

A SHORT HISTORY
of
FORT CANBY, WASHINGTON
by
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An excerpt from Portion of Fort Canby Military Reservation, near Ilwaco, Pacific County, Washington, report on application by Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission for transfer of surplus Federal properties for a historical monument, by John A. Hussey (Region Four, National Park Service, San Francisco, June 1957, mimeographed report, 45 pp., illus., 6 photos, 3 maps).

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SUPPORTING DATA

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY

Synopsis of significance in the broad history of the state or region

The significance of the particular piece of property in question derives from its being an integral part of Cape Disappointment, the promontory which forms the northern portion of the mouth of the Columbia River. From the earliest days of Spanish exploration of the Northwest Coast down to the present, this point has played an important part in the history of the Columbia River--as a landmark, as the scene of many tragic shipwrecks, as the location of an important lighthouse, as the site of some of the earliest settlements in the Pacific Northwest, and as the location of Fort Canby, one of the major units in the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia. In all of this important story, the property in question shared.

Although no important fortifications or military installations were constructed upon the particular tract in question until World War II, the requested property, as part of the former Fort Canby Military Reservation, shares the historical significance of the entire reservation. Certainly, no historical monument established to commemorate the story of Fort Canby would be complete without this tract. Therein lies its chief historical significance.

Identification of the property

There is no question concerning the historical identification of this property. An examination of Map No. 1 and Map No. 2 accompanying this report will establish that the tract in question is a part of Cape Disappointment and is within the boundaries of the former Fort Canby Military Reservation.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Introductory note. Since the requested property is an integral part of Cape Disappointment and of the Fort Canby Military Reservation, it is impossible to separate the history of this particular tract from that of the larger units. This narrative, therefore, is a summary of the history of Cape Disappointment and of the military reservation which was, for all practical purposes, coterminous with it.

Discovery and early history of Cape Disappointment. Cape Disappointment, the headland forming the northern shore of the entrance to the Columbia River, was, when first visited by Europeans, in the territory inhabited by the Chinook Indians. A native town, Nokskaitmithls, stood on the ground later occupied by Fort Canby.¹

The mouth of the Columbia River long eluded European navigators who coasted the Northwest shoreline in the wake of the Spanish expedition headed by Bartolome Ferrello in 1543. Finally, on August 17, 1775, the Spanish explorer Bruno Heceta discovered what he described as a bay, with indications that through it a large river found its outlet to the sea. He named the indentation "Bahia de la Asuncion." The cape at the north of the entrance he called "San Roque." That on the south he named "Cabo Frondoso." Heceta's maps clearly show that he had discovered the mouth of the present Columbia River, although he did not recognize the true character of the "bay."

Cape Disappointment thus became one of the earliest points in the present State of Washington to bear a name. Captain John Meares, a British trader and retired naval officer, learned of a Spanish chart showing Heceta's bay and determined to look for the river which had been surmised by the Spaniards. On July 6, 1788, he sailed around a cape which he hoped would be Heceta's San Roque, but not entering the "bay" far enough to observe the river, he declared in his journal that "we can now with safety assert that no such river

¹John B. Swanton, The Indian Tribes of North America (Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 145, Washington, 1952), 418.

as that of Saint Roc exists." He commemorated his chagrin by renaming the north headland of the bay "Cape Disappointment."²

The first vessel known to have entered the mouth of the Columbia River was the American ship Columbia, commanded by Robert Gray of Boston. Crossing the bar on May 11, 1792, the Columbia made her first anchorage about ten miles up the estuary. Gray named the northern point of the entrance "Cape Hancock," but the designation did not "take." Despite later efforts by military officials and others to perpetuate the name given by Gray, the headland has been known to this day as "Cape Disappointment."³

Almost immediately after the visit of the Columbia, other trading vessels, both American and British, began to make the lower Columbia River a port of call during their voyages along the coast. Beginning with the summer and fall of 1792, when the Jenny, a British brig commanded by Captain James Baker, anchored inside Cape Disappointment, Baker Bay became a favorite haven for these vessels. The half-moon beach where the Fort Canby headquarters and residence structures later stood knew the footsteps of many sailors who sought rest ashore.

One of the vessels which sought shelter here was the Phoenix of Bengal, which spent the winter of 1794-95 in Baker Bay. Evidence of another visit comes from the following message found carved on a tree near the water's edge: "H. Thompson, ship Guatimozin of Boston, Feb. 20, 1804."⁴

²Edmond S. Meany, Origin of Washington Geographic Names (Typewritten ed., Seattle, 1923), 38-39; Henry Raup Wagner, The Cartography of the Northwest Coast of America to the Year 1800 (2 vols., Berkeley, California, 1937), I, 343.

³Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of the Northwest Coast (2 vols., San Francisco, 1884), I, 260.

⁴Lucile McDonald, "State Seeks to Acquire Historic Fort Canby Area for Park Use," in Seattle Sunday Times, June 24, 1956, Magazine Section, p. 2.

Perhaps the most interesting of these early visits from the standpoint of economic history was that of the English vessel, Ruby, in 1795. The crew killed great numbers of wild fowl in the marshes about McKenzie Head; but, more important, they planted vegetable seeds on a small island close to the shore. This latter action has been termed "the first horticultural enterprise in the Pacific Northwest."⁵ It is said that more than 50 years later a pioneer settler discovered vegetable plants there, evidently descendants of those sown by the crew of the Ruby.⁶

The visit of the Ruby appears important from the standpoint of another precedent. When the ship left the Columbia for the last time in January 1796 she encountered rough seas in crossing the bar. As Cape Disappointment was passed, Indians could be seen watching the vessel from the top of the hill. Although the point probably had been used as a "lookout" by the natives from time immemorial, this incident appears to be the first recorded use of the famous observation point as far as European vessels are concerned. From then on, until very recent years, Cape Disappointment served as one of the world's best-known marine information stations.

Lewis and Clark at Cape Disappointment. Cape Disappointment figured prominently in the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition. There has been a good deal of discussion as to exactly where this company completed its westward journey and fulfilled its primary objective--to reach the Pacific Ocean. Certainly, Cape Disappointment can make a good claim for this honor.

During the second week in November, 1805, the expedition, proceeding down the Columbia in canoes, was delayed by stormy weather on the north shore a short distance above Point Ellice. On the 14th, Meriwether Lewis, growing impatient at the delay, set out with a few men to see if there were any ships or white men at the mouth of the river and to determine the accuracy of Vancouver's description of the

⁵Lucile McDonald, "State Seeks to Acquire Historic Fort Canby Area for Park Use," in Seattle Sunday Times, June 24, 1956, Magazine Section, p. 2.

⁶Ibid.; for details of the Ruby's visit, see T. C. Elliott, "The Journal of the Ship Ruby," in Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXVIII (September 1927), 258-280.

country. Three days later he rejoined the main party near the present town of McGowan, having "around passed" Cape Disappointment.

Not much is known concerning Lewis's visit to the cape, but on the 18th William Clark set out for the same point with "all the men who wished to see more of the main OCIAN." Fortunately, Clark left a detailed narrative of his visit. Proceeding down the east shore of the cape from the site of the present Ilwaco, he and his men came to the bend in the shore where, the Indians told them, the trading ships were wont to anchor. This indentation evidently is the one situated about 1/4 mile north of the northern boundary of the requested property. Here he found Captain Lewis's name carved on a tree. He and several of the men left theirs also.

From this point, Clark went to the "inner extremity" of Cape Disappointment. He noted that the point was an elevated, circular hill rising steeply to a height of about 160 feet. From the cove behind the point, the party crossed the isthmus to the ocean over a half mile of low land. Here Clark noted a "high seperate bald hill covered with long coarse grass" projecting into the ocean. He climbed this hill, which he estimated to be about a mile in circumference. Undoubtedly, this hill was the present McKenzie Head. Camp on the night of the 18th was on the ocean shore a short distance north of McKenzie Head. Clark noted in his journal that his men appeared "much Satisfied with their trip beholding with estonishment the high waves dashing against the rocks & this emence Ocian."

The next day the company continued northward through rough country, evidently taking a sight from North Head in passing. Reaching the beach near the present town of Long Beach, they went northward for about four miles, and once more Clark carved his name on a tree, this time a small pine by the side of the ocean. From this point the party returned to the camp near the present McGowan. Although the men of the expedition had met tidewater during their descent of the Columbia, they undoubtedly first stood beside the ocean surf at Cape Disappointment.⁷

The Astor Party, 1811. When the Tonquin, carrying the members of John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company who had been sent

⁷Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition (7 vols. and atlas, New York, 1904-1905), III, 215-237; Atlas, maps 35, 36.

by sea to establish a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia, arrived off Cape Disappointment in 1811, the ship's master stubbornly sent two small boats into the rough sea to seek a passage across the bar. Eight men lost their lives in this reckless endeavor. When the entrance was finally made, the vessel was anchored in Baker Bay, and the master, Captain Jonathan Thorn, wished to locate the proposed settlement in the vicinity of the present Fort Canby Military Reservation. He even sent men ashore to build a stock pen and landed some pigs. The Astor partners would not accept this site, however, and finally insisted on a location farther upstream on ground now occupied by the City of Astoria. Thus Cape Disappointment missed becoming the site of the first permanent white settlement on the lower Columbia.⁸

Disputed Possession. The new fur-trading post, named Astoria, was sold to a rival British concern, the North West Company, during the War of 1812. The treaty which ended the conflict in 1815 provided for the return of captured territory by each belligerent. The United States felt it necessary to re-assert its claim to the territory drained by the Columbia River, and the State Department sent the Sloop-of-War Ontario, commanded by Captain James Biddle, to make "some symbolical or appropriate" act for this purpose. The Ontario arrived off the mouth of the river early on the morning of August 19, 1818. Biddle left the vessel outside the bar and proceeded in three boats around Cape Disappointment, landing near the spot where the Fort Canby buildings were later erected.

There, on the quiet shore, the men waved the American flag and saluted it with three cheers. A sod of earth was turned up, and a leaden tablet was nailed to a tree. The ship then fired a national salute.⁹

The British were not willing to let this claim remain unchallenged. Two months later officers of H.M.S. Blossom conducted a similar ceremony at the same spot.¹⁰

⁸McDonald, op. cit., 2; Washington Irving, Astoria (Chicago and New York: Belford, Clarke & Co., n.d.), 64-72.

⁹T. C. Elliott, "An Event of One Hundred Years Ago," in Oregon Historical Quarterly, XIX (September 1918), 181-187.

¹⁰McDonald, op. cit., 2.

Strategic importance recognized. With the shifting of the center of the lower Columbia fur trade to Astoria in 1811, Cape Disappointment entered a period of comparative isolation and quiet. Its principal use for the next 40 years was as a lookout from which to watch for vessels entering the Columbia or to determine if winds and the condition of bar were favorable for ships about to take their departure. The Astorians; their successors, the North West Company; and, still later, the Hudson's Bay Company all on occasion sent men, or had the Indians send men, to the point when an important ship was expected.

Nevertheless, the point was noticed by travelers, several of whom remarked upon its obvious qualifications as a site for fortifications for the defense of the Columbia River. Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, in charge of the United States Exploring Expedition which visited the Northwest Coast in 1841, later reported to the Secretary of the Navy that a steamer, a few guns on Point Adams, and a small fort on Cape Disappointment would suffice to protect the entrance.¹¹ Two emigrants of 1843, Overton Johnson and William H. Winter, believed that Cape Disappointment, which "entirely" commanded the river's mouth, could be made "almost as impregnable as the Rock of Gibraltar."¹²

Although the strategic importance of Cape Disappointment was thus early recognized by explorers and visitors to the lower Columbia region, the actual employment of the promontory for military purposes was not seriously proposed until about 1845, when it appeared possible that the United States and Great Britain might go to war over the Oregon Country, which had been open to settlement by the citizens of both countries under a joint occupation agreement dating back to 1818. Anxious to encourage American settlement in the Pacific Northwest, the House of Representatives on February 3, 1845, passed a bill to organize Oregon as a territory of the United States. Among other things, the act provided for the erection of a fort at the mouth of the Columbia.

Although the bill never received final passage by the Senate, it was sufficiently provocative to arouse Great Britain to take counter

¹¹Oregon Historical Quarterly, XII (September 1911), 297.

¹²Ibid., VII (June 1906), 173-174.

measures. Sir George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company's territories in America, recommended on March 29, 1845, that steps should be taken to protect British rights in Oregon. "It would be highly important," he wrote, "to get possession of Cape Disappointment and to erect thereon a strong battery."¹³

British officials dissuaded Simpson from his plan to fortify the cape in time of peace, but he suggested that a careful survey of the point, with a view to its eventual occupation for military purposes by the British government, should be made by Lieutenants Henry J. Warre and M. Vavasour, who were sent out from Canada to make a military reconnaissance of the disputed area. Meanwhile, to hold the location for eventual government use, Simpson on May 30, 1845, instructed Peter Skene Ogden, a Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, as a "first object" to obtain possession of Cape Disappointment on behalf of the Company, "ostensibly with a view to the formation of a trading post and Pilots' Lookout." A house was to be built on the cape, and also a fence, "for the exclusion of strangers."¹⁴

As instructed, Ogden visited the Cape as quickly as possible but found it to be already in the possession of James Sanler, who had erected a rude house. Ogden purchased Sanler's rights for \$200, but later upon filing a claim on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company at Oregon City, he found that two Americans named Wheeler and McDaniel were the real claimants and that Sanler was only occupying the property for them. Only after considerable hesitation, correspondence, and negotiation was Ogden able to complete the purchase. On February 14, 1846, he informed Lieutenant Warre that he had bought the land for

¹³Joseph Schafer, "Documents Relative to Warre and Vavasour's Military Reconnaissance," in Oregon Historical Quarterly, X (March 1909), 14.

¹⁴Schafer, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

\$1000 and had filed on it in his own name.¹⁵

Until this purchase had been consummated, Warre and Vavasour could not complete their survey of the point. The two officers were much impressed with the strategic value of Cape Disappointment, and they recommended that it be occupied by three permanent batteries of heavy guns.¹⁶ As matters developed, these recommendations were never put into effect. The international controversy was settled by treaty during 1846, and the Oregon Country south of the forty-ninth parallel became United States territory.

Settlements on Cape Disappointment, 1846-1852. Little is known about the establishment which the Hudson's Bay Company claimed to have maintained on Cape Disappointment as the result of Ogden's purchase. The traditions about the post have been gathered together by Mrs. Lucile McDonald, as follows:

A company employee, Fisk Keplin, or Kipling, was the next person to live there [Cape Disappointment]. He is said

¹⁵T. C. Elliott, "Peter Skene Ogden, Fur Trader," in Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society, XI (September 1910), 261-262. Ogden was later compensated for this expense by the H. B. C. Later, in its claims against the United States, the Company listed its establishment at Cape Disappointment at a value of \$14,600.

Sanler, whose last name also appears in the records as De Sauls, Sanlos, and Saul, was a Negro cook who had deserted from the crew of the wrecked Peacock in 1841. He built a shack at Cape Disappointment and was still there five years later when the Shark entered the river. Information from Mrs. Lucile McDonald, interview, May 9, 1956. According to Mrs. McDonald, Sanler, or DeSauls as she calls him, found Cape Disappointment deserted in 1841 except for a summer Indian fishing camp. "He operated a small sailing schooner carrying freight on the lower river and lived midway between Ilwaco and Fort Canby at a place called Saul's Point." McDonald, op. cit., 2.

¹⁶Schafer, op. cit., 71-73, 87-89.

to have been a Red River half-breed who arrived on the Columbia in 1835 as captain of the ship Dryad. By January, 1846, he had a house near the spot where a crew the following summer erected a hewn-log structure a story and a half high and measuring approximately 60 by 40 feet.

Keplin was still at the cape in 1854 trading and raising potatoes and other vegetables on a cleared place behind his house.

The company post was not used after 1858. A Hudson's Bay officer later said:

"The government took possession of the company land without any notice being sent the company's representative in Oregon. A lighthouse was erected and after that the place was used for military purposes."

Officers' quarters for the fort were built where the company's establishment had stood.

Keplin's nearest neighbor in 1849 was William Edwards, a sailor from Massachusetts, who had arrived four years earlier and settled half a mile farther up the shore. A traveler's journal observed: "He had a squaw and a nine-pin alley." Probably the alley was for entertaining stormbound sailors who often spent weeks in the cove.

Edwards was murdered in October, 1863, his wife and her lover, "Jack Fiske," being charged with the crime. They escaped jail during the trial.¹⁷

The most ambitious attempt to settle Cape Disappointment dates from about 1849. Elijah White, a former missionary in the Oregon Country, decided that the point would make an ideal site for a commercial city, and he established a donation land claim on the shore of Baker Bay, about one mile south of the present Ilwaco.

As early as January 26, 1850, a letter announced that a large company had been formed to build a town there, and during that year Washington Hall, of Chinook, was hired to survey and plat the new settlement, which White named Pacific City.

¹⁷McDonald, op. cit., 2.

White was not modest in making claims for his enterprise, and for a while he succeeded in interesting a good many people in the project. A petition circulated in 1850, to have Pacific City made a port of entry and delivery, was signed by 250 persons, despite vigorous protests from Astoria and other nearby communities. A post office was opened at the town on December 21, 1850, with J. D. Holman as postmaster. Holman also constructed a hotel, said to have cost \$28,000.

The town never grew to match White's claims and expectations. In February, 1851, the population was estimated by the Oregon Spectator to be only about 75; and the figure evidently declined during the year. The end of Pacific City came suddenly and finally on February 26, 1852, when a Presidential proclamation declared Cape Disappointment, including the site of the town, to be a military reservation.¹⁸

Proposals to fortify the mouth of the Columbia River. Soon after the close of the Mexican War, the United States took measures to provide for the defense of the immense new territory it had acquired in the West as a result of that conflict and of the Oregon Treaty of 1846. Individual Army officers made recommendations concerning suitable sites for fortifications; and boards of engineers were sent to the Pacific Coast to make surveys for the same purpose.

The mouth of the Columbia River was early recognized as one of the locations which most required defenses. Brevet Major General Persifer F. Smith, commanding the Army's Pacific Division, reported to the War Department in October 1849 that "strong works" were required on Cape Disappointment and Point Adams; and he recommended the immediate construction of both a fort and a lighthouse at the former place.¹⁹ A special government commission sent to the West Coast in 1850 to select sites for forts, lighthouses, and ports of entry made similar recommendations; and the Chief of Engineers in 1851 urged

¹⁸The story of Pacific City has never been written. This brief account is based upon Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Washington, Idaho, and Montana (San Francisco, 1890), 33-34; Seattle Post-Intelligencer March 30, 1899; Seattle Sunday Times, October 19, 1947; and the Tribune (Ilwaco, Wash.), August 3, 1951, and August 22, 1952.

¹⁹31st Cong., 1st Sess., Senate, Ex. Doc. 47, Part I, 75-108.

that Cape Disappointment and Point Adams be fortified "without delay."²⁰

The Fort Canby Military Reservation, 1852-1948. The first actual step toward the establishment of the defenses of the Columbia was taken in 1851, when the government authorized Anson Dart, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Oregon Territory, to negotiate with the Indians for the strategically valuable land at the mouth of the river. By a treaty signed on August 5, 1851, the Clatsop Indians ceded Point Adams and a large tract of adjoining land on the southern bank of the stream to the United States.²¹

This action was followed by an Executive Order dated February 26, 1852, which reserved for military purposes public lands at both Point Adams and Cape Disappointment. As far as the latter location was concerned, this order created a reservation consisting of all the land for one and a half miles north of the southernmost point of the cape. This original reservation contained 540.2 acres, more or less.²²

The original military reservation on Cape Disappointment was subsequently modified by several governmental orders and decrees and by acts of nature, but in essence the Fort Canby Military Reservation remained the same until it was broken up in 1948. Some of the modifications made over the years are as follows:

By an Executive Order dated December 27, 1859, a lighthouse reserve was created within the limits of the military property. It was located at the southeast tip of the cape and consisted of all of

²⁰Leslie N. Scott, History of the Oregon Country (6 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1924), I, 287; 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., House, Report 86, 421.

²¹Clatsop County Chapter of the Oregon Historical Society, General History, Harbor Defenses of the Columbia (mimeographed, n. p., 1947) I, 20-21.

²²Corps of Engineers, Report of Excess Real Property, Fort Canby, January 26, 1955, MS (in Seattle Office, GSA).

Lot 4, Section 9 of Township 9 North, Range 11 West of the Willamette Meridian, containing 48 acres.

Instructions dated January 15, 1863, from the General Land Office to the Surveyor General of Washington Territory redefined the boundaries of the military reservation so as to extend the area to about 588.2 acres.

By an act approved February 15, 1893, Congress provided for the construction of a lighthouse on North Head, part of which was within the Fort Canby Military Reservation. This action, together with the fact that a confused jurisdictional situation existed regarding Lot 4, Section 9, where both military and lighthouse facilities were located, caused the War Department and the Treasury Department to re-examine their respective properties at Cape Disappointment. As published in General Orders No. 10, Department of the Columbia, May 8, 1894, the two agencies mutually fixed the bounds and defined the limits of the areas to be controlled by their respective officers and agents. The military authorities were to hold complete jurisdiction of all lands contained in the reservation, including the controversial Lot 4, Section 9, with the exception of four described small tracts which were reserved for lighthouse use.

After the building of the Columbia River jetties, extensive sand spits began to build up west and south of Cape Disappointment. By 1940, largely due to these accretions, the area of the Fort Canby Military Reservation had increased to 1664 acres. Part of the increased area, however, was the result of the acquisition of five small parcels or lots located north of the original reservation line.²³

Cape Disappointment Light Station. The first actual development undertaken by the Government on Cape Disappointment was a lighthouse. As early as 1812 the point had been used as a guide to shipping. During that year, the employees at Astoria, learning from the Indians that a vessel was offshore, displayed a white flag and burned several trees at night on Cape Disappointment as an aid to the Beaver in navigating the treacherous entrance. By 1842 the point had been marked by trimming the tops from the tall firs on the crest of

²³Corps of Engineers, Report of Excess Real Property, Fort Canby, January 26, 1955, MS; U. S., War Dept., Military Reservations, Washington (Washington, 1942).

the cape. The notch thus created on the skyline was used as a bearing mark by vessels steering for the mouth of the river. This "beacon with the trimmed tree" was still referred to in official sailing directions written by Lieutenant William P. McArthur of the Coast Survey in 1850.

The need for a lighthouse at the mouth of the Columbia was generally recognized by United States officials soon after the Treaty of 1846, and Oregon Territory's delegate to Congress succeeded in obtaining an appropriation for a light on Cape Disappointment on September 28, 1850.

The Coast Survey made an examination of the cape in the fall of 1850 and selected a site for the light. The spot chosen was not on the highest point but about 95 feet lower, on the southwest spur. During the next year an ox-team road was opened by the Survey to the site, but there was a considerable delay in the arrival of the building materials which were to be hauled upon it. The bark Oriole, engaged to transport the heavier items, went aground on the middle sands at the mouth of the Columbia in September 1853, and the lighthouse supplies were lost. The tower was constructed during the next year but stood unused for two more years waiting for a light. It was finally placed in operation on October 15, 1856.

The light was of the first order of Fresnel, fixed, and could be seen 21 miles at sea. The whitewashed tower was 40 feet high and of fireproof construction to protect it from the danger of forest fires on the densely wooded cape. A fog bell, weighing 1,000 pounds, was housed in a small structure nearby. For many years the light served well, standing guard over the "Graveyard of the Pacific," as the area about the mouth of the Columbia became known because of the many tragic wrecks which occurred there.

In some respects, however, the light was not entirely satisfactory. It was inside the main line of the coast and, because of its relatively low elevation, could not be seen from the river or from certain quarters to the northwest. For this reason, it was decided to erect a new lighthouse on North Head, near the northern boundary of the military reservation. Congress provided the funds for the new structure by an act approved February 15, 1893. Five years later the first order light was moved to North Head; and a fourth order light, with revolving lens, was installed in the old tower on Cape Disappointment. Reduced to the status of a harbor beacon, the old

lighthouse--oldest on the Northwest Coast--continues to serve commerce at the mouth of the Columbia. It was not electrified until 1937.²⁴

Construction of fortifications at the mouth of the Columbia River, 1862-1864. Events proved that it was a long step between the setting aside of military reservations at the mouth of the Columbia in 1852 and the actual building of fortifications. The lack of appropriations caused delay after delay. In 1855, for instance, the Secretary of War urgently recommended that the entrance of the Columbia River be fortified, but no action was taken. In 1859 these pleas were seconded by General W. S. Harney, Commanding the Department of Oregon; and in that same year General J. G. Totten, Chief of Engineers, personally examined the proposed sites and, in a report dated in 1860, recommended the construction of strong defensive work there.²⁵ On September 20, 1860, Colonel George Wright, then Commander of the Department of Oregon, made an impassioned plea for action. Fearing a possible conflict with Great Britain, he called the attention of his superiors to the fact that there was not a single defensive gun on the entire Northwest Coast and that the settlements of the lower Columbia, including the important city of Portland and the military headquarters at Fort Vancouver, were all "at the mercy of a single hostile steamer."²⁶

Finally, on February 20, 1862, Congress passed a fortification bill which appropriated \$100,000 for the commencement of permanent

²⁴This account of the lighthouse is based on the following sources: Lucile McDonald, "Cape Disappointment Light Station is State's Oldest," in Seattle Times, December 13, 1953; Evan Miles, Military History of Fort Canby, W.T., MS (in Corps of Engineers, Portland District, Records Holding Area), 33-34; unidentified clipping in Oregon Historical Society, Scrapbook 50, pp. 179-180; E. W. Wright, "Trip to Fort Canby," in Sunday Oregonian (Portland), June 25, 1893.

²⁵50th Cong., 1st Sess., Senate, Ex. Doc. 165, pp. 53-65.

²⁶36th Cong., 2nd Sess., Senate, Ex. Doc. 1, vol. II, 132-139.

defensive works at the mouth of the Columbia. It is stated in local histories that the fear of Confederate cruisers, particularly the Alabama, induced the War Department to hurry the construction of these forts. Such considerations may have had some effect, but military correspondence of the time proves that on the part of the officers in the Northwest, at least, a "foreign war" was the threat which loomed largest on the horizon.²⁷

To carry out the intent of the Congressional act, two Engineer Officers, Lieutenant Colonel Rene Edward De Russy and First Lieutenant George Henry Elliot, were sent to the mouth of the river to prepare a plan for the defenses. They made their examination during the summer of 1862 and selected Cape Disappointment, Point Ellen (near Point Adams), and Chinook Point as the three sites most suitable for permanent fortifications. Their surveys, drawings, and recommendations were sent to Washington for approval.

There is a persistent tradition, which appears in official post histories of Fort Canby as early as 1871, that the Engineers also began the construction of temporary gun platforms on Cape Disappointment during 1862. Such an action is quite possible in view of the anxiety of the military authorities on the Pacific Coast to fortify the position, but the evidence is not as conclusive as could be wished, particularly in view of subsequent events on the cape.

After much anxious urging on the part of Brigadier General Benjamin Alvord, commanding the District of Oregon, the War Department in the early summer of 1863 authorized De Russy, by then a colonel and chief engineer officer at San Francisco, to proceed with the construction of "temporary" works at the Columbia's entrance. On July 4, 1863, DeRussy assigned the task to Captain G. H. Elliot and ordered him to repair at once to the site of the projected operations. Cape Disappointment was considered the most important defensive point and

²⁷U. S. War Dept., The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (70 vols. in 128, Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, vol. I, pt. II, pp. 96, 139-140.

had the further recommendation of being already owned by the Government. The first works, therefore, were to be constructed there.²⁸

According to newspaper accounts, the construction on Cape Disappointment evidently was already under way as early as August 6, 1863.²⁹ The fortifications erected at that time were earthworks. They were intended to be temporary in nature, to serve until a permanent system of forts could be built at the mouth of the Columbia. The project was sufficiently completed by April, 1864, to permit the works to be turned over to garrison troops.

The defenses constructed on Cape Disappointment during this initial period consisted of three batteries, all on the southernmost tip of the point, as follows:

1. West Battery (also known as the Right Battery, Tower Battery, or Lighthouse Battery). This series of earthworks was situated on the southwestern spur of the point, where the lighthouse was located, at an elevation of 186 feet. The guns, ranged both west and east of the lighthouse tower, commanded the outer approaches to the river's entrance. As initially installed, the armament of this battery was as follows:

One	15"	Rodman gun	(smoothbore)
Four	10"	Rodman guns	"
Two	8"	Rodman guns	"
Two	300-pound	Parrott guns	(10" bore, rifled)

²⁸R. E. De Russy to G. F. Elliot, Fort Point, July 4, 1863; and J. G. Totten to R. E. De Russy, Washington, June 10, 1863, original telegram, both in Corps of Engineers, Portland District, Defenses, Mouth of Columbia River, Letter Book, July 4, 1863, to June 15, 1869, microfilm in Oregon Historical Society. In addition to the sources already cited, this outline of the beginnings of the Columbia River fortifications is based upon, War of the Rebellion, series I, vol. I, pt. II, pp. 89-90, 96, 112, 134-141, 259, 301-302, 322-323, 567-568.

²⁹Oregonian, August 6, 1863.

The 15-, 10-, and 8-inch guns were mounted prior to 1865, evidently early in 1864, although available records are not clear upon this point. The two 300-pound guns were mounted in 1866.

The two 8-inch guns and one 10-inch gun were dismantled in August, 1885. The two 300-pound guns were dismantled and replaced by two 8-inch converted rifles in October, 1890. The 15-inch gun was dismantled and moved to the Center Battery in 1893. In 1900 the armament of this battery was reported to be two 8" rifles and three 10" smoothbores, all mounted; and four dismantled smoothbores.

The 15-inch gun in the West Battery was perhaps the best-known cannon at Fort Canby. It was familiarly known as "Old Betsy." Tradition says that this gun was fired only once, upon which occasion it broke all the glass in the lighthouse.³⁰ As a matter of fact, it was fired at least four times, after which the War Department ordered that it should not be fired because, when pointed in certain directions, it endangered the glass of the lighthouse.³¹ This gun was originally mounted on a wooden platform, but later it was placed on a block of granite set on steel rails.

2. Center Battery. This earthwork was situated northeast of the lighthouse on the center promontory at the southern tip of the cape. Its guns, mounted at an elevation of 231 feet, commanded the river entrance channel. As initially installed, the armament of this battery was as follows:

Three 10" Rodman guns (smoothbore)

The 10-inch guns were mounted in 1866. An 8-inch converted rifle was added to this battery as early as 1863, but it was not mounted until later. In 1893 the 15-inch Rodman gun was moved here from the West Battery; and in 1894 another 8-inch converted rifle was added. In 1900 the armament of this battery was reported to be two 8" rifles, one 15" smoothbore, all mounted; and four dismantled guns.

³⁰Tribune (Ilwaco, Wash.), May 2, 1952.

³¹Capt. J. A. Kress to Asst. Adj. Gen., Dept. of Columbia, Vancouver, September 20, 1875, in Corps of Engineers, Portland District, Civil Files, Box 22, Book 2, microfilm in Oregon Historical Society.

3. East Battery (also known as the Left Battery). This V-shaped earthwork was situated on the northeastern spur at the tip of the cape. Its guns, at an elevation of 169 feet, overlooked Sand Island. As initially installed, the armament of this battery was as follows:

Eight 10" Rodman guns (smoothbore)

All of these guns were mounted in 1866.³²

History of Fort Canby, 1864-1904. The new post on Cape Disappointment was officially activated on April 5, 1864, with the arrival of Company A, 9th Infantry, on the old river steamer John H. Couch from Fort Vancouver. Captain William H. Jordan, in charge of the detachment, became the first commanding officer of the future Fort Canby.³¹

During that year and the next a number of frame garrison structures--officers' quarters, barracks, hospital, carpenter shop, guard house, stable, etc.--were erected along the shore of the cove fronting Baker Bay immediately north of the fortifications. Additional improvements (including a wharf in 1871, a powder magazine in 1869, and a sawmill in 1876) were added from time to time until the post was quite complete and presented an attractive appearance. A breakwater of logs was built along the cove and the area back of it was filled in with rock and earth to form a small parade.

Shortly after the start of construction on Cape Disappointment, work was begun on fortifications on the south shore of the Columbia's entrance. It was decided to erect this second set of defenses not on Point Ellen, as originally planned, but on Point Adams, where the Government already owned some land and where additional property was purchased early in August, 1863. In April, 1865, these fortifications, named Fort Stevens, were ready for occupancy by the line forces. The third set of batteries planned for the defense of the river's mouth, on Chinook Point, were not constructed until the last decade of the century.

³²Except where otherwise indicated, this description of the batteries is based on Miles, Military History of Fort Canby, MS, 24-25.

³³Miles, op. cit., 7-10; Oregonian, April 4, 1864.

Thus, for nearly forty years, the post on Cape Disappointment and Fort Stevens constituted the sole means of protection for the Columbia River.

For a number of years after its establishment, the post on the north side of the entrance was generally known as "Fort Cape Disappointment." When the first garrison reached the point in 1864, the commanding officer of the detachment, Captain W.H. Jordan, dated the letter reporting his arrival at "Fort Columbia," but his superiors disapproved this name and requested Jordan to designate his position simply as "Cape Disappointment, W.T." As far as available records show, the post went for years without an official name being assigned by the Secretary of War as prescribed by regulations. Finally, on December 21, 1874, H. Clay Wood, Assistant Adjutant General of the Department of the Columbia, called attention to the need for an official name and suggested the designation "Fort Canby" in honor of Frevet Major General Edward Richard Sprigg Canby, who had been killed by the Modoc Indians on April 11, 1873. The recommendation was approved, and the Secretary of War designated the post "Fort Canby" in War Department General Orders No. 5, series of 1875. The new name was made public by an order issued by General O.O. Howard, commanding the Department of the Columbia, on February 13, 1875.³⁴

The first unit of artillery troops to garrison the fort on Cape Disappointment was Company L, 2nd Artillery. It arrived on October 8, 1865, relieving the infantry units which had up to that time occupied the post. From its establishment in 1864, Fort Canby was almost continuously garrisoned until after World War I, although in addition to brief periods between the departure of one unit and the arrival of the relieving unit, there were times when the post was inactive. Evidently one such occasion was between 1899 and 1901, when the post seemingly was in charge of the Ordnance Department. A visitor to Fort Canby in late 1899 reported that the post was a "has been," with all its garrison transferred to Fort Stevens except for twelve enlisted men.³⁵ Another such period was between June 30, 1903, and June 16, 1909, when the post was being readied for, and undergoing, major reconstruction.³⁶

³⁴Miles, op. cit., 7-12; Oregonian, February 20, 1875.

³⁵Unidentified clipping, dated January 14, 1900, in Oregon Historical Society, Scrapbook 50, pp. 179-180.

³⁶Miles, op. cit., 38, 61.

Life Saving Station and Weather Station. An official life saving station was established at Fort Canby on September 8, 1877, by Captain J. W. White, of the U. S. Revenue Service. According to tradition, Captain Al Harris had performed life saving services at Cape Disappointment with a volunteer crew for several years before the government station was opened. Certainly, he was in charge of the establishment for many years after its official founding, not resigning until 1893.

The crew of this station--sometimes assisted by the Fort Canby garrison--participated in many heroic rescues over the years. A lookout, constantly maintained at a station near the lighthouse, fired a small cannon when he saw a fishing boat or other vessel in trouble. Upon this signal the crew would man a boat at the Fort Canby wharf and speed to the rescue.

Another important government installation on Cape Disappointment was the weather station. Records of the weather had been kept by the garrison beginning in 1864, but the reports were made irregularly until 1878, when the Signal Corps assigned men to this duty. The station was later under charge of the Weather Bureau. Observers were kept on the top of the cape, reporting wind velocities, condition of the bar, and other data. In many ways, however, the most important part of the work was reporting the arrival and departure of ships at the mouth of the river. In the days before radio, such information was vitally important to shipping interests. The station was connected to Astoria by telegraph in 1888, and from there the reports were relayed to shipping centers everywhere. It is little wonder that a visitor of 1893 was much impressed by the "quiet man resting his spyglass across the big cannon," who, upon identifying an approaching ship, could send the news "round the world." The weather station was closed in 1899 and was reopened at North Head during August, 1902.³⁷

Reconstruction of Fort Canby, 1904-1917. From the time of their first construction, the fortifications at Fort Canby never were considered to be permanent or entirely satisfactory. Built hastily and "of indifferent material," they were reported by 1872 to be "rapidly falling into decay."³⁸ Surviving post records and the correspondence of the Portland District, Corps of Engineers, show that

³⁷Interview with Mrs. Lucile McDonald, May 9, 1956; Miles, op. cit., 34; The Tribune (Ilwaco), August 11, 1950; E. W. Wright, "Trip to Fort Canby," in Sunday Oregonian, June 25, 1893.

³⁸42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., House, Ex. Doc. 1, part 2, p. 71.

frequent rebuildings of the gun platforms and powder magazines were required over the years.

Furthermore, the armament was allowed to become obsolete. The only measures taken to correct this condition during the first forty years of the fort's existence was the installation of four 8-inch converted rifles, one about 1883, two in 1890, and one in 1894. These rifles were described in 1893 as being of "modern pattern." They consisted of old 15-inch guns "choked down" to 8-inch rifled bores.³⁹ A visitor to the fort in 1900 looked at the eleven old 10-inch smoothbore guns then mounted in the batteries and rightly estimated that they were "as harmless as Dundee Reed's bronze lions on Fourteenth St., Portland."⁴⁰

The War Department was well aware of the neglected and practically abandoned condition of both of the forts at the mouth of the Columbia, and had long been seeking appropriations to modernize and strengthen them. In 1886, for instance, the Endicott Board recommended that \$2,919,000 be provided for the defenses of the river.⁴¹ Not until about 1895, however, was the Army able to effectuate a program. The major features of the new plan included the installation of large rifles on disappearing carriages and of mortar batteries at the existing Fort Stevens and Fort Canby and at the long-planned post at Chinook Point. Facilities for mining the river entrance were also to be erected. As a result, during the period from about 1896 to about 1906, an intensive construction program was carried out at Fort Stevens, at Fort Canby, and at the new Fort Columbia on Chinook Point. When the project was completed, the fortifications at the entrance of the Columbia had assumed approximately the form they maintained until World War II.

³⁹E. W. Wright, op. cit.

⁴⁰Unidentified clipping in Oregon Historical Society, Scrapbook 50, pp. 179-180.

⁴¹Edmond S. Meany, History of the State of Washington (New York, 1909), 341-342.

As far as Fort Canby was concerned, the primary result of the new improvement program was the installation of two batteries of 6-inch rifles in concrete emplacements. Funds for the emplacements, in the amount of \$118,000, were allotted on July 15, 1904, and the Corps of Engineers began work on Cape Disappointment during the next month. Incidental to the construction, the old Center Battery, West Battery, Life Saving Station, and boiler house were removed. The emplacements, which had cost less than the original allotment, were completed in December, 1905, and turned over to the Artillery on February 27, 1906. However, the guns and carriages had not been installed by September, 1906, although this part of the work evidently was completed shortly thereafter.⁴² The new batteries were as follows:

1. Battery Harvey Allen. Located a short distance northeast of the lighthouse, this battery originally consisted of three 6-inch rifles on disappearing carriages, 1903 model. After World War I, it is described as consisting of "two 6" RF guns on disappearing carriages."

This battery was named in honor of Lieutenant Colonel Harvey Abner Allen, 2nd U. S. Artillery, whose long and honorable career in the Army had been marked by gallant and meritorious conduct in the Battle of Molino del Rey during the Mexican War and by service in the defense of Fort Pickens, Florida, during the Civil War.⁴³

Battery Allen was "the last 6" battery of its type in the United States to be manned." It was not inactivated until March 9, 1945.⁴⁴

⁴²The Tribune (Ilwaco), June 24, 1949; various letters and reports in Corps of Engineers, Portland District, Civil Files, 1871-1926, Box 23, Books 20-22, microfilm in Oregon Historical Society.

⁴³H. I. Hawthorne, Military Careers of Officers of the Army and Navy in Honor of Whom Coast Artillery Posts and Batteries in the Department of the Columbia Have Been Named (typewritten, n.p., 1908), 25-26.

⁴⁴Clatsop County Chapter of the Oregon Historical Society, General History, Harbor Defenses of the Columbia, 1864-1945 (mimeographed, n.p., December 1, 1947), 6, 13; and Appendix C, p. C-1.

2. Battery Elijah O'Flyng. Located on the site of the old Center Battery, this battery consisted of two 6-inch rifles on disappearing carriages, 1903 model. It was named in honor of Ensign Elijah Temple O'Flyng, who served as a sergeant and, later, as ensign in the 23rd U. S. Infantry during the War of 1812. He died as the result of wounds received during a sortie from Fort Erie on September 17, 1814.⁴⁵

Although this construction project, completed in 1906, gave Fort Canby the armament required to make it an effective coast defense unit, the garrison accommodations had not been modernized and left much to be desired. In his report for 1906, the Secretary of War recommended a number of improvements at the post. As a result, appropriations were obtained, and during 1907 and 1908 new barracks and other buildings were constructed.⁴⁶

The new batteries had been completed only a few years when conditions made them virtually obsolete. The progressive construction work on the jetties at the mouth of the Columbia, commenced on the south side of the entrance in 1889, had the effect of throwing the real entrance of the river farther and farther out to sea. As early as 1913 Artillery officers reported that the entrance was nearly out of the effective range of the armament of Fort Stevens and was only under fire from Fort Canby. However, the 6-inch guns of the latter post were considered "entirely inadequate" for use against a modern fleet, since they could be put out of action by ships lying beyond the range of the large mortars at Fort Stevens. Thus Fort Canby required strengthening if it were to meet the responsibilities of its increasingly important position in relation to the new entrance, and the installation of a mortar battery was recommended.⁴⁷

Fort Canby during World War I. As a result of the entrance of the United States into the first World War in 1917, the garrison

⁴⁵Hawthorne, op. cit., 25-26.

⁴⁶Oregonian, June 14, 1931.

⁴⁷Pacific Coast Artillery District, Annual Report, June 30, 1913, in Corps of Engineers, Portland District, Civil Files, 1871-1926, Box 24, Book 30, microfilm in O. H. S.

of the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia were greatly expanded, and the Coast Artillery units of the Oregon National Guard were mobilized there. Figures are not available, however, concerning the garrison at Fort Canby.

New construction during the period of the 1917-1918 hostilities was meager in the Columbia River defenses, but much modernization and renovation was accomplished. As far as Fort Canby was concerned, the most important change was the creation of a new mortar battery. This installation was made by removing two 12-inch mortars from each of the two pits of Battery Clark at Fort Stevens and moving them to Fort Canby.

The new four-gun battery, named Battery Guenther, was located on the low ground behind the tip of the cape. It proved to be subject to earth slides, which "time and again" filled its pits and produced a serious maintenance problem. The battery did not prove satisfactory until 1942, when the excess hill overhang was removed.⁴⁸

Actually, Fort Canby suffered a loss of strength during World War I. The three 6-inch guns of Battery Allen were ordered removed for use on railway mounts overseas. Evidently, however, only one gun was removed; or, two of the guns were later replaced, since available sources indicate that Battery Allen was armed with two 6-inch guns during the years following World War I.⁴⁹

Very shortly after World War I, the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia were reduced to a state of almost complete inactivity. Only one company was maintained at Fort Stevens, and from it were drawn small caretaker detachments for Fort Canby and Fort Columbia. For a number of years prior to 1931, one sergeant and one or two other enlisted men constituted the sole force at the two latter establishments, and their duties were not arduous. In fact, it is reported that they had plenty of time to keep cows and sell milk to neighboring fishermen.⁵⁰ From 1924 to 1939 the sole garrison troop assigned to the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia was Battery E

⁴⁸Clatsop County Chapter of the Oregon Historical Society, op. cit., 6.

⁴⁹Memorandum from Chief of Engineers, August 27, 1917, in Corps of Engineers, Portland District, Civil Files, 1871-1926, Box 24, Book 31, p. 123, microfilm in O. H. S.; Memorandum on electrical installations at seacoast fortifications, November 6, 1918, in ibid.; see also Clatsop County Chapter of the O. H. S., op. cit., Appendix C, p. C-1.

⁵⁰Oregonian, June 14, 1931.

of the 3rd Coast Artillery.

During a Government economy drive in 1931, General Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff, recommended "partial disposal" of Fort Canby, but evidently no action was taken, since the reservation remained intact. At that time it was reported that the post was still armed by a battery of mortars and two batteries of "light artillery."⁵¹ The quiet of the post was broken only for about two weeks each summer, when National Guard units manned the post's 6-inch guns for training purposes.

Fort Canby during World War II. Unsettled world conditions resulted in increased War Department appropriations in 1939, and the troops at Fort Stevens were increased. As the result of a reorganization of the Coast Artillery on February 1, 1940, units of the 18th Coast Artillery were activated at that post. On September 16, 1940, the 249th Coast Artillery Regiment of the Oregon National Guard was ordered into active service and, after a period of training, was employed to complement the garrison of the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia River. At first all units of the regiment were stationed at Fort Stevens, but on February 21, 1941, Battery B, 249th Coast Artillery, was dispatched to Fort Canby, and a detachment from that unit took over guard duty at Fort Columbia. On that same date, February 21, Fort Canby and two of its batteries, Allen and Guenther, were activated.

At about the same time, under a War Department appropriation of \$130,000 to be shared by Fort Canby and Fort Columbia, construction of new barracks and other structures needed to house additional troops at Fort Canby was begun. The purpose of this activity was to place all three units of the Harbor Defense of the Columbia--Fort Stevens, Fort Canby, and Fort Columbia--on an active basis, both to defend the river's entrance against surprise attack and to serve as training grounds for coast artillery troops. Fort Stevens was headquarters of the command.⁵²

On March 18, 1941, Battery E, 249th Coast Artillery, was added to the garrison at Fort Canby, followed on April 17 by Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, of the same regiment. By July 31,

⁵¹ Oregonian, June 14, 1931.

⁵² Seattle Times, December 13, 1940; Oregonian, April 6, 1941.

1941, activation of all serviceable gun batteries in the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia had been ordered, and "the defenses were at the fullest strength possible without mine fields or new armament."⁵³

After the attack upon the United States by Japan on December 7, 1941, military activity in the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia greatly increased. The declaration of war brought authority to activate the mine fields at the river entrance. This operation began on December 25, 1941, and was completed March 3, 1942. Other phases of this activity included the laying of thirty-four linear miles of barbed wire around strategic points in the command area, a great expansion of searchlight defense, and an intensified training of troops.

Long before World War II, the War Department realized that the armament of the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia was out-moded, and planning boards had worked out projects for the installation of weapons capable of coping with modern naval craft. Under the impetus of war, these plans were put into effect.

The first results were felt at Fort Canby on August 12, 1942, when Battery Guenther was inactivated and its personnel made available for more pressing duties. The 12-inch mortars of the batteries at the mouth of the Columbia were no longer suitable for fire against targets with the speed of World War II naval vessels.

The modernization program was further represented at Fort Canby by the installation of Battery 247, located on McKenzie Head and consisting of two 6-inch, long-range, rapid-fire rifles mounted on barbette carriages. Construction was begun on February 9, 1943, and the battery was activated on March 9, 1945. It was provided with the most modern systems for computing and transmitting fire data. The cost of this battery is listed as \$230,000.⁵⁴

⁵³Clatsop County Chapter of the Oregon Historical Society, op. cit., 10.

⁵⁴[Map] Dept. of the Army, Office of the Seattle District Engineer, North Pacific Division, Real Estate, Fort Canby, Current Status Military Reservation, approved 22 June, 1954.

Another addition to the defense of Fort Canby came on January 12, 1943, with the installation of antimotor-torpedo-boat defense in the form of AMTB #1. This battery consisted of two 90 mm guns on fixed carriage Me, located on the north side of the Columbia near Jetty A, and two 90 mm guns on mobile carriage MIAI.

Radio detection and ranging equipment of the latest types were also installed at Fort Canby. These included S 1 Station (SCR 682), a general surveillance set located on North Head; and D 1 Station (SCR 296A), a sea coast artillery fire control set also on North Head; and D 2 Station (SCR 296A), another artillery fire control set on Cape Disappointment.

It is not possible in this report to list all the military units, with their several changes in designations, which garrisoned Fort Canby during World War II. Suffice it to say that, as during the entire previous history of the military occupation of the fortification, no events outside the normal routine of training and garrison life appear to have occurred, except upon the night of June 2, 1942. About midnight on that day a Japanese submarine fired nine shells which fell harmlessly at Fort Stevens, Oregon. This event has been termed the only bombardment by foreign craft of a fortification within the continental limits of the United States to occur since the War of 1812.

By July 7, 1945, the war had progressed so favorably that the removal of the Columbia River mine field was ordered. On July 16, 1945, AMTB #1 was inactivated, and preparations were made for the eventual inactivation of Battery 247. Reductions in the size of the garrison followed rapidly.⁵⁵

Inactivation of Fort Canby. On March 28, 1947, the three forts comprising the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia were listed by the War Department among 35 Army posts and airfields declared in excess to the needs of the War Department. By October of that year

⁵⁵Except where otherwise indicated, this account of Fort Canby is based upon Clatsop County Chapter of the Oregon Historical Society, General History, Harbor Defense of the Columbia, which, in turn, is largely based upon the post diaries of Fort Stevens.

all Army personnel had been withdrawn from the reservation; and the World War II barracks and other salvageable structures were scheduled for sale and removal from the area.⁵⁶ The War Department stripped the reservation of all its armament and placed the property in the custody of the Corps of Engineers.

In compliance with established excess Federal property procedures, 491.98 acres of the reservation were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department, U. S. Coast Guard, on March 9, 1948. Another 940 acres, more or less, were transferred to the Corps of Engineers, Civil Works Project, Fort Canby Jetties, on December 7, 1954. And 272 acres, more or less, were reported as excess to the General Services Administration by the Corps of Engineers on January 26, 1955.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Oregonian, March 29, 1947; Seattle Sunday Times, Oct. 19, 1947.

⁵⁷Map Dept. of the Army, Office of the Seattle District Engineer, Real Estate, Fort Canby Military Reservation, approved 20 September, 1948 (Drawing No. SE-RE-505).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The preparation of this historical sketch of Cape Disappointment was made possible by the cooperation of a number of public agencies and private individuals. Limitations of space make it impossible to mention each by name, but to all, thanks are expressed. Special mention must be made, however, of the following: Mrs. Lucile McDonald, of the Seattle Times, who freely made available the notes of many years of research; Mr. Frank Turner, Curator of Fort Columbia State Park and former editor of the Ilwaco Tribune, who permitted the use of his valuable scrapbooks of historical articles relating to Cape Disappointment; Mr. Thomas Vaughan, Director, and Miss Priscilla Knuth, Research Associate, of the Oregon Historical Society, who generously gave of their time and knowledge in assisting the research; Mr. J. Ronald Todd, Chief Reference Librarian, and Mrs. Margaret McClure, Reference Librarian, Pacific Northwest Section, University of Washington Library, who supplied many research leads; and Mr. Willard O. Youngs, Assistant Librarian, Seattle Public Library. Mr. Albert H. Culverwell, Historian, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, took the photographs used in this report. Mr. Everett Oscarson, Office of the District Engineer, Portland District, Corps of Engineers, kindly made available important post records of Fort Canby which have since been transferred to the National Archives.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

As far as the present writer has been able to determine, there are no comprehensive, detailed, and documented histories of Cape Disappointment and Fort Canby. Studies have been made of various phases of the story but, for the most part, they are undocumented and somewhat sketchy, thus being rather unsatisfactory as sources. Nevertheless, they have been most useful during the preparation of the present study.

By far the most helpful secondary work relating to Fort Canby is the Clatsop County Chapter of the Oregon Historical Society, General History, Harbor Defenses of the Columbia (mimeographed, n.p., December 1, 1947). Based largely upon the post diaries of Fort Stevens, which apparently are no longer conveniently available, it is particularly useful for the period following World War I. Also extremely helpful for the earlier period of the fort's history is the manuscript official post history, Military History of Fort Canby, W. T., started by Captain Evan Miles on December 21, 1874, and continued to July 13, 1909, by various persons. This document probably is now (June 5, 1957) en route to the National Archives.

A useful general survey of the early history of Cape Disappointment, especially for the period 1775 to 1846, is Barbara Coit Elliott, "Cape Disappointment in History," in Washington Historical Quarterly, XIV (October 1923), 262-268. Particular mention must be made of the fine articles, based upon extensive research, by Mrs. Lucile McDonald, "The Army Vacates Old Fort Canby," "Cape Disappointment Light Station is State's Oldest," and "State Seeks to Acquire Historic Fort Canby Area for Park Use," which appeared, respectively, in the Seattle Times for October 19, 1947; December 13, 1953; and June 24, 1956. Articles by Mr. Frank Turner which appeared in the Tribune (Ilwaco, Wash.) on June 24, 1949; August 3, 1951; May 2, August 22, 1952; and November 26, December 3, 10, 24, 1954, were also extremely useful in the preparation of the present report, for they are based on interviews with local pioneers and upon sources not readily available elsewhere. The book, Pacific Graveyard, by James A. Gibbs, Jr. (Portland, c. 1950) contains an account of the wrecks at the mouth of the Columbia, a phase of the Cape Disappointment story which time and space would not permit treating in the present report.

Otherwise, however, the present study has been based upon a great variety of scattered source materials, most of which are cited

in the footnotes. Several valuable collections of original source materials on the history of Fort Canby exist, particularly the official War Department records in the National Archives and the microfilms of the Corps of Engineers, Portland District, records in the Oregon Historical Society, but the limitations under which this study was conducted did not permit more than a cursory use of the latter and permitted no use of the former. Likewise, the printed annual reports of the Secretary of War, Chief of Engineers, and Treasury Department could be examined only at random. The present study, therefore, is little more than an outline which may serve as a point of departure for some future student.

Photo No. 1
McKenzie Head, looking north from near North Jetty.

Photo No. 2
View from top of McKenzie Head, looking southeast,
Cape Disappointment Light in center.

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Photo No. 3
Battery 247 gun emplacement, top of McKenzie Head.
North Jetty in background.

- -

Photo No. 4
Battery 247 gun emplacement, top of McKenzie Head.

Photo No. 5
Ammunition storage casemate, Battery 247

Photo No. 6
O'Neil Lake



Cape Disappointment Lighthouse, Mark Berhow 2016



Battery 245, Mark Berhow 2016



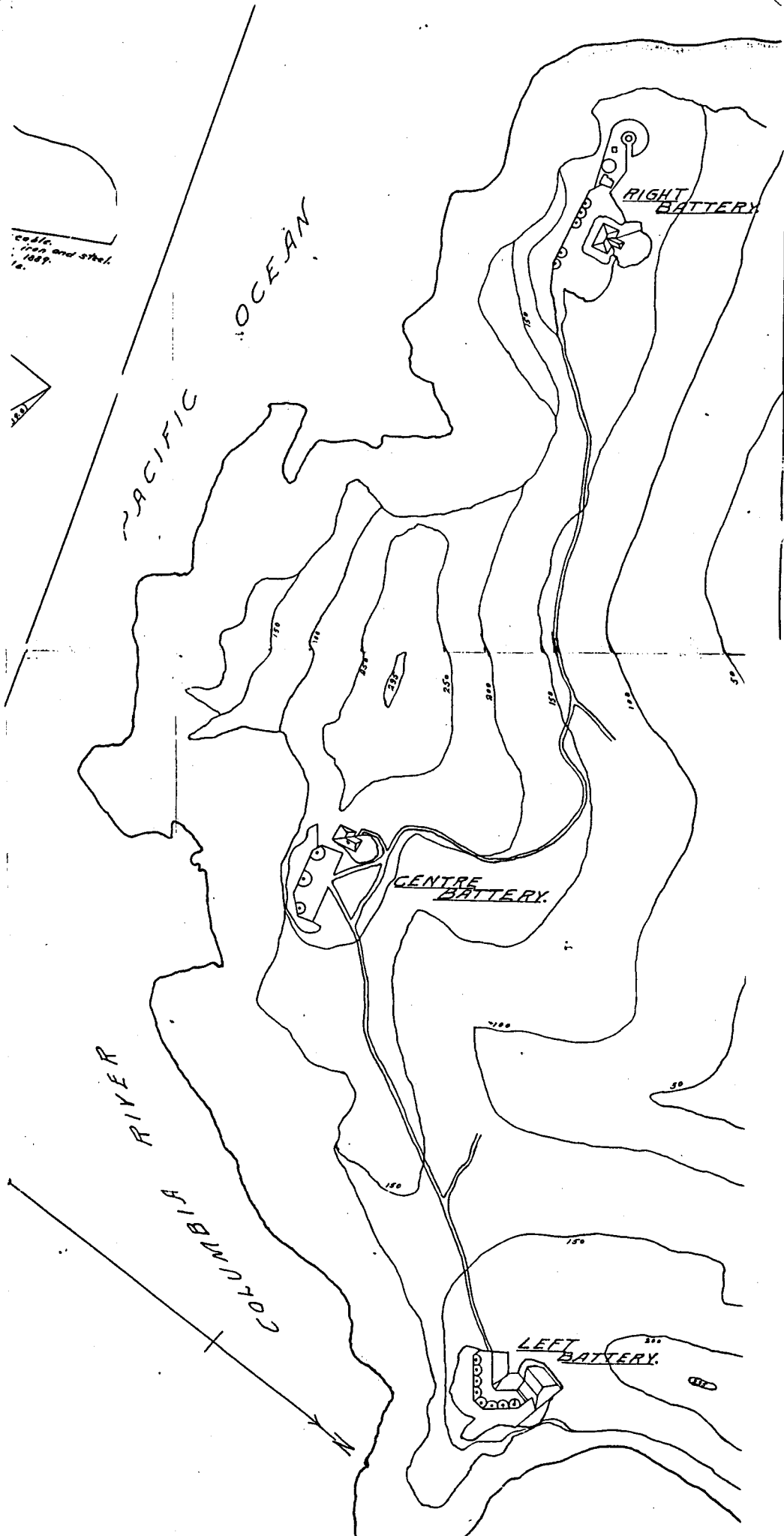
Battery Guenther, Mark Berhow 2016



Battery Allen, Mark Berhow 2016



Battery O'Flyng, Mark Berhow 2018



DEFENSIVE WORKS

FORT CANBY, WASH.

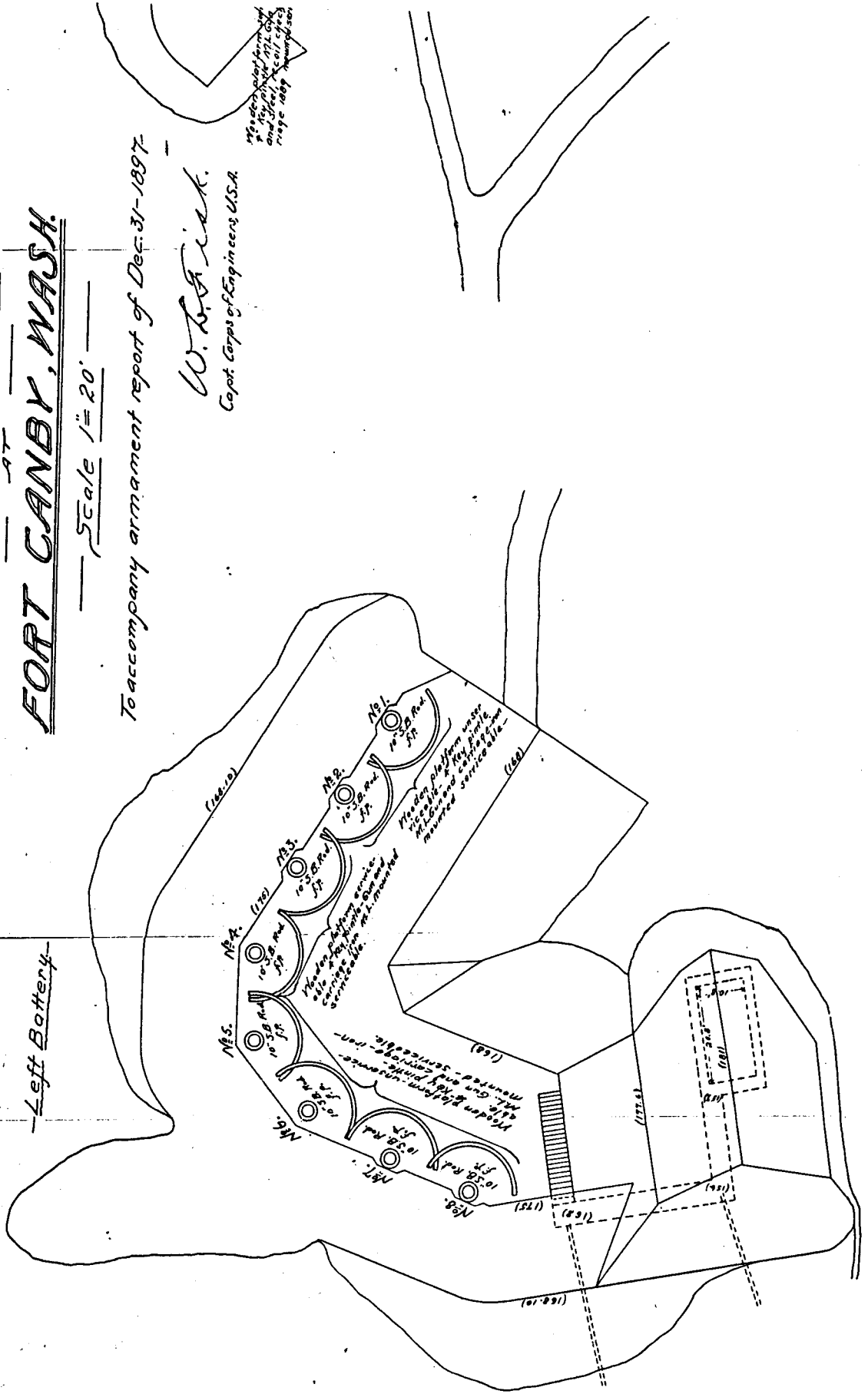
Scale 1"=20'

To accompany armament report of Dec. 31-1897

W. S. Fisk

Capt. Corps of Engineers U.S.A.

Reference to performance of
and to the report of the
page 1897



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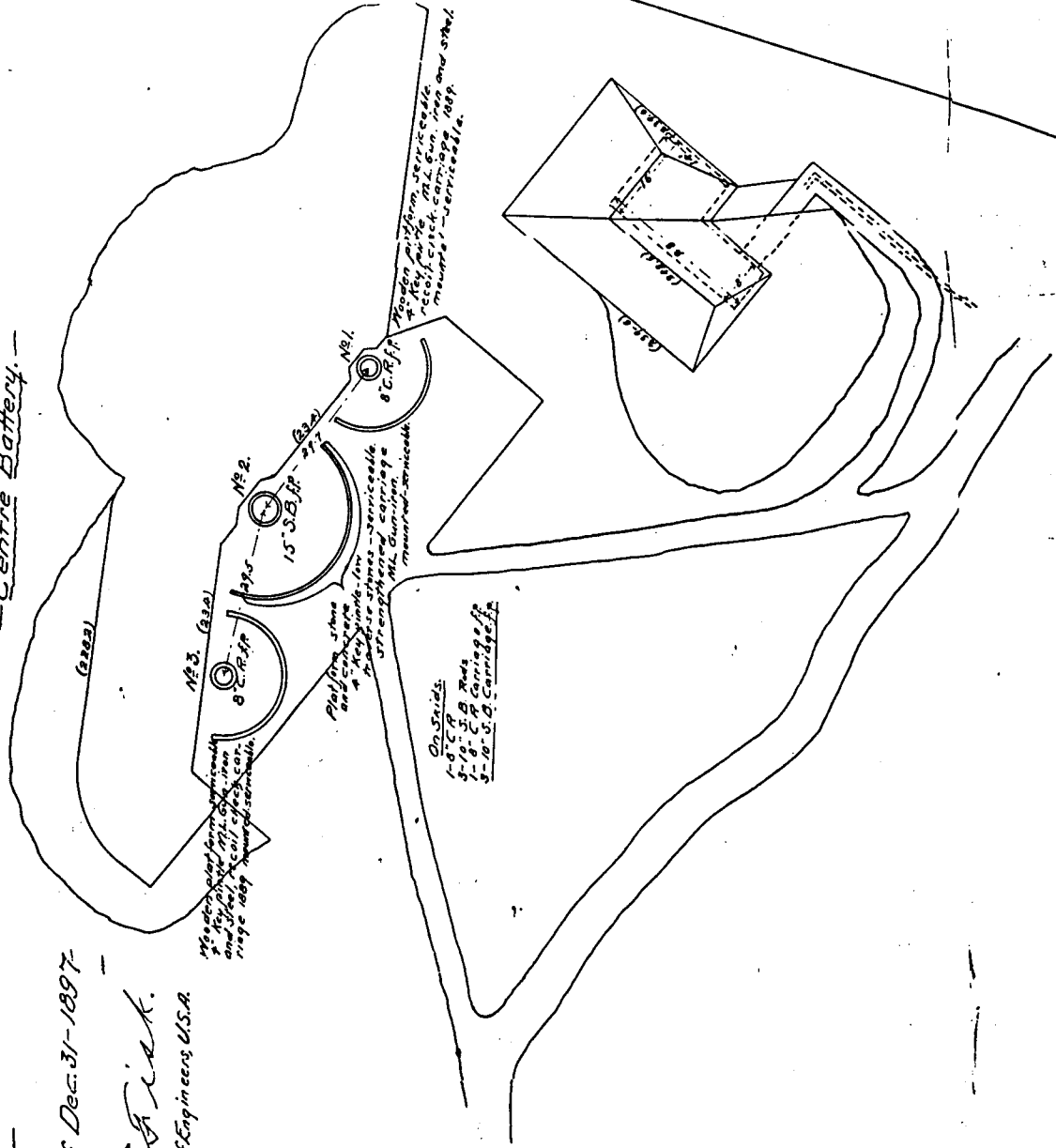
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Dec. 31 - 1897

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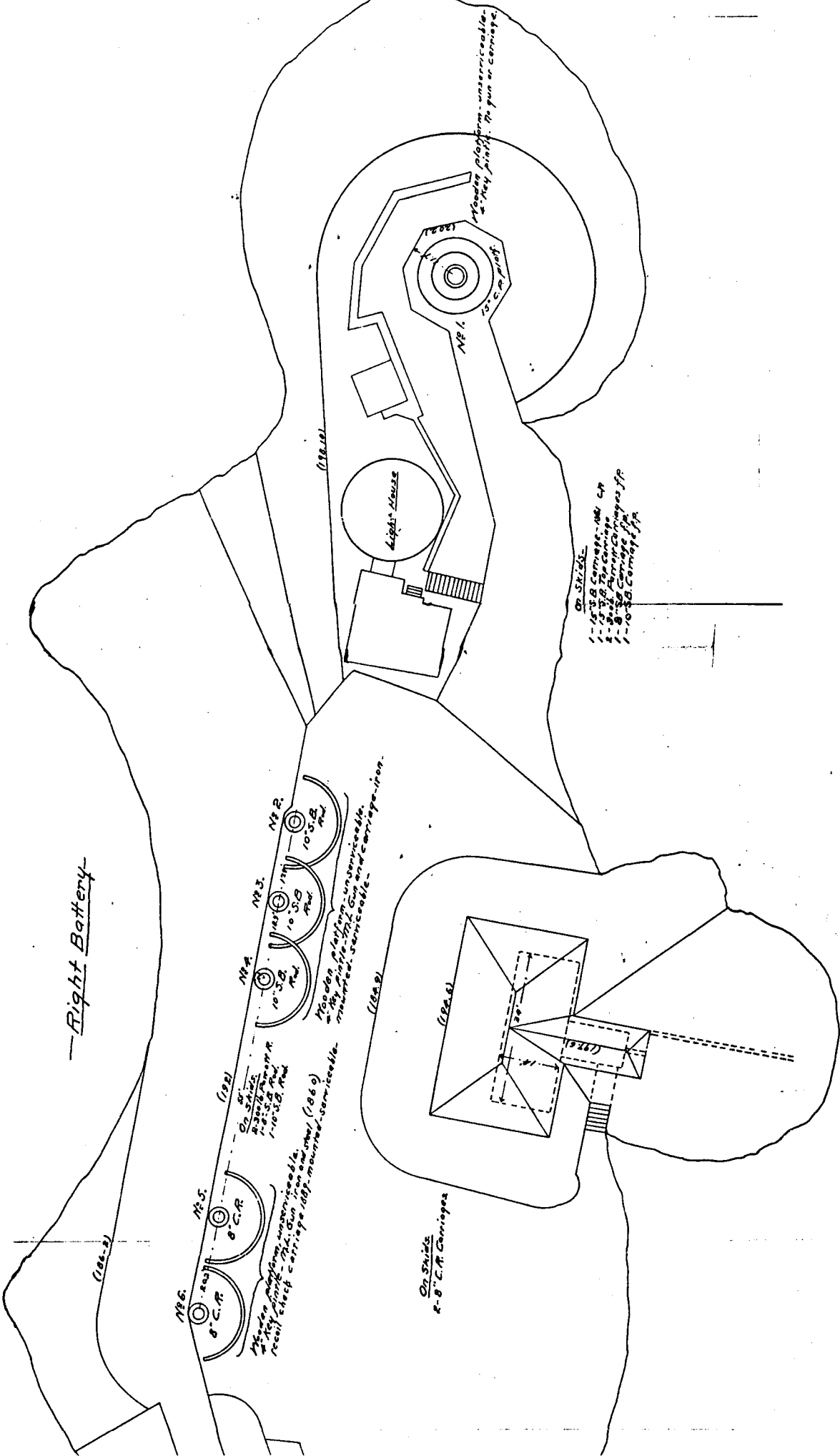
Engineers U.S.A.

Centre Battery.



- On Site:
- 1-8" C.A.
- 2-12" 3" B. Rods
- 3-8" 3" B. Carriage
- 3-8" 3" B. Carriage

Right Battery

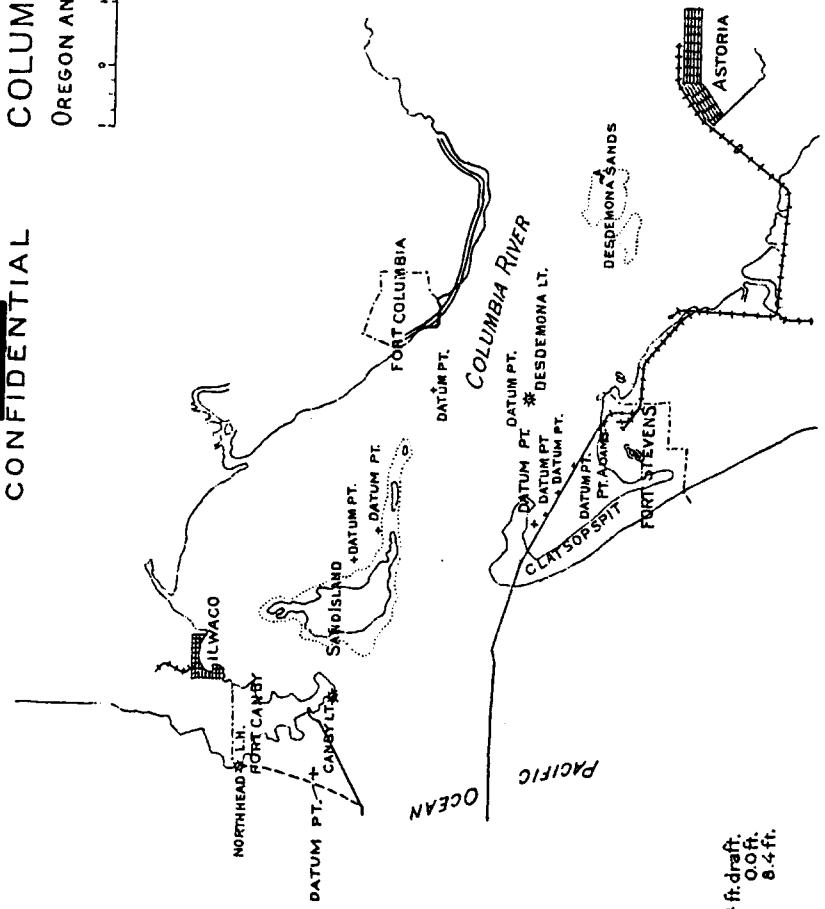
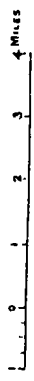


EDITION OF APR. 23, 1915.
REVISIONS: NOV. 8, 1916; DEC. 15, 1919;
APR. 26, 1921; APR. 23, 1925;
OCT. 13, 1925; OCT. 1934

SERIAL NUMBER [REDACTED]

CONFIDENTIAL

MOUTH OF THE
COLUMBIA RIVER
OREGON AND WASHINGTON



Safe for vessels of 34 ft. draft.
M.L.L.W. 0.0 ft.
M.H.H.W. 8.4 ft.

Caretaking Status



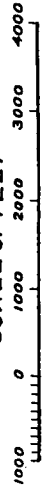
EDITION OF APR. 26, 1921;
 REVISIONS: APR. 23, 1925;
 OCT. 15, 1928; OCT. 1934

SERIAL NUMBER [REDACTED]
 CONFIDENTIAL

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER
FORT CANBY

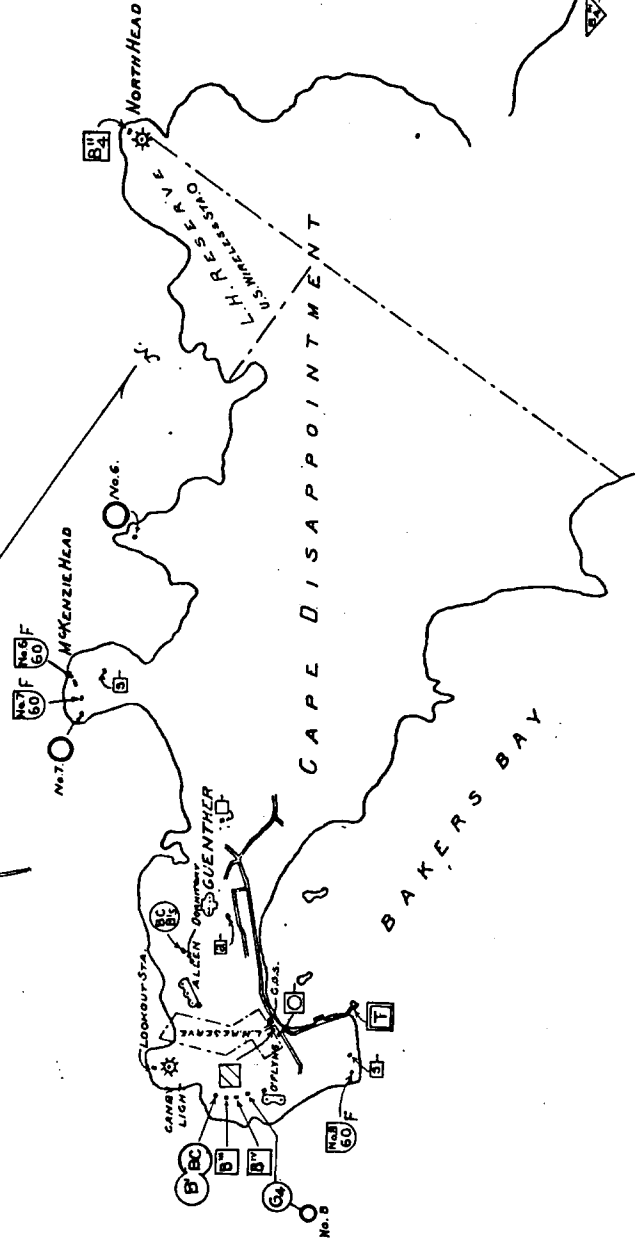
BATTERIES
 GUENTHER...4-12"
 ALLEN...2-6"
 O'FLYNG

GENERAL MAP



† Armament dismantled

NORTH JETTY



Caretaking Status

EDITION OF APR. 26, 1921.
 REVISIONS: APR. 23, 1925;
 OCT. 15, 1928; OCT. 1934

LEGEND

1. COMDG. OFFICERS QRS.
 2. OFFICERS QRS.
 3.
 4.
 5.
 6.
 7.
 8.
 9. RESERVOIR.
 10. LAVATORY.
 11. SPRINGS.
 12. DORMITORY.
 13. OIL HOUSE.
 14. STABLE.
 15. WAGON SHED.
 16. FORMER SW.BD. ROOM.
 17. SHED.
 18. 3 CANTMT. BLDGS.
 19.
 20. ORDN. STOREHOUSE. (5.)
 21.
 22.
 23. ENGR. OFFICE.
 24. ENGR. STOREHOUSE.
 25.
 26. ENGR. STABLE.
 27.
 28. ENGR. HOSPITAL.
 29. COAST GUARD STATION.
 30. COAST GUARD BOAT HOUSE.
 31.
 32. LOOKOUT STATION.

1. COMDG. OFFICERS QRS.
 2. OFFICERS QRS.
 3. OFFICERS QRS.
 4.
 5.
 6.
 7.
 8.
 9. RESERVOIR.
 10. LAVATORY.
 11. SPRINGS.
 12. DORMITORY.
 13. OIL HOUSE.
 14. STABLE.
 15. WAGON SHED.
 16. FORMER SW.BD. ROOM.
 17. SHED.
 18. 3 CANTMT. BLDGS.
 19.
 20. ORDN. STOREHOUSE. (5.)
 21.
 22.
 23. ENGR. OFFICE.
 24. ENGR. STOREHOUSE.
 25.
 26. ENGR. STABLE.
 27.
 28. ENGR. HOSPITAL.
 29. COAST GUARD STATION.
 30. COAST GUARD BOAT HOUSE.
 31.
 32. LOOKOUT STATION.

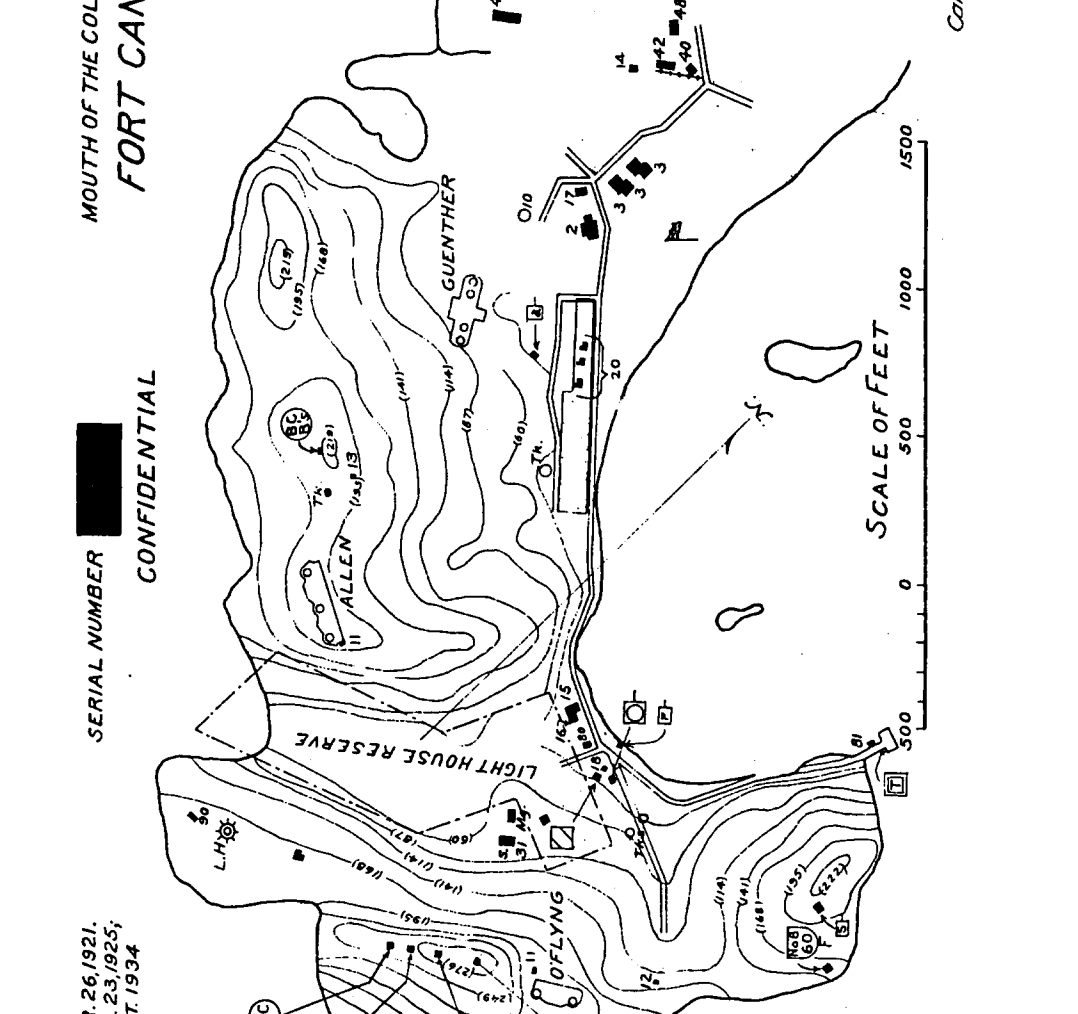
1. COMDG. OFFICERS QRS.
 2. OFFICERS QRS.
 3. OFFICERS QRS.
 4.
 5.
 6.
 7.
 8.
 9. RESERVOIR.
 10. LAVATORY.
 11. SPRINGS.
 12. DORMITORY.
 13. OIL HOUSE.
 14. STABLE.
 15. WAGON SHED.
 16. FORMER SW.BD. ROOM.
 17. SHED.
 18. 3 CANTMT. BLDGS.
 19.
 20. ORDN. STOREHOUSE. (5.)
 21.
 22.
 23. ENGR. OFFICE.
 24. ENGR. STOREHOUSE.
 25.
 26. ENGR. STABLE.
 27.
 28. ENGR. HOSPITAL.
 29. COAST GUARD STATION.
 30. COAST GUARD BOAT HOUSE.
 31.
 32. LOOKOUT STATION.

SERIAL NUMBER
 CONFIDENTIAL

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER
 FORT CANBY-DI.

BATTERIES
 GUENTHER.....4-12" A
 ALLEN.....2-6" D
 O'FLYNG

† Armament dismountec



SCALE OF FEET
 0 500 1000 1500

Caretaking Status.

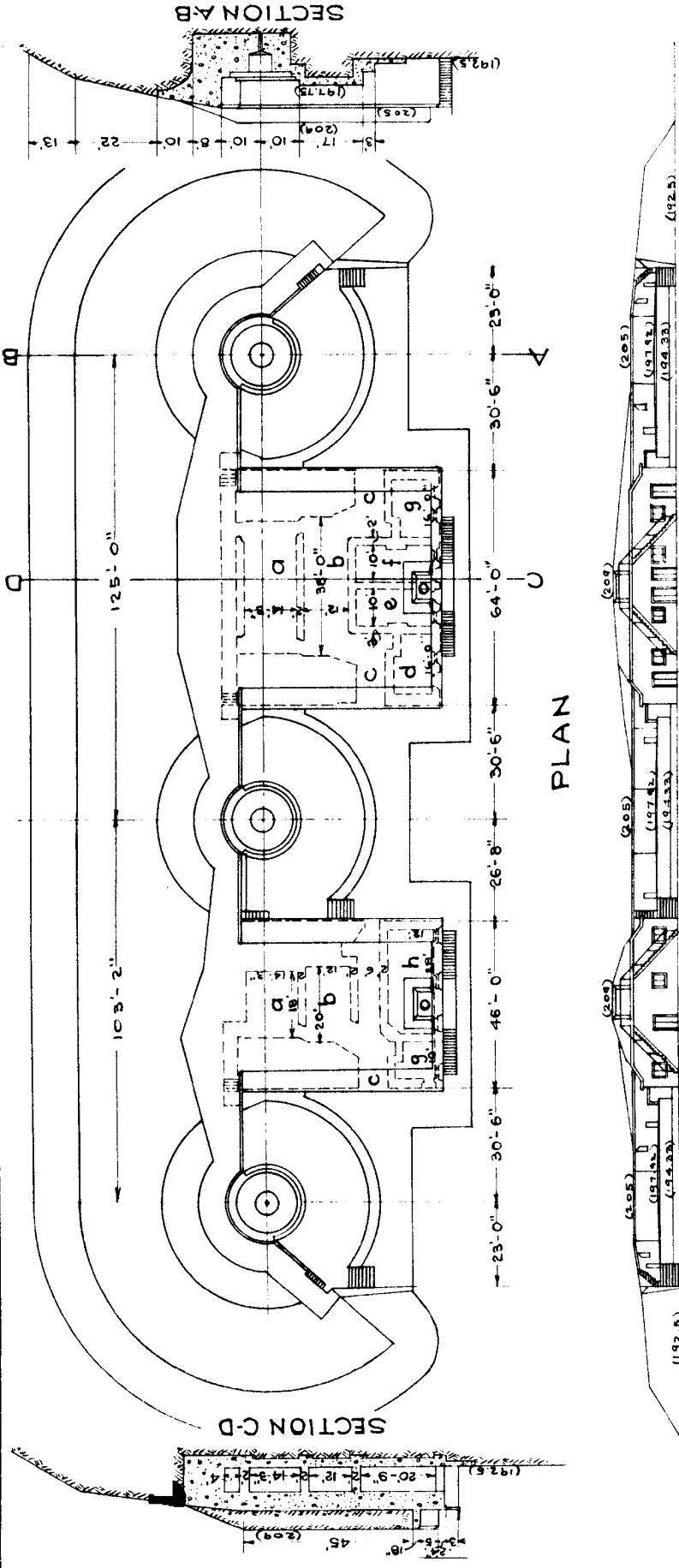
REPORT OF COMPLETED WORKS - SEACOAST FORTIFICATIONS
(Battery Plan)

COAST DEFENSES OF THE COLUMBIA
FORT CANBY
BATTERY HARVEY ALLEN

No. of Guns 3
Caliber 6" Carriage "Dis." L.H.

Corrected to

Form 7.



LEGEND

- a - Powder Room
- b - Shell Room
- c - Passage Way
- d - Storage Battery Room
- e - Guard Room
- f - Office
- g - Store Room
- h - Sleeping Room
- o - Observing Station

Note: Plane of Reference - Mean Lower Low Water.

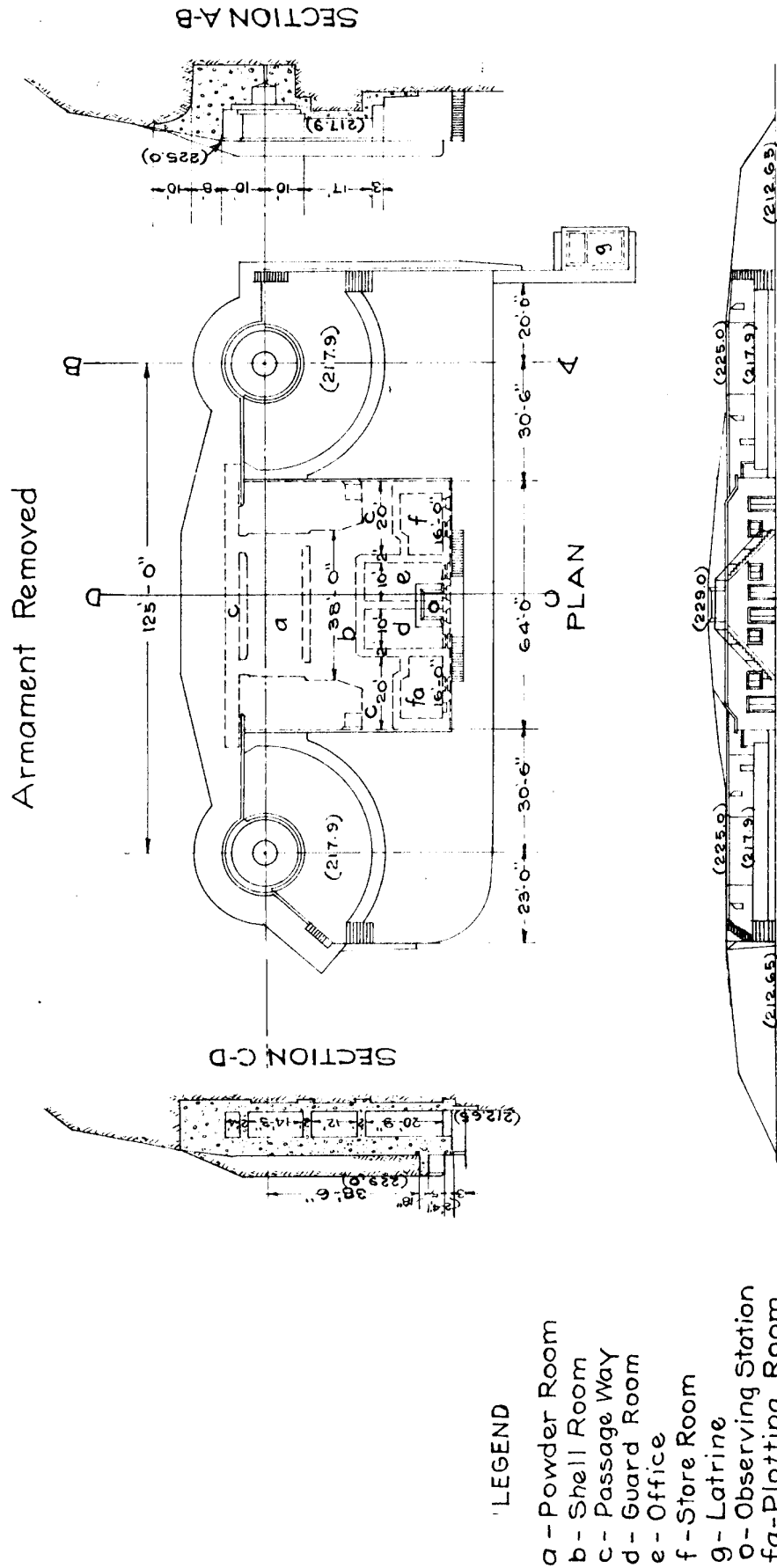
REPORT OF COMPLETED WORKS - SEACOAST FORTIFICATIONS
(Battery Plan)

COAST DEFENSES OF THE COLUMBIA
FORT CANBY
BATTERY ELIJAH O'FLYNG

No. of Guns _____ Caliber _____ Carriage _____

Corrected to _____

Form 7.

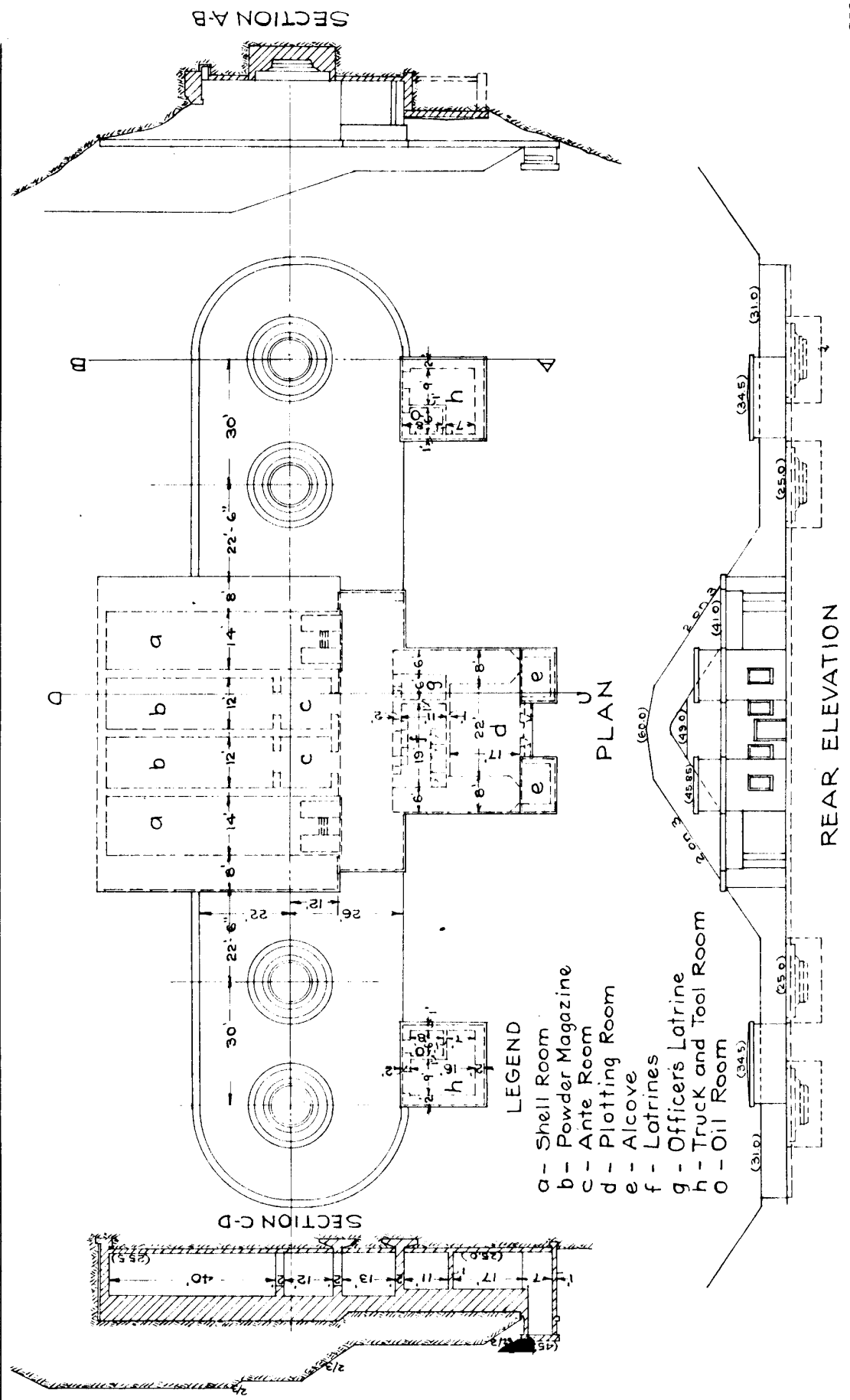
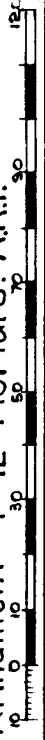


REPORT OF COMPLETED WORKS-SEACOAST FORTIFICATIONS
(Battery Plan)

COAST DEFENSES OF THE COLUMBIA
FORT CANBY
BATTERY GUNTHER
Armament 4-12" Mortars. A.R.F.

Corrected to June 30, 1922.

Form 7



LEGEND

- a - Shell Room
- b - Powder Magazine
- c - Ante Room
- d - Plotting Room
- e - Alcove
- f - Latrines
- g - Officers Latrine
- h - Truck and Tool Room
- o - Oil Room

REPORT OF COMPLETED WORKS - SEACOAST FORTIFICATIONS

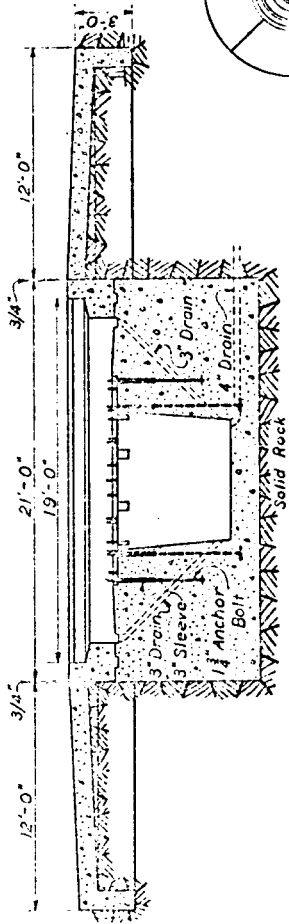
HARBOR DEFENSES OF THE COLUMBIA
FORT CANBY, WASHINGTON

BATTERY 247

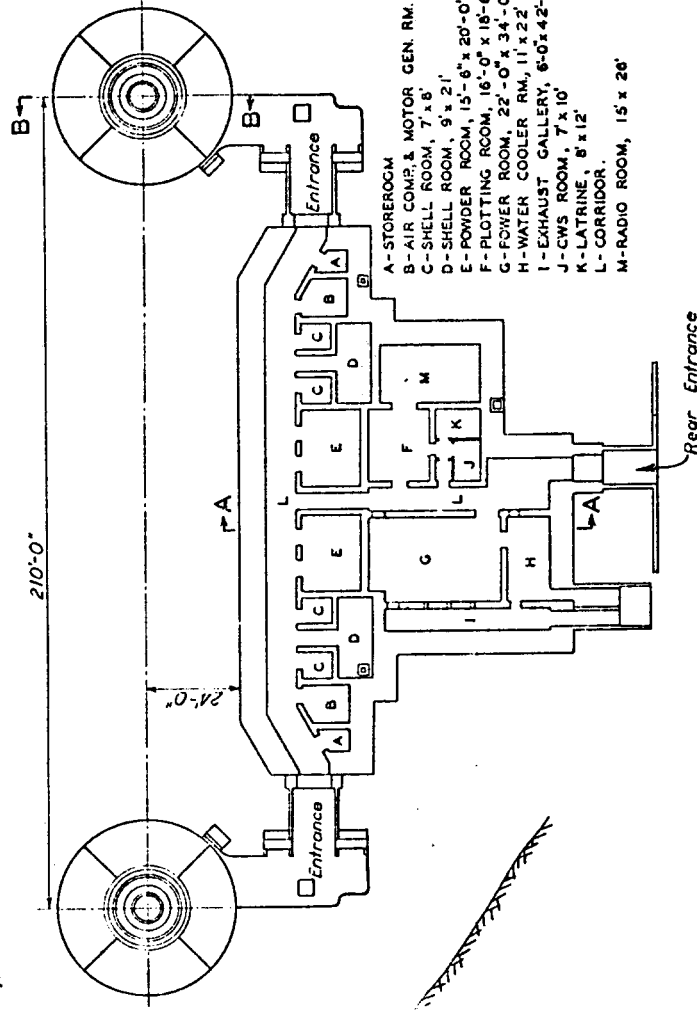
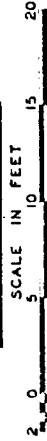
NO OF GUNS 2 CALIBER 6 IN CARRIAGE BARBETTE M-4

SCALES AS SHOWN

PART VII CORRECTED TO 1 APRIL 1944

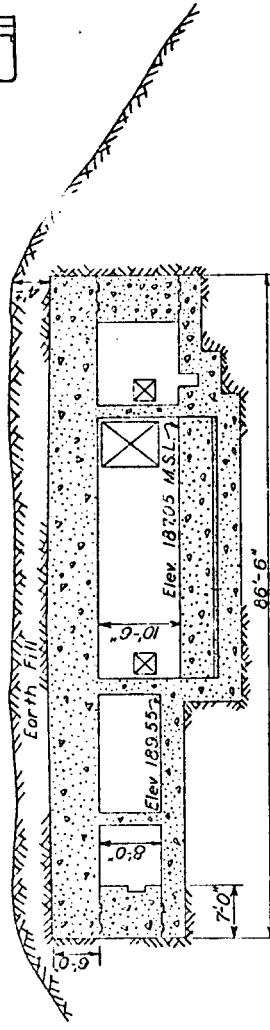
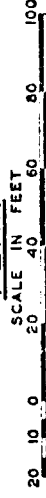


SECTION B-B

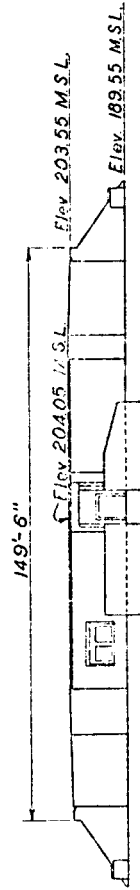
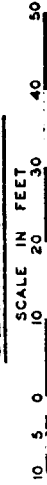


- A-STOREROOM
- B-AIR COMP. & MOTOR GEN. RM.
- C-SHELL ROOM, 7' x 8'
- D-SHELL ROOM, 9' x 21'
- E-POWDER ROOM, 15'-6" x 20'-0"
- F-PLOTTING ROOM, 16'-0" x 18'-6"
- G-POWER ROOM, 22'-0" x 34'-0"
- H-WATER COOLER RM, 11' x 22'
- I-EXHAUST GALLERY, 8'-0" x 42'-6"
- J-CWS ROOM, 7' x 10'
- K-LATRINE, 8' x 12'
- L-CORRIDOR.
- M-RADIO ROOM, 15' x 26'

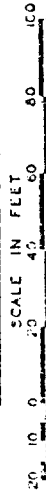
PLAN

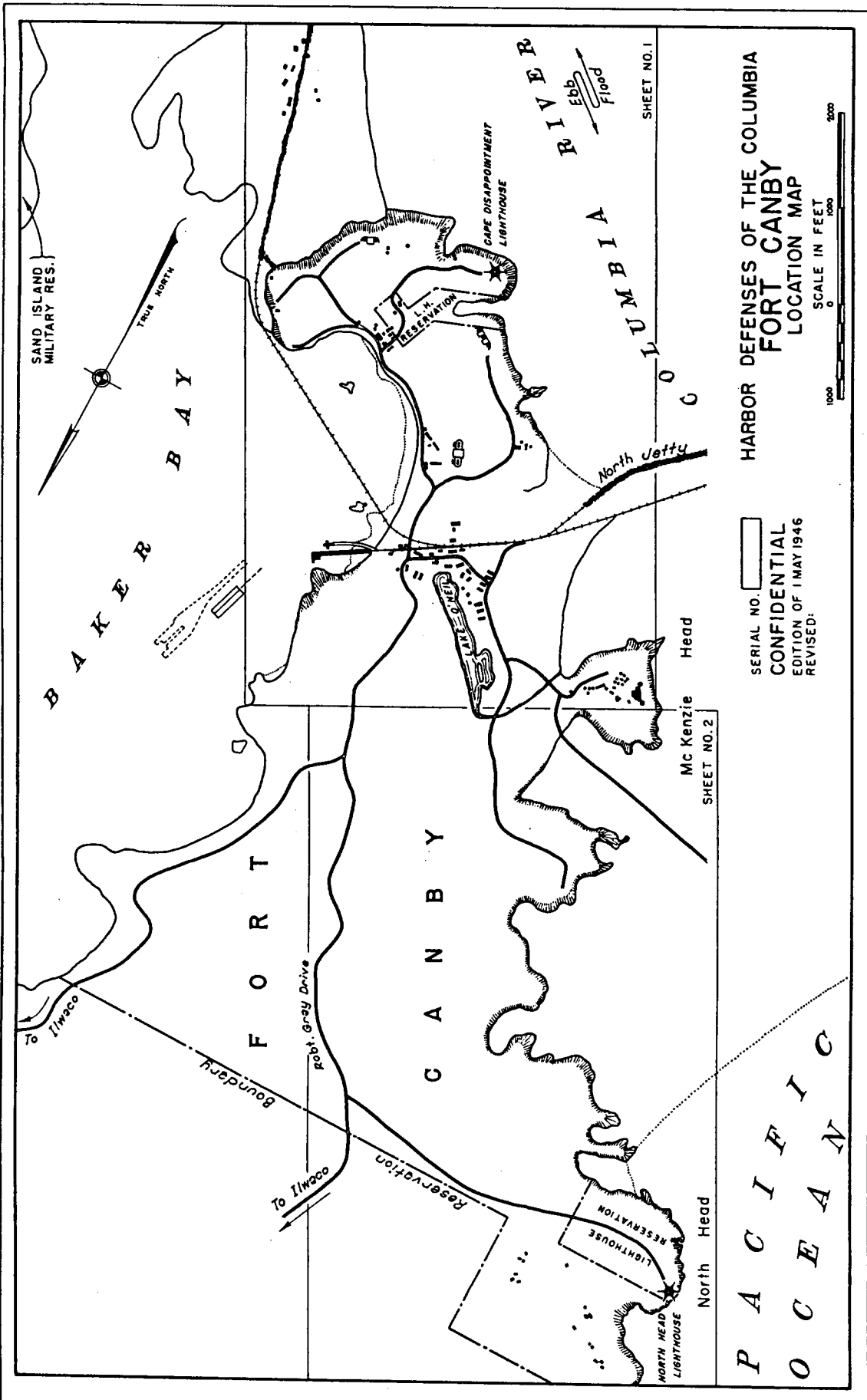


SECTION A-A



REAR ELEVATION





SAND ISLAND
MILITARY RES.

TRUE NORTH

BAKER BAY

F O R T

Boundary

To Ilwaco

Reservation

C A N B Y

L.A. RESERVATION

CAPE DISAPPOINTMENT
LIGHTHOUSE

R I V E R

Ebb
Flood

C O L U M B I A

North Jetty

SHEET NO. 1

Mc Kenzie Head

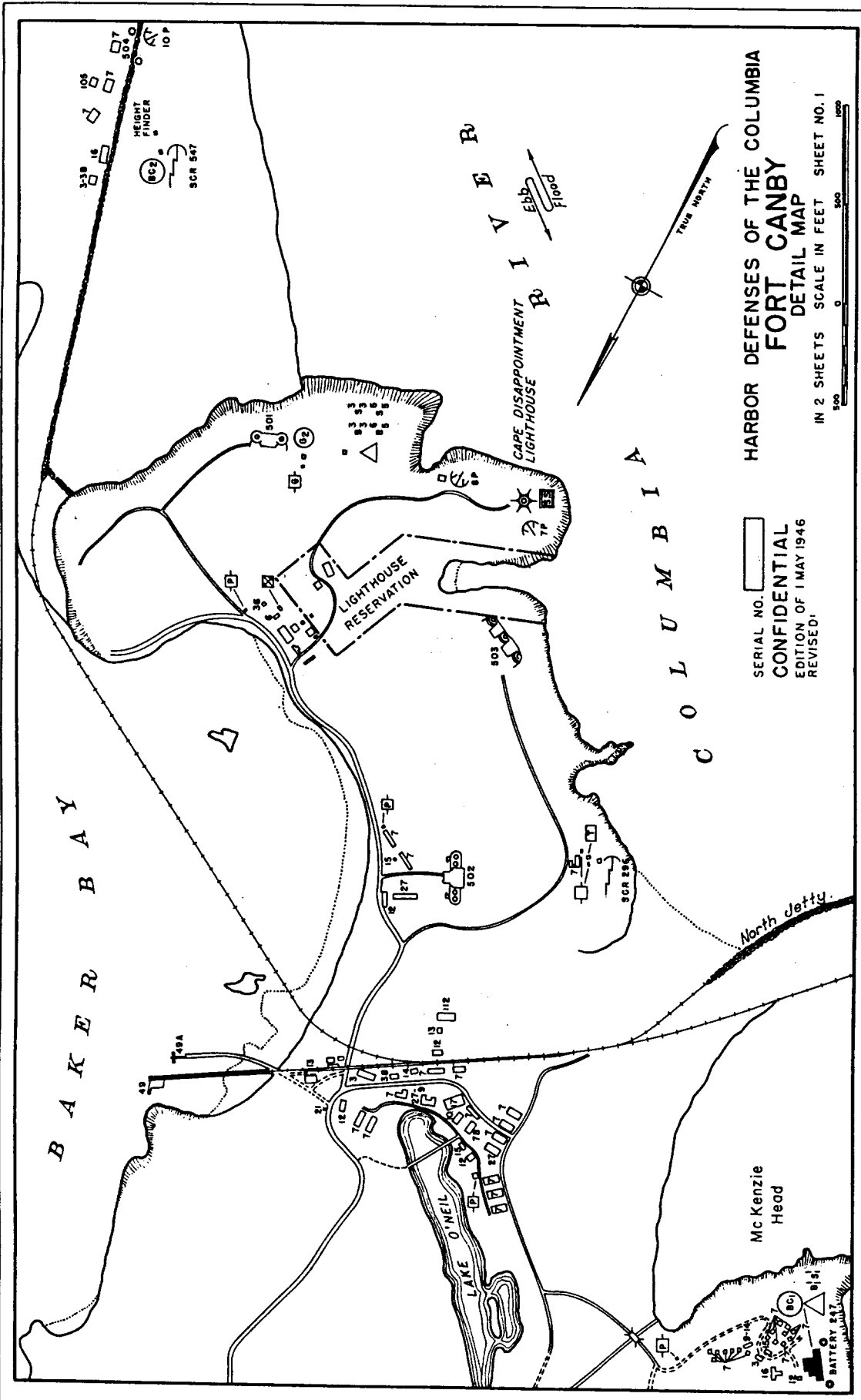
SHEET NO. 2

P A C I F I C
O C E A N

SERIAL NO.
CONFIDENTIAL
EDITION OF 1 MAY 1946
REVISED:

HARBOR DEFENSES OF THE COLUMBIA
FORT CANBY
LOCATION MAP

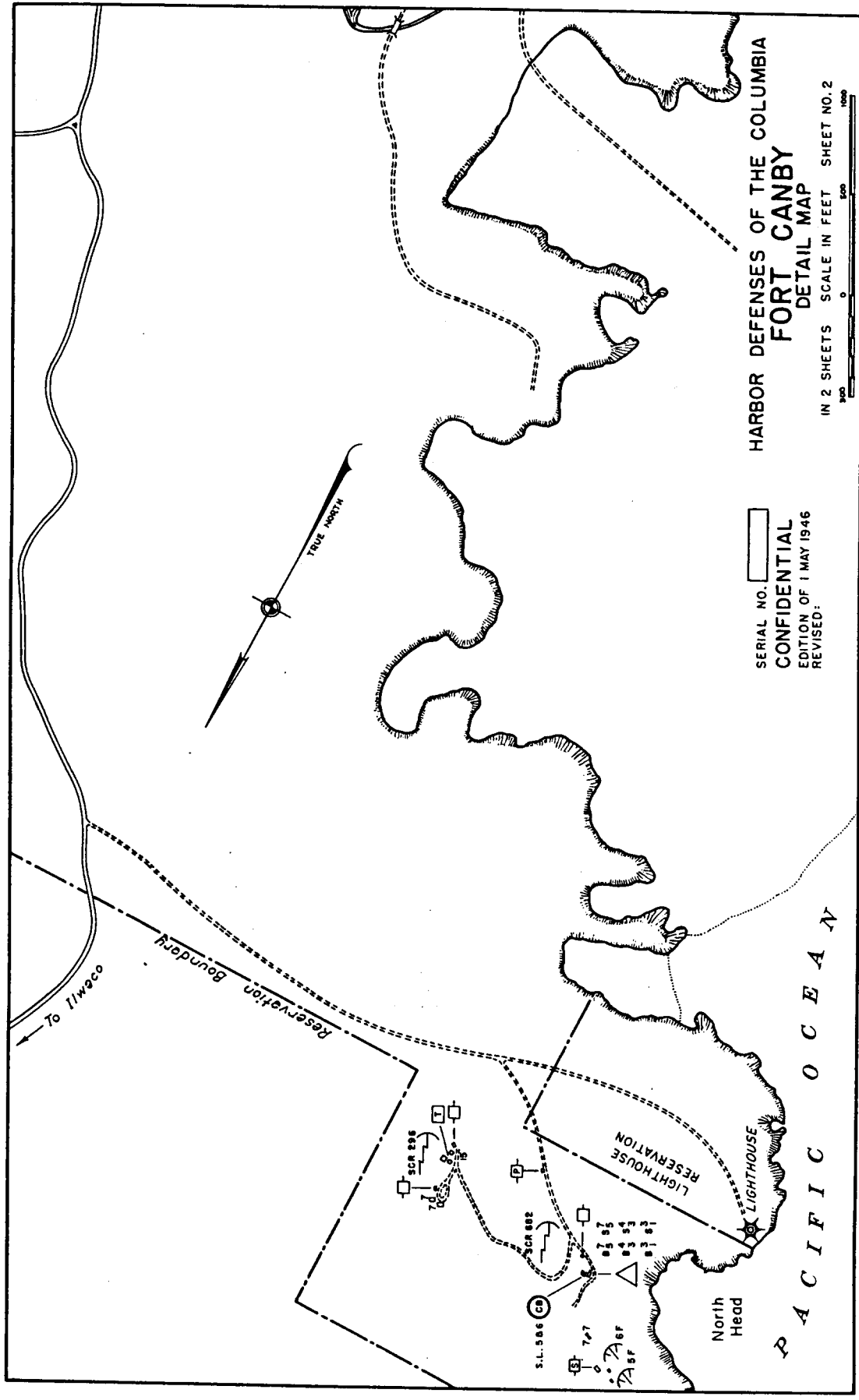
SCALE IN FEET
0 1000 2000



HARBOR DEFENSES OF THE COLUMBIA
FORT CANBY
 DETAIL MAP

IN 2 SHEETS SCALE IN FEET SHEET NO. 1

SERIAL NO. []
 CONFIDENTIAL
 EDITION OF 1 MAY 1946
 REVISED



HARBOR DEFENSES OF THE COLUMBIA
FORT CANBY
DETAIL MAP

SERIAL NO. []
CONFIDENTIAL
EDITION OF 1 MAY 1946
REVISED:

IN 2 SHEETS SCALE IN FEET SHEET NO. 2
1000 500 0