

News Release 0107

**Public Affairs Office
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Gulfport, Miss. - Two active duty Navy enlisted gunnersmates from the 20th Seabee Readiness Group, headquartered at the Naval Construction Battalion Center (Seabee Center) located several miles west of the Armed Forces Retirement Home-Gulfport, have spent and will continue to spend many tedious hours laboring on a project for the veterans of the AFRH.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the AFRH had antique rifles and swords displayed in the main lobby and in the dining room. There were 20 1870 Springfield rifles with bayonets and 40 cutlasses. These historic and valuable pieces of weaponry came from the original Naval Home located in Philadelphia and transferred to Gulfport when the Home was relocated in 1976.

The antique weapons, along with nearly all of our treasured memorabilia located throughout the 11 stories of the building, were saved by AFRH staff and hard working NCTC students and Seabees that worked continuously in the months after the storm, retrieving these items and relocating them to save them from the heat and humidity of the south Mississippi summer. The weapons arrived at the Armory of the Seabee Center several months after the storm, unharmed but definitely showing wear and tear from the ravages of south Mississippi weather. That's where the Seabees have come to our rescue.

GMC(SW) James King and GM1(SCW) Brandon Miles received the AFRH-G's antique weapons at the Armory and upon inspection of them, they knew they wanted to try and restore them to the original state.

"We don't get to work on things like this normally," Chief King said. "So when I saw what we had, I went to work researching what solvents and cleaners to use for metals and wood used back in that era. It was interesting to read about the history of those weapons and I've enjoyed being involved in this project."

Chief King said he discovered in his research that the Navy only had 10,000 of the 1870 Springfield rifles made. These 20, he said, are real collector's items.

"There just aren't that many of them in circulation anymore," he said, "especially ones in the good condition these are in."

Chief King and CM1 Miles anticipate that each weapon will take about three days to completely tear down, clean, condition and put back together. That's if they were only working on this project.

"We are spending an hour here and an hour there as we have to continue to perform our regular duties here at the Armory," CM1 Miles said. "So it's going to take awhile for us to get this done. But we don't mind, it's been interesting and we'll keep working until we get them all finished."

In addition to restoring the 20 1870 Springfield rifles, the Seabees are also restoring the 40 cutlasses, spending countless hours cleaning and buffing them to their natural beauty.

The antique weapons will remain secured at the Seabee Center Armory until it's time for them to be returned to our new facility where they will once again be on display for all to see and enjoy.

Cutlines:

Rifle 1 - CM1(SCW) Brandon Miles (left) and GMC(SW) James King look over the row of 1870 Springfield rifles they are cleaning and storing for the AFRH. The antique weapons will remain safely stored at the Seabee Center Armory until the Gulfport facility reopens.

Rifle 2 - Chief King displays some of the parts of a rifle he has taken apart for refurbishing.