

A CAREER IN SERVICE

From Cal Poly to the U.S. Navy, David Boone aims to make a difference

BY JO ANN LLOYD

While an undergraduate at Cal Poly, Rear Adm. David Boone (B.S., Civil Engineering, 1982) had no intention of pursuing a career in the U.S. Navy.

Now, as director of shore readiness, Boone is responsible for all 70 U.S. Navy bases worldwide plus 122 airfields, 410 piers, 58,000 employees, and an annual budget of \$9 billion.

"I was about to graduate and was interviewing with various companies," Boone said. "A friend was approached by a recruiter specific to civil engineering and kept asking me to go to a recruiting meeting."

Boone came away impressed. "Being an engineer, I made a matrix with potential employers' names on one side and attributes on the other," he said. "The Navy came out on top."

He signed on without his friend. "I intended to do some traveling and gain experience in management and leadership."

Boone has since been to more than 20 countries, including Bahrain, China, Honduras, most of Europe, Kazakhstan, Micronesia, Palau, and Vietnam.

He has conducted disaster recovery efforts around the world. "I hear people all over bad-mouthing Americans for our policies," Boone said. "Regardless of what you see on television, though, we are sought out throughout the world when people need help."

Boone credits much of his career success to Cal Poly's Learn by Doing education. An example was his participation in a group senior project, helping to build an enduring Cal Poly landmark – the Erhart Agriculture Bridge linking North Poly View Drive with the Erhart Agriculture Building. Boone was the sole civil engineer on a team of architecture, architectural engineering and construction management students.

"I appreciate the hands-on aspect that Cal Poly emphasizes – in big ways like the bridge and in small class projects," he said. "I don't think any of us thought it was that big a deal to build the bridge. It fit into the culture of the campus. The Navy has the same work ethic as Cal Poly: Get involved, get your hands dirty and get it done."

Over the years Boone has faced unique challenges. In 2001 he was responsible for the facilities at the White House Operations Center, also known as the "Shelter," as well as Camp David and President George W. Bush's ranch in Texas. "The Shelter is where the President's Cabinet and high-ranking officials meet when the U.S. is under attack," Boone said. "We were under attack on Sept. 11."

After the first plane hit, Boone was inundated with requests from Vice President Dick Cheney, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and various cabinet members. "I remember thinking that I wish the American people could see how the leadership operated that day," he said. "The leadership was measured, methodical, impressive to watch. To be involved in that part of our history was an important part of my career."

Boone deals with very big things: aircraft carriers, utility systems, construction equipment. "We have exciting but challenging lifestyles," he said. "But the most important thing in my career has been mentoring and developing people. It is the most gratifying experience to have a hand in motivating people to do things they never thought possible in themselves."

He also traces that skill to Cal Poly. "The university was an amazing place for its diversity of students – 'big city' kids from Los Angeles and San Francisco and farm kids from the Central Valley. The mix of people created an interesting dynamic, a fun group."

After three decades, he is ready to retire. And he is reflective on the importance of his career path. "I came to appreciate a career serving others. There is no nobler a pursuit than to serve others. A lot of what Cal Poly does is teaching students the importance of looking beyond themselves. I hope students consider that when choosing a career. You can make a difference." □



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