

50TH ANNIVERSARY

ESTABLISHMENT OF DEFENSE MAPPING AGENCY

By Al Anderson

Fifty years ago, on Washington's Birthday in 1972, a planning committee convened in HQ, Army Topographic Command, to begin planning the formation of the Defense Mapping Agency (DMA). The committee was given three weeks to develop this plan by LTG Howard Penney, the newly designated director of the new Agency, while he went back to Europe to wrap up his duties as USAREUR Engineer. Of the nine committee members charged with this challenge, all but one had opposed creation of DMA, so a rapid transformation was called for.

In about 1970, DIAMC, the mapping/charting element of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), undertook a study which recommended consolidating the Army, Navy, and Air Force mapping, charting and geodetic (MC&G) activities. The TOPOCOM BG O'Donnell, in his Army staff role as Topographer of the Army, directed me to develop and coordinate the Army position. Having seen what a stumbling block DIAMC was in support to the Vietnam War, I quickly gathered support for Army non-concurrence and coordinated with the other Services and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), all of whom non-concurred. We thought it was a dead issue.

Not so fast! In the fall of 1971, an OMB examiner was able to insert into President Nixon's decision memorandum on reorganizing the intelligence community a paragraph directing the consolidation of Service mapping, charting, and geodesy activities.

Thus, the creation of our planning group, with two members from each of the three Services plus DIAMC. Army members were BG O'Donnell, the ranking member and an Army ACSI member; Navy and USAF were similarly represented; DIAMC sent the consolidation study leader, Dewey Pegler, and an Army colonel. BG O'Donnell brought me along, ostensibly as executive secretary but allowing me to fully participate in the deliberations. As the last living member of the committee, I decided it was important to offer this remembrance of events.

We quickly agreed that, if we had to have a DMA, it would not be like envisioned in the DIAMC study. Our primary focus would be on support to combat forces and other military activities, with subsidiary support to the Intelligence Community; and be identified as a Combat Support agency, not a member of the Intelligence Community. Unlike the top-heavy structure proposed by DIAMC, we would have a lean HQ structure, pushing authority down to the lowest responsible level. The result was a headquarters of less than 200 people, in an agency that soon rose to 10,000. This at a time when every office needed a secretary/typist. It was also agreed that the three production centers' HQs would be aligned identical to the HQ to facilitate coordination and

direction. Another basic decision was not to attempt any restructuring of the centers line elements until after the IOC (initial operating capability) date, 1 July 1972.

Upon LTG Penney's return from Europe he was given a decision briefing. The only significant change he made was reducing the DMA HQ staffing a little further. Our committee then changed to being the start-up staff and brought in more people from the Services. The pressure of long days and weekend work continued right through June, as we wrestled with the details. An area of contention with the Army was whether DMA would take over its topographic battalions and corps companies and mapping school. LTG Penney's wise decision was Army could keep the units, but the school would become part of DMA so that we could train them to perform tasks consistent with their field support role and not duplicate DMA efforts.

Another major area was the allocation of super grade positions to DMA. LTG Penney was successful in getting the top-level, GS-18, for the senior civilian position, for which Tom Finnie was selected. But he had to settle for a GS-17 Comptroller. Also, an addition to correctly state our senior civilian slots: Tom Finnie was able to get a super grade-equivalent Public Law nonsupervisory scientific position for the DMA HQ and brought in Dr. Charles Martin from AC. In total, DMA got 12 super grade positions and that continued to be the allocation until we undertook development of the digital production system in the early 1980's.

LTG Penney and Tom Finnie realized that Congress would look for savings to come out of the consolidation and came up with a plan to forestall budget loss. They conceived the idea of demonstrating the gap between validated requirements for our products and services and what we were able to deliver to show why the benefits of consolidation should be plowed back into greater support to our Forces. They then charged me with developing a system to track the shortfalls and to measure productivity. It was called the Effectiveness/Productivity program (E/P) — not Economy!. It worked so well that the Government Accounting Office produced a report commending it as a model. We more than achieved our goal of increasing productivity by 10 percent during the first three years. A good reputation in the Services, DoD, OMB, and Congress was achieved.

The drive for these productivity improvements facilitated by my other task: To lead reviews of our production and distribution facilities for consolidation or other improvement, which had been deferred during the startup planning phase. The biggest consolidation was of distribution facilities, which was a critical function in the days of paper products. Another major improvement was documentation of product specifications. The Aeronautical Chart and Information Center (ACIC) (now the Aerospace Center (AC)) had excellent, well-maintained specs, The Army Map Service (AMS) (Topographic Center (TC)) had specs but poorly maintained, and United States Hydrographic Office (USHO) (Hydrographic Center (HC)) had none! On my first visit to HC, then in Suitland, MD, I asked about contracting out production and got the reply "we tried it once and it didn't work." No wonder — no written specifications!

These differences were typical of the three centers in other critical areas as well. The way hydro side of the Navy Oceanographic Office had been neglected was obvious in the antiquated technology and equipment.

The most crucial deficiency was in the educational area. ACIC had required college-level education of all professional positions, while AMS felt most of the work could be competently done by high school graduates. HC had professional standards, but their workforce was much smaller than those of AC and TC. The educational differences in particular made it difficult to try to balance senior positions among the Service backgrounds. Changes were made, but it took years to close the educational gap.

Soon after DMA got underway it was also confronted with huge new requirements for digital products. The initial requirements were from the USAF and were assigned to the Aerospace Center. Its well-educated and equipped workforce was able to quickly adapt to these requirements. Because of their high priority in the Joint Strategic Operational Planning (JSOP) system, the increasing demands were met by tapping the other centers (mainly TC) for staffing positions — “slots”. It was finally agreed that some of the digital work would be assigned to TC, while turning over its Kansas City field office to AC for aero chart production — a real trauma for all (the TC director was outraged!), but ultimately it worked well and accelerated educational changes at TC. The necessary handholding between AC and TC for the transitioning was also resented by both. Lots of interesting — stressful — times, striving to truly become one agency with united purpose.

Before I retired in 1986 as HQ DMA Deputy Director for Operations, probably the best decision of my 36-year career was in the digital area. Based on the solid work of LCDR Mark Schultz, I decided that we were going to transition nautical chart distribution from paper to digital, despite concerns in the Navy staff. Some years later I was invited to attend a Navy-DMA celebration of the successful transition to digital Notice to Mariners as well as charts, resulting in a significant reduction in staffing needs on Naval ship bridges.

Because we ignored the DIAMC study and built an organization dedicated to heeding the needs of the Combat Forces we succeeded in creating a solid base for the evolution into NGA and the successful adoption of the digital revolution.