

Ecologists barrage Army Corps of Engineers

By Jacquin Sanders

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In 1775, military engineers constructed the battlements at Bunker Hill and, ever since, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been, if not beyond reproach, at least beyond effective criticism.

But lately, reality—and miss concern over the environment—have set in. For the first time in a history both distinguished and controversial, the Engineers seem vulnerable.

"Those old pork barrels just don't smell as fresh as they used to," says one congressman. "Time was when all I had to do was get a Corps of Engineers project into my district and everybody loved me. Now a lot of people are taking a second look at some of those projects."

Indeed, some people around the country are beginning to wonder whether all those dams and roads and reclamation projects built by the Corps have been worth the heavy ecological toll. They are also beginning to question some of the 275 new projects the Corps now has on the boards—and to doubt the necessity of spending the \$14 billion that they will cost.

The changing times have led to a series of setbacks for the Corps. More than two dozen

Corps projects are now in litigation and some Corps officials glumly predict they'll soon be spending almost as much time in the courts as in manning their steam shovels and dredges.

By all odds the worst blow absorbed by the Corps was President Nixon's decision early this year to stop construction—already well under way—of the \$200 million Cross Florida Barge Canal. Nixon's action was taken on the grounds that the canal's ecological damage outweighed its financial appeal.

Later, passage of a wild-river bill by Congress halted construction of a dam on Wisconsin's St. Croix River. And a Federal District Judge issued an injunction barring the Corps from completing work on the partially built Gilham Dam on the Cossatot River in Arkansas.

"All of these actions were preceded by tremendously costly efforts by citizens groups to stop their own government from carrying out environmentally dangerous projects," says Charles H. Stoddard, formerly chairman of the Corps of Engineers' own environmental advisory board.

"As a result of these developments," he adds, "I must reluctantly conclude that

only the heaviest external criticism can force the Corps to change its direction."

To Lt. Gen. F. J. Clarke, the Corps' top-ranking officer, this sort of criticism is misplaced. "We simply can't sit back and let nature take its course with our country growing the way it is," he says.

And bitingly, Clarke added that the Corps is being put into "the unhappy and, I can't help feeling, rather unfair position of being blamed for presenting a bill by people who have forgotten that they ate the dinner."

But Corps critics respond that the dinner had its unpalatable aspects and that some of the courses were simply not wanted. At one time, for example, the Corps in its zealotry had plans for 434 dams on the Potomac River.

"The game is boondoggling, played for high stakes by clever, cunning men," declared Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas in a celebrated attack on the Corps. He also noted that the Corps has congressional authority to spend up to \$10 million on any project without approval by Congress.

"What member of Congress does not want \$10 million or, preferably, \$100 million

coming into his district?" Douglas wrote.

Certainly Congress has done little to control the Corps. The "pork-barrel soldiers," as critics call the Engineers, have long held a mutuality of interest with the individual legislators. They put in projects in a lawmaker's home district and he, in turn, votes for all their appropriations.

"The Corps has enormous political clout," says a Nixon Administration aide. "Every congressman, including those who vote well on environmental issues, has a pork-barrel project in his back yard. This is why the environmental groups are taking the litigating route."

Yet even the staunchest conservationist admits that in its day—and it was a long one—the Corps of Engineers played a major role in the country's development. It made the surveys for the early canals, extended the National Road from Cumberland to the Ohio and beyond, made the Ohio, Missouri and Mississippi Rivers safe for navigation.

The Corps founded West Point, laid out the four major railroad routes to the West, built the Panama Canal. More recently, it ran the Manhattan Project that produced the atomic bomb and built the space complex at Cape Kennedy.

In the process, however, the Corps has become a powerful and nearly independent bureaucracy. The Department of Defense pretty much lets it go its own way, Congress approaches it with care and Presidents make it their business to get along with it.

The Corps never gives up on a project—despite the Presidential decision, lobbying still goes on for the Florida barge canal—and its relations with local authorities and businessmen are excellent. (In fact, one criticism of the Corps is the ease with which so many of its retired military officers move into high-paying jobs in industries which have benefited from Corps projects.)

Among its other innovations, the Corps has come up with a particularly effective system of justifying its projects by cost-benefit ratios (CBR). Created by a clause in the 1936 Flood Control Act, CBR seems at first glance eminently rational, requiring that benefits of a project be in excess of the estimated costs.

But critics charge not only that many of the Corps' CBR memos underestimate cost—and sometimes wildly so—but that some of the "benefits" have almost a touch of poetry to them.

Recreation benefits for a man-made lake, say, are based on the Corps' apparent idea that there is no end to canoeing enthusiasts. Antipollution treatments and hydroelectric power are counted as benefits even though cheaper ways to treat water and make power are available.

"The CBR technique is terribly vulnerable to juggling," says attorney Keith Roberts, a Ralph Nader associate. "If it is to work at all, then independent agencies ought to be given the task of evaluating both costs and benefits. This is not the case at present."

Still, the Corps is not as rigid and impervious to change as it may seem to some of its critics. There are younger officers moving up, and many of them approved of the halting of the Florida barge canal. Others take a dim view of some of the same projects the conservationists are fighting.

These men may someday come to agree with Congressman Henry Reuss of Wisconsin, who sees a new and necessary mission in the Corps' future.

"Instead of forever damming up natural streams and ruining rivers by excessive channelization," says Reuss, "the Corps could go to work on wetlands conservation and on clearing up water pollution. They could have an entirely new mission and a legitimate one for our era."



jeffrey hart

The Nixon scenario

A certain office in the State Department building in Washington is known as The Games Center. It contains a large conference table, and every day, from late afternoon until around midnight, that table is surrounded by an assortment of men and women, sometimes whispering to one another, sometimes debating loudly. Papers and file-folders cover the table, telephone messages arrive, secretaries scurry about.

Seated around the table on a given afternoon may be Richard Nixon, Chou En-lai, Brezhnev, Tito, Edward Heath, Sadat, Golda Meir, Papadopoulos. Golda Meir is a thin man in Brooks Brothers suit; he has a gray crew cut and wears horn-rimmed glasses. Brezhnev is an attractive young woman Ph.D. with straight hair tied back in a pony tail. Chou En-lai looks like Robert Morley.

Each of these players is a specialist on the nation and the individual he or she represents in The Games Center, and the point of the operation is to "game out" the responses of the various leaders to trends and crises in the global arena. Information arrives hourly from the CIA, the Pentagon, the State Department, and other agencies; and, using it, the players try to establish the probable responses of the real Brezhnev, Tito or Golda Meir.

Let us try to "game out" one scenario for the player—either at the table or in the White House—known as

Richard Nixon.

He has perceived that the moment may be ripe for certain limited accommodations with the Soviet Union and China. His calculation is that both Peking and Moscow regard a Sino-Soviet conflict as much more likely, just now, than war with the U.S. The Soviet Union, moreover, has had its troubles recently with Poland, Rumania and other irksome parts of its European empire. Both Peking and Moscow, therefore, desire—within limits and if the price is right—to improve relations with the U.S. Shrewdly, the Nixon player first approaches the weaker of the other two powers, China. Temporarily outflanked, the Brezhnev player moves quickly to shore up his own position. President Nixon will come to Moscow.

As it happens, all this harmonizes nicely with the domestic necessities of Richard Nixon. No one, so far, is wildly enthusiastic about his domestic performance. He is hated by the liberals, and the conservatives are restive. Everyone is troubled by the economy. But his double-barreled surprise changes the whole atmosphere and discomfits his Democratic rivals: he will visit Peking and then Moscow. These visits will blanket the media, and partly neutralize its rooted enmity to him. He will run as the man who is trying to bring about peace in our time. The Vietnam issue will be dead and

the liberals outflanked.

So far so good, but there are difficulties. In the NATO theater the fact is that we are outnumbered 2-1 in infantry, 3-1 in armor and 3-2 in the air. Reliable information has reached the Nixon player that by 1973, if present trends continue, the U.S. will be unable to protect its allies or even guarantee the safety of the continental U.S. Naval and nuclear inferiority will be manifest.

Here the Nixon player can close the circle and thoroughly consolidate his domestic political position. As a man of peace, he will have staged his Peking and Moscow spectacles, blanketing his liberal critics. Having established his peace credentials—having, after all, tried—he can then publicly face the strategic issue. In early October, 1971, in fact, his Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird began to prepare the ground. "I can conceive of no circumstances," he said in a little-noticed speech, "in which the American people would accept (strategic) inferiority—a position that might force any American President to crawl to a negotiating table."

Final game-out: After visiting Peking and Moscow, the Nixon player will reconcile the conservatives by turning up the decibels on Laird's theme. He will emerge from the San Diego convention as the man who sought peace, but who also stands for American strategic strength.

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LETTERS to the NEBRASKAN

Dear editor,

In the "wants ads" section of the past few issues of *The Daily Nebraskan* there has been an advertisement for ghost-written college term papers. Such cheating is extremely pernicious, and *The Daily Nebraskan* should not be used to propagate this practice. We urge you to suspend the advertisement immediately.

Thomas Manig
Robert Lipkin

Editor's note: *The Daily Nebraskan* refuses only advertising that is illegal or grossly obscene. The advertisement for "quality college term papers" fits neither category. In addition an advertisement appearing in *The Daily Nebraskan* does not necessarily have the endorsement of the newspaper.

The following points can be made about the ad:

1) A number of sources of information are available to college students as resource references for papers. Encyclopedias, books, magazines and professionally written term papers are all resources a student can use to prepare his own term paper.

2) The term papers service itself is not engaged in plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs only when a student elects to copy material directly from a source.

3) The existence of services such as "quality college term papers" points out the need for a re-evaluation of the usefulness of term paper assignments in the pursuit of educational goals.