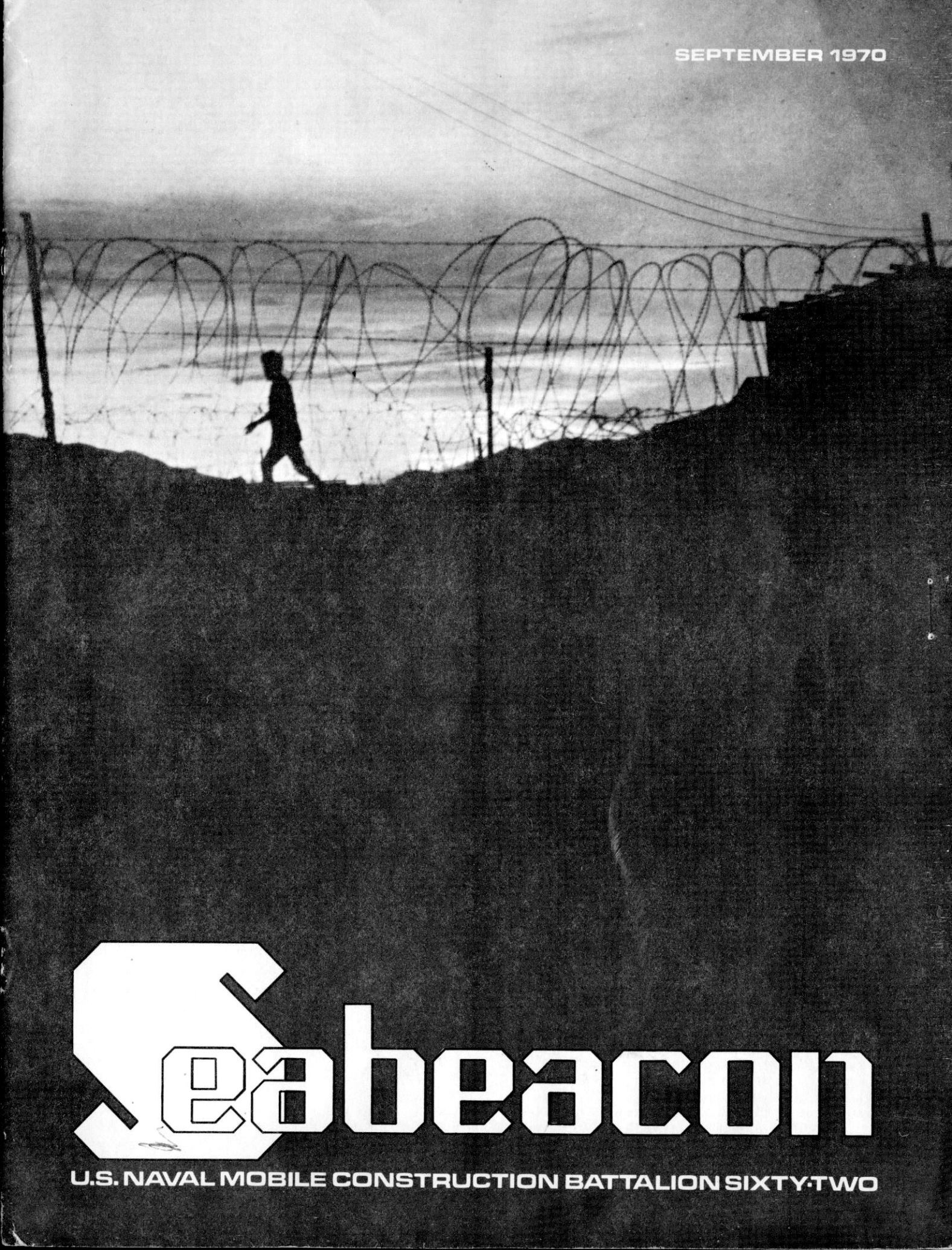


SEPTEMBER 1970



eabeacon

U.S. NAVAL MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALION SIXTY-TWO

View from the bridge



CDR NEWCOMB

I'm sure that at least once during this deployment each of you has asked the question "What good are we doing here?" or "Is all our effort really worthwhile?" I am by no means a student of the strategy of the Vietnam War. However, I am fortunate enough to have been one of the few Civil Engineer Corps officers who became involved during the early months of the U.S. buildup in March 1968. Since then I have spent the better part of three years traveling to Vietnam and observing U.S. operations in every corner of the countryside. With this background I would like to share with you my thoughts and observations on the Seabee contribution to this effort.

When I first came to Vietnam in March 1965 there were only about 16,000 U.S. military personnel in country. Travel from point to point was really only safe by helicopter or fixed wing aircraft. Little of the country outside the perimeter wire of U.S. and ARVN bases and compounds could be considered secure. The Vietnamese people were quite restricted in their travels because of Viet

Cong road blocks and road interdiction. Farm to market transportation was limited to small areas usually within an individual district.

We are all cognizant of the massive U.S. buildup during the past five years and the massive construction program which it necessitated. The Seabees played a major role in this construction program -- especially here in the First Military Region. While the construction of military bases and facilities for U.S. Marines and Vietnamese military forces have had a significant contribution to the conduct of the war, I believe that other construction programs have a much larger and more significant impact in the long run.

I refer to the construction of the vital routes of communications -- and the primary and secondary roads. The ports and harbor facilities constructed by the Seabees at Danang, Chu Lai and Cau Viet will be available for use by the Vietnamese after the cessation of hostilities and hopefully will form the nucleus of an inter-coastal commerce system which will assist the Republic of Vietnam to establish a sound viable economy during the post war years.

Even closer to the experience of the men of SIXTY-TWO, is the construction of primary and secondary roads in the First Military Region. For the past two deployments NMCB 62 has been engaged in the construction of roads and bridges required initially for tactical reasons to permit greater mobility of troops and equipment. The peacetime value of these roads to the Republic of Vietnam is of inestimable value. The opening up of the country side to farm to market travel will permit the sharing of agricultural produce from north to south throughout the country. Such commercial travel will also tend to knit the varied populace of the country into a single national entity.

Finally the road construction programs -- especially the construction of LTL-4 this deployment will permit the Vietnamese people to return to their native homesites and resettle in their ancestral homes.

Five and one half years ago the once fertile valley of the Thu Bon/Cau Lau rivers was abandoned by the Vietnamese people. Viet Cong occupation and seizure of control of the valley had forced the loyal Vietnamese inhabitants to flee, leaving the "rice bowl" of the First Military region to lie fallow, overgrown with weeds and non-productive vegetation.

Recently I called upon the Quang Nam Province Chief. During our discussions he repeatedly stressed the importance of the road and the high level interest in the Vietnamese Government in the progress of construction of LTL-4. The top priority project in the First Military Region related to the pacification program is the construction of LTL-4.

Once the road is complete and paved, the Vietnamese people can return to their birthplaces and establish new villages and hamlets and grow their crops in that fertile valley. Within the past few days, while we have engaged in punching the road through the last mile to QL-1, the Vietnamese have been traveling down the road to the west about 3 miles from Route 1 to stake out plots for the first resettlement village.

Every man in SIXTY-TWO can take justifiable pride in his contribution to this program. Certainly the men of Alfa and Charlie Companies have had direct involvement but each and every man in the battalion has made a contribution. The cooks, bakers, storekeepers, mechanics etc. have all contributed through the working of long hard hours to support the cutting edge of the battalion.

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On the cover

VIETNAM IN PROFILE--A lone youthful figure silhouetted with barriers of concertina wire against an early morning Vietnam skyline presents a strong symbolism to the mood of a country struggling for survival.

◀ SHEEP'S FOOT--Alfa company's wheels continue to roll on Rt LTL-4. One of MCB 62's major projects, it nears completion after five months of steady progression.

Seabeacon

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From the XO's desk



LCDR GERDEL

The past few months have seen an infusion of new ideas in the Naval establishment which are all oriented towards providing a service more attractive to all members without detracting from operational capabilities. For the last several years the Navy has been making a concentrated effort to review procedures and requirements which are unnecessary and degrading. The formation of the Master Chief of the Navy billet and the continuing review of "chicken regulations" are just two examples.

The new Chief of Naval Operations, ADM Zumwalt, has taken a dynamic interest in re-emphasizing the Navy's basic asset, its people. As a result, positive policies are being made and the initiation of action to implement these policies is being directed. I would like to utilize this month's column to discuss some of the more important and general interest programs that have been promulgated in the past two months by what is now becoming famous in Navy jargon as "Z-Gramps."

Of major concern to the young Navyman today is his personal appearance and dress in maintaining an equal sta-

tus with his contemporaries outside the military establishment. Recent directives have established the allowing of growing sideburns to the top of the ear lobe, permission to grow beards when command feels it will not interfere with the mission (sanitary conditions, facial wound possibilities, gas mask fitting capability) and considerable lessening of the restraints on the wearing of civilian clothing.

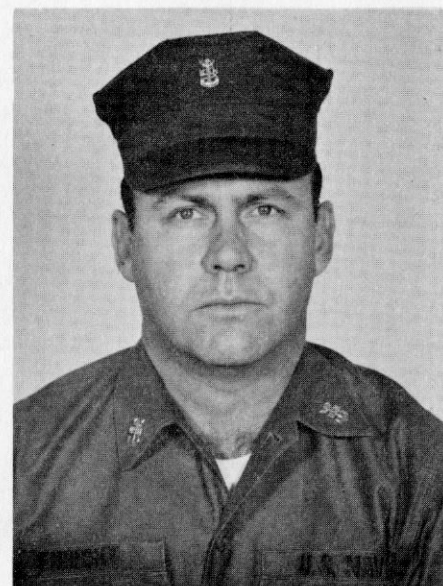
A program is presently underway to test the feasibility of allowing E-6's to maintain civilian clothing aboard ship for liberty calls. All shore stations have been directed to allow appropriate civilian attire aboard the base during non-working and duty hours including allowing civilian attire for the evening and weekend meals. In addition, no restraints or arbitrary standard of taste will be set for what men wear while off the station or ship.

In the personnel area, it has been reiterated that 30 days leave will be granted to all officers and enlisted men on PCS moves. The exceptions shall be rare. The sponsor program has been expanded to include all stateside moves. For those desiring the service, another Navyman will now be assigned to assist an incoming man and/or his family to make the move as smoothly as possible. Advancements, a subject dear to everyone, have also received some modifications with the announcement of the meritorious advancement program. The mechanics and authorization for this program had always existed but were not being fully utilized. Superior performing E-5 and E-6 petty officers who have trouble passing the advancement exam but continually provide superlative performance and potential will now be considered for promotion when recommended by their C.O.

Duty swaps have long been a mystery to some personnel be-

MCPO's pen

We have now reached the part of the deployment that all of us have been waiting for ever since we left Gulfport. The orders are starting to come in, the homeport training staff has already gone back, the advance party is ready to leave. So now we know that another long deployment is almost over, and soon we will be back with our friends and families. I'd like to take time to reflect back over this deployment. This has been a very interesting deployment -- we have had a wide variety of jobs assigned to us throughout Vietnam and we have accomplished them in record



EQCM ENRIGHT

cause of the difficulty of locating a person who would be willing to swap. A central, computerized service is being established at the Bureau of Naval Personnel which will allow qualified personnel to submit their swap request and match it up against someone desiring his duty area. The Navy is also instituting a program of obtaining charter aircraft for which dependents would purchase air fare at less than normal commercial fare and

(Continued of page 11)

time doing real quality work. Projects like the Go Noi Bridge, Route 4, Chau Doc and Tan Chau, to name a few, are lasting things that we can all be proud of.

Some of the most important work though has been done right here in Camp Haskins, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all our Headquarters Company for the outstanding job they've done. Our galley is the finest in Vietnam, as can be attested to by the large number of outsiders that drive over here to get a decent meal. All of you four hundred men getting released from active duty upon our return to home-port owe a special thank you to the personnel and disbursing offices for the tremendous amount of work that they have done in order for you to get discharged in a matter of hours after our arrival, instead of having to wait a week to ten days. The fine job done by our laundry has been commented on by all the other units. We have more pressed greens here than any other unit in country.

These are the things that make a successful deployment, and, as I said earlier, this is one that we can all be proud of.

I'd like to direct a few words to you "short-timers," the ones who will be getting out soon. First of all, I'd like to say that the battalion appreciates the fine job that you have done for NMCB-62, and that we'd be glad to have you stay in and go on the next deployment with us. But, as we all know, everybody is not suited for a career in the service, and we hope you do as well in civilian life as you've done here with us. For the ones of you who are thinking about making a career, don't wait too long, because under the new Navy directive, once you're out, it's going to take special approval from the Chief of Naval Personnel to get back in.

Let's keep up the good safety record we have.

Chaplains Column

When extranged from the familiar we make every effort to re-establish or to acquire a position more to our liking.

Only as approaches to the familiar are cut off do we make adjustments to establish a new position of thought to gain physical comfort.

Once a young man was directed to me for marriage counseling. He had experienced a few months of relative happiness in marriage prior to military service, and due to the draft, came into the Navy for two years. After a year's enlistment, with frequent separations, his wife announced, "Give me a divorce!" There were no reasons which the service member could define as just cause, other than separation, for he had convinced himself, there was some one else.

In counseling with the wife and the man, a very dependent attitude was revealed of the husband upon his wife as a mother figure. This transference had so aggravated the wife, she could no longer remain married to her husband, and finally was granted the divorce.

The young man declared he would never marry again, but in six months had discovered the girl of his dreams, and was married just as soon as the divorce of his first marriage was final.

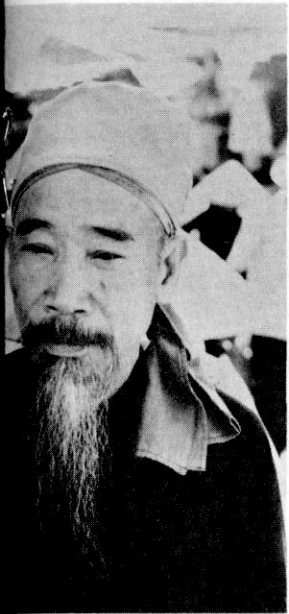
This was done with the full knowledge by the man of his dependency of women as mother figures, though he claimed to have overcome this deficiency in life. My opinion was that he had, but in any case, he is required to make an adjustment or possibly suffer the same fate in the second marriage as the first.

The scripture passage, I Cor. 13:11, points out that love can be childish and immature in a child, but must mature and develop in manhood to the full height of its potential. We have the responsibility as Christians to express and receive love as mature individuals before God and man. To become so dependent on receiving love as a child, without returning that love as a whole person is to deprive the giver and the receiver of the complete and perfect love of God.

CHAPLAIN R.C. WOOD

Vietnam...
as seen





through the eye of a camera



"Hill 55 Boys" conquer enemy

Come on Doc, fix me up. I've got to get back out on the road." The road is an old French-built provincial route southwest of Danang in heavily occupied Viet Cong territory. The words are those of a young Navy Seabee who is typical of a breed of men assigned the hazardous task of rebuilding this vital link for the resettlement and future pacification of South Vietnam's

tor he was driving hit a mine. Four weeks later he was back on the job. He didn't have to return, but he wanted to.

The day after returning to the site, he exploded a small antipersonnel mine. Four days later he hit another heavy equipment mine. Both times he escaped without injury. He's still on the job.

Petty Officer Kuenstler is a member of the "Hill 55 Boys;" or more formally, MCB 62's Detail Buford. They have a vital task in rebuilding six and a half miles of Provincial Route LTL-4. The old road runs right through the middle of what the Marines call "Dodge City." A hot spot in enemy activity.

And a hot spot it has been since these Seabees first appeared on Hill 55 overlooking the road site. The enemy have made it clear that they do not desire the presence of these men, their activity nor the activity that is certain to result in resettling of the area by Quang Nam refugees.

When the project began in late April, the V.C. were ready. They had infested the old road bed with anti-tank, or heavy equipment land mines. Constant harassment was the order of the day.

But this harassment, and even the certain apprehension of "wondering if I'll hit a mine today" has not discouraged the Hill 55 Boys. Exhibiting the same spirit shown by Petty Officer Kuenstler they are determined to build that road.

With just about a mile left to be completed in the project, 25 mines have taken their toll of equipment losses. Eight men have been injured, two of them seriously. A third, Builder Second Class Nelson Hyler, was killed when a vehicle he was standing next to detonated a mine.

Every man who has hit a mine has been given a chance for reassignment to a different project, but everyone has elected to stay. These tragedies have made this job so



Quang Nam Province.

Equipment Operator John Kuenstler was being treated for minor injuries received after detonating an enemy road mine with his TD20 bulldozer. It was his first mining incident, but he was to experience the unlucky occasion three times more. On June 14, approximately a month after his first mine, he was medivaced with back injuries when the truck-trac-

LTL-4 a reality



much more meaningful. It is more than just a job now, it is a personal challenge. Their heavy equipment, ingenuity and sheer courage are pitted against the V.C.

When first beginning the project, U.S. Marine engineers provided mine sweeping teams who daily scanned the proposed route with magnetic mine detectors. But these efforts soon proved useless in detecting the metaless "home-made" mines of rock and plastic composition C-4 explosive.

Devising a method commonly employed by landing parties coming ashore at mined beachheads, the Marines laid C-4 line charges along the route,

and discharged them to trigger sympathetically, any mines buried in the near area. This became an effective method and was used until a new problem emerged.

Moving into the final mile of construction, the road passes through a small village. Use of the line charges threatened possible danger to the citizens there and damage to their homes.

Therefore, Seabee ingenuity prevailed, and a hefty TD20 bulldozer was transformed into a mobile, armored mine-detonating vehicle. Equipped with armor plating for personnel protection, the dozer moves along the road site with blade lowered and

pulling a huge "sheeps foot" earth compacting roller. Any mines encountered are detonated and the explosion is absorbed by the heavy vehicle.

And now with the end in site, things are looking up. If the monsoon rains hold off, the laterite road base will be down and the crushed base rock will be compacted to grade level. Then all that remains will be a layer of asphalt paving.

It's then that the men of Detail Buford can look back at their work with genuine pride. The countless man-hours are over. The quality supervision by EOL John Tye of the rocking crew and EOL Hubert Bass of the fill crew, and the over-all supervision of project officer-in-charge Senior Chief Equipment Operator Jarvis Wood have paid off. Now they can gaze down from ol' Hill 55 and observe Provincial Route LTL-4's first traffic jam. Its people are going home.



Vietnam is "injun" country

■ That's Indian country," is a phrase well known to Seabees in Vietnam. However, in one sense, it doesn't mean VC country, for there really are a type of Indians all around MCB 62's job sites.

Much as the American Indians are the original citizens of the North American continent, so the montagnards (French for mountain people) presently grouped into 18 tribal groups, inhabit the mountainous regions of North and South Vietnam. The Vietnamese call these people "moi", or savages, much as we labeled the American Indians when we swept them from their lands into reservations.

The montagnard's customs and folkways are little changed from centuries ago. Coming down from the North in the 15th century, two Vietnamese groups, the Annamese and the Tonkinese, pushed the montagnards into the hills, trying at times to subjugate them and at times to destroy them. Making little headway doing either, the Vietnamese were content to let them inhabit the rugged untillable terrain in peace.

Centuries have passed, causing little change in the customs of the montagnard tribes. Many of their languages have never been written. The Bru tribe in Quang Tri Province (where MCB 62 constructed National Route 9 last year) has a team of Wycliff Bible Translators from the United States now labor-

ing to write the Bru language. Tape recorders capture the sounds of the speech, while the missionaries record their meanings. Electronic computers will alphabetize the sounds and relay the language to the Wycliff team. Then, for the first time, the Bru will be taught to write their spoken language.

Around Ba To, where MCB 62 will construct an air strip for the American Special Forces, is located the Hre, one of the largest of the montagnard tribes. The Hre's are a stocky, muscular people of lighter skin than most of the other montagnards. The men wear turbans while the women are distinguished by their black, two tiered skirts and colorful blouses. A sacred room in the center of each of their houses contains a sacred mortar and pestle for grinding rice. When the family is absent from the house, two chords hang from the fireplace. When the family moves away entirely, the sacred mortar is broken.

Neighboring tribes of the Hre do not antagonize them, for they are very patient and cool in seeking revenge. To them, hot instantaneous flareups are a sign of weakness.

The best way to show one's manners while visiting a Hre household socially, is to drink the beverage they offer until one passes out. This honors the host.

South of Danang, around Hoi An, over 20 thousand members of the Katy tribe live. These people have been known to be blood hunters. Whenever the gods or spirits seem to be angry with the tribe, they must be appeased, and only with the letting of human blood. When the chief determines this necessity, the warriors prepare themselves through ritual and intoxication, and then hunt until a victim is found, usually from another tribe. After the sacrifice is made, the hunters wash their hands in the victim's blood and leave the mutilated corpse where the killing occurred.

The Katu's also have many taboos. Especially forbidden is the touching of sacred symbols. In addition, they practice eyebrow plucking and tattooing.

The least known of montagnard tribes, the Cua, live in the area around Tra Bong in Quang Ngai Province where the Seabees are upgrading another Special Forces air strip. Their history is full of accounts of ferocious battles with the early Annamese. Of small stature, they are seldom taller than five feet two inches. They never wash their hair for fear of dying and usually wear it in bangs across the forehead. Both men and women wear jewelry, including earrings.

The present Indochina war has probably caused more interchange between the montagnard tribes and their neighbors than has earlier peace. The Viet Cong has attempted to exploit the montagnard manpower force by learning their customs and language and adopting their characteristics of dress. This display of friendliness removed the fears of the montagnards who then joined the VC in their struggle. Time, however, has caused the VC to drop their facade of good will and show their true colors.

The American forces, also wishing to win the favor of the montagnards, have studied and respected their customs

without exploiting them, thus generating with some of them a genuine bond of friendship. Free world military forces have found many montagnard tribes new and able allies. Smallness of stature has prevented them from using heavy weapons, but with small arms, they prove to be brave and capable soldiers.

From the bridge

(Continued from page 2)

So when we have our doubts concerning our contribution to the overall effort or when someone asks, "What did you do in the war?" we can take pride in replying:

"I assisted in the provision of engineer construction support to U.S. and Vietnamese military forces. Of even greater importance, however, I helped to rebuild the Republic of Vietnam so that it may take its proper place among the free nations of the world."

Frank M. Newcomb

FRANK M. NEWCOMB
CDR, CEC, USN
COMMANDING OFFICER

XO' desk

(Continued from page 4)

meet their husbands at overseas locations. This program could conceivably be utilized on a space available basis for single men desiring to utilize it for a low cost vacation.

In the all important money area, a couple of new changes have been instituted. Disbursing officers are now required to provide all personnel, at their request, a statement of earnings showing their gross pay, deductions, and net pay. All activities, clubs, messes and exchanges which provide personal check cashing services have been directed to practice no discrimination in regards to pay grade and the maximum amount (\$50.00) allowed to be cashed.

Although Seabee battalions have long practiced a maximum post deployment leave period, all units have been directed to allow a minimum 50% leave and more if possible upon return from deployment. Compensatory time, long a privilege of civil service employees has now been extended to the Navy in that personnel who stand duty on the holidays, and where the operational situation permits, will be granted a working day off.

In an effort to motivate people and increase the quality of personnel serving in the Navy, several things have been done. For the officers, the below-the-promotion-zone opportunity for selection to the next higher rank has been increased from 5 to 15 percent. A system of preferred enlistments has been instituted to motivate and obtain quality personnel. Also a program to force-retire certain petty officers with over twenty years service who have

not passed the exam for the next rate has been instituted. The major effort is to retain a quality Navy in the face of severe personnel reductions.

The new CNO has shown an interest and desire to utilize Group VIII personnel to upgrade support facilities, barracks, parking lots, recreational facilities and trailer parks. In addition, the formation of Construction Battalion Units at Great Lakes and Pensacola with several more shore duty and technical and practical experience while providing the Navy at a reduced cost, the expertise and manpower to upgrade the shore establishment.

These programs are all designed to enhance the desirability of a Navy career to outstanding, qualified young men while providing a modern, up-to-date Navy, fully capable of maintaining its superiority and providing for the defense of our nation.



ASTRONOMERS--EA2 Chuck Hilbert and EA3 John Collum put the finishing touches on the 4 1/4 inch Newtonian reflector type telescope. The two hobbyists have been building the scope in their spare time and so far have observed four of Jupiter's moons, the rings of Saturn and craters on the surface of the moon. The scope has a variable power range of 50 to 200 power.) Photo by EA2 Harry Goforth)

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Ancient architecture is abundant in Vietnam. This 14th century watch tower, built by the Cham peoples who dominated this area now known as South Vietnam, still stands silently in the open countryside of the Quang Nam Province near MCB 62's Route LTL-4 project. (Photo by PH1 Bob Tilley)