

# Chapter Two

## *Formative Years (1950s-1960s)*



Born into World War II and whip-lashed by the 1944 explosion, Naval Magazine Port Chicago had experienced some rough, character-building years. Owing to instabilities in Southeast Asia and the demands placed upon this naval magazine, the 1950s and 1960s remain formative years for the base. The operations already in place and those soon to be added would define the magazine's roles and responsibilities for much of its life.

Pictured with Safety Engineer, Mr. Frank Haney, and their Executive Officer, Commander Hathaway, are six Navy enlisted men who received U.S. Navy Safe Driving Awards, c. 1954. Left to right – front row: David L. Hill, SN, Kenneth L. Black, SA, Charles F. Robinson, SN – back row: Leroy O'Steen, SN, Jim F. O'Neal, SN, Donald R. Luper, SN (Official U.S. Navy photo/National Park Service)

### **1950s**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The performance of Naval Magazine Port Chicago (NMPC) during the challenges of the 1950s proved the magazine's place in national security.

The Quality Evaluation Laboratory (QEL) blossomed in the wake of the Korean Conflict. It went from being a division within a department to a department all of its own. This promotion mirrored QEL's as well as the magazine's on-going growth in facilities, function and expertise.

Together with its secure position within national security, NMPC now required more real estate. A contentious struggle for and against a safety zone around the naval magazine's piers and encompassing the town of Port Chicago began during the 1950s.

As this decade waned, growth in the facilities, tasks, talent and importance of Naval Magazine Port Chicago led in 1957 to a consolidation and changes in responsibility and name. More than a naval magazine, it was now U.S. Naval Ammunition Depot Concord.

Two noteworthy programs wrap up the 1950s. Disposal of aged chemical weapons represents an on-going responsibility. Taking on guided missile work marks the depot's expanding duties and "a shift in emphasis from conventional to special weapons."<sup>1</sup>

#### **Benny Suggs (Beneficial Suggestions)**

Grass roots participation in reducing overhead and maximizing production was encouraged. Suggestions that proved beneficial brought recognition and a bonus.

Mrs. David Sharkey and Mrs. Earl Rosenthal, for example, were recognized in December 1958 for their "Benny Sugg." It "eliminated a posting operation from ammunition stock recording procedures" thereby saving the Navy \$8,000 per year.<sup>2</sup>