



Source: Barbara Stickle.

War brings a harbor to Morro Bay

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Thirty-four cities and towns along the entire Pacific coast were preparing for war with Japan in 1941. All branches of the military expanded or built new operations and Morro Bay was on the list to build.

The county Board of Supervisors had already voted July 2, 1941, to cooperate with the United States government on harbor improvements. There were local fuel oil resources to defend, and enemy invasions must be prevented.

The Navy condemned 108 parcels in Morro Bay to build the base, and construction began in September 1941 on housing, office space, and docks. The plan was to build out the infrastructure needed for the Navy Section Base at Morro Bay in cooperation with the Coast Guard that would provide beach patrols.

Changing the harbor to house a “mosquito” fleet was necessary, which meant making space for patrol craft and submarine chasers. Congress had already appropriated \$976,000 to begin the project. The plan included dredging the bay

which began in August 1941, reclaiming land, extending the breakwater to 1,000 feet, widening the harbor entrance to 350 feet and dredging it to a 16-foot depth. There was to be a new turning basin 500 feet square. The plan was for fueling and repair facilities for ships as large as a destroyer.

An 1,800-foot-long trestle bridge was built from the shore at approximately Beach Street to the sandspit using local eucalyptus tree wood. The bridge was used by the Coast Guard from 1942 to 1945 to allow beach patrols to cross to the sandspit. Thousands of soldiers and marines—and their jeeps—crossed the bridge for training exercises on the dunes.

In May 1943 the Navy stopped work before construction was complete primarily because it had decided to operate the patrol boats out of Port San Luis, reducing the need for the harbor at Morro Bay. The Navy's funds allocated for the project had been expended and it did not want to continue pending approval of appropriations by Congress through the Rivers and Harbors bill (*Telegram-Tribune*, May 11, 1943). This left the dredging unfinished and one of the two jetties missing some of its backfill.

The county Board of Supervisors then announced the work would be done at the county's expense. But before that could happen, revised assessments of the war needs led the Rivers and Harbors Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives to approve additional funding for the continuation of the Morro Bay project.

The construction of the harbor was resumed and completed in early 1944. By then the war plans had changed and the new harbor was designated as one of eight locations nationwide for an Amphibious Training Base. Morro Bay's contribution to the war effort was finally determined. Equally important, Morro Bay had the harbor it had always needed and its future was changed completely.