

# 54<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Battalion

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*Historical  
Information*



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



54th C.B.

1st Embarkation  
HQTC - Norfolk, Magruder  
ABD - Davisville  
Ready Date - 1 Mar'43  
Left ABD - 4 Mar'43, 22 Feb'43  
Location - Base Glen

2nd Embarkation  
ABDRB - Davisville  
ABD - Hueneme  
Ready Date - 1 Aug'44  
Left ABD - 10 Jan'45  
Location - Leyte Samar-Cebu

LOG

- 1-18-43 - 54th CB detached to ABD Davisville 18 Jan'43. (TWX181212-143 from Lt. Comdr. Fay)  
2- 8-43 - 1st Section ordered Amphibious Force, N.W. African waters.  
2- 8-43 - 1st Section ordered trans. N.Y. as directed port director.  
2-22-43 - 14 officers and 541 men left ABD Davisville for N.Y.  
3- 4-43 - 2nd Echelon of 54th CB, consisting of 525 men and 13 officers, departed from ABD Davisville.  
4- 1-43 - 1 Apr'43 report of 54th CB - 1st Echelon arrived Arzew, Algeria 27 Mar'43. 2nd Echelon left Davisville 4 Mar'43 and arrived Arzew 21 March. Complete CB now together at Arzew.  
6-10-43 - ComNavNaw Conf. disp. 081358 June states that 54th is at Arzew.  
8-12-43 - 54th hdqtrs at Bizerte, with one company at Tunis. (ltr 29 Jun - T. L. Davey, Lancrahnaw to Capt. Mannings.)  
9- 9-43 - 1 Jul'43 report of 54th CB - 948 men and 25 officers at Karouha; 109 men and 2 officers at La Goulette.  
10- 1-43 - 1 Aug'43 report of 54th CB - 25 officers and 948 men at Karouha; 2 officers and 109 men at LaGoulette.

54th C.B.

- 1-17-43 - CBMU 579 is being set up in Bizerte with 316 men from the 54th and 70th CB. CBMU 578 is being ~~xxxx~~ set up in Arzew in 100 men from the 54th and 70th CB.  
2-18-43 - 54th CB arrived in U.S. for rehabilitation about 14 Dec'43. (WRK)  
2-29-43 - 1 Dec'43 report of 54th CB - sailed from Bizerte 23 Nov'43.  
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0-28-44 - 54th CB assigned to AVID(CNO Sec. disp to Com7flt 211501 NCR 1046 dtd 21 Oct'44).  
1-16-45 - The 54th CB arrived Hueneme 10 Jul'44 from Davisville. (Conf Disp 111910 NCR 9115 from Hueneme dtd 11 Jul'44)  
1-16-45 - The 54th CB departed Hueneme 10 Jan'45 for Leyte. (Hueneme Conf Disp to CNO 122027 dtd 13 Jan'44)  
1-13-45 -- The 54th CB is available for assignment to Samar.(CNO sec. ltr to Distribution list Ser. 0039230 dtd 3 Feb'45).  
2-15-45 -- The 54th CB is located at OSSO-ULOD(Leyte).(Comser7flt Sec. disp to CNO 020659 dtd 9 Feb'45).  
4-10-45 - The 54th CB is located at Samar. (Dirpaddock S.F. Sec rep. for 15 Mar'45)  
4-19-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of 54th CB - 10JJan'45 - Embarked from Port Hueneme. 27 Jan'45 arrived Eniwetok via Pearl Harbor. 5 Mar'45 arrived Tacloban. 9 Mar'45 Went ashore on Tubabao Island at camp area. 2officers and 130 mn assigned to Samar Island for temp. duty involving use of batt. heavy equipment.  
-21-45 - The 54th CB to build 20,000 man Rec. Barracks on Tubabau Is. (Comserfor7flt Sec Rep. for Feb.)  
1-30-45 - Comserfor7flt Sec Rep of 1 Apr'45 shows the 54th CB located at Tubaboa Is., Samar.

Location -	<u>Samar Cebu</u>	<u>54th C.B.</u>
5- 1-45 -	The 54th CB is located at Tubaboa, Samar. (Dirpacdocks P Sec Rep of 1 Apr'45)	
5- 8-45 -	The 54th CB is located at Samar. (Dirpacdocks S.F. Sec Rep of 15 Apr'45)	
5-14-45 -	1 May'45 report of the 54th CB - located in Samar area. 1 off. and 103 men assigned to Samar Island for temp work but remain attached to batt. Report routed via the 12th Reg. and 3rd Brg.	
5-16-45 -	The 54th CB heredet presently assigned duties. Prorep Comdr NavSec Base Cebu for duty. Batt will be moved in 3 echelons by LSTs. LSTs will be on beach Samar 17 May to lift 1st echelon. (Comserv7flt sec disp 100013 May to CNOB Leyte)	
5-28-45 -	The 54th CB arrived Gubaboa, Samar on 6 Mar'45 according to Comserfor7flt Sec rep for Mar'45)	
6-4-45 -	1 May'45 report of the 2nd Brig. - The 54th C <sup>B</sup> was transferred to the operation control of the 2nd Brig pending arrival of the Batts assigned to the 2nd Brig.	
6-8-45 -	54th CB herdet 19th Reg. Comserfor7flt disp 100013 May'45 to CNOB Leyte Gulf hereby amended, directing 54th CB to report by ltr to Comdr Const Forces 7 Flt and OinC 3rd Brg Sec 1 after reporting to CO NavSecBase Cebu. (Comserfor7flt sec spdltr ser 00446 dtd 27 May'45 to CNOB Leyte)	
6-21-45 -	54th CB is hereby detached from all its presently assigned duties. To proceed to CO NavSecBase Cebu for duty. (3rd Brg sec movement orders 0085 dtd 11 May to OinC 54th CB)	
6-26-45 -	1 Jun'45 report of the 54th CB - Batt moved from Tubabao Is. to Mactan, Is., Cebu beginning 11 May'45 with last arrival date at Cebu 4 June. Report via 3rd Brg.	
7-10-45 -	1 Jul'45 report of the 54th CB - located at Cebu. 87 men awaiting discharge, 32 men of this group have been transferred to Rec Bar Samar ftt U.S. These men to be discharged in groups of 22 each mo for 4 mos. Report via 3rd Brg.	

Location -	<u>Cebu (Mactan Is)</u>	<u>54th C.B.</u>
7-27-45 -	The 54th CB is located at Cebu, constructing land and seaplane base at Mactan Is. Attached to the 3rd Brg. (COT 7th Flt Sec Rep for June)	
8-13-45 -	1 Aug'45 report of the 54th CB - located at Cebu. Report via 51st Reg and 3rd Brg. 45 men have been transfd for overage discharge.	
8-18-45 -	1 Aug'45 report of the 3rd Brig states that the 54th CB has been assigned the construction of a Naval Air Base on Mactan Island and is attached to the 51st Reg & 3rd Brig.	
9-18-45 -	51st Reg established 8 July'45. Includes following CB units:-54,54,113,118 CBs. CBMUs 546, 565, 609. Under 3rd Brig. (COT, PhilSeaFron conf spdltr ser 0324 dtd 5 Sept'45 to Cominch & others).	
9-21-45 -	1 Sept'45 report of 54th CB. Located at Cebu. Report via 51st Reg & 3rd Brig. 31 men transferred to U.S. for discharge under ALNAV #196-45.	
10-24-45 -	1 Oct'45 report of 54th CB - located at Manila. Report via 3rd Brig.	
1-20-45 -	1 Nov'45 report of 54th CB - located at Manila. Report via 3rd Brig.	
2-12-45 -	1 Nov'45 report of 3rd Brig. states that the 54th CB is in process of inactivation	
1-3-46 -	1 Dec'45 report of 54th CB - located at Mactan. Report via 7th Brig.	
2-19-46 -	1 Jan 46 report of 54th CB - located at Mactan. Report via 7th Brig.	
3-1-46 -	1 Feb 46 report of 54th CB - located at Mactan. Report via 7th Brig.	
4-11-46 -	1 Mar 46 report of 54th CB - located at Mactan, P.I. Report via 7th Brig.	
4-30-46 -	Comservpac directs 7th Brig. to inactivate 54th CB. (Comservpac disp 270156 April to RDO Manila).	
5-9-46 -	1 Apr 46 report of 54th CB - located at Mactan, P.I. Report via 7th Brig.	
5-13-46 -	1 May 46 report of 7th Brig. states that 54th CB is scheduled for inactivation on 10 May.	
6-11-46 -	54th NCB reported inactivated as of 21 May 46.(OinC to OinC, 7th CB Brigade, ltr. dtd, 21 May 46)	

ON BOARD

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>AUTHORITY</u>
1 Aug'44	31	1063	BNP625 & R
1 Sep'44		1037	BNP625
1 Oct'44		1008	BNP625
1 Nov'44		965	BNP625
1 Dec'44		1079	BNP625
1 Jan'45		1076	BNP625
1 Feb'45		1082	BNP625
1 Mar'45		1081	BNP625
1 Apr'45	32	1076	BNP625 & MoR
1 May'45	31	1070	MoR
1 Jun'45	27	1066	BNP625 & R
1 Jul'45	27	1046	BNP625 & R
1 Aug'45	27	1017	BNP625 & R
1 Sept'45	31	937	BNP625 & R
1 Oct'45		816	BNP625
1 Nov'45	10	409	BNP625 & R
1 Dec'45	9	282	BNP625 & R
1 Jan'46	8	263	R & BNP 625
1 Feb'46	6	161	R & BNP 625
1 Mar'46	4	148	R & BNP 625

54th Construction Battalion

(INACTIVATED)

54th C. B.

**DECLASSIFIED**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Notes</u>
5/31/44	-	(Camp Endicott)	-	-
6/26/44	Cub 16	Huenehue 12-43	Ber West memo 7 June 20 1944	Ready to depart August 1.
7/15/44	"	Huenehue	Huenehue Comd disp. 111910 July.	Arrived 10 July from Davisville.
7/21	Cub 16	"	C. O. memo 14 July.	Ready depart Huenehue August 1.
9/18	"	"	" 4 Sept and 12 Sept.	"
10/23	-	Huenehue (avid)	Comd sec disp & 11501 Oct.	reply 180201. Ready now at Huenehue - avoid Avid
1/15	-	Avid	Huenehue Comd disp. 122027 Jan	departed Huenehue 1/10 for avid
2/12	-	BSSO-4L00	Comd sec. 020659 Feb.	added.

# AN LST ODYSSEY

After three months of training we were at last ready for the trip to Island "X." We had shivered in the cold winds at Bradford; waded in the knee-deep mud at Peary and cursed the sub-zero temperature of Endicott. Now we were on our way. Half the Battalion was to leave first, and our last night in camp was spent in speculation. Where were we going? How were we going? Would we ever be together again? Serious questions and yet it was a happy night.

At last came the great day. We stumbled out at four A.M. to eat a hurried breakfast and then rushed back to crowd eighty pounds into a sixty-pound pack. Loaded aboard a train, four to a seat, with the baggage piled in the odd corners, we traveled to a great supply depot. Here we unloaded and lined up along a warehouse to be mustered, and counted off into groups. One group went one way, another group went a different way, and before we knew it our group was on trucks headed for our ship. Then came "ye old scuttlebutt," we're going by air! We're going on a submarine! We're not going at all! Good old scuttlebutt; so dependable. Here we were mustered again (to make sure no one had dropped off for a beer) and after a short wait of two hours we were given permission to board our ship. What a ship! Slab-sided, square-ended, and flat-bottomed. Looked like a glorified garbage scow with guns. By inquiring of the ship's crew we learned that this little number was called an L.S.T. We also heard that the English had attempted to sail these little cuties across the Atlantic and had given up in disgust. Looked as if our names might go down in history; well, go down anyway. Along the bulkheads

of the first deck were shelves of canvas stretched tight over iron frames. These, we learned, were the Navy's idea of a box-spring mattress and were commonly called bunks. Picking out one of these nice soft beds, we spread our blankets and after a period of wishful thinking dropped off to sleep. Upon arising the next morning we found ourselves at sea, in more ways than one. Our destination was still unknown, and as fog cut the visibility down to a few feet we were even unable to tell what direction we were sailing. The day was spent in acquainting ourselves with our new surroundings and speculating as to the minute we would see our first submarine. Toward evening a breeze sprung up which eliminated the fog and coyly revealed the fact that there was no land to be seen. This breeze developed into a young wind and was our constant companion throughout the trip. By the end of the second day the ship was wallowing from side to side like a dowager. Supper that evening was a quiet affair, and many of the boys needed only a glance at the current meat balls and spaghetti to satisfy their hunger. The leeward rail proved to be the popular hangout for the next few days.

Nobody knew where we were going but it was expected that it would take us about four weeks. To those of the queasy midriff this was welcome news. Watches were set up, guns manned, and lookouts scanned the horizon twenty-four hours a day. Water was limited to drinking purposes only. Whiskers grew and flourished in wild profusion. Food was served in quantity but somehow lacked the quality of home cooking. Our friend, the wind, was our constant companion and so we





went lurching and lumbering from wave to wave, day after day. After some days of traveling, the engine gang decided that what few water faucets were in operation needed oiling, so they ran diesel oil through the fresh-water pipes. This caused some disruption, but it was discovered that if two pints of water were filtered through one roll of toilet paper the re-

sulting liquid made a passable beverage. At last a light was sighted blinking its welcome from a foreign shore and we realized how Columbus must have felt at the end of his cruise. After playing hide and seek with the other boats for the remainder of the night we dropped anchor in the harbor at Gibraltar.

The green hills of Spanish Morocco were a pleasing sight to our sea-weary eyes. Upon going ashore we found that the town clung to the steep hill and that considerable action was necessary. The population was a strange mixture of Spanish and English, and for the first time we bumped into an unknown language. However, entertainment of sorts was available and we enjoyed ourselves to the full extent of the possibilities. We also discovered that it was possible to send word home of our safe arrival and so counted our time ashore as well spent. Early in the morning of the fourth day the engines were again started and we were off once more to our unknown destination.

After the waves of the broad Atlantic, the quiet swell of the Mediterranean was welcome. We sailed along watching the North African coastline while dolphins and porpoises played in schools around our bow. Scuttlebutt was again flying thick and fast and we were going to at least five different places. At last, one rainy evening we turned into a harbor and dropped anchor. Word made the rounds that we had arrived at Island "X" commonly known as Arzew. The next morning we moved into the dock and unloaded to find the men of the Second Echelon waiting for us.



## ON OUR WAY

Good-bye to A.B.D. We of the Second Echelon were finally underway to Island "X." Packs, rifles, seabags, crates and lockers—what a mass of personal equipment. Despite the confusion and hustling, everyone of the Second Echelon was very happy to be finally underway. This is what we had been waiting for—Island "X" and a job to do. No one minded the six inches of snow; we were leaving the cold New England weather behind now.

Rumors and scuttlebutt galore; we were bound for California, Gulfport, Seattle, or back to Norfolk? Despite all the hopes and logical arguments, we finally debarked from our train well after dark some place in New Jersey.

Here began the long and tedious job of loading aboard the transport. What a shock to go down, down, down into the hold. Finding there tier after tier of tightly lined bunks reaching from the floor up and up to the ceiling, until the sight made you dizzy. All of our equipment must somehow hang from these same bunks. We all thought of the old slave-runners and immediately developed a kindred feeling for the darkies of olden times. Everyone was dog-tired and piled into the bunks; fully dressed; packs, equipment and all.

The following morning, after the shock of being awakened in the middle of the night to be herded through the chow line, we began to take stock.

Our ship was a large freighter temporarily converted into a troop carrier and we found ourselves aboard along with 2500 soldiers and the ship's crew of about 500. During the night we had pulled out and the convoy had formed. We were underway and everyone was a little queasy with the roll of the huge ground swells.

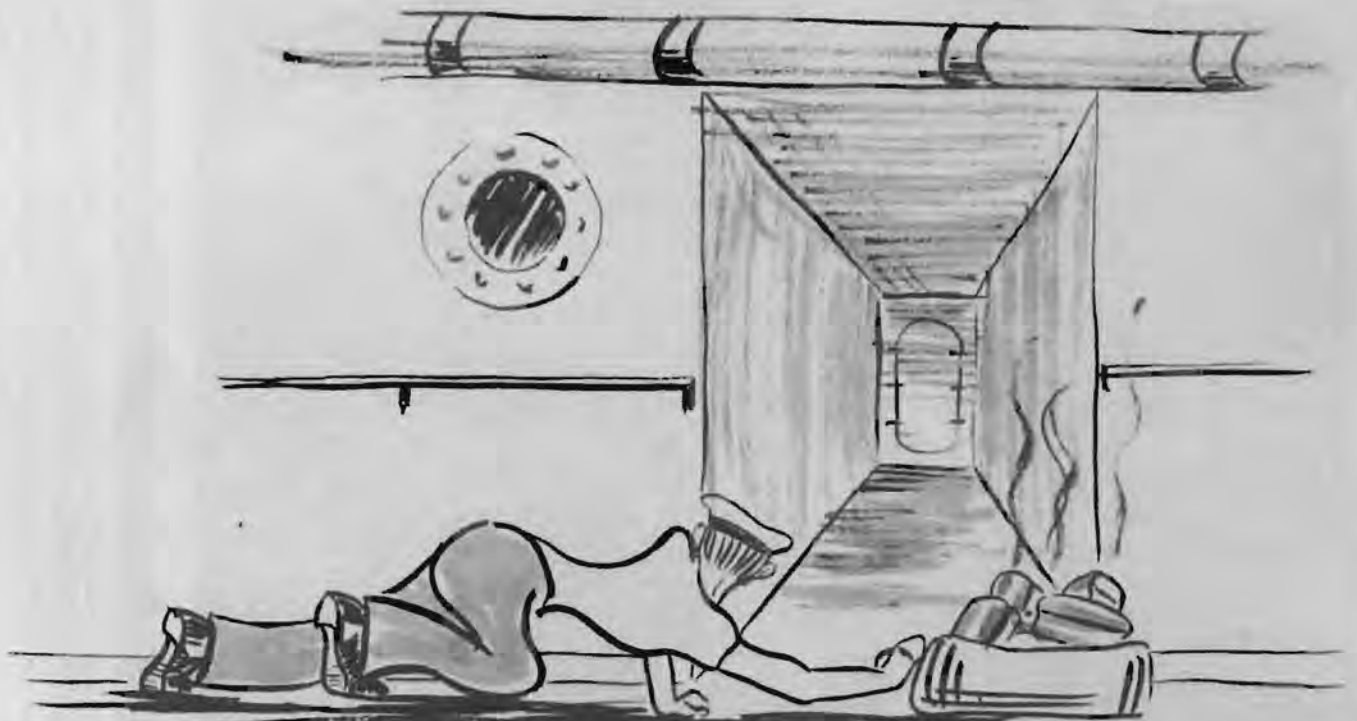
The convoy was very large with its freighters, liners and escort vessels and we experienced the thrill of realizing that

our group was an actual part of a huge organized overseas unit. We quickly learned that this was no pleasure cruise and that just as in camp there was an ironbound routine to follow. Gun watches, clean-up details, guard duty, and ship repair groups made it clear that we were to work for our passage to our unknown destination. Here, too, we found the incessant waiting in line and began to realize that lines, lines, lines would constantly be with us throughout our Naval careers.

After the first few days everyone began to feel better. The ground swells were left behind and we were becoming old salts. Appetites were returning only to grow sharper with a trip through the chow line, as the food served was of very poor quality. This led to the establishment of hot bread hijackers and midnight lunches, where aromatic hot bread and jam were wolfed down in huge mouthfuls. None of us will ever forget the exciting dash along the dark decks with a red hot loaf of bread clutched next to a very thin scivy shirt, leaving a telltale aromatic odor from one end of the ship to the other.

We were in the Gulf Stream now, with winter left behind. Next appeared in our midst the old time salts with calculations of longitude and latitude. We were headed for Bermuda, South America, Africa and India. Some even plotted our course so that we would end in the middle of the Sahara Desert. Through it all the convoy continued zigging and zagging on its way with little regard for the compiled statistics.

Everyone's nerves began to show the strain of many days' confinement, with the ever-present danger of submarine attack. Diversion was supplied by our first introduction to anti-aircraft fire as the various ships unlimbered their guns and held practice sessions.



Dog-eared magazines were at a premium. We began to feel as though we had lived aboard ship always and that any other life had just been a very pleasant dream. The lack of proper bathing and washing facilities began to make itself felt and we became more and more unkempt. This was rather a rude shock, as we had never realized that a ship could be such a dirty place.

However, the farther south we went the nicer the weather, and soon we were experiencing some very beautiful moonlight nights. It was pleasant to stand at the rail watching the reflection on the waves with the white trail of sparkling phosphorescence rolling out from the side of the ship. How nice it would be to be on a pleasure cruise in better times so that our wives or sweethearts could enjoy such quiet beauty.

We did have a few submarine scares; however, each man is always armored with the thought deep in his heart that "This will never happen to me."

After many days of speculation and very heated arguments we were issued handbooks, explaining how we were to conduct ourselves in North Africa. So this was, after all, to be our destination.

Shortly after, we had our first glimpse of land; the thrill of seeing two continents at the same time. Everyone felt himself a bit of an explorer. On the left, we were told, was Spain and on the right was Spanish Morocco. How rugged and mountainous the countries appeared; entirely different from what we had pictured in our minds.

Due to the exigencies of war we did not go through the Straits of Gibraltar until after dark. Thus we were deprived of any clear view of the famous landmark. However, we did see the lights of the large city of Tangier in North Africa.

Strange it was indeed after being accustomed to the blacked-out coastal cities of our own United States.

The next morning we awoke to find our convoy in the care of tiny British Corvettes. Indeed it appeared as though we had been left to the care of the two Chaplains and the Swiss Navy. All day we followed the coast line of North Africa. The convoy pulled into the harbor of Oran late in the afternoon.

What a wonderful feeling; we had arrived safely. Here was Africa, that strange continent. What a spectacular setting for a harbor. The docks were located at the foot of very steep hills with sharp cliffs breaking down to the water on both sides. Over there on the left could be seen the colorful Arab section peeking over the brow of the cliff. Directly ahead, following the winding road, could be seen some of the modern French section terraced up the steep hillside and progressing over the top to the main city beyond. On the right the harbor was framed by a sheer cliff crowned by an old chapel which appeared to have grown from the very rock itself.

Near at hand, the channel weaved back and forth between half sunken hulls. Here and there just a smokestack would indicate the ship beneath. There in the dry dock is an old submarine hull, a huge hole blown in her side. Thus we had our first views of the destructive power of modern warfare.

The ship's railing was packed solid while we docked, and here we introduced ourselves to the ragged Arab beggars and children. This meeting was accomplished by the simple act of tossing cigarettes and candy over the side and watching the mad scramble. We will always remember the cry that was to follow us all over Africa: "Cigarette, Joe."





# HOMeward BOUND



Change your francs for greenbacks! We're on the move! Even though they were gold seal invasion notes it seemed good to be carrying American money again.

Official word was posted. We were to pack all equipment and ready ourselves for a major move. What an outburst of scuttlebutt, speculation and wishful thinking. Immediately bets were

placed. Two to one we were on our way home. England, Italy and even India came in for their share of the gamblers' attention although the odds were considerably different.

The only drawback—the Battalion was to be split with Company "C" and a pontoon detachment left at Bizerte. The parting of friends is not pleasant although in the Navy it is a daily occurrence.

The mad scramble was on. Pack this, take that to the hangar to be left with Company "C." Discard those souvenirs even despite the Navy bulletin to the contrary. We were really camping out now, with the galley cut down to the minimum and our cots and beds already loaded aboard ship.

Again we were split into two groups with each section scheduled for a different ship.

At last, we were ready with packs, rifles and seabags. Each man looking like a one-man moving van. Why did we have to pack our sheepskins? That wait all morning down at the docks was really cold and did we get hungry.

Our ship was anchored out in Lake Bizerte near Ferryville so we were loaded aboard L.C.I.'s for the first step of our journey. Our quarters we found to be in the two forward

holds. These had been lined with bunks and provided with a small galley to facilitate the removal of prisoners from the war zone. How tired we were going to become of this setup before we finally reached our destination.

Early the following morning we steamed slowly through the Lake, followed down the canal and anchored in the outer harbor. The wind was blowing a gale but despite the weather we crowded the deck and lined the railings, each of us looking upon familiar landmarks for the last time. Other freighters and tankers anchored near us, until towards evening we had a goodly collection of ships. Soon after dark there was a bustle of activity and the ships began pulling out and forming into convoy. One thing, we were headed westward! Life aboard ship soon settled down to routine. Watches were set up, gun crews manned their weapons, kitchen police and mess cooks went to work.

Due to the cramped conditions of the galley, meals were limited to two a day. In a public speech one of the chief commissary stewards promised all hands two big meals. One of these we ate on Thanksgiving Day; the other is yet to come.

Axis bombers had a habit of making things hot for convoys in the Mediterranean so a sharp lookout was kept at all times. Large flying boats were constantly circling back and forth on submarine patrol. Tiny corvettes and destroyers formed a protective screen entirely around the group.

We followed the coast line of North Africa very closely and as we progressed ships came out from all of the principal harbors to join the convoy. The trip from Bizerte to Gibraltar took a week and by this time the convoy with its circling planes and dashing corvettes made an impressive sight.

Passing through the Straits of Gibraltar the convoy maneuvered into long columns in order to thread through the mine fields. Although the straits are only some ten or twelve miles in length it took three hours to complete the passage.



The frowning ramparts of "The Rock" were partially shrouded in clouds with just the very peak exposed. On the opposite side could be seen the hazy outlines of the mountainous coast of Africa. As we progressed farther "The Rock" and Africa fell to the background and we followed the coast of Spain for a few miles. Here, the country was mountainous also, with the bare rolling hills coming right down to the water. Our last sight of land for many days was to be "Tarifa Light" on Point Europa in Spain.

Shortly after heading into the open sea, interest was added when we passed a large eastbound convoy heading into the Mediterranean. We were all thankful that our convoy was, for the present, headed in the *right* direction.

The difference between the waves and swells of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean at once became apparent. Much to our chagrin we learned that the L.S.T.'s weren't the only boats that could roll. The ship shook a mean rudder in her own right. The rail birds took their positions and the chow line was noticeably shorter for the next few days.

No less than seven dogs had joined our company. These friendly little beasts infested our two crowded holds and soon the air was predominately doggy. This we couldn't have, so they were caged in a locker on deck, where their time was spent in alternate howling and yapping.

Our daily routine by this time was well established. We had four wash basins available with one fresh-water tap for 500 men. This meant that the lavatory was in constant use twenty-four hours a day. There were regular shifts getting up all night long in order to shave. After meals the mess hall was cleaned and immediately became a replica of an old-time gambling hall with games of chance of all description in progress. Usually, shortly before sundown, everyone went "top side" for a breath of fresh air and a last cigarette before the order "darken ship." The stretch from four-thirty dinner until breakfast in the morning became quite an ordeal and soon we were enjoying cold lunches served about nine o'clock at night.

The days passed into a week and the first week into the second since we had left "The Rock." Three weeks since we had loaded aboard at Bizerte. Could the ocean be this large? Anyway, we were headed in the right direction, but let's quit dragging the anchor!

Speaking of dragging the anchor, towards the end of the second week from "The Rock," we bit a four-day storm and everyone wished that we were where we could drop anchor. The steering apparatus of the ship broke and we wallowed around every which way, reaping the full benefit of the storm-tossed waves. Cooking was impossible and "K" rations became the order of the day. Sleeping also became quite an

ordeal and many a pipe frame was almost pinched in two by frantic Seabees endeavoring to ride her out.

The steering gear was repaired and the storm gradually lessened and we started making headway again. By this time it became evident that we would reach some port in the States. Spirits soared and many were the plans laid for the invasion of our homeland.

The weather had become much colder and we were nearing our last few days aboard ship. A number of ships left the convoy headed for other ports. Eagerly we scanned the sky for the sight of a coastal patrol plane. Finally we saw her, a huge Catalina flying boat, keeping her eternal vigilance over American waters.



The next morning buoys and channel-markers dotted the water, and during the afternoon a dark blot on the horizon grew to be the entrance to a U. S. harbor. All hands lined the railings as we slowly moved up the harbor and had our first glimpse of U. S. soil in many months.

Feverish last-minute packing and what a scramble on deck. Everyone wanted to get ashore, but fast. This was the end of our voyage after practically a month aboard ship. Boy, were we happy. We were home. Shouldering our packs we filed slowly down the gangway amid the flashing light of the newspaper reporters.

Red Cross workers were on hand with candy, doughnuts, coffee and milk. Milk for the first time in nearly a year!

A train was waiting on the siding and we were soon on our way to Camp Endicott at Davisville, Rhode Island.

# SUPPLY

Americans like things concise and to the point. They have said that this is a tough war. They have said that it is a war of supply. Cryptic statements, perhaps, but we of the "S" division have come to regard them as true.

Our battalion in Africa was but one of thousands of units. Our work with its attendant supply function was but a very small part of the effort necessary to free Africa of the Axis powers. Our problems of supply, although a small part of the whole, were such as to teach us that a war demands as much or more in materials as it does in men. They were problems that taught us that supplies are an intricate part of that war and that success depends directly upon the prompt delivery of these supplies.

The "S" division is charged with and responsible for the following functions: Supply and Procurement, Purchasing, Commissary, Finance and Accounting. Commissary includes clothing and the ship's store as well as the handling of the food. The supply section handles supply and procurement along with the purchasing, while the disbursing section takes care of the commissary, finance and accounting.

The problems involved in the performance of these functions were many. They were not always easy. The fact that our battalion had been split into six separate detachments and scattered up and down the coast from Nemours to Cherchell presented additional and unique difficulties in the procurement, control and accountability of supplies. Yet the efficiency of a battalion depends largely upon a continued flow of materials to the men when and where they are required

and war is not tolerant of delay. A thousand skilled Seabees can do a lot to stock piles and can do it in a hurry; to keep them supplied required some hustling. We hustled. Navy sources of supply in the early months of the campaign were practically non-existent so sometimes it was a prolonged harangue with a Frenchman who spoke with machine-gun rapidity but decided to sell his cement with snail-like slowness. Again it was a case of persuading a harassed and busy army colonel that we needed fifty feet of pipe in Tenes more than the Army needed it in Bone. We usually broke about even on a deal like that. We had requests for everything and some of these requests, based apparently on the supposition that we were just across the street from Naval Supply Dept., Norfolk, approached, if they didn't quite attain, the status of the proverbial inquiry for the fur-lined bathtub. It can be said, however, and with the utmost sincerity, that the ingenuity, skill and perseverance displayed by the men in improvising and getting a difficult job done time and again with only makeshift materials at hand was in keeping with the highest traditions already established in this war by the Seabees the world over and entirely worthy of their motto—"Can Do."

Difficulties were also encountered in obtaining commissary and ship's store supplies. During the first few months in Africa our rations came entirely from the Army, supplemented on occasion with fresh vegetables and fruit purchased from native sources. The procurement of fresh meat was the greatest problem and eventually, in order to give



tired palates some relief from the terrible monotony of canned luncheon meat and stew (it had other names, too). Arab beef was purchased and slaughtered by our own butchers under the supervision of an Army Major of the Veterinary Corps. Men who saw similarities between the States and Africa in many things couldn't, in good conscience, see the slightest similarity between our U. S. beef and those tired African oxen. It made good hamburger though and it helped. As the campaign progressed and reached its climax with the fall of Bizerte, Navy supplies from the States began to come in. What a welcome that first supply ship had with its cargo of fresh meat, fruit, and eggs. The Seabees did pretty well with the inner man from then on. We had our gripes, plenty of 'em, but it is said that they are to be expected; nor did we particularly worry about them. We felt better after seeing our combat troops with their "C" rations and how our paratroopers, boarding invasion ships for Italy, reacted to a few fresh oranges and potatoes our unloading crews threw to them.

We were fortunate in maintaining a fairly stable stock in the Ship's Store. Cigarettes were rationed to a pack a day at first but as our stock gradually accumulated we were able to sell each man a carton a week. Candy was more difficult, and while chocolate was cut off during the summer months in favor of a less perishable variety, it came back fairly strong in the fall upon arrival of shipments from the States in response to our requisitions. The Chaplain's hunger for cigars, and a very decided craving among a few of the mates for Copenhagen, gave us a little trouble several times. The profits of our store amounted to \$4,063.24 which amount was cred-

ited to the appropriation, Ship Store Profits, Navy, and held available for expenditure upon the order of the officer in charge of the welfare, amusement, and entertainment of the crew. Several purchases were made from this source, including a piano, Christmas cards, and an experiment in Tunisian beer. The bulk of it, however, is still available and will probably be applied to defray, in part, the cost of this book.

We were green as to the many aspects of our job when we boarded the ship on that cold, bitter day of February, 1943. A few days later, on that heaving L.S.T. somewhere on the Atlantic, many of us were green in quite another sense. Ten months of Africa, however, taught us much about our jobs and upon embarkation for home even the trips to the rails were less frequent.

At the beginning it was largely a question of how to best beg, borrow or "acquire" needed materials and sometimes in the process the "C" in "CB" came to denote connivance rather than construction. Eventually, however, more than one Army and Navy unit in the area came to refer to our camp as that "Seabee Country Club." Many were the British Tommies and American Doughboys who dropped in on us for a meal or a cold lemonade. Many were the occasions upon which it was said that our construction men had built the finest galley in Africa and that our cooks and bakers were worthy of it.

That, in brief, was the job of the Supply Section of the "S" Division and we like to think that we got it done. The caliber, diligence and morale of the enlisted men of the Supply Section were excellent and the Supply Officer feels not the slightest hesitation in giving to those men the highest praise in the Navy—"WELL DONE" . . .



# DISBURSING

The 54th Battalion's familiar sign, "Disbursing Office," was first raised December 1, 1942, in Camp Bradford. It was there that the now famous "Battle of Bradford" was fought, meaning sufferance of colds, cat-fever, shortage of oil to keep the huts warm, and even upon occasion total lack of electric lights. Nevertheless, the mountain-high piles of insurance applications, family allowance and MAQ applications were waded through and before the battalion was out of boot our first payday was held on December 20th, being a token payment of \$20 to \$80 to each man.

On March 24 we held the first payday in Africa, giving each man 1,000 francs which, at the rate of exchange prevailing at that time, amounted to \$20. American currency could not be used, on orders of the Army Finance, even though the natives were willing to pay a premium to secure American dollars. This payday was a memorable one from the point of watching the men inspect their first seen francs questioning and even skeptically. The next lesson learned was that a thousand francs had lasting power, as there was little to buy except wine at ten to fifteen francs per glass. The opposite illusion of the value of this new form of currency

was realized when thousand franc notes were tossed into the card games which soon reached a new high.

The procedure in securing new francs was comparatively simple. An Exchange check for Cash-Foreign Currency was drawn, formal approval secured from the local American Consul, then cashed at the Banque of Algeria. Here a \$50,000 check would realize two million, five hundred thousand francs, in notes ranging in denomination from five, twenty, fifty, one hundred, and five hundred to one thousand francs.

By this time, too, our battalion had split into groups of a company each, located as far west as Nemours, on the border of French Morocco, and east as far as Cherchell. As a result, with the consent of our Officer-in-Charge, it was decided that one payday a month would be held. This plan worked satisfactorily until our return to the States. The men were able to draw sufficient funds for a month's needs which in hundreds of cases amounted to approximately \$10 to \$20 each. This then gave us the necessary time to make the circuit which at times included the above-mentioned Nemours base, Beni Saf, Oran, Arzew, Mostaganem, Port-aux-Poules, Tenes and Cherchell.



Later, as our various units began to purchase from local concerns, we had added to our duties the paying of bills. We came to Africa knowing no French but the duties compelled the acquisition of a smattering. It is interesting, though, how deals can be completed and exchanges of the coin of the realm made by the ever useful sign language. Our attempts even ran to Arabic. However, in most of the banks one of its personnel would know a few words of English; yet we found quite essential a speaking knowledge of the French numbers up to twenty, and with this knowledge we could also pay the Arab merchants, most of whom could speak French and Spanish as fluently as Arabic.

After arrival at Bizerte we assumed further and additional duties by taking over the accounts of the 1005th Detachment, of some 200 men. At other times we were requested to pay units of the 1006th Detachment and once, 250 men of the 70th Battalion.

In November we learned of orders directing us homeward and there ensued in the next two days one of the most hectic periods of our experience. We spent two nights converting \$30,000 in francs to Gold Seal, then selling a local Disbursing Officer an another naval unit on the good-neighbor idea of accepting them on a transfer. We finally completed this requirement thirty minutes before boarding ship. During the two preceding days our storekeepers closed out approximately 500 accounts, of those men who were to remain behind. As a result, we packed our personal belongings at dinner time and then returned to the hangar offices at Bizerte and worked all night. At eleven-thirty the next day, we climbed the ladder of a naval supply ship, homeward bound. We had no regret for leaving a country scarred by the marks of hard battles, which will always be remembered in American history, because of those of our fellow members who there made the supreme sacrifice.



## SHIPS SERVICE

You say you belong to the 54th Battalion? YES! I know—That's "The country club of North Africa!"

One of the main reasons for such a description of our camp was our battalion's ships service department. We could rightly boast that our battalion was provided with all of the essentials of our home communities. Post Office, Laundry, Barber Shop, Cobbler Shop, and Tailor Shop all grouped under the heading of ships service to provide for our comfort.

Each battalion has men skilled in these trades who in turn are provided with the proper, efficient tools and machinery to maintain these services.

Any mail today? The most important question in any service man's mind. The most cussed and discussed department in the whole Navy. I hear they have 100 sacks of mail for us—they say all of our mail has gone to South America—they are going to start flying all of our mail direct—I heard that the

mail ship was torpedoed—many hours did we spend in speculation and anticipation. When all was said and done, we finally received the longed-for letters although at times they were months late.

The largest accumulated pile of mail was the one that greeted us when we returned from our thirty-day leave after coming home from Africa. There were 600 bags containing Xmas packages and greetings which had gone to Africa and followed us back again. There were also about three months' communications from home sealed in over 150,000 first class letters.

The battalion sent \$400,000.00 home in money orders. Of this amount \$18,300 was sent home on one payday. From the statistics, those at home at least have been appreciative as the battalion receives an average of 2,000 pieces of mail daily while sending out only 1,000.

When we first arrived in Africa clean clothes immediately became a problem. Many were the intricate deals made with the French washerwomen. Don't let anyone tell you that the French can't drive a sharp bargain. As soon as our equipment arrived the battalion laundry was set up and we were saved the necessity of having to support the entire French population of North Africa. Seeing the British washing their clothes in the muddy little stream below our camp in Bizerte made each and everyone of us thankful for our own complete laundry set-up.

Razor blades, chewing gum, pocket combs, practically every item but a set of false teeth was made available to the purchaser. For one memorable period while in Arzew we were able to obtain beer.

Thus we even had our version of the corner drug store to complete the picture of our community.

To top the picture of making Joe Seabee sartorially resplendent we had our own two-chair barber shop. Although some few of our members had no need to call for a haircut, the majority of the battalion benefited very greatly in appearance by utilizing this service. As all barber shops should be, it was strictly for men; there was no beauty parlor in connection. One thing, we did lack the ever-present Police Gazette.

Forming another portion of our civic center was the cobbler shop. Here many pairs of shoes were repaired and kept

in good condition thereby saving many dollars for both the men and the government. The machinery in the shop served the dual purpose of accomplishing work in shoe repair and also affording a means for the men to work on souvenirs in their spare time.

To complete the list of our ship's service we had available a tailor shop. Here it was that those C.I. "too smalls" and "too bigs" were altered to fit. Many men were also saved considerable embarrassment by handy patches installed in the right places. Finish work was also done on dress uniforms which included pressing and trimming.

With all these services available our camp was rightly called "the country club of North Africa."

A small percentage of the money collected from these shops went to defray the expense of maintaining them, while the bulk of the revenue was placed in the battalion's welfare fund.

The ship's store, although a separate unit operated by the supply department, really was the most important part of our civic center. As is the case in civilian life we were strictly under the ration system.

At first cigarettes were rationed to a pack a day. Later on, however, we were able to obtain a carton a week. Due to the climatic conditions, candy bars were always scarce. This shortage was supplemented by life-savers and hard candies. May we never see another box of "Charms" again!



# ARZEW



During the last week of February and the first week of March, the 54th Naval Construction Battalion left the United States in two echelons. Each echelon consisted of two full companies abetted by cooks, bakers and engineers from Headquarters Company and so comprised that each could function as an independent unit.

The first echelon was loaded aboard L.S.T.'s (Landing Ships Tanks) at an East Coast Port. They were the first armed forces to cross the Atlantic in amphibious landing craft. After a trip of thirty-three days, they arrived in Arzew, North Africa. Here they found the second echelon already ashore and impatiently awaiting their arrival.

This group had left New York on a troop transport and after a trip of fifteen days, arrived on "Island X" to find the country knee deep in mud. As all the battalion's supplies and building materials were aboard the L.S.T.'s there was little the second echelon could do except utilize the available materials and turn to salvage for the balance.

Upon the arrival of the first echelon and the supplies, a tent city was established some two miles from the town of Arzew. This camp was built on a gently sloping plain overlooking the rocky Mediterranean shore. As this was to be our home for the next few months everyone endeavored to make it as comfortable as possible. Tents were set up around a central service unit in such a manner that through streets were possible. This service unit comprised of the galley, mess tents, ships service, and sick bay. Although the first few days were confusing it wasn't long before our new home took shape. On the hill close by a large water tank was built. Evaporators were set up on the beach and water was piped through camp in a two-inch main. A large diesel generator was installed to furnish power for all tents. On the outskirts of camp, bulldozers leveled the ground and a 1,000-inch rifle range was built. This range was used constantly by Army and Navy personnel alike. A salvage yard was established and all lumber from boxes and crates was saved for use around the area. A large recreation site was laid out and graded. Small French cottages along the beach were cleaned and repaired to serve as officers' quarters. When complete, this camp, backed by the high hills and looking out over the ever restless ocean, was well situated.

The town of Arzew with its city square and tree lined streets is located on the shore of a large bay some thirty miles east of the city of Oran. It was here that we first came in contact with the natives of North Africa. Never to be forgotten were our first meetings with the Arabs. Clad in rags, caked

with dirt, barefoot and to all appearances homeless, they roamed the streets and country-side begging cigarettes, candy and chewing gum. The surrounding country was hilly by nature and given over to the cultivation of grapes and grain.

While stationed at this camp we were able to visit some of the surrounding towns and villages. The largest of these was Oran; a city of about two hundred thousand people. Here we became acquainted with the metropolitan atmosphere of Africa's larger towns. Built on the bluffs overlooking the harbor, with its stone breakwaters and jetties, Oran presented many interesting and colorful contrasts to our "New World" minds. Among notable places of interest was the Cathedral and Castle built high on a rocky promontory affording an overall view of the city and harbor.

From the start it was apparent that our work would be closely connected with that of the Amphibious Force and that the battalion's main job would be to build and maintain bases for that branch of the service. Early in the month of April men were sent to seven different ports along the Algerian coast for this purpose. Company "C" went to Tenes and Cherchell while Company "D" furnished men for Mostaganem, Beni Saf, Nemours and Port aux Poules.

This left Company "A" and Company "B" to carry on the work of unloading supplies and building the amphibious base at Arzew. This base was the largest of its kind in Algeria and was built of quonset huts. Roads and streets were built and graded. Water and power lines run to all the necessary buildings. On a low hill near the main camp a hospital unit consisting of 19 quonset huts was built and the equipment installed. In the meanwhile, shipload after shipload of supplies arrived and the battalion furnished unloading crews twenty-four hours a day. These supplies were trucked to a supply depot near camp and placed under an armed guard. On the sandy beach of the harbor the pontoon crew set up their shop. Here were built all manner of pontoon assemblies. Long causeways for the L.S.T.'s to use on invasion work. Single and twin motor barges for hauling supplies. All were turned out as needed and in rapid succession. Due to the tremendous amount of shipping entering and leaving the harbor, it was found necessary to build concrete bollards along the breakwaters. This enabled more and larger ships to unload their cargo at one time. Near the dock area four large 40x100-foot quonset huts were built. These large buildings with their concrete floors were used as warehouses. A quonset hut laundry to serve all Naval personnel was built and put in operation to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Early in May, Tunis and Bizerte fell and Company "B" was sent ahead to take over these advanced posts. By the second week in June all the battalion had moved into the Tunisian area and the second phase of our overseas work was under way.



# BENI-SAF

Shortly after the 54th Battalion's arrival in North Africa half of Company "D" was sent to Beni Saf. This city proved to be a small place on the Algerian coast 80 miles west of Oran. Here we were to operate as an independent unit drawing our necessary supplies and building materials from the main supply depot at Arzew.

To facilitate moving men, material and equipment, our group was divided into two parties. One traveled overland by truck, the other by boat along the coast. For those of us who went by truck it was the first view of the colorful African countryside. Arabs, carts and animals of all sorts were continually catching our eyes. Small French children along the wayside would wave frantically, one hand giving us the "V" for Victory sign and the other extended for cigarettes and bon-bons. The route led us through one of the principal agricultural districts of the country. The rolling land was given over to great vineyards owned by



French landlords and tilled by Arabian help. The beautiful homes of the French owners were quaintly off-set by the native quarters enclosed by an adobe wall. Ever uppermost in the minds of the natives was privacy. Even the cattle were enclosed with a high fence of cactus. This cactus, growing to a height of twelve to fifteen feet, and having broad, spiny leaves was an Arabian necessity. Not only was it used to protect homes and possessions but it furnished the base for a native brew and produced in the fall a fruit highly prized by all. Here and there, tucked away amidst olive groves, little white churches glimmered in the bright sunshine. The green hills covered by the blue sky and brightened by the white buildings made an interesting picture at all times as we traveled along.

The trip by boat to our first overseas assignment was a pleasant one. The day was warm with a light breeze and as we cruised along the coast we could see tiny villages perched on the steep hillsides. Porpoises played a continual game of tag at the bow or swam contentedly alongside. From time to time we caught sight of huge turtles some three feet in diameter, asleep on the surface. As we entered the gates of the harbor of Beni Saf our eyes were met by a picturesque view of an Arab village set upon a hill. Extending from the hill

were a large mine dump and tram tracks. These formed a sharp contrast with the picturesque Arab village. This mine, we learned, was one of the largest producers of manganese in the world and was busy furnishing ore to the Allies.

We landed and were taken by truck to a group of buildings along the beach which were to be our quarters. These buildings proved to be the summer homes of the well-to-do French of the district. Unfortunately this region had suffered a cloudburst a short time before and the beauty of the place was somewhat marred by debris.

Our job at this base was to rehabilitate the existing buildings and install the necessary equipment for an amphibious base. There was a considerable amount of concrete to pour and the entire electrical system had to be repaired. In the harbor, anchor buoys and markers were installed. One of our most memorable tasks was to dispose of a dead whale about sixteen feet long which washed up on the beach. We first tried to bury it but struck rock before the hole was deep enough. We then tried to tow it back out to sea but our boat leaked badly and the surf kept driving us ashore. At last Chief Lailin volunteered to swim it out to sea. It was a sight to behold, the Chief on one end of the line and the dead whale on the other. The Chief proved to be a powerful swimmer and returned some time later minus the whale. He even managed to keep the overseas cap he was wearing dry.

The city of Beni Saf was built on a steep hill. As in most North African towns the city square or market place was the center of life within the town. Here the French and Arab tradesmen maintained their tiny open shops. On Sunday the farmers of the out-lying districts brought their wares to town for trade and barter. On these days the square was a wondrous sight. Yapping dogs, scampering children, rumbling carts formed an undertone to the shrill cries of the venders. Running from the hub, like the spokes of a wheel, were the narrow crooked streets of the town. Winding here and there on the steep hillside, first up then down, yet always passing the homes of the city.

We had a pleasant time among the hospitable people of Beni Saf. On Easter Sunday one of the well-to-do Arabs of the district gave us a barbecue. He herded some goats from the hills and onto a small flat where he killed, skinned and prepared them. By noon the goat ("LaCobra" they said) was taken from the spit. A tasty morsel entirely prepared for us by the natives. This was our finale as that same afternoon we returned to Arzew. However, Beni Saf will always live in our memory as a quiet happy little village where we came in close contact with the everyday native life of North Africa.

## BUILT ADVANCED AMPHIBIOUS BASE

1. Cleaned and concreted warehouse floor, 10,000 sq. ft.
2. Erected 40x100 ft. Quonset for storage.
3. Repaired diesel tank and built sand bag wall around same.
4. Installed five 150 cu. ft. refrigerator boxes.
5. Installed generator for lighting purposes.
6. Installed 7 bollards and 2 mooring buoys.

# MOSTAGANEM

Mostaganem, a large city with a population of about 50,000, lies on the Mediterranean about thirty miles east of Arzew.

The dock facilities were already in use for the unloading of supplies and our orders called for the establishment of a Quonset camp and hospital unit. A small detachment of engineers was sent from Arzew to make a reconnaissance of the surrounding country and report on a suitable site for this new camp.

We left Arzew in two groups aboard L.C.M.'s for the trip across the bay. The trip proved to be exciting as well as interesting. When we were halfway across the bay we sighted a submarine surfacing. No one knew whether it was an enemy submarine or one of our own. Our relief was tremendous when the submarine turned out to be English and we found that it was returning to Mostaganem after a tour of duty.

Our two groups reached Mostaganem in the afternoon. Here we were quartered in a warehouse which had been taken over by large wharf rats. We contested the ownership to the best of our abilities. Fortunately after the first night we were quartered aboard some L.C.I.'s that were in the harbor for repairs.

After making a search for a suitable site, one was finally found at the edge of town on a high bluff some 200 feet above the port proper. The site consisted of two wheat fields. One on each side of the main highway. It was decided to construct the hospital unit and adjoining officers' quarters on the upper side of the highway. The galley and enlisted men's quarters were to be built on the lower side of the highway. Here the area was split in half by a deep gully some thirty feet wide.

We reported back to the main camp at Arzew where the plans were prepared for the base layout. About the middle of April two platoons from Company "D" under the direction of Lt. Anthony were moved to Mostaganem to start construction of the base.

When the two platoons of Company "D" arrived the Arabs were in the midst of harvesting the wheat and it was quite a problem trying to set up tents and a galley which were to serve as living quarters during construction.

The first job of the group was the erection of a large 15,000-gallon water storage tank. This was placed on the hill in back of the hospital group and pipe lines were run down to the waterfront, a drop of over 300 feet. At the same time a crew was set to work constructing a bridge across the gully in the lower area so that materials could be delivered to their proper

locations. By the time that these two jobs were completed the materials for the huts were arriving by two methods from the large supply depot at Arzew. Part of the supplies came overland by truck and the rest were shipped aboard L.C.T.'s.

A survey party came from Arzew and transferred the plans onto the ground and Quonset huts began to spring up as fast as they could be brought in.

A job that was not on the books was the construction of a huge 200-step stairway leading from the camp to the bottom of the bluff. This also had to cross a railroad which was half-way down the side of the bluff. The reason for the stairway was to save time and distance in getting down to the port. If it were not used a person would have to travel two miles by road to reach his destination at the docks.

The Seabees also built Quonset huts and water tanks on the waterfront and installed several water purifiers to service the ship with fresh water.

The city of Mostaganem was situated on steep hills and had many winding narrow streets. Here were found buildings of modern design mingled indiscriminately among those of more traditional style. The main part or business section was on top of a hill and was the only level place to be found.

The main street lined with palm trees and flowers led from the city hall to the main town square. Here was located the Catholic Cathedral which from the outside did not make a very presentable appearance. However, once a person was inside, the atmosphere was entirely different. The Cathedral was very beautiful, decorated with hand carvings, statues and altars giving a person a very great sense of grandeur.

One side of the square was formed by the Grand Hotel and Cafe with its open air terrace while next to it was a large French theatre. This was being used by the U.S.O. and American Red Cross to stage various shows and programs for the American armed forces. The other sides of the square were lined with shops, stores and wine shops of all descriptions.

On the way from the square to the Seabee camp was located the main quarters of the French Colonial Troops. These barracks and buildings covered about six city blocks in area. Here were found the representatives of the various colorful regiments of the French Colonial Army.

The people of Mostaganem are of French and Spanish descent and were very friendly to the American soldiers and sailors. Altogether, Mostaganem was a very pleasant city, quite representative of North Africa.



### WORK DONE AT MOSTAGANEM

1. Erected 25 Barracks Quonsets.
2. Erected 11 Mess Quonsets.
3. Erected 4 Shower and Latrine Quonsets.
4. Erected 12 Officers quarters Quonsets.
5. Erected 9 Dispensary Quonsets.
6. Erected 2 Administration Quonsets.
7. Installed laundry, 1000-man unit.
8. Installed 3 distilling units with tanks.
9. Installed 2 refrigerators and 2 50-kw generator sets. Erected 7 Quonsets for storage and repair facilities.



Quonset Camp, Mostaganem



Hospital Unit, Mostaganem

## PORT AUX POULES

On a wide, sandy expanse of beach fifteen miles east of Arzew, sat the tiny village of Port Aux Poules. Because of its sheltered location and the topographic features of the shore line this port made an ideal location for practice amphibious maneuvers. As these maneuvers were extensive and included both army and navy personnel, some installations were found necessary. Forty-six men and one officer of Company "D" were detailed to the job.

This crew traveled by truck from Arzew to their new home and were housed in French summer homes along the beach. A galley and mess hall was quickly set up and work was started on the various projects. The wind was constantly shifting the sand dunes and some difficulty was experienced in protecting the electrical equipment from this fine dust. Vari-

ous items necessary to training of amphibious landing groups were built. Fresh water was always a problem in North Africa and a large distilling unit complete with tanks and lines was installed. A diesel generator was set up to furnish power for the base. Quonset huts were built to shelter supplies and serve as repair shops for light equipment.

Although this base was of a minor importance in the sum total of work accomplished, it was an outstanding example of team work. Army and Navy personnel cooperated to their fullest extent on all jobs. Throughout the entire job the name Port aux Poules haunted us. Why this sandy stretch of beach should be called "The Port of Chickens" was beyond our comprehension.

1. Altered and repaired 43 villas for personnel quarters.
2. Built tents and double bunks for 300 enlisted men.
3. Built galley and mess halls for personnel.
4. Built shower and latrines for personnel.
5. Installed distilling unit with tanks.
6. Erected 2 Quonsets for small boat repair.
7. Timbered shipway for small boats.
8. Erected fuel tank for storage.
9. Built 100 ft. of wooden dock.



## NEMOURS

After traveling from Arzew to Beni Saf by L.C.T., one platoon of Company "D" was sent by truck to Nemours. This small village was located in the extreme northwest corner of Algeria and marked the extent of the Battalion's activities in that direction.

After their arrival, tents were set up on a concrete ramp near the waterfront to serve as living quarters. An old building was cleaned and repaired to be used as a mess hall and galley. Barb wire fences were built around the area and guards were posted. Ships loaded with the necessary materials for the construction of a small amphibious base arrived. As lumber was very scarce all boxes, crates and dunnage was carefully salvaged. Typical of Nemours, as of most North African towns, was the lack of fresh water. To remedy this condition a distillation unit capable of converting 5,000 gallons of sea water into fresh water every twenty-four hours was installed. Storage tanks were built, existing plumbing was disinfected, and all necessary new water lines were laid. To furnish power for the base, a diesel-driven generator was set up and power lines were strung. A large French residence was remodeled

and fitted with hospital equipment. Soon our efforts were rewarded with a smooth running and comfortable base from which to operate.

The town of Nemours was typical of all coastal North African towns. Built on the side of a steep, bare hill, it gave the impression of being constantly in danger of falling into the sea. With the exception of the main boulevard the streets ran helter skelter along the hillside, twisting up and down at will. The harbor was protected by breakwaters of concrete blocks. As this port had been a fishing center of some importance during peace times, facilities for the handling of fish and the drying of nets lined the docks. The surrounding country comprised of rolling bare hills totally lacking in native vegetation. On the plateaus, where the soil made farming possible, the ground was given over to the cultivation of wine grapes. The people were of a friendly nature and seemed glad of the Allied occupation of their country. We spent a busy month at Nemours and returned to Arzew by truck just in time to be on hand for the first air raid at that camp.

### APRIL AND MAY

#### Built Advanced Amphibious Base.

1. Altered warehouse and built double bunks for enlisted men's barracks.
2. Installed plumbing in hotel for officers' quarters.
3. Installed distilling unit and fresh water system.
4. Re-roofed and re-floored warehouse for enlisted men's mess.
5. Installed 250 cu. ft. refrigerator.
6. Erected Quonset for shower and latrine.

# TENES

Shortly after our arrival in North Africa, Company "C" was designated to move eastward to Tenes and establish a base at that point. The trip over 130 miles of narrow, winding road through the strange African countryside proved to be a continuous unfolding panorama of colorful scenes. The route led along the irregular coast line, for the most part following the water's edge. At other times the road wound high among the steep hills which rose directly out of the sea. Occasionally one could catch a glimpse of a jackal slinking about in the brush-choked gullies looking for strays from the Arab tended flocks. Deep valleys which cut the hills at irregular intervals were spanned by narrow arched bridges of unusual beauty.

The entire trip was traversed without accident and we arrived in plenty of time to sweep out an old French warehouse on the Quay of Port de Tenes and to cook the evening meal over an open fire before it got dark. Then, by the light of the jeep headlamps we made up our bunks for the night and posted guards for we were strangers in a strange land. However, it made us feel a little more at home to remember the huge road sign we had passed that day reading: "San Francisco City Limits." Evidently Los Angeles had been a little late with their incorporation papers.

All night the guards kept complaining of shadows on the gloom just beyond the limits of their post and when the cold, grey dawn swept down over the Mediterranean we found an advanced unit of the A.A.T.B. (Advanced Amphibious Training Base) waiting for us to build them a camp. On the side near the shore-line we discovered that the native French Algerian troops had posted guards

to protect us from the Arabs. We learned that this protection was not for our lives but rather for our stores. These supplies the native Arabs valued far above any such monetary values that we had placed on our possessions. We were now in the land where the law of supply and demand was first enacted. A mystery to us, was where these apparently impoverished people got so many francs to offer for our belongings. However, the answer became apparent when we received our first laundry bills.

The first week was spent in erecting a tent city on the muni-

cipal playground. This housed all of "C" Company and the A.A.T.B. personnel until supplies arrived from Arzew so that a more permanent base could be built. The playground was located at the foot of a steep mountain and boasted of one of the finest white-sand beaches in Algeria. Close by was the Port De Tenes. A beautiful but entirely man-made port consisting of a long pier extending out from shore with the open sides protected by stone breakwaters. The entire port was dominated by a huge grain elevator which the Seabees promptly commandeered. Here was built a signal platform which was manned day and night. Plans for the future buildings were quickly drawn and a survey party came from Arzew to transfer the plans onto the ground. Quonset huts began to spring up almost before the stakes were set. Power wires, city water pipes, distilled water pipes, salt water pipes, steam lines, telephone lines soon had the draftsman pleading for more and different colored pencils. The men continued to turn out work faster than it could be traced on the plan.

The city of Tenes was situated on the crest of a large hill overlooking the sea. The top of the hill was reached by a series of inclined walks and stair steps rising some 200 vertical

feet. The wide paved streets flanked by light-colored shop fronts lent a clean and clear-cut air to the city. Tenes was primarily a military town. Here, the French trained and maintained a large force of French Colonial troops. The city square and parade grounds were dominated by the huge barracks of native stone adjoining them.

Tenes did not have an air raid while the Seabees were there, however, the LCT 33 (Landing Craft Tanks) shot down a Junkers 88 Bomber shortly after leaving Tenes for Algiers. This

bomber was one of Germany's largest and crashed into a hill-side only 15 miles from town thus enabling many of the men to view the remains and secure souvenirs. There were, however, no souvenirs to be found the evening an English manned Hudson Patrol Bomber exploded in mid-air directly off-shore from the Tenes Base. The exact cause of this explosion was never known. Crash boats immediately sped to the area but were only able to locate two of the crew and these men never regained consciousness.



After the base at Tenes was well started it was decided to build another some 107 kilometers (67 miles) eastward at the small town of Cherchell. The necessary men were loaded aboard trucks and driven to their destination over a narrow, winding, hard surfaced road. Here the country grew more broken and mountainous and the brush covered hills gave way to peaks of some size covered with a stunted pine growth.

Those of us that were named to represent Company "C" at this base were indeed fortunate. Cherchell proved to be a beautiful place that had not been greatly affected by the rigors of war. The city was clean, the people neatly dressed and a general air of well being predominated the town. The

#### APRIL AND MAY

##### Built Advanced Amphibious Base.

1. Erected 27 Barracks Quonsets.
2. Erected 9 Galley and Mess Quonsets.
3. Erected 3 Head and Shower Quonsets.
4. Erected 2 Laundry Quonsets.

stores and shops still had a fair supply of merchandise and everyone seemed to be living a normal, happy life.

In the days of the Roman Empire, Cherchell had been a great center of power and was, after the fall of Carthage, the leading Roman city of Africa. Many objects of art from these days had been collected and placed in a park over-looking the harbor. On the outskirts of town were the ruins of a Roman amphitheatre as well as those of an open air theatre. In the harbor, waves could be seen breaking over an old Roman breakwater. It was indeed interesting to come in contact with the site of a one time great Roman capitol and it was with regret we left when our work was finished.

5. Erected 1 Recreation Quonset.
6. Altered cottages for 25 bed dispensary.
7. Altered villas and erected 3 Quonsets for officers' quarters.
8. Installed distilling unit with fresh and salt water tanks.
9. Altered building for machine shop.



Quonset Camp at Tenes—City in Background



Port of Tenes (Above)

Port of Cherchell (Below)

Quonset Camp, Cherchell (Below)



# BIZERTE

Indicating how closely our Battalion's activities were coordinated with those of our actual fighting forces is the fact that Company "B" arrived in the Tunis-Bizerte area while "mopping up" was still being done by the army. This group left Arzew aboard L.S.T.'s and L.C.I.'s (Landing Craft Infantry) along with an advance unit of amphibious replacement men. As both bases were in need of construction men, the company divided into two parties. Those that were nominated to serve at Bizerte spent their first day loading prisoners for shipment out of the combat area. Divers and salvage crews immediately started clearing the channel into the inner harbor and checking it for under-water mines. This work was made doubly hazardous by the enemy action taking place in the adjacent hills. On the day after their arrival small boats were running into the inner harbor and the Navy personnel was quartered in barracks at La Pecherie. This had been, under French control, a submarine station, and had been used as a naval operating base for each successive nation. Litter from French, German, and Italian forces covered the floors of the buildings and the surrounding yards. Cleaning crews set to work at once to make the place sanitary and livable. A machine shop was set up near the waterfront and mechanics started to rebuild and overhaul all damaged equipment. Numerous German and Italian cars, trucks, and motors were in this manner put to work for the Allied cause. Evaporators were set up and started the job of converting sea water into fresh water for us on the base. Large diesel generators furnished power until the French system could be put back in order. In the meanwhile the waterfront had been cleared and larger ships could take advantage of the inland harbor. Large numbers of L.S.T.'s and L.C.I.'s unloaded supplies, equipment, and the rest of the 54th Battalion began to arrive and the work assumed new proportions.

The harbor at Bizerte is unique. By constructing a channel some five miles long the French were able to utilize a large inland lake. This made it possible for large ships to unload their cargo at Ferryville, a city of about 10,000 population, twenty miles inland from Bizerte. The open or sea end of the Channel was well protected by stone and concrete breakwaters. Along this estuary the French importers and exporters had their warehouses. Foundries, grain elevators and gasoline storage tanks were all accessible to water-borne transportation.

Four miles from Bizerte along the channel was the small town of La Pecherie. Here the French had established a submarine base. Large barracks and administration buildings had been built as well as an elaborate system for the storage of munitions. Large concrete air-raid shelters gave protection from air attack. Along the water front many narrow finger piers had been built, each complete with facilities to refuel and re-water small ships. The grounds within the confining walls of the base had been beautifully landscaped. Although

this base had been somewhat disrupted by sabotage and bombings, no serious damage had been done and it was quickly taken over by our Navy for an operating base.

Farther along the channel, near its junction with the lake, was the French Naval Air Base of Karouba. On a large flat piece of land enclosed by high stone walls, large hangars of both steel and concrete had been built. A wide strip along the waterfront was surfaced with crushed stone and oiled. This air station with its large hangars for storage and its hard surfaced beach was made to order for a supply depot. Here L.S.T.'s could be unloaded, overhauled, refueled and re-watered with a minimum of effort. Barracks and office buildings to house staff and personnel left little to be desired. It was here that the Navy's Amphibious group set up their work shops.

The bulk of the Battalion arrived in Bizerte from Arzew and Tenes at different times. The trip was made on L.S.T.'s and although the convoy was never under attack, enemy planes bombed coastal cities within our view. Those men that arrived first were quartered with Company "B" at La Pecherie. Seeing the necessity for establishing our own camp, a site was chosen in an olive grove about a mile inland from Karouba. All available men went to work with a will erecting a tent city. A Quonset hut galley was built and plumbers and electricians quickly installed the equipment. Carpenters built tent floors while crews of men put up the tents and staked them down. Everyone was in a hurry to move as "Adolf's Boys" had found La Pecherie an interesting place and our nights were broken by frequent and hurried trips to the air-raid shelters. When this camp was nearing completion and anticipation running high, orders came to abandon the location and move to a point some four miles farther on—"Ours not to reason Why."



The new camp site was located at the foot of a range of hills and was reached by a narrow, rough, dirt road. Here among the olive trees and Arabs our new camp was built. Tents were set up under the trees to make them as inconspicuous from the air as possible. Galley and mess halls were built in the open and camouflaged. The Arab families who resided in the area were asked to move. Roads were built through the camp area and oiled with the waste oil from the sabotaged tanks at La Pecherie. A rifle range was built on a nearby hill and used by both Army and Navy personnel. One of the outstanding features of the camp was its outdoor theatre. Men of all the armed forces, French, English, Canadian, and American, filled the seats and stood in crowds around the screen at all pictures. The ice cream mixer, which the Seabees built from odds and ends, was in action whenever the necessary materials were on hand. This camp became famous for its good food and hospitality and was called the "Navy's Country Club" by the other branches of the armed forces. Visitors by the hundreds dropped around for a dish of ice cream or to attend the outdoor picture show. Later, when time permitted, a large wooden recreation hall was built and the theatre was moved inside.

The country surrounding Bizerte was broken by high rocky hills rising from the plain. The low-lands or plains were given over to the raising of grain and grapes. In some areas shallow wells furnish water for irrigation and here the French raise all kinds of garden truck.

The Arabs of Bizerte were a cleaner, more intelligent and industrious people than those of Arzew. Each family seemed to have a small plot of ground for their own use. This they tilled with oxen and planted by hand. The harvest was a community affair with each family helping until all the grain was under cover. Even the small children were busy and herds of cattle and goats under their care were always in sight on the rocky hills.

While stationed at the base the battalion was attached to the amphibious forces. A large concrete hangar at the Air Base of Karouba was taken over to serve as a base of operations. Here, in small rooms along the side, were set up the administrative offices of the Command, Personnel, Disbursing and Supply. Other rooms were set up to house plumbing, paint and electrical shops. At the rear of the hangar a complete wood working shop was installed, while the front portion was used to store supplies. Directly in back of this hangar, in a separate building, the transportation office set up their staff and machine shop. On an adjacent vacant lot all the battalion's construction equipment and rolling stock was parked. These two buildings were the Seabees "Hub of the Universe" and from them emanated not only the orders on

the job but the equipment and materials as well. Existing buildings at La Pecherie and Karouba were renovated and the electrical and water systems repaired. Galley and mess halls as well as additional living quarters for amphibious and small boat crews were built. L.S.T.'s and L.C.L.'s were unloaded and repaired, refueled and made seaworthy. A connecting road between LaPecherie and Karouba was built along the water front. Considerable work was done to further both the invasion of Sicily and Italy and the 54th Battalion's men accompanied each invasion. On the railroad siding crews of men worked day and night unloading the supplies that came overland and trucking them to a central supply depot. At Ferryville the L.C.T. fleet set up a repair base and replacement center. For this group the Seabees built a galley and mess halls, two large 100 by 40 Quonset huts as well as a number of smaller Quonset huts for office and living quarters. These were busy days and everyone worked hard and long. By fall, however, after the invasions, everything was running smoothly and the work resolved itself into the repair of damaged boats and the maintenance of the base.

#### JUNE, JULY, AUG., SEPT., & OCT.

General clean-up. Rebuilding & Maintenance. Karouba & La Pecherie Naval Base.

1. General repairs on buildings.
2. Plumbing.
3. Salvage work.
4. Dredging.
5. Road construction.
6. Engineering, surveying and drafting.
7. Erected 50 Quonsets.
8. Loaded or unloaded approximately 200 ships and 150 R.R. cars.
9. Electrical installations.
10. Sorting and maintaining cargo dump.
11. Refueled approximately 250 ships.
12. Built and operated drydocks.
13. Carpenter work.
14. Welding, construction and repair.
15. Installation and operation of nine distilling units.
16. Erection of steel tanks.
17. Ship repairs.
18. Operation of heavy equipment.
19. Painting of approximately 150 boats, 1 hospital and 1 building.
20. Built pontoon ramps for L.S.T.'s.
21. Rigging.
22. Mechanical repairs of equipment.
23. Built flotilla base at Ferryville. 80 tents with floors. Galley & mess buildings. Showers and latrines. 2 generator houses.
24. Built Sea-Bee camp. 140 tents with floors. Galley & mess halls. Wash rooms. Showers, latrines, laundry, recreation hall, rifle range, hobby shop, basketball court, baseball diamond & boxing ring. Installed electric lights in all tents.



# LA GOULETTE

On May 9, 1943, three platoons of Company "B" loaded gear and equipment aboard L.S.T. 385 for the trip from Arzew to our new base. These were the last days of Axis power in North Africa and nerves were keyed to a high pitch. Gun crews manned the turret twenty-four hours a day. Lookouts on deck and bridge scanned the horizon and cast watchful eyes skyward. "General Quarters" was sounded many times on the alarm system but luckily the danger was always slight or non-existent. After a four-day trip we sailed into the harbor of our new base with the sound of the big guns on Cape Bon in our ears.

This Base turned out to be La Goulette, a small town built on a narrow strip of land separating the Mediterranean from the large shallow Lake de Tunis. The French had constructed a channel through the lake so that the inland city of Tunis could be served by waterborne transportation. La Goulette acted as a port of entry and clearing house for all shipping in the district. The city itself was pleasant, with wide paved streets, large buildings, and tree shaded walks. Large docks, machine shops, and naval installations made this city a key point in the closing battle for North Africa.

Axis forces were making a desperate attempt to stop the Allies in this sector and we arrived only two hours after La Goulette had fallen. Many booby traps and signs of a recent hurried exit were all that was left of Adolf's "Supermen." Crews of divers and salvage men went to work at once to clear the harbor. An attempt had been made by the Axis to block the channel by sinking boats across it. All ships on the water front had been scuttled at their moorings. Mines and delayed action bombs were numerous.

Our first night ashore was spent in an old French Zouave barracks. What a night! The place was full of educated bed bugs. When it was too crowded for them to crawl up the legs of the cots, they climbed up the walls and volplaned from the ceiling. Everyone was up in plenty of time for breakfast. The next day we moved into the town of La Goulette

proper. Half of the detachment took over an Italian school building while the others moved into a villa formerly occupied by an Italian banker. This was quite a place, with tiled floors, tiled bath, a radio and even Grandpa's picture on the wall.

There was much to be done and everyone went to work with a will. Crews built galley and mess halls. The water system was checked and repaired. Diesel generators were set up to furnish power and light. Large portable refrigerators were installed and put into operation. Small cottages that had formerly housed German officers were cleaned and renovated for use by our officers. A small dry dock was cleared, cleaned, repaired and placed in use. Water tanks were built and salt water evaporators started converting sea water to fresh water for domestic use. On the water-front crews were unloading supplies and trucking them to a supply base. Salvage crews cleaned the beach of all broken and damaged equipment. A machine shop was set up and all usable cars and trucks were repaired. In a short time our efforts were rewarded with a smooth running and efficient base ready for any emergency.

The Germans had informed the natives that the Americans were very bad people and it was some time before many natives were in evidence. However, as soon as they learned that we didn't eat little babies or push small ducks in the water, they began coming from the hills and cactus patches. Everywhere we went we were followed by the plea for bon bons, chewing gum, cigarettes for Papa, soap and tooth paste; they would take anything.

The country surrounding La Goulette was broken by high hills that arose steeply from the plain. Grain, grapes and olives were the chief agricultural products. The large fields and vineyards were tilled by Arab workmen and owned by French landlords. Here for the first time in Africa we saw tractors in use. On the waste land and hills herds of cattle and goats grazed, tended by Arab children. Where water was available from shallow wells, irrigation allowed the growth of garden truck. The method of getting this water onto the land was centuries old. A skin bucket was fastened to a soft fiber rope which in turn ran through a pulley on the wellhead. When pulled from the well by

oxen or camels the bucket was tripped into a stone trough and the water ran out into the ditches. Pumps were unheard of. At the oldest well in the district the continual wear of the rope against a marble slab had cut grooves to a depth of ten inches in the solid stone.



About three miles from La Goulette lay the old city of Carthage, now called Salambo. Here were to be found many ruins of a fallen empire. Still visible was the old harbor with its enclosing breakwaters and stone piers. On a nearby hill broken walls and tiled floors marked the site of a one time residential district. Large marble columns flanking a raised stage and terraced seats marked the location of an open air theatre. At the top of the hill overlooking the bay and surrounding country was a Cathedral. Although neglected after the fall of Carthage it was restored to order in 1812 and was said to be the finest in North Africa. Some distance from the old city were the remains of a Roman amphitheatre. Underground cells of solid rock left no doubt as to where prisoners and wild animals had been held while awaiting a day of sports. Both these theatres had been used by the Axis as ammunition dumps.

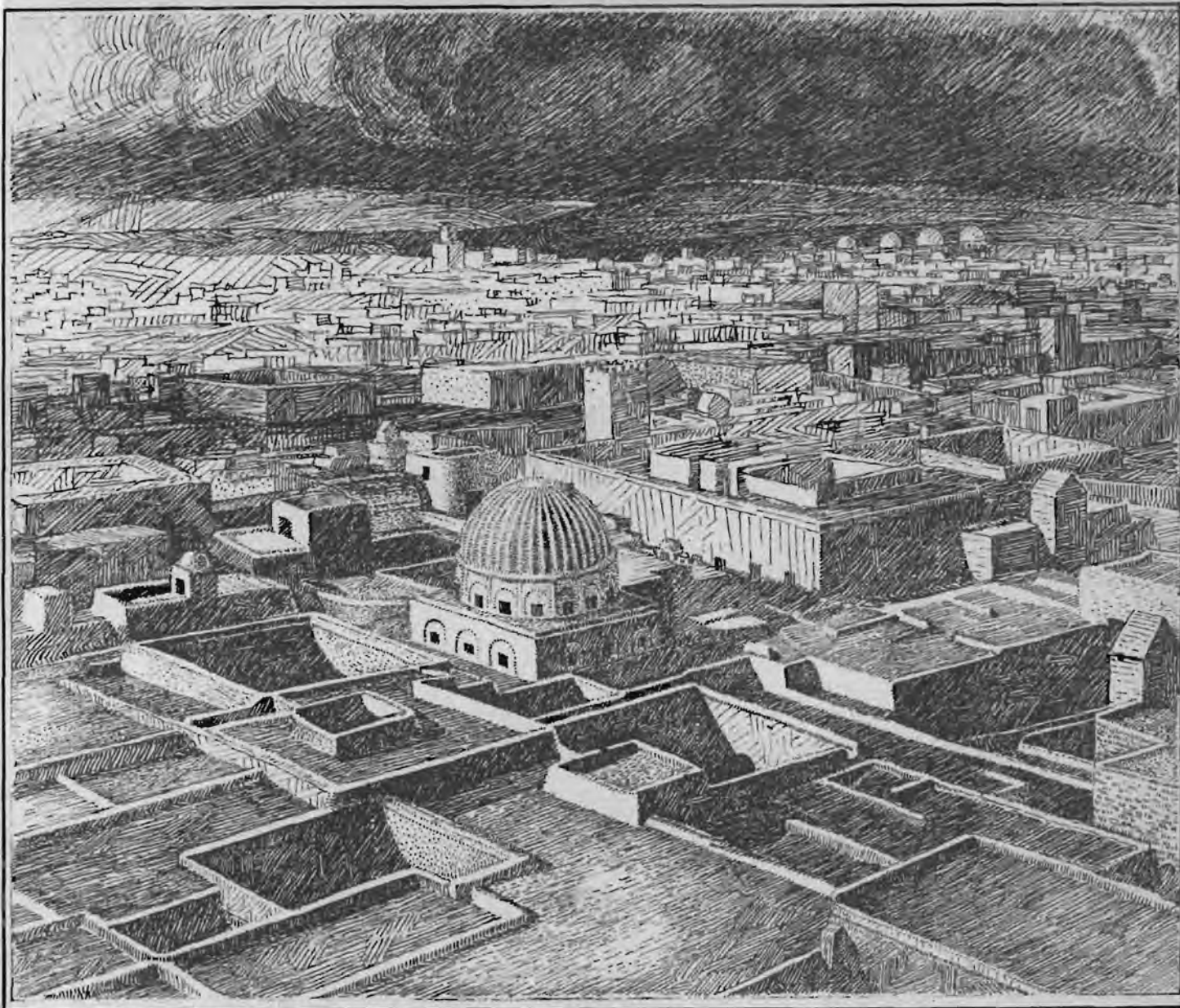
Near La Goulette are the three towns of Sidi-Bou-Said, Le Kram and La Marsa. Sidi-Bou-Said, which was built on the highest hill in the region, was inhabited by the better class

of Arabs, which we found to be very pro-German. From the crest of this high hill, looking out over the sparkling blue bay one could see the rugged outline of Cape Bon extending into the Mediterranean toward Italy. Below lay the Lake of Tunis and the ruins of a bygone race. Squares of greens and browns dotted by the gleaming white of the buildings lent color to the scene. It was on the crest of this hill that the Seabees built and maintained a signal tower to ward off unexpected attacks by the enemy.

Le Kram and La Marsa were located on the Mediterranean and served as a summer resort for the city of Tunis. The long white sandy beach with cottages and the warm surf made these towns popular during the hot months. The Bey of Tunis, or head man of the Arabs in Tunisia, maintained two complete summer homes in this area.

We spent four busy, happy months at this base and then returned to Battalion Headquarters at Bizerte, the home of "Dirty Gertie."





## CITY OF TUNIS

Tunis, a thriving metropolis, is situated along the shores of Lake de Tunis. The city forms a connecting link between the ancient site of Carthage and rugged, mountainous Cape Bon. Progressing from the waterfront Tunis has been built upon the surrounding hillsides. From the Palace of the Bey of Tunis, an excellent view is obtained. In the foreground are seen the vaulted roofs covering the Medina and its narrow, twisting streets. Domes and minarets of the mosques and holy places burst from this hodgepodge forming a truly picturesque setting.

In the distance is the European section. Its modern buildings and apartment houses contrasting sharply with the ancient native buildings in the foreground. The two, native and modern, are set off by an excellent view of the Lake framed by the terraces of Carthage on one side and the cliffs and mountains of Cape Bon on the other.

The city offers never-ending contrasts. Along the wide Avenue de France, with its central tree shaded park, are

found modern stores, shops and theatres. Here also is a place to lounge. Tables are set on the terraces of the many cafes opening directly onto the street.

The Medina, or native section, in sharp contrast to the Modern or European section, consists of narrow winding streets. Many are in deep shadow but here and there a bright shaft of sunlight falls on a native craftsman plying his trade in front of a single stall shop. Here is encountered the real feeling of the mystic East. Veiled Arabian women hurry by with never so much as a sideways glance. Bearded men lounge in convenient spots giving the impression that they are reading your innermost thoughts. From behind the heavy walls can be heard occasional laughter and noises of family life, forever shut off to the Westerner.

This, then, is Tunis. A huge metropolis embodying two distinct developments in the history of North Africa. The traditional and the modern living distinctly, but mingling in the pursuit of everyday living.

## 54<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Battalion

### Chronology

- 24 Dec 1942 Battalion commissioned at NCTC, Camp Bradford, Norfolk, Virginia.
- 28 Dec 1942 Transferred to NCTC, Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Virginia, for military training.
- 22 Jan 1943 Departed NCTC, Camp Peary, Williamsburg, VA.
- 23 Jan 1943 Arrived at ABD, Camp Thomas, Davisville, R.I. for advanced military training.
- 22 Feb 1943 First Echelon (541 enlisted men and 14 officers) departed ABD, Camp Thomas, Davisville, R.I., for Bayonne, N.J., fft to Algeria, North Africa.
- 23 Feb 1943 First Echelon sailed from U.S. on L.S.T.s 386, 333, 385, and 388.
- 28 Feb 1943 First Echelon arrived Bermuda, B.W.I.
- 03 Mar 1943 First Echelon sailed from Bermuda, B.W.I.
- 04 Mar 1943 Second Echelon (524 enlisted men and 13 officers) departed ABD, Camp Thomas, Davisville, R.I., for Staten Island, N.Y., fft to Algeria, North Africa.
- 05 Mar 1943 Second Echelon sailed from U.S. on U.S.S. Anne Arundel.
- 19 Mar 1943 Second Echelon arrived at Oran, Algeria, N. Africa.
- 21 Mar 1943 Second Echelon arrived at Arzew, Algeria.
- 25 Mar 1943 First Echelon arrived at Gibraltar.
- 26 Mar 1943 First Echelon sailed from Gibraltar.
- 27 Mar 1943 First Echelon arrived at Arzew, Algeria.
- Apr 1943 Battalion operating at Arzew, Mostaganem, Charchel, Port-Aux-Poules, Tenes, Beni-Saf, and Nemours, Algeria, North Africa.
- 09 May 1943 First Echelon (221 enlisted men and 4 officers) sailed from Arzew, Algeria for Bizerte and LaGoulette, Tunisia.
- 12 May 1943 Second Echelon (299 enlisted men and 7 officers) sailed from Arzew, Algeria for Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 27 May 1943 Second Echelon arrived Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 31 May 1943 Third Echelon (285 enlisted men and 8 officers) sailed from Arzew, Algeria for Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 07 June 1943 17 enlisted men and 1 officer sailed from Arzew, Algeria for Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 07 June 1943 Fourth Echelon (237 enlisted men and 7 officers) sailed from Tenes, Algeria for Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 08 Jun 1943 Third Echelon arrived at Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 12 Jun 1943 17 enlisted men and 1 officer arrived at Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 12 Jun 1943 Fourth Echelon arrived at Bizerte, Tunisia.
- Jul, Aug, Sept, Oct, and Nov 1943 Battalion operating at Bizerte, Ferryville, Tunis, Karouba, LaGoulette, LaPecherie, Tunisia.

ITINERARY OF THE 54TH CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

- 24 December 1942 - Battalion commissioned at NCTC, Camp Bradford, Norfolk, Virginia.
- 25 December 1942 - Transferred to NCTC, Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Virginia, for military training.
- 22 January 1943 - Departed NCTC, Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Va.
- 23 January 1943 - Arrived at ABD, Camp Thomas, Davisville, R.I. for advanced military training.
- 22 February 1943 - First Echelon (541 enlisted men and 14 officers) departed ABD, Camp Thomas, Davisville, R.I., for Bayonne, N.J., fft to Algeria, North Africa.
- 23 February 1943 - First Echelon sailed from U.S. on L.S.T.s 386, 333, 385, and 388.
- 23 February 1943 - First Echelon arrived Bermuda, B.W.I.
- 3 March 1943 - First Echelon sailed from Bermuda, B.W.I.
- 4 March 1943 - Second Echelon (524 enlisted men and 13 officers) departed ABD, Camp Thomas, Davisville, R.I., for Staten Island, N.Y., fft to Algeria, North Africa.
- 5 March 1943 - Second Echelon sailed from U.S. on U.S.S. Anne Arundel.
- 19 March 1943 - Second Echelon arrived at Oran, Algeria, N.Africa.
- 21 March 1943 - Second Echelon arrived at Arzew, Algeria.
- 25 March 1943 - First Echelon arrived at Gibraltar.
- 26 March 1943 - First Echelon sailed from Gibraltar.
- 27 March 1943 - First Echelon arrived at Arzew, Algeria.
- APRIL 1943 - Battalion operating at Arzew, Mostaganem, Charchel, Port-Aux-Poules, Tenes, Beni-Saf, and Nemours, Algeria, North Africa.
- 9 May 1943 - First Echelon (221 enlisted men and 4 officers) sailed from Arzew, Algeria for Bizerte and LaGoulette, Tunisia.
- 12 May 1943 - First Echelon landed at Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 22 May 1943 - Second Echelon (299 enlisted men and 7 officers) sailed from Arzew, Algeria for Bizerte, Tunisia.

- 27 May 1943 - Second Echelon arrived Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 31 May 1943 - Third Echelon (285 enlisted men and 3 officers) sailed from Arzew, Algeria for Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 7 June 1943 - 17 enlisted men and 1 officer sailed from Arzew, Algeria for Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 7 June 1943 - Fourth Echelon (237 enlisted men and 7 officers) sailed from Tenes, Algeria for Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 8 June 1943 - Third Echelon arrived at Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 12 June 1943 - 17 enlisted men and 1 officer arrived at Bizerte, Tunisia.
- 12 June 1943 - Fourth Echelon arrived at Bizerte, Tunisia.
- July, August, September, October, and November 1943 - Battalion operating at Bizerte; Ferryville, Tunis, Karouba, LaGoulette, LaPecherie, Tunisia.
- 21 November 1943 - First Echelon (368 enlisted men and 13 officers) sailed from Bizerte, Tunisia on U.S.S. Tarazed for U. S.
- 23 November 1943 - Second Echelon (482 enlisted men and 10 officers) sailed from Bizerte, Tunisia on U.S.S. Levi Woodbury for U. S.
- 23 November 1943 - First Echelon arrived at Oran, Algeria.
- 27 November 1943 - First Echelon sailed from Oran, Algeria.
- 17 December 1943 - First Echelon landed at Norfolk, Virginia.
- 17 December 1943 - Second Echelon landed at Bayonne, N. J.
- 18 December 1943 - First and Second Echelons arrived at NCTC, Davisville, R.I.
- January, February, March 1944 - Battalion at NCTC, Davisville, R.I. training.
- 10 April 1944 - Battalion moved to ABD, Camp Thomas, Davisville, R.I. for advanced military training.
- 5 July 1944 - First, Second, and Third Echelons (1052 enlisted men and 31 officers) entrained for ABRB, Port Hueneme, Calif.
- 10 July 1944 - First Echelon (370 enlisted men and 10 officers) and Third Echelon (333 enlisted men and 10 officers) arrived at ABRB, Port Hueneme, Calif.

11 July 1944 - Second Echelon (349 enlisted men and 11 officers) arrived at ABRB, Port Hueneme, Calif.

August, September, October, November, December 1944 - Battalion at ABRB, Port Hueneme, California for advanced training.

#### SECOND TOUR OF FOREIGN DUTY.

- 10 January 1945 - Battalion (1024 enlisted men and 32 officers) sailed on U.S.A.T. Cape Perpetua from ABRB, Port Hueneme, California and U. S.
- 17 January 1945 - Battalion arrived at Pearl Harbor, T.H.
- 19 January 1945 - Sailed from Pearl Harbor, T.H.
- 28 January 1945 - Battalion arrived at Eniwetok, Marshall Islands.
- 23 February 1945 - Sailed from Eniwetok, Marshall Islands.
- 4 March 1945 - Battalion arrived at Tacloban, Leyte, P.I.
- 7 March 1945 - Sailed from Tacloban, Leyte, P.I.
- 7 March 1945 - Battalion arrived at Guiuan, Samar, P.I.
- 9, 10, 11 March 1945 - Battalion disembarked at Guiuan, and Tubabao, Samar, P.I.
- March, April, May 1945 - Battalion operating at Tubabao, Guiuan, Inatoulan, Calicoan, and Manicani, Samar, P.I.
- 18 May 1945 - First Echelon (181 enlisted men and 6 officers) left for Mactan Island, Cebu, P.I. on L.S.T. #593.
- 20 May 1945 - Second Echelon (176 enlisted men and 7 officers) left for Mactan Island, Cebu, P.I. on L.S.T. #719.
- 21 May 1945 - First Echelon arrived Mactan Island, Cebu.
- 22 May 1945 - Second Echelon arrived Mactan Island, Cebu.
- 26 May 1945 - Third Echelon (180 enlisted men and 3 officers) left for Mactan Island, Cebu, P.I. on L.S.T. #593.
- 28 May 1945 - Third Echelon arrived Mactan Island, Cebu.
- 29 May 1945 - Fourth Echelon (175 enlisted men and 3 officers) left for Mactan Island, Cebu on L.S.T. #719.
- 30 May 1945 - Fifth Echelon (160 enlisted men and 2 officers) left for Mactan Island, Cebu, P.I. on L.S.T. #741.
- 31 May 1945 - Fourth Echelon arrived Mactan Island, Cebu.

- 1 June 1945 -- Fifth Echelon arrived Mactan Island, Cebu.
- 2 June 1945 -- Sixth Echelon (192 enlisted men and 6 officers)  
left for Mactan Island, Cebu, P.I. on L.S.T. #593.
- 4 June 1945 -- Sixth Echelon arrived Mactan Island, Cebu.





CONSTRUCTION  
BATTALION









