

Battery Townsley Facts At A Glance

Battery Townsley was a Coast Artillery battery that mounted two 16-inch caliber guns, each capable of shooting a 2,100-pound armor-piercing projectile 25 miles out to sea.

Built 1938-1940 as a response to threat of long-range battleship gunfire and air power.

First fortification of its kind in the nation to be completed and fired.

Manned by up to 150 soldiers from Battery "E" of the 6th Coast Artillery Regiment.

Active from 1940 to 1948.

Currently being restored by park volunteers to tell story of San Francisco's World War II Harbor Defenses.

Named:

In honor of Major General Clarence P. Townsley, a general officer in World War I who had also served as superintendent of West Point Military Academy and as commanding officer of the Coast Artillery post on Corregidor Island in the Philippine Islands.

Significance:

Battery Townsley represented the height of America's pre-World War II coastal defense.

The guns and their associated ammunition magazines, power rooms, and crew quarters were covered by up to 14 feet of concrete and 20 feet of earth.

Townsley was the first casemated 16-inch gun battery ever to be fired.

Site of numerous war-time tests including blast effects on casemated batteries, early radar-direction for coastal guns, and the effects of firing 16-inch projectiles against concrete fortifications.

World War II :

During wartime, Townsley's guns had to be ready to be fired on short notice – sometimes only five minutes – so as many as 150 soldiers lived within its underground hallways and galleries.

Due to its remote location, the guns were fired more often than its near-twin at Fort Funston (Battery Davis). People living as far away as San Mateo could hear a rumbling roar as the guns fired.

Soldiers erected an extensive network of barbed wire entanglements and machine gun emplacements outside and on top of the battery protected it from infantry attack.

Obsolescence & Post War Use:

Changing military technology – especially the development of long-range aerial bombers and nuclear weapons during World War II – made the battery obsolete at war's end.

Townsley's guns were last fired in 1948 to test the accuracy of radar-directed gunfire, and then in November its guns were cut up for scrap metal.

During the 1950s, soldiers assigned to the nearby Nike missile sites apparently used its rooms as living quarters and workshops.

Government-related testing agencies used Townsley's underground hallways and casemates as a research facility during the 1960s and '70s.

Battery Townsley became badly vandalized following the closure of the testing facility.

To stop the damage and keep visitors from harming themselves in the dangerous interior, the National Park Service welded the battery shut in 1990.

Today:

Since 2006 the battery has been cleaned out, electrified, repainted and made safe for visitors through a bequest made by a former NPS volunteer, Mr. Chuck Wofford.

Preservation is still continuing, thanks to the efforts of Volunteers in Parks (VIPs) who perform physical restoration as well as offering interpretive programs to visitors.