

The Beginning of Seabees and the US Marine Corps: We Remember (Version 2)

On the occasion of the Marine Corps Engineer Association's first presentation of the Outstanding Naval Construction Force Unit Award, it is both fitting and essential to touch upon the genesis and forging of the long mutual relationship between the Seabees and the US Marine Corps.

The term Seabees comes from the acronym associated with Construction Battalions, a long and cumbersome name associated with the first units organized. All Marines since WWII know who the Seabees are, what they represent, and what they do for Marine Forces. Wherever we find a Marine Expeditionary Force deployed, Seabees are there supporting with extensive horizontal and vertical construction support capabilities. Seabees are always a part of Marine Corps contingency plans.

When and how did they start? Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, and recognizing the need for construction units to build Naval Bases in the war zone, Rear Admiral Ben Moreell planned and coordinated efforts to organize, train, and equip Navy Construction Units. His tireless efforts contributed to the success and greatness of the Seabees, leading the way to overcoming numerous formidable challenges in areas such as Public Law, shore establishment organization, funding, and labor relations. And his personal touch to the Seabees official motto is most appropriate: *Construimus, Batuimus – We Build, We Fight*. 325,000 Seabees served in WWII and more than half of them in the Pacific Theatre.

During WWII, the Marine Corps received operational support from an extensive number of Seabee organizations and resources through all campaigns in the Pacific theater of operations. Seabee battalions were sometimes redesignated as Marine Corps battalions, and wore Marine Corps uniforms with US Navy Seabee insignia. Below is a list of the major support provided to the Marines by Seabees:

18th NCB: 3d Battalion 18th Marines (Engineer Regiment) – 2d Marine Division
19th NCB: 3^d Battalion, 17th Marines (Engineer Regiment) – 1st Marine Division
25th NCB: 3d Battalion, 19th Marines (Engineer Regiment) – 3d Marine Division
121st NCB: 3d –Battalion, 20th Marines (Engineer Regiment) – 4th Marine Division
142nd NCB: 3rd Battalion, 16th Marines (Engineer Regiment) – 5th Marine Division
1st Naval Construction Detachment (Bobcats): 3rd Battalion, 22th Marine Regiment (Reinforced)
53rd NCB: Naval Construction Battalion, 1st Marine Amphibious Corps

So it is clear that Seabees and Marine operating forces were “joined at the hip” early during WWII. Naval Construction Forces remain so today, and will be tomorrow...

Following WWII, Seabees forces were drastically reduced. Today, there are fewer than XX,XXX Seabees. Throughout the Korean and Vietnam wars, Desert Storm and Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, the Seabees have been and continue to be there to support Naval Expeditionary Forces.

Lastly, the coin that the MCEA struck for the NCF Unit award has the Fighting Seabee icon we all know so well on one side, and a rendering of the Seabee Memorial in Washington which is a dramatic, enduring tribute to the service and sacrifices of all Seabees in service to the Nation. Just as the Seabee is an enduring icon, so is the Seabee legend and motto of their services. Seabees always have and always will provide “Can Do” support to the Marine Corps.