley, Y2c, contributing editors. The art is handled by T. C. Beyerlien, Flc; L. H. Gee, SF3c, and J. S. Lynch, S2c.

The other, published by the 102nd, is still searching for a name, and a cash prize is being offered to the winning suggestion. Its first issue of six mimeographed pages with art, was the good work of a staff of: Commander John F. Halpin, publisher; Ensign Julian J. Lane, advisory officer; H. M. Sharkey, editor; J. W. Perryman, managing editor; and Harold Tayler, J. W. Perryman, C. C. Townsend, and J. P. Smith, reporters.

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QUICK THINKING AND DARING WINS PRAISE

When a gasoline-powered pump aboard a barge caught fire, two Seabees of the Thirty-first battalion on another craft didn't need any orders about what to do. They dispatched a messenger to telephone a report of the fire, stripped off their clothes, swam a hundred yards through a choppy sea, discovered the cause of the blaze, and put it out.

As a result of their heroism, H. L. Cormicle, SF2c and C. A. Johnson, Slc, were commended by Captain J. M. Creighton, USN, for their "display of alertness, daring and initiative" which resulted in saving valuable Navy material.

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JAPS' POOR JOB AT NUMDA FINALLY DONE RIGHT

The bomb plastered, poorly constructed air field which the Japs built at Munda was rebuilt properly and was receiving our planes within eight days from the time the first units of a Seabee battalion commenced repairing it.

In a report on the reconditioning and improvement of the strip, Commander K. P. Doane, CEC, USNR, observed that "the air strip and taxiways had never been properly completed by the enemy and had been later damaged to some extent by bombing and shelling.

"The runway was partially surfaced with coral, an area 150 feet by 3,000 feet, and the remaining areas were overgrown with grass and very soft."

Details of what the Seabee battalion accomplished in improving the airfield cannot be revealed beyond a comment that Seabee "Can Do" operated at its best.

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UNDERWATER TORCH NO. 2

Not to be outdone by two Seabees at a North Atlantic base who recently improvised an underwater cutting torch, Chief Boatswain's Mate P. J. Mackey of Davenport, Ia., made one out of $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch brass tubing. At 70-foot depth he was able to cut $\frac{5}{8}$ inch cables in 16 seconds, and five inches of $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch plate in four minutes.

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FIVE NEW BOOTS

The Third Construction Battalion recently received five new recruits not included in their complement, when "Blackout," the Battalion's canine mascot, gave birth to pups. R. Duane Sand, CMLc, reports the mother and the new boots are "doing nicely."

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TEXAS ADOPTS 99th BATTALION

Texas has adopted the 99th Battalion which henceforth is entitled to bear the name, "Lone Star Battalion", and to carry the state's colors.

In a proclamation, Governor Coke R. Stevenson declared that "Texas desires to recognize its many native sons now serving with the Seabees all over the world, as well as the members from all other states." Impressive ceremonies marked the presentation of the governor's proclamation and the Lone Star colors to Commander Richard R. Cook, CMC, USNR, officer-in-charge of the battalion. One fifth of the men comprising the 99th are Texans.

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