

135th Naval Construction Battalion

Historical Information



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



135th C.B.

NCTC - Peary - Davisville
ABD - Hueneme
Ready Date - 15 May'44
Left ABD - 17 May'44
Location - ~~Licn 5, Hek. 1 (Oahu)~~ Tinian Okinawa

LOG

- 10-23-43 - 135th CB departed Peary 11 Oct'43. (TWX 231351 from Peary to Budocks)
12-15-43 - CNO orders transfer of the 135th CB to ABD Gulfport about 18 Dec. (Conf. Disp. 141845 NCR 6351 from CNO to NCTC Davisville)
4- 8-44 - CNO orders transfer of the 135th CB to Hueneme about 20 Apr. (Conf. Disp. 061845 NCR 5672 from CNO to Gulfport dtd 8 Apr'44)
5-19-44 - 135th CB left ABD Hueneme for PRAY 17 May'44. (WRK)
6-30-44 - 135th CB reported to 2nd Brig. 23 May'44 and assigned to the 7th Reg. (2NOCBrig. 3rd end. dtd 29 May'44 on Hueneme orders NT4-59/P16-4/00 ser 1281 dtd 9 May'44 to Cinc 135th CB.
7- 7-44 - 1 Jun'44 report of 135th CB - operating at Moanalua and Camp Catlin.
8- 9-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of 135th CB - operating at Moanalua Ridge and Camp Catlin.
8-30-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 135th CB - operating at McGrew's Point, Camp Catlin and Moanalua Ridge at Oahu.
9-25-44 - 13th and 135th CB's to be moved about 13 Oct. to Tinian (approx 1528 men). Approx 700 men (remainder of the 13th and 135th CB's) to be booked for casual shipment to LIRP. (Sec. Disp. 22 Sep from Cincpoa to CNO 230045 NCR 5757)

135th C.B.

- 10-12-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 135th CB - Location not stated. Several small detachments were received during the month of Aug.
10-23-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 135th CB - operating at Oahu. Report endorsed by 7th Reg. Estimated date of completion of present assignment is 15 Nov'44.
10-27-44 - 135th CB detached from the 33rd Reg. and ordered to report to the Cinc 6th Brig. (Hawaiian Area NO brigs Conf. ltr HAB-06-HCB/fnf over P16-4/00/10M over Ser 5047 to Cinc of the 135th CB dtd 23 Sep'44)
10-31-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of 33rd Reg. - 135th CB made preparations for departure during the latter part of Sep of the 1st Echelon consisting of 21 off. and 502 men.
11- 1-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of 135th CB - located at Oahu. Batt was secured 27 Sep'44. Report endorsed by 33rd Reg.
1-1-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of 135th CB - no info on location. Report endorsed by 30th Reg.
1-10-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of the 30th Reg. - A draft of 60 men reported to the 135th CB on 18 Oct'44.
2- 7-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 135th CB - location not stated. Report endorsed by the 30th Regiment.
3- 5-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of the 135th CB - location not given. Report end. by 30th Reg.
3-16-45 - ComFwdArea nominates 117th and 135th CBs for mounting estimated 26 May; 13th CB for mounting estimated 26 June. Pending Cincpoa approval, these 3 CBs authorized release from present duties 3 weeks prior to mounting date for rehabilitation and reoutfitting. (Comfwdarea Sec Disp 130943 Mar'45 to Cincpoa & Conservpac)
3-31-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of the 135th CB - located at Tinian. Report end. by 30th Reg.
4-24-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of 135th CB - located at Tinian. End. by 30th Reg & 6th Brig.
4-25-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of the 30th Reg. - The 135th CB came ashore on Tinian on 24 Oct'44. Batt has been alerted and is relieved of all duties on 6 Jun'45.

Location - Tinian 135th C.B.

- 4-28-45 - 135th CB listed as scheduled for BIVE. Approx ETD April. (Comservpac Sec ltr Ser 001581 dtd 11 Apr'45 to ComFwdAreaGenPac)
- 5- 8-45 - The 135th CB is located at Tinian, assigned Okinawa. (Dirpacdocs S.F. 3_ac Rep of 15 Apr'45)
- 5-25-45 - 1 May'45 report of the 30th Reg. - Alerting of the 13th and 135th CBs has been modified by directives recd from higher authority. Lifting schedule for the 135th has been changed to 34 Jun'45. Work stops 3 Jun'45.
- 5-29-45 - 1 May'45 report of the 135th CB - located at Tinian. Rept end. by 30th Reg & 6th Brg
- 6-8-45 - The 135th CB detached from present duty. Proceed in accord with shipping instr and report to Comdr Const Troops APO 331. (Comservpac sec disp 042341 Jun'45 to Com Mariannes)
- 6-27-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 30th Reg - The 135th CB has 31 officers & 1067 men on board for the month of May'45. The 135th CB secured all work on the field on 20 May'45 preparing for forward movement.
- 6-29-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 135th CB - located at Tinian as of 1 Jun. Work secured on 20 May. Report via 30th Reg and 6th Brg.
- 7-29-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 30th Reg - The 135th CB was detached from the 30th Reg on 27 June.
- 8-21-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 135th CB - located on Tinian as of 1 Jul'45. Preparing for forward movement.
- 8-21-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 135th CB - Arrived Okinawa on 17 Jul'45. Report via 17th Reg and 8th Brig.
- 8-21-45 - 135th CB reported to the 11th Brig on 29 July '45. Ordered to further report to the 17th Reg for duty. (8th Brig conf end dtd 2 Aug '45 ser 0222 to CinC, 135th CB).

Location - Okinawa 135th CB

- 8-21-45 135th CB reported to the 17th Reg on 29 July '45. (17th Reg conf end dtd 9 Aug '45 ser 0090 to CinC, 135th CB).
- 8-23-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 17th Reg - The 135th CB reported to the 17th Reg for duty on 29 Jul'45.
- 9-19-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 135th CB - located at Okinawa. Report via 17th Reg & 8th Brig.
- 10-31-45 - For consolidation purposes request inactivation when directed by CNOB, Okinawa the 135th CB. (Comdr., NOB, Okinawa conf disp 291147 Oct'45 to Comservpac).
- 12-4-45 - Comservpac reqs NOB, Okinawa to inactivate 135th CB. (Comservpac spltr ser 5800 dtd 13 Nov'45 to CNOB, Okinawa).
- 12-6-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 135th CB - located at Okinawa. Report via 17th Reg. & 8th Brig.
- 12-13-45 - Officers & men under the command of 17th Reg. are reassigned to 37th Reg. (8th Brg. conf ltr ser 0321 dtd 20 Nov'45 to 9th, 86th, 135th CBs & CEMU 521).
- 1-4-46 - 135th CB reported inactivated since 20 Dec'45. (Comservpac, Pearl disp 032103 Jan'46 to BuPers).
- 1-14-46 - 135th CB reported to 37th Reg. on 21 Nov'45. (CinC, 37th Reg. 2nd end. ser 1836 to 9th, 86th & 135th CBs & CEMU 521).
- 1-14-46 - 135th CB was inactivated on 3 Dec'45. (CinC, 8th Brig. ltr ser 3096 dtd 4 Dec'45 to CinC, 135th CB).
- 1-29-46 - 1 Oct'45 report of 135th CB - location not stated.

INACTIVATED

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
6/3/44	(Lion 6)	-	-	-
6/6/44	Lion 6	En Route	dis. Dec. Dept. SF. Sec. disp. 231854 May.	Personnel departed from Coast 17 May and Equip departed 21 May
7/19	*	Oahu FRAY P.H.	C B report 1 July com 14 sec act disp. 060609 July	
9/20	-	"	Cincpoa sec disp 158813 Sept.	being lifted vessel for augmented Coast Linnar.
9/25	-	(Yimian)	Cincpoa sec 2 20045 Sept.	Loading 21 Sept Eta Man-hall 17 Oct
11/10	-	LIRP (Yimian)	20 Yimian sec act disp. Nov 010521.	
3/13	130943 Mar. sec. nominate 13,117 6135 do substitutes for 43.52 698 - Pine.	(Pine)	Comdesopac sec. 110237 May and Combud decre. sec 130943 Mar.	nominate to be alerted for Pine's. for mounting est. 26 May.

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Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
5/14	-	(Cdr Burke noa-	"alerted to Pine-	
6/12	-	-	by 070029).	
			Comdesopac sec detached present disp 042341 June duty - proceeds report Cdr. Coast. Groups APO-331.	

Aug report shows amount Pine

ON BOARD

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>AUTHORITY</u>
30 Jun'44	31	1051	Rec. p.
1 Aug'44	30	1062	MoR
1 Sep'44	30	1061	MoR
1 Oct'44	30	1025	MoR
1 Dec'44	32	1065	MoR
1 Jan'45	32	1078	MoR
1 Feb'45	32	1065	M6R
1 Mar'45	29	1059	MoR
1 Apr'45	28	1053	BNP625
1 Jun'45	31	1067	BNP625 & R
1 Jul'45		1018	ReCap Sheet
1 Aug'45	31	1018	BNP625 & R
1 Sept'45		999	BNP625
1 Oct'45	32	885	BNP625 & R
1 Nov'45	20	541	BNP625 & R

135th Construction Battalion (INACTIVATED)

CAMP PEARY

In September 1943, some 1100 men, ranging from lads just starting to shave to greyhaired men who had volunteered to serve their country a second time, men from almost every state, were converging on Camp Peary in Virginia. Farewells had been said; Good-bye parties were over; Next, a Seabee "boot camp." As the gates of Peary closed behind them, few fully realized the ominous meaning of the act. And it is well that such was so. A long train ride, hurrying, lines, wonder, strangeness, lonesomeness, made a two-decker bunk a welcome sight that night.

The next morning at 0400, the bugle announced a day that will remain a vivid memory to every man regardless of the age he attains. From one shed-like building to another went the initiate, shouted at, hurried, questioned, ordered to undress and put his civilian clothes in a box in 60 seconds. Now in his birthday clothes, a big number was painted on his chest and he was no longer "John Smith," but that number. The barber asked from what state he came. He was just finishing his answer when the last of his hair fell to the floor and his new friends and future mates roared with laughter. Then they took his picture and put it on an I.D. card so that he could never forget how he looked at that moment. Innumerable physical exams, insurance and experience interviews followed.

Next, the journey through the clothing issue department began where blankets, mattress, sewing kits, steel helmet, towels, etc. were rained down on the already sagging boot. Pants, shoes, blues, whites, jumpers had to be tried on. The sun was setting as this now-befuddled, exhausted future Seabee, reeling and staggering under a mattress cover, now holding some 100 pieces of clothing and equipment, made his way to the big semi-trucks. In a manner destined to remain a mystery, he managed to get himself and his gear aboard the truck which hauled him to his boot camp barracks—a barren, shed-like structure, capable of housing 60 men.

Then, for four long weeks, from 0430 to 2100, it was: fall in, fall out—Hair lip, 1-2-3-4 lectures—obstacle courses—K.P.—shots—general orders—rolling clothes—calisthenics—fire watch—hikes—military training—muster—guard duty—waiting for the first mail—washing clothes with a scrub brush—extra duty for slight infractions—living in close quarters with new, different men—close order drill—gas chamber—manual of arms—inspection that lasted two hours—rain and mud, yet stay neat and clean—scrubbing barracks and "all else in sight"—inter-regional arguments—training films—military courtesy—Scuttlebutt—work details—fading waistlines, sore muscles—dog tags and I.D. card which presaged the end of "boot." This, and much more was crammed into the recent civilian until he felt as if he had been in a tailspin, a period that might be summarized briefly as follows: If you do this, that will happen to you; If you don't do that, this will happen to you.

"Stow gear preparatory for moving in the morning." The order had finally come. On 20 October, the enlisted personnel which were to become the 135th Naval Construction Battalion, moved to the giant B-9 drill hall where awaited the officers of this battalion; men who had just been put through the rigors of officer training.

On this day, a seasoned "salt," viewing these 1100 men, likely would have commented, "They're green, raw, unpolished, but they seem to have the makings of a battalion which will write a proud record for the Seabees and the Navy."

From cruise book of 135th NCB

CAMP ENDICOTT

On the afternoon of 23 October 1943, a band was playing martial music as the 135th Naval Construction Battalion entrained for its journey to Camp Endicott on the shores of Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island. Here, the 135th graduate boots were to take advanced training which emphasized combat techniques. In one month, this Seabee battalion was to be trained to operate efficiently under any of the many unpredictable conditions.

Now clad in green Marine wool pants, shirts and mackinaws, 135th men began attending a wide variety of schools. Some were given extensive training in machine gun, anti-aircraft and automatic weapons; others, in extended order, judo, barge operation and bayonet and hand-to-hand combat techniques; some attended classes in mosquito control, sanitation, laundry, refrigeration, quonset hut construction and general camp maintenance practices. A Seabee battalion had to be self-sufficient. All men attended the dry fire school for training in the use of the carbine and spent a week at the Sun Valley rifle range where they lived in quonset huts for the first time. After a few days of practice firing under Marine instructors, the 135th shot a battalion score surpassed by few if any.

In spite of the busy schedule, life became a little sweeter. Liberty (those few hours the Navy allowed you to catch a fleeting glimpse and remembrance of what civilian life was like) was granted after six weeks of strict confinement. Five o'clock liberty lines two blocks long and crowded busses meant nothing to the 135th mate struggling to reach Providence, Boston or even New York, where he could relax and be himself provided he did not run afoul the shore patrol. Liberty hours passed unbelievably fast; it usually was a rush to get the chit back in the liberty box by 0630. Some failed to make it; others lost wallets containing I.D. cards; the OinC had a new duty—captain's mast.

After 1700 at Endicott, it was undress blues when you took in the movies, sipped some beer, went shopping, bowled, or attended a War Bond dance. Yes, life was a little more worth living now.

In late November, a lovely New England Indian Summer gave way to old man Winter with his sharp bite. In zero weather, short chow lines seemed and were long; hitting the deck on frozen ground was not fun; holding a piece with frost-numbered fingers did not help matters.

"Embarkation leave for men who live East of Mountain Standard Time." Instantly, it was time tables, connections, hours to, wires for money, and no mate was late for his train appointment. While the geographically eligible mates ate Thanksgiving dinner with their families and enjoyed their brief freedom, other 135th men continued the regular routine and ate their first famous Navy Thanksgiving dinner.

Men back from leaves; new men to fill the battalion's complement; advanced training completed; the 135th was ready for its colors. In only 75 days, from a heterogeneous group of 1100 men, the 135th Naval Construction Battalion had been trained, fused and forged into a self-reliant and competent unit.

On 7 December 1943, at a formal review on the parade grounds at Camp Endicott, the battalion was presented its colors and commissioned. It was prepared to fulfill its assignment in the struggle against the Axis.

CAMP HOLLYDAY

On 18 December 1943, the 135th entrained a second time. In three separate sections which travelled over three different routes, the battalion left wintry Camp Endicott and four days later, after a 2,000-mile pullman ride, arrived at Gulfport, Mississippi.

Soon after arrival, Westerners headed for home on embarkation leaves. For those whose freedom had been spent and who were passing Christmas in camp, it was a long, lonesome day.

Navy rules and regulations prescribe clearly how a battalion should function. Knowledge is one thing; to put it into practice is another. Actual operations were necessary. During the four months at Gulfport, the 135th handled jobs and duties of all types and sizes. Each man and each department had the opportunity to learn, understand, and iron out the kinks in himself or his department.

The largest of several sizeable construction jobs undertaken and completed was the Horn Island railroad and dock for which work the battalion received a fine commendation from Army officers. Horn Island was a secret Army experimental base. Smaller jobs were barge dismantling at West Pier, paper and tin can conservation, laying out of simulated mine fields for Army War Dog training, construction of camp structures, while mechanics worked at their trade in Navy shops. Shore patrol, fire watch, messenger, boilerwatch, fence guard were only a few of the many duties.

Military training here included the realistic amphibious landing on Cat Island and its occupation; the hike to the rifle range (18 miles one day, 18 miles the next, a week of firing, then the 36 mile march back, completed in one day); participation in the impressive regimental review; extended order; obstacle course; P. T.; and close order drill.

Camp Hollyday was a pleasant place with its southern pines, warm climate, comfortable barracks with inside plumbing, movies, smokers, stores, attractive messhalls, athletic field, quonset huts, and proximity to fun.

Once outside the gate, a mate was almost certain to have a good time in Gulfport, Biloxi, Pascagoula or Mobile. And, only two hours away was the great liberty magnet, quaint New Orleans with its world famous French Quarter, good food and abundant entertainment. Here, many a 135th liberty hour and dollar went the way of all flesh.

Sports came in for some attention. In a station field meet, the 135th took second place and both the softball and hardball teams left the base undefeated. The 135th military and swing bands were busy playing for dances and reviews. "Scuttlebuzz," the official battalion newspaper, made its appearance.

A Base order decreed that effective Easter Sunday, whites were to replace blues for dress uniform. Rain, red mud and whites called for lots more elbow grease on the scrub brush and bigger washings.

At this time, the Navy undertook considerable reorganizing of C. B. units. Some outfits were broken up into drafts and C.B.M.U.'s; some men transferred to general service; new men came into the battalion; units departed; the 135th was next—maybe; scuttlebutt was always plentiful everywhere. The 135th mates were getting impatient; they wanted to move on.

Four months of handling varied and multiple tasks; mistakes made, corrected, and lessons learned; "boots" of six months ago taking on a more seasoned and polished appearance; the 135th was not perfect, but it was functioning reliably and efficiently. The tempo of the war in the Pacific was increasing.

"Pack your ditty bags." On 20 April 1944, the 135th, led by a band, marched into Gulfport. No doubts this time—it was West into the shadow of the gangplank. But, that is what all had been waiting and asking for, so, "Give the highball, conductor." And he did.

CAMP ROUSSEAU

Through the swamps of the delta country, across the endless expanses of the great Southwest, over the Rockies, into the picturesque San Fernando Valley with its colorful orange groves, vineyards and palms, then a bit north, raced the troop trains. Mates began to realize just how large their country was, of how many smaller and different worlds it was composed.

At Camp Rousseau, situated on the shores of the Pacific with the mountains in the Eastern background, home was a quonset hut, and the bed a cot.

Little time passed before men were in lines being issued their own carbines, Browning automatics, or Thompson sub-machine guns, clips, cartridge belts, ammunition, first aid pouches. Then shelter halves, a poncho, gas mask, mosquito netting, haversack, canteen, mess kit and foul weather gear.

Classes in fixing a full, a light, and a combat pack followed. Again to the rifle range to sight in the weapons. Lectures on gas defense and other military subjects were attended. The trip through the gas chamber was too realistic to be funny. A midnight maneuver, which got every man out of bed to be rushed to the defense of the dock against a fictional attacking enemy, completed the crowded three-week equipping and military program.

During leisure hours, mates enjoyed shopping in the big ship's stores, having pictures taken at the photo shop, drinking beer in the evening in the camp's cosmopolitan business district. Big league baseball, big time shows and movies filled out the entertainment menu.

But, the camp entertainment offerings simply could not compete with the glittering liberty paradise which surrounded the camp. Only an hour or so away was Hollywood with its famous canteen, Hollywood and Vine, movie stars and studios; Los Angeles with its Olivera Street, Chinatown, and about any relaxation a man might seek; Ventura and Oxnard had their attractions, too. This was too good to last. Correct.

Scuttlebutt about the shipping date had crystalized into fact. The date was near. The area became a scene of hustle and excitement; packing supplies and equipment for overseas shipment; getting personal gear in order; good-bye wires and phone calls to the folks at home; last minute purchases of everyday needs. The last days passed swiftly.

On 17 May 1944, as the sun's pre-dawn rays silhouetted the mountains, the 135th partook of its last chow in the U.S.A., last, at least, for a long, long time. Shortly, men were in platoon formation with all their gear and baggage. One man viewing his mates perspiring and plodding along with 80 pound packs on their backs, carbines or other weapons slung over one shoulder, seabags containing a mattress, blankets, pillow on the other, fully equipped belts around them, a gas mask hanging at their left, ditty bags in hand, summed up the picture in a few words when he said, "By God, this is total war."

Up the gangplank, down a narrow hatch into the hold where bunks were selected, went the 1100. Lunch was served—an apple and cookies. Majestically, the S. S. Meteor sailed out of the harbor into the boundless blue Pacific.

The Pacific was putting out the setting sun, twilight changed to darkness, 135th men stood quietly by the rail to catch the last glimpse of their native land, the land they loved enough that they were willing to go to far places to play their part in the defense of it.

That night, in a ship's bunk, thoughts were of home, of the unknown future lying ahead.

HAWAII

The "Meteor's" prow cut a calm Pacific. But, even a calm sea has a roll. This roll caused many a 135th mate to spend much time hanging over the rail. These rail-birds with the greenish-yellow pallor began to believe nature was reversing herself—namely, all that goes down must come up. However, all survived.

For six days it was general quarters at sunrise and sunset, lugging Mae Wests around, watching flying fish in the day, and the brilliant phosphorus in the sea at night, sky and water, water and sky. In the early dawn of 23 May a small speck appeared on the horizon and soon Diamond Head was clearly visible. Ahead was Hawaii, "the cross roads of the Pacific," the land of the Hula, poi, and lei, where rain falls while the sun shines brightly, where palms and sugar cane sway in the gentle ocean breezes, where American military might assembled and moved forward against Japan.

As the "Meteor" slowly eased its way through bustling Pearl Harbor, men jammed the rails to view an almost unbelievable array of American naval strength. Wherever one looked there were countless naval craft of all descriptions. Some ships, headed for battle, were new in appearance. Others had seen action and carried battle scars.

Amid the noise and commotion of this busy harbor, the 135th disembarked and was taken to an incomplete area on Moanalua Ridge where mountains rise to the east and Hickam Air Field and Pearl Harbor lie to the southwest and west.

The battalion quickly completed the barracks and the area. Promptly, men of the 135th were helping to build facilities and handling other assignments vital to this gigantic base which served as the springboard of the U. S. Pacific offensive. This offensive was gaining momentum rapidly in August, 1944. An assignment in a far forward area was imminent; additional realistic military training was essential. The marches to Red Hill, the climbing of it, sitting in fox holes and crawling on one's belly on top of it were realistic enough. The eight mile trudge up the mountain to the bivouac made the eight miles back a long, long trail that day. The sham battle on the mountain top in a pineapple field was another full day. On military training days, the sun had a habit of boiling down, humidity was always high, and "water discipline" was strictly enforced.

Liberty broke the work-training schedule. On Oahu were many scenic wonders and places of interest. Honolulu, with its many races of people and its mixture of native and modern life, was nearby. On Sundays, groups piled into trucks with beer and sandwiches and went over Pali Pass, where it is always raining, to the beaches for a picnic and swim. Many learned that Kanaki juice was a poor substitute for the real product.

In September the flag pole went up. The battalion was ordered to an undisclosed forward area. On 29 September, the first echelon went up the gangplank of the APA, U.S.S. Adair, and ten days later the second echelon went aboard the Dutch liner, Tjisadane. After layovers in the Marshalls, both ships headed west for Island "X".

Batting practice was over; the deciding game of the world series between the United States and Japan was about to begin. The 135th was ready to take its place in the lineup and it was well it was conditioned and prepared.

TINIAN

Tinian is one of the Marianas Islands lying near the southern extremity of the Archipelago. Primarily devoted to the raising of sugar cane, the island has no industrial importance, but it is an important link in the easterly of the two island roadways from Japan to the Mandates to the south. Tinian is two and three-quarters miles southwest of Saipan, is ten and one-half nautical miles long and has a maximum width of five miles. It covers approximately forty-eight square miles and has thirty-four miles of shore line consisting of steep rocky cliffs covered with dense vegetation.

The civilian population of Tinian ran close to fifteen thousand before the assault. Of these, the great majority were Japanese with the balance being made up of Koreans. The Chamorro natives had been removed by the Japanese some time previous. The Japanese were mainly Okinawahs, brought in by the Nanyo Kohatsu Kabushiki Kaisha or South Seas Development Company of Japan. Ruins of the prehistoric Tago race still remain near Tinian Town in the form of monoliths. These were discovered by Spanish explorers in 1565, but little history of the race is known.

The Second and Fourth Marine Divisions began the assault and invasion of Tinian on the morning of July 24, 1944. Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, U.S.M.C., was in command of the Landing and Amphibious Forces. The tactical surprise was great and with the aid of Seabees and their heavy equipment, the beachhead was expanded with rapidity. Twenty-four hours after the Seabees reached the Jap North Airfield, it was being used by American supply and evacuation planes. The Stars and Stripes were raised over Tinian on August 2, 1944, after five thousand Japs had been killed and principal organized resistance had been broken up.

The first echelon of the 135th Seabees landed on Tinian from Higgins landing boats on the early morning of October 24, 1944. A temporary bivouac was set up at "96th Street and Broadway" and during the first few days a permanent campsite was laid out and supplies and equipment were brought ashore. For the first week, K-rations, supplemented only by hot coffee was the only food available. During the second week, the second echelon landed and C-rations became the regular diet for months to come.

Almost at once, the bulk of construction men were assigned to airstrip construction, while battalion shops were constructed, organized and put into operation. The first of over twenty Japanese air raids was experienced during the second week, truck drivers were sniped at during night runs, and several Japs were killed by 135th perimeter guards, but these harassments failed to interfere with normal operations.

During the months to follow, the 135th participated in the construction of every Navy and Army airfield and facility on Tinian. Despite enemy bombing and strafing attacks, a 6,000 foot runway with complete facilities for Navy search and bombing planes was completed within the deadline. This job included the greatest earthmoving feat ever attempted by the Navy. On December 20, 1944, the first 8,500 foot B-29 field was commissioned and the first giant superfortress landed on it the next day. This was only the beginning and construction of a similar nature continued until, with the 135th as the "lead construction battalion," the final super-bomber strip was completed to establish Tinian as one of the greatest military airdromes in the world.

The 135th suffered the loss of three enlisted men on Tinian. Two died as the result of enemy action and one met accidental death from fire arms. In its only tactical contact with the enemy on the island, the battalion was responsible for the killing of twenty-six and the capturing of ten Japanese.

A Miracle of Construction

A news commentator who visited Tinian shortly after the first Superfortress landed on the island told the American public that he had witnessed "miracles of construction"—the accomplishments of Navy Seabees in the development of Tinian Island as an operational base for planes of the 20th Air Force. The 135th Naval Construction Battalion is proud to have helped made these "miracles" possible.

The story of the development of a B-29 airfield on Tinian is an interesting one. The north end of the island, fairly level, was the site of one 4,000 foot Japanese runway with facilities for medium bombers. American forces immediately put this field to use for evacuation and supply planes. The Seabees also made it possible for the Navy to establish there an operating base for Liberator search and bombing squadrons within a month. However, because of the proximity of Tinian to the Japanese homeland, plans were immediately formulated for the construction of a base for B-29 super bombers. Japanese propagandists said that it could not be done, but on December 21, 1944, but 36 days after work on the first strip had begun, Navy Seabees had finished an 8,500 foot runway for the first Superfortress to land upon. Seven hundred thousand cubic yards of earth had been moved, nine hundred thousand truck miles had been piled up. But this was only the beginning.

To begin with, with the exception of the inferior Jap strip, the area was covered with fields of sugar cane, Jap farm houses, enemy oil and ammunition dumps, revetments and dugouts. The first task, after the preliminary survey was completed, was the cutting of the cane and the stripping of topsoil from the solid coral formation of the island. This job took every available shovel, bulldozer, pan, carry-all and truck. Then, the area had to be leveled off before the sub-grade for the airfield could be started. Pans, 'dozers and rooters were unable to do the work without the liberal aid of dynamite, and again and again, the island shook. High points were excavated—low spots were filled. Hundreds of men and hundreds of pieces of equipment worked around the clock. The north end of the island looked like a huge jig-saw puzzle.

Huge coral pits were developed, with hundreds of trucks running day and night from the source of the material where they were filled by power shovels, to the airfield area where dumpmen regulated the disposal of the loads to prevent the slightest confusion. It was like a well-oiled machine—and with the tempo increasing, one by one, problems were overcome and difficulties remedied. The coral was spread, leveled, impacted, rolled—layer by layer—until the final surface had been reached. It was discovered that the action of the salt water, sprayed from tank trucks on the coral as it was spread and rolled encouraged a cementing process. It was also discovered that the pulverizing of the coral by sheepsfoot rollers increased the cement-like formation and speeded the action. All along the line, innovations were introduced as the men observed the results of their work. By the time the first strip was completed, and a little later, after it had been used and subjected to the tremendous weight of the heavy bombers, further improvements in the delicate process were developed and put to use in subsequent construction.

As soon as each phase of the first huge strip had been completed, similar work was started on another. It was mass production. Deadlines were not only being met, they were being beaten and the quality of the workmanship was improving with experience. Military authorities were so impressed with the original facilities planned for the island when they neared completion that additional ones were quickly authorized and further development continued without interruption. The jig-saw puzzle stage was no more.

Among other things, V-J Day gave evidence that these "miracles of construction" had served their purpose well.

OKINAWA

On Easter Sunday, 1 April 1945, doughboys swarmed ashore on the Ryukyus Island of Okinawa, only 325 miles from Japan. The Jap resistance was at first surprisingly light, but it soon stiffened along the Naha-Shuri-Yonabaru line and a bitter struggle which lasted nearly three months cost the lives of many American men and far more Japanese.

On Tinian, the 135th anxiously watched the news of the battle. Word had been received that the battalion was to move forward, and forward could mean only Okinawa. The departure date was originally set for 26 May, but delays because of weather conditions at sea, availability of transportation and changes in orders from the forward area postponed the sailing until 27 June. The five LST's, loaded with the battalion's personnel, supplies and equipment, steamed to nearby Saipan where they took on provisions and fuel. The ships lay at anchor in Saipan Harbor for well over a week and during this period recreation parties were taken ashore to enjoy beer and soft drinks at the Fleet Recreation Area and to tour the island which for months they had seen from across the narrow channel separating it from Tinian.

Finally, on 8 July, the large convoy assembled, the escort vessels took their protective positions and the voyage to Okinawa was under way. Because of the limited accommodations aboard LST's, a large number of men were required to bed down and live topside on the open decks. Amid the trucks, jeeps and heavy equipment lashed to the deck, the men spread tarpaulins for shelter and tried to make themselves reasonably comfortable. The 1200-mile trip was noticeably uneventful, at first. It differed greatly from previous battalion voyages. The apprehension that underwater and air attacks were imminent was not apparent as had been the case for the past several years, and the water was beautifully calm.

But upon reaching the destination, the excitement began. Arriving at Okinawa and attempting to enter Buckner Bay at night, two of the LST's ran aground on a reef. A rising wind and rough seas put these ships and their personnel in jeopardy throughout the next day. The accident occurred on the night of 14 July, and on 17 July the personnel abandoned ship, coming ashore between 2130 and 2315. They proceeded immediately to the camp area assigned to the battalion at the southern end of Baten Ko. The remaining three ships were unloading cargo and personnel at Yonabaru when a typhoon warning forced them to stand out to sea to ride out the storm.

Hardly had the battalion pitched its pup tents before it began work on its assignment, that of building administrative and housing facilities for the Naval Operating Base. But when the job assignments were progressing steadily and the battalion camp was well on the way to completion came the news of the Jap surrender. There was wild shouting and shooting as the men on Okinawa celebrated. Two men of the 135th were injured by carbine bullets as a result of the demonstration. Soon after the official confirmation of the unconditional surrender came the announcement of the Navy point system for discharge. Officers and men began to leave for home and the rest waited.

On 16 September, the Battalion had its first introduction to a typhoon. All afternoon of that dreary day men worked in the driving rain to secure their tents, but in spots where the full force of the wind chose to hit these precautions were of no avail. All in all, twenty-eight tents were blown down, including the OinC's Office, Disbursing Office, Library, and living quarters. Damage to other areas of the island and to shipping in the surrounding waters was considerable.

However, this storm was only a prelude to the typhoon of 9 October, the strongest and most destructive in twenty years. On that date, a wind in excess of 150 miles per hour reduced the 135th camp to just so much twisted steel, broken lumber and scattered debris. Most of the battalion spent the night in a huge cave within the camp area, emerging the next morning to begin rebuilding and to salvage scattered gear. Nearly every part of Okinawa and ships lying at anchor nearby suffered heavy damage. B-29's shuttled food and tents from the Marianas and the Philippines. Camps were soon restored and the storm was only a fearful memory.

More and more men shoved off for home; replacements arrived; then deactivation orders were received. On 7 December, four years after Pearl Harbor, and nearly twenty-six months after its formation, the 135th Naval Construction Battalion ceased to exist as an active organization. It had completed its mission; the enemy had been unconditionally defeated; the ways of peace were ours once more.

RESTRICTED
DECLASSIFIED

PLAIN

ITINERARY OF THE 135th NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

- 11 Oct. 1943 Transferred from Camp Peary, Williamsburg, Virginia to Camp Endicott, Davisville, R.I.
- 18 Dec. 1943 Transferred to ABD, Gulfport, Miss.
- 20 Apr. 1944 Transferred to ABD, Hueneue, California.
- 17 May 1944 Left Hueneue for Pearl Harbor.
- 23 May 1944 Arrived Pearl Harbor.
- 24 Oct. 1944 Battalion departed Pearl Harbor and arrived Tinian this date.
- 1 July 1945 Located on Tinian, preparing for forward move.
- 17 July 1945 Arrived Okinawa.
- 1 Sept. 1945 Located at Okinawa.

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NOTE: This itinerary based on records available in O. R. Operations and Personnel Section of Bureau of Naval Personnel.

Date: 21 September 1945.



BUILD AND FIGHT

U.S.N. SEABEES

✕ 135TH ✕
CONSTRUCTION
BATTALION









