

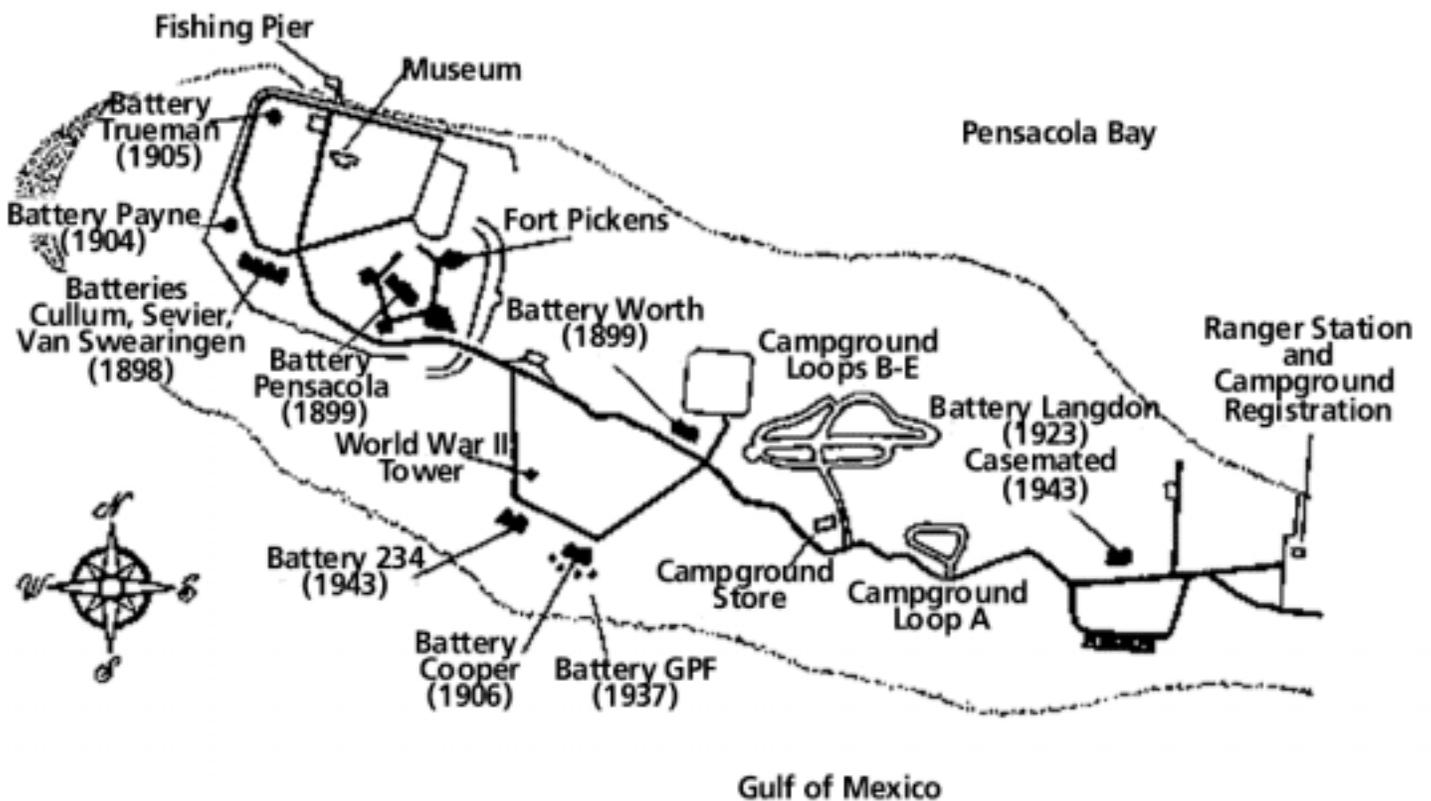


Coast Artillery



Sea Coast Guns

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 Before 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.

Changing Technology	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.
Modern Defenses for Modern Threats	A new branch of the Army, the Coast Artillery Corps (CAC) developed the weapons and tactics needed to protect harbors against modern navies. The CAC used underwater minefields, 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.
13th Coast Artillery Regiment	By the 1930’s, the job of defending Pensacola Bay fell to the 13 th 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 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.
Hazards of Duty	Once on the island, men assigned to outlying batteries boarded a narrow-gauge train, dubbed the B&F (for Back and Forth), 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 rattlesnakes. 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 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, and hearing problems were so common that the condition was called “Artilleryman’s Ear.” When things went wrong, men were maimed or killed.
World War II Ends An Era	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 seagulls 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 Frontline on the Home Front: The 13th Coast Artillery at Pensacola, 1930-1947 , available in park bookstores.