



# *the* CDSG Newsletter

The Coast Defense Study Group, Inc. — November 2000

## Chairman's Message

Gordon Bliss

Another conference has gone by and with it our annual changeover in the Board of Directors. I would like to thank our outgoing Chairman, Greg Hagge, for his service over the past 3 years and welcome Alan Hardey as our newest board member.

This year's conference covering the Chesapeake Bay was great and I would like to thank Fielding Tyler, Terry McGovern, and Dale Floyd for their time and efforts spent to ensure that it was a success. We had superlative weather for the whole conference, and a well-paced schedule that allowed us to see almost all the sites in the defenses. We were able to see many restricted and hard to get to sites and thanks is due to the people at Fort Monroe, Fort Wool (City of Hampton), Fort Norfolk (Norfolk Historical Society), Fort Story, Fort John Custis/Fisherman Island (Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge) and Camp Pendleton (Virginia State Military Reservation) for helping us out. The annual conference is the main opportunity most of us will have to meet and talk to other members and I would like to strongly encourage members, particularly those who have not made it to one yet, to attend an annual conference. The next annual conference will be held in late October of 2001 in Portsmouth, NH.

Our current chairman for the Preservation and Representative committees, Sam Stokes, has resigned these positions due to other responsibilities. I would like to thank him for his efforts in helping to get the Representative program started and for overseeing it since then as well as taking on the Preservation committee responsibility for this past year. With these two positions vacant, I wish to put a call out to the membership for volunteers to fill these two positions. If you have an interest in one (or both) of these positions, please contact myself, or one of the other board members. I would particularly like to encourage interest in the Representative committee chair. There are a number of CDSG members out in the field as active representatives and we need to keep up the communication with them. This is an excellent opportunity for someone that wants to share their enthusiasm with others and to better get to know other CDSG members from around the country.

## St. Babs XVIII

### Annual Conference of the CDSG Harbor Defenses of the Chesapeake Bay October 18-22, 2000

Mark Berhow

Members attending the 2000 CDSG Annual Conference headed to Virginia, gathering in the meeting room of the Norfolk Airport Hilton on the evening of Oct. 18. Conference Chairs Terry McGovern and Dale Floyd were at the front table to check us in and lay out the next four day's itinerary to visit the heart of the coast artillery. After an evening of presentations, we were reminded to be up early for our first stop in the morning. We received the first set of daily handouts prepared by Fielding Tyler—short histories of each of the forts we were to visit along with directions and an itinerary.

## Historical Background

The entrance to the Chesapeake Bay and Hampton Roads has played a vital role in American history. The

## CDSG Calendar

January 1, 2001

- Last day to submit photos for Volume 15 covers
- Dues for 2001 are due

January 15, 2001

- Last day to submit items for *CD Journal* 15.1

February 15, 2001

- CD Journal* 15.1 goes to press

Mid-March 2001

- Approximate delivery date for *CD Journal* 15.1

March 30 - April 10, 2001

- CDSG Special Tour to the Philippines

October 2001

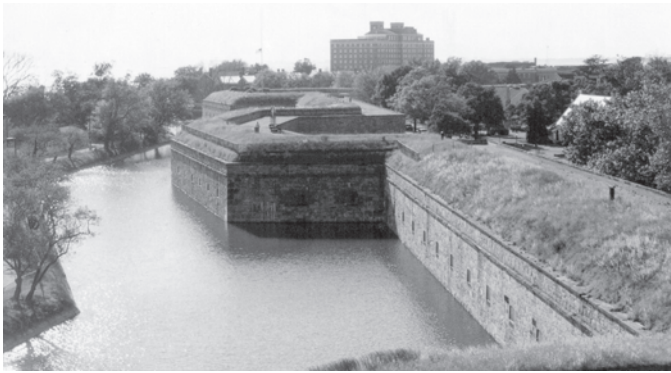
- CDSG Annual Conference, HD Portsmouth, NH

February 2002

- CDSG Annual Conference, HD New Orleans, LA

Spring 2003

- CDSG Annual Conference, HD Long Island Sound



The parapets of Fort Monroe

first British colonists sailed through Hampton Roads and up the James River to establish Jamestown in 1607. The Virginia colony played a vital role in the development of the British Empire in the New World and furnished key players in American Revolution. The final major campaign of the Revolution was fought on the peninsula, near Hampton Roads at Yorktown. The new United States early (1794-1810) sought to protect this key harbor, with its important ports, by constructing seacoast fortifications at a number of sites around the entrance to Hampton Roads. The War of 1812 saw a British invasion fleet burn Hampton, go on to burn Washington D.C., and attack Baltimore.

Following the war, the American government established a permanent board of fortifications to oversee the construction of a new system of fortification for the major harbors of the nation. Two new forts were to be built at the entrance to Hampton Roads. Fort Monroe was begun in 1819 at Old Point Comfort and was essentially complete by the beginning of the Civil War. For the other fort, an artificial island was built, beginning in 1818, on a shoal in the center of Hampton Roads. The actual building of the fort, named Fort Calhoun but renamed Fort Wool, began in 1826, but progress was slow due to the continued settling of the island. Fort Wool remained incomplete at the beginning of the Civil War.

Control of the entrance to Hampton Roads was a key feature of the American Civil War. Forts Wool and Monroe remained in Union hands, while Norfolk fell to the Confederates in 1861. The shipyard there converted the U.S.S. *Merrimack* into the C.S.S. *Virginia*, one of the first ironclads. The famous battle of the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack* (actually the *Virginia*) was fought in Hampton Roads in 1862. Fort Monroe was the launching point for McClelland's Peninsula Campaign in 1862 and Butler's 1864 campaign.

The modernization of American seacoast defenses began in earnest following the publication of the Endicott Report in 1886, and the defenses of Hampton Roads were a vital part of the plans. New concrete batteries were built at Fort Wool and Fort

Monroe after 1890. Plans to defend the actual entrance to the Chesapeake Bay began with the Endicott Board's proposal for floating batteries. After the turn of the century, plans were drawn up for an artificial island mounting 14-inch guns, but were never implemented. A battery of four 16-inch howitzers was built in the early-1920s at Cape Henry (Fort Story), which effectively achieved that goal. The Modernization Program of 1940 proposed five more two-gun 16-inch batteries (only three of which were built), and six two-gun 6-inch batteries. Today, Forts Monroe and Story remain active army posts, Fort Wool is now a city park, and Fort John Custis (Cape Charles and Fisherman's Island) is a national wildlife refuge.

### The First Day—Fort Wool and Fort Monroe

Fielding Tyler, director of the Virginia Beach Lighthouse Museum, served as tour coordinator for the conference. Intimately familiar with the terrain, and well connected to those in charge, he arranged permission for our visits, set up the schedule, and shepherded the group ("herding kittens") from site to site, making the conference a success.

Our first stop was across Hampton Roads at the Hampton Tourist Center to board the *Miss Hampton II* for the trip to Fort Wool. Other than being a little breezy, it was a perfect morning. We had a pleasant ride over to the island and were able to dock at the island, despite some concern over the chop in the water. Our host, Mr. Michael Cobb, curator of the Fort Wool Historic Site, City of Hampton, welcomed us to the island and told of plans to rebuild a barracks in the near future for use as a visitors center. He noted that the fort usually has about 20,000 visitors a year via the *Miss Hampton II*. We were able to visit the entire island, including parts not normally open to the public, and even climb the battery commander's station tower. Only the very eastern portion of the Third System casemates remain, about six in all. It was interesting to see the damage caused by the settling of the island, and the unfinished second tier of the casemates where the iron "Totten" embrasures could



Fort Wool batteries and fire control tower





"Totten" embrasures of old Fort Wool

be examined in detail. The rest of the old fort was modified to accommodate the batteries built after 1900—Batteries Gates, Dyer, Claiborne (all 2 X 6 in DC), Hindman (2 X 3 in P) and Lee (4 X 3 in P). The concrete construction came at the expense of much of the rest of the granite fort, although some of the old stone walls can be seen inside the rooms of the batteries. Battery Gates was modified again in 1943 into BCN 224 (2 X 6 in P). BCN 224 is a unique WW II 6-inch battery, built on the existing battery with its gun platforms one story above the ammunition rooms, resulting in a battery that is very different in appearance from any other 6-inch battery. The City of Hampton seems to support this park, and the efforts of the park volunteers are evident in the generally good condition of the grounds and fortifications. At 11 AM, the boat blew its whistle, and we re-boarded for our trip back to the mainland.

Upon returning to Hampton, the group next gathered at a picnic area on Fort Monroe, a post generally open to the public. After a leisurely lunch, the group headed out to inspect the lone 12-inch mortar position in the Chesapeake Bay defenses, Batteries Anderson and Ruggles (8 X 12 in M, each). The battery was an earlier mortar position, built in the linear form. Much of the sand parapet has been removed, especially on the left flank. The battery is overgrown and unkempt, surrounded by "Keep Off" signs, but access to some of the inside rooms was gained.

Next we visited the sole remaining fire control tower on the post, a fort-command tower built

in 1903. Moving south, we were met by Dennis Mroczkowski, director of the Fort Monroe museum, with the keys to the remaining concrete batteries at Fort Monroe. Battery Church (2 X 10 in DC) has had the sand removed from its sides and front, but is otherwise in pretty good shape. Battery DeRussy (3 X 12 in DC), is in pretty much the same shape as Battery Church, but with a few interesting treasures. The loading platform of Emplacement No. 3 contains a number of artifacts, including railway push carts (possibly ammunition carts) and a 155 mm gun barrel. The rooms below emplacement number one were open, and the emplacement still contains its Taylor-Raymond ammunition hoist in good condition. The other two ammunition areas were closed up.

The next stop was Battery Parrott (2 X 12 in DC). This battery has been extensively modified to take two 90 mm on fixed mounts, part of BCN 446, tactical No. 23, in 1943. Later, a 90 mm gun on an M3 fixed mount was relocated to Emplacement No. 1 from Fisherman's Island, one of only two fixed 90 mm guns remaining. The interior of the battery is currently used for storage.

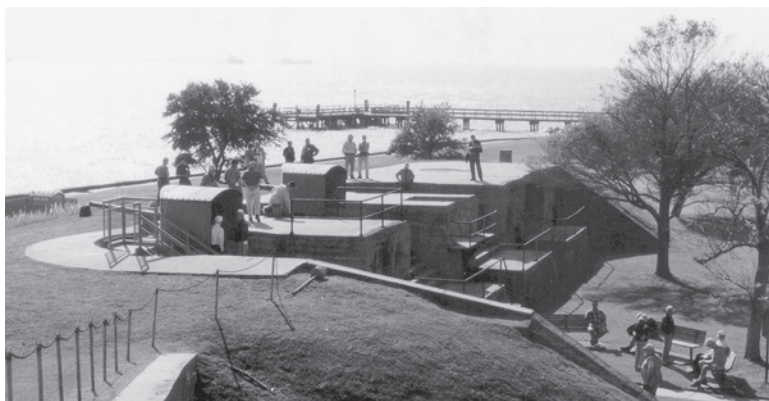
On the southern flank of Battery Parrott is Battery Irwin (4 X 3 in MP). The original ordnance was removed after WW I. An antiaircraft battery was located there during 1942-46, and then two M1902 3-inch guns on M1902 pedestal mounts (originally from Fort Wool) were installed as saluting guns in 1946. These two guns remain in the battery today, and are an impressive sight.

The next stop was inside the Third System fort, a massive, impressive structure. It is the largest enclosed masonry fortification built by the United States—the walls enclose 63 acres. Usually, once you are inside a Third System fort, you can pretty much see the enclosed area, but not so with Fort Monroe. The large interior area is filled with buildings, and even on the parapet it is difficult to see the whole structure. The entire trace of the main fort remains intact, but the redoubt to the north of the fort and the water battery on the eastern flank of the fort have been destroyed. Originally, the wet moat completely surrounded the main fortification, now it only surrounds about three-fourths. About half of the single level of casemates have been refurbished to



One of the mortar pits of Battery Ruggles





Battery Irwin and its 3 inch guns

house the Casemate Museum. This fine museum interprets the history of Fort Monroe and the coast artillery with models, photographs, uniforms, and other artifacts. I was very impressed with both the variety and quality of the artifacts and displays in the museum. The public is allowed to walk along the parapet of the fort, a long, but rewarding walk. We visited the site of Battery Gatewood (4 X 4.72 in Armstrong), the sites of the parapet-mounted 8-inch BCs, and the command, signal, and observation post. This was my first visit to Fort Monroe and I was very impressed by both the size of the fortification and its appearance today.

Once we had completed our tour of the defensive structures, we could then tour the rest of the post. The Artillery School and the Artillery Board, renamed the Coast Artillery School and Board, were located here. Many structures remain from the coast artillery period, including the Coast Artillery School (1909), the Coast Artillery Board offices (1909), officer's quarters, barracks, mine storehouse, and many others. If you are interested in the history of American coast artillery, this post is well worth a visit. The post is currently being used by US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC).

Upon completing the tour of Fort Monroe, we headed back to Norfolk for an evening of presentations.

### Day Two: Fort John Custis

The second day promised a more leisurely pace, but required us to consolidate into as few vehicles as possible to visit Fisherman's Island. We made the drive out to Cape Charles via the Chesapeake Bay Bridge/Tunnel and gathered at the Eastern Shore and Fisherman's Island National Wildlife Refuge visitor's center. Our host, Bob Carpenter, guided us back out on the bridge/tunnel approach to a gated area on Fisherman's Island. Once we all squeezed into the limited parking area, we trekked the mile or so to the fortifications area and examined the remains of the WW II defenses there. We were quite fortunate to get permission to visit these structures, as there is usually only limited birding tour access to this site. Most of the concrete structures remain, though very

much abandoned. BCN 227 (2 X 6 in SB) still retains its three Worthington motor-generators, mufflers, radiators, and electrical panels, though very rusty. The remains of the BC tower lay behind (north) of the battery. The gun blocks and magazine entrances for AMTB BCN 442, tactical No. 24, (2 X 90 mm) are visible in the sand, as is the magazine for Battery No. 20 (2 X 3 in P). The mine casemate (1944) has been partially demolished and its entrances blocked. A few intrepid members able to crawl in found the remains of two large plotting boards inside. The



AMTB battery on Fisherman's Island  
trip back to the cars involved several stops to pick burrs out of our shoelaces and socks.

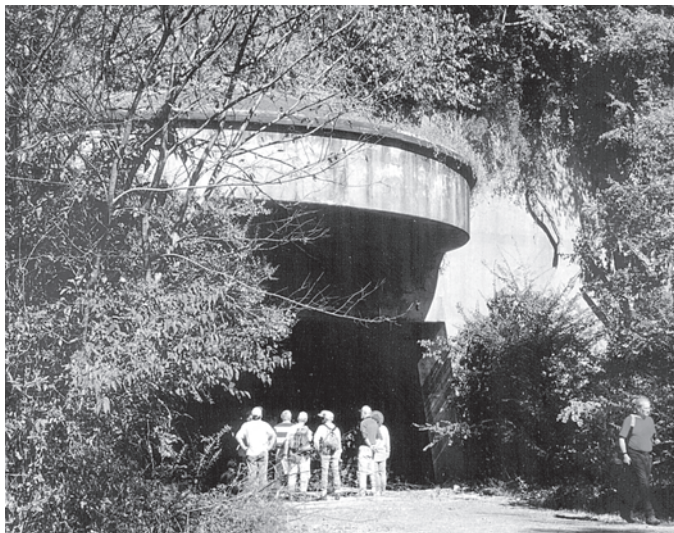
Heading back to Cape Charles, the group gathered behind Battery Winslow (BCN 122, 2 X 16 in BC). Our host unlocked the door to the interior of the battery and we were able to walk through the rooms and corridors of this typical later WW II 16-inch battery. The casemates are open to the public and there is a small information kiosk telling the history of Fort John Custis. We then returned to the visitor's center for lunch and a group picture. The group was then turned loose to visit the remaining structures around Cape Charles. Near the visitor's center is the buried mound of the PSR for Battery Winslow, sealed BCN 228 (2 X 6 in BC), the four-



At the Cape Charles Visitor's Center



story group tower, and the meteorological station. The Cheapside fire control tower and the three towers on Smith Island were viewable from a distance.



Battery Winslow, Fort John Custis

After a relatively short day, we headed back across the bay. At 6 PM we gathered for the annual banquet and business meeting, followed by more presentations.

### Day Three: Camp Pendleton and Fort Story

The third day we headed east from the hotel to Virginia Beach. We gathered in the Fort Story club parking lot at 8:30 AM and drove down the seashore to "Parcel C." One of two fire control towers remains here. It seems likely that the military will soon destroy this tower. A few more miles down the beach we pulled into the gates of Camp Pendleton, the Virginia National Guard facility. The reservation is on land purchased by the State of Virginia in 1908 for training state troops. The camp was used during World War II by the US Army, and then returned to the state. Today, the post continues to offer facilities for training and for a number of military and civic organizations. The majority of buildings are World War II vintage or earlier. We were able to visit the WW II chapel, a restored WW II barracks, and a WW II supply/administration building. The exterior of these buildings had been painted recently and the grounds looked immaculate. The camp has been maintained in excellent condition.

Driving back up to Fort Story, we were met by SFC Gareth Gillespie who accompanied us on our tour of some of the locked structures of Fort Story. The post was established in 1917 and later served as the site of a large part of the armament that protected the entrance to Chesapeake Bay. Today, the post still serves the US Army as a logistics and transportation center and hosts units from the Coast Guard, navy, Marine Corps, and the Army Reserve. Next to the parking lot at the Fort Story club is the concrete ammunition shelter for BCN 443-B, tactical No. 19, the examination battery (2 X 3

in P). We were allowed inside the 1922 mine casemate, with a fire control tower on top of it, the IFC area for the Fort Story Nike battery (1956-1970), and two AMTB batteries, No. 21, BCN 432, and No. 22, BCN 447 (2 X 90 mm fixed). The combined ammunition structure and battery commander's station for Battery 21 was built in 1942, one of the first 90 mm AMTB batteries. Later batteries had much simpler (and less permanent) ammunition storage. The gun blocks of Battery 22 are now in the surf. The next stop was the 1933 harbor defense command station, later a mine casemate, under the Cape Henry lighthouse, then on to Battery Cramer (BCN 225, 2 X 6 in BC) now used for storage (mostly dead computers). Lunch was on the beach near the Panama mounts of Battery "U" (4 X 155 mm), three of which are now in the surf.

After lunch we headed to the back part of the reservation to visit the plotting rooms and a protected railroad tunnel (for ammunition cars) for Batteries Pennington and Walke (2 X 16 in H each), America's only 16-inch coast defense howitzers. The plotting room is now used as a computer classroom. Under this same sand dune were the 1943 HECF/HDCP for Chesapeake Bay and the PSR for Battery Ketcham, which is currently in use. Next was the PSR for BCN 121; nearby BCN 121 (2 X 16 in BC) was not open for our visit, we had to content ourselves with the view of its rear entrances. We did stop at the launch area for the Nike missile battery. All the buildings remain at this site, as well as the three magazines. We were able to go into one, empty now, with the elevator well full of water. Our final guided stop was Battery Ketcham (BCN 120, 2 X 16 in BC). The casemates had been used for a variety of functions, but the battery is now empty. It is an example of an early WW II 16-inch casemate; the ammunition corridor features a set of bends not seen in the later batteries like Battery Winslow at Fort John Custis.

After this tour, the attendees fanned out to visit the remaining structures at the fort. Of particular interest were the dispersed shell and powder rooms for Batteries Pennington and Walke, and the two remaining 16-



Battery Cramer, Fort Story



Panama mount, Fort Story

inch howitzer gun blocks, now overgrown. Exterior photos could be taken of BCN 226 (2 X 6 in BC) and Battery Worchester (BCN 224, 2 X 6 in P), an early 6 inch WW II battery. Also of interest was the post commander's house on the beach and the exposed gun blocks of WW I-era AA Battery No. 1. After revisiting sites missed earlier or now devoid of people, the group headed back to the hotel. The CDSG Fund hosted the annual workers recognition dinner, and a final evening of presentations was held.

#### Day Four-Fort Norfolk

On Sunday, those who had not had to catch early flights home met at Fort Norfolk, where Carter Furr of the Norfolk Historical Society graciously drove a long distance to open the fort for our visit. The Second System fort, completed about 1810, presents a very attractive appearance, and the Norfolk Historical Society has devoted much time, energy, and money to its preservation. Both building in the rear of the fort were open for us to visit, including one which contained Civil War graffiti left by Confederate blockade-runner prisoners, which has recently attracted press attention in the Norfolk area. After enjoying the tranquil waterside scene, the group dispersed, to meet again next year.

#### Some Final Thoughts

I thought the meeting was well up to the usual high CDSG conference standards. We were able to see a number of interesting and unique seacoast defense sites, especially Fort Wool, Fort Monroe, and Battery Pennington. It will be interesting to see how long the US Army is able to keep Forts Monroe and Story, on such prime real estate. I hope they do.

On behalf of all the attendees, I would like to thank Terry McGovern and Dale Floyd for all their hard work in organizing this meeting, and Fielding Tyler for his work as tour coordinator. In addition the CDSG would like to thank Lt. Colonel Kevin Donohue and SFC Gareth Gillespie from Fort Story, Mr. Michael Cobb from the City of Hampton Arts Commission, Zeke Th-

ompson from the Virginia State Military Reservation, Mr. Carter B.S. Furr of the Norfolk Historical Society, Mr. Dennis P. Mroczkowski of the Fort Monroe Museum, Jim Kenyon and Bob Carpenter from the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. From all of us attending-a job well done!

The organizers' did a great job of putting together a program to visit almost all the remaining structures, and at a fairly leisurely pace. They assembled a fine set of conference notes, nearly 500 pages of maps and engineer RCW forms, now available from the CDSG Press for \$50.00. Ordering information can be found on the back of this newsletter or on the web site at [www.cdsg.org](http://www.cdsg.org).

Terry McGovern notes that he has ten or so hats remaining, beige with a red bill and red letters "CDSG 2000." He will send them to anyone who sends him a check or money order for \$10 at 1717 Forest Lane, McLean, VA 22101-3322.

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#### CDSG Business Meeting 2000

The Annual Business Meeting of the Coast Defense Study Group, Inc., was held in the Hilton Ballroom B on October 18, 2000. Incoming Chairman Gordon Bliss opened the meeting at about 7 PM following the end of the conference banquet. First of he thanked outgoing chairman Greg Hagge for his service over the past year. He noted the addition of Alan Hardey beginning his three-year term on the Board joining Gordon and Tom Batha as the 2000-2001 board.

The first item on the agenda was the presentation of a plaque to Robert Zink, in recognition of his efforts in the organization and early years of the CDSG. The plaque presentation was accompanied by a rousing round of applause. Presenter Tom Batha noted not only Bob's role in the formation of the CDSG but his generosity in helping researchers obtain information on American seacoast defenses.

Next up were the committee reports. Elliot Deutsch, the membership and fund chairman, noted that we currently have 425 members, 32 organizational members, 1 family member and 1 honorary member. We have lost 30 members since last year and have picked up 34 new members. He also reported that the CDSG Fund does not currently have a project. The two proposed projects from last year were not followed up on by the agencies that proposed them, so they have been dropped.

Terry McGovern, treasurer and CDSG Press chairman followed Elliot. He noted that he has received the accounts from Elliot, the previous treasurer. The review of the books for 1999 was published in the last newsletter. Any members having questions about the finances of the CDSG should contact Terry. For the first three quarters of the year 2000, the organization has taken in \$14,877 and spent \$11,760. It is anticipated that the