

CAN DO, WILL DO . . . DID!



Official U. S. Navy photograph
READY TO WORK OR FIGHT: *This young American, typical of the jacks-of-all trades who form the Seabees, is en route to the South Pacific.*

That's Watchword of Seabees, 2 Years Old And 262,000 Strong

With a thrilling chapter of achievement under fire behind them, the Navy Seabees on 28 December commemorated their second birthday—a new arm of the nation's first line of offense; a force 262,000 strong, skilled in the arts of peace and the newer science of destruction.

The recent bloody encounters at Tarawa and elsewhere in the South Pacific have added glorious passages to their brief history. They now can share with the marines that famous slogan, "The First to Fight."

For slogans, the Seabees have their own. They have emblazoned upon their banners these words: "We Do the Difficult Immediately. The Impossible Takes a Little Longer." Coined first as merely "Can Do," the watchword has now grown to "Can Do, Will Do—Did." The stevedore battalions of this outfit have the motto: "Keep the Hook Moving."

The Seabees are a select outfit. Recruiting to their ranks is now closed, except for officers, who still are sought if they have special qualifications. The Navy already has enrolled the full enlisted complement, and the last Seabee boots are at present completing their training.

Recent news has furnished an illustration of the speed with which they work. Secretary of the Navy Knox told newspapermen that at Tarawa the Seabees disembarked with the first wave, were working while the fighting was going on, and had the airfield in commission with planes taking off four days after the initial attack. The landings in Africa, Sicily, Italy, the Aleutians and those in the South and Southwest Pacific saw the Seabees on the beach with the first outfits. Mr. Knox recalled that one of the first two officers killed at Salerno belonged to the Seabees.

The job of the Seabees is to build advanced bases. At such bases are kept the stores of the fleet. There the fleet refuels, takes on new provisions and additional ammunition.

One of the Seabees' first jobs was to establish fuel bases in the South Pacific, where the convoys carrying troops and supplies, and their protecting naval forces, could refuel on their way to Australia. The Seabees did not create those fuel bases, however, until they had first constructed the gun emplacements to defend them from attack by sea or air.

When the Allied forces in the South Pacific began their drive at New Georgia on the Munda airfield, the Seabees, after landing under fire, helped



SEABEE BATTLE: *The drawing above, by a U. S. Coast Guard artist, depicts the dramatic scene on Mono last October when, during the U. S. conquest of the Treasury Islands, a Seabee rolled his giant bulldozer over a live Japanese gun emplacement. The driver, according to a war correspondent's report, approached from the rear, raised the bulldozer blade as a shield against enemy fire, then rolled over the coconut-log shelter, burying its 12 Jap occupants. The official U. S. Navy photograph at right shows the wreckage after the action.*



unload supplies from ships. That done, they fashioned a crude corduroy road—the only type possible on the swampy terrain—and over this roadway moved the artillery, the shells, the food, the medical supplies and all the myriad of supply items which made it possible for the Allies in a few weeks to blast the Japs off Munda and pass on to other offensives in the Central Solomons.

Even before a base has been taken by our forces, the Seabees have the job of helping to get the supplies ashore. This involves not only actual unloading, but the fitting together of lighters and the construction of temporary or permanent wharves and other landing facilities. Once the supplies are ashore Seabees must immediately move them off the beach where they are vulnerable to air attack. This requires the construction of storage facilities and bivouac areas. One of the earliest jobs of the Seabees is to aid in setting up defenses. Another is the construction

of roads over which supplies may be moved.

Once established on the ground, the Seabees construct the advanced base. The variety of such construction is considerable. It includes airfields, barracks, hangars, machine shops and storage facilities for fuel and supplies of all kinds, including powder magazines and underground storage tanks for aviation gasoline and fuel oil.

Seabees dam mountain streams and pipe fresh water to the base, or set up water purification systems. They install telephone and electric systems, including loudspeaker air-raid warning networks. They set up refrigeration plants and malaria-control works, cantonments and hospitals, and repair facilities to service everything from damaged warships to broken machine guns.

Seabees often are detached and go in small or large detachments or units away from their bases on special work. Thus, the aircraft carrier *Enterprise*

was repaired while en route to battle and back, and the Seabees aboard her for that purpose actually were working on the vessel while she was in combat.

There have been several other instances of ships being repaired by Seabees. An outstanding example was the USS *Alchiba* (later awarded a Presidential Unit Citation) which was beached after suffering severe torpedo and fire damage while carrying supplies to the Solomons area. Although first given up and announced as lost, the *Alchiba* was repaired sufficiently to permit her return to a repair base. Seabees played a large part in making those emergency repairs which made possible the eventual saving of this vessel.

As part of their day's work Seabees saved troops from a bombed vessel off Sicily by jamming a causeway between their rescuing ship and the doomed vessel. Over this causeway the men ran to safety. Another vessel was bombed,



SEABEES ON THE TROPIC FRONT: They unload a cargo ship, set up buildings on an island

and a team of four Seabees rescued 90 men from that vessel, pulling them out of the water. Meanwhile Seabees went about their job of unloading supply vessels and also salvaged 100 small boats which had been used in creating the invasion bridgehead.

The salvage dump is a treasure store to inventive Seabees. Faced with the shortage of machinery, they have proved that "necessity is the mother of invention." Such ingenuity had its reward in ice cream for dinner one night in a tropical clearing bounded by sea and jungle.

After unloading the last of a long line of transports, the battalion of stevedore and longshoremen specialists was in the mood for a celebration. The cook took stock:

"We've got some powdered milk, eggs and sugar, so we could have ice cream if you fellows would go a little light on the sugar in your Java for awhile. But you might as well forget it. We don't have an ice-cream freezer."

"Don't take anything for granted," someone yelled back, and the Seabees went scavenging.

One man chiseled the head off a big oil drum. Another found a smaller drum and fitted it into the larger one, with just enough clearance for brine.

A discarded brass tubing was wound around a palm stump to make a cooling coil. Fins for the agitator were cut from a big artillery shell, and brazed onto an old steel shaft. With other assorted items, the collection was assembled, polished and tinplated, then hooked up to a dough-mixing machine and refrigerator. In went 10 gallons of the cook's mix, and out came ice cream.

Seabees adapt themselves to whatever materials and supplies are available. Thus, after oil drums had been used in carrying fuel to the South Pacific, Seabees used the empty drums for making culverts along swamp roads, hot-cake grills, trusses to reinforce building construction, buoys for rafts and even for a small floating drydock, basins, tubs, piping and ripping; drums were flattened by rollers to make roofing material, filled with sand and used as baffles for buildings.

One chief shipfitter built the following machinery, mostly from the scrap heap:

A 23-inch drill press, made from an automobile transmission, 8-inch channel iron and two bomb-bay screws from a B-17.

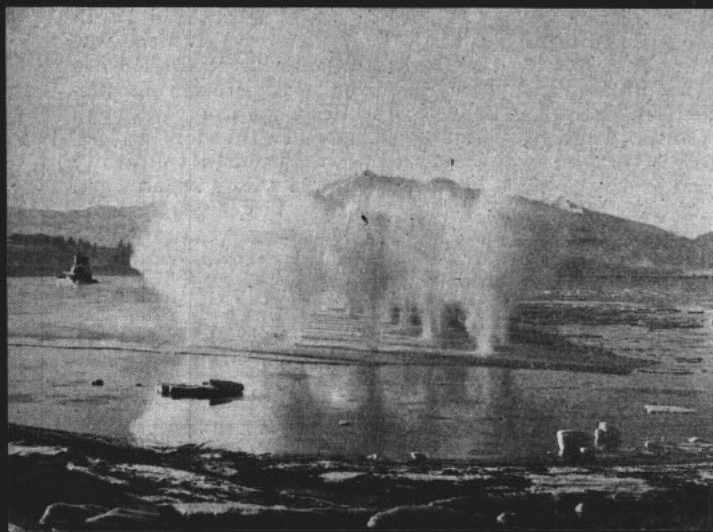
A lawnmower, complete with 2-horsepower motor and a set of tires.

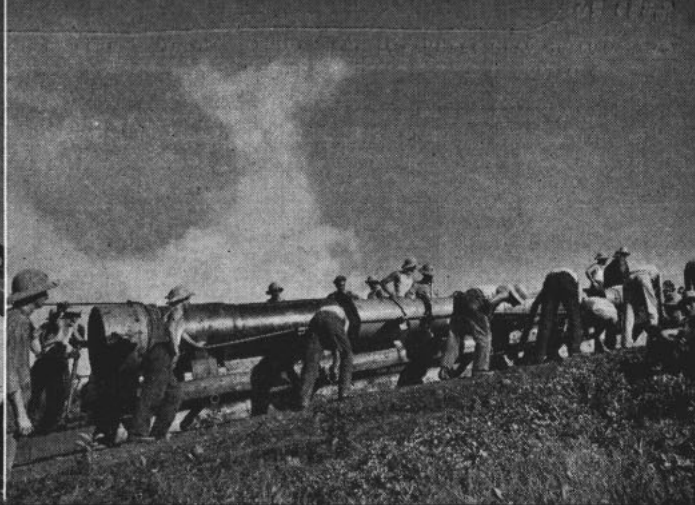
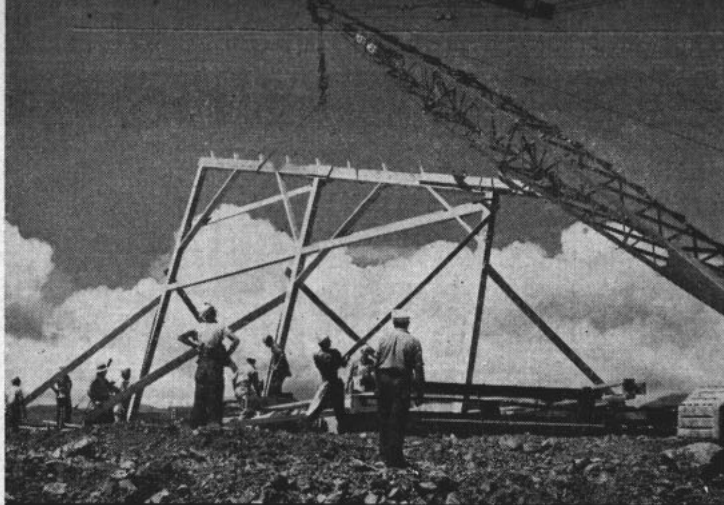
A bolt threader constructed from an automobile transmission and a pipe vice.

One of the special Seabee battalions trained particularly for the job of getting supplies from ships to shore at advanced bases has been commended four times—by any Army commander, a naval base commander, a Marine commander and a Navy service squadron commander. One of the naval officers said that the work of this battalion "helped to eliminate one of the principal bottlenecks to the war effort in the South Pacific." When the battalion arrived at a South Pacific base, it found the port congested with a number of ships riding at anchor while unloading, offering tempting targets for Jap bombers. The Seabee specials turned to and got the ships unloaded quickly and sent back to home ports.

Another battalion made possible one of the springboards of attack in the New Guinea offensive last summer by carving an airfield out of a dense tropical jungle under torrential rains in 13 days. During the first 11 days, 16½ inches of rain fell. The fighting builders landed early on the morning of 2 July, and by 0700 the work was under

SEABEES FIGHT A WINTER WAR: They blast up ice in Kodiak Bay, build a base on Adak,





stepping stone to Tokyo, roll a seven-inch Navy gun to its emplacement at a South Pacific base.

way while supplies were still being unloaded. Huge trees had to be dynamited. Bulldozers burrowed their way through dense undergrowth. Work continued 24 hours a day in spite of the deluge and bombing by the Japs. By 14 July a 3,000-foot runway 150 feet wide had been surfaced with a foot and a half of crushed coral rock and was ready for use.

Working under extremely adverse conditions, a group of Seabees in the winter of 1942 recovered and repaired a section of floating drydock which broke loose from its tow during a gale and was threatened with complete destruction on a rocky coast.

The first citation to be earned by a Seabee was awarded for defending construction work in the Solomons in October, 1942. Lawrence C. Meyer, S2c, USNR, of Toledo, Ohio, was awarded the Silver Star posthumously for manning a machine-gun during an air raid and firing on Jap Zeros. Shortly afterward he was killed in action while working on the pontoon barge, loaded with gasoline, which was struck by an enemy bomb.

The Seabees defend what they build—defend their installations with their very lives, if need be. Times have changed indeed from the day the Japs

rained fire and ruin upon the relatively helpless civilian construction workers at Wake, Guam and Cavite. Today, the Seabee can grab a gun, a grenade, an anti-aircraft shell just as readily as he can use his saw, his wrench or other tools of his craft. Pearl Harbor and its aftermath emphasized the need for just such an organization.

Capt. John R. Perry (CEC), USN, prepared and launched the Seabees plan. For his outstanding work he was awarded the Legion of Merit.

In October, 1941, the Navy Department approved the organization of an experimental construction company of 99 men. This was really the genesis of the Seabees, but it was not until 28 December 1941 that Rear Admiral Ben Moreell, USN, chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, officially inaugurated the Seabees. The popular name, however, was not officially adopted until 17 March 1942.

A list of the principal trades and skills represented in a construction battalion usually includes: blacksmith, bulldozer operator, carpenter, concrete worker, construction worker, crane operator, dredge deckhand, quarry driller, electrician, engine operator, excavation foreman, dredge fireman, gas and Diesel engine repairman, labor

foreman, launchman, dredge mate, mechanic, oiler, shovel operator, painter, piledriver foreman, pipefitter and plumber, pipelayer, powderman, rigger, road-machine operator, sheet-metal worker, coppersmith, steel worker, telephone man, truck driver, water tender, welder, wharfbuilder, baker, barber, boatswain, chainman, chief of party, cook, chauffeur, clerk, diver, draftsman, instrumentman, mail clerk, photographer, rodman, sailmaker, steward and storekeeper.

On their second birthday the Seabees received congratulations from many notables, including Secretary Knox, Admiral Ernest J. King, USN; Rear Admiral Moreell and Lt. Gen. (now General) Thomas Holcomb, USMC.

But the highest praise came from President Roosevelt, who said:

"I have followed with personal interest and admiration your record of achievements at home and on all our fighting fronts. . . . Your war effort is outstanding because you accomplish three great purposes which enable our fighting forces to carry on the offensive. You build, you fight, and you repair. You are prepared to repeat the operation whenever necessary—you go forward together. I congratulate you and wish you good luck and God speed."

lay a landing strip for planes and fill sandbags for a machine-gun emplacement at Amchitka.



Official U. S. Navy photograph