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100TH ANNIVERSARY
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CONSTRUCTION BATTALIONS

SEABEES
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SEABEES IN ACTION

STORY OF THE SEABEES

WORLD WAR II TO VIETNAM

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
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U. S. NAVY CONSTRUCTION BATTALIONS
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SEABEE COVERALL

HOME OF PACIFIC SEABEES

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The Seabee Tradition

BY LCDR W. D. MIDDLETON

THE NAVY'S Seabees were less than six months old when their first unit came under fire early in World War II. Only three weeks after the Marines assaulted the beaches of Guadalcanal in August 1942, Seabees of the Sixth Naval Construction Battalion followed them ashore to begin the difficult job of converting a muddy former Japanese landing strip at Henderson Field into an all-weather airfield capable of supporting anything from fighter aircraft to Army B-17's.

The construction job was tough enough, but to make matters worse Henderson Field was under almost constant attack by Japanese artillery and aircraft, and great craters were torn in the airfield every time a bomb or shell scored a hit. As if all this didn't give them enough to do, the Seabees had to be ready to take up positions in the defensive perimeter in the event of Japanese landing against the narrow beachhead.

Typical of Seabee ingenuity at Guadalcanal were the "crater crews" that rushed to repair the damage after every hit on the airfield. Quickly learning from experience, the Seabees stockpiled Marston matting (the pierced steel planking used to surface the field) along the runway in bundles sufficient to repair an average sized hole. Construction equipment and trucks, already loaded with enough sand and gravel to fill a bomb or shell crater, were placed under cover at strategic points along the runway.

Whenever Japanese bombers approached or artillery opened up, the Seabee "crater crews" raced from their foxholes, tore away damaged matting, backfilled the craters, and quickly laid down new matting. Before long the Seabees were doing the job so rapidly that forty minutes after a bomb or shell fell it was impossible to tell that the airfield had ever been hit.

Throughout the three-month battle for Guadalcanal the Seabees performed construction miracles to expand Henderson Field and to keep it open, at one time continuing work even when Japanese troops had pushed the Marine front line to within 150 feet of the field. During one particularly fierce attack, the Japanese put no less than 53 bomb and shell holes in the airfield during a 48-hour period.

But despite the worst efforts of the enemy forces, the Seabees were able to keep Henderson Field open throughout the bitter campaign, and their success in keeping Marine fighter planes in the air played no small part in the eventual U. S. victory at Guadalcanal. Thus was begun the Seabee "Can Do" tradition of World War II.

SEABEES AND MARINES

One of the earliest traditions developed by the Seabees of World War II was an unusually close comradeship with the United States Marines. Although they fought and built almost everywhere in the global conflict, and worked with Army troops and fleet sailors as well as Marines, the Seabees' greatest contribution to World War II victory was the role they shared with Marines in the bitter island-hopping war in the Pacific.

Based upon mutual respect and shared hardships, the Seabee-Marine fellowship was born as early as 1942, when Marines and Seabees worked and fought side-by-side throughout the bloody battle to held the Guadalcanal beachhead and to keep the Henderson Field airstrip open to Marine fighters and Army bombers. In this and later Pacific campaigns the Seabees learned to admire the Marines' unsurpassed skill as professional fighting men, and the Marines became equally impressed with Seabee skill as professional builders.

As often as not this Seabee-Marine mutual esteem was expressed in good-natured jokes at each other's expense. Recruited largely from the ranks of skilled construction workers, the average Seabee was ten years or more older than the typical Marine. Soon after the first Seabees came ashore at Guadalcanal the Marines were joking, "Never hit a Seabee, he might be some Marine's father." The Seabees quickly retaliated by manufacturing "Junior Seabee" badges, which they awarded to deserving Marines. And the Seabees liked to claim, "Marines only capture territory; it's the Seabees who improve territory."

In a classic piece of one-upmanship on one occasion during the Pacific campaign, the Seabees managed to best the Marines' proud boast of always getting places first. At New Georgia in July of 1943 a detachment of Marines charged ashore from landing craft in a dawn assault and rushed up the beach looking for Japanese troops, only to be greeted by a party of Seabees that had already landed on the enemy-held island to make a reconnaissance for an airfield site.

The close relationship that grew up between Marines and Seabees during World War II has continued throughout the postwar years. As they have ever since the formation of the first construction battalions 24 years ago, Marines still guide and assist Seabees in learning their necessary fighting skills. Much of the Seabee construction effort since the end of the war has been devoted to Marine Corps facilities. And today, in the Republic of Vietnam, the Seabees are devoting almost their entire effort to the construction of advance base facilities to support the operations of the Third Marine Amphibious Corps.

SEABEE INGENUITY

One of the earliest Seabee traditions to emerge during World War II was the almost legendary ability of a Seabee to improvise. Hastily formed and rushed into the war, the early construction battalions were nowhere near as well equipped as the present-day battalions. Frequently, too, supplies of construction materials and spare parts were insufficient for the job at hand. None of this, however, deterred the resourceful Seabees from getting the job done.

Early in the Solomon's campaign, for example, the 15th Construction Battalion was handicapped by a lack of machine tools.

A Seabee warrant officer, who had been a machinery salesman before the war, set out on a trip to New Zealand, where he successfully repurchased equipment from his former customers, and the Seabees soon had a well equipped machine shop. More equipment was scrounged from the aircraft carrier Enterprise in retrun for repair jobs. Before long the Seabees were taking in repair work from the Army and Marines, and were even repairing airplanes.

Lacking a replacement for a blown out bulldozer head gasket, Seabees in the Ellice Islands fashioned a replacement from thin sheets of metal and paper, and quickly put the 'dozer back into service. A Seabee chief on Samoa manufactured a replacement condenser out of waxed paper, tinfoil from cigarette packages, and an old beer can in order to keep one piece of equipment operating. On Guadalcanal another Seabee petty officer kept captured Japanese trucks in operation by improvising replacement radiators out of metal ammo boxes, a method that was soon being used all over the Pacific. Other Seabees learned how to keep tractors runnings by mounting fuel drums in place of smashed radiators.

The 55-gallon fuel drum, as a matter of fact, proved to be one of the most useful of Seabee construction materials. With the ends cut out and welded together, thousands of drums were converted into culverts. Split down the side and flattened, they made excellent roofing material. One group of Seabees even manufactured a sightseeing canoe from fuel drums.

Worn out tires that would no longer hold inner tubes were kept in service by filling them with a mixture of palm tree sawdust and cement. Beer and Coke bottles were used as insulators for power and telephone lines. Seabees learned how to make replacement watch crystals out of plexiglass from wrecked planes, devised a method of welding broken dental plates with a mixture of ground rubber and cement, and one Seabee machinist even manufactured a pair of silver stars from two quarters for a newly promoted general. Other Seabees made extra money during off-duty hours by manufacturing fake Japanese battle souvenirs and native jewelry for sale to gullible new arrivals.

Perhaps the best-known of all stories of Seabee ingenuity, however, is that of a first class petty officer named Aurelio Tassone, who converted a bulldozer into a piece of combat equipment during the Treasury Islands campaign in 1943. Coming ashore on his bulldozer, Tassone found that a Japanese pillbox was holding up the advance. While a Seabee lieutenant provided covering fire with a carbine, Tassone raised his blade as a shield against enemy fire and advanced on the pillbox. At the last minute Tassone dropped the blade and demolished the emplacement.

SEABEES' MAGIC BOX

Probably the least glamorous in appearance of all the new "weapons" that helped the U.S. to win World War II was the lowly steel pontoon — the Seabees' "magic box" — that became an indispensable tool of a hundred purposes for the U.S. Navy's mighty amphibious forces.

Civil Engineer Corps planning as early as 1936 had forseen a need for a variety of barges, small yard craft, and other miscellaneous floating equipment in the event of a major amphibious war in the Pacific. By 1940 a CEC captain, John N. Laycock, had set to work in earnest developing his ideas for a standardized steel pontoon that could be assembled into an almost endless variety of floating equipment. By early 1941 the first experimental pontoons had been successfully tested and soon thousands of them were in production.

The basic pontoon was little more than a steel box five by seven by five feet. The real key to its versatility was the system of heavy steel angles and special hardware, or "jewelry," developed by CAPT Laycock which permitted the pontoons to be assembled in a wide variety of arrangements. Strings of pontoons were assembled for use as barges or piers, and with the addition of a specially developed outboard propulsion unit, the amphibous Seabees had a self-propelled barge or a warping tug for work around a harbor or beachhead. Cranes, pile drivers, dredges, and almost any other kind of equipment for waterfront work could be mounted on a pontoon barge. Arranged as a barge with pontoon walls on each side, and equipped with the necessary piping and pumping equipment, a batch of pontoons could be assembled as a floating drydock for PT boats and other small craft.

Seabees, of course, found many more uses for the versatile pontoons than those envisioned by its designers. Many saw service as fuel and water tanks, and a pontoon with the addition of a little piping could be mounted on a flat bed truck to make a water distributor. With the addition of a door a pontoon made a fine paint or gear locker. A Seabee cook in the Russell Islands even converted a pair of the pontoons into an oven and grill.

The pontoon really came into its own, however, in the Allies' 1943 landings in Sicily. The Navy's versatile LST had been designed to approach a steeply sloping beach, drop its ramp, and disgorge its load of tanks and other vehicles directly onto the shore. Since they assumed the LST's and other large landing craft couldn't get close enough to make a landing on the shallow sloping beaches along much of the southern shore of Sicily, the Germans had installed only relatively light defenses.

The ingenious CAPT Laycock, however, had already gone to work on a new use for his versatile pontoons. Special hardware and fittings were devised that permitted assembly of the pontoons in long two-pontoon wide causeway sections, which were hung on the sides of the LST's. As the landing ships approached the shore the causeway sections were cut loose, dropped into the water, and their momentum carried them into the beach. The intrepid amphibious Seabee crews that rode the pontoons quickly connected the causeway sections, the LST's were "married" to the outer end, and in a matter of minutes vehicles were rolling ashore.

First used in the Sicily landings, where causeways over 300-feet long were employed to land allied forces where they weren't expected, the new pontoon adaptation was a major factor in the success of the operation, and for the remainder of the war the LST-pontoon causeway combination was used in almost every major amphibious assault.

Even today, a quarter of a century after its development, the versatile pontoon remains as a workhorse of the amphibious Seabees. Only last May, when MCB-10 and Marine Corps forces landed at Chu Lai, Republic of Vietnam, their equipment and supplies went ashore over the familiar pontoon causeways.

"RHINOS" IN OPERATION OVERLORD

Among the difficult problems faced by planners of "Operation Overlord," the great Allied invasion of Normandy in 1944, was one presented by the character of the beaches where the landings were to take place. At both Utah Beach and Omaha Beach, where the U.S. forces were to land, the slope of the beaches was unusually flat, and the water line moved up or down the beach a half mile or more as the tide rose or fell. Just off the shore and running parallel to the beach, sandbars—whose position shifted constantly with the tide or storm conditions—presented still another problem.

Because of these positions, it would have been almost impossible to use LST's or other amphibious craft in the usual man-

ner. Landings could have been made at high tide, but unless the vessels were quickly unloaded, the rapidly receding tide might leave them stranded high and dry on the beach, exposed to German attack until the tide came back in and refloated them. If landings were made at low tide the vessels would ground on the sandbars, leaving troops and vehicles with deep water between them and the shore. Even if they were able to get past this obstacle, the inrushing tide might overtake them before they could get all the way up the beach.

Under these conditions even the Seabees' famous pontoon causeways, first used the year before in Sicily, would have been unable to bridge the gap between ships and shore. The Civil Engineer Corps' CAPT John Laycock, who had originally developed both the pontoons themselves and the pontoon causeways, quickly came up with still another variation of the Seabees' "magic box" to solve the problem of the Normandy beaches.

One hundred-eighty of the pontoons were assembled into a huge ferry barge, six pontoons wide and thirty pontoons long, powered by two of the large outboard motors developed for use with smaller pontoon barges. A specially developed loading and unloading ramp was placed at one end. Big enough to take half an LST load of supplies and equipment, the pontoon ferries were designed to "marry" an LST safely anchored in deep water. As soon as the ferry was loaded it cast off and headed for the beach under its own power. With its shallow draft the pontoon ferry could easily get over the treacherous sandbars to the beach. Only two trips were needed to unload an LST, and then the ferry proceeded to unload another ship.

To a naval aviator, who happened to fly over one of the first experimental models at Quonset, R.I., the Seabees' pontoon ferry looked more like a rhinoceros than anything else, so before long, "rhino ferry" became their unofficial name.

As the great Normandy invasion grew nearer, Seabees of the 81st and 111th Construction Battalions worked in British shipyards to assemble their rhino ferry fleet, and as soon as they were completed, they took them to sea to practice the tricky job of "marrying" them to LSTs and transferring cargo.

On June 5, 1944, the day before D-Day in Normandy, the rhino ferries and their Seabee crews headed out to sea for the journey to France, each of them on a 300-foot towline behind an LST. Early on D-Day morning the LSTs and the rhinos were off the beaches at Omaha and Utah. Unexpected heavy seas made the task of joining the ferries to the LSTs almost impossible, but after several hours of effort the job was finally completed and the rhinos were on the way to the beaches. It was close to noon before the first rhinos reached the beach, only to discover that the Germans had planted mines and obstacles all along the beaches that made it almost impossible to land. A few got ashore that day, but many of the Seabee crews had to wait offshore with their ferries for a day and a half or more before demolition teams were able to clear the beaches so they could land.

Throughout the first days of the Normandy invasion, despite the hazards of severe weather, mines, and German gunfire, the Seabees and their rhino ferries shuttled between the invasion fleet and the beaches, landing thousands of trucks, tanks, and other vehicles, and tons of the supplies that sustained the American armies ashore.

THE GREAT B-29 BASE ON TINIAN

By the summer of 1944, advancing U.S. Forces in the Pacific War against Japan had reached the Marianas Islands, 4,000 miles west of Hawaii and less than 2,000 miles from Japan itself. On June 15, the Marines hit the beaches at Saipan. On July 21, they began the invasion of Guam, and only three days later the same Marines that had taken Saipan were swarming ashore on Tinian.

Even before the Marines had officially secured Tinian, Seabees began landing to work on their biggest single job of the entire war—constructing the world's largest air base for the Army Air Corps' B-29 "Superfortress" bombers that would soon begin carrying the war to the Japanese homeland. Tinian, 12 miles long, six miles wide, and fairly flat, provided a good airfield site that placed the new B-29's within range of Japan for the first time.

To support the huge B-29 fleet that was to operate from Tinian the Seabees built six runways, each a mile and a half long. Four were built at North Field, together with 11 miles of connecting taxiway and hardstands for 265 planes. At West Field, an 18-mile taxiway network and 361 hardstands were built to support the remaining two bomber runways, as well as two smaller airstrips. In addition to the airfield facilities themselves, the Seabees constructed nearly a thousand buildings, miles of roads, fuel and ammunition storage, and utility systems for the Tinian base.

To carry out the huge construction task, the Navy organized the Sixth Construction Brigade, made up of three Construction Regiments, each of which in turn was made up of several battalions. Altogether some 15,000 Seabees were involved in the Tinian work. The fleet of well over 1,500 pieces of heavy construction equipment assembled for the job included almost 800 trucks, 173 scrapers, 160 tractors and bulldozers, 60 graders, and 80 power shovels.

Working in two ten-hour shifts daily, the Seabees built the world's largest air base in record time. Although much of the terrain was reasonably level, in places the bomber runways required cuts as deep as 15 feet and fills 30 to 40 feet high. By the time the job was done the Seabees had moved more than 11 million cubic yards of earth and coral.

Removal of coral "heads" from the runway sites and quarrying of coral for runway surfacing consumed an average of 12 tons of dynamite and 4,800 blasting caps a day. Maintenance crews worked around the clock to keep equipment going despite the ravages of coral dust that wore out moving parts in a fraction of the usual time. Twenty-four welding crews were required just to repair the damage done to power shovels, bulldozers and scrapers by the hard coral.

Except for one runway, which took 73 days to build, none of the B-29 runways took over 53 days to complete, and the entire base was completed in less than a year. Only a few months after the Seabees first started work the Army's B-29 fleet began striking at Japan from the Tinian base. The biggest Seabee job of the war had played a vital part in launching the great bombing raids that speeded victory in the Pacific War.

CUBI POINT

By far the largest peacetime job ever undertaken by the Navy's Seabees was the construction of a major base for the U. S. Seventh Fleet at Cubi Point, on Subic Bay in the Philippine Islands. Required to support the growing U. S. commitments in the Far East, the Cubi Point base was started at the height of the Korean War in 1951.

Overall direction of the project was in the hands of the 30th Naval Construction Regiment, which was set up at Cubi in September 1951. During the next two years the arrival of Mobile Construction Battalions 2, 3, 5, 9 and 11 brought the Cubi Point construction force to a total of some 3,000 Seabees.

Working as many as three shifts a day, six days a week, the Seabees spent five years converting Cubi Point's jungle and mountains into a modern base for Seventh Fleet carriers. Huge trees, sometimes as much as a hundred and fifty feet tall and six to eight feet in diameter had to be blasted out of the way; swamps filled, and even a native village relocated.

A huge hill was removed and Cubi Point itself widened to accomodate the base's airfield. One battalion was given the task of removing 85 feet from the top of a mountain to provide a safe approach to the runway. Over 200,000 cubic yards of rock and earth were moved in the process.

Once the airfield was done the Seabees built roads, piers, shops, ammunition storage, and barracks to complete the base. By the time the great project was done it was estimated that 20 million manhours of Seabee labor had gone into the building of the Cubi Point base, and that a greater volume of earth had been moved than in the digging of the Panama Canal.

At Cubi Point the Seabees built a major new base for the Navy, but perhaps even more important the project provided a priceless opportunity to develop construction skills and leadership qualities in a whole new postwar generation of Seabees. Hundreds of Seabees who first learned their skills at Cubi Point still serve on active duty. Now senior petty officers and chief petty officers, they provide the indispensable background of experience needed to guide and train the young Seabees of the 1960's.

SEABEES ON THE ICE

This year's 1966-67 Operation Deep Freeze marks the beginning of a second decade of Seabee participation in the continuing U. S. program of scientific study and exploration of the Antarctic continent.

Seabees first landed on Antarctica in 1947 as part of the Navy's Operation High Jump expedition led by RADM Richard E. Byrd. Seabee work in this first post-World War II Antarctic expedition included unloading of supplies and equipment and the construction of new facilities near Byrd's 1939-40 Little America base.

Although Operation High Jump lasted only a few months, the Seabees and the Navy returned to the ice to stay in 1955 when the U.S. began constructing permanent scientific outposts in the Antarctic. The Seabees of the first Operation Deep Freeze, as it was called, were part of the newly formed Mobile Construction Battalion (Special) organized at Davisville. Rhode Island and specially trained in cold weather operations. Their Deep Freeze missison included hauling of supplies by tractor and sled across the ice, construction of camp facilities at Little America and McMurdo Station, and construction of a ski-plane airstrip on the ice of McMurdo Sound.

Among a "wintering over" party from the first Deep Freeze II, were nearly 200 Seabees, whose tasks included support of the scientific program and construction of a 6,000 foot ice runway on McMurdo Sound. Working throughout the Antarctic winter in temperatures that often fell to 65 degrees or more below zero, and despite a fierce three-day blizzard that once destroyed the entire project, the Seabees had the new runway ready for arrival of a Deep Freeze II advance party by air from New Zealand in October 1956.

Before the end of October, RADM Dufek, Commander of Deep Freeze II, took off from the Seabees' ice runway to become the first explorer ever to land at the South Pole by plane. A few weeks later, Seabees, sled dogs, construction materials, and equipment followed the admiral to the Pole to commence construction of a permanent camp at South Pole Station.

In the nearly ten years since the first Deep Freeze expeditions, thousands of Seabees have continued to work at Anartica, building roads, runways and buildings at the American stations on the frozen continent.

In 1962, a milestone in the use of nuclear energy was achieved when the first of several nuclear reactors began to produce electric power and heat, and to distill fresh water, at McMurdo Station. Operating the reactors were crews made up largely of specially trained Seabees.

Although the climatic environment and much of the materials and equipment they work with have been far different from those normally encountered by Seabees, their traditional qualities of ingenuity, skill, energy, and endurance have enabled the Navy's Seabees to establish a distinguished, and still growing, reputation for their many achievements on the Anarctic ice.

SEABEE TEAMS

An important new part of the Seabee tradition in recent years has been the several types of Seabee Teams, which have proven a valuable addition to U.S. programs aimed at strengthening the free world by helping the people of underdeveloped nations help themselves.

Utilizing the construction skills of carefully selected men, Seabee Teams have been deployed to locations as widespread as Southeast Asia, South America and Africa, where their skills have been employed in a wide variety of "civic action" construction missions aimed at improving the living conditions of the people of other nations.

Even more important than the work they have done themselves, the Seabee Teams have helped to train people of these countries in modern construction methods so that they themselves can continue to improve their own living conditions long after departure of the Seabee Teams.

Although Seabees have always been eager to lend a helping hand wherever they have been, the formal Seabee Team program was not born until 1960, when an Atlantic Seabee detachment was deployed to Haiti. Their mission was the construction of a road, causeway, and pontoon bridge at Lake Miragoane, Haiti, when flooding of the lake threatened to isolate the southern tip of the island.

Soon after this first venture, other Seabee Teams were sent on a regular basis to other countries for similar missions. Since 1960 Atlantic Seabee Teams have deployed to such countries as Chile, Costa Rica, Santo Domingo, Liberia, the Republic of Chad and the Central African Republic, where they have built farm-to-market roads, taught construction skills, and engaged in disaster relief work.

Since January 1963, teams from the Pacific Seabees have been deploying to Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam, where they have engaged in a wide variety of rural development work, including road, bridge, and school construction. Several teams deployed to the Republic of Vietnam have been engaged in construction of Special Forces camps. One team, Seabee Team 1104, was constructing such a camp when it participated in the heroic defense of Dong Xoai against a heavy Viet Cong attack last June.

In addition to the normal 13-man teams, other special teams from the Pacific battalions have performed similar work in Southeast Asia. Well-drilling teams have helped provide pure water supplies to rural villages in Vietnam, and EO/CM teams have helped in a rural road building program in Northeast Thailand.

RADM J. R. Davis, former Commander of the Pacific Seabees, recently expressed the comment of the U. S. ambassador to Thailand that no other U. S. aid program has accomplished as much in proportion to its cost as has the Seabee Team program.

Thus, in a few short years, the Seabee Teams have become a proud — and continuing — part of the Seabee story.

A NEW CHAPTER

In the spring of 1965, as the U. S. increased its commitment of military forces in support of the war against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, the Seabees were once again called upon to provide construction support to Navy and Marine Corps forces in a combat area. Not since World War II had the Seabees been committed on such a large scale in support of combat operations.

MCB-10, then deployed on Okinawa as the Pacific "alert battalion", was the first to go. Late in April MCB-10 commenced

its mount-out, and within less than ten days the entire battalion, its equipment and supplies, and aluminum matting to construct an 8,000-foot expeditionary airfield, were embarked on amphibious force ships of the U. S. Seventh Fleet.

Early on the morning of May 7, in one of the largest operations of its kind since the Korean War, Marines came ashore in a coordinated amphibious landing to occupy the Chu Lai site. The Seabees of MCB-10 were right behind them with their equipment and supplies to set up a camp and begin work on the Chu Lai runway. In only 21 days time, high performance Marine jets were flying strikes against the Viet Cong from the Seabee-built airfield. During the remainder of its Chu Lai deployment MCB-10 continued to expand and improve the airfield, and constructed a wide variety of roads, cantonments, and other facilities in support of units of the Third Marine Amphibious Force operating in the Chu Lai sector.

MCB-3, deployed on Guam as the Pacific "back-up battalion", was the next to leave for Vietnam. Preceeded by an advance party, which started work on a battalion camp at the base of Hill 327 at DaNang, MCB-3 mounted out from Guam in May and commenced construction work at DaNang by the end of the month. Chief among Three's projects was the rebuilding of a road leading to the Marine missile site on Hill 327.

MCB-9, deploying from Port Hueneme early in June, was the third battalion to arrive in Vietnam. Establishing its camp next to the South China Sea at DaNang East, Nine immediately started work on a wide variety of projects, chief among them a large Naval Hospital and an extremely difficult road to a missile site on Monkey Mountain, in DaNang Bay.

In order to coordinate mobile construction battalion work in Vietnam, the 30th Naval Construction Regiment, inactive since the Cubi Point project in the early 1950's, was reestablished at DaNang in May. Initially, the regiment was under the command of CAPT Harold F. Liberty. The current commander is CAPT Nelson R. Anderson.

Seabee strength in Vietnam was increased to four battalions in September, when MCB-8, previously an Atlantic battalion, moved to Port Hueneme and almost immediately deployed to DaNang, where it commenced work on port facilities and other projects.

MCB-5 became the fourth Pacific battalion to deploy to Vietnam in September when it relieved MCB-3 at DaNang. A second Atlantic battalion, MCB-4, moved its home port to Port Hueneme in November, and deployed to Chu Lai a month later to relieve MCB-10. Most recently, MCB-11 deployed to DaNang early in February to relieve MCB-9.

The large scale commitment of Seabees to the war in Vietnam has proven the value of the long, hard peacetime deployments and the continuing emphasis on training, mobility, and self-sufficiency characteristic of the Navy's mobile construction battalions. For each of the seven battalions that have thus taken part in the Southeast Asian conflict has shown the same capability to deploy to a new location, establish itself, and commence production construction with a speed, effectiveness, and flexibility unmatched by any other military engineering unit.

With Seabees in demand as never before since World War II the Navy has commenced a broad build-up of the naval construction force. Each of the ten original battalions has been increased in its officer and enlisted complement and early this year the Navy Department announced the formation of four new battalions at Davisville, Rhode Island. MCB-40 was formally commissioned on Feb. 1, with MCB's 58, 62, and 133 to follow during the next few months.

Clearly, as General Douglas MacArthur wrote to ADM Ben Moreell during World War II, "the only trouble with your Seabees is that you don't have enough of them!"

About the Author

"The Seabee Tradition" is adapted from a series of articles highlighting Seabee accomplishments originally published in the MCB-11 Stinger during 1965.

The author, LCDR William D. Middleton, has been executive officer of MCB-11 since August 1964, and is presently deployed with the battalion at DaNang. His previous naval service includes assignments at Port Lyautey, Morocco; at NAS Minneapolis; as civil engineering adviser to the Turkish Navy on the staff of the U.S. military mission to Turkey; and as planning officer at PWC Norfolk.

During a period of inactive duty he was employed as a structural engineer with firms in California and Wisconsin, and as a bridge designer with the Wisconsin State Highway Commission.

In addition to his engineering duties, LCDR Middleton has long been active as a writer. He has written numerous articles for newspapers and magazines, among them American Heritage, and is the author of two published books of railway history, with a third due for publication later this year.

He received a bachelor of civil engineering degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1950 and later did graduate work in the engineering and journalism schools at the University of Wisconsin.

His wife Dorothy and sons William and Nicholas currently reside at 1061-A Guadalcanal Street on the Center.

SEABEE COVERALL

PRIDE OF THE PACIFIC SEABEES

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