

Commander's Note: On 4 March 2017, we were honored to have two very special guests, Mrs. Sea Bee Ruault and her husband Claude, join us at the 75th Anniversary Seabee Ball in Washington D.C. Sea Bee and Claude travelled all the way from Avranches, France to share and celebrate this evening with us. Sea Bee's story began some 73 years ago, during the Normandy invasion, in the small French village of Saint Marie Dumont. In the midst of the fierce fighting, a Seabee medical team from the 81st Naval Construction Battalion was dispatched to assist with her birth. Her mother was so thankful for the assistance, she named her newly born daughter "Sea Bee." During the Seabee Ball, Claude delivered an inspirational speech which focused on the connection we Americans have with the French people and why it's so important that we strive to maintain and strengthen this bond. As well, he thanked the Seabees for all they did that day to assist in the birth of Sea Bee. I encourage you to take a few moments to read his remarks.

RADM B. J. Muilenburg

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Dear friends,

We have a long common history. The Franco-American friendship began with Louis XIV entering into an alliance with the American rebels against England and the American Independence War from 1775 to 1783, Lafayette, Rochambeau, The Statue of Liberty to commemorate the centenary of American independence

Thousands and thousands of young soldiers in the U.S. Army crossed the Atlantic Ocean to fight to free us during World War II. And us, we cross the Atlantic Ocean, in the other way, to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the creation of the Seabees and to say you "Thank you" and pay tribute.

I want to tell you what the Seabees did in Normandy in June 1944.

During D-Day of the Normandy invasion, 6 June 1944, the Seabees were among the first to go ashore as members of naval combat demolition units. Working with U.S. Army Engineers, their crucial task was to destroy the steel and concrete barriers that the Germans had built in the water and on the beaches to forestall any amphibious landings. When dawn betrayed their presence, they came under murderous German fire. Whole teams were wiped out when shells prematurely detonated their explosives. Heedless of the danger, the survivors continued to work until all their explosive charges were planted. As a result of their heroic actions, the charges went off on schedule and huge holes were blown in the enemy's defenses.

The arduous assignment of the combat demolition units was only the beginning of the Seabees' work on Normandy's beaches. After the invasion fleet had arrived off the coast, the approximately 10,000 Seabees of Naval Construction Regiment 25 began manhandling their pontoon causeways onto the beach. It was over these causeways that the infantry charged ashore. Under constant German fire, directed at slowing or stopping the landings, the Seabees succeeded in placing large numbers of these pontoon causeways. Allied troops and tanks subsequently swept ashore in ever greater numbers and pushed the German defenders inland.

The Seabee contribution to the success of the invasion was not restricted to assembling and placing pontoon causeways. They also manned the large ferries known as "Rhinos" that carried men and supplies from the larger ships to the beaches. These ferries were actually little more than floating pontoon structures powered by giant outboard motors. Huge amounts of much needed equipment were hauled ashore on Rhinos during the first few days of the invasion.

The Seabees also built offshore cargo and docking facilities, piers, and breakwaters. These were constructed out of old cargo ships, special prefabricated concrete structures that were floated over from England, and the ubiquitous steel pontoons. The huge port area that was formed out of this odd combination of materials became known as "Mulberry A." Even after the artificial harbor was partially destroyed in a severe storm, the Seabees landed hundreds of thousands of tons of war material daily. In addition to these massive amounts of supplies, by July 4, only 28 days after D-day, they had helped land more than a million Allied fighting men.

The liberation of Cherbourg and Le Havre led to the next big Seabee project. Mulberry A, for all its impressiveness, was only a temporary facility, and the established harbors of these two cities were desperately needed by the Allies. Knowing of this need, the Germans had cleverly devastated the harbors of Cherbourg and Le Havre before retreating. It thus fell to the Seabees to put these harbors quickly back into service. On the heels of the liberating armies, the Seabees entered Cherbourg and Le Havre. At Cherbourg, the first cargoes were landed within 11 days, and within a month the harbor was capable of handling 14 ships simultaneously. Seabee accomplishments at Le Havre were equally impressive.

As the front continued to move inland, other ports along the northern and western coasts of France were restored. At Brest, Lorient, and St. Nazaire, the Seabees rapidly cleared and rebuilt harbors to handle additional vital shipments of cargo.

We want to pay tribute to brave soldiers who gave their blood and sacrificed their youth and their life, for many of them for our own lives and our freedom and so that we can express freely today. We'll never forget.

Two hundred and ninety three thousand dead or missing U.S. soldiers (293,000) during World War II. Fourteen thousand (14,000) bodies are buried in Normandy ground. The white graves in cemeteries always impress.

Each year, French people show that they don't forget and that they will never forget the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of young American soldiers.

Loyal and faithful soldiers, loyal to the alliance of their country with the others allies, faithful to their values that are the democracy, the freedom, before any the freedom. They are heroes whom it's advisable to greet on their just merit. It's the object of ceremonies every year necessary if we want to feed the national memory. To forget these deaths in the world, it would be to kill them a second time.

Let us not forget history so that it does not catch up on us.

It's always positive to remember the war because it can always re-appear brutally.

We'd like to express our thoughts and to remember some Seabees we met or we had news: William "Bill" Manning and Arthur Cotton, we received at home in 1994, Captain Robert Lübker, Joe Francis, Tony Merline, Bob di Stasio, Walt Parson, Norm Hill, Nick de Cola, Arthur Signorelli, William Slage, we met in Boston in 1997, and also Othal Skinner and Rich Dowling who kept the memory of Sea Bee's birth. And of course, we don't forget Dr. Anderson (who passed away too early in 1954) who was Sea Bee's godfather, Dr. Douglas Butman and Sam Buxton, the doctors who attended the birth of Sea Bee. Finally, we wish to thank Rear Admiral Muilenburg, the President of the foundation and Captain Bill Hilderbrand and Nancy Kuehn for their invitation and their precious assistance.

Last year, John Kerry [former Secretary of State] said that France is the oldest allied country of the United States. Of all the major countries of Europe, France is the only one with which the United States have never been at war. The values of freedom which we carry (wear) are the same, democracy , defense of the freedom, the human rights.

We hope it will continue. And as our president said last week, it's never good to mark the mistrust towards a friendly country. Friendship means never having to say things we don't mean. We don't want to lose the opportunity to express our gratitude.

And we'd like to finish by sending immense thanks to Dan Urish whom we live these unforgettable moments, the kingpin of our route since 1994. It's a great pleasure and a great honour to join you all for this Seabee Ball. And Thanks to you all.

Sea Bee and Claude RUAULT.