

What Kind of Ship is an MCB?

By: Mike McDonald

I joined MCB 11 as a 3rd class Electronic Technician prior to the battalion's 1967 deployment to Dong Ha that we all soon learned was in Vietnam's far north area widely known as the DMZ. Of course, ET is not a Seabee rating--I was in the 6th year of an 8 year enlistment in the Naval Reserve and had been rated 3rd class after meeting all the Petty Officer requirements as a reservist. This was the point in my enlistment where I was required to serve two years in active duty.

It was 1966 and the Vietnam War was heating up but I was sure that I would be fine being a fleet sailor. To start my active duty I had checked into the Navy Base at Treasure Island, San Francisco. This is where duty assignments were made, for me to a ship, I was sure, where I would be well-fed and dry for the duration. Each morning at muster some of us would be given a strip of paper, much like a fortune in a fortune cookie. On this was the info we were looking for—to what ship were we headed--CVA61, DD231, DE861, LSD241 etc.? When it was finally in my hands, my "fortune" read "MCB 11." What kind of ship is an MCB I wondered? I couldn't find anyone who knew. Finally I ran into a 1st class that was saltier than I was and he said: "Son you're going to the Seabees!" That can't be I thought - I'm a fleet sailor!

Next stop Port Hueneme. I traded in my dungarees for jungle greens and you know the rest of the story. I soon found myself assigned to the early Advanced Party, the first of the first in the battalion to reach Dong Ha Combat Base in the spring of 1967. There were five of us that left the relative comfort for the adventure we foresaw at Da Nang and onward. After landing we soon jumped on an LCM "mike" boat with rifles, gear and forklifts and headed north up the South China Sea and into the Cua Viet river. We sailed west for 10 miles or so to the landing ramp a mile or so from the Dong Ha base. In short order, we were off loading and making our way to the site of MCB 11's future Camp Barnes. The five of us set out our single tent, dug some holes, strung some concertina wire and began the task of going back and forth to the river offloading and moving supplies to get things going at our barren camp. I was assigned to stay with the tent and man the radios. As a Forward Combat Base, Dong Ha was pretty quiet during those early days and my days were somewhat boring as I sat in the heat watching the others come and go with the supplies. One afternoon I was afforded the opportunity to defend our little stake out for over the rise came a horde of

Vietnamese carrying shovels, rakes and hoes! I jumped into my fighting hole readied my M14, prepared to do battle. The invading throng stopped a few yards away and began digging...it seems our base was placed on top of a Vietnamese burial ground and these people had come to remove their ancestors. While no doubt not happy, they were not a threat to us at all. The rest of those days were spent swatting gnats and waiting for the real advanced party to arrive.

Submitted by:

Mike McDonald

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Time in Navy and Career Since

I was on both the Dong Ha and Quang Tri deployments, flying out of Vietnam at the end of 1968 my two year hitch in active duty at its end. One highlight of my time in Vietnam was being named as Seabee of Month but I'm not sure which month but I have a picture of Commander Hartnell shaking my hand.

On return home to Oregon I got a job selling construction equipment in 1969 and eventually owned and was the general manager of several construction equipment dealerships in California and Oregon. I sold my Case dealership in Bend, OR about 12 years ago and retired—hunting in Africa several times as well as hunting and fishing in Alaska. I have a wonderful wife of 36 years, three children, three grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Life is good-thanks to the Seabees of 11!

Contact: mmcdonald7190@centurylink.net