

# Claude W. Grimshaw's U.S. Navy Service as a Seabee in World War II



Claude Grimshaw in 1944



Claude served as a Seabee in the U.S. Navy

August 2010

# Claude W. Grimshaw's U.S. Navy Service as a Seabee<sup>1</sup> in World War II

by

Thomas W. Grimshaw  
Son of Claude Grimshaw

August 2010

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<sup>1</sup> "Seabee" is the term used for Construction Battalions (CBs) of the U.S. Navy.

## 1. Introduction

Claude Walter Grimshaw entered the US Navy in July 1942, eight months after Pearl Harbor, at age 21. He served until November 1945, a total of about three years and four months, during which he participated in campaigns in the Pacific Theater. Claude was assigned to Naval Construction Battalions, commonly referred to as "Seabees", and he held rank of Chief Boatswains Mate (CBM). He entered on active duty in Seattle, Washington, where he had moved to from his home in Oacoma, South Dakota in about 1940.

After receiving Seabee training at Camp Allen, near Norfolk, Virginia, in August, Claude was dispatched to the Aleutian Islands with the 21<sup>st</sup> US Naval Construction Battalion. The unit arrived at Dutch Harbor in October 1942 and remained in the Aleutians until November 26, 1943, when it was deployed to Camp Parks near San Francisco. Claude departed the Aleutians two or three days prior to the 26<sup>th</sup> and was on the Liberty Ship John P. Gaines when it broke up at sea on November 24. Most of the passengers, including Claude, were rescued. He was assigned to the 89<sup>th</sup> NCB while at Camp Parks.

The next record of Claude was his marriage to Phyllis Rogers in San Jose, California on April 1, 1944, about four months after leaving the Aleutians. Phyllis traveled from Oacoma for the marriage. The 89<sup>th</sup> Construction Battalion, a replacement pool at Camp Parks, was demobilized on July 15, 1944, and Claude was apparently transferred to the Construction Battalion Replacement Depot (CBRD) – his third assignment – at that time.

Claude was then assigned to the 17<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Battalion, which departed for Saipan in September 1944, about two months after the main battle on the island had taken place in July. He apparently remained on Saipan until early 1945, because his half-brother Stanley Bice, who was assigned to a US Army Air Force maintenance unit on Tinian, visited Claude on Saipan in 1945.

Sometime after meeting with Stanley, Claude departed with his Seabee unit for Okinawa, where the main action took place from April to mid-May 1945. Claude reported to his family that he was injured in action while attempting to rescue a US Marine who had fallen from a rope ladder while transferring to a troop landing ship. It has not yet been confirmed, but it is likely that Claude was injured while piloting an LST – a common assignment for a CBM in the Seabees – during or after the 2½-month long battle on Okinawa.

Claude was released from active duty in Minneapolis in November 1945 and joined his new family (his first son was born during the preceding March) in his hometown of Oacoma, South Dakota. After attempting farming for a while, Claude became involved in the earth trenching then in the earth boring and water well drilling business, which he continued throughout his professional life.

According to Claude's separation record, he served in five units -- a training battalion in Norfolk followed by the 21<sup>st</sup> and 89<sup>th</sup> Battalions, the Construction Battalion Replacement Depot (CBRD) at Camp Parks, California, and finally the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion. A brief history of these units has been found in the internet and is shown below.

### 21<sup>ST</sup> BATTALION

Formed at Norfolk, the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion reached Hueneme Sept. 22, 1942, and embarked for Alaska Oct. 10. The Battalion operated from Dutch Harbor for 14 months, with detachments on Atka, Adak and Ogilaga. The 21st returned to Camp Parks Dec. 14, 1943. On its second tour of duty, the 21<sup>st</sup> reported to the Seventh

Regiment July 27, 1944, at Pearl Harbor, and operated at Moanalua, Intrepid Point and Waipio Point until the Spring of 1945, when the Battalion moved on to Saipan and the Ryukyus to finish out the war.

#### 89<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION

Formed at Camp Allen in February 1943, the 89<sup>th</sup> Battalion was transferred to Camp Peary later that month. On April 21 it was moved to Camp Parks. After serving more than a year as a replacement pool, the 89<sup>th</sup> was decommissioned at Camp Parks July 15, 1944.

#### 17<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION

The 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion was commissioned at Camp Allen Aug. 8, 1942, and transferred to Camp Bradford the next day. On Sept. 1 the outfit was moved to Gulf-port, Miss, and three weeks later to Davisville, R. I. Embarking at Staten Island on Oct. 1, the Battalion arrived at Argentia, Newfoundland, on Oct. 12. On March 14, 1943, the ranks were swelled by the addition of CBD 1004, filling the Battalion complement. Returning home, the unit sailed from Argentia on Nov. 17, 1943, arriving at Davisville Nov. 20. On May 9, 1944, the outfit entrained for Port Hueneme, arriving May 14. After a month at Hueneme, and three months at nearby Point Mugu, the Battalion started its second overseas tour, sailing from Port Hueneme Sept. 11, 1944. Saipan was reached Oct. 6, 1944. After the Okinawa invasion the outfit was transferred there.

Source: <http://www.seabees93.net/GI%20Naval%20Construction%20Battalions.htm>

A description of the other unit in which Claude served (after training) was also been found and is shown below:

#### CBRD Camp Parks

Camp Parks was a Constructions Battalion Replacement Depot (CBRD): the rest camp and training facility for Seabee units that had returned from the Pacific.

Source: <http://www.seabees93.net/BC%20appendik%20%201-21-03.htm>

Thanks go to Fay Bice, Stanley's wife and Claude's sister-in law, for providing information and photos for this booklet. Thanks also to Sam Bice, Fay's son, for making accessible materials in Joe Bice's trunk of family heirlooms, which included several letters from Claude. Much of the information and photos presented here is from photo albums and scrapbooks prepared by Claude and Phyllis. The most important one for Claude's World War II experience is a combined album and scrapbook described in Section 11 of this booklet. Much of the information on the training and Alaska deployment of the 21<sup>st</sup> NCB is from a "Souvenir Annual<sup>2</sup>".

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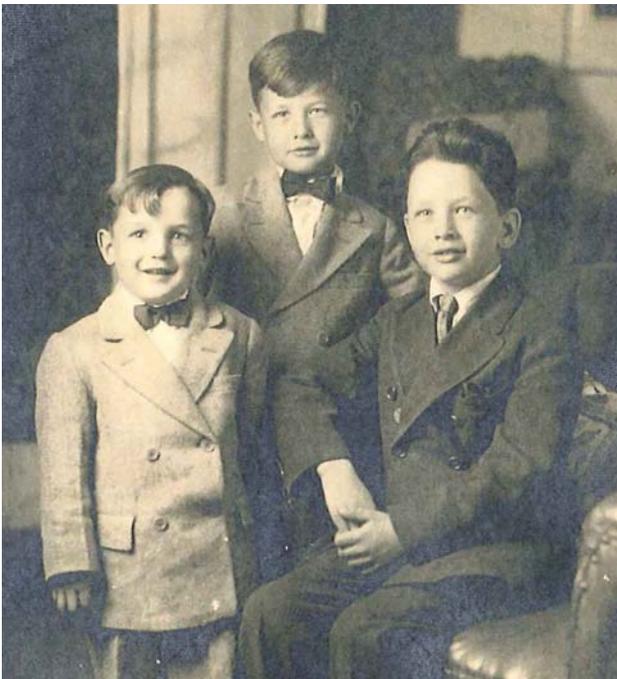
<sup>2</sup> Nease, Earl D., ed., 1943. 12st Naval Construction Battalion, 1942-1943: Souvenir Annual. Publisher Not Identified. 18+ pages.

## 2. Claude's Life before the Navy

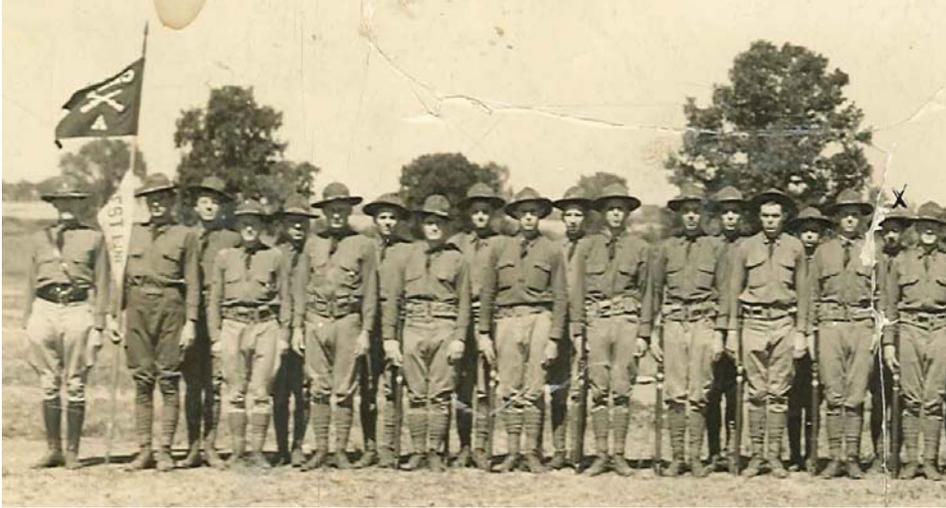
Claude Walter Grimshaw was born in Oacoma, South Dakota, in October 1920. Freda Grimshaw was Claude's mother; his father, also named Claude, died from pleurisy several months before Claude's birth. A picture of Freda with her older son, George, and Claude is shown below.



After she was widowed, Freda married Joseph Bice, and the couple had one son, Stanley, who is shown below (left) with his half-brothers, Claude T. (center) and George Grimshaw.



Claude graduated from high school in Oacoma in 1938. He participated in Civilian's Military Training Camps at Fort Snelling, near Minneapolis, Minnesota that summer and the following summer. He completed the "Red" course in August 1938 and the "White" course in August 1939. Shown below is a photo believed to be one of the two classes. The photo is the left half of the original, in which Claude indicates his location with a small "x". Claude also signed the back of the photo, the signature is shown below the picture. The flag with crossed rifles indicates Company A of an infantry brigade.



*Claude Grimshaw  
Oacoma  
S. D.*

An image of Claude's certificate of completion of the Red course in 1938 is shown below.

**MILITARY TRAINING CERTIFICATE**



**Citizens' Military Training Camps**

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

KNOW YE, THAT, CLAUDE W. GRIMSHAW

HAS ATTENDED THE RED COURSE OF INSTRUCTION,  
INFANTRY ARM, AT THE CITIZENS' MILITARY TRAINING  
 CAMP HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT OF THE UNITED STATES  
 AT FORT SNELLING, MINNESOTA  
 FROM JULY SEVENTH TO AUGUST FIFTH, ONE THOUSAND  
 NINE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-EIGHT  
 GIVEN AT FORT SNELLING, MINNESOTA THIS FIFTH  
 DAY OF AUGUST, IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD ONE THOUSAND  
 NINE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-EIGHT

REMARKS: None

FOR THE CAMP COMMANDER: *Philip W. Merrill*  
 PHILIP W. MERRILL,  
 1st Lieut., 3rd Infantry  
 COMMANDING

W. D. A. 51-51, Form No. 138  
 May 1, 1937

Fort Snelling was visited by the author of this booklet in June 2010. The photos below are of the tower and enclosing wall of the original fort as well as the parade ground inside the enclosure. The third photo is of a building outside the enclosure that is no longer in use but may well have been the barracks where Claude stayed in 1938 and 1939.

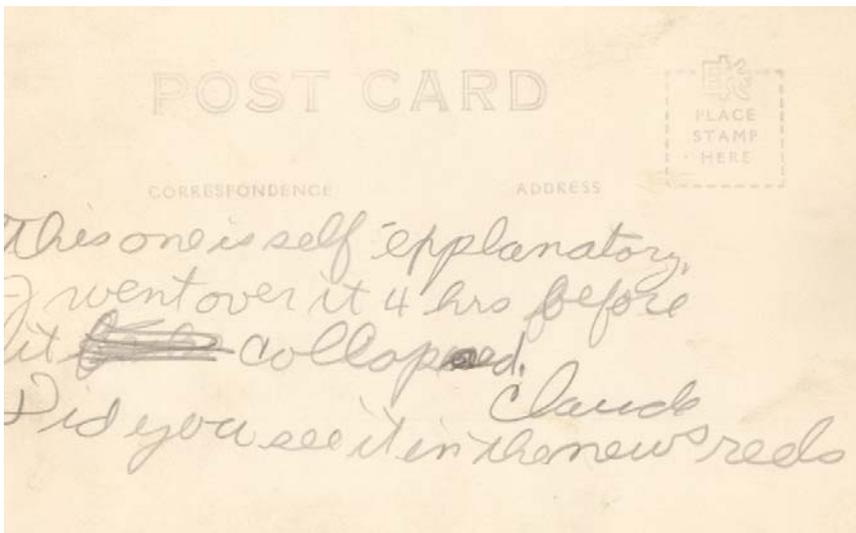


Sometime between August 1939 in November 1940, Claude left Oacoma for Bremerton, Washington, where his brother, George, and wife, Judy, were living and had jobs at the Navy Yard. Shown below is a postcard from Claude to his parents in Oacoma showing that he had arrived there by November 29.



Claude may have worked at the 80 Yard, but it is known from family learned that he was engaged as a deep sea diver, and he was also a pilot of a tugboat in Puget Sound according to his U.S. Navy records.

Another postcard shows that Claude crossed the Tacoma Narrows Bridge just a few hours before it collapsed on November 7, 1940 as shown in the images below



### 3. Enlistment and Training

World War II began for the US shortly after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. That enlisted in the U.S. Navy seven months later, in July 1942, at which time he was working for the geek Ramsey Company as a tugboat operator. He was assigned to the 21<sup>st</sup> Naval Construction Battalion (a unit of the "Seabees") and received his training at Camp Allen, near Norfolk Virginia. The 21<sup>st</sup> NCB was actually commissioned when the training of its members was completed on August 6. An image of the unit's logo from its "Souvenir Manual"<sup>3</sup> is shown below.



After training, the 21<sup>st</sup> NCB traveled by train back to the West Coast, to Port Hueneme in Southern California, where furloughs were granted before deployment to the Pacific Theater. The photo of Claude shown below has not yet been dated, but is believed to have been taken during his first year of service. The insignia indicating his rank shows that he was not yet promoted to a "big" Chief Boatswain's Mate. Note the signature in the lower left corner, "Love Claude".

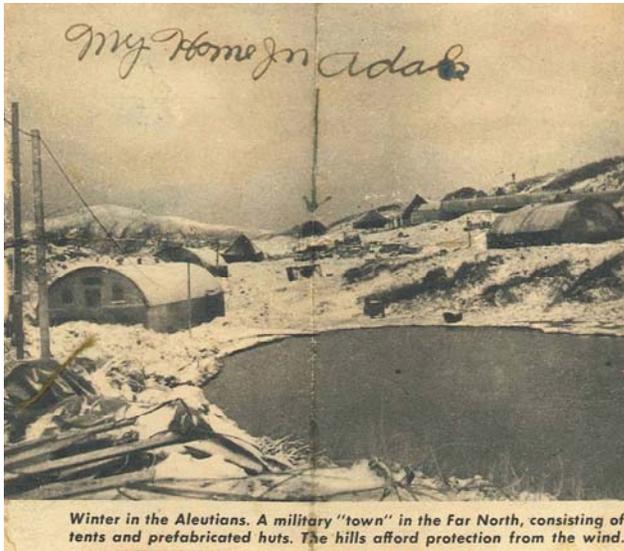


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<sup>3</sup> [Souvenir Manual citation]

## 4. Deployment to the Aleutian Islands

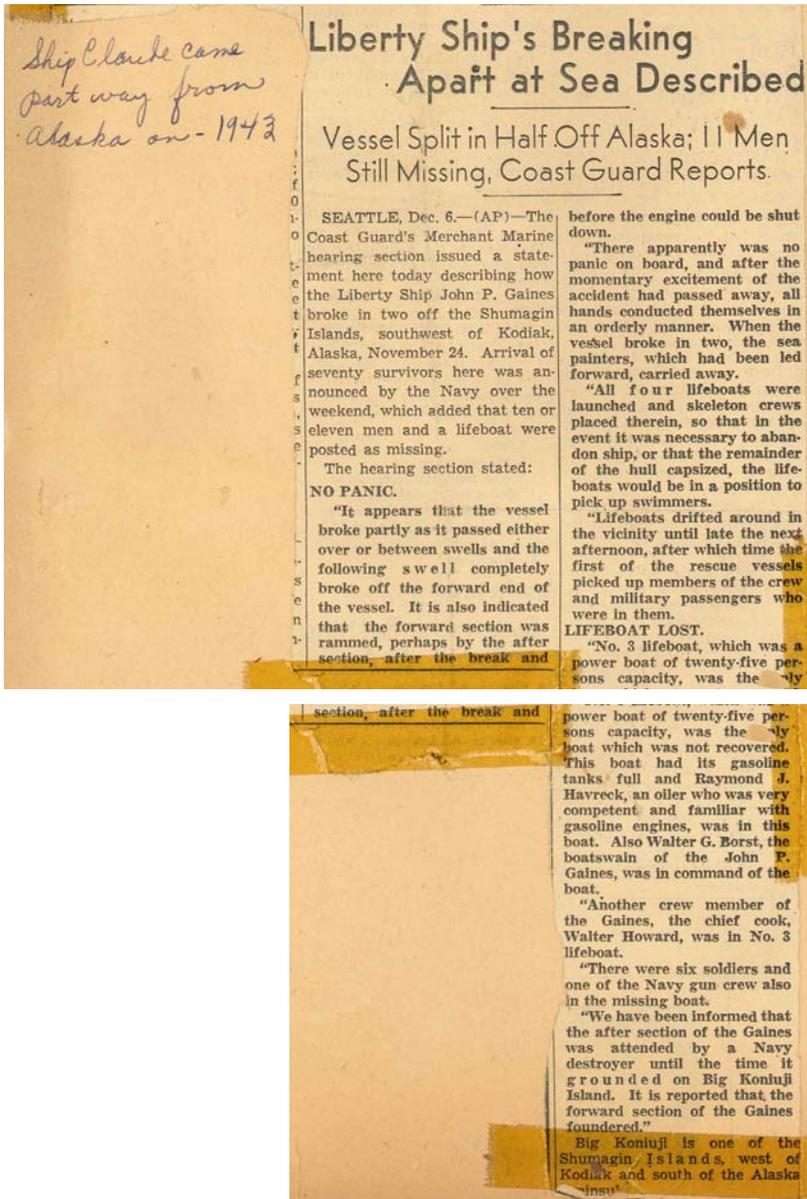
The 21<sup>st</sup> Seabees arrived at Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians, where the Japanese had dropped a few bombs several months earlier, about the same time that they captured the islands of Attu and Kiska. Details of Claude's responsibilities and activities while in the Aleutians are not known, although it is clear he was assigned to the island of Adak, as indicated in the image below from a newspaper article. Claude's handwritten entry indicates that he lived in a Quonset hut on Adak. The Quonset hut was a universal container used by the Seabees for living, working, storage and other purposes.



While stationed in Alaska, Claude wrote a letter his parents, which is shown below. The date, September 27, 1943, was about two months prior to his departure from Alaska.

C. Claude M. E. Sept-27-43  
Dear Mom & Dad,  
Oh me! am tired  
I am lying on my back just  
ready to crawl in & just blowed  
& shovled. Otherwise there isn't  
a whole lot no. Went to a movie  
last nite. It wasn't bad.  
What's new with you folks  
Hope you are all getting along happy  
& healthy.  
I had my new blues tailored.  
They sure fit swell now. Cost me  
\$4.06 to get them fixed.  
Have you heard from Hot Judy  
lately. How is she getting along.  
Haven't received my watch as  
yet. Hope it gets here soon as I sure  
miss it a lot.  
Well Mother & Dad I'll close  
and see you in dreamland.  
And write very very soon if  
so. With all my love  
I'll remain  
Claude

Claude remained with the 17<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Battalion in Alaska for about 14 months, after which he was assigned to the 89<sup>th</sup> NCB (a recuperation and training unit at Camp Parks, near San Francisco) according to his service record. He left the Aleutians in late November 1943 and was on the Liberty Ship John P. Gaines when it broke in half on the island of Big Koniuji, one of the Shumigan Islands west of Kodiak. The breakup occurred on November 24, which was just two days before the 17<sup>th</sup> Seabees left Dutch Harbor. A newspaper article describing the fate of the John P. Gaines is shown below with Phyllis Grimshaw's handwritten description in the scrapbook where the article was stored.



A photograph that accompanied the newspaper article on the sinking of the John P. Gaines is shown below.



**SEA WRECK**— The Liberty ship John P. Gaines, built in the Kaiser yards at Portland, is shown after breaking in two 100 miles off the coast of Alaska. Survivors are shown pulling away from the hulk in a lifeboat. Eleven men were reported lost. —Associated Press Wirephoto.

## 5. Marriage to Phyllis Lorraine Rogers in San Jose, California

The next record we have of Claude is in April 1944, four months after leaving Alaska, when he married Phyllis Rogers in San Jose, California, which – like Camp Parks – is in the San Francisco area. Phyllis had traveled there by train from her (and Claude's) hometown of Oacoma, South Dakota. A photo of Claude and Phyllis, taken in San Jose within a month of their marriage, is shown below.



An image of Claude and Phyllis Grimshaw's marriage license is shown below.

State of California County of Santa Clara

**MARRIAGE LICENSE**

These Presents are to Authorize and license any Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice of the District Court of Appeal, Judge of the Superior Court, Justice of the Peace, Judge of any Police Court, City Recorder, Trustee, Minister of the Gospel of any denomination, to solemnize within said County the Marriage of

CLAUDE WATER GRIMSHAW native of SOUTH DAKOTA  
 aged 25 years, resident of OACOMA County of LYMAN  
 State of SOUTH DAKOTA and PHYLLIS L. ROGERS native of SOUTH DAKOTA  
 aged 20 years, resident of OACOMA County of LYMAN  
 State of SOUTH DAKOTA. The man's WHITE the woman's WHITE

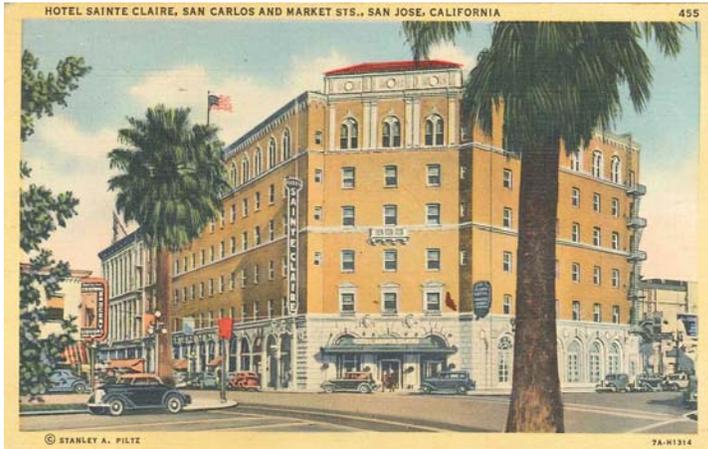
In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Seal of the Superior Court of said County, this 1st day of APRIL A.D. 1944.

FRANK W. HODGSON  
 County Clerk and Ex-Officio Clerk of the Superior Court in and for Santa Clara County  
 State of California, County of Santa Clara: I Hereby Certify, That on this 1st day of April 1944, by authority of a License to which this Certificate is attached, at San Jose, in the County of Santa Clara, State of California, I joined in marriage Claude Water Grimshaw and Phyllis L. Rogers in the presence of Witnesses, to-wit: Mrs. Paul Mahan a resident of Lyman in the County of Rice State of Kansas and Bob Mahan a resident of Lyman in the County of Rice State of Kansas.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this 1st day of April 1944.

Arthur W. Johnson Minister of the Methodist Church

A postcard depicting the Hotel Sainte Claire in San Jose (shown below) may have been kept in an album by Claude and Phyllis possibly because it was their honeymoon hotel/

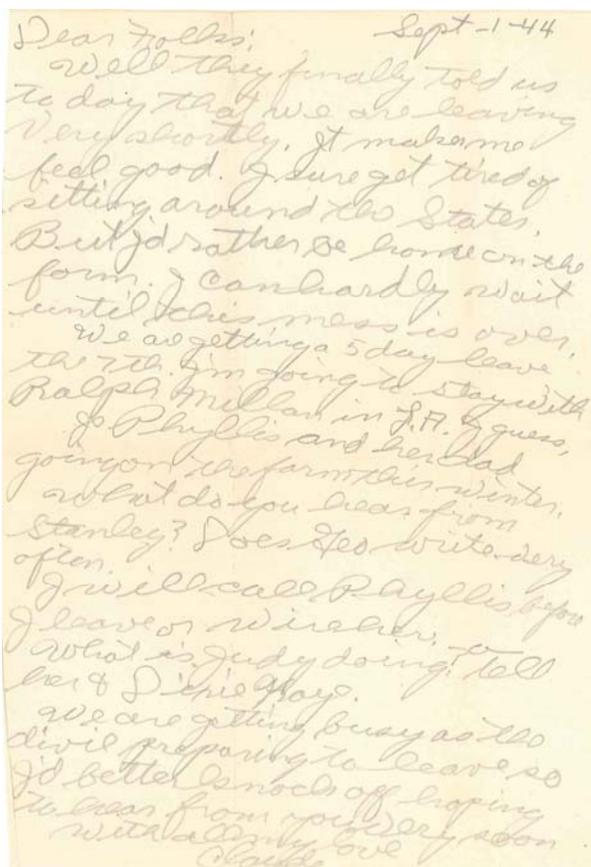


The following photo of Claude must have been taken in the same timeframe, as the photo studio whose stamp appears on the back of the photo is located in San Jose.



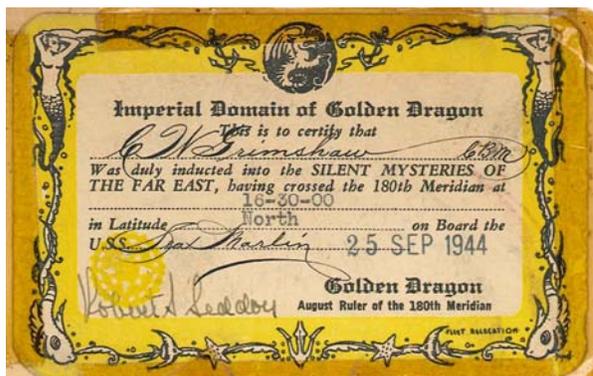
## 6. Deployment to Saipan

Claude and Phyllis Grimshaw were together until about June 1943, as their first son, Thomas, was born the following March 23. Therefore sometime during July or August, Phyllis returned to Oacoma, where she lived with her sister-in-law, Judy Grimshaw, pending Claude's return from the war. Claude, who was assigned to the 21<sup>st</sup> Naval Construction Battalion after CBRD Camp Parks, remained stateside until September (his former unit, the 17<sup>th</sup> NCB went to Hawaii in July). He received his orders for his next assignment on September 1 as indicated in the letter below to his parents.

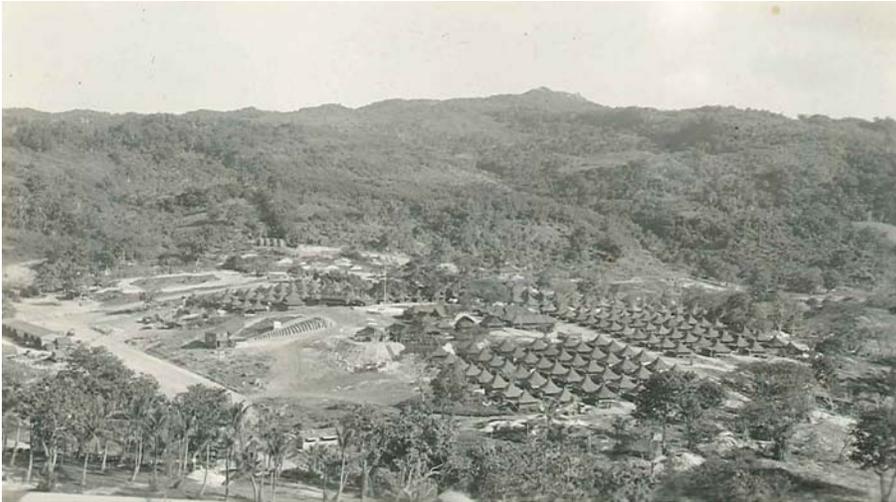


Dear folks; Sept-1-44  
Well they finally told us  
to day that we are leaving  
Very shortly. It makes me  
feel good. I sure get tired of  
sitting around the States.  
But I'd rather be home on the  
farm. I can hardly wait  
until this mess is over.  
We are getting a 5 day leave  
with Jim going to stay with  
Ralph Miller in J.P. I guess  
Phyllis and her dad  
going on the farm this winter.  
What do you hear from  
Stanley? Does he write very  
often.  
I will call Phyllis before  
I leave on wire later.  
What is Judy doing? Tell  
her I love her.  
We are getting busy as the  
devil preparing to leave so  
I better knock off hoping  
to hear from you very soon.  
With a lot of love  
Claude

Claude crossed the International Date Line on September 25, as indicated by his membership card for the "Imperial Domain of the Golden Dragon" shown below.



The 21<sup>st</sup> NCB arrived on Saipan in the Mariana Islands on October 6, 1944, which was about three months after the defeat of the Japanese. Presumably he was involved in the post-battle cleanup and reconstruction. A picture of the camp on Saipan where Claude was stationed is shown below.



*“Our camp in Saipan taken from the air”*



*“Claude on Saipan”*

The photos of Claude shown below were probably taken sometime later, perhaps after the tents had been replaced by more permanent Quonset huts.



*“The big chief by Quonset hut 1944”*

## 7. Visit to Saipan by Claude's Half-Brother, Stanley Bice

One of the highlights of Claude's World War II experience was a surprise visit from his half-brother, Stanley Bice, while he was on Saipan in 1945. Stan was assigned to a maintenance unit of the U.S. Army Air Corps on Tinian, a nearby island of the Marianas. He had heard that Claude's unit, the 21<sup>st</sup> Seabees, was on Saipan, and (according to his wife, Fay Bice) seized an opportunity to go to Saipan to assemble a truck. There, he found Claude, who later said it was "the best of my life" when he saw Stan. The photos shown below are of Stan and Claude while they were together on Saipan.



*"Stan and Claude in Camp on Saipan"*



*Stan and Claude by shrine"*



*Stan and Claude by Jap 75"*



*“Stan and Claude on Saipan”*



*“Claude and Stan by Hirohito statue on Saipan”*

Stan subsequently continued his assignment on Tinian and had his photo taken (shown below) sometime after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.



Fay Bice, widow of Stanley, indicates that the carved figure shown below is from Saipan. Apparently, Stan made arrangements for it to be shipped home in South Dakota while he was visiting Claude. The piece, which is about 18 to 24 inches high, is in Fay's possession in Rapid City. The language or meaning of the figure have not yet been interpreted.



## 8. Deployment to Okinawa after Saipan

Sometime after his meeting with Stan on Saipan in 1945, Claude departed with the 21<sup>st</sup> Seabees for Okinawa. Records of his experience there have not yet been found, although the paragraph on the 21<sup>st</sup> Seabees in the Introduction to this booklet seems to indicate that the unit arrived after the main battle, which was very intense and lasted from April through mid-June, was over. Shown below are photos apparently taken by Claude while he was on Okinawa.



*“Our landing from LSTs on Okinawa. Notice Jap machine gun nest and pill box. I came on 888” (Note: “888” is the number on the craft on the right.)*



*“Ishikawa on Okinawa”*



*“Native hut on Okinawa”*



*“Okinawa cart”*

It was well known in the family that Claude had been injured during landing operations in the Pacific operations during World War II. It seems likely that as a Chief Boatswain's Mate (CBM) he was piloting an LST carrying US Marines from troopships to the beach. According to family

lore, Claude – while piloting the landing craft – observed a Marine fall from a rope ladder leading from a troopship to the LST. Claude dove or jumped into the water in an unsuccessful attempt to save him the Marine and was caught between the troopship and LST, resulting in a broken collarbone and several broken ribs. It was also known in the family that Claude was in a hospital somewhere on the West Coast for several weeks recovering from his injuries.

It has not yet been proven that Claude saw action on Okinawa and was injured as described above, but the scenario seems most likely in light of what was known in the family and has been found in his World War II service record.

## 9. Navy Separation and Service Record

Claude received his discharge from the U.S. Navy Separation Center in Minneapolis on November 10, 1945 – coincidentally at or close to the location of his para-military training at Fort Snelling, six or seven years earlier. His Notice of Separation (shown below) includes the following facts:

- Claude served from July 16, 1942 to November 10, 1945, a total of 3 years, 3 months and 25 days.
- His assignments included: 1) Naval Construction Training Center at Norfolk Virginia; 2) the 21<sup>st</sup> US Naval Construction Battalion; 3) the 89<sup>th</sup> Construction Battalion; 4) the Construction Battalion Replacement Depot (CBRD), Camp Parks, California; and 5) the 17<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Battalion.
- His ranks were: 1) Boatswain's Mate First Class; 2) QM1/c; 3) Chief Boatswain's Mate (AA); 4) Chief Boatswain's Mate (T) (CB).
- He was a tugboat operator working for Rumsey Puget Sound in Seattle when he enlisted.
- He completed three weeks of diving school.

The Notice of Separation is shown below in two parts, followed by Claude's U.S. Navy identification card.

NOTICE OF SEPARATION FROM U. S. NAVAL SERVICE					53496	
NAVPERS-553 (REV. 8-45)					South Dakota Veterans WW II Bonus applied for.	
1. SERIAL OR FILE NO.		2. NAME (LAST) (FIRST) (MIDDLE)		3. RATE AND CLASS/OR		5. PLACE OF SEPARATION
RANK AND CLASSIFICATION		4. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES				USN PersSepCen Minneapolis, Minn.
664 69 32		GRIMSHAW, CLAUDE W. <sup>alter</sup>				4. CHARACTER OF SEPARATION
CBM(T) V6 USNR		Chief Boatswain's Mate (T)				HONORABLE
1145-589		OACOMA, SO. DAKOTA Lyman County				7. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT
						Same as #4
8. RACE	9. SEX	10. MARITAL STATUS	11. U.S. CITIZEN (YES OR NO)	12. DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH		
W	M	M	Yes	10-5-20 Oacoma, South Dakota		
13. REGISTERED	14. SELECTIVE SERVICE BOARD OF REGISTRATION	15. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Washington (seat)	834 4th Bremerton, Washington				
16. MEANS OF ENTRY (INDICATE BY CHECK IN APPROPRIATE BOX)	17. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE	18. NET SERVICE (FOR PAY PURPOSES) (YRS., MOS., DAYS)				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENLISTED <input type="checkbox"/> INDUCTED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMISSIONED	7-30-42	3-3-25				
DATE 7-16-42	DATE	DATE				
19. QUALIFICATIONS, CERTIFICATES HELD, ETC.	20. RATINGS HELD	21. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE WORLD WAR II				
See rating description booklet	EM1/c QM1/c CBM(AA) CBM(T) (CB)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO				
23. SERVICE SCHOOLS COMPLETED	24. SERVICE (VESSELS AND STATIONS SERVED ON)					
Diving	3					
	Const. Batt's USNCTC Norfolk, Va. 21st USNCB 89th Const. Batt. CBRD Camp Parks, Calif. 17th NCB					

**PAY & INSURANCE DATA**

**IMPORTANT:** IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER, INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTOR'S SUBDIVISION, VETERAN'S ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

23. KIND OF INSURANCE N-N-N	25. EFFECTIVE MONTH OF ALLOTMENT 1-30-42	27. NO. NEXT PREMIUM DUE 12/45	28. AMOUNT OF PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH 1.32-1.32-4.02	29. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO CONTINUE INS. Yes
30. TOTAL PAYMENT UPON DISCHARGE \$ 273.32	31. TRAVEL OR MILEAGE ALLOWANCE INCLUDED IN TOTAL PAYMENT \$ 88.55	32. INITIAL MUSTERING OUT PAY 100.00	33. NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER D. J. HART, LT. (jg) SC USNR	
24. REMARKS Inactive Duty 7-16-42 to 7-30-42			35. SIGNATURE (BY DIRECTION OF COMMANDING OFFICER)  H. J. VOLLMER Lieut., USNR	

**EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATIONAL DATA**

36. NAME AND ADDRESS OF LAST EMPLOYER Rumsey Hight Sound Seattle, Wash.			37. DATES OF LAST EMPL. MT. FROM 1941 TO 7-16-42	38. MAIN CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND D. O. T. NO. Opp. Tug Boats
39. JOB PREFERENCE (LIST TYPE, LOCALITY, AND GENERAL AREA) Undecided			40. PREFERENCE FOR ADDITIONAL TRAINING (TYPE OF TRAINING) None	
41. NON-SERVICE EDU. (YRS. SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED) GRAM. 8 H. S. 4 COLL. ---			42. DEGREES ---	
43. MAJOR COURSE OR FIELD ---			44. VOCATIONAL OR TRADE COURSES (NATURE AND LENGTH OF COURSE) None	
45. RIGHT INDEX FINGERPRINT 		46. OFF DUTY EDUCATIONAL COURSES COMPLETED None		
47. DATE OF SEPARATION 11-10-45		48. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED C. W. Grimshaw		

CCR

**UNITED STATES NAVY**  
*Identification Card*

**GRIMSHAW, Claude W.**  
Name

*Claude W. Grimshaw*  
Signature

Color Hair **Brown** Eyes **Blue**  
Weight **156** Birth **10/5/20**  
Void after **DOW**

*Robert S. Lendon*  
N. Nav. 148 Validating Officer

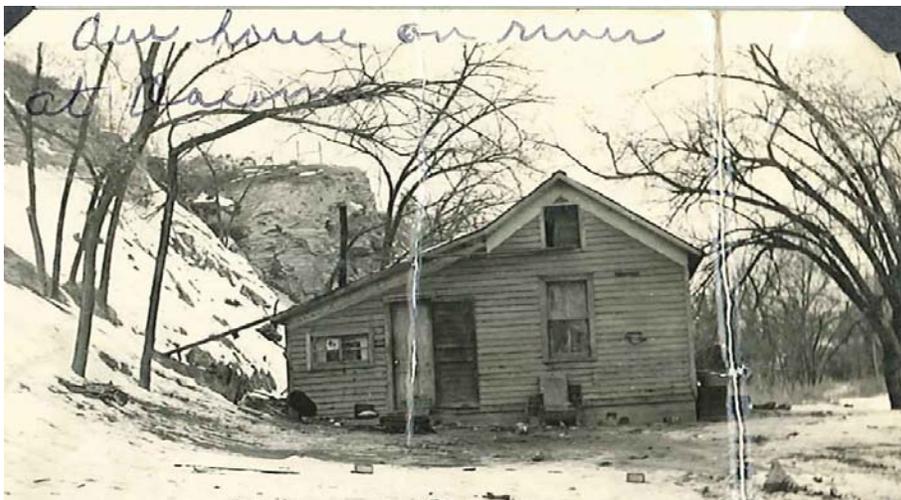


## 10. Return to Civilian Life

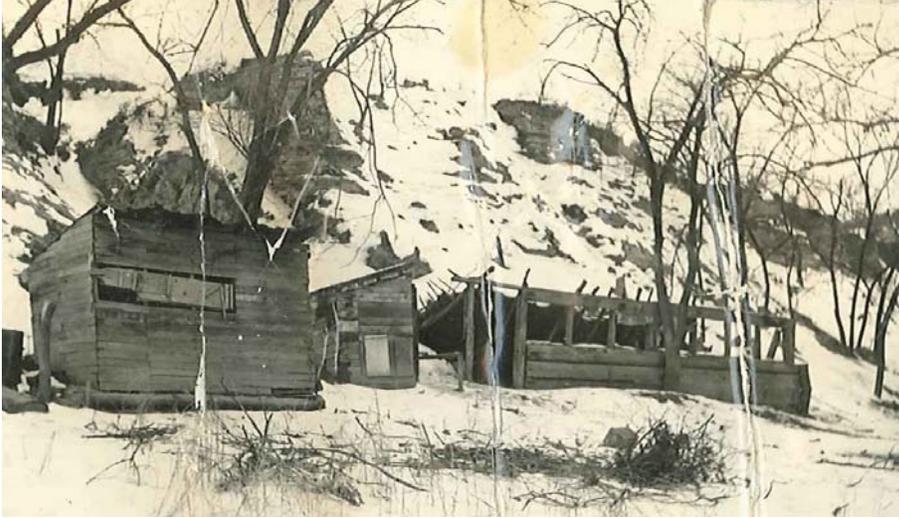
After his discharge, Claude returned to his home town of Oacoma and joined his wife, Phyllis, and eight-month-old son, Tommy. Phyllis and Tommy are shown below when he was just a few weeks old.



The young family began their life together on a farm, apparently from Joe and Freda Bice, on the Missouri River “bottom” a few miles downstream from Oacoma. The house and outbuildings, shown below, were on the edge of the floodplain and at the foot of the slope of the Missouri River breaks.



*“Our house on river at Oacoma”*



The family remained on the farm for a few years as indicated on the photo below, which appears to have been taken near the house in the photo on the previous page and is labeled “1948” in its album. Since Claude’s younger son, Joey, was born in December 1947, he must have been just a few months old in the photo. Tommy would have been about three years old.



“1948”

Claude decided that “he was not a farmer” (according to family lore) and the family moved to Oacoma by 1951, when Tommy started the first grade. Claude became involved in the earth trenching business, first with a small Jeep-mounted chain-driven trencher (“Jeep Digger”) and then with a larger truck-mounted backhoe (“Bantam Backhoe”). Pictures of the Jeep Digger and Bantam Backhoe are shown below.



*“Our Jeep Digger”*



*“Claude”*



*“Jan 1952”*



During this timeframe, Claude and his half-brother, Stan, became familiar with a large-diameter earth-boring machine while working on a crew at a manganese mine on the Missouri river bluffs near Oacoma. Stanley, shown below (right) near the boring machine at the mine, had the idea of using the rig for water well drilling.



Claude and Stan subsequently formed well-drilling companies, at first together and later separately, and drilled wells with rigs of this design throughout South Dakota. Pictures of Claude dumping the boring bucket of one of the rigs are shown below. Later models were equipped with an arm that had a hydraulic ram and cable apparatus for pulling the bucket for dumping, which greatly reduced the manual labor required.

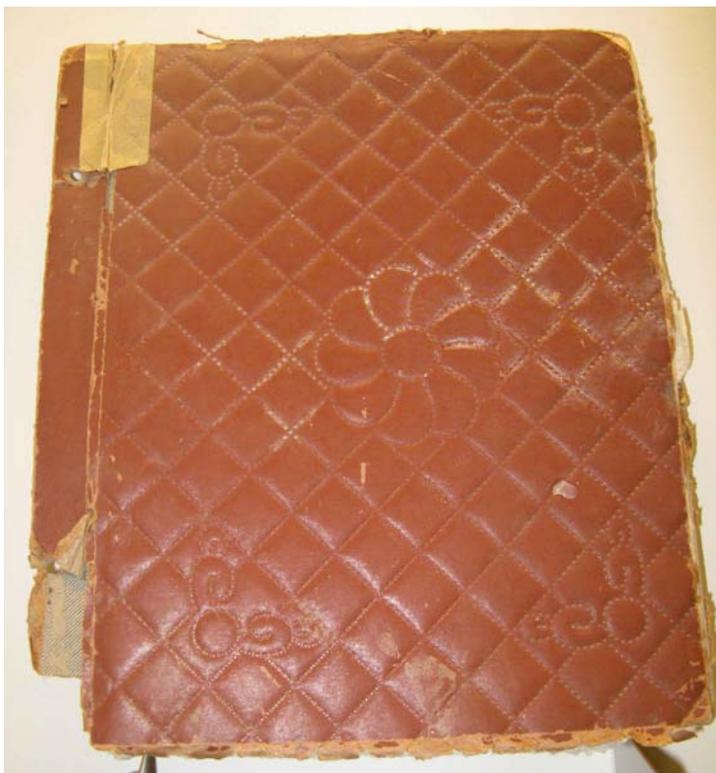


*“Claude, 1954”*

Claude developed new drilling methods (“reverse circulation”) that were widely applied throughout the U.S. and the world. In about 1961, Claude sold his drilling company (he was living with his family in Sioux Falls by this time) and accepted a job in the Los Angeles area. From there, Claude traveled worldwide as a consultant and earth drilling equipment salesperson for many years before his retirement to Colorado in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

## 11. Claude's World War II Scrapbook and Other Artifacts

Apparently, not long after Claude joined his family in Oacoma, he and Phyllis put together a combined scrapbook and photo album with pictures and other items to document his World War II experiences. This scrapbook is the source of many of the images in this booklet. An image of the front cover is shown below.



The scrapbook has 33 pages of materials (and several blank pages not used), a booklet mounted on the inside back cover, and a number of loose (unmounted) items. The contents of the album are summarized as follows:

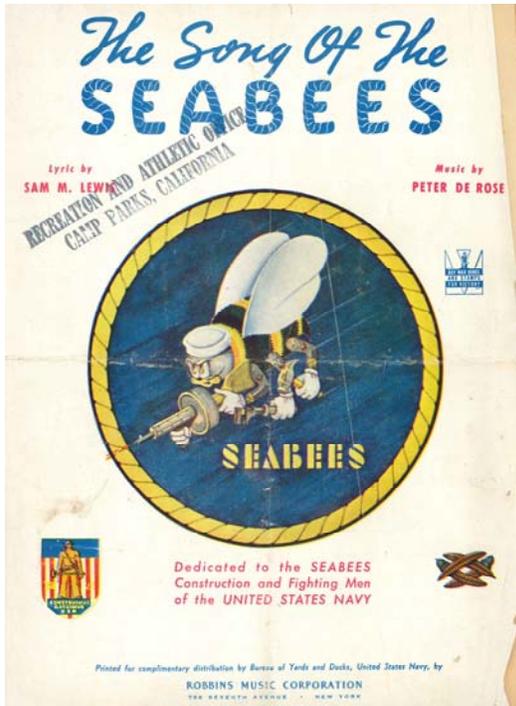
<u>Pages</u>	<u>Description</u>
1-7	Saipan photos by Claude and friends, including Douglas Thomas Brown and Stanley Bice.
8	Three postcards. May include hotel where Claude and Phyllis stayed in San Jose.
9	Alaska newspaper photos. Annotated by Claude with "My Home in Adak").
10-11	Japanese currency.
12	Two photos, possibly from a deceased Japanese soldier. Japanese newspaper.
13	Saipan and Okinawa photos.
14-16	Okinawa photos, none with Claude. Also, five loose photos from the album.
17	Japanese buttons, cigarettes and other memorabilia.
18-21	Saipan battle action photos, apparently taken prior to Claude's arrival in October.
22	Claude's U.S. Navy identification. Also, "Imperial Domain of the Golden Dragon" card, signifying that Claude crossed the International Date Line on September 25, 1944. Navy

- uniform insignia signifying clouds rank as a Boatswains Mate and Chief Boatswains Mate. Plastic tag with "Super Mole" engraved.
- 23 Newspaper articles, including wreck of Liberty Ship John P. Gaines, in November 1943. This is the ship that Claude was on as he was departing Alaska.
- 24 Footprints and lock of hair -- "Tommie Grimshaw – 9 days old"
- 25 "I Remember" – poem to Claude from Mary Alice McElroy, 1942 (probably while he was in training at Roanoke, Virginia).
- 26 Claude's letter of discharge, with original signature of James Forrestal, November 28, 1945.
- 27-31 Pacific island wartime photos, without captions, apparently taken by Claude.
- 32 Two group photos, apparently graduation ceremony for Seabee training in Roanoke Virginia (subsequently identified as Company A the 21st Battalion from the booklet inside the back cover).
- 33 "The Song of the Seabees" music sheet.
- Loose [In preparation.]  
Materials
- Inside Back "21<sup>st</sup> US Naval Construction Battalion, 1942-1943, Souvenir Annual". Records the  
Cover initiation of the Battalion on August 28, 1942 after training at Camp Allen near Norfolk, Virginia. The Battalion traveled from Roanoke to Port Hueneme, California in September and then to the unnamed port of embarkation in October, 1942. The 21st Battalion was stationed at Dutch Harbor on the island of Unalaska in the Aleutian Islands. Claude spent at least part of his tour of duty on the island of Adak before apparently departing in November 1943 on the Liberty Ship John P. Gaines.

One of the items in the scrapbook is an oversize piece of cloth and probably made of parachute fabric, signifies the presence of the Seabees in the Mariana Islands, which include Saipan and Tinian. An image of the cloth is shown below



The scrapbook includes the sheet music for “The Song of the Seabees”; the cover page is shown below. The words to the song are shown next to the image. If you are looking at this booklet as a Microsoft Word document, double-click on the speaker symbol below to listen to the music.



Words by Sam M. Lewis

Music by Peter de Rose

We're the Seabees of the Navy  
We can build and we can fight  
We'll pave the way to victory  
And guard it day and night  
And we promise that we remember  
The "Seventh of December"  
We're the Seabees of the Navy  
Bees of the Seven Seas  
The Navy wanted men  
That's where we came in  
Mister Brown and Mister Jones  
The Owens, the Cohens and Flynn  
The Navy wanted more  
Of Uncle Sammy's kin  
So we all joined up  
And brother we're in to win

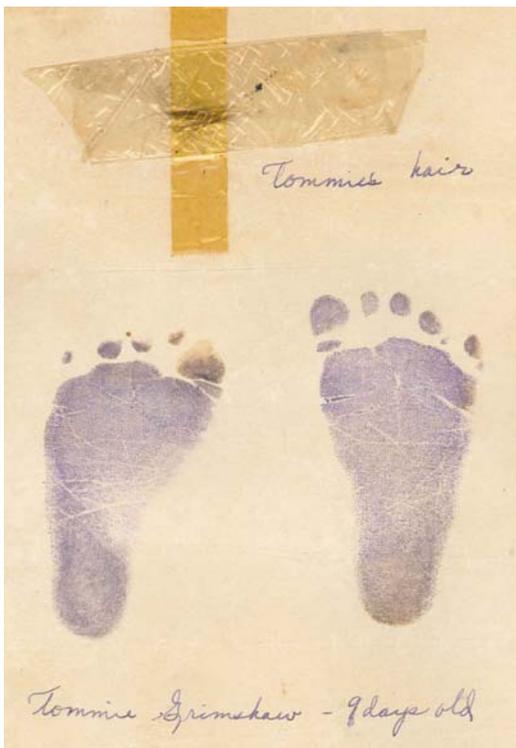
A crucifix, apparently made of brass, is also in the scrapbook. An image is provided below. The significance of the crucifix here is not fully understood, but – like other items in the scrapbook – it may be a souvenir from a deceased person on Okinawa. Collecting such battlefield souvenirs was apparently common practice at that time and place.



A patch or insignia showing Claude's rank as "The Big Boatswain" (probably signifying a Chief Boatswain's Mate rather than just a Boatswain's Mate) is in the album. An image is shown below.



It was also apparently common practice during World War II for mothers of newborns to send items related to the child to the serviceman husband in faraway places. Phyllis sent such an item for son Tommie, who was born on March 23, 1945. An image is shown below.



Claude was probably on Saipan when he received the item, as the 17<sup>th</sup> NCB apparently didn't arrive on Okinawa until after the battle for the island was won by the Americans in June.

## 12. Interment at Black Hills National Cemetery

Claude Grimshaw smoked cigarettes for most of his adult life – a habit he may have picked up during his wartime experience, as did many other veterans. Not long after retiring, he had an aneurysm of the descending aorta at about the level of the navel. After undergoing surgery for an aortic replacement that extended to the femoral arteries, his health declined dramatically. His renal arteries became occluded after the surgery, and he became dependant on dialysis, including continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis (CAPD), which increased his mobility and independence. The abdominal tubing for the CAPD was inadvertently pulled out one night, and Claude underwent surgery for its replacement. He died of heart fibrillation on the operating table in Pueblo, Colorado, on April 4, 1983, at age 62.

At his request, Claude was buried at Black Hills National Cemetery near Sturgis, South Dakota. His wife, Phyllis, died on May 27, 2007 subsequent to removal of a brain tumor and is buried with Claude. Shown below is the entrance to the cemetery. Claude and Phyllis Grimshaw’s grave is behind the left pillar. The photo – and the two below it – were taken in June 2010.



Claude’s grave marker is shown below with Tom Grimshaw, Claude’s older son and author of this booklet. JoAnne Grimshaw, Tom’s wife, is shown with the reverse side of the marker, which has the entry for Phyllis.



## Appendix A. Wikipedia Article: The Seabees in World War II

The Wikipedia article on the Seabees' role during World War II provides excellent context for the Claude Grimshaw's military career. The article is reproduced in part below. The paragraphs most relevant to Claude are shown in bold font.

### Contents

1. Creation
2. The first Seabees
3. World War II
  - 3.1. The Atlantic theater
  - 3.2. The Pacific theater
4. After the war

### 1. Creation

Under international law civilians were not permitted to resist enemy military attack. Resistance meant summary execution as guerrillas. The need for a militarized Naval Construction Force to build advance bases in the war zone was self-evident. Therefore, Rear Admiral Ben Moreell determined to activate, organize, and man Navy construction units. On 28 December 1941, he requested specific authority to carry out this decision, and on 5 January 1942, he gained authority from the Bureau of Navigation to recruit men from the construction trades for assignment to a Naval Construction Regiment composed of three Naval Construction Battalions.



*WWII recruitment poster*

An urgent problem confronting the Bureau of Yards and Docks was who should command the construction battalions. By Navy regulations, military command of naval personnel was limited to line officers. Yet it was deemed essential that the newly established construction battalions should be commanded by officers of the Civil Engineer Corps who were trained in the skills required for the performance of construction work. The bureau proposed that the necessary command authority should be bestowed on its Civil Engineer Corps officers. However, the Bureau of Naval Personnel (successor to the Bureau of Navigation) strongly objected to this proposal.

Despite this opposition, Admiral Moreell personally presented the question to the Secretary of the Navy. On 19 March 1942, after due deliberation, the Secretary gave authority for officers of the Civil Engineer Corps to exercise military authority over all officers and enlisted men assigned to construction units. The Secretary's decision, which was incorporated in Navy regulations, removed a major roadblock in the conduct of Seabee operations. Of equal importance, it constituted a very significant morale booster for Civil Engineer Corps officers because it provided a lawful command authority status that tied them intimately into combat operations, the primary reason for the existence of any military force. From all points of view, Admiral Moreell's success in achieving this end contributed ultimately to the great success and fame of the Seabees.

With authorization to establish construction battalions at hand and the question of who was to command the Seabees settled, the Bureau of Yards and Docks was confronted with the problem of recruiting, enlisting, and training Seabees, and then organizing the battalions and logistically supporting them in their operations. Plans for accomplishing these tasks were not available. Workable plans were quickly developed, however, and because of the exigencies of the war much improvising was done. <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq67-3.htm>

## 2. The first Seabees

The first Seabees were not raw recruits when they voluntarily enlisted. Emphasis in recruiting them was placed on experience and skill, so all they had to do was adapt their civilian construction skills to military needs. To obtain men with the necessary qualifications, physical standards were less rigid than in other branches of the armed forces. The age range for enlistment was 18-50, but after the formation of the initial battalions, it was discovered that several men past 60 had managed to join. During the early days of the war, the average age of Seabees was 37. After December 1942 voluntary enlistments were halted by orders of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and men for the construction battalions had to be obtained through the Selective Service System. Henceforward, Seabees were on average much younger and came into the service with only rudimentary skills.



*The Seabee logo*

The first recruits were the men who had helped to build Boulder Dam, the national highways, and New York's skyscrapers; who had worked in the mines and quarries and dug the subway tunnels; who had worked in shipyards and built docks and wharfs and even ocean liners and aircraft carriers. By the end of the war, 325,000 such men had enlisted in the Seabees. They knew more than 60 skilled trades, not to mention the unofficial ones of souvenir making and "moonlight procurement". Nearly 11,400 officers joined the Civil Engineer Corps during the war, and 7,960 of them served with the Seabees.

At Naval Construction Training Centers and Advanced Base Depots established on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, Seabees were taught military discipline and the use of light arms. Although technically support troops, Seabees at work, particularly during the early days of base development in the Pacific, frequently found themselves in conflict with the enemy.

After completing three weeks of boot training at Camp Allen, and later at its successor, Camp Peary, both in Virginia, the Seabees were formed into construction battalions or other types of construction units. Some of the very first battalions were sent overseas immediately upon completion of boot training because of the urgent need for naval construction. The usual procedure, however, was to ship the newly-formed battalion to an Advanced Base Depot at either Davisville, Rhode Island, or Port Hueneme, California. There the battalions, and later other units, underwent staging and outfitting. The Seabees received about six weeks of advanced military and technical training, underwent considerable unit training, and then were shipped to an overseas assignment. About 175,000 Seabees were staged directly through Port Hueneme during the war.

As the war proceeded, battle-weary construction battalions and other units in the Pacific were returned to the United States to the Construction Battalion Recuperation and Replacement Center at Camp Parks, Shoemaker, California. At Camp Parks, battalions were reformed and reorganized, or as was the case in several instances, the battalions were simply disestablished and the men assigned to other battalions. Seabees were given 30-day leaves and also plenty of time for rest and recuperation. Eligible men were frequently discharged at Camp Parks. On a much smaller scale, the Advance Base Receiving Barracks at Davisville, Rhode Island, performed similar functions for Atlantic battalions.

The construction battalion, the fundamental unit of the Seabee organization, comprised four companies that included the necessary construction skills for doing any job, plus a headquarters company consisting of medical and dental professionals and technicians, administrative personnel, storekeepers, cooks, and similar specialists. The complement of a standard battalion originally was set at 32 officers and 1,073 men, but from time to time the complement varied in number.

As the war progressed and construction projects became larger and more complex, more than one battalion frequently had to be assigned to a base. For efficient administrative control, these battalions were organized into a regiment, and when necessary, two or more regiments were organized into a brigade, and as required, two or more brigades were organized into a naval construction force. For example, 55,000 Seabees were assigned to Okinawa and the battalions were organized into 11 regiments and 4 brigades, which, in turn, were all under the command of the Commander, Construction Troops, who was a Navy Civil Engineer Corps officer, Commodore Andrew G. Bisset. Moreover, his command also included 45,000 United States Army engineers, aviation engineers, and a few British engineers. He therefore commanded 100,000 construction troops in all, the largest concentration of construction troops during the entire war.

Although the Seabees began with the formation of regular construction battalions only, the Bureau of Yards and Docks soon realized the need for special-purpose units. While the battalion itself was versatile enough to handle almost any project, it would have been a wasteful use of men to assign a full battalion to a project that could be done equally well by a smaller group of specialists.

The first departure from the standard battalion was the Special Construction Battalion, or as it was commonly known, the Seabee Special. These special battalions were composed of stevedores and longshoremen who were badly needed to break a bottleneck in the unloading of ships in combat zones. Their officers, drawn largely from the Merchant Marine and personnel of stevedoring companies, were commissioned in the Civil Engineer Corps. The enlisted men were trained practically from scratch, and the efficiency of their training was demonstrated by the fact that cargo handling in combat zones compared favorably to that in the most efficient ports in the United States.

Another smaller, specialized unit within the Seabee organization was the Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit, which was about one-quarter the size of a regular construction battalion. It was organized to take over the maintenance of a base after a regular battalion had completed construction and moved on to its next assignment. Still another specialized Seabee unit was the construction battalion detachment, ranging in size from 6 to 600 men, depending on the specialized nature of its function. These detachments did everything from operating tire-repair shops to dredges. A principal use for them, however, was the handling, assembling, launching, and placing of pontoon causeways. Additional specialized units were the motor trucking battalions, the pontoon assembly detachments that manufactured pontoons in forward areas, and petroleum detachments of experts in the installation of pipelines and petroleum facilities.

In the Second World War, the Seabees were organized into 151 regular construction battalions, 39 special construction battalions, 164 construction battalion detachments, 136 construction battalion maintenance units, 5 pontoon assembly detachments, 54 regiments, 12 brigades, and under various designations, 5 naval construction forces.

### **3. World War II**

During the Second World War, the Seabees performed deeds in both the Atlantic and Pacific Theaters of Operation. At a cost of nearly \$11 billion and many casualties, they constructed over 400 advanced bases along five figurative "roads" which all had their beginnings in the continental United States. The South Atlantic road wound through the Caribbean Sea to Africa, Sicily, and up the Italian peninsula. The North Atlantic road passed through Newfoundland to Iceland, Great Britain, France, and Germany. The North Pacific road passed through Alaska and along the Aleutian Island chain. The Central Pacific road passed through the Hawaiian, Marshall, Gilbert, Mariana, and Ryukyu Islands. The South Pacific road went through the South Sea islands to Samoa, the Solomons, New Guinea, and the Philippines. All the Pacific roads converged on Japan and the Asiatic mainland.

#### **3.1. The Atlantic theater**

Along the Atlantic front, the Seabees helped forge two roads to victory. From the Caribbean to the ultimate destination of Germany, they played a crucial role in initially opening and later maintaining bases of critical importance to the war effort.

*(This part of the Wikipedia article is not included here.)*

### 3.2. The Pacific theater

Seabees in the Pacific Theater of Operations earned the gratitude of all Allied fighting men who served with them or followed in their wake. Their deeds were unparalleled in the history of wartime construction. With eighty percent of the Naval Construction Force concentrated on the three Pacific roads, they literally built and fought their way to victory.

In the North, Central, South and Southwest Pacific areas, the Seabees built 111 major airstrips, 441 piers, 2,558 ammunition magazines, 700 square blocks of warehouses, hospitals to serve 70,000 patients, tanks for the storage of 100,000,000 gallons of gasoline, and housing for 1,500,000 men. In construction and fighting operations, the Pacific Seabees suffered more than 200 combat deaths and earned more than 2,000 Purple Hearts. They served on four continents and on more than 300 islands.

**Of the three Pacific roads to victory, perhaps the least significant was the one which wound through the North Pacific. At the outset of hostilities, however, this region, which included Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, had been a Japanese target. The Japanese campaign of 1942 that succeeded in seizing the Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska was partly a feint, partly a serious probe of American defenses, and partly a move to prevent the United States from invading the Japanese homeland through the Aleutian and Kurile Islands. Many of the first Seabees were sent to the North Pacific to help forestall what appeared at the time to be a major Japanese offensive.**

**By late June 1942 Seabees had landed in Alaska and had begun building advanced bases on Adak, Amchitka, and other key islands in the Aleutian chain. In 1943 these new bases were used to stage the joint Army-Navy task force that recaptured Attu and Kiska. While subsequent activity in the North Pacific was minimal, the long, flanking arm of Seabee-built bases pointing toward the Japanese home islands served as a substantial threat to the Japanese throughout the remainder of the war. Even as action in the Central, South, and Southwest Pacific areas became the major focus of attention, the Japanese continued to look northward in fear.**

Of the remaining two Pacific roads, the one through the steaming jungles of the South and Southwest Pacific had the Philippines as one of its principal destinations. The Seabees' first stop along this road was in the Society Islands.

The First Naval Construction Battalion (later redesignated the 1st Construction Battalion Detachment because of its small size) left the United States in January 1942 and, one month later, landed on Bora Bora in the Society Islands. The men of this battalion called themselves the "Bobcats" after the code name BOBCAT, given to the island of Bora Bora. The Bobcats were actually the advance party of the more than 325,000 men who were to serve in the Naval Construction Force during the Second World War. The Bobcats' mission was to construct a fueling station that would service the many ships and planes necessary to defend and keep open the sea lanes to Australia. Shortly after landing on their tropical paradise, the Bobcats discovered that the island had many climatic and hygienic disadvantages. Continual rainfall, 50 varieties of dysentery, skin disease, and the dreaded elephantiasis all combined to make life miserable for the construction men. To make their task even more difficult, the island, far from the regular trade routes, had no piers from which to unload the supply-laden ships. Despite these almost overwhelming problems, the Bobcats immediately set about accomplishing their crucial objective. After devising a method of bringing supplies ashore aboard pontoon barges, they swiftly constructed the necessary fueling facilities. Their strenuous efforts were later rewarded when the island's tank farms supplied the ships and planes that fought the historic Battle of the Coral Sea.

While the Bobcats labored on Bora Bora, two additional groups of Navy construction men were organized into the 2nd and 3rd Construction Battalion Detachments. Less than five months after the Bobcats arrived on Bora Bora, the Second Detachment was sent to Tongatapu in the Tonga Islands and the Third Detachment to Efate in the New Hebrides.

These two islands were also on the supply route to Australia and were being used as a staging area for a counterthrust by the Allies against Japanese forces in the Southwest Pacific. On these islands the Seabees constructed fuel tank farms, airfields, supply depots, and other facilities to support military action in the Coral Sea and Solomon Islands.

The island of Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides was closest in proximity to Japanese-held Guadalcanal and, thus, rapidly assumed major importance. Guadalcanal was the very tip of the Japanese thrust down the Solomon chain toward the Allied southern communications route. The need to destroy the big Japanese airfields nearing completion

on Guadalcanal was imperative. The Seabees of the 3rd Construction Battalion Detachment were rushed from Efate to Espiritu Santo and instructed to build a countermanding Allied bomber strip as rapidly as possible. Within an incredible 20 days the detachment had carved a 6,000-foot (1,800 m) airstrip from virgin jungle. As a result of this tremendous feat, the Allies were able to mount large scale air attacks against Guadalcanal and destroy the dangerous Japanese air base under construction there.

When the Marines finally invaded nearby Guadalcanal, the men of the 6th Naval Construction Battalion followed them ashore and thus became the first Seabees to build under combat conditions. They immediately began the arduous task of repairing the airfield, now named Henderson Field that they had earlier helped to destroy. This became a never-ending job, because as fast as the builders leveled the strip and put down Marston matting, the Japanese would send bombers overhead to drop high explosives on their work. Nevertheless, in the midst of battle, the Seabees were able to repair shell and bomb holes faster than the Japanese could make them. The Allied pilots desperately needed the use of Henderson Field, so the Seabees kept this precious airstrip in almost continuous operation.

The first decorated Seabee hero of the war, Seaman 2nd Class Lawrence C. "Bucky" Meyer, USNR, was among the Seabees of the 6th battalion who worked on Henderson Field. In his off-time, he salvaged and repaired an abandoned machine gun, which, on 3 October 1942, he used to shoot down a Japanese Zero fighter making a strafing run. For this exploit, he was awarded the Silver Star. It was, however, a posthumous award, for 13 days after shooting down the plane, "Bucky" Myer was killed in action when the gasoline barge on which he was working was struck by Japanese naval gunfire.

On the same day Guadalcanal was invaded, Marines landed on Tulagi Island, a short distance across the Sealark Channel. Once again the Seabees also came ashore, but this time to construct an important torpedo patrol boat and repair base for the U.S. Fleet. The base played a strategic role during the savage sea battles in the "slot," the narrow channel between the islands of Tulagi, Savo, and Guadalcanal. Patrol boats darted from the Seabee-built advanced base to scout Japanese offensive moves, and crippled American ships limped in to receive temporary Seabee repairs.

As the Allies continued to island hop up the Solomon chain, the Russells, Rendova, New Georgia, and Bougainville also became centers of a frenzied construction effort by Seabee units. At the same time, Seabees in the Southwest Pacific were driving northward from Australia to New Guinea and the Philippines.

It was during the landing on Treasury Island in the Solomons, on 28 November 1943, that Fireman 1st Class Aurelio Tassone, USNR, of the 87th Naval Construction Battalion created that legendary figure of the Seabee astride his bulldozer rolling over enemy positions. Tassone was driving his bulldozer ashore during the landing when Lieutenant Charles E. Turnbull, CEC, USNR, told him a Japanese pillbox was holding up the advance from the beach. Tassone drove his dozer toward the pillbox, using the blade as a shield, while Lieutenant Turnbull provided covering fire with his carbine. Under continuous heavy fire, Tassone crushed the pillbox with the dozer blade, killing all 12 of its occupants. For this act Tassone was awarded the Silver Star.

Although Seabees were only supposed to fight to defend what they built, such acts of heroism were numerous. In all, Seabees earned 33 Silver Stars and 5 Navy Crosses during World War II. But they also paid a price: 272 enlisted men and 18 officers killed in action. In addition to deaths sustained as a result of enemy action, more than 500 Seabees died in accidents, for construction is essentially a hazardous business.

Another milestone in Seabee history was in the making in 1943—but the location was Hollywood rather than the South Pacific. Made in 1943 and released in early 1944, the motion picture *The Fighting Seabees*, starring John Wayne and Susan Hayward, made "Seabee" a household word during the latter part of the war. This picture also began a relationship between John Wayne and the Seabees which was to last more than three decades. In fact, John Wayne's last motion picture was *Home for the Seabees*, a Navy documentary filmed in 1977 at the Naval Construction Battalion Center, Port Hueneme, California. This was most appropriate, since the exteriors of *The Fighting Seabees*, had been filmed in and around the same base during World War II.

While Hollywood made films, however, the grim reality of the war continued. Initially, the Seabees in the Southwest Pacific busied themselves enlarging and constructing new, vital staging and supply ports at several Australian coastal points. By mid-1943, however, Merauke, on the underbelly of New Guinea, resounded with the roar of battle and the clatter of Seabee hammers and bulldozers. After building an important bomber strip that helped fend off Japanese air attacks, they constructed a communications station at Port Moresby.

Finally, on 26 December 1943, the Seabees joined the First Marine Division in an assault on Japanese-held Cape Gloucester, New Britain. During the battle, Seabees bulldozed paths to the Japanese lines so that American tanks could attack the hostile positions. By New Year's Day, the Japanese airstrips were captured and the American flag flew over the entire Cape.

The Admiralty Islands atop the Bismark Sea became the key to the isolation of Rabaul and the final neutralization of enemy forces on New Britain. When the Allies seized Manus Island and the adjacent smaller Los Negros Island, enemy supply and communication lines from all points north and east were cut. In the busy months following the capture of the Admiralties, the Seabees transformed Manus and Los Negros into the largest U.S. naval and air base in the Southwest Pacific. By 1944 the new base had become the primary location for service, supply, and repair of the Seventh U.S. Fleet. During the same month, the capture of Emirau Island in the Saint Matthias Group completed the encirclement of Rabaul. There the Seabees built a strategic, two-field air base, huge storage and fuel dumps, a floating dry dock, miles of roads, and a base for torpedo patrol boats.

Leapfrogging ahead with General Douglas MacArthur's forces, the Seabees reached Hollandia and turned it into a major forward base that was later instrumental in the liberation of the Philippines. In fact, the Seabees of the Third Naval Construction Brigade were still with General MacArthur when the South and Southwest Pacific roads to victory converged on the Philippine Island of Leyte in October 1944. Naval Construction Battalions operated the pontoon barges and causeway units that brought the Allied Forces ashore and fulfilled General MacArthur's famous promise to one day return.

These Seabees were soon joined by those of the Second and Seventh Naval Construction Brigades, units that had been organized and staged in the Hawaiian Islands. This vast Naval Construction Force of 37,000 men spread out into the adjoining major islands and began building the facilities that were needed to make the Philippines a great forward base in the Pacific, indeed one of the last steps on the way to the invasion of the Japanese home islands.

The Seabees of this force built U.S. Navy and Army airfields, supply depots, staging areas for men and materials, training areas and camp-sites. Seventh Fleet headquarters was moved to the Philippines and Seabees built the facilities that this enormous fleet required: fleet anchorages, submarine bases, ships repair facilities, fast torpedo boat bases. By the summer of 1945, U.S. military forces were prepared and poised for that last step on the South Pacific road to victory.

While the Seabees in the South and Southwest Pacific were hacking their way through vermin-infested jungles toward the Philippines, their comrades to the north were striking across the Central Pacific island chains straight at the heart of the Japanese Empire. It was on this extremely hazardous road to victory that the Seabees perhaps made their greatest contributions toward winning the war. They continually played a major role in the savage fighting which characterized the island-hopping campaign in the Central Pacific. One after the other, the Gilberts, Marshalls, Carolines, and Marianas were seized. After landing in the initial Marine assaults, Seabee battalions built on these islands the advanced bases from which the U.S. Pacific Fleet, the Marines, and the Army moved inexorably toward the Japanese homeland.

Tarawa Atoll in the Gilberts was one of the toughest of them all. Only after savage fighting at a cost of nearly 1,000 American dead were the Japanese defenders overwhelmed. On Tarawa, the Seabees landed with the Marines and in a mere fifteen hours put a shell-pocked airfield back into operation.

On the atolls of Kwajalein, Eniwetok, and Majuro in the Marshalls, the Seabees rendered further assistance in the destruction of Japan's eastern defense perimeter. Seabees converted the idyllic atoll of Majuro into one of the major fleet anchorages in the Pacific, and similarly transformed Kwajalein Atoll into a major aviation facility. The Carolines were the third stepping-stone on the Central Pacific road to Tokyo. Combat and construction in this island chain served yet another purpose. When the fleet and air facilities in the western Carolines were made operable by the Seabees, the islands were used as bases to support the coming liberation of the Philippines.

**The seizure of the Marianas spelled the beginning of the end for the Japanese. The loss of the islands cut the Japanese line of defense and, even more important, gave the United States an airbase from which bombers could strike at the very heart of the Japanese Empire, the homeland. It was during Operation "Forager," as the Marianas Campaign was named, that the Seabees made one of their most significant contributions in the Pacific Theater of Operations.**

**Seabees and Marines landed together on the beaches of first Saipan, then Guam, and finally Tinian. The very same day the Marines captured Aslito, the main Japanese airfield on Saipan, the Seabees went to work**

**repairing its bomb-damaged runways. Stopping only to fend off Japanese counterattacks, they succeeded in making the airstrip operational within four days. During the three week battle for Guam, the Seabees participated by unloading ships and performing vital construction jobs directed at eventually turning the island into the advanced headquarters for the United States Pacific Fleet, an airbase for Japan-bound B-29s, and a huge center of war supply. The invasion of Tinian called for yet another exhibition of Seabee ingenuity. Because its narrow beaches were covered with low coral cliffs, Seabees devised and operated special movable ramps which made the landings possible. Once ashore, and even as the battle raged, their bulldozers accomplished prodigious feats of construction on the damaged and unfinished Japanese airfield.**

What was needed after the successful Marianas campaign was an emergency landing field much closer to the Japanese homeland that would service crippled bombers returning from raids and enable shorter- ranged fighter planes to accompany the giant bombers to their targets. The island chosen for this purpose was Iwo Jima, scene of some of the most savage fighting of the war. On 19 February 1945, the Fifth Amphibious Corps, which included the 133rd Naval Construction Battalion and elements of the 31st Naval Construction Battalion, hit the beaches. During the assault, the 133rd Naval Construction Battalion had the dubious honor of suffering more men killed or wounded than any other Seabee battalion in any previous or subsequent engagement. Although only minor construction was accomplished during the first ten days of the operation, the Seabees later built one crucial emergency landing field and fighter airstrips so desperately needed by the Allies.

**The Seabees also played a key role in the last big operation of the island war, the seizure of Okinawa. The main invasion forces landed on Okinawa's west coast Hagushi beaches on Easter Sunday, 1 April 1945. Off the amphibious landing craft and over pontoons placed by the 130th Naval Construction Battalion went the 24th Army Corps and Third Amphibious Corps. Right beside them were the 58th, 71st and 145th Naval Construction Battalions. A few days later, two additional Naval Construction Battalions, the 44th and 130th, landed. The fighting was heavy and prolonged, and organized resistance did not cease until 21 June 1945.**

**The Seabees' task on Okinawa was truly immense. On this agrarian island, whose physical facilities a fierce bombardment had all but destroyed, they built ocean ports, a grid of roads, bomber and fighter fields, a seaplane base, quonset villages, tank farms, storage dumps, hospitals, and ship repair facilities.**

**Nearly 55,000 Seabees, organized into four brigades, participated in Okinawa construction operations. By the beginning of August 1945, sufficient facilities, supplies, and manpower were at hand to mount an invasion of the Japanese home islands.**

While the Allied forces in the Philippines and on Okinawa were readying themselves for the final battles that would get them to Tokyo and complete the roads to victory, decisive events were taking place elsewhere, on the island of Tinian in the Marianas. During the summer of 1945, the USS INDIANAPOLIS arrived at Tinian from the Naval Weapons Center at Port Chicago, California. Seabees of the Sixth Naval Construction Brigade helped with the unloading of the components of a newly- developed weapon. The Seabees then stored the elements in a shed built by themselves, and organized a detachment to guard the shed and its mysterious contents. Scientists assembled the weapon in the shed with several Seabees assisting as handymen.

**On 6 August 1945 the new weapon was loaded into a U.S. Army Air Force B-29 bomber, named the Enola Gay. A short time later, the Enola Gay took off with its secret load from Tinian's North Field, which the Seabees had built, and started on her mission to Japan. Later in the day, the mission ended with the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima.**

This historic event sealed the fate of Japan. Realizing that the war was lost, the Japanese government negotiated a cease fire that went into effect on 16 August. On 2 September 1945 Japan formally surrendered, and Allied forces occupied the Japanese home islands in a peaceful manner. Thus, the Pacific roads to victory reached their final destination.

#### **4. After the war**

With the general demobilization following the war, the Construction Battalions were reduced to 3,300 men on active duty by 1950. Between 1949 and 1953, Naval Construction Battalions were organized into two types of units: Amphibious Construction Battalions (ACBs) and Naval Mobile Construction Battalions (NMCBs).