

WAR PERIOD HISTORY HARBOR DEFENSES OF SAN DIEGO

(From typescript copy, National Archives)

Situation at Harbor Defenses of San Diego as it existed 7 Dec. 1941.

The mission of HDSD was to protect the San Diego area against land, sea and air attacks. Several factors had made the protection of this area of increasing importance in recent years.

The Consolidated Aircraft Company was in a state of continuing expansion, turning out patrol bombers for the U.S. Navy, and Liberator land bombers for Great Britain. The U.S. Navy Destroyer Base was being developed into a complete Repair Base and serviced all types of units except battleships for the Pacific Fleet. Some of our largest aircraft carriers called San Diego home port and were in and out of the harbor at frequent intervals. The San Diego Naval Air Station was being enlarged to provide a base of the air arm of the Pacific Fleet. The Headquarters of the Eleventh Naval District was in San Diego. A large Navy supply depot, the Naval Training Station, the Marine Base, the Naval Fuel Depot, and smaller installations were also located here. All of these required protection not only for themselves, but also for the shipping which flowed in and out of the harbor to make use of them.

The terrain of the area provided some favorable features for defense, but also left some natural avenues of approach which an enemy might use in a land attack. such attacks were likely only from the north and south because of the mountain range east of the area. Several thousand troops at the Camp Callan CARTC and Marines in combat training at Camp Elliott provided an obstacle to any attack moving down the coast from the north. Attacks from the south must come across the International Border from Mexico. The Mexican garrison in lower California was small and could offer little resistance to the enemy landing and subsequent movement. However, it is a sparsely populated area, few roads and small opportunities exist for living off the country. The 11th Cavalry was stationed at Camp Lockett and carried on frequent maneuvers along the border. It could delay or block any attack from Mexican territory.

Few favorable conditions could be found which contributed to defense against air attacks, the third part of the mission. There was no radar to provide warning of the approach of planes. Drills had been carried out with Navy ships and shore stations for report of aircraft, however, coverage provided was incidental to ship movements made for other reasons. A volunteer air raid warning service with filter center for the area was ready for its first test. Almost no plans(?) of active defenses were available. Planes at the Naval air Station were equipped for training and Army planes at March Field were far away and might be needed at Los Angeles.

Within the Harbor Defenses action had been taken for carrying out the three parts of the mission. Plans had been prepared and practiced for moving troops to threatened points within the defended area. Prior to outbreak of hostilities these were concerned primarily with sabotage or inspired riots.

Co's D and F, 180th Infantry were made available to the RD Commander. They were sent to protect EL Capitan Dam, San Diego's chief water supply source, and the power transformer stations serving the important parts of the city. Active and close liaison was maintained to take advantage of other troops in the San Diego area in case of attack.

The Harbor Defense had the following armament installed for repelling attacks from the sea:

Batteries White and Whistler, 12" mortar batteries of four guns each, these had been installed in 1920, were slow firing and could be easily outranged by any ship larger than a destroyer.

Batteries Calef and Wilkeson, two 10" DC gun batteries of two guns each. These had been installed in 1900 and covered only a limited water area to the south. These batteries suffered from the same range limitations as mortars.

Battery Strong, a battery of two 8" guns mounted on barbette carriages. This was the only modern battery in the Harbor Defense and had been completed and proof fired in the summer of 1941. It had modern plotting room equipment and DPFs, but only one base line. The guns were not shielded and had no power equipment.

Two batteries of four 155mm GPF guns each, installed in field emplacements to cover the south-west, west, and northwest approaches to the Harbor.

Battery McGrath, a battery of two 3" guns. This battery had been installed in 1919 and could cover the Harbor entrance channel on the east side of Fort Rosecrans.

The fire control equipment in all batteries except the 8" was old and a good part of it was improvised. The 155mm batteries had only temporary base end station.

There were 8 fixed Seacoast Searchlights, 6 at Fort Rosecrans and 2 on North Island. All had been installed in 1920. Eight more, modern portable searchlights were available at Fort Rosecrans.

A new Harbor Defense Command Post had been completed in the spring of 1941. The other command stations were much older, and inadequately protected and concealed.

A Harbor Entrance Control Post had been established in the Old Spanish Light House at Fort Rosecrans in July 1941. It had operated since that time with an Army Officer, a Navy Officer and enlisted assistants on duty twenty-four hours a day. A signal tower was operated as part of the station. Battery McGrath was designated the examination battery and was also manned twenty-four hours a day.

To repel air attacks, five positions had been prepared at Fort Rosecrans for four .50 cal MG's each. These were well dug in, rivetted, and complete with connecting tunnels between pits. However, only .30 cal. MG's were available in the Harbor Defense for installation in the positions.

Although the Harbor Defense armament was inadequate, the troops assigned were better prepared. The 19th CA Regiment consisted of a Hq Btry, a searchlight Btry, and 3 Battalions of Hq Btry and three lettered batteries each. Enlisted cadres for the organizations had come from the Regular Army. The remainder of the enlisted men were mostly selectees from the Middle West who had ten months training. About three - fourths of them had received all their training at Fort Rosecrans. The other one - fourth had come from the CARTC at Camp Callan, after completing basic training there.

The field officers in the Harbor Defense were Regular Army, and company grade officers were largely Coast Artillery Reserves, who had been on active duty from 6 to 18 months.

The regiment had trained intensively in artillery drill, infantry drill, small arms firing on other basic military subjects. Almost all personnel had participated in at least one seacoast artillery target practice.

War condition periods of several days each had been held at six-week intervals during the war 1941. During these periods troops had lived at their gun emplacements under assumed tactical conditions, which might prevail during hostilities.

Troops were normally comfortably housed in two containment areas, consisting of mobilization type buildings, built in winter 1940-41.

The outbreak of war on 7 Dec. 1941, with the temporary impairment of the Pacific Fleet, made enemy attacks on the Pacific Coast not only possible but to all appearances, also probable.

Troops were to their gun positions immediately. Ammunition was hauled to the battery positions and made ready for firing. Guards at the reservation gates and boundaries were increased and the

general public excluded from the fort. Organizations were assigned areas of the reservation in which they were responsible for protection against paratroopers, fire, and sabotage.

Marine troops were obtained from Camp Elliott for the protection of the Naval Fuel Depot. Batteries H and I, 19th Coast Artillery were sent to Consolidated Aircraft Company for air raid protection. They had only their own limited number of .30 cal. MG's and AA mounts. This armament was increased by the use of some .50 cal MG's which were at the plant to be mounted in bombers, and by four 37mm guns borrowed from Camp Callan. This constituted the only AA defense until AA units began to arrive from Texas and Georgia, a week later. The harbor Defense troops were not completely relieved to return to Fort Rosecrans for almost a month.

The Harbor Defense Command Post was manned immediately and was continuously on alert until after V-J Day. By mid-afternoon of 7 Dec. 1941 all armament was ready to fire, although an attack in force would have found the Harbor Defense badly out-ranged and at serious disadvantage in fire power. Battery Point Loma, the 155mm battery in the southwest part of Fort Rosecrans, was made the examination battery. All personnel on pass, leave and furlough were ordered back to their units.

Field fortifications and beach defenses were strengthened and increased in number. Camouflage improvement was initiated. These processes were continuous for the period of the war.

During the period 9 to 14 Dec 1941, the 155mm battery in the northwest part of the reservation, was moved to Coronado Heights and named Battery Imperial. This extended the water area covered by Harbor defense guns considerably to the south.

All batteries eight inches and below were put on constant anti-sub marine alert status. During the period of the war, there were sixty-one reports of enemy submarines, unidentified surface vessels and underwater contacts off San Diego recorded by Harbor Defenses of San Diego. During 1942 and 1943, local defense ships and planes went into action twenty eight times on the basis of such reports, and during 1943, 115 depth charges were dropped by these forces. No friendly shipping was sunk and no enemy craft were ever identified within range of the Harbor Defense guns.

Before the war all base-end stations had been either at Fort Rosecrans or across the channel entrance, new temporary base-end structures were established at La Jolla, Hermosa, above Ocean Beach, Coronado Heights, and at the Mexican Border. This gave complete coverage of the coast line and adjacent water areas within naval gun range of San Diego. Communications were extended to all these points from Fort Rosecrans.

One platoon of Battery A, 19th Coast Artillery was sent to Camp Callan CARTC to man 155mm guns there. While thousands of troops were in the CARTC, training was not of such nature to make effective tactical manning of guns practical. This platoon remained in position for several months.

The portable searchlights were also moved to positions so as to provide illumination for all the new base-end stations.

Also in the first week of the war the Harbor Entrance Control Post was moved into a room in the Harbor Defense Command Post structure. A completely integrated Joint Army-Navy command post was now a reality and continued as such during the period of the war.

Action was taken to press for immediate start of delayed construction in the Harbor Defense project, and for approval and start of work on the modernization program.

Panama mounts were completed for Batteries Point Loma and Imperial in January 1942. This enabled coverage of the entire coast line and adjacent water area from south La Jolla to below the Mexican Border by at least one battery of 155mm guns.

Construction started immediately thereafter on new armament and base end stations. In the next two years 26 new base-end stations and two new were completed. Portable searchlights were installed to

serve these stations and a total of 22 searchlights were actually in position at one time. New armament installed will be enumerated individually in order of completion.

A system of permanent buried Fire Control Communication cables was also started at this time. In a little over two years the permanent communication cables called for in the modernization project were all in and working.

The 262nd Coast Artillery Battalion, consisting of a Hq Btry and two lettered batteries, was activated at this Harbor Defense, 1 May 1942. Most of the officers and personnel for the organization came from the 19th Coast Artillery Regiment. The Battalion was organized and trained on Harbor Defenses of San Diego armament. It left for duty in Alaska, 2 Nov 1942.

The 77th Chemical Smoke Generator Co was activated at Fort Rosecrans, 16 April 1942. These colored troops established the smoke generator defense of the San Diego area. They moved to temporary barracks in San Diego, 17 August 1942.

Prior to the war, the U.S. Marine Corps had mounted three 5" Navy guns near Battery Point Loma for training purposes. When the 155mm battery was moved from the northwest corner of Fort Rosecrans to Coronado Heights, 9-14 Dec 1942, no armament was left in this area. Request was made then to move these three 5" guns to the old 155mm emplacement and use them as interim Harbor Defense armament until the modernization battery in that area could be built. This request was approved and in June 1942 the move was completed and the manning of the battery taken over by Harbor Defense troops. The battery was named Gillespie and provided an addition to the defense against submarines and light surface units for well over a year.

The Harbor Defense also obtained the loan of two 7" Navy guns from the U.S. Marine Corps. The emplacement of these was completed in July 1942 and the battery named Zeilin. This battery strengthened the density of the defense to the west although not extending the range. It was manned for over a year.

Battery Humphreys emplacement, the first of the modernization batteries, was also completed in July 1942. The 6" guns and carriages were not available and two 155mm guns were borrowed from Camp Callan to install beside the gun platforms. The battery thus constituted became the examination battery and affectively covered the entire outer channel approaches.

Another structure of the modernization program was added in August with the completion of the bomb-proof transmitter station. This housed both Army and Navy radio transmitters for the combined Harbor Defense Command Post-Harbor Entrance Control Post.

Until August 1942, all officers and men for operating the Harbor Defense headquarters and command post had come from the 19th Coast Artillery Regiment. All that time a harbor Defense Hq and Hq Btry was authorized, which made possible the dividing of the two headquarters. An Harbor Entrance Command post section was included in the new battery and it became possible to adequately man that station.

In the fall of 1942 the motor batteries and the 10" DC batteries were declared obsolete and scrapped. Since sufficient new armament was not yet completed which could be manned, Battery F, 19th Coast Artillery was deactivated, 1 October 1942.

The first of the AMTB armament was received in October with the arrival of eight 37mm guns. Modification and emplacement of these units was started immediately. The following months six mobile 90mm guns were received for AMTB defense. These were emplaced in previously selected positions at Fort Rosecrans, North Island and on the Silver Strand. The battery at North Island was moved to Ballast Point a few months later at request of the U.S. Navy. Improvised methods and means of fire control were devised and personnel trained in them.

The War Department in December officially designated the Coronado Heights area Fort Emory. Battery H, 19th Coast Artillery had been moved to that post to man the new AMTB Armament and AA MG's, so the garrison consisted of two lettered batteries and the 3d Bn Hq Btry.

The first radar in the Harbor Defense went on the air 17 February 1943. This was an SCR-296-A and was installed not far from Battery Strong's BC Station and for use by that battery. This radar was on the air in time to track the battleship task group which simulated a bombardment of Point Loma as a part of their training for the Aleutian counter-invasion. Together with a similar Navy set at the Radar Laboratory complete tracks of the ships's movements was obtained, although because of fog they were visible for only a short time. It was the first use of radar in such a joint Army-Navy problem.

The radio receiver room addition to the Harbor Defense Command Post-Harbor Entrance Control Post was also completed in February 1943. The radio communication project for this joint installation was now complete.

On 25 February 1943, the 281st Coast Artillery Battalion was activated, consisting of a Hq Btry and two lettered batteries. The Battalion was trained at Harbor Defenses of San Diego and part of the officers and men were furnished from this Pacific area 18 May 1943.

The first target practice to be fired in the Harbor Defenses of San Diego using radar fire control for position finding and spotting occurred 18 May 1943. The radar first on the air in January was used with Battery Gillespie for the practice. Results compared favorably with these which had previously been obtained by visual methods.

Mounting of the 6" guns and carriages at Battery Humphreys was completed in July 1943 and were proof fired the same month. This was the first modernization project battery to be completed in the Harbor Defense. The 155mm guns which had served for a year and now removed and this battery also replaced Battery Point Loma in the tactical plan of the Harbor Defense.

In the same month the plotting - switchboard room for Battery Ashburn, the 16" battery at Fort Rosecrans was completed. The Fort Rosecrans fire control switchboard was now moved from old Battery White to its new location. With the addition of new equipment this became the largest installation of its kind on the west coast.

The mounting of the fixed 90mm AMTB armament was completed in August. The three AMTB Batteries were named Cortez, Fetterman and Cabrillo, and were located on the Silver Strand, Ballast Point, and in front of old Battery Point Loma respectively. A complete battery consisted of 2 fixed 90mm gun in gun houses, 2 mobile 90mm guns, and 2-37mm guns with 2 .50 cal MG mounted on each 37mm carriage. Three positions of 2-37mm which were separated somewhat from the 90mm units were called Batteries Channel, Bluff and Cliff, the first two being on the east side of Fort Rosecrans and the third just above the Point Loma Light House. The M9 Directors arrived, were issued, and by the end of September all the AMTB batteries had fired target practice with their new guns and fire control equipment.

The fire control radar set at the Mexican Border site was put on the air in October 1943, and the one at the end of Point Loma was in operation the following month. This completed the original radar project for the Harbor Defense. However, later three more fire control sets and a surveillance set had been authorized and work continued on them.

The two remaining 6" batteries in the modernization project were completed and proof fired in November 1943. The manning of Battery Grant at Fort Emory superseded Battery Imperial. Battery Woodward at the northwest part of Fort Rosecrans now replaced both Batteries Gillespie and Zeilin.

The following month the plotting - switchboard room for the 16" battery at Fort Emory was completed and the Fire Control switchboard for that post installed. Communications there had been

maintained for two years with the field switchboard, field telephones, and originally all field wire. The wire had been progressively replaced with cables as construction proceeded.

During the year 1943, many changes in armament assignments had been made in changing from interim batteries to the permanent project batteries. Also, these new batteries were fixed as quickly after their turn-over to troops as possible. When the year ended, the total 70 target practices fired in the Harbor Defense during 1943, by the eight lettered batteries.

The only serious accident of the war in harbor Defenses of San Diego occurred 29 January 1944. A defective fuse in a 6" HE projectile caused a premature detonation at Battery Humphreys. Five men of the gun crew were killed and seven were injured. The gun tube and cradle ere damaged beyond repair and were replaced with like armament several months later.

Also during January 1944, the number of troops assigned to San Diego Sub-Sector was reduced to the 113th Cavalry Rgn Sqdrn (M) and the Commanding Officer Harbor Defenses of San Diego also designated San Diego Sub-Sector Commander. The Hq and staff were moved to Fort Rosecrans. In April the squadron also moved there. On 30 Jan. 44, they departed for Louisiana. San Diego Sub-Sector was inactivated and two platoons of the 141st Cavalry Troop were attached to harbor Defenses of San Diego. In July 1945 this was farther reduced to one platoon.

In February 1944, the War Department ordered work on some parts of the modernization project deferred. Affected were the mounting of the guns and carriages, installation of the director and power plant for the 16" battery at Fort Emory. The gun emplacements and all the base-end stations for the battery and been completed by that time. The sixth fire control radar station was not started nor was the Battalion CP tower at Fort Emory, and construction of both was deferred.

The fourth fire control radar station at La Jolla-Hermosa was completed in March 1944, and was assigned to Battery Ashburn.

On 25 April 1944, the first big cut in personnel for the Harbor Defense came when the Third Battalion plus Battery E of the 19th Coast Artillery was sent to Texas to be used as Field Artillery replacements.

The fifth fire control radar set was on the air at Fort Emory in June, 1944 and was assigned to Battery Grant.

In July came on of the anticipated events of the modernization program, when Battery Ashburn was proof fired. Considerable speculation existed prior to the firing as to the effect on structures on the post and adjacent areas. However, no damage resulted and the battery was later calibrated and a successful target practice fired.

The surveillance radar was completed and in operation in August 1944. This gave the Harbor Entrance Control Post a very important intelligence means and completed the Harbor Entrance Control Post project.

On 18 October 1944, the 19th Coast Artillery Regiment was inactivated. The First Battalion of that Regiment became the 19th Coast Artillery Battalion (HD), and the Second Battalion, the 523rd Coast Artillery (HD). The Regimental Hq Btry was incorporated into a large Harbor Defense Hq. Btry; and Btry K, the Searchlight battery, became Btry A, HDSD.

During 1944 several units were stationed at Fort Rosecrans during their amphibious training in preparation for the Pacific operation. These were:

505th Tank Bn.	27 April to 13 May 1944
779th AA (AW) Bn.	28 April to 17 May 1944
Some units of 11th Armored Division,	1 May to 22 May 1944
713th Tank Bn.	18 May to 29 May 1944

534th AA (AW) Bn.
782nd Tank Bn.

20 Aug to 22 Oct 1944
9 Sep to 22 Oct 1944

At the beginning of 1945 the largest change in personnel in the Harbor Defense was experienced. Most of the able-bodied soldiers of the command were transferred to overseas replacement depots or to infantry replacement training centers. Replacements for those men were overseas returnees, very few of whom had been in seacoast artillery, and men physically or mentally unfit for overseas service. The training problem was the greatest which had been experienced since the original shipments of soldiers (?) four years before.

On 13 August 1945 the Harbor Defense Command Post was closed and the Harbor Entrance Control Post moved to the Battalion CP 1 station. This was more economical of manpower, and was adequate to meet any threat units of reduced Jap fleet might muster.

On 15 September 1945 the 19th and 523rd Coast Artillery Battalions (HD) were inactivated and the strength of the Harbor Defense reduced by another battery. The organizations assigned now were Hq Btry and four lettered batteries, Harbor Defenses of San Diego.

On the same date the functions of the Harbor Entrance Control Post were discontinued by the Navy and a few days later also by the Army. Consequently, there ceased to be a 24-hour alert command post and examination battery in the Harbor Defenses of San Diego for the first time in almost 50 months.

The Commanding Officer of the Harbor Defenses of San Diego during the entire period covered by this history has been Colonel P. H. Otteson, CAC, U.S. Army.

