

MCB-62 'Seabees' Train



Under the justifiable close observation of their instructor, Constructionman James D. Flory, center, and Lt. Carl E. Christenson keep on as friendly terms as possible with 40 pounds of high explosive as they prepare to cut a steel beam the easy way.

Story and Photos By:

Lt(jg). J. D. Wilburn and JO3 K. C. Jensen, MCB-62

Those guys aren't upside down PFC's, they're Seabees. From their homeport of Gulfport, Mississippi, Mobile Construction Battalion (MCB)-62 arrived at Camp Lejeune three weeks ago to add the final polish to their military training.

MCB-62, which was recommissioned on July 2, 1966 by Rear Admiral Henry A. Renken, Commander Service Forces Atlantic, devoted a two-week slice of each Seabee's time this summer in preparing for this training. The builders, engineering aids, construction mechanics, steelworkers, equipment operators, construction electricians and utilitiesmen have been receiving specialized technical instruction in each of their fields.

At the same time, preparatory military indoctrination in the prime areas was administered by 20th Naval Construction Regiment instructors. This consisted of one week's classroom instruction and a week of living under field conditions at Camp Shelby, Miss.—a National Guard training camp.

The World War II Naval Construction Battalion 62, from which the present battalion inherited its number designation, helped make history when it participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima with the Marines during February and March of 1945, and rebuilt the bombed-out Japanese airfields there for use by the Allies.

Commissioned at Davisville, R. I., December 30, 1942, the battalion trained for three months in the United States, and then moved to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, to expand the airfield, pier complex and fuel storage facilities there.

The work at Pearl approached its end as the summer of 1944 drew to a close, and the Seabees began jungle warfare training on Oahu Island and elsewhere in the Pacific.

The "Bees" were ready when D-Day came. A portion of the battalion, which came ashore the evening of D-Day, was assigned the task of keeping the beaches clear for amphibious vehicles, off-loading supplies from naval craft to the beach, and maintaining supply lines to the Marines. The entire battalion was ashore and working at this job by 2 a.m., February 26.

Artillery and machinegun fire from enemy positions in the hills raked the beach throughout the invasion, but the Seabees stayed put, took what was dished out, and kept the beans and bullets coming. Some of the battalion's men fought side-by-side with the Marines on the front lines.

As the first of Iwo Jima's three airfields was captured, the Seabees moved in with dozers and mine detectors and began the job of rehabilitating it. At times, the Japanese line of resistance was a scant hundred yards in front of the toiling "Bees."

An observation plane landed on the strip less than three weeks after D-Day, and within another week traffic on the strip was heavy enough to hamper the workers in their efforts to complete it.

Working always within range of sniper fire and subjected to attacks by pockets of Japanese resistance, the Seabees in another week had started rebuilding the second airstrip. Number Two became—at 5225 feet—the longest airstrip in the Western Pacific.

For its outstanding work on Iwo Jima, the World War II MCB-62 was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation, which the new 62 proudly wears on its color standard.

On October 1 this year, MCB-62 moved from Gulfport to Camp Lejeune to begin the final phase of its military training. Prior to commencing the first week, the officers of MCB-62 met with Lieutenant Colonel F. H. Waldrop, Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, to finalize schedules and arrangements.

The spirit of the Seabee motto "Can Do" was demonstrated by the battalion Marines as they served up a thorough, in-depth program of ground warfare instruction to the construction men.

The students had not had the benefit of Marine basic training and "TTR," but they, prodded by their Marine instructors, have in most cases, equalled and in some cases, exceeded Marine expectations for "outsiders."

SIXTY-TWO spent their first training week at the rifle range—snapping in, contorting themselves into positions Ghandi wouldn't



MCB-62's Lt(jg). John M. O'Reilly and Commanding Officer, Cdr. William J. Richeson, watch for the "disk" as Cdr. Richeson's score is tallied from the butts.



Construction Apprentice Richard Bonilla places an improvised "Bangalore Torpedo" charge under the guidance of his clear

With 1stBn, 8th Marines

believe, and then live-firing to prove the pudding. Breathing, aiming, slacking, squeezing, and above all relaxing were the rules of the day. Qualification day approached and the "Bees" filled silhouettes with holes.

The day posed no problem. The morning dawned, bright but cold, and 0630 saw MCB-62 flexing cold trigger fingers into some looseness. The first targets were run up and qualification day began, and ended, with 63% qualifying with the M-14 and almost 90% with the .45.

During the Battalion's week at the rifle range, fifty-two Seabees had an opportunity to attend the Second Marine Division's Counter-Guerrilla Warfare School. The 52 "Bees" repelled ambushes, prepared and launched ambushes of their own, and assaulted a disturbingly realistic mock-up of a Vietnamese village defended by disturbingly realistic Marines in VC "costume."

Training with the elite Recon Marines and the Navy's ace SEALs, the Seabees did unexpectedly well and more than held up their end of the assault in taking the mock-up village.

The Battalion, under the guidance of the 1/8 Marines and under the instruction of at least seven Marine units, jumped off into the second week—a bit of classroom lecture, but mostly the Marines' favorite prove-it-by-doing-it-yourself practical application. The Battalion, filtered out over the 110,000 acres of the base, learning command and field communications, field fortifications, and field medicine.

In other areas, 19 Seabees are in the process of learning the art of demolition from the 2d Engineer Battalion. From first-day introduction through graduation, the Seabees will blow up, explode, ruin and otherwise polish off much of God's Green Earth, trees, posts, and chunks of metal.

The first day was caution personified, as to the crimping of blasting caps and setting of charges. But, by the last day, the 'Can Do' Seabees had improved to the point of confidence that, instead of merely cutting pieces of metal, they fractionalized it.

Other companies of the battalion had spent nights in the field smoothing the rough edges off compass problems and C Ration cookery. As Second Lieutenant Bert Calhoun of 1/8 stated, "Their attitude is outstanding and their performance is, in some cases, better than some of the Marines we have going through ITR."

The crew-served weapons personnel have been getting detailed instruction in each of their specialties: the 3.5 inch rocket launcher, M-79 grenade launcher, M-60 machine gun and 81mm mortar, and have rapidly picked up the finer points. One "Bee" is said to have set a new record for reassembling the M-60 from a detailed stripping. And M-79 rounds were dropping right on the targets.

Meanwhile, the staff officers and senior petty officers have been gaining instruction from Major G. E. Beattie, 1/8 Executive Officer, in staff functions and organizations, all of which is designed to familiarize the Seabee officers with the battalion, lines of communication and organization.

The four weeks at Camp Lejeune will conclude with a three-day field exercise during which all the knowledge gained the previous three weeks will be put to the test.

The battalion will dig in and establish a perimeter and from it operate as a self-supporting unit, handling its own communications, patrols and defenses.

The perimeter is expected to be probed by Marine "aggressors" day and night during the three days in the field. Then, back to the barracks for hot showers, food and liberty.

Concluding their training the Seabees will pass-in-review before Lieutenant Colonel F. H. Waldrop, 1/8 Commander, on October 28 at 2 p.m.

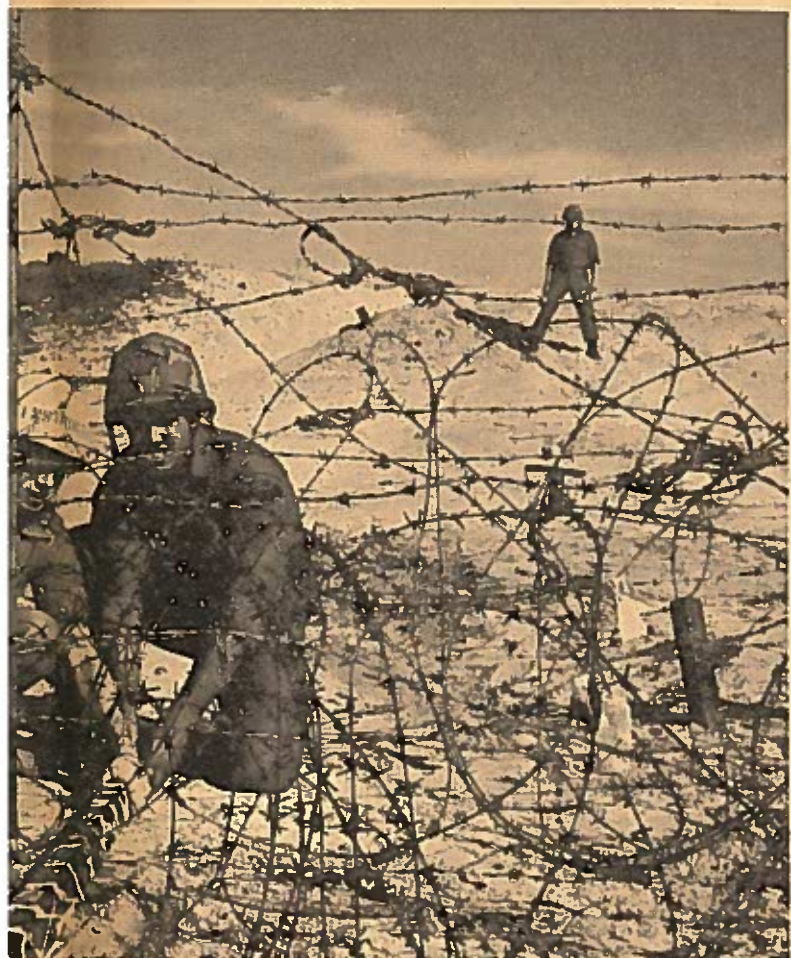
The battalion on the following day, will board C-130 "Hercules" aircraft for their airlift back to Gulfport with stored-up knowledge from the best training ever received. Builder and rifleman, steelworker and grenadier, storekeeper and machine gunner, the Seabees Have Done, Can Do and Will Do.



Seabees and Marines attending the 2d Marine Division Counter-Guerrilla Warfare School counterattack an ambush of a truck convoy.



Utilitiesman Third Class William A. Fienga crouches to listen for trouble during a pre-dawn assault on a mock-up Vietnamese village during the 2d Marine Division's Counter-Guerrilla Warfare School.



his 2d Engineer Battalion instructor. The charge is designed to clear barbed wire entanglements.



Seabee and Marine students learn together in the 2d Engineering Battalion Demolition and Mine Warfare School. Here, a "leapfrog" charge is prepared.