

GUAM, MARIANAS 53rd NCB - SEABEES

Early in June, 1944, the 53rd was attached to the First Provisional Marine Brigade, for the assault operation on Guam, in the Marianas group. Leaving a rear echelon of two officers and 79 men, the remainder of the Battalion embarked on two ships, on June 6, 1944. En-route to the island, plans for the Battalion's part in the invasion were carefully laid and gone over almost daily. Two special beach parties, composed of volunteers, were assigned to assist in the landing operations and unloading of supplies on D-Day, June 21.

The remainder of the Battalion moved ashore on D-Plus-3, to set up their camp near Agat Village. Concurrently with the construction of quarters for themselves, the Bees were almost continuously occupied with the task of clearing debris from existing roads, clearing jungle, and constructing new roads to facilitate movement of supplies to the Marines at the front. LCDR Thompson's official report of the Battalion's activities on the Guam invasion is quoted:

At Guam, Marianas, two beach parties were assigned from the 53rd NCB. One officer and 17 enlisted men, equipped with several tractors, landed on D-Day (H-Plus-5 minutes), July 21, 1944, with special mission to assist unloading a Marine Battery of Sherman Tanks from LCM's and LCT's at the edge of the reef at Agat Beach. This task was finished within an hour under heavy enemy mortar and machine gun fire. Three of the Sherman Tanks dropped into bomb craters on their way in from the reef to shore and were submerged. This party volunteered to rescue these Tanks and succeeded in getting two of the Tanks safely to the beach in two hours, under heavy fire. A second beach party of five enlisted men was assigned the task of operating a North West Crane, mounted on a pontoon barge and anchored off the reef of Agat Beach, to unload gasoline and ammunition from LCT's to LVT's in support of assault troops. The barge was under heavy mortar fire for the first four days. The remainder of the Battalion moved ashore on D-Plus-3 and established, maintained, and constructed roads and bridges in support of the assault troops. The Battalion's beach camp was under enemy artillery fire for four hours on D-Plus-3. The 53rd NCB maintained the only Seabee Demolition Squad on the island, consisting of a Chief Petty Officer and 13 enlisted men. This squad cleared all beaches, roads and areas ahead of construction troops over a nine months period.

While the 53rd NCB was attached to the First Provisional Brigade, during the initial landing on Guam, they were detached from the Marines on July 27, 1944, and assigned duty under the Fifth Naval Construction Brigade.

The 53rd on Bougainville

Official account of the 53rd Seabee Battalion's work while in support of the 3rd Marine Division on Bougainville, covering the period November 1-24, 1943. Two Hundred and forty-four men, the Officer in Charge, seven officers and one bulldozer landed in the second wave with the Second Raider Battalion on Beach Green-2 (on D-Day, November 1). This group acted as shore-party for the unloading of the USS George Clymer. This work was concluded early in the afternoon of D-Day.

Seventy-four men, two officers, and one bulldozer landed in the second wave on Puruata Island, with the Third Raider Battalion and one battery of the Third Defense Battalion. This group acted as shore-party in unloading their ship, and assisted the Third Defense Battalion battery in securing their positions. This detail remained with the battery for eight days. Twenty three men, one officer and one bulldozer landed in the first and second waves on Beach Yellow-4 and assisted as shore-party temporarily, their principal mission being assistance to the third defense Battalion in securing their battery positions. One man, with bulldozer and one officer landed in the second wave on Beach Blue-1 to assist the Third Defense Battalion in securing their battery positions. On November 2 about one hundred men and two officers from Beach Green-2 were assigned to assist the battery for three days.

On November 2 all available men were constructing bridges and pioneer road along the Piva Trail from Beach Yellow-1. No amount of construction equipment was available until November 6, and progress was slow through the swamps. This project was later expanded to include a pioneer road from Blue-1 and extension of the Piva Trail to an intersection with the Piva Road near Piva. On November 6 an additional six Officers, 179 men, and considerable construction equipment were landed on Puruata Island. These troops were transferred to the mainland on November 9, and assigned to road construction. Here, at Empress Augusta Bay, was once again seen the close relationship and camaraderie which existed between the Seabees and the Marines. The main road, when completed, was named "Marine Drive" and dedicated, with deep affection, "To our very good friend, the Fighting Marines". A large sign, announcing this fact, was placed at one of the roads terminals.

On November 15, work was started on a two-lane road up the Piva River from the beach. On November 30, this road was open to traffic to the southeast corner of the Piva Airfield site. The Piva Trail pioneer road was 85 percent completed at this time. Survey crews, on November 4, started surveys from Yellow-2, and, on November 10, these crews started preliminary surveys for the Piva Airfield. These crews worked under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions as sporadic enemy opposition was encountered in these areas until about November 30. The various detachments of the Battalion landing on D-Day were under operational control of the Third Marine Division until November 8, at which time they reverted to the control of the Commanding General, First Marine Amphibious Corps. Up to November 24, a total of two miles of primary highway and 1.8 miles of pioneer road had been constructed. A majority of this work was through extremely difficult swamps and jungles, and a considerable portion of these roads were built on corduroy brush mats, by hand.

"Miscellaneous activities included"

1. Construction of operational dugouts for First Marine Amphibious Corps, numbered among these was the elaborate one built for the personal use of Admiral Halsey.
2. Hauling ammunition and rations on Affe trailers to the front lines, until relieved of this duty by the Third Division.
3. Start of development of a coral pit on Torokina Point.

4. Construction of emergency operating tent and hospital ward for Third defense Battalion Medical Officer, and the loan to him of the assistance of two Battalion medical officers and several Corpsmen to care for Raider casualties during the first ten days.

Available records indicate 81 enemy air alerts in which enemy planes were overhead and bombs were dropped. Enemy artillery, mortar and machine gun fire existed on the beaches November 1st and 2nd. Sniper fire existed for the entire two months period in the jungle. Its assigned missions successfully and commendably completed, the 53rd returned from Both Vella Lavella and Bougainville during the middle of January, 1944, to its former camp at Doma Cove, Guadalcanal. Once again we were to undertake extensive and vigorous Marine Amphibious training. But this time, there was also much construction to be done. Since our previous camp had been occupied by other troops during our absence or had been rendered useless by changing conditions and our expanding requirements, we built a camp for ourselves before turning to the construction of a 1,500-man Marine camp.