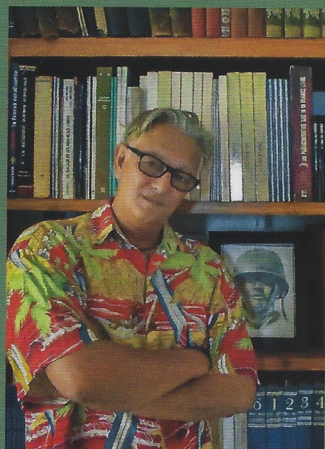


BOBCATS US TROOPS IN BORA BORA • 1942-1946



Jean-Christophe Shigetomi, author of three works of reference about the Tahitian participation in the Second World War, opens another page of history with *Bobcats*, a page which is set on the island of Bora Bora, the 'Pearl of the Pacific'. Access to military archives revealed to him some little-known aspects of the American presence on the island. Rumors and local hearsay concerning diplomatic relations between the Free French and the Americans, the co-existence between locals and the military and the American evacuation of the island in June 1946 are explored and verified. But revisiting the history of the *Bobcats* is above all a necessary pilgrimage for us and the many North American tourists who visit us.

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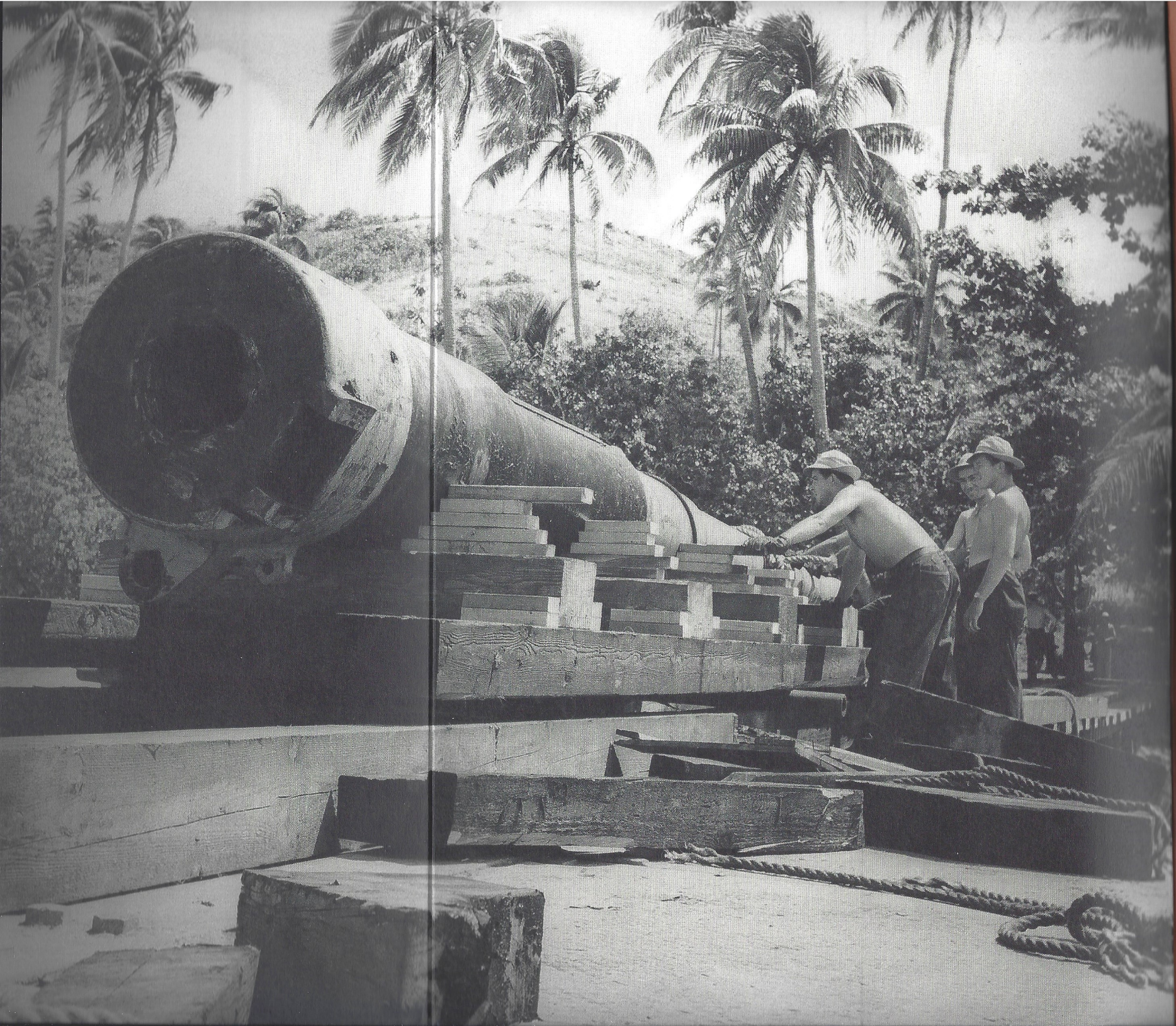


BOBCATS US TROOPS IN BORA BORA 1942-1946

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE SHIGETOMI



Editions 'URA • TAHITI







In memoriam
Jean-Louis Saquet

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GRAPHISME Isazalie
ACHEVÉ D'IMPRIMER • 2^e TRIMESTRE 2023
IMPRIMERIE MÉDIA GRAPHIC
DÉPÔT LÉGAL • 2^e TRIMESTRE 2023
ISBN 979 10 93406 25 1

Jean-Christophe
SHIGETOMI

BOBCATS
US TROOPS
in Bora Bora
1942-1946

ÉDITIONS 'URA - TAHITI





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BOBCATS

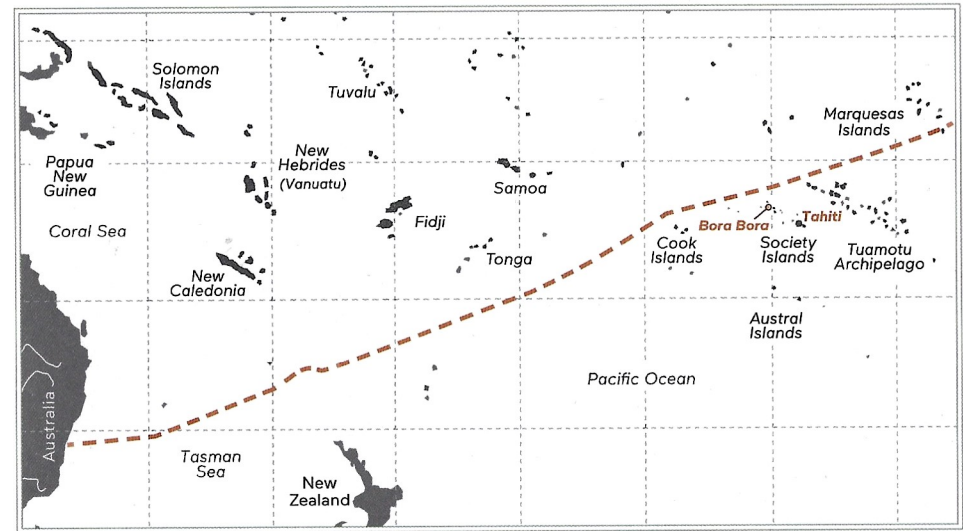
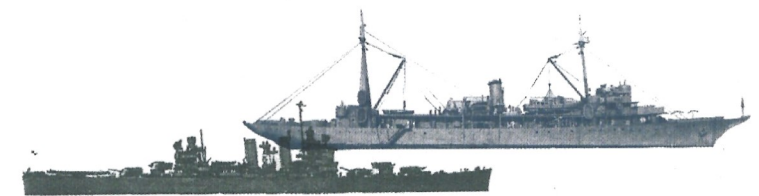
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**AMERICAN INSTALLATIONS
ON BORA BORA ISLAND**



PACIFIC OCEAN MAP - 1942

As the North Pacific sea route was then controlled by the Japanese, it was necessary to provide a southernmost link to support Australia, the last bastion of resistance to the victorious Japanese offensives. Bora Bora offered the best stop-over on this southern route for refueling heavy oil convoys on the way between the Panama Canal and Sydney.





INTRODUCTION

Any account of the role Tahitians played in the maelstrom of the two world wars and the resolute commitment of the Etablissements français d'Océanie (now French Polynesia) would be incomplete without documenting the occupation of the volcanic island of Bora Bora by American forces from 1942 to 1946. On two occasions the war inexorably forced its way to this small French colony in the Pacific. Firstly, when a German naval squadron made a short stopover on the island of Bora Bora before going on to bomb and partially burn down Papeete on

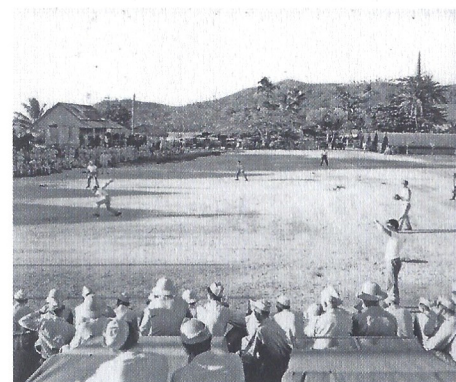
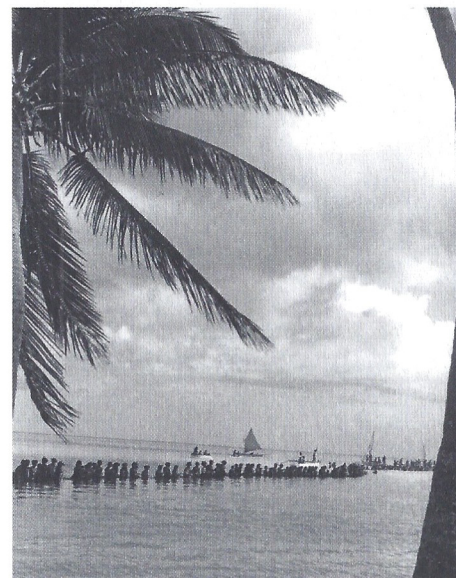
September 22, 1914. Tahiti and her islands replied by sending ten contingents totaling one thousand soldiers, of whom three hundred would never return. The two sons of notary Gustave Vincent from his marriage with Tauruaa Mai, a descendant of the royal family Mai of Bora Bora, were both killed in battle. François Vincent, transferred from the 6th to the 5th colonial regiment was wounded and captured at Barleux on September 4, 1916. He died in captivity in Munster, Westphalia. His brother, Henri Vincent, was seriously wounded and died at Salonica on December 15, 1916.



Mahoa, also known as Mahoa Nahi, a native of Bora Bora living in the Cook Islands, enlisted in the Rarotonga battalion. He was evacuated after being wounded in the fighting at Flers. Then, on the September 2, 1940, the Etablissements français de l'Océanie joined the Free French, engaging their islands in the second world war alongside their British allies. In January and March 1941 Tahitian volunteers enlisted in the Free French naval and air forces. On the April 21, 1941, a contingent of three hundred men embarked on the New Zealand Navy cruiser *Monowai*. These men would forge the legend of the glorious Pacific Battalion. Among their ranks were men from the island of Bora Bora. Tetanui Tu, who played *Matahi* in the film *Tabu*, enlisted in the Pacific Battalion. Tu's brother, Tama Tetohu, was killed on May 4, 1942 at Rotonda Signali, 100kms from Bir Hakeim. Rai a Rai, born in Bora Bora was reported missing in action on September 19, 1944 at Saint-Germain du Plan in the department of Saône et Loire. One of his comrades reported that he drowned in the river Saône when his dingy capsized. Orairai Mahahe, born July 14, 1923 at Nunue, Bora Bora, enlisted as a parachutist with the Free Forces in 1943. Parachuted into Brittany, he fought at Saint-Marcel on June 18, 1944 and was captured and sent to a German prisoner-of-war camp. Having joined the Free French Forces on September 2, 1940, the small Pacific colony was placed on a war footing despite the apparent safety offered by its geographic isolation. But was it really under any serious threat? Yes, but only to a certain degree. The front line was far away, very far away, and only submarines or German raiders could reach Tahiti and its islands. The Japanese had offered military assistance to the government of Vichy in order to restore its sovereignty

over its disloyal colony as well as over New Caledonia. But the watchful eyes of the Americans made them change their mind and the phosphate deposits on the island of Makatea weren't enough of an incentive for risking a confrontation with them. Anyway, as far as military strategy was concerned, the Japanese had a far more important objective: the destruction of the American Pacific fleet and its aircraft carriers in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The story of the installation of the military base on Bora Bora revolves around the complex relations between the Free French and the United States, and their respective interests, which were divergent if not contradictory. The Free French were particularly concerned with retaining sovereignty over their Pacific territory and were wary of the Americans whom they suspected of wanting to annex or liberate this tiny outpost of their empire. The American occupation of Bora Bora also brought to light the tumultuous relations between the Free French, (especially their diplomatic representatives in the United States) and the local government and community leaders in Tahiti. This was particularly evident in the exchanges between the Bobcat High Command and Governor Orselli and his delegated administrators. On the French side many popular misconceptions concerning the period of American occupation still abound.

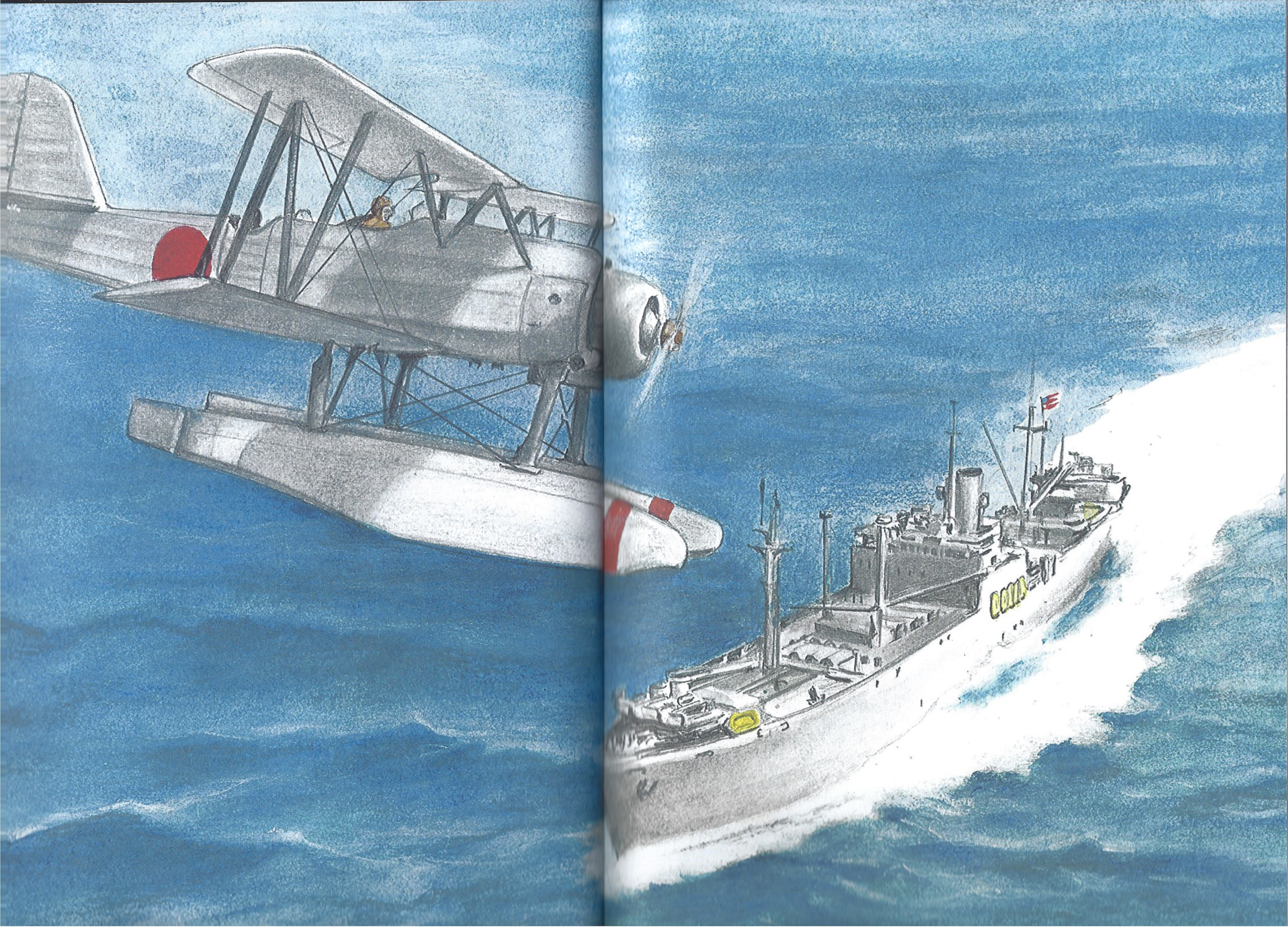
Such as everything being in abundant supply in Bora Bora while people were going hungry in Tahiti. And some scenes of wastage when the Americans finally left did nothing to refute this, as unwanted equipment was allegedly thrown into the sea when the local authorities refused to purchase it. However, several documents from the archives contradict these ill-founded rumors. From the American point of view, the lasting impression of Bora Bora



for most soldiers was that it was a paradise, especially when compared to the inferno of Guadalcanal or the Gloucester Islands. And this reputation soon spread worldwide. But was the island of Bora Bora really such a paradise for the Bobcats and Seabees responsible for installing the huge-scale American infrastructure? Didn't boredom weigh heavily on the morale of the GIs, so far from home on their Pacific island? Bora Bora's geographic and strategic involvement

in WWII took effect from the moment the American navy came ashore on February 17, 1942. With this intrusion into their hitherto peaceful existence, the islanders had to deal with a series of defensive measures, such as traffic and supply restrictions. And more importantly, they had to cope with the presence of so many GIs everywhere on the island, which wasn't always welcomed or accepted. On November 1, 1941, the population of the Leeward Islands was 11,981 of whom just 1,200 lived in Bora Bora. Being in a state of war with its inherent restrictions was difficult enough, but the shock of cohabiting with people from such a different culture was brutal, as James Norman Hall describes in his book, *Lost Island. Bobcats in Bora Bora* tells the story of a remote and peaceful French Pacific island suddenly having to come to terms with the twentieth century. A rude awakening which came in the form of mass construction, a different way of life, and more significantly, a brand new economic structure. Bora Bora soon became the first island in the French Pacific to possess a landing strip. Thanks to its sudden international renown, the island would become the flagship of the Polynesian tourism industry. Bobcat was perceived by French Pacific islanders as a glimpse of El Dorado and paved the way for the establishment of the Centre d'Expérimentations du Pacifique (the French nuclear weapons testing center) in the 1960's.

The following pages tell the story of this remote chapter in the history of WW2 ■



TE RO, TE RO, TE RO!¹

CH 1

On January 22, 1942, lookouts posted on Bora Bora by the administrator of the Leeward Islands signaled the approach of an unidentified vessel. By joining the Free French, the *Etablissements français d'Océanie* left itself open to the threat of Japanese military intervention to reinstate the government of Vichy's sovereignty over Tahiti, especially since increasing numbers of Japanese cargo vessels were shipping phosphate from the island of Makatea. In 1940, the *Etablissements français d'Océanie* had produced 173,000 metric tons of phosphate and Japan had been its most important customer. On December 7, 1941, the United States joined the second world war following the Japanese attack on their Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

On December 8, 1941, Free France announced that it would use all available means to ensure the defense of the Pacific, in cooperation with all the other powers concerned. In Tahiti and Makatea, Japanese nationals were interned or placed under house arrest. Their property and assets were seized. With Japanese 'raider' ships active in the eastern Pacific, lookouts were posted throughout the islands to counter any attempt by enemy agents to come ashore and to signal the presence of any suspicious vessels.

1. Tahitian equivalent of « Ship ahoy ! »



On December 9, 1941, two Japanese armed merchant ships, the *Aikoku Maru* and the *Hokoku Maru* sailed through the Tuamotu islands. On December 13th midway between the Gambier islands and Pitcairn, they attacked the US merchant navy ship, SS *Vincent*, on its way from Australia to Panama. On January 2nd a seaplane type E7K2 from the *Aikoku Maru* strafed an American cargo vessel, the SS *Malama*, nine hundred kilometers south of Bora Bora. The crew of SS *Malama* scuttled the ship using four bombs to sink it. The American sailors were picked up by the *Aikoku Maru* and taken to Japan as prisoners of war. On January 22, 1942, the gendarme Allaurme, a representative of the head of the district, together with an American named Henry Mead Hedges, a resident of Bora Bora, and a local man, Ariiorai a Maiarii, decided to go out to meet a vessel coming through the pass into the lagoon. Mr Hedges' canoe, powered by a primitive outboard motor, was quickly surrounded by several reconnaissance speed-boats. They were flying the American flag.

On January 29, 1942, the replenishment oil tanker USS *Ramapo* came through the pass into Bora Bora's lagoon. Thomas C. Hair, born on March 4, 1923, in the Bronx district of New York recounts: I was first assigned to the USS *New York* (LPD-21). I was later taken off the *New York*

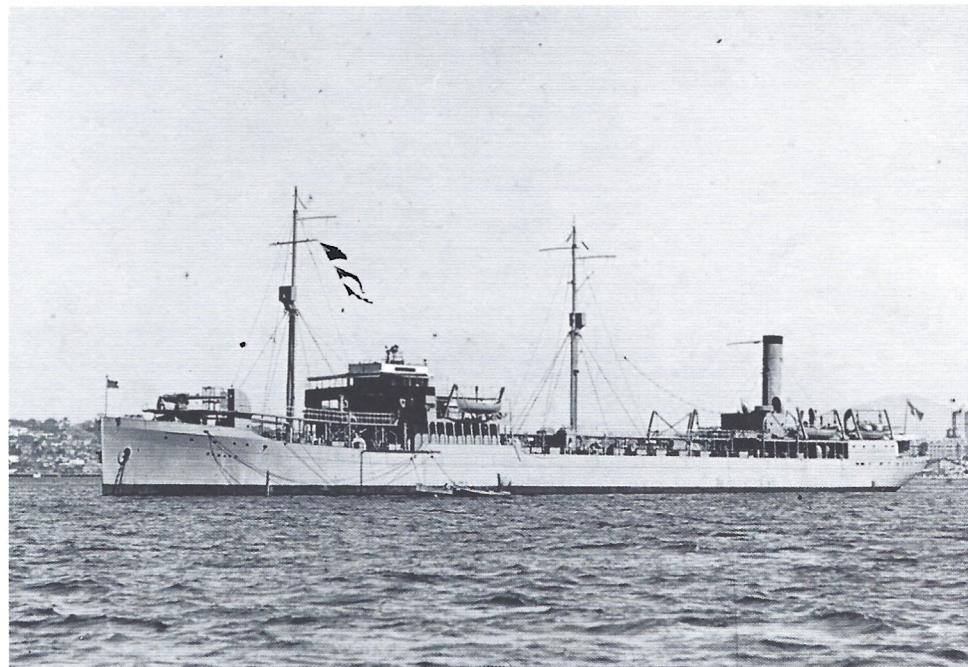


and assigned to base a code name for Bora Bora. They were building an was in Bora Bora for assigned to a ship, the was an oil tanker. Sh West Coast home port was a big oil tanker there for maybe a of USS *Ramapo* in warships would stop February 13, 1942, the

The oil tanker USS *Ramapo* in January 1942. Naval History and Heritage Command

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and assigned to base "bobcat", which was a code name for Bora Bora in the Pacific. They were building an oil base out there. I was in Bora Bora for a while and then got assigned to a ship, the USS *Ramapo*. She was an oil tanker. She went back to her West Coast home port in San Pedro. She was a big oil tanker and I stayed aboard there for maybe a year. The presence of USS *Ramapo* indicates that other warships would stop for refueling. On February 13, 1942, the lookout station in

Vaitape signaled the presence of a convoy of several vessels. The Baker 100 convoy, consisting of the cargo vessels *President Tyler*, the *Hamul*, the *Irénée du Pont*, the *Middleton* and the *Alchiba*, escorted by the destroyers *Richmond* and *Warrington*, discharged its cargo and wave after wave of men and equipment came ashore as part of operation Bobcat.

On February 13, 1942, the Second World War came to Bora Bora ■

The oil tanker USS *Ramapo*, second ship to arrive in January 42. *Naval History and Heritage command.*



JOINT BASIC ARMY AND NAVY PLAN *for the Occupation and Defense of Bora Bora*

CH 2

Less than a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the islands of Guam and Wake fell into Japanese hands and the Philippines were occupied. The allies were unable to do anything to prevent it. The British lost Hong Kong, Singapore was under siege and the Dutch East Indies were invaded. And the Japanese would have control of the Pacific if they were able to seize Australia and New Zealand. For the American High Command it was vital to keep the lines of communication open between the United States and these two bastions of the South Pacific. The route north, passing west-south-west of Hawaii, was controlled by the Japanese. So the route south, via the South Sea islands, had to be kept open at any cost. American strategy revolved around having a supply base in the South Pacific, either in the Marquesas, Cook or Society Islands. A plan entitled *The Joint Basic Army and Navy Plan for the Occupation and Defense of Bora Bora* was approved on January 8, 1942. Bora Bora is located 255km north-west of Tahiti. The island measures 8km from north to south and 5km from east to west (for a total surface of less than 40km²) and its two highest points are the twin peaks of Mont Otemanu, 727m and Mont Pahia, 661m. It is surrounded by a barrier reef with a single pass through it, Teavanui. Spread along the reef are numerous islets, called motu in Tahitian. The island boasts

three deep bays, at Faanui and Povai in the west and Hitiaa in the north-west. Bora Bora was 'discovered' by the Dutch navigator, Jakob Rooggeven in 1722. It was visited by James Cook in 1769, who originally gave the island the name Pora Pora. It was eventually annexed by France in 1888. The island is divided into three districts : Faanui, Anau and Nunue, where Vaitape, the island's main town, is located.

The operation involving the occupation and defense of Bora Bora in the Leeward Islands was given the codename Bobcat which became the island's war name. Operation Bobcat centered on the establishment and protection of a seaplane base and a fuel depot consisting of 200,000 barrels of heavy oil and 37,500 barrels of gasoline. The island of Bora Bora wasn't unknown to American cinema-goers. In 1928, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau and Robert Flaherty shot the silent film *Tabu*, story of the South Seas on Bora Bora. The filming lasted about 18 months. It was the story of a pearl fisherman, played by Matahi, who falls in love with the beautiful Reri, who had been chosen by the tahu'a, Hitu, to be a priestess and must therefore remain a virgin. She is tapu. To escape Hitu's wrath, the two forbidden lovers decide to run away together.

Anna Chevalier, daughter of a Polynesian mother and French father, was born in 1912. At 16 years of age she played the

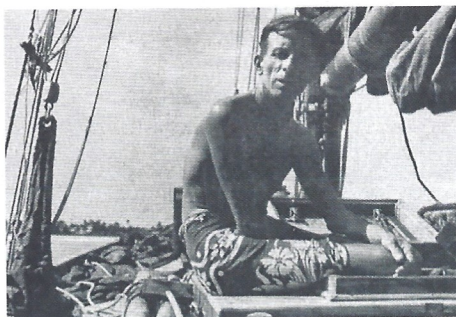
lead role in the silent film *Tabu*. The film's success brought her fame in Hollywood and holidays in Europe. In 1934, she played the Tahitian wife of a Polish sailor, interpreted by Eugeniusz Bodo in the film *Black Pearl*. She also made a brief appearance in the John Ford film, *Hurricane*. She died in 1977.



Before the war, numerous American millionaires had already moored their yachts in Bora Bora, much to the displeasure of the celebrated writer and adventurer, Alain Gerbault, who worried about the ill-effects that the onset of tourism would have on the local population.

In 1923, Alain Gerbault discovered the South Pacific on his first solo circumnavigation. He returned in 1933 and fell for the charms of the islands and sided with the population in their differences with the colonial authorities, the clergy and the French settlers. In his book, *L'Évangile du soleil*, he exposes the ill-effects of civilization on the islanders. He learns their legends,

genealogy and folklore, and is keen for them to rediscover their traditions, sports and the taste for hard work. With the armistice of 1940, he joined the Comité des Français d'Océanie, which supported Marshal Pétain. He was also close to the extreme right-wing organization, Action Française, and the



engagement of the Etablissements français d'Océanie alongside the Free French forced him to set sail for Indochina. He left French Polynesia and sailed via New Caledonia to Delli, on the north coast of Timor, where, weak and in failing health, he died on December 16, 1941. His remains were shipped back to his favorite island, Bora Bora, in 1947.

Confronted with the Japanese menace in the Pacific, the Americans had already requested that their allies allow them to establish a chain of landing strips for their heavy bombers between Honolulu and New Zealand, long before the attack on Pearl Harbor. In 1941, at the end of the southern winter season, discussions were held in Washington between the Free French and the US State Department, concerning the installation of military bases in French territories. With the Free French having an accredited delegation in the United States, the negotiations were to

Anna Chevalier. *Bambridge collection*.
Alain Gerbault. *Private collection*.
P21. Adrien Tixier. *Private collection*.

take on a more urgent attack on Pearl Harbor. dated December 24, 1942, the Free French issue went beyond the imposed the condition be recognized over all the Pacific.

In a letter to Adrien Tixier, representative of the Free French, dated January 15, 1942, Admiral Ray Atherton, gave

Dear Mr. Tixier.

With reference to your letter of December 24, 1941, and naval authorities establishing several bases in Pacific territories.

This offer was accepted by the Defense Department. Your conditions (letter of December 24) have been carefully considered.

I have been authorized to inform you that the United States Government follows the following conditions:

1. That Free French territory remains intact and is not to be used by any base the United States establish.

2. That title to the land on which said base is established remains with the Free French.

3. That all permanent structures, such as buildings, will become the property of the Free French Government upon ratification of this agreement.

4. That property of the United States Government, the establishment of the base, will be undertaken with the authorization and cooperation of the French authorities in the Pacific.

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take on a more urgent tone following the attack on Pearl Harbor. In correspondence dated December 24, 1941 and January 8, 1942, the Free French, considering that the issue went beyond the confines of the war, imposed the condition that its sovereignty be recognized over all French territories in the Pacific.

In a letter to Adrien Tixier, the representative of the Free French in Washington, dated January 15, 1942, the American diplomat, Ray Atherton, gave his confirmation:

Dear Mr. Tixier,

With reference to your letters dated December 24, 1941, and January 8, 1942, in which you offer the military and naval authorities the possibility of establishing several bases in the French Pacific territories.

This offer was very much appreciated by the Defense authorities and your conditions (letter of December 24) have been carefully considered.

I have been authorized to inform you that the United States accepts the following conditions :

1. That Free French sovereignty remains intact and is not jeopardized by any base the United States may establish.

2. That title to the property on which said base is established remains with the Free French Government.

3. That all permanent installations, such as buildings, docks etcetera, will become the property of the Free French Government upon the expiration of this agreement.

4. That property leased for the establishment of the base, or any part of same, will be undertaken with the authorization and cooperation of the Free French authorities in Bora Bora, and

just rentals will be paid for any property so leased.

5. That in the event it should be found desirable to retain the said base after the expiration of said lease, French rights shall be established under a reciprocal basis.



Adrien Tixier, the son of Pierre-Edouard Tixier and Marie-France Derosier, was born on January 31, 1893, in Folles, Haute-Vienne. He joined up for the Great War in August 1914 and was seriously wounded, losing his left arm in the Ardennes. After the war, he was a militant for the French section of the Workers' International (SFIO) where he formed a strong relationship with the congressman and former Armaments Minister, Albert Thomas, who enrolled him in the International Labor Organization in Geneva. In 1940 he was against the armistice signed by Marshal Pétain and joined General de Gaulle. With the offices of the International Labor Organization having been moved to Montreal, he was able to make his way to the United States. In November 1941, General de Gaulle appointed him as the representative of Free France in the United States.

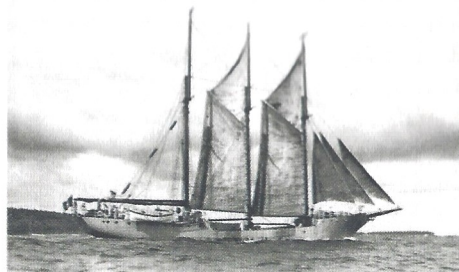
He worked in close collaboration with the France Forever association, the heart of Gaullist propaganda in the United States.

In mid-afternoon on February 14, 1942, the cruiser, *USS Trenton*, dropped anchor in Bora Bora. She was no stranger to the French Pacific, having already visited the Marquesas Islands in 1925, when the locals were the privileged witnesses to the first flights of amphibious aircraft in the skies of Polynesia. *USS Trenton* was then joined by the destroyer *USS Sampson* which was escorting the *Baker Tare 200* convoy and had broken away to inspect the Marquesas Islands, before arriving at Bora Bora on February 18, 1942. Aboard the *USS Sampson* was Vice Admiral Shafroth, who had been charged with the mission of reaching an agreement with the local French authorities for the American military occupation of Bora Bora.

Following up the aforementioned diplomatic exchanges, Vice Admiral Shafroth met with Charles Passard, the Administrator of the Leeward Islands, based in Raiatea.

John Franklin Shafroth JR., nicknamed *Big Jack* because of his weight, was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1887, the son of the State Governor, Senator John F. Shafroth. He graduated from the Naval Academy in 1908 and served as a lieutenant on the *USS Virginia*. Later he participated in the Mexican campaign as Executive Officer aboard *USS Jenkins*.

Vice Admiral Shafroth was assisted by Lieutenant-commander Sylvester, chief engineer responsible for the installation of the future base on Bora Bora, Commander



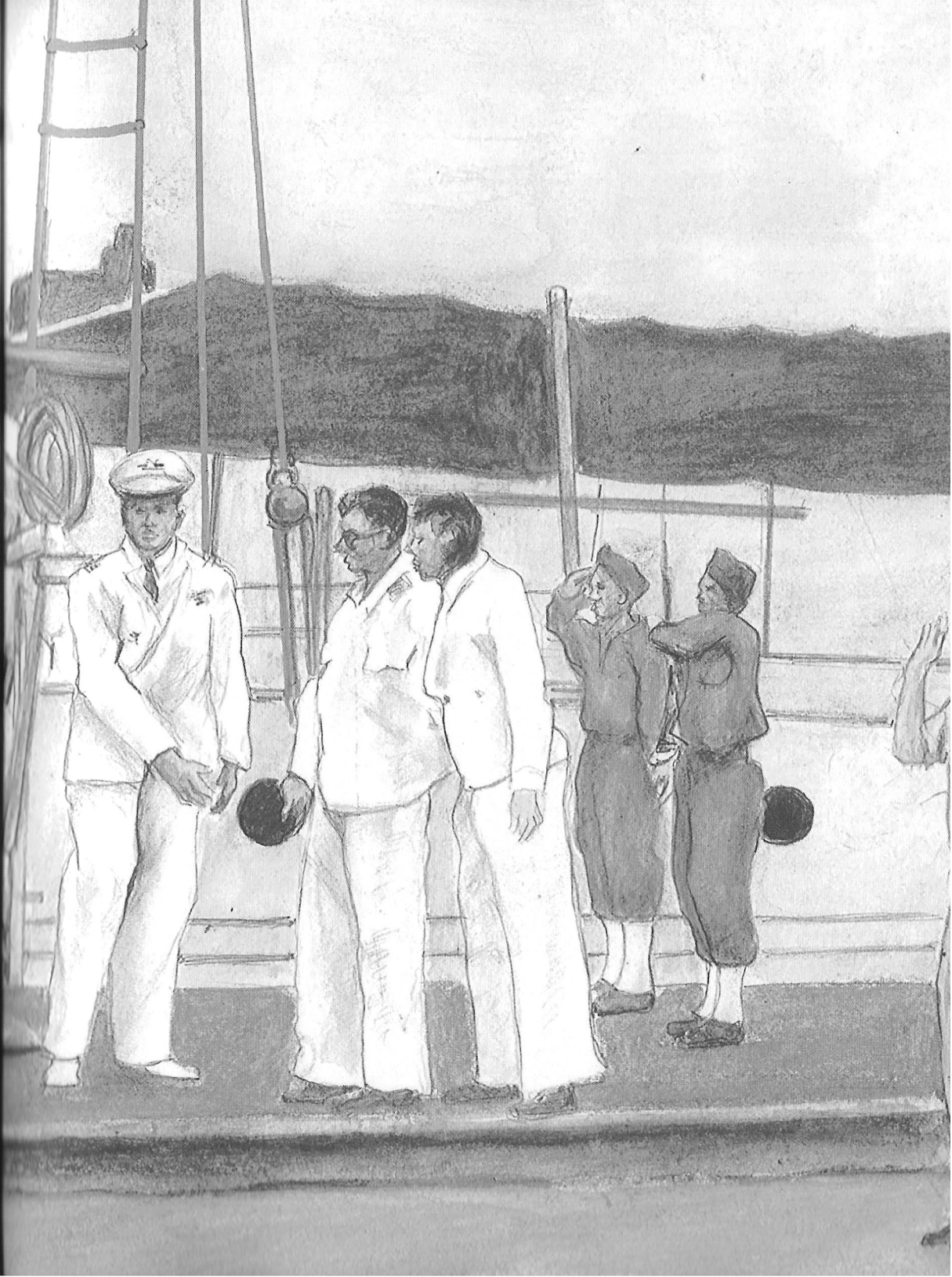
Saunders, commander of the naval base and Colonel Charles Douglas Yelverton Ostrum, commander-in-chief of the troops to be stationed on Bora Bora. An officer from *USS Ramapo* (the purser) was the legal expert for the American delegation. A draft proposal was drawn up, which respected France's sovereign and proprietary rights. Administrator Charles Passard was not an authorized signatory, so a provisional agreement was reached for the Governor to subsequently accept, modify or refuse. In light of this preliminary agreement, American engineers began work on existing wells for the supply of water for public standpipes. Governor Orselli arrived from Tahiti on February 22, 1942, aboard the armed schooner *L'Oiseau des îles*.

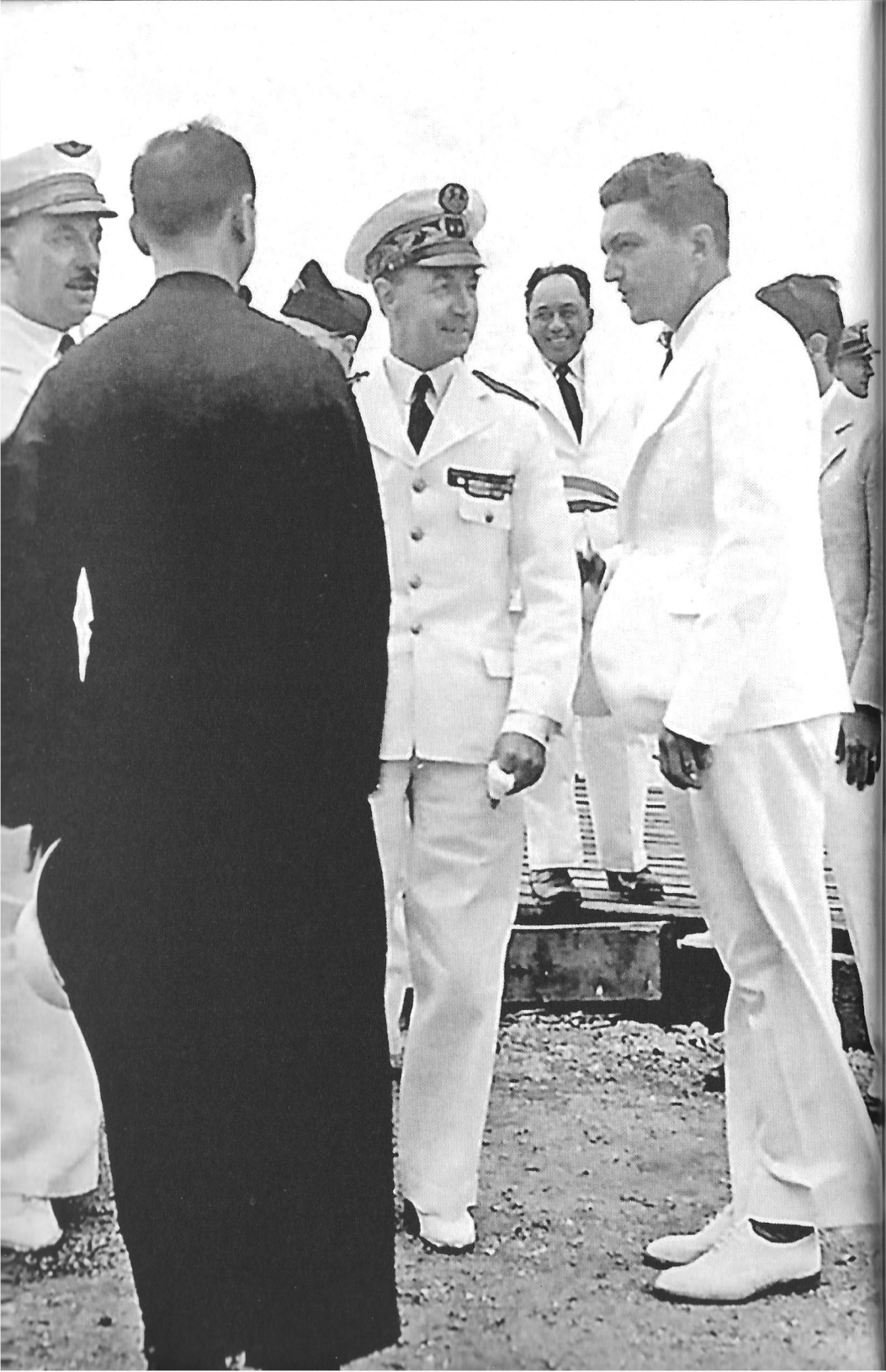
An agreement written in English, concerning the utilization, administration and day-to-day functioning of the naval base on Bora Bora by the United States, was signed on February 23, 1942. The presence of American troops was strictly confined to the island of Bora Bora. However, permission was granted on a weekly basis for a detachment of 17 to 20 men to spend a few days' leave in Papeete. They were transported from Bora Bora to Papeete on one of two ships belonging to Lewis Hirshon, the *Ruahatu* and the *Hiro* ■

The schooner L'oiseau des îles. Private collection.

P23. The cruiser, *USS Trenton* and the destroyer *USS Sampson* in Bora Bora bay, february 1942. *Naval History and Heritage command.*







THE AGREEMENT

relating to the use administration and operation of a naval base on Bora Bora by the USA

CH 3

The agreement relating to the use administration and operation of a naval base on the island of Bora Bora by the United States of America was signed on February 23, 1942 in the following terms:

Whereas, General De Gaulle, chairman of the French National Committee has agreed to the establishment of a United States Naval Base at Bora Bora, and

Whereas, The United States has agreed to the following broad conditions:

1. That Free French sovereignty remains intact and is not jeopardized by any base the United States may establish.
2. That title to the property on which said base is established remains with the Free French Government.
3. That all permanent installation, such as buildings, docks etcetera, will become the property of the Free French Government upon the expiration of this agreement.
4. That property leased for the establishment of the base, or any part of same, will be undertaken with authorization and cooperation of Free French authorities in Bora Bora, and just rentals will be paid for any property so leased.
5. That in the event it should be found desirable to retain the said base after the expiration of said lease, French rights

shall be establish under reciprocal basis, and

Whereas, The Free French Government represented by Lieutenant-Colonel G. Orselli, Free French Air Force, Governor of the Free French Settlements of Oceania, and Rear Admiral John F. Shafroth, United States Navy, having been duly authorized to effect certain supplementary agreements.

Now therefore, the signatories hereof do hereby agree on behalf of their governments as follows :

The above stipulations cover the basic principles of agreement and should additional or supplementary agreements become necessary from time to time, the local representative of the Free French Government in Bora Bora and the commanding Officer of the Armed Forces of the United States in Bora Bora are authorized to conclude agreements without further reference to their respective governments.

(Seal)

Lieutenant-Colonel G. Orselli, Free French Air Force, Governor of the French Settlements of Oceani behalfa ;

(Seal)

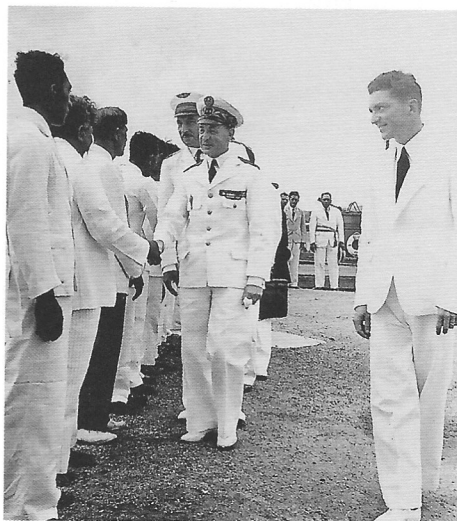
Rear Admiral John F. Shafroth, United States Navy, for and on behalf of the Government of the United States.

Done at Bora Bora this 23rd day of February, 1942.

President Roosevelt was reluctant to recognize the legitimacy of General de Gaulle and the Free French Government. He refused to discuss anything other than technical and operational military matters. Otherwise, he would only deal with the Free French at local government level and even then, only when they were strategically concerned in the war. The central authority was never consulted or informed. This agreement doesn't seem to have ever been ratified by the Fighting France National Committee of the Free French. Such an arrangement gave the local authorities free rein to negotiate the installation of bases directly with the American military. The recognition of French sovereignty was the fundamental condition for the establishment of an American base on Bora Bora.

Charles Passard, administrative head of the Leeward islands, based in Uturoa on the island of Raiatea, worked to ensure that French sovereignty would be guaranteed. He moved his offices to Bora Bora and spent a large part of his time there. He visited the inhabitants of the districts of Anau and Faanui and reminded them that they were French and would remain so. In fact, the people of Bora Bora were only French subjects and did not obtain full citizenship until it was granted on March 24, 1945. Passard oversaw exchanges between the locals and the Americans and all property leasing agreements had to be countersigned by him.

All the land in Bora Bora still belonged to the islanders and had not been plundered as in the other islands. The agreement concerning the utilization, administration and operation of a naval base on the island of Bora Bora by the USA stipulated that the renting of property to be used, in part or as a whole, for the purpose of establishing the base should require the authorization and



cooperation of the Free French authorities on Bora Bora. It also stipulated that a fair rent should be paid to the owners of the land. The French colonial administrator's consent was required before any land could be finally rented to the American forces. Regimental Intelligence Office Ervan F. Kuser observed the diligence and zeal of the French bureaucrat² : *On April 17, I was informed that the administrator, Mr Passard, assisted by a native of the island called Marie, was in the process of*

2. *Bogged down in Bora Bora*, Ervan F. Kuser.

measuring the width of a ruler. Apparently, the being taken to verify among the locals. 69 pl by 115 people were rent

The plans came fr of Tahiti, but the lea the hands of the Arme approved by the c administration, notably State of the Treasury version : Standard Form 1935, revised. The plans were attached to the The landowners each year payment of one th (Source : Raymond E. C historian). However, th mentioned that, for the symbolic annual payme would be made. Certa such as free water an also offered. Coconut tre unharvested were comp of twenty francs per yea

He was, however, s about the generosity of which would be diffic requested the rapid op de change locally beca become the standard cu the island. Administrat disapproved of Genera ment of Lieutenant V to smooth over any p the local population a because it meant that longer be dealing direct High Command on their

P24-25. Governor Orselli, on arriving in Bora Bora. Illustrat P26. Official visit of French french delegation is accompan tor Charles Passard. Haley C P28. Portrait of governor Ors Portrait of Francis Sanford.



Free French authorities also stipulated that a fair deal to the owners of the colonial administrator's land before any land could be handed to the American forces. Intelligence Office Ervan F. Kuser. The diligence and zeal of the bureaucrat²: On April 17, 1942, the administrator, accompanied by a native of the island, was in the process of

Bora, Ervan F. Kuser.

measuring the width of the new road with a ruler. Apparently, the measurement is being taken to verify ownership disputes among the locals. 69 plots of land, owned by 115 people were rented.

The plans came from the Governor of Tahiti, but the lease agreements in the hands of the Americans were those approved by the central American administration, notably the Secretary of State of the Treasury in their American version: Standard Form n°2, dated May 6, 1935, revised. The plans of each plot rented were attached to the lease agreements. The landowners each received a first-year payment of one thousand US dollars. (Source: Raymond E. Charlton, American historian). However, the lease agreement mentioned that, for the following years, a symbolic annual payment of just one dollar would be made. Certain fringe benefits such as free water and electricity were also offered. Coconut trees cut down or left unharvested were compensated at the rate of twenty francs per year.

He was, however, somewhat worried about the generosity of the Americans, which would be difficult to criticize. He requested the rapid opening of a bureau de change locally because the dollar had become the standard currency throughout the island. Administrator Charles Passard disapproved of General Orstrum's appointment of Lieutenant Walter H. Pleisse to smooth over any problems between the local population and the Americans, because it meant that Passard would no longer be dealing directly with the Bobcat High Command on their behalf.

P24-25. Governor Orselli, on board of the *Tamara* arriving in Bora Bora. Illustration J.L. Saquet.

P26. Official visit of French representatives. The french delegation is accompanied by the Administrator Charles Passard. Haley Collection;

P28. Portrait of governor Orselli. III. J.L. Saquet. Portrait of Francis Sanford. III. J.L. Saquet.



Walter Pleisse could speak Tahitian and knew the island well, so he was the ideal man for the task. He was an officer in the Ordnance Corps and had visited Bora Bora as a student to prepare a thesis on Japanese colonization. The young officer had been flown from Washington to Balboa to join the expeditionary corps bound for Bora Bora.

On March 16, 1942, Francis Sanford, the newly designated head of the district of Bora Bora, arrived from Raiatea aboard a Free French Navy patrol boat. He was to be responsible for the Vaitape branch of customs and excise as well as the inland revenue service for Bora Bora and Maupiti. Born on Mai 11, 1912 in Papeete, Francis Sanford was the head administrator of the Gambier Islands at the time of the 1940 armistice. He orchestrated the rallying of the people of the Gambier group to the cause of the Free French and organized the recruitment of volunteers from the Gambier and Tuamotu Islands, accompanying them to Tahiti. The 1st contingent of the *Tamari'i* Volunteers had already been constituted and his father, a veteran of WWI who had re-enlisted, was among their ranks. Due to his adherence to the Free French, Francis Sanford was imprisoned for three months as part of



Governor Richard Brunot's campaign against the movement's activists. He was released without charge by Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu, French High Commissioner for the Pacific, who had been instructed to put an end to the actions of Brunot, the self-proclaimed Provisional Governor of the *Etablissements français d'Océanie*.

By decree n°13C dated January 15, 1942, article 2: Mr Francis Sanford, schoolteacher, has been made available to the administrative district of the Leeward Islands in the capacity of head of the district at Uturoa. He will also be responsible for the Inland Revenue Service for the islands of Raiatea and Tahaa. He will also assist the administrator as per the conditions outlined in article 3 of the decree dated December 17, 1931 which covers the creation and organization of the commune of Uturoa.

Francis Sanford was decorated with the Medal of Freedom by the United States and was one of only two Frenchmen to receive this honor.

The military authorities also presented him with the precious visitors' register of the Bora Bora Officers' Club, which opened on February 17, 1942 and closed on June 2, 1946. The register contains the signatures of no less than three thousand US Navy officers as well as many important personalities who visited the island during that period.

Like Francis Sanford, Louis Picard, known as Ruru, was required to fulfill several administrative functions on the island of Bora Bora. A schoolteacher in Bora Bora since 1932, ill-health had obliged him to return to Tahiti in April 1940, where he taught at Paofai school with Madeleine Terorotua, born Moua. He was sent back to Bora Bora at the end of December of that year by Marcel Sénac, former administrator of the Tuamotu Islands, to take over as head of the Postal Service, the Treasury and the radio station ■



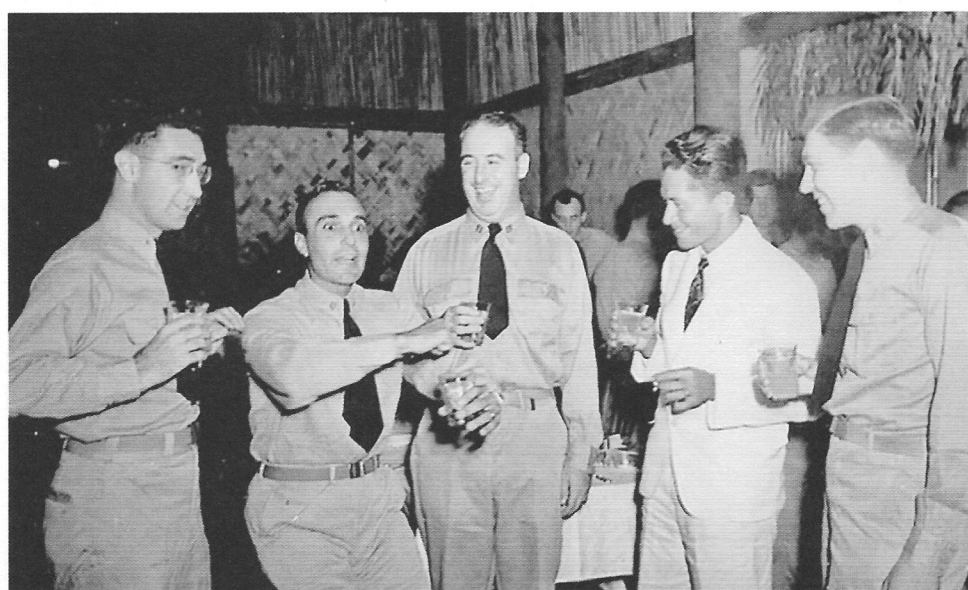
P30. The island of Bora Bora is a no-go zone. The merchant delivers freight to Bora Bora route after having informed the Haley Collection.

Bobcat Base Commander C. On his left, administrator C. Archives



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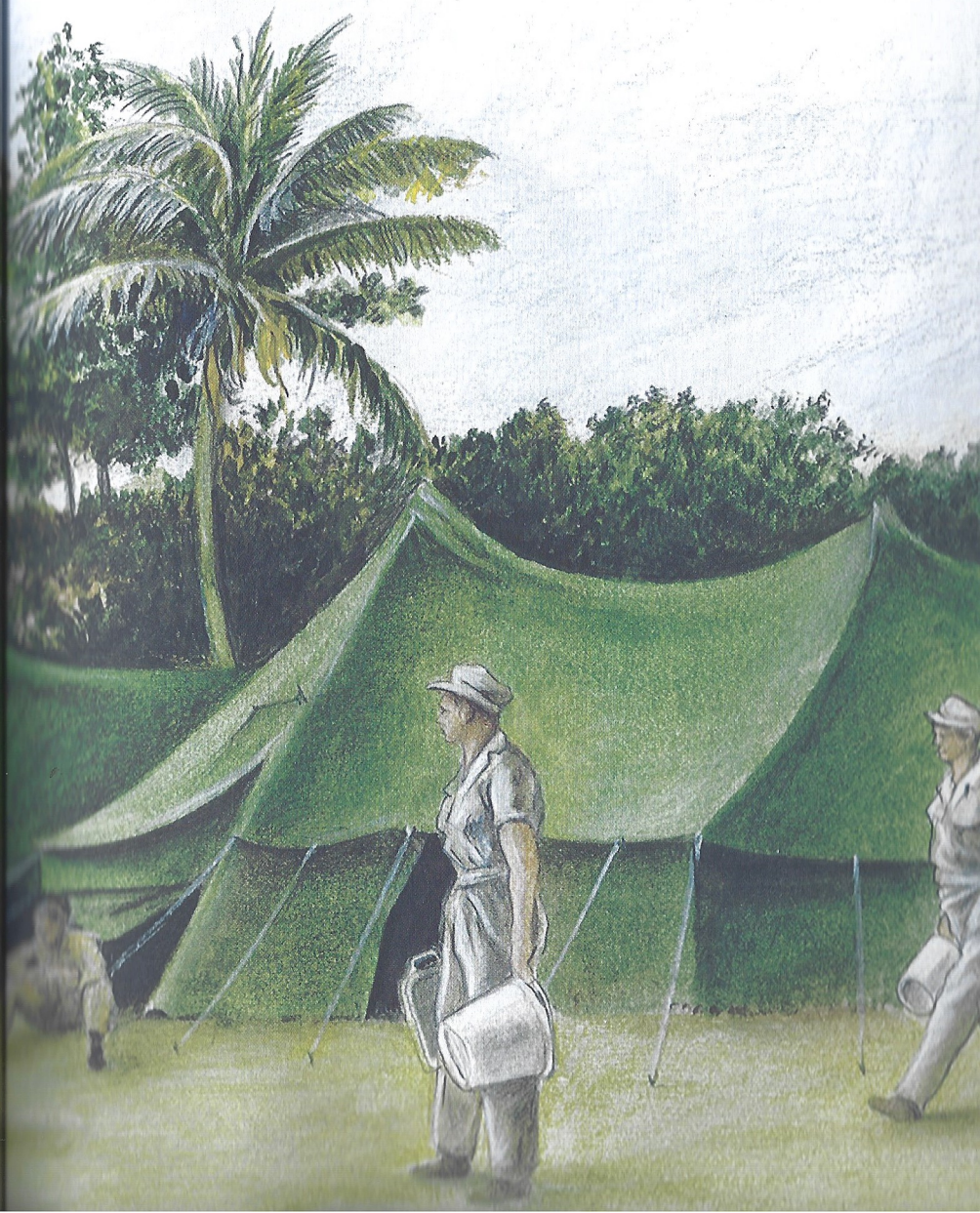
Francis Sanford, Louis Picard,
 and others were required to fulfill se-
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P30. The island of Bora Bora joined the war and became
 a no-go zone. The merchant schooners authorized to
 deliver freight to Bora Bora had to follow a precise
 route after having informed the American authorities.
Haley Collection.

Bobcat Base Commander Charles Ostrom, center.
 On his left, administrator Charles Passard. *Seabees
 Archives*

The officers' club. *Haley Collection.* Francis Sanford
 (in a white suit) assistant of the head French
 administrator of the district of Bora Bora was
 required to fulfill several administrative functions.
 Francis Sanford was decorated with the Medal of
 Freedom by the United States.



BOGGED DOWN *in* BORA BORA

CH 4



On February 13, 1942, four seaplanes flew over the bay of Bora Bora. They were reconnaissance planes from the *Baker 100* convoy.

On February 17, 1942, the convoy itself arrived from Charleston. Numerous vehicles and seaplanes were on the decks of the ships and three of them were loaded with troops. It took 10 days to unload *USS President Tyler*, 3 weeks for *USS Irénée, Dupond* and *Alchiba*, 4 weeks for *USS Middleton*, 6 weeks for *USS Hamul* and more than 7 weeks for *USS Mercury*.

It took 52 days to unload the *Bobcat* convoy, which prompted one superior officer to comment, with a touch of humor: *The Japanese were kind enough not to attack us during that time. The problems which caused such a delay in the unloading were of course blamed on the way USS President Tyler, Alchiba, Hamal and Mercury had been loaded to start with. The equipment should have been loaded in the order in which it would be required at the other end : firstly construction material, then fuel tanks, followed by equipment for the defense of the island. Barges should have been loaded last, so that they could be taken off first.*

The Army provided and provisioned a garrison of 4,000 soldiers for the defense of the island. The US Navy transported the soldiers for *Bobcat* and the Navy's Construction Battalion built and managed the base. Six ships were required for the transport of the troops and equipment for operation *Bobcat*, but the US Navy could only spare three. So three other ships had to be requisitioned and armed. Some ballast had to be added to *USS Arthur Middleton* to compensate for the weight of the newly installed cannons. *USS President Tyler* was requisitioned by the American War Department and required so much repair work that its commander, C.H. Sanders said of it: *The Tyler was, and still is, a trashcan. The Army criticized the Navy for the delay and the Navy blamed the Army's poor packaging, labeling and loading of the freight. There was also a lack of equipment and dockworkers for unloading the ships. The heavy freight, such as barges, tractors, bulldozers and other vehicles, had been loaded in a hurry with no particular attention being paid to priority. This inevitably caused problems when it came to unloading. The embarkation of the troops, on the other hand, went ahead without a hitch. At sea they would help to defend the convoy against aerial attack, using the 6-37mm AA machine guns which were mounted on the decks of all the transport ships. The*

P32-33. *Valtape* was rapidly clogged with many tents. Illustration J. Saquet.

P34. Landing by barges. Haley Collection.



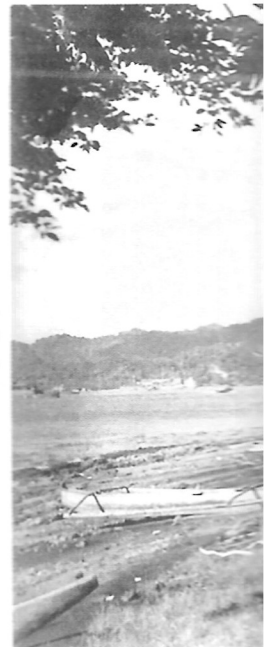
unloading at Bora Bora showed exactly what can go wrong if the dock isn't big enough, if there isn't enough warehousing and above all, if no landing barges are available.

Without barges, it was impossible to bring ashore the heavy handling equipment such as cranes and tractors, especially since the docks at Vaitape and Faanui were built on coral and weren't solid enough to support such heavy loads.

Causeways which reached as far as the deep water had to be constructed in several places. Logs cut from coconut trees were tied together and laid on a base of rocks, coral and earth. At first, there were just two 30 ton landing barges, which had been loaded on the ships' decks, and could be used to unload freight. Later, they were supplemented with several 50 tons barges. Nevertheless, three weeks after the unloading had begun, neither the hoisting crane nor the two heavyweight, 100 ton landing barges were operational. A South Sea island paradise floating in a

turquoise lagoon, surrounded by a coral reef. With coconut palms swaying in the breeze, the thatched roofs of the native huts and suntanned islanders wearing pareos, paddling outrigger canoes, Bobcat was like a dream come true. But the dream would soon become a nightmare. The troops were used as dockworkers and then laborers.

Vaitape was rapidly clogged with ambulances, trucks and crates. The town lacked warehousing and a local cinema had to be rented to store flour and sugar. PX rations and perishable goods were stored in a school. Eventually a hangar was built close to the wharf. The island had one road, which had been traced by Reverend Orsmond a century before. But it was only partially usable, because its bridges and culverts couldn't take the weight of the heavy trucks of the Bobcat forces. The road was 2.5m wide and ran for just 2.5km. The rest of the island was connected by mountain trails.

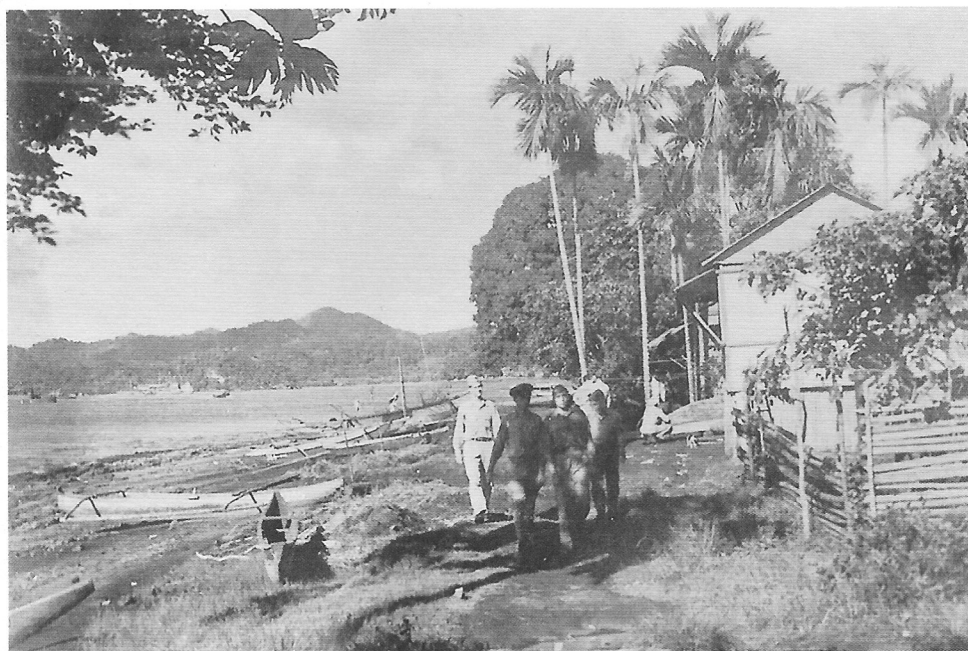


There was no road in the districts of Vaitape. Building a suitable road was a priority, but the equipment for such an undertaking was limited. The road was built for the Bobcat project. The island didn't possess any equipment, so the work had to be carried out using local resources and six trucks borrowed from the States which were light enough to travel on the existing road. There was no doubt a little in the way of building, so large rocks had to be moved with pickaxes before they



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There was no road linking the three districts of Vaitape, Faanui and Anau. Building a suitable road was therefore a priority, but the equipment required for such an undertaking hadn't been provided for the *Bobcat* pioneers and the Army didn't possess any either. The work had to be carried out using just one rock crusher and six trucks borrowed from the Navy, which were light enough to use the existing road. There was no gravel pit and very little in the way of boulders and stones, so large rocks had to be broken up with pickaxes before they could be put in the

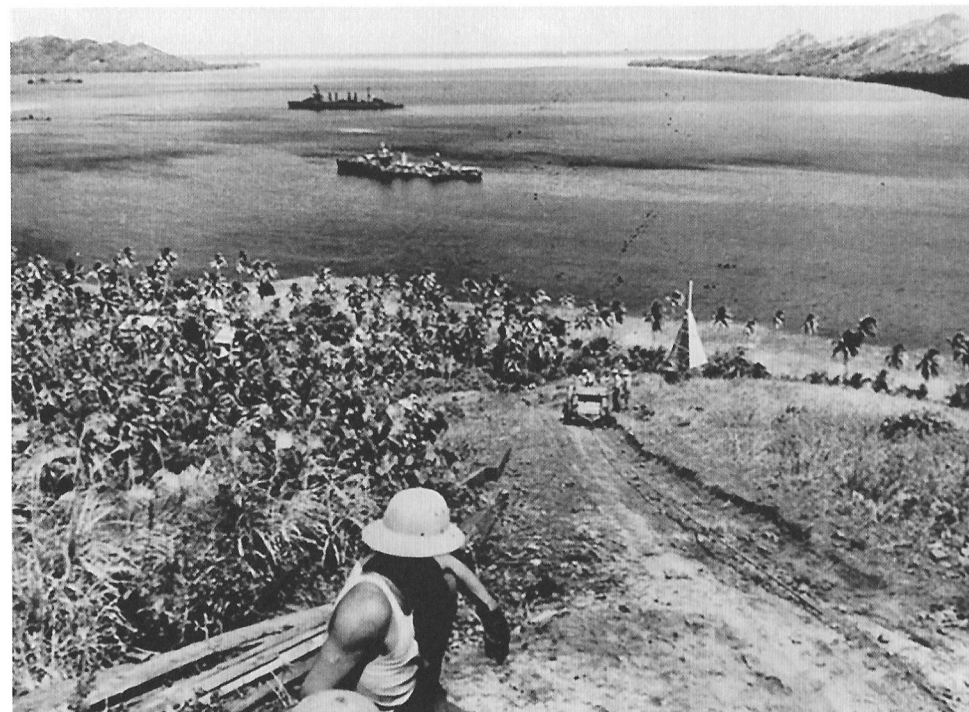
crusher. The gravel was then loaded on the trucks to be spread manually on the roadway. Crushed coral proved to be unsuitable because, being organic matter, it retains humidity and makes the surface slippery. Coconut tree logs were the only suitable material for bridges and culverts. The island's existing road was soon in a pitiful state as were many of the vehicles which had been unloaded. The big trucks, pickups and jeeps were being used day and night, just like the barges and landing craft which were going back and forth non-stop in the lagoon. It was the rainy season and under the heavy traffic the road soon became a knee deep river of mud, which the local population didn't appreciate at all ■

P36. Seabees build a road of coral. *Haley Collection.*
 The centuries old Bora Bora coastal road. *Haley Collection.*



WAR

CH 5



In spite of the difficulties in unloading the convoy, it was imperative for the armed forces of Bobcat to organize the defense of the island rapidly in preparation for a possible Japanese reaction. In the absence of detailed maps, reconnaissance was unable to find suitable sites for gun emplacements.

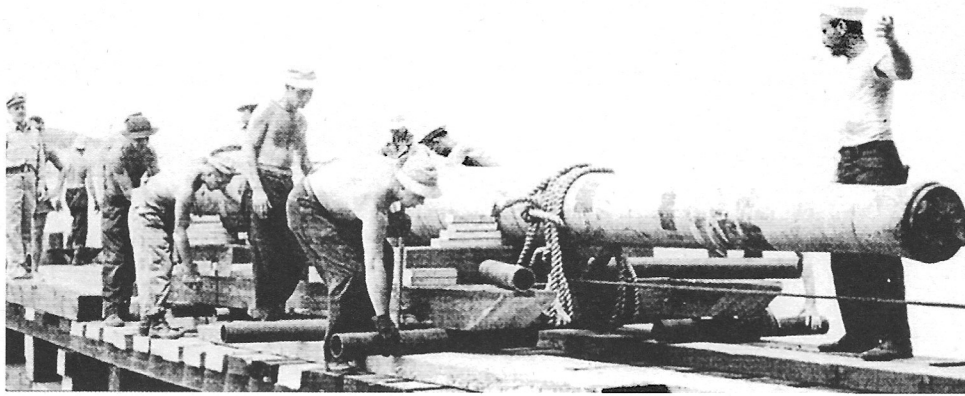
The building of defensive installations proved to be an enormous undertaking.

For the Seabees and GIs, the island soon ceased to be a paradise. They had to start from scratch in conditions of extreme heat and humidity, ideal for the propagation

of skin diseases, elephantiasis and other unpleasant complaints. Yet by April 26, 1942, the island's defenses were more or less operational. Four batteries of two Navy 7 inch / 45 caliber guns Mark II had been taken from WWI battleship Connecticut class.

The first battery was placed at the highest part of Pahua point, on the northern tip of the bay of Vaitape, directly opposite the Teavanui pass.

The second was installed at Matira point in the south of the island, a third at the northern point of Faanui and the fourth at Fitiuu point.



Pieces of heavy artillery, these 7 inch/45 caliber cannons were capable of hitting any target on the other side of the barrier reef. They were rapid-fire, long-range guns firing armor-piercing shells.

Temporary wharves had to be built to unload them and it took two weeks to lay the concrete foundations on which they were to be installed. To begin with, the engineers had to lay wooden rails. Then the barrel of the canon was mounted on blocks and towed along the rails, inch by inch by a motorized pulley, with men pushing it at the same time, sometimes up 45 degree slopes.

Two batteries of 3-3 anti-aircraft canons were positioned on the sides of hills without having concrete bases and without camouflage. Their ammunition was buried next to them.

These canons defended the south of the village of Vaitape, just above Tianoa point. A third battery was installed high on Matira point. Batteries of 37mm mobile anti-aircraft guns equipped with rangefinders were positioned along the coast all around the bay of Vaitape. Sixteen anti-aircraft guns of 24 and 37mm protected the fuel depot and the port infrastructure in Faanui bay. Some 47mm canons were also positioned on

the hills around the airbase in order to fire on any ship which managed to force its way through Teavanui pass. Eight more covered the wharf at Vaitape, protecting the infrastructures and any moored ships from attack by low-flying aircraft.

The aircraft control facilities close to shore were shielded by a sand bulwark. There were also 37mm guns on the slopes of the hills at Tatahi point, to the east of the airbase. 50mm anti-aircraft machine guns were positioned next to the various batteries to protect the canons and the SCR 270 radars.

A battery of 75mm howitzers was installed at Raititi, the southwest point of the island, and another at Farepiti point, west of Faanui. These mobile batteries were in fact static due to the lack of *half-track* vehicles, which had been used to transport road-building materials and were now useless. There was a critical shortage of motor vehicles ■

P38. Hauling coastal guns to the top of a ridge. *Haley Collection.*

P39. *USS Concord & Warrington* destroyers. *Haley Collection.*

The guns had to be taken through the sea to get them in position to be hauled to the hill. *Haley Collection.*

Us Army Force H

Communications
Cryptography

Supply

Utilities & Engineering

Motor Maintenance

Medical
— Field Hospital

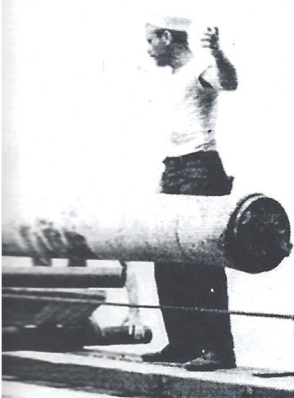
Motu Mute Airfield
— ATC

Special Services
— Chaplain
— PX
— P.Q.

BORA BORA ISLAND COMMAND US ARMY — JULY 1942

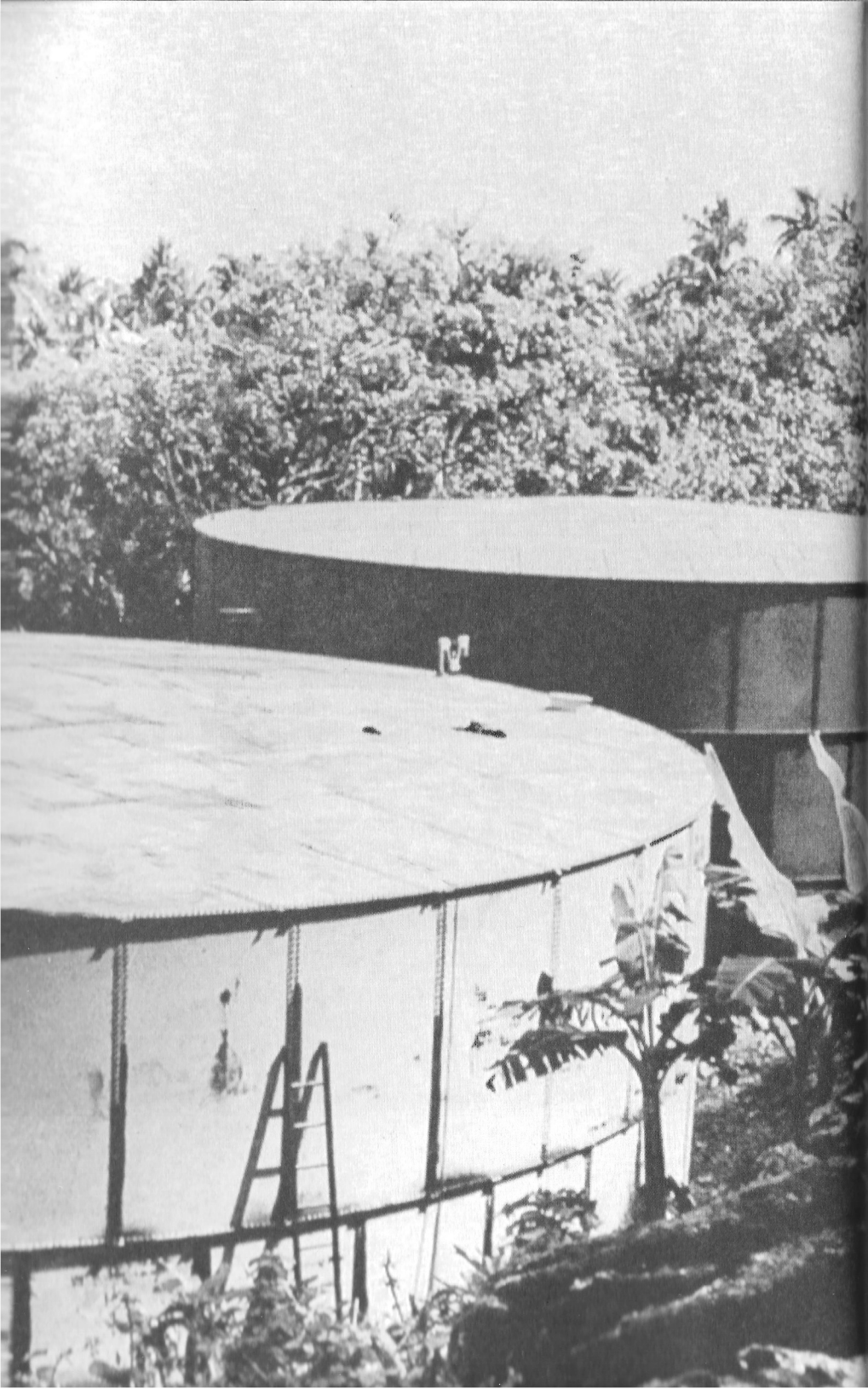
In July 1942, the Bobcat forces were organized as follows:

Us Army Force Headquarters	Us Navy Base Administration
<p>Communications Cryptography</p>	<p>Harbor Control & Defense – Control Post – Underwater Dectectors – Harbor Patrol – Boat Pool – Cargo Issue Pub</p>
<p>Supply</p>	<p>Communications Joint Army- Navy – Radio Coding – Basegrams – Post Office – Telephone – Issue Pub</p>
<p>Utilities & Engineering</p>	<p>Storage Facilities & Consumables – Supply – Disbursing – Commissary</p>
<p>Motor Maintenance</p>	<p>Medical – Field Hospital</p>
<p>Medical – Field Hospital</p>	<p>Medical – Medical & Dental Care (a)Station - (b)Small Craft – Medical Supplies Quarantine - Sanitation - Out patient</p>
<p>Motu Mute Airfield – ATC</p>	<p>Aviation – Tupua Seaplane Base – Maintenance – Fueling – Camp</p>
<p>Special Services – Chaplain – PX – P.Q</p>	<p>Ordnance – HI net – Buoys – Sonobuoys</p>
	<p>Co – Quarters Recreation – Ships services</p>
	<p>CBC Public Works – Base Maintenance – Water Supply – Barge repair – Tank Farm – Stevedoring – Construction – Mosquito Central – Electrical – Telephone Ttce – Motor Pool</p>



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 o be hauled to the hill. Haley





TANK FARM *and* REPAIR STATION

CH 6

The purpose behind the Joint Army and Navy Plan for the occupation of Bora Bora was to set up a refueling station for convoys en route to Australia from Panama. The capacity of the depot was 200,000 barrels of heavy oil, in 20 reservoirs of 10,000 barrels each – a total of 1.5 million liters and 20,000 barrels of gasoline, in two reservoirs of 10,000 each.

A declassified report entitles 'Base Bobcat Engineering Report' gives details of the make up and organization of this fuel depot.

Bunker A Fuel for storage: 200,000 Bbbs (barrels). With a loading and unloading capacity of 6,000 barrels per hour.

Diesel Oil: 20,000 Bbbs. With a loading capacity of 1,500 barrels per hour and a distribution rate of 2,000 barrels per hour.

Aviation and Motor Gasoline: 50,000 Gals. Capable of filling underground storage tanks at a rate of 100 gallons per minute and capable of loading by gravity into tank, wagon or barge distribution facilities.

On January 29, 1942, the fully-loaded tanker *USS Ramapo* anchored in Bora Bora. Its presence indicated that other warships or seaplanes might be stopping at Bora Bora soon. On February 13, 1942, the light cruiser *USS Honolulu* arrived at Bora Bora for refueling. Steel fuel tanks

designed and made by Standard Oil of New Jersey (Esso), were shipped with the *Baker 100* convoy which arrived in Bora Bora on February 17, 1942. On February 19, it was the turn of *USS Sepulga* and *USS Samson* to anchor in the bay. On the same day, *USS Ramapo* left Bora Bora, escorted by *USS Richmond* and the torpedo ship *USS Warrington*. She returned on March 27, 1942.

The unexpected difficulties encountered with the unloading of the cargo, the necessity of renovating Bora Bora's ancient road, the provision of a water supply and various other complications, delayed the beginning of the construction of the depot, the main purpose of operation *Bobcat*, until April. Prior to April 2, 1942, two cruiser moorings had been set in place but the appropriate chains for use with them couldn't be found in the equipment embarked on the *Baker 100* convoy and ropes had to be used instead. Only two of the twenty-two planned storage tank sites had been dynamited. The sites were of hard rock which had to be extracted and soft soil which was difficult to work with when wet. Work was suspended in favor of the completion of the installation of artillery batteries and the provisioning of water to the *Bobcat* base which mobilised all available men and equipment. In particular, the cranes were used for unloading the *Baker 100* convoy operations before

being rigged onto barges and used as dredgers. The six Caterpillar tractors were used for the installation of the artillery batteries, and for bringing sand required for the foundations of the water supply tanks. A large quantity of cement was lost due to being unloaded before adequate storage facilities had been prepared in the absence of storage depots. The network of pipelines hadn't progressed either. Apart from these logistical delays in the completion of the depot, progress was also slowed by the men's lack of experience of this kind of construction. A progress report dated April 27, 1942 indicates that this was the reason why the first two tanks would not be completed before June 30, 1942 and the depot as a whole not before September 30, 1942. This was contrary to the orders from the High Command which had stipulated completion of the first eight storage tanks by June 1942 with facilities for filling at sea, beyond the barrier reef. The deadline was unrealistic for the commanding officers of the Bobcat and Seabees forces, especially considering the uneven terrain which hindered the construction of the heavy oil depot.

Commander Richard G. Walke reported: This was done by peculiar construction methods contrary to the accepted procedure of using stiff leg derricks of bolted tanks. The idea was utilized of eliminating two large guy derricks which were all set on the center of the tank. It was, thus possible to erect the bolted sides in a continuous circle without any additional setups and with two such rigs we were able to work two tanks at once. The average working time for the erection of one tank including the base, sides, roofs frame and final tightening up was between two and a half and three days a tank. While the first tanks were being erected the pipe liners get to work under

the direction of Lieutenant Commander Duddleson who was shortly to leave on account illness and later by myself.

In order to be able to meet the completion date for the heavy oil depot, seven hundred and twenty Army personnel were needed to reinforce the two hundred and fifty Seabees. It would require a total of eighteen thousand man-hours of work. The network of pipelines was completed within the six week delay, at about the same time as the last three storage tanks. Another small group, under the command of Lieutenant Crain, completed the anchoring of the mooring buoys for the ships. On June 6, 1942, the tanker L.V. Sanford came into the bay and anchored off Faanui. On June 9, 1942, the first of eight fuel tanks was ready. Its construction had required 720 Army personnel assisting 250 Seabees working 7 days a week, for a total of 18,000 hours. The depot wouldn't be completely finished until March 1943. The fuel from L.V. Sanford was piped directly into the fuel tanks on shore. According to Ervan F. Kushner: *The Navy did a great job. There wasn't a single leakage at sea or on land.* Ervan F. Kushner praised the excellent work of the Navy: *There are no leaks either at sea or on land.* He was obviously unaware that tanks number seven and eight were not yet watertight. During the initial transfer of heavy oil to the tanks, a considerable number of men were at work on ladders tightening the last bolts to prevent oil seeping out. With no electrical tools available they worked using handheld spanners. The tanks were to be painted with a protective camouflage coating and covered with netting to disguise their round shape. However, shortages of material meant called for improvisation using what was available locally. Islanders were



employed to plant tree vegetables which were camouflage anyway. The declassified Base Bobcat Report indicates that the depot or Tank Farm should consist of several structures: a complete protection system with a rate capable of delivering fuel at 1000 per minute. Henceforth Zealand, Australian and American would be able to refuel at an average of two per hour. The mooring facilities were completed and the ships were ordered to connect to a fuel line. Base Bobcat Engineer

The offshore network of pipelines connected to the pontoon buoys: Buoy number one buoy is to be fitted with a swinging boom to receive cargo hoses to effect refueling of the ships. In July 1942 was being run by 2000 compared with 6000

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nprovisation using what
e locally. Islanders were



employed to plant trees, shrubs, grass and vegetables which were better-suited as camouflage anyway. The aforementioned declassified *Base Bobcat Engineering Report* indicates that the heavy oil depot or Tank Farm should contain the following structures: a complete salt water fire protection system with two pump houses capable of delivering four hundred gallons per minute. Henceforth, American, New Zealand, Australian and French vessels would be able to refuel at Bora Bora at an average of two per week. However, the mooring facilities were still not adequate and the ships were obliged to anchor at one of the two cruiser mooring buoys and connect to a fuel line. The declassified *Base Bobcat Engineering Report* states:

The offshore network consists of pipelines connected to two sea loading pontoon buoys: Buoy A and Buoy B. Each buoy is to be fitted with a pipe mast with a swinging boom to enable the lifting of cargo hoses to effectuate the refueling of the ships. In July 1942, the fuel depot was being run by 2 officers and 192 men, compared with 6 officers and 123 men

before it left Charleston. The historian, Raymond E. Charlton estimated that during the course of 1943, 181 ships stopped for refueling and 193 for supplies of water. Repairs were carried out on 45 vessels, of which 10 required major repairs. It is estimated that 19,000 crewmen passed through Bora Bora. On February 18, 1943, the tanker *USS Pecos II* arrived in Bora Bora. On March 19, 1943, the tanker *USS Cache* took on a cargo of gasoline at Bayton, Texas and set sail for Bora Bora and Noumea. *USS Pasquotank*, loaded with fuel, anchored in Bora Bora on December 3, 1943 ■

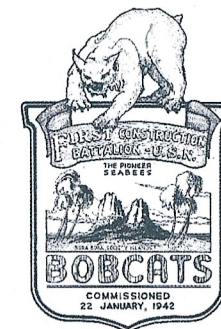
P42-43. The island's existing road was soon in a pitiful state as were many of the vehicles which had been unloaded. *Illustration J.L. Saquet.*

P44. Fuel tanks. *US National archives.*

Tank farm seen from the sky. *Seabees archives.*



BOBCATS versus SEABEES



CH 7

It was urgent for the US Navy to be able to send a construction unit with technically qualified personnel to the island of Bora Bora. There wasn't enough time to wait for the creation of the three battalion construction regiment proposed by the Bureau of Navigation on January 5, 1942. Therefore, the Bureau of Yards and Docks decided to form a separate battalion, Construction Battalion Bobcat, named after the operation in which it would serve. The battalion was formed around part of the *First Headquarters Construction Company* stationed in Newport, Rhode Island, which had been equipped and specially trained for work in Iceland. Despite being neutral, Iceland had been dragged into the war because of its strategic value in the battle of the Atlantic. On May 10, 1940, the British occupied the island to use it for the protection and refueling of its convoys. In 1941, the British requested that the Americans extend their security cordon from the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic to Iceland, about 2,300 nautical miles from New York. On July 7, 1941, the British forces occupying Iceland were replaced by 4,095 US marines. In September 1941, the American armed forces assigned the construction of a fuel depot and maintenance service for their airbase to *The Fuller Company* and *the Scott Corporation*. They began

work at the end of October 1941; it was the first time civilian workers had been engaged in a theater of war. This military involvement in the war in the Atlantic convinced the US Navy to create a marine engineering and construction division. Vice admiral Moreell, head of the Bureau of Yards and Docks (and the founding father of the Seabees,) believed that civil workers should not be used for the Navy's construction work in combat zones. Moreover, the Geneva Convention prohibits the arming of civilians, even for their own personal defense, lest they be considered as irregular troops and, as such, liable to face death penalty. His opinion was confirmed during the attack on Wake Island, when civilians who hadn't been evacuated in time were either killed or taken prisoner. Vice admiral Ben Moreell advocated the creation of a specialized military construction unit, which should also be capable of assuring its own defense. By 1943, 250.000 Seabees had been trained to fight.

On October 31, 1941, C.W.Nimitz, the head of the Bureau of Navigation, sent a circular to all Navy recruitment offices concerning the enlistment of men of category V-6, for active service in the *Headquarters Construction Company*: (...) To obtain professionally qualified candidates (...) on condition that they are physically and otherwise apt. Once enrolled, the men

will be placed on active service and sent to the Naval Training Station, Newport, Rhode Island for a three week training period at the end of which they will be transferred to the Naval Air Station, Quonset Point, Rhode Island.

The unit to be sent to Iceland to oversee the civilian construction work was formed on October 31, 1941. It was made up of draftsmen, technical assistants and building inspectors. The 100 men who formed the *First Headquarters Construction Company* were all qualified personnel from the construction trade. They were reinforced with 150 unqualified men, recruited from among the ranks of the *Newport Basic Training Camp*. The new unit consisted of 250 men and 8 officers. Before being sent to Charleston in South Carolina, the new battalion was assembled at the Naval Air Station at Quonset Point, Rhode Island, for a short course on the assembling and erection of Quonset Huts. On January 14, 1942, the *Bureau of Navigation* informed the *Sixth Naval District* at Charleston that Lieutenant-commander Harold M. Sylvester was to take command and consolidate the new battalion. Harold MacTavish Sylvester was born on August 29, 1903 in Alexandria, Virginia. He graduated from the Naval Academy in 1927. He was detached from the *Bureau of Yards and Docks* in 1935 to teach at the *Technical University of Delft*, before returning to join the *First Construction Battalion*.

Quonset Hut

Despite its isolationist policy, President Roosevelt made sure that the USA was prepared for war. Its troops might become involved in theaters of war throughout the globe and they would need adequate lodging, which should be movable, like

traditional nomadic dwellings and should make use of the latest in prefabricated materials. Using the British *Nissen Huts* of the First World War as models, the Americans created various designs in a half-moon shape, which they named *Quonset Huts* after their base in Rhode Island. The half-moon struts were brought by rail from a factory in West Davisville directly to the quayside at Quonset Point, where construction got underway as early as July 16, 1940. In 1942, because of the material used in their fabrication, the production of the steel panels was transferred to the *Stran Steel Division* of the *Great Lakes Steel Group*. The factory at Davisville became a storage facility.

The half-moons came in various sizes depending on where they were to be used. The most common were:

Quonset Hut T. Rib: 16'x36' et 16'x20'

Quonset Hut Redesign: 16'x36' et 24'x60'

Quonset Stran-Steel Hut: 20'x48' et 20'x56'

Pacific Hut: 18'-6'x37'-4'

The Quonset huts were assembled using corrugated panels of 3 or 4mm thick steel, laid on the metal arches of the framework and fixed with clips. The panels were covered with a protective tin or a rust-proof zinc coating and bent into shape to fit the half-moon shell. The huts were double-lined with the interior lining mounted first and an outer lining of panels with vertical ridges to help the rainwater drain off.

A memo dated April 9, 1942 signed by Sylvester to *Bobcat's* command in chief tells us that some of the Quonset huts have refrigeration. The refrigeration works concern the premises of the 8th Hospital.

On January 21, 1942, the *First Seabee Battalion* was born. Despite its formation and title, the *First Construction Battalion USN* was in fact a support company. The *Pioneer Seabees* left for Bora Bora



on January 27, 1942
tion battalion didn't
Seabees, which was
Bureau of Navigation
Instead, they called
cats. The Bobcats
when their unit was
men and 2 officers
Construction Battalion
September 11, 1943
Bora for New Caledonia
They reached Pago Pago
1943, where they were
Construction Company
of the 22nd Marine
seven months the
Marshall Islands ca
April 17, 1944, after
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Rib: 16'x36' et 16'x20'
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 Steel Hut: 20'x48' et 20'x56'
 -6'x37'-4'

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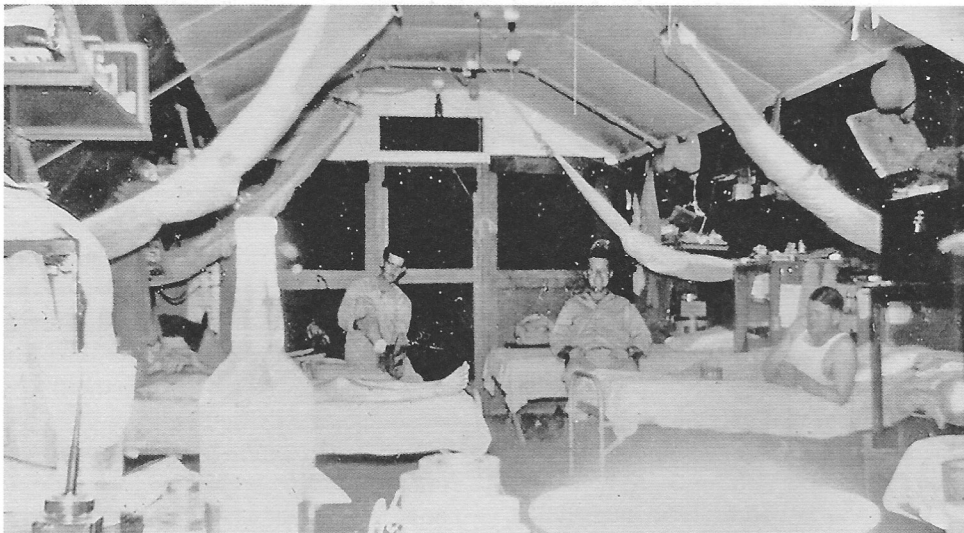
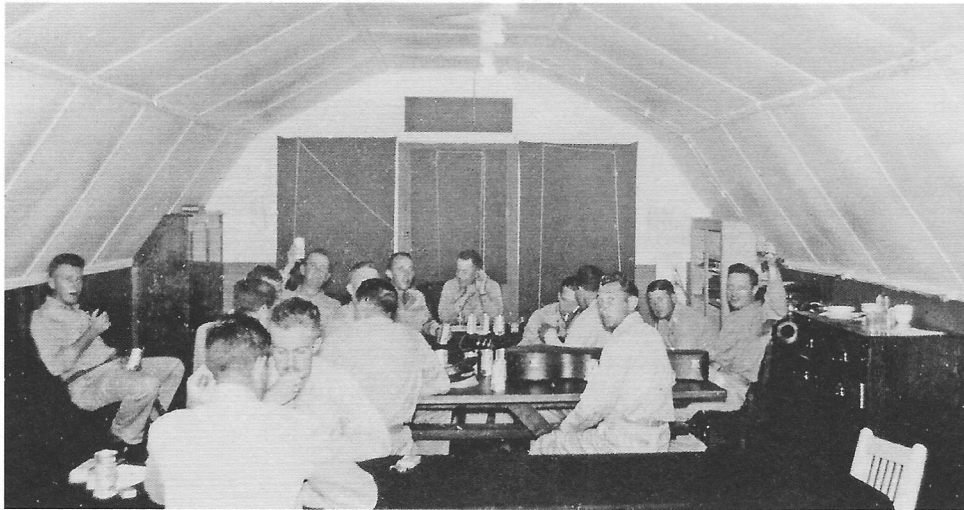
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 First Construction Batta-
 n fact a support company.
 eabees left for Bora Bora



on January 27, 1942. This first construction battalion didn't go under the name Seabees, which was only adopted by the Bureau of Navigation on March 5, 1942. Instead, they called themselves Bobcats. The Bobcats only became Seabees when their unit was reinforced by 100 men and 2 officers from Company A, 3rd Construction Battalion in June 1942. On September 11, 1943, the Bobcats left Bora Bora for New Caledonia and then Samoa. They reached Pago Pago on September 6, 1943, where they were renamed the Naval Construction Company and became part of the 22nd Marine Regiment. For the next seven months, the Bobcats took part in the Marshall Islands campaign. It wasn't until April 17, 1944, after 26 months of fighting, that they were detached from the Marine Corps and renamed the First Construction Detachment. On May 5, 1944, the detach-

ment was linked up with Naval Construction Battalion 3 and repatriated to the USA. On June 7, 1944, the First Construction Detachment was dissolved at the Construction Battalion Replacement Depot at Camp Parks, California.

On April 10, 1942, USS Neville left Hampton Roads¹ with a cargo of 20mm canons and landing craft for the theater of war in the Pacific. US Navy archives show that USS Neville dropped anchor in the bay of Faanui in Bora Bora and its passengers, comprised of military personnel and Seabees, disembarked: 138 rookies, 13 non-commissioned officers, 99 trained men and 8 engineering officers. The Bobcats of Bora Bora did not call themselves Seabees until the unit arrived. Their new colleagues called themselves Seabees and the old Bobcats proudly adopted the name when they learned of their exploits



in the Solomon Islands. A Seabee unit was engaged in action in a combat zone for the first time in Guadalcanal on September 1, 1942, where it was completing the construction of Henderson Airfield as part of the Sixth Naval Construction Battalion. The emblem of the Seabees is a bee in a sailor's uniform holding a Thomson machine gun with a C drum magazine in one pair of hands and construction tools in the others. Admiral Ben Moreell gave

them their motto: *Construimus, Batuimus* - We build, we fight. While the average age for a US Marine was 19 years, the average age for a Seabee was 34 years. This provoked a 'tongue in cheek' saying by the Marines: *Be kind to a Seabee, he might be your father*. The first Seabee recruits were skilled workers who had taken part in the construction of the Boulder Dam, national highways and New York skyscrapers. Others had worked in mines and quarries

and dug subway tunnels and built docks. They had even built ocean carriers.



The Seabee

Eternal Father,
 Whose arm hath borne
 Who biddest the man
 It's own appointed
 O hear us when we
 For those in peril
 Lord, stand beside them
 Give them courage,
 O grant them peace
 And comfort loved
 Lord, hear our prayer
 Where they be - c

On March 26, 1942, the USS *Seabee* (LST-1162) was christened by Commander H.M. Sylvester of the First Construction Battalion. The *Seabee* was the first construction unit to be rechristened. The christening was necessary in January 1942 when the construction units were moved to Tongatapu in the Tokelau Islands (codename: Bleacher) and the Hebrides (under the name of the *Seabee*). These two new detachments were at the same time at Cape Charles, Virginia and were transferred to the battalion on March 26, 1942. The name of the *Seabee* was changed to *Seabee*. With a total of 1080 men, the *Seabee* comprised a command



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 arine was 19 years, the ave-
 Seabee was 34 years. This
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 nd to a Seabee, he might be
 e first Seabee recruits were
 who had taken part in the
 f the Boulder Dam, nation-
 nd New York skyscrapers.
 rked in mines and quarries

and dug subway tunnels, worked in shipyards and built docks and wharves. Some had even built ocean liners and aircraft carriers.



The Seabee Prayer

Eternal Father, strong to save,
 Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
 Who biddest the mighty ocean deep,
 Its own appointed limits keep.
 O hear us when we cry to thee,
 For those in peril of the sea.
 Lord, stand beside the men who build,
 Give them courage, strength, and skill.
 O grant them peace of heart, and mind,
 And comfort loved ones left behind.
 Lord, hear our prayer for all Seabees,
 Where they be - on lands or seas.

On March 26, 1942, Lieutenant-commander H.M. Sylvester took command of the First Construction Detachment, as the First Construction Battalion had been rechristened. The change of name became necessary in January 1942 when two other construction units were required for Tongatapu in the Tonga Islands (under the codename: Bleacher) and Efate in the New Hebrides (under the codename: Roses). These two new detachments were formed at the same time at Camp Allen in Norfolk, Virginia and were brought together as a battalion on March 15, 1942 under the name of the First Construction Battalion. With a total of 1080 men, the battalion comprised a command company and four

construction companies. The Battalion's three Construction Detachments were then sent to Bora Bora, Tongatapu and Efate ■

P51. Seabees assembling a quonset hut. *JL Saquet illustration.*

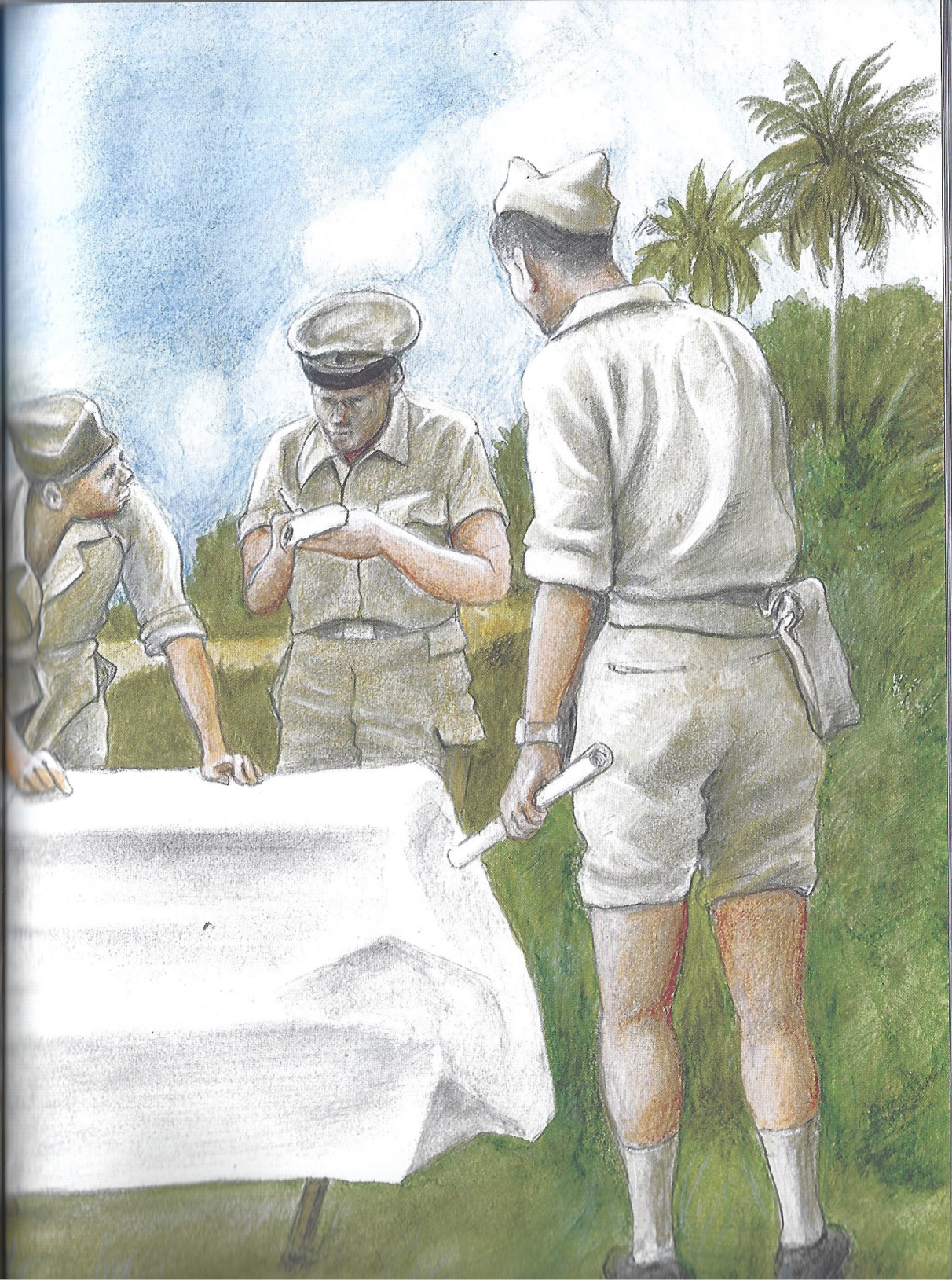
P53. First Seabees logo. *Seabees archives.*

P56. *Haley Collection.*

The Seabees' unit patch is a bee in a sailor's uniform with a Thompson sub-machine gun with a drum magazine on one leg and miscellaneous tools on the other legs. *Seabees archives;*

JL Saquet illustration.







War training. Seabee archives

BOBCATS UNITS

CH 8

The strength of the forces stationed on Bora Bora can be evaluated from three documentary sources :

- The assignment order n°1 of January 1942 issued at the departure from Charleston by Colonel Charles D.Y. Ostrum, commander of the Bobcat forces.
- The inspection report of Vice admiral Richard E. Byrd.
- A description of Bora Bora's defenses in 1942 by the administrator Charles Passard.

In 1942 the American forces stationed on Bora Bora comprised 3,500 men from the artillery corps, the infantry, sanitary services and administration, 192 officers and an adjutant, all under the command of General Ostrum assisted by Colonels

Schultz and Novy, ten Lieutenant-colonels including two doctors, and a chaplain.

102nd Infantry

**Order 1
Charleston
19 janvier 1942**

Inspection report
by Vice Admiral
Richard E. Byrd
1942 July

**Officers 58
Enlisted Men 1283**

The 102nd Infantry Regiment counted less than 2 battalions. Order n°1 of the date of departure from Charleston, January 19, 1942, indicated that the unit consisted of 58 officers and 1,283 men. By July 1942, the number of men had increased to 1,319. They were armed with 16M3 37mm



anti-tank cannons, which were standard antitank weapons for the infantry. Their compact size meant that they could be towed by a jeep. The 102nd Infantry Regiment was armed with :

- 8 A1 machine guns of 30 caliber, completely automatic and water-cooled, they had a firing rate of 400-600 rounds per minute and a range of 1,000 meters ;

- 6 A4 machine guns 30 caliber.

- 4 mortars 81 mm

- 9 mortars 60 mm

The 60mm mortar was characterized by its lightness, weighing nineteen kilos less than the 81mm mortar. It had both a reasonably long range and high firing rate. The troops were armed with rifles, automatic rifles, machine guns and pistols. The battalion took part in maneuvers on two occasions in the United States before embarking for Bora Bora. The use of combat troops for road-building seriously hampered their training. The hard labor took a greater toll on their physical condition than normal training.

99 th Field Artillery Battalion 603rd Field Artillery 4

**Order 1
Charleston
19 janvier 1942**

Inspection report
by Vice Admiral
Richard E. Byrd
1942 July

**A Battery
Officers 4
Enlisted Men 142**

**Officers 14
Enlisted Men 340**

**B Battery
Officers 4
Enlisted Men 144**

4. The 99 Field Artillery became the 603 Field Artillery and consisted of two artillery batteries of 8 officers and 286 men.

The 99th Field Artillery commanded by Major Tarbell was made up of two batteries :

- Battery A operated by 4 officers and 142 men.

- Battery B operated by 4 officers and 144 men.

Their armament was:

- 8 M1A1 75mm pack Howitzers, as used by the US Army during WW2.

- 4 anti-aircraft machine guns caliber 50.

The 99th Field Artillery became the 603rd Field Artillery and was strengthened with 2 supplementary batteries operated by 8 officers and 286 men.

198 th Coast Artillery Regiment

**Order 1
Charleston
19 janvier 1942**

Inspection report
by Vice Admiral
Richard E. Byrd
1942 July

**Officers 75
Warrant Off. 1
Enlisted Men 1330**

**Officers 71
Warrant Off. 1
Enlisted Men 1317**

The 198th Coast Artillery Regiment was the largest unit deployed on Bora Bora with 1,330 men and 75 officers on March 10, 1943. The 198th Coast Artillery Regiment was based in Delaware and was the first unit deployed in a theater of operations. The regiment would be stationed in Bora Bora for one year. The 1st battalion of the regiment was formed on September 16, 1940. It was stationed at Camp Upton, Long Island before being transferred to Camp Edwards, Falmouth, Massachusetts in March 1941. On September 13, 1941, the battalion left Camp Edwards for Fort Ontario near Oswego, New York where it received news of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

On December 8, 1941, the 198th Coast Artillery was given more personnel and the regiment left Fort Ontario, Connecticut the next day. Due to a snowstorm, and established position to the east, the 198th Coast Artillery was reorganized at the Whitney aviation factory.

On January 1, 1942, the 198th Coast Artillery was reorganized as the 198th Coast Artillery Regiment, and on January 9, 1942, the 198th Coast Artillery personnel were taken to Charleston where they received a medical examination. These elements of the 198th Coast Artillery Regiment, with their officers, an adjutant and a sergeant, embarked on USS Arcturion and set sail on January 27, 1942.



Bobcat officers. Left to right: R.F. Carter, C.H. Sanders. Back row: Reinhardt, Weaver, W.

Field Artillery commanded by
 was made up of two batteries :
 operated by 4 officers and
 operated by 4 officers and
 ment was:

5mm pack Howitzers, as
 Army during WW2.
 ft machine guns caliber 50.

Field Artillery became the
 artillery and was strengthe-
 nimentary batteries ope-
 ers and 286 men.

1st Artillery Regiment

Inspection report
 by Vice Admiral
 Richard E. Byrd
 1942 July

 Officers 71
 Warrant Off. 1
 Enlisted Men 1317

1st Artillery Regiment was
 deployed on Bora Bora with
 75 officers on March 10.
 Coast Artillery Regiment
 Delaware and was the first
 theater of operations.
 could be stationed in Bora
 r. The 1st battalion of the
 rmed on September 16,
 ated at Camp Upton,
 ore being transferred to
 Falmouth, Massachusetts
 On September 13, 1941,
 Camp Edwards for Fort
 ewego, New York where
 of the attack on Pearl
 ber 7, 1941.

On December 8, 1941, the 198th Coast Artillery was given movement orders. The regiment left Fort Ontario for Hartford, Connecticut the next day, in the middle of a snowstorm, and established a defensive position to the east, close to the Pratt & Whitney aviation factory.

On January 1, 1942, the 198th Coast Artillery was reorganized as the Coast Artillery Regiment, Anti-aircraft, Mobile. On January 9, 1942, two thirds of the personnel were taken in secret to the port of Charleston where the men were given a medical examination and vaccinated. These elements of the 198th Coast Artillery Regiment, which included 75 officers, an adjutant and 1,330 men, embarked on USS Arthur Middleton which set sail on January 27, 1942.

Their armaments on Bora Bora :

- 12 mobile 3 Anti-aircraft batteries;
- 24 cannons of 37 mm (12 x 2 cannons);
- 24 anti-aircraft machine guns, 50 caliber (6 sets with 4 guns each);
- 15 projectors type 60;
- 6 Radars (type SCR 268).



13th Coast Artillery

**Order 1
 Charleston
 19 janvier 1942**

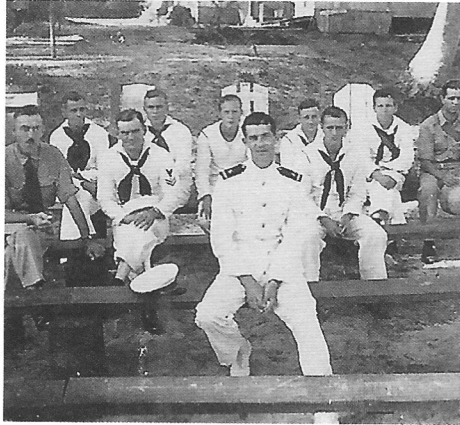
Inspection report
 by Vice Admiral
 Richard E. Byrd
 1942 July

**Officers 14
 Enlisted Men 340**

**Officers 14
 Enlisted Men 338**



Bobcat officers. Left to right, front row: Danforth, R.F Carter, C.H Sanders, Laporte, Seddon. Second row: Reinhardt, Weaver, Walke, Schroeder, Anderson, Gaynor. Third and fourth rows: Haley, Lowman, Frazer, Dumont, Roger Mayo Flynt, Tolan, Cartelli and Sanford. Haley Collection.



Formed on February 27, 1924, for the defense of the country's ports, the 13th Coast Artillery, was organized into several companies on July 1, 1924 at Fort Barrancas in Pensacola, Florida: the 121st, 145th, 162nd, 163rd, 170th, 179th, 180th, 181st, 182nd, 183rd and 188th grouped into 5 batteries. The batteries were posted as follows:

Battery A at Headquarters in Fort Barrancas;

Battery B at Fort Pickens, Florida;

Battery D at Fort Moultrie, Charleston, South Carolina;

Battery E at Key West Barracks in Florida;

Battery G at Fort Crockett, Galveston, Texas.

The coat of arms of the 13th Coast Artillery was adopted on August 11, 1924. The red of the shield represents the aerial defense artillery. The gold cross alludes to the Confederate flag and represents the coastal defenses, notably Charleston, Pensacola and Key West. The fleur de lys commemorates the engagement of the 121st company, battery C, of the 61st regiment in France during the Great War. Their motto is *Quod Habemus Defendimus* (We defend what we possess). The 1st battalion was formed on January 8, 1940

at Key West Barracks and the 3rd at Fort Barrancas on January 15, 1941. On January 15, 1942, the battalion, strengthened by the reactivated Batteries F and H, moved to the Charleston Port of Embarkation to take part in operation Bobcat. In October 1942 batteries F and H had been inactivated and their personnel transferred to become the 276th Coast Artillery Battalion in Bora Bora. The unit was made up of 14 officers and 340 men.

Their armament was composed of:

- 8 marine cannons 7/45 M1902 supplied by the Navy;
- 4 batteries of 2 guns each;
- 8 anti-aircraft machine guns of caliber 50.

8th Station Hospital

Order 1
Charleston
19 janvier 1942

Inspection report
by Vice Admiral
Richard E. Byrd
1942 July

Officers 20
Enlisted Men 150

No nurses
American Red Cross
with the Force
consisted of a Field
Director and his
assistant.

Order 1
Charleston
19 janvier 1942

2 sections Co. C
QM
(bakery)
Officier 1
Enlisted Men 16

Station radio 17

Order 1
Charleston
19 janvier 1942

Officer 1
Enlisted Men 10

695e Signal
Signal Repair

Order 1
Charleston
19 janvier 1942

Officer 1
Enlisted Men 10





tracks and the 3rd at Fort
 January 15, 1941. On Janua-
 battalion, strengthened by
 Batteries F and H, moved
 n Port of Embarkation to
 ration Bobcat. In October
 an H had been inactivated
 nel transferred to become
 Artillery Battalion in Bora
 as made up of 14 officers

ent was composed of:
 nns 7/45 M1902 sup-
 f.
 f 2 guns each;
 ft machine guns of cali-

tion Hospital

Inspection report
 by Vice Admiral
 Richard E. Byrd
 1942 July

 No nurses
 American Red Cross
 with the Force
 consisted of a Field
 Director and his
 assistant.

94 TH QM Bn

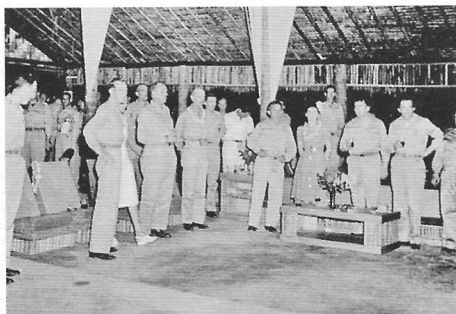
Order 1	Inspection report
Charleston	by Vice Admiral
19 janvier 1942	Richard E. Byrd
	1942 July
-----	-----
2 sections Co. C	
QM	Q.M
(bakery)	(bakery)
Officier 1	Officers 4
Enlisted Men 16	Enlisted men 78

Station radio 175th Signal co

Order 1	Inspection report
Charleston	by Vice Admiral
19 janvier 1942	Richard E. Byrd
	1942 July
-----	-----
Officer 1	Officer 1
Enlisted Men 10	Enlisted Men 9

**695e Signal Reporting
 Signal Repair Detachment**

Order 1	Inspection report
Charleston	by Vice Admiral
19 janvier 1942	Richard E. Byrd
	1942 July
-----	-----
Officer 1	Officer 1
Enlisted Men 10	Enlisted Men 9



Air warning Service

Operated 2 SCR-270 radars & filter center

Order 1	Inspection report
Charleston	by Vice Admiral
19 janvier 1942	Richard E. Byrd
	1942 July
-----	-----
	Officer 6
	Enlisted Men 118

The Signal Corps Radio (SCR 268) US
 Army's operational radar could identify
 targets with precision and guide the
 projectors for the anti-aircraft guns.

Ordnance and finance Department

Order 1	Inspection report
Charleston	by Vice Admiral
19 janvier 1942	Richard E. Byrd
	1942 July
-----	-----

Detachment finance	Detachment finance
Department	Department
Officer 1	Officer 1
Enlisted men 6	Enlisted Men 8

Ordnance	Ordnance
detachment	detachment
Officers 2	Officers 2
Enlisted Men 38	Enlisted Men 36

Headquarters staff

Order 1	Inspection report
Charleston	by Vice Admiral
19 janvier 1942	Richard E. Byrd
	1942 July
-----	-----

Officers 3
+ 1 marine Officer
attached.



The Army's headquarters were 800 m to the north of Vaitape and the majority of its troops were based in that sector. The headquarters of the Navy were in Vaitape itself. The gasoline depot was on the northern side of Faanui bay and most of the Navy personnel were based in that sector.

Total Fighting Units

Order 1
Charleston
19 janvier 1942

Officers 192
Warrant Off. 1
Enlisted Men 3645

Inspection report
by Vice Admiral
Richard E. Byrd
1942 July

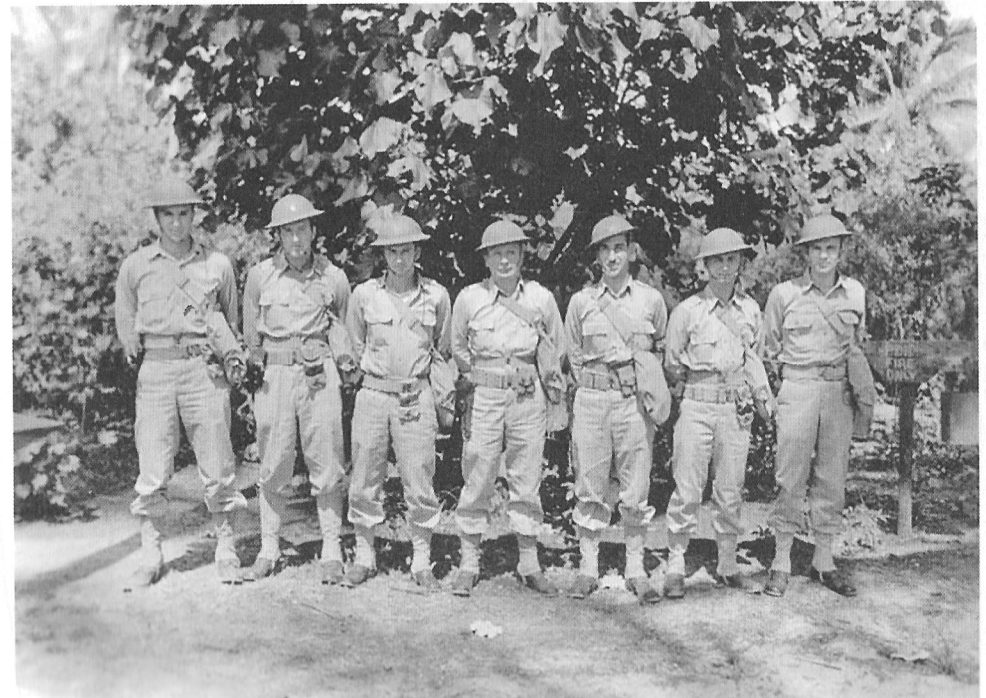
Officers 151
Warrant Off. 1
Enlisted Men 3260

P62. Installation of cannon barrels. *Seebeas archives*.
198th Coastal Artillery men in Bora Bora 1942. *Nello Fraticelli Collection*.

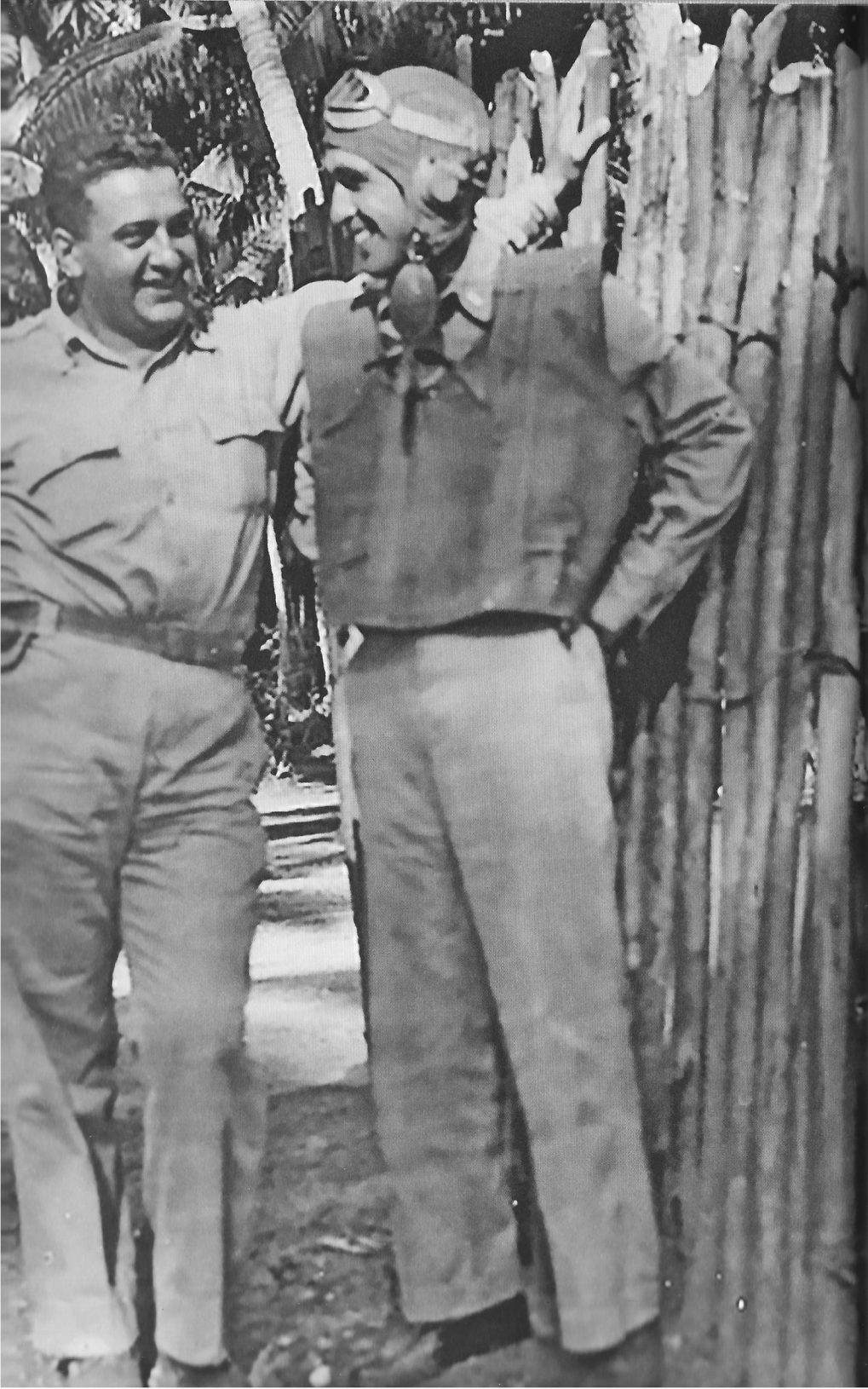
As well as American Army personnel, there were 451 men and 23 officers of the US Navy serving in the VS2D14 Scouting Squadron, the fuel depot and the Seabees. The coastguards from the Connecticut National Coast Guard were also counted. Charles Passard noted a corps of 600 marines placed under the authority of Commander Saunders, but this corps is not included in Ostrum's assignment order and Vice admiral Byrd probably included them with the 102nd Infantry.

In July 1942, the administrator Passard counted twelve military camps :

- At the 3-3 AA battery at Tianoa point.
- At the airfield.
- The marines at the northern tip of Faanui bay.
- At the first aid station in Faanui bay.
- The administration and provision stores and services and the DCA emplacements on the left hillside of Faanui bay ■



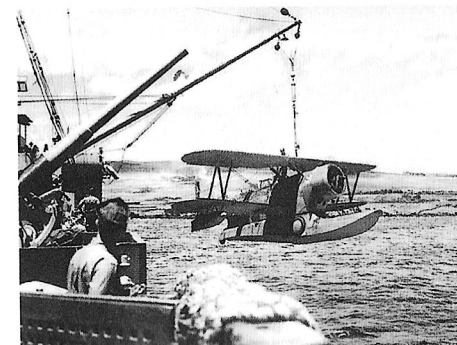




The VS2-D14 SQUADRON

CH 9

A joint directive dated January 8, 1942, gave instructions for the Navy to build, manage and operate a seaplane base equipped with 8 VSO aircraft, including spare parts and the appropriate facilities on shore for them and 12 Catalinas (VPB).



P66. Pilots. Haley collection.

Sea landing Kingfisher. Sea bees Archives.

Concord amphibious aircraft. Naval History and Heritage Command.

The OS 2U Kingfisher is recognizable by its central float and small stabilizing floats under the wings. Robust and maneuverable, it was the main observation plane used by the US Navy during WW2.

On January 11, 1942, the VS2-D14 squadron was formed. Commanded by Jack Roudebush, it comprised 7 pilots and 74 men. It was a fully autonomous unit. The 8 seaplanes were dismantled for shipping in pairs on four separate ships.

The site for the seaplane base was selected after reconnaissance by Jack Roudebush using an amphibious aircraft from *Uss Concord* and a motorized whaleboat.

He decided on the small bay of Papua, just to the north of Faanui bay and about 2 miles from the Navy Camp. The sandy beach permitted seaplanes to land without a landing ramp. Later the seaplanes would be towed onto a strip of wire mesh laid on the sand.

The camp consisted of tents, a large tarpaulin sheet, a field kitchen and a water tank, all obtained from Army supplies. Later the camp would also be given Quonset Huts. The site of the squadron's camp was relatively small and surrounded by steep mountains.

The beach was cleared with a bulldozer to allow for the beaching of LCT landing craft loaded with the hulls of the seaplanes. Afterward, the wings were



attached and the first test flights began in March, two weeks after the arrival of the Bobcat forces. A vast quantity of equipment was delivered by truck and LCT landing craft, including spare parts for the planes, barrels of fuel and 100 pound bombs, all of which was stored under the coconut trees.

The squadron's personnel built the entire seaplane camp on their own, with the exception of the prefabricated 20 by 40 ft VOS aircraft hangar. A standard size 20 by 40 ft Quonset Hut was also used for storage. Reserves of 50,000 gallons of fuel were stored in 10 reservoirs buried in the hillside behind the camp.

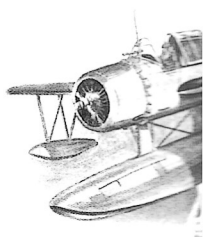
They were connected by buried supply pipes to two gasoline tanks close to the take-off ramp. There was no gasoline truck on the base. A portable, 300 gallons petrol pump was used, mounted on a two-wheeled trailer towed by a Ford Bom pickup.

When the cruisers left Bora Bora for Panama, to escort the high priority troop

convoys to New Caledonia, Australia and New Zealand, Jack Roudebush's squadron began patrolling from dawn to dusk with three planes.

The VS2D14 had 9 pilots, 7 chief petty officers and 65 men. With the exception of their commanding officer and his second in command, the squadron's pilots were all trained at the Air School in Jacksonville in December 1941.

The Kingfisher could cover a zone of 200 miles around Bobcat and escort shipping to a distance of 50 miles. It could carry two 100 pound bombs or one 325 pound depth charge. A considerable number of seaplanes could be anchored in the bay at the same time, but reparations and refueling in emergencies was difficult. The meteorological conditions in Bora Bora were perfect for flying. Visibility was always excellent except for brief periods during the rainy season. The wettest months were from November to March. Landing and take-off were carried out on the



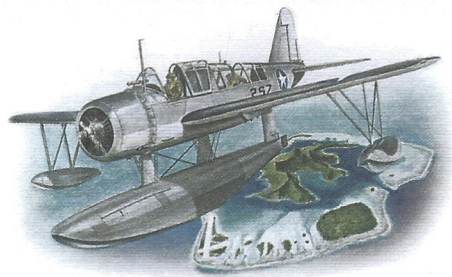
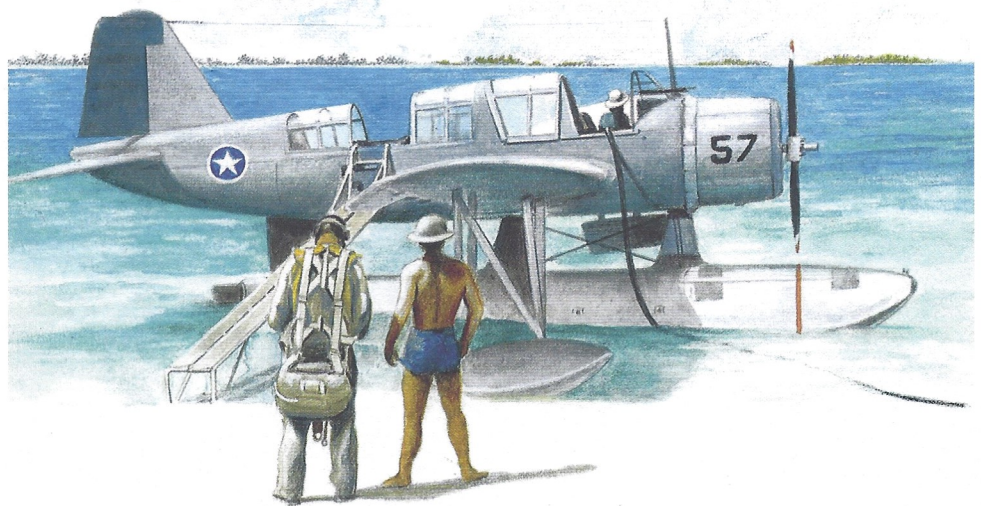
lagoon, close to the north and west sides. Dangerous headwinds were removed.



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lagoon, close to the coral reef, along the north and west coasts of the island. Any dangerous heads of coral or other obstacles were removed.

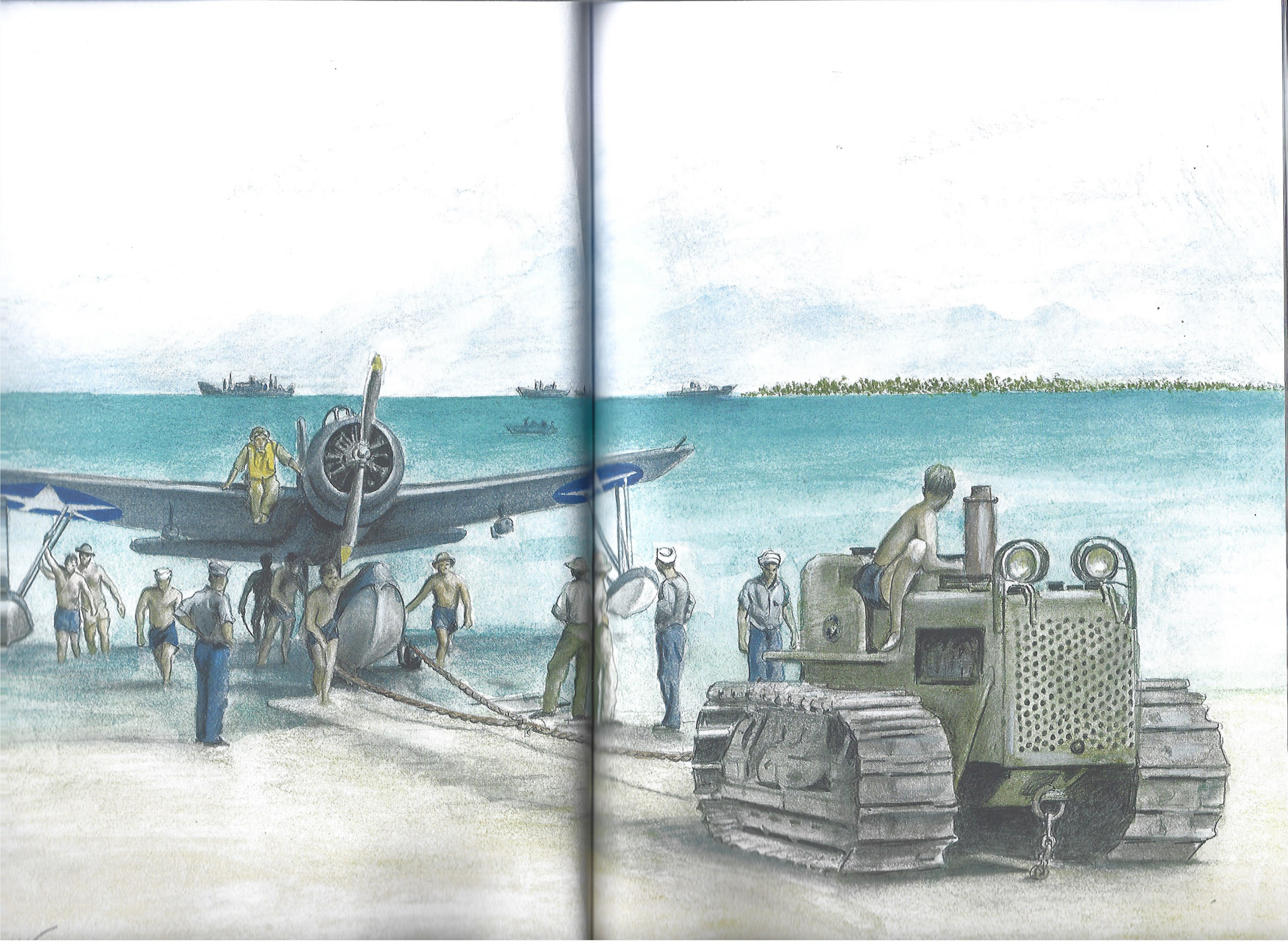
Although the joint directive gave instructions for the installations on shore to be adequate for 12 VPB planes as well, neither the VPBs nor any other additional planes ever arrived on the island. Francis Cowan indicates that the Bobcat forces also stationed a Kingfisher in the far north of the island of Tahaa in order to have a rescue plane in case of attacks by the Japanese on the island of Bora Bora. His mission was to fly to Papeete to give the alert.

In april 1943, Francis Cowan followed his older brothers to enlist in the New Zealand Army. Despite his sixteen years, he was allowed to join the Air Training Corps where he learned to fly on a biplane ■

P68. The Kingfishers of the VS2D14 reconnaissance squadron in Vairupe under the coconut trees and nets camouflage. Seabees archives.

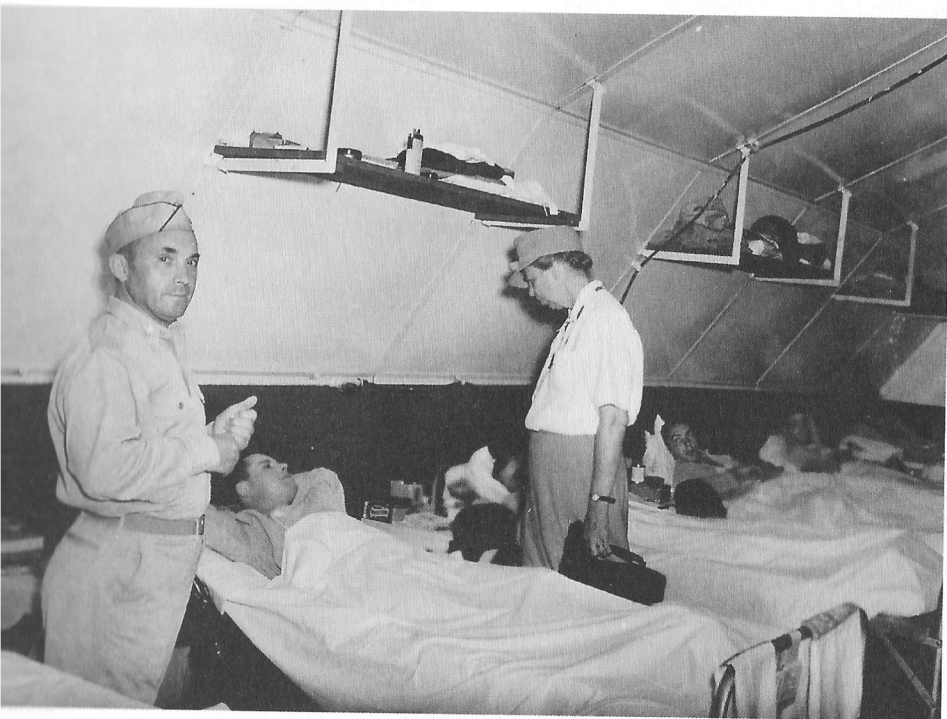
The vought Kingfisher OS2U is a two places observation, patrol and rescue aircraft. Armed with two 30. Cal (7.62 m/m) machine guns. It could carry bombs load of 200 Lbs. JL Saquet illustration.

VS2-D 14 Squadron pilots. Haley Collection.



8th STATION HOSPITAL

CH 10



Before the American armed forces arrived in Bora Bora, there was neither a hospital nor even a doctor on the island. There was just a dispensary in Vaitape which was run by a local nurse. In his notes, Alain Gerbault describes how the local population had always refused to believe in the effectiveness of European medicine, despite the efforts of nurse Tehea to convince them. They preferred to trust the remedies proposed by their own healers, based on plants and tree barks. The locals were now given access to the significant medical services available to the American troops in Vaitape.

Louis Picard, head of the TSF, was able to have his chest examined which allayed his fears of having contracted tuberculosis. Sadly, that was not the case for a certain Rere who was found to be consumptive and was authorized to leave Bora Bora to go Tahiti for treatment. Papeete also benefited from the medical services available on Bora Bora. A note from the governor, passed by the administrator to the Admiral, thanked him for his gift of vaccines. When the convoy left Charleston it had medical personnel consisting of 20 officers and 150 men. By July 1942, they were 16 officers and 145 men.

The military hospital was installed about 1 mile south of Vaitape in the district of Nunue. It was a series of Quonset huts

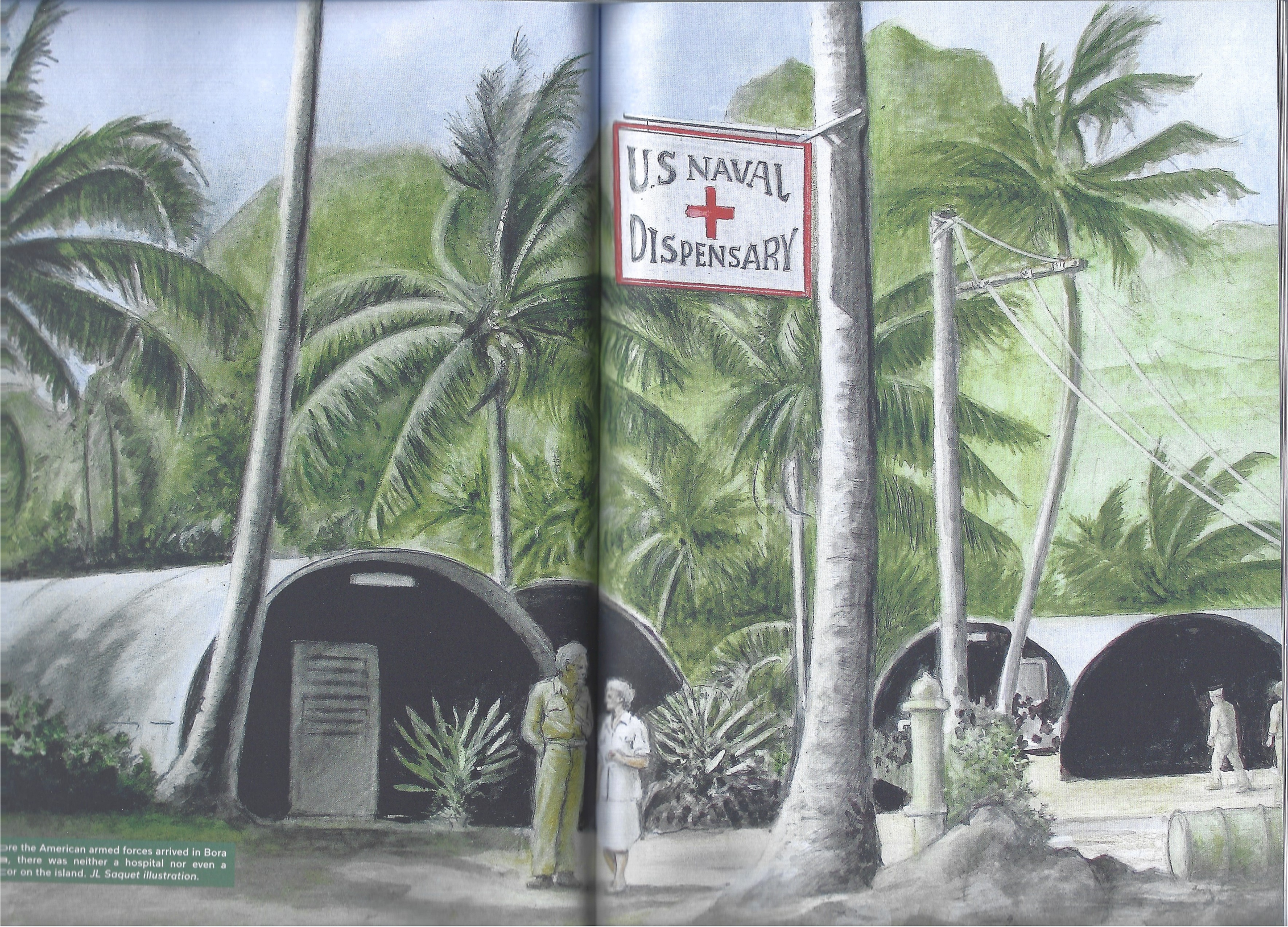
and had 250 beds, which could eventually be increased to 500.

The medical personnel consisted of 17 officers and 145 men although several officers were given other duties and only 10 doctors were available for work in the hospital. There were also first aid units attached to troops stationed elsewhere on the island. The Navy had its own medical center at its base in Faanui with 13 medical personnel. There were also 5 medical personnel at the Navy airbase and 5 others with the Construction Battalion.

The Navy hospital consisted of 3 Quonset huts with the following installations : a waiting room, a pharmacy, an x-ray room, an operating theater and a ward with 10 beds.

The hospital at Nunue also provided dental care. The American military doctors identified the following diseases: Yaws skin infection: Kahn tests carried out on 500 islanders gave 20% positive reactions. Filariasis: blood smear tests gave 20% positive results for 1 in 5 of the 500 islanders tested in 1942, with 22% of those having traces of elephantiasis. Tuberculosis was present as was the occasional case of leprosy. And of course, traveler's tummy bugged soldiers and islanders alike ■

P72. First Lady visit to the Pacific forces. Fred Haley collection.



U.S. NAVAL
+
DISPENSARY

Before the American armed forces arrived in Bora Bora, there was neither a hospital nor even a doctor on the island. J.L. Saquet illustration.



ARMY POST OFFICE 919

CH 11

The military postal unit on Bora Bora started service on February 17, 1942 and was originally called Army Postal Section APO 919. On October 6, 1942, it was renamed 919 Army Postal Unit. In June 1942, the address Bobcat c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California became the postal address for operation Bobcat. The sender's address was APO 919.

In September 1942, Navy 9913 replaced the name Bobcat, which was no longer used. The postal unit was placed under the command of the 12th Base Post Office, APO 502 in Noumea and the South Pacific Base Command. Postal archives from APO 919 show that the postal unit had no personnel affected to it. The officers who acted as postal agents did so as an additional task in their everyday functions. The men serving in the postal unit were mostly from *Battalion Headquarters* staff or among the ranks of the 102nd Infantry Regiment. The postal unit in Bora Bora was composed of 1 sergeant, 1 technician 4th grade, 1 technician 5th grade and 1 private 1st class.

On September 2, 1942, the Navy ordered the Navy Post Office 203 in New York to handle the mail for the Navy in Bora Bora. The Navy Post Office 8000 was ordered to take care of the mail for the 1st Construction Detachment. Most of the mail destined for Bora Bora was sent by

sea from San Francisco. The mail was very important for the troops on Bora Bora. It took on average six weeks for a letter to get to Bora Bora. A great number of letters from various theaters of war were sent under the Free mail facility. The Free mail facility for US forces in war zones was adopted by the US Congress and became effective on March 27, 1942. Before then, the APO 919 issued stamps priced 3 cents and 6 cents depending on the letter's weight. As letters were sent by airmail from the US they required additional postage to include the extra cost of air transport.

The personnel of APO 919 were sufficiently well-trained to cope with incoming and outgoing mail which often had to be sorted on the same day, whatever the volume.

The censor service for outgoing mail from Bobcat made sure that letters were mailed within 24 hours of being submitted. The delivery of mail from Bobcat to the USA could take anything from 10 days to one month. However, as APO 919 didn't stamp the date on envelopes, it was difficult to know how long it took. Most mail was sent by sea, but some went by air whether it was marked Air Mail or Free. Airmail letters were delivered by a



Catalina seaplane which operated in the South Pacific.

Bora Bora wasn't on the strategic east-west axis, so was it the last stopover on the Catalina's route. However, as the mail from Bobcat was the last to be loaded, it was also the first to come off at the other end. On September 2, 1940 the Etablissements français de l'Océanie joined the Free French. Although the Vichy Government issued its own stamps for overseas territories, they were not authorized in Free French territories.

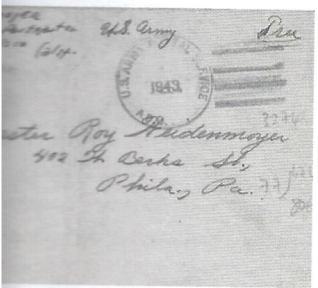
During February and March 1941, all stamps from previous issues were over-stamped by the government printers in Tahiti with the words France Libre (Free France) in black or red, as can be seen on the stamps the bay of Moorea issued in 1929, tiki issued between 1934-39 and aviation issued in 1934. The Administrator of the Leeward Islands found the price of airmail for official correspondence



prohibitive when destined for Algiers, London, San Francisco, Sydney or New Zealand. So, in order to reduce postage costs to a minimum, he negotiated for special official mail to be sent by the US Navy postal service in Bora Bora.

The inside envelope would be addressed to the recipient in the French services and the outer envelope would be clearly marked: *Official Messenger* or *Official Mail*. The colony reimbursed the US postal services 0.06 dollars per 8 ounces of mail. Official correspondence from Algiers and London was also allowed to use the US postal service with the mention : *Official Messenger*,

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then destined for Algiers, San Francisco, Sydney or New York in order to reduce postage to a minimum, he negotiated for mail to be sent by the US service in Bora Bora. The envelope would be addressed to the recipient in the French colony. The outer envelope would be marked: Official Messenger mail. The colony reimbursed the services 0.06 dollars per 8 oz. Official correspondence to and from London was also sent by the US postal service. Official Messenger,



commanding Officer, Navy 203 c/o Postmaster San Francisco. Several private collections in the US contain stamps from the Etablissements français de l'Océanie bearing the letter 'V-', and the sign "...—" representing the letter V in Morse code stamped on them in purple. The French authorities weren't greatly concerned by these unofficial markings because they were mainly intended for American stamp collectors. These stamps have no particular philatelic value. As from March 1944 the workload of the postal service of Bobcat was reduced considerably as the troops were shipped west or back home to the US. Only two employees remained in the service. However, their numbers had to be doubled to comply with the official roster. The US Army postal service kept working right up to its closure on November 9, 1944. The following day the Bobcat postal service became part of the 12th Base Post Office in Noumea ■



The military postal unit on Bora Bora started service on February 17, 1942 and was originally called Army Postal Section APO 919. François Dupuy Collection. Catalina on the strategic Coral route brought urgent mailing. J.L. Saquet illustration.



MOTU MUTE

CH 12

The difficulties in pronunciation meant that the Americans said *muri* for *Mute*. So that *Motu Mute* (*Mute Islet*) ended up as *Muri Muri*. The people of Bora Bora started using this version in their everyday conversations. Bora Bora was intended to be a refueling station for the seaplanes in the Pacific central zone. In October 1942, the general in command of the American base on Bora Bora informed Governor Orsellì that an airstrip was to be built on the islet *Motu Mute* to the north of the island and inside the coral reef. The two islets, *Motu Mute* and *Motu Omi* had been surveyed to confirm the feasibility of building a runway 7,000 feet long on one of them.

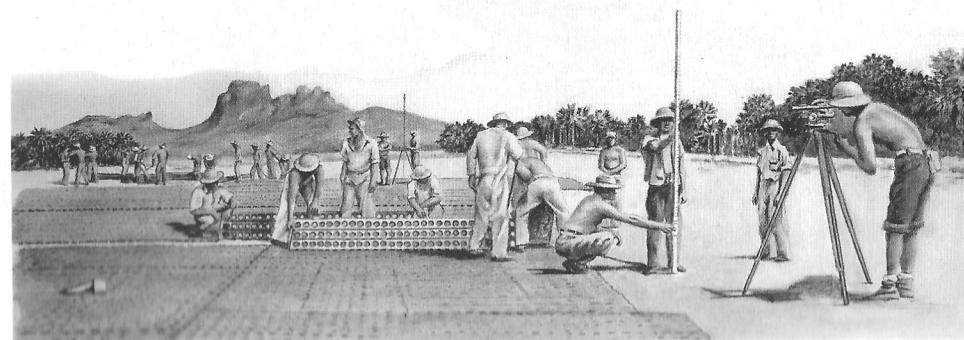
The islet *Motu Mute* finally had two runways built on it, the first 6,000 feet long and 400 feet wide with side alleys

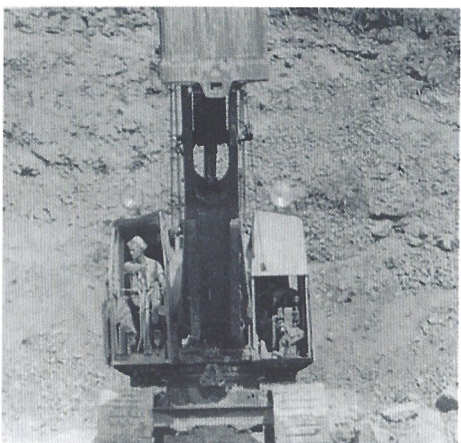
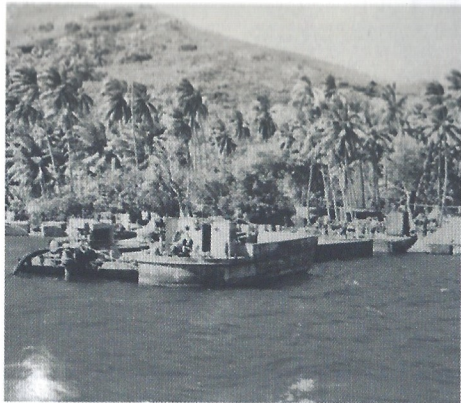
150 feet wide so that heavy bombers could also land.

The airfield wasn't intended to be an operations base but rather an assembly base for the planes which would be shipped from the States in kits. The second runway, 3,000 feet long and 150 feet wide, was to be used for transport planes. The plan was for troops to arrive in Bora Bora by air or sea and from there to be transferred by ship or plane to the combat zones.

The construction of the two perpendicular runways began on December 16, 1942. It was carried out by Seabees, easily recognizable in their colonial helmets. A mountainside on the main island was dynamited to provide the rockfill which was then delivered to *Motu Mute* by boat.

The 2 transverse runways of *Motu Mute*. *Seabees arch*. Aerial view of the 2 runways. *Fred Haley collection*. The islet *Motu Mute* finally had two runways. *JL. Saquet illustration*.





The work continued uninterrupted and the two runways were finished in less than seven weeks, on April 5, 1943.

In 1943, Lieutenant Jack Murph Pollin, who had taken command of the American naval base, wrote to his daughter:

Bora Bora French Oceania

The airstrip is just visible cutting across the small island in the center foreground. It is, about as perfect an atoll as I've ever seen and the peak rising nearly 4000 feet out of the water is unusual.

The two runways were used until June 1946 when they were closed to air traffic.

The longer of the two runways was reopened as a stopover for Trans-Pacific flights in 1950, making Motu Mute

the first commercial airfield in French Polynesia. In 1950, a DC4 belonging to Air France with the identification F-BELH, made a test flight from Paris to Bora Bora. Its flight-path took it to Saigon, Noumea, Santo in the New Hebrides, Nandi in Fiji, Aitutaki in the Cook Islands and finally Bora Bora, where it landed on the American runway. The flight was a test run for fortnightly commercial flights from Paris to Bora Bora via Saigon and Noumea, but the project was abandoned because of the navigational constraints of such a journey.

On October 2, 1958 the first DC6 of the company TAI landed at Bora Bora, opening the route Paris-Tahiti, via Noumea and Nandi.

In February 1960 TAI replaced its DC6s with DC7-Cs. From May onward TAI flights were extended to Honolulu and Los Angeles. The company Air France provided a trans-Atlantic flight from Los Angeles, making a round-the-world flight possible ■

Visit to the Pacific forces of the First Lady. *JL Saquet illustration.*

P83. The longer of the two runways was reopened as a stopover for trans-Pacific flights in 1950, making Motu Mute the first commercial airfield in French Polynesia. *JL Saquet illustration.*





LOST ISLAND

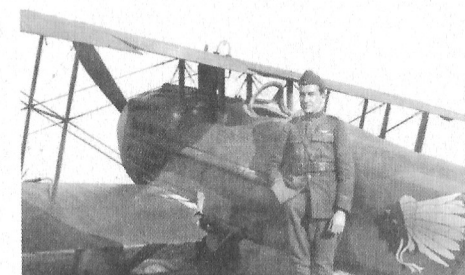
CH 13

In February 1942, the arrival of the US armed forces in Bora Bora caused a great upheaval in the lives of the local population. Their tents were all over the island. Some of the troops walked around in their encampments completely naked. They helped themselves to fruit in the plantations of the locals.

A local man lost his life defending the honor of his vahine who the subject of a soldier's unwelcome attentions was. The units were on maneuvers night and day, on land and at sea. The road soon became unusable. The dollar was king and with new services such as the laundry, the curios, the local economy soared.

And of course, the young local girls let their hair down. A lot of children would be fathered by Americans on Bora Bora. About 80 of them would survive. Their mothers were often very young so they would be brought up by their grandparents. Most of the Americans would quickly forget their South Sea romances, some of them unaware that they were fathers.

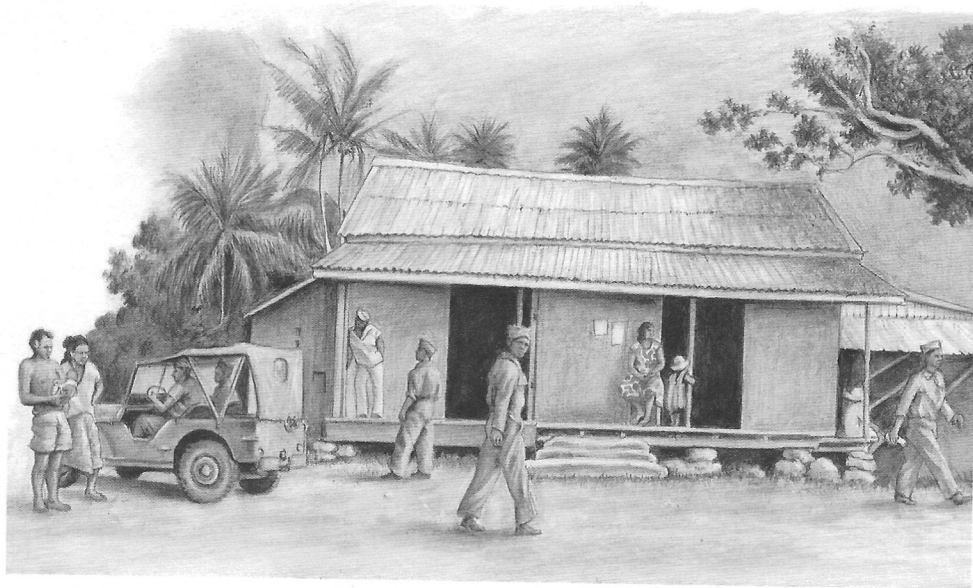
Like the American citizen Henry Mead Hedges from Chicago who had settled with his family in Bora Bora, James Norman Hall, the legendary pilot from the *Lafayette* squadron living in Tahiti, was in his turn caught up in the war. James Norman Hall used the arrival of the



American forces on Bora Bora in 1942 as the background for his book, *Lost Island*, published in 1944.

The convoys bringing men and material turned his imaginary island upside down, just as they did in Bora Bora. The look of this island paradise changed quickly with new infrastructures being built. James Norman Hall was outraged and spoke out against such a tragic upheaval. The island of Bora Bora joined the war and became a no-go zone. The Commander in chief of allied forces in the Pacific, C.W. Nimitz, ordered the local transmitting station to close and to suspend the transmission of official encrypted telegrams as well as ordinary mail. The Americans feared that the Japanese might intercept them and find out about operation Bobcat. The merchant schooners authorized to deliver freight to Bora Bora had to follow a precise route after having informed the American authorities, otherwise they might come under fire from the coastal batteries.

James Norman Hall the legendary pilot from the *Lafayette* squadron living in Tahiti. JN. Hall coll.



They had to respect the permitted hours of navigation, between 7.00am and 6.00pm. Any ship unidentifiable by reconnaissance seaplanes was subject to attack. Outrigger canoes were forbidden from paddling out to meet ships to sell trinkets and jerrycans of water. However, these regulations were often flaunted by the locals who had to be given successive reminders. The movement of individuals was also strictly controlled. A curfew was imposed on Bora Bora. The American High Command wanted the island to be kept on a permanent war footing and regularly sounded the alarms, which frightened the local population. The Governor and Administrator Passard were the only people authorized to enter and leave Bora Bora.

Non-natives of the island had to request permission from the Governor in writing. But sometimes these restrictive

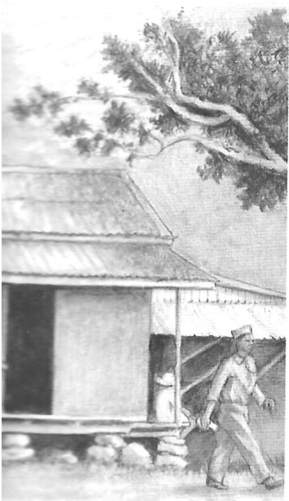
The local economy soareth. *JL Saquet illustration.*
 P87. Merchant schooner delivering freight in Bora Bora. *Haley Collection.*
 Local woman braiding coconut palm. *Haley Collection.*
 Lister bags. *Nello Fraticelli Collection.*

measures counted for very little, as was shown by the surprise visit to Bora Bora of Pouvana'a a O'opa in 1942 when he escaped from Huahine. Visitors had to have authorized passes, but they weren't allowed access to the batteries. Sentries were ordered to open fire on trespassers. The shooting ranges were off limits to the locals. Shooting practice could sometimes have unfortunate consequences. A twelve-year-old child from Anau felt victim to the explosion of a shell found in the sea and brought home by his father.

Bora Bora having been cut off both militarily and strategically, its population had to be supplied by the Americans. Only the schooner, *Hiro*, was authorized by the US Army to come to Bora Bora to collect goods and pick up the island's copra production.

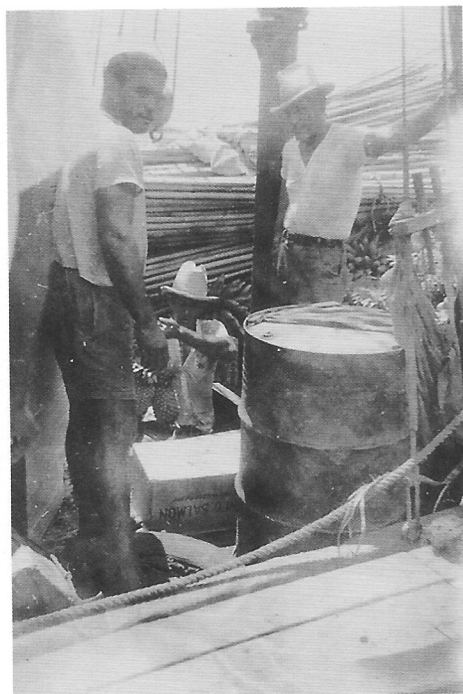
Before the arrival of the Americans, supplies came from Papeete and shortages of food and petrol for Primus stoves were common. But the rumor which was spread of opulence in Bora Bora while Papeete starved shouldn't be accepted at face value.





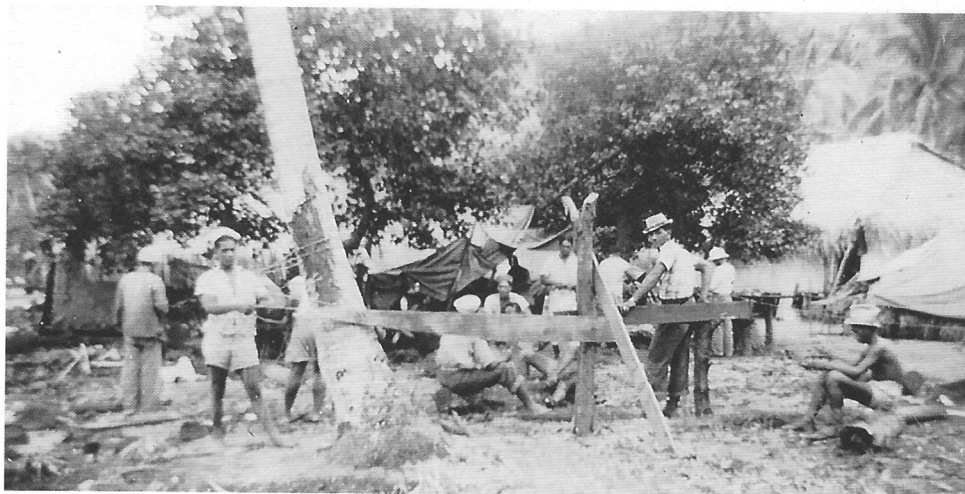
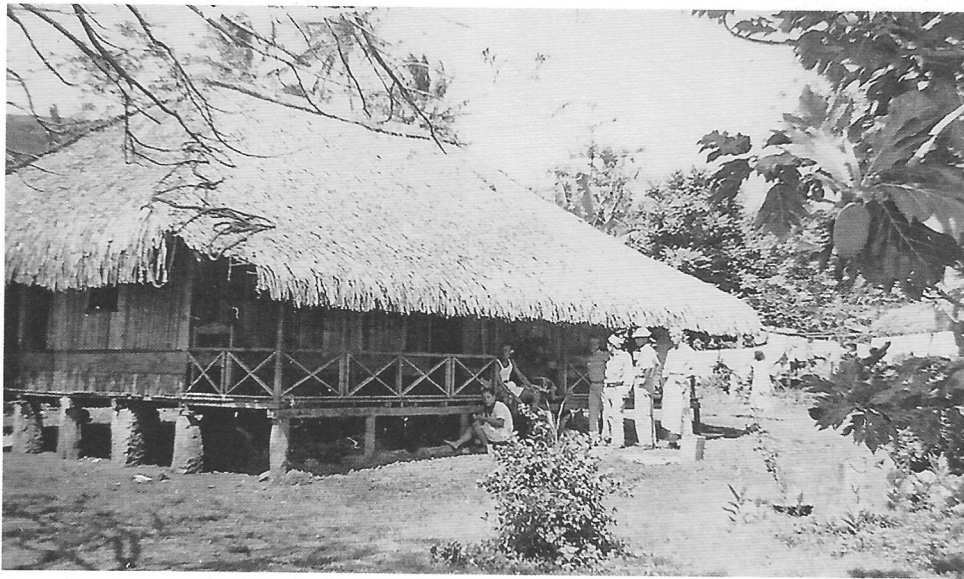
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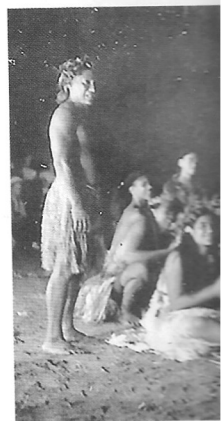
When they arrived in Bora Bora the Americans realized that the topography and poor quality of the soil would prevent any large-scale agricultural activity. And whereas breadfruit, coconuts, and fruit and vegetables from garden plots were fine for the locals, they certainly wouldn't satisfy the needs of the American forces. Supplies for the troops stationed on Bora Bora and the local population would therefore depend on the arrival of convoys. Any delay, or the loss of a convoy meant the rationing of existing stores. These constraints were the same as those suffered by US citizens back home. American military authorities solicited fresh fish from local fishermen for submarine crews and allied support vessels operating in the Society Islands.

The catches were conserved in cold-rooms that had been installed on the island. Circulation permits were given to local fisherman to allow them to leave



the lagoon. Fishing was permitted to the north of the pass from 04.00am on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. A fisherman from Raiatea was even allowed to base his fishing business in Vaitape. Small motorized boats were used for tuna and bonito fishing and large nets were used for fishing in the lagoon. The lack of fishing equipment available on the island was compensated for by supplies from the Americans. The Bobcat High Command

also requested that large quantities of fish should be conserved at Papeete so that passing ships could take on supplies if required. Papeete, the main town in Tahiti and capital of the colony, had a canning factory for tuna and bonitos, which had been founded by Lewis Hirshon. Born in New York on December 11, 1905, Hirshon had settled in Tahiti when he passed through on a round-the-world trip. He opened a factory to produce tinned





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pineapple and tinned tuna and bonitos, sold under the red label 'Auhupo, which means bonito in Tahitian.

Goods never before seen by the people of Bora Bora and Tahiti, were suddenly arriving on the island in large quantities and circulating on the black market. Despite the restrictions on movement, bartering still went on: root vegetables for sugar, bananas for cigarettes etc... With the complicity of certain Americans, Chinese grocery stores were selling American cigarettes that came from the military stores. At the time, there were four Chinese grocery stores in Bora Bora. Apart from Magasin Chin Lee, which still exists in Vaitape, there was Magasin Are in Tiipoto, one at Anau and another one in Faanui.

The consumption of beer was allowed on the Bobcat base, but any other alcohol was forbidden. One of the most popular American beers was Altes, which was sold in a bright green can. Hence the slogan: The green beer in the green can.

*Life Magazine and the Vahine. Haley Collection.
 Children playing with band army drums. Haley Coll.*

The Americans also took a liking to local Tahitian beer brewed from pine-apples, coconut water and oranges. Large quantities of wine, rum and other alcoholic beverages were smuggled in from Tahiti and Raiatea to be sold to American soldiers. The merchant schooners which came to Bora Bora often smuggled in alcohol. Even the Free French Navy cutter *Lorraine* reputedly dealt in illicit liquor. A bottle of rum was sold to American soldiers for 7 dollars or exchanged for an overcoat. At that time, a decent local rum was produced at the Atimaono factory in Tahiti. Almost all services and goods were paid for with American dollars, which soon circulated widely on Bora Bora. The local French wanted American officers and troops to exchange their dollars at the bureau de change and pay for their purchases with French francs. But with so much American currency available, it was difficult to stop it changing hands illegally. The Treasury in Tahiti informed the bureau de change in Bora Bora of an attempt by a Chinese storekeeper to smuggle out 3,000 dollars. He was sanctioned immediately by having his commercial license irrevocably revoked. On arriving in Bora Bora, Vice Admiral Shafroth advocated the free circulation of dollars, arguing that crews and soldiers on passing ships would spend liberally while they were stationed on the island, and the local Treasury wouldn't be able to exchange that much foreign currency. The American military authorities agreed and once again refused to oppose the principle of free circulation, on the basis that :

— The camps were spread throughout the island and time off for the men was short. There would have to be a bureau de change next to each camp ;

— The French banknotes were dirty and fragile.

Purchases were rare and required immediate payment. So it was finally agreed that American soldiers could pay in dollars and it would be up to the locals to convert them into francs.

The market for souvenirs from Polynesia was thriving in the United States long before it went to war in December 1941. American soldiers stationed on Bora Bora wouldn't think of returning home without taking a few curios as gifts for family and friends.

The governor asked Administrator Charles Passard to organize the sale of souvenirs on Bora Bora.

But the quantity of curios made by the locals wasn't enough to satisfy the demands of the American forces. So souvenir production quickly spread to Raiatea and Papeete. George Spitz, known as *Loulou*, ran the biggest souvenir shop in Tahiti : *The Spitz Curios Store*. Some German detainees in Tahiti passed the time making curios. At first, souvenirs were sold through the Chinese stores on Bora Bora.

But this soon came to a halt to prevent profiteering. Instead, the curios were sent to the Administrator of the Leeward Islands or his representative on Bora Bora, with a detailed inventory of quantity and value, countersigned by the seller or craftsman. The sale price was fixed by the supplier and could be altered by the Administrator, if he judged it to be too high or too low by market standards. Sales of imported souvenirs were carried out through the military canteen on Bora Bora, where sales to American soldiers were processed and then supplied by the Administrator. Souvenirs from Tahiti were also exported independently, as the *Pacific Islands Monthly* headline of June 1945 reported: *Tahiti has a remote control Curios Boom*.



9.1. Spitz

The curios were New Caledonia where troops were equally souvenirs. This advertisement in the *Pacific Islands Monthly* produced Tahiti souvenirs. Be laces, necklets, sea s ful Hula costumes.

Wholesale from Tahiti Pacific » Wholesale invited Write or Call Farnham, Papeete. Tahiti

Before the Americans the locals used to go to

were rare and required
payment. So it was finally
American soldiers could pay
it would be up to the locals
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The curios were even sent as far as New Caledonia where the many American troops were equally keen to buy exotic souvenirs. This advertisement from *Pacific Islands Monthly* proudly offers direct sales: Tahiti souvenirs, Beautiful shell necklaces, necklets, sea shells in bulk, colourful Hula costumes. Posted or Shipped Wholesale from Tahiti « The Pearl of the Pacific » Wholesale inquiries especially invited Write or Cable direct to John R. Farnham, Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands.

Before the Americans came, the locals used to go to the cinema every 3 or

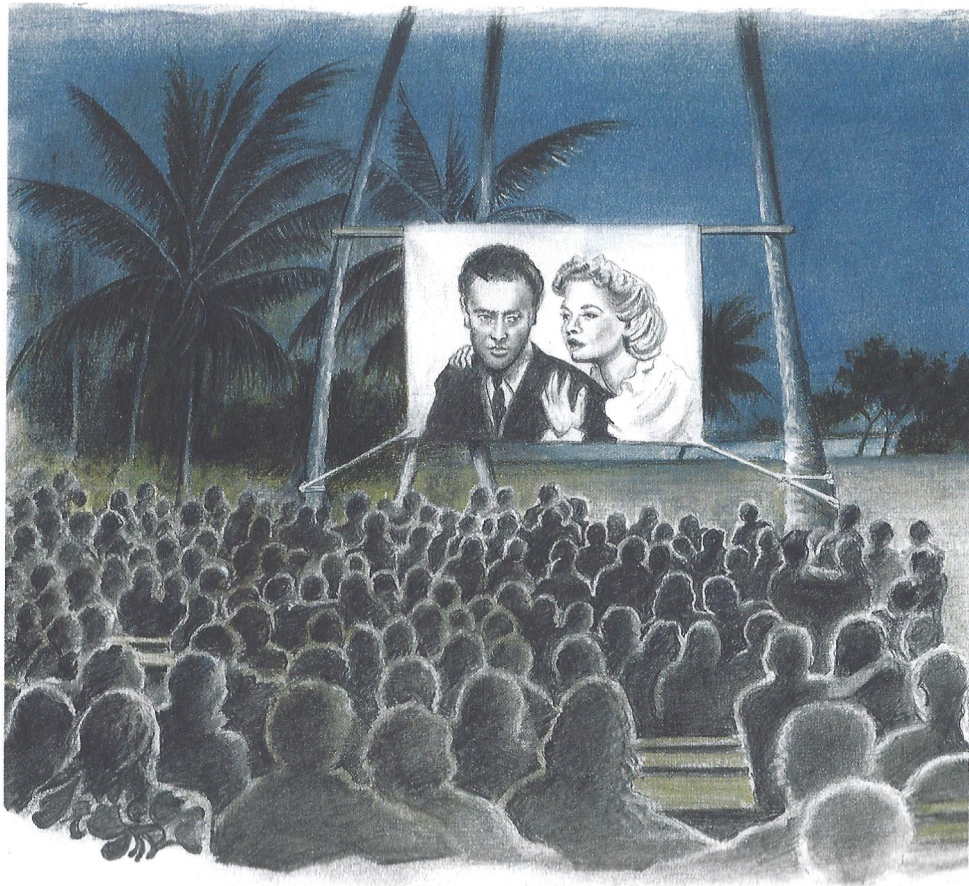
4 days, and although the films were about 20 years old, the islanders were able to discover a whole new world. However, what they really liked most were westerns, especially with lots of fighting in them. Their wives made cowboy hats for them and their children played Cowboys and Indians with lassos and toy pistols.

Thanks to Bobcat, there were cinemas in all three of the island's districts and films were shown every evening. More often than not, the films were B movies. Soldiers and locals alike would walk out in the middle if the films were really bad.

And sometimes alarm signals would interrupt the screening and the soldiers would dash off to their posts while the locals were escorted to safety. As well as renting out his cinema to the American Bobcat forces, Tony Bambridge also allowed them to screen *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The Tahitian name for a cinema was and still is a *Fare Tony*, a tribute to his efforts to introduce movie theaters in the districts and in the islands of Raiatea, Moorea, Bora Bora and Makatea. All of Tony Bambridge's movies theaters were painted the same blue. The American

authorities also lent films for screening to the locals in Uturoa and Tahiti. The American films were lent for between 8 and 15 days so that they could be screened in Papeete. Receipts from these screenings in Uturoa and Papeete went towards the war effort of the provisional government of the French Republic, or to the French branch of the Red Cross. Embezzlement of the receipts led to a court martial ■

P91 et 92. Thanks to *Bobcat*, there were cinemas.
JL Saquet illustration.
P93. Bora Bora women. *Fred Haley collection.*







PULLING UP STAKES

CH 14

BY April 1944, there remained only 210 men at the Bobcat base, left behind to take care of administrative affairs, sanitation and the airfield. There were also 400 Navy personnel. Beginning on June 1, 1944, the cargo ship USS Zebra was ordered to recuperate harbor defense equipment, especially anti-submarine nets, from American Pacific bases in New Caledonia, Fiji, Tongatapu and Bora Bora.

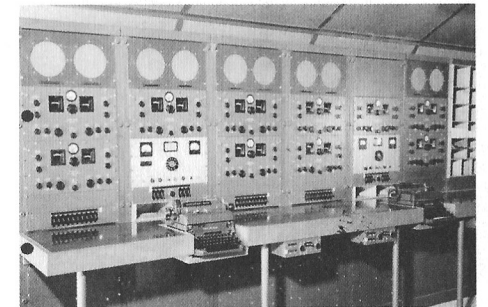
The dismantling was completed in December 1945 and all excess equipment was taken apart and sent to Noumea. It is widely believed that the mutual antipathy that existed between General de Gaulle and the Americans resulted in much of the equipment from Bobcat being thrown into the sea behind Motu Toopua and in the bay of Faanui, when the *Etablissements français de l'Océanie* declined to purchase it.

However, reports of the French administration's refusal to buy the equipment left by the American forces on Bora Bora should not be taken at face value. The truth is, the government of the EFO offered to pay 250,000 dollars for the naval base including the telephone system and the warehouses.

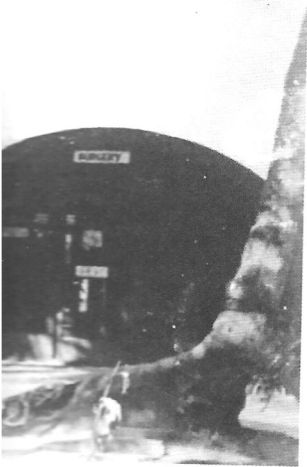
And the head of the meteorological service in Tahiti wanted to purchase the weather measuring instruments put in

place by the Americans, particularly the thermometers.

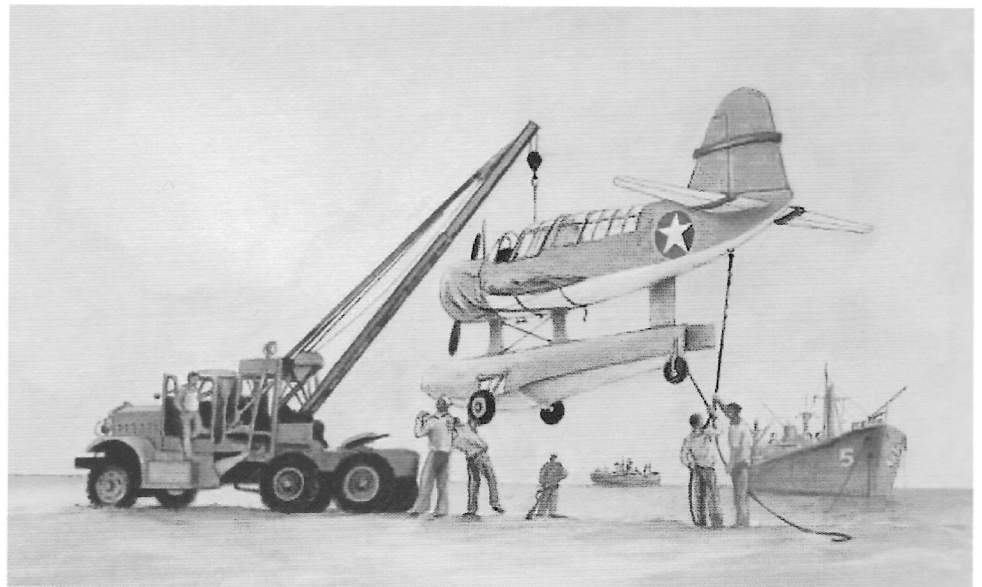
But the telegram from the liaison officer Francis Sanford leaves no doubt as to why he was unable to do so: (...) *Commander meteo does not agree to sell meteorological equipment Stop states that our list of February 1, 1946 does not mention meteorological equipment. Sanford.*



P96. Vahine and scouting pilote from US Navy.
Haley Coll.
Seabees Archives.
Us National Archives



cal equipment on Bora Bora was purchased and dismantled for transport. The surgical lighting in the theater in Vaiami hospital in Bora Bora was shipped from the American base on Bora Bora. The equipment from the Bobcat was transported by Lewis Hirshon, who was the first laundry to open in Bora Bora. Ute. Blanche Neige, (Snow White) was sent to monitor and safeguard the equipment in the south Pacific. The American equipment was packed down to the last sheet of paper. Barracks, cinemas, televisions and a lot more. Equipment such as water tanks and artillery were left behind. The equipment that were of no use or were considered too heavy to take away, such as munitions. Between 2011 and 2013 excavations were undertaken to find munitions lying on the seabed of Bora Bora. On November 18, 2017,



nine additional shells were exploded. The only equipment that could be saved from being destroyed was the telephone exchange, which a technician decided to take apart and ship to Tahiti. As the last of the American soldiers were leaving Bora Bora, rookies from the Légion Valmy were ordered to gather up any equipment left on Bora Bora and take it to Tahiti. Water tanks and pipes were dismantled and simply dragged away along the road. The Command Cars were shipped to Tahiti and used by Papeete town council.

The legionnaires also inspected every house on the island and confiscated anything the Americans had left with the locals. The islanders had to hide wooden planks stripped from American buildings in their taro fields. Any US dollars found were confiscated and the Quonset Huts which had been left to landowners by their American tenants were almost all dismantled. The pillage of Bora Bora went on for a whole year. The justification for taking goods left to the locals can be found in the directive issued by the

Comité National de la France Libre (Free France National Committee) dated August 7, 1942. Insisting on the benefits of a Lease Lend agreement wherever possible, the directive stated: *It is not all one way, because we allowed the United States free use of our aviation facilities in Africa and New Caledonia, as well as the technical resources of our public services. When it concerns the normal needs and requirements of the Colony, and is therefore provided for in the Colony's budget, the value of the goods supplied is to be paid to the central fund of the National Committee on a Lease Lend basis and a standard invoice is to be issued. Material left to individuals or for consumption by the Colony, is to be reimbursed and the sums received are to be paid to the central fund, as above ■*

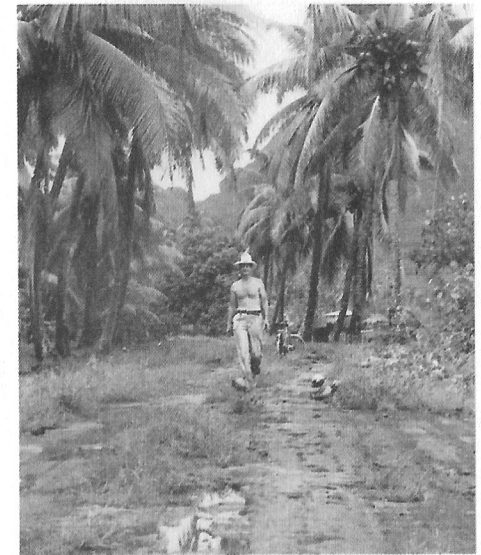
P98. Faanui chief with two grandchildren. Trossy coil. Vahine and Marine from US Navy. Haley Coll. The Kingfishers are dismantled and embarked. JL Saquet illustration.



CONCLUSION

The American soldiers who took part in operation Bobcat would never forget the island of Bora Bora. Some of them were lucky enough to make a return visit. Jeff S. Morehead was one of them, as were officers Charles Douglas Yelverton Ostrum, Fred Haley and Jack Roudebush who came back to visit their friend Francis Sanford. In the year 2000, the daughter of Colonel Berrien was another pilgrim. But many years have gone by since the last American soldier left the island on June 2, 1946. Today, Bora Bora is the flagship of the Polynesian tourist industry, with its symbolic bungalows on stilts in the lagoon and mount Pahia in the background. Bora Bora's reputation as a paradise owes much to US Army film crews and the tales of the GI's who came home captivated by the beauty of the island and the hospitality of its people, with whom they even managed to play games of football.

But the veterans of Bobcat who used to get together after the war aren't here anymore. And even such a recent past can quickly fade from collective memory. If it wasn't for some pieces of heavy artillery scattered among the vegetation up in the hills and the occasional frame of a Quonset Hut still standing here and there, locals and visitors alike could easily forget this chapter in Bora Bora's history altogether. There is no memorial, no museum and no plaque to signal the passage of the



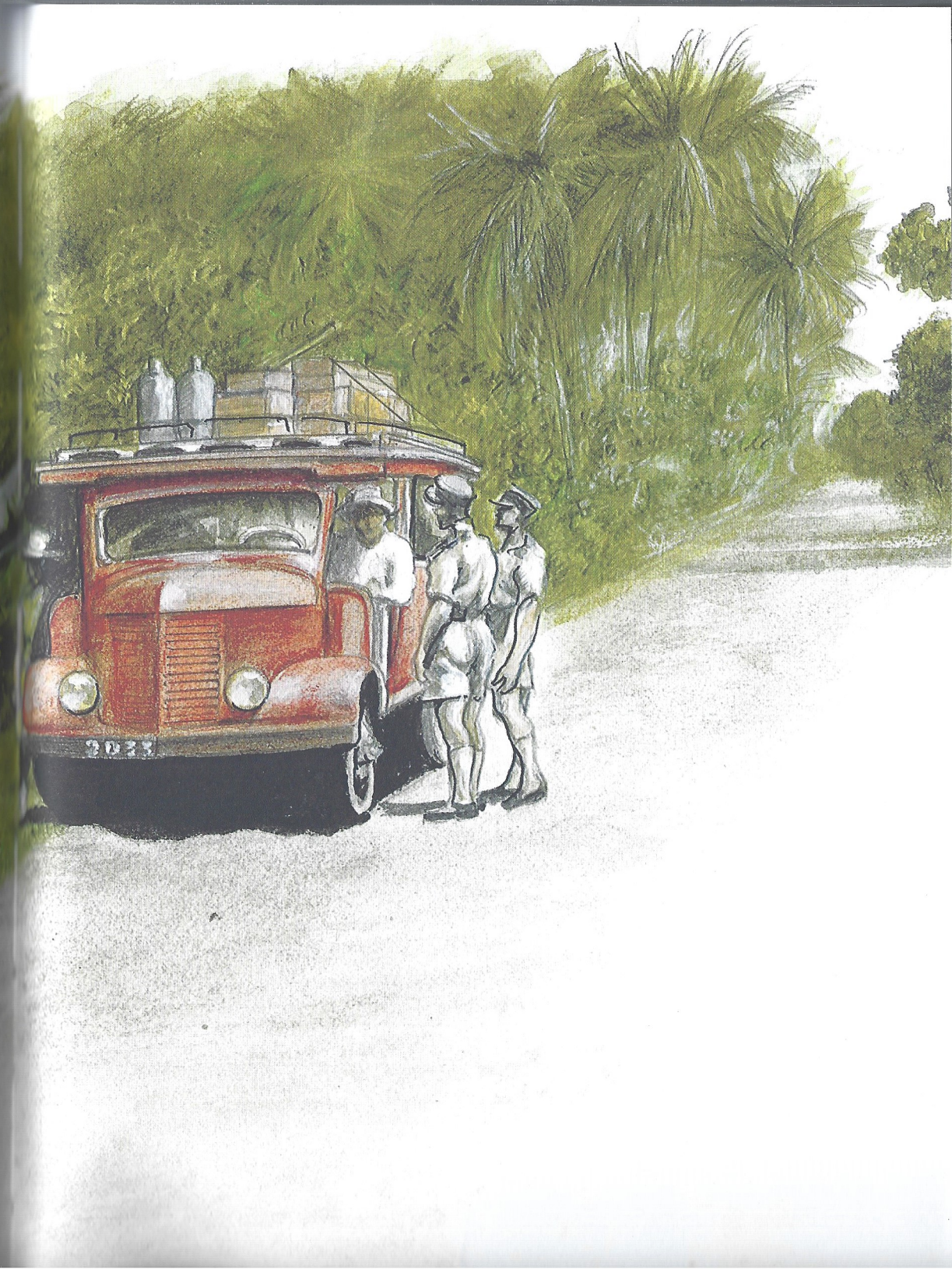
American military on the island. And a few recent projects to install some kind of a memorial didn't get very far, perhaps because of the Polynesian tradition for the oral transmission of history. Today, certain children growing up in Bora Bora are direct descendants of those American Bobcats.

Hopefully, this book will help to keep alive the memory of the Bobcats in Bora Bora ■

P100. Vaitape temple, dear to Fred Haley. *Fred Haley collection.*

Fred Haley back to Bora Bora in the Bobcat's footsteps. *Fred Haley collection.*

P102. The Willis jeep becomes local. *JL Saquet illustration.*



Chronology

1777, James Cook discovered Bora Bora.

September 21, 1914, a German naval squadron comes to Bora Bora.

1931, Shooting of the film *Tabu* by Friedrich Murnau on Bora Bora.

December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor.

January 22, 1942, *USS Sumner* on a surveying mission.

January 25, 1942, Charles Passard, the administrator of the Leeward islands, arrives in Bora Bora.

January 29, 1942, arrival of *USS Ramapo*.

February 14, 1942, vice-admiral Shafroth arrives on *USS Trenton* and opens discussions about the conditions of the occupation of Bora Bora by the American armed forces.

February 17, 1942, a large naval convoy loaded with troops and equipment arrives in Bora Bora. It is the beginning of the occupation of the island.

February 23, 1942, Governor Orselli arrives from Papeete to sign an agreement for the utilization, administration and operation of a naval base on the island of Bora Bora by the United States of America.

December 8, 1941, Great Britain declares war on Japan.

December 10, 1941: sinking of the battleships *HMS Repulse* and *HMS Prince of Wales* by the Japanese air force.

December 25, 1941, Hong Kong falls to the Japanese.

January 2, 1942, The Japanese capture Manila.

January 29, 1942, the American army occupies Fiji.

January 31, 1942, the Japanese lay siege to Singapore.

February 14, 1942, Japan seizes Sumatra.

February 15, 1942, Singapore surrenders. The Japanese bomb the Australian town of Darwin.

February 27, 1942, first naval engagement in the Java Sea.

March 12, 1942, fall of Corregidor, General Mac Arthur manages to escape from the Philippines.

March 16, 1942, arrival of Francis Sanford, the district head of the Leeward Islands.

April 26, 1942, the battery is operational.

May 4, 1942, a battalion in Bora Bora to reinforce the *Pioneers*.

May 20, 1942, American forces occupy the atoll.

June 9, 1942, completion of the tanks.

August 30, 1942, a major explosion of a ship, the death of his father.

October 1942, Admiral King opens the Marquesas Islands for a landing strip.

December 16, 1942, two airstrips on Motu Mute.

January 1943, Major King a dispute with a US officer.

March 1943, the fuel system is operational.

April 5, 1943, opening of the Motu Mute.

March 16, 1942, arrival in Bora Bora of Francis Sanford, the newly designated district head of the Leeward Islands.

April 26, 1942, the island's first coastal battery is operational.

May 4, 1942, a battalion of *Seabees* arrives in Bora Bora to reinforce the *Bobcat Pioneers*.

May 20, 1942, American ships reach Manihi atoll.

June 9, 1942, completion of the first fuel tanks.

August 30, 1942, a child dies at Anau from the explosion of a *shell* found in the sea by his father.

October 1942, Admiral Byrd explores the Marquesas Islands for a suitable site for a landing strip.

December 16, 1942, construction begins of two airstrips on Motu Mute.

January 1943, Mamana a Metua is killed in a dispute with a US soldier over his *vahine*.

March 1943, the fuel depot is completely operational.

April 5, 1943, opening of the runways on Motu Mute.

March 12, 1942, 17,000 American troops disembark in New Caledonia under the command of General Alexander Patch.

April 18, 1942, The Doolittle Raid. Planes from the aircraft carrier *USS Hornet* carry out a 30 second bombing raid on Tokyo.

June 5, 1942, defeat of the Japanese fleet at the battle of *Midway*.

July 3, 1942, General de Gaulle delivers a speech about the Far East on the BBC: (...) *Vast operations are underway in the Far East. The enemy has captured considerable territory. He is still fighting with the Chinese. He is engaged in India and Australia. He has reached outposts of the American continent.*

July 28, 1942, the Free French cargo ship *Le Cagou* is torpedoed by a Japanese submarine.

August 7, 1942, US marines disembark on the island of Guadalcanal.

February 8, 1943, the defeated Japanese retreat from Guadalcanal

April 18, 1943, a Japanese airplane carrying Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto is shot down.

December 26, 1943, US Marines disembark on Cape Gloucester in New Guinea.

October 20, 1944, American troops under General MacArthur disembark in the Philippines.

October 27, 1944, the Japanese fleet suffers a severe defeat in the battle of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines.

January 1945, Japanese *kamikaze* pilots join the fray.

February 19, 1945, American troops disembark on the Japanese island of Iwo Jima.

February 23, 1945, the Stars and Stripes is raised on the summit of Mount Suribachi in Iwo Jima.

March 3, 1945, liberation of Manila.

March 17, 1945, Iwo Jima comes under US military control.

The US Navy is deployed off Okinawa.

August 6, 1945, an American B29 drops an atomic bomb on the town of Hiroshima.

August 9, 1945, Nagasaki becomes the second target of an atomic bomb.

August 15, 1945, Emperor Hiro Hito announces the capitulation of Japan on the radio.

August 21, 1945, the end of Japanese *kamikaze* attacks

September 2, 1945, the act of unconditional surrender (Japanese Instrument of Surrender) was signed aboard the battleship *USS Missouri*.

June 2, 1946, The American forces leave the island of Bora Bora.

Specia

Jean-Louis Saquet, M
Richard Baur, Christi
Church, François Cou
Delacruz (Us Navy Se
Mike Devemy, Juanit
Edwards, Jeanne Ella
Charles Haoatai Mao
Haoatai, Annick Hen
Larcarde, Morgan Le
History Command), T
Parkin, Gearldene Pe
Alex du Prel, Irma Pr
Haoatai, Kimberlee F
Seaman, Terii Seama
Vairani Tetaria, Jean
dit Beo, Marine Vallé

