

Naval Construction Maintenance Unit 574

Historical Information



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



CBMU 574

NOTC - Peary
 ABD - Hueneme
 Ready Date - 20 Jan'44
 Left ABD - 13 Mar'44
 Location - NAS Pearl Harbor

LOG

- 12-15-43 - CNO orders transfer of CBMU 574 to ABD Hueneme about 20 Dec'43. (CNO conf disp 151535 to Camp Peary dtd 15 Dec'43)
 3-15-44 - CBMU 574 departed ABD Hueneme 13 Mar'44. (Restr. Disp 141820 of 15 Mar from ABD Hueneme to Addressees)
 5- 8-44 - 1 Apr'44 report of CBMU 574 - operating at NAS Pearl Harbor. Arrived in field 21 Mar'44.
 5- 1-44 - 1 May'44 report of CBMU 574 - operating at NAS Pearl Harbor.
 6-19-44 - 1 Jun'44 report of CBMU 574 - operating at NAS P.H.
 7-26-44 - 1 Jul'44 report of CBMU 574 - operating at NAS P.H.
 8-29-44 - 1 Aug'44 report of CBMU 574 - operating at NAS P.H.
 9-26-44 - 1 Sep'44 report of CBMU 574 - operating at NAS P.H.
 11-16-44 - CBMU 574 is located at Pearl Harbor. (Com 14 Sec Disp to CNO 062243 NCR 15886 dtd 11 Nov'44)
 11-34-44 - 1 Oct'44 report of CBMU 574 - operating at P.H.
 11-30-44 - 1 Nov'44 report of CBMU 574 - operating at NAS P.H.
 1- 2-45 - 1 Dec'45 report of CBMU 574 - operating at NAS P.H.
 1-27-45 - 1 Jan'45 report of CBMU 574 - Men and off. of CBMU 574 are being trf'd to CBMU 554 at Johnston Is. and men and off. of CBMU 554 are being trf'd to CBMU 574

CBMU 574

- 1-27-45 - (Cont.) - at NAS P.H. This move was ordered as a relief to men who have been on duty over 9 mos. at NAS Johnston Is. As of 31 Dec'44 133 men and 2 officers have been sent from CBMU 574 to CBMU 554, and 131 men and 2 officers have been transferred from 554 to 574. The transfer is being made at NAS Johnston in order to maintain the full strength of the CBMU there, and CBMU 574 is working at half strength during the movement.
 2-17-45 - CBMU 574 is located at Pearl Hbr. (Com 14 Sec. disp to CNO 081016 Feb'45).
 3-22-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of CBMU 574 - located at Pearl Hbr. The transfer of men and officers between this unit and CBMU 554 at Johnston Is. is still underway. As of 31 Jan'45 260 men and 4 officers have been transferred from CBMU 574 to CBMU 554, and 134 men and 3 officers have been transferred from CBMU 554 to CBMU 574.
 2-27-45 - 1 Feb'45 report of CBMU 554 - The exchange of personnel between CBMU 554 and CBMU 574 has been completed.
 3-28-45 - 1 Mar'45 report of CBMU 574 - On 9 Feb, 131 men and 2 off. were rec'd from CBMU 554, completing the exchange of personnel initiated 27 Dec'44. Location not stated.
 4-11-45 - 1 Apr'45 report of CBMU 574 - located at NAS Pearl Harbor.
 5-1-45 - CBMU 574 located at NAS P.H. (Dirpadocks P Sec Rep of 1 Apr'45)
 5-15-45 - 1 May'45 report of CBMU 574 - located at Pearl Harbor.
 6-7-45 - CBMU 574 is located at NAS Ford Is., Oahu. (Comservpac conf sdlttr 02787 dtd 29 May'45 to CNO)
 6-14-45 - 1 Jun'45 report of CBMU 574 - located at NAS P.H. 31 men were trfd to Rec Sta ffa.
 7-17-45 - 1 Jul'45 report of CBMU 574 - located at NAS P.H. 1 off. and 27 men on temp duty on Molokai, T.H.

CBMU 574

- 8-13-45 - 1 Aug'45 report of CBMU 574 - located at Pearl Harbor. On 26 Jul'45 196 men were transferred to NavRecSta P.H. for further assignment and on 28 Jul'45 2 officers were transferred to ComSerforPac^{Flt} for further assignment. 3 officers and 10 men are still with CBMU 574 closing out the records. The detachment of 1 officer and 27 men at Melakai, T.H., returned to this station on 18 Jul'45.
- 8-27-45 - Inactivation of CBMU 574 completed 15 Aug'45. (CO NAS P.H. conf ltr ser 0211 dtd 15 Aug'45)
- 9-11-45- Comservpac directs Com14 to inactivate CBMU 574 & transfer pers to CB units in the 14th ND. (Comservpac spdltr ser 04601 dtd 11 Aug'45 to Com14).

INACTIVATED

<u>DATE</u>	<u>ON BOARD</u>		<u>AUTHORITY</u>
	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>MEN</u>	
1 Jul'44	5	259	MoR
1 Aug'44	5	257	MoR
1 Sep'44	5	279	MoR & R
30 Sep'44		285	Recap
1 Oct'44	5	285	MoR
1 Nov'44	6	281	MoR
1 Dec'44		282	MoR
1 Jan'45	5	271	MoR
1 Feb'45	4	149	MoR
1 Mar'45	6	264	MoR
1 Apr'45	6	260	MoR
1 May'45	6	260	MoR
1 Jun'45	6	230	MoR
1 Jul'45	5	216	BNP625 & R
1 Aug'45	3	8	BNP625 & R

CEMT #574

Date	Organization	Location	Reference	Notes
6/13/44	-	NAS Beaul Harbor FRAY	c. B. report 1 June	Left U.S. Mar. 1944.
11/13	-	FRAY	Com 14 sec act. diag. 060609 July. Com 14 sec act diag 062243 Nov.	

THE RAMBLING RAIDERS

OR

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN THE LAST TWO YEARS?

* * *

This is the story of the group of Navy Seabees who started out in the fall of 1943 as Company A of the 21st Supernumerary Battalion, went overseas under the name of Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 574 and wound up their wartime career as CBMU 554.

Despite the successively changing unit titles, the original group has remained virtually intact for nearly two years. With only a few exceptions, the 211 men and officers of CBMU 554 who, at this writing, are sweating out demobilization on Johnston Island fought the Battle of Camp Peary together in the old 21st Super and have lived and worked together ever since.

THE BATTLE OF PEARY

The story begins on a bright autumn day, the first day of November, 1943. Approximately 1,100 men, most of them still dazed after four weeks

it was in the books that Company A would later become CBMU 574 and the other three companies would go forth as CBMUs 575, 576 and 577.

The month in A-3 was memorable. Few will forget the P.T. sessions to which they blindly stumbled each freezing morning before dawn; or the military maneuvers in the woods, when nobody ever seemed to be sure which side he was on; or the really interesting days on the rifle range, where everybody discovered whether or not he was another budding Sergeant York (M-1 style) and where the harassed instructors kept insisting that a trigger is something to be squeezed and not jerked.

It was in A-3, too, that many a wondering construction man discovered that four walls and a roof do not a shelter make. The gales that howled through the cracks in the barracks were enough to make a guy shiver just to think about them - even two years later. But those who slept near the



of boot training, gathered that day in Area A-3, one of the quieter residential sections of Camp Peary, Va. They thereupon became known as the 21st Super, which was merely a handy title for use during the ensuing month of advanced training. Although the men were not aware of the fact,



pot-bellied stoves didn't have to worry about the icy breezes. They were nearly roasted to death. That was one of the novel features of the barracks in A-3: in a single room, at one end and the same time, you could freeze or you could swelter, depending on the distance between your bunk

and the stove. Somehow, all hands survived, but there were few who did not acquire at least a sneezing acquaintance with cat fever (known in pre-Peary days as grippo, flu, the common cold, or what have you).

Roundly damned though it was, Camp Peary had its brighter side. It was there the embryo Seabees learned the Navy believes in at least two of life's minor blessings: movies and beer. Both were available nightly. Foam and flickers were to be standard fixtures at every station along the route of this particular group of Seabees.

Available, too, was the quaint town of Williamsburg, which one was free to visit every fourth night. Of course, there was the drawback that the town's world-famous charms were difficult to see, so dense were the crowds of lonesome servicemen who continually milled about looking for something to do on liberty.

The best day at Peary was the day most of the 21st Super left for the long-awaited 10-day pre-embarkation leave at home. The Far-Westerners stayed behind and took their leaves at a later date, but for the others this was the big day. From all accounts everyone made the most of the 10 fleeting days that followed. And after the last fling was over, it was back to Peary to be rehabilitated. That was December 10.

GO WEST, YOUNG MAN

On December 20 the 21st Super Battalion became a memory and CBMU 574 came into being, along with the other three units that made up the parent organization. That was the day all four groups - each now a separate, commissioned outfit - departed from Camp Peary and headed west. The movement was under confidential orders, and the rank and file didn't know for sure just where they were going until they got there. But no one was very much surprised when, on Christmas morning, the special troop train pulled into the sprawling naval center with the odd-looking name, Port Hueneme, Calif., which was to be home for the next three months.

That winter at Hueneme was a time of contrasts. The celebrated Southern California climate performed at its best and its worst. There were balmy days that matched even the rosier of the Chamber of Commerce propaganda stories, and there were days reminiscent of the Biblical deluge.

There was the rigid camp life,

the long hours of work and military training and the everlasting waiting for orders to ship out. But there were also good liberties in nearby



Oxnard and Ventura and, farther down the coast, in Los Angeles and the glittering place called Hollywood. All things considered, Port Hueneme was good duty.

In the course of those three months the men of CBMU 574 coined for themselves a nickname which still stands. During a midnight mock battle the never-to-be-forgotten O-in-G of the unit, Lt. Harlow H. Lippincott, led his men with such dash and enthusiasm (getting himself roughed up in the process) that the outfit thereupon became known as Lippy's Raiders. The Raiders never got close to a real battle, but the name endured as a memorial to that nocturnal skirmish.



On Friday, March 10, 1944, came an announcement that brought the California sojourn to an abrupt end. Sailing orders finally had arrived. Half the outfit was slated for a special 60-hour liberty that week-end, but it had to be cancelled. The unit was secured. Everybody went to work packing gear and wondering where Island X would be.

HEAVE HO! HEAVE HO!

Late in the afternoon of the following Monday, the 13th, the Raiders entrained for Oakland, arriving there shortly before noon Tuesday. From the train they proceeded directly to a ferry which carried them across San Francisco Bay to a waiting escort aircraft carrier flying the British Union Jack. H.M.S. Patroller was at their service.

The Patroller cleared the Golden Gate on Wednesday morning. When well at sea, the captain revealed the destination. Dopesters in the unit had been whispering for many weeks that it would be Pearl Harbor, and, sure enough, that's what it was. This was one of those rare occasions when the scuttlebutt artists were right.

A few of the Seabee passengers, such as the cooks and bakers, had to work their way across, but for the others the voyage was as carefree as a holiday cruise. Sunbathing on the flight deck, swapping yarns with the British tars, drinking tea each afternoon in the best English tradition, losing money on tombole (the British version of bingo) - all these made the war seem remote. The chow was

the only drawback, but since a large proportion of the voyagers on that rolling sea couldn't have retained even the best cooked food for long, the questionable quality of the meals didn't make much difference.

One other sidelight that still sticks in the minds of those who came over on the Patroller was the strange chant that roused them from slumber each morning before dawn. A very British voice would float out of the public address loudspeakers with the cheery message: "Heave ho, heave ho, heave ho! Make a move, make a move, make a move!" Then, after a few minutes of silence, the voice would be back with the admonition: "Action stations in five minutes time." That was the last call, and the late sleepers would tumble out of their bunks and up to the darkened hangar deck, there to wait until the sun rose and the danger of a dawn submarine attack was over.

The trip was supposed to last five days, but on the fifth day, Monday, trouble developed in the engine room, and the Patroller stopped dead in the water. There it lay for most of the afternoon like a sitting duck, but any uneasiness which the passengers may have felt was dispelled with the arrival on the scene of a pair of destroyers from Pearl Harbor. These guarded the disabled carrier until she got under way and then escorted her the few remaining miles to port. It took all night, though, and part of the next morning to finish the trip, for the Patroller was able to make only a fraction of her usual speed.

SO THIS IS ISLAND X!

It was shortly after noon on Tuesday, March 21, that the Raiders first set foot on their so-called Island X. Ford Island, it was, site of Pearl Harbor's Naval Air Station and hub of the Pacific Fleet's air activity. It wasn't exactly the rugged kind of Island X the Raiders had been primed for during nearly six months of training. The beach-head was made via the ramp of a ferry boat, and the first inland objective taken was a roast pork dinner (ice cream for desert) in the island's main messhall.

A newly constructed Quonset hut village was ready for the Seabees, and within a few hours they were settled in their new quarters and beginning to get acquainted with their surroundings.

Lying in the middle of Pearl Har-



ber, bounded on two sides by the picturesque hills of Oahu, Ford Island turned out to be an elaborate layout combining the functions of a landing field, aircraft supply depot, repair center and country club. Looking at the array of warehouses, hangars, shops, barracks, swimming pools, tennis courts - yes, and even an abbreviated golf course - that covered the mile-square island, the newly arrived construction men could not imagine what work there could be left for them to do. But it didn't take long to find out.

PUTTING UP AND TEARING DOWN

The CBMU was assigned to work under the station public works department. There was a certain amount of routine maintenance work to be done and a long list of improvements to be made on existing structures. Also, a surprising assortment of new construction jobs.

One of the first projects tossed in the Seabees' laps was construction of a 55-by-300-foot extension to an aircraft assembly and repair building. Among other knotty aspects of that job was the designing of 85-foot timber trusses to support the roof, but the Seabees had the entire project finished in 27 days.

With the battle lines receding westward, the danger of a new attack on Pearl Harbor grew negligible, and now it was time to remove some of the defense works that cluttered Ford Island and took up precious space. The Raiders got the thankless chore of clearing away a number of heavy, reinforced concrete revetments that lined the airstrip. A small crew, using dynamite and a two-ton skull crusher, demolished 40 of them in three months and converted the debris to subgrade fill.

The Seabees were always ready to take on odd jobs. One of the oddest was the hurry-up installation of all interior fittings on two ocean-going aviation supply barges, involving wiring, shelving, refrigeration, and placing of a stiff-leg crane on deck. Working day and night, they filled the order in 11 days. For that feat, they were later commended by a grateful admiral, who cited the valuable role the barges played in support of a forward area operation soon after the Seabees fixed them up.

Another ship job was the installation of "between" decks in the U.S. S. Supply, a 10,000-ton freighter.

Thirty tons of steel framing were put in and 60,000 board feet of decking laid. New quarters and heads for the ship's crew were installed, and all was completed in three weeks.

These are only samples of the work done by the energetic Raiders on and around Ford Island. To mention a few others, they rebuilt and doubled the feeding capacity of a large civilian cafeteria, reorganized the station laundry so that service was cut from 10 days to three, constructed a recreation building for Waves (and never even got to see the future occupants), designed and built an exterior freight elevator shaft for a large shop building and installed the elevator and machinery.

THE LIGHTER SIDE

Life on Ford Island wasn't all work for the Seabees. The modern movie theater, despite the G.I. formality that sometimes strained the patience of the audiences, provided many diverting evenings. The beer garden wasn't a bad place to kill a few hours. A man had his choice of a variety of sports - baseball, basketball, football, softball, bowling, tennis, handball, swimming. A baseball team organized by the Raiders made quite a name for itself in Oahu diamond circles and wound up the season by winning the championship of Ford Island.

Every-sixth-day liberties made it possible to enjoy the varied attractions Honolulu and its environs had to offer. Waikiki Beach, Diamond Head, Kau Kau Corner and all the other familiar place names were soon old stuff to the liberty hounds. It



wasn't long before they learned there is no north or south in Honolulu - but only lewa and waikiki. And that when the glass is empty, the drink is pau. They discovered, too, that if a man wears his hat at the wrong angle and an SP sees him, his liberty is liable to be pau.

From their vantage point in the center of bustling Pearl Harbor, the Raiders saw many stirring chapters of the Pacific war begin to unfold. Great ships of the fleet gathered at their very doorstep in preparation for new strikes, and it was always plain to see when another invasion "down under" was in the making. And when President Roosevelt came to discuss high strategy with his generals and admirals, the Seabees had a front seat to witness his arrival aboard the cruiser Baltimore.

CBMU 574 acquired some new faces and lost some old ones during those months at Pearl Harbor. Most of the new acquisitions were men who had gone through Camp Peary in the late fall of 1943 and had shipped out in a ship repair unit. But the Navy was doing so well against the Japs, the ship repair business failed to come up to expectations, and consequently part of the personnel was transferred to regular Seabee outfits. Other newcomers to 574 were men fresh from Navy training camps. It wasn't long before all the new arrivals were as thoroughly at home in the unit as the charter members.

Summer had faded into fall and fall was about to give way to winter (though you would never have known it without the aid of a calendar, for the weather was always the same) when it was suddenly revealed that the Raiders were earmarked for another assignment. At a place called Johnston Island, it was said. Many a blank stare greeted that announcement. Few of the men ever even heard of Johnston, much less knew its location.

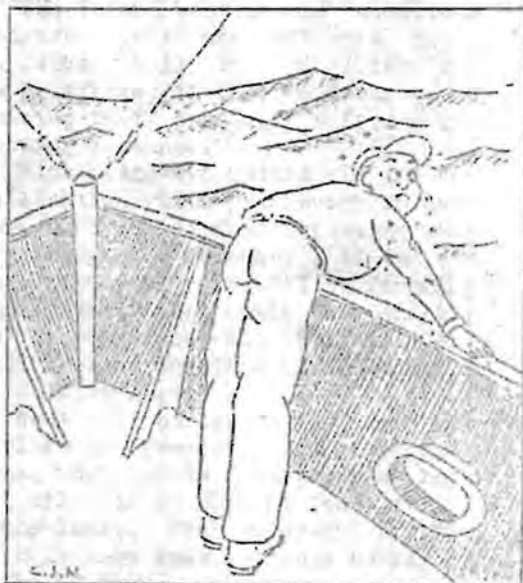
Some keen-eyed student of geography finally spotted it on a map, and it was established that Johnston was situated 717 airline miles southwest of Honolulu. Further research revealed it was a former U.S. bird sanctuary that had been taken over by the Navy and converted into an air station several years back. Two facts were plain: Johnston was very, very small, and it was about as isolated a place as one could find anywhere in the Pacific.

The deal was simple. The entire personnel of CBMU 574 would trade

jobs with the personnel of CBMU 554, who were rounding out a full year on Johnston. The unit numbers and all equipment would remain where they were. The transfer was arranged for humanitarian reasons. To keep a man on a rock like Johnston for more than a year would have been equivalent to some of the old Oriental torture tricks one reads about - such as allowing drops of water to fall upon a man's head until he went out of it.

LAND OF THE MOANING BIRDS

The Raiders sailed to Johnston in two sections, half the unit arriving on Christmas Day and the other half more than a month later, on February 3, 1945. Both groups made the trip aboard the U.S.S. Panay, a little cargo-passenger vessel that was remarkable for its ability to roll and pitch and all but turn back-flips even when the sea was relatively calm. For those who weren't too sick



and who didn't mind the lack of elbow room, it was a pleasant enough voyage, lasting half a week.

Soon after the arrival of the second contingent, Lt. Lippincott turned the command of the unit over to his executive officer, Lt. David N. Stirrett, and departed for a new assignment that was to take him to Okinawa as officer-in-charge of CBMU 624.

The Raiders' job on Johnston (and its tiny suburb, Sand Island) was to run the public works department of the Naval Air Station. This involved operating the various utility services such as water and electrical systems, performing construction and

repair work, maintaining equipment, keeping roads and runway surfaces in shape, unloading supply ships, and engaging in numerous other routine but important maintenance chores. Important, because upon the efficient functioning of the air station depended the safety and comfort of hundreds of trans-Pacific air travelers who stopped off each day at the island on their way to and from the forward areas.

It was a dull assignment, no question about it. Confined week after week and month after month to a 176-acre speck of coral in the middle of nowhere, the Raiders found their new life to be anything but a picnic. But they didn't forget that the men in the foxholes 3,000 miles to the west weren't having any picnic, either, so they did their best to bear the isolation and the loneliness with a minimum of griping.

One of the hardest things to get used to was the moaning birds which made Johnston their summer headquarters. Said to be a variety of petrel, these morose creatures filled the night air with their weird repertoire of moans, wails and sobs that sounded like something out of another world - like a chorus of lost souls, perhaps.

HOW TO SPEND A ROPEYARN

Johnston possessed some natural advantages that the Seabees didn't overlook. For those who liked swimming, the sky-blue water of the lagoon at the northwest side of the island was a delight. There was no sandy beach, but the gently-sloping seaplane ramp made a satisfactory substitute. Other popular pastimes were collecting shells among the reefs that surround the island and looking at the magic, underwater scenery through diving masks. Some men spent their leisure time fishing - and a few even managed to catch a big one now and then.

Hobby-lobbying was a favorite - and remunerative - way of passing the time. Making knife handles, fancy boxes, rugs, rings and the like was right down the Seabees' alley, and there was always a good market among the less talented members of the community. The handicraft experts were able to send home many a fat money order representing profits from their various specialties.

And, of course, there were the beer garden and the movie hall to help relieve the monotony. One could drop into the latter - an airless,



semi-underground chamber - on a warm evening and not only see a show but enjoy a Turkish bath as well.

The island boasted one sumptuous pleasure spot: the officers club. The Seabees built it and later had the privilege, if they so desired, of admiring their handiwork - from a respectful distance.

With peace two months old and demobilization getting underway in earnest, CBMU 554 is fast shrinking away to nothing. By November 1 it is expected that the unit will be formally inactivated. That would be exactly two years since the Raiders were first brought together as Company A of the 21st Super.

What will happen to the men who are left on November 1 is anybody's guess. But it is everybody's hope that all will go home at least for a 30-day leave. The majority of the men will have been overseas nearly 20 months by then.

In any event, it appears fairly certain that Johnston Island soon will be a closed chapter as far as the Raiders are concerned. With all its good points and its bad - its ideal climate and its moaning birds, its open-air showers and its rationed water, its easy informality and its long chow lines - life on Johnston has been a memorable experience.

For what the Raiders accomplished in World War II no medals have been awarded. They did the sort of job that warrants no headlines. It was unspectacular, dull and sometimes grueling. But the job was necessary and they did it well.

That is what counts.

- D.J.W.

DECLASSIFIED

ITINERARY OF CONSTRUCTION BATTALION MAINTENANCE UNIT 574.

PLAIN

Formed at Camp Peary, Virginia.

- 20 Dec 1943 - Transferred from Camp Peary to ABB, Fort Huachuca.
- 18 Mar 1944 - Departed ABB Huachuca for overseas.
- 21 Mar 1944 - Arrived and assigned to duty at Naval Air Station, Pearl Harbor.
- 18 Aug 1945 - CBMU 574 inactivated at Pearl Harbor with personnel transferred to Naval Receiving Station Pearl Harbor and Comservforpacflit for further assignment.

To Facilitate
Administrative Handling
Classification changed
from:

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DECLASSIFIED

To: **RESTRICTED**

Irvin S. Rosmussen
Signature

NOTE: This itinerary based on records in G.B. Operations and Personnel Section of Bureau of Naval Personnel.

Date: 4 September 1945.



**NO
LOGO
AVAILABLE**



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