



SEABEE MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL PARK

Davisville, Rhode Island - Original Home of the Seabees



ABOUT US
MISSION/VISION
PROGRESS
BUILDING FUND
PHOTO TOUR
MUSEUM NEWS
SEABEE HISTORY
FIGHTING BEE
QUONSET HUTS
MEMBERSHIP
DONATIONS
SUPPORT
MEMORIALS
LINKS
CONTACT US
SEABEE STORE

SEABEE HISTORY

Convinced that war was coming, the U.S. Navy realized that fighting in theaters halfway around the world would present new challenges in logistics and would require a vast infrastructure. Beginning in 1940 they began a program of building bases on far-flung Pacific island using civilian contractors. When the United States officially entered the war, the use of civilian labor had to stop. Under international law civilians were not permitted to resist enemy military attack. If they did they could be executed as guerrillas.

On December 28, 1941, [Rear Admiral Ben Moreell](#), Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks (BUDOCKS), requested specific authority to activate, organize, and man a unique, very special organization that would support the Navy and Marines in remote locations and defend themselves if attacked — the Naval Construction Battalions. On January 5, 1942, he was given that authority and the original Battalions were formed at a new Naval base in [Davisville](#), Rhode Island.

The first naval construction unit to actually deploy from the United States left Davisville, Rhode Island, less than two weeks later on January 17, 1942. It was designated the First Construction Detachment. The 296 men arrived at Bora Bora on February 17, 1942.

On March 5, all Construction Battalion personnel were officially named Seabees by the Navy Department. Admiral Moreell personally furnished them with their motto *Construmus Batumius*, or We Build, We Fight. A logo, the [Fighting Bee](#), was created by a Rhode Islander at Davisville.

The [Davisville Advanced Base](#) depot became operational in June, 1942. Camp Thomas, a personnel receiving station on the base, was established in October of that year. It eventually contained 500 Quonset huts for personnel. On August 11, 1942, the Naval Construction Training Center, known as Camp Endicott, was commissioned at Davisville. The Camp trained over 100,000 Seabees during the Second World War.

The Navy built their Battalions with experienced, highly skilled craftsmen ... electricians, carpenters, plumbers, equipment operators — virtually any construction or building trade was welcome in the Seabees. Seabee units were quickly engaged in construction and combat. By July 1942, the first Naval Construction Battalion landed on Midway Island to begin work on the new airstrip on Sand Island and to start the massive clean up of damage caused by the Japanese bombing.



From the construction and defense of Henderson Field on Guadalcanal to the Normandy Invasion, Seabees participated in every major amphibious assault in World War II. They quickly earned a reputation for exceptional creativity. If materials weren't available, the Seabees used whatever they could to get the job done.

More than 325,000 men served with the Seabees in World War II, fighting and building in more than 400 locations before the war's end. They knew more than 60 skilled trades. In addition, nearly 8,000 Civil Engineer Corps officers served with the Seabees

With the general demobilization following World War II, the "Bees" were all but disbanded. The Advanced Base Depot and naval Construction Training Center were closed in December of 1945. There with only 3,300 men on active duty by June 1950. Renamed Mobile Construction Battalions (MCB's) they had support duty in Cuba and throughout the Pacific.

Korea

On June 25, 1950, North Korea attacked South Korea. This civil war was greatly expanded when the United States, and later China entered the conflict. In Korea, as in World War II, the "Can Do" spirit shone again. CBC Davisville was reestablished on August 8, 1951.

Landing at Inchon, Seabees provided pontoon causeways within hours of the initial assault. Seabees served side by side with the Marine Corps and the Army, building and defending what they built.

Seabee participation in the Korean War was not limited to amphibious operations. The Seabees were broken up into numerous detachments and each was assigned to an airfield designated with a "K" number, such as K-3 at Pohang, K-18 at Kimbo, and K-2 at Taegu. Seabees



"The only trouble with your Seabees is that you don't have enough of them."

Gen. Douglas MacArthur

could be found throughout the war zone constructing, repairing, and servicing the K-fields of the various Marine Air Groups.

Keeping the planes flying was an arduous and often dangerous task. At one small airstrip on the 36th Parallel, chuck holes were opening up in the failing concrete faster than they could be repaired. As it was absolutely vital that the field remain open, the undaunted Seabees graded, poured, and patched one side of the runway while bomb-laden aircraft continued to fly off the other side.

During the Korean War the Navy realized they needed a naval air station in this region. Cubi Point in the Philippines was selected and civilian contractors were initially selected for the project. After seeing the forbidding Zambales Mountains and the maze of jungle they claimed it could not be done.

The Navy then turned to the Seabees. The first Seabees to arrive were MCB-3 on October 2, 1951; followed by MCB-5 on November 5, 1951. Over the next five years MCB-2, -7, -9, -11 and -13 were also deployed to Cubi Point.

Seabees cut a mountain in half to make way for a nearly two-mile long runway. [Cubi Point](#) turned out to be one of the largest earthmoving projects in the world, equivalent to the construction of the Panama Canal. The \$100 million facility was commissioned on July 25, 1956 and comprised an air station and an adjacent pier that was capable of docking the Navy's largest carriers. Another example of Can Do -- Done!

Antarctica

Beginning in 1955 Seabees began deploying yearly to the continent of Antarctica. As participants in Operation "Deep Freeze," their mission was to build and expand scientific bases located on the frozen continent. The first "wintering over" party included 200 Seabees who distinguished themselves by constructing a 6,000-foot ice runway on McMurdo Sound. Despite a blizzard which once destroyed the entire project, the airstrip was completed in time for the advance party of Deep Freeze II to become the first to arrive at the South Pole by plane.



Over the following years, and under the most adverse conditions, Seabees added to their list of accomplishments such things as snow-compacted roads, underground storage, laboratories, and living areas. One of the most notable achievements took place in 1962 when the Navy's builders constructed Antarctica's first nuclear power plant at McMurdo Station.

During the "Cold War" the Seabee undertook a number of other missions, including constructing the Distant Early Warning (DEW) system in the arctic. Again operating often under extreme conditions, the Seabees successfully completed every mission assigned to them.

Vietnam

The Seabees numbered 10,000 men in May of 1965 when the first Battalions went across the beach at Chu Lai, Republic of Vietnam. During the peak of the Vietnam conflict, Seabee strength reached 25,000 men in 22 Battalions, two Regiments, two Maintenance Units, and scores of Civic Action Teams.

Nearly \$100 million worth of construction was completed by the Seabees, a 3 million man-day effort. The types of jobs ranged from the construction of logistical complexes in DaNang and Chu Lai to Special Forces camps in remote regions. It was at Dong Xoai that **CM3 Marvin G. Shields** was awarded the Seabees' first and only [Medal of Honor](#).

In 1970, Seabee activity in Vietnam drew to a close. The Navy's builder-fighters had made a lasting contribution to the people of South Vietnam. Seabee construction skills and medical assistance contributed greatly in "civic action" programs.

While the Seabees supported the Marines and built a staggering number of aircraft support facilities, roads, and bridges; they also paved roads that provided access to farms and markets, supplied fresh water to countless numbers of Vietnamese through hundreds of Seabee-dug wells, provided medical treatment to thousands of villagers, and built schools, hospitals, utilities systems, roads and other community facilities. Seabees also worked with, and taught construction skills to the Vietnamese people, helping them to help themselves and proving that the Seabees really were "builders for peace."



In 1971 the Seabees began their largest peacetime construction project, on Diego Garcia, an atoll in the Indian Ocean. The project lasted 11 years and cost \$200 million. The base accommodates the Navy's largest ships and biggest military cargo jets, and proved invaluable during [Operation Desert Shield/Operation Desert Storm](#). During the Gulf War, more than 5,000 Seabees (4,000 active and 1,000 reservists) served in the Middle East. They built advanced bases, constructed air fields with hardstands for Marine aircraft, provided petroleum and water facilities, and accompanied the Marines into Kuwait. Active and reserve battalions served in-country and in other support locations worldwide.

In 1982, responding to civil war in Lebanon, the US Marines went in as part of an international peacekeeping force. On October 23, 1983, a truck loaded with explosives crashed through the security perimeter of the Marine Barracks and [exploded](#). Two hundred forty one were killed and 80 seriously wounded. In November, a 42-man Seabee detail from

As part of Operation Deepfreeze, Seabees provided logistic support for the scientific research programs that were conducted by seventy American universities, government agencies, and industrial firms.



In Vietnam, during Tet 1968, Seabees from Phu Bai were summoned to rebuild and repair two vitally needed concrete bridges. When enemy snipers drove them from their work, they organized their own combat teams which silenced the snipers and let them complete their important task.

Click the image below for a moving tribute to Vietnam Veterans



Enlisted US Navy personnel assigned permanent duty are required to wear a Unit Identification Mark on the right sleeve of their Dress Jumper uniforms, Winter Blue shirts, and short sleeved white shirts.

These patches have 1/4 inch white block letters, embroidered on a black background 1/2 inch wide. The lettering is the approved short title of the command.

These patches are commonly referred to as "rocker patches." At various times the Seabee Battalions were referred to as MCB (Mobile Construction Battalions) or NMCB (Naval Mobile Construction Battalions). Various Seabee Battalion patches are shown above.

Also shown above is a rocker patch from the USS Marvin Shields (DE 1066), which is named in honor of Seabee Medial of Honor recipient [Marvin Shields](#).

These rocker patches are from the Museum's collection.



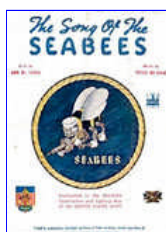
Mobile Construction Battalion ONE was ordered to Beirut to build underground bunkers for the Marines. The detail was quickly enlarged to 82 men. There was no serious retaliation from the Americans and civil war escalated. On February 7, 1984, President Reagan ordered a withdrawal from Lebanon.

From the island-hopping of World War II, the cold of Korea, the steaming jungles of Vietnam, the deserts of the Middle East, Seabees have built cities, paved thousands of roads, and constructed numerous airstrips in the four corners of the world.

Seabees Today

Seabees continue to play a major role in the Global War on Terrorism. In support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Seabees repaired runway facilities at Camp Rhino and Kandahar in Afghanistan. Twenty-six Seabee units deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and [15 Seabees were killed](#). The construction of multiple 20-acre aircraft-parking aprons, munitions storage areas, a 48,000-square-foot concrete pad, bridges, a 1,200-person camp and repaired various roads have been proven invaluable to coalition forces.

In 1942, to encourage enlistment, Sam Lewis and Peter DeRose composed "The Song of the Seabees," click the image to read the words and hear the music.



There are currently about 18,000 Navy Seabees serving worldwide. Two thirds of today's Seabees are reservists. Active duty Seabees serve in eight active Battalions, two Amphibious Construction Battalions (ACB's) and two Underwater Construction Teams (UCT's).



The Seabee reserves are organized into 12 battalions, two support units, and four regiments located throughout the United States.

With a primary mission of providing continuing construction in a war zone, the Seabees are ready to deploy on short notice to any point on the globe. Upon arrival, they work night and day.

Seabees also conduct humanitarian missions worldwide, including earthquake and hurricane recovery efforts in the United States. And it all began here ... in Davisville, Rhode Island.

The true spirit of the Seabees is their "Can Do" philosophy. It's a timeless belief representing Seabees past, present, and future. We invite you to tour our site and visit the Seabee Museum and Memorial Park in North Kingstown, Rhode Island..



"WITH WILLING HEARTS AND SKILLFUL HANDS,
THE DIFFICULT WE DO AT ONCE,
THE IMPOSSIBLE TAKES A BIT LONGER
WITH COMPASSION FOR OTHERS
WE BUILD - WE FIGHT FOR PEACE WITH FREEDOM"
Seabee Memorial, Arlington, VA

For a complete history of the Seabees, click [HERE](#) or go to the [Naval History web site](#).

Certain features require Adobe Acrobat, if you do not have Acrobat installed you can visit the [Adobe web site](#) for a free download.

Website © 2007-2008, Seabee Museum & Memorial Park, Davisville, RI Webmaster: webmaster@seabeesmuseum.com