

the 12 men inside. Tassone earned the Silver Star and out of his impromptu action came the armored bulldozers which were used so effectively in later campaigns.

Seabees landed with the first waves of assault troops in virtually every campaign of the war. The Seabees were in on the North African invasion and they were on the beachheads at Sicily and Salerno on D-Day. It was at Salerno that Lieutenant C. E. Olson died a hero's death and his name was later given to a new type of landing ramp which was devised for the cross-channel attack.

The Seabees were on the Normandy beaches and among the first into the Port of Cherbourg. Some of them moved across France to help the Army cross the Rhine. One battalion, the 69th, went all the way—into the heart of Germany.

They labored to construct giant bases, 18 that cost the U. S. more than \$10 million each. All of the 18 except Trinidad, Argentina, Espiritu Santo, Bermuda, New Caledonia, and Milne Bay had to be captured from the enemy and cleared of enemy troops and battle-

field debris before construction work could begin. Their job was to build everything from sidewalks to bomb-proof storage plants for diesel and fuel oil.

By the end of World War II there were 12 Seabee brigades, 54 Seabee regiments, 151 construction battalions, 136 CBMUs, 39 special battalions, 118 detachments, and five Seabee Naval Pontoon Assembly Detachments. Of this vast working force which numbered more than 325,000 men only four battalions failed to see overseas service.

Few U. S. outfits were as well-traveled as the Seabees. For example, the 9th Battalion which began its overseas career in Iceland finished up the war on Tinian from where the first A-Bombs were launched. There was the 70th Battalion which was at Oran and Bizerte and Salerno and got to the Pacific in time to see service on Guam, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

There were the 81st Seabees who ranged from Falmouth, Britain, to Utah Beach and Paris—then Eniwetok, Ulithi, and Okinawa. There was the 146th Battalion which traveled from Iceland to Okinawa by way of Omaha

Beach.

Many Seabee reservists were with the new 1st Amphibious Naval Construction Battalion when it was activated and rushed to the Far East in the summer of 1950 following the outbreak of hostilities in Korea. When General Douglas MacArthur's planning staff devised the end-around landing at Inchon it was at first opposed by the Navy because of the 30-foot change in tide. But MacArthur's officers were adamant. Inchon was the place to land.

It was the Seabees of the 1st Amphib Battalion who came up with the blueprints for an extended pier that would permit around-the-clock unloading despite the tide. On both coasts of Korea the Seabees equipped with new seagoing 'dozers worked the causeways and conducted salvage operations.

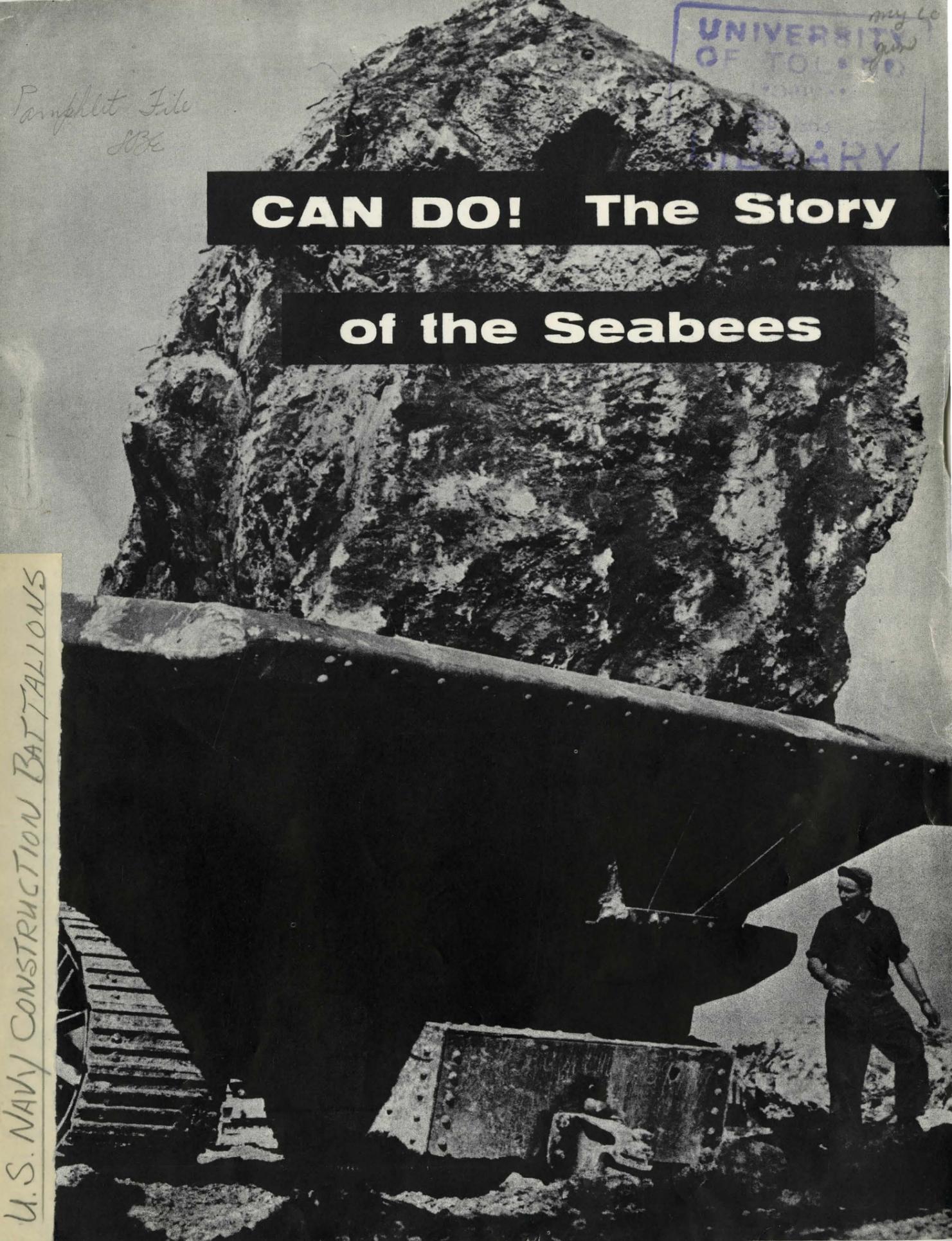
The old Seabees of Bora Bora, Guadalcanal, New Georgia, the Philippines, Guam, Iwo Jima—and 393 other wartime base operations—are in civvies like most of the other naval veterans of that war which ended 11 years ago. Few of them ever learned a belaying pin from a capstan, after all. They were too damn busy! **★THE END**

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U.S. NAVY CONSTRUCTION BATTALIONS



CAN DO! The Story

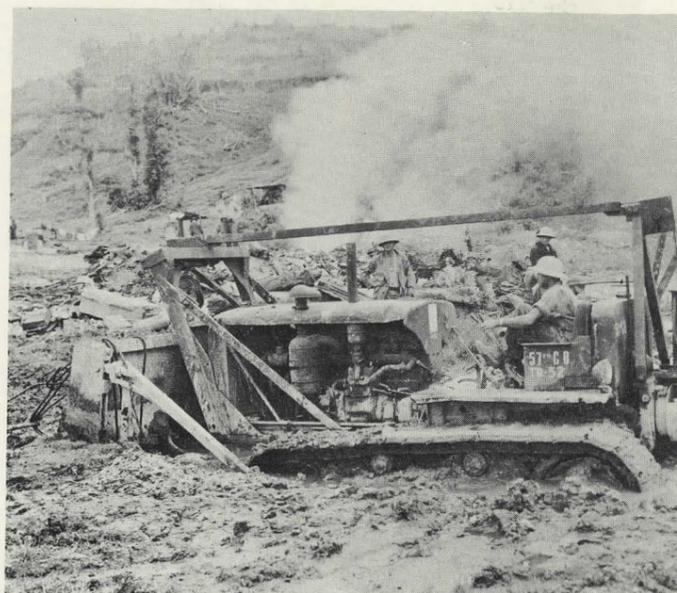
of the Seabees

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Pamphlet File
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Hacking through thousands of miles of coral and jungle, the pick-and-shovel sailors laid the roads and airstrips that led to victory

By **BRUCE JACOBS**



Official U. S. Navy Photos



Even their most ardent supporters agreed that the men of the United States Navy Construction Battalions were the most unlikely-looking sailors ever to wear the Navy's blues. Their disregard for conformity was notorious, their penchant for the spectacular was monumental.

Organized for immediate overseas duty in the most crucial days of World War II, the pick-and-shovel sailors, the swashbuckling Seabees, became a colorful legend in the jungles and atolls of the Pacific. They shipped out to the hot spots in the global war before most of them could tell a belaying pin from a capstan and they won a Paul Bunyan-ish reputation for being men who could get things done under the worst conditions available.

They were equally expert at fighting and working but working was their primary duty. In the Navy there is an old saying that the fleet is as good as its advance bases. With their trip-hammers, bulldozers and giant cranes, the Seabees gave the Navy—as well as the Army and the fly boys—a string of advance bases and airfields from the far reaches of the South Pacific to the doorstep of Japan herself.

All told, by V-J Day the Seabees had built more than 400 advance bases in the Pacific and in the Atlantic—construction jobs that involved the expenditure of the staggering sum of two billion dollars. The highways they hacked out of jungle and the airstrips they carved out of coral would, if placed end to end, circle the world twice!

It was out of sheer admiration for the Seabees' efficiency that Admiral William F. (Bull) Halsey once remarked, upon returning to his flagship from an inspection trip ashore, "I had to move lively to keep from being bulldozed off the beach!"

And a famed Marine raider battalion posted a huge

signboard adjacent to their Bougainville camp which proclaimed:

*When we reach the Isle of Japan with our caps
at jaunty tilt,
We'll enter the city of Tokyo on roads the
Seabees built.*

Seabees saw service in the Mediterranean and in the European Theater of Operations, too. But it is for their Pacific duty (82 per cent of the Seabees served in the Pacific) that they are best known. Their success was spectacular and they were unique in that, despite the inter-service rivalry prevalent in the area, the Seabees were highly regarded by all. They were a hardy lot—particularly the men of the early battalions (the term Seabees comes from the initials of Construction Battalions) who were recruited directly from civil life on the basis of their experience in the construction business. They were supreme in their self-confidence and it can be truthfully said that they never tackled a job that stumped them. They built airfields at the height of a rainy season when veteran engineers said it couldn't be done. And they did it in record time. They liked to boast that they were among the first to land and the last to leave. For the Seabees to put "their mark" on an island meant to transform it from a wilderness into a modern base of operations.

Their familiar corps insignia was a fighting bee whose arms bristled with a tommy gun, a hammer and a wrench. Less well known was the Seabee official motto: *Constrimus, batuimus*—We build, we fight.

But it is in keeping with the character of the Seabees that the catch phrase for which they are best known is one that they devised for themselves. It came out of the

stink and grime of Guadalcanal and out of the muck and fever of New Georgia. *Can do!*

This was the creed of the horny-handed construction men of the Navy—the steam-fitters, cat-skinners, loggers, hard-rock drillers, pipe-line experts, and steel-workers who manned the Seabee Battalions from Iceland to Samoa, from the Aleutians to the Normandy Beachhead.

Now it is a legend, one that is as much a part of Naval history as John Paul Jones and "I have not yet begun to fight!" and David Glasgow Farragut and "Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!"

Nor did the Seabee legend end with the victory over the Axis in World War II. Already there are new chapters in the story. There is, for example, a story that is told of an incident that took place during the heavy fighting for Inchon and the approaches to Seoul on the west coast of Korea in September, 1950. The grimy men of the 1st Marine Division were pushing inland when a locomotive came toward them, chugging its way up tracks miraculously left intact following a vicious mortar and artillery duel. Marines swiftly maneuvered into position along the railroad embankment and two of them busied themselves with a bazooka as the train came nearer. To their astonishment they recognized green fatigue uniforms of a strictly GI cut. "Wait a second," somebody said, "Those guys aren't North Koreans."

Shell fire and bullets raked the cab of the locomotive as it neared the Marine position until at last they were

able to see its occupants—laughing, grinning and waving to them as the train sped through on its way back to the rear area. Crestfallen, a young Marine private turned to his platoon sergeant, a middle-aged veteran who had seen action in World War II. "Imagine that, Sarge," he said with a sad shake of his head, "there was a bunch of 'doggies' out ahead of us."

"Naw," replied the sergeant, "it's just them damn Seabees at it again!"

The Seabees' association with the 1st Marine Division is an old one which dates back to Guadalcanal and the frightful battle for Henderson Field. It was there that the old 6th Seabees (properly, the 6th U. S. Naval Construction Battalion) fought the Japs and simultaneously rebuilt Henderson and readied it for the arrival of U. S. air support. And it was there that a Marine officer reported to his commanding general: "Those Seabees build roads so fast the Japs are using them for avenues of escape."

"I don't know how we would have gotten along without the Seabees," declared General A. A. Vandegrift of the Marines. General H. M. ("Howling Mad") Smith of the Marines called the Seabees "the find of this war." And a career Naval officer, Rear Admiral O. O. ("Scrappy") Kessing who had a gang of Seabees (from the 27th Battalion) under his command in the islands said of them: "They're a rough, tough, loyal, efficient bunch of men who don't give a damn for anything but

The Seabees pitch into a military jig-saw puzzle, cleaning up and rebuilding an island blasted to pieces by bombs and artillery.





A platoon swaps its picks for rifles to scout a Jap-infested sector of the front where the Air Force wants a landing field.

doing the job and getting the damn war over."

In the early days of World War II a Naval chaplain, deeply concerned over the fact that the Seabees were "older men" (average age: 33), expressed a desire to learn what could be done to make life in the Navy easy for them. "Begging your pardon, Padre," one Seabee told him respectfully, "but I got into this outfit to give, not to get."

It is in the record that when the 8th Seabees got to Bremerton, Washington, en route to an overseas assignment in 1942 more than 200 men passed up their last liberty on the town and volunteered to chip paint on the USS *Nevada* just back from the inferno of Pearl Harbor.

The Seabees were like that.

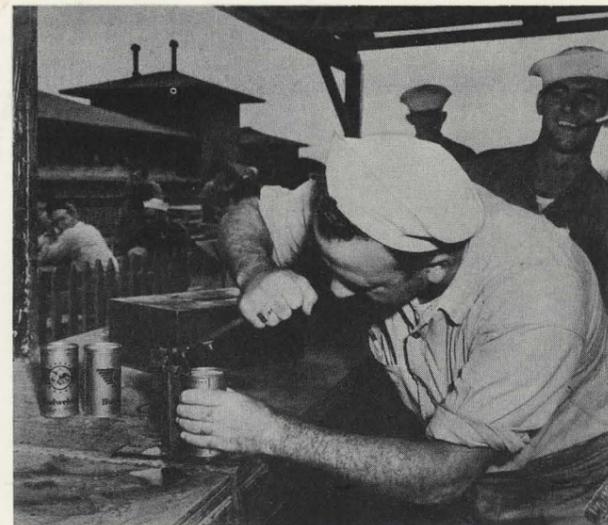
In order to arrive at a clear understanding of the reasons that lay behind the creation of the Seabees it is important to go briefly into the history of Naval advance-base construction. The advance bases required by the fleet were by custom constructed by civilian workmen under contract to the Navy's Civil Engineer Corps. Every job was done under the surveillance of CEC officers but the construction gangs were composed of civilians.

This was never a satisfactory system in the judgment of many senior Naval officers because of the obvious fate that awaited these workmen should the base at which they were employed come under enemy attack. Not only were they unfamiliar with ordinary weapons but by the terms of International Law they could not be armed at all. In Washington, however, there was considerable opposition to the idea of Naval construction detachments. There were those who feared that these units would be sent into Stateside Navy yards to replace civilian workmen and stevedores. An outgrowth of this is a policy which exists today—Seabees are employed only on overseas projects.

The anticipated tragedy became a reality with frightening suddenness on December 7, 1941. At that time there were no less than 70,000 unarmed civilian contract workers employed on naval-base projects. Among them



Moving mountains was child's play to the Seabees, but not even their ingenuity could do anything about the mud on Guadalcanal.



The Seabees claim credit for the biggest secret weapon of the war, a tricky device for opening a can of beer with one punch.

were 1,931 at Midway, 1,149 at Wake, 71 at Guam, 3,412 at Cavite in the Philippines, and 207 on Corregidor.

The man to whom the Navy turned was then Rear Admiral (later four-star Admiral) Ben Moreell. The man, who was to become known as the "King Bee" by the Seabees, was Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks and, therefore, the Navy's Chief of Civil Engineers.

Born in Utah, raised in St. Louis, Missouri, Moreell graduated with high honors from Washington University. His engineering degree got him a job with the city of St. Louis but when the U. S. entered World War I Moreell entered the Navy. He stayed on in the regular service

after the war and earned a brilliant reputation.

In the Navy an officer may be designated "line" or "staff duty." The latter assignment tends to permit a more stabilized home life (shore duty assignments) but few promotions. Nevertheless Moreell, at 51 was destined to become the youngest three-star admiral in the Navy.

It was to Moreell's request (whose CEC in 1940 consisted of 125 officers and no enlisted men) that the Chief of Naval Personnel issued orders on October 31, 1941, directing the formation of a naval construction battalion for duty in Iceland where 369 civilians were then at work. The men were to be recruited directly from civilian life and were to be awarded "rates" on the basis of their civil experience and professional background.

Moreell had nearly all of his Iceland battalion enrolled and in training when developments in the Pacific dictated a sudden change of plans. As the Japanese swarmed down upon the islands like a locust plague the Allied high command began to make plans for the establishment of "blocking positions" astride the sea lanes that the Japanese would attempt to dominate.

The most urgent requirement was for a construction force to build fuel-storage tanks on Bora Bora, a small island in the Society Group, 140 miles from Tahiti.

Thus was the Seabees' first mission born. The word came as the first naval construction "boots" struggled with their bell-bottom trousers and learned to rig hammocks and salute. Nearly 200 of the construction men who had enlisted for Iceland plus 103 general service recruits were officially designated the 1st Naval Construction Detachment and rushed aboard ships in a convoy poised to sail from the east coast.

When Moreell first learned that his "Iceland Battalion" was to be entrusted with the Bora Bora mission he began to look around for a pipe-line expert. Several top civilians mentioned Morris T. Duddleston of St. Louis who was then finishing the job of laying 141 miles of pipe (at the rate of a mile a day) for the Portland-Montreal Pipe Line Company. Moreell decided Duddleston was just the man to supervise the Bora Bora job. After two days of lengthy long-distance telephone negotiation, "Dud" flew to Washington for a conference with "the Chief." He was commissioned a lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve and assigned as executive officer of the detachment whose C.O. was Cdr. H. M. Sylvester. The paperwork was expedited—but even so Duddleston was aboard ship and on his way to the South Pacific before his commission was fully written up.

Bora Bora was code-named "Bob Cat" and the Seabees of the 1st Detachment were henceforth known not by their number but as the "Bob Cat Detachment." They were destined to become the Old Settlers of the Pacific War and saw service at Tutuila, Kwajalein and Eniwetok before being disbanded 39 months later.

The favorite story of the Bob Cat Seabees concerned the time one of their number overheard several sailors fresh from Pearl Harbor admiring the sun tans they had acquired on shipboard.

"You guys make me laugh," the Bob Cat Seabee finally exploded when he could contain himself no longer. "You think you're sunburned. Well, just yesterday I was walking near the docks in

a pair of shorts when a couple of soldiers asked me how much I charge to weave a grass skirt!"

The fact is the Bora Bora Bob Cats came early and stayed late. Their early days were murder—even without the presence of any hostile Japs. They slithered through the mud of a rainy season that wouldn't end, encountered monstrous land crabs and learned at first hand of the dread disease called elephantiasis. They went ten weeks without any mail from home because they were whisked away so swiftly that even the super-efficient Fleet Post Office was unable to figure out what had become of them. But they constructed the tank farms that contained the fuel for the planes and ships that would ultimately fight the Battle of the Coral Sea.

The Bora Bora Bob Cats were followed overseas by the 1st and 2nd Naval Construction Battalions which were also rushed to South Pacific islands. The 3rd Seabees headed for the Fijis while the 4th Battalion sped north to Dutch Harbor where it promptly lost most of its heavy equipment and machinery in a Jap bombing raid. The 5th Battalion raced to Samoa while the 6th and 7th Battalions joined forces at sea and eventually reached Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. It was from here that the 6th jumped off for Guadalcanal where its members earned immortality as "the Seabees of Henderson Field."

In later years Rear Admiral Joseph F. Jelley, Jr., as a successor to Admiral Moreell, was to comment, "The extreme pressure on the Navy to get the Seabees out into the advanced areas allowed too little opportunity to acquaint the men with the ways of the Navy. But that did not stop the Seabees from accomplishing their purpose."

Sometimes Seabees found that their ignorance of the "Navy way" was actually a blessing in disguise.

There is the story of an Army unit, set up near a Seabee outfit, which prided itself on knowing all about the Seabees and their midnight raids. ("The Seabees never steal," an Army man once remarked caustically. Then he added, "Anything that's so big you couldn't bundle it off in a 2½-ton truck.")

Accordingly the soldiers took extensive precautions and organized special guard details to safeguard the battalion's automotive supplies. Therefore it came as something of a shock to the Army commander when he realized one day that Seabee vehicles were tearing up and down the roads while most of his vehicles were halted for want of spare parts.

Strongly suspecting skulduggery he asked for—and got—an official inquiry into the matter.

Diligent investigation finally pinned down the key man in the great spare-parts mystery: a Seabee warrant officer who blandly confessed that he had "imported" a machine shop from New Zealand!

As a former machine-tool company executive he had recalled the names of some customers in New Zealand. He bummed a ride on an airplane bound for Auckland and upon arrival called upon his company's old customers and cajoled them into parting with their tools "for the duration." In this way he put together a complete machine shop.

A Navy captain told the Seabee that this wasn't precisely the Navy way of handling a procurement problem.

"Doggone it, sir," exclaimed the un-

happy Seabee, "that's exactly my problem. I just can't seem to get the hang of the Navy way!"

All through 1942 Seabee recruits swarmed into the Naval Receiving Stations and were funneled to the training camps set up for Seabees at Camp Peary, Camp Allen, Camp Bradford (all in Virginia), Camp Endicott, Rhode Island, and Camp Lee-Stephenson in Maine.

Out of the training mill poured fresh battalions to be processed through the advance base depots as they headed for overseas assignments. The principal port of embarkation for Seabees headed for the Pacific was Port Hueneme, California, which later became a sort of Seabee shrine. Today it is the Construction Battalion Center for Seabees assigned the Pacific area as well as the home of the Seabee Museum where thousands of items used by Seabees in combat and equipment captured from the Japanese may be seen. In addition to busy Hueneme there were advance base depots at Davisville, Rhode Island, and Gulfport, Mississippi.

During the summer of 1942 the 9th Seabees, the first Naval Construction Battalion to head east, crossed the Atlantic to Iceland. They were set to work on the runways for Meeks Field, soon to become an important Air Force bomber base. As the huge airbase neared completion there was ever-increasing concern as to which of the services would have the honor of making the first landing on the new field. The Air Force claimed the prerogative on the basis of ownership. But blood is thicker than water. The airmen failed to remember that the Seabees who were building the field were Navy men at heart—even if most of them didn't know a capstan from a belaying pin. Undercover arrangements for a "tip off" were made between the Seabee boss and Captain (later Rear Admiral) Daniel V. Gallery.

One brisk morning the word was flashed to Reykjavik where Gallery, as Commander of the U. S. Fleet Air Base Iceland, had his headquarters. Gallery grinned as he listened to his excited Seabee conspirator: *two hundred feet of runway was fully paved and finished.* A few moments after he received this "flash" from his secret agent at the airfield site Gallery leaped into a little Navy utility plane. Several minutes later he landed on the spanking new runway to the utter dismay of all Air Force personnel concerned. Thus first-landing honors went to the Navy—thanks to Seabee connivance. It was a bit of teamwork that Gallery never forgot. When he went to sea in the "baby flattop" the USS *Guadalcanal* he nick-named the vessel, *Can Do*.

The world over Seabees were regarded as big-time operators. James Michener, who probably had the best eye for detail of all those who have written about the war in the Pacific, came up with the very personification of the *beau ideal* Seabee in his Luther Billis of *Tales of the South Pacific* fame.

The Seabees were big-time operators—and they gloried in the role. Their lockers of cold beer and their ice cream on beachheads were part of a proud tradition. Their windmill washing machines were Pacific landmarks. In their spare time they built motor scooters, sailing boats and surf boards out of material taken from the junk piles. In at least one outfit worn-out truck tires were "salvaged" and turned into rubber heels. In another outfit the "kingpin"

was a fellow who fashioned a two-pronged device for opening beer cans. Its magic (and its appeal to the gadget-happy Seabees) lay in the fact that it enabled drinking hole and air hole to be made in one easy movement!

For the most part Seabees were overly generous. A visiting Marine or infantry soldier could always get a hot meal at a Seabee mess and when he left it was usually with a fresh shirt (stenciled "USN") in place of the mud-crusted fatigue shirt he was wearing when he arrived.

It is a matter of historical fact that a unique rivalry developed between the Seabees and the Marines.

"Actually," says a former Marine Corps combat correspondent, "it was sort of an undercover mutual admiration society."

An anonymous bit of Seabee doggerel that helped to fan the flames of the feud is reprinted herewith. It is said to originate with the Seabees who were in the New Georgia campaign.

The admiral just dropped around to chat the other night. Said he, "Now boys you're here to work, but you've been trained to fight. So if there's any trouble, don't stop to put on your jeans. Just drop your tools and grab your guns—and protect those poor Marines!"

It was during the assault on one of the New Georgia beaches, as a matter of fact, that when the Marine landing party hit the shore it was astounded when the bushes parted—and out stepped a welcoming party: Seabees led by Lieutenant Commander Robert L. Ryan of Santa Paula, Calif.

"Major," the 50-year-old Seabee officer told the Marine commander with a broad grin, "it is always a pleasure to welcome the Marines." (Later it was disclosed that Commander Ryan and some of his men had made a recon patrol prior to D-Day to locate the best site for an airstrip on Segi Point. For his subsequent job in rushing the airstrip to completion Ryan was awarded the Legion of Merit by the Army.)

The Marines rarely got sore at the Seabees. They just growled their slogan: "Never slug a Seabee—he may be some Marine's father."

All inter-service friendships were out the window of course, when it came to souvenirs. This was a serious business and one in which the enterprising Seabees participated with all their hearts. The most celebrated instance in the writer's memory concerns a transaction that took place on Iwo Jima. It was a time when the Army Garrison Force had taken over and the island seemed to have been picked clean of worthwhile souvenirs although Japanese canteens, mess kits and cartridge pouches were still plentiful. Then it became known that certain Seabees had a stock of samurai swords, Jap helmets, and highly prized battle flags.

A Naval officer ashore from an LST made contact with the traders and negotiated for a blood-spotted battle flag. It was a steal at 50 bucks and a bottle of stateside bourbon.

It wasn't until weeks later when his ship was back at Pearl Harbor that the Naval lieutenant had an opportunity to display his proud possession before an admiring throng at the Moana Hotel at Waikiki. Among his drinking companions was a Nisei interpreter who listened, along with the others, as the Navy man pointed out the Japanese characters scrawled in ink upon the

bloody, begrimed flag.

"This is supposed to be the 'chop' of the most famous movie actress in Japan," he said glibly, quoting his Seabee benefactor. "I guess this Jap was her lover—or maybe just a fan."

Then he turned to the Nisei. "Hey! Can you translate the whole business for me so's I can write it down?"

The Nisei broke into a grin at this point. "What it says," he told the Navy officer, "is that you have been taken for a ride by the 133rd Seabees!"

It is, in a sense, misleading to relate the stories of Seabees as big-time operators and good-will ambassadors. It should not, for even one moment, be forgotten that they were fighting men. They did not win their battle honors and their rapid acceptance among the services because of their kindnesses to stray soldiers or because they could be counted upon to produce a cold can of beer.

The Seabees fought and worked hard—and they almost never complained about their lot.

The quarter of a million men who served in the Seabees in World War II (like the 10,000 who served during the Korean emergency) worked for officers who were basically engineers or veteran construction men. Few of the Seabee officers were regulars, practically none of the troop commanders were

INVEST IN U. S. SAVINGS BONDS NOW EVEN BETTER

Annapolis graduates. Nearly all of the 10,000 officers of the Seabees were designated as CEC, USNR, Class V (S). That is supposed to stand for Civil Engineering Corps, United States Naval Reserve, Volunteer Specialist. The officers themselves joked about this designation and claimed that "V(S)" meant "Victory—then Scram."

One of the most colorful figures in the Seabees was Captain Wilfred L. "Wild Bill" Painter who hailed from Seattle, Washington, but had spent most of his adult years in China and thereabouts. Painter's specialty was behind-the-lines forays to scout sites for airfields. Frequently he landed on enemy-held beaches to pick the landing site for an amphibious assault. At 35 he was the youngest four-striper in the Navy. A reservist, like most of his fellow officers in the Seabees, "Wild Bill" was famous for the "Painter Expedition" into Jap-held China when he was a civilian oil man before our entry into the war.

There was Commander Joseph P. Blundon, who was probably the first Seabee under fire in World War II. Commander Blundon came to Guadalcanal ahead of his 6th Seabee Battalion and in the course of inspecting the perimeter of Henderson Field he was pinned down by machine-gun and mortar fire. Blundon found to his dismay that a slight speech defect which mattered little back in Keyser, West Virginia, could be the difference between life and death on the 'Canal. Like our adversary, the Japs, Blundon was unable to properly pronounce "I." After a few unhappy experiences with

trigger-happy Marine sentinels, when called upon to identify himself the Seabee officer would roar, "Commander B'undon, dammit!"

Blundon's Seabees of the 6th Battalion helped write the text book on Guadalcanal. They functioned as combat engineers, aviation engineers and construction engineers on an around-the-clock schedule. They found that Seabees had to handle assignments that weren't laid out in the training manuals.

Working under gunfire and bombardment they found that 100 Seabees could completely repair the damage done by one 500-pound aerial bomb in just 40 minutes. During one terrible bombardment when 53 bombs struck Henderson Field the Seabees worked until they were about to drop. Another time they filled 13 holes in one hour, during an artillery shoot, as a crippled U. S. plane circled overhead, waiting to land.

"But the very worst thing," recalls one of the Seabees of Henderson, "was when a bomb *didn't* go off. We had to dig it out anyway."

The first combat hero of the Seabees proved to be Seaman First Class Lawrence C. (Bucky) Meyer of Toledo, Ohio. Meyer "obtained" (a Seabee expression which can mean anything) a machine gun and set it up in his foxhole. Next he got a supply of ammunition from the Marines. One day he raced for his gun as the Jap raiders appeared overhead. As the enemy began his bombing and strafing run Meyer trained his machine gun upward and began pumping lead. He knocked down a Jap Zero and helped break up the attack. He was awarded the Silver Star, the first decoration for gallantry in combat given to a member of the Seabees. Meyer was later killed in a Jap air raid while working on a pontoon barge.

Seabees Duncan Giles and Howard Osborn got the Silver Star on the 'Canal for digging eight men out of a foxhole that was caved in by a shell. Under fire the whole time (around three hours) they finally pulled out the Marines, seven of whom were still alive. Unable to use their shovels in the mud and slime the two Seabees dug with their hands and helmets while steel rained all around them.

More Seabees (14th and 26th Battalions) reached Guadalcanal to pitch in and help out as the malaria-weakened 6th struggled with the limited facilities at hand. In two months every piece of lumber that the 6th used was salvaged from Japanese material. When they couldn't get the parts they needed to keep their U. S. vehicles in operation, the Seabees pressed 25 Jap trucks into service.

They worked and fought and died. One time a Jap sub surfaced and fired point-blank at a ship the Seabees were working on. By mid-January when the 6th Seabees departed for New Zealand (the 1st Marine Division had already been relieved) it counted 56 casualties.

Among the lessons that the Navy learned on Guadalcanal in the early days of the campaign was that civilian stevedores could not efficiently unload cargo on a beachhead. This too became a job for the Seabees and an outfit known as the 1st Special Naval Construction Battalion was rushed to the 'Canal to unload the boats. This was the forerunner of 41 special battalions employed on beachheads in every theater of operations as the war progressed.

Besides the "specials" the other offshoots of the Seabees were the Naval

Construction Battalion Maintenance Units (CBMUs) and the Naval Pontoon Assembly Detachments. The former were small detachments formed to replace regular Seabee Battalions once the major construction job was completed and the war moved on.

Today the Seabees are organized into Amphibious Construction Battalions (such as the unit which served in Korea from 1950-53), Mobile Construction Battalions, and CBMUs. The amphib Seabees are even trained as frogmen.

Around the time that the 6th Seabees were getting ready to make their move to Guadalcanal another battalion that was to enjoy a long and interesting association with the Marines was formed under Commander L. E. Tull. In World War I, Tull had served as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army Engineers and subsequently had spent many years building Methodist Missions in South Africa. Before he joined the Seabees he was a construction engineer for the Treasury Department and the Federal Works Administration.

His outfit, activated as the 18th Seabees, was ordered to Norfolk to ship out for overseas. At Norfolk the Seabees were issued Marine Corps clothing and equipment and told to send their scarcely used Navy "blues" and "whites" back home. On November 11, 1942, the battalion arrived in New Caledonia. It was soon on its way to Guadalcanal with a new designation: 3rd Battalion, 18th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. The 18th Marine Regiment was the engineer regiment of the 2nd Marine Division. Its 1st and 2nd Battalions were regular Marine engineers. By the time the campaign had come to an end and the 2nd Marine Division was ready to depart for New Zealand the 18th Seabees were hard at work expanding Henderson Field into a major airdrome and so they were left behind when the Division pulled out. Later the battalion caught up with the others at "Moonshine Camp" in Judgeford Valley where the Seabee-engineers shared in the good times enjoyed by the Marines.

The 6th Seabees were replaced in the 1st Marine Division by the 19th Seabees who then became known as the 3rd Battalion, 17th Marine Regiment.

Naval Construction Battalions served in the Marine divisions in the Pacific until the spring of 1944 when the engineering regimental organization was abolished by the Marine Corps and replaced by pioneer and engineer battalions. The principal reason for the change was the fact that all available Seabees were required for important construction tasks and the Navy did not want entire battalions tied up with divisions that were largely inactive between campaigns.

Thus after Tarawa the 2nd Marine Division and the 18th Seabees parted company as did the 1st Marine Division and the 19th Seabees after New Britain.

But the Marines of the 2nd Division would long remember how Commander Tull's Seabees drove their bulldozers against enemy positions on bloody Betio. By the same token the 1st Marine Division would always remember its 19th Seabees and the amazing speed with which they built the bridges over which the Marines' tanks advanced to Hell's Point and to the airfield.

"If any operation was ever won by the Seabees and their bulldozers—that was it," the Marines said of the New Britain campaign.

Only the signal people were unhappy. They claimed the Seabees stole their hard-to-come-by telephone poles and

used them for bridge pilings.

Simultaneously with the operations on Tarawa and Makin the Marines secured Apamama in the Gilberts and in short order the 95th Seabees were landed to build a fighter strip that became known as O'Hare Field. They had it ready by December 10 and the first plane landed on December 13.

For the Seabees there weren't enough hours in the day as they converted the beautiful little island into a war base with tank-fuel farms, taxiways, Quonset huts—the works.

And in their spare time the Seabees brought a touch of the outside world to a tired old French priest and three nuns (the only white women on the island) of the Society of the Sacred Heart, a Catholic mission. By the time the Seabees of the construction battalion moved out (in May, 1944, when a CBMU was moved in to take over the job) they had equipped the tattered old Mission with electric lights and had taught a native how to run the portable generator. They installed an electric pump so neither the sisters nor the priest, who was quite sick, would have to carry water from the well; they installed a kerosene refrigerator, taught the sisters how to make ice cream by using powdered milk and fruit extracts—and brought their isolation to an end by the crowning gift of all—a radio that was powerful enough to pick up programs from Sydney, Australia, and San Francisco. On leaving, the Seabees apologized for being unable to furnish the Mission with an electric washing machine. In the months that lay ahead the Seabees of Apamama were destined to see action in the Marshalls and on bloody Iwo Jima.

Seabees continued to serve with assault troops (of both the Army and Marines) but as "Corps Troops," which is to say they came under command of the Corps Commander—a step upward in the echelon of command.

Although they earned their greatest fame operating with the Marines, few incidents of Seabee valor can surpass that of the 40th Battalion with the 1st Cavalry Division of the United States Army in the "Brewer Force" assault on Los Negros in the Admiralties.

The vital airfield was overrun by the GIs of the 5th Cavalry Regiment and a perimeter was hastily organized. When the Japanese launched a counter-attack against the still-thin U. S. lines, the senior Army commander issued crisp orders to the Seabees: "Move in and hold the line!"

On shore at the time was an advance detachment of two officers and 100 men from the 40th Battalion. They swiftly took over a sector of the perimeter on the right flank of the beachhead.

The battalion's ditch-digger was used to scoop out a trench 300 yards long and into this ditch piled the Seabees armed with an array of BARs, rifles, and sharpened knives. The battalion's 20 mm gun (truck-mounted) was set up behind the trench and ordered to place its fire upon a grove that was thick with snipers.

While this 100-man force prepared to help hold the line other members of the battalion landed and began to grade and clear the taxiways and runways under fire.

The major Japanese counterattack came March 3-4 and it was a night of terror and confusion. In one place, when most of the Army guns went silent the Seabees rushed forward to lend their supporting fire. They recaptured two machine-gun positions and a

Bofors gun as they chased the Japs back to the beach.

When morning came the Seabees of the 40th Battalion counted 47 casualties including nine killed in action. It had been a bitter night's work and out of it came an award, to the Seabees, of the Army's Distinguished Unit Citation.

Later the 515th CBMU, which took part in the assault on Guam with the First Provisional Marine Brigade, was named as one of the Seabee organizations to win the Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon.

When the brigade became the Sixth Marine Division on Guadalcanal in the fall of 1944 the 58th Seabees, who were already veterans of Cape Gloucester, put their talents to work and created a "Japanese Village" in the jungles of the Tassafaronga area—complete with a bank, a bar, and a luridly decorated *geisha* house. All simulated, of course. Months later the 58th Battalion saw action with the Division on Okinawa.

At Camp Tarawa, Hawaii, the 31st Seabees hooked up with the Fifth Marine Division—and promptly appropriated the division's "Spearhead" nickname. Commander D. T. Ermilio's veteran outfit was new to the Pacific, being on a "second cruise" after duty in Bermuda. It was destined to accompany the Marines to the sands of Iwo Jima. The "Spearhead" Seabees took part in the shore-party operations on the hotly contested beachhead where (like the sister 31st, 62nd, and 133rd Battalions) it endured the fierce shot and shell on the tiny island at Japan's doorstep.

It was here that a dilemma was posed when Army-manned amphibious trucks trying to land sorely needed Marine Corps artillery on the beachhead on the afternoon of D-Day found that the place selected for their lodgement was not a sloping beach but a shelf-like formation.

The DUKWs were unable to make it onto dry land—until an intrepid Seabee leaped into a bulldozer and raced down the beach with a grappling hook. As enemy mortar and machine-gun fire rained down, the unknown hero hauled the artillery-packing DUKWs from the water—until at last he was struck down by enemy fire.

Seabees armed with rifles and automatic rifles moved forward at an awkward gait, into the swirl of battle. In the 133rd Battalion alone there were more than 200 casualties by the time the terrible ordeal of Iwo was over.

The fortunes of war assigned the Seabees to an Army task force when the 24th Seabees were landed at Munda with the 172nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team of the 43rd Infantry Division. Commander Roy Whittaker's battalion was faced with the job of building an airfield at the worst of the rainy season. The site indicated was little more than a bog. Nevertheless the big bulldozers moved in and the work began. They were bombed and in one vicious raid lost 26 men, their biggest bulldozer, five tons of dynamite and all their supplies and equipment. When they pulled out all they owned was the clothing on their backs. The average Seabee in the Munda campaign lost over 20 pounds.

The Seabees introduced a new style of warfare during landings in the Treasury Islands. When a Japanese pillbox held up the works and pinned down the Marines a 28-year-old Machinist Mate First Class, Aurelio Tassone, drove his bulldozer right up to the pillbox and dumped a ton of earth on it smothering