

# 53<sup>rd</sup> Naval Construction Battalion

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*Historical  
Information*



*“Construimus, Batuimus”  
“We Build, We Fight”*



53rd C.B.

HQTCO - Norfolk - Davisville  
ABD - Davisville  
Ready Date - 24 Feb'43  
Left ABD - 12 Feb'43 to New River  
Location - Marine Corps - Bougainville Guadalcanal Guam

LOG

- 12-20-42 - 53rd CB transferred to ABD Davisville on 28 Dec'42. (TWX 201455 12-32 from Lt. Comdr. Fay)  
1-16-43 - 53rd CB divided into 2 sections at Davisville.  
1-20-43 - Orders requested transferring portion of 53rd CB to 120th CB for overseas hookup at Dowager.  
1-21-43 - Norfolk building up 2 companies  $\frac{1}{2}$  hdqtrs. to bring 53rd to full strength - available 12 Feb. (This is called 2nd Echelon)  
2- 3-43 - To transfer 2nd Section as requested by Port Dir. NYK - assigned Casablanca.  
2- 7-43 - Departed for embarkation.  
2-12-43 - 1 Company plus  $\frac{1}{4}$  hdqtrs for 1st Sect. plus staff officers transferred to Hudnot Point FMF New River.  
2-12-43 - 1 Company plus  $\frac{1}{4}$  hdqtrs from 1st Sect. transferred to FMF San Diego.  
2-12-43 - 2nd Echelon ( $\frac{1}{2}$  Hdqtrs - 2 Co.) transferred to Marines at Hudnot Pt. FMF New River.  
2- 8-43 - To be attached to 1st Marines relieving the 18th CB which will become Co. "C" when 53rd arrives San Diego early in March.  
2-12-43 - 53rd CB, 2nd Echelon, ordered transferred to Norfolk to Hudnot Pt., New River.

53rd C.B.

- 2-13-43 - 10 officers and 257 men departed from Davisville to New River.  
2-13-43 - 4 officers and 269 men departed from Davisville to San Diego.  
2-18-43 - 442 misc. ratings transferred from New River.  
3-12-43 - Left training center, Fleet Marine Force, San Diego, Calif. for White Poppy.  
4-27-43 - 53rd CB, which was formerly designated "53rd C.B." has been at EPIC since 25 Mar'43 is now called Naval Construction Battalion First Marine Amphibious Corps. (Ltr from OinC (C))  
5-11-43 - 53rd CB (Assigned 1st Marine Amph. Corps) is located at Noumea. (ComNavBases SoPac area to ComSoPac Sec. ltr dtd 5-11-43)  
10-26-43 - 1 Oct'43 report of 53rd CB - expected to move to Bevy first week in Oct.  
12-29-43 - 1 Nov'43 report - Secret P16 - 5395 - 7th Oct. - Moved from Noumea to Guadalcanal then to Bougainville on 1 Nov'43 with 7 officers and 244 men. Detachment from Co. "B" sent to Vella LaVella for sawmill work; left Guadalcanal 18 Oct'43. On 19 Oct'43, 2 officers and 73 men of Co. "B" left for Bougainville landing operation. Balance of battalion scheduled to move on at a later date.  
1-29-44 - 1 Dec'43 report of 53rd CB - operating at Bougainville.  
2-17-44 - 1 Jan'44 report of 53rd CB - Distribution of 53rd CB for Dec'43 - 23 officers and 673 men at Bougainville, 1 officer and 72 men at Vella LaVella, 2 officers and 45 men at Guadalcanal. It is anticipated that the batt will be detached from the 16th Reg. about 15 Jan'44 and be returned to Guadalcanal for reassignment to 1st Mar. Amph. Corps.  
3- 7-44 - 1 Feb'44 report of 53rd CB - operations on Bougainville were secured 17 Jan'44 and returned to Guadalcanal 23 Jan'44. The detachment at Vella LaVella returned

53rd C.B.

- to Guadalcanal 3 Jan'44. 44 replacements were received 17 Jan'44. Detached from 16th Reg. 30 Jan'44 and reassigned to 1st Mar. Amph. Corps. ~~affix~~
- 3-25-44 - 1 Mar'44 report of 53rd CB - operating at Guadalcanal.
- 5-27-44 - 1 Apr'44 report of 53rd CB - On 18 Mar'44, 4 officers and 236 men were detached and transferred to 4th MarReg to organize a Seabee Co. On 1 Apr'44, the 53rd CB was detached from 1st MAC and assigned to CNB Guadalcanal.
- 5-27-44 - The Seabee Co. with 4th MarReg. inactivated on 14 Apr'44. (Naval Const. Co. 4th MarReg. 1st MAC ltr to Supers dtd 19 Apr'44 from Lt. Kean)
- 6-19-44 - 1 May'44 report of 53rd CB - operating at Guadalcanal.
- 8-28-44 - 1 Jun'44 report of 53rd CB - Majority of batt was on board ship for transportation during June.
- 9-19-44 - Jun & Jul report of 53rd CB - operating at Guam. On 5 May'44 this batt was attached to the 1st Marine Provisional Brig. of the 3rd Amph Corps for duty on the FORAGER movement. The administrative control remained with the Navy Base, Guadalcanal. Participated in the invasion of Guam attached to the 1st Prov. Mar. Brig. in initial landing. Under fire from 21 Jul'44 until southern part of Guam was secured.
- 10-27-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of 53rd CB - On 13 Aug'44, the batt was detached from the III Amph. Corps and assigned to the 5th Brig. and 27th Reg.
- 10-30-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of 53rd CB - no info on location except batt is operating in region of Agana. <sup>Guam</sup> Report. Report endorsed by 27th Reg.
- 11-11-44 - The 53rd CB is located at Guam. (Is. Com. Secret Airmailgram to CNO 011201 NCR 14731 dtd 6 Nov'44).
- 12- 1-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of 53rd CB - operating at Guam. Report endorsed by 27th Regiment.
- 1-3-45 - 1 Dec'44 report of 53rd CB - located at Guam. Report endorsed by 27th Regiment.

Location - Guam

53rd C.B.

- 1-30-45 - The 53rd CB is located North East of Agat, on Guam, (5th Brg. War Diary 1 Dec thru 31 Dec'44).
- 2- 2-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of the 53rd CB - located on Guam. Report endorsed by 27th Reg.
- 2-28-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of the 53rd CB - located on Guam. Report endorsed by 27th Reg.
- 4- 3-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of the 53rd CB - no info on location.
- 4-10-45 -- The 53rd CB is located NE of Agat (Guam) (5th Brg. War Diary 1 Feb to 28 Feb'45).
- 4-11-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of the 53rd CB - located on Guam. 31 men trfd from the 33rd CB joined this batt on 17 Mar'45.
- 4-16-45 - The 53rd CB is located E of Agat on Guam and is attached to the 27th Reg. (5th Brg War Diary of 1 Apr'45)
- 4-15-45 - 1 May'45 report of the 53rd CB - located at Guam. 196 men were ret'd to States for rehab leave and reassignment in Apr'45. 117 men were recd in Apr from Davisville via 5th Brg. Report routed via 27th Reg and 5th Brg.
- 6-28-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of the 53rd CB - located at Guam. Report routed via 27th Reg & 5th Brig.
- 7-19-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of the 53rd CB - located at Guam. Report via 27th Reg and 5th Brg. 48 replacements recd on 2 July.
- 8-21-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of the 53rd CB - located at Guam. Report via 27th Reg and 5th Brg.
- 9-25-45 - 1 Sept'45 report of 53rd CB - no info as to location. Report via 27th Reg. & 5th Brig. 76 men waiting for transportation to U.S. for discharge under the point system. 53rd CB rec'd replacements from the 72nd CB & 59th CB.
- 10-26-45 - 1 Oct'45 report of 53rd CB - location not stated. Report via 40th Reg. & 5th Brg. 63 men transferred to U.S. for discharge under the point system.

- 11-15-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 53rd CB - location not stated. Report via 40th Reg. & 5th Brig. 191 transferred for discharge under the point system. 240 men ordered to RecSta for leave.
- 11-27-45 - 1 Nov'45 report of 40th Reg. stated the 53rd CB transferred 191 men to U.S. for discharge.
- 1-3-46 - 1 Dec'45 report of 40th Reg. - location not stated. Report via 35th Reg. & 5th Brig. 665 men transferred to U.S. for discharge. 248 men departed for leave & reassignment.
- 2-13-46 - Comservpac orders inactivation of 53rd CB. (Comservpac disp 080225/Feb 46 to RDO Guam).
- 2-15-46 - Inactivation of 53rd CB cancelled. (ComMarianas disp 150625/Feb. 46 to Comservpac).
- 3-1-46 - 1 Feb 46 report of 53rd CB - located at Guam. Report via 35th Reg. & 5th Brig.
- ~~3-1-46 - 53rd CB inactivated as of 28 February 1946 (5th Brig. ltr ser 0210 (conf.) dtd 12 Feb 46 to Cinc 53rd CB)~~
- 4-10-46 - 1 Mar 46 report of 53rd CB - located at Guam. Report via 35th Reg. & 5th Brig.
- 6-20-46 - (Comservpac orders inactivation of 53rd CB. Personnel to transfer to CBD 1156. upon evacuation Binika for 2nd test. (Comservpac Disp. 172041/June 46 to APA 231 St. Croix)
- 7-11-46 - Hdqtrs 53rd CB on Rolette - effective 6 July 46. (disp Fm. CJTF 080328 to DirEastPacDivBuDocks/Atoll Com Kwajalein, ComMarianas BuDocks, Cinc Port Hueneme ComServPac, CinCPac.)
- 7-23-46 - 53rd NCB expected to be inactivated by 1 Aug.. 28 enlisted USNR men will be transferred to separation centers. Balance of 240 men to be transferred to CBDet 1156. (Cinc 53rd CB disptch. 190042 to BuPers)
- (INACTIVATED)

8-7-46 - It is planned to inactivate the 53rd CB while

- 8-7-46 - It is planned to inactivate the 53rd CB while at sea, for test Baker, and sending home all USNR men who can be spared, and activate CBI 1156 which will be composed of the 240 USN personnel now in the 53rd CB. All officers, except the CinC & exec are USNR and will be returned to the US. (CinC 53rd ltr. dtd. 20 Jul serial 648 to Comm. Joint Task Force ONE)
- 8-8-46- Comdr. Busky sends - 53rd NCB inactivated. Activated and assumed duty 3 August as CinC of 1156 which is reporting herewith for cross roads operational control. (Dispatch 022131 f AKA 99 Roulette to CJTF1)
- 8-27-46 Ltr Memo P16-5, YD531/jt Serial: 47603 dtd 1 Aug 46 unit in process of inactivation.

ON BOARD

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>AUTHORITY</u>
30 Jun'44		1085	Recap.
1 May'44	19		MoR
1 Jun'44	35	1074	MoR
1 Aug'44	35	1066	MoR
1 Sep'44	34	1059	MoR
1 Oct'44	33	1022	MoR
1 Nov'44	36	1018	MoR
1 Dec'44	36	1031	MoR
1 Jan'45	35	1036	MoR
1 Feb'45	31	1016	MoR
1 Mar'45	29	1010	MoR
1 Apr'45	27	1025	MoR
1 May'45	27	897	MoR
1 Jun'45	28	900	BNP625 & R
1 Jul'45	31	876	BNP625 & R
1 Aug'45	27	930	BNP625 & R
1 Sept'45	25	903	BNP625 & R
1 Oct'45	21	780	BNP625 & R
1 Nov'45	27	431	BNP625 & R
1 Dec'45	16	929	BNP625 & R
1 Jan'46	28	1343	R & BNP 625
1 Feb 46	32	929	R & BNP 625
1 Mar 46	18	444	R & BNP 625

53rd Construction Battalion

## United States Naval Construction Battalion 53

On December 22, 1942, the year after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, United States Naval Construction Battalion 53 was established at the Naval Training Center, Camp Allen, Norfolk, Virginia, with Lieutenant Commander Phillip J. Riley, CEC, USNR, as Officer in Charge.

On December 28, it was transferred to the Advance Base Depot at Davisville, Rhode Island and underwent advanced technical training to prepare for overseas duty.

In the middle of January, 1943, the battalion was divided into two sections. On February 7 one section departed from Davisville, later arrived in Casablanca, Morocco, and was combined with a section of Naval Construction Battalion 17 to form Naval Construction Battalion 120.

The section of the 53rd Battalion remaining at Davisville constituted the battalion for the time being. On February 11 Lieutenant Commander Roy M. Harris, CEC, USNR, was appointed Officer in Charge of the 53rd Battalion and the following day led his new command of one company and one-fourth of the headquarters company to Hadnot Point, New River, North Carolina. There they acquired additional men from newly formed training companies. The 53rd Battalion, now at half strength at 13 officers and 541 enlisted men entrained for San Diego on February 26, 1943. When it arrived in San Diego, on March 2, seven more officers and 268 enlisted men were

assigned to the battalion. At the same time, the battalion itself was assigned to the First Marine Amphibious Corps. This assignment marked the beginning of a long association and battle-proved friendship with the United States Marine Corps.

Thus, after a hectic four months of shifting personnel and station hopping the men of the 53rd Battalion embarked for Noumea, New Caledonia, aboard the USS Mount Vernon on March 12, 1943.

On landing at Noumea on March 25, the 53rd Seabees prepared the initial landing site for further operations. On April 14, the battalion was redesignated Naval Construction Battalion, First Marine Amphibious Corps, and was assigned the function of a supporting force in Marine amphibious operations. However, the battalion technically remained the 53rd Construction Battalion. The dual designation sometimes engenders confusion in identifying the battalion. Throughout its early history, the designation 53rd Construction Battalion was rarely used except in correspondence with the Bureau of Yards and Docks.

The battalion's first assignment on New Caledonia was the construction of three Marine Corps camps, each housing 2,000 men. The camps were completed in record time. The battalion then turned to constructing an airfield urgently needed by the Marines. The airfield required a parking area of 180,000 square feet and supporting facilities. The battalion leveled the field, surfaced it with nickel ore slag, and covered it with Irvine mesh. With the field in operation the battalion



drained nearby Lake Gaettege to prepare the level bottom for future camp sites. In between these construction assignments, the battalion underwent "certain special Marine training" to prepare themselves for combat operations.

On October 7, 1943, after six months of intensive labor and training, the 53rd Battalion embarked with the First Marine Amphibious Corps for the Solomon Islands. Arriving at Guadalcanal on October 12, the Seabees of the 53rd Battalion camped at Doma Cove to undergo intensive jungle combat training. Beginning on October 13 and continuing through December 1, nine echelons of the battalion sailed to join the invasion of Bougainville and one detachment sailed to Vella Lavella. A rear echelon of two officers and 46 Seabees was left behind at Guadalcanal. Also assigned to the Bougainville expedition were Seabees of the 25th, 71st, and 75th Construction Battalions.

On D-day, November 1, 1943, at 4 minutes past H-hour, the first elements of the 53rd Construction Battalion hit the beach of Bougainville at Empress Augusta Bay with the first assault troops of the Third Marine Regiment (Reinforced). In the second assault wave on Beach Green 2 at Bougainville, 244 Seabees and eight officers of the 53rd Battalion, with a bulldozer, went in with the Second Raider Battalion and acted as the shore party for the unloading of the USS George Clymer. Though under enemy small arms fire, the detachment completed the work on the afternoon of D-day.

With the second wave of the Third Raider Battalion, 74 Seabees, two officers, and a bulldozer of the 53rd Battalion landed on the beach of the offshore Puruata Island, accompanied by an artillery battery of the Marine's Third Defense Battalion. The detachment unloaded the supplies of the combat troops, helped the Marines secure their position, and then remained with them for eight days.

One officer and 56 men of the 53rd Construction Battalion went ashore in the second assault wave on Beach Blue 2 and acted as the shore party for ten days, unloading supplies and bulldozing defense positions.

One enlisted man, one officer, and a bulldozer of the 53rd Naval Construction Battalion landed on Beach Blue 1 with the second wave of Marines to assist the main body of the Third Defense Battalion secure positions for the batteries. They remained there for 5 days and were joined by 100 men and two officers from Beach Green 2 to assist the batteries.

On November 2, 1943 all available men of the 53rd Battalion were started on the construction of bridges and a pioneer road from Beach Yellow 1 along the Piva Trail. The men worked without equipment for the first six days of the invasion. With the arrival of construction equipment, the battalion pushed the road through the thick swamp and expanded operations to include another road from Beach Blue 1. The battalion also expanded the work on the Piva Trail, extended the road

to an intersection with the Piva River near the village of Piva, and made preliminary surveys for Piva Airfield.

By the close of the assault stage of the invasion, the battalion had built three airfields: a bomber strip 6,000 feet long and 250 feet wide and two fighter strips each 4,000 feet long and 200 feet wide. It also built almost four miles of road through the thickest jungle swamp to be encountered.

Meanwhile, the detachment sent to Vella Lavella on October 18 set up two sawmills and operated them for over two months, in which time it produced one-and-a-half million board feet of lumber from native jungle trees. The lumber was urgently needed for bridge timbering.

The echelons from both operations returned to Guadalcanal in the middle of January, 1944, and again staged at Doma Cove. From January to May, the men of the battalion received more Marine combat training and built themselves a camp. Other construction during this period on Guadalcanal included a 1,500-man camp for Marines, five miles of coral-surfaced road, three timber bridges, and a timber pile dock 400 feet long by 50 feet wide.

On February 17, 1944, Commander Edward M. Denbo relieved Commander Roy M. Harris as Officer in Charge of the battalion and Commander Harris took command of the Twenty-first Naval Construction Regiment. Then on April 14, Naval Construction Battalion, First Marine Amphibious Corps was redesignated as the 53rd Naval Construction

Battalion. It was detached from the Amphibious Corps and was assigned to duty under the Commander of the Guadalcanal Naval Base. In May, the battalion was restored to full strength as a regular construction battalion with the addition of a fourth company.

On June 1, 1944, the 53rd Battalion was attached to the First Marine Provisional Brigade of the Third Amphibious Corps for the assault on Guam in the Mariana Islands. The battalion left a rear echelon of two officers and 79 men on Guadalcanal and embarked on two transports for the invasion. Two special beach parties of volunteers were assigned to assist landing operations on D-day, July 21, 1944. One officer and 17 enlisted men equipped with tractors went ashore at four minutes past H-hour to help the Marines unload Sherman tanks from mechanized landing craft and tank landing ships. Three of the tanks sank into bomb craters on the ocean bottom, but the detachment managed to salvage two of the tanks in two hours while under intense enemy mortar and small arms fire.

A second beach party of five enlisted men operated a crane mounted on a pontoon barge anchored off Agat Beach to unload ammunition and gasoline. This group landed five hours after the main assault and worked continuously for five days to unload the critical supplies. The barge and the men were under enemy counterfire and artillery barrage. A tank landing ship berthed next to the crane was hit by an artillery shell during the unloading.

The remainder of the battalion went ashore three days later and camped near Agat village.

On July 27, the 53rd Naval Construction Battalion was detached from the First Provisional Marine Brigade and assigned to the Fifth Naval Construction Brigade, a move that later excluded its members from earning the Navy Unit Citation awarded to other organizations taking part in the initial assault.

Shortly after the Guam invasion, on August 25, Commander Denbo was put in command of the Twenty-seventh Naval Construction Regiment, Fifth Naval Construction Brigade, and Lieutenant Commander Charles A. Thompson, the battalion Executive Officer, became Officer in Charge of the battalion.

Commander John P. MacBean, CEC, USNR, took command on May 13, 1945, and was in turn succeeded by Commander John D. Burky CEC, USN on November 1, 1945. Commander Burky remained with the battalion as commanding officer until it was decommissioned.

The battalion stayed on Guam for 15 months and participated in rebuilding the island facilities destroyed during the battle with the Japanese. The battalion built a highway 12 miles long and 56 feet wide. The highway was based with coral and surfaced with asphalt. In addition, it built six miles of highway 45 feet wide and six miles of highway 32 feet wide. For the three road construction jobs, the battalion moved 800,000 cubic yards of earth and made hill cuts up to 92 feet deep. The

tremendous work done on the highways by the battalion was reported in the Engineering News Record by Commodore William O. Hiltabidle.

The 53rd Construction Battalion also built the first asphaltic concrete plant on Guam, and the necessary aggregate production facilities including quarry, primary and secondary crushing plants, a rotary dryer and hot asphalt heating and mixing plants. From April to July, 1945, it built the 10,000-foot by 250-foot bomber strip on the Northwest Field to accommodate the B-29s of the Army Air Corps for their raids on the Japanese homeland.

The battalion also built other noteworthy facilities on Guam: a black fuel oil tank farm of 27 tanks with a total capacity of 450,000 barrels, the camp and administration area of the island, a concrete and sheet steel dam and three and one-half miles of 12-inch pipe line to service the Agat Water Supply area, a two-story cargo operations building of steel and concrete, five two-story timber buildings, an aviation gasoline tank farm with four 10,000-barrel capacity tanks, and an eight-mile road project connecting the villages of Agat and Umatac. In addition, the battalion also laid one and one-half million square feet of asphalt paving for taxiways, parking areas, and airstrips, and assisted another battalion in the construction of four aviation gasoline tanks on another tank farm.

The battalion also included the only Seabee demolition squad on the island, composed of a chief petty officer and thirteen Seabees. This

squad cleared all roads, bridges, and campsites by defusing land mines and unexploded shells before the entry of work parties.

By September, 1945, the last of the original members of the battalion had been sent back to the United States under the rotation and demobilization programs.

By the end of 1945, the battalion's work on Guam was nearly completed and the battalion was scheduled for inactivation on March 1, 1946. However, this inactivation date was later set aside, because the battalion was assigned to participate in Operation Crossroads at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. Operation Crossroads was the Department of Defense's first large-scale atomic weapons research testing program.

On March 8, 1946 the battalion boarded the assault transport USS Randall and sailed for the Marshall Islands. It arrived at Bikini on March 13 and transferred to the assault transport USS St. Croix, which was anchored in the atoll lagoon, and the ship was the battalion headquarters during the entire Bikini operation.

Materials and equipment for the project arrived from Port Hueneme and Pearl Harbor. The battalion unloaded the mountain of supplies arriving on tank landing ships by blasting pathways through the coral under the surf and running the craft up on the beaches.

The main construction projects of the battalion, started March 14, 1946, was the erection of several 90-foot high towers and protected steel

huts for housing the instruments used to record the atomic blast data. The Seabees also built the recreational facilities for the 35,000 men engaged in the testing program, such as baseball fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, and an archery range.

The first Bikini blast, Test Baker, was detonated on July 1, and by then the Seabees had met programmed building schedules.

With the completion of the Bikini atom bomb tests, the battalion was inactivated on Bikini Atoll on August 3, 1946, after 38 months of continuous overseas duty. Many of the officers and men in the inactivated battalion returned to the United States for separation from the Navy. The remaining officers and men were assigned to the newly activated Naval Construction Battalion Detachment 1156. This detachment then performed cleanup and restoration duties on Bikini.



United States Naval Construction Battalion 53

Officers in Charge

Lieutenant Commander Phillip J. Riley, CEC, USNR	22 Dec 42	11 Feb 43
Lieutenant Commander Roy M. Harris, CEC, USNR	11 Feb 43	9 Feb 44
Commander Edward M. Denbo, CEC, USNR	17 Feb 44	25 Aug 44
Lieutenant Commander Charles A. Thompson, CEC, USNR	25 Aug 44	13 May 45
Commander John P. MacBean, CEC, USNR	13 May 45	1 Nov 45
Commander John D. Burky, CEC, USNR	1 Nov 45	3 Aug 46

Executive Officers

Lieutenant Commander Charles A. Thompson, CEC, USNR	20 Feb 43	25 Aug 44
Lieutenant Edward Kean, CEC, USNR	25 Aug 44	5 Dec 44
Lieutenant Felix W. Reeves, CEC, USNR	5 Dec 44	15 Jun 45
Lieutenant Commander Clyde V. White, CEC, USNR	15 Jun 45	1 Nov 45
Lieutenant Abel Bates, CEC, USNR	1 Nov 45	1 Jan 46
Lieutenant Sidney Smith, CEC, USNR	1 Jan 46	16 Feb 46
Lieutenant Commander G. B. Prothers, CEC, USNR	16 Feb 46	3 Aug 46

## Chronology

### United States Naval Construction Battalion 53

- 22 Dec 42 The battalion was established at the Naval Construction Training Center, Camp Allen, Norfolk, Virginia.
- 28 Dec 42 The battalion was transferred from Norfolk to the Advance Base Depot, Davisville, Rhode Island.
- 16 Jan 43 The 53rd Construction Battalion was divided into 2 sections, each consisting of one-half of the Headquarters Company and two companies.
- 7 Feb 43 The 2nd Section left the Advance Base Depot, Davisville with orders to join with a section of the 17th Construction Battalion to form the 120th Construction Battalion. The 120th Battalion was activated in Casablanca, Morocco.
- 12 Feb 43 1 Company and 1/4 Headquarters Company of the 1st Section and staff officers, departed Davisville for Hadnot Point, New River, North Carolina, for duty with the Fleet Marine Force.
- 12 Feb 43 1 Company and 1/4 Headquarters Company, and 4 officers, departed Davisville for duty with the Fleet Marine Force at San Diego, California.
- 15 Feb 43 All enlisted men who reported to Hadnot Point were transferred into "Naval Construction Replacement Group, Camp Lejeune, New River, N.C."
- 19 Feb 43 13 officers and 541 enlisted men (approximately 2 companies and 2/3 Headquarters Company) were transferred to the 53rd Naval Construction Battalion from "Naval Construction Replacement Group, Camp Lejeune, New River, N.C." Approximately 25 of these men were from the original detachment arriving from Davisville.
- 26 Feb 43 The contingent of 13 officers and 541 enlisted men, including the Officer in Charge, entrained from New River, N.C., for San Diego, California.
- 2 Mar 43 The echelon from Camp Lejeune arrived at San Diego, California. At this time 7 officers and 268 enlisted men (approximately 1 company and 1/3 Headquarters Company) were transferred to the 53rd Naval Construction Battalion from Naval Construction Battalion Replacement Groups at Camps Elliott and Pendleton, San Diego, California. The battalion then was at full strength on the basis of the Table of Organization for a Construction Battalion attached to the Marine Corps, and consisted of 20 officers and 809 enlisted men.

12 Mar 43 The 53rd Construction Battalion departed San Diego for Noumea, New Caledonia.

25 Mar 43 Arrived Noumea, New Caledonia.

14 Apr 43 Designated Naval Construction Battalion, First Marine Amphibious Corps.

7 Oct 43 The entire battalion, consisting of 27 officers and 781 enlisted men move from Noumea to Guadalcanal .

12 Oct 43 The battalion arrived at Guadalcanal.

Invasion of Bougainville and Vella Lavella.

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Departed</u>	<u>Arrived</u>	<u>Date of Arrival</u>
13 Oct 43	7	242	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	1 Nov 43
18 Oct 43	1	74	Guadalcanal	Vella Lavella	20 Oct 43
19 Oct 43	2	74	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	1 Nov 43
25 Oct 43	1	26	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	1 Nov 43
30 Oct 43	1	55	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	1 Nov 43
1 Nov 43	2	12	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	6 Nov 43
2 Nov 43	4	169	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	6 Nov 43
8 Nov 43	1	62	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	11 Nov 43
24 Nov 43	3	32	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	28 Nov 43
1 Dec 43	1	16	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	4 Dec 43

(A rear echelon consisting of 2 officers and 51 enlisted men remained at Guadalcanal.)

2 Jan 44 The Vella Lavella detachment left that island.

3 Jan 44 The Vella Lavella detachment arrived at Guadalcanal and joined the rear echelon there.

20 Jan 44 The main body of Naval Construction Battalion, First Marine Amphibious Corps left Bougainville.

22 Jan 44 The main body of the battalion arrived at Guadalcanal.

12 May 44 Naval Construction Battalion, First Marine Amphibious Corps was redesignated as 53rd Naval Construction Battalion.

Invasion of Guam.

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Departed</u>	<u>Arrived</u>	<u>Date of Arrival</u>
24 May 44	1	29	Guadalcanal	Guam	21 Jul 44
1 Jun 44	4	55	Guadalcanal	Guam	21 Jul 44
3 Jun 44	17	501	Guadalcanal	Guam	21 Jul 44
5 Jun 44	11	421	Guadalcanal	Guam	26 Jul 44
21 Jul 44	-	8	Guadalcanal	Guam	13 Aug 44
24 Jul 44	1	60	Guadalcanal	Guam	24 Aug 44
30 Jul 44	1	11	Guadalcanal	Guam	31 Aug 44
31 Aug 44	The battalion continued to restore island facilities almost totally destroyed in the Japanese resistance.				
1 Nov 44	The battalion started the construction of 12 miles of highway 50 feet in width and six miles of highway 45 feet in width.				
1 Mar 45	The battalion started construction of six miles of 32 foot wide highway and completed it in two months. The highway projects required the movement of 800,000 cubic yards of earth and hill cuts up to 92 feet deep.				
Apr-Jul 45	The battalion built a 10,000-foot by 250-foot bomber strip on the northwest field for B-29 bombers.				
Jul 45	The battalion built several fuel and aviation gasoline tank farms, one of which had 27 tanks with capacity of 450,000 barrels. The battalion also built a camp and an administration area for the Island Command, another aviation gasoline tank farm with four tanks, a cargo operations building of two stories, a capsheet steel and concrete dam with three and a half miles of 12-inch pipe for the island water supply, and an eight mile road connecting Agat and Umatac villages.				
15 Aug 45	The battalion began demobilization and was tentatively scheduled for inactivation in March 1946. Most of the men and officers went home on "points". However, the battalion, greatly reduced in size, continued operating and did demolition work on Guam. Later, with the pending atomic bomb testing on Bikini, the inactivation of the battalion was postponed.				

- 8 Mar 46 Naval Construction Battalion 53 boarded the USS Randall and sailed for Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands, to prepare that area for Operation Crossroads, the testing of atomic bombs.
- 13 Mar 46 The battalion arrived at Bikini and made its headquarters on the assault transport USS St. Croix.
- 14 Mar 46 Naval Construction Battalion 53 began working on its projects which included demolition operations, the building of steel instrumentation towers and steel huts, and building a recreation area for 35,000 men. The battalion remained at Bikini until it was evacuated in preparation for the atomic testing.
- 3 Aug 46 Naval Construction Battalion 53 was inactivated at Bikini.

## 53<sup>rd</sup> Naval Construction Battalion

### Chronology

- 22 Dec 1942 The battalion was established at the Naval Construction Training Center, Camp Allen, Norfolk, Virginia.
- 28 Dec 1942 The battalion was transferred from Norfolk to the Advance Base Depot, Davisville, Rhode Island.
- 16 Jan 1943 The 53<sup>rd</sup> Construction Battalion was divided into 2 sections, each consisting of one-half of the Headquarters Company and two companies.
- 07 Feb 1943 The 2<sup>nd</sup> Section left the Advance Base Depot, Davisville with orders to join with a section of the 17<sup>th</sup> Construction Battalion to form the 120<sup>th</sup> Construction Battalion. The 120<sup>th</sup> Battalion was activated in Casablanca, Morocco.
- 12 Feb 1943 1 Company and ¼ Headquarters Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Section and staff officers, departed Davisville for Hadnot Point, New River, North Carolina, for duty with the Fleet Marine Force.
- 12 Feb 1943 1 Company and ¼ Headquarters Company, and 4 officers, departed Davisville for duty with the Fleet Marine Force at San Diego, California.
- 15 Feb 1943 All enlisted men who reported to Hadnot Point were transferred into "Naval Construction Replacement Group, Camp Lejeune, New River, N.C."
- 19 Feb 1943 13 officers and 541 enlisted men (approximately 2 companies and 2/3 Headquarters Company) were transferred to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Naval Construction Battalion from "Naval Construction Replacement Group, Camp Lejeune, New River, N.C." Approximately 25 of these men were from the original detachment arriving from Davisville.
- 26 Feb 1943 The contingent of 13 officers and 541 enlisted men, including the Officer in Charge, entrained from New River, N.C., for San Diego, California.
- 02 Mar 1943 The echelon from Camp Lejeune arrived at San Diego, California. At this time 7 officers and 268 enlisted men (approximately 1 company and 1/3 Headquarters Company) were transferred to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Naval Construction Battalion from Naval Construction Battalion Replacement Groups at Camps Elliott and Pendleton, San Diego, California. The battalion then was at full strength on the basis of the Table of Organization for a Construction Battalion attached to the Marine Corps, and consisted of 20 officers and 809 enlisted men.
- 12 Mar 1943 The 53<sup>rd</sup> Construction Battalion departed San Diego for Noumea, New Caledonia.

25 Mar 1943 Arrived Noumea, New Caledonia.  
 14 Apr 1943 Designated naval Construction Battalion, First Marine Amphibious Corps.  
 07 Oct 1943 The entire battalion, consisting of 27 officers and 781 enlisted men move from Noumea to Guadalcanal.  
 12 Oct 1943 The battalion arrived at Guadalcanal.  
 Invasion of Bougainville and Vella Lavella.

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Departed</u>	<u>Arrived</u>	<u>Date of Arrival</u>
13 Oct 1943	7	242	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	01 Nov 1943
18 Oct 1943	1	74	Guadalcanal	Vella Lavella	20 Oct 1943
19 Oct 1943	2	74	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	01 Nov 1943
25 Oct 1943	1	26	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	01 Nov 1943
30 Oct 1943	1	55	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	01 Nov 1943
01 Nov 1943	2	12	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	06 Nov 1943
02 Nov 1943	4	169	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	06 Nov 1943
08 Nov 1943	1	62	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	11 Nov 1943
24 Nov 1943	3	32	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	28 Nov 1943
01 Dec 1943	1	16	Guadalcanal	Bougainville	04 Dec 1943

(A rear echelon consisting of 2 officers and 51 enlisted men remained at Guadalcanal.

02 Jan 1944 The Vella Lavella detachment left that island.  
 03 Jan 1944 The Vella Lavella detachment arrived at Guadalcanal and joined the rear echelon there.  
 20 Jan 1944 The main body of Naval Construction Battalion, First Marine Amphibious Corps left Bougainville.  
 22 Jan 1944 The main body of the battalion arrived at Guadalcanal.  
 12 May 1944 Naval Construction Battalion, First Marine Amphibious Corps was redesignated as 53<sup>rd</sup> Naval Construction Battalion.

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Departed</u>	<u>Arrived</u>	<u>Date of Arrival</u>
24 May 1944	1	29	Guadalcanal	Guam	21 Jul 1944
01 Jun 1944	4	55	Guadalcanal	Guam	21 Jul 1944
03 Jun 1944	17	501	Guadalcanal	Guam	21 Jul 1944
05 Jun 1944	11	421	Guadalcanal	Guam	26 Jul 1944
21 Jul 1944	-	8	Guadalcanal	Guam	13 Aug 1944
24 Jul 1944	1	60	Guadalcanal	Guam	24 Aug 1944
30 Jul 1944	1	11	Guadalcanal	Guam	31 Aug 1944

31 Aug 1944 The battalion continued to restore island facilities almost totally destroyed in the Japanese resistance.  
 01 Nov 1944 The battalion started the construction of 12 miles of highway 56 feet in width and six miles of highway 45 feet in width.

01 Mar 1945	The battalion started construction of six miles of 32 foot wide highway and completed it in two months. The highway projects required the movement of 800,000 cubic yards of earth and hill cuts up to 92 feet deep.
Apr-Jul 1945	The battalion built a 10,000 foot by 250 foot bomber strip on the northwest field for B-29 bombers.
Jul 1945	The battalion built several fuel and aviation gasoline tank farms, one of which had 27 tanks with capacity of 450,000 barrels. The battalion also built a camp and an administration area for the Island Command, another aviation gasoline tank farm with four tanks, a cargo operations building of two stories, a capsheet steel and concrete dam with three and a half miles of 12 inch pipe for the island water supply and an eight mile road connecting Agat and Umatac villages.
15 Aug 1945	The battalion began demobilization and was tentatively scheduled for inactivation in March 1946. Most of the men and officers went home on "points". However, the battalion, greatly reduced in size, continued operating and did demolition work on Guam. Later, with the pending atomic bomb testing on Bikini, the inactivation of the battalion was postponed.
08 Mar 1946	Naval Construction Battalion 53 boarded the USS Randall and sailed for Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands, to prepare that area for Operation Crossroads, the testing of atomic bombs.
13 Mar 1946	The battalion arrived at Bikini and made its headquarters on the assault transport USS St. Croix.
14 Mar 1946	Naval Construction Battalion 53 began working on its projects which included demolition operations, the building of steel instrumentation towers and steel huts, and building a recreation area for 35,000 men. The battalion remained at Bikini until it was evacuated in preparation for the atomic testing.
03 Aug 1946	Naval Construction Battalion 53 was inactivated at Bikini.



## 53<sup>rd</sup> Naval Construction Battalion

### Officers in Charge

Lieutenant Commander Phillip J. Riley, CEC, USNR	22 Dec 1942 – 11 Feb 1943
Lieutenant Commander Roy M. Harris, CEC, USNR	11 Feb 1943 - 09 Feb 1944
Commander Edward M. Denbo, CEC, USNR.	17 Feb 1944 - 25 Aug 1944
Lieutenant Commander Charles A. Thompson, CEC, USNR	25 Aug 1944 - 13 May 1945
Commander John P. MacBean, CEC, USNR	13 May 1945 - 01 Nov 1945
Commander John D. Burky, CEC, USNR	01 Nov 1945 - 03 Aug 1946

### Executive Officers

Lieutenant Commander Charles A. Thompson, CEC, USNR	20 Feb 1943 - 25 Aug 1944
Lieutenant Edward Kean, CEC, USNR	25 Aug 1944 - 05 Dec 1944
Lieutenant Felix W. Reeves, CEC, USNR	05 Dec 1944 - 15 Jun 1945
Lieutenant Commander Clyde V. White, CEC, USNR	15 Jun 1945 - 01 Nov 1945
Lieutenant Abel Bates, CEC, USNR	01 Nov 1945 - 01 Jan 1946
Lieutenant Sidney Smith, CEC, USNR	01 Jan 1946 - 16 Feb 1946
Lieutenant Commander G.B. Prothers, CEC, USNR	16 Feb 1946 - 03 Aug 1946

53<sup>rd</sup> NCB



1ST MARINE  
AMPHIBIOUS  
CORPS





53<sup>RD</sup>

UNITED STATES NAVAL  
CONSTRUCTION BATTALION  
BIKINI ATOLL





