



the CDSG Newsletter

The Coast Defense Study Group, Inc. — November 1997

Chairman's Message

Karl Schmidt

As the incoming chairman I want to thank Bolling Smith for his contributions to the quality and growth of the CDSG as a board member and as editor of the *Journal* and *Newsletter*. The coming year promises to be one of growth and new achievements. Our present membership stands at 350 individual members and 35 museums or organizations. I have always felt the number of organizational memberships is a tribute to the quality of the research and the professional appearance of our publications and book reprints.

Our present three CDSG Press reprints continue to sell very well. Terry McGovern, the CDSG Press chairman, will announce in the near future a fourth publication which we think will provide a much needed break from steel and concrete and be a valuable addition to the libraries of our brick and stone enthusiasts.

This issue of the *Newsletter* will announce the dates of the Tampa-Key West conference. The conference chairman is Bob Burt, with Elliot Deutsch as an assistant. The Columbia River conference is still slated for 1999 with Gale Hemmen as chairlady and Greg Hagge as her assistant. As usual, the board is appealing for volunteers for future conference chairmen. At present the board would like the 2000 conference to be held in one of the more obscure locations such as New Orleans. You will notice the 1998 and 1999 conferences will have an assistant chairman at the suggestion of Elliot Deutsch. These assistants will be members who have chaired or helped with past conferences. We hope this system will ease our search for chairmen with the promise of direct help from an "old hand."

Mark Berhow has initiated a web site for the CDSG and will be its editor. Mark has done a very good job with the text and photographs. The site has generated a surprising amount of inquiries and applications for membership in its first few weeks of operation. Mark's coast artillery primer will make its debut in this newsletter. The primer is quite a large volume and should be a big help to newer members bewildered by map symbols, gun models, mine grand groups, etc. that many of us take in stride. The primer is not a walking tour of Fort Whatever or a history of Battery Eveready, but is a large compilation of information, drawings, definitions, and articles by members not previously published. Even for the "old timers," it may prove to be a valuable consoli-

dation of the folders, binders, and stacks of loose documents many of us are prone to put up with.

Our tireless membership chairman, Elliot Deutsch, has introduced CDSG and Mark's primer to the National Park Service chief of interpretation, "Corky" Mayo. Elliot reports Mr. Mayo was very impressed with the primer, and will recommend that NPS sites with coast defenses purchase copies. Elliot has also arranged a courtesy exchange of membership with the National Association for Interpreters which has about 3500 members in 30 countries. The exchange of publications between the two groups and sales of the primers should go a long way toward eliminating the painful lectures we have to endure on "command bunkers" and 18-inch guns at various locations.

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Visitation to Alaskan WWII Coast Defense Sites, August 1997

Glen M. Williford

A group of seven adventurers (Glen Williford, Bolling Smith, Alex Holder, Karl Schmidt, Bob Burt, Terry McGovern, and Roger Davis) set out in August to explore the remaining coastal defenses at Dutch Harbor, Kodiak, and Seward. With the addition of Dutch Harbor, for a couple of us this repeated a trip taken in 1992. This is both a report on the current status and condition of the sites, and an aid for those planning similar expeditions. The itinerary was spread over eight days, allowing a full day of travel at each end to and from Anchorage. While not necessarily a tight agenda considering the number of batteries and sites, unpredictable Alaskan weather and the heavy dependence on boats and planes argues for more "cushion" time than some other locations. Mention should also be made of group size. Most of these locations should not be visited alone, for obvious safety reasons. On the other hand, most Alaskan boat operators are themselves or their boats only licensed for six individuals, which did necessitate our group making two trips on most water journeys. Most of the sites are "open," that is not fenced or posted. Most are owned either by the State of Alaska or local Indian corporations (which may require previous notification or, in the case of Dutch Harbor, hiking permits). The problem is arranging boat or helicopter access to sites, not permission to visit. For that reason it is strongly suggested that these arrangements be made in

advance; with a few exceptions these defenses are not good places to simply show up and arrange on the spot, unless you have a very open schedule and more than adequate financial resources.

For each of the three defenses, I will recap what we saw, with comments on access and procedures. I will summarize important contacts and suggested (or at least used) cooperators. Obviously some of this material becomes quickly dated; again, adequate pre-planning is urged.

Dutch Harbor

After flying into Dutch Harbor/Unalaska on Alaska Airlines, we rented trucks. Trucks are definitely preferable to cars, and on a couple of occasions 4-wheel drive was a good idea; such vehicles are readily available. Our first stop was the Ounalaska Corporation in Margaret Bay (within the perimeter of the old military base) to pay for hiking permits for the three days. Virtually all of the battery sites are located on this corporation's property. From there we went north past the airport, up the steep gravel road to Fort Schwatka, at Ulatka Head north of impressive Mount Ballyhoo. We were accompanied by Colt Denfeld, historian with the Corps of Engineers, and Linda Cook, with the National Park Service, both from Anchorage. There is a project underway by the NPS to assist in interpreting and preserving the Schwatka works, though with considerable dialogue and difference of opinion with the local Indian land owners. Interestingly enough, for those who have not been there before, Amaknak Island (as well as all of the Aleutians this far out), lacks trees; the rugged hillsides are mostly grass covered, though at times that grass can be quite dense. It does facilitate seeing batteries, fire control stations, and searchlights well from a distance, but low structures, like 90 mm gun blocks, can be almost impossible to locate. Also a word on weather is appropriate. Apparently weather in the Aleutians can be quite nasty; commonly featuring rain, mist, fog, and wind. Our days here were relatively good, a few short showers and some low evening clouds, but otherwise sunny and cool but not cold.

Fort Schwatka's major feature was Battery #402, a dual 8-inch battery. It is a relatively standard World War II design: a central magazine with guns on open barbettes on either sides. Battery #402 did have considerable wooden crew shelters built around it, most now collapsing. The guns were destroyed postwar, and some fragments of the carriage are left in the #2 position. The gravel road leads directly behind the battery; once on site most of the major features are readily accessible. A short distance to the west of the 8-inch battery are the remains of a 155 mm Panama mount battery. Two emplacements are to the west, with the concrete battery commander's station (BC). Emplacement #1 is barely visible to the right of the 8-inch #1, and #2 is buried in the 8-inch battery fill. Further to the east of Battery #402, following the ridge line, are a combined BC/base

end station (BES) for #402, the foundation for the SCR-296 radar, and at a distance, the combined HDCP/HECP with a platform for an SCR-582 on top. Almost directly behind #402 is a separate concrete plotting room. In addition, this ridge and several behind it have numerous collapsed Quonset hut type buildings, magazines, light AA weapons positions, and other buildings. Two searchlight shelters in a ravine to the southwest of the battery supposedly still exist, but were not spotted.

On the ride back down from Ulatka head, we made a side trip out onto Amaknak Spit to try and locate the site of the 90 mm battery there. Using the location of the short pier there, an approximate location was identified, but either nothing remains of the battery, or if it remains, it is completely buried or overgrown.

At the end of the day we drove to the southern end of the island to take the gravel roads up to Hill 400. While the island is not all that large, the road is not that apparent. This site had another 155 mm Panama mount battery. All four emplacements, a nice concrete BC and BES, a covered plotting room and both ready and reserve magazines are in good shape.

Unlike locations in Hawaii and on the West Coast, Unalaska and Dutch Harbor still bear considerable evidence of their Second World War service. Many additional structures dating from 1941 to 1945 are easily located. Numerous pillboxes are located on most landing beaches, some built for 37 mm antitank guns on wheeled mounts, others for machine guns and small arms. Other buildings we visited and photographed included: the protected powerhouse, the aircraft administration building, the naval radio station, quarters, the underground medical station/hospital, the torpedo storage and maintenance complex, the protected hanger, the marine railway at the old submarine base, and the most interesting joint command post.

The following day we dedicated to getting to Fort Learnard, at Eider Point. This isolated fort, inaccessible by road from Dutch Harbor, is several miles across the bay to the northwest of Fort Schwatka. A pre-arranged charter boat took us to the shore below the site. From there we had two choices. The first (discouraged by everyone we consulted) was to take the old "road" from a landing beach up the hillside to the battery site. Apparently this road is heavily overgrown, and in some places collapsed along the cliff line. The second, recommended, route followed the line of the old tramway directly up the hillside (the battery and fort site sit at 600 feet elevation) from a rocky beach below. That we did. The hillside is relatively steep (not mountain climbing) and relatively overgrown, and we were relatively challenged, but all made it in about an hour. This should only be attempted as a group, there is no one living at or likely to be visiting this location, and help is a long way away.

On site are the remains of Battery #298, an otherwise typical 200-series 6-inch battery. The guns were blown up postwar; the tubes are missing but pieces of

the carriages and shields (one shield mostly intact but upside down) remain. The battery has many tools and parts intact inside (including a shell cart and an interesting "over-and-under" spotting board). Hundreds of 6-inch powder cans litter the site, most near the gun positions. To the side of the battery is a concrete triple BC and BES. Further down the ravine on the west side are positions for two searchlights, distant electric searchlight controllers (DECs), and power stations, which we observed only from a distance. Behind the battery is the SCR-296 station. In its collapsed ruins is the actual rotating radar screen. Like Fort Schwatka, numerous mostly collapsed buildings and huts litter the immediate area. Back down at water level (the climb down is easier than going up), we examined the site of the 90 mm battery. The BC station on a shelf above the battery is very apparent, but the heavily overgrown spit area deterred most of us from actually locating the gun blocks.

That evening we drove around the mainland east of Amaknak, to the location of Fort Brumback at Summer Bay, the site of the third Dutch Harbor battery of 155 mm Panama mounts. All four emplacements are clearly visible, with two ready ammunition magazines at each emplacement and a combined BC/BES on the hill behind. Further on the road to the north were the covered plotting room for the battery and automatic weapons magazines. No sign of the searchlights at Priest Rock were seen; with the expansion of the road, they may have been destroyed.

Dutch Harbor Arrangements:

Alaskan Airlines from Anchorage (two regional carriers also fly)

Hotel: Carl's Bayview Inn (907-581-1230). \$90/night for two double beds.

Trucks: North Port Rentals (907-581-3880) At airport. \$60/day for four-wheel drive pickups.

Hiking Permits: Ounalaska Corporation (907-581-1276). \$5/person/day. 400 Salmon Way, Unalaska, AK 99685

Boat charter: Fox Island Charters (Richard Chagin) (907-581-1621). PO Box 117, Unalaska, AK 99685. \$50/person round trip to Eider Point from Unalaska marina.

Kodiak

At Kodiak we chose cars for economy sake, but for some locations beyond Chiniak Point trucks would have proved useful, primarily for their higher ground clearance. We began at Fort Abercrombie, a state park close in to Kodiak and easily accessible. While there are some errors in the local interpretive signs, in general this is an excellent site well displayed for the visitor. Most items are open, and we easily prevailed on a friendly local ranger to open the battery early, as well as the war reserve magazine.

The fort features Battery #404, a standard design 8-inch dual battery. The armament was destroyed on site, but parts of the carriage still exist, and one damaged

tube is on display at the #2 position. The battery is otherwise in outstanding shape. The park has carefully cleaned, repainted, and lit the interior. Also on the fort reservation are the remains of 404's short BC tower, a searchlight and DEC, the concrete battery plotting room, and a substantial war reserve magazine. Southeast of the plotting room, a new path and wooden stairs lead past a lake to Piedmont Point, with another searchlight and DEC, as well as the footings for the SCR-296 tower. This site, well covered in Sitka Spruce, is a beautiful location. The ranger station has a nice collection of plans and period photos. They have recently collected maps and have published a small paperback map collection, *Road System Guide to Kodiak Island World War II Sites*.

Nearby Spruce Cape is the site of a U.S. Navy special operations reserve center. While it is open to the public (register at the duty officer's desk), the reservation is fenced and closed at nights and sometimes on the weekend. The site contains two searchlights and their DECs, a collapsed wooden fire control tower, and a 90 mm battery (two fixed gunblocks just off the road in the brush, but the BC station is now gone). Some comment is needed on Kodiak searchlights. The Harbor Defenses of Kodiak contained no less than 22 fixed 60-inch searchlights. The emplacements are fairly uniform, consisting of a concrete shelter with two openings, one for the searchlight on wheeled mount, and one for the portable generator. DECs for the lights (usually one per light, but in some cases doubled up in a single structure) are separate concrete structures looking a good deal like a standard fire control BES.

We then visited the area north of the airport known as Fort Greeley. Parking just south of Boy Scout Lake, we hiked inland on a complicated series of old roads and trails. Taking the second road to the left, and then another up a steep hill to the right, we passed by the earthen revetments of an AA battery. We eventually located the Kodiak combined HECP/HDCP on Artillery Hill. This site is heavily overgrown and difficult to see until almost upon it. The HEOP is nearby.

Backtracking to the main entry road, we then took the next left to the site of the Buskin Hill 155 mm battery. All four Panama emplacements remain, two on each side of the ravine. The concrete BC station is on a hill to the south of the #1 emplacement. Further south in the state park, on the nature trail is another AA battery site. Good maps (better than the ones we had) are recommended if you do not want to spend a lot of time and energy back-tracking the trails here. There are several other locations of interest in this part of Kodiak. At the Buskin River Inn at the airport is one of the gun tubes from Battery #403 at Fort Smith. On the main road going north into Kodiak, near a quarry can be seen a DEC for a searchlight at Gibson Cove. The other DEC, two searchlight shelters, and a fire control manhole station also exist here, but can not be seen in summer vegetation, and are very difficult to reach.

The next day we were scheduled to visit Fort Tidball on Long Island, but stormy weather intervened and our charter boat operator allowed us to reschedule to optimize the conditions. Instead, we went to Cape Chiniak and Fort J.H. Smith. The trip on the road follows the coastline to the southeast, and takes about 90 minutes. Any food or drink should be taken along, as there were no stores open near Chiniak. We stopped at Midway Point for Searchlights #9 and #10, with a double DEC. Shortly beyond that is the 155 mm battery just off the road. Panama mount #4 is quite clear, but the other three are either overgrown or were destroyed during road construction. The BC and a fire control station stand just to the west of the battery, on private property. Just past an inn, we parked and walked into the 8-inch battery site (we later found we could have driven in a different road, though the road condition varies). Battery #403 is the most atypical of the three 8-inch batteries in Alaska. The BC station is on top, and like the others, major pieces of the carriage and even the breech of one gun was left on site. Uniquely, however, the battery magazine is double layered. The top layer obviously serves the battery, and the otherwise unconnected lower level is probably the war reserve magazine for the reservation. Inland from the battery is the concrete plotting room, which showed signs of more recent occupation. Unlike the other forts visited, few buildings or remains are evident. The area is controlled by the Lesnoi Corporation.

To the east of the battery, numerous searchlights and fire control stations exist at locations described on maps as Bald Hill, South Cape, and North Cape Chiniak. Searchlights #5, #6, #7, and #8, with their DEC's, and a separate double fire control station were all located. While not extremely obvious, paths (grown-in roads) were found to all sites, the trip being best made on foot. Further south on the main highway is Round Hill. Logging since the visit of five years ago has made the site more recognizable now. The SCR-296 tower for Battery #403 is intact, along with a collapsed wooden tower for a groupment station. We could not locate a navigable road to either Cape Greville or Point Soquel.

On the following day, our chartered boat took us to Fort Tidball on Long Island in two groups from the Kodiak Marina. We found the northern landing beach within the island's cove more advantageous for foot traffic. The paths taken varied with several sub-groups, but all visited the site of Battery #296 at Castle Hill. This 6-inch 200-series battery features both intact 6-inch gun shields and major carriage parts, all damaged by post-war demolition. The battery itself is a split level, the plotting and machinery rooms toward the back being at a lower level than the magazines in the front. Considerable equipment and details inside, including most of the fire control switchboard, remain, as do partial remains of wooden shelters at the entry points. The battery's BC is a collapsed short wooden tower to the southeast,

and beyond this are a mostly intact SCR-296 tower and transmission and generator rooms. The screen for the radar is still atop the tower, and can be seen, toppled on its side, from below. The war reserve magazine is on the road back to the landing beach. Directly to the east of the landing is the path to Deer Point, site of another battery of 155 mm guns on Panama mounts. The four gun emplacements are closely grouped, with an auxiliary BC directly behind. The main BC, a BES, and the plotting room are further inland on the road away from the battery.

Due to time limitations we did not explore further on Long Island, and so missed the searchlights and stations at Burt Point, Pyramid Point, Point Head, and North Point. This is a big island, and as it was the hiking became strenuous on account of the muddy road conditions in light rain. Lesnoi Corporation also owns Long Island. On the return to Kodiak, one boatload checked out Puffin Island for evidence of the searchlight, DEC, and 90 mm Battery #7. Puffin Island is a bird sanctuary, and landings should be avoided in spring and early summer during nesting season.

Kodiak Arrangements:

Air service by a variety of carriers from Anchorage; we used Alaska Airlines.

Several hotels and guest houses. We used Inlet Guest Rooms, Jim and Francis Ashford (907 486-4004), PO Box 703, Kodiak, AK 99615. \$65/night for two twin beds.

Avis, Budget, and National rental cars are available at the airport, with conventional rate structures.

Boat charter: Gunnar's charters (800 762-5634), PO Box 8630, Kodiak, AK 99615. \$50/person roundtrip to Long Island.

SEWARD

We flew back to Anchorage, rented cars, and drove to Seward. The road is paved all the way, and normal autos are fine. However, due to road construction, the driving time was three hours. Arriving in Seward, we located Jack Sinclair of Alaska State Parks for the boat trip to Caine's Head. Caine's Head State Park can be hiked to along the beach from Seward, but this is an all day affair, requiring careful attention to the tide schedules. A boat to North Beach is far preferable. We had arranged this in advance with the parks people, otherwise this may also be coordinated with the operator of the local water taxi service, at Miller's Landing. Once at North Beach (the old army wharf is not usable), the hike is strenuous but fairly direct to the 6-inch battery. It is mostly uphill, and takes a little over an hour, passing four covered igloo-style magazines.

Battery #295 at Caine's Head (Fort McGilvray) is a real delight. While missing any traces of its armament, the interior is in outstanding shape. The doors and fixtures look like they were just recently completed. On

top of the battery is the BC station, with intact, thick steel shutters on overhead rails. We happened to hit Seward on a bright clear day, and the views from the battery out into Resurrection Bay were magnificent! The week before, a couple of the group had pressed on beyond the battery to locate the foundations for the SCR-296 tower. An attempt to follow the road around to South Beach and the Panama mounts at Rocky Point was, however, unsuccessful due to the conditions of the hikers and the road (or lack of it). Of all the sites to visit in Alaska, this one is probably the most highly recommended. On the return from North Beach we stopped at Lowell's Point and found the two 90 mm blocks under debris near Miller's Landing.

Unfortunately, our good luck ran out on the final day in Seward. We had scheduled boat service to Rugged Island to visit Fort Buckley, with 6-inch battery #294, a signal station, and a combined HECF/HDCP. From past experience we knew this would be a difficult landing and ascent to the 750-foot high battery. Sadly, the boat we were to take had been wrecked shortly before in a landing accident, and the service operator had to cancel. We found that Kenai Air Service in Seward operated helicopter tours, and arranged to be flown out to the battery, intending to land actually on top of the double BC station atop the magazine for a quick twenty-minute visit. Rugged Island is owned by the State of Alaska, and formal permission is not required. However, the first group to go out discovered that the combination of wind and tree growth prevented the pilot from landing, and they had to content themselves with aerial photos. By then, we were pretty exhausted group and anxious for the return to Anchorage and home.

Seward Arrangements:

Numerous guest houses and a few hotels. We used the military recreation camp, courtesy of Roger Davis, 907 384-3474. \$125 for an attractive modern cabin with two double and two single beds.

Water taxi: Mike Miller (Miller's Landing), 907 224-5739. \$35 roundtrip to North Beach. Rate negotiable depending on group size and time to Rugged Island. (No one really likes to go to this island!)

Kenai Air Alaska, 907 224-3778. Seward Airport, Lucky Wilson.

Jack Sinclair, District Ranger, State of Alaska Parks and Recreation, Kenai Area. Box 1247, Soldotna, AK 99669. 907 262-5581.

Email: jacks@kenarea.state.ak.us

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Preservation Report

Nelson Lawry, chairman of the Preservation Committee, reports that he has attempted to contact Delaware officials regarding future plans, particularly regarding Battery Torbert at Fort Delaware. However, he has received no response.

Sam Stokes reports that the USAF and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) have a memorandum of agreement to preserve two base-end station at White Point, HDLA, B"1 for Battery Leary and BC₂C₂S₂ for Battery Bunker. The 1920s B' for Barlow will be moved off site. The remainder will be destroyed for USAF housing. Although Sam's earnest efforts did not result in the preservation of all the stations, the USAF has had their consciousness raised. They will document all the sites found on their property and make the documentation available for use in the nomination of Battery Bunker for the National Register. The battery itself is on Los Angeles City property, while the PSR and base-end stations are on USAF property. The National Park Service is monitoring the recording efforts. The USAF has run into a vertical ventilation shaft for Bunker's PSR during the grading. Also found is a Signal Corps cable vault.

Everyone in the preservation community agrees that this entire area, Fort MacArthur to White Point, and all existing base-end stations, should be a historic district, and Sam will be working toward that in the next year or so.

The SHPO also mentioned that the Nike site qualifies as a "Cold War" structure, an exception to the 50-year rule for the National Register.

The success which has been achieved is due to the efforts of the San Pedro Bay Historical Society (SPBHS), the Fort MacArthur Museum, and Sam Stokes, our man on the spot. Together, they made the USAF stop the project and reevaluate after a discussion with their civil attorney about the provisions of Section 106 of the Federal Historical Preservation Act. Sam also reports that Courtney Damkroger, Assistant Director of the Western Regional Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in San Francisco, was very helpful.

Sam subsequently reported that a firm called RECON was contracted to dig out and document the White Point fire control stations, subject to review by the NPS. RECON has dug out stations for Batteries Merriam and Saxton, on either side of the WW-2 BC for Battery Bunker. Both showed substantial modifications to the original structures. Doors had been added to both stations, on the seaward side of the stations. The DPF bases in both stations had been extended 21 inches to the rear, and Saxton's station had wooden louvers installed in the viewing slots. The stations appear to have possibly contained some powerplants, but the documentation is lacking. RECON found a complete DPF bench inside a station for Osgood, and it may be used in one of Barlow's stations.