

MILITARY + DEFENSE

**SUN
DAY**

“We’re very lucky because we prepare for war while building partnerships.”

Capt. Mike Saum • Port Hueneme Seabees commander



FUND FOR VIETNAM MEMORIAL GETS \$10M DONATION

Grant will help fund proposed education center in Washington

BY MICHAEL E. RUANE

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund has received a \$10 million grant for its proposed education center adjacent to its famous memorial on the Mall in Washington.

The fund said the grant from the Lilly Endowment is the largest single cash donation in the fund's 37-year history.

The fund has been trying to raise money to build the underground Education Center at the Wall since 2003. With the Lilly donation, the fund said it now has \$42.5 million of the \$130 million it needs to raise.

The center will be a 25,000-square-foot building displaying thousands of artifacts left at the memorial over the years, first-person accounts of veterans and citizens, and a two-story wall showing the faces of the 58,000 people whose names are etched on the memorial.

CELEBRATING SEABEES

For 75 years, the Navy Construction Force has been supporting U.S. military units around the world

BY AMANDA COVARRUBIAS

From the shores of Normandy to the beaches of Vietnam and from the mountains of Afghanistan to the deserts of Iraq, they have laid the groundwork for every U.S. military operation since World War II.

Deployed to some of the most remote spots in the world — the atoll of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, the Saudi Arabian desert and the South Pole in Antarctica — they were told to “make it work” decades before reality TV popularized the phrase.

And they followed through on the order. Working under extreme conditions wrought by weather and war, they erected camps, bases, airfields and roads in the run-up to combat with the enemy.

Sometimes they came under fire themselves, these warrior-builders trained to carry a hammer in one hand, a machine gun in the other.

They are the men and



A Seabee transitions from a crawl to a pull while crossing a wire obstacle on the endurance course at the Jungle Warfare Training Center in Okinawa, Japan.

MC2 ADAM HENDERSON U.S. NAVY

women of the U.S. Navy Seabees, and they celebrate their 75th anniversary today.

Carpenters, plumbers, steelworkers, engineers, crane operators and other tradespeople who form their ranks have built a reputation over seven-and-a-half decades for carrying

out their missions with ingenuity and grit.

Some even do it under water in rivers and oceans. Dive teams encumbered by heavy gear and limited visibility lay pipe, build ramps and recover weapons, sometimes bodies.

When not preparing for war, Seabees use their skills

to build hospitals, schools and amenities for people around the world struck by natural disasters or strife.

“At the beginning, I was just proud to serve my country and proud to be a Seabee,” said Lawrence Sharpe, command master chief of Naval Construction Group 1, home of the

Seabees at Naval Base Ventura County Port Hueneme. “It turned into being proud of the work we do for the folks overseas and the difference we make in their lives.”

A Seabee (short for construction battalion) is a member of the Naval Construction Force, whose primary mission is to support the Navy and Marine Corps by building whatever is necessary to wage war.

They constructed docks and causeways during the invasion of Normandy in 1944 to end Hitler’s march on Europe, and they worked near the front lines under enemy fire during recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mentally tough, physically fit and highly skilled, they were tapped by the Navy in the 1950s to construct and maintain scientific bases in Antarctica.

And they’ve done it all with little fanfare, their talents sometimes overshadowed by flashier brethren in
SEE SEABEES • A31

“It’s incredibly encouraging that an organization like the Lilly Endowment that is so well-known and so well respected in philanthropic circles, sees the value and has confidence in this project,” said Jim Knotts, president of the fund.

“We still have a long way to go, and the project is not certain,” he said in a telephone interview last week. “But I think receiving this kind of commitment from Lilly really indicates to others that this project is a real project, that we’re making great progress, that it will happen with the support of others.”

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of the war’s landmark “Tet Offensive” by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, Knotts said.

In addition, he noted, this September filmmaker Ken Burns is set to release a 10-part documentary about the war on public television stations.

Knotts said he has seen six of the episodes. “I truly believe it will restart a conversation in this country to remember and honor our Vietnam veterans in a way nothing ever has,” he said.

Ruane writes for The Washington Post.

VA CHIEF SHULKIN EXPECTS TO SEE FUNDING INCREASE

Has his eye on improving health care for veterans

BY HOPE YEN

care better and stronger and to transform the VA,” Shulkin said.

The 57-year-old physician, who previously served as the VA’s top health official under the Obama administration, addressed



U.S. INVESTIGATES WHETHER RUSSIAN PENSION MONEY IS FUNNELED TO HACKERS

Funds flow into U.S. with little scrutiny

BY GREG GORDON, KEVIN G. HALL & DAVID GOLDSTEIN

Hundreds of thousands

a deputy assistant secretary of state for sanctions from 2012 to 2014.

“You want to hide them in a large volume of transactions.”

A former highly regarded



SEABEES

FROM A30
fighter planes and special forces.

"They don't brag much, it's not their style," said Kim Crowell, curator of the Seabee Museum in Port Hueneme.

Port Hueneme is home to the Pacific Seabees and one of two Seabee bases in the United States. The other is in Gulfport, Miss., where the Atlantic Seabees are based.

"Our main job is to plan for war," said Capt. Mike Saum, who commands the Port Hueneme Seabees. "We train and prepare for it, and we deploy to prepare for combat operations."

On the humanitarian front, Seabees responded to devastating earthquakes that shook Haiti and Fukushima, Japan, in 2010 and 2011, respectively, and to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005.

"You can't predict when those are going to happen," Saum said. "You just have to be ready to go if called on."

Last year, the Pacific Seabees partnered with all branches of the U.S. armed forces and military branches in 17 countries, including Australia, Cambodia, the Philippines and Bangladesh, to carry out humanitarian projects. Pacific Seabees in Cambodia, Timor-Leste in Southeast Asia, Micronesia, the Philippines, Palau and the Marshall Islands built six schools and restrooms, a clinic and two maternity wards that helped more than 18,000 people in developing communities.

"The good thing is, anywhere we go, whether you're overseas, whether you're in some of these smaller island countries, they're very appreciative of what we bring," Saum said. "We're very lucky because we prepare for war while building partnerships. Seabees are generally welcome around the world."

Today, the men and women of the Seabees are 11,000 strong in active and reserve units, and they continue to prepare for any call of duty.

"Our mission is to man, train, equip," Saum said. "We've got the people in the battalion, they've got the training they need, and



PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS IGNACIO D. PEREZ U.S. NAVY

Equipment Operator 3rd Class Mathew Clem and Builder 2nd Class Brandon Rowe participate in training exercises with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133.

that the Navy and Marine Corps needs them to do."

At the height of World War II, the number of active-duty Seabees had swelled to 325,000— as many people as there are in the entire Navy today. By 1946, that number had fallen to 20,000. Just before the Korean War, their ranks had dwindled to around 3,000.

"Across time, we will ebb

and flow," Saum said.

In addition to Naval Construction Group 1, its two regiments, three battalions and three reserve battalions, Port Hueneme is also home to an underwater construction team. A construction maintenance unit in San Diego is attached to the base as well.

With a new commander in chief in President Donald

Trump, the Seabees' mission remains unchanged, Saum said.

"We're going to continue doing what we're doing," he said. "We're going to continue to train. As long as there's going to be expeditionary forces on land, they're going to need what we do."

Covarrubias writes for the Ventura County Star.

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