

KOREA

The Navy never had any doubt it could plaster the invasion beaches at Inchon with shells, rockets and bombs. The problem was the 30-foot tide which twice each day transformed the beach into a sloppy mudflat quite capable of supporting sandpipers. Somehow, heavy field artillery and supply laden trucks would have to be brought across these flats to support the Marine assault troops.

The solution of this problem lifted the curtain on the fact the Navy's fabulous Seabees are back in business. The fighting construction men of World War II turned the trick with their pontoon strings. Just as at Sicily, Normandy, and the island invasions across the Pacific, they placed and manned steel roadways from ship-to-shore, then rode their bulldozers on in to build and defend the facilities the Navy needs on land.

Yes, the Seabees are back, and they haven't lost a nickel's worth of spirit and ingenuity. After placing pontoon docks at Wolmi Do and Inchon and working to get the bomb-blasted harbor back in shape, word came that two undamaged locomotives stood at near-by Seoul for the taking. A Seabee patrol set out to liberate them despite heavy enemy fire. It succeeded, but a short delay was encountered. Seems the locomotives were standing alongside a distillery and that certain bottled goods might just as well be liberated at the same time. The well-loaded locomotives arrived back in Inchon, and the Seabees soon

were able to claim having broken more than the transportation bottleneck. As for the Seabees' entire contribution to the Inchon operation, their commanding officer, LCDR M. T. Jacobs, CEC, USNR was awarded a Bronze Star by Rear Admiral J. H. Doyle who said: "Without the Seabees the invasion would have failed."

The Seabees in Korea, who also assisted in amphibious operations at Pohang and Wonsan, belong to the First Amphibious Construction Battalion, a new designation for Seabees trained and organized to operate pontoons and to build a temporary naval base from the shambles of a beachhead. The latter includes everything from access roads and temporary shelters to water supply and communications systems. The "A. C. B.'s" together with Mobile Construction Battalions, which construct and defend any type of advance naval base, are the basic Seabee organizations. They spearhead the Navy's line of combat bases, which are later turned over to smaller Seabee detachments for maintenance.

Although recruiting posters find it hard to resist presenting the Seabees as bulldozer mounted Marines, they are essentially top-notch builders drawn from the nation's construction trades. Supported by Union Labor and particularly by its Building Trades from whose ranks many of them come, the Seabees embrace about 60 different construction skills.

They are commanded by Navy Civil Engineers, who also staff the Bureau of Yards and Docks and carry out its mission to design, build and help maintain the entire naval shore

establishment. The Seabees' construction work is confined to overseas bases during national emergencies, a limitation which has done much to win them Labor's support. Civilian contractors perform all Navy construction under supervision of Navy Civil Engineers during peacetime but only continental construction during emergencies.

This amicable split of Navy shore construction gives Seabees only that part which civilians are unable to perform. Experience has shown that military discipline is essential to construction under combat conditions and defense against counter-attack. It also affords fighting Seabees the protection of a Navy uniform, without which they would be considered guerillas and liable to execution if captured.