

OCT 6 1950

BUDOCKS PRESS RELEASE

Background on Seabees in Korea

The Seabees are at it again. Dispatches from Korea tell of a commendation being given to the Construction Battalion Detachment now operating in the zone of hostilities, and the award of a medal to its commanding officer, LCDR M. T. Jacobs, CEC, USN, for its work in taking over Inchon harbor and making it possible to move troops and supplies inland for Seoul's liberation.

As usual, mechanical ingenuity is the Seabees' trademark. The first mention in the press of Seabee activities in Korea described a new use they had found for the perforated steel landing mats generally used for combat airfields. The Seabees stretched this Warston matting over a wooden pier to increase traction for vehicles and prevent wear on the pier itself.

Although their work has not been publicized very widely, the Seabees were well prepared for just such service as they are now performing in Korea. Seabee forces at Little Creek, Va., and Coronado, Calif., from which the Korean detachment was drawn, have been practicing amphibious techniques ever since the close of World War II.

An important part of their training has been the handling of pontoons. The training has paid off. It has now been disclosed that pontoon barges built secretly in Japan were towed

to Korea for the recent landings.

This "building block" of the Navy, which was almost as familiar a sight in the last war as the bulldozer, is the Seabees' most important amphibious implement. It has been used to form ship-to-shore causeways, piers, breakwaters, docks, self-propelled barges, seaplane ramps, drydocks, and buoys.

Only last spring, an amphibious Seabee Battalion at a pontoon training center constructed what is believed to be the longest surf-built pier ever built. During maneuvers in pounding surf the Seabees rigged a causeway consisting of nine separate pontoon sections arranged in an interlocking pattern to allow for two-way traffic from an LST to the beach, a distance of close to a thousand feet. The job was complicated and made more hazardous by seven foot swells.

This was another illustration of the important part the pontoon has played in military operations since its development in 1943. At that time allied engineers were confronted with the problem of how to land heavy equipment such as tanks and trucks on shallow Mediterranean beaches where no docking facilities existed. Even shallow-draft LST's could not come within seven or eight hundred feet of the beach.

Captain John Laycock, one of the Navy's Civil Engineer Corps officers, began experimenting with empty cigar boxes. He arranged the containers in various combinations until he hit upon a device by which they could be locked together to form a structure as strong as an individual unit. It was only a step further to construct 5x7x5-foot all-welded, re-inforced,

hollow  $\frac{3}{16}$  - inch steel cans, and bolt them together by hand

with locks and nuts to form any combination.

After a test run in Narragansett Bay, Army engineers were convinced. When the LST's ground to a stop off Sicilian beaches a few months later they cut loose a string of pontoons secured to each side. The Seabees did the rest. Within the 30 minutes the pontoons were locked together to form runways to the beach and trucks with supplies were rumbling ashore.

Later, at the Normandy beachheads, it is doubtful whether landings would have been as successful as they were without the help of the Seabees' floating docks, breakwaters, and barges. They also helped the Ninth Army to cross the Rhine in 1945.

The dangers of working with heavy steel in a powerful surf were sometimes the least of the Seabees worries. On more than one occasion they were subjected to heavy fire from enemy shore installations. At Salerno men of the 1006th Detachment rode their pontoons in under heavy fire from the hills although they were as defenseless as sitting ducks. Casualties ran as high as 23%, a statistic which the Secretary of the Navy later recognized with a unit Commendation Ribbon.

Construction Battalion activities during World War II were not confined to amphibious operations. Once a beach had been established the Seabees' job had only begun. Landing

strips had to be hewn out of jungles, roads built, powerplants and water systems installed, and living quarters erected. More often than not, this involved working around the clock.

At Henderson Field on Guadalcanal, for instance, Seabees assigned to help rebuild and defend the vital airstrip were under an almost constant bombardment, both from artillery and from the air. Despite the fact the Seabees were sometimes so short of equipment they had to use their helmets as shovels, the field was never out of operating condition for more than four hours at a stretch.

Less spectacular but vitally important Seabee accomplishments during the War were such developments as Quonset huts and sectional floating drydocks.

Since the war the Seabees have been made a permanent part of the Navy. A small force was retained on active duty to maintain overseas bases and perfect new amphibious techniques, while interest in a reserve program has been kept up among a backlog of some 250,000 Seabee veterans.

At present the Seabees are carrying on a recruitment drive for 70,000 qualified construction men to join the Seabee Standby Reserve. If general mobilization should become necessary the Navy's Construction Battalions would have a force of experienced Seabees ready to resume the role of expert, high-speed builders for battle that made the Navy's "Can-Do" men so famous during World War II.