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U. S. NAVAL MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALION NUMBER SEVEN
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From: Commanding Officer, U. S. Naval Mobile Construction
Battalion SEVEN
To: Commander, Naval Construction Battalions, U. S.
Atlantic Fleet
Subj: MCB SEVEN History
Encl: (1) The History of U. S. Naval Mobile Construction
Battalion SEVEN
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THE HISTORY OF
U.S. NAVAL MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALION SEVEN

U.S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion SEVEN was commissioned on August 22, 1951. Its first Commanding Officer was LCDR R.F. Smart, CEC, USNR, who held the command until being relieved in June 1953.

Since commissioning, SEVEN has seen duty in Morocco, Cuba, the Bahama Islands, the West Indies, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Spain, Sicily, Newfoundland, and in the Republic of South Vietnam.

In its primary role of construction MCB-7 has begun or finished such projects as airstrips, housing facilities, gymnasiums, enlisted men's clubs, office buildings, cantonments, and soil stabilization control. Generally, the work in which the battalion has united its efforts has been of a magnitude too great to allow completion during a single deployment. As a result MCB-7 has relieved and been relieved by other Atlantic Fleet Battalions on single projects to enable completion of work without interruption.

From October 1957 until August 1959, however, SEVEN set a record by remaining deployed to three isolated islands in the West Indies, completing single-handedly the largest construction project ever undertaken by a peace-time Atlantic Construction Battalion. The project, consisting of two Coast Guard LORAN Stations - 42 buildings, five steel structures, 15 miles of road, and 16 acres of concrete catchment area - stands as mute testimony to the ability of MCB-7. Although living conditions were primitive and the heat and humidity were extremely uncomfortable, the project was completed on schedule.

The battalion returned to Davisville in September 1959, and remained there until January 1960, when it deployed to Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. MCB-7 returned to Davisville in August 1960 after a successful deployment.

On January 11, 1961, the battalion left Davisville for the U.S. Naval Base, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to relieve MCB-4. Enroute it left 67 men and two officers of Detachment MIKE at Roosevelt Roads to set up an asphalt plant and repair about eight miles of the Naval Station roads.

At Guantanamo, MCB-7 constructed 20 concrete block, barred enlisted men's quarters having sectional pre-cast roof slabs. It also built a Community Center of two large buildings and a covered patio which provided a recreation room, auditorium, cafeteria, and Navy Exchange Retail Store. The Seabee camp improvement program included a new administration building, MAA Office, paint shop, and three 40' x 100' shop and storage buildings.

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Guantanamo proved to be an excellent deployment site for MCB-7 to train and actively work at the three part mission for construction battalions: provide rapid and effective construction support; conduct defense operations; and perform emergency public works operation functions.

Strained political relations with Cuba generated an atmosphere of vigilance and realism in which to train and conduct defense operations. SEVEN constituted a major element of the base's Ground Defense Force, supplying two rifle companies reinforced by crew-served weapons.

MCB-7 assured the continued operation of essential utilities by training and providing men to operate the Naval Base power, water treatment, and refrigeration plants, and critical boilers and pumping stations. These functions were assured monthly during each two-day base wide defense drill and emergency occasions. For 10 days, during the Bay of Pigs invasion, some of MCB-7's men operated the plants.

On October 11, 1961, SEVEN returned from Cuba to Davisville, R.I., to begin planning, training and outfitting for its Rota, Spain, deployment. While at Davisville, CBLant announced that MCB-7 had been selected the "Best of Type" in the Atlantic Fleet for fiscal year 1961, and also "Best of Type" in the entire Navy in 1961.

MCB-7's November detachment, composed of about 150 men, departed Davisville shortly before the main body for work in Bermuda. While there the detachment maintained and repaved roads, constructed a salt water pumping station, and installed a grounding system in 150 magazines. After completing the assigned projects, the detachment was redeployed to Argentia, Newfoundland, where it completed exterior rehabilitation of two barracks and an administration building, repaired shower decks in seven barracks, constructed a steel radar tower, installed primary ground systems in an AEW shop, and undertook construction on a road and potable water line through very difficult terrain. The detachment returned to Davisville in July 1962.

The battalion was assigned 15 different projects at Rota. These projects covered a wide variety of construction work and served as a good example of the broad scope of construction capabilities of a Construction Battalion. The largest project was the completion of a permanent 86-man barracks started by MCB-4. This project included construction of tile interior partitions, plastering, tarrazo, and ceramic tile decks, built-up roofing, installation of windows, doors and interior metal cubicle partitions, plumbing, electrical, sidewalks and landscaping. An Aviation Fuel Truck Repair Shop, a metal Public Works Transportation Shop, a small permanent office building and a prefabricated metal office building for visiting squadrons were constructed. Other projects included road building, earth work to repair soil erosion damage, stabiliza-

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tion of a large area near the waterfront, security fencing, installation of security floodlights, improvements to the small-arms range, and cycling of functional components.

During its Rota deployment, SEVEN participated in a successful People-to-People program. Prior to its departure, 5,400 pounds of used clothing and toys were collected in Davisville. By March 22, 1962, this material had been distributed to needy Spanish citizens in the villages of Rota, San Lucar de Barrameda, and Puerto de Santa Maria.

In April, Detachment OSCAR deployed from Spain to the U.S. Naval Air Facility, Sigonella, Sicily, to build two warehouse-type buildings and complete other small projects. The Detachment returned to the main body in Spain on July 5, 1962.

In July 1962, MCB-7 and MCB-1 participated in the first airlift deployment and redeployment in the Atlantic Seabees. MCB-1 landed at Rota with 180 personnel on July 17 and on July 18, MCB-7 departed with 220 personnel on three C-135 jet transports for direct airlift to Davisville. A rear echelon of 60 men completed work on the last few projects, turned over camp and equipment to MCB-1, and loaded battalion gear aboard the USS YANCEY for return to Davisville on August 6, 1962.

In anticipation of their December deployment the battalion received six weeks of intensive infantry training from Marine instructors at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina, during August and September 1962.

Although not scheduled for deployment to Cuba until December, the battalion received word in early October while still at LeJeune that SEVEN would leave for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in late October. The nature of the work in Cuba was classified and of such an important nature that SEVEN would join with MCB-4 to hasten completion of that project.

On October 26, an LST left Davisville, with 336 enlisted men and eight officers of MCB-7 and new construction equipment. On October 30, MCB-7 arrived at Guantanamo Bay and turned to with MCB-4.

During the first two weeks of the crisis, the Seabees built more than 20 miles of new roads which, in case of an attack on the base, would have been invaluable to the supply and communications network. A line of new concrete and steel bunkers was built.

While the Seabees on the front line were working on defense construction projects, others were at work in the rear, converting existing ammunition storage bunkers into command posts to order.

The Seabees worked around the clock in two shifts. Front line construction crews couldn't work at night, but did the job so fast in the daytime, it took shifts at the Seabee Camp to keep up support.

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This was Project MIGHT, an important and urgent project constructed by Seabees to improve the defenses of the Gitmo Naval Base.

By early December, the critical situation at Guantanamo Bay had been eased, and MCB FOUR moved out for Davisville, leaving MCB SEVEN to continue with the project until it was completed in May 1963. With the completion of Project MIGHT, the men of MCB SEVEN turned to other major projects including the McCalla Airfield lighting system, complete rehabilitation of airfield lighting, Leeward Point; rehabilitation of perimeter road and fence, AWW fire protection system, and the Gitmo River Bridge.

In early July 1963, it was announced that MCB SEVEN had been selected as "Best of Type" in the Atlantic Fleet and was awarded the Battle Efficiency "E" for fiscal year 1963.

Upon SEVEN's return to Davisville in late July, the men were given leave and the battalion prepared for its Puerto Rico deployment.

On October 7, 1963, approximately 60 men and one officer departed Davisville via air to reactivate the Seabee Camp at Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. On November 20, the main body arrived at Roosevelt Roads and commenced work on a number of projects there.

Major projects included replacement of Fender Systems on station piers and repaving of 4.5 miles of roads with asphaltic concrete produced in the portable asphalt plant.

In early December, work commenced to establish a tent camp at the Naval Ammunition Depot on Vieques, approximately eight miles from Roosevelt Roads. As living facilities were completed the Vieques company was increased to 170 men. By the time the company was relieved on April 21, 1964, by a detachment from MCB FOUR, they had quarried and crushed approximately 40,000 tons of rock and spread and compacted crushed rock on approximately 12 miles of roads in the NAD. Additionally, an old warehouse was converted to a barracks, subsistence and administrative facility. Fifty-three magazines were rehabilitated and an 80' by 80' reinforced concrete LST ramp was constructed.

In late February a company of approximately 60 MCB SEVEN Seabees arrived at the UDT Training Facility on St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, to accomplish assigned projects. These projects included structural, electrical, and plumbing repairs and modifications to buildings 10 and 18; electrical service and lighting on Pier Alpha; construction of small boat launching ramp, and reconstruction and surfacing station roads and parking lots.

The Battalion returned to Davisville, R.I., in late April of 1964 for leave and training. In preparation for the coming Cuba deployment, SEVEN left for extensive military training at Camp Lejeune, N.C., on July 1. Three weeks after returning to Davisville, MCB-7 deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

During September of 1964, a 75-man Air Transportable Disaster Recovery Detachment was sent from Davisville to Mayport, Fla., for emergency repairs of hurricane damaged beaches.

On September 21, 1964, the advance party was airlifted to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The main body was on the construction site by October 5. Construction jobs undertaken on this deployment were the repair of roads, construction of concrete block head facilities, boiler repair, replacement of sanitary sewers, alteration of transmitter buildings, installation of a 100 foot antenna tower, repair and construction of buildings, repairing and repainting of 32 USN vehicles, installation of street lighting, electrical installations, and Seabee camp repairs.

The most important work accomplished while at Guantánamo Bay from the viewpoint of the Naval Base, was the construction and placing of 18 prefabricated observation posts around the base defense line, construction of over 20 miles of access road, seven helicopter pads, and two LCM ramps. In the six-week period during October and November 1964, the MCB-7 Construction Platoon of 35 men was deployed to Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, and accomplished the construction of an air impact zone in support of fleet training operations.

During the period from September 18 through November 12, 1964, a detachment was deployed to Anegada, British Virgin Islands to repair and improve on Fleet Training Target Control Facilities.

From April 22 until July 13, 1965, MCB-7 trained at Davisville, R.I., in preparation for the coming Spain deployment.

On the afternoon of July 13, 1965, MCB-7 began loading aboard the USNS BUCKNER that would take them to Rota, Spain. This was the first time since 1960 that SEVEN had deployed to this naval base in Southern Spain.

The Rota deployment was unusual in that almost the entire resources and man-power of SEVEN were concentrated on a single project. Because many American dependents were forced to live in the city of Rota due to shortage of government housing on the base, MCB-7 was called upon to alleviate the situation by the construction of USA Homes.

The USA Home, built by Knox Home Company, was an experiment undertaken by the Defense Department to provide much-needed government housing at overseas bases. Unit construction, the major project of the deployment, provided an excellent opportunity for training in all Group VIII rates. The houses themselves were striking examples of the completeness and construction efficiency now possible in prefabricated structures. Each single apartment began as 22 large crates weighing a total of 50 tons. Every crate was numbered and contained various parts in the exact order that they would be required for assembly.

During the four months of building, MCB-7 completed 20 units in the A-Area and shortly after November 1, 1965, the first families moved in. MCB-7 returned to Davisville in the early part of December. A small rear echelon remained in Spain to finish the houses in the D-Area. When the rear echelon left, 96 units had been erected and 36 finished for occupancy. This had included site preparation, sewer system installation, erection of the units, installation of heating units and ductwork, and

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the interior painting, tiling, fixture installation, and general finishing that changed the rough unit into a real home.

During July 1965, MCB-7 was awarded "Best of Type" in the Atlantic Fleet for Fiscal Year 1965.

During Fiscal Year 1965, Seabee Team 7-2 had been deployed for six months in Liberia for the training of Liberian personnel of the Department of Public Works in building construction trades, vehicle and equipment maintenance and operation and road construction and repair techniques.

Military training at Davisville, R.I., and Camp Lejeune, N.C., filled the period from December 13, 1965 to April 15, 1966. During this time MCB-7 was preparing for deployment to the Republic of Vietnam.

In March 1966, SEVEN deployed a Construction Platoon to NATF, Lakehurst, N.J., to rehabilitate a Marine expeditionary airfield - Short Airfield for Tactical Support. On March 15, an Advance Party of about 100-men was airlifted to the Hue Phu Bai Combat Base, Republic of Vietnam.

By April 15, the entire Battalion was on site. The mission of SEVEN was three-fold: Logistic support for field units, defending a 1,000 meter portion of the Phu Bai vital area, and winning friends among the Vietnamese people through a program of Civic Action.

Cantonment construction was chief among SEVEN's many projects. Four increments were built for the 4th Marine Regiment (Reinforced). Each increment contained 122 prefabricated "strongback" huts, one 500-man galley, eight "honeybucket" latrines, and three roofed showers. Inside the base, cantonments were also constructed for MCB-7's own camp, Force Logistic Support Unit Two (FLSU2), and for the Army's 131st Aviation Company. At Dong Ha, seven miles South of the DMZ, a large cantonment of 170 huts was built.

In almost all hut construction, portions of the huts were precut at a prefabrication plant designed and instituted by SEVEN. There, gable ends, doors, steps, floor joists, and rafters were cut for transportation to the job sites. Time studies revealed that this operation reduced the man-day expenditure by half, enabling output to become ten complete huts per day, besides precutting the parts for another ten huts. By using this method, a cantonment could be completed in about 3,000 man-days, or in 15 days time.

There were several special features of MCB-7's own camp, named Camp Campbell, in memory of SWE3 Stanley Claus Campbell, who lost his life on the defensive perimeter while in the security company. One feature was the 3-5 ton per day block ice plant, which distributed ice to every military unit in the base. Other features included a 15,000 gallon per day water plant, an air-conditioned Chapel-Library, a split level ward-room, an excellent "Quonset-based" medical and dental facility and a bamboo thatch EM Club, named the "Pungi Fit."

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The Page Communication Project, located inside the base, involved pouring 336 concrete antenna bases for a nearby Army Communications unit. These 3' X 6' pits were dug by hand, as well as four miles of cable trench around the antenna installation. The project was completed by mid-September.

Bravo Company of SEVEN assembled a 48,000 cubic foot refrigeration unit for FLSU2. Bravo Company also maintained all the generators within a 15 mile radius of the camp, erected 15 Stran Steel buildings, 15 Quonset huts, and installed the entire culvert drainage system at FLSU2 and the Regimental Cantonment area.

While in RVN, MCB-7 had men living and working in six separate sites in the I and II Corps areas. The largest detachment consisted of 135 men living at Dong Ha. There, the 3,000 foot runway was surfaced with aluminum AM-2 matting in an around-the-clock operation which was completed without interruption to air traffic. In addition to the airstrip, two parking areas, totaling 195,000 square feet, were surfaced with T-17 rubber membrane sprayed with penepriime. Dong Ha accomplishments also included two galleys and several showers and latrines. Because the expanding perimeter of the Dong Ha airbase was to force some 60 Vietnamese families to abandon their homes, MCB-7 relocated the families. Though the families had lived in thatched huts with earth floors they were moved to tin-roofed dwellings with concrete floors and inside furnishings built by SEVEN. The six new buildings measured 12 feet by 120 feet, enough for each building to house 10 families.

Near Col Co Beach Island five miles East of Hue, a 21-man detachment constructed a causeway 500-meters long and eight-meters wide. The end of the long causeway acted as an unloading ramp for Naval cargo craft. The peninsula was topped with M8AL Steel matting, and 60,000 cement-filled sandbags were placed to form the retaining wall.

At Lang Vei, a hilltop outpost two miles from Laos, a 22-man detachment poured concrete bunkers for a 200-man ARVN unit. For this action, five of SEVEN's Seabees received the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross for their "Outstanding Military Service." All other members of the detachment received citations.

A six-man detachment was sent to Qui Nhon and another went to Nha Trang. Each team provided supervision for military units who were rebuilding messing and berthing facilities.

SEVEN also improved the living conditions of Marines living in CAC villages. Several abandoned stockades that the Marines occupied were remodeled. Earth floors gave way to raised plywood platforms and crumbling, ruined buildings were screened and repaired. Most of the projects involved some degree of new construction.

The mission of Sierra Company was to provide external security for Camp Campbell by resisting enemy probes. To accomplish this, elaborate bunkers were built, concertina wire laid, and trip flares set up. Close coordination between MCB-7's 81mm mortar crew and the defensive line was main-

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tained. To supplement mortar illumination, a system of 15-500-watt floodlights was installed on the line. These could be activated on a moments notice. The advantage of the floodlights was that they denied the enemy any advance warning of being illuminated.

MCB-7's Civic Action Program was the third major part of the Battalions mission. The medical staff made three "sick-call" trips a week to local villages where they treated 25 to 40 patients in an afternoon. A good portion of the program was spent in helping the villagers in their civic projects. Building materials were donated and roads were either rebuilt or newly constructed. A load of cement was given to one village to rebuild a Buddhist pagoda which was destroyed by enemy action. Cement was also used to build a dam. The dam controlled the monsoon flood rains so the rice crops would not be destroyed. Scrap wood from the construction projects was also donated to the villagers for firewood or building materials.

MCB-7 had as its Civic Action responsibilities the villages of Thuy Choa and Thuy Phu. The two villages were about three miles from the Seabee camp. The Battalion started a drive to collect donations to keep gifted Vietnamese children in school at both villages. Each pupil received a package of school supplies containing paper, pencils, and crayons, as well as a toothbrush, toothpaste, and bars of soap. Other items that SEVEN distributed included sewing machines, clothes, food, a bicycle, and a teeter-totter.

MCB-7 returned to its homeport of Davisville, R.I., in mid-December, 1966. The Battalion is under the Commander, U.S. Naval Construction Battalions, Atlantic Fleet.

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