



# UNITED STATES NAVY SEABEE MUSEUM

## The SeabeeGram

The official newsletter of the U.S. Navy Seabee Museum providing regular museum updates and sharing historical information about the Seabees and the Civil Engineer Corps.

[Visit our Website](#)

### Museum News

The museum is open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 4pm

To help ensure physical distancing and a safe, comfortable experience, the number of visitors in the museum is limited and visitors are asked to follow these guidelines:

- Please do not enter the museum if you feel sick or have a temperature over 100 degrees.
- Exhibits requires one-way foot traffic flow.
- The STEM Bee Fun Zone is temporarily closed.
- The Seabee Museum Archive Reading Room is open to researchers Monday through Friday from 9am to 4pm (closed from 12pm-1pm for lunch). Reading Room access is by appointment only; [make an appointment](#).
- Maximum museum capacity is 150 visitors.
- Official Navy Events and Ceremonies for groups of 125 or less; [make a reservation](#).
- In-person tours available for groups of 10 or less; [make a reservation](#).

For the most updated visitor information, follow the museum on [Facebook](#) or visit the [museum's website](#).

[Upcoming Family Events:](#)



UNITED STATES NAVY  
**SEABEE  
MUSEUM**

THE UNITED STATES NAVY  
SEABEE MUSEUM PRESENTS

## JUNIOR SEABEE Second Saturday Program

The United States Navy Seabee Museum is proud to host a program designed for children ages 5-12 called Junior Seabee: Second Saturday Program. Together, we will explore the seven rates of the Navy Seabees with different interactive projects and Seabee guests each month.

EVERY MONTH @ 1:00 PM

Register at [SeabeeMuseumVisitor@navy.mil](mailto:SeabeeMuseumVisitor@navy.mil) or call us at 805-982-6180

3201 N. VENTURA ROAD, BUILDING 100,  
PORT HUENEME, CA 93043

### SEPTEMBER 11, 2021

Kids will learn about circuits with a **Construction Electrician** and create a Sea"BEE" that lights up.

### OCTOBER 9, 2021

Become an **Equipment Operator**! Join us for a "Big Rig" day at the museum. See and touch some of the trucks Seabees use.

### NOVEMBER 13, 2021

"Weld" with chocolate and learn welding techniques from **Steelworkers**.

### DECEMBER 11, 2021

Challenge your **Utiliesmen** skills by building a gravity-powered water pipeline.

### JANUARY 8, 2022

Learn hydraulic engineering with a **Construction Mechanic**. Build a hydraulic lift.

### FEBRUARY 12, 2022

Create a lasting keepsake and learn how **Builders** use concrete for construction projects.

### March 12, 2022

Join us for a scavenger hunt through the museum as we explore compasses and maps with an **Engineering Aide**.



Engineering Magic

YOU'RE INVITED TO:

# STORYTIME WITH A SEABEE

Join us at the U.S. Navy Seabee Museum for a book reading and craft. Books will be read by a Navy Seabee! Every week beginning August 5, 2021.



Perfect for Pre-K - 3rd Graders.

Every Thursday @ 10:30 A.M.

3201 N Ventura Rd. Port Hueneme, CA 93043  
(805) 982-5165

## Director's Welcome

For 80 years our Navy Seabees have been protecting the nation and serving the U.S. Navy with pride and outstanding dedication. The men and women of the Seabees have been engaged globally in every theater, constructing bases, building airfields, and conducting underwater construction, building roads, bridges and other support facilities. Seabees have and continue to play a crucial role in supporting the Fleet and Combatant Commands while carrying out our Navy's maritime strategy.

For the past 75 years, the U.S. Navy Seabee Museum has served the Seabee community by preserving and protecting their history and heritage. In continuing this tradition, the museum is developing a new permanent exhibit plan. The museum is working closely with the Seabee Historical Foundation to create a new exhibit plan that reflects the accomplishments of the Seabees from their origins in World War II to the work being done by today's Seabees. The new exhibit plan will also tell the story of the Civil Engineer Corps and explain how the Bureau of Yards and Docks/NAVFAC has supported the Navy's shore establishment for the past 155 years. This new exhibit plan will be completed and ready to share by Summer 2022.

As we all know, the Seabees of the United States Navy were born in the dark days following Pearl Harbor when the task of building victory from defeat seemed almost insurmountable. The Seabees were created in answer to a crucial demand for builders who could fight. This edition of the newsletter commemorates the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Seabees with the article "The SeaBees in World War II" written by Admiral Ben Moreell for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Seabees. Originally published in *Proceedings* in March 1962, Moreell reviews the legendary accomplishments of the "Can Do" Construction Battalions of World War II. Special thanks to the U.S. Naval Institute for providing a copy of the article as it appeared in *Proceedings* and permitting the reprint.

Happy history hunting,

Lara Godbille, Ph.D.  
Director, U.S. Navy Seabee Museum  
Naval History and Heritage Command

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**"The SeaBees in World War II" by Ben Moreell, Admiral, CEC, USN (ret.)**

Self-reliant, confident and efficient, the SeaBee paved the road to victory in World War II.



# The SeaBees in World War II

by Ben Moreell, Admiral, CEC, U. S. Navy (Retired)

*The "King Bee" of the SeaBees reviews the legendary accomplishments of the "can do" Construction Battalions of World War II on their 20th birthday.*

It is no simple matter to relate the World War II exploits of the SeaBees. In the first place, we had nearly a quarter million of them—"construction stiffs" largely—who had to be recruited, trained, organized, and equipped almost overnight and initiated into the niceties of military life. Many of these men were not noted for polished language or conduct, and the Navy did nothing to alleviate these shortcomings. Secondly, it is a little difficult to report on everything these SeaBees did because they were so busy accomplishing impossible things that they had little time to make reports on how they did it. So, in being objective about these colorful men, it may be necessary to remember a few facts which never existed. For an old SeaBee, the "impossible" is still possible.

The forerunner of the World War II SeaBees was a construction regiment formed during World War I at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station for routine construction and maintenance work. Its purpose was to supplement the short supply of civilian construction workers in that area. The regiment worked only at Great Lakes, except for a small detachment which was assigned temporarily to assist in the erection of steel towers at a naval radio station at Croix d'Hins, France. Most of the men had received some training in the various building trades in the schools at Great Lakes. There were few craftsmen who were skilled in their trades when they enlisted.

Civil Engineer officers assigned to the regiment had jurisdiction only during working hours, *i.e.*, while the men were engaged in construction at the site of the work. At all other times, the regiment was under the command of line officers, as required by Navy Regulations.

Although the purpose and procedures differed greatly from those of the SeaBees, this idea of a uniformed construction force, which originated at Great Lakes with Commander (later Captain) Walter H. Allen, of the Civil Engineer Corps, was a big step in the right direction and established a precedent of great value. It served as a basis for war planning during the period of relative stagnation between the two world wars. During this interval, the War Plans Division of the Bureau of Yards and Docks initiated studies of methods by which the Bureau and the Civil Engineers could contribute to the effectiveness of the Fleet and the Marines, with their respective air arms, should a "war of movement" develop in the Pacific.

The organization of construction regiments, following the pattern of the Great Lakes regiment, had a place in these war plans, which placed primary emphasis on the development of construction equipment especially designed for operations at advanced naval bases. Raw recruits were to be trained in naval artificer schools, and then organized into units, commanded by line officers, who would have civil

On the arrival of a transport at an undisclosed South Pacific port, a SeaBee leads the disembarking procession down the gangplank. SeaBees were ready either to work or fight, as the occasion required.

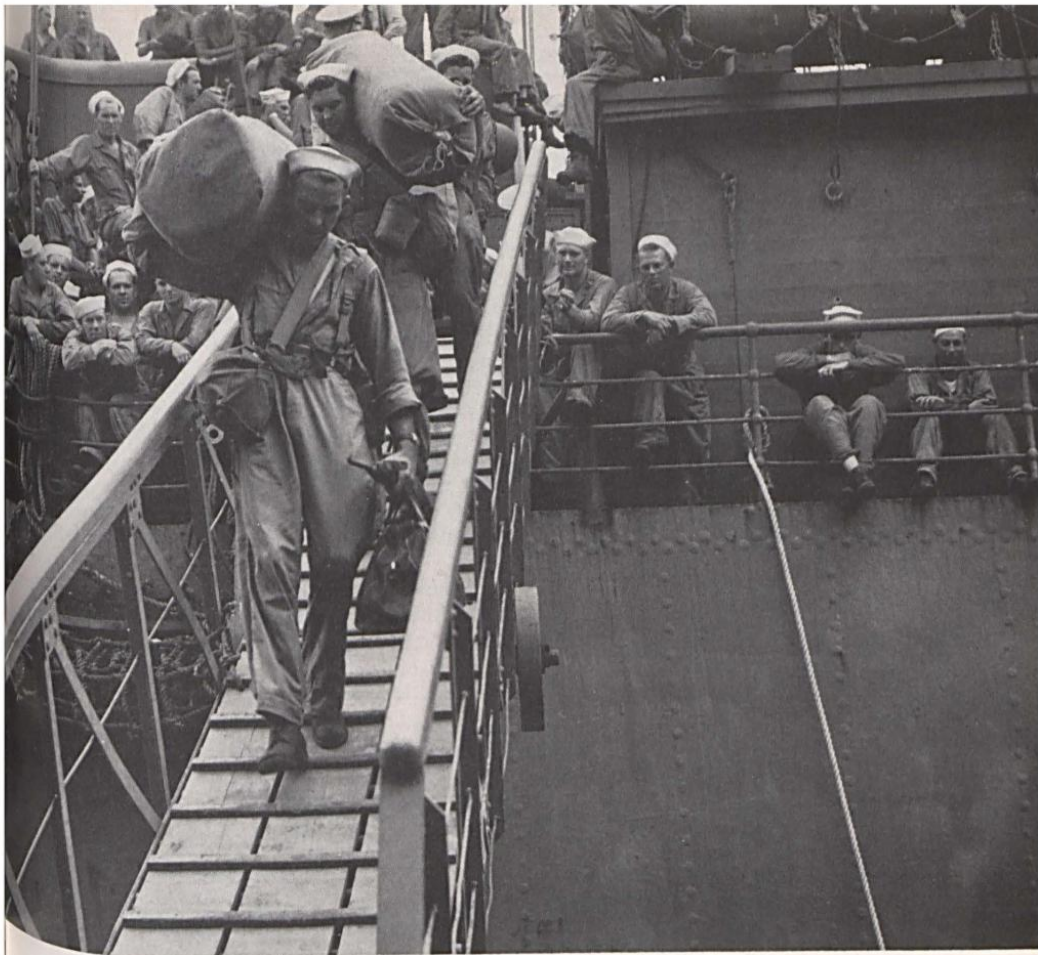


engineer officers on their staffs to direct construction operations in the field.

In the years just prior to World War II, Captain John N. Laycock (CEC), U. S. Navy, was in charge of this planning. His brilliant foresight and talented ingenuity in the development of special equipment contributed importantly to the later successes of the SeaBees. His development of the 5'x5'x7' steel Navy pontoon, later known as "The Magic Box," which could be assembled like a building block for use as drydocks, piers, causeways, barges, bridges, lighters, and many other purposes, was especially noteworthy. Some 520,000 of these "boxes" were built during the war and as many as 45,000 were used in one landing operation. They made possible the successful landing of Allied Forces on

Sicily and of our own troops on several islands in the Pacific. In addition to their designed uses, these versatile "boxes" were used by the SeaBees as hamburger stands, storage bins, and laundries, and there is some evidence (though not conclusive) that on occasion they were adapted for the distillation of spirituous liquors on some of the more isolated islands of the Pacific.

Prior to World War II, the Navy's construction operations were limited to bases owned or governed by the United States. In general, the work was of a permanent nature, similar to the peacetime pattern of construction within the continental limits. In 1940, the Bureau of Yards and Docks had large projects underway in the Hawaiian Islands, Johnston, Palmyra, Midway, Samoa, Wake,



Guam, and in the Philippines; in Alaska and the Aleutians at Kodiak, Sitka, and Dutch Harbor; and in the Caribbean at the Canal Zone, Guantanamo, and Puerto Rico. In November 1940, the United States traded 50 destroyers to Great Britain in exchange for base rights which involved construction at Newfoundland, Bermuda, Great Exuma, Antigua, St. Lucia, Jamaica, Trinidad, and British Guiana. In March 1941, the Bureau of Yards and Docks began the construction, under "lend-lease," of naval bases for the British; three in Northern Ireland and one in Scotland, at a total cost of approximately 50 million dollars. Shortly thereafter, a fueling depot in Iceland was added to this program.

All of this work was planned to be accomplished by American contractors, using

civilian skilled labor from the United States, and where possible, common labor obtained locally. Supervision was to be by Naval Civil Engineers.

In late October 1941, when it became evident that civilian draftsmen, surveyors, inspectors, accountants, and clerks required to man the naval offices at these bases could not be obtained in sufficient numbers, the Bureau of Navigation authorized the enlistment of 99 men for a "Headquarters Construction Company" to perform these duties.

Shortly thereafter, four additional headquarters' companies were authorized, intended for use at Iceland, Newfoundland, Bermuda, and elsewhere in the Caribbean. The first company, scheduled for Iceland, had been organized by 7 December, when

the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. This company was then diverted to form the nucleus of the first Construction Detachment which left the United States on 27 January 1942 to construct a fueling station on Bora Bora, in the Society Islands.

With the attack on Pearl Harbor, it became clear that civilian contractors and their employees could not be used effectively in combat areas. Under military law, civilians could not offer resistance when attacked. A civilian bearing arms would be considered a guerrilla, liable to summary execution if captured. Furthermore, the capture of the civilian employees of our contractors at Wake, Guam, and Cavite demonstrated that few had the training and discipline required to enable them to protect themselves when under fire. Since most construction workers are physically rugged and mentally toughened, however, it was believed that they could be given military training in a relatively short time so that, in an emergency, they could be used effectively in combat.

Therefore, on 28 December 1941, the Bureau of Yards and Docks requested the Bureau of Navigation to authorize the organization of three Construction Battalions, each to consist of 1,073 men and 32 officers. Each battalion was to be constituted as to trades and specialties so as to be self-sufficient for carrying out any construction work assigned to it. Its officer personnel was to consist of 17 commissioned officers and ten warrant officers of the Civil Engineer Corps, two officers of the Medical Corps, one of the Dental Corps, two of the Supply Corps, and one Chaplain. The three battalions were authorized by the Bureau of Navigation on 5 January 1942, the effective beginning of the building and fighting component of the Navy. Construction Battalions soon became CB's, and this soon turned into SeaBees. There were some crucial problems to be solved before a successful operation could be launched, however. First, and most important, was the question of military command. In the World War I Public Works Regiment, military command was exercised by line officers, as required by Navy Regulations. But that regiment functioned only at Great Lakes and only as builders. SeaBees were to go all over the world; they were to receive combat training and

would be expected to build, fight, evacuate wounded, unload ships, or do whatever other odd jobs might be needed.

Obviously, the transfer of administrative control back and forth between line officers and civil engineer officers under such erratic conditions would result in chaos, sharply decreased efficiency, and added costs in time, effort and money. Furthermore, since the greater part of the SeaBee personnel would be seasoned construction workers, much older than the ordinary naval recruits, it was felt that their morale would be strengthened if they were commanded by Civil Engineer Officers who had received military training, who "spoke their language," and who understood construction practices and procedures.

The solution of this problem was essential if the SeaBees were to be effective. On recommendation of the late Rear Admiral W. B. Woodson, then Judge Advocate General of the Navy, the Secretary of the Navy signed an order which gave to the commander of a construction unit military command authority over all personnel ordered to that unit.

Of almost equal importance was the authority to enlist skilled construction men in petty officer classifications commensurate with their civilian construction experience. Vice Admiral Randall Jacobs, Chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, recognized the need for this added incentive to induce skilled workers to leave their high-paying civilian jobs at a time when their services were in great demand. Also, many of these workers, being older than the recruits for general service in the Navy, were married and had families, and most were exempt from compulsory military service because of age or the nature of their occupation.

SeaBee recruits represented some 60 different trades. In the early days of recruiting, the average SeaBee enlisted with a rate of petty officer second class, with pay and allowances totalling \$140.00 a month, which at that time represented about eight day's pay for his counterpart in civil life. Thus, the average SeaBee made a considerable financial sacrifice to enter the service. By his far-seeing action, Admiral Jacobs made possible the success of the SeaBee recruiting program.

With the solution of these two vital problems, the way was cleared for the task of build-





Trees and logs are put in place by Marines and SeaBees for a bridge across a jungle stream on the road to the Cape Gloucester airfield, New Britain Island.

Known as the "Can Do" boys, the SeaBees performed prodigious construction feats during World War II. With immense energy and enthusiasm, they proceeded to solve insoluble problems. Even mud like this could not stop them.





In spite of all the good-natured chaffing they received from the Navy and the Marine Corps, the SeaBees had what it took. Unperturbed by minor distractions, these men are well on the way to being up to their necks in work as they discuss plans and details for seaplane runway ramps.

ing a force of combat-trained construction workers. One year later the total authorized strength of the SeaBees was 210,000 officers and men. At its peak, on 30 June 1945, the SeaBees numbered 258,872 officers and men on active duty, of whom 83 per cent were outside the continental limits of the United States. The officer strength had grown from 159 on 30 June 1939 to 10,186 on VJ Day, 15 August 1945.

As all existing naval training facilities were already heavily congested, a new SeaBee training station at Norfolk, Virginia, was authorized in March 1942. Until this camp

was completed, recruits were given two weeks of military training under Marine Corps instructors at National Youth Administration Camps, after which they were trained for several weeks in the handling of advance-base gear at the Naval Air Station, Quonset Point, Rhode Island.

The training camps at Norfolk (Camps Allen and Bradford) quickly became congested. Camp Endicott at Davisville, Rhode Island, was built to accommodate 350 officers and 15,000 men in June 1942. In November 1942, Camp Peary near Williamsburg, Virginia, with a capacity of 50,000 men, was

placed in operation. At the end of 1942, Camp Parks was established near Livermore, California, primarily as a replacement and recuperation center for battalions returning from overseas, but it was used effectively for tactical training of organized SeaBee units transferred from the East Coast for embarkation.

This expedited recruitment and training still could not meet increasingly insistent requests from the combat areas for more SeaBees. The needs were so imperative that it became necessary to ship some battalions out with very little, if any, military training and with incomplete complements of construction equipment, supplies, arms and ammunition.

Every great achievement is the result of the co-ordinated efforts of capable, dedicated and co-operative men. It was so with the SeaBees. There were many such men in the Civil Engineer Corps and the SeaBees; in fact, too many to mention by name. No individual in the naval service is more deserving of credit for the accomplishments of the SeaBees than the late Rear Admiral John Perry who, as a Captain (CEC) was in charge of SeaBee recruiting and training. His wise and dedicated efforts, which acknowledged no limitations on his energies or on his capacity for hard work, and the results obtained therefrom, will stand forever as a monument to his memory.

The operations of the SeaBees in all theaters of war over a period of three and a half years have been recorded in two official Navy publications, *Building the Navy's Bases in World War II*, compiled by the Bureau of Yards and Docks, and *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II*, by Rear Admiral J. A. Furer, U. S. Navy (Retired). In addition, William Bradford Huie, Lieutenant (j.g.) in the Civil Engineer Corps Reserve, a professional writer who was attached to the SeaBees in Alaska, in England, and in the Pacific, wrote two books, *Can Do—The Story of the SeaBees*, and *From Omaha to Okinawa*. These contain accounts of all SeaBee operations beginning with the first authorization of January 1942 and ending with VJ Day.

Other books about the SeaBees are *We Build We Fight*, by Hugh B. Cave; *SeaBee* by Henry B. Lent; and, *Bulldozers Come First*, by the War Correspondent Editors of *Engineer-*



A towering geyser of water rises as a heavy coral shelf is blasted. The blast will give access to the coral sand below the shelf, a valuable material for building good airstrips.

A SeaBee diver welcomes the chance to get a few drags between assignments since his occupation prevents him from smoking while working.





On Attu the construction battalion took over where the Army and Navy had fought and won. Picture shows the construction of an operational ramp which constituted one small section on the "Tokyo Trail."

*ing-News-Record*, a civil engineering weekly journal.

One full-length movie entitled, "The Fighting SeaBees," starring John Wayne and Susan Hayward, was produced in 1943, to stimulate recruiting. It was primarily a commercial project, however, and scored a great financial success. The SeaBees did not rate it highly because, they said, "It had too much love stuff in it."

The Rogers and Hammerstein Broadway play, "South Pacific," based on James Michener's book, *Tales of the South Pacific*, is built largely around the SeaBees, and there have also been a number of television shorts based on their work. This new naval organization struck a responsive chord in the minds and sympathies of the American people.

So much for the brief formal account of the origin of the SeaBees, their recruitment, indoctrination, and training. There remain some interesting questions. What kind of men were they? Where did they serve? What kinds of work did they do? What made them "tick"? And what did the senior officer under whom they served and their comrades in other branches of the service think of them?

*What kind of men were they?* Perhaps their favorite definition of themselves will give us a clue. "A SeaBee," they said, "is a soldier in a sailor's uniform, with Marine training, doing civilian work at WPA wages."

Actually, the SeaBees were, for the most part, typical American craftsmen—plumbers, carpenters, steam-shovel operators, truck drivers, wharf builders, engineers, surveyors, draftsmen, clerks, lawyers, teachers, preachers, cooks, and bakers—in fact, almost every trade and profession was represented in the ranks of the SeaBees. Of the 10,000 officers, almost 85 per cent had one or more college degrees, mostly in engineering. Others were honor graduates of the "University of Hard Knocks," tempered in the fire of the highly

competitive construction industry. Most of the officers had been contractors, project managers, superintendents, and foremen on construction operations in civil life.

Many of the enlisted personnel were also college graduates. Some who had failed to get into other branches of the Armed Forces because of physical defects or advanced age, were accepted in the SeaBees if they were competent workmen in reasonably good physical condition. Using his best powers of persuasion, Captain Perry had succeeded in convincing recruiting officers that it was unfair to the Navy to be too exacting about a good craftsman's age, physical condition, or previous history.

The enlisted SeaBees were older than their colleagues in the other branches of the Navy and in the Marine Corps. Their average age was about 33, while the men in the general service of the Navy and the Marines were ten years or more younger. There was considerable unofficial flexibility in the SeaBee age limit. In many instances, any resemblance between the age figure given in a SeaBee's application for enlistment and his real age was purely coincidental.

Perhaps, partly because of this marked difference in the ages, and partly because the SeaBees were great admirers of and especially solicitous about the "care and feeding" of Marines, a very close comradeship developed between these two organizations. There was much good-natured banter between them. The Marines had developed a catch phrase, "Never strike a SeaBee, he may be the grandfather of a Marine." Whereupon the SeaBees retaliated by establishing a "Junior SeaBee" rating, to be conferred on any Marine who had served with the SeaBees for three months and had a good conduct record. The SeaBees even fabricated a Special Junior SeaBee badge to be worn by Marines who had earned this distinction.

SeaBee recruiting was made far easier by the wholehearted co-operation of organized labor. An estimated 70 per cent of the SeaBees were members of unions. The Navy made an agreement with the Building Trades Department of the A. F. of L. not to use SeaBees for work within the United States except for secret installations and when civilian labor could not be obtained for important and urgent projects.

*Where did they serve?* It is difficult, if not impossible, to find any active combat zone where there were no SeaBees. They participated in every amphibious operation in the Pacific. They were in North Africa, in Sicily, and at Salerno. They handled the artificial harbor, landing barges, causeways

and fueling facilities at Omaha Beach in Normandy. They participated in the Rhine crossing. They were in the Caribbean, Iceland, Newfoundland, Alaska, and the Aleutians. On Tinian, a SeaBee was a stow-away on a B-29 which bombed Tokyo.

*What kinds of work did they do?* In addition to the regular Construction Battalions, whose job was building the advance bases which served as stepping stones toward Japan, specialized types of battalions, units and detachments were organized as new needs developed.

The largest among these were the "SeaBee Special" battalions used primarily for stevedore duty. They were recruited in large part from steamship and stevedoring companies,

Commodore John R. Perry, officer in charge of the Hawaiian Area Construction Brigade, inspects a smart formation of SeaBees of the 302nd Naval Construction Battalion as it received its battalion colors. The 302nd Amphibious Battalion set up vital pontoon devices on combat beaches.





SeaBee medical officers study blood specimens in a tent laboratory on Guadalcanal to gain vital knowledge in their fight against malaria.

and given specialized training at SeaBee camps where full-scale ships equipped with loading machinery had been built on dry land. Their job was the hazardous one of loading and unloading ships in the war zones where there were usually no docking facilities. In addition, they were frequently called upon to lend a hand in construction and combat duties. By VJ Day, 40 of these battalions of about 1,100 officers and men each were in the forward areas.

The Construction Battalion Maintenance Units (CBMU), about one-fourth the size of a regular battalion, took over the maintenance of the work built by the regular battalions, thus freeing the latter for further moves forward. There were other groups ranging from six to 500 men designated as "SeaBee detachments." In addition to relieving, replacing or strengthening regular Construction battalions, they performed special tasks such as operating a tire repair shop, manning a dredge, manufacturing steel pontoon "boxes" in the forward areas, setting up pontoon causeways, operating barges, *etc.*

There were truck operating battalions, one of which had 2,800 men, construction depot units for handling materials, equipment and supplies, equipment repair units, units organized to drill for oil in Alaska, power plant con-

struction and operating units, and spare parts units.

SeaBees also participated as members of special Navy under-water demolition teams, one of the most hazardous of their many assignments.

Early in the war, three Construction Battalions were attached to Marine divisions, one to each division, in the capacity of combat engineers. The original plan had been to attach one SeaBee battalion to every Marine division assigned to the Pacific area. This plan was changed because of the great demand for SeaBees for other assignments.

*What made the SeaBees "tick"?* It would be trite to say that the SeaBees had high morale. They did. But so did many other outfits in our Armed Forces. But in addition they knew their jobs, they respected their officers; by and large they knew what the war was about, they were anxious to "get it over with" and get home. Furthermore, they were doing what they wanted to do—what they had chosen to do voluntarily. By far the larger part of the SeaBees were volunteers.

The SeaBee insignia, [see page 100] suggested by Civil Engineer officers and drawn by Carpenter's Mate First Class Frank Iafrate, consists of a flying bee, fighting mad, with a white hat on his head, a spitting tommy-gun



One of the major tasks of the Navy's SeaBees in the Pacific was improving captured Japanese airfields. Following the fall of Eniwetok in February 1944, they promptly began enlarging and improving the airstrip on the atoll. Tents in the palm grove house the aircrewmembers.





in his forward hands, a wrench in his mid-ship hand, and a carpenter's hammer gripped in his after hand. This insignia, officially approved by the Bureau of Navigation for use on SeaBee equipment, added much to the spirit of the organization. A marching song, "The Song of the SeaBees," was composed by two prominent artists from "Tin Pan Alley," and donated by them to the Bureau.

I have mentioned the high spirit of the organization. I believe an important factor contributing to that spirit was the emphasis on the fact that ours was (and is) a service organization, that it is our job to help the other fellow get *his* job done, and that the extent to which we helped him was an accurate measure of the value of our services. SeaBees were told, "It is our job to build bases and airfields and harbor facilities and all those things which are needed by the striking forces, the ships, the planes and the land forces to make more effective their efforts to subdue the enemy."

I have frequently been asked the origin of the slogan which contributed so much to the morale of the SeaBees. When Captain Perry came back from a trip to the Pacific in the early days of the war, he told of landing on Johnston Island and being met at the airstrip by the Commanding Officer. In answer to his question, "How are the SeaBees doing?" The CO's reply was "You mean those 'Can Do' boys? They can do anything you ask them to do. They're great." Thus "Can Do" became the SeaBee slogan.

*What did the "top brass" under whom they served, and others with whom they were associated, think of them?* It would be false modesty on my part to imply a lack of pride in the many compliments received by the SeaBees. In every theater of war in which they operated, they received the favorable attention of those in high command.

Fleet Admiral King, in his official report to the Secretary of the Navy, stated:

"The accomplishments of the SeaBees have been one of the outstanding features of the war. Furthermore, the SeaBees have participated in practically every amphibious operation undertaken thus far, landing with the first wave of assault troops to bring equipment ashore and set up temporary bases of operation. There can be no doubt that the

SeaBees constitute an invaluable component of our Navy."

And on the second anniversary of the SeaBees, Admiral King wrote to them, "Your ingenuity and fortitude have become a legend in the naval service."

General MacArthur, in conferring the Presidential Citation on the 40th SeaBees for their part in the battle for Los Negros in the Solomon Islands, said in part, "After working all day and fighting all night, small parties of the Construction battalion personnel still found time during their few hours of leisure off-duty to rout out small bands of the enemy, locate and report pill-boxes, and otherwise carry the offensive to the enemy's position.—The cheerful and uncomplaining attitude of these engineers and the outstanding *esprit* was noticeable to all associated with the unit—and created an immediate resurgence of the offensive spirit in weary troops."

During a call which I made on General MacArthur at his headquarters in Brisbane, Australia, in February 1944, he told me, "... the only trouble with your SeaBees is that I do not have enough of them."

On 28 February 1957, Fleet Admiral Nimitz wrote, in his usual generous and charming manner, to congratulate me on the occasion of the 15th Anniversary of the SeaBees. He said, "It is my pleasure to extend to you, the 'King Bee'—my heartiest congratulations on a job 'well done'—The original idea of having highly skilled construction workers in uniform has developed into one of the many valuable components without



A GRADUATE of Washington University in St. Louis, Admiral Morell began his Navy career in 1917, serving in various capacities with the Department of Public Works and the Bureau of Yards and Docks. He did postgraduate study at L'Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, Paris, France in 1932-33. During

World War II he was Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks and Chief of Civil Engineers of the Navy. In 1941 he organized the Navy's Construction Battalion which became known as the SeaBees. He retired in 1946 and is now a consultant on business organization.

which we could not maintain our Navy as we know it today." Then with his customary magnanimity, he added this postscript in his own handwriting, "Dear Ben: Above is only a part of my admiration for the SeaBees. Without them we could not have beaten the Japs."

General Holcomb, Commandant of the Marine Corps during the war years, wrote me, "Our Marines returning from the fronts have had nothing but praise for the work of our Navy's rugged fighter-builders. Wherever Marines have gone they have seen their SeaBee comrades performing miracles of construction and repair, often under heavy fire."

Late in 1961, Admiral Stark, former Chief of Naval Operations and commander of all naval forces in European waters during the war, said, "... nothing you or anyone else can say would be justice to the wonderful work of the SeaBees in the British Isles, and especially their preparations for the invasion of Normandy. If you wanted a piece of equipment, all you had to do was tell the SeaBees. If they didn't have it they would make it!"

Considering their wonderful achievements and colorful reputation, perhaps the best way to close an account of the SeaBees is to let "Spider" Rowland, Sports Writer for the Little Rock *Arkansas Gazette* in June 1943 do it for me. He had shipped with a battalion of SeaBees to North Africa and on arrival he sent back a report which appeared in the *Gazette*. A few excerpts will indicate Mr. Rowland's impressions of the SeaBees.

"To the Editor of the Gazette:

"A swarm of SeaBees that we hauled from a port, the name of which I am not allowed to reveal, has just been unloaded at a place which is a military secret. . . .

"This is the first time I have been round any SeaBees but . . . they are as handy as a bride at a wedding. . . .

"Called Construction Battalions by the Navy, SeaBees by the public, and Confused Bastards by each other, they can do anything up to and including stringing a telephone line, constructing a bridge, building an out-house, or repairing a cigarette lighter.

"There are all kinds of guys in the SeaBees, from the cotton picking champion of Iceland to a former admiral in the Swiss Navy. Skilled craftsmen, lots of SeaBees abandoned high salaried, draft-deferred jobs to get in the



On Easter morning, 1 April 1945, Marines and Navy SeaBees attended divine services atop Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima. Meanwhile, American troops were swarming ashore on Okinawa.

SeaBees work through a 60-mile gale at an Aleutian base from which American planes took off to bomb Paramushiru, a key Japanese stronghold in the Kuriles. U. S. Navy warships bombarded installations on the southeast coast of the island on 4 February 1944.



The difficult they did immediately, the impossible took a little longer but they always got the job done. Building a windmill washer, or bulldozing out a mountain road, the SeaBees' professional ability stood out.



service and they don't think any more of these strikers than a cat does of mustard.

"Furnished by a Chinaman, their motto 'Can Do' means they can handle any kind of job that comes along with just what tools happen to be handy. They can build tank traps with sticks of macaroni, repair a lady's wrist watch with a Stillson wrench or pitch hay with a one-prong fork. . . .

"A guy with a faint heart or weak back would be as much out of place with the SeaBees as a goldfish in a school of man-eating sharks. They do any kind of work needed by the Navy and during their rest periods reinforce the Marines.

"There is a lot of difference between an order to reinforce Marines and an invitation to an all-day singing and dinner on the grounds. Between the two, rather than back up the Marines I would take my chances going over Niagara Falls in a beer mug. It is a fact, known by one and all, especially the Japs, that a Marine is tougher than an elephant hide sandwich, will fight a circular saw and give it ten rounds to start on. A Marine wouldn't need any help for some little something like stopping a tank if he had a weapon as good as a fly swatter. So, anytime you take out to aid . . . the Marines . . . you are not headed for any Sunday school picnic. . . .

"Next to the most outstanding thing about the SeaBees is their morale. It is higher than an eagle's dandruff. The most outstanding thing about them is their ability to wield a knife and fork. After watching them eat I know why there is a shortage of food. . . .

"The SeaBee physical is pretty tough, but for skilled men, they have been known to make an exception or two. If you are a good man, the SeaBees will overlook the fact your feet are as flat as a White Eagle pancake. If a man is valuable enough, all he needs to do is to be able to see lightning and hear thunder. In such cases, they don't examine the applicant's eyes. They just count them.

"I understand that 50 is the SeaBee age limit but, as we hauled three or four grandfathers, I have a hunch they don't waste any too much time investigating how many summers he has been around if they want a guy. I ran across one talking about the Spanish-American War, and, in my line, it wouldn't be over two to one he wasn't in it. This SeaBee didn't have any more teeth than a White Leghorn hen and when I questioned him, he said, 'I'll do it if they want me to but when I signed up I didn't think they was figgerin' on me biting the enemy.' . . .

Those were the SeaBees—who could indeed do the impossible.



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## From the Collection

There is a beginning to every idea. The Construction Battalion flag is a long honored tradition that is recognizable everywhere. See how the Navy decided on the specifications for the very first one.

IN REPLY REFER TO No.

QR  
ND11-FGJ/Rts  
444(NR)

NAVAL [REDACTED] BASE  
ELEVENTH NAVAL DISTRICT  
SAN DIEGO, 30, CALIFORNIA



*p1*

30 MAR 1948

Dear Captain Sandquist,

In accordance with your request contained in your letter of 5 March, Enclosure (A) is herewith forwarded. Information indicates that this is a standard Navy Battalion Infantry Flag as provided by the Mare Island Navy Yard in 1943.

It is my belief that you will find this flag in the Standard Stock Catalog and that all that will be required, is to have the appropriate letters and numbers sewed thereon.

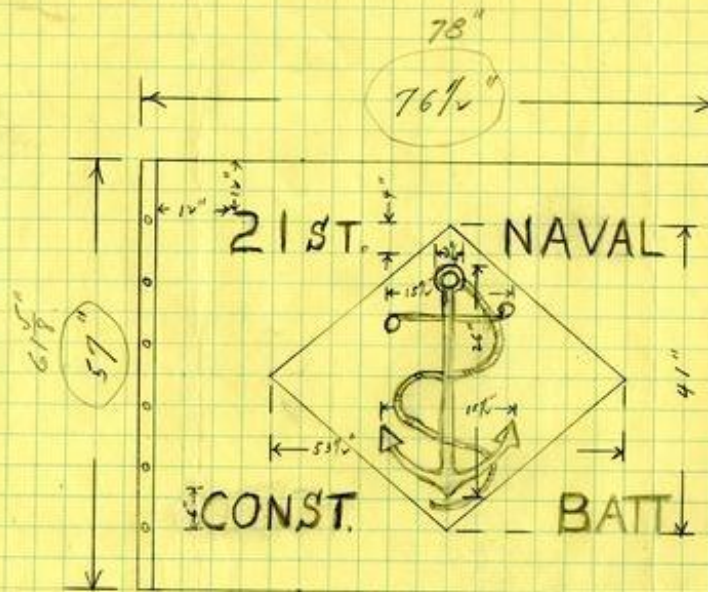
The boys in this District are most anxious to receive their colors and we are awaiting any information you may have along this line.

*F. G. Hansen*  
F. G. HANSEN  
Comdr., CEC, USNR

Capt. O. A. Sandquist  
Budoeks Annex, Room 1A81  
Navy Department  
Washington 25, D.C.

Enc: (A) Sketch of Flag.

*OH* *Jan*



Flag is standard Navy Battalion Infantry Flag - Blue with white dia

Large Letters and Numbers - 6" white  
 Small letters - 4" "



Last issue we asked: Where did you attend your most memorable Seabee Ball and what made it so noteworthy?:

"NMCB 40 detachment to Exercise Teamwork '92, Bardufoss, Norway, March 1992 - Despite the harsh conditions, we improvised a brief but memorable birthday celebration. The Marine Corps AirWing Major to whom we were OPCON made a speech, our mess cook somehow managed to bake a cake, I bought everyone one beer, and we selected a female Marine who happened to be there in the mess hall as the Seabee Queen (yes, there once was such a thing). A good time was had by all and we didn't have to get dressed up!" - Rame Hemstreet

The question for this issue is:

**What exhibit would you most like to see in Seabee Museum?**

Tell us in 50 words or less.

Representative responses will be published in the May issue. Please submit your submissions to [SeabeeMuseum@navy.mil](mailto:SeabeeMuseum@navy.mil) no later than Friday, April 22nd.

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## Connecting on Social Media

While the museum is closed, staff are increasing education activities and offerings on social media. Follow the museum on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for On This Day in Seabee History, interactive activities, insights into museum operations, and other fun information!



[Facebook](#)



[Instagram](#)



[Twitter](#)



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## Seabee Historical Foundation

The SeabeeGram is published with support of the Seabee Historical Foundation (SHF). The SHF is the non-profit charitable partner of the U.S. Navy Seabee Museum chartered to support the museum and its programs. For more information about the SHF, visit their website at [www.seabeehf.org](http://www.seabeehf.org).



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## Contact Museum Staff

**Museum Staff is *always* available to assist you with Seabee-related historical questions or museum operations questions.**

General museum operations questions contact: [NHHC\\_USNSMvisit@us.navy.mil](mailto:NHHC_USNSMvisit@us.navy.mil)

Historical/reference questions contact: [NHHC\\_USNSMarchive@us.navy.mil](mailto:NHHC_USNSMarchive@us.navy.mil)

Information about donating historical material contact: [NHHC\\_USNSMcollections@us.navy.mil](mailto:NHHC_USNSMcollections@us.navy.mil)

Or visit the museum's website at [www.seabeehistory.com](http://www.seabeehistory.com)



