



Military Corner

United States Navy

Norfolk Naval Training Center

From its earliest days, the Navy was chronically in need of manpower. In the early 20th century, the Navy's recruiting efforts met with enough success to produce a large number of new sailors from all areas of the country. The Navy was confronted with the problem of how to provide basic training for these new recruits.

To address the problem the Navy designated training ships for landsmen, such as the *Hartford*, the famous Civil War flagship of Admiral Farragut. But the training ships solved only part of the problem – while basic training for landsmen could be accomplished on a ship, the men also had to acquire increasingly sophisticated skills. By 1905, the training squadron was disestablished, and the training ships were replaced by naval training stations such as St. Helena, officially known as Naval Training Station, Norfolk. St. Helena was established in 1908, just opposite the navy yard. The commanding officer of the training station was also in command of the receiving ships at Norfolk (the old warships *Richmond* and *Cumberland*), and a considerable camp on shore. It had a total capacity of 3,555 men.

Despite the fact that St. Helena was a training station, it was operated as an appendage of the Navy yard, relying on the yard for support. As a subordinate command, it suffered from neglect. 1917, President Wilson issued a proclamation to buy the 1907 Jamestown Exposition site at Sewell's Point for a Navy base. Within a period of 30 days, housing for 7,500 men had been constructed, consisting of

barracks buildings, mess halls, lavatory buildings, storehouses and the necessary auxiliary construction, including water systems, lighting, roads and walks. Three miles of standard-gauge railroad provided access to the base. On October 12, 1917, fewer than four months from the date of approval of the act of authorization, it was reported that one regiment from St. Helena had been moved to the naval operating base with appropriate ceremonies. From this date, the population of the station increased rapidly. The Naval Air Station was founded in 1918 on 150 acres of the Jamestown Exposition site



The end of the Second World War did not result in the severe defense spending cuts that marked the end of the First World War, as the Navy confronted the threats arising with the onset of the Cold War. Naval units from Hampton Roads steamed to the front lines, including wars in Korea and Vietnam and crises in Cuba and the Persian Gulf, among a host of others. Naval Station Norfolk (the largest in the world), as the complex is known today, continues its most important function of preparing the Navy for combat operations in support of U.S. interests around the world.