

## Military Disregard for the Environment

*Native people have been living on this land for ten thousand years  
and we've destroyed it in a hundred.*

In 1542, when the Spanish explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo anchored at Point Loma at the mouth of the San Diego Bay, he saw a beautiful and unspoiled bay, teeming with abundant species of plant and aquatic life. The golden hills were alive with vegetation and wildlife.



*A replica of Cabrillo's ship, El Salvador*

The historical record suggests that Cabrillo sailed his ship, the *El Salvador*, into San Diego Bay to escape a storm blowing out of the southwest. He may have anchored off the current location of the San Diego Naval Station and marveled at the pristine beauty of the place. The shore along San Diego Bay had been inhabited by the Kumeyaay Indians for 10,000 years, dating back to the Mesolithic Age. These people could teach us so much! They knew they were part of the land and they treated it with reverence. After 500 generations of stewardship, they were forced to cede control of the land, the water, and the air to the invading Europeans.

The waterway leading to the safety of San Diego Bay that Cabrillo sailed on that fateful day is less than half a Spanish milla wide, or about 2,000 feet. The thin stretch of land north of Point Loma, on the port side of the great ship, separated the raging sea from the relative

calm of the protected bay. Sadly, that protective strand of rock and sand is now home to the Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control, (NCCOSC). It is an active EPA Superfund site today, having been poisoned by three generations of US Naval activities. The soil is contaminated with dangerously high levels of Arsenic, Copper and compounds, Vanadium, and Lead.

The cleanup of the contamination at NCCOSC has already cost taxpayers \$27.6 million. Military cleanup operations are still ongoing, and even when they're completed, the site may still be hazardous, as many of these locations are put under long-term monitoring or other restrictions.

Cabrillo sailed into the safety of San Diego Bay to the unspoiled waters of Chollas Creek where it empties into San Diego Bay. Today, it is one of the most polluted places on the planet.



***Portrait of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo  
(Portuguese: João Rodrigues Cabrilho),  
who discovered San Diego Bay in 1542.***

The deadly contamination at Point Loma is tiny compared to the environmental disaster caused by the Navy at the San Diego Naval Station. The Naval Station has 26 active EPA

Superfund sites that have already cost the American public \$127 million and are expected to cost another \$288 million before the poisons are removed by 2029, if they ever are.



**Cabrillo wouldn't recognize Chollas Creek and the San Diego Bay today.**

Since 1922, when then Secretary of the Navy, Teddy Roosevelt Jr., established the facility known then as the U.S. Destroyer Base, San Diego, the land and water have been polluted by the United States Navy, its corporate sponsors, and a disengaged, largely uninformed public.

Consider the contaminants in the water today:

Trichlorophenoxyacetic acid, Propionic acid, Trichlorophenoxy, Dibenzo, Dioxin, Tetrachloro, Mercury, Beryllium, Diethylamino Ethane, Dalapon, Dichloroethylene, Silver and compounds, Carbon Tetrachloride, Lead, Selenium, Chloroform, Antimony, Thallium (I) Carbonate, Copper, Molybdenum, Arsenic, Zinc, Vanadium, Barium, Fluoride, Fluoridone, Chloride and Strontium.

It's tough to read.

The *soil* is poisoned by Methylene chloride, Mercury and compounds, Arsenic, Lead, Copper and compounds, Vanadium, Zinc, Barium and Aluminum.

These pollutants are threatening to all varieties of plant and animal life. The data on these pollutants was collected by the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA. The Trump administration has submitted a budget that strips \$2.5 billion from the annual budget of the Environmental Protection Agency — an overall reduction of more than 23 percent. Meanwhile, many of the agency’s web pages detailing environmental destruction at the hands of military and corporate polluters, are disappearing. The screams of the Kumeyaay can be heard in the winds as they rip across the poisoned sea and land.

Same deal on the other side of the continent



*From a tribute to John Smith in 1616 – “Thy faire discoveries  
and fowle overthrowe of salvages, much civilized by thee..”*

In 1607, sixty-five years after Cabrillo discovered the San Diego Bay, the English moved into the Chesapeake region of the North American continent, setting in motion the same kind of calamity for the Indians, the land, the water, and air. Nature counts time in millions of years, but it has taken one century to destroy huge swaths of the Potomac River basin.

In 1608, John Smith became the first European to explore the waters of the Potomac River from the Chesapeake Bay to Washington. Describing the river and the Chesapeake, Smith wrote, “Heaven and Earth never agreed better to frame a place for man’s habitation.” Legend has it that Smith and his crew tried to catch fish with a frying pan during their exploration of the Chesapeake in the summer of 1608.

It is still lovely, and much of it, surprisingly, remains undeveloped, but 400 years later, the waters and soils are poisoned, like they are in San Diego Bay. Let’s take a cruise down the Potomac from its source in the mountains of West Virginia to its mouth at the Chesapeake Bay. The journey down this mighty waterway details six EPA Superfund sites created by the Pentagon’s reckless disregard for the fragile ecosystem of the Potomac River watershed.

The U.S. Navy’s **Allegany Ballistics Laboratory** in Rocket Center, West Virginia, 130 miles north of Washington, is a critical source of contamination in the Potomac River. The on-site disposal of explosive metals and solvent wastes contaminates soil and groundwater with hazardous chemicals.

Traveling the river 90 miles further south brings us to **Fort Detrick** in Frederick, Maryland, the Army’s “proving ground” for the nation’s biological warfare program. Anthrax, Phosgene, and radioactive carbon, sulfur, and phosphorous are buried here. The groundwater is laced with deadly trichloroethylene, a human carcinogen, and tetrachloroethene, suspected of causing tumors in laboratory animals.

Just 40 miles down the river from Fort Detrick lies Washington’s **Spring Valley** neighborhood and the campus of American University. This area was used by the Army during World War I to test Lewisite, a lethal gas made of arsenic. Soldiers tied animals to stakes and set off chemical bombs to see how quickly the animals died. The area was densely covered with deadly biological agents, while soldiers buried the remaining stockpiles of munitions after testing. One hundred years later, Perchlorate and Arsenic are present in groundwater and houses are still being demolished because of the contamination.

Five miles further south, the **Washington Navy Yard** is located on the Anacostia River, close to its confluence with the Potomac.



*Present-day Washington, DC from Smith's amazingly accurate map of Virginia, published in 1612*

Captain Smith sailed up the Eastern Branch of the Potomac at present-day Washington and was well received by the Nacotchtanck, a native people of the Piscataway Tribe in present-day Anacostia. Smith's map marks the area as Natcotchtanck, the location of today's Washington Navy Yard.

Today, ancient Natcotchtanck is one of the most contaminated patches of real estate on the continent. The Navy Yard was a former foundry for the manufacture of cannons, shells, and shot. The ground adjacent to the river is contaminated with tetrachloride, cyanide, perchloroethylene, carbon tetrachloride, dichloroethene, vinyl chloride, lead, and heavy metals, acids, cleaners, caustics, iridite and alkaline, lead, chromium, cadmium, antimony, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and dioxins.

Along the Maryland shoreline, 20 miles from the Navy Yard, we come to the **Indian Head Naval Surface Warfare Center** in Charles County, Maryland, with its 100-year history of dumping and burning hazardous waste products. Groundwater samples collected at Indian Head contained perchlorate at concentrations between 1,600 and 436,000 ug/L. To put these data into context, the Maryland Department of the Environment established a drinking water

advisory level of 1 ug/L. Perchlorate has been linked to its negative effect on the thyroid gland.

Finally, we arrive at **The Naval Surface Warfare Center – Dahlgren**, located another 20 miles south of Indian Head, along the Potomac River in King George County, Virginia. We notice changes in the waterway. Salt from the sea mixes in the water where crabs and oysters have found a home for millions of years. Their habitat is threatened. Reckless disposal of chemical agents contaminates the soil, groundwater, and sediment. To this day, Dahlgren open burns hazardous waste, sprinkling a powder of poison over the Potomac, the Northern Neck of Virginia, and Southern Maryland.

At Dahlgren, discarded mercury is mixed with sediments in Gambo Creek, which empties directly into the river. The burial of munitions contaminated with heavy metals and polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) have poisoned the earth along the mighty Potomac. PCBs, Trichloroethane, and various pesticides mix with lead contamination from firing ranges and buried depleted uranium used to make a type of nuclear weapon favored by Army commanders and known as a bunker buster.

The sands of the Potomac beaches south of Dahlgren hold a treasure of Indian artifacts, like arrow points and spearheads, lost by Piscataway hunters over thousands of years, but walking along the beach at Dahlgren is prohibited today, due to the potential for unexploded ordnance and fragmenting metal.

The EPA has identified these poisons in the waters of the Potomac river basin, all of them the result of military activities: Acetone, Alkaline, Arsenic, Anthrax, Antimony, Bacillus Globigii, Beryllium, Bis(2-ethylhexyl) Phthalate, Cadmium, Carbon Tetrachloride, Chromium, Cyanide, Cyclonite, Depleted Uranium, Dichloroethylene, Dichloromethane, Dinitrotoluene, Dioxins, Escherichia Coli, Iridite, Lead, Mercury, Nickel, Nitroglycerin, Perchlorate, Perchloroethylene, Phosgene, Phosphorous, Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), Polyaromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) , Radioactive Carbon, Radioactive sulfur, Serratia Marcescens, Tetrachloride, Tetrachloroethane, Tetrachloroethylene, Toluene, Trans-Dichloroethylene, Trichloroethene, Trichloroethylene, Trinitrobenzene, Trinitrotoluene, Vinyl Chloride, Xlene, and Zinc.

It's tough to read. Few in power give a damn.

The Pentagon's destruction of the Potomac and San Diego Bay is the rule, rather than the exception at military bases across the country. About 900 of the EPA's 1,300 Superfund sites are the result of the military's disregard for the environment. These pollutants are threatening to all varieties of human, plant and animal life and their effects may last forever. Meanwhile, the public's watchdog, the EPA, is slowly being dismantled. Just sayin.

