

# For the Seabees, hazardous construction zones have always been part of the job

**Do you know once the U.S. was in an officially declared state of war (December 1941) with Japan and Germany that, under international law, the use of civilian labor in war zones became illegal?** (That's because civilian workers resisting enemy military attack were subject to summary execution as "guerrilla fighters.") Do you know during the D-Day invasion of Normandy that the Seabees were among the very first to hit the beach (as members of naval combat demolition units)? That in the teeth of relentless machine-gun fire, entire squads were decimated before reaching shore when enemy gunfire prematurely detonated their explosives?

Nevertheless, they were successful in opening holes in the enemy's stout defenses.

Do you know that Ward Cleaver was a Seabee?

Or maybe your introduction to the Seabees was the 1943 John Wayne film, *The Fighting Seabees*. According to various online sources the film is credited with helping to attract much-deserved attention to the valuable work done by the battalion.

The early history ([www.seabeeshf.org](http://www.seabeeshf.org)): The first Seabees were seasoned enough — if asked — not to go looking for any left-handed monkey wrenches,

as the emphasis in recruiting them was placed on work experience and skills. But to find recruits with the necessary qualifications, physical standards were relaxed in comparison with the other branches of the military. And in illustration of early wartime patriotism, it was discovered that several men past 60 had managed to join up, although the age range for enlistment was 18–50. Indeed, during those first uncertain days of the war the average age of a Seabee was 37. But early in 1943 voluntary enlistments were halted by President Roosevelt and men for the construction battalions had to be processed through the Selective Service System. The result: Seabees were now of a much younger average age, but they joined the group lacking the necessary skills.

The exploits of the Seabees — young and "old" — in wartime leave us with much to be grateful for. But things change—and so over the years have the Seabees. Early on, beginning with their formation in 1942 as a "militarized, U.S. Naval Construction Battalion" — or CBs — they were known primarily for their demolition, road and airstrip construction prowess. But the Seabee of today is someone proficient in any number of engineering sectors and applications, often working as certified mechanics in,

for example, power plants or as mechanics for aircraft; diesel; refrigeration; electronics; hydroelectric machinery; and electric motors.

If there's a problem with gearing or electrics, today's Seabees are trained to fix it. And isn't that a good thing when you consider all the U.S. companies looking for competent people to do the very same

## "We Build, We Fight"

Seabees motto

thing? After all, most Seabees aren't military lifers; after their discharge they will be looking for good-paying work in the field they were trained for.

So there you go — hire a Seabee!

Consider: condition monitoring is the manufacturing buzz term du jour, correct? Now take a look at the areas a typical Seabee is trained up for as a *certified* construction mechanic: diagnose and troubleshoot equipment failures; repair and maintain diesel and gasoline engines; adjust and repair ignition, fuel, electrical, hydraulic and steering systems; work with hoisting and jacking equipment, power tools, measuring instruments, gauges and meters; lubricating equipment; maintain and repair tires, batteries, brakes and valves; and perform shop management functions such as maintenance scheduling and spare parts inventory control.

If I'm an OEM, job shop, or just about any other hirer of manufacturing personnel, I'm going to be doing some reverse recruiting of Navy Seabee veterans. And, they are combat-ready with no background check needed.

Consider this as well: Seabees earned 33 Silver Stars and 5 Navy Crosses during World War II; 272 enlisted men and 18 officers were killed in combat. More than 500 Seabees died in *construction accidents*. In addition to the European theater, the Seabees were at Saipan, Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Anzio, and much, much more throughout the Pacific. At war's end 325,000 men had enlisted in the Seabees, representing dozens of skilled trades.

Since WW II, the Seabees have been a vital part of every major U.S. military action — from Korea to Afghanistan. That is quite a resume, a resume that continues to evolve right along with advancing technology.

One that serves the nation well in war *and* peace. **PTE**



Builder 3rd Class Joseph Flowers, assigned to the Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 15's Convoy Security Element, throws chains under a pallet of sandbags while constructing a bunker in support of the Afghanistan National Army. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Daniel Garas/Released)