



# NMCB-8 NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 5, ISSUE 2

SUMMER 2005



## NMCB-8 REUNION AT PORT HUENEME

NMCB-8 Seabees from different eras came from all over the United States to celebrate at Port Hueneme, CA in May, 2005.



Front row l. to r.; Jim Daniels, CA; Bob Solterbeck, NE; Harry Davis, WA; William Clerke, FL; Ken Bingham, CA; Arnie Cicerone, CA; Morris Burnham, CO; Eric Davis, MI; Dan Epplert, CA; John Teichman, NY; Jim Dutcher, MA. Back row l. to r.; Jack O'Leary, CA; John Reed, NH; Gordon Gilmore, CA; Ron Sabattis, CA; Ron Dougal, AZ; Jerry Malott, OH; Bob Westberg, CA; Jack Quinn-Dennis, CA; Carl Bolton, CA; Gary Thede, MI. Missing, Joe Setting, WA.

## Port Hueneme California Reunion

Once again Eight led the way at Port Hueneme. We had over 20 reunion participants with close to 30 including wives and friends. The camaraderie gets better with each reunion. **Arnie Cicerone** and **Ron Sabattis** set up a hospitality suite where everyone had an opportunity to talk over old times, tell tall stories (that get bigger every year) and enjoy each others company into the wee hours. As in Gulfport last year, the bathtub was filled with cold beverages of choice and an unending supply of snacks was consumed by all.

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Greetings from coast to coast were exchanged at the reunion dinner by Dan Epplert (left) from Hesperia, CA and John Teichman who lives in Plattsburgh, NY.



Morris Burnham rode his Honda all the way from Aurora, CO to be at the reunion, a distance of almost 1100 miles. See his thoughts on the Reunion on page 5.

## From Your President

Your Association had a great reunion at Port Hueneme this past May. It's always good to see the old group and especially the new faces. Unfortunately, the new generation of both officer and enlisted Seabees seem to be getting younger and younger with the passing years! When the Base Commander looks like a high school graduate instead of some old man, you realize that's why they're in and we're out! But remember, we may take a little longer doing things but our Seabee "Can Do" spirit is still the same. I guess that is what makes the Seabees both past and present great people.

I would like to thank the Association for letting me stay in office for another two years. Again, our organization could not go on without the dedicated work from our staff and members who contribute to make our reunions a success.

We are moving forward in setting our agenda for the next year. Our three major goals, as discussed during our Association meeting are: (1) to organize the reunion for 2006; (2) continue to solicit support in the way of articles from members for the newsletter and; (3) seek out and employ a volunteer webmaster for our webpage "NMCB8.com" which is in the beginnings of construction.

We are extremely fortunate to have a great group of Officers who support our association and a special thanks to **Harry Davis**, who has once again taken over our newsletter. The newsletter is vital to our organization. However, to continue to make it a success and an interesting source of Seabee news, Harry needs your help. As in the past, he needs articles you would like to share with your fellow Seabees. There are hundreds of interesting stories out there. So put on your thinking caps and come up with a tall tale or maybe just a small recollection of your days with EIGHT and send it in. Harry said he will publish anything and everything that you send him.

Our next reunion will be in September 2006. **Ron Dougal**, **Troy Branch**, and **Billy Boggs** are setting up the reunion, which will be held at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. The dates are Sept. 27 thru Oct. 1, 2006. We will be sending out reunion information packages soon. Hotel rates will be good for extra days if anyone wants to stay longer.

In the future, our plan is to move the main reunion around the country. If you have a specific location you think would make a great setting for a reunion, let me know. We still plan to have a showing at the All Seabees Reunion in Port Hueneme but it will not be our main emphasis in 2006.

We are also looking for someone to take charge of the web site. So if you have any webmaster experience and would like to give it a try, let us know.

*Arnie*

## Arnie Cicerone



## "I LOVE THE SMELL OF CRUISE BOOKS IN THE MORNING"

Since **Harry Davis** (your editor) and I began the cruise book project for NCB/MCB-8, "Foundation" volunteers at the CEC/Seabee Museum have copied all cruise books (WW II through 2003). Thank you all, for your donations to this project. Out of the approximately 511 books, one of my favorites (not counting the 8th NCB or MCB-8) - is CBD 1058 of WW II.

CBD 1058 is one of my favorites because their mission was so different than other Seabee units. While most Seabees units were building roads, airbases, and camps in the Pacific, CBD 1058's job was to find oil in Alaska around the North Slope. 1058's cruise book is a fascinating read about construction, sled trains, cutting trail, trail guides going missing, and putting up with the hostile elements. Just establishing a beach-head in those days in Alaska and getting re-supplied was no small feat. Having worked in the "oil patch" myself, made it more interesting.



All of the cruise books are interesting though. The sprinkling of humor and art throughout these books is great. Walt Disney supplied the 133rd NCB with his own take on a Seabee caricature (below). Also shown is a bit of humor from one of the WW II cruise books.

**Ken Bingham**



# 2005 REUNION MEMORIES IN PICTURES



# THE HERITAGE OF A BATTALION NAMED EIGHT

*CONTINUED FROM THE WINTER 2005 NEWSLETTER VOL 5 ISSUE 1*

**EDITORS NOTE:** *In the last issue of the newsletter you read about the heritage of a battalion named "EIGHT" from the beginnings of WWII up through the early years of the Vietnam War. This article continues the story as "EIGHT" begins its deployment to Phu Bai, RVN, in January of 1968.*

Three weeks after arriving in Phu Bai, the Battalion began its Civic Action Program in the refugee village of Phu Luong, where some 20,000 refugees from the war-torn city of Hue sought asylum. EIGHT's Medical Team spread the Civic Action Program from Phu Bai to Hue to Col Co Island.

In one week, after three mortar attacks on the camp, the Battalion bounced back on its feet and started projects which its men completed in EIGHT's well known record time, Emergency repairs on the enemy mortared railroad bridge in Hue were conducted around the clock, and troops were crossing the fallen bridge 27 hours after the enemy attack. Other vital tasks included installation of the fuel pipeline from Hue to Col Co Island.

In addition to details in the vicinity of Hue, the Battalion's construction companies were committed to jobs between the Gia Le Combat Base, where its own Camp Wilkinson was located, to Hue and the Perfume River banks.

With the end of a successful third deployment, EIGHT once again returned to homeport for a well earned rest. After the leave period, the men of EIGHT concentrated on sharpening construction skills learned in the Republic of Vietnam and acquiring new ones, as well as undergoing intensive military and professional training in preparation for their fourth deployment.

With the departure of the last flight in mid-March, NMBC EIGHT was on the way to the most successful deployment of its history. Two details were deployed almost immediately following arrival of the aircraft in Danang, Republic of Vietnam. Detail Yankee disembarked from the transoceanic flight, only to re-embark C-123 aircraft for airlift to An Hoa Combat Base where its men were tasked with constructing bunkers for the Marines. Within a day of arrival, 65 men of Detail Zulu were convoyed to Hue to commence paving 22 miles of QL #1 and 2.4 miles of the North Hue Bypass.

Meanwhile, part of the main body at Camp Haskins South immediately began construction on the 1,000-man First FSR Cantonment. This work included housing, messing, and shower facilities, as well as complete electrical, water, and sewage distribution systems.

Late in April, ASP-1 suffered a devastating series of explosions, resulting in severe damage to wide areas surrounding the ASP. Within a few days, NMCB EIGHT found itself shifting crews to the Third Military Police Battalion Cantonment, west of ASP-1, to repair and rebuild a portion of that camp which was leveled by the blasts. From there, many of the these same crews were assigned to the

reconstruction of the Freedom Hill Exchange, also severely damaged by the explosions.

Following these disaster recovery projects, NMCB Eight was tasked with constructing 45 aircraft shelters at Marine Air Group 11.

This being the first time that the shelters were constructed by Seabees in Vietnam, EIGHT developed many new and effective assembly methods.

The Dau Mit Dam was constructed to stop the flow of the Bau Xau River before the monsoon rains, in order to provide water for the rice crops in the nearby area. Built on the site of an old dam which had washed away, the job required solution of many unique and challenging problems.

Through the entire deployment, EIGHT was charged with maintenance of the vital section of QL #1 from the Nam O Bridge north, through the Hai Van Pass to the Lang Co Bridge. EIGHT's Engineering Department designed over 100 culverts which were constructed by Vietnamese contracted labor, under the direct supervision of NMCB-EIGHT personnel.

Late in the deployment, another disaster sent crews from EIGHT racing to the scene, when an ARVN Ammunition Supply Depot was hit by a rocket, causing detonation of numerous anti-tank mines. The resulting air pressure from the tremendous secondary explosions severely damaged 240 metal buildings at the nearby Naval Support Activity Covered Storage Facility.

Along with these projects, a vigorous Civic Action Program was conducted. MEDCAP and DENTCAP teams went into nearby villages to provide needed medical and dental care to the villagers. Under the CONCAP (Construction Civic Action Program), office buildings for three local hamlet chiefs were constructed by the Vietnamese themselves, as were a 500 student school building and a chapel.

The remainder of NMBC EIGHT'S main body was kept busy with extensive repairs of the bridge Cargo Ramp and the upgrading of the storage facilities there, both of which had been severely damaged when a rocket hit an ammunition ship nearby.

The many interesting and diversified work assignments accomplished during this deployment played a large part in contributing to the high level of morale and outstanding achievements of the Battalion.

The history of NMCB Eight - sixteen years of service to the U.S. Navy - is one in which all members take great pride and strive to enhance.

*"The difficult we can do at once....  
The impossible takes a little longer."*  
Seabee Slogan





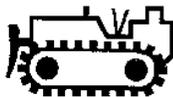
For the past several years NMCB-8 reunions have been held in either Port Hueneme, CA or Gulfport, MS. This scenario is about to change. Yesserie y'all! We are goin' south (and it's not Gulfport)! In September 2006, EIGHT will hold its next reunion in Pigeon Forge, TN.

What's in Pigeon Forge you ask? It's **Dollywood, USA**. That's right! The family entertainment showplace created by country legend Dolly Parton, located in the middle of the Smokey Mountains, and the home of the famous Dixie Stampede Dinner and Show, is our next NMCB-8 reunion destination.

At this past May's reunion in Port Hueneme, Ron Dougal said that Troy Branch, who lives in Seiverville, TN (not far from Dollywood), has volunteered to take on the job of setting things up for us. Troy has an inside track, as he worked for many years for the Parton family and knows the "ins and outs" of how to set up a reunion. Those of us present thought it was a fine idea and it was voted unanimously to go to Dollywood in 2006.

Dates have been established for the reunion as **Wednesday, 27 September to Sunday, 1 October 2006**.

Ron Dougal is planning a trip to Dollywood in August of this year to lay the groundwork for the reunion with Troy Branch. As soon as information is available about the reunion, it will be published in a future newsletter. So standby!!



## A WORD ABOUT DUES

The reason you received this newsletter is because you paid dues sometime in the past. Some of you are life members and do not need to ever pay dues again. The rest of us have paid by the year. Some are up to date, many are not. So if you haven't paid dues in the past year or two, please help us out.

To pay, send a check payable to NMCB-8 Association to **Ken Bingham, 1773 Tamarin Ave, Ventura, CA 93003**. Dues are \$10/year or \$100 for a lifetime membership.

Your support is what keeps us going and enables us to send you this newsletter.

## REUNION REFLECTIONS

On day four of my motorcycle ride from Denver, CO, I left Selma, CA and headed for Port Hueneme for the Seabee reunion. My excitement was growing as I rode the 200+ miles and I believe my anxiety level was increasing without my conscious awareness. I turned the wrong way trying to find my hotel, got lost having to call for directions, and I kept forgetting things. I really felt high anxiety as I walked into the reunion hotel.

Anyway, I got there and NMCB-8 was having their own reception, which I found. As soon as I walked in, John Reed came up and greeted me saying "I recognized you when you walked in." I was so surprised! I couldn't remember him or anyone else. But as the evening progressed, the memories began to come back. I left Vietnam with John Reed as we were discharged at the same time. I met several guys and the memories began to filter through as we talked about the stories both stateside and in-country. I had a great conversation with Harry Davis and his wife Paula. He was one of my company commanders and was wounded when a jeep he was driving hit a land mine. He spent 30 years in the Navy as a Civil Engineer Corps Officer.

On the second day of the reunion we met in the morning and went for a base tour including the Seabee Museum. I was able to talk with some of the active Seabees and could see that the men and women were knowledgeable and dedicated. The "Can Do" spirit was evident in the visible willingness and exuberance to serve. In the afternoon all of us MCB 8 Seabees met for planning future activities. This also included camaraderie and story telling, strengthening the cohesion of our group. I am grateful for those who are serving as officers and committee persons. The reunion planned for September 2006 in Pigeon Forge, TN at Dollywood will be very exciting. I lived in Chattanooga, for almost 5 years and I just love the TN-NC Smoky Mountains area.

In the afternoon, John Reed, Bill Clerke, and myself took a ride to find the house that Bill had rented. Bill's house was on the beach point, and we had fun telling stories of some of the crazy stunts that happened (no names mentioned) from parking motorcycles in the living room, driving old cars into the channel, and "cumshawing" a Christmas tree from the landscaping on Fifth St.! We laughed hard as we ate hamburgers at the bar across the street from where Bill had lived.

Our evening dinner was another great event with mixing and talking with many more MCB 8 Vets including WWII and Korea. I am so glad that I came to this, my first, reunion. It has given a reality to much that had occurred during my active Seabee tenure. Another comfort I found is that all of us are the same. There is no distinction between rate, chief, or officer, whether CO or fresh Seabee from boot. At this reunion there was no segregation or superficial barriers to enjoying each other as fellow human beings; as vets who served together if not in body then in spirit. This truly is the Seabee spirit I'll always remember.

This is a call for all MCB 8 Seabees to make plans now for the 2006 NMCB 8 reunion September 27th–October 1st. I am challenging all you Charlie Company guys to come on out and make the Seabee Spirit come alive in your life. Ya'll come ya hear!

**Morris Burnham**

## Skipper's Corner

Jack O'Leary was EIGHT's Skipper from 1967 to 1969. He relieved Pap Phelps in Chu Lai on April 2, 1967. He then accompanied the battalion from Port Hueneme to Phu Bai and returned to Port Hueneme after an eight month deployment. He was relieved by Bob Westberg in 1969. He and his wife Emily are retired and live in Mill Valley, CA.



This will be a short column (I can hear the sighs of relief from here) as I have just returned from Southern California and a great EIGHT reunion and Harry Davis is already very politely, but firmly on my back to complete the next newsletter. At the reunion, EIGHT continued its practice of setting up an MCB-8 Hospitality Suite where we could all meet and greet old buddies and new ones over some cold liquid refreshment. The crew is starting to show its age, especially old goats like me who were caught yawning around 9:00 or 10:00 PM. and there was considerable soda and water consumed in addition to a respectable quantity of suds. But as always, the highlights were seeing old friends and fellow warriors and being able to spend some time reminiscing and catching up with them. I have always been very proud of having served with the men of EIGHT and the feeling grows stronger every year. See you next year - God willing. **Jack**

## Remembering Pap

Thank you so much for sending me the notice on Capt Phelps who I will always remember for the fair and caring man he was during my time with MCB-8 during the period of 1965 and 1966. I was with MCB-8 during the first Vietnam deployment serving as one of the DK's. But as you know, we all had to pitch in and help with the real mission to build support facilities. This is how I came to know Pharo as a great human being. I treasure the picture that I still have where he presented me with my 3rd class crow. Over the years when talking to my own children, it was not unusual for me to mention Pharo as an example of how to set a positive example to the people you are responsible for leading.

As we travel the road of life we all meet people who have positive influences on us and that is true of Capt Phelps. Our youngest son is now on his second deployment to Iraq with HCS-4 at Balad. This is his 3rd squadron since joining the Navy 9 years ago. I'd like to think that the positive example shown to me by Capt Phelps so many years ago was a factor in my own son's desire to serve this country as part of the Naval Service. Steven is responsible for maintaining and repairing the electrical and electronic systems on the squadrons helicopters. All I can say is that the kids serving in today's Navy are much brighter than I was at that age.

While sad to hear of Captain Phelps passing, I am grateful for having had the opportunity to serve in his command.

**Don Frohm**

## REMEMBER WHEN....



### "Put it back on deadline Chief"

A young CM works on a piece of equipment during EIGHT's 1962 deployment to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.



NMCB-8 participated in numerous civic action programs throughout their four deployments to Vietnam. Here is an EIGHT Corpsman administering an antiseptic to a small child being held by his mother. This visit to a village in Danang took place during EIGHT's last deployment before being deactivated in 1969.



In 1964, U.S. Naval Construction Battalion Center, Davisville, Rhode Island, was homeport for the Atlantic Seabees. In addition to MCB-8, MCB's One, Four, Six and Seven called Davisville home.

# Seabee Memorial, Washington, D.C.



## IN MEMORIAM

*In remembrance of those who served with us.*

We have received word of the passing of two shipmates: **Howard Boerum**, February 04; **Charles L'Hommedieu**, December 04.

## A VOICE FROM THE PAST

My mother's brother, Uncle Enoch, was a carpenter in the 14th NCB on Nomeau and then Guadalcanal in WWII. My family name is Henderson, but no relation to Henderson Field at Guadalcanal. When I was young I heard "sea stories" from Uncle Enoch. The 14th deployed to the "Canal" after the heavy action .....! I became interested in military service as a career but Vietnam service in the enlisted ranks, with the policies, became unattractive, so I chose discharge and returned home to a family who admired WWII vets but not Vietnam Vets. Many years later, due to my own pride as a member of an elite military unit during a highly protestable era, I chose to bring attention to my service group. Numerous former Seabees have been re-united with their former units due to information received when they observed a Seabee exhibit. I will be doing a Seabee exhibit at the Vietnam Moving Wall in Tulsa, OK, March 22-28 and will be doing a POW Watchfire at Pittsburg, KS, April 29-30. Harry, I hope you can get the NMCB-8 newsletter working again for our group. In the meantime I plan to carry on for Seabee vets and for vets in general. **Richard B. Swallow**

## A PICTURE FROM THE PAST



**PRESENT ARMS** – The Seabees of NMCB-8 come to "present arms" as the National Anthem is played at the Change of Command Ceremony, held April 2nd in Chu Lai RVN. During the ceremony, CDR Jack O'Leary relieved CDR Pharo (Pap) Phelps as Commanding Officer, NMCB-8.

**NMCB-8 SEABEES' ASSOCIATION**

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	Ken Kerr
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



SEABEES "CAN DO"



**NMCB-8 ASSOCIATION ROSTER UPDATE**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone & E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

*The mailing list and roster for the NMCB-8 Association has become outdated. Only through a current roster can we ensure your receipt of the newsletter and information of current and future reunions. If you have had a change of address within the past two years, you can update this information by filling out the above form. Please include your e-mail address, if you have one.*

Detach the form at the dotted line and return to: **Harry Davis, 241 Windrose Drive, Port Ludlow, WA 98365.** *If you have e-mail and want to make your update electronically, please do so. Send updates by e-mail to [nmcb\\_8@msn.com](mailto:nmcb_8@msn.com). Thanks for your support !*

