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CDSG Annual Conference Portland, Maine, May 2 to 8, 2023

Mark Berhow

It was a wild and stormy weekend leading up to the start of the CDSG Conference in Portland Maine at the very end of April. The Sunday before the meeting started saw over 4 inches of rain in a 24-hour period. However the major part of the storm had passed by Monday and only lingering waves of rain came through on Tuesday and Wednesday. We only had one bad day of rainy weather for the rest of the meeting,



Stopping at the Holy Donut, gourmet potato donuts on the waterfront in Portland

The area around Casco Bay and the river bays to the north have an outstanding collection of remaining seacoast fortifications ranging from unique Second and Third System forts, largely intact early modern era forts, to WWII era forts. In all there is a significant collection of seacoast defense structures that are rarely seen elsewhere. Several sites are accessible only by boat and a number are privately owned, so attending this conference might well have been the only way most fort enthusiasts to see them.

Casco Bay was one of the original deep seaports used by British and French explorers beginning in the late 15th century. A British colony was established in 1623, and fortifications were established over the years for defense against native Americans, the French, and later against the British as well.

I will keep this report relatively short on the details as the history and remaining structures are well covered for the 2005 CDSG Portland Conference. Joel Eastman's conference notes for the 2005 meeting are comprehensive and available from the CDSG. The tour notes published in the May 2005 and August 2005 *CDSG Newsletter* cover the details of our last visit, from which remarkably little has changed in the status of the sites in the past 20 years. The history of the Portland and Casco Bay defenses

is covered in a very detailed history by Bill Gaines published in the 2011 volume 25 of the *Coast Defense Journal*; a reprint was provided with the online materials collected for the conference. Ken Thompson's outstanding book *Portland Head Light & Fort Williams* (The Thompson Group, Portland, ME 1998) covers Fort Williams.

The budget process was interesting—besides the usual hotel, meeting room, and banquet arrangements—charter boats and ferry rides had to be arranged for three days, golf cart rentals were made for one island and some admission fees had to be covered. The operational costs were nearly \$25,000, which translated to \$330 per person for the 62 folks that originally planned on attending.

Tuesday May 2nd

Registration and check in was held on Tuesday afternoon at the Best Western Merry Manor Inn in South Portland, followed by an overview of the next days events and presentations on the Army's hospital buildings by Quentin Schillare and some historic views of the Portland defenses by Mark Berhow.

Wednesday May 3rd

We gathered at 7AM at the Fogg's Water Taxi Dock in downtown Portland. By 9 AM we had been shuttled to Cushing's Island and began our guided tour of the remaining structures of Fort Levett with John and Fred Spencer, our island hosts.



The hospital at Fort Levett



Battery Bowdoin Fort Levett



Battery Kendrick Fort Levett



Hoist in Battery Bowdoin Fort Levett

Cushing Island is a private community, only island residents and their guests have access through a private ferry service, so the CDSG visit was a unique arrangement. Fort Levett was an early modern-era fort constructed in the late 1897-1905 with four concrete gun batteries and a small garrison facility. A fifth long range battery was built there after World War I. Our hosts walked the group round the old parade ground which retains most of the original buildings that have now been converted to summer homes. The fortification area is the Cushings Island Conservation Corporation land and remains undeveloped. The weather was cool and breezy, but no rain. The group toured all the batteries and the remaining fire control structures. Although



Battery Foote, Fort Levett

now more overgrown than 20 years ago, the concrete structures remain in relatively good condition and retain a fair amount of ancillary power and communication wiring as well as several hoists. Time is taking a toll as the metal and concrete continues to deteriorate, and most of the wood structures have fallen into ruin. Our last stop was the switchboard room near the dock which retains much of the original boards and wiring.

We were ferried over to Peaks Island at around 1 PM as the weather began to deteriorate to a blustery cold drizzly rain mixed with snow. We headed up to Mike's Carts to rent 12 golf carts to help us move around the Island. Peaks had some fire control and searchlight structures built in the early 1900s. During the World War II years, four major gun batteries and additional fire control structures were built on the island. These structures were fairly dispersed on the Island, and many are now privately owned. The group traveled around the island on carts or by foot braving the cold wet winds to drive by the major sites. We were able to go into Battery Steele, the relatively neglected 16-inch casemated battery that is now in the island's nature preserve. The group finished up with a welcome, warm, and dry visit to the Fifth Maine Regiment Museum opened especially for us by Susan Hanley, the museum's director. The group caught the Casco Bay Lines Ferry back to Portland.



Battery Cravens (BCN 203) Peaks Island



Battery Steele (BCN 102) Peaks Island

The group gathered in the evening for presentations by Paul Drinan on Fort Gorges, Paul Lawton on the sinking and discovery of wreck of the USS *Eagle*, and Ken Thompson on Fort Williams.

Thursday May 4th:

Another 7 AM start at Fogg's water taxi dock for our journey to Cow Island and Fort Lyon. The small early modern-era fort was built after 1900 with two concrete batteries, one search light emplacement, a mine fire control secondary station, and three 3-inch antiaircraft guns. The Island is now owned by Rippleffect, a Portland based youth program that uses the island for outdoor adventures and events. Adam Shepard, the executive director, graciously gave us permission to visit the island as this was before any of their summer programs had started. We had a quick walk around the small island and we boarded the boats to head over to Great Diamond Island.



Battery Bayard Fort Lyon



Double mine secondary foundation Fort Lyon

The group gathered near the old quartermaster wharf where we met Rick Frantz, Kathryn Worley, Ben Mackey, and Bill Middleton, our guides and hosts from the Diamond Cove area and the Friends of Fort McKinley. Another early modern-era coast defense fort built during 1897-1905, Fort McKinley takes up about half of Great Diamond Island. The post had a major garrison facility, with 8 concrete batteries of up to 12-inch guns, and a large mine depot. The site had several fire control stations, searchlights, and switchboard buildings. The post was used mainly for Navy housing during the World War II years. Turned over to a private owner in the 1950s, the post buildings were eventually renovated into private residences, with most of the buildings and tactical structures remaining intact. Public visitation is generally limited to museum guided tours. The fort and its grounds in general looked much the way it did when it was a active post. The site is protected by historic landmark designation which restricts the exterior alteration of the buildings and some of the grounds.

Battery Commander's station and plotting room remains
for Battery Honneycutt Fort McKinley

Battery Carpenter Fort McKinley

We were divided up into 5 groups and escorted around the grounds visiting the structures on the South Fork and the North Fork with a break for lunch in the old post exchange building. Only about half of the tactical structures were on "common access" grounds, the rest were part of particular property lots. We were able to see most of the remaining structures except for the privately owned mine facilities and 12-inch Battery Berry, which we did not have permission to visit. We did at least view nearly all the remaining tactical structures and walk around the garrison area. Our hosts then treated us to drinks, wine, beer, chili, cheese, and dessert in one of the old quartermaster buildings. A great way to finish the day before we boarded the ferry back to Portland!



Battery Thompson Fort McKinley



Old fort commander's station Fort McKinley



Double barracks, now a hotel, Fort McKinley



Post exchange and gymnasium, now the community center, Fort McKinley

The annual CDSG Worker's Appreciation Dinner was held and the evening presentations included talks by Glen Williford on a few coast artillery subjects and two other presentations.

Friday May 5th:

A bit later start of 10 AM at Fogg's Water Taxi dock on this day to take advantage of high tide to take us over to the stone wharf at Fort Gorges in the middle of the Portland harbor. We were able to make the landing and were met by Paul Drinan. After short talk on the Friends of Fort Gorges plans for the facility, our group was able to explore most of the structure, except for sections of the second story casemate that were closed off for

safety reasons. This magnificent Third System work was largely completed by the beginning of the American Civil War, but not armed until the 1870s. It is currently owned by the City of Portland and administered by the Friends group which uses it for events and tours during the summer. The big concern is the sea is slowly undermining the ledge the fort sits on, which is leading to potential long term stability issues.



Fort Gorges

A short shuttle by the water taxi brought the group to the dock at House Island below the ramparts of Fort Scammel. Initially built during the Second System, the fort was totally rebuilt during the Third System as a unique bastioned fortification unlike any other built by the United States. The half of the island the fort is located on is now owned by a new private owner and is being used as a private event location run by Fortland for camping and events. We were hosted by Stefan Scarks and after a brief introduction the group fanned out to visit the fort, which is still



CDSG 2023 Conference attendees at Fort Scammell



Fort Scammell bastion



Emplacements on a bastion Fort Scammell



interior of a bastion Fort Scammell

largely unmodified from its final state in 1870s. Stefan noted they plan to keep the historic integrity of the fort intact, while improving and stabilizing the site.

A quick trip back to Portland by 4 PM so we could get ready for our annual banquet. The banquet was held at the Portland Regency Hotel and Spa which is in the old Maine National Guard Armory Building in downtown Portland. The annual business meeting followed chaired by the current chairman of the board of directors Steve Waldron.



The Portland Maine National Guard Armory Building
Currently the Regency Hotel

Saturday May 6th:

Up and on the road by 8 AM for our journey along the southern shoreline of Casco Bay. The first stop was at the campus of the Southern Maine Community College in South Portland which is on the old military reservation of Fort Preble. Originally built during the Second System, the defensive work was to be rebuilt during the Third System, but construction was halted part way through the rebuilding. Modified with additional batteries during the 1870s, the post received three concrete batteries, a mine depot and new garrison buildings after 1897. The reservation was turned over to the city after World War II and the mortar batteries were buried to create more usable space. Several of the



Fort Preble unfinished Third System work



Battery Rivardi Fort Preble



Collapsing walls of the Third System work at Fort Preble garrison buildings remain today along with the unfinished Third System fort, some of the 1870s batteries, and two concrete batteries. The area is open to the public, but public parking is limited during active school hours. Sadly, three of the eastern casemates of the uncompleted Third System fort recently collapsed and additional casemates are being undermined by the encroaching sea.

Moving on down the coast to Portland Head and the site of Fort Williams, now a large popular city park. Portland Head received fortifications in the 1870s, which were generally replaced by 6 concrete gun batteries and a mine depot during the period



Fort Williams bandstand



Battery Blair and Portland Head Light Fort Williams

of 1897-1905. The post had a large garrison area and was the headquarters post for the harbor defenses of Portland. Unlike Fort McKinley and Fort Levett, most of the buildings fell into disrepair after the military left in the 1950s. The Town of Cape Elizabeth obtained the property in 1964, but did not decide to develop the site into a park until 1979. By that time most of the old buildings had been destroyed. The three large batteries were filled in for safety reasons, leaving a large open park area today. The main attraction is the Portland Head Lighthouse and one with beach and field access. We headed to the Batchelor's Officer's Quarters home of the Cape Elizabeth Historical Society with exhibits dedicated to the history of Fort Williams where we were hosted by Jim Rowe, Ken Thompson, and Bob Dodd. The museum has an excellent set of historic photos and displays as well as some nice dioramas of the fort and the Town of Cape Elizabeth. The group fanned out to visit the remaining structures of the fort before returning to the cars to head further south.

We gathered in the parking lot of Two Lights State Park where we were met by Ranger Kurt Schoener. Kurt led a tour of the interior of the World War II era 6-inch battery near the shoreline of the park and discussed plans for the eventual restoration of the interior for tours and events. The group divided up to visit the fire control towers in the area including one in the park. The Trundy Point Fire Control Towers are owned by Russ Keenan—one is a WW2 concrete tower and the other is a very rare surviving steel tower from the 1920's - used by Battery Foote. The nicely preserved "second" lighthouse of the Two Lights is now owned by Jim Lane, who let us climb up the old lighthouse to the fire control station installed during the 1940s. This ended the official meeting agenda.



Fire control station in a converted lighthouse at Two Lights



Battery Construction Number 201 Cape Elizabeth

Sunday May 7th:

The first add-on day to complete the visits to the fortifications around Portland was a 124-mile driving trip up to Fort Knox near Bucksport, Maine. Constructed between 1844 and 1869, the fort remains today almost entirely intact and is an outstanding



Fort Knox



Gun in casemate Fort Knox

example of Third System construction. The remaining faithful arrived at the magnificent fortification at a bend in the Penobscot River just after the park opened. The casemates and grounds are open for inspection during regular hours and there is a nice gift shop there. The view of the fort from the Penobscot Narrows Observatory is well worth the admission price.

On the return from Fort Knox to Portland we stopped at Fort Edgecomb across the Sheepscot River from Wiscasset to see the Second System earthworks and restored blockhouse, then it was on to Popham Beach to visit Fort Popham and Fort Baldwin.



Fort Edgecomb blockhouse



Lobster Rolls!!

Fort Popham is a partially completed Third System fort built to guard the entrance to the Kennebec River, now a popular beach park. The signs of seashore erosion were present here as well. Fort Baldwin, now a state historic site, is an open access area with three concrete late Endicott period batteries (one converted for two 155mm mounts in WWII) and a WWII fire control tower.



Fort Popham



Battery Hawley Fort Baldwin

Monday May 8th:

14 hardy souls remained for the final trip out to the more remote Jewell Island with its WW II-era 200-series battery, two AMTB batteries, and two fire control towers. Twelve of the group met at Fogg's Water Taxi dock for the trip out to Jewell on two 6-man boats. Because of boat capacity limitations, the other two in the group took the public ferry to Great Chebogue Island, where Erno Bonebakker ferried them to Jewell Island on his boat. Jewell Island is now a state wildlife preserve managed by the Maine Island Trails Association. Luckily the caretaker was out there to help with the landing on the island which has no dock. After landing at Cocktail Cove the group hiked the 2 miles to the south end of the island to visit the remaining structures. Erno helped with getting the folks back on the Fogg's boats after the visit.

Meeting Summary

I was very interested in returning to visit the Portland Defenses. However, several key locations were in private hands and/or difficult to reach as they were on islands that required boat

transportation. As far as I understood it, the CDSG had lost many of its old contacts in Portland since Joel Eastman ran the last two CDSG meetings in 1985 and 2005. With no one in the group stepping up to take on the organization of this meeting, I decided to give it a try. It was interesting trying to make these arrangements from Illinois. I started a couple of years in advance to find and contact folks on Cushings Island, Great Diamond Island, House Island, Fort Gorges, and Peaks Island. Finding the boats to hire was also challenging, but it came down to using the only big water taxi operator in town and, once I had the right contact, I thought it all went smoothly. Several things required knowing the local scene, such as choosing a hotel venue, a banquet venue, buying lunches, getting the best driving directions, etc., so I had to make a best choices from a distance. Bottom line, it is helpful to have local contacts to help set up the meeting logistics, and someone familiar with what the CDSG wants and expects to make these things go smoothly. I really encourage members to step up and volunteer to chair and run these meetings in the future or we won't be able to have them!!

I was struck by how relatively little had changed in the preservation status of the historic areas in the past 20 years. Almost all of the structures present in 2005 are still here, though time and neglect has taken its toll on the metal and wooden structures at the Endicott and WWII fortifications.

However, the effect of the rising sea levels and the increase in the number and intensity of storms is starkly evident especially on those structures at or near sea level. The damage to the Third System casemates at Fort Preble has already begun, and the encroaching sea is causing damage to Fort Gorges and Fort Popham that will cause structural damage unless mitigated.

As noted at the beginning of this report, visiting all of the Portland Defenses is a challenge. Special arrangements must be made to visit the privately held Fort Levett, Fort McKinley, Fort Lyon, and Fort Scammel as well as the city held Fort Gorges—true jewels of remaining American seacoast fortification architecture—and can be difficult to do on your own!

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USAMP Colonel Charles W. Bundy



USAMP *Colonel Charles W. Bundy* was launched in 1943 by the Marietta Manufacturing Company, Point Pleasant, West Virginia. This 2023 computer 3D printer model of her is now on display at the Ohio River Museum in Point Pleasant.

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The National Guard And The CAC 1921

By the National Guard Bureau

Edited by Charles H. Bogart

The Coast Artillery Corps (CAC) component of the National Guard works under a somewhat greater handicap than other National Guard units because members of National Guard CAC companies are by force of circumstances always separated from their weapons, except for the period of the fifteen-day summer encampment. The difficulties brought on by this situation are met to some extent by the policy of locating most of the National Guard Coast Artillery companies in the large coastal cities where they are within comparatively easy access of CAC manned fortifications thus permitting week-end visits to the batteries if the guardsmen are so inclined.

The second step in overcoming the inherent difficulties of the National Guard CAC companies training problem was the action of the federal government some years ago in establishing rather elaborate installations of artillery equipment in certain armories. A typical National Guard CAC armory plant includes three pieces of dummy CAC armament—one 10-inch gun on a disappearing carriage, one 12-inch mortar, and one 3-inch gun on a pedestal mount. These guns and mortars, along with their carriages, are actually like the corresponding service pieces they are to man in war time in practically every respect except they are made of cast iron. It is possible, therefore, not only to drill a gun section, but to give practical instruction to the cannoneers in all the mechanics required in keeping a gun battery in operating condition.

In addition to the dummy guns there is provided a complete installation of modern fire control apparatus, including the usual observing instruments, plotting room equipment, and communication system thus permitting range finding drills for both battery and fire commands. Some of the armories also have a searchlight, a storage battery, gas engines, generators, radio apparatus, and an electrically driven ammunition hoist for 1000-pound projectiles. One of the armories has a moving target in the form of a boat, (but actually on wheels) with a storage battery as the motive power and the machinery so geared that the operator can drive it at varying speeds, permitting a thoroughly realistic tracking drill.

The training of the National Guard CAC companies consists of three parts: (1st) the fundamentals, required of all soldiers of all arms; (2nd) a small amount of Infantry work, such as close order company drills, ceremonies small arms target practice, and riot duty; (3rd) the service of the armament to which the company is assigned.

Separated from the weapons they must use in war; it is not expected that immediate readiness of these National Guard companies for duty in the fortifications will be attained upon mobilization. However, having received reasonable Coast Artillery training in the National Guard armory, they under proper supervision and guidance can quickly master their war time battery assignment, unlike new recruits with the National Guard soldier many of the subjects which are purely technical, mathematical and theoretical, can be eliminated as they have been covered during monthly training. Thus, all that is needed is to accentuate the practical side of the work.