

CECOM Building Demolished

By Melissa Ziobro, Command Historian

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The front page of the 19 August 1971 *Monmouth Message* featured some big news.

“The General Services Administration approved a lease for a structure to be erected on the Mangan farm at the northwest corner of Tinton Avenue and Wayside Road in New Shrewsbury (now Tinton Falls).”

Thousands of people eventually worked there, in the CECOM Office Building (also known as the “Command Office Building” and “Green Acres”).

Now, the 17 July 2009 *Monmouth Message* must announce its demolition.

CECOM’s predecessor, the Army Electronics Command (ECOM), first submitted a project to the Army Materiel Command in 1964 for the construction of an office building at Fort Monmouth to resolve a critical need for adequate office space.

You see, ECOM offices lay scattered throughout the post. Many personnel worked in World-War II vintage “temporaries.” About 1,000 ECOM employees of the Procurement Directorate worked in the Coles area, four miles north of Main Post; and about 2,000 ECOM employees worked the National Inventory Control Point in Philadelphia.

After seven years of planning and negotiating, the General Services Administration entered into a binding contract with the Dorman Building Corporation of New York on 27 August 1971. The contract provided for “the construction of a modern six story office building and a 2,500 car parking lot.”



Demolition of the COB as seen from atop the Myer Center in the Charles Wood Area, July 2009. Photo by Mike Berry.

The site selected at the corner of Tinton Ave. and Wayside Road stood approximately three miles west of Main Post and within sight of the Charles Wood Area.

The 25 January 1973 *Monmouth Message* boasted that the building would feature 13 conference rooms, a state of the art auditorium, a self-service supply store, a cafeteria, and a “wide variety of retail stores.” And don’t forget the “35 vending machines in six separate areas dispensing cigarettes, cigars, candy, soda, and ice cream.”

The air-conditioned building officially opened on 19 November 1973 when the first 180 ECOM employees

moved in. “Green Acres” initially provided approximately 535,000 square feet of usable office space for an expected 3,500 total personnel. Countless thousands worked there in the ensuing decades.

Those thousands of personnel have included some of Fort Monmouth’s senior leaders, many of whom remembered the building fondly in their official exit interviews.

When in December 2006 outgoing Deputy to the Commanding General Mr. Victor J. Ferlise was asked, “What are some of the things that you’ve experienced here that would be memorable,” his reply included, “when they first closed the CECOM Office Building and moved us on post.”

COL James Costigan, former Military Deputy for Operations and Support, recalled in June 2007 how former CECOM Commander Alfred J. Mallette would go to the “big cafeteria down at the bottom [of the building]. And, you know, he didn’t have his lunch brought up. He would stand in line; he wouldn’t go to the front of the line. He’d just sit down with people and he would talk [with] them.”

When asked in November 2007 if any particular areas [of Fort Monmouth] held a special place in his heart, Mr. Edward Bair, outgoing Program Executive Officer (PEO) for Intelligence, Electronic Warfare, and Sensors (IEW&S), replied, “Area number one is the old CECOM Office Building...because that’s where I began, that’s where the roots of my friendships are, and that’s where I met my wife.”



CECOM Office Building weathered this storm damage wrought by Hurricane Gloria in 1985, but could not survive the 1993 Base Realignment and Closure round.

He also laughed, “And it was a god-awful place...But that’s where I began, and that’s where my roots are.”

In fact, Mr. Edward Thomas, Deputy to the Commanding General, CECOM Life Cycle Management Command, has said “I met Eddie Bair standing in line in the lobby of the CECOM Office Building on July 15, 1974, as we were both in-processing on our first day as AMC Comptroller interns.”

When asked “If you came back...in twenty years, what would you expect to see, what would you like to see,” Bair replied that he would like to come

back “twenty years from now and [say], there’s the CECOM Office Building, where mom and dad met.”

Unfortunately, Mr. Bair will not get that opportunity. The building weathered damage wrought by Hurricane Gloria in 1985, but could not survive the 1993 Base Realignment and Closure round.



Demolition of the COB as seen from the site, July 2009.

Photo by Mark Stevens, LRC.

BRAC 93 mandated that CECOM vacate leased space outside of Fort Monmouth and move all activities onto the post. The completion of Building 206 allowed the last remaining group, the Directorate for Resource Management, to vacate the CECOM Office Building in December 1998. The structure reverted to the General Services Administration that same month and was then sold into the private sector.

After sitting vacant for many years, the building will finally make way for an active adult community. The demolition began in earnest on 1 July, according to Joseph Thompson. Thompson is PRC Development Group's Senior Vice President for property management and commercial construction, and is overseeing the project. Thompson expects the demolition project, including clean up, to be complete in about 14 weeks. Construction of the adult community should begin about a year from now and continue for approximately three years.

Email your recollections of the CECOM Office Building to the CECOM LCMC Command Historian at melissa.ziobro@us.army.mil.

Comments:

"As another employee who began their government employment in the building, I think you captured the essence of it (with the exception that we could not open the windows, there was no "pa" system and no sprinkler system."

"Oops! I forgot the basement flooding every time we had a heavy rain...!"

"You did a very good job...in spite of everything I think we will all miss it...especially the shopping!"

"I remember the old building fondly. I remember the smoking rooms. You could get lung cancer just from sitting there but the door was kept closed and you could just sit and talk with friends for a few minutes."

"I remember the parking lots. If you didn't get there early in the morning it felt like a mile hike to get to the building."

"I remember the cafeteria. Everyone complained about it but it wasn't really that bad. I met someone on line one day and we started talking. It turned out we had a lot of things in common and we became friends. After more than 20 years, she's one of my best friends."

"I remember the mice and rats. I was with DRM and after everyone else left it was weird coming into the building. If you worked late, you could actually hear little feet scurrying around. Thankfully you never really saw them but you knew they were there."

"When I started work with the Army, back in 1979, my first day brought me to the COB. How impressive and intimidating it was. What door do I go in? Do I park in the front or the back? Which elevator do I take (I believe there were six, 3 on each side)? Then the color coded hallways - Green, Yellow, Blue or Orange. I did finally get the knack for finding where I was going. Then I thoroughly enjoyed the shopping and the bar, grill restaurant and the cafeteria. We also had the Credit Union in the building and a mail box. I can still see it from my office window in the Hex. It certainly was an icon. I'm sorry to see it go."

"Great article!! I was working at the Hex, the Myer Center now, as a GS-2 Clerk Typist in a property book office. People couldn't wait to move there because the building was so new. They started calling it "The Country Club". The thing I remember most is the "flea market" in the cafeteria. We used to get some good bargains there."