

CIVIL ENGINEER CORPS
100TH ANNIVERSARY
MARCH 2, 1967

UNITED STATES NAVY CONSTRUCTION BATTALIONS



SEABEES
25TH ANNIVERSARY
MARCH 5, 1967

SEABEES IN ACTION

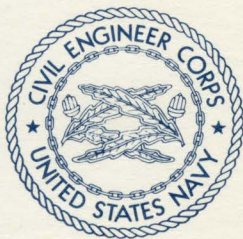
**"Heroes, hell,
We're construction men!"**

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U. S. NAVY CONSTRUCTION BATTALIONS
"CONSTRUIMUS, BATUIMUS · WE BUILD, WE FIGHT"

"CAN DO!"



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BLOODY BAPTISM WHILE BUILDING

Viet Seabees Retrain

By **TED THACKREY JR.**
 Herald-Examiner Staff Writer

PORT HUENEME, June 4—Here's a word of warning: If you happen to visit the Navy's Construction Battalion Center here, and run across a man from the Ninth Seabee Battalion, you can talk to him all you want — but don't call him a hero.

He won't like it . . .
 The Ninth returned three months ago from a bloody eight-month tour of duty at Da Nang, South Viet Nam.

They were the first Seabee battalion since World War II to come under direct attack from an armed enemy, and they brought

back a "most outstanding" unit citation as well as one Silver Star, a Legion of Merit, seven Bronze Stars, seven Navy Commendation Medals . . . and 109 Purple Hearts.

"But now we're getting ready to go back," said Capt. Richard E. Anderson,

USN, commanding officer of the Ninth. "There's no time for telling ourselves how good we were.

"That was then. This is now. This outfit's got a long way to go before it'll be ready for a combat zone again."

He should know.



Builders But Will Also Fight

That Silver Star, the Legion of Merit — and one of those Purple Hearts — belong to him. He also holds the 1965 Morrell Medal of the Society of American Military Engineers for his outfit's achievements at De Nang.

"Heroes, hell," he said quietly. "We're construction men. Builders, not line troops. We'll fight if we have to, sure. And, especially in a place like Viet Nam, we'll probably have to.

"But the main job is building; that's why the Seabees were formed in the first place, and that's still our principal mission."

First Taste of Guerrilla War

Of course, the Seabees have always been first-rate builders. They first proved their abilities at Guadalcanal, where they kept runways open at Henderson field despite repeated Japanese air attacks.

They provided the floating drydocks that made possible the Sicily and Normandy landings, and have built bases all the way from Tinian to Antarctica.

Viet Nam, however, was their first experience in actual guerrilla warfare — and an expensive lesson.

The Ninth Battalion was the third Seabee outfit of its size to reach Viet Nam. It moved in at Da Nang East, last June 27. Within hours, men and machines were at work on a missile site nearly four miles up a weird peak called Monkey Mountain which was made up almost exclusively of dense jungle and high cliffs.

They got that job done a month ahead of schedule, and had just completed their other big project, a full-scale Naval Hospital for combat casualties on Oct. 28, when the Viet Cong hit them.

Eight of the hospital buildings were destroyed by demolition charges and the 500-man outfit took 90 casualties within an hour.

But the hospital was rebuilt within two months, and ready for patients again.

Just a week later, there was another attack by the Cong. A total of 13 mortar rounds were exploded inside the camp's perimeter and another eight men wounded, including Capt. Anderson.

That didn't stop them, either.

They repaired damages there "with the left hand" while building a Marine base at Marble Mountain. And the whole area was shipshape when the 11th Battalion arrived to take over operations at the end of January.

"We were tired when we got home," admitted Steelworker First Class David Lancaster, 31, of Spartanburg, S.C. "But it wasn't the end of anything. It was just the beginning."

The troops got some leave, and then the retraining process began.

First came replacements. The Seabee battalions have been increased in strength from 500 to more than 700 men, which means about 40 per cent of the Ninth is now made up of youngsters fresh out of boot camp, plus a few old-hands returned from civilian life.

Those who have construction experience receive ratings in accordance with that experience. Those who have none go to special schools here at the Construction Battalion Center.

Field Problems Like Infantry

Military training comes second — but a very big second, indeed.

This week, the battalion has been deployed at Conejo Brade on overnight bivouac. Their field problem is strictly infantry: Find and destroy an "aggressor"

guerrilla force made up of combat veterans operating against them in the hills.

The "aggressors" are Seabees, too, of course. But they wear special uniforms and carry nonstandard weapons. And their tactics are copied from the Viet Cong, against which the battalion will be operating again before the year is out.

"Some of the kids were a little skittish at first," said Equipment Operator First Class Gus Meilleur, 38, of New Orleans, La. Meilleur is one of the "aggressors" who ambushed a truck on the road up the grade — and blew off a front wheel — in the opening maneuver.

"But they'll settle down. Now, and later when we go down to Camp Pendleton for extra training with the Marines at their Infantry School there. They'll be fine by the time they get to Viet Nam. They always are."

Capt. Anderson listened without comment.

Return by Air During August

"The teamwork training for the construction jobs to which we'll be assigned comes later," he said, "and it's got to be done before August. That's when we go back . . ."

This time the battalion will go by air to the combat zone, instead of riding a ship transport as they did last year. They can be manning machines in Viet Nam just one day after they shove off from Hueneme.

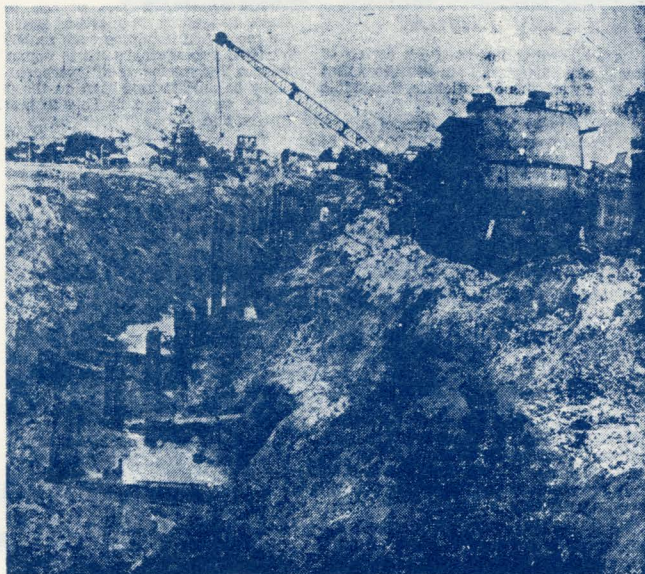
"And that's what they will do," the commanding officer said. "All we want is to get the job done. If we can do it without a fire fight, we'll do it. If not fight, we'll do it. If not . . ."

He looked up the hill where Able Company was dealing handily with a simulated Viet Cong attack by "aggressors." The men, veterans and newcomers alike, seemed to be working well together. He nodded thoughtfully.

"Heroes, hell . . ."



Although their main job is building, Seabees must learn how to fight. In a simulated battle, men of Ninth Seabee Battalion, background, come out of the dust in the wake of a smoke bomb, to attack Viet Cong "guerrillas" in foreground.

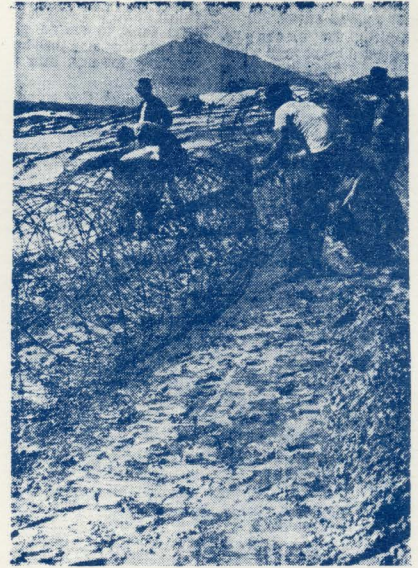


A 1700-foot quay wall was built in Da Nang. The Ninth was the first Seabee battalion since World War II to come under direct attack from an armed enemy. It was named a "most outstanding" unit.

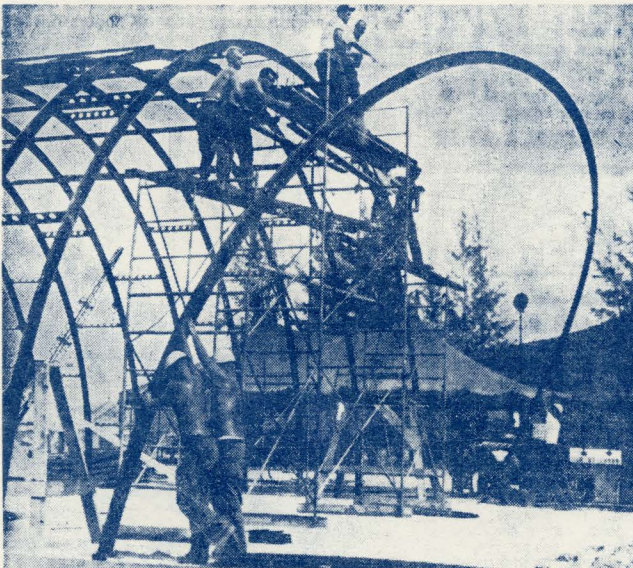


The Ninth Seabee Battalion returned three months ago from a bloody eight-month tour of duty at Da Nang, South Viet Nam. During their tour there, the Seabees were frequently attacked by Viet Cong

A scene of wreckage after their camp near East Da Nang was hit by Viet Cong mortar and small arms fire.

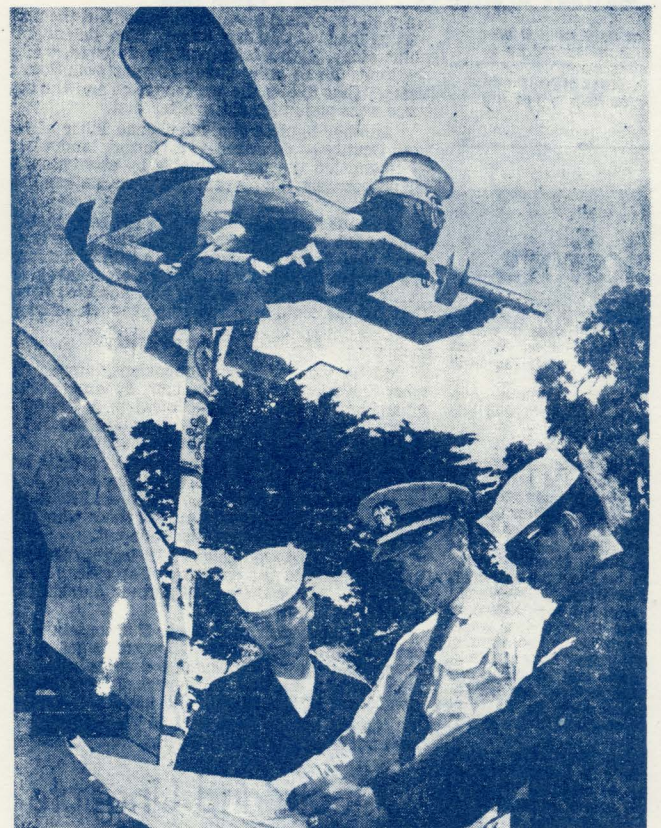


Members of Ninth Seabee Battalion build barbed wire around their camp in Da Nang. The unit is expected to return to Viet Nam in August.



Seabees are shown raising the steel framing of an "elephant hut" in Viet Nam. This building was used as

a supply warehouse. They constructed a missile site, a Naval hospital and other structures.



Standing under the famous insignia of Seabees, Lt. Comdr. Ben W. Morris, center, and two construction

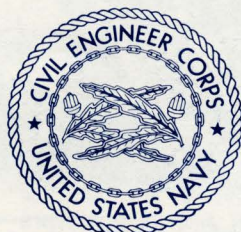
—Herald-Examiner Photo by LOU MACK apprentices, Joseph Pillar, 19, left, and Carl Nickens, 20, look over blueprints of new projects.

The United States Navy Seabees warmly thank THE LOS ANGELES HERALD-EXAMINER for permission to reprint this exclusive story.

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