



CBMU

FIVE EIGHTY TWO

THE BOYS IN BLUE, WW II

*(And How They Won the War
In the South Pacific)*

The Story Of
**CONSTRUCTION BATTALION MAINTENANCE UNIT
FIVE EIGHTY TWO
UNITED STATES NAVY**

Robert J. Bushee

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March, 1987

--- ABOUT THE AUTHOR ---

I use this term loosely, and you'll know why after you have read this book. I was 23 years old when the Skipper, Commander O'Rourke, told me -- "Write a book!"

"Yessir", I replied, and went to work.

I had the book almost completed when we received orders to ship out to the Philippines. There I was assigned to run the Personnel Office under Lt. Greger at Calacoan, when one day a month or so later a visit to Sick Bay was necessary, and I turned up with Malaria. So....I transferred to the Naval Hospital on Samar, then a hospital ship to Treasure Island, and from there to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital.

Some while later I was discharged from Geneva-on-the-Lake, New York (with a pension for one year). This was on February 22, 1946.

I returned home to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My wife, and eventually three children, settled in and raised a lovely family. I established a Personnel Consulting business, and now, at 66 years of age, am President of Corporate Management Services, Inc. in Pittsburgh....and so far, living "happily every after".

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CHAPTER ONE

- BEGINNING A MILITARY LIFE -

JULY 1943 was the month of transformation; from a self-confident civilian one day to a confused Seabee the next. The Oath of Allegiance to the United States Navy had been taken and a seven-day leave had been utilized in putting private affairs to rights. And now, at the Recruiting Office, with personal belongings in battered overnight cases, an assemblage of men lined up as a salty yeoman butchered their names at roll-call. He also issued the rules of the train: "No drinking, no gambling, no carousing, no nothing" -- just sit there (wishing you were someplace else). Then he hung U. S. Navy tags on everyone and started the motley assortment marching in a column of twos for the station.

ARRIVING at the station the group was informed by its Petty Officer in charge (a Petty Officer at that time was on the same par as a Captain) that there was a half hour before train time in which to say goodbye. After being cautioned not to stray too far from the meeting place, and threatened with court martial if they did, the men were dismissed. Immediately there was a search for wives, mothers or sweethearts and the ensuing scenes were touching. There wasn't a dry eye left in the station. Finally came the dreaded moment -- the departure. Lining up again in a reasonable facsimile of a double column, midst waying hankies, brave smiles of loved ones and cheers of the populace, the recruits dragged themselves down the length of a streamlined train to a private car; compliments of Uncle Sam.

PRIVATE car indeed! No one else would have sat in the damn thing. That's why it was private. It was the first car behind the engine, covered with a thick veneer of coal dust and cinders, and lighted by ten 20-watt bulbs (dipped twice in frosting and covered with nutmeg). Lighting a match, seats were found (something like a park bench only harder), and all settled down for a nice, long trip.

THIRTY men were in the car, including the Petty Officer, who immediately pulled out his travel orders and called the roll. He wanted to make certain that no one had changed his mind at the last minute about going. Confident that no one had escaped, this leader-of-men rolled up in a corner and went to sleep, thus convincing the others that he had been in the last war, and had ridden in cattle cars before. With the sound of his first snore, fifteen bottles of assorted whiskies (pre-war stuff) were pulled out of travel bags and fifteen guys started to get artificial cases of sunburn. The other fifteen lapsed into discussions of home life and businesses in a manner suggesting they had been friends for years.

SINGING popular songs of the day, and some of Father's day, was imperative for prospective fighting men. It was only after the stimulants were gone and throats got hoarse that the noise stopped and comparative quiet prevailed. Then, twisting until a soft spot was found, or made, in the so-called chairs, the warriors tried to get some sleep.

HOURS later, upon arrival in Washington, they were still trying. Sleep was forgotten, however, when it was announced that the group would detrain for breakfast. This piquant meal was eaten in the station restaurant and consisted of scrambled eggs, Spam (more about Spam later), coffee and toast. Harried by the Petty Officer, drooled at by comely waitresses, and pushed by important-looking civilians, the men had hardly time to swallow their last mouthful of egg before they were back on the train -- a much better affair this time; you could see out of the windows. As the seats were a little softer in this car, most of the party dropped off to sleep, waking just as the train pulled into the next stop.

RICHMOND was the station, and crosstown travel to another terminal was necessary. This feat was accomplished with the aid of a hospitable Southerner, and the loss of only one recruit. Mission fulfilled. Food was desired but with only ten minutes to catch the southbound, the party had to be content with box lunches containing a bologna sandwich, a piece of cake and an orange. The station loudspeaker blared out that the southbound was leaving, so twenty-nine men raced down the narrow platform and caught the last car just as it pulled out of the station.

--- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ---

Many people helped write this book. Forgive me for those I don't mention.

Starting at the top, Commander O'Rourke started it all by commissioning (ordering) me to write it, but God love him, giving me the time to write.

Chief Tyler and the guys in Personnel were always there with information and help.

Manny Ehrlich (an English teacher) edited it, and he helped to dress it up.

Al Lambert did those beautiful photographs. Forty-three years later they look better than the originals.

Tom Martin (alias Roman T. Styczykowski) provided those beautiful sketches of all those important scenes and facilities.

Ralph Kennedy (my human dictionary) - God rest his soul - was a tremendous help.

Al Imrie and the songs he wrote for CBNU #582 - see back of book.

And, the men of 582, their accomplishments, escapades and antics provided the rest.

My business partner, Dorothea Crass, typed the final draft.

My deepest gratitude to all of you.

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COACHES were crowded with hundreds of men all heading for the same place; some willingly, but most, because they had been judged as being made of sterner stuff by a jury of their peers should henceforth wear the Navy Blue. The new arrivals traveled the length of the train three times looking for a seat. None could be found until some "wolf", coming to the rescue guided the group into the Ladies Lounge where they sprawled on chairs, cushions or floor, and forthwith dug into their box lunches.

WHILE eating someone discovered a brown skirt hanging on a hook, and immediately several pairs of lecherous eyes glued themselves on the door of the cubbyhole, hopefully waiting for the unclad owner to claim her property. It was quite a disappointment then when a WAC strode into the compartment from the corridor, gave the invaders a frigid stare and lifted her skirt from the hook (she had one on, too), and then hastily retreated, throwing an indignant "Ah doo-o declare" over her shoulder. At once, grins grew sheepish, eyes slowly focused back to normal and hammering pulses subsided. The remainder of the lunch was eaten in silence.

NOT many hours later the train pulled into Williamsburg, Virginia with a lurch that threw the dispirited men bodily from the train, landing in a heap on the platform in the heat of a southern Sunday afternoon. Before bodies could be disentangled they were heaved into a fleet of dump trucks -- with benches -- and were again under way. The trucks were driven a good hundred miles over dirt roads (well, ten anyway), finally screeching to a stop at the entrance to what appeared to be an enlarged version of a homemade chicken coop, but which in reality was the Induction Area of Camp Peary.

"THIS is it", a zealous rookie cried. "The first step toward becoming a Seabee. Here is where we will learn to fight, and what is learned here may someday save lives on the battlefronts of the Pacific. We are all strong, husky men intent on doing our part. This place won't be so tough." (Wonder who that lad thought he was kidding.)

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AFTER entering the stockade and standing in the dusty road under a blazing sun for two hours, an instructor (a Seabee with a barbed tongue) herded the group together and marched them three miles through the woods to the chow hall. Food at last! Gosh, this was wonderful. The recruits were fed first -- after the prisoners. Everyone knew they were prisoners because all had shaved heads and a large "P" on the back of their coveralls. Also, because they ate with spoons, not being permitted to use knives or forks as they were regarded as dangerous characters. They had probably told someone to "go to hell". Everyone felt like doing just that on that first day, but didn't dare. Anyhow, who likes to eat with a spoon? Besides, the urge soon passed.

SUPPER (called chow in the Navy) was a simple affair that first evening -- very simple. It would be an impossibility to describe, unless it could be said that the servings were the leftovers from a 1933 bread line. While the men were eating a loutish MAA (Master at Arms; equivalent to the Russian OGPU) lectured on how to hold a tray and how to wash utensils, and delivered an essay entitled "Eating Chow". When chow was finished, the newcomers were banded together again and marched back to the Bull Pen, as the Induction Area was called.

NEXT port-of-call was a large warehouse where mattresses, undershirts, towels and Lifebuoy soap (best friends won't tell you but the Navy will) were issued. Then, rolling up the mattresses, everyone sat down and waited another two hours before being led into an oblong shack containing two rows of double-decked bunks. This was home for the night. A Seaman First Class (equal to a Second Louie in the Army) took over, laying down the house rules and picking a Fire Watch (a guy who looks for lighted cigarette butts) for the night. Then he proceeded to hand out some advice.

HE hinted at some of the dire things that would happen on the morrow, and advised all to get a good night's sleep. He stated that his name was Isadore Jkrwfski, and if anyone got lost, strayed or stolen; "just ask anybody for Jkrwfski." Grateful for this fatherly advice (after all, Jkrwfski had been in the Seabees for more than two months), everyone stripped, hid pocketbooks under mattresses and stretched out on the bunks. The sound of "Taps" came through the windows, the lights were turned out and all settled down to another sleepless night of counting sheep, clocking snores and praying to the Lord for strength to live through another day.

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MORNING came quickly, just as the majority were falling into a deep slumber. It was heralded by the bugler sounding "Reveille", although there was nothing to revel in at that early hour. Jkrwfski came in looking fresh as a daisy. He yelled, "Hit th' deck. You've got fifteen minutes to get cleaned up before we march to chow". Then he turned around and stomped out again. Taking the hint, the now wide-awake seamen grabbed shoes, shaving gear and towel and stormed the "head".

THE "HEAD", a place for showering and shaving, among other things, was the busiest place in camp. Some enlightened seaman compared the "head" to the gents' room in the hometown theatre. At any rate, it was crowded in there, with more milling and shoving than there is at a bargain sale in Macy's basement. One pint-sized fellow waited six minutes for his turn at the sink (a horse trough with spigots). He was finally rewarded with an eight inch space between two guys who could have doubled for Firpo and Joe Louis. Sneaking a look in the mirror he lathered his face and attached his face with vigor. It wasn't until four hours later that the poor guy discovered he still had his beard. Looking around he saw Firpo with a nice, smooth shave. He decided, then and there, that thereafter all his shaving would be done at night, and never when Firpo was around. He said for all to hear: "Imagine the crust of that guy letting me shave him and not even a 'thank you' for my trouble."

A LITTLE later, breakfast. There were also dim recollections of dinner and supper, but they were mighty dim. Confusion had descended upon the rank and file as they were "put through the mill". There was a faint memory of being shoved into a big, drafty room where scores of men were throwing suits, shirts, shoes, underwear, blackjacks, fresh fruit, straight-edged razors and roulette wheels into tiny boxes that the Navy would mail home. After packing belongings into the boxes, each man jumped up and down on his own box until he got it closed. Then it was tagged and turned over to a Navy clerk who was working part-time for the Railway Express Agency. The money for sending the packages home was shelled out and the men were left standing there with their few personal effects tied in a sock -- all that was left to prove they had once been civilians.

NEXT, completely disrobed, they were pushed into an adjoining building for medical examinations, the same examination that everyone had gone through at the induction center. A tribe of corpsmen descended upon the diffident rookies. One jabbed for his "pint of blood", another handed out test-tubes and said: "Fill it". One timid chap ventured politely, "With blood?" "No, you ape, with alcohol", was the sardonic reply. In rapid succession stomachs were prodded, tonsils fluttered, knees hammered, eyes, teeth and ears examined, lungs photographed, hearts tested, etc. Questions were being fired from all directions: "Did you ever have smallpox, measles, dyptheria, mumps, chicken-pox, infantile paralysis, meningitis, sinusitis, flu, pneumonia or rheumatic fever? How about syphillis or gonorrhoea? Were you ever operated on? Where? Why?" One doctor said: "Bend over and spread your cheeks." Another, "Straighten up and cough. Were you ever ruptured? No, then how come that lump there? Milk 'er down. Stand up. Sit down. Lay down." The final phase required that the 100 yard dash be run in one position. The M.D. wanted to check blood pressures at their boiling points, and Brother -- they were boiling.

ABOUT this time everyone was convinced the examination was a put-up job. Those who had hopes of failing became reconciled when the cheerful corpsman commented: "Don't worry, Mate, you're in." Or, "As long as you're warm you'll do for Uncle Sam". "Yea, but what about my bad eyes?", one nearsighted lad wanted to know. "That's okay", a corpsman laughed, "If you can't see, we'll give you a seeing eye dog, and that's something you wouldn't get if you went into the Army." Finally, convinced that they were through paying social security for the duration, the men went to wait in front of the building for Jkrwfski.

JKRWFSKI breezed up, leading stragglers, slowpokes, drag-behinds and two Irish bulls by their noses. Gathering up his flock, he led them through a maze of warehouses where clothing, shoes, coveralls and more bedding was issued. Some of the clothing was put to instant use. Dungarees and blue denim shirts covered blanched skins. Feet were cranked into G.I. shoes, sometimes referred to as LCI's. Then came the crowing glory -- a little white sailor hat (the envy of all the kiddies). The remainder of the issue went into mattress covers or sea bags.

DROPPING the gear in front of a pretentious office building, everyone went inside to sign up for a \$10,000 Government insurance policy (NSI). This was voluntary, but God help the guy who didn't take the amount he was supposed to; namely, \$10,000. Some also made out allotments of pay to be sent home, while all the married men signed up for Family Allowance and war bonds. With all these deductions taken out of a man's pay, there wasn't enough left to keep a baby in talcum powder.

HAIRCUTS were next on the list, so off to the barber shop. This operation didn't take long; 30 seconds or less, but never more. One genial barber asked: "What state you from, Mate?" ZZZZIP! "Next man." Another, equally friendly, remarked as he patted a fluffy head of hair, "Umm, nice hair." SSSwoosh! "Wasn't it? Next." And so on down the line until every head looked like a cue ball. One fellow got by with a half-inch left on his head, but the barber, realizing his mistake, called him back and quickly remedied the error. That guy came out the second time with a head like an onion skin.

TWENTY miles must have been walked that day. Up and down dusty roads, heavy packs, blazing sun, and all that sort of thing; but finally at sundown several hundred men were poured into a big open field. They made quite a mass of humanity, all with big bags slung over their shoulders and wearing the inevitable blue. They lolled around on the brown earth as they waited for further orders, which came along presently. Each man was told to listen for his name, and hearing it he was to immediately report to a designated truck. After two and a half hours the last name was called out, and dog-tired the last man hoisted his gear on his broken back and headed for the truck. He climbed into the truck bed, where other equally confused Seabees were waiting, and shortly thereafter the trucks were heading for the hills.

CHAPTER TWO

- BOOT CAMP -

NONE of the Seabees had ever been in prison, but if any ever do end up as wards of the state, they can say they served their apprenticeship as "boots" at Camp Peary. Boot camp is where recruits go for indoctrination into the Navy. It is divided into areas (each the size of an ordinary cow pasture). The areas were individual camps and isolated by means of a high wire fence. An area consisted of a chow hall, a ship's store, a couple of "heads" (two heads are always better than one), a drill hall, and two dozen oversized dog houses, which served as barracks. One barracks was large enough for a small family house, minus three rooms and bath. Sixty men were thrown into each building and somehow each man found a bunk for himself.

EXPERIENCE is the best teacher. So the men found out as they learned to swab decks, police grounds, scrub "heads", wash, dry and roll clothes, and shine shoes daily whether a shine was needed or not. There were two ways of doing things; the "Navy Way" and the other way. Everything was done the "Navy Way", or else.....

MILITARY training and lectures occupied most of the daylight hours. Military consisted of close-order drill, extended order, manual of arms, throwing hand grenades and bayonet drill with rifles. For variation there were lectures. These were divided into two texts: "What to do in Combat" and "Six Lessons on Military Courtesy", including the art of saluting. The lectures were dry and uninteresting but always had a wide-awake audience. The reason for this was that if the instructor caught a man dozing, he was ordered to stand at attention for the remainder of the session. Who likes to stand at attention? So, everyone was wide-awake.

DAYS were all the same. A typical day saw the "boots" shattered out of their dreams at 5:30 a.m. After a quick trip to the head they streamed out onto the drill field. Falling into platoons, the sleep-clogged men spaced off and ran the gauntlet of physical training exercises. P.T. was contemptuously referred to as Physical Torment. Then the platoon jogged down the road to breakfast. After chow they had an hour in which to prepare the barracks for inspection. At 0800 the platoons were again lined up on the drill field for Colors. The morning was occupied by one of the phases of military training. Noon chow and an hour's rest period was the highlight of the day. Afternoons were spent in lecture circles or at extended order in the woods, playing cowboys and indians. All activity secured at 1630 and the exhausted trainees returned to the barracks to clean themselves up, and to prepare for chow.

EVENINGS were classified as "free time". The hours between supper and Taps were spent writing letters, reading, sewing, fighting the war: between the North and the South, in gab-fests and telling stories. When Taps sounded the men were only too glad to crawl into their sacks, and despite their aching bones and stiffening muscles, soon dropped off to sleep.

DUTY day was one in four. It was also called Work Day. Each man had assignments to guard duty, kitchen police (K.P.'s are called Mess Cooks in the Navy), police duty (picking up butts and other refuse) and public works. The latter job was best because after cleaning up the camp for the station force commandos (also called USO Commandos), they took the detail to their chow hall for dinner. In comparison to the food eaten in the boot areas, station force chow was superb.

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ONE of the first questions Mother asked Philbert when he came home on leave was, "How was the cooking, Dear?" The invariable reply was "Terrible", or if Philbert was an indifferent sort with a cast-iron stomach, he replied, "Aw, not too bad." To which Mother usually ventured, "But, Dear, I thought the Navy used only fresh vegetables and choice cuts of meat."

THAT'S all very true, Mom. The Navy does buy the best of everything, but you know the old saying: The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Well, these Pearyites were the proof that there wasn't any pudding. There were plenty of stews though, and lots of cabbage disguised in many ways--but still cabbage. They ate hominy grits and beans for breakfast and drank an evil-looking brew, erroneously called coffee. For noon chow, cabbage, beans, potatoes, pork chops, (there was a hog ranch on the base) and lemonade; and for supper, usually a light meal, such as cabbage or cole slaw, mashed potatoes, bread, cocoa and slices of luncheon meat (which might have been Spam).

FOOD was never anything to rave about. It was high in starch content and edible but that's all that can be said about it. Of course, the desserts weren't bad. The meals were usually rounded out with strawberry jello, layer cake or mashed cherry pie, and once there was ice cream. Then there were the drinks. In the morning and evening there was coffee (any similarity to Maxwell House purely accidental), and at noon lemonade was served. Both liquids were entirely lacking in dextrose, and if a mate didn't care for the beverage served at any particular meal, he could always drink water. Usually he drank the lesser of the two evils, and it wasn't water.

THE Warrant Officer of the platoon did much to explain the food situation to the mates. He informed all who would listen (and all did) that the men working in the galley were "boots" too and were learning to cook "the Navy Way". He assured the men that the meals would improve as time went on. Cooks became known as "belly robbers" and the Chief Commissary Steward as their leader. No one knew the many problems this nervous little man faced until one day it was learned that he was allowed only 65¢ a day with which to feed each man. Then came the light! Everyone knew why they were being slowly starved to death. Who in the name of Epicurus can live on 65¢ a day? But believe it or it, these men did, and eventually learned to like it. For all their griping about chow (a gripe that will live forever) everyone gained weight.

WATER also was an object of much griping. It was stale, flat, saturated with chlorine, and hot. So hot that it was just perfect for taking a shower. This was what the men had to drink, yet much as they detested it, they drank their fill whenever the instructor called time out for a drink. During these time-out periods the lamp was lit (smoking permitted). Once in the morning and once in the afternoon the men were given a respite from drilling for a drink and a smoke. To think that such cruelties exist in this day and age! Men who ordinarily smoked a pack of "coffin nails" before noon limited their smoking to two cigarettes during the working day. It was cruel, but such is life.

INOCULATIONS -- or "shots" -- were administered weekly. Each week the platoons lined up alphabetically and were pushed into the Sick Bay between rows of Satanic corpsmen brandishing lethal stilettos. Bared arms were presented, dagger-like needles were plunged into twitching muscles and gallons of liquid fire were shot into the veins of the perspiring Seabees. When the hypos were withdrawn the dazed men staggered through the doorway and fell into the arms of Mother Earth. In this manner were the ConBatt men given the equipment, months in advance, with which to ward off deadly jungle diseases.

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BOOT CAMP was an adjustment period. One mode of living had been discarded for another. Four weeks of drilling, working and sleeping together had changed these civilian soldiers from individuals, who walked alone, into a teach marching together. True, they were individuals in the sense of likes and dislikes, loves and hates, but these were mental attitudes. Physically, the platoon became the form of society. The difference between the men who had shakingly entered Camp Peary a few short weeks before, and those who lined up (smartly this time) in platoon formation at the end of the training period was plainly marked. Bodies were held

erect, shoulders squared. There was a new "set" to these men. And pride, too, because they had been able to take all that was "dished out". The taunting "you'll be sor-ree" cries, which hounded them throughout boot camp made them laugh now that the initial training had been completed. They weren't sorry. On the contrary, they were looking forward to assignment to a battalion and the second phase of Navy training.

CHAPTER THREE

- 126th NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION -

THE mates were assigned to the 126th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion, which was formed on 30th August 1943. The 126th, like all preceding battalions, was made up of approximately 1081 enlisted men and 33 officers, divided into four construction companies into which went equipment operators, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, etc. Also included were the pick and shovel men, or Seamen. (The backbone of the battalion.) There was a fifth company, Headquarters, composed of surveyors, yeomen, storekeepers, cooks, pharmacist mates and others who didn't dare get their hands dirty, but were assigned to "soft-deal" jobs. All officers, with the exception of the Battalion Commander's immediate staff, were Civil Engineer Corps officers. The CEC, or Civil Engineer Corps, and the Construction Battalions are under the cognizance of the Bureau of Yards and Docks.

THE company of primary interest in this "chronicle" is "C" Company -- 5 officers, 220 enlisted men -- skippered by Lt. George P. O'Rourke. Company officers were Ensign Harold W. Greger (CEC - USNR) and Warrant Officer Cecil H. "Pete" Holsinger (CEC - USNR). Officers and men of "C" Company were a cross-section of America, coming as they did from all parts of the country and from all walks of life. Businessman, engineer, tradesman, shopkeeper and laborer all worked together to make this company the best in the Battalion.

FOR the remainder of the stay in Camp Peary the 126th was quartered in the B-6 Drill Hall. The Drill Hall, a large, hanger-like building, contained about 600 double-decker bunks, and nothing else. Bunks ran the entire length of the building, rows of them, and every bunk had a man in it. Privacy was one word not in the Navy's vocabulary, for gathered together in one room were more men than the average person meets in a lifetime.

A STAGE at the forward end of the drill hall served as the quarter-deck on which the Skipper of the Battalion, company commanders and their officers set up offices and organized the Battalion. Here every step humanly possible was taken to insure the health and comfort of the men. Company officers interviewed each man personally to determine the qualifications he possessed. Plans for moving the battalion to another camp were laid out, the various departments were set up, and quickly what seemed to be an unwieldy assortment of manpower developed into a well-knit outfit.

WHILE the officers worked the men lolled around, having nothing better to do than catch up on correspondence, wash clothes and read. Of course, "C" Company had its share of guard duty, mess duty and general cleanup to perform but this was child's play after the four hectic weeks just completed.

ONE night the company was given liberty of the camp and several of the men set out for the beer hall, which was the only sight worth seeing. (They don't serve beer in boot camp.) The beer hall was a long, flat building surrounded by a stockade. From a distance could be seen about 5,000 men milling and shoving to get to the little building in the center. Upon entering the stockade the cluster of hopeful tipplers leaped into the shortest of three lines, converging on the beer tap. This line was picked because it had only about 1,500 men in it. There was a great thirst for beer but after snaking and wiggling along the line for the better part of an hour, everyone lost the thirst, but finally got the beer. At the bar each man was sold two glasses of the amber-colored beverage and told to move on. The idea then being that if you wanted more beer you would go to the end of the line and start over. The "C" Company boys went back to the drill hall.

THE following night liberty in town was permitted. This meant that the isolation period was over, and once more a man could walk down a street, wink at the pretty girls (or some not so pretty) and rub elbows with the people. It was thrilling to put on dress uniforms for the first time, hurriedly board a bus, speed through the main gate and set foot in a town again.

IMMEDIATELY upon arrival in Williamsburg, assailants masquerading as taxi drivers appeared everywhere. Knowing the wants of a Seabee they whispered into willing ears that the town was dry as a bone but they knew where there were barrels of the stuff, and offered trips to a certain roadhouse for the paltry sum of four dollars. Some had intentions of admiring the beauty of colonial Williamsburg but when the word "beer" was heard good intentions were forgotten. The thirsty Seabees formed into groups of eight men each and were driven to the rural night spot. The prevailing conception of a night club differed somewhat from the driver's. A gaudy showplace was expected, with soft lights and music, bevies of lovely damsels in shimmery dresses, and immaculate, white-clad waiters anxious to please.

IT was disappointing then to be ushered into a dimly lit dive in which two black gals and a greasy looking barkeep were tossing bottles of beer across the mahogany bar to a mob of Seabees, soldiers and sailors. (What, no Marines?) All those lovely things that had been envisioned just weren't. However, having learned to make the best of a situation the newcomers dropped anchor at the bar and each bought three bottles of a brew called Valley Forge. This light colored concoction advertised on the label: "Made of pure mountain spring water". After a healthy pull on the bottle all agreed. It was made of spring water and little else.

DESIRING food (among other things), six men, fortified with a battery of bottles and potato chips grabbed a corner table and ordered one "Southern Fried Chicken" apiece. An hour later they ordered another chicken -- the first hadn't arrived yet. Fortified with more bottles and chips another hour passed. At last the dinners arrived and were really enjoyed. Everyone was so damned hungry even horse meat would have been palatable. While eating one of the lads took off his hat (thinking it the gentlemanly thing to do), but when a mate laughingly called attention to his lack of hair, the hat was hastily replaced and the meal finished in silence.

DECIDING they had enough of "night life", the tariff (which was high) was paid and out the group went to again be mobbed by taxi drivers, driven back to town by one of the cut-throats and relieved of another four dollars.

ON the main drag the disgruntled men drifted into the USO for comfort and companionship. Smiling sweetly at several attractive girls and drawing a blank, they again looked for something to eat. A counter was found that served and donuts and a snack was had. Each man was informed, as he started to walk away after completing the snack, that he owed twenty cents. Embarrassingly, bills were paid and a rapid retreat was made from such harsh commercialism.

A SHORT while later the bus was boarded for the trip back to camp. They checked in at the gate, were accosted and examined by the drill hall guard and logged in on the quarter-deck. Bunks were plunked into and the disillusioned Seabees fell asleep, dreaming of all the fun that wasn't had on liberty.

PREPARATIONS for the first ride on a troop train took place on 5th September. There had been short-arm inspections and several practice train-musters prior to entrainment. Therefore, when the battalion boarded the train to the tune of the "Seabee Song" played by the Station Force Band, there wasn't a hitch in the operation. Seats were assigned and the next hour was spent trying to brush the lumps of coal from the cushions. The chugging of the engine, then the clickity-clack of the wheels on the rails announced to all that the train was pulling out of the station. By this time the cushions had been cleaned to the satisfaction of the occupants and they sat down to enjoy their trip.

DARKNESS descended. Immediately the order was given to douse the lights. The train was observing East Coast blackout regulations and God help the man who was responsible for even a pinprick of light showing through the curtains. The night was spent in a shroud of blackness, sometimes waiting for hours on sidings while Limiteds sailed by. Farms, towns and cities flowed by in the night but there was no way of knowing the names or what manner of people inhabited these places. In keeping the identity of the battalion movement a secret from the populace, the Navy also kept the troops in the dark about the movements of the people.

THROUGH the night the human cargo sped. Sleep came in fits and starts. Everytime the train started the men had fits. The night was filled with wonderment -- wondering who the hell was sitting opposite you, and wishing he would take his damn feet out of your lap. It wasn't so bad though; the transfer could have been made by ox-cart.

IT was with great joy and bleary eyes that the early dawn was greeted. The shades were raised and eyes feasted on rural countryside. The unfolding panorama of grass, tall stately trees and lush meadows was immensely thrilling. Numerous towns and cities were passed that were now wide-awake. Old women and children waved at the passing train. Girls leaned out of factory windows and waved or blew kisses at the men on the train. They, in turn, waved at everyone they could see, especially the girls. They also made it a point to thumb their noses at every man in civvies. They thought they were really "IT". They were Seabees on a troop train going forth to lick the Jap, and they wanted everyone to know it. Though cramped and tired and covered with soot, spirits were high and all looked forward with impatience to the first sight of Camp Endicott.

CHAPTER FOUR

- CAMP ENDICOTT -

CAMP ENDICOTT (Davisville, Rhode Island) was a wonderful surprise after the limitations suffered in boot camp. Arriving on the 6th of September the days were found to be warm but the nights were cool and refreshing. The battalion was quartered in area "D" and "C" Company was assigned an entire two-story barracks. In the hallway of each barracks was a Coke machine, which did a land-office business when it worked. Each man was assigned a bunk and a locker. No time was lost in taking dress blues and whites out of seabags and stacking them neatly on the shelf of the locker. Not having to dig into a seabag for every piece of clothing was almost as wonderful as not having to get up on Sunday morning. Indeed, this outfit was getting up in the world. Also, behind each building was a large "head", containing showers, lavatory, sinks and washroom. All the modern conveniences of home, if one lived on a farm.

THE first time the Chief looked the other way a group of guys from Platoon One sneaked off for a look around. The first thing to catch the eye was a ship's store, where everything was sold except the latest model Ford coupe. A glance disclosed candies, drinks and cookies at one counter; toilet articles of all kinds at another. The jewelry counter covered every need of a serviceman, including Seabee pins, watches, cigarette lighters, non-rustable dogchains (what a liar that clerk was) and 'diamond' engagement rings that sold for a buck and a half. There were magazines, writing pads, sandwiches and cigarettes. If you wanted something that was not in stock the genial clerk took your name and outfit number and sent the article COD as soon as it was received.

THERE was a library, poolroom and bowling alley in each area, and several theatres in the camp that showed all the current movies. A beer hall with an adjoining sandwich shop and ice cream bar did a rushing business. Drill halls cropped up here and there and were devoted to sports — basketball, wrestling, boxing, etc. (but no swimming pool).

THE BIGGEST ATTRACTION, however, was the WAVES quarters. This was a building on the west side of camp, enclosed by a wire fence fifty feet high (okay -- make it ten). The fence was well-guarded and woe unto the wolf who tried to get friendly with these female sailors. One lad should have a torrid story to tell when he gets out of the "brig" in 1965. It was permissible to look, but soon tiring of this the lads went on with their inspection.

THE GUEST HOUSE, near the liberty gate, completed the inspection tour. Here wives visited Seabee husbands, and sat, talked and held hands until 8:30 p.m. nightly. The facilities which the camp provided for guests were many. The house was a long, bungalow type building. There were restrooms for the ladies, an information booth and a confectionary store. The interior of the building was one large room resembling a lounge. Soft easy chairs and divans encircled the walls. Card tables and chairs were conveniently placed in the center of the room. Lamps, ash trays, coffee tables, cushions, a radio and an attractive job of interior decorating gave the entire layout a quiet, homelike atmosphere.

OUTSIDE was a large enclosed courtyard. Beach chairs, tables and colorful umbrellas dominated the enclosure. There was a promenade covered with white sand for strollers, and spaced at intervals along the circular walk were park benches for moonlight spooning.

THE INITIAL inspection completed, the boys from Platoon One returned to the area to tell the others what they had seen. Several married men immediately wrote to their wives, telling them to come to Camp Endicott. Many husbands and wives made good use of the Guest House, or Dry Firing Range as it came to be called, on nights that liberty was not to be had, while the single men enjoyed the other extensive privileges of the camp.

WITH all the recreational facilities it was difficult to figure how military training was going to fit into the schedule, but it was soon found out. On 7th September the battalion was broken up into groups and assigned to various training schools. The schools attended were: Extended Order, Mortar, Machine Gun, Anti-Aircraft, Chemical Warfare, Browning Automatic Rifle, Thompson Sub-Machine Gun, Fire-Fighting, Mosquito Control, Signaling, Quartermaster, Armorer, Diving, Judo, First Aid, etc. Almost every phase of modern warfare was considered, and practically every man in the battalion went to one or more of the schools. In addition to schooling, the men ran the obstacle course, had bayonet practice and threw hand grenades daily -- just to keep in trim.

AFTER schooling was completed every man in the battalion had a course in Dry Firing. This was taught in a mammoth Quonset drill hall by competent instructors. The purpose of the course was to explain the mechanism and operation of the .30 calibre M-1 carbine. After the rifles had been stripped and reassembled many times, the men were taught how to sight, or aim. Various firing positions were practiced so many times that joints and muscles ached. The off-hand (standing prone, kneeling or sitting) positions were taught. The course lasted one week and was of much benefit to the men. Besides learning to operate the carbine the men developed some tender spots from sitting for hours on the cement deck listening to lectures.

WITH Dry Firing completed, the theories earned in the classroom were put to practice on the rifle range. The range was located a few miles from Endicott at a place called Sun Valley. On 18th September the 126th moved to this camp for a week's stay. Under the expert tutelage of Marine and Seabee Instructors, the men of the 126th became proficient in the use of the M-1 carbine -- that handy little rifle used exclusively for jungle fighting. Lessons were so well learned that many men qualified as marksmen and won expert and sharpshooter medals. In addition to rifle instructions, machine gun, mortar and anti-aircraft classes were continued at Sun Valley.

SO that all men in the battalion could fire daily the 126th was split into two groups; one group firing on the range in the morning and the other in the afternoon. In this manner each man had ample time to fire his day's supply of ammunition, and the coaches were able to devote time to individual instruction. That the instructor's time was not wasted was evident as soon as each man became acquainted with his rifle and the high scoring was recorded.

OLD-TIMERS with a rifle take their high scores as a matter of course but to the newcomer on the range there is no comparison to the thrill of scoring a bulls-eye. The feeling of exaltation is intense as one sights down the barrel of the rifle, takes a deep breath, then slowly squeezes the trigger. The rifle jumps violently, spitting flame and lead, then smokes slightly. While waiting for the target to be marked the rifleman lays his cheek caressingly against the rifle stock. He is rewarded in a moment with the sight of a white disk which appears in the center of the target. Any squeamishness he might feel at the thought of one day sighting down the barrel at a human is lost in the exhilaration he has when aim holds true and man and rifle are as one -- steady and strong as steel. Excitement mounts to a high pitch on the firing line and when the shooting is over for the day, animation freezes, leaving him curious quiverings in the stomach, clammy hands and a sweaty brow.

THOSE who did not make good scores had an iron-clad alibi, which was that the rifles, ordinarily surveyed after firing 50,000 rounds, were crowding the 100,000 mark. It was a common and amusing sight to see these obsolete rifles fall apart, or pieces fly through the air during a particularly heavy siege of firing. If the Marine Instructor couldn't reassemble the rifle with hammer and screwdriver, another relic was obtained and the firing continued. Equally amusing were Maggie's Drawers (bright red bloomers waved from the "butts" to indicate a complete miss), and when some frustrated Seabee shot at the wrong target everyone laughed heartily. However, when some "sharpie" continued to pump bullets through the "bull", all stared in amazement, wondering what manner of man was this who could hold a rifle so still and aim so true.

IN the half-day not on the firing line men were assigned to work parties. Some worked in the "butts" pulling and marking targets for those who were firing. An experience in the "butts" (or pits) simulated active combat without the artillery, hand grenades or fear of attack. It was an exciting sensation to those working behind the earth and log fortifications to hear the bullets zinging overhead and the ping-g-g they made when ricocheting off the log parapets before plopping into the earthworks behind. Besides being exciting, work in the pits was hard. This could be seen in the drawn faces of the men when they emerged from the "butts" at the end of the day.

THERE were many other jobs to be performed by the battalion personnel, some soft and some hard. The easiest of all was the "head" cleaning detail, to which seventeen men from Platoon Six were assigned. This task, normally a menial one, rapidly became the envy of all men not assigned to it, when the marvelous "ducking-off" possibilities became known. There were three "heads" to clean, which required sweeping and swabbing the decks. It took ten minutes to complete this assignment. Then the doors were locked so that some worthless Seabee wouldn't spoil the sparkling floor with muddy boots, and the boys dispersed -- in the direction of the four winds.

"DUCKING-OFF" is nothing new to the Armed Forces. The Army may call it goldbricking, but in the vernacular of the Seabees and Marines the term duck-off applies to men not holding up their end of an assignment, or who disappear from the job during working hours. Each man had his own ideas about ducking-off. Some find a nice, warm place in which to relax, then think up a good excuse for being there in case an officer discovers him. Others drop into the library to write, read or play a game of checkers. Then, there were a few who tried to panhandle a bite between meals at the galley. Most, however, just roam aimlessly about, searching for a crap game or other equally enlightening form of entertainment. Being a "duck-off" is much more difficult than staying on the job because trying to get out of work is always harder than actually working.

IT was rough going at the Valley for those not accustomed to the rigors of outdoor life. Accommodations were few and complaints were many. Each platoon (35 men) was quartered in two Quonset huts. The furniture in these huts included an oil stove (minus the oil), ten double-decked bunks and a bucket for washing clothes. The screened windows and doors were covered with plywood, and this gave the interior of the huts a dank, dreary atmosphere.

THE chow hall wasn't much better. In fact, there wasn't any chow hall. Meals were eaten in the great outdoors. It was quite enjoyable eating dinner and supper underneath the shady trees, but there wasn't much treat in partaking of an early morning meal under the stars in sub-zero weather. Alright, 45° above.

FOR early autumn the weather was typically New England. Morning rains were depressing but afternoons were bright and sultry, while the nights were so cold that two blankets, a peacoat and a sweater were not sufficient to keep the icy air from penetrating to the bone. All this served its purpose, however. It toughened the men up considerably, and had there been some social life to fall back on everyone would have been happy.

AS for social life, there wasn't any. True there had been a couple of movies during the week, the library and visitor's pavillion were always well filled, but liberty was not to be had -- officially. It was a theory of the high command that drinking bouts had a peculiarly unsteady effect on eye and aim, so everyone stayed home and had to be content with fireside chats (minus the fire) waiting for the long-promised weekend liberty.

THE more adventurous men didn't wait for the weekend. Each night they flitted away like shadows in the gloomy twilight to scale the high, two-foot fence, and thumb their way to town for a few hours of stolen revelry. They returned in the wee hours of the morning, smelling of Kessler's (10¢ a shot) and beguiling the stay-at-homes with tales of debauchery.

MOST of the men, however, were content to crawl beneath blankets and coats shortly after evening chow for their nightly bull sessions. From the comparative warmth of their sacks, these law-abiding citizens entertained each other with hair-raising tales of personal experiences which had a tendency to make the narrator seem a reckless individual, or a damned good liar. In any event, these gab-fests helped to pass the time between chow and Taps in a pleasant manner.

THE week on the rifle range passed quickly, and on 25h September all was in readiness for the return of the 126th to Camp Endicott. There was no feeling of regret when the battalion departed from Sun Valley, marching along the rustic roads that led to the main camp. Still, no one could truthfully say that the stay on the range had not been worthwhile, or at the least, educational. However, everyone in "C" Company had liberty foremost in mind and they were content to tramp along, formulating plans for a quick shower and change into fresh underwear and dress blues, which along with a liberty chit and an affidavit signed by the Commanding Officer, enabled one to get outside the confines of Dear Old Endicott.

LIBERTY always started with a rush -- a rush to get in the showers first, a rush to get dressed first, a rush to get a liberty chit and pass a rigid inspection first; then a rush to the gate, a rush to buy a bus ticket, and little less than massacre to get on the bus itself.

IN town, though, it's an entirely different story. As soon as a Seabee feels the sidewalks beneath his black leather slippers, he is on his own. In this instance he has 36 hours of liberty to do with as he pleases. Invariably, a Seabee will (if single) search out a member of the opposite sex for companionship. Or, he spent his time drinking, eating, visiting friends, or on a sightseeing tour of the city. Then again, perhaps he was one of those quiet guys who was content to just be himself on the edge of the crowd, slightly aloof, yet regarding with amusement (or even superiority) the great show civilians made of hurrying from place to place intent on keeping up the pretense of "being busy as a bee".

WHEN activity in the town ceased, the Seabee, tiring of revelry, returned to camp (if the Shore Patrol didn't get him first). He had a smug, complacent air about him as he checked in at the gate and walked across the drill field to his area. Having had his good times, he was content to get a few hours sleep before resuming his militaristic form of life in the morning.

THE men of "C" Company enjoyed many liberties in Providence. Liberties that won't be forgotten, for in Providence was found the real New England hospitality one hears so much about. To men in uniform doors opened automatically. Old women, and sometimes a young one, smiled at them in trolley cars in a friendly, unaffected way, no doubt thinking of their own kinfolk in the service. Conductors looked the other way when street cars were boarded, waiters gave these "dry-land sailors" better service than they did the civilians, and shopkeepers acted as if they were waiting on their very best customers. Private homes were thrown open to the Seabees and there were many invitations to dinners, which made a big hit with the married men far removed from their own homes. Such kindnesses were not taken for granted but will live forever in the hearts of the men in uniform.

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FOLLOWING "C" Company's weekend liberty the 126th went into its final week of Advanced Training at Endicott, and this week was the longest that the men had ever lived through. Each day seemed like a year, and the week itself was a lifetime. The reason for this was the ten-day leave the Battalion's personnel had been promised at the end of their secondary training. The anticipation of this leave shone in the eyes of every man in the outfit and the animated talk and gestures, and the excitement that prevailed in the barracks, was mindful of a teenage girl all aflutter getting ready for her first date.

MUCH was done during those few days before leaves commenced. Train tickets were purchased, reservations made, uniforms altered and pressed, clothes washed, and a hundred other items taken into account. Finally, Sunday, 3rd October, did roll around and the company fell out in front of the barracks on the double. A routine inspection was held and leave papers were issued, and a final muster was taken. Then the company was broken up into two groups -- those traveling by train marched to the station, and those traveling by bus or auto headed for the liberty gate and the open road.

IT is an impossibility to attempt to follow a thousand men on leave but there is this to be said. Each man returned to his family and hearth a hero of the perilous battles of "boot camp" and "advanced training". There wasn't a man in the battalion who didn't walk into his home cockier, sturdier, more physically fit in mind and body than he had ever been before. The general improvement was noticeable in each of them. During his stay at home each man related with pride the rigorous training to which he had been exposed, especially the obstacle course -- bearing the sign "Men over 70 are not permitted on this course" -- which was run daily. Physical training, rifle range, chow, Navy slang, washing clothes, mistakes made during close order drill and 1,000 little incidents (too varied to mention here) all came in for a share of the limelight. "Oh yes, Dad, and let me tell you about the pretty WAVES I saw at Endicott", and so on.

THE days prior to the leave had passed slowly but the ten days away from the jurisdiction of the Navy (if that is possible) sped by much too quickly. Continuously, from the 11th October until the early hours of the 13th the tired but happy Seabees (filmy-eyed from lack of sleep, and stiff and sore from long hours or crowded trains) straggled back into camp. After locating seabags and mattresses they fell into bunks for some much needed rest.

THERE wasn't anything much to do on the 13th, which was fortunate, because there wasn't an ounce of strength left in the battalion. However, the following day found all companies on the drill field learning the left and right wheel for the dress parade and presentation of colors to be held on the 14th.

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AS the time for the parade drew near the air was so thick with apprehension and excitement it could be cut with a knife. Hurriedly the men went about last minute preparations. The uniform of the day was dress blue baker (white hats) and there was considerable fussing with neckerchiefs, squaring of hats and brushing and rebrushing of shoes and uniforms before all was in readiness.

AT 1230 the bugler sounded Assembly and platoon after platoon streamed out onto the company street, lining up in formation. When the ranks had been dressed-up the battalion marched to the armory to draw rifles. Ranks were dressed-up again after the rifles had been received, and at 1300 the 126th Battalion marched out on the parade ground.

COMING to a halt in the center of the macadam ground, the battalion "left-faced" and stood at attention before the Commanding Officer of the USNCTC Camp Endicott, Rhode Island. The ceremony which followed was the presentation of the colors to the battalion's officer in charge, Commander John H. Brelsford, CEC USNR.

THE officers and men (eleven hundred strong) standing behind their Commander intently watched the impressive proceedings as the lovely "color-girl" was handed the cased flag which she unfurled slowly, and the blue banner, on which was emblazoned "126th Battalion", the traditional anchor of the Navy, fluttered in the breeze. Stepping forward the attractive flag bearer presented the colors to Commander Brelsford, who accepted the flag on behalf of his battalion, and then entrusted the banner to the battalion "color guard".

THEN followed a brief but formal personnel inspection. As Captain Rogers and his party approached each line of men, rifles were snapped to "port arms" and bolts were opened for inspection. When the men had been inspected, Captain Rogers and Commander Brelsford exchanged military courtesies, in which the former asserted that the 126th was a "top-notch battalion" composed of a "fine body of men".

AS soon as the inspecting party returned to the reviewing stand the band pealed out with the "Seabee Song", and the commands "right-t-face" and "forward march" thundered across the heads of the assembled forces. Parading past the reviewing officers and the crowds of interested onlookers, the Seabees (heads held high, white hats glistening in the sun, rifles obliqued on right shoulders) turned "eyes right" as they paid their respects to the Captain of the Station.

THEN with a precision that would have put imperialistic troops to shame, the 126th Battalion synchronized as one man and marched off the parade ground, and the first and only parade of the 126th came to an end.

CHAPTER FIVE

- ON TO CAMP PARKS -

THE day after the parade passed quickly enough, for there was packing to do, barracks to clean and a hundred necessary items to be purchased from the ship's store. The reason for all this activity was that the 126th Battalion was leaving Camp Endicott that afternoon, 15th October, for California.

THERE may have been some misgivings about leaving Endicott, but the anticipation of adventure which accompanied each move soon pushed aside such feels, and besides, the battalions (and WAVES) who remained behind did their best to cheer the 126th on its way. Thousands of men lined up along the main street to shout and wave and wish the departing Seabees "good luck". The station band, marching at the head of the battalion, played stirring music for the occasion, and at the train the senior Chaplain of the Station said a short prayer to "God-speed" the 126th on its way.

UPON boarding the train everyone plunked down into soft-cushioned seats and got comfortable. The trip was being made in Pullman cars and 25 men were quartered in each Pullman. It wasn't long before the train started, and shortly after that everyone took off his snug-fitting dress blues and slid into the more comfortable coveralls. All the needs of the men were taken care of by a Porter, and while the men were engrossed in the scenery he proceeded to make up berths for the night. Imagine the delight of the rough-and-tumble men who had been sleeping on hard bunks for the past two months when the Porter disclosed clean white sheets and soft, wool blankets for the beds.

AS rapidly as the Porter made up a berth, a Seabee tumbled into it, anxious to try out this new-found luxury. The lights went out early that night to enable everyone to enjoy these civilian comforts, but then lights go out early every night in the Navy. Taps is never later than 10:00 p.m.

IT took more than a day for the train to leave New York State. On the second morning Pennsylvania was touched at Lake Erie, then across Ohio and Indiana to Chicago, where the train stopped for a few hours. From Chicago the route led southwest, splitting Illinois in half, across the Mississippi River, and entering the great farm state of Kansas. Bearing westward the train crossed the Rocky Mountains, climbed the Continental Divide. Once over the Divide the cold and snow of the mountains was exchanged for the warmer currents of the salt beds of Utah. The Great Salt Lake was viewed and fleeting glimpses of the red-rocked bluffs of Nevada were enjoyed, and on the sixth day the train chugged into the promised land - California.

TO most of these boys who had never crossed the United States before, the constantly shifting scenes were an object of much awe. They continually changed from one side of the car to the other to stare with wonder at some particularly interesting feature of the countryside. As in a technicolor movie, the enthralled lads kept their eyes glued to the windows as long as there was light in the sky, watching absordedly the unrolling panorama of swift rivers, peaceful lakes, metropolitan cities, tiny hamlets, wooded mountains, yawning gorges, arid deserts and lush, fertile farmlands. All made their appearance for a moment, then were gone, as the heavily laden train drove constantly toward the setting sun.

UNCLE SAM must have had a secret motive for sending his favorite nephews across the country from one camp to another. Perhaps he felt that if his men could see for themselves the vastness and beauty of their country the willingness within them to do their level best to safeguard their country would be strengthened. They were going out to preserve their nation for themselves and their families, and how could they better realize what they were fighting for than by observing with their own eyes the wonderful power of this great land which belongs to all who live within its borders.

WHEN sightseeing became monotonous, as it did innumerable times on the long trip, relaxation was found in games of cards or checkers. There was also some reading material to while away the idle hours. Most of the books furnished by the battalion were of a technical nature, issued by the Military Training Department so that the men could continue their training while enroute. These manuals were hidden under the cushions for the duration of the trip and marked preference was shown to the comic books and magazines that circulated around the cars. As the destination drew near, however, the manuals were uncovered and returned to the officer who had distributed them, with the usual comment, "Mighty good stuff in there, sir." The officer smiled his thanks for the interest shown, but many swore they saw his lips frame a four-letter word. He never spoke it though, just smiled it.

AT least once each day the train would stop on a siding or in a freight yard, or perhaps at a station, and the order to detrain for exercise would ring through the cars. The purpose of these calisthenics was to keep the men from going stale on the long trip. "P.T." was given alongside the train, but several times there was a march through a town. The men enjoyed these marches along shaded streets much better than the exercises, and showed their high spirits by bursting into song and whistling at all the girls who were attracted by the singing. The older folks, when they saw the Seabees marching down the avenue, would rush into their houses, gather up every magazine in sight and hurry out again to distribute the magazines among the men. There were many cases of such kindnesses all along the route the 126th traveled.

AT various stops a volunteer organization distributed baskets of apples, cookies and cigarettes. Magazines and books were shoved into the windows at almost every stop, as were the daily papers. Sometimes the platoon chiefs would run into a bakery or candy store near a station and buy everything in sight. The Ship's Service Department also went on occasional forages, buying crates of oranges and apples for resale to the troops. There was very little that the men lacked in the way of refreshments during the trip across the country.

THE food problem was well handled. Meals were served three times a day, same as always, although they were much lighter than the meals served in camp. Most of the time chow was eaten in a dining car, which was hooked onto the rear of the train, and reached by running an obstacle course of outstretched arms and legs, orange crates and crap games -- but it was reached. The tables in the dining car were covered with white tablecloths and meals were served on real china dishes by an ebony-faced waiter who juggled fifteen full plates on one arm, and collected fifteen empty ones on the other. At the end of the meal the waiters, busboys and chefs congregated around the end of the galley watching one of their number, who, braver than the rest, circulated among the diners with an outstretched tip dish into which went dimes and quarters, as indications that the meal had been a success.

A FEW times when there was no dining car and a stop was made around chow time, wayside restaurants would be available and everyone got off for a "stationary" dinner. One such stop was made at a quaint, little hotel nestled in the mountains, and it was there that the finest dinner of the trip was eaten. It might seem from all this that the men did nothing but eat. Well, it's true. Even between meals or in the evening, ditty bags were dug into for apples and candy bars which had been stowed away before leaving Endicott. When not eating in the dining car or out of ditty bags, they were usually wishing for something to eat, or getting ready to eat. In fact, the first question asked upon arrival at Camp Parks was: "When do we eat?"

THE 126th arrived at its destination, Camp Parks, California, on the evening of the 21st October. It had taken the battalion six days and nights to cross the country, and when the train pulled into the camp, the men were actually sorry to have such a pleasant excursion come to an end. It would have been impossible, however, for the train to have taken a longer route, unless it had gone to California by way of the Suez Canal.

CHAPTER SIX

- CAMP PARKS, CALIFORNIA -

CAMP PARKS, located about 32 miles from San Francisco, is nestled among the barren hills of the San Fernando Valley -- at least they were barren when the 126th was there. Here there were two story barracks, pool rooms, bowling alleys, a swimming pool, theatres and numerous ship's stores and lounges scattered throughout the camp. Although this West Coast camp was primarily a recuperating center for battalions returning from overseas duty, the 126th wasn't there to recuperate but to continue its training until further assignment.

IN October 1943 Camp Parks was filled to overflowing, and still the construction battalions, "special" or stevedore battalions and maintenance units continued to arrive and depart. In order to handle this steady influx in population, hastily constructed quonset hut villages had mushroomed in the northwest and southeast sections of the camp. When the 126th arrived all the barracks in the camp were occupied, so the battalion moved into the last group of quonsets in the northwest section.

THE quonsets assigned to the 126th had not quite been completed when the outfit took over the area. Before the men could inhabit their quarters it was necessary for them to complete the installations by putting in the doors and windows which were lying alongside the huts. Individual steel cots were still in packing cases, and these, too, had to be set up. Luckily there were one or two mechanics in each platoon and they soon had the beds in a horizontal position.

AFTER the bunks were ready there followed that eternal scramble for seabags, each man trying to locate his own out of a pile of 500 or more. When located the bags were carried into the huts, mattresses and blankets were unpacked and beds made in the prescribed manner. Then the fatigued men also assumed a horizontal position.

BUT not for long! Some adventurous soul had discovered the chow hall. Hearing this news, the "sack artists" rose from their cots and asked for the whereabouts of said chow hall. The directions were given with a wave of a hairy mitt, and "Over thataway". A dozen or so men took off in the direction indicated. A mile and a half of rapid walking was rewarded by sight of the chow line. The new arrivals fell into the line, which crawled along for about a half mile, and at last -- the mess hall.

IT was a pleasant surprise to the men, after shoving up to the door, pushing along the counter, filling trays to overflowing and grabbing empty seats, to find the meal not only edible but palatable. Forthwith, Camp Parks became an oasis, a place where potatoes were whipped instead of mashed into big lumps; where roast beef was cooked so that it was longer stringy; where bread had a remarkable lightness to it, and when covered with creamery butter shone like amber. The cocoa had real milk in it, not that powdered kind. The real surprise was the conscientious manner with which mess cooks beckoned the diners back to the line for seconds. After absorbing all that fraternalism and good food the men decided they were going to like Camp Parks. And, strangely enough, they did.

THERE wasn't any time wasted in scouting around the camp after chow was eaten. Very few had any aspirations for burning the midnight oil -- at least not for another day or two. Almost to a man, the Seabees returned to their huts, put gear in some semblance of good order and lost little time getting to bed. They would have had a good night's sleep too, if it had not been for the chilly California weather. Contrary to popular belief, the temperature took an alarming drop once the sun had dropped behind the hills.

IT was a rude awakening for these men, who had been lolling in the lap of luxury for a week, to have the bugle rouse them from their sacks at 0530. What an unearthly hour for honest people to have to get up! It was still pitch black outside but orders are orders, so the men, rubbing sleep from their eyes and trying to restore the circulation to their frozen limbs, stumbled through the darkness to the "head". The usual early morning scuffle to get to the sinks was in progress, but after much maneuvering everyone got washed and returned to the huts to don outer garments. Thus, against the fog and rain of a California morn, the men paired off or assembled into groups and departed for breakfast. The chow line was already long when the "C" Company arrived so they took their places and waited the customary half hour before entering the barn-like restaurant. A hurried but hearty meal was consumed, trays were dunked and the return trip to the huts undertaken.

ONCE back in the area there was nothing to do but loaf around and wait for daybreak. One fellow, astronomically inclined, gazed at the heavens and remarked that it would be quite some time before daybreak. This remark had a staggering effect. The drowsy Seabees sprinted for their bunks to catch a few more winks of sleep before muster.

THEY didn't get much sleep, however, because orders came through for everyone to fall-out on the company street. The men lined up in platoon formation, then stood "at ease" while the chiefs called muster. The names were called alphabetically (how else) and their owners indicated that they were present by yelling Hup, Yere, Yah, Yo, and a sprinkling of Heres, which is the proper answer. Sick Bay slips were then issued to those who had colds, or any malady, imaginary or otherwise, which might be effective for "ducking-off".

ONCE these "racketeers" were weeded out it was time to march to the drill field for Colors. Colors is the daily flagraising ceremony. On the field the platoons formed into companies and the companies were in battalion formation behind the company officers, staff officers and O in C.

AT 0800 the bell tolled eight times recording the hour, and simultaneously the band struck up the National Anthem. No orders were given, but at the sound of the first note thousands of right hands were snapped to hat brims in salute to Flag and Country. The flag was unfurled and hoisted and all eyes solemnly followed it until it was secured at the top of the staff.

IT took but a moment for this daily ritual to be observed, and as the last notes of the Star Spangled Banner wafted away on the breeze, arms dropped smartly and the battalion turned quickly to the business of the day.

THE plan of the day had been issued to the CEO's, so all that was required of the chiefs was to say to their platoons: "Today, men we are going on a hike -- a long hike." There were mutterings in the ranks at this announcement so explanations were forthcoming and they were pointedly direct. One chief summed it up nicely: "You guys are soft from a week on th' pullman, but the picnic is over. By next week you're gonna be in shape again."

THE chief was right. A week later there were great signs of improvement (mutterings were louder at the word 'hike'), and these signs became more noticeable as the ten weeks at Camp Parks rolled by. Yessir, there was a great improvement.

SO they went on a "long hike" that morning, and nearly every morning after that. Whoever said, "An army travels on its stomach" certainly knew what he was talking about. These lads didn't travel on their stomachs at first, but after marching constantly for a couple of weeks their legs were whittled down to stumps, and then the stumps disappeared until they were "traveling on their stomachs". When not swinging along country roads or over hill and dale on hikes, they were wending their way to and from the chow hall, or joining the procession to the liberty bus which stopped at Wood's Corner.

MOST of these marches were made in double file, one column walking along each side of the road, thus leaving the center open for motor vehicles. The CPOs would tramp up and down this open space between the ranks, exhorting everyone to greater effort, and demanding silence every time a hapless individual opened his mouth to speak to a mate. Talking wasn't permitted, but trying to keep those "yappers" quiet was like putting the clamps on a "hen party".

THE "shoe leather commandos" were permitted to speak only during rest periods. The idea of the marches being to plod along in silence for five miles, then at the word "Halt" to fall to the turf along the roadside for a five minute rest. While relaxing the "smoking lamp" was lit, shoelaces unloosened and words exchanged. Then before cigarettes were half smoked or bodies sufficiently rested, the order was barked to "Fall In" again.

WONDERING where the rush was, the "sad sacks" threw away their smokes and fell in line, trying to relace their shoes while the columns forged ahead. What's the reason, they asked each other, for all these damned hikes? Scuttlebutt had it that the Navy had too many Seabees, and those in excess were being transferred into the Infantry. "Oh Lord," said a newcomer in the battalion, "not that -- anything but that." However, there was no foundation to these fears. No one was being transferred anywhere -- not yet. All this marching was merely part of the Construction Battalion's "toughening up" program. "And anyhow", remarked one 'joe' when complaints about the hikes grew too numerous. "What are you guys hollering about? Uncle Sam's paying for th' shoe leather. All we have to do is march." And march they did.

ONE hike which the 126th was fortunate in missing was the forced march to Mt. Diablo, which was about 27 miles from Parks. The training program was usually concluded by a march to the top of this mountain, camping there for three days, during which maneuvers were held, then returning to civilization. It was due to the severity of the lovely California climate that this phase of training was neglected. However, no one was sorry that a view of the countryside was not to be had from atop the mountain. Not a bit sorry.

IT was no fault of the "C" Company boys that bodies improved so much physically, for on liberty nights everyone dissipated. The bay cities of San Francisco and Oakland were painted a particularly bright scarlet, as was the city of San Jose, where some of the lads were treated like long, lost brothers. The inner circle was also toured, and hidden charms were discovered in towns such as Hayward, Stockton, Livermore and Pleasanton.

ALL the bars and clubs in this area were put back on a paying basis. The only reason the taverns didn't do enough business to "enlarge the place" was that a decree, passed by the state legislature, forbade the sale of alcoholic beverages after midnight. At the time this was thought to be a terrible imposition to put on the nation's fighting men, but the men soon learned to consume enough in the hours before midnight to be able to carry on for the rest of the night, and then some.

IT can readily be seen that everyone had fun -- barrels of it -- especially on liberty, but even on nights that liberty wasn't permitted. There were always shows to see, recreational halls to visit, and a beer hall to patronize, where the finest brews in the country could be purchased "two for a quarter". It was really surprising, then, that in spite of all this "night life" the men were able to take all the punishment that chiefs and instructors dished out, but they did, and still came back for more.

THE monotony of the hike was broken (after a night of heavy imbibing) by close order drilling, which proved that the officers didn't have hearts of stone because they considered drilling the less strenuous of the two forms of exercise. It was, however, the same as hiking, merely confined to a smaller area. If the morning was expended in drilling, it was invariably polished off with a run over the obstacle course. Everyone knows what an obstacle course is. It's a runway, separated at frequent intervals by obstructions made of earth, wood and steel, across which the weary butt of some maniac's little jokes must gallop, daring not to fall, lest he be trampled to death by the oncoming hordes behind.

CAMP PARKS had another obstacle course. The second one was called "the natural" or Judo course. It consisted of a path, a foot and a half wide, carved along the side of a mountain, which climbed, dipped and turned, crossed river and bog, and ended in an open field six miles from camp. After running this course in prescribed time (twenty minutes for an invalid), the usual five minute rest was permitted before the return to quarters was undertaken.

IN view of this constant expending of energy, it wasn't any wonder that the men became "sack lovers" during leisure hours, or drowned their sorrows when granted an occasional liberty. Ah, but life wasn't all drilling and marching. "C" Company construction men were assigned to the Public Works Department of the camp for a short period. Here at last they were given an opportunity to prove their capabilities at the manly art of wielding pick and shovel. And some were even promoted to the exalted positions of concrete workers. The concrete workers constructed monuments to the company all over the camp in the form of sidewalks, driveway, roads and curbing. And, the men made certain that no other outfit misappropriated any of the credit for doing these jobs, so "Co. C - 126th Batt." was inscribed on every piece of work.

AN undeniable "first" for the company came when one of its favorite sons conceived the idea of donations to the American Red Cross Blood Bank in Oakland. The plan called for an entire platoon descending enmasse upon the Red Cross Center for the purpose of donating a pint of blood. Realizing the spirit which prompted such a proposal, the plan was endorsed by Lt. O'Rourke, approved by Commander Brelsford and publicized by the battalion newspaper -- "The Scuttlebutt". Arrangements were made with the Oakland Chapter to handle the men, transportation provided by the battalion, and each of the six platoons in the battalion given a special liberty in order to report to Oakland for the contribution. The plan rapidly became a success and was picked up by the other companies, securing a hundred percent turnout, when the program was suddenly interrupted.

INTERRUPTED, Hell! Shattered is more like it. Lt. Commander Graham D. Spickard, CEC, USNR, who had superseded Commander Brelsford as O-in-C, received orders to transfer his battalion to Camp Rousseau, Port Hueneme, California. Blood banks, training, liberties were all forgotten in the confusion which accompanied the preparations for shipment to another camp.

WHAT was known by the men about this move to another camp could be put in a peanut shell. Via the Scuttlebutt route it was learned that Hueneme was a port of embarkation, and once there preparations would be made for transfer to an overseas base. It might be another month, maybe two, but now the battalion was on its way.

PACKING for the trip was routine stuff. When orders to "fall-in" were issued on the afternoon of 3rd January, with cigarettes and magazines tucked into blouses, the men took their places, well prepared for the usual hours of waiting. For troop movements the customary wait before boarding a train is three hours and fifteen minutes, and sometimes it runs into days. This trip was no exception, but finally the waiting was ended and the battalion marched toward the station.

WITH a slight air of secrecy the battalion marched out a side gate and down a little-used road to the railroad tracks, hoping in this manner to avert a commotion. However, it had not counted on the hundreds of civilian employees working in offices along the edge of the camp. These patriots dropped their work to shout and wave goodbye. Before long, the men in the 126th felt as if they were marching in a Labor Day parade. Once beyond the camp limits and alongside the train, the fanfare ceased, and the battalion made ready to board the train. One last muster was taken as the men mounted the train's steps and places were found in the dingy coaches.

WHEN the train finally started to move hundreds of heads and shoulders were poked through the open windows so that everybody on the train could wave farewell to those left behind. Then, with the camp far to the rear, seats were slouched into and the majority of the mates passed the next hour lost in reverie. Good times, and bad, at Parks were mused over. Each liberty was relived, and the farewell party -- a special show and dinner, which the camp had given the men -- was thought of with gratitude. Taking everything into consideration, Camp Parks had been a fine emplacement, and it was hoped that it would be seen again when the battalion returned to the States.

CHAPTER SEVEN

- COMMISSIONING OF CBMU #582 -

CAMP ROUSSEAU was reached after a sleepless night on the train. Why all overnight jumps were sleepless ones, no one dared say. It could be said, however, that the destination wasn't much to brag about. The land of "perpetual sunshine" was covered by rain clouds when the battalion dismounted from the train.

THE quarters weren't much to rave about either. Area "C", where the 126th was installed, was as bare of vegetation as the Sahara; along the road to the town of Hueneme, where the giant Eucalyptus trees flourished in shady rows, and emitted a pungent odor. Again it was quonset huts for quarters, something like the ones at Sun Valley, and the chow hall arrangement was the same too. This wasn't minded too much; the men were used to taking what they could get, and liking it -- or not liking it as the case may be.

IT took close to a week to get things ship-shape because time was occupied with hikes, lectures, liberties and large quantities of Scuttlebutt. There were many far-fetched tales circulated which listed the ultimate destination of the 126th as being China, Guadalcanal, Australia or Tarawa, and some were willing to bet that the battalion was returning to Camp Endicott for shipment to the European Theatre of Operations. One tale, which was regarded with scorn, was that the outfit was being broken up. Laughter met this announcement, but had it been known that plans for such a move were being poured over in the Skipper's office, laughter would have changed to suspense. Everyone knew that something was "cooking", but what was it? And, how did it effect the men?

AFTER Colors on Monday, 15th January, these questions were answered. Lt. Commander Spickard advised that as of today Company "C" was no longer a part of the 126th Battalion. Instead it would be Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit Number 582. He then made known other changes which effected the battalion, and then went on to say that he was sorry the outfit couldn't stick together but such were the orders. The O-in-C concluded his statement by wishing the officers and men of the new Unit much success and the best of luck and hoped that a reunion might someday be effected somewhere overseas.

NOW that this company was no longer a part of the battalion it was necessary for the men to get "signed-out" or transferred into the new Unit. First of all, Allowance Cards were distributed. These cards were taken to the Senior Medical Officer, who, assisted by his corpsmen, gave every man a routine physical examination before he signed the cards. Then there were four more autographs to be collected. They were: The Chaplain's, the Officer of the Day's, the Executive Officer's and the Company Commander's. When five signatures had been affixed to every card, the men were officially a part of CBMU 582.

U. S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION MAINTENANCE UNIT FIVE HUNDRED EIGHTY-TWO was commissioned on 15th January 1944. This Unit, the eighty-second of its type to be authorized by the Bureau of Yards and Docks, had the distinction of being the first CBMU formed at the U. S. Naval Advance Base Depot, Port Hueneme, California.

ALTHOUGH CBMU 582 was primarily made up of Company "C" men, in order to bring the Unit up to complement it was necessary to draft men with "special skills" from the other four companies in the 126th. Even then, the quota of five officers and 269 men was not completely filled, so ship's company and the General Detail at Camp Rousseau supplied the additional manpower. The completed master-role showed that the 123rd and 125th battalions had also contributed men to this newly commissioned organization.

THE first task confronting the new unit was moving into new quarters. These were provided in Area "Q". Moving day was 19th January, and the change was for the better. The most agreeable feature of "Q" area was its convenient arrangement. Instead of quonsets the quarters were wooden huts. These were one story barracks, each of which accomodated an entire platoon, by utilizing double-decker bunks. The "head" was conveniently located between the two rows of huts which were occupied by 582, and the chow hall was directly across the street from the area. Far superior to mess facilities in other areas, the Master Galley had the latest equipment with which to turn out delicious meals -- and did! The only inconvenience of Area "Q" was its distance from Gate 4, the Liberty Gate.

DESPITE the tremendous amount of work necessitated by the transfer of personnel and the organizing of a new unit, everyone was finally comfortably settled, when in typical Navy style, orders came through for another move. This time, however, the move was within the unit.

INSTEAD of being separated into various weapons and scouting platoons, as had been the case in the battaliion, the new plans called for six Construction Platoons and a Headquarters Company. Therefore, months in advance of an overseas assignment each man knew what his job would be when he arrived on Island X, the ultimate destination of all Seabees.

AS soon as the men got settled again, the Military Training Officer, Warrant Officer Joseph D. Cowan, CEC, (s) USNR, announced a staggering military program. The men were dumbfounded. They considered themselves already well trained, and they were; but they had not received their ABD training--yet!

FIRST there was an issue of combat gear. This consisted of pack, half tent, mosquito netting, cartridge belt, canteen, rifle clips, mess gear and poncho. Then shoes and coveralls were inspected in order to replace those in poor condition. Finally, each man was issued his "baby" -- a brand new Carbine. After a few days of instruction and drill with the new issue the Unit was ordered out early in the morning of 25th January to go to the rifle range. Collecting their gear the men mustered, ready to climb into the trucks which would take them to the range. Trucks? They marched to the range. And, it wasn't a walk to the corner drug store either. It was a cross-country hike.

YES, in spite of the long walk, the chilliness of the morning, the biting sand and raging wind, the Seabees were in their usual high spirits until they learned that the Plan of the Day called for Dry Firing. That dampened the spirits. Next day when the men reached the range their spirits remained high; they were actually going to fire their rifles. To make the day even more pleasant the wind died down while the men were on the firing line and the sun made its appearance just as firing commenced.

Everyone had an opportunity to fire his "piece", and when scores were counted it was agreed that the rifles had performed satisfactorily. Then there was a mad dash to the Range House to get at the boiling water, ramrods, patches and oil. The rifles had to be cleaned. This chore completed a line was formed in anticipation of the chow truck. When the chow truck pulled into the area it was met with a rousing cheer. The damned thing was only about an hour late and the guys were hungry. The rich repast consisted of cold beef or cheese sandwiches (one to a customer), cookies, apples and coffee; all seasoned generously with sand. After the meal canteen cups were washed and the men indulged in a short rest before hiking back to camp.

THE Military Training Area, located several miles from the main camp, included the rifle range, the obstacle course and the many training schools. This area was the scene of most of 582's training. Even the long hikes to and from the area (two round trips daily) were considered as part of this training.

THERE wasn't much difference between ABD training and the training programs in the other camps. The men listened to lectures on Judo, the art of throwing hand grenades and bayonet fighting; ran the obstacle course; descended the cargo net; made mock beach landings; and went through the gas chamber. Going through the gas chamber was a unique experience. The purpose of the chamber was to test gas masks for flaws, and at the same time to enable the men to see how the masks worked. Whether the masks worked or not, the men were exposed to the horrors of tear gas, because if the mask didn't work, the instructor made the man pull it off anyhow.

EVERY man got a whiff of these "deadly" fumes, and when he emerged from the chamber of horrors, he looked as if he had just peeled a ton of onions. When the experiment was finished, the masks were cleaned and replaced in their carriers, there to remain until the Japs started using poison gases. Everybody hoped that day would never come.

ALTHOUGH the gas chamber was quite an experience, there were thrills by the dozen the day the Unit listened to a hard-boiled instructor discourse on "hand grenades". In order to illustrate a point in his lecture, this SFC (Station Force Commando) had everybody lie behind a sand parapet. Once the men were all in a prone position the instructor inquired if insurance policies were paid up. Receiving an affirmative reply he hollered, "Duck!", pulled the pin from a grenade and tossed it into the hollow in front of the parapet.

FIVE second later the earth heaved and swelled like a stormy sea. Stars came out in multitudes. Bits of metal and waves of sand flew overhead. It was Chateau Thierry, Dunkirk and Anzio all rolled into one. The men were scared stiff, speechless. They were numb. Never had anything like this happened to them before. After a few moments the turbulence ceased. The stars disappeared and the earth became stationary. Slowly the dazed men reached kneeling positions. When commanded to rise they did so hesitantly.

WHEN composure was regained the instructor continued with the lecture. The audience was highly attentive for the rest of the session, and no one was ever to forget the effectiveness of the hand grenade for use in combat. The Seabees learned their lesson for the day, and everybody was damn glad when that day was over.

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WHEN the field training was completed the men were sent to schools. These lasted for two weeks and the subjects were the same as those taught at Camp Endicott. The most popular school of all was Anti-Aircraft. Warrant Officer Cowan took a group of students to Pacific Beach, California for firing practice, at the end of which time the lucky individuals who had chosen A.A. returned to Hueneme bubbling over with stories of the fun that had been had on the range and on liberties. "Some guys get all the breaks", moaned one stay-at-home.

HOWEVER, there were few breaks to be had from schooling. As soon as the military training was completed, Warrant Officer Holsinger, the Technical Training Officer, was ready with his training program. The men who were qualified by trade, or who were inclined toward mechanics, found themselves enrolled in one of the following schools: Cable Splicing, Carburetor Repair, Welding, Refrigeration, Equipment Operation, Water Purification, Diesel, Radio, Range and Ovens, or Boiler Testing.

THE schools were also attended daily, except Sunday, and the men prepared for future assignments by studying hard, cramming, taking countless examinations and getting practical experience in addition to theories. They also learned that the Navy never misses a trick when it prepares its men for overseas duty.

THEN one day schooling was completed. "Now", said the men, "for that much needed rest." Al, but wait a minute fellows. What's this notice on the bulletin board? The men gathered round, pushing and shoving, until one lad (a little more intelligent than the rest--he could read) solved the problem of how to get to the bulletin by reading aloud so that everybody could learn the news without getting a leg broken in the scuffle.

HE read that on the 14th February at 1300 the men were to fall out on the drill field. The outfit was going on a "bivouac". This word meant nothing to the listeners. The notice went on to list the uniform of the day, equipment that was to be taken along, gave instructions as to behavior, and was signed by the Officer in Charge, which made it official. Now there was nothing to do but get ready for the bivouac. This, however, took half the night and all of the next morning.

THE following afternoon found everyone who could walk lined up on the drill field. Officers and men alike wore coveralls, helmets and leggings, carried rifles and full packs strapped to their backs. In each pack, as per instructions, were blanket, towel, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, dungarees, shirt, socks, shoes, shelter-half, poles, pegs, underwear, sweater, mess gear, poncho, cigarettes, cigars, pen knife, K-rations, candy bars and many other articles which might prove useful on such a trip. Being full packs, weight was considerably more than the hundred pound "light-pack", but the men were strong and tough and would think nothing of a mere four hour hike with this slight load strapped to their backs.

MANY of the boys thought they were going on a lark when they started out, and were very cheerful, often bursting into bits of song as they sauntered along the road. But after the road had been left behind and there were still several miles to be marched along the beach through shifting sands, the songs turned to gasps as breathing became more difficult.

FINALLY the officers called a halt and the men were paired off and ordered to pitch tents. Packs and rifles were unslung, holes dug between the sand dunes, and the pup-tents were pitched. These pup-tents were so inferior to anything the Seabees had ever slept in that in comparison the barracks seemed like a Statler Hotel. Yet, this was home while 582 was on maneuvers, protecting its section of the beach from an imaginary enemy. K-rations were eaten for three days and everybody practically starved on this diminished food allowance. Washing was out of the question for the entire period as only one canteen of water was allowed per day, and this was for drinking. Beards grew long and faces got black. Sleep was sought at night by wearing to bed every article of clothing that had been brought along, but still the wind whistled through blankets to chill to the very bone, and sand drifted under the covers and seeped into noses, ears and mouths.

THE bivouac lasted for three days. Three days of cold winds, biting fleas, flying sand and piercing cold. Three days without fires or hot meals, or cigarettes between meals or after dark. It was like three days of hell but 582 protected its beach, successfully concluded all training programs, and the men proved that they could "take it". On the afternoon of 16th February the encampment was broken up, packs were rerolled, slung over shoulders, and the Unit set out for the main camp.

THE hike back to the Unit Area was the final blow. The men arrived in camp so tired they couldn't see straight, so hungry that backbones had become acquainted with belly-buttons, and so dirty and unkempt they couldn't stand of each other. What started out as a lark ended as the toughest of all training experiences. Ah, but the wonders of modern times. After a bath and shave, clean clothing was donned, then a hot meal eaten, and finally everybody went to sleep, none the worse for the experience.

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AWAKENING the next morning everyone was completely refreshed. The past few days had been like a nightmare but that was all over now. Seabees become accustomed to looking ahead, not behind. So, looking ahead, what was to be seen? Why, liberty, of course, and good times for the evening or weekend in Los Angeles, Hollywood, Santa Monica and Pasadena, or men with wives saw a quiet evening at home in Oxnard, Ventura or Santa Barbara. Whatever the plans, no one needed coaxing to shine shoes, climb into dress blues, grab "liberty chit" and head for the main gate.

ONCE outside the gate paths took different directions. Husbands went home to supper and an evening of comparative quiet, and would return to camp on the morrow, well-rested and disgustingly sober. Those not quite so fortunate headed for L.A. or one of the surrounding towns. Hollywood was the most likely spot for an enjoyable evening and many ended up in the home of the movie industry. Here, again, came a split of ranks. Some with prearranged dates took off for the homes of girl friends, or for a rendezvous in some quiet little cafe. Others without dates headed for the Palladium or some other night spot, and would probably end up with dates. The more timid Seabees, or movie star worshippers, went directly to the Hollywood Canteen, where in an evening's time could be seen many actresses and actors, or a dance or two with a charming hostess, and where food was on hand in abundance for the ever-hungry servicemen.

BESIDES the dancer, the movie star worshipper and the husband, there was one other type of liberty-going Seabee -- the drinker. The drinker and his mates (also soaks) headed immediately for the homey atmosphere of a favorite bar and dropped anchor. Then the task of refueling for the long days between liberties would be undertaken. Between drinks the whiskey lovers would reminisce of days long gone by. Yarns would be swapped about old jobs, present and past loves, what swell kids each had, and how anxious everyone was to get overseas, get the job done and get back home again.

BACK and forth the talk drifted until twelve o'clock. The bartender then went into his routine of letting customers know that it was time to go by making a great flourish of cleaning glasses, putting bottles back on shelves and wiping off the bar. The Seabees discovering that ballast tanks are filled, take the hint and haul in the anchor. Underway at last, the tipplers surged into the darkened street and navigated for a lunch counter where enough food was shoveled in to keep them going till morning. Filled to the neck with meat and drink the merrymakers joined the rest of the Hollywood party at the bus terminal, boarded a bus and returned to camp. Thus can be seen how a Seabee spends his liberty nights and why he wanted liberty so often.

WEEKEND liberty was the same as overnight liberty, only moreso. The only difference was that on weekends everyone went sightseeing. Almost all visited one or more major Hollywood studios, and a man wasn't a true member of 582 if he couldn't brag of meeting at least one movie star, preferably of the female variety. Besides the Hollywood Canteen and the studios, the Hollywood Bowl and Rose Bowl were visited, and many stayed overnight at the Hollywood Guild -- the foster home of all Seabees.

WHILE on the subject of liberties, mention should be given to the Special Liberties which Lt. O'Rourke gave to married men with wives in the vicinity, and to men whose homes were within the liberty district. Special Liberty was made possible by permitting these men to take the places of men who did not desire liberty of an evening. The arrangement proved very satisfactory and everyone enjoyed a fair share of liberty at Hueneme. Liberty, whether regular or Special, overnight or weekend, was all that a Seabee lived for.

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SPORTS WEEK was anovel innovation for a Seabee Unit, but the 582 training program had been completed, so the Skipper stamped his okay on this respite from military training. Ensign Greger inaugurated the sports program, and in this he was assisted by Chiefs Freeman, Anderson and Curtright. Bill Hodgins and John Banker also did a lot of work in connection with this program. The entire week from 5th to 12th March was called Sports Week, and a week long program was devoted to inter-platoon competition in softball, volleyball, horseshoes, pool, and a game was even made out of close-order drill, that thorn in the side of every Seabee. Sports made a fine break from training and everybody had a lot of fun, and played at the games so hard they might just as well have been drilling. Along with this Sports Week the softball enthusiasts got together and formed a ball team, and after a good deal of practice played some bang-up games. Among teams the 582 defeated were ball clubs from CBMU 561 and the 127th Battalion.

ENSIGN GREGER, Welfare and Recreation Officer, was responsible for lighting the sports fuse in CBMU 582. Starting from scratch he built the Unit a complete Recreation Department by purchasing with allotted funds, or procuring from unofficial sources, athletic gear, fishing equipment, small games, radios, phonographs, records, books, magazines and other items which would make an overseas stay more pleasant. Bill Hodgins and Bill Heinz, who were assigned to the Recreation Department, helped Mr. Greger to make selections for the mates, and to pack the gear for shipment. It was later believed that CBMU 582 had one of the finest recreation departments to have ever left the States.

BESIDES doing a great amount of morale boosting, the Sports Week started the Scuttlebutt mill functioning overtime. It was reasoned that the sports program would wind up the stay at Hueneme, and any day would see the Unit boarding ship for some small island in the Pacific. Though many dates were passed out as being the date of departure, all were generally inclined to acceptance of the first week in April as the date of embarkation.

EMBARKATION seemed more imminent when one day during the latter part of March, a C-2 Cargo Ship, fresh from its ways in Richmond, California, docked at Port Hueneme. It was this ship which would carry supplies and equipment to CBMU 582's overseas base. When the stevedores commenced loading her a large squad of men from 582 was dispatched to the dock to check cargoes and to act as cargo and "ammo" guards. These men started the rumor that several men from the Unit would travel with the Cargo Ship. Many had hopes of being assigned to this ship but they could have saved themselves a lot of worrying because when the ship pulled out of the harbor on 28th March Ensign Greger, also Cargo Officer, was the only representative of the outfit on board. One thing the mates did know, however, and that was that it wouldn't be many days before the Unit followed Mr. Greger.

SOMETHING else happened during this same period which made the men forget, temporarily, about "shoving off". This was a "72 hour liberty", which was given all hands so that affairs could be wound up on the outside, and everyone could have one last fling. Besides the good times that were had on this extended liberty, and the enormous amount of money spent, there was another reason for remembering this holiday. It was the first "72 hour pass" that any of the men in the outfit had had since joining the service. It was also the last liberty that was to be enjoyed in the United States, or elsewhere, for many months.

LT. BROADHURST, the Executive Officer, looked the Unit over carefully as it lined up on the drill field. When the men were all in place he called the company to attention, then ripped off a series of commands to see how the men were reacting to discipline. Apparently well satisfied, he then gave the command "At ease", and said:

"MEN! As of 0800 this morning, 1 April 1944, Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 582 is Secured". (This announcement was met by a resounding cheer.) "No one, regardless of the reason, will be permitted beyond the limits of Port Hueneme. If any man thinks he can get into town for a pair of glasses or to pick up a set of false teeth, he is sadly mistaken. He'll have to get along as best he can without 'em. This Unit is to be prepared for immediate embarkation, and it is my belief that we will be on board ship before the week is out."

MR. BROADHURST'S voice continued to rise and fall as he issued careful instructions to commence packing, to remain close to the area and to check all equipment to make certain the required amount was had and that it was in perfect condition. The men listened with their ears but their minds drifted. Schooners of beer, silk-stockinged beauties and bright lights of Hollywood were seen floating by on a cloud just out of reach. Already they were on a desert island, even with the bustle of camp life all around. However, the realm of reality was returned to when the Executive Officer turned the Unit over to the Skipper.

LT. O'ROURKE said that Mr. Broadhurst had given the complete story, and that he did not have anything to add except to say that he was proud of his Unit's behavior during the stay at Hueneme. He offered the men a few words of advice regarding the impending voyage and concluded by saying that he, too, was happy to be finally shipping out. The Unit was then called to "attention" and a moment later the men were dismissed.

IMMEDIATELY bedlam broke loose. Backslapping and yelling rent the previous tranquil scene to shreds. Instead of being glum about leaving everybody was looking upon the voyage as an adventure. All were happy in knowing that at long last they were going overseas. Everyone milled around the field, ran back and forth through barracks and shouted to one another wise remarks about, "Finally getting a chance to show 'em what we can do". It wasn't until later that a disgruntled liberty hound hollered: "Dammit, there goes my weekend liberty to hell."

BUSY days followed. Preparations were many for the intended "cruise". Hordes of men sprinted for telephone and telegraph offices to make phone calls or send wires, collect. Letters were written by the dozens telling home folks not to expect mail for a few weeks, "because I'm going on a little trip." Playboys told indulgent parents, "Hold up on that fifty, I won't need it after all." Everyone with whom Mac Seabee corresponded got some sort of a scribbled note explaining the situation and begging not to be forgotten to Jim or Mike, Annie or Gert. Change of address cards were distributed, filled in and mailed, listing the Unit's new address as being "c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California". Then there were clothes to be washed, rolled and packed, bunks to be cleaned and dried for the next occupants (good housekeepers these Seabees) and many other details to be taken into account.

THE Ship's Store was invaded and purchases of cigarettes, cigars, tobacco, candy, soap, writing paper, ink, pens, lighter fluid, flints, wicks, matches, books, magazines, etc. were made in large quantities, leaving the store in a state of depletion and the clerks with sad grins on their grimy faces. A trip was also made to the Small Store where everything and anything that might be needed in the way of clothing was bought. Not a thought was given to where all this merchandise was to be packed, but it was found out later that it would have been more prudent to have done without most of the items purchased.

CONSEQUENTLY, packing presented its problems. Into seabags went all clothing that would not be needed on board ship, and when these bags were filled to the top they were hauled down to the dock and thrown deep into the hold of the ship, to reappear again it was hoped upon arrival at destination. Then into duffle, laundry and ditty bags went a vast assortment of goods that would be, or might be, used while the ship was in transit. These would be carried on board ship along with the combat packs, rifles, gas masks, helmets, etc., which would give each man a load of slightly less than a hundred seventy-five pounds to lug on his back.

AS the date of departure drew ever closer the Unit was secured to the area, although groups were still permitted to go to the theatres in the evenings under the watchful eyes of a CPO. Then on Friday night Lt. Broadhurst took the fellows down to the beer hall for a last fling. Everyone had a helluva good time, drinking gallons of beer, singing songs, and in general raising the roof. It was a real get-together and a big night was made of it because everyone knew it was to be the last night in camp.

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THE great day finally came. It was the date of Embarkation -- 5th April 1944. At 1200 everything was in readiness. A final meal as the guests of Ship's Company -- not unlike the last repast of a condemned criminal in the "death house" -- had been eaten, and now the Unit fell-out into the "street" chafing at the bit and ready to go. The men looked like so many pack horses lined up in platoon formation. The roll was called, then everyone was twisted, turned and subsequently lined up in alphabetical order in preparation for the "boat muster".

THERE seemed to be a slight delay in transportation, so, with or without permission, duffle bags were dropped to the earth and bodies plunked on top of them. After an hour of waiting, trucks appeared around the end of the buildings and Ship's Company men rose out of nowhere to handle the loading of the trucks. As soon as a truck screeched to a stop, each was loaded with a sweaty mass of men and equipment, then, with difficulty and a couple of smashed fingers the tailgate was closed and the driver signaled to be on his way. In like manner, the entire fleet of trucks was stuffed with manpower and sent racing to the ship. Once at the docks the trucks discharged their human cargoes with a lightning-like speed. The men were again lined up alphabetically and before the name of the ship could be learned, or even what it looked like, loading operations began.

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ADAMS, Altemus, Anderson, Arnould; the names rang out hard and cold as the Loading Officer, assisted by Unit Officers, called off the "boat muster". Badore, Baimbridge, Banker, Baumeister; past the officers and up the ramp went the heavily-laden men. Caldwell, Carey, Carney, Caulfield; they went over the rail and across the deck. Davis, Decker, DeGuilio, DeLaney; and down the companionway into the hold. Sharply the names were clipped off on the dock, and with an answering "Heresir", men quickly boarded the ship, crossed the deck and descended the hatchway into the bowels of the ship. They were hurried down to "C" desk -- two decks below the sunshine -- then shoved through narrow corridors between tiers of bunks. When directed, each man threw his gear into one of these bunks, crawled in after it and laid motionless while the churning continued all around.

PRESENTLY quiet prevailed. Laying quietly on the steel-framed bunks the heavily breathing Seabees looked around the hold and wondered what it was all about. An hour was spent in surveying a view that took ten minutes to digest. The entire hold was painted white; bulkheads, topside, bunks, all white, except the deck which was a buff colored concrete affair. No port holes opened to the sea, the air coming as it did through ventilators which opened about a foot above the floor. Hundreds of bunks, nothing more than shelves, filled the hold from the deck to the ceiling in tiers of five and six, and each shelf was just large enough for one man and his gear. It was crowded but far from cozy, yet this was to be home for the next five weeks. What a home!

EVENTUALLY permission was granted to go back on deck. It was found after climbing the staircase to the blinding sunshine, that the ship was still tied to the dock so everyone made a bee-line for the rail to watch the last minute loading and to listen to the Seabee Band which played half a dozen songs, then went its merry way. The boys must have had liberty that night. Impatiently, the afternoon was whiled away, then a supper of creamed chicken was had, and then some more waiting. The evening was almost gone now and still the ship didn't move. Perhaps plans had changed and the ship wasn't leaving after all.

AH, but it was going! At 2115 the whistles blew, the anchor hoisted and the gangplank lowered away. The turbines started singing down in the engine room. Slowly, very slowly the big ship started to swing out into the harbor, and an ever widening gulf of black, forbidding water appeared between the shore and the ship. Underway at last! There were no flags waving, no women or brass bands to cheer the Seabees on their way, just a few husky dockhands who dropped their work for a second to wave a hand and shout, "Good-luck". A helluva poor sendoff for men who were going overseas for a year or two, some maybe for good, but then again, perhaps it was better that way.

THE ship was in the center of the harbor and putting out a little more steam. Slowly, carefully the iron hull slid through the opening in the sub-gates and then was out on the Pacific. Lights had drifted astern, and groups who had been singing became silent. Voices dropped to whispers as the coastline rapidly became swallowed up in the gloom. There were few stars overhead and no moon. The waves rolled by and there was a strange rise and fall to the ship. The ocean was dark, too dark, and too rough for most of these landlubbers, so after one last look at the sea and a glance back at where land had been, the men began to drift below.

SO, after eight months of training the men of CBMU 582 were on their way. Finally they had a destination and a job to do. How well they would accomplish that job remains yet to be seen, but there were no fears or doubts that the Unit would give anything but a good account of itself on its first assignment. To a man, the outfit was prepared and willing to prove that CAN-DO, the watchword of the Seabees, would also be characteristic of the driving spirit of 582.

CHAPTER EIGHT

- OVER THE SEA THEY GO -

THAT first morning out was indeed rough. The sea was wild and fierce, waves racing by as tall as a house; and the bow crashed headlong into the big ones with a force that sent salt spray skimming across the deck, and everything with it. Those men who were able to clamber topside were soon drenched to the skin, despite the slickers and ponchos with which they were covered.

EVERY minute or two a pulpy-faced lad dashed up the companionway and staggered to the windward or starboard side of the transport. "The other side! Go to the other side!", shouted the bystanders. Feeling water splashing in his face the wild-eyed youth seemed to get the idea because he did. There, with head hung over the side and hands clenched to the rail he saw parts of him that he never knew existed roll with a wave and disappear to the blue -- or was it green?

THERE were many like this fellow, all suffering from seasickness, in spite of all the "kill or cure" advice that was freely given. Men following suggestions to fill up on solids, or to suck on pickles or lemons still got seasick. As did those who didn't listen to any advice but stayed in their sacks, afraid to trust their wobbly legs to the slippery deck. Regardless of the recommendation followed, if a man was destined to get seasick, nothing saved him -- he got sick. Seasickness is believed by many to be a derangement of the mind, and thinking and talking about it only brings it on more quickly. Perhaps that is why so many of the fellows with iron-clad stomachs continuously harped on the subject of "Oceanitis".

AT least fifty percent of the personnel of 582 were ill, and although some more so than others, there was one type of seasickness that was dreaded by all. This was an empty stomach sickness called the "dry-heaves". A man with the heaves throws up his insides and nothing else, and this feeling is so horrible that he will pray for the most drastic things to happen to him or the ship so that an end will be put to his suffering. The "heaver" is not responsible for his actions and he might, in a moment of temporary insanity, pull the plug out of the bottom of the boat, or worse yet, grab two or three of his shipmates under his arms and jump overboard. Luckily for the Unit, no matter how sick the men were, none reached this advanced stage of nausea.

ALTHOUGH these internal pangs were horrible, even seasick persons agreed that there had been many amusing sights to be seen. For instance, Abe Katelman carried his helmet with him all times, prepared against spasmodic burpings. Then there was Lee Goodwin, who wasn't able to get off his shelf until the boat hit a smooth stretch of water; and Gordon Green kept company with his ghost, while most of his fellow travelers sympathized with the ghost. Some men were incapacitated to the extent that they thought death was near, and at times afraid they were about to die, yet fearful that they wouldn't. One sickly-hued mariner, recalling his recent inertia said, "I walked through the valley of death but it was so crowded they wouldn't let me stay there."

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SURPRISE and disbelief were to be seen on the faces of the men who moved about the deck on the first day. Slowly, after scanning the broad, empty expanse of water, they came to realize that the trip across the Pacific was being made without destroyer escort or battleship protection.

OBESE and frightened Joe Lualdi croaked from atop Hatch #2, "My gosh! There ain't even a sub-chaser out there!" Always quick on the draw, comedian Johnny Ashburn retorted, "So what th' hell do ya want, Lou? Egg in your beer?"

AND so it went, the lack of protection dominating every conversation. Also, the evil which might befall a lone ship was discoursed at great length, intensifying the fears of the more timorous characters on board.

HOWEVER, first reactions soon gave way to indifference, typifying the "Don't give a damn" attitude of Seabees in general, and these Seabees in particular. And as the waters continued to be unmarred by periscopes or enemy ships, a feeling of tranquility descended upon the ranks and thoughts were turned to other things.

FOR a time the beauty of the ocean held everyone spellbound. Those who had never been on the sea before watched with unrestrained delight the path the transport cut as it plowed through the blue-green waters. Seagulls, and later on the albatross, put on a great show for the men by diving into the waves when they spotted scraps of food or a fish. And now that land was many miles behind, the sea grew calm and remained at peace with nature for the rest of the passage.

FREQUENTLY the ocean became like a mirror, reflecting on its broad surface the brightness of the sky. Other times it was broken by choppy, little waves topped with fringes of white. The early mornings were always misty (usually it was raining) but as the day grew older, mist vanished and the sun tagged after the ship, growing hotter and hotter as the transport drew nearer to the equator. Always there were clouds, sometimes overhead, but more often clinging to the horizon. Days were longer, hotter and more monotonous than any the men had ever known, and it was only with the sunset that relief from the heat came to the travelers.

WHEN night came a refreshing tropical breeze cooled off the deck and the faces of the travelers. There were phosphorescent sparks, cast aside by the steel bow churning through the darkened waters, filling the onlookers with admiration for the wonders of the deep. Overhead a large, silvery moon sailed by, entrancing everyone with its loveliness as it cut a swath of light across the waves. That is, it was entrancing until one young genius announced that moonlight brightened up the surroundings and silhouetted the ship against the sky, making it prey for submarines. For the lovers of beauty, such an observation removed the last semblance of glamour from the voyage. They took to wishing for dark, forbidding nights because such nights were safer and they actually gloated when such evenings grew in number.

AFTER all illness had disappeared, and after scenic admirers found that instead of being "constantly changing" the ocean was nothing but a never-ending body of water, the men became inquisitive about the "tub" they were sailing on. Making inquiries they learned that the name of the ship was the MORMACDOVE, and that Mr. Moore and Mr. McCormack, its original owners, had intended it to be a cargo ship. However, the Army had other ideas and had rigged it up as a hospital ship. Since a hospital ship carries wounded only on the return trip, the MORMACDOVE was being used on the outgoing journey as a transport.

IT'S all rather confusing, but the Unit of Seabees was traveling on an Army hospital ship, supervised by Army officers, leased to the Navy as a transport, operated by the Merchant Marine and protected by the Armed Guard of the Navy. In addition to CBMU 582 there were two other Seabee outfits and a Navy SLCU (Standard Landing Craft) unit quartered 'tween decks for the entire voyage, and at more than one time there were representatives of the Navy, Marine Corps and their three air wings on board this ship.

TO give this South Sea cruise a romantic twist, there should have been a couple of companies of WACS on board, or at least a nurse or two, but this happens only in the movies. There would be no female companionship for these boys for many months to come, and the only "she" that dared to invade this masculine world was "Penny", a big, black dog, the mascot of the SLCU outfit.

WITH such a large passenger complement, the MORMACDOVE, none too big to begin with, was loaded to capacity. This was especially true of the Fore deck, which was reserved for enlisted personnel. Here men congregated during the day, hanging over the rails or on life rafts, straddling booms and sitting or lying on hatches. The ship was so crowded that once a guy captured a vantage point he rarely left it during the day except at chow time. Then he usually told a friend to "Save my place, Joe."

JUST as finding a seat was an impossibility, once the day had begun so was taking a turn around the deck. That is, unless one didn't mind stepping on someone's arms or legs and chancing an engagement or two in the art of fisticuffs. Rather than run the risk of ruffling tempers, most of them, being of a peaceful nature, stayed in the same spot for hours on end; possibly their only movement being to shift from one buttock to the other.

FROM these cramped positions the "enlisted" looked with envy toward the Superstructure which towered skyward from 'midship'. In this large, building-like structure was housed the engine room, bridge, radio room, ship's officers' staterooms and merchant seamen quarters (and an ice water fountain). It is out of the question to try to describe this part of the ship. To safeguard the privacy and dignity of the chosen few who lived behind those steel-gray walls, at all its entrances huge signs shouted: "OUT OF BOUNDS FOR TROOPS", and signifying the importance of these warnings sailors stood watch with loaded carbines at all approaches. Needless to say, none of the troops ventured "out of bounds".

BEHIND the superstructure was the Aft' section of the deck, set apart for passenger officers and men of the Armed Guard. Few enlisted men had access to this part of the ship, except during boat drills and when standing "short arm" inspections (which occurred weekly and were a source of much embarrassment). Although access to the Aft' deck would have given troops full run of the ship, except for a few explorers laboring under the "grass is always greener" theory, most tourists were content to remain within the assigned area and wax fat and lazy.

WAXING fat wasn't difficult because chow (Army rations prepared by Navy cooks) proved to be surprisingly appetizing. Three well-cooked meals were served daily, which was contradictory to Port Hueneme "scuttlebutt" that stated that only two meals a day would be served on board ship, and skimpy ones at that. However, one could never call a breakfast of hard-boiled eggs (or scrambled), bread, jam, fried potatoes and coffee skimpy. Nor could a supper of meat, potatoes, vegetables and coffee or cocoa be termed as lacking in nourishment. Whoever made such brash statements must have been referring to the lunches, which were light, consisting only of soup (of undetermined origin) and an orange or apple. Lunches were not characteristic of the meals served aboard the transport, but were rather a "holdover" between breakfast and supper. No sir, taken as a whole, there was nothing wrong with the chow.

EXCEPT, of course, the chow lines which formed before six in the morning and were still quite lengthy at six in the evening. They were always long, often winding around the decks four or five times, and it was not at all unusual for the more timid lads to stand in line for two or three hours; and even the bolder guys never got by without at least an hour of waiting. That is, if one could find the end of the line to start with. This was an almost hopeless task, and it is doubted if a private detective would have been of any help on this score. Consequently, "chiseling" became the rule rather than the exception.

AT "chiseling", a lowly form of gate-crashing, the men of 582 were past masters, but they sneaked into chow lines only as a last resort. The more intelligent "chiselers" secured Early Chow Passes, which enabled them to eat without standing in line, on the pretense of being working men — a few were. Those who fell short of the brilliant stage but were still "smart" knew where back doors were located, and could, by taking a roundabout route along the lower decks, infiltrate through forbidden territory to the chow hall. Once inside a tray was picked up, and looking important a guy could walk up to the head of the line, step in front of a mate with a "Scuse me, Bub", and have his tray heaped with food.

REGARDLESS of whether the chow hall was entered legally or otherwise, when Mac Seabee had his tray filled, he was shoved from the serving line to a place at a chairless table that was just level with his chest. He ate quickly. He had to because the heat in the hold was terrific. When he finished his meal, Mac took his coffee to the deck to drink, with an after-dinner smoke. Lighting up a Luckie Mac took a sip of jamoke, but was quickly disillusioned. The coffee tasted like dishwater. Wrinkling his face in disgust, and swearing profusely, Mac threw the dregs of the cup to starboard and howled with glee when the wind blew the murk back into the faces of the mates lining the rail. At least this way Mac derived some satisfaction from his "cup of mud".

BESIDES waiting in chow lines and eating, there were many forms of entertainment provided to keep the transients amused and occupied. There were boxing matches, stage shows, community singing and recorded music. The ship's library provided considerable reading material. "Heave-Ho", a weekly newspaper was edited by a staff composed of two men from each outfit (Roy T. Styczykowski, Painter Third and Donald F. McVey, Machinist Third, represented CBMU 582) and a daily "news sheet" was mimeographed by the Ship's Chaplain (Capt. Floyd V. Brower, USA) who also arranged the other forms of entertainment. The poker and crap games which dominated the scene were not sponsored. They just grew! Everytime a mate jingled two coins together another pulled out a deck of cards or a pair of galloping dominoes.

ENTERTAINMENT did much to make the crossing an enjoyable one, but being quartered below decks in a troop transport had its disagreeable aspects too. Most disconcerting of these was wearing those damned life-jackets. Every man wore one of these cumbersome, hot, dirty overcoats once the NORMACDOVE got beyond the three-mile limit, and wore it continuously throughout the crossing. Strict orders were issued that these outmoded Mae Wests were even to be worn to bed at night. Some, however, deviated from this ruling and used the jackets as pillows. It wouldn't have been bad if the life-jackets were all that had to be worn, but dungarees, shirts, helmets, cartridge belts and full canteens were also worn at all times. Worse yet, was wearing this clothing to bed at night, and when one thinks of the intense heat prevalent in the hold, the proximity of the shelves (one atop another) and the hundreds of men packed in there like sardines, a mental picture of what hell is like can easily be drawn.

TO offset the Essence of Perspiration which was rife below decks, sanitary rules were followed. Orders were to bathe and shave daily, and in the Navy, orders were carried out. But it was like gathering grapes from thorns to get clean by showering in sticky, evil-smelling salt water, or to remove whiskers (also with salt water). The worst thing that can be said of this brackish water was that it left a man dirtier after using it than he was before. Washing clothes in this water was completely out of the question. Many tried it but soon gave it up as hopeless and wore the same uniforms for the entire trip. And at the end of the voyage the decrepit raiment was burned or buried.

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EXERCISE was provided daily by "Abandon Ship" drills. The men were generally down in the hold when the whistles blew announcing that the drill was underway. Hearing the signal everyone stifled a slight, gnawing fear that this might be IT and dashed topside to stations forward and aft; and there to stand in readiness for a dive into the ocean if life rafts were released overboard. Everyone entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of the drill, feeling each time the whistle blew that this was the "real thing", and later thankful that it wasn't. While excitement was at a high pitch new records were established for orderliness and rapidity in carrying out instructions, but the men soon grew disinterested as each drill found them still looking out over serene waters. The drills became something the officers had planned for relieving the monotony, and in keeping with safety precautions.

THE Armed Guard crew held firing practice every few days, and this had a lot to do with the feeling of security that was mounting, besides doing much to relieve the monotony. So that no one would get panicky, word was passed about the ship that guns were to be fired. It's a good thing this information was circulated because when the firing commenced, it sounded like ten "shoot-em-up" westerns playing simultaneously. Some of the fellows might have jumped overboard if they hadn't known it was just practice. Besides being fun to watch, practice was a wonderful morale builder, both for the Navy gunners as well as the passengers. It also exhibited advantageously the firepower of the ship, which was greater than any of the travelers thought was possible for such a small ship.

GOSH, how those Navy boys could shoot! First they sent up a three-inch shell, and when it exploded they peppered the puff of smoke with .20 and .30 mm anti-aircraft shells. It was like a Fourth of July celebration to the spectators. Shells burst overhead, explosions rent the air to shreds; and tracer bullets, streaking like rockets for the target, left streamers of white and red in their wake. It was a "field day" for the gunners, and as they continued to pierce the target they instilled confidence in everyone with their fine marksmanship. After one of these sessions there was very little fear of aircraft attack because it was now known that the Armed Guard was composed of capable men.

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BEFORE someone gets the idea that this voyage was one big picnic, it should be explained that during the entire trip, men from 582 worked -- like beavers -- everywhere on the ship, and worked hard too. Cooks and bakers took over the Troops' galley, which was the reason for food being so well prepared. Charles K. Carney, Chief Commissary Steward, and his lads (all well experienced in their line) prepared meals for more than five times the number of men they were accustomed to feeding. They had to work from dawn to dusk to do it, but they satisfied the mates with their cooking -- which is saying a lot.

A GUY who put on a one-man show was short, round-faced Frank J. Toenniessen, Machinist First. Operation of the machine shop was Frank's job and he built himself an A-1 reputation by working eight hours a day in the stuffy, dimly-lit shop. He turned out some fine work too, parts that were badly needed to replace worn out pieces of machinery.

EVERYONE got a good laugh at seeing Steve Giles and Ray Claypoole, both Shipfitters First Class, parading with tool kits from one part of the ship to another in search of work, until those that laughed got caught in the manacles of John Banker, Duty Clerk. Steve and Ray had accepted (without increase in pay) positions as "Roving Plumbers". Keeping continually busy, they repaired leaking water lines, bilge pumps, scuttlebutts, coffee urns, clogged pipes and drains. They worked several shifts in the super-heated engine room packing pumps, and one time were called upon to repair a leak which had flooded an officer's compartment with three feet of water. In this job they were aided by John K. Paul, Metalsmith First, and Leland A. Craig, Shipfitter Third, who removed several sections of steel paneling to enable the plumbers to get to the faulty pipe and repair it.

FOR a time it seemed that "work" was CBMS 582's password. Aristides Lafazanos, Ship's Cook Third, attached himself to the ship's crew as a rigger, having had considerable experience along this line with the Greek Merchant Marine. Albert G. Lambert, Carpenter Third, and William Leabo, Seaman First, were assigned to the bridge as Signalmen. One detail spent several weeks painting a hold. Dozens of men went to work in the galley and scullery. Several more were put to work as mess cooks. There were cleaning details, "head" details and guard details. None of these jobs were too bad but there wasn't any comparison between cleaning a "head" and an assignment to the Armed Guard. Men from 582 were assigned to every gun on the ship, and many more were recruited as ammunition carriers. This was the best assignment on the ship because as Men of the Armed Guard they enjoyed many special privileges that were denied to the troops at large.

SUMMING it all up, CBMS 582 had more than two-thirds of its personnel actively employed during the crossing. Keeping quarters and decks clean paid dividends too because the Transport Captain, Ship's Doctor and Chaplain Brower all declared that the men on this trip were the best behaved and cleanest the NORMACDOVE had ever carried, and they had transported many. And, for shipboard accomplishments, Carney, Toenniessen, Giles and Claypoole each received a letter of commendation from the Transport Captain.

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CROSSING the Equator really put the skids on Ole Man Monotony for the day! The crossing was made early in the morning of 15th April. Festivities started at 0800 when a huge, black flag -- embellished with skull and crossbones -- was hoisted to the top of the main mast. Shortly thereafter, King Neptune and his retinue took over command of the ship. In the Royal Party were the Queen, the Royal Baby, Davy Jones--Royal Scribe, the Doctor, Judge and innumerable other mythical characters, all decked out in outlandish costumes. These characters were portrayed by Shellbacks -- men who had previously crossed the equator. With great pomp and ceremony his gracious majesty, Neptunis Rex, was ushered to a throne on the after-deck, and the trial of all lowly Pollywogs was begun.

POLLYWOGS were persons crossing the imaginary line for the first time, and punishment would be meted out to them for absurd, fictitious crimes which no one could ever possibly think of committing. Nevertheless, there was only one plea which was acceptable to the hard-hearted ruler. That was "Guilty!"

RANK was not recognized on this occasion, other than that the officers were brought to trial first. Lieutenants O'Rourke and Broadhurst were called before the court, and knowing the procedure, both entered pleas of guilt. After their crimes were passed on and sentences carried out, Warrant Officers Cowan and Holsinger were brought before the Mast. Next came the Chief Petty Officers and they too pleaded "Guilty". The Chiefs were really given the "business". As chiefs they were compelled to dance like an indian chief, and then they did a snake dance, which entailed crawling across the grimy hatch on their bellies.

BECAUSE of the great number of Pollywogs present, only a few dozen enlisted men were selected to stand trial. These unfortunate men, clad only in underhosrts, suffered enough for the entire unit. Sentences included having heads shaved with clippers and mustaches cut off. Bodies were painted with mercurochrome, blue paint and heavy grease. Making matters still worse, 'Wogs were forced to swallow quantities of flour, motor oil, rotten eggs, castor oil, vinegar and other vile tasting concoctions. One lad, not present when his name was called, was dragged out of hiding and tied to the cross for the remainder of the ritual. No one escaped the wrath of the Underwater Ruler and his henchmen. All Pollywogs ran a gauntlet of wooden paddles on hands and knees, and they were drenched again and again by a steady stream of water from a fire hose.

FINALLY the ceremony was over. Lowly Pollywogs were officially admitted into the "Solemn Mysteries of the Ancient Order of the Deep" and elevated to the exalted positions of Shellbacks. As such, they were presented with Certificates of Membership, which provided that never again would they be maltreated when crossing the equator. It was all over now, so the men of 582 retired to lick their wounds and bathe their sunburned bodies.

THE court remained in session for the rest of the day to take care of the other units. At sundown the "skull and crossbones" was hauled down, and the ship returned to Captain Long, its rightful Master. Then came a long blast of the trumpets and Neptunis Rex, followed by his attendants, disappeared once more into the land of make-believe at the bottom of the ocean.

THE day following the equatorial crossing the ship passed over the International Date Line. It couldn't be seen but the itinerants were told that it was a hypothetical line running from north to south, on one side of which it was Sunday, and on the other it was Monday. At 11:00 on Sunday night the clocks were pushed forward to twelve, thus making the next day Tuesday. Or, to make it still more perplexing, the men went to bed on Sunday night and woke up two mornings later. All this merely drove home the fact that the ship was finally in the Tropics. Down where you lose a day -- or was it gain a day? Anyhow, this was the topic for many discussions and arguments in the tiresome days yet to come.

NO agreement had been reached between opposing factions on the Dateline question, when one morning there suddenly appeared, straight ahead, a long, dark blob on the horizon.

"LAND!", shouted a sharp-eyed mariner standing in the bow of the ship -- not unlike Magellan must have done three centuries before. Immediately there was a stampede to the rail. "Where? Where d'ya see land?", the nearsighted lads wanted to know. The 20-20 boys condescendingly pointed out the blotch of earth sticking out of the water. When everybody had seen the island in the distance they stood transfixed, watching it grow and grow as they drew closer to it. Questions were being hurled about asking the name of the island, who owned it, and how long would it take to get there. But no one knew the answers, at least no one on deck.

EXCITEMENT reached a still higher pitch! Out of the sun came a plane! It was flying low and heading straight for the ship! Gun Crews were called to stations! Passengers were instructed to be prepared to go below. Even before their orders were issued eager gunmen had uncovered their long-nosed anti-aircraft batteries and were standing in readiness. An air of expectancy hung over the ship. Everyone waited for the plane to be identified as friend or foe, and when it was recognized to be a friend by the huge, white star on its fuselage, the cheering and shouting men went wild.

THE plane, a U. S. Hudson bomber, flew past the ship, then circles and flew by again. It kept this up for some time, all the while signaling to the bridge by blinker. While the signalmen were running up a series of colored flags in reply to the pilot's queries about the ship, the mates were trying to read the blinker flashes. The message was never understood by the men in the ranks (it must have been code), so the fellows on deck were content to sit by and watch the bomber flying overhead, feeling quite brave now that they were safeguarded from the enemy.

NEW HEBRIDES was the name of the islands to which the Hudson led the crowded ship, and which the men had been wondering about all morning. Anchor was dropped off Espiritu Santo, situated on the northernmost tip of New Hebrides. Outgoing mail was put ashore at this island but none was picked up. Then there was a day and a half of waiting while a convoy was made up. For the first time since leaving the states the NORMACDOVE would be sailing in the company of other ships, and still more important, several DEs (Destroyer Escorts) were going along for protection.

THIS island was indeed a beautiful one. Low-lying mountains covered thickly with palms, ferns and other tropical growth, and bordered by long, sandy beaches, made it a real South Sea island paradise, or so it seemed from a distance. It was at Santo that a lovely young lady came aboard. She was Lt. Ruth L. Whited, Army nurse, and sister of John L. Whited, Electrician's Mate First. Ruth and John had dinner together the night of the visit as guests of the officers, and enjoyed a fine reunion -- their first in almost two years.

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LEAVING the harbor at Santo the NORMACDOVE slid into her prearranged position in the convoy and sailed between several tiny islands before once more reaching the open sea. When once again land became just a dot on the horizon, the convoy huddled closely together because it was passing through what were classified as "dangerous waters".

THIS fact was brought to a head the day after departure from the Hebrides. About 0530 the men were blasted out of their sleep by the now familiar, but still startling, piercing whistles which announced the "call to stations". Simultaneously a harsh voice rasped over the loudspeaking system:

"ATTENTION ALL HANDS! Proceed to Abandon Ship stations immediately. On the double there! On the DOUBLE!" The order was repeated twice again, while below decks the scene was one of confusion. It was an orderly confusion, however, because from long practice the men slipped out of bunks, sprinted between tiers and rushed up the companionways to the deck. Once on deck each man stopped for a split second trying to penetrate the gloom with sleep-closed eyes, yawned, and then raced and pushed along the deck to stations beside liferafts.

ONCE settled on the hatches the men stared expectantly into pitch-black ocean. For an hour they stood by, watching and wondering. The eerie darkness slowly gave way to a gray, pre-dawn mist, and then the sun peeped its head above the horizon. Only when the scene was completely lighted were the men permitted to leave their stations.

THROUGHOUT the day talk hovered always on the subject of the early morning "alert", and scuttlebutt said that the ship was in the self-same waters where the great Coral Sea Battle was fought. The thrill and tension of impending danger was everywhere, and men were careful to keep canteens filled and lifejackets tied tightly, just in case "something should happen".

AGAIN that night, promptly at dusk, came the "call to stations". This time there was no confusion. The drill went like clockwork. Most of the travelers were already on deck and they immediately reported to their positions. Darkness descended slowly and not a sound was to be heard as everyone tensely, almost fearfully, waited for a torpedo to strike. Cigarettes had been snuffed. Blackout curtains covered port holes and companionways. Not a pinprick of light was visible on the entire ship. Men waited with bated breath for that which couldn't be seen. There was no longer any griping at being held on the deck, only an anxiousness that was overcome to a great extent when darkness had blackened the ship. Although nightfall had lessened the possibilities of attack, there still remained an uneasy feeling which could not be put aside. Despite the fact that the men were free to move about the ship now that it was night, many remained at their places for hours afterward not daring to trust themselves to the below deck.

AND so these dusk and dawn "alerts" continued for the rest of the voyage keeping the men always mindful of the fact that danger was present on all sides of them. Nightly blackouts were also enforced for the remainder of the trip, from the moment the sun went down until it came up again. No longer did the men go through these drills as if they were mere routine. Their hearts and souls were in them now, and apprehension was as thick as pea soup about the ship, except when the sun rode high overhead.

THERE was good reason for being apprehensive because later that same night the DOVE was notified by blinker that a Jap submarine was in the vicinity. Heeding instructions, the transport killed its turbines immediately and hove-to in the inky darkness to await further orders. Nor did it look like they would be coming for quite some time, for the convoy with its precious cargoes was being extra-cautious. The ships had come too far to risk losing them now that "destination" was almost in sight.

THE NORMACDOVE was motionless now but the officers on the Bridge weren't. They doubled the watch in the crow's nest, ordered a strick radio silence kept, and passed instructions up for'ard to the crew and Armed Guard to stand-by for submarine attack. Preparations were so many and varied that the bridge was a beehive of activity.

MOST of the troops were asleep in the holds, and those who were on deck thought only that the engines had broken down, and that the ship had stopped in order to repair them. This type of thinking was all well and good as far as the Bridge was concerned because they didn't want anyone getting frightened and causing confusion on the deck. The Bridge knew that if anything dastardly happened to the ship, they could have All Hands at "Abandon Ship" stations in a few moments, providing everyone remained cool and calm.

ONCE all preparations against attack had been completed, it became as quiet as a grave on deck, and continued that way for over an hour. Then, far off to starboard a burst of flame was seen, followed by a loud, deafening explosion. Then another! And still another! Then all was still again. There was more waiting, more silence. Suddenly the blackness was pierced by quick, sharp flashes of light. A neighboring ship was signaling by blinker, and this time it was good news. When the message was translated into words it was delivered to the Captain, and when he had digested its contents he ordered the engine room to start the turbines, and for the Quartermaster to continue on the previous course.

THE text of the message was made known to the men on watch. It said simply that the sub had been located by a DE and several depth charges had been dropped, blowing the sub to the surface. Disintegrating slowly, the Japanese underwater craft had disappeared again beneath the waves. And by the time the message had been received, the "sons of heaven" were probably on their way to hell.

NEWS of the sinking was released to the troops the next morning. When they heard what had been going on while they slept, their only expressions were of great disappointment. They were sorry that they hadn't been on hand to watch the show. There wasn't any fuss raised about, they didn't even cheer or shout. For the most part, the feeling was that it was their ship the Japs had been after. Therefore, everyone was glad that the Japs had gotten what was coming to them and thankful at being alive to talk about the episode.

THERE was one other occurrence that gave the men food for thought, and this happened a night or two after the sub incident. This time it was a huge mine floating in the water that threatened the ship and the lives of those on board. The mine came to close to the port side of the ship that those standing along the rail could actually see its long, sharp spikes reaching for the steel hull. For a breathless moment it looked as if all were lost, that this was the end of the line for the thousands within the shell. But the churning waves, thrown aside by the prow, drove the huge, ugly mine away from the ship. The little group who had been watching this gripping drama stared after the black ball of steel as it continued to be washed farther away. When it had finally been left astern, the knot of men uttered a low, reverent "Thank God", as danger once again passed them by.

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TULAGI was reached the morning after the "mine scare", and after spending a day in the harbor, the ship pulled into shore. As soon as it was tied up to the wharf, unloading operations were begun, and since this would take some time, the passengers were permitted to go ashore.

ONCE on the pier, the men of 582 formed into a column of twos and struck off at a rapid clip for ahike along the beach road. Since they were marching along a road which had just a few months ago been the scene of an invasion, there was much for the men to see. There were many camps along the way, and in each of these were tents, shops, mess halls, and one had a little church. Ammunition dumps were spaced at infrequent intervals by the wayside. The beach was pock-marked by numerous shell craters and wreckage -- shell casings, empty oil drums, ammunition boxes, smashed foxholes, machine gun belts, K-ration containers -- was strewn amongst the sand. Several strands of barbed wire stretched along the shore, visible at low tide just above the water, where it had been placed to tear at the flesh of attacking Americans. The caves where the Japs hold out were seen, as was the cemetery where the brave lads who didn't make the beach laid in final rest. Each grave was marked by a tiny cross, which blended into a solid blanket of white that covered the large field.

EVERYWHERE men were working or sleeping, laughing or arguing, as if they knew of no other life save living in the jungle. Tulagi was hot, small and muddy, and it rained all the time the visitors were on their sightseeing tour. First impressions -- and lasting ones -- were that this island was an ugly, little place, and the men were actually happy when ordered back to the ship.

THE boys in the Landing Craft Unit got off at this base, and while their gear was being unloaded a Catholic Chaplain came aboard to hear confessions, say Mass and give Communion. After services were concluded the boys gathered around the priest for a little "bull-session" and the Padre recounted some of the hardships and misery that the Marines and Army had undergone "Up Forward". Digging into his own past, the slim, elderly Chaplain told how he had lived in a foxhole for days, getting out only to comply with the demands of nature. He gave the Seabees some valuable advice about poisonous reptiles and fish, and worried everyone considerably by stating that a watch wasn't needed to tell "chow time" because the Nips always came over when meals were being served. Concluding his informal chat, the priest begged his listeners to have faith in the lord and to pray every chance they got because it might be their last.

THIS talk with the priest laid a heavy hand on the hearts of many of the lads, but Chaplain Brower eased this somewhat during his General Services on the following morning, which was Sunday. The Chaplain told the boys not to worry because God being willing, all of them would return home when it was all over, in the same condition they were in now.

THE services on this last Sunday of the trip were held at Guadalcanal. The MORMACDOVE had made the dash over from Tulagi in the early hours of the morning and was busy, as usual, with the loading of the ship. Attendance at church this Sunday was rather large. Possibly this was due to the large quantity of five hundred and thousand pound bombs which were being loaded in Hatch #5, because it was noted that men who hadn't attended services before were becoming very devout on this occasion. Perhaps they had chanced going to church because there wasn't a roof to cave in upon them while they prayed, or then again, maybe it was the fact that danger was imminent that brought them into the flock.

REGARDLESS of the circumstances which sent the men to pray, the congregation was a large one, and very reverent. It was quite impressive to see the Chaplain, a huge hulk of a man, leading the men of diverse religions in spontaneous and unified prayer and song. Despite the fact that missiles of death were being loaded Aft', and that bloody, battle-scarred Henderson Field laid just a short distance off the port side, the men were at peace with the world that bright, shiny Sunday morning; a peace that was reflected in their general attitudes in the weeks to come. However, it was particularly noticeable on this morning, and the impressive quiet which prevailed must have been caused by the tranquility. Even those lads who spent Sunday mornings reading mystery stories instead of attending service, who trusted to Luck rather than God, were thoughtful enough to refrain from making boisterous or obscene remarks, thus proving that they too were careful to respect this time of devotion.

AFTER church services were concluded, the fellow gathered into groups on the for'ard deck and devoted the rest of the morning to comments on the sermon or to "scuttlebutt". Generally accepted as "real stuff" was the belief that "Destination Unknown" was to be Bougainville, the largest and northernmost island in the Solomon Group. There was no official confirmation of this, but when the Unit's officers were asked about Bougainville they neither confirmed nor denied this rumor. Assuming, then, that the destination had been guessed correctly, the only remaining question was: When would it be reached?

ONLY time would give the answer to this query but it didn't look like it would be soon, because the Sunday visit at Guadalcanal had been the second time this island had been visited. Then there came stops at Munda, Treasury, Vela Lavella. At each port of call, fresh troops and equipment were put ashore and seasoned warriors and battle-scarred machines picked up for transfer to a forward area. With each port that was left behind the destination grew nearer and nearer, until on the morning of 4th May it was learned that the next island, which was to be reached later in the afternoon, would bring the journey to an end for 582.

WITH journey's end, it may be said without fear of contradiction, that the trip had been uneventful. True, dire threats of enemy subs and floating mines almost became a reality, but, fortunately disaster had been averted on both occasions, and generally speaking the maiden voyage of the MORMACDOVE across the Pacific had been a pleasant one. All that cruise lacked to make it a "bon voyage" was decent quarters, steamer chairs, deck games, ten course dinners, spacious dining rooms, swimming pool, soft music, dancing, alcoholic beverages and beautiful girls. Otherwise, the men had everything they wanted.

NOTWITHSTANDING the privations which had been suffered, these Seabees were grateful, nevertheless, to the Navy Department for the opportunity to view first-hand the loveliness of the South Pacific and its isles of paradise. If the Secretary of the Navy received any letters thanking him for this free cruise, he may feel free to consider them as lies; all lies. The guys that wrote the letters were probably looking for rerates. For most of the men, even with all this beauty thrown in, this trip was the only ocean travel they would ever undertake, for regardless of what alluring posters say about the South Seas in post-war days, these lads will know differently. One unhappy Carpenter's Mate voiced the opinions in general when he said, "Just get me off this damn ocean! If I can only set foot on dry land I'll never step onto

FURTHER expressions of gratitude were interrupted by the appearance of land ahead. It took the ship several hours to reach the island, but the end finally came at noon 4th May 1944, after thirty long days on the ocean. "Destination Unknown" or "Island X" was no longer a mystery. Scuttlebutt predictions had been correct, for the island was Bougainville. There it was -- a long, jungle covered, extremely mountainous, swamp island, spread out as if on a platter before the eyes of the men.

THE Unit, to a man, was anxious to get ashore and find out what the island was like, what the job was to be, and where the camp would be. For the present, however, the MORMACDOVE dropped anchor about a mile off shore in Empress Augusta Bay. Debarkation would not be until the next morning, so in the meantime the men were instructed to clean their quarters, get gear in shape and have everything in readiness for a "beachhead" on the morning of May 5th.

CHAPTER NINE

- BOUGAINVILLE -

DEBARKATION began at 0800, 5th May, with the 582 Seabees loaded down under pack, gas masks, rifles, etc., going over the side and descending the wildly swinging cargo net. At the bottom of the net those who went over first stepped off into an LCT (Landing Craft Tank) and pushed up into the prow, making way for the men yet to come. Then, when the landing barge was loaded it took off for shore, and as it did so the mates turned to take one last look at the MORMACDOVE, and to wave goodbye to those who remained behind.

AFTER a fifteen minute run from ship to shore the barge hit the beach with a SLAM. Everyone went sprawling, despite the instructions which had been to squat so that the shock of stopping would be lessened. The ramp was let down while the men were picking themselves and their gear up from the deck. Then the order was given to start moving, and the debarkees scrambled down the ramp, through the shallow water and up onto the beach.

ONCE ashore the Unit was divided into several sections and hustled to a fleet of waiting trucks. It took but a few minutes to pack men and belongings into trucks, and then the convoy of vehicles got underway. Only a passing glimpse was had of the sandy shore and beach activities before the trucks pulled out of the sand onto the road, driving swiftly toward the jungle home of CBMU 582.

582 had made its "beachhead" without bloodshed or disorder. It was certainly far removed from the training camps' versions, but everyone was extremely grateful for this. No one felt sorry that he had stormed the strange beach to meet peaceful dump trucks instead of chattering machine gun bullets. Marines, the Army and Construction Battalions had paved the way for CBMU 582. After all, this Unit had come ashore not to fight, but to build and maintain.

RIDING along the road from the beach, the surprising thickness and lusuriance of the jungle was noticed, as was the stateliness of the palm trees and the clearness of the sky overhead. But even more astonishing were the fine, dirt roads twisting and turning through this wilderness, the well camouflaged Army encampments, the strongly fortified gun emplacements and the solid looking pill-boxes which cropped up at frequent intervals along the wayside. The appearance of huge, well kept vegetable gardens also filled the men with wonder. This couldn't possibly be the Bougainville with the seven by six and a half mile beachhead. This was the Bougainville of smooth roads and vegetable gardens. Perhaps it wouldn't be as terrible here as had been thought. From the looks of things a great number of Seabees had spent many an hour worrying about a Jap threat that (so the men thought) no longer existed.

DRIVING for five and a half miles on the main thoroughfare, the trucks then turned into a narrow lane which ran down a hill, crossed a small stream covered by an earth and log bridge, and came to an abrupt stop in a tiny clearing in the jungle. This was CBMU 582's home for the duration of its stay on Bougainville. It was a damp, dismal place with light filtering through the leaves of huge trees which formed a stockade around the open area. A maze of smaller trees, ferns, vines and weeds completely enclosed the area, and the earth was soft and rocky, having but recently been cleared of jungle.

WHILE the boys were looking over their new surroundings, a truck drove up loaded with pyramid-shaped tents (borrowed from another outfit), which would be used for shelter instead of pup tents. When the tents were unloaded from the truck the men were called together and given some instructions about the job on hand by Lt. O'Rourke and Lt. Broadhurst. Then they were formed into platoons and a platoon was broken up into seven groups of five men, and each group was allotted a tent. Everyone got busy immediately with the job of fitting center poles together, raising canvases and pounding stakes. One by one the tents rose in the clearing, giving the appearance of a tent city divided into seven platoon streets.

IT wasn't really as easy as it sounds, because for most of the men this was their first experience at tent erection. Some of the groups took the entire morning just to put up their tents, and mates with previous training in the National Guard or Boy Scouts were called upon to act as instructors on more than one tent-pitching project. Finally the slowpokes had their canvas stretched and then looked around to see what they were supposed to do next.

THE second phase of tent erection was ditching. This consisted of digging a shallow trench along all four sides of the tent to keep the rain water from flowing under the tent, and was a job that kept everyone busy for the remainder of the morning. When the trenches were completed the loose earth was piled on the inner side of the ditch, thus building a still higher barricade against the water. Then rifles, packs and seabags were moved undercover, and everything was made secure from the elements, or so it was thought at the time.

NOON chow call interrupted further work on the camp site so the fellows grabbed mess gear and headed across the road for the 36th Battalion chow hall. This was the "beanery" that the Unit would inherit when the 36th left for home, but for the present the newcomers were to be guests of the battalion. And they were made to feel right at home too. First they were instructed to wash their eating utensils in boiling water at an outdoor scullery. This was to safeguard against dysentery. Then they had their dishes filled with food and an M.A.A. told them to help themselves to seats.

THE food wasn't as bad as had been expected, but it wasn't too good either. The meal consisted of canned or dehydrated foods, battery acid (lemonade--lemon powder mixed with water), fresh bread and apple butter. However, it was a hot meal and the guys were hungry, so they made short work of the grub. With the dinner completed the visitors exchanged cigarettes and a few words with the oldtimers, washed mess gear again and returned to their camp.

HIGH spot of the afternoon was Mail Call, the first since leaving the States. When mail was sorted and distributed it was found that every man in the outfit had fallen heir to a large stack of letters. Some were a month and a half old, yet were as welcome as an invitation to a sorority dance. Work fell off completely and everywhere men were seen reading letters, some sitting on packs, others on the ground, and many more just stood where they had received their mail, deeply engrossed in news from home. Thoughts drifted far away from Bougainville and most of the men made the mistake of being more interested in letters than in fixing up their new homes. They would have done better to have stayed on Bougainville, but anyhow the afternoon passed quickly, and soon it was time to wash up and get ready to eat again.

AT evening chow the new arrivals had an opportunity to get a good look at their hosts. They found the average age of the men in the 36th to be higher than those in 582. These veterans of many months overseas were a quiet, courteous lot, not in the least outspoken. In fact, they seemed almost allergic to conversation. They didn't seem bitter, just tired. Possibly after a year or more overseas the newcomers would be that way too, without topics to discuss or a desire to enter into unnecessary conversation. For the present, though, every man was ambitious. He wanted to work, and if necessary, fight. He wanted to know what was going on, what the work was like, and what the possibilities were of the enemy making things rough.

IN order to get some information on what was going on around them, Jessie Sharp, Bill Ivers, Abe Flynn and Lloyd Chase went to work on a young, sandy-haired chap who was sitting at their table. He was Robert Jensen, Storekeeper Third, and in answer to questions about the fighting, said:

"WELL, for one thing, you fellow are in th' line of fire. When the Japs shell the strips, those shells come screamin' just over your camp. They make enough noise to wake th' dead too!"

IT took a few seconds for this information to sink in, then Bill Ivers, looking thoughtful, wanted to know: "Do those shells ever land on this side of the strip?"

"OH YES", was Bob's answer. "Only last week a few dropped down your way. But don't worry about it, we've had lots of them hit our camp. Usually you can hear them comin' and have time to dive into a foxhole. That's th' imporant thing. Dig yourself a good foxhole and youll be safe from everything 'cept a direct hit."

JESSIE, with visions of Jap souvenirs, broke into the conversation for the first time. "How far are the front lines from here?", he asked. Jensen, who had been chewing on a piece of brad, swallowed and then replied:

"OH, the doggies are holed up just over that ridge back of your camp. You can hear the gunfire now and then if you listen." Seeing the worried looks being exchanged between his listeners he added, "Don't let that bother you, though. Those dog-faces are a rough bunch. Nothin' gets past 'em, and remember, if you have a good foxhole you'll be safe from shells too. The noise they make comin' over will get on your nerves at first but you'll get used to it."

BY this time everyone had finished eating his Spam, canned tomatoes and dehydrated spuds, so mess gear was pushed back and Lloyd passed around a pack of cigarettes. Everyone accepted except Abe Flynn, who pulled out a big, black briar and loaded up. After lighting up the fellow settled back on the benches to enjoy a smoke and hear what else Jensen had to say.

NOW that he had been loosened up, Bob waxed talkative. He said, "You guys are lucky that you arrived here in May instead of March. In March, you know, the Japs staged a big offensive. It was one of them suicide attacks! They thought they were going to knock us out and regain complete possession of the island. Just imagine, in eighteen days, the 37th and Americal Divisoins killed 9,000 Japs, and God only knows how many more were wounded before they retreated.

BOY! It was really hell around here then. Shells comin' over at all hours of the day and night, and several direct hits were scored on the bomber strip. Quite a few of our guys got shell-shocked and had to be evacuated, and a number of others were wounded. You boys won't have to go through anything like that though. I think the Japs have learned their lesson. There are still more than 20,000 Japs on the island, but after that last drive they'll stick to their own side of the island." Bob indicated that he had finished talking by looking at his watch, mentioned that he had something to do and with a "See you later, boys" he picked up his mess gear and headed for the door.

MOST of the 582 boys were ready to leave too, but nature decreed otherwise. The clouds opened up their flood valves and the downpour left them marooned. This was an ordinary Bougainville rain, so they were told, but back home, residents of the river sections would have headed for the hills immediately if a rain of this type had descended upon them. Here it was just rain, an everyday occurrence that the men in the 36th didn't give a second thought, or a first either for that matter.

HOWEVER, when the rain ceased and the newcomers had returned to their tents, they gave it a second thought. Nearly every tent in the camp had become a miniature swimming pool. Gear, bedding, clothes, everything was thoroughly soaked. Typical of the damage the water had caused throughout the camp was the wreckage in the tent belonging to Ralph Kennedy, Art Mang, Roy Styczykowski and Chester Sinclair. There wasn't an inch of dry ground left in their tent, and mud and water had saturated everything they owned. It looked as if these fellows were going to have a wet and sleepless night of it, and off the record, they did.

BUT they weren't the only ones, for everywhere in camp men were hurriedly sorting gear for dry blankets (even a damp one would do), and night was closing in rapidly, which accounts for the sudden rush to get belongings in order. Finally darkness descended upon the camp. There were no lights, and entertainment was limited to some brave (or insane) character giving a tearful rendition of "Swanee River". Rather than fall into the horrible chasm of despair that the singer was in, most the mates decided to bale out tents, spread ponchos and then blankets on the ground and hit the "sack". Once everyone was in bed a loud clamber was directed at the singer to "knock it off", so he quit vocalizing and the camp quieted down for the night.

SLEEP should have come quickly because the men had worked hard that day, but beds were hard and strange, and blankets damp. Consequently, very few slept well, some not at all. Everyone, it seemed, was waiting for those shells to come over, but none did. Occasionally, however, over the noises of frogs, crickets and birds in the jungle, there came the intermittent rattle of machine gun fire on the other side of the hill, and now and then there were quick, sharp bursts from a carbine. That's the way the night passed. Sometimes it was deathly quiet, other times the firing had the entire camp on edge. After such a night it was almost with relief that the jittery Seabees greeted the opening notes of "Reveille", which heralded the beginning of another day.

EVERYONE was up before dawn that second morning on Bougainville, including the non-sleepers as well. At 0515 the men crawled out into the dewy morning and climbed into dungarees that felt as if they had just come out of a washing machine. Then shoes were peeked into for a stray centipede, which is an overgrown Disney creation with a bite like a bulldog. Finding nothing nestled inside, G.I.s were slipped inot and everybody headed for the chow hall.

SOGGY pancakes, sugar-water syrup, dehydrated apricots and Australian coffee made up a breakfast, which was certainly nothing to brag about. This sumptuous meal was eaten in sleepy silence, and then it was back to camp again to see what was to be done in the way of work that morning.

IT might have been known that when the men returned from chow that the entire day's work had already been planned for them. Of course that's the nice part about the Seabees. Someone else always takes care of the thinking. All the mates do is work! They were ordered to get busy immediately and dig foxholes outside each tent, and a special detail was formed to dig foxholes for officers, chiefs and others assigned to permanent jobs.

A LOGGING crew was also formed, and its job was to fell trees for logs with which to line the office and supply tents. This was necessary in order to keep the equipment off the deck and safe from the river, which swirled through camp each afternoon on its way to the ocean. The loggers also cut timber for use in roofing foxholes. The procedure was to cover the hole with several logs, then spread palm leaves over it, and finally top the leaves with a thick layer of sand. This made a nice little cellar with an entrance and a window. Nature provided the running water.

SOME of the foxholes dug that day approached the subterranean cavern stage, particularly the one built by Peter Gray, Matt Sullivan, Mike Thomas and Art Blitzer. If these fellows only had a few quarts of whiskey at the time they could have opened a rathskeller that would have put some of the underground night spots in the states to shame. On the other hand, if they had the whiskey they would, in all probability, have drunk it, and then thrown the empty bottles into the foxhole.

WHILE work was going along on underground shelters, still another crew was kept busy transferring from the beach to camp the cargo that had been brought along on the troop ship. It took this detail an entire day to bring up tarps, tools and the thousand and one things needed to keep the Unit in the field until the cargo ship arrived with its million and one items required for the Unit's operation.

THE man who was in charge of Supply was tall, mustached, quiet-spoken Wiley D. Saunders, Storekeeper First. Wiley's job was to account for all supplies, and along with Clifford P. Duarte, Storekeeper Second, and Glenn N. Light, Storekeeper Third, had the job of taking inventories and stacking cargo in the Supply tents. The men who did the backbreaking work were Art Carey, Vern Clary, Arbie McClenny, Ray Laurent, and others whose jobs were to unload cargo trucks, uncrate boxes and pass the contents into the storeroom for stacking. This was a rush job because all materials had to be put under cover as soon as possible to protect them from the weather.

LATER in the afternoon, Wiley, Cliff and Glen issued mosquito bars and frames, canvas cots, sun helmets and huting knives to all hands. The men immediately took their issue to their tents, unpacked and assembled the cots. Then mosquito frames were attached to the cots, and nettings were hung over the frames. Blankets and sacks were laid out on the cots, and they were ready for occupancy. After the beds were made, some ingenious lads (there were a few) built wooden frames around the tents' center poles or along one side. Packs and seabags were arranged on the frames, thus lifting them off the deck where water couldn't bother them. The dozens of holes in the tent fabric through which rain poured didn't count. One thing, with all these improvements, the tents began to look more homey, although with five cots in each tent, and gear stacked in one pile, they also took on a very crowded appearance.

BESIDES the tents and foxholes, showers and "heads" had been erected. The showers were the overhead, pull-chain kind, and were constructed on a wooden platform, along one side of which were four spigots for washing. The water was ice-cold (about 60°; too hot for drinking, too cold for bathing), yet was still a real treat after the salt water used on board ship. Everyone wallowed in fresh water showers at the slightest provocation, and no matter how primitive, the showers were still the camp's greatest asset.

THE "heads" too were far from being lavish "built-in-tile" affairs, however, the lads who had lived on farms were right at home. These were the canvas covered, wide board, round-hole type, which for sanitary purposes were enclosed with mosquito netting, giving them the appearance of grandstand seats. Regardless of how far removed they were from the highway "comfort stations" on Route 22, the "heads" still served a purpose, comfort or no comfort, and that was all anyone cared about. There were four of these little buildings in the camp area; one in each corner, and quite handy for all parties concerned. However, with all due respect to the Supply Department, there was one item that was sadly insufficient in those early days. That was an adequate supply of "G. I. Kleenex". Other than that, there were no "kicks" about the "heads".

IN fact, there was no real griping about anything. Setting up the tents, offices, warehouses and other camp facilities kept the men well occupied, and when men are kept busy, they're kept happy. The first three days passed swiftly. There was little time for anything but working, eating and sleeping; three things that Seabees take care of in a splendid manner. The camp was shaping up nicely, and with everything in the 582 area soon to be "squared away", it was believed that permanent job assignments would be forthcoming.

MUSTER was at 0745 on Monday morning, 8th May. Then the men stood at attention while the Stars and Stripes were raised to the top of a makeshift flag pole fastened to a huge tree stump. Following Colors Lt. Broadhurst put the men at ease, then stated that he wanted to give them the lowdown on the job the Unit was going to do. Tilting his hat on the back of his head, the Lieutenant said:

"MEN! You've all been wondering what our job is going to be. Well, the Skipper has given me permission to give out all the details. The primary job, and the one for which we have been sent overseas, is the maintenance and operation of the Piva Fighter and Bomber Strips. I don't mind tellin' you that this is one helluva big job; one that entails a lot f hard work, and I mean damned hard work!

THE most important part of this assignment is to see that the thousands of feet of Marston mat, with which the strips are covered, are kept in flight condition. Next we have to take care of the crash strips at the end of each main strip, and there are seven main taxiways (A through G), connecting taxiways, roads leading to adjoining shop areas and hundreds of revetments that have to be graded almost daily. Besides the grading of taxiways and revetments, a fleet of sprinkler trucks will keep these facilities watered at all times. And, there are also many culverts and drainage ditches in this area that require constant attention.

WE have chosen 109 experienced men to operate the dump trucks, sprinkler trucks, bulldozers, motor patrols and other heavy equipment on the strips. Other men will be assigned to jobs in the Heavy Equipment Shops, Carpenter Shop, Plumbing Shop and Water Purification, and two crews have been chosen to handle all emergency repairs on the strips. I want you men to remember that all of these activities are still under the command of the battalion we are replacing. Battalion personnel will instruct our crews in their duties, and as soon as we learn our jobs the Unit will take over completely, and the 36th will be able to go home for a much needed rest."

THE Executive Officer concluded: "I guess that's about all men. I want you to know that we're counting on you, so let's get out there and do our best, and just to make certain that there is no confusion about assignments, check with the Bulletin Board or with Banker for information about your job. Report to work immediately after being dismissed, and good luck to you." The Lieutenant then called the men to "attention, and then barked "company dismissed".

AND, so the men went to work. Some reported for duty out on the strips, others in the shops, the mess hall and on camp construction details. Permanently assigned men returned to jobs in offices, warehouse, commissary and Master-at-Arms and Cleaning Details. Everywhere that 36th men worked, 582 men worked alongside, learning the job and preparing to take over. No one was idle, no one complained, and no one got into any trouble. The men were all too busy for anything but the job at hand.

WITH all men assigned to some sort of a job, they finally got used to getting up at 0500 every morning, eating chow in the dimly-lit mess hall, then going about their work for the day. During off-hours they washed clothes, wrote letters or made improvements around the tents. Everyone was unused to the sultry, damp, disagreeable climate so tired easily, and perspiration flowed freely from pores at the slightest exertion. Insects abounded in untold multitudes to plague the men at work or rest, and daily rains flooded the camp, held up the work and presented a never-ending maintenance problem in the camp and on the strips.

EVENINGS for the most part were exceedingly dull. They were whiled away by resorting to "bull sessions", writing letters by the light of an improvised lantern (made by sticking a piece of cloth or rope into a bottle filled with diesel oil), or just plain sleeping. Some nights the 36th Battalion Theatre showed a movie, showing how the other half lived -- the half that had been left behind. These movie nights were a real godsend, breaking the monotony as they did with a few hours of entertainment, and everyone derived genuine pleasure from a night at the cinema. Regardless of the weather (it often rained throughout the entire movie) or the type of picture, every man took off for the theatre on these gala nights, escaping into another world, even if only for a few hours.

AFTER the movie or "bull session" everyone went to bed. What else was there to do? This was usually promptly at 2130, sometimes before. The uniform for slumber was conspicuous by its brevity. Sometimes a pair of undershorts were worn, more often nothing at all. Usually a man went to sleep without a blanket because the night was stifling, but he woke in the early morning to pull up a cover when the dampness and cold began oozing out of the jungle. Once settled in bed, a man made certain that his netting was tucked securely around the edges of his mattress, which kept him from being blitzkrieged by dive-bombing mosquitoes. Thus protected, sleep came quickly for it had been a long day, and a day in the tropics is very tiring. Even the crackling of machine guns and carbines no longer disturbed the sleepers. Instead of thoughts of war, everyone concentrated on getting his eight hours of "sack duty" in preparation for another day's work.

A NEW day started with "Reveille" at 0500, and the big guns commencing to shell Jap positions at 0505. Those who liked to turn over for a few more winks were forced out of bed, on the double, by the guns to the left and right of camp, which seemed to shout, "war, War, WAR!" everytime a shell let go. No one could escape the fact that a campaign was still in progress on Bougainville. Batteries around the camp, along the road, at the strips and up forward sent salvo after salvo from .75, .90 and .105 millimeter guns screaming across the front lines in a never-ending barrage. At first it was a source of discomfort to have those big boys pounding in one's ears all day long, but one gradually became accustomed to the noise and the shaking earth. In fact, those crashing barrages became so much a part of the existence that it was felt something was missing when the guns ceased firing for an hour or so.

IN the mornings the shelling was most constant, and men going about their work of cleaning camp, grading taxiways, repairing equipment, inspecting strips, or felling trees usually stopped for a minute or two to listen and be thankful they were on this side of the lines and not the other. Up front, Army patrols pushed the fight to the enemy. The men on the lines watched for Jap snipers and scouts. Planes took off on a round-the-clock basis, loaded with bombs and bullets, made their raids on the other side of the island, returning only after unloading their death missiles on the Japs.

THROUGH all this CBMU 582 went about its daily job of maintenance. The strips were always open. The garages repaired equipment and sent it back to the field. The carpenters completed one job and started another. Mess cooks served breakfast, cleaned the galley; served dinner, cleaned the galley; and so on. The work went round and round, never ending, never finished.

OUT on the strips the men who had been fortunate enough to pull a choice position on the Emergency Strip Repair Crew (by dint of much "brown nosing", meaning bootlicking in Seabee lingo) described the flight takeoffs as being impressive. From their ring-side seats along the Bomber Strip they saw wave after wave of fighters and bombers taking off on early morning flights. Squadrons of Corsairs, P-38s and SRDs raced down the runway with streams of flame shooting from their motors along the sides of the planes, and bouncing off the steel mats underneath. There were thirty, sixty, ninety planes shooting up into the atmosphere embarking on daily missions, totling more than 400 sorties weekly, which kept better than thirty Jap airfields in this theatre damaged beyond usefulness. And now it was the men of the 582 who took pride in knowing that it was they who kept strips and taxiways in excellent condition, enabling the planes to push the fight constantly to the enemy. They knew also that no matter how small their part, it was still a necessary part of the operations if these fighters and bombers were to be kept in the air.

ONE plane that didn't get into the air, however, was the one which had a collision with Adam Kurenezuk's water truck. Adam, accompanied by Red Tilton, was driving his truck along the road that circled the lower end of the bomber strip. He was watching warily for planes that might roll out of one of the many taxiways. Seeing none, and reaching the entrance to Taxiway "C", Adam stopped the truck. Red jumped to the ground and ran around to the back of the truck. He was turning on the valve which unleashed the water into the springling pipe when he saw a plane coming toward them. He stopped turning the valve wheel and hollered,

"KRENZUK! K--REN--ZUK! Get the hell out of the road! There's a plane coming!"

BUT, Adam didn't hear the warning. He didn't know what was happening until Red raced back to the cab and pointed. "There's a plane! Get Movin'!" but he spoke too late. The plane's left wing tip crashed resoundingly into the pontoon tank on the truck. And then the plane, swinging in a half-circle, was bearing down on the side of the cab where Adam was sitting. The silvery prop, thrashing the air like a knife, was coming straight toward Kurenezuk.

INSTINCTIVELY, Adam knew this was the end. Unless...unless...he could get moving. Without a second to lose, he clutched the motor, jerked the gear shift into second, spun the wheels to the right, pushed the accelerator to the floor, and the truck leaped ahead -- twenty-five... fifty feet. Out of the range of the swishing propeller Adam stopped the truck and looked back.

THE plane completed its circle and came slowly to a stop. The pilot leaned forward in the cockpit, contemplating the damage. It must not have been too serious because he waved a hand to the Seabee that said, "Forget it." He pushed the idling plane forward again, this time in the direction of its revetment. Though only slightly damaged, that plane wouldn't fly that day. Perhaps the pilot was happy about that.

WHEN Adam got the pilot's signal he slumped back in his seat, wiping beads of perspiration from his forehead with the side of his hand. "Geezz!" he signed, "that was a close one."

RED, who was nervously lighting a cigarette, nodded agreement. Wiping clammy hands on dungarees he thought aloud, "Thank God we got out of

THERE was no trouble or fuss made about the accident. When Tilton and Kurenezuk reported the crackup they were asked if anyone had been hurt. When they replied negatively they were then told to "forget about it -- no bodily harm done -- that's all that mattered. Just be more careful in the future."

THEY couldn't forget about because after the collision, excitable, fast-talking Kurenezuk, and the red-headed, broad shouldered machinist's mate were the center of attention. They had to relive their experiences again and again for their mates. These two Seabees shared the dubious distinction of being the first men in the outfit to almost lose their lives on the island -- if that's a distinction. But after a few days, the incident faded into the background as the mates found something else to talk about.

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ON 22nd May Ensign Harold Greger, tall, angular and sleepy-eyed, arrived in camp. He had left the states on the cargo ship a week before the Unit disembarked. And now, almost two months later, he was scrutinizing the camp, telling everyone how good it looked to him, and how happy he was to be with the Unit again after those long, tiresome days and nights on the cumbersome, slow-moving cargo ship.

MR. GREGER'S arrival meant that the supply ship was in the harbor. In fact, unloading operations had already begun, and as Mr. Greger put it, "There's going to be a helluva lot of work bringing the cargo up to camp."

NOR was he far from wrong, for all day on the 22nd the Seabees carried cargo from the beach to camp. Work continued on the cargo detail on the 23rd, 24th and 25th, with the truck drivers pushing their trucks back and forth from beach to camp all day long, and sometimes far into the night.

IT took four days to bring up the 1,290,000 pounds of supplies that comprised the cargo. And as rapidly as the trucks brought the cargo into camp details went to work sorting, stacking and checking the vast quantities of goods. There were stacks of redwood, bundles of corrugated iron, steel purlins, masonite, plywood, boxes of spare parts, tools, galleyware, and miscellaneous items such as soap, brooms, nuts, bolts, screws, nails, first-aid supplies, impregnating greases, etc. etc. On and on in a never-stopping stream came the materials needed by the Unit to enable it to contribute its share toward the war effort.

THEN came the equipment. There were dump, personnel and cargo trucks; bulldozers, carryalls, clamshell and cranes; traxcavators, motor patrols, jeeps and trailers. All rolled into camp under their own power, that is, except that the jeeps pulled the trailers, and the bulldozers the carryalls. Finally came the stationary machines consisting of puro-pumpers, water pumps, generators, battery chargers, power saws, lathe, reefer motors (and reefers), ice cream machine, bake ovens, washing machines, welding machine, decontamination unit, ice machine, etc. etc. Equipment and gear filled the camp area, yet still it came, and there was so much that some had to be stored in another area.

IT wasn't just good equipment either. It was the best that money could buy. It was the finest equipment the Government could purchase. There's no denying that a good job was almost a certainty with pieces of equipment on hand made by such top-ranking concerns as Ford, Chrysler, Caterpillar, International, GMC, Remington, and countless other smaller but still just as reliable companies. Furthermore, this equipment was not purchased from a number of small contractors scattered across the country, but rather from one huge, immensely competent contractor who assembled everything from bulldozers to shoelaces to outfit each outgoing unit completely. It left nothing to be desired, purchasing, accumulating and assembling everything as it did in the Advanced Base Depot at Port Hueneme, and even went so far as to load the materials on board ship for the departing units. Everything with which the Unit was equipped came from the Pacific Naval Advanced Base (PNAB) contractors at Hueneme, and it can be said again, the equipment was the very best that money could buy, or a great nation produce.

BECAUSE the equipment, which was stored in another area, was so valuable (and irreplaceable), a guard was posted over it, lest it be set upon by procurers from other outfits. Four men, each working six hours, were assigned the job of standing guard over the equipment, thus providing round-the-clock coverage. The three shifts from 0600 to 2400 were, more or less, routine jobs of keeping the curious from tampering with the stock. However, the shift from 2400 to 0600 was one in which the long, dark Bougainville night settled on the shoulders of the guard. The guard found himself not just standing a watch, but protecting vital war supplies from the entire Nip army. Truly this was a ponderous task, and one involving great responsibility.

THE lad who felt heir to the "midnight to dawn" shift was genial Edward Harold Mehr, Seaman First from Brooklyn, USA. Eddie has the eminence of being one Jewish boy in the outfit who can boast of having a middle name. He is also the chubbiest and jolliest guy in the Unit. And poor Ed was selected to stand watch while the others slept. Everything happens to Eddie.

EDDIE was anything but jolly this night. He made several rounds of the cargo dump, making certain that everything was okay. Then he evenly distributed his bulky frame on a stack of lumber and practiced swinging his night-stick. "Who knows," he thought, "perhaps I might get a job as a cop in Brooklyn someday if I live right." Then he hummed a tune softly to himself, while the dark night and the darker jungle hung heavily about him. His eyes began to play queer tricks on him. He imagined seeing hordes of shadowy figures slinking through the jungle on the edge of the area. Maybe he was seeing things, but no, there -- over behind that tree -- was a face. What was it? He waited....watched....tensed his muscles against the impact of striking bullets. Five minutes passed. He prayed to Abraham...to Isaiah. Ten minutes passed. Then a half hour. But still nothing happened.

THEN Ed saw a solution to these hallucinations. "Let there be light!", he shouted. "Then I shall see no flitting shadows."

GALVANIZED into action he sprang down from his lumber pile and climbed into each truck in the clearing. He drove the trucks, one by one, into a circle. When the circle was formed he turned on the headlights of each truck. The lights threw a pool of sunshine into the blackened ring. Inside the circle it was daylight, and Eddie sat down in the very middle, surrounded by bright lights, to wait for the dawn. No more would he see faces, or Japs, or shadows in the bushes. He was safe as long as he had light, and there he spent the night, without worry, without illusions.

WHEN morning came the dimming headlights heralded its approach. Eddie rose, stretched his arms and made the rounds of all the trucks. He switched off all the lights and no one would ever notice (he hoped) that the lights had run down the batteries. When the morning guard put in an appearance, Edward Harold Mehr, Seaman First Class, reported to him that "All is secure!" Then, relieved of his post, he walked calmly back to camp and went to bed. The hectic night had already been forgotten.

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IT is generally believed that the seizure of the Empress Augusta Bay region on Bougainville and the subsequent establishing of a perimeter, was the culmination of the Solomons Campaign. It was not necessary that the entire island be brought under the control of the Americans, which is why the perimeter was established. All that Bougainville was needed for was a large enough area for air strips from which to bomb Raboul, to keep the Japs from utilizing their Bougainville air strips, and as a staging ground for massing and training of troops for the step-off to another island fortress in the fight against Japan.

A GREAT number of the fighters, bombers and observation planes that were making life miserable for the Nips in this theatre were operating from the Piva Strips. It was to be expected, then, that the Japs would try to bomb the strips in an attempt to cripple American air power. The precautions taken against this possibility were many. On the beaches the radar units combed the skies incessantly for sounds of enemy planes. On the strips were many anti-aircraft batteries whose men maintained a vigilant guard over the

ALL of these precautions added up to but one thing -- that an almost perpetual state of "Condition Red" existed on Bougainville. This condition, meaning that enemy planes were approaching, could only be applied to the early days on the island -- the days following the invasion. Better let it be said that during May, and the succeeding months, that the Americans lived in a "state of watchfulness".

THIS watchfulness ripened, however, and became "Condition Red" one night in the latter part of the Unit's first month ashore. Shortly before Taps that night the air raid sirens shrilly warned that the Nips were coming over. Lights were snuffed immediately. Cigarettes were pinched. Voices became hushed. Over by the O.O.D.'s office small groups had collected for the purpose of finding out "what was up?", and talking quietly about what would happen "if the Japs got through." In the tents men sat on the edges of their cots, anxiously awaiting the outcome of the raid, curiosity again mingled with that sense of fear for the unknown.

IN the sky long, slender fingers of light crossed and recrossed as they raked the heavens for foreign intruders. While out on the strips could be heard the sound of planes warming up, then a continuous rattling of steel as they raced down the matting and into the air. Hearing planes overhead, Edward Coleman and George Thompson (two CPOs who had seen action in the Aleutians), and dozens of others, dove into their foxholes and remained there for the duration of the alert. Many of the men thought that this was amusing, but there is nothing amusing about a fear of bombs and death and destruction. These men did what they had been trained to do, what they had done before during a time when a siren's wail meant that death was on its way. A time when American air power was weak and was unable to dash into the sky, as it did this night, to stop the oncoming Japs.

THIS time the Japs were stopped and had turned and fled. No one knew what drama had been enacted in the skies off the coast where the enemy flight had been intercepted. One only knew that after an hour the American planes (some of them limping) had dropped down onto the bomber strip, and pilots reported that some enemy planes had been shot down, others had dispersed. The "All Clear" was sounded and the men returned to their sacks, but not to sleep because thoughts of Jap planes and falling bombs made unpleasant bedfellows.

NEVERTHELESS, the raiders had been cut off before any harm was done, and what was more important, this was the last attempt to bomb the Piva strips. Japanese air power in the Southwest Pacific was almost completely broken and no future effort would be made by the enemy to regain its Solomon holdings. A campaign that started even before the Americans landed on Guadalcanal on 7th August 1942 swept northward to engulf island after island, and stormed ashore on Bougainville on 1st November 1943, was announced completed. And now, the perimeter secured, the campaigners were moving northward and westward to new and greater victories.

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CHAPTER TEN

- THE MONTH OF JUNE -

JUNE, the Unit's second month on the island, brought with it many things, namely; illness...the P-38 crash...improvements to the camp... installation of electric lights...inauguration of sports activities... the first construction job...securing of the 36th Battalion...etc...etc.

ON 1st June Thomas D. Hughes, Chief Carpenter's Mate, and Elmer I. Elwood, Machinist First, departed for the hospital at the Navy Base. Everyone thought it strange that two lean, hard-working six-footers like Elmer Elwood and Pappy Hughes should get sick at the same time and end up in the hospital with the same ailment, backaches.

WHETHER Elmer's and Pappy's ailments were contracted while working on the island no one was able to determine (many thought the backaches were a hang-over from civilian days), but everyone agreed that these illnesses had an element of humor, for when the two men returned to the unit a week or so later, their backaches had disappeared, along with their tonsils. Each had undergone a tonsillectomy while at the Navy Base and were again as good as new. At this time the question, "Are the Seabees really confused?" again arose. The answer to this impertinent query had best be saved until a later date.

ENSIGN Greger will also remember the first day of June for a long time to come. It was on this date that he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant (junior grade), having completed all requirements necessary for advancement to the higher rank. Mr. Greger was well pleased with his appointment, as were the men who served under him.

THEN on 2nd June the Unit was assigned its first construction job. A detail of carpenters headed by Warrant Officer Joe Cowan were given the job of building several quonset huts and laying cement decks inside for the Camp of the Commander of the Naval Forces of the Northern Solomons, Commodore E. J. Moran, USN, who was making Bougainville his headquarters.

THE camp was not entirely constructed by CBMU 582, but the Unit did its share, and the project was completed in record time. The men of 582 were proud of their share in this construction job, a job that had been rushed to completion through blinding heat and pouring rain. Nor could any of the boastful carpenters ever ride by the COMNAVFORNORSOLS camp without throwing out his chest and shouting, "I helped build that camp!", and not without reason did he do that because at that time it was the finest looking camp on the island.

WHILE the carpenters wer engaged on the quonset huts, the electricians were installing electric lights in the officers' tents, the offices and the warehouses. This job was supervised by Chief Electrician's Mates Stephen P. Skiffington and John H. Curtright. The electricians ** set up the poles, strung wires leading into the various buildings and tents, and connected the entire lighting system to a 75 KW generator which the Unit had borrowed from MAG 24 (Marine Air Group 24).

HAVING electricity in the camp also made posible the setting up of the Recreation Department's 12 tube, Super Skyrider, Hallicrafter radio (acquired in the states) and the public address system. Milton Klein and Paul Miskulin installed the radio and P.A. system in a small building which was to house the Photo Lab. The loudspeaker was fitted into an improvised amplifier made of plywood and this was placed high up in a banyan tree; and from this excellent vantage point the radio could be heard in all parts of the camp.

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** Unit Electricians were: James E. O'Brien, EM1c; Arnold E. Wald, EM1c; Milton Klein, EM3c; Paul J. Miskulin, EM3c; Robert W. Headrick, Slc; and Jimmy A. Quiriconi, Slc.

THE radio became the source of much pleasure. Late news broadcasts and popular swing music, entirely out of place in this jungle setting, filled that lonely gap between supper and Taps. All the top-notch radio shows and dance bands were brought into camp either via the short wave or from the local Army Expeditionary Radio Station, which operated every afternoon and evening. And, dreams of other, happier days became something special when a man laid back on his cot in the evening and listened to soft, sweet love songs which floated through the camp. No matter how much money was paid for the Hallicrafter (and it was a lot), it was well worth it; every cent.

AFTER the radio was hooked-up, the Electrical Department (with the approval of the Skipper) installed an electric light in each of the tents occupied by the crew, and on 12th June every tent in the camp had electric lights. Another comfort of home had been added, and the pop-bottle lantern was discarded; and this just a little more than a month after the Unit had landed.

IN order to install electricity in the camp, the electricians had to do a lot of procuring and improvising because their stock of supplies was low at the time. Where, one might ask, did the wiring, plugs, connections and insulators come from that went into this new lighting system? If asked such a brazen question the electricians would bristle, become indignant, because it is a breach of etiquette to inquire of a Seabee where he procures additional parts, tools or equipment. In the case of the "juice mechanics", they embarked on their camp wiring job with very little wire and few parts. Insulators were all used in one day. From then on, coke bottles and small pieces of two-by-fours became insulators. Wire, connections, sockets, etc. were begged, borrowed or stolen (Beg pardon, the word is procured) from other units in order to complete the job. But! -- and this was important -- the job was completed, every tent was illuminated, and grateful mates were saying, "Thank God and Thomas Edison for the incandescent lamp." Yes, they were very grateful for the work the electricians had done, too.

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DURING the latter part of May and throughout the month of June the Camp Construction Detail, headed by Warrant Officer "Pete" Holsinger was kept busy building up the camp. The original crew * built the Photo Lab, a warehouse to replace the supply tents and a 12' x 14' building for for the use of the Recreation Department. The warehouse was 50' x 28' constructed with logs as uprights and center pieces and enclosed with chicken wire. In the smaller building a Library of 500 books and magazines was established, and this building also became an issue room for recreation gear. Then, too, the radio and P.A. system was transferred to this building.

WHEN the carpenters completed these jobs they went to work on the tents which housed the Personnel Office and the O.O.D.'s office. Frameworks were built for the tents, floors were laid and the sidewalls were covered with mosquito netting or wire. All of these buildings in the camp area were made out of native lumber, roofed with heavy tarps, screened in with mosquito wire and each was rigged with electric lights, thus making them semi-permanent buildings.

WHEN these camp jobs were completed the carpenters moved on to other bigger jobs. There was a considerable amount of construction work going on in the different camps on the island, so these men were always kept busy, and what a capable lot they were. There wasn't anything any one of them couldn't do when it came to working with his hands and a piece of wood, and he did it too. These carpenters and the two chief carpenter's mates, Pappy Hughes and Fred Kraus (Frederick F. Kraus), were the nucleus of all crews formed for construction jobs performed by the Unit while servigin on Bougainville. The carpenters will be heard from again, for their accomplishments are many, but right now, an accident which occurred out on the strip should be looked into.

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* Robert A. Wheatley, CM1c; John W. "Bill" Sampson, CM1c; William E. Ivers, CM1c; Charles F. M. Baxter, CM1c; Walter J. Peters, CM2c.

THE accident took place on 11th June. It was afternoon and Woodie Sommerville, Lloyd Chase, Marvin Mittie and Ralph Kuehl * were using an air compressor to blow out a culvert which ran under the bomber strip and emptied into a drainage ditch on the north side of the strip.

THE Culvert Detail's equipment, a truck and an air compressor on a trailer, were parked alongside the drainage ditch. Kuehl, sitting on the right running board which was just above the ditch, and Mittie, sitting on the other running board, were waiting for Chase and Woodie to return from the opposite side of the strip where they were checking to see if water was flowing through the culvert.

CHASE and Woodie were examining the culvert's mouth when a plane suddenly loomed over the trees at the end of the strip and leveled off for a landing. The two Seabees stopped to watch the plane come in and were appalled when the P-38, coming in fast and low, blew its right tire as soon as the wheels touched the mats. The plane landed all right but the blowout caused it to swerve to the right. It headed straight for the truck. Chase and Woodie, seeing what was going to happen, started to run across the strip, shouting a warning to Ralph and Mittie as they ran. The two men on the truck didn't hear the yelling (nothing could be heard above the roar of the P38's motor) so they were entirely unprepared for the impending crash.

MITTIE heard the plane approaching a moment before it was too late. He dived to safety, yelling to Kuehl as he did so. Ralph, however, is slightly hard of hearing and was ignorant of the danger. The plane ripped through the air compressor and the trailer and smashed into the back of the truck. The impact threw Ralph from the running board into the water-filled ditch where he lay stunned.

A SECOND later the other two men arrived on the scene, just in time to see the plane climb into the bed of the truck and explode. Fortunately for the pilot, he was able to get out of the cockpit a moment before the plane and truck went up in flames. He had joined Chase, Woodie and Mittie, and the three men pulled the pilot with them until they were a safe distance from the plane and truck. Then they turned to watch the spectacle.

THE trailer, air compressor, plane and truck were a blazing inferno, and .20 millimeter shells and machine gun bullets, exploding in the flames, added another element of danger to the scene. Then the crash truck and ambulance arrived. However, there was nothing the crash crew could do but stand by and watch the plane and equipment burn, just as the others were doing. That's all anyone could have done, just stand around waiting for the flames to burn themselves out, and be thankful that no one was injured. That is, no one except Ralph Kuehl. Ralph was pulled out of the water by the ambulance driver, who after taking one look at the drenched Seabee, put him in the ambulance and drove to the MAG 24 Dispensary. Ralph spent the remainder of the day and the night in the Sick Bay because he was badly bruised and suffering considerably from shock.

WHILE Ralph was being loaded the ambulance, another scene was going on by the wreckage. The smoke-blackened pilot and Mittie were pounding each other on the back and jabbering like a pair of monkeys. It turned out that the pilot, Lt. Charles Sparks, USAAF, and Mittie had worked for the same company in Los Angeles about six years ago as truck drivers. They must have been good friends, too, judging from the exultation and joy each exhibited at the reunion. Sparks was heard to remark to Mittie that, "This is one helluva place to be a meetin' you!" And Mittie replied, "Yeah! and what the hell are you doin' over here?" The rest of the fellows just stood around smiling, watching the two old pals carry on like a couple of youngsters. All this only goes to prove that sometimes, even disasters such as this one have their brighter sides.

BY this time the fire had burned itself out, so an examination was made of the equipment. The plane, air compressor and trailer were completely ruined and the truck also appeared to be beyond redemption. Its bed was charred, the cab had been burned to a crisp and the motor was all twisted and bent out of shape by the heat. On one would have believed that this was the same truck which had been driven up from the beach less than a month before, its windshield still encased in crating.

WHAT was left of the truck was hauled to the Heavy Equipment Area where the mechanics and welders look askance when they saw the wrecked truck towed into the yard. It dawned on them that here was a piece of junk, out of which they were supposed to build a truck. They knew there was nothing they could see about the foolhardiness of this project, so they went to work.

IT was soon decided that putting this truck back on the road was an impossibility, but the mechanics did have a plan. Half of them went to work on the junked truck, removing chassis and smaller parts, while the others took the motor and some slightly damaged pieces from the burnt truck. Out of the wreckage of the two junk-heaps emerged a two and a half ton cargo truck. The welding shop put the finishing touches to the new truck, then it was painted and declared ready for service. Put to instant use, this newly assembled cargo truck proved to be as good, if not superior, to any other truck belonging to the Unit.

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DEPSITE the long, hot work day, the newness of the jobs and the island, it was summer, and summertime meant baseball and softball games. The younger members of 582 decided they would like to play ball in the evenings or on their afternoons off. That part was okay, but what would they do for a ball park. Bill Hodgins (of the Recreation Department), assisted by Bob McAuliffe, Shorty Caldwell, Bob Lamneck, Howdy Adams * and several others solved this problem by building a ball diamond. Bill, backed by Lt. Greger, who was Recreation Officer, enlisted the aid of Ed McClure and Kelly Schaefer ** (heavy equipment operators) to tackle the jungle in the rear of the camp. Ed and Kelly brought their bulldozers into camp when they had some time off and pushed back brush, dropped trees, dug up stumps, and when they had cleared away the jungle they did the preliminary grading by back-dragging the field. Next step was to bring in a pair of graders to level and smooth the area, and behind the graders hopeful ball players raked up branches, stones and discarded shells and ammunition boxes. The field looked tolerable so attention was directed to a backstop. Using salvaged canvas, sections of chicken wiring (borrowed when the owner wasn't looking) and lumber picked up at random, the sports enthusiasts erected a backstop, which though not a thing of beauty was capable of keeping the balls from sailing over the steep embankment at the south end of the field. Foul lines were marked off, bases made by filling canvas sacks with sawdust, and a pitcher's mound and home plate were set into the ground.

THEN to give the field a professional look the men fashioned dugouts of canvas and logs for home and visiting teams, and tree trunks were rolled to the foul lines for bleachers. The work didn't end with the completion of the ball diamond, however, but continued until horseshoe, basketball, badminton and volleyball courts were laid out adjoining the larger field. Then a pair of backboards were shaped-up for the basketball court, and after one last look around to make certain that everything was in order, the sportsmen of CBNU 582 declared the Unit Ball Park to be officially opened.

NOR had the work on this project been done in vain, because all of its facilities were put to good use. A series of ball games with other units was scheduled and the availability of recreation gear for all kinds of sports gave the ballpark a place of prominence in the camp community.

FURTHERMORE, the fact that the men had shown great initiation in building something for themselves was not the crowning point of this achievement, but rather that they build the field in their spare time, interfering in no way with work schedules, and used equipment only when it wasn't needed on the air strips.

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* Robert T. McAuliffe, S1c; Ronald E. Caldwell, Cox; Robert J. Lamneck, Cox; and Howard F. Adams, C11c.

** Edwin R. McClure, MM2c and John K. Schaefer, MM1c.

FOR men not especially interested in sports, but desiring to put their idle hours to a worthwhile use, Warrant Officer Cowan conceived the idea of a Hobby Shop. He selected a site for the building on the north edge of the camp, right alongside the jungle. Collecting the necessary materials, Mr. Cowan, Bill Sampson and Bob Wheatley constructed a tarp-covered, skeleton-framed, 20' x 20' mesh screened building. The electricians did their share by installing the lights. Work benches were fashioned inside the structure, and a drill press, vise, grinder and numerous hand tools were placed in the shop. Alfred D. Decker, Carpenter Third, was assigned as Custodian of the Tools and the Hobby Shop was ready for business.

TAKING advantage of these resources, hobbyists began immediate production of rings, bracelets, watch bands, ash trays, belt buckles, etc. Once again Seabees were hard at work at their favorite occupation -- souvenir making -- and many were the cries of awe and admiration when the finished products of the hobbyists were displayed for approval.

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IF CBMU 582 had been a state or a nation or a political party, it could have been said that the Unit came into power on 20th June 1944. On that date the 36th Battalion secured all activities and formally turned the Piva Air Strips and accompanying facilities over to the 582nd. Now that 582 knew what was to be done the 36th turned its thoughts to home, or at least to someplace other than Bougainville. The 36th rolled up its camp completely and dismantled all the shops (even taking the lumber from the framework and the tarps along). Nothing was left that might be useful at a later date. Once again the Shop Area was a barren little clearing in the jungle, empty except for three water tanks which had been left behind. The Heavy Equipment Area was equally bare.

MOVING into the shop Area, located across the river from the camp, the Camp Construction Detail built a carpenter shop, reefer shop, electrical shop and a shop for water purification. In the wake of the builders the respective crews for each shop moved in, set up their work benches and equipment and were ready for work.

IN the Heavy Equipment Area the story was the same, only in this shop area the men were doing all the work themselves. These mechanics, welders, machinists and lubrication men didn't need any wood-floored, screen-enclosed buildings in which to work. They were satisfied with just a canopy over log framed structures, and this work they were able to do themselves. Protection from the rain was all they wanted, and having this they asked nothing else but to be left alone so that they could work in peace.

THERE was much more to CBMU 582's camp than just a little clearing now that the 36th had secured. In addition to the camp proper there were the two shop areas. Neither of these was located in the main camp; the Shop Area situated at the top of the hill on the left hand side of the road leading into camp, and the Heavy Equipment Area was located on Marine Drive, about 500 yards from the camp road. Also there was Officers' Country, which was situated at the top of the hill opposite the Shop Area. Here officers of the Unit lived in quiet seclusion in pyramid tents that had been stretched over wood frames. They were also floored and well screened.

OFFICERS' Country had all the appearances of a charming little park. The tents were spaced at intervals among graceful palms and stately teakwood and mahogany trees. Besides quarters the officers had their own Mess Hall (galley and dining room) which was managed by capable cooks and messmen. Clayton C. Haney, Lyle "J" Pebernat and Benjamin R. Running (all Ship's Cooks Second Class) each had an opportunity to try out their culinary skills on the officers. William Leabo, Seaman First; Neal J. Lauro, Painter Third; and John W. Kula, Seaman First are the three young men who served meals and took care of the officers' quarters so competently. From all reports, the officers were well satisfied with their little community.

IN fact, the entire outfit was well satisfied with the camp and its outlying communities. And why not, for the jungle had been pushed back from all sides of the camp to make the area larger, and also more healthful by admitting an abundance of fresh air and sunshine -- and rain. The work on the strips and other projects was progressing satisfactorily. The men had facilities for recreation at hand; also a barber shop and laundry, which had been established for the convenience of the mates. Then, too, one mustn't forget the beer reefer which was set up in the camp area for cooling the monthly beer issue obtained from the Naval Base, and rationed to the men on a bottle-a-day basis. It can readily be seen, in view of the above facts, that after only two months CBMU 582 had all the makings of a fine camp. Actually, the Unit already had a fine camp; a camp of which the men were rightfully proud.

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MOST wonderful of all feelings that a serviceman, officer or enlisted, can have overseas is to learn that a member of his family is in the same locality. Immediately he begins looking forward to a reunion; sometimes hurrying it by obtaining permission to visit his father, brother or son.

SUCH was the case of the Skipper, Lt. O'Rourke, who was granted permission by the Captain of the Naval Base (Comdr. Earle H. Kincade, USN) to visit his son Paul shortly after the Unit arrived on Bougainville. Paul (Lt. George P. O'Rourke, Jr., CEC-USNR) was attached to the 27th Naval Construction Battalion, then stationed on Emirau in the St. Matthias Group.

LT. O'ROURKE, Sr. flew down to Emirau in one of the big C-47 SCAT transport planes (on a regular cargo run) to meet his son. There is no need to go into details about the meeting or the pleasure the two officers derived from their few days together, because everyone knows what a reunion would be like between parent and only son, who hadn't seen each other for many months. The younger O'Rourke had been overseas almost eighteen months at the time of the reunion. And when the Skipper returned to Bougainville he spent considerable time telling everybody how happy he had been to see Paul again, how well his boy had done since joining the Navy, and what a fine job the 27th was doing on Emirau.

HOWEVER, the Skipper wasn't the only one who had visited with a family member since leaving the States. Besides John Whited's reunion with his sister, Ruth, at Espiritu Santo, Foster Leng had a cousin for company on the trip across the ocean, and Leo LaBell spent his free time on board ship with his uncle, a Seabee with CBMU 587.

BUT none of these instances can quite compare with Danny Minihan's reunion with his younger brother, John (Lt. John J. Monahan, USN) *. The best part of this meeting was that John dropped right into camp for the visit and the two brothers had a wonderful time trading experiences and talking about home. It was only after John had departed that Dan told his mates about his flyer brother.

JOHN MONAHAN (the story goes) enlisted in the Navy in prewar days as an Apprentice Seaman. He slugged it out for a time in the Fleet and at Pearl Harbor, then one day passed a competitive examination for flight training that landed him at Pensacola. When he graduated from flight school he was a Chief Petty Officer, and after more training and then plenty of combat he attained the rank of Lieutenant, senior grade, which is really coming up the hard way. John's latest exploit, of many, was the rescuing of three Army Flyers whose planes had been shot down. He had to land his Catalina in a heavy sea in order to perform the rescue, a feat which earned for him a citation and added another bar to his already amply beribboned chest.

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* The Monahan brothers learned upon the death of their father that the family name is Minihan, not Monahan. Before coming into the service, Danny changed his name to Minihan. John, already in the Navy, decided to avoid red tape by waiting until he was released before changing his name from Monahan to Minihan. Hence, Danny's name is Minihan, John's is Monahan; yet they are brothers. (Confusing, isn't it?)

ANOTHER nice thing about Dan's visit with John was the quart of whiskey that John gave Danny before taking off. "Gosh!", said Danny, "that sure was thoughtful of Johnny. Ya know, I'm sure proud of that kid." Danny added, after looking suspiciously at his mates, "And don't get any ideas, you guys. You can't have any of this. I'm saving this to celebrate the Fourth."

THAT's what Danny thought! As soon as word got around that Dan had a quart of stateside whiskey the line formed in front of his tent and extended along two platoon streets. Reluctantly Dan brought out the whiskey, passed it out, a shot to a man, until the bottle was empty. "Only got one drink out of the damn thing myself," griped Danny sadly, gazing at the empty bottle.

THERE seemed to be no end to these family reunions. A few days after Lt. Monahan left, another brother arrived on the scene. This time it was Ray Laurent's * brother Ed. Sgt. Ed Laurent, attached to a Marine Corps Fighter Squadron, was also stationed on Bougainville, so that their initial meeting was not the only one. Their respective camps were situated closely together so the brothers managed to see each other two or three times a week.

WHEN Ed and Ray got together it was usually an occasion for a celebration, so resources were pooled, and enough firewater was purchased for a little "blow-out". It was the custom of the brothers to invite a few close friends to these parties. When everyone had assembled, bottles were uncorked, cans of procured (not stolen) food were opened, and the party got underway. Usually a great time was had by all.

NOR were the Laurent brothers the only ones who entertained socially. Saturday nights were customarily set aside by many groups for observance of the time-honored American custom of "hitting the bottle". Some (few) let their enthusiasm for the American way of life run to extremes, but for the most part, these anti-prohibitionists were raising the elbow in an effort to break the gloom which shrouded the camp on nights which, as civilians, had been occasions for celebrations. Drinking for these men evoked a close comradeship between them and they were content to sit in tents, raise glasses together, spin yarns and indulge in a bit of melodious (sometimes raucous) harmony. There was no harm in that....now was there?

IN view of the above statements there is no denying that, even in the middle of the Bougainville jungle, alcoholic beverages could be had. Not at a liquor store or across a bar, this was strictly "off sale" stuff. Sometimes it was real honest-to-goodness stateside merchandise, but more often it was bottled-in-bond in Australia or New Zealand, slightly inferior to Peoria's corn and rye, but still drinkable. Also, for a time, a bootleg market flourished and "corn likker" undersold the more highly advertised, highly priced commodities. But then U. S. Army "revenoor agents" clamped down on this illicit (but enormously profitable) enterprise by stamping out many stills that had been concealed in the jungle.

WITH the passing of "corn likker" another, more deadly, witches brew came into existence. It was the era of wood alcohol, or "torpedo juice", a bottle of which would drive a man mad. But the life of the "torpedo juice" business was short because this kind of liquor was purchased only by those men who were looking for a one-way ticket home by "blowing their tops."** There weren't any (many) men of this low calibre in 582; most men had chosen to remain overseas with the Unit until the job was done.

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* Rheome E. Laurent, GMlc was the Unit's Armorer (and a good one) until one day in February 1945 he fell from a moving truck, landed twenty feet below road level in a drainage ditch. Damage to Laurent: Left leg fractured in three places. Because of the limited hospital facilities, it was necessary to evacuate Ray to Guadalcanal for proper medical treatment.

** Blow your top, Flip your lid: To become a psychoneurosis case; to become insane, nuts, slap-happy or just plain bugs. It is claimed that living in the jungle brings on this condition rapidly.

PRICES for moonshine or "chain lightning" were very low, but there was no OPA around to place a ceiling on legally distilled spirits. Whiskey sold for \$45 to \$50 per quart, gin for \$25 to \$35. Occasionally, a bottle of sherry could be had for \$15, but that was an occasion.

BECAUSE of the exorbitant prices asked for liquors, very few men could afford to go on a drunk oftener than once every month or two. Nevertheless, Seabees liked to drink and they did receive a daily issue of beer. Of course, 3.2 beer is not very potent, but if you have enough of it.... It was possible for a man to save his daily beer issue for three or four days, then add to it by talking a few teetotalers out of their issue. Armed with nine or ten bottles of grog a man was then ready, after foraging supper, to go on a good, old fashioned "Solomon Spree". (The writer admits that this was a lot of work to go to just to get a little tipsy, but...it was worth it.) And this was the manner in which a guy blew off steam on Saturday night, recuperated on Sunday and was ready for another week's work on Monday morning.

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JUNGLE wasn't the only thing of which Bougainville had plenty. It also had many, broad, sandy beaches. Beaches meant swimming, which was something a good many Seabees liked to do, and running eastward from Torokina Point was the smoothest stretch of beach that one could hope to find anywhere. It early became the practice of the men to go swimming whenever off duty. Whether it was only an hour at lunchtime, a half hour in the late afternoon after the work was done, or an entire Sunday afternoon, time spent at the seashore was always well enjoyed.

THE scene at the beach in the early afternoon is always the same, yet not the same, because one never tires of its beauty. The azure sky is spotted with a few feathery, white clouds suspended overhead like marionettes dangling from invisible wires. The palm trees line the shore, in regimented order, as if they are sentries on duty, and between the palm leaves can be seen the black forbidding rain clouds hovering over the brown, lava-stained volcano.

THE sand on the shore, bleached a pale yellow by the blazing sun, was so hot that little waves of steam rise up, then vanish into thin air. And the ocean...long, rolling waves that come out of the depths, rise up, reach a crest, then tumble into a foaming, churning mass of white which cascades onto the beach, only to spend itself among the sands. Beyond the crashing breakers lie the coral reefs, and there the ocean is the color of indigo. Further out, and extending until it spills over the horizon, the sea is the color of moss, dotted here and there with incoming and outgoing destroyers and cargo ships.

THIS was the setting in which Seabees and other members of the Armed Forces indulged in horseplay, both on land and in the water, stretched out on the sand getting a suntan (or burn), or recklessly wasted their energy bucking the breakers. It was also considered great sport to climb onto a wave an instant before it broke, and by keeping one's body rigid, ride the wave like a surfboard into the shallow water.

ON the other hand, the ocean had its dangerous, terrifying aspects. A man could have his back broken if a wave caught him off balance, smashing him with a shattering force to the ocean's floor. Or, if caught in the undertow, he could be carried out to sea before help could reach him. On more than one occasion a swimmer found himself caught in the undertow and carried beyond the breakers. It was only through the grace of God and the prowess of the Fiji scouts (many of whom were stationed on the island) as swimmers that the drowning man found a lifeline thrust into his grasping hands. Then a dozen or so husky men on shore hauled in the line, thus pulling the hapless swimmer onto the beach. Sometimes a man was not so lucky and was never heard from or seen again.

THERE were a few deaths by drowning recorded in the annals of the U. S. Armed Forces on Bougainville, but fortunately none of the men in 582 became neighbors of Davy Jones. Not that the Seabees didn't have a few close ones—they did. For instance, there was the time Al Lambert was caught in the undertow, but attracted attention to his plight in time to prevent being swept out to sea. His mates pulled him into shore. Then one day Angus Murray, a non-swimmer, stepped into a deep hole in the otherwise shallow water and had to be hustled back to the beach. That's just two examples. There were many more but all had a happy ending.

A MAN didn't have to be a poor swimmer to be bested by the ocean. Many an amphibious Seabee had memories of an encounter with Poseidon when he was in a spiteful mood. Walt Peters had such an encounter, and he thought he was a good swimmer. For that matter, he was. But few good swimmers could have done what Walt did one Sunday afternoon in July and gotten away with it.

WALT, a swarthy, bespectacled, easy-going Iowan, is of medium height, and on this particular occasion a little too cocky for his own good. Peters was bucking the breakers along with Wayne Tyler and a few other guys, when he and Tyler, tiring of this pastime decided to take the yellow raft and go beyond the breakers. After several futile attempts to bridge the waves, which were breaking tree-high along the beach, the other men who had gone along gave up the fight and headed back for shore. But not Tyler and Peters! They continued to push their little raft farther out. When a particularly high wave came in the two men threw the raft over the wave while they dived under. In this manner they finally got beyond the line of breakers and were soon riding on the peaceful swells.

FOR a short time they enjoyed this sport immensely. Then a gigantic wall of water broke over the tiny raft and left the two men floundering in the foam. The raft had disappeared from view and they were left alone, separated by about twenty-five feet of water. Tyler, first to recover, treaded water for a minute or two trying to catch his breath. Then glancing at Peters he noticed that Pete was panicky by the way he was flailing the water and gasping for air.

A FEW quick strokes brought Tyler to Peters' side. He told Pete to relax; that there was nothing to worry about. Peters calmed down immediately. Reassured by Tyler's presence he confessed that he had swallowed a good deal of salt water; said that's what made him so scared.

AFTER taking it easy for a few minutes the two men struck out for shore. However, it wasn't quite that simple. The faster they swam the less ground they gained. For a brief instant both were panicstricken. Then fear passed. They discovered that by riding in on the waves and treading in the backwash they were slowly making their way through the breakers. Tyler swam along easily, helping Walt morally and physically over the rough spots. Peters struggled along, his movements slow, almost spent. But together they made it, and finally crawled up onto the beach, exhausted but thankful.

PETERS was lavish in his praise of the way Tyler had stuck by him, and helped him to shore, but Tyler reiterated that he had done nothing. "I still say," asserted Walt, "that if I'd been out there myself I wouldn't've made it in. As it was, we had a helluva time gettin' back on this side of th' breakers." Looking peaked, but determined, Walt resolved: "I don't know about the rest of you guys but I for one am never goin' to get caught out there again. I'm stickin' so close to shore, people'll think I'm a land crab."

WELL, that's the way one swimming party ended. It wasn't the only incident of this type but it was characteristic of all seashore escapades. If any of the others were related, the names and location might be changed, but the core of the story would be the same. There were a few occurrences, however, when the circumstances were a trifle different. There was the time Bob Leshner and Ross Long were forced back to the beach by the sudden appearance of a shark near where they were swimming. Ross and Bob didn't need any bidding; they took off for shore the moment they saw that gray fin cutting through the water toward them. Nor did Henry Schroder argue with the giant turtle he bumped into while swimming one day. Henry didn't have time for thinking about turtle soup or anything else; he just dee-parted.

AND far from humorous was the poisonous reef snake that Arvene Faris tangled with while shell hunting off Puruta Island. The snake must have come out second best because Faris returned to camp to tell about his escapade. Then there was the time the men from the Heavy Equipment Shop swam in Lake Kathleen, a fresh water pond that reputedly harbored crocodiles. The heavy duty repair men laughed this tale off by calling it "scuttlebutt". Then some lads from the Navy Base caught a baby croc that measured four feet from nose to tail, one afternoon while fishing with dynamite. That stopped the swimming in Lake Kathleen, and that ends the stories about swimming adventures.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

- THERE'S WORK TO BE DONE -

MAINTAINING an air strip in the Southwest Pacific proved to be very interesting and thrilling work at first (later on it got damned monotonous), especially for the morning shift of the Strip Repair Crew which went to work before dawn to inspect the strips for squadron takeoffs. The first duty of the "strippers" was to canvass both the fighter and bomber strips for the purpose of removing any debris that might be scattered over the mats. Even the smallest rock might upset a fast-moving plane, so the men went about this aspect of their work very meticulously.

THIS job done, the Strip Crew adjourned to their headquarters on the side of the bomber strip opposite the control tower, from where they could watch the planes warm up, then take off down the mile-long strip. These squadrons of planes were taking off for strikes against the Japanese Army on Bougainville, New Britain, New Ireland, Choiseul and the Shortland Islands, so the Seabees always made it a point to say a few silent prayers for the return of these planes that heading out into the blue.

TO understand how this vitally strategic air field was operated, it is necessary to consider its complex organization. For one thing, there were a great number of fighters, fighter-bombers, bombers and observation planes operating from the two strips. The fighters and fighter-bombers were kept in shape by Navy and Marine Corps Ground Crews; were flown by Navy pilots and Marine pilots. The bombers and P-38s (the latter belonging to a Photo-reconnaissance squadron) were Army planes kept in repair by Army personnel and flown by Army pilots. The Catalinas and other amphibious planes were also Navy.

ON the ground the anti-aircraft gun emplacements around the field were manned by Army gunners; crash crews, radiomen and weather forecasters were regular Navymen. The guards posted at all entrances to the area and on each corner of the strips were negro soldiers attached to an Army security guard battalion. And besides this vast assortment of U. S. Armed Forces personnel, there were a few squadrons of New Zealand (RNZAF) and Australian (RAAF) planes, along with their respective ground crews, which operated from the Piva Strips. All of these organizations worked hand in hand to further Allied war aims in the South Pacific, and all these organizations were directly dependent upon the Seabees to keep the airfield in operation. This was a responsibility that CBMU 582 took far from lightly.

THE job of Officer in Charge of Maintenance and Operation of Piva Bomber Strip, Piva Fighter Strip and accompanying facilities fell upon the broad shoulders of quiet, sandy-haired, college-bred Lt. (jg) Harold W. Greger. Mr. Greger took over the reins of this job the day after his arrival on the island, and proved his capability from the start, both as an executive and in construction. He was ably assisted in this work by Charles B. Mecham, Chief Machinist's Mate; Fred A. Baimbridge, Chief Shipfitter; George F. Thompson, Chief Carpenters Mate and Edward N. Coleman, Chief Carpenter's Mate. These four men, all construction workers formerly, knew the "ropes" and handled their respective jobs and crews in a fine manner, thus enhancing the efficient management of the air strips.

FRED BAIMBRIDGE had charge of the Emergency Strip Repair Crews, or the Strip Crews, as they were called by the men. The reason these crews were called Strip Crews was obvious. They maintained the strips. Yet some claimed it was because on the job the fellows only wore a pair of shorts and shoes--they were practically stripped.

THE functions of Baimbridge's crews were many. They had to see that all damaged mats were replaced immediately after a crash landing had ripped them up. They had to keep the sand swept off the mats so that planes wouldn't slide on the smooth surface, and they also had to keep sand built up under the mats (an endless job because of the daily washouts caused by incessant, heavy rainfalls). Finally, the "strippers" had to keep the air and crash strips * cleared of debris which was left in the wake of every rainstorm that flooded the strips, and to maintain a constant watch for loose boards (mats), the presence of which might cause serious accidents.

* The Piva Bomber Strip was 6,000 feet long (a mile and a quarter), the Fighter Strip 4,000. Both were covered with Narston mat. The crash strips, one at the end of each air strip, were 2,000 feet long and were not covered with mats.

TO the front-line combat soldier or to the defense plant worker this may not sound like much of a job, but it was, partly because of the constant vigil that had to be maintained, but primarily because of the hard work necessary to repair damage caused by crash landings and floods.

THE importance of the job is realized when one takes into consideration the large number of planes using these strips as a base, and the fact that when flights were many, planes were invariably shot-up while in action, planes blew-out tires landing and taking off, and pilots were sometimes unable to get landing wheels down when coming in for a landing. All of these unavoidable circumstances meant only one thing -- crash landings, or just plain crackups. During the Unit's first few months on the island the average was one crash landing per day. When this happened the Strip Crew on duty had to get out on that strip and replace the mats which had been torn up or twisted by the crashing plane.

CHANGING the mats was a job that required driving speed. They had to be replaced in the shortest possible time because other planes circling overhead were waiting to land. The planes had to come down before their supply of gas ran out, or else... The Strip Crews * knew that they were responsible for getting those planes down safely and they also displayed super-human strength on such occasions by never taking longer than fifteen or twenty minutes to repair the strip.

THE Heavy Equipment Operators **, headed by Chiefs Thompson and Mecham, were another bunch of hardworking guys whose jobs were never done. They did a job, then the rains came along and undid it. The next day they went out and did the job all over again, and again the rains came. They worked on their rigs in the blazing sun and got red, then brown, then black; so black that some of the men could have passe for natives, and still the job was never finished.

THAT was the reason the Heavy Equipment Crew was the largest detail in the Unit. Usually there were more than thirty men assigned to this phase of construction-maintenance, and theirs was a major contribution to the successful operation of the Piva Strips. These men were the operators of bulldozers, clamshells and crane, shovels, tractors and carryalls, traxcavators, motor patrols and dump trucks. It was their job to keep the drainage ditches open, the taxiways and strip shoulders graded, the jungle pushed back from the strip area. They also cleared wooded areas for additional parking space for planes and facilities, loaded dump trucks with same which was distributed to washed-out places on the strips and roads, and graded numerous camp areas. Although there was plenty of work to keep the equipment operators busy, theirs rapidly became the most tedious of occupations. The only consolation they had was that they were out where things were always happening. Because of this, and because these men drove the "big stuff" their jobs became the envy of all other workers in the Unit.

ONE bunch of lads who had their hands full everytime it rained -- and it rained every day -- were the boys on the Culvert Detail. This detail was first headed by Chief Kraus, passed on the Leugene L. Vickory, Carpenter First; and finally inherited by Marvin R. Mittie, Carpenter Second. It was the job of this crew to keep sulverts cleaned and drainage ditches open.

TO appreciate the job this detail had to do it is necessary to know what a culvert looks like. A culvert is a long drainage pipe or duck made by welding together several oil drums which had the ends knocked out. These welded "oil drum pipes" were placed at desired internals underneath strips, taxiways and roads for the purpose of conveying enormous amounts of water under the roads and strips from one drainage ditch to another, thus preventing (to some extent) strips and roads from being flooded.

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* The men who served on the Emergency Strip Repair Crews for the longest period of time were: John K. Paul, M1c; George J. Philpot, MM1c; Joseph H. VanNess, BM1c; Edward K. Arnauld, SF2c; Robert M. Leshner, CM2nc; Ross E. Long, SF2c; James E. O'Neil, SF1c; Albert D. Safallo, McMM2c; Albert Shear, CM2c; Martin F. White, MM3c; Leland A. Craig, SF3c; Harold J. Creedon, CM3c; Wallace F. Evans, MM3c; Harold F. Kleidosty, CM3c; Arthur J. McDaniel, SF3c; Robert T. McAuliffe, Slc, and Guadalupe B. Lopez, Slc.

** Heavy Equipment Operators were: Howard F. Adams, CM1c; Lee C. Maize, MM1c; Winfred E. Rash, CM1c; Desmond A. Ryan, MM1c; Jack A. Stetter, MM1c; James R. Doggett, MM2c; Kenneth A. Gonyea, MM2c; Louis E. Hewitt, CM2c; James H. Kincade, MM2c; Kenneth A. Madison, SF2c; Edwin R. McClure, MM2c; Harold F. McNutt, CM2c; John J. Minchak, MM2c; Robert G. Peterson, CM2c; Warren E. Ranger, MM2c; Carson E. Shaffer, MM2c; Theodore E. Shelton, CM2c; Robert A. Williams, MM2c; Rondal E. Caldwell, Cox; Alexander S. Csernyik, CN3c; Jay W. Sheaffer, SF3c.

LITTLE equipment was required on the job by this detail. The men used a dump truck for transportation and hauling sand, and an air compressor for blowing sand out of culverts. But primarily they used shovels and their hands... shovels for digging silt and clay out of ditches and bare hands for pulling debris out of the mouths of culverts. The Culverteers * were young lads (19-20 years old) and were husky, impulsive lads who worked in mud, lots of mud, and in water all the time. They worked in the heat and in the rain. They never wore shoes, nor shirts. "Damned things rot away from sweat", they said. You were lucky to get those guys to wear pants or even shorts, on or off the job. However, one thing was certain; a job on the Culvert Detail was not to be envied, but like all unsung jobs in this war, it was necessary...and it had to be done.

ONE lad on the Culvert Crew was somewhat of a celebrity. He is Stanley Kurpysz, a blond, quite but pleasant guy of medium build from Brooklyn. When the other fellows on the detail check a culvert to see if it is working properly, they wait until it rains, then see if water runs through the culvert. Not so with Stan. He crawls through them to see if they are cleaned out. It is of Stan that the brag has been made that he has crawled through every culvert in the Piva Area, and never got stuck yet. This is quite an accomplishment when one takes into consideration the diameter and length of a culvert. Some are more than two hundred feet long, only two and half feet wide. That's why no one ever tried to win the title of Culvert Crawler from Stan. If a man got stuck in one of those pipes he stayed stuck.

THERE is one other phase of strip maintenance left to be mentioned; the Sprinkler Truck Detail, ** headed by Chief Coleman. It was the task of men assigned to this detail to water all taxiways and revetments. This was an enormous job, and a monotonous one. In fact, it was a helluva job. The general idea was to sprinkle water on the taxiways so that when planes raced to and from the strips the dust would not rise up to blot out the pilots' view. This called for a lot of sprinkling because as fast as the water was sprayed on the ground, the earth would soak it up, or the wind created by rotating propellers would blow the dampened sand completely off the taxiways.

THERE wer eighteen trucks used on this job. Each was a 2½ tons GMC, equipped with a pontoon tank which 1,100 gallons of water (Bureau of Weights and measures please take note). These trucks had seen long service overseas and if the "rotation plan" had applied to them, all eighteen would have been back in the states enjoying a much needed rest. As it was, they were fugitives from a scrap pile, but were kept on the road by the ingenuity of 582 mechanics. Each truck had a permanent driver who looked upon his "pile of junk" as personal property to be treated with loving care. The drivers named their trucks after wives or sweethearts, thus giving each truck an individual identity, which put it (in the mind of the driver) on an equal par with the bombers which also had their own names.

TO understand the procedure followed by these drivers in their daily work, it is necessary to follow one of them around the taxiways a couple of times. The job is very simple. The driver loads his pontoon from the huge tank that is kept filled by pumping water from the rapid-flowing Piva River. The water from the tank travels through an overhead pipeline, which has six hoses attached to it, any of which can be dropped into a hole cut in the top of the pontoon. When the pontoon is filled to overflowing, the driver wheels his truck out of the loading yard, across Marine Drive, and up onto the Piva Area.

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* Members of the Culvert Detail are: Thomas A. DeLaney, CM3c; Philip S. Kemp, CM3c; Stanley Kurpysz, CM3c; Thomas M. Lyons, CM3c; Robert A. Martocchio, CM3c; and Ralph H. Kuehl, Slc.

** Sprinkler Truck Drivers, all who have more than 1,600 driving hours to their credit, are: James H. Brown, MM2c; Arvene J. Faris, SF2c; Leo F. LaBell, M2c; Howard R. Leonard, GM2c; Henry Schroder, McMM2c; Jessie F. Sharp, McMM2c; Robert L. Wills, MM2c; Martin J. Ford, CM3c; Lelen L. Fross, CM3c; Samuel W. Haynes, SSNC3c; Frank C. Johnson, Cox; Duncan J. McIntyre, WT3c; Matthew M. Sullivan, MM3c; James M. Thompson, MM3c; Thomas J. Ingrassia, Slc; and Milton K. Lewis, Slc.

ON this trip the driver is watering Taxiway "A", so he stops at the entrance to the taxiway and turns the hand wheel which opens the valve through which pours the water from the tank into a perforated pipe running the rear-width of the truck. The water comes out of the pipe in tiny streams which fall to the ground. With the valve opened, the driver starts up the truck again, and as he drives along the streams of water fall evenly onto the roadway, thus settling the dust.

AFTER a run up the taxiway, the driver turns his truck around, then retraces his route. When he gets to the beginning he turns around again, covers half the taxiway this time, then turns around in an empty revetment and returns to the water tower. Back at the tower the driver pulls up under a hose, refills the pontoon, then starts out over the same route again. This same routine is followed day in and day out, month in and month out. In fact, a whole damned year was spent running up and down taxiways, then back to the tower, then up and down the taxiways again. It's a wonder some of those guys didn't "blow their tops".

TO make matters still worse, few of the trucks had covers over the cabs, so as an added attraction the sun showered heat bolts down on the drivers' heads. And the sand and dust that the drivers chewed and swallowed during their year on the strip must have run into the bushels. This job, as anyone can see, was far from glamorous, nor was it exciting or adventurous. It was a tiresome, thankless, monotonous, never-ending, disagreeable, miserable piece of work, that no one (unless he was a Seabee) would undertake if there was any other type of employment available. It was a helluva job!

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CHAPTER TWELVE

- THE ISLAND OF BOUGAINVILLE -

WHEN CBMU 582 first arrived on Bougainville, there wasn't a man in the outfit who knew anything about the island other than that it was the first island in the Pacific on which the Army had established a perimeter instead of securing the entire island. This perimeter was seven miles long at the beach, six and a half miles deep at its farthest penetration. The camp of CBMU 582 was located just one mile inside this penetration, and that was the extent of anyone's knowledge of Bougainville.

HOWEVER, after many excursions within the perimeter, and a few patrol trips * beyond, the men had some idea of what the island was like. Then, too, letters written home had stated that, "I'm on an island in the Solomons that has a volcano." Relatives receiving this information delved into magazines, newspapers and books and came forth with the knowledge that "Joe" was on Bougainville. It didn't take them long after that to include data from books, as well as clippings from many publications about action on Bougainville, in their return letters, and soon the men knew almost as much as their relatives about the island on which they were stationed.

FROM information received it was learned that Bougainville, the largest island in the Solomon Group, is an Australian mandate. It is 125 miles in length, measures 49 miles through at its greatest width, and has an overall area of 3,500 square miles, much of which is still unexplored (except by the Japs). A range of forest covered mountains runs the length of the island. In the south the mountains are called the Crown Prince Range, and in the north the Emperor Range. There are two active volcanos known to the Seabees on the island.

EVERY man in the outfit is familiar with Mt. Bagana, which is practically in 582's back yard, and rises more than 8,000 feet into the sky. On a clear day it can be seen from the bomber strip. A bare brown, pyramid-shaped mountain, it always has a dirty, gray cloud hovering around its peak. This cloud floats down on the camp every afternoon and brings with it the daily rains. This volcano is extremely active, continually emits a curling stream of gaseous vapors into the air, and small streams of lava can be seen running down its sides. Mt. Balbi, 10,171 feet, is also visible from the bomber strip, recognizable by its tell-tale curl of smoke. This brown, cratered mountain is in the northern range and is one of four jagged peaks silhouetted against the verdure of the smaller mountains in the range.

IN the Empress Augusta Bay region, the sector in which the American forces are located, is an alluvial plain that is quite marshy in places, and a short distance from the coast are mangrove swamps which cover considerable territory and are almost impenetrable. Ask any Dogface who had to fight in them. Beyond the swamps are some high, sandy spots such as those on which the air strips and many camps are laid out, and then come more swamps, some ridges and hills and then the mountains. Everything is covered with a luxuriant jungle, except those areas which have been cleared for camps, roads and military installations.

THERE are many rivers running through the island, but they are short and rarely navigable. Those with which the Seabees are familiar are the Laruma, Numa Numa, Torokina and the Piva. It is the Piva which flows past 582's camp, and is the source of the Unit's water supply.

THE island has few harbors, of which Buka Passage, separating Buka from Bougainville, is by far the best; but of little use to the Americans because it is still in Japhands. Rawa Harbor, on which the former Australian government headquarters town of Kieta is located, is on the northeast shore, and on the southeastern end of the island is Tonolai Harbor. There are also useless to the Americans because they also are under Jap control.

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* Many of the men in the Unit went on numerous patrols beyond the front lines with Army infantrymen. Of these, Vernon E. Hiles, Slc and Roby Hobbs, SF3c, are two lads who can probably say that they went on more patrols and scouting parties than all the other men in the outfit combined.

ALTHOUGH the Americans have Empress August Bay, which is much more placid than the open sea, it is not quite as desirable an inshore anchorage as a harbor would have been. At the time the Unit arrived on Bougainville, all ships had to remain out in the bay. Men, supplies and equipment were unloaded into Ducks (amphibious trucks) and LCTs (Landing Craft Tank). These, in turn, were unloaded onto the beaches which had been sectioned off along both sides of Torokina Point.

LATER on pontoon docks were constructed on the lee side of the Point for the use of LCT's, LCIs (Landing Craft Infantry) and Inter-Island Ferries, but heavy shipping continued to remain offshore. This was primarily due to the abundance of coral reefs in the bay off the smaller islands of Suicide and Puruta.

IT was on Suicide Island that 200 entrenched Japs were wiped out by a detachment of Marines and Seabees in the initial invasion, before the main force came ashore, on 1st November 1943. Hence, the reason for its being so named. This island and Puruta, laying directly off Torokina Point, are nothing more than raised piles of coral dotted with a few palm trees. Small as they are, they have nevertheless proven quite useful, because they are now bases for Landing Craft Flotillas and are covered with repair shops and crews' quarters.

ALSO on Bougainville there were, supposedly, 150 to 200 miles of roads and trails, but one thing was certain; they weren't in the Empress Augusta Bay region. Almost all the good roads were on the northeastern side of the island (the Americans were on the southwestern side), however, Navy Seabees (after completing the Torokina Fighter Strip) pushed roads into the interior as first the Marines then Doggies advanced the front lines. And six months after the beachhead had been established there was a fine network of roads extending to all points within the perimeter. There was even a perimeter road which encircles the American portion of the island, and in some parts (particularly along the beach) the road reached far beyond the perimeter.

THE physical characteristics of the soil formation on which roads, taxiways, revetments, etc. are laid is such that a continuous maintenance problem exists. The soil of the Piva and Torokina area is of volcanic origin, very likely passing down from Mt. Bagana during the many scores of years in which this volcano has been active. Underneath a thin covering of topsoil lies a layer of pumice, rhyolite and other very fine volcanic ash. This varies in depth from a few feet to many feet. On the south side of the Piva Fighter Strip this volcanic ash reaches to a depth of more than fifty-six feet, and when saturated with water is quite unstable. In fact, it is nothing more than quicksand. *

BECAUSE of this fineness of soil, water trucks have to keep the ground damp at all times. This prevents the topsoil from blowing away. On the other hand, heavy rains cause the soil to flow like water. Banks of gullies, which have been washed into the soil by flowing water, will stand vertical, while the bottoms will be practically horizontal. After every rain there were hundreds of these little gullies washed into the crash strips, along the roadways, in every open area. Taxiways and roads looked like washboards, culverts were stopped up and drainage ditches were clogged with rocks, sand, brush and rubbish.

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* On more than one occasion men on the Culvert Detail have been sucked into this soil, sometimes up to their armpits. And it was only because they carried a lengthy piece of pipe against such an occurrence, that they were able to extricate themselves.

THERE was no remedy for preventing the ravaging of the soil of water. When the rain ceased it was always the same damn story. The cleared areas, which looked like a glacier had raced across them, would have to be repaired; and some (especially roadways) would have to be reconstructed. The method of repair was always the same. Dump trucks hauled sand to the washed-out places, bulldozers pushed the earth from the sides of the taxiways back onto the crown; then the graders leveled them off. The clamshell removed piled-up sand and clay from drainage ditches, thus enabling water to flow freely again. The work continued until the job was done. The operation never varied. It was the same after every rainfall. This was one fight with the elements in which man was almost beaten, but never willing admit that they were licked the men kept coming back for more.

WHAT made matters still worse were the two streams which ran through the Piva area. These streams were flooded during heavy rains by flash floods from jungle cleared areas. Sometimes they overflowed to such an extent that on the bomber strip alone the water was eighteen inches deep at the height of the flood. When rainfalls exceeded two inches, these streams caused damage that required all available men and equipment working on the strips and taxiways as soon as the waters abated. Frequently, the rainfall rose much higher than this two-inch damage level, and in these cases an "Emergency" was declared.

"EMERGENCY" meant that all men connected with the strip details report for duty immediately--regardless of the hour. Water truck drivers and strip repair men were assigned to clearing the strips of huge stones, logs, branches and limbs of trees, oil drums and other refuse. The waters rushing over the strips had taken tons of sand from the Marston mat, so the men also had to fill these washouts with truckload after truckload of sand before the mats were secure again and safe for planes. Equipment operators were also swamped with work. They had to whip the taxiways back into shape, or else the planes would not have had access to the strips. And, as was to be expected, many culverts had been clogged by the food, so the Culverteers had their hands full too.

THE officers, as well as the chiefs, were always on hand during these emergencies to supervise the various operations. It was through the guidance of the officers, the untiring work of the men that the strips were always in "flight condition" a short time after the waters had receded. And it is the proud boast of the Unit that, "Never were the Piva Air Strips held up for more than thirty minutes once the Seabees were on the job repairing the damage caused by floods." Nor did Lt. O'Rourke ever fail to let his men know, after each emergency, that he heartily appreciated the enthusiastic manner in which they threw their strength into this ceaseless fight against the elements.

THESE adverse soil and climatic conditions were in direct contrast to what the Unit had expected to find on Bougainville. It had been the prevailing opinion of officers and men that airstrips and taxiways were built on crushed coral rock (a substance that reacts favorably to heavy rainfall in that the rains cause the coral to adhere, thus creating a hard, concrete-like finish.) Imagine the disappointment, then, to find that these strips were laid on volcanic ash and sand which reacted just the opposite from coral -- washed away every time it rained.

WHEN a strip was built on coral rock, little or no maintenance was required for many months thereafter, because the strip's foundation was solid. On the other hand, the Piva Strips were never completely built. There was never a time when you could say, "There! The job's done."

IT was not a job of maintenance (making minor, periodic repairs) that CBMU 582 had inherited from the 36th Battalion, but a construction job that required men and equipment in continuous operation on strip facilities. Whereas on coral strip maintenance a handful of men could manage the job, on the Piva Strips sixty percent of the outfit was assigned to jobs on the airfield.

AS for equipment! Now that was something else again. The Unit could not possibly have kept abreast of existing conditions, let alone get ahead of them, with its inadequate supply of equipment; so sufficient earthmoving equipment and rolling stock were borrowed from the Navy base to enable the Unit to handle the construction-maintenance problems which were prevalent on the strips.

THE Unit's gear plus the borrowed equipment raised the sum total of 582's heavy equipment and rolling stock to a figure more than twice the amount of a normal CBMU equipment allowance. All of which goes to show that the job CBMU 582 had undertaken was much larger than anybody had counted on. However, with the aid of additional equipment, and by spreading its manpower resources mighty thin, CBMU 582 was able to carry out its assignments to the complete satisfaction of all commands and organizations connected with the Piva Air Strips and Facilities.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

- UPS AND DOWNS -

ALTHOUGH everything was going along fine on camp construction and strait maintenance, there always had to be something to keep a situation from being perfect. That something was the illness of Frank J. Toenniessen, Machinist First, who came close to being the only death recorded in the records of CBMU 582. Frank, or Tony as he is called, was stricken ill in the latter part of May and rushed to the Navy Base Hospital. Tony and his mates thought he had dysentery, but it soon developed that he had (medically speaking) an inflammation of the peritoneum, or as the doctors explained it to him, he had swallowed a fly in his food that had been in contact with dead bodies, the result being peritonitis.

TOENNIESSEN was in bad shape those first few weeks in the hospital. His white bloodcount went up to 35,000 (4 to 6,000 is normal), and it was feared that he was a "cooked goose", however, Doctors Alt and Plank thought otherwise. They directed that a stomach pump be used and sulfadiazine be administered indefinitely. The pump remained attached to Tony's stomach for five days, he was given nothing to eat for ten days, and nothing but cracked ice to quench a maddening thirst.

THEN in the middle of the second week in June Tony passed the crisis, but it was not until the middle of July that he had regained enough strength to be released from the hospital. He returned to the Unit anxious to get back to work, but he still looked a little peaked so the Skipper put him on "No Duty" until he had completely recovered.

IT is surprising how quickly people will give a man up for lost. True, Tony had been a semi-coma for weeks before coming around, but he was far from dead; yet his mates had held out no hope for his recovery. In fact, they were so sure that Tony was a goner that one day when the flag slipped its moorings and slid halfway down the pole, they spread the rumor around camp that Toenniessen was dead, pointing to the flag at halfmast as mute evidence. But even while long-faced mates were telling each other what a fine lad Tony had been, the man reputed to be dead was rallying from his coma and lived to rebuke those who had been so quick to give him up for dead.

WHILE recuperating at the hospital Toenniessen had an opportunity to look around, and he saw the battle between life and death fought many times. The doctors Tony described as being the best in the world. Lt. Commanders Alt and Wilson and Comdr. Plank as being Navy Surgeons * of the first rank. He said they performed nothing short of miracles in some cases and went on to tell how they had handled the cases of three New Zealand soldiers who had been burnt beyond recognition in an explosion. One of the three had been burnt so severely that it took Dr. Alt three hours to bandage him. All were fed an unbelievable amount of blood plasma and were treated with penicillin in such quantities that if the men had had to pay for their treatments, they would have been in debt for the rest of their lives. Yet, in spite of the seriousness of their burns, when the bandages were removed, not one of these soldiers had a single scar on his body.

THERE was other cases, equally incredulous, with equally miraculous cures. There was the soldier who had his stomach blown to hell during the March attack; the sailor who had his buttocks shot away. Both men, after many months of hospitalization, were soon to walk out of the hospital as good as new. Tony said he could go on indefinitely listing the accomplishments of these skilled surgeons, but wasn't he walking proof of their fine work?

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* The doctors that Toenniessen lied so well are: Comdr. Howard A. Plank, MC-U(S); Lt. Comdr. William A. Wilson, MC-U(S), USNR; and Lt. Comdr. Richard E. Alt, NC, USN.

PARTICULARLY impressive was the kindness, the consideration and the courtesy these tired, overworked men showered on their patients. They were never too busy to cheer a lad along, never walked by a bed without speaking. And the corpsmen were gentle, helpful guys who would do anything for the patients. "One corpsman", Tony remembered laughingly, "walked through the ward each morning with a big smile on his face and ordered every patient to smile too. He told us if we didn't smile he was going to throw us all the hell out of there. We had to laugh outright at that because most of us couldn't even move. He got his smile though."

COMPLETING his story about the hospital, Tony, squinting into the sunshine, mused, "if it weren't for those doctors I'd be six feet under right now. They're a great bunch of men, and how well I know it."

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ALTHOUGH CBMU 582 was the first Construction-Maintenance Unit to be sent into a forward area where fighting was still in progress, very few of the men in the Unit ever saw a Jap, let alone use their carbines on one. Of course, their concern was with construction and maintenance jobs, not Jap killing. This was left to the more seasoned Marines and Soldiers who had made a science of jungle fighting.

HOWEVER, there was one group of men from 582 who came close to working under actual battle conditions. These men worked on the Logging Crew, and from the very first had to push their way deep into the jungle in quest of trees of a certain size and type for lumber. In their search they battled vines that curled around a man like a snake; they even battled snakes. They fought off hordes of mosquitoes, flies, gnats, and a thousand other varieties of insects teeming in the woods.

USUALLY the men worked up to their hips in mud, often through pouring rain. The soil was soft, muddy, covered with decaying vegetation. Sometimes as many as three bulldozers would bog down in this gumbo at the same time. Trucks loaded with logs slid off embankments, held up the jobs for hours on end. With all these nightmares of nature with which to contend, one would think that here the misery would end, but no, there was also the constant threat of Jap patrols and scouts turning up in this neighborhood. This threat became a reality when on two consecutive days, 19th and 20th July, a Jap scout was flushed by the woodsmen.

ON the first occasion the lumberjacks were busy felling trees, so the element of surprise belonged entirely to the Jap. When he was noticed the Jap was sitting calmly on a little knoll, clad only in a loin-cloth, watching the loggers at work. The fellow who made the discovery let out a yell. The Jap, startled at the yell, jumped to his feet and high-tailed it into the jungle.

A FEW of the men "hit the deck", while others grabbed carbines and .45 automatics and gave chase. They searched through the underbrush for quite awhile but to no avail. The Jap had eluded them. The loggers did find the foxhole in which he had been living. It was dug in the soil at the foot of an uprooted tree. It showed signs of recent habitation too, because inside were seen animal bones, small boxes like K-ration containers, and many shells (some of which had been fired). The imprints of the fugitive's elbows were noticeable on the walls of the depression, as were marks made by his split-toed sandals on the bottom of the shallow pit. However, they didn't find the Jap, so the search was given up, and since it was quitting time for the day the loggers returned to camp.

IN the afternoon of the following day when a huge tree fell to earth with a resounding crash, another monkey man jumped out of hiding. He stood quite still for a moment, probably trying to decide whether to run or give himself up. Then he too disappeared into the undergrowth. Fearing that the Jap was decoy trying to lead them into a trap, instead of giving chase the Seabee proved the wiser by reporting to the 164th U. S. Army Anti-Tank Company (located in the neighborhood of logging operations).

A PATROL of Seabees and soldiers was made up immediately, and heavily armed struck out into the jungle in search of the Jap. In his haste to get away, he had left a plain track for the party to follow. And the patrol, always keeping a sharp lookout for possible ambush, moved warily along this freshly made trail.

EVERY bush was scrutinized for broken twig, every inch of mud for footprints. After pushing through this dense foliage for an hour, something in the signs made the men in the lead slow down the pace. Then, up ahead, a slight movement near a banyan tree caught the eye of the sergeant in charge. Quickly he made a motion with his arm and the squad deployed to the right and left. The big tree was their objective. The men moved toward it with carbines cocked, fingers hooked around triggers.

WHEN the distance had been narrowed down to a few yards the Jap could be seen crouching among the roots. The sergeant ordered him to come out into the open but the Jap made no movement to indicate that he understood. Then as if at some prearranged signal, four men detached themselves from the group and cautiously slid toward the trembling son of Nippon.

EVER mindful of the treachery for which these orientals are famous, four pairs of eyes wavered not an inch from this one's face. He couldn't have moved a muscle without telegraphing his intentions to the Americans. When they had closed in to arm's length one of the men prodded the Jap with a rifle. He flinched but did not move. When ordered to come out with his hands above his head, he seemed to comprehend that he was not to be shot.

RISING slowly, gazing straight ahead, he advised trembling into the open. Quickly he was ringed with steel and deft hands searched him, removing a long, dagger-like knife, his only weapon. Next his clothes, dirty and unkempt, were ripped from his body and thrown away. By signs, the Jap was instructed to put his hands behind his head; then he was goaded down the path toward the Army camp. The men fell into positions silently and also moved forward. The Jap hunt had come to an end.

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SOOTHSAYING was not one of Lt. O'Rourke's attributes, but he did know that CBMU 582 had a long stay ahead on Island X. Believing that his men would be better equipped to withstand the monotony, the lack of excitement if they were kept comfortable, the Skipper decided at an early date to get the Quonset huts erected. He was thinking of the health of the men too, because having lived in a tent himself he knew that the dampness prevalent in the tents was injurious to one's health, especially during the rainy season. The Rainy Season? It was always raining!!

THERE was another reason for the Skipper's urgent desire to get the Quonsets erected. The outfit from which the tents had been borrowed was preparing to leave the island, so if another form of habitation was not soon found the men would be living in pup tents. Building the Quonsets would provide a quick solution to this problem, yet according to plans that had been previously made, CBMU 582 was supposed to move into the 36th Area when that battalion quit the island. However, rather than live in an unsettled state while awaiting this move, Lt. O'Rourke obtained permission, after a little persuasion, from his Immediate Superior to erect the Quonsets in the original area occupied by the Unit.

WORK began then on the Quonsets, and it was Mr. Holsinger's Camp Construction Detail that got the job. It was a piecemeal job at best, because it had to be sandwiched between many construction jobs of a more important nature, which were issued to the Unit by the Public Works Officer of the Naval Base.

NEVERTHELESS, work on the Quonsets rapidly progressed under the able supervision of Chiefs Hughes and Kraus. The carpenters * worked steadily on their housing project, and the huts were gradually being erected. Then someone dropped a fly into the ointment. It seemed that a Base Order prohibited the erection of Quonset huts for enlisted personnel. It was permissible to build Quonsets for hospital or administration buildings, but for enlisted quarters the answer was "NO"! Mr. O'Rourke's orders to build the huts had been rescinded by a higher authority, higher than the officer who had given the permission.

CAMP construction was at a standstill. The detail of carpenters didn't know what to do. They reported on the job in the mornings but were not permitted to go to work. Usually the men stood around for an hour or so, waiting for some kind of an order, but when none came, they started drifting off in the direction of their tents -- probably had some "sack duty" to catch up on.

THE stretch of ground behind the rows of tents on which the huts were being erected looked like a graveyard. Three or four half-completed structures and one or two completed ones stood empty and forsaken. It looked very much like all the work of snaking trees out of the jungle, cutting them into sections for foundations and setting up the frameworks of the huts had all been done in vain. Even the ones that had been built might have to be torn down.

THEN on 24th July Rear Admiral Lewis B. Combs (CEC-USN), Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, paid the Naval Base a visit. It was the Assistant Chief who proved that the old saying "Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining" still held true. When presented with 582's problem, and the explanation that CBMUs are equipped with Quonset huts for housing of personnel in the field, the BuDocks Executive approved the building of Quonset huts for CBMU 582. With the ban on building lifted the carpenters went back to work and proceeded rapidly to push this project to completion.

ADMIRAL Combs was on an inspection tour of Pacific Bases when he visited Bougainville, and it was said by those who met him that he was very sympathetic and understanding of the problems faced by the men in the field. Certainly his decision in favor of CBMU 582 proved this because it proved to be a lifesaver for the Unit. Furthermore, it was Admiral Combs, upon completion of his inspection tour, who said:

"The men of our maintenance units and battalions working at rear bases cannot be given too much credit for digging in on jobs involving a lot of sweat and practically no excitement.

However, they can take satisfaction in knowing that while the smoke and noise is at the muzzle of the gun, the bullet has to travel the barrel of the piece first. The rear bases they are maintaining constitute the barrel.

As for battalion morale", the Chief said, "I observed that morale is highest when the men are on the move -- forward toward Japan or backward toward home. And that's why men at bases in between, particularly the CBMU's deserve all the more credit for keeping up their good work."

In only one way did the men of CBMU 582 differ with Admiral Combs. They still considered their island to be a forward base, not a rear base.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

- THE HEAVY EQUIPMENT SHOPS -

THERE is a sign hanging above the entrance to the Heavy Equipment Repair Shop which reads:

"THROUGH THESE PORTALS PASS
THE WORLD'S MOST ABUSED EQUIPMENT.
THE IMPOSSIBLE WE DO NOW;
THE MIRACULOUS TAKES A LITTLE LONGER."

THIS sign is typical of the type of men working in the shop. They are as cocky, fun-loving and rough and ready a bunch of guys ever to have donned a pair of dungarees. And as dirty, too, because daily they got covered with more oil, grease and dirt than a white-collar worker does in a lifetime. At the end of the day these rough characters each take a bath in gasoline to get rid of their dirtiness -- and not an "A" card in the crowd either. They also raise as much hell as possible. That's the reason for the boisterous sign at the shop's entrance. They like to heckle the equipment operators. In this they have succeeded time and time again.

MOST of the men in this shop are built like two-legged versions of a pack horse. They swing bulldozer parts around as if they were toys; also have a bag of tricks from which spring pranks that would be the envy of Lucifer. A favorite stunt is to initiate new members into their "Dismal Order of Cat-Greasers" (a mythical lodge without by-laws or members). In initiation a prospective member is stripped of his clothing, then a five pound can of grease is liberally applied to his anatomy, and it takes days before this grease finally comes off. It is suicide to visit this shop. A man's a goner as soon as he's within arm's length of these maniacs. And while their first love is giving an extra-special grease job to CPOs, they take great pleasure in subjecting anyone to this particular type of torture.

KELLY SCHAEFER is the Pusher * of these wild men and his co-workers are Joe Vigil, Tony Ashburn, Roy Massman, Julie Trujillo and Bebe Badore. ** Their job is to keep the big stuff -- tractors, bulldozers, cranes, motor patrols -- rolling. During slow periods they repair an average of one rig per day. But in rush periods there is no limit to the work that can be done. It had to be this way. Older pieces of equipment wore out frequently because they were in continuous use maintaining the strips. Even the new machines bogged down and had to be brought into the shop for many adjustments and repairs.

BESIDES equipment repairs, the Cat-Greasers had another job -- cable splicing. Massman and Trujillo *** did this work, splicing six to ten cables daily. And so adept at this work did Julie Trujillo become that he opened a cable splicing school, during working hours of course. First two pupils to enroll were Ed Wells and Malcolm Nelson. They were the only two, for that matter, because when Ed and Nels learned how difficult the work was they passed the word along the line to beware of school-teacher Trujillo, and the school quickly faded into oblivion.

DESPITE all this schoolteaching and tom-foolery, it was a known fact that during the Unit's many months on Bougainville, the heavy equipment repairmen have been called upon to do the impossible (as the sign said) on many occasions. This they did without batting an eye. When asked to do the miraculous, they, in turn, called upon the Machine Shop for help in whipping a piece of equipment back into shape.

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* A Pusher is usually a Petty Officer First Class who acts as a Straw Boss or Assistant Chief.

** Heavy Equipment repairmen: John "K" Schaefer, MM1c; Donaciano E. Vigil, CM1c; John R. Ashburn, Flc; Duane R. Massman, MMS3c; Julian T. Trujillo, CM3c; and Bernard E. Badore, MMS3c.

*** Julian Trujillo was evacuated to Guadalcanal on 31 March 1945, then to the states on 1 May 1945. Reason; Multiple fracture of left ankle.

HERMAN VOSS, Machinist First, a guy with short, curly hair, a pair of blue eyes set into a sun and atabrine-stained face and a build like a blockhouse, is in charge of the Machine Shop. Besides a ready wit and a fine sense of humor, Herman has a vast knowledge of machines and machine tools, and knows how to use them too. As a civilian he was a tool and die maker back in Long Island, New York. As a Seabee he has been of enormous value to the Unit by making unobtainable spare parts for the various repair shops and departments.

HOWEVER, "Hoiman" isn't the only guy who works in this shop, for Louis P. Stewart, Machinist Second and Thomas J. Huber, Machinist Third, do their share too. Lou hails from Grapevine, Arkansas, while Tom, a quiet, studious chap, is also from Long Island. These three men have done wonders turning out a vast amount of work in their little shop, which is equipped with a 9" x 54" lathe, a drill press, bench grinder and standard hand tools.

A SAMPLE Of the excellent craftsmanship of these men is the crankshaft turned out for a crippled D-6 tractor. After turning down the crankshaft, each journal a different size, the men poured and finished bearings and inserts which had to fit perfectly. Then followed two weeks of hand scraping to fit bearings to journal, and the process was completed. Next the equipment repairmen took over and soon made the necessary repairs, and the D-6 left the shop in good working condition.

OTHER specimens of machine shop work were the flare nuts and expansion valves made for refrigeration units, bolts for tractors and other equipment; shafts for water pumps and piston rods for Wisconsin engines.

A NOTEWORTHY piece of inventiveness was the "grinding and scratch wheel machine" built by Voss and Stewart. It was constructed from junked parts of motor patrols and bulldozers, pieces picked out of junk heaps and parts made from Jap shells and casings. When completed, the machine (which was dubbed "Junior") became a very useful part of the shop's equipment and another example of Seabee ingenuity.

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UNDER the able guidance of slim, blading Arthur J. Carey, Machinist First, the Truck Repair Shop maintained an equal footing with all the other shops in the Heavy Equipment Area. Art, an A-1 mechanic, comes from Nanticoke, Pennsylvania in the heart of the anthracite region, and it is jokingly reported that he first saw the light of day when he entered the Seabees, having spent the rest of his thirty-odd years working in a coal mine. However, regardless of when or where Art Carey saw the light, he certainly knew what the score was in the repair shop.

ART and six other mechanics * had the job of keeping more than thirty-five pieces of rolling stock (trucks, jeeps, etc.) in trim. They also repaired, when necessary, water pumps, puro-pumps, generators, welding machines and other types of stationary equipment. Evidence of the kind of work this department did were the eighteen sprinkler trucks (2½ ton cargo trucks on which pontoon tanks were mounted) which had seen almost two years service before being acquired by the Unit. These trucks were practically falling apart, but through careful attention and frequent overhauls by the mechanics, the trucks were held together. As for the Unit's own equipment, the shop crew kept such a watchful eye on it that at the end of a year's operation on Bougainville it was still in excellent condition.

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* Truck Shop Mechanics: Elmer I. Elwood, MM1c; Walter H. Hoag, CM1c; Leland D. Goodwin, Ptr2c; Joseph F. Lualdi, MMS3c; William S. Maxwell, CM3c; and David E. Witham, McMM2c.

THE Welding Shop is the hottest damn spot in the shop area. With the temperature continually hovering around ninety, Bobby Murgonovich, Georgie Marr and Jack Wells *, clad in coveralls and faces covered with hoods, tried somehow to keep up with the ever increasing pile of work that had to be done.

SUPERVISING the Welding Shop was the job of Angus R. Murray, Shipfitter First, 42 year-old welder from Dearborn, Michigan. Of Murray the opinion of the men in the shop was: "Ah-h, Ole Baldy-Bean ain't such a bad guy! Even if he does work us like hell."

AND work like hell they did. They worked eight hours a day, six days a week -- stateside hours but not under stateside conditions. These men knew their trade, too. They knew burning, brazing, electric and gas welding, and with this knowledge they kept the equipment together. There wasn't any job too big for them to handle. They welded funnels to oil drums for use as urinals; attached a giant framework for a crane to the front end of a 2½ ton dump truck; built an immense trailer out of junked parts for hauling logs. On dump and cargo trucks they welded fenders, mufflers, tire racks and pipe racks attached to the truck beds for increasing load capacity.

ALSO, from time to time these men were called upon to burn ends out of hundreds of oil drums. Then they welded these drums together to provide thousands of feet of additional culvert pipe. And besides their work for the Unit, the welders were called upon to do many jobs for the Army and Marines. When any outfit on the island had a job they couldn't do they took it to the Seabees, and the 582 welders always came through. There wasn't anything the Seabee welders couldn't do.

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TRANSPORTATION had Bryant M. Wood, Coxswain, as its Dispatcher. Woodie was the guy who checked out cargo and dump trucks for hauling men and materials to and from the various construction jobs and commissary details. B.M. also took the monthly inventory which showed equipment on hand and spare parts used.

THERE were many truck drivers assigned to this department, but they were constantly changed, and only a few remained on a permanent basis. They were Arbie H. McClenny, McMM2c; Paul J. Casoni, CM2c; Walter B. Hill, McMM3c; James T. Biedenharn, McMM2c; George G. Brown, McMM2c; and Louis L. Ludwin, MM3c.

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BEING a Super-Service Station, Bougainville style, was the aim of the Lubrication, Tire and Battery Shop, also located in the Heavy Equipment Area. The function of the grease-monkeys ** was to lubricate trucks, heavy equipment, stationary equipment and anything else that required oiling or greasing. Another part of the job was changing tires and fixing flats. Tiremen worked on all sizes of tires from the small Jeep tires (600 x 16s) to the enormous motor patrol tires (1400 x 24s). There were also many batteries to be changed and charged daily. The heavy iron content in the soil played havoc with batteries, sometimes causing them to wear out almost overnight.

CHIEF Machinist's Mate Malcolm K. Nelson, a tall, dark Casanova from North Hollywood, California, was in charge of the Lube Shop. Nellie, as he is called, was a service station operator before coming into the service, so he was just the man to be in charge of this shop. He proved himself qualified for the job too. The Chief was one of the best liked CPOs in the outfit. This was probably due to the fact that he let his men do their jobs in their own way. The only time Nellie stepped in was when he saw a man doing a job wrong; then he usually straightened him out by doing a little demonstrating.

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* Robert Murgonovich, SF3c; George H. Marr, N2c; Jack D. Wells, SF2c; and Roby Hobbs, SF3c, the Unit's Blacksmith, also worked with the Welders.

** Robert J. Casoni, MM2c; Stephen J. Flapanaki, SF3c; Ralph F. Hamilton

ANOTHER responsibility of Nelson's was the two tank trucks, one of which hauled gasoline, the other diesel oil. These trucks were always kept on the go supplying gas and oil to many Navy camps, and they made many trips daily out to the strip for the purpose of gassing the heavy equipment right on the job.

THE crew * on the Field Service Truck also took orders from Chief Nelson. Their job was to completely service all pieces of equipment permanently stationed out on the strips. Thus, considerable time was saved by not having to bring the equipment into the shop for lubrication. The Field Truck was a unique piece of equipment. It was a complete service station on wheels, and everything necessary to keep a machine running smoothly was to be found on this truck.

BETWEEN the men on this truck, on the tank trucks, and the men in the Lube Shop, all rolling stock and heavy equipment were kept under constant surveillance and were gassed and lubricated almost daily. This continual attention and care resulted in longer life and increased efficiency in all equipment, factors which aided considerably in the operation of the Piva Strips.

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THE Heavy Equipment Shop Area had a Spare Parts Storeroom which was run by Everett Lickey, Machinist Third. Lickey, a paunchy, good-natured Kansan (Wichita), spends his day passing out tools and spare parts and scuttlebutt to the men in the shops. Nothing else matters to him unless it's the outlandish looking hunting knives he makes, and the twenty-two cups of coffee he drinks daily.

OF course, Lick's job gives him plenty of time to drink coffee, and he makes his own brew right in the storeroom. A smokeblackened can, in which the coffee is made, sits on a blow pot all day long. All of the mates in the area take advantage of this to drop in for a "cup of mud" and some late scuttle several times during the day. But the reason Lickey hits the coffee pot so heavily is probably due to the lack of spare parts -- a headache that coffee will never cure.

ANOTHER worrier about parts is Edward S. Wells, Chief Machinist's Mate. ** Ed is Chief in Charge of all repair shops in this area, and he has to see that all work gets out on time. He keeps his departments operating smoothly, tries his damndest to dig up necessary parts and machinery, and also acts as a liaison between Lt. Broadhurst and the men in the shops.

AND to Lt. Edward M. Broadhurst, CEC USNR, graduate of North Carolina University and holder of a degree in Civil Engineering, the job of supervising the Heavy Equipment Shops was only one of his many duties. Nevertheless, he devoted much of his time to the management of this part of the organization. Lt. Broadhurst was also a Procurement Officer, not in regard to men, but in reference to equipment. When Chiefs Wells and Nelson failed to find a source of supply for certain automotive parts, after covering the entire island, Mr. "B" would take up the search.

IN this search for parts, the slim, soft-spoken Executive Officer traveled far afield. Several times he had to make trips to the great Navy Base at Manus via SCAT planes, where by using the finesse of a diplomat he was able to procure the needed parts. Each time he returned from such a mission he brought with him, or was having sent, boxes of badly needed parts and machinery.

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* Field Servicemen: Mark A. Pemberton, MMS2c; Layton Givens, EM3c; Frank C. Johnson, Cox and Melvin J. Hadfield, MMS3c.

** Ed Wells and Jack Wells are brothers. They are the only brother team in the outfit and have been serving together since Jack joined the original 126th Battalion, of which Ed was already a member, at Camp Endicott, Rhode Island.

WHEN the boxes of parts arrived it was just like Christmas morning in the shops. The heavy equipment men fell to opening the boxes with gusto. Much hullabaloo was made over each new part to be stripped of its wrappings. As was to be expected, Mr. "B" received no compensation for this extra work. But he often said, "It's remuneration enough for me just to watch the faces of the men when they open those packages. They're like a bunch of kids with a new toy."

JUST the same, he got his thanks when the parts began to disappear into the bowels of the rigs and trucks that had been lying useless in the yard. The purr of repaired motors was all the thanks he needed....that and the smiles of men as their ears also picked up those sweet sounds.

THAT just goes to show you how wrapped up in their work these men were, and how they felt toward the equipment, and how they tried to keep the stuff running. Of all the men in the Heavy Equipment Shops there is this to be said:

THEY are all typical hard-working Seabees. On the job they are as dirty and greasy as anyone could possibly be, from morning till night. Off the job they are as neat and clean as the officers' messmen. Despite their hell-raising and practical jokes, these men all work with a steadfastness and skill that is amazing. The combined crews of all the shops have performed marvelously in view of the lack of spare parts and the constant wear and tear on equipment due to the rough terrain over which it operates. Yet, in spite of these conditions, in spite of the terrific heat in which they work, these men have all come through with flying colors. They got their jobs done!

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

- LOTS OF THINGS HAPPEN IN AUGUST -

AUGUST, for some reason or other, was the month most noted for visits by U.S.O. Camp Shows. Bob Hope and his troupe were the first group of entertainers to arrive on Bougainville. They did several shows for the Army and Marine personnel, visited all the hospitals, and on 3 August they put on a show at the Navy Base for the sailors. The officers and men of CBNU 582 were to see this performance as guests of the Captain.

FROM "high noon" until 1700 the audience, exclusively men, trooped into and gradually filled the Halsey Theatre * to overflowing. The overflow took up positions in the branches of palm trees which surrounded the arena. Some of the men, those with the front row seats, had been waiting hours for the performance to begin. But it was worth it.

IN a gag-packed show that lasted an hour and a half, Bob Hope paraded across the stage such film and stage notables as himself, Frances Langford, Patti Thomas, Jerry Colona and Tony Romano. These artists, all top-notchers, put on a breezy, snappy show, and it did the boys a world of good to see old friends from "back home" once more.

MORALE jumped fifty feet into the air when Patti Thomas, clad in a black velvet dancing costume (like an abbreviated bathing suit, 1950 model), bounced onto the stage. Bob, always one step ahead of everybody else, grinned: "She's a dancer fellows." And dance Patti did, doing everything from the hula to the rhumba with a few jitterbug numbers in between -- which she danced with a couple of long-eared characters from the audience.

WHEN Francies Langford came out on the raised platform, 8,000 (more or less) lovesick Gobs, Seabees, Doggies and Leathernecks let out a sigh that tore all the palm leaves from the trees for miles around. Frances flashed the lads in the audience a Pepsodent smile and purred, "Hel-l-o-o Fellas", and then joked back and forth with Bob for a bit before going into her first number. She sang "I'm in the Mood for Love", "You Made Me Love You" and other favorites which left the boys starry-eyed and gasping for air.

TONY ROMANO was featured as the Guitarist and also played all the accompaniment for the singers. Bob, Tony and Jerry did a cockeyed imitation of the Ink Spots singing "If I Didn't Care", and punctuated the entire show with the kind of jokes that only a serviceman can appreciate. It was a grand show. One that left the fellows with a warm feeling inside. Not the feeling you get from drinking a hot cup of coffee, but the kind you get when someone goes out of his way to do something special and unexpected for you. That's what these people had done. They had traveled thousands of miles, endured hardships; just to bring a bit of home and happiness to a lot of lonesome guys. They were really great.

BOB HOPE'S Show must have broken the ice for U.S.O. entertainers in the Southwest Pacific, for on 17th August Bob's arch-enemy, Jack Benny, and his party, rolled onto the island. The Jack Benny Show, which the Unit saw as guests of the Marines, was also a marvelous piece of entertainment. Jack presented to the boys of Bougainville Carole Landis (sighs), a couple of other charming bits of fluffiness (more sighs) and Larry Adler, the harmonica player of world renown (no sighs, but he was good). And, of course, Jack added quite a little "color" to the show himself. Here again, little in the way of entertainment was left to be desired.

IN the months that followed the Benny and Hope shows, other U.S.O. shows visited the island, as did Army Special Service Bands and Units. Many of these were induced to play at the Palace Theatre (The Unit's Cinema, three shows weekly, bring your own cushions).

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* The Halsey Theatre was located in Camp Halsey, a part of the Navy Base; and was named, of course, in honor of Admiral of the Fleet William F. Halsey, USN.

ONE of the more popular of these shows was a U.S.O. Concert Group which featured Miss Yakinoff, a ballerina. Also in the show were a concert pianist, a violinist and two vocalists (a baritone and a soprano) who sang rollicking songs from popular operettas. At first the Army Special Service Officer, who booked this show, worried about it being a little too high-toned for the average G.I. However, his worries were for nothing, for even the lowly "man in the ranks" appreciated some of the better things in life. Consequently, the concert was an enormous hit.

THEN from Tasmania in the lower South Pacific came a bunch of zanies who called themselves "The Tasmaniacs" -- and that's just what they were too; maniacs. All enlisted men in the Australian Army were the ones this group were out to entertain. They even went into the front lines to play for the combat troops. They were real soldier-trouper, carrying their musical instruments on one arm, rifles on the other.

SOMEHOW Lt. Greger, Manager of The Palace, talked this bunch into doing a show for CBMU 582. A few nights after the request was made, The Tasmaniacs arrived at the theatre and soon had a song and dance show going that was packed from beginning to end with jokes. Regardless of what the men in the outfit thought about Lend-Lease before the show, they were heartily in favor of it after seeing the men from Tasmania do their stuff.

THE Special Service shows were also good; damned good, as were the orchestras formed within Army units that toured the camp theatres. Everyone of the men who played in the Service shows and bands should hit the top if he were to continue in the theatrical business after the war -- whenever that is! All of the shows that played on the island, especially the U.S.O. Shows (which had "white women" in 'em), did more than anything else -- except MAIL -- to boost the morale of the men serving on the Isle of Bougainville.

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PROMOTIONS are something that will always gladden the heart of man, whether he be serviceman or civilian. And in the Seabees, just as it is (or was) in civilian life, hard work and interest in one's job are duly recognized. Officer and enlisted personnel are promoted to higher ranks or ratings for doing their jobs well. Although there aren't the opportunities in the service that there are in private employment, almost every man in CBMU 582 has been the recipient of at least one promotion or rerate during his stay in the Seabees.

REALLY, there was nothing difficult about getting a rerate out of the "Old Man". All that a man had to do was: (1) Be able to pass an examination which would determine whether or not he qualified for his particularly desired trade or rating (Qualifications are set forth by the Bureau of Navy Personnel and Bureau of Yards and Docks); (2) Have a proficiency in rating and leadership qualifying mark of 3.5 or better and have a conduct mark of 4.0 (perfect), which has been instanding for several months; (3) Have a record that is unmarred by Captain's Mast or Court Martials for the previous ninety days; (4) Have served sufficient time in present rate to be eligible for advancement; (5) Have a recommendation from his Chief Petty Officer who has made observations as to the man's character, neatness of person and quarters, working and leadership abilities and willingness to get along with his mates, etc. etc.

THEN if a man passes all of these qualifications with a better than average grade, he is all set -- unless there isn't a rate open in his particular field. In that case the applicant has to wait, sometimes for months, until a vacancy develops. And that's all there is to it.

FOR men in the Seamen and Firemen branches, all they wanted out of the Seabees was to get an "Eagle on their arm", which means to become a Petty Officer. To Petty Officers their dreams were to get "another stripe", which meant an advancement to the next highest rank. Almost all the men in the Seamen and Firemen branches were promoted to Seaman or Fireman First Class while serving with CBMU 582, and many of these realized their desires to become Petty Officers.

AMONG the "rated men" a considerable number of Petty Officers Third Class were promoted to Second Class, Second Class men attained First Class, and eight Petty Officers First Class were advanced to the exalted station of Chief Petty Officers, * the pinnacle for an enlisted man in the Navy serving overseas with the Unit.

IN the officer ranks Ensign Harold W. Greger became Lt. (jg) Harold W. Greger on 1st June. Warrant Officers Joseph D. Cowan and Cecil H. Holsinger were elevated to the rank of Chief Warrant Officer on 1st August, and on 1st October Lt. (jg) Edward M. Broadhurst rose to the rank of a full or senior Lieutenant. Among the enlisted personnel promotions became effective on the first day of March, June, July, August and December 1944, and on the first day of June 1945. (Boy! That's a lot of Firsts.)

IN some cases there were a few good enlisted men who were not promoted due to the lack of openings in their specific fields. There were also a few (but a very few) who held themselves back by "fouling-up" their records with court martials. Then again there were some men who, when enlisting in the Seabees, had received the rating for which they were fitted. Accordingly, these men were not advanced because they had been at the top since the very start. However, they performed their jobs with great skill and "know-how", thus proving themselves qualified for the ratings they held. Possibly if there had been openings in the higher brackets, they too would have advanced another step. Still it is popularly known that the going is toughest when the top rung of the ladder is almost within reach.

It can, nevertheless, be said of these men with a high rating, that they did their jobs well; left little to be desired. Also, the many men who were promoted while with CBMU 582 proved, to the outfit and to themselves, that they were capable of handling the work and the responsibilities that went with the higher rating.

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NOW that the subject of rerates has been polished off, Edward J. Vanderboom, Carpenter First, has a story he wants to tell. But first, a word about Ed.

MRS. Vanderboom's son, Edward, is a brown-headed, brown-eyed, pleasant faced, barrel chested guy thirty years of age. He is married and his wife and baby girl are impatiently waiting for him back home in Milwaukee. Ed is a construction man from way back and he has been in the Seabees since December 1942. Okay, Eddie! Now you take it from here.

"...WELL, the incident that I want to tell about happened on August the 8th while Phil Kemp (Philip S. Kemp, Carpenter Third) and I were working in the Marine Warehouse, alongside the bomber strip. We had been working steady all morning and had just reached a good breaking-off point, so we decided to step outside for a breather and a smoke. After we had lit-up I noticed that a Ventura Bomber was getting ready to take off so Phil and I wandered over to the edge of the strip to watch.

"PRESENTLY the plane came racing down the strip, but just as it got near the end of the mats one of its motors caught (shut off). Then instead of taking off the pilot tried to land the plane on the crash strip. But he was too far over for that. He had overshot the strip and the Ventura crashed into a big tree on the side of the hill.

"AS soon as we realized that the plane was crashing Phil and I started to run. We got to the plane before anyone else, and boy -- what a mess that was. It sure had piled up. The crew was really lucky. They had gotten clear by jumping through the hatch. The Co-pilot landed about ten feet in front of the plane. He was yelling and pointing when we came up. I heard him shouting -- 'pilot, pilot', and then I knew that the pilot was still inside.

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* Promoted to Chief Petty Officers were: John K. Cunningham, CSF; William D. Lassiter, CCM; Kenneth C. Beery, CBMA; Malcolm K. Nelson, CMMS; John M. Banker, CCM; Claude Hatfield, CNO (Evacuated); Edward S. Wells, CMMS and James E. O'Brien, CEM.

"A DOGGIE, who got there almost the same time we did, jumped onto the wing. He kicked in the windshield and among the three of us we somehow pulled him through the broken glass and lowered him to the ground. An ambulance had just arrived so a couple of Marines helped us carry this lad over to it. We had to be very careful. God! he was hurt bad. We placed him inside and that's the last we ever saw of him. Did hear, though, that he had a broken back. The rest of the crew -- by the way, they were all New Zealanders -- came out all right. The only one seriously injured was the pilot.

"THE finish to the story", said Vanderboom, "was that the plane burst into flames while we were carrying the pilot off the field. A lot of .50 calibre shells began to explode but everyone had taken cover, so no damage was done. Luckily, the bomb didn't explode. That was a sight, though. The plane, bomb, bullets -- everything burnt up completely."

When someone wanted to know if Ed figured he and Kemp would get a commendation for what they had done, he answered thoughtfully:

"Well...there was a major from the Army Evacuation Hospital there. He took down our names but I don't think anything will come of it. Personally, I don't give a damn about a commendation, and I know Phil doesn't either."

That was the last that was ever heard about the crackup from either Phil or Van. In fact, this story had to be wormed out of Van. But then, that's the kind of fellows they are, just ordinary guys doing an ordinary job. They didn't want any commendation or any fuss made over them for doing -- as Van said -- what anyone would have done. What they did for the pilot was all in a day's work.

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BROOKLYNITE * George H. Marr, Metalsmith Second, is probably the only one in the outfit who can refer to himself as a "one-man construction company". This came about because George did a stretch of twenty days temporary duty at the Boat Pool on Puruta Island. He spent this period reconditioning seven LCTs which had seen considerable action and service in these waters. Some of the seven were in pretty bad shape, so George had to stick pretty close to the job until it was done. While making the repairs, "Smithy" Marr, a stocky, happy-go-lucky fellow, worked, slept and ate on the LCTs.

USING a Hobart Brothers welding machine George worked consistently at welding plates on shell holes that had been made by Jap artillery. He welded many separated seams, thus stopping water seepage. He made railings for almost all the ships, brazed parts on engines and pieces of pipe on water pumps. He straightened hatches and made many new hatch covers. And he built posts and braces for canvas covers, which he then set up on a few of the ships.

A LOT of time and sweat and effort went into this job, a job which was a helluva lot of work for one man to accomplish in such a short time. But it was completed to the satisfaction of the Officer in Charge of the Boat Pool and Lt. O'Rourke. George returned to camp on August 9th, his temporary tour of duty at end, and was George ever glad of that.

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* The complement of the Unit included 26 men from the Empire State. The frequency with which the name Brooklyn appears in this book seems to indicate that most of the New Yorkers in the outfit were also Brooklynites; however, there were only ten men from the "Borough of Churches".

THIS next story is peculiar in that it is about a piece of equipment, and not about a man or group of men. It is a story of a D-8 bulldozer, a big, lumbering yet maneuverable machine of many uses.

CBMU 582 had two of these huge machines, the first D-8s that were put ashore on Bougainville. And these Cats were so big and had such powerful engines that when they were driven from the beach to the camp, groups of soldiers and even natives gathered at many points along the road to get a glimpse of the mechanical monsters.

THE operators, too, were impressed with the power of the bulldozers, especially after putting them into operation breaking ground or clearing jungle. It soon became an established fact that a single bulldozer could do more work in a matter of hours than dozens of men could accomplish with hand tools in maybe a week. Power, then, is the theme of this story which tells how a D-8 Caterpillar bulldozer was instrumental in refloating a beached LCI. Here is how it happened:

AFTER all other available means had failed, a Caterpillar D-8, which belonged to CBMU 582, equipped with a power winch, provided the means for returning the beached LCI to her fleet. The ship was sitting high out of the water, almost on the shore. It had been beached during heavy swells. Hundreds of tons of sand had been piled against it by the constant pounding of the waves. All previous efforts to extricate the ship had been thwarted. As rapidly as sand was removed from the side of the ship, waves washed it deeper into the excavation.

IN order to refloat the ship the D-8 was driven into the surf and anchored. Next the cable on the power winch was made fast to the stern of the LCI. The enormous pulling power exerted by the winch held a constant strain on the stern. This prevented the ship from slipping deeper into the hole when other equipment dug the sand out from under it. The job was rushed rapidly to completion. And at high tide the ship had been dug out of the sand. It was pulled into a floating position, the engines started, and it put out to sea.

THE bulldozer, which has played such an important role in Seabee construction, had one more accomplishment added to its ever lengthening list of achievements. For it was unanimously acknowledged that the LCI could not possibly have been freed without the aid of this piece of equipment. *

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THE JUNGLE JOURNAL was the name of the Unit newspaper, founded on 17 August 1944. The paper was edited by Ralph A. Kennedy, Yeoman Second, and appeared on the "streets" every morning without fail. Its main purpose was to provide worldwide news "hot off the wires" for the men of CBMU 582 and adjoining camps. It was just a mimeographed newspaper but it had well-blocked columns and it was set up in a very attractive form. Cartoons or a comic strip appeared daily, and together with the many jokes that Kennedy printed, evoked many a laugh from the mates.

RALPH KENNEDY, a slim, nearsighted scholar in his middle thirties, was the perfect choice for the editorship. Ralph, a college graduate who has spent many years in and around his home town of Asheville, North Carolina teaching school, also studied journalism. And, he has had considerable experience in this field. So knowing what was needed to make a good paper, he proceeded to make the Journal into a first-rate newsheet.

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* The D-8 bulldozer is a product of the Caterpillar Tractor Company of Peoria, Illinois, and is equipped with a Hyster winch.

THE daily newspaper was a two-page sheet, but the Sunday edition consisted of four pages and was something special. In addition to the news coverage, a weekly cartoon or drawing depicting camp scenes and activities appeared on the back page. The artist was Roman T. Styczkowski, Painter Third, and his drawings were true to life and well-liked by the men. Also well received were the pin-up girls which Roy drew for the paper occasionally.

THE third page of the Sunday Journal was reserved for the weekly column of Robert J. Bushee, Yeoman Second, which was entitled "Stoppin' the Clock". This column contained current "scuttlebutt, anecdotes about the officers and men, and stories covering the various work details in the outfit. Realizing, too, the power of the press, the Clock Stopper decided to wage a one-man war against CPOs who had forgotten that they had (once upon a time) been enlisted men. While this war was going on the column assumed a "throat-cutting" quality, but the tables were soon reversed, and in the end it was the writer who got his throat severed.

FINALLY coming to the conclusion that he couldn't buck the "Machine" to which CPS's belonged, Bushee and his column bowed out of the picture. However, Bob's rest was a short one. A short time after his ejection he was given a good talking to, then his writings once more dominated the third page. The new column, "The Open House", became somewhat subdued in tone, and because of this change in policy it enjoyed a much longer life than its more radical forebear.

ALTHOUGH Kennedy's Jungle Journal never won any Pulitzer Prizes, it can, nevertheless, be said without reservation that it was a fine newspaper. And, for a long time the Journal was considered the best paper on the island. Also, because it served the very useful purpose of keeping the men informed on current events, the Jungle Journal held an important position in the general scheme of camp life.

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THERE were so many planes flying continuously over the camp that the men had long ago ceased to notice them. The sky was constantly filled with the sound of many motors. The earth was often overshadowed as flight after flight of planes passed over the camp on the way to and from the strip. The only time the men on the ground looked up was when a large formation of fighters or bombers flew overhead. They never paid any attention to a single squadron of Corsairs or an occasional SBD or P-38.

THAT was why no one took any particular notice to the Corsair which flew low over the camp on the afternoon of 28th August. Neither did anyone notice the bomb slung to the undercarriage of the plane. In fact, it was learned later that the pilot didn't even know that he had that 500 pounder hooked to the rank. He believed, no doubt, that he had dropped it "On Target", or had unloaded it in the bay before coming in for a landing.

HOWEVER, one fellow -- Doc Gerardi, the Unit Corpsman * -- found out about that bomb and he almost didn't live to tell about it. "Doc" was so well informed because when the plane peeled off over the Unit Sick Bay the bomb dropped. It landed less than a dozen feet from the doorway where "Doc" was standing.

WHEN "Doc" saw the bomb hit he stared at it hypnotically. The hairs on the back of his neck bristled. As if in a nightmare he tried to run, only to find that his feet were frozen to the ground. Laboring under the illusion that the bomb was going to explode, he stopped breathing lest his breath jar the bomb to life. He died in that long moment and was merely waiting for the earth to swallow him.

AFTER what seemed like a lifetime, but was really only a few seconds, "Doc" shook as if from a chill. A faint light played in his fear-filled eyes. His fear turned to horror...horror to disbelief...disbelief to thankfulness. Mastering great strength he whispered hoarsely, "It's a dud!" Then "Doc" slumped to the ground.

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* Eugene J. Gerardi, Sr., CM3c

A COUPLE of mates, who had dived into a nearby ditch when they saw the bomb falling, brought Gerardi back to consciousness a few minutes later. He sat up, blinked his eyes a few times, still in doubt as to his whereabouts. Then realizing what had happened, "Doc" went over to look at the bomb. "It's a dud!", he repeated; then added, "Thank God for that".

ABOUT a half hour after the bomb had fallen two RNZAF demolition men arrived at the Sick Bay. They unscrewed the detonator, then carted the now harmless missile away. With the bomb gone, "Doc" went back to work. He could push the incident to the back of his mind now, but it is doubted if he will ever be able to forget. For while "Doc" might never fire a shot in this war, and might never see a Jap (except in the prison corral), he will always remember how he almost encountered death. And, as "Doc" Gerardi will frankly admit, he died a thousand deaths when that bomb dropped beside him.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

- SEPTEMBER -

SEPTEMBER on Bougainville was no different than August, July or June. It was unheralded by changing seasons, children returning to school, Labor Day picnics or football practice. It was just another thirty days. Thirty days gripped in a perpetual heat wave. Thirty days of air filled with dust and a million insects. And through it all, the incessant rains continually reminded everybody that the tropics was one helluva place to earn a living.

THIRTY days in which "work went on as usual". Five-Eighty-Two continued to maintain the air strips and facilities, and had the usual number of crackups and flash floods with which to contend. The repair shops' crews did a lot of improvising and procuring, and somehow kept most of the equipment running. The carpenter details completed several building construction jobs, and the maintenance of roadways and reefers and electrical systems in several Navy and Marine Corps camps was carried on as before.

ONE of the construction jobs completed was the erection of Quonset huts for the personnel of the Unit. The fourteen tropical style huts, which featured plywood floors, wire-screened doors, windows and bulkheads, electric lights and four-way ventilation, were declared ready for occupancy on 2nd September. Each platoon was allotted two huts, and when the order was given a mass movement of men from tents to Quonsets took place.

JUST one day was required to make this move, and on the following day, 3rd September, the abandoned tents were struck, gathered up and returned to their rightful owner. Then bulldozers and graders were brought into the area to clear and level the camp. Makeshift tables and chairs and other articles, accumulated over a period of four months by a bunch of scavengers, were carried off and burned. Foxholes and drainage ditches were filled with dirt. Graders put the finishing touches to the cleared area, and the Quonsets had what appeared to be a front yard, but instead turned out to be a drill field -- much to the dismay of the enlisted men.

AS living quarters in the tropics, Quonset huts cannot be equalled. They are clean, dry and airy. The screening protects them from infiltration by mosquitoes or other pests. There were approximately eighteen men assigned to each hut, and after they were settled the huts took on a homey atmosphere. That is, if living in a dormitory can be considered homey. With nine men occupying each side of a hut, there was still room enough for a man to set a footlocker or stool alongside his cot and his seabags fitted easily against the bulkhead. Shelves along the bulkheads and ends of the huts were ideal for stowing packs, gas masks, helmets and clothing. And shoe racks, built under each cot, kept footgear from being kicked around, besides keeping a uniform position throughout the huts.

AT the ends of each hut there were usually a small table and bench, and quite often there were enough overdue library books piled on top of the table to give each hut its own library. Hundreds of pin-up pictures, photos of wives, sweethearts and families and couple of pairs of candy-striped pajamas gave the huts a colorful aspect not to be found in the tents. But the best part of living in the Quonsets was that mosquito bars no longer had to be used; although a few diehards still continued to cover their beds with netting, as protection against rats, not mosquitoes.

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THE huts always looked clean but they looked their best on Saturdays, which were inspection days. Then the area surrounding each hut was spotless, as was the floor inside. Gear was neatly stacked on the shelves, shoes were shined and placed in an orderly manner on the racks. Each two cots were paired off, one directly opposite the other, and all the beds had clean white mattresses and pillow covers on them. And to top it all off, every bed was made alike -- blankets, pillows and mattresses were placed identically. The entire hut, housing eighteen individuals, was the essence of uniformity.

THE men took immense pride in keeping their homes and belongings shipshape, and woe unto the one who didn't have his gear in order on inspection day, thereby incurring the wrath of the Inspecting Officer upon the entire hut. The mates considered this as treason, and the unlucky party would surely get a B.I. bath (a rubdown in strong soap and sand) for his negligence. For one thing that the men would not tolerate in a mate was uncleanness. All of which only proves the fact that the men were always proud of their quarters, but especially so on Saturdays.

FROM the ridge, which ran along the north side of the camp, the view disclosed an area more than twice the size of the original jungle clearing. A neat, orderly layout met the eye. To the east was the Ball Park, and between the Park and the Drill Field the fourteen huts (two rows of seven each) were laid out. On the west side of the Drill Field were six (screened, floored and framed) tents for housing the Chief Petty Officers. Directly south of the tents were the Laundry, Barber Shop, Beer Reefer and the CPO's showers. On the north edge of the camp, built into a little alcove, was the Quonset for the Library, Post Office and Censors' Office, while in the northwest corner of the area were located the OOD's Office, Ship's Service Store, Armory, Photo Lab, Paint Shop (previously known as the Hobby Shop), two warehouses (one was a Quonset hut, the other the original tarp-covered warehouse), a Quonset Administration Building for Personnel and Executive Offices and a small tarp-covered affair housing the Jungle Journal and Engineering Department offices.

NOT to be forgotten were the four "heads", one in each corner of the camp proper. Three of these were "four-seaters" and the other one was a Granddaddy "head", an eight seater. A later addition to the camp was the enlisted men's concrete floored shower and washroom situated directly to the south of the fourteen Quonsets.

THE maintenance of this camp and its various facilities required quite a number of men. Just to give the reader an idea of how many men and how varied were these facilities, the following list covers briefly the departments operating within the camp:

A. OFFICER OF THE DAY'S OFFICE - The Company Commander and Company Officers took turns supervising this office which transacted the Unit's daily business, conducted weekly inspections, assigned jobs, posted duty bills, operated the telephone switchboard which handled incoming and outgoing calls, escorted visitors within the camp, officiated at Flag-raising and -lowering ceremonies, and in general maintained a twenty-four hour control over the camp.

NEXT in command and directly responsible to the OOD was John M. Banker, Chief Carpenter's Mate, who was Sergeant of the Guard and Duty Chief. Under Banker there were three Corporals of the Guard, each working an eight hour shift. They were Julian C. Anderson, Chief Carpenter's Mate; Abe L. Katelman, Boatswain Second and Clovis G. Duke, Machinist Second. The OOD's Messengers were George J. McMahill, Seaman First; Gordon R. Green, Seaman First and Archie B. Ludington, Coxswain. Security Guards also took their orders from the OOD but they were being constantly changed, so their names appear elsewhere.

B. PERSONNEL OFFICE - Chief Petty Officer in Charge, Willard W. Tyler, Chief Yeoman, who was assisted by Victor S. DeGuilio, Yeoman Third; William E. Harmon, Yeoman Third and Robert J. Bushee, Yeoman Second. This department took care of all personnel records, submitted Monthly Reports on Activities to the Navy Department and Area and Fleet Commanders, and handled all correspondence for the Unit. Also working in Personnel was Chester J. Sinclair, Storekeeper First, who was in charge of Disbursing; ie, handling pay records and accounts and arranging for paydays.

C. GENERAL STORES WAREHOUSE - Petty Officer in Charge, Wiley D. Saunders, Storekeeper First, assisted by Owen P. Mahon, Shipfitter Third and Edward H. Mehr, Seaman First. The men in this department handled all supplies in everyday use by the Unit. They issued and received tools and supplies, kept a perpetual stock inventory and stacked and stored materials. They crated and uncrated seventy-five percent of all materials entering or leaving the camp.

D. CENSORS' OFFICE - Officer in Charge and Chief Censor, Lt. (jg) Harold W. Greger. William G. Hodgins, Watertender Second; Thomas T. Atkinson, Quartermaster First and Ralph H. Kuehl, Seaman First, acted as Assistant Censors, whose duty was to examine outgoing letters for, and delete therefrom, information which might "benefit the enemy" if the letters fell into enemy hands. Besides the three censors listed, there were many others, however, these worked for a temporary period only (three months) and are too numerous to mention.

E. POST OFFICE - Chalres G. "Doc" Cowgill, Carpenter Second, held the position of Postmaster. * "Doc" collected and distributed mail, mailed packages, purchased money orders and supplied the men with stamps and stamped envelopes (for a price). Always the "center of attraction" on days when there was mail, this post office was unique in that each man had an individual pigeon-hole, just like in a small town post office, and could always tell whether or not he had any letters by looking into his box. This greatly facilitated the handling of mail and was considered a great improvement over the old method of having letters left on a man's bunk by a disinterested platoon mail orderly. That was one thing that could be said about "Doc" -- he did have the interest of the men in mind at all times.

F. MASTER AT ARMS FORCE & CLEANING DETAIL - Chief Petty Officer in Charge, Kenneth C. Beery, Chief Boatswain's Mate (Master at Arms). Assistant M.A.A.s were John F. Lowell, Boatswain Second and Peter J. Gray, Shipfitter Third, the Chow Hall M.A.A. These men were the police force, occasionally referred to as the Gestapo, for the Unit. They saw to it that discipline and order was maintained at all times.

THE Cleaning Detail was responsible for maintaining a high standard of sanitation and cleanliness within the camp. Sanitation Engineers were: Robert W. Merritt, Slc; Robert G. Merrill, Slc; Howard L. Crosby, Slc; Frank J. Fazzino, Slc; Robert H. Losch, Slc; Edward F. O'Brien, Slc; Darrell S. Ingle, Slc and Vernon E. Hiles, Flc.

G. ARMORY - Petty Officer in Charge, Lloyd I. Case, GM1c, who took over when Ray Laurent was evacuated. Chase, a former blaster and forest ranger, was assisted by James R. Doggett, MM2c; Howard R. Leonard, GM2c and Ralph E. Hamilton, GM3c, who were part-time armorers called upon when needed. Lloyd's job was to clean, store and keep in constant readiness the carbines belonging to Unit personnel, and since he was an expert marksman he also officiated over the rifle range on days when the Unit had firing practice.

H. PHOTO LAB - Albert G. Lamber, Cm3c, Unit Photographer. Lambert's duties consist of photographing, developing and printing official photographs which showed the work progress of CBMU 582.

I. DRAFTING & ENGINEERING - Petty Officer in Charge, Abe Tom Flynn, CM1c, who was the Surveyor and Draftsman for the Unit. Abe was assisted by Elmer Spanik, CM3c, the Rodman, and field parties which were detailed when needed. The duties of this department were:

- 1) To survey and estimate proposed projects --topography, airfield drainage, pipe lines, etc.;
- 2) To survey and layout approved projects;
- 3) To layout and set batter boards for structures;
- 4) Drafting, blueprinting and computing necessary details for each project; and,
- 5) To make daily, monthly and yearly weather charts showing rainfall on Bougainville.

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* "Doc" Cowgill succeeded Carl H. Clough, McMM2c, who was granted an emergency leave to return to the States.

ONE of the many jobs performed by the Cleaning Detail was the task of burning-out the "heads". This was done daily by spraying diesel oil into the pit, over which the "head" was built. Then, by throwing a lighted match into the oil the waste matter in the bottom of the pit was disposed of by incineration.

SOMETIMES the "heads" (which were constructed of wood and canvas) would burn along with the refuse, but nothing was thought of this because accidents will happen. That was why nothing was said when the "open-air toilet" in the Shop Area burned to the ground. However, a week or so later when the "head" in the Heavy Equipment Area was also ravaged by flames, the men began suspiciously to eye John Lowell, the guy who sprayed the "heads".

JOHN listed the burning of the two "heads" as accidents on his reports to Chief Beery but his mates thought otherwise. They didn't like the look on his face when he watched a fire burning. Even when he lit a cigarette his eyes narrowed to slits and his face glowed as he peered at the tiny flame.

POSSIBLY Lowell achieved his peak of greatness as an arsonist when he started the fire in "Head No. 1". This happened one morning while John, as usual, was going about his job of spraying and burning. He had burned-out No. 1, and satisfied that the fire had died down sufficiently to be unnoticed, he went on to No. 2.

NOT long after John left the scene someone noticed the flames licking hungrily up the wooden framework to the roof. Soon a merry braze was warming the surrounding area, as if it needed warming. The flames grew higher and higher and the smoldering fire in the bottom of the pit had turned into an inferno.

ALL the men not on duty gathered to watch the conflagration. A hurried call went out for Al Lambert, Unit Photographer, and Al came running to take pictures of the raging fire. After the photos were taken (and not until then) the fire truck was brought into the area. Bill Aubry and Gigi Brown flew into action. They started the pump, turned on the hose and brought it into play against the burning building. However, the fire had reached such a degree of magnitude by this time that spraying water upon it had no effect whatsoever, so the fire was allowed to burn out of itself.

IT took almost two days for the flames to completely devour the wooden structure. On the third day water was sprayed on the dying embers and the carpenters moved in. Soon they had constructed a new and sturdier "head" near the site of the old one. But this one would not be burned-out. A new system of cleaning was inaugurated where lime, instead of diesel oil, was liberally sprinkled on the floor of the pit. Lime proved to be a much slower process of disposing of the rubble, but there wasn't that danger of fire that was present when oil was used. Even with lime, though, the "heads" still smoked continuously but there was no flame, and all that actually burned were the posteriors of the persons who frequented the "heads".

"...AND anyhow", said John Lowell referring to the recent fire, "that's one way of getting rid of those damn flies." In this respect John was right, for the large, bright green dysentery flies which held a convention in the "heads" every day were quite a nuisance. No matter how hard the Cleaning Detail tried they could never get rid of these disagreeable insects. But John had found the solution. He said, "Burn 'em out!", and then proceeded to carry out his own instructions. (P.S. After the fire John was assigned to M.A.A. duty in the Mess Hall.)

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ON 26th September CBMU 562 had its first opportunity to show off its camp, for on that date Commander Earle H. Kincaid, USN (Ret.), the Captain of the Navy Base, conducted a personnel and quarters inspection of the camp. Since the inspection was to take place in the morning, the men had been forewarned and everything was in readiness. Wearing the traditional working uniform of the Navy (blue dungarees and shirts and white hats, all spotlessly clean), the men assembled on the Drill Field. Although the time was only 0830 everyone was already awaiting the appearance of the visiting officers.

WHEN the Captain, accompanied by his staff and Dr. Bradley, * arrived, he was met by Lt. O'Rourke, Lt. Broadhurst and the Company Officers in front of the COD's Office. Salutes and handshakes were exchanged; then the group of officers walked toward the Drill Field. Anticipating their arrival, Lt. Greger had called the company to attention and issued the order to "Open Ranks". The maneuver completed he turned just in time to salute Commander Kincaid and state, "Company is ready for inspection, sir."

THE Commander returned the salute, then started to move along the first line of men. Lt. Greger took his position in the party. The officers went up one rank, down another, and so on. Before the men could realize that they were being reviewed the inspection was over. Mr. Greger was complimented on the fine appearance of the men, then the officers went on to survey the Quonset huts and camp facilities. While this was going on the enlisted men were compelled to remain on the field, but the order to "Fall Out" was given. This enabled the men to talk and smoke while waiting.

BOTH Commander Kincaid and Dr. Bradley were highly pleased with the neatness and cleanliness and order which prevailed within the huts, or for that matter, throughout the entire area. The Navy Base Captain won the admiration of officers and men alike when he took the time while inspecting to shake hands and speak with each of the chiefs in charge of the huts and the men in charge of the various facilities. And yet, while this inspection was the most thorough the Unit had ever undergone, it had taken far less time to be completed than any previous one; which was no mean reflection on the efficiency with which these Navy "Line" Officers carried out their duties.

BESIDES inspecting personnel and quarters, the Navy Base officers had scrutinized offices, recreation facilities, laundry, showers, etc. Even the "heads" were given a once-over. Then the inspecting party, escorted by Lt. O'Rourke and his officers, left the camp for a tour of the shop areas. With the departure of the officers the inspection had officially come to an end; so Lt. Greger reassembled the men and gave them permission to "Carry On".

TO say that Commander Kincaid was merely satisfied with the inspection is something of an understatement, for he went on record in a letter to Lt. O'Rourke by stating:

"INSPECTION of your unit discloses that in the short time you have occupied this area a great improvement has been made in the appearance of your camp. The smartness of the officers and the excellent appearance of the men was noticed particularly. This indicates the health of the men is well taken care of and that they are in a high state of morale, which aids and improves the quality and quantity of their work.

"The buildings and quarters of the men were in excellent condition, and it is gratifying to note the excellent use made of the quonset huts for enlisted men. The many little innovations found in the huts shows the officers as well as the men have taken pride in the appearance of the camp.

"The Commander Naval Base wishes to congratulate the Officer in Charge and the men of his camp on the overall excellent condition throughout."

This was signed: E. H. Kincaid (Commander Naval Advanced Base, Navy 158).

OFF the record Commander Kincaid was heard to remark that if the Seabees could build such a fine camp in just a few months, he could see where he would have to do a little hell-raising around the Base in order to bring it up to Seabees standards. In view of the Commander's statement and the comments of visiting officers and men from camps on Bougainville and other islands, it was little wonder that the men of 582 considered theirs as the finest looking camp, not only on Bougainville, but in the entire Southwest Pacific Theatre.

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* Bruce E. Bradley, Capt. MC USN, Sr. Medical Officer of the Naval Advanced Base Hospital

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

- THE SHOPS AT THE TOP OF THE HILL -

WITHOUT a doubt, the pulse of the outfit was the Water Supply and Purification Department, for without water the Unit could not have existed. Headed by John K. Cunningham, CSF, this department was located in the Shop Area -- or Goat Hill *, as it was more commonly called, and had the job of supplying purified water to 582 and other camps in the vicinity. Permanently assigned to this job were Raymond Claypoole, SF1c and Arthur Blitzler, WT2c, inhabitants of Philadelphia and Brooklyn respectively.

THE function of this department was to pump water from the waterpoint on the Piva River, up a fifty foot embankment to a 3,000 gallon tank in the shop. The water was strained through the tank into a puro-pumper where it was treated with chlorine, then it was filtered through sand and gravel and finally pumped into one of the three storage tanks, each having a capacity of 5,000 gallons. From these tanks an average of 30 to 35 thousand gallons of water was distributed daily to the various parts of the Unit's camp and adjoining camps.

CLAY and Blitz made an hourly test of the water passing through the puro-pumper, and a formal weekly test was made in the laboratory at the Base Hospital to determine the purity of the water, also the amount of bacteria and animal matter therein. It was from the hospital's records that Cunningham learned that the water distributed by his shop had the highest degree of purity of any water used on the island. It was also the only odorless water on the island.

THEN too, the water supply of 582 was plentiful. True, there were times when water was not pumped due to heavy rains which muddied the river, however, by always keeping a full supply on hand in the three tanks, it was never necessary to scrimp on water. The Galley used it in unlimited quantities for cooking and cleaning and the men were permitted to shower as many times daily as they wished; and to wash clothes as often as they desired. Thanks to Cunningham, Claypoole and Blitzler, CBMU 582 always had an abundance of clear, fresh, purified water during its entire stay on Bougainville.

THE Plumbing Shop, another part of Water Purification, was also directed by Cunningham. The work was done by Judge (first name is Stephen), Giles, Chris "The Greek" Dovalis and Mikie Thomas. ** These men did all the plumbing work necessary when the camp was set up. With this job done their work from then on was to maintain and rebuild stoves for Naval and Marine Units and to repair and install galley equipment. They also dug cesspools, laid pipelines and built showers. Building showers was their specialty. They installed overhead bath tubs for officers and men in the Unit, then went on to place many of these "luxury items" in the Marine Air Group camps as well.

THE services of these three men were always much in demand, and at times they had so much work to do that many other men were assigned to the Plumbing Shop during busy seasons. For the most part, however, Mike, Judge and Chris, working steadily seven days a week, were able to keep up with the work themselves.

A SINGULAR accomplishment of the shipfitters, or plumbers, was the installation of showers, toilets and galley taps on several Liberty ships (and others). Chief Cunningham and his crew had to travel far out into the bay to work on these ships. And a job of this sort was always labeled "RUSH" because these ships never remained in the harbor more than a day or two. It is worth mentioning that the plumbers never failed to finish their jobs ahead of schedule, and the Masters of the ships always expressed their thanks for a job well done in letters of appreciation which were highly complimentary to John Cunningham and his men.

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* Plumbing Shop Personnel: Stephen W. Giles, SF1c; Michael J. Thomas, SF1c; and Chris J. Dovalis, SF3c.

** Nicknames for the various areas were: "Goat Hill" for the Shop Area; "Skunk Hollow" for the Camp Area; "Rustlers Roost" for Officers' Country; "Belly Robbers Paradise" for the Galley Area; and just plain "Transportation" for the Heavy Equipment Shop Area.

OFFICIALLY the Refrigeration Shop came into being the day the Skipper called John L. Whited, EM1c, into the office back in Hueneme and told him: "Whited! I'm putting you in charge of the Refrigeration Department of CBMU 582." Unofficially the shop didn't come into existence until several weeks later, or upon the Unit's arrival on Island X.

WHEN Whited took over the refrigeration business of the outfit on Bougainville, he found himself faced with three major problems; namely: A complete lack of reefer (refrigeration) tools, spare parts, and--worse yet--experienced reefer men. First of all, before any work could be done he had to have manpower, so John put in a request and was rewarded with six men*; four of whom had some knowledge of refrigeration, two were desirous of learning the trade.

JOHN Whited's own set of reefer tools represented the Shop's equipment. The Unit didn't have a single tool in stock. With these few tools, and accompanied by his six proteges, John went to work installing the Hussman Ligoneer, Carrier Corp. and Ward Monterey refrigerating units in the Galley Area, and also set up a Taylor Ice Cream Freezer and Vilter Pac Icer (an ice making machine) in the Galley proper.

WHILE Whited worked on each unit he instructed the crew in the principles of refrigeration, showed them how to determine the causes of breakdowns and how to install and service the units. He poured out all he knew about reefers, which was considerable, and the men ambitiously soaked up this information. Then they added to it from John's pile of textbooks on the subject, and soon became able to carry their own share of the load. Thus, the problem of manpower was solved, but there were still others.

TOOLS and spare parts remained huge obstacles which had yet to be overcome, so a "beg, borrow or steal" strategy was decided upon to get the necessary equipment. "The Reefer Gang" first went on several procuring missions, did some fast talking and came back from their expeditions loaded down with essential parts and tools. Next several repair jobs were done for appreciative Army outfits who reciprocated with more tools and parts. When the "haul" was counted, it was discovered that as a result of much sweating and contriving, there were enough tools for everybody. Each man became the owner of a tool kit. Furthermore, with the accumulated stock of spare parts, the Refrigeration Department was able to go into the maintenance business. Then they really went to work.

FROM May until November approximately ninety-five refrigerators (belonging to Navy and Marine Corps Units) were maintained by the reefer men. After that, the number of refrigerators maintained dropped to fifty-two. An average month's work for these men included: Recharging and building up of existing loads or charges of ten units, making approximately fifteen repairs to reefer systems, and removing moisture from twenty to thirty units.

MAKING repairs was the big item because of the aforementioned scarcity of spare parts. However, the Machine Shop helped out considerably on this score by making thirty or more parts each month, and tubing and small parts salvaged from wrecked planes also came in handy. These salvaged pieces were altered and adapted with some degree of success to units utilizing Freon 12, however, it was impossible to put these parts (which were made of aluminum) into units using methyl chloride. **

DESPITE these spare parts difficulties which were a problem on every repair job, somehow or other the reefer crew kept their units running. And when not mending reefers on land, Whited and the others were also sent out into the bay to make repairs to refrigerating systems of LCIs, LCTs and several cargo ships. Another thing, these not only repaired electric refrigerators, but gasoline driven and kerosene machines as well.

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* Reefer Men: Donald E. Brant, EM1c; Edward A. Masztakowski, EM2c; Emery Senzer, SF2c; Charles F. Sawyer, CM3c; Robert H. Kortekamp, MMR2c, and William H. Heinz, Slc

** Freon 12 and methyl chloride are liquids with a low boiling point which are used as refrigerants.

REGARDLESS of whether the refrigerating systems were products of American, Australian or New Zealand manufacturers, the Reefer Shop could (and did) make the necessary repairs. In fact, during a nine month period eight damaged units were successfully restored to use, even though they were a combination of various sizes, models and makes. Three of these units, which had been declared valueless by other commands, worked so smoothly after being rebuilt that they were retained for the outfit's use, and were dubbed Bougainville Blizzard #1, #2 and #3. Special pride of the outfit was the third Blizzard because it was capable of freezing to ten degrees below zero a box which held the outfit's supply of ice cream.

THIS particular reefer probably received more special care than all of the other units put together. It didn't really need all this attention but by checking the box frequently, the reefer boys were able to help themselves to ice cream whenever they wanted.

LETTING the cat of the bag about the ice cream deal completes the story of the Refrigeration Department, which it is hoped illustrates the indispensable part Whited and henchmen played in CBMU 582's operations. And an all conclusive fact is that the Reefer Shop did more than three times as much work as any other reefer department on Bougainville.

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THE Carpenter Shop, nestled in the farthest corner of the Shop Area, was opened for business shortly after the Unit's arrival and remained in operation for the duration of the Unit's stay. Chief Carpenter's Mate Fred Kraus was in charge of the shop and a crew made up of John W. Sampson, CM1c; Robert E. McEvoy, MM3c (don't let the rate fool you; Mac's an expert carpenter); and Arnold Ochoa, CM2c, three past masters at the art of hammer and saw wielding. Alfred D. Decker, CM3c and George J. McMahill, Slc, among others, also put in a tour of duty in this shop.

THESE men did all of the Unit's finished carpentry work, cut out to pattern lumber ordered for the various building projects, and made thousands of shipping crates and boxes required by CBMU 582 and other Naval commands for shipment of supplies to forward bases.

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THAT modest little "shanty" on the right hand side of the camp entrance belonged to the Electrical Shop, the last of the shops to be mentioned. In this shop Arnold E. Wald, EM1c; Paul J. Miskulin, EM2c; and Jimmy A. Quiriconi, EM3c rewound generators, transformers, electric motors, etc. for many commands on the island.

ONE time Wald and Miskulin worked nineteen hours a day for two weeks straight rewinding six 3-h.p. motors which supplied the electric current for a large Marine encampment, and they rewound all six motors with nothing but field coils stripped from old auto generators. These two men, assisted by Quiriconi, worked continuously at repairing and rewinding generators and motors on ships in the harbor and in various Navy and Marine camps. They also restored to use two generators (a 50 KW and a 75 KW) that one Marine outfit had junked. When the 75 KW was repaired, it was used to supply the electricity for the Seabee camp.

THE prowess of the electricians was so well known throughout the perimeter that one time "Elec" Wald was even called upon to do some work for Army Ordnance. This work had something to do with making a magnet charger for bazookas, but it was of such a "hush-hush" nature that no one ever uncovered the complete story. It was known, however, that the red-headed Irishman secured a hearty "well done" for the completion of this assignment.

THERE was also another part to the Electrical Department, the Outside Crew headed by Chief Electrician's Mate James E. O'Brien. The crew was composed of Milton Klein, EM2c; Edward J. Graham, EM3c; Raymond L. Edgar, EM3c; Thomas J. Dring, MM1c and Robert W. Headrick, Slc. These men maintained the electrical facilities of the Piva Air Strips and numerous camps, as well as the electrical and telephone systems of 582. They set up poles, strung wires (overhead and underground) and did everything else that came under the classification of line work. They also installed wiring and lighting in all huts and tents in the camp area and on many of the outfit's building construction projects.

BEST lineman in the outfit, or any other outfit, was sparse-toothed, 48 year old Jim O'Brien, the Unit's representative from Houston, Texas. Jim has been an electrician all his life, and what he doesn't know about the practical end of the lineman's job isn't worth knowing. The younger fellows on the crew, like Klein and Headrick, could spout theories all day long but it was Obbie or Jim who showed them what the job looked like from the top of a pole. Yet the old-school men and the theorists pooled their knowledge and abilities both inside and outside the shop, and the result was "one damn good Electrical Department".

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

- SEABEES AND DOGFACES -

CLOSE association between the various branches of the service and various units within and between the branches is inevitable if operations and campaigns are to be a success. Sometimes these associations aren't always pleasant because there is intense rivalry between the units, and even more so between the branches. On the other hand, some alliances have sprung up -- such as the one between CBMU 582 and the 129th Infantry Regiment of the 37th Division -- which will be remembered because of the friendships formed between the officers and men of both organizations.

A JAP barge that had been sunk a short distance from the mouth of the Laruma River while trying to land troops was indirectly responsible for bringing the two outfits together. The barge was discovered by three men of the 129th -- Major "Doc" Holliday *, Staff Sergeant Vincent Walters and Sgt. "Honker" Reordan, who had been searching for a craft which they could use as a fishing boat. When this derelict was found it was filled with sand and water, which to be removed before it could be hauled on a trailer to the "129" camp, six miles distance from the beach.

AS soon as the boat arrived in camp, a number of the Doggies went to work helping Major Doc, Walters and Honker weld the 487 .50 calibre bullet holes and patch the twelve 20 and 37 millimeter shell holes found in its hull. Next the barge was painted and then a 220 h.p. diesel engine was procured from the Navy Base for power. That was where the Seabees fitted into the picture. Someone was needed to install the motor.

MAJOR Holliday called upon Chief Warrant Officer Holsinger for help. Mr. Holsinger delegated Frank Toenniessen (recently returned from the hospital) to handle the job. Tony inspected the boat and motor and found that several attachments to the motor were missing, so he and Mr. Holsinger scoured the island's junk heaps and camps in search of the missing parts.

WHEN everything needed for the boat was gathered together, Tony started to work. With the exception of the engine, all the parts that he used were makeshift; sleeving gear, starter, gas tank, etc. were improvised from old airplane and auto parts. This meant that much more work went into the setting up of the engine than if all the pieces had already been attached. It took several weeks to complete this job because of the difficulties connected with procuring and improvising, but one day in early September the boat was finally ready.

LABOR DAY was the day of the launching. Every man in the 129th turned out for the occasion. When the boat was brought to the beach, no time was lost it getting it launched. The cheering was thunderous as the trailer on which the boat was riding was backed into the water, and as soon as it hit the surf the former Jap barge was christened, "John D. Frederick". That was the men of 129th's way of honoring their commanding officer, Colonel John D. Frederick, USA.

AFTER the shakedown cruise, Vince Walters was delegated to skipper the newly christened ship. And for the next three months, before the 37th embarked on another campaign, Walters piloted his ship up and down the coast twice each day. The boat fulfilled its purpose. It was used exclusively for fishing trips and accommodated twenty men on each cruise. Every man in the 129th who wanted to had his chance to go fishing.

THE Seabees also went on boat rides. In appreciation for assistance rendered by Mr. Holsinger and Toenniessen, Major Dock lent the boat to CBMU 582 one day each week. On this day the Seabees did their fishing, but there weren't any fish-fries enjoyed after these trips, for the construction men didn't stack up very well as fishermen.

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* Major William T. Holliday, Sr. Medical Officer of the 129th.

IT was on the boat that the friendliness between the 129th and the CBMU 582 got its start. Then it broadened into visits being made back and forth between camps by members of both outfits. Congenial relations came easily because the men of the 129th hailed primarily from the middle states, and the Seabees from Ohio, Illinois, Michigan and Indiana found many former friends and fellow townsmen in this outfit. Thus, friendships were quickly renewed and new friendships were formed. The officers of the two organizations also became good friends. And the visits that were exchanged aided considerably in passing what would otherwise have been dull afternoons and evenings in a pleasant manner. In the course of these visits, some of the many experiences and exploits of the doggies came to light, and it was because of the indispensable part that these men had played in the Battle of Bougainville that the Seabees became quite proud of their association with the men of the One-Two-Nine.

AND who couldn't be proud of the men of the One-Two-Nine? They were members of the 37th Division, a time-honored, tradition-steeped, integral part of the United States Army. Formerly the Buckeye National Guard Division (Ohio), this division was a fighting outfit whose history dated back almost to the time that the 36th Division, a Texas outfit, was formed to fight in the Mexican War. The 37th's battle emblazoned standard carried pennants and streamers of many colors, each signifying an engagement in which it had taken part. The 37th had fought on two battlefields in the first World War, had served in two campaigns in the present war, and it was soon to engage in another.

ON Bougainville the 37th Division's record had been superb. It fought side by side with the Marines, had pushed the Japs back into the hills, and had cleaned them out of the perimeter. For many long, weary months it had held down half of the perimeter line while the American Division had protected the other. Through the dark, insect-ridden nights and torrid days, through incessant tropical rains, these men of the One-Two-Nine, One-Four-Five and One-Four-Eight (the 37th Division) had holed up like animals in foxholes and pillboxes on the front lines, or had slithered through the jungle on numerous, ever lengthening patrols. And this outfit was the one which did so much to stymie the banzai charges in March 1944 when an attempt was made by the Japs to regain control of the entire island.

MOST of the men in the division suffered through those March days of hell and horror and death and destruction. Days that were without sleep, without rest or release from fear; days filled with the never-ceasing, thunderous roar of artillery, of shells crashing and screaming through the trees. And through it all, the Japs came charging like madmen again and again into the lines. As fast as the Japs attacked they were mowed down. They got so far, then ran into a wave of flying steel and lead that stopped them dead. (Stopped them dead, hell. They were dead.)

THEIR bodies laid out there in the jungle. There were scores of bodies, hundreds, thousands, laying out there all up and down the perimeter. It had been a gruesome battle, a slaughter, and the Japs laid where they had fallen. Then the sun got to them. The bodies started to sweat, to stink, and the tropical breezes rising among the trees wafted a stench and a foulness beyond description into the faces and nostrils of the men on the lines.

THEN it was quiet again. The attacks had ceased; no more Japs came charging over the barricade of their own dead. Those who were still alive had fallen back into the jungle. Scouting parties and patrols sent out to check on the movements of the enemy reported back that the Nips had dispersed. Only stragglers had been found in the vicinity. They were obliterated.

THE danger had passed so the Doggies set to work cleaning up their installations and the battlefield. Order was once again created out of chaos. The Japs were buried. The American boys who had fallen in battle were buried too, but in a flower-bordered plot behind the lines, not on the battleground. Then again it was back to dugouts, foxholes and pillboxes. To swatting mosquitoes. To listening to the barking and croaking of frogs and the intermittent thunder of artillery. And above it all was heard the screaming of shells overhead -- that sound never stopped.

BECAUSE CBMU 582 was a construction outfit as well as a maintenance unit, it was called upon to help many organizations with their building problems. Primarily, the function of CBMU 582 as a service force of the Seventh Fleet, was to render all possible assistance to forces afloat, and next came the land and air forces of the Navy and Marine Corps. The Unit was attached to the Navy Base and Lt. O'Rourke took orders from the Commander Naval Base. There had never been any stipulation made that CBMU 582 should do work for the Army. It was not connected to the Army in any way. However, the Unit had on numerous occasions voluntarily come to the aid of Army outfits, and several times it had been of assistance to the 129th Infantry Regiment.

IN fact, because of the part the 129 had played on Bougainville, the Seabees considered it an honor to be of help to this outfit. Therefore, when the Dogfaces needed a rifle range for some pre-invasion target practice, all they did was ask, and Ed McClure was sent with his bulldozer to clear and level the hundreds of yards of jungle needed for the range.

AND when the 37th prepared for extensive maneuvers, CBMU 582 sent bulldozers into the maneuver area. Roads and tank tracks were cut into the jungle so that tanks of the 129 could travel through the otherwise impenetrable underbrush. The roads enabled tanks and infantrymen to simulate open-terrain warfare such as they would encounter in the Philippines. There were also many other things, like getting the boat in shape, that the Seabees were able to do for the soldiers because they had the "know-how" and the equipment, while the soldiers had neither. All they could do was FIGHT. These things the Seabees were glad to do because they had many friends in the 129th.

WHEN the maneuvers were over the doggies were ready for something big. They had been toughened up, their wrinkles had been ironed out. They were razor sharp and even a child would have known that something was going to happen. It was November, just one year after the Empress Augusta Bay beachhead had been made. A transfer was taking place. Aussie troops were replacing the Americans in the lines. The Australians were taking over the island.

A GROUP of Army officers and a high ranking Australian officer and his aides went out beyond the perimeter one day. They traveled through the jungle for some time, then climbed to the top of a high ridge. The ridge overlooked Jap-held territory and the Allied officers crawled to the edge, which overlooked an enemy pillbox. Within a stone's throw of the fortification the party stopped. The Aussie "brass hat" hurled a grenade. When the sound of the explosion had died and the dust had settled, the highest ranking American officer tossed another grenade into the pillbox. With that done, the officers climbed down from the ridge and returned to their lines.

THAT unimpressive ceremony meant that the Australians and New Zealanders had officially relieved the American Ground Forces and much of the Air Forces on Bougainville. The island -- or rather the perimeter -- was turned over to the ANZACS.

MANY of the Army outfits lost no time in getting off the island. Some were not quite so fortunate and still remained on the island many months later. However, the 37th was not one of the outfits to remain. Its ships had been loaded. Thanksgiving dinners had been eaten a week early, and everything was in readiness for the departure. But before the division pulled out, the officers and the men of the 129 and 582 had a few last parties, at which bottles of whiskey and rum were polished off. The Doggies couldn't take liquor on board ship so they drank the stuff. A few days after goodbyes were said the soldiers boarded ship and then one bright morning in the latter part of November the transports hauling the soldiers hoisted anchor and sailed away.

NOTHING was heard of the 129th or the 37th until early in January, then much was heard about them. Newspapers and broadcasts vibrated continuously with reports of the 37th Division's exploits. The 37th had made the Lingayen Gulf beachhead on Luzon, had pushed everything before it on that historic march to Manila, and had been the deciding factor in the capture of the Philippine capitol. The 37th had proved once again that they could not be beaten.

THE Seabees were glad that their Doggie friends had done so well. Again the 129th had given the men of CBMU 582 reason to be proud of their association. And they were happy in knowing the 582, by completing several jobs for the 129, had indirectly aided in the successful conclusion of a major operation against the enemy.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

- DITCHES AND TREES -

THE officers and men were getting damned sick of those floods out on the strips. sometimes there were one or two a week. Sometimes muddy waters surged across the strips daily, halting flights, strewing the mats with oil drums, rocks, logs and other debris. Something had to be done about the floods. Too much time was being lost. The planes just couldn't be left hanging upstairs. Planes had to be brought down on time. The ones on the ground had to take off too. It would be disastrous if flights were held up because of floods.

TWO streams cutting across the strips were the cause of all this trouble. They were too small to be called rivers, too big to be creeks; yet they raised hell when rains swelled them to two--three times their normal size. Not only that, but the culverts (groups of three or four pipes laid side by side and extending from four hundred to five hundred feet under the mats and strip's shoulders) carrying the streams under the mats, were clogging up. And nothing could be done about this. To repair the culverts the steel mats would have to be unhooked and taken up. The strips would have to be laid open in order to lift out the old culverts and put in new ones.

ALL this would take time, and time was something that couldn't be spared. Manpower and equipment could be spared, played with, used on any job for any length of time; but time could not be spared for splitting up the strips. Nothing could split up the strips and still keep flights in operation.

NOBODY dared to close the strips for an hour, yet alone for a day or a week. More than 350 sorties were being flown weekly from the Piva Airfield, so the strips had to be in continuous operation. Rabaul had to be bombed. Kieta and Buka had to be hammered. Not once a day, but many times. Hammer those Japs! Hit 'em hard! Keep 'em groveling in the dirt! No, some other way would have to be found to keep the strips from being flooded. The wanter would have to be diverted around the Piva Area. But how...how...could streams be swung away from their natural course?

THAT was what Abe Flynn of the Engineering department was trying to figure out. That was what the officers were working on, and worrying about. Even the equipment operators had ideas about how it could be done. But Abe got out there on the strips with his instruments, and figured, computed, scratched his head; yet no matter what angle he tried he always ran into a dead-end--a blank wall.

IT wasn't anybody's fault that the strips were being continuously flooded. Nobody could be blamed. The men who had constructed the strips had done their job well. They couldn't be blamed. When the air strips were constructed, adequate drainage facilities had been built to take care of the rainfall, the floods and the many streams crossing the area. They had figures to aid them too. The rainfall had been computed for several preceding years. Drainage facilities were based on an average yearly rainfall of 112.51 inches. And the area surrounding the strips was completely covered with jungle. This alone would absorb a large amount of the rainfall. The water would never reach the strips. The only water with which to contend was that falling directly on the strip area.

HOWEVER, since July 1944 seventy percent of the drainage area (the jungle area) surrounding the strips had been cleared to make way for new camps and installations. The annual rainfall had increased by twenty-five percent. This meant that the water falling on the cleared areas flowed into the two streams, causing them to become swollen. The streams flowed to the strips' culverts, but the culverts couldn't handle all of the water. So, the strips became flooded. The water falling on the taxiways and revetments and strips didn't help matters either.

FINALLY Abe and his instruments and the officers with their ideas found a solution. To offset these floods a diversion channel was plotted along the north side of the bomber-crash strip heading westward. The ditch was dug and the streams diverted--on paper. Everything had lined up perfectly on the drafting table, so the work was begun.

THE construction of this ditch would be no mean accomplishment. It meant that all heavy equipment and dump trucks belonging to the Unit, besides many pieces of borrowed machinery, and above all, many men would be tied up for some time on this job. No one was underestimating the bigness of the job. Because of the usual adverse weather and soil conditions, it would be a huge project.

THE heavy equipment operators were given an explanation of the purpose of the ditch and how it would work. Then they were given their instructions. They, too, were damned sick of clearing up after each flood -- scooping earth out of the bottoms, leveling off the strips' shoulders, building up, cutting down. They understood the purpose of the project and saw the usefulness of it. This was something they could sink their teeth into, and so they went to work with a will.

THE specifications for the diversion ditch called for a length of more than 2,000 feet and a width almost twice the size of a bulldozer. To dig the channel according to requirements, approximately 20,000 cubic yards of earth was removed. Many types of equipment were used on the job, but in the ditch it was primarily bulldozers or tractors and pans (carryalls) that did the excavating.

THE depth of the ditch varied. Where the channel started at the end of the bomber strip it had a depth of six feet, but it sloped gradually to the west until it reached a depth of twenty, or more, feet at the end of the crash strip. When the channel reached the end of the strip area it didn't stop. Instead it cut across the Koromokina Road (which ran north to south just beyond the airfields), and on the other side of the road the channel widened, then emptied into a swamp. When the channel was completed it was necessary to build a bridge across the road where it had been cut through. It was a very simple bridge. Logs were thrown across the divide and then anchored at both ends, and dirt was piled on top. It wasn't much of a bridge but the logs were heavy and strong, so the bridge held, and served its purpose.

ALSO put to good use were the 20,000 cubic yards of earth (more than 30,000 tons) that were removed from the diversion. Some of the dirt was utilized in building up the strips' shoulders, some was hauled away to the jungle, but most of it went into building a levee along the strip side of the ditch. The purpose of the levee or dike was to further prevent flood waters from climbing the side of the ditch and spilling onto the strip.

AND so the diversion ditch was completed. It was a big job and a tough one. It took a lot of men and equipment. Thousands of yards of earth had been dug up and moved. Instructions had been followed to the letter. To finish this project was supposed to take weeks, but it didn't. The heavy equipment men completed the ditch in one week, and this despite the fact that the work was retarded many times by heavy rains and washouts.

THUS, one stream was diverted, but to complete the drainage of the Piva Bomber Strip, Ditch No. 1 (which ran eastward along the north side of the strip) was deepened and widened. And, when finished, carried away the overflow from the second stream that ran under the mats. This ditch was dug so that at a point halfway up the side of the strip, where the stream's overflow poured into the ditch, it was almost at ground level. But a rapid decline was made as the ditch lengthened. From the end of the Strip Area the ditch cut under Marine Drive, which was east of the strip, then emptied into the Piva River.

WHEN the bomber strip's drainage facilities were finished, work was immediately started on a diversion ditch for the fighter-crash strip. This was not as large as the first channel, but the stream it diverted was swung completely around the end of the crash strip. The ditch carried the stream to a point beyond the strip area where it could do no harm. Then it flowed back into its original channel. However, even with this diversion ditch, heavy rainfall still covered the fighter strip with flood waters.

CONSTRUCTION of these diversion and drainage ditches did not mean that maintenance of the strips was no longer necessary. It only meant that flight operations would no longer be impeded by floods. Maintenance crews would continue to do as they had done before. In fact, the ditches themselves presented a maintenance problem. But keeping these ditches in constant repair would be much simpler than repairing the damage that would have occurred to the strips if the streams had not been diverted.

IT was during the last week in October that the airfield's drainage was completed. There was, admittedly, considerable worrying as to whether the ditches would carry to intended load, although everyone knew that they were well constructed. There was no need to worry about those ditches, for on 3rd November there fell on the Piva Area an extremely heavy rainfall of 4.9 inches. This was 2.9 inches above flood level, yet flood waters never reached the bomber strip. Of course, the fighter strip was flooded to a certain extent, but all of the planes were able to use the larger strip, so operations were not halted. The diversion ditches had proved to be a success.

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FROM a distance the jungle looked beautiful. It was like the backdrop on a stage, a solid green wall stretching high into the air. The sun shimmered off the trees and vines and dust-speckled rays gleamed through the foliage. The coloring of the vegetation varied from the shadowed deep green to emerald where the sunshine tinted the branches. Sometimes pockets full of mist were suspended among the trees and dew on the leaves sparkled like thousands of tiny jewels. Milk-white parros flying among the tree tops lent a pleasant contrast to the greenness, as did the bluish haze drifting through the shrubbery. Above the lofty trees was the blueness of the sky, its beauty further enhanced by the presence of many wispy white clouds.

THAT was the jungle from the outside looking in. Within the jungle, however, any beauty was dubious. The jungle itself was an impenetrable mass of trees, vines, thickets and weeds. It was still, hot and dank. Small animal and insect life abounded in this eerie semi-darkness, and snakes, centipedes, scorpions and lizards slithered along the ground among the rotting vegetation. Disease was rampant in this intermingled growth. Malaria, elephantiasis, jungle rot, fungus, as well as other fearful maladies were ever present. And situated in a little clearing right in the midst of this god-forsaken jungle was the campe of CBMU 582.

NATURALLY such a setting was hot. Mid-mornings and afternoons, when the sun was high overhead, were filled with scorching, blistering heat. The humidity was high, the air inert. Prolonged physical exertion was well-nigh impossible. Temporary relief was brought by the daily rains, but when these passed over the heat returned and the humidity was heightened. It was only with nightfall that deliverance from the torridness of the day came, as if by way of compensation for the suffering of the day. A coolness descended upon the camp that made a jacket, and later on a blanket, not only advisable but necessary. Soft, refreshing breezes swept the fieriness from the clearing, and made the evenings, nights and early mornings quite bearable.

FOR eight months of the year, April to November, the breezes came from the southeast, but during the other four months, from November through March, there were periods of extreme calm, broken often by northwest winds, which especially at night became very heavy. These were not serious enough to be classified as hurricanes but were sufficiently violent to be called gales. They ripped up trees, hurled branches and limbs about like matchsticks, and scattered far and wide everything that was not tied down.

IT was fortunate for the Seabees that they lived in Quonsets, for they had the protection of corrugated iron roofs and bulkheads to keep the branches from falling upon them. Then, too, the wire screening kept clothing and gear from being blown away. The gales or falling limbs didn't frighten the men, however, it was what the wind did to the trees, for trees were the real danger.

THE trees were tall. They were teakwood, mahogany, black palm, breadfruit, multiple trunked banyan and others peculiar to the South Pacific jungles. Most of these trees grew to a height of 100 to 150 feet, but they seemed taller because foliage grew only near the tops. The reason for this was they grew so closely together that sunlight was unable to penetrate the denseness. The trunks, however, were not bare, but were heavily matted with creepers, vines and parasitic plants growing from the bark.

WITH each succeeding year this matting became thicker, became hopelessly entangled, died and left the trees weighted down with decaying vegetation. The heaviness of this accumulated matter plus new growth exerted quite a strain on the limbs and shoots of the trees, and when heavy rains continually soaked into the decay, the load became too much for the branches to carry. It was then that they cracked under the added weight and crashed to the ground.

ANOTHER thing, with trees of such height the roots should have become deeply embedded in the earth, but that was not the case. The soil was not fertile. The only way that roots could feed was by staying close to the surface, therefore they never burrowed into the dirt more than a few feet. Thus, because of such feeble anchorages, the timbers were rendered unstable, and heavy winds could easily cause them to topple.

THIS year the winds shifted early. October will probably be remembered as the month of freakish gales. Usually they came at night and were heralded only by the quick sweep of rain that came out of the jungle and raced through the camp. Then the winds came, crossing the perimeter with a rush and a moan. Their velocity was so great the giant trees were felled in the camps and the jungle. Then, as quickly as they had come, the winds were gone.

NO one knew from whence these gales had come or what caused them, but it was known that they were very destructive and that the loss of life was heavy. During the first of these storms a tree fell onto a tent in a Marine encampment. Three leathernecks asleep therein were killed. Many Army units had deaths to report after each gale, all attributed to the same cause -- falling trees. CBMU 582 was indeed fortunate that none of the banyans or teakwoods within the camp had fallen, although there were several trees surrounding the clearing that no longer rose up to blot out the sky. In Officers' Country the worst almost happened. Two trees fell in that section, one of them across Mr. Holsinger's tent. The tent was completely demolished, but luckily, Mr. Holsinger got out in time.

AFTER the first storm the trees within the camp took on a new significance. They were as dangerous to the men as Japs! Because of this danger, the Logging Crew was ordered to remain in camp to cut down the trees hovering over the huts. The loggers made short work of these! They felled several trees in the camp area, then moved into Officers' Country where they dropped many more, and then to the Shop Areas which also had to be cleared. When the woodsmen finished with their own camp they were sent to the Commodore's camp to drop some trees which threatened the officers' quarters. This they did with their usual neatness and dispatch.

OF all the trees that the Seabees dropped among tents and buildings, there was only one that did not fall clear. That was the tall dead tree standing between Huts 3-B and 4-B. Situated in such a way that a direct drop to the ground was impossible, it was felled between the two huts, but didn't quite clear Hut 3-B. The corner of the hut, in which Al Shear had his bunk, crumbled under the tree's weight. Al's bunk was flattened to the floor, his personal gear scattered about. Yet, the total damage was light, so while the logging crew went to work cutting up the tree, the Camp Construction Detail was left with the repairing of the hut.

ONE tree that didn't have to be cut down was the lone tree near the Library, which had been overlooked because it wasn't a menace to living quarters. It fell of its own accord one day while Alex Csernyik was cutting away the hump, separating the Library from the rest of the camp with a D-8 bulldozer. Alex was pulling a log away from the base of the tree when he heard the tell-tale crack-k-k-k! Then the tree started to splinter. It hovered in midair for just a second, then dropped directly onto the Quonset. Slicing through the corrugated iron roof like a knife through paper, the tree settled on the floor in a cloud of dust. The building had been neatly split in two.

THREE men (Bob Losch, Glen Light and Ralph Kuehl) were inside at the time of the crash. They emerged unscathed but complete unnerved by the episode. Table, benches, bookcases and books didn't fare quite so well. The interior was a maze of wreckage. Even the prized pinup collection was ruined. However, no bodily harm had been done and that was really all that mattered. The building could be repaired -- and was, within a week.

THE winds continued to roar through the camp in the days that followed, but with the trees out of the way the peril of one crashing through a Quonset hut no longer existed. Although some still fell in the jungle, there wasn't any fear in the heart of the men; for as the trees had gone, so had the danger.

CHAPTER TWENTY

- AND A NIGHT IN THE JUNGLE -

THE LOGGING DETAIL was charged with the task of furnishing the island's Naval facilities with vitally needed lumber for construction. This detail supplied timber for the Navy's sawmill (which was run by another outfit), and in doing this the Seabee loggers had to go far in advance of the front lines in their search for timber devoid of shrapnel. The scene of logging operations was the logging camp, located seven miles beyond the perimeter. It was reached by traveling over a route which covered minefields, former battle-grounds, the native village, the Laruma River, canebrakes and marshlands. The road finally came to a stop at this makeshift camp situated at the foot of a heavily wooded mountain in the very heart of virgin jungle.

IT was in this jungle that the loggers braved the dangers of Japs, malaria and skin diseases. They cut paths through the underbrush to the feet of huge, towering trees. When the woodsmen found a tree that measured up to their dimensions in height and girth, they cleared away the scrub and vine matting from its base, then went to work with long, quivering saws and keen-edged axes. The tree's fins were cut through, steel bit deeply into the trunk and soon afterward the ringing cry of "TIMBER-R-R-R" rent the air. The tree fell with a tearing sound followed by a crash which caused the very ground to vibrate. Dust and leaves and decay filled the air, then slowly settled to the earth. Another tall, handsome lord of the jungle fell victim to the interminable requisites of man.

WHILE the tree was still quivering the "cutters" pounced upon it and severed its limbs from the trunk. They peeled off the branches, stripped the tree of its garments until it was nothing but a long naked log lying amidst its former neighbors. But it didn't lie there long, because bulldozer operators were called and soon the log was hooked by cables to the lumbering machine and was being snaked out of the jungle into the logging camp or yard.

IN the yard the log was cut into sections of approximately twenty feet each, then the sections were loaded onto a truck for delivery to the mill. It was a hazardous operation, this ripping trees out of the jungle, but the men were well equipped both mentally and physically for their jobs, and accidents were few, although the number of cases of jungle rot and fungus infections contracted in the jungle were many. Working conditions were always most trying for there was the heat, the closeness, the insects, the rain, and the sweat with which to contend. Then, too, the experiences, the narrow escapes that the loggers had were many. They ranged from fights with wild animals and snakes to a near-ambush by an Australian patrol. But by far the worst experience of all was being marooned for a night far out in "No Man's Land".

IT was on 10th November that torrential rains raised the waters of the Laruma River above flood stage and prevented the woodsmen from returning to the main camp. Of course, an attempt to cross the river was made but this almost led to disaster. The truck in which the men were making the crossing was caught by the river's mad currents and carried downstream. The men had to swim for it. It was a bitter struggle, but the lumberjacks finally made it to shore after being tossed around like a canoe on the stormy sea. One by one the battered Seabees climbed ashore, the same shore from which they had started out. As for the truck, it had disappeared beneath the muddy surface. It was recovered later, but its engine had been completely ravaged by the water.

THE men knew they were stranded, however, hopes were still high because six of their crew had returned to camp earlier in the day. This group had left with the trailer truck which was carrying a load of logs to the mill. Perhaps these men would take word to camp about the river being swollen. That was just what happened too, for when the big White crossed the Laruma it was already above its ordinary level. Even this trip had not been made without difficulty for the load of logs had rolled into the stream while it was being forded. The opposite bank was reached, however, and when the six loggers arrived in camp they immediately reported the situation to the O-in-C.

MEN assigned to the Logging Detail for the longest period of time were: William D. Lassiter, CCM (In Charge); Edward J. Vanderboom, CMLc (Pusher); Vernon E. Christensen, BMlc; William M. Champlin, M2c; Rogers E. Davis, CM2c; Chris C. Driitsen, MMS2c; Joseph D. (Roger) Emard, Slc; Henry M. Knowles, MM2c; Everette E. Lanpher, CM3c; Leonard J. Matonic, CM3c; Alfred E. Schweitzer, CMLc; William R. Aubry, BM2c; George E. Sheldon, MM2c; William F. Tinton, MM2c; and Robert J. Lamneck, BM2c.

THE following men were marooned for a night in the jungle. Lassiter, Vanderboom, Champlin, Davis, Driitsen, Lanpher, Matonic, Schweitzer, Sheldon, Aubry, Lamneck and George Cole, the truck driver who took the loggers to and from the woods.

WHEN the remaining loggers failed to appear by late afternoon, the worst was feared. A party of officers and men got together and drove to the river to ascertain the extent of the loggers' predicament, and if possible, to effect a rescue. However, upon arrival at the scene, the would-be liberators gazed helplessly at the raging Laruma and it was quickly realized that there was little to be done. Several attempts were made, nevertheless, to throw ropes across the torrent, but the ropes fell short. One audacious Seabee tried to swim across the muddy, boulder-strewn stream with a rope tied around his waist, but he was bucking the impossible. He was swirled downstream, tossed and twisted and slammed against rocks and floating logs. Finally an eddying current caught him and smashed him back to the same bank from which he had started.

IN the meantime the loggers had not been idle. They split up into two groups and foraged up and downstream to search of another crossing or maybe a log which had fallen across the stream. Their search was fruitless. They were hopelessly marooned and there was nothing to be done about it. Since there was no intervening twilight between daylight and darkness, and the day was almost over, the stranded men decided to return to the log woods. The rescuers, beaten by the overpowering odds of the elements, drove back to the main camp.

HUNGRY and dirty, tired and drenched, the handful of men make the long trek back to the logging camp. Upon their arrival their first thoughts were of dry clothing. Taking the moisture out of the coveralls in a rain-saturated jungle seemed impossible until someone thought of starting the motor on the crane, and when it became heated laying the cloths over the radiator. This they did, and after a time the coveralls were dry enough to put on again. They were still muddy and a trifle damp but the clothing provided protection against the thousands of insects which filled the clearing. The few men who were clad only in shorts and shoes were the sorry ones. They had nothing to look forward to but a long night of misery.

NOR was the night long in coming. Darkness descended swiftly. Trees cast long shadows across the clearing. The shadows quickly blended into one solid mass of blackness. It was a depressing, gloomy blackness that enfolded the stars and moon and sky to her bosom. As if in outright defiance of the opacity of the night, a tiny fire of damp twigs and branches, soaked with diesel oil burned fitfully. It threw jagged orange streaks across the faces of the men huddled around the tiny flame for warmth.

TIME passed slowly. Each hour seemed like an infinity. Rain beat down incessantly on the ragged tent and slashed at the men within. The songs of the frogs and crickets and birds blended together in a weird jungle melody. Falling branches or trees or an animal crashing through the underbrush snapped the Seabees back to wakefulness whenever they dozed. They were continually alerted by the false sounds of the jungle. While half of the men tried to sleep, the others stayed awake to guard against Japs and wild animals, and to keep the fire going. They scrutinized every bush and tree for a lurking enemy. They swatted mosquitoes and brushed away or stepped on hundreds of creeping, crawling things. Through the noise-filled stillness the watchers and the men who were supposed to be sleeping hoped and prayed and waited for the dawn.

SOMETIME during the early morning the rains ceased. It seemed that the darkness would never lift, but the sky finally became gray, then streaked with white. The men slowly rose to their feet, their bodies stiff from cold. Stomachs throbbed dully and the pangs of hunger became intense. Faces were drawn and dirty and eyes were wild-looking from lack of sleep. A damp penetrating chilliness had sneaked in behind the all-night rain. The men were stomping around and flapping their arms trying to restore heat through circulation to their bodies. Then, since dawn was not far off and it was

IT was a long hike back to the Laruma. The woodsmen had been walking along the deep-rutted road. They were only a short distance from the river when the sound of a motor was heard. Suddenly a truck came around a bend in the road. Joyous shouts pierced the quietness of early morning. Reaching the men on foot, the truck came to a stop. The weary guys climbed aboard, exchanging greetings with the rescuers as they did so. Doc Gerardi, who had come along to dispense first aid, busied himself with the cuts and scratches that had been sustained on the previous day in the scramble for shore and the forages through the thickets. When this was done, Arbie McClenny, the driver, turned his machine around and retraced the route to the river.

THE flood waters had subsided somewhat during the night. Still, they were high enough to warrant great care in the crossing. Mac slapped the truck into four-wheel drive and low gear, then eased her down the slope and into the river. It wasn't difficult cutting through the shallow water, but as the truck got farther from shore the going got rougher as the water became deeper. Expertness at the wheel was required because the river was flowing into the cab and over the motor. Once the hopes of all were shattered. A huge boulder was struck! The truck shuddered and almost stopped.

MAC quickly turned the wheel the right thus causing the truck to slip off the boulder, then whipped her straight again, pushed hard on the accelerator and the truck leaped ahead. She churned forward through the swiftly running water and steadily drew nearer the opposite bank. Then with a final tremendous burst of power the heavy machine climbed out of the river and up onto the road. Mac stopped the truck, slipped the motor out of four-wheel and started toward camp. The most terrifying night the loggers had ever known was behind them. They were homeward bound to hot food and some much needed sack duty.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

- CBMU 582 CARRIES ON! -

SINCE the start of the war Seabees and Marines have worked hand in hand to further America's war aims in the Pacific. On Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Munda, Treasury, Bougainville, Tarawa, Saipan, Guam -- every beachhead in the Pacific Area -- Seabees went in with the Marines. A mutual respect was born. Seabees admired the fierceness with which Marines slashed out footholds on reef-bound islands against fanatical Jap resistance. The Marines marveled at the driving force, the swiftness and agility which Seabees displayed in landing supplies, carrying ammunition, clearing jungle and setting up air strips on these tiny footholds.

SEABEES often had to drop their tools to fight alongside the Leather-necks. And when they weren't fighting they were working feverishly at building installations, roads, foxholes and anything else that would enable the Marines to secure the beaches and push the enemy inland. In most instances the construction men worked under the same hazardous conditions as the fighting men. There were occasions, too, when the Seabees carried out assignments in advance of the front lines.

THE Marines depended on Seabees for many of their needs. The Seabees unloaded the ships, set up the water supply and reefer systems. They established the field kitchens, built the camps and even constructed administration buildings and mess halls when the fighting was over. In return for these services Marines brought back Jap souvenirs to the Seabees and gave them first crack at plexiglass and aluminum from wrecked planes. In general, they tried their damndest to show appreciation for what the construction men had done. And all the time the Seabees had been the ones who were trying to show their appreciation for what the Marines had done.

AS a result of all this cooperation, this comradeship in arms, this giving and taking, there was never the rivalry between the Marines and Seabees that existed between other branches of the service. Marines and Seabees became brothers under the skin. They fought and worked and died together. Between them a bond of friendship sprung up that has no counterpart anywhere else in the Armed Forces of the United States.

WHEN the Marine Raiders moved onward to new and fiercer battles, some of their Air Groups and Transport Wings remained behind. When the Construction Battalions chased after the Raiders, Construction Battalion Maintenance Units took their places. It was up to the CBMUs to uphold the traditions and reputations that the hell-raising battalions had built. This was a difficult charge because the maintenance units were primarily made up of younger and less experienced men, and were only one-fourth the size of the battalions. Still the reputation of "CAN DO" (established by the battalions) had to be upheld.

SUCH was the situation which CBMU 582 faced when it disembarked on Bougainville. The men of the Unit had to carry on where the 71st, 75th, 25th, 53rd, 77th and 36th U. S. Naval Construction Battalions and part of the 6th Special (Stevedore) Battalion had left off. Keeping up the reputation established by their big brothers (the battalions) was an enormous task for the smaller unit. But by dint of hard work and a willingness to help out whenever needed, the men of CBMU 582 not only upheld the "CAN DO" reputation, THEY STRENGTHENED IT!

FRIENDSHIPS sprang up between the 582 men and the MAG boys out on the Piva Strips. On the strips the Seabees had an opportunity to observe the skill with which the Marine pilots handled their planes, and on the taxiways they watched with interest the fine care the ground crews gave these same planes. The MAG boys, in turn, took notice to the Seabees who worked continuously at the wearisome job of maintaining strip facilities. The two factions early realized how dependent one was upon the other, thus the knot of friendship was pulled ever tighter.

CHRISTENSEN had been assigned to temporary duty with MAG 25 while he was working on the sawmill. Upon its completion he didn't return to the Unit but stayed an additional two weeks to teach fifteen of the Leathernecks how to operate the mill. He taught them how to file the saws, how to change the teeth and how to get the correct lead on the logs. Being apt pupils, the Marines learned their lessons rapidly. By the time Chris finished his tour of duty the novice lumbermen were cutting 8,000 board feet of lumber in a six-hour shift. That, according to Chris, "Ain't bad for a bunch of rookies working in a mill which should be in a museum". *

WHEN Flight Officers from MAG 25 requested a building in which they could relax and have fun, Anthon B. Jablonski, CM1c, and Fred H. Brumm, CM2c, were sent out on the job. The two Seabees started construction, according to plans drawn up by the Marines, of a building made of two Quonset huts laid out in the shape of a cross, and which an open space in the center. This open space was the main part of the building and had four sections branching off from it. It was twenty feet square covered by a cupola style roof, and would have made a dandy dance floor. But in the absence of petticoats, it became the taproom.

SPECIAL pains were taken to make the building look attractive, especially the interior. Copper screening was used to cover the open bulkheads. The inside, or underside, part of the steel purlines were concealed from view with masonite. Concrete was used for flooring the entire building, and it had, of all things, indirect lighting throughout. A bar was built in one of the wings facing the taproom, or raised section of the building. Behind the bar was the storeroom. The other three wings were used for recreation and rumpus room, lounge and a reception room; one section for each.

IN addition to the building, the two carpenters built a marquee (a cement walk covered with a canopy) which extended thirteen feet from the entrance. When the job was completed it was such a fine looking piece of construction that Jabby and Fred were ready to celebrate. But the same day that saw the building completed also saw it almost entirely demolished. An hour after the two men had called it quits, a huge tree fell atop the playhouse, and two of the wings were totally wrecked. So-o-o-o, the next morning found the Seabees back on the job. If it hadn't been for this accident the job would have been completed in record time. As it was, even with the damage, the building was finished by two men in less than a month. "CLUB 25", as the recreation center was called, became the "Showplace of Bougainville", and was the envy of every other outfit on the island, including the Seabees of 582.

THERE were many other specimens of Seabee handicraft and ingenuity reposing in the various Marine camps on the island. Three examples, though, should be sufficient to point out that the Seabees were not content just to sit back admiring the work the Marines have done, and are doing. The construction men went further than that by showing their appreciation in the only way they knew -- by building and maintaining U. S. Marine Facilities on Bougainville.

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* In appreciation of the fine workmanship displayed by Christensen on the sawmill job, Capt. Robert J. Allen, USMC, MAG 25 wrote a Letter of Commendation to Lt. O'Rourke. The Commendation read:

"During the period Christensen has been engaged in the erection of a sawmill for MAG 25 his efficiency and balance, under oft-times trying conditions, has earned the admiration and respect of MAG 25 personnel, both officers and men, whom he contacted in connection with his duties. On several occasions Christensen voluntarily worked overtime, including two entire Sundays. In this regard he inspired the men working under him to the extent that they willingly worked the extra hours with him. On these and many other occasions he demonstrated his capacity and fitness for leadership. This letter is written in commendation thereof."

ASSOCIATION between the MAG outfits and 582 didn't stay confined to the strips. It found its way into the Marine camps where the Seabees had taken over the camp maintenance. Caring for these camps soon had the Seabees calling themselves "Nursemaids for the Marines". Crudely put perhaps, but the name was nevertheless true. The Unit did do considerable work for the Marine Air Groups. This work included grading of camp roads and areas, maintenance of electrical, reefer and water systems, and installation of showers, pipelines and culverts.

THE Seabees also erected latrines, wood-framed tents, buildings and made additions to existing facilities. They cleared jungle for these installations and for plane parking areas as well as draining low areas. In short, every time the Marines needed something built or repaired, they called upon CBMU 582 to do the job.

ONE instance where CBMU 582 came to the rescue of the Marines was when MAG 24 was preparing for transfer to a forward area. For transportation the Group was assigned two freighters. It was soon learned, however, that the 'tween deck space available for sleeping quarters was not sufficient. It provided for only one-third of the number of Marines assigned to each ship. The top decks of the two Liberty ships were loaded down with equipment, so the Marines couldn't bed down there either. This meant that unless additional space was found, two-thirds of the Leathernecks would have to stand or sit all the way from Bougainville to their destination.

CONVERSION of these two cargo ships into transports was the request that Lt. O'Rourke received; through regular channels. He assigned CWO "Pete" Holsinger the job of figuring out conversion plans and carrying out the necessary construction. There were just three days before the ships were scheduled to sail, so Mr. Holsinger, fighting against time, designed and supervised the construction of skeleton-framed bunks that were built in tiers of three. Chiefs and men alike worked like hell for they knew the job was labeled RUSH! Almost overnight the two freighters were transformed into troop carriers. The job was completed in time for the ships to sail on schedule.

THE wood-framed bunks enabled the Marines to place their collapsible canvas cots three high. The first one was set on the deck, the second on the framework a few feet above the first, and the third was anchored to the frame above the second. Where previously only one man could have slept, there were three men sharing the same deck space, and these wooden frameworks stretched out in long rows, filling the ships' holds from stem to stern. Although these accommodations were far from being luxurious, the Leathernecks were, nevertheless, able to get some rest while enroute to their new assignment.

ANOTHER job for the Marines was the sawmill that Vernon E. Christensen, BM1c, built for Marine Air Group 25. Chris, a veteran logger and mill operator, was placed in charge of seven MAG guys and told to go to it. The first step in mill construction was the digging of a pit (16' x 6' x 6') into the bottom of which went the base of the saw. Next came the husk track and motor which had to be uncrated, assembled, oiled and greased before it was installed. Then a sawdust conveyor was set up and a lumber table built. Chris procured an edger which he installed with another sawdust conveyor. He also built a log turner. Chris admitted that a log turner wasn't a necessity but he explained, "It'll make it easier fer th' fellers". The final step was to cover the entire mill with a roof 100' x 40'.

THE worst trouble that Chris and his assistants had (not counting the rain water that had to be bailed out of the pit daily) was that two boxes of parts were missing from the equipment. Much time was wasted while Chris went on procuring missions. When this failed to get all the necessary parts, he ended up doing a great deal of improvising. Most of the parts they did have were rusted and the men considered them damned poor equipment with which to work. However, the mill was completed in a reasonable length of time and was soon turning out lumber for the Marines.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

- THE MORALE DEPARTMENTS -

IN JULY Clifford P. Duarte, SK2c, started selling dungarees and shirts in the warehouse. That was the beginning of CBMU 582's Ship's Service Store of which Mr. Holsinger was appointed Ship's Service Officer and Duarte the Store's Manager. Getting a store was no problem (it was located in the building which formerly housed the library), but money was. However, it didn't remain a problem long because each man in the Unit came through with a ten dollar loan, providing for the venture a proprietorship of more than \$2,500.00. Once they had the capital Mr. Holsinger and Duarte made contacts with Navy Base Ship's Store and Army Service Command and purchased needed items such as toilet articles, cigarettes, candy, beer and clothing. Then the store was formally opened for business.

PROGRESS was slow at first because the store lacked purchasing power. Everything that Ship's Service sold had to be bought and paid for on a strictly cash basis. Ship's Service was not permitted by the Navy to operate on credit. Once a reservoir of cash had been built up, however, commodities were purchased on a wholesale scale, and in turn sold to the men at a very low cost. Some articles, especially Coca Cola, were sold for less than the actual purchase price, and this in spite of waste and spoilage which was often very high.

DESPITE this "cash on the line" method of doing business, the profits grew. Ten dollar loans were repaid to the men a few months after being made and soon thereafter the store became a flourishing enterprise, which catered only to the men of CBMU 582. As proof of the progressiveness of this operation the Ship's Store published a statement not many months after its conception which listed assets of cash and merchandise far in excess of the original investment of \$10.00 per man. Incidentally, liabilities were nil. It might also be stated that at the discretion of the Officer in Charge, all profits derived from this store could be turned over to the Welfare Fund of the Unit, or used in numerous other ways that would be of direct benefit to the men.

LARGELY responsible for the store's success was genial, ever-smiling Cliff Duarte, who had been in the saddle since the beginning, had worked with the interests of the Unit always foremost in mind, and had done a conscientious job as Manager. Another man who lent a hand to this department was Chester J. Sinclair, SK1c, the Unit's short, friendly, businesslike Pay Clerk. Chet took the monthly inventories and aided Cliff with the many reports that were submitted each month to the Navy Department.

THE store hours were 0730 to 0930, 1100 to 1300 and 1500 to 1600 daily except Sunday. It was operated much like a stateside store, even down to the rationing of cigarettes (one carton every ten days). The shelves were usually well stocked, although there was never any meat on hand, unless Cliff had it hidden under the counter. Cliff kept the store well supplied by going out on frequent shopping tours, and when he closed up shop every afternoon at 1600, he wasn't through for the day by any means. He also worked from 5:00 to 6:00 every evening dispensing good cheer at the Beer Reefer. It was during this hour that the men found temporary solace in a bottle of lager or pilsener, their daily ration.

THAT the store (and the beer) was appreciated was evidenced by the fact that the men were all partners in the business. They had the satisfaction and the privilege of buying what they wanted when they wanted, and never had to go begging other commands for life's little necessities. Possibly what endeared this department to the men more than anything else though was the free beer which was issued on Holidays and other occasions, and the clothing issues of socks, underwear, handkerchiefs, etc., which were likewise gratis. And don't let anyone be heard to say that he had to buy shaving cream during his overseas stay. That was one item which never had a selling price.

ANOTHER Ship's Service Activity was the Laundry managed by Lowell G. Teller, WT1c, a jovial, perpetually pregnant old timer. Pop or Simon Legree (Teller answered to both names) kept his boys continuously busy operating four Thor washing machines, rinsing clothes in the four stationary tubs and hanging them out to dry. There was always plenty of hot water on hand, furnished by a Heat-Pak water heater, and only the strongest of G.I. soaps was used for washing sweat-stained garments.

THE Laundry's rates were quite reasonable. The charge for washing a blanket was 25¢ and a bundle of clothing (any size) was wet-washed for only 15¢; a real bargain in any man's language. "The Quickest Service in the Islands" was the loud boast of the laundrymen. A bag of clothes taken to the laundry in the morning was always ready by noon of the same day. Clifton J. McNeese, SSML3c; * Frank L. Duda, Cox; Duncan J. McIntyre, WT3c and Frank J. Martin, Slc, were the men who did such a fine job of laundering for the officers and mates (and chiefs). The Laundry played a very useful part in the camp community because it enabled men to devote spare time to hobbies and recreation rather than to the tedious task of washing clothes.

NEXT door to the Laundry was Miller's Barber Shop, complete with shingle and candy-striped pole, swivel chair and razor strap, which had been in operation since the Unit's arrival at this base. Another SS man, Robert J. Miller, SSMB3c, a steady, easy-going fellow, was the proprietor. Bob worked six days a week in his shop and kept all his customers entertained with stories about his year with a construction company on the island of Trinidad. He was a top man in the field because he had been a barber for a good many years. Evidence of Bob's ability was his super-deluxe "10¢ Haircut", a scissors job that couldn't be beat at ten times the price. **

LAST but not least was the Tailor Shop, a one-man show featuring slim, dependable William V. Myers, SF3c, who made everything from ditty bags to jeep covers. Most of Bill's income for the store, however, came from doubling the lives of dungarees and shirts by sewing on patches and buttons. Bill was a welder by trade but he showed marked ability as a tailor, and served the Unit well in that capacity.

ALL of these shops, which provided for the "material wants" of the mates, were combined to form the Ship's Service Store. This activity proved its worth a thousand times during the Unit's sojourn in the Pacific. As for the men employed under Ship's Service, it was heartily agreed by the entire Unit that these men had done an outstanding job. It wasn't a job that was measured in dollars and cents, but rather the performance of a service that was beneficial to all.

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THE RECREATION DEPARTMENT was another part of the Unit which functioned entirely for the men. It was made up of many minor departments, all of which were operated under the guiding hand of Lt. Greger, the Recreation Officer. It was Mr. Greger who had made certain that the Unit's larder was filled with sports equipment, small games, fishing tackle, books, magazines, etc. before leaving the States. As it later developed, everything that had been brought along was used to good advantage by the mates.

A BALL PARK had been laid out and a Library and Hobby Shop built soon after the camp was set up. However, these facilities did not gain immediate prominence because of the newness of the environment, and the sights to be seen. Spare time during the first few months was spent visiting the front lines, Hill "700", the million dollar Lookout Tree, the beaches and the fresh water pools. Many men whiled away their idle hours by going out to the strip to watch the planes take off and land.

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* "Sleepy" McNeese became Head Man in the Laundry in the Spring of 1945 when Pop Teller left the outfit. Pop, aged 44, became eligible for transfer to inactive duty when the "Over 42" policy went into effect.

** After the turn of the year (1945), the Ship's Service Department was making so much money that it was decided to offer the services of Laundry and Barber Shop to the men free of charge.

It wasn't until November that the men of 582 began to get tired of seeing the same old sights and scenes and faces every day. When this happened they started casting about for something new to hold their interest. The unrest among the men was so noticeable that the Powers-That-Be appointed John M. Banker, CCN, as Recreation Chief and told him to give the sports activities a "shot in the arm".

FIRST thing Banker did was to call sports enthusiasts together for an open meeting in the Library. Quite a number of the men responded to this call, and the meeting was a huge success. The men talked over the matter of sports with Chief Banker and made suggestions and requests. One request was that a Sports Committee of enlisted men be set up to represent the entire Unit in all matters pertaining to recreation. An election was held for committeemen, and five popular sportsmen * were chosen for seats on this committee.

MORE open meetings followed the initial venture. Their purpose was to get further opinions and to give every man a chance to participate in the forthcoming sports programs. Then the Sports Committee held a closed session to draw up plans for the sports activities decided upon, and to set down field rules and regulations. After the first conference the members met at least once each week to consolidate their ideas and the wishes of the mates, and to arrange new contests and programs. Lt. Greger and Chief Banker sat in on many of these meetings and the cooperation manifested on the part of both officers and men led to the success of this democratic venture, and that was believed to be original among CBMUs.

AN Inter-Platoon Softball League was the first sports plan to be inaugurated by the representatives. Each platoon organized its own team, and a series of games were played to see which platoon had the best team. At the same time some much needed practice took place. Many of the men hadn't played ball for years, so they were able to use a preliminary workout. After the practice session and few exhibition games were played, the "Big Fracas" began. The same procedure was followed in this series as had been followed in the preliminaries. Each platoon team played against its six rival platoon teams. The winner of the series was awarded the title of Unit Champions. Platoon Three won the Preliminary Series and Platoon Six defeated all the others in the "Big Fracas" and became the Unit Champions.

EVERYONE who was interested in softball was able to play in the series. Not only were the best players fielded, but also the worst. There was a prize for the winning team that had all the men playing like hell. Five cases of cold, mellow, golden beer went to the Champs, and with such an incentive best efforts were put forth to be on the beer drinking team. Intense rivalry was very prevalent between the platoons, everybody was out for blood. The turnout for all games was exceptionally large. Every officer and man in the outfit not playing was an interested and agitated spectator. The cheering and razzing between the rooters for rival teams was such that it would have put an Army-Navy football classic to shame -- almost.

WITH the sport program sailing smoothly ahead, and interest much in evidence, another request was made of the committee. This request was for a large recreation building where, as the men put it, a lot of hell could be raised. The Sports Committeemen were in favor of the building (they liked to raise hell too), so they turned the request over the Chief Banker. Since Mr. Greger was absent at the time Banker presented it directly to Lt. O'Rourke. The men had asked for a tarp-covered structure or a large tent but the Skipper did much better than that by ordering the construction of a large Quonset hut, one and half times as long as a regular Quonset.

IN due time Pappy Hughes' carpenters had the building completed. It was located opposite the OOD's Office (just in case the boys got too boisterous). While the hut was still in the process of being set up a contest was held by the Jungle Journal for the purpose of naming this new Community Center. However, none of the names submitted were in keeping with the magnificence of the establishment. So the contest petered-out and Editor Kennedy drank the prize money -- five bottles of beer. For awhile the men called the new building "Pappy's House of Ill Repute". No one was able to figure out whether the name was honoring Pappy Hughes, the Builder, or Pappy O'Rourke, the Founder. So this name quickly faded out of the picture. After that, and for all time, the building was known simply as the Wreck Hut, a cockeyed abbreviation of Recreation Hut.

* Sports Committee members were: John K. Paul, James E. O'Neil, Stephen W. Giles, Howard F. Adams, Rondal E. Caldwell, Philip S. Kemp, Clifford P. Duarte and Ralph H. Kuehl.

INSIDE the hut the ceiling and upper part of the bulkheads were painted a distinctive shade of blue. The middle part of the bulkheads was open for ventilation and was covered with screening. Below the screening the bulkhead was cream-colored. Using white paint, Roy Styczkowski painted several murals on the blue section of the bulkheads. Some of his paintings were of men engaged in various types of sports, others were of naked and scantily-clad damsels pretending to be sportswomen. The furniture of the hut consisted of pingpong tables, two punching bags, a heavy bag, three felt covered tables with wooden benches, a piano and a cupboard that was filled with boxing gloves, small games and playing cards. Several dart boards hung at intervals around the walls.

THE piano, a small upright Gulbransen, was the Hut's crowning glory. It had been carefully packed and brought across seven thousand miles of ocean without being scratched or knocked out of tune. It reposed proudly in the corner of the Wreck Hut, the only piece of polished furniture in the outfit. And it belonged almost exclusively to one man, Albert E. Imrie, CM2c. Imrie, a pleasant, English born, correct spoken Seabee, was the Impresario of the Keyboard. He played entirely by ear and his memory had recorded hundreds of songs. Whenever he felt the urge (which was several times daily) Al would sit down to play, and no matter what song was requested, he could dig up the tune and he never failed to comply with a request.

ON showless nights Imrie was always on hand to brighten up the camp with music, and there were many strong, mellow voices anxious to join in on the vocals. On holidays, birthdays, whenever music was needed to bring good cheer, Al Imrie stepped forth willingly to offer his talents. Besides this, he played in several shows on the island and staged individual performances for patients in American and Australian hospitals. If Imrie ever received a Letter of Commendation for his piano playing, it would, in all probability, read: "The Recreation Department of CBMU 582 commends you, Albert Edward Imrie, for singular achievement in boosting morale, promoting welfare and providing first class entertainment for the men of this Unit."

THOMAS M. LYONS, CM3c, was another pianist who occasionally took a seat at the piano and gave forth with classics or swing. Tommy wasn't a "long hair" by any means but a song had to be smooth before he would play it. He was the boy with the magic touch and a sensitive ear. The only reason he didn't play more frequently was due to the scarcity of sheet music. He couldn't even play "Yankee Doodle" without the notes in front of him.

THE only other musically talented person of any prominence in the outfit was Thomas J. Ingrassia, S1c, New Orleans' husky, swarthy, curly-headed gift to the Music World. Tommy, better known as Dago, was the Master of Jive and Basin Street. His rhythm was strictly from hunger. The remarkable thing about this boy was that he had never seen a piano before coming into the Seabees, yet in a few short months of overseas duty he had mastered the intricacies of sharps and flats. He could bag out those low-down tunes with the ease of an accomplished musician. He could also pound out the same ditty louder and longer than a song plugger in Tin Pan Alley. To the chiefs, who slept within spitting distance of the Hut, Dago was a "pain in the butt", however, the mates considered him as the "Eighth Wonder of the World".

BY far the main feature of the Wreck Hut, discounting the piano, was the Coffee Shop. This was the brainchild of Michael J. Thomas, SF1c, and Peter J. Gray, SF3c. These two men missed the hot dog stands and hamburger joints that used to be their haunts so badly that they went to Lt. Greger and asked permission to install a light lunch stand in a corner of the recreation building. Once official sanction was obtained, Mike and Pete went ahead with their plans. They made the rounds of the Marine camps and returned laden with a coffee urn, enough coffee for a regiment, several cases of canned milk, a couple sacks of white sugar (a scarce item), and a bunch of cups and spoons.

THEIR next step was to get ready for the clientele. Mike's experience as a plumber helped considerably because he went right to work and set up the urn, built a sink out of sheet metal and ran a water line to the sink. Then the proprietors talked Danny Minihan and Arnold Ochoa into building a drainboard, a cabinet, a counter, some butt boxes and some high stools for the diminutive customers. With that finished the store was opened for business.

PETE GRAY, former strip repairman, plumber, cop, M.A.A., bank guard and beer drinker extraordinary, became Manager of the new establishment, and Bob Wills (Robert L. Wills, MEM2c) was appointed to the Assistant Manager-ship. Pete and Bob split the work day between them. A steady stream of coffee, in cups of course, was kept flowing across the counter all day long. Morning, afternoon and night the Coffee Shop was crowded. Business boomed, and as it did so, Mike Thomas, the Supply Manager for the concern, was kept busy scaring up more and more supplies for the goshawfullest bunch of coffee drinkers on the wrong side of the Pacific.

COFFEE wasn't the only item that went across the counter. Three times a week Pete, Mike, Bob and a crew of Red Cross Workers (Pete's nickname for all volunteers) fried up a mess of donuts that were really superb in taste and quality. These fellows should have come into the Seabees as Belly robbers, they sure could cook. And what a contraption they used for a stove. A frame was built around a blow pot and a big kettle set atop the frame; that was the stove. Everything was done on a large scale. The donut dough was mixed in a huge steel basin, rolled on an eight foot by four foot section of plywood and cut to pattern with an instrument turned out by the Machine Shop, which looked like a hub cap from a Ford V8. For deep fat several pounds of Aussie butter (canned) was melted down and the donuts were dropped into this solution.

AS soon as the aroma of cooking filled the Hut the crowds began to gather. A guard was needed to keep the drooling onlookers from grabbing donuts right out of the pan. When the donuts had become browned they were set over the sink so that the fat could drain off, then they were dipped into a pan of powdered sugar, piled into trays and placed on the counter. That was when the fun began. Everybody and his brother made a dive for the delicious looking confections. "Get 'em while they're hot!" the counter men shouted. But even after the rush was over there were still plenty left. The boys never wanted anyone to feel cheated so they made enough for everybody. Even the Skipper got his share.

THE nicest thing that Pete Gray ever did on donut-making days was to put away a pan or two of fried cakes for the following morning. It was in the morning that these delicacies were most enjoyed. Especially so on Sunday mornings when a good many of the men slept late. It was quite convenient to hop over the Coffee Shop about nine and be able to get a breakfast of coffee and donuts. Missing breakfast became a habit on donut mornings because a guy could always get his fill at Pete Gray's Place.

ALONG about the time that the first softball series was coming to an end, a Baseball Club was organized. Tryouts were held, teams lined up, and then several evenings a week devoted to practice. Once the boys had been warmed up and a string of dependable pitchers worked into shape, the team was ready to go on the road. A few exhibition games were played, after which the Hardballers entered the Island League. They played in two series, won the Island Championship in the first series, and defended it successfully in the second.

WHEN it came to fast-steppers these boys were IT. Almost all of them were potential big leaguers. They could hit, run, pitch and field with the best in the business. Their record wins during the Bougainville season was almost unblemished. They won twenty-six games out of twenty-eight. Since most of the games were played on the home grounds, which was the biggest and flattest field on the island, the Seabee Baseball Club * had a large rooting section. It had the Unit behind it to a man, and knowing this the players put their hearts into every game. That was why they had the best team in the League.

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* The members of the Seabee Baseball Club were:
William G. Hodgins, Sr., Robert J. Lamneck, Thomas A. DeLaney, Howard F. Adams, Fred Mitchell, Robert A. McAuliffe, Albert D. Safallo, Everette E. Lanpher, Hubert R. Brown, Rondal E. Caldwell, Philip S. Kemp, Harold F. McNutt, Robert A. Mangene, John R. Ashburn and Robert W. Merritt.

NATURALLY, with only nine men on a team, everyone couldn't play with the ball club. There were several reserves, of course, but the rest of the men had to look elsewhere for sports activities. These sportsmen contented themselves with playing softball, badminton, horseshoes, volleyball, basketball and pingpong; also checkers, dominoes and chess. Softball, basketball and volleyball were the most popular because they gave a large number of men an opportunity to play. There were many pickup and inter-platoon games played in these sports, and Unit Teams were also formed to meet teams from other outfits. These teams did very well for the Unit, and although the 582 athletes didn't win every game, they certainly always put up the best possible fight.

FOR some unknown reason boxing never enjoyed much prominence in the Unit. Perhaps it was the heat, maybe the men liked each other too well for slugfests, or it could be that they didn't know anything about fighting according to rules. Whatever the reason, only a few matches were put on within the outfit. These were called the Midnight Boxing Bouts and were held out beyond the clotheslines, near the edge of the jungle. Admission to these pugilistic encounters was by invitation only, and the prizes for winners and losers alike were Captain's Masts (if they were caught). Needless to say, the bouts were not sponsored.

TAKING a library of three hundred books (primarily pocket books) and enlarging it into a 3,000 volume booklovers paradise was Manny Ehrlich's (Emanuel Ehrlich, CM3c) contribution to the Unit during the time he was Librarian. Manny, college graduate and former schoolmaster in New York City, was assigned to the Library when it was still quartered in a tarp-covered shack and was nothing more than an issue room. However, when the Quonset huts were built, one was set aside for the Library, and books, magazines and athletic gear were moved into the new building.

THE new Library quarters was also to be a Reading Room so Ehrlich drew up plans for utility tables, shaded lighting fixtures attached along the center of the tables, benches, equipment storage shelves and six large bookcases. Then the carpenters stepped in and in a few days had completed the necessary construction. Ehrlich, taking over from there, arranged the furniture, stocked the shelves and bookcases and covered the walls with maps and a really choice collection of pin-up gals. Next he went to work on the library itself. By procuring, trading and borrowing (without intention of returning) this energetic, fast-talking, spectacled student of social science filled his shelves with old books and new until the number reached the 3,000 mark, providing the mates with more books than they could possibly read while overseas.

IN addition to library duties and issuing sports equipment, Ehrlich handled the Education Department. He recommended courses to fit the future plans of individuals, filled in applications for courses and helped students with their "homework". When courses were completed, he administered final tests, then handled the mailing of completed examinations. * So, even in the Seabees Mr. Ehrlich followed his trade to a certain extent, which is more than a lot of men can say.

BOOKS weren't the only item that Ehrlich acquired for the Recreation Department, nor was he the only one who did the procuring. Whenever there was a scarcity in any type of equipment, Mr. Greger, Chief Banker or Ehrlich went out on a mission which always brought back the goods. In addition to procuring, quarterly allotments for recreation purposes came through from the Navy Department. With these allotments the department was able to purchase new equipment to replace the stock that had been worn out, lost or broken, or had just rotted away.

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* Some 300 odd courses were taken by about a hundred men in the Unit. Most of the courses were U. S. Armed Forces Institute courses. Final examinations for credit were given in sixty of these courses. The administration of the tests were duly proctored (by Ehrlich) under conditions that were as agreeable as was possible under existing conditions. A few men who had taken these correspondence courses had accumulated enough credits to be eligible for high school diplomas.

IN a sense, the Photo Lab was also included in the Recreation Department. Officially it was part of the Administration Department, but Al Lamber, the Photographer, had many rolls of film and a quantity of printing paper on hand that had been purchased with recreation funds. Out of this supply of film and paper, Limey (Lambert) was able to take two snapshots of each man in the outfit and a group picture of each of the seven platoons. Every man was given one print of his platoon picture, one print of each of his own snapshots, as well as the snapshot negatives. Most of these pictures were sent home so that the folks back there could see how well their men were standing up under the grueling heat of the Tropics.

TAKEN as a whole, the Recreation Department encompassed many miscellaneous departments. It took in the Jungle Journal, Sports Activities, Wreck Hut, Radio, Palace Theatre, Library, Education Program and anything else that would benefit the men morally, physically or mentally; and kept many men steadily employed caring for these facilities. * The Recreation Department functioned solely for the purpose of maintaining a high standard of morale within the Unit. In this it had succeeded splendidly, and at the same time had rendered an invaluable service to the men by keeping them from becoming despondent during the long, weary months overseas.

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THE Jap Barge, which the Seabees had helped transform into a fishing boat, was given to CBMU 582 by Col. Frederick, Commanding Officer of the 129th Infantry Regiment, when that outfit embarked for Luzon. This final gesture was in appreciation of the work done by the Seabees for the One-Two-Nine while it was stationed on Bougainville. While the 129th was boarding its transports, Frank Toenniessen, newly appointed Skipper of the craft, operated a shuttle for the Army officers, and he made many trips to the transports carrying small cargo.

AFTER the One-Two-Nine left, the boat was put into drydock. Bob Wheatley and Walter Hoag built a cabin and deck on the boat. The engine was overhauled, boxed and the entire ship was painted a slate gray. The cabin, deck and paint job transformed the boat still further from the battered looking barge that had been hauled out of the mouth of the Laruma River. Whereas before the reconditioning it had a blunt, ugly appearance, after it was rebuilt it had graceful lines that made it a thing of beauty. In fact, it looked like a brand new boat, and since it was the property of CBMU 582 it was rechristened. Its new name was the U. S. S. SEABEE.

THE launching of the SEABEE took place in mid-December. The boat was assigned a four-man crew **, which was broken up into a port and starboard watch, each twenty-four hours long. While one watch remained on board (hammocks, a cook stove and water barrel were included in the gear) the other watch returned to camp to shower and eat some decent chow. As soon as the boat had proven its seaworthiness, an operative schedule was drawn up. The enlisted men were given the use of the SEABEE five days of every week. The officers had it on Sunday; and Monday was allotted to the crew for making repairs.

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* Men not listed above but who also served hitches with the Recreation Dept. were: William G. Hodgins, WT2c; William H. Heinz, Slc; John H. Curtright, CEN; Julian C. Anderson, CCM; Albert E. Imrie, CM2c; George J. McMahill, Slc; Daniel R. Minihan, CM2c; Robert H. Losch, Slc; Harold F. Kleidosty, CM3c; Howard R. Leonard, CM2c; John K. Paul, Mlc; Harold F. McNutt, CM2c; Everette E. Lanpher, CM3c and Murray Starobin, EM2c. Starobin, in addition to his duties on the Electric Detail, operated the movie projectors at the Palace.

** Those who served aboard the SEABEE at various times were: Frank Toenniessen, Pat Long, Alex Csernyik, Dick Schmidt, Archie Ludington, Herman Voss, Tommy Atkinson, Jim Kincaid, Henry Knowles, Walter Hoag and Jay W. Shaeffer.

THERE were two runs made daily -- one in the morning, the other in the afternoon -- and the procedure was the same on each run. After the passengers boarded the SEABEE at Beach Four, the anchor was lifted and a course set for the Magine Islands, which were reached after a forty-five minute ride up the coast. The Magines, two tiny fingertips of land piercing the blue waters of the bay, laid about two miles off the main shore. They were covered with coconut palms, scrub grass, elephant's ears and a variety of undergrowth. Both islands were fringed with white sandy beaches over which the waves had strewn giant handfuls of colored coral beaches. Only the absence of alluring tawny-skinned maidens, inadequately clad, kept the setting from being an enchanting South Sea Islands paradise.

CONSIDERABLE maneuvering was required to beach the boat on the larger of the two islands. An almost fathomless channel separated one island from the other. The craft was navigated into this passage, then steered into a picturesque little cove, care being taken not to run aground on the coral reefs which grew from the ocean's floor to within a few feet of the surface. When the SEABEE'S nose was pushed into the sand, the passengers hastily undressed and slid over the side. More than an hour was then spent swimming in the crystal-clear water, diving for cat-eyes, or searching the beach for shells and odd shaped bits of coral that had been washed ashore.

ALL too soon it was return to camp so everyone climbed aboard, the engine was started and the arduous task of backing out of the cove undertaken. In the channel the SEABEE was pointed toward home. After the return trip was made the passengers were set ashore on the pontoon docks, located on the lee side of Torokina Point, and the boat was anchored offshore. So ended an experience that would be long remembered for its novelty and the beauties that had been seen.

SOMETIMES when a morning of fishing was desired the SEABEE went far out into the bay. This enabled the fishermen to use the Unit's fine collection of poles and tackle. Trolling was the only method ever tried and was great sport, but the profits derived from the sea were never of sufficient quantity to warrant mentioning.

TRANSPORTING construction gangs to and from cargo ships on which 582 had been issued work assignments was another function of the SEABEE. And while making these trips the crew on more than one occasion picked up men who had fallen overboard from anchored ships. Then, too, during unexpected squalls the SEABEE'S crew was called upon repeatedly to rescue men from small vessels which had broken away from their buoys, and were floundering in the sea.

REGARDLESS of whether CBMU 582's flagship was effecting rescues in the storm tossed harbor, or plying through the serene waters of the bay on a pleasure cruise, it was strange indeed to think that this peaceful craft had once been a Jap barge carrying combat troops on missions of death and destruction.

THE titles Welfare Department and Recreation Department were synonymous. In fact, officially, the departments came under the same heading, Welfare and Recreation Department, which had as financial backing a Welfare Fund consisting of a moderate sum of money allotted to the Unit by the navy Department. Out of this fund came the money for the purchase of all recreation gear and for making loans to enlisted personnel who were in dire straits. It was the lending of financial aid to the men, therefore, that characterized the main difference between the two departments, or between two units of the same department.

ANOTHER difference was that the Welfare Department arranged, through the proper channels; ie, the Officer in Charge, short leaves for men who wished to visit relatives serving in the Southwest Pacific Area. The men fortunate enough to get off the "rock" for a few days were:

- 1) Louis E. "Pop" Hewitt, CM2c, who visited his son, John H., AMM(H)2c, stationed at the time of the reunion on Guadalcanal.
- 2) Desmond A. Ryan, MM1c, rejoined his father, Alfred J. (CSF-Seabees) at Banika, Russell Islands.
- 3) John L. Whited, EM1c, weekended with sister Ruth at Espiritu Santo, and
- 4) Philip S. Kemp, CM3c, wasu nited with brother Frank (Frank A. Kemp, Capt. USMC, 6th Marine Division) on board ship at Guadalcanal.

THE officers also got leaves. Lt. O'Rourke revisited his son, Paul, at Emerald Island for a few days in September. In October Lt. Greger and Lt. Broadhurst enjoyed, together, a ten days "recreational leave" in Australia and a month later Chief Warrant Officer Holsinger spent ten days on the Mainland. * Transportation for all leaves was furnished by the Marines. Visitors travelled to and from destinations on SCAT planes, C-47 Douglas Transports.

THE rest of the outfit labored for a time under the supposition that the entire Unit would get a "recreational leave" after completion of nine months jungle duty. Their grounds for this belief was a Navy Department "Circular Letter" which authorized this type of leave (in some cases). Using the "Cir-Ltr" as his authority the Skipper made formal application for this leave for CBMU 582. Parts of the letter were put on the Bulletin Board for the information of the mates and hopes were high at the thought of seeing civilization, and WOMEN, once again. Some men were even so bold as to dig out dress blues and wash them in anticipation of the coming frolic "Down Under."

HOWEVER, a later Circular Letter superceding the leave authorization communication cancelled all leaves for Naval personnel in Australia or New Zealand, excepting recuperation and/or rehabilitation leaves. So, the disgruntled mates sadly returned dress uniforms to seabags and resigned themselves dejectedly to the fate of spending another year (or two) on the beautiful island of Bougainville.

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THE two remaining departments of CBMU 582, the Galley and the Sick Bay, might (with tongue in cheek) also be classified as part of the Welfare Dept. They functioned for the welfare of the men, but that department never laid claim to either the Galley or Sick Bay. The Galley, all too frequently called Belly Robbers Paradise or Holsinger's Hash House **, was located about one fourth of a mile due west from the camp proper. Why so far away? It had been the 36th Battalion's chow hall and was still located in their old area.

CHARLES K. CARNEY, CCS, was the Major-domo of an establishment which included galley, chow hall, chiefs' mess, commissary storeroom and warehouse, storkeepers' tent *** and several reefers. Jake (Carney's nickname) had jurisdiction over a large crew of cooks and bakers ****, a group of men who could throw together a meal fit for a king (better make that a Duke) when, and if, they had the ingredients. These men, hardworkers all, toiled long hours feeding the men of 582, and there was nothing exciting or spectacular about standing over a hot cook stove stirring beans all day.

HOWEVER, by far the worst job over which Jake had control were those of the Mess Cooks. These lads were pulled from the Seamen ranks to serve food and to do all the cleaning in the galley and the mess halls. They worked at this job for a period of three months, then were assigned to construction or maintenance gangs. As far as one group left a new batch of "cookies" were brought in for indoctrination of Lacy Wright, who was Galley Captain and slave driver, but still a fine fellow.

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* Chief Warrant Officer Joseph D. Cowan (CEC-USNR) had been transferred to the Naval Construction Battalion in September. A letter from "Uncle Joe" addressed to the Unit arrived many months later. It disclosed that his outfit had been one of the first Seabee Battalions to make a D-Day landing on Leyte. It stated that Mr. Cowan had weathered the storm satisfactorily, was in good health and fine mettle, but missing the "Old Gang".

** Mr. Holsinger was the Commissary Officer.

*** Galley personnel: Baumeister, Betterly, Hubert R. Brown, Haney, Kerbow, "Harry" Lafazanos, Joe Marino, Mitchell, Ben Running, Sid Self, Bob Feller, Febernat, Piper (the stoveman) and Bobi Reichman (ice cream machine operator).

**** Art Mang was the Commissary Storekeeper and he shared this tent with Ben Running, who ran the ice cream plant. Art was the former Arthur W. Mang, longtime employee of the Chase National Bank of New York. In addition to his banking duties Art was also the Draft Clerk

THE food situation varied like the stock market, it had its ups and downs. For the first few months on the island, dinners and suppers were mostly C-Rations (meat and vegetable stew), baked beans, canned meats, vegetables and fruits, and occasionally some fresh mutton or lamb. Ice cream was a rarity but bread was plentiful and cakes were good. Breakfasts never got beyond the leaden pancakes, french toast, powdered eggs and sow-belly bacon during the entire tour of duty; and drinks were always the same too. They were coffee (putrid), lemonade (battery acid), grapefruit juice (torpedo juice), coca (cold, liquid mud), ice water (delicious) and fresh milk (a fantasy).

THEN for a period of approximately eight months (the middle part of the Unit's isolation from civilization) the food got better. In fact, it reached a peak of quality, quantity, excellence and variety. It was strictly OK!

The Galley boys were treated with reverence, their culinary abilities respected. They were the most popular "joes" in the outfit. They wallowed in this glory, lapped it up like cream, and instead of getting worse their cooking got better. They were no longer "hash slingers"; they were CHEFS!

THE supply ships came often and brought with the delicacies such as a prospective father craves during the early period of his wife's pregnancy. Steaks, chops and roasts of beef were prepared in such a manner they almost melted in your mouth. Bread, cakes, pies and cookies, baked with fresh flour and yeast, were so buoyant they would have floated like balloons had they not been anchored to the table.

FRESH butter helped to improve the taste of pancakes and french toast, a little. Hydraulics (dehydrated potatoes, etc.) were replaced by the more edible Irish and Idaho potatoes, and mashed, boiled or fried spuds were enjoyed until the potato sack was empty.

THERE were plenty of fresh vegetables such as beans, lettuce, cabbage, onions and carrots, with emphasis on the cabbage. They were quite nutritious and replaced bodily deficiencies with much needed vitamins, as did the fresh fruits that arrived in abundance. In this case, the word fruits means apples. Furthermore, someone discovered a god mine of canned milk so once each day, a creamy, fluffy concoction known as ice cream was liberally piled into the center section of each man's tray.

WHILE such tasty dinners and suppers were being served the men were content, almost happy. They were proud of their cooks, proud of their outfit and proud of their Navy. The fame of Seabee chow spread over the island like wildfire. Doggie and Leatherneck friends, invited to break bread with the Seabees, were aghast at the fine, heaping trays set before them.

ALWAYS perfect gentlemen, the Seabees invited almost every serviceman with whom they became acquainted home for dinner. Before long, Chief Carney was feeding almost a hundred men more than his food allotments permitted, so restrictions had to be made. Only twenty guests were allowed to eat at the Chow Hall on Saturdays or Sundays. No guest limitations were put on week days because everyone was working and had little time for visiting.

BESIDES the 582 Seabees there were many representatives of other branches of the Service who frequented the Seabee Chow Hall. They were Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, transient Seabees, Aussies, New Zealanders, Merchant Marines and Fiji scouts. Also, natives were served leftovers from the rear door. In general, the comments of Seabees and visitors alike boiled down to something like: "The best damn chow this side of the ocean", to which the cooks and bakers shouted happily and egotistically, "A-men!"

ALAS! All good things must come to an end. The war moved across the Pacific to the Philippines and with it went the supply ships. Much of the American personnel left the island for forward assignments and someone in Washington lost the thumb tack or tiny flag which represented CBMU 582 on the map. 582 became the forgotten outfit! It was left the shift for itself. Slowly the fresh meat and food stores diminished and then, one day in February 1945, the Galley went back to hydraulics.

EACH day that passed the food seemed to get steadily worse. Cuisine, no matter how well it was camouflaged and prepared, was still not tasty. A man had to be practically starving before he could eat dishes such as Vienna sausage, corn willy, C-Rations, baked beans, spaghetti, chili, powdered eggs, dehydrated fruits, vegetables and potatoes, canned butter, hash, salmon patties, canned chicken, sow-belly, canned pork sausage and Spam, Spam and more SPAM. Only canned fruits and an occasional pair of fresh eggs (flown from Australia by SCAT planes) kept them strong enough to be able to bitch about the rest of the food, which was eaten automatically.

FOR some reason (not hard to imagine) Dogfaces and Leathernecks politely turned down invitations to eat in the 582 chow hall. A merchant mariner was heard to remark that never again would he eat supper with a Seabee outfit. The meal that night had been spaghetti and chili (mixed). Often the men went to chow for the walk (sic times a day that quarter mile was covered), and many were the times that the men hit the sack during chow time instead. The question, "What's for chow?" was heard less frequently because the inquisitors knew the answer would be, "Th' same ole crap!"

MEN with stomachs approaching the ulcerated stage sometimes would tell of the delightful supper they'd had which included an atabrine tablet, a cup of water and a slice of bread and jelly. But the rest of the men who were in better shape constitutionally were somehow able to consume enough to keep going until the next meal, which it was hoped would be more appetizing.

THE bakers had their troubles too. The flour went bad, the yeast grew old. Bread and cakes became as heavy as cast iron; pancakes had always been heavy. Weevils began to appear in the bread in ever increasing numbers. At first the men held the slices of bread up to the light (this was a common sight at the chow table) and picked out the bugs. One feller, a funny duck, lined his bugs up in platoon formation on the table. However, as time went by most of the fellows became accustomed to the weevils and began eating them along with the bread.

ONE thing they drew the line on though was grasshoppers in the pancakes. When that happened (and it frequently did), he forgot thrift, threw the pancake away and went back for another. The war certainly took the squeamishness out of a man -- or did it?

FORTUNATELY the supply of canned milk never petered out. Ben Running, the Good Humor Man, continued to furnish the outfit with a daily ration of ice cream. When Chief Carney was asked why ice cream was served daily, he inevitably replied: "Gosh! We gotta give the mates at least one item that's fit to eat." So, ice cream instead of bread became the "staff of life". It provided an inexhaustable source of nourishment, and the cooks were never scrimpy with the stuff. They gave a man all he could eat. Ice cream was not a luxury; it was a necessity. A monument should be erected to the concocter of this tasty dish, the dessert that saved the lives of the 582.

AH, but wait! The picture isn't as bad as it has been painted. Two incidents occurred in the spring of the year which did much to change the average Seabee's outlook on life. The first incident was a refrigerated ship headed for other ports which had to put into Empress Aususta Bay because its reefer system was out of commission. And, it was loaded with fresh meat!

CALL it jetsam or flotsam if you like, but whatever the cause, tons of meat were unloaded and distributed among the various outfits on the island. CBMU 582 got its share and the men's craving for STEAK was satisfied, but not satiated. The wolf was staved away from the door for another few weeks.

THE second flicker of light shining through the dreary darkness was another supply ship. This one, however, had been sent directly to the island with an abundance of meat aboard. To make certain they would get a share of these provisions the Seabees helped to unload the ship. 582's apportionment of the cargo was enough to enable Carney to serve meat once a day for about a month.

INTEREST in meals perked up again, and once more the attractively worded men that Jake hung each week on the Bulletin Board, was consulted. There was one Chef's surprise listed for each day. It would be one of the following: Pork chops, steaks, Southern friend chicken, turkey, ham, hamburgers, stateside frankfurters or stateside bacon. * However, when the month was over and the meat gone, the men again sank to their former state of apathy. Still, there was always a little spark of hope glowing within them. They prayed for another cargo ship, laden with tempting viands, but it never appeared.

NO doubt, the cooks and bakers felt the fresh food shortage and meat famines more acutely than anyone else. They tried their damndest to serve the best meals they could with what they had in the Commissary at the time. It wasn't their fault they didn't have the wherewithal to make every meal a gastronomical delight. They did their jobs well and were as essential to the successful operation of the Unit as were the strip repairmen, equipment operators or carpenters.

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GOING to and from the Chow Hall one always passed the Sick Bay where Doc Gerardi made his residence during working hours. This institution dispensed first aid to the men of the outfit and performed minor surgery. At least ten percent of the personnel were treated daily for colds, headaches, dysentary, constipation, sorethroats, skin abrasions, minor cuts or dermatitis; so the "pill-pushers" were kept quite busy.

CHUBBY, dowager-necked, competent Pharmacist's Mate Eugene J. Gerardi (a former undertaker) held "sick call" every morning and evening, and in addition to his office hours remained subject to call twenty-four hours a day. In case of an emergency, Doc administered to the stricken person's immediate needs, then if the case was a serious one he transported the patient to the hospital, staying with him until he had been put to bed. In all such instances, Gerardi's calmness and bedside manner would have done credit to a registered physician.

AS a first-aid station, the spotlessly clean, white-washed Sick Bay or Dispensary was more like a small hospital. Its equipment consisted of a sterilizer, operating table, heat lamp, other miscellaneous equipment, an assortment of instruments and well-stocked medicine cabinets.

into the Sick Bay went men with all manner of diseases peculiar to the Tropics, and many with illnesses not unknown to the civilized world. In all cases too serious for him to handle Dock sent his mates to either the Navy, Army, Marine or Australian Hospital, whichever was handling the Unit's personnel at the time.

WHEN aofrward assignment (a second assignment) seemed imminent, the Sick Bay dug out hypos and serums to inoculate the men against Cholera, Plague and Typhus, and to administer booster shots to supplement those inoculations given in the States whose effectiveness had worn off. In this large scale operation Gerardi worked under the supervision of a Navy physician and was aided by the other corpsmen. **

A SIMPLE tribute to the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery is made when it is stated that the men never lacked for anything insofar as their health was concerned. Throughout CBMU 582's lengthy stay on Bougainville, medical, dental, psychiatric and optometric facilities were always available, and were the best that the Allied Armed Forces had to offer.

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* To differentiate between canned Vienna sausage and sow-belly bacon, which were products of Lend-Lease, and the higher grade fresh bacon and hotdogs which came from the U. S., the term "stateside" is used.

** Dr. Sullivan G. Bedell, Lt. Comdr., USN-NC (Ret.), psychiatrist and general practitioner, visited the Sick Bay daily, and Albert Lannutti, PhM3c, and Ray Gillson, PhM3c, detached from a Naval Hospital Cub Unit, rounded out the Dispensary staff. Other corpsmen who were attached to the Sick Bay for short periods of time were CPhM William F. McGillen and CPhM Glen Loveland.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

- THE HOLIDAY SEASON -

CHRISTMAS 1944. The chapel was small, canvas-covered and earthen floored. At Midnight Mass or early morning Services the men paid simple homage. There were no stained glass windows, statues or incense. The men prayed in semi-darkness, the only light coming from tiny wax candles. There was no snow, no pine trees glistening with a thousand drops of whiteness, no mistletoe or holly, no gay throngs, no Christmas carols floating through the crisp clear air.

INSTEAD there was a musty smell from the dampness of the earth and the proximity of the jungle. When the sun rose it disclosed a hot, damp cheerless camp, and two hundred and fifty guys who were miserably homesick.

CHRISTMAS 1944 was going to be a flop! Then the indomitable will of the Seabees saved the day. Careful planning by the Welfare Department with the wholehearted cooperation of the Sports Committee resulted in the formation of an entertainment program which made the cheerless day one of festivities.

TRUCKS were scheduled for an early run to the beach, and surf-loving Seabees piled in to make a full load. Lying around on the hot sand, swimming in the calm, blue ocean and gazing at a palm-lined shore was some compensation. Nostalgia was somewhat sublimated to the thought that here was something they had never done before on Christmas. Swimming at Christmastime was new to them, and they made the most of it in their letters to snowbound folks at home.

...THE time flew by, and the men returned for chow. They were in better spirits when they got back to camp. A quick shower, and a change into clean dungarees was made, and soon the entire camp began to drift over to the Chow Hall.

A REAL surprise was ready for the men. The cooks had prepared a genuine Christmas dinner! Turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, giblet gravy, cranberry sauce, pease and bread and butter. For dessert there was ice cream, brandied fruit cake, dates, nuts and figs. A three piece band played the current favorites of themen during the meal and cigars and cigarettes were furnished with the coffee. That completed the meal and there had been plenty for everybody. Chief Commissary Steward Carney was proclaimed another "Oscar of the Waldorf". The men left the chow hall with the most pleasant of sensations — a full stomach!

CHRISTMAS afternoon saw the real beginning of the day's activities. Friends were visited. The heavy eaters took naps. More parties went to the beach. A truckload or two went for a tour of the perimeter. Bottles of holiday spirits were brought out and imbibers took deep draughts of the demon rum. With the aid of the free issue of beer, and bottles which had been cached away for this day, dull spirits became buoyant. "Have a drink" became the password of the day. A Roman Holiday air prevailed. And while a few of the men became boozey, and one or two bibulous characters disappeared, most of the lads stayed within bounds and had one helluva good time.

THE sports activities arranged by the Committee consisted of foot racing, ball throwing, a volleyball game and a hardball game. The Seabee Ball Club went up against another outfit's crack team for the Championship of the Island. It was a pitchers' battle with Phil Kemp laying thirteen strikeouts across the plate. The game ended 3 to 2 for another 582 victory.

YE OLDE JUNGLE JOURNAL did itself proud by publishing a six-page, three-color, finely illustrated "Holiday Edition", and Ralph Kennedy also printed a Christmas Program. Highlighted in the program was a message to the mates from Lt. O'Rourke. It read:

"As the year 1944 nears its end, and we take account of its events, I am proud of the accomplishments of the Unit, and heartily appreciate the cooperation, loyalty and effort of each of you.

I sincerely wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

/s/ "The Skipper"

THE evening's doings included a movie, followed by music, singing and drinking in the Wreck Hut. With the day's festivities ended, the men started (with some coaxing) to drift off to bed. Shortly after everyone was in his sack and the lights turned out after Taps had sounded, a group of the boys, led by Hubert Brown playing his guitar, visited every hut and sang Christmas Carols. It was a final gesture on the part of these fellows to squeeze into the departing Holiday a bit of comradeship and "Peace On Earth". The hymn "Silent Night" floated through the quiet, darkened huts, hung suspended for a long moment in the damp air, then died away in the tree tops.

WHEN the singers departed the Bougainville jungle closed in on the camp. The mosquitoes hissed and the river churned over the rocks on its way to the ocean. As fatigue enveloped the huts the men dropped off to sleep. Their thoughts were of previous Christmases, the prevailing wish of all was, "Let's hope next Christmas will be spent at home with our loved ones."

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THE NEW YEAR was heralded by more hell-raising and heat and dust and rain. January also brought with it the first anniversary of the commissioning of CBMU 582 as a Unit. The first Maintenance Unit to be formed at Port Hueneme! The first Maintenance Unit to be assigned to a forward area! And in the minds of officers and men, the best damned Maintenance Unit in the United States Navy.

ON 15th January the men of CBMU 582 gathered in the Wreck Hut to celebrate the Unit's birthday. A birthday cake, five layers high, had been baked by Will Baumeister and Sid Self, and in pink letters on white icing appeared the legend, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY * CBMU 582". Coffee was served and it was help yourself to the cake, so every man had his fill.

WHILE refreshments were being enjoyed, Al Imrie officiated at the piano for the vocal efforts of the gang. Good will, back-slapping and genteel bullthrowing was prevalent. Cherry Williams, assisted by Eddie Graham, staged an impromptu floor show which ended amid whistles, cat-calls and spontaneous pleas for encores.

THE men were in high spirits for they had just completed a good year. They had received a very interesting assignment and had carried out their work in a splendid manner. There were no complaints on that score. They had one of the finest -- if not THE finest -- camps in the Southwest Pacific Area. Their quarters, recreational and library facilities were beyond comparison. They had everything they wanted, under existing circumstances, and had built what they had with their own hands. This was reason enough for satisfaction and thankfulness, and their only hopes were that they would fare as well in the future.

THEIR thankfulness was especially strong when they thought that in the entire year they had not lost a single man. Yes, men had been evacuated, because of illness or inability to stand up under the herculean pace, but not one man had been killed or seriously hurt as the result of an accident.

NOR had the Unit lost men to the enemy, lathough the proximity of the enemy to the camp at times resulted in lack of sleep for some of the seamen, despite the adequate guard detail. Truly, in view of all the work done, the risks involved, the accomplishments the outfit could look back upon, the factthat not one man had been killed, wounded or accidentally injured was a marvelous thing indeed. Perhaps it was the work of God Himself.

THE Skipper, although adverse to stump speeches and flowery parade ground oratory, wished to congratulate the men for a job "well done" during the past year, and for the splendid spirit shown throughout the Unit's operational part in the Bougainville Campaign. Choosing the front page of the Jungle Journal's Anniversary Edition as a means of communicating his thoughts to each man in this outfit, he said:

"ON THE EVE OF OUR FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMMISSIONING OF OUR UNIT, I, AS YOUR SKIPPER, WISH TO CONVEY MY THANKS AND APPRECIATION TO EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU FOR THE FINE JOB YOU HAVE DONE, AND THE EXCELLENT TEAMWORK DISPLAYED IN THE PERFORMANCE OF YOUR DUTY.

MOST OF THE MEMBERS OF THIS UNIT WERE FIRST ASSIGNED TO A BATTALION ON 26 AUGUST 1943. UPON THE FORMATION OF OUR UNIT, 15 JANUARY 1944, MEN FROM OTHER BATTALIONS WERE WELCOMED TO ROUND OUT THE FIRST CBMU TO BE COMMISSIONED AT PORT HUENEME.

IN CARRYING OUT OUR PRESENT ASSIGNMENT, YOUR EFFORTS HAVE BEEN VITALLY IMPORTANT IN ASSISTING OUR FORCES IN NEUTRALIZING THE ENEMY IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY. YOU HAVE MAINTAINED ALL FACILITIES CONTINUOUSLY, AND NUMEROUS EMERGENCIES HAVE BEEN OVERCOME IN THE SHORTEST POSSIBLE TIME.

ALL THE OFFICERS APPRECIATE THE WHOLEHEARTED SPIRIT OF COOPERATION DISPLAYED DURING THE LAST YEAR, ESPECIALLY SINCE UNDERTAKING OUR PRESENT JOB. IT IS WITH A FEELING OF PRIDE AND SATISFACTION THAT I REVIEW OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS WHICH WERE ONLY MADE POSSIBLE BY YOUR ABILITY AS A TEAM TO GET THE JOB DONE. OUR RECORD TO DATE CLEARLY INDICATES THAT WE HAVE THE BEST OUTFIT OF ITS TYPE IN THE NAVY.

THEREFORE, ON THIS FIRST ANNIVERSARY, I CAN ONLY SAY THAT IF PAST PERFORMANCES ARE THE YARDSTICK BY WHICH WE MEASURE THE FUTURE, THERE IS NOT A DOUBE IN MY MIND THAT THE UNIT WILL CONTINUE TO GIVE AN EXCELLENT ACCOUNT OF ITSELF AS A COMPONENT OF OUR GREAT NAVY."

/s/ George P. O'Rourke

LIEUT. GEO. P. O'ROURKE, SR.
"THE SKIPPER"

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

- AN INTERESTING ASSIGNMENT -

THE jobs on the strips might be called interesting. The Strip Crews, who had spent more than a year watching the planes take off and land, idled away their time by shooting the bull, reading every available book and magazine they could lay their hands on, and playing the inevitable game of Hearts. The two shifts played three games apiece per day, each shift trying its damndest to give Chief Baimbridge the Black Lady (Queen of Spades). After the two thousandth game, however, interest died in this pastime also.

THE men no longer needed any occupation for their hands or minds. They had become adept at waiting. In many ways this was the hardest part of their job. That "waiting, watching type of work" left a fellow with the feeling that that he could have done more, even while knowing that he was doing his part. It was hard, hoping there would be no trouble, yet waiting for trouble to occur so that he could rush to the scene and repair the damage without delay.

FROM their observation post and headquarters tent, opposite the Control Tower at the middle of the runway, these men could candidly view the entire strip. Nothing escaped their watchful eyes. Mentally they had recorded the number of planes which had blown a tire while taking off, and there were many. They counted bombs which landed on the strips, falling from outgoing planes and rolling menacingly across the mats.

THE strip had to be cleared when bombs fell. That was why the Seabees remembered these occasions so well. They had to stand by while a demolition crew removed the detonator from the bomb. If the bomb blew up, they, the Seabees, would have to clear away the wreckage and repair the strip. There were more than forty instances when bombs dropped from their racks, yet not one of these eggs exploded. This was a tribute to the demolition men who handled these death missiles, and a break for the Seabees because then they didn't have to repair the strip.

THERE were many other things to do besides just sit and wait. When the first shift hit the strip in the dark hours before sunrise, their first job was to examine both strips from one end to the other, checking the mats for possible breaks or loose boards. They picked up rocks and other debris, making certain that nothing would hinder the strikes that began taking off even before dawn.

WHEN squadron after squadron warmed up and rushed, two at a time, down the strips, their wheels screamed on the mats, causing a continuous rattling of steel. Bolts of fire, thrown off by highly agitated engines, marked each plane's progress as it raced forward and upward.

WHILE the Corsairs and Avengers and Dauntless Dive Bombers and Hellcats were taking off the Strip Crew remained at the post, counting planes whizzing by, and boosting them into the air with prayers, wishing them "God-speed and Good Luck" on their missions.

WITH two hundred and more planes taxiing from revetments to strips in the pre-dawn grayness, and hurrying down dimly-lit strips, there were bound to be planes cracking up on the takeoffs. Although accidents were held to a minimum, there were occasions when something went wrong. One instance was when two New Zealand Corsairs were taking off further along in the morning.

THE two planes were running abreast down the bomber strip. When they neared the center of the strip the plane on the right got its left wheel locked. It swerved to the left, narrowly missing the other plane. John K. Paul, Mlc, was an unwilling actor in the drama which followed. He said:

"The Skipper and Chief Baimbridge were in front of the tent going over something. Mr. O'Rourke was in his jeep, Baimbridge was standing alongside with his back to the strip. The rest of us were up the strip away putting sand under the mats when we saw those planes getting ready for the takeoff. Of course, we pulled the truck off the strip and were standing by, waiting for the planes to come ahead. None of us dreamed one of them was going to get tied up, or we'd have been under cover.

"ANYHOW, when that New Zealander swerved toward us, we didn't have time to think, we just ran! That is, McDaniels, Leshner, Ross Long and I did. Lopez and Craig were in the cab of the truck and Lupe just drove the truck into the ditch. The rest of us headed for the creek. Rose fell! He laid there clawing sand, too damned scared to get up again.

"I LOOKED over my shoulder, while running, and saw that Baimbridge had dived behind a tree. The Skipper was still sitting in his jeep and I'll bet he was praying. He was stuck. He didn't have time to back up and couldn't go forward because that plane was heading straight for him. I guess he was frozen to the spot.

"I STILL don't know how that Corsair missed the Old Man. That damned plane went right between him and Ross. Yep, Ross was still lying there on the ground. Neither of them moved a muscle from what I could see, and the next thing we knew the plane lifted itself over our foxhole, and over the brush into the revetment on the other side of the bank.

"WE ran over to "C" Taxiway to get in on the finish and saw that the plane had just missed hitting a couple of 'Ensign' planes in the revet. Then it bounced into the ditch. The fuselage stuck on the side of the hill and the motor and a bunch of parts flew into the creek.

"THE crash crew arrived just as the pilot pulled himself out of the cockpit and jumped to the ground, taking his seat with him. No one was hurt but we sure as hell had been scared half to death. Especially Rose and the Skipper!

"THERE was one other thing about that crash that stuck in my mind," concluded John Paul. "A New Zealand Officer and three men came up to take charge of the bomb. When the men started to move in on the bomb their officer called them back and told them to wait where they were. He went up to the bomb himself and removed the detonator. I thought that was pretty good of him, not letting his men risk their lives, then going ahead and risking his own. A guy sees a lot of funny things out here, and that's one of them I'm not likely to forget."

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IT couldn't be done, so the Seabees had been told, but then it wasn't every day that bulldozers take the place of cranes, and Seabees act as ballast in an airplane.....

ON 15th December a four-motored Liberator bomber overshot the strip in landing. When it finally slid to a stop it was on a steep clay embankment at the west end of the crash strip. Though not damaged the right wing and two motors were hanging over the edge of the bank and the right wheel was embedded in the soft clay.

SURVEYING the plane hanging precariously to the edge of the bank, the Air Operations Officer moaned, "...And here we are without a crane or piece of equipment on this island big enough to put that Liberator back on the strip." He and the plane's crew were discussing the possibility of dismantling the plane and getting it back that way when Lt. O'Rourke approached him.

FLASHING the Operations Officer a sympathetic smile Lt. O'Rourke volunteered, "How about giving the Seabees a crack at this job?"

THE perplexed face of the officer lighted up a little as he said, "Doubt if you can help, but if you think you can do anything for us, O'Rourke, go ahead."

LT. O'ROURKE went ahead. To Lt. Greger he explained the plan he had formulated. Lt. Greger nodded his head several times as the Skipper outlined the procedure, then with a "Yes Sir! I've got the idea!", he went to work. Chief Mecham (Heavy Equipment) and Chief Baimbridge (Strip Repair) were called to the job. Mecham was told to get two bulldozers, and Baimbridge to get several sections of Marston mat and his "strippers".

THE following is Lt. O'Rourke's description of the plan as it was carried out:

"Salvage operations began with Chief Baimbridge and his crew digging the mud from under the right wheel and leveling the earth sufficiently to enable the bomber to roll back to solid ground. Then several sections of mat were laid to form a miniature runway which provided traction for the wheels. When this was completed two D-8 bulldozers, driven by Rash and McClure, were brought up behind the plane. A cable was attached from each the 'cats' to the landing gear. A third cable was hooked from Mecham's tractor to the tail assembly.

"Lt. Greger ordered ten men to crawl into the tail of the B-24 to keep it on an even keel. Then the dozers tightened up the cables and slowly pulled the bomber over the hump to the strip. In less than an hour the job of salvaging the plane was completed. The heavy bomber had been saved from possible destruction, and it taxied down the strip under its own power.

"The Air Operations Officer was utterly amazed when he saw that boat headed for its revetment. But (Mr. O'Rourke concluded) I wasn't! I had utmost confidence in the men handling the assignment satisfactorily. That's why I took the job. I wanted to show those fellows what the Seabees can do. And I say the job was well done."

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BOB LESHER, the Pennsylvania Dutchman and another strip repairman, tells the following incident, which caused the boys a little worry.

"A squadron of Corsairs was comin' in on the bomber strip. One of the first ones on the deck ended up in a crash landing and tore up several sections of mat. That closed the strip and the rest of the group had to land on the fighter strip.

"We were driving up the north side of the strip to repair the mats when one of these Corsairs, which had landed on the other strip, came taxiing across the bomber strip to get to its revetment on Taxiway "A". I guess the pilot's hand musta slipped on his stick because his guns started blazing away. At US!

"All I heard was hrrump-hrrump-hrrump as those fifties flew over our heads. Blea burst out with "What th' hell!" and Ross long hollered "Hit the deck!", suiting action to words. So did the rest of the fellows. They all dropped to the floor of the truck.

"It took me a second to wake up but I suddenly realized what was happening and slamming my foot against that gas pedal, got the hell out of there. In a hurry!

"The firing didn't last but a few seconds", finished Bob. "We went ahead and removed the twisted mats from the strip and put in some new ones. We had the strip open again in less than no time and then went back to the shack. The other fellows were nervous as hell so they lit up cigarettes. But I don't smoke so I chewed my fingernails instead. Damn but we were a jittery bunch for the rest of that morning. Do you blame us?"

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JOE VAN NESS, Pusher on the afternoon crew, told about a takeoff that ended in disaster. Said Joe:

"It all happened kinda' sudden like. A P-38 was taking off and the pilot pulled the wheels up too quick. He crashed back onto the strip and his propeller plowed hell out of about fifty feet of mat before the plane stopped and flipped over on its back. The gas tank blew up and how that plane did burn. The bomb burned too, but didn't go off, which was damned lucky for all of us.

"THE crash crew came up and some of the men started spraying the flames. others pulled the pilot out of that inferno. tow of them got hit by fifties that were poppin' off in the flames. However, they weren't seriously injured.

"WHEN the crash crew pulled the plane off the strip we moved in to replace the mats. We didn't give any thought to plexiglass that day though. You see...that pilot died from getting his lungs full of gas fumes...not on the strip, but later in the hospital. We got the strip in flight condition all right but didn't have any desire to do anything else that day, even eat. It was sure tough about the pilot." *

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SUNDAY was usually a day of inactivity for the "strippers". However, one Sunday in November wasn't. They worked the entire day on the fighter strip. A particularly heavy rain the previous night had flooded the strip, and a huge quantity of earth had washed out from under the mats.

BOTH Morning and afternoon shifts went to work pulling up more than two hundred sections of matting. The Heavy Equipment men shoveled and trucked enough sand to fill in the washout, which varied in depth from six to sixteen feet and covered considerable space in diameter. Once the cavity had been filled and the earth pounded down the two crews replaced the mats.

MR. GREGER, examining the completed job, declared the strip ready to handle flights. Knocking off soon thereafter, the "strippers" returned to camp and chow. They slept well that night. In fact, they slept better than they ever had before because the task they had completed had been an enormous one.

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A FEAT which resembled the job performed on the B-24 was accomplished by the Strip Crew and their "Keep 'Em Flying" truck. A flight of Corsairs, piloted by New Zealanders, was going up when one of the last planes in the flight caught its wheel in a small ditch on the north side of the warmup area. The pilot tried to pull the plane out by braking his free wheel and at the same time racing the motor, thereby causing the wheel in the ditch to push itself onto solid ground.

INSTEAD of freeing itself, however, the wheel only dug in deeper, and the plane swung around until its tail was pointing toward the strip, and its nose toward the diversion ditch. Seeing that he was stuck, the pilot called on the seabees for help, which they gave willingly.

THEY attached the cable that was on the front end of the truck to the tail hook, then one of the men slowly backed up the truck and pulled the Corsair out of the ditch and onto the strip.

THE pilot waved his thanks and got ready to join his flight, which was waiting upstairs. It was then that he noticed his "IFF" wasn't working. He hollered back to the fellows on the truck, asking if they knew anything about radios.

JOHN PAUL, the Pusher, looked around but the fellows all nodded "No" so he yelled back: "Sorry, we've got shipfitters, metalsmiths, machinists and carpenters, but no radioman." That finished the pilot. He slid down into the cockpit, gunned his engine and headed back for his revetment. He didn't go up that day, much to the disappointment of the men who had just pulled him out of the ditch.

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* One of the reasons why the Strip Crew felt so badly about the death of this pilot was because he was the first and only pilot to lose his life in an accident on the Piva Airfield while 582 Seabees operated it. They hadn't lost a plane because of a crash landing either. The P-38 and the others which had met idaster had been taking off or had already landed when the accidents occurred. The men were proud of that record because they felt individually responsible for every plane landing and taking off. They maintained their fields religiously and it was largely due to the firmness of the strips and excellent conditions of the mats and taxiways that accidents were held to a minimum.

NOT to be outdone by the Strip Crews, the Heavy Equipment men also had their "incidents". The mishap which caused the greatest excitement among the men was the crashing of a Corsair into the motor patrol of Desmond A. Ryan, MM1c.

THE collision occurred on 19th December while Ryan and Kenny Gonyea were operating patrols on the north shoulder of the bomber strip. Gonyea, was approximately a hundred and fifty feet in front of Ryan, had a ringside seat during the entire action. He tells the story:

"When Ryan I were about halfway down the shoulder heading east, the Control Tower flashed us the red light. We pulled as far off to the side as possible, stopped the patrols and waited with the engines idling. The Corsair had cleared the bushes at the end of the strip and was coming in for a land

"Just as the Corsair hit the strip its tail tire blew out and the pilot lost control. The plane veered sharply to the right, ran off the mat and made a beeline for Ryan's patrol. When Ryan saw that the plane was going to crash into his machine he dove clear. He flew about ten feet into the air and came up running on all fours. The plane crashed into the grader and buried its deep into the steering levers. You should've seen that big nine-foot propeller tearing hell out of the spot where Ryan had been standing just a minute before

"As soon as the plane stopped Ryan came running back. He jumped onto the plane's wing and slid back the cover on the greenhouse. Then he helped the stunned pilot unhitch his straps and assisted him to the ground. That Ryan guy was sure on the ball.

"He saw hi-octane gas from the plane's punctured center tank splash onto the hot motor of his patrol, so he ran to the engine, jerked the wires from the magneto and pulled a badly bent lever, which changed the engine from diesel to gas. That stalled it and prevented an explosion for sure. It's a wonder that something didn't explode because that patrol motor was hot as hell and gasoline was flying everywhere."

In Lt. Greger's accident report to the O-in-C he concluded his recounting of the incident with: "During this accident Ryan gave no thought to his personal safety, knowing well that a fire and explosion could occur any instant. His concern was for the New Zealand pilot's safety, and then do his utmost to prevent an explosion. He showed courage, initiative, cool headedness and logic in keeping with the best traditions of the U. S. Navy.

Ryan's tussle with the Corsair had left him quite chilly. However, less than a month later Ryan was left cold by a second adventure. He didn't have time to jump this time, his patrol went with him. It all happened when D.A. patrol slid into a ditch. Ryan tried to prevent the huge Austin Western from going over but he had little to say about it. The patrol landed in the bottom of the ditch upside down, its four wheels clawing the air, and Ryan underne out cold. When revived, Ryan calmly picked himself up and walked away from the capsized machine. Ryan was slowly getting used to trouble.

THOUGH D.A. was fortunate on both occasions when disaster seemed imminent, his mates were getting worried. They watched him, thereafter, like hawks, hoping to prevent any further tantalizing of Lady Luck.

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ALL of the incidents which occurred on the strips were not hazardous. Some were amusing. As for example, the following:

ONE morning while a strike was taking off Chief "Tommy" Thompson, Heavy Equipment Chief, was sitting in the open-air "head". The Strip Crew, standing a short distance away watching the planes take to the air suddenly broke into a run. They shouted to Thompson as they headed for their foxholes. Because the chief was unable to see anything through the canvas walls of the "head", he immediately sensed the warning of those shouts. A plane was crashing.

TOMMY jumped from his seat! His pants were hanging around his knees but he didn't dare stop to pull them up. He kept on running until he reached the safety of the brush, into which he dove without delay. Laying there on the ground, panting, Tommy waited for the plane to crush him into the earth.

HE waited but nothing happened. The last plane had raced into the blue. As the drone of the motors grew fainter, Tommy rose and adjusted his clothing. He looked around for the "strippers" and there they were, laughing uproariously. There hadn't been any crash. The strip men had played a little joke on the chief.

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THERE were other occurrences which were interesting and exciting and dangerous, many of them. They became milestones by which the men measured the length of time they were assigned to the Strip Repair Crew. There were the belly landings which followed a Corsair or Hellcat pilot's discovery that he was unable to lower his landing gear. He had to bring his plane in without wheels, so a belly landing was literally packed with drama.

THERE was the prelude of a plane flying around and around the field, the pilot working furiously trying to get the wheels down. Crowds gathered to be in on the finish. The strip men, sharing the pilot's anxiety and worry, waited expectantly, hoping for the best but fearing the worst. The crash truck and its crew was standing by; the ambulance waiting.

THE plane continued to circle the field, using up the supply of gasoline so that chances of an explosion would be lessened when the landing was made. Then the red light flashed from the Control Tower! The plane made one last swoop to the east, banked slowly and came in low over the threes at the end of the strip.

FROM one end of the strip to the other the plane flew a scant six feet above the ground, then nearing the end of the mats the plane dropped, hit the steel with a sickening thud and slid onto the crash strip. Without wheels the plane stopped almost instantly. The prop dug into the dirt, pole vaulted the plane upward and forward, and then in a cloud of dust it fell back onto its belly.

MANY times this drama was enacted, always with the same prelude, the same birchlike swoosh down the steel mats, the same sudden, crashing STOP! And there was the same unclenching of sweaty fists and loosening of tightened throats on the part of the ground personnel as the pilot emerged from the cockpit — always considerably shaken up, but seldom hurt, and seldom smiling.

THERE were also times when a pilot brought his plane down on only one wheel, or so badly shot up that he was lucky to get back at all. And, there were a few occasions when a pilot was given orders to take a damaged plane out over the bay and "dump it". He was to hit the silk.

THE Strip Crews considered all of these incidents as part of their job. Not the working part, but the worrying part. The other part of their job was hitting the strips before dawn, working and waiting through the long days of driving rains or the heat that often raised the temperature to a hundred and fifty degrees. There were the nights too, when the fighter-bombers went up and the strip men stood by long after darkness descended, waiting for all the planes to check in before calling it a day.

BUT in spite of all accidents and weather obstacles the strips were always open. Even after a crash landing the mats were usually replaced within fifteen minutes, never longer than thirty. Perhaps of all the stories the strip men have to tell when they return home, the story of how they kept the Piva Air Strips in continuous operation should be the best and the biggest one of all.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

- THE AUSTRALIAN CAMPAIGN -

BOUGAINVILLE began to change hands in November. It was on the 11th that Australian soldiers began pouring onto the island. They were coming in to take over, thus relieving American troops for further conquests.

IN the days that followed the heavily-clothed, red-faced men from Down Under, wearing their brown, broad-brimmed hats, swept up and down the perimeter. They established their camps, set up their supply dumps, ammunition dumps and stores. They built loading docks and warehouses and organized their transportation system. As fast as the Australians moved in the Americans moved out.

ON 22nd November the 2nd Australian Corps officially assumed control of the thirty-five square miles of perimeter that was in American hands. This was the same thirty-five miles the Americans had held for almost a year without attempting to enlarge upon it.

HOWEVER, while thirty-five miles had been enough for the Yanks' purpose, there were thirty-five hundred square miles of Bougainville that belonged to Australia and she wanted every inch of it -- without the Japs, of course. What that the Australians had to do then was to take one hundred times as much territory as had been secured by the Americans. While a beachhead, initial assault and consolidation was not required, the task was not an easy one.

AUSSIE troops moved into position in the mountains north of Torokina on 23rd November and took over all existing front line or perimeter positions in the central sector. Then they began their "Big Push". One body of troops advanced toward the north, other troops made a bold advance southward along the coast between the sea and the swamps, while a third body of troops began the drive eastward toward the other side of the island. Once again the men of CBNU 582 heard the thunderous roar of the big guns on three sides of the camp. But not for long!

BY 1st January the Aussies had advanced far inland and had occupied positions atop Pearl Ridge overlooking the Numa Numa Plantation on the east side of the island. In both northern and southern operations plans were going according to schedule. In these drives scores of wide, dangerous rivers had to be crossed, each a minor beachhead in itself, and in the north several amphibious operations had to be made. These were all successful.

PROGRESS on all fronts was satisfactory. The Aussies (many of them veterans of Milne Bay and Kokoda or the Middle East) were the perfect choice for clearing the little yellow men out of the jungle, adept as they were in the art of "bush fighting" and jungle warfare.

BUT the Jap did not submit to this wholesale annihilation with the meekness for which he had been noted before the war. Although he had attained fame for fanaticism along the chain of islands leading to his front door, there was nothing fanatical about his resistance on Bougainville. Instead he was a shrewd and calculating enemy.

THERE were very few instances on Bougainville of Japanese banzai tactics. The Japs were well prepared for the occidental counter-intrusion. Their installations were well built and only superior military tactics were able to break through these bulwarks, both manmade and natural. They were proficient jungle fighters who had dug in and were fighting to the last man, making each man count.

NOR were the Japs, as the American Military Hierarchy had forecast in 1943 and 1944, left dangling on a limb or withering on the vine. They were still well organized, amply fed and clothed and were supplied with enough ammunition to enable them to employ defensive strategy indefinitely. Perhaps it had looked at one time as if the Japs would wither, but their roots had taken hold. Instead of dying off they had prospered.

THE Japs kept their larder reasonably filled by planting vegetable gardens. Although air operations had destroyed these gardens to some extent, oil sprays could not spoil the root vegetables, so these still grew luxuriously. A crop was ready for harvesting almost every six weeks due to favorable tropical conditions. Besides vegetables and military food stores, the Japs had practically all of the coconuts and cocoa on their side of the island. Almost all of the plantations are on the northeast and northwest coast, both sections in Jap hands.

THERE was also an abundance of fresh fish, from the ocean and the many freshwater streams, and the jungle yielded an unlimited supply of wild meat (boars, honey bears, etc.). Some authorities had ventured that the Japs on the islands were better fed than they had ever been in their homeland. The basis for their opinion was the appearance of the Japanese who had been taken prisoner.

THOUGH the Australians suffered many casualties, theirs were not as great as those suffered by the Japs. The reports at the end of six months of fighting listed more than 5,000 Japanese killed, more than half again had been buried by their countrymen or had died of wounds, and almost two hundred prisoners had been taken.

IN many places Australian drives northward and to the south had been spearheaded by "Matilda" tanks as well as artillery. When opposition was encountered by Jap 150 mm guns, the Aussies brought into play their 155s, the Long Toms, which always helped to pave the way for further infantry advances.

AS usual, the infantry did the bulk of the fighting. First the scouts and patrols moved forward through the underbrush or along the trails. Then the main body of troops advanced, bringing with them automatic weapons, machine guns and artillery.

PROGRESS was hampered at times by the fierceness with which the Japs contested every river, garden and stronghold. The persistent rains, the swamps and the impassable jungle made the advancement of troops and the building of supply lines difficult. Nevertheless, headway was considerable.

IT wasn't any wonder that the Australian soldiers bristled when someone mentioned the catch word "Nopping-up". They definitely asserted that Bougainville was a part of the "Consolidation Campaign of the Northern Solomons" and not a mere "Nopping-up" procedure. The reports on Japanese casualties seemed to substantiate their reasons for indignance.

FURTHER proof of the importance of this campaign was the visit to Bougainville of the Duke of Gloucester, the Governor General of Australia. The Duke visited with the Brigadiers and the troops and was also warmly received by the Naval Officers at Commander Kincaid's camp, "COMNAVFACNORSOLS" (Commander Naval Facilities of the Northern Solomons).

ANOTHER visitor was General Sir Thomas Blamey, Commander in Chief of the Australian Army and Allied Ground Commander of the Southwest Pacific. Among many other visits General Blamey reviewed troops at a rest area. These men had just completed five and a half months of continual fighting in southern Bougainville. He congratulated the men for the fine job they had done during the battles for Puriata River and Slater's Knoll and expressed confidence in their future performances.

THE Commander in Chief covered the situation in a nutshell when he said: "When you engage a European army and break up its organization you have won. But when you fight the Japanese, although you may smash their formations, every man becomes a combat unit of his own and continues to fight. That is what we face on this island. We have to kill them all off." *

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* This is an excerpt from the "Guinea Gold", a newspaper published by the Australians and distributed to the Allies in the SWPA. This paper, incidentally, was the major source of exclusive worldwide news. It was a favorite among the men and was highly regarded.

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NATIVES were definitely on the side of the Allies. In some of the islands the natives had been friendly with the Japs who had treated them with just enough deference to keep them fooled. However, on Bougainville it was just the opposite. Brutality was the paramount feature of Japanese occupation. The Japs ravaged the women and pressed the men into labor gangs to build air fields and installations.

OFTEN native workers reporting to Jap officers for promised payment were shot instead. The Japs kept the Buka boys under their thumb by discouraging escapes. They shot two prisoners for every one that escaped. This was reported by an Amboinese indian who had managed to flee from the Japs. They killed many natives without provocation and mercilessly chastised men and women alike for the slightest breach of discipline; sometimes for no reason whatsoever.

IN view of such conditions it wasn't any wonder that the natives were friendly to the Allies. Americans and later Australians treated the native men with friendliness and their women with respect. The Australian Intelligence Service indulged in widespread propaganda which explained to the natives that they belonged to Australia, and that the Government had sent its men to Bougainville to help the natives rid it of the Japs.

THUS the aid of the natives was enlisted against the Japanese and harmony was further guaranteed by missionaries who went among the natives spreading the word of God, and at the same time acting as Liaisons between the natives and the Australian Commanders.

TWO of these missionaries were Bishop Wade, an American priest who had served many years in these islands and had become Bishop of the Northern Solomons, and Australian Army Chaplain Father O'Sullivan, who had spent twelve years as a missionary on Bougainville. Both Bishop Wade and Father O'Connor, as representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, had been on Bougainville at the time the Japs moved in, but had averted capture by hiding in the mountain. These two men and many other missionaries and nuns were evacuated by submarine to Australia shortly before the Yanks' invasion in 1943. Since the missionaries had spent many years on Bougainville, they were well known and revered by the natives, and consequently were able to reorganize the native tribes into components of the Allies.

FOR some time the natives had been waging their own little war against the Japs. Using only bows and arrows they had killed many enemy troops, and reports flowed in regularly telling of new native achievements. The Aussies used the male inhabitants and many of the New Guinea brown men as "police boys" (scouts). These simple, willing lads could actually smell a Jap before seeing him. If they found a scent while scouting ahead of Aussie patrols, they located the enemy position, then returned to the white men to report number and location of the Japs, and were even able to advise the best method of approach. Such tactics accounted for many Nips and kept patrol losses to a minimum.

BESIDES the "police boys" many other native bucks were engaged for construction work under the Army. They were paid the prevailing government wage for native labor. In addition to providing work, the Aussies also guarded the native village, and in general protected, governed and helped the natives in any way they could. It wasn't unusual to see gangs of native workers riding in Aussie trucks, or to see one or two privileged lads traveling in a jeep with an officer. That was why Winford E. Rash, CMLC didn't think anything of it when one day he saw a group of thirty natives being towed around the air strips by some Australian officers.

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RASH was operating a D-8 bulldozer at the time. The party had stopped nearby and the officers were pointing out to the natives the strength and power the bulldozer had. The natives, chieftains of various tribes in the north and northwest sections of Bougainville and on the southern tip of Buka, were awed at the spectacle of the huge machine clearing jungle as easily as one would sweep a floor.

THE reason for the natives' tour of the Base was their desire to see for themselves whether the stories the Japs had told them were true. In "pidgin English" they had related these tales: "American all gone! Only ten-ten Australian stop long Buka. Soon all Australian die pinpish! Airplane he no stop! No kai-kai! Prettie quick Jap numba one boss man long Buka!

IN simple English, without the pidgin, this meant: The Americans had left and only one hundred Aussies remained on Bougainville; they were too sick to live. All of the airplanes had gone, food supplies had been used up, and soon the Japanese would be in complete control of Bougainville.

TO counteract these lies, the Aussies had shown the natives the huge food dumps, ammunition dumps, gun emplacements, row upon row of fighters and fighter-bombers, the big Douglas transports, the ships in the harbor, the condition of roads and airfields, the large number of motor vehicles in operation, and the numerous camps of Aussie soldiers scattered throughout the perimeter.

THE natives had just completed their tour of the strips when they came upon Rash clearing ground at the east end of the bomber strip. They were visibly impressed by what they had seen but were amazed when they saw the monstrosity that Rash was operating. Wonder and disbelief were written on their faces as they saw trees and scrubs and piles of earth being pushed aside by the blade of the D-8.

RASH stopped his machine to learn the manner of audience for which he was performing. An Aussie officer stepped forward to explain that the natives were visiting chieftains, and went on to tell about the Jap stories and the natives' desire to see for themselves. It could be seen that these men weren't ordinary Blacks such as were located in the native village. Each man was tall, darkly-browed, well built and intelligent looking. They all bore an imprint of intelligence and authority upon their finely carved faces, and they carried themselves with quiet dignity.

ONE OF the officers asked Rash to give a few of the men a ride on the 'dozer. The Seabee answered, "Shore, let 'em come ahead!"

HOWEVER, it took considerable coaxing to get even the bravest to climb aboard that "demon". Finally two of the natives climbed reluctantly alongside Rash. They held on tightly, ready for anything. After being given a wild ride they slid to the ground, much relieved to feel solid earth beneath their feet again. Two more stepped forward, now that the ice had been broken, and they too were given a jolting and bouncing they would never forget.

THAT was the end of it though. All the others profusely pleaded that their sore backs, trained necks or bad stomachs wouldn't permit them to ride. Each one rubbed the ailing part of his anatomy as eloquent proof of the illness he was enjoying. One native, when asked how he enjoyed the ride, sadly replied: "Me peel allesame like two pella earthquake. Both rockin' same time. He (pointing to the 'cat') strong pella too much."

AT the completion of the tour there wasn't any doubt that the chieftains would return to their tribes bearing tales of Allied strength and equipment wealth. Possibly the thing foremost in their minds, though, would be the big machine that pushed the jungle aside so easily, and which shook like "Two earthquakes; both rockin' same time!"

NATIVES were well acquainted with earthquakes as they occur quite frequently on Bougainville. Fortunately there weren't any serious quakes while CBMU 582 was stationed on the island, but there had been several tremors which were strong enough to rock the huts. One night shortly after the Unit arrived there was a severe quake, which if it had occurred in a congested city would have toppled many buildings. However, there was no damage to the 582 camp.

CORSAIRS of the Royal New Zealand Air Force provided air cover for almost all advances made by Australian land forces. These Corsair Squadrons (and there were several) kept up a continual daylight bombardment and strafing of roads, villages, gardens, trails and installations. Thanks to the New Zealanders not one Jap airfield was in operation on Bougainville, Buka or Choiseul, and they did their share toward the neutralization of Rabaul, too. Because of their effective bombing on Bougainville these New Zealand planes seldom encountered ack-ack. They had knocked out almost all of the anti-aircraft guns, in addition to accounting for many Japanese killed and much equipment destroyed.

THE Australians' Boomerangs (small fighter planes) were also used in air operations, as were their Biscuit Bombers. The primary use of the Biscuits (or the purpose for which they were used on Bougainville) was to drop food supplies and ammunition to patrols operating beyond the front lines. It was also necessary at times to use these planes for dropping supplies to the main body of troops when such troops had advanced so rapidly that their supply lines were unable to keep up with them.

CBMU 582's part in this campaign was the continued operation of the Piva Air Strips and facilities. The Seabees maintained the strips for the New Zealanders and Australians as well as a few American Squadrons that remained on the island, after the bulk of American air power had been transferred to the Philippines. Among those that remained were two squadrons of C-47s, Marine transports, that plied their trade between the Solomons and the Philippines.

IN conjunction with Piva Facilities, CBMU 582 had taken over the maintenance and operation of Torokina Fighter Strip No. 1 on 18th December. This strip was the first one built on the island. It ran east to west, parallel to the beach, and had been constructed of Marston mat. The strip was located on former swampland that had been filled with coral and sand. Short after D-Day in November 1943 the 71st U. S. Naval Construction Battalion had built the Torokina Strip, and went through hell and high-water to do it too. Prior to the time CBMU 582 took over its maintenance, another Seabee maintenance unit had operated it.

MOST Of the New Zealand Corsairs had been based at Torokina, but these were transferred later to the Piva Strips. The beach strip was operated primarily as an emergency landing field. It was still used quite frequently however, because of black, volcanic clouds that drifted down from Mount Bagaga in late afternoon to create a "CEILING ZERO" over the Piva area. For some reason the Torokina Strip was seldom clouded over, so when landings were impossible at Piva the planes landed at the beach.

CHIEF George F. Thompson was in charge of Torokina Operation and Maintenance. Tommy was assisted by Jim O'Brien, Murray Starobin and Shorty Caldwell in the job of inspecting and repairing mats, sanding low spots, keeping drainage ditches open and checking lighting facilities and power units. In other words, the same tasks that had to be done on the Piva Strip were also performed at Torokina, only on a much smaller scale.

HOWEVER, maintenance and operation of three air strips and facilities and maintenance of numerous camps and repair shops had not been the only activities of 582 during the "American-Australian Change-Over". It was also the job of the Seabees to roll up the camps of American Forces that had left the island. This work started in December and went into full swing in January, continuing on into March.

ALL over the perimeter various units of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps were packing equipment, striking tents and embarking for greener -- or bloodier -- pastures. In most cases CBMU 582 was left with the job of dismantling quonset huts and buildings. These huts and other facilities were dismantled by the Unit's "Base Roll Up Detail". Pappy Hughes was placed in charge of the large crew, made up of Camp Construction men and Equipment Operators, which tore down more than forty-nine buildings, crated them, marked the crates for shipment and delivered them to the Navy Base. These semi-permanent buildings were then shipped north where they would be erected again by other Seabee outfits at some newly acquired base.

IN addition to building roll-up, Al Simpson was in charge of a detail that included Imrie, Peterson and Sawyer, and charged with the dismantling of several large, knock-down type reefers belonging to the Army Service Command. Still another detail, composed of Jablonski, Altemus and Brumm, spent quite a few weeks building crates and boxes for shipping purposes at Commodore Moran's camp, COMNAVFORNORSOLS (Commander Naval Forces Northern Solomons).

AS in 1944, when CBMU 582 had been instrumental in building and improving American facilities on Bougainville, so did the Unit perform a useful service by rolling-up these same facilities. Thus, the buildings which had served their original purpose on one island would still be serviceable in the Philippines or somewhere else along the Road to Japan.

AN amusing tale of woe was told about Pappy Hughes' detail. It seemed that the men had finished too late in the afternoon to crate a hut which they had just dismantled. So when they knocked off for the day they left it laying on the ground, ready to crate the following morning. In the meantime, however, a heavy rain washed out the road leading to the hut. It wasn't until the third day that the men returned to crate it.

BUT...as Pappy said in his daily report, "When I went after the hut it was stoled...by the Aussies or someone."

THE Australians had beaten them to the hut, but the men just shrugged their shoulders. "They just saved us the trouble of crating it", was their only remark.

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THE same heavy rains that had been slowing down the Aussies' drives through the jungle had also been causing 582 a world of grief in the camp and on the air strips. Every month had heavy rains but rainfall in January was heavier than in any previous month since the Unit had taken over the strips. But the rain of 14th January beat all records! A total of 6.66 inches of rain fell during the hours from 1430 to 0500 with 6.33 of this falling in the first two hours. The result of such an enormous deluge was devastation itself.

BEFORE the rains the air strips and facilities had been in excellent condition. However, a rainfall of such magnitude (it could've wiped out most of the towns in the Ohio River Valley) had a way of changing things. Although drainage ditches protected the bomber strip to a certain extent, there was no stopping the flood which swept across strips and taxiways.

TAXIWAYS were split in many places by gullies eroded by flood waters which also left the strips covered with debris. The fighter strip especially was in deplorable condition. It was covered with muck as well as debris, and in low spots small ponds had formed.

SHORTLY after the heaviest part of the deluge had fallen, Chief Coleman's Water Truckers and Chief Baimbridge's "Strippers" went to work on the bomber strip. They used several dump trucks for carting away oil drums, rocks, logs, etc. that were scattered the length of the strip. They worked furiously to get the runway in shape, and at 1800 after one last inspection the strip was reopened.

RAIN was still falling and the soil was muddy, so Mr. Greger told the heavy equipment operators to put off rebuilding strip shoulders and grading taxiways until weather conditions improved.

WEATHER conditions improved at 0400. In the morning! At that time All Hands assigned to Heavy Equipment, Culvert and Strip Repair Details were called out. By 0700 they had repaired all taxiways that were in use at the time, opened all culverts and drainage ditches, and sanded those parts of the strips which were washed away. It had really been an EMERGENCY, but the men had put forth their best efforts and had things under control in short order.

OTHER parts of the perimeter also suffered from the heavy rains. Man roads and bridges had been washed away completely. At one point on Marine Drive, just east of the bomber strip, a gulley eight feet deep and six wide cut through the road. Drainage ditches bordering the roads looked like miniature Grand Canyons. Two bridges along the beach road had washed away, had stretches of the road itself; and at the Marine Drive and Corps Road junction a small lake had appeared.

FIVE-EIGHTY-TWO'S camp road had been made impassable by deep gullies running downhill through the middle of it. The Piva River had risen to such a stage that water was flowing over the camp bridge, however, the bridge held. At the height of the rainstrom the camp looked like a lake and the quonset huts like stilt-houses sticking out of the water. Most of the southwest sect of the camp had been carried away by erosion, and a chasm large enough to swallow a crane appeared on Goat Hill as a result of the onrushing flood wat

BUT that wasn't all of the damage was blamed on the "6.66 Rainfall". A few mornings later a minor catastrophe occurred to the Heavy Equipment and Machine Shops. Weakened by the driving winds and rains a huge tree had crac and it fell right through the roof the combined shops.

THE accident happened during working hours. Hearing the ripping, tea sound that preceded the crash, Kelly Schaefer, Ashburn, Vigil and Trujillo dove outside the shop. Chief Freeman, a visitor, tried to claw his way thro a screened wall. Voss and Stewart sought safety under the lathe bench. Bad was the only casualty. He had been unable to get under cover and was hit on side of the head by a branch. His face was scratched and his glasses broken otherwise he was okay.

A SMALL truck caught the full force of the blow. The benches in the b of it were reduced to tinder but the bed held. It kept the massive tree trunk from crushing the men who hadn't gotten out of the shop. Therefore, t only damage was to the shop. It was complete demolished.

AS a sequel to the tree crash, the men of the two shops had the monstrous job of cutting the fallen tree into sections and removing it from had once been the shop. Then the entire shop was rebuilt. It took three da to get the job done. This included clearing away the old framework, felling many small trees for crossbeams and uprights, cutting these saplings into proper lengths and building a new frame.

WHEN the framework was in place a procuring party set out in search c sufficient tarps to replace the ones that had been torn in the crash. The freebooters returned with the required number and a few to spare. No time w lost in getting the tarps into place, and when they were anchored so that th wouldn't blow away, the job was considered "done". On the morning of the fourth day after the crash the new shop was in operation.

HOWEVER, complications set in. The aftermath to this tale was that t shop crews who had turned loggers for a day had contracted tree poisoning fr the trees on which they had been working. The following six weeks were spen treating this dreadful contaimitation of the jungle. Mechanics and machini alike went about their work covered with some white medicine that made them look as if they had seen a ghost, or else were the ghosts.

ANOTHER calamity (blame it on ole "6.66" too) was the water tower. I had its supporting timbers undermined by flood waters and the tower crashed one afternoon without warning. Fortunately, none of the trucks were being filled at the time so the only damage was to the wooden tank which had been splintered into a million pieces. The overhead network of pipes had also collapsed and thousands of gallons of water were spilled into the parking ar

WHEN the damage was first reviewed it was thought to be considerable. However, it was later decided that instead of rebuilding the tower and tank, water could be pumped right from the river into the pontoons. Working along these lines the plumbers, aided by the truck drivers, rejoined all the pipes and outlets that had not cracked in the fall. Those that were cracked were repaired by the welders. When reassembled the overhead pipes proved satisfi without the tank, so twenty-four hours after the tank had collapsed the sprinkler trucks were again watering the strips.

BESIDES the constant repairs to be made on the strips after each flood, the camp also had to be worked over. The road as well as the entire area had to be graded frequently and 'dozers were brought into camp time after time to push earth, logs and rubble into gullies and chasms. This was done with the hopes that further erosion would be prevented.

ON three occasions the rising river and heavy rains had weakened the camp bridge to such an extent that it collapsed under the weight of trucks or other equipment. Each time the bridge caved in the logging detail got the job of rebuilding it, and each time the loggers used larger logs and buried them deeper into the river banks. But all of this was to no avail. The elements had the last say. After every rain the damage was always considerable. The weather -- next to the Japs -- was believed by all to have been the worst enemy that was encountered on Bougainville.

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DUE to jungle density and the wide deployment of front-line troops, Jap patrols were successful on innumerable occasions in penetrating far behind the Aussie lines. Although the overall damage by Jap raiding parties was negligible, there were some soldiers killed before these invaders were wiped out.

THESE raids were particularly harassing because the Aussies not only had to fight the Japs at the front, but they were attacked from the rear too. Most of these infiltrations were for the purpose of waylaying front-line soldiers but there was one break-through that had bigger plans than mere ambush of troops. That was the March Scare in which the Japs penetrated both the southern front and the inner perimeter.

TWO patrols of Japs had gotten through. Reports stated that there were seventy-four men in one, and ninety in the other. Several automatic riflemen and demolition men were included in these groups. Once inside the perimeter it was believed that the patrols had broken up into smaller groups. Their intentions were known to the Aussies. The Japs had orders to demolish bomb and gas dumps, to put the air strip out of commission, and to destroy airplanes and medical supplies. It was surmised that the Japs also had orders to kill high-ranking Australian officers and as many New Zealand Corsair pilots as possible.

IMMEDIATELY upon receipt of information about the Japanese break-through the Australian Headquarters passed the alarming news to every camp within the perimeter. It was alarming because the presence of a small part of Japs at loose behind the lines was just as dangerous as an opposing Army on the battlefield.

PRECAUTIONARY measures were taken at once! A cordon of Aussie soldiers was thrown around all facilities of military importance. The 920 Air Base Security Battalion (an American all-negro outfit) more than trebled its guard around the Piva Strips. New Zealand Air Force personnel maintained a vigilant watch over the invaluable lives of Corsair pilots. Even the walking patients at the Australian Hospital were pressed into standing watch over that establishment.

FIVE-EIGHTY-TWO got the news late on that first afternoon. Prompt action was taken! An interior guard detail was organized to stand watch over the camp between sunset and sunrise. The Armorers hastily made last minute adjustments to carbines and loaded countless ammunition clips. These were distributed to the guards. Browning automatics were also broken out and issued to squad leaders.

LT. BROADHURST summoned all guards to the COD's office and gave them final instructions. No smoking or talking was to be permitted on any post and the guards were to call "Halt" once. If no response was forthcoming, "Shoot to kill".

INTERIOR guards were assigned to posts on each corner of the main camp and to positions at the camp entrance in the Goat Hill Area in Officers' Country and in the Heavy Equipment Area. There were three watches of four hours each and the men who were not standing watch were assigned to tents where they could be called on a moment's notice. They slept fully clothed and with rifles within easy reach.

THEN began the long nights of watching and waiting; the nights when every twig that moved in the breeze became a Jap, and every ray of moonlight that fell on a leaf, a face. The guards stood at posts behind tree stumps or boxes, and with their green coveralls remained almost invisible. They never left their posts, didn't dare to walk back and forth for fear of drawing fire from their own men. All they had to look at was the dark, mysterious jungle, and when the nights were pitch black, as many were, they couldn't even see the jungle.

THE false scares were many, until the men learned to distinguish the sound of a wild dog or boar from that of a footstep. There were times when a guard, seeing something on the jungle's edge, shouted "Halt!" Getting no reply he hurriedly emptied his clip at the place where he was sure he saw the enemy. Daylight failed to disclose any dead Japs, but once or twice there were footprints in the soggy earth.

ONE night the guard on Post No. Four, the southeast corner, received no reply to his challenge. Immediately he sprayed the shadows that he had seen moving. The shadows answered back! The Seabee hit the deck, so did his adversary. More shots were exchanged. The guard had the protection of the quonset hut's foundation; the enemy was behind the river embankment. The shots went zinging-g-g back and forth under the quonset.

THE men who had been sleeping within also hit the deck. They were trying to get out of the line of fire. But bullets were flying under them! Slugs were hitting into the earth and wood and splattering dirt into the faces of the men laying on the plywood floor. For the first time in their lives that these men had been under fire the bullets traveled below them instead of above.

BY the time reinforcements arrived on the scene the firing had ceased. Careful examination of the surroundings failed to disclose the enemy. The guard said that he had heard rocks striking the water so it was presumed that the Jap had slid down the embankment and made his escape via the river.

AT daybreak bullet holes were discovered in the hut's floor and ceiling. They were caused by slugs ricocheting off the steel beams under the quonset. Fortunately, the bullets had gone between the bunks instead of through them, consequently no one was injured.

IN each instance when bullets started to fly in the middle of the night the sleeping Seabees immediately cast aside the arms of Morpheus. They hit the deck and laid there wondering how many Japs were descending upon the camp. They expected to see a horde of monkey-men burst through the screen doors and bayonet them as they tried to crawl through the floor.

STILL, there was no need for worry. Even if the Japs had made an attack, the alert guard would have prevented a massacre from taking place. The state of preparedness in which the camp lived would have guaranteed the Japs one helluva hot reception -- that was a certainty. The men not on duty were able to sleep fitfully, knowing full well that their lives were being guarded by responsible men. They were men who, if given half a chance, would have gladly blown a Jap all the way to Tokyo.

OFFICERS' Country for some reason was the hot bed during the March Scare. Twice strange characters were discovered prowling around the officer's tents. The first time a call went into the OOD's office for assistance, but by the time the guards arrived the unwelcome visitor had departed.

THE second time, however, the guards were already on the job. A man dressed in an Australian uniform stepped out of the bushes where he was halted by one of the guards. When questioned as to his reasons for being there the intruder's replies lacked authenticity so he was turned over to the officers. They were unable to get any intelligible answers either so the Aussie (or whatever he was) was taken into custody and handed over to the Australian Military Police.

THE Japs Scare didn't die off suddenly. It lasted for weeks. In the daytime the Japs kept well hidden in the jungle; they only ventured forth at night. This made it necessary to maintain an unceasing watch over all pregnable facilities for as long as the Scare continued, or until all the Japs were accounted for.

A COUNT taken three days after the break-through disclosed that eighteen Japs had been killed and two captured. As the days wore on, additional Japs were killed or captured at the bomb dumps and gas dumps, and several were done away with near the hospital.

ALL of these facilities were in the same locality as the 582 camp, so it was reasonable to believe that the Interior Guards hadn't been firing at shadows all of the time. Some of those shots had been directed at Japs!

TAKEN as a whole, the Japs had failed in their mission. The March Scare had been just that; a scare. None of their objectives had been reached, let alone destroyed. So after many weeks of quiet within the perimeter the Aussies and Americans disbanded their extra guard details. That was all except 582, for the Seabees still continued to patrol their camp. The number of guards was reduced but the guard set-up remained in force for the rest of the Unit's stay on the island. But no further disturbances were reported. It was supposed that those Japs who had evaded death or capture had managed to return to their own lines. The second March attack the Japs had made while the Americans were on the island had been squelched.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

- A HOST OF VISITORS -

CHIEF Warrant Officer Herman B. Burke, CEC-USNR reported on board CBMU 582 on 25th January. He had come to Bougainville from Fleet Hospital #108, where he had served as Maintenance Officer. Prior to that Mr. Burke had been with the 18th Naval Construction Regiment, the 3rd Special Battalion, and before leaving the States in February 1944 hfe had been an instructor at Officers Training School, Camp Peary, Virginia.

MR. BURKE, brisk, bald-headed and rotund, became Officer of the Day shortly after his arrival. In addition to his duties in that capacity he also served as Officer in Charge of several work details during the remainder of the Unit's stay on the island. CWO Burke easily filled the vacancy Mr. Cowan had left, and he was readily accepted by officers and men alike as one of the family.

HOWEVER, Mr. Burke's abilities as a construction man were secondary. He was better known for his prowess as a trader. It all started out with his fondness for fresh eggs, and his failing for Jap souvenirs. Eggs, he found, were a scarcity, yet souvenirs were plentiful. Mr. Burke capitalized on this by taking Jap souvenirs down to the cargo ships and trading them for eggs. That was how he got the eggs for the officers' breakfasts, and the officers' mess cooks too.

JAP rifles, flags, revolvers, etc.....Mr. Burke had all that he wanted. One concensus had it that he owned more mementoes of Bougainville than the rest of the outfit put together. Some were obtained with cash, others as a result of shrewd bargaining.

BUT there was one article that he didn't have. That was a Japanese officer's saber, an item he wanted more than any of the others. He hunted the island from stem to stern for such a sword but his search was fruitless. He had given up in dispair. Finally one of the mates found a saber that was for sale. When the officer inquired the price the Seabee mentioned a figure that was exhorbitant. Mr. Burke did so want that souvenir though. Nothing else mattered. He was prepared to mortgage his home, his car, his life insurance policies, even his sould. He must have that sword!

AH! But they didn't call Mr. Burke "Trader Horn" for nothing. He visited the owner of the sword and a friendly parley took place. A wad of greenbacks changed hands. Mr. Burke got the sword and he didn't have to mortgage anything. A few hundred dollars had done the trick and "Trader Horn" became the proud owner of a genuine Japanese officer's rhinestone-hilted saber with leather scabbard and silk tassels. Indeed, it was one of the finest souvenirs a man could have at any price.

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EVERY boy should have a dog and every outfit should have a mascot. CBMU 582 was no exception. In fact, the Unit had several mascots. There were white dogs, brown ones and spotted ones, plus three cats and a parrot. Where they came from no one seemed to know. But they certainly did accumulate. Nor were they one-man dogs either. No sir, they belonged to everybody. That is, they all did except Baldy.

BALDY had quite a history, and it was doubted by many that her past would stand much uncovering. Yes, Baldy was a she-dog. She was a prolific female of the first rank and her offspring were scattered far and wide across the islands of the Southwest Pacific.

HERESAY had it that Baldy began her career of ill-repute on the island of Espiritu Santo where she became a member of the 36th Battalion. With the 36th she visited Banika and later arrived on Bougainville. When the batallion left for the states, CBMU 582 inherited Baldy along with the chow hall.

BALDY was a broad-rumped, speckled white, sadeyed pooch with an under carriage that would have done credit to a prize winning Guernsey milk cow. She was an indifferent sort, not unfriendly but not given to any outward show of affection. She had seen thousands of men so they were no novelty to her nor were men dogs either. Baldy was a one-man dog and that one man was Ben Running whom Baldy had adopted shortly after the Unit's arrival.

THE Love that Baldy had for Ben had no comparison, and Ben treated his pet with the greatest of care. Being a cook, Ben was able to feed her as well as the men, sometimes better, and during her many periods of confinement he was both considerate of her wishes and extremely helpful. In appreciation of his kindness Baldy presented Ben with three litters of puppies during the outfit's seventeen months on Bougainville.

ALL told, Baldy must have whelped twenty-five pups, but Ben, the ungifted fellow, managed to trade off most of these. Only a few remained with their mother long enough to attain manhood or womanhood. These became the mascots of CBMU 582.

THERE was Brownie, Herman Voss' pup; Mike, the big brown and white playmate of the officers and their mess cooks; and Peggy, born of the third generation, who was Melvin Hadfield's pride and joy. These dogs attracted many others, as dogs are prone to do, and therefore, an accurate count of the number of dogs that enjoyed the hospitality of CBMU 582 was never made.

BESIDES Baldy's family there was the huge silent Germany Shepherd that for a time would attach himself to one or another of the mates. At a word the dog would obediently follow at the heel until told to do otherwise. After observing how well he complied with all orders the opinion of many was that he must have become detached from the Army's K-9 Corps. He had all the earmarks of a true soldier.

ANOTHER camp follower was the cute little Eskimo-like pooch that had lost its eye in a scrap. Only this dog and the brown Shepherd bore the imparts of quality. All of the rest were strictly mongrels. But regardless of the ancestry they became friends with every man in the outfit. Their antics were a source of much enjoyment; they were a side-show in themselves.

ALL through the day the dogs scampered about the camp. They retrieved sticks the men threw into the river, frolicked with the fellows and fought with one another. They enjoyed a dog's life, free of burdens or care, and were forever happy.

THEY never became vicious. Only once was a dog known to have bitten a man. That was when Jimmy Quiriconi ran to the aid of a pup that had been hit by a truck. Being in extreme pain it bit Jim without knowing what it was doing. That was the only dog that had to be disposed of.

THERE was never such a thing as dog days. The pups capered about even when the thermometer hovered well above a hundred. They had acclimated themselves much better than had the men, and there wasn't one case of distemper, rabies or other diseases peculiar to the canine. All they had were fleas, and these they harbored in abundance.

THE dogs were militarized too. They stood morning Colors and Retreat in the evening along with the men. At Taps they followed the example of the masters and went to bed. They were also good Security Guards. No matter how many Seabees entered or left the camp, the dogs never opened their mouths. But when a Doggie, Marine or Aussie came into the area they barked their heads off. How they knew the difference was one of their own secrets but it was always felt that as long as the dogs were present the Unit never needed to fear a sudden attack.

MOST Important of all, however, was the connection these dogs provided between the men and their homes. Almost all of the mates were dog-fanciers and in these playful pooches they were brought just a little closer to those things they dearly loved and which were so far away. Beyond a doubt, every boy should have a dog, and every outfit a mascot.

SEABEES weren't called upon very often for monetary contributions, but when the Navy requested its personnel to go "all out" for the Navy Relief Society during its drive from the 4th to the 15th of February, the mates proved they could and would help this worthy organization. When the final figures were compiled it was found that CBMU 582's officers and men had contributed a total of \$422.10. The contributions were made to aid dependents of Navy personnel during emergencies. The mates of 582 proved their ability to come through by hitting a peak 25% above the figure suggested by BuPers.

CHIEFS Hughes and Tyler, committeemen for the drive, were swamped as Unit personnel, almost to a man barged into the office with their donations, which in most cases were far beyond the amount recommended for individual pay grades. It was truly gratifying to note the willingness and wholeheartedness with which each man dug down into his dungarees to aid those less fortunate than himself.

ALSO worthy of note was that CBMU 582 led the field among its Navy components on Bougainville. In comparison to size, these construction-maintenance men gave far more than did any other outfit on the island.

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ANOTHER quick conversion job -- cargo ship to transport -- were the orders received by Lt. O'Rourke. This time he gave the assignment to Chief Kraus, who with a detail of six men (Simpson, Giles, Peterson, Dovalis, Sawyer and Schmidt) boarded the S. S. Ralph W. Emerson at 1600 on Sunday, 25th February. Although hampered by lumber the Seabees went to work immediately.

THAT night they slept on deck. Or rather they tried to sleep. At midnight the rain began to pour down and the men were forced to go below. The remaining hours of darkness were spent sitting in the crew's mess hall. With the coming of dawn the ship (which had been at sea throughout the night) pulled into Treasury.

SHORTLY thereafter the lumber needed for construction was hauled aboard. Work began immediately in Holds #1, #2 and #5 on bunk racks upon which the passengers could place their collapsible cots. Construction was speeded with the aid of the Seabee passengers who carried lumber and performed other helpful tasks. The temporary bunk structures were three-tiered wooden-framed bunks such as Mr. Holsinger had designed for MAG 24's ships.

WHILE the carpenters were working on bunk racks the plumbers were busy too. They built a galley on the foredeck of the ship, installing stationary tubs for sinks and attaching water pipes to the fresh-water supply of the ship. Then they set up field ranges and an oven for baking, covered the top of all of this with canvas, built counters out of rough lumber and had a galley ready for instant use.

CONSTRUCTION of two overhead showers was next. These were built on the aftdeck, one on each side of the ship. The showers were built flush with the rail so that the water would drain off into the ocean. Each shower was equipped with five nozzles. This enabled ten men to shower simultaneously. A platform was laid under each shower and the pipes attached to the salt water system.

WHEN the carpenters completed the bunk structures they went to work building two "heads", one alongside each shower. They were six-holers, long box-type, open-air jobs with tarp roofs, and lenty of sea breeze for ventilation.

THE entire job---bunk racks, galley, "heads", showers---was completed by the time the ship again anchored in Empress Augusta Bay. Kraus and his boys had worked on the way down to Treasury, while the ship was loading at Treasury and on the return trip to Bougainville. The assignment had been completed to everyone's satisfaction and the men returned to camp, tired, hungry and dirty, but convinced they had done their work well.

OF the trip Chief Kraus said, in a dialect that had earned him the name "Dutchie when he was still an enlisted man. "We hadda sleep on da deck goin down und komin' back, fife nites in all. It raint every nite, und radder de get zoaked we set up most of da nite in da mezhall. Dey dint feed us bad at We ate fresh aigs a coupla timez. Poy! Dey woz goot. While dey woz loadin da poat at Treazury it woz hell workin' in doz holds. Dem damn winches cre 'n da boxes fallin' in da holds made a helluva racket. We coun't even tink. We sure woz glad to get back to camp. Poy! It woz goot yust to get a frezh water shower again. It woz a real treat and I'm lookin' for'ard to crawlin' into my goot, ole fortsack again."

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CBMU 582 played host to the Seabee unit from Treasury which had stopp over in the bay on board the Ralph Emerson. To relieve the monotony of the many days of traveling which the men of this unit had in store for them, the Skipper invited them to spend a day or two ashore as guests of the 582.

THE invitation was accepted and Lt. O'Rourke dispatched Toenniessen a Pat Long in the SEABEE to transport passengers from ship to shore. A fleet of trucks picked up the visitors at the beach and drove them to the camp. This unit had made the initial crossing aboard the same ship on which CBMU 5 had sailed. Hence the visitors were far from being virtual strangers to the of 582. There were many shipboard friendships to be renewed.

DELIGHTED to be playing the role of host, the Bougainville Seabees to their guests for a tour of the camp. They were proudly shown the Quonset quarters, the hot and cold water shower room, the Library and its row upon row of late editions and pinups, the Administration Building and warehouses, the Beer Reefer with the ice-water spigots alongside, Miller's Barber Shop and the Laundry; and, lastly, the Wreck Hut.

THE visitors were taken into the Wreck Hut for a cup of hot coffee and a couple of freshly made donuts. Several ping-pong games were in process and the small games tables were occupied by men playing checkers, chess, dominoes and cribbage. Al Imrie was clinking away at the piano and the air was filled with fun and laughter.

PETE GRAY, Mike Thomas, Bob Wills and a slew of Red Cross Workers were making batch after batch of sinkers for consumption by visitors and the mates. It was a gala holiday for guests and residents alike.

WHEN it was time for noon chow the guests were escorted up the hill to the Chow Hall. Here they were surprised beyond words at the fresh meat (meat and vegetables, and the abundance of ice cream which was slapped on the individual trays. They ate heartily and had many compliments to pay on the quality of the chow.

AFTER lunch several trucks were pressed into service to show the visitors around the island. They were taken to the native village, which was always a must on a visitor's itinerary, to the air strips and taxiways, past the Australian Hospital; where it was pointed out, "They got nurses in there!" They were driven up and down the maze of roads and connecting roads which had beenwoven into the perimeter by Seabee and Army construction men. Then a swim in the ocean was for some, while others had their first fresh-water dip in months at the waterfall.

WHEN the parties returned to camp the hosts dug down into seabags for clean towels so that the guests might bathe in fresh water before returning to the ship. Then the Wreck Hut was visited again for more coffee and donuts. Each man made an average of six trips to the Wreck during the day for refreshments, and the supply of coffee and donuts was inexhaustible -- thanks to Pete, Mike, Bob and the others.

ALL too soon it was time to return to the ship, and it was with some reluctance that the visitors took their leave. The unit had been broken up into two liberty parties (it was liberty just to get off that ship), one party visiting CBMU 582 on 3rd March, and the other on the 4th.

BOTH groups were lavish in their praise of the Bougainville camp's facilities and hospitality. They were grateful for the tour of the island. They had been able to cover their own island on foot in less than an hour. The Seabees enjoyed the fresh water swim or the jaunt which some of the braver ones took through the jungle where they gawked at crude foxholes and pillboxes and the pile of Jap bones which had been washed to the surface during a recent rain.

THE Jap souvenirs which were the stock in trade of Simpson, Sharp and Martin-Searl evoked the envious glances of all who gazed upon those much sought after trophies. They looked but could not buy. A Japanese officer's saber (not Mr. Burke's) on sale of \$300; a Jap luger for \$75; and a Jap "twenty-five" rifle priced at \$50.

THEY were all grateful for the chance to clean up and for the friendly spirit which prevailed, into which they had been drawn as if by a magnet. Impressed by the neatness of the well-built camp, they admitted that theirs had not been as "nice a set-up", and it was doubted if they would ever see another camp such as the Seabees had on Bougainville.

HOST and visitors alike were sorry when it was time to go. The departing men warm-heartedly expressed their thanks, and the men who were staying spoke only of the enjoyment they'd had entertaining the travelers, and wished them "Good Luck and Happy Hunting!"

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WHEN Roy Styczykowski was told by a messenger that the Skipper wanted to see him he said anxiously: "Golly! Wonder what I've done now." A summons to the "front office" usually meant something serious was up, so Stich, dropping his work in the Paint Shop, hurried over to the Administration Building. Entering Lt. O'Rourke's office, Styczykowski froze shakily to attention.

THE Skipper turned turned around in his chair, indicating with a wave of his hand to dispense with ceremony, and said: "Stich! Do you recognize this sailor?", motioning to the chief who was sitting opposite him. Stich glanced at the CPO, then reverted his eyes to the Skipper and answered, "No sir!"

"LOOK at him again...and take a good look this time!", Lt. O'Rourke ordered. He did as he was bid and scrutinized the stranger. Suddenly it dawned on him. He was staring at his brother!

"FRAN!", he shouted. "Yep, it's me, Roy," Francis Styczykowski replied, happy that he had finally been recognized.

THERE immediately followed the rush of questions and answers occasioned when two people haven't seen each other for a long time. After initial greetings were exchanged, Lt. O'Rourke, his role as a conciliator completed, smilingly sent the pair off to get reacquainted.

THERE was much to talk about. Their last meeting was in the spring of 1938, shortly before Francis, then 18, had enlisted in the Navy. That was the reason Stich had not recognized him. Stich had been only thirteen at the time, and an interval of seven years, besides the changes which the war had wrought upon Francis' countenance, had done much to alter his memories of his older brother.

FRANCIS Styczykowski, a quiet, unobtrusive, broad-shouldered Chief Metal-smith, had seen seven years of Naval service. He had been stationed at Pearl Harbor during the "sneak attack" in 1941. Later on he was assigned to sea duty, and had seen action in many parts of the Pacific. At the time of the reunion, which was in March, FRan was serving aboard a P.T. Tender. The tender had put into drydock at Manus, so he had been able to fly down to Bougainville to see Roy.

THE brothers had five whole days together, five days in which to relive the experiences of seven years. They were inseparable, and Fran easily slipped into the carefree life of a shore-based Seabee. When it came time for the departure, both Roy and Fran agreed that their next meeting (which they hope is not far off) will be in Frisco, late in forty-five.

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ISMOND, Dorian (n), Flc....a young curly-headed, black-haired and browed Seabee, who was born of Canadian parents in Shanghai, China's International Settlement. Dorian, or Don, also called "izzie", or "Chink" because he could speak Chinese, spent fourteen years in the Far East, then went to Victoria, British Columbia with his family when they returned to their homeland.

IN Victoria Don finished high school, then traveled down to Portland, Oregon, and from there entered the Seabees in July 1943. After Boot Camp he was placed in the 126th Battalion, as were most of the men in 582. Since enlisting in the service Dorian Ismond, Flc ha become a citizen of the United States.

DON'S father, Wolfe Ismond, had for many years been an auditor for the Eastman Kodak Company in China and Japan. In November 1941 he was prevailed to return to Chungking, Free China to look after his company's interests in the Orient. So Mr. Wolfe Ismond said goodbye to his wife, son and three daughters and boarded ship for Manila.

IN that city, upon arrival, he tried to get a plane for Chungking but all flights to China had been secured. That was on 8th December 1941. Then the Japs invaded the Philippines, Manila was captured, and so was Mr. Ismond. Along with countless thousands of others, civilians and soldiers, he was interred, and he was to remain a Jap prisoner for more than three long years.

ALL the time that Don had been in the Seabees he wondered and worried his dad. The only word the family received was an occasional Red Cross report stating that Mr. Ismond was still alive and listing condition as "fair". When the news of the 37th's beachhead at Linganyen, and its subsequent capture of Manila reached Bougainville, Don's hopes soared. But so did his doubts. "D they arrive in time?", he asked himself repeatedly.

THEN on 3rd March Don received a letter from his mother. The letter told him the news he had waited so long to hear. His father had been freed! He was recuperating at Santo Tomas, having lost forty pounds during his imprisonment, and he was soon to go home!

DON knew that the chances were slim but he did so wish to see his dad. So, armed with the letter he went to see Lt. Greger. He wanted to know his chances of going to Manila. Mr. Greger referred Ismond to the Skipper, so after hearing Ismond's story went "to bat" for him. In fact, a lot of gold braid took a hand in getting Don to Manila.

LT. O'ROURKE visited Comdr. Kincaid and related Ismond's problem and hopes. The kind, understanding Captain of the Base, and specialist in morale saw immediately the importance attached to such a request, so he went to work on it at once. Comdr. Kincaid drove over to see Col. H. C. Major, Commanding Officer of Marine Air Group Twenty-Five. They laid their heads together and the upshot of it all was that Don left for the Philippine capitol as Col. Major's personal passenger, in the colonel's own plane, a C-47. He was going to see his father!

ONCE in Manila Col. Major assisted Don in locating his dad. They went directly to Santo Tomas where Mr. Ismond had been held captive. At the prison a woman office attendant was consulted, and she thumbed through file after file, murmuring, "Ismond--Wolfe Ismond--Ismond". Finally she turned around and said she was sorry, but she couldn't find any data on Wolfe Ismond.

DON'S blue dungarees and white hat had fooled her. She thought his father was an American too. In his slow, thoughtful way Don said: "Well... maybe...you see, he's a Canadian...and as near as I know, he was up north at Baguio...until just recently."

HE Noticed a slight change in the lady's face, her eyes brightened just a trifle. "Does that help!", he asked hopefully. It certainly did. She dug into another file, a card was extracted, and Don was told that he would find his father in a little hospital a short distance removed from Santo Tomas. Stammering his thanks, Don and Col. Major rushed out of the office, and a few minutes later were entering the ward to which Mr. Ismond had been assigned.

DESPITE the changes which internment had made, despite the thin and haggard features, Don recognized his father instantly. The parent, however, didn't know that Don was

THE meeting that took place was described by Col. Major as being "The most spontaneous, affectionate and joyous scene I have ever witnessed." The Ismonds spent several happy crowded days together. They relived past experiences and Don related to his news-hungry father all that he knew about home and the family. They made plans for the future, which included a reunion in Victoria when Don's present tour of duty was over.

AT the end of his leave, Ismond, the Seabee, returned to Bougainville happy with the thought of having seen his father, and knowing that he would soon embark on a hospital ship for America. The Seabee was grateful to those officers who had helped him make the 2,500 mile flight to Manila and back. And one thing was a certainty. The latter half of his stay overseas would not be as lonely or as filled with anxiety as had been his first.

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NORSOLS UNIVERSITY was organized by the top-ranking officers of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps on Bougainville. These officers realized the importance of education for the Armed Forces. The purpose of this institution was to maintain high morale and to provide an outlet for energy during the "Change-Over", which had left several hundred idle while awaiting shipment to new assignments. Other outfits, including 582, which were remaining behind, also needed some morale building; so these, too, were included in the plans for the university.

A FACULTY of instructors, former educators and specialists in certain fields, was drawn from the three Branches to set up the courses and schedules, and to supervise the enrollment of students. The education officers of each command promoted the idea of group study, extolled the value to be derived, and also aided in facilitating enrollment.

CLASSES were inaugurated in both academic and vocational subjects. Auto Mechanics, Diesel Repair, Radio, Refrigeration, Bookkeeping, Business Law, English, History and Languages were just a few of those listed in the curriculum. Sessions were held in chapels, recreation huts, mess halls, or wherever a body of men could be accommodated. School was held two nights weekly for each subject, and class periods lasted for two hours each. The entire semester, consisting of twenty hours of group study, was completed in five weeks. When the first semester ended, those men who wished to continue with their studies did so for an additional five weeks.

APPROXIMATELY fifty men from CBMU 582 attended the NorSols University. Some of these men took as many as three subjects, going to school six nights a week. The Unit's officers were quite happy with the interest shown by the mates in the university, as was the faculty. But 582's real pride was in three men. They were John Whited, Edward Nasztakowski and Roy Styczykowski. Whited, with Masz' assistance, conducted the Refrigeration Course in the Unit's Chapel; Stutch acted as an Art instructor.

FOR their wholehearted cooperation with the group study activity, these three men each received a Letter of Commendation from Major Earle P. Schouten, CMP, Education Officer of USAFNORSOLS and Head of the University. They were commended for:

"...generously and unsparingly giving of your off-duty time to contribute to the program, and for the superior manner in which you conducted your classes."

GRADUATION Exercises for the first semester were held on 10th March. They were attended by all of the students, both officers and men, as well as most of the Commanding Officers of organizations stationed on the island at the time. It was with immense pride that the Seabees listened to their mate, Al Imrie, deliver the Valedictory Oration. Next the students were addressed by several officers who had lent their support to this program. Then to each and every student a "Certificate of Accomplishment" was presented. And SCHOOL DAYS were over.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

- THE WIND UP -

PROBABLY never again will the men of 582 experience days as hot as those of March and April. They will never have to live through such heat again unless they should one day visit the Gobi or Sahara desert. During those sixty-one days of March and April there were only eight days when the rains were heavier than one inch, and only four when the rainfall exceeded two inches. Heavy daily rains (so necessary to human, animal and plant life on a tropical island) were not forthcoming. Indeed, worse even than the floods was this heat which could only be alleviated by continual rains, yet for days on end, little or no rainfall.

EACH day was hotter than the previous one, or so it seemed, and the sun was cruel and relentless. In the camp the temperature hovered between 110 and 120 degrees, and on the strips a thermometer reading of 140 or 150 degrees was not at all unusual. For hours at a time the sky was void of clouds, and even old Smokey Joe (the volcano) refused to send over the afternoon rain cloud which had heretofore brought the rains and the only relief from the exasperating rays of the sun.

IN the camp, on the roads and out on the strips the earth became like burning coals. The sands disintegrated and a thick haze of dust rose up over roads and taxiways to engulf anyone who ventured forth.

HARDEST hit by the heat wave were the drivers of the sprinklers. The men labored for twelve and fourteen hours daily, pushing their trucks up and down taxiways and revetments trying to beat down the dust with water. But the sun drank up every drop and the dust continued to plague all whose lot was that of a working man.

RELIEF was nowhere to be found from the heat, dust and broiling sun. Loggers, strip workers, carpenters, shop men and camp laborers all suffered. A breeze was prayed for, slight rains were a blessing. But neither made an iota of difference. The days were almost unbearable.

THOSE men who were off-duty were unable to take a siesta (a must in the tropics) because perspiration completely saturated bedding and cots, and the tents were like ovens. Even a swim in the ocean brought no easement for the salt water was tepid, and only heightened the heat of men's bodies.

NOR did deliverance come with the night. True, there wasn't any sun with which to contend, but the heat lingered from the day. Even if a breeze did spring up it was a warm one. Completely surrounded by jungle, the camp a virtual prison. The trees and underbrush held back the cool night air, thus making the area like a fire box in a furnace.

STILL the work was carried on as usual. Men reported on jobs as scheduled. They labored for their six hours which had become the typical working because that was all a man could stand. Perhaps they didn't work as hard as previously but that was because they were not able. They stopped oftener throughout the day for smokes and drinks too, and many times it was just to rest in the shade for a few moments.

THE climate was hard on one's nerves. An argument could be had easily but few took the trouble and energy to argue. Greetings customarily exchanged between mates going to and from chow ceased to be boisterous and friendly. Instead they became short. Sometimes one man didn't even bother to nod to another.

IT wasn't any wonder that everyone got fed up with everything in general. These Seabees were fighting a different kind of war. Excitement? That was not for them. All they knew was watching, waiting, repairing and building. The same routine was followed day after day after day. It was work, sleep and eat with an occasional move or ballgame thrown in to keep them from blowing their tops. Yes, and there were some who did blow their tops! But most of the men stuck it out, hoping that something would happen to break the monotony.

ABOVE all else the men "wanted to get the hell off this damned island!" It didn't matter where they went. Anywhere would do! It could be home, so their eyes turned hopefully toward the Philippines. That was where they'd like to go, the Philippines. They certainly wanted to get the hell away from Bougainville.

LATE in March it looked as if this wish was to become a reality. Some Australian Air Force construction men were flown in from their homeland to take over the Piva and Torokina Strips. Long awaited, they were nonetheless still welcome upon arrival.

NOR was any time wasted in acquainting the newcomers with the workings of the strips. Under able tutelage and Aussies were quickly taught how to repair culverts, clear drainage ditches, grade taxiways, revetments and shoulders, replace matting, etc. Everything that the Seabees had learned about the strips and facilities was passed on to the men with the brown, broad-brimmed hats.

AUSSIE and Seabee constructioners got along famously together, both at work and at plant. The Yanks learned to play cricket while the Australians developed a liking for baseball. Every afternoon the newcomers brought out tea pots and cups, and invited their friends for a "bit of teah".

THERE were get-togethers in the evenings too. Beer was the beverage served at these gatherings, and it was Aussie beer of which the Seabees were quite fond. It was more potent than their own, and besides, it came in quart bottles. The lads from Down Under had a craving for American cigarettes, so an even trade was made, smokes for drinks.

MATES enjoyed the newness of driving Aussie trucks with the steering wheel on the right side. They didn't like the "left side of road" method of driving that the 2nd Australian Corps had inaugurated shortly after arrival. They had to drive on the left side of the road but they didn't have to like it.

IT wasn't all fun, however, for the two factions working side by side on the strips. And the most important thing to the Seabees was that they were going to unload their year-long headache on to the Australians. That meant that 582 would be pulling out. Everything pointed to the belief that Embarkation Day was not too distant, so preparations were made to wind up CBMU 582's affairs on Bougainville.

COINCIDING with the arrival of the Aussies was the erection of the tents on the drill field. Once again the mates were going under canvas. It was almost with a feeling of regret that they squared away their gear and bade their steel homes adieu.

THE Base Roll Up Detail, strengthened by the Logging Detail, dismantled each hut as rapidly as its occupants moved out. Boxes and crates had already been made, and as fast as each hut was dismantled it was crated, banded and marked for shipment.

THE entire Quonset City, with the exception of the Wreck Hut, was dismantled and crated over a period of three weeks. Then the foundations were ripped up and destroyed and the area cleaned up and graded. A week after this work was completed no one would have been able to tell that fourteen buildings housing two-hundred and fifty men had ever been located there.

NEXT the warehouse gear was inventoried, boxed, banded and stenciled. Lengthy manifests were typed and mimeographed. Except for shop equipment, household and galley gear, the Unit was ready -- and eager -- to roll.

FIVE-EIGHTY-TWO might have been ready to roll but there wouldn't be any rolling for some time to come. For the time being there would be just a lot of waiting. It helped, nevertheless, just to see the gear crated. The men knew they were going. They didn't know where...but they knew they were going!

13TH APRIL was a bright, sunny day, one of those quiet mornings when there wasn't much doing. Almost all of the details had been secured so practically everyone was in camp.

ABOUT 0930 Frank Johnson blew the bugle. It was strange to hear a bugle at that time of day. It wasn't Chow Call, Reveille or Taps. It was Assembly, a call that the men hadn't heard for almost a year so they weren't quite sure what the bugle call meant. But it was different than the ones with which they were familiar. They figured that something was up, therefore they came a-running.

MEN streamed out of tents, offices and warehouses. Some came running up the road, others out of the showers (with just a towel around them), and many (judging from the way eyes blinked in the sunlight) had just jumped out of the sack.

ALL of them streamed into the open area south of the flag pole. They started to line up into a column of threes, got tangled up, untangled, spaced off, straightened up, and finally stood at attention. All the time the men were assembling there was a lot of talking. Everyone was excited. Almost to a man they figured that sailing orders had come in and the Unit was ready to shove off. They were in high spirits at this thought, and when attention was called for they snapped to it, impatiently awaiting the announcement.

WHEN Lt. Broadhurst had the men squared away the Skipper stepped forward. His eyes roamed up and down the ranks, then he cleared his throat and said quietly: "I regret to inform this Unit..." He paused for a moment as if he was mastering his words with great difficulty. "I regret to inform this Unit", the Skipper repeated, that at 1435 Eastern War Time on 12th April our Commander-in-Chief, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the President of the United States, passed away."

A BOLT of lightning in their midst couldn't have stunned the men more. They were shocked. To think that President Roosevelt was dead! Who had said the day was bright and sunny? Peaceful and quiet? There was no brightness. The cloud of sorrow rising from the ranks obliterated all brightness. The entire company acted as if it were in a trance. The men were numb. Only a murmured "My God!", "I can't believe it!", or "Oh, My God!" transfixed the deadly silence.

THE Skipper's next words brought the men back to the incident at hand and broke the silence. "In keeping with Military Customs in matters such as this, the Flag today, and for twenty-nine days hereafter, will fly at half-mast in honor of our beloved President."

THAT was Friday, the 13th April. Indeed it was a Black Friday. As black a Friday as ever the men had seen. Throughout the entire camp there was sorrow. Deep sorrow. Each man felt a personal loss in the death of this President who had been a philanthropist and a statesman, an aristocrat and a commoner. Each man spoke almost with reverence of this man whom they had looked upon for so long as their leader. Each worried considerably about his own fate and the fate of the nation without Roosevelt's guiding hand.

THERE wasn't any revelry in the camp that night. Reactions were the same as those experienced by the folks at home. Many of the men sat for hours listening to the radio for more details on this disastrous occurrence. Every conversation was dominated either by the untimeliness of President Roosevelt's death, or by mention of President Truman, of whom only little was known at that time.

ALL day Friday and throughout the following day church services were held hourly in every chapel on the island. Men of all branches of the service, of all denominations, including the Australians, went to Mass or Service to pray for President Roosevelt. All asked God for only one thing, to let this Great Man "rest in peace".

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ANOTHER incident of major importance also occurred on 13th April. This, it would have been of major importance if the saddening news of the morning hadn't been heard. Now in the afternoon it became just a mere formality. But it was a milestone in the history of the Unit, so it created considerable interest.

THE incident was the "Transfer of Piva and Torokina Air Strips and Facilities from Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 582 to the 7th Airfield Construction Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force". Officially the transfer was made on paper but men don't work steadily for an entire year without attaching some importance to their jobs, so a little ceremony was held to mark this occasion.

IN the early afternoon the Seabee and Australian Strip Crews met on one of the Taxiways, parking their trucks in front of an Australian Beaufort. The men got out of their trucks and stood in front of the plane. Then Lt. (jg) Harold W. Greger, Officer in Charge of Maintenance and Operation of Piva and Torokina Air Strips and Facilities, passed his duties over to Flight Lieut. K. W. Storey of the RAAF.

AFTER the transfer was completed, officers and men of both organizations wished each other "good luck" and shook hands all around. Next a picture was taken of the group of Aussies and Seabees, and that brought the little ceremony to a close.

THEORETICALLY the transfer meant that CBMU 582 was finished up on Bougainville. The job the unit had come overseas to do was done. Almost all Naval Forces on the island had long since departed. There was nothing of import to warrant keeping CBMU 582 detained at this base any longer. It was only natural to believe that a new assignment was forthcoming. After all, the Unit had only been overseas for a year. Where that assignment would be was still an empty guess. But there would be one, and it was hoped that orders would soon arrive.

DEPRESSION days came with the transfer of the strips. CBMU 582 was out of a job. All strip details had been secured. The Logging Detail was secured, all shops were practically wrapped up; in fact, almost every detail outside of the camp proper had been disbanded. Only the Camp Security Guards and Camp Administration Details continued to work fulltime.

FOR the majority of the men in the Unit there was nothing to do, nothing to occupy their time. Nothing? Well, nothing except the following:

1. Installation of a diesel motor in an Army Ordnance boat.
2. Installation of a valve in an Int. patrol for the Army Engineers.
3. Repair of a D-8 bulldozer for the Army Engineers.
4. Installation of plumbing facilities on five cargo ships.
5. Dismantling of water tanks on two LCTs.
6. Construction of Dispensary for Marine Air Group Twenty-Five.

This job consisted of grading the entire hospital area, erection of six Quonsets (four of which were for wards and the other two for housing of Sick Bay, pharmacy, doctors' offices and surgery), building of ten framed, floored screened tents for additional hospital beds, and the construction of two cement floored wooden buildings, one of which was for use as a galley, the other for "head" and shower room.

7. Construction of a Dispensary for USAFNORSOLS (U. S. Army Headquarters). This job, comparable with the MAG 25 project, was completed in twelve days by a crew of thirty-eight men.

8. Repair of light plant for the Army Signal Corps.

9. Crated a 40' x 100' Quonset warehouse for the Navy Base.

10. Dismantled surveyed trucks and heavy equipment for shipment to the States as scrap iron, at the Army Engineers' Salvage Dump. This job required the services of eighteen men -- cutters, equipment operators, laborers, etc. for a period of thirty days.

11. Stevedore work aboard the cargo ship SS POWELL. Thirty-three men were assigned to this detail, the first loading job undertaken by the Unit. The men were wholly unfamiliar with this type of work, yet their first stevedoring was the handling of two thousand pound bombs! Incidentally, 582's portion of this operation was completed in four days without injury to any of the crew, and without damage to any of the bombs. Thank God!

12. Stevedore work aboard the SS WATSON SQUIRE for the Army Service Command.

BESIDES these jobs and the dismantling of the 582 camp, the Unit's Heavy Equipment Shops reconditioned all rolling stock, heavy equipment, stationary equipment, etc. Every engine was overhauled. Every tire and tube was checked. And every piece of equipment was given a fresh coat of paint.

THEN all of the shops were rolled-up. The equipment was crated, marked for shipment; and shops, Quonsets, tools, gear, equipment, etc. was carried down to Beach Four where it was stacked to await the arrival of the cargo ship. Only the barest necessities were kept in the camp.

CBMU 582 was so organized that it was prepared to board ship on twenty four hour notice. Neither the Skipper nor the men were taking any chances on being left behind once orders were received. During the time while awaiting shipment to another base, the Unit had nothing to do. Well, almost nothing.

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DESERVING special mention in this list of jobs completed during the waiting period was the month's work Seabee mechanics put in with Marine Corps ground crews servicing C-47 cargo planes. This was quite a jump for Art Care and his crew of "motor Macs" and "grease monkeys" after twelve months of repairing jeeps and trucks. The duties entailed in this assignment were to repair and check a squadron of these huge planes which operated regularly to the Philippines, and to accompany pilots on test flights.

ARRANGEMENTS for this unique Seabee job of "Keeping Marines Flying" were made by Lt. Col. H. F. Brown, USMC Commanding Officer of VMR 153, 1st Marine Air Wing, and Lt. O'Rourke, 582's Skipper. For their part in these operations the Seabees got another hearty "well done" and a wealth of new and interesting experience.

ALSO out of the ordinary was the chapel the Seabees built for Father Kelly of the RAAF. This was strictly a volunteer assignment and the men worked only during their off-duty hours. It took longer to build because of that, but when completed it was certainly one of the finest chapels ever to be erected on the island. From the outside, St. Anthony's Chapel looked like a big barn or as Pete Gray put it, "Shure an' it looks like Rafferty's Saloon back in Brooklyn."

THE reason for this unchurchly appearance was because it had been constructed of surveyed Quonset materials and rough lumber over which canvas had been stretched, all of which was procured by the builders with Father Kelly looking on to make certain the boys didn't go too far. The only indications that this building was a church were the name of the chapel painted across the front and a white cross fastened to the roof.

INSIDE, however, the Seabees had excelled in all respects. There were wooden benches, electric lights, a neatly finished altar and tabernacle, a cupboard for the priest's vestments, a communion railing and several pieces of furniture necessary to a church. The body of the church had an earthen floor but the altar and sanctuary were built on a wooden dias. The interior of the chapel was even painted. Walls, ceiling and benches were a deep blue, while the sanctuary was painted white.

THE crowning glory of St. Anthony's was the two imitation stained glass windows which Roy Styczkowski designed and painted on canvas. One window was set into the wall on each side of the altar and when the light shone through the windows the blue, white and gold tints created a paragon of beautiful color.

WHEN Father Kelly said the first Mass in St. Anthony's Chapel, Pete Gray, Tom Caulfield, Vanderboom, Stitch, Lambert and the other Catholic Seabees who had helped build the church sat in the very first pew. After dedicating the chapel Father Kelly made a little speech from the altar. He thanked the Seabees for the fine job they had done and told them that so long as he was able to say Mass they would always be remembered in his prayers.

BESIDES that message Father Kelly sent a letter to the Seabees which in itself explained why the men liked and respected this short, stocky, red-faced Australian Chaplain who was described as being friendly, democratic, and above all, a "regular guy". The letter read:

"To the Commanding Officer and men of the 582 Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit, I wish to tender my sincere thanks and appreciation for the generous and enthusiastic assistance you gave in the construction of St. Anthony's Chapel, and without which it would still be just a good intention. In Australian we say, 'You'll do me', but strictly Brooklyn, it was a 'good deal'.

Thanks fellers, and may God bless you and see you safely home. I'll never forget you for it."

Yours sincerely,

/s/ Father Brian L. Kelly

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SCUTTLEBUTT had it that a personnel inspection was scheduled for 5th May, the anniversary of CBNU 582's arrival on Bougainville. A notice posted on the Bulletin Board confirmed the rumors, although no mention was made of the speech the fellows said the Old Man intended to make.

WHEN the 5th rolled around all hands fell out at 0745 and lined up in platoon formation in front of the flag pole. At 0800 the Unit stood at attention while the Stars and Stripes were raised, then the men were given "at ease" after the final notes of the bugle had faded away.

NEXT would come the inspection but first the Skipper stepped forward. He apprised his men by permitting his eyes to sweep up and down the ranks. When he cleared his throat the men figured they were going to be given a talk. They guessed right, for the Skipper said:

"ON this anniversary of our landing on this island I feel that it is appropriate to express my complete satisfaction in the accomplishments of this Unit's assignments as a service force of our Navy. You were the first Maintenance Unit to enter an active combat area, and the most advanced Unit in the Pacific Theatre at the time of our landing.

"IN the beginning and until now y our duty has been in direct Support of Operations against the enemy here and at nearby installations. You have carried out all assignments in a most commendable manner and have lived up to the Can Do spirit on a job well done.

I WANT you all to know I am proud to be your Commanding Officer and to show my appreciation this day will be considered a holiday, and is given you for your own persoal pleasure."

A ROUSING cheer went up from the company at this announcement. Once the shouting had subsided Lt. O'Rourke continued: "I know that everyone has been waiting as anxiously as I, if not moreso, for news as to what we shall do and where we shall go from here. With violating any security regulations I can tell you this: I have received orders from the Seventh Fleet instructing this Unit to embark for the Philippines. This we will do as soon as shipping facilities are made available.

I'M not at liberty to disclose our destination but I do know we have been assigned to another job. That's all I have to say at the present, men. However, you will be kept informed on future developments."

AS the Skipper wound up his speech, there were more ear-splitting cheers and yells. Then, his broad Irish face broken by an ear-to-ear grin the Old Man spoke to Lt. Broadhurst, motioning to the men as he did so. Next the Exec turned to the men and said:

"THE Skipper is mighty pleased with the neat appearance of the men, and inasmuch as this is to be your day, we will dispense with the remainder of inspection."

THIS was an occasion for more cheers for there was nothing the men hated more than a personnel inspection.

PRIOR to dismissal the men were again called to attention. Heels were strapped together, arms smartly dropped to sides. The men, every one of them, stared straight ahead.

BUT they stared out of unseeing eyes. They didn't see the officers who were facing them or the flag whipping smartly in the breeze, or the trees stretching skyward from the edge of the jungle. They didn't notice how the sand was shimmering up from the hot sand or how it was making the moisture on the tents go up in steam. They didn't see the leaves rolling along the ground or the sweat trickling down the Old Man's face. Nor did they take note of how beautiful the purple-tinted mountain in the background looked in the morning sunlight.

THEY were looking beyond all that. They were trying to see into the future. The men were thinking of the trip to the Philippines and of assignment to a new and hopefully interesting job. Calculating swiftly, it was figured that in possibly six or eight months the work would be completed. Then every man Jack in the outfit would be going home. That was all any of them wanted. In fact, that was what these Seabees wanted more than everything or anything in the world. They wanted to do their share of the work to hasten victory.. and then they wanted to go HOME!

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- TWO -

COMMANDER NAVAL FORCES
Northern Solomons
Fleet Post Office
San Francisco

FROM: Commander Naval Forces Northern Solomons
TO: Officer in Charge, C.B.M.U. #582
SUBJECT: Service rendered by C.B.M.U. #582

1. Upon my detachment from this command I wish to commend officers and men of your organization for their wholehearted cooperation and efficient performance. The voluminous forms of construction work and the maintenance of air strips, highways and port facilities were carried out by your Unit in splendid fashion. To your "Can Do" and "Will Do" outfit I say "Very Well Done".

/s/ E. J. MORAN
Commodore, USN

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- THREE -

Headquarters
FLEET MARINE AIRCRAFT WING
Fleet Marine Force

KV10/P15/gpd
Ser. No. 3184-45

23 May 1945

FROM: Commanding General
TO: Commanding Officer, Construction Battalion
Maintenance Unit No. 582
SUBJECT: Letter of Appreciation

1. The Wing Commander takes pleasure in forwarding this letter of appreciation for the cooperation and help your command gave to Marine Aircraft Group Twenty-Five.

2. With the aid of members of your staff, Marine Aircraft Group Twenty-Five now boasts an excellent officers' club, a new sick bay and dispensary, and, through your assistance and that of your staff, improvements have been made in the electrical and refrigeration set-up in the Marine Aircraft Group Twenty-Five camp area.

3. Such close cooperation tends to make for better team work and is in the best traditions of the Naval service. It is with deep gratitude for a job well done that this letter of appreciation is transmitted.

/s/ R. J. MITCHELL

NB110/P15
(EHK:ye)
Serial 116

NAVAL ADVANCED BASE
NAVY L58
Fleet Post Office
San Francisco

17 February 1945

C O N F I D E N T I A L

FROM: Commander Naval Advanced Base, Navy 158
TO: The Chief of Naval Personnel
SUBJECT: Commendation

1. As American forces have withdrawn from Bougainville, Australian Solomon Islands, and upon completion of the M-1 staging operation, the following commendatory letter has been received by the Commanding Officer:

FROM: Commander, Amphibious Group Seven
TO: Commander Naval Forces, Northern Solomons
SUBJECT: Services rendered by Naval Advanced Base, Torokina

1. Commander Amphibious Group SEVEN desires to express his appreciation of the excellent services rendered by the Commanding Officer, Naval Advanced Base, Torokina in support of Group SEVEN during the period in which the Group was based ashore at Torokina.

2. The cooperative spirit and effective support rendered at all times by the Naval Advanced Base, Torokina contributed greatly to the effective functioning of Amphibious Group SEVEN during that period.

/s/ I. N. KILAND

2. It gives the Commanding Officer great pleasure to make it a matter of official record that:

The Officers and enlisted personnel of CBMU 582 were among those whose loyal services contributed to the successful part played by the Naval Advanced Base, Torokina in this important mission against the enemy.

/s/ E. H. KINCAID

o o o o

CONSTRUCTION BATTALION MAINTENANCE
UNIT #582
Fleet Post Office
San Francisco

13 April 1945

FROM: Officer in Charge
TO: Lt. (jg) H. W. Greger, Maintenance Officer
SUBJECT: Maintenance of Piva and Torokina Airstrips, discontinuance of

1. As of this date maintenance of Piva and Torokina airstrips has been assumed in its entirety by 7-ACS-RAAF.

2. In line with above you are hereby relieved as officer in charge of maintenance of subject airfields and this detail is secured.

3. As Officer in Charge of this Unit I feel that it is highly appropriate at this time to commend you and the personnel under your jurisdiction for the excellent and efficient manner in which those facilities have been maintained for the past eleven months.

(continued)

4. Due to excessive rains and destructive crashes on the strips, many of which were over a repeated 24 hour cycle, required long arduous hours, sometimes lasting from dawn, throughout the day and several hours after dusk. You and your men are to be congratulated on the fact that at no time were the scheduled operations delayed for more than 30 minutes. This devotion to duty by those under your charge, as well as yourself, aided in the successful operations against the enemy which were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Naval Service.

/s/ GEORGE P. O'ROURKE, SR.
Lieutenant CEC USNR

— PROLOGUE —

One of the last pages in the book lists the itinerary for the trip from Bougainville to Samar on the HMS WESTRALIA. This was the end of CBMU #582 because from Samar we traveled to the small island of Calacoan, where many of us joined the 75th Battalion, others signed over into the Regular Navy, others to other Battalions....and that was the demise of CBMU #582.

But not for long. For the last several years, a number of mates and their lovely wives have been getting together for an annual reunion to relive those "HAPPY DAYS" in the South Pacific.

MAY THE REUNIONS GO ON FOREVER!!!

AIRCRAFT BASED ON PIVA STRIPS DURING 582'S PERIOD OF OPERATION:

SBD - Dauntless Dive Bomber	B-26 - Martin Marauder
TBF - Avenger Torpedo Bomber	Gruman Hellcat
DBV - Ventura Bomber	P-38 - Lightning
F4U - Corsair Fighter-Bomber	P-39 - New Zealanders (Kitty Hawks)
B24 - Liberator Bomber	P-40 - New Zealanders
PBJ - Billy Mitchell Bomber (B25)	Beauforts (RAAF)
PBY - Catalina "Blackcats"	SCAT - DC-47, DC-46, DC-54
Whirlaways (RAAF)	BOOMERANGS (RAAF)

CBMU 582'S EQUIPMENT (Complement and Borrowed):

<u>CBMU EQUIPMENT</u>	<u>NAVY BASE EQUIPMENT</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
10 - 2½ ton trucks, cargoes & dumps	20 - 2½ ton trucks	30
5 - 1 ton trucks		5
3 - Jeeps, plus 3 Jeeps procured		6
1 - Crane (mobile)		1
1 - North West #25 (Comb. Clamshell & Crane)		1
1 - Pullgrader		1
1 - Motor Patrol	8 - Motor Patrols	9
4 - Bulldozers	3 - Bulldozers	7
1 - Tractor (Traxcavator)	4 - Tractors	5
5 - Trailers (various weights)	2 - Trailers	7
3 - Carryalls	3 - Carryalls	6
2 - 1½ ton personnel trucks	2 - 1½ ton trucks	4
1 - Rooter		1
1 - Concrete Mixer		1

SHIP'S LOG

Aboard

H.M.A.S. WESTRALIA

- 13 August: Boarded ship at 1400. Ship anchored in Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, A.S.I.
- 14 August: 0600, Left Bougainville
1500, Arrived Mono I., Treasury Island
- 16 August: Went ashore on Mono Island
- 19 August: Went ashore on Mono Island, visited Native Village.
2320, Left Treasury Islands
- 20 August: 1100, Arrived Munda Island, New Georgia Group
1400, Left Munda for anchorage
1830, Arrived at Gongea at sundown
- 22 August: 0700, Left Gongea at sunrise
1200, Arrived at Munda
1500, Left Munda
- 24 August: Passed through Strait between New Guinea & Britain.
2100, Passed to right of island with active volcano
- 25 August: 1830, Arrived Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea
- 26 August: 1700, Left Hollandia
- 27 August: 1600, Crossed Equator, Lat. 00-00, Long. 139-00 E
- 31 August: 1600, Arrived West End, Leyte Gulf, Philippines
- 1 Sept: 1400, Left Leyte Gulf (Tacloban)
1700, Arrived off Guiuan, Samar
- 2 Sept: 1300, Disembarked at Guiuan. Traveled by truck across causeway to Calicoan I. (small island off southernmost tip of Samar)

C. B. MAINTENANCE UNIT #582

OFFICERS

O'ROURKE, George P., Sr.	Lt. Comdr., CEC USNR	295598
BROADHURST, Edward M.	Lt. (jg), CEC USNR	173232
GREGER, Harold W.	Lt. (jg), CEC USNR	262372
COWAN, Joseph D.	Carp., CEC USNR	277139
HOLSINGER, Cecil H.	Carp., CEC USNR	277163

CHIEF PETTY OFFICERS

ADAMS, H. F.	CMM (AA)	Hdq.
ANDERSON, J. C.	COM (PA)	Hdq.
BANKER, J. M.	CCM (AA)	Hdq.
BAIMBRIDGE, F. A.	CSF (AA)	Plt. 6
BERRY, K. C.	CBMA (AA)	Hdq.
COLEMAN, E. N.	CCM (PA)	Hdq.
CURTRIGHT, J. B.	CEM (AA)	Plt. 1
CUNNINGHAM, J. K.	CSF (AA)	Hdq.
FREEMAN, A. E.	CSF (PA)	Hdq.
HUGHES, T. D.	CCM (AA)	Plt. 2
JENKINS, J. R.	CMM (PA)	Hdq.
KRAUS, F. F.	CCM (AA)	Plt. 3
LASSITER, W. D.	CCM (AA)	Hdq.
MECHAM, C. B.	CMM (AA)	Plt. 4
NELSON, M. K.	CMM (AA)	Hdq.
SKIFFINGTON, S. P.	CEM (AA)	Hdq.
THOMPSON, G. F.	CCM (PA)	Hdq.
TYLER, W. W.	CY (AA)	Hdq.
WELLS, E. S.	CMM (AA)	Hdq.

C. B. MAINTENANCE UNIT # 582

HEADQUARTERS PLATOON

BEERY, Kenneth C., GBMA, Chief in Charge	
BANKER, John M., Jr., CCM	Assistant
CARNEY, Charles K., CCS	Assistant
TYLER, Willard W., CY	Assistant

1. BAUMEISTER, Wilburn G.	Bkr1c
2. BETTERLY, George W.	SC3c
3. BROWN, Hubert R.	SC2c
4. BUSHEE, Robert J.	Y1c
5. CHASE, Lloyd I.	GM1c
6. CHRISTENSEN, Vernon E.	BM1c
7. COWGILL, Charles G.	CM2c
8. DE GUILIO, Victor S.	Y3c
9. DUARTE, Clifford P.	SK2c
10. EHRlich, Emanuel (n)	CM3c
11. GERARDI, Eugene J.	PhM3c
12. HANEY, Clayton C.	SC2c
13. HARMON, William E.	Y3c
14. KATELMAN, Abe L.	BM2c
15. KENNEDY, Ralph A.	Y2c
16. KERBOW, John H.	Bkr3c
17. LAFAZANOS, Aristides (n)	SC3c
18. LAMBERT, Albert G.	CM3c
19. LOWELL, John F.	BM2c
20. MAHON, Owen P.	SF3c
21. MANG, Arthur W.	SK2c
22. MARINO, Joseph F.	SC3c
23. MC NEESE, Clifton C.	SSML3c
24. MEHR, Edward H.	SK3c
25. MILLER, Robert J.	SSMB3c
26. MITCHELL, Fred (n)	SC3c
27. PE BERNAT, Lyle "J"	SC2c
28. RUNNING, Benjamin R.	SC2c
29. SAUNDERS, Wiley D.	SK1c
30. SELF, Sidney L.	Bkr3c
31. SINCLAIR, Chester J.	SK1c
32. WRIGHT, Lacy W.	SC1c

C. B. MAINTENANCE UNIT # 582

FIRST PLATOON

* * *

ANDERSON, Julian C., CCM - Chief in Charge
CUNNINGHAM, John K., CSF- Assistant

1. EMARD, Joseph D.R.	Slc
2. FAZZINO, Frank J.,	Slc
3. GREEN, Gordon R.	Slc
4. HAMILTON, Ralph E.	GM3c
5. HENDRICK, Robert W.	Slc
6. HEINZ, William H.	Slc
7. HILES, Vernon E.	Flc
8. INGLE, Darrell S.	Slc
9. INGRASSIA, Thomas J.	Slc
10. ISMOND, Dorian	Flc
11. KUEHL, Ralph H.	Slc
12. KULZ, John M.	Slc
13. KURENEZUK, Adam E.	Slc
14. LAURO, Neal J.	CM3c
15. LEBBO, William (n)	CM3c
16. LENDZION, Quintin E.	Slc
17. LEWIS, Milton K.	Slc
18. LOPEZ, Guadalupe B.	Slc
19. LOSCH, Robert H.	Slc
20. MANGENE, Robert A.	CM3c
21. MARTIN, Francis J.	Slc
22. MC M.HILL, George J.	Slc
23. MERRILL, Robert G.	Flc
24. MERRITT, Robert W.	Flc
25. PIPER, John R.	Flc
26. PLATZ, Kenneth S.	Slc
27. REICHMAN, Bobi (n)	PM3c
28. SUMMERS, James P.	Slc

C. B. MAINTENANCE UNIT # 582

SECOND PLATOON

* * *

LASSITER, William D., CCM - Chief in Charge
WHITED, John L., CEM - Assistant

1. ALTEBUS, David A.	CM3c
2. ATKINSON, Thomas T.	QM1c
3. BIEDENHARN, James T.	MoM2c
4. BRANT, Donald E.	EM1c
5. BRUMM, Fred H.	CM2c
6. GAULFIELD, Thomas F.	MM3c
7. CLARY, Vern M.	M3c
8. DOVALIS, Chris J.	SF3c
9. EDGAR, Raymond L.	EM3c
10. GILES, Stephen W.	SF1c
11. HENDRICK, Donald F.	T3c
12. JABLONSKI, Anthony B.	CM1c
13. KLEIN, Milton (n)	EM2c
14. KORTKAMP, Robert H.	MTR2c
15. MASZAKOWSKI, Edward A.	EM2c
16. MC CLENNY, Arbie P.	MoM2c
17. MISKULIN, Paul J.	EM2c
18. OCHOA, Arnold (n)	CM2c
19. QUIRICONI, Jimmy A.	EM3c
20. SAMPSON, John W.	CM1c
21. SENZER, Emery (n)	SF1c
22. STAROBIN, Murray (n)	EM1c
23. THOMAS, Michael J.	SF1c
24. VANDEBOOM, Edward J.	CM1c
25. WILD, Arnold E.	EM1c
26. WHITE, Lartin F.	MM3c

C. B. MAINTENANCE UNIT # 582

THIRD PLATOON

KRAUS, Frederick F., CCM - Chief in Charge
NELSON, Malcolm K., CMMS - Assistant

1. AUBRY, William R.	EM2c
2. BROWN, George G.	MbMM2c
3. CASCINI, Paul J.	CM2c
4. DAVIS, Rogers E.	CM2c
5. DECKER, Alfred D.	CM3c
6. DE LANEY, Thomas A.	CM3c
7. DRITSAN, Chris C.	MMS2c
8. FLYNN, Abe T.	CM1c
9. IVERS, William E.	CM1c
10. KEMP, Philip S.	CM3c
11. KLEIDOSTY, Harold F.	CM3c
12. KLICK, Eric C.	CM3c
13. KURPISZ, Stanley (n)	CM3c
14. LAMNECK, Robert J.	BM2c
15. LANPHER, Everette E.	CM3c
16. LENG, Foster E.	CM3c
17. LYONS, Thomas M.	CM3c
18. MARTIN, Searl (n)	SF3c
19. MARTOCCIO, Robert A.	CM3c
20. MATONIC, Leonard J.	CM3c
21. MINIHAN, Daniel R.	CM2c
22. MITTIE, Marvin R.	CM2c
23. SAWYER, Charles F.	CM2c
24. SCHMIDT, Richard L.	CM3c
25. SCHRODER, Henry (n)	MolM2c
26. SHEAR, Albert (n)	CM2c
27. SIMPSON, Alva W.	SF1c
28. SOMMERVILLE, Woodrow W.	CM1c
29. SPANIK, Elmer (n)	CM3c
30. STYCZKOWSKI, Roman T.	Ptr3c
31. WHEATLEY, Robert A.	CM1c

C. B. MAINTENANCE UNIT # 582

FOURTH PLATOON

THOMPSON, Geo. F., CCM - Chief in Charge
RASH, Winford E., CMM, - Assistant

1. ADAMS, Howard F.	CM1c
2. CALDWELL, Rondal E.	Cox
3. CSERNYIK, Alexander S.	CM3c
4. DOGGETT, James R.	MM2c
5. GIVENS, Layton (n)	EM3c
6. GONYEA, Kenneth A.	MoMM2c
7. HADFIELD, Melvin J.	MMS3c
8. JOHNSON, Frank C.	Cox
9. KNOWLES, Henry M.	MM2c
10. LUDINGTON, Archie B.	Cox
11. LUDWIN, Louis L.	MM3c
12. MADISON, Kenneth A.	SF2c
13. MAIZE, Lee C.	MM1c
14. MC CLURE, Edwin Richard	MM1c
15. MC NUTT, Harold F.	CM2c
16. MINCHAK, John J.	MM2c
17. PEMBERTON, Mark A.	MMS2c
18. PETERSON, Robert G.	CM2c
19. RANGER, Warren E.	MM2c
20. RYAN, Desmond A.	MM1c
21. SCHAEFER, John "K"	MM1c
22. SCHWEITZER, Alfred E.	CM1c
23. SHAFFER, Carson E.	MM2c
* 24. SHELDON, George E.	MM2c
25. SHELTON, Theodore E.	CM2c
26. STETTER, Jack A.	MM1c
27. WELLS, Jack D.	SF2c
28. WILLIAMS, Robert A.	MM2c
* 29. SHEAFFER, Jay W.	SF3c

C. B. MAINTENANCE UNIT # 582

FIFTH PLATOON

HUGHES, Thomas D., CCM - Chief in Charge
WELLS, Edward S., CMMS - Assistant

1. ASHBURN, John R.	F1c
2. BADORE, Bernard E.	MMS3c
3. CAREY, Arthur J.	MoMM1c
4. CURTIN, Richard J.	MMS2c
5. DUKE, Clovis G.	MMS2c
6. ELWOOD, Elmer I.	MoMM1c
7. FLORENCKI, Stanley J.	SF3c
8. GOODWIN, Leland D.	Ptr2c
9. HOAG, Walter H.	CM1c
10. HOBBS, Roby (n)	SF3c
11. KIRBY, Alonzo H.	MM3c
12. LICKEY, Everett (n)	MoMM3c
13. LINDER, Dale V.	CM3c
14. LONG, Patrick J.	SF2c
15. LUALDI, Joseph F.	MMS3c
16. HARR, George H.	SF2c
17. MASSMAN, Duane R.	MMS3c
18. MAXWELL, William S.	CM3c
19. MC VEY, Donald F.	MM3c
20. MURGENOVICH, Robert (n)	SF3c
21. MYERS, William V.	SF3c
22. SANDERS, Robert M.	MoMM3c
23. SHERMAN, Lloyd H.	MoMM2c
24. STEWART, Louis P.	MMS2c
25. VIGIL, Donaciano E.	CM1c
26. VOSS, Herman (n)	MMS1c
27. WHITEHEAD, John C.	CM3c
28. WILLIAMS, Charles F.	MM3c
29. WITHAM, David E.	MoMM2c

C. B. MAINTENANCE UNIT # 582

SIXTH PLATOON

BAMBRIDGE, Fred A., CSF - Chief in Charge
COLEMAN, Edward N., CCM - Assistant

1. ARNAULD, Edward K.	SF2c
2. BLITZER, Arthur (n)	WT2c
3. BROWN, James H.	MoMM2c
4. CRAIG, Leland Al	SF3c
5. CREEDON, Harold J.	CM3c
6. CROSBY, Howard L.	S2c
7. DUDA, Frank L.	Cox
8. EVANS, Wallace F.	MM3c
9. FARIS, Arvene J.	SF2c
10. FORD, Martin J.	CM3c
11. FROSS, Lelen L.	CM3c
12. GRAY, Peter J.	SF3c
13. HAYNES, Samuel W.	SSMC3c
14. HILL, Walter B.	MoMM3c
15. IMRIE, Albert E.	CM2c
16. LA BELL, Leo F.	M2c
17. LEONARD, Howard R.	GM2c
18. LESHER, Robert M.	CM2c
19. LONG, Ross E.	SF2c
20. MC AULIFFE, Robert T.	S1c
21. MC DANIEL, Arthur J.	SF3c
22. MC EVOY, Robert E.	MMS3c
23. MC INTYRE, Duncan J.	WT3c
24. O'BRIEN, Edward F.	S1c
25. O'NEIL, James E.	SF1c
26. PAUL, John K.	M1c
27. PHILPOT, George J.	MM1c
28. SAFALLO, Albert D.	MoMM2c
29. SHARP, Jessie F.	MoM'2c
30. THOMPSON, James M.	MM3c
31. VAN NESS, Joseph H.	BM1c
32. WOOD, Bryant M.	Cox

FIVE EIGHTY TWO

By Albert E. Imrie CM 2/c
U. S. Navy CBMU#582
Solomons, December 1944

Let's drink to the men in blue,
Who serve in the CBMU
On beach and hill or rocky coast,
Where ever they're needed most.

Now drink to the best of 'em all,
The men who have carried the ball
In heat and rain; in dust and dew,
The Seabees of Five-Eighty-Two.

In warehouse, galley and shop,
Logging, air strip, hauling rock;
Odd mix of security-destruction
Levned by rugged construction.

The Catholic, Protestant and Jew
That musters in Five-Eighty-Two
Forms the sure and winning basis
In manning the Navy's great bases.

Seamen, gold-braid and chiefs,
All have their share of "beefs",
But jobs are tackled and thrown
To speed up the getting back home.

Worker, builder and fighter too,
Fighters everywhere take their cue;
Never can say "Too late, too few",
M.U.'s give with the old "Can Do".

"I've Got A Bimboo Down In The Solomon Isles"

By Albert E. Imrie, CM 2/c
U. S. Navy CBMU #582

I've got a bimboo down in the Solomon Isles,
She's waiting there for me,
Beneath that Banyan Tree.

All she wears is a great big beautiful smile
She dances daily...gaily,
She'd make a hit with Barnum Bailey.

I've got a bimboo down in the Solomon Isles
She's got two big lips that hang a mile.

Now I've seen wrecks...plenty of wrecks,
Wrecks on the stormy sea,
But, oh by heck, I've never seen a wreck
Like the wreck she made of me.

Heaven help me when she rolls those eyes.
I've got a bimboo down in the Solomon Isles.



