



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 now 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:

- As directed by the Department of Defense, all visitors to the museum two (2) years of age or older are required to wear a mask, regardless of vaccination status.
- 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 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

Even though we celebrate it annually on November 11th, every day is Veterans Day at the U.S. Navy Seabee Museum. The museum is dedicated to celebrating Seabee veterans, providing them with resources, and making sure they know their service mattered. We do this through a variety of ways including exhibitions, education programs, and collection acquisition and management. While much of what the museums happens on-site in Port Hueneme, the staff reaches out to the global Seabee community through its social media channels on Facebook, Instagram and WordPress (the museum's blog site). Not only does the museum share historical information about the Seabees, but the staff actively seeks out current news stories about what Seabees are doing today, both active-duty and veterans. One story that the museum shared this month was about Rear Admiral Jack Buffington who served as the Command of the Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) and the Chief of the Civil Engineer Corps from 1992 -1995. Admiral Buffington was featured in an article in an [article in the Northwest Arkansas and River Valley News](#) for his service as first responder for his local fire department in Fayetteville, Arkansas. The article illustrates how Buffington, a revered Seabee veteran, continues to show compassion for others in his civilian life. If you don't already, please consider following the museum's social media for more interesting stories of Seabee veterans.

Normally, the museum releases "The SeabeeGram" in the beginning of the month, however, this issue was purposefully delayed until today, November 26th. Today marks the 20th anniversary of the Seabees involvement of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. This edition of the newsletter commemorates the Seabees involvement in Afghanistan. In the lead article, CDR Joel Sensenig, CEC, USN (ret), the

Assistant Officer-in-Charge of Air Detachment of Seabees that first arrived in Afghanistan in 2001, shares his firsthand experience of the construction of Camp Rhino. In addition to CDR Sensenig's article, in the "From the Collection" section are also links to blogs written about the Seabees in OEF written by museum archivist, Gina Nichols, who has conducted extensive research using the collection housed at the museum.

Happy history hunting,

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

Camp Rhino, Afghanistan: Seabee Air Det 2001 by CDR Joel Sensenig, CEC, USN (ret)

Twenty years ago, as the Seabees of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion One Thirty-Three (NMCB 133) deployed from Gulfport, MS for their Pacific Deployment, the mission set was full. Including the standard main body tasking in Guam, the Seabees had detachments deploying to Palau, Bahrain, Lemoore, Fallon, Camp Pendleton, San Diego and Hawaii. Additionally, they had been tasked to support the closing of the Navy Base in Puerto Rico and had prepared in homeport to send a detachment, mid-deployment, to complete that mission. This detachment would begin the winding down of Seabee deployments to Camp Moscrip, Puerto Rico, supporting Southern Command missions for the last 40 plus years.

However, on September 11, 2001 the focus of the nation instantly changed when almost 3,000 were killed as terrorists hijacked planes and flew them into the "Twin Towers" in New York, the Pentagon and the fourth hijacked plane crashed in Shanksville, PA. While the nation mourned and planned a response, the Seabees began to prepare to do what they've always done, answer the nation's call.

The challenges of responding to the attacks of 9/11 included understanding the threat from a new enemy, identifying capabilities needed to support a mission in the landlocked country of Afghanistan, as well as continuing to maintain existing missions. Planning and execution of the Seabee mission in support of Task Force 58 (TF-58) in Afghanistan has been well documented* but, as we look back 20 years from that event, the flexibility and cohesiveness of the Seabees in executing the mission stands out.

While the Seabee battalion had just left a successful homeport training cycle, the 89-person Air Detachment (Air Det) was being reconstituted with leadership to support a changing mission and include potential skill sets the tasking may require. Planning and preparation included refresher training on military and technical skills including Chemical, Biological and Radiological (CBR) response. This was the beginning of the Global War on Terror and the enemy's capabilities, and tactics were not well known. They had just used four commercial planes to attack the United States, so defending their own training areas and base of operation could involve any number of tactics. Preparing for the worst was the task at hand.

The reserve augment battalion was called up and reported to Guam. This augment battalion included reservists from New York and New England that had left businesses and families at a moment's notice, they responded with determination and focus. Their role would be a critical one in filling the number of missions the battalion was assigned. Although most would not be sent to Afghanistan the tasking in Puerto Rico and Guantanamo Bay would also require their leadership, planning, and skill.

Initially only 27 Seabees would be sent to support Task Force 58, led by then Brigadier General Mattis, to serve as the Southern block to the Northern Alliance's actions to crush the Taliban in Afghanistan. A Memorandum from the Commander, Task Force 58 emphasized the fact that "we are going into a combat zone in which we must expect close combat." The memo goes on to identify the uniform requirements in addition to stating that "...no Marine or Sailor will be more than three steps from his weapon or war belt (with ammunition, water and first aid kit). Gas mask must be accessible but is not required to be worn." In preparation for this environment the Seabees of NMCB 133 had reinforced key elements as planning for the mission took place in Guam. This included additional training on Communications gear, holding uniform and 782 gear inspections, checking individual knowledge at the squad level to reinforce training and even included assigning a few shotguns for force protection in case close combat inside camp was required.

On November 26th, the advanced party of Seabees left Camp Covington for Andersen Air Force Base on the North end of Guam. There they boarded two C-5 Galaxy's with cargo and six pieces of Civil Engineer Support Equipment (earth moving equipment and trucks), to perform the critical mission of maintaining a

6000 foot dirt runway. The C-5 flights refueled in Diego Garcia and completed the first leg of the trip, landing in Thumrait, Oman where they were reconstituted.

Within the next 24 hours the flight briefing would take place and two sorties would be loaded on C-17's (Globemaster III) and land on a semi-improved desert airstrip. This would be the first time C-17's would be used in a contingency environment requiring a security offload of cargo and passengers, under blackout conditions. Using red lights internal to the plane, during a full moon, the offload was projected to take 30 minutes for each sortie. In-flight refueling of the C-17's was required to take off with over 100,000 pounds in cargo and then land on a 6,000-foot dirt runway.

While detailed planning and rehearsals are a bedrock of any military operation no plan goes off without a hitch. The first C-17 flights into Camp Rhino, Afghanistan proved the same. The actions of the Air Force Pilots, Special Tactics Squadron Combat Controllers and crew exhibited great skill in executing this first landing of a C-17 under combat conditions; however, the offload occurred at the far end of the runway away from the main camp compound requiring a longer than planned move to camp. The Seabees completed movement of four of the nine pallets of cargo prior to ending operations for the night and established their berthing area at the warehouse facility inside the camp walls.

At first light the activities supporting critical tasks began. After completing a survey of the airfield, it was evident there was much more damage than anticipated. Requests went out to the chain of command for two additional graders, another roller and water truck. The Seabees also began the work of arranging the cargo and preparing for camp projects while establishing work priorities and setting up their own Operations Center in a maintenance facility of the camp.

Initial difficulties of that first day exhibiting Seabee skill and their "adapt and overcome" mentality included resolving how to get water into the water truck (3000 to 5000 gallons per day would be required) and nursing a grader that was not running smoothly due to the change to Jet Propulsion 8 (JP8) fuel. First day's grading of the runway was completed by back dragging the dozer. The grader problems would continue until two additional graders were sent on 1 December. Seabees would also use the Front-End Loader and Roller to keep up with dirt runway maintenance. Their efforts were in keeping with the saying that World War II Seabees made famous, "The difficult we do at once, the impossible takes a little longer."

Those first days at Camp Rhino also included providing immediate operational support when a C-130 was stuck turning on the runway as its nose gear dropped into a soft spot as well as force protection when an unidentified helicopter approached the area. As Marines, Seabees and the Tactical Combat Controllers scrambled to respond, it was clear that understanding and adjusting to operations and threats would require changes to the Seabee camp set-up and communications structure. The solution included manning a separate Operations Center on the airfield for Seabee communication, maintenance, operations, and defense.

After 18 days at Rhino, a small element would re-deploy to support the mission at Kandahar airfield. For almost three weeks the Seabees would be split supporting runway repairs, improving defensive positions, and completing camp construction taskings at both locations. In the coming weeks, the detachment would end up adding another 19 Seabees to its ranks to support the split tasking. On January 3, 2002 Camp Rhino operations ended and the Seabees would spend the next month fully supporting operations at Kandahar.

While the tasking never ended up requiring a full Air Det (89 Seabees) the flexibility of the Battalion and skillful support of the Naval Construction Force ensured mission success. On January 31, 2002, the Seabees would leave Kandahar as mission requirements were turned over to the Army's 326th Engineer Battalion, 101st Airborne Division. A message from Commander TF 58 to the White House Briefing Room summed up the events this way; "The final elements of NMCB-133 Air Contingency Detachment have departed Kandahar. These Sailors have been the lynchpin to the completion of TF-58's Operations in Afghanistan. The accomplishments of these forty-six sailors were herculean, their maintaining of the dirt strip at Rhino and rapid opening and repair of the Kandahar runway enabled the buildup of combat power in Afghanistan."

* For more information about the Seabees in the early years of OEF, see "A Deployment To Remember: The Navy's Seabees in Afghanistan" by Lieutenant Commander Leonard W. W. Cooke, USN, Seapower, October 2002; "From 911 to Kandahar" by Rear Adm. Doug Morton, P.E., F.SAME, USN (Ret.), The Military Engineer, Vol. 109, No. 707 (MARCH-APRIL 2017), pp. 87-89



Rhino Airfield Repairs: Roller and Water Truck Ops, 2001.
Photo taken by IT3 Martin Reiger.



Rhino Airfield: AM2 Matting, 2001.
Photo taken by IT3 Martin Reiger.



Rhino Airfield: "Rhino Snot" used for Helo Pad Dust Suppressant.
Photo taken by IT3 Martin Reiger.



Rhino Airfield: Seabee Operations Center, 2001. Photo taken by IT3 Martin Reiger.



Rhino Camp Improvements: CE1 Victor Cabrera and CE3 Stuart Dahl making expedient "distribution panel" for transitioning power between generators.
Photo taken by IT3 Martin Reiger.



Rhino Airfield: 4-Hole Burnouts, 2001.
Photo taken by IT3 Martin Reiger.



Camp Rhino: Seabees constructing 4-Hole Burnouts. Note New York state flag flying under U.S. flag in background, 2001. Photo taken by IT3 Martin Reiger.



Camp Rhino Dozer Operations: Excavating borrow pits and making fighting position improvements, 2001. Photo taken by IT3 Martin Reiger.

From the Collection

As part of the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, the museum has published a two-part blog about the Seabees in Afghanistan. Gina Nichols, the museum supervisory archivist and manager of the Collections Department, has conducted extensive research using the battalion's deployment completion reports and cruise book to document the activities of the Seabees in Afghanistan. [Part one](#) examines the Seabees on the Front Line in the Global War on Terror and [Part two](#) focuses on the Seabees surge into Afghanistan starting in 2009.

The museum has also collection many artifacts related to the Seabees in OEF. One example is this uniform last worn by BUC Raymond Border in Gulfport, Mississippi before he deployed with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 74 in 2011. BUC Border, 31, was killed in action on October 19, 2011 in Paktika province, Afghanistan, while assisting with a road assessment for a convoy. This uniform was the most common uniform of Seabees from 1993 until about 2015. It is sometimes referred to as "woodland cammies" or BDUs.



Seabee Corner

Last issue we asked: If you could tell somebody only one story about Seabees, what would it be?

CDR John Kucinski, CEC, USN (RET), who served as the Commanding Officer of Amphibious Construction Battalion 2 from 1993-1995, shared this account:

As CO of I received a call from a woman who said her elderly father was a World War II Seabee and asked if it was possible for us to meet so he could share his story with someone. We made it happen. I expected to hear about the Seabees' renowned exploits in the Pacific, but instead got a firsthand account of the earlier European landings in Sicily and Normandy where causeway equipment nearly identical to the PHIB's was first used. The Seabee and his family gleamed with pride as his wonderful story unfolded.

The question for this issue is: What is your proudest Seabee accomplishment?

Tell us in 50 words or less.

Representative responses will be published in the January issue. Please submit your submissions to SeabeeMuseum@navy.mil no later than Friday, December 24th.

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](#)



[YouTube](#)



[WordPress](#)



[Website](#)

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.



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

Historical/reference questions contact: NHHC_USNSMarchive@us.navy.mil

Information about donating historical material contact: NHHC_USNSMcollections@us.navy.mil

Or visit the museum's website at www.seabeehistory.com

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