

My Chanh Bridge Project, 1968

By Ben Bower



In December, 1967, coming off of a year of shore duty in Pacific Beach, Washington. I was assigned to MCB 11 in Port Hueneme, California. At first, I served as a carpenter training instructor. During this time, I also furthered Battalion military training at Marine Camp Pendleton where I served as one of the M-16 rifle range instructors prior to our deployment to Vietnam.

In April and May 1968 the Battalion was air lifted in Navy C-130s from nearby US Naval Air Station Point Mugu to South Vietnam, via numerous Pacific islands onward to Manila in Philippines and to our destination of Quang Tri in far northern South Vietnam.

One of our first major projects on this deployment was building a heavy timber bridge, south of Quang Tri, next to a little village called My Chanh. The story that follows is the ongoing story of that bridge.

Prior to our arrival, the Battalion that we relieved, MCB 5, had completed dirt work approaches to the future bridge and set the head walls on both ends. When we arrived on site, we set up two squad tents and sandbagged one day, then we all pitched in a quarter a day and had the native town people build us a bunker and finish sandbagging while we started work on the bridge. For months, we drove piling and set heavy creosoted timber 8"x24" beams to build what became a two-lane wide bridge 600' long with two concrete fire breaks in the planking to replace a temporary pontoon bridge which had been in place for some time to replace an earlier bridge that had been destroyed.



**My Chanh Bridge,
REPLACEMENT OF WAR
DAMAGED RAILROAD
COMBINATION VEHICLE
BRIDGE IN 1968, QUANG TRI
DEPLOYMENT**



**MY CHANH BRIDGE,
REPLACEMENT WITH
TEMPORARY
PONTOON BRIDGE.**



**NEW HEAVY
TIMBER
BRIDGE BUILT
BY MCB #11**

A two-lane wide heavy timber bridge 600' long with two concrete fire breaks with 4' side walks on each side.

It took a lot of sweat, burns and blisters from the creosote bleeding out of the timbers but we survived. I doubt if OSHA would approve of some of the features shown above such as lack of scaffolding, safety belts or harnesses or hard hats. Just to make the full picture clear it is important to point out that while building this new My Chanh bridge we occasionally took sniper fire during the day and had to make for the bunkers.



MCB #11 crew on the My Chanh river bridge job.
Back row L to R- 1.Neadow, 2.Scalpi, 3."H" Co. Surveyor?, 4. Culliton, 5.?, 6.Dickey, 7. Connally, 8.Claffey, 9.Griffith, 10.Smith, 11.Baines, 12.Mewborn, 13.Berg
Front row L to R- 1.?, 2,Burkhart, 3.?, 4. Chief, A.F. Baker, 5. Roberts, 6.Youmans, 7. Finn, 8. Bower (In red box)



After completion of the bridge, we continued to upgrade Highway #1 by placing new concrete headwalls for the steel culverts and asphalt roadway and maintaining the highway from Dong Ha to Hue.

In addition to this bridge we also built numerous SEA hut's (16'x32'sleeping quarters) for Marine, Army and Air Force units plus a contingent of Australians. It was a major objective of ours to get these forces out of the tents/mud/sand they were living in onto a wood platform/deck, with plywood

sidewalls and with a metal roof before the rainy season and winter. MCB 11 also built galleys/mess halls, hospitals, a non-denominational church and unfortunately a morgue. All of us worked long hours each day to accomplish the task at hand in keeping of the Seabee Motto "Can Do".

THE MY CHANH BRIDGE EVOLVES

On May 11, 1972, the Des Moines Register newspaper ran an AP story with a picture showing retreating South Vietnamese Marines and our My Chanh bridge burning to prevent the North Vietnamese Army from advancing tanks south on what I can assure you was once a pretty good road!! A lot of hard work up in flames.

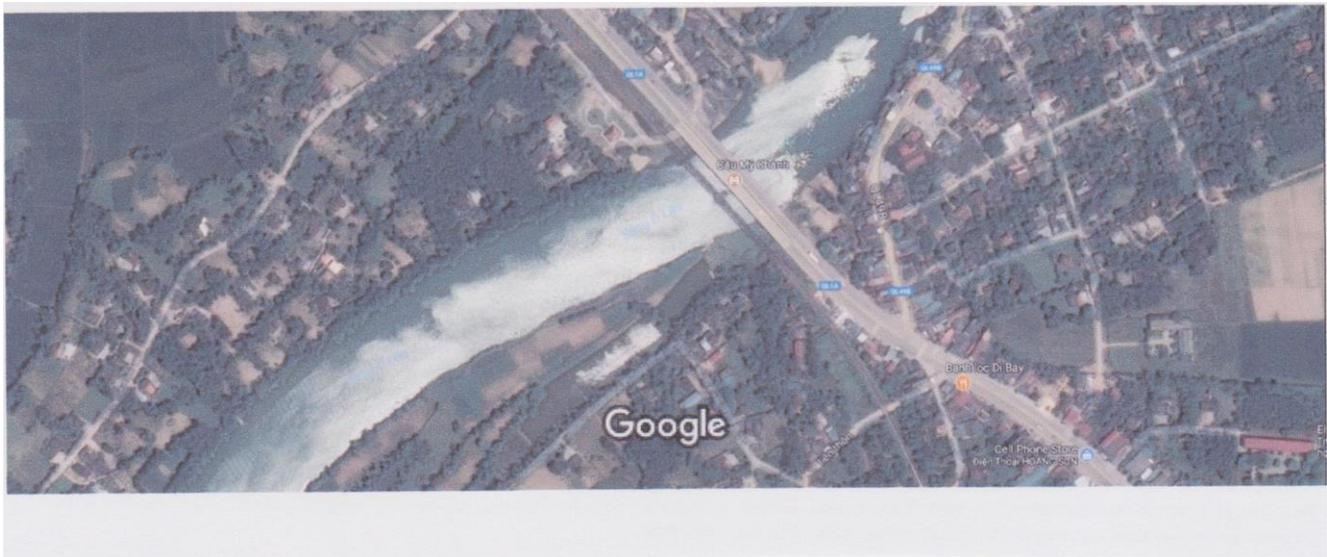




A July 2015 photo shows a much modernized My Chanh. This picture of skull & cross bones communicates a lot of relevant information, indicating that during construction workers uncovered unused mortar rounds. A couple of years ago, Quang Tri Province officially reported 1,324 deaths and injuries since 1975 from unexploded ordnance. In partnership with Norwegian People's Aid Vietnam, a group called Project RENEW expanded mine action work into Hai Lang District around this bridge which has sustained the second highest number of UXO casualties. The

program receives funding from the U.S. Department of State via Norwegian People's Aid (NPA).

THE MY CHANH BRIDGE IN 2017, 4-LANE HIGHWAY!



What will this bridge look like in its next incarnation? Who knows but history will always show that MCB 11 was a part of its evolving story.

My Navy Career

After boot camp at Great Lakes as a Navy Seabee my first duty station was Port Hueneme, California. MCB #8 was returning from Vietnam, so I received orders as soon as their advance party landed back at home port of Port Hueneme. The "C" company chief wanted to know if I could type, the A/C felt pretty good in the office, so I said I would give it a try and see if I was good enough typist for him and the Company commander. Within 30 days I received orders to ship out but the chief was not happy and said I could turn the orders down if I would stay and work with him. My office skills must have been better than I thought. I had relatives in Seattle, Washington, so I chose shore duty at Naval Facility in Pacific Beach, Washington. I worked in a Seabee Maintenance Group for the facility a base with no more than 100 Navy personal. It was a Top-Secret submarine listing base, known as an

Oceanographic Research Base at the time. It is now a R & R center. I left there as a 3rd Class Petty Officer after a 13 months shore duty.

I joined MCB 11 in December of 1967 and my first tour, to Quang Tri, and the detachment at My Chanh bridge. My second tour was to Camp Evans and on a detachment to Saigon Mekong Delta, Rung Sat Zone.

I was Discharged from the Seabees as a Second Class Petty Officer on November 28, 1969 in Port Hueneme, California. As part of President's plan to reduce forces in Vietnam, the MCB 11 was de-commissioned the following month, in December 1969.

Return to Civilian Life

Upon my discharge, I used my construction training and continued to work as a Construction Millwright, Welder and Carpenter, as a journeyman, foreman, superintendent and estimator for companies in Southeast Iowa, Illinois, Missouri and Wisconsin. I have been associated with various heavy industrial projects in the area, including a power house, a paper mill as well as meat processing facilities and metal foundries.

I also served as a Millwright Apprenticeship Coordinator and instructor of the program at the South Eastern Community College and was Business Agent for the Carpenters, Millwrights & Piledrivers of Southeast Iowa, Western Illinois and Northeast Missouri area for eight years.

After working for a major corn processing company from 1995 I retired in 2010.

I feel fortunate to have served with a group of young men that worked in such a good team--Can Do!