

Seabee View of Vietnam

I made three trips to Vietnam, two with MCB 11 battalion and one with Seabee Team 1110 which gave me different perspectives of Vietnam. Therefore, I wish to share some of the observations which helped develop these perspectives.

The battalion (MCB 11) was deployed to Dong Ha in the northern I Core in 1967 and then to Quang Tri in 1969 which was also in the northern I Core. These deployments were strictly military related, that is to support the US Military effort in the northern I Core by building combat bases. These combat bases were to support the Marine Corps with a place to stage and provide storage for supplies, such as ammo and fuel. The resistance in the I Core was mostly the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) which provided a regular harassment of mortar and rocket barrages with some sporadic small arms fire toward the combat bases but out on detachment the fighting was much more intense. Such as at Cua Viet and Khe Sanh. The Seabees took all this in stride and built the base while under fire.

The Seabees were constantly at work with only an association with other military personnel. You were fighting a war for South Vietnam but had no direct contact with the South Vietnamese people. The fight was to occupy ground in the I Core, block the Ho Chi Min Trail, and make it safe from NVA harassment for the South Vietnamese. And in more cases than not, after heavy fighting at great losses to the American Marines, the ground was abandoned and moved on a new area for the next fight. Guess I will never understand the logic of what was critical ground and what was not.

On the other hand, Seabee Team 1110 was deployed to Long Xuyen in the Mekong Delta in 1968 to work with the South Vietnamese people to better their way of life. (Civic Action) We (the team) lived and worked in the village with the South Vietnamese people. There was a



Womack with Kids. They were always on our work site

MACV unit in our area but other than that very little military. The Seals and A Teams were not operating in our area at that time. In fact, our Team was almost a version of a military Peace Corps. All our projects were 100% for the people, a high school building, a maintenance facility, road improvements, generator facilities, water supply and of course medical help.

The risk for the team was the Viet Cong (VC) and we provided our own security but experienced little or no resistance. Maybe the

VC figured we were not a threat to them. The children were always around our work site looking



Womack teaching Surveying to Vietnamese

for a handout (candy mostly) and the adults just wanted to be left alone to protect their family, grow rice, and go to market. It

did not appear that they cared what kind of government was in Saigon, they just wanted all the fighting to stop. After all, the people had been dealing with the fighting since back in the 1950's when the French were in Vietnam. A peaceful



Team Member placing concrete with Vietnamese help

country side is what they were looking for. We quickly learned



Team Member charging concrete mixer with Vietnamese help

that their concerns for a peaceful family life were the same as ours but just in a different part of the world.

The Vietnam war was an American Military operation which I saw from two different perspectives. Living the war for what it really was in a total combat arena verses the effect on a local village and its people. It is sad that some people made the ultimate sacrifice for a very unpopular but worthy cause. Me for one am proud of my service and would do it again tomorrow.

GOD BLESS AMERICA!

EA2 Bill Womack 1966-1970