

Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Headquarters, Kure District (Former Imperial Navy Regional Headquarters)

The former regional headquarters of the Imperial Navy was built during a time of rapid military expansion. This expansion began in the mid-nineteenth century, in response to pressure from several Western powers that used their superior naval forces to compel the Japanese government to open its borders to trade. In order to strengthen its naval defenses, in 1886 the Japanese government designated four natural harbors as sites for major naval bases: Kure Bay in Hiroshima Prefecture, Yokosuka Bay in Kanagawa Prefecture, Sasebo Bay in Nagasaki Prefecture, and Maizuru Bay in Kyoto Prefecture. Regional headquarters were constructed at each of these four naval bases.

The naval headquarters building was completed in 1907. In the closing days of the World War II, the building was almost completely burned down, leaving only the outer brick façade. The BCOF later restored the building and used it as their headquarters until 1956. Since then, it has served as the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) Headquarters of the Kure District.

The Japanese pine standing in front of the building's entrance was planted during the Meiji era (1868–1912). The pine was once much taller, but the commander of the BCOF thought it obstructed the view from his office and had it severely pruned back. The JMSDF has continued maintaining the pine, and it has been groomed into the shape of an anchor as a symbol of the navy. A pond across from the pine is believed to have once been the entrance to a secret bunker, as suggested by its peculiar shape and the stairs leading down into it. The cannon located to the south of the entrance is also a mystery; it is much older than the naval base, and it is unclear when it was brought to Kure or by whom.

The room on the south side of the headquarters building's second floor once served as the office of the Imperial Navy's commander-in-chief. The room is now used in the same capacity by the JMSDF. During the Occupation, however, the commander of the BCOF chose to use the central room, which until then had been used exclusively by members of the imperial family and other important guests. Around the north side of the building, a set of steep stone steps leads down to the harbor. These steps were built in preparation for visits by the emperor and other eminent guests arriving by ship.

Immediately next to the building's back door, a metal hatch marks the entrance to a complex system of underground tunnels constructed between 1942 and 1945. As of today,

less than half of the tunnel system has been explored.