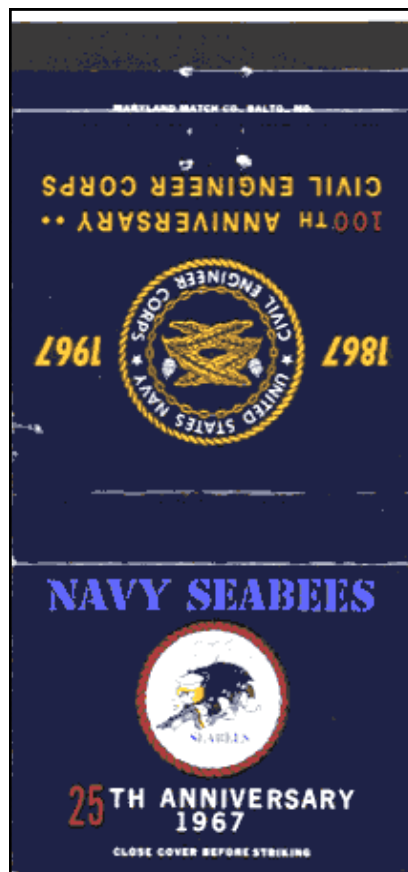
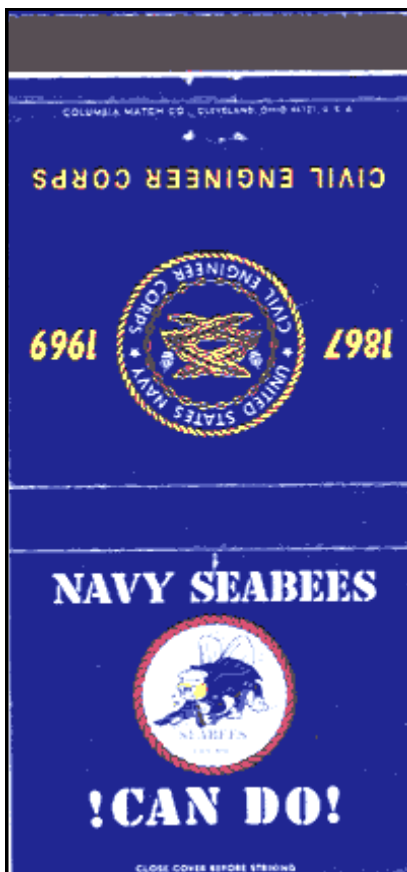


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The Seabees

by
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The motto says it all: "We build, we fight." From the island hopping of World War II and the cold of the Korean War to the jungles of Vietnam and the mountains of Bosnia, the Seabees have built entire bases, bulldozed and paved thousands of miles of roadway and airstrips, and accomplished a myriad of construction projects around the world.



In December 1941, Rear Admiral Ben Moreell, Chief of the Navy's Bureau of Yards and Docks, recommended establishing Naval Construction Battalions. With the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was given the go-ahead. The earliest Seabees were recruited from the civilian construction trades and placed under the leadership of the Navy's Civil Engineer Corps [*anyone besides me remember the great old John Wayne movie about the Seabees?*].

More than 325,000 men served with the Seabees in World War II, fighting and building on six continents and more than 300 islands. With the general demobilization following the war, the Construction battalions were reduced to 3,300 men on active duty by 1950, but the Korean War saw a call-up of more than 10,000 men.

The Seabees landed at Inchon with the assault troops. Following Korea, the Seabees provided assistance in the 1953 earthquake in Greece. In Vietnam, they built schools and infrastructure. Afterwards, they repaired bases in Puerto Rico, Japan, Guam, Greece, Sicily, and Spain. In 1971, they built a new Naval base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. More than 5,000 Seabees served in the Gulf War, building camps, galleys, and 6 million square feet of aircraft parking aprons. Seabees also served in the Bosnian conflict.

I don't know of any collector who collects Seabee covers as a specific category, although it's entirely possible that a retired Seabee would start such a collection. Such covers are to be found within the much larger category of "Military." Thumbing through my own collection, I don't come across many Seabee covers at all, but when one of the little gems occasionally makes an appearance—it's worth the time to pause and reflect on the concept behind this unique group and the impact that such service personnel have had upon our history. The importance of their contributions is far beyond what one would normally expect from such relatively small numbers of people.