

SEABEES OFFLOAD GEAR IN BALIKATAN, PHILIPPINES

By LTJG Christina Suarez, NMCB ONE Balikpapan Det.

On the 7th of January, the Aegean Leader cargo transport vessel docked pier-side at Subic Bay Metropolitan Area (SBMA) in the Republic of the Philippines. Loaded on-board the vessel were 73 units of Civil Engineer Support Equipment (CESE), 12 dock-loaded CESE attachments and 15 storage containers to eventually be used for support in the various exercises associated with Balikatan 2004 in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija. To assist in the off-load efforts, the US Navy and the Seabees of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion ONE solicited the assistance of various local Filipino contractors to off-load and transport the equipment from SBMA to Fort Magsaysay. The 12 Seabees of NMCB ONE present to oversee the off-load consisted of three khaki, six Equipment Operators and two Construction Mechanics.

Equipment off-loads and transport took a total of three days and five convoys using 61 tractor-trailer combos of high-beds and lowboys. The five convoys took anywhere between five to 20 hours in transit depending on the time of day the convoy departed the port. Traffic and the condition of the roads played a large factor in the slow travel time. The most challenging piece of CESE for the Filipino contractors to transport were three scrapers to be used for work on a runway project located at Fort Magsaysay. Five attempts were made before finding a trailer that could withstand the weight and accommodate the size of the scrapers. An 80-ton crane and a nearby loading ramp were used to assist in loading numerous units of CESE. The 3-day long evolution with no down time, was accomplished with zero safety mishaps. It was a great learning

experience for all involved. EOCS (SCW) Mike Noggle, Operations Chief for the detachment, commented:

“The interaction with the Filipino contractors, the Port Authority, and the Navy Regional Contracting Center provided many challenges for our Seabees, but in true Alfa Company spirit, the entire off-load operation went flawlessly; just as expected. Watching my EO’s and CM’s do what they do best is very rewarding. Working 24/7 under less than ideal conditions sometimes provides safety and morale challenges, but for NMCB ONE, troops on the ground, every detail was executed in a true, professional sense. We are all looking forward to the next phase which is construction of the runway and other projects.”