



Rodman cannon on the inner wall of Fort Clinch.

* * * * *

2018 CDSG Conference The Harbor Defenses of Columbia River April 25-27, 2018

Mark Berhow



Fort Columbia in the morning fog

The classic Pacific Northwest spring weather patterns were in full swing in April, with periods of heavy rain earlier in the month. But, as April 25 approached, the skies cleared, with sunny skies as CDSGers gathered at the Shilo Inn Hotel in Warrenton, OR. My guess at attendance was low, so we arranged to hold our evening meetings at the Warrenton City Community Center less than a mile from the hotel. After registrations, we had an overview of the next day's events and three presentations, from Glen Williford, Ian Wolfe, and Karl Fritz.

The Columbia River was the major commercial and military entry for Oregon from the early 1800s through the turn of the century. Land was set aside in 1852 for military reservations at both Cape Disappointment and Point Adams. Concern over possible foreign invasion prompted the construction of three earthen batteries on the bluffs of Cape Disappointment and an enclosed earthwork on the low sands of Point Adams in 1863. The fortifications were essentially completed by the end of the war. The Point Adams work was named Fort Stevens, after Maj. Gen.

Isaac I. Stevens, killed at the battle of Chantilly, VA, in 1862. The forts were occupied throughout the 1870s but were only manned by caretaker detachments in the late 1880s. In 1875 the post at Cape Disappointment was named Fort Canby, after Maj. Gen. Edward R.S. Canby, assassinated by Modoc Indians in 1873.

The Columbia River defenses were listed in the Endicott Report of 1886 and construction of the new defenses began in 1896 at Fort Stevens and at a reservation at Chinook Point on the Washington side of river. Additional batteries were added in 1900 and eventually eight gun batteries were built at Fort Stevens, three batteries at the new Fort Columbia at Chinook Point, and two batteries at Fort Canby. The harbor also received mine defenses.

Several guns were removed from all three forts during 1918-20, and four mortars were moved from Fort Stevens to a new battery at Fort Canby. The coming of World War II brought a new set of defenses: three new 6-inch batteries built 1942-45, and two new 90 mm AMTB batteries; the mine defenses were also updated. Fort Stevens had the distinction of being the only continental U.S. military reservation to be fired on by an enemy since the War of 1812, when Japanese submarine *I-25* lobbed several shells at the post in June 1942. Following the war, the Columbia

River defenses were inactivated in 1947 and the reservations were declared surplus. While a portion of the Fort Stevens reservation was sold to private interests, and a portion of the Fort Canby reservation was given to the Coast Guard, the rest of the military properties ended up in state hands.

More in-depth history on these three forts can be found in three very good books available at the local gift shops. The first is *Fort Stevens, Oregon's Defender at the River of the West*, by Marshall Hanft. I believe it is only available at the Fort Stevens Museum gift shop. Hanft was a long-time researcher of Fort Stevens history and an early coast artillery historian. The other two books are *Columbia River Forts: History of Fort Canby* and *Columbia River Forts: History of Fort Columbia* by Donella J. Lucero and Nancy L. Loomis. Donella was a long time Washington State Parks interpretation specialist specializing in the Columbia River forts. These two books are well illustrated with maps and photographs. These two books appear to only be available at the Lewis And Clark Interpretive Center gift shop at Cape Disappointment.

Day 1: Fort Stevens

The group started Friday morning at Fort Stevens State Park. Except for the garrison area around the parade ground, most of the old military reservation is now part of the state park. The area is well maintained by the state. An excellent historical museum, coordinated by Lauren Neal and staffed by park volunteers, is in the old war game building, which has a great book shop. The museum contains a number of seacoast artillery related artifacts, including a rare depression position finder and an azimuth scope.



155 mm GPF at Fort Stevens

The park also reconstructed the basic outline of the Civil War earthwork on the location of the original. The walls have been formed and a sally port has been built, but the work remains unfinished.

Park Ranger John Koch opened unique Battery Mishler (2 x 10-inch DC, all-round fire) for the group. This 360° battery was built completely enclosed except for the circular gun pits and the crow's nest observation stations. It is the only one of its kind built and was used as the HECF-HDCP during WW II. The Air Force built a concrete roof over the two-gun pits in the late 1940s. The state has installed lights in the structure and conducts guided tours on special occasions. The battery had recently been used as a movie set and some of the props, obviously for some sort of a horror film, were still in one of the gun pits.



Inside one of Battery Mishler emplacements

Next, we visited Batteries Walker and Lewis (2 x 10-inch DC each). Both batteries have decayed considerably and are currently off limits to visitors. We were able to walk through parts of Battery Lewis. Next the group fanned out to visit the other structures in the historic area, including Battery 245 (2 x 6-inch shielded barbettes) with two 5-inch naval guns in destroyer gun mounts in the emplacements, and Battery Pratt (2 x 6-inch DC), with its full-scale replica of a 6-inch gun on a disappearing carriage built by long-time member Jack Buckmeir. Work continues on restoring the interior of Battery Pratt, with plans for rebuilding a functioning Hodges ammunition hoist.



Battery Lewis



Battery Pratt

After a visit to Battery Clark (8 x 12-inch mortars), the central power house, and a quick trip into the large brick guardhouse with its intact cells, we then headed out to visit Battery Smur (2 x 3-inch MP). Battery Smur is slated to get a M1898 3-inch gun barrel mounted on a replica carriage within the month after our visit. The area also included several fire control stations and pillars, the central and reserve power plants (the reserve plant has a fairly complete GE motor-generator), three generations of mining casemates, two mine loading structures, the post switch-board room, the mine cable tanks, and mine storehouse, as well as numerous foundations for the WW II-era barracks.



Battery Clark



Fort Stevens guardhouse



Fort Stevens mine tanks and switchboard room



M1898 3-inch gun on a reproduction mount ready to be installed at Battery Smur

The highlight of the afternoon was visiting Battery David Russell (2 x 10-inch DC) and Fire Control Hill, south of the battery. The battery was built 1903-04 to defend the southern approach to Point Adams and prevent naval bombardment of Fort Stevens from that point. For this reason, this battery is well to the south of the main fortification area. The state has built a large parking lot and the area is generally open year-round. The structure is clean of trash and graffiti, a fine example of late Endicott-era construction.



Battery Russell

Fire Control Hill, some 600 feet or so south of Battery Russell along a well-groomed trail, is an excellent complex of fire control structures, including the fort commander's station (1910s-30s), several other base end stations, and a barracks. These structures are in various states of disrepair, some missing roofs and walls. South of this were two searchlight positions and the SCR 296 radar for Battery 245, as well as a dummy Battery Russell. A few folks headed to the jetty area to visit the two concrete gun blocks that remain from AMTB Battery 1 (2 x 90 mm fixed, 2 x 90 mm mobile) as well as to search for a few of the more remote fire control stations to the south. We then headed back to the hotel. The Fourth Annual Workers Dinner as held that night, followed by presentations.

The State of Oregon, the Friends of Old Fort Stevens, and numerous volunteers have done a wonderful job of preserving, interpreting, and restoring the historic remains at this site.

Day Two: Fort Canby and Fort Columbia

On Friday morning we were up bright and early for a 30-minute drive across the Columbia River Bridge to the defenses on the Washington side of the river. We (eventually) gathered in the parking lot in front of the US Coast Guard gate at Cape Disappointment to begin our tour of Fort Canby. The Coast Guard



Battery Guenther



Battery Guenther mortar pit

has jurisdiction over the southern half of the cape, and through arrangements with DCM Jason Billings, they graciously gave us access their property. Our first visit was to the unique Battery Guenther (4 x 12-inch mortars). Guenther was the last mortar battery built by the US Army (1921-22), for four mortars removed from Battery Clark. Located behind some of the USCG family housing, it is not generally accessible to the public. The battery was recently cleaned of all trash and debris by a volunteer crew and we were able to look at the interesting plotting room and simple shell rooms and magazines.

In the main station area, we headed up the hill toward Battery Elijah O'Flyng (2 x 6-inch DC). Battery O'Flyng is slightly overgrown, but clear of any vandalism due to its isolated location. Further along the crest of the promontory were five sets of fire control structures. The fire control structures along the ridge between O'Flyng and the lighthouse are much more overgrown, with a treacherous trail between them.



Battery O'Flyng

Next the group was on their own to visit the remaining structures. In the state park area, a road leads up to the "second" bluff of Cape Disappointment and the site of Battery Harvey Allen (3 x 6-inch DC). The state has built an interpretive center on the front of parapet of this battery that houses exhibits on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Cape Disappointment, and Fort Canby. The center has a number of artifacts from Fort Canby, including parts of one carriage from Battery Allen and a number of 6-inch



Remains of Rodman mount and Battery Allen, Fort Canby



Powder magazine, Battery Allen

and 12-inch shells. The battery itself is clean and has one powder magazine restored with racks and powder canisters.

Behind the battery are the granite blocks that made up one of the 15-inch Rodman emplacements near the lighthouse. All other remains of the Civil War earthwork batteries have been destroyed. Out along the bluff toward the north are the remaining foundations of the BC for Battery Allen and the SCR radar facility for Battery 247. Other structural remains in Fort Canby State Park include Battery 247 (2 x 6-inch BC) and two searchlight shelters on McKenzie Head, and some fire control structures and the SCR radar site for Battery 247 near the parking lot for the trail to the North Head lighthouse.

At 1 PM the group began to gather at Fort Columbia State Park for a visit to the barracks interpretive center, which is still pretty much in original condition, with its kitchen intact and an unmodified sleeping dorm above. We headed out with Ranger Stephen Wood to visit Battery 246 (2 x 6-inch BC). The State of Washington procured two complete M1903A2 6-inch guns on shielded M1 barbette mounts from Fort McAndrew in Newfoundland, Canada, restored them, and mounted them at Fort Columbia in 1994. After touring the inside of the battery, the group toured the two mining casemates at the fort, then fanned out to visit Batteries William Murphy (2 x 6-inch DC), Frank Crenshaw (3 x 3-inch MP), and Jules Ord (3 x 8-inch DC), as well as the impressive garrison buildings above the batteries.

A number of interesting highlights were seen during this visit. Parts of two Hodges hoists from Battery Murphy are currently inside Battery 246; plans are being made for their restoration.



Fort Columbia quarters and barracks



Guardhouse and Battery Ord



Barracks enlisted sleeping bunks



Barracks ordnance display



Battery Crenshaw and one 6-inch gun of Battery 246



Shell room display inside Battery 246

The central powerhouse contains a G.E. motor-generator. The administration building, two officer's quarters, the hospital, the fire station, the quartermaster storehouse, and four NCO quarters still remain. Additional structures visited included three sets of fire control structures on the hillside above the main post. Fort Columbia is a fine intact example of a small turn-of-the-century American coast artillery post, with much of the reservation under state control.

The group then gathered back across the river at 6 PM for a banquet buffet dinner in the Warrenton Community Center, followed by the annual business meeting and two more presentations. With that, the conference officially concluded. On Sunday morning, a number of the attendees headed north to Forts Worden and Casey; a number of other attendees had visited those forts before the meeting.

My personal thanks go to all that made the journey to attend the meeting and to CDSG representative Aaron Buda, Fort Stevens State Parks Ranger John Koch, Friends of Old Fort Stevens members David Lindstrom and Theresa Buckmeir, Coast Guard DC1 Jason Billings and BM1 Timothy Edginton, Washington State Parks retired interpretive specialist Donella Lucero, and Washington State Parks Rangers Aaron Webster and Stephen Wood. Also, we all deeply appreciated the evening presentations by Glen Williford, Terry McGovern, Ian Wolfe, Douglas Crist, Karl Fritz, and Steve Kobylk.



CDSG evening meeting



2018 CDSG attendees at Battery Pratt, Fort Stevens



2018 CDSG attendees at Battery Allen, Cape Disappointment State Park



Distinctive unit insignias of the 18th (left) and the 249th (right) coast artillery Regiments



Fire Control Hill, Fort Stevens

* * * * *

CDSG Fund

The CDSG Fund supports the efforts of the Coast Defense Study Group by raising funds for preservation and interpretation of American seacoast defenses. The CDSG Fund is seeking donations for projects supporting its goals.

Visit the CDSG.ORG website for more details.

The goals of the CDSG and CDSG Fund are the following:

- * Educational study of coast defenses
- * Technical research and documentation of coast defenses
- * Preservation of coast defense sites, equipment, and records for current and future generations
- * Accurate coast defense site interpretations
- * Assistance to groups interested in preservation and interpretation of coast defense sites

Donations are tax-deductible for federal tax purposes as the CDSG is a 501(c)(3) organization, and 100% of your gift will go to project grants. Major contributions are acknowledged annually. Make checks or money orders payable in US funds to: Coast Defense Study Group Fund or the CDSG Fund. Donations can also be made by credit card through the CDSG website at www.cdsg.org.

The Fund is always seeking proposals for the monetary support of preservation and interpretation projects at former coast defense sites and museums. A one-page proposal briefly describing the site, the organization doing the work, and the proposed work or outcome should be sent to the address below. Successful proposals are usually distinct projects rather than general requests for donations. Ideally, we desire to fund several \$500 to \$1,500 grants per year. Upon conclusion of a project a short report suitable for publication in the CDSG *Newsletter* is requested. The trustees shall review such requests and pass their recommendation onto

the CDSG Board of Directors for approval. The trustees for the CDSG Fund are Terry McGovern, Quentin Schillare and Mark Berhow.

Send donations to (and made out to):

CDSG Fund c/o Quentin Schillare

24624 W. 96th Street, Lenexa, KS 66227-7285 USA

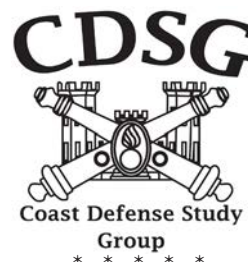
Or use your credit card via PayPal on the www.cdsg.org website.

Send Fund Project requests to:

CDSG Fund c/o Terry McGovern

1700 Oak Lane, McLean, VA 22101-3326 USA

Please prepare a written request of your need and how your request relates to the goals of the CDSG.



CDSG Logo Hats, Shirts & Patches

The CDSG is pleased to offer custom-made hats, T-shirts and patches to our membership. Wearing these hats, T-shirts and patches are a great way to make others aware of the CDSG and its goals. It is also an excellent way to promote new memberships in the CDSG.

The CDSG patches have been available for several years. Designed especially for the CDSG, these quality patches combine the Coast Artillery Corps and the Corps of Engineers symbols to reflect their involvement in U.S. coastal defenses. This logo is now on hats and a set of T-shirts which are great for showing the CDSG "flag."

To order your hat, T-shirt or patch, please complete the order form below and send it along with your check (made out to CDSG, Inc.) to Terry McGovern at 1700 Oak Lane, McLean, VA 22101-3326 USA (e-mail: tcmcgovern@att.net).

CDSG hats, T-shirts and patches ordering information

Black T-shirt with white ink:

Size & # ___L ___XL ___2XL ___3XL

Red T-Shirt with white ink:

Size & # ___L ___XL ___2XL ___3XL

Kacki T-Shirt with black ink:

Size & # ___L ___XL ___2XL ___3XL

Navy T-shirt with yellow ink:

Size & # ___L ___XL ___2XL ___3XL

Total Number: ___ times \$_____ = Total \$_____

(domestic \$18/overseas \$26 each)

Patch: ___ times \$_____ = Total \$_____

(domestic \$4/overseas \$6) each

Hats: ___ times \$_____ = Total \$_____

(domestic \$20/overseas \$25) each

Be sure to include your name and shipping address.

You can also order online at cdsg.org/shopping/