

History of the 18th Engineer Brigade

Sent in by: Billl Skiles

The 18th Engineer Brigade traces its history back to July 29, 1921, when it was originally formed as the 347th Engineers (General Service) in the Organized Army Reserve. The unit was inactive until the beginning of World War II but on May 6, 1942, it was ordered to active duty at Camp Clairborne, Louisiana and was redesignated the 347th Engineer General Service Regiment.

During World War II, the Regiment served in the campaigns of Normandy, Northern France, the Rhineland, and Central Europe. For this service, the 347th Engineer General Service Regiment was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation. After the end of World War II in Europe, the Regiment was inactivated in Germany and was assigned to the Army Reserve.

On October 25, 1954, the 347th Engineer General Service Regiment was withdrawn from the Army Reserve and allotted to the Active Army with concurrent redesignation as the 18th Engineer Brigade. The Brigade saw active service at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri until March 26, 1963, when it was again inactivated.

Two years later, on July 16, 1965, the 18th Engineer Brigade was reactivated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Under the command of Colonel C. Craig Cannon, the Brigade prepared for deployment to Vietnam. The Advance Party of the 18th Engineer Brigade arrived at Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam on September 3, 1965. Three days later, Major General then Brigadier General Robert R. Ploger assumed command of the Brigade. Within two weeks, the Brigade Headquarters at Tan Son Nhut was fully operational and on September 16, 1965, the Brigade assumed operational control of the 35th Engineer Group (Construction) at Cam Ranh Bay. The 937th Engineer Group (Combat) at Qui Nhon was assigned to the Brigade in June of 1966.

The history of the 18th Engineer Brigade in the Republic of Vietnam is a continuing story of impressive accomplishments in every field of engineering. The Brigade began construction operations in an underdeveloped country having extremely rugged terrain. The supply of Free World Forces in the First and Second Military Regions required ports of entry where none existed and roads where only trails could be found. In response to this challenge, the Brigade began construction of the ports at Cam Ranh Bay, Qui Nhon, and Vung Ro Bay.

Before the ports could effectively supply troops, access roads had to be constructed. At Vung Ro Bay, an 8,000 foot, two lane road, which rose from sea level to an elevation of 420 feet, was cut through the mountainous jungle to National Highway QL 1. At Cam Ranh Bay, the Brigade constructed the original floating bridge at My Ca, which was the longest tactical bridge in Vietnam, in order that the growing Cam Ranh Bay depot could be connected with the mainland.

On November 30, 1966, the 921st Engineer Group arrived from Fort Leonard Wood and was redesignated the 18th Engineer Brigade (North) with duty station at Cam Ranh Bay, while the original unit at Tan Son Nhut became the 18th Engineer Brigade (South) until December 1, 1966, when it was redesignated U.S. Army Engineer Command, Vietnam, and moved to Bien Hoa. The 18th Engineer Brigade (North) was redesignated simply the 18th Engineer Brigade and moved its headquarters to Don Ba Thin, near Cam Ranh

Bay.

On January 15, 1967, Major General then Brigadier General Charles M. Duke, took command of the Brigade. He was succeeded by Colonel Harold J. St. Clair on August 9, 1967 who, in turn, was succeeded by Major General then Brigadier General Andrew P. Rollins on September 5, 1967.

Throughout 1967, the Brigade continued to direct and coordinate all non divisional Engineer efforts in the First and Second Military Regions. Base camps, airfields, hospitals and the continuous upgrading of vital roads were the major projects of the Brigade at this time. In addition to the critical National Highway QL 1 along the coast, Brigade units began to clear roads inland to the plateau areas around Pleiku and Ban Me Thuot. Large hospitals at Pleiku and Cam Ranh Bay were completed.

On November 6, 1967, Brigadier General Willard Roper succeeded General Rollins as Brigade Commander and during 1968 the Brigade continued its construction efforts, undeterred by harassing enemy activity and the ever changing weather in the country. In March and April of 1968, the 45th Engineer Group moved to the First Military Region with headquarters established at Da Nang. In February of 1968, work began on the critical Hai Van Pass, which was vitally needed to open the first overland supply route from Da Nang to the northern provinces. Although the first attempts at this by others had ended in failure, the 18th Engineer Brigade, through ingenuity and determination, overcame all obstacles and the road was opened to traffic in December of 1968. Soon a weekly flow of traffic exceeding 5,000 vehicles was traversing the pass.

On September 21, 1968, Brigadier General then Colonel John H. Elder, Jr. assumed command of the Brigade.

An ammunition storage area was completed at Cam Ranh Bay on January 18, 1969. It had taken two years for the Brigade to build this complex, which covers 191,700 square feet. Brigade engineers finished English Airfield on March 21, 1969 at LZ English near Qui Nhon. The runway of this field is 3,600 feet long, 60 feet wide, and is complete with a 150 foot by 150 foot turn around area.

On May 3, 1969, Brigadier General John W. Morris assumed command of the Brigade. Soon afterwards, Brigade engineers finished construction of a cold storage warehouse at Qui Nhon for the Qui Nhon Support Command. It was the first of its kind in Vietnam. Construction of the Tandem Switch Building at Vung Chau Mountain was also completed about this time. This 4,000 square foot building houses more than \$900,000.00 worth of sophisticated communications equipment. During the summer months of 1969, Brigade engineers completed the 200,000 barrel capacity Air Force tank farm at Cam Ranh Bay, after laying over 12, 000 feet of pipe for the project.

The beginning of 1970 saw the initiation of the 18th Engineer Brigade's Operation Last Chance, a program of command emphasis and tight organization directed toward the motivation and success of that year's engineer operations. The goals of the program were to maintain primary missions of combat support as well as 'insure the completion of the many projects planned for the 1970 construction season

The ship loading and unloading capacity of the DeLong piers at Cam Ranh Bay's port facility was greatly increased by repair and reconstruction of the seawall there by Brigade engineers. Implanted along a mile long section of beach, the wall permits barges and other shallow draft craft to dock at the shore for easy on and off loading.

February of 1970 saw the completion of a project begun in the summer of the previous year at Qui Nhon that replaced the deteriorating floating steel dock with a permanent structure which accommodates six ammo barges. The port of Qui Nhon is one of the few supply points where ammunition for the First and Second Military Regions can be handled in bulk quantities. Prior to the completion of this new facility, the handling of ammunition there had to take place in an area near public housing and fuel storage depots.

On May 3, 1970, Major General then Brigadier General Henry C. Schrader assumed command of the 18th Engineer Brigade.

Shortly after this; the most difficult stretch of roadway that the Brigade had ever undertakes the 27 kilometer stretch of National Highway QL 11 South in the Central Highlands known as the Good View Pass was completed. This road was transformed from a treacherous mountain path into a thoroughfare worthy of the name of National Highway in little more than a year's time. The Good View Pass metamorphosis is one of the high points of the Lines of Communication highway project that the Brigade is engaged in.

The Lines of Communication Program, which represent the most significant contribution that the 18th Engineer Brigade has made to the economic growth of Vietnam, consists of about 1,500 kilometers of road upgrade from 1967 to 1972. After a slow start in beginning this work, the Brigade finished some 560 kilometers of highway reconstruction and improvement in 1970 and another 450 kilometers are scheduled for completion in 1971 by Brigade units.

In conjunction with the Brigade efforts on the Line of Communication Program, 18th Brigade engineers have been deeply committed to a program of affiliation with ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) engineers. In addition to continuous training programs which the Brigade established to train ARVN equipment operators, the engineers of the 18th provided technical assistance and logistical support to several projects undertaken by the Vietnamese Army, most notably in the construction of the 3, 600 foot bridge at Tuy Hoa. Upon its completion and opening on February 13, 1971, this bridge became the longest overpass of its type in the Republic of Vietnam.

Some 76 other concrete and steel bridges on a smaller scale than that at Tuy Hoa were constructed solely by Brigade units in 1970 and a similar number of such bridges is scheduled for completion in 1971.

Land clearing operations have proven to be a major secondary mission of the Brigade for the security of both military and civilian transportation along roads. Over 50,000 acres of jungle and other dense vegetation have been removed so far for this purpose, thus denying the enemy cover, concealment, and bases of operation. The most dramatic example of such land clearing operations is on the Batangan Peninsula, long the stronghold of the Viet Cong 48th Local Forces Battalion. Over 13,000 acres of countryside in this area were plowed free of all vegetation in 1970 and some 300 enemy bunkers and 8,000 yards of tunnels and trenches were discovered and destroyed as well as large quantities of ordinance and food supplies. The work in the Batangan area and similar locations elsewhere in Vietnam is being continued by Brigade units in 1971.

In support of the XXIV Corps, the 18th Brigade mounted what was described as the most ambitious engineering effort in Vietnam at the end of January 1971. The Brigade engineers pushed a roadway across the rugged terrain of the northern Quang Tri Province to the Laotian border and constructed a 3,200 x 60 foot assault airfield in little more than a fortnight at Khe Sanh. This construction effort was part of Operation Dewey Canyon II in which South Vietnamese troops were rushed into Laos to stem the flow of North Vietnamese men and supplies coming down the Ho Chi Minh trail into South Vietnam.

Most of the units operating as subordinates to the 18th Engineer Brigade have at one time or another been engaged in civic action projects with the villages nearest them. The 18th Brigade engineers have built schools and hospitals, relocated villages, given medical aid, and built artificial lakes for the benefit of the local nationals. An example of these projects is found in Ban Me Thuot where elements of the Brigade have worked closely with a MACV Civil Affairs Team in cleaning up the village market place of literally tons of garbage.

Thus the accomplishments of the 18th Engineer Brigade have not only made the success of combat forces

possible in the First and Second Military Regions, but have also provided an impressive beginning in stimulating and stabilizing the economic growth of the Republic of Vietnam.

[Back one page](#)