TER BELLIES

1944-1945

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This book has been prepared especially for the members of Construction Battalion Maintenance Units 572 and 573, and their families and friends. Some of the material contained here is not suitable for general release to the public press and radio until the end of the war. It is requested that none of the contents be made available to the public press or radio.

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BITTER BELLIES

The odyssey of Construction Battalion Maintenance Units 572 and 573 from boot camp to the South Sea isle of Banika —a saga of muscles in the Russells, of sagging sacks and straining backs, and more than a tinge of wishing for home.

"And the voice . . . . said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I . . . . said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter . . . ."

Revelation 10:8-9.

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Photographic facilities of the 12th Special Construction Battalion were made available to us through the courtesy of Lieutenant Commander Clyde E. Cuevas and Lieutenant Philip L. Perrin. Some of the pictures were made with the help of Robert Carner, also of the 12th Special. Officers of Pontoon Assembly Depot No. 2 have kindly allowed us to select from their files some native and operational negatives for inclusion here. We are indebted, too, to officers of our own units, notably Lieutenant Raymond T. Andrews and Chief Carpenter Charles T. Walsh, for furnishing us with some of their interesting personal films. The original idea, in fact, of compiling a photographic record to assure all unit personnel a permanent collection of island scenic and operational pictures came from Mr. Andrews. To him and to Lieutenant Everett I. Brown falls the task of nursing the project through the complicated channels of wartime censorship to actual publication.

Much of the material pertaining to the natives appears here because of the helpful interest shown by Captain Ronald McGregor, British Army, who is Acting British District Magistrate for the Russell Islands; and by Captain Olaf E. Bergin of the British Army.

Both of these men kindly allowed us to draw on their long experience among the islanders for information. Captain Bergin, a Swedish-born Briton, has spent the past 18 years on Banika as manager of the Fairymead Sugar Company's copra plantation on the island and as a British Army officer has wartime jurisdiction over part of the island and the native labor corps. Captain McGregor, a native of Scotland and a World War I British Army veteran who saw service at the Dardanelles, in Mesopotamia and Africa and was wounded nine times, has lived on Banika as general manager of the Russell Islands properties of Lever Pacific Plantations for 16 years. Their sincerity and willingness to be of assistance deserves our thanks. A debt is also acknowledged to Chief Carpenter Harold W. Musser who arranged for meetings and talks with the British Army officers.

To Commander Byron J. Beattie, USNR, recently-named captain of the Naval Advanced Base at the Russell Islands and formerly Acting Base Executive Officer, we extend appreciation for technical advice and assistance in planning of publication and photographic reproductions and for granting permission to produce a record of this nature at this time.

And to all those officers and men of our units who offered valuable information and technical criticisms and who displayed a great interest in the volume's preparation, we are grateful.

In collecting facts about the Solomon Islands and Melanesia, extensive use was made of the sixteenth in a series of war background studies distributed by the Smithsonian Institution—*Island Peoples of the Western Pacific—Micronesia and Melanesia* by Herbert W.

Krieger; and a handbook published by the Bureau of Yards and Docks of the Navy Department called *Native Woods for Construction Purposes in the Western Pacific Region.*

FOREWORD

THE following account of the activities of two Seabee maintenance units, from organization through their first year of overseas duty, attempts, in its modest way, to record as objectively as possible not only some of the facts involved but also in part the temper of the men behind the facts and the flavor of the life confronting them. It is perhaps impossible to cover adequately even a fraction of the field represented by a group of this sort, but if there results an approximation of the general feeling, that will be sufficient. Some may be able to recognize themselves in the ensuing pages; others will not. Be that as it may, facts of the material things we had to deal with are believed to be substantially correct.

Not everything, very likely not even the things some might consider most vital, is depicted in the following text, drawings and photographs. It is a human failing to overlook things which, being too close, take distinct shape only as time and distance sharpen the image. But it is the expectation that enough material has been presented—enough of the small details as well as the broader patterns—so that it will recall to you unmentioned facts that may be more pertinent to your own life in the naval service. If you don't want to remember any of it, you can obtain, for a nominal sum, an ashcan into which this volume will fit conveniently —and no questions asked.

On the other hand, if you not only wish to remember some things but also to add a touch of the spectacular for the benefit of a couple of Charlies who weren't

there, you can use the material to develop a lie that will at least be consistent with some of the facts. You will still have plenty of latitude. The only thing you should guard against is passing the book around to show your friends where you appear in the photographs. A stray glance at another picture or a cartoon may spoil your whole story and you might have to make a deal with your friends to keep their traps shut.

Throughout the textual matter, you will notice the absence of proper names. There are only four that have a direct connection with the outfits: Gunner, the dog; Blackie, the dog; Brenda, the dog; and Doc, the parrot. Omissions were deliberate, following a policy of generalization. But somewhere in the photographic section each man will find a facsimile of his mug.

This account makes no pretense of being literary. It was put together too fast to be anything except a hasty reproduction of sections of life on a South Pacific island during wartime. And it had to be done fast, not only because our island stay was increasingly uncertain, but also because it was necessary to get the material into the many hands that must thumb and approve it before the printer takes over. As it was, you had almost forgotten about the book by the time you received your copy, hadn't you?

It should be noted that during preparation of the book no official pressure was exerted to subordinate one thing or to elevate another, to omit some things or to substitute others, or in any way to distort the scene as it appeared to the recorded. But the demands of censorship at this time being inexorable, it may follow that certain deletions will be insisted upon.*

*They were. Deletions included several passages and references in the text, and a few photographs and maps.

Costs of publishing enough copies to furnish each man in the units with one will be defrayed entirely by the Recreation Fund. For extra copies you must make with the moolah.

All of us together produced this volume. Now, damya, read it!

R. E. S.

Banika
Russell Islands
British Solomon Islands

11 March 1945

INTRODUCTION

THIS story begins in all corners of the country, in the homes of the men who left them and in the minds of the men who came away. They came like the sands of an hourglass, flowing toward the center. They sifted through the cursal passage that was the training ground, and on the other side they spread out to assigned places over the globe. Some of them clung together and this is the story of some who did.

From the beginning there were difficult adjustments to make and hardships to be borne in preparation for the task at hand. So there were complaints and some bitterness—but for all that, resignation to whatever lay ahead.

This is not to say that inconveniences and disruptions were endured always with the best of grace. However, from the unsettling undercurrents of war and its background, men fashion an expedient perspective—an outlook that finds a measure of security in the inevitable and develops a sustaining humor from the commonplaces of necessity. Thus, while they bear no resemblance to talent scouts for comic opera, they eventually become capable of locating, at the drop of a coconut, something to chuckle about, even though it is morose or ironic. And if there is nothing to chuckle over, bitching fills the gap—becomes, in fact, a fine art of maintaining emotional stability. It is an expression of the unholy satisfaction to be derived from the assumption that nothing has been done right, nothing is being done right and the chances are that nothing will ever be done right.

We have done plenty of chuckling and plenty of bitching; and although we may not be able to say we enjoyed ourselves in the service, sometimes at least we were probably able to kid ourselves into thinking that parts of it weren't too bad.

In our attitudes we were no different than any other branch of the military which has been pushed around from here to there, and so we are at liberty to use the old military formula of complaining like all git-out about the beating we took. To do this, let's take a look at our period of service as it looked to us while it was happening. But if we see anything too, too wonderful about it, let's stop smoking those things altogether.

And now having duly expounded the expectable and stated our defense, we take a gander backward . . . .

CHAPTER ONE

In which a large group of diverse persons, being brought together for the first time and processed at a naval training ground, become sorely tried and are only too happy when they can leave the sumbitch.

THE good residents of the State of Virginia could do nothing about it. A national combine known as the Bureau of Yards and Docks of the Navy Department had taken over fourteen square miles of Virginia's finest red mud fields and said: "Let there be a United States Naval Construction Training Center, Williamsburg, Va.!" And there was one. But part of it was in Magruder, Va. Well, those things *will* happen.

And private contractors descended and built all manner of ramshackle barracks, and roadways and *divers* establishments. And they caused messhalls and drill sheds to be erected. And water systems and plumbing lines created they them. And when they had finished, behold, the Bureau gazed upon their work and called it good!

One thousand and seventy-six men disagreed with this conclusion. The why and wherefore may become apparent in the narrative of the 1076.

Once upon a time (October 20 1943), a sad-sacked aggregation of self-styled "confused bastards" lined up on a cold sand-bare drill ground of Camp Peary's A-1 Area. They were members of the new 18th Super Battalion. The name had all the sound and earmarks

of a "crack first-line" outfit, something extra powerful, dire and ominous for the enemy, like a secret weapon. But all it meant was "supernumerary;" in short, something that could be dragged in if and when it were needed. And soon, not being needed in its then constituted form, the gallant 18th was drawn and quartered. Two of its components formed the organization that one day would settle, with much wailing and gnashing of teeth, on the little island of Banika, a water-bound wart on the body Pacific, albeit one of the larger of the 50-odd Russell Islands.

But all this was in the future and the typical Seabee is not psychic. For the moment the unhappy band was fated to stand on Peary's drill field, to await the calling of their names, to shoulder their two ungainly seabags and to haul their aching fundaments after an officer who would guide them to their new barracks.

Most of the 18th's personnel was fresh from boot camp where in four long weeks the fear of God, the Officers and the CPO's had been so instilled in them that they trembled at the thought of a bunk out of alignment with the cracks in the floor and blankets folded the wrong way so that the stencils were upside down.

Throughout boot, there had been fourth day "duty days." Bug-eyed men had been initiated into the mysteries of "short arm." On kitchen police they had known the torment of peeling onions, had felt lye water swirl ankle deep on messhall floors. They had kept the midnight vigil at guard posts, challenging both shadow and substance. They had practically policed the area down to bed rock. There had been boardwalk repair and mop pushing and hand shovel operation and all kinds of slimy details in all parts of camp. There had

been lectures and more lectures and the inevitable reading of the "Articles for the Government of the United States Navy." If the weather stank too bad for outdoor operations, a lecture on interior guard was always on tap. Sometimes there were lectures in the barracks on field stripping of pieces. There were agonizing mornings and afternoons of drilling; and for the "awkward squad" or those whose towels didn't happen to be Rinso white at a crucial inspection, a little night "instruction."

"Right shoulder . . . . Ha-a-a! Left shoulder . . . . Hams! . . . . Faw-wood . . . . hotch! . . . . By the right flank . . . . hup! By the left flank . . . . hoop! . . . . He-e-ep, hup, trip four and your left . . . . your left . . . . To the rear hutch to the rear hutch . . . ."

It went on until your brogans wore your feet to raw meat and you walked as though you momentarily expected an indecent gesture.

There were drill instructors, who with studied critical gaze, sauntered onto the field a minute late probably because they had lain awake half the night mulling over a new gag to use on the boots. Some of these fugitives from a day's work struggled very hard to be comedians. They had a few standard sadisms such as ordering a quaking delinquent, who may quite innocently have confused east with west, to stand at attention, helmet in teeth. Or they had, for instance, a quip calculated to panic the audience:

"All right, all right, Mac! Suck in that Budweiser tumor!"

Not all instructors had Broadway in their blood; but some would have given their Bluejackets Manual with right arm attached to be known as a "card."

"All right, Mac! Suck in that Budweiser tumor!"

On dry days, or if the dew were less than a half inch deep, you might be herded into the woods for extended order, a form of attack by infiltration which could be effective if your butt didn't have an Eiffel Tower complex. The way it happened in boot, you crawled on the ground following your squad leader and chief who blithely led you into ambush. And when you saw a guy with a handkerchief tied to his arm, you jumped the sumbitch and told him he was dead but he wouldn't believe you.

With one thing or another—bayonet drill, grenade heaving and machete drill with a wooden facsimile of the McCoy—boot training ran its course. The "Fighting Seabee" who had successfully fought his way

through was given parting injunctions and warnings; then his assignment. For most, the assignment was to the 18th Super and thus the 1076 stood, on October 20, at the A-1 drill field, slightly confused and bewildered.

Advanced training began with a stimulated bang. Up the hill to drill shed you went to hear a loudspeaker blare: "Simulate load and lock;" then "Fire at will," and the dry firing clicks filled the echoing shed like the chatter of New Year's eve noisemaker.

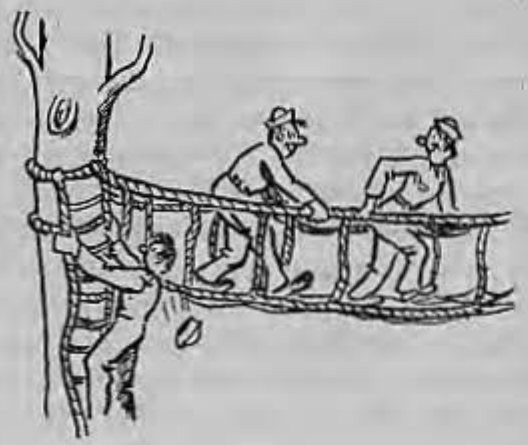
Later there were cozy seminars in the woods where an instructor explained the history, mystery, measurements and operation of the M1—the little carbine everyone allowed he'd like to have for hunting after the war. When the instructor was sure you knew which end of the weapon should be pointed at the target, you were ready for the sloppy trek to the rifle range, where you flung yourself into the mud, squinted through the rain and pinged away at the 100 and 200-yard targets. You also kept score for the man on the relay just ahead of you, if you happened to be looking at his target at the time. If you qualified at 135 or better, you got a slip saying so in your Service Record (the one they gotta show you, it says so right in da book). If you got a 175 or better, you were a sharpshooter and could wear the appropriate bulls-eye on your blue dress jumper sleeve. As a whole for the 1076 men of the battalion, the percentage of qualification was high in the 90's and established a new record for the range. The record, unfortunately, was broken soon after by another outfit.

Things began to happen faster now. After several days of military, enrollment for special schools began. From then on the personnel was in more or less sharp division, one group being assigned full time to schools

and the other occupied with daily drills, lectures, extended order and maneuvers. While technical instruction was paramount for the school men, some attempt was made to supply them with military training. A case in point was the plumbers' ten-mile "abortive putsch," for which they were dragged out of the sack about midnight.

Climaxing the military instruction was a series of mimic warfare operations, staged over wide areas in the wooded sections surrounding the camp. Strategies and tactics were worked out beforehand on maps. Officers, chiefs and squad leaders were in charge of detachments. If anything went wrong, the woods came alive with theoretical corpses who congregated in a clearing to enjoy a post-mortem discussion by a Monday morning quarterback. These were enjoyed principally because you could sit down.

Memorable enough for the record is the bloody day the Blue Dungarees attempted to storm defensive positions across a swamp held by the Green Coveralls.

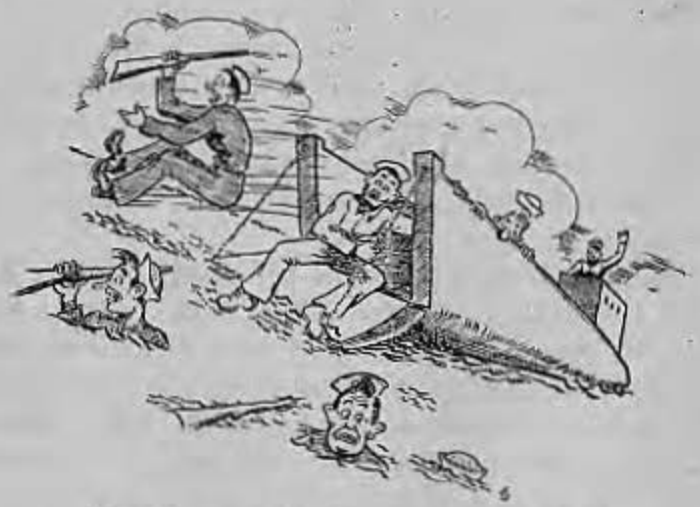


Laughing at danger (who laughed right back at them), these hardy Blue Dungarees crept from the heights of the knoll to the pit of the swamp, forthwith plunged into the muddy hollow and sank knee to waist deep. Thus immobilized, many had to be freed by brute force, but soon or late enough of the attackers had made the treacherous crossing to deploy for hand-to-hand combat. Whereupon, the enemy, with a trace of disgust, said that all them sumbitches had been picked off like sitting ducks. It had been a massacre. There was much washing of clothes that night.

So it went—hikes, schools, drill, boiler watch, guard—and later the obstacle course, which turned out to be a three-ring circus, complete with an aerial act and the usual assortment of clowns. If for any reason you were excused from playing "follow the leader," you had permission to sit in the bleachers, hold coats and watches and yell words of discouragement to all the miserables who had to go over that obscene thing. There are probably some who still think the only reason the rope bridge didn't break was that their insurance was paid up.

Life never settled down for any length of time. If it wasn't one thing, it was two. There came a day in chilly November when we were called upon to plunge into a literally blood-chilling escapade—the historic amphibious operation across the James River. For some, the storming of the woods on the west bank from assault barges was a slick operation, the attackers stepping from barge to dry land with an ease that would have made Sir Walter Raleigh feel useless. But at least one barge got hung up on a sand bar and couldn't get off. Whether the helmsman's bifocals were in the repair

shop or whether it was an official "act of God," nobody ever took the trouble to explain. At any rate, the bow ramp was lowered and the men were ordered to make like a fish—only keep that dummy rifle dry! Since the water was only shoulder to chin deep and the barge was little over 100 or 150 yards from shore and the mudholes were not too near together, nobody drowned; but the briny was icy, the legs became numb, the teeth chattered and the shore looked far away. With the weight out, the barge was maneuvered off the bar while dunked personnel shivered through the woods, took it for granted they had chased the enemy and hastily returned to the landing spot. The barge still stood out from shore. The only way to board it again was to wade out.



The helmsman's bifocals were in the repair shop.

On the slow, spray-filled trip back to port, a rattle-voiced choir churned out familiar ditties to bolster be-

draggled spirits; but it was not until the hike in wet clothes from the dock to the barracks, interspersed with double time, had begun, that normal blood circulation returned. Despite exposure, the only casualties were sartorial; but immediately thereafter, scheduled periodic assaults on the west bank of the James River were halted for the year, apparently by the camp medical staff. Too cold.

Scuttlebutt has a peculiar habit of sometimes being not entirely wrong. Already there were rumors that the 18th Super was to feel the axe, that out of it would come some kind of distinctly specialized units, which at a signal would go off to war on their own. Whatever the accuracy of the reports, the 18th Super was now making plans for what would be, to all intents and purposes, its last public social appearance as a battalion. Or perhaps, since it was dying, the event could more properly be called a wake. In any case, the Pre-embarkation Smoker was shaping up. It was a little early (by about three months) for pre-embarkation shenanigans, but shortly after the approaching ten-day leave, the new units would become realities.

Rehearsals of bandsmen, hill-billy groups, comics, dancers and singers (all stag) took precedence over "R-r-eep, two, three, four and your left!" until at last the Ziegfelds were satisfied they had a super-colossal extravaganza. On the appointed night, the doors were thrown open to 1000 patrons who sat one way to view the spectacle, then twisted the other way to see the boxing matches at the rear of the hall. During intermissions, candy, cigars, cigarettes, cokes and peanuts were distributed, but unfortunately the laws of supply

and demand were on vacation and some of the audience were lucky to gaff a goober.

This alpha and omega of the 18th's social season marked the decline and fall of advanced training. Uppermost in the minds and emotions now was the ten-day leave. The great majority of the men had been away from home for two months; those who had sweated it out in Replacement Battalion or withstood a siege in Ship's Company, had been away three months or more. But regardless, it seemed like years, so quickly and firmly had camp routine insinuated itself into the new fabric of living. Now that the prospect of home was near, it was a little unbelievable. Naturally there was rejoicing, yet it was sobering to realize that since this was to be an embarkation leave, it may be the last chance to see family and friends for a long time to come.

Officially, leave papers had been dated November 18 to 28, but the Powers had dug down deep in their hearts and brought forth a 12-hour grace period, so that actually we could start shaking off the dust of Peary at 5 p.m. on November 17.

The night before, bunks had been stripped of mattresses so that seabags could be packed and ready for early storage. Men slept, if at all, on bare springs or a single blanket. The device of awakening the brethren by a call to urination, which was then starting to achieve its place as an institution in camp life, was frequently employed during the night by its most able exponent, Elmer. (You-know-Elmer-he's-a-riot!)

About 4 a.m. (0400 hours), some exuberant insomniacs concluded that it was time to rise and shine and from that moment on until 5 p.m., we seemed always to

be on the verge of leaving. "They" said that right after we dropped off our blankets to be washed, we'd be going, but we didn't. "They" said to stick around the barracks and make sure we had on our dress blues because we were liable to get orders anytime, but we didn't. "They" said hurry up and get chow, because we would probably "leave out" right afterward. We didn't.

The sun was already low in the afternoon sky before we shuffled through the Personnel Office, ID cards in hand, clutched our leave papers, formed into files and hiked up the hill to the main drag, and down the main drag to the station where a long train waited and wheezed.

"By the right flank . . . . ."

Behind were left the leave-hoarders from the West, the ones who expected to go to the Pacific Coast and therefore elected to take their leaves from there, so not to lose any precious time traveling. The fact that all the companies, reconstituted as units, went to Gulfport, Miss., and not the West Coast, was no ill wind for the Westerners, however. Many were granted additional travel allowances exceeding those given Easterners.

(If any blank space appears on this page, it is now and hereby dedicated to personal activities and projects which may have characterized the ensuing ten days of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. What you did you will never forget, unless it happens that you couldn't remember in the first place.)

Upon returning, we found that the A-1 Area had become a thing of the past. The mates who had stayed behind had moved all our belongings to new barracks in Area B-6, adjacent to but barred from Area B-5 (psychiatric and medical area, sometime known as the "nuthouse"). Here the business of more drill went on, if only to fill the time until entrainment for our new station. In the brief space of ten days, our muscles had softened and our marching coordination and rhythm had suffered equally, so that we'd make a bunch of raw boots look like the Rockettes. But we had to be kept occupied, "they" said.

Then one night the chiefs gave us our new address: Camp *Hollyday*, Gulfport, Mississippi. There was general rejoicing.

"Thank God we're getting out of this obscene place," the tenor of comment ran. "I don't *never* want to see the sumbitch no more!"

The day the 18th Super died had a holiday air. Places had been designated on the drill field for stacking of seabags according to assigned train coaches for the trip south. Early in the morning the stacks began to grow. Knots of men in dress blues and pea coats, lugging ditty bags, appeared at their stations, talking and congratulating themselves on leaving the "concentration camp."

A little after mid-day, the group due to ride the

second of the two-section Gulfport-bound train was yelled into formation by chiefs and officers. At the proper time and at the proper signal the procession moved off the drill field in route step.

Presumably, each of the Gulfport train sections had a schedule, but who knows for sure? They chugged out when the engineers took a notion and managed to convey it to the locomotives.

Two hours or so later, in the half-deserted B-6 Area, after a period of pleasant restlessness, the mobilization procedure was repeated and the first section men trouped from the grounds.

Before the depot they halted to await the pleasure of the Iron Horse. For a long time they waited, coat collars turned up against the chilling wind, and passed the time hooting truck-borne detachments of Ship's Company men or truckloads of Negro boots.

At last a ripple of chatter ran down the file of waiting men and the column moved. At the station, as the loading began, the Ship's Company band broke into a loud martial air. When everything was in order, the train groaned to a start. Before the indifferent gaze of scattered station watchers, the former 18th Super Battalion reincarnated as Construction Battalion Maintenance Units, moved on to a new era in its history. The date was December 7 1943.

CHAPTER TWO

In which blisters and "Maggie's Drawers" and prophets and doctors play prominent parts in a sad farewell.

OF all the secret weapons of the war, by far the most terrifying was the so-called railway "troop carrier." Built in the style of a bedroom dresser, with concealed soot-intake ducts and alternating hot and cold dust-blowers, they made riding the rods seem like life on a Santa Fe "Chief."

Both sections of the Gulfport train carried several of these tributes to man's perversity. When the windows were shut, the stale air hung heavy with smoke and BO. When the windows were open, draughts dug channels through the compartments and soot sifted onto clothes and skin. When it became too chilly, someone flipped a switch and soon it was too hot. The other coaches were of more conventional types, though. The soul of the railroad industry was not all black.

Mealtime on a troop train is a harrowing experience, like that of an army retreating through roads chocked with refugees. Narrow aisles are jammed by a line snaking through three or four cars. Through this line, bucking the tide, squirm those who have eaten and want to get back to their seats. Eating in itself isn't a bad operation; the chow is good, comes on round, gleaming white plates, officer-style, and is placed—not thrown—before you by a civilian attendant. It is just a matter of shoveling it in, tipping the waiter and forgetting the bill (which your grandchildren will pay). Puffing and

Your grandchildren will pay the bill.

sweating when it's all over, you have to admit that the hardest part is getting to a table. For that you need patience or strategy or both.

Twice we got off our train to eat, once for an evening meal in a Savannah, Ga., naval station, and the following morning at Columbus, Ga., in the nearest thing to a tea shoppe the Navy has ever thrown our way. This was route of the first section which left second and arrived last. The second section, which left first, followed a slightly different route, but beat the first section into Gulfport, arriving about 9:30 p.m. December 10. The first section, which left second, covered the ground in three nights and two days, arriving about 4 a.m. December 11. If this sounds like a slide-rule symphony, just remember there are three ways of doing everything: The right way, the wrong way and—think hard, Jasper! We want to get 100 on our examination, don't we?*

*The Navy way—and we don't give a damn about our marks.

At night it gets just as dark in Mississippi as it does in Virginia, and so we said howdyado to Gulfport without seeing anything more than a mist and a truck convoy waiting near the rail line to take us to new barracks.

The barracks were yellowish, two-story frame structures with shower rooms at the front on both floors, the familiar double bunks, large wooden lockers for each man and fan-type gas-heating units. We threw our gear on hastily assigned bunks, then made for the chow hall, in line as usual, wearing rolled up shirtsleeves and feeling very comfortable, even though it was early on a December morning.

By the time we had had a breathing spell, the sun had risen bright and warm and we were mustered outside the barracks for our first look at the new country. Camp *Hollyday* followed the usual pattern of military reservations, functional buildings in a regular layout on a setting of flat, bare and barren land. The camp, an *Advance Base* Depot, was divided into two distinct sections, the Navy Armed Guard, an organization of men trained to man guns on merchant ships, and the *Advance Base* Depot Receiving Barracks, the area to which we belonged.

Most of the musterees had a chance to view more of the flatness and bareness when they were taken out on a leash for a de-stiffening walk. The remainder had already been subtracted for KP or other details. It was beginning again.

It required only a brief time for the organizations to become reoriented and shaken down into the groove they would follow for the next two months. But even before settlement was complete, the matter of ten-day

leaves for the West Coasters had to be handled. The majority of Southerners, having assumed that they lived as near to the East as to the West, had already been home.

With matters of organization fairly well along, we began to swing more fully into a routine of military field instruction and pre-embarkation preparations; for even at this time interest had turned to the question of "shipping out." Solemn-faced purveyors of scuttlebutt would quote "a guy that knows" and cite dates. Fingers traced courses all over the map. Some of the best scuttlebutt came "direct from the head;" if it came from the "first stool," the chances are it was pretty straight stuff. In the days of 9:30 "lights out," when the head was the only lighted room, there were many post-taps "cracker-barrel" discussions. It was surprising how many men felt impelled to personal body functions, and once arrived found it convenient to talk, write letters or play hopscotch. Usually the fire-watchman was around, too. It was his duty to be everywhere.

The exodus on the first round of liberty sections was practically unanimous. There was a strong desire to test Gulfport, Biloxi and later New Orleans, as "good" or "stinking" liberty towns. First reactions appeared to be that Gulfport was a pretty good place and Biloxi its equal. But later there was a feeling that there ain't nothing to do nowhere, and New Orleans became the place you were lucky to get to. Gulport's night life—the Silver Moon, the Cinderella, Bennie French's, Angelo's, et al—began to lose its charm. Enough remained, however, to lure some of the boys out through the famous Gate Two-and-a-Half ("T'row you over the

The lure was worth a small fee.

fence for ten cents") on nights when they should have been mending their socks.

Daily routine at Hollyday was only slightly different in form from that at Peary. One of the most striking differences was the playing at Colors every morning by one or more of the Armed Guard bands—well-drilled snappy outfits that concluded the Colors ceremony with marches through company streets, blaring zestful martial airs.

Issue of the 03-A3 rifle (what's your number?) launched a crescendo of scuttlebutt. It was evident our stateside tour was drawing to a close. The fact that we hadn't been given carbines, considered to be the weapon of the Pacific, indicated to a minority that we might be

headed for Europe; but this scant argument was loudly howled down. There were other ideas of what might happen, too. These were based on stories that such-and-such an outfit had "left out" with full battle equipment and training, had cruised up and down the East Coast for a couple of months and finally wound up at Camp Endicott, Davisville, Rhode Island. But with the issue of items for tropical living and lectures on malaria control and prevention, it was quite generally agreed that we were headed for the Pacific. A few of the more gimlet-eyed eagles even asserted that they knew for a fact just where we were going. To them we doff the proverbial chapeau.

The immediate burning question of the month, however, was whether we would go to Cat Island, the allegedly fever-wracked, insular dunghill just off the Mississippi coast, said to be a place where men got a taste of Island X. According to surreptitious reports, officers of our units were darting from here to there like the late Dexter Fellows making advance arrangements for the Big Show. They were going to yell us out of the sack some midnight; we'd find out! But we never went and "Cat fever" died.

Gas drill in the chlorine chamber, lectures, schools and field tactics came along in the repetitious course of training. But the most noteworthy event of our Gulfport sojourn (barring liberties) was the glorious episode of the Rifle Range march, a gruelling climax of all the "conditioning hikes" that had become something to go to Sick Bay about.

Thirty-two (count 'em), 32, miles from Camp Hollyday in the wooded country of Mississippi lies the Rifle Range, as purposely a primitive establishment as

you wish you hadn't seen. It's a bit "rugged," especially if you go there in January, as we did, when the freezing air doesn't stop at the barracks doors.

There were two ways of getting to the Range: The political method, by truck, hauling supplies and equipment; or the proletarian method, hauling your rifle and dragging your buttocks. The officers took turns leading the way, starting out at a leisurely pace through the camp gate, past the dilapidated Negro shacks and finally through the center of an outlying section of town. Spirits were high and a feeling of martyrdom rode the ranks, but out on the highway and into more open country, exuberance subsided when the pacemaker stepped up the marching rate to a point where leg muscles began to talk back and incipient blisters appeared. The double file became progressively more disrupted, spaces widened between men, some dropped to near-last positions for the momentary rest it afforded. What a relief to hear the whistle and to fling yourself on the roadside for five or ten minutes every hour! It was always worth a groan or two to get going again. The highway stretched interminably, although nearly everyone struggled through that part of it. Not until we turned from the concrete into the uphill, unpaved back roads, did the lengthening march really take its toll. Blister-ridden, fagged men lurched out of line to sit down and await one of the trucks that would be along to pick up stragglers. Here and there up ahead were reclining remnants of other units that had preceded us.

Most killing of all were the last five miles when the body had become a mass of aches. The sun was lowering and we knew we must be almost there, but the road didn't end. Truck riders jounced by and we yelled:

"How far?" One said, "Half a mile." Another said, "Only two miles." Some pointed casually: "Just up ahead!"

Bushed as a rat on a treadmill.

At last over a rise appeared the entrance to the Range, a high angular gateway of narrow rustic limbs. Cheering wanly, we straggled through to the far end of the camp where Peary-type barracks ranged side by side. It was 6 p.m. (1800 hours), and we felt as if we'd been walking for 1800 hours. We had started at 7 a.m. We had marched 32 miles. We were as bushed as rats on a treadmill. Half of the men "hit the sack" at once, stirring only an hour or so later to take chow in the messhall across the company street.

There was a messhall eloquent of its name! Water was heated in big G.I. cans over outdoor open fires and some of the cooking was done there also. Frequently washing of dishes, trays, cutlery and the messhall itself had to be done in lukewarm or cold water. The whole works served only too well to illustrate some of the difficulties to be met on an Island X.

Since there were only a couple of generators, electricity was at a premium. But the messhall, though scanty of operational facilities, was at least wired for light and power. None of the barracks was lighted except by air-gasoline lanterns in various stages of inefficiency. Since there were but two to a barracks, only the ends of the buildings glowed, the rest of the room looking like the home of bats and vampires. It was an eyestrain, sometimes, even in the lighted zones, to tell a jack from a deuce, and writing a letter made you

think of Abe Lincoln. There were wood-burning stoves at each end that did their best to heat the draughty places but with 40 men making trips during the night to the eight-holer out in back, the doors were continually swinging. There was a "shower" in back too, but it dispensed only cold water. Iceboxes for Eskimos!

We stayed at the range for more than a week, during which time we witnessed the solution to the engineering problem of the age: How to salvage a "cat" that has

been mired almost out of sight in the transplanting of an eight-holer? The answer: First, assemble about 100 semi-official consultative assistants who work in shifts. They discuss methods, apply hand power and try automotive power. Then they go get somebody who knows how to salvage mired "cats," and behold, it's done! The "cat" has been saved from a fate worse than death!

Naturally, the primary purpose of coming to the Range was to shoot. To those whose only pre-Seabee

He fired that shot.

experience with firearms had been a few turns with the Flit gun, the prospect of firing 100 or 120 rounds of .30 calibre was a disconcerting adventure.

On alternate days we went in groups to the range a few hundred yards from the camp site. On intervening days we stood in the long, wide pit behind the target embankment to hoist, patch and mark targets being fired upon by another group. The number of rounds per man fired daily by a given group increased in successive sessions, starting with 20 to 40 and in the final period 80 to 120.

The conventional offhand, standing to sitting and kneeling positions were not too rough on the neophyte —at least as far as comfort was concerned. Making a decent score in those positions was a different story. But the prone position on solidly frozen ground with the body numbed by cold felt like a trip through a hamburg grinder. Padding of shoulders and elbows with gloves or watch caps didn't help much and many a left elbow was scraped raw by the recoil and many a shoulder or collarbone was black and blue from wear. Men built brushwood fires all along behind the firing line to warm themselves between relays. Qualification scores were not officially recorded here, but unit percentages were somewhat below the records chalked up at Peary with the carbine.

Contributing to this statistical drop was "Maggie's Drawers" which more than frequently blazed out in slow, double waves across the faces of targets unmarred by rifle fire.

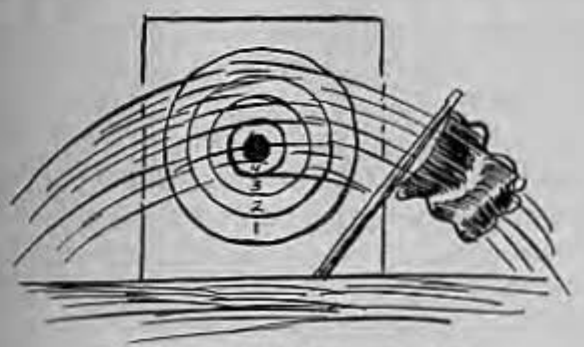
"Maggie's Drawers" was the name given to the red flag which swept the target to indicate a complete miss. Whatever the reason—astigmatism, indolence, firing on the wrong target or failure to get off all your shots in the required time—the man in the pit seemed to take ghoulish glee in advertising the fact that you couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. You had two lines of defense: Either that you'd made a bulls-eye on the target next door, or that you'd put a bullet squarely through a previous hole. As a last resort you could claim that the sumbitch in the pit was crazy.

The sessions began with curt, firm instructions over an amplifying system by the rangemaster.

"Ready on the right!..... Ready on the left!..... Ready on the firing line!...."

And woe to him who fired at Will before he was supposed to! Somewhere in the world today walks a man whose ears perhaps ring with the question: "WHO FIRED THAT SHOT?" It is one of the Range's mysteries. But we know, don't we?

One day of the time spent at the Range was allotted for the much-heralded Combat Range—a broad tract of land well away from the firing grounds, where instruction was given in the rudiments of infantry attack under simulated battle conditions. Some live ammunition was used and land charges of explosives were detonated close to squads in the field. But it was all safely controlled. Compared to the more stark realism of combat ranges in other branches of the armed services, ours was like a carnival where air whistles up your pants-leg and trapdoors swing out to slap you on the behind. The course could be covered within an hour and for many the hardest part was the 300-yard zigzag run uphill across the field that began the "attack." Top point of the exercises was rapid fire at metal target



Her drawers kept the average down.

figures from theoretical points of vantage. Policing the ground for cartridge cases followed.

Our goodbye to the Rifle Range was a mental thumbing of the nose and we began a two-day trek back to the Hollyday Barracks, spending the intervening night in a prepared bivouac area at the halfway point. Quarters there were well worn, high-peaked tents with an average of eight cots to each, no lights and a small, wood-burning unmanageable stove and flue in the center. To keep the stove burning and, while burning, to keep it from overheating, someone had to to be awake all night. We were glad to get started on the last 16 miles back to camp, even though it threatened to rain for most of the march and finally, just before we entered the familiar section of Gulfport, it poured like all git-out. Drenched, dripping and aching but with a satisfied, good-natured glumness, we ambled up the home stretch. Typical was the overheard comment made by one mate to another:

"What glory, Price!"

The biggest part of training schedules now behind us, scuttlebutt on "shipping out" buzzed around camp and Gulfport itself, infecting all whom it bit with the "straight dope." Letters home hinted darkly at expected surprise moves in the dead of night. Many Seabee wives came from far corners of the country to be with their husbands for the last few weeks or days of stateside tenure. You had to be a crossbreed of Sherlock Holmes and Henry Kaiser to find a room for the little woman, but it was done. And the little woman, once comfortably set up, made it a point to gather a lot more scuttlebutt than camp-bound "insiders" could hope to root out.

With the coming of the distaff side, came also a growing list of requests for more, better and longer special liberties. Telegrams and letters, flourished in the face of the Personnel Officer, often blossomed into 21 or 48, or even 72-hour liberties. Items of business hanging fire in Gulfport or surrounding areas were exploited for what they were worth, even if good for only five or six hours. The increasing number of empty bunks in the barracks at night equalled the number of sad or red-eyed sleepy men who reported for 0700 muster.

Final issue of field equipment—shelter halves, bush mosquito nets, cot mosquito nets, knives, bayonets, canteens, messkits, gas masks, tent poles, stakes, sun glasses, etc.—brought the matter to a head. Even skeptics who had half-figured on indefinite stateside duty were convinced. From then on, it was merely a matter of when the ship would get in and be loaded. Merely? It was the hottest controversy since the Webster-Hayne debates!

The prophets who had been at the docks, or who had known someone who spoke to one of the civilians who worked at the docks, filled the ears to overflowing with misinformation. There were some, though they would not believe themselves, who could tell a convincing story about the keel-laying of our ship. Among the many to give ominous testimony, there may have been some who actually knew the score. But if so, their small voices were lost in the welter and the end result was that we didn't know from nothing.

Finally the word was official and definite. We were "leaving out" very soon. The order went out to tell all wives to go home—an order that was neither strictly

adhered to nor rigidly enforced. Passenger lists were being drawn up with next-of-kin listings, headed by the code word for our unknown destination.

The afternoon of the day before departure was set aside for a physical examination, a rubber-stamp once-over given presumably to determine fitness for overseas duty. Apparently, diagnosis of a man's constitution depends for validity on *who* asks the questions. If you should meet a friend and he should ask you "How are you today?" and you should answer, "Very well, thank you"—why that is no diagnosis at all. But if you should go to a doctor's office and the doctor should say, "How do you feel?" and you should answer, "Very well, thank you"—now *that* is a diagnosis. Our examinations came closest to the classic exaggeration attributed to draft board procedure: If you're warm, can see light and hear thunder, you're in.

"How do you feel?"

Trucked to the Camp Hollyday Station Force Dispensary, we lined up for a "short arm;" the doctor thrust a small wooden paddle in our mouths, asking simultaneously: "Is there anything wrong with you that you know of?" Assuming that you gargled "No," as was customary, the doctor said either "H-m-m-m" or "O.K.," depending upon his mood; and you were officially considered a fit specimen.

Late the following afternoon, dressed in green coveralls, wearing full helmet, with about 60 pounds of

full pack strapped to our backs, field equipment hanging from all sides, and carrying rifles, we waddled out in front of the barracks. Mustering by alphabetical order required some time, so those from the P's to the Z's allowed themselves to collapse in a lump, not seeking hoisting assistance until their time drew near.

At last we were ready. Ranged in double file, we started the winding course through camp. Well-wishers called out. Off-hand goodbyes echoed back and forth. At the gate, where knots of civilians had gathered, a band met us to head our procession on the three-mile hike to the dock. Town watchers stood on verandahs or along the line of march, their expressions ranging from excitement, through awe, to dead-pans. Clusters of children trailed excitedly along the column until outdistanced. In the fast-growing darkness, we hit the gulfside boulevard, turned left toward the dock area. Automobiles eased past us on the light-spattered thoroughfare. From the column came periodic calls, tinged with mock and premature irony:

"Look! A white woman!"

For us it was a significant date—the first day of a year and more that we would be separated in a deeply personal sense from the things we loved. In a way the day's events seemed like unrealities. It was February 7, 1944.

CHAPTER THREE

Wherein flying fish and Mae Wests, and sunsets and submarines fail to delight famished mariners.

THE ship lay moored to her dock berth, half hidden by darkness and concealed by shadowy warehouses from which the last of her cargo was being loaded. Spots of shaded electric light illuminated a section here, a section there. All about was the muffled rumble of pre-sailing activity.

Behind us, as we straggled out on the pier, lay the lights of Gulfport, before us lay the black of the Gulf, beside us loomed the warehouses and ship. We came to a halt, milled aimlessly around, finally flopped anywhere that was convenient. Guards patrolled nearby. There would be nearly a couple of hours' wait before we were taken aboard, although then we expected the order every few minutes. We moved a little every half hour, and once inside the wharf shed, could see the gangway leading to deck and a file of men going aboard.

Two checkers stood at the gangway's foot, one on each side, clicking tally-meters as a man clomped up the ramp. His last name was called and he responded with what was left.

"Zilch," said the checker.

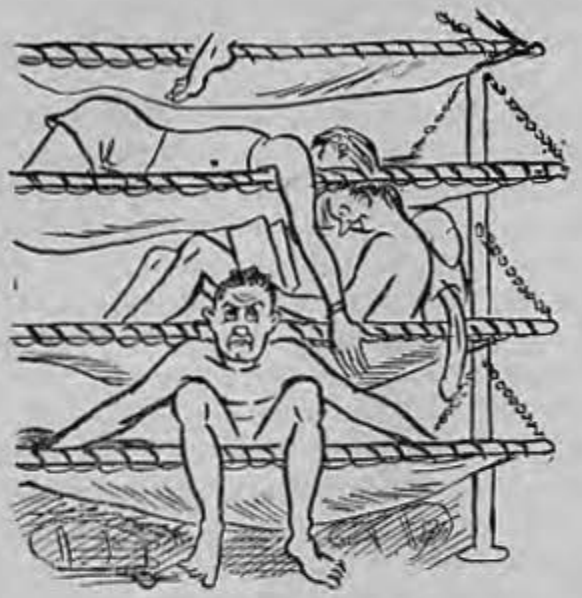
"Joe Ambrose," said Zilch and passed upward.

On deck he saw gray, grotesque shapes of ship's gear, loading equipment and superstructure. He followed the man before him like a sheep, entered the hatch, scrambled awkwardly down the steel companionway.

With the others he was led by a Marine sergeant to a lower deck. When they stopped it was in a large, oppressively compact compartment, one of the three forward that composed the enlisted men's quarters. Each of the three decks had the same arrangement. The compartment was packed with tiers of bunks four deep—metal frames strung with canvas, looking like meat racks or morgue slabs. Every conceivable space where a man could be laid endwise was used. Once in the racks, especially in a lower one, you were trapped until the herds of men finished tramping through the scanty aisles. You had slightly over two feet leeway before your head hit the drooping form of your upstairs neighbor's butt. Looking out, you could see only masses of legs blocking the aisles.

As background to the noises of getting settled sounded the steady day-and-night whir of the electric air blowers. Now and then the loudspeaker (one to a compartment) buzzed, relaying scratchy orders from above.

For the first night you perhaps slept in your clothes. You were heated from the hike and chilled by the wait on the pier; it was nearing midnight and you were dog-tired. Besides, you were issued only one khaki blanket and it was growing cooler all the time. You might have to chase down the Marine sergeant to get the blanket, too. There was one in your pack, of course, but the damn thing took you a couple of hours to roll when you had plenty of area. Here and now you wouldn't bother with it.



Your neighbor's butt intruded.

The ship left the pier early on the morning of February 8 while hundreds of men snored belowdeck.

When the first morning's breakfast was over, Gulfport was a haze on the horizon and we looked out across the green Gulf to see the small escort ships convoying us, we learned from crewmen, to New Orleans. It would be just a short run.

The aforesaid meal was not as easy to get as it sounds. There had been no time yet to organize chow schedules. The idea was to get in line and stay there, carrying your rattling, tarnishing messkit (that had to be reamed out with steel wool every day or so). The lines at first were organized (the word is used loosely) entirely belowdeck; later the jam became so intolerable

they had to be started on deck. Anyway, the first chow line was not the worst. Not until the men saw that getting to chow was a survival of the hungriest, fittest and most persistent, and also discovered that shipboard eating schedules called for but two meals a day, did the real crush begin—a stampede of swearing, sweating, complaining hundreds, pushing, being pushed and pinioned against bulkheads. That sort of thing went on for several meals. Afterward chow passes were issued and regular eating times assigned for each of the Units and Casual Draft.

The messhall, situated about three-quarters aft, had apparently been converted from a storage hold, the hatch cover, two decks up, being its ceiling or overhead. When the heat below became too terrific, this hatch was uncovered, but the heat remained terrific nevertheless. The chow lines, starting at the "bottleneck"—a series of narrow labyrinthine passageways that led to the galley—wound through all three compartments as far forward as the brig, which was about as far as you could go. To get to the messhall, you had to pass through the crew's quarters, by the engine room where the heat rose in solid banks, then down the companionway to the galley. There was plenty of time to study landmarks along the route. Moving was slow and uncomfortable. Sometimes it took hours.

You stood at high counters in the messhall to eat, the sweat running down your face, arms and body and often dripping into the steaming messkit before you. When the voyage was further along and the wearing of the Mae West life jacket was compulsory, these were tied around your waist. Afterwards, as if you hadn't sweated enough already, you dumped your garbage into

Always the Mae West.

the swill can and bent over boiling water to wash your mess gear. After that you fled in all possible dripping haste to your compartment, flung your utensils on the bunk and ran for the cooling breezes of the deck, dragging your inseparable Mae West.

Aft of the galley were the chiefs' mess and the officers' wardroom, where meals were served to a considerably fewer number of men three times daily.

The third meal came to those few enlisted men who stood guard at various points of the ship, or to those who by some "smoke-filled room" politics had inveigled themselves into stewards' jobs.

The food was not of the choicest, but it would sustain life if swallowed along with a few other aversions. Chief cause of complaint was the scarcity. It was common fact that some of the men had dug into the trash pile to recover raw potatoes or onions. Sometimes the cooks would hand out bread or other items as long as a surplus lasted, but it was not everyone who shared in this.

When complaints mounted so high as to echo aft, the officers-in-charge of the Banika-bound units made inquiries among the men concerning causes of dissatisfaction. Nothing could be done about the two-meal schedule, but shortly after, fresh fruits, such as oranges and apples appeared on our menus and the helpings increased somewhat. But eating was still a matter of stuff

all you can while you can and grab what you can when you can.

It was near mid-morning of the first day aboard ship when our vessel turned from the Gulf into the Mississippi for the day-long upriver run to New Orleans and Algiers where the degaussing system (apparatus affixed to the ship's hull to neutralize the effect of magnetic mines) was to be inspected. The checkup completed by the following morning, the ship sailed downriver again, past New Orleans' waterfront teeming with landing ships, dingy unpainted freighters, transports, old-type stern-wheel riverboats reminiscent of Show Boat days, battered hulks, ships of many nations, an aircraft carrier flying the French tricolor—and against this panorama, the background of the old city.

Next morning we were still in the Mississippi, one among a flock of ships of varying sizes, some sloppy and inert, others snappy and ready to sail. We detached ourselves from the crowd, and threaded slowly out through the Delta lands, past the Cagin country, out through the narrow channels where a well-ordered Coast Guard station sparkled like a garden in a swamp. Finally toward late afternoon, we slipped into the open Gulf where the water is bluer.

Far ahead we saw two ships about our own size, possibly a little larger. Planes circled periodically. The mainland grew more distant. Evening closed in and the gun watch took their stations. Ship's rails were lined with water-lookers, lethargically watching foam break from the vessel's prow and drift backward in patterns of white and blue agate. The canvas-covered hatches were studded with garrulous groups getting the feel of the ship. Then the deck loudspeaker ordered:

"All troops below!" and we made ready for the nightly blackout.

Shipboard life resolved itself into a regular form: After morning chow we hunted cool, shady spots until it was time for the deck crew to hose down everything in sight with sea water. Then we hunted dry, cool spots, slept, read, talked or wrote letters until mid-afternoon when it was time to think about going through left tackle for a meal. In the evening we lolled at the side or perched on the hatches until it was time to go below.

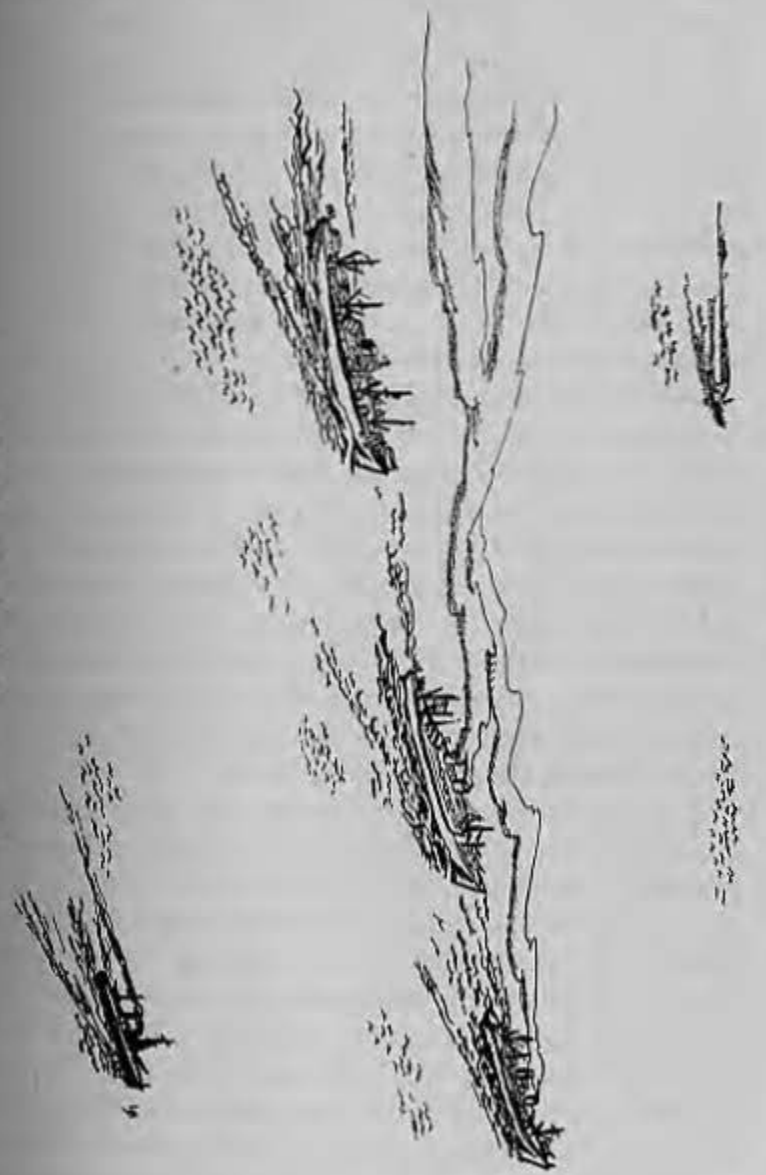
Apprehensions always rose at night, despite assurances of the skipper that proper warnings would be issued if danger threatened and that there were 45 per cent more Mae Wests aboard than were required for the number of personnel. Instructions to follow, should the "abandon ship" order be necessary, had already been given. Yet with the setting up of the "sunset watch"—the period of danger from submarines when ships are most readily silhouetted against sun or clouds —came the annoying habit of closing the hatches and pounding the bolts into place. The sound of metal on metal never failed to draw comment.

"Yeah, hear that? Now just whatinell we'd do a torpedo hits? Crissake! The doors'd be so bent you never get out!"

Somebody else would break in: "Listen that crazy sumbitch. A tin fish hits this place, nobody in the goddam compartment is gotta worry about it!"

"Shoot a quarter!"

Usually morbid talk soon gave way to gaming; or to homespun music and singing; or to reading "whodunits" the Red Cross had distributed as we came aboard; or to writing letters that would be censored on board



. . . across the Gulf of Mexico. (Lafitte extreme left)

and mailed at the first port of call; or washing clothes, using sea water in a helmet stuck in a head stool; or showering in salt water and rinsing with forbidden fresh water; or chess or checkers. Sometimes, the loudspeaker would interrupt with messages to ship's crewmen or with detail assignments for troops. (KP came infrequently, the Casual Draft taking the beating for the first week or more, a fact which gave the units comfort and pleasure. They got their turns later, however.) Or perhaps the call over the speaker would be in the well-known Scandinavian voice:

"Stond-by mon, report to the bridge *immediattle*!"

In later stages of the trip messages would direct resetting of timepieces as we moved westward. And, if so, "lights out" would be delayed. A few guide lights still burned after "lights out," but since there were no ports below deck, they held no danger. Beneath the lights, located above companionways, card games continued far into the night. On the meat racks men tossed or sprawled at coolest angles, for the weather was becoming perceptibly warmer and the roaring air blowers failed to reach all corners of the hold.

During the night petty officers, assigned as guards, stood deck watch. From them came many a weird tale of things that happened on the ocean in the dead of night. Somewhere along the line fact and fancy merged. Several days out from New Orleans, the morning brought a tale of submarine chasing. But another version of the same episode asserted that the ship's fuel pumps had gone haywire ("sounded like all the machinery being chewed up and then went dead") and that the good ship had been wallowing and pitching in mountainous troughs for an hour until repairs were made.

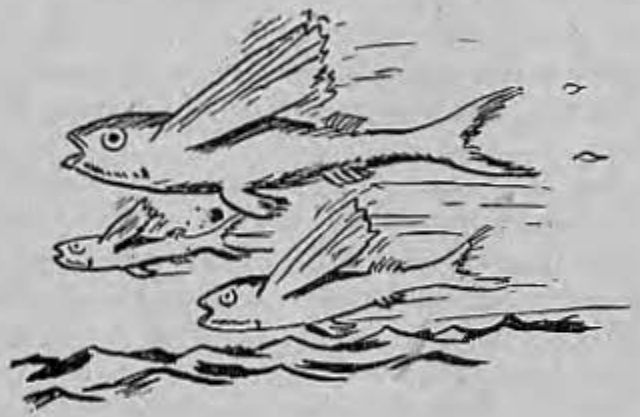
Not only that, but at the time the machinery became constipated, the story goes, we were in the famed Yucatan Straits, the narrow strip of water separating Yucatan from the western tip of Cuba and marking the southern passage from the Gulf of Mexico to the Caribbean Sea. This area has shared, along with others, the name "Torpedo Junction," since it is the logical place for enemy undersea craft to ambush Gulf shipping bound for Panama or South America. According to speculative reports published sometime previous to this, the area fell under the domain of one Graf von Luckner, World War I commander of the German sailship-rigged raider and suspected of being in charge of Nazi undersea operations in the Gulf during World War II.

Be that as it may, after chow of the morning in question, everything seemed the same. There was no doubt that we were in the Caribbean, which not long ago had been profitable hunting grounds for the enemy; but outwardly at least in the clear blue of the day, it might have been a Cook's tour (with alterations).

To those who were not below with an ailment known as seasickness or those not at the leeward rail expecting, the blueness of the Caribbean, the sweep and rhythm of the water, the swishing foam and churning wake, and the striking phenomenon of a perfect-circle horizon were things of wonder and a not unpleasant experience.

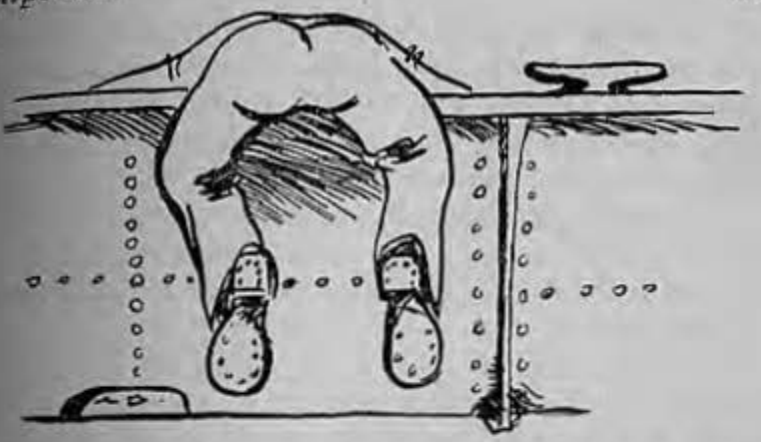
Flying fish had already caught the attention of the railbirds. Schools of the little fellows romped across the waves, covering a couple of hundred feet or more at a flight, cutting through the wave tips and disappearing or suddenly changing direction and hopping off again. Splashes far seaward were identified variously as por-

poise, shark and even whale. Occasionally the ship would knife through patches of what was believed to be a peculiar type of seaweed, almost granular in form, brownish in color and hanging close to the water's surface. This was often hastily described as "oil slick" and from then on "you pays your money and you takes your choice." How it got there was said to be: (a) from a torpedoed tanker; (b) seepage from some ship ahead; (c) a depth-charged submarine.



Stories of "ash can" action during the night made the rounds in the morning. Some nights, down in the hold, it really did sound as if some were dropped. But you'll have to get your Congressman to check on this.

Along about this time it fell to some of the World War I veterans among us to deplore the offhand practice of tossing overside papers, cigarettes, orange peel, apple cores and other trash. It wouldn't have been tolerated in the other war, they said: A dead giveaway to the enemy.



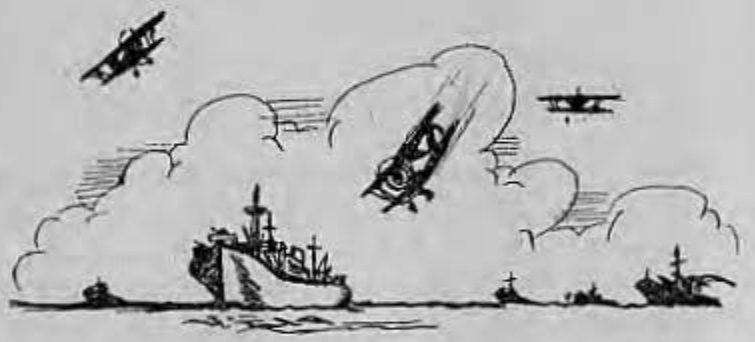
Physical training on the forward cargo hatch in the early afternoon was supposed to provide some exercise for otherwise sedentary personnel, but the practice was perfunctory and gradually petered out. One rigidly regular routine was piece inspection, both by chiefs and officers. Rust would appear overnight either in the rifle barrel or around the breech merely from the damp atmosphere. Oiling and cleaning was a chore well looked after.

Some of the most beautiful sunsets in the world are fashioned in the declining moments of a Caribbean day. Like a backdrop to an Inferno, the fiery sun sinks behind an arc of clouds lying flat on the horizon, and from this prismatic core every conceivable hue radiates across a vaulted sky while slowly changing shapes of fire-fringed clouds are flooded by color—brilliant and delicate and unforgettable. Call between 7 and 7:30 p.m. Must be seen to be appreciated.

Since the men, at this time, had little else to appreciate, they lingered at the ship's rail, watching the scenic miracle on the rim of the sea.

Seasickness took a continuing toll. Lemon-sucking became a common deck sight. Not so common, but noticeable enough, was indiscriminate retching. One night the chow line was 350 men short. No appetite. There were days and nights of rather violent rolling and pitching. The ship creaked and rumbled throatily when zigs were changed to zags. The zigzagging was normal and natural. Our ship did it regularly throughout the voyage.

During our Caribbean crossing rain was infrequent. When it did come, it loomed out of the distance as a gray, opaque cloud sliding across the water, then split into streams as it neared. You saw it coming and you could see where it ended and sometimes you could sidestep.



Panama landfall.

We made our Panama landfall in mid-morning. First sight of the tenuous land strip on the horizon brought the usual skeptical comment: "Land, he says. He calls that land! That's clouds!"

But it was Colon, Panama, a welcome sight. Both land and seaplanes zoomed out to look us over. Destroyer escorts met us outside the heavily fortified zone to conduct us in; then, when we were in close to the jetties, they circled far behind and continued patrol.

Amid this display of wartime seafaring and defense, we saw two Panamanian natives paddling their canoe around the inlet with enviable unconcern, fishing the waters nations vie for.

It was afternoon before we had picked up our pilot and actually entered the first of the Panama Canal's four Gatun Locks, the magnificent, massive pieces of engineering that convey the ships over high ground. Sleek black-and-yellow donkey engines on grooved rails toiled up the hills of track, dragging the lumbering vessel by rope until she was safely through to the calm fresh-water lake beyond where we met British and Canadian craft bound for the locks.

Above hovered the queer-looking Panamanian birds with the split tails and dive-bomber wings which we called, for want of a better name, the "long-assed duckbill." Later someone claimed they were properly known as "frigates" or "men o' war."

Crewmen of our ship flexed their imaginations and told lurid tales of the Panamanian jungles, not forgetting the headhunting classic about the white man who formed a jungle expedition to locate his archeologist friend lost some years before. The story says that he came upon a group of natives who offered some shrunken human heads for sale. One of the heads (of course) was that of his long-lost friend. Hm-m-m!

Descent to the Pacific side of the Canal (which runs north and south) began with entrance into the first of

the Pedro Miguel Locks. We passed through the second one in the night's early darkness. Overhead brilliant shafts of anti-aircraft searchlights stabbed the sky, weaving a web of light. Some melted away and others flashed on, crisscrossing each other and converging on patrol planes that shuttled back and forth. The air seemed alive with might and invulnerability.

Farther on through the waterway the Miraflores Lock, last of the chain, came into view with its large neon arrow, signs and lighted embankments. We tied up. There was no blackout that night and we stayed on deck for a long time. On the concrete below sat two natives conversing in a ground-slapping, gesticulating sign language interspersed with gutterals.

Through the Pedro Miguel Locks.

By morning we found that we had already slipped through the lock and were into the Pacific. Destroyer escorts trailed at our sides, but eventually they were

gone and we were depending for safety on the speed and maneuverability of our vessel, which was considerable, and on our own armament.

Compared to the Caribbean, the Pacific was calm. Some days its glassy surface seemed to move only in long, slow undulations. The ocean could show its temper, though. One story that went the rounds told of a Seabee ship which, in crossing a few weeks before, had run afoul of a terrific storm. There had been violent moments of uncertainty when the pitching vessel barely managed to withstand the pounding waves. A chief petty officer had died (of natural causes) at the height of the storm's fury; and a small escort ship had gone down with all hands.

But during our crossing, one day was much the same as another: Rail-lounging, reading, incessant

smoking, arguments on any subject at all, dozing. Chief diversion was the mid-day opening of the ship's store belowdeck near Sick Bay. There you could purchase cigarettes, pipe tobacco, if available, writing paper,

pipe cleaners, peanuts and other small items. On deck at 11 a.m. the candy counter opened. You took pot luck with frozen bars that were rationed three to a customer. The lines were long and the waiting was hot, even if you came early, because someone was always there first. But while the stock lasted, men hit the line "again and again and again."

Dress aboard ship was a matter of comfort and whim; the only required item was the Mae West, the kapok-filled life jacket that picked up more grease and dirt than a fleet of street department masseurs. Tied in front at the waist and slung to cushion the butt, it served mainly as portable upholstery, or as a pillow on which to sleep when you strung up a poncho or blanket for shade. Depending on the weathering of your skin, you went naked except for a pair of shorts, or you wore shorts and skivvy shirt or even full overalls. Some men were painfully burned by the equatorial sun for the sake of a good coloring.

In the evenings musical talent foregathered on a forward cargo hatch, set up their instruments and launched into a jam session, led by jivey, wailing "licorice sticks." If they got off the beam on the long-haired side, the hepcats had the screeming meemies until they got back in the groove. Shoot the Klaxon to me, Jackson!

The more sonorous elements of the band, plus a foot-pumped organ which came from the chaplain's office, held forth during Sunday morning divine services, conducted for both Catholic and Protestant faiths. The altar was on the usual hatch and the congregation spread out over the width of the deck, incorporating some who hung at the rail or watched and listened from

other unconventional points. There was no absence of religious feeling at appropriate times and it was not at all uncommon to see a man engrossed in his Bible or Testament in private moments. Beneath the surface lay anxiety. Men wanted to know the answers.

Since leaving the Panama Canal we had struck out in a zigzag course southwesterly across the Pacific. We crossed the equator at a narrow oblique angle on February 19 1944. War or no war—this we had to celebrate!

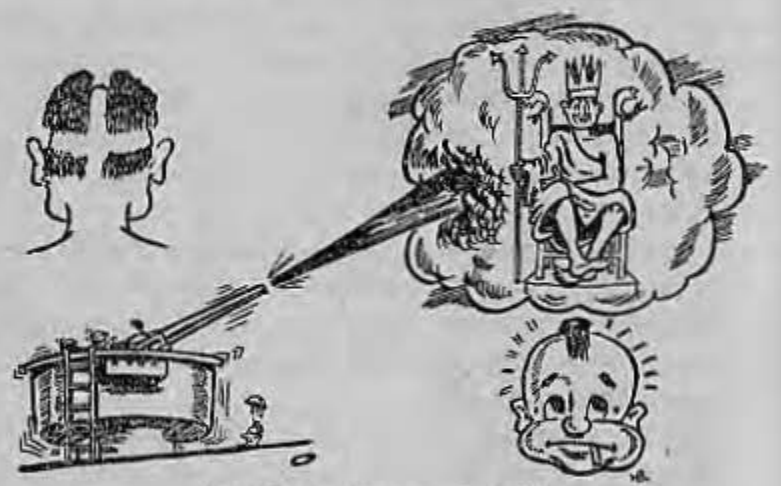
Shenanigans began in the morning when the ship, an erstwhile sub-dodger, kicked up her heels and practically did a hornpipe, circling willy-nilly and cutting back until only the captain and the sun knew which way was west. Everything on board that could be fired sounded off in ear-splitting thunder. Anti-aircraft tracers grunted skyward in rapid succession to hang in the air a moment before bursting. Cannon exploded in a mushroom of fire, smoke and concussion, and far out across the sea geysers sprang to life.

It went on for what seemed a long time, until Neptunus Rex (the amphibious gentleman with the toga, crown and trident) was duly warned of our approach. The ship, recovering from her epilepsy, shook herself and continued on course.

But the activities were not over. Neptune sat regally enthroned on the forward hatch, surrounded by his henchmen. Everyone who had not yet undergone the rigors of crossing the equator was still a Pollywog to him. That included everyone on board except the ship's crew and a very few others. To graduate from the Pollywog stage and become a full-fledged line-crossing Shellback, you had to be initiated into the Ancient Order of the Deep, which is accomplished by an infinite

number of methods limited only by the most horrible depths of the sinister mind. In all forms, however, King Neptune holds court.

One by one the sheepish Pollywogs knelt before the Rex, heard charges lodged against them and entered pleas. The usual practice was to answer "Guilty!" A plea of "not guilty" usually brought a stiffer penalty, because you were convicted anyhow. If by silence, you implied "nolo contendere," you were likely to get the works. Toward the end, court became merely a matter of passing in front of Neptune, perhaps grinning at him, and going on to face the music.



A receding hairline was the fashion.

Charges ran in this vein: Winking at the Royal Mermaids; confusing the sun and the moon; failure to show proper respect in "my realm;" giving away food to the mermaids at the expense of Seabees; etc., ad infinitum.

Punishments fit the crimes like mail order suits and were meted out at random. "Make him an old man" meant to cut the hair down to the scalp. "The sun and the moon" meant shave a patch here and a patch there. "Give him the equator, a north to south, the sun and the moon" was very nearly the works.

With your hair cut in weird patterns, you ran the gauntlet. Your bare skin was painted with dye back and front, and as you shied off down the deck, a fire hose dispensing volumes of sea water drenched you and pushed you around.

Not every Pollywog became a Shellback that day. There were some who never became Shellbacks; there were a few who repaired to belowdeck privacy and had a buddy trim a lock from their hair, thus escaping Neptune's wrath, but provoking Hoyle's.

Mimeographed certificates attesting to the act were presented qualified Shellbacks aboard ship. Later, on Banika, personnel received sheepskin-size, colored certificates inscribed in Old English lettering with their names, the date of the occurrence and their destination, then called only South Pacific.

Days and days of nothing but water and sky, flying fish and sunsets piled up monotonously. Now and then there would be a hurried bark from the ship's speaker, calling gun crews to stations. On the bridge, field glasses would scan the water and clouds, then as excitement relaxed, gunners would be released. Regular stripping, cleaning and testing of the armament went on day in and day out. There was no telling when it might have to be put to work.

On at least one occasion actual presence of the enemy was detected. It was toward mid-afternoon. The

speaker blared orders for all men to go on deck and fo secure life jackets on their persons. Tension on the bridge communicated itself to the troops and serious faces peered over the waves and at the clouds. Ship's officers on watch combed the seascape with glasses, pointing here and pointing there. The eyes of the men followed their gestures, but the sea looked the same as ever. Groups hung conspicuously near the large wooden life rafts which were poised for release should the signal be given. In half-bantering mood, reluctant to disclose their true fears, men sketched plausible courses of action if an attack should come. Others ate up the situation with relish, even disdaining the Mae West.

Whether the suspected enemy was a plane or a sub was never really known to the rank and file. (This is another thing you'll have to have your Congressman check after the war.) But the excitement waned and at last the all-clear signal was given. Inevitably, tales of things seen with one's "own eyes" came to light. One man "saw" a torpedo knifing across the waves. It missed the ship.

"Dahellya mean? There was three of 'em. A guy *seen* 'em .... I'm telling you!"

To meet a ship on the broad expanse of the Pacific was a novelty. We met one only once. At the sight of her we veered sharply off course until recognition as a friendly ship was assured. Apparently the same thing had gone on aboard the other ship, for her course changed, too. We were never within hailing distance of each other.

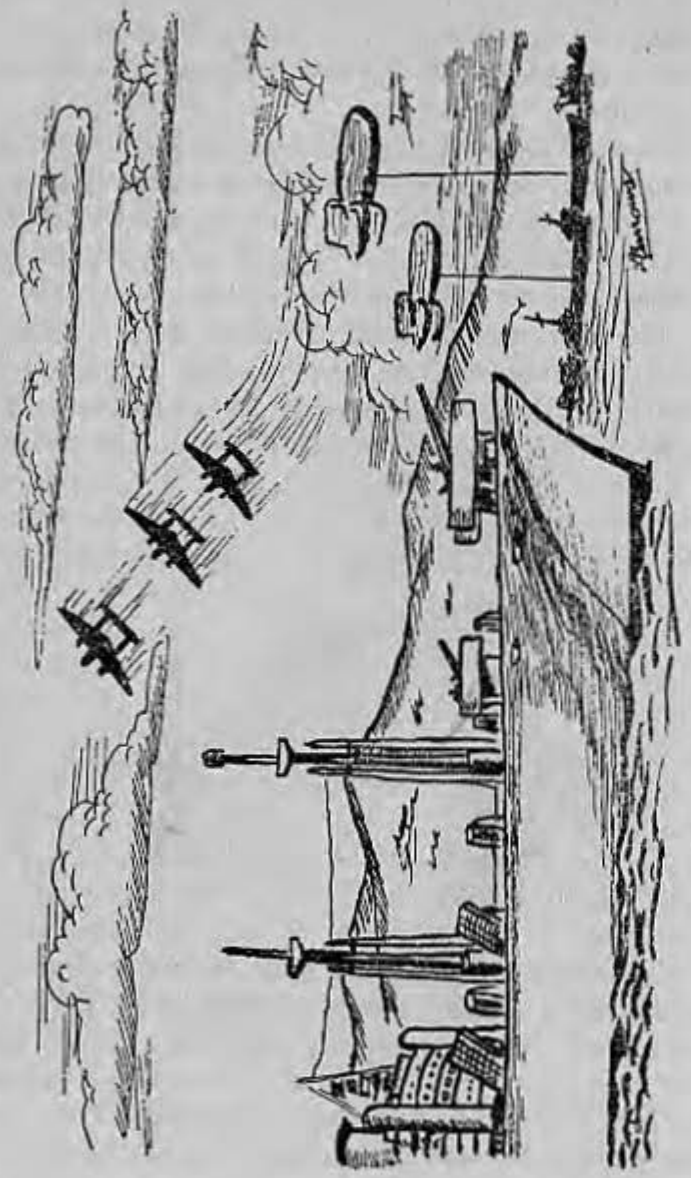
On March 1 we crossed the International Date Line without fanfare, making the following day March 3. Periodically on the westward voyage we had been told

to reset our timepieces, roughly once every two days. And when we approached the islands of the New Hebrides group, we were a full 17 hours ahead of the Eastern Seaboard time.

First sight to break the monotony of solid water was the large gray mass of an extinct volcano, which we judged to be some 40 miles distant. It rose in impressive majesty from the water line, its peak thrust into the clouds. We never heard what it was.

Islands began appearing on all sides now. Characteristically in this season, known as the period of the intermittent northwest monsoons (so-called rainy season), heavy rain was a frequent daily occurrence near

land. Through the rain and haze, we skirted several small islands, threaded warily through the narrows between others, until we gently nosed into the fortified harbor at Espiritu Santo, largest of the New Hebrides island group. Months later we would have a hard time trying to recapture the interest we showed then in coconut plantations and nuts bobbing in the water. We were



We anchored briefly at Guadalcanal.

to find that unrestrained drinking of coconut milk rendered the system—shall we say—incohesive.

As we neared the island of Espiritu, wartime activity was greatly in evidence. Escorts had met us the previous day, and now planes were circling overhead, skimming low over the ship, the pilots waving in greeting.

Like the Allied naval base it was, the inner harbor of Espiritu Santo teemed with merchantmen, transports and warcraft. We anchored in the harbor for two days and swam for the first time in the far Pacific.

Most striking to many on the first night here was the absence of blackouts. Lights shown aboard ships, searchlights swept the water, specks of lights glowed from all shore installations, and along the winding roads in steady procession moved the twin beams of vehicular traffic.

"Dimout in the states, lights all over out here!" we said. "Jeez! We tell 'em back home, they wouldn't believe us!"

There was no blackout for us that night either. The deck was littered with gabbing men until near midnight.

From Espiritu it was but a few days' run to Guadalcanal. Our trusty escort criss-crossed the zigzag course we followed. We passed the spot where a pre-war American liner, converted to a troop transport, had gone down after striking one of the area's protecting mines. Part of it was reported sometimes visible above the water.

Anchored only briefly at Guadalcanal, we spent time studying the contour of the island and trying to estimate the location of historic spots such as Bloody Knoll

and Henderson Field. In the sky, P-38's kept up a fast pace of dog-fighting and startling air tactics. Along the busy shoreline we saw fire-blackened hulls and wrecked, sunken craft.

This was our first stop in the Solomon Islands, the war-publicized archipelago that swings in a 700-mile arc up toward New Guinea. Our next stop was to be in the Russell Islands, some 50 miles way, at Banika's White Beach. We arrived there in mid-March 1944.

ISLAND ALBUM

Units' symbol at entrance to camp areas.

CAMP LIFE

National Colors flying at camp's circular park on crest of ridge overlooking shoreline.

Camp areas. *Top*: Section of Unit 572's enlisted men's quarters, looking to the southwest. *Center*: Officers' Country, looking southeast. *Bottom*: Section of Unit 573's enlisted men's quarters, looking southwest.

Morning Call to the Colors. Ceremony enacted at site shown in background picture.

Master-at-Arms Shack.

Camp galley area, showing *(left to right)* two commissary storage huts, including office in second one; refrigerator shack, galley entrance, and at right, bakery. Burners outside bakery heat two ovens, camp-constructed from pontoons. Entrance to one of enlisted men's two messhalls is partly visible at extreme right.

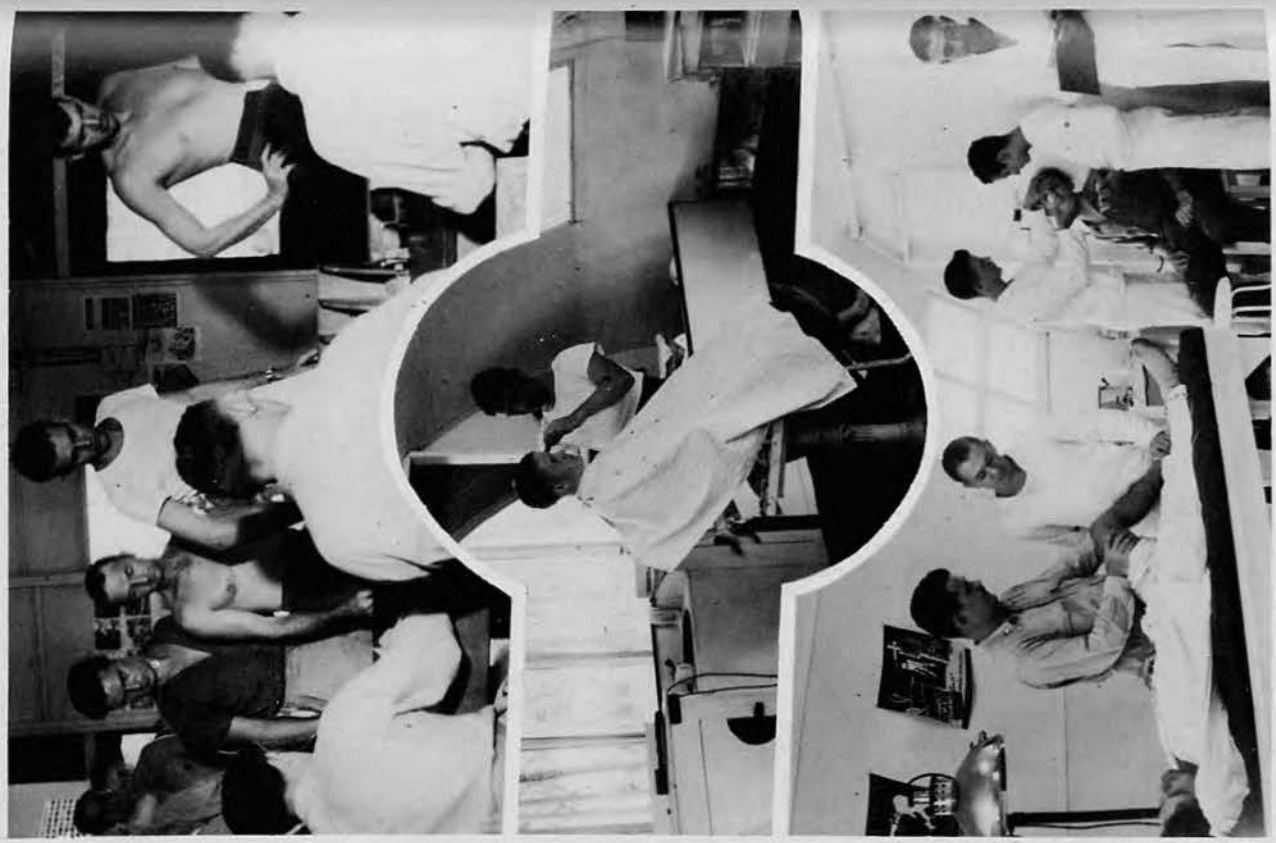
Chow hall scenes. *Top*: Middle section houses galley, serving line, scullery. Wings on either side are mess halls. *Center*: Men passing through serving line. *Bottom*: Scullery, showing tubs of hot water for each man to wash own tray.

Above:
Officers' Wardroom.
Indirect lighting fixtures
made in camp.

Below:
Chief Petty Officers'
Mess.

Left: View of three Quonset huts housing paint shop at left, plumbing shop at center and carpenter shop at right. Part of 572 area shows in background.

Right: Vehicle grease rack at left and fuel depot at right. Gasoline tank is made from pontoon. Quonset hut in background is carpenter shop.



Top: Section of the monthly pay line set up in recreation hall. *Center*: Camp barber shop. Furnishings and fixtures all camp-made. *Bottom*: Sick Bay presided over by doctor. Men in white are corpsmen.

EQUIPMENT SHOPS

Left: Looking north. In line left to right: Cylinders of welding gas stacked outside welding shop; heavy equipment shed; parts department (lower Quonset hut in center); light equipment shed; tire repair shop; battery maintenance and machine shop.

Right: Same line of installations looking south. Trailer machine shop is at right, behind trucks and in front of Quonset hut machine shop.

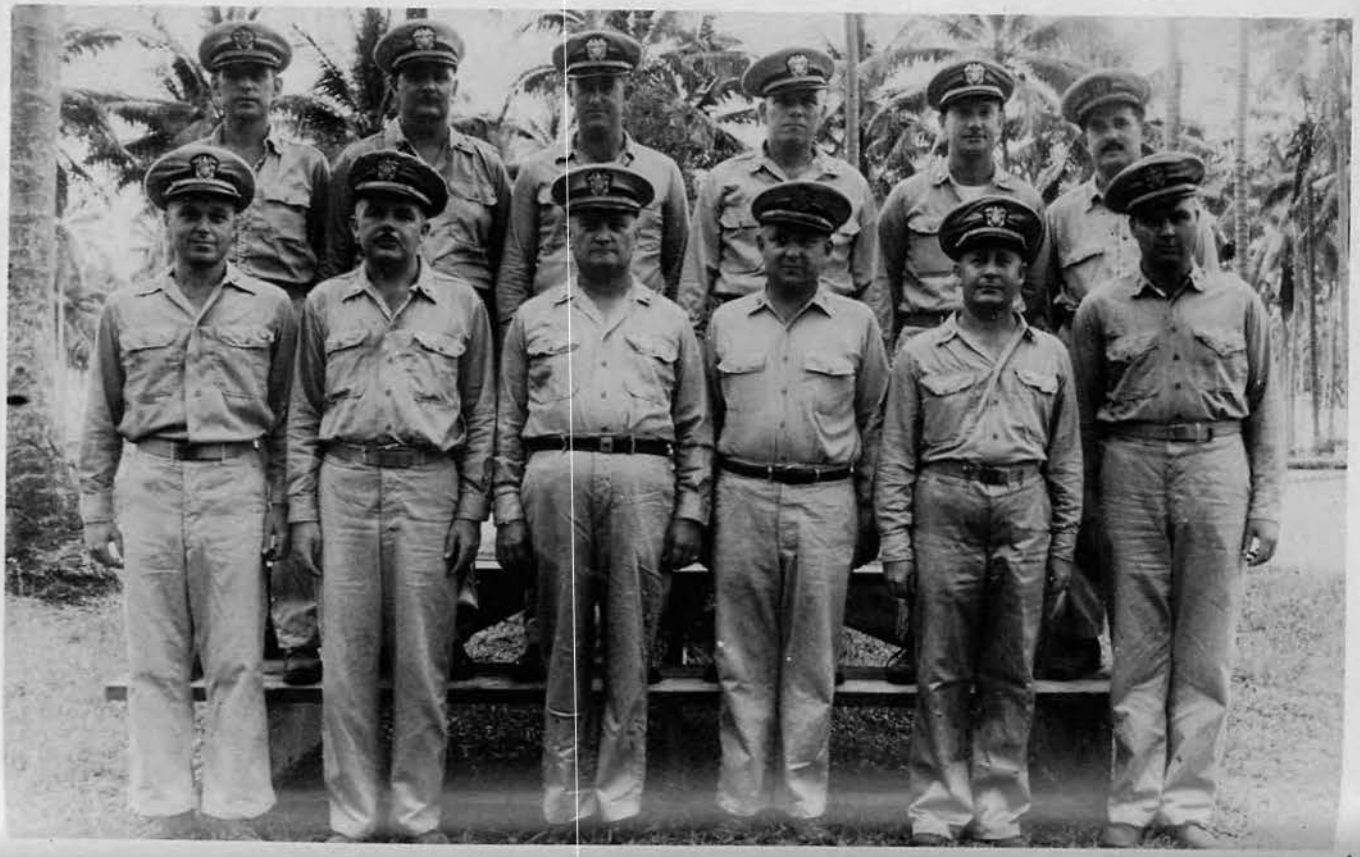
Top: Ship's Service store which dispensed smokes, toilet articles, edibles, beer or "cokes" on issue nights, some clothing and incidentals. *Center*: Tailor shop. *Bottom*: Section of Post Office showing censors at work.

Top: Protestant service on stage of Scuttlebutt Junction. *Center*: Easter Sunrise Service atop Bulldog Hill, 1945. *Bottom*: Catholic service at Scuttlebutt Junction.

Scuttlebutt Junction.

PERSONNEL ORGANIZATION

Keeping the records.



OFFICERS

Left to right—*Top row*: Chaplain Ernest T. Marble*, Chief Carpenter Herbert V. Nordholm, Chief Carpenter Harold W. Musser, Chief Carpenter Oscar G. Lundgoot, Chief Carpenter Charles W. Walsh, Lt. R. H. Watt*

Bottom row: Lt.(jg) J. Frederick Clarke, Lt. R. Joel Haverstick, Lt. Brown, Lt. Andrews, Lt. Edward L. Sandy, Lt.(jg) Clifford J. McFarlin.

*Attached temporarily.

CBMU 572

HEADQUARTERS PLATOON

Left to right—Top row: Lloyd M. Lindberg, Lewis E. Barrows, George Hazelton Jr., Arthur C. Cook, Robert C. Norton, John R. Briggs, Fred Dawson, John M. Victory.

Fifth row: John T. Connors, Albert S. Giulietti, Samuel A. Williamson, L. D. Anderson, James W. Hahler, Joseph L. Franklin, Max Herr.

Fourth row: James L. Bewley, William F. Kimbrough, William E. Yohe, Frank L. Perate, Raymond Dingfelder, Elton H. Cook, Dino P. Ampolini.

Third row: Allen M. Flye, Albert M. Smilie, Herman H. Eddy, Percy H. Skelton, Francis L. Sylvester, Lawrence C. Bishop, Cyril M. Wolfe.

Second row: Robert L. Favor, James R. Garrett, Jewel E. Ames, Evan B. Sweet, James F. Cummings, George F. Lease, William A. Sheldon.

First row: Carl F. Felix, Salvatore J. Scappellato, George L. Key, Charles T. Wells, Merlin Goldberg, Robert L. Sample.

Kneeling: James E. Cox, Lester G. Volkman (with Gunner), Ira L. Adams.

CBMU 572

PLATOON ONE

Left to right—Top row: Andrew J. Krankota, John H. King, Walter Haeuber Jr., Henry P. Sermuks, Charles G. Delaney, William E. Meehan, Joseph H. Baldwin.

Fourth row: Chester E. Shaffer, Willard R. Swartz, George L. Burgess Jr., Alfred T. Tonelli, Roy E. Davis, Lloyd F. Johnston.

Third row: James Fascia, Clarence R. Boughner, Ralph M. Saavedra, Thomas J. Bennett, Albert P. Moore.

Second row: Everett J. Wright, Arthur C. Gage, Alton G. Jennie, Frederick Dernago, John H. Hadden, Russell A. Nelson.

First row: Louis R. Chatey, Carl C. Capriglione, Fred J. Antioco, Harry L. Campbell, Edgar W. Coogan, James P. Butchart, Fay L. Wickliff.

Absent: Marcus M. Cash.

CBMU 572

PLATOON TWO

Left to right—Top row: Leo V. Falon, Ralph J. Host, Joe A. Ruggiero, Edward S. Key, David G. McDonald, Edgar E. Ford, Harrison C. Freidel.

Fifth row: Arthur R. McNeil, Robert P. Nelson, Forrest L. Newmaster, Cyril A. Blesener, William J. Renner, Leonard A. MacDonald.

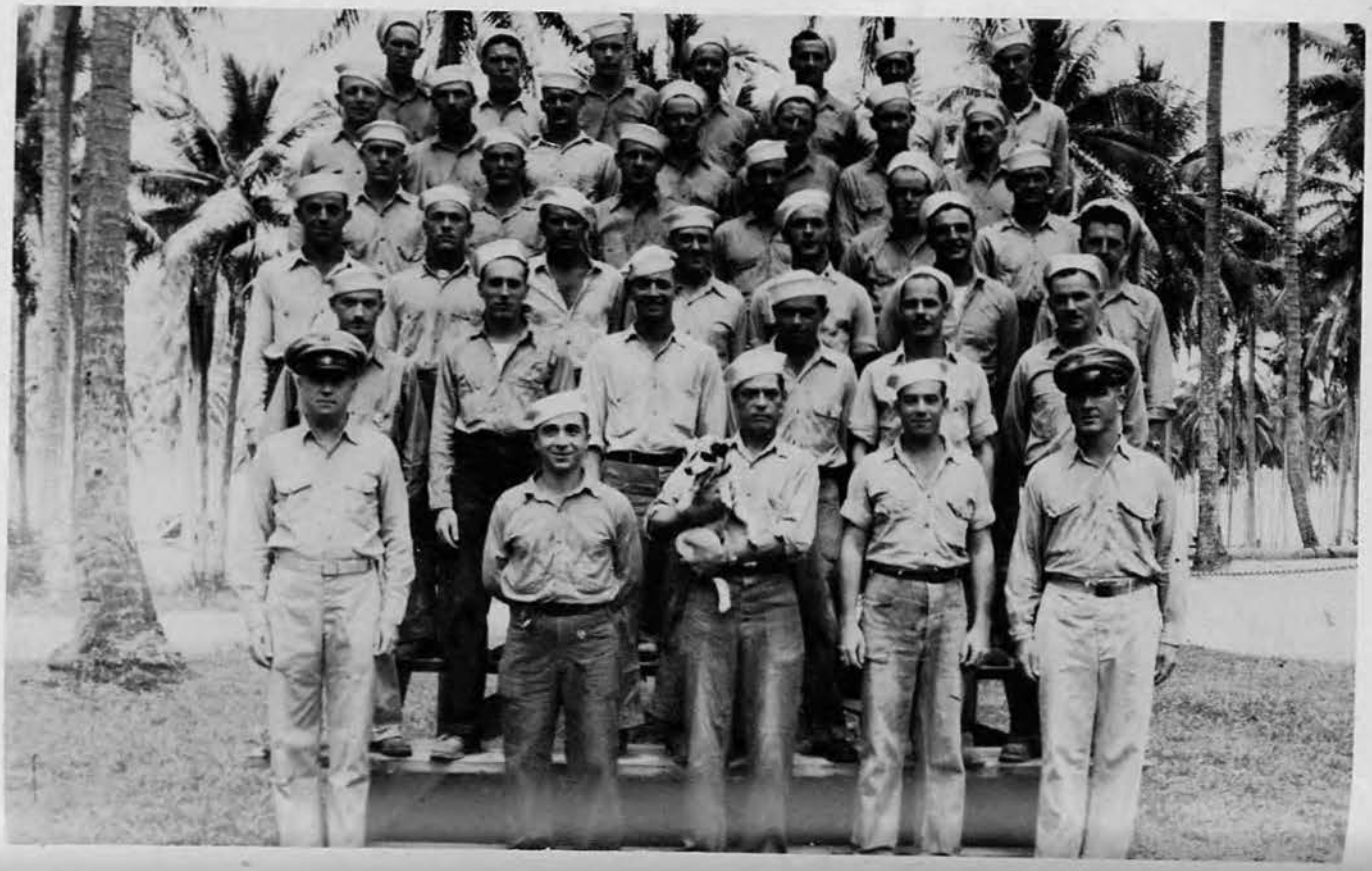
Fourth row: Sebastian M. Pipier, Ernest W. Wenzel, George L. Moon, Donald K. Zeiner, John A. Babish, Earl E. Corpe.

Third row: John F. Schaad, Willard C. Thompson, Robert S. Lewis, Fred W. Graham, Joseph T. Bruno, Milo J. Hyland.

Second row: Albert E. Farrall, Daniel A. Delfino, Lester L. Leitch, Clarence A. Rogers, Charles A. Bliss, Miguel L. Grado.

First row: Albert H. Paulsson, Hyman J. Greenberg, Edward L. Klapper, Bennie F. Edens, Asa D. Philbrick.

Absent: Merlyn G. Kresge.



CBMU 572

PLATOON THREE

Left to right—Top row: William T. Sutton, Louis T. Mueller, Lawrence T. Maberry, Homer L. Copeland, Charles G. Janka, Stewart R. Norris, Leon A. Rioux.

Fifth row: Anthony J. Boudreau, John J. Novacek, Theodore V. Miller, Charles L. Marseilles, Albert R. Dutrizac, Clarence F. Morilla, Charles H. Roy.

Fourth row: Charles R. Miller, Roma L. Thorn Jr., Charles Stone, Forrest P. McBryde, Ralph E. Miles, Ralph F. Mumby.

Third row: Ernest P. Stimmel, William A. Merrick, Gunnar A. Linder, Mark W. Price, John H. Mack, Leonard Post, Frederick L. Prescott.

Second row: Robert E. Stansfield, Francis X. Odermann, Fred W. Lloyd, Jess L. Owen, Abraham Malmad, James D. Melvin.

First row: Harlin C. Hayes, Emile D. Cefola, Nelson F. Dubois (with Gunner), Joseph W. Perry, John E. Manley.

CBMU 572

PLATOON FOUR

Left to right—Top row: Floyd W. Hitchcock, John H. Kannady, Paul C. Olson, Norman E. Culver, Ray J. Cowley, Frank Novotny.

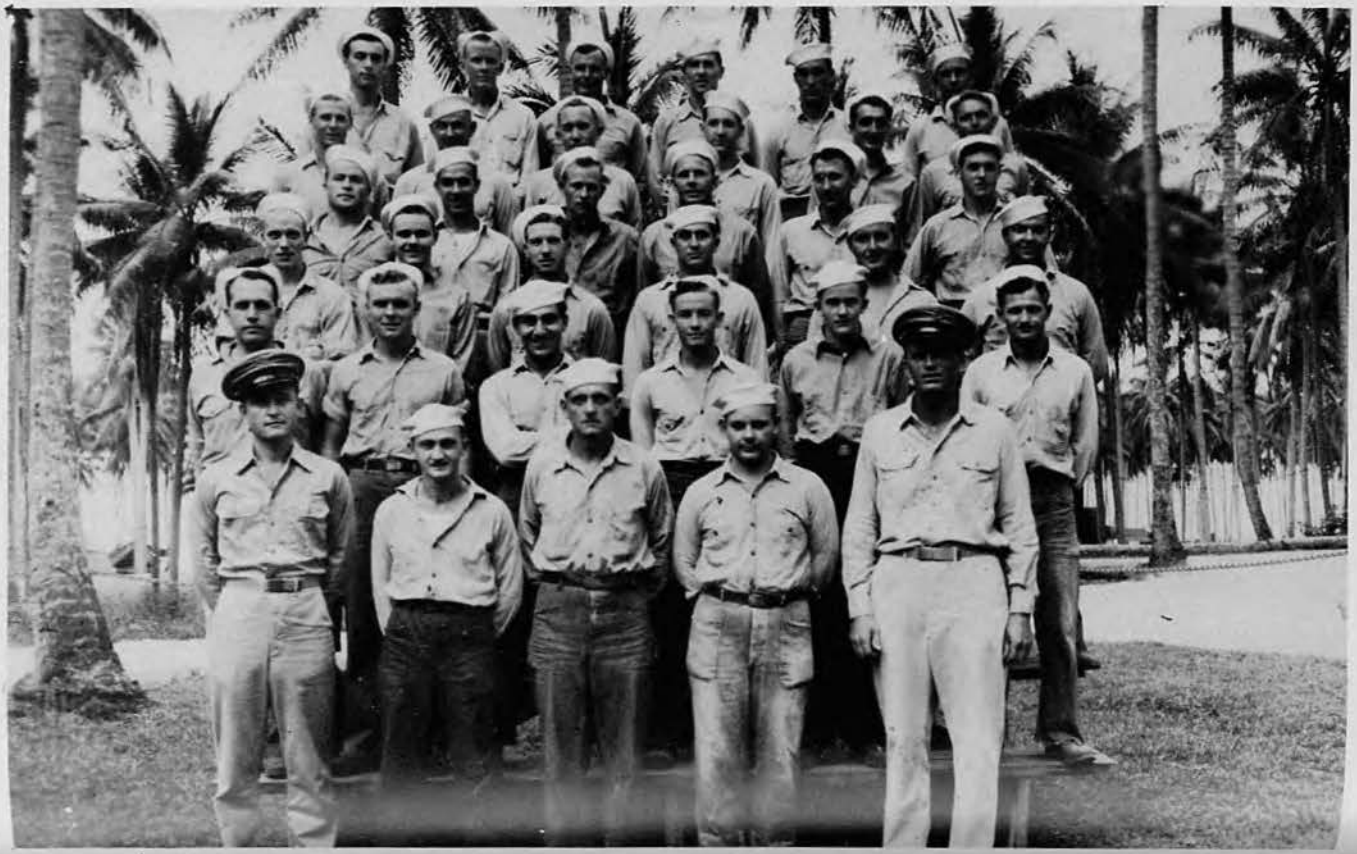
Fifth row: Clarence D. Boyd, Frank Dolinar Jr., John H. Scott, Stanley E. Rego, Arthur L. Gray, Edwin A. Zugar, Charles F. Conroy.

Fourth row: Robert E. Drenttel, Robert E. Fischback, Walter A. Stewart Jr., Charles F. Taylor, William J. Gass, Robert G. Stark, Jesse H. Grice.

Third row: Clayton C. Olewine, Angelo Racioppi, Robert J. Quinn, Louis E. Cupeta, Earl H. Bagnell, Harold Greenfield, Robert D. Hall.

Second row: Robert E. Wasik, George P. Butler, Raymond P. Rasmussen, Ernest C. Gilchrest.

First row: Laurence E. Stump, David V. Mudiman, Charles T. Taylor, Clyde L. Roberson, William Hamm (with Gunner).



CBMU 572

PLATOON FIVE

Left to right—Top row: Joseph J. Argiso, Kenneth W. Holz, William L. Norton, Joseph H. Busby Jr., Ray E. Paker Jr., James V. Kesterson.

Fifth row: Raymond G. Cawood, Earle R. Mossey, Paul F. Morgan, Gustav A. Schmoegner, George P. Kish, Howard R. Carpenter.

Fourth row: Herbert A. Schoenenberger, Arthur L. Burke Jr., Forest N. Reed, Arthur E. Muse, Alvie H. McCartor Jr., Johnie G. Gross.

Third row: David K. Brown, Willard F. Hamilton, Samuel N. Conner, George Onei, John J. Mulsoff, Leroy G. Murray.

Second row: John T. Cole, John P. Hoke, Frank A. Laurino, Raymond F. Moore, Harry C. Starr, John Lash.

First row: Charles A. Reed, Sylvio E. Nepveu, William J. Troy Jr., Kendall C. Tuttle, Frank J. Roberts.

CBMU 572

PLATOON SIX

Left to right—Top row: Walter T. Barlow, Alfred J. Schwarz, Nolan J. Bramell, Thomas G. Ellsworth, James G. Healy Jr., Allen E. Hayes.

Fourth row: Carl O. Nelson, Theodore J. Brinkman, Herbert A. Bosley, Neal Bell, Harry S. Stites, Irl R. Gulick.

Third row: John A. Reichenberg, James A. Scott, Ben Elliott, Leroy J. Martin, Russell N. Bronson.

Second row: Robert B. Langdon, Clyde W. Hess, Adolph W. Benning, Lloyd G. Walker, John S. Palmer.

First row: Doyle S. Bonds, Edward J. Contino, Walter A. Rose, William H. Brittingham, Robert L. Sweet.

CBMU 573

HEADQUARTERS PLATOON

Left to right—Top row: Norman K. Davis, Robert C. Myers, Frank C. Baptist, George A. Russon Jr., Raymond G. Tangen, Frederick Pope Jr., Joe E. Richardson.

Fifth row: John Sinovich, Thomas G. Paxton, Oliver L. White, Richard A. Husak, James F. Daugherty, Joseph M. Attanasio, Phillip A. Clement.

Fourth row: Morris C. Phillips, Richard C. Wood, Joel L. Yother, William C. Dryden, Edward H. Gorst, A. D. Davis Jr., Ralph E. Daniel.

Third row: John Chorney, Travis Harding, Victor J. Illig, James C. Brown, Melvin W. Hunt, Edward R. Holbrook, Raymond A. Bishop.

Second row: Joseph Stegler, John W. Alberts, Richard H. Foege Jr., Frank M. Ciotti, James R. Gillispie, Clemile Lemaire Jr.

First row: Albert St. Pierre, Earl L. Williams, Elden S. Baldwin, Jack Larue, Selwyn G. Weintraub, Harold B. Roberts, John W. Dickey.

CBMU 572

PLATOON SIX

Left to right—Top row: Walter T. Barlow, Alfred J. Schwarz, Nolan J. Bramell, Thomas G. Ellsworth, James G. Healy Jr., Allen E. Hayes.

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First row: Doyle S. Bonds, Edward J. Contino, Walter A. Rose, William H. Brittingham, Robert L. Sweet.

CBMU 573

HEADQUARTERS PLATOON

Left to right—Top row: Norman K. Davis, Robert C. Myers, Frank C. Baptist, George A. Russon Jr., Raymond G. Tangen, Frederick Pope Jr., Joe E. Richardson.

Fifth row: John Sinovich, Thomas G. Paxton, Oliver L. White, Richard A. Husak, James F. Daugherty, Joseph M. Attanasio, Phillip A. Clement.

Fourth row: Morris C. Phillips, Richard C. Wood, Joel L. Yother, William C. Dryden, Edward H. Gorst, A. D. Davis Jr., Ralph E. Daniel.

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First row: Albert St. Pierre, Earl L. Williams, Elden S. Baldwin, Jack Larue, Selwyn G. Weintraub, Harold B. Roberts, John W. Dickey.

CBMU 573

PLATOON ONE

Left to right—Top row: Louis H. Bliss, Charles M. Heck, Harold A. Clukay, Homer A. Wright, Charles W. Curtice, William J. Thorpe.

Fifth row: Clarence C. Yates, Clarence E. Kettler, George Seltzer, Roy W. Briggs, Russell B. Jones, Richard B. Williams Sr.

Fourth row: Kermit L. Adams, Norman E. Hollcraft, Lawrence S. Gilman, Dwight B. Gleason, Donald F. Schmidt, Edmund J. Tobin.

Third row: Richard C. Dillow, Edward H. Orr, George F. Muse, Ray E. Sedlak, Edward H. Calnan, Edward C. Zukowsky.

Second row: Kenneth D. Ellsworth, Llewelyn R. Stoddard, Thomas A. Burling Jr., Frank C. Flores, Harold E. Johnson, John O. Taylor.

First row: William E. Torres, William M. Faurote, David A. Bodenhamer, Garland W. Mitchell, William J. McCarthy, Frank B. Trainor.

CBMU 573

PLATOON TWO

Left to right—Top row: Elim R. Hopkins, John W. Coates, Nick J. Puhich, John H. Williams Jr., Alvin C. Howard, Harold J. Sharpe.

Fifth row: Stanley M. Harwood, Eddy R. Troxel, John R. Cotter, William J. Trinka, Edwin E. Phillips, Harm Huisinga.

Fourth row: William E. Lawhorn, James T. Tromiczak, Milton A. Weaver, Daniel R. Sener, Charles E. Wallace, Roy A. Redd.

Third row: David W. Raybourn, Charles R. Kramer, Edward E. Goyette, Ray E. Marz, John E. Hout, Forrest B. McPherson.

Second row: Ernest J. Henrichsen, Richard C. Timreck, Edward V. Hicks, Anthony Borghise, Daniel A. Kelly, Ralph N. Pfeiffer.

First row: Richard C. Stoller, John T. McLeod, Harvey D. Fish, John C. Harris.

CBMU 573

PLATOON THREE

Left to right—Top row: William B. Ward, Charles W. Katsel, Meredith J. Nash, Horace Place, Howard J. Yates, Arthur P. Lyon, Harry E. Stello.

Fourth row: Denver B. Austin, Donald M. Norton, Olen F. Westfall, Robert R. Blackley, Allen W. Snow, Schuyler W. Slater, Ernest J. Stroub.

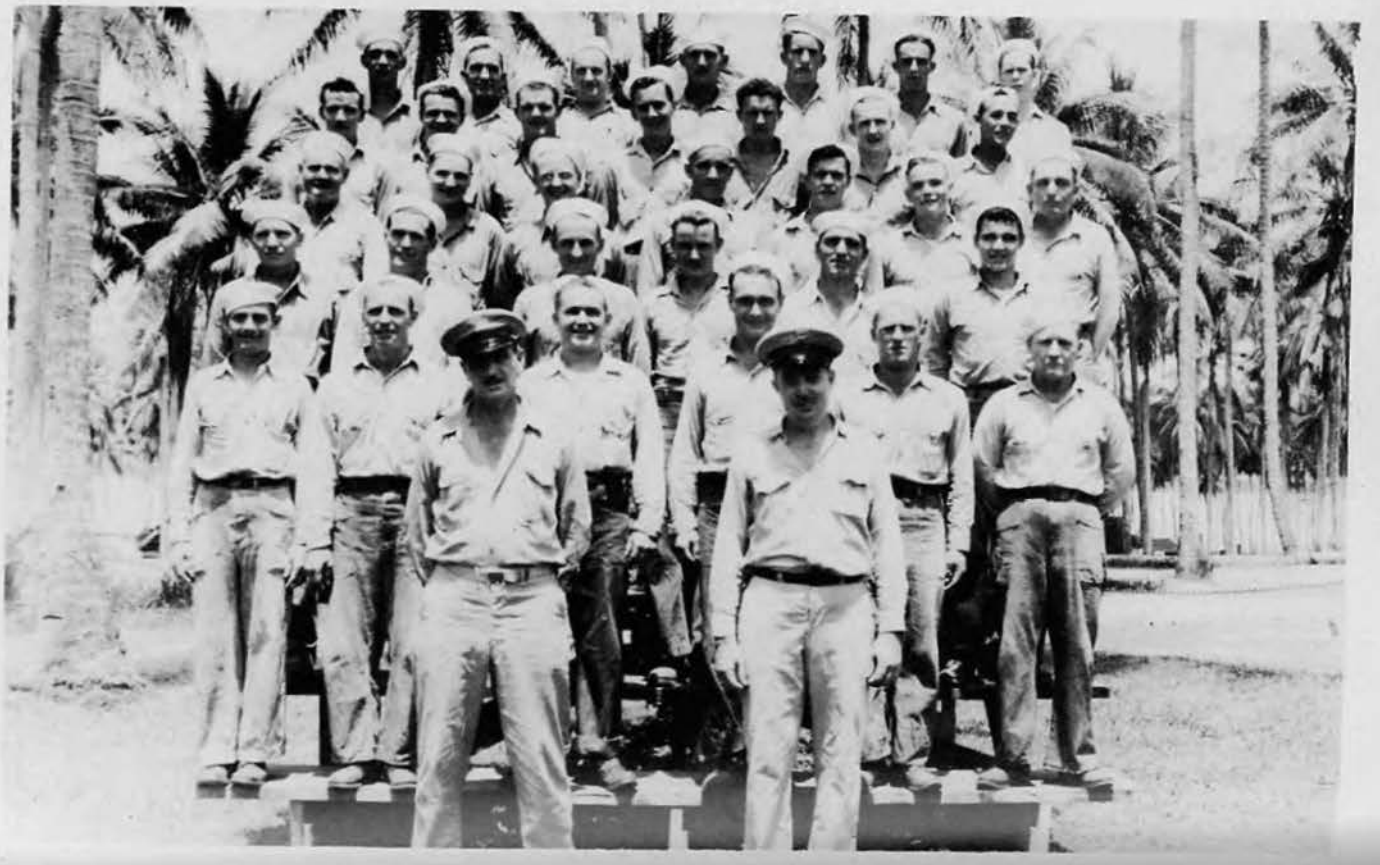
Third row: Paul V. Sherman, Charles G. Johnson, Lawrence C. Weimar, Anthony L. Natoli, Brice E. Storey, Robert K. Purser.

Second row: Elmer F. Kimball, John Parker, James R. Rigby, Phillip P. Peluso, James J. Russo, Mel L. Roziene.

First row: Leroy J. Ackermann, Earl R. Herring, Clarence G. McMackin, Stephen M. McGreevy, Harold L. Norris, Peter Stensland.

In front: Burke D. Lundberg.

Absent: John T. Polinskey, Wilfred Riendeau, James E. Smith.



CBMU 573

PLATOON FOUR

Left to right—Top row: Lloyd C. Ettig, Joseph F. Miller, Wendell K. Reisch, Raymond E. Monigold, Clyde D. Davis, Frank E. West, James P. Heneghan.

Fourth row: George D. Dull, Jack Pendell Jr., Raymond E. Arledge, George V. Ketchum, Ewell B. Stephens, Frank M. Sander, Jacob C. Aguilar.

Third row: Newton T. Phelon, Warren N. Phelon, Paul G. Schultz Sr., Frank W. Morrison, John O. Price Jr., Max E. Wagoner, James L. Westfall.

Second row: James L. Martel, William G. Spillane, Albert J. Hanna, Reino R. Pulkkinen, John L. Menti, Douglas M. Jones.

First row: Carl L. Ingraham, John E. Krawcyk, Bob E. Matthews, Henry J. Hruska, Frederick J. Youren, Fredrick A. Grater.

In front: Charles D. Harkins, Lloyd D. Cooper.

CBMU 573

PLATOON FIVE

Left to right—Top row: Ralph R. Samek, Kenneth W. Cote, Donald D. See, Carl A. Schwanbeck, John D. Cyphert, Conrad G. Hanson, Hugh E. Simpson.

Fifth row: Neil J. Dalton, Harold D. Shields, Gerhard E. Evenson, David Bleier, Donald L. Yeager, Walter L. Currier, James T. Farris.

Fourth row: Benjamin G. Simons, William J. Salyers, John H. Swenson, Woodrow C. Leaird, Clarence A. Mullaney, Daniel A. Sawicki, Joseph H. Cook.

Third row: William P. Leitgeb, Melvin E. Clark, Arthur W. Graeser, Edward V. Rowe, Frank W. Stout, Nicholas Pituch, Woodrow W. Fisher.

Second row: Joseph Swartz, Burton E. Weaver, Clarence M. Uhrig, Arthur W. Taylor Jr., Philip D. Litano, Isaac W. Duste, Robert E. Wolf.

First row: Robert L. Slaton, Henry R. Patterson, Vincent N. Grosso, Joseph C. Eoff, John W. Hull.

Absent: Perry W. Tingler.

CBMU 573

PLATOON SIX

Left to right—Top row: Dalfred C. Jackson, Harry K. Dunham, Edward N. Lawton, Harry R. Bughman, William J. Smith, Edward T. Jordling.

Fifth row: Walter A. Plaisted, Samuel J. Stauffer, Donald P. Woodward, Lloyd J. Grinder, Calvin J. M. Lewis, George B. Kerr.

Fourth row: Randell Conine, Eber S. Emerson Jr., Michael Z. Hoffman, Emerick Kovacevich, Wayne McV. Ward, Alfred L. Slizewski.

Third row: Henry D. Lanigan, Marvin E. Wilborn, Andrew Tarasovitch, George J. Hennessey, Herbert D. Sipe, William P. Sidella.

Second row: James A. Galbraith, Leonard D. Cuthbert, Herbert A. Mumblow, Leander J. Potter, Robert V. Keeffe, Clacey McNary.

First row: Goodwin J. Phillips, Christy M. Champ, Maurice F. Shea, Nick J. Cimino, Lynden M. Barber.

CHAPTER FOUR

In which aquatic nomads encounter for the first time the romance of an exotic South Sea isle, and find confidentially, it stinks.

A MONTH or more aboard a troop transport on the broad reaches of two oceans and a sea is apt to impress upon the mariners certain fundamental facts, to wit:

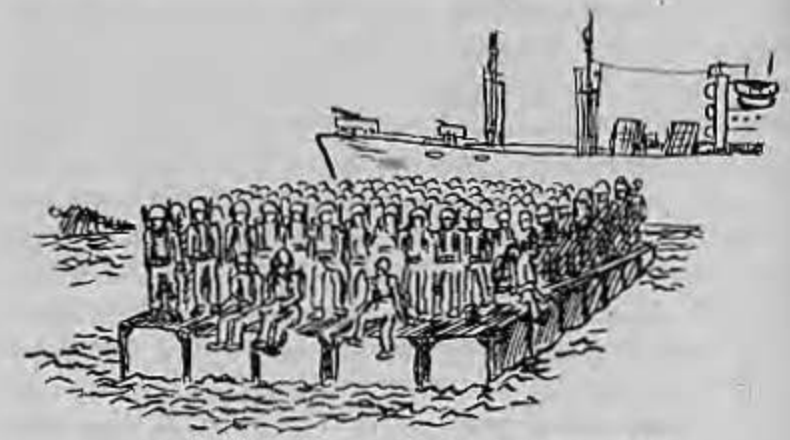
The human body is so constructed that it requires food; large masses of human bodies congregated in a small space smell bad; the equatorial region is the second hottest place known to man; and, there is more water on the face of the earth than there is land.

With these truths implanted in our minds, we are temporarily elated at the prospect of again setting foot to terra firma where we could spread out and live among the green flora and wild fauna—such as it would be. This we did the morning in March after our ship hove to off the coast of Banika, one of the largest islands in the Russells group, second only to neighboring Pavuvu.

From the ship we could see the narrow finger of land that was Lever Point and word was spread that we were headed overland to a point on Renard Sound, a deep inlet that nearly cuts Banika in two at its northern tip. We didn't know the names of the places then, or even the name of the island, but we had heard that where we were going was several miles away by road. This was disconcerting intelligence, since the morning sun was blanketing the region in heat and we were saddled with

our full packs and field gear. Even during the pre-debarkation lineup on deck, the pack straps cut deeply into the foreshoulders, and what they did to sunburn shouldn't happen to a dog. A hike in our condition would have reduced man to meatball. Fortunately, advance reports also said there would be trucks waiting for us.

A big self-propelled pontoon lighter chugged out through the still green water to the ship and idled alongside. A ship's gangway was lowered, a steep narrow ramp studded with step-like slats, down which you tripped trying not to go too fast. On the lighter you crowded into semi-vacant space, standing or being stood upon, sitting or being sat upon, chiseled a drink from somebody's canteen and yelled a few random remarks—it didn't matter what. When the lighter was crowded to capacity, a couple score more men were loaded on, the motor revved up and we slowly moved away toward the island.



We shared semi-vacant space on the shoreward ride.

White Beach had a brownish tinge, caused by a sea of liquid mud that covered the waterfront area to a depth of more than an inch. A few transport ships lay in close to shore or at the sturdy steel pontoon docks. We scrambled from the lighter to the slippery steel and across to the sloppy areaway where Army trucks, driven by Negro troops, awaited us. Overheated by the day and hobbled by the warehouses strapped to our shoulders and waists, we somehow got into the trucks and left the muddy dock behind us as we rumbled over the coral-surfaced roads toward the island's interior.

For a small island which Messrs. Rand and McNally have seen fit to depict (when they depict it at all) as a pinpoint on the Pacific map, we rolled a long way to our destinations, following the wide hairpin turn of Renard Sound's shoreline.

Along the route the ground was strewn with sights to make a newcomer's eyes pop. Even in our absolutely uncomfortable state, there were the characteristic exclamations of awe.

Mountainous stacks of materiel were thickly dispersed throughout the thousands and thousands of coconut trees that, except for the jungle areas, were the only shade and concealment the terrain offered. Fifty-five-gallon oil and gasoline drums were stacked by the hundreds, pyramid fashion. Piles of new, folded tents sprawled over the ground; hills of heavy bomb casings appeared left and right. There were areas covered with massive round water buoys, mines, rows and rows of light field pieces, some covered against the weather, others open; stacks of big shell casings, mountains of ammunition boxes, thousands of cases of prepared rations; lines of light tanks, trucks, jeeps; piles of

lumber, heavy construction equipment, here and there junked vehicles, rotting or rusting equipment. There were gun emplacements and anti-aircraft batteries and sound detectors and harbor control towers. We passed the bright coralled runway of the bomber strip, saw planes dispersed in tree-shrouded taxiways. Camp areas were pocked with foxholes.

We couldn't help but be impressed by the palm-hidden arsenal that only a few hundred yards from shore had looked like placid territory as virgin as a mermaid with halitosis.

Seabee, Army or Marine camps dotted the cloaked interior of the island: Rough layouts of tents, semi-circular, prefabricated metal Quonset huts, shacks and warehouses. Here and there bushy-headed little black natives, pipes indolently drooping from their mouths, perched atop spindly framework, lazily engaged in applying thatching for a hut or storehouse.

The destination of Unit 572 was an area near Renard Sound. The area was already occupied by a Construction Battalion that had been on the island for close to a year and had built many of the then-present installations under threat of Japanese air action which on occasion has become actual.

Unit 573 went a couple of miles farther to an area occupied by another Construction Battalion. There they found, as any outfit does, tropical discomforts at their unmitigated worst. Unit 571 (the old Company B of the 18th Super) was assigned to an area where it too discovered the low point in Pacific habitation.

(The old Company A, Unit 570, was at this time honeymooning in Florida and letters from men there likewise said that, when they weren't on liberty, they

were stagnating in some of the worst terrain on the face of the planet.)

The immediate post-landing period was in fact not destined to be a bed of lotus blossoms. With the best hill areas occupied by the active battalions, new replacements fanned out to the suburbs, choosing as far as possible high ground where breezes would allegedly sweep through camp and drainage would be at its best.

But the highest priority upon arrival was not the selection of sites and setting up of camps. It was something more vital, a sacred Seabee rite performed by South Sea novitiates—the Feast of the Coconuts.

Packs were unslung and hurled aside. Thirsty, sweaty men, grasping the discoloring nuts that littered the ground, hacked away with bayonet or knife until the cooling milk gurgled in the gullet and molars mangled the moist meat. On the faces beamed the expression that seemed to say: "I done it! I done it!" Old battalion hands watched like patient parents. Then they advised us.

"Everybody does it. You'll get over it. You'll get so sick you won't ever want to see one . . . . Don't take them old ones. They'll give you the runs. They will anyway if you eat too many. Get one that's a little bit green, just when they fall."

That was the beginning of the brief period during which the battalions acted as big brothers. They fed us in their chow halls; they told us what to do and what not to do; and they told us that out here "the chiefs don't do any work," that the place was an "officer's paradise," that if we stayed long enough we'd get a 30-day leave (as they had) at New Zealand and spend anywhere from $300 to $1000 there. They let us use

their precious rainwater; they let us write letters in the shadows of their electric tent lights; they let us shelter from the rain in the lee of their tents. After all, we were their relief. They'd have a chance to get off this "goddam rock." Nothing was too good for us.

But there is a limit to everything. We lengthened their chow lines; we tried to buy up their scant supply of cigars, writing paper, etc.; we crowded their showers; we depleted their water supply and generally exhibited nuisance value. Soon signs began to appear on rain barrels: "So sorry—no more water;" and the showers were closed down just when we worked up a good, dirty sweat. Gradually we began solving our own problems, then began to take over the entire area as the battalions prepared to pull out. Before they left, several weeks hence, it was we who had turned into the big, if relatively inexperienced, brothers.

Our first meal as guests followed the coconut orgy. There was ice-cold synthetic citrus fruit juice which we lapped up with abandon—the first cold drink in a long time. It was the despised "battery acid," but we didn't yet despise it. We had "Seabee steak," that ingenious animal medley known as Spam, and mashed potatoes. We thought we were in clover. We told our new friends how lucky they were to have such good chow, to be so lavish with it, and to have their chow lines move as fast as they did. If we weren't green, somebody must have revised the spectrum!

The pup tent era began right after noon chow. Amid the coconut trees, men paired off in straight lines, pooled shelter halves and constructed those triangles of torture which gave you the choice of keeping your head or your feet inside. Unrolled packs littered the

ground in the midget tent city. Someone broke out entrenching tools and shallow drainage ditches were dug around the tents. Theoretically all ditches were to be interconnected but it was a hit or miss job. Late afternoon saw a sad array of shelters set up with bush mosquito nets covering the entrances.

Running water in every tent.

The malaria carrier against whom we prepared was the anopholes, the female of which species puts the bite on you only in the dark and is distinguished by the fact that she points her bustle skyward during the act; but we were warned not to waste time noting posture. Just slap.

The old hands used to like to tell us to let the little ones go but to watch out for the kind that "turn over

your dog-tag to see what type blood you have." Oddly enough, mosquitos in 572's zone were not as great an annoyance as expected. The area occupied by 573 was bothered considerably by the malarial "gang buzzers," despite the fact that precautions were taken there, too. In time the comparative lack of malaria infection brought relaxation of personal protective measures, though the campaign for caution continued.

If Mrs. Anopholes was asleep at the switch, rats and lizards were not. They wanted the tents themselves and were annoyed at us for using them. Big, fat and grey they came truckin' on down, pranced over our feet or even took a bite here and there. Little lizards scooted back and forth. Ants did a cash and carry business all over the areas. The night was alive with flashlight beams, inspecting this or that, and wakeful men debated whether the latest movement in the dark was a rat or a snake, not yet having learned that snakes were rare.

Then came the rains. Torrents poured out of nowhere and the drainage moats were either washed out or overflowed, so that water ran through the tents, sometimes over the poncho you lay on, sometimes under. Everything you had in the world, including your rifle, was wet, damp or muddied. You were sleeping in most of your clothes too, and they were wet or muddy. If you touched the inside of the pup tent, the rain came through. The air inside was stifling in spite of ventilation. If you got a few hours' sleep you were lucky. In

the morning the sun was out and the ground steamed before it dried out. You hung your gear atop your shelter or spread it on the grass to dry. Maybe some of it was still there during the next rainstorm which you couldn't very well foretell. You cleaned your rifle to be ready for piece inspection, and brother—there was some cleaning!

For meals and for evening recreation you slogged down the muddy incline and up the other side to the battalion's area. There you sat on the hard log seats of the battalion theater, the Banikadrome, and heard news broadcasts. Counter-thrusts of hemmed-in Japanese troops on Bougainville, a couple of hundred miles up the line, was of immediate interest then.

When it became dark enough the Banikadrome presented its nightly movie with waits between reels. After it you picked your way back through the mud, and if you didn't have a flashlight, maybe you fell into a foxhole and skinned yourself. Maybe you tripped over things too and ripped yourself on coral. Back at the tents, you ran your flashlight over your belongings, muttered "To hell with it!" and crawled in.

On brilliantly moonlit nights you might call attention to the full moon lighting the clouds, silvering the tops of the coconut palms and spreading patches of yellow light on the ground, almost bright enough to read by. If your buddy didn't feel like an argument just then, he might say, "Yeah. Bright as hell, ain't it?" and you both turned in.

Organization of detail assignments at first was, figuratively and literally, fairly sloppy but every man worked at something. There had to be day and night gangs helping to unload the ship and to truck equipment to the camp site. New 16-foot square pyramidal tents with plywood decks had to be erected and coconut logs sawed for pilings. Equipment already in the area had to be guarded against scavengers. (Apt mates were beginning to learn the art of "procurement," the method by which official materiel is unofficially put to legitimate use.) Small crews had already been assigned to help maintain the bomber strip at Renard Field, others to help in road maintenance; some drew KP. But right now the primary job was unloading and organizing supplies.

It turned out that on our first hurried scramble across the White Beach dock we had merely skirted the sea of liquid mud. During ship unloading operations we walked through it ankle deep. With rain an almost daily occurrence, sometimes twice daily or more, docks and roads were treacherous as ice. It was not

uncommon to see a truck that had sloughed offroad nose down in a drainage gully, or one that had skidded in a half circle, blocking the road and holding up a dozen or more vehicles.

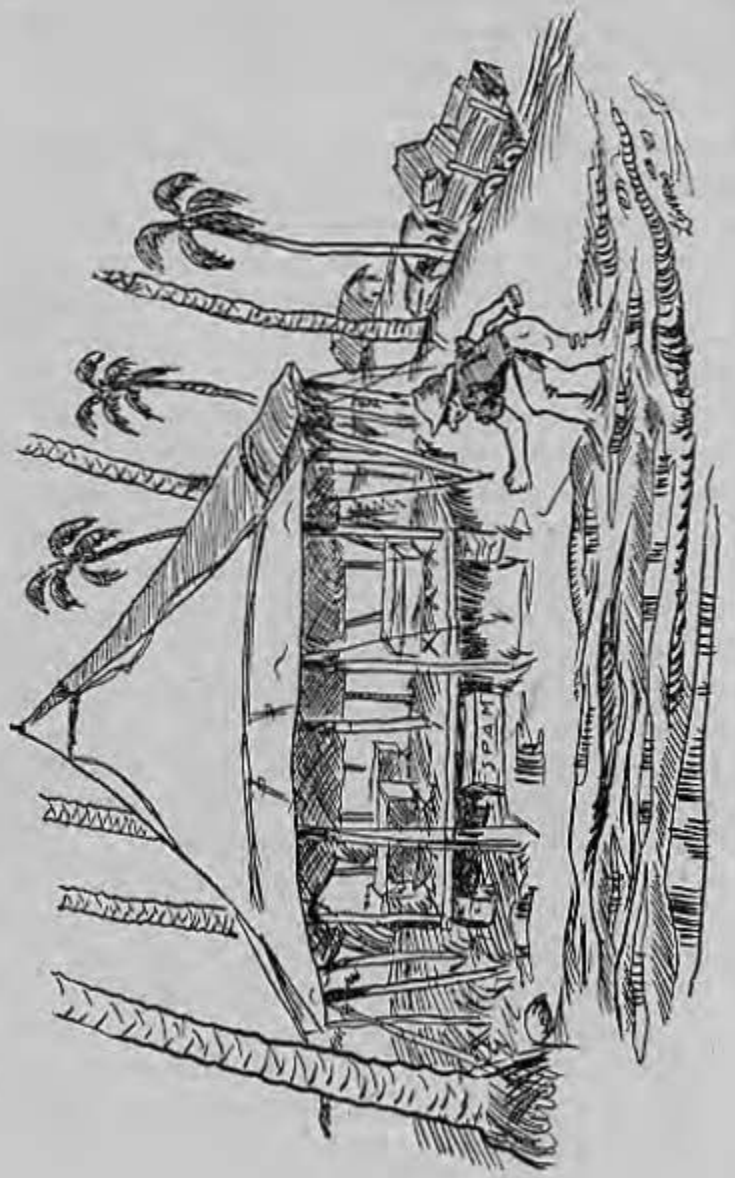
Our former floating home lay at the dock disgorging cargo. Winches and booms creaked and groaned and cargo nets swung overside amid the hoarse calls and orders of machine operators and guy-rope men. Tons of crates and lumber poured onto the dock. As it came down, someone yelled:

"Headache!"

Sometimes nets spilled their contents directly into back-up trucks. Gangs piled it up, rode the truck to camp, unloaded and went back. Other gangs worked in the hold, rigging huge tonnages for crane hoisting. Sometimes they got lost in the ship and suddenly found themselves in the galley, filching a cup of java and a fat meat sandwich. They worked by day in the rain or the sun and by night in the limited range of dock and ship lights.

Unloading went on for a couple of days at a feverish pace in an effort to get everything off before the 0700 deadline when the ship would have to pull out. Ships came and went on strict timetables (a consideration graphically illustrated later when a ship had to sail with several thousand cases of beer still aboard).

The pyramidal tents (permanent in type but not in location) were going up on the crest of a rise overlooking the beach, and as they went up the pup tents came down. It was a great day when you could rake all your gear together, haul it to the new residence and heave it to the deck where it lay until you had time to dis-



Then came the dawn of civilization.

entangle it. Temporarily each tent would quarter eight men, and each looked like an outsize version of Fibber McGee's closet with a little mud slung around to make it cozy. Cots were issued the night we moved in. Up went the bunk mosquito nets for the first time. It was all done by flashlight. Edison came late to us.

Gradually camp life was falling into a plan. We were moving in on the battalion's transportation lot, its galley, its electric shop and paint shop, and we had our own guards watching their junk to see that nobody stole it before we did. We were looking over their area with vulture eyes like the prospective tenants we were. There was talk that Unit 573 would move into the area, too, and we were out to stake claims. But we were not so future-minded that we neglected to build sidewalks through our temporary area. Many a coconut log was wrestled into place and many a back strained over the piles of crushed coral. But we moved again before the project was completed. Just as well; the sidewalks had nearly reached the brow of the hill, about as far as they could go without turning into the Tri-borough Bridge.

Before leaving this location we underwent a new experience, one whose seriousness failed to dawn on us until later. It was shortly after the show that the giant hoop near the MAA's sounded an air raid alert. At the generator plants the master switches were cut and the camp areas plunged into darkness. In our tents we asked ourselves: "Wonder what that is?" But as we wondered, the idea soaked in. An alert. Veteran battalion men who had undergone bombing attacks before and had a healthy respect for alerts, mentally or actually picked their foxholes and prepared themselves. We

stayed as we were, very much unworried. Somewhere in the darkness a flashlight beam showed. A voice yelled: "Put out that light!" A few seconds later one of our own men shouted his idea of good advice:

"Everybody out! Everybody in the foxholes!"

"Shaddap!" someone answered. "Hellya talkin' about? You crazy?"

We sat in the dark until the all-clear was given and we could put on our flashlights again. Perhaps it was only an alert caused by a friendly plane not immediately identified. Perhaps an enemy *was* near. But in any event it illustrated the difference between the initiated and the uninitiated.

Only one other time was our territory affected by an alert, and that of the mildest sort, not even relayed at large. Scuttlebutt told of it the next morning. The intelligence had been communicated to certain unit officers, but apparently it had failed to develop seriously.

Among the first things we learned after reaching the island (indeed, we had begun to learn it aboard ship), was a new system of military protocol between officers and enlisted men. Saluting was as outmoded for ordinary use as a Willkie button. Standing at attention was used only on rare occasions, such as during inspection of quarters, and even then the flesh was weak. The relation of officers to men, while not relaxing its background of authority and formality, was generally concerned with communicating an idea or an order in the most expedient way, and of accomplishing a desired end with the greatest force and haste. This allowed ample opportunity for men to report their conversations with officers in glowing terms, such as . . .

"So I tells him, just like I'm talkin' to you. I says, so all right, now listen to me. I says what in the hell . . . ."

Moving and moving again—that was the story of our eventual settlement in the area. We sneaked up a little at a time. From the pup tents we went to the pyramidals, then relocated ourselves in platoon order. After that, since we would have to put up the same quarters in a different location, we moved to vacant tent warehouses until the transplanting was accomplished.

In the meantime the main body of the departing battalion had moved out and their crudely furnished, worn tents had felt the axe, hammer and (let's face it) the rusty-nail puller. Our new Quonset hut for the plumbing shop was going up; the galley and messhalls were on the verge of face-lifting operations; our trucks and equipment and other acquired items were lettered with our stamp in preparation for heavy work; the Banikadrome's sign was down; stills were making the chlorine-saturated lister bags or "goatskins" a relic of past days. In short, progress was on the march, gallantly disregarding a slight limp.

The Master-at-Arms shack, equally well-known as "Gestapo Headquarters," marked the dividing line between the areas of Units 572 and 573. This was seat of law enforcement. From it came abnoxious reminders of all sorts: Orders to report for duty, for extra duty, for new assignments or for mast. From it emerged the sharp-eyed trash sleuths who gloried in finding areas that needed policing. From it raced messengers, the bicycle-borne "bad-news boys," who wakened you from a sound sleep to get up and walk your post or called you

to the telephone to answer a question that could have waited until next month and then made no difference.

Several months later "Gestapo Headquarters" took on a new star boarder, the "Officer-of-the-Day," an informational clearing house that walks like a man and is a repository for all complaints and organizational ills. The job of "officer-of-the-night" usually fell to the warrants or chief warrants who do not require as much sleep as commissioned officers. With the braid's invasion of precincts constabulary, the "MAA's" corporate title changed to the "OOD's."

Tent areas were slowly assuming definite patterns. Platoon streets were laid out—worn pathways not yet coraled. Trucks traversing them left ruts that filled with water or turned to slushy mud. If you had an "ol' buddy" in the coral business or could answer "whataya got to trade?" satisfactorily, you might find a pile of crushed coral dumped near your tent and you could spread it around at your convenience. You pestered hell out of the carpenter shop and paint shop personnel, trying to furnish your quarters like the east wing of the White House. Somebody would have a "contact" on fabric screening; somebody else could get you "all the wire you want." Intra-tent conferences always included: "I know where I can get...."

During off-duty hours, or even on-duty hours, men could be seen criss-crossing between tents, sacheting around with verboten plywood, two-by-two, two-by-fours, wire, tools and other home construction items they later considered their own by virtue of some obscure legality. Luxury items, such as extra light sock-

ets, bulbs or clothing changed hands like the "feelthy peenups" in *Yank's* Parisian cartoon.

All sizes and shapes of cupolas straddled the tent peaks at various cock-eyed angles. Old boxes or crates were transformed into fantastic furniture under the dexterous hands of craftsmen gifted with a Rube Goldberg imagination. Center poles were cut in two and beams substituted. "Porches" were built (until an order stopped them); and one by one, the small corner tent poles supporting the canvas eaves disappeared. Their elimination also did away with the maze of guy ropes between tents which rats often mistook for the Lincoln Highway and which you had to be a human crochet needle to navigate successfully.

The rumble of 50-gallon oil drums being rolled into camp from dump areas brought an era of backyard bathrooms. The drums, after the heads were knocked out, were painted and became rain barrels. Washstands were set up near them—fancy kinds with built-in shav-

ing mirrors and compartments, or functional kinds with only a hole in which an inverted helmet would fit.

The helmet was used for everything except putting on the head. You could keep nails or other hardware in it, hammer stakes with it, wash clothes in it, burn small papers in it, sit on it, or—most common, take a bath with it. Some tentside lavatories dispensed entirely with helmets, being rigged instead with water containers fastened to trees and having shower arrangements on the bottom. This gave running water if you hoisted pailfuls regularly enough to keep the reservoir filled. In some cases they worked well; in others you might as well have used a water pistol.

Heads were spaced for convenience and olfactory comfort. They didn't go in for Crane fixtures, using instead merely a deep hole in the coral that eventually became smaller and smaller and had to be filled in and dated for future avoidance. They were built to accomodate eight occupants, exclusive of flies and rats. If you were a social non-conformist and as a result found that the OinC rewarded your attitude with a little extra duty, you usually got a chance to dig one of the things.

In the matter of dress around camp, there might

have been some trouble distinguishing between a Seabee, a Marine, a regular Navy man or a soldier. Theoretically everyone was supposed to wear his particular G.I. Kuppenheimer, but "procurement" and trade had brought style changes. Sartorial mutilations, even on regulation dress, often made recognition difficult. One of the first things done, if it hadn't already been done aboard ship, was to slice off the trouser bottoms of the blue dungarees, whites or G.I. greens to make shorts. These were of varying lengths and ragged at the ends. The blue dungaree shirt had undergone severe evolution since boot camp. The whiter and thinner it got and the more rips it had, the more "salty" it was. Nobody had crisp, pressed clothes, because no clothes were ironed after washing. When dressed, you might be wearing Australian army shoes, Navy socks, Army shorts, Marine shirt (possibly with tails and sleeves cut off) and a "baseball cap," or perhaps the regulation issue sun helmet.

The chances are you didn't wear underwear. Many men found that wearing even the drawers (nainsook) aggravated crotch itch. The skivvy shirt was worn, if at all, for protection from the sun. But generally the tanned torso was bare. Only in the evenings at the show, where the "Gestapo" was on guard, or at morning and night chow when the messhall MAA's were on the prowl, was full length clothing standard.

Still in the process of getting acclimated to the new surroundings and settled into the impress left by the battalion, we cast critical glances at some of the infirm installations we had inherited—the two moth-eaten frame shacks of wood and screening that were separate

name of Joe and returned the "Haba haba" greeting in a variety of ways. They might laugh, repeat the phrase, say "Hello, Joe," or ignore us completely.

They came on Sundays to wander through the camp peddling shells, war clubs, grass skirts and other merchandise. No slouches with the cash register, they could spot a green outfit—and up went the prices.

Often they would cuss you out good-naturedly in characteristic, if rudimentary, Seabee dialect. Or they might be more serious businessmen who would sidle away morosely if you didn't come through with a mattress-cover or the watch you were wearing. We sometimes treated them as souvenirs themselves, inspecting at close range scarification marks, bare calloused feet, spindly proportions and rotten teeth, or pointing out with great amusement the bleached fuzzy hair some of them wore. A good many passively resented the freak view we took of them and were at pains to let us know it. Others enjoyed the dubious limelight and tried to carry on awkward conversations or made themselves right at home in tents, scouting the furnishings with interest.

We learned early about the American Red Cross canteen and recreation room which was housed in a large native-built thatched hut a stone's throw from the water. In the pup tent days when our blood had not thinned (as it eventually does in tropical climates) and we were not yet inured to heavy work in the debilitating heat, work groups knocked off during the day for a quick rest at the Red Cross and a cup of something cold to drink. Sometimes the cold drink turned out to be hot coffee or cocoa. There were tables

Beachhead at the Red Cross.

and chairs there, months-old books and magazines, ping-pong tables and a broken-down piano, silent in spots and off-key in its articulate moments.

After a roughhouse or two the place was closed down temporarily but later remodeled and reopened. Still later it was ornamentally staffed by a few Red Cross girl workers, the first American beauties to grow in our garden for almost half a year.

As time went on we came to know more about the island, its coconut plantations, its souvenir grounds, its drawbacks and its questionable advantages, its *"gooks"* and its changing wartime personnel. And we came to appreciate the size of pinpoint island groups and the breadth of oceans.

It didn't take long for the coconuts to go from a curiosity to a drug on the market, especially when gangs had to clear the ground of them periodically.

Interest in the South Seas turned to profound, profuse and profane disgust and to boredom. Day after day the sun continued to rise and set on Banika and we were stuck with it.

CHAPTER FIVE

In which we get down to business and do something to earn our campaign ribbon.

A SEABEE maintenance unit is a service organization. As such it is likely to find itself playing an unspectacular role in distant outposts that link the active war fronts to sources of men and materiel. Bases must be ready to meet traffic bound for the fronts, if it is routed their way. If it isn't, the base must be operated, just the same in preparation for the unexpected. It must be operated, regardless of activity, until advancing power has swept it hopelessly to the rear; and even then it must be maintained until all its contributory possibilities have been exploited.

The lot of maintenance personnel is sometimes a depressing experience. Complaints and criticisms are rife. Perspectives narrow and scales of value become distorted. Achievement is interpreted in terms of individual occupations. This is not to say that inefficiencies are wholly avoided or that woefully incidental stopgap projects are not started in days of lean activity, but an overall fact emerges: The base remains equipped, ready and staffed to meet contingencies of supply.

A Seabee base (like its insect counterpart, the bee) may spend its life preparing for a one and only mating and then die. But, if such be the case, in the total pattern of war it has served its purpose. If it entails months and months of irritation and "standing by," that is also part of the cost.

In the early part of May 1944, two months after CBMUs 572 and 573 landed on Banika, the "virtual completion" of the South Pacific campaign "except for mopping-up and starving-out operations" was announced by Admiral William F. (Bull) Halsey, commander of the South Pacific Force and later Commander of the Third Fleet, who paid this tribute to the work of service organizations:

". . . A great measure of the credit for the sky-blazing, sea-sweeping, jungle-smashing of the combat forces goes to the construction gangs and service organizations that bulldozed bases out of jungles and brought up the beans and bullets and supplies."*

We can't take credit for building the Naval Advanced Base at the Russell Islands, but we changed the face of it considerably and we did bring up Spam, "the beans and bullets and supplies."

Paramount features of our work were: Maintenance of the bomber strip at Renard Field and the fighter strip at Sunlight Field; maintenance of 11 miles of

*Complete text of Halsey's commendation received at NAB, Russell Islands, dated 4 May 1944:—"With the announcement of the virtual completion of the South Pacific campaign, except for mopping-up and starving-out operations, I can tell you and the world that no greater fighting team has ever been out together. From the desperate days of Guadalcanal to the smooth steamrollering of Bougainville and the easy seizure of Green and Emirau, all U.S. and Allied Services put aside every consideration but the one goal of wiping out the Japs. As you progressed, your techniques and teamwork improved until at the last, ground, amphibious, sea and air forces were working as one beautiful piece of precision machinery that crushed and baffled our hated enemy in every encounter. Your resourcefulness, tireless ingenuity, cooperation and indomitable fighting spirit form a battle pattern that will everywhere be an inspiration, and a great measure of the credit for the sky-blazing, sea-sweeping, jungle-smashing of the combat forces goes to the construction gangs and service organizations that bulldozed bases out of the jungle and brought up the beans and bullets and supplies. You never stopped moving forward and the Japs could never get set to launch a sustained counter-attack. You beat them wherever you found them and you never stopped looking for them and tearing into them. Well done, Halsey."

island highway, later increased to 18; and handling of huge tonnages of base cargo. In addition there were regular and special maintenance projects and salvage of departed Army, Navy or Marine establishments.

Significant concentrations of shipping around the islands sometimes brought the war forcefully close. Ships of all descriptions lay offshore at anchor or at noisy, clanking docks. Loading and unloading proceeded according to a matter-of-fact plan. Sleek, camouflaged transports, some troop-laden, appeared and disappeared around the islands. Practice debarkations were in progress. Amphibious invasion craft scooted like water-bugs in intricate patterns. Harbor control blinkers talked with the ships, seeking identification or relaying berthing orders. Small patrol craft scudded back and forth across the ship lanes. At the docks lay ugly LSTs, bow ramps down while tanks, trucks and armored construction equipment grated and rumbled into the yawning interiors. Carrier planes winged over the island. Sometimes the penetrating thunder of big naval guns shook the air and the ground. By night harbor and island waters were alive with blinkers and searchlights. The waterfronts resounded with the clang of preparations. On the roads rose and fell the rumbling din of caterpillar tanks, "buffaloes," "alligators" or "ducks" on their way to the docks.

One morning the concentration would have suddenly thinned and all but vanished. Then it was assumed

the forces were out for "staging" operations, practice maneuvers in areas mapped similarly to the actual military objective.

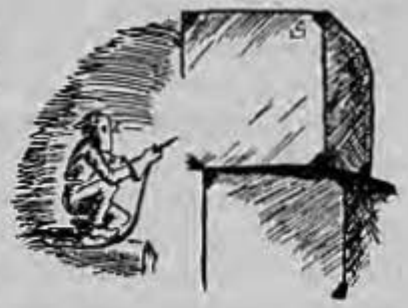
Within slightly more than a month after we landed on Banika, our crews had expanded facilities of PAD #2 (Pontoon Assembly Depot). Our crews, too, were working at assembly, coupling the welded hollow metal cubes into rigid strings which could be installed on the sides of LSTs or similar invasion craft and dropped offshore, when the destination was reached, to provide causeways for unloading or tow barges.

Perhaps after a distant hard-won battle the solemn evidence of it might appear at our shores—a gleaming white hospital ship, sides marked with huge red crosses. From it would come walking or stretcher cases on their way to the base Mobile Hospital, later a Fleet Hospital. Sometimes, too, there would be forbiddingly simple pine boxes laid to rest beneath white crosses in a plot of ground near the hospital.

Scant time was lost after our Banika arrival in getting to work. We were assigned at once to maintain Renard Field, where traffic was heavy in bombers, transports and training planes. The island of Bougainville was then a battleground, with a strong force of Japanese surrounded and cut off but making desperate sorties in vain attempts to escape. Renard Field, besides being a bomber base, was also an operational seat of Seat (Service Command Air Transport) from which frequent hops to Guadalcanal or other points were made.

In addition to strip maintenance we were assigned to keep 11 miles of treacherously muddy island highways fit for use, to maintain watches on a bank of

"reefers" (refrigerators) at the Blue Beach dock and to maintain and operate the "San Cal" exchange, a part of the island telephone communications system.



In all these projects we were at first severely handicapped by the fact that our heavy equipment had been left on the dock at Gulfport, nearly 10,000 miles away. It had been consigned aboard another ship and was on its way to us, we heard, but in the meantime we struggled along with equipment salvaged from the Public Works Equipment Pool plus whatever pieces we could beg, borrow or steal.

The following month, April, while heavy rains still vied with periods of intense sun, we increased our working field, taking on the operation of the Renard Field coral pit in preparation for the job of resurfacing the strip and we also rebuilt the field's aircraft control tower. Besides, we took over operation of another coral pit to furnish crushed rock for road work—surfacing, grading, and such things as construction of reinforced concrete culverts.

To aid anti-aircraft gunners of a Carrier Aircraft Service Unit, who must be adept in following swiftly moving targets in the air, we constructed a rifle skeet shoot range and an armory. Training in aerial gunnery as exemplified by the skeet shoot was merely an exercise designed to keep the eye alert.

Actual anti-aircraft practice employed plane-towed sleeve targets.

During our second month, in addition to pontoon assembly work, we laid concrete decks for warehouses of the Marine Depot and began construction of concrete-decked Quonset warehouses at Blue Beach. We built a mooring dock at the beach and a 100-foot dock at Ufa Island, just off Banika, where for several months the Army had maintained an ordnance supply dump. We helped to unload a new Construction Battalion which had just come from the States and numbered among it many acquaintances of officers and men of our units. And we started remodeling Seat lunchroom, better known as "Wimpy's Cafe," a place of hot dogs and hamburgers.

Resurfacing of Renard Field with its numerous dispersal taxiways, was a project requiring night and day crews for nearly two months. Also falling to us were jobs such as building pontoon or log piers, loading platforms, dock pilings, a new post office for Blue Beach, Army post exchange warehouses and a foundation and deck for a new version of the Blue Beach Red Cross. As one project was completed, a new one was set to start. Besides the continuing work on the roads and the strip and repairs to installations like harbor or aircraft control towers, there were various problems of health

and housing to be dealt with. Our own camp areas had to be reconstructed or repaired periodically, the area had to be cleaned, swamps had to be cleared and drainage ditches dug. Inevitably new construction involved the clearing of trees or underbrush.

In anticipation of an increasing volume of heavy materiel movement, the broad Blue Beach dock area had to be resurfaced with crushed coral. At this or similar beaches LSTs and transports would tie up to take on munitions destined for coming battles. Projects involving war shipping were interrelated. For instance, the pontoon pier we built at Daumie Island—in part a storage dump for some of the ordnance used in the Philippines—facilitated transfer of the munitions to waiting craft at the beaches, and thence to the embattled shores of Leyte, Samar, Mindoro or Luzon.

The story of island base maintenance partially repeats itself. Work completed three or four months ago must be begun all over, so quickly do installations deteriorate under continual use and climatic influences. By July the tent quarters we erected soon after landing were already leaking and beginning to rot. Tent warehouses in various island areas had to be replaced or metal huts substituted. Roads needed constant attention; bad spots extending for a mile or more had to be completely resurfaced, which meant a continuing production of coral from the pits. Sections of camp like the fuel depot, the Public Works Storage Lot, our own transportation lot and heavy equipment yard, which would turn to sloppy mud holes in torrential weather, had to be resurfaced. And to add to our difficulties, while equipment was building up to a favorable inventory, spare parts were lacking more often than not.

Army, Navy and Marine outfits had claim to our services. We built living and operating facilities for some of them. We sometimes helped a Special Battalion (a stevedore outfit like all specials), in loading operations. On occasion we worked aboard ships, repairing or installing galleys, bulkheads or other necessary interior structures.

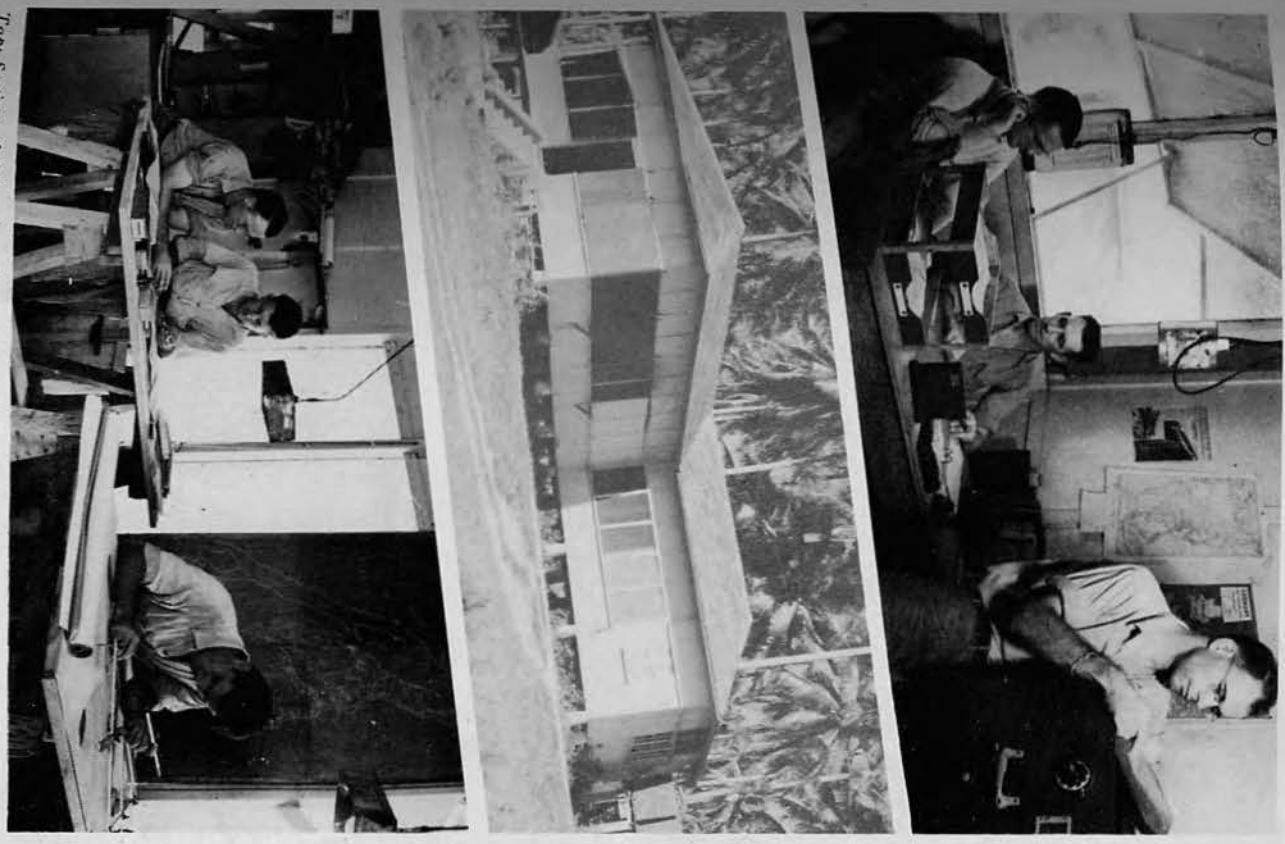
By August we had taken on another project, maintenance and operation of a bulk fuel storage depot or "tank farm" and not long after this, our second "tank farm." The first of a series of salvage operations began, too, with the dismantling of an Army Defense Battalion's camp site. From this time on, many mobile outfits would be moving from Banika to more forward bases or into actual combat, and it was part of our job to clean up after them, to salvage what could be salvaged and to pack what could be packed for transshipment.

Sometimes unexpected construction projects developed. The Special Battalion's messhall, for instance, was completely destroyed by fire when a galley stove

OPERATIONS

Bulldozer at work.

Typical scene of personnel office in operation. Office was room in plantation building which also housed disbursing office, drafting and communications rooms.

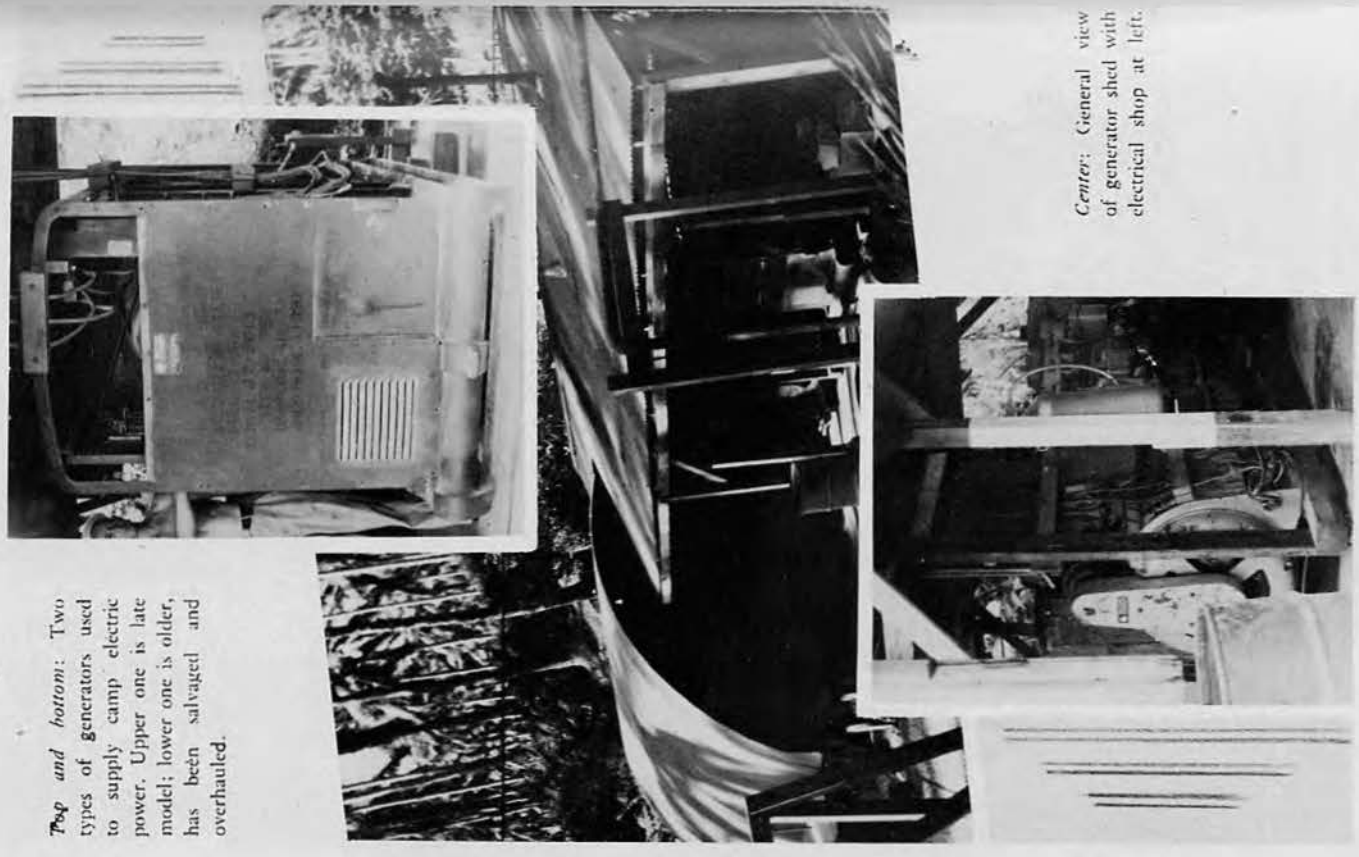


Top: Section of disbursing office in personnel building. *Center:* Exterior of personnel building, formerly plantation building. *Bottom:* View of drafting room located in wing of personnel building in foreground of center photograph.

Section of interior of GSK (General Storekeeper) warehouse, from which supplies and equipment were issued.

Top: Cobbler shop. *Inset*: Exterior view of GSK. *Bottom*: Laundry, showing large washing machine (behind men) made in camp.

Quonset hut houses camp's electrical shop. Two men at left construct mounting for electric fan. Man at center tests motor armature while group at right makes adjustments on battery charger. Improvised test panel shows above them.

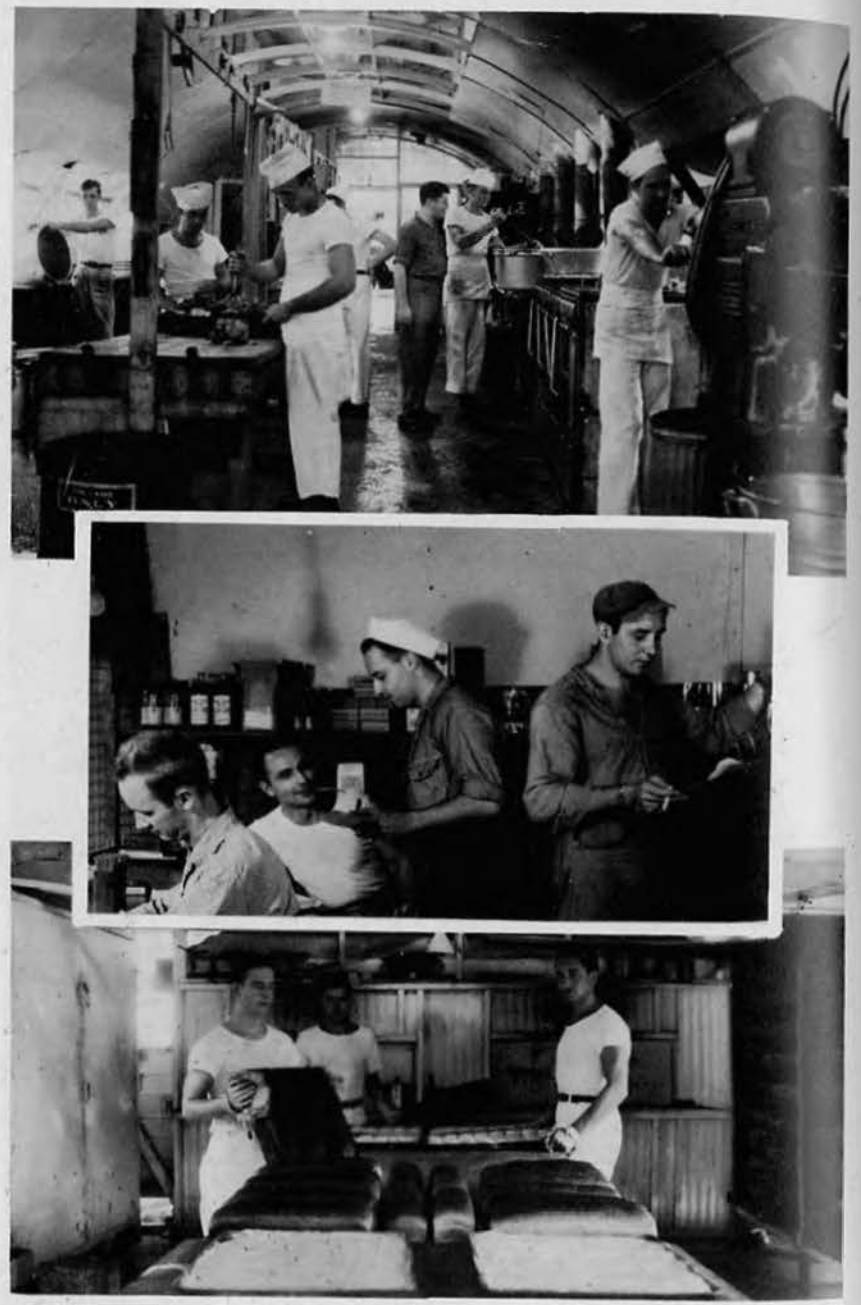


Top and bottom: Two types of generators used to supply camp electric power. Upper one is late model; lower one is older, has been salvaged and overhauled.

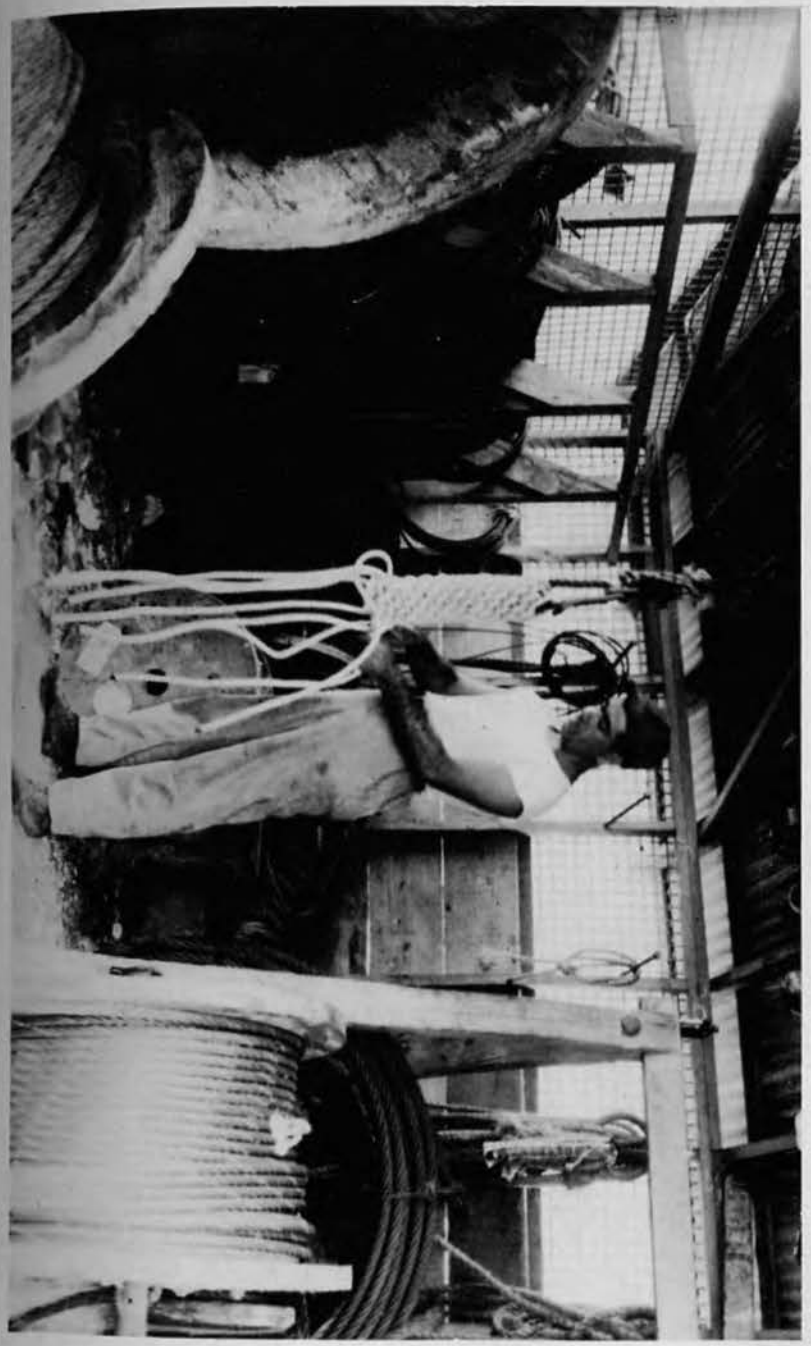
Center: General view of generator shed with electrical shop at left.

Unit electrical maintenance man splices tie into main line. Live coconut trees serve as poles.

Section of units' communications room showing San Cal telephone exchange switchboard and frame.

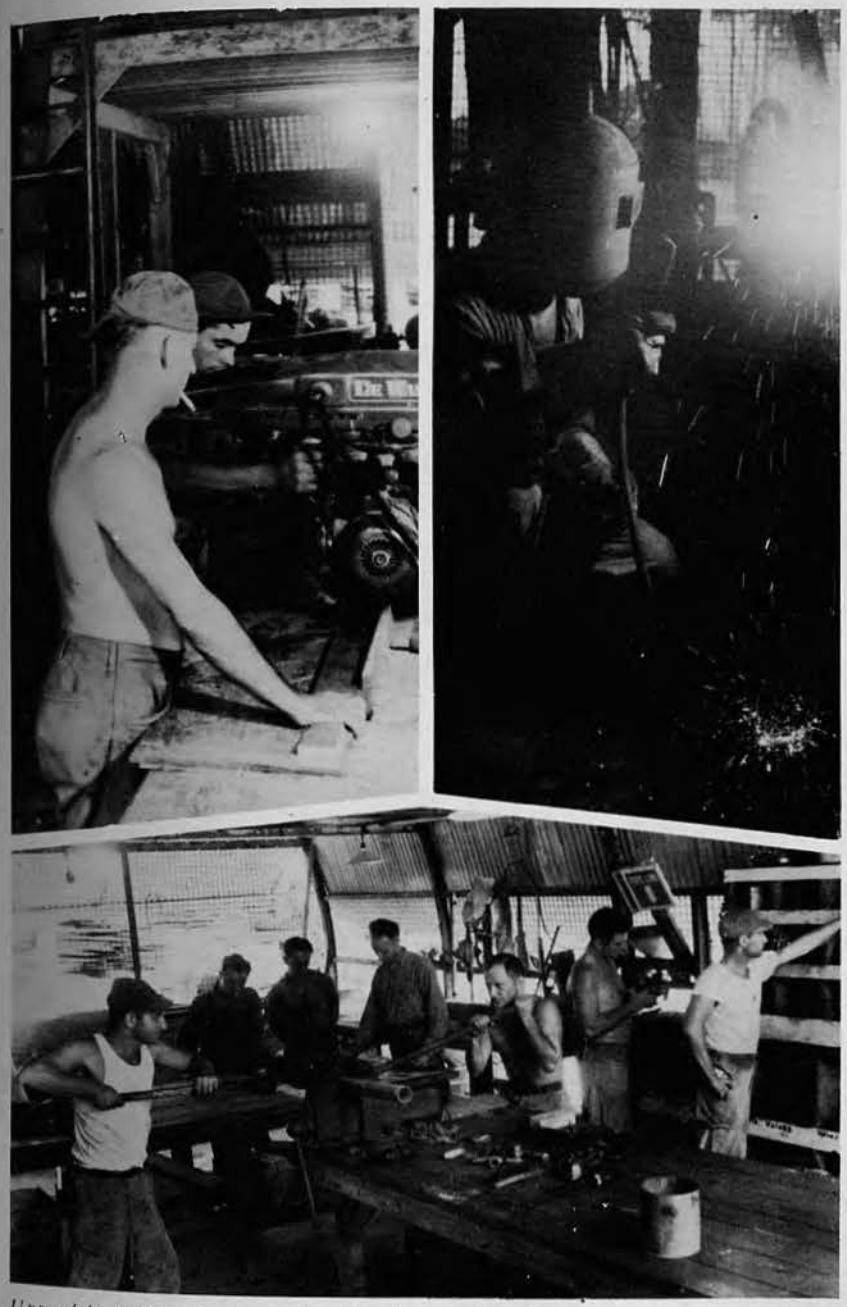


Top: Interior of Quonset hut camp galley. *Center*: Section of commissary office. *Bottom*: Interior view of camp bakery.



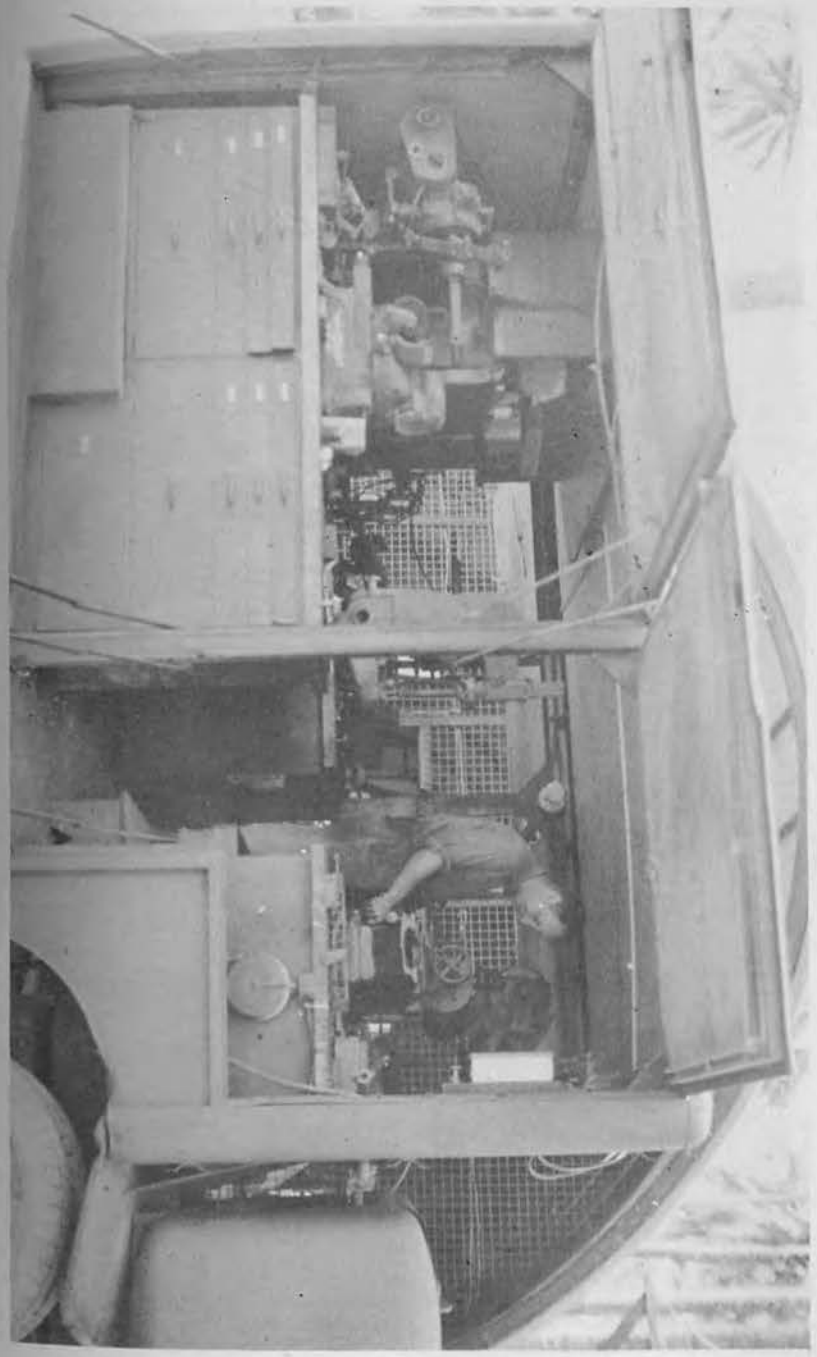
Rigging loft, showing boat fender being woven of rope strands. Cables, pulleys and other tackle are kept here in constant readiness for use.

Rows of rifles with sheathed bayonets in the units' armory.

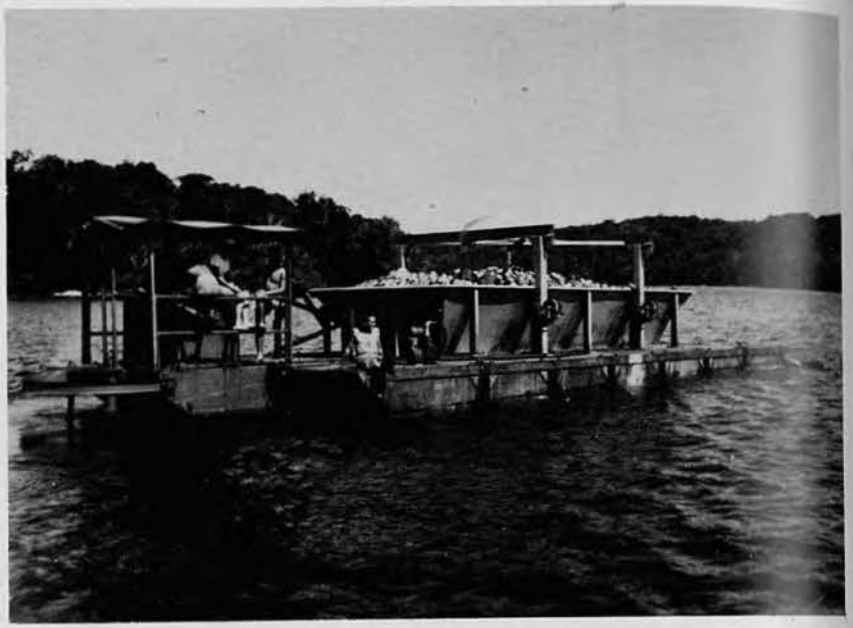


Upper left: Section of carpenter shop showing power saw in operation. *Upper right*: Welder at work in welding shop. *Bottom*: Plumbing, refrigeration and sheet metal shop.

Above: Interior view of Quonset hut machine shop where many camp conveniences were contrived and manufactured besides other required items from lathe parts to surgical splints for battle casualties. *Below*: Motor overhauling at light equipment shed, showing tire loft and tire repair shop at right.



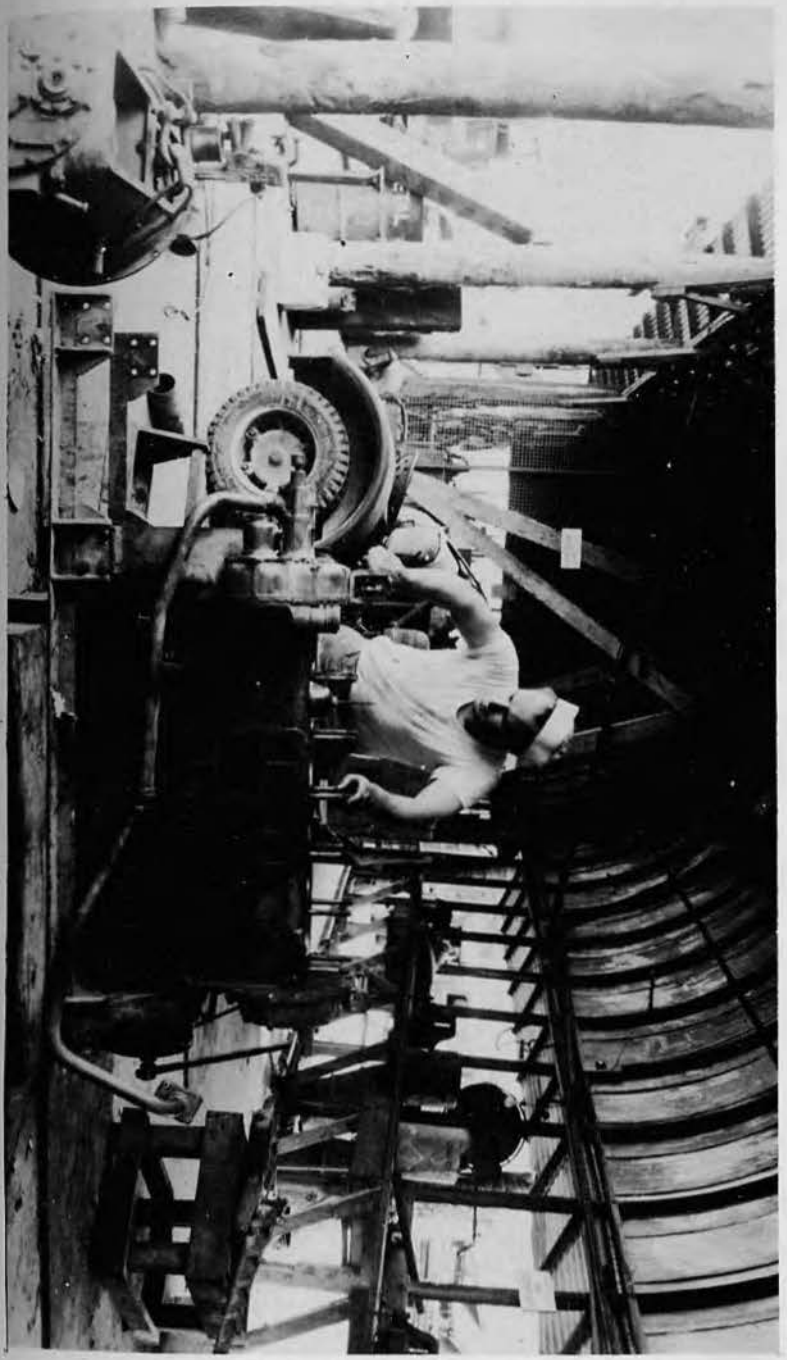
Complete mobile machine shop in trailer, parked in front of Quonset hut machine shop.



SANITATION WORK. *Above*: Scow putting out near Lingatu Point for garbage disposal. *Below*: Crew making daily collection of refuse from camp area trash barrels.

Scenes around paint shop. In upper photo sprayers paint pole trailer devised by units to haul logs or other long, heavy timbers. Equipment is painted under canopy erected outside shop. Lower photo shows section of Quonset sign shop.

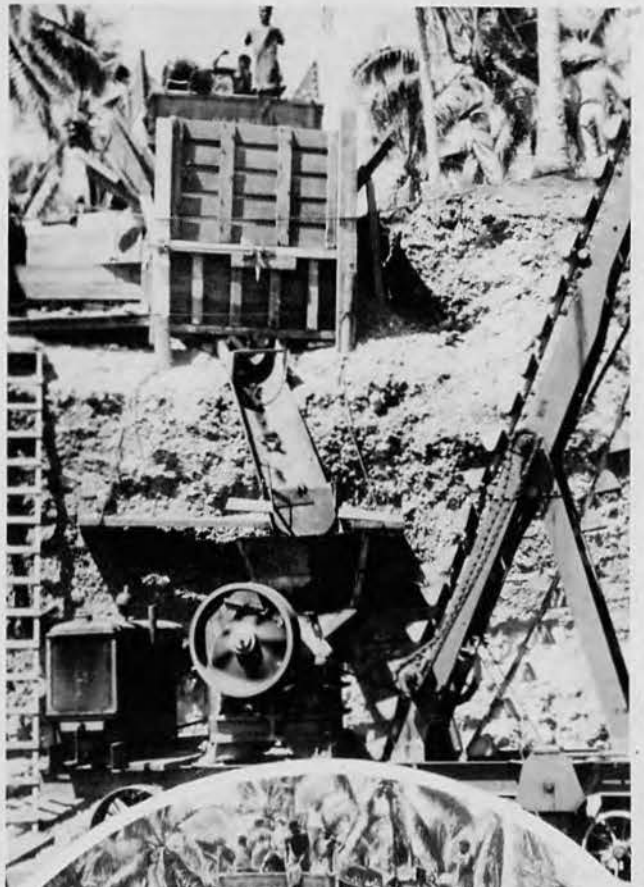
Surveying crew at work in the field.

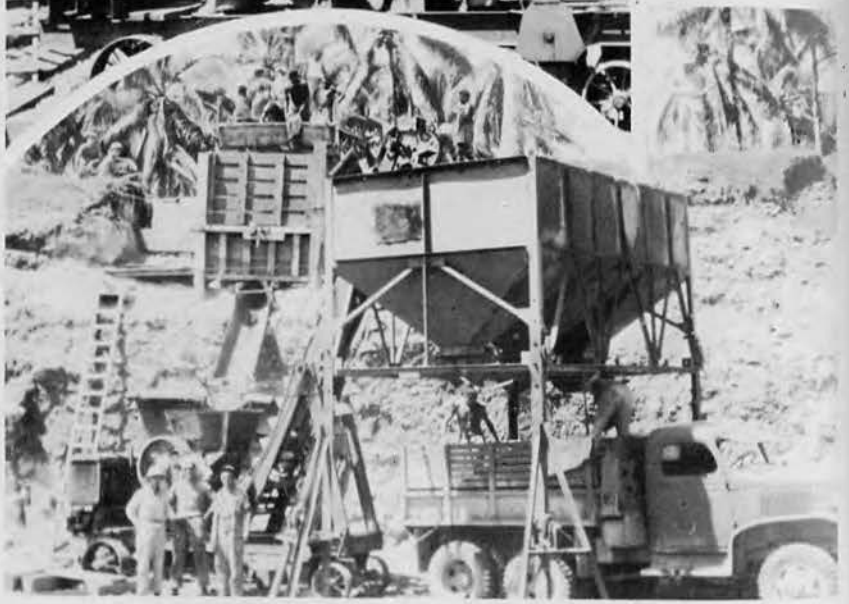


Section of heavy equipment shed where bulldozers, tractors, graders, draglines, etc., are maintained and repaired. Above scene shows man at work overhauling marine engine.

Top: Resurfacing section of island highway with coral. *Bottom*: Scene at one of coral pits.

Above: Maintenance grader at work on section of roadway where drainage culvert has just been constructed. Five drainage pipes made of welded fuel drums. *Below*: A coral pit in operation.



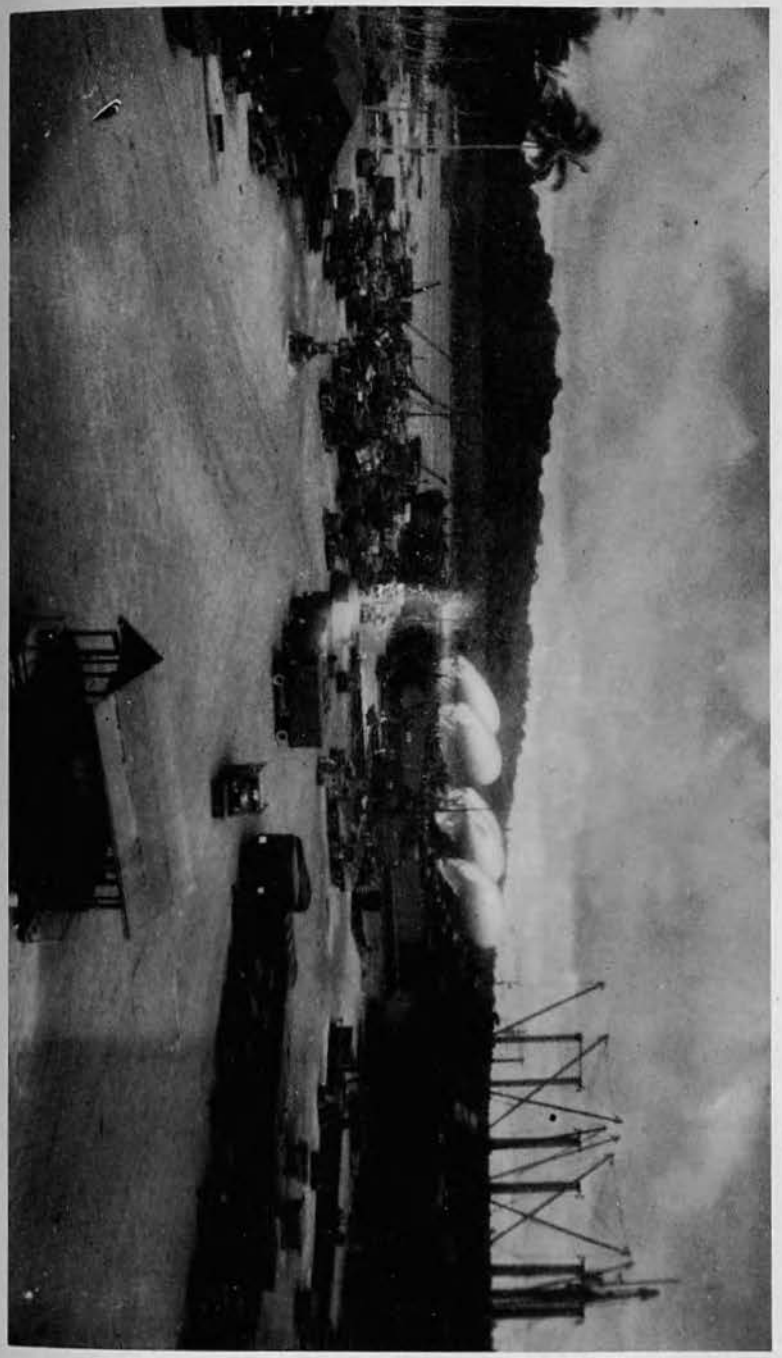


CORAL CRUSHING

Natives work in bin which feeds rough coral to crusher. Crushed coral is conveyed by scoop belt to hopper shown in bottom view, from which trucks are loaded.

Road maintenance grader at work on section of South Massachusetts Boulevard near Marine warehouses and Blue Beach coral pit.

SCENES AT RENARD FIELD. *Top*: View showing Catalina flying boat and operational buildings of SCAT (Service Command Air Transport). Wimpy's Cafe behind plane. *Center*: Main strip. Control tower left center. *Bottom*: Graders at work on main strip.



Section of a dock area showing loading operations, principally of supplies and construction equipment. Barrage balloons are attached to LST's. Structure in foreground is cargo checkers' shack. In background are Renard Sound and part of Banka. Loading is Special Battalions' work.

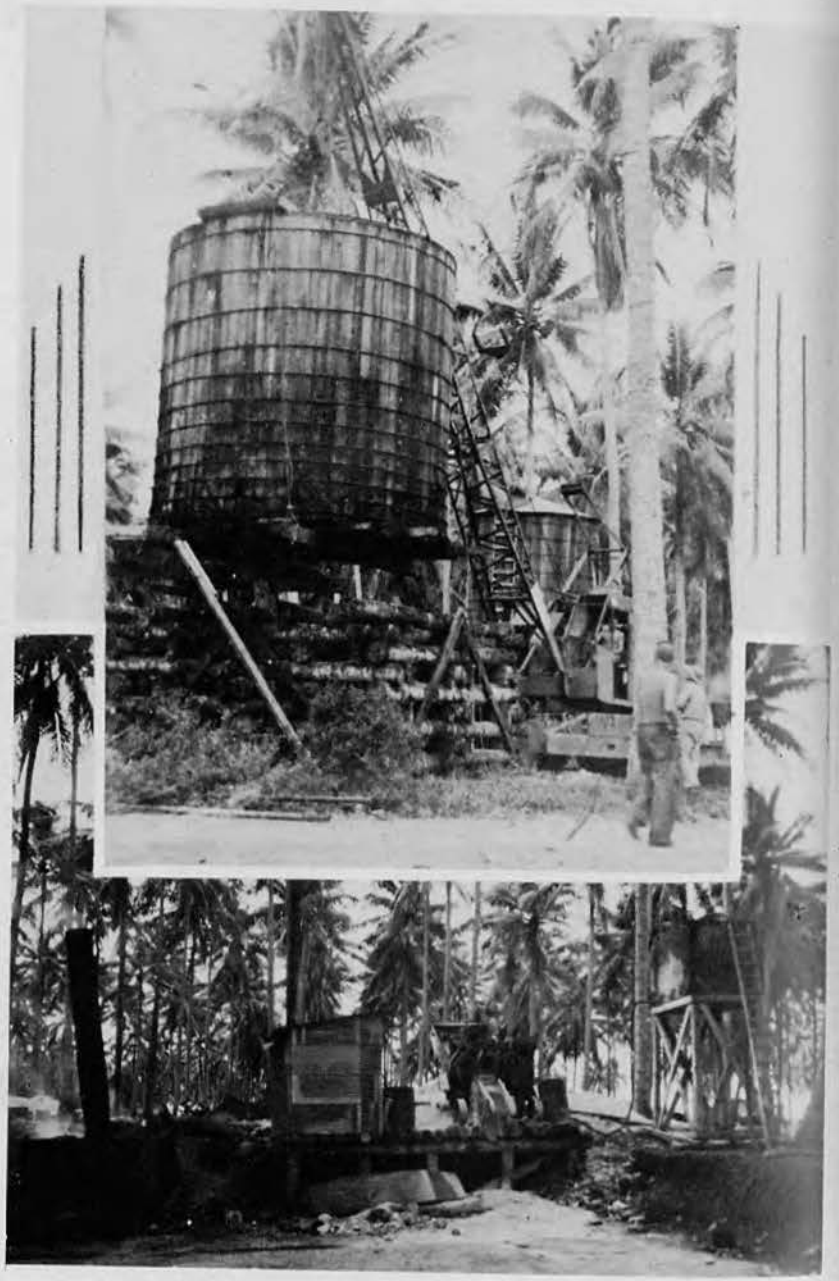
LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel) being loaded on LST. Note larger landing craft already aboard. Work of this kind was done by Special Battalions.

Top: Section of 572-3 Base Cargo Transportation yard. *Center:* Renard Sound viewed from its mouth. *Bottom:* Unloading from transport to base cargo truck.

Left: Loading at beach for new battlefront.
(Special Battalion Photo)

Right: Driving piling for construction of 572-3 Boat Pool dock on Renard Sound. North section of Banika in background.

Top: Base cargo trucks wait at Dock area to have cargo transferred to ships. To left of trucks is pile of fuel drums. At far end of area, left to right: Red Cross hut, Marine dock office, 572-3 base cargo office. At right center is checkers' shack. *Bottom*: Closer view of above area, showing loading. Red Cross at upper right. Ufa island in background.

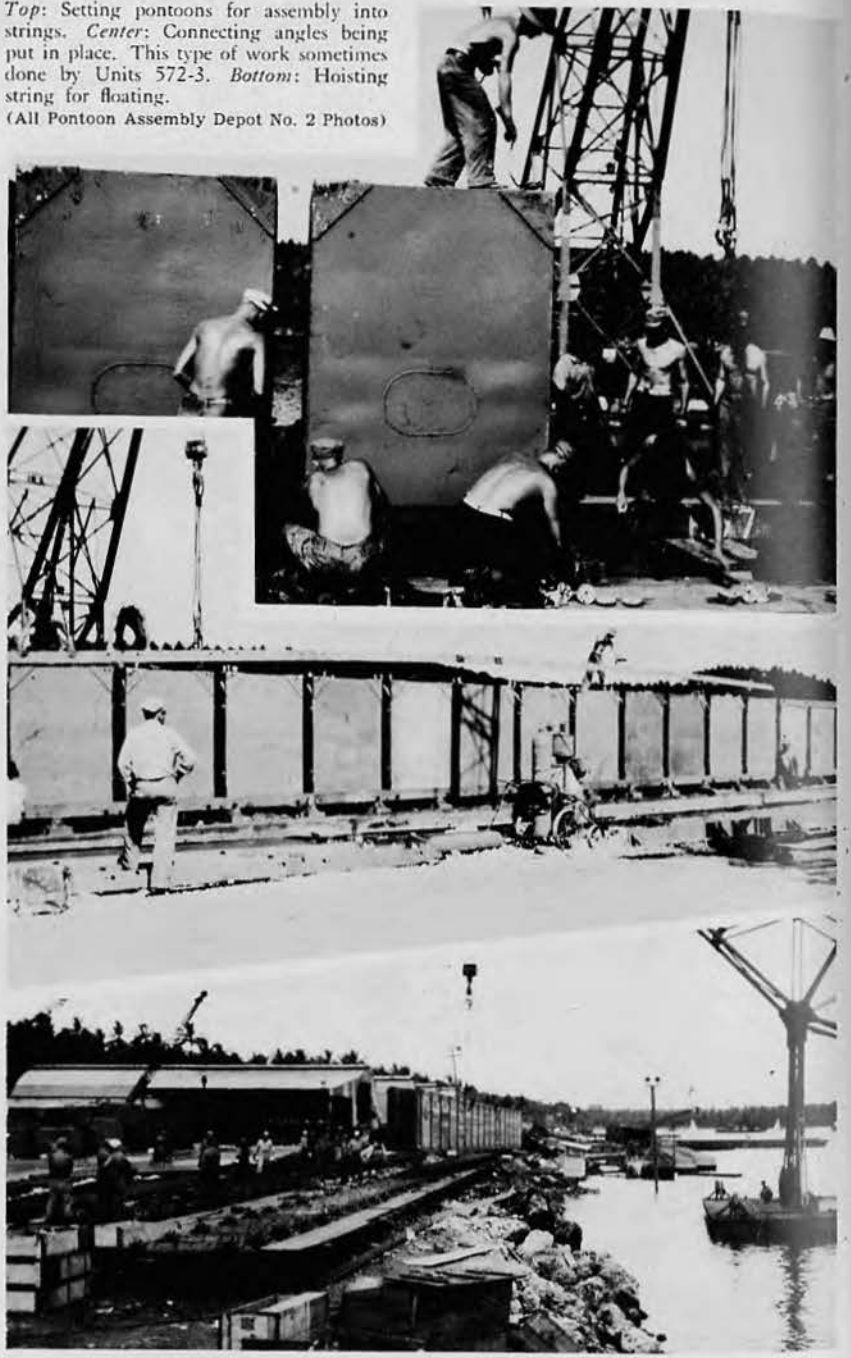


Top: Removing water tank from old foundation behind galley in preparation for setting it on new base. *Bottom*: Concrete batch plant and, at left, incinerator.

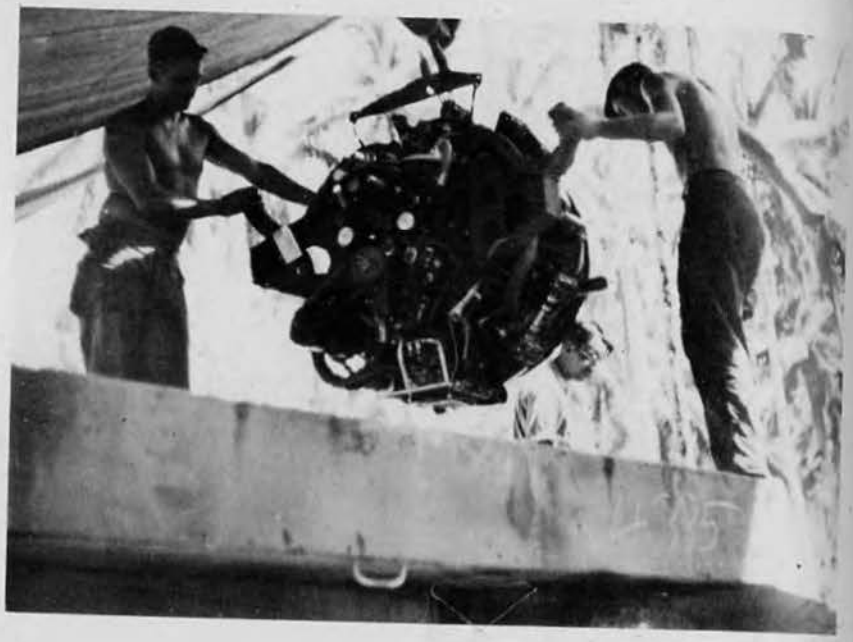
SCENES AT PONTOON ASSEMBLY DEPOT. *Top*: Prefabricated pontoon forms being set in place for welding. *Center*: Stack of prefabricated forms. *Bottom*: Piles of finished pontoons and connecting angles for stringing. Work shown here all done by PAD personnel.

(Pontoon Assembly Depot No. 2 Photos)

Top: Setting pontoons for assembly into strings. *Center*: Connecting angles being put in place. This type of work sometimes done by Units 572-3. *Bottom*: Hoisting string for floating.
(All Pontoon Assembly Depot No. 2 Photos)



Top: Hoisting completed causeway into position to be fastened on side of LST. *Center and inset*: Two views of pontoon causeways attached to LSTs. *Bottom*: One method of launching completed pontoon string.
(All Pontoon Assembly Depot No. 2 Photos)



Above: Installing new motor in reconditioned LVT hull. *Below*: Salvaged tracks to be sent back to LVT repair base, Regular Navy outfit on Banika, for reconditioning.

Top: View of 572-3 farm hewn from jungle at southern end of island, looking toward personnel quarters visible just below right center. Note huge banyan trees. *Center and bottom*: Scenes looking from quarters.

Trucks hauled the coral from the pits.

camp shops, and the hated incidental project of picking up and clearing out coconuts and dead palm fronds.

Spare parts, which we needed for maximum efficiency of heavy equipment, were coming in well now. In December, automotively, we were in a favorable position—and just in time. Responsibility for the day and night job of trucking endless stores from docks to warehouses was staring us in the face. The Army outfits that had handled base cargo operations were moving off, leaving us 50 trucks to service and keep rolling around the clock. The following month we acquired some 10-ton trailers to speed up the work and were by that time employing 135 men as operators on the cargo project alone. To accommodate the sudden gain in equipment, a special cargo transportation lot had to be built. In the meantime, we had to convert the old mobile base area into living quarters for an expected increase in working personnel for the Pontoon Assembly Depot.

Nevertheless, we had also found time to clear a patch of several jungle acres and to plant it to many different vegetables including corn, okra, cabbage, cucumbers, melons, lettuce, radishes, etc. The garden, hacked out of the southern end of the island, was undertaken with the technical assistance of a representative of the Foreign Economic Administration who made soil tests and furnished seed for us as he had done for numerous military agriculturalists in Africa, the Mid-

dle East, Guadalcanal and other likely farm lands in the Pacific.

The year we stayed at Banika produced many superficial changes. Green-painted Quonsets or sprawling rows of yellowish frame structures had replaced tent warehouses and tarpaulin-covered piles of stores. Road, camp and dock areas were hard, flat and firm under applications and reapplications of coral. Highways were wider and better drained. New ones had been constructed, dangerous curves or grades eliminated. Trees had been thinned in many places, allowing greater freedom of vehicular movement. New facilities for entertainment and recreation had been introduced, like the ones at the Fleet Hospital, our own new swimming pier with its high and low diving boards, or our boat pool—the dock where we kept sailboats, outboards and heavier craft for fishing or boating excursions. We had lately furnished a spacious, long, side-screened headquarters for Island Command.

Marine, Army and Seabee outfits were moving up. Our old neighbor, CBMU 571, had gone to the forward area. The construction battalion which had come after we did, was leaving as part of the major force then making up in the Pacific. Base population was dropping sharply. As it decreased, salvaging and dismantling jobs piled up one on the other. Maintenance work is never quite finished.

Manpower of each unit when we left the United States was up to authorized complement—269 enlisted men and five officers. Thus we undertook the numerous island projects with a total of 538 men and 10 officers. But under the attrition of climate and living conditions which induced a wide variety of ailments, oc-

cupational accidents and disabilities, transfers of personnel and discharges, actual strength "on board" decreased as time went on. And sometimes numerical working strength was even lower because of confinements to sick bay or hospital. Shifting of personnel from one gang to another was necessarily frequent. A man may have found himself on a different job every day in the week; many had run the gamut of all jobs on the island; some few had remained permanently at initially assigned occupations.

We were burned and bronzed by the sun, inured to discomfort, used to sweat and labor and throughout we had looked ever forwards to delivery from the "rock." Now the time of delivery seemed near.* A year had passed to the rear, leaving its mark upon us, upon Banika, on the course of the war and on history.

*It only seemed so.

CHAPTER SIX

In which baseball and gooks and progress and snails, a lonely horse and an amorous goat brighten the corners where they are.

AMONG the greatest hazards to be faced in an isolated tropical outpost such as Banika is the utter boredom, the monotony, the frustration of spirit that breeds all sorts of dissatisfactions. The business of "standing by" in wartime, which is the lot of the greater percentage of men in the armed forces, is an unspectacular, nerve-gruelling adventure that exacts its toll with imperceptible slowness. The dragging, oppressive months are fertile ground for bitter introspections and warped outlooks. Spirits fluctuate between irritability and resignation against a background of complaints.

"If only we was near some town where you see civilization once in a while, it wouldn't be so bad," is a frequent complaint. "Like in Europe—that ain't so bad. But this . . . . why Christ, this ain't a fit place for a man to live! What're we doin' out here anyway . . ?"

"I'll tell you what we're doin'," somebody answers. "We're making a lot of goddam chairs for the Red Cross and souvenirs for the officers. Why, for all the good I'm doin' . . . . I was doin' more to help the war back home. I ain't kiddin' you . . ."

"Yeah, well let me tell you somethin'! You get back home, you ain't gonna be worth a damn for nothin'! After being out here so long, you ain't gonna be worth

a damn for nothin'! The old lady'll say 'Whothehell's that broken-down old man!' "

The conversation zigzags from one unrelated subject to another. Sooner or later somebody is accused of "never having lived better in his life" and then the discussion is concerned with who did or did not wear shoes before he came into the service. Such an accusation enjoyed wide favor, being an easy way of insulting a neighbor.

So the boredom and the frustration rankles and explodes in fits and starts of exaggeration. Some might mean what they say, others talk because it's the thing to do, still others find relief and satisfaction in an inventory of troubles. Time and mental idleness become enemies. Recreation, either organized or of one's own making, is the natural force to combat all this. Therefore, if some of the recreational facilities described here give the impression that Banika was a vacation resort, it is the sound of the words that is deceptive. All the diversions were of a rudimentary sort and all put together merely took the edge off a keenly-felt isolation, did not efface it by any means.

When we reached the island there was much settling to be done and little thought was given to the length of time we might have to spend there. The hope that we might some day "move up" was fed by a belief that we were there only to become acclimated before taking an active war front position. But after the day's work there were off-duty hours that had to be filled, by necessity, with something more than thoughts of home and distance that kept cropping up.

The Banikadrome was our first major amusement center. Near evening chow time its loudspeaker blared

musical recordings. After chow it told the news, and later there was a show. We were a little surprised to find a neighborhood theater in the Solomon Islands, but we had to admit the Battalion was "on the ball." The center section of the outdoor log setup, covered with rotting tarpaulins, was reserved for the battalion personnel. The two wings, tapering from front to rear, were open to all comers which included the weather and us. We heard that USO shows and other stage productions came here periodically. In fact, we had missed the Ray Milland show by two or three days.

Early in the evening the battalion veterans began lounging into the show, dragging with them all kinds of seats—the kind that would fit firmly over a log, or could be slung between a couple, or just a flat board. Some men might drape themselves comfortably over two or three logs, tilt a bottle of issue beer and settle down for a period of music, news, scuttlebutt and a show. It looked sloppily luxurious. Maybe there was something to this veteran islander stuff.

The hoi-palloi in the wings also brought seats with them if they wised up in time; and they invariably took some sort of rain gear. The monsoon season was in its last violent stages. Many a man was drenched to the skin watching Edward G. Robinson or Cary Grant.

Before the show there was a short period of organized scuttlebutt, usually ending with the rating of the picture to follow. Two coconuts, three coconuts, as the case may be, or on occasion "One . . . rotten . . . coconut." The battalion also had a daily show bill plastered above the chow hall door with an indication of the show's merits. One show featuring Nelson Eddy and

Unreserved seat.

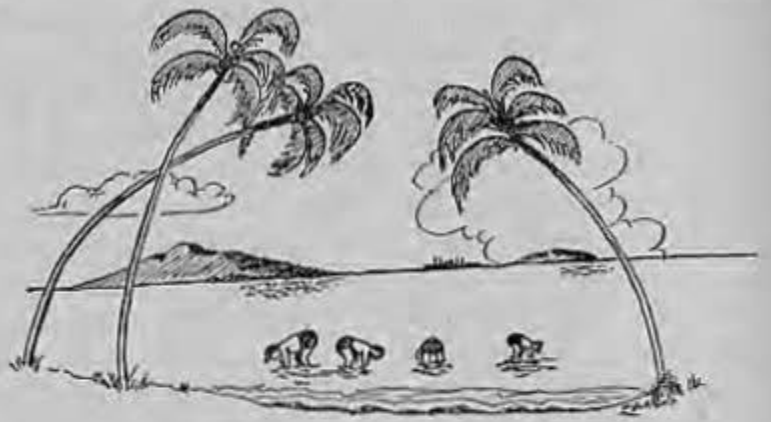
Jeanette Macdonald, was billed "Another Good Night to Write Letters."

The Blue Beach Red Cross had already attracted attention because of its refreshments, its letter paper, its crowded lounging room with ping-pong tables, magazines and "swap library" and also its ice-cold water. Filling canteens at the ice tap was taboo, so we filled our canteens at the ice tap just the same. Pretty soon they turned the water off.

Reserved seat.

Before Edison's theories were applied to our tents, there was only one lighted central place in camp to write letters—the messhall. Men straggled in with their implements and flung themselves at the problem of describing the island and saying where they were without offending the censors. According to a post office announcement there seemed to be some doubt in the censors' minds that *everybody* had a "Russell" in the family, or that "Grandpa Russell" and a bunch of his relatives were scurrying cross-country saying "hello" to the merest strangers. ". . . The temperature is 130 . . ." ". . . the rainfall is 400 inches . . ." ". . . we live in foxholes . . . " "the natives are headhunters . . ." "Has Barney (Barney Russell—he's 84 come next Candlemas Day) been drafted yet? . . ." The messhall was also a card room and reading room.

Souvenirs were standard items of recreational fare. The cat-eye, the tiger-eye, the dewdrop (snake-eye) and mother-of-pearl were strange and enchanting; especially the cat-eye which could be filed into many shapes, rubbed and polished. Often the shallow, inshore waters were dotted with wading men, backs bent to search out the snails and their shells. Two or three-man expeditions were made to likely hunting spots—quietly, to avoid a gold rush. Big thick necklaces made from 60 or 70 dewdrops strung on ordinary cord were a quick sale at $10 to $15. Strangers from other outfits peddled big dark-green cat-eyes shining like glass that went for $2 to $3 each, regardless of size. The native *gooks* had some, too but only as incidental items; they didn't go in for them in a big way. Later, by personal hunting or *gook* contacts, a few of our men specialized in cateye acquisition and did a land-office business.

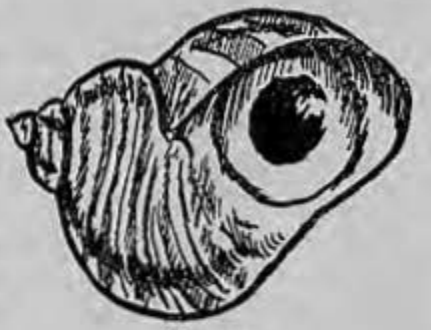


Inshore prospectors hunted the fabulous snail.

Airplane junk piles were located by men armed with tinsnips who cut whole sections of aluminum fuselage which they later transformed by saw and file into armbands, bracelets or watchstraps. Cat-eyes were carved and set in metal—aluminum or stainless steel. Minor businesses grew up. Bits of coconut shell were polished into crude mementos. Tortoise shell became a prize possession. Later there were imports from the Fiji Islands of tortoise shell necklaces, bracelets and clips inlaid with silver. The first of these sold like gilt-edge securities for $45 to $70, were reduced in price as the supply grew and finally, when the Army Post Exchange opened briefly on Banika, it sold the jewelry for $15 to $20 a set of three pieces.

Trading helped to satisfy the natives' instincts as well as our own. We were eager for primitive goods; they were eager for western items. The *gooks* were great smokers. Half of them went around with pipes drooping from their mouths; many were in the market

for cheap wooden pipes whose only claim to briar grain lay in the varnish coating. Sometimes a native boy would be induced to give an exhibition of bare-footed tree-climbing for a pack of cigarettes. The black men had twisted sticks of strong, black, vile-smelling tobacco, a standard luxury among themselves.



Cat-eye.
(Actual size)

When we first saw the *gooks*, they were mainly interested in clothes. "Mattress cuvvah" was their price for a war club; for a crude ironwood walking stick, perhaps "two mattress cuvvah." They would also deal in shorts, sun-glasses, caps, belts, rings and watches. Some were more interested in spot cash. Many amassed fat bankrolls which they would squander in poker, craps or Crown and Anchor at their village hangouts. Cash price for a war club was at first "two dollah." If you offered less—"No like. Two dollah." Often the *gooks* would enter a tent, give it an appraising gander and perhaps make an offer for a clock, box of matches or a flashlight.

For their own part they brought shells, war clubs, palm baskets, mats and grass skirts. They recognized a "tourist trade" when they saw it. The war

clubs were of all sizes and shapes and of different kinds of dark, hard woods, variously called ironwood, teak, ebony, mahogany or blackwood. The more expensive models came with built-in "eye-gougers" or "belly-stickers" and some were inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The grass skirts also had a wide price range, from $1 up to $3. Some were short and thin, others long and luxurious. In later days, east met west and the natives were palming off skirts made from something that looked suspiciously like long, straightened wood shavings (grain marks and small knotholes showing). These were dipped in atabrine (anti-malarial quinine substitute) to dye them yellow. Published reports even intimated that in some localities, the skirts were made by Seabees. East met west once more in the manufacture of war clubs. Witnesses told of seeing *gooks* laden with armloads of unfinished clubs that had apparently been roughed out on bandsaws and lathes.

The native village (actually the native labor corps quarters) was "off limits" but just outside the wired area was the trading place. When we had become reasonably familiar with the island, we often "bummed" rides or borrowed transportation to reach it. There we found servicemen browsing with deep interest among the natives who held out their wares for inspection. *Gooks* were standing or sitting, laughing and talking among themselves—ostensibly about American naivete. They extolled the merits of their combs and baskets, clubs and skirts, mats and fans. Some who had a meager knowledge of English gave themselves western names. They told you that they'd been on a missionary ship, had gone to Australia, New Zealand or England, had attended native schools or gone to church.

If you could get a boy in a weak moment and he consented to sing, you might hear a tuneless, rugged interpretation of "Shoo, Shoo, Baby" or "Lay That Pistol Down, Babe." Most all of them had the basic idea behind a dirty joke and sought to convey it without a trace of finesse—usually ending in a lecherous giggle.

With time, the demand for native goods fell off somewhat and *gook* entrepreneurs had to develop other means of separating us from our money. One that flourished for a short time was coconut-clearing. Our tents, situated among the coconut trees, were subject to sudden bombardment from falling coconuts and palm fronds—not to mention the hazard to ourselves. There were surprisingly few instances of men being "beaned" by coconuts, but it did happen on occasion, knocking the victim for a loop. Sometimes as high as six or seven nuts would let go at once. Besides, nuts and fronds littering the area meant policing.

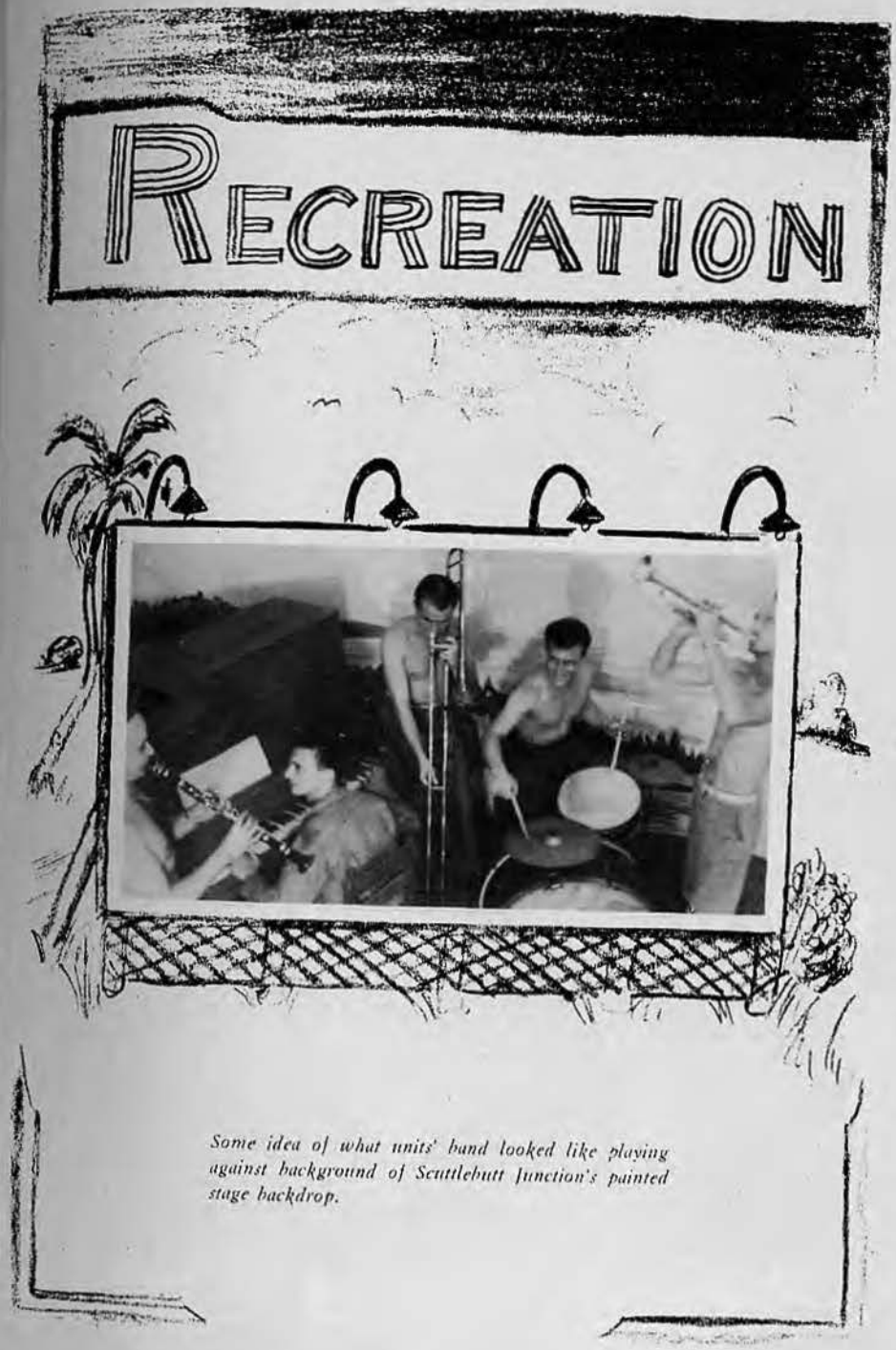
For a "dollah," a native would climb an offending tree bare-handed and bare-footed, slashing a machete into the tree trunk above him as he went, and, sitting among the palms which were infested with millions of ants, he would calmly hack down nuts, buds and dangerously rotten fronds. He might crack himself a nut while he was there and take a "pause that refreshes." For his "dollah" he also carted away the refuse to a trash pile. The operation took him about half an hour at the most, and although he seemed to be doing a lazy job, he was efficient. Some natives used a leather thong around their ankles to aid in climbing, but generally they worked without aids, resting during the climb in

a crouching position, feet braced on the thatch-like nodes of the tree trunks.

Coconuts and trees were the butts of sarcasm and irony. Among the more picturesque references to them was the expression, "the coconut trees are closing in," meaning that life was getting too hard to bear. In short, a victim of ambulant foliage was in danger of becoming "island happy." Elaborations on wandering copra might also take this form: "When I first seen 'em, so help me, they were 20 feet apart! Now look at 'em!"

Almost a year after landing, when boating had been added to the recreation plan, visits were made to nearby islands where there were native family settlements. Although enlisted whites were technically not allowed on the islands without passes, trading could be carried on at the shore. Many a boat returned laden with pineapples, bananas, cat-eyes and such treasure.

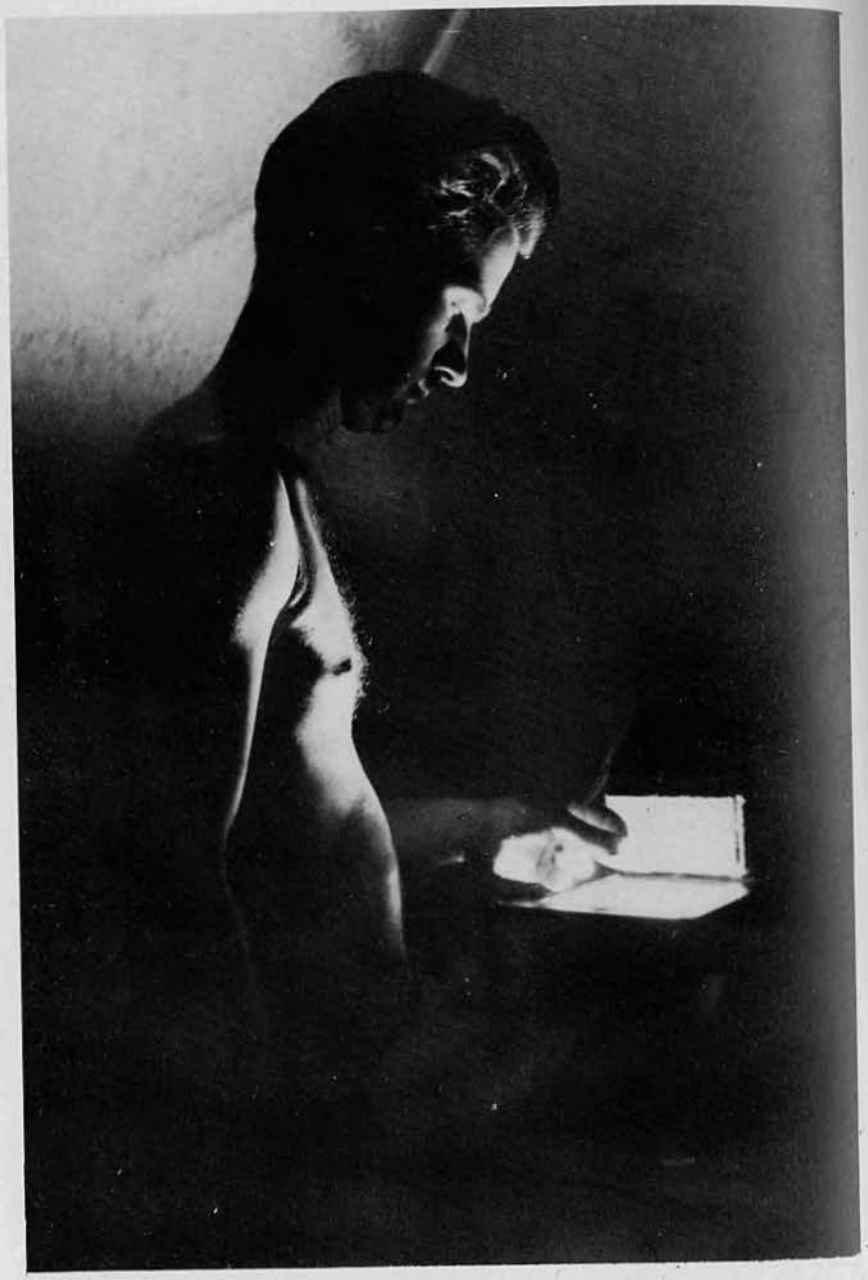
The first weeks in our permanently located tents went rather fast, much of our spare time being used in making of furnishings. Chests and cupboards and chairs and tables were fashioned out of whatever was available. Extra screening was found, doors and steps built, arched bows installed on all four sides. The prime rule for the moment was: "Don't throw anything away." Odds and ends of junk were hoarded. Lumber or disassembled crates were carefully earmarked and stored in the tent or underneath. Bits of wire, sheets of paper, airplane metal, the then-scarce plexiglass (for colorful knife handles), heavy shell casings, Jap rifle shells, rusty machetes, all grades of knife blades, even coconuts were put aside for future use. After a while it became evident that everything from hairpins to bulldozers were obtainable on the island—if you



Some idea of what units' band looked like playing against background of Scuttlebutt Junction's painted stage backdrop.

Library in Recreation Hall. Three lower shelves on left are stocked with small paper-covered reprints of standard and recent books issued by the government to armed services.

Top: Exterior of Recreation Hall. *Center*: Hobby Shop in the Recreation Hall, showing one of two lathes and other metal and woodworking bench equipment. *Bottom*: Ping-pong in main room of Recreation Hall. Door at left rear opens into Hobby Shop.



Scene in camp photographic darkroom, set up in a half-size Quonset hut.

Top: Theater projection booth. One of two 35 mm. arc-type machines at left. At right one of two 16 mm. *Bottom*: Scuttlebutt Junction during "Princess O'Rourke."

Top: Hyde Park recreation grounds where Tony Romero and Frances Langford (above) entertained on stage with show starring Jerry Colona and Bob Hope (right).
(Pictures of performers are Special Battalion Photos)

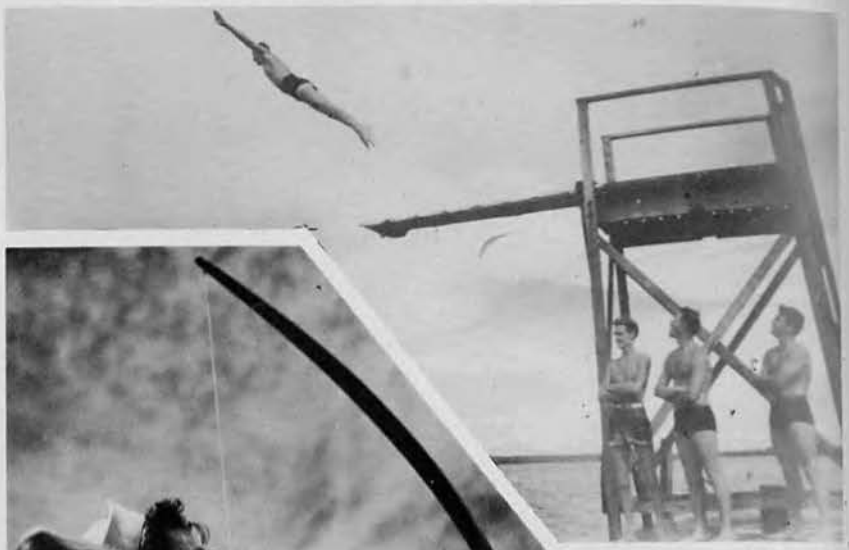
Stars in the Jack Benny show which played at Hyde Park. *Top left*: Larry Adler, harmonica virtuoso. *Top right*: Jack Benny and his famous violin. *Lower left*: Martha Tilton, radio and stage singer. *Lower right*: Benny and screen star Carole Landis. All pictures taken on stage.
(Special Battalion Photos)

Top: Members of Royal New Zealand Air Force Band doing novelty number during performance at Hyde Park. *Bottom*: Same New Zealand band group at Hyde Park before exhibition drill and concert. The outfit later appeared at Scuttlebutt Junction.

Above: Evening musical recreation in men's tent quarters. Note plywood deck and individually contrived furnishings. Square object on end of table is radio speaker connected to receiver in tent visible through wire screening at left. *Below*: Evening recreation with cards in tent quarters. Overhead is fashioned of target cloth, giving extra insulation from sun. Conveniences installed to meet conditions. Note indirect lighting.

Military personnel on the island did much of their trading with the natives at the location shown above, just outside the native labor quarters. Area containing thatched huts and enclosed by wires strung with netting was "off limits."

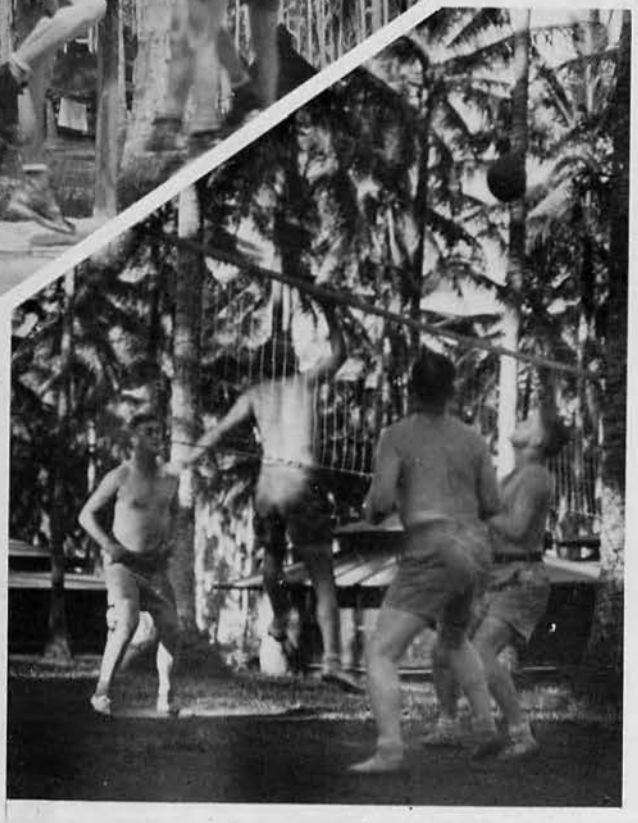
Scene at trading post at native labor corps quarters. Thatched structure is set back from roadside but is outside fenced "off-limits" area.



Above: Swimming pier in front of Personnel office showing three - meter board Low board does not show in photo.

Above: Archer takes aim on range set up at old unit ball diamond. Targets were made in camp. *Right*: Scene during 1944 inter-unit softball tournament. Unit 573 at bat.

Left: Basketball on coraled court located to right of Recreation Hall.



Right: Volleyball at court in Officers' Country.

Fishing for recreation around the Russells in boats built or remodeled by units. *Top*: The "Queen Bee." *Center*: LC (Elsie). *Bottom*: A unit boat. Dim outline on center horizon is Banika.

View of units' Boat Pool and dock. Note boat under construction in shed at left.

Is everybody happy?

Whadaya got, Joe?

knew the angles—and the new aim was to get rid of all possible junk.

Music offered its share of diversion. Strains (no pun intended, but you can have it if you want it) of harmonicas, ukuleles, a banjo or a violin, accompanied by raucous voices, issued from lighted tents into the warm night air. Sometimes horns groaned miserable notes or zipped out melodies, depending upon the musician. Future bandsmen laboriously studied the trade.

At 9:30 p.m. (2130) the music was "taps." As the first uncertain notes filled the air, men in their bunks hastily bet five cents to 25 cents to a dollar on whether the bugler would make the "high note." It was an even money bet. If he made it, there was a loud, sustained chorus of congratulation from the tents of the two areas. If he faltered and failed, there was a chorus of condemnation, distinguishable from the other only by a slightly different inflection. Afterwards, somebody might give the call of the rooster. Then sleep settled down. Time brings all things and eventually the bugler was able to rip off a true and soulful rendition of "taps" at will.

Briefly, until mast threatened offenders, it was a post-taps custom for a group to sound off in unison on a very troublesome question. In the lean days, someone had "procured" a pair of hinges from a head. The

question went something like this, in a slow, measured cadence: "One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . Who stole the hinges from the headhouse door?"

Gunner.

Pets and animals were familiar sights in the area. The little terrier, Gunner, was perhaps the best known, although there were countless other dogs of doubtful lineage. Gunner scampered around the areas, never too busy at first to stop and say "hello" to anyone. He came to recognize at sight a sizeable percentage of men in both units; and he barked madly at strangers or *gooks,* some of whom he scared. Later he developed into a full-fledged "Red Cross Commando" and thereafter became pretty independent, ignoring would-be petters and trotting past without a greeting. Of the four or five dogs who came with us, Gunner was the sole survivor.

Among the other dogs who roamed the areaways and struck up lasting friendships, a couple of the best known were Blackie and Brenda. Blackie was a lumbering, jet pup of varied ancestry who liked to chase and retrieve coconuts and to eat small nuts. He wasn't above cracking them himself. Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, pecans or almonds—he took them all in his stride, breaking them open and worrying the meat out. Brenda was a nervous, pathetic little girl of good heart, whose accomplishments, outside of swimming, were a minus quantity. But she liked to be with people—especially people at the messhall. Her complexion was slightly

weird, she looked as though she'd been rolled successively in salt, pepper and brown sugar.

On arrival at the island, we found two nanny goats, closely followed in both time and distance by an old odorous billy. A true wolf with a voice like a blues singer, his call echoed far and wide. If there had been a drugstore on Banika, he would have been in front of it. In due course there were three little frisking goats, a pair of twins and a singleton. For a couple of months they enjoyed freedom of the reservation, but on medical orders were finally removed—the billy first and the rest of the family later.

Perhaps one of the loneliest animals to inhabit Banika was the horse. She turned up one day eating scrub grass around our temporary pyramidal tents. And in nightly wanderings she surprised at least one man who waked at midnight from a sound sleep to see and hear a horse calmly munching grass in the moonlight just outside his mosquito netting. When fitted with rope halter, the horse unwillingly carried riders on aimless jaunts. But at last she decided to leave—or someone stole her. She reappeared, though, at infrequent intervals—in our area or elsewhere. But she never looked happy.

The Horse.

Actually there were more nags on the island than this unhappy creature but she was the only one who came to call. In peacetime, horses were used extensively by white planters for island

transportation. Many of them had been moved off for the duration.

Another elusive animal was the Brahma bull, the hump-necked black and white beefer that in pre-war days had been imported from India and Burma. Originally there had been three herds of them on the island, but they too had been moved away, and during the war only scattered foragers might be seen lazing along out-of-the-way roads.

A familiar figure in our intra-camp menagerie was cantankerous "Doc," the white parrot with a temper perpetually at white heat. When he first arrived, he would do nothing except mope and moan; but later, becoming accustomed to the area (which he seldom left), he adopted a meager yet effective vocabulary, cursing all who interfered with him and invariably calling everybody "Doc." In whimsical moments he loved to fondle a half-dollar, but in moments of irritability his comb feathers would rise stiffly and then someone would be in for a verbal pasting.

Doc.

The foregoing have been examples of the kind of entertainment and divertisements we found for ourselves. Now, with area settlement under control, a period of organized recreation began.

On the site of the *Banikadrome* rose *Scuttlebutt Junction*, a well-equipped theater (as they go) under

new management. It still had coconut logs for seats, but they were all newly cut and their bed had been graded, eliminating the mosquito-breeding puddles that formed between the old logs and sometimes flooded the incline deep enough so that water reached halfway up the stage. (Near the end of our island tenure planks and uprights—some of the native mahogany that was plentiful in the jungles—suddenly transformed the logs into seats with back rests. It was good but hard to believe even after you saw it.) Concrete drainage gutters covered with steel matting encircled the spectators' section. New tarpaulins were suspended firmly and evenly atop the center section which was for our exclusive use. The stage itself was planned acoustically like a "music shell;" it had backstage dressing rooms, and one (1) entirely camp-manufactured flush toilet. There were footlights and spotlights and loudspeakers set at each side and in the center. The projection booth was remodeled into a light-tight efficient operating room. The canvas screen could be rolled up for stage presentations or lowered for motion pictures. The painted stage background showed a luscious, Hollywood-style South Sea maiden, clothed only by a rose in her hair and a genuine grass skirt (which stage comedians always managed to brush aside). In the picture the maiden danced to the guitar music of a *gook* seated on a Spam box and a *gook* tom-tom beater. In the background a crocodile yawned at the water's edge.

For divine services on Sundays, the maid and the *gooks* were discreetly covered with a white sheet.

When we had one film projector there were waits between reels and the sound system was fuzzy and unpredictable. With the advent of two new, latest-type 35 mm. machines and a new sound apparatus, we had by far the best reproduction of any of the several theaters on the island and we attracted crowds. Cinematic fare was doubtful. We had some four or five-year-old films, but we also had a picture not scheduled for stateside showing until the following year. In late 1944 we were seeing newsreels of the bombing of Kiska, Attu and of the late Erwin Rommel's El Alamein defeat and disastrous desert retreat. Some short features we saw over and over again.

Scuttlebutt Junction also presented USO shows, variety programs by Marine outfits, an exhibition and concert by the Royal New Zealand Air Force Band, productions by the 28th Special Service Group (Army), song, dance and instrumental recitals and various swing or jazz orchestras, including our own.

Our units' band, after practicing all week at the centrally-located recreation hall, delivered itself of a few selections on Friday nights just before the show. These appearances, however, slacked off and finally stopped entirely. A few times small piano and violin units of the Special Service Group made the rounds of the messhalls, furnishing "dinner music."

Some of the biggest names in the entertainment world came to us on Banika, among them Bob Hope, Jerry Colona, Frances Langford, Jack Benny, his violin, Carole Landis and Eddie Peabody. The Hope and Benny shows, within a month of each other, were presented at Hyde Park to throngs of servicemen. Special transportation from our area was arranged for the occasion.

Not exactly in the same class with these were our own two shows, written, directed and performed by talent from the units at *Scuttlebutt Junction*. Still, they were fair entertainment, especially from a heckler's standpoint.

The Recreation Hall was a spacious Quonset hut, housing a well-stocked library, reading and writing tables, ping-pong tables and a dilapidated piano. Finally, a hobby shop was added to the rear. It had a lathe, vises and an assortment of tools on which many professional-looking souvenirs of wood, metal or shells were fashioned in spare moments.

In spite of the heat and the humidity, sports had their seasons on Banika. Games in the inter-platoon softball tournament were played on our own diamond, drawing considerable crowds, developing intense interest and causing much moolah to change hands. There was a basketball court adjacent to the "Rec" Hall, and nearby someone had set up a badminton court. In other parts of camp there were volleyball and tennis courts and an archery range.

Swimming, as a widespread pastime, took some time to get under way. Stories that the water produced or aggravated fungus infections were partly responsible and to some extent also, the fear of sharks or other marine life. However, the beach at Lingatu

was medically approved as a recreation center, and trucks were assigned each Sunday to transport swimmers there. The cove was a sheltered spot at the southerly end of Sunlight Channel—a quietly picturesque locale of blue and green.

Boat trips to nearby swimming shores were sanctioned for a time, until we built our own swimming dock just in front of the old red-roofed plantation building that served as a Personnel Office. A solid structure of heavy timbers, the dock had both a low and three-meter diving board which catapulted the divers into water that was 43 feet deep only a few feet from shore.

Boat excursions or fishing trips were regularly scheduled. For fishing trips, you started out in predawn darkness in a converted LCP (Landing Craft, Personnel), reaching fishing grounds such as Victoria Shoals, about five or six miles out of the island group, by sunrise. Most of the catches were of barracuda, tuna or bonito. In half a day's fishing, an average catch ranged from zero to two.

Cameras were a delicate issue. Their use was not officially allowed, except by authorized unit photographers of which there were two. Some men amassed volumes of photographs. Others did not; and one of the purposes of this book is to supply those who did not with a representative group of island scenes.

Extra area recreational outlets, besides Hyde Park, Nielson Park and Lingatu Center, were the newly-remodeled Blue Beach Red Cross and the White Beach (Katura) Red Cross. At Blue Beach there were horseshoe pits, ping-pong tables, refreshments, the library, holiday shenanigans and some musical events. Fre-

quently there were outdoor tables under beach umbrellas, a theater, rows of arts and craft shops, reading and writing rooms, a music room and on one occasion a carnival lasting for several days.

The attitude of men toward the work of the Red Cross was practically unanimous approval; but attitudes sometimes pointedly expressed, was that the South Pacific wasn't any place for girl "ornaments" was mixed. A common feeling, toward the presence of girls—especially if they merely sat around like pretty "do-gooders." Not quite balancing this idea, but still widely prevalent, was the opinion that they provided a "stateside" touch and a pleasing, if momentary, companionship of a different sort. Meantime, the girl at the center of the controversy went about her work, arranging this and arranging that, making small talk and wishing—just as fervently as the men—for the war to end.

Eventually our area and the island in general assumed some fleeting elements of city organization. Electrification was complete. There was a rudimentary bus system—cargo trucks or weapons carriers with the word "Bus" painted in yellow on the bumpers. There were broad and well-surfaced roads to all necessary parts of the island, patrolled by motorcycle cops (MP's) who nabbed speeders or reckless drivers. There was a "Quiet—Hospital Zone" sign near MOB-10. There were all types of specialized repair shops. On Guadalcanal, the Armed Forces Radio Service (serving all the armed forces in the Solomon Islands) was

on the air almost continuously during the day and evening with rebroadcasts of "stateside" programs, news reports and commentaries, all done in professional style even down to the commercials:

"Who says Annie (anopholes mosquito) doesn't live here anymore? Keep fully clothed after sundown and use your mosquito repellent. It is your protection."

"Annie likes to hit the chow line after 6 o'clock and she's always hungry. Keep your sleeves rolled down."

The station, which started out by calling itself the "Mosquito Network," also had a daily musical period known as the "Atabrine Cocktail Hour" which was heralded by a recording of "The Flight of the Bumblebee."

Radios came slowly to our area but in time became common. Most tents lacking receivers were hooked up by earphone or speaker to a nearby set. Toward the end of our stay also, the jumbled babble of the messhall had to compete with scratchy speakers installed in the buildings to relay news broadcasts which late eaters would otherwise miss.

If our Banika sounds like a spa on the pre-war Riviera, the words are deceptive. From start to finish island life had no more charm than a city dump at high noon. Throughout, we were ridden by various forms of fungus, ringworm, boils, prickly heat, rashes, climatic debilitation, some malaria, threats of filariasis or elephantiasis and fear of such dreaded afflictions as yaws or leprosy.

Educational opportunities were advanced through the Armed Forces Institute. Correspondence courses in elementary, secondary or trades schooling were offered for a fee of $2. College correspondence courses

were offered on a split percentage plan, part paid by the government and part by the individual. Curricula included everything from English composition to electrical theory, electronics, typewriting, accounting, carpentry, journalism, geology, ethnology, etc.

Our units' educational program began in early 1944 and by March of the following year, a total of 105 men had enrolled—60 from Unit 572 and 45 from Unit 573. Approximately 10 per cent of the total enrollment was for college courses, the bulk of study being given to mathematics, business or trades.

Right on the island, however, were many concrete lessons in economics—notably inflation. With money coming in every month and with nothing to spend it on, it was inevitable that in personal trading small luxury goods should sell for outlandish prices. Cigarette lighters cost anywhere up to $15 for common types; cameras as high as $200 or $350; watches up to $75 or $100; radios near $100; jewelry up to $60 or $70; beer or other beverages $ .50 to $60 or more. (Homegrown "torpedo juice," a potent drink of cut alcohol with grapefruit juice as a meager flavoring agent, was more reasonable.) Everything was on a comparable scale. Surplus funds floated from one pocket to another, usually following a game of one sort or another.

Also on the island were concrete lessons in linguistics, consisting for the most part of stylized obscenity, adapted to meet the needs of the times. This was not too unnatural, if we are to believe the observations made in a handbook of advice to junior naval officers, which says in part:

"It is unfortunate that the sailor has a great tendency, unless it is checked, to become an artist in the use of profanity and obscenity . . . .

"Frequently outbreaks (of obscenity) occur in a ship that has been away on a long cruise . . . . This is particularly true of ships that have been overlong in the tropics."*

We must have been "overlong in the tropics." No attempt has been made, either in the handbook or here, to explain what mystical forces in the tropics affect the spoken word. But do we need an explanation? We should live so long!

Thus educational opportunities on Banika ranged from lowbrow to highbrow, from smut to aesthetics; living conditions ranged from the primitive to the technological; and life itself plodded its monotonous, sloppy, repulsive course month after month, while we tried desperately to find some enjoyment in what, perforce, lay with us.

*Naval Leadership—Revised 1939 Edition, printed at Annapolis, Pg. 79 et seq.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In which we take a fleeting and perhaps last look at Banika and its gooks.

BANIKA, the second largest of the islands in the Russells group, erstwhile station of CBMUs 572 and 573, is an irregularly shaped bit of land and coral about eight miles long from tip to tip (Yellow Beach to Lever Point) and about five miles wide at its widest point. For the most part it is hilly, though not as mountainous as the island of Pavuvu, largest of the group, which lies just across narrow Sunlight Channel and whose purple peaks on overcast days are lost in low-hanging clouds. From Banika's highest points the smaller satellite islands of the group can be seen dotting the surrounding blue water while fringes of white surf beat their shores or break over coral reefs. Sometimes wisps of smoke from islands where there are native settlements rise lazily into a cloud-bright sky.

The island is by nature a color mass of bright and dark greens, browns, grays and coral that glares white or yellow in the sunlight. Before the military came thick expanses of shrubs and the regular rows of coconut palms were relieved only by a few scattered yellow frame, red-roofed buildings which housed planters, plantation overseers and their families. Here and there were dried thatched huts.

The irregularity of Banika's shoreline creates many narrow points which, jutting out in various directions and studded with sparse plantings of coconuts, give

the impression from a distance of colonnades. At close hand, however, these constructions lose their picturesqueness. Some of the trees are twisted, bent or leaning seaward and the land around them is composed of the common shrubs, earth, dirty coral, rotting coconuts, fronds, weeds and weathered rock that are part of the whole island's makeup.

In the more open, flat areas foliage grows broad and luxuriant as high as 15 feet. Botanically there are infinite varieties of plant life (many not yet classified), but to the ordinary observer they are distinguishable only generally. Big fan-type leaves, narrow palms or reeds or small tapering foliage mingle with plain green bushes. Here and there may be pale flower buds. Everything blends into a thick, wrinkled blanket of greenery which ripples gently when a breeze floats in from the sea. One unusual type of bush, very ordinary by day, exhudes an elusive perfume at night.

Jungle patches in the interior are stocked with trees strung with gnarled, though flexible, vines. Tangled skeins of bush and fibrous plants twist along the ground. Roots run aboveground, burrow into the soil or lose themselves in the thicket. Secondary tree roots or plants spread like mats on the forest floor. Tall grasses are broad enough

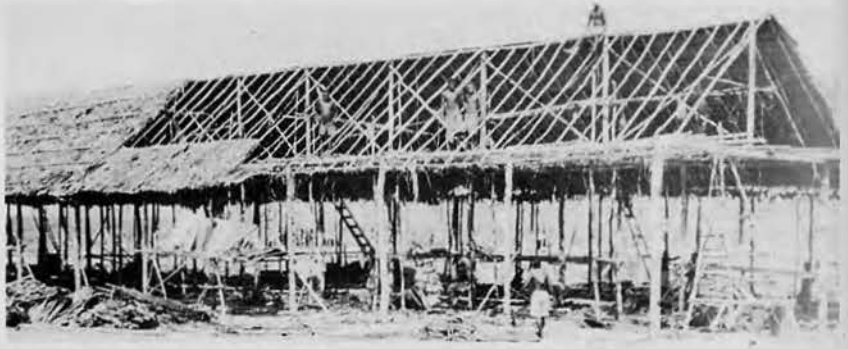
to hide a standing man. There are fallen, rotting trees of past eras and monster banyans with systems of pillared trunks growing downward into the earth, giving them a basal diameter of 20 feet or more. Epiphytic plants twine through underbrush and trees. Parasitic vines droop like slack wires from their adopted members. Bright colors are generally lacking in these sections where sunlight penetrates only to a very diffuse degree. Flowers, when they are discoverable, are large, coarse and unbrilliant.

Through at least one patch of jungle runs a thin creek of clear water dwarfed by its banks, along which the terrain is fairly open. Near here are evidences of past liquor distillations and tin cans nailed to trees and riddled with bullet holes, apparently a "private" target range. Other unnatural sights are deep earth cuts connecting with the natural channel of the creek, but they are dry—very likely a part of the island mosquito control drainage system. At another point a larger creek, a sort of tail to Renard Sound, skirts the edge of a jungle for a few hundred yards before plunging into it. Lizards up to 15 inches long, other reptiles, birds, rats and numerous varieties of large, dull-colored butterflies are among the most common forms of wild life to be observed. Some jungle areas are fronted by swamps or a lagoon where crocodiles averaging about five feet from head to tail may be found with moderate frequency. Snakes do not appear to be very numerous or at least not given to public appearances, although some are seen occasionally near the water's edge.

The most comfortably habitable part of the island is the shoreline where there is usually a fresh breeze.

NATIVE LIFE

Santa Isabel natives.



NATIVES AT WORK

Top: Building warehouse for Marines.

Center: Mosquito control swamp drainage.

Center inset: Climbing coconut tree.

Bottom: Copra mill on Talina island.

ISLAND DWELLINGS

Left: At Luna.

Center: At Moko.

Right:

At Luna.

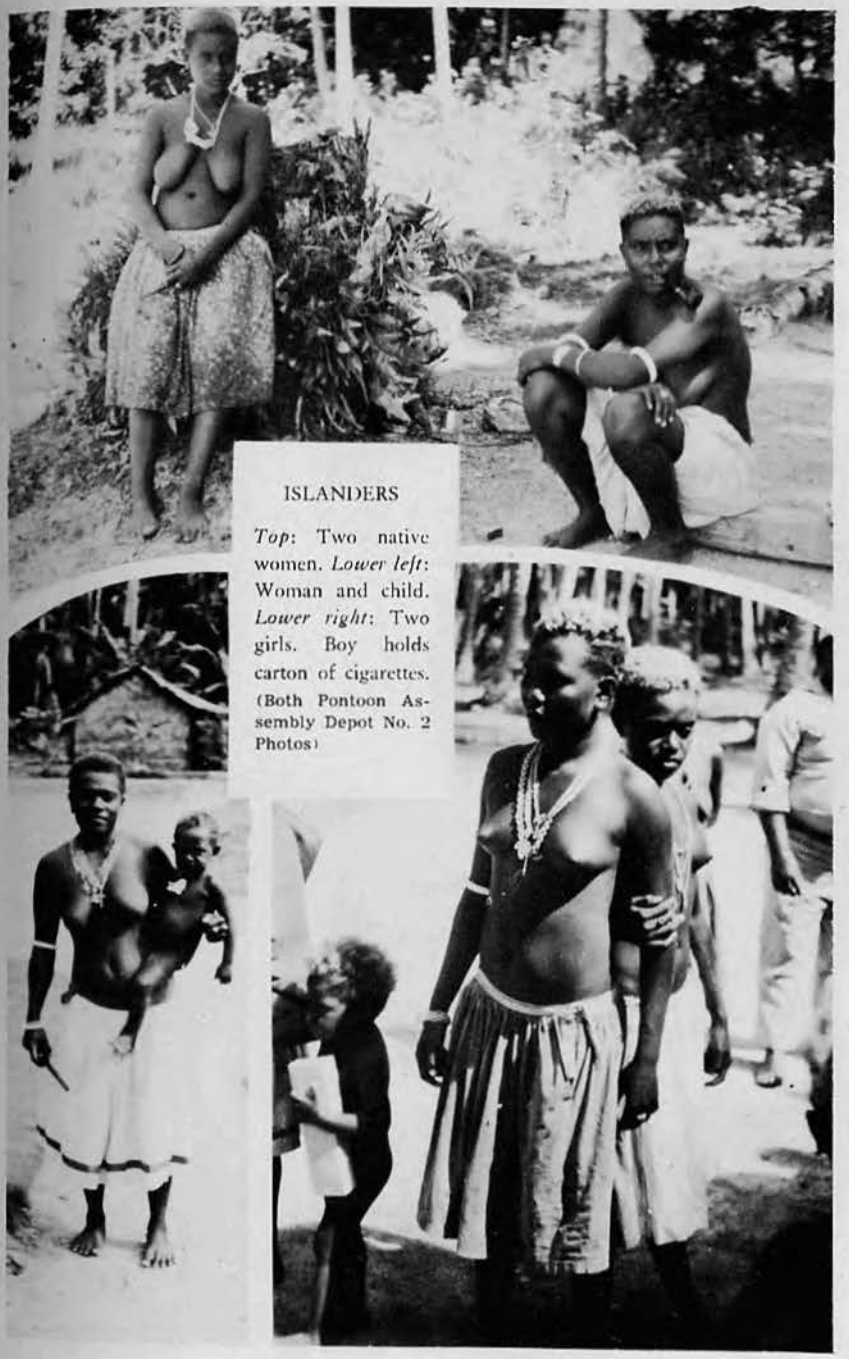
Top: Scene on island of Luna in the Russells, showing woman (at left) with two children. Another child and a man (clothed) are also visible. *Bottom*: Three women and children in front of thatched hut on Luna. (Pontoon Assembly Depot No. 2 Photos)

Top: Native village scene on island of Luna. *Center*: Santa Isabel woman pounds meal with gourd to make bread while husband looks on. *Bottom*: Santa Isabel woman prepares coconut mash on strip of corrugated metal probably acquired from plantation building or military establishment.

Types of women and girls seen on island of Luna.

(Pontoon Assembly Depot No. 2 Photo)

Group of children living on island of Santa Isabel.



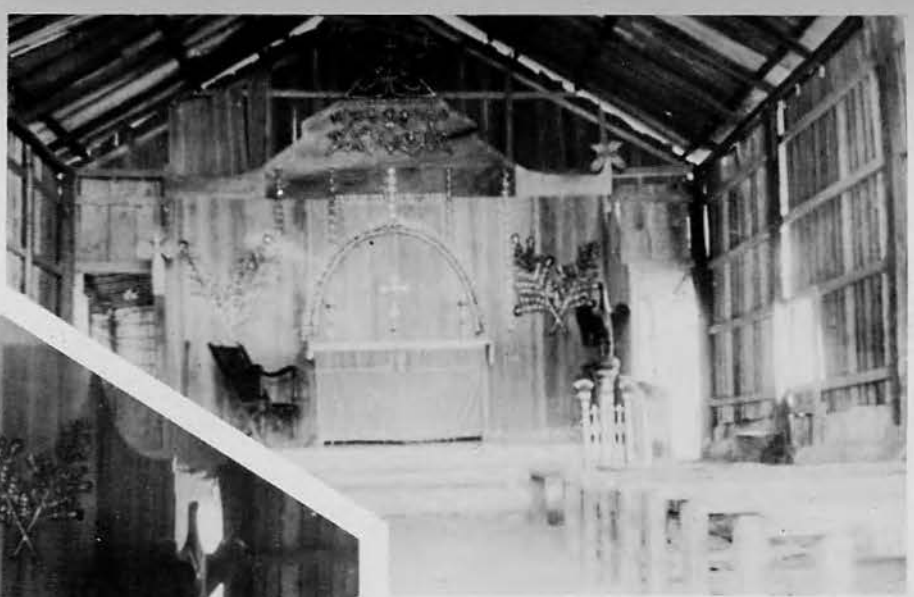
ISLANDERS

Top: Two native women. *Lower left*: Woman and child. *Lower right*: Two girls. Boy holds carton of cigarettes.

(Both Pontoon Assembly Depot No. 2 Photos)

Scene on Moko island—Dance by native girls appropriately festooned and carrying American bandanna handkerchiefs. At first said to be in dedication of new church, later called the *Araballa*, a ritual supposedly commemorating coming of white man. Probably a social event performed for entertainment of white visitors.

Right: Interior of native church on island of Santa Isabel. (Church of England.)



Left: Closeup of altar in church shown above and native altar boy. Note bird carving on standards at right foreground. Bird decorations are characteristic of native churches.

SANTA ISABEL GIRL
standing before her "marriage mat" which will become her marriage bed. She is holding a fish.

LUNA ISLAND BOY
and guitar. Islanders are eager to get American string instruments.
(Pontoon Assembly Depot No. 2 Photo)

Top: British government doctor's boat at Banika on one of its periodic rounds of the islands. *Bottom*: U. S. naval corpsman administering anti-toxin injection to native child on island of Luna, Russells.
(Pontoon Assembly Depot No. 2 Photo)

Around the coastal curves wind broad coraled roadways, equivalent in width to a three or four-lane highway. Some push "crosstown" in sections like Lever Point, the Blue Beach area or at the southern extremity near Lingatu Cove and Yellow Beach. But no roads at all traverse the Sunlight Channel side of Banika.

Under the penetrating heat of the day, reapplications of coral and the constant traffic of heavy equipment, the road surface hardens into something like pavement, grayish white in color. When first built, a heavy rain would loosen the surface, turning it to slushy brown mud which overlaid for an inch or so. Changes from hard to muddy surface were likely to occur daily or twice daily, but with improved beds and surfaces and unexpected dry weather, the rain-born mud overlay became slightly more than a film.

What is generally termed the "rainy season" in the Russells is technically known as the period of the "intermittent northwest monsoons"—in a normal year expectable from November to March. It could be better described as the likeliest period of the greatest rainfall, since nothing is guaranteed and the wet and dry seasons are not as distinct as in some of the other Pacific island groups. The so-called "dry season" is

the period of the "southeast trade winds," which similarly is not a guarantee of bone dry weather.

Our stay on Banika included one of the abnormal weather years. Arriving in March, the end of the northwest season, we expected the sudden downpours would cease within a month, but heavy rains continued at irregular intervals for several months. By the time the hottest months of the year, November and December, had rolled around, we were having an uncomfortable dry spell—natural enough for the southeast trades season. But the dry weather continued far past its expectable limit. Then we learned that if rain in good volume didn't show upon schedule (*i.e.* by late November or early December) the chances were that it would not come until some time in February. February did bring a noticeable increase in volume and frequency of rainfall, but nowhere near the normal amount. A plantation manager, now a British Army captain who has been on Banika for 16 years, once remarked that, by curious coincidence, the weather had been freakish since about the time of the American landings on Guadalcanal in late 1942.

A peculiarity of the Solomons archipelago is the diversity of meteorological conditions in relatively nearby islands. This is partly due to variations in size of land masses which affect cloud formations. There even may be wide differentials between sections of a small island—a phenomenon demonstrated on Banika. Heavy rain has often fallen on one part while another remained totally dry. This condition is more striking on Guadalcanal where high interior mountain slopes met warm moisture-laden air from the sea, loosing torrents. Rainfall in such regions has not been recorded

but it is believed to reach 500 inches yearly. On the other hand, some years see not more than 45 inches on Guadalcanal's northern plain. Yet in the Russells, not more than 50 miles away, average normal rainfall is about 120 inches. It is estimated that during a full year of our stay on Banika we scarcely had 100 inches.

Temperatures are equally variable throughout the islands. The mean temperatures in the Russells area seem startlingly low (after having experienced them), ranging between 75 and 88 degrees Fahrenheit, according to information from Washington sources.* However, officially recorded temperatures are likely to be taken under specially-controlled conditions and at designated places. Thus they do not always take into account all geographical and contributing conditions that may affect the actual amount of heat being radiated or magnified. In spots shielded from the breeze but open to the sun, especially if the area is coraled, heat builds up and reflects to a high degree. Besides, humidity is naturally high, averaging 82 per cent*—too high for comfort. In other words, on the Russells only "mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun" —and then only if they can't help it.

While some rain occurs in the normally dry season, there is a difference in the types of storms of the two periods. In the northwest period, storms arrive and break suddenly, continue hard for rather long stretches then cease just as suddenly, as if nothing had happened. The burning sun is out again in full force, steaming the ground and drying it, and by the time the next burst comes, evidence of the first has practically dis-

*Native Woods for Construction Purposes in the Western Pacific Region published by Bureau of Yards and Docks, Navy Department.

appeared. In the trades season, the storm is more likely to build up visibly and to be steady but less intense than the others. These are, however, not hard and fast rules.

Island storms sweep their course slowly, can be heard approaching as they beat along coconut trees or tent tops and can be seen moving like sheets of glass.

Hurricanes are rare in the Russells area, but electrical storms are common and of considerable intensity. Earthquakes are fairly common but are so weak and of such brief duration they are generally unnoticed. In

the South Pacific volcanoes are numerous all the way from the New Hebrides to the island of New Britain, where the most recent destructive eruption occurred in 1937. But no volcanic action in the Russells has been in evidence lately except for minor submarine tremors.

From Banika's Blue Beach two of the major islands of the eastern Solomons can be seen if weather conditions are favorable. To the southeast lies the deeply-blue outline of Guadalcanal (Spanish spelling—Guad-

alcanar; also called Sevo by the natives and not to be confused with nearby Savo Island). Only a section of the island is apparent, visibility being cut by small islands of the Russells, but in this section is included one of its highest peaks—one like Popomanasiu which rises to more than 8000 feet. To the northeast of Banika the light blue line of Santa Isabel (Ysabel) looms through the haze (long and thin on the distant horizon). On some days it may not be visible at all.

In any brief consideration of native life in the Russell Islands, ethnologic analysis may tend to obscure rather than clarify the picture; but a little is necessary. All the natives we saw in the Russells were Melanesians regardless of differences in skin color, features or hair colorations (which may be natural or artificial). In all the Russells, it was estimated there were less than a dozen natives of Polynesian strain.

The name Melanesia is derived from two Greek words, *melanos* meaning black, and *nesos,* meaning island, hence is literally translatable as "black islands." Geographically, Melanesia embraces the oceanic region south of the equator from the western tip of New Guinea eastward to the Fijis and south to include New Caledonia but to exclude any part of Australia. Thus it extends in an arc swinging northwest to southeast, 3300 miles long and 700 miles wide.

(Polynesia's western boundary may be considered roughly as a line drawn north and south from the western sides of Midway Island to New Zealand. North of Melanesia and west of Polynesia lies the oceanic area called Micronesia.)

The reason that there has sometimes been confusion as to the "type" of native we saw on Banika is that,

MAP OF MELANESIAN AREA

(Copied from *Island Peoples of the Western Pacific*)

1. New Guinea
2. Solomon Islands
3. New Caledonia
4. Fiji Islands

while they were all Melanesian—and for that matter, all Solomon Islanders—they came from different parts of the archipelago. In general, the skin color of the Solomon Islanders is at its darkest in the western end of the chain—at Little Buka and Bougainville (Big Buka), the only two major islands of the group, incidentally, under Australian mandate.

Skin colorations may even vary among inhabitants of a single island—as on Malaita where in long-past days the huskier "salt-water boy" (shore dweller) had apparently chased the weaker "bush-boy" back into

the jungle interior, where from lack of sunlight and different diet, his physical characteristics changed.

Natives spend considerable time in cultivation of their hair. Some of the "redheads" or "blondes" we saw got that way of their own free will. One method of hair bleaching is by the application of a lime paste made of burned, crushed coral. Another is by using the familiar washing bluing.

Most of the natives we saw, while fairly well representing as a group the type of peacetime plantation worker, were not strictly Russell Islanders. They were imports, principally from Malaita, Choiseul and Santa Isabel. The real Russells inhabitants, of which there are only about 300, have their native settlements on four of the smaller islands of the group. Luna has about 182 population; Moko, 62, and Baisi and Karamula only about a couple of dozen each. They live on these small islands even during peacetime, Banika and Pavuvu being given over exclusively to the production of copra and the quartering of native plantation workers. In peacetime also there are about 30 whites—planters, overseers and their families—on Banika.

When we were there the island's native labor population was 586, mak-

ing a total for the Russell group of not over 900. In peacetime, operation of the coconut plantations alone calls for between 800 and 900 natives.

In peacetime, as in war, each of the natives is listed by the British governing officials by his native name—the only legal one, since assumed western names are not recognized—and by a number, enabling Crown authorities to keep an accurate check on movements of the inhabitants. The above figures on native populations were obtained from the British Acting District Magistrate, whose province is the whole Russell group. In the normal course of Crown affairs, he is responsible to the British Protectorate for the Solomon Islands at Tulagi, who in turn is responsible to the British High Commissioner for the Western Pacific at the Fijis.

The largest employer of native labor in the South Pacific is Lever Pacific Plantations, an exclusively British concern that maintains coconut plantations in almost all of the Solomon Islands except Malaita. Plantation lands operated by this company in the Russells include from the Lingatu and Yellow Beach areas of Banika north to the native labor corps quarters in addition to the Green Beach area on the Lever Point side of Renard Sound and all of Pavuvu's planted areas. Part of these lands are freehold and part are leased from the British government.

Despite belief to the contrary, the area on Banika occupied by CBMUs 572 and 573 was not Lever-operated property, but under the control of an entirely separate concern—the Fairymead Sugar Company whose home office is in Queenstown, Australia. The lands operated by this company extended from the native labor corps quarters north to Renard Sound.

They also were part freehold and part leasehold. Operations by an Australian company in no way injected Australian control into the picture. The Solomons, except for Buka and Bougainville, are entirely British-controlled lands covering, incidentally, a total of 14,600 square miles and having a population of about 100,000.

The Russells population having been thinned considerably over the years by tribal warfare, all of the islands were not necessary as living space for the natives and thus were available for planting.

A brief history of the Solomon Islands may be in order here. The first islands in the 700-miles long chain to be discovered were sighted in 1567 or 1568 by a Spaniard named Alvaro de Mendana de Neyra who landed at Santa Isabel and gave the name "Isles of Solomon" to the archipelago, assuming that it held the riches worthy of a King Solomon. He remained reticent about his discovery, fearing indiscriminate exploitation of what he considered his "find," but rediscovery of the islands began in earnest some 10 years later with the sighting of Malaita by Carteret. At last, French, Dutch and English explorers uncovered the entire chain and trading in tortoise shell, sandalwood, trepang and later coconuts went on for nearly 100 years. The practice of "blackbirding" (kidnapping of natives for slave labor) largely by Australians, came into prominence about 1860 and the traffic continued until the first few years of the Twentieth Century—around 1903. During this period many whites suffered death at the hands of hostile natives.

Tribal wars were prevalent during the 1880's and in the following decade aggressive tribesmen from Van-

gun to the west practically decimated the Russells population.

In a cursory investigation of present-day Solomon Islanders, it is difficult to escape a sympathetic point of view. With Hollywood, fictioneers and public inclinations striving to keep a century or two behind the times by depicting natives as "black, butchering, pagan savages," it may be somewhat of a surprise for persons having no contact with the islands to find that they lead a drab life. It is true that their patterns of culture still include vestiges of former exotic ceremonials and

that their experience is limited, but for the last 50 or 60 years they have been in contact with the white man and his missionaries, and have arrived at a sort of willing compromise between primitive and western, both in material and cultural considerations. They have not been fully westernized by any means; there is still a long way to go (if they ever *are* to reach what we tell them is civilization), but they have been rendered more amenable to outside influences.

There have been stories bruited about, even while we were on Banika, that the Russells natives had been headhunters only three or four years ago and that they had snapped out of it all of sudden. As a matter of anthropological fact, headhunting, even 100 years ago, was not practiced by any of the Solomon Islanders living east of Santa Isabel, although some headhunting persisted in parts of the New Hebrides islands. The purpose of headhunting, where it was practiced, was largely procurement of heads for rituals such as launching of war canoes, etc. Even cannibalism, though more common, was not the orgy it is sometimes pictured. According to recognized studies of native customs, there have been very few evidences that the taste of human flesh was ever relished, the principal idea behind cannibalism being that to eat an enemy was considered the greatest possible insult to him.*

Missionaries have exerted a powerful influence on the Russell Islanders, establishing schools and prepar-

*Island People of the Western Pacific—Micronesia and Melanesia by Herbert W. Krieger, published by the Smithsonian Institution, 1943. "Headhunting was most developed in the western Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides, and New Britain and New Ireland, but was completely absent from southern Melanesia. In the Solomons, natives of the islands southeast of Ysabel (Santa Isabel) did not practice headhunting."

ing native teachers for work among their own people. Among the schools is Siota College on Florida Island, maintained by the Church of England. Missionaries have also provided the natives with medical treatment, supplementing the calls of the government doctor to the natives, which are said to occur about once every three months. The doctor, however, may make special calls in the event of accidents, unusual cases or emergencies. (The sloop which we saw now and then while on Banika, though generally thought to be a missionary boat, was actually the one used by the doctor in making his rounds.)

Most of the 300 natives on the Russells are literate in their own tongue which is simply called Russell Islands language. In other islands the number of dialects may reach a score, rendering some villagers unintelligible to others. This is true of Guadalcanal. However Pidgin English would be understandable in almost any controlled region of the Solomons—such as an assertion by a native that he can talk properly:

"Talk b'long me, he straight; all other kind talk, he cranky."

The natives we saw generally could make themselves understood in a more advanced type of English which they had picked up from the various military establishments, examples of which would not exactly please the missionaries.

Despite the fact that their only legal names are their native ones, the natives under missionary influence have adopted western names which they may use or discard at will. Thus some will blandly tell you their names are "Godalmighty Bartholomew," "Basil," "John Mack Stewart," to mention only a few, but upon next meeting may disclaim them.

It is sometimes hard, especially among a mixed group of wartime native workers on Banika, to gain a very accurate picture of native life. An impartial observer must try to allow for enthusiasms of his informants, remembering that a Rube in New York might one day find himself the proud possessor of the Brooklyn Bridge. Natives are not always too truthful in their representations, perhaps for the reasons that they fail to understand questions properly, that they take the easiest way out and sometimes words are put into their mouths. Besides, they have no particular interest in spreading facts. And many of them are adept at leg-pulling—a trait especially noticeable in the more aggressive Malaitamen.

Missionary work in the Russells is divided between the Church of England and Catholicism. The settlement at Luna is devoutly Catholic and the other three, Moko, Baisi and Karamula, are Church of England.

In this connection it should be pointed out that there *are* ceremonies, rituals and customs peculiar to the various villagers which may appear pagan (if only because of their un-western look), but they reflect a disappearing tradition rather than an active barbarism. For instance, one widely circulated story was that the natives of Baisi were "bird worshippers" since their temple exhibited a large, ornately carved bird. White planters say that this is merely decorative—that it is the custom for many native churches to be decorated with images of pigeons, parrots, etc.

Also while we were on Banika, a dance by native girls was performed on the island of Moko (a picture

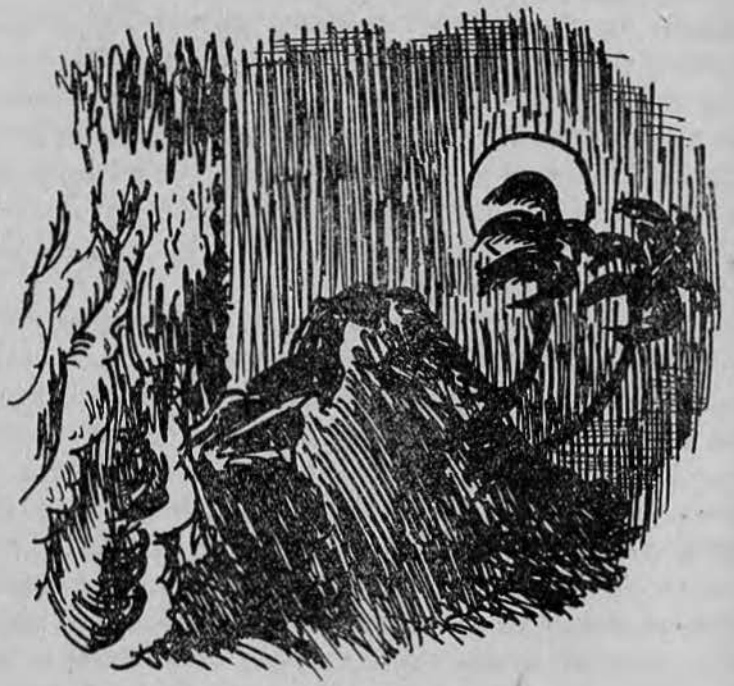
of which appears in the photographic section of this book.) There is no doubt that the event took place, but there is some confusion on why it took place. The first story current was that it was in dedication of a Catholic church built for the natives by the whites (although the Moko settlement is Church of England). Later it was claimed that the dance was known as the *Araballa*—an annual celebration of the coming of the white man. But such a titled or stylized dance had never been heard of by a planter who has spent 16 years in the Russells. He concedes that at times the natives will costume themselves and put on "shows" for the white man in a spirit of friendliness or gratitude, and that these performances will inevitably include some definite aspects of tribal ritual, but that they are not standardized. Natives may also create songs for various occasions and sing them when appropriate. In fact "sing-sings" by native children who have learned American folksongs from phonograph records are common in the social life of the islands.

The weirdly colorful aspects of native life have more or less died out within the past half century; but in anthropological discussions they never fail to appear —which is only right (unless they are interpreted too narrowly) since they have a place in the history and development of native cultures. There is, for instance, the following story of sorcery involving the "sacred island of Rauna" in the Russells:

"Throughout the Solomons, magic causing death or sickness is applied by indirect means—by hiding charmed portions of the victim's person in the house to be withered by smoke, by shooting malign influence into him, or by other means. However, a peculiar form of magic known as *vele* is practiced in Guadalcanal, the adjoining small island of Savo, and the Russell Islands. The sorcerer makes a point of telling his name to his victim, and then assaults him.

"The word *vele* means 'to pinch,' with reference to the tingling or pinched feeling in the arms that warns protected persons of the proximity of the *vele* magician. The object in which the magical power of the *vele* resides is the *vasa*, a small container of fiber with an assortment of articles which must include one standard ingredient—earth from the island of Rauna in the Russell group. A typical *vasa* contains this sacred earth, pieces of shrub or creeper, a man's tooth, and a short piece of native shell money. These articles are taken from the sacred ground inhabited by the magician's ancestral ghost to whom he makes his sacrifices, or are articles which belonged to this ghost in life and which, impregnated with his *manama* or *mana*, are powerful and dangerous. The *vasa* is taken by the magician to this sacred ground and is 'made alive' by invocations. It is then ready for its deadly work.

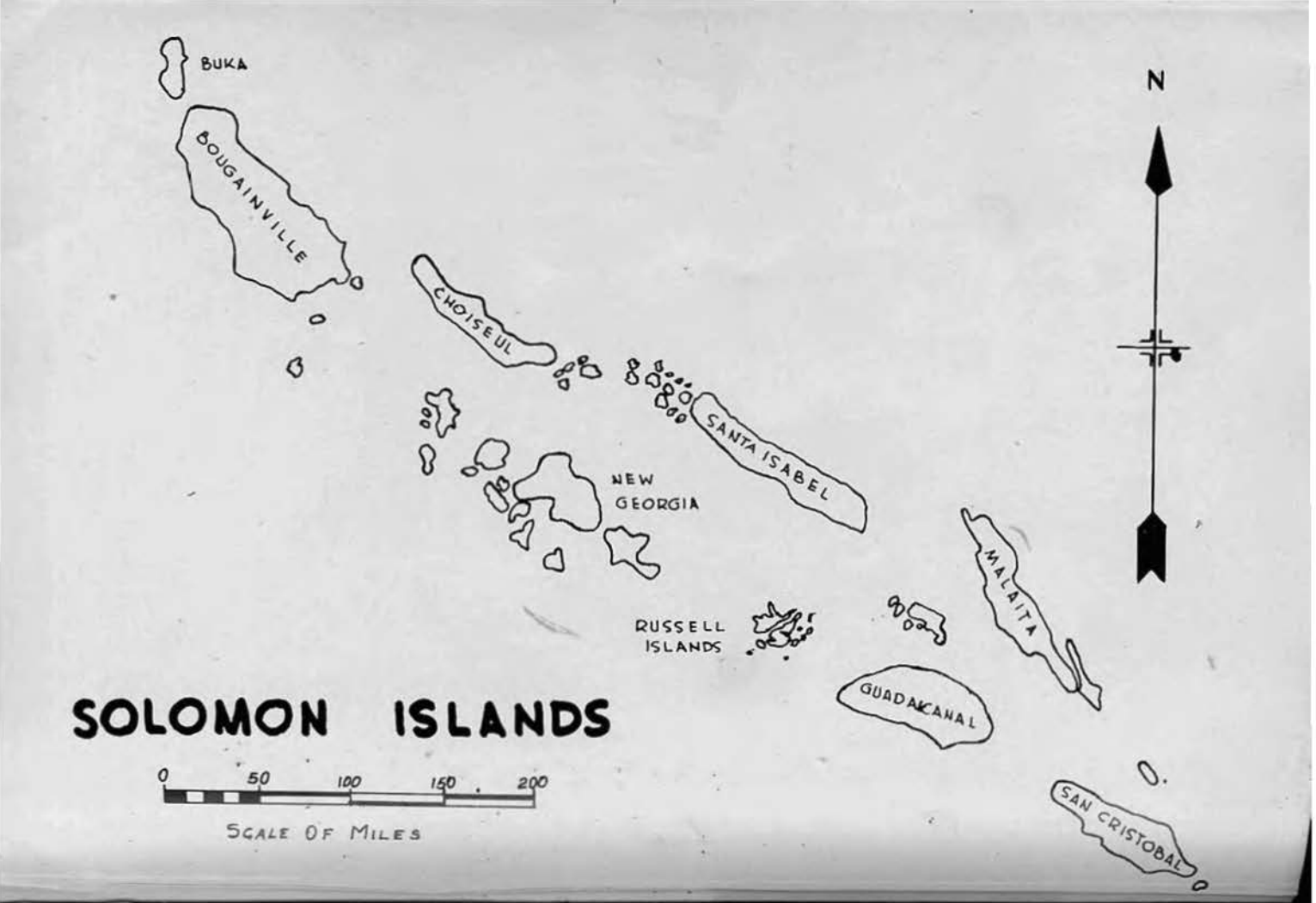
"The usual method employed by the sorcerer is to hide by the side of a path and, as the victim approaches, to attract his attention by making a sharp noise. The victim turns and, seeing the *vasa* suspended from the sorcerer's finger, collapses, usually in an unconscious condition. The sorcerer forces earth, rotten wood, grass and similar rubbish down his throat and then



swings the *vasa* so as to touch lightly particular parts such as the head and shoulders, which immediately become crushed internally without leaving any trace or mark on the skin. He then brings him back to consciousness by placing under his nose *ria* (which may mean not only the ginger plant but almost anything with sacred and dangerous associations). The sorcerer then tells the victim to go home. He returns to his village apparently suffering from an attack of fever, but he never mentions what has occurred. Usually within three days he is dead. The tradition of terror with which the 'attack' is invested, plus the effect of putting

ISLAND SCENES

Looking from Banika across southern end of Sunlight Channel toward twin peaks of Pavuvu. Tip of island of Hui at right center.



Edge of Banika appears throughout fo
whose tip, at the center of the scene,
of Pavuvu shown here runs to the ext
smaller islets just off Pavuvu with the
the middle of the southern outlet of Si

ghout foreground. The island closest to Banika on the left portion of the picture is Taiena and behind it is the larger, longer island of Alokun scene, helps to form the narrows leading to open sea. The other point of the narrows is Cape Boloka on a projecting tip of Pavuvu. The section the extreme right end of the picture and includes (slightly to the left of its highest visible point) the noted twin peaks. The larger of the two vith the reef-like clumps of land running toward it, is called Sand. The low island closest to Banika at the right of the picture is Hui which is in let of Sunlight Channel. The Channel separates Banika from Pavuvu.

PANORAMIC VIEW OF SOUTHERN END OF
RUSSELL ISLANDS
AS SEEN FROM LINGATU POINT
ON BANIKA

PANORAMIC VIEW OF NORTHERN END OF
RUSSELL ISLANDS

SEEN FROM ATOP BULLDOG HILL
ON
ISLAND OF BANIKA

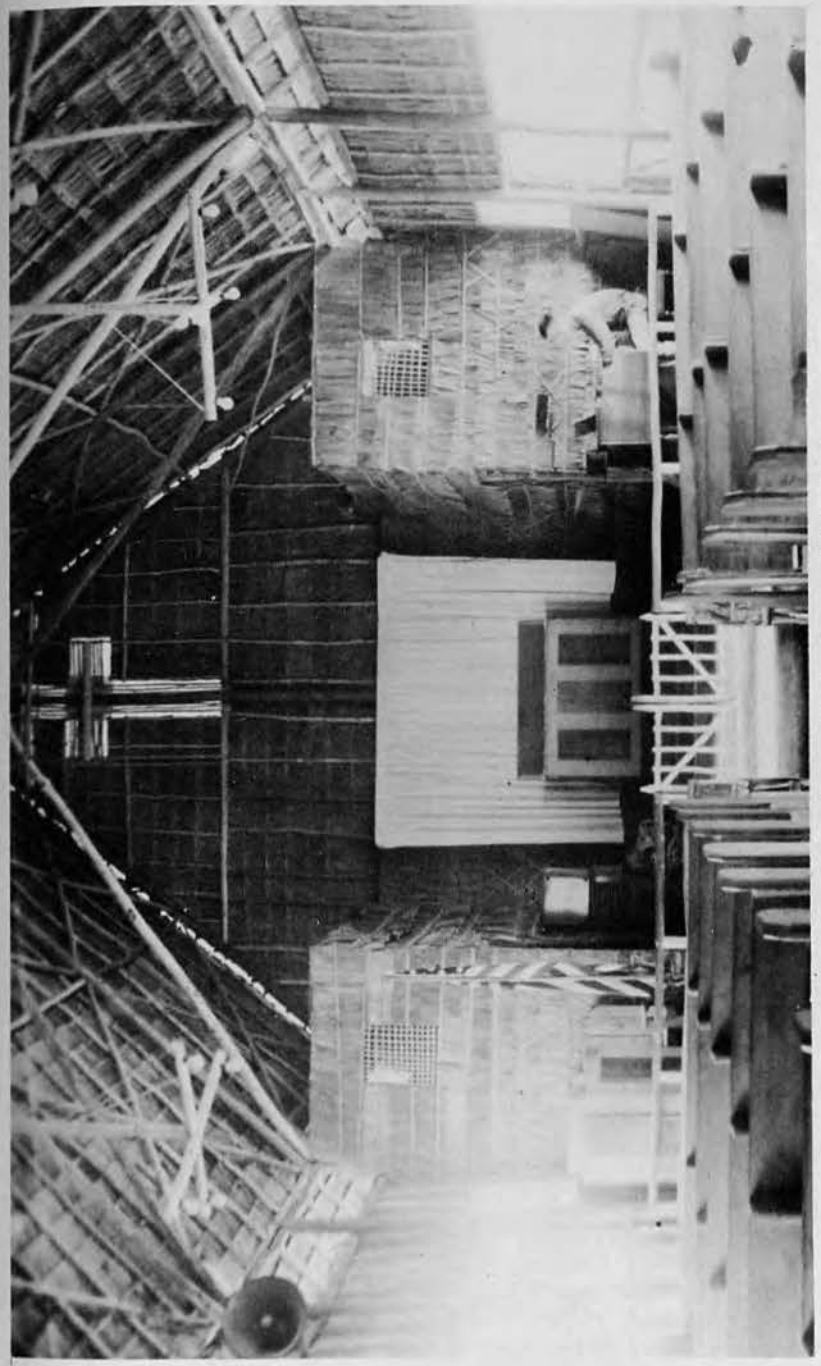
Top: Looking out to open sea from Lingatu Point, Banika. Overhanging cliff is coral.

Inset: Sunset from Lingatu Point looking seaward through narrows between islands of Alokun on left and Pavuvu on right. *Bottom*: Coral shelf framing twin peaks of Pavuvu. From Lingatu Point.

Jungle scene of comparatively open area traversed by fresh water stream. (12th Special Battalion Photo)

Top: Wimpy's, used as lunchroom for Service Command Air Transport. *Center*: Scene at Katura Red Cross center. Part of row of craft shops appears in background. Area also had theater, lunchroom, recreation hall. *Katura* is native word of coral. *Bottom*: View of another Red Cross center. Left wing is canteen. Section bearing sign is for recreation.

Exterior of *Sugana Tureie* (House of Prayer), Fourth Base Marine Depot chapel constructed by native labor.



Interior view of *Sugana Tureie*. Organ at right is electric.

Cluster of signs tacked to coconut tree at side of main island highway.

Above: Entrance to U. S. Fleet Hospital, formerly a Mobile Hospital.

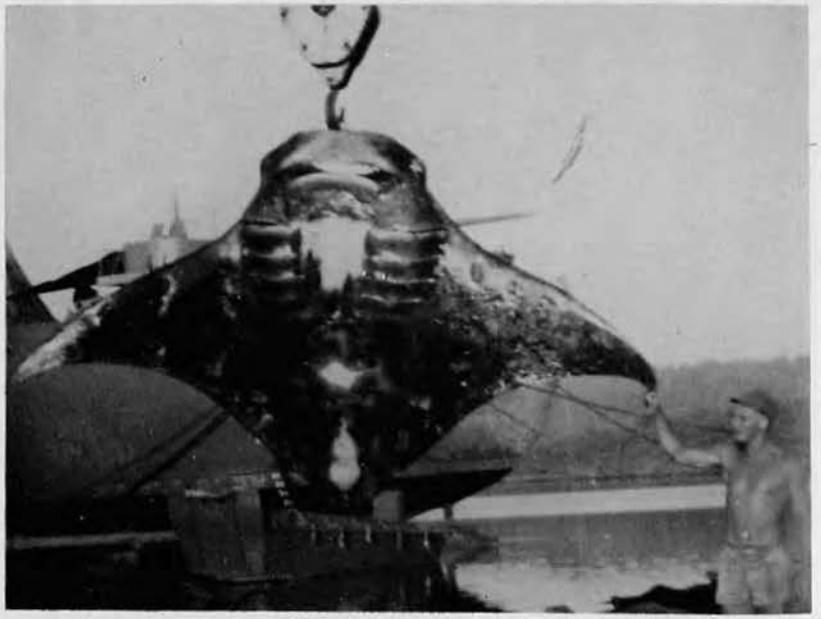
Right: Photo showing application of Schrader-type splint composed of parts made in camp machine shop. Subject is injured member of Unit 572.

Top: Construction of roadway through jungle to farm. *Inset:* Seabee farmer exhibits garden-grown watermelon. *Left:* Jungle soil produces tall corn.

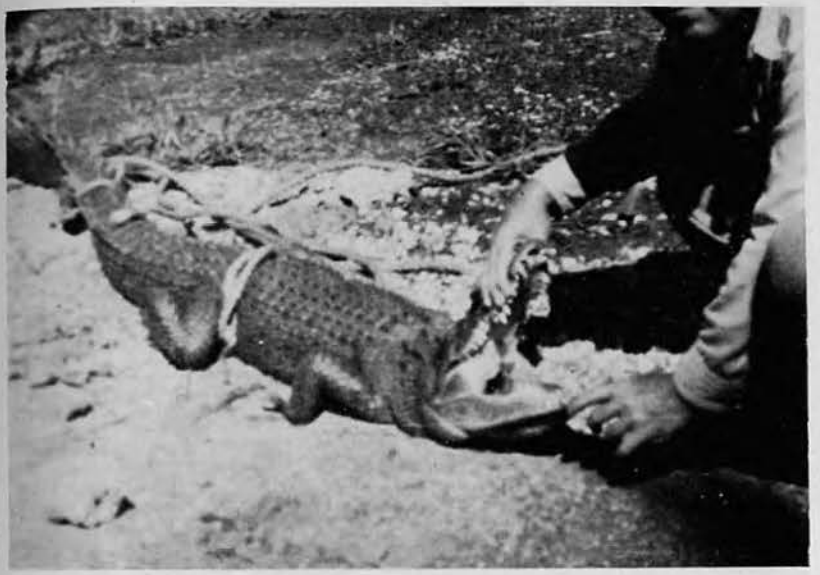
Quarters constructed at farm for farm workers. At left is water tank and pump. Galley and mess hall (center) is connected to sleeping quarters by sheltered companionway.

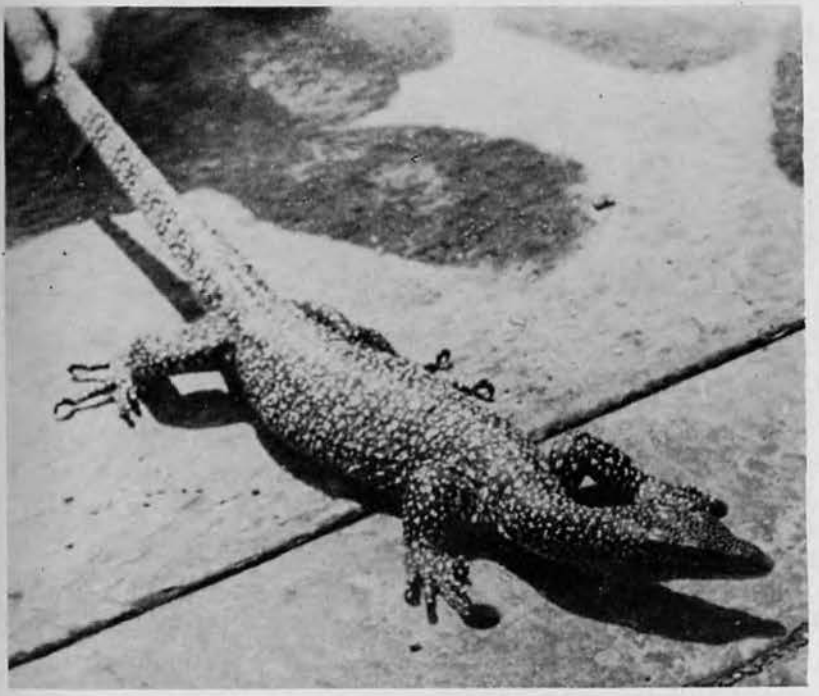
Miscellany

Boat used by doctor in making calls on natives throughout islands.



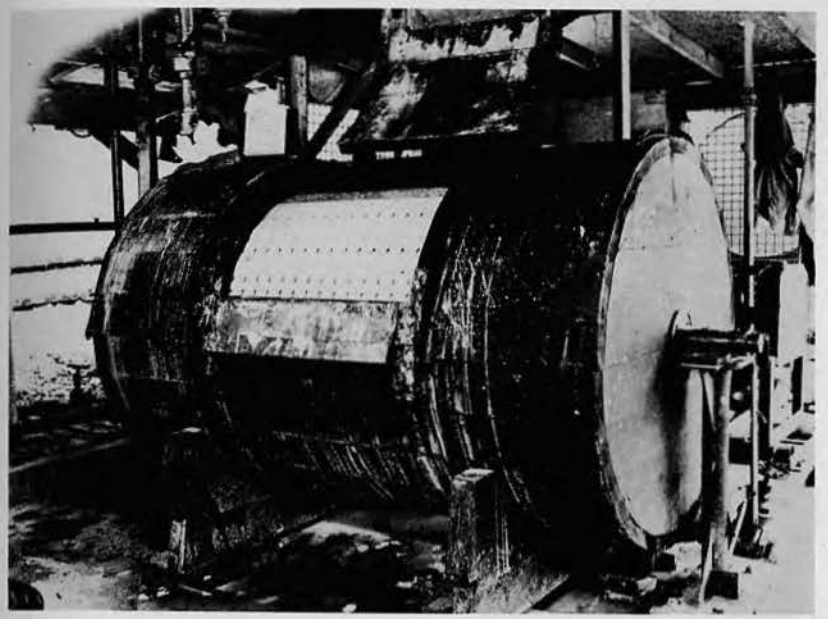
Top: Two sand sharks, weighing about 60 pounds each, caught on fringe of island chain with rods and reels made in camp. *Bottom*: Devilfish or giant ray caught near the docks at White Beach. The catch was unusual at Banika although the great fish is common to South Pacific waters. A crane holds the fish aloft.



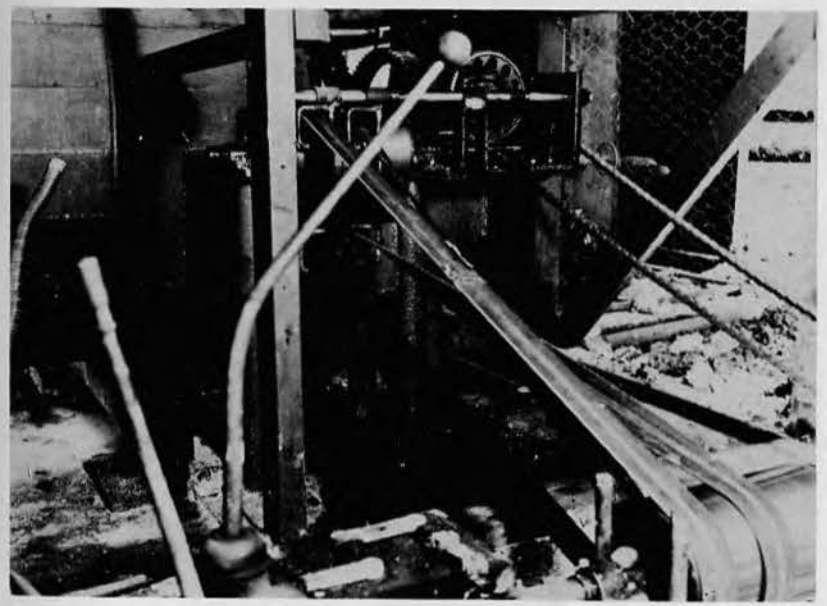


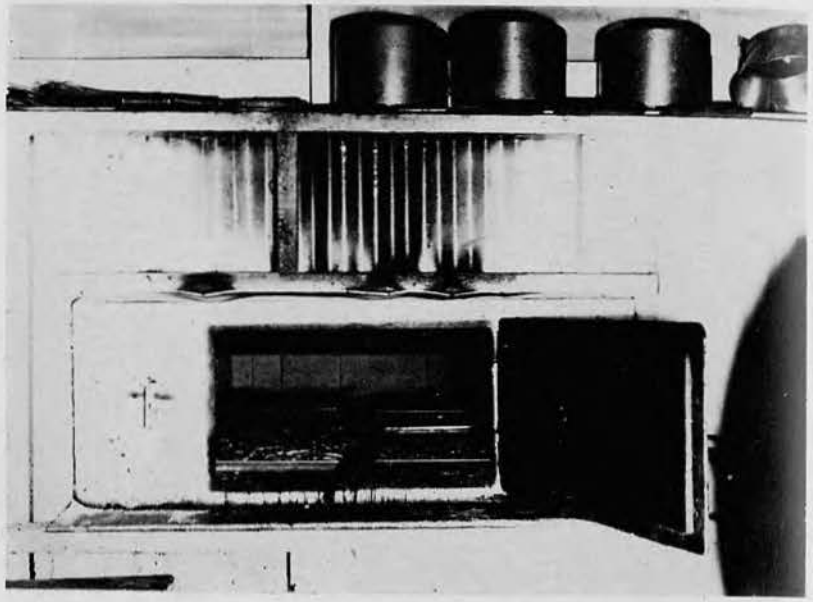
Top: Crocodile more than five feet long shot on Banika. *Bottom*: A large species of lizard found in the Russells. Compare size by thumb and finger holding tail.

Christmas 1944 decorations on Scuttlebutt Junction stage. Painted background scene is year-round. Electrically lighted tree and ornaments were manufactured in camp.

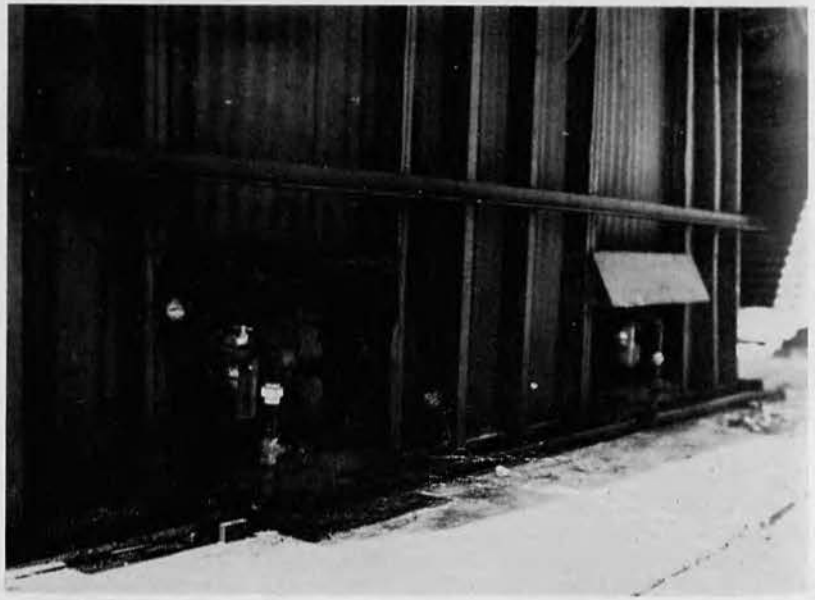


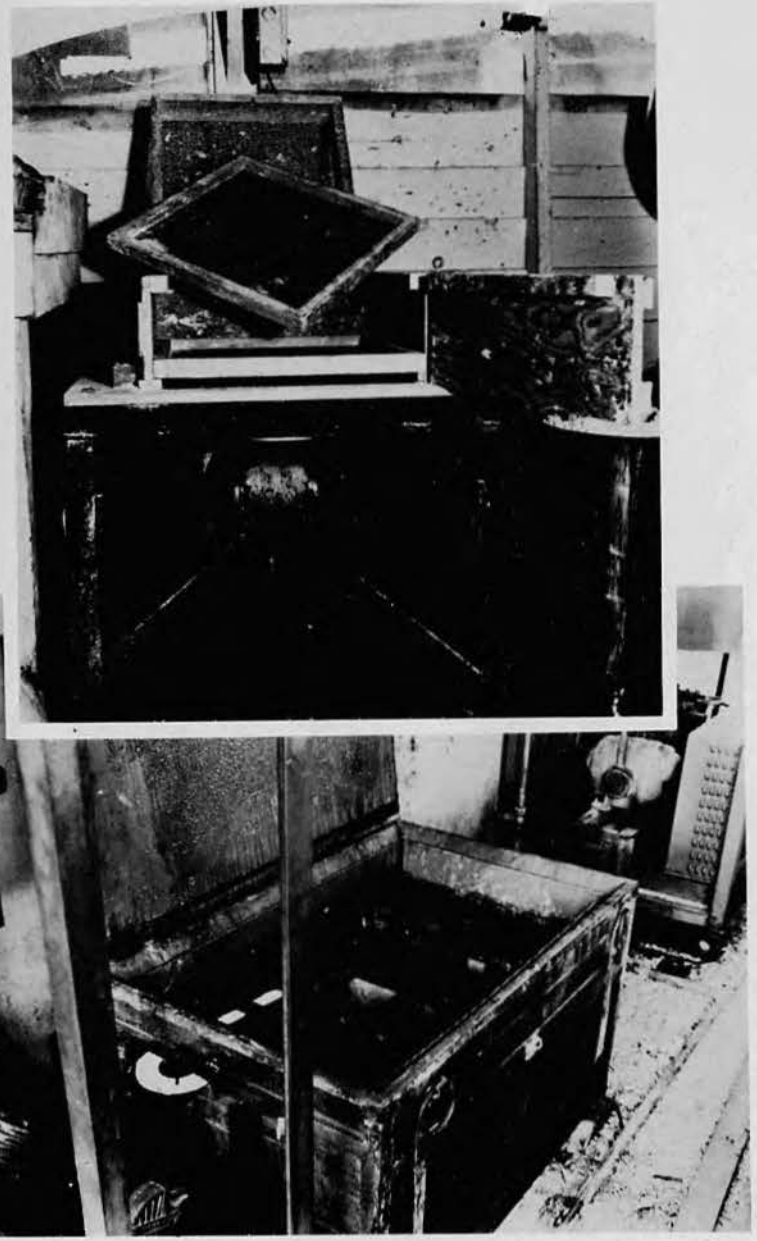
Ingenious camp washing machine. *Top*: Washing cylinder made from abandoned redwood water tank. Center section of cylinder revolves and reverses automatically. *Bottom*: Jeep motor and transmission powering washer and automatic reverse arrangement. Gear lever starts and stops machinery.





Bakery ovens built at camp from discarded pontoons. *Top*: Open view of one of two ovens, seen from interior of bakery. *Bottom*: Oil burner units for ovens, seen from exterior of Quonset hut bakery.





Top: Camp-devised bug sifter. It removes bugs from flour for bread-making. Three screens of varying sizes mesh and sift simultaneously. Agitator is eccentric drive. *Bottom*: Block ice plant constructed in camp. Freon runs through coils installed around metal casing. Plant is connected to carrier-refer unit.

Right: Barber chair made from miscellaneous parts found around camp and in machine shop.

Left: Flush toilet made in metalsmith shop. Seat is plywood. Toilet is connected to disposal tank, thence to drainage system.

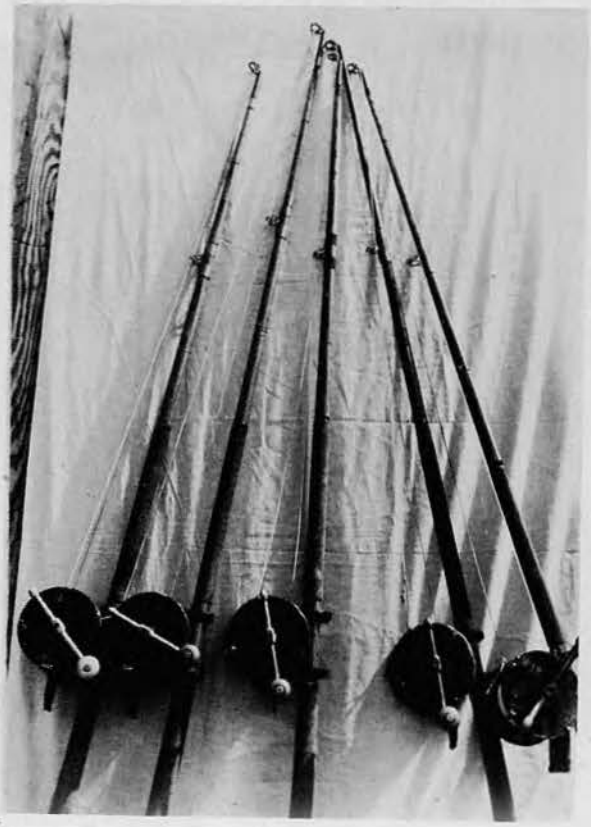
TWO TYPES OF WATER HEATERS

Top: Solar heater. Pipe coils are placed atop living quarters.

Bottom: Oil burning stove to furnish hot water for men's showers is equipped with aquastat. Valve must be shut off when fire-fighting equipment is in use to protect pontoon tank made to withstand 30 pounds pressure.

Left: Sand blaster made from tire inflation machine. Used for cleaning equipment.

Right: Fishing rods and reels completely constructed in camp. Rods were made from broom handles; reels from 105 mm. shells. Reel handles fashioned from aluminum propeller of Jap Zero shot down at Rekata Bay.



Island cemetery near hospital.

injurious vegetable matter into a man's stomach, is fatal when aggravated by his inflamed imagination."*

The planter mentioned previously, whose knowledge is based on long observation, had never heard of any such sorcery, although he knew of the island of Rauna, a speck of land off Ufa Island.

It is not claimed here that islanders are always docile and peaceful. There are occasions when they cause trouble. A case in point is the incident which occurred on Malaita in the late 1930's in which a group of natives attacked and killed a party of government tax collectors at Sinarango. But episodes of this kind are infrequent. It is safe to say that during our Banika stay, we saw no evidence of native aberrations.

Granting that in past eras there have been instances of barbarism, present-day observation lends little credence to the masses of material that have been written attributing to the South Pacific natives what is the fashion to expect of them: Voodooism, savagery, sexual abnormalities and abuses. There may be isolated instances of such things; but conversely, a Solomon Islander set down in the Western Hemisphere might also be appalled at the incidence of gang wars, trunk murders, vicious sex crimes including mayhem, and the practices of various cults (nudists, etc.).

Native offenses against society were formerly handled in tribal fashion, the chief of a tribe acting as arbiter; then, with the advent of white rule, the government assumed control of the courts. Within the past six months, however, the system of investigating a government-appointed native "headman" has been

*Island People of the Western Pacific—Micronesia and Melanesia by Herbert W. Krieger, published by the Smithsonian Institution, 1943.

tried out. In mid-1945 it had not yet demonstrated success or failure. The plan, designed to relieve the Acting District Magistrate of manifold small duties, provides for removal and replacement of the "headman" if he proves incapable of handling the job. Appointment goes to the most intelligent of the natives who sits in judgment on his fellows, considering crimes such as murder, adultery, defamation of character, theft, etc. When the charges are lodged with the "headman" against a native, they are not, of course, coached in any such legal terminology, but the range of offenses shows how universal behavior patterns are. The decision of the "headman" is reviewed by the District Magistrate or Acting District Magistrate, and if found to be appropriate, the sentence is imposed. Sentences may range from hanging to incarceration in native jails, or fines, the latter being exacted in British currency.

The only one of the charges listed above that has an entirely different ethical connotation from its western counterpart is adultery. The position of women is responsible for this. Native women are considered chattels—property that a man acquires when he marries. Violation of a married woman is therefore in the same class as destruction of private property or trespassing. According to observers, the higher moral aspect of the situation is lacking.

Women are not badly treated in native villages, nor are they required, as is sometimes thought, to perform the hardest domestic tasks. They have their own agricultural duties, care of the children, kitchen chores, etc., but their place in village life is purely functional —something apparently that the missionaries have not yet changed, or perhaps will not change if the present

mode remains satisfactory enough to both men and women.

The marriageable age of women in the Russell Islands has been put at from 14 to 18, which does not mean that girls do not marry after 18. The men usually marry between the ages of 18 and 20. Weddings are performed in western style by priests and ministers, with perhaps some supplemental native ceremonies. It is generally thought that native wives are "bought" for a few pigs or a bit of "spot cash." This very likely used to be true; now only a vestige of the practice remains in the groom's gift of three or four pigs (prize possessions) to the father of his intended. But this turns out to be not so much a gift as a conventional token, since the girl's father sets up the wedding guests to a feed using the pigs or money, if any were given. Payment of this dubious dowry depends on the wealth of the groom. A native is allowed but one wife.

The nearest thing to authentic sorcery encountered in the Russells, which has qualified corroboration, is the secret of birth control. Since the method used is a jealously guarded possession of women—not even the native men know it—white doctors have been unable to describe or explain it, but some of them will attest to its apparent efficacy. The procedure of preventing pregnancies is passed down among the women by word of mouth, certain appointees becoming custodians of the secret. One of the reasons medicine is inclined to recognize the existence of the method is that native boys and girls are reported to indulge quite freely in physical intimacies, but the girls never seem to become pregnant until after marriage. Generally, the native family runs between three and five children.

The average Melanesian is about 63 inches in height. Despite a characteristically unhealthy body, giving rise to the assumption that his life expectancy is about 25 or 30 years, he usually lives to reach the age of 50. The most prevalent disease among the islanders is "yaws" or "island sores," which are symptomatically similar to syphilis and which pass through stages similar to syphilis, yet are distinctly non-venereal. Syphilis is so uncommon in the Solomons as to be practically unknown. Through the centuries, natives have developed something of a natural immunity to malaria, but it is still a common disease. Measles, the common cold and pneumonia are dread diseases as well as poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis) which is believed to originate in imported rice, a staple food item.

Leprosy is uncommon in the Russells although a recent census indicated that one out of every 100 natives in the Solomons were lepers. Greatest incidence of leprosy appears to be in New Caledonia where the latest census (1924) shows four of every 100 natives afflicted.

The money that we put out for war clubs and mats and cat-eyes and skirts has an interesting adventure after the native takes it back to his quarters. He will usually squander it—believe it or not—at poker, craps or a British game called Crown and Anchor which combines the principles of craps and roulette. When he chooses, he may cash in his American money (of which he probably has a hefty roll) for British currency. There is as yet no such thing as a native "bank."

So we have seen the *gooks*—curiosities to us—undoubtedly steeped in long enchanting traditions which they have not entirely thrown off, but still westernized enough to converse, to joke, to make "deals," to trade,

to swear and—a fact not to be overlooked—to actively aid the Allies in the war against the Japanese. Three battalions of native scouts, a total of about 3400 men, were operating bravely and effectively with the First Marine Division during the tense, bloody days of the Guadalcanal campaign; and they were reported to have killed a share of the enemy proportionately equal to the score of the Americans. But they did not rely on war clubs. They used our lethal western weapons, and with their help, the Japanese were driven from Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands by February 5, 1943.

EPILOGUE

THIS is where the narrative ends but the story goes on—somewhere. By now we know where it went, but in March 1945 only a very few hundred would have been willing to swear they knew exactly. Having failed to get a real foolproof "in" with Admiral King, we got on the ball ourselves—the crystal ball—to find out for sure whether we'd go north, to New Zealand for a rest, home for thirty days, or stay on Banika. But visibility was practically zero and all the ball showed was "Rain and warmer." So to hell with it.

No matter what view you took of the future, though, there were slogans ready made. "Back alive in 'forty-five" considered the possibility of stateside leave. "The Golden Gate in 'forty-eight" advertised a long wandering of the Pacific sealanes. "Back for more in 'fifty-four" took an even longer-range squint at world prospects. But with the coconut trees down to two-foot centers, the immediate questions were: "Are you nervous in the service?" or "Are you at ease overseas?"

There were, of course, some definite clues to the future. It had been the policy of Comsopac not to keep a maintenance unit at one overseas base longer than 56 months. On the other hand it had been the policy of Comsopac not to send maintenance units outside the city limits of Richmond, Va. In addition it had been Comsopac's policy not to have a policy. An average of these, divided by two, which cuts the chances in half, proves without a doubt that not only was everybody right but that their wives knew before they did.

Naturally, we were reluctant to leave beautiful Banika with its waving palms, its lush foliage, its delightful climate and its stench of rotting rat cadavers. Many of our number even considered going "walkabout" in the bush so they wouldn't have to leave. We were happy for the island; it made us so crazy. That is, we were crazy to get happy on the island. What we mean is, we were crazy for the island; it made us so happy . . . .

Yeah, it *was* about time.

GLOSSARY
(*Abridged and Expurgated*)

THE basic Seabee vocabulary is pretty well established at some stateside point like, for instance, Williamsburg, Va., or Gulfport, Miss.; but the Seabee modifies it as he goes along. Therefore, it is not unnatural that Units 572 and 573 wound up on Banika with a mixture of basic military synonyms, some terms peculiar to Seabees alone and still others of their own private stock. A few of the ones in common use follow:

Armstrong motor—a pair of arms powering a pair of oars.
Battery acid—synthetic citrus fruit juice.
Belly-robber—a cook.
Blow it out!—Shut up!; Knock it off! I don't like you!; Hello.
Beat the gums—To talk much and say little.
Blues—blue dungaree work clothes.
Brig—the klink; the hoosegow.
Brown-nose—one who curries favor; an apple-polisher.
Bud—Mac; Joe.
Bulkhead—a wall.
Coconut trees closing in—life is getting hard to bear.
Chow—meals.
Deck—the floor; the ground.
Dig holes—to do extra duty.
Dogface—any Army man.
Dress blues—full dress uniform.
Engineer, sanitary—captain of the head; latrine maintenance man.

Engineer, landscape—one detailed to cut grass or pick up coconuts.
Fish eyes—tapioca.
F.O.—one who does a "fade out;" one who quietly leaves job without permission.
Flunkie—a conscientious attendant.
For the birds—something hard to believe.
Gestapo—Master-at-Arms staff members.
Good deal—anything that works out to advantage.
Gook—a native.
Gold braid—an officer.
Greens—combat field clothing.
Gyrene—a Marine.
Head—toilet.
Hit the deck—deliberately fall flat on the face; also to get out of bed.
Hit the sack—to go to bed.
Honey wagon—the garbage truck.
Horse stock—cold cuts.
Haba, haba—a pseudo-native greeting; how are you? whatcha know, Joe.
Island happy—screwy on account of island conditions.
Jig—a Negro.
Jimmylegs—a master-at-arms.
Joe—any native; Mac; Bud.
Knock it off!—stop what you're doing.
Mac—a Marine; Joe, Bud.
Maggie's drawers—red flag indicating complete target miss on rifle range.
Make a deal—negotiate an off-the-record transaction.
Mae West—kapok-filled life preserver jacket.
Meatwagon—ambulance.

Miss too many transports—to approach "island happy" stage.
No duty slip—medical authorization to knock off.
Overhead—a ceiling.
Pill-roller—a sick bay corpsman.
Procure—to obtain official goods through unofficial channels.
Punk—bread.
Red Cross Commando—a regular frequenter of the Red Cross canteen.
Rock—any Pacific island.
Rugged—hard to take; uncomfortable.
Sack—bunk.
Sack duty—prolonged use of bunk.
Sad Sack—a pathetic, bewildered unhappy mess of a man.
Scrambled eggs—decoration on naval officer's cap visor.
Scuttlebutt—information that a friend got from a friend who got it from a friend who knows somebody on the inside; also, a drinking fountain.
Seabee steak—Spam.
Slop on a shingle—creamed chip beef on toast.
Skivvies—underwear.
Snafu—"situation normal; all fouled up;" also used as a verb:—to *snafu* something.
Square needle—mythical medical weapon said to be used for inoculations.
Stateside—in the United States; also used as an adjective to denote luxury.
Swab jockey—a Navy man.
Tail gunner—end man on water truck who controls flow.

The Old Man—the OinC (Officer-in-Charge).
Tin can—a destroyer.
Torpedo juice—a homemade beverage of alcohol and hardly anything else.
Tin fish—a torpedo.
Wood butcher—a carpenter's mate.