

POSTWAR USE OF BATTERY CONSTRUCTION NUMBER 134

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Editor's Note: Alvin H. Grobmeier was the Asst. OIC at NAVRADSTA (R) Imperial Beach in 1958-60.

Fort Emery (Coronado Heights Military Reservation) was a subpost of Fort Rosecrans at San Diego and the location of Battery Construction Number 134. Construction of 134 commenced on March 27, 1943, and was completed in a curtailed status on February 21, 1944, transferring to the Coast Artillery on November 11, 1944.

It was to have mounted two 16-inch guns on barbette carriages and was reportedly to have been named Battery Gatchell after a former Fort Rosecrans commanding officer, but the guns were never installed and the name was never officially assigned. The huge structure, costing \$1,044,970.29 and built of reinforced concrete, remained vacant until 1947 when the U.S. Naval Radio Station (R) Imperial Beach was established in 134, having moved from a site on Point Loma. It retained the Radio San Diego call sign NPL.

The 500 ft. long main corridor tunnel of 134 was inclined slightly upward from the emplacements at each end for about 100 feet with the center 300 feet being level and slightly elevated from the emplacements. It was in this 300 feet that the Navy placed the operating positions and radio receivers for one of its main west coast radio stations. The south shell room and powder room became the officer-in-charge's office and administrative office, respectively, while the north powder room became a communication-security monitoring space and the north shell room housed the large AN/FRM-3 frequency measuring equipment.

The two storerooms at the north part of the main corridor were used by the Navy Electronics Laboratory, Point Loma, for experiments with

LORAN and OMEGA, both radio navigation systems. The casemates' fronts were for parking space for the station's emergency communications van and station vehicles. The 25 x 60 ft. powder room in the rear of the tunnel and on a lower level had had the generators removed and was an empty space with a highly polished light green tile floor, used occasionally for personnel inspections during inclement weather. The old Army motor-generator set in nearby Battery Grant provided the station with emergency power when required.

Along the west wall of the main corridor was where the Navy radiomen maintained a continuous 24-hour watch for ship-to-shore traffic. Nearby was a large bank of remote controlled radio receivers used by Fleet Air Wing 14 and other commands at the Naval Air Station, North Island, six miles north on the Silver Strand and next to the city of Coronado.

The site at Imperial Beach was a "quiet area" for long-range radio reception and provided space for a large field of rhombic receiving antennas in front of 134. Far-ranging Navy patrol seaplanes and ships close to shore and far at sea sent their messages there without delay. The NPL radiomen often vied with their counterparts at NPG San Francisco, NPM Honolulu and even with NPN Guam to be the first to answer a ship's call and accept its radio traffic. When the first U.S. Navy submarine surfaced at the North Pole in 1959, NPL's radiomen were the first to answer its call.

Stretching some 2000 feet in a north-south line, the PSR, 134 and Battery Grant (239) remain today covered with earth and ice plant. From seaward they appear as three large humps along the Coronado Bay

beach which is only a few hundred feet away. A two-story concrete building has replaced 134 as the main receiving site, the rhombic antennas replaced by a circular display antenna array and satellite dishes, and the Morse code dots and dashes replaced by high speed radio teletype and digital data systems.

Navy men and women now work side by side as opposed to the days when there were no women assigned to NPL at Imperial Beach. Even the name has changed as Naval Radio Receiving Facility Imperial Beach continues to use 134 as spare office and storage space. Although it has been within the city limits of Coronado for many years, 134 will always be known as the fort at Imperial Beach.

#### TRAGEDY AT BATTERY MCGRATH

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Battery McGrath at Fort Rosecrans, San Diego, California, was named in honor of Major Hugh Jocelyn McGrath, 4th U.S. Cavalry, who died November 7, 1899 of wounds received in action at Noveleta, Luzon, Philippine Islands, on October 8, 1899. Commenced in August 1899, the battery was completed in March of 1900 and transferred to the Coast Artillery on November 17, 1900. Two 5-inch guns were mounted on balanced pillars. These guns were removed to an overseas outpost on September 23, 1917\*, and replaced on February 28, 1919\* by two 3-inch pedestal mount guns transferred from Battery Meed, Fort Pio Pico, which was across the San Diego harbor channel from Fort Rosecrans.

For a period during World War II, Battery McGrath was the examination battery for Fort Rosecrans but it was disarmed in 1943 and abandoned after the war. In 1957 it came under Navy ownership and in 1963 under what is now the Naval Submarine Base, San Diego.

In more recent years, Battery McGrath has been used to store

illegal fireworks confiscated by the Customs Service at the Mexican-U.S. border before they were eventually destroyed by personnel of the Army's 70th Explosive Ordnance Detachment. On the morning of July 29, 1980 tragedy struck when Army EOD personnel were loading a truck with fireworks stored in the battery. A fire started on the truck, either from a spark or some careless smoking, and quickly spread to the concrete bunker where an explosion and fire killed three and injured two. Two were burned beyond recognition - a man huddled over a woman soldier, apparently trying to protect her. Thereafter, the Army no longer stored and destroyed illegal fireworks for the Customs Service at San Diego.

Battery McGrath's wartime black tar and paint on its outer concrete surface has been changed to a creamy white with the structure little used now and completely enclosed by a fence within the naval Submarine Base.

\*Dates in Report of Completed Works and the Fort Record Book differ.