Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 8

Historical Information

"Construimus, Batuimus"
"We Build, We Fight"

NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE COMMAND

History

of

United States

Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Eight

1 November 1960 - 6 August 1967

Office of the Historian
Naval Facilities Engineering Command
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On November 1, 1960 Mobile Construction Battalion Eight was activated again and recommissioned at Davisville, Rhode Island with Lieutenant Commander Archie Floy, CEC, USN, the Commanding Officer. The new battalion consisted of 221 men and officers, most of whom came from Detachment "U" of Mobile Construction Battalion Six.

By March 1961 the battalion consisted of 345 men. During their stay in Davisville the Seabees of Mobile Construction Battalion Eight attended classes and worked on a number of construction projects, including the Quonset Point golf course and a bunker at Sun Valley.

On April 13 the battalion went to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina for a six-week course of military training. On May 26 and 27 it returned to Davisville manned with skilled fighters as well as skilled builders.

On September 25, 1961 MobileCConstruction Battalion Eight embarked for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and arrived on September 29.

In Cuba the Seabees major assignment was the construction of 58 units of dependents housing at Villamar. However, when the Seabees arrived the rains came, so progress on the housing units was limited. When the rains stopped, the battalion really began to work. In spite of the inauspicious beginning, the project was finished almost a month ahead of schedule.

The Seabees also repaired storm damage to various facilities, repaired roads at Leeward Point, worked on defense positions, relocated a quonset hut, and repaired 2,300 yards of perimeter fencing.

On June 25, 1962 the Eighth Battalion boarded the USS Suffolk County and four days later arrived at Davisville. Davisville meant, as always, liberty, reunion, and retraining. On August 17, 1962 the battalion greeted its new Commanding Officer, Commander George L. Hoffman and began to train for an assignment in Antarctica.

In preparation for the new assignment, the battalion, now grown to 450 men, was cut to the 200 required in Antarctica. Detachments then were sent to Greenland, Alberta, Canada; Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Maine to train for living and working in cold climates. Some men also were sent for advanced training to Port Hueneme, California.

On July 15 a detachment of Mobile Construction Battalion Eight flew to Christchurch, New Zealand as an advance party to prepare a base there as a staging area. At Christchurch, the detachment rehabilitated a barracks,erected a steel tower, and completed a boiler house.

The main body of the battalion left Quonset Point, Rhode Island by air on September 24, 1962 to report to the Commander, United States Naval Support Forces, Antarctica, at Christchurch, New Zealand, for operational control. The battalion then left New Zealand in echelons, and upon arrival at Antarctica, they were dispersed to five camps.

At New Byrd Station, the Seabees arrived on October 16 and 17 and began working on their assigned projects. The Seabees enlarged the public works building and connected it to the galley and recreation hall.

They also enlarged another building to house the equipment of the Public Works Department, built new fuel tanks, improved a ventilating system, and repaired camp buildings.

At South Pole Station the battalion constructed new barracks buildings, a 75,000 gallon fuel tank, and a generator building, and repaired several other buildings, and installed electrical equipment.

The Seabees of the battalion stationed at Hallet Station re-roofed the station's buildings, installed two 10,000-gallon water tanks, enlarged the biology laboratory, and constructed facilities for a seismic laboratory.

Ten men were located at Camp Eights. There they erected 12 trailer units, repaired wood and canvas buildings, and built all the necessary quarters for the wintering-over party.

The main base at McMurdo Sound was the scene of the greatest amount of construction activity. There Mobile Construction Battalion Eight built two 40 feet by 100 feet warehouses, a water distillation plant, a condenser building, a senior science building, a public health service building, and a cosmic ray laboratory building. In addition, the Seabees erected two 250,000-gallon fuel tanks and drew up plans for a wharf at Hut Point.

The battalion left Antarctica on February 27, 1963, at the end of the austral summer. It arrived at Davisville in March and assumed the usual home port routine.

After a short stay at their home port the Seabees of Eight once

again went to Camp Lejeune for military training. Arriving on April 28, they trained under their Marine instructors for five weeks. On May 30, the men returned to Davisville and resumed construction training. In July a detachment went to Bermuda to rehabilitate a pier and boat house at the U. S. Navy Base. The remainder of the battalion continued to train for their next Antarctic assignment.

On October 20, 1963 Mobile Construction Battalion Eight began departing by air from Quonset Point for Christchurch, New Zealand to stage for their second assignment in Antarctica. By November 6, under Commander George L. Hoffman, CEC, USN, as commanding officer, the battalion was assembled in Antarctica to begin work in support of Operation Deep Freeze 1964.

At McMurdo Sound Mobile Construction Battalion Eight's Seabees continued working on the water distillation plan started during their previous tour of duty. The primary assignment of the battalion during the austral summer, 1963-1964, was the erection of towers at all the major research stations for the study of cosmic rays. The towers were 180-foot high antennas built to withstand the 100-knot winds that blew across the continent. The towers were built in ten-foot sections, because the men could only work ten or fifteen minutes at a time in the 50-degree below zero (fahrenheit) weather.

Mobile Construction Battalion Eight erected antennas at McMurdo, South Pole and New Byrd Stations for the United States, and then a detachment of eight men went to the Soviet camp, Vostock Station, and

built two towers for the Russian scientists. Besides the cosmic towers, the Seabees built scatter antennas for radio research at New Byrd Station.

The battalion also renovated a number of existing buildings and built new structures, including quarters for senior scientists at McMurdo Sound.

Four men of the battalion joined the crew of the coast guard ship Eastwind and participated in an engineering survey in the vicinity of Cammers Island, Palmer Peninsula.

The advent of the austral winter in February and March 1964 brought weather too cold to work in and so the battalion left Antarctica.

After arriving back at Davisville, the battalion resumed its usual homeport routine. On April 10, 1964, at a change of command ceremonies Lieutenant Commander Joseph P. Trunz, Jr., CEC, USN, assumed command of Mobile Construction Battalion Eight relieving Commander George L. Hoffman.

While undergoing training and recutfitting at Davisville, Mobile Construction Battalion Eight learned that its next assignment would be in a warmer clime at the United States Naval Station, Rota, Spain.

On July 16, 1964 the battalion arrived at its destination in Spain. The primary duty, assigned to the battalion at Rota was site preparation for a 300-unit family housing project. Basically, the battalion was to grade the site and lay foundations for the first 64 housing units. Besides working on the housing foundations, the Seabees of Eight erected four Butler buildings to be used for storing components of the

prefabricated houses. They laid out and paved roads, parking areas, and sidewalks, and relocated fencing and lighting. In another area of the Naval Station, the Seabees dismantled and rebuilt quarters for officers.

On October 15, 1964 Mobile Construction Battalion Eight went to Almeria, Spain and participated with the Second Marine Expeditionary Force in the Joint U.S. Army-Marine Exercise Steel Pike I. As part of the exercise, Seabees constructed a 4,000-feet Short Airfield for tactical support. As part of this project, the men built a camp and access roads, cleaned and leveled 29 acres of ground, laid interlocking aluminum matting on runways, taxiways, parking areas, and turn-up pads. The battalion also set up and operated a water distillation plant for the Marines.

Steel Pike was completed in early November. On November 15, the Seabees dismantled the matting and then returned to Rota, and proceeded with the construction of the housing project. On December 2, the main body of Mobile Construction Battalion Eight boarded the MSTS General Alexander Patch and returned to the United States

During its assignment in Spain, two detachments of the battalion were sent to other locations to work on construction projects. One detachment of 150 men went to northern Greece, where at the site of one of the ancient worlds' historic battles, the plains of Marathon, Seabees already were erecting a communication station. The initial work on

Project Judy had been started in 1963 by Mobile Construction Battalion Six, but, in 1964 when new planning called for expanding the station; men from the Eighth Battalion were called upon to do the job. The detachment prefabricated and erected 82 antennas, laid underground water lines and power cables, erected fuel oil storage tanks, and installed heating, air conditioning, security lighting, and fencing. It placed large quantities of fill to provide the transmitter and receiver sites with an expanded network of roads and building pads. It also laid the concrete foundations and erected three Robertson buildings.

The detachment completed the Marathon communications station early in January 1965 and departed for Davisville on January 20, 1965.

An 18-man detachment went to Karamursel, Turkey on October 9, 1964 to build an administration building at the United States Air Force base there. The Seabees laid a concrete foundation and sidewalks and erected the prefabricated metal structure. They built interior block walls, installed power lines, plumbing and air conditioning, relocated an overhead steam line to provide heat, and paved a concrete parking lot The building essentially completed, the men returned to Rota on November 22. Shortly afterwards, they boarded ship for the United States.

On December 19, 1964, the main body of the battalion arrived at Davisville aboard the Patch, and the officers and men dispersed to

their homes for leave. Then the battalion reassembled at its home port for further training and reoutfitting, including a two-month stint at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for intensive military training.

The stay in home port was marked with a change in command. Commander Pharo A. Phelps, CEC, USN, relieved Lieutenant Commander J.P. Trunz as the Commanding Officer of Mobile Construction Battalion Eight. There also was another change. Instead of going to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as the battalion had expected, the officers and men of Mobile Construction Battalion Eight found themselves transferred to the U.S. Naval Construction Battalion Center, Port Hueneme, California. The United States was expanding its military construction activities in the Republic of Vietnam.

The main body of the battalion arrived at Port Hueneme on September 11, 1965. The stay at the new home port was not very long, however. Traveling in seven aircraft, the main body arrived at Da Nang in Vietnam on September 30 and joined the advance party that had been there since August 26.

The advance party had already begun to build a camp, later named Camp Faulkner. The camp included a galley and mess hall. The battalion intended to improve the camp and its facilities during the tour of duty, but the pressure of higher priority construction projects prevented anything more than minor improvements.

At Da Nang, Mobile Construction Battalion Eight began working on waterfront facilities that included two gravelled unloading areas, four landing boat ramps, three docks, a 314-foot timber pier, and a 1,700-foot quay wall.

In conjunction with Mobile Construction Battalion Five, the Eighth Battalion also began building a 48-structure Butler building storage complex for the U.S. Naval Support Activity and warehouses for United States Marine units.

At Da Nang, Seabees of Eight also put a lot of effort into the construction of bunkers, barbed wire security fencing, and concertina wire entanglement for the defense of their camp. To provide the concrete necessary for their major project, the Naval Air Station storage area, the battalion built a drive-through concrete batching plant.

Mobile Construction Battalion Eight also build a cantonment for the U.S. Marine 5th Communication Battalion, in Da Nang East. On this project, it worked hand in hand with Marines who contributed much of the labor for the project. At Hue and Phu Bai the battalion helped the Marines build a 33 strong back camp by providing Seabee supervisors and the precast materials while the Marines provided the labor. A detachment of the Eighth Battalion also erected two 20-foot by 48-foot quonset huts at Hue-Phu Bai to be used as a hospital operating room and recovery ward. The U.S. Marine Force Logistic Support Unit #2 was also aided by the battalion in the construction of a cantonment consisting of 80 strong-back huts and a 500-man galley. The battalion supplied materials and supervision.

On October 28, 1965 the Eighth Battalion was attacked by the Viet Cong, but no casualties and little damage were incurred.

On May 21, 1966 the main body began its flight home when the first of five planes took off for Port Hueneme. During this tour of duty,

the battalion numbered 394 men, a number considerably under its authorized strength.

At Port Hueneme, the battalion once again followed the home port routine of enjoying liberty, replacing men and material, and training for its next assignment. During the stay at the home port the size of the battalion was augmented. Therefore, when Mobile Construction Battalion Eight left for its second Pacific tour of duty, it left with 21 officers and 734 enlisted men.

The advance party, consisting of three officers and 27 enlisted men, left Point Mugu, adjoining Port Hueneme, by air on October 28, 1966, and arrived at Rosemary Point, Chu Lai, Vietnam on November 1. The main body left in echelons beginning on December 1 and by December 10 the entire battalion was assembled in Vietnam.

During the Chu Lai tour of duty the Eighth Battalion accomplished a great variety of construction. It built and converted strong-back huts, and erected two pre-engineered Pasco Hangar Buildings for Marine Air Group 12. The hangar buildings, the largest structures ever built by Seabees in Vietnam, were 96 feet wide, 245 feet long, and 65 feet high.

It also built the Chu Lai Dairy Plant that consisted of five 40-foot by 96-foot Butler buildings. Although material shortages prevented completion of the interior of the building before the battalion's departure, progress was well enough along to permit beneficial occupancy.

Shortly after arriving at Chu Lai, on December 13, 1966, eight Seabees of the Eighth Battalion were injured by an enemy mine while

traveling on Route #1 and were subsequently awarded Purple Heart Medals. Again, on January 11, 1967, five men of the battalion were injured by a mine. On May 14 the Viet Cong attacked the Mobile Construction Battalion Eight camp with 82-mm mortar shells and 57-mm recoilless rifles. Six Seabees were wounded and BUR3 Michael D. Estek was killed.

In February, 1967 a detachment of the Eighth Battalion working at Tam Ky came under a mortar attack and UTP2 James O. Miller was killed in action.

One of the major responsibilities of the battalion was the improvement and upgrading of Route #1 from Chu Lai to Quang Ngai, a distance of about 25 miles. Not much could be done during the early part of the battalions tour of duty, which coincided with the height of the rainy season. However, by June the rate of construction of the road was more than two miles a month.

Among other projects built by the battalion at Chu Lai, which was fast becoming a major United States combat zone in Vietnam, was a two-pump American style gas station, a hospital complex including two operating rooms, an antenna field for communications, six Butler buildings to provide storage space for Marine Air Group 12, a fire station, a 15-ton ice plant, several building complexes for communication centers, and three wooden pile bridges. At Tam Ky, 25 miles north of Chu Lai, a 40-man detachment from Mobile Construction Battalion Eight built a complete cantonment for troops of the Republic of Vietnam. The cantonment included housing, messing, and shop facilities.

On April 2, 1967 Commander John F. O'Leary, CEC, USN, succeeded Commander Pharo A. Phelps as Commanding Officer of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Eight.

Besides its regular military construction activities in Vietnam in 1966 and 1967, Mobile Construction Battalion Eight found sufficient time to help the Vietnamese people through civic action programs. During its stay at Chu Lai, the battalion was assigned civic action responsibility for the island of Ky Xuan. To benefit the Vietnamese on the island, Seabees from the battalion converted an unused masonry building into a medical dispensary. The battalion medical staff then provided medical services for the villagers and trained a village nurse to minister to the villagers when United States Forces were not in the area.

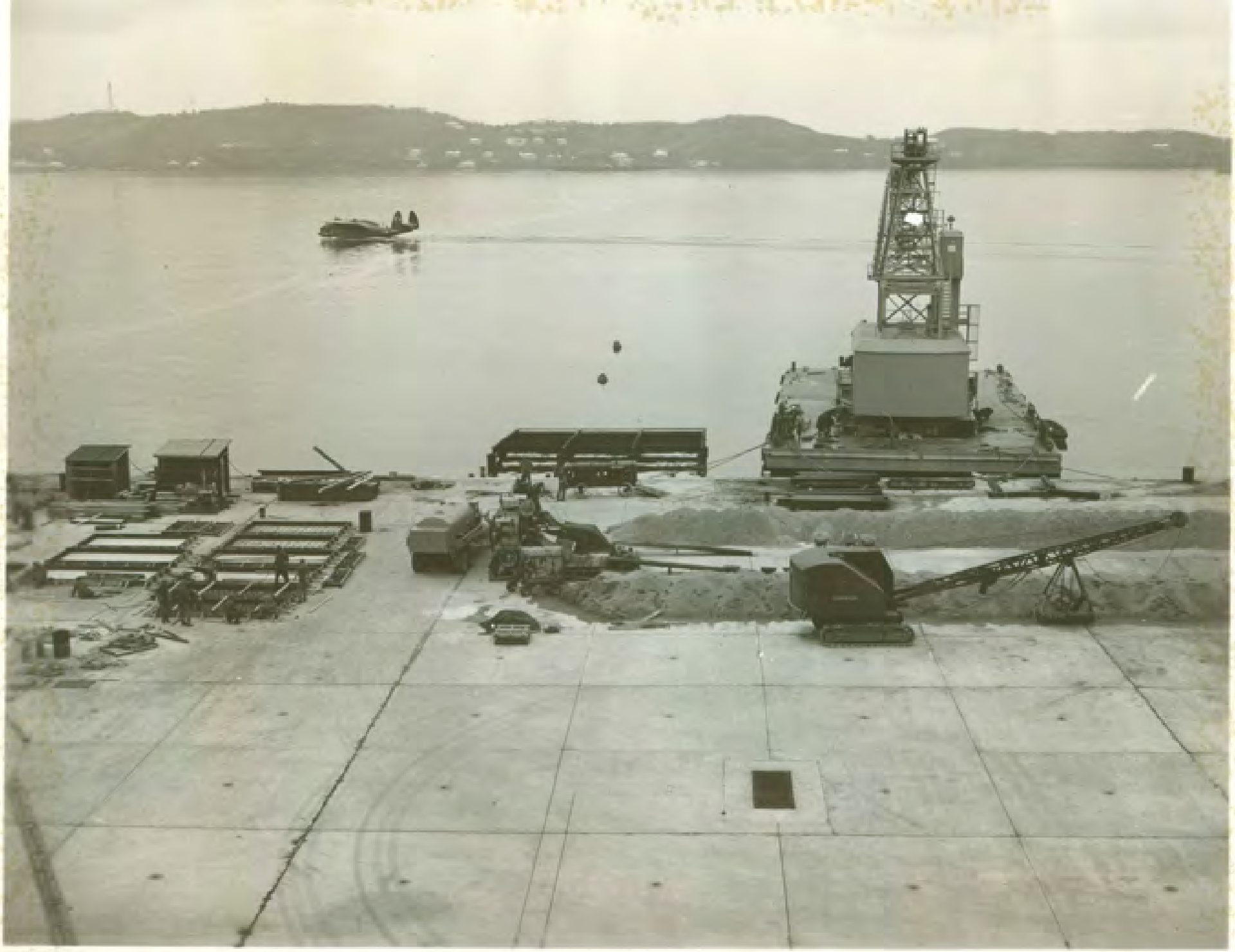
In addition, the men of the battalion, with the assistance of their wives, back in the United States, supported a village school, and donated school supplies. Moreover, for five months an orphanage was supported by battalion chapel funds.

Meanwhile, Mobile Construction Battalion Six was assigned to Chu Lai to take over projects from Mobile Construction Battalion Eight, whose allotted tour of duty was just about over. On June 29, the advance party of the Sixth Battalion arrived at Chu Lai and the advance party of the Eighth Battalion began preparing for departure. Between August 3 and 6, 1967 Mobile Construction Battalion Eight returned to its home port at Port Hueneme,

dispatch in the well known tradition of the U.S. Navy's Seabees - building and fighting for the United States.

MCB Eight (Port Hueneme)

Antarctica	Oct 62 - Feb 63
Antarctica	Nov 63 - Mar 64
Rota, Spain	Jul 64 - Dec 64
Joined Pacific Fleet Battalions	Aug 65
Danang, Vietnam	Sep 65 - May 66
Chu Lai, Vietnam	Dec 66 - Aug 67
Phu Bai-Gia Le, Vietnam	Feb 68 - Oct 68
Danang, Vietnam	Mar 69 - Nov 69
Disestablished	20 Dec 69

MCB Eight Disestablished 20 Dec 69

U.S. NAVAL MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALION EIGHT
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U.S. PACIFIC FLEET