

Chinese coast from Shawtow, China, north to Shanghai, to spot any preparations by the PRC to attack Taiwan.

The USN moved shore-based patrol squadrons (VP) to the Far East to carry out aerial reconnaissance off mainland China with twin-engine P2V Neptunes. On November 28, 1952, VP-22 arrived at Naval Air Station (NAS) Atsugi, Japan, for a seven-month tour in WestPac. One of VP-22's assignments was ship surveillance along the Chinese mainland. The flight path for these patrols appears to have been NAS Atsugi across the East China Sea to a landfall near Shanghai and then southward to Hainan Island, flying three miles off the coast. After reaching Hainan Island, the planes turned and flew back up the coast to Shanghai and then on to NAS Atsugi.

On January 18, 1953, VP-22 launched BuAer 127744, a P2V flown by Lt. Clement R. Prouhet, for a flight along the Chinese coast. On board were 11 navy personnel and two civilians. When near Shantou, China, BuAer 127744 overflew Tao Island. It is assumed the aircraft was checking shipping within the island's three ports, Houzhai, Shenao, and Nanao. While over-flying Nanao at approximately 1220 hrs, BuAer 127744 was taken under fire by anti-aircraft guns around the harbor. One shell exploded on the left side of the aircraft behind the wing, puncturing the wing and fuselage, while another shell damaged the vertical and horizontal stabilizers. These shells ignited a fire in the left engine and the cabin area which forced Lieutenant Prouhet to ditch his aircraft some five miles off of Nanao.

Before BuAer 127744 successfully ditched, she got off an SOS that was picked up ashore. While everyone exited the aircraft safely, only one raft was launched, and high seas soon drove part of the crew apart. United States Coast Guard (USCG) Station Sangley Point, Republic of the Philippines, in response to the distress message, launched a Martin PBM-5G seaplane to the scene of the ditching, BuAer 84738 piloted by Lt. John Vukic, USGC. Despite the high seas, 15-foot swells, and 30-knot winds, Lieutenant Vukic successfully landed his aircraft and recovered 11 of the downed crew. However, as Lieutenant Vukic tried to

take off, a wave caught the right wing float and flipped the plane. Now there were 19 men in the water.

As other aircraft arrived overhead, they were fired on by PRC anti-aircraft guns on Tao Island. With the seas now rougher, it was decided not to attempt another landing with a PBM-5 but wait for a surface rescue. Two USN destroyers, USS *Halsey Powell* (DD-686) and USS *Gregory* (DD-802), which were in the area, were ordered to retrieve the two downed crews. *Powell* closed in on the two rafts in the water and by midnight had taken onboard ten men, seven USN and three USGC.

When *Gregory* arrived, she set up a search downwind from the crash site, taking her toward Tao Island. As she closed the island, anti-aircraft or coast defense guns near Nanao took *Gregory* under fire. Shellfire bursts came no closer than a half mile of *Gregory*, but caused her to break off her search. She left the area without returning fire. There were unconfirmed reports that two crew members from BuAer 127744 were rescued by the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) and later shot by the PLA as spies.

Interestingly, the histories of the *Halsey Powell* and *Gregory* in the US Navy Ship History Section at the Washington Navy Yard do not mention this event. However, the history of VP-22 held by the US Navy Aviation History Section does cover this event.

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2009 St. Babs XXVII attendees at Aberdeen Proving Ground.

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2009 CDSG Conference St. Babs XXVII The Coast Defenses of Baltimore and the Potomac River

Mark Berhow



Fort Washington from the air (Photo by Terry McGovern 2009)

It has been 19 years since the Coast Defense Study Group (CDSG) held an annual conference at the former Coast Defenses of Baltimore and the Potomac River (Washington, DC). The 2009 meeting was organized by Jonathan Prostack and Andy Grant with Terry McGovern arranging access to the Potomac River defenses and the Naval Surface Warfare Center at Dahlgren, VA. Arrangements for access to all the sites we visited were made in advance, with special effort required to gain access to restricted areas at both the US Army proving ground at Aberdeen, MD, and the US Navy proving ground at Dahlgren, VA.

The defenses of Baltimore and Washington date from the First and Second Systems and are among the earliest harbor areas formally defended by the United States. The War of 1812 put these forts to the test and they fared from poorly (the surrender of Fort Washington in 1814) to good (the defense of Baltimore Harbor at Fort McHenry that same year). The defenses were enhanced under the Third System; the only new fort built being Fort Carroll at the entrance to Baltimore harbor. The Civil War of 1861-65 resulted in a ring of earthworks around Washington, D.C., that included some river defenses and found additional uses (garrisons, hospitals, and prisons) for other forts.

New or remodeled gun batteries were proposed and initiated in the 1870s program, but generally not completed.

The modern defense program initiated by the Endicott Report of 1886 resulted in new concrete gun batteries at Fort Washington and the new Fort Hunt on the Potomac River, and Fort Carroll and the new Forts Armistead, Smallwood, and Howard around

Baltimore Harbor beginning in 1890. With the emplacement of long-range artillery at Fort Story to close the entrance to Chesapeake Bay in the 1920s, the decision was made to eliminate the active defenses of Baltimore and the Potomac River.

As early as 1922 most of the remaining guns had been removed from the defenses and the property assigned to other uses. Several of the reservations were used as staging area, schools, hospitals, or POW camps during World War II.

By the 1950s the military reservations had been turned over to other governmental agencies. Fort Washington, Fort Hunt, and Fort Foote are part of National Capital Parks-East. Fort McHenry is a National Shrine; Fort Armistead, Fort Smallwood, and part of Fort Howard are city or county parks. Fort Carroll is privately owned and essentially deserted. The garrison area of Fort Howard, until recently a Veterans Administration hospital, is slated to become a retirement community.

The attendees started to arrive a few days ahead of the formal beginning of the conference to visit locations of interest. The organizers made a trip out to Fort Carroll with a representative of the owners to see if a bridge could be improvised to get from the landing over to the fort sally port. Unfortunately the bridging materials proved short. As it turned out, other arrangements could not be made to bridge the 20-foot gap between the landing and the sally port, and in the end, the rough weather on Friday cancelled the landing altogether. Jonathan Prostack did make some good connection with the Eisenberg family that owns the island and is planning a work trip to the fort later this year. The

registration table opened in the conference room of the Rose Restaurant, adjacent to the Comfort Inn, Linthicum Heights, MD, at the Baltimore-Washington Airport (not really at the airport) around 5 pm. Nearly 80 people attended some part of the meeting. The evening presentations included an overview of the next day's schedule. The sale of coast defense books and other artifacts was begun, including the auction of selected books and items from Ray Lewis' private collection.



The CDSG gathers at the 16 inch gun on proof mount
Thursday, April 2

The first stop was around 30 miles north of Baltimore at the US Army Proving Grounds near Aberdeen. The group gathered at the Ordnance Museum parking lot and visited the outstanding outdoor collection of artillery, tanks, and other ordnance. The museum was opened and a ceremony was held in front of the 16-inch gun on its proof carriage, as the local community commemorated the CDSG visit and recognized the efforts of the Elliot Deutsch, the Friends of the Ordnance Museum, and the CDSG. A shuttle was arranged to bring the group in shifts to visit the restoration shop where we were treated to a behind-the-scenes look at the restoration of the vehicles and weapons, including stripping, disassembly, stabilization, fabrication, reassembly, and finish work to bring these rare tanks and artillery pieces back to life. A few folks managed to visit the actual firing line at the Proving grounds on this visit as well. The Ordnance Museum is scheduled to move with the Ordnance School to Fort Lee, VA, in 2010. About half of the collection will be moved to a new museum facility including a large indoor display area. The other half of the collection will remain in Aberdeen as part of a new museum focused on the Army Proving Ground, which is not moving to Fort Lee. The military reservation at Aberdeen itself will be picking up a number of new functions (such the



The "Leopold" German RY gun



Aberdeen historical vehicle restoration shop

Signal Corp and its museum) in the years ahead as this round of BRAC finishes. Thanks to Elliot Deutsch and Robert Smart for leading the tours of the restoration shop, as well as for arranging our visit.



Fort McHenry

After a box lunch the group headed out for our afternoon tours of Baltimore harbor forts. First stop was Fort McHenry National Shrine, the guardian of the inner harbor of Baltimore. The group toured the First-System fort with its impressive collection of Rodman smoothbores. The big change at the site was the newly reconstructed water battery with its fine collection of War of 1812 armament and plans for a new visitors center.

Next stop was Fort Armistead, now a Baltimore City park adjacent to the Francis Scott Key Bridge. The park has a large parking area for fishing and a boat pier. The batteries, Battery



Water battery Fort McHenry



8 inch Rodmans at Fort McHenry

Winchester (1 x 12 in DC), Battery McFarland (3 x 8 in DC), Battery Irons (2 x 4.7 in Ped), and Battery Mudge (2 x 3 in BP, now missing its parapet), are in the tree-lined area behind the parking lot, are still generally neglected, but it looks as though some work of the trees and brush in and around the batteries has been cleared. The Armistead batteries are still the "poster children" for neglected coast artillery batteries of today.



Battery Winchester, Fort Armistead

The final stop of the day was at Fort Smallwood, now an Anne Arundel County park. The park is a very popular day-use area and the staff is seeking to restore and interpret the military history of Fort Smallwood. Battery Hartshorne (2 x 6 in DC) has had its protective slope of earth removed from the front and is sealed up and whitewashed. Its companion 3-inch rapid-fire battery was removed years ago for no apparent reason. The original barracks remains, and although modernized somewhat for a variety of uses, the plan is to remove the drop ceilings and additional walls and restore the building for use as office space and an interpretive center. John Marshall, Matthew Grey, and Deborah Yeater, staff members at Fort Smallwood Park, were most helpful with our tour.



Barracks at Fort Smallwood

The day concluded with presentations at the conference hotel meeting room by Joe Frechette from the US Army Center of Military History, Danny Malone, and Karl Fritz.

Friday, April 3

The day started off cold and gloomy, with periods of heavy rain. The trip out to Fort Carroll had been changed from a landing to a seaborne drive by. About 30 of the attendees met at Anchor Bay East Marina for an hour ride out and around Fort Carroll, a Third-System work modified with the addition of three Endicott-era batteries. The rest of the crowd fanned out to visit local museums including the National Electronics Museum and the B&O Railroad Museum.



Fort Carroll from the Francis Scott Key Bridge

The entire group gathered at the parking lot of Fort Howard Park, a Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks location. The park, roughly the eastern third of the old Fort Howard military reservation, includes all the remaining seacoast artillery batteries, currently safety-fied with rails and fences around the gun pits: Battery Key (8 x 12 in BLM), Battery Stricker (2 x 12 in DC), Battery Nicholson (2 x 6 DC), Battery Harris (2 x 5 in BP), and Battery Clagett (2 x 3 in MP). The park is in pretty good shape, though a bit overgrown and looking a bit neglected. We were able to go inside the mortar battery magazines, used by the park for storage. The remaining two-thirds of the Fort Howard military reservation was until recently a Veterans Administration hospital. That has been closed and all that remains is a small outpatient clinic. The remaining buildings, including the hospital, officers' quarters, headquarters building, mine storage building, QM storage building, post exchange/

Saturday, April 4



Battery Nicholson, Fort Howard



Battery Harris, Fort Howard



Officer's Quarters, Fort Howard

gymnasium, and theater are currently unoccupied. The property is being transferred to private ownership for development into a retirement community. The plans include the refurbishment of all the historical buildings and the construction of several new apartment/condo complexes on the open spaces. Currently, the unoccupied buildings are slowly deteriorating and a number have been broken into and vandalized. The local police do patrol the area; the group was queried by an officer while we were there. But, if things do not move along with the development soon, some of these buildings may be lost.

The evening started off with the annual CDSG banquet at our hotel, followed by the annual business meeting and a special discussion on the future of the CDSG.

The group saddled up and headed south toward Washington, DC, and south to Fort Washington National Park, MD, a part of National Capital Parks-East, administered by the National Park Service. The park has fine defensive works dating from 1800 to the 1910s. An interpretation center and the magnificent transitional-period stone and brick fort attract the most attention, while the Endicott-period batteries, fire control, and mine facilities are generally ignored. The park's primary use is for picnicking, walking, and running. Gathering at the parking area next to Battery Meigs (8 x 12 in BLM), the group visited the mortar battery (now a storage facility), the former stables, and Battery Wilkin (2 x 6 in DC) by shuttle. The next stop was at Battery Humphreys (2 x 10 in DC) and Battery Smith (2 x 3 in BP), along with the platform for a 10-inch BC mounted during the Spanish-American War in between. Next up was a concrete two-story battery commander's station and the early Endicott-period Battery Emory (2 x 10 in DC), which had gun carriages of two different models. The battery was recently cleared of vegetation overgrowth by a volunteer crew organized by Terry McGovern and local CDSG members.



Battery Emory, Fort Washington

The next stop was the ravelin built during the Third-System reconstruction of the fort, now capped by Battery White (2 x 4 in P), and the remaining mine facilities (storehouse and casemate) along the shoreline. Then it was up to main parking lot to visit two nice brick fire control stations, Battery Decatur (2 x 10 in DC), the visitors' center, and the generally restored Second/Third System fort. The door to the south side of the work was opened to let the group visit the rifle gallery and newly cleared Battery Many (2 x 3 in P), the beneficiary of another CDSG work party. The grounds looked great and the NPS crew was just beginning to put out the picnic tables for the coming season. Many thanks to Barbara Wadding, Bill Clark, and other NPS employees for letting the CDSG group run around the park and into the interior of the batteries.

Next we drove north to Fort Foote National Park, MD, also a part of National Capital Parks-East. Fort Foote was an enclosed earthwork battery built on Rozier's Bluff to command the river and strengthen the ring of fortifications that encircled Washington, D.C. during the Civil War. It was modified during the 1870s program for 8, 10, and 15-inch Rodman guns.



Casemates of Fort Washington



Rifle gallery at Fort Washington



Battery Many, Fort Washington



Mine casemate, Fort Washington

Today the overgrown earthworks are accessible by a path and interpretive signs lead to two massive original 15-inch Rodman smoothbores remounted on reproduction carriages in original emplacements.

The final stop of the day was across the river at Fort Hunt National Park, VA, a part of the NPS George Washington Memorial Parkway system. The area is a popular picnic ground; only few military structures remain, including four batteries: Robinson (1 x 5 in BP), Sater (3 x 3 in MP), Porter (1 x 5 in BP) and Mount Vernon (3 x 8 in DC), and one NCO's quarters that



Battery Foote

is being restored as a visitors center. The batteries looked clean and neat, and the group was able to enter some of the magazines and galleries of Battery Mount Vernon. The staff is working on a new interpretive program for the fort. Thanks to Vince Santucci, Brandon Bies, and Victoria Stauffenberg for arranging our access and their participation in the tour of the site.

The evening was highlighted by the CDSG Fund Worker Bee appreciation dinner hosted by Terry McGovern and Meg Hogan at their home in Virginia and the conclusion of Ray Lewis's auction at the hotel. Presentations at the hotel on Saturday evening were given by Ian Stevenson and Shawn Welch.



Battery Mt. Vernon, Fort Hunt



Enlisted Men's Quarters, Fort Hunt
Sunday April 5

The group saddled up again for another trip south, this time to the Washington Navy Yard. The former shipyard and ordnance plant of the United States Navy in Washington, DC, is the oldest shore establishment of the U.S. Navy. Currently a ceremonial and administrative center for the U.S. Navy, it is home to the Chief of Naval Operations, and headquarters for the US Naval Historical Center, the Department of Naval History, the US Naval Criminal Investigative Service, the U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps, US Marine Corps Institute, and numerous other naval commands. The group gathered in the historical center's parking area to meet with the director who took the group on a tour of the upcoming new wing of the US Navy Museum dedicated



Navy Museum, Washington Navy Yard



16 inch MkII gun barrell, Washington Navy Yard



14 inch Navy railway gun, Washington Navy Yard



Test fire damage to Japanese battleship armor



"Fat Boy" nuclear bomb case, Navy Cold War Museum

to Cold War history. The exhibits are being housed in the old navy model-tank building, which is slated to be open to the public later this year. The rest of the time was spent visiting the Navy Museum and examining the various pieces of ordnance on display around the plaza, including a 16-inch MkII gun barrel (the same as the ones given to the US Army for coast artillery use in the WWII batteries) and a 14-inch naval gun on a WWI railway mount.

The final stop on the agenda for this conference was a rare visit to the US Navy's Naval Surface Warfare Center at the Dahlgren Proving Grounds in Virginia (about a 90-minute drive from the Washington Navy Yard). The group had to have a list of names two weeks before our visit for a background check and proper ID to get in. The US Navy provided two buses with drivers to transport us through the proving grounds. We were met by Wayne Harman and Peter Kolakowski, who gave us our agenda and answered the groups' questions. Our first stop was at a 16-inch gun in a proof mount on display in a park area (quite a bit different from the army 16-inch proof mount). Then it was out to the firing line, where the group was met by Rich Mason and Robin Station. After a brief overview, we headed out through the blast wall to the line. The US Navy still proof fires all ordnance to be installed on its ships, as well as testing experimental and foreign ordnance. On the line were 5-inch (and smaller) ordnance currently being fired. A number of older, larger-caliber weapons were there as well, including a 12-inch gun, a 16-inch gun, and two 8-inch guns in a *Salem*-class turret, none of which have been fired in some time. To the left (north) were the towers and mount-



Firing line, Dahlgren NSWC



Firing line, NSWC



18 inch test gun barrell



16 inch navy gun on proof mount at Dahlgren



16 inch barrells



Behind the firing line



Gun barrels at NSWC



12 inch railway gun at Dahlgren



The Dahlgren "boneyard"

ings for the fire control equipment; arrayed behind the line was a large collection of gun tubes and liners including an experimental 18-inch gun, a number of 16-inch guns, and an assortment of guns ranging from 5 to 14 inches. To the right and behind the blast wall was the only surviving US Army 12-inch M1895 gun on a Batignolles railway carriage and another collection of gun tubes. As time was drawing short, the group headed back to the buses for a trip out to the "bone yard," a collection of mounts and barrels no longer used. Thanks go to Terry McGovern for making the contacts and arranging the visit for the CDSG. We

would also like to thank Capt. Shelia A. Patterson and Stacia Courtney for permission to visit the NSWC.

The Dahlgren visit ended the conference. Thanks again to conference organizers Jonathan Prostack and Andy Grant for heading up the arrangements for this meeting. Thanks also to all who lent a hand with the two battery cleanup days at Fort Washington before the conference. The group would also like to thank all the staff and volunteers at Aberdeen PG, Forts Carroll, Smallwood, McHenry, Howard, Washington, and Hunt, Washington Navy Yard, and Naval Surface Warfare Center, Dahlgren Division, for all their help in making our visit possible. These conferences cannot be held without volunteers to run them and the members who attend them. While nearly all the old coast artillery forts in the Baltimore and Washington DC areas are open to the public, it is great to be able to visit them in a group like this so questions can be answered. We often get to get into extra places normally closed to the public, and even though the Fort Carroll adventure fell through at the last minute, we still had the contacts to get proper permission to visit that site. Another wonderful meeting, thanks to all those who worked so hard to make it a success, and to the nearly 80 members that attended.

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The CDSG Fund

The CDSG Fund supports the efforts of the Coast Defense Study Group, Inc., by raising funds to support preservation and interpretation efforts concerning seacoast defenses around the United States. The CDSG Fund is seeking donations for preservation projects around the United States consistent with the goals of the CDSG. Donations are tax-deductible for federal tax purposes, and 100% of your gift will go toward the project selected. The CDSG Fund will acknowledge your gift and keep you informed on the status of its projects. Make checks or money orders payable in US funds to The CDSG Fund.



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