

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>California</b>
COUNTY: <b>Solano</b>
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
**Mare Island Naval Shipyard**

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**Mare Island Naval Shipyard**

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Mare Island**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Vallejo**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
**4**

STATE:  
**California**

CODE:  
**06**

COUNTY:  
**Solano**

CODE:  
**095**

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	_____	_____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
**U. S. Government (Contact Mrs. Sue Lemmon, Public Affairs Officer, Mare Island Naval Shipyard)**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Department of Defense, Pentagon**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Washington**

STATE:  
**D.C.**

CODE:  
**11**

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
**Office of the County Recorder**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Solano County Courthouse**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Fairfield**

STATE:  
**California**

CODE:  
**06**

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Historic Sites Survey (OSC)**

DATE OF SURVEY: **1963**       Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**Historic Sites Survey**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**1100 L Street, NW.**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Washington**

STATE:  
**D.C.**

CODE:  
**11**

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## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

I. Mare Island Naval Shipyard has been in continuous operation since it was founded in 1854, and it has expanded greatly, both in acreage and in the number of structures within its bounds. Land reclamation projects and grants have increased the property to about 2,625 acres of dryland and about 1,890 acres of tideland. This large area holds several hundred buildings and other structures, including some from each stage of the shipyard's history. These edifices display a variety of architectural styles and building materials, and many are occupied by tenant commands. Among these units are the Naval Weapons Station, Marine Barracks, Nuclear Power School, Combat Systems Technical Schools Command, and Naval Electronic Systems Command, Western Division. Because of the size of Mare Island Naval Shipyard and the numerous 20th-century structures that are intermingled with the older ones, it is neither desirable nor possible to include all surviving historic edifices in a single district. They form four distinct areas and have a combined size of approximately 150 acres.

II. Area A. The most significant structures on Mare Island are in this district. Included are the oldest shops, some of the oldest residences, and the post chapel. The shop and maintenance facilities are situated in a security area, but some, at least, are connected visually with the dwellings. The boundary is drawn to exclude as many modern structures as possible, but the following nonhistoric buildings lie within the district: 50, 52, 54, 101, 115, 116, 137, 164, 165, 215, 225, 239, 261, 271, 273, 469, 569, 607, 855, 862, 865, and 873.

Smithery (building 46). Now used as a pipeshop and adjoined to other, more modern, structures, this one-story, rectangular-shaped, red brick building was among the first erected by Farragut in 1854. It measures 260 feet long and 200 feet wide and has a parapet gable roof, arcaded sides, and semi-circularly arched windows. The chimneys have been removed and the interior had been altered substantially, but the structure appears to be in fair condition.

Structural Shop, Pattern Shop, Sail Loft (buildings 51, 53, 55). These two-story, rectangular-shaped, gable-roofed, red brick buildings were constructed between 1854 and 1857. Two are 400 feet long, and one (55) is 324 feet long. The original first-floor window and door openings have been partially closed with bricks and boards, and considerable internal changes have been made. According to shipyard

(Continued)

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**3. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian;       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century  
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)      **1854-1974**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal     | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric    | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Invention   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art            | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military    | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation   |   |  | _____  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In September 1854 Mare Island Naval Shipyard became the U.S. Navy's first permanent installation on the Pacific coast. The yard is situated in the San Francisco Bay area on what is now a peninsula bounded by the Napa River and Mare Island Strait on the east, Carquinez Strait on the south, and San Pablo Bay on the west. At the time of its founding and for many years afterward, Mare Island Naval Shipyard symbolized both the culmination of U.S. expansionists' desires to obtain and hold California and the Nation's efforts to protect and extend its economic and political interests throughout the Pacific.

During the yard's 120-year history, the Navy has undergone many changes, including passing from the use of sails to the use of coal, oil, and finally nuclear power to propel its vessels. Mare Island has remained continually active through this transition and contributed significantly to naval progress. Until 1891 the yard had the only U.S. ship repair facilities on the west coast. In addition Mare Island Naval Shipyard built the first U.S. warship (1859) and the first drydock (1872-91) constructed on the Pacific shore, converted a coal-burning vessel into the Navy's first oil-burning ship (1905-8), and built the only U.S. battleship ever fabricated on the west coast (1916-19). Furthermore the yard turned out nearly 400 ships during World War II, and since 1958 it has constructed some 17 nuclear submarines.

Despite the present-day mission of the shipyard, it retains, through numerous historic structures, much of the flavor of the past. The base is closed to the public.

History

Recorded history of Mare Island began in 1775 when Spanish ship captain Don Juan Perez de Ayala touched there

(Continued)

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Braisted, William Reynolds, The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1897-1909 (Austin, 1958).

Hoover, Mildred Brooke, and Hero Eugene and Ethel Grace Rensch, Historic Spots in California, revised edition (Stanford, 1966).

(Continued)

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	38° 06' 34"	122° 16' 32"		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SE	38° 04' 30"	122° 14' 38"		° ' "	° ' "	
SW	38° 05' 07"	122° 16' 13"		° ' "	° ' "	

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **ca. 150 acres**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**George R. Adams, Managing Editor**

ORGANIZATION: **American Association for State & Local History** DATE: **Dec. 1, 1974**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**1315 Eighth Avenue South**

CITY OR TOWN: **Nashville** STATE: **Tennessee** CODE: **47**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Keeper of The National Register*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Description (cont'd.)

officials, the structures are scheduled for demolition, but the Navy is still using them for office and storage space. They are an important part of the historic waterfront scene.

Steam Engineering Complex and Foundry (buildings 85, 87, 89, 91). Now used as nuclear support buildings, these structures are striking symbols of the transition to modern ship propulsion systems. The Navy erected these rectangular-shaped, gable-roofed, red brick edifices in 1858, and together they form a large "U" that measures at least 330 feet along each side. Building 87, the base of the "U", has two stories, while the other structures have only one. A modern facility has been attached to the older buildings, but with their stately lines and original slate roofs, they still provide an indication of the yard's early appearance.

Supply Warehouse (building 69). This slate-roofed structure closely resembles buildings 51, 53, and 55 but is smaller. It was constructed in 1869.

Coal Sheds (buildings 141, 143, 145, 147, 149, 151, 153, 155, 163). Erected about 1900, these nine gambrel-roofed sheds are built almost entirely of steel and are open at the ends. They are situated side by side, and together they extend approximately 700 feet along the northern part of the waterfront. At the time of their construction, Mare Island was the chief west coast coaling depot, so they represent a significant part of U.S. naval history. Today they serve as storage space for various kinds of equipment.

Drydock 1. This was the first drydock constructed on the U.S. Pacific coast. Begun in 1872 and completed in 1891, it is built of cement, gravel, and stone. It is approximately 58 feet wide at the bottom and about 575 feet long, having recently been extended 50 feet and deepened 6 feet to accommodate nuclear submarines.

Administration Building (building 47). Erected in 1855, this two-story, hip-roofed, red brick structure has been altered considerably, but original features remain dominant. The initial domed, octagonal cupola and centrally placed front pediment still adorn the roof, and brick pilasters,

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7. Description (cont'd.)

semicircularly arched first-story windows, and segmentally arched second-story windows still add charm to the front facade. A full-length, single-tiered veranda has been removed from the front, and a second level has been added to each of the formerly one-story wings. Inside, the halls and stairways are little changed, and the old yard commander's office exhibits beautiful white-painted woodwork and yellow-painted plaster and looks much as it did when Farragut occupied it.

Officers' Quarters (buildings A, B, C, D, E, G, H, J, K, L, M, N, O). These two-story, white-painted, stucco-covered residences were constructed about 1900 on the foundations of some of the earliest base quarters, which were erected between 1856 and 1858. Situated along beautiful tree-lined Walnut Avenue, the present dwellings have attractive columned porticos and resemble officers' residences at nearby Benicia Arsenal.

Officers' Quarters (buildings 17, 19, 21, 29). These white-painted, frame dwellings were built in 1897-98 and form an integral part of the officers' row along Walnut Avenue.

Saint Peter's Chapel (building 104). According to shipyard officials, this was the second chapel built on U.S. Navy property. Only the original chapel at Annapolis preceded it. Also Saint Peter's is believed to be the first chapel built with Government funds on any military reservation and intended for use by both Catholics and Protestants. Designed by Albert Sutton, the one-story, cross-shaped edifice was constructed in 1900-1901. The north-south transverse is hip roofed; the east, or front, end of the other transverse is gable roofed; and the entire structure is covered with wooden shingles. Beautiful stained-glass windows present a striking contrast to the otherwise dark-brown exterior. Front entrance is through a one-story, right-of-center tower that is topped by an octagonal spire.

Boundary (as indicated in red on the accompanying maps). Beginning at the intersection of Ferry Street and Waterfront Avenue, a line running northwestward along the centerline of Waterfront approximately 2,325 feet to a point opposite the northeast corner of building 91; thence southwestward along the northwest side of building 91 approximately 650 feet to

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7. Description (cont'd.)

the northwest corner of building 98; thence southeastward along the southwest side of building 98 to the southwest corner of that structure; thence northeastward along the southeast side of building 98 to the centerline of California Avenue, a total distance of about 120 feet; thence southeastward along the centerline of California approximately 1,700 feet to the northeast corner of building 45; thence along the northwest side of building 45 and across Railroad Avenue and along the northwest side, or rear, of buildings 47-A and 47 to the northwest corner of building 47, a total distance of about 500 feet; thence southeastward to the nearer curb of the access road in front of building 47; thence along that curb and across Walnut Avenue to the far curb of that street, a total distance of about 150 feet; thence northwestward along the left curb of Walnut approximately 1,150 feet to a point opposite the northeast corner of building 21; thence southwestward along the northwest side of building 21 and beyond, a total distance of about 210 feet; thence a straight line southeastward, passing to the rear of buildings 21, 29, 19, 17, J to P, A to E, G, and H approximately 2,350 feet to the northwest edge of Chapel Park; thence counterclockwise around the edge of triangular-shaped Chapel Park to the left curb of Walnut, a total distance of about 1,600 feet; thence northwestward along the left curb of Walnut approximately 550 feet to the northernmost entryway to the circular drive in front of building D; thence a 90° turn to the right and then northeastward approximately 1,400 feet, passing first across Alden Park, then along the left curb of Ninth Street, and finally along the southeast side of drydock 1 and to the nearer edge of Mare Island Strait; thence counterclockwise around the northeast and northwest sides of drydock 1 to the centerline of California; thence northwestward along California about 400 feet to Ferry; thence northeastward about 525 feet along the centerline of Ferry to the starting point.

III. Area B. The U.S. Naval Weapons Annex has immediate charge of this area. It includes munitions storage facilities, now vacant, and the nearby base cemetery, all of which are located at the southern end of Mare Island. The following nonhistoric structures lie within the district boundary: A-44, A-146, and A-267.

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7. Description (cont'd.)

Stone Magazines (buildings A-1, A-4, A-20). Building A-1 is the oldest of these one-story, rectangular-shaped, gable-roofed structures, which were built between 1857 and 1864 from stone brought around South America as ballast. They have sheet metal roofs, steel doors, and rusticated quoins. Above the double doors of building A-1 is a meticulously rendered stone relief depicting an eagle and flags.

Brick Magazines (buildings A-3, A-5, A-6, A-11). These rectangular-shaped, red brick structures stand near and resemble buildings A-1, A-4, and A-20. Erected in the 1890's, the brick magazines have parapet gable roofs and denticulated cornices along the sides.

Base Cemetery. The cemetery is situated a few hundred feet northwest of the magazines and is surrounded by a white-painted, wooden picket fence. Established in 1856, the cemetery now contains approximately 900 graves, including those of several flag officers, Francis Scott Key's daughter Anna Turner, and Russian, French, British, and Dutch sailors whose ships called at Mare Island in the 19th century.

Boundary (as indicated in red on the accompanying maps). Beginning at the northeast corner of the base cemetery, a line extending counterclockwise around the northwest, southwest, and southeast sides of the cemetery, including the fence, and to the nearer edge of the unnamed access road that bounds the northeast side, or front, of the cemetery; thence southward and then southeastward along the right edge of that curving access road approximately 330 feet to a point where the road forks; thence southeastward to the retaining wall at a point opposite the southwest corner of building A-5, passing to the south of building A-43 and extending a total distance of about 500 feet; thence southward along the top of the inner edge of the retaining wall to a point immediately opposite the southwest corner of building A-11; thence eastward about 150 feet to the nearer edge of Mare Island Strait; thence northward approximately 850 feet to a point immediately east of the northeast corner of building A-15; thence westward about 130 feet to the northwest corner of building A-15; thence in a straight line northwestward approximately 800 feet to the starting point.

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7. Description (cont'd.)

IV. Area C. This elongated area contains three 19th-century buildings that are separated from the other historic shipyard structures. The three have a visual connection along Cedar Avenue.

Hospital (building H-1). Erected in 1889, this was the first U.S. naval hospital on the west coast. The front portion of the irregular H-shaped, cream-colored, frame-and-stucco structure consists of a three-story central block and two two-story wings. Together these three sections measure almost 300 feet in length. The building has undergone numerous alterations, including removal of the original mansard roof and addition of a full-height, pedimented portico over the front entrance. Several annexes now adjoin the initial structure also, and it is occupied by the Combat Systems Technical Schools Command.

Stable (building 88). This two-story, rectangular-shaped, gable-roofed, red brick structure was built sometime between 1854 and 1860. Some door and window openings have been altered, but the building retains the original slate roof and three square ventilation cupolas. At present the stable is utilized as storage space.

Marine Officers' Quarters (building M-1). Constructed in 1871 and moved subsequently to the present location, this two-story, white-painted, stucco-covered residence commemorates the oldest permanent Marine Corps barracks (1862) on the Pacific coast. Decorative features of particular note include entablatures above most windows, a boxed cornice with freize and supporting scroll brackets, and a column-supported, semi-circularly arched entrance portico.

Boundary (as indicated in red on the accompanying maps). Beginning at the southwest corner of the intersection of West 13th Street and Cedar Avenue, a line extending southeastward along the right curb of Cedar approximately 1,100 feet to the rear of building H-1; thence passing counterclockwise around building H-1, underneath the passageway that connects buildings H-1 and H-80, along the outer curb of the access road immediately in front of building H-1 to a point immediately opposite the northeast corner of that structure,

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7. Description (cont'd.)

underneath the passageway that connects buildings H-1 and N-72, and to the nearer curb of Cedar; thence northwestward along Cedar approximately 750 feet to a point opposite the southwest corner of building 88; thence counterclockwise around building 88 and along a wire security fence and returning to the right curb of Cedar; thence northwestward along the right curb of Cedar about 500 feet to a point opposite the northeast corner of building M-1; thence crossing Cedar and extending approximately 250 feet to a point opposite the northwest corner of building M-1; thence southeastward about 200 feet to San Pablo Avenue; thence northeastward along the left curb of San Pablo about 190 feet to the nearer curb of Cedar; thence southeastward along the right curb of Cedar approximately 250 feet to the starting point.

V. Area D. This small tract includes four relocated officers' residences that are separated from the other historic areas.

Officers' Quarters (buildings M-2, M-3, M-4, M-5). Unique among family dwellings on the base, buildings M-2 and M-5 are irregularly shaped, 2 1/2-story, cream-painted, frame structures that were built in 1888. Each has a hip-roofed central block and two gable-roofed ells. A one-story, L-shaped section connects the ells. Richly ornamented scrollwork, imbricated wooden shingles, and bargeboards decorate the gable ends. Buildings M-3 and M-4, also constructed in 1888, combine to form a duplex.

Boundary (as indicated in red on the accompanying maps). Beginning at the intersection of Mesa Road and Preston Street, a line extending southeastward along the left curb of Mesa approximately 250 feet to the intersection of Mesa and Helen Street; thence eastward along the left curb of Helen approximately 250 feet to the intersection of Helen and Wahoo Avenue; thence northward along the left curb of Wahoo approximately 350 feet to the intersection of Wahoo and Preston; thence southwestward along the left curb of Preston about 300 feet to the starting point.

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8. Significance (cont'd.)

and called it Flat Island. It received its present name from Mexican cavalry commander Gen. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, whose favorite horse was found there after being carried away by the swift current of the Sacramento River in 1830.

The United States became interested in Mare Island about 1850. Following the acquisition of California in 1848, President Millard Fillmore and various naval officials wanted to erect a permanent depot and drydock on the west coast, for as historian Robert Johnson has pointed out, "the whole burden of the defense of the newly acquired territory rested on the few American warships" present in the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> The Nation's small standing Army could garrison only a few posts along the coast, and lack of a transcontinental railroad made quick re-inforcement of those impossible.

Navymen had other reasons, too, for wanting a west coast base. Ever since the first American merchant vessel had entered Pacific waters in 1784, the country had engaged in almost continual trading activities there, and in 1818 the Navy had established a cruising Pacific Station, which at that time consisted of only one patrol ship. During the next 3 decades, U.S. naval vessels cruised the Pacific regularly, assisting American consuls threatened with harm in Latin American and other foreign ports, protecting U.S. merchant ships against privateers, guarding American fishing and whaling vessels, patrolling the Mexican coast to discourage British interest in California, and exploring and making maps. The Navy carried out all these activities without a Pacific base, and consequently vessels on the Pacific Station frequently lacked sufficient supplies.

To increase the efficiency of the Pacific patrols and insure the protection of California, Congress appropriated

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Erwin Johnson, Thence Round Cape Horn: The Story of United States Naval Forces on Pacific Station, 1818-1923 (Annapolis, 1963), 93.

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funds for a west coast naval installation in 1851. In January of the following year, Secretary of the Navy William A. Graham appointed a board of officers, headed by Commodore John A. Sloat, to select a site in the San Francisco Bay area for a navy yard, depot, hospital, and marine barracks. The board recommended Mare Island as the most suitable location, and the Navy purchased the 956-acre tract in 1853. Difficulties with the land title delayed completion of the transaction for more than a year, but finally, in June 1854, Comdr. David G. Farragut received orders to construct the new base.

Farragut arrived at Mare Island in September of that same year. Modifying plans drawn earlier by Sloat in Washington, the commander started work on the yard immediately. A floating drydock, manufactured in New York City and shipped in sections around Cape Horn, had arrived already, and soon naval vessels on the Pacific Station began coming in for repairs. So too did merchant ships and foreign naval vessels, for no other such facility was available on the Pacific coast. Any government or shipowner, who could pay for the work, was allowed to use the dock. It remained the dominant feature of the yard for many years and served, according to naval historian Arnold S. Lott, as "a symbol of United States interest in the growing importance of the Pacific maritime industry. . . ."2

Additional importance accrued to Mare Island Naval Shipyard merely because a senior naval officer, the yard commander, remained constantly on duty there. This allowed the Pacific Station commander to leave the San Francisco vicinity and give personal attention to problems throughout the area in his charge. He spent much of his time off the coast of Panama, where he tried to insure an uninterrupted flow of U.S. mail across the isthmus, but he dealt also with matters in far-distant waters. For example, during the 1850's U.S. naval

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<sup>2</sup> Arnold S. Lott, A Long Line of Ships: Mare Island's Century of Naval Activity in California (Annapolis, 1954), 21.

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8. Significance (cont'd.)

vessels surveyed the North Pacific, protected American whalers in Somoa and Fiji, and kept order among U.S. guano merchants on Peru's Chincha Islands.

Early in the next decade, the performance of such duties proved somewhat more difficult. The Civil War split the Nation temporarily and placed extra burdens upon the small U.S. Pacific Squadron. In addition to guarding against possible southern seizure of Lower California, the Navy had to position one vessel near the Panamanian coast permanently to protect gold-carrying, California-to-Panama mail steamers from Confederate privateers. Precautions had to be taken, too, against the possibility of hostilities with France and Britain. Both countries received southern pleas for assistance, and both maintained strong squadrons in the eastern Pacific. More-over in 1863 France took advantage of America's preoccupation with internal problems, disregarded the Monroe Doctrine, and conquered Mexico. Because of the large number of ships required to blockade the South's Atlantic and gulf coasts, the Navy could not reinforce its Pacific Squadron during this critical period. Johnson has suggested, however, that "the situation would have been much more serious had it not been for the Mare Island Navy Yard," which repaired damaged and weary ships without their having to leave the Pacific Station.<sup>3</sup>

For several decades after the Civil War, Mare Island continued to serve as America's principal Pacific naval installation. The Navy Department divided the Pacific Squadron into two units, northern and southern, and both made Mare Island their home base. Perhaps more important, the yard began developing into an important builder of warships.

Farragut initiated the first construction effort in the late 1850's, when he pointed out to Congress that American shipbuilding capabilities on the Pacific shore would help deter any aggressive notions that Great Britain, France, or

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson, Thence Round Cape Horn, 115.

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8. Significance (cont'd.)

Russia might have toward the United States. Congress made the necessary funds available in 1857, and in March 1859 Mare Island Naval Shipyard launched the first U.S. warship constructed on the west coast. Christened the "Toucey" and later renamed the "Saginaw", it was a 155-foot-long, steam-driven vessel with three guns.

During the immediate post-Civil War years, the United States reduced the size of its fleet, but cutbacks notwithstanding, the Navy secured authorization to build the Nation's first west coast drydock. Yard workers commenced constructing the 525.9-foot-long facility in 1872 and completed it finally in 1891. The yard built several ships during that period, too, and repaired countless others. All work progressed slowly, though, for despite continuing its hydrographic surveys, trying to protect ever widening U.S. commercial interests in the Pacific, and responding to crises in Samoa in 1889 and Chile in 1891, the Navy remained small and short of funds.

In 1898 the Spanish-American War prompted a flurry of repair and supply activity at Mare Island. The following year work began on a second drydock, and in 1906 the 450-foot-long Prometheus slid down the yardways. The biggest and most expensive vessel constructed at Mare Island up to that time, it was Lott asserts, the "clincher in the years-long argument that ships could be built on the Pacific Coast for less than they cost . . . on the East Coast."<sup>4</sup>

Since that historic launching, Mare Island Naval Shipyard has enjoyed numerous significant accomplishments. The first of these came in 1908 when it finished converting the coal-burning Wyoming into the Navy's first oil-burning vessel. A couple of years later, Mare Island workmen erected a temporary platform on the stern of the Pennsylvania, and in 1911 Eugene Ely set down a Curtiss biplane on that short seagoing runway, making the first carrier landing in history. Eight years later yard workers launched the only U.S. battleship, the California, ever built on the west coast. Mare Island facilities were expanded during both World War I and World War II,

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<sup>4</sup> Lott, A Long Line of Ships, 148.

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8. Significance (cont'd.)

and while the latter conflict raged, the shipyard produced nearly 400 vessels. In 1958 the first of 17 nuclear submarines were completed. Certainly from 1854 to the present, Mare Island Naval Shipyard has been consistently one of the Nation's most important naval installations.

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