National Park Service
U. S. Department of Interior

Gulf Islands National Seashore

Coast Artillery
Self-guided Tour

Battery Cullum at the instant of firing, 1930

***"It felt like the world was ending."* McHenry Harry, 1935**

When Langdon's guns went into action the vibrations could be felt all the way to Pensacola across the bay. McHenry Harry recalled the first time he pulled the lanyard, the cord which activated the firing mechanism: "It felt like the world was ending." His hat blew off, his pants split, and he could see concussions rippling through the sand.

Homeland Security through World War II

Before the age of nuclear weapons, "homeland security" meant "harbor defense." In the absence of long-range airplanes, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and amphibious assault equipment, any potential attack on the U.S. (except from Canada or Mexico) required capturing harbors to unload armies and supplies. Protecting the harbors protected the entire country, and harbor defenses received our best technologies and most powerful weapons.

The success of Fort McHenry in keeping the British fleet out of Baltimore Harbor in the War of 1812 inspired the "Star-Spangled Banner" and the building of castle-like forts to defend other harbors from 1817 to 1870. For centuries, cannons fired round balls and ships were made of wood. Against these threats, masonry forts like Pickens and Barrancas were unbeatable. Simply building such forts at all major harbors effectively closed them to foreign navies and the armies they might bring. But by the end of the Civil War in 1865 all this had changed. Revolutionary inventions including rifled cannon and ironclad warships had defeated harbor defenses. New defenses were needed.

Underwater mine defenses (shown here about 1910) were used at Pensacola from 1894 until 1926.

Protecting harbors against modern navies required new weapons and tactics, and eventually a new branch of the U.S. Army, the Coast Artillery Corps (CAC). The CAC used underwater mines, searchlights, complex systems for tracking moving targets at sea, and huge guns in concrete batteries. The threat of fast motorboats led to rapid-firing artillery, airplanes led to anti-aircraft artillery, and every new naval threat was countered by new defenses.

By the 1930's, the job of defending Pensacola Bay fell to the 13th Coast Artillery Regiment, headquartered at Fort Barrancas Army Post, on what is now the western half of Pensacola Naval Air Station. A 10-minute ferry ride took the men across the bay to Fort Pickens, where a smaller army post area supported all of the active gun batteries. Summer encampments housed Florida National Guard units and Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) students from The Citadel, University of Alabama, Mississippi State, and Georgia Tech for weeks of training on anti-aircraft and heavy artillery, and the complex science of tracking a moving target across miles of featureless water by triangulation.

Once on the island, men assigned to outlying batteries boarded a narrow-gauge train, dubbed the B&F for "back and forth" railroad, that made the 3-mile run twice daily. A soldier missing the train had a tiring hike through the soft island sand to his destination, watching for rattle-snakes. For the plotting crew, the triangulation tracking system required coordinated spotting to the ringing of a 15- or 20-second time interval bell, using precision optics, and doing complex calculations while

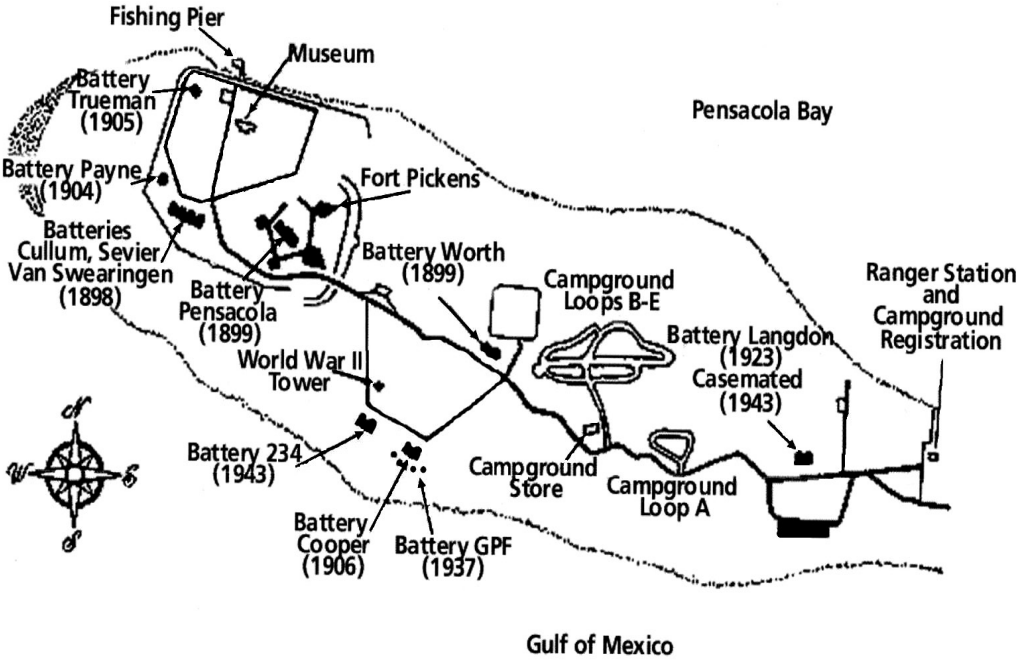
Dressed in dark blue denim fatigue uniforms, artillerymen posed next to a 12-inch artillery shell for Battery Pensacola, circa 1910

under stress. Far greater hazards were encountered at gun drills. Guns weighing as much as 58 tons, projectiles over 1000 lbs., and large amounts of high explosives presented constant dangers. Even when everything worked right, the concussion of firing the big guns could knock a man breathless. Hearing problems were so common that the condition was called "Artilleryman's Ear." When things went wrong, men were maimed or killed.

Tensions were high after Pearl Harbor and German U-boats sank ships in the Gulf of Mexico in 1942, but by 1943 the tide of war turned in favor of the Allies. The last batteries built at Pickens and McRee were completed that year, but never armed. New technologies of that war, including jet airplanes, ballistic missiles, and the atomic bomb, made harbor defense less important to homeland security.

Fort Pickens and the Fort Barrancas Army Post closed in 1947. Guns, railroad tracks, and steel towers were salvaged, leaving only concrete remains. Now gulls call and children play where powerful weapons once shook the earth and stood ready to defend the country. Not long ago, these concrete bunkers were vital to homeland defense. Their time has passed even as the story continues, and new threats demand new defenses.

To learn more about harbor defense, tour the concrete batteries or read The Soldiers Story: The 13th Coast Artillery at Pensacola, 1930-1947, available in park bookstores.



Touring the Batteries

The following is a brief guide to the concrete batteries on the western end of Santa Rosa Island. You may visit the structures mentioned in this guide partially by driving, hiking or by biking. While visiting the batteries observe the following safety tips: Obey all signs that designate safety hazards of closed areas. Use caution when on top of any of the structures. Carry a flashlight for use in unlit or dimly lighted areas. Protect your feet; wear shoes. Report any vandalism you see to the nearest park empolyee.

1. Battery Pensacola, located in the center of Fort Pickens, illustrates the evolution of coastal defenses from brick and stone fortifications to modern reinforced concrete. Completed in 1899, Battery Pensacola mounted two 12-inch rifles on disappearing carriages capable of firing 1,070 lb. shells approximately 8 miles. The battery was declared surplus in 1933. Its guns were removed in 1934 and its carriages sold for scrap in 1942.

2. Battery Trueman was named for Major Alexander Trueman of Maryland who died of wounds received in action with Indians in 1792. Positioned on the western end of the island north of the harbor entrance, the battery was built in 1905 and mounted two 3-inch rapid-fire guns designed to defend the bay entrance against fast torpedo boats and minesweepers.

3. Battery Payne was named for U.S. Army 1st Lieutenant Matthew M. Payne of Virginia who served in both the War of 1812 and Mexican American War. Constructed in 1904, Battery Payne was designed and had a similar mission as Battery Trueman.

4. Battery Van Swearingen was named for Captain Joseph Van Swearingen who was killed in action against the Seminole Indians at the battle of Okee-cho-bee. The threat of war with Spain prompted the immediate construction of this battery in 1898. Two 4.7 inch guns were mounted on pedestal carriages. By 1917 the guns were obsolete and dismounted. In 1922 the battery was given a new mission to serve a a Range Finder Station for the 3-inch rapid-fire batteries.

5. Batteries Cullum and Sevier were built in 1896-98 as one four-gun, 10-inch battery and named in honor of Brig. Gen. George W. Cullum, author of the Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy, published in three volumes in 1890. In 1916, the battery was divided for better fire control, the west end becoming Battery Sevier in honor of John Sevier, pioneer, soldier, and Tennessee's first governor. The 10-inch guns were removed in 1942, and Battery Trueman was relocated to old Battery Cullum in 1943.

6. Battery #234 and its twin, Battery #233 on Perdido Key, were designed to house 6-inch guns with curved shields from cast-steel four to six inches thick. The shields provided protection against machine gun and light artillery fire. Although the batteries received their shields and barbette carriages in 1946, the 6-inch guns were never received. The guns, shields, and barbette carrages present today were placed there in 1976 through the cooperation of the Smithsonian Institution and are identical to the type of guns that would have been emplaced by the Army. The tower adjacent to Battery #234 was to be used to direct gunfire from Battery #234's 6-inch shield guns.

7. Battery Cooper was named for Lieutenant George Cooper who was killed in action at Mivital, Philippine Islands in 1900. Battery Cooper mounted two 6-inch guns on disappearing carriages. During World War I (1917) the guns were removed for use on railway mounts in France.

8. Battery Worth was named in honor of Bvt. Maj. Gen. William J. Worth who was the first to plant the U.S. flag on the Rio Grande in 1847. Completed in 1899, Battery Worth housed eight 12-inch mortars in two gun pits. Four of the mortars were active until 1942. That year, the

Firing a 12-mortar at Battery Worth, 1905 Projectiles weighing up to 900 pounds had a maximun range of 9 miles.

two-story tower was added and the battery became essential for Army-Navy defense, becoming the Harbor Entrance Control Post and the Harbor Defense Command Post (HECP/HDCP).

9. Battery Langdon was named in honor of Brig. Gen. Loomis L. Langdon, who served at Fort Pickens in 1861 and returned as commander in 1885. When completed in 1923 the battery boasted two 12-inch guns. During 1942-43, massive concrete casemates with walls 10 feet thick and overhead masonry 17 feet thick were added to protect the guns and crew.

Glossary of Terms

Barbette: an open platform from which guns fire.
Battery: emplacement for two or more pieces of artillery.
Casemate: a fortified chamber from which guns fire.
Disappearing carriage: gun carriage lowered by its own recoil behind the walls of the battery for safety and quickness in reloading.
Emplacement: the space or platform for artillery pieces.
Mortar: a short cannon used for propelling shells at high angles.
Ordnance: artillery supplies including weapons, ammunition, vehicles, and maintenance tools.
Projectile: an object fired from a gun by an explosive propelling charge, such as a bullet, shell, solid shot, rocket or grenade.
Rifling: a system of spiral groves cut in the inner surface of the gun barrel to give the projectile a rotating motion and thus render its flight more accurate.
12-inch, 10-inch, etc.: refers to the diameter of a projectile.

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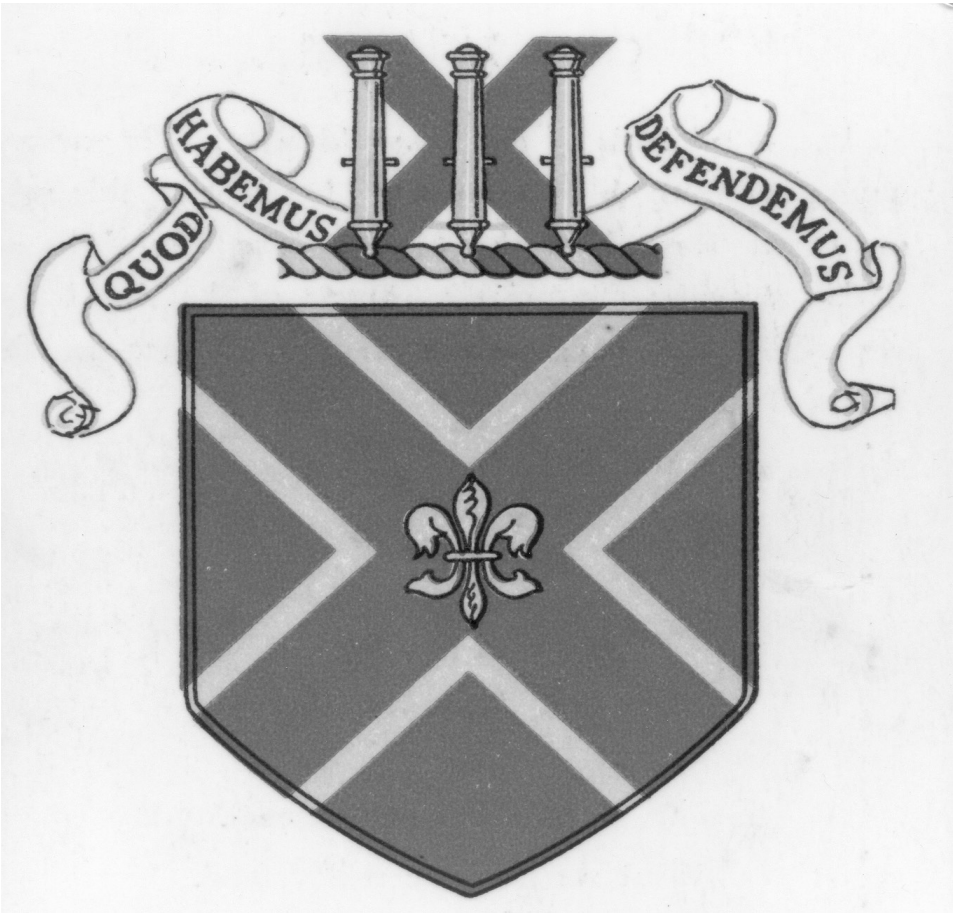
1801 Gulf Breeze Parkway
Gulf Breeze, FL 32563



Insignia, 13th Coast Artillery Regiment, U. S. Coast Artillery Corps