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Serving The Mississippi Coast

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"Over There!" . . .

Ambushed during a reconnaissance patrol, these two Seabees of MCB-62 prepare to cut down an aggressor with M-16 automatic rifles. For the field exercise conducted near Gulfport the battalion's 50-man security force served as the aggressors. The force will man defensive lines and provide security

teams for the battalions' operations in Vietnam when it departs. The two-night exercise was the culmination of four weeks of training which the battalion conducted at homeport, the Gulfport Seabee Center, as is usually done. (Daily Herald photo)

Life In A Foxhole Almost As Real At Home As In Vietnam War?

By RICHARD GLACZIER
Daily Herald Staff Writer

Life in a foxhole at 3 o'clock in the morning, with aggressor forces in the area, can be cold and damp—especially if you are defending your perimeter in the middle of a swamp and the temperature is just below freezing.

Meanwhile, in the battalion CP (command post), the operations officer and commanding officer plan their strategy in defending the camp of 645 men from the attackers outside the lines.

Seabee battalions homeported at the Gulfport Seabee Center have in the past traveled to the Camp Lejeune, N.C., U.S. Marine Corps Training Center for their military training before redeploying to Vietnam. Now this training is being conducted at home.

Last week, Mobile Construction Battalion 62 completed four weeks of intensive military training with a two-night battalion exercise at the Keesler AFB rifle range area north of state Highway 67 in the Success Community. Although the entire unit took part in training at home, 180 men did go to

Camp Lejeune for specialized training in crew-served weapons and technical instruction.

Cmdr. John Paul Jones Jr., battalion commander, said his force is "as ready to go (to Vietnam) as if it had gone to Lejeune."

Although Camp Lejeune is far superior as a training facility for military tactics and weapons, due to the highly experienced instructors, specialists, adequate areas for live firing of all weapons used by the Seabees and a fully established training operation, Commander Jones said he feels the homeport training had distinct advantage.

At Lejeune, the battalion is split into smaller units, whereas at the homeport the five companies, and the battalion as a whole were able to train as a unit. Commanding officers directly supervised their personnel, under Marines of the center's Military Training Department, and company and battalion integrity was maintained. "I am better satisfied with the training here for this reason," Commander Jones said.

The training itself consisted of four phases:

(1) Classroom training to indoctrinate the men in such subjects as use of the M-60 machine gun, the 3.5 rocket launcher, the M-79 grenade launcher, map reading, mines and booby traps, ambushes, escape and evasion, communication equipment and procedure and the 81mm mortar.

(2) Company tactics, conducted at the Keesler range area in the DeSoto National Forest, consisting of instruction and application of perimeter defenses, tactical marches, defenses, tactical marches, patrols and camouflage.

(3) Company commanders' week during which training in areas needing further emphasis is conducted and preparation made for inspections to follow.

(4) Battalion tactics week where the entire battalion takes part in the exercise just completed.

Training for MCB-62 this time around, before deploying on its third tour of duty in Vietnam is especially important. About 80 per cent of the battalion's personnel are new. These men,

without combat experience must be prepared for what they can expect when their water-filled foxhole is located in Southeast Asia and the aggressor force outside the perimeter is called the Viet Cong—and his ammunition is not blanks but real.

But how effective is a field exercise such as this, where an aggressor takes off his headgear and stands up when he is shot?

The man on his stomach in the fighting hole cannot tell the difference. The night pitch black. Not even star shine to illuminate the dense foliage in front of him. A faint noise in the underbrush and then—the rapid staccato as M-16 empties its 20 rounds less than a second, yelling heard as if from every direction and a radio crackles instructions from the CP. It's real, right.

And in the CP, coffee is served as the gunfire is heard from the Delta Company perimeter. A listening post set up outside the perimeter is in danger of being overrun. The operations officer tells a communication contact Delta CP with instructions for LPD-1 to return lines. Then the Sit Report (report)—seven KIAs (killed in action) enemy KIAs. It's real, officers, too.

