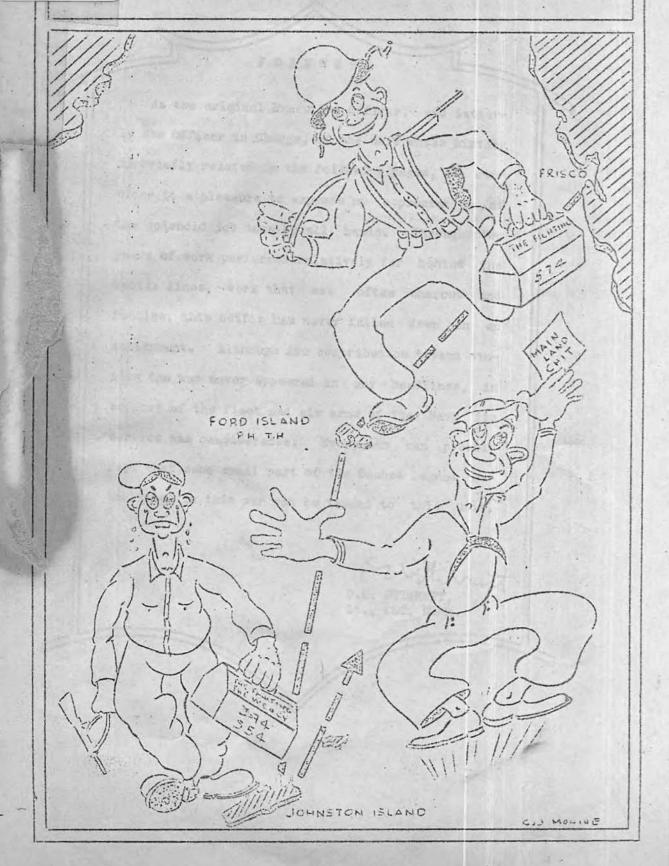


# HE RAMBLING RAIDERS



FOREWORD

As the original Executive Officer, and latterly the Officer in Charge, of the unit whose history
is briefly related in the following pages, I consider it a pleasure to express my appreciation of
the splendid job done by all hands. Through two
years of work performed relatively far behind the
battle lines, work that was often onerous and
routine, this outfit has never fallen down on an
assignment. Although its contribution toward winning the war never appeared in any headlines, in
support of the fleet and air arms of the Navy its
service was considerable. Every man can proudly
feel that some small part of the Seabee legend established in this war can be traced to this unit.

D.N. STIRRETT, Lt., CEC, USNR.

# THE RAMBLING RAIDERS

OR

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN THE LAST TWO YEARS?

\* \* \*

This is the story of the group of Navy Seabees who started out in the fall of 1943 as Company A of the 21st Supernumerary Battalion, went overseas under the name of Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 574 and wound up their wartime career as CBMU 554.

Despite the successively changing unit titles, the original group has remained virtually intact for nearly two years. With only a few exceptions, the 211 men and officers of CBMU 554 who, at this writing, are sweating out demobilization on Johnston Island fought the Battle of Camp Peary together in the old 21st Super and have lived and worked together ever since.

## THE BATTLE OF PEARY

The story begins on a bright autumn day, the first day of November, 1943. Approximately 1,100 men, most of them still dazed after four weeks



of boot training, gathered that day in Area A-3, one of the quieter residential sections of Camp Peary, Va. They thereupon became known as the 21st Super, which was merely a handy title for use during the ensuing month of advanced training. Although the men were not aware of the fact,

it was in the books that Company A would later become CBMU 574 and the other three companies would go forth as CBMUs 575, 576 and 577.

The month in A-3 was memorable. Few will forget the P.T. sessions to which they blindly stumbled each freezing morning before dawn; or the military maneuvers in the woods, when nobody ever seemed to be sure which side he was on; or the really interesting days on the rifle range, where everybody discovered whether or not he was another budding Sergeant York (M-1 style) and where the harassed instructors kept insisting that a trigger is something to be squeezed and not jerked.

It was in A-3, too, that many a wondering construction man discovered that four walls and a roof do not a shelter make. The gales that howled through the cracks in the barracks were enough to make a guy shiver just to think about them - even two years later. But these who slept near the



pot-bellied stoves didn't have to worry about the icy breezes. They were nearly roasted to death. That was one of the novel features of the barracks in A-3: in a single room, at one and the same time, you could freeze or you could swelter, depending on the distance between your bunk

and the stove. Somehow, all hands survived, but there were few who did not acquire at least a sneezing acquaintance with cat fever (known in pre-Peary days as grippe, flu, the common cold, or what have you).

Roundly damned though it was, Camp Peary had its brighter side. It was there the embryo Seabees learned the Navy believes in at least two of life's minor blessings: movies and beer. Both were available nightly. Foam and flickers were to be standard fixtures at every station along the route of this particular group of Seabees.

Available, too, was the quaint town of Williamsburg, which one was free to visit every fourth night. Of course, there was the drawback that the town's world-famous charms were difficult to see, so dense were the crowds of lonesome servicemen who continually milled about looking for something to do on liberty.

The best day at Peary was the day most of the 21st Super left for the long-awaited 10-day pre-embarkation leave at home. The Far-Westerners stayed behind and took their leaves at a later date, but for the others this was the big day. From all accounts everyone made the most of the 10 fleeting days that followed. And after the last fling was over, it was back to Peary to be rehabilitated. That was December 10.

## GO WEST, YOUNG MAN

On December 20 the 21st Super Battalion became a memory and CBMU 574 came into being, along with the other three units that made up the parent organization. That was the day all four groups - each now a separate, commissioned outfit - departed from Camp Peary and headed west. The movement was under confidential orders, and the rank and file didn't know for sure just where they were going until they got there. But no one was very much surprised when, on Christmas morning, the special troop train pulled into the sprawling naval center with the odd-looking name, Port Hueneme, Calif., which was to be home for the next three months.

That winter at Hueneme was a time of contrasts. The celebrated Southern California climate performed at its best and its worst. There were balmy days that matched even the rosiest of the Chamber of Commerce propaganda stories, and there were days reminiscent of the Biblical deluge.

There was the rigid camp life,

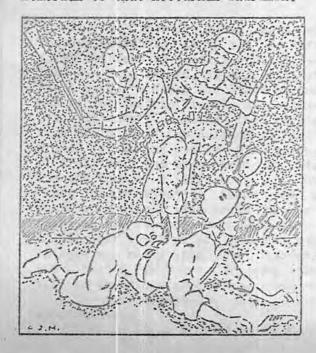
the long hours of work and military training and the everlasting waiting for orders to ship out. But there were also good liberties in nearby



Oxnard and Ventura and, farther down the coast, in Los Angeles and the glittering place called Hollywood. All things considered, Port Hubnoma

was good duty.

In the course of those three months the men of CBMU 574 coined for themselves a nickname which still stands. During a midnight mock battle the never-to-be-forgotten O-in-C of the unit, Lt. Harlow H.Lippincott, led his men with such dash and enthusiasm (getting himself roughed up in the process) that the outfit thereupon became known as Lippy's Raiders. The Raiders never got close to a real battle, but the name endured as a memorial to that nocturnal skirmish.



Half the outfit was slated for a special 60-hour liberty that week-end, didn't make much difference. but it had to be cancelled. The unit packing gear and wondering where Island X would be.

## HEAVE HO! HEAVE HO!

Late in the afternoon of the following Monday, the 13th, the Raiders entrained for Oakland, arriving there shortly before noon Tuesday. From the train they proceeded directly to a ferry which carried them across San Francisco Bay to a waiting escort aircraft carrier flying the British Union Jack. H.M.S. Patroller was at their service.

Gate on Wednesday morning. When well at sea, the captain revealed the destination. Dopesters in the unit had enough, that's what it was. This was one of those rare occasions when the scuttlebutt artists were right.

A few of the Scabee passengers, such as the cooks and bakers, had to with the arrival on the scene of a others the voyage was as carefree as These guarded the disabled carrier a holiday cruise. Sunbathing on the until she got under way and then esflight deck, swapping yarns with the corted her the few remaining miles to British tars, drinking tea each aft- port. It took all night, though, and ernoon in the best English tradition, part of the next morning to finish losing money on tombolo (the British the trip, for the Patroller was able version of bingo) - all these made the war seem remote. The chow was



On Friday, March 10, 1944, came . the only drawback, but since a large an announcement that brought the Cal- proportion of the voyagers on that ifornia sojourn to an abrupt end. rolling sea couldn't have retained Sailing orders finally had arrived. even the best cooked food for long, the questionable quality of the meals

One other sidelight that still. was secured. Everybody went to work sticks in the minds of those who came over on the Patroller was the strange chant that roused them from slumber each morning before dawn. A very British voice would float out of the public address loudspeakers with the chesry message: "Heave ho, heave ho, heave ho! Make a move, make a move, make a move!" Then, after a few minutes of silence, the voice would be back with the admonition: "Ahotion stations in five minutes time." That was the last call, and the late sleepers would tumble out of their bunks and up to the darkened hangar deck, there to wait until the sun The Patroller cleared the Golden rose and the danger of a dawn submarine attack was over.

The trip was supposed to last five days, but on the fifth day, Monbeen whispering for many weeks that day, trouble developed in the engine it would be Pearl Harbor, and, sure room, and the Patroller stopped dead in the water. There it lay for most of the afternoon like a sitting duck. but any uneasiness which the passengers may have felt was disspelled work their way across, but for the pair of destroyers from Pearl Harbor. to make only a fraction of her usual speed.

#### SO THIS IS ISLAND X:

It was shortly after noon on Tuesday, March 21, that the Raiders first set foot on their so-called Island X. Ford Island, it was, site of Pearl Harbor's Naval Air Station and hub of the Pacific Fleet's air activity. It wasn't exactly the rugged kind of Island X the Raiders had been primed for during nearly six months of training. The beach-head was made via the ramp of a ferry boat, and the first inland objective taken was a roast pork dinner (ice cream for dessert) in the island's main messhall.

A newly constructed Quonset hut village was ready for the Seabees, and within a few hours they were settled in their new quarters and beginning to get acquainted with their surroundings.

Lying in the middle of Pearl Har-

bor, bounded on two sides by the picturesque hills of Oahu, Ford Island turned out to be an elaborate layout combining the functions of a landing field, aircraft supply depot, repair center and country club. Looking at the array of warehouses, hangars, shops, barracks, swimming pools, tennis courts - yes, and even an abbreviated golf course - that covered the mile-square island, the newly arrived construction men could not imagine what work there could be left for them to do. But it didn't take long to find out.

# PUTTING UP AND TEARING DOWN '

The CBMU was assigned to work under the station public works department. There was a certain amount of routine maintenance work to be done and a long list of improvements to be made on existing structures. Also, a surprising assortment of new construction jobs.

One of the first projects tossed in the Seabees' laps was construction of a 55-by-300-foot extension to an aircraft assembly and repair building. Among other knotty aspects of that job was the designing of 85-foot timber trusses to support the roof, but the Seabees had the entire project finished in 27 days.

With the battle lines receding westward, the danger of a new attack on Pearl Harbor grew negligible, and now it was time to remove some of the defense works that cluttered Ford Island and took up precious space. The Raiders got the thankless chore of clearing away a number of heavy, reinforced concrete revetments that lined the airstrip. A small crew, using dynamite and a two-ton skull crusher, demolished 40 of them in three months and converted the debris to subgrade fill.

The Seabees were always ready to take on odd jobs. One of the oddest was the hurry-up installation of all interior fittings on two ocean-going aviation supply barges, involving wiring, shelving, refrigeration, and placing of a stiff-leg crane on deck. Working day and night, they filled the order in 11 days. For that feat, they were later commended by a grateful admiral, who cited the valuable role the barges played in support of a forward area operation soon after the Seabees fixed them up.

Another ship job was the installation of "between" decks in the U.S. S. Supply, a 10,000-ton freighter. Thirty tons of steel framing were put in and 60,000 board feet of decking laid. New quarters and heads for the ship's crew were installed, and all was completed in three weeks.

Those are only samples of the work done by the energetic Raiders on and around Ford Island. To mention a few others, they rebuilt and doubled the feeding capacity of a large civilian cafeteria, reorganized the station laundry so that service was cut from 10 days to three, constructed a recreation building for Waves (and never even got to see the future occupants), designed and built an exterior freight elevator shaft for a large shop building and installed the elevator and machinery.

# THE LIGHTER SIDE

Life on Ford Island wasn't all work for the Seabees. The modern movie theater, despite the G.I. formality that sometimes strained the patience of the audiences, provided many diverting evenings. The beer garden wasn't a bad place to kill a few hours. A man had his choice of a variety of sports - baseball, basketball, football, softball, bowling, tennis, handball, swimming. A baseball team organized by the Raiders made quite a name for itself in Oahu diamond circles and wound up the season by winning the championship of Ford Island.

Every-sixth-day liberties made it possible to enjoy the varied attractions Honolulu and its environs had to offer. Waikiki Beach, Diamond Head, Kau Kau Corner and all the other familiar place names were soon old stuff to the liberty hounds. It



wasn't long before they learned there is no north or south in Honolulu - but only ewa and waikiki. And that when the glass is empty, the drink is pau. They discovered, too, that if a man wears his hat at the wrong angle and an SP sees him, his liberty is liable to be pau.

From their vantage point in the center of bustling Pearl Harbor, the Raiders saw many stirring chapters of the Pacific war begin to unfold. Great ships of the fleet gathered at their very doorstep in preparation for new strikes, and it was always plain to see when another invasion "down under" was in the making. And when President Roosevelt came to discuss high strategy with his generals and admirals, the Seabees had a front seat to witness his arrival aboard the cruiser Baltimore.

CBMU 574 acquired some new faces and lost some old ones during those months at Pearl Harbor. Most of new acquisitions were men who gone through Camp Peary in the fall of 1943 and had shipped out in a ship repair unit. But the Navy was doing so well against the Japs, the ship repair business failed to come up to expectations, and consequently part of the personnel was transferred to regular Seabee outfits. Other newcomers to 574 were men fresh from Navy training camps. It wasn't long before all the new arrivals were as thoroughly at home in the unit as the charter members.

Summer had faded into fall and fall was about to give way to winter (though you would never have known it without the aid of a calendar, for the weather was always the same) when it was suddenly revealed that the Raiders were earmarked for another assignment. At a place called Johnston Island, it was said. Many a blank stare greeted that announcement. Few of the men ever even heard of Johnston, much less knew its location.

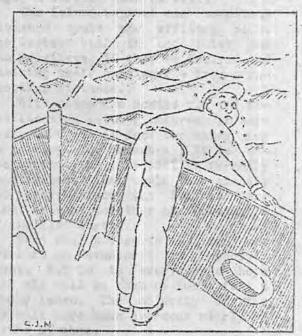
Some keen-eyed student of geography finally spotted it on a map,
and it was established that Johnston
was situated 717 airline miles southwest of Honolulu. Further research
revealed it was a former U.S. bird
sanctuary that had been taken over by
the Navy and converted into an air
station several years back. Two
facts were plain: Johnston was very,
very small, and it was about as isolated a place as one could find anywhere in the Pacific.

The deal was simple. The entire personnel of CBMU 574 would trade

jobs with the personnel of CBMU 554, who were rounding out a full year on Johnston. The unit numbers and all equipment would remain where they were. The transfer was arranged for humanitarian reasons. To keep a man on a rock like Johnston for more than a year would have been equivalent to some of the old Oriental torture tricks one reads about - such as allowing drops of water to fall upon a man's head until he went out of it.

#### LAND OF THE MOANING BIRDS

The Raiders sailed to Johnston in two sections, half the unit arriving on Christmas Day and the other half more than a month later, on February 3, 1945. Both groups made the trip aboard the U.S.S. Panay, a little cargo-passenger vessel that was remarkable for its ability to roll and pitch and all but turn back-flips even when the sea was relatively calm. For those who weren't too sick



and who didn't mind the lack of elbow room, it was a pleasant enough voyage, lasting half a week.

age, lasting half a week.

Soon after the arrival of the second contingent, Lt. Lippincott turned the command of the unit over to his executive officer, Lt. David N. Stirrett, and departed for a new assignment that was to take him to Okinawa as officer-in-charge of CBMU 624.

The Raiders' job on Johnston (and its tiny suburb, Sand Island) was to run the public works department of the Naval Air Station. This involved operating the various utility services such as water and electrical systems, performing construction and

repair work, maintaining equipment, keeping roads and runway surfaces in shape, unloading supply ships, and engaging in numerous other routine but important maintenance chores. Important, because upon the efficient functioning of the air station depended the safety and comfort of hundreds of trans-Pacific air travelers who stopped off each day at the island on their way to and from the forward areas.

It was a dull assignment, no question about it. Confined week after week and month after month to a 176-acre speck of coral in the middle of nowhere, the Raiders found their new life to be anything but a picnic. But they didn't forget that the men in the foxholes 3,000 miles to the west weren't having any picnic, either, so they did their best to bear the isolation and the loneliness with a minimum of griping.

One of the hardest things to get used to was the moaning birds which made Johnston their summer headquarters. Said to be a variety of petrel, these morose creatures filled the night air with their weird repertoire of moans, wails and sobs that sounded like something out of another world like a chorus of lost souls, perhaps.

# HOW TO SPEND A ROPEYARN

Johnston possessed some natural advantages that the Seabees didn't overlook. For those who liked swimming, the sky-blue water of the lagoon at the northwest side of the island was a delight. There was no sandy beach, but the gently-sloping seaplane ramp made a satisfactory substitute. Other popular pastimes were collecting shells among the reefs that surround the island and looking at the magic, underwater scenery through diving masks. Some men spent their leisure time fishing - and a few even managed to catch a big one now and then.

Hobby-lobbying was a favorite and remuncrative - way of passing the
time. Making knife handles, fancy
boxes, rugs, rings and the like was
right down the Seabees' alley, and
there was always a good market among
the less talented members of the community. The handicraft experts were
able to send home many a fat money
order representing profits from their
various specialties.

And, of course, there were the beer garden and the movie hall to help relieve the monotony. One could drop into the latter - an airless,



semi-underground chamber - on a warm evening and not only see a show but enjoy a Turkish bath as well.

The island boasted one sumptuous pleasure spot: the officers club. The Seabees built it and later had the privilege, if they so desired, of admiring their handiwork - from a respectful distance.

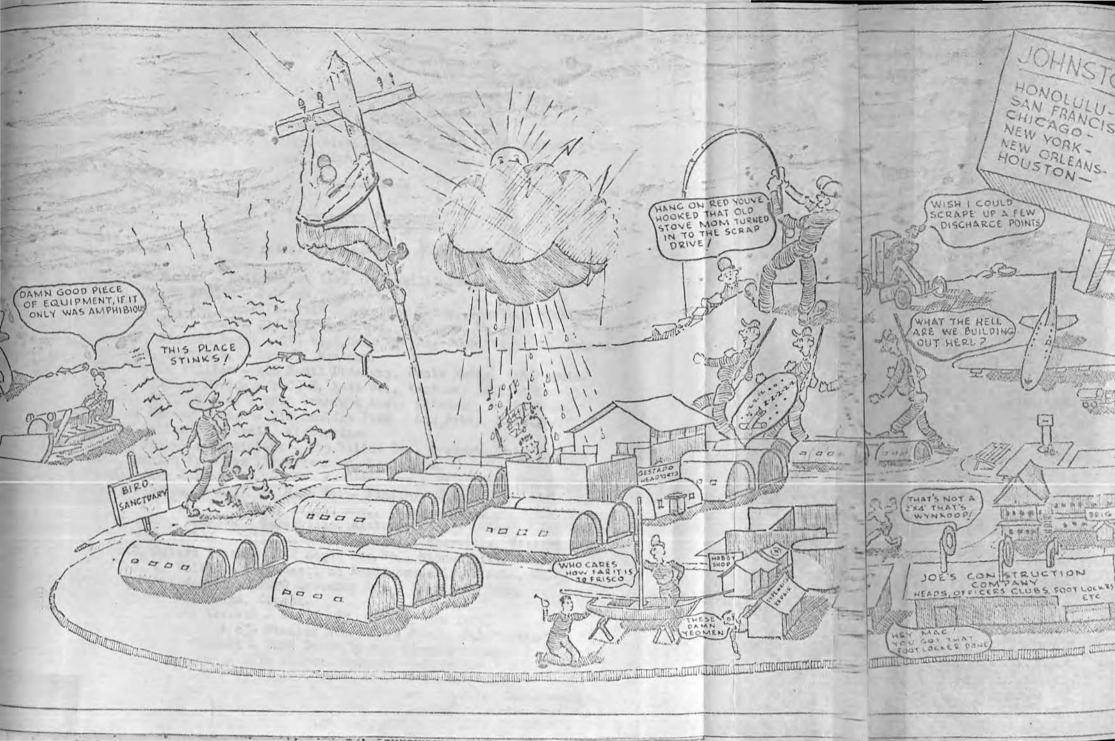
With peace two months old and demobilization getting underway in earnest, CBMU 554 is fast shrinking away to nothing. By November 1 it is expected that the unit will be formally inactivated. That would be exactly two years since the Raiders were first brought together as Company A of the 21st Super.

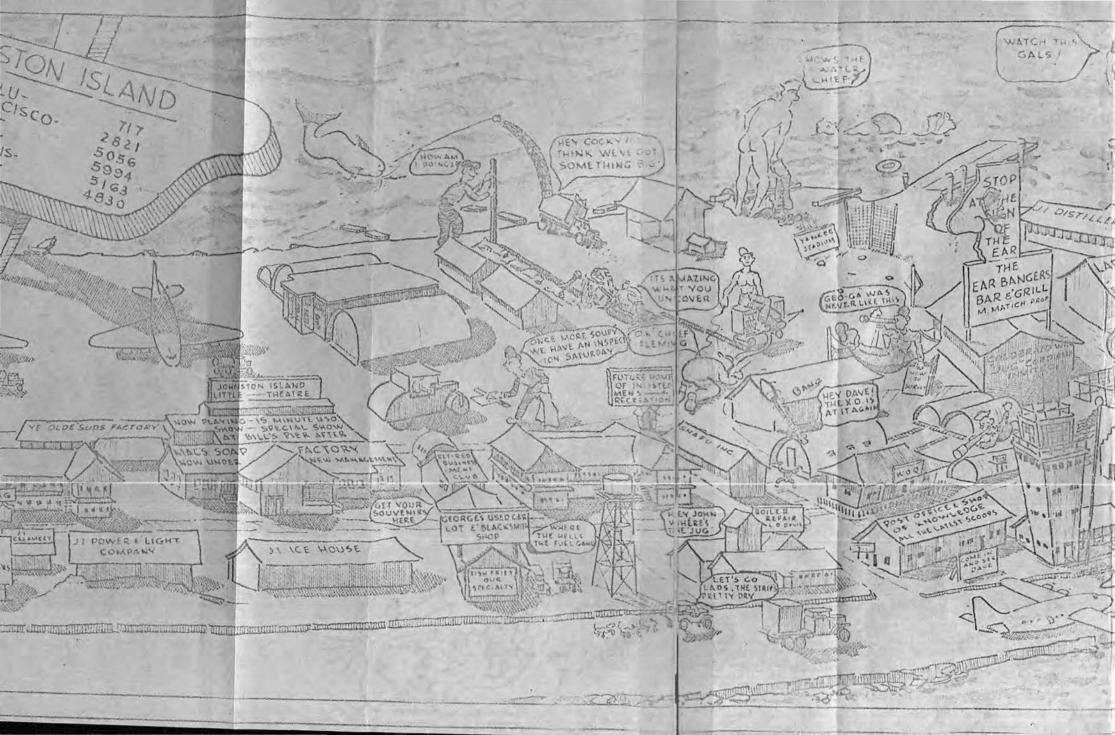
What will happen to the men who are left on November 1 is anybody's guess. But it is everybody's hope that all will go home at least for a 30-day leave. The majority of the men will have been overseas neight 20 months by then.

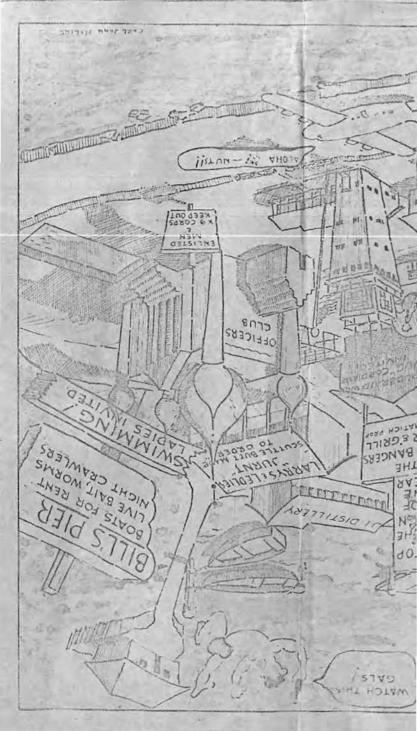
In any event, it appears fairly certain that Johnston Island soon will be a closed chapter as far as the Raiders are concerned. With all its good points and its bad - its ideal climate and its moaning birds, its open-air showers and its rationed water, its easy informality and its long chow lines - life on Johnston has been a memorable experience.

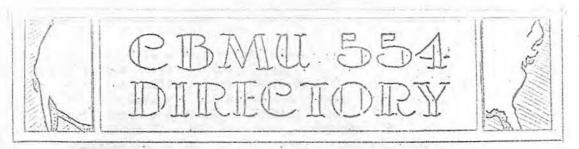
For what the Raiders accomplished in World War II no medals have been awarded. They did the sort of job that warrants no headlines. It was unspectacular, dull and sometimes gruelling. But the job was necessary and they did it well.

That is what counts.









# OFFICER PERSONNEL

(On roster subsequent to July 1, 1945)

CARLSON, Jarl Arthur - 35 Indian Lake Prkwy., Worcester, Mass. CURRERI, Joseph Gaspar - 85 Lakewood Terrace, Bloomfield, New Jersey.

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STIRRETT, David N. - 832 Greenwood Ave., Wilmette, Ill. WELLNER, George H. - c/o Minn. State Highway Dept., 1242 University Ave.,

St. Paul, Minn.

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# ENLISTED PERSONNEL

(On roster subsequent to July 1, 1945)

ACKERMAN, Murray - Hollowbrook Lake, Peekskill, New York. ADAMS, Joseph Ledlie - Lubbock, Texas. ALLSTEAD, William Russell - 1186 Blackstone Drive, Inkster, Michigan. ANDERSON, James Reed - 213 Andrew Street, McKinney, Texas. ANDERSON, Richard Leroy - 220 West Main Street, Vermillion, So. Dakota. ARMSTRONG, Burton E. - Laurel, Montana.

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DIXON, Laurens M. - 265 Worth St., Corry, Pa.
DOYLE, Carlisle Langton - General Delivery, Fenton, Missouri. DUECKER, Fred Earl - 1550 Lingo St., Cincinnati, Chio, DUGAN, Vincent Francis - 4562 Carroll St., Pittsburgh, Pa. DUNGAN, William C. - 915 Banklick, Covington, Kentucky. DURKIN, Edward J. - 495 Ave. A., Utica, New York. DWYER, William John - 8 Prescott, Boston, Mass.

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 -UJARUK, Michael - East Morris, Conn. -
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 LKIMMEL, Walter William - 5536 Carville Ave., Halethorpe 27, Md.
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 = LASSWELL, Kenneth Eugene - R.F.D. Deepwater, Mo.
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LOVAN, Rerbert C. - Clovis, New Mexico.
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WALKER, Bernard Wood - 1006 Piedmont Rd., Charleston, W. Va. WALLER, Don "E", - Clare, Mich.

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## GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

(Men transferred out of unit between March 1, 1945, and June 30, 1945. Home addresses are not available.)

BAILEY, Elbert Dan BENNETT, Earl Everett CARLSEN, Henry "C" "E" CARTER, Marvin Autrie CHUBB, Martin Earl COUHIG, Thomas Francis COUNTRYMAN, William Norman CUTLIP, David Franklin DAVIS, Jodie Lester DEVINE, John Joseph DIAZ, Leon DURDEN, Ottis Jackson EARLEY, Thomas John EGGERS, Russell Lewis ELLIS, Howard Morrill FILLER, Israel FISH, Carl Raymond FLACK, Delmar Perry FUDGE, Robert Maurice GILLILAN, Wilbert McAllister

GOLDEN, Bertie Clement HARRIS, "J" "B" HOBSON, George Allan HOPKINS, Donald Carr HORNEY, Thayer Bowers HOWENSTINE, Frank Ivan HUGHES, James Calvin, Jr. JENKINS, Ray Boswell KEENAN, Edmund Howard MC CARRON, Joseph MELLOR, John Ernest NELSON, Milton Julius PETERS, John Joseph SENN, William Lambert, Sr. SITTE, August Armond SMITH, Walter TAPASZTO, Gabriel Arthur, Jr. TRAUTWEIN, Edward Elliott TURK, Joseph Joseph