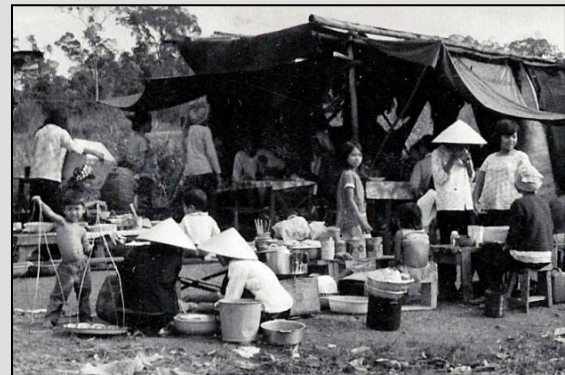
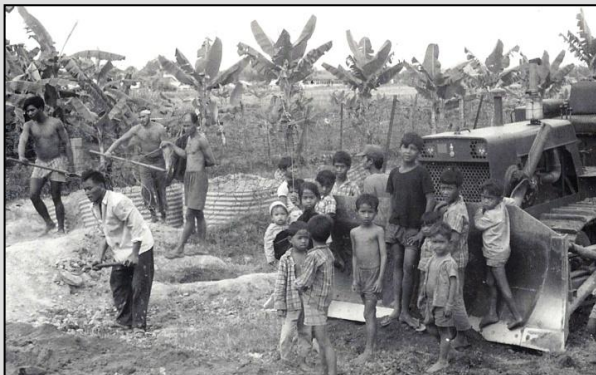
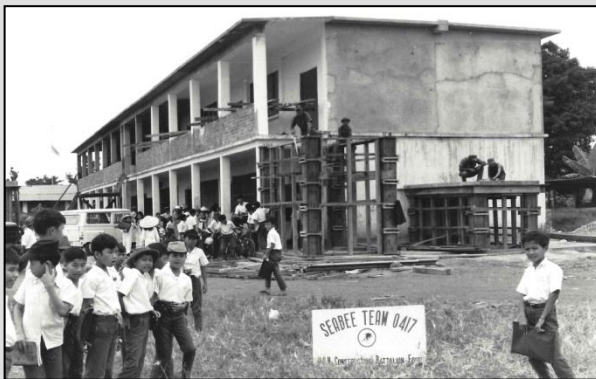


# *Seabee Team 0417*

*Its Humanitarian Mission and Ongoing Story  
1971-2019*

*Written by Lieutenant Jerome Murray, CEC  
July 17, 2019*



Report written and completed by Jerome Murray on July 17, 2019.

I am eternally grateful to my father, Lieutenant Colonel Donald Murray, for his encouragement to become a Seabee Officer and his advice about being a military officer.

A special thank you to:

- My wife, Patricia Murray, for editing this report and her vital support of the team
  - My fellow naval officer, Lieutenant Keith Olson, who greatly supported me before and after my deployment to Vietnam
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Pictures on the cover and the following pages provided by:  
Jerome Murray and Dennis Simpson

Pictures on the cover from top to bottom and left to right are as follows:

Top row:

- Boudreau with hamlet children move bricks for the Soui Cat Marketplace project.
- Wilke shows trainees how to lay brick at Phu Binh School project.

Second row: Seabee Team 0417 Emblem with bulldozer and map of Vietnam (modeled after Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Four emblem. The team was a sub-unit of NMCB 4.).

Third row:

- Prospective students visit Long Khanh High School during construction. Campbell and Walters work with trainees in upper right of photo.
- Children at Xuan Loc Orphanage play on swing repaired by Copeland and Campbell.

Fourth row:

- Hill, third from left, works with Montagnard villagers and children at Dinh Quan Hamlet road project.
- This is a picture of the primitive Soui Cat Hamlet Marketplace before start of new construction by team.

## **Introduction:**

Seabee Team 0417 was a special naval unit that performed humanitarian work with the people of the Republic of South Vietnam (or RVN) in 1971 and 1972. For its work the team was honored with two respected RVN medals. One was the Cultural and Education Medal, and the other was the Social Services Medal.

Seabee Team 0417 was one of about 100 Seabee teams that served in Vietnam between 1963 and 1972. Hopefully, the following summary with appendices will shed light on this 13-man Navy team who proudly served their country in the Vietnam War. It is a story of its humanitarian work in a hostile land. It is also an account of the team's continuing story and subsequent annual reunions.

Appendices are included that provide further information about the team and its history. In particular, Appendix B is a newspaper article written about the team in 1972. Appendix E shows the timeline history of Seabee Team 0417 with respect to the Vietnam War.

## **Seabee Teams in General:**

President John F. Kennedy was instrumental in first supporting the Peace Corps concept of, *"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."* Likewise, the President supported the development of Seabee teams, which became the Navy's version of the peace corps. Seabee teams were trained as small, mobile construction units that could be airlifted with their construction equipment and medical supplies to any location in the world.

Since 1963 Seabee teams have worked in many third-world countries in Africa, Asia, South America, and Micronesia. Unlike the Peace Corps, Seabee teams worked in remote areas where hostility may have been present. These Navy units typically included about 13 men who were teacher-builders and worked alongside the poor. Team members were trained to speak the native language and to respect the customs of the nation served. Seabee teams and their civic action work have received little or no recognition by the media. Consequently, their humanitarian work was, and even today is, generally unknown by the public.

Seabee civic action programs generally included the construction of schools, roads and other community facilities. Also, medical care and instruction to the sick and poor were a critical part of a team's mission. Emphasis was on teaching peasants in various trades, using locally available materials, tools and resources to improve their standard of living.

In Vietnam each team as a whole and each individual team member had to have the will and ability to help the poor and rural populations better survive by themselves. A team had to be flexible, adaptable to the situations encountered and mature enough to deal with unexpected problems. These might have included enemy action, local acceptance,

language barriers, and inadequate resources, including but not limited to equipment, materials, funding and manpower. Monsoon weather and mud caused further complications. A team could not let itself become frustrated with these issues. How well a team recognized problems and worked toward solutions was a measure of the team's success. If these problems had not existed in the team's area of influence, there would have been little reason for the unit to be sent to that particular site.

### **Seabee Team 0417:**

Seabee Team 0417 was formed in December 1970 in Okinawa, Japan. The team members were chosen from Naval Construction Battalion Four and were considered some of the best Seabees. Five team members had previous, meritorious tours in Vietnam. All were combat Seabee qualified and could perform construction work in hostile areas. This newly-formed team possessed extensive skills in road building; carpentry, masonry and concrete work; steel work and welding; water and sanitary systems; electric power generation and distribution; and logistics. Additionally, the team had top-notch mechanics and combat medical capabilities. Each man on the team was a competent supervisor in his trade, yet he had to be flexible and willing to work in other trades, when necessary.

The team basically included 12 enlisted men and one officer. The Officer-in-Charge was LTJG Jerome Murray, who was a Navy Civil Engineering Corps officer from California. The Assistant Officer-in-Charge was EOC Harvey Glines from Kansas. The team's hospital corpsman was HM2 Eugene Herman from Delaware. Our builder supervisors were BU1 Jim Campbell from Virginia and BU3 Mike Graham from Utah. Our equipment operator supervisors were EO1 Frank Walters from South Carolina and E02 Ritchie Grethey from Illinois. Our construction mechanics included CM2 Lloyd Lunsford from Arkansas and CM3 R.T. Hill from Virginia. SW2 Mike Copeland from Mississippi was responsible for welding and steel work. CE2 Dennis Simpson from Michigan served as the team's electrician and power lineman. EA3 Pete Boudreau from New York was the team's surveyor and engineering aide. UT3 Ronald Wilke from Minnesota was our water and sanitation systems expert. All those who served with the unit are covered further in Appendix C.

The team received 18 weeks of intensive training, mostly at the Naval Construction Battalion Center in Port Hueneme, California. The training included education in Vietnamese language and customs, construction trades cross training, military unit defense, and skills in SERE (i.e., Survival-Evasion-Resistance-Escape). Each team member had to teach and supervise others on the team in his particular trade and the Vietnamese, once deployed. For example, the builders, Campbell and Graham, had to instruct others on the team about building structures. Walters, Grethey, Lunsford and Hill taught us how to operate and maintain the team's construction equipment.





(May 1971)  
Seabee Team 0417  
in training at the Construction  
Battalion Center, Port Hueneme,  
California

Bottom Row (Left to Right): Murray,  
Graham, Campbell, Grethey,  
Lunsford, and Peckham

Top Row: Herman, Simpson, Hill,  
Walters, Copeland, Boudreau, and  
Chief Hill

(September 1971)  
Seabee Team 0417  
in Xuan Loc, Vietnam

Bottom Row (Left to Right):  
Murray, Campbell, Graham,  
Grethey, Lunsford, and  
Copeland

Top Row: Walters, Boudreau,  
Hill, Simpson, Herman, and  
Glines



(November 1971)  
Seabee Team 0417  
in Xuan Loc, Vietnam

Bottom Row (Left to Right):  
Murray, Campbell,  
Graham, Wilke, Copeland,  
and Boudreau

Top Row: Walters,  
Lunsford, Hill, Grethey,  
Herman, and Glines

The team had personnel complications upon completing its training. A major issue was the replacement of the Assistant Officer-In-Charge. This resulted in huge discontinuity of leadership. Also, UT1 Harry Peckham was seriously injured in a bicycle accident three weeks before the team's deployment. He had previous Vietnam Seabee team experience. Because he was unable to deploy, the team lost a member who had valuable in-country experience and a proven leadership record. Because of these complications, it was a wonder the team was sent to Vietnam, especially considering that the War was viewed as already lost by the media and many in our country by 1971.

The team was deployed to work in Long Khanh Province in III Corps, South Vietnam. It was stationed in a compound on the southern perimeter of the city of Xuan Loc, Vietnam. The team was located here from June 30, 1971 to January 21, 1972. The team worked on sites as far away as 35 miles from its compound. Its rural projects especially helped those suffering from communist religious persecution. They mostly included Catholic refugees and Montagnards. The Montagnards were indigenous mountain people of Vietnam. Both the Catholics and the Montagnards were committed to South Vietnam winning the war and were close allies with U.S. forces.

### **City of Xuan Loc - A Strategic Military Area:**

The city of Xuan Loc was a strategic location vital for the defense of South Vietnam, especially its capital to the south, Saigon. The city was the capital of Long Khanh Province. Xuan Loc was at the crossroads of four major highways, each critical for public transportation, commerce and troop movements. It was located 50 miles east of Saigon on National Highway Route 1A. This highway was the lifeline of both North and South Vietnam. It went from Hanoi to Da Nang and eventually south to Saigon. Also, Highway 20 funneled traffic from the Central Highland cities and Cambodia to the Xuan Loc area. Highway 56 went due south from Xuan Loc to the southern coast.

During the Vietnam war about eight percent of the population of North Vietnam became refugees. Most of these were Catholics escaping religious persecution. Many of these refugees resettled in Long Khanh Province and were destitute and exhausted from their long journeys through North and South Vietnam and often through Cambodia. Many moved into areas surrounding Xuan Loc. The new refugees often established hamlets in unsettled areas. Their living conditions were primitive, and they desperately needed new roads, schools, marketplaces, utilities, medical clinics and other basic infrastructure.

The final major battle of the Vietnam War was the "Battle for Xuan Loc." It ended on April 21, 1975. In a last-ditch effort, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) of South Vietnam committed almost all of its remaining mobile forces (40,000 soldiers) to the battle. North Vietnam (PAVN) committed about 50,000 troops. It was a 12-day battle, one of the fiercest of the war. 55,000 were killed or wounded. Xuan Loc was heavily bombarded by the North Vietnamese Army, causing a mass exodus of refugees and troops south. Nine days after the fall of Xuan Loc, South Vietnam put forth little resistance and surrendered.

### **Vietnamese Training Program:**

The team's basic mission was to provide on-the-job training so that the Vietnamese could improve their standard of living. Hamlet chiefs and other Vietnamese leaders were mainly responsible for providing the team with laborers, volunteers and locally available materials to complete the assigned projects. The team found itself always working alongside more than 50 Vietnamese. They were very committed and hardworking, as they were investing in themselves and their community's future.

Seabee Team 0417 trained and graduated 22 Vietnamese in various trades, including 2 young women who became medical assistants. These were mostly teenagers. Twenty of the graduates were educated in building construction and equipment maintenance. The construction graduates were generally assured jobs in public works or with local contractors. Our trainees and laborers were paid approximately \$30 per month. Their income was very important for their families, as most of the able-bodied adult men were serving in the South Vietnamese military. Consequently, their wives and their older teenage children were often left to lead and support their families.

During our seven months in Vietnam, the team held two graduation ceremonies. These were festive occasions where we honored our graduates. The celebrations were officiated by the mayor of Xuan Loc. He gave graduates their diplomas, and LTJG Murray gave each graduate a tool box.



*Trainee receiving graduation certificate*

*Left: LTJG Murray with interpreter and Mayor of Xuan Loc and graduate*



*Lunsford with mechanic graduates*

The team had the assistance of senior Vietnamese workers, who were very helpful in looking after the teenage trainees and keeping them on task. They helped us immensely in breaking through custom and language barriers. Consequently, the team had excellent rapport with its trainees and other volunteers from the villages. One of these seniors was Ong Pete, who was our carpentry shop foreman. He focused on the prefabrication of building structures with trainees. Such items would include roof trusses, window frames and shutters. He was also instrumental in finding prospective trainees for the team who would be conscientious. Ba Chau was a Montagnard grandmother who worked with the team. Her cheerful attitude was helpful in working with the trainees and team.

## **Construction Projects:**

Early on Walters and Campbell took informal control of coordinating the resources for the construction projects. Each morning they formulated the plan of the day. This involved assigning team members, trainees and equipment to the various projects that were being worked on simultaneously. The focus was always on working around obstacles and the timely completion of the projects.

All construction projects were started and had to be finished by the team in less than seven months. Some team members complained that the team was "set up for failure," because we had insufficient time, manpower, equipment and materials to complete them. Also, the team found out at mid-deployment that it would not be replaced by another team. This put extreme pressure on the team to completely finish and clean up all its projects before leaving Vietnam.

The team's construction projects included the following:

### **1. Long Khanh High School**

The team's most ambitious project was completion of the Long Khanh High School. A prior team had built six classrooms on the first floor. Seabee Team 0417 was assigned the more complex work of building the second floor with six school rooms. The building was a reinforced concrete design that required special engineering of the columns, beams and roof. Murray was responsible for the structural engineering. Considering our limited resources, it was one of the most challenging projects undertaken by any of the Seabee teams that served in Vietnam.

The project was led by Campbell, the builder in charge. Walters was his co-manager, who focused more on site work, construction equipment and crane operations. These two, working together, were outstanding supervisors who complemented each other well. Copeland took charge of the rebar welding. These leaders directed and worked alongside about 14 Vietnamese construction trainees and laborers on a daily basis.

A major issue was lifting the concrete up to the second story level for the columns, beams and roof. The team needed a crane for this task. Our Navy headquarters (CBPAC DET RVN near Saigon) could not provide us with such a crane. Fortunately, Lunsford, Grethey and Glines were able to obtain a Loraine crane from the U.S. Air Force base at Ben Hoa. This crane could not be driven under its own power. Consequently, it had to be towed 30 miles to the team's compound. There, Lunsford and Hill partially fixed the crane's transmission to make it minimally functional for the project.

The construction had to be staged by completing two rooms at time. Concrete had to be mixed in small, 6-cubic foot mixers, and each batch had to be lifted separately in place by the crane. This process, including pouring and spreading the concrete in a timely



manner, had to be done with precision coordination by both the ground and rooftop crews.



*Campbell teaching about placing roof concrete*



*Walters operating crane and Campbell directing*

The project was almost shut down because of lack of reinforcement rebar. Fortunately, the needed rebar was obtained just in time. Lunsford was able to acquire additional rebar from CBMU 302, another Navy Seabee unit located 30 miles away.

During the final days of the project, the team and trainees worked 16 hours per day in order to meet the dedication ceremony deadline. It was amazing that the team completed this complicated project at all, let alone in less than seven months. This collaborative effort was a perfect example of Seabee "Can Do" spirit and resourcefulness.



*Walters working with trainee in carpentry*



*Copeland instructing trainee in welding rebar*

A massive dedication ceremony was held at the newly-completed high school. It was attended by dignitaries from U.S. Military and State Departments as well as Vietnamese government officials. Attendance included about 150 students who would be using the high school. At the ceremony, the RVN Minister of Education gave each team member the Vietnamese Cultural and Education Service Medal. This was a great day, and we were honored by the recognition given to us by the South Vietnamese Government.

Long Khanh High School may be viewed at GPS coordinates: 10.927909, 107.242656. Today it is a modern campus with four-story buildings. On Google Maps one can view the campus and pictures of attending students (see Appendix A). The students appear to

be very talented. The entire team, especially Walters and Campbell, should be proud of the legacy it left there.



*Left:  
Trainees  
laying brick  
at high  
school*



*Right:  
The  
completed  
Long Khanh  
High School*

## 2. Rural Projects Off of Highway 1 (south of Xuan Loc)

The following three projects basically involved helping Catholic refugees in primitive new hamlets. The team's "Rural Squad" and trainees worked on these projects. They were located as far as 20 miles away from our compound. Consequently, longer travel times, logistics and communications were significant obstacles. Potential enemy action was always a concern. When one project was completed, the Squad moved on to help another rural hamlet. Its projects were much smaller in scope than the high school but produced more immediate benefits.

Graham and Grethey were the construction leaders for the Rural Squad. Graham was responsible for building construction, and Grethey was responsible for the roadway and storm drainage work. Boudreau took charge of the surveying. These three were inseparable. Simpson and Wilke also assisted them.

### Nam Ha Hamlet School and Road System

This was probably the quintessential project of the team, as it involved the development of a new refugee settlement. It was constructed in rough terrain covered with scrub trees and jumbo grass. Getting storm water away from the school site and new road system was a major obstacle.

The school included two classrooms and was of a basic Vietnamese rural school design. It had masonry walls made with four-cell bricks, wooden trusses, a corrugated metal roof and a concrete floor. The walls were plastered and painted. The completed school had no electricity, water or toilet facilities. The open windows provided natural light for the students. Graham managed the building construction with his crew of eight Vietnamese trainees and laborers.

*Graham inspecting school walls with trainees**Completed school and trainees with Graham in center*

The construction of Nam Ha's new roads was challenging. The team had to carve out the hamlet roads with a bulldozer and front end loader. The roads were then compacted and finished by a road grader. Drainage culvert was also installed. It was common to see Grethey and Boudreau riding a bulldozer together. They would sit side by side, with weapons always ready for potential enemy activity. Grethey would concentrate on operating the dozer, and Boudreau would be alert watching for Viet Cong.

Terrorist activities disrupted the construction on one occasion to the point that Seabees and its crew had to leave the site for a number of days. South Vietnamese army reinforcements were brought in to secure the area and stayed on to guard the hamlet.

*Grethey driving survey stakes**Grethey and Boudreau operating a bulldozer*

A dedication ceremony by the Catholic community was conducted at the completion of the Nam Ha school and roads. The ceremony included the blessing of the hamlet and a new statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in front of the school. The statue was double the size of a human. The new hamlet was dedicated to her in a very solemn, respectful ceremony, with villagers, priests, Vietnamese soldiers and some team members present.

The large Nam Ha road system built by Grethey, Boudreau and others is still visible today at GPS coordinates: 10.871238, 107.279935. There is no evidence that the school still exists. The hamlet has a modern Catholic Church near where the school was located. The Nam Ha community shows that it has considerable vitality and pride, which can be



viewed on Google Maps and YouTube videos (see Appendix A). Our team should be extremely proud that it was instrumental in the establishment of this hamlet.

### Phu Binh Hamlet School

The Squad went on to build a one-room school addition at the existing Phu Binh Elementary School. This hamlet is located just south of Xuan Loc. This school was of similar construction to the one built in Nam Ha. This site was in the vicinity of GPS coordinates: 10.900236, 107.228321. Murray met with the Hamlet Chief to coordinate the layout of the new school classroom. The Chief told him that the hamlet's people were refugees who had escaped from North Vietnam.



*Graham (center) with trainees laying brick*



*Completed Phu Binh School*

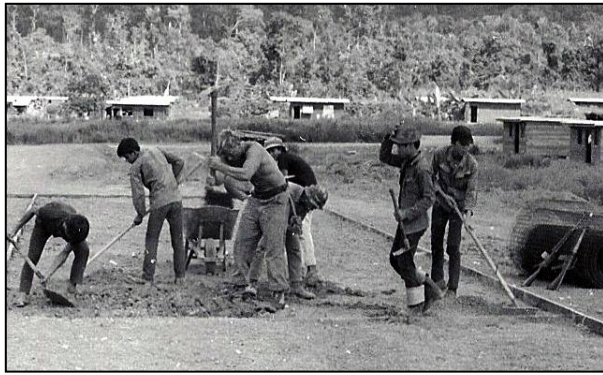
### Suoi Cat Marketplace Building

The Squad's last project was the construction of a farmers market for the reestablished hamlet of Suoi Cat. It was an open-air building with a concrete floor, column-supported trusses and a metal roof. Construction of a new access road from the highway to the market was also provided. This hamlet was about 20 miles east of the team's compound along Highway 1A (near GPS coordinates: 10.907161, 107.368463). The Highway 1A corridor south of Chua Chan Mountain in the vicinity of Suoi Cat was a common site for enemy ambushes in the 1960s. It came to be known then as Ambush Alley. Suoi Cat was obliterated by a significant battle between U.S. and North Vietnamese forces in 1966.

Before construction began, refugee women sold their products in primitive shacks with dirt floors (see front cover). The completion of the marketplace greatly improved sanitation and commerce for the community. This construction was completed in about a month's time.

There is no evidence that the marketplace still exists. Google Maps show that Soui Cat is a flourishing community today. Again, the team should be proud that it was instrumental in the reestablishment of this hamlet.





*Soui Cat excavation work by Graham and trainees*



*Nearly completed Soui Cat Marketplace*

### 3. Dinh Quan Road

This project involved a major upgrade to the roadway through the middle of a Montagnard hamlet. It was located just south of the city of Dinh Quan. This road was impassable except by foot or water buffalo carts. It involved the raising of the roadbed by two feet and compacting a hard surface on it. A shoulder drainage system was installed so that the road could withstand the rainy monsoon seasons. Suitable culvert material was unavailable. Resourcefully, Grethey and Copeland with trainees welded empty 55-gallon fuel drums together to divert storm water away from the road and housing.

The Dinh Quan road building was led by the team's two equipment operators, Grethey and Walters. Boudreau, the team's surveyor, and Hill, one of our mechanics, assisted. The project was approximately 35 miles away from the team's compound along Highway 20 to the north. Because of its distance from the team compound, they lived on the site in military base tents.



*Dinh Quan road construction crew*



*Upgrading road through Montagnard hamlet*

Today, one can see the existing road and community at GPS coordinates: 11.182954, 107.344489. A Cultural Center is now located along the roadway. The Montagnards were very loyal to U.S. troops during the Vietnam war. After 1975, the communists greatly persecuted the Montagnard culture, which may be one reason a Cultural Center is located along this road today.



*Left: Trainee and Grethey welding 55-gallon drums for culvert material*



*Right: Walters installing a culvert for a walkway to a Montagnard family home*

#### 4. Small Projects

When requested, the team undertook small good-neighbor projects. These were high impact projects which provided immediate benefits to the local villagers. The Mayor of Xuan Loc especially appreciated the improvements in his city. He had mentioned to Lunsford that our team was the best Seabee team with whom he had worked. Some of this work included:

- Repairing playground swings for the Xuan Loc Catholic orphanage. Campbell and Copeland became heroes for this work;
- Repairing a water pump and controls for a city well and tank in Xuan Loc. Lunsford and Wilke worked together to restore water to a Vietnamese neighborhood;
- Repairing trucks and vehicles belonging to the Vietnamese that had broken down, thanks to Lunsford and Hill;
- Performing small road building and fill projects by various team members;
- Building playground equipment for a Chinese elementary school led by Copeland;
- Setting up a generator for a Xuan Loc neighborhood, thanks to Lunsford;
- Supplying free electricity to an adjacent Vietnamese government compound, facilitated by Lunsford in obtaining a large 60 kW generator;
- Completing projects unfinished by previous Seabee teams; and
- Providing miscellaneous support to the province and city public works departments.



*Copeland repairing an orphanage swing*



*Typical classroom finished by the team*



### **Medical Assistance:**

A critical mission of the team was creating sustainable medical programs for the rural populace. Medical needs of the rural Vietnamese were pressing. Family immigration and relocation caused by the war contributed to widespread health issues. The infant mortality rate was about 30 percent. Many of the refugees and the poor had inadequate diets, lived with poor sanitation, and had no access to doctors or hospitals. The team's medical program treated about 5,000 Vietnamese. This program was a crucial part of the team's effort to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people.

The medical program was led by Navy Corpsman Eugene Herman. He ran a first-rate medical civic action program (or MEDCAP). We called him "Doc" out of deep respect. He was a well-trained field medic who had Marine infantry experience. Before deployment his supervisor, a doctor, said Herman could be trusted to perform limited surgeries (e.g., appendicitis operations), if needed.



*Nurse Trainee being treated by Doc Herman*



*Vietnamese being treated in a temporary medical clinic. Doc Herman on right with nurse trainee to the left of him.*

Doc was responsible for training two medical assistants. They helped him in treating and explaining to patients the care that they needed. Upon their graduation, he helped his trainees set up primitive clinics in remote hamlets where medical treatment was unavailable. Doc continued to provide medical supplies to these newly-established clinics.

Also, he would travel with one of his medical trainees to various remote hamlets and set up one-day clinics. The rural populace walked or biked long distances to get medical care. Doc always drew large crowds of people wherever he held sick call. Many had never received skilled medical care before. The villagers were appreciative of the medical care they received and respected Doc.

When Doc was not in the field, he was holding sick call in our compound. With minimal screening, sick and injured Vietnamese were allowed to come in to our compound sickbay for treatment. Some of those treated were probably enemy sympathizers. This was a security risk to the team. Lunsford remembers on at least two occasions that he or

Glines had to escort questionable persons out of the compound. These Vietnamese appeared to be scoping the defensive capabilities of our compound.

Doc also coordinated DENTCAPS (Dental Medical Civil Action Programs) in rural hamlets. He arranged for U.S. military dentists and their assistants to set up one-day clinics in remote areas. They pulled teeth and treated dental diseases. For many this was their first visit to a dentist.

Doc had great rapport with the chief doctor of the Xuan Loc hospital. He provided him with medicines and supplies to augment the hospital's needs. He also encouraged team members and other Vietnamese to give blood at the hospital.

Herman was also appreciated by American and Vietnamese troops in the area. Some troops coming in from combat field operations had him treat their injuries. Many trusted the emergency care he provided.

Furthermore, Doc was responsible for overseeing the health care of his teammates and the sanitation of our compound. He kept the team healthy throughout the deployment. This was a major accomplishment in itself.

### **Equipment and Logistical Support:**

It was critical to keep the team's construction equipment, vehicles and other support equipment well maintained and operational. The team's equipment maintenance was led by Lunsford. He was assisted by Hill. They both were outstanding mechanics, who together could fix anything. Amazingly, they kept our equipment running without down time for the team.

Lunsford and Hill led a very successful mechanic training program. Their Vietnamese trainees gained extensive skills in the maintenance and repair of the team's equipment listed in Appendix D. Graduates gained valuable skills crucial for the livelihood of their communities.



*Left: Hill teaching trainee about maintaining a road grader*



*Right: Lunsford teaching a trainee about jeep repairs*



Lunsford was adamant in doing frequent, preventive maintenance and washing our equipment when not in use. Navy headquarter representatives audited the team's equipment maintenance on two occasions, and we received perfect ratings.

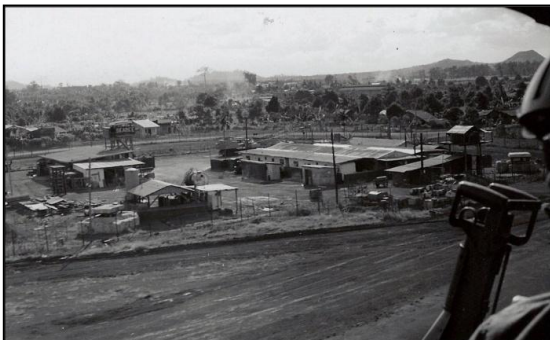
Our construction equipment experienced frequent flat tires. The rule was that if a team member experienced a flat tire, he was responsible for fixing it. However, a lot of the flat tires were left for the mechanics to fix. Hill got so frustrated once that he shouted, "I am going to flatten all these tires so all you bastards can help fix them before leaving camp."

Because the Vietnam War was quickly winding down in 1971, the Navy sharply suspended the supply of needed equipment and repair parts to field units. Cumshaw (or unofficial military bartering) quickly became crucial between U.S. units to prevent work stoppage. Lunsford and Glines were our cumshaw experts. They were able to get extra needed supplies from the Army, Air Force and Seabee bases located about 35 miles away in the Ben Hoa and Long Binh areas.

One of our vital challenges was to keep the compound's electricity running 24-hours a day. Continuous electricity was crucial for compound support and for security lighting, especially during the night. The generators provided to the team initially did not have the capacity or reliability that the compound required. One large food refrigeration unit failed prematurely because of inadequate voltage power. Lunsford spent many nights near the generators, ready to make repairs or adjustments when they became unstable. Lunsford obtained a Stevens 60 kW generator to support our existing two 15kW generators. This solved the compound's voltage problem.

### **Team Compound:**

The team's compound was our home and support base for our satellite construction projects. The area of the compound covered about two acres. The road that circled around the compound can still be seen at GPS coordinates: 10.923685, 107.246314. The compound had to be defended and self-sustaining on a continuous basis. The compound housed our central shops, sickbay, sleeping quarters, dining and cooking facilities, utilities, fuel depot and a recreation club. Additionally, it contained our defense tower and bunkers. Each night our construction equipment had to be brought back from the project sites and parked within the compound for security purposes.



*Looking south from helicopter at team compound*



*Trainees leaving compound at end of work day*

It was a monumental total team effort to keep the compound in good working condition. Lunsford was the team's compound maintenance manager. In this role he made sure that the compound was well maintained in a military manner.

Construction equipment repairs and maintenance were performed in the central shops. When equipment was not operational, it was serviced in the mechanic's shop. Also, pre-fabricated components, such as wood trusses, window shutters, and welded structures, were assembled in the shop area.

The compound had continuous utility service day and night, which included water, electric power and lighting, and sewage systems. Further, the team's diesel and gas fuel had to be stored safely and readily available.

The compound's club was important for recreation after work hours. The club included a bar and tables and chairs for relaxation. The club also served as a safe meeting place after hours where construction coordination issues could be discussed.

Doc supervised the sanitation in the compound. He frequently checked food sanitation, water chlorination levels, and refrigeration storage temperatures.

Communications were extremely difficult in rural Vietnam. Copeland and Simpson communicated by radio every evening with our Navy headquarters (CBPAC DET RVN) and other Vietnam Seabee teams.

### **Security:**

Team members were always concerned about security and vandalism. The project sites and the compound were exposed to attacks and could have been easily overrun by a small enemy force.

Our compound had experienced three attacks in each of the two years before the team's arrival. The compound and the city came under heavy enemy rocket, mortar and small arms fire in 1969. One Seabee climbing down the ladder out of the compound tower was killed by shrapnel. In 1970, the compound experienced two separate attacks. Both involved enemy B-40 rockets and small arms fire. One of the attacks resulted in wound injuries to one Seabee and a Vietnamese guard.

The compound had to be guarded on a 24-hour basis, with extra vigilance needed at night. The compound had one elevated tower bunker with an M-60 machine gun. The compound also had five ground-level bunkers, one on each corner of the compound and one at the main gate. The team hired Vietnamese, mostly Montagnards, to assist us as guards.

The team's compound security was audited by the U.S. Army twice during our deployment. Their concerns resulted in our upgrading the compound's defenses. One

upgrade was to add concrete and steel reinforcement to the machine gun tower. Another was to install a 12-foot chain-link fence and more concertina wire between the compound and the adjacent village. Area flood lighting was also increased. Copeland and Simpson were instrumental in carrying out these security upgrades.

Every night three Seabees would alternate watch duty in the tower, with one Vietnamese guard, between 1900 hours until 700 hours. Another Vietnamese guard was stationed in a bunker at the rear of the compound. During the day, a Vietnamese guard was positioned at the gate to screen people who entered or left the compound.

Vietnamese trainees and construction workers entered the compound in the morning and left at the end of each workday. Also, there were random comings and goings by villagers seeking medical care. We suspected that some of these Vietnamese were Viet Cong sympathizers. After the compound was attacked, Vietnamese entering the compound were searched by a Vietnamese guard, with Chief Glines and Lunsford sometimes observing.

Because the compound was up against village homes and a busy road, the team was emphatically instructed not to fire weapons unless fired upon or clearly threatened. Because of a malfunction of the tower M-60 machine gun, about 20 rounds of ammunition were accidentally fired over village homes. If this had resulted in death or injury, major Vietnamese unrest could have resulted.

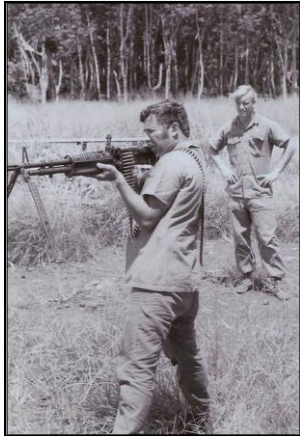
During the last months of our deployment in Vietnam, the security of the team became a greater concern. Whole U.S. Army battalions were leaving the area in convoys, eventually returning to the U.S. The team was feeling more and more alone because of diminishing U.S. military support.

### **Enemy Action:**

Seabee Team 0417 experienced enemy action on two occasions and potential enemy action at its Nam Ha project. The team suffered one Seabee casualty during its deployment. These actions appeared to be mostly harassment to encourage the team and Americans to leave Vietnam. These events are described as follows:

1. Near midnight on September 25, 1971, the compound's sickbay was hit by a B-40 enemy rocket. Another rocket was shot over the compound. These rockets were fired from a position next to an adjacent village house. Walters, the team's ordinance expert, ran up and manned the tower bunker immediately after the explosion. He was prepared and ready to operate the M-60 machine gun should the enemy seek to overrun the compound. An illumination artillery round was requested over the compound to assess enemy activity. The U.S. Army had just recently turned the nearby artillery base over to ARVN control, and the ARVNs had lost our location coordinates. Consequently, we received no artillery support and were left exposed to a potential enemy overrun.

One rocket caused significant destruction to the sickbay, medical supplies and a 3/4 ton truck. Moreover, EO2 Grethey was wounded in one of his knees. He was evacuated by helicopter to the Ben Hoa Air Force Base for treatment and hospitalization. He returned for work two days later. He subsequently received the Purple Heart Medal, and each team member received the Navy Combat Ribbon for the attack.



*Left: Boudreau and Graham training with a M-60 machine gun at a shooting range*

*Right: LCDR Endenbrock, Commander of CBPAC DET RVN, giving Grethey the Purple Heart*



2. On December 23, 1971, Walters suppressed a mortar attack from the tower with the M-60 machine gun. His quick and precise action surprised the enemy. The enemy mortars fired went over the compound and landed in the adjacent air field. There were no casualties or damage to the compound. The mortars were fired from the same location as the earlier B-40 rocket attack.

3. Nam Ha was threatened with enemy activity while team construction was in progress. RVN army reinforcements were brought in to provide more security for the hamlet site. We learned later that there were enemy tunnels under the hamlet. At some of the other rural project sites, team members heard weapons fire nearby.

### **Completion of Work and Departure:**

The team was abruptly advised of a one-month earlier return to the U.S. The team worked many long hours to complete all projects within the accelerated schedule. Despite this and other obstacles, we had successfully completed our training and humanitarian mission.

We were then rushed from our Xuan Loc compound and Vietnam in late January 1972. Fortunately, we avoided an anticipated spring offensive by North Vietnam, especially focused against U.S. pacification units. Four Seabee teams still remained in Vietnam after us, and each experienced serious enemy attacks or threats. All Seabee teams were evacuated from Vietnam by the end of April 1972, three months after our departure.

Our return flight landed at Travis Air Force Base near San Francisco, California. We then flew our final leg and landed at Point Mugu Naval Air Station (just south of Port



Hueneme). It was a heartfelt moment with our families being there to meet the returning team.

The country we returned to was exhausted and shamed by the Vietnam War. Its citizens wanted to forget this War. Team members, like many other Vietnam veterans, did not receive a "welcome home" by our nation. On the contrary, even our friends and neighbors were not interested in hearing about our experiences in the war or with the Vietnamese people. We felt like we were losers.

### **My Reflections:**

As the Officer-in-Charge of Seabee Team 0417, I was very fortunate to have men who were true leaders-teachers-builders to complete our projects and programs. I was also proud of how they trained and showed respect to the Vietnamese people with whom we worked.

It was an honor to work in the pacification program to improve the lives of the Vietnamese rural population. This program was led by CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support), which integrated U.S. and RVN military and civilian efforts to defeat the insurgency in South Vietnam. The focus was on "winning the hearts and minds" of the South Vietnamese people.

I was also privileged to work with numerous organizations and individuals in South Vietnam and while training in the United States. Without their full support we could never have completed our mission. My team and I are grateful for the support and security provided by the following organizations:

1. USAID (United States Agency for International Development);
2. MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam);
3. CBPAC DET RVN (Construction Battalions Pacific Detachment Republic of Vietnam), especially LCDR E. Buckner and LCDR R.N. Endebrock;
4. Seabee CBMU 302 and U.S. Army and Air Force units in the Binh Hoa area;
5. NMCB 4 (Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Four), especially Admiral J.E. Buffington, Captain J.A. Ruscyk, LT K.A. Olson and CWO4 R.K. Goudy; and
6. 31<sup>st</sup> NCR (31<sup>st</sup> Naval Construction Regiment).

I greatly enjoyed working with the Vietnamese people and learning about their culture and language. In particular, I valued working with Vietnamese hamlet chiefs and officials in the province. The focus was on planning new community facilities and improving the quality of life of their people. A high priority was building schools for the

education of their children. Considering the hardships of these leaders and their people, I gained a lasting respect for their determination to overcome extreme hardships. They were most appreciative of any work and support that our team could give their communities.



*From right to left: Murray and Graham meeting with Nam Ha hamlet chiefs to coordinate their projects.*



*Ceremony dedicating the Nam Ha Hamlet, especially the new school and road system built by the team.*

The hamlet chief in the right picture below greatly impacted me with his positive attitude and leadership. He told me that his people were refugees who had escaped from North Vietnam, resettled in Cambodia and later moved just south of Xuan Loc. He mentioned that he loved Ernest Hemmingway's books. When I returned to the U.S., I sent him a couple of the author's books.



*Montaganard Hamlet Chief and Murray (on right) standing on road being upgraded by the team*



*Phu Binh Hamlet Chief in the center with Graham to his left and Murray to his right*

Xuan Loc and the communities near our project sites appear to be flourishing today. Because I met many people of good will there, I still feel a strong bond to the Vietnamese people. I enjoy seeing current videos and pictures of the city of Xuan Loc (especially of Long Khanh High School), the hamlet of Nam Ha and other areas where we worked. (See Appendix A for GPS coordinates of our project sites and interesting browser links.)

I am saddened by the probable fate of the Vietnamese who worked with us in Vietnam. Many of the Vietnamese leaders and others with whom we worked would have been tortured in communist re-education camps or even killed. Would our trainees, workers and friends still be alive?

After the war Vietnam's new communist government persecuted the Catholic and Montagnard people. Even so, the Xuan Loc Catholic Parish, including St. Joseph Seminary (across the road from Long Khanh High School), has educated a resounding number of priests and religious. Many Vietnamese around the world today recognize Xuan Loc as the "Vatican of Vietnam." It is greatly respected for its stand against religious persecution during and after the war.

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### **Ongoing Team Story and Reunions:**

Most of the then-living teammates of Seabee Team 0417 and their wives met at a reunion in August 2013 in Port Hueneme, California. This was the first time the team had met since leaving Vietnam more than 40 years before. Many more reunions have followed (see Appendix F). These reunions have resulted in a new and stronger team, especially now that our wives have been included. The wives have encouraged the reunions and continued camaraderie.

An important benefit has been the sharing of old photographs of the team's humanitarian work in Vietnam. These photos have been proudly shared with families and friends. These pictures have helped others appreciate how the Vietnam War and the Seabees impacted our lives.

The more-senior veterans on the team have been very helpful in providing information on how to obtain deserved benefits from the Veterans Administration. Some members on the team did not know they were eligible for VA benefits, or they had been discouraged by the VA. Without persistence the VA too often denies claims for health benefits. Together, the team has been able to gather the documentation required by the VA to prove combat action and Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam.

Our fifth reunion in 2016 in Boyne City, Michigan was especially healing. The teammates received Vietnam War 50th-year anniversary pins in a ceremony led by the Traverse City, Michigan Chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Ritchie and Jane Grethey were responsible for coordinating the event. Accompanying the pins, we were given a proclamation from President Obama, which stated, "Let us strive to live up to their example by showing our Vietnam Veterans, their families, and all who served the fullest respect of a grateful Nation." The team was finally and officially "Welcomed Home" by our nation. I proudly wear my pin frequently today together with my Seabee Team 0417 hats.

## WELCOME HOME



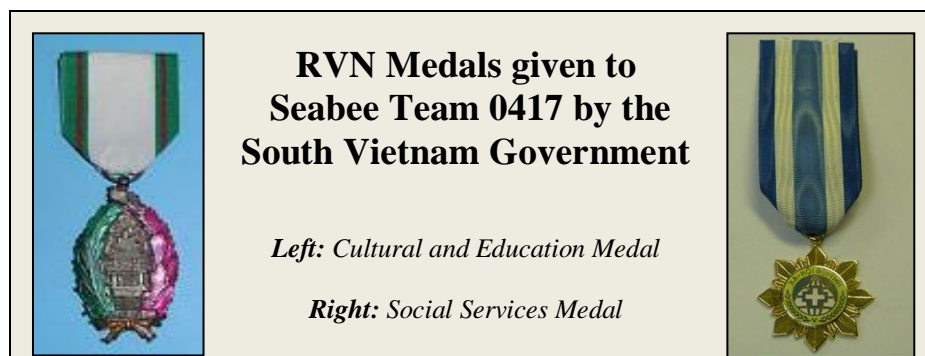
***Ceremony with Team Flag***

*Sponsored by Traverse City VFW at Boyne City, Michigan in September 2016*

### **Conclusion:**

During its deployment, Seabee Team 0417 successfully completed the construction of three schools, built numerous roads, an open air marketplace and many other small projects. The team's medical program impacted about 5,000 villagers. Most importantly, it trained and graduated 22 Vietnamese in the construction and medical trades. Other Vietnamese leaders, workers and the general populace benefited from our mutual collaboration.

The Republic of Vietnam was grateful to Seabee Team 0417 for this humanitarian work. As mentioned previously, it honored us with two medals. Although these medals cannot be worn on an official U.S. military uniform, they are treasured as a heartfelt thank you from the Vietnamese people.



### **RVN Medals given to Seabee Team 0417 by the South Vietnam Government**

***Left: Cultural and Education Medal***

***Right: Social Services Medal***





*The Long Khanh High School dedication ceremony.  
RVN Minister of Education giving team members the RVN Cultural and Education Medal.*

Each member on the team gave unselfishly to complete the team's humanitarian mission, no matter how difficult or mundane the work. Each respectfully led and worked alongside Vietnamese trainees and others. We worked as an amazing team.

I feel very fortunate to have served on Seabee Team 0417. I am humbled to have been involved in the team's civic action programs in Vietnam and its apparent lasting impact. I am extremely proud of the team today for its continuing mutual support and annual reunions.

I greatly look forward to our eighth team reunion in September 2019 at Port Hueneme, California. We hope to meet again at the Seabee Museum and visit the Seabee areas at the Naval Base Ventura County. We are returning to the military base where we trained as a team. It certainly will bring back fond memories.

I grieve for the team members who have passed away. Of those on our 13-member team, 7 have died. Why did the majority of them die so prematurely? In a conversation with one teammate's mother, she said her son had been very proud to be a part of the team and our humanitarian work in Vietnam. But, she was troubled to say, her son never recovered from the effects of the war. She received some consolation, especially from Ritchie Grethey, in learning of her son's outstanding contribution to the team and to the Vietnamese people.

Attending team reunions, sharing memories and helping each other have bonded us again. We are now a true team and family. Our seven annual reunions have been a healing process for us. As the Officer-in-Charge of the team, I continue to gain overwhelming respect for each member and the team as a whole. We still have that Seabee "Can Do" spirit.

I am proud to wear my team hats received at our reunions. Two of the hats are clearly labeled "Seabee Team 0417." Additionally, one includes the Seabee Combat Action Badge and another states "Brothers Forever." It is an honor to meet other veterans today wearing their military unit hats. We can now truly appreciate our military brotherhood and sincerely say, "Thank you for your service," to each other.

I urge other veterans to "Find your Battle Buddies" and to cherish the comrades with whom you served in Vietnam or on any military duty assignment. You owe it to each other. You served your nation and should be very proud of your sacrifice.

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## **BROTHERS FOREVER**



***Seabee Team 0417 Attendees at 2017 Reunion at Salem, Oregon***  
*From Left to Right: Frank Walters, Lloyd Lunsford, Ritchie Grethey, Ron Wilke and Jerome Murray*

Appendices A through H are included in pages 25 through 32.

### **Appendix A - GPS Coordinates and Current Website Links**

Below are the GPS Coordinates where Seabee Team 0417 worked in Vietnam in 1971 and 1972:

1. Xuan Loc Team Compound: 10.923685, 107.246314
2. Xuan Loc High School: 10.871238, 107.279935
3. Nam Ha Hamlet: 10.871238, 107.279935
4. Phu Binh Hamlet School (approximate): 10.900236, 107.228321
5. Soui Cat Marketplace (approximate): 10.907161, 107.368463
6. Dinh Quan Road: 11.182954, 107.344489

Below are interesting websites about our project locations today:

1. 2015 Video of the flight over Xuan Loc. The modern Long Khanh High School can be viewed near the end of the video.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFApyEOj5VE&list=UUSgHdY824l7AWKqPfvjmvXw&index=72> )

*Right: Long Khanh High School taken from above website*

*Below: Picture of Long Khanh High School today*



2. 2017 Video of flight over the church and hamlet of Nam Ha  
( <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdy1kyTizGk> )



**Appendix B - Newspaper Article about Seabee Team 0417**

From: Oxnard Press Courier Newspaper Archives, Sunday, February 13, 1972 - Page 3

Californian Assemblyman, has never been on a mission last out the symphonies efforts. However, continued for attempting to per house table to aid those through County ers told. June have to ter the ons this ow time put into er, R-ess that see if l to get can, I Senate its own hin the

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Recently, AFL-CIO leaders have also been angered by ad-

pany, Hartford, is a building, 1 million square-foot office complex located along the John F. Kennedy Expressway near Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

## Tiny Seabee Unit Ends Big Mission

Seabee Team 0417, a 12-man "jack-of-all-trades" unit, has returned to Port Hueneme from South Vietnam after a construction mission that included erecting five schools and fending off Viet Cong terrorists. The team, headed by Lt. (j.g.) J. A. Murray, was deployed seven months at Xuan Loc Village. A unit of MCB 4, it will now undergo regrouping and further training.

Murray's team was the last of six Seabee teams to work in Long Khanh Province and one of the last to leave the Republic of Vietnam.

Besides school building projects ranging from one to six rooms each, new construction included an open-air market, roads, and water-storage and sanitary facilities.

While building a two-room elementary school and a road simultaneously at Nam Ha, the divided team was "constantly subjected a Viet Cong terrorist activities," Murray reported. Despite the harassment and enemy buildup in the area, the crews completed both jobs.

When the small team completed a six-room, second-story addition to Long Khanh Province High School, the Vietnamese minister of education was on hand to express personal thanks.

During its deployment and projects in scattered areas, Seabee Team 0417 also was able to assist more than 5,000 Vietnamese medically, build recreational facilities for school children, and perform other people-to-people tasks including the training of 22 Vietnamese in various trade skills.

*Valentine's Day Sale*

**YES ONLY!!**

AND XIC



## **Appendix C - Seabee Team 0417 Personnel**

1. Jerome Murray was Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of the team. He held the rank of Ensign in the Navy Civil Engineer Corps, when selected. He was promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade (LTJG) in Vietnam and Lieutenant (LT) while serving in the Naval Reserve. After the Navy he became a professional engineer working primarily in utility engineering. He became Chief Engineer for the Oregon Public Utility Commission in the Utility Safety, Reliability and Security Program.
2. Harvey Glines was a Chief Equipment Operator (EOC) and Assistant Officer-in-Charge (AOIC) of the team while in Vietnam. History after the team is unknown. (Deceased)
3. Frank Walters was an Equipment Operator First Class (EO1) on the team. He ultimately became a Master Chief Equipmentman (EQCM). After the Navy he worked as Equipment Director for the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station operated by Southern California Edison.
4. Jim Campbell was a Builder First Class (BU1) on the team. He ultimately became a Master Chief Constructionman (CUCM) and later Master Chief of the Reserve Seabees. After the Navy he worked for the construction firm, Brown and Root. (Deceased)
5. Lloyd Lunsford was a Construction Mechanic Second Class (CM2) on the team. He ultimately became a Chief Construction Mechanic (CMC). In his long military service he served in three wars: Korea, Vietnam and Desert Storm.
6. Eugene Herman was a Hospital Corpsman Second Class (HM2) on the team. He ultimately became a Chief Hospital Corpsman (HMC). After the Navy he worked for the U.S. Postal Service as a manager. (Deceased)
7. Mike Copeland was a Steelworker Second Class (SW2) on the team. He ultimately became a Master Chief Constructionman (CUCM). After the Navy he worked as a heating/ventilation contractor. (Deceased)
8. Ritchie Grethey was an Equipment Operator Second Class (EO2). After leaving the Navy he was a Fire Protection engineer and contractor working on commercial high rise and other buildings in Illinois.
9. Dennis Simpson was a Construction Electrician Second Class (CE2). After leaving the Navy, he obtained a BS degree in electrical engineering and went on to become the Operating Manager of Great Lakes Energy Cooperative in Northern Michigan.
10. Michael Graham was a Builder Third Class (BU3). After leaving the Navy he obtained his BS degree in Architecture and worked for various architectural firms. (Deceased)
11. Pete Boudreau was an Engineering Aide Third Class (EA3). History after the team is unknown. (Deceased)

### **Appendix C - Seabee Team 0417 Personnel (continued)**

12. R.T. Hill was a Construction Mechanic Third Class (CM3) on the team. After the Navy he worked as a civilian mechanic for the Construction Battalion Center at Port Hueneme, California. (Deceased)

13. Ron Wilke was a Utilitiesman Third Class (UT3) on the team. After the Navy he returned to Minnesota where he owned and operated his own plumbing firm.

Others who served partially on the team included:

14. Roy Hill was Chief Construction Electrician (CEC). He served as the team's AOIC while the team was in training at Port Hueneme. He later became a power plant electrician for Southern California Edison after the Navy.

15. Harold L. Peckham was a Utilitiesman First Class (UT1) who trained with the team at Port Hueneme. He was seriously injured in a bicycle accident and could not deploy with the team to Vietnam. (Current status unknown)

16. Frank Sasser was Utilitiesman First Class (UT1). He served on the team during initial training and for a short time in Vietnam. History after the team is unknown. (Deceased)

### **Appendix D - Construction Equipment Inventory**

Standard issue to the team in Vietnam:

- Two Jeeps (1/4 ton)
- Two cargo trucks (3/4 ton)
- Two dump trucks (2.5 ton)
- Two tank trailers (400 gallons)
- Two concrete mixers (6-cubic feet)
- One road grader
- One front end loader
- One arc welder
- One bulldozer
- Two 15 kW generators

The team augmented the following equipment necessary for projects and compound:

- One Loraine crane (acquired from the U.S. Air Force)
- One 60 kW Generator (Manufacturer - Stewart)

**Appendix E, page 1 - Seabee Team 0417 Timeline**

Dec 1970	Seabee Team 0417 selected from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 4
Jan 1971	Seabee Team training starts at 31st Regiment, Naval Construction Battalion Center, Port Hueneme, CA
17 Apr 71	Survival, Evasion, Resistance & Escape Training completed
7 May 71	Vietnamese Language School completed
16 June 71	Seabee Team Training completed at 31 <sup>st</sup> Naval Construction Regiment, Naval Construction Battalion Center, Port Hueneme, CA
25 June 71	Arrived in Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam
30 June 71	Arrived at Xuan Loc compound
25 Sep 71	Team sickbay hit by one rocket at 2324 hours resulting in EO2 Grethey being wounded
Oct 71	Wet season ends
23 Dec 71	Team small arms fire suppressed a mortar attack
14 Jan 72	Minister of Education of the Republic of Vietnam dedicated the 12-room Long Khanh High School
21 Jan 72	Team departed Xuan Loc
27 Jan 72	Seabee Team 0417 departed Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam for U.S.
29 Jan 72	This date and after, four remaining Seabee teams experienced numerous enemy attacks at their compounds or project sites
15 Feb 72	Vietnam New Year (Tet)
March 72	North Vietnam Army begins spring offensive in South Vietnam
18 Apr 72	Last Seabee team leaves Vietnam (Ham Tam site)
9 - 21 Apr 75	Battle of Xuan Loc led to the downfall of the Republic of Vietnam on 30 April 1975

**Appendix E, page 2 - Seabee Team 0417 Timeline**

1853 - 1881	French take control of all of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia;
1945	Ho Chi Minh creates Provisional Government;
1946	Indochina War begins;
Oct 1955	South Vietnam declares itself the Republic of Vietnam. French soon leave Vietnam;
Dec 1960	The National Liberation Front (NLF), also called the Viet Cong, is established in South Vietnam;
1962	US Air Force begins using Agent Orange (a defoliant to expose roads and trails used by Vietcong forces);
Mar 1965	First U.S. combat troops arrive in Vietnam;
Jan 1968	North Vietnamese launch Tet Offensive attacking approximately 100 South Vietnamese cities and towns;
Mar 1968	My Lai Massacre, public not made aware until Nov 1969;
Mar 1968	President Lyndon Johnson announces that he will not run for re-election;
15 April 68	First Seabee team arrives at Xuan Loc, (Team 0912);
Dec 1968	U.S. troops in Vietnam reached its peak of 540,000;
July 1969	President Richard Nixon orders the first troop withdrawal from Vietnam;
18 May 69	Xuan Loc team compound came under heavy rocket, mortar and small arms fire attack. CE2 Phillip Lee Grieser of Seabee Team 1013 killed by shrapnel;
19 Apr 71	SW2 Kenneth Thatcher, member of Seabee Team 0319 from Xuan Loc team compound, killed in plane crash. Plane shot down by ground fire;
30 June 71	Seabee Team 0417 arrived at Xuan Loc compound;
14 Jan 72	Minister of Education of the Republic of Vietnam dedicated the 12-room Long Khanh High School completed by Seabee Team 0417;
21 Jan 72	Seabee Team 0417 departed Xuan Loc;
Feb -April 72	Four remaining Seabee teams in Vietnam experience numerous enemy attacks;
Mar 1972	The North Vietnamese cross the demilitarized zone (DMZ) to attack South Vietnam in what became known as the Easter Offensive;
18 Apr 72	Last Seabee team (at Ham Tam site) leaves Vietnam;
28 Jan 73	Cease-fire agreement goes into effect;
29 Mar 73	The last U.S. troops are withdrawn from Vietnam;
9 - 21 Apr 75	Battle of Xuan Loc led to the abrupt downfall of the Republic of Vietnam;
30 Apr 75	South Vietnam surrenders to communists;
1986	Doi Moi (Reform) launched throughout Vietnam to reform economy, politics and society. Foreign sectors are recognized; and
1995	U.S. restores diplomatic ties with Hanoi.



## **Appendix F - Reunions and Significant Events**

I first contacted Ritchie Grethey in December 2012. Grethey was anxious to find the rest of the team. My wife, Patty, was responsible for finding all the living team members. Grethey also insisted that we have an immediate reunion. Below is a summary of the reunions:

1. Tampa, Florida (January 2013) - attended by Jerome Murray (& Patty), Ritchie Grethey (& Jane) and Mike Copeland. After this reunion, I sent over 200 pictures to each of the team members we had found. This prompted further sharing. Lunsford improved on the pictures making them into a slide show movie and adding music.
2. Port Hueneme, California (August 2013) - Hosted by Jerome & Patty Murray with Campbell, Walters, Copeland, Lunsford, Herman, Grethey and their wives attending. We received a history presentation about Vietnam Seabee teams and a tour at the Seabee Museum. We were also given a presentation on current Seabee operations at the Naval Base Ventura County (previously named the Naval Construction Battalion Center at Port Hueneme).
3. Savannah, Georgia (October 2014) - Hosted by Frank & Donna Walters. Dennis Simpson and his wife, Lynda, attended for the first time.
4. Phoenix, Arizona (September 2015) - Hosted by Lloyd Lunsford. Ron Wilke and his friend, Debbie, attended for the first time.
5. Boyne City, Michigan (October 2016) - Hosted by Dennis and Lynda Simpson.
6. Salem, Oregon (August 2017) - Hosted by Jerome & Patty Murray.
7. Fort Meyers, Florida (October 2018) - Hosted by Ritchie and Jane Grethey
8. Port Hueneme, California (Sept. 2019) - To be hosted by Frank and Donna Walters



*Attendees of Seabee Team's second reunion at Port Hueneme, California in August 2013*

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