

History of the Naval Facilities Engineering Command

August 31, 1842, marks the establishment of the Bureau of Navy Yards and Docks (BuDocks), forerunner to the Naval Facilities Engineering Command.

In early days of BuDocks, the command originally had responsibility only for the design, construction, and maintenance of Navy yards and a few other shore stations. In 1842 there were seven Navy yards arrayed along the eastern seaboard of the United States. Captain Lewis Warrington, a line officer, and six civilian employees, were assigned to administer public works at these yards.

During the second half of the 19th century, the Bureau of Yards and Docks guided the temporary expansion of the shore establishment that was necessary to fight the Civil War. It also oversaw the development of permanent Navy yards on the Pacific Coast at Mare Island, California, and Puget Sound, Washington.

In 1898, the Spanish-American War precipitated a great increase in the Bureau's activities. Its civilian workforce grew from 7 to 22 people; and the Civil Engineer Corps – which had been established in 1867 – was expanded from 10 to 21 commissioned officers, five of whom reported for duty at Bureau Headquarters. The treaty at the war's end led to the construction of naval stations in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. In the next few years the Navy yards at Boston, Norfolk, and Philadelphia were modernized; and a new yard was built at Charleston, South Carolina.

During the early years of the 20th century, Congress expanded the Bureau's responsibilities by consolidating Navy public works under its cognizance. The most important law was passed in 1911, when Congress placed the design and construction of all naval shore stations under BuDocks control: Previously, the bureau that operated each type of shore facility had performed its own design and construction. For example, the Bureau of Ordnance built naval magazines; and the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery built naval hospitals.

The experience gained by the Bureau during its first 75 years laid the foundation for its tremendous growth during World War I. Between July 1916 and the armistice in November 1918, the Bureau expended \$347 million for public works. That was more money than the Navy had spent on shore stations in the previous 116 years. The construction program included 35 naval training stations; submarine bases at New London, Connecticut; Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; and Coco Solo, Panama; and naval air stations at locations throughout the eastern United States and in England, Ireland, Italy, Tunisia, and France.

The period between the world wars was generally a time of retrenchment and stagnation for Navy public works. By 1921, more than 375 ships had been decommissioned; and the shore establishment shrank accordingly. During the Great Depression of the 1930's, Congress appropriated some money for a naval construction program, which made

improvements in shore facilities while providing much-needed jobs for unemployed civilians. When war broke out in Europe in 1939, however, the Civil Engineer Corps had fewer than 200 officers on active duty; and the shore establishment was woefully unprepared for a major conflict.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Navy's military construction program exploded to global proportions, expanding far beyond the continental United States and its prewar possessions to Europe, North Africa, Asia, and the far corners of the Pacific. To provide supervisors for this huge wartime effort, more than 10,000 Reserve CEC officers were recruited from civilian life between 1940 and 1945.

The establishment of bases in war zones, where workers were subject to enemy attack, made the use of civilian construction men impractical at many overseas locations. Therefore, in 1942 Rear Admiral Ben Moreell, Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, implemented a proposal mapped out by the Bureau's War Plans Section during the 1930's: Experienced construction workers were recruited into the Navy to build overseas bases. Thus, the Naval Construction Force – popularly known as the Seabees – was born. The new Seabees received brief military training before shipping overseas to build advance bases in war zones. Led by Reserve CEC officers, the 325,000 men recruited for the Seabees during World War II built bases on six continents and at locations all over the Pacific. Without the Seabees, the Navy's huge advance-base construction program would not have been possible.

Without a doubt, World War II presented the Bureau of Yards and Docks with the greatest challenge in its history: The value of the naval shore establishment in 1939 was estimated at less than half a billion dollars; by 1945 the shore establishment was worth at least \$6.5 billion. All of this new construction was carried out under the Bureau's cognizance.

At the end of the war, the Bureau faced a new problem – maintaining a much larger shore establishment with reduced funding. The onset of the Cold War in the late 1940's led to some much-needed increases in the Bureau's budget. Then, in 1950 a hot war erupted in Korea. The Korean conflict, which required more men and materials than World War I, presented the Bureau with new challenges. With the help of the Seabees, it met the emergency: CEC officers and Seabees built bases throughout the Pacific to support United Nations troops. In Korea proper the Seabees also placed landing causeways for the invasion forces and built air bases and camps.

In the mid-1960's the United States again went to war, this time in Southeast Asia. Although the Vietnam War was modest in size compared to World War II, it nonetheless created a demand for a substantial amount of military construction. In 1963 the Bureau of Yards and Docks was formally designated as the contract construction agent for Southeast Asia and thus became responsible for nearly all U.S. construction there, including facilities built for the Army, the Air Force, and other Federal Government agencies. Nearly 1.8 billion dollars' worth of construction went into Vietnam under the Military Construction Program.

Meanwhile, in May 1966, as a result of a Navy Department reorganization, the Bureau of Yards and Docks got a new name: Henceforth it would be known as the Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC), one of six systems commands under the Chief of Naval Material. This reorganization eliminated the traditional bilinear organization under which the Chief of Naval Operations and the chiefs of the various bureaus reported separately to the Secretary of the Navy. The result was a unilinear organization, under which the systems commands reported to the Chief of Naval Material, who in turn reported to the CNO. Then, in the mid-1980's the Naval Material Command was disestablished; and NAVFAC began reporting directly to the Chief of Naval Operations.

U.S. forces withdrew from Vietnam in 1973, and the end of American participation in the war brought the usual demobilization and funding cuts to the Navy. In 1970, in anticipation of postwar reductions, NAVFAC consolidated its 13 engineering field divisions into six. The concentration of technical expertise into fewer and larger divisions led to a stronger and more efficient field organization. Within NAVFAC, in the 1970's emphasis was placed on improvements in personnel facilities to support the new all-volunteer Navy, environmental protection, and energy conservation.

The tight military budgets of the 1970's did not last long, however, for in 1980 the United States began one of the largest peacetime military buildups in its history. For fiscal year 1981, President Jimmy Carter requested an increase in the DOD budget of more than 5 percent real growth. After Ronald Reagan took office the next January, the DOD budget grew even faster.

In 1981 Secretary of the Navy John Lehman embarked upon a major program of shipbuilding to increase the Fleet from 540 ships to 600 ships by the middle of the decade. This expansion meant that the Navy needed more shore facilities to support the new ships, which in turn led to more construction work for NAVFAC. Between fiscal years 1982 and 1985, Congress appropriated more than \$5 billion for Navy military construction.

At the end of the 1980's, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought an abrupt end to the Cold War; and the Navy no longer needed so many ships and planes or bases to support them. From NAVFAC's perspective, one of the most important results was the Base Realignment and Closure Program (BRAC). Between 1988 and 1995, Congress authorized four rounds of selections for base closures; and numerous installations were slated for disestablishment. Until the fall of 2004, NAVFAC managed the BRAC Program for the Navy and Marine Corps. By the end of fiscal year 2004, the Command had helped the Navy dispose of 72 unneeded bases and had an inventory of 19 closed installations remaining to be excessed.

In October 2003 an important change occurred in the administration of the naval shore establishment: A new command known as Commander, Naval Installations Command, (CNIC) was established. Henceforth CNIC would provide uniform program, policy, and funding management for all Navy shore installations. NAVFAC's role in the new system was to support CNIC in the Command's areas of expertise.

In 2004, NAVFAC embarked upon an historic realignment of its organizational structure, a functional realignment of its Business Lines, and a major move toward improving and standardizing its business processes to help NAVFAC better support the Navy and Marine Corps, and its other federal clients. The most significant aspect of NAVFAC's transformation was the consolidation of NAVFAC field activities – including engineering field divisions, engineering field activities, officer in charge of construction organizations, public works centers and departments – into regional facilities engineering commands, or FEC's. The FEC's provide the Navy, Marine Corps, and other clients with a single touchpoint for all NAVFAC public works, engineering and acquisition support.

Building on nearly 165 years of experience, in 2006, NAVFAC manages planning, design, construction, contingency engineering, real estate, environmental, and public works support for U.S. Navy shore facilities all over the world. The Command has a proud history of delivering the Navy excellent products and services since 1842.