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No Boots Left Behind St. Babs XXXIX, CDSG 2022 Conference in New Orleans Trip Report

Quent Schillare

The Coast Defense Study Group held its 2022 conference March 23-27 in New Orleans. From its headquarters in the Ramada Metairie-New Orleans Airport, a group of 40 intrepid adventurers and guests visited eight historic locations associated with the defenses of the city and the lower Mississippi River. Our last conference in New Orleans was twenty years ago, February 27 to March 3, 2002. We've penciled in our next visit to the city for twenty years hence, March 4-9, 2042.

This year's conference was unique for several reasons. Our annual conferences typically require a year to conceive, plan, and execute. With that in mind, the coordination team began planning in the spring of 2019 for a March 2020 conference. A few things got in the way, the coronavirus pandemic, and Hurricane Ida, to name just two. To name a third, conference scheduling in NOLA (as the locals call it) requires fitting events in between Mardi Gras, the Jazz Festival, and many other lesser known but well attended get-togethers. The onset of the pandemic and the responses by government at all levels forced us to reschedule the conference from March to September 2020 and then to cancel it altogether; a first for our organization. Because the planning for the 2021 conference to Charleston/Savannah was far advanced, the visit to New Orleans was pushed to 2022. While we were pushing, at the end of August 2021, Hurricane Ida came to town and impacted our planning in two ways. First, it badly damaged the first and then the second hotel we had booked. They cancelled on us. Second, the storm devastated several of the locations we planned to visit, especially, Grand Isle, the launch point for boats to visit Fort Livingston.

Faced with these obstacles, your valiant coordination team of Terry McGovern, vice chair and boat procurement specialist,

Chuck Ruby, registrar, and unparalleled navigator to marinas and other obscure locations, John Weaver, Third System subject matter expert (SME), Mark Berhow, computer smart guy, and me. Regardless of the physical, microbiologic, and bureaucratic obstacles the team pulled it all together arranged for the group to visit all eight historic locations, focusing on the five requiring water transportation.

This year's conference was masonry heavy but leavened with enough Endicott and Taft concrete on the lower reaches of the Mississippi River to keep both brick/stone and concrete members happy. Our visits were to locations with military history that spans more than 102 years of United States fortification construction and occupation (1818-1920). And we visited a location older than that. Fuerte San Felipe, now called Fort St. Philip, was begun by the Spanish in 1792 and reinforced by the French before Louisiana became a part of the United States in 1803.

Whenever New Orleans is mentioned in the framework of U.S. military history the story inevitably turns to the Battle of New Orleans. The context was the War of 1812 and the desire of the British to gain valuable North American real estate to enhance their bargaining position in ongoing peace negotiations to end the war. Not just one fight, the battle was a series of seven engagements (or nine or twelve according to our evening presenters) between the British Army and the Royal Navy on the one hand and the polyglot American forces on the other. It began with a Royal Navy victory on Lake Borgne on December 14, 1814, and ended with the Royal Navy bombardment of Fort St. Philip from January 9-17, 1815. As is always the case in war, there was plenty of valor, competence, and incompetence on both sides.

And contrary to American historical myth, the main battle on January 8, 1815, primarily an artillery duel where the Americans had the biggest guns, did not occur after the end of the war, at least legally. Signed by the negotiators in Ghent, Belgium, on December 24, 1814, the treaty was ratified by Parliament and signed into British law by the prince regent on December 30, 1814. Trans-Atlantic transportation slowed things down and the treaty was not sent to the United States Senate by President Madison and ratified until February 16, 1815. So, the war did



Fort Pike (drone photography by Andy Bennett)

not officially end until then. Both sides remained on a war footing until official notification. And there was no surrender on the battlefield, both sides exchanged prisoners and the British forces eventually sailed away.

What did this have to do with the Third System and later defenses of New Orleans? Plenty! American military planners went to school on the campaign. Fort Massachusetts (1858) was sited to cover the deep-water anchorage in Mississippi Sound formerly occupied by the Royal Navy. Battery Bienvenue (1828) is located where the British invasion force disembarked from its boats on Bayou Bienvenue/Bayou Villiers. Fort Pike (1819) is on Pass Rigolets, and Fort Macomb (nee Wood, 1820) covers Chef Menteur, the two primary water routes into Lake Pontchartrain to the north of the city of New Orleans. Tower Dupre (1830) and Proctor's Tower (1846) in Lake Borgne protected the city on the east along routes explored by the British during the campaign. Forts Jackson (1822) and St. Philip guarded the lower approaches to the city along the Mississippi. And finally, Fort Livingston (1841) on the Gulf of Mexico kept watch on the entrances to Barataria Bay, a potential back door to the city. The conference visited each of these historic sites except Tower Dupre which has succumbed to time and weather and today is a pile of stones. What follows is a day-by-day report.

Day 1 (Wednesday, March 23). John Weaver arranged a pre-conference visit to Camp Parapet, a Civil War earthen fortification on the Mississippi River to the south of the conference hotel. Local historians opened the gate and about 40 people, local and CDSG, toured the works and discussed the site with historians. The actual conference kicked off with registration and preliminary announcements in the meeting room of the Ramada Metairie (3400 S. I-10 Service Road, Metairie, LA 70001). The evening began with a general introduction and safety briefing. Followed by a schedule change. John Weaver, our Third System SME, had to bow out of the conference because of a family emergency. Terry McGovern filled in with an overview of the defenses of the Panama Canal. Because of the aggressive daily travel schedule, the evening presentations ended between 9 and 10pm.

Note: in the interest of space, this trip report will focus on the how we got to a site, who helped us, and salient information about the site. For those with an interest in the works themselves



Fort Massachusetts (Mark Berhow)



Fort Pike (Mark Berhow)

the reader is directed to John Weaver's *A Legacy in Brick and Stone* for Third System fortifications and the various Reports of Completed Works for Endicott/Taft batteries.

Day 2 (Thursday, March 24). The day started with breakfast at the IHOP restaurant at the hotel and box lunch pickup in the meeting room. We drove east to Gulfport, MS, to board Ship Island Excursions' *Capt. Pete*, our private charter for a one-hour ride to West Ship Island and Fort Massachusetts. The coordination team decided to pay a premium to charter our own boat so we could control our time on the island and leave at 11:30am vice the normal tourist departure of 2:30pm. Fort Massachusetts is an element of the Gulf Islands National Seashore. The group was escorted to Fort Massachusetts by park ranger John Bernstiel who provided introductory remarks. The masonry fort is a small, truncated circle with two demibastions that sits in the sand on the west end of the island. It has a casemate tier and a barbette level. Of interest to our group was a 15-inch Rodman on a reproduction carriage, a hot shot furnace on the parade, on the remains of front pintle Rodman gun mounts. The site is under the active management of the National Park Service and in a good state of repair.

We reembarked on the *Capt. Pete* to return to Gulfport and continued our journey to Fort Pike State Historic Site back in Louisiana. Ray Berthelot, the parks program manager for the Office of Louisiana State Parks, met us at the gate and served as the SME. Fort Pike was the first fortification constructed in the Third System. It is shaped like a slice of pie with two demibastions and a central bastion. Vertically, it has one level of casemates with a barbette level sited to provide fire on the Rigolets. The parade is dominated by a two-level citadel intended for last-ditch defense. The interior of the fort was dry. The fort shows its age (203 years) and is under very light management by the Office of State Parks. Hurricanes and budgetary shortfalls impact the future.

After a ride back to Metairie and dinner on our own with enjoyed two interesting presentations. Rhett Breerwood, the command historian of the LA National Guard, discussed the history of Jackson Barracks, the headquarters of the LANG and a major Army base in New Orleans since the 1830s. Following Rhett, Marty Morgan, a local historian, and host of a show on the Science Channel, talked about exfiltration operations that fol-

lowed the battle of New Orleans, including recent archeological excavations of a fort site on the west coast of Florida established during the war of 1812.

Day 3 (Friday, March 25). This was our first day with local water transportation with an ambitious schedule to two hard-to-get-to forts and one drivable location. After breakfast we car-pooled to Campo's Marina at Shell Beach in St. Bernard Parish. Campo's Marina is said to be the oldest marina in continuous operation in the state of Louisiana. The day's first mission was to visit Proctor's Tower, an unfinished brick defensive tower near shore in Lake Borgne. Protected by rip rap on all four sides, the fort sits in water on three sides. This was our first opportunity to work with a local boat provider to land members of our group on rip rap—and reload them. Our fleet consisted of a large oyster boat and two smaller fishing charter boats captained by Robert Campo, Jimmy Corley, and one of Jimmy's employees. We learned that local boat captains like a challenge. We divided ourselves into two groups, those willing to climb over the rip rap from the small boats and those willing to take photos from the oyster boat. The small boats landed their first groups and then returned to the oyster boat to pick up another load. Those on the fort were able to explore both the outside and the inside, including some who climbed to the unfinished second level. To tie the site to history, a LA state historical marker near the Marina commemorated the first naval fight of the New Orleans campaign in December 1914.



Proctor's Tower (Andy Bennett)

We left Campo's Marina in midmorning and drove elsewhere in St. Bernard Parish to The Parish Marina to link up with Monty Montelongo and St. Bernard Ecotourism. After a box lunch and safety briefing, we departed on a 27-passenger pontoon boat and a 20-passenger airboat to Battery Bienvenue out in Bayou Bienvenue. Although the British Army of 1814-15 was able to



Battery Bienvenue (Andy Bennett)



Battery Bienvenue (Pete Payette)

land at this site and make their way to the Mississippi River on semi-dry land, subsequent engineering and 207 years of weather has made the site a mixture of dry land and thick brush near the fort's brick wall and swamp with standing water everywhere else. Capt. Monty developed a procedure for all to get ashore. He ran the airboat up on the grass to the right of the ramparts and then tethered the pontoon boat next to it to enable everyone to access the fort. Along the ramparts are six cannons, some mounted on concrete stands. Although 19th century weapons, it is unclear if they were original armament to the site, but may have been emplaced years ago as tourist attractions. CDSG records indicate they are: one M1819 24-pounder siege gun, one M1829 32-pounder seacoast gun, three M1845 42-pounder seacoast guns, and one M1839 42-pounder seacoast gun. This last is serial #1 which may be a prototype of the later M1845s. Those brave enough to tread in the swampy ground behind the ramparts were rewarded with views of two magazines and two other structures. Battery Bienvenue was the group's first experience with boot-sucking mud resulting in several briefly lost boots and muddy feet. This resulted in the CDSG NOLA 2022 motto of "No boots left behind."

Our last stop of the day was Fort Macomb, a near twin of Fort Pike with smaller casemates resulting in a slightly smaller fortification. Fort Macomb receives less tender loving care from budgeteers for preservation and maintenance, but has an interesting present. The site is used as a movie location. As we visited a crew was removing equipment used the day before for filming. While CDSG members are used to visiting abandoned site by



"No Boots Left Behind"



Fort Macomb (Mark Berhow)

themselves, we are not used to sharing the location with many non-historians, including a snake wrangler who told us that he had only seen nine or ten snakes that day, all of them non-poisonous. Armed with that valuable information we were able to explore the casemates, the barbette tier, and the citadel. The interior of the fort was dry and because of the ongoing movie operations was cleared of brush and tall grass.

That evening CDSG member Chris Zeeman brought us up to date with Fort Adams, RI, where he is president of the Fort Adams Trust. A gem as both a Third System fortification with an advance redoubt and Endicott/Taft emplacements, Fort Adams is under active management. Following Chris, Ian Gray, a guide at the Chalmette National Battlefield, discussed the context, geography, and history of the battle of New Orleans.

Day 4 (Saturday, March 26). This was perhaps our most ambitious day. We had breakfast, picked up our box lunches, and drove south along the west side of the Mississippi to Buras in Plaquemine Parish. Rendezvousing at LZ Dock near Fort Jackson, the group climbed aboard a deck boat, a smaller Boston Whaler-type boat, and an airboat. Capt. Lonnie Davis of Bayou Marine



Fort St. Phillip (Andy Bennett)



Battery Merrill, Fort St. Phillip (Pete Payette)



Battery Pike, Fort St. Phillip (Mark Berhow)



Fort St. Phillip bastion (Mark Berhow)

led the flotilla across the half-mile-wide Mississippi to Fort St. Philip on the eastern shore of Plaquemine Bend. Louisiana river boatmen are crafty, and instead of disembarking over the rip rap and the levee on the river itself, the boats travelled through a series of bayous on the west side of the fort to stage for a landing operation where we transferred in smaller groups to the airboat to go ashore near Battery Merrill (4 x 6-inch pedestal mount). The guns and carriages for this and the other five concrete batteries

were removed long ago. Travelling west to east on foot across the swamp from Merrill to Battery Pike (2 x 10-inch disappearing carriage) the next concrete emplacement enabled us to use what we had learned about movement across swampy ground at Battery Bienvenue the day before. It seems that some of us did not learn the lessons very well. The batteries themselves were sited on dry high ground although below the loading platforms deep water made exploration impossible. Beyond Battery Pike, Battery Forse (2 x 8-inch disappearing carriage), Battery Brooke (2 x 3-inch masking pedestal), Battery Scott (2 x 3-inch masking pedestal), and Battery Ridgely (2 x 4.7-inch Armstrong) were all accessible. The top and side walls of the Third System Fort St. Philip are accessible, but sediment over the last 120 years has made getting into the works difficult. Most of us returned to the Battery Merrill embarkation point by retracing our steps through the brush and swamp, but a lucky few went down to the river and boarded the airboat which had landing through a gap in the rip rap. Sharing the site with us on this day was a herd of cows belonging to someone with grazing rights to the property. In the back of our minds was a chance encounter with a local critter. Several were sited but evaded their human visitors, except one large snake that was chased away by two of our more adventurous souls who walked the outside of the perimeter seawall. Several conference attendees deployed small drones to view areas inaccessible on foot, including one who spotted a six-foot long *Alligator mississippiensis* near the foundation of the former lavatory on the north side of the fort. Joining us on the trip to Fort St. Philip was Kelly

Duncan, a local attorney who is a direct descendent to Brigadier General (CSA) Johnson Kelly Duncan who was in command of the coast defense of the approaches to New Orleans during the early days of the Civil War. A unique connection with the last time Fort St. Philip heard shots fired in anger. The shuttling back to the west side of the river was uneventful.

Rod Lincoln, the Plaquemine Parish historian, and Charlie Schmitz, a local historian and tour guide, met us at Fort Jackson to provide access and answer questions. In addition to the Third System fort, the group had access to Battery Millar (2 x 3-inch masking pedestal) on the river levee and Battery Ransom (2 x 8-inch disappearing carriage) on the parade of the fort.



Fort Jackson (Mark Berhow)



Fort St. Phillip (Mark Berhow)



Fort Jackson (Andy Bennett)



Hornsby-Ackroid engine and power plant, Fort St. Phillip (Mark Berhow)



Battery Millar, Fort Jackson (Pete Payette)

The day ended with the annual banquet, and annual meeting at Don's Seafood in Metairie. After the annual meeting Mark Berhow briefed the assembled folks on the planning for next year's conference to the harbor defenses of Portland, ME.



St. Babs XXXIX New Orleans Conference Attendees (Michel Van Best)

Day 5 (Sunday, March 27). Breakfast at the IHOP and box lunch pick up was followed by a long carpool drive to Grand Isle on the Gulf coast. As we neared the coast, we started to see the desolation caused by Hurricane Ida six months before. An estimated 50% of the buildings on Grand Isle were destroyed or uninhabitable. We assembled at newly rebuilt Sand Dollar Marina to link up with our two deck boats from Jean Lafitte Marine. Captains Rick and John were initially hesitant to tackle the newly emplaced rip rap around the western end of Grand Terre Island, home to Fort Livingston, but they accepted the challenge. We divided the group into two, an adventurous group intent on going ashore and the leisure group content to sail around the island and photograph the remains of the Third System fort. As luck would have it, after a two-mile ride across Barataria Bay, many passengers of both boats went over the rip rap to explore the fort. The remains of the fort were accessible from the rip rap and were relatively dry. Folks went up to the barbette level and explored some of the interior. There were no encounters with critters probably because of the ongoing noisy reconstruction of the protective rip rap and the removal of the remains of the former fisheries station. They were working on



Landing at Fort Livingston (Mark Berhow)



Fort Livingston (Pete Payette)



Fort Livingston (Andy Bennett)



Fort Livingston (Mark Berhow)

a Sunday when we visited. Both boats returned to the Sand Dollar Marina where many conference attendees enjoyed their box lunches on picnic tables under a protective covering. The conference officially ended.

For the record, here is a list of conference attendees: Matt Bell, Andy Bennet, Mark Berhow, Keith Chapman, Carl Chappell, Craig Dyson, Julie Ann Dyson, Karl Fritz, Andy Grant, Robert

Grimm, Alex Hall, Dave Jamroz, Carolyn Jamroz, Dave Jernigan, Pat Jernigan, Scott Larimer, Scott Logan, Olga MacKenzie, Jim MacKenzie, Danny Malone, Dale Manuel, Terry McGovern, Jeanne Parks, Don Parks, Pete Payette, Phil Payette, Bill Preston, Chuck Ruby, Quent Schillare, Rolf Thoendel, Jim Touza, Ann Touza, Michel Van Best, Steve Waldron, Greg Wolf, Ian Wolfe, Chip Woodman, Bob Wooley, Sue Wooley, and Chris Zeeman.

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A Postcard From Hawaii

Charles H Bogart

I recently bought on eBay a postcard featuring the *U.S.A.T Hunter Liggett*. The sales site did not show the back of the card. The postcard upon being received held a pleasant surprise for me for on its back was a hand written message. The postcard had been mailed from Honolulu, Hawaii on June 4, 1940 by Clyde M. Linn, Battery I, 64th CA Regiment, Fort Shafter, Territory of Hawaii. The photo of *United States Army Transport Hunter Liggett* on the front of the postcard was taken circa January 1940 as the ship has an American flag painted on her side. World War II started in September 1939 and Germany soon launched a campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare. United States merchant ships as a result of this submarine warfare quickly had painted on the sides of their hulls American flags, to show that the ship belonged to a neutral country.

The postcard was sent by Clyde Linn to Mrs. Hazel Kedden of Miami, Florida. The postcard reads: "6-2-40 Hello Hazel, Here I am again. Thank for the nice card and I hope you will like this one. Say how about



United States Army Transport Hunter Liggett at Honolulu, Hawaii. She does not appear to be carrying any armament.

