

the ESPRIT of 53



DECEMBER 1969

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The colors are hoisted
down for the last time

HOME TO STAY

MCB-53's second and final deployment to the Republic of Vietnam ended with the arrival of the delayed party on November 19.

Preceded by a ten-man advance party that arrived on October 12, the main body touched down in Quonset Point, Rhode Island, in five flights. The first through fourth flights arrived on November 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. The last flight arrived on the 19th.

With CBLANT's band playing and the drill team going through its paces, MCB-53's Seabees were welcomed home by CAPT C. F. Krickenberger, Jr., COM-CBLANT, and CAPT C. C. Heid, COM21-NCR, as they disembarked from the plane. Just outside the entrance to the airfield the families and friends were waving and anxiously awaiting the sight of their Seabee.

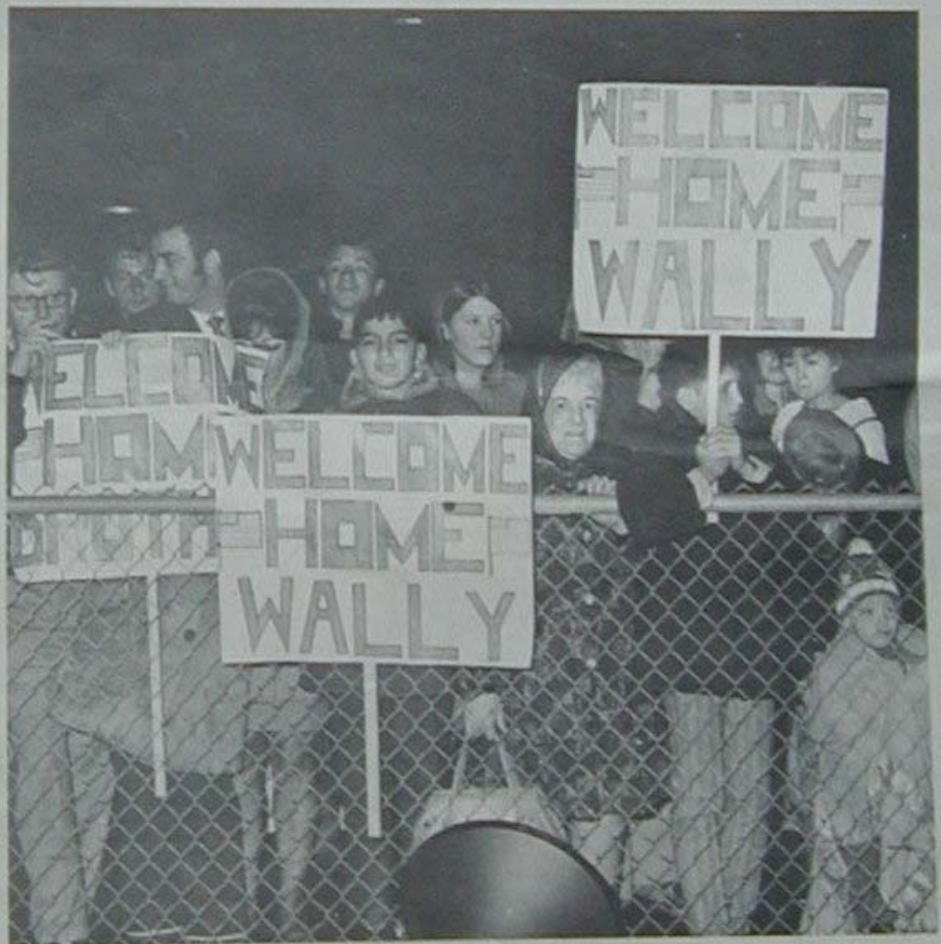
Prior to arriving at Quonset, there were layovers and crew changes in Yokota, Japan; Anchorage, Alaska; and Seattle, Washington. Actual flying time from Danang to Quonset was approximately 24 hours.



There could be little doubt as to how the waiting crowds felt about welcoming their men home.



Togetherness...



Wally and others had their own fan clubs.



Men of the fourth flight begin disembarking.



Even late at night large crowds gathered.



Rain or shine, the drill team and the red carpet were there.



Nobody was any happier to be home than the Captain.



Photographer in action. That's him on the left.



Tired and damp, but glad to be home.



CS1 Nichols is greeted by his family.



Welcome home, Gary...



BU3 Littlefield gets a welcome home hug.



You haven't changed a bit, Ruff.

Awards and medals for jobs well done

Thirty-three medals and awards were presented to various officers and men of MCB-53 in an In-Country awards ceremony at Camp Haskins North, RVN, on October 26, 1969, and in two homeport awards ceremonies at CBC, Davisville, on November 13 and 21, 1969.

For "his leadership and untiring efforts" from March to November 1969 Cdr. Robert K. Miller, Commanding Officer of MCB-53, received the Bronze Star with combat "V." Under his guidance the "Battalion was successful in accomplishing a large construction mission in support of III Marine Amphibious Force" that included the reconstruction of Camp Monahan and the Freedom Hill Recrea-

tion Complex after an explosion at ASP 1, as well as "upgrading and reinforcing ... the seven hundred foot Lang Co Bridge ... and the upgrading of the Northern Artillery Cantonment Facility." Cdr. Miller also guided the construction of the Communications and Electric Building at the Force Logistics Command and sent a special crew to "remove safety hazards at the Ha Thanh Special Forces airfield."

For his service as Operations Officer and then as Executive Officer for MCB-53, LCdr. David L. Forney was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V." The citation especially noted LCdr. Forney's organizational abil-

ity in creating a separate construction company to operate a rock crusher and asphalt plant at Vinh Dai. Also noteworthy was his careful supervision of the Data Processing facility built by MCB-53 at the Force Logistics Command. The facility housed "the largest air conditioning system ever installed in the Republic of Vietnam by Seabees."

"All jobs undertaken by him," read the citation, "were successfully completed within the specified time frame as a result of his meticulous attention to detail, extreme engineering competence and organizational ability."

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Cdr. R. K. Miller receives the Bronze Star.

LCdr. D. L. Forney receives the Navy Commendation Medal.



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For heroism while serving on MCB-53's Liberty Bridge Crew at Phu Lac, RVN, SW2 Russell Luppo, II, received the Navy and Marine Corps Medal. On April 30, 1969, Petty Officer Luppo heard a cry for help "from a Marine in the muddy waters of the Song Thu Bong River." With "complete disregard for his own safety and aware of the personal dangers involved" he jumped from 15 feet into the water and swam a hundred yards to the Marine. He tried "to calm the panic-stricken man, who then twice broke away from him and sank beneath the muddy water." In spite of repeated dives Petty Officer Luppo was unable to find the Marine.

Lt. Eugene P. Fucile received a Navy Commendation Medal for his "professionalism and devotion to duty" while serving as Company Commander for the combined 170-man Charlie and Delta Companies. "Throughout his tour, Lt. Fucile performed his duties under the imminent threat of enemy terrorist squads and mainline units and was subjected to numerous rocket and mortar attacks," yet he never wavered in the performance of his duties. His "organizational and managerial abilities were vital to the completion" of such disaster recovery projects as the reconstruction of Camp Monahan and Freedom Hill.

Three enlisted men also received Navy Commendation Medals. CM2 Terry W. Jackson was awarded one "for heroic achievement while serving with USN- MCB-53 at Liberty Bridge, Phu Lac, RVN. Petty Officer Jackson swam to assist SW2 Russell Luppo, II, who had been supporting a drowning Marine. When the Marine became panic-stricken and broke away, Petty Officer Jackson dived repeatedly but unsuccessfully to find him.

SW2 Willard J. Cheirrett received a Navy Commendation Medal for his assistance in repairing the Perfume River Bridge at Nam Hoa. Enemy sabotage had caused a steel pile to be sheared off at the waterline, critically weakening the bridge. Using knowledge gained from being a member of the crew that originally constructed the bridge, Petty Officer Cheirrett determined the method of repair, acquired the necessary materials and, "on 1 April, he started the final welding on the steel pile, tirelessly working throughout the night until the job was completed."

HM3 Richard C. Laux was awarded a Navy Commendation Medal for saving the life of a Vietnamese soldier. On 11 August 1969, while attached to the Lang Co Bridge detail "Petty Officer Laux received word ... that a Vietnamese soldier assigned to a Regional Force Company had been wounded by automatic weapons fire from an unknown size Viet Cong force," read the citation. "Without regard for his own life and safety and unaware of the tactical situation Petty Officer Laux moved across

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ABOVE: Lt. E. P. Fucile receives the Navy Commendation Medal. BELOW: UTI J. A. Cole receives a Navy Achievement Medal.





ABOVE: EO2 G. W. Alexander is awarded a Purple Heart. BELOW, LEFT: CM2 T. W. Jackson receives a Navy Commendation Medal. BELOW, RIGHT: BU2 R. D. Samson receives a Navy Achievement Medal.

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the bay, administered first aid, and brought the wounded man to safety.

Four men received Navy Achievement Medals. LTjg David W. Johnson received a Navy Achievement Medal for his "diligent efforts" as Material Liaison Officer. His "initiative and devotion to duty" enabled the Battalion to "complete assignments in a timely and professional manner" time after time. In addition, he was "responsible for the orderly storage, warehousing, and material management in the storage areas and the maintenance of a complete and accurate stock record system for rapid identification and issue of project material."

BU2 Richard D. Samson received a Navy Achievement Medal for his "professional achievement" while in charge of MCB-53's rock crusher detail at Vinh Dai. "His efforts were in large part responsible for the completion and upgrading of the camp's defensive system of bunkers, watchtowers, mortar pits, ammunition bunkers, and fighting holes. He displayed sustained superior performance in training, leading, and coordinating the fifty security personnel at the main camp and two isolated quarry sites."

UT1 John A. Cole was awarded a Navy Achievement Medal for his work as Bravo Company construction supervisor. "His professional ability to plan and construct advance base facilities with

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inferior materials," read the citation, "greatly contributed to his command's ability in meeting critical construction schedules." In particular, Petty Officer Cole was "directly responsible" for the "timely completion of urgently needed facilities at NSA Hospital, Da Nang, and the Combat Operation Center, III MAF Headquarters."

EAC Franklin D. Henthorn received a Navy Achievement Medal for his exemplary work as MCB-53's Engineering Chief and Engineering Officer. Besides preparing his men for their duties, he planned, organized, and set up "the asphalt testing laboratory at the Vinh Dai crusher and asphalt plant site." He also "supervised the calibration of the new asphalt plant at that site" and was so efficient that the plant was "producing quality asphalt three weeks after the first components arrived."

Two men received Purple Heart Medals. EO2 Mickey K. Dunlap was awarded one "for wounds received in combat action on 19 August, 1969," and EO2 George W. Alexander received one "for wounds received in combat action on 11 September, 1969."

Lt. Ira O. Cartee, MCB-53's Chaplain, received the Republic of Vietnam Medal for Honor First Class from General Hoang Xuan Lam, Commander RVN First Army Corps, I Corps Tactical Zone. The citation praised Chaplain Cartee for his "efficiency and reliability" in helping the Vietnamese people in, and occasionally outside of, his Civic Action Zone. The citation took special note of the many scholarships the Chaplain gave to schools in five local hamlets and also of his efforts in supplying "construction materials to build many needed buildings in Hoa-Khanh, and also in Phuoc-Thanh, Chon-Tam and My-Khe." In addition, the Chaplain gave the people "much needed clothing and supplies" and did much to "help the friendship between the Vietnamese and the Americans."

August's "Petty Officer of the Month" was EO2 James E. Hardigree. Petty Officer Hardigree was chosen for "the great proficiency" with which he operated "the whole range of earth moving equipment," especially the motor grader and the bulldozer. His "forte is the difficult task of fine grading which separates the outstanding from the good equipment operator." His "work on the Data Processing Building, Force Logistics Command, on the Northern Artillery pads, on erosion control at Ammo Supply Point 2, and the initial site grading at the Camp Haskins railroad spur are a few of the essential jobs" he performed in an outstanding manner. He also spent "many hours developing the skills of younger operators."

EO3 Harry M. Light was named August's "Seabee of the Month" for displaying "confidence and initiative" in working on his own. In addition to normal duties, he occasionally "helped in

the expediting of materials." Especially noteworthy was his assistance "in locating critical railroad rails for the crane system at the First Force Service Regiment maintenance facilities. He also displayed the trait of a good equipment operator by caring for his "equipment, keeping it clean, and in good working order."

Chosen "Petty Officer of the Month" for September was SW1 Alfred L. Bogue for his "outstanding degree of professional knowledge and leadership ability." Because of his high degree of competence Petty Officer Bogue was "assigned exclusively to high priority projects" throughout the 1969 deployment. Most noteworthy was the skillful work he put in on overhead traveling crane systems and on the steelwork of the critical Lang Co Bridge project.

Chosen "Seabee of the Month" for September was FN Roslino J. Daco, an electrical striker. In his work at the Bravo Company shops he showed an "outstanding eagerness to learn and diligent application to all tasks assigned." He learned far more than the average electrical striker, and on his own he "successfully checked out and returned to service several deadlined generators."

CM2 Donald R. Lindblom was chosen October's "Petty Officer of the Month" for his "unexcelled knowledge of repair parts sources and identification." He enhanced the efficiency of the whole Battalion by "holding to a minimum the equipment deadlined for lack of parts."

EA3 Wilson G. Combs was chosen "Seabee of the Month" for October for the "outstanding and professional manner" in which he performed his duties as Operations Petty Officer. Throughout the deployment he had the difficult and tedious task of compiling and preparing data for reports and "often worked far into the night to complete weekly and monthly operations reports." In addition to these duties he was made Battalion Timekeeper and Operations Yeoman during the last two months of the deployment, both of which jobs he performed with his usual competence.

Two Good Conduct Awards were also presented. GM1 Raymond L. Reed received his third such award, and UT3 Dennis A. LaRoche received his first.

SN Keith Harley and CN Ronald T. Willoughby both received Letters of Commendation from Cdr. R. K. Miller

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SW2 W. J. Cheirrett receives a Navy Commendation Medal.

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for their "enthusiasm and professionalism" in performing their duties as bunker sentries and later as members of the four-man listening post. Willoughby was also commended for taking it upon himself "to learn the job of Battalion radio operator. Within a period of four weeks" he rated "with the best radio operators in the Battalion."

Ens. John R. Jepson was presented the Award of Merit of The Society of American Military Engineers for being the outstanding graduate of Basic Class No. 104, Navy Civil Engineer Corps Officers' School, Port Hueneme, California.

Letters of Superior performance were presented to EOC K. R. Wilson, POIC of the batch plant, and EO2 A. M. Closs, Assistant POIC, for their smooth operation of the plant and its fleet of trucks. They were also commended for the smooth installation and switchover to a new Ross Porta-Plant which used bulk instead of bagged cement.

Expert Pistol Medals were awarded to LCdr. Laurits M. Larsen, LTjg James V. Bartlett, LTjg Frederick L. Bouchard, LTjg James C. McVicar, LTjg John P. Heinstadt, and Ens. Robert S. Meyer.

TOP: EAC F. D. Henthorn is awarded a Navy Achievement Medal. RIGHT: Lt. Ira O. Cartee, MCB-53 Chaplain, is congratulated by Cdr. Miller for receiving the Vietnamese Medal of Honor First Class. BELOW: LTjg D. W. Johnson is congratulated after receiving a Navy Achievement Medal.



Another chapter closes in MCB-53's proud history

"Sir, MCB-53 stands decommissioned," said Cdr. Robert K. Miller, Commander, MCB-53, as he passed the Battalion colors to Capt. Custer F. Krickenberger, Jr., Commander Construction Battalions Atlantic Fleet, on December 10 at CBC, Davisville, R.I. With that simple statement another chapter—perhaps the last—closed on the colorful history of MCB-53.

Both Capt. Krickenberger, the Honored Guest, and Cdr. Miller expressed regret that such a proud and hard-working battalion was to pass out of existence for a second time but added that it had a rich heritage to build on should it ever be commissioned again.

Cdr. Miller said it had been a privilege for him to serve with so many outstanding officers and petty officers. The men turned out consistent, quality work that only improved under the pressure of deadlines, he said. He added that the World War II nickname — "The Action Battalion" — was particularly apt for the present day MCB-53 because the men of 53 were "consistently the most responsive Battalion In-Country."

Only a handful of officers and enlisted men — all that remained of the once 750 man battalion — attended the brief ceremony, and the very smallness of

their number added a certain solemnity to the occasion. The rest of the men had either been transferred or separated in the brief month after the Battalion had returned from Vietnam.

Also present at the ceremony was Lt. L. C. McAuliffe, CBC Chaplain, who delivered the invocation. In addition, the Seabee Band played the "Navy Hymn" and the "Seabee Song."

3 Ensigns make LTJG



In a brief ceremony on 23 November in the Commanding Officer's office three veteran Ensigns were promoted to Lieutenants, junior grade. Standing with Cdr. Miller are LTjg Heinstadt (left), LTjg McVicar (second from right), and LTjg Mauch (right). All three joined the Battalion In-Country in April 1969, and spent the last six months of FIFTY-THREE's deployment in Vietnam.

After the Battalion decommissioning each of the three were assigned to other units in the Seabee family. LTjg Heinstadt joined MCB-71 in Puerto Rico, LTjg Mauch joined MCB-40 which will relieve MCB-71 in January, and LTjg McVicar joined the staff of Construction Battalion Center, Gulfport, Mississippi.

the ESPRIT of 53

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One Last Fling

Nearly \$2,000 in door prizes was given out at MCB-53's combination Welcome Home and Decommissioning Party held November 25, 1969, at Club 400 in West Warwick, R.I. Among the prizes received by the lucky winners were a dishwasher, several television sets, 17 U.S. Savings Bonds, and many small appliances.

The 250 people that attended the party were first wine and dined with free cocktails and lavish buffet, and then they were entertained by the two bands hired for the occasion. It was the last Battalion party for MCB-53, and everyone seemed primed to make it an especially enjoyable one.



TOP LEFT: LCdr Forney apparently found a surprise on his plate. TOP RIGHT: LTjg Heinstadt, the organizer of this party, er ... ah ... unwinds a little bit at the bar. LEFT: Chief Hamm announces the winner of the first door prize after Mrs. Miller drew the name from a paper bag. The Commander's wife had just undergone surgery on her knee. ABOVE: Some of the boys from H Company chuckle for the photographer.

BELOW LEFT: LTjg Mauch tries to spear an ice cube. BELOW RIGHT: Fagan whispers sweet nothings into his date's ear while trying to avoid her feet. BOTTOM: McClain makes a point to a friend across the table.



While
some
sat
and
talked...



others danced



Cdr. Miller reminisces over MCB-53's proud history at Camp Haskins North



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