

Good evening ladies and gentleman and thank you for that warm welcome. What a privilege it is to be here with you tonight as we celebrate the proud legacy of the United States Navy Seabee. Can I get a HOOYAH?

I've had the opportunity to visit Seabees all around the world, at your bases in Gulfport, Port Hueneme, in the deserts of Iraq, Afghanistan and in the Western Pacific.

I walk away from those visits inspired by your dedication and esprit de corps, whether in combat, Humanitarian Relief missions, or helping to build other nations.

You represent the best of who we are as Sailors and Americans.

I may not be a 'Bee but I think I know who you are, how hard you work and what you do on behalf of this country and the freedom-loving people from around the world. We're going to talk about that in a minute.

First, I want to tell you something else. Not only do I respect and recognize the work you do...I just love being around you. There is no group more honest and willing to stop what they are doing to assist a Shipmate or someone they don't even know than a bunch of Seabees. Also no Sailor in our Navy will be as quick to tell you what's on his or her mind.

I appreciate that.

Something that surprised me when I took this job is the amount of people who tell me what they think I want to hear. Well, between Force Master Chief Holdcraft and Jimmy Fairbanks I can tell you that you are well represented at all levels of the chain of command. ....both are straight shooters ...and neither one of them care one bit about shining an apple and putting it on the MCPON'S desk.

The Seabee Force is alive and well. It's healthy and it's relevant all around the world.

You're working for six separate combatant commanders.

Today's Seabees are living up to the standard set at places like Normandy and Guadalcanal. You're fighting where it's toughest and helping those in need. I was speaking to a group of Notre Dame ROTC students a couple weeks ago and one of them asked me to describe the Navy Seabee.

I told them a little about what a Seabee does, who a Seabee is, where our Bees are located all over the world...and then I said that some of our youngest American's who call themselves Navy Seabee's are rebuilding nations after catastrophes, providing Humanitarian Relief or on the fields of battle...where your motto always rings true.....Can Do!

I told the future officers that the Seabees are taking the American spirit to the citizens of the world and introducing them to freedom and hope..... Not with weapons but with hammers, nails and compassion for their fellow man.

I know what you're capable of at war. I've heard stories of the exploits of Seabees in the most dangerous of situations and I've read about Marvin shields' heroics in Vietnam.

I know of those seven hours he spent under fire, the men he saved, the way he led and the way he died. Like you, I consider him an American hero.

But you're proving something else. You're proving that heroism doesn't end on the battle field. Seabees around the globe tonight.....on watch are heroes in the eyes of millions of people who know that they are the face of America.

In the Philippines, the men and women of NMCB 133 built a health clinic, water treatment facilities and schools.

NMCB 74 spent part of 2008 in the Pacific helping build communities another part of last year in the Horn of Africa, supporting our country's goal to stamp out terrorism.

I just talked with the Seabees in Anacostia who are getting ready to embark onboard Comfort.

But it's not just our friends and partners around the world who you are assisting...it's right here at home too. Seabees from NMCB11 deployed to Texas last fall in response to Hurricane Ike.

Those are just a few examples of your engagements.....it wasn't so long ago that work like that was called "winning hearts and minds." I've never bought into that term, to tell you the truth. Not where our Sailors are concerned. Not when it's the Navy Seabee we're talking about.

Helping those in need is not a campaign or a program or a means to an end. Compassion is a way of life and it's a characteristic that's been yours for sixty seven years.

Building a hospital isn't about winning hearts and minds...it's about providing hope for a community or a country so that children can grow up healthy and safe. That's who a Seabee is and those are the Seabees I enjoy being around.

Is there an EO1 DeMontagnac here tonight? Stand up Shipmate.

Many of you may be aware that she won a pretty Prestigious Leadership Award recently,

Let me read a little bit of it here and embarrass her the best I can.

"Always there to coordinate volunteer projects or give a helping hand regardless of her workload or personal responsibilities off the job. Petty Officer Demontagnac lives by the Navy Core Values...Honor, Courage, Commitment. Her dedication to duty and the wellbeing of her fellow man has motivated juniors and seniors alike. She is "The Ambassador of Goodwill for Construction Battalion Center, Gulfport."

I read things like that about one of you, about sailors like that...and I'll tell you my chest swells with pride. It's why I do this job. Why I go to work every day.

"The Ambassador of Goodwill for Gulfport..."...that's outstanding.

Shipmate front and center.....

Before I close let me say thanks to all the spouses in attendance tonight. Everybody join me in a round of applause. As a matter of fact...Seabees, on your feet. Let's give these ladies and gentlemen what they deserve...a standing ovation.

It is my honor to have been invited here tonight. I'm not kidding you when I tell you of the respect I have for this community. I love being around Seabees. I love watching you work and you damn well better know that when I speak to people who don't know about our Navy...I'm gonna tell them about what you do and how you do it.

Happy birthday Bees and keep making me proud.

HOOYAH Seabees!!