

"ALL HANDS"  
SEPT 71

THREE OTHER DIVERS AND I recently departed Guam for Ponape at the request of the U. S. High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The other members were Chief Gunner's Mate J. Chubb, Chief Engineman R. Seitz and Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class R. Powers.

Our mission was to enlarge and deepen the existing ship channel into Ponape. Since Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Ship Repair Facilities personnel have worked well together in the past, it was decided to have EOD provide the expertise and SRF provide the diving support.

Two days were spent inspecting the explosives and making necessary logistic arrangements for blasting. In determining the size of the first blast, consideration was given to the surrounding area. The airport hut, gas tanks, a nearby village, and a buoy were all within 4000 yards of the blast area—a potential danger zone. It was decided to limit the first blast to a 40-pound charge, and study the results.

Two days after leaving Guam, we placed 40 pounds of explosives on the prime target, a tabletop reef located in the middle of the Ponape channel. This area was of particular concern to the Trust Territory since several ships had reportedly run aground there. The reef was situated 22 feet below the low waterline and measured 35 by 20 feet.

THE RESULTS OF OUR FIRST BLAST were amazing! Seitz and I dove shortly afterwards and discovered that half of the reef was blown away. Chubb decided to try another charge immediately. Shortly after the second blast, we inspected the reef again to find most of it dispersed and the channel depth increased to 27 feet.

That evening, a conference was held to plan the events for the remainder of the week. Chubb convinced the local authorities that the plate glass windows of the airport building should be removed. There appeared to be very little chance of flying matter, but due to the size of the glass and the replacement problems involved, it was decided to play it safe by removing the windows.

The village, the airport hut, the buoy, and the gas tanks would be in no danger. The plan was to take the targets in order of priority and use as much explosive as necessary to achieve the desired result. The targets were: the center reef—increase the depth there from 22 to 30 feet; the turning basin—cut 30 feet off the reef and increase the depth accordingly; and increase the depth of the seaward reef from its five to 10 feet to a new depth of 30 feet.

The next day, Chubb decided to destroy the center reef and the turning basin reef.

With Seitz, Powers and myself doing the positioning and tying in, and Chubb doing the final inspection and ever-dangerous "capping in," we were able to blow a 750-pound mine on the center reef and five hose charges on the turning basin reef. We inspected the area and found that we now had 34 feet of depth and a white-tip shark where the reef had been.

# DIVING AIDS TRUST

The turning basin reef was another story. We had managed to cut 30 feet off the reef, but the depth in one area was still only 10 feet.

The third day found us back in the "Mike" boat with one 750-pound mine destined for the turning basin.

**D**URING OUR PRE-INSPECTION DIVE, Powers and I wandered onto another reef about four feet across in only 15 feet of water—right in the channel. How vessels kept from hitting this pinnacle is a mystery. We rigged this new and unexpected target with a 40-pound sack charge.

The results of the morning blasting were excellent. We now had the desired results at the turning basin, and we had also leveled the pinnacle to 33 feet. That afternoon we rigged five 750-pound mines on our final target—the large seaward reef. About 1500, the weather turned bad, and we had to secure operations for the day.

Returning the next day, a Thursday, we rode the Mike boat out to the seaward reef, hoping this would be the final day of blasting. During our dives we had run into six or seven lone white-tips, so we had Powers standing guard with a shark stick while Seitz and I "tied in."

I handed the ends of the cord to Chubb and Seitz and got out of the way.

Chubb capped in, rigged, lit the fuse, then encased the firing end into a plastic bag to better ensure detonation. He then drove his boat to a safe distance and waited.

**W**HEN THE SHOT WENT OFF, the spray reached over 400 feet into the air. Before the water had stopped churning, the area was alive with native boys in outboards scurrying to retrieve fish killed in the blast.

After the activity subsided, we found that we still had a lot of work left. The seaward reef was reduced in size from 70 to 20 yards, but the depth was only 15 feet. Three more mines, five 500-pound bombs, two hose charges, 150 pounds of sack charges and C-4 were rigged on the remaining portion of the reef.

This time the desired results were obtained—30 feet minimum depth at low tide.

The blasts again brought the native fishermen, and this time we joined them. We collected a sackful of fish and treated our local hosts to a fish fry.

Five days after the start of the blasting expedition began we packed our gear and flew back to Guam, content with the knowledge of a "job well done."

Later, Paul L. Winsor, director of transportation and communications for the Trust Territories on Saipan, M. I., commended the group of divers and stated that their efforts greatly improved shipping in Trust Territory waters. He said, "Ships are now transiting the channel without experiencing the earlier 'touching-bottom' difficulties."

—By LCDR R. A. Bornholdt,  
SRF Diving Officer

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