

Army Corps of Engineers Encyclopedia Article

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Army Corps of Engineers

The United States Army Corps of Engineers, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is the world's largest engineering organization. The Corps was founded on June 16, 1775, the eve of the Battle of Bunker Hill, as the Continental Army fought cannon bombardments from British ships.

From early in the history of the Corps, the organization has handled both military and civil engineering needs of the United States. In earlier times those needs included coastal fortifications and lighthouses, surveying and exploring the frontier, construction of public buildings, snagging and clearing river channels, and operating early national parks such as Yellowstone. Under Corps' direction, the Panama Canal and **St. Lawrence Seaway** were built, and the Corps administered the Manhattan Project which led to the development of the atomic bomb during World War II.

Today, the Corps of Engineers provides engineering and related services in four areas: water and natural resource management (civil works), military construction and support, engineering research and development, and support to other government agencies.

In its military role, the Corps of Engineers provides support on the battlefield, enhancing movement and operations of American forces while impeding or delaying enemy actions. Corps engineers also plan, design, and supervise construction of military facilities and operate and maintain Army installations worldwide.

In its civil role, the Corps is responsible for the development of the nation's **water resources** and the operation and maintenance of completed water resource projects. Emerging engineering needs include renewal of infrastructure, management and control of **wetlands** development and **ocean dumping, waste management**, including hazardous and toxic waste, **solid waste**, and nuclear waste, and disaster response and preparedness.

The Corps undertook the task of "unstraightening" the Kissimmee River in south Florida. The river had been straightened into a canal for flood control between 1961 and 1971, losing half its length and most of its marshes. In the first reversal of a Corps' project, the river is slated to regain its curves. The restoration is due to be completed in 2005, but already there have been an increase in the **flora** and **fauna** around the developed areas.

The Corps employees more than 48,000 military and civilian members, has 13 regional headquarters, 39 district offices, and four major laboratories and research centers throughout the country.

Resources

Periodicals

Duplaix, N. "Paying the Price." *National Geographic* 178 (July 1990): 96. Historical Highlights of the United States Army Engineers. Publication EP 360-1-13. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, March, 1978.