

Among the millions of words filed by correspondents in Korea, a small paragraph about the Navy's Seabees reached the United States shortly after the invasion of Inchon last

It gave no more than the bare fact that the Seabees were back in action and had placed pontoons to assist in the landing operations.

But let's take a closer look and see what they did.

The 104th Naval Construction Battalion was undergoing amphibious training at the Coronado base when it was alerted for overseas duty in July 1950. This caused no frenzied activity. All hands worked just a little harder - a little longer to get ready for the big job ahead.

For operational purposes the unit was divided into two groups: a Pontoon company of four officers and 127 men; and a Construction company with two officers and 115 men. The Pontoon company was to operate all pontoon equipment and salvage units. The Construction men were to set up a central camp and maintain security.

Equipment and supplies for the pontoon company were loaded on three LSTs and two AKAs. The construction unit was to sail on the USS WM. A. WRIGEL. Late in July both groups were underway for Japan.

At sea, the first of many troubles began. The LSTs ran into a typhoon. One of the unwieldy causeways lashed to the side of the LST shifted forward some 150 feet out of its hinge on the side of the ship.

With all hands working around the clock, the lashings were kept secure. Loss of the causeway would have been serious. Bad storms were encountered later. None were lost, however.

Arriving at Yokosuka, the tedious task of unloading, overhauling and checking equipment began. Time was of the essence and all hands worked eight hours on - eight hours off. No liberty was granted until the job was done. Then a nine-hour pass was issued.

On August 30, a month after leaving Coronado, combat loading began. Causeways and barges were loaded sidescarry on LSTs. Cranes, bulldozers and miscellaneous equipment were loaded on tank decks. Warping tugs and dock sections were made into tows. Two 5x30 and one 5x15 dock sections were built, combat tows made ready. The detachment was under way in eight days to invasion point.

In convoy, the outfit arrived off Inchon. Combat ships let loose a heavy bombardment of Wolmi Do Island X and the port of Inchon. Aircraft from carriers fired bombs and rockets to dislodge the wellintrenched enemy. Shelling and bombardment continued at a terrific pace for hours. Heavy dust and smoke pall enveloped the entire area. Even though several miles out decks vibrated from the heavy concussion.

With the bombardment letting up and the beaches reasonably safe, work began in earnest. The enemy still kept up intermittent fire. Work was complicated by the four-knot tide at Wolmi Do Island which has a rise and fall of 30 feet between flood and ebb. Three attempts were made before a 5x30 dock section was anchored. It was connected to the beach by 2x30 causeway sections and extended 400 feet from the shore.

With the last bolt in place, the pier went into immediate action. Troops, vehicles, ammunition and supplies were rushed ashore.

The Seabees set up camp at OPAL Beach on the island, directly across from Inchon. It consisted of 50 tents, a galley, a mess hall and a head; all erected in eight hours. Water was a critical item and had to be transported five miles. Chow was mainly "O" rations.

At the outset, petty annoyances plagued the outfit. Pay was late. The galley burned down, and it took some old fashioned Seabee speed to rebuilt it for the next meals. Little mail had been received since leaving the states. One mail delivery was recovered from the bottom of the sea, but so water-soaked it was illegible.

Despite the annoyances, morale was good. It was given a lift when beer was obtained twice from the Fleet. Then a movie projector was obtained and a theater set up to accommodate about 100 spectators. It proved so popular, it had to be enlarged to seat a thousand service personnel.

