

Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command, San Diego - Old Town Campus (Air Force Plant 19)

The Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) is headquartered in really old buildings painted grey and trimmed in red, disguised with modern smoke-glass windows and topped with sawtooth roofs.

Collectively, the buildings were formerly known as Air Force Plant 19, the place where the local Vultee/Convair Aircraft Company, which eventually would become General Dynamics, produced B-24 Liberator bombers. The bombers, produced one per hour, were pushed out the door and taxied over a bridge to Lindbergh Field, where women pilots flew them to Air Force bases around the world so men pilots could fly into combat and win the war.

Today, the buildings still resemble an industrial plant, with concrete floors, high bays, ceiling windows and hangar doors. Nestled inside the industrial plant in square pods and stilted freight train tunnels are the offices and cubicles of the men and women who are military, civilian and contractor employees working for SPAWAR Headquarters, a Navy Echelon II Command.

Consisting of three 775 foot-long, 3000 square-foot buildings, the facility progressed from blueprints to aircraft production in less than a year. The factory itself showed similar remarkable efficiency, turning out 162 planes a week in its peak period, almost one per hour, around the clock.

In 1943, the entire Convair factory complex (now SPAWAR) was camouflaged with paint netting to resemble brushy hillside bearing a few (fake) trees and suburban houses. They were actually on the factory roof of the buildings.

The buildings became the property of the Air Force during the Korean War, when the site was known as Air Force Plant 19. The Air Force leased the plant to General Dynamics Convair Division for fabrication of missile launchers and rocket assembly. That work led to identification of the facility as an inspection site onto the Intermediate Nuclear Force Treaty.

After General Dynamics departed from the site, Consolidated Aircraft used the buildings for production of commercial airliners.

With the 1966 closure of the Naval Repair Facility, San Diego, the facility's Electronics Department stood up as the Naval Shore Electronic Engineering Activity, Eleventh Naval District, and relocated from Naval Station to Air Force Plant 19.

In August 1969, the activity became Naval Electronic Systems Command, Southwest Division.

In 1971, the organization was assigned electronic repair responsibilities and established as a depot. The command name was changed in 1974 to Naval Electronic Systems Engineering Center.

In 1992, with establishment of the Navy's Warfare Centers to speed technology flow to the fleet and reduce the size of the research, development and engineering infrastructure, the center joined 10 other commands to form the Naval Command, Control and Ocean Surveillance Center. Later, the center consolidated with similar organizations in Vallejo and Pearl Harbor to form the NCCOSC In-Service Engineering West Coast Division

(NICE West), with headquarters at old town. NCCOSC successfully negotiated with the Air Force to take over responsibility for the site.

In 1995, substantial refurbishment program began, using Base Closure And Realignment Commission (BRAC) funds. Work included seismic retrofit to bring the buildings up to current earthquake code, and addition of mezzanine floors for office spaces.

In 1996, with an intention to fashion and organize true cradle-to-grave responsibility for Navy electronic systems, NISE West was consolidated into the NCCOSC RDT&E Division. The site became known for the first time as the Old Town Campus.

With the transition ceremony, on October 1, 1997, the site became the Old Town Campus of Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center San Diego, and the new headquarters of Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command.