

IV. Fort Cronkhite

A. A Brief History

Fort Cronkhite is the newest of the several military reservations now included in Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Along with Forts Baker and Barry it had been a part of the ancient Rancho Sausalito. Samuel R. Throckmorton, whose acquisition of the rancho has already been mentioned, sold various parcels of the land north of the Lime Point Reservation over the years. By the time the army became interested in the area north of Rodeo Lagoon, it was owned by Antoine Borel and Company, whose office was at 440 Montgomery Street, San Francisco.

In 1904, when the Department of California was contemplating the construction of a large rifle range in the Marin Headlands, a Board of Officers noted that a piece of Borel's land would be needed to round out a sufficiently large level space for the range. The history of Fort Barry, in Part III of this study, noted that the Secretary of War refused to ask the Congress for an appropriation for this purpose. Five years later, the Army again became interested in Borel's land as a suitable location for seacoast searchlights. The searchlight project in 1909 called for two lights (to be numbered 16 and 17) to be installed on Tennessee Point. Lt. Col. John Biddle, Corps of Engineers, informed the Chief of Engineers that Borel was willing to sell five acres at the point and a right-of-way thereto for \$2,000.¹

Lengthy negotiations followed. When Borel refused to furnish a warranty deed for the five acres, the Army considered

1. NA, RG77, OCE, Gen. Correspondence, 1849-1923, Biddle, Oct. 13, 1909, to Chief of Engrs.

instituting condemnation proceedings in order to secure a clear title. Borel declined to agree to a consent verdict and began hinting that he valued the land at much more than \$2,000. These tactics scared the Engineer Department into dropping the idea of a condemnation suit and it suggested to the U.S. District Attorney at San Francisco that a "grant, bargain, and sale" deed be accepted inasmuch as the California statute of limitation seemed to establish Borel's title.²

Borel was agreeable, if not enthusiastic, to providing this type of deed; but now negotiations between him and the U.S. District Attorney bogged down over restrictions that Borel imposed concerning the right-of-way. Meanwhile, the engineers grew more and more nervous, fearing that Borel would withdraw. Not until July 28, 1914, were 5.5 acres of land and the right-of-way thereto at Tennessee Point purchased by the United States.³

Searchlights Nos. 16 and 17 were constructed on Tennessee Point eventually; and the five and one-half acres became an integral part of the seacoast defenses of San Francisco Bay. The design of these two lights was unusual in that each was mounted on an elevator that lowered them into the ground when they were not in use. Practically no remains of them are visible today.

2. FARC, San Bruno, RG77, OCE, San Francisco Dist., Letterbooks, vol. 25-27, 1911-13, Lt. Col. T.H. Rees, Sept. 24, 1911, to Borel, and Oct. 4, 1911, to R.T. Devlin, U.S. Dist. Attorney; No. 11, 1911-12, W.B. Thomas, Chief Clerk, U.S. Engr. Office, Mar. 20, 1912, to Borel.

3. NA, RG77, OCE, Gen. Correspondence, 1894-1923, Biddle, Oct. 13, 1909, to Chief of Engrs., and subsequent documents; RG407, Supplement to Harbor Defense Project, San Francisco, 1945, Annex A, p. 29; FARC, San Bruno, RG77, OCE, SF Dist., Letterbooks, vols. 25-27, 1911-13, Rees, Feb. 11, 1913, to J.L. McNab, U.S. Dist. Attorney.

Installation of the mighty 16-inch gun at San Francisco became a matter of serious discussion as early as 1915. Planning at first was oriented toward siting the guns at Fort Funston, south of San Francisco. In 1928, however, the Adjutant General of the Army announced there would be two batteries of two 16-inch guns each, one battery on either side of the Golden Gate. Tennessee Point was selected tentatively for planning the northern battery in 1932. Then in the appropriation "Seacoast Defenses, United States, 1937," the Congress approved the expenditure of \$318,500 for the purchase of land at Tennessee Point on which to build the immense battery. The army acquired approximately 800 acres north of Rodeo Lagoon by condemnation in 1937, the deed being recorded on June 21. War Department General Orders No. 9, December 17, 1937, designated the new reservation Fort Cronkhite in honor of the recently deceased Maj. Gen. Adelbert Cronkhite, a West Point graduate (1882) who had commanded the 80th Division, National Army, during World War I.⁴

In March 1938, excavation on Wolf Ridge for the firing platforms began. In a secret letter dated December 31, 1937, the Adjutant General announced that the battery would honor Maj. Gen.

4. NA, RG407, Supplement to Harbor Defense Project, San Francisco, 1945, Annex A, p. 29; Annexes to Harbor Defense Project, Harbor Defenses of San Francisco, 1937, Annex A, p. 6; FARC, San Bruno, RG77, OCE, SF Dist., Fortification Files, 1880-1944, AG, Nov. 22, 1937, to Chief of Engrs.; Lewis, A History of San Francisco Harbor Defense Installations, Appendix I, pp. 3-4. Although the General Orders naming Fort Cronkhite were not published until Dec. 17, 1937, the Adjutant General notified the Chief of Engineers on Nov. 22 that the fort was designated Cronkhite. The original 5.5-acre site at Tennessee Point was not added to Fort Cronkhite until 1938, making the entire reservation 805.80 acres.

Clarence P. Townsley, an artilleryman. At one time, Townsley had been superintendent at West Point, and, later, the commanding officer on Corregidor Island in Manila Bay. In World War I, he was one of the first American officers to arrive in France, where he later commanded the 30th Infantry Division. Townsley died in 1926. The battery and its reserve magazine were both transferred to the artillery in July 1940. On July 1, the first 16-inch round ever fired from the Pacific Coast of the continental United States was fired here.⁵

The 1937 Annexes for the Harbor Defense Project, San Francisco, called for a mobile antiaircraft battery of three 3-inch guns on Wolf Ridge, above Battery Townsley, at Fort Cronkhite. Two years later, a Board of Officers recommended that this battery be a fixed one, i.e., the guns be permanently mounted on concrete plugs. The battery, designated AA Battery No. 1, was completed on August 26, 1940. In addition to the three guns and their concrete platforms, two reinforced-concrete structures were built. One of these served as the magazine; the other contained the power and storage rooms. Nearby was a director pit, a reinforced concrete, rectangular pit sunk into the ground.

Five fire control stations were constructed on Wolf Ridge during the 1930s and World War II. Two of these served as the B¹S¹ and the battery command post for nearby Battery Townsley. All of them still exhibit various camouflage endeavors, including

5. Data concerning Battery Townsley has been taken from my earlier volume on the fortifications of San Francisco Harbor, which is still in a draft stage.

rocks mortared into place and concrete that simulated rock, and all are in a good state of preservation.

In addition to these fixed fortifications, Fort Cronkhite became the home of three batteries of mobile 155-mm guns in July 1941, as America's entry into World War II grew nearer. The twelve guns were located at the north end of the parade ground which was west of the cantonment area. The 56th Coast Artillery was activated and assembled at Fort Cronkhite that summer to man the 155-mm weapons. The day after Pearl Harbor one battery (four guns) moved into position at Tennessee Point; another battery moved into position at the west end of the parade ground; while the third traveled up the coast to Drakes Bay. The 56th Regiment left Fort Cronkhite in February 1942; but the disposition of the weapons remains unknown.⁶

The cantonment at Fort Cronkhite, with its ubiquitous World War II-type barracks was rushed to completion during the spring and early summer of 1941. A photograph taken June 24, 1941, shows the nearly-completed project and a platoon of soldiers marching on the parade ground--possibly Battery E, 6th CA, which had officially established the garrison only four days earlier.⁷

Despite the rows of tidy quarters, the 150 men who manned the great guns of Battery Townsley found themselves from

6. Fort Record Book, Fort Cronkhite, Presidio Museum, San Francisco.

7. FARC, San Bruno, RG77, OCE, Photo, Ft. Cronkhite, 2 p.m., June 24, 1941, No. 0-111-3 (QM899); Lewis, A History of San Francisco Harbor Defense Installations, Appendix IV, p. 5.

Pearl Harbor on living within the concrete walls of the battery itself rather than down on the shore of Rodeo Lagoon. They were still occupying the gloomy corridors a year later when a plea was made for adequate bathing facilities for them at the battery. It took fifteen minutes one-way by truck to get down to the barracks to use the showers there. Because the guns of Battery Townsley were required to be ready for action within fifteen minutes or less, approval was given for the installation of showers.

The men manning the antiaircraft guns also had to live up on Wolf Ridge. The personnel shelters, the mess hall, and the battery offices were all built underground. Because of the sparse vegetation of the ridge, camouflage procedures were extensive. Even the aboveground passageways between the guns and the other structures were covered with simulated rocks. This "rock" consisted of a framework of wood and chicken wire, covered with burlap, and plastered with a mixture of casting plaster, cement, and sawdust or sisal. Coloring matter was added to the mixture; but the experimenters found they could get a more satisfactory effect by spraying the finished rock with color. Much of this camouflage was fragile in nature; but remnants of it may yet be found on Wolf Ridge.⁸

By 1944 the war had receded to the western Pacific and the threat of a Japanese naval or air attack on the West Coast had greatly diminished. Reflecting this change was the diversion of Fort Cronkhite's mission from that of being solely a seacoast fortification garrison to the added function of a Commando Combat School. This school, the first of its kind in the Western Defense

8. WNRC, RG77, OCE, Harbor Defense Files, San Francisco, Brig. Gen. R.E. Haines, HDSF, Dec. 1, 1942, to CG, Western Defense Command; unsigned, undated report concerning camouflage, HDSF.

Command, began operations on January 4, 1944. The school trained officer instructors in commando tactics and in combat training for smaller units. The four weeks, later increased to eight, of intensive schooling included judo, war aquatics (?), physical training, hand and shoulder weapons, scouting, chemical warfare, stream crossing (Rodeo Lagoon?), map reading, infiltration tactics, demolitions, booby traps, camouflage, jungle living, street and village fighting, and communications. The school lasted less than a year, being discontinued in December 1944.⁹

Fort Cronkhite continued to play an important role in the coastal defenses throughout World War and into the immediate postwar years. Radar increased the effectiveness of the 16-inch and the antiaircraft guns. But this coastal artillery post, like the others, was soon to be stripped of its guns, now made obsolete by atomic bombs and missiles. The fort assumed a new function in the late 1950s and early '60s when it became the home of Nike missile installations. In 1955 a Nike radar control center (San Francisco 88C) was constructed on top of Wolf Ridge at an elevation of over 800 feet. This complex served as the control center for the Nike battery at Fort Barry. Of the several elements remaining, two radar control towers are considered to possess historical significance. They are the only such towers remaining within Golden Gate NRA. To the north of the cantonment area, a Nike launch area (San Francisco 87-L) was constructed. Presently adapted in part for use as a maintenance area, this Nike complex is also considered to possess a local level of historical significance.

The east half of the 1941 cantonment was largely remodeled to house the Nike personnel. The western portion,

9. Western Defense Command, "Historical Record," p. 30.

however, still retains its character as a World War II army post. This military architecture, then to be found in all corners of America, is fast disappearing everywhere. These "balloon" barracks, mess halls, day rooms, and orderly rooms were so familiar to millions of Americans only a few years ago as to be held in contempt. Today, veterans of the wars seek out their old military homes only to discover they no longer exist. The importance of those times in the national memory is demonstrated by the fact that the Smithsonian Institution recreated a squad room and a latrine, down to the smallest detail, as a major Bicentennial exhibit.

B. A Partial List of Units Assigned, 1940s-1950s

Much confusion exists concerning military units stationed at Fort Cronkhite during World War II. The Fort Record Book, as noted above, recorded that the 56th Coast Artillery Regiment was activated and assembled at Fort Cronkhite in July 1941, and that it departed from the post in February 1942. The "Historical Record" of the Western Defense Command, however, states that the Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 56th CA was at the post from May 1, 1942 to February 13, 1943; the 1st Battalion of the 56th was there from May 1, 1942 to January 22, 1944; the 2d Battalion, from May 1, 1942 to October 1, 1942; and the 3d Battalion, from May 1, 1942 to October 1, 1942. This "Record" goes on to say that the 2d and 3d Battalions, 56th CA, returned to Cronkhite for one day in 1944--January 22; while Battery G of that regiment stayed at the post from January 22 to February 7, 1944. Other short-timers in 1944 were the 44th, 45th, and 48th CA Battalions who were present from January 22 to February 12. Also listed in the "Historical Record" was the 283d CA Battalion (HD) (Comp.), stationed there from March 27 to June 12, 1943.

Annex No. 1 to Appendix No. 4 of the "Historical Record" has a quite different listing of units at Fort Cronkhite:

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Activated</u>	<u>Inactivated or Transferred</u>
HdQRS. Btry, 2d Bn, 6th CA	G-1 Station	Before Dec. 7, 1941	Oct. 18, 1944
Btry. E, 6th CA	Townsley	Before Dec. 7, 1941	Oct. 18, 1944
Btry B, 130th CA Bn. (AA)	AA Guns	Apr. 1, 1942	Apr. 25, 1944
Btry. B, 173d CA Bn. (HD)	Townsley	Oct. 18, 1944	Sept. 15, 1945

Still another listing of Fort Cronkhite units, 1941-47, has been compiled by Raymond Lewis in his study of the fort:

20 Jun 1941 Garrison officially established, by Btry. E, 6th CA. Prior to this date, reservation maintained by Btry. K, 6th CA.

20 Jun 1941 Following units of 56th CA arrived at Ft. Cronkhite: HQ & HQ Btry.; HQ & HQ Btries of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Bns.; Btries. A-G, inclusive.

20 Jun 1941 Btry. G, 6th CA, activated, assigned to Ft. Cronkhite.

13 Apr 1942 56th CA (less Hq & Hq Btry. and Btry. B) left Ft. Cronkhite.

- 13 Apr 1942 Hq & Hq Btry., 2nd Bn., 6th CA, arrived Ft. Cronkhite.
- 13 Apr 1942 Btry. G, 6th CA, left Ft. Cronkhite for Ft. Barry.
- 14 Oct 1942 Btry. B, 56th CA, left Ft. Cronkhite sometime prior to this date.
- 30 Aug 1943 Hq & Hq Btry., 56th CA, left Ft. Cronkhite sometime prior to this date.
- 28 Jan 1944 Hq & Hq Btry., 2nd Bn., 6th CA, left Ft. Cronkhite for Ft. Barry.
- 18 Oct 1944 Btry. E, 6th CA, redesignated Btry. B, 173rd CA Bn. (HD).
- 15 Sep 1945 Btry. B, 173rd CA Bn. (HD), disbanded.
- 20 Mar 1947 Arty. Det., SBTAS (billeted at Ft. Baker) assigned to Battery Townsley, Ft. Cronkhite.

A list of units assigned to and organizations at the post between 1951 and 1957 has been compiled by reference to the telephone directory for the Presidio of San Francisco and its subposts:

- July 1951 Engineering Research Institute, University of California.
- July 1952. Battery C, 9th AAA Gun Bn.
Batteries A, C, and D, 459th AAA AW Branch

Headquarters Battery, 459th AAA AW Branch
Headquarters and C Batteries, 718 AAA Gun Bn.
93rd AAA Gun Bn.

January 1953. Hdqtrs., A, B, C, and D Batteries, 459th AAA
Gun Bn.
Battery C, 9th AAA Gun Bn.

July 1953. Battery C, 9th AAA Bn.

February 1954. Battery C, 9th AAA Bn., Western Antiaircraft
Command
459th AAA Gun Battalion
60th Signal Detachment.

December 1954. Battery B, 752nd AAA Gun Bn., Western
Antiaircraft Command
194th Ordnance Det. (QM MAINT NIKE).

April 1955. Battery B, 752nd AAA Gun Bn., Western
Antiaircraft Command
194th Ordnance Detachment (QM MAINT NIKE)
197th Ordnance Detachment (QM MAINT NIKE).

October 1955. Battery B, 9th AAA Gun Bn., Sixth Antiaircraft
Regional Command.
Batteries A, B, C, and D, 441st AAA Missile Bn.
Command.
194th Ordnance Detachment (QMM NIKE).
197th Ordnance Detachment (QMM NIKE).

February 1956. Battery B, 9th AAA Gun Bn., Sixth Antiaircraft
Regional Command.

Hdqtrs. & A Batteries, 441st AAA Missile Bn.,
Sixth Antiaircraft Regional Command.
194th Ordnance Detachment (QMM NIKE).
197th Ordnance Detachment (QMM NIKE).

October 1956. Hdqtrs. and A Batteries, 441st AAA Missile Bn.
194th Ordnance Detachment (QM MAINT NIKE).

April 1957. Battery B, 9th AAA Gun Bn., Sixth Antiaircraft
Regional Command.
194th Ordnance Detachment (QM MAINT NIKE).¹⁰

C. List of Historic Structures, Fort Cronkhite

Fort Cronkhite, like Forts Baker and Barry, has been placed in its entirety on the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination form, however, listed only two structures by name: Battery Townsley and Nike Control Site 88. As already indicated in this study, Fort Cronkhite contains a number of additional structures that are worthy of consideration for nomination to the National Register. A listing of these historic structures follows:

Harbor Defense and Missile Structures

Battery Townsley. Structure No. FC-1014. Two 16-inch guns, casemated. First 16-inch battery to become operational on the West Coast of the United States, July 1940.

10. Fort Record Book, Fort Cronkhite, Presidio Museum; Lewis, History of San Francisco Harbor Defense Installations, Appendix IV, p. 5; "Units Stationed at Fort Cronkhite," typed document, 3 pages, acquired by Regional Historian Gordon Chappell, Western Regional Office, NPS, San Francisco, from the Presidio of San Francisco, U.S. Army.

Reserve Magazine, Battery Townsley. Structure No. FC-1130.

Switchboard, Radio, and Plotting Rooms, Battery Townsley.
Structure No. FC-1008.

Antiaircraft Battery No. 1. Structure No. FC-1200. Complex includes three concrete plugs for the guns; reinforced concrete magazine; reinforced concrete storage and power rooms; director pit, and underground quarters.

Five Fire Control Stations, Wolf Ridge. These steel and concrete stations served during World War II as B¹S¹, Townsley (FC-1201); battery command post, Townsley (FC-1202); GB-1 (FC-1203); B⁴S⁴, Davis (FC-1204); and B¹S¹, Construction No. 129 (FC-1205). They are in excellent condition, and most of them exhibit good examples of camouflage.

Fire Control Station, Tennessee Valley. Mines I. Structure No. 1206.

Two Missile Tracking (Radar) Towers, Air Defense Missile Site, Nike, San Francisco 88C. Structure Nos. FC-1194 and 1197. These two steel radar towers are the only survivors of the several control centers that were located within the boundaries of Golden Gate NRA. This control center was for the Nike missiles at Fort Barry.

Nike Launch Area (San Francisco 87-L). Two batteries, two assembly shops, and a warhead building. Structure Nos. FC-1100, 1101, 1106, 1107, and 1109, respectively.

Garrison Structures

Although built as late as 1941, the cantonment area at Fort Cronkhite is the best example of the military architecture adopted on the eve of World War II that is to be found within Golden Gate NRA. This study recommends that a portion of the complex of barracks and associated structures be preserved and interpreted as representative of that still familiar but fast disappearing era of massive mobilization. It is further recommended that as much as possible of the western half of the original cantonment area be preserved. This includes barracks, mess halls, orderly-supply rooms, and recreation rooms between Structure No. 1048 and Structure No. 1071.

- No. FC-1048, Recreation building
- No. FC-1049, Mess Hall
- No. FC-1050, Administration building (company orderly room and supply room)
- No. FC-1051, Administration building
- No. FC-1052, Mess hall
- No. FC-1053, Recreation building
- No. FC-1054, Barracks
- No. FC-1055, Barracks
- No. FC-1056, Barracks
- No. FC-1057, Barracks
- No. FC-1058, Barracks
- No. FC-1059, Barracks
- No. FC-1060, Administration building
- No. FC-1061, Barracks
- No. FC-1062, Barracks
- No. FC-1063, Barracks

- No. FC-1064, Barracks
- No. FC-1065, Barracks
- No. FC-1066, Recreation building
- No. FC-1067, Mess hall
- No. FC-1068, Administration building
- No. FC-1069, Administration building
- No. FC-1070, Mess hall
- No. FC-1071, Recreation building

These structures represent the quarters requirements for approximately four batteries or companies, each unit having one administrative building, one recreation building, one mess hall, and two barracks.

D. Conclusions and Recommendations

Although a relatively recent seacoast artillery post in San Francisco, Fort Cronkhite was strategically important to the World War II defenses of San Francisco Bay. Battery Townsley's huge 16-inch guns protected the northern approaches to the Golden Gate from a naval attack. The anti-aircraft guns likewise protected San Francisco from a northern attack. When the traditional coastal defenses became obsolete, Fort Cronkhite continued to play an important defense role as the home for Nike missile batteries.

In recent times Battery Townsley was occupied by a private firm that carried out experiments of some unknown kind. When this use of the battery ceased, several large pieces of equipment were left in the corridor and in the rooms. Recommend that this material be removed so that the battery may be properly interpreted for its important role in coastal defense.

The underground personnel shelters for the anti-aircraft battery on Wolf Ridge are generally in an advanced state of

deterioration and some portions present a safety hazard to visitors. Yet, these remains are historically important and are prime exhibits for demonstrating the extreme emergency that followed the destruction of the battleships at Pearl Harbor. Recommend that the several structures and ruins be stabilized where possible and safety hazards be removed. Also recommend an early recording of these structures, through measured drawings and photographs, because of their fragile nature. If the camouflage "rock" cannot be preserved in place, recommend that samples be removed for preservation in a museum collection.