

## **A TWO-FRONT "WAR"**

by Ralph Liebing, RA, CSI  
Cincinnati, OH

Specifications, specifications writers, and even CSI are caught in a two-front "war"--a scenario feared by even the biggest of powerful nations!

Simply, the situation requires that you divide your resources and efforts to fend off or deal with two different but some what parallel issues. Oh, we spec writers may have to deal with two deadlines, congruently; which is quite distressing, granted. But to also engage other groups and their particular demeanors is even more so.

Bad enough we still have the "issue" of establishing specifications as creditable, "legitimate" and valuable/useful instruments (among contractors and even some of our associated colleagues) there are two other "fronts" that require attention--and the sooner the better. Now these are not necessarily directly related, but really do have an important relationship. They are both imposing and important.

Oddly enough within the two "fronts" there are two issues--again remotely related, but related nonetheless! These issues are 1) specifications, and 2) building codes. The relationship is fairly apparent to we specifications writers.

The two "fronts" that we need to "attack" (OK, address!) are:

- Lack of due respect for both specifications and building codes in the professional office, and the lack of practice instruction that provides basic information about both to students as budding professionals;
- Lack of due respect for and use of specifications in relating building code compliance in the code administration office, and the increased but unauthorized effort by code agencies to require re-formatting of contract documents and the proper location of construction information (solely for their unilateral convenience).

Surely, this IS a two-front "war"! OK, be picky--not war, but confrontations or issues of elevated concern!

Time, money and distress are being needlessly expensed in trying to merely with these issues, but not really resolve them. It appears that they are viewed, more often than not, as annoyances or nuisances, and not of "real" concern. But the fact is that if there can be an increased effort put forth at a high level to sincerely resolve these issues, the construction industry as a whole will benefit--as will individual office efforts, resources, and costs.

Within the offices, there is need to offer instruction, enlightenment, and assistance to really elevate understanding of both specifications and building codes. New hires and young professionals need to be "geared up" on both so they become less contentious and more SOP. This can be done with explanation and instruction. And it can be further enhanced with instruction in the academic sequence in the professional schools--another topic for another time!

In the process of code administration the new array of regulations and codes (although so much better now than the previous fragmented, three-code system) has brought new levels of concern, in that code agencies are still learning the code (the IBC and its related family) which breeds apprehension. With ever limited and diminishing resources and staffing in the jurisdictions, there is increased pressure to lessen the time for plan review--so much so that agencies are making unilateral demands for imposing changes

**A TWO-FRONT "WAR"**  
**by Ralph Liebing, RA, CSI**  
**November 2007**

in documentation. This directly impacts the time/cost scenario in the offices as the documents must be adjusted for submittal to varied jurisdictions with varied requirements.

The need then is obvious. There should be a productive interface between design professionals and code officials. And this needs to include the validity of specifications as instruments that involve code compliance--i.e., information correctly located in the specs is available to and should be part of the review process. Even the IBC itself acknowledges this in the definition of "construction documents".

In summary, there is need to expand and concentrated effort on making specifications more viable and more widely understood in the offices. And in the same token, to have them understood and used in the code agency offices. In total the effort is to provide documents of value to all parties, that include code compliance data--and to have them both understood and utilized.

Remember no "war" has ever been won by not fighting it!

But the highest and best resolution is to "engage" the issue(s), "battle" through them and "conquer" them with appropriate solutions!