



NMCB-8 NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1

REUNION 2008, PIGEON FORGE, TN - SEE INSIDE FOR DETAILS

JUNE 2007

FORMER “SEABEES” HOLD NAVY REUNION IN PIGEON FORGE

EDITOR’S NOTE: *In the last issue of the newsletter much was said about the reunion we had in Pigeon Forge, TN last September, including pictures and testimonials from those who attended the three day extravaganza. A couple of weeks after I got home and published the newsletter, I received a copy of the “Mountain Press”, the local daily newspaper for Pigeon Forge and surrounding area. We made news on Saturday, the day of our banquet. The above headline appeared on the front page in big bold letters. I thought it appropriate to share this article with all of you on our front page. It tells a story about us and the Association as others see us. There are a few minor inaccuracies but these can be overlooked as the reporter was a “civilian” not fully familiar with our organization or the Seabees in general. Overall though, I think the article is right on and shows how much the folks from Pigeon Forge respect the military and what it represents, and how glad they were that we selected Pigeon Forge to hold our best reunion ever.*

PIGEON FORGE - Pigeon Forge may be a state away from the closest ocean, but it has attracted some attention from the Navy in the past few days.

A reunion group of members of the Navy’s “Seabees” was in the area for a time of fellowship and taking in the local sights.

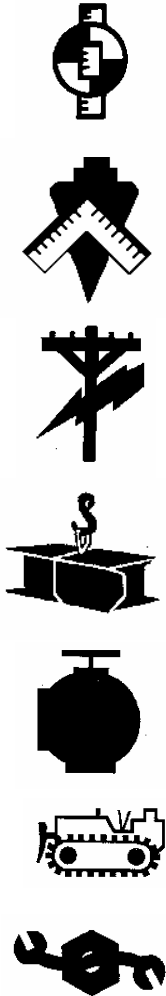
“We’ve held these reunions every year since 1999, but we usually have them at naval bases on the West Coast or in Louisiana,” said Troy Branch, a Sevier County native who organized the local event. “I told them I’d do it after I retire next year but we really wanted to get away from bases, so we decided to have it here this year.”

So, after about two years of planning on Branch’s part, around 100 former Seabees and 100 others came together at the Ramada Inn on the Parkway in Pigeon Forge, the largest crowd ever at a reunion. For some of them it was the first time they had seen other members in their group in 30 years.

The U.S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Eight, or Seabees, are a specialized branch of the Navy composed mainly of men who worked in some construction trade prior to enlisting.

Their job in combat is to construct the facilities, airfields, headquarters and others that are needed to support the combat divisions. Those in the battalion train at a special school in California for six months to acquire the skills needed by

(See SEABEES, page 7)



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From Your President

Arnie Cicerone

It seems like we just got through the last reunion less than a year ago and we are starting the planning for the next one. I have talked to Ron Dougal, Ron Sabbatis, Troy Branch, Billy Boggs, and Rick Reese and the consensus is we couldn't go wrong by going back to Pigeon Forge one more time. The time frame for the reunion is September 25-28, 2008. We plan to incorporate some changes, home cooking seems to be on the menu, we have some good chefs among the troops and a steak barbeque is planned for one night and a pancake breakfast in addition to the traditional banquet on Saturday night. Of course we will have plenty of time to sit around and tell "war" stories which seem to get more ridiculous as time goes by. Troy also promises us more good shows to attend in the evenings.



On a somber note I was honored to receive a letter from Lt. Gene Steffens my "D" company commander. He read a story I wrote in a past newsletter "Standing on the Edge". It told about Billy Boggs and me being sent to various Marine encampments all over Chi Lai. I was grateful that he had the trust in Billy and me to do the job. In his letter, the compassion he felt for his men and the concern he had for the injuries we suffered at the time came through. I was hoping to visit him in Florida to personally thank him and let him know how good it was to have served under him in Chi Lai, but unfortunately Gene passed away this past February. May God bless him and his family as we will miss him.

Contact Ron Dougal or Rick Reese with any information on missing personnel including junior officers who seem to be a scarce commodity at the reunions. I would like to have everyone try to contact one new person to bring to the reunion.

Last but not the least, please check that your dues are current. If you are behind in your dues, send a check to Ken Bingham. (See **A Word About Dues** on page 3).

Arnie

NOW HEAR THIS!

It has been 10 months since our last reunion. Those of you who were not able to attend missed a wonderful time. Those of you who did attend (and can still remember) are probably still talking about it!

It is now time to look forward to the 2008 reunion. It takes about 2 to 3 years to put on an event like we had in Pigeon Forge. Troy Branch can certainly attest to that! A casual survey was taken at our last meeting to choose a destination for reunion 2008.

There were a lot of suggestions but no definite location was picked. A decision was made to hold the 2008 reunion in Pigeon Forge once again. Thanks to Troy Branch and his posse, most of the preliminary work has been done. A schedule of events will be published in the fall issue of our newsletter along with registration forms.

Looking beyond 2008, several locations have been suggested for REUNION 2010. I have listed them in no particular order:

Washington DC
Las Vegas
Caribbean cruise
Hawaii
Branson, MO
San Diego
Norfolk, VA

We would like everyone to email (or snail mail) your 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choice by the end of August. We will list the top three sites in the fall newsletter.

Thanks to everyone,
Ron Sabbatis

Address: 606 Capitola Ave., Capitola, CA, 95010
Email: sabagus@charter.net

SAVE THE DATE

I recently talked to Troy Branch and we have firm dates for the 2008 reunion, so mark your calendars. The fun starts on Thursday, September 27, 2008 and runs through Saturday the 29th. Advance party check-in starts on Wednesday the 27th. Special reunion hotel rates will be available all week. So come early and stay late.

Ron Sabattis

GENE STEFFENS PASSES AWAY

Gene Steffens' wife Joan wrote to tell us that Gene passed away on February 2, 2007, from congestive heart failure. Gene was OIC of the Phu Bai detachment during the '65-'66 Danang deployment and Delta Company Commander during the '66-'68 Chu Lai, RVN deployment.

The story of Tom Gade

EDITORS NOTE: *John Wahl currently lives in Saint Cloud, MN. He sent in a tribute to Tom Gade who passed away in September 2005. John served in MNCB-8 from 1951 to 1955. He along with many others was a plank owner in EIGHT when it was commissioned in 1951.*

When I received the February issue of the NMCB-8 Newsletter, I was a little startled to read Rich Berry's tribute to Tom Gade. I was not aware of his passing, and it brought back many, many memories of my time in MCB-8 with Tom and the rest of the guys.

Being fellow members of "D" company and working on the concrete crew with Tom, we shared many memories that were brought to mind as I read Rich's article. While we were deployed in French Morocco the first time, Tom was one of the people I shared a hut with.

I think, at that time, if a vote was taken in the hut as to which person we lived with was the least likely to become a lawyer and be elected to the San Diego City Council, Tom would have won hands down. And he would have laughed about it! Tom was a hard worker on the crew, and a hard player after hours. But he had a quiet side to him. One of my memories of that hut was seeing Tom sitting at the table we had, very thoughtfully reading a letter. Maybe it is because that was so different than his usual bubbly self.

One time, about 20 years after our service together ended, he was in Minnesota and he looked me up. At the time I was working as a project manager in Minneapolis where I stayed during the week. He got my telephone number from my wife, Irene, and Tom and I got together for a dinner and a great deal of talking. (Not a great deal of drinking, like it would have been 20 years earlier.) That is when I found out about his election to the San Diego City Council, What a surprise.

We also talked about old times and faces. Lt. Luck was our company commander, fondly known to the troops as "Mother Luck". When we got back to Davisville from our tour in French Morocco, MCB-8 was scheduled for our next tour in Argentina, Newfoundland. Someone from COM-CBLANT laid on a request for a reinforced Builder company for detached service. They didn't tell the big wheels in MCB-8 where the detachment was going, so they gave it to "D" company. We became Detachment "Fox" and then told us we were going to have to go to BERMUDA.

We had Lt. Luck and one Commissioned Warrant Officer (don't remember his name, but remember him saying to "Mother" on more than one occasion, "J—s C—t, Dave, you can't do that!")

One of our jobs down there was to demolish a poured concrete water tower with jackhammers. It was over 32' high, and Mother wanted to know how we intended to get

the compressed air up there since he remembered from his science classes that air pressure would just balance a 32 foot column of water at sea level. And when we could not get the trailer mounted air compressor started one time, he offered us his jeep to pull the AC until it started. It was a fun night with Tom, and we both enjoyed it.

John A. Wahl, BU1
MCB-8 Plank Owner, 1951-1955

A WORD ABOUT DUES

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

The above notice is repeated in each newsletter. Some of you have responded with checks to renew your membership and keep the newsletter going. Others have asked when their Association membership is up for renewal. Since all of our members joined at different times it was difficult, if not impossible, to keep track of renewal dates and advise everyone when they should pay up. Ken Bingham, our treasurer and keeper of the renewal dates, is a one man show and since we don't have an automatic renewal tracking system like the magazine industry, we have not, up to now, mailed out individual reminders as to when memberships needed to be renewed. However, due to the magic of the computer we have devised a tracking system that will enable you to know when your membership expires.

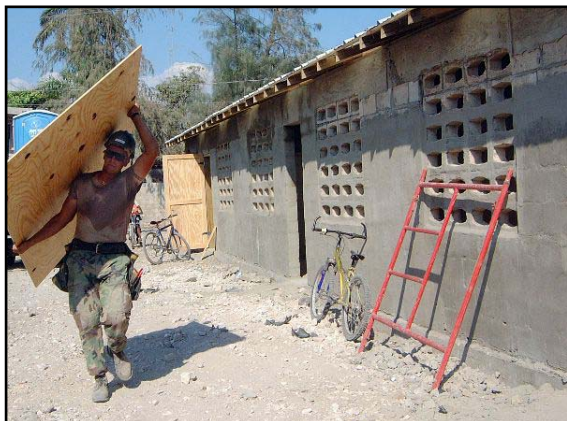
Please note the mailing label attached to the back of your newsletter. Next to your name, you will see a date (month & year) denoting when your membership should have been renewed. A letter "L" next to your name denotes a life member and no renewal of membership is necessary. If your membership has expired but you would like to renew it in order to continue receiving the newsletter and keep up on the latest reunion information, and other news, please submit payment by check to **NMCB-8 ASSOCIATION**. Send checks to **Ken Bingham, 1773 Tamarin Ave, Ventura, CA 93003**. Please do not send checks to me.

Dues are \$10/year or \$100 for a life membership. To bring your membership up to date, submitting a check for \$10 will be sufficient.

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

Harry Davis, Newsletter Editor

TODAY'S SEABEES AROUND THE WORLD



Seabee assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion One (NMCB-1), carries a sheet of plywood during construction of a three room schoolhouse in Gonaives, Haiti.



Camp Lemonier, Djibouti. Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Three (NMCB-3), Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa cut wood for three new buildings.



Seabee assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Two Four, (NMCB 24) re-levels and packs the base of an airfield runway expansion joint trench at the air base in Al Asad, Iraq.



U.S. Navy Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Seven Four (NMCB-74), clear debris at the Ministry of Education Building in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan.



U.S. Navy Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalions Seven (NMCB-7), survey the site of a schoolhouse destroyed by the Dec. 26th Tsunami in the village of Koggala, Sri Lanka.



Construction personnel from Philippine Navy, and U.S. Navy Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Five (NMCB-5), put the finishing touches on a two-room schoolhouse in San Narciso

REMEMBER WHEN....

To Harry Davis, Editor, NMCB8 SEABEE Association. Your last newsletter contained a nice story by John Wahl who I may have met some time ago, as I also was a "plank owner" of MCB-8 back in 1951. I would imagine there are not many owners still around, but it was nostalgic reading and brought forth some memories of my own, so here goes.

I enjoy your newsletter and am reminded to send a check! But actually it was to write a little more "spin" about the early MCB-8 during the Korean Conflict, Great Lakes in Jan 1951, Oxnard CA in April 1951, and then MCB-1 at Davisville, RI. and finally forming MCB-8 in August 1951. By Dec, the new battalion got orders to Guantanamo and we left Quonset Point & Brooklyn and arrived several days later in Cuba for a 6 month stay. This was a tropical paradise compared to RI where the weather was too much like Great Lakes. We had a super mess hall, bingo and radio station, outdoor movies, golf, horse back riding, snorkeling, swimming, tanning and a favorite game, basketball. No up to date barracks for us, we got the APL barge (boat)! Communal shower and latrine! Canvas bunks 4 high and powerful fans for our comfort!!

As I was just recently married, I spent Christmas eve writing love letters and listening to music. We were famous enough though as Bob Hope and his company performed for us (and others!) during our duty there.

One of our "Chiefs" answered our loneliness by starting a basketball team that I played on, and he soon had us heading to Norfolk for their All East Coast Navy Basketball Tourney. We took in New York and I hitchhiked back to Illinois to see my wife before returning to Cuba where I worked in the carpenter shop mostly making foot lockers to send home with cheap cigarettes and an occasional Jack Daniel supply. Six months duty and back to Davisville for three.

About August 1952, we loaded up on board a ship and headed to French Morocco, Port Lyautey. The picture of the "guys" is from that trip and has us in our issued "greens" and green baseball hat. I never stood any duty in Gitmo or aboard any of the ships we traveled on. The old salts thought we were Civil Engineers and not regular Navy and we didn't correct them.

My wife and I rented a small unit in West Warwick and we soon had our first child who was born at the hospital at Quonset Point. I was offered a shore base job at COM-CBLANT where I helped design and assisted in upgrading the Commander's office with a rubber mosaic tile rendition of the classic SEABEE on the entry office floor. Helped with drawings to redo the Flagpole area with two very old muzzle loading cannons brought back from Bermuda. I did play a bit of Softball for the Base team and did "scut" work for a Lieutenant who was researching info. for an official report of the history of the SEABEES. Cushy tour huh? Just remember, I enlisted during my Jr. year at college and served a full 4 years and I probably got all these

great assignments because I was a pretty good athlete, but more realistically stated, was that I could type, was a great draftsman, and was good with woodworking tools.

The pictured officers below L to R are: LT N.T. Dietrich, LT H.H. Evans, CDR R.C. Gordon, CAPT F.C. Ray, CDR W.R. Yankey, CDR F.S. Parker, LCDR Niehaus, CMC W.D. Boarman

**Albin Johnson (BU2)
San Clemente, CA**



COMCBLANT, Davisville, RI



The APL (Apple) rigged out for Christmas - Gitmo style



GITMO Carpenter Shop



In our greens at sea, heading for Port Lyautey, Morocco

A Word From the XO

Joe Patterson relieved Tom Burton in May of 1968 and served as XO of NMCB-8 until the Battalion was decommissioned in Dec., 1969.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the last issue of the newsletter Joe Patterson wrote an article on current SEABEE operations around the world. The information he acquired was, in some part, based on first hand discussions he had with military brass including Seabees at their deployment sites. Joe was able to visit these sites because of his work related travels around the world. The following information is statistical in nature and shows how deeply involve the modern day SEABEES are involved in current world affairs.



Current Involvement in OIF/OEF/GWOT*

NMCB 40 and **NMCB 25** deployed to Iraq in support of the First Marine Expeditionary Force.

NMCB 7 and **NMCB 21** Seabees deployed to Kuwait in support of the Combined Forces Land Component Commander.

NMCB 1 Seabees supported the detainee mission in Iraq and Kuwait.

NMCB 40 and **NMCB 25** Seabees deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq in support of the Combined Joint Operations Task Force.

NMCB 7 Seabees supported the Joint Task Force Horn of Africa.

* **OIF** - Operation Iraqi Freedom
OEF - Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan)
GWOT - Global War On Terror

2006 Seabee Efforts

In January, Seabees assisted Kenyan authorities in rescue and recovery operations following a building collapse in Nairobi, Kenya.

In April, Seabees from **NMCB 4**, **UCT2** and **30NCR** completed Joint Exercise Balikatan in the Philippines, where they built a three-room schoolhouse.

A group of **NMCB 7** Seabees finished building two schoolhouses as part of Exercise New Horizons in Honduras.

NMCB 4 Seabees completed a Rapid Runway Repair exercise with Korean Navy Engineers and provided camp maintenance support.

NMCB 4 Seabees completed their participation in Exercise Cobra Gold in Thailand.

UCT 1 Seabees trained with divers from Ukraine, Romania and Macedonia during Exercise Sea Breeze 06 in Ukraine.

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.



Well, it's official! EIGHT's 2008 reunion is heading back to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Once again, Troy Branch has stepped up to the plate and agreed to do the magic that he did in 2006 that led to our best reunion ever in the same Pigeon Forge. Those of you who attended that one will need no encouragement to come again. Those of you who didn't are getting a second chance to find out what you missed. Dollywood is a different theme park, worth seeing and great fun. In addition, you will have the opportunity to explore the Great Smokey Mountains, a number of interesting towns within easy driving distance, and most of all, get to know some of the warm and welcoming people there who still have a great respect for flag, country and military veterans. And if all of that isn't enough, you'll have the opportunity to swap tall tales and memories with your old shipmates. So, with Troy once again in charge, let's see if we "can do" and have an even better turn out than the one in 2006.

Just a short note on the passing of Gordon Gilmore. Gordon was my first Ops in EIGHT and one of the finest men I have ever encountered. He was also one of the few who were responsible for starting up our reunions after some thirty years of inactivity. He will be sorely missed by me and, I know, by you. Rest in peace Gordon - and thanks for the privilege of knowing you.

Jack

(Continued from previous column)

Members of the **1st Naval Construction Division** and **CBMU 202** participated in Exercise Ulchi Focus Lens 06 in Korea and Okinawa where they supported the Marine Expeditionary Force Engineer Group.

NMCB 5 Seabees drilled water wells and perform other construction projects during New Horizons 06 in Peru.

Fifteen Seabees from **NMCB 40** deployed aboard the USNS Mercy for its deployment to nine countries. The Seabees renovated medical facilities.

NMCB 1 Seabees drilled up to 30 water wells in Micronesia.

NMCB 7 Seabees restored a high school in Sao Tome and performing other community relations projects in Angola, Congo and Gabon.

SEABEES "CAN DO"

Seabee Memorial, Washington, D.C.



IN MEMORIAM

In remembrance of those who served with us.

Ron Dougal advised us that the following men who served in NMCB-8 passed away. Harry "Ole" Olson in 2004; Dennis Fligg on 11/20/06; Bernard Davis on 12/28/06; Jim Mecca on 2/16/07 and Don Partain on 3/20/07. Doug Celeen informed us that his father Bob Celeen passed away on 10/3/06. Bob served with the 8th Naval Construction Battalion during WWII. Gene Steffens' wife Joan informed us that Gene passed away on 2/7/07. John North advised us of the passing of Duane Smock on 7/1/07 and Jerald D. Oakley, BU2, 3/27/07.

SEABEES

From Page 1

builders, electricians, surveyors, inspectors, mechanics and steel workers.

In combat, they are among the first into an area, coming in along with the first wave of Marines to set up facilities to house fighting units. In addition to providing a home for other battalions, the Seabees' motto is "We build, we fight" meaning they would pick up a weapon in battle, too.

The eighth battalion's motto is "Can do," which member Art Locke explained.

"If somebody says, 'You can't do it' the Seabees will do it just to prove them wrong," Locke said.

Though the eighth is currently decommissioned, their men served in combat from the World Wars to Vietnam. They were decommissioned in 1970, just after service in the Southeast Asian battle, though the unit can be called back into service at any time.

Among those attending the event in Pigeon Forge are the battalion's two surviving commanding officers, Jack O'Leary and Bob Westburg, along with Jim Daniels, who served with the Seabees for 27 years and saw service in World War II and in Korea.

The group decided to move away from holding their reunions on naval bases because their entertainment options were limited. In Pigeon Forge they found a bounty of activities, spending one evening at Dixie Stampede and the next at the Comedy Barn. Tonight, their final night in the area, they will hold a banquet in the hall at the Ramada.

"It's been great," Branch said. "I think they're probably going to want me to have it here again next year."

The area's entertainment provided plenty for the visitors to do and, for their part, the places they visited were glad to host the group.

"We're such a good match for them because we're just all American," said Dixie Stampede Marketing Director Steve Cruz. "In this type of atmosphere they can all have dinner at the same place and during the show they can whoop and holler as loud as they want. They're free to be themselves."

The group was recognized by performers and audience members during shows at both theaters.

Derek Hodges
Staff Writer

NMCB-8 SEABEES' ASSOCIATION

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Ken Kerr
Rick Reese
Recruiting Ron Dougal
Newsletter Editor Harry Davis

Web Page: <http://www.nmcb8.com>

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 needs to be continually updated. 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. **Thanks for your support !**

