

Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 58

*Historical
Information*



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



On March 15, 1966, the battalion was commissioned as U. S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 58. Commissioning ceremonies were conducted at the battalion's designated homeport, Davisville; R. I. Commanding officer was Commander Ward N. DeGroot ITT, CEC, USN.

During the six months following commissioning, the battalion underwent military and technical training in preparation for overseas deployment. In late October, 1966, MCB—58 deployed to Camp Haskings South, near Danang, Republic of Vietnam, in relief of MCB-1. The battalion, under the operational control of the 30th Naval Construction Regiment, was charged with providing engineering and construction support for U. S. Forces in the I Corps tactical zone of South Vietnam.

During the battalion's initial Vietnam deployment, a wide variety of projects were undertaken for the III Marine Amphibious Force; Force Logistics Command, First Marine Division, and First Marine Aircraft Wing. Roads were upgraded in the Danang area, including the first phase of improvements to Routes I and 4. A parking apron was constructed at the Danang air base and numerous helicopter pads were built, including the 3rd Naval Construction Brigade pad which was officially numbered "58" in the battalion's honor,

The most notable single project of the first deployment was the Complex of facilities built for Marine Air Control Four on Monkey Mountain. The mountain top was virtually leveled to provide otherwise unavailable construction space. Work was completed in a drastically curtailed time frame. The battalion also conducted one of the most wide-ranging civic action programs in the Danang area. A 32-home project for families surviving a Christmas Eve plane crash was completed in just 10 days. In cooperation with Vietnamese workers, the battalion completed a 160-home project for victims of a disastrous fire, a 200 child orphanage and a maternity clinic. It assisted in the construction of two high schools, four primary schools, 16 wells and several smaller projects. Battalion personnel provided medical and dental assistance for approximately 3,450 patients,

In June of 1967 the battalion was relieved by MCB-71 and returned to Davisville for leave and refresher training.

Redeploying to Vietnam in December, 1967, MCB-58 again relieved MCB-I, this time at Camp Haskins North. Operations of the Happy Valley Quarry and other projects for the Force Logistics Command, First Marine Division, and the First Marine Aircraft Wing were initiated. The design, construction and testing of nine different prototype bunkers was accomplished under an extremely tight deadline for the Commander, U. S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam. The bunkers were personally inspected by General William Westmoreland and other high ranking military officials.

On March 1, 1968, the battalion became the first Seabee unit to redeploy within Vietnam when it moved from Camp Haskins North to Hoi An, a distance of some 15 miles. Work began on an 8,000-man cantonment for the 2nd Republic of Korea Marine Brigade.

The Hoi An project took some four months and was considered the largest single Seabee job of the Vietnam War. What were once barren sand and scattered trees was transformed into a

sprawling complex comprising over 1,300 structures with over 550,000 square feet of floor space. The cantonment had 14 separate camp sites, complete with electric and water systems, security berms, helicopter pads and connecting roads.

Massive quantities of material were used in the project. Enough half-inch plywood was used that if it were stacked end to end would exceed the combined height of New York's Empire State Building and Rockefeller Center. Two by fours laid end-to-end would extend from Los Angeles to San Francisco. Over 60 miles of exterior and interior wire was installed and more than four miles of water pipe was placed underground. Approximately 75,000 bags of cement were used in road construction- and the pouring of concrete foundations. Upwards of 50,000 man-days of labor were expended at a total cost of more than \$1,250,000.

While the Seabees of 58 were involved in this giant task, the fighting continued in surrounding areas. Air strikes were conducted almost daily, and on several occasions mines caused damage to some of the battalion's heavy equipment. Snipers attempted, unsuccessfully, to hinder the work. Beginning June 11, 20 equipment operators and two bulldozers from the battalion were involved in a two-week search and destroy mission "Operation Dragon Palace"—under operational control of the 5th Infantry Battalion, 2nd ROK Marine Brigade. The operation was conducted some four miles northwest of the Hoi An Camp site. Four Korean infantry companies provided security for the mission. Numerous enemy bunkers, caves and food stores were destroyed in the bulldozer operation. The sweep accounted for seven enemy killed in action, three enemy captured, approximately 6,500 rounds of assorted ammunition, 10 weapons and more than 10,000 pounds of rice captured.

With the Hoi An project in the final stages, the battalion moved back to its original camp site at Camp Haskins North, Danang, on June 21.

On May 31, Commander Charles J. Mathews, CEC, USN, relieved Commander DeGroot as commanding officer. For his efforts with the battalion, Commander DeGroot was awarded the Republic of Korea "Order of Military Merit" by Lieutenant General Chae Myung Shin, Commander, Republic of Korea Armed Forces, Vietnam.

Although the Hoi An job was the major battalion project during the deployment, considerable effort was exerted in other areas also. In addition to the main part of the battalion at Hoi An, the "Great 58" had details at Nam Hoi, just south of Hue, where a rock quarry was operated; at Phu Bai, 60 miles from the Demilitarized Zone, at Chau Phu on the Cambodian border, and at Soc Trang, deep in the Mekong Delta.

Throughout the deployment the battalion pursued a vigorous civic action program. Activity continued in both Danang and Hoi An. In the Danang area, a three room school house was constructed. An orphanage and maternity clinic was also built. In Hoi An, the battalion organized aid directed construction of a school for the blind, the second of its kind in Vietnam. Other civic action included donations of clothing and scrap materials to needy Vietnamese, financial support of orphans and students, and weekly visits by MEDCAP/DENTCAP teams. The teams, comprised of battalion medical and dental personnel, treated an estimated 3,500 Vietnamese

patients.

In August, 1968, MCB-58 was relieved by MCB—22 and returned to Davisville for leave and refresher training.

Most of the homeport time was spent on projects and training. In early December, some 50 men started three weeks of military training at Camp Fogarty, near Davisville, This included firing of the M79 grenade launcher, 81mm mortar, 3.5 rocket launcher, 45-caliber pistol and M-16 rifle. The battalion also received instruction on basic military tactics and field problems. In January, 1969, the battalion received three more weeks of military training at Camp Lejeune, N. C. before again deploying to Vietnam.

U.S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Fifty-Eight *(History # 1; chronology)*
March 1966 - To date

- 15 Mar 66 U.S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Fifty-eight was established at the Naval Construction Battalion Center, Davisville, Rhode Island.
- 27-31 Oct 66
to 5-8 Jun 67 Battalion headquartered at Camp Haskins South, Danang, Vietnam. The battalion rebuilt and widened roads; constructed fuel tanks, rigid steel frame buildings, warehouses, and an aircraft parking apron. At Monkey Mountain, they constructed one-story barracks, a 500-man mess hall, showers, administration and operations facilities, covered storage, motor transport spaces, a dispensary and generator sheds. In addition, MCB Fifty-eight reconstructed 32 homes for the hamlet of Binh Thai, near the Danang Air Base. The homes were destroyed by the crash of a U.S. plane.
- 10-16 Dec 67
to 1 Mar 68 Battalion Headquartered at Camp Haskins North, Danang, Vietnam. The Battalion designed, constructed and tested nine different prototype concrete bunkers for the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam. They also repaired and maintained roads.
- 1 Mar 68
to 21 Jun 68 Battalion headquarters was moved from Camp Haskins North to Hoi An, Vietnam. There, the battalion constructed a complete cantonment for an 8,000-man brigade of Marines from the Republic of Korea.
- 21 Jun 68
to 13-16 Aug 68 After completing construction of the cantonment at Hoi An, the battalion headquarters moved back to Camp Haskins North. The battalion continued to build and repair roads and bridges. They also built a 5,000-barrel water tank and aircraft revetments.
- 10-15 Feb 69
to 8-13 Oct 69 Battalion headquarters were at Camp Shields, Chu Lai, Vietnam. The battalion repaired and reconstructed bridges, upgraded and maintained roads, constructed facilities to support aircraft based at Chu Lai, installed water, power and sewer systems for various units, and resurfaced and repaired three airfields.













