

Naval Construction Maintenance Unit 101

Historical Information



*“Construimus, Batuimus”
“We Build, We Fight”*



*Officer in Charge Lt Cmdr Cameron W. Lee
Succeeded by Lt Cmdr Harry C. Wills*

United States Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 101

- Aug 51 Commissioned as Construction Battalion Detachment 1804.
- 1 Sep 51 Established Atsugi, Japan. Lieutenant D. W. Roudebush CEC, USNR, was designated Officer in Charge. The mission of the detachment was to support the First Marine Air Wing which was operating in Korea.
- Oct 51 Lieutenant Commander Cameron W. Lee replaced Lieutenant Roudebush as Officer in Charge of the detachment.
- 12 Oct 51 The detachment departed Atsugi. Their equipment departed Yokohama.
- 13 Oct 51 Construction Battalion Detachment 1804 arrived in Korea. In Korea the detachment worked on airfields constructing concrete slabs, hard stands, laying Marston mat runways, installing utility distribution systems as well as routine maintenance.
- Jul 52 Construction Battalion Detachment 1804 was redesignated Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 1.
- Oct 52 Lieutenant Commander Harry C. Wills CEC, USN, was designated Officer in Charge.
- 15 Jul 53 Commander Ordis E. Forbess CEC, USN, became Officer in Charge of CBMU 1.
- 24 Aug 53 The first echelon of CBMU 1 left Korea, ~~for Atsugi, Japan.~~
27 Aug 53 c BMUT arrived at Atsugi, Japan
Oct 53 CBMU 1 was redesignated CBMU 101. Detachments were working at Atsugi and Korea. At Atsugi the men were working on a concrete parking apron and rebuilding three hangar floors at the Naval Air Station. In Korea the unit continued working on Marine Air Group projects. Men continued to leave Korea for Japan.

- Feb 54 Unit was working on projects in Korea, Atsugi and Oppama, Japan. At Oppama Naval Air Facility the unit was rehabilitating barracks and the operations area.
- Jun 54 Lieutenant Commander W. A. Miller became Officer in Charge CBMU 101.
- 16 Jun 54 The detachment at Atsugi moved to Iwakuni, Japan to work on a parking apron and on plant erection. The unit had men working in Korea on the aforementioned projects as well as base maintenance.
- Sep 54 Detachments continued to work at Iwakuni and Korea. In Korea the men rebuilt a bridge, graded the area and prefabricated the bridge before erecting it.
- Jan 55 The unit continued working on projects in Korea and Japan. A Seaplane taxiway and parking area was built and utility systems were built and installed.
- Feb 55 Lieutenant Commander M. R. Nelson CEC, USN, became Officer in Charge. Detachment of CBMU 101 worked at Korea, Iwakuni, and Atsugi. At Atsugi 35 quonset huts were erected and utilities installed.
- Mar 56 Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 101 was inactivated in Japan.

Seabee History: Between the Second World War and the Korean War

Following the victories in Europe and Asia, the U.S. Armed Forces rapidly demobilized. The Seabees were part of this demobilization, and by June 1946 their number had fallen from a peak strength of more than 250,000 men to approximately 20,000. In the continental United States, the web of training bases and depots dissolved, and all Seabee activity was concentrated at the Naval Construction Battalion Center, Port Hueneme, California. As Seabee ranks continued to thin, the early postwar years saw only a few battalions and small construction battalion detachments scattered at naval bases and stations abroad. Despite the diminished strength of the force, Seabee peacetime activities took on a unique and diversified character. Besides maintaining advanced bases built during the war, they were confronted with many unprecedented construction assignments.

What could be more unusual than Seabees building a fleet weather station on Russian soil? Yet in September 1945, Seabees of the 114th Naval Construction Battalion, stationed in the Aleutian Islands, were ordered to Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula to accomplish just such a project. They perhaps have the distinction of being the only Americans invited to do construction work in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Also in 1945 and 1946, six battalions of Seabees performed a variety of tasks on mainland China at Shanghai, Tsingtao, Tangku, and other cities. Primary among them was the construction of harbors and airfields to be used for the evacuation of the defeated Japanese troops and the importation of supplies for the war-torn Chinese nation.

China was not the only nation to receive Seabee assistance after the guns fell silent. As part of the occupation force, 13 construction battalions and 3 special battalions were sent to Japan to aid U.S. naval forces at Hiroshima, Kobayashi, Yokosuka, Omura, Nagasaki, Sasebo, and Kure. Out of the postwar rubble, they rebuilt all types of facilities including airstrips, docks, houses, electric and telephone systems, bridges, roads, recreation areas, and hospitals.

In mid-1946 Seabees were assigned the task of constructing facilities on Bikini Atoll in preparation for the historic atomic bomb tests there. That same year Operation "High Jump" brought Seabees to Antarctica for the first time. An initial detachment of 173 men accompanied Admiral Richard Byrd to Little America to build new facilities and unload supplies and equipment.

When Vieques Island, off the coast of Puerto Rico, was chosen as the site for an interservice war exercise, code named Operation "Portrex," Seabees performed a dual function. They were on the scene prior to the "invasion" to reclaim the island's abandoned wartime defense facilities. They then returned as participants in the exercise and successfully built a pontoon causeway which brought the invading army units ashore.

During World War II the Seabees were a Naval Reserve organization, created specifically for that war. Most Seabees were "USNR" and served "for the duration plus six months." After the war, however, it was clear that the Seabees, having more than proved their

worth, would be a valuable new addition to the regular Navy. Thus, in 1947, the Seabees became part of the regular, peacetime Navy. In December 1947 a Seabee Reserve Organization was established to augment active-duty Seabees during national emergencies. Many of these first Seabee reservists were Seabee veterans of World War II who wished to continue to serve the nation. The first reserve Seabees were organized into a number of divisions in each Naval District. Each Seabee Reserve Division initially consisted of 5 officers and 40 enlisted men. Although by 1949 the number of active duty Seabees had dwindled to 3,300, the Reserve Organization served as a ready force for expansion in the coming emergency in Korea.

SEABEES IN THE KOREAN WAR

In June 1950, following the invasion of South Korea by the armies of communist North Korea, the Seabees found themselves at war again. As part of the United States contingent of the United Nations force, they rose to the challenge in the tradition of their "Can Do" predecessors. By a calling-up reservists, their active-duty force was expanded to more than 14,000.

On 15 September 1950 U.S. troops landed at Inchon in what has come to be known as one of the most brilliant amphibious assaults in history. Seabees achieved renown as the men who made it possible. Battling enormous thirty-foot tides and a swift current while under continuous enemy fire, they positioned pontoon causeways within hours of the first beach assault. Following the landing, the incident known as the "Great Seabee Train Robbery" took place. The need to break the equipment bottleneck at the harbor inspired a group of Seabees to steal behind enemy lines and capture some abandoned locomotives. Despite enemy mortar fire, they brought the engines back intact and turned them over to the Army Transportation Corps.

In October Seabees ran their pontoon structures ashore again and set up another operating port at Wonsan. When the strenuous harbor construction and camp operations ceased to fill their days, they branched into the unusual tasks of inspecting North Korean armament on an abandoned mine-layer, clearing mined tunnels, and performing repair work on nearby ships.

When the Chinese Communists joined the retreating North Koreans to launch another full scale invasion of South Korea, the Seabees were compelled to redouble their efforts -- this time to help the retreating U.N. forces. At Hungwan, Wonsan, and Inchon, where Seabees had been instrumental in putting U.N. forces ashore, Seabee pontoon causeways were now loaded with troops and equipment going the other way.

By February, however, the tide turned once again and the Seabees returned to Inchon for another landing. They found their previously constructed harbor facilities in a state of ruin, but, miraculously enough, some of their sturdy pontoon structures were still in place. After a rapid repair job, men and equipment streamed ashore again.

Seabee participation in the Korean War was certainly not limited to amphibious operations. Another of their outstanding contributions was in that specialty of their World War II predecessors -- airfield construction. Seabees could be found throughout the war zone constructing, repairing, and servicing the K-fields of the various Marine Air Groups. The Seabees were broken up into numerous detachments and each was assigned to an airfield designated with a "K" number, such as K-3 at Pohang, K-18 at Kimbo, and K-2 at Taegu.

Keeping the planes flying was an arduous and often dangerous task. At one small airstrip on the 36th Parallel, chuck holes were opening up in the failing concrete faster than they could be repaired. As it was absolutely vital that the field remain open, the undaunted Seabees graded, poured, and patched one side of the runway while bomb-laden aircraft continued to fly off the other side.

Seabee relations with the Marine Corps were further cemented by a group of nine Seabees who kept a 21-mile stretch of road open between an isolated Marine intercept squadron and its source of supplies. They worked round-the-clock in five-below-zero temperatures to successfully fulfill their promise to rebuild any damaged bridge within six hours.

One of the most incredible Seabee feats of the war took place on the small island of Yo in the Bay of Wonsan. In communist hands again in 1952, Wonsan was a key supply and transportation center for the enemy. As such, carrier-based aircraft strikes against Wonsan and points deeper in the interior were numerous and constant. Planes were hit by enemy fire daily leaving their pilots with the unhappy choice of either ditching at sea or attempting to land in enemy-held territory. The need for an emergency airstrip was critical and, under the code name Operation "Crippled Chick," a detachment of Seabees came to the rescue. Put ashore on Yo Island, they were given 35 days to construct a runway. Working under constant artillery bombardment from neighboring enemy positions, they managed to complete the 2,400-foot airstrip in only 16 days. By a prearranged signal, "Steak is Ready," the Seabees signaled that the job was done, and nine damaged aircraft landed on the new field that same day.

The rapid demobilization that followed the Second World War was not repeated after the signing of the Korean Armistice in July 1953. Crises in Berlin, Cuba, Africa, South America, and especially in Southeast Asia created the necessity to maintain military strength and preparedness. Seabee Reservists had helped meet the Korean crisis, but the onset of the Cold War had indicated the need for a basic reorganization of Seabee capabilities as well as for increased Seabee numbers. Between 1949 and 1953, 13 battalions of two distinct types were accordingly established. The new establishments signified a gain in greater battalion mobility and specialization. The first type, the new Amphibious Construction Battalions, were landing and docking units. An integral part of the Fleet Amphibious Forces, their mission was to place causeways and ship-to-shore fuel lines, construct pontoon docks, and perform other functions necessary for the expeditious landing of men, equipment, and supplies. Naval Mobile Construction Battalions constituted the second type. They were responsible for land construction of a

wide variety, including camps, roads, tank farms, airstrips, permanent waterfront structures, and many other base facilities.



FMAW

Manchuria

North Korea

Yellow Sea

Japan Sea

South Korea

CBMU-101









