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CDSG 2024 Key West Conference Tampa Special Tour May 7 - 11, 2024

Mark Berhow and Chuck Ruby

Pirates, chickens, iguanas, Hemingway, Jimmy Buffet, the Conch Republic, Duval Street, Mile 0, and—oh yes—seacoast defense fortifications, drew about 30 members of the CDSG to the southern most point of the United States for our annual conference. The conference was coordinated by Chuck Ruby, who arranged for the various site visits, and worked with Terry McGovern to coordinate visits to two sites under Navy control. The evening meetings were held at VFW Post 3911 located at 2200 N. Roosevelt Blvd. in Key Wes. We gathered at 7 PM on Monday May 6 at the surprisingly busy VFW for the discussion of the upcoming schedule of events. Mark Berhow and Terry McGovern then provided talks on Nike/HAWK system and Panama harbor defenses, respectively, before adjournment just after 10 PM.

Tuesday, May 7

The group arrived at the *Yankee Freedom* Dock in downtown Key West to check in by 7:30 AM. The *Yankee Freedom III* is the only charter ferry with the NPS taking passengers out to the Dry Tortugas and Fort Jefferson. Most of us had made reservations months in advance and they did stop taking reservations for this particular day a couple of months before. Just a word of advice if you want to visit Fort Jefferson by ferry, book well in advance! The ferry holds about 250, but plans are afoot to get a larger ferry in the near future. We departed a little before 8 AM for our 2-1/2 hour cruise out to the west. Breakfast was served and an entertaining dialog was provided by Ben Jones, a member of the ship's crew. The weather was fair with a bit of a chop to the sea. After arriving at the dock, we unloaded with instructions to return to the boat for lunch and to be back on the ship by 2:45 PM. Plenty of time for us to tour the fort. Several members accompanied Ben Jones on his outstanding 2 hour guided tour of Fort Jefferson.



The Dry Tortugas

Fort Jefferson is a three-tier brick fort with an interior parade ground area of 17 acres—the third largest Third System fort in the U.S. Built to protect the sheltered deep water harbor at the western end of the Straits of Florida, the fort was never fully completed, the second level of casemates were unfinished. It was partially armed after the Civil War, then decommissioned after 1870. Most of the guns were salvaged over the years except for the guns on the barbette tier, which remain today. The National Park Service has been working on the restoration and replacement of some of the wall elements of the fort and has provided for an impressive self guided tour. It is a highly recommended visit on any fort agenda. Several of our members also took time to go snorkeling around the outside of the fort's moat. We loaded up and left at 3 PM for our journey back to Key West arriving by 5:30.



Fort Jefferson sallyport



Fort Jefferson parade



Hot shot furnace at Fort Jefferson



Fort Jefferson bastion, scarp wall, and moat



Parrot Rifle on the barbette tier

The guests who did not go on the ferry to the Dry Tortugas and Fort Jefferson, had lunch and enjoyed the beach or shopping, thanks to arrangements made by Chuck Ruby's wife Dorenda. The CDSG Fund's annual workers dinner was held on the Smoked BBQ Barge and the rest were on their own for dinner. We gathered at the VFW that evening for two talks by Edward England on his father Howard's legacy at Fort Taylor and an overview of the HAWK missile sites in Key West.

Wednesday, May 8

The group visited the remaining defenses of Key West around Fort Taylor. Fort Taylor was a magnificent 3 story Third System fort on a island built on offshore coral reef to protect the anchorage and port facilities at Key West and guard another portion of the Florida Straits. The three-tier Third System fort was virtually completed by the start of the Civil War, with a large rear cover face, and was connected to the main island by a causeway. The fort has been substantially altered since then—the waterway has been filled in, with the cover face and two tiers of the old fort removed for the construction of Endicott Period Battery Osceola and Battery Adair. The remains of the old fort languished as a storage yard for the Navy until the 1960s when it was slowly restored and eventually became a Florida State Park. Key West Endicott period batteries Ford, Covington, Gardiner and DeLeon have been destroyed by the Navy in the 1950's and 1960's. The WW2-era Battery 231 has been repurposed and we could not visit it.

We started off at 9 AM at the Naval Air Station Truman Annex Security Gate near Battery Seminole. Having completed the Navy's Access Pass Registration, our group was allowed to pass the gate and park near the battery where we were met by Navy

representatives Dannette Baso Silvers, LDCR Aaron Buren, Ed Donohue, Ed Russell, Christina Gardner, and Kent Cummins. Battery Seminole (1904-1943) was an early design two pit 12-inch mortar battery that is currently located within US Navy Truman Annex. A mine casemate/switchboard room and a WW2-era HECP/HDCP were built into Battery Seminole. The HECP/HDCP was not accessible due to crumbling ceilings, but we were able to walk all around the exposed backside of the battery/center complex. We were able to go into the right pit of the battery and its magazines.



Battery Seminole



Our Navy Hosts

Next, we drove over to the parking lot at Fort Taylor and met with Ranger Andrew Grim who gave us an overview talk about the 3rd System fort. We toured the remaining lower level of the fort and its large collection of guns and carriages recovered dur-



Parade at Fort Taylor

ing the restoration. Most interesting were the cannon from the Third System fort that were buried in the rubble as fill during the construction of the later batteries, some retrieved and some still remaining in the fill. Also of interest were the recovered hoist system from Battery Osceola and the four M1898 3-inch gun masking parapet carriages from Battery Adair that had been removed from the excavation of the landfill in front of the fort and stabilized by the state. Battery Adair and the second 90mm AMTB mount were not open due to safety issues.



Andrew Grim welcomes the CDSG to Fort Taylor



In the casemates of Fort Taylor

At around 1 PM the group headed over to the West Martello Tower, 1100 Atlantic Blvd. now the Key West Garden Club. One of two "Martello" towers with extensive outworks built to defend the southern beach and approach to the Key West harbor to the west, the western tower was partially destroyed by the construction of a two-gun 3-inch battery after 1900. The



The cannons embedded in front of Battery Osceola



The West Martello Tower



The M1898 3-inch Balanced Pillar carriages



The Key West Garden Club

reservation was used through WWII. The tower remains were saved in 1949 by local action designating the site as a historic landmark and was developed into the Key West Garden Club, which has incorporated landscaping around the brick remains of the tower. A surprising amount of the outworks remain at the site. The volunteer staff is very aware of the site's history.



Battery Inman at the West Martello



Battery Inman's ammunition rooms

The rest of the afternoon and evening was left open for touring other historic sites, such as USCG Cutter Ingram which is now a museum ship, and other tourist sites of Key West.

Thursday, May 9

The group drove out on Government Road to the old "Salt Ponds" area to the north of the Key West Airport. A cutoff to right led to a foundation of what was possible part of the radar installation. There is a lush green square in the middle of the salt pond near this foundation in the area shown on some maps as a radar tower. Further on Government Road is the old Salt Ponds Military Reservation 1942-1970 which is currently KW Airport and County Facility with controlled access, and the location of WWII Battery #232 with two 6-inch barbette mount guns 1944-1946. We were unable to get access to the battery but the rear entrance to the battery was visible behind the fence, next to the road. Traveling on down the road to the end we stopped



Missile shelter at WAWK Battery KW-65

at the site of HAWK Missile Site Bravo Battery (KW-65) which was manned by B battery of the 6th Battalion of the 65th Air Defense Artillery Regiment during 1962-1979. Nearly all the site structures remain, but the grounds and launch pad areas are in pretty poor shape as they have been used as a barrow pit and a storage area by the county and the airport.

Next stop was at the East Martello Tower near the entrance to the Key West Airport off of Roosevelt Ave. The tower is part of the Key West Art and Historical Society holdings which also administers the custom house and their lighthouse. It is open regular hours and houses a historical display as well as rotating art exhibits. The tower was essentially completed by the 1870s,



The East Martello Tower

but never armed. As with the West Martello Tower, this fortification had a casemated row of 10 seacoast cannons facing the main channel. These were part of the outer works that protected the central tower or citadel. The third story of the tower had positions for four guns that could fire in a 360-degree traverse, giving the tower both a seaward and landward defensive role. The tower and outworks are virtually intact, except for the partially destroyed caponier in the parade that connected the tower to the outworks. The earthen glacis that was to protect the landward approach was never installed, but otherwise this Martello tower retains all of its designed features. Thanks to Cassandra Collett and Cori Convertito for a nice tour and talk through of the site.



Inside the East Martello Tower



Inside the East Martello Tower

After breaking for lunch, we gathered at the gate on the north side of Boca Chica Key off the exist of US 1 to meet our Navy escorts to visit the remains of HAWK Battery KW-10. Built after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1963, this battery was the home to D battery 6th Bn 65th ADA until 1974. Being on restricted Navy property, the site is in a better state than KW-65. The five radar towers are still extant, as are the shelters for the mobile missile



Visiting HAWK Battery KW-10

launchers and the generator building, though all the buildings have been stripped of their contents. The four launch pads and their protective berms are intact. It was a great opportunity to see one of 8 HAWK sites built in the continental US.



KW-10 missile launch area



KW-10 missile radar towers

The rest of the afternoon was left for free time before we gathered at the VFW Post 3911 for the annual banquet and business meeting (see separate report on the CDSG Annual Meeting in the previous issue of the *CDSG Newsletter*.) This ended the formal CDSG 2024 meeting.

CDSG Special Tour to HD of Tampa

Friday, May 10

The remaining attendees made the journey from Key West to St. Petersburg for a special add-on tour of the Harbor Defenses of Tampa Bay. For those that were driving, there was a special stop in the Everglades National Park to visit Nike site HM-69



Ranger David Zeigler at Nike Missile Site HM-69



The Historic Registration Marker for HM-69



The above ground launch area and missile storage shelter



Nike Hercules missile at HM-69



Inside the missile storage bunker at HM-69

outside of Florida City. We gathered at 10 AM at the Daniel Beard Research Center to meet Park Ranger David Zelagin. This was the location of the IFC (radar control) site for HM-69, the buildings of the research center were the admin and barracks buildings. The Nike site is usually only open for special tours from December to March, but we were able to arrange for this special May visit. We drove out to the site and were given a great talk and tour by David. This Nike site is one of the "above ground" sites built for the Nike-Hercules deployment in Florida and around several SAC bases in the 1960s. It has the distinction of being the last Nike site active in the CONUS when it was shut down in 1974. Now a part of the Everglades NP, it is being preserved and interpreted by the NPS. We visited one of the launch areas and its missile storage shelter which had several nice equipment displays and a nicely restored dummy Nike Hercules missile.

The rest of the day was spent getting to St. Petersburg. A few folks visited the Dewey Memorial located at Plant Park, 401 W. Kennedy Blvd. in Tampa at the University of Tampa. The memorial has an 8-inch gun on a M1918 railway mount. It is located next to the ornate historical Plant Hotel, now the administration center for the University. This 8-inch gun barrel was once mounted at Battery Bowyer, Fort Morgan, Alabama.



The 8-inch gun at the Dewey Memorial in Tampa



The Plant Hotel

Saturday, May 11

We met at Fort DeSoto Pinellas County Park on Mullet Key, 3500 Pinellas Byway South. After dealing with the tolls and parking fees, we gathered at the park museum in a reconstructed Quartermaster store house to meet Park Manager David Harsbarger. He provided a brief overview of the history of the fort and park, followed by a tour of the museum and the site. In the 1960's the Boy Scouts and the Rangers marked the original locations of the buildings of the fort. They built brick foundation pedestals at these locations and placed pictures of the buildings on posts in front of the original foundations.



The reconstructed Ordnance Storehouse at Fort DeSoto

The fort was home to two Endicott-era gun batteries. The highlight is visiting Battery Laidley, which originally had eight 12-inch mortars and was in service from 1902-1921. Four mortars were removed after WWI, but 4 mortars are still emplaced at this battery, the only remaining 12-inch mortars in the US. In addition, the two 6-inch Armstrong guns from Battery Burchstead at Fort Dade were recovered, refurbished and installed as displays behind Battery Laidley. Quite the place to see actual seacoast artillery! David noted there are plans to expand the interpretation displays at the battery and we hope the CDSG can help. Most of the large trees and shrubs have been cleared from the battery and walking path has been built over the top. Photos



Battery Laidley, Fort DeSoto



Battery Laidley, Fort DeSoto



A 6-inch Armstrong gun and carriage at Fort DeSoto



Battery Bigelow, Fort DeSoto

and maps of Mullet Key and Fort DeSoto over the years are in the Battery Laidley magazine. The other gun battery—Battery Bigelow - two 3-inch MP (1904-1920)— is now broken up and in the gulf waters.

At 11:30 we gathered at the parking lot near the bay fishing pier for our charter boat ride over to Egmont Key and Fort Dade (1899-1928). Loading up from the beach, the crew took us around Egmont Key and by the partially submerged remains of Battery Burchstead (two 6-inch Armstrong guns and carriages and one 3-inch masking pedestal mount gun) and Battery Page (two 3-inch masking pedestal mount guns) and the southern mine casemate. The key is now a popular state park, but much of the southern half of the island is a wildlife refuge and bird sanctuary with limited access. Landing on the shore near the



Battery Burchstead, Fort Dade



The guardhouse museum at Fort Dade



Brick road at Fort Dade



Battery McIntosh, Fort Dade

old quartermaster's wharf, we headed out to explore the remains of Fort Dade. Most of the buildings of the post have long since been destroyed. The guardhouse has been restored and is now a museum. A walking tour along the old brick roadways has a few of the building locations marked. Battery McIntosh (two 8-inch guns on disappearing carriages) and Battery Howard (two 6-inch guns on disappearing carriages) have been damaged by shore erosion but are currently stable. Other remaining structures include fire control pillars, the partially ruined mine facilities and Battery Mellon (three 3-inch guns on masking parapet mounts) which was built into a modified Spanish American War emergency battery for 8-inch guns. After getting back on the charter boat we departed from Egmont Key back to Fort De Soto Park, where our tour to the Harbor Defenses of Tampa ended.



Battery Howard, Fort Dade

This conference and tour visited Third System, Endicott, WWII, and Cold War sites by land and sea stretched out across Florida from the Dry Tortugas to Tampa Bay. The leisurely pace on a day-to-day basis provided ample time to examine the sites.



Battery Mellon, Fort Dade



The mine wharf at Fort Dade

The CDSG would like to thank Chuck Ruby for taking up the effort to get this organized and Terry McGovern for his help with the Navy. We owe thanks to the folks at the Key West VFW, The Dry Tortugas NHS, Fort Taylor State Park, the staff of the Naval Air Station Key West, the Key West Garden Club, the Key West Art and Historical Society, the Everglades National Park Rangers, and the staff at Fort DeSoto County Park, as well as the crews on the *Yankee Freedom III* from Key West and the charter boat at the Bay Dock in Mullet Key.



The 2024 Conference attendees at Battery Seminole