United States Navy SEALs

The United States Navy's Sea, Air, and Land Teams, commonly known as the US Navy SEALs, are the U.S. Navy's principal special operations force and a part of the Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC) and SOCOM.

"SEAL" is always capitalized in reference to members of the Naval Special Warfare community. The acronym is derived from their capacity to operate at sea, in the air, and on land. In the War on Terror, SEALs have been utilized almost exclusively for land-based operations, including Direct Action, Hostage Rescue, Counter Terrorism, Special Reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, manhunts and foreign internal defense operations. SEALs are male members of the United States Navy. An exchange program with the Coast Guard, which graduated three Coast Guardsmen as SEALs, was suspended in 2011.

The CIA's highly secretive Special Activities Division (SAD) and more specifically its elite Special Operations Group (SOG) recruits operators from the SEAL Teams. Joint Navy SEALs and CIA operations go back to the famed MACV-SOG during the Vietnam War. This cooperation still exists today and is seen in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in the finding and killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan.

Birth of Navy SEALs & Vietnam

President John F. Kennedy, aware of the situations in Southeast Asia, recognized the need for unconventional warfare and special operations as a measure against guerrilla warfare. In a speech to Congress on 25 May 1961, Kennedy spoke of his deep respect for the United States Army Special Forces. While his announcement of the government's plan to put a man on the moon drew all of the attention, in the same speech he announced his intention to spend over $100 million to strengthen U.S. special operations forces and expand American capabilities in unconventional warfare.
The Navy needed to determine its role within the special operations arena. In March 1961, Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations, recommended the establishment of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla units. These units would be able to operate from sea, air or land. This was the beginning of the Navy SEALs. Most SEALs came from the Navy's Underwater Demolition Teams, who had already gained extensive experience in commando warfare in Korea; however, the Underwater Demolition Teams were still necessary to the Navy's amphibious force.

The first two teams were on both US coasts: Team One at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, in San Diego, California and Team Two at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Men of the newly formed SEAL Teams were trained in such unconventional areas as hand-to-hand combat, high-altitude parachuting, demolitions, and foreign languages. The SEALs attended Underwater Demolition Team replacement training and they spent some time training in UDTs. Upon making it to a SEAL team, they would undergo a SEAL Basic Indoctrination (SBI) training class at Camp Kerry in the Cuyamaca Mountains. After SBI training class, they would enter a platoon and conduct platoon training.

According to founding SEAL team member Roy Boehm the SEAL's first missions were directed against communist Cuba. These consisted of deploying from submarines and carrying out beach reconnaissance in prelude to a proposed US amphibious invasion of the island. On at least one occasion Boehm and another SEAL smuggled a CIA agent ashore to take pictures of Soviet nuclear missiles being unloaded on the dockside.

The Pacific Command recognized Vietnam as a potential hot spot for unconventional forces. At the beginning of 1962, the UDTs started hydrographic surveys and along with other branches of the US Military, the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) was formed. In March 1962, SEALs were deployed to South Vietnam as advisors for the purpose of training Army of the Republic of Vietnam commandos in the same methods they were trained themselves.

The Central Intelligence Agency began using SEALs in covert operations
in early 1963. The SEALs were involved in the CIA sponsored Phoenix Program where it targeted key North Vietnamese Army personnel and Vietcong sympathizers for capture and assassination.

The SEALs were initially deployed in and around Da Nang, training the South Vietnamese in combat diving, demolitions, and guerrilla/anti-guerrilla tactics. As the war continued, the SEALs found themselves positioned in the Rung Sat Special Zone where they were to disrupt the enemy supply and troop movements and in the Mekong Delta to fulfill riverine operations, fighting on the inland waterways.

Combat with the Viet Cong was direct. Unlike the conventional warfare methods of firing artillery into a coordinate location, the SEALs operated within inches of their targets. Into the late 1960s, the SEALs were successful in a new style of warfare, effective in anti-guerrilla and guerrilla actions. SEALs brought a personal war to the enemy in a previously safe area. The Viet Cong referred to them as "the men with green faces," due to the camouflage face paint the SEALs wore during combat missions.

SEALs continued to make forays into North Vietnam and Laos, and covertly into Cambodia, controlled by the Studies and Observations Group. The SEALs from Team Two started a unique deployment of SEAL team members working alone with South Vietnamese Commandos (ARVN). In 1967, a SEAL unit named Detachment Bravo (Det Bravo) was formed to operate these mixed US and ARVN units, which were called South Vietnamese Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs).

At the beginning of 1968, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong orchestrated a major offensive against South Vietnam: the "Tet Offensive". The North hoped it would prove to be America's Dien Bien Phu, attempting to break the American public's desire to continue the war. As propaganda, the Tet Offensive was successful in adding to the American protest of the Vietnam war. However, North Vietnam suffered tremendous casualties, and from a purely military standpoint, the Tet Offensive was a major disaster for the Communists.
By 1970, President Richard Nixon initiated a Plan of Vietnamization, which would remove the US from the Vietnam War and return the responsibility of defense back to the South Vietnamese. Conventional forces were being withdrawn; the last SEAL advisor left Vietnam in March 1973 and Vietnam fell to the communists in 1975. The SEALs were among the highest decorated units for their size in the war. SEALs were awarded 2 Navy Crosses, 42 Silver stars, 402 Bronze Stars, 2 Legions of Merit, 352 Commendation Medals, 3 Presidential Unit Citations and 3 Medals of Honor.

**Naval Special Warfare Groups**

Naval Special Warfare Command is organized into the following configuration:

- Naval Special Warfare Group 1: SEAL Teams 1, 3, 5, 7
- Naval Special Warfare Group 2: SEAL Teams 2, 4, 8, 10
- **Naval Special Warfare Group 3**: SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team 1
- Naval Special Warfare Group 4: Special Boat Teams 12, 20, 22
- Naval Special Warfare Group 11: SEAL Teams 17, 18 (formerly Operational Support Teams 1, 2)

The total number of Navy SEALs assigned to Naval Special Warfare Command is approximately 2,000 out of a total staffing of 6,500. About half of the SEAL contingent are based at Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base and Dam Neck Annex in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Most of the remainder are headquartered at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, California or with SDVT-1 in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.