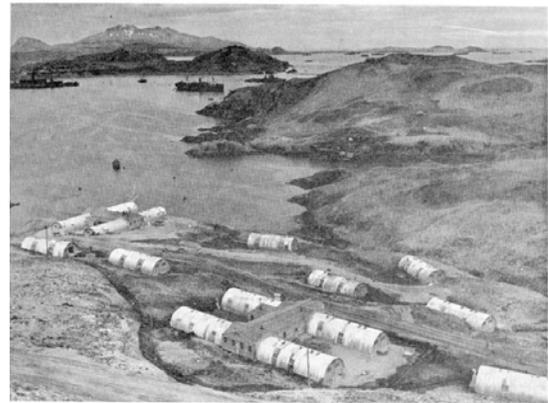


With compassion for others, We Build, We Fight, for peace with freedom...

This motto has rung true in the hearts of Seabees since their establishment during the Second World War. Following the events at Pearl Harbor, American forces were deployed to the Pacific theater in order to capture strongholds and establish airfields that would be critical refueling points for aviators participating in island bombardments.

Initially, civilian contractors were hired and sent to these islands to provide construction support for Marines transiting from battlefield to battlefield or those remaining behind to provide logistics support for those pushing forward. Due to federal laws and the nature of utilizing civilian support in an austere combat environment, the military was unable to arm these vital construction workers, leaving them vulnerable to enemy attack.

The United States Navy recognized this critical vulnerability and developed a plan to stand-up a military construction force capable of building and maintaining facilities and key infrastructure, while at the same time defending their assets and accomplishments. Hence, the Seabees were created. Assembled primarily from trades' people, the military trained them in combat operations, tactics and communications, armed them, and sent them forward to complete construction missions.



Hospital made utilizing Quonset Huts Adak, AK



Airfield, Adak, AK

As the war continued to gain momentum in the European theater, the Japanese launched a campaign in the northern Pacific Ocean, aimed at establishing a foothold near American soil. In 1942, the Japanese succeeded in capturing and occupying two islands in the Aleutians, Sitka and Attu, allowing them to observe American forces operating in the Pacific Northwest, and enabling the Japanese to launch an immediate assault against the US, anywhere along the West Coast. This also provided defensive capabilities, from the North, for the Japanese mainland. In August 1942 the Navy responded to the Japanese invasion by occupying the island of Adak, AK, also located in the Aleutians.

One such Seabee who answered the call to arms was Jack Kelley. Born and raised in Frackville, Pennsylvania, Mr. Kelley came from humble roots. His grandmother sold homemade moonshine at his father's bar. Jack attended school until the eighth grade, and upon turning 17 years old, lied about his age in order to enlist in the US Navy; a decision not uncommon for patriotic Americans during the 1940's.



Jack Kelley, 1943



Seabees in Formation, Adak, AK

Upon completion of basic training, Jack was assigned to the 32nd Naval Construction Battalion in Adak, Alaska, where he helped build and establish Naval Complex Adak (later renamed NAS Adak). Jack, along with over 1000 Seabees, was given the daunting task of constructing hundreds of facilities supporting the American initiative to regain control of the Aleutian Islands. The mission assigned to these Seabees was extraordinary in scope, ranging from hundreds Quonset huts, housing thousands of troops, to an elaborate underground hospital

capable of withstanding bombardment from Japanese aircraft. Feats that directly supported the aviation assets assigned to the island included construction of two 6000 ft runways, hangars capable of housing and providing maintenance facilities for Kingfisher and PBV Seaplanes, and administrative buildings. They leveled mountains and valleys in order to construct roads capable of enabling efficient flow of logistics throughout the island, utilizing materials that they dredged from the bottom of the surrounding seas. These historic tasks were completed in an extremely arduous environment, including intense winds and tremendous amounts of precipitation of over 64 inches per year.

In Reno Nevada in 2005, fate brought Mr. Kelley a new friend, CDR Brian Ferguson. While exchanging insurance information after a minor collision, Jack noticed the DOD decal on CDR Ferguson's windshield and asked, "Navy Man?" And promptly told CDR Ferguson not to worry about the damage. Although it took CDR Ferguson much convincing to get Mr. Kelley to allow repairs to his new vehicle, a friendship was born. In the years that followed, the two Navy men became great friends who visited with one another frequently. CDR Ferguson valued his time with the former Seabee and during their visits where they would have long talks about their Naval service, their families, and their interest in guns. They would exchange "Sea Stories" and ponder the events of current times. Mr. Kelley was enthralled at the younger man's stories of fighter aviation, as was he of Jack's stories of the WWII Navy. On several occasions, Jack with a sparkle in his eye would ask his friend "Brian, when are you going to take me flying in that jet of yours?" With Jack in his 90's and now a double amputee, Brian would just smile at his friend and say "I'd really like to take you flying, Jack. Maybe someday..."

At the great age of 92, Jack Kelley passed away in Reno, NV. CDR Ferguson, now the Executive Officer of his squadron, was finally able to grant an old friend his last request. In April of 2011, Mr Kelley's ashes were flown in an F-5 by his good friend, to honor his life and selfless dedication to the service of his country. As the aircraft taxied out at dusk, a small formation of Seabees from NAS Fallon stood at attention as the jet passed with the two friends, and rendered a warrior from the Greatest Generation his final honors. The jet roared down the runway at Fallon and into a beautiful sunset, and high over the desert of Nevada, the ashes of a Great American were released into a magnificent orange sky. They had finally flown together.



Jack was one of the original Seabees and should be remembered for his selfless contribution to one of the largest scale wars known to humanity. He is forever lost to us, but will forever be remembered.

Jack Corlis

LT, CEC, USN

