

C. B. M. U.  
512



JUNE 1943

AUGUST 1945

# **PART I**



## **LT. DAVIS S. HILL, CEC, USNR**

Lt. Hill assumed the responsibility of Officer in Charge of C.B.M.U. 512 in Camp Peary, Virginia, and has successfully guided the destiny of the Unit through Alaska and the Philippines. It has been his duty to organize subordinate commands, to plan operations, and to administer justice. He has not ruled with an iron hand; he has not had to, for he has set an example of hon-

esty, sincerity, and clean living. Each time that Mr. Hill has passed judgment on one of his men for some misdemeanor, the punishment has been greater on him than on the offender. He has played the part of Chaplain and always welcomes the opportunity of counselling his men when their problems seem greater than they can bear. He has always considered it an honor to have his officers and men call him "Pappy."

# EXECUTIVE OFFICERS



LIEUTENANT M. C. MATTICE

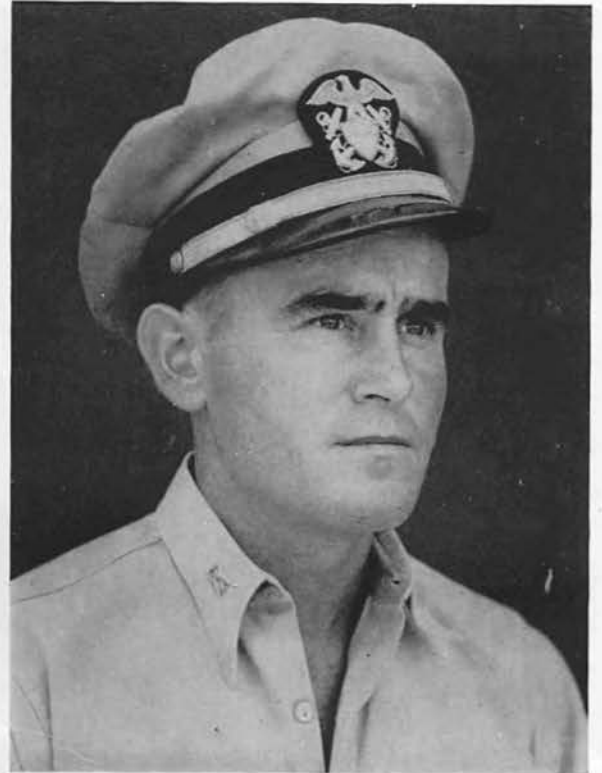
LIEUTENANT K. J. WOLAVER







JOHN W. NAGLE  
Ensign



BURTON B. BELL  
Chief Warrant Officer



LAWRENCE E. FINE  
Warrant Officer



MELVIN E. WEIMER  
Warrant Officer

# CHIEF PETTY OFFICERS



M. H. BARTON  
CEM



P. M. EDWARDS  
CMM



R. E. EDWARDS  
CCM



G. D. GRESHAM  
CEM



F. B. HAVLICEK  
CSF



R. E. HINES  
CBM



F. E. HETHERINGTON  
CCM



W. H. HOLLAND  
CCM



L. E. IRVIN  
CSF

# CHIEF PETTY OFFICERS



V. A. LARSON  
CCM



R. W. MANNING  
CSK



J. R. MARQUIS  
CSF



L. J. PETERS  
CMM



E. SEVIGNY  
CBM



L. G. SMITH  
CMoMM



R. C. SMITH  
CCM



R. P. VINING  
CCM



J. W. WYLIE  
CY

# THE CREW



O. J. ABERNATHY  
CM2/c



C. J. ALBRIGHT  
SI/c



J. G. ARGENTA  
SC3/c



J. N. BAKER  
WT3/c



R. V. BARBER  
SI/c



P. BELLAVIA  
MM3/c



M. M. BERNARD  
FI/c



A. Z. BIANCO  
BM2/c



M. BLOOM  
SI/c



C. F. BOGER  
MM3/c



A. O. BORDELON  
SFI/c



E. A. BOWEN  
Y2/c



R. BOZEK  
FI/c



A. L. BROWN  
SI/c



E. L. BROWN  
SI/c



W. H. BROWN  
SI/c





G. G. BURNLEY  
SF1/c



A. R. CECERE  
FI/c



D. H. CHILD  
SI/c



W. M. CHRISTENSEN  
MM3/c



J. CLARK  
SF2/c



J. G. CLARKE  
BMA1/c



G. R. CLOUD  
SKI/c



C. COCHRAN  
GM1/c



G. H. COFFEY  
CM3/c



C. G. COLE  
CM3/c



C. L. COLEMAN  
SI/c



D. W. COLLINS  
MI/c



J. E. COLLINS  
FI/c



G. G. COLVIN  
SKI/c



J. R. CONTE  
EM3/c



H. C. COOK  
MM2/c



R. L. COOK  
FI/c



R. H. COOPER  
EMI/c



A. H. CORBIN  
SI/c



A. J. COSBY  
SF3/c



D. F. COSTELLO  
MM3/c



D. A. CROCKER  
CMI/c



E. H. CROSS  
BMI/c



G. CUNNINGHAM  
SI/c



L. DALESSANDRO  
Ptr3/c



W. B. DAY  
FI/c



R. S. DEMING  
CMI/c



V. J. DERES  
SI/c



P. A. DOBLE  
FI/c



K. EBERHARD  
FI/c



H. O. EDWARDS  
FI/c



J. ERBA  
SI/c



R. W. EVANS  
CM1/c



G. R. FARMERIE  
CM1/c



R. L. FARR  
CM3/c



L. C. FAX  
SC3/c



B. FINCHUM  
CM3/c



F. FITZMAURICE  
Ptr2/c



A. E. FLORES  
MM2/c



J. H. FOLEY  
Fl/c



F. G. FOLSOM  
Fl/c



A. J. FRIELLO  
SI/c



J. S. GELFO  
Fl/c



A. F. GERKHARDT  
Fl/c



R. B. GIBSON  
CM2/c



R. B. HAMILTON  
SI/c



F. HAZEBROUCK  
SI/c



C. E. HENRY  
Ptr1/c



O. HERENE  
EMI/c



R. W. HILL  
SI/c



B. J. HILLIKER  
SF3/c



W. H. HOLT  
WT1/c



R. HUGHES  
CMI/c



A. J. HUTNICK  
FI/c



E. E. JACKSON  
MM2/c



F. A. JENNINGS  
CMI/c



W. F. JENSEN  
BM2/c



H. W. JESTER  
SI/c



N. J. JOHNSON  
MM3/c



H. A. JONES  
CM2/c



J. E. JUNELL  
MM1/c



W. E. KEITH  
MM1/c



R. E. KING  
Bkr3/c



S. KIRKLAND  
SI1/c





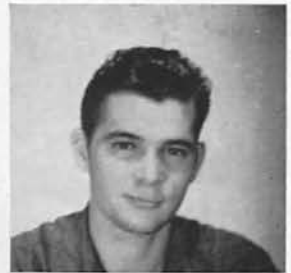
E. J. KLAZER  
SSMB3/c



R. O. KLINE  
EM2/c



R. J. KNORR  
CM1/c



I. KOCH  
CM2/c



A. M. KURCAB  
MoMM2/c



S. KUSHICH  
SF3/c



E. N. La CROIX  
CM2/c



W. A. La ROWE  
SF3/c



W. F. LAMBERT  
CM2/c



L. LAMONTAGNE  
CM3/c



W. F. LANG  
MM1/c



R. O. LANGLEY  
SF3/c



C. A. LANIER  
SKI/c



R. LAPLANTE  
CM3/c



J. R. LASCKO  
SI/c



J. F. LEACH  
SI/c



R. G. LEMIEUX  
MM3/c



L. C. LENK  
MM3/c



H. C. LEWIS  
CMI/c



G. E. LONG  
FI/c



H. P. LYSIAK  
CM2/c



R. V. MAGEE  
SI/c



J. V. MAGGIO  
SI/c



H. MAGISTRALI  
SC3/c



W. J. MAIERS  
EM2/c



H. C. MANLEY  
Cox.



L. J. MARTEL  
SI/c



G. H. MARTINEZ  
Ptr3/c



J. MARTINEZ  
SI/c



J. J. MAZZOLA  
CMI/c



M. P. McADAM  
SFI/c



C. McCONNELL  
SFI/c



W. E. McDANIEL  
SI/c



J. E. McDONOUGH  
YI/c



H. J. McDUFFEE  
MMI/c



H. M. McLAUGHLIN  
CM2/c



W. F. McNEW  
SCI/c



R. E. McSHANE  
EM3/c



J. H. MEAD  
CM3/c



R. A. MERONE  
SI/c



C. T. MERRY  
EMI/c



C. G. MESSINA  
CMI/c



H. J. MILLER  
WT2/c



H. H. MILLER  
BMA2/c



G. B. MINTER  
SFI/c



E. J. MONROE  
MM2/c



J. A. MOORE  
StMI/c



R. C. MOORES  
EMI/c



W. K. MRAZ  
SCI/c



R. MULHOLLAND  
SF2/c



N. MURPHY  
StMI/c



J. P. MURRAY  
GMI/c



L. J. NEARY  
SFI/c



T. B. NEELY  
FI/c



R. A. NICOLA  
CM3/c



P. E. NOE  
CM3/c



J. T. NOLEN  
CM3/c



G. P. NOVIA  
FI/c



J. E. NOWAK  
EM2/c



J. F. NUSBAUM  
MM2/c



C. NUTT  
MM1/c





J. J. O'LEARY  
EM1/c



J. P. OLDHAM  
MM2/c



E. F. OLIVER  
MM2/c



A. S. OSGOOD  
EM3/c



E. C. OXFORD  
SF1/c



D. A. PAGE  
S1/c



E. E. PALMER  
CM2/c



T. G. PANTORNO  
SF2/c



J. E. PAQUIN  
M3/c



R. A. PAQUIN  
MoMM3c



J. B. PARTYKA  
F1c



W. PATTERSON  
S1c



J. L. PATTON  
MM2c



A. E. PERKINS  
M3/c



A. PERRY  
MoMM3/c



R. D. PHARIS  
MM3/c



D. J. PIACENTE  
CM2/c



D. PIANO  
S1/c



A. F. PINHEIRO  
GM3/c



D. J. POTONIEC  
CM3/c



C. I. POTTRUFF  
MM2/c



L. P. POULIN  
BM2/c



W. T. POWELL  
SC3/c



W. F. POWERS  
Bkrl/c



E. D. PULICE  
MM3/c



D. PUOPOLO



A. QUATTRONE  
CM2/c



F. A. RAGALYA  
SI/c



R. J. RANDALL  
CM2/c



S. RANDELL  
CM3/c



J. S. REED  
MM1/c



L. V. REVELLA  
CM3/c



E. REYNOLDS  
SI/c



C. RICCETTI  
CM1/c



R. E. RICHER  
CM3/c



G. S. RINE  
CM1/c



N. L. RIVARD  
CM3/c



J. E. ROESCH  
CM2/c



F. C. ROLL  
MM3/c



U. R. RUEL  
CM3/c



S. RUTKOWSKI  
MoMM3/c



R. SAKER  
CM3/c



H. A. SALL  
SFI/c



J. E. SANDERS  
CM2/c



R. E. SHOFFLER  
CM3/c



C. R. SILVA  
MM3/c



W. B. SIMPSON  
MoMM1/c



L. B. SINICO  
MM1/c



C. E. SMITH  
MM2/c



J. J. SOUSTEK  
MoMM1/c



A. H. SPEER  
CM2/c



G. A. SPELLMAN  
Bkr2/c





S. SPONG  
GM2/c



E. O. STORY  
MM3/c



C. P. STROM  
MM3/c



H. L. STUCK  
MM3/c



H. J. TAMMINEN  
CM1/c



M. TAYLOR  
CM2/c



O. B. TERRY  
SF3/c



F. L. TETU  
CM3/c



R. R. THOMAS  
EM3/c



D. F. TOMBARI  
MM2/c



F. J. TONELLA  
EM2/c



G. TOWNSON  
SF3/c



H. N. TRICE  
BMA2/c



M. W. TROY  
SK2/c



R. A. TURNER  
BM2/c



W. UHTENWOLDT  
CM3/c



E. R. VAN WYK  
Y3/c



R. E. VANKIRK  
MM2/c



R. A. VESEY  
MM3/c



C. F. VICKNAIR  
EM2/c



P. A. VILLENEUVE  
CM3/c



D. B. WATERS  
Ptr2/c



G. H. WERNIMONT  
MoMM1/c



L. E. WILSON  
SC2/c



J. C. WOLF  
SSML3/c



W. J. WUETHRICH  
CM1/c



J. ZECKER  
M1/c

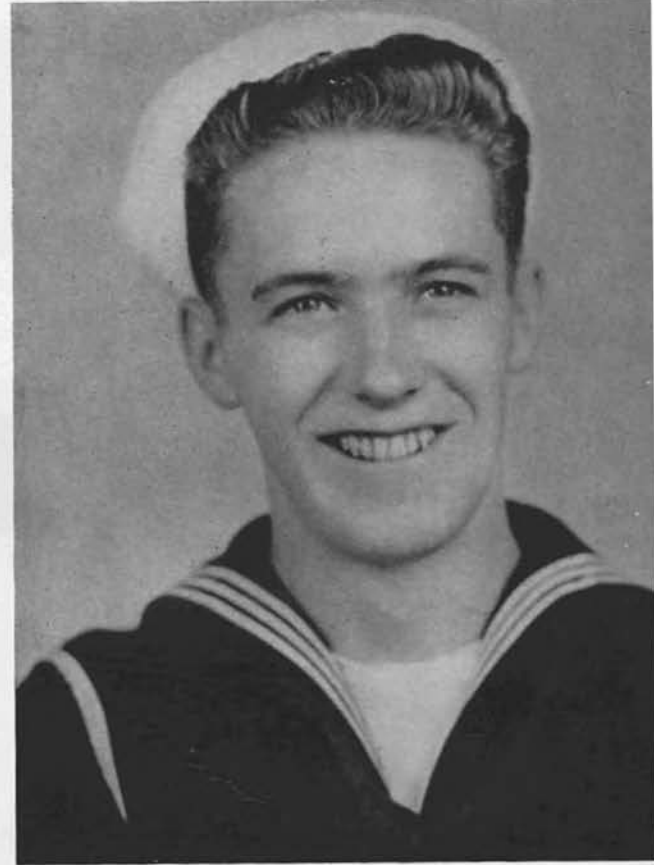


R. W. ZOLLNER  
MMS3/c

# IN MEMORIAM



ALEXANDER L. POULIN, CM3c

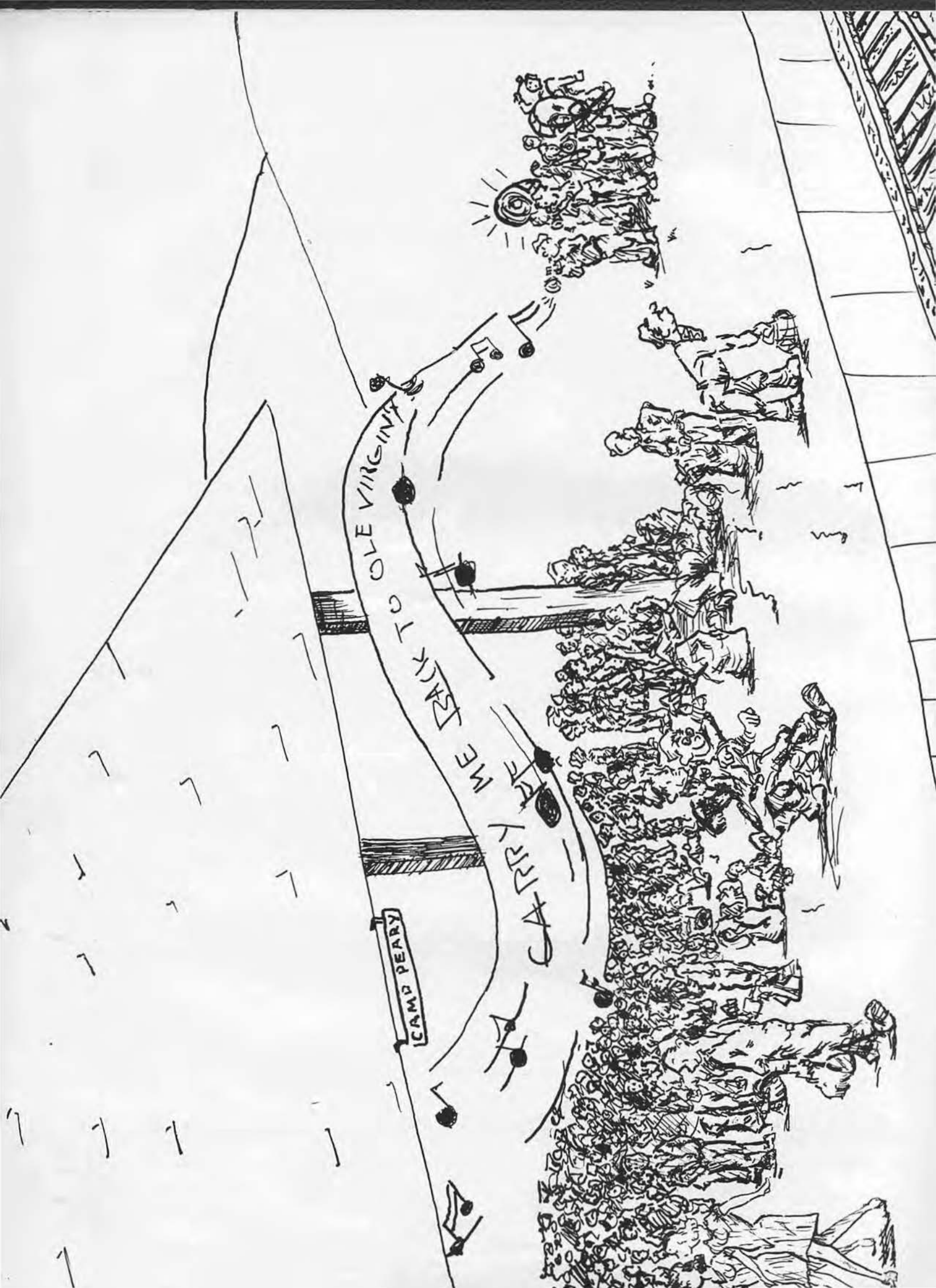


ARTHUR P. ROBINSON, PTR3c

Taps sounded for A. L. Poulin and A. P. Robinson, 25 December 1944, as a result of enemy action in the Philippine Theater of War. Their years were brief, but those years were crowded with things worthwhile—love, friendship, and generosity. That they walked close to God was evidenced in their thoughts and in their everyday actions. The memory of these two American youths shall linger forever in the hearts of the members of C.B.M.U. 512.

# PART II





# HISTORY OF C. B. M. U. 512

It was a hot Virginia sun that cast its piercing rays into the flesh and bones of 275 officers and men of C.B.M.U. 512. We had been assembled at the railroad station at 1300, 13 June 1943, to board a train that would take us from Camp Peary to the West Coast. The train was late, and Captain J. G. Ware, who always made the final inspection of outgoing units, was also late. Camp Peary's band played lively music including the song, "Carry Me Back To Old Virginia," which brought cat-call from many perspiring men. This waiting period gave us time for memories.

We remembered those days some six months previous when we doffed our civilian clothes to step into dungarees and G.I. shoes. We recalled each phase of the transformation. Nothing was ever accomplished in the Navy without first having to stand in line, and it made no difference whether the line was in the sleet or snow, rain or sun, indoors or outdoors—but invariably it was outdoors. This continuous line of confused men began with the clothing issue, then to the barber shop where we lost most of our hair, then to the photograph laboratory for identification



HAMILTON

THAT BOOT HAIRCUT ..

card pictures, then to a warehouse to draw mattresses and blankets, and finally to tents where we were to spend our first night sleeping on a hard canvas cot. We were awakened the following morning at 0530 by the unpleasant sound of the bugle—an instrument that has broken our dreams for more than two and one-half years. We knew that our boot training had begun. The long, weary days that followed found us marching, drilling, listening to lectures, and learning the lessons of how to kill and how to survive. We were moulded into a machine, the brains of which existed only in our instructor's head. Doctors were forever sticking needles in our arms, inoculating us against practically every known disease. It was an unpleasant business and far from the conception of the peace-loving men we had been a short time ago. We were "prisoners" for six long weeks confined within the areas of Camp Bradford, Camp Allen, and Camp Peary, and it was a feeling of relief when the gates were thrown open and we were granted our first liberty.

We remembered those days spent in replacement. We were subjected to new instructors, more drilling, and more marching, but we had learned our lesson well in boot camp and knew that we were good. We took pride in our military appearance. Some of us were placed in scarlet fever quarantine, necessitating weeks of segregation from our mates, yet our military training continued. The more fortunate of us were immediately put in battalions, while others waited weeks. Vacancies in rates of battalions' complement determined the rapidity with which we were assigned. The assignment sheets were posted, and each day everyone sought his name, and sooner or later it appeared.

We remembered those days when we were assigned to Supernumerary Number II, which was later changed to the 90th Construction Battalion. It was a good thing that we had absorbed as much military training in boot camp and in replacement as we had, for we were to receive our ad-

vance training under the ever watchful eyes of the Marines who became our instructors. We thought that we had learned everything of a military nature, yet that was a



THE MARINES TAUGHT US THE HARD BITTER FACTS OF KILLING

mere drop in the bucket as compared to what the Marines pounded into us. There were forced twenty mile marches under full pack; there were the precarious obstacle courses; there were continuous days of monotonous drills. Finally we knew the value of team work; we knew how to take orders and how to execute them; we knew how to get the job done with the least amount of effort. We were taught that there are three ways of doing a job—the right way, the wrong way, and the Navy way. Some of us were fortunate in having been assigned to service schools to learn the Navy way of doing the same trades that we had learned and practiced many years in civilian life. Eight weeks closed our advance training, and although we had thought we were good before, we were much nearer to perfection after having been impregnated with the best training the Navy could administer. Much to our surprise the 90th Construction Battalion was divided into three sections. One-half of the battalion was made into the 1009th C.B. Detachment, one-quarter of the battalion went to the Fleet Marine Force at New River, North Carolina, and Company D and a portion of Headquarters Company comprised Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit Number 512.

We remembered those liberties spent in Williamsburg, Richmond, and other nearby communities. The town of Williamsburg was, and still is, one of the most interesting places on the East Coast, having been reconstructed by the Rockefeller Foundation to appear as it had during the time of the English rule. Service men were invited on conducted tours through those 18th century mansions, palaces, capitol, armory, and taverns. We felt somewhat out of place among the pewter, heavy chests, and antiques. Although hard liquor was not for sale openly, it could be had for a price, yet most of us stayed within the bounds of the old taverns to enjoy quart mugs of beer and ale. The girls,



THE GIRLS IN WILLIAMSBURG WERE PRACTICALLY UNTOUCHABLE

students of William and Mary College, were under age and practically untouchable. Richmond was a sightseer's paradise and far removed from the sedate Williamsburg. One could find there what he wanted—be it church services or the proverbial wine, women, and song.

And so it was on that hot June day after six months of training, we were leaving Camp Peary to take our place among the millions of men who were dedicated to the cause of freedom, equality and justice. We were snapped to attention as Captain Ware's black sedan came into view. He and Admiral Morales rode by, looked us over, and went



on their way with the feeling that at least 275 officers and men had graduated with honors from that military college.

It was not long before the train rounded the curve; and, while we were engulfed in its compartments and coaches, the band played "California Here I Come." Traveling on a troop train can be perhaps the most monotonous experience a person can have. We were invariably standing in line for chow as there was only one diner, and chow at its best on one of those trains was none too good. We managed to while away the hours reading, sleeping, and watching the landscape fade into the East. Occasionally the train would stop giving us a chance for exercise. It took five days and six nights to zigzag across the continent, and finally we arrived in Port Hueneme, California, 18 June 1943.

Those men who had not taken their leave from Camp Peary were given leave from Hueneme. That was the last chance of visiting loved ones before shoving off to parts unknown. To many it was the first time they had been to the sunny shores of Southern California; to many it was a disappointment; but everyone made liberty in the fabulous Hollywood. Those more fortunate were taken on conducted tours through the studios, while the less fortunate stood on the outside wondering what was going on within the sound stages.

The men who were not on leave were again thrown into military training and service schools. Days passed into weeks, and it was three weeks after our arrival when we had our first indication of what part of the world we were to be sent. We were issued fleece lined coats, woolen underwear, arctics, and everything essential for living in the cold north. We entrained 7 July 1943 at Port Hueneme and for two days rode through the beautiful redwood forests of California and Oregon, under the shadows of snow capped Mount Shasta and Mount Rainier and over the rivers and valleys to Seattle, Washington.



The S.S. MORMACHAWK, the ship that was destined to transport us to "Island X," was docked at her berth, awaiting our arrival. We immediately boarded ship. Liberty was granted to a few men who lived in Seattle, but the remainder of us were permitted only to walk around the Naval premises. The following morning, 11 July 1943, the MORMACHAWK dropped her lines, and, as she got underway, the stern of the ship hit the end of the pier, but went slowly on her course. It was a comforting sight to see small Coast Guard boats encircle us. Those boats were to be our escorts for two days, together with a Navy blimp that hovered over us, searching for marauding submarines. With a feeling of security we settled down to enjoy the beautiful scenery of Puget Sound. At the mouth of the Sound, the Skipper pointed the bow to the West. The ship



rolled and tossed, and it was not very long until the rails were lined with heaving, seasick, dry land sailors. Some of the men, among whom was H. J. Miller, continued to be sick throughout the entire voyage. After a westward course





*Cross Mountain.*

of approximately seventy-five miles, the MORMACHAWK turned due North. Bets were flying high, and scuttlebutt outdid itself. We were going to Attu, Kiska, Dutch Harbor, and Seward. No one knew, but everyone passed on each bit of information to his mates, and each time a little more was added. The farther North we traveled, the longer the evenings grew. It was 2130 the 13th of July that land was first sighted. Little did we know that this island was to be the future home for some of us.

In the distance the mainland became clearer and clearer with beautiful, snow capped Harbor Mountain blocking our course. Cross Mountain, to the starboard, reflected its snow crested cross into the green waters of the bay. At 2330 the MORMACHAWK turned into Sitka Channel, and a sight, long to be remembered, was old Baranoff Castle overlooking the channel. From its windows dozens of fe-

as a Japanese prison camp during the Russian regime and which was now to be used as our base of operations.

We spent the remainder of the night aboard ship, and each of us, eager to get a better view of his new home, awakened early the next morning to watch the fishing boats at anchor and to view the beautiful northern scenery. After



*Fishing Fleet.*



chow we disembarked, loaded our gear on trucks, and marched in a military manner to our quarters. It was a feeling of disbelief when we walked into a three story, steam heated barracks complete with tile heads and showers, lounge, double decked steel bunks, eight inch thick mattresses, steel lockers, and a magnificent view from every

males waved flags and bunting with large lettering—WELCOME, U.S.O. That was the first indication that "Island X" was not to be as dismal as our instructors had painted it back in dear old Virginia. The ship tied up to the dock on Japonski Island, an island that had formerly been used



*Lt. Mattice, Lt. Hill, and Chief Warrant Officer Strehlau.*

window. The officers fared even better. They occupied one-half of a two-story duplex furnished with an overstuffed living room set, a Chippendale dining room set, an all electric kitchen, and private bed rooms with twin beds. After we had squared away our gear, we took a tour of the base. The dispensary was near our barracks and was staffed with the best medical personnel, including two nurses, that the Navy could obtain. We were amazed when we walked into the mess hall. The interior was in white, stainless steel steam tables and coffee urns, tile deck, clean linoleum topped tables, and a radio-victrola combination. The library possessed practically everything one would want to read, and it afforded a quiet place in which to study or read current newspapers, magazines, and books. The recreation building housed the theater, canteen, basketball court, bowling alleys, billiard tables, exercise rooms, heads and showers. The channel was jammed with small Navy boats to be used for fishing. All in all it was a far cry from the training camps that we had experienced, and we considered ourselves lucky to have fallen into the lap of luxury.

We did not have long to tarry before our work was cut out for us. No sooner had Lt. Hill paid his respects to Captain R. S. Taylor, Skipper of the base, and to Lt. L. L. Willard, Public Works Officer, than work assignments began to take form. Two major construction projects with supporting activities had to be started immediately. This was the organization set-up: Lt. Hill, Officer in Charge of C.B.M.U. 512; Lt. Mattice, Engineer in charge of construction; Ensign Wolaver, Superintendent of construction at Makhnati; Warrant Officer Bell, Superintendent of construction at Biorka; and Warrant Officer Strehlau, Superintendent of garage and heavy equipment.



*Surf beating against volcanic rocks.*

The first job to get underway was the completion of an Army installation on Biorka, the island that we had first sighted on our way to Japonski. Biorka covered an area of approximately eighteen square miles. A natural bay guarded the entrance to the island and was supported by a newly constructed "T" dock. There were two small sandy beaches, but the majority of the coast line was a mass of rocks and cliffs with the surf rising at times from 50 to 100 feet. The island was hilly. Fir, spruce and pine trees towered 90 feet in the sky at the beach while on top of the hills only scrawny scrubs would grow due to the high velocity of the winds that whipped across the island. The island, in its beginning, was nothing more than a volcanic rock, but as time progressed enough soil accumulated to support trees and vegetation. Gradually the island was covered with muskeg, a substance composed of volcanic ash, hair roots, and rotting vegetation. This muskeg was a continual hazard which acted like quicksand, ranging from two feet to thirty feet deep. Rainfall constituted the only source of water, but there was always an abundance. Although it did not taste bad, it was the color of vinegar from seepage through the muskeg. The island as a whole was very bleak and dreary.

On the 15th of July Chief Whalen and a detail of sixteen men left for Biorka to prepare the campsite for approximately sixty permanent personnel. Immediately upon



their arrival, they began the job of cleaning barracks, mess hall, sickbay, showers and heads, all of which had been previously occupied by employees of a private contracting firm. The following day Mr. Bell and the remainder of the crew arrived on the Nile, a 75 foot tug that was to play an important role in our construction program. An or-



*The Nile.*

ganization was set up under the very capable direction of Mr. Bell. William Campbell acted as Mr. Bell's assistant engineer, and it was partly through his efforts and leadership that the work progressed so rapidly. It was 512's loss when he received his commission as Ensign a few months later and returned to the states for further assignment. Supporting activities were set up to facilitate the construction of the major project. F. F. Hatfield was in charge of the sickbay, and as a result of his untiring efforts and long hours of duty, we were kept in the best of physical condition, and man hours lost due to illness were far below the minimum. George White presided over the galley which was staffed with such excellent cooks as W. F. McNew and R. F. Keefe. These three men did much to keep the morale of the men high with their palatable chow. Chief Duncan had charge of the garage and heavy equipment, a major assignment in itself in view of the fact that only broken-down trucks, bulldozers, and a shovel were available for use.

Chief P. M. Edwards worked with Chief Duncan in keeping the equipment in working order. The electrical crew was headed by Chief Krumenaker; J. R. Marquis supervised plumbing and pipe fitting; V. A. Cusanello was labor boss. Chief Whalen was in charge of construction crews, while Chief Sheridan handled camp maintenance and waterfront activities.

The Army installation was located on the highest point of the island, approximately three and one-half miles from the beach. A rough, corduroy road had long been used, and the steady hauling of materials to the project soon put this road in a useless condition. It would have been impossible to surface the road due to the quicksand-like muskeg and the lack of gravel. The only other solution was to build a wooden road. The material was close at hand because a few days after our arrival, a violent storm had torn away our new dock and had tossed the lumber and piling high on the beach. Although it was a catastrophe insofar as our supply lines from the base were concerned, it was a boon to our wooden road. All hands turned to the construction of the road, and it was not long before it was completed. A covering of rock and sand protected it from the grinding treads of the caterpillar. A maintenance crew kept the road in usable condition throughout our stay.

Work on the major installation was continually hampered by rain. During the first three months of operation only three days were free from rain. Each man wore rain gear, but after several hours of working outside, the rain gear would be soaked. Everyone had to change his clothes at noon and again at night. When he ran out of clean, dry clothes, he was confined to his barracks as a prevention against colds. Service from Japonski was very irregular, and it was a job to keep us supplied with the bare necessities.





ONCE IN A WHILE THE SUN WOULD TRY TO BREAK THROUGH.

The installation required tons and tons of concrete, and to obtain it required untold ingenuity. Cement in bags was transported from Japonski to Biorka on barges or rafts, usually pulled by the Nile, which entailed working with the tides. The rafts and barges were beached at medium,



*Barge being pulled by the Nile.*

out-going tides, and all hands had to turn to to unload the cement. The time of day or night made no difference—the material had to be unloaded. It was hauled on trucks from the beach to the project and stowed in a waterproof shed. Procurement of aggregate and sand was another problem. Chief Edwards operated the shovel at the beach to dig

out all the stone and sand possible without changing the coast line. This material was then hauled to the job where a stone crusher had been assembled. Rock was put through the machine and crushed to the required size, washed and screened. Water used for washing aggregate and sand was pumped from a muskeg hole 900 feet away through forty-five length of two inch pipe. This water supply was inexhaustable as it rained each day, replenishing that which had been previously used.

Transportation of supplies hampered progress on the job. Storms frequently disrupted the under water telephone communications. Vitally needed supplies could not be ordered from the base, and at times those that were ordered could not be procured at Japonski; consequently weeks and sometimes months passed before replacement parts arrived from the states. The Army maintained a regular boat schedule to Biorka, and we had the Nile and several smaller crafts that made the trip laden with material and equipment. During extremely rough weather, all boats were held at anchor leaving Biorka isolated.

To add to the many troubles confronting these toiling Seabees, the garage burnt down. A truck was on the grease rack, and someone was burning off a tie bolt when sparks from the cutting torch ignited gasoline fumes arising from the deck. The garage and all its contents were consumed in a blazing inferno in a few minutes. A broken-down truck in front of the garage was snaked away to safety, and all that could be done was to spray water on gasoline drums near the garage to keep them from exploding. The loss of the truck, a new International motor, and tools was a serious blow, but it did not take long to erect another garage and to procure tools and equipment from the base.

Not all of our time was spent in working. There were

limited recreational facilities. One of the buildings was converted into a theater and canteen. We had movies three times a week with Stanley Narog acting as projectionist. There were tables in the canteen where we sipped

the trip over the rough water was not worth the trouble of going because invariably most of us would get seasick. So, we were contented to spend the long weekends on the island searching for whatever meager diversions we could find. We enjoyed fishing from skiffs, and the small halibut that we caught supplemented our diet. There was an abundance of deer on the island; and when our meat supply ran low, a nice, tender buck was killed. Approximately forty mink were caught during our stay. Mallard ducks were plentiful, and bald headed eagles were forever keeping a watchful eye on us. A natural cove afforded us a perfect target range. We set up our targets on one side and fired from the other. Cartons of cigarettes constituted prizes for the best marksmanship. When the weather was too bad for anything out doors, we stayed in the barracks, listening to the radio, reading, writing, or just lying in the sack dreaming of our loved ones back home and wishing that the war would end.

Work on the project continued as rapidly as possible, then one day, ten months after we had first set foot on Biorka, orders came for us to pack up our gear and return to the base. Those were busy days because we had accumulated quite a bit of material and supplies during the time we had been there. The faithful old Nile, together with Army boats and barges, carried us and our equipment back to the base. As Biorka faded in the distance there was a feeling of happiness for some of us to leave the island, while for others there was a feeling of reluctance because we had enjoyed the peace and quietude of the island and the many friendships we had made that only an isolation can bring.



OH, THOSE GOOD OLD BEER PARTIES!

our beer and cokes. Chiet Whalen presided over ship service, selling those necessities that were obtainable from the base. Saturday night was always the big night at Biorka. Almost all of the crew would assemble in the canteen for hours of mass bingo. Cartons of cigarettes or perhaps cans of beer were the prizes. It was necessary that one-quarter of the crew be aboard at all times, and at the beginning of our duty three-quarters of us went to Sitka for liberty over the weekends. We soon learned that



*Fishing from a skiff.*





*Makhnati crew.*

Immediately after the selection of men for the Biorka job, another crew of approximately sixty men was picked for our Makhnati project. Mr. Wolaver was appointed superintendent of construction and was very capably assisted by Chiefs Braden, Weimer, Taylor, and Johnson.

Makhnati was originally an island, one of a chain of small islands jutting off Japonski into the open sea. Makhnati was the farthest, and all of these islands were connected by a three mile causeway with Japonski. Incoming tides and strong currents continually undermined the causeway, necessitating a constant patrol to keep it in repair. Gigantic waves often broke over the causeway, throwing huge boulders on the runway; and many mornings on our way to work we had to bulldoze these rocks over the side before we could proceed. Since our Makhnati project was only



*Japonski and island chain before the war.*



*Our barracks and Millersville.*

three miles away, we lived in our steam heated barracks and commuted back and forth to chow, thus we enjoyed all the recreational facilities and entertainment available at the base. We were granted liberty every fourth night, and as a whole our work on Makhnati was much more pleasant than at island projects.

Construction on military installations had already been started and abandoned when we arrived. For the first three weeks we tore down old forms, policed the area, and brought in material and supplies. Chief Weimer, Brinker, Holland, Edwards and their crews of carpenters then began erecting forms. Shorty McConnell had charge of laying the reinforcing steel, and each piece of steel was welded into place. Chief Johnson laid his maze of electrical conduits that were to be embedded in concrete. At last when everything was in readiness for the pour, the crews were divided into two groups of twelve hour shifts with Chief Weimer and Brinker in charge of one and Chief Braden and Chief Taylor in charge of the other. Each pour required from twenty-four to thirty-six hours of continuous work; and almost invariably when a pour was scheduled, the sky would open, and we would be deluged with rain for days. Inclement weather never stopped a Seabee. We worked in the rain unprotected by watersoaked rain gear.

Unlike other island projects, concrete was not mixed at





*Concrete plant.*

the job. Since the gravel bunkers were located on the other side of Sitka, sand and aggregate were hauled by truck to the dock where they were dumped onto a barge. The barge was then towed across the channel and unloaded by means of a stiff-leg which deposited the material on a conveyor belt. This belt carried the sand and gravel into



*Top: Makhnati construction.  
Bottom: Bay City at work.*

the concrete mixer that was operated by Charlie Nutt and his crew. After the concrete was mixed, it was hauled in trucks over the causeway to the job. The trucks backed onto a ramp and dumped the concrete into a bucket which was pulled with a winch to the top of our specially designed tower. At the top the bucket tripped, spilling the concrete into a hopper, and then from the hopper the concrete was poured into a metal chute and directed to awaiting forms. It was a rather long, drawn out process to get concrete, but with everyone working as a team, each pour was successful and not a single section had to be repoured.

As soon as the deck, bulkheads, and overhead had been poured, interior construction began. Chief Johnson directed his crew in the installation of one of the most intricate electrical systems ever designed. To have said it was a good job would have been a masterpiece of understatement—it was perfect; it had to be perfect. Chief Irvin and his metalsmiths prefabricated all ventilating and heating ducts in the sheet metal shop, then installed them throughout the projects. The buildings were air conditioned with air coming from the outside into a machine where it was either cooled or heated, gasproofed, and humidified. Havlicek and Hincks handled the plumbing and pipefitting.

There was a considerable amount of grading to be done. Tura did the surveying, and H. C. Cook operated the bulldozer, pushing down trees and leveling the ground. It was necessary that a rocky hill be removed, so Cochran and Sanders were called to do the blasting. In a short time there was no hill. Buck Junell, Pottruff, and Oswald operated the Bay City crane. This piece of machinery was the most used equipment on the entire job and required skill in operating it. Gagnon administered first aid to our cuts and bruises.

Morale of the men was always high. We had a lot of practical jokers who were forever playing jokes on someone, and newcomers seemed to suffer the worst. One day one



of our men who had not had much outside construction experience came to work with us. We were stripping forms at the time, and this man was instructed to remove a steel dowel that was embedded about twelve inches in concrete. He got a wrench and did his best to unscrew it, but it would not budge. He got a larger wrench and set to work with more vigor; but after much tugging and twisting and stuttering, he decided it was a pretty bad joke and gave it up. Another time he was sent from one person to another in quest of a sawdust blower to remove some sawdust that had collected between forms. On one of Lt. Willard's inspection tours he brought one of the Civil Service secretaries with him. McConnell was busy welding and did not see them come in the building. Something went wrong, and Mac went into a routine of cursing that would have put the saltiest of old time sailors to shame; whereupon the secretary made a nonchalant exit as fast as possible.



McCONNELL'S MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT

As the work progressed and only the interior remained to be completed, most of our men were sent to various island projects. During the course of our construction, we were honored with frequent inspections by high dignitaries, among whom were Admiral Whiting, General Buckner, and

the Truman Committee. Mr. Wolaver usually played the part of a guide and after he had shown General Buckner and his staff through the installations, General Buckner complimented our efforts, and said, "Everywhere I go, I always find the Seabees doing a swell job."

Our project was completed eight months after it was started, and immediately upon our departure, the Army moved in to occupy the fortification.



Japonski, our operational base, was the focal point from which flowed material, supplies, and leadership. Enormous warehouses contained practically everything that was needed, and that which was not available was prefabricated in our many service shops. Much of the credit for our successful construction program was due to the untiring efforts of the men who operated these shops.

The nerve center of both military installations and supporting activities was, of course, our office where Lt. Hill and Lt. Mattice directed all operations. Mr. Hill took care of the men of the Unit, playing the roll of father, Chaplain, and advisor. Every man in the Unit felt free to bring his troubles to him, knowing that Mr. Hill would do his utmost to solve his problems. Mr. Mattice was engineer in charge of all construction projects which kept him busy straightening out the many engineering problems that constantly arose. He and Mr. Hill made periodic inspections of our work, keeping us on the straight and narrow path. Wylie, McDonough, Bowen, and Van Wyk handled the personnel records and voluminous reports.

Mr. Mattice also supervised the drafting department which was the most complete and competent drafting department in Alaska. Plans and specifications of every job



*Drafting department.*

in that sector were turned out on the drafting tables with clocklike precision. Larson, Jennings, Knorr, and A. L. Poulin worked long hours preparing the ground work for our projects.

The electrical department was headed by Chief Johnson. From Japonski he supervised the intricate electrical and telephone installations at each one of our island projects. His electrical assistants were Chief Krumenaker, Gresham, Cooper, Moores, Herene, and Zych. O'Leary, Maiers, Nowak, Tonella, and Kline handled telephone and communication maintenance.

Mr. Strehlau was in charge of the garage, and it was a tremendous task to keep hundreds of trucks, jeeps, and



*Garage crew.*

heavy equipment rolling. Slippery roads and continuous hauling of material required constant repair work. Unfortunately our garage caught fire and burned to the ground one Sunday, leaving nothing but charred skeletons of trucks and equipment. Although it was a serious blow to our program, the damage was repaired, and garage work was carried on the next day.

The maintenance shop was under the watchful eyes of Mr. Sheridan, who had subsequently been promoted from Chief Petty Officer to Warrant Officer. This department was the trouble-shooting unit. If anything went wrong on the base, the maintenance shop was called. Chief Hetherington was in charge of the carpenter shop which prefabricated cabinets, doors, and other installations for our projects. Bordelon, Kurcab, and Tombari turned out machine tools and equipment that could not be drawn from stock. The gravel bunkers, located on the Sitka side, were also under the supervision of Mr. Sheridan. From these bunkers most of the aggregate and sand used in the Army projects was obtained.

The sheet metal and welding shop was always a beehive of activity. Chief Irvin and his metalsmiths prefabricated all ventilating and heating ducts in the shop and then installed them in the projects. Fred Lawton, our blacksmith, wielded the hammer and manipulated the forge without the aid of the proverbial shade of the chestnut tree. At the close of a day's business the shop became the number one hobby shop where we turned out gifts for our friends back home.

The supply department was operated by Commander R. G. Culbertson who was assisted by Chief Manning, George Cloud, Lanier, and Keith. It was a tremendous task of ordering and distributing supplies, and it was a problem to anticipate future needs because one never knew whether an order would be received for a safety pin

or a bulldozer. George Colvin took care of our disbursing needs.

Chief Ashdown and Chief Hines controlled waterfront and shipping which was, perhaps, our most vital supporting activity. Without the services of the boats and their crews, our work in Alaska could not even have started. Except for our project on Makhnati every ounce of supplies and material depended on transportation by boat and barge. Sevigny was skipper of the Nile and was competently supported by Simpson, Saker, Potoniec, Revella, Townson, and Shoffler. The Nile continually plowed its way back and forth



*Crew of the Nile.*

through storms and heavy seas and was constantly in danger of being thrown onto rocks that seemed to pop out of the sea in every direction; however, Sevigny knew his navigation and each member of the crew knew his job, and the Nile always returned safely to its berth. R. A. Turner and R. A. Paquin piloted the Henry and the Dorothy, while Louie Poulin and Jensen operated the CB-6. These were the smaller boats that hauled tons of material yet got in and out of the most treacherous places.

On the 27th of March the Nile was towing a 120 ton barge through gigantic waves in the middle channel of Sitka Harbor when a three inch tow line snapped, leaving the barge overturned and awash. The tossing barge was a menace to navigation and on the verge of breaking up in

the heavy surf of Passage Island Rock. Chief Ashdown asked for three volunteers to save the barge, and immediately Turner, Potoniec and Saker eagerly stepped forward. Turner's outstanding skill in navigating a small boat enabled him to deposit Potoniec and Saker on the barge. There was nothing with which to brace themselves, so they laid flat on their stomachs and drove out a drain plug, secured a hawser to a crowbar, and inserted the bar into the hole. Turner reapproached the barge, took aboard his two passengers, and maneuvered to safety. The bravery of these three men saved the Navy a \$50,000.00 barge as well as removed the danger to many other crafts in the Channel.

There was a considerable amount of underwater work to be done which was handled by our diving crew consisting of Jensen, diver; Louie Poulin, tender, and Merry, radio-



*Jensen on the diving platform.*

man, together with the services of various members of the boat crews. This smooth functioning unit repaired the bottoms of ships, salvaged material that had been accidentally dropped overboard, surveyed the floor of the channel, and shored up holes in the water tight bulkhead of a destroyer that had had its stern blown off by a floating mine. A job of cutting samples of pilings on the gravel bunkers was given to them, so Poulin dressed Jensen in his heavy diving



suit, and Jensen made the dive. As he was working on the pilings, for some reason never determined, carbon monoxide accumulated in the suit, and Jensen gradually lost consciousness; however, before he passed out, he radioed his condition to Merry. He was quickly raised, but his heavy iron shoes caught on the ladder, and he could not be brought to the surface. Merry dived into the water to extricate him, but it took three dives in the icy water before Jensen was brought to the surface. His suit was cut off, and both he and Merry were rushed to the hospital—luckily neither of them suffered ill effects from the ordeal.

Boat repair and dock building was under the supervision of Chief Di Matteo. The bottoms of barges were continually knocked out by heavy surfs throwing the barges onto beaches against protruding rocks. Teredos, long saltwater worms, ate the bottoms out of barges, boats and pilings; therefore Di Matteo and his crew were always busy working with heavy timbers repairing the damage. Docks had to be constructed and kept in repair. Storms had a habit of tearing away in a few moments that which had taken weeks to build.

The water supply for both Sitka and Japonski came from a small stream located outside Sitka. Walter Lang and C. E. Smith did an excellent job of operating the water system, cleaning screens, chlorinating the water, and repairing broken water lines. Their job was hazardous and kept

them outdoors in bitter, cold weather most of the time. The cabin at the dam was called "Cascade Castle."

Approximately two weeks after we arrived at Japonski, Hetherington and Marino received temporary orders to do some work at Annette, an island off the coast of Canada. One morning before they had gone to work, a seaplane circled overhead preparing to land in the bay. The plane hit a windfall and pancaked into the water. Marino and two regular Navy men, Butler and Flynn, jumped into a boat and sped to the scene of the accident. They saved the lives of three of the passengers, and for their bravery they were awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal.



Mr. Wolaver was placed in charge of construction of three projects on Kayak, an island guarding the entrance to Sitka Channel. Kayak in reality was a group of small islands separated only by canyon-like gullies that had been cut through the volcanic rock by the endless, turbulent surf. During rough weather, enormous waves rushed through these depressions with the force of a freight train sending mountainous walls of water high into the air. There were no



*Cascade dam.*



*Gullies at low tide.*



beaches, but instead, sheer rocky cliffs dropped horizontally into the sea. The islands were covered with trees and, of course, the ever present, soggy muskeg. Continuous rains never permitted the islands to dry, and during our occupation, there was scarcely a day that it did not rain.

It was a cold, rainy day, 3 February 1944, when R. E. Edwards, Holland, Gibson, and Hasson shoved off in the Henry for Kayak to get the jobs started. A few Army men were living on the island, so our four men moved in with them. A quonset hut constituted the living quarters, and a mess hall, similar to a stateside corner lunch stand, was soon in operation. These four men immediately cleared away the sites for the projects and actual construction began to take form. Additional men were sent to the islands from time to time to speed up the work, and about one-quarter of the projects had been completed when Mr. Bell and a portion of his Biorka crew arrived to complete the jobs. Chief Whalen took over the duties of construction superintendent. In addition to this semi-permanent crew, approximately twelve men commuted from Japonski each day to further speed the construction.

There was absolutely nothing on Kayak that could be used for construction material; consequently every kind of material and supplies had to be transported from our operational base to the islands. There was a small dock, but it was inadequate inasmuch as pilings could not be driven into the volcanic rock, and it was continually being washed away



*Lighter loaded with sacks of aggregate.*

by the pounding waves. A temporary unloading platform was built at the water's edge which made the handling of sand, gravel, cement and other material much easier. Only small boats and rafts could get close to the platform, and even on the calmest days, it was a treacherous business and more than one Seabee received an icy bath. Aggregate and sand were transported and hand-handled in fifty pound sacks. On the days that this material arrived all hands would be pulled off the jobs to unload it, then the following day would be spent carrying it by hand to the concrete mixer. The water problem was solved by the procurement of a 275 gallon tank and twenty-five oil drums. A pipe line was run from the dock to the tank, and an Army water barge periodically pumped our tank and drums full of water.



*Unloading material.*

The mixer was placed on the highest point, and the three structures were poured from there. One building right over this location was poured by erecting a derrick boom on a tree just higher than the building itself. The load lines were sheaved and the leads hooked onto a winch. This eliminated a great deal of manual labor and speeded the pouring of the job. The second job, located on a separate island, about three hundred feet away, was poured by the use of a two-way high line which was secured to a spot higher than the building. A working platform was built and the whole job was poured by the use of chutes from the platform. The third structure was poured by means of a one-way high

line, and the material was pulled uphill by power and returned to the mixer by gravity. It required ingenuity to overcome the many problems of this type of construction,



*Reading from Top to Bottom: Unloading material. Pouring concrete in shute. Highline between islands. Concrete shute. Concrete crew at work.*

and we were continually hampered by ice, snow, sleet, and rain. The elements seemed always to be against us.

The islands were so small that there was practically no recreational facilities. After working all day, most of us were content to return to the hut to read, write, or listen to the radio. Fishing was the most enjoyed sport. We



*"MAC'S FOLLY GETS THE LAUNCH ON WATERS."*

would hand-line fish from the rocks or use a small skiff. This row boat was brought from Japoniski, and McDuffee and Gibson spent three days caulking and painting it. They decided to name it "Helen" in honor of Mac's wife, but one of our humorists beat them to the punch and painted on its bow, "Mac's Folly." One day Gibson decided to fish from the skiff, which was moored to the dock, and took a big hunk of Keefe's best sirloin steaks to use as bait. He climbed into the skiff, shoved away from the dock, and put all of his weight on the oars. The skiff rowed hard; he gave a heavier pull; the oar locks came out; he fell flat of his back on the deck. Upon investigation he found a sack of cement under his boat tied with wire to the oar locks. On the dock Edwards was "busting a gut" laughing at him. Sea lions made their home on an adjoining island and were always swimming around Kayak. Eagles and ravens made their nests in the trees. Life on the islands was not very interesting, and we always returned to the base each Saturday afternoon to enjoy liberty in Sitka.

An almost near fatal accident happened one evening to a member of the crew that commuted to Kayak each day.

Lafferty was sitting on the bow of the Henry when a sudden wave caused him to fall overboard. He fell directly under the boat, and as it passed over him, he pushed himself downward. Each time he came up, the boat would be overhead. He miraculously missed being hit by the screw, and when he had passed that, he found himself under the bottom of an Army lighter that was being towed by the Henry. After both vessels had passed over him and after he finally came up to the fresh air, he was hauled aboard. He resolved never to sit on the bow of a boat again.

The construction jobs on Kayak were completed the 27th of July. Securing was celebrated by Keefe's cooking one of his best turkey dinners with all the "fixins," topped off with four cases of free beer. All excess material and supplies were loaded onto barges for transfer back to the base. It was a feeling of satisfaction of a job well done when we cast off the Henry's lines and left Kayak—never to return.



The morning of 4th of February found Chief Weimer and his crew of nine men boarding the Normandie that was to carry us to Lisianski Point for the purpose of constructing additional Army installations under the supervision of Mr. Wolaver. The Normandie, perhaps the most un-



orthodox craft in the Alaskan waters, had been reconstructed from a liberty boat into a nightmare resembling nothing pertaining to a boat, a barge, or a seagoing lighter;

but it was durable, dependable, and a work-horse of the first water. Lisianski Point was located on an island about one and a half hours by boat from Japonski, guarding the inland route to Old Sitka and to Sitka Channel. A small, shallow bay afforded a haven for small crafts that tied up to a floating dock. High, treacherous, tree-covered mountains rose directly from the water's edge; and except for a delta where the campsite was situated, there was no other possible landing. A miniature stream, seemingly innocent during the short dry season and a raging torrent at a moment's notice after a heavy rain, separated the galley and the quonset hut that was occupied by three Army men.

Our first job was to give the hut and galley, as well as the entire campsite, a thorough cleaning. This done, we set to work erecting a substantial bridge over the stream, and then all hands turned to for the construction job which we had been sent to do. The Army always seemed to pick out a site for its installations in the most inaccessible places, and in picking out this site, it outdid itself. The foundations for the first job had to be laid at 208 feet straight up the face of the mountain. Naturally, material could not be carried to the top by hand, so a three-quarter inch steel cable was secured to a tree at the base of the mountain, and all of us strained, swore, and said unkind things about the Japanese while we tugged the other end of the cable up the mountain. As soon as the cable was in operation, our labors became easier because we no longer had to crawl up and down the slick, muskeg mountainside. The cable carried both men and material. Pottruff operated the winch. Concrete was mixed at the bottom and was hoisted via the high line to the installation. We finally finished this project, and then, much to our surprise, the Army decided it wanted steps built to the top. Material was transported at varying heights, yet it was a precarious task laying these steps. We were hampered by ice and snow which made footing very difficult, and the wind blew so hard at times



we could not work. There were 189 steps from the base to the first landing, then 111 more steps to the top. A two-by-four railing encased the steps. After weeks of climbing up and down the steps, the muscles in our legs became like iron. Gresham and Waters completed the task of stringing a power line to the top. It was the first of June when this installation was finally completed.

The second project did not require as much back-breaking work as had the first one because it was located near the beach on a slight rise. We beached our material barge at three quarter tide, and a high line was suspended from the barge to the project. A concrete mixer was placed on the barge near spots of sand and aggregate and bags of cement. We ran a water line from the stream behind the galley to the barge; however, occasionally this pipe would freeze solid. To overcome this handicap we wrapped the pipe in gasoline soaked burlap and ignited it. It was a simple matter to mix the concrete and send it over the high line to the project.

The third installation was to be erected on a plot of

ground overlooking a rocky cove. We moved our barge around to the cove and secured it to an overhanging rock. Concrete was mixed on the barge and wheeled to the installation in wheelbarrows. Both the second and third projects were completed about the 20th of July.



*Channel near Lisianski Point.*

Lisianski Point was surrounded by the best fishing banks in that part of the country. Salmon would jam the bays and inlets, searching for a fresh water stream in which to spawn. It was a beautiful sight to see a fifteen pound salmon jump into the air. In view of the fact that we were in such a wonderful fishing area, we were constantly bothered with fishing parties coming to our galley for chow. We kept a live box attached to our floating dock in which there were always halibut and salmon awaiting their turn to appear on our menu. Mr. Wolaver, our most ardent fisherman, caught the largest halibut—a 125 pounder. Deer were plentiful, and during the extremely cold weather, we would get in the Normandie and cruise along the shores until we spotted a buck. After it had been killed and dressed, we would bring it to camp and hang it outside on a tree to freeze. A week later we would cut thick, juicy steaks, entirely void of that wild taste, from its haunches. One afternoon eight of us were idling along in the Normandie in search of a deer—each of us boasting what a crack shot he was—and as we rounded a bend, there, big



THE SALMON LEAPED SO HIGH IN THE AIR YOU'D THINK THEY WERE JET-PROPELLED



as life, stood an enormous buck watching us. We fired in unison; the deer looked at us contemptuously, then walked nonchalantly into the woods. That was the exception rather than the rule, for we nearly always returned to camp with either one or two deer. From the first of June to the first of August was the prettiest time of the year. That was the time for new life to begin its battle for survival. Our bay was a parade ground for ducks. As the small skiffs plowed through the water, mother ducks would guide their young to safety. Does would bring their fawns to the mountain stream to drink. During our stay, we made pets out of a fawn and two eaglets. Story, Waters, and Wuethrich caught five mink and several foxes, but all of them were eventually given their freedom.

Since Sitka was so near, about half of us returned to the base each weekend to enjoy a few hours of civilization. The other half liked to stay at camp to fish, hunt, or just rest after a week's hard labor. Chief Weimer received his promotion to Warrant Officer, and, of course, that called for a big party. We could usually depend on Herb Stuck to entertain us with his hillbilly stories and his everlastingly playing "Great Speckled Bird" on the victrola. We sat on the porch in the evenings watching the NORTHLAND or the NORTH SEA plowing its way via the inland route to Seattle. Everytime one of them passed, each of us knew what the others were wishing.

After five months of hard work in snow, sleet, and rain, we finished our projects in record time to the satisfaction of our own officers and to the praise of the Army officers. We packed all of our belongings in the Normandie and headed back to the base for another assignment.



Chief Braden and his crew of about twelve men set out in the Dorothy for Clam Island, an island about three quar-



*Island near Clam.*

ters of an hour's boat ride from Japonski. Since there was no dock, Paquin and Turner anchored the Dorothy in the bay, and we rowed to shore in a skiff. The only entrance to the rock bound island was a "V" shaped inlet from which sharp, volcanic rock protruded. These rocks together with crashing waves made landing hazardous and almost proved fatal to some of us. The island was a dismal sight when we made our first inspection tour, for it was waterlogged from continuous rains, and the muskeg oozed with dark brown seepage.



*Clam Island and crew.*

We moved into a quonset hut that was also used by a few Army personnel. The galley was nearby where Jack Hayman prepared his delicious meatballs and spaghetti. Some unkind person nicknamed him "Meatball," a name that has stuck with him until this day. Our first job was to get the island ship-shape, for we did not like to live in the haphazard manner to which the Army was accustomed.

Our next job, before construction on the installations could begin, was the erection of an unloading platform at the shore. When it was completed, a high line was strung from this platform to the middle of the island where a concrete mixing platform was built. As on other island projects, sand, aggregate and cement were unloaded from



*Army barge.*

barges and hoisted to the concrete mixer. An Army barge brought water once a week, but this was inadequate and had to be supplemented with rain water. From the mixing platform, concrete was hoisted via high lines to the projects. Lenk had two narrow escapes—once a bucket of cement hit him in the back, then another time he fell from a platform built in a tree to steps below. Cussanello also narrowly escaped being crushed to death when he slipped from the rocks into the water where a barge was docked. He managed to swim from between the rocks and the tossing barge just in time.

When our work on Biorka was finished, Mr. Bell took over the supervision of the work on Clam. To speed up the construction program, approximately fifteen men commuted each day from Japonski. With this additional crew, work progressed rapidly.

There were many inconveniences to be borne. Due to the lack of water, we were allowed only one bath a week, and sometimes when the supply of water was exceptionally low, we did not take any. Rough weather often put our telephone out of order, and supplies and material could not be requested from the base. Recreation was practically nonexistent; however since we were so close to Sitka, most of us spent the weekends there. It was fun digging for clams for there was an abundance of them ranging from tiny button clams to enormous plate sized clams with long necks. Clam Island was a haven for bird life which provided us with target practice.



*Chief Krumenaker with long neck clams.*

One weekend when almost everyone had gone to the base, Cochran and Randall were hunting some form of diversion. A barge had washed upon the rocks, and we had been unable to float it away. Cochran decided that the barge might be dynamited back into the ocean, so he and Randall set their charges. The blast knocked the barge into the water, but the heavy surf deposited it in the same location that it had been for so long a time. They were satisfied, though, that it could be done.

Five months after our arrival at Clam, we finished our projects. Our work had not been pleasant, yet there was an inward pleasure in knowing that we had done a swell job. The old Nile made its last trip to the island, and with

the remaining material, equipment, and human cargo aboard slowly made its way back to the base.



Mr. Wolaver's next assignment was the construction of more Army installations at Sound Island, an island, about thirty miles from Japonski, that guarded the inland passage to Sitka. He picked his crew of about sixteen men, and with gear and supplies aboard the CB-6, we set out to spend the next six months in the wilderness. The passage



*Water cascading down the mountainside.*

to Sound was one of the prettiest waterways in that sector. Tree clad mountains, with rippling waterfalls and streams, towered high above the channel, while bald-headed eagles perched silently on the highest trees watched our craft plow through the emerald water.

Since there was no place for living quarters on Sound, we established our campsite on Kirby Point, approximately



*Alaskan Eagle.*

two miles away and separated by very rough water. The Army had previously set up several quonset huts and kept some of its personnel there; so we moved in with the Army. A log cabin, at one time used as a hunting and fishing lodge, served as a mess hall and galley with sleeping quar-



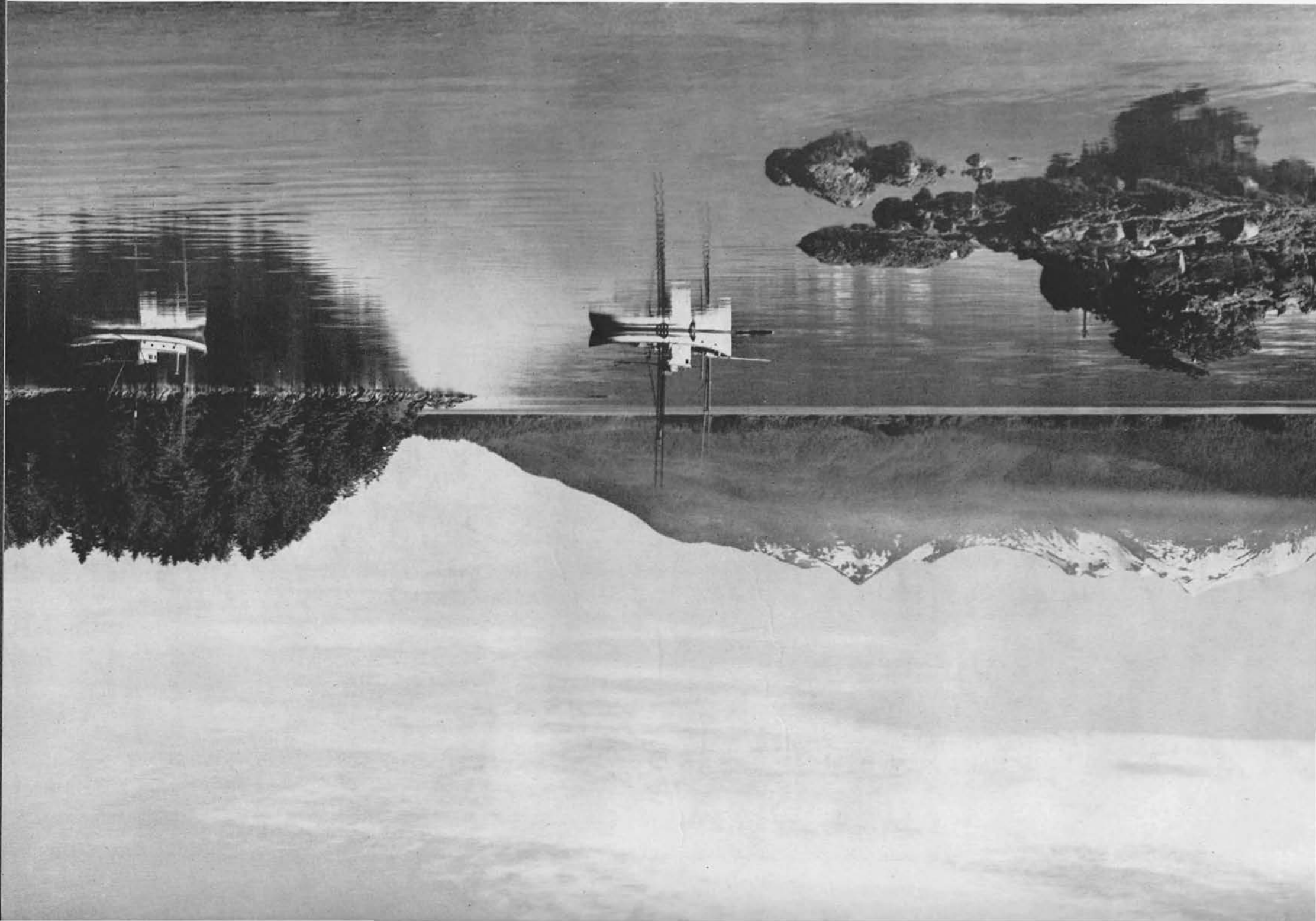
*Sound Island crew.*

ters in the loft for the cooks. The large front room with its massive stone fireplace provided us with a recreation room where we played poker, drank beer, and wrote letters.

Inasmuch as we had to commute back and forth to our job each day, we kept the Henry and Louie Poulin to operate it. This one boat soon proved inadequate when additional personnel arrived, so we procured a small whale-boat. These two boats, together with several row boats,



*Entrance to Sika Channel.*





took care of our transportation needs. There was no dock at our campsite, but merely a float anchored in the bay in water deep enough for the Henry to tie-up, and from this float we rowed to shore in skiffs. Although this inconvenience made handling of supplies for the camp rather difficult, we managed to get them ashore without too much trouble and without more than a dozen men falling into the icy water.



*Work crew rowing to fleet.*

Docking facilities on Sound were somewhat better since we procured a floating dock and secured it to the beach. The Army, this time as before, had picked out a spot for the installations in the most difficult place. Because we had to wind around trees and boulders, building steps to the top was like putting together a jig-saw puzzle. It was necessary to swing a high line from the top to a platform at the base of the steps before construction could begin. Another high line was swung from this platform to the shore where material barges were beached. Jones operated a hoist that was mounted on a barge. The Nile pulled barges of sand, aggregate and cement to the island, and this material was hoisted in a bucket made from an oil drum to the mixing platform. Several drums collected water from a nearby spring. With all the necessary components of concrete on the platform these were mixed in the concrete mixer and hoisted to the top in another oil drum where it was dumped into a chute and poured into forms.

Mr. Wolaver was working on the top one day and happened to see something swimming in the bay. He yelled

for Louie to get the Henry started, scrambled down the side of the mountain, and hurriedly got the boat under way. We all stopped work, and from our vantage point watched what was going on below. Mr. Wolaver stood on the bow

*The Hunter Takes Aim*



of the speeding boat twirling a lasso over his head. When he let it go, the loop dropped over the head of a deer that was swimming from one island to another. With the help of Louie, he dragged the deer into the boat and headed for camp. We cheered from the mountain top.



*SHIP'S COOK M'NEW DISCOVERS GOLD*

The deer was taken to camp and tied to a tree, but upon discovering that the deer was soon to become a mother, she was set free.

The gold rush of '49 and the Yukon days was a mere drop in the bucket as compared to Sound Island's gold rush. McNew, on his days off duty from the galley, found a cave not far distant from the camp. At low tide the floor of the cave contained black soil; so curious-minded Mac got a pan and began working his gold mine. After many hours of backbreaking sifting, he filled a small bottle of that metal that makes men go mad and took it back to camp. He melted the gold with an acetylene torch into a lump big enough to make a necklace for his wife. Jones and Farmerie decided that panning gold was too much work, so they constructed a sluice box and went into the gold business in a big way. They, too, obtained enough gold for necklaces for their wives.



*McHew and Junell holding 15-pound halibut.*

Fishing at Sound, as at other islands, was the most enjoyed pastime. Darkness did not fall until 2200 and later which gave us plenty of time after the close of a day's work to spend several hours in search of denizens of the deep. When evening chow was over, we piled in the two boats and set out for fishing banks nearby. Halibut feed close to the floor of the ocean and are caught on skates or trotlines. Upon arrival at the fishing banks, all hands were

busy baiting the hooks with herring; and after several skates had been anchored, we hand-line fished for an hour or two, then began the task of bringing the skates to the surface. The weight of a skate plus the weight of several 100 pound halibut required four men to haul in the line. Each skate, as it was raised and the fish removed, was rebaited and anchored again to be left there over night. Early the next morning we ran our lines and reaped whatever harvest that was attached. We had a large live box secured to our float where the halibut were kept until a fishing boat came along to buy our product or until we wanted fish for chow. All the time we were at Sound, there was an ample supply of fish in the live box.



*Lt. Hill holding a halibut.*

Hunting was the next most enjoyed outdoor sport, and it did not take much searching to spot a deer roaming along the shore. We had venison in our cold room almost all the time. One of the most pathetic sights to see during the winter months was deer lying dead along the water's edge. When snow covered all vegetation, deer came to the shore to eat the green seaweed while the tide was out. Seaweed caused them to have dysentery, and they would lie down in the seaweed; then when the tide came in, they

were too weak to stand. Hundreds of deer drowned in this manner.

Our work progressed rapidly although we were continually hindered by rain, ice, and snow. Mr. Hill and Mr. Mattice, together with Army officers, made weekly inspections, and we were always the recipients of their praise. During the last of July, we finished our projects and headed back to civilization. We were anxious to get back to Japonski, for scuttlebutt had it that we were going back to the states.



We were granted our first liberty about ten days after we arrived at Japonski. Those ten days had given us sufficient time to hear about Sitka and all that it afforded; we were eager to put our feet on brass rails again. Liberty boats crossed the channel every thirty minutes; so by two and fours and sixes we plied our way across the channel. We had our first close look at a fish storage company by



*Liberty dock—Sitka Side.*

the liberty dock on the Sitka side and the Pioneers Home that occupied a high plot of ground overlooking the channel. Alaskan oldtimers lounged on the grass and on the rock wall and told tales of their experiences during the



*Pioneers Home.*

Yukon days. Whether it was by chance or by forethought two saloons were open for business just a block from the liberty dock. Those who had left Japonski by two and fours and sixes melted into a crowd of seventies and eighties in each of the bars. We were not permitted to buy drinks, for the town populace welcomed us with open arms. One group would buy us beer, another whiskey, another vodka, etc. Since we had been on only a watery diet for some time, it was not long before we were a happy, carefree lot. Many of us had to be taken out for air, only to return for more spirits of Sitka. And so it was—we had gone to Sitka to sightsee and had seen only the four walls of the Silver Foam on the left side of the street and the four walls of Ernie's Bar on the right side of the street. Those who were able to navigate under their own power helped their mates to the liberty dock.



*Main street of Sitka.*



One fourth of the Unit was granted liberty every night from 1700 to 2300 and from 0900 to 2300 on Sundays. This gave us ample time, after our first liberty, to really see what lay within the boundaries of Sitka which had played such an important part in the development of Alaska. It was there that Baranoff, the famous Russian explorer, made his headquarters. He built his castle on a rock over-



*Baranoff Castle.*

looking the channel and Silver Bay. The original castle burned, but another was built in its place; and it was from the windows of the second castle that the U.S.O. girls had welcomed us the night our ship docked at Japonski. Many of the old Russian buildings still stand among which is St.



*Spire of St. Michael's Cathedral.*

Michael's Cathedral. This remarkable edifice, built in 1817, in the form of a cross, is the most historic shrine of religion on the Pacific Coast. The Cathedral is equipped according

to the lavish custom of imperial Russia with gold and silver trimmings, jewelled crowns, robes of costly texture, and paintings of rare beauty and inestimable value. The Cath-



*Mary and Jesus.*

edral contains the world-famous painting of the Madonna and Child. We were invited to attend services there. It was like stepping into another world to listen to their chant-



*Interior of St. Michael's Cathedral.*

ing, to see the expressions on their faces, and to watch their ceremonies. Sheldon Jackson School, a Presbyterian mission, was located near the beach, commanding an excellent view of Silver Bay, Harbor Mountain, and Cross



Mountain. Indian students from all over the Aleutian Chain and Alaska returned to this school each year to further their education. The school was practically a self-sufficient community in that it had its own gardens, fishing boat, church, school, living quarters, bakery, laundry, etc.—all of which were operated by the Indian students under the supervision of Presbyterian teachers. Sheldon Jackson Glee Club was the best in Alaska.



*Sheldon Jackson school.*

Service men enjoyed going to church and attending mass in the Lutheran, Presbyterian, St. Peters By The Sea, and Catholic churches. The Lutheran Service Center was managed by Mrs. Grace Chase, who became the "mother away



*St. Peters By the Sea.*

from home" of many homesick service men. Then there was the U.S.O., housed in a newly constructed building, with its lounge, soft drink bar, dining room and kitchen, library, and ballroom. Ann Howe and Frank Craven were in charge of the U.S.O. and did their best to make us welcome. It was a comfortable place to spend a lazy, rainy Sunday reading, writing, listening to the radio, playing ping pong, dancing, or watching 16 mm movies.

Not far distant from the U.S.O. was Swan Lake Inn overlooking placid Swan Lake. The Inn was under the manage-



*St. Michael's Cathedral and the Lutheran Church.*

ment of a colored woman who had migrated from the deep South and who knew her business. The cost of entertainment was not high—three dollars usually covered an evening of fun and relaxation. One invariably left some part of him behind, and occasionally took something away.

Sitka National Park was a photographer's paradise located just outside of town. There were hundreds of beautifully carved totem poles dispersed throughout the park.



*Carvings on a totem pole.*

The Indians, years ago, had carved symbols of men, fish, animals and birds in the most grotesque manner with each carving having its own particular meaning. In one spot the poles formed a complete circle as if it were a council of war. A replica of the original block house was built on the point and inside were several cannons that had been used by the Russians to protect their town from the marauding Indians. The park was used for picnics, and, of course, there was lovers' lane where uniforms and dresses strolled



*Lover's Lane.*

arm in arm. In the winter the park changed from green to white with the snow covered Sitka spruce piercing the sky. To believe its sublime beauty one would have to see it in all its splendor. Indian River moved slowly on its way to the sea at one side of the Park.



*Totem poles in the winter.*



*Fishing fleet at anchor.*

About half the population of Sitka was made up of Indians. They are a rather stocky race with pronounced features—broad nose, small forehead, and beady, black eyes. They lived in dirty, rundown houses with several families to a house. They made their livelihood either by working in the fish canneries or in actual fishing.

Sitka's primary industry is fishing and fish canneries. It was interesting to watch the fishing fleet at anchor, to see it head out to sea and return loaded with salmon and halibut. Service men were free to watch the canneries in operation, thereby giving them an overall picture of the salmon from its origin to the dinner table. The Sitka Cold storage was also an interesting place to visit. Fish were unloaded from boats into a small flat car which carried the fish into the freezing rooms where the temperature was regulated at different degrees. Each room contained thousands and thousands of frozen halibut and salmon stacked like cordwood. Employees, dressed in layers of woolen underwear and fur coats, could not work long at a time in the freezing rooms and would have to go outside to get warm.

The citizens of Sitka were very hospitable to us. Many of them were Civil Service employees who worked on Japonski. They went out of their way to make us feel wel-

come in their homes, and it was a pleasure for us to get away from the base and enjoy the comforts of their living room and their home-cooked food. For a few pleasant hours it was like being back in the states. We shall never forget our many friends there.

The Navy's recreation department made our work-free hours most enjoyable. Lt. (jg) Henderson worked night and day to keep the regular Navy and the Seabees entertained. If a group wanted to go on a fishing trip, all that was necessary was to give Mr. Henderson a call. He made arrangements for a Navy boat and crew, food, and fishing tackle. We were required only to bait the hook and pull the



*Hunting and fishing party at Fish Bay, Burnley, Spong, Sanders, Mr. Wolaver, Paquin, Gresham, Chief Irvin.*



fish out of the water. During the salmon run, everyone tried his luck. Prior to the salmon's entering the fresh water stream to spawn, it would swim around the bays in schools, jumping out of the water to catch insects and hitting the water with a splash. It was real sport to hook a fifteen pound salmon, for one that size can put up a terrific battle. After the salmon spawns, it dies and floats back to the sea. More easily caught and with less fight were the enormous halibut that ranged from five pound fryers to 150 pounders. Crabs and lobsters abounded at Fish Bay.

Skiing was enjoyed by some of the braver service men. Harbor Mountain, towering above the clouds, formed a natural ski slope as well as a place for a panoramic view of the thousands of islands dotting the coast line. Mr. Mat-tice was one of our most ardent skiers and was president of the Ski Club. Many amateurs' legs, arms, and noses were broken learning the art of how to become a successful skier.

Mt. Edgecumbe, perhaps the most photographed mountain in Alaska, afforded experienced mountain climbers a chance to try their skill. It is a beautiful mountain; in fact, it is an extinct volcano that rises in solitary grandeur from sea level to the edge of its rock-bound crater. Mt. Edge-cumbe is an almost perfect cone in formation with its pu-mice-covered slopes streaked with snow.

Outdoor recreation—fishing, hunting, skiing, bob-sled-ding, boating—was enjoyed by most everyone, yet those more inclined to indoor sports found basketball, volleyball, billiards, and bowling just as enjoyable. Chief Hines coached our basketball team, C. E. Henry was captain of our bowling team, and Chief Irvin managed our undefeated baseball team.



Our work at Biorka, Makhnati, Kayak, Lisianski, Clam, and Sound constituted our major projects; however we did some work at Golf, Little Biorka, Keta, Shoals Point, St. Lazaria, and many more islands.

Scuttlebutt of going home had been passed from one to another for several months, but it did not become official until the middle of July. Those projects that were not finished were rushed to completion with additional manpower, while the job of crating equipment and supplies was given to those men who were not on actual construction. Japon-ski swarmed with hurrying Seabees. We did not have enough lumber to use for crates, so it was decided to dis-mantle an abandoned camp. To get the buildings apart easier a small charge of dynamite was placed in the center of the building, all doors and windows were tightly closed, and the dynamite was detonated. The building then sprang apart, and the lumber was taken to the carpenter shop where Chief Hetherington and his crew of carpenters worked night and day turning out hundreds of packing cases. It was a busy time for the storekeepers, for each crate had to be tagged, showing the number and kind of material within the crate.

The S.S. HENRY P. FAILING was scheduled to arrive at Sitka 5 August 1944, but it was delayed. Rumors were prevalent that it had been sunk by enemy action, and each day when it did not arrive, we began to think that our go-ing home was only a myth. Finally on the afternoon of 11th of August, the most beautiful sight that a tired, homesick Seabee had ever seen was the FAILING emerging from under a fog bank headed toward Japonski. The ship rode high on the crest of the waves; and as she pulled up to the dock, hundreds of service men cheered, whooped, and patted each other on the back. The next five days and nights were spent in loading the ship. All hands worked hard and no one needed encouragement; everyone wanted to get the job finished. On the night of the 16th the ship was at last loaded to capacity and settled low in the water.





*Sitka, Japonski, and Mt. Edgecumbe.*

The following afternoon, with the fighting, building 512 aboard, the FAILING drifted from the dock into the channel while the entire remaining population of Japonski waved farewells and goodbyes to us. Slowly Sitka, Japonski, Biorka, and beautiful snow-clad Mt. Edgecumbe faded into the distance. There was an eagerness to be on our way home, yet there was a reluctance to leave our many friends and the northern country that we had learned to love. We left, though, with a feeling that we had done a good job and knew that in our leaving we had fulfilled our mission in carrying out the tradition of the Navy in its newest branch of the service.



The trip to Seattle was uneventful. Some of us were required to work in the galley, but most of our time was spent in lying on the deck dreaming of the things we would do when we finally arrived home. The FAILING entered Puget Sound on the morning of August 19th, and three hours later it tied-up to the dock in Seattle. It was a pleasant sight to see tall buildings, to watch females drive trucks, and to set foot on our homeland again. The aircraft carrier, U.S.S. CASABLANCA, pulled alongside the dock behind the FAILING, whereupon we immediately transferred to it. This was a surprise that we had not anticipated, for most of us had never seen a carrier, much less

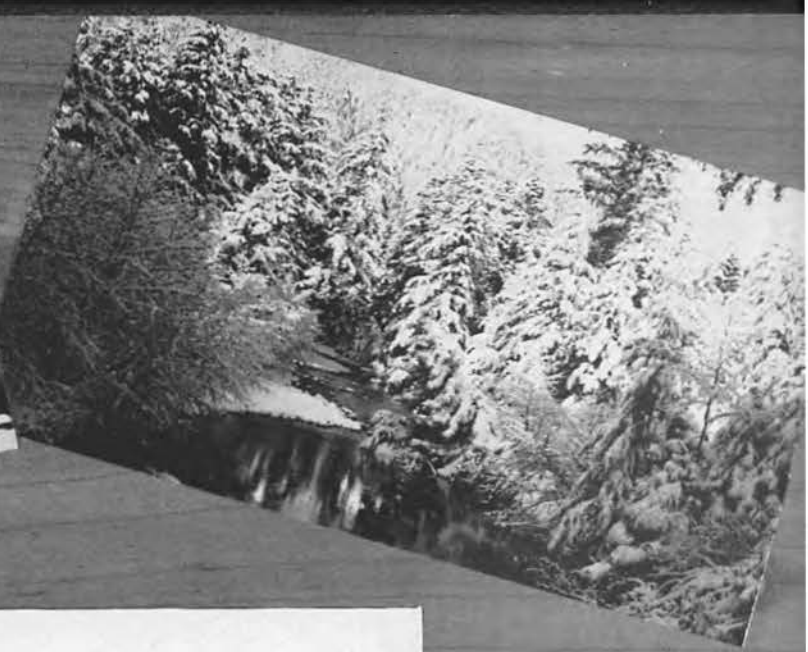


*U.S.S. CASABLANCA*

to have the opportunity of riding on one. We took with us only our personal gear. After we were quartered, ships company officers assigned us to various duties; such as, scraping paint, painting, galley watches, welding, etc. It was interesting to take a tour of the carrier and to see how life was lived on one of Uncle Sam's deadliest weapons.

The CASABLANCA headed into the Sound before day-break the next morning. When it hit the open sea, the carrier began to roll and toss, and as usual, some of us became seasick. Trust a land-lubber sailor to lose his cookies as soon as a slight swell upsets his equilibrium. We were under escort all the way, for it would have been a feather in Tojo's hat to have sunk our carrier. The coast of California loomed into sight the morning of August 22nd, and it was not long before San Francisco could be seen through the fog. All hands were ordered on the flight deck and stood at attention while the CASABLANCA passed under the Golden Gate Bridge. From our vantage point we could see the whole of San Francisco and the many types of ships that crowded the bay. At 1500 the CASABLANCA docked at a pier in Alameda, and from there we boarded buses that took us to Camp Parks. Everyone made a bee-line for the telephone to call his loved ones, and two days later we all left Camp Parks on our thirty days' leave.

Thus ended our first tour of duty of fourteen months in World War II.



# ALASKA

There's a land that's called Alaska,  
Far off the beaten track,  
Where in the vastness of its forests  
Still roams the gaunt wolf pack;  
Where gold is found and deer abound  
In swamp and rocky dell,  
And majesty of ice and snow  
Creates a mystic spell.

No other place in all the world  
Can a dawn come up as clear,  
Or the silence of a moonlit night  
Bring God so very near;  
Or teach a man to understand  
The workings of his mind,  
When it's filled with passion, love or hate  
For others of his kind.

There's a certain humble greatness  
In its lofty mountain peaks,  
And the ripple of its silver lakes  
A soothing voice that speaks  
To king and pawn, and speeds them on  
To seek a greater goal,  
For here, in nature's treasure house  
A man can find his soul.

ROBERT B. STREHLAU,  
CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER,







*Mount Arrowhead*





# PART III



Our thirty days' leave ended all too soon, and we found ourselves once more in Camp Parks. Some of us brought our wives back to the West Coast and set up housekeeping in neighboring towns. We needed a thirty days' rest period to recuperate from our leave, but that was not for us. Camp Parks was supposed to be a recuperation center; however, we found it far from that. Again we were thrown into advance training. We marched and drilled and went through battle formations under the instructions of men who had never set foot outside the states. A portion of our Unit attended service schools. It was necessary to transfer out of the Unit about forty men who held high rates and who had physical disabilities, and about seventy seamen were transferred into the Unit to bring our strength up to complement. We were unfortunate in losing Lt. Mattice; however, it was his good fortune to be assigned Officer in Charge of C.B.M.U. 623. Upon Mr. Mattice's leaving, Mr. Wolaver became Executive Officer of our Unit. Mr. Strehlau, Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Weimer were transferred to a replacement pool, while Ensign J. W. Nagle and Warrant Officer L. E. Fine joined C.B.M.U. 512.

After four weeks of intensive training, we were given an embarkation leave of ten days plus travel time. Those men who lived on the East Coast again crossed the continent to spend a few days with their families before shoving off once more. This leave ended November 6th, and the remainder of our time was taken up in preparing for embarkation. We were issued tropical clothing. Boxes of gear were stencilled with the number of the place where we were destined

to go, but the secret of this number was so well kept that none of us could discover where the advance base was located. We only knew that where we were going was hot and mosquito ridden. None of us was too enthusiastic over leaving the states again, for our Unit was held in the states a shorter time than any other battalion or unit. We had been there only 87 days.

Nevertheless, at noon 17 November 1944, buses took us from Camp Parks to Pier No. 7 in San Francisco where we went aboard the M.S. SOMMELSDIJK, a Dutch ship that was to transport us to our next "Island X." All of our equipment had been previously put aboard. We were quartered in the first and second decks of Hold No. 2 near the bow of the ship. It was our good fortune to have drawn such

WE WERE FORTUNATE TO GET ON A CLEAN SHIP. EVEN THE CABINETS HAD BEEN PAINTED.



a clean ship, for it had just been painted. Our bunks, mounted on steel frames, had a canvas cover, and during the day they folded upward, giving us more freedom of movement. After we secured our gear, we went upon deck. At 1900 the SOMMELSDIJK got underway. Again we slipped under Golden Gate Bridge and watched the



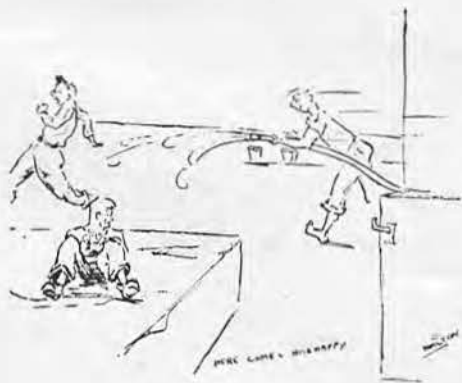
WE WERE OFF AND AWAY.



lights of San Francisco become dimmer and dimmer. We had a feeling of jumping off into the unknown, knowing not whether we would ever return safely to our homes. There were many silent prayers said among the men.

Our first chow aboard ship was the traditional weiners and sauerkraut, the purpose of which was to clean out our systems and to keep seasickness to a minimum. It would have taken all the sauerkraut in Germany to have kept some of us from being seasick. As soon as the ship hit the open sea, fish consumed quantities of weiners and sauerkraut. For the first three days the SOMMELSDIJK heaved and tossed, then it settled down to a smooth course.

Various duties were assigned to us. Our cooks had watches in the galley; we had clean-up details for the sleeping quarters and heads; and Chief Braden had charge of keeping the upper deck clean. We had battle stations-- life rafts, ammunition carriers, and lookouts. A typical day aboard ship was: out of the sack at 0630, stand in line for breakfast for an hour, eat breakfast, shave and shower, clean-up detail, lounge around on deck until 1130, stand in line another hour for noon chow, read, write and play cards during the afternoon, stand in line for evening chow, play cards until bedtime, and then hit the sack to roll and toss the rest of the night. Our routine seldom changed. The first day at sea we were told that we would have two full meals each day with only six or eight cookies and an orange for noon chow. Even though we had no physical exercise, a handful of cookies and an orange hardly filled our stomachs. After the noon chow line had finished, the mess cooks put the cookie boxes and orange crates in G.I. cans to be thrqwn over the side. There were always a few cookies and



oranges left, and we would rummage through the boxes for tidbits. One day in a clear voice over the microphone the troop commander said, "You men get out of those garbage cans." That was the standard joke everafter when we lined up for our cookies and orange. Twice each day the deck had to be hosed down. Cunningham operated the hose; and invariably when we had our cards spread out on the deck, he would come around with the saltwater. Someone would yell, "Here comes Hosehappy," and we would scramble to another spot where he had already washed.

Showering, shaving, and washing clothes was an ordeal. We had to use cold saltwater, and that mixed with shaving cream formed a glue-like substance which was not very conducive to good shaving. We managed to get a pretty good lather with saltwater soap. Our heads were a far cry from those we enjoyed in Alaska. After a week aboard ship our life became monotonous and boring. Our course was west and south, and each day the weather grew hotter. Thanksgiving Day was just like any other day except that we had turkey with all the trimmings.

The 27th of November will be a long remembered occasion, for on that day we crossed the equator and were initiated into the Royal Order of Shellbacks. We had been told more or less what to expect, but did not know it was to be so bad. Rank did not mean a thing; in fact, the officers suffered just a little more than the seamen, and they were the first to receive their initiation. We were instructed to remove all of our clothes except our undershorts which were to be worn backwards. We had to crawl on our hands and knees from the bow of the ship to Hold No. 4. After a saltwater bath, we crawled through a double line of paddles, then we were painted from stem to stern with tar and grease, a "dentist" shot foul tasting brew in our mouth, a "barber" cut our hair, we were given a rotten egg shampoo, and more paddlings; then at the end of the line we gave our names to a chief who promised us a beautiful shellback certificate. Each one of us hurried for the showers to remove the grease, yet no amount of scrubbing made the slightest difference. It took days for it to wear off.





Some thought the initiation was fun; some thought Davy Jones was a little too harsh, but it broke the monotony of our cruise. We crossed the International Date Line during the night of November 28th, thereby losing a day. We sighted a tip of the Solomon Islands at 0630 December 3rd, and at 0700 a bomber circled above us. Two days later the SOMMELSDIJK entered Milne Bay, New Guinea, where some troops disembarked and additional troops came aboard. It was a disappointment in not being allowed to go ashore. We remained at Milne Bay for three days, then followed the coast line to Hollandia, New Guinea, where we waited two days for a convoy to form. Finally December 13th the convoy got underway traveling north. We crossed the equator again. Air alerts became frequent,



*Island X.*

and planes were sighted almost every day. We knew then that we were going to the Philippines, and a few days later the SOMMELSDIJK dropped anchor in a bay where the might of Uncle Sam's Navy was assembled. We were

again disappointed in not being permitted to go ashore; however, Lt. Hill and several other officers went ashore to get further orders. The SOMMELSDIJK weighed anchor and cruised out of the harbor alone. When it dropped the hook again at noon 24th of December, we were at our destination. We spent a rather boring Christmas Eve aboard ship; however the monotony was broken by three air alerts.

Christmas Day was hot and humid. We lined the rails to watch natives who came alongside in outriggers to barter



*Filipino outriggers.*

Japanese money for soap and clothing. Christmas carols were sung, and we all dreamed of spending the next Christmas at home. Turkey appeared on the menu again, and as usual at chow time we had an alert. A meeting was called at 1930 in upper 'tweendeck of Hold No. 2 to discuss plans for disembarking and unloading the ship the following day. Our entire Unit with the exception of a few were crowded together listening to Mr. Wolaver explain the plans. At 1954 we heard men running above, and someone yelled, "Air attack," then a few seconds later the alarm sounded. As soon as we heard the men running, most of us moved from the 'tweendeck to safety under the steel overhead, but some could not make it. At that instant an aerial torpedo struck the bow of the ship and exploded in Hold No. 1 which housed sickbay. The explosion was terrific. The heavy hatch covers and a steel girder were blown high into the air and fell downward to the 'tweendeck where we had

been standing. Those men who could not get to safety were struck by falling debris. As soon as we could collect our wits, we carried the injured on deck, and everyone cleared the hold.

Palmer and Bordelon were on deck, and this is the story of the torpedoing as told by Palmer: "A Marine sergeant, Frenchie, and I were on the forecastle under the gun tub searching for a lost toilet article case. The Marine said that he heard the whine of a plane, so we looked toward shore and saw a plane skim the bow of another ship and head directly at us. We hit the deck as the plane crashed into the water about a hundred yards away. We looked over the side and saw the white wake of a torpedo coming toward the bow beneath us. We hit the deck again, and at the same time the torpedo struck. We bounced around on the deck while the ship seemed to rise out of the sea and then settled back again. The explosion knocked the anchor off the chain which caused the chain to be pulled back into the bow. I saw the chain whipping around me, but luckily I was not hit; however, it ripped my life jacket from my arm. I thought that the bow had been blown from the rest of the ship, and my first inclination was to go over the side, then Frenchie yelled to come on and we hit the ladder. We knew that the ammunition was stowed directly beneath us, and Hold No. 1 was a blazing inferno. As we raced down the ladder, I cut the rope that held Blackie, our mascot. We joined the crowd that was coming from Hold No. 2."

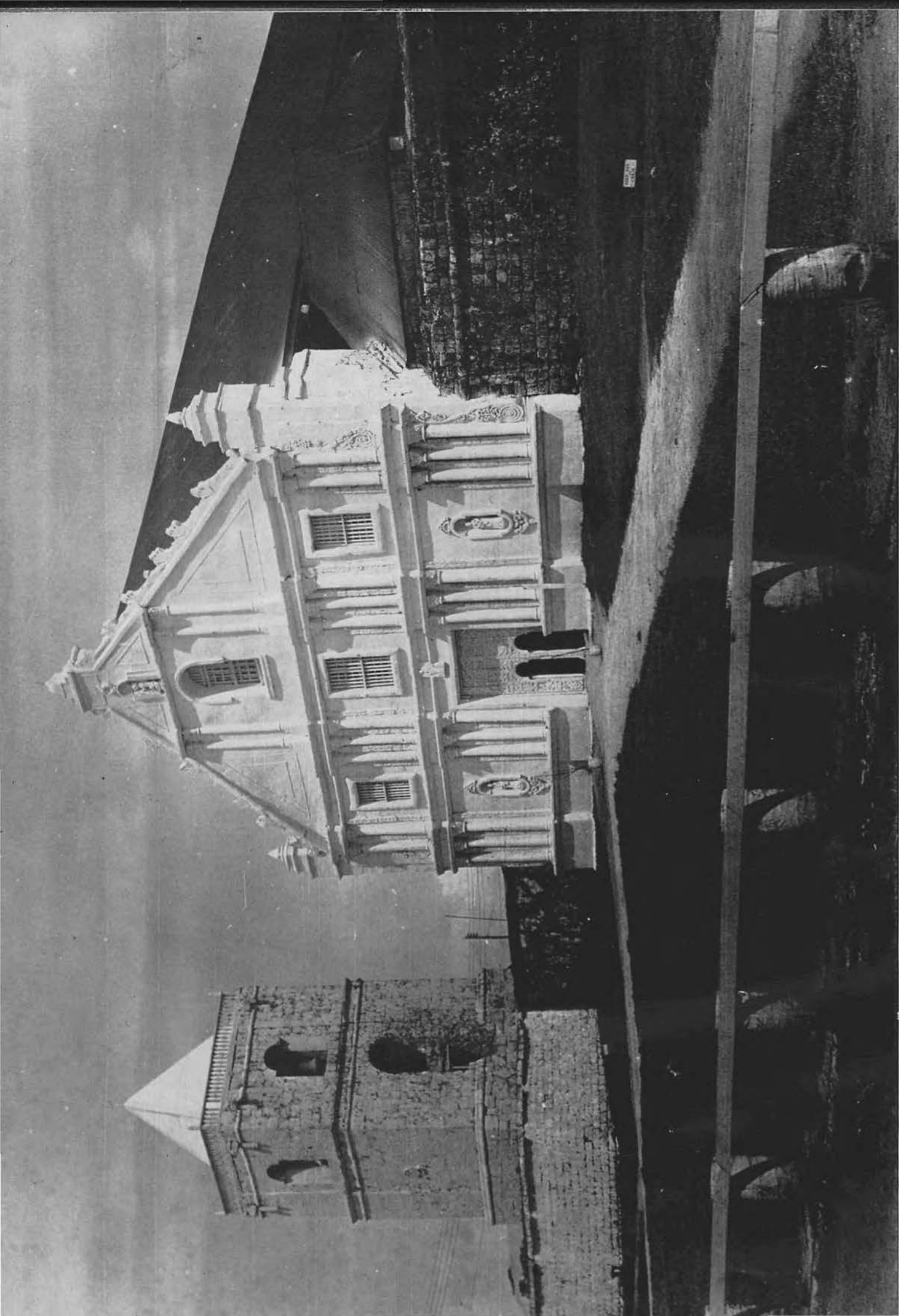
L. P. Poulin was in sickbay at the time. This is his story: "I was confined to sickbay and was sitting on the edge of my bed putting on my slippers when the torpedo struck. Everything in sickbay was flying through the room, but luckily I wasn't hit. In three bounds I was at the ladder and scrambled to the top in nothing flat. As far as I know, I am the only one who got out of sickbay alive."

The troop commander in a clear, calm voice ordered everyone aft. This was a time of heroism. Those who were not injured ripped doors off heads and carried the injured to the mess hall in Hold No. 5, which was turned into a

temporary sickbay. Those less seriously injured were supported by their mates. In order to go aft, it was necessary to climb a ladder midships and proceed along a narrow passageway. Although most of the men were calm and were hurrying as fast as possible, there was danger of someone being crushed. Pop Lawton, our 275 pound blacksmith, spread out his arms and legs and said, "Just take it easy, we'll make it, don't crowd your mates with the wounded." Nothing could have gone past him. Finally everyone was astern. It was reported that there was to be a strafing attack, so we huddled behind steel bulkheads and under any cover that was at hand. However, we were not attacked again, but it was later learned that another Japanese torpedo plane was shot down on its way to hit the stern of the ship.

An Australian frigate was several miles at sea when it picked up our SOS, and immediately it came to our rescue. The frigate pulled alongside and pumped tons of water in Holds No. 1 and No. 2. Men in asbestos suits waged a war against the flames, knowing all the time that the magazine might explode. We transferred to the frigate where we were given coffee, sandwiches, liquor and rum. The wounded were treated by Australian doctors. Never shall we forget the kindness of our Australian allies. The only ones who remained aboard the frigate were Oldham, Ross, Plesha, Van Foeken, and Brinker. These men were taken to a hospital ship, and, with the exception of Oldham who returned to our Unit a couple of months later, were subsequently returned to the States for treatment. LCMs pulled alongside at 2230 to take us to shore. It was about 2300 when we set foot on the small pier—thirty-eight days after we boarded the SOMMELSDIJK at San Francisco.

We walked to an ancient cathedral not far from the head of the pier to await the arrival of the rest of our Unit. As each group came into the cathedral, most of the men knelt at the altar and thanked God that they had been spared. It was impossible to get an accurate muster; however, we were definitely sure that Alex Poulin and A. P. Robinson had not come ashore. Some of us spent the remainder of



*Church of the Immaculate Conception.*



the night in the church, but the majority stayed outside for fear of another attack—hardly anyone slept. The next morning we ate chow with a nearby battalion. A crew was picked to go aboard the ship to get our records and salvage whatever gear possible. As the landing craft approached the SOMMELSDIJK, we could see that it had listed to the port with a 30' x 18' gaping hole in its bow. Luckily we found that our records had not been damaged, but our personal gear was almost a total loss. Since the lower deck of Hold No. 2 was flooded with water to keep it from burning, we were not allowed to take any gear out except that in the upper deck, all of which was water-soaked. By midafternoon we had salvaged everything possible and rejoined our mates at the church. We learned that Poulin and Robinson had been killed and that there were twelve seriously wounded in our Unit. We had to spend the second night in the church because of rain, and most of us managed to get some sleep because we were so tired.

The next morning the sun came out. We spread what gear we had on the grass to dry, but it was not long before it began to rain again. The Captain of the base appointed an area for us about three miles inland from the village. Gear was put on trucks, while we marched in knee-deep mud to our campsite. Part of our area along the so-called road was flat, but behind that was a higher piece of ground. We pitched tarps for shelter as it was raining hard. Chief James and George Cloud procured some food, and we had weiners, cheese, and crackers for our first chow. Those men who had salvaged their gear shared it with their mates, for some of us had come ashore without shoes, shirts, or



DON'T STEP ON THAT HAT, THERE MIGHT BE SOMEONE UNDER IT

pants. We went to sleep that night only to be awakened by air alerts. We cursed the Japs, but were thankful to be alive. The next day our field kitchens were set up, and our morale was raised 50 percent with hot chow in our stomachs. We ate the same kind of food morning, noon, and night for weeks.

As each day passed, our conditions improved. Everyone worked long hours and no one bitched. New Years Eve night we expected a Jap paratroop attack. Each of us was armed with a carbine and a knife and was appointed a battle station. Not much sleep was had that night although nothing happened—we were glad when dawn arrived.



*Holt geared for action.*

Almost immediately upon our arrival about twelve of our men were put to work building a mess hall for the Naval Station. Another twenty-five of us were temporarily assigned to a battalion that was building a coral air strip. Still another twenty-five men were given temporary orders to another battalion some seventy-five miles away. The balance of our crew worked on our campsite. Our temporary galley as well as some of our tents were on low ground, so it was decided to move our camp to higher ground and in another location. By this time we had enough tents for the crew, and all hands set to work erecting them. Although the temporary galley was moved, it seemed that it was no better than the first, for we had to wade knee-deep in mud through the chow line.

Continuous rains hampered our every move. The road was impassable for days, and trucks had to be winched out of the mud with bulldozers. All of our equipment had been under saltwater in the holds of the ship. As soon as each



# IT WAS A RUGGED LIFE



*Chiefs Whalen, Vining, Braden, Irvin, Johnson, Duncan, Hines, Smith.*



*Chief Irvin.*



*Chief Hines.*



*Chief Whalen.*



*Chief Vining.*



*Chief R. C. Smith.*



*Chief Johnson.*



*Chief Irvin and Chief R. C. Smith.*

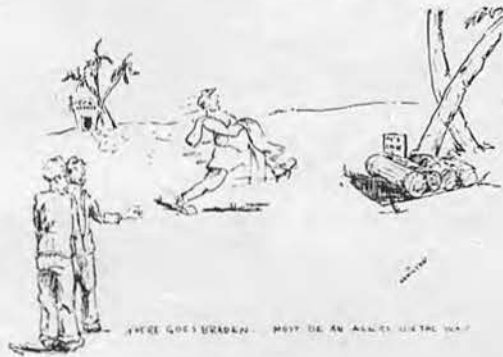


*Chiefs Irvin, Smith, Vining and Johnson.*



piece of equipment was brought ashore, Chief Edwards and Chief Duncan and their mechanics cleaned out the salt-water and got as much equipment as possible in working order. We begged, borrowed, and stole (procured, as it is known in the Navy) as many supplies and material from battalions as we could. Clothing, or the lack of it, was our worst problem, next to food, and blankets were nonexistent. Ship service supplies were not to be had at our base; consequently our men did not have tooth brushes for weeks. Those were tough, very tough, days and will not soon be forgotten.

Air alerts were numerous both night and day. Most of the men dug fox holes by their tents; and when the three warning shots were fired, everyone hit his fox hole. Chief



Braden held the record of getting there first. So far we have been lucky, for not a single enemy bomb has been dropped on our station even though we have one of the best air strips in the Philippines. Alerts continued almost nightly for the first three months after we arrived, then dwindled to occasional alerts.



Within a month's time our camp was in excellent condition. Low places were filled with sand, boardwalks led to every tent, and water lines were laid throughout the



*Our homes.*

camp. We screened-in our tents and discarded cumbersome mosquito nets. Chief Braden and his crew constructed a permanent screened-in mess hall. We enjoyed the luxury of open air showers. At first when the native women came through the camp in search of laundry, they stared with wonderment at our nakedness, but later they



*Showers.*

passed by without a glance, thinking, no doubt, that the Americans have strange customs. However, it was not long before we enclosed the showers.

Much has been written about Chic Sales, and much more will be written about them in the future, but C.B.M.U. 512 vies for the honor of having the most comfortable one. We built it in a beautiful valley at one side of the Camp. It is a twelve seated affair, painted white on the inside and camouflaged green on the outside, and it is very doubtful that it could be spotted from the air, for it nestles deep within coconut palms. Immediately across the valley is a small native hut that is the home of about eight Filipinos.



*512's Chick Sale.*

After breakfast the rush hour begins. It serves as a meeting place to greet our mates with a cheery goodmorning. After we have settled comfortably, we divide the latest paper, which may be from one to three months old, with our friends. It is interesting to read the ads and see the comforts of life at home. A laxative ad makes us settle back and try a little harder, but when nothing happens, we watch the natives bathe by the side of their hut. They have a strange custom of bathing fully clothed. The landscape is a place of beauty—one of the few spots that has not suffered the ravages of the bulldozer. When the work bell rings, we hurry from our repose to catch a truck to our job, promising ourselves that at noon we will return for unfinished business.



*Outdoor theater.*

Almost before we were settled, we received orders to build an open air theater for the Naval Base. Mr. Bell had

charge of the job with Chief Vining as his assistant. The site for the theater was low and swampy, necessitating many truck loads of sand and hours of grading before construction could begin. Plans called for native design. We scoured the countryside for straight, tall coconut trees which were felled and hauled by trailer to the site. The stage was built in a unique manner with coconut log bulkheads, sand base, and a wooden deck. We built dressing rooms on either side of the stage, and the entire structure was covered with shingles made of coconut leaves woven by the natives. Four straight coconut logs supported the massive screen. The open air seats consisted of coconut logs with the upper part hewn to a flat surface. The theater was originally designed to accommodate only motion pictures and small stage shows, but when news came that Irvin Berlin's "This Is The Army" was on its way, we went on a



*512 Welcomes cast of "Oklahoma."*

twenty-four hour schedule to expand the stage facilities. Many shows have played in our theater, and it is a beautiful sight to sit in the audience watching a performance with a full tropical moon shining down on us.

Another one of our projects was the construction of a chapel, located near the theater. More sand and more coconut logs were required. The framework was made of logs and covered with tarp. Although the chapel is not too impressive a structure, it has served as a place of worship for many service personnel and Filipinos.

The job that we had come 9,000 miles to do was the maintenance of the Naval Station. Operations were first





*Bear Mountain*





*Temporary chapel.*

directed from our office and temporary shops at the camp until such time as we finished the erection of a 40' x 100' quonset hut at the base. This huge structure houses the office, carpenter shop, sheet metal shop, plumbing shop, and electrical shop with the garage built on the outside. A small quonset hut serves as an automotive spare parts warehouse. An organization chart of our operations was set up, and although frequent changes were made, it followed this plan—Mr. Hill, Maintenance Officer, Mr. Wolaver, Field Superintendent, Mr. Nagle, Public Works Engi-



*Carpenter shop.*

neer, Mr. Bell, Heavy Equipment and Camp Maintenance Officer, and Mr. Fine, Construction Superintendent. Chief Johnson received his promotion to Warrant Officer and became Utility Superintendent. With an organization of



*Sheet Metal Shop.*

capable officers supported by experienced craftsmen there was nothing on the base that could not be constructed, repaired, and put in working order.

Chief Hetherington's carpenter shop is a beehive of activity. All of the cabinet work and furniture for the Naval Base is built in the shop by our cabinet makers. Chief Irvin's sheet metal shop turns out ventilation ducts, galley equipment, and all sorts of metal work required on the base. Chief Marquis and his plumbing crews work at all hours of the day and night either repairing broken water mains or installing new ones. Chief Gresham directs his



*Nutt, Swindle, Costello, Christensen, Hilliker, Sinico.*

electricians in the stringing of hundreds of miles of electrical wires and mending those damaged by falling trees. Chiefs R. C. Smith, R. E. Edwards, and Bill Holland are in charge of outside construction crews who erect hundreds of quon-



*Sinico and his bulldozer.*



*Working in the coral pits.*



*Garage.*

set huts, building piers, and transforming the placid countryside into civilization. Chiefs P. M. Edwards and L. G. Smith operate the garage where hundreds of jeeps, automotive equipment, and heavy construction equipment are repaired. Chief Peters has charge of road construction

and road maintenance. All roads are surfaced with coral that is blasted from the many coral pits dotting the island. Chief Larson drafts all plans and specifications for our projects, while Ensign Nagle and Knobby Knorr survey the island for land acquisition from the Filipinos.

Our social life is very restricted. We visit our friends in neighboring Seabee battalions, Army, and Marines, but there isn't much of a variety of places to go. Although



THE EARLY MONTHS



THE LATER MONTHS

we are not permitted to go into native homes, some of the men take Filipino girls to dances and to shows at night. Almost every battalion has its own picture show which gives us a selection of pictures to see each night. We have our own 16 mm. projector that is in operation nightly in the mess hall. We enjoy playing badminton and volley ball in the evening. Few of the men have gone fishing and were lucky in having caught tuna.



*Mr. Wolaver, Stuck, Bordelon and their catch.  
Completed baseball diamond.*

*Baseball team, left to right: Silva, Stuck, Merone, Rush, Chief Irvin,  
Uhtenwoldt, Jones, Mraz, Cecere, G. Martinez, Speer, Tetu, Holt.*

The Naval Base needed a baseball diamond, and, of course, 512 was the logical unit to construct one. The site for the diamond was selected adjacent to our camp area, and Mr. Bell and his heavy equipment crews began the job of blasting coral, leveling and grading. After weeks of continuous round-the-clock work, the diamond was finally completed. Captain S. B. Robinson was called upon to make the dedication address, and in his address he pointed out that our field is one of the best in the Philippines. Immediately after the Captain's dedication, Pappy Hill's Raiders played their first game. Although our team has not gone through the season undefeated, each game was played enthusiastically and with an eye to the sport of the game rather than to inflicting defeat upon the opponent.

Chief Irvin is captain of the team which is composed of Jones, Silva, Tetu, G. Martinez, Uhtenwoldt, Stuck, Holt, Mraz, Speer, Merone, and Powell.

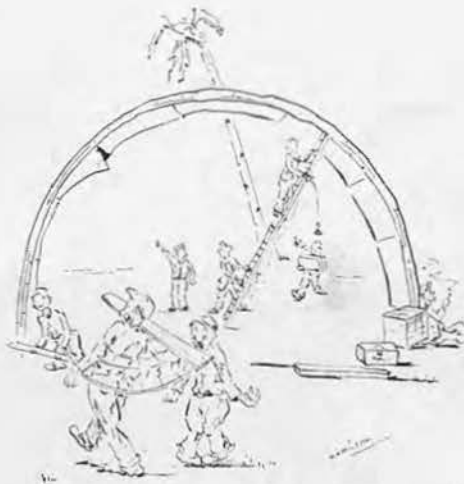
Purple Heart Medal Awards had been received for those men who were injured in the torpedoing of the SOMMELSDIJK, and Lt. Hill asked Captain Robinson to make the awards. It was decided to make the presentation the day the ball diamond was to be dedicated. The whole of 512 assembled in columns of threes in front of the administration area, and with the benefit of the Naval Base Band we marched in a military manner down the hill to the baseball diamond. While we stood at attention, Captain Robinson made a presentation speech, then pinned the awards on H. J. Miller, McDuffee, Oldham, Erba, and Conte. Immediately thereafter, we marched off the field. That was the first time since we arrived at "Island X" we had an occasion to use our military training, but needless to say, everyone knew what to do and did it. Purple Heart Medals were mailed to Caravello, Brinker, Zych, Marino, Ross, and Plesha, all of whom had returned to the states for treatment.

Advancements in rates were posted 15th of June, and almost everyone received a promotion. Seven new chiefs









WORK ON OUR NEW LIVING QUARTERS BEGINS

but it was impossible to keep our bunks dry even though shelter halves, canvas, and blankets were put over them. Finally a requisition was approved for quonset huts for the Unit, and Mr. Fine put most of his carpenters and laborers on the job of erecting them. Fourteen men occupy each hut which is insulated against heat. We no longer have to hunt for a dry place to sleep. Although we started our campsite under the most trying conditions when we arrived, we now have one of the best camps in this section of the Philippines. The camp is kept clean by Filipino laborers under the guidance of Tetu, and although it requires twelve of them to do the work of two Seabees, they take their time and keep the grounds in tip-top condition.



TETU AND HIS GUNDS.

Each morning we watched the mighty bombers circle overhead, then wing their way in perfect formation toward the Rising Sun. They returned in the evening to be refueled

and reloaded for the next day's mission. The weaknesses of the enemy became weaker as the Allied might strengthened. The first of August found Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet roaming at will up and down the Japanese coast shelling city after city without opposition. The world, particularly Japan, was astounded when, on August 6th, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Then to add to the woes of the Japanese, Russia declared war on Japan August 8th, and the following day the second atomic bomb was dropped—this time on Nagasaki. The concentration of so much force made the Japanese see the error of their ways. On August 10th they agreed, with certain provisions, to accept the surrender terms that were contained in the Potsdam Agreement. It was not until August 15th that peace was officially declared.

Almost immediately after the ending of the war the organization of C.B.M.U. 512 was also terminating. Orders were received 18 August 1945 for the transfer of our Unit to the 61st Construction Battalion. The news of the transfer was received with misgiving among the men, for we had worked together as a Unit since 13 June 1943. Already the Navy has announced its discharge point system. In the meantime we will work, we will sweat, and we will dream of the day when we can return to our wives, children, and sweethearts and to the job of rebuilding a peaceful world. That day will come, and we of C.B.M.U. 512 will return to our homes knowing that our efforts contributed much to the winning of World War II.



I GUESS THIS IS THE REAL THING THIS TIME

# MEDICAL DEPARTMENT



LT. COMDR. E. A. LEBOLD



R. R. LOWRY  
PhM1/c



C. J. STUTE  
PhM3/c



O. W. BUDDE  
PhM3/c

Dr. Lebold and his staff of experienced corpsmen have kept the personnel of C.B.M.U. 512 in tiptop physical condition. Our thanks go to them for their untiring efforts.

# MALARIA CONTROL UNIT

This group of men has done an excellent job of keeping typhus and malaria to a minimum. It is the responsibility of this Unit to keep mosquito breeding places drained, to spray DDT where insects abound, and to destroy vermin.

A. B. KELLEY  
PhM2/c



W. H. DEWYER  
PhM2/c



E. F. McDONALD  
PhM3/c



J. G. WHITE  
PhM3/c

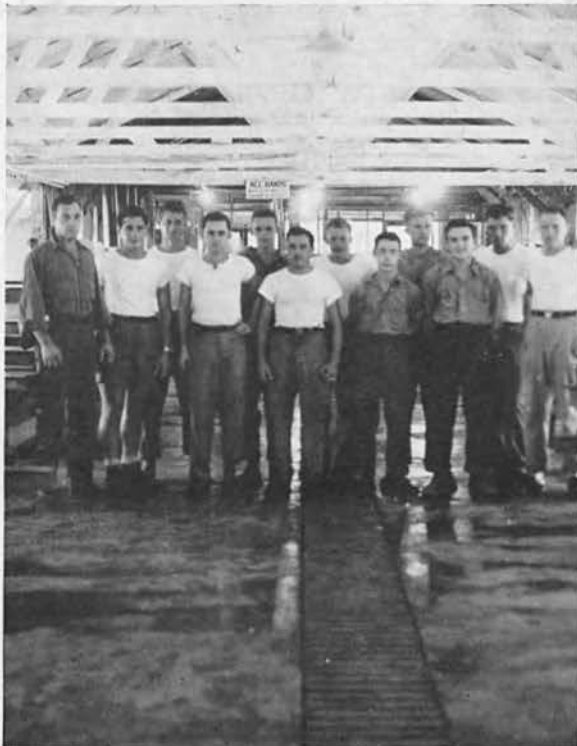


LT. (JG) H. J. RAYNER

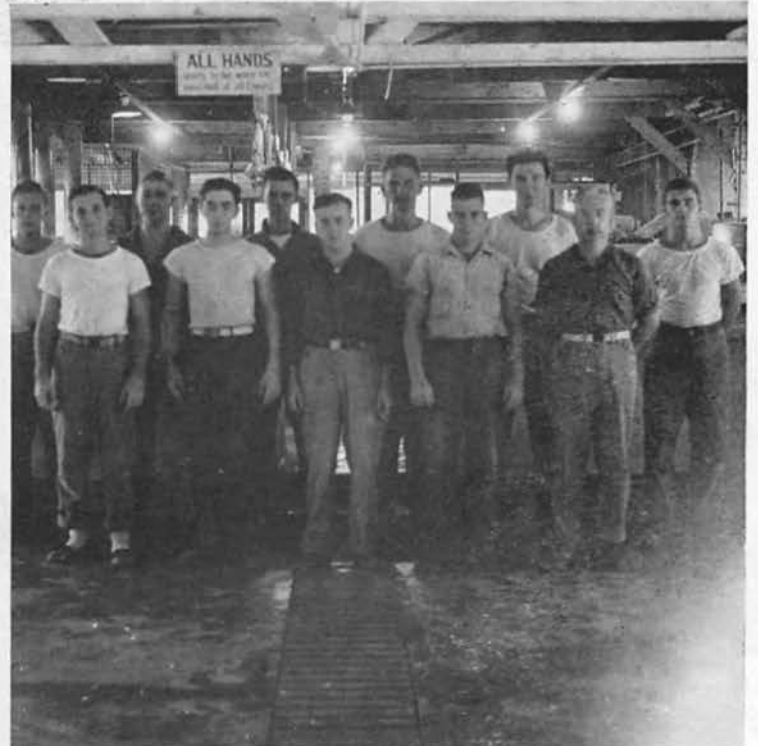
*Officers' Mess.*



*Chief Petty Officers' Mess.*



*General Mess Attendants.*



*General Mess Cooks and Bakers.*





**SNAPSHOTS**

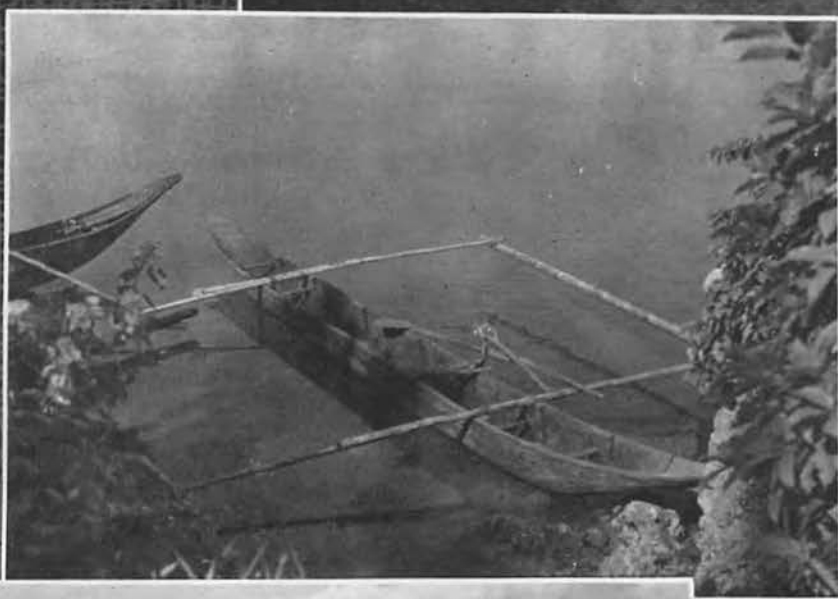
















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 HILL, Davis S., 1118 Franklin, Waco, Texas.

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SHERIDAN, William L., Buffalo, Wyo.  
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# MEMORANDUM



To: All Hands

1. This is your book—the story of your life since that fateful day C.B.M.U. 512 came into existence. It is meant to be an over-all story to which you are invited to add your own personal experiences. In the years to come this book will become increasingly precious as you turn its pages, and, in the vividness of your memory, live again those experiences you had in Alaska and in the Philippines. My sincere thanks go to Chief John Wylie for his having written and compiled this book and to those who so generously assisted him.

2. It was a privilege and a pleasure to have been your officer in charge. We have gone a long way together, and I am sorry that in the final stages of victory the Unit was forced to become part of a battalion. I appreciate the cooperation that each of you displayed in making C.B.M.U. 512 one of the best Units in Uncle Sam's Navy.

*Davis S. Hill.*



