

Newspaper Article

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Technology helps preserve Seabees' historical books

CRUISES; *Chronicles of World War II adventures saved on CD-ROM.*

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Staff writer

The book is worn and tattered, and its binding is almost gone.

But preserved within its pages is the story of the 33rd Battalion of the U.S. Navy Seabees during World War II, a construction battalion that fought and built during the Pacific island-hopping campaign.

Now Seabee veterans have preserved the book -one of 200 rare cruise books on file at the Civil Engineer Corps and Seabee Museum at Port Hueneme - by transferring it to CD-ROM. Sponsored by the CEC/Seabee Historical Foundation, the ongoing project will transfer the entire collection to CD-ROMs.

"I believe that this project adds to the honor of our World War II vets by preserving a portion of their history and making their history easy to distribute to others," said project coordinator Kenneth Bingham, who served in a Seabee battalion during his three tours in Vietnam. "In a way, its a memorial to their hard work and sacrifices."

The foundation will soon sell CD-ROMs in the museum bookstore to raise money for a \$6 million renovation of the museum. The current museum was built in 1956. The remodeling will streamline the museum and weatherproof the building with humidity and air quality controls suitable for preserving the Seabee artifacts inside, curator Lara Bickell said. Because Port Hueneme became the primary place to which all Seabee records were sent, the museum has the most complete collection of Seabee cruise books and other Seabee collectables in the world.

"We are going to expand the museum to show the history of the Civil Engineer Corps and the Seabees' role in that, rather than just the Seabees," Bickell said. "We want to open it up to be of interest to the general public,

expand the mission to more general American history."

The foundation, a non-profit organization that operates out of Gulfport, Miss., must raise the funds for the re-modeling because, by law, the Navy cannot pay for the museum building.

Bingham compared the books as similar to high school yearbooks in that they describe historical events, activities and meaningful times in the outfit's tour of duty through words and pictures. The books, written by members of the battalion, provide a skeletal version of events to help veterans remember their own personal experiences.

"The details, the color, the personal flavor; the humorous trimming are left to be filled in by those who will read and interpret this book," reads the preface to the cruise book for the 33rd Battalion. "For who can describe the fear of death, the sound of shrapnel, the crunch of bombs, the nausea of seasickness, the joy of coming home - who better than he who has experienced it?"

Bingham, an electrician/foreman, began the project after he was contacted by fellow Vietnam veterans to gain copies of the Seabee cruise books for his battalion, U.S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 8 - MCB-8. He made and distributed more than 100 CD-ROM copies of the entire history of his battalion, from World War II to 1969, on seven disks. In doing so, Bingham saw the need to preserve and distribute all of the cruise books in the same way.

"I became fascinated looking at the history and pictures of these men creating air bases out of jungles at islands with names like Tinian, Guadalcanal, Okinawa, Iwo Jima, Guam, etc.," Bingham said, "through reading and investigation, I also became more aware of the enormous sacrifice made in these foreign places by these men."

Bingham continues to seek donations and volunteers to perform the scanning needed to transfer the books to CD-ROM, he can be reached by e-mail at Jordan2323@MSN.com

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