

A Visit to the National Navy UDT-SEAL Museum

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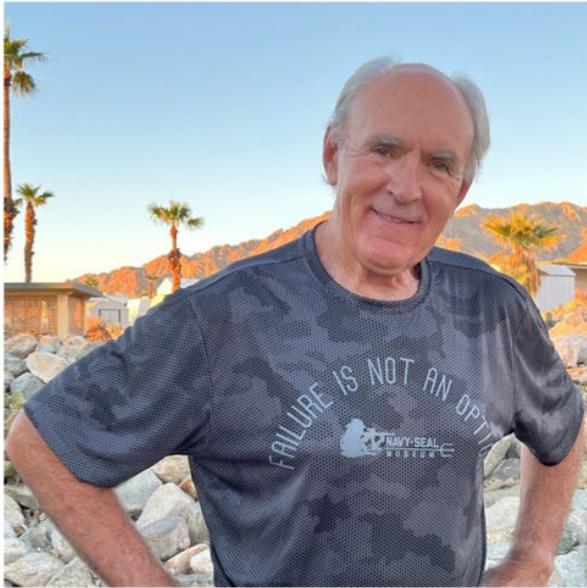
National Chaplain, KWVA

The Marsh Post 442 Chaplain, Cambridge, MA

After our annual KWVA membership convention in Orlando, Florida on October 29, 2021, I drove to the National Navy UDT-SEAL Museum in Fort Pierce, FL, about two hours away from the Orlando International Airport. I had longed to visit ever since I was invited three years earlier to the 50th reunion of the UDT-SEALS in San Diego by my friend, former Navy SEAL warrior, Chaplain Samuel Birky (Retired Army colonel). In 2020, during the SBC annual meeting in Orlando, FL, my planned trip to the museum had to be canceled due to COVID restrictions. So, I was overjoyed when I later heard that our Korean War Veterans Association meeting the following year was going to be in Orlando. The wait was well worth it. I learned so much about the history of the Navy UDT (Underwater Demolition Teams) SEALs and how they serve our nation around the world with such dedication, commitment, and sacrifice.

What is so special about the Navy SEALs? They are highly trained and well-equipped to conduct a variety of Special Operations missions in the most difficult environments. Today's SEALs trace their history back to the elite frogmen of World War II. The SEALs training program is extremely demanding, both mentally and physically, and those who make it through are some of the world's best maritime warriors. Currently, there are 2,450 active-duty SEALs (just 1% of all Navy personnel) and around 600 Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewmen (SWCC) in support of various SEALs operations. These forces spearhead our global maritime security worldwide. Their mental toughness, grit, and self-discipline allow them to stand out and earn the right to proudly wear the SEAL Trident. Their skills are constantly reinforced through many challenging covert combat missions that civilians never hear about.

I had the privilege to meet Admiral William McRaven during a photo-op at the 50th Reunion of UDT-SEALS. After this uplifting encounter, I read two of his books, *Make Your Bed* and *Sea Stories: My Life in Special Operations*. The first and foremost lesson I learned from the books and from the museum tour is to never give up. To ring the ship's brass bell means to quit the SEALs training and for those who complete it, they are the ones who take seriously the challenge to leave the bell alone! Many do end up ringing the bell. The enlisted SEAL attrition rate is around 73 to 75%.



Top left: Chaplain Samuel Birky (army Col., retired former Navy SEAL)

Undergoing such grueling, high-intensity training has its spiritual parallels: "...in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure..." (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). This was the confession of Apostle Paul as he faced the mental and physical challenges of overcoming the spiritual darkness in his generation through spreading the light of the Gospel. The power of Christ allowed him to endure every obstacle: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:16). Like a good soldier of Christ, he put on the whole armor of God in preparation for spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-20). He challenged others to imitate Christ as He gave up His life for us (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Another important theme I learned from the museum and the SEALS is the importance of relationships. SEALS are a Band of Brothers in its truest sense. Over the course of their training, they learn to depend on one another for survival. During combat missions, they literally entrust their lives to the team. In the Gospels, we see how the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to trust and love one another. Upon experiencing the resurrection power of Jesus, the apostles understood the significance and meaning of Jesus' command to be one and they used their unity and love to turn the world upside down. They became His witnesses to the ends of the earth through the power of the Holy Spirit. They were able to be overcomers of this world by leaning upon one another.

In today's church, we are commanded to obey our Lord Jesus—to make disciples of all nations in fulfillment of the Great Commission through the power of the New Commandment. This is not easy; it takes spiritual training, determination, and at times, harsh discipline. It takes obeying the words of Jesus, no matter the cost. The Bible is an instruction book on how to live this life in preparation for the return of Christ. The Bible says, "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). May we trust and obey God on this earth while we await the establishment of His kingdom to come. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!