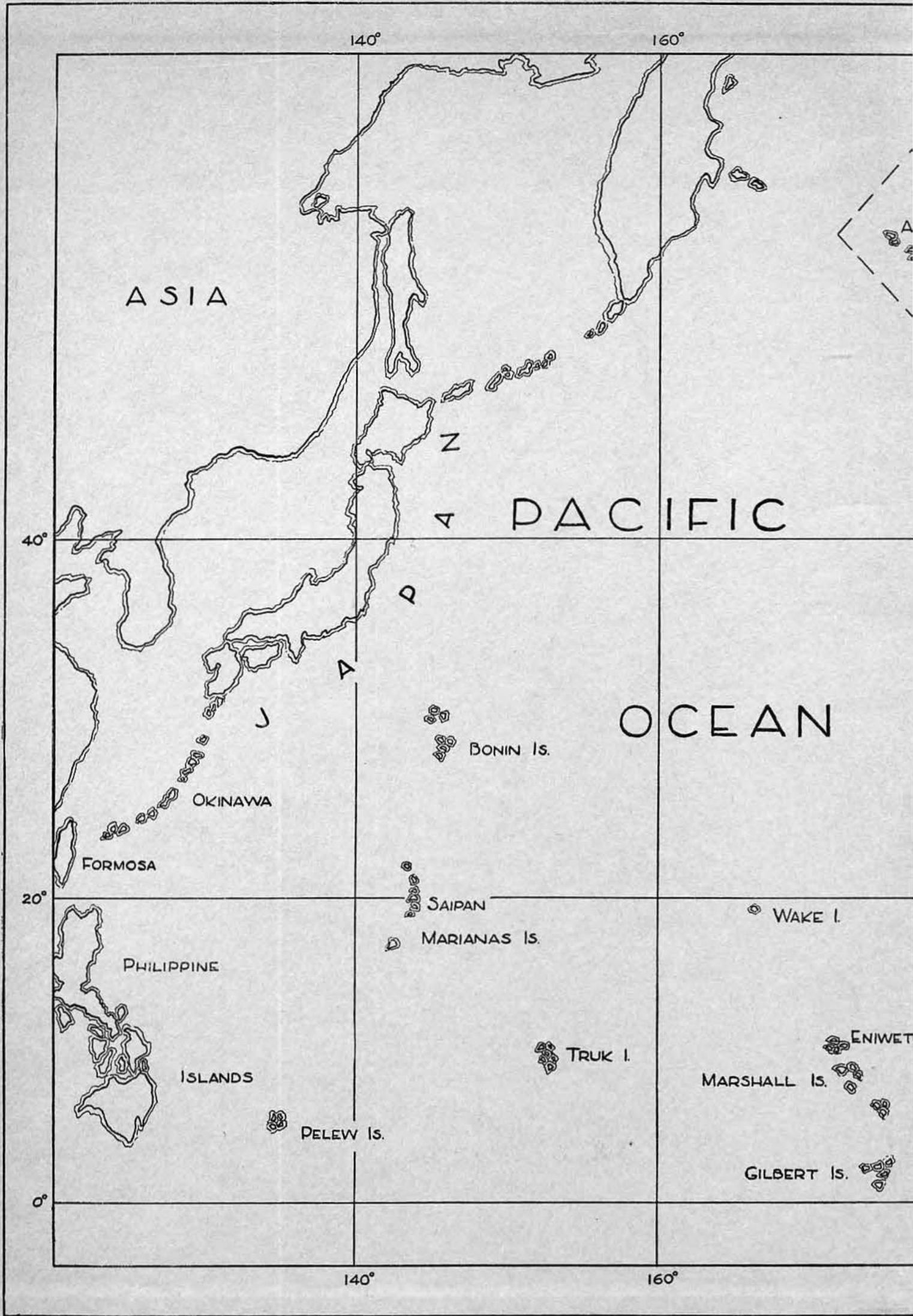


The
Blackjack



1944

1945



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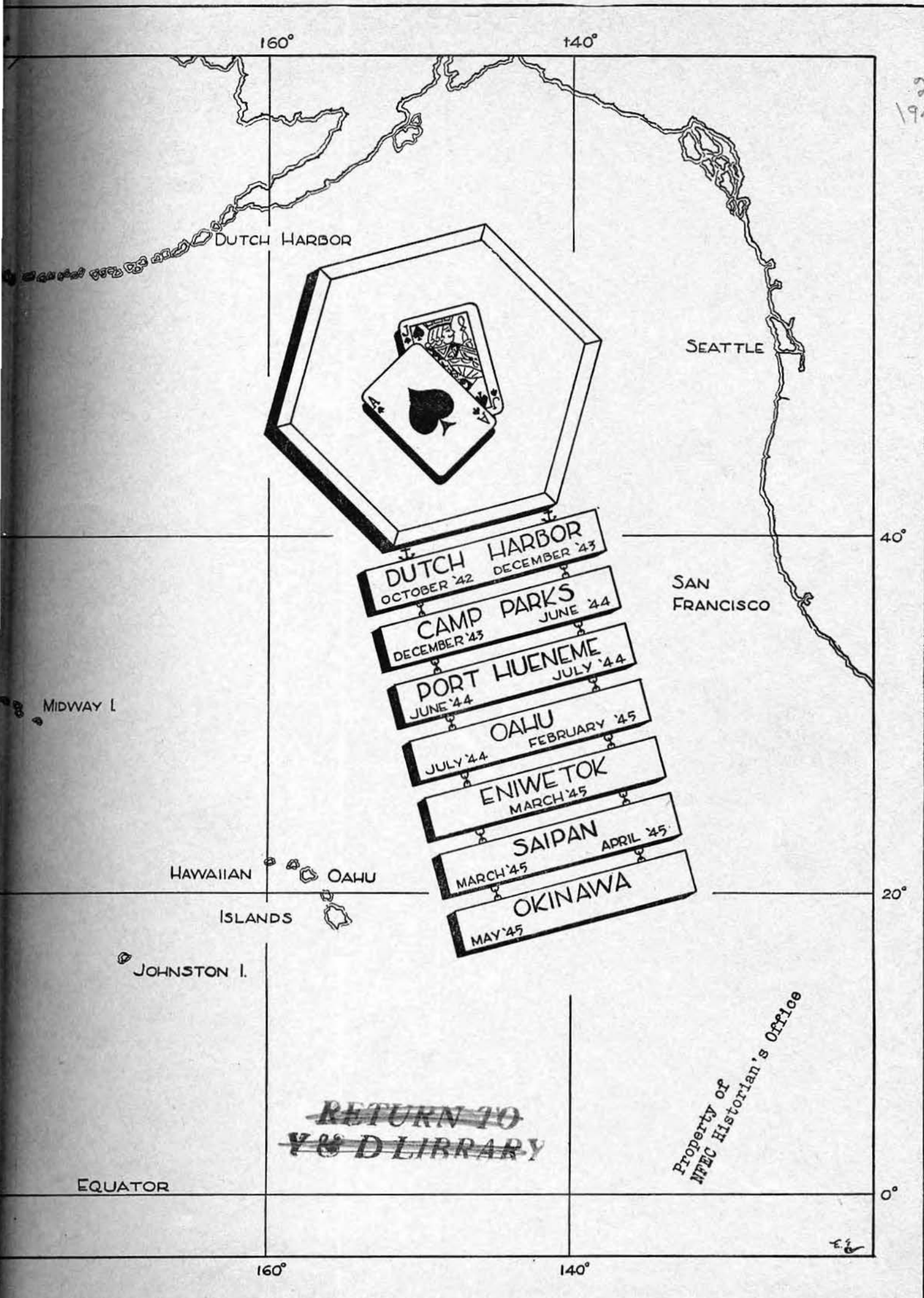
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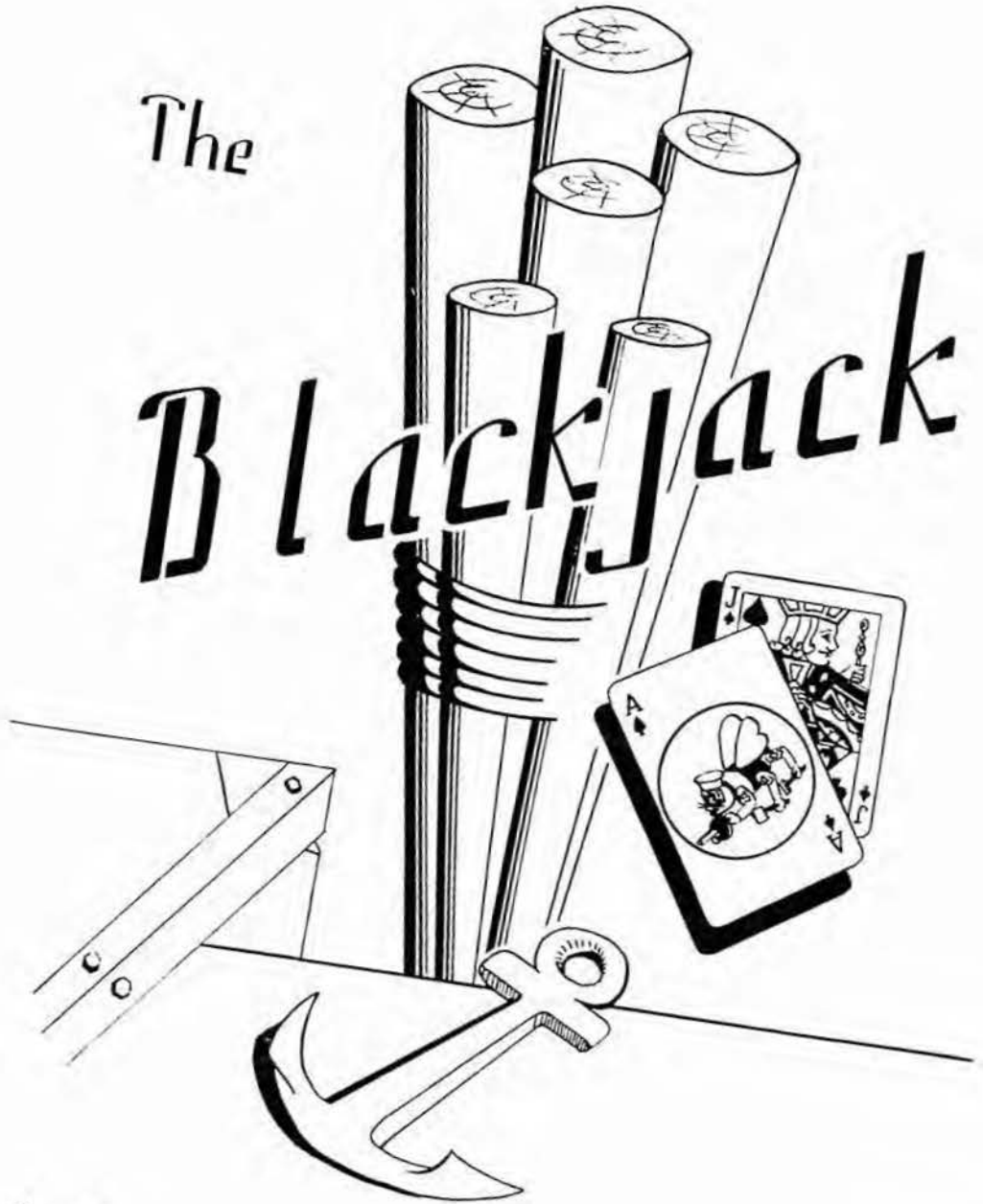
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The

Blackjack



1944

1945



A STORY ABOUT
AND PUBLISHED BY THE
21ST U. S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION
BATTALION

F O R E W O R D

Under a bright Virginia sun, one thousand men clad in Navy whites paraded at Camp Bradford on the 28th of August 1942. The date and ceremony marked the commissioning of the Twenty-First as a regular Construction Battalion of the United States Navy. It was the start of an adventure that would take this group of men to far, unheard-of parts of the world. To the frozen wastes of the Bering Sea and the stark, silent tundra of the Aleutians. To the sun-drenched isles of Hawaii and the strange, unfamiliar waters of the far western Pacific.

Men, knowing only the names of their native American towns and states, would come back from that three-year adventure, their vocabularies enhanced with knowledge of such outlandish places as Unalaska, Dutch Harbor, Adak, Attu, Atka, Amchitka and Kiska. They would know the terrain of Ugadaga Pass more familiarly than the valleys of their neighboring home counties. They would return to speak of Pearl Harbor and the Pali in terms of old acquaintance; tell tales of Diamond Head and Waikiki; recite the charms of wahines in the knowing language of the kaamina. Eniwetok, in their eyes, would no longer be a vague spot on some far Pacific map but the desolate, wind-swept, battle-shattered coral strip of misery it really is. And they would bring home stories of the Marianas—the shell-pocked cliffs of Saipan and the making up of huge convoys in the bay off Garapan.

As the men in white swung by that hot day in August, no mind among them knew the meaning, much less the whereabouts, of the Ryukyus. Before that three-year stretch was ended, they were to know all too well the heat and stench of Okinawa, the fox-hole mud and fear-stiffening sounds of battle; the dive of kamikaze; the scream of bomb and shell; the moan of the wounded and quiet of the dead.

The men in line that memorable day made up a cross section of all America on the march. Here were our workers, the builders of the nation, the engineers and mechanics, the craftsmen and artisans of every trade

and craft that make the American way of life possible. Here were our carpenters and plumbers, our electricians and welders, our painters and glazers, machinists, steelworkers, pile drivers, surveyors and draftsmen; our earth-movers, cat-skinners, shovel, crane and pan operators, drillers and powder men; our auto mechanics and heavy equipment repairmen. Yes, and our cooks and bakers, too, and our bookkeepers and accountants; our barbers and tailors and our all-important corpsmen.

They marched, and after the parade their whites were stowed away. Henceforth they would be seen in the dungarees and work greens of the Seabees in a dozen far-flung ports, on a hundred widely different jobs. And because of them and their efforts, ships could find haven, supplies could move, planes could land and take off, troops could be housed and fed, and all the multiple needs of the Fleet could be met. Because of them, and their mates in other battalions, the war would move on at an ever-accelerating pace to the ultimate and inevitable victory.

Men marched in review that day in August who had, but a few days before, been utter strangers. Experiences shared in every clime and under every weather, in camp, aboard ship, on the job and in the barracks, dangers and hardships shared in common—all the good times and bad known together have brought about lasting ties that will endure as long as life itself endures.

For three years these men have adjusted their individual characters, their own ways of doing things, their very natures to that vague method of procedure called "The Navy Way." It is at once the most efficient and most bungling method of getting things done. It is a conglomerate of logical procedure mixed with hopeless muddling, sound economy with profligate waste, rank incompetency with expert performance, nonsensical methods of operation with excellent results. Men exposed to the Navy Way for three years have drunk the dregs of despair and tasted the wine of life at its fullest. They have seen life at its worst and at its best. Men so exposed will never be the same. Such are the men of the Twenty-First.



This is our story. This is the story of the 21st U. S. Naval Construction Battalion, the 21st Seabees, the Blackjacks—one of those groups of a thousand-odd men who helped to build and fight the way to the defeat of Japan. We were just one battalion, and thousands of battalions and millions of men and women made up our armed forces. Maybe our part was

small in the whole history of the war, but we saw to it that this part was done with a let's-get-it-over-with-quickly, "Can Do" energy.

These words and pictures are mostly about our second tour of overseas duty—our work in the Central and Western Pacific. Before this came our first "cruise" in the Aleutians.



Bleak, sometimes volcanic, mountains made up the Aleutian chain

Fourteen months were spent with our good neighbors, the Aleuts, on their native islands, the Aleutians. After brief training and organization at Camps Allen and Bradford and a short stop at Port Hueneme, Calif., we sailed from Seattle on

October 12, 1942, few of us knowing the exact destination and none of us knowing what was in store for us. A week later we were at our home base, Dutch Harbor.

Advance bases had to be built, and working

From Unalaska island, Amaknak island with its Dutch Harbor is dominated by Ballyhoo mountain



THE FIRST CRUISE



DUTCH HARBOR

October 12, 1942—December 4, 1943



In slush and under dark, wet skies, we built much around Dutch Harbor. This warehouse is a small sample.

parties soon represented the 21st from Atka to Adak, from Ogluiga to Amchitka, and at the invasion of Attu. Fighting the ice, snow, rain and wind—high winds and williwaws—was the tough-

est part of it all. These, together with the heavy hearts of being away from home for the first time, made the over-a-year spent there something the officers and men will never forget.

Aboard the Failing on the north Pacific from Dutch Harbor to Seattle was pleasant only because we were going home.



A wonderful record was piled up during our Aleutian service; personnel attached to other activities stationed throughout the chain will never forget the work of the Blackjacks against adverse conditions to make life a little more livable for them. They'll remember the 21st as the hardest-working bunch ever put together by the Navy Department. And the Blackjacks remember the Aleutians as one of the harder parts of their naval careers—an experience for which they wouldn't take a million, nor do over again for another million.

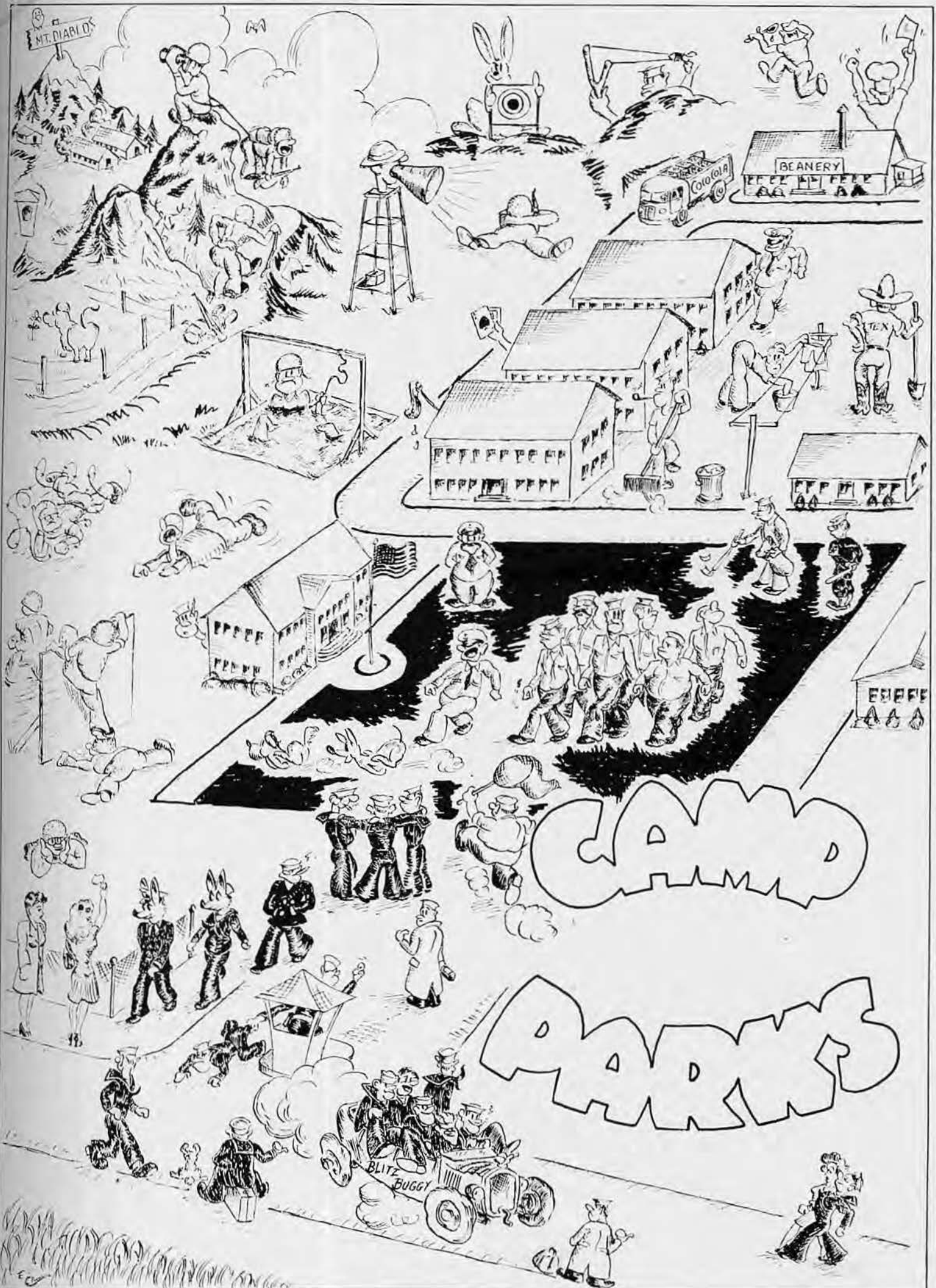
We started home in late November, 1943. We loaded on ship during a cold rain and in the middle of the night. We were pushed around terrifically, and aboard, the chow was worse than terrific. The voyage itself was something you had bad dreams about—but the destination was perfect.

The landing at Seattle was made under poor conditions, and the wait for Pullmans was long. When the trains pulled out, tired but happy Blackjacks settled down for the night in already-prepared berths. The familiar sounds of wheels rolling on steel rails, of far-off automobile horns, and just the thrill of being home again soon put all to sleep.

The next day the trains stopped at Klamath Falls, Ore., for refueling. Some of the higher-ups made the mistake of getting off, and soon hundreds of dungaree-clad Blackjacks were overrunning the scanty restaurants and drug stores. The value of the dollar was forgotten in the haste to purchase such desired items as magazines, milk, and edibles of all kinds.

Camp Parks was sighted; gear was gathered; opinions were exchanged; orders were given. The 21st was soon parading through the gates of California's gift to the Seabees.





MT. DIABLO

BEANERY

COLOGIA

BLITZ BUGGY

CAMP PARKS



Morning muster was held week-days on the "black-top," except for a few weeks in mid-winter

BACK HOME . . .

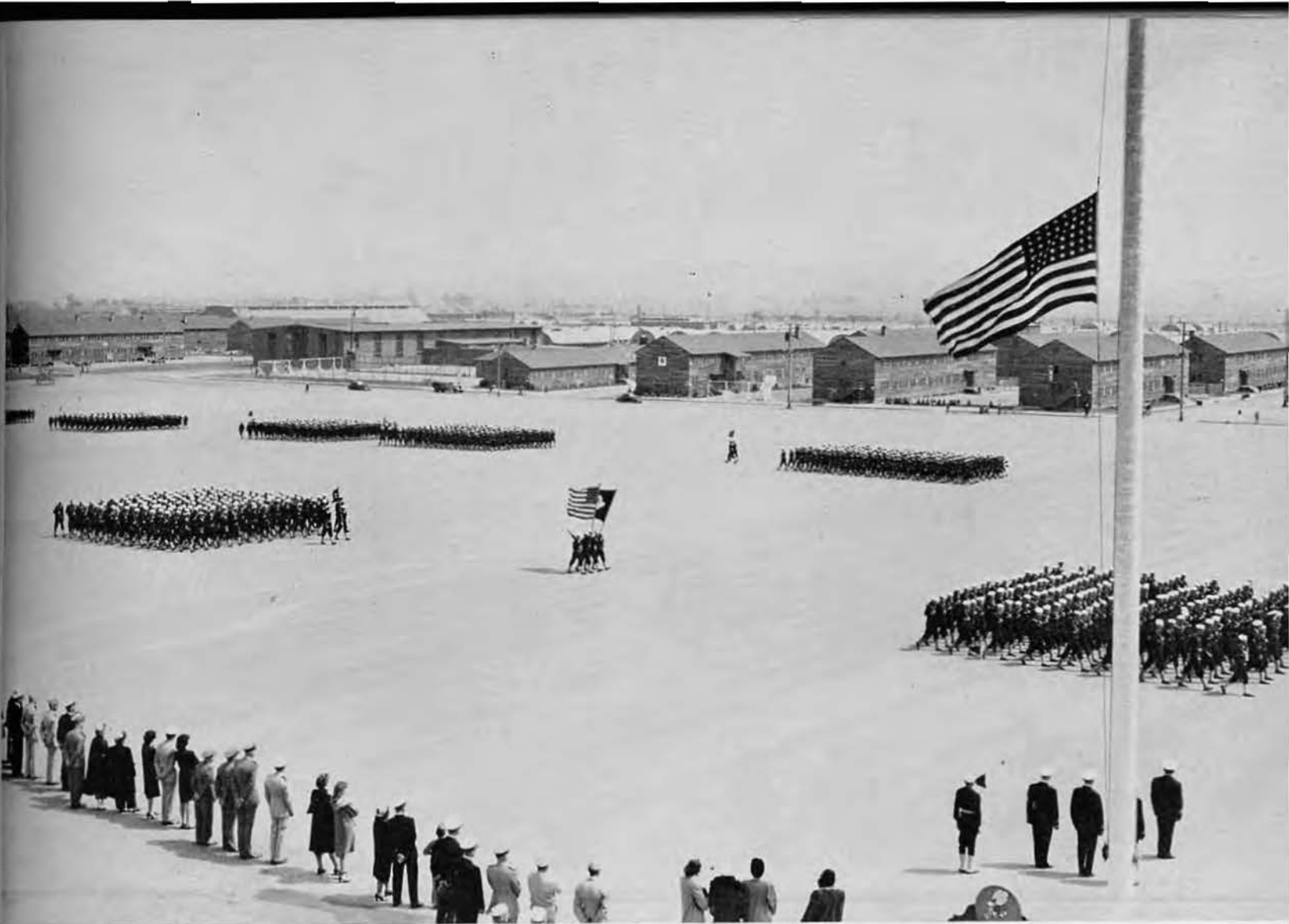
We were back in the States, in Shoemaker, California; now everyone began the many tasks required for a 30-day leave at home. Buying clothes, making travel arrangements, phoning home—all were done gladly. Trains, planes and autos soon scattered the Blackjacks all over the country. No matter

who it was, where he went or whom he saw, each managed to crowd plenty of living into those days. If our pockets were empty at the end, no one was to blame but ourselves, and the happy memories of the month at home did more than make up for any folly.

After settling down to the grind of training and morning "flag raising," Blackjacks began to find out what was meant by the magical word "liberty."

Lt. Comdr. Thomson, Lt. Trudell and Lt. Comdr. Cornell inspected the peacoated Blackjacks





A dress review was always a bother. Wooden barracks and quonset huts stretched beyond the "black-top."

LIBERTY

Having been sent overseas shortly after joining the Navy, we didn't know what it meant to go out for an evening with the threat hanging over our heads of "be in by 0700 or else." Quickly, however, we became apt at the fine art of wrangling extra hours on short liberties, of getting back to camp by a few-seconds margin, of travelling in and out of town with as little trouble as possible.

The Top of the Mark in San Francisco, Tiny's in Oakland, Mattioni's in Stockton, the Shangri La in Hayward, and spots in San Jose, Livermore, Richmond and Berkeley—all were familiar to fun-seeking Blackjacks.

Generally speaking, the Californians opened their homes and their hearts to the Seabeeks. At first it was liberty one night in four; later, it was every other night and every other week-end. Many men had their families in nearby towns; some were married; the remaining put forth efforts to break hearts all over the West Coast.



R E C R E A T I O N

And in camp there was plenty of recreation. Our barracks were just across the street from the main movie theatre. With movies, ball fields, gyms, bowling alleys, horseshoes, volleyball courts and well-stocked ship's stores, it was paradise compared to the Aleutians. The Blackjacks were soon taking part in all the camp athletics.

The camp softball tournament was divided into "red" and "blue" sections in order not to interfere with liberty. Our combined Companies A and C won the "blue" championship while Companies B and D lost only one game in the "red." In an early summer tournament, the battalion team lost out in the semi-finals to Line 6.

For "hard ball," the 21st built their own Thompson Field just south of the "black-top." Behind the pitching of Barney Ross, Lefty Connell, and Larry Callahan, we eked out five victories in six attempts.

In the volleyball tournament, the 21st team won the lower draw, but was handily beaten by the 89th NCB for the championship.

In the camp basketball tourney, the 21st was never able to have the same "five" on the floor two times in a row. The team struggled to the quarter finals, however, and then lost to the strong, professional-like 145th NCB quintet that won the title.

The Blackjack bowlers were the tops. Led by "Bronco" Vukmanovich, the team bowled the league silly, winning 12 straight games and setting the highest single-game score.

In the ring, we were represented by heavyweights Evans and Hardie, and by Bellmard, our fancy lightweight. And our grunt-and-groan men, "Killer" Kurtz and "Angel" LaCourse, with Red Carpenter as their own referee, were always entertaining.



The volleyball team at Camp Parks: front row—Kern, McAllister, Pickering; back row—Miller, Hodges; not in picture—J. L. Jones, H. E. Martin and Blair.





Southpaw Heavyweight Evan Evans (won 6, lost 0)

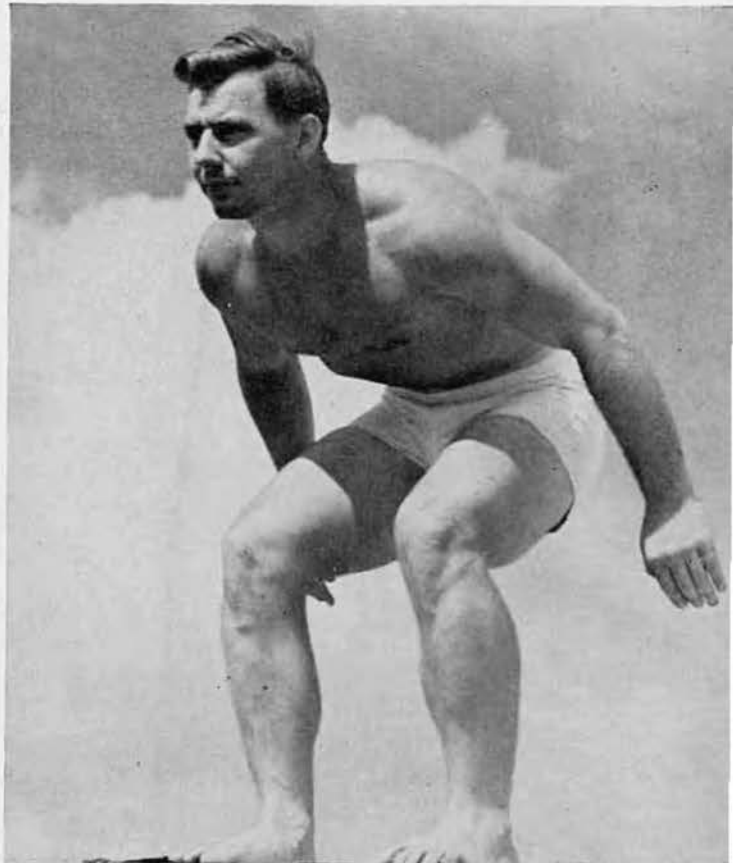


The bowling team: Patlan, Kasad, Letourneau and Lintner; not in picture, Vukmanovich, Tarter and Banek.



Heavyweight Ernie Hardie scored a second-round KO. He won 12, lost 9

Charles W. Hart was a 50-yard free-styler on the Camp Parks swimming team and instructed life-savers.





Hiking to Mount Diablo



It was a long way, but we reached the camp

T R A I N I N G

All was not play at Camp Parks. There were many days of drilling under the hot sun on the hated "black-top," hiking through the hills, long and boring reviews, bone-breaking judo lessons, and a three-day trip to Mount Diablo.

There were schools in chemical warfare, all kind of automatic weapons, mortars, and other military subjects.

There were technical training classes in hut construction, earth moving, heavy equipment repair, and all the other skills required of a Seabee outfit. We even had men already experts to teach these trades.

Not content with training, the Blackjacks helped build some of the camp developments such as a bowling alley, a cobbler shop, and the officers' club.

A part of the Mount Diablo camp



Company battled company on maneuvers





We learned to handle carbines on the rifle range.

And all the time we were at Parks, the battalion offices were kept busy transferring men to and from station force, replacement battalions, and other outfits. The 21st had changed a lot from the battalion that came back from the Aleutians—by recuperation, re-training, and replacements.

After about six months of Camp Parks life, the always-remembered June third brought embarkation leave. We were due to leave the States again, but in the meantime we had from 10 to 15 days of leave with loved ones. Confusion, calls home, train and plane reservations, and scuttlebutt—but we made it and too soon were back at Camp Parks with more than moisture in our eyes.

In a few days, the battalion was ready to move. Where? Well, on June 23rd we marched out of the gates of Parks for the last time and boarded trains. Many a wistful eye looked back to what had been our home for a

half a year, and many a heart was heavy. Yet there were adventuresome spirits, too, in the crowd. And so, with tin horns blowing some sentimental number, the whistles tooted, and the 21st battalion moved south.

The next morning, at daylight, we were riding along the southern California seashore and soon pulled into Camp Rousseau at Port Hueneme.

We made a game of throwing hand grenade dummies



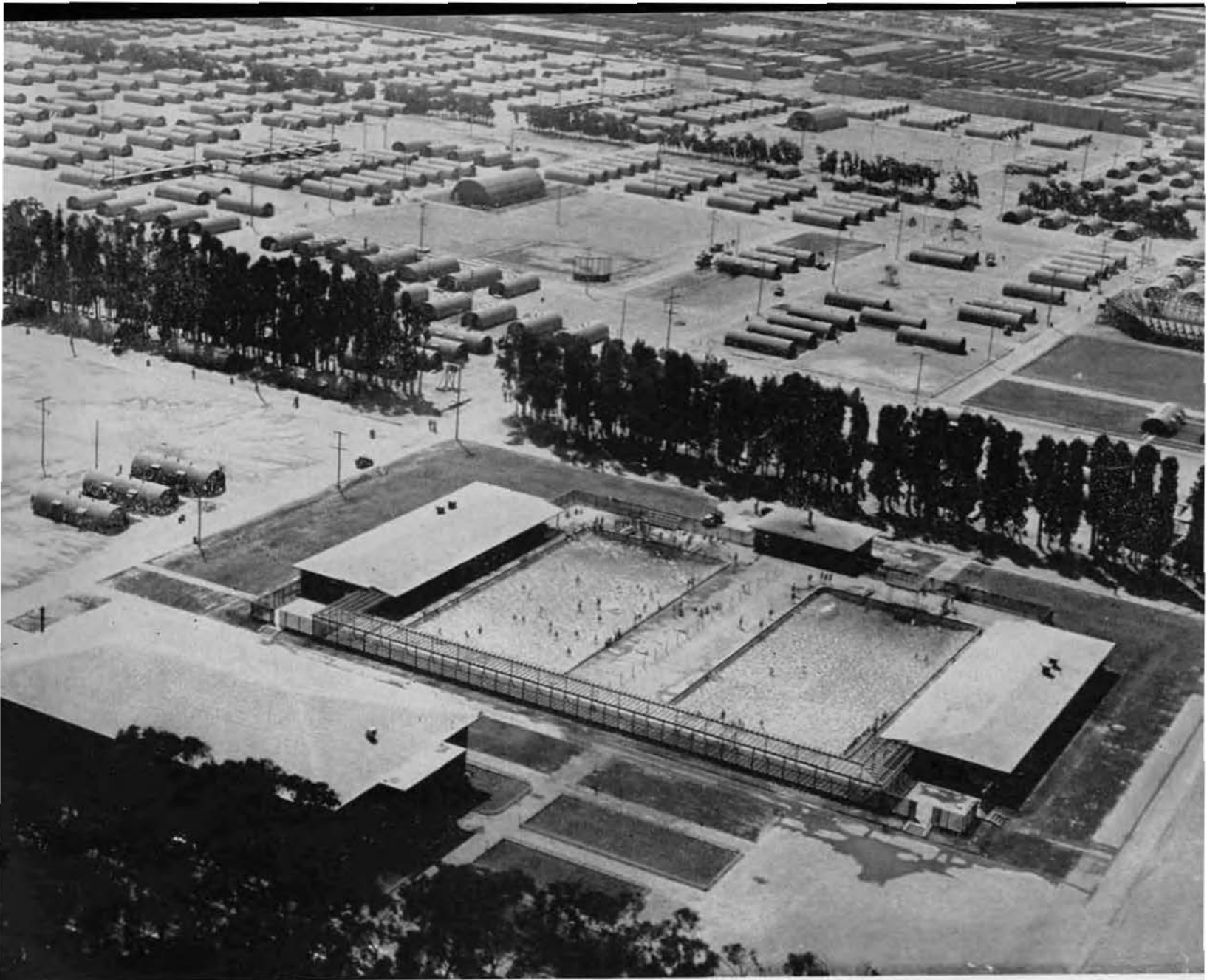


PORT HUENEME

Prominent in the days of old when clipper ships and schooners put into port with their cargoes from the Orient, Hueneme was again playing an important role. In September, 1942, the 21st spent a little over a week here, and we were back again to use the white-sandy shores.

Perhaps we remember, more than anything else, the "rugged" incidents and things we used to gripe about. The training book was brought out again, dusted off, and pitched to us with an inside curve. Foggy dawns saw the outfit getting the kinks out of their joints with the good old "hut two, hut two" PT drill. Then there was a short-mile "stroll" to the beach training area where the instructors' awe-inspiring lectures held us spellbound—judo, bayonet, the gas house, and "how to get rock-happy folding a pack," to name a few. We can't reminisce without recalling those melt-in-your-mouth cheese sandwiches at noon or hitting the deck at 2300 to tackle a night problem in the tomato patch; even the skipper asked for an aspirin.

Ah yes, we griped, but there was a brighter side. The gaiety and night life of Hollywood and neighboring cities were at our beck and call. Each night found Blackjacks hobnobbing with the "stars" at



Athletic facilities, quonset huts
and warehouses covered Port
Hueneme.





We made the most of our final stateside liberties



Carrying all our gear was the hardest part of the embarkation



the Canteen, Earl Carroll's, the Palladium, along Sunset "Strip," and "wolfing" at Hollywood and Vine.

In camp we also found some recreation. Fortunately, our "P" area had a recreation hut with a piano, ping-pong table, and two billiard tables which were never empty. The hut was also used for captain's masts, much to the annoyance of the men—who appeared before them.

As a last sports gesture in the States, we took our vengeance out on Snuffy Smith's elegantly uniformed softball and baseball teams. The Blackjacks looked like bushers in their greens and heavy work shoes, but they downed the 51st at softball 3-2 behind the pitching of Koen, Schieck, and Wosnum, and slaughtered them 11-4 in baseball with Lefty Connell hurling and Rivers standing out as catcher and clouter.

The good times couldn't last forever, and, after four weeks in the southland, the orders came through to shove off. Beers were "hoisted," and sorrows were drowned the evening prior to embarkation. On E day, the 20th of July, trucks bearing the ready and burdened Blackjacks convoyed their way to the docks and the waiting "Cape Canso."

Four smiling girls waved good-byes from the dock, and others from the beach at the harbor entrance. The second cruise of the 21st battalion had begun.



FAREWELL STATESIDE

Dave Sharpe and Tony Garcia, the welters who did so well in the Aleutians, sparred a few rounds.



The "Cape Canso" had a merchant marine crew, an Army staff, a Navy gun crew, and was carrying the 21st Seabees. The first day out was a bit rough, and those with sensitive stomachs found themselves "riding the rail." As usual, the sleeping quarters were hot and crowded.

the meals were served standing up in a turkish-bath atmosphere, and drinking water was scarce and warm. To many of us on our first ocean voyage, just watching the sunlit blue expanse of water and the sparkling phosphorescence at night was impressive. Afternoons brought on the "Happy Hour" and movies in the darkened hold.

On the morning of the 27th land was dimly ahead; airplanes began to swoop low over us. Slowly we neared and rounded Diamond Head, began to pick out the renowned sights along Honolulu bay and entered calmer waters.



The deck and rigging were packed to watch the show

U. S. S.
CAPE
CANSO
JULY 20, 1944

"Killer" Kurtz and "Angel" LaCourse gave one of their exhibition bouts.

"Sundown" gave a preview of the hula dance





KAHUKU PT.

ENA PT.

HALEIWA

MT. KAALA

SCHOFIELD
BKS.

WAHIAWA

NUUANU
PALI

MOANALUA
RIDGE

NANAKULI

KAILUA

IROQUOIS PT.

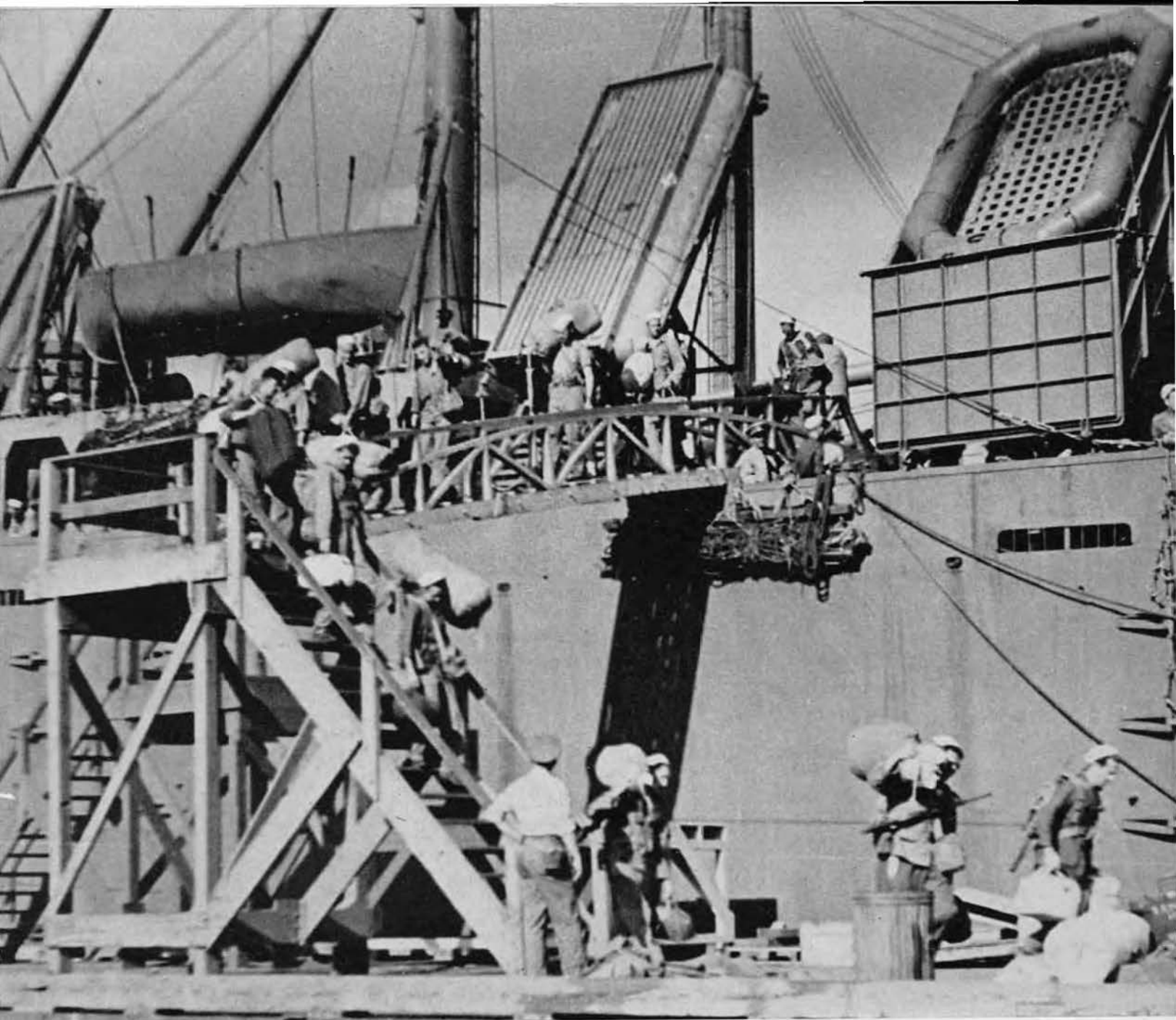
HICKAM
FIELD

WAIKIKI

BARBERS PT.

BLOY
HOLI

A



The 21st debarked at Pearl Harbor on July 28

P E A R L H A R B O R

The deep blue water, over which we had been riding for a week, changed to light green, and we passed into the narrow channel leading into Pearl Harbor—and such a harbor! Never before had any of us seen so much sea power and shore activity packed together. We thought of December 7, 1941, and looked for signs of the destruction—the signs

were few. We steamed deep into the great clover-leaf of water, anchored for a few hours, and then went back to a dock on the channel. We edged by warships and cargo ships; small boats cruised back and forth; cranes lined the docks; airplanes practiced overhead; the tropical scenery, backed by the Hawaiian hills, was inviting. We were in the midst of the greatest naval base in the world.

MOANALUA RIDGE

After a night aboard ship, we began to debark. It was July 28, and that same day the late President Roosevelt began his inspection of Oahu and met with high-ranking military and naval officers to plan the progress of the war.

From the dock, we rode trucks through Hickam Housing to the Seabee camp at Moanalua Ridge, just a few miles outside Honolulu. We passed by double-decker wooden barracks and low quonset huts to end in a partly finished tent city.

At first, we had not water, no lights, and no chow hall. We ate with the 129th battalion, put in refreshingly cold showers, installed lights, and began to unload our gear from the ships. We enjoyed the evening shows in the open-air hillside theatre, enjoyed almost as much the awe-inspiring views of the harbor from this same place. Maybe the tent city was dusty and hot, but we were fresh from foggy California and fresh to Hawaiian sights.



Overseas now, we were more impatient than ever for mail from home.





For the first time for most Blackjacks, "whites" were washed and worn—on liberty in Honolulu

A L O H A ! M A L A H I N E

Vacation-famed playland Honolulu was only a few short miles away by bus or hitch-hiking. "Whites" were put in shape at once, or after the annoying shore patrolmen had handed out "tickets." Money went fast in the souvenir shops; grass skirts whisked through the censors' office.

Nearby Waikiki Beach was an attraction, too, and almost all Blackjacks swam at least once on that famous beach. All

around were sights like the aquarium, Iolani palace, Kapiolani Park with its zoo, the library, the pineapple canneries, the USO's. But these cities at the cross-roads of the Pacific were too crowded, too cheap in spots. They were "wide open," and before long the glamor of the "Paradise of the Pacific" wore off.

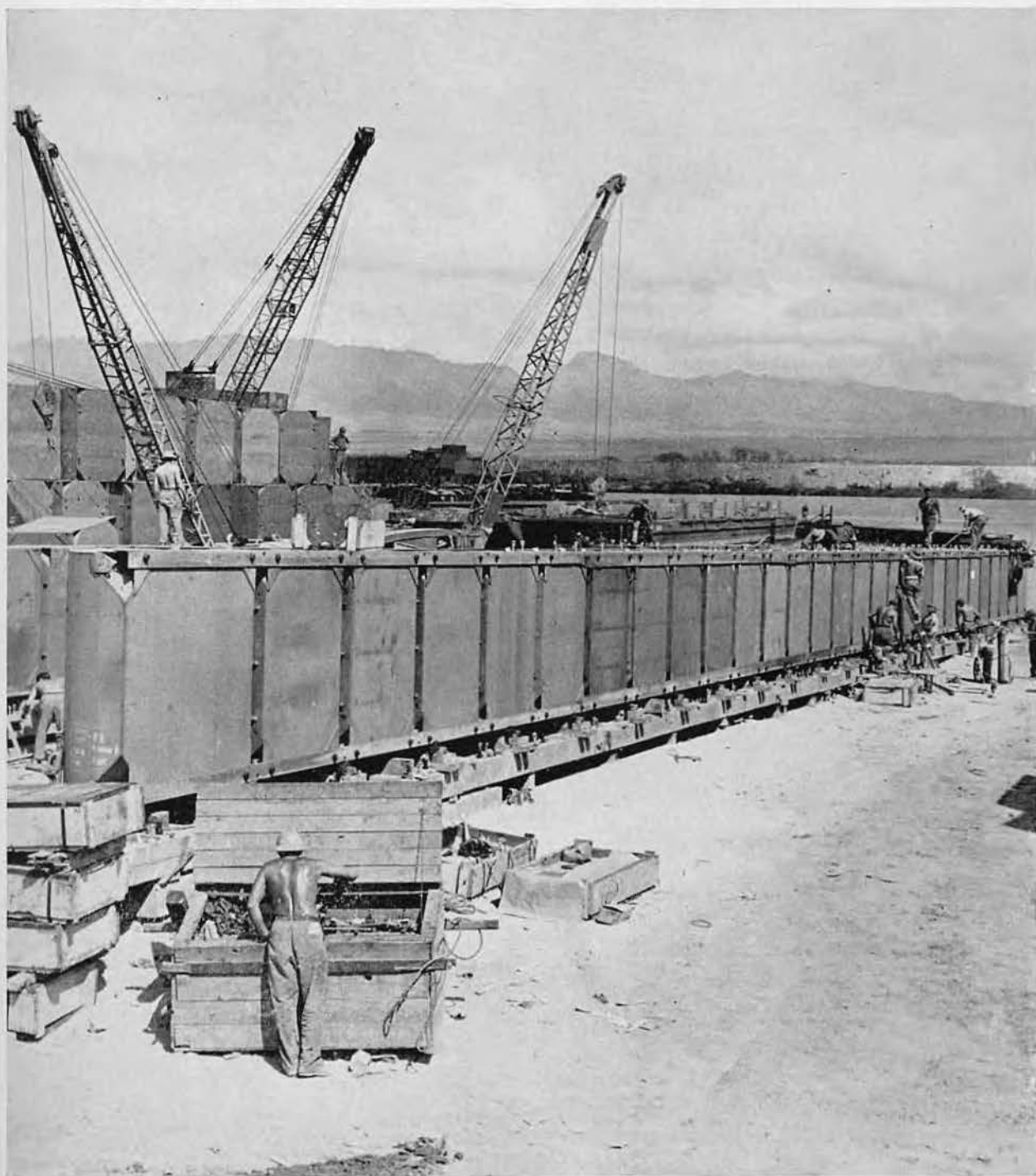
And soon, too, the 21st had work to do.

Downtown Honolulu streets were lined with shops to spend money quickly.



Waikiki Beach was colorful and restful





A pontoon string was almost ready for launching

P O N T O O N S

PEARL HARBOR

While we were still unscrambling our supplies and getting acquainted with Oahu in early August, a large 21st crew began assembling invasion pontoon causeways and barges on Intrepid Point. These steel floats were one of the newfangled developments of ship-to-shore

warfare—hollow steel blocks that could be piled and tied into all sorts of shapes and put to all sorts of uses in the water and on land. Pontoon units of varying sizes were produced, ready for invasions in the Philippines, the Marianas, and other Western Pacific objectives.



Doubledecker bunks in an Iroquois Point hut



Just one corner of a big, beautiful collection

mountain ranges, usually crowned by big white clouds.

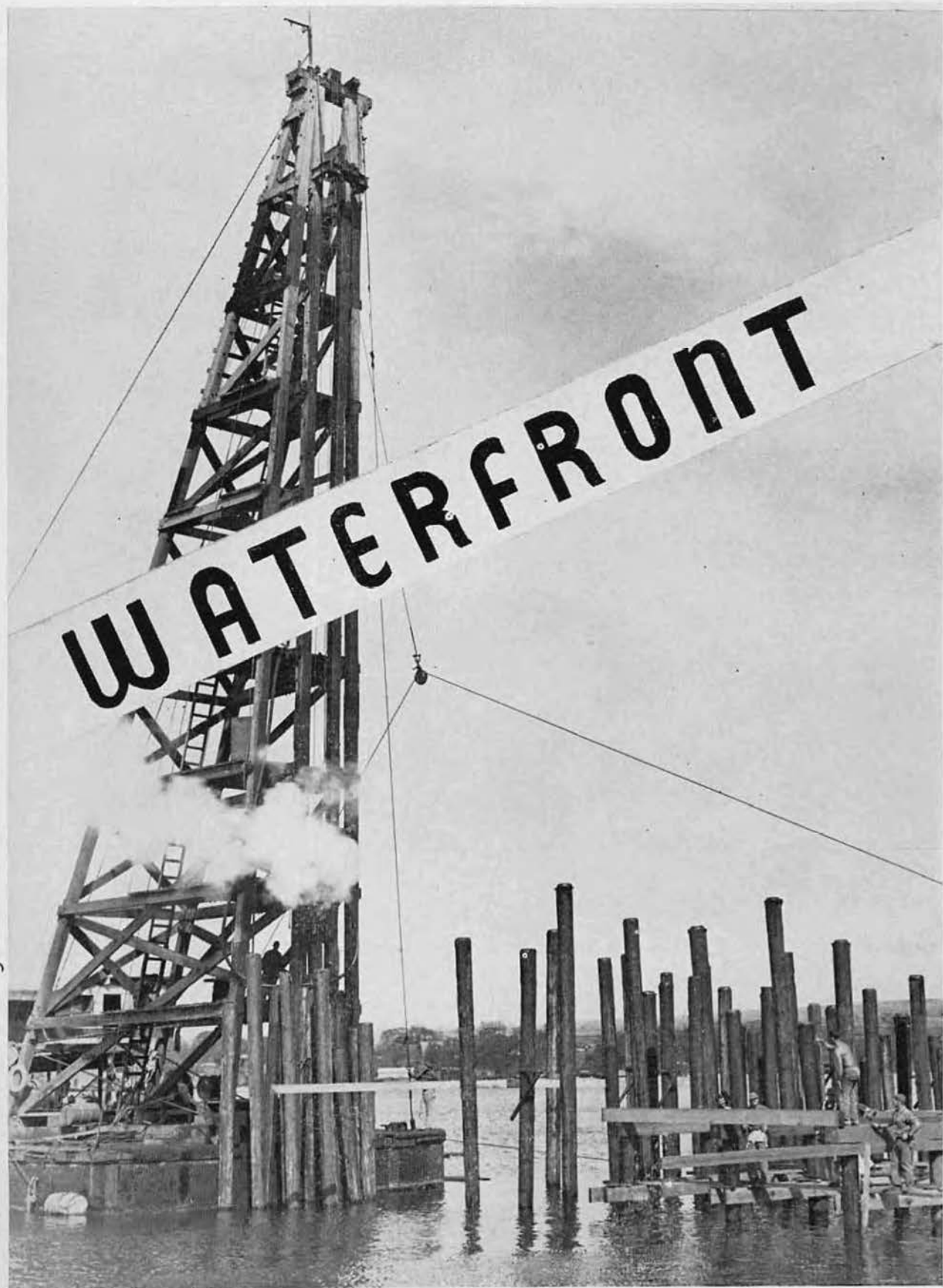
Honolulu was a 25-mile trip around the harbor, though only a half a dozen miles away if a ferry were taken across the channel. And we rode trucks or barges to our jobs which were scattered all around the harbor area.

Quonset huts made good living quarters—good, that is, compared to what we endured later. Perhaps the com-

fortable, even temperatures of Hawaii had something to do with this. Anyway, they were dry and reasonably clean. Each of us had his own locker with which we could get away from the inconvenience of living out of a sea bag. Heads were handy with plenty of running water. The nights were quiet, except for snoring and nightmares. All in all, Pearl Harbor was the paradise of overseas duty.

We not only built things. Blackjacks gave their blood for the urgent aid of the wounded on Leyte

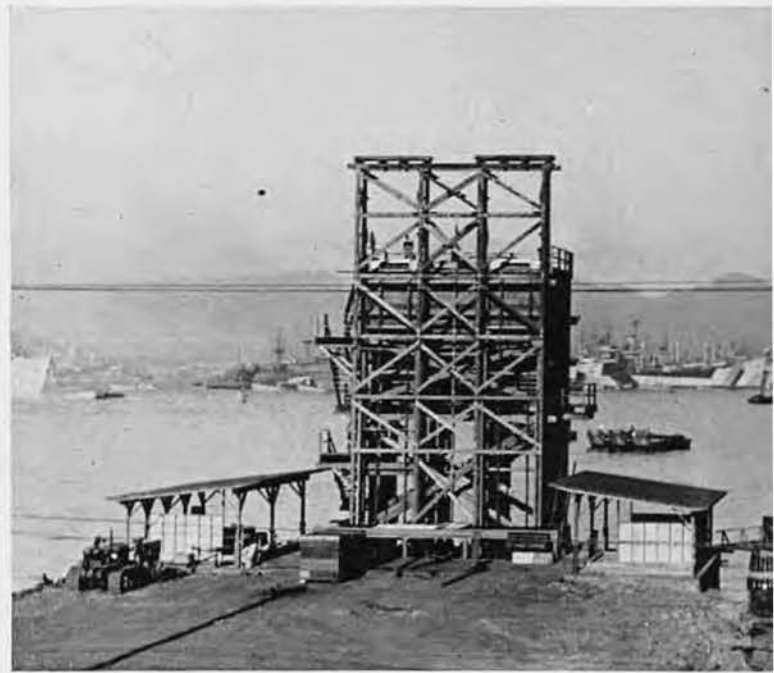
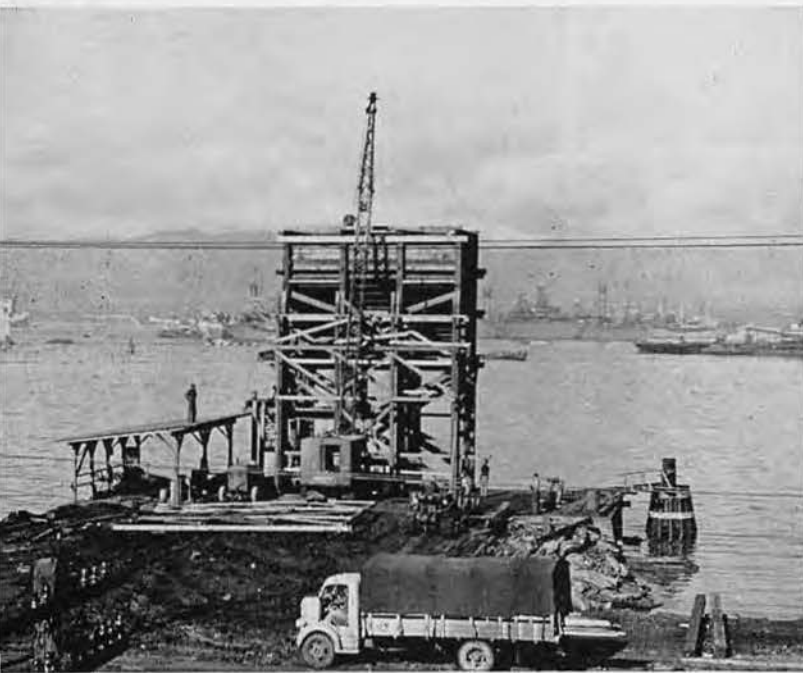




A Blackjack pile driver

While we were still at Camp Parks, the 21st had been designated a "waterfront battalion." We had been learning the waterfront game, and at Pearl Harbor we began to become experts in making the installa-

tions that the Navy needed between ship and shore, usually piers, wharfs, docks, or landing places of some kind. We were hampered by the lack of enough pile-driving equipment. Nevertheless, the Blackjacks left their marks on the harbor shoreline.



A GARBAGE COLLECTION FACILITY was built in the Aiea area. This was a pile-supported garbage lighter wharf and dolphins, with hoppers, towers and chutes for handling the refuse. From here, barges were loaded and taken to sea for dumping.

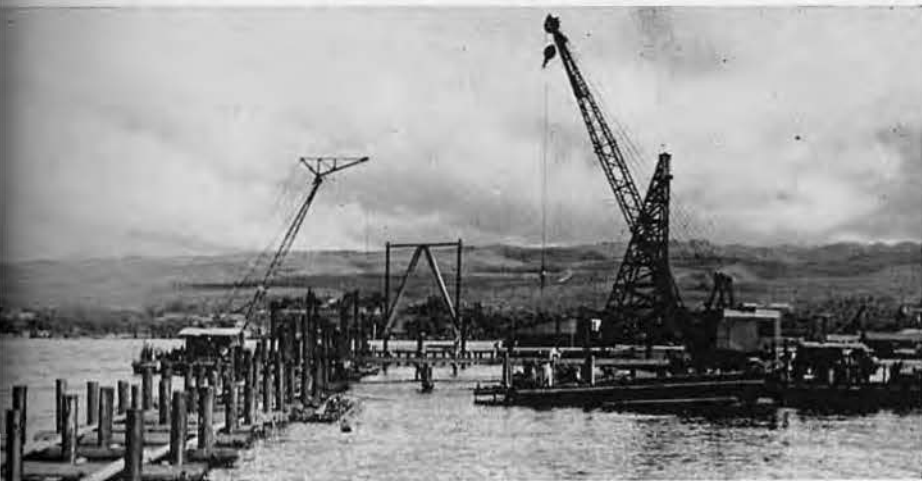
SMALL BOAT MOORINGS were put in on Kuahua island. The 21st drove dolphins and built a timber catwalk as an approach to the moorings. Such jobs weren't big as bigness went around Pearl Harbor, but they took time and labor and were needed.





A BARGE SLIP was built at Iroquois Point to handle airplane-loaded barges. Aircraft were stored on a large field in this area. The slip helped to speed the transfer of the planes from ships to the field and from the field to the carriers.

A BERTHING FOR FUEL BARGES was developed near Halawa stream. Old moorings were removed; nineteen dolphins were driven; a timber catwalk was built; pipe lines were laid; a machine shop, office, galley, and living quarters were erected. Soon Navy Yard oilers were using the berthing to supply the ships.





The expansion of the base for amphibious operations including a large chow hall



Cats with carryalls were best for heavy earth-moving

Two ways to clean up the sugar cane fields: The native way . . .



WAIPIO AMPHIBIOUS

We were assigned a project the last part of August which kept us busy until we were preparing to leave for the forward areas. This was the 1,500-man expansion of the Waipio Amphibious Operating Base at Waipio Point.

We started from scratch by clearing the fields of high, thick sugar cane. From the levelled, graded ground rose a complete camp: mess hall, barracks, mess heads, medical buildings, rigging, and storage huts, and a 3,000-man open air amphitheatre. Maybe the 2nd was a waterfront battalion, but Blackjacks were skilled at any kind of construction, and our carpenters really plied their trade at Waipio Point.

. . . And the Seabee way





Storage huts and five large wooden barracks

OPERATING BASE

Our heavy-equipment men coral-surfaced roads and sloped and graded a landing beach. Plumbing and hot water equipment were installed. Dolphins were driven. An eight-foot security fence was thrown around the whole area.

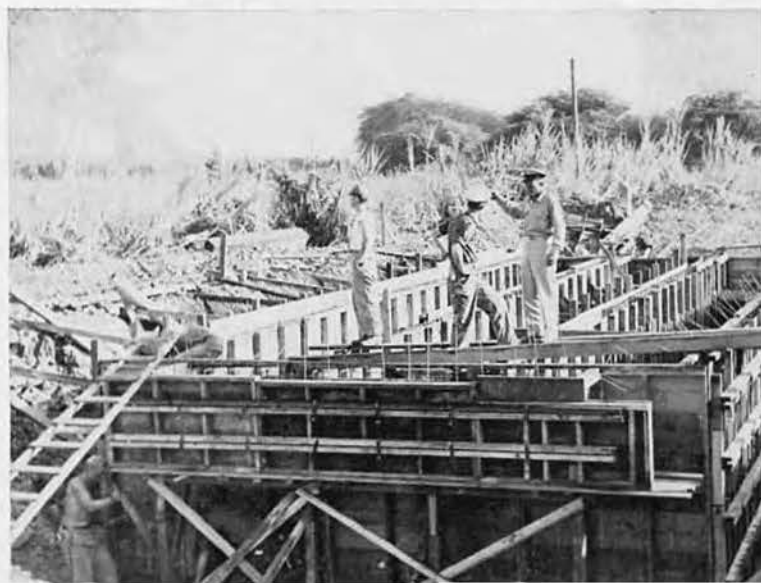
When the work was done, the commanding officer of the base wrote in appreciation of the "excellent accomplishment of recent construction work constituting an important contribution to the expansion of the base. . . . commendable job expertly done." From here, amphibious operations of larger sizes could now be planned, trained and equipped.

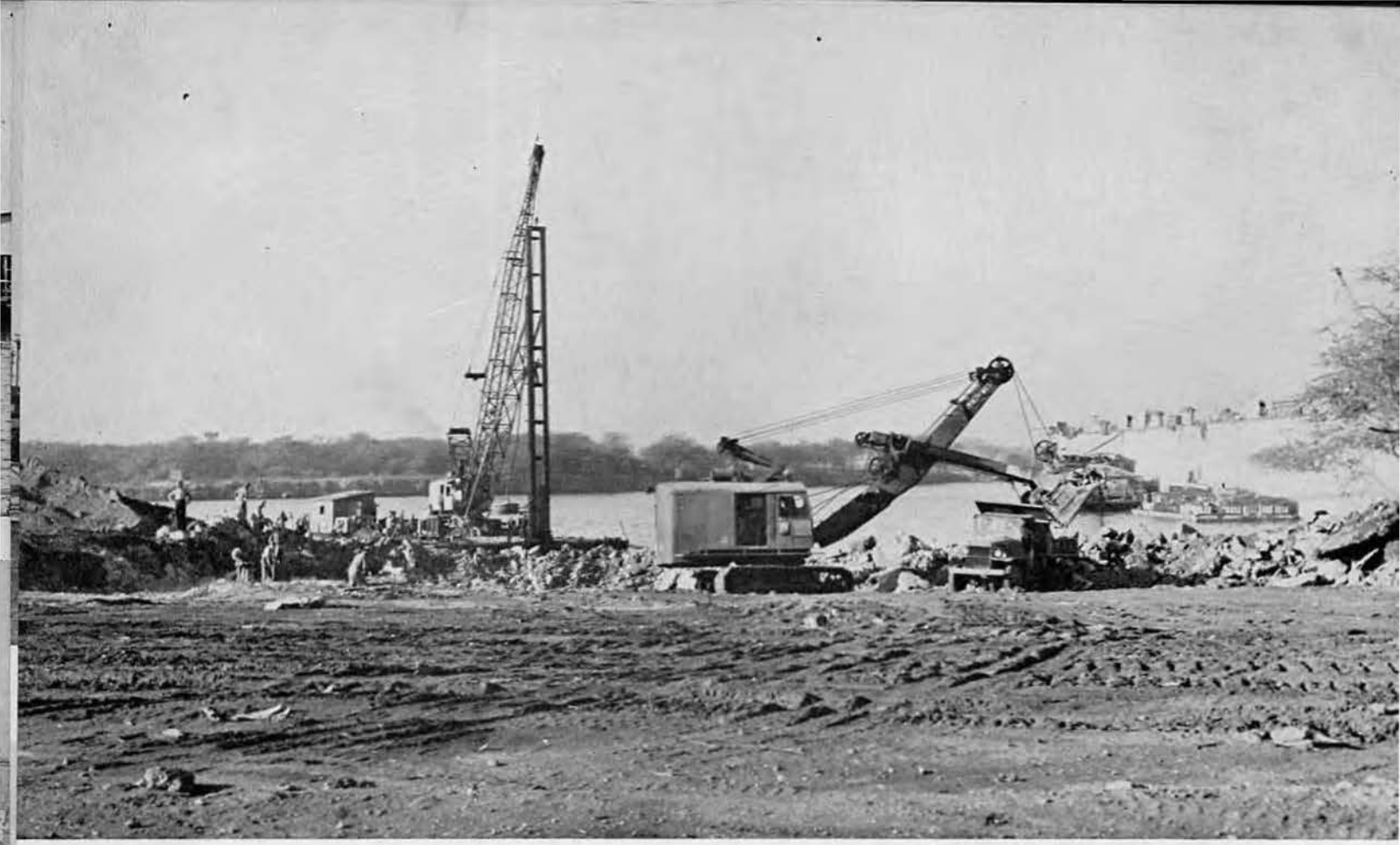
The open air theatre at Waipio Point could seat 3,000 men



A Euclid with a bottom dump helped grade the camp area

Concrete was a part of most construction





Amphibious operations centered on beaches; we graded and paved a sloping landing beach



The Blackjacks were commended for their expert work at Waipio Point



GANTRY CRANE

WAIPIO
POINT
OAHU

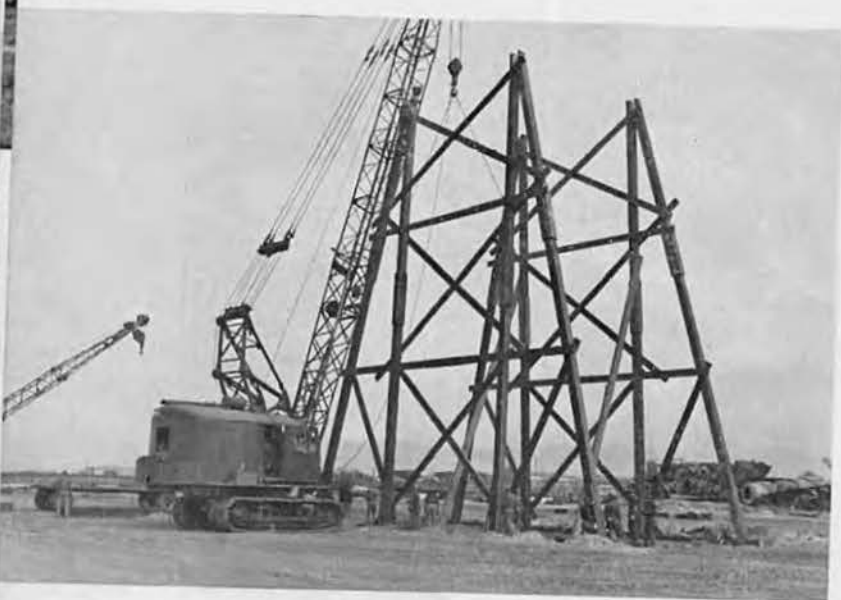


The gantry crane loomed high on the Pearl Harbor skyline

When Pearl Harbor was attacked, a large gantry crane in the Navy Yard had been damaged. It was torn down, and the pieces were stored away. Later, it was decided to rebuild the crane in the Navy Yard's storage area at Waipio Point; this was a huge task. The "gantry" was to have a 60-ton capacity. The materials alone were estimated to cost over \$800,000. Several outfits had turned down the construction as too gigantic for them to handle. Late in October, the Blackjacks were given this project, and they took great pride in this assignment and in their performance on the job.



The damaged steel pieces had been stored in a muddled heap

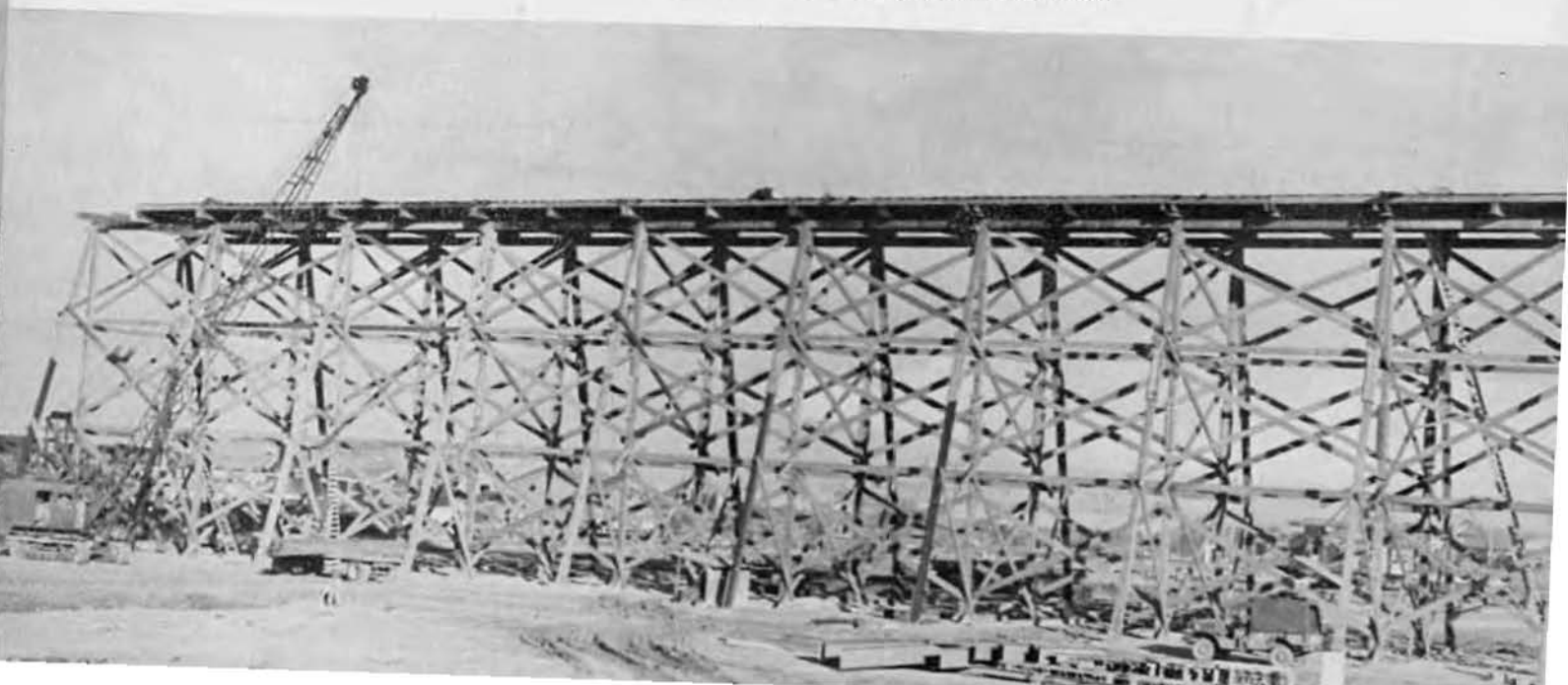


The first wood false work went up December 5



Heavy, bolted timbers formed the trestle

The false work was all up by the end of December





The first steel began to rise on January 5

From the start, the big problem was the fitting of the damaged structural members—bent and twisted in the Japanese attack. Some pieces were entirely missing, over 400 out of the total of 5,400. The Navy Yard shops had to fabricate some of the lost parts. Many headaches developed in finding and sorting the jig-saw of steel pieces, and each member taken from the old crane had to be sand-blasted and painted.

Grading came first. Test borings were made of the ground to be sure the heavy loads could be held. A lagoon area had to be filled. After the crane runway was started, the plans were changed.

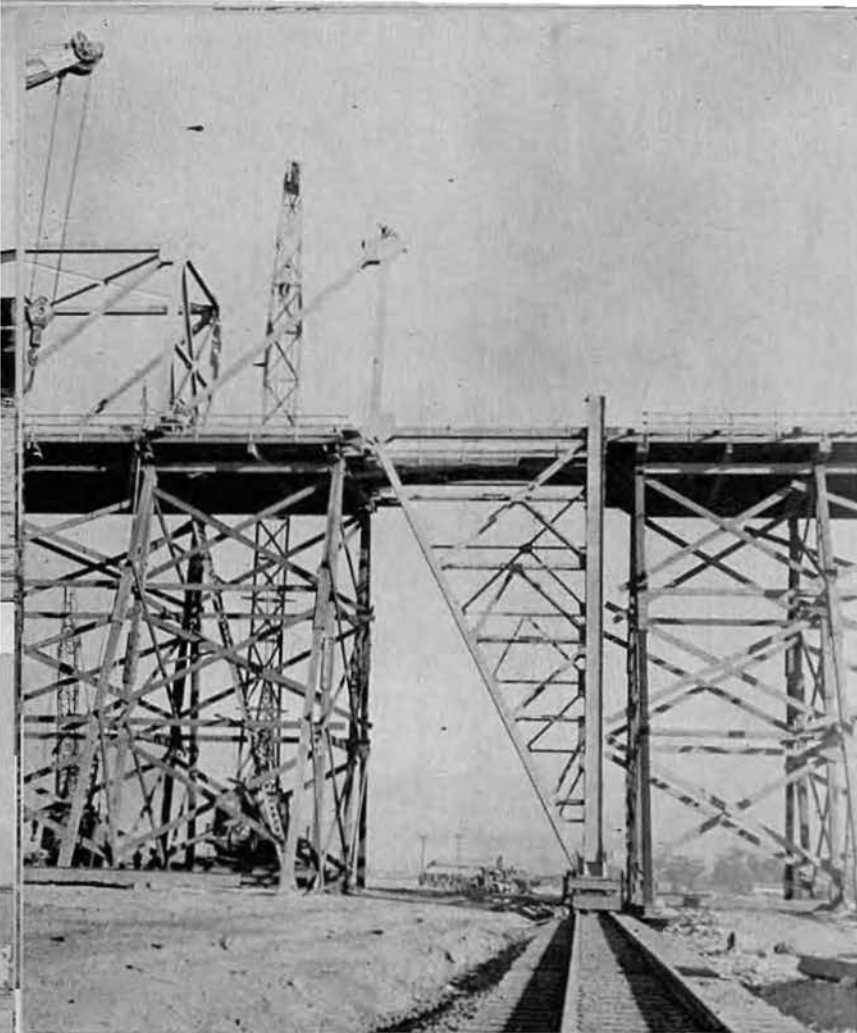
The sixty-foot falsework trestle was finished in December, and steel erection went rapidly during January. When we secured from the job at the end of that month, the crane was about 85% completed. We had bolted the steel together; riveting remained to be done. But the ninety-foot steel stood high on the Pearl Harbor skyline. The Blackjacks had contributed greatly in expanding the Navy Yard storage equipment. Heavy storage, like big gun barrels, could now be handled easily.



The top of the steel was 90 feet in the air

Below: "Elbow-grease" aligned the iron-rail runways
Bottom: The runways were solid for 60-ton loads





The rolling legs were in position when we wound up our part of this large project.



The gantry crane crew were rightly proud of their accomplishments





LANDING MATS

PEARL HARBOR

World War II moved fast in the Pacific. We had to move fast because there were thousands of miles to cover. The 21st battalion had assembled pontoons to speed operations; we'd expanded the waterfront with the same purpose; we'd enlarged an amphibious operating base; we'd quickened the handling of heavy storage. In mid-De-

cember, the Navy Yard needed help in assembling landing mats—perforated steel sections used mostly on airfields, but also on roads when crossing marshy ground and in landing equipment from LST's upon soft beaches. Black-jack welders and assemblers worked in the yard for about six weeks, holding down the graveyard shift from 2300 to 0700.

PREFABRICATING THE

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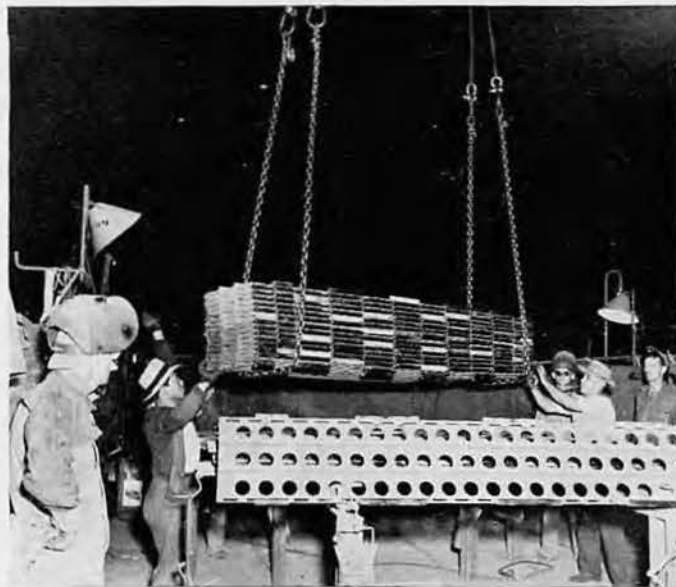
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Hinge pipes were welded to each mat section



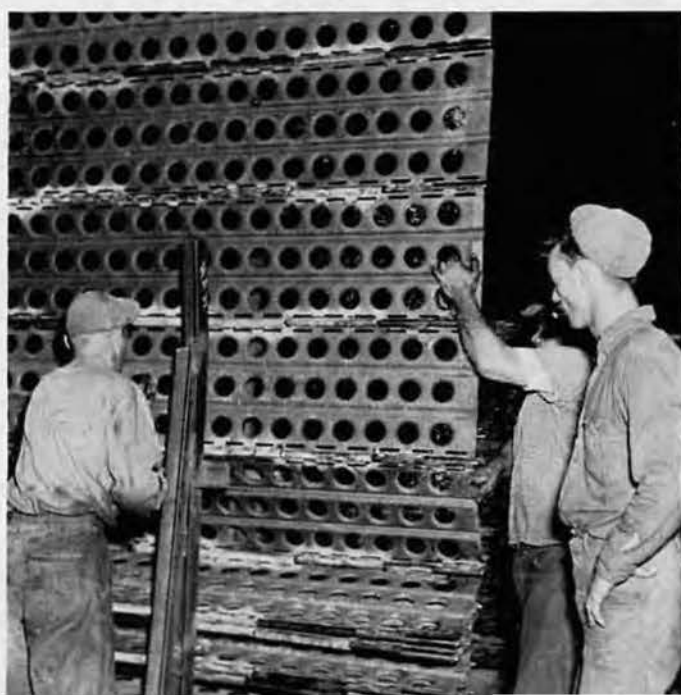
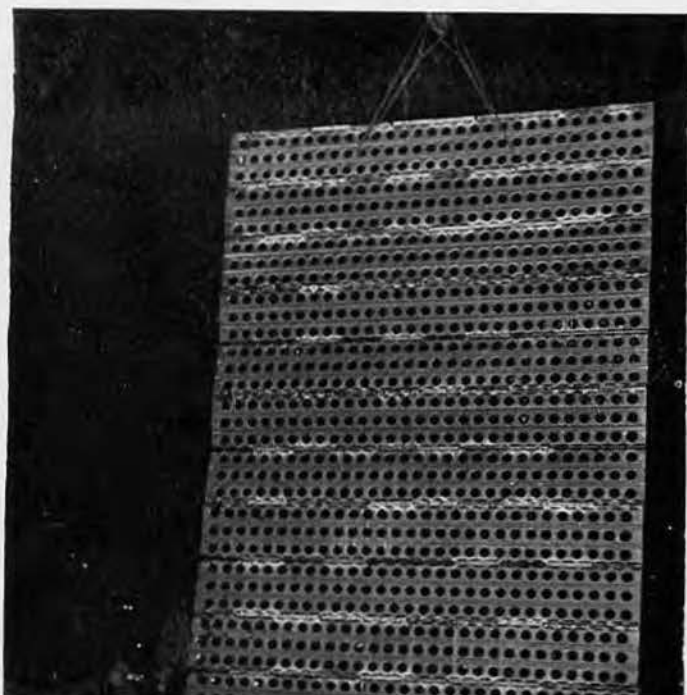
Civilian workers helped on the assembly in the Navy Yard



Above: Stephenson, Kelley and Ellis inserted hinge rods
Below: Over 500 mat sections were completed

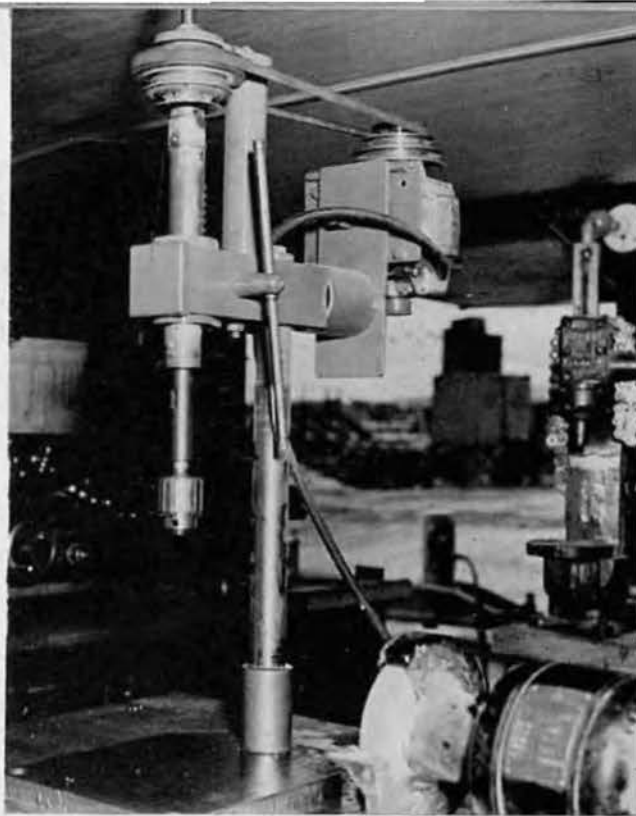
Old-type fasteners were cut off, new hinge pipes were welded on, and sections were connected with rods. About 50 sections went into a mat measuring about 80 feet, and the mats were ready for shipment. By completing over 500 of these mats while they were on the job, the 21st might lay claim to having strengthened at least seven miles of the road to Tokyo—a road the outfit itself was to travel far.

The landing mats were folded for shipment



SEABEE INGENUITY

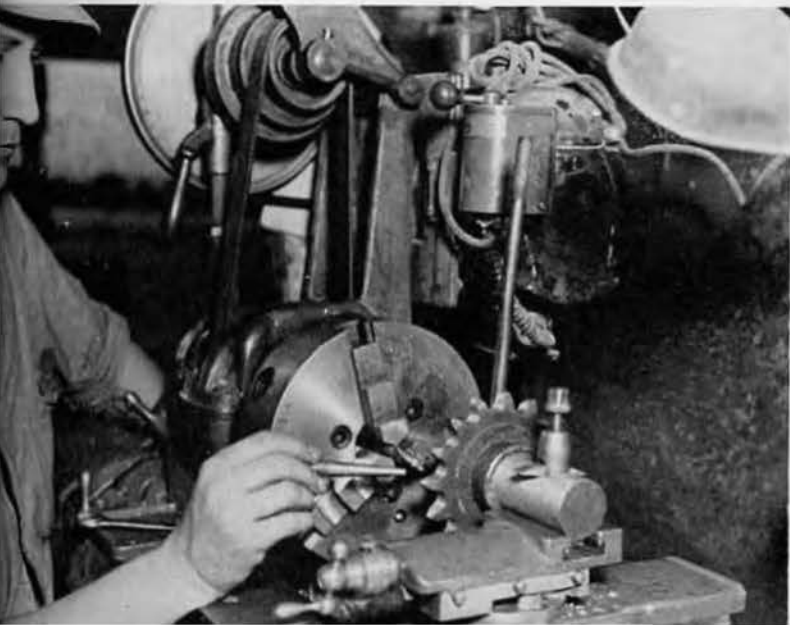
The Seabees have become famous for their talents in adapting materials and equipment on hand to novel and necessary uses, and the "Can Do" idea was as strong among the Blackjacks as anywhere. We saw inventiveness and cleverness in all types of work; we had to be that way when we were far distant from supplies. The cooks showed it in some of their galley equipment; the yeomen showed it in office work; it was most noteworthy in the shops and on the jobs. Of course, the explanation was partly due to the skilled men who had enlisted in the Seabees and who knew their trades from A to Z and back again.



Above—Frank Swoboda rigged up a high-speed drill press from salvaged airplane parts. It worked like a charm on precision drilling for various jobs.



Above: Ingenious Swoboda also improvised a power hack-saw for some hard cutting.

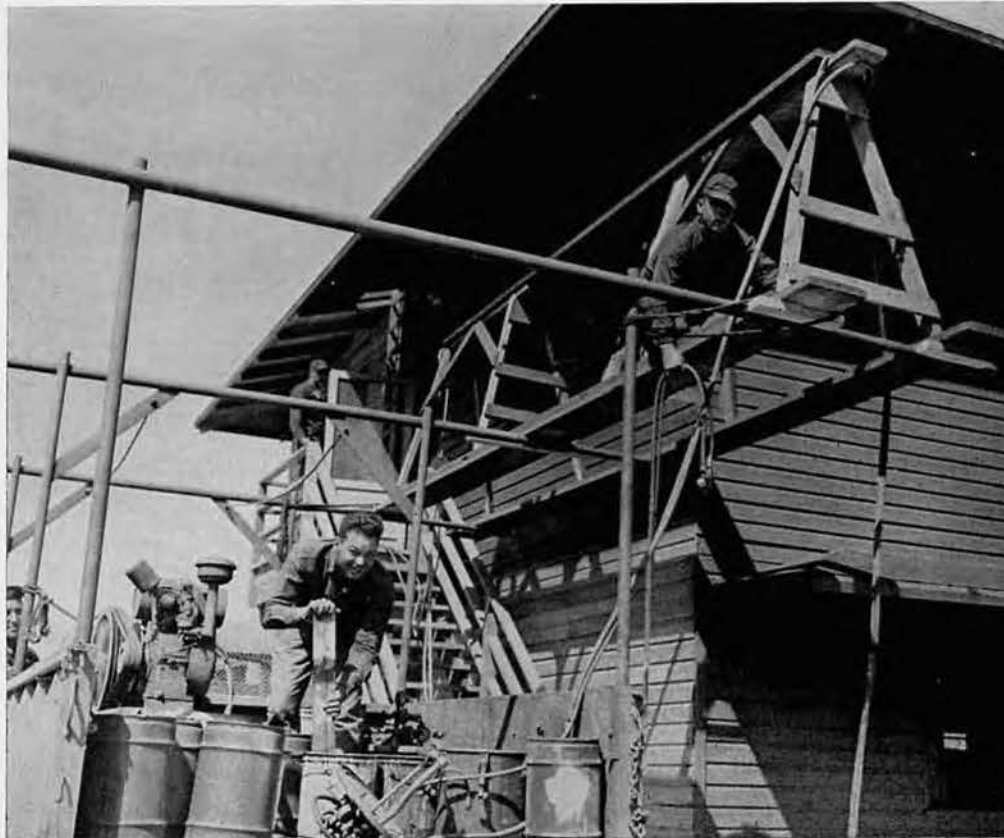


Left: With no milling machine or milling attachment for a lathe, a needed change in a sprocket couldn't be made. Swoboda and E. W. Swanson made a special mounting for their lathe—and the job was done.



Seidenberg, Wyatt and Garrison put junkyard caterpillar rollers from an old bomb carrier on to a field welding tank so that it could be pushed easily over the roughest terrain.

Redmond conceived and put into use a travelling scaffold which permitted painters to spray barracks and other large structures in about one-third the time required formerly.





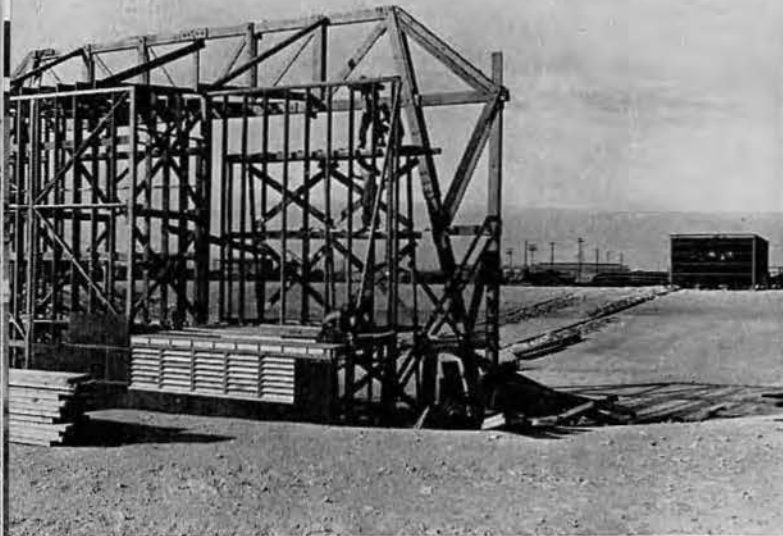
The Bagley Theatre had a huge stage and movie screen

B A G L E Y T H E A T R E

At Iroquois Point, we lived next door to the ABRD — Advance Base Replacement Depot — in many ways, we were a part of it. In a sense, we had to earn our keep. We did our share in expanding this camp.

We rushed to completion a 5,000-man open air

theatre. By the middle of December, the screen was showing the best of movies, and the stage was presenting touring USO and service-talent acts. The Bagley theatre was always an alternative to the smaller 21st-43rd theatre which most of us still preferred.



"Something for the boys" always inspired hard work



By mid-December, the theatre was offering the best of good fun



Q U O N S E T S

Besides the theatre, the 21st erected four quonset-hut areas as more and more living quarters were needed for the Seabees and regular Navy men passing through to the forward areas. And supplies

needed protection as much as personnel. Our men painted 14 large warehouses.

At Pearl Harbor, we took on all kinds of jobs. If a job needed to be done, we rarely turned it down as outside our abilities. We built anything, everything.

We erected some of the quonset-hut units that covered Iroquois Point





Liberty-hounds crowded the daily "bus" that we ran into Honolulu

LIBERTY

Of course, we didn't work all the time. The rules called for one day off in seven. For most, that meant Sunday; some duties required a "GI Sunday" on some week-day. It didn't make much difference what day it was; it was liberty.

The desire of most men was to get out of camp on the day off, to see some different scenery, to live a little like civilian life, to forget camp routines for a few hours. The Recreation Department ran a personnel truck into Honolulu and back daily. Some preferred to hitch-hike or cross the harbor on the ferry.

On Sundays, groups of men borrowed trucks and went sight-seeing, joy-riding, picnicking, and swimming wherever they pleased. And sandwiches and beer were provided for lunch. If the camp existence was boring and if Honolulu was too crowded and commercial, many beautiful spots were situated around the island.



Sunday truck trips showed us the sights around the island



We passed the Waipahu sugar mill on the way to town



Near Aiea, natives grew water cress

A R O U N D T H E I S L A N D

The usual trip around Oahu covered over 100 miles, counter-clockwise. Out of camp through the mesquite-like trees and the sugar cane fields; through little Honolulu, where a little general store could provide cokes and cookies; around Waipahu where the sugar mill had

its sweetish odor and we could turn right to our jobs on Waipio Point; glimpses of the ships and boats in the corners of the harbor as we went through Pearl City; a switch off the main road up through little Aiea, over Red Hill, and down through the landscaped Moanalua

Moanalua Gardens had green lawns, flowers, spreading shade trees and a lagoon





Statue of Kamehameha King



Honolulu climbed up the hills from the canal and River Street

Gardens as we entered the outskirts of Honolulu at Fort Shafter. The highway became King Street as we passed high schools, stores and homes.

The traffic squeezed into the narrow streets. The sidewalks teemed with Navy men in white, with soldiers and Marines in tan, with faces of all shades from white to dark brown. King Kamehameha's statue recalled the past glories of the Hawaiian monarchy, as did Iolani palace. Chinese schools and churches symbolized the oriental population which has become the majority, though the Japanese are the largest group. The hundreds of shops demonstrated the city's great retail trade which has boomed with the influx of the thousands of war workers and service men and women. Penny arcades where we could have our pictures taken with a "hula girl" were flourishing.

It was just a short ride to Waikiki where the shops seemed more expensive, the hotels more luxurious, the homes finer, and the famed beach offered swimming, surfboards, and outrigger canoes.

All these places were over-advertised, and we kept going around Diamond Head and past fabulous estates. Rocky shores lay to the right, and a stop was made at the peculiar blowhole where the waves throw up a salty geyser.

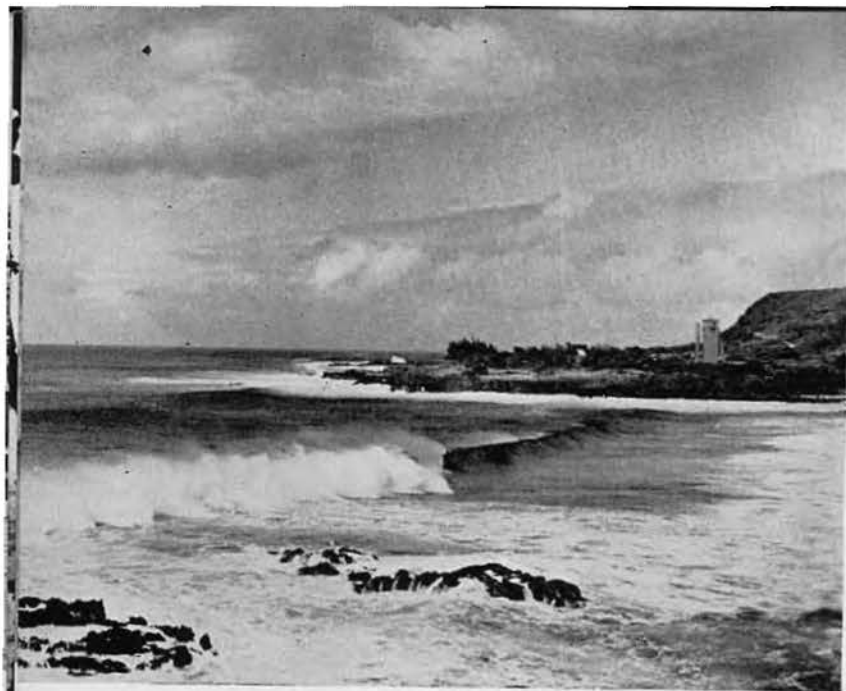
On the windward side of the island, the beaches returned, and a stop was often made at Kailua for a swim and lunch. Then on through small plantations to the



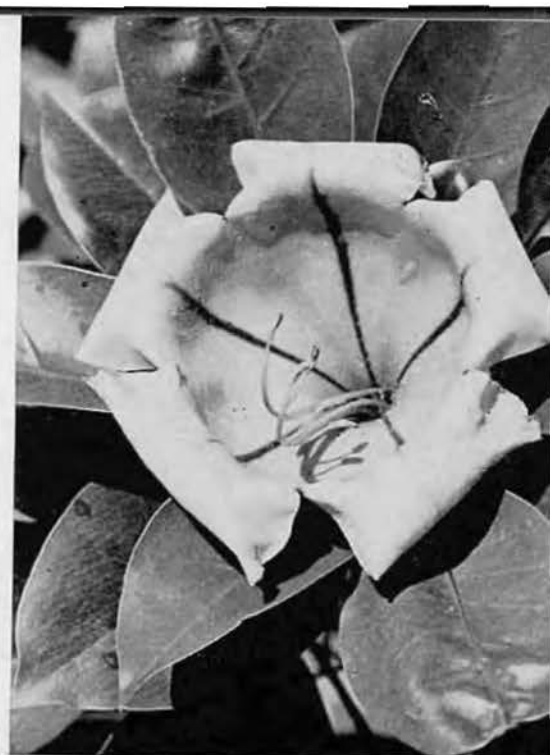
Kau Kau Korner

The Chinese church was colorful and unique





The wind whipped spray from the surf at Waialua Bay



The Hawaiian "Cup of Gold"

The beautifully designed and landscaped Iiwi Temple was a famed shrine





The red hibiscus was everywhere



Top: Oahu's red-dirt center was overspread with pineapple fields, dotted with plantations homes.



The USO at Waimea was one of many available for pleasure-seeking Blackjacks.



Reefs sheltered the windward shore at Waialua



RECREATION



The recreational program was chalked up on a blackboard in front of our recreation hut



What number was called?—a tight moment in a bingo game

The Saturday-night bingo games never had a dull moment



While we were in camp, we could use one of the largest Seabee recreational plants on the island. A 40x100 quonset hut, which we had inherited, was the hub of activities. Here were the athletic gear, a game room, an office for portrait, film, and gift services, a gym for basketball, volleyball, table tennis. On one side of the hut was a concrete court for tennis, basketball, and volleyball; on the other side was a training platform for boxers.

Bingo parties on a number of evenings were largely attended in the "rec" hall. Here also "Steamboat" Jones and his hill-billy orchestra practiced and entertained.

Table tennis was the most popular of the "rec" hall's sports, with three tables continually in use and ping-pong balls getting so scarce that we put guards on ours to keep other battalions from walking off with them. A hard-

"Steamboat" Jones and the hill-billy band sounded off





The Co. D volleyball team was the undefeated 21st champions



Walter, the one-man team and his girls' team, showed the boys how it's done on Oahu.

fought tournament brought Johnson out on top. And Lt. Clifford paired with the inimitable Lt. Coddou to defeat the surprise team of Dunsay and McAllister in the doubles. In team competition, Captain Red Smith got together an aggregation of ping-pongsters that was undefeated.

Volleyball had its spot on the sport parade. In outside games, we finished third in the Seabee tournament and reached the quarter finals of the All-Service play at CHA-3. And never to be forgotten is Pickering's friend Walter, the one-man team, who often and soundly defeated the Blackjacks, as well as every other team, with amazing, amusing performances.

After some confusion about playing fields, the 21st and neighboring battalions pitched together to get three ball



Action in the "rec" hall

Elmer "Lefty" Johnson, right, winner of the Blackjack table tennis tourney, was congratulated by Gene Meyer, the runner-up.



The table tennis team: Meyer No. 2, Smith No. 4, Stadelman No. 3, Johnson No. 1. Not in picture, McAllister.





At the Army-Navy "Y" in Honolulu, Blackjacks 28, Redmen 27 with 1½ minutes to play. We lost 31-29. Honest!



Lt. Jones batted and Chief Armstrong caught in an officer-chief softball game. The chiefs led in the series.



fields watered, rolled, marked and back-stopped. Then for the softball team we purchased uniforms featuring black sweatshirts with "Blackjack" printed across the chest. We entered the Seabee Athletic Association League and finished fourth in both halves of the play. Our brand of ball, however, reached unbeatable heights at times, and we were offered more games under the lights at CHA-3 than any other team. The final weeks of the league saw the Blackjacks defeating everyone they came across, including all the divisional winners and runner-ups, but not our nemesis, the 43rd battalion.

The basketball team secured some snappy blue uniforms with red numerals. Playing in three tournaments, they reached the play-offs of the Iroquois Point tourney, finished second in the Seabee Iroquois Point tourney and fourth in the Seabee League after a bad start. The Seabee League comprised 24 teams, and all games were played at the Honolulu Army and Navy "Y." Win or lose, the pineapple specials were never neglected after each game. For the season, Connick was the team's high-scorer, with Lambert one point behind.

The boxing picture was full and alive, although a team coached by Toennigs never had a chance to show its wares. Kenny Bellmard made a name for himself, includ-



Below, left: The Blackjack softball team. Front row: Zajaros, Koen, Zgoda, Straw, Doiron, Climo, Captain Parker, Coach Olson. Back row: Manager Dunsay, Tischler, Merkle, Drake, Wosnum, Andres, Schieck, Seymour, Cotton, Bailey, Gustafson. Not in picture: W. J. Flynn, M. T. Peters, E. W. Jones, Jaseniuk, and Cracolici.

Right: The basketball squad. Front row: Chief Gustafson, Scorekeeper Clifton, Olson, Manager Dunsay. Second row: Lockhart, Simpson, Lambert. Back row: Connell, Livacich, Adams, Captain Seymour, Connick.





The only time Kennis M. Bellmard hit the deck in any of his bouts under the colors of the 21st he arose to lose a close decision.

ing a win over the mid-Pacific champ in a non-title bout. He lost three bad decisions at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. Hardie, scrapping in and out of the ring, became well-known. Tutko and Cabral were other members of the team to fight in competition.

Once more Kurtz and LaCourse entertained the men all over the island with their professional wrestling antics. One record that they held was Kurtz's toss of LaCourse into the fifth row in a bout at Ford island. Until then, the third row had been the record.

Joseph Cabral, middleweight, won 4, lost 0.

Kennis M. Bellmard, lightweight, won 16, lost 4.

John Tutko, middleweight

Richard LaCourse (won 9, lost 12) and George Kurtz (won 19, lost 10, drew 4), including four battle royals.





Blackjacks soon learned a few tricks of the hula dance



STAGE SHOWS



Peewee was in the first hula show

Overseas, the movies were the most popular form of recreation. Often there wasn't anything else to do, and we saw everything—the good ones with praise, the bad ones with complaints. The 21st-43rd open air theatre was filled every night. When there was a stage show, the place was packed to the roofs of nearby quonset huts.

The Hawaiian shows were a natural attraction

from the first, and we eyed many. The wahines were happy to show their songs and dances to the malahines: the swaying music, stories like that of the princess something-or-other who had "plenty papayas," the green grass skirts, the sign language of the hands.

We didn't have any of the well-known stage and screen stars at our own theatre, but it was easy to

Stage shows were rare enough to be a real treat. Officers and men packed every seat—and some nearby roofs.





Keep your eyes on the hands!

Are you kiddin'?





Above: Six-year-old hula maid
 Below: Samoan dancer

Lovelie Natalie

Sweet Leilani



"Out of This World"



"Crossing Pali Pass"





Our shows were presented in the 21st-43rd theatre



A chief's birthday was an excuse for some merrymaking

get transportation to see Jack Benny at the Nimitz Bowl, or Maurice Evans in "Hamlet" in town, or any other show around the island.

It would be wrong to talk about sports and movies and stage shows as the whole recreation picture. It's

true these held the attention of large groups, but there were smaller bits of fun like informal dinners in town or in camp, visits in camp and out with friends, and card games for which the Blackjacks were noted. We didn't neglect the beer halls, either.

Good eats were relaxation for the painters after a day with brushes and spray guns





The cooks did things up brown



Turkey, ham, pie and ice cream and all the fixings loaded the trays

Top: Candy and smokes were "on the house"
Bottom: A little tree dressed up the officers' club

Top: The chow hall was decorated, though Oahu could produce few Christmas ornaments.
Bottom: Bartenders Callaghan and Carman had the best job in the outfit





HOLIDAYS

Away from home, a bitter-sweetness flavors the holidays. "Just another day," many of us had to say as we went about our assigned tasks, but letters and gifts from home and thoughts of home brought to the surface memories of a past Thanksgiving or a past Christmas.

Little could be done in camp to brighten these days. Special

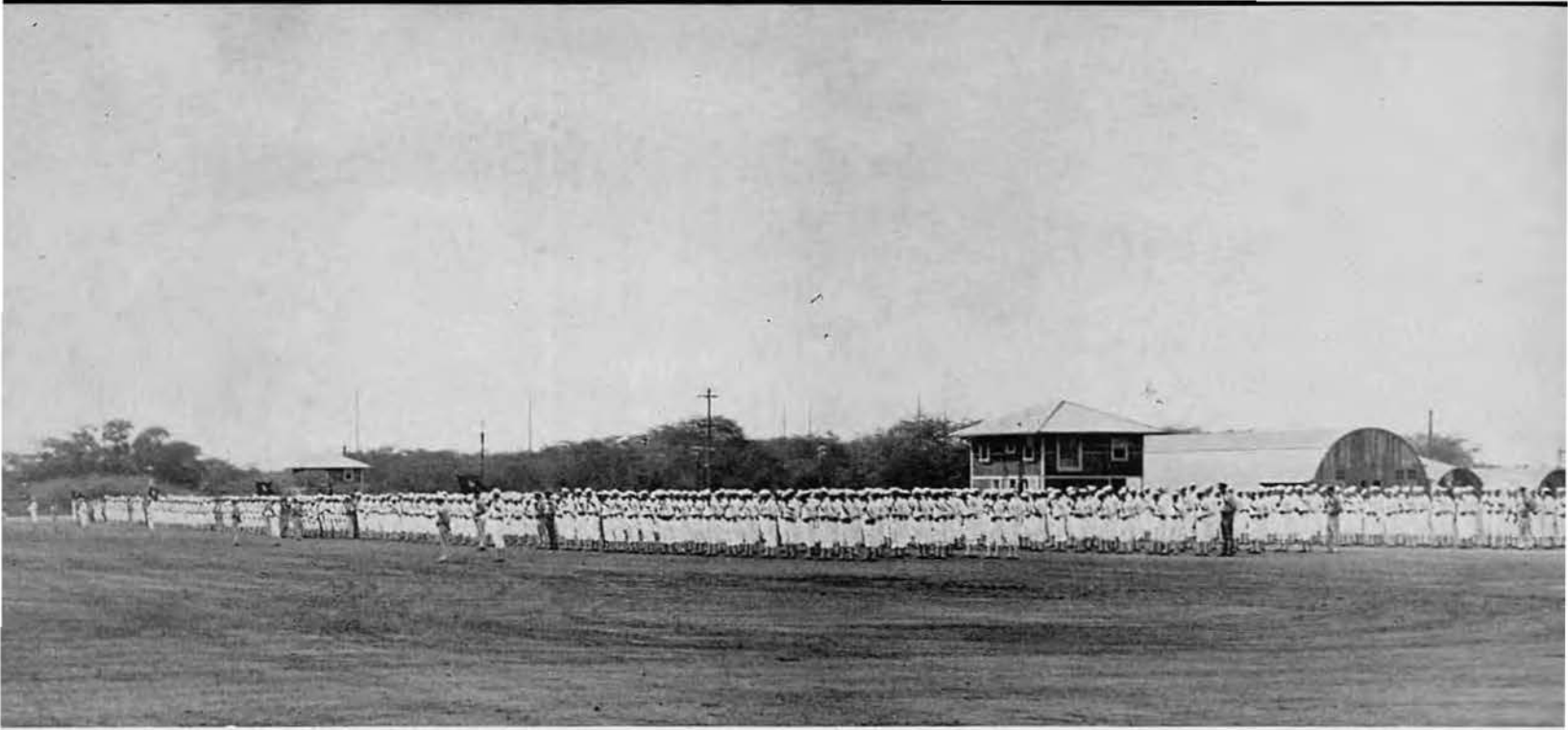
menus were prepared, and a full, tasty feed made something of an occasion. It would have taken a fleet-full of decorations to cheer up a military camp, and decorations were few. The glee club sang and the band played; there were special divine services. The celebrations were just a touch, a taste, and most men were glad when the holidays were passed and they could stop thinking of what they were missing at home.

Above: The glee club sang Christmas Eve. Front row: Ruiz, Macht, Heitman, Marshall, Redeker, Wilhelmson, Sutterfield, Shaw. Back row: Oliver, Critchfield, Sheldon, Loeffel, Boulter, Blue, Babiana, Kasad, Daffern, CWO Travers.



Right: In addition to Christmas Eve, the band played for dress reviews, chow, at the theatre and beer hall, and aboard ship. Front row: Von Seggern, Oliver, Schihl. Second row: CWO Travers, Wood, Murdock, Nordella, Couch, Kellner, Corrage, Potter. Third row: Brown, Murray, Sheldon, Loeffel, Attarian, Johnson. Fourth row: Redeker, Marshall, Porter, Boulter, Hanneman, Bierman.





The 21st battalion was ready for review

DRESS REVIEWS



When we think of Christmas, 1944, we remember also that we spent that morning practicing for a dress inspection. We were disgusted, even though the exercise whetted our appetites. Dress reviews just couldn't be avoided at Pearl Harbor. We suffered two, one on September 18, and again on December 26.

In September, the 21st battalion was a part of the 2nd Seabee Brigade. By December, re-organization had taken place, and we were in the 8th Brigade, where we stayed for the remainder of our tour of duty.

When we finally put our mind to a review, we could really look like a military organization. On each occasion, the inspecting officer complimented the battalion on its appearance and performance. Said Commodore Seabury of the 8th Brigade: "The appearance of the personnel and the smart conduct during the review indicated a sincere effort on the part of the battalion. The entire performance was creditable."

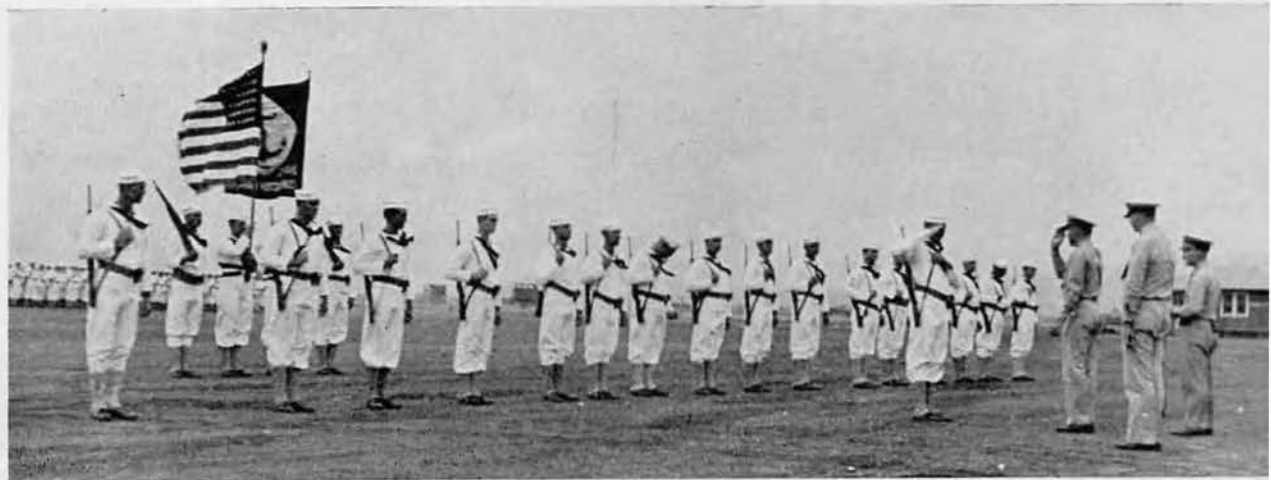
We had no reviews at Saipan and none at Okinawa. We didn't march down Market Street in San Francisco. For these escapes, most of us were thankful.



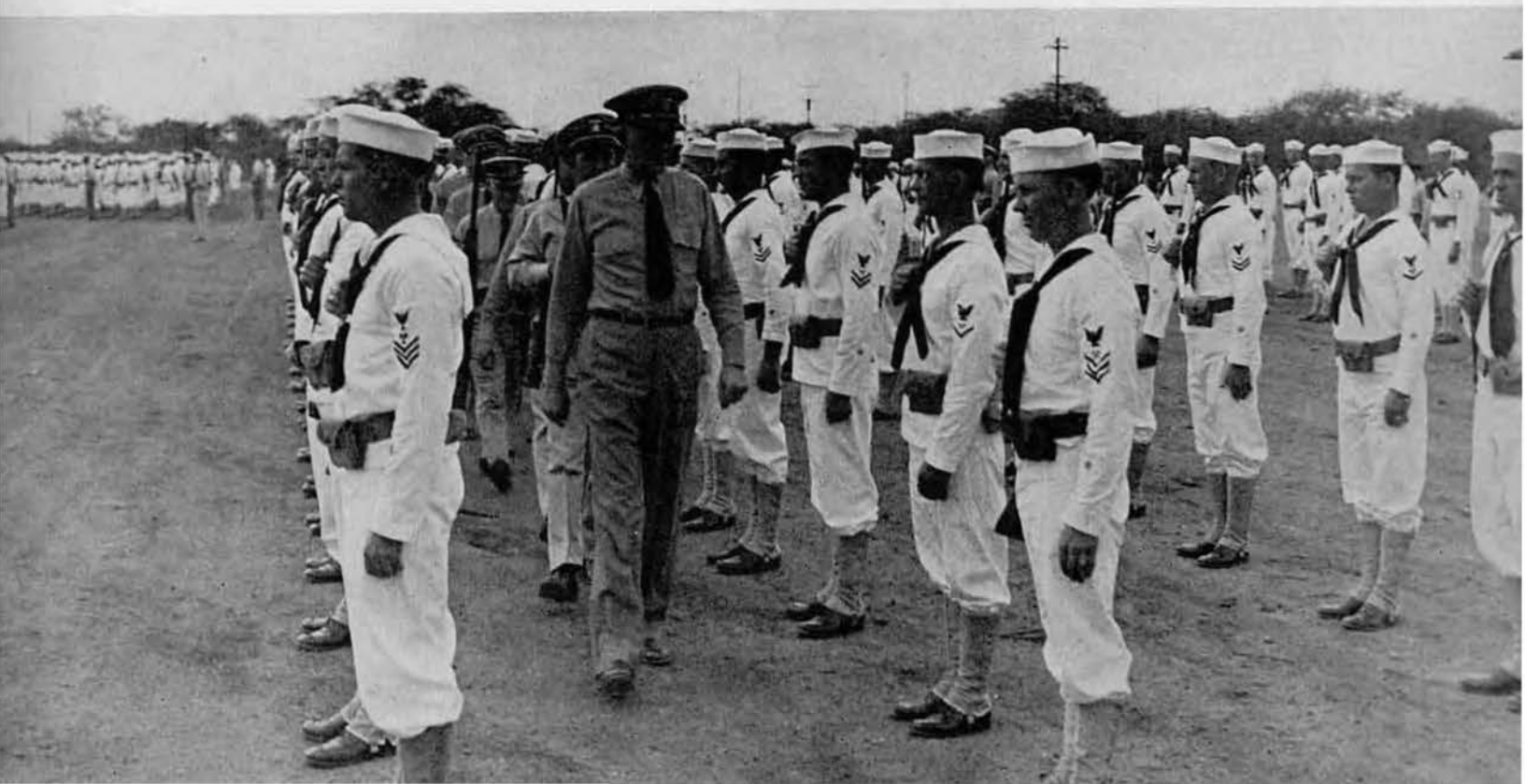
Capt., now Commodore, Seabury of the 8th Brigade made the December inspection.



Many Blackjacks were awarded Expert Rifleman Medals.



Below: Capt. Andrews, officer in charge of the 2nd Seabee Brigade, inspected the battalion in September.



JUNGLE TRAINING



We trained, ate and slept under jungle conditions

At the end of January, 1945, we learned that we were scheduled to ship further west before long. We were secured from all our jobs. Then started a glorious rush of military training.

Part of the battalion struggled through jungle training on the "red course" on the windward side of the island. This was a week of rough conditioning along lines that had been proved in the island fighting in the South Pacific.

All the Blackjacks attended movies, exhibits, and lectures on field sanitation and were properly impressed by the tales of horrible diseases. All learned more about chemical warfare and tested their new gas masks in a portable gas chamber. All had a chance to try out life jackets and show their swimming abilities. We received a new style pack, and the special tricks of putting this Marine invention together brought on headaches. Some had another chance at the rifle range.

We crossed a stream while explosives went off beneath us



A L O H A ! K A M A I N A !



About seven "shots" prepared us for diseases of the forward areas

The stock-piling of supplies and equipment had been progressing for some time. Now a compound was set up near the Iroquois Point docks; sorting, counting and labelling—BIVE was slapped all over everything—were rushed. Our cargo ship left with a few Blackjacks aboard.

We had to be protected from all sorts of diseases; the Medical Department punched some seven "shots" into our arms. We shipped home excess personal gear like the white blankets which had been

replaced by brown ones. Censorship of letters was more strict than ever.

On the morning of February 27th, exactly seven months to the day since we had arrived on Oahu, we began to board the *Sea Flyer* at one of the Iroquois Point docks. The 7th battalion was also going aboard. The last boxes and mail bags were thrown down the hatches. At about two o'clock in the afternoon, the lines were cast off—we headed out into the channel and out of Pearl Harbor.



Although the deck was sun-baked, clothes dried slowly



21st and 7th battalion officers grouped together on the Sea Flyer

A B O A R D T H E S E A F L Y E R

We were crammed like cattle on the *Sea Flyer*. 21st and 7th men filled every bunk, every inch of deck. As we held a course southwesterly, the stuffy holds grew hotter and hotter. More and more slept on deck, and we had to place our bedding early to

have any spot at all. Many slung jungle hammocks.

Blackouts, submarine alerts at dusk and dawn, and abandon ship drills made us realize that we were approaching the fighting war. Occasionally, the gun crews practiced on high-flying balloons.

"Sweepers, man your brooms" was just one of the many work details we had aboard ship. Decks were washed down; we cleaned our sleeping quarters; we helped prepare and serve the food. The snappy 7th battalion dance band alternated with the 21st's more military music for the afternoon concerts on deck.

The chow hall was one of the best we'd seen. Two lines speeded the serving, and we could sit down to eat. The voyage was so smooth that hardly a soul missed a meal. Cold water was scarce, but we could get some by dodging some of the guards. Movies were shown nightly in the chow hall for small numbers at a time.

On March 3rd, we crossed the International Date Line and skipped a day, though the watch-setting announcements confused us about this at that time.



Chief Anderson (right) won the cribbage tournament, defeating Pinkerton in the finals.



The "troop quarters" were crowded and stiflingly hot



The chow line stretched to the bow of the ship—and usually back again.

S A I P A N B O U N D

Then, in the mid-morning of March 7th, we entered the calm waters of the barren Eniwetok atoll in the Marshall islands. The *Sea Flyer* anchored here a week. Movies were shown on deck; mail left for home; the ship's library kept busy. We all had a chance to go ashore to the recreation center on Parry island where beer and swimming were the chief attractions. Around these few acres of sand we could

also look over some of the devastation caused by the battle almost a year earlier.

Four days after leaving Eniwetok, on the morning of March 18th, we sailed between Tinian and Saipan islands in the Marianas. Later, we pulled inside Saipan's coral-ringed harbor and tied up at the pontoon docks at supper time. After 18 days of rolling decks, the *Sea Flyer* had brought us safely to our destination.

A place to sit was hard to find. A place to sleep on deck at night was still harder





To All Sailors, wherever ye may
be and to all mermaids, flying dragons,
spirits of the deep, devil chasers and all
other living creatures of the seas,

Domain of the Golden Dragon

Ruler of the 180th Meridian

Greetings

Know ye that on this 3rd day of MAR. 19 45

in latitude 16°N longitude 180° West

within the limits of my august dwelling

on board S.S. SEA FLIER

Hearken Ye

the said vessel, officers and crew have inspected and passed

ALL HANDS - 21st SEABEES

and has been found sane and worthy of the Mysteries of the Far East

12 ND
Form 330

Golden Dragon Ruler of the 180th Meridian





TOKYO
1500M

BANADERU

SUICIDE CLIFF

TANAPAGU

GARAPAN

SUGAR
MILL

CAMP
SUSUPE

RAURAU

ASLITO

S A I P A N



Our Saipan camp was between the sea and the "Bloody Nose Ridge" cliffs, white pock-marked from shelling.

BETWEEN THE CLIFFS AND THE PACIFIC

In the pitch-dark we debarked and loaded on trucks for a winding ride over the hill to the other side of the island. We stumbled with our sea bags into tents in the 14th battalion's area and laid out our ponchos and bedding on the dirt. We stayed here several days while our own area was being cleared of sugar cane, graded, and having tents erected. The food was questionable, and one memorable night the heads were neither near enough nor numerous enough.

Our camp was on a gentle slope from the sheer cliff, pockmarked with shell bursts, to the blue Pacific. In the battle for Saipan, bloody fighting had taken place in these fields. Our camp took shape with coral-surfaced

streets. Lister bags gave water for drinking, but we washed in our steel helmets until a shower was built. Half of us ate with the 7th battalion and the other half with the 14th. The noon-day meal was topped with a bright-yellow, bitter atabrine tablet, our protector against malaria. Beer and cokes were rationed and not plentiful enough. A movie area was constructed, and each night the gang was entertained there.

Every other evening we could count the shining B-29 Super-Fortresses skimming low over the ocean after their take-offs for Japan. Since Iwo Jima had been captured just before we reached Saipan, we ourselves were in no danger of air raids.

THE WAR COMES CLOSER

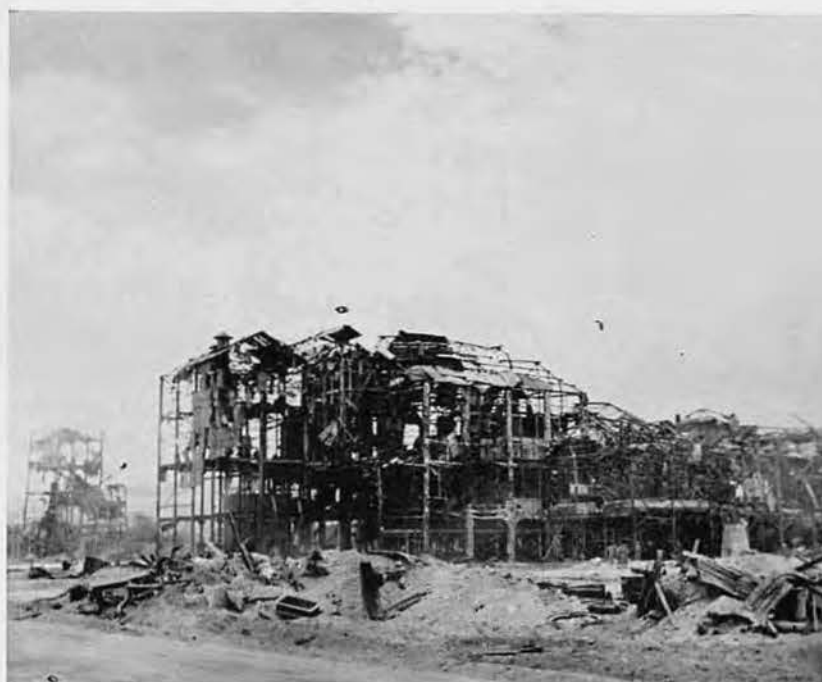
Though several hundred Japanese troops still lurked in caves and our perimeter guards were trigger-happy at imagined visitors, the island of Saipan was pretty safe. Sight-seeing, with its related sport of souvenir-hunting, was popular.

At the southern tip of the island was Iseley field, the B-29 base. A few Blackjacks bagged rides during test flights, and many others had guided tours through the intricate, scientific marvels inside the planes.

All over the island were the wrecks of buildings. The main town of Garapan survived in just a few scattered concrete structures; the rest of the levelled town had been cleared for camps and compounds. The twisted steel skeleton of a sugar mill at Charan-Kanoa testified to the main crop the Japanese had taken from the island. Still in the water off the western beaches were disabled tanks.



Many frightened civilians had leaped from "suicide cliff" during the clean-up on Saipan.



The sugar mill at Charan-Kanoa was the largest ruin

Super-forts went and came from Japan





The public bath and laundry circle were popular at camp Susepe

SAIPAN CIVILIANS

The natives of Saipan were a mixed lot—Chamorros, Koreans, Okinawans—but they were all in camps set up by the Navy's Civil Affairs office. Camp Susepe was "out of bounds," but glimpses could be caught of the cooped-up lives.

Long, low barrack-like dormitories had been built; each family had a small section. Water was scarce here as elsewhere, and the civilians made the most of their portions. Some of the people worked during the days on small garden plots outside the camp; some went fishing; many worked for the military authorities.

None of us envied the lot of these simple laboring people who had been caught by the war. Still, it seemed likely that their standard of living would be better than under the Japanese mandate and rule—eventually.



A family posed in front of their small apartment

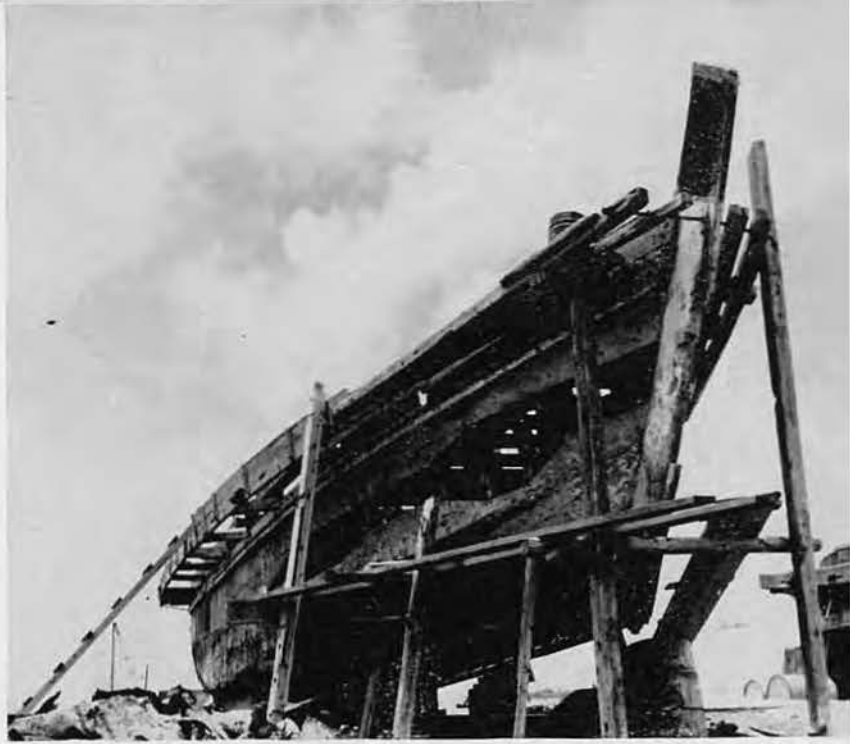


Young and old enjoyed the baby's bath near the civilians' barracks





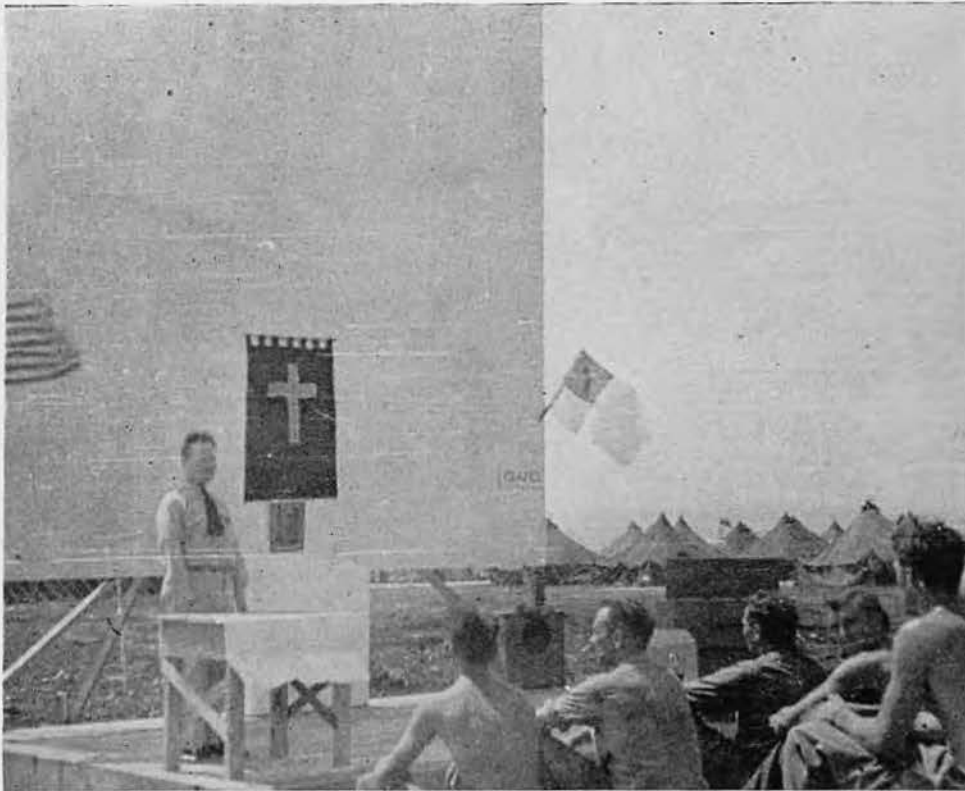
Naval Civil Affairs authorities watched over the catching of fish



Right, top: The wreck of a Jap fishing boat was being repaired
 Center: Each family received its ration of the fish catch
 Right, bottom: Some of the native wagons and beasts of burden survived the battle.



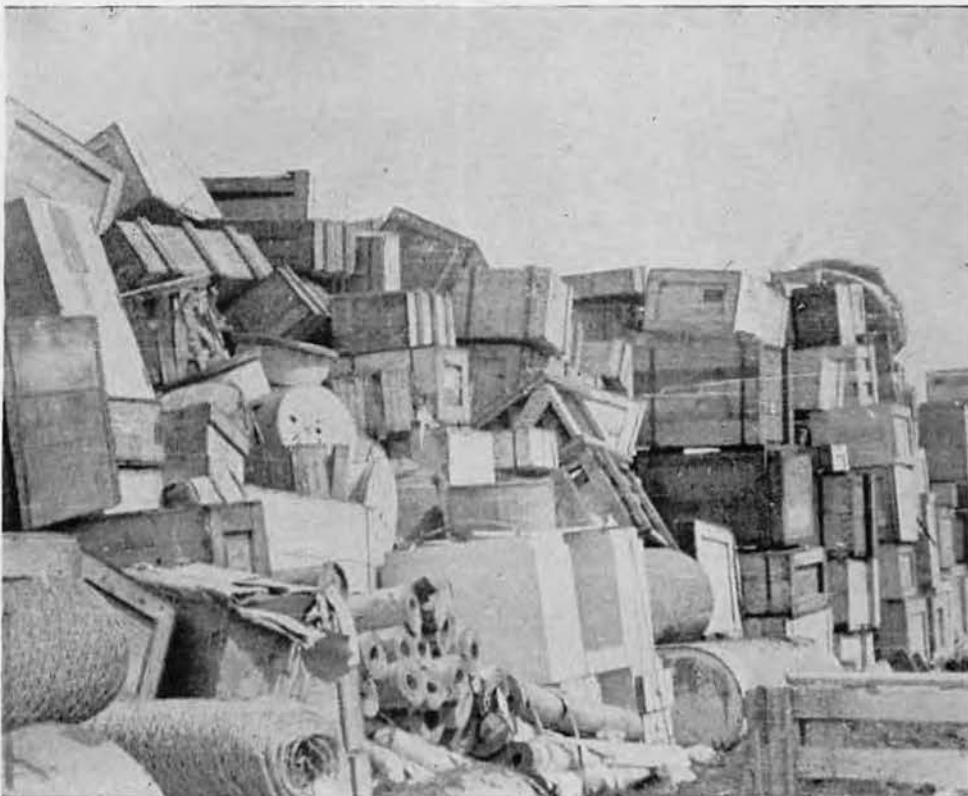
AIMING AT THE TARGET



Chaplain Holloway led an early-morning Easter worship service. At the same time, American forces were invading Okinawa.



Our compounds had to be set in order and sorted for the voyage to our target



When Okinawa was invaded on Easter Sunday, April 1, we knew that the 21st battalion was destined to be a part of that campaign. Chaplain Holloway gave five short talks just before evening movies, on what Okinawa was like. Military intelligence gave stern warnings about the diseases there, the poisonous snakes and the bad weather to be expected. We didn't look forward to our "target."

More military training was rough giving experiences of actual combat. One Blackjack was hospitalized when a home-made grenade exploded too near him, but he recovered quickly. Much emphasis was placed on scouting and patrolling.

Our supplies and equipment were a mess when they were piled off the ships. Self-service "procurring" had taken away some valuable materials. During the whole of our stay at Saipan, our major task was to get our compounds in shape, to know where things were, and have them where we wanted them.



Saipan's picturesque harbor was a jumping-off place to invasions

The early part of the Okinawan campaign went rapidly, more so than expected. The landings had been only lightly opposed. The call came for us to come as soon as possible. We rushed work in the compounds. Our clothing was impregnated against typhus-bearing lice; we were "shot" in the arm again.

Then there was a wait for LST's, and finally on April 18th, 700 Blackjacks — our first echelon — loaded onto three LST's at Saipan's docks. The rest of the battalion stayed behind to handle the large amount of cargo that would follow after a few weeks.



Our most pleasant sea-ride was in LST's from Saipan to Okinawa

L S T ' S T O O K I N A W A

The food was the best ever



Already to go, the convoy didn't leave Saipan until April 22nd. The voyage turned out to be the most comfortable we had had. With only about 250 men to a ship, there was plenty of room—around and under and on top of the equipment. The food was the best ever eaten aboard ship, with fried eggs almost every morning. The crews were friendly; the sea was smooth.

When our escorts picked up sounds of a submarine, we had some excitement: The escorts scurried around dropping depth charges; the LST's altered their courses, and two of them narrowly escaped a collision in the confusion. At last, a big explosion and floating debris gave proof enough that the sub had been sunk.

The chief trouble with the trip was that we were going west, going away from home, going into our first real warfare. We paid close attention to the advice and words of warnings of our officers and were ready for the worst—maybe we would have to fight out our own beach-head.

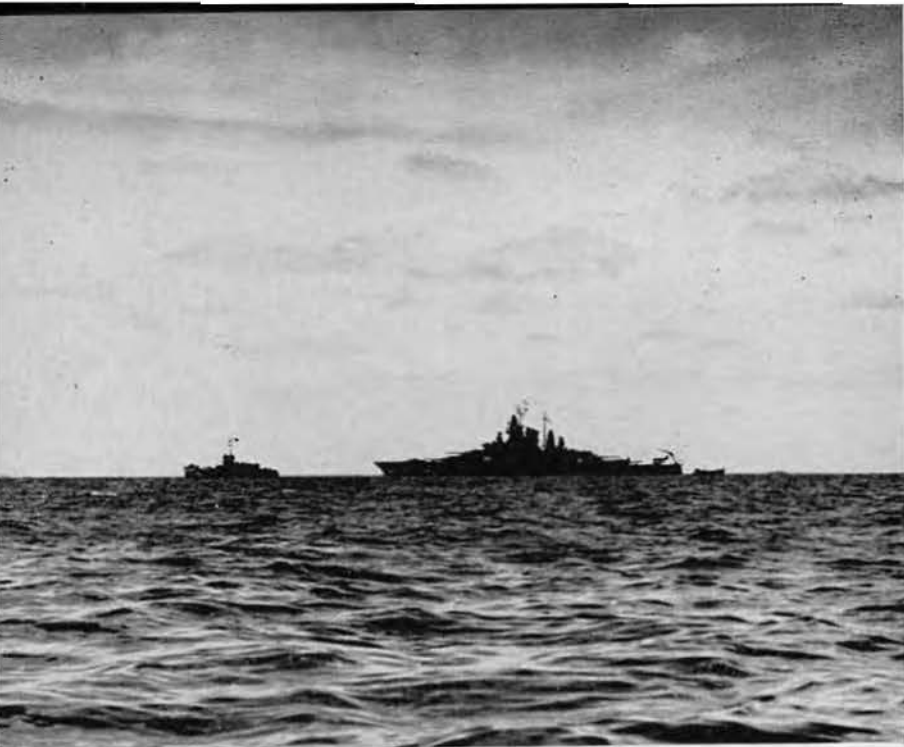


EAST CHINA SEA



沖繩縣

OKINAWA



A R R I V A L

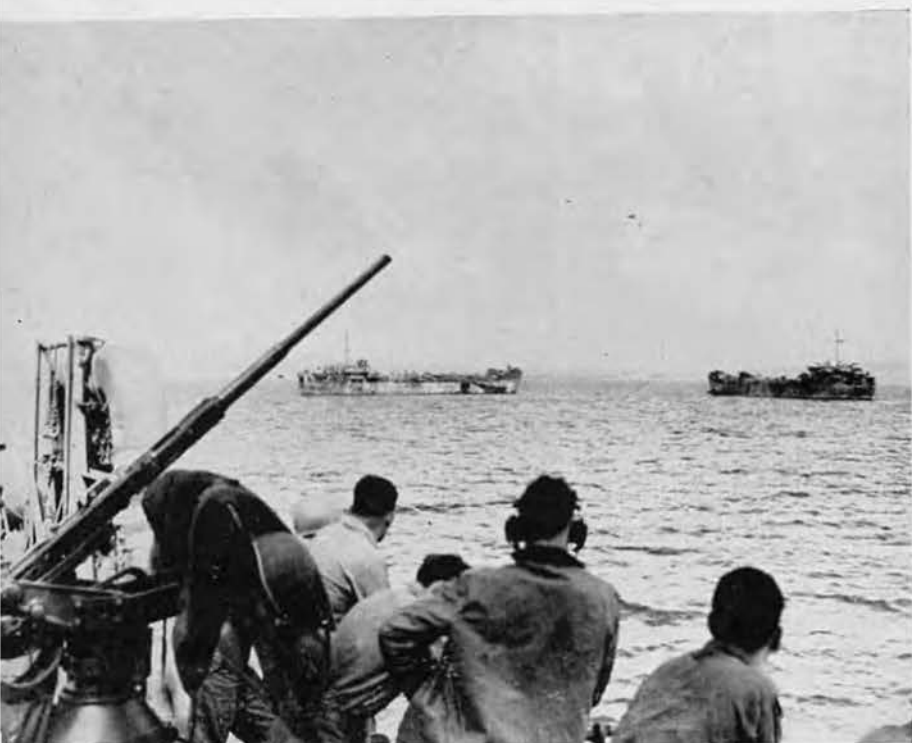
The green hills of Okinawa looked pretty and peaceful enough, but the big guns of the Navy offshore were bombarding inland, and the boom of field artillery was almost constant. Air alerts were frequent. The Japanese were throwing their full weight into their kamikaze attacks, and our fleet was taking heavy losses in ships and personnel.

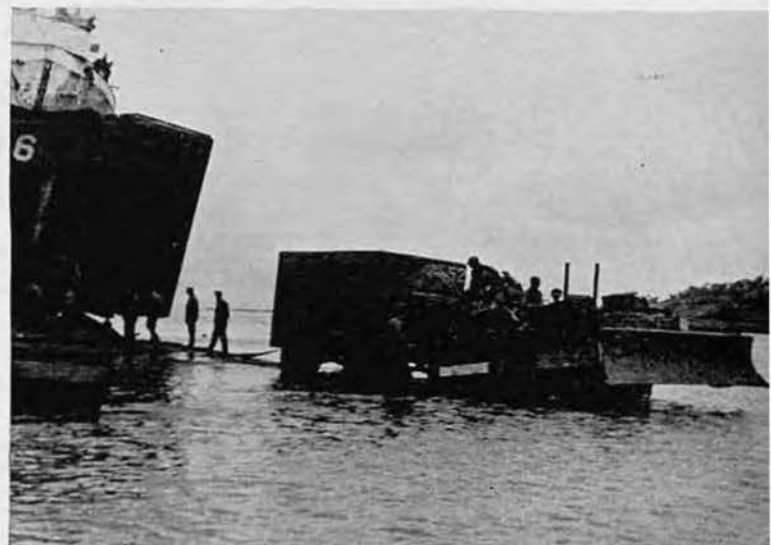
On April 29th, the three LST's anchored in Chimu Wan ("wan" means bay). This was about halfway up the eastern side of the island. On shipboard, the guards were doubled at night to watch out for Japanese swimmers attempting to blow up the ships.

The next day we circled around and entered Nakagusuku Wan, around the shores of which we were destined to spend many months. Except for a few warships, the big bay was almost empty.

We had reached our target. We had come over 1,200 miles from Saipan; we were over 7,000 miles, the way we had sailed, from the States. We were only 450 miles from Shanghai, 360 miles from Japan's Kyushu island and 845 miles from Tokyo—"A stone's throw from Tokyo" was the boast of the Okinawa radio station.

Okinawa Shima is about 65 miles long. It is about in the center of the Nansei Shoto or Ryukyu Retto, the chain of islands running southwesterly from the Japanese home islands to Formosa. It is the largest and most important spot in this chain, a protector of Japan's sea supply lines to southeast Asia and a selected stepping-stone for Allied advances to the north and west. As we landed on Okinawa, we knew we were taking part in a vital campaign. We didn't realize how decisive it was to be or how near to defeat Japan was.





U N L O A D I N G

On the first of May—exactly one month after the Okinawa battle had started—our first LST began unloading on Brown Beach, the tidal flats on the northwest shore of the bay. The other two LST's beached at the same place on May 2nd. We were told that "Tokyo Rose" broadcast a welcome to 21st battalion when we landed, but we didn't care.

To unload the ships, the men had to work through water, rain, and mud. Only when the tide was low twice a day could the work go rapidly. The mobile equipment drove off to the nearby campsite near the village of Atsuta; the trucks were unloaded and returned to the ships for more cargo. Many Blackjacks found back-breaking work in floating, pushing, and rolling the oil barrels ashore. By May 4th, the unloading was finished.



We worried about snakes as we slept in "pup" tents pitched on hillside vegetable patches while the larger tents went up.

THE FIRST DAYS

During the first days and nights, the Blackjacks bivouacked where they could. Most pitched their pup tents; some slept in trucks; a few tried the native houses. The standard 16x16 tents were put up as fast as possible, but we were still uncomfortable and wet.

A temporary galley was thrown up, but it was limited to hot coffee and K rations. How we came to hate K rations!

The cold, canned ham and eggs; the cheese; the pork and beef loaf; the hard crackers. These are all right for a while, but they become definitely distasteful after a few days. A few men tried warming the rations and found this an improvement.

We began to set up shops, to clean up the ruins of Atsuta village, to knock down many of the buildings, and to renovate some for our uses. Souvenirs were everywhere.

The first galley handed out hot coffee and cold K rations





As supplies piled up in the compounds, the slope started to look like a camp

Our third night ashore the Japanese threw a scare into the eastern shore. They attempted to land troops on our beaches in small landing craft in order to disrupt behind-the-front operations. The Army and Navy were ready for them and destroyed them all. It was a little too lively, however, for comfort.

The sky above us was often full of ack-ack as the enemy planes came overhead. We soon learned to fear the falling ack-ack sharpnel more than possible bombs. One evening a native house caught on fire as enemy bombers were approach-

ing. One of our bulldozer operators courageously used the Seabees' favorite weapon to push dirt and rubble over the blaze.

Highway 13 to the front lines went right by our camp. Just south of us was the Army's Field Hospital 74. Casualties arrived here in ambulances directly from the front lines. Trucks went back and forth carrying replacements to the battle and bringing back the weary. Even when our own lives seemed tough, we felt fortunate that we were not combat troops.

Sawed-off, unbridled native horses were sport until the Army took them away





Our surveyors laid lines for our first pontoon pier while our LST's were still on the tidal flats

KUBA SAKI PIER

Five days after we landed we were at work on the first of our important waterfront jobs. This was a wharf for LST's at Kuba Saki, where the fringing coral-reef came close to shore. The 600-foot pontoon pier, with two approaches to form a "U," was urgently needed to unload supplies for the fighting front only a few miles south.

Surveys were made; nearby rice paddies were drained; fill was brought from the wrecked villages of Kuba and Tomai; the approaches were levelled and filled. The area was dredged; coral heads were blasted out; dolphins were driven and tied. pontoon sections were assembled and put in place.

Two weeks after the work started the first LSM's used the pier, although all work was not completed until June 15. Work was pressed all the time. The Japs must have seen the progress, for bombs were dropped very near one day.

In the final weeks of the Okinawa campaign, the pier poured supplies to the front. After the fighting, it was essential in the building up of the base, and when the war was over, men jammed the pier as they headed for home under the demobilization program. Even the bad typhoons, which beat ships up on shore and ripped out most piers, did not keep the Kuba Saki pier from being used.

The first finger of Kuba pier was used 12 days after work started.

LSM's unloaded their cargoes on May 19





Shrapnel from a Jap bomb punctured pontoon cells on May 17



And perforated a welding machine. Luckily, no Blackjacks were injured.

The pier head was jammed with craft unloading war supplies





Except during blackouts and air raids, Kuba pier was lit all night. A full moon picked out the anchored ships.



LST's used the pier. Inside the "U," we stored piling





The pontoon sections were held together by hinges which were welded to the sides

P O N T O O N A S S E M B L Y

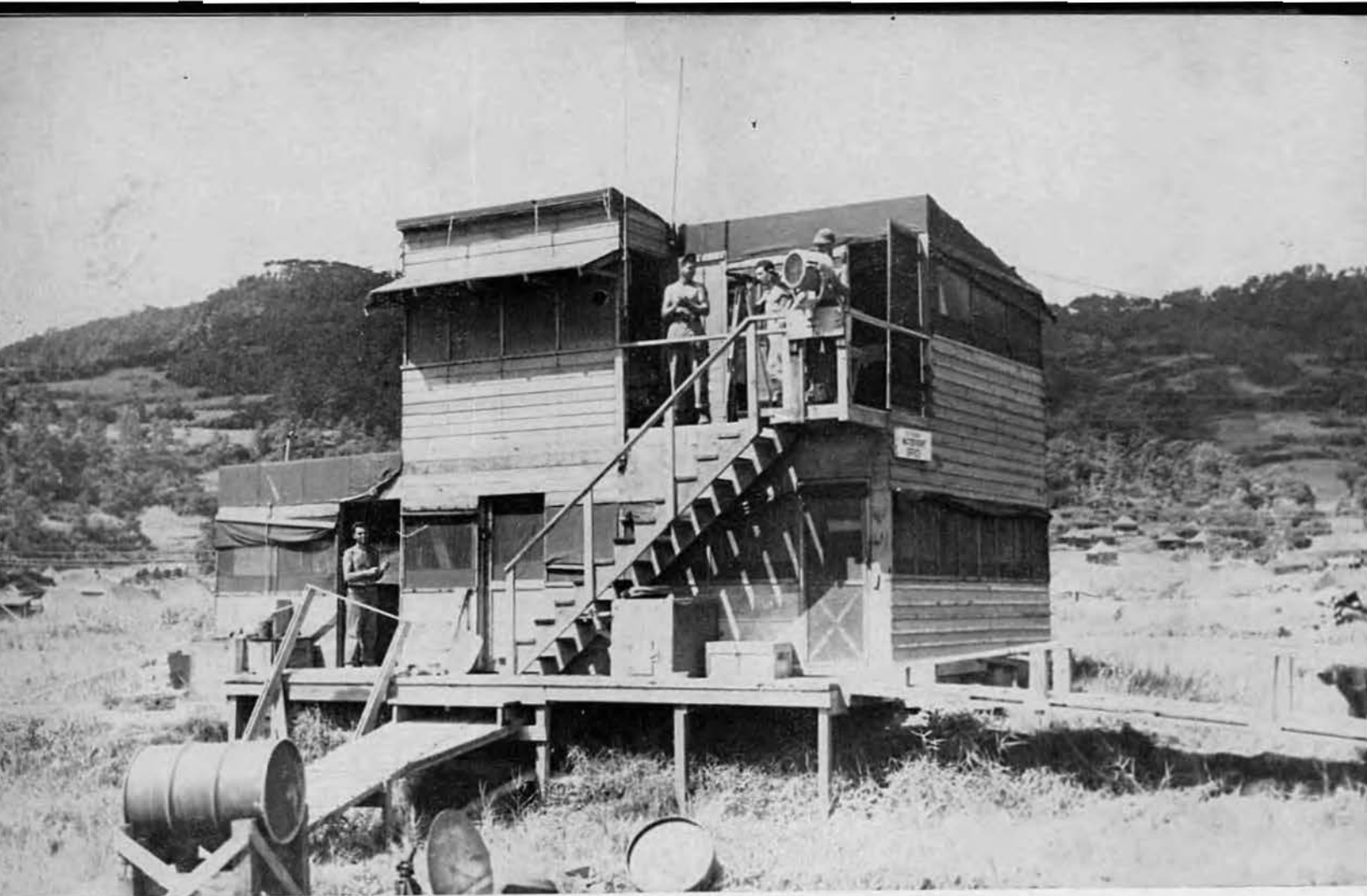
To make piers, we needed pontoons and we needed lots of them. LST's brought in two 2x30 causeways apiece. Sea-going tugs towed piggy-back assemblies from Guam and even the States. Our boat crews picked these assemblies up in the bay and brought them to anchor off Brown Beach, where our waterfront assembly yard was located next door to the Kuba Saki pier.

Blackjacks put the pontoons together in the called-for

shapes and sizes. Work went on day and night, often in danger during air raids because of the exposed position. High winds were troublesome: even three-ton anchors didn't hold sometimes, and the heavy assemblies were risky to work around when the sea was rough. We were the only pontoon assembly outfit on the eastern side of the island, however, and other construction, as well as our own, required speedy production.

The docks of the pontoon assembly yard were surrounded by boats and barges





Visual signalling controlled the boats and barges from the waterfront office—the Rod and Reel Club

The "waterfront" crews made an excellent record in producing pontoon assemblies needed on the eastern side of Okinawa.





LCM's were also a part of the fleet

Left, top: A 21st barge tied up at the Baten Ko pier. Left, Bottom—the crews of the Skagit-winch barges handled the towing.

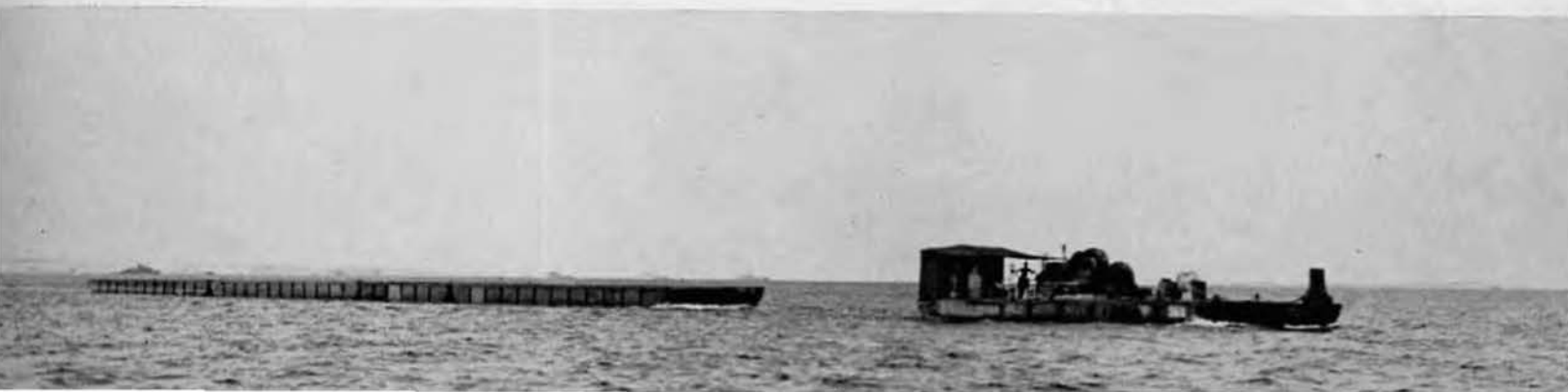
BLACKJACK FLEET

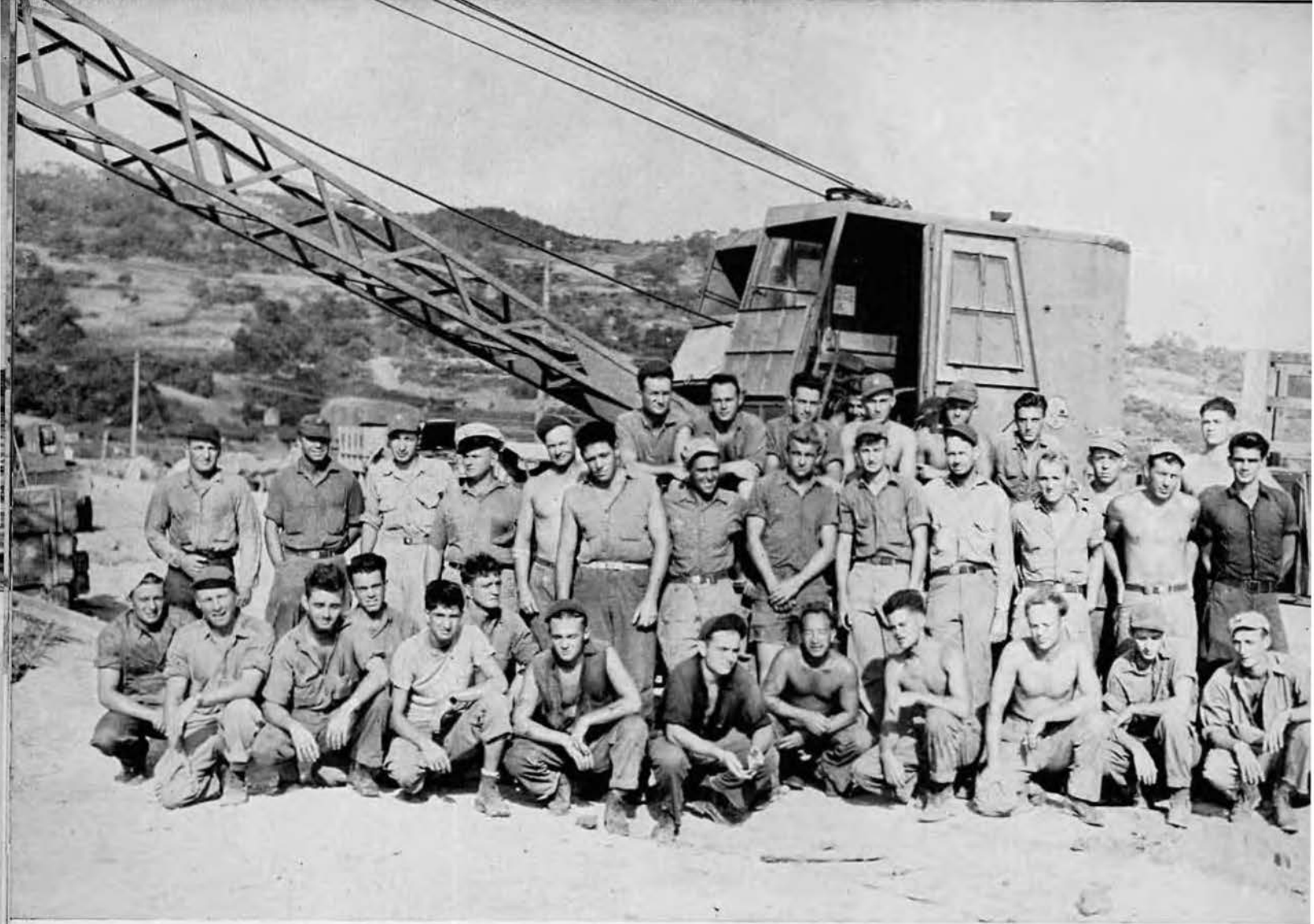
All our waterfront work would have stopped without the "21st Fleet"—a group of small boats, pontoon barges, and a tug which carried and towed equipment and supplies from the ships to our jobs and from job to job. Except for a few weeks, cargo ships had no place to dock in Buckner Bay; our fleet was a part of the steady parade from ship to shore.

The crews were proud of their craft. The men lived on them, ate there, slept there. They were likely to be called for work at any time of the day or night. More than any other Blackjacks, they were unprotected on the bay during air raids. During storms, even typhoons, many of the boat crews risked their lives to save their equipment.

An essential part of running a fleet was communication between the units. There was visual signalling, and we had our own short-wave stations with the calls "Innertube One" and "Innertube Two."

Below: A barge of the Blackjack fleet towed a pontoon assembly across the bay to a pier project.





The boat crews worked long hours, often dangerously, but they often ate fresh food from the ships they helped unload.

Heitman donned the 200-pound deep-water suit



Divers were vital, too, to waterfront work. The Black jack divers worked from a barge which was moved from job to job, wherever there was underwater work to be done. And theirs was the privilege of seeing the brightly colored, strange fish of the Western Pacific waters.

Seidenberg removed the shallow-water diving mask. "Moose" Kochinski was "Admiral" of our half-dozen divers.

D I V E R S





The caterpillar half of a dragline disappeared in the deep mud of Highway 13

R O A D T O T H E F R O N T

When we came ashore, the Japanese road along the bay was not much more than a cow-path, yet it had to be used for heavy traffic to the battle a few miles to the south. On May 8th, we began work on the improvement of what became Highway 13, the main eastern-shore road. On this job, we learned how powerful the famous "General Mud" could be.



During the first part of May, filling chuck holes and widening and surfacing were the main jobs. Coral fill was obtained from newly-opened pits. Then, on the 24th and 25th of May, heavy rains began to soften up the road bed. Coral fill was rushed and crews labored with shovels to clear drainage ditches. At all times, the maintenance of military traffic was important.



Three shifts shovelled to drain water and fill holes on the supply road to the front lines.

Left: Wide, deep ditches were dug for the run-off of the heavy rains.



On the 27th, we started to work round-the-clock to keep the road passable, and on the 31st this road work was given top priority over all our other projects. The fighting men needed supplies; the wounded must be brought to field hospitals; the terrible conditions on the front lines required that many replacements be brought forward.

The rain and military traffic continued to be heavy. By June 3rd, tractors had to pull traffic

Bottom, left: Often blasting was the most efficient way to dig ditches.

Right: Sometimes the "boom-boom" gang used one propagative blast for the channel through the rice paddies from the highway to the bay.





Seabees adopted the Bailey bridge for some low spots and put them together as fast as the more experienced Army engineers.

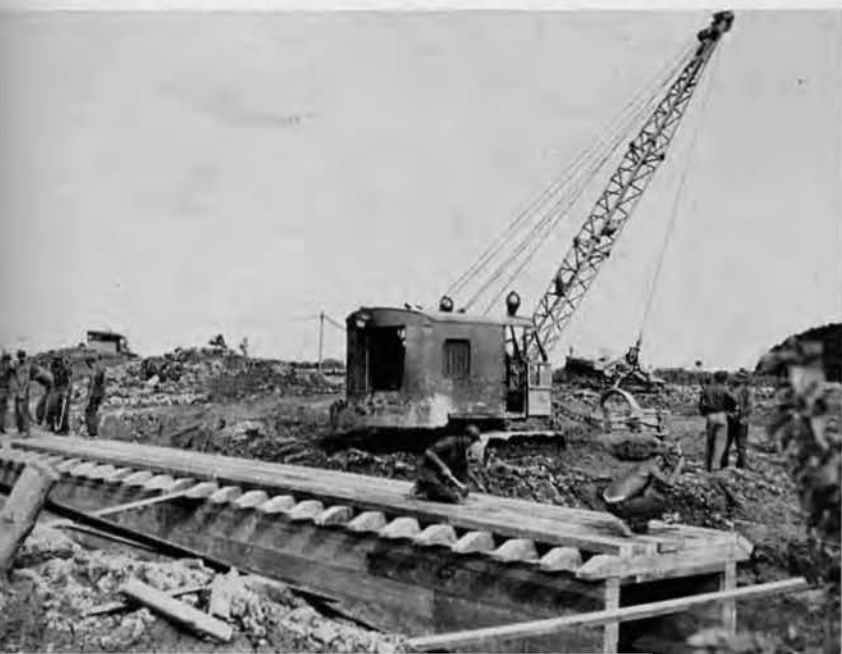
through the bad spots. In some holes the water was three and a half feet deep. Ditches were blasted for drainage and the powder crews placing the dynamite charges in the rice paddies were often in mud up to their waists. Part of the road alignment was changed. Finally, the mud became too much after the 13 days of heavy rain; traffic came to a standstill.

Work continued without let-up, and the rain stopped. Trucks, tractors, cranes and shovels, motor graders, cats and carryalls in combination, air compressors, motor ditchers, draglines — all did their

stuff. In the 59 days we maintained Highway 13—days in which the fiercest fighting and final victory had taken place—we had installed 15 culverts of heavy timber, pontoon cells, and oil barrels; we had filled the road with 33,000 cubic yards of coral, rock and rubble: We had laid the foundation for a fine road.

On July 5th, as we were starting to move south on the island, we turned the maintenance of Highway 13 over to another Seabee battalion with the realization that we'd done the best we could under the worst of conditions.

Heavy-timber culverts covered some of the ditches under the road



Native tombs blocked some of the road widening and alignment





Top: A bulldozer and dragline filled in the last section of Highway 13 on which Blackjacks worked
Bottom: When the weather dried up a little, Highway 13 had a solid coral base and surface



Fill material gradually formed an approach for the Section Base pier.

SECTION BASE PIER

A week after we hit Okinawa, we started another pier, called Section Base Pier "A." Before long, however, we turned the work over to the 7th battalion. Before we left, we had improved an access road, made a 750-foot fill along the sea wall, opened up a rock quarry, stockpiled finger coral for surfacing, extended one pier approach 200 feet out into the bay, and added one foot of fill to the Japanese pier already there.



Left: Blackjacks had their own camp near the Section Base on Katchin Hanto. A native woman helped with their laundry.

Below: The pier approach moved out into the bay.



TSUGEN JIMA

A few miles off the main island of Okinawa, at the entrance to the bay, lay little Tsugen Jima, (jima or shima means island). All organized Japanese forces had been driven from it, but reconnaissance in early May showed that the island was loaded with land mines, ammunition dumps, and booby traps. We were given the task of making the place safe.

For over a month our mine disposal unit worked and lived on Tsugen Jima—later known widely as Boom-Boom Jima. Heavy rains and deep mud reduced the efficiency of the mine-detector instruments and made progress slow and dangerous. Sometimes mines reappeared where they had been removed. As a result, the natives in the island's town were transferred to Okinawa. When houses which were suspected of being booby-trapped were burned, two-thirds of them blew up.

Carpenter, Dugas, Dykes, Fletcher, Goodman, Gordon, Kaufman, Laurvick, Moriarty, Odenius, and Schieck made a fine record under the direction of CWO Mundt. They did away with 995 land mines and a large collection of rocket duds, artillery projectiles, bazooka duds, rifle grenade duds, mortar duds, hand grenades, anti-personnel bombs, horned sea mines, and satchel charges. Six ammunition caves were demolished.

Other than one man, who was slightly burned by a caustic liquid, the men completed the hazardous work without injury.

Top: Odenius, Moriarty and Fletcher prepared a Tsugen Jima cave, full of Japanese ammunition, for blowing up. Bottom: Chief Warrant Officer Mundt, in charge of the mine disposal unit, examined a projectile the Japs placed as a booby-trap.





Goodman, Odenius and Dykes inspected a cave after the Jap ordnance had been exploded.



One of the sea mines, prepared for demolition, was looked over by the officers in charge.

Tsugen Jima gave up many souvenirs. Holding some were Passo, Harwood, Dugas, Goodman, Commodore Seabury, Moriarty, Lt. Comdr. Thomson, CWO Mundt and Dykes.





A T S U T A C A M P

From the air, the hillside Atsuta camp appeared flat. The shops and offices were at the bottom; the living quarters and mess hall, in the center; the western side of Okinawa, at the top.

While we worked on our initial Okinawa jobs—the Kuba pier, the Section Base pier, Highway 13, Tsugen Jima, and N.O.B.—we were building our own temporary camp on the site and slopes of Atsuta village.

The offices, shops, and compounds were on the

flat land, and the living tents and mess hall spread over the slope. In between was the climb that was bad enough in dry weather but became, in times of deep and slippery mud, a struggle on foot and an adventure in jeep or truck.

At first the tents were in orderly rows, but orders

Officers' country was in close to the steep hill



Roads and spots for the tents were gouged from the slope





The transportation office was just inside the camp entrance

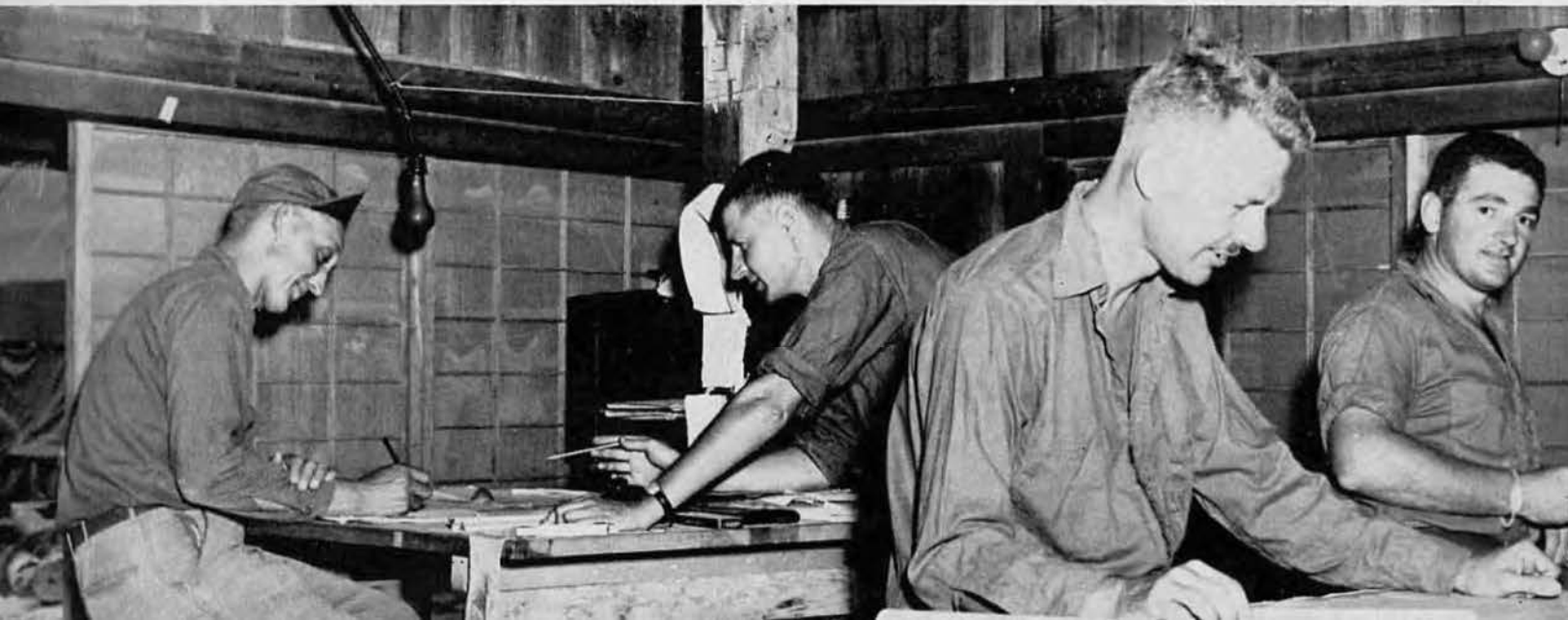


The Personnel Office squeezed into the small rooms of an Atsuta house.



Bliss, Lt. Harting and Roberts worked under pressure in the Operations Office.

Morrow, Yonker, Lang and Attarian drafted plans in the Engineering Office.





The Plumbing Shop put in lots of pipes



From the machine shop came all sorts of repairs and gadgets for work projects.



Above: The offices took over red-tile-roofed, wood-framed native buildings. The shops operated in tarpaulin-covered sheds. Our garden was laid out in the rice paddies beyond.



Below: Our electricians put in lines for needed power and light





Ekins and Ley drove the water trucks where there were no pipe lines.



Our plant on the bay shore purified water from the sea

came to disperse in order to be more protected from bombing attacks. We lived all over the hill, any place a flat spot could be carved.

After about two weeks of K rations, the new galley and mess hall were ready. The letter on the cans changed to C, and as long as most of us were on Okinawa the unappetizing C rations were our usual dismal diet.

On May 27 the second echelon of 157 men arrived from Saipan. The heavy rains were at their

height; it was exhausting work finding a place to sleep and hauling gear up the slippery slope. The whole battalion was on hand on June 16, when the third group of Blackjacks arrived.

By the end of the Okinawa battle, our camp was fairly comfortable. Many tents found scrap lumber to make floors and furniture. Water was more plentiful. A library and chapel were operating. With the end of the battle, however, we knew we were scheduled to move to a permanent camp further south.

From the tents on the higher ground, the camp sloped away to the tree-covered remains of Atsuta village. Beyond lay Highway 13 and rice paddies and in the right distance the ridge of Katchin Hanto.



Another native house held the Armory





Top: We were among the first to show movies, a couple of weeks after we landed. The screen, atop the chow hall, had blinds to permit the show to go on during air raid alerts. Center: From Atsuta heights, Highway 13 was a stream of light, Kuba pier was the brightest spot, lighted boats and barges stood off the pier, and ship lights dotted the distance.

Cats and cranes handle heavy loads in the compounds and pulled trucks out of the mud.

Hinson and Silver found the mud too much for their jeep and entrenching tools.



ENEMY ACTION

We had plenty of proof that a war was being fought, and it wasn't just the air raid whistles or sirens. We built fox-holes and used them, though the rains had a way of washing them out. Only once did bombs fall close, but spent ack-ack was often alarming and dangerous. Many a night's rest was broken and ruined.

During May, a big gun just across the ridge shook bunks and shattered sleep continuously at night. We frequently had warnings of expected paratroop attacks that never materialized.

The APA 194, on which the second Blackjack group came from Saipan, was hit by a kamikaze plane the morning after most of our men had debarked. Some of our men were aboard, however, and one was burned and received a Purple Heart. Chaplain Holloway worked long helping to care for the many burned and wounded.

Our perimeter guards were alert, but there was little action while the island battle continued. When resistance ended around June 20, Japanese soldiers tried to work their way to the north of the island to organize harassing attacks; our camp was on their route. Guards were increased; trip flares were set. Our nights were broken by the brilliant flares and by much rifle fire. Many Japs were killed as they entered camp and many more were captured. Jackson even captured one by threatening to hit him with a rock.



Some foxholes were strong and roomy; more were small and washed out in the heavy rains.

These Okinawans had been missing from a Military Government camp for several days. One of the women had been shot in the hand, but our guards didn't shoot them during daylight.



K A M I K A Z E H I T L S T

From the Atsuta hillside, we were often spectators of kamikaze attacks on the ships in the harbor. In the mid-morning of June 18th, a single-motor Japanese plane bolted across the bay heading directly for our camp. All, except the overly curious, dove for the nearest cover. As the plane neared the bay shore, it swerved over the Blackjack waterfront yard and suicided into the starboard side of an LST tied up at the Kuba pier.

Smoke poured from the ship. Men began rushing

to the scene to help, even as another kamikaze plane approached and was shot down. Many were injured on the LST. Some Blackjacks had been working on our pier, and three of them were injured. One of them, C. J. Lacy, was awarded a Purple Heart. The wounded were removed to hospitals, and the damage was brought under control.

In the early afternoon, while further repairs were in progress, fire broke out again. Before the blaze was stopped, the LST was resting on the bottom of the bay.

Black smoke billowed from the LST several hours after it was hit by the kamikaze plane





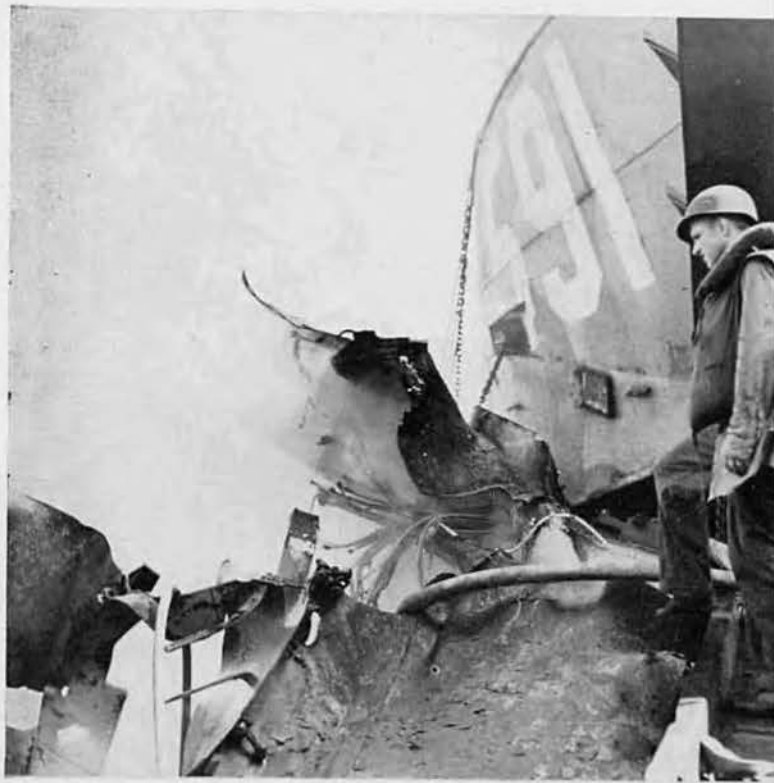
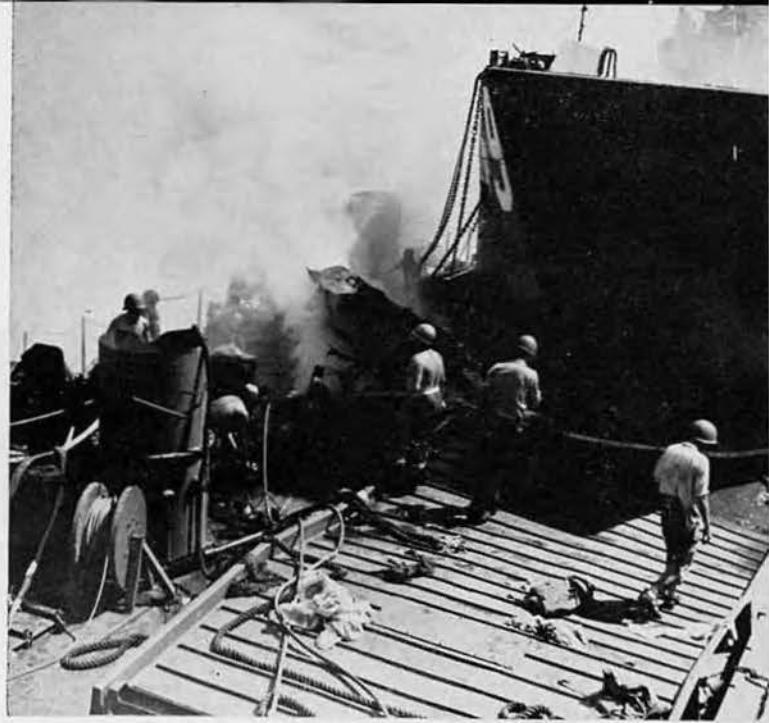
Some plane wreckage landed on Kuba pier.



Right, top: LST crewmen rushed to save lives and control damage. Center: Smoke poured from the hole of twisted steel. Bottom: Dr. Tufft and Pharmacist-mate George Sorenson were among the Black-jacks who hurried to help.



Injured men were handled carefully



BLACKJACKS DIG OUT HOSPITAL

HEADQUARTERS
74TH FIELD HOSPITAL
APO #331

26 May 1945

SUBJECT: Commendation.

TO : Commanding General, Island Command, APO #331.

1. It is my desire to call to your attention the assistance given this organization by the Officers and EM of the 21st N.C.B.

2. As a result of the excessive rain fall during the past 24 hours and the poorly drained area in which the 74th Field Hospital is located, we found ourselves virtually at a standstill at 0700, with two feet of water in the Operating Room, large streams flowing through the wards and vehicular traffic completely bogged down and most departments flooded.

3. While every available man of the organization was attacking the problem of drainage without any marked degree of success, the 21st N.C.B. arrived, without having been requested, with all necessary equipment and volunteered their services. They immediately began the necessary construction of deep ditches, rebuilding roads and placing new culverts. They dug by machinery and by hand; they assisted in carrying patients out of the inundated wards to improvised wards arranged on higher ground. In fact, they gave with enthusiasm every possible assistance to help us in our effort to protect the lives and comfort of patients in this hospital.

4. Few times, if ever, have I seen such a complete demonstration of cooperation and a whole-hearted desire to serve without regard to their own discomfort.

5. It is requested the proper Naval authorities be informed of the above expression of appreciation.

Harold E. Damon
HAROLD E. DAMON
Lt COL, MC
Commanding



Top: The personnel of the hospital showed their gratitude in many ways.



Left: Blackjacks started to dig drainage ditches at the flooded Army field hospital.

HEADQUARTERS TENTH ARMY

Commendation

TO

THE TWENTY-FIRST NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND TIMELY ASSISTANCE RENDERED TO THE SEVENTY FOURTH FIELD HOSPITAL WHEN, DUE TO THE EXTREMELY HEAVY RAINS OF 25 MAY 1945. THE AREA OF THAT HOSPITAL WAS FLOODED AND MANY OF ITS FACILITIES WERE INUNDATED. BY YOUR UNTIRING EFFORTS, AND WITHOUT REGARD FOR YOUR OWN PERSONAL DISCOMFORT, YOU ASSISTED MATERIALLY IN PROTECTING THE LIVES OF WOUNDED TROOPS AND THE SAFEGUARDING OF GOVERNMENT PROPERTY. THIS VOLUNTARY ACTION IS IN KEEPING WITH THE HIGHEST TRADITIONS OF THE MILITARY SERVICE.



R. H. BUCKNER, JR.
Lieutenant General, U. S. Army

Right: In one of his last official acts before his death, Lt. Gen. Buckner commended the 21st battalion.



Bottom: And the smile and thanks of a Red Cross worker were a welcomed reward, too.





Military Government moved homeless Okinawans to civilian camps

N A T I V E S H E L P

As the Okinawan campaign went on, more and more of the 400,000 inhabitants were made homeless as their villages and farms were destroyed. Military Government supervised the refugees as they struggled with their few possessions along the roads and moved into civilian camps.

We began to get groups of them in June to help on our projects. Their ragged, strange appearance was a

curiosity. They were short, simple and friendly. We could converse haltingly with many signs and much pointing. Our cigarettes and clothing were good in exchange for native money, dishes, hats. Some of the women and girls worked around the galley and policed the area. The men and boys helped on much manual labor.

Okinawan labor crews, usually barefoot, helped dig us out of the mud.



Natives worked in the compounds, moving supplies here and there—and sometimes back again.





Top: An LST and LCT's discharge supplies at the emergency Yonabaru pier for the nearby battlefront. Bottom: An observation plane flew overhead and Conical Hill was to the left of our much-needed temporary installation at Yonabaru.

EMERGENCY PIER AT THE FRONT

As the Army and Marine fighters moved south, in particular as they broke through the Yonabaru-Shuri-Naha line in early June, more of the bay's waterfront was opened up. We moved south to put in installations.

Because the roads were badly bogged down by bottomless mud, a dock was urgently needed in the Yonabaru corner of the bay to handle supplies and to remove

wounded from the front lines. We undertook to fill this need by construction not in the original plans. A temporary, single-causeway "T" pontoon pier for the docking of LCT's was operating by June 12.

Yonabaru was a shattered town stinking of death when our surveyors and pier builders started their work. Snipers were still a danger, and sometimes at night Japanese swimmers would try to come in behind the lines.



The town and harbor of Yonabaru were war-wrecks when the 21st started a pontoon pier.



One end of the pontoon assembly was pulled ashore by a "cat"

A needed pile driver was improvised from a crane



YONABARU PIER

Sand-bottomed Yonabaru harbor, where the Japanese had been making a wharf, seemed a likely location for a pier. On June 6th we started to build one, and by July 22nd a double-causeway pontoon pier was completed. As early as July 3rd, however, a part of the pier was being used, and from July 12th to the 28th it was a busy place. Although the battle for Okinawa had been won, the island was developed as fast as possible for basing more severe strikes against Japan.

Then, at the end of July, came four days of very high winds. The wind and waves beat in from the exposed northeast, and the smooth, shallow bottom pushed up the pressure of the ground swell. The pontoons could not hold and they broke away from the dolphins.

The pier had held a top priority among construction projects during June and July. While reconstruction was progressing, Japan surrendered. Later in August, it was decided not to build the pier again.

The right-hand approach to the Yonabaru pier was used first by LST's on July 3.





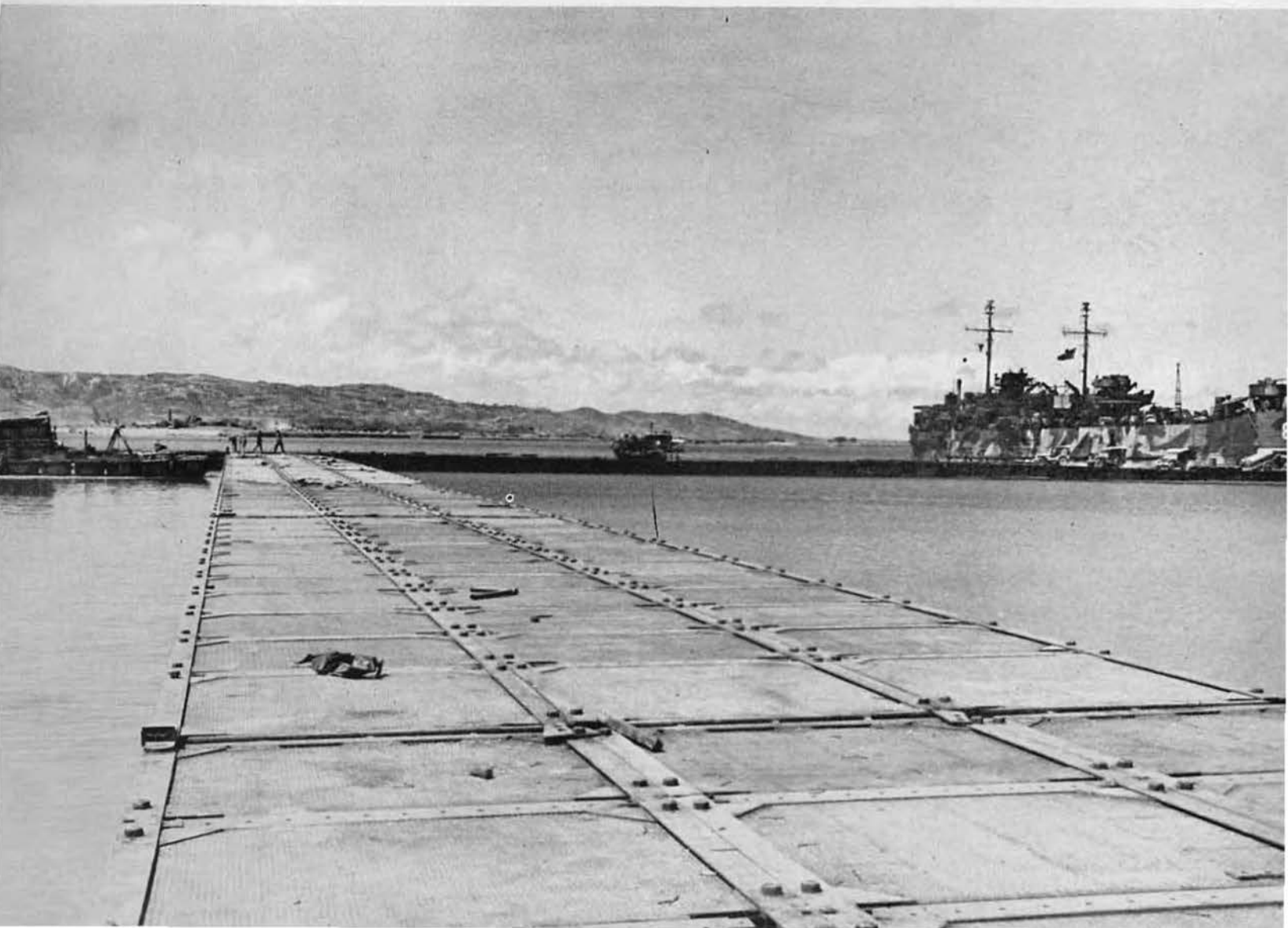
An LST slowly headed for the pier

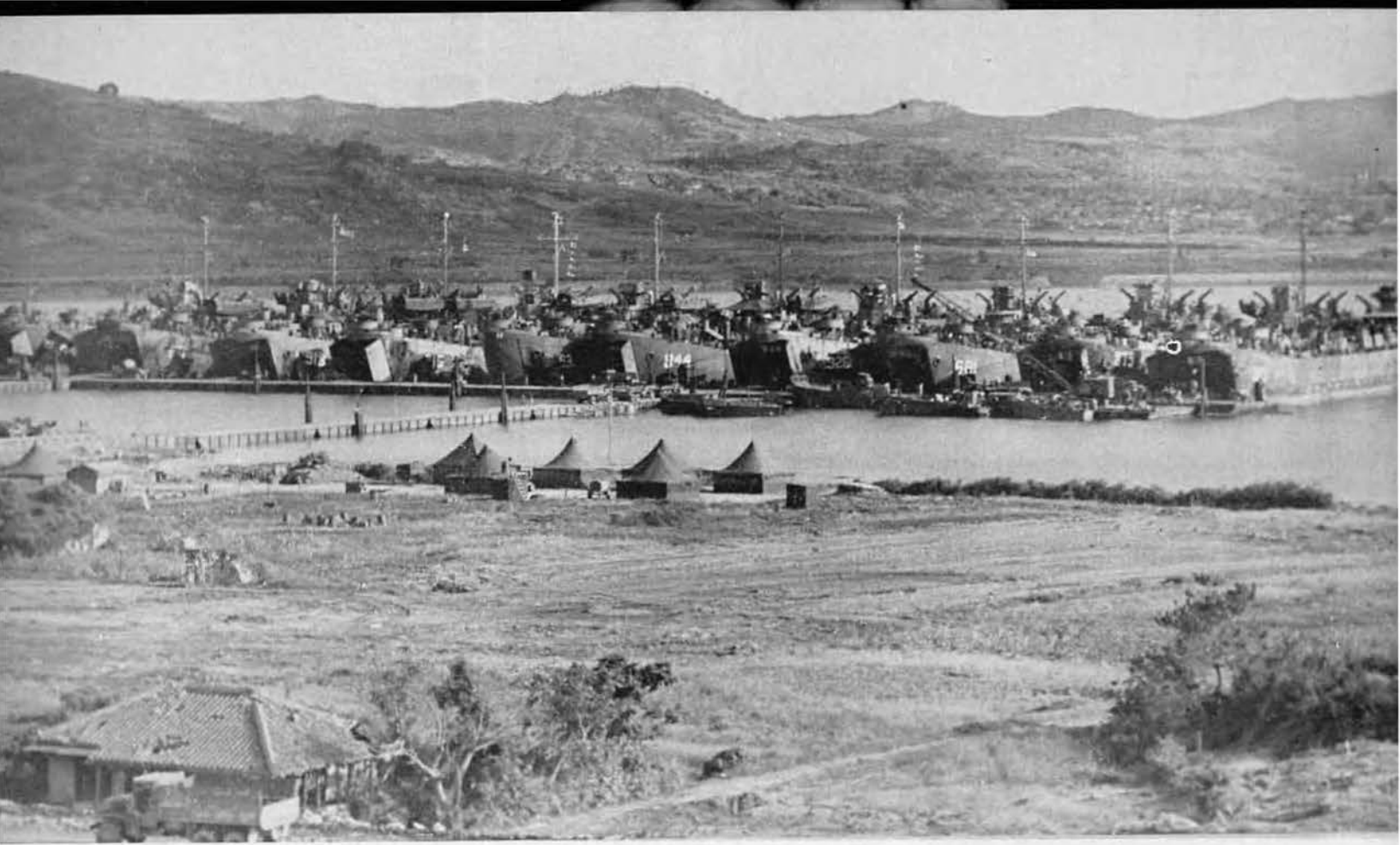


When an LST rammed the pier, it sheared off a dolphin

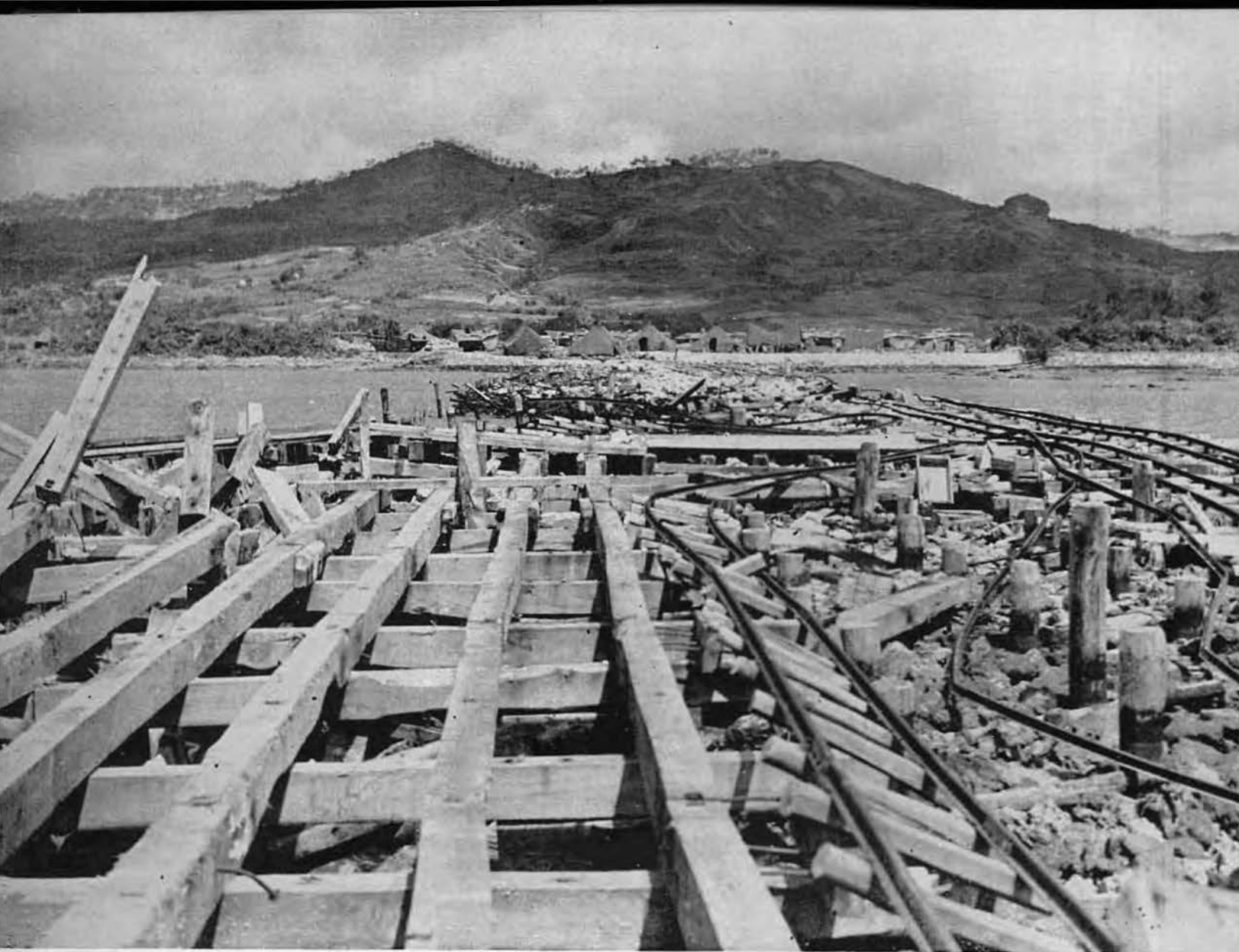


While the right-hand approach was busy unloading LST's, the left-hand approach was completed.





Top: Eleven LST's used the pier at one time. Though its life was brief, the Yonabaru pier paid off
Bottom: The hard storms of the last of July and the first of August destroyed the Yonabaru pier



The Baten Ko pier was on the site of a wrecked Japanese pier which may have been used for loading torpedoes. We salvaged the lumber and rails before adding fill on top.

B A T E N K O P I E R

A few miles around the south end of the bay, to the east of Yonabaru, was Baten Ko, where the Japanese had had a pier, possibly used in loading torpedoes. We were assigned to build a pontoon pier sticking out from the western shore of this little harbor.

Since we were also building the Yonabaru pier and expected to establish a permanent camp sometime at this end of the bay, a temporary camp was set up at the foot of the Jap pier. Work started on June 16.

Pile-drivers, rigging barges, tugs, welding machines, trucks, skagit winches, air compressors, fire pumps, pontoon barges, and propulsion units—all the usual pier-building equipment and their operators were kept busy, as the project had a high priority. It was completed by July 23. Actually, it was all done on July 17th, but two LST's rammed it so hard that it was shut down six days for repairs.

The need for a larger pier became evident as plans were made for the Baten Ko Naval Operating Base. Its shape was originally a "T." The cross-



Top: Our temporary camp was at the foot of the pier. The small ramp was removed.
Bottom: At first, the pier was a "T." Our permanent camp was on top of the plateau rising in the right background.



Later, as the Naval Operating Base began to move to Baten Ko, the pier's length was extended and a second approach was put in.

bar of the "T," the head of the pier, was extended 600 feet; a second approach was made to form a "U." Using some pontoon sections from the abandoned Yonabaru pier, the extension was finished on the last day of August.

All the time, of course, the pier was lined with

barges unloading supplies. Then, on September 16, a typhoon struck hard and the pontoons were driven ashore. By the 22nd, a single-approach "T" pier was back in operation. Then, on October 8, came the worst typhoon in 20 years. Again the pier was knocked out, and again we rebuilt a "T" pier.

Part of the crew that built and maintained the Baten Ko pier



LEST W



For the Okinawan campaign, the 21st battalion was assigned to the Tenth Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Buckner, until a few days before the island was secured.

Ernie Pyle, famed war reporter of GI Joe, was killed on Ie Shima, just a few miles west of Okinawa



FORGET



The battle for Okinawa was one of the war's bloodiest and costliest in lives

As our trucks and jeeps travelled on their tasks and on sight-seeing, souvenir-hunting expeditions, we became acquainted with other parts of the island. Naha, formerly the biggest city and the capital of Okinawa, was demolished, with just a few concrete structures standing. Shuri, the old hill city and key to the Japanese defenses, was a waste-land of shell and bomb craters. Many hills were shorn of trees and marked with shell holes. Decaying bodies were discovered by advance working parties. The battle

for Okinawa had been one of the bloodiest and costliest.

Scattered throughout the island were the cemeteries of the various units that fought here. We had not been in the thick of combat—thank God—and no man of the 21st battalion was buried on Okinawa. We had seen the awful cost in the hospitals and the simple white crosses. As the months went by, green-growing Okinawa could cover only a part of the ravages of war.

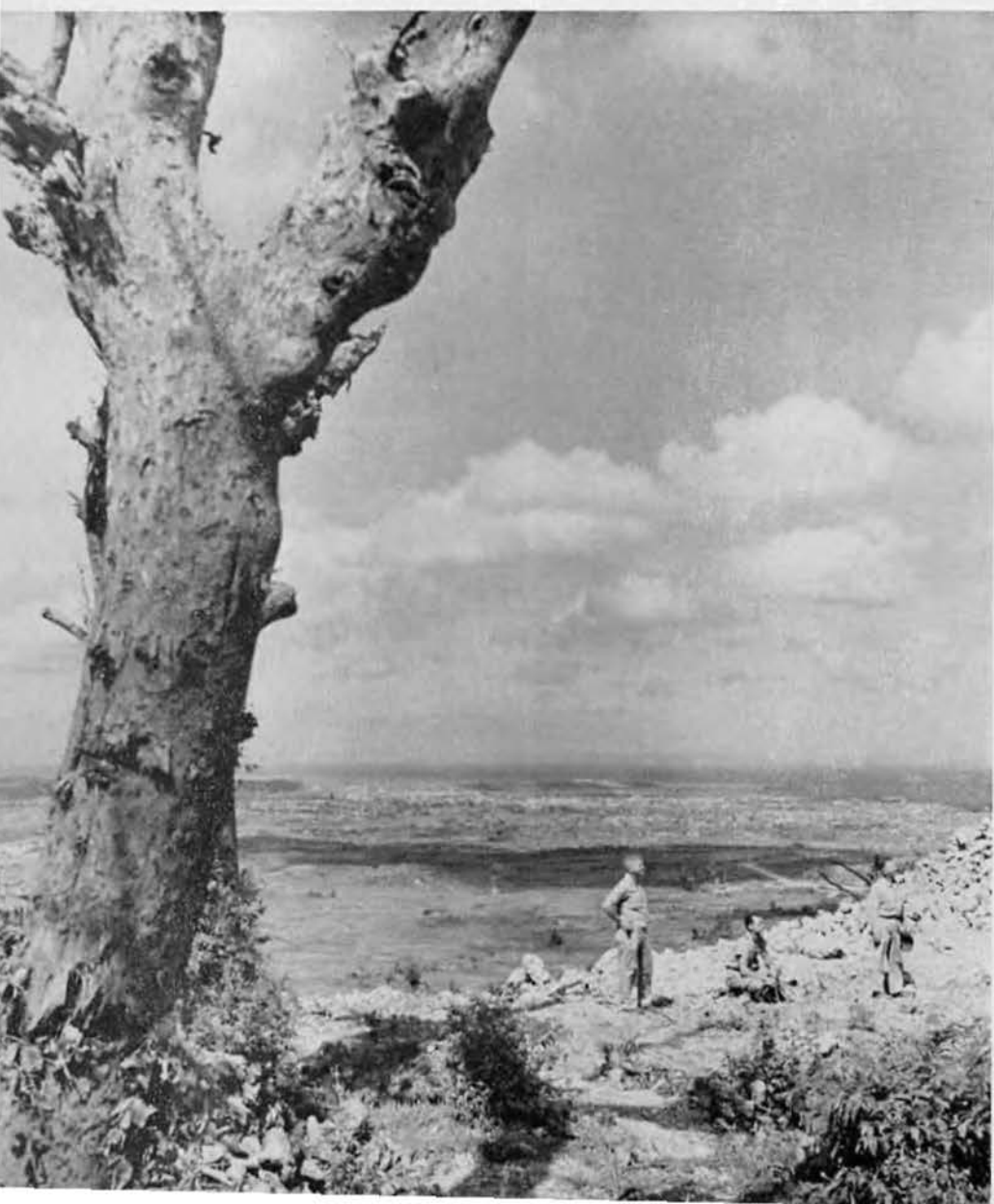
"Baka" bombs were carried by another plane and released near the target toward which the kamikaze pilot steered to his death.

A mission in Naha was used as a fortress by the Japanese defenders.





Top: The ruins of a public market and a bank were among the few Naha structures still standing.



Left: From the bitterly fought-for Shuri hill, Naha's outline was still clear.

Right, top: A Japanese fortress at the southern tip of the island had been built around native burial vaults.

Bottom: When a native died, his body was put in a box and sealed in a tomb. After three years, a woman picked any remaining flesh off the bones with chopsticks, washed the bones in alcohol, and put them in an urn.





The Futema shrine was at the end of a road

One shrine still stood in our Atsuta camp



An Awase shrine gave shade for the children



SHINTO SHRINES

The burial vaults and the Shinto shrines were novel sights for us. The tombs seemed to be everywhere. They had been used during the fighting; they hid Japanese troops after the campaign ended; they sometimes hindered construction; they became refuges in the typhoons.

The shrines were not so numerous, but there had been one in the village of Atsuta which had become our camp. We had little opportunity to understand just what this religion was. We knew that it involved ancestor worship and worship of deities in nature and that the Japanese had tied Emperor-worship to the beliefs.



Top: Sandbags had not been much protection

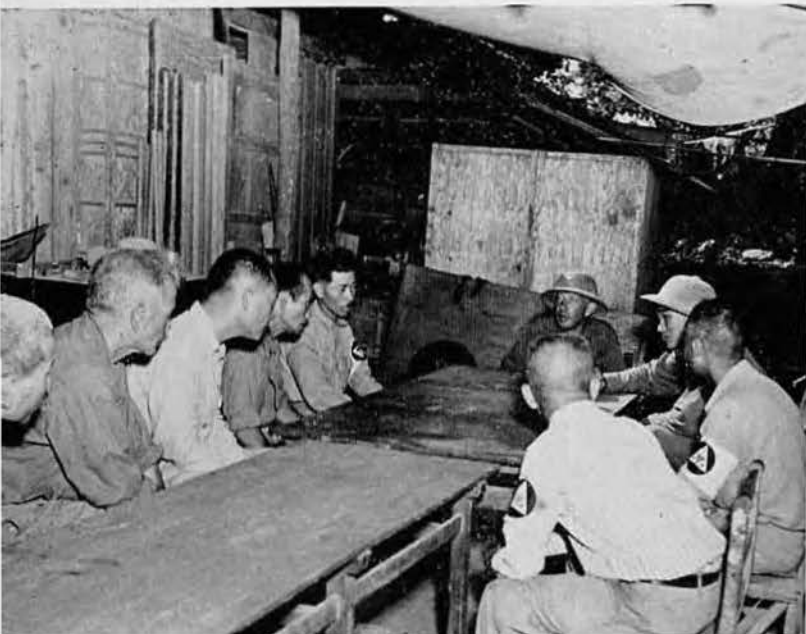
Bottom: A Naha shrine was partly ruined



During our early days on Okinawa, natives often came from their hiding places in the hills, loaded down with their possessions.

An uncooperative native, in the left center, was given a fair trial by the Military Government. His sentence was suspended because of his earlier good record.

Natives, just out of the hills, stopped at a water hole



NATIVE LIFE

We had little trouble with the natives, though they were supposed to be much like the Japanese. They were great scavengers for anything around camp, but they rarely took a thing without asking for it politely first. They worked very slowly, but their "honchos" kept them at whatever the tasks might be. They were dark and small, but their strength in lifting and carrying heavy objects amazed us. Many of them may have given aid to the Japanese soldiers that hid in the caves, but many indicated that they hated the Japs and many showed great interest in learning about the Americans. All in all, we just didn't have the time or the opportunity to understand the Okinawans.

• Of course, it was the Military Government people who supervised their lives, who were striving to set up a form of life and government for them. The villages into which the natives had been moved were often "out of bounds" to us. With permission, however, we could travel through the crowded places and see their ways of living.



Most Military Government nurses seemed to wear pig-tails

School children of Gushikawa exercised as part of their daily program





Gushikawa natives washed their clothes with their hands and feet for the Military Government hospital.

The women threshed the rice with their feet





Okinawan women ground soybeans



Well water was all right for the natives, but not for the armed forces.

Top: Simple meals were prepared outdoors in the courtyard
Bottom: A family of Gushikawa entertained

Trying to talk with the Okinawans was always a good game that was enjoyed by all. The phrase "Habba, Habba" seemed to pass for a greeting and this was thrown into the conversation whenever needed. Words were learned slowly. We'd point at an object and say, "American—hat." They'd point at it and say, "Okinawan—something or other, whatever the word was." The Blackjacks who be-

came "gook-pushers" learned more words like "come here," "go there," "hurry." We found one common song tune. It was "Auld Lang Syne," and they'd sing it for us often.

They had an easy sense of humor, laughing at themselves as much as at us. They told us our tents and buildings wouldn't stand up in a bad typhoon, so they had some right to laugh at the destruction



The children in Awase had a playmate

Bottom: There was no drug store, but this was Nudoki's street-corner hang-out.

The children soon learned we were suckers for their begging

in our camp; usually they found pleasure in less disastrous happenings.

As more and more of the American forces left Okinawa, the natives were brought back to their former villages. These were to be rebuilt. They were to be helped in setting up their former means of making a living. They had their own govern-

ment, with Military Government supervising and seeing that subversive elements were eliminated. They had their own schools; they would renew their religious activities. As was happening all over the world, now that the war was over, peoples were picking up the threads of their former lives. The friendly "gooks" were re-inhabiting Okinawa.



Top: Trees and walls protected the village homes from typhoon winds

Bottom: Refugees swarmed in the unruined villages



Very few homesteads escaped damage during the fighting

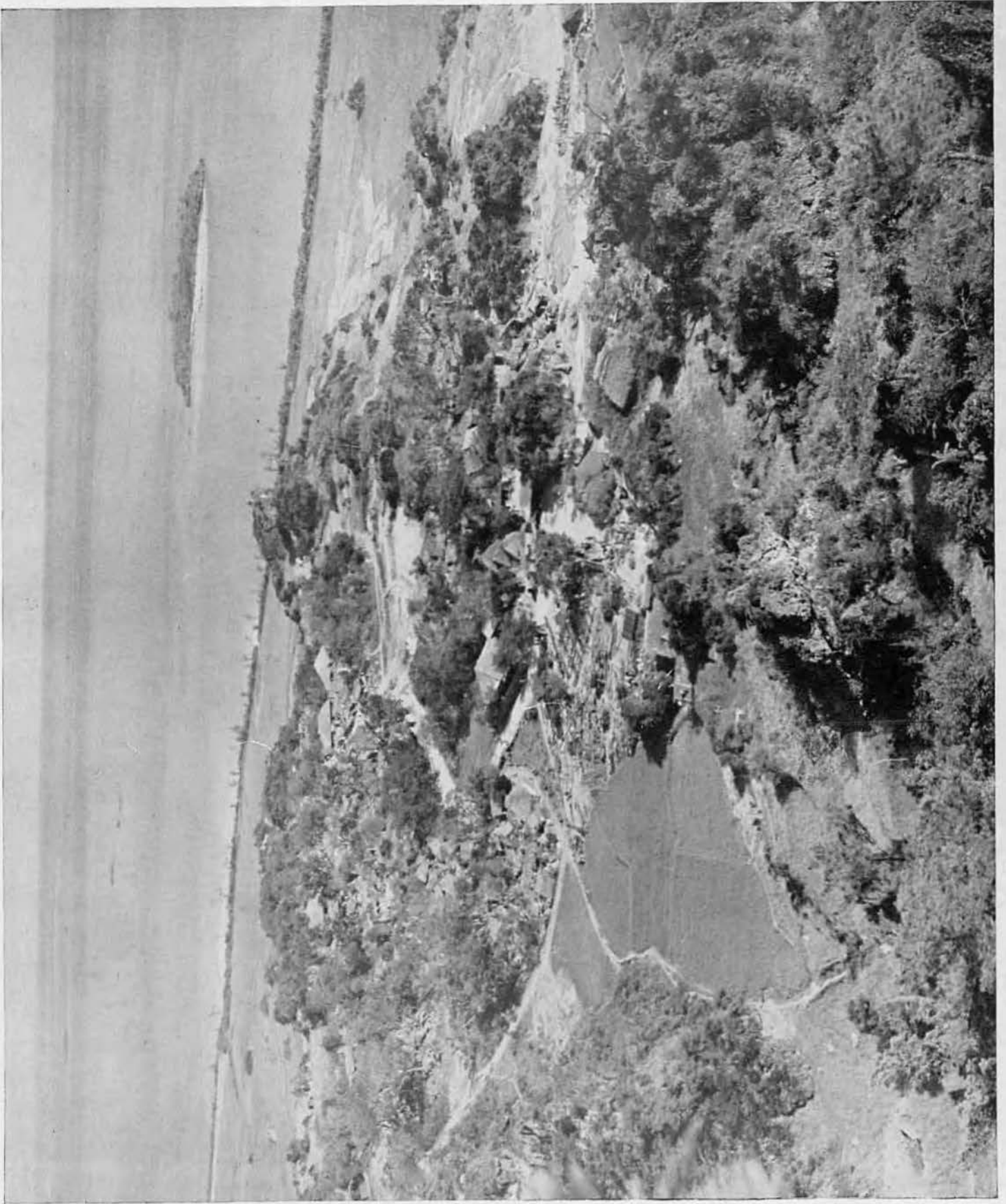


Thatched roofs, horse, harness and cart were evidences of old Okinawa.



A pattern of rice paddies and fields spread out below the Blackjack waterpoint





The sheltered village of Shichiya furnished many of the native laborers around our camp



Top: From Baten Ko, an old Jap road wound steeply to the top of the 400-foot-high plateau. Seabees improved the road to our camp
Bottom: From Shichiya, the coastal lowlands stretched north to Chinen Saki where the white of the 21st coral pit stood out. Off shore, to the right, lay Kutaka Shima.



Many shovels-full were carried on many Blackjack trucks to our construction projects.



We used the 27th battalion's coral pit for a while

C O R A L P I T S

All construction—the piers, the roads, the camps—demanded rock and dirt of some kind as fill. The rubble of ruined native villages was often turned to account, but coral pits and quarries were the chief sources of supply.

Our crews worked in pits at Tomai, Futema and other spots near our first camp. When we moved to the Baten Ko area, we opened up a coral pit near the top of the hill on the main road. Later, we developed a quarry near

Besides a lot of road work, heavy-equipment operators handled the coral after it had been blasted





Later, we opened a coral pit near China village. To the east was the Pacific Ocean; to the north, Buckner Bay

China village. The need for coral was never satisfied; trucks formed long lines waiting to be loaded.

Round-the-clock shifts were kept up with the trucks, shovels, dozers, jackhammers, and wagon drills. Tons of dynamite were consumed in thousands of drill holes. Our output often averaged from 2,000 to 3,000 cubic yards a day.

As if handling powder were not enough, the coral pit crews were exposed to bombing and sniping. The men often missed the air raid warnings, and one night Jap bombs dropped near our men as they worked in an Army coral pit. Our "cat" operators were once caught between the fire of our guards and Army sentries when a flare was tripped.

Powder crews did the coral-pit blasting. In this group, front row: Griert, Sparks, Martin, Springer. Back row: Renfro, Bowers, Brown, Frentzel, Brooks.



Many 300-hole charges were blasted in the quarry near China village.





Heavy equipment widened the old Jap road along the south shore of Buckner Bay

An old, narrow, Japanese road ran around the southern end of Buckner Bay. Because we were building piers around the bay, especially a ship pier at China Saki, we were also assigned the project of widening, surfacing and draining the old road into Highway 44 as a thoroughfare to the piers. We worked from the village of Sashiki, at the south end of Baten Ko, to China village and also a section from the China Saki pier, near the village of Nukhasa, into China village.

A crew of men from our armory and some gooks had a big job in blasting drainage ditches from culverts on the road to the sea. In rice paddies, the men worked in mud up to their waists. As much as 500 feet was blasted at once using prima cord and propagative blasting. The natives cleaned and dressed the ditches, and the blasting was cut by one-third by tying our ditches into connecting native ditches.

Macht, Horbach and Footer drilled holes for blasting away rock in the road right-of-way

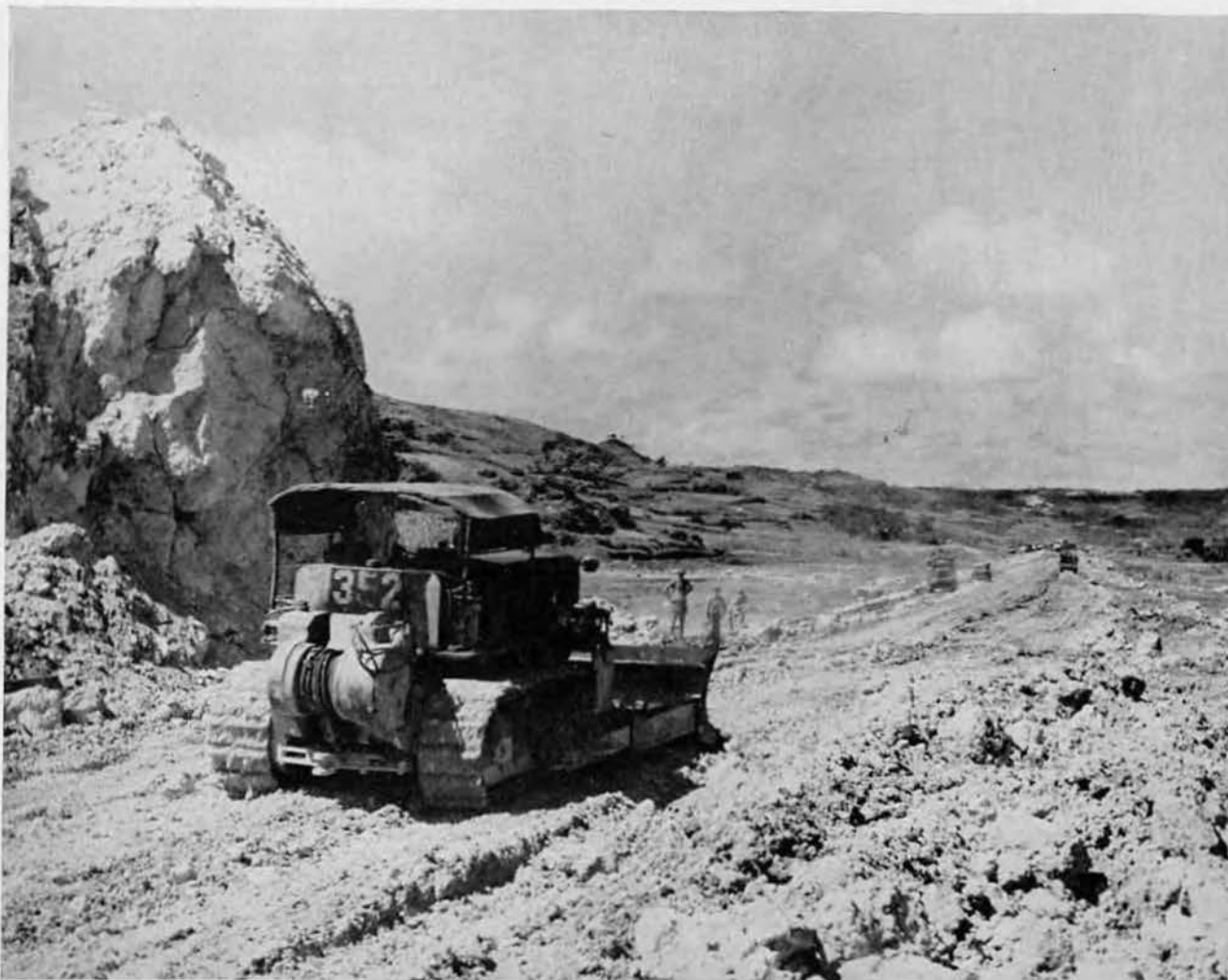


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Building roads was a sideline, but many Blackjacks were experienced and skilled at it

Highway 44 began to take shape





Rubble from ruined villages furnished fill for the pier approaches



One tough problem was the fill where the coral rock, the pontoon and the sea water met

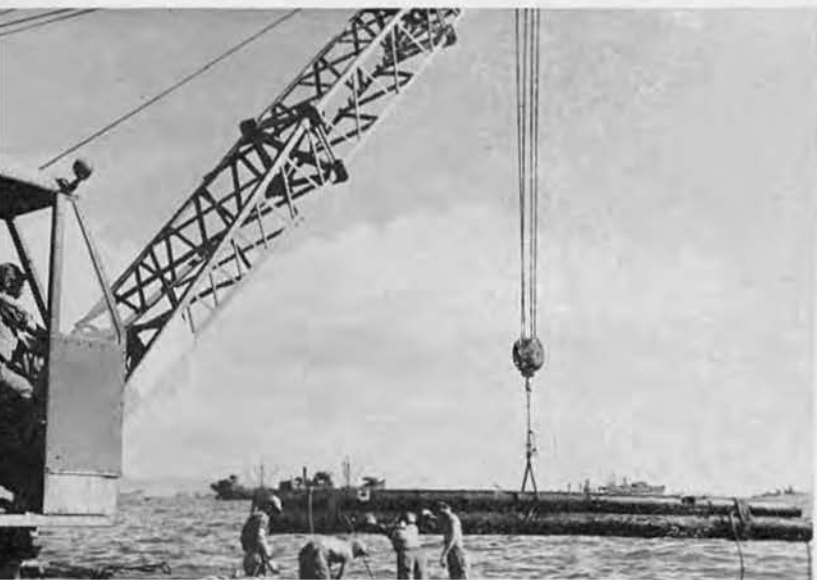
"Camels"—pile fenders—were hung along the face of the pier as cushions when ships docked.

CHINA SAKI PIER

The last of the piers that we started was at China Saki, a point on the southeastern tip of the bay. Our piers at Kuba, at Yonabaru, and at Baten Ko did not reach water that was deep enough for Liberty ships and other freighters. The 21st was elected to build two pontoon ships' piers—labelled "S" and "T"; later the "T" job was cancelled. We started work on July 5th.

Two approaches were filled; pontoon sections were put in place and anchored; spliced piling was driven; ship mooring buoys were placed at the ends of the pier; the approaches were rip-rapped.

Available piling was spliced into 100-foot lengths for the deep water.





The approaches neared completion

The pier was exposed to the wind and waves of the open bay. The storm of late July and early August broke the hinges between pontoon sections, ripped and punched holes in the pontoon cells, and washed out part of the east approach. The waves bounced the pontoons around so badly that men couldn't keep their footing on the pier. Repairs were rushed, however, and LCT's were unloading troops over the pier by August 7.

The first freighter tied up at the pier on August 23, and the pier was busy in the next few weeks. When troops left Okinawa in early September for the occupation of Japan and Korea, many embarked from the China Saki pier.

Then came the destructive typhoon of mid-September. The China Saki pier was destroyed and was not reconstructed.

The first freighter tied up at the China Saki pier on August 23. Katchin peninsula, across the bay, was about six miles distant.





As high winds and waves shook the pier, the maintenance crew — Eberle, Smerchek, Sorenson, Pettit, Lynch — was kept hopping. Heavy cables helped hold the pontoons in place.

Army troops, headed for the occupation of Korea, embarked from the China Saki pier in early September.





Dolphins were driven for sea-loading tanks

SMALLER JOBS

It was a tribute to the skilled workmen in the Blackjacks that we were so often called on for small jobs as well as big ones. Sometimes, men were detailed to another outfit. For example, two other battalions were building the Yonabaru airfield, and, when the pressure was on to complete it, they borrowed 26 of our expert heavy-equipment operators.

Many small jobs never were a matter of record; they were just bits of cooperation with other Seabee battalions or with Navy, Marine, and Army organizations. Some of the little projects were: the 17th Seabee Regiment dump; sea loading tank dolphins at Yonabaru; pontoon pier for boat pool "Able"; sea loading line at Brown Beach; quonset hut for the Tsugen Jima degaussing range; tanker mooring at Doma; equipment for the 1st Provisional Trucking Company; site surveys for a garage chute and for the 8th Seabee Brigade camp; office furniture for the 17th Regiment; garbage scows for the N.O.B. at Kuba.



Top: Seventeen acres were cleared and graded for the 17th Seabee Regiment dump.

Bottom: A garbage scow was built for the Naval Operating Base





A gang of "gooks" dressed up drainage ditches after blasting

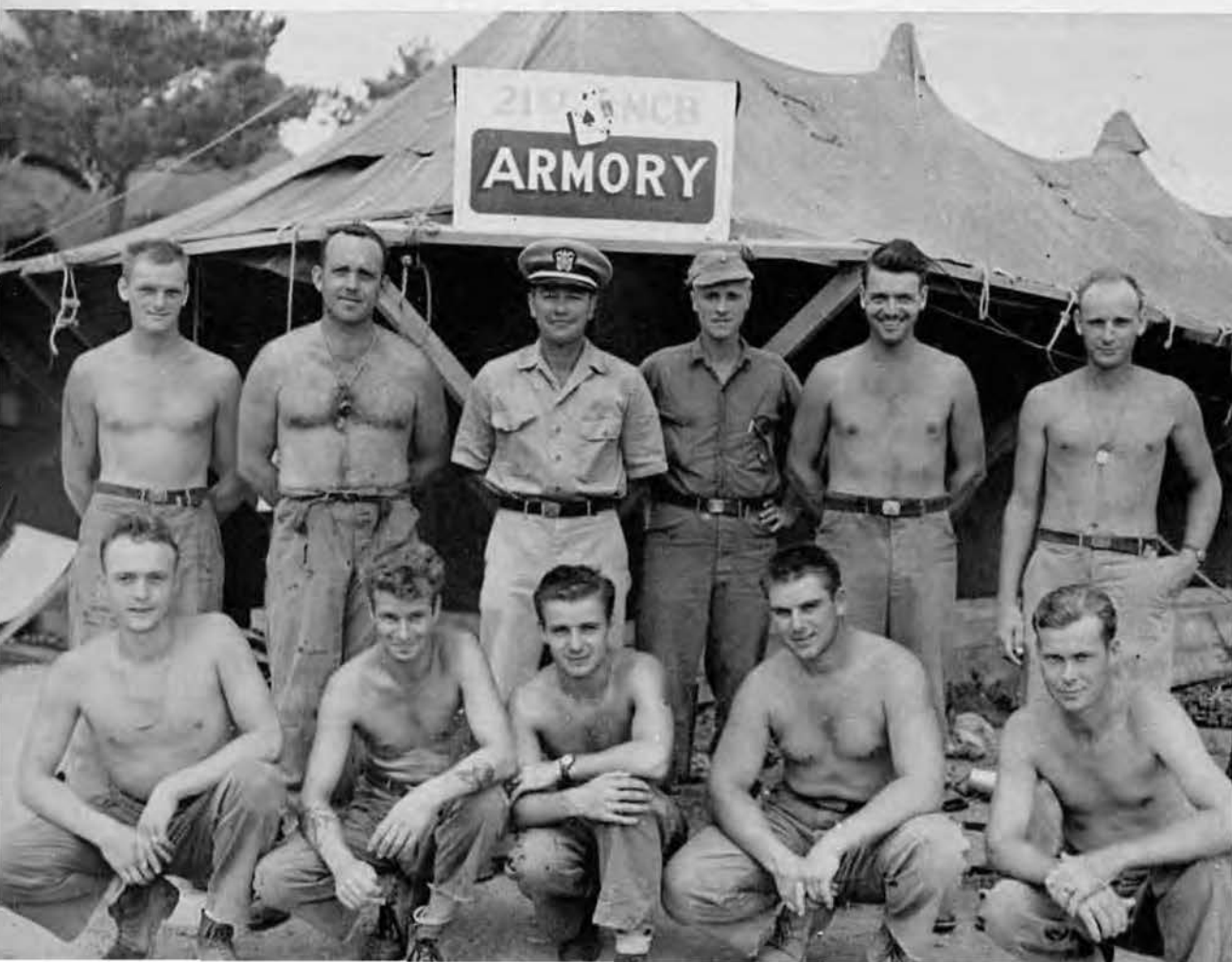
A R M O R Y

Over most of southern Okinawa there had been heavy fighting. Before any place was safe for men and machines, our mine disposal unit went to work. It makes a lengthy list just to mention the places that our men cleared of mines and booby-traps, of

duds from our own and from the enemy's guns, of ammunition stored in caves. They disposed of everything from 16-inch shells on the beaches to hundreds of thousands of rounds of small-arms ammunition in ammunition dumps.

Another "security" activity was the guards. Around Atsuta we had needed as many as 60 guards at a time. In protecting the camp, our property and our work areas, our guards killed about 25 Japanese soldiers, sailors, and Imperial Marines and captured about the same number. Two of the armory men, A. H. Hansen and J. G. Weed, were awarded Purple Heart medals for wounds received when a grenade was thrown at them as they drove along a highway while returning from posting the guards at a coral pit.

The armory men did most of the blasting of drainage ditches and of coral heads that obstructed the construction of piers and their sea approaches, and they had the housekeeping cares of all the battalion's ordnance gear.



The armory group managed the security guard, handled mine disposal work, and stocked all ordnance gear. Front row: Kaufman, Weed, Laurvick, Kurtz, Jordan. Second row: Hansen, Fletcher, CWO Mundt, Force, Dykes, Odenius. Not in picture: Kelley, Gordon, Drake and Schieck.



As more and more of our work was located around the southern end of Buckner Bay and as the fighting was over, a permanent campsite was selected on the rolling top of the 400-foot-high plateau overlooking Baten Ko. During the latter part of July and the first part of August—often through rain and mud—the men moved south slowly. The moving could not interfere with our high-priority pier construction.

Our camp was spread over 53 acres. To our west was the 86th battalion; to the east, the 9th battalion. Other Seabee outfits were scattered over the plateau, including regimental and brigade offices and later the Commander of Naval Construction Troops.

In planning and building the camp, as much as possible of the original trees and fields and knolls were left as they were. For once we escaped a camp in neat, military rows. The living tents and other buildings were strewn all over the area—even before the typhoon.

Looking south, the maintenance and service shops stood in the triangle bordered by the outdoor movie theatre, Highway 137 and the main road into camp.



Chaplain Holloway, Lt. Walsh, CWO Lahert, Lt. Trudell, CWO Hodges and Lt. McCaleb inspected the proposed camp-site overlooking Baten Ko.

B A T E N C A M P





The new camp was laid out to preserve the natural terrain and vegetation.

The camp grew gradually. No quonset huts were permitted at first, and all structures were of wood and canvas. Later, quonset huts were erected for the sick bay, galley, mess hall, chapel, post office, and ship's service store. Electric lines supplied all the tents—living quarters as well as offices and shops. Telephones connected the many departments. For a camp of temporary construction, ours seemed above the average.

The Okinawa climate, however, made living anything but pleasant. When it wasn't hot and humid, it was raining. The mud wasn't deep; it was just slippery and sticky. In August, more than 12 inches of rain fell, and in September and October typhoons made our existence not only unhappy but also unhealthy.

Looking west, tents covered the knolls as well as the flat spots. Beyond, the 86th battalion pitched orderly tent rows. The CNCT (Commander Naval Construction Troops) camp was in quonset huts in the right distance.

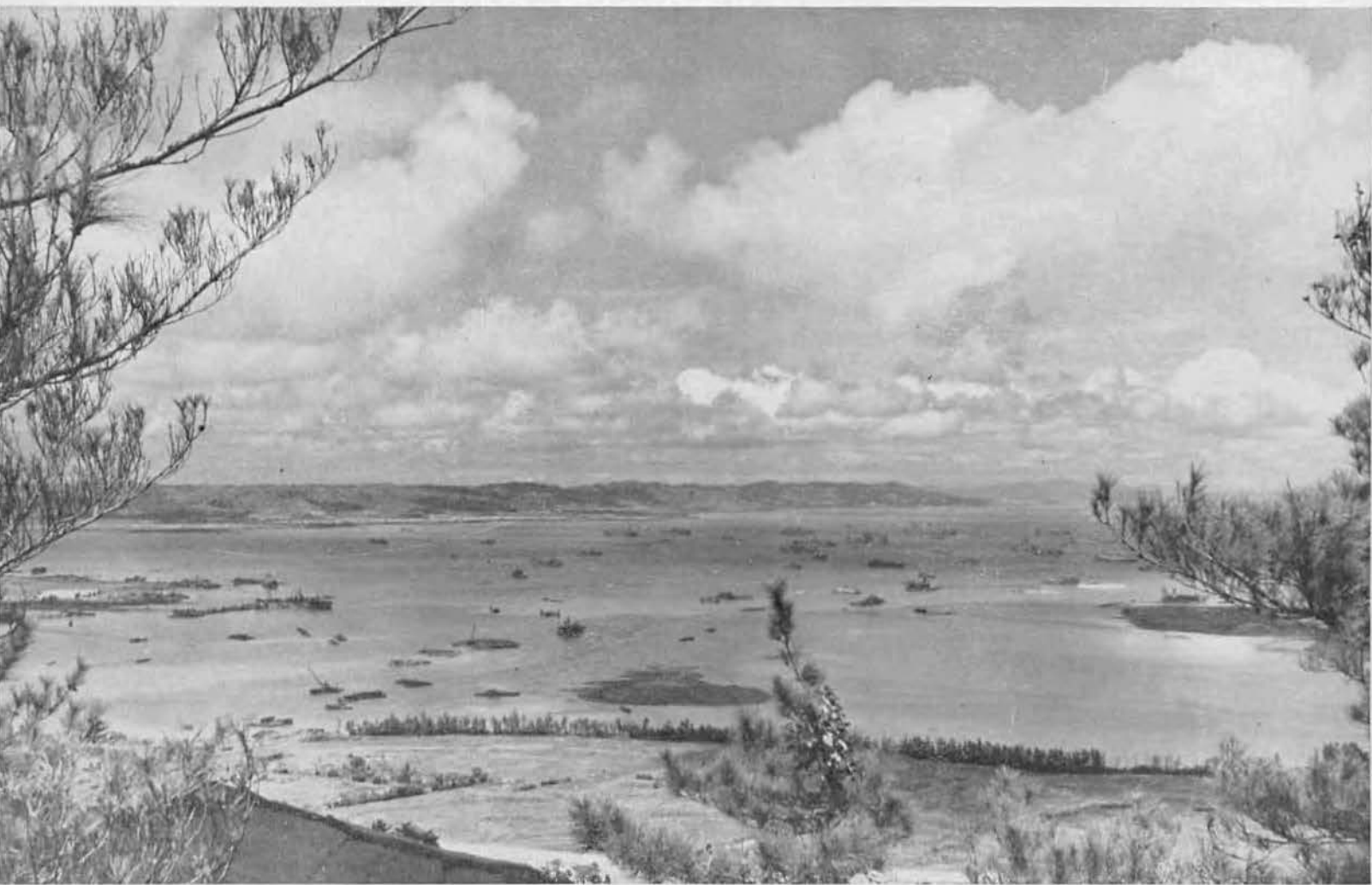




Top: Too few men could be spared from high-priority jobs for camp construction; the crews did a big job



Bottom, looking northwest: Living tents edged towards the three sick-bay quonsets; beyond were the large quonsets of the chow hall and galley and the smaller huts of the post office and ship's store; to the right were the white 21st Seabee Chapel and the long library tent; on the cliff's edge were the chiefs' tents, the offices and the officers' country; below the plateau were the Baten Ko and Yonabaru sections of Buckner Bay, formerly called Nakagusuku Wan.



Top: Across a corner of Baten Ko and China Saki, the bay always appeared full of enough ships to take us home.
Bottom: Baten Ko was a little harbor on the south side of Buckner Bay. The reconstructed 21st pier was at the left.

WATER POINT

Water supply was counted as a major problem before the invasion. At Atsuta, we had set up a purification plant to make drinking water from the ocean. Long before we moved to our Baten camp, our searchers located a fine water supply on the hillside above the eastern-shore village of Shichiya. A small Blackjack party set up a camp at once to protect our interests in what was one of the best water points on the island.

The pipes and pumps and tanks were installed. We had such a good spot that the 8th Brigade took over the plant, and we began to supply many of the battalions on the plateau. The original capacity of 80 gallons per minute was doubled, and the end of the war called a halt to plans to enlarge the plant more.

It was over a mile from the water point to our camp. We laid the pipeline for the last half of the distance.



An underground lake might have been our water supply. Natives had developed the source, however, and military authorities let them keep it.

Water was pumped a hundred feet from the water hole to the purification plant





Clear, clean drinking water was made at the rate of 160 gallons per minute by our water works



The water-point men built and operated one of the best water-supply plants on Okinawa



W A T E R T A N K

In camp, on a hill-top called Mt. Walsh, we erected a 126,000-gallon wooden water tank. From here pipes ran all over camp. We probably appreciated most the showers which eventually gave us some hot water to bathe in. Except for the sea voyages when what hot water there was was scarce, we didn't have hot showers from February in Pearl Harbor until September on Okinawa.



Our 126,000-gallon water tank perched on the highest height in camp.

A six-foot "21" on the water tank advertised the Blackjack camp



T H E S H O P S

Our construction and our camp couldn't have started or kept going long without the maintenance and service shops. They were the first things set up at Atsuta after we landed on Okinawa, and they were the first buildings at the Baten camp. The truck drivers and mechanics, the heavy-equipment repairmen, the welders, the blacksmiths, the riggers, the carpenters, the painters, the sign painters, the elec-

tricians, the line-men, the plumbers, the "sanitation engineers," the machinists—these specialists put together, took apart, invented, reconditioned, tinkered, reclaimed, patched up, refashioned, and strengthened. The demands for their services were heavy because we were building from the ground up in a strange land and because equipment received rough treatment.

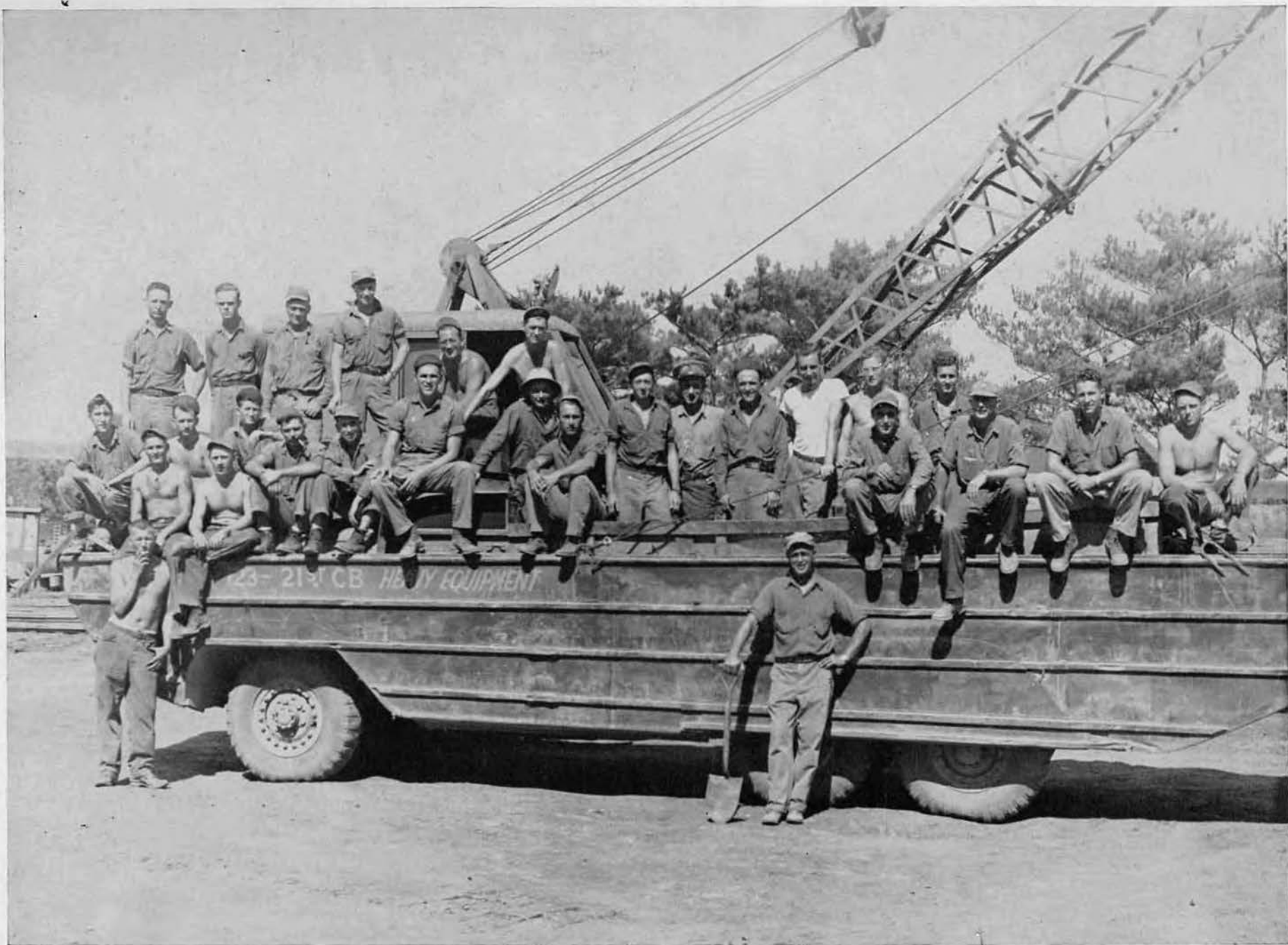
By the middle of August, most of our Atsuta camp had been moved south. The waterfront office and crews, the laundry and a chow hall gang stayed on.





"TRANSPORTATION" kept the battalion rolling: drove the trucks and kept all vehicles in repair.
We operated over 100 trucks and jeeps.

THE NIGHT SHIFT on transportation bore the burdens from dusk to dawn. The roads were rough;
the loads, heavy.



Whatever heavy equipment it was—a bulldozer, crane, shovel or "duck"—our skilled operators could run it. Rough, rushed work on Oinawan mud and rock brought many repairs.



Top: When mud was deep and water rushing, Welders Kirkpatrick, Ricks and Witter turned out thousands of feet of drainage pipe made from 105-mm. howitzer shell cases.

Bottom: The welders, blacksmiths and riggers were vital to the alteration and repair of equipment. Seated: Bressler, Ricks, Kirkpatrick, CWO Travers, Pool, Schieck, Witter. Standing: Angell, Rudolph, Jones, Hall, Cochran.



The men of the carpentry, paint and sign shops handled every demand

The electricians did everything from erecting electric and telephone lines to screwing in bulbs. The men went into enemy territory to get enough Japanese poles and wire to wire up the entire Atsuta camp,





Okinawa was supposed to be full of bad bugs and diseases. Even if it didn't our field living conditions kept the sanitation squad occupied

The plumbers started from scratch; Okinawans didn't have much plumbing





The machine shop fashioned metal parts to keep equipment going and to fit into construction. In the picture: Smith, Penrod, Richards, Rex, Swanson.

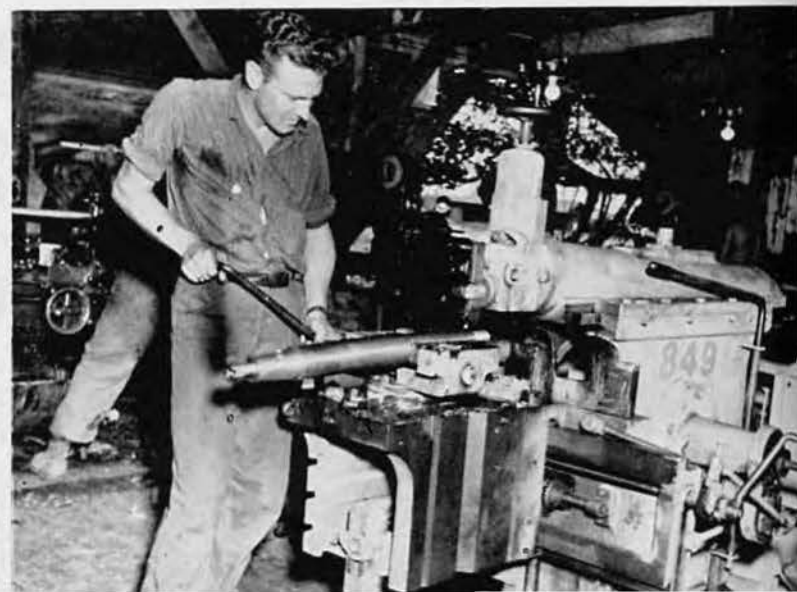
Left, top: R. D. Angell treadled a Japanese lathe picked up near Naha



Left, bottom: H. F. McCoy rebuilt a Japanese milling machine found near Sugar Loaf Hill while the Okinawa fighting was fiercest.



A. D. Smith cut a key-way in the shaft of a bulldozer on a Japanese shaper. The salvaged machine had to be repaired before it could be used.





Top: Even continual C rations didn't reduce the Baten Ko chow lines

FOOD

The shops kept our equipment going, and food kept the men going. Sometimes we wondered how C rations could keep anybody alive, but we survived. We read about all the fine eats that the armed forces had cornered back in the States; we wondered where it went—not to Okinawa.

Right: Keeping cool on Okinawa was difficult, but the refrigeration gang kept food and drink safe in their "reefers." In picture: Rutkowski, Stiles, Greenup, Gunn, Turnbo.

Bottom: All seamen and third-class men were likely to catch a month of mess cooking, and a few liked the work and stayed longer.





COOKS



The Atsuta mess was smaller than Baten Ko's and sometimes it procured fresher supplies. Front row: Lacicier, Ellis, Lovorini, Bentley, Caravella, Guzik, Gantert. Back row: McCune, Skelley, E. W. Jones, H. M. Jones, Castonguay, Guenther.

With the limited, mostly canned, food supplies, the cooks and bakers did the best they could. Front row: Rowland, Key, Ellis, Wisbey, Smith, Tarter, Llavore, Jennings. Back row: Childers, Jones, Trosi, Connick, Malpass, Bass, Kostasich, Schuster, Ranalli, Gibbs, Karr, Bellows, Motes, Wenger.





Cabral inspected a young watermelon



Newton pushed the hand cultivator

O N T H E F A R M

In Honolulu we bought seed; in Saipan we secured advice from the Foreign Economic Administration; on Okinawa we planted the "Blackjack Vegetable Gardens" in what had been native rice paddies and sweet potato patches. Its more than 12 acres were believed to be the first armed-forces garden on the island.

Our five farmers—Means, Cabral, Lintner, Newton, and Sheldon—set up an "Old Homestead" in a native tile-roof house and thatched shed. They

Boss-farmer Means spread fertilizer among the vines



planted radishes, tomatoes, watermelons, and muskmelons, and 25 other vegetables. To work the hard-when-dry, gluey-when-wet soil, they had a small tractor, a disc harrow, and hand tools. They kept a few pigs and chickens for their own table.

Native women came to harvest the rice crops. One night the farmers captured a native farmer as he came from the hills. Military vehicles insisted on running over their fields. The weather was too dry and then too wet. Nevertheless, the Bluejacks did enjoy some fresh vegetables from their own garden.

Sheldon kept an eye on the pigs and chickens





The medical department set up in native houses, tents, and finally a fine quonset-hut arrangement. Front row: Sutton, Passo, Sorenson, Neagle, Sella and Lombardi. Back row: Dr. Evans, Collins, Mangini, Dr. Watson, Steele and Dr. Trigg.

S I C K B A Y

"Doc" Dodd and Sorenson secured souvenirs while working at our advance camps.

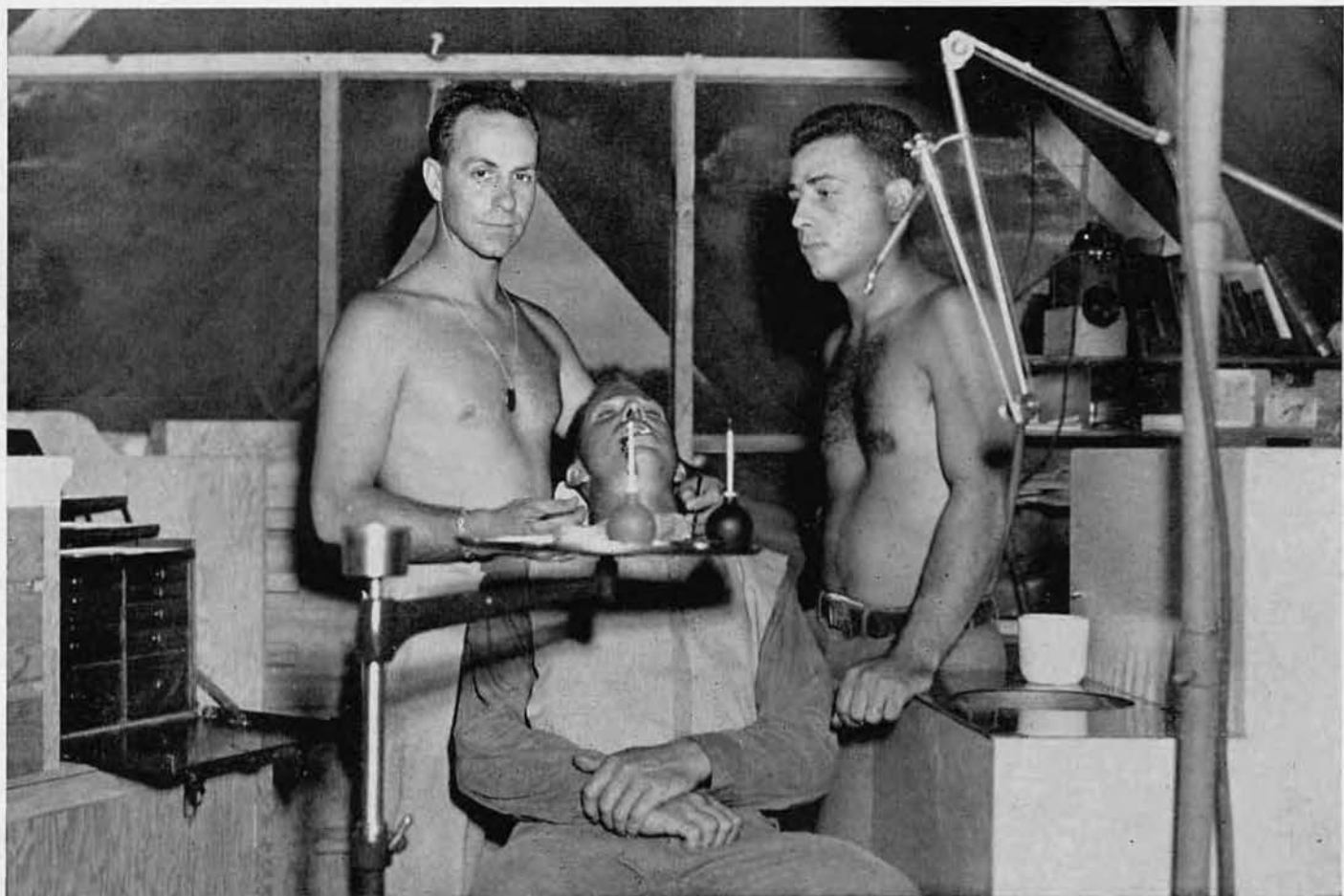


The Medical Department had its hands full much of the time. That's to be expected when there are a thousand men for whom to care, and Seabees were generally older than the men in the other branches of the services. Accidents happened in the rush of getting big jobs done. The hot Okinawa weather brought out skin irritations; the wet weather gave fungus a head start. Teeth didn't find much to exercise on in the C rations. Just plain homesickness sometimes laid a man up. Outdoor living may be good, but we found that the war had a way of setting us down in some pretty unhealthy open air. Some men were evacuated, sent home; some men were in better physical shape than when they entered the Seabees; most men were about the same, though two or three years older, and were not often on "light duty" or "no duty."



Dr. Tufft and Louis Rinaldo

Dr. Bentley made the digging as painless as possible





To the censors fell a thankless, but essential, task; everyone was pleased when the war's end meant we could write anything. In the picture: Thompson, Loeffel, Callahan, Leeds, McCoy.

M A I L

The post office at Atsuta had been in a little native house. It moved to a tent at the Baten camp, and this was blown down in the September typhoon. A quonset hut was quickly completed, and this lost its roof in the October typhoon. The mail men had their troubles.

Mail came in bunches, irregularly. Perhaps we became a little irregular about writing, too, for work hours were long, stationery scarce, and places to write few. As fully as the censors would allow, however, we tried to share our experiences with the folks back home. When censorship ceased on September 6, we really opened up with tales of what had been considered military secrets.

Mail warmed the inner man most fully and quickly. Corbin, Frank and McKelvey speeded letters and packages to and from families, relatives and friends.



SHIP'S SERVICE

For the first couple of months on Okinawa, we washed our own clothes and got along with the toilet articles we had brought with us. The Red Cross, however, did come through with some needed supplies. When the laundry started, we were happy. In early July, the ship's store opened with a limited stock. Like the post office, the ship's store at Baten was first in a tent and then in a quonset hut.

Barbers Kaufman and Keppler kept our hair in trim, though they had no control over the beards and moustaches that sprouted and spread. Sciarra did some tailoring and was helped considerably by some Japanese sewing machines which were salvaged from Naha. Reeves repaired watches, not only for us, but for what seemed a large part of the Army, too.



Having our laundry done for us was one of the greatest time-savers, a big boost to morale. The laundry remained on the Atsuta waterfront until the big typhoon.

Beers and cokes didn't become available until late in July—and even then supplies were tightly rationed. Part of the time the drinks were on the Recreation Department; sometimes we paid in yen and sen.

Ruiz kept the ship's store line moving, even though an adding machine was needed to compute the confusing yens and sens.





M O V I E S



Movies were just about the only recreation we had. Outdoor sports were hampered by the long working hours, lack of playing fields, and rainy weather. We could always count on a couple of hours of relaxation at the show every evening, whether the night was fair or foul, dark or moonlit, peaceful or bothered with air raids.

So many came to the shows at Atsuta that we had to restrict attendance while air raids were a danger. One memorable evening a snake caused a near-riot and some injuries because the crowd thought a grenade had been thrown in their midst.

At the Baten theatre, we had only one projector for a while and had to endure waits between reels.

We presented just two stage shows. One, at Atsuta, was popular because of two Red Cross girls, a magician, and a dance band. One at Baten featured a lively Army dance band and a couple of comedians. We were off the beaten track of the famous USO troupes that hit Okinawa occasionally.



Left, top: Parka-type jackets were popular outfits for the show



Center: George Hartzell put us to bed with a good movie, and Bob Fanslow was our expert radio-repairman and the "voice" that said: "It is 0500; hit the deck!"



Bottom: We didn't dare count on an evening without rain. Moviegoers came prepared for the worst in the open-air theatre.



ON THE BALL

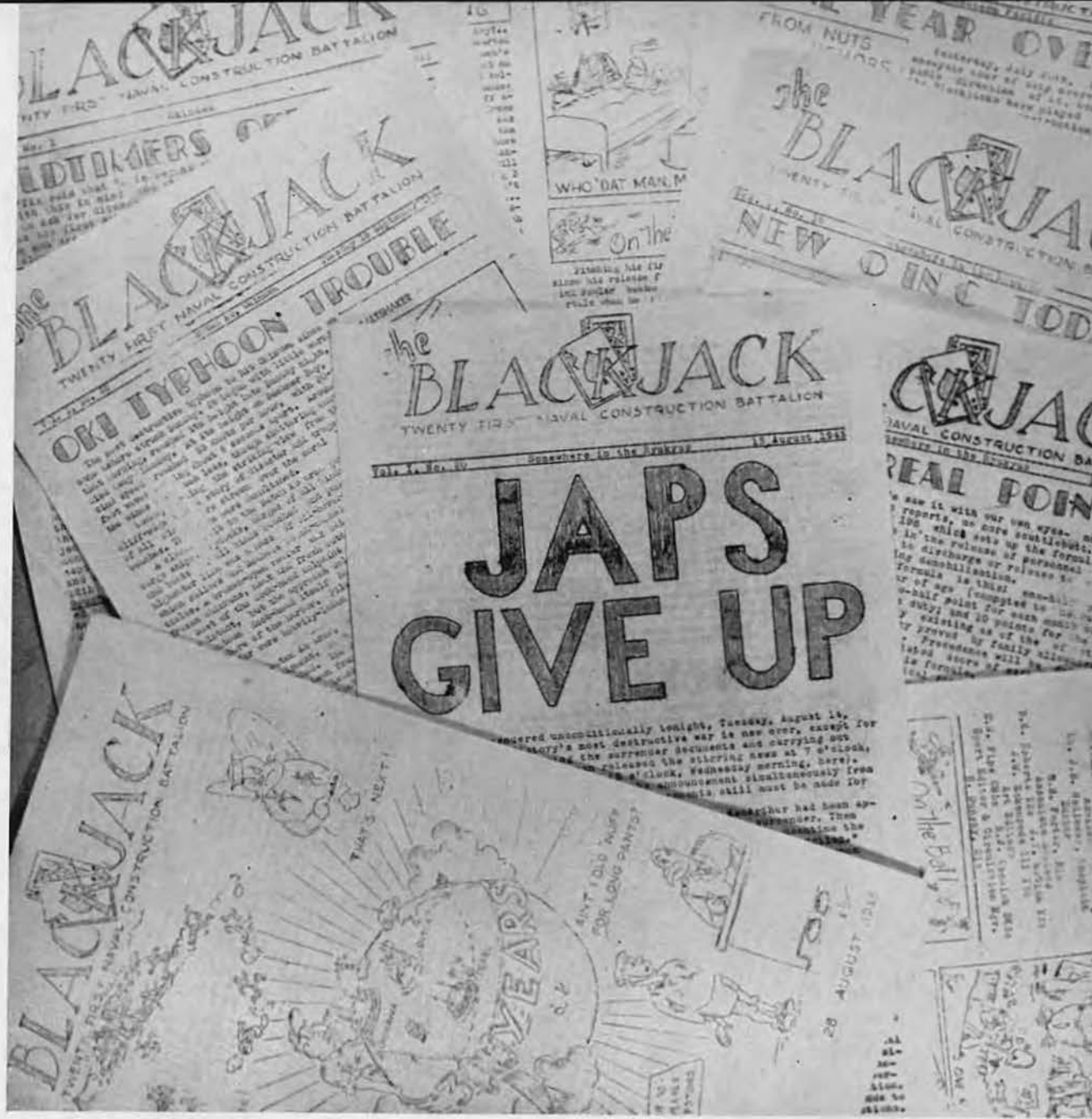
INSIDE STRAIGHT

CHAPLAIN CHAT

Mag Grinning

NEWS

SAYS



"The Blackjack" was born late, on July 1, but it managed to report some big stories.

BLACKJACK

The editorial staff of the paper liked the work. Pipe was art editor; Porter, the original editor; Potter, the mimeographer; Dunsay, sport editor and all-around associate; McGinn, a columnist; and Schutz, the second editor.



Our battalion paper didn't start until we were settled on Okinawa. Then, as if to make up for lost time, it came out three times a week. Aimed to cover battalion happenings, it ran into some of the biggest stories any newspaperman could want: the end of the war, the atomic bomb, typhoons, and demobilization.





We thought our chapel was one of the best-designed on the island

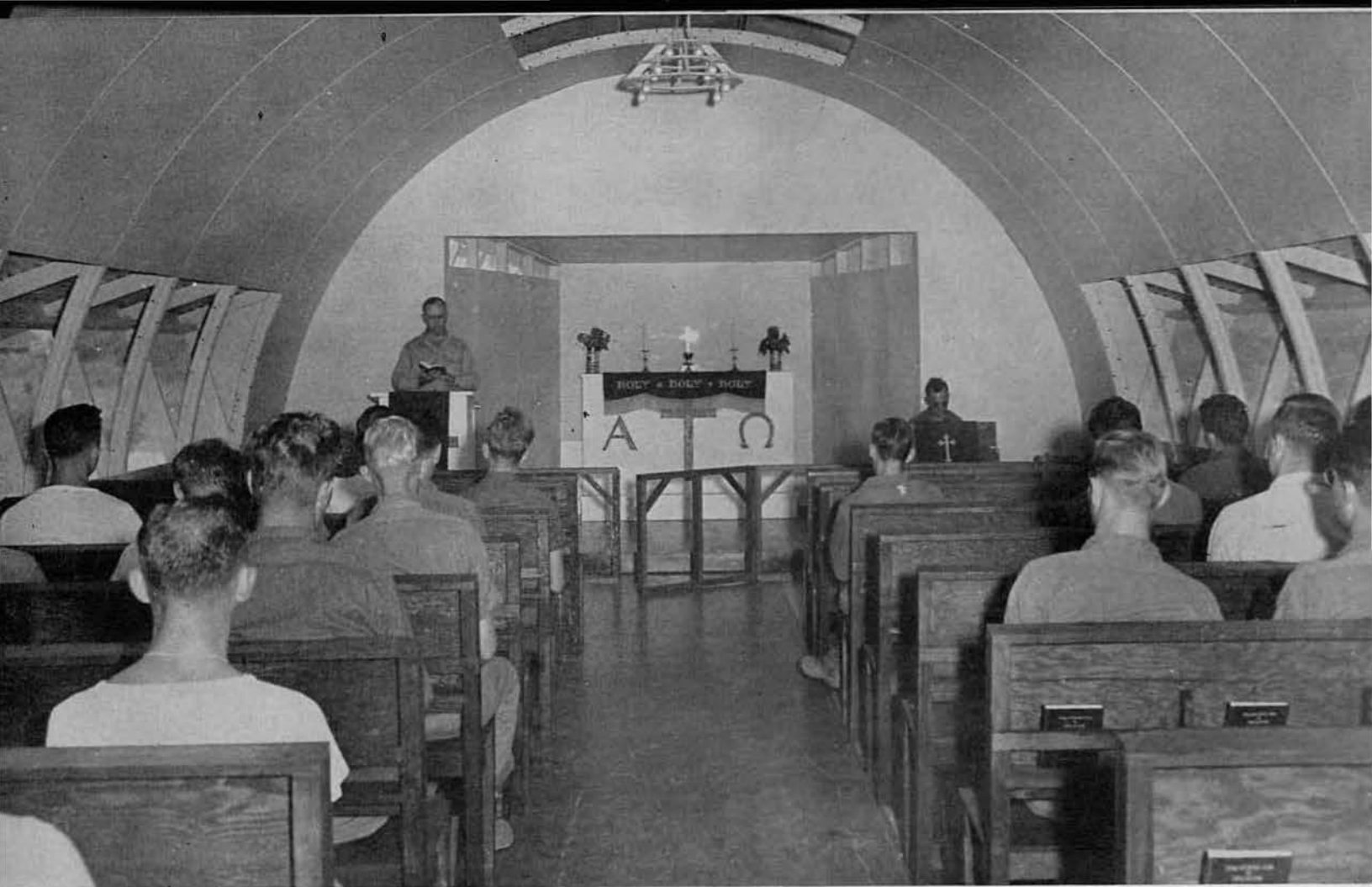
R E L I G I O N

We had four different chaplains on this tour of duty. Chaplain Boud came with us from the States; Chaplain Voegler was with us a few weeks in Pearl Harbor; Chaplain Holloway joined us at the end of 1944 and left us for discharge under the point system in September, 1945; Chaplain Paul came to us in September from Iwo Jima and left in November to work with the Okinawa natives on their religious activities.

It was not until the very last of our stay that we had our own chapel on Okinawa. We used the chow hall, the outdoor theatre, a temporary shelter, or the library.

The chaplain's office also ran the library, which never stopped operating even during sea voyages. Many men continued their education by taking correspondence courses through the Armed Forces Institute, and at Pearl Harbor we had conducted some dozen evening off-duty classes.

And, of course, the chaplains were always ready to help on the personal problems that came up, with the great distance from home being a major obstacle to their solution. Sometimes the men secured emergency leaves or even discharges.



Chaplain Paul conducted the dedication service of the 21st Seabee Chapel

The first Sunday in October, 1945, was World Communion Day





Cyphers tore over the rough roads like a Buck Rogers to bring and take official communications

ADMINISTRATION

A Naval Construction Battalion uses manpower for a great many things besides direct construction. Men are used for all the hundred-and-one tasks that make a Seabee outfit completely self-sufficient. "We build; we fight" is our motto, but we also cook and bake, we doctor, we police, we pay, we supply, we survey, we process every kind of "red tape" imaginable.

Of course, a battalion is the operating unit. In the hierarchy above the battalion are regiments, brigades, theatre and area commanders, the Bureau of Yards and Docks, the Navy Department. Our orders, our rules and regulations, our troubles as well as our benefits were determined, not by ourselves, but by the officials on these higher levels.

It was the job of the staff offices, the offices that didn't actually build things, to keep clear and harmonious relations with the higher-ups and the regulations, to see that the construction men had what they needed.





The MAA force—the gestapo—kept us on the straight and narrow path, saw to it that we received announcements and notices, and had one of the best coffee shops in camp. Front row: Buchheit, Hyden, MacFarland, Rachenski. Back row: Armstrong, Simrall, Borah, Messner, Duff.

The company commanders, adjutant chiefs and company clerks had to know their men. Front row: Lt. Wheless, Pattee, Hearne, Von Seggern, Lt. Weber, Murphy, Sweum. Back row: Lt. Walsh, Olson, Auerbach, Lt. Wolf, Clifton, Lt. Harting, Pederson, Wendt.





The Disbursing and Supply Offices shared the same native house at Atsuta and the same tent at Baten Ko. Pay days came only once a month. We had little use for money on Okinawa anyway, and military currency—yens and sens—kept us muddled. "Supply" had its headaches in the lively, scrambled game of procuring. Front row: Hecht, Finnegan, Lt. Adams. Back row: Russell, Dillon, Laudiotis, Lt. (jg) Clifford.

Handling supplies in the compounds was a tough task because boxes and crates were jumbled as they came off the ships. Sorting and piling took planning and patience. We moved our compounds seven times in one year. Front row: Connolly, Cotner, Jenkins, Jacobus, Avelani. Back row: Ostrander, Cracolici, Stilson, Burkhart, Scarborough, Miller, Hill.





The surveyors and draftsmen of the Engineering Department did the groundwork for every project. Surveying while the fighting was still on had its dangers. Rule O. Seymour received a Purple Heart for wounds received when a booby-trapped grenade blew up when he tripped it while surveying.



With so many jobs—some large, some small—planning and control was important. The Operations Office assisted the officer in charge in this administrative work. Front row: Roberts, Mills, Bliss. Back row: Lt. (jg) Cain, Lt. Comdr. Stephenson, Lt. Trudoll, Lt. Harting.

The Personnel Office really became a hot spot when demobilization started, but they'd always had plenty to do with keeping records, rate changes, transfers, work assignments, and hundreds of pieces of paper affecting our lives. Over 1,000 rate increases were made. Nearly 400 men were awarded Good Conduct Medals. Front row: Lambert, Lt. (jg) Cain, Olson, Simpson. Back row: Meyer, Daegling, McGinn, Eckenrode, Samples, Keating.



★

OFFICERS IN CHARGE

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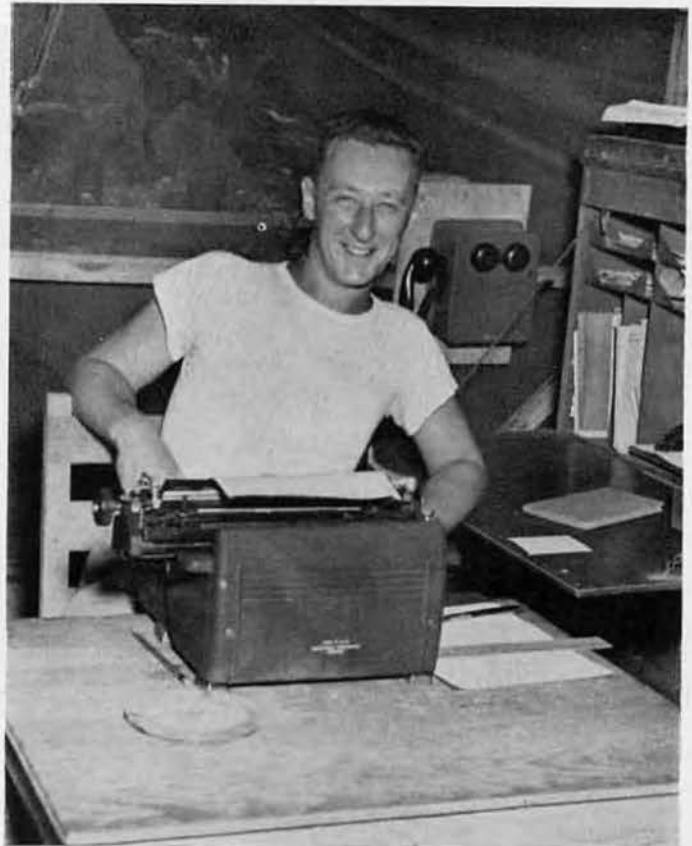


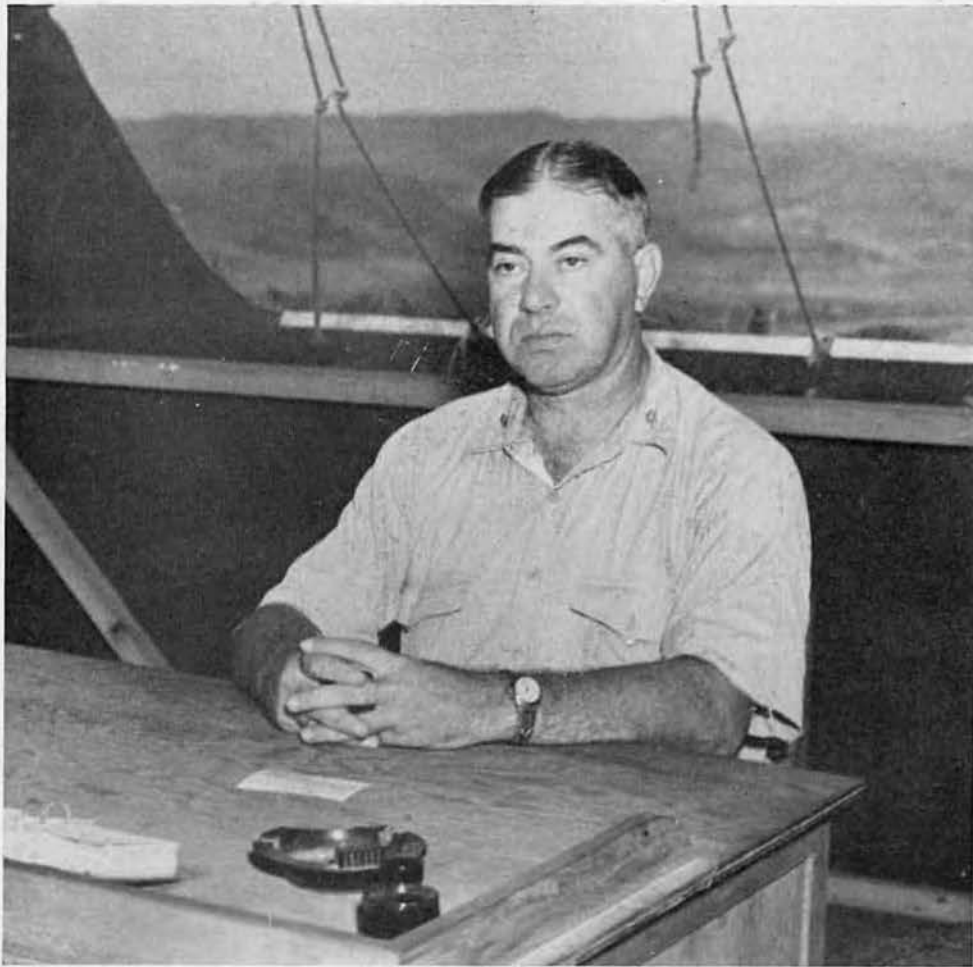
Lt. Comdr. F. M. Thomson

Lt. Comdr. F. M. Thomson was our officer-in-charge from a few days after the battalion's commissioning in August, 1942, until August 4, 1945—just a few days before Japan surrendered. His leadership carried us through Dutch Harbor, Camp Parks, Camp Rousseau, Saipan, and the Okinawan campaign. Our record and reputation had been established when he left us for discharge under one of the point systems.

When he left us, "Tommie" wrote: "During my three years' association with you, I have come to know many of you personally and to have a personal interest in all of you. In the course of three years one is bound to become attached to an organization—to admire the loyalty and ability of that particular group. From the first day we stepped ashore in Dutch Harbor you proceeded to do a 'bang-up' job and to establish a reputation for achievements through the months and years which followed. I feel sure that those in close touch with the overall picture of Seabee accomplishments are fully aware of the part played by the Twenty-First in the reputation established by the Seabees."

Johnny Weber was yeoman in the Executive Office. He had the "inside" on many developments, yet effectively guarded his confidential work.





Lt. Comdr. L. J. Stephenson was our officer in charge from early August to early October, 1945—when he, too, had enough points for discharge. He came to us with wide experience in waterfront construction and furnished friendly leadership and advice in the war-less but windy construction problems.



Lt. W. M. Harting was our acting officer in charge during some of the final weeks of the active life of the battalion. He eagerly speeded transportation home of men eligible for discharge.



Our commanding officer had been changed. An atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. We were going about our work as usual. Russia had declared war on Japan. Blackjacks were high with hopes of an end to the war. The second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. There were rumors.

It was Friday, August 10th. It was about nine-fifteen, and we were watching Rosalind Russell feeling her first love pangs in the first movie at the Blackjack theatre at the Baten camp.

Red tracer fire began to arch high to the right of the screen, then to the left. Searchlights streaked the night. Rifle fire broke out all around us. The movie stopped. Maybe it was an air raid. There had been no air raid sirens, but the shooting made the sky look like the worst air raid yet.

We tried the big radio, all station, but the programs were going on as usual. The firing crescendoed, and Lt. Trudell said, "This is the closest we've been to the front yet." The movie started. Those listening to the radio heard an announcer say, "We take you to the White House." The movie was stopped; the President's voice was put over the loudspeakers. It was just a rebroadcast of his radio report on his Potsdam trip.

We waited quietly, tensely for the 10 o'clock news. One news item reported that the Domei news agency said that the Japanese government was ready to accept the Potsdam ultimatum with the understanding that it did not compromise the Emperor. That was that. We went off to bed, but we went off feeling "high," as if from big glasses of champagne.

The Big Four—the United States, Russia, Great Britain and China—told Japan that unconditional surrender meant unconditional surrender. Japan hesitated. Then, at eight o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, August 15th, on Okinawa, the radio announcement came: Japan had surrendered unconditionally. Bob Fanslow put the news over the loudspeakers a minute later. Blackjacks continued to work, but they were smiling, whistling, joking, and singing more. The big excitement had been the previous Friday. Now, we wondered when we'd go home.

We watched the plans for the occupation of Japan. Troops used our piers for embarkation. We saw the "Tokyo Trolleys" on the airfields at Kadena. And on September 7th, the surrender was signed on Okinawa in line with the September 2nd surrender in Tokyo Bay.





Separatees left the Baten camp in trucks

G O I N G H O M E

To end the war and to go home were always our greatest desires. Even before the fighting stopped, some Blackjacks were in the lucky group of men over age 42 who could apply for discharge. Our old-timers started going home the end of June. A few went home "on rotation" at the end of July.

With the end of the war in mid-August, the Navy

set its demobilization program in operation. At no time was scuttlebutt so thick as during the days when the point-score discharge system was rumored, went into effect, and then was changed from time to time.

The highest 13 of the 44-pointers left Okinawa on August 30. Then transportation trouble devel-

Forty-four points was a happy number as the demobilization program gained momentum. Transportation off of Okinawa was an immediate obstacle to going home because we were too near the shipping lanes to the occupation of Japan. Around the third week in September, however, the first group of separatees started for home.





The 42-year-olds started the homeward trek. Front row: Lee, Goodman, Sherman, Lantry, Hudac. Middle row: Culley, Jenkins, Yachik, Vashaw, French. Back row: Simpson, Milford, Hillhouse, V. L. Johnson, Miller, Overman.

oped as the ships were needed in the unparalleled job of occupying Japan. Some Blackjacks went down to the staging center three times and returned to us. Then came the typhoon of September 16; the shipping was mixed up again. The extra one-quarter point for each month of overseas service was announced, and we had over 350 men with enough points impatiently awaiting shipping. On September 23, the last of the original 44-pointers left on units of the Third Fleet.

Slowly, in drafts by separation centers, the men with 44-or-more points left us. Then came the worst typhoon of all, on October 9. Our good old Kuba Saki pier held together, however, and men kept going home. Destruction had been great on the island, and all Seabees were "frozen" until repairs had been made. Next, the point score was lowered to 41. The "freeze" was removed, and the 21st battalion was down to a few over 300 men on the first of November. Going-home was the order of the day.



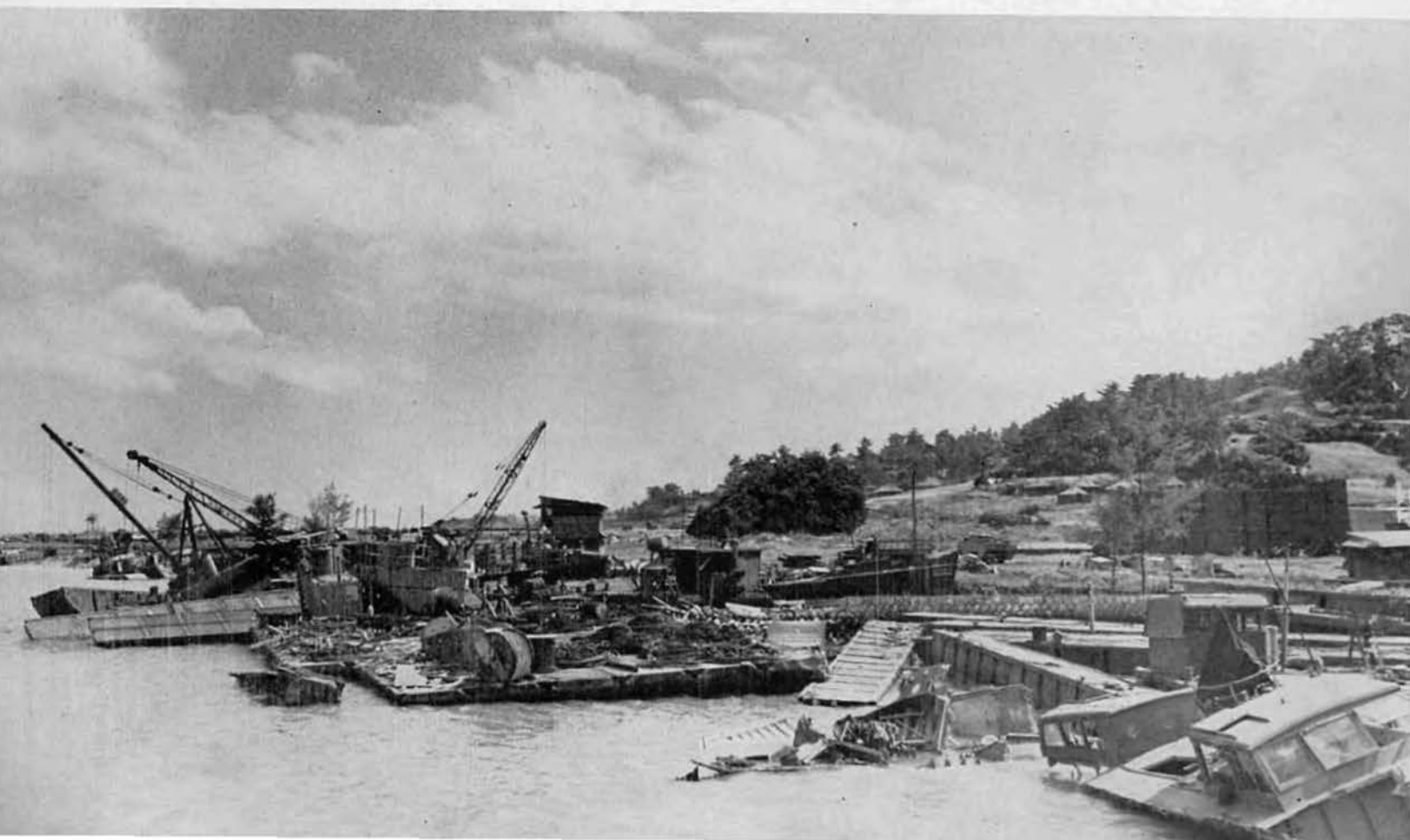
The Baten Ko pier was knocked out by the pounding. Later a part of it was reconstructed

S E P T E M B E R T Y P H O O N

Off and on, while we were on Okinawa, we heard warnings of typhoons. At first, nothing ever hap-

pened. Then came Sunday, September 16, and we learned a little how destructive they could be.

Pontoons, boats, barges and cranes littered Brown Beach after the typhoon of September 16





The September typhoon destroyed the China Saki pier completely. A freighter, which had been tied up to it, was blown ashore.

Most of us met the storm's force in camp and spent a restless night nailing more and more supports to our teetering tents. Some of the boat crews, at the risk of their lives, saved their craft by riding them through the wind and waves.

Monday morning we counted the damage. Some living tents were down; all the sick bay tents had fallen, as had the post office and censors' tents. The cliff-edge officers' tents took the worst beating. The knoll-top skipper's tent had crashed and scattered its furnishings. The galley and mess hall tents had collapsed. Tarpaulins were torn from the shops. The water point had shut down. Telephone and electric lines were broken.

Around Buckner Bay were all kinds of boats, barges, and ships on the reefs and beaches. The China Saki pier was completely knocked out. The Baten Ko pier had lost its pontoons, but the dolphins still stood. Both the assembly pier and small-boat pier at Atsuta had been washed out, but Kuba pier held well. We had lost most of our waterfront equipment: barges, boats, tugs, cranes and pile-drivers, compressors, and welding machines.

Repairs were rushed. Tents were rebuilt. A galley and mess hall were established in the quonset hut mess hall which was under construction. Baten Ko pier was reconstructed in a "T" shape. Our waterfront plant was put back in operation.

THE BIG BLOW

We hadn't believed the stories the natives told us about typhoons. We hadn't been convinced by the September typhoon. We had to be shown, and the typhoon of October 9th showed us—too well. "The worst typhoon in 20 years" was what some people said. "One of the greatest disasters ever suffered by the United States Navy and Maritime Service" was another comment.

The wind velocity was estimated to have hit 173 miles per hour. The atmospheric pressure dropped so low that a needle on the vertical drum of a barograph fell completely off the bottom. As we write, the Navy has not announced the full account of damage and casualties, but we know what happened to the Blackjacks.

We had been warned that the storm's height would come about noontime on the 9th. Before noon, some of the steel sheets of the big chow hall were blowing off and crashing to the ground, but tents were still up. We thought this was the worst of it. After chow many of us began to strengthen our tents, but around one o'clock the tents began to go, regardless of what we did. And when the tents fell, all sorts of objects began to fly through the air. It was dangerous; several men were hit. "Chuck" Dillon had both his legs badly broken by a flying 4x8 piece of plywood which clipped him just above the ankles.

We found refuge in the hillside tombs and in the caves. These were chilly and dripped streams of water, but they were out of the terrifying wind. We ate cans of cold C rations for Tuesday's supper.

Almost everything blew down. The exceptions were about four living tents, the chapel with its white steeple, the sick bay, post office, and ship's store quonset huts, and a couple of the commissary storage huts. The steel sheeting of the galley and mess hall had peeled off and then the buildings had collapsed in a mass of twisted steel girders. All the offices and all the officers' and chiefs' tents were flat. The shops were down, except for some of the frame of the paint and electrical shops. The movie projection booth had been smashed. The Baten Ko pier had been cleared of its pontoons again; the Atsuta waterfront piers had been demolished; but the miraculous Kuba pier was still there.

We set up a hot coffee and B or K ration serving stand in the back of one of the commissary warehouses, and we ate this way for several days. Tentmates pitched in to build some sort of a shelter—and strange to see were some of the resulting designs. The movie projectors were repaired, and about three evenings after the storm our spirits were lifted greatly by the resumption of evening movies. We started to eat with the 9th battalion, and the food improved. We heard rumors that the island might be evacuated, but this never materialized. We repaired the Baten Ko pier; we helped rebuild the Fleet Post Office and the N.O.B. mess hall; we put the waterfront pontoon assembly plant back in operation.

"Beautiful Okinawa. . . . Where the typhoons spend the winter," said a radio announcer. After that October typhoon we were all the more anxious to leave, to go home.



Left, top: An A Company tent was not typical: It wasn't blown flat

Center: A few tents were rebuilt in the chiefs' area

Bottom: Wreckage was scattered all over the officers' country





The pieces of the galley and mess hall—two large quonset huts—were peeled off like a head of lettuce; then the huts collapsed

The skipper's office was spread all over the outdoors, just like all the other offices





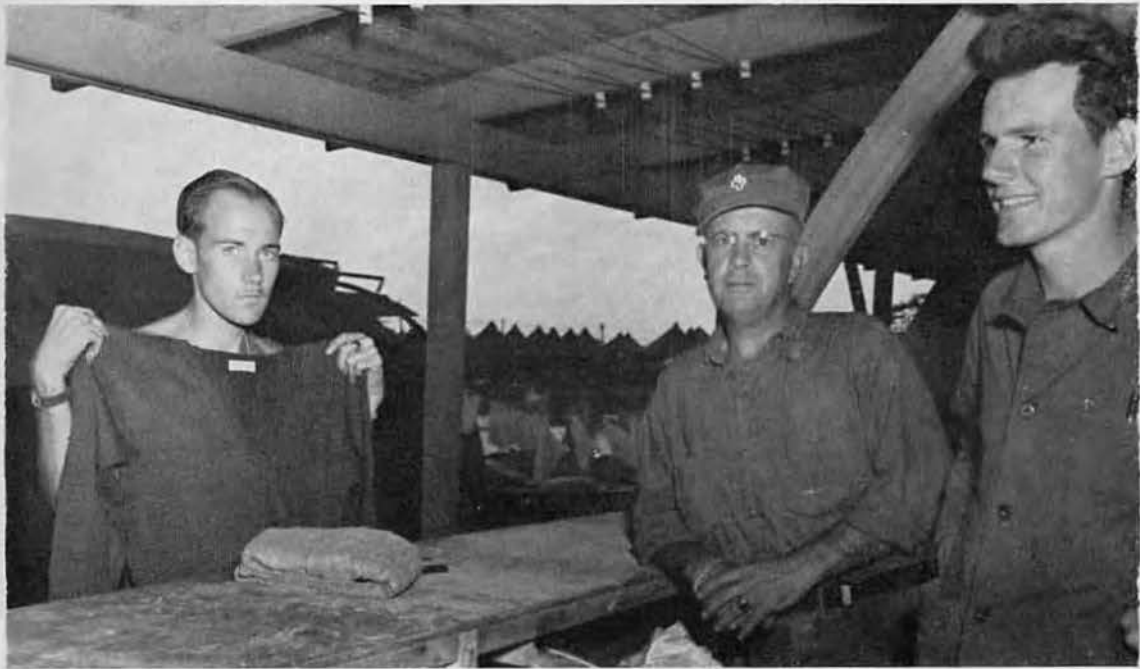
The carpentry shop was smashed, as were the heavy equipment repair and transportation shops

Baten Ko was a chaos of wrecks





For the second time, the Blackjacks' Baten Ko pier went out



Red Cross Field Representative Zander produced some emergency supplies of clothing, toilet articles, candy, smokes and reading materials.

Post-typhoon tent architecture was left to those quartered in each tent



A C C O M P L I S H M E N T



Commodore C. C. Seabury, USN, set off an ammunition cave on Tsugen Jima

For most of this tour of duty in the Central and Western Pacific, the 21st Battalion was a part of the 8th U. S. Naval Construction Brigade commanded by Commodore C. C. Seabury, USN. After the war was over and we had about finished our work on Okinawa, Commodore Seabury commented upon our accomplishments:

"The 21st Battalion was scheduled in an early echelon of the Okinawan operation for the primary purpose of constructing temporary piers so that unloading of ships could be expedited. Immediately after the battalion's landing at Brown Beach, work was begun on the approaches, dump area, and construction of the Kuba-Saki temporary pontoon pier. This pier was placed in operation as soon

as one approach and approximately 200 feet of pierhead had been installed so that unloading operations could proceed simultaneously with construction of the remainder of the pier. Without question, this pier was one of the most important factors in the support of the combat forces during the past May and June. During this period priority was placed on combat supplies so that the combat forces could be furnished with the necessary ammunition and foodstuffs during the critical phase of the campaign.

"As the front line moved south, the 21st Battalion was again called on to construct two temporary pontoon piers in the Yonabaru area. The first pier located at Yonabaru beach contributed in a large measure toward the final break-through at Yonabaru. In this phase of the campaign the roads in this area were practically impassable so that it was necessary to bring in practically all supplies and evacuate all wounded for this end of the line across Yonabaru beaches.

"The major part of the construction battalion gear and Naval Operating Base construction materials were landed over the Baten-Ko and China-Saki pontoon piers which were again constructed by the 21st Battalion. The importance of adequate cargo handling facilities on the beaches cannot be over-emphasized. Therefore, it is considered that the primary contribution of the 21st Battalion to the Okinawan campaign, and later to the occupation, was the rapid construction of temporary piers without which cargo unloading would have been at a virtual standstill."

T H E L A S T W O R D

The 21st Battalion was soon to be inactivated. The Blackjack wanted a final word said. We approached our acting officer in charge, Lt. W. M. Harting, who was also the last of the original battalion officers. We stated our purpose.

"Those men of the Seabees who served with the 21st NCB," stated Mr. Harting, "can be justly proud of the part they played in the winning of World War II. In a war involving vast territories, millions of men, countless items of construction equipment, and a complex array of fighting machines and materials, a Seabee battalion is just another small unit in the overall pattern of victory. That final victory was brought about by the combined efforts of small units such as ours."

"What did we accomplish at Dutch Harbor?" we asked.

"The men who were at Dutch Harbor know that their efforts speeded up certain phases of the war in the far North. Improvements to the submarine base lent to the more efficient operation of submarine patrol, fuel oil tanks provided needed fuel for war vessels and merchant ships, construction of barracks and Naval Base Facilities allowed larger concentrations of men and materials to be moved out along the Aleutian chain toward Japan, and docks and waterfront structures provided the necessary facilities for handling the cargo and manpower that was sent via the Northern Route for the attack on Japan."

Mr. Harting spoke of our work to make life more comfortable for the soldiers and sailors stationed at Dutch Harbor and the appreciation shown by these men. "Do you remember how good it was to see the States again?" we asked.

"Seeing the States again was one of the most pleasant experiences of our lives. After a 30-day leave, the routine of Stateside duty became monotonous to a majority of us, and most of us were anxious to begin the next tour of duty."

We wondered just how important our work had been around Pearl Harbor.

"In Oahu, Hawaii, the battalion built pontoon invasion barges and causeways. The battalion constructed a camp for the Amphibious Operating Base, continued with its waterfront work, and started the construction of a large

gantry crane which had been dismantled shortly after the Pearl Harbor disaster. . . . Again our work was contributing to the overall pattern of victory."

"Our Okinawa work was more than just "overall" help, wasn't it?" we inquired.

"The job that obviously aided in the successful conclusion of a campaign was the work the 21st NCB did in connection with the construction of pontoon piers on the east shore of southern Okinawa," Mr. Harting said strongly and he mentioned the use of the piers in the final days of the Okinawa battle.

"We've really done a lot of work, haven't we?" we asked as we looked back.

"In its more than three years of active service, the 21st NCB has seen duty in both frigid and tropical areas and has shown great versatility in the types of construction work that it has done. Whenever the going got really tough the officers of the 21st could always count on the men to get the job done. The men worked through the weeks of rain and mud and K rations on Okinawa without ever losing their determination to get the job done. The destructive October typhoon failed to daunt the spirits of the 21st men."

The pace of demobilization would soon make it impossible for the 21st battalion to continue operation as a separate unit; it was destined to be one of the inactivated battalions. Its personnel was less than one-third of its complement. After more than three years, the 21st was to lose its identity in name, though our experiences with the battalion would always remain with us. Mr. Harting had a final word to say.

"Speaking for all the officers who have served with the 21st NCB, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks for the cooperation and loyalty that the enlisted men have given us. Personally, I have enjoyed working with the men of the 21st NCB and I want to express my sincere appreciation for the many months and years of hard work that you have given to the service of your country and to the winning of the war. The officers are proud of the construction record that you have made. Your country appreciates what you have done, and your determination and courage gives one great faith in the ultimate destiny of the United States in this confused world of today."

After all its funds and property had been disposed of, the inactivation of the 21st Naval Construction Battalion was completed on 21 November 1945.

ROSTER OF MEMBERS OF THE 21ST U. S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

OFFICERS

Originally, most of the officers and men of the 21st Battalion, came from the Western States. Replacements only reduced this majority. California led as the home state of Blackjacks; Texas was second; Oregon third, and Oregon, a close fourth. Living and working with men from all over our country were great, valuable experiences. The names and addresses listed in the following pages may help to preserve the friendships formed while we were Seabees.

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The Blackjack staff when the material was almost ready for publication. Front row: Olson, Porter, Pipe, Greco, Dunsay. Back row: Ensign McGrew, Chaplain Paul, Lt. Harting, Lt. (jg) Cain.

T H I S B O O K

This pictorial has been the work of many men working together to produce a book that the battalion wanted. We had work to do—not until after Japan had surrendered. We ran a race with the demobilization program. We came safely through the October typhoon. We hope that the result is satisfying.

The photographs are the main part of this book. Our photographers were chiefly E. D. Nease, PhoM1c, and Anthony Greco, PhoM2c. Nease went home for discharge early, and E. W. Pipe, CM2c, assisted Greco in the final picture-taking and making of enlargements. A number of photographs were the work of E. A. Smith.

Pipe was also the staff artist, making all the drawings from cover to cover.

The writing was done mostly by G. H. Porter, Y3c, and he was also responsible for the whole production in the later stages. J. F. McGinn and Herman Dunsay contributed to the writing. Dunsay also handled most of the lay-out work, as well as many other important details.

Many officers served on the book's editorial committee and provided advice and assistance. Mention should be made of the help of Lt. Trudell, Lt. Harting, Chaplain Holloway, Lt. Walsh, Lt. (jg) Cain, Lt. (jg) Small, Chaplain Paul and Ensign McGrew.

Chief R. Olson and Paul Daegling of the Personnel Office prepared the roster of battalion personnel. In-

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Photographers Greco and Nease

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*Typography, engravings and printing by
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Army & Navy Publishing Company Building
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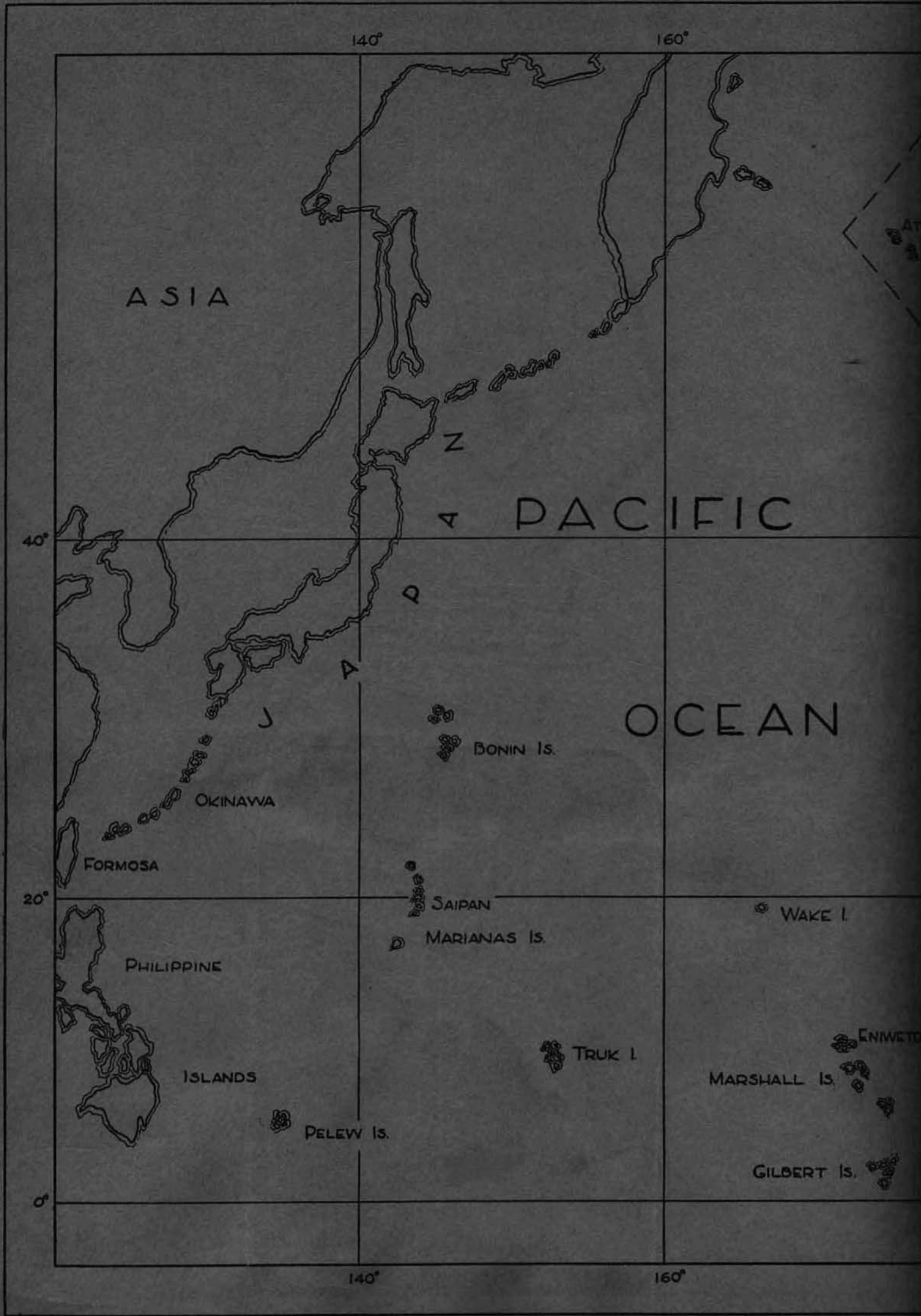
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THE BLACKJACK - 1944-1945

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140°

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40°

OCEAN

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BONIN IS.

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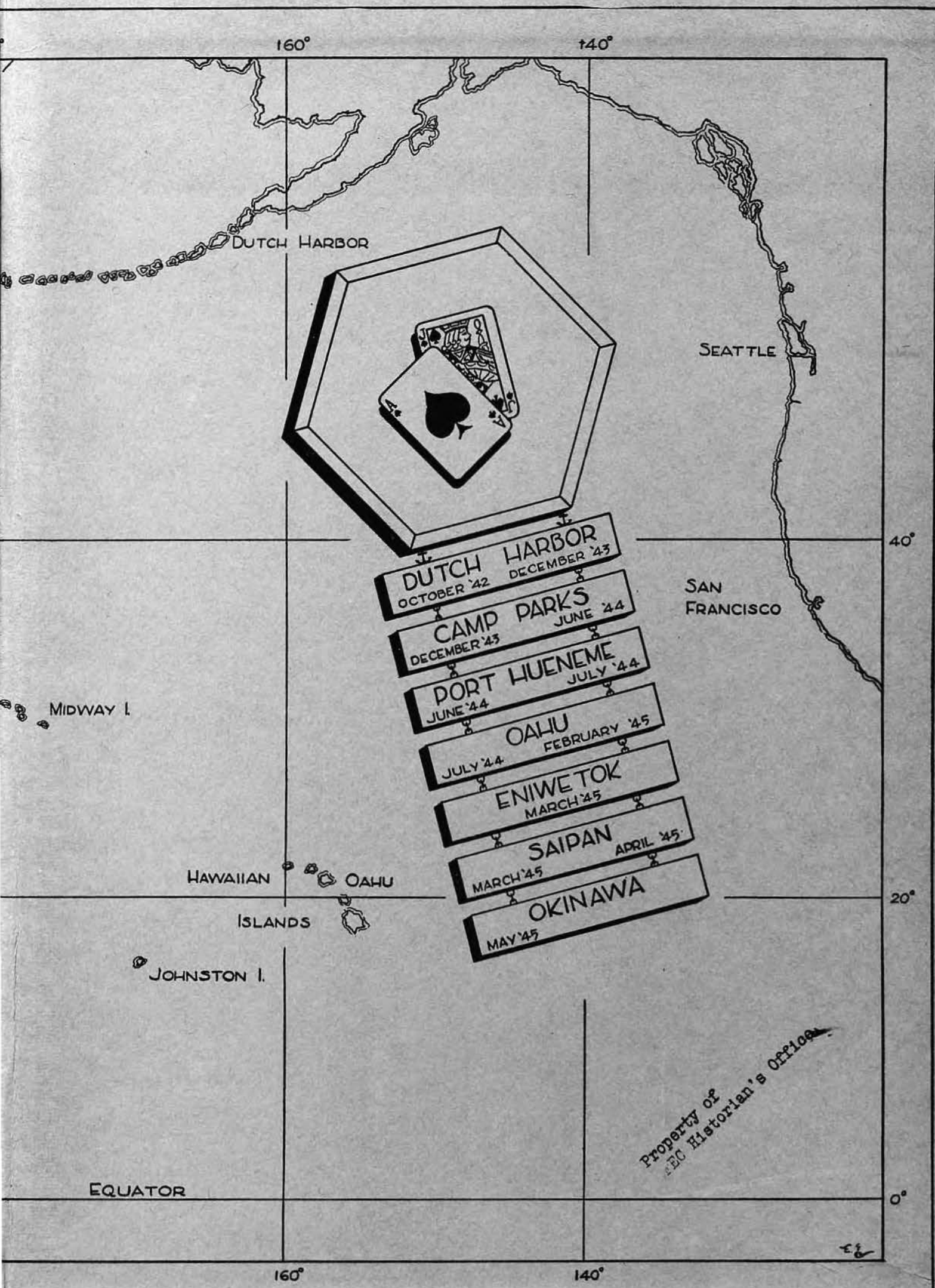
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