Fact Sheet

A Brief History of the Naval Facilities Engineering Command

The Naval Facilities Engineering Command is the oldest of the Navy's System Commands, having been established as the Bureau of Navy Yards and Docks in August 1842. Its officers comprise the Navy the Civil Engineer Corps, which came in to being in March 1867. As a result of the 1966 reorganization of the Department of Navy, the Bureau of Yards and Docks became the Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC).

The history of the United States Navy, since its inception by the Continental Congress in 1776 to the global naval complex of today reflects in a very real sense the history of the Naval Facilities Engineering Command.

The Continental Navy

The Secretary of War administered the Continental Navy in its infancy until 30 April 1798 when the Office of the Secretary of the Navy was established. Benjamin Stoddert served as the first Secretary of the Navy, taking office on 21 May of that year.

The Navy then consisted of three frigates – the United States, the Constellation, and the Constitution. Stoddert realized that the building and repair of Navy ships at private yards would be a continually increasing cost to the government. Accordingly, he purchased suitable land for use as Navy yards where ships could be serviced and repaired by Navy employees. By the time Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801, Stoddert had established six Navy yards.

In 1804, the Navy selected Benjamin H. Latrobe to design an enormous dock – a type of roofed-over dry basin – to hold the country's twelve frigates during peacetime. However, it was until 1827, 13 years after Latrobe's death, that construction of the first drydocks at Boston and Norfolk commenced.

During this period the War of 1812 had served to emphasize the importance of the shore establishment and the need for a more efficient organization of the Navy Department. The difficulties faced during the war resulted in the establishment of the Board of Navy Commissioners in 1815 to advise the Secretary on technical and naval problems. The Board functioned for 27 years until it was replaced by the Bureau system in 1842.

Bureau of Yards and Docks

The Board was abolished in 1842 when Congress created the Bureau System, which brought into being the five original bureaus, the first of which was the Bureau of Navy Yards and Docks. Captain Lewis Warrington, who served as the head of the Board of Navy Commissioners, was assigned as its first Chief. The duties assigned to the Bureau of Navy Yards and Docks (its name was changed to the Bureau of Yards and Docks or BUDOCKS in Navy Department reorganization in 1862) were set forth in a Navy Department Regulation dated 26 November 1842.

The other four Bureaus established at this time were (1) Construction, Equipment and Repairs; (2) Provisions and Clothing; (3) Ordnance and Hydrography and (4) Medicine and Surgery. The duties of each bureau are implicit in their titles.

Civil Engineer Corps

On 2 March 1867, Congress passed an act that provided that the Navy's civil engineers should be commissioned by the president, by and with the consent of the Senate. This legislation signaled the birth of the Navy Civil Engineer Corps.

The first five civil engineers to be commissioned under the Act of 1867 included William P.S. Sanger, who due to his seniority in service dating back to the beginnings of the Navy may justifiably be considered the first civil engineer in the U.S. Navy. The Navy commissioned Sanger as a Captain on 2 March 1867.

The strength of the Civil Engineer Corps remained fixed at ten until long after the Civil War, the period from 1867 to 1883 being one of pronounced naval inactivity. At the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898 the number of civil engineers was increased to 18, with additional increase to 40 on 3 March 1903.

On 29 August 1916, a naval act, frequently referred to as the Preparedness Act, was enacted which based enrollment into the Navy Civil Engineer Corps upon a percentage of line officers.
In 1898, Rear Admiral Mordecai T. Endicott was the first Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks to be appointed from the newly formed Civil Engineer Corps. Before his term of office was completed, the rule was established by lay (29 June 1906) that thereafter, the Chief of the Bureau should be selected from members of the Corps exclusively.

BUDOCKS' Expanded Mission

Beginning in April 1907, the Bureau prepared plans and supervised the construction of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. The following year the Secretary approved similar arrangements for the Marine Corps construction. And on 4 March 1911, Congress enacted a law that placed all Navy public works under the Bureau of Yards and Docks. Prior to that time, projects, other than those at Navy yards and certain designated stations, were designed and constructed by the bureau having cognizance of the facility. The report of the House Naval Affairs Committee dated 28 January 1911, contained the following statement:

> In order to facilitate a better coordination of the work in the matter of public works, the Committee has consolidated under the Bureau of Yards and Docks all the public works of the entire naval establishment. The Bureau is controlled by the Corps of Engineers in the Navy, which is a corps of officers trained in construction work at Navy yards and stations.

Thus, the enormous growth that marked the naval shore establishment throughout the twentieth century, as well as most of the earlier development, has been the work of the Civil Engineer Corps.

World War I

The experiences gained by the Bureau of Yards and Docks throughout its history to this time laid the foundation for its extraordinary expansion of work in World War I and again in World War II. During World War I, $347,000,000 was spent for public works under the direction of the Bureau. This sum exceeded the total amount spent hitherto to all Navy yards and Naval stations. This remarkable accomplishment was repeated during World War II when a seemingly incredible $9 billion worth of facilities was constructed.

The first occasion for direct activities on the part of the Bureau in Europe during World War I was in connection with aviation. It was decided to make use of aircraft for the purpose of protecting ships in harbors and coastal waters. Preliminary examinations were made in Europe and the British Isles and a number of stations were selected on the French and Irish coasts during the summer of 1917. The Bureau of Yards and Docks began providing materials for construction at these stations. In all, the Bureau built 24 aviation facilities in France, England, and Ireland. Additionally, oil storage facilities and communication towers were erected at several locations in France.

One of the Navy's immediate needs in World War I was for trained men. To meet this need, the Bureau built 35 training camps. In addition to the large-scale development of training camps, emergency hospitals, and other facilities, World War I was noteworthy for the development of various other facilities including aviation facilities, submarine stations, and permanent storage facilities.

Many of the post-World War I problems confronting the Bureau in 1919 and 1920 were to be repeated following World War II – salvage and dispositions of surplus materials, berthing of deactivated ships, deactivation of stations, and establishments of hospitals for veterans. By 1921, a total of 376 ships had been decommissioned and laid up at prepared berths at Navy yards in Philadelphia and San Diego.

World War II – The Birth of the Seabees

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, a supplementary construction program was established, which rapidly moved from the continental United States and its prewar possessions to many far corners of the globe – in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America, as well as many islands of the Caribbean, North Atlantic, and across the Pacific. This great expansion not only required additional Civil Engineer Corps officers and civilian personnel, but also presented

special problems of a logistics nature. Ten thousand Civil Engineer Corps Reserve officers filled the role of the construction supervisors, however, the Navy did not have any construction workers, as they could no longer send civilian contractors into a war zone.

In early 1942, on the initiative of Admiral Ben Moreell, Chief of the Bureau, the famed Seabees were born – the Naval Construction Battalions. After receiving training in military matters, these military construction men were deployed to overseas bases where the threat of enemy action made it injudicious to send civilian contractors. During World War II, approximately 325,000 Seabees built – and sometimes fought to defend – the Navy's overseas bases.

The Cold War Era

Following the signing of the agreements between the governments of Spain and the United States in September 1953, the Bureau of Yards and Docks was designated as the U.S. government construction agent for Spain. The requirement for providing a complete base complex in Spain, where none previously existed, called for the establishment of new concepts in construction management and development of local construction resources. During the period of 1954 to 1957, four major air bases, a Naval Air Station, POL (Petroleum, Oil & Lubricant) facilities, and seven AC&W (aircraft control and weather) sites were constructed.

IOn 22 October 1962, President John F. Kennedy imposed a naval and air blockade in shipments of offensive weapons to Cuba, demanding that the Soviet Union remove the missiles and dismantle the bases they had in Cuba; the blockade lasted until 20 November 1962. United States and Cuban relations remained hostile with Cuba repeatedly demanding the surrender of the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay. A climax was reached in February 1964 when Fidel Castro ordered the water supply to the Naval Base to be severed. President Lyndon B. Johnson directed that the base be made self-sufficient, thus beginning the Bureau's construction of a combined seawater desalinization and electric power generation plant. The first of three desalinization-power generation units went on-line on 30 July 1964 and the entire project was completed by the next February.

As world tensions increased the rate if construction performed by the Bureau increased proportionately. This was particularly significant in Southeast Asia where construction in support of United States' commitments date back to 1956. It was then that the Navy was designated to administer predominantly military construction in Thailand under a grant totaling almost $18 million jointly funded by the United States and Thailand. In July 1963, the Bureau of Yards and Docks was formally designated as the Construction Agency for all construction in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam War

Unlike the Second World War, the Vietnam situation allowed for a mix of civilian construction workers and construction troops with the civilian contractors. The civilian construction effort amounted the largest single construction job in history. This job was accomplished by a joint venture of four of the largest civilian construction firms in the United States and the contract was administered by the Bureau of Yards and Docks through its Pacific Division in Hawaii, and its Officer-in-Charge of Construction in Saigon.

Construction troops were primarily engaged in building in the insecure areas outside the major enclaves. The men of the Naval Construction Force – the U.S. Navy Seabees – reestablished their World War II reputation in Vietnam as fighters and builders. From the Demilitarized Zone in the north to the Delta region in the south, they built structures necessary to support the allied operations, while at the same time, fought side by side with the U.S. Marines, Army troops and the forces of the United States allies. For their gallantry the Seabees received numerous decorations and awards.

It was a Seabee – Petty Officer Third Class Marvin G. Shields – who became the first Navy man in Vietnam, and the first Seabee, to receive the nation's highest award. He was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions at Dong Xoai.

From Bureau to Systems Command

On 1 May 1966, as a result if the Navy Department reorganization, the Bureau of Yards and Docks became the Naval Facilities Engineering Command – one of six Systems Commands under the Chief of Naval Material.

This reorganization eliminated the traditional bilinear system under which the Chief of Naval Operations and the Chiefs of the various bureaus reported to the Secretary of the Navy. The results were a unilinear Navy concept under which Systems Commands reported to the Chief of Naval Material who, along with the Chiefs of the two remaining bureaus, reported to the Chief of Naval Operations.

In 2004, NAVFAC embarked on an historic transformation to improve its efficiency, effectiveness and delivery of products and services to create savings that can be reinvested by Navy and Marine Corps leadership. This transformation involved the combining and aligning of NAVFAC component commands world-wide (except Specialty Centers) and a functional alignment of NAVFAC's business and support lines to ensure a uniform, enterprise approach to accomplishing its mission.

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Innovation, Leadership, Performance

The Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) manages the planning, design, construction, contingency engineering, real estate, environmental, and public works support for U. S. Navy shore facilities around the world. We provide the Navy's forces with the operating, expeditionary, support and training bases they need. NAVFAC is a global organization with an annual volume of business in excess of $7.6 billion. As a major Navy Systems Command and an integral member of the Navy and Marine Corps team, NAVFAC delivers timely and effective facilities engineering solutions worldwide.