6th Naval Construction Battalion

Historical Information

"Construimus, Batuimus"
"We Build, We Fight"

NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND

1st Embarkation — 6th C.B.

NSTC - Norfolk (and NYA centers) - Left NCTC 24 Jun'42
ABD - Gulfport, 24 Jun'42 - Hueneme 10 Jul'42 FFT
Ready Date - 1 Jul'42
Left ABD - 21 Jul'42 (SanFran)
Destination - Noumea Pago-Pago, Esp-Santo, Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Auckland, Noumea

2nd Embarkation
NCTC - (CBRD Parks)
ABD - Hueneme
Ready Date - 15 Apr'45
Left ABD - 28 May and
Location - 4 Jun'45

LOG

1-20-43 - Recently withdrawn from Cactus for rest at Fulcrum pending reformation & assign.
3-22-43 - At White Poppy.
5-11-43 - 6th CB located at Noumea. (ComNavBaseSoPac area to ComSoPac Sec. ltr dtd 5-11-43)
5- 1-43 - Requested 319 men by dispatch. Will be sent as soon as available. (IKS)
4-13-44 - 6th CB detached from 2nd Reg. (ComSoPac Conf. Disp. to 6th CB and others 290602 Mar'44)
2-28-44 - CBMU's 536 and 537 arrived at this base (Noumea) and relieved this batt of maintenance duties.
6- 2-44 - 1 May'44 report - 6th CB operating at Noumea.
7- 5-44 - 1 Jun'44 report - "
7-31-44 - 1 Jul'44 report " This batt left SanFran 21 Jul'42.
8-21-44 - 6th CB to be retd. to U.S. when transp. is available. (Comseronsopac (S) Dispatch 180945 19 Aug'44 NCR 9178 to CNB Noumea)
8-24-44 - 6th CB located at Noumea - arrived Espiritu Santo Aug'42
" Guadalcanal Sep'42
" Auckland, N.Z. Jan'43
" Noumea 2 Mar'43
(Data of SoPac as of 1 Jul'44)
8-31-44 - 6th CB with 18 officers and 740 men located at Noumea ready to sail for U.S. (Comseronsopac Sec. Disp. 272110 NCR 6134 28 Aug'44 to CNO)

Location - 6th C.B.

9- 9-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of 6th CB - at Noumea.
9-25-44 - 6th CB arrived Parks 18 Sep'44 with 16 off. and 394 men. (19TWX2204 Sep'44) From Parks.
9-26-44 - Above are on overseas leave until 23 Oct. (23TWX2353 Sep'44 from Parks to Budocks
10-12-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 6th CB - The staging area project was turned over to a Regiment on 7 Aug. Work on other projects was carried on up to 19 Aug., when all construction work was terminated preparatory to departure from the base.
1-16-45 - Parks ordered to transfer the 6th CB about 20 Jan'45 to Hueneme and for temp. duty with Acorn Tradet while awaiting overseas assignment. (CNO conf disp to Parks 121831 dtd 13 Jan'45)

2nd Embarkation

1-20-45 --- The 6th and 85th CB's will depart Parks for Hueneme 22 Jan'45.(Parks conf. disp to Bupers 160415 dtd 16 Jan'45).
1-29-45 --- The 6th CB will be ready for shipment to Cincpoa 15 Jan'45.(Cominch Sec. disp to Cincpoa 211829 211829 dtd 21 Jan'45).
2-26-45 -- The 6th CB will be ready for Cincpoa 15 Apr'45.(Cominch Sec. disp to Cincpoa 222134 dtd 23 Feb'45).
3-23-45 - 6th CB ready for BIVE 15 Apr'45. (Cominch Sec Disp to Cincpoa P & Adv Hq. 201905 Mar'45)
4-19-45 - The 6th CB arrived with 22 off. and 952 men at Hueneme on 16 Apr'45 from Acorn TraDet. (Huen TWX 18004 Apr'45 to Bupers)
6-5-45 - 1st echelon of the 6th CB departed Hueneme 28 May'45 for overseas with 19 off. and 753 men. (Hueneme conf disp 291702 May'45 to Bupers)
6-7-45 - 2nd echelon of 6th CB with 263 men and 4 off. departed Hueneme for overseas on 4 Jun'45. (Huenme conf disp 062205 Jun'45 to Bupers)
7-23-45 - The 6th CB is assigned to the 11th Brg and 45th Reg effective 10 July. (CCT APO 331 sec report on assignment of CB units ser 897dtd 10 July)

Location - Okinawa 6th C.B.

8-23-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 6th CB - located at Okinawa. The 1st Echelon consisting of 19 offcrs and 753 men departed Port Hueneme on 28 May'45 and arrived at Okinawa on 14 Jul'45. The 2nd Echelon consisting of 2 offcrs and 2 men departed Port Hueneme on 29 May'45 and arrived at Okinawa on 10 Jul'45 & the 3rd Echelon consisting of 4 officrs & 263 men departed Port Hueneme on 4 Jun'45 and arrived at Okinawa on 14 Jul'45. Report via the 46th Reg and 11th Brig.

9- 6-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 7th Brig, re comments on 6th CB. 6th CB departed U.S. in 3 echelons. 1st Ech. with 19 off & 753 men left Pt. Hueneme, Calif. 28 May'45 & arrived Okinawa 14 July'45. 2nd Ech. with 2 off & 2 men departed U.S. 29 May'45 from Pt. Hueneme, Calif. & arrived 10 July'45 at Okinawa. 3rd Ech. with 4 off. & 263 men departed Pt. Hueneme, Calif. 4 June'45 & arrived 14 July'45 at Okinawa. Entire batt at present located in the 46th Reg area at Tengan.

9-11-45 - Inactivation of following CB units approved Comservpac disps 291935, 290051 & 290007 all Aug:-4,6,7,17,20,66,74,78 & 87 CBs - Okinawa. (Cincpoa conf spdltr ser 9 032559 dtd 4 Sept'45 to Comservpac).

9-29-45 - Comservpac directs to inactivate the following CBs 4, 6, 7, 17, 20, 66, 74, 78 & 87. Inform Comservpac when inactivations are completed. (Comservpac conf spdltr ser 05174 dtd 11 Sept'45 to Comdt., NOB, Okinawa).

10-1-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 6th CB - located at Okinawa. Report via 46th Reg. & 11th Brig.

10-11-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 6th CB - located at Okinawa. Report via 46th Reg. & 11th Brig. In process of being decommissioned. 181 men transferred to U.S. for discharge under the point system. 804 men transferred to other units.

1-15-46 - Records of 6th CB (inactivated) are being shipped to the Western Division Records Management Center. (OinC 46th Reg. ltr. ser. 574 to OinC NRMC, Western Div. dated 27 November 1945)

INACTIVATED.

	ON BOARD		
DATE	OFFICERS	MEN	AUTHORITY
1 Jul'44	22	661	MoR
1 Aug'44	21	557	MoR
1 Sep'44	16	361	MoR
30 Sep'44		177	Recap
1 Oct'44		177	BNP625
1 Nov'44		181	BNP625
1 Dec'44		848	BNP625
1 Jan'45		957	BNP625
1 Feb'45	24	1079	BNP625 & R
1 Mar'45		1072	BNP625
1 Apr'45		1072	BNP625
1 May'45		1073	BNP625
1 Jun'45		1021	BNP625
1 Jul'45		1017	BNP625
1 Aug'45	25	1009	BNP625 & R
1 Sept'45		836	BNP625
1 Oct'45	14		R
1 Nov'45	5		R

6th Construction Battalion (INACTIVATED)

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Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
1/4	—	Parks	Repdep. cal. Conf disp. dec. 310245.	Can make ready with present personnel aboard by 15 Jan.
1/17	—	(Hueneme)	Cno conf disp. 121831 Jan.	Parks transfer about 20 Jan to Hueneme & render Acorn Tradet Hueneme while awaiting overseas assignment
[illegible]	—		[illegible] 181821	[illegible] plans schedule [illegible]
			Cincpoa sec 130159 Jan.	[illegible] priority – May.
2/3	—	Acorn Tradet Hueneme	Budocks memo 2/3.	Ten. ready date 2/1/45 Earmarked Biue.
2/8	—	✓ (Biue) (Okinawa)	Op 30 Conf. Serial 048430 Feb 2.	Ready Hueneme 4/15/45 assd Biue. probable May shpg.
5/12	—	"	Cno sec 071930 May	assd priority – being shpd Biue may & early June

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
5/30/44	—	Noumea	—	Left U.S. July 1942.
9/5/44	—	U.S.	Comsosowespac sec disp 180945 Aug. also Comgensowespac sec disp. 272110 Aug.	Retd present duty return U.S. first available transportation.
9/9	—	U.S.	Comsosowespac sec disp. 060550 Sept.	Departed Noumea 5 Sept destined San Fran.
9/29	—	U.S.	BuDocks memo 27 sep. & 10/7	Returned U.S. 9/18. Ready Jan 1 '45 at Parks – Earmarked by Cincpoa.
			Cincpoa conf disp. 102034 Nov.	for planning purposes – has W. coast ready date Jan 1 '45.
12/23	—	Parks	C.B. memo 12/16.	Tentative ready date 2/1/45.
12/30	—	"	Cominch sec disp [illegible]	recommend lift from W. coast to [illegible] during [illegible] (Biue) – (Budocks memo 12/23)

HISTORY OF THE

SIXTH U. S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

V O L U M E 1

May, 1942, to March, 1943

NCB 6

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Chapter One

INDOCTRINATION

It was on the second and third of May, 1942, that potential Seabees from every State in the Union poured into Great Lakes, Ill., and Camp Allen, at Norfolk, Va. The excitement of the trip, the jokes of the men and the fun of getting acquainted, rapidly relieved the loneliness of parting from loved ones as the men marched into the receiving station where the first muster was held and bedding was issued.

The first night in boot camp will always be remembered. Many of the men had never seen a hammock before - much less tried to sleep in one, with the result that during the night, there was little sleeping, but lots of fun. The next few days were taken up with medical examinations, receiving Navy uniforms, vaccinations and inoculations, filling out insurance and other forms, and generally learning how to stand in line and wait, Navy fashion.

Guard duty was explained and posts were assigned. The Master-at-Arms, company clerks, and mail clerks were appointed. Cleanliness in the barracks was a major issue and inspections were rigid.

With most of the routine details accomplished, the men were taken in hand by their C.P.O.'s and leading P.O.'s and given the fundamentals of drill. The next few days were uneventful except for fever and mild sickness from the typhoid shots. Leisure time was spent in writing letters and attending Happy Hours at which popular music and entertainment was furnished by Navy bands and various celebrities who donated their time and talent.

Sunday, May 10th, was a quiet day in camp. It was Mother's

Day, and the men spent most of the day penning thoughts to mothers and wives at home.

The last week at boot camp was spent on K.P., one company, to be exact, Company 331, was highly commended for neatness in the way they kept the galley and a letter to that effect was posted so that the regular Navy could see that the Seabees "had something on the ball."

May 22 was a twenty-four hour liberty day starting at noon. The following day was visitors day and two hours were allowed to entertain visitors at the Hostess House. On May 24, the men packed and moved to Out Going Unit. The brief stay at boot camp was over. During the evening of May 25, the men boarded trains bound in every direction. The battalion was split into ten groups, each group going its own way.

The first group to leave was all yeomen. They were sent to Norfolk, Virginia, to start work on the battalion records and to be taught the Navy way of bookkeeping.

The other nine groups, approximately one hundred men to a group, were sent to nine National Youth Association camps: Beltsville, Maryland; Benton Harbor, Michigan; Carrolton, Ohio; Dixon, Tennessee; Grafton, Illinois; New Castle, Pennsylvania; Reading, Pennsylvania; Tampa, Florida; and Savannah, Illinois.

Each contingent was under the command of a commissioned officer aided by two Marine corporals. The men were taught how to defend themselves and how to use and care for firearms along with more advance drilling. This was only half of the program, the other half being spent in getting the men used to working together by applying their skills in the construction and repair of buildings, roads, shops,

and any pieces of machinery or equipment that needed attention.

It was the first time construction battalion recruits were sent to N. Y. A. camps, and the experiment was most successful. Much good was done for the camps as well as for the men. The men were treated well during their three weeks stay at the camps and were highly commended for efficient work by the officials of the N. Y. A. Memorial Day was celebrated during this period. The men marched proudly in the parades of that day and the praise of the towns-folk was encouraging.

After spending three weeks scattered about the country, the battalion united again at Camp Bradford, Norfolk, Virginia, arriving there on Monday, June 15th. At Camp Bradford, the men first met the battalion officers who had completed an indoctrination training program at Camp Allen, N.C.T.C., Norfolk, Virginia. On arrival, each man was assigned to a permanent company in the battalion, which was now definitely taking form.

Chapter Two

CAMP BRADFORD, GULFPORT, MOFFETT FIELD & POINTS WEST

It is interesting, at this point, to note the type of personnel which made up the first roster of the Sixth Naval Construction Battalion. The original muster of men and officers is given on page ____. The men were preponderantly skilled workers; building foremen, operators of heavy construction equipment, carpenters, electricians, clerks, cooks, truck drivers, painters, brick masons, and the like. The officers were professional men; civil engineers and construction superintendents, two doctors, a dentist, and a supply officer. There was fruitful promise of an outfit which could handle rough, tough construction work. It remained to mold the battalion into a smooth coordinated working unit. This latter objective was rapidly attained under the able leadership of Lieutenant Commander Blundon, the skipper of the Sixth.

At Camp Bradford there was drill and more drill again. The drilling which was by nature arduous and distasteful to construction hands, was helping to shape the battalion into a smooth working military unit.

While here, the men were individually photographed for Naval Intelligence Records and were issued more clothing and equipment. One item in particular, the steel helmet, was accepted with a more or less humorous attitude. Who had ever heard of a construction man wearing a steel helmet? It was little imagined that before long, that helmet would become practically a bed partner.

After evening chow, the men used to hike down to the bay for a

swim. It was, to many, their first experience in salt water and to all not the last. Liberties at nearby Virginia Beach remain a pleasant memory.

On June 24th, gear was packed and the battalion mustered to leave at 8:00 P. M. The following day aboard train many wrote letters, but mailing them en route was prohibited. Precautions were taken by the battalion officers to keep secret all troop movements.

After a 48-hour train ride, the battalion arrived at the Advance Base Depot, Gulfport, Mississippi, on June 26. It was the first battalion to occupy this camp, which was still in the early stages of construction. The men were moved into new barracks, so new that beds had not yet been provided. For the first few nights they slept on the deck, moving their gear in the morning to give the painters room to work.

The battalion was welcomed to Gulfport with a speech by the Mayor. The patriotic enthusiasm of the people of that city was expressed by a flag designed and donated by the Womens Auxiliary. The flag, however, traveled over 8,000 miles before it caught up with the Sixth Battalion. Writing of flags, the Sixth erected the flagpole at the Gulfport Camp and was the first battalion there, to salute "Old Glory" in a military ceremony on July 4th.

On the morning of July 6, reveille was earlier than usual. Despite lack of previous scuttlebutt, the battalion was again on the move. By 6:30 that evening, all gear was stowed aboard the trains and the battalion was headed westward across Mississippi, through Louisiana, thence a long trip across Texas into New Mexico, across the Rio Grande

River to Arizona. The scenery was beautiful and the food and service on the train deluxe. Many of the men were seeing this part of the country for the first time. Leaving Arizona and traveling up the coast of Southern California, the train finally pulled into a siding at Moffett Field, the largest "lighter-than-air" patrol base on the coast.

The first day at Moffett Field the battalion was given a new mailing address: Navy U.U.B., c/o Fleet Postmaster, San Francisco, California. There was every indication that the stay here would be brief. Actually the battalion was awaiting only the loading of equipment on ships and the issuance of sailing orders.

At Moffett Field, the men were equipped with field packs, gas masks, cartridge belts, mosquito netting and about half were armed with Springfield rifles and bayonets. Lectures were given by experts in the field of chemical warfare and the men were instructed in the use of gas masks. Additional training with the rifle was given by Marines.

Cub One, a particular type of overseas base unit, was organized at Moffett Field. At that time, the Sixth Construction Battalion was designated as the constructing agency. The remainder of the Cub One organization was made up of technicians as radiomen, Medical Corpsmen, aviation mechanics, etc.... who would maintain and operate the base as it was constructed. The chaplain's department of Cub One which was headed by Chaplain F. P. Gehring, assisted by Chaplain B. B. Brown, won the respect and affection of the Sixth C. B.

The chaplains organized "Happy Hours" and boxing and wrestling matches; they directed recreational activities, using the books and musical instruments which Ensign Cavenaugh and Storekeeper Al Landes had collected in San Francisco, principally through the kindness of Mrs. Alma Spreckles Awl; and performed many other like tasks, in addition to holding divine services and providing counsel and assistance for men who needed help. A good share of credit for the high morale in the Sixth should go to these men. Father Gehring later attained national fame for his work on Guadalcanal.

On Monday morning, July 20, 1942, the battalion was ordered to stow their gear aboard train. Equipped as a combination of soldier, sailor and construction worker, they were ready to tackle their first assignment.

Before the last outlines of the mammoth dirigible hanger faded from sight, all manner of scuttlebutt was rampant as to the destination of the outfit. In a matter of hours, the trains pulled into sidings at San Francisco and at Navy Pier, Oakland, California. The men were assigned to a hold in either the S. S. President Polk or the U. S. S. Wharton. By 7:00 P. M., all were aboard, late chow was served and the men were busy exploring the ship.

The loading of eggs, vegetables and equipment was rushed, until at noon the following day the lines were cast off and the two ships moved into the bay where they lay at anchor about three hours while other ships moved into position to form a convoy of seven ships escorted by the light cruiser U. S. S. Helena.

Chapter Three

GUADALCANAL VIA SAMOA & THE HEBRIDES

At 3:00 p. m. on the afternoon of July 21st, the convoy sailed out of San Francisco Bay. Life jackets were donned with orders to wear them at all times. At 5:00 P. M., while all hands were waiting in the chow line, the alarm was sounded for general quarters; then followed the boat drill. Boat drills were practiced each day and the time, from the sound of the alarm until the last man was at his post was recorded. As days passed, this time decreased and the drills became more proficient.

Life on the ocean was much the same as in camp. Guards were posted, most of them on submarine watch. Work details were assigned to keep the ships clean as possible. Cooks and messmen were kept busy in the galley. The officers and yeomen set up an office in the ships lounge where plans were studied, personnel qualifications reviewed and executive meetings held.

Feeding so many men from a cramped galley was a problem. The heat and crowded quarters made sleep difficult. The bunks were 4-tiered and equispaced between decks. With limited ventilation and the necessity for having a place to store their gear, many of the men chose to spread their bedding topside and sleep under trucks or wherever space was available. Spare time was spent reading magazines and books and playing games furnished by Chaplain Gehring aroard the Polk, and Chaplain Brown aboard the Wharton. A few days out, Chaplain Gehring appointed reporters and started a

ship's paper, for the amusement and entertainment of the men. This was attached to the regular ship's news bulletins and passed out twice a week.

Religious services were held each morning in the ship's lounge and were well attended. Happy Hours were held in the evenings with music by the men led by Chaplain Gehring, who played his violin.

Several times while crossing, the escorting cruiser would launch a seaplane towing a long sock to represent an enemy plane. The plane would fly overhead and the machine gun crews on each ship would fire at the sock. The fine marksmanship of these men was a comfort, considering the ship was in the danger zones. On July 30th, at the equator, all neophytes were initiated into the realm of King Neptune. Certificates of membership were given, showing that each man had become a full-fledged shellback.

August 3rd, the convoy stopped for about an hour while the officers conferred with those on other ships. With the ship standing still, some of the men tried their luck at fishing off the fantail. One of them had a strike and with lots of help hauled a four-foot shark to the rail, only to lose him when a blow on the head of the shark dealt by another fisherman caused Mr. Shark to become another "big one that got away."

During the evening of August 4, the convoy was joined by a British cruiser. It then split up and four of the ships left under the escort of the new arrival. The four remaining ships picked up speed and many miles were covered by morning. The first pitching

of the ships at the increased speed caused many cases of mal de mer.

At dawn the next morning, land was sighted. After two weeks of "water, water everywhere," it was a welcome sight. The convoy was approaching American Samoa. At 9:00 A.M., the ships were piloted through the mine fields and dropped anchors in the beautiful harbor of Pago-Pago on the island of Tutuila.

A 24-hour stop was made to pick up the Seventh Naval Construction Battalion. As the ships lay at anchor, several natives paddled their outrigger canoes to the ships and displayed souvenirs which many of the men purchased at higher than market prices. Coconuts, for instance, were sold at 25¢, about 15¢ more than they cost in the States. By 6:00 AM, the following morning, August 6th, with the new men aboard, the convoy put to sea.

On leaving Samoa, squalls caused the ships to roll and pitch with resulting loss of meals and other symptoms of mal de mer for many of the men. However, in retrospect, it was fortunate that these were the extent of the troubles in crossing the enemy infested waters. On Friday, August 7th, by crossing the International Date Line, a day was lost and the next morning became Sunday, August 9th.

Monday, August 10th, the convoy was met by a Navy destroyer which escorted it all that night. The next morning, piloted by the destroyer, the ships moved through the mine fields and into Segond Canal, a natural harbor protected from the sea by the largest of the Nouvelles Hebrides Islands, Espiritu Santo.

At this point in the story, it is advisable to stop and relate a few facts so far unmentioned.

When the Sixth Battalion left the States, its destination (a deep secret at the time) was the Solomon Islands, at that time in Japanese control. The initial landing of the First Marine Division took place on August 7th, while the Sixth was still at sea.

Pending stabilization of the beach heads in the Solomons, the battalion was held in the Hebrides. The Seventh Battalion went ashore immediately upon arrival. The other half of the Sixth Battalion then came aboard the Polk from the Wharton and the whole battalion on the Polk waited in Segond Canal for a week, ready to move up to the Solomons as soon as the order was issued. Sitting idle on the ships, the men became restless, after 28 days on water.

On Monday, August 17th, 300 of the men were taken ashore on Espiritu Santo, followed by the rest of the battalion during the next few days. Camp was set up in a coconut grove, the area was policed, and work was begun on several projects, the first of which was a pier constructed of sand bags, reinforced by coconut logs. Two of these piers were built to enable trucks to get as close as possible to the Higgins boats hauling equipment ashore. Ships had to be unloaded and men were kept busy night and day. Other men were put to work constructing warehouses and Quonset huts to be used as hospitals. Casualties from the Solomons and from ships hit in enemy action filled the Quonset huts, almost before they were completed.

With construction well under way and while awaiting the outcome of the August 7th action, the skipper, Lieutenant Commander Blundon, boarded a plane headed for the Solomons, landing on Guadalcanal August 20, just 13 days after the first Marines made their landing. Upon arrival, Commander Blundon made a quick tour of the area held by the Marines. It took only a brief inspection to see that if facilities for more air power were not soon established, the United States could never hold the island base. Commander Blundon examined the equipment and machinery left behind by the fleeing Japs. The attack had been so sudden that the Japs were unable to destroy their equipment. Realizing that time was the all-important factor, Commander Blundon immediately sent word back for two companies and a few extra men trained for special details such as water purification and machinery repair. Expecting to return to the Hebrides before his men left, he found that his plane had departed ahead of schedule and Commander Blundon was forced to remain on Guadalcanal seven days longer than he expected.

During his stay, the commander slept on the ground. There were only a few cots on the island; no tents were erected as they would provide targets for the enemy. On the next plane available, Commander Blundon returned to the Hebrides, but too late to contact the first contingent of his men, who had already left for Guadalcanal.

The first contingent of the Sixth Battalion, selected principally from Companies "A" and "D", with a few out of the other companies, landed on Guadalcanal on September 1st, 1942.

Chapter Four

GUADALCANAL

The first contingent of the 6th C.B. to land on Guadalcanal consisted of 387 men and five officers. Lieutenant (jg) T. L. Stamp was Officer in Charge and in charge of all operations.

Upon landing, the men dug in immediately. The first camp was established in a narrow strip of coconut grove, standing between two clearings now known as Henderson Field and Number One Fighter Strip. The erection of tents was at first prohibited as a matter of camouflage discipline, so the men dug small shelters, a couple of feet into the ground, and used their ponchos for shelter covers. During unloading operations, a large part of the galley equipment disappeared, and until what was left could be made serviceable, the men messed with A and B Marine Tank Companies.

As soon as camp had been set up, the men were distributed to various sites to commence construction. The largest and most important project was Henderson Field. That story is related in the following pages.

A. HENDERSON AIRFIELD

On September 2 a detail from the Sixth Construction Battalion under Lieutenant (jg) A. P. Pratt took over construction and maintenance of Henderson Airfield. They found a runway 3,800 feet long by 150 feet wide, with 150 clearance zones adjacent to the flight strip. The Japs had not yet completed grading and clearing about 600 feet of the flight strip near the center of the field. However, the Marine Engineers had done enough grading to make the runway usable for fighter planes. The soil was generally an unstable, elastic, organic muck, which had been corrected with gravel base by the Japs over a small portion of the field. The field had been level-graded and rolled by the Japs with no provision for drainage. Current use of the field by Navy and Marine fighter planes, combined with intermittent rainy weather, created mud ruts which caused numerous plane crashes. At this time and in the days following, more planes were lost to the U. S. through landing-field difficulties than in combat with the enemy.

Work on the airfield was divided between clearing a 1,300-foot additional length of flight strip, building up a crown in the existing runway, and finally surfacing with Marston mat. Operations were complicated by the necessity of keeping the field open for flying at all times, and by shellings and bombings from the Japs, who made the field one of their prime targets.

Equipment available for use on the field included 2 HD7 Bulldozers, 6 International 1½ yd. dump trucks, 1 Adams patrol grader, 1 traxcavator, and later on, a 5 yd. carryall scraper and

two small scrapers borrowed from the Marines. In addition, the Japs left 8 small tandem rollers, of which two were made to operate under their own power and the rest pulled tandem by a "cat", two or three to a unit. There were also about 15 Jap trucks. The Jap equipment was similar in design to English or American equipment, but of cheaper construction. The Jap trucks resembled American Pontiac and Chevrolet models of about 1936.

The airfield story can best be told in chronological order. On September 2 a crew under Chief Carpenter's Mate Floyd Johnson started maintenance work on the field, filling and grading ruts with a mixture of clay, rotten stone, and coral. At 11 A. M. the men had their first attack by a lone Jap bomber. His bombs missed the field by a wide margin. It was not until later in September that the Jap bombers began to get the range of the field.

In bombing raids, there were generally two warnings, a "Condition Yellow" and a "Condition Red." "Condition Yellow" forewarned that enemy planes would be overhead in 30 to 45 minutes. "Condition Red" indicated the planes were in a position to bomb and called for an immediate retreat to the foxholes. The construction crews all worked throughout the "Condition Yellow", dispersing equipment or continuing at their tasks. Oft times the "Condition Red" did not appear until the planes were overhead.

Crews under Chief Shipfitter Van Martin Sarver and Chief Carpenter's Mate Carl Rutherford began clearing an additional 1,300 feet of runway and building up the runway crown. Hundreds of coconut

palms were cut and the stumps blasted with Jap powder. In locations where the soil was unsuitable for compaction, it was excavated to a depth of 21 inches and replaced with gravel, coral, and clay. In addition, a 12-inch crown at the center of the runway made a total thickness of 33 inches of good base material. Grading for the crown was particularly difficult, as it was necessary continually to maintain a smooth transition between the flat portion of the runway and the 12-inch crown, in order to permit continued plane operation.

On September 4 a fighter plane in landing hit a high spot of ground, looped and burst into flames. The pilot was rescued by the Marines and Seabees.

To protect the field from bombings, the Marines manned gun emplacements at various locations along the flight strip. During an attack on October 3rd, "Bucky" Meyer, seaman second class, jumped into a machine gun pit, manned the gun, and was credited with bringing down a Jap Zero. For this action he was posthumously decorated with the Silver Star. Meyer later was killed in an attack by a Jap plane while serving aboard a pontoon barge. He was the first Seabee to be awarded the Silver Star.

The first large-scale laying of Marston mat began on September 25, and about that time the Flying Fortresses started to use the field. Small sections of mat which previously had been laid over unstable base were removed, and the base corrected. This matting, although bent and curved under daily usage by the planes, had held together and served successfully to bridge over soft spots. In

some locations, after the matting was placed, the corrected base would settle, resulting in a shallow, hollow area. It was found that these areas could be remedied by lifting the assembled mat with bars and shaking additional fill material through the mesh. Work was also commenced on the matting of taxiway stubs to hard-standing areas.

During the early part of October, a Jap offensive pushed the Marine lines back to the Lunga River at a point some 150 feet off the west end of the runway on Henderson Field. With the Marines entrenched and fighting at one end of the field, the Seabees were carrying on construction at the other.

In addition to air raids, which at first occurred so regularly every noon that conditions "Yellow" and "Red" could almost be anticipated, there was minor sniping from the adjacent hills and woods and a more serious annoyance known as "Pistol Pete." "Pistol Pete" was one or more Jap six-inch artillery pieces hidden away in the hills. He had the range on Henderson Field and other strategic locations. He shelled for 15 or 20 minutes, usually about meal time, generally creating more mental hazard than material damage. In the case of the airfield, "Pistol Pete" at one time forced all planes to move to a new flight strip. In other instances, he would damage the Marston mat, which would then have to be repaired under fire.

The condition of the runways was not the only cause of plane accidents. On the 12th of October, three fighter planes took off

in a cross wind. The first plane went part way down the runway, veered to the left, and crashed into some coconut palms. The second plane gained enough altitude to clear the top of the trees and was caught in a gust of wind to crash in the woods. The third plane gained just sufficient altitude to clear the ground, when it was blown off the runway and crashed into a parked water tank and burst into flames. The pilots of all three planes were rescued by the Marines and Seabees. They attributed the crashes to cross-wind currents. On November 10th Chief Carpenter's Mate Arthur Haldeman, in charge of a maintenance crew doing repair work on Henderson Field, was walking down the side of the strip as a dive bomber came in to land. Chief Haldeman, with his back to the plane, did not notice that it was having difficulties. A cross wind caught the plane just as it touched the field, forcing it to the side of the runway and into the chief, killing him instantly. Haldeman, the leading chief of Company D, was one of the best-liked chiefs in the battalion.

October 13 and 14 were particularly busy days at Henderson Field. The Japs in the hills observed all activities on the island. Two days earlier, a large contingent of Army troops had landed on Guadalcanal. To prevent the troops from consolidating their positions, the Japs launched an all-out sea, air, and land assault in an attempt to retake the island. The attack started at 11:45 A.M. on October 13. Approximately 30 twin-engined Jap bombers dropped their bombs on the airfield, and with improved aim made several direct hits on the bomber strip.

U. S. fighter planes took off immediately in pursuit of Tojo's warbirds. As soon as the last plane left the ground, the entire battalion turned out to assist in repairing the damage. Specially loaded trucks, which were standing by for such an emergency, carried gravel to help fill the bomb craters. Others carried equipment for repairing the Marston mat which had been torn and shattered by the bombs. Peavies were used to pull the pins which held the mat sections interlocked. Entire sections were replaced and fitted into the undamaged mat. Every man went to work, either picking up pieces of mat, pieces of shrapnel, or helping to backfill and compact the craters. Because there were not enough shovels to supply all the men (nearly every man in the battalion was there), many used their helmets to pick up earth fill and carry it to the bomb craters. Three planes had been hit; several fuel drums were afire, and a number of small ammunition dumps were left blazing, keeping small calibre shells popping for hours.

At 2:00 P. M. a second flight of Jap bombers hit the field and repeated the morning's depredations. At 2:45 P. M. there was another alarm, but the bombers were intercepted before getting to the field. The men worked all afternoon to get Henderson Field into service. After dark they returned to camp for noon chow.

That night about midnight, the air raid alarm sounded, and shortly afterwards several star shells lit up the camp and Henderson Field. The star shells marked the beginning of a barrage of 14-inch and smaller shells from a Jap fleet consisting of a battleship, cruisers, and destroyer escort. The shelling lasted about two and

one-half hours. One 14-inch shell struck and collapsed a foxhole sheltering six Seabees. Two men in a nearby foxhole, H. L. Osborne, SF1c, and D. L. Gillis, SF1c, hearing the cries for help, left their own shelter and rescued five of the men amid heavy shell fire. One shell exploded so close it splattered them with dirt. The sixth man in the hole, H. L. Thompson, CMM, died of suffocation. For their heroic action, Osborne and Gillis were recommended for a citation and received the Silver Star.

After the shelling, strong Jap aircraft concentrations bombed Henderson Field and the camp in three waves, the raid lasting until 5:30 A. M.

Henderson Field suffered 21 holes in the Marston mat, most of them due to the shelling. Of 16 Flying Fortresses which were on the field, only one was damaged. It was deemed essential to fly the Fortresses out immediately. Using only 2,600 feet of runway, the remaining 15 skipped the shell craters and took off successfully, except for one plane which cut a tire on some torn Marston matting and had to be abandoned.

Repairs to the damaged field began immediately after the flight of the Fortresses. Fortunately the Jap cruisers had used armor-piercing shells, which made holes some 15-and 20-feet deep but of relatively small diameter. However, some of the bomb craters were 40 feet in diameter. The hollow, armor-piercing nose of the shells was found intact in a number of instances, even to the good condition of the threads which attached the nose to the casing.

At 9:30 A.M., noon, 1:00 P.M., 2:15 P.M., and again a little later, the field was bombed by enemy craft. "Pistol Pete" also kept banging away. Holes were put into the strip as fast as they could be repaired, and then repaired as fast as they were made. Our aircraft used the field throughout the attacks.

Early on the morning of October 15 there was another heavy shelling lasting 50 minutes by Jap cruisers. The men were forewarned that enemy transports were standing by and that if the Marines retreated, the Seabees were to fall back with them and aid in the defense of the island. With only one rifle available for every two Seabees, it was an unpleasant prospect, which fortunately failed to materialize. The Jap bombers hit the runway again, to make a total of 53 hits in 48 hours.

On October 16 and 17 the field was again shelled and bombed. On October 17 in a noon bombing by 47 Jap planes, 35 were downed by U. S. fighters and anti-aircraft defense. Three flight strips were constructed to supplement Henderson Field. Number One was a rolled-turf strip, 4,600 feet by 300 feet, and was constructed in three days under Chief Carpenter's Mate Walter Joslyn. The sage was cut to a height of about 18 inches, hummocks leveled, old foxholes filled, and the field rolled. All equipment used in this work was Japanese. At one time in October, this fighter strip served all air traffic, including B-17's, when "Pistol Pete" made Henderson Field untenable. Number Two was a grading job accomplished with a single carryall and one bulldozer which pulled some Jap trusses rigged into a drag.

Number Three was a rolled-turf strip used only for dispersal. These last two strips were on the front lines at the time they were constructed. Marine patrols set up emplacements and stood guard over the construction work. Work on Number Two was delayed by "Pistol Pete" and Jap snipers. Number Three was constructed in front of the barbed wire protecting the lines. Just prior to completion of Number Three, the job was secured one evening; and on the night of the following day the Japs engaged U. S. Army troops across one end of the strip.

Bombings and shellings continued through the latter part of October and November, but on a reduced scale. In the latter part of November, Henderson Field was turned over to the Marine Aviation Engineers. At that time, 3,400 feet of mat had been laid and the remainder of the flight strip improved to serve heavy traffic without the necessity of Marston mat.

It is the proud record of the Sixth that despite the shellings and bombings suffered by the field, it was never out of operation for more than four hours and was always kept in condition so that in emergencies fighter planes were able to land and take off as required.

B. GUADALCANAL CAMP

Within a week after landing, tents were erected and more elaborate foxholes constructed. The necessity for this latter item was learned the hard way.

During the first bombing, shortly after midnight on September 2, the men took cover in shallow, open-trench foxholes. Many turned on their backs and watched the show. This easy attitude continued for two or three days. Then came a bombing which found several Seabees and eleven Marines all in one shallow trench. The Marines decided the trench was too crowded and moved to a nearby gravel pit. An anti-personnel bomb fell nearby and killed all eleven men. These anti-personnel bombs, called "daisy cutters," were set to explode upon initial contact, and would clean a 50-foot diameter area at the surface of the ground, throwing shrapnel, bolts, razor blades, and assorted debris. If they hit a tree, they would explode and shower downward.

Foxholes of revised construction were at least 4 feet deep, 3 feet wide, and 6 to 9 feet long. The top was covered with coconut logs and crowned with a 2-to 3-foot earth cover. Many were furnished with sleeping gear, cigarettes, and rations for all-night use. Most were built with the entrance in or very close to the tents.

Food was an especially critical problem during the first three months of camp; in fact, the scarcity of food prevented bringing more men to the island at a time when every hand could have been used. Chief Commissary Steward Rudder, in charge of the Commissary Department, utilized available supplies to the utmost. Two meals a

day consisting of captured Jap rice, oats, or spaghetti, along with an occasional side dish of canned franks or "corned willie," made up the menu for nearly a month. There was boiled rice, rice pudding, chile and rice, tomatoes and rice, and rice with raisins. Unofficially, there were also rice weevils and worms, which sometimes failed to rise to the surface for skimming when the rice was boiled. Native cattle on the island helped to furnish an occasional meal of fresh meat. The first hamburger was served shortly after a cow attacked Chief Rudder. Cattle hit by shell fragments were officially available for chow; and strangely enough, the mortality among the non-tubercular cows was quite high. Sweets were limited to a Jap sugar-syrup candy of various flavors. For men working from dawn to dusk on construction work, and then in the evenings living in foxholes, it was pretty slim going. At the end of the first month, many ribs stood out like washboards.

Later, as refrigeration was set up and more supplies brought in, conditions improved so that it was possible to serve turkey dinners for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

During the first week in October, camp was transferred to a new location between Henderson Field and the beach, and set up in more permanent form. A battalion office and carpentry, photographic, and sign shops were established. A sick bay, hospital, postoffice, and repair shops rounded out the camp, making it a self-sufficient unit.

Plans and Surveys, under Lieutenant W. H. Day, turned out plans for roads, buildings and all construction projects. Job surveys

were also made by this detail. In many instances, road-location parties would run surveys up to the front lines. Two Jap transits and a Jap level were used extensively for layout work. The instruments were of good quality and similar in design to American-made instruments.

At times there were as many as 100 carpenters working under Carpenters S. J. Higgins and C. M. Fletcher. Fourteen Quonset huts were built, several in the heart of the jungle. Most of the huts were for Marine Aviation galleys and messhalls and for Naval hospitals. The hospital huts required special construction, partitions, and even running water. The first two huts built in the jungle were completely destroyed by an enemy 14-inch shell. Another shell, hitting a few feet from the huts and directly into a dugout, killed five officers from one flight squadron who were sleeping there when the shell struck. On a hill adjacent to Henderson Field, the Japs had constructed a large pagoda-like building. From items found in the building, it apparently had been used by the Japs as a pilots' club house. The carpenters remodeled the interior and put in desks and office furniture. Later when the Jap bombers began hitting the runway strip day after day, it was thought the building might serve the Japs as a guide in calculating a bomb-release spot. For this reason, the building was razed and the lumber salvaged for other uses. The carpenters constructed a signal tower for control of traffic at Henderson Field, radar and beacon masts. They also constructed the chapel for Father Gehring, pictures of which were

featured in "Life" magazine. It is interesting to note that every piece of lumber used by the Seabees and Marines in the first two months on the island was salvaged from Jap materials.

From the outset of work at Guadalcanal, it was considered desirable to obtain a photographic record of construction progress and unusual conditions encountered. This assignment was given to Frank deSimone, PhoMlc, who in private life operated his own studio. With a dark room slightly larger than a phone booth, and using a salvaged Jap motorcycle for transportation, he obtained hundreds of 4 x 5 prints, 35 mm Kodachrome, and rolls of movie film. His excellent photographic work was acknowledged in a letter from BuDocks in Washington.

Another specialist from civil life who followed his own profession was Al Browne, Ptrlc, whose shop turned out signs for the Marines, Army, Navy and Australian Forces. Equipment stencils, road markers and educational cartoons, grave markers, were all in the days work. He also turned out a number of special designs in color, including a large Seabee insignia, which not only advertised the Sixth, but gave evidence of its professional abilities.

The transportation and equipment center operated under Ensigns Augusterfer and Cavanaugh, and the affiliated shops constituted one of the most important departments in the camp. It was their job to keep the equipment distributed among the various jobs and, most important of all, to keep it running. Chief Machinist's Mates Helme and Farmer operated a garage and heavy-equipment repair shop. Sup-

plementing this shop was a blacksmith and welding shop operated by Chief Carpenter's Mate Huebner and Chief Shipfitter Huffman.

There were some 100 Jap 3-ton stake-bodied trucks on the island, with about 25 allotted to the 6th. These trucks had low beds, which made them ideal for loading and unloading on the beach. Repairs were mostly a matter of inter-changing parts. Incidentally, grease racks and many other garage accessories were furnished by the Japanese. Several 40-HP Jap "KATO" tractors, similar in design to "Cletracs," were put into service for the Seabees in one way or another. Some were used in the field, others salvaged for parts. Steering clutches and other units were adapted for use with American "AC" and "International" tractors. The upkeep of American equipment was most difficult because of lack of spare parts. The work of the blacksmith and welding shop was invaluable in making and remaking parts. There was fine cooperation and mutual assistance between the Marines and the Seabees in helping to keep each other's equipment running.

The Jap rollers were 8-ton tandems powered with American-made Ford Model A and V-8 motors. In one case a motor was stripped down and the bearings removed and ground to fit an RD-8 tractor. Radiators were particularly vulnerable to shell fragments; however, repairs were expedited by H. A. Duvall, Flc, who made new radiators out of metal ammunition cases. At one time Chief Huebner made and rigged a 5-ton platform crane using tractor winches, Jap structural shapes, and an amphibious-tank motor. To distinguish it from the Northwest cranes in the battalion's equipment, this item was dubbed the "Southeast" crane.

The Seabees have been described as capable of fixing anything from a wristwatch to a steamshovel. It was true of the Sixth, even to a watch-repair shop. The watch repairman, Herman Koester, S1c, had more work than he could handle. He serviced watches for the Army, Navy and Marines. Watch repair had been his hobby before joining the Navy.

Night life in the 6th C.B. camp was anything but a quiet affair. The bombing and shellings aimed at Henderson Field also included the camp, which was within a quarter of a mile. Beginning October 13, and for nearly two weeks thereafter, most men spent the nights in their foxholes.

In addition to the previously noted heavy bombings and shellings, there were nuisance attacks nearly every day and night. It was a frequent occurrence for "Pistol Pete" to break up a chow line, or for a single small plane, popularly called "Washing Machine Willie," carrying two or three bombs to cause a nightly retreat to the foxholes. Another hazard during the months of September and October was the "trigger-happy" condition of Marine and Seabee sentries, which made it very unwise to venture anywhere at night. On one black night Ensign Webb, Navy bomb-disposal officer who lived with the Sixth and who faced death regularly in his work of disarming live bombs and torpedoes, spent an unhappy five minutes under the muzzle of the brig sentry's rifle -- fortunately not loaded -- before Chief Master at Arms Musen identified him.

The 6th suffered very few casualties in camp from the afore-

mentioned shellings and bombings, principally because of their well-constructed foxholes. Marines bivouacked in adjacent areas under temporary shelters lost many men.

During the first months on Guadalcanal, the men worked long hours on meager rations and with little sleep. Their resistance became low, and several hundred fell prey to malaria. However, under the leadership of Doctor R. Tharp, Senior Medical Officer, and Doctor J. F. Maser, almost all cases were checked at an early stage. Only one man died of malaria. Prophylactic dosage of atabrine and mosquito-control measures helped to hold the disease in check.

In all, 31 men in the 6th were evacuated from Guadalcanal because of wounds or nervous breakdowns, 13 killed in action, and 2 died of illness.

C. WATERFRONT OPERATIONS

Unloading from ships to beaches was accomplished by means of Higgins boats, tank lighters and pontoon barges operated by Navy personnel. Working parties of Marines and Seabees generally did their own unloading, except during critical periods when it was necessary for the Marines to man the front lines and the Seabees to take over. Initially, coconut log ramps about 35 feet long and wide enough to accomodate a truck were constructed on the beach. The ramps extended far enough into the water to float a Higgins boat at one end. Loading directly from the boat to trucks was accomplished by a power-operated cable, which ran through a sheave, supported on an A-Frame at the end of the ramp, to a winch on the beach.

Later, three piers of timber construction were built along the beach. The first job, performed under the supervision of Carpenter Fletcher, was to rebuild an existing pier at the "old N. O. B.", Kukum Beach. Creosoted telephone poles left by the Japs were used to replace damaged piling. Pile caps and stringers were 8" x 10" section, and the decking 2" x 6", all furnished by Tojo. On the day it was completed, "Pistol Pete" got the range on N. O. B., wrecked a newly completed signal tower, and forced the men working on the pier to scatter to fox holes. It was necessary to abandon N. O. B., and the pier was left unused for a considerable time thereafter.

In lieu of the above pier, two smaller piers, 52 feet long by 25 feet wide, were constructed; one at the "new N. O. B." (Lunga Lagoon) the other at Red Beach. The pier at Lunga Lagoon was named "Jennings Landing" in honor of Chief Shipfitter Jennings.

During October there was an acute shortage of aviation gasoline on Guadalcanal. It was necessary to ferry all gasoline from Tulagi in drums. Oftimes the Seabees would be called upon to assist Navy and Marine personnel in unloading operations. On October 15, after dark, a detail was sent to the beach to unload gas brought in by a "Yippee" boat from Tulagi. Arriving at the beach, the scene was suddenly lit by two aerial flares, followed by a half dozen bombs or so from "Washing Machine Willie" and a friend. The men took shelter in Marine dugouts along the beach. About an hour after the planes disappeared, the Tulagi ferry arrived. The gasoline was quickly unloaded and distributed in caches along the beach. The last drum had hardly reached the beach when Jap ships moved in and opened fire on Henderson Field. The shelling continued for over an hour, until U. S. surface craft forced the Jap ships to flee. There was no loss of personnel or gasoline during the two attacks.

The following day, October 16, a detail of 17 men under Chief Shipfitter Jennings was sent two miles off Red Beach with a pontoon barge and fuel drums to unload gasoline from the now-famous aircraft tender, the converted destroyer McFarland. Just after the last drum was filled, and before the lines could be cast off, Jap dive bombers swooped in. The first wave missed completely; the second hit the barge,

which burst into flames, and the third scored a hit on the fantail of the McFarland, exploding the depth charges. In the strafing which accompanied the bombing, several planes were brought down by the McFarland's guns. Those on the barge who were able dived into the water and were picked up within three minutes by the crew of a Higgins boat. Both the Seabees and the crew of the McFarland were hit heavily. Of the men in the 6th, R. J. Watson and S. B. Hale were severely burned by the flaming gasoline, D. L. Gillis, SF1c, suffered a ruptured ear drum, and eight men were reported killed in action. These were Chief Shipfitter Jennings, J. A. Addor, CM2c; J. L. Brinker, CM3c; J. A. Deeks, CM3c; H. V. Jensen, SF2c; J. J. Plas, S2c; E. B. Janney, S2c; and L. C. Meyer, S2c. En route to the beach, W. J. Curry, S1c, administered artificial respiration to Watson, who suffered severely from shock. On November 7th, while a crew of Seabees was building a pier at the new N.O.B. and another was unloading lighters along the beach nearby, a Jap submarine fired a torpedo at a cargo ship which was standing by. The torpedo missed the ship and beached itself not more than 50 feet from the men. It gave them quite a scare, but fortunately, failed to explode. A second torpedo was more accurately aimed, and the ship was hit.

D. ROAD AND BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION

The 6th C. B. during its stay on Guadalcanal constructed and maintained about 24 miles of road. The principal road jobs were as follows: Fighter one to Fighter three, 1¼ miles; between the Tenaru and Lunga River, 4½ miles; from the Lunga River to the Matanikau River, 2½ miles; from the Lunga River to the beach, 2/3 miles; from the Lunga Lagoon to ½ mile beyond the Tenaru, 2¼ miles; and maintenance of 12 miles of road in the Lunga Lagoon - Tenaru River area. Almost all of the construction supervision was under Chief Petty Officers F. L. Johnson, J. E. Caffall and V. M. Sarver.

Initially, road work was limited, due to the construction work which was under way at the airfields. However, after the battalion was relieved of airfield work in the middle of November, a great many men were diverted to road work. All of the roads, excepting the road between the Lunga and Matanikau Rivers, were gravel roads. Contrary to the road-building practise, no attempt was made to remove the layer of organic material—i. e., dried leaves, plants, etc.— which formed sort of sub-base for most of the roads. A 12-inch to 18-inch clay blanket was filled over the organic, traffic-compacted and surfaced with 6 inches of gravel. The roads proved adequate for the traffic served, which was mostly light and heavy trucks and mobile armament.

The road between the Lunga and Matanikau was built up and surfaced with 18 inches to 24 inches of coral. After traffic compaction and with slight maintenance in blading, it compared favorably with a surfaced highway.

Much of the delay in road building was due to lack of equipment. At first, there were only 4 bulldozers, 2 5yd.scrapers, 1 patrol grader, and several trucks. This equipment was at times entirely diverted to airfield work.

Typical of the difficult situations encountered was the construction of the "Mammy Yokum" bridge on the road between Fighter Strips One and Three. The bridge spanned a small creek over which the Marines had previously planked a crossing by sinking two amphibious tanks for piers. But the tanks kept sinking, so that it was necessary to build a new bridge. A Seabee crew, under Chief Carpenter's Mate Jesse Caffall, using a pinch bar, cross-cut saw, a double-bit axe, and some baling wire, constructed a 40-foot bridge of two 20-foot spans, which was put into use for heavy truck traffic.

The 6th C. B. constructed four major vehicle bridges, ranging in length from 90 feet to over 200 feet. This work was under the general supervision of Carpenter Fletcher. One of the most important spanned the fast-flowing Lunga River on the Lunga River Road connecting the front lines near Henderson Field with the Marine Base Supply Camp and Hospital. In construction of this bridge, a pile driver was fabricated from Jap structural shapes. The bridge, when completed, was 225 feet long with a 20-foot roadway.

Initially the Lunga was spanned by a narrow coconut-log bridge constructed by the Japs. It was not strong enough for trucks, so they had to ford the river and would oftimes get stuck. In high water, the stream was impassable. Work on the bridge was begun on September 14. By October 11 more than half of the piling had been driven when high

water, resulting from the heavy rains in the hills, washed out the Jap bridge and carried it down stream to where the new bridge was being constructed. The Jap bridge hit the new work, sheared two piles, and tumbled the pile driver into the river.

This occured just before the major Jap offensive to retake the island on October 13. Because of the immediate necessity for the bridge, men were put to work salvaging lumber from the Jap bridge. A temporary pontoon bridge was constructed using empty fuel drums and the Jap lumber. During the action of October 13, 14, and 15th, the bridge carried traffic bearing casualties to the dressing stations at the rear and carrying ammunition to the front. It was kept in use until the new bridge was completed October 25.

The Lunga bridge was named Douglas Bridge, after Chief Shipfitter Douglas, who supervised its construction. It was 20 feet above the river bed and was constructed of 5 pile bents. Creosoted Jap telephone poles of about 12-inch diameter were used for piling. Caps measuring 14 inches by 14 inches in sedtions were hewn from tropical lumber, which ranged from good grades of teak and rosewood to a poor mahogany. Tojo also furnished I beams for stringers and most of the deck timber. The bridge was designed for a 20-ton loading but supported greater loads in carrying heavy artillery.

Less than two weeks after Douglas Bridge was constructed, work on another bridge of the same type was begun. This bridge, measuring 209 feet in length, sat 15 feet above the river bed and had a 20-foot roadway. It spans the Tenaru River at a point where the Japs once tried

to break through the Marine lines. It was estimated by the Marines that over 400 Japs were buried in the muddy bed of the river just below the bridge. Trainer Bridge (so named in honor of Chief Shipfitter Trainer, who supervised its construction) presented greater problems than the first bridge, in that the supply of Jap timber was becoming exhausted, and it was necessary to hew many of the timbers from trees cut in the nearby jungle. Hatch covers from a torpedoed ship made part of the decking. Trainer Bridge was opened to traffic on December 5, 18 days from the start of construction.

Work was started December 6 on a third bridge, spanning the Matanikau River, in which the girders were Jap steel roof trusses. This bridge was seventy-five percent completed when turned over to the 26th Battalion on 2 January. The front lines at one time were less than a half-mile from the bridge. However, encounters with the Japs were limited to occasional mortar shells which fell in the nearby jungle.

Other bridges included a 90-foot trestle across a gulch on the road to Fighter Strip Two and several foot bridges. The most interesting among the latter was a 168-foot suspension span across the Matanikau River. The bridge was supported by a 7/8-inch cable pulled into position with a tractor and anchored to a "dead man". Cable clamps and turnbuckles salvaged from a torpedoed ship were used in the construction. Marston mat hung from 3/8-inch hanger cables

was the decking.

Hardware for all of the bridges was cut from Jap steel, heat-treated and threaded in the battalion blacksmith shop.

E. PIPE LINES AND TANK FARM

One of the most important supply operations involved the transporting and storage of aviation fuel for Henderson Field. At first, fuel drums were loaded from cargo vessels to landing barges, unloaded at the beach, and thence transported by truck to fuel dumps near the airfield. These operations were costly of man power; and in addition, it was at times impossible to furnish by this method enough fuel to satisfy the requirements of aircraft operating from Henderson Field.

Late in October work was begun on three 250-barrel tanks at Henderson Field. These tanks were so located that it was possible to roll drums from the trucks onto a rack and empty them by gravity into a trough and thence to the tank. Fuel was drawn from the tanks by gravity flow into tank trucks for use on the airfield. In December additional storage volume was provided through the erection of one 1,000-barrel and two 10,000-barrel tanks. The tanks were all of steel, pre-fabricated, bolted construction. To provide a measure of safety against air attack, the tops of the smaller tanks were covered with a blanket of coconut logs and sand.

The final step in the construction of the tank farm consisted of laying a 6-inch all-welded pipe line connecting a distributing point on the beach to the various tanks. The construction of the pipe lines and tanks was under the supervision of Lt. (jg) E. K. Smith, assisted by Lt. Paul Davis, attached to the battalion temporarily for this duty.

On November 21 the unloading of pipe and tank-farm material for the 10,000-barrel tank from the U.S.S. Libra was begun. By November 24th, the site for the first tank had been completed, and work was started on the steel

erection. This tank was completed on November 10; completion of the second tank was accomplished in December. By November 24th 350 feet of trench had been excavated for the 6-inch line. On this date, the trencher, a used and antiquated machine, suffered a broken drive shaft, so that it was necessary to excavate by hand, using Seabee labor. The trencher was repaired and placed into service, only to break down again beyond repair on December 3. Digging proceeded by hand until on December 6 a trencher was borrowed from a Marine aviation-engineer unit to complete the job by December 19. The length of the 6-inch line from the beach to the tank farm was 5,219 feet, with a total rise of 24 feet. In addition, 2,910 feet of 4-inch screw-joint pipe was installed to carry fuel from the main tanks to the smaller tanks in the vicinity of Henderson Field. Pumping stations were installed near the beach and at Henderson Field.

Of particular interest was the twin 4-inch line connecting the main 6-inch line with tankers anchored off the beach. It extended 850 feet into the bay. At the seaward end a union joined the pipe to a flexible 6-inch hose, which in turn was anchored to a floating bouy by a five-inch manila line and a 3/4-inch chain. In construction the 4-inch lines were welded, floated into place, and then sunk and anchored. Upon completion of the project, it was possible for a tanker to anchor near the bouy, pull the six-inch flexible hose over the side, and pump fuel directly to the storage tanks.

F. POWER

A group of electricians and diesel mechanics under Chief Electrician's Mate C. M. Fouts arrived with the first contingent on September 1 and immediately started work to place in operation a powerhouse which the Japs had constructed. The Jap generating unit consisted of a 4-cylinder, full-

reversible marine diesel engine, connected with a 100-kilowatt, 3300 - volt, 3-phase generator, which at one time bore a Westinghouse tag. By September 7 the plant was in operation. The Japs also left numerous transformers, ranging from 1/2-kilowatt to 30-kilowatt capacity.

This power plant served nearly all electrical appliances on the island, excepting the anti-aircraft searchlights. The output averaged 60 KW with a 97 KW peak; and included among the major loads were the field lights for three airports, the base radio and transmitter, two ice plants, seven reefers, the Division Field Hospital, five Medical Corps units, the aviation machine shops and oxygen transfer, Naval Headquarters and several camp areas. The unit was in operation 24 hours a day and was maintained at all times by an eleven-man crew.

On landing, it was found that the Japs had laid out about 1/3 of the necessary power lines. Seabee line crews were soon at work finishing the job. In jest at using a Jap truck - along with nearly all-Jap electrical equipment - one crew painted a sign on their truck which read, "Tojo Power and Light Co.,Inc." Standby units for the main power plant included 4 American Caterpillar generators and another 100 - KW Jap power plant.

The Japs were exceedingly generous in furnishing electrical equipment. They left two 6-cylinder Jap diesels and generators; several 1-cylinder, 15-HP Jap diesel and gasoline engines, and two 6-KW, 4 - cylinder gasoline-engine power plants. These small units were put to work generating power for portable pumps, sawmills, radio equipment, and similar activities. Large stocks of both high- and low-voltage cable were left by the Japs. High-voltage cables were usually installed about 18 inches below the ground surface. Low-voltage cable ranged from

single-conductor to 50-pair telephone cable.

Special jobs handled by the electricians included repair of a 3300-volt oil switch for the airfield lights; the construction of a voltage regulator for the 90-mm AA range finder; making a motor-generator set for charging radio and equipment batteries; and even helping to set up a shower outside the power house. The shower utilized warm water from the diesel cooling system. At times it served as many as 700 to 1000 men a day.

The 6th C.B. operated the principal power facilities for the island during their stay, and when they left, the job was turned over to the 26th C. B.

G TUNNELS

During the month of September when air and sea defenses turned back one attempt after another by the Japanese to retake the island, bombings and shellings threatened vital radio and radar equipment, all of which was surface housed. It was determined necessary to get the equipment beneath the surface of the ground as soon as possible.

The project was turned over to the Sixth Battalion, and a crew of men under Chief Carpenter's Mate W. H. Joslyn and Chief Machinist's Mate I. J. Rose began tunneling operations into the side of Pagoda Hill, just a few hundred feet from Henderson Field. Because of the urgency of the completion of this tunnel, three eight-hour shifts were put to work. Japanese 1/4-yard cars which ran on Jap rails were used to remove the dirt from the tunnel. Digging was done with air spades, air drills, and hand shovels. The tunnel was shored on three-foot centers and had two entrances leading to three rooms. Number One entrance was 107 feet long and 5 by 7 feet in section. Number Two entrance was approximately 68 feet long. One room used for aviation operations measured 12 by 20 by 8 feet; and another

room, used as a switchboard room, was 5 by 4 by 7 feet. The third room, a radio communications room, was 12 by 12 by 8 feet. All inter-plane communications to Navy and Marine planes were conducted from this tunnel.

The digging of this tunnel, which was later named Joslyn Tunnel, was one project not interupted by Pistol Pete; although he shelled the vicinity several times, work went on as usual. However, work was delayed for a short time by a minor earthquake which caused a small cave-in, and excavation was stopped until the shoring crew could catch up and prevent further cave-ins. On October 14th all equipment was moved from the Pagoda building on top of the hill into the tunnel. It was none too soon, for that same night Jap shells hit the Pagoda.

Joslyn Tunnel was the first of four tunnels excavated by the 6th C. B. Some of the features common to all the tunnels are worth noting at this time. In general, a tunnel consisted of two or more rooms with two exit drifts 60° to 180° apart. Two drifts were used to provide emergency exit in the event that one shaft was closed by a hit, and also to provide a relief from the concussion pressures created by shells bursting near the tunnel entrances. It was found that before the two tunnels were joined, an explosion near a tunnel outlet would sometimes deafen a man in the tunnel for several days. Ventilation was accomplished through vertical shafts, usually one to each tunnel and room.

In locations where soft earth formations were encountered, solid shoring was used along the wall and solid logging for ceilings. This was particularly necessary in the tunnel rooms. Nearby hits would cause the walls and ceilings to shake and jump violently. If the walls had not been framed solid, cave-ins would have resulted.

During the construction of the tunnels, it was necessary to use the utmost care in protecting the air compressor, which for a time was the

only one on the island. At the first air-raid warning, the compressor was concealed in palm groves, sometimes a quarter of a mile away. The wisdom of this practise was born out when in construction of the third tunnel, an air raid occurred without the customary warning, and the compressor was hit and damaged beyond repair. Fortunately, by that time the Marines had a spare machine available.

The second tunnel, used b y the Naval Radio Station, was 168 feet long and led into two 8-by 30-by 8-foot rooms, and one 5-by 6-by 7-foot room. Number Three tunnel was dug for a division command post. The first shaft, 159 feet long, led into a large operations room measuring 12 by 20 by 8 feet. The original plan called for 189 feet; however, poor earth formation was encountered, and thirty feet were abandoned. On the second shaft, it was necessary to drill through solid coral. Every foot of the 205 feet was blasted. After each blast, it was necessary to wait until the shaft cleared of powder fumes. The cover on the rooms on Number Two tunnel was 40 feet, on Numbers Three and Four 25 feet. Number Four tunnel was built for Naval Intelligence. It had two shafts, 140 and 125 feet in length, leading to two 8-by 30-by 8-foot rooms, all blasted out of solid coral. Both rooms were solid logged and shored. Number Three and Four tunnels were started by the 6th C. B. and turned over to the 26th C. B. for completion.

CHAPTER FIVE

ESPIRITU SANTO ISLAND

During the period between August 17 and October 12, a detachment of the 6th C.B. was maintained at Espiritu Santo Island, pending their transfer to Guadalcanal. After the departure of Lieutenant Commander Blundon, this group was in charge of Lt. M. H. Jordan. This unit, in company with the 7th C. B. accomplished the initial basic construction for the island.

One of the most important operations of the unit was the unloading of ships. Winch operators and unloading details were furnished to work

both aboard the ships and ashore. Cargoes from the ships' holds was placed on Higgins boats or pontoon barges, transported to shore and unloaded by hand, or with the assistance of cranes and A-frames mounted on tractors. Most of the cargo was made up of heavy goods such as airport matting, magazine steel, quonset hut steel, heavy gun mountings, thousands of drums of high test gasoline and fuel oil, depth charges, heavy calibre ammunition, food supplies and countless other items, many of which were later sent to the Solomons.

A necessary first construction project was the establishment of a drinking water supply. Two evaporating units were set up on a hill overlooking Segond Canal. These units, each of 3,000 gal. capacity, were located in camoflaged positions. Pumps were used to force the salt water from the canal through the units and thence to a 5,000 gallon, wood stave, storage tank from which water tanks on trucks were filled by gravity. An allotment of one gallon of water per man was made for all Marine, Army and Navy personnel.

Later, a small group of men made a reconnaissance through the jungle seeking a source of fresh water. After three trips, a suitable spring was found but the 6th left before a project was developed.

Over a hundred wood bases for tents were built by the 6th Batt. on Santo. A complete transportation system was established with repair garage and battery shop. The transportation department was later turned over to the Seventh Battalion. In the travels of the 6th Batt men on Santo, they came upon a French band saw which was immediately repaired and put into service. An engine from an old Dodge truck furnished the power to operate the saw. Planks were cut at the sawmill and used as mud sills for ammunition storage magazines. These magazines, built of No. 8 guage corrugated steel sheeting and resembling Quonset hut in form, were constructed deep in the jungle.

In the large hospital area the 6th Batt. erected over 20 Quonset huts. Several of these huts required special construction to fit them for operating and X-ray rooms. One hut was especially built for a hospital laundry, another for a hospital galley. Others were used as wards for the wounded pending evacuation. These huts were camoflaged with green wire netting to conceal them from aerial observation. Five 40 by 100 foot steel warehouses were constructed; one for medical supplies and equipment, one for general stores, such as food and clothing; one to house two 6,800 cubic foot refrigerators at Cub One, and two which were turned over to the Army to be used for commissary stores.

Besides all the wooden tent frames, carpenters also built medical supply cabinets, tables, chairs, shelves and countless other pieces of furniture for the hospitals and galleys. Construction of a large galley for Cub One was also under way. The carpenters built their own equipment, such as work benches, tool boxes, and circular saw benches, and a long list of miscellaneous items.

Electricians and communications men strung telephone lines and made power installations throughout the island, traversing swamp and jungle. An unpleasant job which occasioned much griping, was the policing of the grounds and the digging of foxholes for the Cub One unit. One of the last jobs done by the 6th on Santo, was the assembling of three 50 ton barges for use in the unloading of cargo ships. A number of docks and piers were also constructed, two of which, Painter's Dock and Marcus Pier, were named in honor of the men in charge of their construction.

On Santo, evening blackouts were not required. On Sunday nights, the men of the various island units would gather around a well illuminated stage to enjoy a Happy Hour staged by Chaplains Gehring and Brown. Music and entertainment included the 6th Batt. Band, boxing, dancing and comedy acts.

The Sixth Batt. suffered its first fatality on Santo on September 28 when Paul Brucker, Ptr3c, was struck by a bullet from an accidentally discharged rifle. It was a particularly tragic accident, not only because Brucker was wàll known and liked, but also for Harry Brucker, F2c, Paul's brother who was also in the Sixth Battalion.

Lt. Jordan, on October 5, depparted for Guadalcanal with all except 50 men. This group was, through some mistake, set ashore at Tulagi, and was ferried across to Guadalcanal in small increments. On October 12, Lt. (jg) Smith and the remaining men departed aboard the U.S.S.Alchiba, a Navy cargo ship. Another AK, two destroyers, a tug and a P.T. boat tender made up an accompanying convoy. On the evening of the 13th, the tug picked up the barge from the other "AK" and, escorted by one of the destroyers, the U.S.S. Meredith, proceeded towards Guadalcanal. The remainder of the convoy turned about and headed back for Santo, because of the heavy enemy action occuring at Guadalcanal at that time. About 1000 on October 14, a single enemy plane was sighted and fired upon. The barge attached to the Alchiba was then set adrift and the convoy proceeded at full speed for Santos. At 1700, of the same day, nine Jap planes dive-bombed the convoy, without scoring any damaging hits. On October 15, the convoy was attacked by submarines and again escaped damage. Subs were claimed to have been sunk by the destroyers and the "PT" boat tender. October 16 found the ships back at Santos. The men were kept aboard ship and sailed again on October 25. Because of enemy action near Guadalcanal, the convoy followed a round about route, finally arriving at Guadalcanal on November 2. Thus was completed a trip of 21 days aboard a ship for a voyage normally requiring 36 hours.

CHAPTER SIX

Miscellaneous Solomon Island Projects

Although the major construction effort by the Sixth Battalion was centered at Guadalcanal, numerous projects were undertaken on other islands of the Solomon Islands group. At one time detachments were doing survey and construction work on seven different islands, including Santo, Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Florida, Tanambogo, Macambo and Gavutu.

About a month after the first arrival of the battalion on Guadalcanal, a detachment of 59 men under Lt. B. Marcus, was sent to Tulagi to construct a patrol torpedo boat base. Later the strength of the group was increased to 133 men and officers, in order to accomplish additional construction projects.

Upon landing, a camp was set up and a galley large enough to serve 500 men was put into operation. All Naval personnel and large numbers of transients, ship-wrecked, refugees, were fed from this galley. A five ton stiff leg derrick, built by the 6th from Jap structural steel shapes and powered by a salvaged Jap version of a Chevrolet Motor, was installed on Government Wharf. A carpenter shop and saw mill were set up to turn out galley and camp furniture. Electricians set up a generator and linesmen strung power lines over the island. Telephone lines were installed and maintained on Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, the Hajavo seaplane base and to several disabled ships in the harbor, including at various times, the cruisers Pensacola, New Orleans, and Minneapolis, the P.T. tender Jamestown, and the destroyer McFarland.

A seaplane base was built at Halavo, on Florida Island, by a small group under Carpenter Gray detailed for this task. These men and a handful of Marines were the only troops on Florida Island at the time. On several

occasions when warnings were given that enemy troops might land during the night, Seabees and Marines shared the watches, half standing watch while the other half slept.

Keeping the PT boats operating in the adjacent coral reefed waters required continual maintenance, of which a good share was handled by the Sixth Battalion men. The piers for the PT boats were repaired, and two floating wharves were built to accomodate additional boats. Chief Carpenter's Mate Ingram and his crew were officially commended for the construction from pontoons of two badly needed P.T. boat dry docks.

A complete topographic survey of Tulagi, Gavutu and Tanambogo was a accomplished by the survey crew under the supervision of Chief Carpenter's Mate H. P. Boswell.

One of the most laborious projects was the construction of a radio transformer and receiving station back in the hills on Tulagi. It was necessary to haul gravel and cement for concrete decks from Guadalcanal by barge. These materials were carried by hand in buckets and bags up a steep hillside to the site, where the concrete was hand mixed and poured. The walls and roofs of the buildings were of corrugated iron salvaged from sheds previously demolished by shellfire in the original occupation of the island.

Two 50-ton barges were assembled at Tulagi. The most difficult feature of this job was the finding and collecting of the barge sections, which had been scattered on most of the adjacent islands prior to the arrival of the Sixth. An emergency outlet channel was dredged and blasted for Tulagi Harbor in order to guard against the bottling up of the P. T. Boats by enemy warships.

In November it was decided to lay out a more adequate camp. Surveys were made, ditching and drainage started, and barracks were contracted for with native labor. A small dam forming a reservoir of 3,000 gallon capacity was constructed to furnish facilities for washing and bathing near the campsite. A rock crusher was assembled and placed in operation to provide crushed gravel for such jobs as the concrete pier on Government Wharf for installation of a 60 foot boom derrick, and for roads which were built by Marine engineer unit.

Although the men on Tulagi were neither shelled nor bombed, it cannot be said that they failed to see action. From the top of the hill overlooking Savo Island and Guadalcanal, they viewed the great sea battles of October 11 and November 12 and 14. They witnessed the sinking of the cruiser Atlanta, and in their camp shared their extra clothes and gear with the surviviors of the Northampton.

Delays in progress due to lack of equipment and loss of man hours due to illness were even greater than at Guadalcanal. A progress report shows that between October 8 and December 19, 1,303 man-days were lost due to malaria and the general rundown condition of the men.

One of the highlights of life on the islands was the bi-weekly trading with the natives of Florida and Gavutu Islands. These natives would venture over to Tulagi with cargoes of coconuts, pineapples, bananas,papayas, and nuts. In purchasing goods the barter system was preferred by them, although they would take American silver. A nickel would buy more than a dime, but the most preferred items were pipes and tobacco. The Seabees were set wise in the ways of trading by Chief Warrant Officer M. I. Harper, R.A.N.R., who formerly owned an island plantation near Tulagi and who now acted as a pilot for U.S.Naval craft.

New Year's eve found the Sixth Battalion Detachment on a ship headed back for Guadalcanal.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS * GUADALCANAL

On November 12, a month after the Japs made their first unsuccessful attempt to retake Guadalcanal, a Japanese task force again approached the area patrolled by the U. S. Naval forces. The two forces engaged in battle just off Savo Island. It was in this engagement that Admirals Callaghan and Scott were killed and we lost the cruisers Juneau and Atlanta. U. S. forces repulsed the Japs and inflicted such severe damage to a Jap battleship that it was latter scuttled.

At 1:30 a.m., November 14, a reformed Jap task force shelled Henderson Field for 45 minutes, before being repulsed by U. S. forces. The Jap task force consisted of battleships, several cruisers and destroyers and 12 large transports. U. S. Naval surface craft, and Naval, Marine and Army planes from Henderson Field and other bases hammered the Jap forces constantly throughout the 13th, 14th and 15th, inflicting severe damage and heavy casualties to the Japs. Of the 12 transports, 8 were sunk outright on the 14th. The Japs finally beached the four remaining ships, only to have them thoroughly blasted and set afire by U. S. planes. It suffices to say that if this Jap task force had successfully efected a landing, the entire story of Guadalcanal would have been changed.

On December 21 a terrific explosion rocked the island. An Army truck, heavily loaded with land mines, exploded near the Jap ice plant operated by the Sixth Battalion. The explosion killed F. E. Huber, EM2c and seriously injured H. H. Elwell, EM1c, who were filling sandbags nearby. Several soldiers on the truck and two riding closeby in a jeep were killed.

Christmas Eve was celebrated with a midnight Mass offered by Chaplain Gehring. The words of the Chaplain, "Peace on earth and good will towards men", were all but drowned out by a flight of Fortresses winging their way north. Christmas day was celebrated with a feast of turkey and all the trimmings.

January 4 found the Sixth Battalion assembled at the cemetery, in whites, paying a final tribute to the Seabees and Marines who lost their lives in the taking and holding of "Airport Island". At an altar in the center of the field, a requiem Mass was offered by Chaplain Gehring, taps were sounded with the battalion at hand salute, and the ceremony was closed with the reading of a letter of appreciation from Commander Compton, Commanding Officer of Cub One.

The battalion marched back to camp where orders were given for all hands to pack their gear and police the camp area. On January 5, every man was up at dawn. Parties were dispatched to the beach to load the very few items of equipment to be taken with the battalion. At noon the Sixth Battalion embarked upon the U.S.S.Hunter Liggett, and in convoy, weighed anchor for Auckland, New Zealand.

CHAPTER EIGHT
AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

The stay of the Sixth Battalion in Auckland, New Zealand, was intended as a rest, recreation and recuperation period. Quartered at a rest base, the battalion was divided into port and starboard watches, with liberty for each watch on alternate nights.

The food served at the camp was unparalled in all the travels of the Sixth. Fresh meat, butter, vegetables and cold milk were served in abundance. Together with the cooler climate, it soon resulted in a very noticeable improvement of the physical condition of the men.

There were duties to perform, even at a rest base. Camp guards were posted, shore patrols were dispatched to the downtown area during liberty hours and guard duty at the Navy Pier was taken over by the Sixth. Maintenance work was done on the main camp at Victoria Park, and the Domain where Company D was stationed, and at a Navy Mobile Hospital.

Each day at rest camp was started with a period of calisthenics before breakfast. An hour of close order drill made up part of the morning's routine, and liberty for those who rated it began at 1 p.m. Shortly after arriving in Auckland, Ensign A. Kohn took over the direction of the battalion dance band, and rehearsals were held daily. Before long, service men were dancing to music of the band at the Red Cross recreation center and at the recreation hall in Victoria Park, where dances were held for the 6th Battalion personnel and their guests. Each program had an hour's floor show with Tom (Monty) Montgomery serving as Master of Ceremonies. Monty participated in pr practically every program presented by the 6th Battalion and won the admiration of all hands with his witty stories and pointed remarks. The band played for a dance on St. Valentine's day at the Town Hall in Auckland, where their swing

version of late American songs made a big hit with the servicemen and their New Zealand Guests. Before leaving Auckland, the band's popularity landed them at radio station 1 Z B where they put on a 45 minute program which was broadcast tothe South Pacific area and was recorded for rebroadcast in the States.

During the stay in Auckland, every man in the battalion was given a complete physical examination. The examinations revealed that apporximately 200 men were unfit for duty. These men were transferred to the hospital, where with care and treatment, many of them recovered and were returned to the battalion. Others were sent back to the States for further treatment, or to receive medical discharges. Within two months in Acukland, in spite of an ideal climate, and the absence of the Anopheles mosquito, approximately 150 cases of malaria were recorded in the battalion's medical records. These cases included recurrences as well as many new victims.

While in Auckland, the men were given five day leaves to see the country, or relax as they saw fit. The warm hospitality, friendship and courtesies extended by the New Zealanders during these and other liberty hours will live forever in the hearts of the men of the Sixth Battalion.

Life at the rest base was just too good to last. On March 3, just after each company had completed a 5-mile hardening hike, annouucement was made that the battalion was on 24 hour sailing notice. Leaves were cancelled and on the morning of March 9, the battalion moved to the pier, where, after a bag inspection, it embarked on the U.S.S.Pinkney, the ship whose destination would be the next tour of duty for the battalion.

Chapter Ten EPILOGUE

Due to current censorship regulations, an accounting of the battalion's activities between March 9 and the present date, must await another change of station.

This history was compiled by Tom O'Reilly Sl/c, and edited by Ensign R. H. Gadney

United States Naval Construction Battalion 6

24 Jun 42 — U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 6 was activated at Norfolk, Virginia. Lieutenant Commander Joseph L. Blundon, CEC-V(S), USNR, was the Officer in Charge.

The battalion boarded a train the same day and departed for the Advance Base Depot at Gulfport, Mississippi.

26 Jun 42 — The battalion arrived at Gulfport, Mississippi. They were the first battalion to occupy the camp, which was still under construction.

6 Jul 42 — The 6th Battalion boarded trains for a move to Moffett Field, California.

10 Jul 42 — The battalion arrived at Moffett Field. While they were at Moffett Field they were designated as the construction unit for Cub One, a type of overseas base unit.

20 Jul 42 — The battalion departed Moffett Field by train for San Francisco, California. They arrived in San Francisco on the same day and boarded the transport ships Wharton and President Polk.

21 Jul 42 — The battalion sailed from San Francisco in a convoy.

5 Aug 42 — The convoy dropped anchor in the harbor of Pago Pago, American Samoa. A 24-hour stop was made to pick up U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 7.

6 Aug 42 — The convoy departed from Pago Pago for Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides.

11 Aug 42 — The convoy arrived at Espiritu Santo. The officers and men of the battalion on the Wharton were transferred to the President Polk and the whole battalion waited for a week in Segond Canal before going ashore.

17 Aug 42 — A group of 300 men of the 6th Battalion went ashore at Espiritu Santo and were followed by the rest of the battalion in the next few days.

At Espiritu Santo the men of the battalion constructed a pier of sand bags reinforced by coconut logs, unloaded ships, and constructed warehouses and Quonset huts that were used as hospitals.

29 Aug - 12 Oct 42 — The battalion departed from Espiritu Santo in five echelons for Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands.

1 Sep - 2 Nov 42 — The battalion arrived at Guadalcanal.

At Guadalcanal the Seabees of the 6th Battalion lengthened and maintained Henderson Field, constructed piers, bridges, tunnels, roads, a Patrol Torpedo Boat Base, a tank farm, and a power plant which they also operated. Most of the work was accomplished under enemy fire: strafing and bombardment from Japanese aircraft and shelling from the Japanese fleet.

7 Oct - 31 Dec 42 — While the main body of the battalion was employed at Guadalcanal, detachments were sent to Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, and Halavo. The work of these detachments included the construction of a patrol torpedo base, the installation and maintenance of telephone lines to several islands and ships, topographic surveys of several islands, and construction of a radio transformer and receiving station.

5 Jan 43 — U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 6 was relieved by U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 26. The entire battalion departed for Auckland, New Zealand, aboard the USS Hunter Liggett.

12 Jan 43 — The batt lion arrived at Auckland, New Zealand.

While at Auckland the battalion performed maintenance work at the main camp at Victoria Park and at a U.S. Navy Mobile Hospital.

9 Mar 43 — The battalion dpparted New Zealand aboard the USS Pinkney for Noumea, New Calendonia.

12 Mar 43 — The battalion arrived at Noumea and once on shore the men established temporary camp facilities. They also worked on construction and alterations of warehouses and U.S. Navy Mobile Hospitals 5 and 7. They operated a blacksmith and welding shop, unloaded ships, established a material dump, and provided personnel for base water, telephone, and power systems.

5 Sep 44 — The 6th Battalion departed Noumea aboard the USS General Hugh L. Scott for Camp Parks, California.

18 Sep 44 — The battalion arrived in San Francisco, California, and was transported by buses to Camp Parks. At Camp Parks the men were given leave and the battalion was reformed.

22 Jan 45 — The battalion departed for the U.S. Naval Advance Base Depot at Port Hueneme, California.

23 Jan 45 — The battalion arrived at Port Hueneme, While at Port Hueneme the battalion was given additional military and construction training.

28 May - 4 Jun 45	The battalion departed from Port Hueneme in three echelons for Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands.
10 Jul - 14 Jul 45	The battalion arrived at Okinawa in echelons.
14 Jul - 13 Sep 45	At Okinawa the 6th battalion built its camp and then joined the men of 10 other battalions to construct buildings and facilities for a large Naval Supply Depot which eventually covered about 10 square miles. The principal projects assigned to the 6th Battalion were the construction of two finger piers, the grading of the adjacent docking area, construction and grading projects, and a complete Quonset hut installation for Naval Supply Depot personnel.
14 Aug 45	V-J Day (Okinawa time).
7 Sep 45	The emergency over, the first draft of battalion personnel received their orders to return to the States.
13 Sep 45	U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 6 was inactivated at Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands.

Officers in Charge

Commander Joseph L. Blundon, CEC, USN	14 Jun 42 - 99 Nov 43
Lieutenant Commander Mark H. Jordan, CEC, USN	9 Nov 43 - 28 Nov 44
Lieutenant Commander John H. Hulse, CEC, USNR	28 Nov 44 - 10 Sep 45
Lieutenant Leroy D. Parker, CEC, USNR	10 Sep 45 - 13 Sep 45

Awards

Presidential Unit Citation (As part of the First Marine Division, Reinforced)	Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

SIXTH U. S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION
U. S. NAVAL BASE
PORT HUENEME, CALIFORNIA

HISTORICAL RECORD

ENCLOSURE 1

Return to HISTORIAN
Bureau of Yards and Docks

CONFIDENTIAL

CERTIFIED ITINERARY OF SIXTH U. S. NAVAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

24 June 1942	Battalion Commissioned at Norfolk, Virginia.
24 June 1942	Departed Norfolk, Virginia.
26 June 1942	Arrived ABD, Gulfport, Mississippi.
6 July 1942	Departed ABD, Gulfport, Mississippi.
10 July 1942	Arrived NAS, Moffett Field, California.
20 July 1942	Departed NAS, Moffett Field, California.
20 July 1942	Arrived San Francisco boarded ships.
21 July 1942	Departed San Francisco, California.
5 August 1942	Arrived Pago Pago, American Samoa.
6 August 1942	Departed Pago Pago, American Samoa.
11 August 1942	Arrived Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides.
29 August 1942	First echelon (357 men) departed Espiritu Santo.
1 September 1942	First echelon arrived Guadalcanal.
18 September 1942	Second echelon (156 men) departed Espiritu Santo.
26 September 1942	Second echelon arrived Guadalcanal.
29 September 1942	Third echelon (155 men) departed Espiritu Santo.
2 October 1942	Third echelon arrived Guadalcanal.
5 October 1942	Fourth echelon (280 men) departed Espiritu Santo.
9 October 1942	Fourth echelon arrived Tulagi.
12 October 1942	Fifth echelon (50 men) departed Espiritu Santo.
2 November 1942	Fifth echelon arrived Guadalcanal.
11 October 1942	107 men departed Tulagi.
11 October 1942	107 men arrived Guadalcanal.
12 October 1942	75 men departed Tulagi.
12 October 1942	75 men arrived Guadalcanal.
17 October 1942	98 men departed Tulagi.
17 October 1942	98 men arrived Guadalcanal.

From 7 October to 1 December 1942 in various small echelons a total of 133 men departed Guadalcanal arrived Tulagi.

31 December 1942	133 men departed Tulagi.
31 December 1942	133 men arrived Guadalcanal.
5 January 1943	Entire battalion departed Guadalcanal.
12 January 1943	Entire battalion arrived Auckland, New Zealand.
9 March 1943	Departed Auckland, New Zealand.
12 March 1943	Arrived Noumea, New Caledonia.
5 September 1944	Departed Noumea, New Caledonia.
18 September 1944	Arrived Camp Parks, California.
22 January 1945	Departed Camp Parks, California.
23 January 1945	Arrived Port Hueneme, California.

CERTIFIED TO BE CORRECT J. H. Hulse

J. H. Hulse
Officer in Charge

HISTORICAL RECORD

Return to HISTORIAN
Bureau of Yards and Docks

31 Dec. 1942	133 men departed Tulagi.
31 Dec. 1942	133 men arrived Guadalcanal.
5 Jan. 1943	Entire battalion departed Guadalcanal.
12 Jan. 1943	Entire battalion arrived Auckland, New Zealand.
9 Mar. 1943	Departed Auckland, New Zealand.
12 Mar. 1943	Arrived Noumea, New Caledonia.
5 Sept 1944	Departed Noumea, New Caledonia.
18 Sept 1944	Arrived Camp Parks, California.
22 Jan. 1945	Departed Camp Parks, California.
23 Jan. 1945	Arrived Port Hueneme, California.

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NOTE - The above itinerary has been checked and authenticated by the Officer-in-Charge of the 6th Naval Construction Battalion.

17 September 1945.

SECOND TOUR OF DUTY

28 May 1945	First echelon, 19 officers and 753 men departed Hueneme.
29 May 1945	Second echelon, 2 officers and 2 men departed Hueneme.
4 June 1945	Third echelon 4 officers and 263 men departed Hueneme.
10 July 1945	Second echelon arrived Okinawa.
14 July 1945	First and third echelons arrived Okinawa.

To Facilitate Administrative Handling Classification changed from: CONFIDENT[IAL]
To: RESTRICTED
Irvin S. Rasmusson
Comdr. C...
Signature

DECLASSIFIED-DOD DIR. 5200.9, 27 Sept. 1958

Inactivated 15 Jan 1946
... ltr ... 24/N4-6(3) dtd 15 Oct 1946

... 17 Sept 45 at Okinawa

Journey to the Wars

MARK H. JORDAN
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ON A HOT morning in the first summer of World War II—July 10, 1942—the Sixth Naval Construction Battalion was welcomed to Moffett Field, California, where "Cub One," created by the Chief of Naval Operations only a few days before, was feverishly organizing under Comdr. James P. Compton. A completely prefabricated naval base unit, the Cub lacked only a construction force to carry out its mission, as yet secret, of creating and staffing the base which the Marines were about to wrest from the Japs at Guadalcanal. The Sixth was to be that construction force.

Little known except among other Seabees and the First Marine Division, the "Fighting Sixth" can justly claim a large share in establishing the "Can Do" reputation which is the Seabees' proudest boast. First of the Naval Construction Battalions to come under enemy fire, the Sixth was rushed straight from civil life into the desperate Solomons campaign in the dark days of mid-1942. Inadequately equipped, only half armed, given the merest gloss of training, the battalion, in the restrained words of General Vandegrift of the Marines, "approached and successfully performed an unusual variety of tasks" —an assignment which became a commonplace among Seabees after the Sixth had shown the way.

The tale of the Seabees at Guadalcanal began on August 25, 1942, less than three weeks after the landing of the Marines, when Lt. Comdr. Paul Blundon, commanding officer of the Sixth, flew in on a PBY from Espiritu Santo, where the battalion was staging. A week later Companies A and D followed on the attack cargo ships *Betelgeuse* and *Fomalhaut*. These pioneers were under fire in just one day less than four months from the time the first of them donned Navy blue, and they had spent most of that period in various forms of transport en route to the wars.

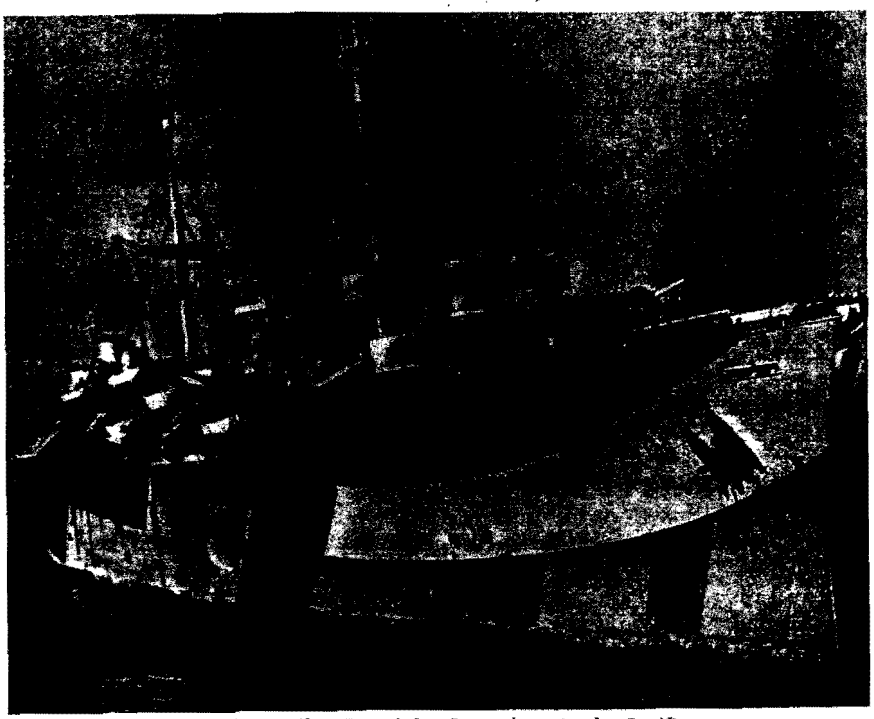
What ensued between then and January 5, 1943, when, battle-worn and malaria-ridden, the Sixth departed for a well-earned rest in New Zealand, is Seabee history. Commander Compton summed it all up when he wrote on January 3: "From the confusion and haste of Moffett Field, you arrived at this base an organized, determined unit. . . . With no equipment except your own bare hands and exceptional ability, plus Japanese scrap, you have performed wonders. Through daily bombings and nightly shellings, rain, mud, dust, and sickness, you have persevered and finished your job."

General Vandegrift said the same thing in different words: "I do not know how we would have gotten along without the Seabees."

As yet unwritten, however, is the page of history which tells the hectic beginnings of the battalion. The odyssey of its journey from Great Lakes to Guadalcanal reads like a manual of how *not* to organize a military unit.

TRAINING CAMPS

Bataan had gone down and Corregidor was falling when, in the first week of May 1942, the thousand skilled artisans who were to become the Sixth Seabees streamed into Great Lakes Naval Training Station. Camp Allen, the burgeoning Seabee training center at Norfolk, Virginia, already bulged with more recruits than it could hold; hence, the diversion of the Sixth to Great Lakes, normally devoted to training for the "seagoing" Navy. Three weeks later, squeezed out of Great Lakes to make way for even newer arrivals, the battalion (at this stage still a group of recruits without permanent officers or formal organization) found itself split into detachments of a hundred each and placed in "cold storage" for another three weeks at National Youth Administration camps scattered between Tampa, Florida, and Benton Harbor, Michigan.



Seabee-laden Ship Bound for Somewhere in the Pacific

Thus it was that when Commander Blundon checked in at Camp Allen early in June, fresh from his consulting engineering practice, he found himself in command of a paper organization. Sixteen other officers, all but two or three a scant week or less removed from civil life, and a handful of yeomen and storekeepers comprised his battalion. His thousand men were present only as a roster of names and trades, forwarded from Great Lakes. Perhaps it was as well. With the

officers undergoing a concentrated two-week schooling, the additional burden of company administration would doubtless have sent a few lieutenants to the hospital with nervous exhaustion.

Time fled on winged feet. Liberated from the NYA camps, the Sixth assembled on June 15 at Camp Bradford, Quonset-hut annex of Camp Allen. Immediately it faced trouble with the housing shortage again. On June 24, said the schedule, you must move to make way for the Tenth. That left nine days for the novice officers to whip an organization into shape. Into these nine days they somehow squeezed a little technical

Seabees Going Ashore with Duffle Bags and Small Arms

training on specialized advanced base equipment. To carry on military training, there were eight Springfield rifles for the thousand men.

On June 24 the Sixth—now a fully commissioned unit of the United States Navy—moved. Its destination was Gulfport, Mississippi, site of a not-yet-commissioned Advance Base Depot. There the Seabees were staggered to find a wilderness of half-finished barracks, muddy roads, no sidewalks, no parade ground, hardly enough plumbing fixtures or galley equipment.

While the living conditions were primitive enough, training facilities were completely lacking. The camp had as yet no training staff; in fact, the entire station force consisted of the Officer-in-Charge-of-Construction and his three officer assistants. The battalion was unequipped and unarmed, having surrendered its eight Springfields before leaving Norfolk. However, a convenient meadow became a drill field, and under the tutelage of Ensigns Dave Cavanaugh and Don Augusterfer, both recent graduates of the Engineer ROTC at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the men sweated and stumbled through hours of infantry drill. In first aid, as well, competent instruction was available from the battalion surgeons. Over the other training efforts, it is best to draw a cloak of charitable silence.

Fourth of July was a big day. Having learned by now to march in step, after a fashion, the Sixth staged a review, and hoisted Old Glory over the depot for the first time, on a mast which the Seabees themselves had erected. Then, it being Saturday, they went to town to celebrate the end of their first week in Gulfport.

In Washington there was no time for celebration. The news from the South Pacific was bad; on Guadalcanal the Japs were making progress with their construction. The invasion, scheduled for early 1943, must be advanced to August. Already at sea were the regiments of the First Marine Division. A hasty exchange of guarded dispatches and telephone calls ensued between Washington and Gulfport. The Sixth, having played a ten-day stand, took to the road again on July 6, bound for Moffett Field.

Overnight the Seabees found themselves, by comparison, veterans; having been together as a unit for three whole weeks, and having made two troop movements in that time totaling some 4,000 miles, they had begun to evolve perforce the rudiments of an organization. By contrast, the hastily-assembling Cub, for which the last draft of men would not arrive until the eve of embarkation, was going through the throes which the Sixth had suffered at Camp Bradford.

However, a mass of tangled paper work—pay accounts and service records—still remained to be set in order; even more pressing, not a man in the battalion had yet acquired a "full bag" of clothing or a single item of field equipment. Most urgent of all was the question of construction tools, equipment, and material. Off went Commander Blundon to Port Hueneme, 50 miles north of Los Angeles. There he found the newly-created Advanced Base Depot, West Coast counterpart of Gulfport, frantically collecting trucks, bulldozers, generators, lumber, tools, all the myriad items necessary to put two thousand Seabee hands to good use at their as-yet-unrevealed destination. All, that is, with one exception.

"A portable sawmill?" said the officer in charge of the depot, when Blundon objected to its omission. "You'll have no use for a sawmill. We know where you're going—there's no usable timber there. Now, about that sheepsfoot roller. . . ."

At the commander's insistence, a supply of fatigue uniforms and heavy field shoes for the Sixth was hastily dispatched by express, but a few miles short of its destination the car was shunted onto a siding, and there it stood when the battalion sailed.

At Moffett Field, meanwhile, the frenzy of preparation reached fever pitch. Field equipment—packs, helmets, gas masks—arrived and was dealt out. On the 16th a supply of arms appeared—five hundred rifles for a thousand men! Ensign Cavanaugh and Storekeeper Al Landes were dispatched to San Francisco with the battalion's meager welfare fund, and bought, begged, or stole a whole truckload of recreational equipment, ranging from fencing masks to an upright piano. Ensign Hashagen, the supply officer, located a store of clothing at the Oakland supply depot and, with his storekeeper force and the energetic Ensign Augusterfer, stayed up the entire night before embarkation to finish the job of issuing it.

EMBARKATION

For the Sixth, it was another ten-day stand. On July 21, from the decks of the transports *Wharton* and *President Polk*, the Seabees watched the Golden Gate fade astern as they headed south and west for parts unknown.

They had been in uniform for periods ranging from six weeks to two and one-half months, and had been together as an organization for thirty-six days. Their mission was construction; but, as a unit, they had

built nothing. One of every two of them was armed. He had had his rifle for four days, and he had never fired one in his life.

Thus the Sixth Battalion went to war.

Three weeks later, when the Seabees and Cubs lined the rails to stare at the green shores of Espiritu Santo,* the South Pacific war had entered a new phase. Four days before, on August 7, the Marines had stormed ashore at Tulagi and Guadalcanal. The Savo Island naval defeat, rumors of which were already flying through the convoy, had cost the South Pacific Force four cruisers and left the control of the Solomons a wide-open question.

Those weeks had been eventful ones for the Sixth Seabees, too. On the crowded decks of the transports, cluttered with gun mounts, boats, and cargo, they had striven with makeshift facilities to fill the huge voids in their training which the hectic weeks in the United States had left unfilled. Under the uncertain tutelage of the few World War I veterans and ex-National Guardsmen among them, they had acquired a limited familiarity with their Springfields, swapping them around at drill; they had even fired five rounds each over the side under careful supervision.

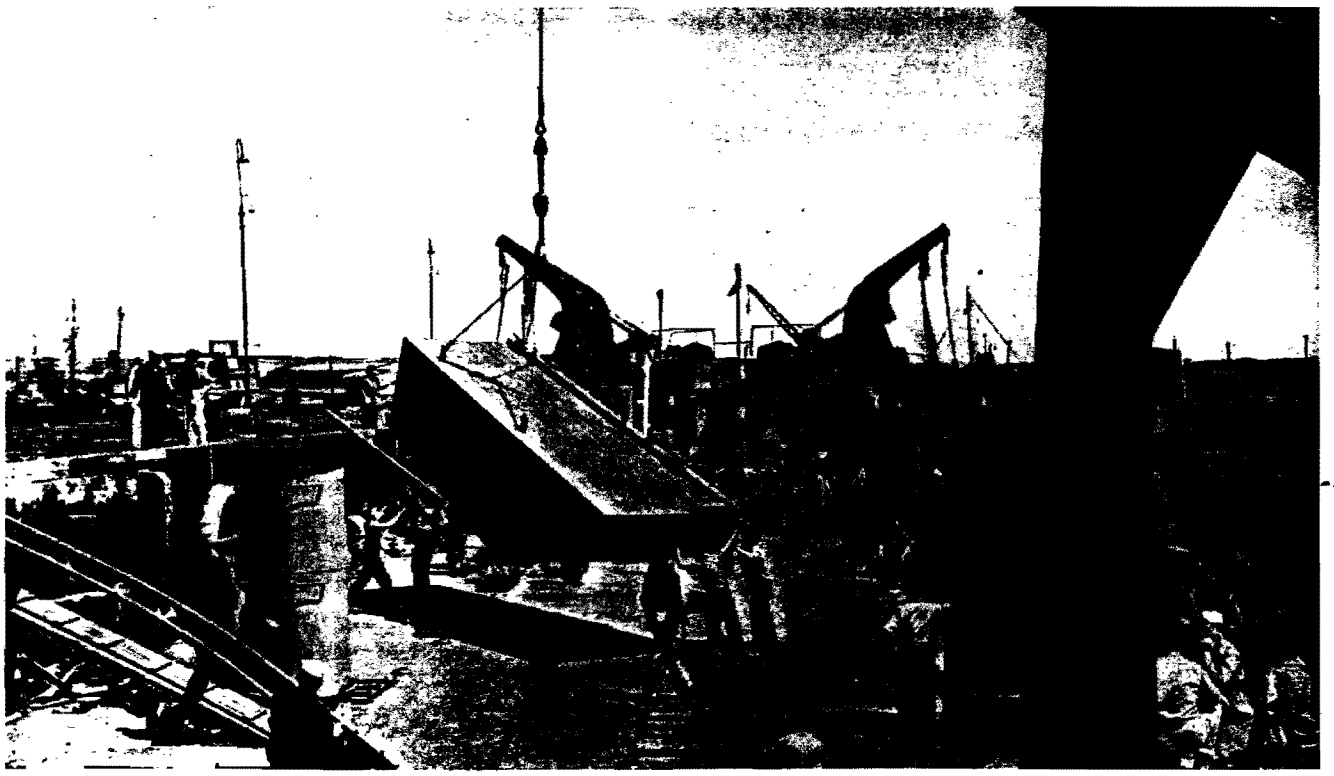
They were eventful weeks particularly for Commander Blundon and Commander Compton, who found themselves trying to plan for all sorts of eventualities with the most meager information. Opening of the sealed orders, duly accomplished two days out of San Francisco, had dispelled the rumors running riot through the convoy and in their stead came a host of urgent questions for the planners to answer. What would we find ashore? The only "intelligence" available to us, the Hydrographic charts and the Coast Pilot, gave almost no answers to that one; they were intended to serve the seagoing, not the "shoreside" Navy. How could we unload the ships, crammed hatch full with a heterogeneous cargo and obviously intended to be discharged alongside a pier well equipped with cranes? (This was not the fault of the stevedores who did the stowing—telling them to "combat-load" the convoy would have tipped the Navy's hand.) On the *Wharton*, Lieut. Al Pratt, Ensign Augusterfer, and Chief Shipfitter Raleigh Jennings worked on designs for a raft to be based on metal lifeboats, for use in barging cranes and bulldozers ashore. There were no landing craft or pontoon barges in the convoy!

An overnight stop at Pago Pago, to add the Seventh Seabees to the convoy, only increased the woes of the command. Now there were two battalions, but construction equipment for only one. Not even the wisdom of a Solomon could accomplish a division which would keep both Seabee skippers happy. So the planners studied and restudied, allocated and reallocated, while the dispatches from the high command daily reflected the changing face of war. At one time they were working simultaneously on three different plans: go to Auckland and re-stow the cargo ships; go to Noumea and reload; go direct to Guadalcanal. In the end they did none of these.

LIFE AT ESPIRITU SANTO

A year hence Espiritu Santo—"Button"—would be a major South Pacific bastion. On August 11, 1942, it boasted its rough-hewn airstrip, the standard lush tropical growth, the inevitable coconut plantation, an excellent sheltered anchorage, and a coral beach with a tiny log-crib-and-sandbag pier—"Painter's Dock"—utterly unsuitable for all but the smallest boats. Roads consisted of a few plantation trails; water was present in a brackish stream here and there, and in an occasional spring. At this most advanced of the embryonic bases supporting the Solomons campaign, Allied military might was represented by a couple of

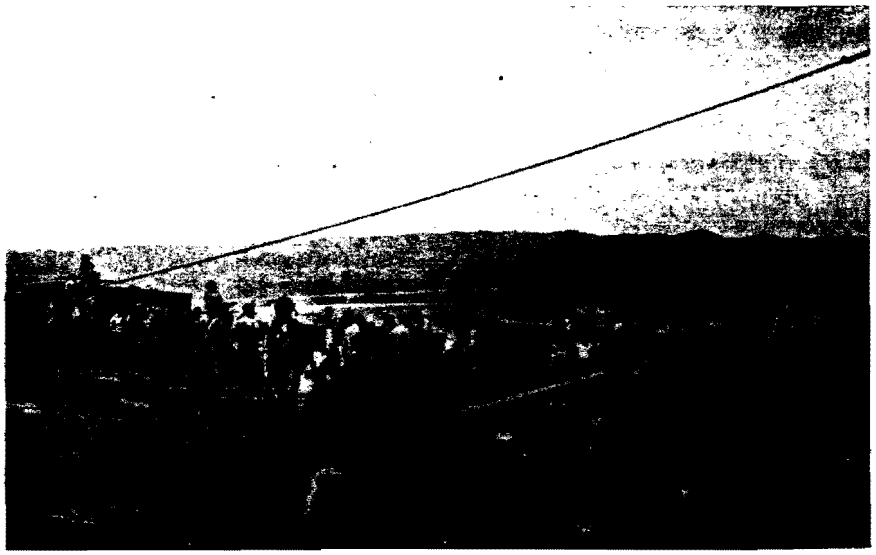
*See "Base Button at Espiritu Santo" by Comdr. Joseph H. Barker, Jr., in THE MILITARY ENGINEER for December 1948.



Unloading and Salvage Operations after Dropping Anchor at Advance Base

companies of Army infantry, a Marine fighter squadron, a dozen B-17's, and the builders of the crude airfield, a handful of Seabees from the First Battalion. This was Espiritu Santo in August of 1942.

Unloading commenced at a whirlwind pace. The *Wharton*, lightly laden, was in a hurry to be on her way. A division of combat transports (the familiar *Presidents*), just back from Guadalcanal, furnished an ample number of boats for the task. In twenty-eight hours all the *Wharton's* cargo was ashore, jamming Painter's Dock and the adjacent beach and overwhelming the ship's recent passengers.



Beach Scene of Amphibious Landing at Guadalcanal

With the other ships it was a different story. The burden of the departed transport had consisted of boxes and crates which could be handled by the men. From the cargo ships, *Santa Ana* and *Delbrasil*, there were still to come all the heavy lifts—many of them stowed on top of parts to the cranes which should have preceded them ashore. As the Sixth transferred from the *Polk* to the land, one or two hundred men a day, life on Santo became a nightmare. Men labored around the clock unloading boats on the beach, floundering knee deep in the surf on coral which in a week cut to tatters their salt-water-soaked dress shoes (for want of the field boots left on the siding at Sunnyvale!). To augment the pitiful pier facilities, two shifts under Lieut. Ben Marcus pushed out into the bay with a second flimsy jetty of sandbags and logs, which became known as "Marcus Dock." Slowly the precious heavy equipment began to trickle ashore, most of it requiring laborious assembly by hand before it could be used.

There was the crawler crane which arrived on the beach in three parts — cab, crawlers, and boom — of which the first two each weighed well over 10 tons. At first they were stumped. Then Chief Boatswain's Mate Arthur Coyle, a Texas oilfield rigger, found the solution. With a couple of heavy jacks the cab was painfully raised on a timber crib. This done, a trench was dug by hand under the crib, of sufficient dimensions to permit the crawler to be towed into it for placing under the cab. The cab was then jacked down onto the "cat," and all that remained was the relatively simple job of wrestling the boom into place.

Part of the nightmare was the daily grist of impossible tasks which somehow had to be solved. Part of the nightmare was the fare during the first ten days ashore. The menu was Spam and crackers and coffee, over and over again, until finally, in sheer desperation, the cooks burrowed into the side of a little knoll by their tent galley, and out of black magic and gasoline drums, built a bake oven which turned out sweet rolls. Part of the nightmare was the weird working hours. With no facilities either for carrying food to the stevedores at the beach or for transporting the men back to camp, shifts and meals had somehow to be geared together. They were, by a schedule whose only virtue was that it worked. The unloading crews went on a three-shift basis, six hours on and twelve off. The galley served meals to all comers four times a day, at 6 a.m., 12 noon, 6 pm., and midnight. The constantly changing hours of this continuous shift system were a source of irritation to the men; the cooks got practically no sleep; but the cargo kept rolling, and that was what counted.

The most elementary needs of existence presented fantastic problems. One was fresh water. The only acceptable source was miles away, over "roads" on which a 5-mile trip consumed forty-five minutes in dry weather. Stills consumed precious fuel, and their capacity, when divided among the island's American population, amounted to little more than a gallon per man daily. The distilled supply being strictly reserved for drinking and cooking, the cleanliness of the troops varied with the supply of rainwater which could be collected from tent roofs. To scrub clothes or bathe, one had a choice between the salt bay or a 2-mile hike to the brackish Sarakata River.

TRANSFER TO GUADALCANAL

From this madhouse existence, transfer to Guadalcanal came to the Sixth almost as a release. The embarkation of the first contingent was in thorough keeping with the insane-asylum atmosphere which pervaded life on Espiritu.

"Transfer four hundred men to Cactus. Two hundred each on *Fuller* and *Betelgeuse*. Construction equipment to follow on *Fomalhaut*" read the dispatch from ComAmphibForSoPac on August 26.

The assignment fell to Companies A and D. Preparation for departure seemed a simple enough task. Information which floated down to the battalion through some vague channel indicated that the men should take only such personal belongings as could be carried in their packs, leaving their heavy gear—seabags and hammocks—to follow with a later echelon. Squad tents, cots, galley equipment, and crated tools, a few truckloads in all, completed the organizational baggage.

The *Betelgeuse* made her appearance on Thursday, the 27th, and promptly sent word that she was sailing on Saturday at 4:45 p.m. and would take passengers on board any time between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. All was serene until Saturday morning, when, at the daily 8 a.m. Cub One conference, two bombshells were exploded simultaneously on the Sixth. First, the arrival

of the *Fuller* had been delayed, and now both companies were to go in the *Betelgeuse*. Second (and here was the real rub) each man was to take, not merely his pack, but all his possessions.

With this reversal of plans, the Sixth was really in trouble. The only vehicle route between the camp of the battalion and the beach was a rough track through the coconut grove. In its meanderings it led up a steep grade which, slimy with mud from the previous night's heavy rain, was for the time being impassable. Furthermore, truck transport was extremely scarce. Even after the hot tropic sun had dried the road sufficiently for cars to ascend the hill, it still would be impossible to muster more than sufficient trucks to carry the tools and camp equipment. To move the bags and hammocks — clumsy bundles weighing, when lashed together in traditional seagoing fashion, upwards of a hundred pounds or more—there was only one answer: carry them by hand.

Slowly, reluctantly, the Seabees started the weary trek to the beach, under their awkward burdens. On Marcus Dock the pile of bags grew with maddening slowness. Around noon the first truck, slithering dangerously in the mud, negotiated the slippery hill to the camp and took on a load of tents and cookstoves.

At 2:15, just as the last load reached the beach, a messenger came running to Marcus Dock from the signal tower, waving a flimsy dispatch:

"We are sailing at 4:45 whether or not passengers are on board."

An hour later, still awaiting the return of the first boat dispatched to the *Betelgeuse*, the executive of the Sixth realized that he had badly underestimated the length of time needed to unload a boat alongside the cargo ship. Then help appeared from an unexpected quarter; the beachmaster, "refugee" skipper from a recently-lost destroyer, deserted his usual post at Painter's Dock and came striding down the beach to help get the boats loaded. Under his vigorous direction the stack of seabags melted. Only a few remained when, at 4:30, spray blossomed at the hawsepipe of the *Betelgeuse*, evidence that the anchor detail was hosing down the chain in preparation for weighing anchor. Lieutenants Stamp and Pratt and the few men left scrambled into the waiting boat. It was rounding under the stern of the ship when a fresh plume of spray broke from the hawsepipe. A moment later the solid dark blue of the jack at the bow came fluttering down. The ship was under way.

Under way for Guadalcanal were Companies A and D, Sixth Seabees, or at least most of them. The last boatload, arriving alongside at the dot of 4:45, had been waved away from the gangway as the anchor broke ground—and in it, with one exception, were all the officers of both companies, who had been held on shore to the last minute to push the loading of the boats. A hasty census on board the ship revealed that nearly half the battalion was temporarily, and quite unexpectedly, under the command of Warrant Carpenter Walton Gray.

The stragglers lost no time in making their way out to the *Fomalhaut*, likewise bound for Cactus with the meager outfit of heavy equipment allotted to the Sixth Battalion and were welcomed aboard as seagoing hitchhikers.

All's well that ends well. Three days later, September 1, 1942, the *Betelgeuse* Seabees landed at Guadalcanal, welcomed to the beach by a bombing raid. In the resultant confusion much of their camp gear disappeared, including the precious field ranges. Next morning, having spent the night huddled under ponchos in a tropical downpour, without pausing to set up their own camp, the Sixth took over construction of Henderson Field from the Marine combat engineers, and went to work.

"Can Do" had arrived at Cactus.

Seabees of the 6th Naval Construction Battalion during Ceremony of Awards, Guadalcanal

THE ARMED SERVICES

Mobile Materials Laboratory

The soils, concrete, and bituminous test sets, developed by the Corps of Engineers during World War II were a valuable aid in controlling design and construction projects. These sets, however, were not always available. Many instances were reported where the sets were either plundered in depots, received with broken instruments, or lost in transit. In order to minimize these experiences, and to insure adequate design and test facilities, the development of a mobile materials laboratory has been initiated. This laboratory will combine and expand the equipment now included in these sets. The laboratory is designed to support all military construction and to make possible the prompt evaluation of existing airfields and other paved surfaces. It will contain facilities for testing materials necessary for the construction of airfields designed to support single-wheel loads of 60,000 pounds.

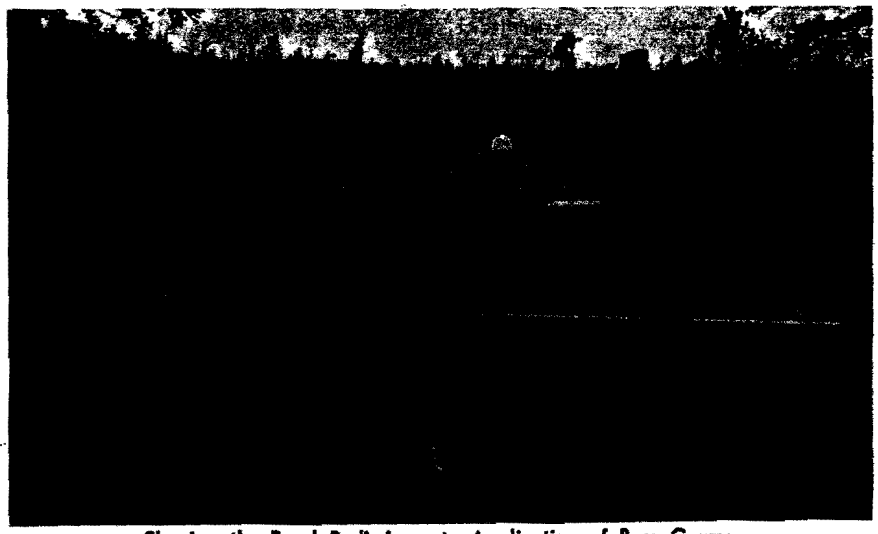
The laboratory equipment will be housed in a special-purpose van-type trailer. It will be air conditioned and insulated to permit operations in temperatures from —20 degrees to 125 degrees Fahrenheit. A special multi-purpose press for conducting strength tests on soils, flexural tests on concrete, and flow tests on asphalts is another unique feature. A self-contained "suit-case" or pack type soil reconnaissance kit will be included as a separate item. The kit will weigh less than 50 pounds and will contain essential equipment to determine grain size, moisture, and Atteberg limits of soils for advance planning.

Activities of the 329 Engineer Combat Group

Instead of talking about the problems of road-building, the 329 Engineer Combat Group, during its field training period last year actually went to work with instruments and tools at Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, to perform the needed surveying, excavating, drainage, cutting, filling, and surfacing operations that go into production of any major road project.

Under Col. James A. Cunningham, Group Commander, officers and men alike turned to with picks, shovels, bars, hammers, axes, and brushhooks. They removed the jungle, scraped the tops off the hills, filled in the holes and soft spots, and installed culverts and drainage ditches. Out of some 300 enamel, 16-inch powder magaine canisters no longer useful, they produced serviceable metal culvert drains in lieu of purchasing steel or concrete piping by cutting out the bottoms of the cans and chamfering the edges to fit one into another for continuous pipe.

The 4 miles of broad gravel highway thus produced will appear on maps of Camp Edwards henceforth as Maston Road. Originally it was a narrow trail built by men of the Civilian Conservation Corps more than a decade ago. It could be negotiated with difficulty only by jeep. There were deep ruts and holes, sharp 90-degree turns and steep grades. Now it is a road over which heavy army vehicles can travel. It has opened some 20,000 acres of new territory for army maneuverability in case of fire. In fact, it was completed in time to be of service to fire-fighters battling the blaze that broke out at the camp this year.



Shaping the Road Preliminary to Application of Base Course

The factor most responsible for providing such a productive program was the availability of heavy road-building machinery not usually turned over to Reserve units for training. There were three giant bulldozers, three large motor patrols, half a dozen dump trucks, two mobile air compressors, and a Quickway crane with a ½-yard clam-shell bucket. The equipment was in "mothballs" and ready for overseas shipment when the 329th took it, broke the seals and put it to use for a brief period.

Operations Order Number 1 issued by Colonel Cunningham through Maj. John Morabito, Group Operations and Training Officer, outlined areas of responsibility for the two Engineer Combat Battalions involved—the 481st and 483d. Assisting the 329th Group in drawing up plans for summer training was Capt. George P. Carr, Winthrop, Engineer Reserve Unit Instructor.

Altogether, 17,000 cubic yards of gravel were moved, three 30-foot culverts were installed, two existing culverts were strengthened and cleared, and railings were installed at all culverts. The road was widened to an average of 24 feet with all sharp turns widened and banked and the curvatures were reduced by as much as 50 per cent. Grades were cut down an average of 25 per cent and the drainage improved by installing new culverts and leads thereto.

The purpose of the road project was two-fold: to afford practical training in the use and handling of standard engineer heavy equipment, and to build a facility of some value to Camp Edwards. The different phases of the job were carried out by arranging the personnel, regardless of rank, in groups that rotated from one occupation to another. Thus many men had an opportunity to take part in surveying, brush clearance, equipment operation and maintenance, earth moving, surface grading, gravel pit operation, surface stone removal, culvert construction, supply, and transportation.

The value of the work accomplished, based on the same job being done by a civilian contractor was estimated to be about $44,000. With normal maintenance the road should be good for many years.

Seabee Marine Training

Seabee Reserves once again are undergoing active training duty at Marine Corps Training Camps. Four hundred eighty men are scheduled to

U. S. Naval Construction Battalion 6

24 Jun 42 — U. S. Naval Construction Battalion 6 was commissioned at Norfolk, Virginia. Lieutenant Commander Joseph L. Blundon, CEC-V(S), USNR, was the Officer in Charge.

The battalion boarded a train the same day and departed for the Advance Base Depot at Gulfport, Mississippi.

26 Jun 42 — The battalion arrived at Gulfport, Mississippi. They were the first battalion to occupy the camp.

6 Jul 42 — The 6th Battalion boarded trains for a move to Moffett Field, California.

10 Jul 42 — The battalion arrived at Moffett Field. While they were at Moffett Field they were designated as the construction unit for Cub One, a type of overseas base unit.

20 Jul 42 — The battalion departed Moffett Field by train for San Francisco, California. They arrived in San Francisco the same day and boarded the transport ships Wharton and President Polk.

21 Jul 42 — The battalion departed San Francisco in a convoy.

5 Aug 42 — The convoy dropped anchor in the harbor of Pago Pago, American Samoa. A 24-hour stop was made to pick up U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 7.

6 Aug 42 — The convoy departed Pago Pago for Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides.

11 Aug 42	The convoy arrived at Espiritu Santo. The officers and men of the battalion on the Wharton were transferred to the President Polk and the whole battalion waited for a week in Segond Canal before going ashore.
17 Aug 42	A group of 300 men of the 6th Battalion went ashore at Espiritu Santo and were followed by the rest of the battalion in the next few days.
	At Espiritu Santo the men of the battalion constructed a pier of sand bags reinforced by coconut logs, unloaded ships, and constructed warehouses and Quonset huts that were used as hospitals.
29 Aug - 12 Oct 42	The battalion departed Espiritu Santo in five echelons for Gualacanal, Solomon Islands.
1 Sep - 2 Nov 42	The battalion arrived at Gualacanal.
	At Guadacanal the Seabees of the 6th Battalion lengthen and maintained Henderson Field, constructed piers, bridges, tunnels, roads, a Patrol Torpedo Boat Base, a tank farm, and a power plant which they also operated.
7 Oct - 31 Dec 42	While the main body of the battalion was employed at Guadacanal, detachments were sent to Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, and Halavo. The work of these detachments included the construction of a patrol torpedo base, the installation and maintenance of telephone lines to several islands and ships, topographic surveys of several islands, and construction of a radio transformer and receiving station.

5 Jan 43	U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 6 was relieved by U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 26. The entire battalion departed for Auckland, New Zealand, aboard the USS Hunter Liggett.
12 Jan 43	The battalion arrived at Auckland, New Zealand. While at Auckland the battalion performed maintenance work at the main camp at Victoria Park and at a U.S. Navy Mobile Hospital.
9 Mar 43	The battalion departed New Zealand aboard the USS Pinkney for Noumea, New Caledonia.
12 Mar 43	The battalion arrived at Noumea and once on shore the men established temporary camp facilities. They also worked on construction and alterations of warehouses and U.S. Navy Mobile Hospitals 5 and 7. They operated a blacksmith and welding shop, unloaded ships, established a material dump, and provided personnel for base water, telephone, and power systems.
9 Nov 43	Lieutenant Commander Mark H. Jordan relieved Commander Joseph L. Blundon as Officer in Charge of the battalion.
5 Sep 44	The 6th Battalion departed Noumea aboard the USS General Hugh L. Scott for Camp Parks, California.
18 Sep 44	The battalion arrived in San Francisco, California, and was transported by buses to Camp Parks. At Camp Parks the men were given leave and the battalion was reformed.
28 Nov 44	Lieutenant Commander John H. Hulse relieved Lieutenant Commander Mark H. Jordan as Officer in Charge of the battalion.

22 Jan 45	The battalion departed for the U.S. Naval Advance Base at Port Hueneme, California.
23 Jan 45	The battalion arrived at Port Hueneme. While at Port Hueneme the battalion was given additional military and construction training.
28 May - 4 Jun 45	The battalion departed Port Hueneme in three echelons for Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands.
10 Jul - 14 Jul 45	The battalion arrived at Okinawa.
	At Okinawa the 6th Battalion built their camp and then joined the men of 10 other battalions to construct buildings and facilities for a large Naval Supply Depot which eventually covered about 10 square miles. The principal projects assigned to the 6th Battalion were the construction of two finger piers, the grading of the adjacent docking area, construction and grading projects, and a complete Quonset hut installation for Naval Supply Depot personnel.
14 Aug 45	V-J Day (Okinawa time).
7 Sep 45	The emergency over, the first draft of battalion personnel received their orders to return to the States.
13 Sep 45	U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 6 was inactivated at Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands.

6th Naval Construction Battalion

Chronology

24 Jun 1942	U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 6 was activated at Norfolk, Virginia. Lieutenant Commander Joseph L. Blundon, CEC-V (S), USNR, was the Officer in Charge. NCB 6 departed the same day for the Advance Base Depot at Gulfport, Mississippi.
26 Jun 1942	NCB 6 arrived at Gulfport, MS. They were the first battalion to occupy the camp, which was still under construction.
06 Jul 1942	NCB 6 boarded trains for a move to Moffett Field, CA.
10 Jul 1942	NCB 6 arrived at Moffett Field. While they were at Moffett Field they were designated as the construction unit for Cub One, a type of overseas base unit.
20 Jul 1942	NCB 6 departed Moffett Field by train for San Francisco on the same day boarded the transport ships Wharton and President Polk.
21 Jul 1942	The battalion sailed from San Francisco in a convoy.
05 Aug 1942	The convoy dropped anchor in the harbor of Pago Pago, American Samoa. A 24-hour stop was made to pick up U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 7.
06 Aug 1942	They convoy departed from Pago Pago for Espiritu Santo in the New Herbides.
11 Aug 1942	The convoy arrived at Espiritu Santo. The officers and men of the battalion on the Wharton were transferred to the President Polk and the whole battalion waited for a week in Segond Canal before going ashore.
17 Aug 1942	A group of 300 men of the 6th Battalion went ashore at Espiritu Santo and were followed by the rest of the battalion in the next few days. At Espiritu Santo the men constructed a pier of sand bags reinforced by coconut logs, unloaded ships, and constructed warehouses and Quonset huts that were used as hospitals.
29 Aug–12 Oct 1942	During these 3 months the battalion departed from Espiritu Santo in five echelons for the Gaudalcanal, Solomon Islands.
01 Sep-02 Nov 1942	The battalion arrived and regrouped at Guadalcanal. At Guadalcanal the Seabees of NCB 6 lengthened and maintained Henderson Field, constructed piers, bridges, tunnels, roads, a Patrol Torpedo Boat Base, a tank farm, and a power plant, which they also operated. Most of the work was accomplished under enemy fire: strafing and bombardment from Japanese aircraft and shelling from the Japanese fleet.

07 Oct-31 Dec 1942	While the main body of the battalion was employed at Guadalcanal, detachments were sent to Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, and Halavo. The work of these detachments included the construction of a patrol torpedo base, the installation and maintenance of telephone lines to several islands and ships, topographic surveys of several islands, and construction of a radio transformer and receiving station.
05 Jan 1943	NCB 6 was relieved by NCB 26. The entire battalion departed for Auckland, New Zealand, aboard the U.S.S. Hunter Liggett.
12 Jan 1943	NCB 6 arrived at Auckland, New Zealand. While at Auckland the battalion preformed maintenance works at the main camp at Victoria Park and at a U.S. Navy Mobile Hospital.
09 Mar 1943	The battalion departed New Zealand aboard the USS Pinkney for Noumea, New Calendonia.
12 Mar 1943	The battalion arrived at Noumea and once on shore the men established temporary camp facilities. They also worked on construction and alterations of warehouses and U.S. Navy Mobile Hospitals 5 and 7. They operated a blacksmith and welding shop, unloaded ships, established a material dump, and provided personnel for base water, telephone, and power systems.
05 Sep 1944	NCB 6 departed Noumea aboard the USS General Hugh L. Scott for Camp Parks, California.
18 Sep 1944	NCB 6 arrived in San Francisco, CA and was transported by buses to Camp Parks. At Camp Parks the men were given leave and the battalion was reformed.
22 Jan 1945	The battalion departed for the U.S. Naval Advance Base Depot at Port Hueneme, CA.
23 Jan 1945	The battalion arrived at Port Hueneme, While at Port Hueneme the battalion was given additional military training and construction training.
28 May-04 Jun 1945	The battalion departed from Port Hueneme in three echelons for Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands.
10 Jul-14 Jul 1945	NCB 6 arrived at Okinawa in echelons.
14 Jul-13 Sep 1945	At Okinawa NCB 6 built its camp and then joined the men of 10 other battalions to construct buildings and facilities for a large Naval Supply Depot which eventually covered about 10 square miles. The principal projects assigned to NCB 6 were the construction of two finger piers, the grading of the adjacent docking area, construction and grading projects, and a complete Quonset hut installation for Naval Supply Depot personnel.
14 Aug 1945	V-J Day (Okinawa time).
07 Sep 1945	The emergency over, the first draft of battalion personnel received their orders to return to the States.
13 Sep 1945	U.S. Naval Construction Battalion 6 was inactivated at Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands.

Officers in Charge

Commander Joseph L. Blundon, CEC, USN	14 Jun 1942 – 09 Nov 1943
Lieutenant Commander Mark H. Jordan, CEC, USN	09 Nov 1943 – 28 Nov 1944
Lieutenant Commander John H. Hulse, CEC, USNR	28 Nov 1944 – 10 Sep 1945
Lieutenant Leroy D. Parker, CEC, USNR	10 Sep 1945 – 13 Sep 1945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SEABEES


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