

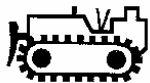


# NMCB-8 NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 6, ISSUE 2

AUGUST 2006



Inside this issue:

From Your President	2
Standing on the Edge	2
The Finest Brothers .....	3
New Years Eve 1966	4
Skippers Corner	6
Shoveling Dirt	6
Remember When	6
In Memoriam-Honor Roll	7
History of Eight	7

## TWO MONTHS AND A WAKEUP

### DOLLYWOOD REUNION UPDATE

Remember that saying? How many of you had a calendar next to your bunk with the days leading up to redeployment back to CONUS marked out with that final count down getting closer and closer to just a wakeup away from going home? Well, mark your calendars again. The Dollywood reunion is less than 60 days and a wakeup away, and I'm not kidding!

Troy Branch tells me we now have close to 200 people signed up getting ready to have some "fun in the sun". That's double the number that was reported in the February newsletter. He still has a lot of hotel rooms available but thinks the reunion hotel may fill up quickly in the coming weeks. If you put off signing up until the end, you could find yourself a little away from where the action is.

As we mentioned in the last newsletter, Dollywood and its surrounding area is a family kind of place so bring your whole family. We have 122 rooms blocked off at the Ramada Inn.

Reunion registration forms were sent out in the winter newsletter. If you have recently decided to go to the reunion, but can't find the forms or didn't receive a copy of the newsletter, they are available on line at our web site: [www.nmcb8.com](http://www.nmcb8.com) or you can call me at home (480) 807-3016 or send me an email at: [dougalsr@aol.com](mailto:dougalsr@aol.com) and I will sent them to you. LET'S MAKE THIS THE BIGGEST and BEST REUNION EVER FOR "NMCB-8" !

Ron Dougal, Reunion Committee

**From Your President****Arnie Cicerone**

I would like to take a minute to thank all of our members especially our staff for the great effort in providing the support necessary to keep the NMCB-8 association moving in a forward direction. I have had an difficult time over the past eight months with my business and have just now been able to provide necessary time to devote to the Association. Unfortunately, I have not been able to advance some of the programs necessary to build our organization; the three major projects are fundraising, membership and newsletter article support.



Thanks to **Harry Davis** as he continues to provide great leadership and support to our Association. Harry publishes an interesting and professional looking newsletter envied by many military groups. The newsletter is the heart of our Association and we must continue to put top priority on providing articles, tidbits, gossip and sitreps as to how we are doing as a group of retired (and working) people who can trace back a common thread to the days when we were "EIGHT" Seabees. Step forward fellas and get out the old slides and stories behind them and send them to Harry for publication.

**Ken Bingham** is back from Iraq and continues to do an outstanding job as the Association Treasurer. I'm looking forward to hearing Ken's stories at the reunion in Dollywood as we compare Viet Nam to Iraq. By the way, I believe Ken made more money in Iraq than he did in Viet Nam!

**Troy Branch** and **Ron Dougal** have done a great job working on this year's reunion we are all looking forward to a good time. Please get your reservations in and contact other members to do the same. There will be a bulletin board at the Hotel that will have our annual Association meeting time and place. We are expecting a large turnout. This is our chance to elect new officers for the next year and assign new people to various projects. We will have a manager and assistants assigned to important positions. Some positions open are Web Site Manager, Newsletter Article Manager, Fundraising Manager along with assistants. Please take time and think of who could do a good job. I will not be taking the President's job this year but will continue to work with Harry as his assistant "Postmaster" for printing and mailing.

See you at the Dollywood Reunion.

**Arnie****STANDING ON THE EDGE**

By Arnie Cicerone

I only had a couple of weeks left when I broke both my heels and fractured my back. I can remember this as if it was yesterday. I can see the crane operator trying to tell me to stop as I was walking backwards while directing his bucket of concrete towards me. I was so rapped up in finishing the concrete, I didn't realize I was standing at the edge of the revetment. Suddenly, I fell from the top of the revetment, about 14 feet, and landed on the concrete taxiway of the Chu Lai airport. I had never broken a bone prior to this, but, I knew that day that I had broken more than a few.



Arnold Cicerone, Bruce Lawrence, Billy Boggs, Bob Mayberry, Walter Gilbertson

I didn't spend much time at the base camp in Chu Lai. Billy Boggs and I spent most of our time on detachment in areas south of Chu Lai, with the Marines. Whenever we came back from a trip, Lt. Steffens sent us somewhere else. Some of our buddies would kid us and said that Lt. Steffens thought we were bulletproof! I can remember on one trip, Rosy gave me the radio and said my call sign was "Hope" - "Hope you make it." We all laughed.

The ironic thing about this was that a few days prior, I was with the Marines south of Chu Lai. The area was a "hot spot." When we arrived, the Marines thought we were replacement troops rather than Seabees building hard back tents and a mess hall. We had a great crew. Bill Boggs was in command. We had plenty of beer, and, the Marine Captain supplied the whisky. After spending weeks there I became a short timer, and, I was getting nervous. We were worried about getting overrun by the Viet Cong any day. I told the chief this was my second tour and I was ready to go home. I asked if I could get back to the main camp where it was safer! He agreed and, in a couple of days,

*(Continued on page 3)*

# THE FINEST BROTHERS I HAVE KNOWN

By Rick Reese

As the time nears for the Dollywood reunion, I have dusted off my cruise book and pulled up my photographs on the computer, but not to refresh my memory. No, the memories of my deployment with **EIGHT** are as clear and vivid, as if they had happened yesterday.

The reason is for story telling, expanding of stories and creation of deployment legends or just out lying of stories we have told and retold, since we reunited after 33 years at **Joe Setting's** house in 2000. It will be 40 years this coming March, since I went on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tam Ky Detachment, with the finest people I know. I am talking about **Tam Ky Detachment 1967**



**Tom Zophi, Floyd Vigil, Joe Setting, Ron Sabbatis, Lonnie Neel, Charlie Kavanaugh Bill Hall, Walt Gilbertson, Ron Dougal, Dennis Capps** and our beloved team leader **William Odell Boggs**



**aka Billy Boggs**, who is without equal as being the best story teller in the world. There were other's there for sure, such **Jerry Mallot, Al Black, JJ Markham, Richard Cunningham** and the rest, but my team was from the "**Big D**" the best team the battalion could

send and the best brothers a guy could ask for.

So, when we get to Pigeon Forge, we will all get together, and have some of the story elixir that Troy Branch has promised and listen to Billy spin those great tales. Troy said he could put up a stage and 100 chairs in the parking lot. I told Troy, when Billy started we would have to add a hundred more. Post and Twain would be no match.

Some of the stories will be about crazy **Charlie Kavanaugh**, who scared the hell out of us, the day he emptied, the damn "**Burp Gun**" he had gotten off some ARVN, into an ant hill he had sat down on. There will



Is Dougal still inside that drum?

be the one about the snake Joe Setting almost stepped on coming back from the showers. It will have grown to a "King Cobra" by then, although it did not look that big. Or the time Dougal, Hall and I had to get into the drum of the mixer to get the load of concrete out which had set up inside. There will also be the ones of the great card games and on and on.



Tam Ky Detachment 2000

L to R Front Row: William Boggs, Joe Setting. Back Row: Rick Reese, Walt Gilbertson, Ron Dougal, Ron Sabbatis, Tom Zopfi.

I wish all of the guys who served on the detachment could be there, but I know that most of my brothers will be there and I look forward to that. In closing, I feel sad for those who have served with others never to see them again. I know it leaves a hole, which has closed for me. So, I will hug my brothers and renew my faith in them and come away a better man in Dollywood.

*Rick Reese currently lives with his wife Ann in Yorba Linda, CA. He has been an investigator for the Orange County DA's Office since 2000. Prior to that he worked as a homicide investigator for 14 years for the City of Santa Ana, CA.*

## STANDING ON THE EDGE

*(Continued from page 2)*

I was back in Chu Lai.

I thought of this as I was lying on the concrete runway. Everyone was worried (especially me). I heard the chief wondering if I was paralyzed and he was concerned about how much pain I was in. Finely, the corpsman came and gave me a shot of morphine; this was great stuff. I could feel no pain, and, I was not sure that I even cared about the pain. I was taken to the field hospital Chu Lai. I was more concerned at how fast the driver was going than I was about my injuries. While I was lying on the stretcher, the corpsman's helmet fell off and landed on my head. The corpsmen felt so bad he apologized and said he though he broke my cheek bone! He further asked me not say anything about this because I was his first patient since arriving in Viet Nam. I must admit I never said anything till now. I guess this is OK! I felt sorry for him. I often wondered how his second patient went.

**More of Arnie's adventures in newsletters to follow!**

## USS MAHNOMAN COUNTY LST-912 INCIDENT NEW YEARS EVE 1966

Remembrance by Ray F. Longaker Jr.  
(Then Boatswains Mate Third Class)

On that fateful New Years Eve and Day of January 1, 1967 I was prone, in a damp bunk, in damp clothes and bedding and in the nether-land of dreamless sleep while the wind was howling and the rain beating down on the corrugated tin roof of the hooch.

Sometime around Zero-Dark-Thirty I feel a shaking like an earthquake and hear a voice that's slightly familiar, which I really didn't want to hear and wake me up into the reality of the damp and cold. **"Hey 'Rat Fink'! Hey 'Rat Fink' wake up. The Captain wants to know if you can rig a high-line over the beach!"** My brain was trying to get into gear because I knew I was In-Country Viet Nam but what did some Seabee Captain want with a high-line on a beach? I finally woke all the way up to the damp and cold and saw the serious face of "CB" Chuck Hall. Whatever had drove him out of his cozy CP bunker into the wet and mud must be important. "What's up CB? Why'd you wake me?". "Come on 'Rat Fink' the Captain wants to know if you can rig a high-line over the beach. Some ship ran aground on the beach". I thought for a moment and tried to shake the rest of the cob webs out and I commented words to the effect that, "...on board ship I'd assisted with rigging a high-line for personnel transfer". CB's persistence was, "...can you rig a high-line?" After a quick explanation from CB, I finally grasped the situation and told him to tell the CO I could and that I'd be on my way.

As the door to the hooch slammed shut with CB's departure, I pulled on my already wet boots then dug down in the bottom of my locker for the Boatswains Mates Bible, the Boatswains Mates Third & Second book. I then took off running out the back door of the hooch and then out the south gate of the camp towards where CB had said the ship was grounded.

I saw the ship on the jagged rocks with the surf pounding her starboard side. Saw the white block numbers 912 on her port bow and recognized her to be a U.S. Navy landing ship tank (LST).

As I got to the bluff above the ship, some of MCB-8's personnel and the ship's crew had managed to get a shot line up to the bluff. The LST's crew had rigged their underway replenishment high line station on the port quarter and was signaling with the rig signal paddles. I saw that the ship's rig signalman was signaling to heave around, so I instructed the personnel standing around to take the line in hand and to start pulling. As the shot line turned into a manila messenger then increase in size to the larger main messenger, the terminal end



BM3 Ray Longaker Jr. at the MCB-8 60 Ton Timber Bridge Project at Bien Son.

of the high-line with its connecting shackle came into view.

Where we were standing on the rocks, in the mud and puddles in the driving wind and rain we didn't have a "king-post". One of the equipment operators had driven up onto the bluff with a 2 ½ ton six-by truck. I asked him if he'd turn it around and back it to the spot where I was pointing. He gave me that Sea Bee "Can do" and jumped into his truck and had it moving into place. Right

about then the terminal end and shackle for the high-line came over the bluff and now I had a place to connect the terminal end to, the towing pintal of the six-by. Along with the terminal end of the high-line came the out-haul for the trolley block. I

instructed everyone to start heaving around on the out-haul and I gave the ship the "slack-off" signal. The trolley block came into view with the "Coaling Bag" attached to the cargo hook. I managed to get word to the ship with the first load that they should dead-end their end of the high-line. I recommended that they just tend the in-haul line since their crew was already beat up from the ordeal of the night before when they were trying to save their ship.

We loaded the coaling bag with damage control equipment, and with the six-by tensioning the high-line, we managed to slide the first load over the bluff then slacked out on the out-haul and the load worked its way over to the ship. This was going to be tough. Not impossible, just tough.

Just shortly after the first load, one of MCB-8's crawler cranes got into position and lowered the main whip. I then asked the equipment operator of the six-by to back up and put slack into the high-line. We then connected the high-line terminal end to the crane's main whip. The crane operator then topped up the boom head and at my signal heaved around on the high-line. What a difference! Now we had the height needed and could control the loads going to the ship much easier.

We had been doing everything by hand for most of the morning. Now that the crane was hooked up things were going much easier. All my attention was in getting the Damage Control equipment over to the ship and I hadn't noticed one of the CEC officers had his personnel rig up a snatch block to the crane boom under the main whip. He was going to have the out-haul line be worked from and controlled by one of the other winch drums in the crane.

The CEC officer came over to me and said that they were ready to take over the out-haul. I was so focused in what my crew and I were doing that it didn't register what he was trying to explain. I told him that my crew and I had it under control and he looked at me with that unusual understand that



BM3 Ray F. Longaker Jr. (r.) with CB Rig Team and Coaling Bag loaded with Damage Control equipment.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

only a good officer possesses. He saw and knew that we were pretty burnt out and he knew that we would do whatever it took to get the job done. Unknown to me he had also planned and was trying to execute a solution. Simply, let the machine do the work. With great patience, he got my attention and pointed over to the crane where I saw what he was talking about. (That's the trouble with Boatswains



Mates. If you don't color them pictures, they just don't understand.) I then understood what he was saying and we transferred the out-haul over to the crane. In the picture above: BM-3 Ray F. Longaker Jr. "rig captain" on the extreme right. The out-haul tending crew center and the equipment operators making the last connections of the out-haul to the crane's winch drum to the left of the picture. You can see in the picture that the wind is still blowing but the rain had stopped. The wind was still driving the high seas and swells that had been beating up the ship all night and the whole time we were working the LST. You can also see in the center of the picture a stack of submersible pumps and other Damage Control gear.

We had since learned that the ship's name was the USS Mahnoman County LST-912. We heard that in heavy seas during the night, while anchored off the entrance to Chu Lai Harbor, she had drug anchor. The crew had fought to get her underway and headed into the swells, but timing and conditions prevented that from happening, and she slammed down hard onto the rocks in the driving rain and seas. To compound the situation, she was carrying a full load of bag cement.

My crew and I had been at it for hours with other battalion members and when the crane took over the manual tasks we were then properly relieved. We went to the galley and had a



USS Mahnoman County LST-912 ran aground on the rocks just below and to the south of the MCB-8 base camp at about 0117 January 1, 1967. The high-line is connected and a Coaling Bag with Damage Control equipment being sent to the ship.

hot lunch then off to do our assigned duties and tasks.

Sometime later the Security Platoon was assembled at our usual Zero-Dark-Thirty early morning Quarters for Muster and Inspection. The normal business of assigning watches, Sergeant of the Guard assignments, and squad functions were being assigned when we were suddenly called to attention. The Commanding Officer of EIGHT, Commander P. A. Phelps arrived at our formation. Salutes were exchanged and Commander Phelps had words with the Security Platoon Leading Petty Officers. The next command that I heard was, "Petty Officer Longaker, front and center". Being a good Boatswains Mate, the first thought that went through my head was, "...what'd I do now..." I did a snappy Security Platoon about-face and left ranks at a quick march to front and center. Saluted and said, "Petty Officer Longaker reporting as ordered sir." After returning my salute, Commander Phelps presented me with a Letter of Commendation, stating in part, "...You are hereby commended for the outstanding manner in which you responded in providing emergency assistance to the LST MAHNOMEN COUNTY which ran aground near the U.S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion EIGHT camp in Chu Lai, RVN on 1 January 1967. The appreciation of the Commander, Naval Support Activity, Da Nang, Rear Admiral WESCHLER, and the officers and men of the MAHNOMEN COUNTY is expressed in enclosure (1).

Over the course of the following weeks and months, we watched Navy salvage tugs make their attempt at pulling the USS Mahnoman County free of the rocks but she wouldn't budge. There were attempts to off-load her cargo and other measures to lighten her and pull her free during a high tide. Then word came back from one of the salvage officers. Not only had her tanks been holed by the rocks, but the rocks went clear through the hull and were piercing into her well deck and into the cargo. It was not a matter any more of salvaging her or getting her off the rock. She was now imprisoned on the rocks. The USS Mahnoman County LST-912 was decommissioned in place and listed as out of service for scrapping. Everything usable was removed and she was unceremoniously cut into sections.



The End of the USS Mahnomen County

A few months later, Marine Air Group 36 extended an invitation for any person from MCB-8 who wanted to fly door gun

position on their Huey's just needed to get command permission and wander over to their compound. I went through my chain-of-command and reported to the MAG-36 flight shack. I was issued the appropriate gear and we took off and made runs up and down the coast. Followed the river inland from Chu Lai then flew back down the coast past MCB-8's camp and the x-USS Mahnomen County. There she lay, still impaled on the rocks.



## 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 brief as I am still coming off major surgery and we will be leaving on a three-week vacation in a few days. We're also booked for the battalion reunion and looking forward to seeing many of you there. Our XO in Chu Lai and part of Phu Bai, Tom Burton, has assured me that he will be able to make it for the first time (Good Lord willing). I'm hoping that a lot of you from the East Coast, reluctant to travel to the reunions at Port Hueneme, will show us all what a good 'turn-out' is.

As for the rest of us, we'd better show that a mere two to three thousand miles is no obstacle to getting together with old warriors and good friends. We spent a lot of time with one another and it is always fun to share those memories again and perhaps add a few tall tales over a cool one to boot. So, a safe trip to you all and God bless. I look forward to seeing you in Tennessee.

**Jack**

## HOW I LEARNED TO SHOVEL DIRT

By Morris Burnham

It was during the 1967 deployment to Chu Lai at a Charlie Company job. I believe we were working at FLSG, or maybe the water storage tank. I'm just not sure where we were! Anyway, we needed additional fill dirt down in a ditch, so we had some guys in the ditch, and some of us (including me) were above, shoveling dirt down to the guys in the ditch who were placing the fill in the desired place. So there I was sending dirt down like it was coming out of a blower. Of course it was going all over the guys. I remember Ewald down in the ditch was pi...d the first time I did it, the second time he was ready to come up and kick my butt. He probably thought this was my idea of a joke, and he didn't think it was funny. I was flustered. I didn't know what I was doing wrong as no one else was having the problem I was. Finally someone helped me out, and I can't remember who that was. He taught me to loft the shovel and the dirt would go down in a clump right where I aimed. I was amazed at this process! I actually began to have fun shoveling the dirt!

So my sincere thanks goes out to whoever taught me how to shovel dirt. I want you to know that this skill has been very valuable throughout my life. Loft, don't throw. Is there a life metaphor here?

## REMEMBER WHEN....



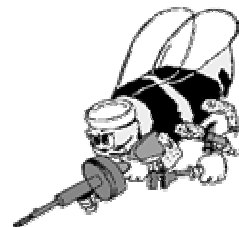
60 Ton Timber Bridge Project near the Vietnamese village of Bien Son constructed during the Chu Lai deployment



Charlie Company constructing a Quonset hut in Chu Lai 1967.



CHARLIE COMPANY RAT PACK  
L to R: P. Plankey, Ray Kingston, Morris Burnham,  
David Ewald, Gerald Blanton



# Seabee Memorial, Washington, D.C.



## IN MEMORIAM

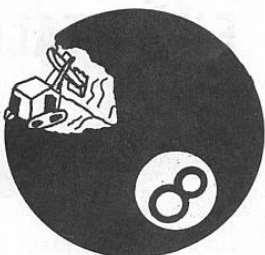
*In remembrance of those who served with us.*

We have received word of the passing of two shipmates: Ron Dougal advised us that **Lester Uhlmann from Bay City, MI** died in a car accident in Sept. 2005 and **Daryl Engel** died on June 3, 2006 after a long battle with cancer.

## HISTORY OF EIGHT

Since its commissioning in 1951 NMCB EIGHT has had nine commanding officers. The Battalion has been decommissioned twice during its history including for the final time in 1969 during the Viet Nam drawdown.

COMMANDING OFFICERS	DATES OF COMMAND
CDR W. E. NORCROSS, CEC, USN	AUG 1951 - JAN 1953
CDR R. G. WITHERELL, CEC, USNR	JAN 1953 - DEC 1954
CDR J. A. HIEGEL, CEC, USNR	JAN 1955 - Decommissioned JUN 1955
LCDR A. E. FLOYD, CEC, USN	NOV 1960 - AUG 1962
CDR G. L. HOFFMAN, CEC, USN	AUG 1962 - APR 1964
LCDR J. P. TRUNZ JR., CEC, USN	APR 1964 - JUL 1965
CDR P. A. PHELPS, CEC, USN	JUL 1965 - APR 1967
CDR J. O'LEARY, CEC, USN	APR 1967 - JUL 1968
CDR R. WESTBURG, CEC, USN	JUL 1968 - Decommissioned DEC 1969



**NMCB-8 SEABEES' ASSOCIATION**

241 Windrose Drive  
Port Ludlow, WA 98365

President ..... Arnie Cicerone  
Treasurer ..... Ken Bingham  
Past Presidents ..... Gordon Gilmore  
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](mailto:nmcb_8@msn.com). **Thanks for your support !**

