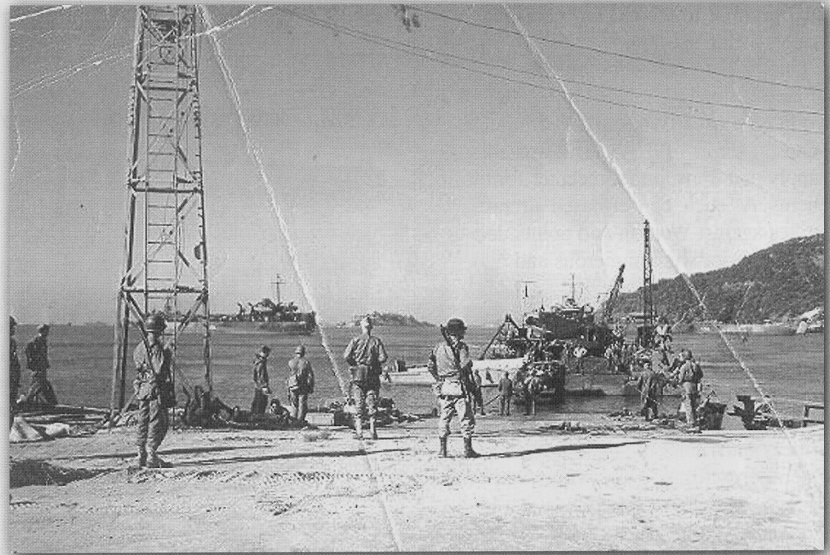


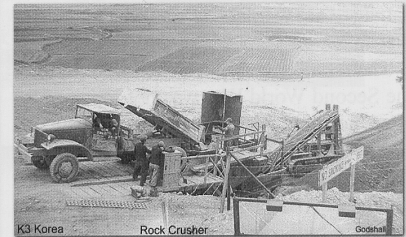
Seabees in Korea, 1950-1953

The worldwide US network of WWII bases and stations remained after the war. The Navy's were still in existence in the late 1940s — and Seabee units were deployed around the globe.

STORY BY CAPT. LARRY G. DEVRIES, CEC, USNR (RET.)
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY PAT MORRIS



Above, Seabees set up a pontoon pier to unload supplies from landing craft at Inchon, Sept. 19, 1950. Below left, a CBD 1804 "class picture" at K-3, Spring 1953. Below right, a rock crusher operating at K-3.



The story of the Navy Seabees and their performance during the Korean Conflict begins in the immediate post-World War II years. As with all of the US armed services, the Seabees were part of the wholesale release of active personnel during the 1945 to 1947 period. The World War was ended and more than 12 million uniformed personnel were released from active duty beginning in 1945.

Several events during the post-World War II period drew attention to possible future US military actions. The period was one of developing world tension. The Soviet Union took over Hungary in 1947 and Czechoslovakia in 1948. The East Germans and the Soviets blocked the land access to the Allied sections of Berlin causing the Berlin Airlift during 1948-1949.

The US armed forces, including reserve forces, were engaged in the Berlin Airlift. The explosion of an atomic bomb by the Soviet Union in 1949 continued the escalation of tensions.

Seabees on active duty dropped from over 250,000 during World War II to a level of 3300 active duty Seabees by 1949. That number increased to 6000 by 1950, primarily due to increasing demand for construction and maintenance support at naval bases and stations worldwide. In general, the post-World War II period was a time of smaller operations and austere budgets for the Navy and the Marine Corps.

When the North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel June 25, 1950, and entered South Korea, US forces were shocked initially and absorbed the attack while withdrawing to the south. The theater commander was GEN Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander, Allied Powers Japan.

The Naval Forces Far East Command had been under the command of ADM C. Turner Joy, USN, since August 1949. He reported in Japan to General MacArthur, who was later designated, Commander in Chief, UN Command. The Far East Command, including the mission of logistics support,

was located in Japan and its principle bases were at Yokohama, Guam and at Subic Bay in the Philippines. All were significant distances from any action in Korea. The operating fleet was the Seventh Fleet under VADM Arthur D. Struble, USN.

Reacting to the need for personnel for Korean operations, President Truman called out the nation's Reserve and National Guard units July 19, 1950. As an example of the speed of mobilization, the first Marine Corps Reserve units reached Camp Pendleton, Calif., July 31, 1950. By Sept. 1, 1950, call-ups had brought in about 256,000 men into the three services.

The Seabees supported the Marine Corps in Korea as they had done in World War II. This was especially true of airfield maintenance and construction, because the transition from prop-driven planes to jet aircraft occurred during this time. From an engineering viewpoint, the Pierced Steel Planking (or Marston mat), used so successfully as main runways in World War



Seabee CE3 Pat Morris, with CBMU 1 at Chinhae, Korea, in 1953.

II for piston-engine aircraft, did not stand up to the punishment meted out by jet aircraft. That fact demanded new methods and materials in airfield runway construction and a six-inch blacktop layer was often used.

Cold weather, approximately that of northern Maine, and hot weather, approximately that of Washington, DC, contributed to the stress on the work and the Seabees. The shortage of native skilled labor and lack of local supply sources contributed to the challenges of construction.

The Navy's Seabee battalions were not deployed to Korea as complete Mobile Construction Battalion units. Active duty Bees were called upon to provide smaller construction units.

NCB-104 was formed by reactivation of a World War II unit in 1947. It arrived at Camp McGill, Japan, at the outbreak of the Korean Conflict. It was shortly converted into ACB-1. GEN MacArthur successfully landed with the United Nations forces at Inchon, South Korea Sept. 15, 1950, and drove north. The Seabees of ACB-1 were attached to the 1st Marine Division and were part of the landing force under RADM James H. Doyle, USN, Commander, Amphibious Force at Inchon.

ACB-1 was organized in 1950 from NCB-104. It served at Inchon, Wolmido, Red and Blue Beaches and Yo Island in the Bay of Wonsan assigned

to the 1st Marine Division. It was part of Task Force 90 and *Operation Chromite*, US Army X Corps, during the Inchon landing and was part of landing of The Wonsan Campaign of October 1950.

The ACB-1 Seabees were landed on Inchon as part of the landing force. Their effort was directed at providing the pontoon causeways necessary to unload LSTs.

In May 1952, ACB-1 managed to build an emergency airstrip on the small island of Yo. While under heavy enemy fire, they built a 2400-foot airstrip in

16 days.

During the work, they were forced to repair the new shell holes made daily by the enemy batteries across the bay. During the year it was used, it saved more than 60 fliers and at least \$10 million in aircraft.

During the Korean War, the UN Far East Air Force (FEAF) used some 15 air bases in Japan to support combat operations in Korea. In addition, the Air Force either improved or constructed some 55 airfields. These air bases were all numbered and some became better known by their number than

by their name. The more important of these airfields included:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| K-1 Pusan West | K-13 Suwon |
| K-2 Taegu | K-14 Kimpo |
| K-3 Pohang-dong | K-16 Seoul |
| K-5 Taejon | K-40 Cheju-do |
| K-6 Pyongtaek | K-46 Heongsong |
| K-8 Kunsan | K-47 Chunchon |
| K-9 Pusan East | K-55 Osan |
| K-10 Chinhae | |

The Seabees grew from their strength of 3300 just prior to Korea up to 14,000 at the peak strength during the conflict. The authorized strength of a Mobile Construction Battalion was 550 men, but actual strength often varied.

The standard issue rifle was the M-1 .30-cal Garand rifle, but some Seabees were reportedly issued M-1903 .30-06-cal Springfield rifles in training, a carry-over from World War II. The .45 cal. pistol was a standard sidearm.

The Seabees' uniform was a mixed assortment. Seabees on active duty in-theater Korea wore Marine Corps-issue uniforms, while some of those in training in the States, including Reservists, wore the white "Dixie cup" cap with blue work dungarees and a Navy work jacket.

RADM Joseph F. Jelley, CEC, USN, had been Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks (BuDocks), and the Seabees, since Dec. 1, 1949. The worldwide US network



PHOTO COURTESY CONRAD LAWLOR

of World War II bases and stations remained after the war and the Navy's were still in existence in the late 1940s. BuDocks, therefore, still had responsibilities and missions in many places around the globe, including Seabee units deployed in the Atlantic, Caribbean, European and Mediterranean areas.

A Korean-era project that occupied many Seabees was begun in the Philippines in 1951. It was at this time that the Seabees began building the naval base there at Cubi Point. About 3000 Seabees from MCBs 2, 3, 5, 9 and 11 spent the next five years expending over 20 million man-hours building the installation for the Navy's Seventh Fleet.

Reserve Seabees

As we know, the Seabees were created in World War II and their ratings were considered Reserve ratings. In fact, all World War II Seabee construction personnel were designated "USNR." All Seabees remaining on active duty continued in that status before the Navy made them a permanent part of the Navy and classified construction ratings as permanent "USN" in 1947.

The Naval Reserve had existed since 1916, but the Seabees were not a part of the Naval Reserve as the Seabees had been created during World War II. After a period of post-war review the Seabees became an official part of the Naval Reserve on December 31, 1947.

The Reserve Seabee program consisted of 234 Seabee Companies, with about 1100 officers and 9000 enlisted, organized in about 200 Naval Training Centers. Reserve Seabee Companies were not deployable organizations, so no "Reserve Seabee units" per se served



in the Korean era.

Seabees from the reserve component, however, had a profound effect when the Korean Conflict began. The Navy called on the Seabee Reserve for skilled construction men to bolster the regular force.

Within a few weeks, individual volunteers from across the country had been activated and had proceeded to their ports of embarkation.

Within a few months, more than 60 percent of Seabees on active duty were Reservists. ☉

I was there: An Oral History

RICHARD COULSON

BU2s Jack Kaelin (left) and Richard Coulson, "apparently trying to figure out what we were doing there." >>



"DURING THE KOREAN WAR, I served two tours in Korea with CBMU 1 and CBMU 101. They were attached to the 3rd Marine Air Wing out of Orange County, Calif., at the old El Toro Marine Base, now closed.

"All in all, I owe so much to the Seabees for getting me started in a useful career in construction, being a contractor and a consultant, and today owning a large, successful general engineering and construction consultancy. But prior to enlisting, while in high school and college, I joined the Navy as a Reservist. While in school during and after World War II, many of my friends had joined the Army Reserves in California.

When the Korean Conflict started, all who belonged to the Army Reserves were called to active duty with the famous 40th Division, which went directly to Korea. I didn't want to wait for my call up, so I went to Los Angeles and enlisted in the Seabees. It was the best thing that ever happened to me.

"I was advised never to volunteer for anything, but I volunteered for everything that came along. It often really paid off. While in Korea, my commanding officer asked for a volunteer to fly to the island of Cheju-do and make a survey for a later radar site. One of the Marine pilots flew me over in his plane and I was there for two weeks.

"The island was a training base for Republic of Korea (ROK) Marines. While waiting for my plane ride back to base, I spent time with the famous Ama community. In their culture, women go diving for food, for kelp, lobster and abalone, while the men stay home and take care of the children. Having done some diving in the waters of Southern California, where I was born and raised, I

felt I could free-dive with the best of them. Was I ever wrong! Those Ama women divers could hold their breath for three to four minutes at a time. I couldn't even approach that time.

"For the most part, CBMU 1 was stationed at K-3 at Pohang-dong, on the east coast near Taegu. Our unit's project was to construct and maintain an airfield for the 3rd Marine Air Wing — one of whose pilot members was Ted Williams, at the time probably one of the best professional baseball players in the world. I had played some baseball in school, as most all students did in those days. There is just no comparison between the ball we played, though, and the ball played by Ted Williams. This by itself was worth the trip to Korea to be able to say, 'I played baseball with *Ted Williams*.'

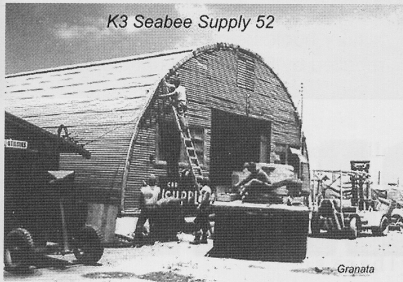
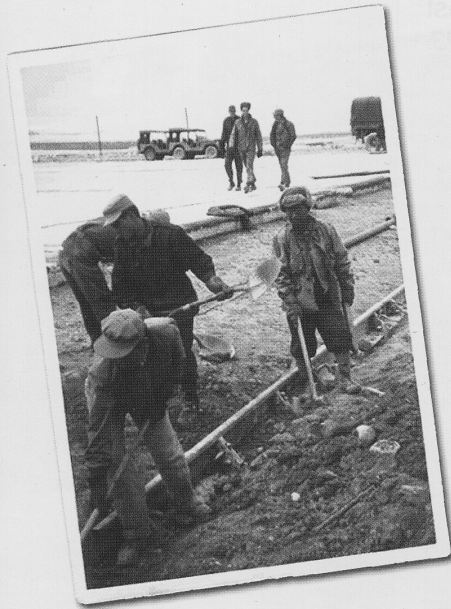
"I later was stationed on Guam with Construction Battalion Detachment 1506. While there, I would volunteer to look for Japanese stragglers from WWII. Either they didn't know the war was over or didn't believe it. They hid in caves during the day and came out at night to scour local ranches for foodstuffs.

"During my tour, we captured three such holdouts that were shipped back to Japan. While on Guam, I volunteered for temporary duty at such exotic places Saipan, Spain, Tinian, Kwajalein, Bikini and Eniwetak.

"The photos I was able to salvage after 50 years were taken by a Kodak Box camera that I carried with me, a present from my Mom. I apologize for the quality, but that's all I had. I really did join the Navy to see the world — and any success I have had in the business world is due to my time spent with the United States Navy Seabees."

— Richard Coulson

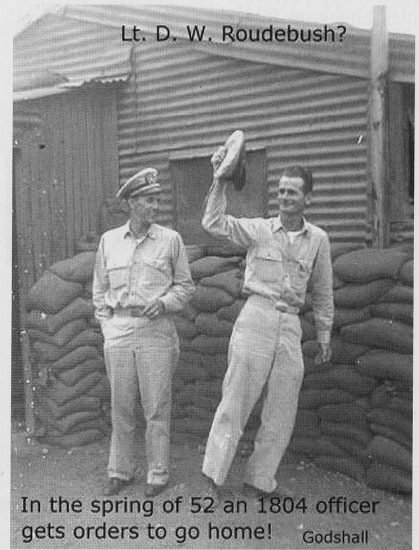
SEABEE Magazine expresses its profound appreciation for the personal photos former Seabees pulled — from their wallets and Web sites.



K3 Seabee Supply 52

Granata

Seabee scenes, clockwise from upper left: Local workers help build the airstrip at K-3; baseball legend Ted Williams, a Marine Corps fighter pilot in WWII and in Korea, walked away from an unscheduled hard landing there. A Korean English teacher and his family. An officer departs for home. "Military Payment Certificate" was "American money" in Korea. Ray Sorrentino and Tex Groves at CBD 1804. Bees from CBMU 1 open their Korean new "super-highway." Seabee Supply at K-3. Below, another Seabee Quonset hut goes up.



Lt. D. W. Roudebush?

In the spring of 52 an 1804 officer gets orders to go home!

Godshall



Jaccino



Jaccino



K3 Korea CBD-1804 52

Ray Sorrentino Tex Groves

Granata



Military "funny money" 1954

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