

GAO

December 1991

MINE WARFARE

Ingleside, Texas, May Not Be the Best Location for Consolidation



National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-246709

December 27, 1991

The Honorable Richard B. Cheney
The Secretary of Defense

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This report presents our views of two major changes the Navy has proposed to correct long-standing deficiencies in its mine countermeasures operations, which were recently illustrated during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. These changes are to (1) centralize operational control of mine countermeasures forces under the Commander, Mine Warfare Command, and (2) consolidate mine warfare forces at a new strategic homeport at Ingleside, Texas.

Background

During Operation Desert Shield, four mine countermeasures ships, six mine countermeasures helicopters, and two explosive ordnance disposal detachments were deployed to the Persian Gulf. In addition to providing a mobile operating base for the helicopters, the USS Tripoli, an amphibious assault ship, provided some support to the mine countermeasures ships. Ironically, the Tripoli was the first of two ships to strike a mine, causing millions of dollars in damage. The USS Princeton was the other ship that struck a mine. As of September 1991, over 1,200 mines had been located and subsequently destroyed. Efforts to remove the threat of mines in the Persian Gulf are considered completed.

The Navy believes a key lesson learned during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm was that a permanently designated, trained mine warfare force is needed under the leadership of a central manager. Consequently, the Navy proposed reorganizing its mine warfare activities by centralizing operational control and the physical location of most of its mine warfare forces. Under the proposed reorganization, the Commander, Mine Warfare Command, would become responsible for mine warfare training and readiness and for providing full-time, deployable forces to support regional conflicts and contingency operations.

In May 1991, the Navy announced it would begin homeporting 22 mine countermeasures ships at Ingleside, Texas, in early 1992. The Navy anticipates that all 22 ships will be homeported at Ingleside by fiscal year 1998. Currently, the Navy is considering locating other mine warfare forces, including helicopter squadrons and explosive ordnance disposal detachments, at Ingleside. Navy officials told us that the Chief of

Naval Operations could approve the phased consolidation of the other mine warfare forces in January 1992. If this occurs, the consolidation could begin by April 1, 1992.

Results in Brief

We endorse the Navy's efforts to strengthen management of mine warfare forces by giving the Commander, Mine Warfare Command, operational control of ships, helicopters, and associated explosive ordnance disposal detachments. If the Navy provides the needed resources to effectively manage these forces, holding the Mine Warfare Command accountable could improve oversight and direction of mine warfare activities.

However, the Navy's efforts to consolidate its mine warfare forces at Ingleside should be suspended. Ingleside involves unknown costs and other problems that have not been studied adequately. Locating mine warfare forces at an existing base on both the East and West Coasts may be much less costly and more advantageous to correcting known deficiencies, such as the inability to train with deploying carrier or amphibious battle groups. Also, other factors may counter the advantages Navy hopes to gain by consolidating these forces at Ingleside. Until the Navy adequately studies and estimates the costs involved at Ingleside and alternative locations, it cannot be sure that Ingleside is the best location for consolidating mine warfare forces.

Centralized Operational Control of Mine Warfare Forces Could Strengthen Management

The Navy has stated that the most important lesson learned from mine countermeasures operations during Desert Shield and Desert Storm is that no one was in charge of these operations. The Commander, Mine Warfare Command, served only as an advisor to the four operational fleet commanders, who retained operational control over mine countermeasures forces. Navy officials believe that the lack of a full-time, deployable force commander and staff resulted in no one being responsible for preparing a coordinated mine countermeasures force for deployment.

To correct this shortcoming, Navy officials proposed that the Commander, Mine Warfare Command, be held accountable for all mine warfare activities, including mine weapon systems and mine countermeasures. The Commander's responsibilities would include platform and systems procurement, research and development, force operations, support activities, training, and integrated tactics development.

After we completed our review, Navy officials informed us that the Chief of Naval Operations approved the reorganization and that it would be implemented on January 2, 1992. Additional resources, such as small increases in staffing, were also approved to help the Commander effectively manage these activities.

Ingleside May Not Be the Best Location for Mine Warfare Forces

The Navy's new homeport at Ingleside was originally designed to accommodate an aircraft training carrier and a battleship battle group. Significant additional funds could be required to relocate the planned mine warfare forces at Ingleside. Although consolidating mine warfare forces at any location, including Ingleside, would allow the Navy to better conduct integrated mine training, the remoteness of Ingleside's location poses certain problems.

Cost to Consolidate Forces at Ingleside Could Be Significant

The Navy is currently identifying the cost to modify or expand Ingleside's waterfront facilities and infrastructure to relocate mine countermeasures ships. For example, the Navy will have to add new ship degaussing ranges and make pier modifications to accommodate the much smaller but larger numbers of ships.

Additional funds will also be necessary to consolidate other mine warfare forces. For example, preliminary Navy data showed that it would not be feasible to collocate the mine countermeasures helicopter squadrons at Ingleside due to waterfront constraints, since ships would have to be moved away from the pier for the helicopters to safely hook up their towed mine countermeasures gear. The Navy is considering nearby Corpus Christi Naval Air Station as an alternative location. However, Corpus Christi might not be a good alternative because it would also require extensive and costly improvements in its facilities and support infrastructure. The current estimate for military construction costs to relocate just one helicopter squadron at Corpus Christi is about \$34 million. Five helicopter squadrons, one of which is designated and already equipped for training all new personnel, are being reviewed by the Navy for relocation from Norfolk, Virginia, and Alameda, California.

The Navy must also address the impact of incorporating explosive ordnance disposal personnel into ongoing mine warfare training and operations at Ingleside. In addition, Navy officials told us that they are also considering the possibility of moving Mine Warfare Command headquarters personnel from Charleston, South Carolina, to Ingleside.

Training Benefits Are Not Unique to Ingleside

Navy officials believe that consolidating mine warfare forces at Ingleside would allow them to better coordinate and conduct mine warfare training among these forces. Although we recognize that a single location could increase opportunities for integrated training within the community, this benefit could also be obtained if mine warfare forces were located at an existing fleet site on both the East and West Coasts.

Consolidating forces at Ingleside could also negatively impact training. Because of Ingleside's distance from the major East and West Coast fleet locations, operational training with the fleet battle groups before their deployment would be more difficult, time-consuming, and costly. Ingleside's distance would also increase routine training costs for its assigned personnel. For example, pilots and air crew members would have to continually travel to fleet locations to maintain flying proficiency.

Ingleside's Location Has Other Disadvantages

Mine countermeasures ships and helicopters have to be able to quickly deploy overseas to support fleet operations and conduct simultaneous missions. Ingleside's remote location could increase transit distances and therefore could delay the arrival of these forces. Because these forces cannot be deployed by themselves, support ships are necessary to transport them to operational areas and remain as a base for operations. The Navy has not yet determined the number, configuration, and cost of dedicated support ships.

Another problem is that mine warfare forces have not periodically conducted coordinated exercises with the battle groups and amphibious groups they could be called upon to support. Consequently, the need for and impact of mine warfare operations are not well understood by fleet commanders—another lesson learned from Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Ingleside's distance from fleet operating areas could further isolate the mine warfare community from the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets. This isolation could compound the existing problems of a lack of interaction with the fleets and a lack of knowledge throughout the Navy regarding mine warfare.

Department of Defense officials acknowledged our concern that coordination and training exercises with the fleets could be further hampered if the mine warfare forces are located at Ingleside, but they believed that these problems could be overcome.

Decisions Have Not Been Documented, and Total Cost Remains Uncertain

In discussing our draft report, Department of Defense officials acknowledged that the Navy's May 1991 decision to homeport mine countermeasures ships at Ingleside was based, in part, on the costs already incurred to build that homeport. They also acknowledged that assigning the mine countermeasures ships to Ingleside would be a major factor in future decisions on consolidating other mine warfare forces. However, the officials were not able to provide documentation that the decision to homeport the ships at Ingleside was supported by an analysis of costs or operational impacts on other Navy forces or locations. For example, the Navy has not considered the advantages and disadvantages of consolidating mine warfare forces at an existing base on both the East and West Coasts.

The total cost to develop the Ingleside base remains uncertain. Navy data showed that it would cost \$142 million for the Ingleside homeport to achieve initial operational capability.¹ This amount consists of \$92 million in military construction appropriations and \$50 million in local contributions. As of October 31, 1991, \$108 million had been expended. Navy officials informed us that another \$24 million had recently been released for additional construction, and officials now estimate that new projects to accommodate the mine countermeasures ships will cost an additional \$6 million. Department of Defense officials did not provide us documentation supporting these estimates or estimate how much additional funding would be necessary to consolidate mine countermeasures helicopters, explosive ordnance disposal detachments, or headquarters personnel at Ingleside.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We believe that the Navy's decision to homeport its mine countermeasures ships at Ingleside will necessitate the expenditure of significant additional funds to accommodate the ships and consolidate other mine warfare forces. Ingleside's distance from the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets could also increase operational costs and hamper efforts to better integrate mine warfare forces into overall Navy operations. Further, we believe that the Navy has not adequately addressed these concerns or sufficiently analyzed the potential benefits of locating mine warfare forces at a base on both the East and West Coasts.

¹In our report, *Navy Homeports: Expanded Structure Unnecessary and Costly* (GAO/NSIAD-91-158, June 14, 1991), we stated that related projects and other sources of funds could increase the total cost to \$300 million.

We recommend that the Secretary of the Navy provide you with a detailed evaluation of locating mine warfare forces at Ingleside or at a base on both the East and West Coasts. We also recommend that construction projects at Ingleside and plans to move the mine countermeasures ships be halted until this evaluation has been completed.

Agency Comments

On November 27, 1991, we provided the Department of Defense with a draft of this report. We requested written or oral comments within 10 days because of the short time remaining before the Navy's proposed decision on further consolidation of mine warfare forces at Ingleside. On December 10, 1991, we met with Department officials, who informally advised us that the Department did not have a final position on our report. Accordingly, the Department did not provide us with official agency comments. However, the officials provided additional informal comments on our report, and we incorporated their comments where appropriate.

Scope and Methodology

We reviewed the Navy's plans to strengthen its mine warfare capabilities. To determine what changes were underway in the mine warfare community, we interviewed Navy and Marine Corps officials at the Office of the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Naval Warfare, Naval Sea Systems Command, and Naval Air Systems Command, Washington, D.C.; Mine Warfare Command, Charleston, South Carolina; Naval Coastal Systems Center, Panama City, Florida; and Marine Corps Research, Development, and Acquisition Command and Combat Development Command, Quantico, Virginia.

We were able to determine that major changes were underway; however, Mine Warfare Command officials would not provide us with any documentation outlining proposed structure changes. We conducted our review between August and November 1991. Except for the above limitation, our work was done in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen, Senate and House Committees on Armed Services and on Appropriations; the Secretary of the Navy; and other interested parties. We will also make copies available to others on request.

As you know, 31 U.S.C. 720 requires the head of a federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the House Committee on Government Operations and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs no later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

Please contact me at (202) 275-6504 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Major contributors to this report are Robert Eurich, Assistant Director; Brenda Farrell, Evaluator-in-Charge; and Janine Cantin, Evaluator; National Security and International Affairs Division, Washington, D.C.

Sincerely yours,



Martin M Ferber
Director, Navy Issues

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