

A Personal Account of the Coast Artillery in the Harbor Defenses of San Francisco during World War Two

Col. John Schonher, Ret.

This account is based on an interview conducted October 25, 1995, in Sacramento, CA, by Steve Haller, park historian, and John Martini, curator of military history, National Park Service, Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It has been edited and re-written, while keeping it in the first person. Editorial insertions are in brackets.

Readers are reminded that this interview took place more than 50 years after the events discussed, while Colonel Schonher was 86 years old. As such, it represents a veteran's recollections of events long passed, and should be interpreted as such. Bolling W. Smith



John Schonher. Harbor Defenses of San Francisco: 1941, *The Army and Navy Pub. Co.*

I was born September 5, 1909, in Seattle, WA. I came to California in October of 1924 and completed high school in San Francisco, joining junior ROTC and later the National Guard. I obtained a scholarship to the University of California in 1927, and continued in ROTC, being commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army Reserve in December 1930, prior to my graduation in 1931. I asked to be attached to the 6th Coast Artillery as a Reserve officer, as it was the only nearby coast artillery unit, which is what I had been trained in.

I had a special interest in coast artillery because I belonged to the 250th Coast Artillery in the National Guard, a tractor-drawn, 155 mm regiment. I joined underage, as many did. I got a lot of hands-on training, from the very basic part of the artillery preparation and manipulation of the data to transfer to the guns for firing. I think the first summer of active duty, I was just operating one of the azimuth instruments that tracked the target. The next year, I plotted on the firing board.(1)

After I was commissioned, I was in the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Coast Artillery. We were supposed to be the antiaircraft battalion; of course, it didn't materialize quite that way. All they had were .50-caliber machine guns. They had no 90 mm antiaircraft guns, no 3-inch guns, nothing. Very skeletonized. But we could go through the maneuvers; you know, move and go wherever we'd be needed.

In 1940, the Fourth Army held maneuvers in the state of Washington, and I went on a four-week active-duty tour. We spent the first week up there just getting in the trucks and moving, reconnoitering all the territory so we knew what the ground was like. Of course, it turned out a lot of it was wasted, but we didn't know what was coming. Finally, I think the maneuvers lasted three days, if I remember correctly. We really didn't know what was really going on very much. They had umpires galore all over, too, but I never saw one. So I guess we never got very much involved in the maneuvers at all. But it was a big one. It was very interesting. You'd go up a highway and come to a crossroads, and here's a reconnaissance unit with a horse and a .30-caliber machine gun. We saw the trains coming in for that maneuver on the Milwaukee Route in the northern part. I never saw so many trains and coaches that they brought out from everywhere just to pull these people in. Because it took, I think, men from Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California. I guess what was used to be called the 9th Corps Area before they divorced the tactical up to the maintenance people.

Feeling it was only a matter of time until I was called to active duty, I volunteered to go on extended active duty in November of 1940. I thought maybe it might be a little advantageous to be on there first. But it didn't seem to make a great deal of difference, because pretty much every reserve officer assigned to 6th Coast Artillery was on active duty. We had a huge mobilization.

I went on active duty in November of 1940. They put the captains and the junior officers all in a class. We got instruction on battery administration - you know, what it takes to run a battery: food, rations, morning reports, prisoners, guard duty, all the little details you don't have hands-on experience with, because you don't experience this, even on a two-week active-duty tour, you know. So that was until January, when we received the troops; and they activated the batteries that were reorganized. It was a big expansion; and we manned installations that were obsolete, in a way.

My first assignment was as CO of Battery D. We decided to move to one of those two old barracks out at Fort Barry. We were assigned to Battery Mendell [two 12-inch DC] at that time.

Battery E was next door. It was one of the active batteries, because they were manning the 16-inch gun battery at the time [Battery Townsley]. But they only had skeleton organizations for all of these batteries. They'd maybe only have 70 men, where a full complement was a little over 200.

I received my full complement of draftees in January. Of course, I had a cadre - first sergeant, some of the technical people, cooks, and the mess sergeant that you have to have. Basically, they had some training. And Battery E next door, they received enough to fill up to a full complement.

Our assignment to Mendell was only temporary. We received these troops about January 23, and by April we had to fire one gun at Battery Mendell. These people came directly from the reception center; they had no basic training. We had to train them from scratch, as far as military discipline, whatever it was. So we fired Battery Mendell, and it was quite successful. I think one round put a crescent on one of the skids on the target, but we had a misfire because of a faulty primer. So because of the time element, we ended up with only a satisfactory performance.

In May, we were moved to Battery Chester [two 12-inch DC, one 12-inch BC] at Fort Miley, a 12-inch disappearing battery with that one old 1892 barbette carriage, with the hoist to raise the shells up. It was sort of a museum piece, really obsolete. But they weren't going to give up on them because, I guess, the overall idea was use whatever you have. I commanded that battery, and there we started our continued training; not only artillery, but even mob control. This was just routine, but there are a lot of techniques that have to be learned so you don't fire at people indiscriminately. We trained in chemical warfare, infantry, use of the bayonet, and small arms target practice.



Fort Miley, 1938. *NARA, Archives II, RG-499, Entry-118*

Back when we were with Battery D, at Battery Chester at Fort Miley, we had that one old barbette gun. The barbette gun, we just trained on it. We only did it for fun, really, because we didn't have enough personnel, I don't think that we could have used it. It was just something else that could be used. And we did train on how to load it and so on.

But, at any rate, I remember this one group; I don't know who they were, inspectors, maybe from Fourth Army. One of the officers - I think he was a major-said, "Did you ever fire these guns?" I said, "Look at Sutro Baths down there. They're all glass roofs. You know what would happen if we fire the gun?" He said, "Well, we could pay for it." I don't know if those guns were fired. Not when Sutro Baths were there.

Fort Miley was surrounded by what they called a "man-proof" fence. No fence is man-proof, but that was enough security to keep out any casual person trying to get in. It was kind of like a post by

itself. We had our own post flag and a retreat ceremony every day. I had to mount a guard. Instead of sending people down to the guardhouse to go on a guard mount, we had to provide our own guard. We had rotation and people on guard; one officer. There were 12 of us [officers], we just had to rotate to be on duty.

The mortar batteries [Batteries Livingston and Springer] were given up because of their very limited range. They used to practice with some of the mortar batteries. I went on one active duty in 1932, I think, where they had a mortar practice at the one on the south side, down towards Funston. There was a mortar battery there [Battery Walter Howe], and we watched that. But it was just a matter of training and tracking of targets, and so on, doing the things that, hopefully, they'd have better armament to use later.

When I was in charge of Battery Chester at Fort Miley, I was senior officer for the entire post, because there were no other officers, except our own battery. And we had other training. For example, a height finder was just brought in the service for antiaircraft purposes, a rather long tube with reflectors and telescopes. We had to train some personnel for that, too, because that was the only fire control for antiaircraft guns at the time.

We found a lot of foggy weather there in summer, of course, so we finally ended up sending them over to Oakland every day. I guess the Army Air Corps provided a plane for us to track. That was another one of the facets of training that went on.



Fort Cronkhite, 1939. *NARA Still Pictures, 342-FH, B17205*

Now, as far as incidents, I can move on to about December. E Battery had problems and they relieved the commander and sent me over to take charge of the battery. I was scheduled to have target practice the week after December 7, 1941. I found a lot of things rather strange there. I reported in the afternoon and I'm standing there talking to the first sergeant in the office and I look at my watch and I said, "It's time for retreat."

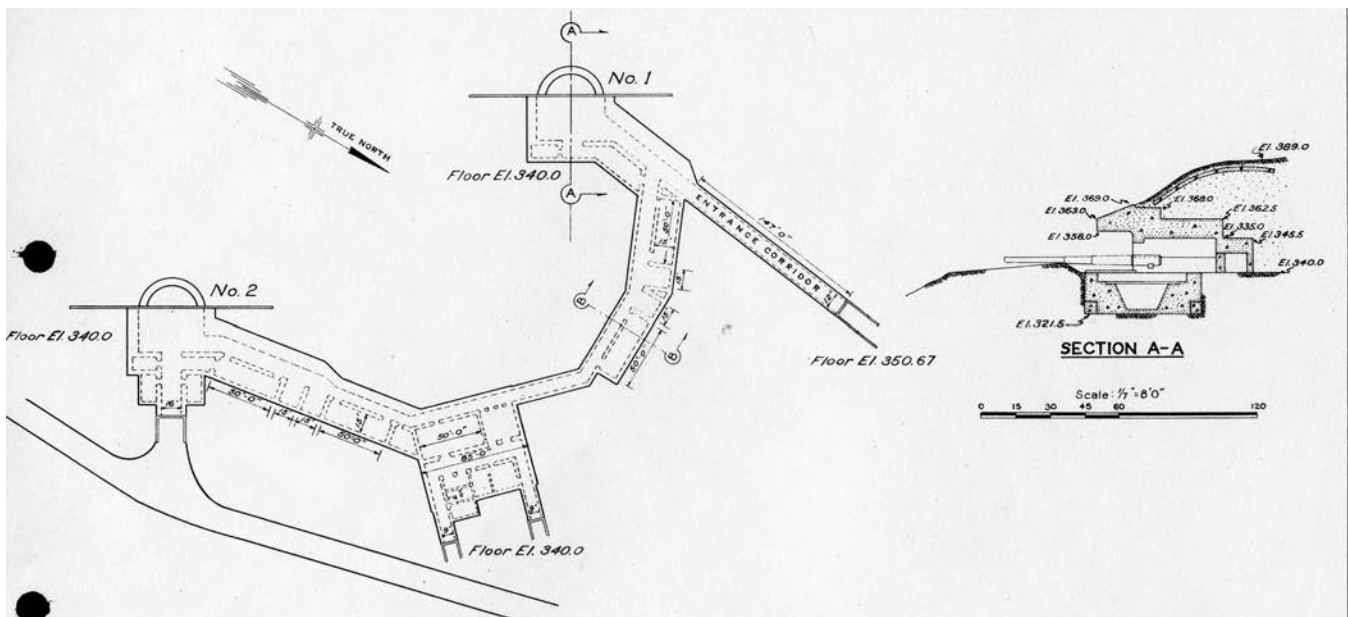
"Retreat?"

"Haven't you ever had a retreat?"

"No."

That was pretty sad. This is how bad things had gotten.

E Battery was in the barracks area at Fort Cronkhite, assigned to Battery Townsley [two casemated 16-inch guns]. They were in the throes of trying to locate all the property that had to be signed up. This was a big hassle for any commander; you're responsible for all the property. I wouldn't sign for anything until I could find it, and there's a lot of property with that 16-inch gun battery. That was an interesting part of getting started. I think this was several days before December 7.



Battery Townsley, 1940. *NARA, RG 77, Entry 1007*

But, at any rate, I got familiar with the organization and took care of some of the problems that they had with the personnel. I had some excellent people, and some dogs. And, unfortunately, a lot of the problems were people that had gotten into the army voluntarily sometime in the past. The draftees were no problem.

On December 7, I had Quarters 26B on [Fort Winfield Scott]. My wife was at Berkeley visiting a friend, and the two children were out in the yard playing on Sunday morning, December 7, while I was trying to get some breakfast together. My daughter rushed in and said, "They attacked Pearl Harbor!" So I turned on the radio and heard the story.



Quarters 26 A&B, Fort Winfield Scott, Schonher's quarters. *NARA, RG 77, Entry 393, Box 237*

Then the phone rang. General Stockton called and said that he was getting ready to activate all of our defenses, and he would call me later. In the meantime, on the radio, they had calls going on in the bay area. Everybody - all military personnel - report immediately. Another call from General Stockton - he said go ahead and report to the battery and get organized to be able to defend ourselves against any kind of attack. And that's what happened on Sunday morning.(2)

I think we had to bring the cots up, as they were in the barracks; scatter them around inside the battery emplacements the best we could. There's a lot of room in there. It's hard to find it because it's dark now. The quartermaster found a way to attach these springs to the wall and they could be held by chains so that they were in proper position and could be folded back after the bed had been made. So this became the living quarters. The kitchen had gasoline field ranges, which had been authorized because of the antiaircraft - the possibility of movement in the field - and we had enough area to feed. We had another area for the office and enough room for the officer personnel to put their own bunks in there, including the battalion commander, a good commander, Lt. Col. [John H.] Fonvielle, at the time.

I don't remember if it was the first night or the second, it was quite late - I was asleep in bed - I had a phone right next to me in bed and Fonvielle was right next to me. The phone rang, and the harbor defense commander said it's been reported that the Japanese navy was 400 miles off the coast of California. I shook Colonel Fonvielle and we looked at each other. Four hundred miles, well, that's a long ways away, so we went back to sleep. I think both of us had very many reservations about that statement to begin with; turns out we were correct. At any rate, that's how my career started with Battery Townsley.

Around the first days of the war we had an alert. We had a rather primitive radar setup right there at the roadside near the barracks area. Just where the road starts up the hill, there was a van parked with radar equipment. I think they had more than one. At any rate, immediately, the alarm was sounded that there were planes overhead and a blackout was ordered for San Francisco, but it was incomplete. I remember there was a lot of hair-raising over that as far as San Francisco was concerned. People went around jerking out lights, breaking windows, and so on. That happened to be a very clear night, too.



Lt. Col. John H. Fonvielle. Harbor Defenses of San Francisco: 1941, *The Army and Navy Pub. Co.*

Nobody could hear anything or see anything. The searchlight battery turned on all their searchlights. There was a big antiaircraft organization in the Oakland area. They were alerted. That all came to naught.

Several days later, we had a very heavy rain. Up and down the coast, the infantry and field artillery were just going around; from wherever they started, the Golden Gate Bridge was filled with trucks, artillery going someplace to take up positions. And then it began to rain. This one day, a captain who had an Infantry company in the area, supposed to provide infantry protection, came and, lo and behold, it was Captain Bunker, who was a CCC commander at the same time I was. I said, "All your people have are shelters ... only shelter halves." "Well, I think it's going to be okay. If you'd like to move in behind the two guns, it's a large covered area. It's kind of damp and cold, and the wind blows through there, but it's out of the rain." He said that would be great, so I called Harbor Defense and they said that's fine. They moved in and it was heaven for them. They could get in out of the rain; put their sleeping bags on the cold concrete.

And we happened to be on alert at that time. We had a "Class-A alert." One of the gun commanders, a sergeant, came to me and said he had the magazine doors open. Had to have everything ready. And he said, "There are quite a few Japanese in that outfit."

I said, "Well, I don't know. It'll probably be all right if I called headquarters." I called the Harbor Defense Command Post. Gen. [Edward A.] Stockton came back personally and said, "Well, they're members of the army. Let 'em stay." I assumed if he had any question about it, I thought I had to inform him.



Gen. Edward A. Stockton. Harbor Defenses of San Francisco: 1941, *The Army and Navy Pub. Co.*

And they were there for only two nights, and then they moved on. I think there was a lot of repositioning—a lot of changes going on, even in our organization. Originally, the harbor defenses were organized as sectors. Gen. [Henry T.] Burgin at the time was the commander of the Northern California sector. When war broke out, we were transferred to the control of the [9th] army corps. That was the organization for a while, until I guess it went back directly under 4th Army. I'm a little hazy about this, anyway.

I know my promotion was delayed for about five or six months. It was early in January [1942], the War Department wanted to get data on bombproof shelters, and they had nothing about penetration by aerial bombs. They decided that they would use the 16-inch gun battery [Townesley]. Well, they constructed four concrete blocks of various thicknesses with various reinforcing steel in 'em and I was assigned the problem of firing at these blocks. Although the harbor defense ordnance officer would be charged with it, I never saw him.



Battery Townsley test blocks. *NARA*

Well, it was kind of a neat problem. They had to define the muzzle velocity of the shell to approximate the terminal velocity of a bomb. So they had to use different powder charges to get the results they wanted. So they brought out an ordnance powder man, a civilian from Salt Lake City, who happened to be in the corps area command structure. He made up the different sizes of powder charges. We were going to fire a live armor-piercing shell, but the ordnance man deactivated the base fuse, which sets it off. They wanted just to get the simple penetration.

The other problem was to aim a gun like that. The block was probably about 300 or 400 yards away; I don't remember the exact distance. I could bore-sight the gun by pointing it at the target they put up. First of all, you put a wire across the muzzle, and you connect that with the wire screen on the block, and they can determine the actual velocity of the shell when it cuts through the wire of the muzzle and when it penetrates the frame of wood with chicken wire. The frame wasn't very big, and I had to aim at it. I worked it out that I'd have to aim the gun about 18 or 20 inches above the target for a spot. So I traversed the gun until I had somebody do it while I was looking through the primer hole. I had the cross-struts with the front of the barrel, so I had an aiming point. That way, I could set the gun as far as azimuth. Then I went over to the range drum and put a little scratch there, because the readings on it weren't that fine. That worked fine.

The Lockheed Aircraft Company provided the high-speed camera. They rigged it up with the primer on the gun to have a slight delay to allow the camera to get up to speed before the guns fired. So, [the cameraman] actually fired the gun. I'd just tell him "Fire," he'd start the camera, and then he'd press the button and the gun would fire.

The projectile hit right in the middle of the screen. Unfortunately, the muzzle velocity was too high; the shell penetrated the block completely and lodged in the dirt behind it. So I had to come down to a lower velocity. The powder bags were quite long. They had to end up with a very small one, about like a pancake, about maybe eight inches deep and greater than 16 inches in diameter, because the powder chamber is bigger than the shell. At any rate, he put that in last. He closed the breech, got ready to fire again, and nothing happened. The captain said, "What the hell did I do wrong?" I said, "Nah, nothing. I think it's a misfire."

Colonel Fonvielle said, "Well, why don't you put a new primer in it?" I said, "Well, regulation says that if the primer fires, you wait a full two minutes before you open the dang breech," so we waited and

pulled the primer out. The gun commander said “open the breech” and looked in and said, “Is it still burning?” I said, “Close it,” and I waited. I finally said, “There’s something wrong with it.” I opened it up. Well, the base of that powder charge, it’s painted red, and he thought that was burning. All that happened was this thing collapsed in there, and the flames just skittered right off the powder charge, never ignited. It didn’t even smolder. It was just no better than a scorch mark on it, because when it collapsed, it was pretty flat; and the flame has to hit it directly.

Unfortunately, we blew the counter-recoil cylinder on the darn thing, because nobody knew that with this navy gun, you had to reduce the pressure in the counter-recoil mechanism at the time. We checked with the navy and they said, “Oh, just reduce the pressure; we do it all the time,” because they didn’t fire a full [charge].

So then when we finished the rest of that successfully, they put the shell back in [the concrete block] and detonated it to see what happened to the concrete. Unfortunately, it’s like a mortar that had struck. If you look at the top of the concrete up there [on top of Casemate No. 1], there’s this chip mark up there. When they’d detonate, I could hear the stuff rattling on the shield. See, they have a big, about three-inch-thick armor around the carriage, spaced around so no fragments could get through.

Somebody was telling me that they had a black 155 mm regiment [the 54th CA] down at Cronkhite at that time, and they furnished the guard for the area down there. And this guard happened to hear this thing a’whistling, and he started running and he stumbled down. And the fragment hit not far from him. We had a .50-caliber machine gun on top of the plotting room [PSR], and some of the stuff started raining down on them, too. So every time they detonated a shell, we had to get everybody to stand clear down in the Cronkhite area, because that stuff was just flying all over.

The shells actually dropped when they hit, and they had to hoist them back and put them in the crater, and then electrically detonate ‘em. They have a very, very blunt armor-piercing steel front. In fact, those shells didn’t even break up into pieces. We put one on top of a post on top of the battery there for a gas alarm. It made a nice bell sound. In fact, one of the guards, on a foggy night, he thought that was a person. He challenged; nothing happened, so he fired his rifle at it. He found out it was just this shell sticking on a post. It looked like a man in the fog.

We had USO groups come up to the battery, some famous actors. I can’t remember ‘em, but they were pretty famous. The only one I can remember is this funny fellow that had the big bug eyes, Colonna, Jerry Colonna. And there were two women actresses that had the same last name. I can’t think of them. Anyway, it went pretty well.

We had a lot of rain that winter. One of the base end stations - the last one up north near Drakes Bay, we couldn’t even get to them with a truck. They were marooned for several days. So we went out with a truck and took several people along. We just carried the rations in about the last quarter mile. But they had good quarters at these base end stations and we supplied them. They did their own cooking. In fact, a couple of them, I think, got a deer or so.

The guys were on duty at the base end station constantly. At the first part of the war, they just lived there. They didn’t rotate, stayed for weeks on end. They had bunks there.

As CO of Battery E, I was responsible not only for Battery Townsley and its two guns, but also for all the base end stations; they were all part of the same personnel. We had to fire up there in Drakes Bay and down past Point Montara, clear down to Devil’s Slide. And of course, we had to have plans for defense of the land around us. I was responsible for the antiaircraft machine guns around Townsley, as well.

Somewhere in the early past, [Assistant] Secretary of War John J. McCloy came out personally. I showed him around the battery, as battery commander. The battalion commander doesn’t, he just goes



John Schonher at Battery Townsley. *NPS, GGRA Archives*

along. It's up to me to take him around. And he decided that the defensive area wasn't satisfactory. He wanted barbed wire entanglements put up. So we put them down on the beach there at Rodeo Lagoon and we put it up on the hillside, on the north side of the hill above the powder magazine. It was just barbed-wire entanglements, where you put posts in the ground. They're like a triangle, as I remember; very formidable. The barbed wire was dipped in some kind of tar-like substance to retard rusting in that salt air.

As far as the organization, there was the battalion organization and then there were the groups. There were really three groups - major-caliber, lighter caliber, and the mines. The major-caliber included Davis, Townsley, and Wallace. I never kept up too much on the six-inch gun batteries.

The year before Pearl Harbor, we had the 6th Coast Artillery; the 2nd Battalion, 18th Coast Artillery; and the 56th, which was tractor drawn. Of course, these were gradually withdrawn as time went on. The 18th was deactivated [May 5, 1944], and the officers, I think, went to either the anti-aircraft or field artillery and I guess the enlisted personnel went into the infantry. We also had an anti-aircraft battalion. It was activated when I became a lieutenant colonel. Lt. Col. [Richard R.] Moorman had command of the anti-aircraft battalion. It was a separate battalion, the 65th Coast Artillery Battalion, but it was finally deactivated.(3)

All these units were gradually cut down as time went on. At different times after I'd been promoted to lieutenant colonel, they took out a cadre of one lieutenant colonel and one major to activate anti-aircraft battalions, and this is where a good deal of the officers went. Colonel Moorman was assigned to the field artillery.

One of the courses that I went to in 1943, I guess, they decided that field officers, who would inspect motor vehicles, should know what to look for. So they had a school down at the ordnance, the

people that occupied Santa Anita racetrack. Colonel Moorman went down on one week's tour there to learn all the intricacies of what maintenance is required for motor vehicles. Before that, well, I can remember the regimental commander, all he did is look to see that everything was clean and take a look at the dipstick. That's all they'd ever do. And this modern detergent-type of oil was just coming in; and it doesn't look like the other. He didn't believe me. He got the motor-pool sergeant, who said, "Oh, that's new." So he finally gave in. That's how much he knew about inspecting a motor.

While we were there, we saw a very interesting gun parked over there. It was an eight-inch field artillery gun. We didn't know it existed; it was just something new. It took a huge vehicle to move it. The strange thing about it is when I got a letter from Colonel Moorman and he said he had a battalion of those eight-inch guns.

Camouflage was already being planned before I took over command of the battery. They had strung out cables from the top of the parapet to anchor bolts in the ground and put a great net that we could collapse very quickly and tow these cables out of the way to get the gun in position to fire. Of course, they had something different for the three-inch guns. There were flat things with cables running out of them. I'm not too familiar with them.



Fort Cronkhite April 26, 1944, before tone-down camouflage. *NARA RG 77, Entry 1007, Box 136*

The harbor defense commander said they had arranged with the navy to take a ride in one of their blimps, just to look at the camouflage. They had a blimp out all the time for patrol in the daytime for antisubmarine alerts. They let me sit in the bottom of the air seat, which was fine, because it was right in the center of gravity, and I never got airsick. We went over and the camouflage looked pretty good. Of course, I knew what I was looking for, but it blended in very nicely. They put the right number of streamers, the right colors, in there. It looked very good. That was all the camouflage measures. The base end stations had a certain amount; they had their steel visors painted with camouflage. The base

end stations were painted sort of browns and greens, dull greens. If you looked at them from a distance, you couldn't distinguish them.

We had one or two incidents where our authority checked our alertness by making dummy attacks, you know. But they never affected me. Most of it was done on the San Francisco side because it was a lot easier, I guess. But it was interesting, because the people making reports of what they saw were pretty bad.

The regular army officers were being drawn off constantly; they had better background than the reserve personnel and certainly were more qualified. Of course, I felt I did just as well as the battalion commander. We'd have been in bad shape without reserve officers. You can understand how pitifully small the Regular Army was - very small, a little under 300,000.

At any rate, I gradually moved up. Captain [Arthur] Kramer got promoted to major. I was still a captain; my first promotion was delayed because of this hang-up between our organizations. I finally got to be a lieutenant colonel in January '43, I think.

I was senior officer at the north post, so I had command of all the forts, with general responsibility for them. Of course, you have the quartermaster and all the other people that do all the housekeeping anyway.

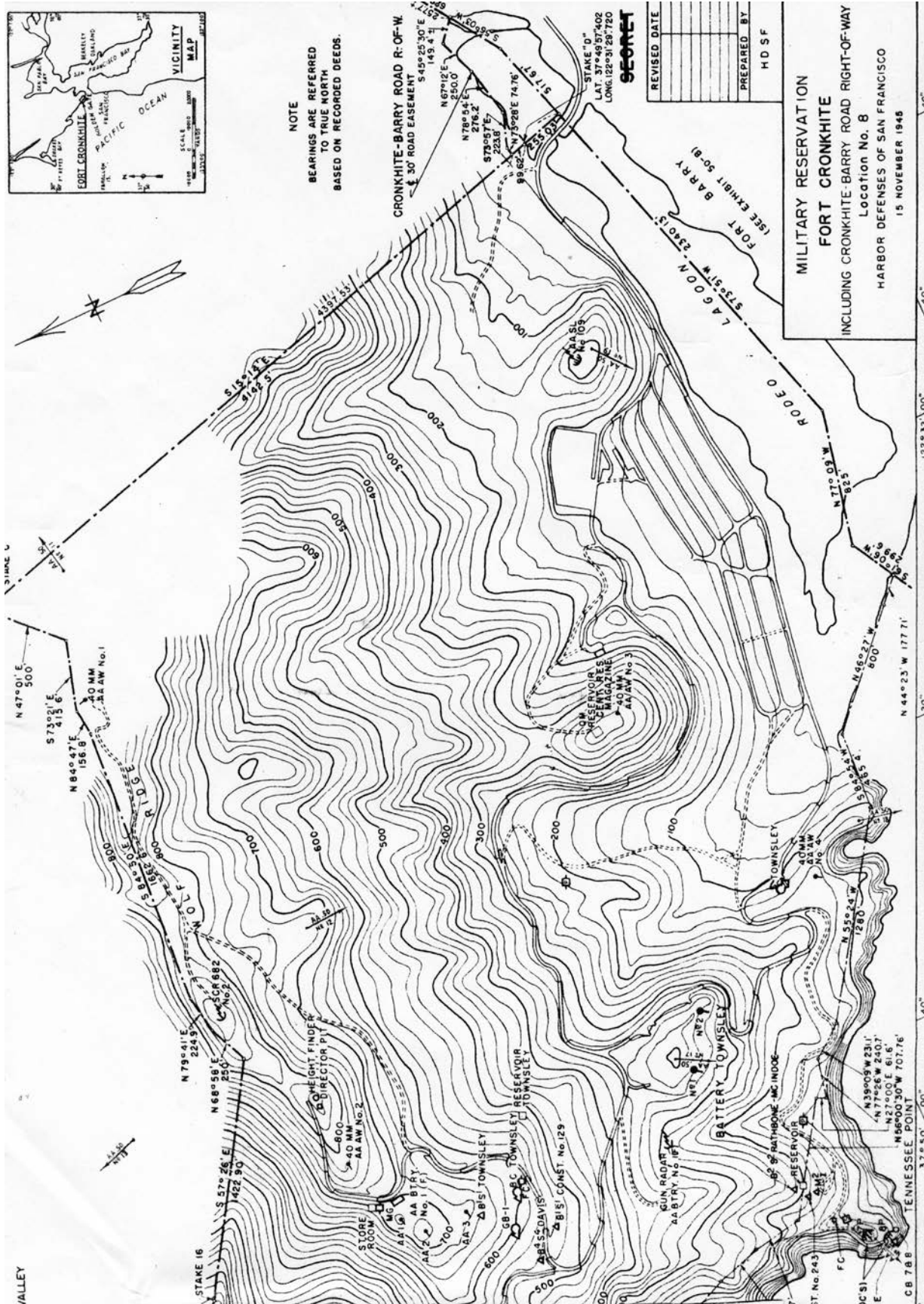
Forts Baker, Barry, and Cronkhite all remained separate, as far as names were concerned. They were not important so much as the armaments was concerned. I had Battery Wallace and Townsley, and I had Battery Davis to the south. There was quite a bit of distance between them. I also had command of the searchlight battery. That was in the battalion, too, because it provided illumination for the major-caliber guns and for the others, too.

As major-caliber commander here on the north side, my action station was the Group Barry command post on Wolf Ridge, but I didn't spend much time in it. I remember when I was battalion commander we had target practice with Battery Townsley. Captain [Wayne B. Garff], I think, was in charge then. I just stood outside his command station and gave him his orders for his target, because I wanted a place right where I could see what was going on and could see the guns fired that I'd never fired in a target practice.

As far as an administrative post, I had that Fort Baker headquarters building, the little building up at the end of the parade ground. And when the alert status got much lower, I spent time there for administrative problems. The rest of the time, it was just a matter of inspections and constant supervision of what was going on, which wasn't a big chore, really.

By the time I was battalion commander, I don't think we ever had any Class-A alerts. In June of 1942, of course, we had broken the Japanese code and we knew about the attacks on Alaska and Midway. They gave us that same information, because we wouldn't know; might have to do some kind of diversion even on the coast. So we knew about it in advance. But I don't think we had any real immediate alert. Maybe we were Class B, ready to go in 15 minutes. I just don't remember. It was such a long period that we were there; and, yet, we spent so much of it in a rather relaxed state of readiness. Nothing was a threat.

When I became battalion commander, Colonel [Felix M.] Usis was regimental commander. I admired him; he was a very competent officer, a West Point graduate, and he went back into the reserves. He was a Ford motor company executive in Richmond, and he came back as a lieutenant colonel. He was first the mine commander and was promoted to colonel. Then he got a little itchy for something more. He wanted to get something in Europe or something, and finally he ended provost marshal [the officer in charge of military police] in North Africa. He came back for a visit afterwards, and he didn't think much. He said, "You can't believe what our troops can do."



Fort Cronkhite, 1945. HD Annex

When Colonel Usis was regimental commander, 1943 at least, if I remember, they were taking lieutenant colonels and majors for activating anti-aircraft battalions almost every month or two, but Colonel Usis said, "No, you're not going to go." He just wouldn't let me go.

Then the other time was in August of '45; I was picked for what they call "Shipment X-Ray," about 2,000 officers, to set up for the invasion of Honshu. There were about 2,000 officers there. They had to come up with a different type of organization, a much more massive type of situation, I guess. At headquarters on the post, I had to do something for the family and started to scurry around to find a place for them to rent, which was difficult. About the second day, Col. [William F.] Lefrenz called me and said, "Ah, forget it. Somebody down at Presidio has bumped you off." So the irony of it was they went out on the ship. I knew when they were going out. They went out under the Golden Gate Bridge on VJ Day and kept going.

On VJ Day, I went down to San Francisco that afternoon, and the activities were really starting. Everybody was out on the street. More sailors around than servicemen, really, and doing a lot of crazy things. I remember one sailor was doing a handstand on the Emporium building. I saw that, figured he was probably drunk anyway. But, at any rate, that was the big celebration. And then the 6th Coast Artillery staged a large VJ Day parade, about a day or so later. I was in command of the regiment, whatever was left of it, for the parade.⁽⁴⁾ It was interesting. We started down one of the side streets down at the foot of Market Street. I don't know how far we went up Market Street. I think up to Civic Center, at least. The army outranks the navy, so we led the parade.

The cluster of three-inch guns on the hill above the battery had their own command structure. They were a separate battalion, not part of the 6th Coast Artillery Regiment at that time, I think. I remember, when I went on active duty in 1939, the 6th Coast Artillery manned those anti-aircraft guns. They were under the battalion commander. It was Colonel Moorman at the time, and they were in touch with the radar setup that they had.

The radar for gun control didn't come into being until way late, somewhere in '44-'45, I guess. Needless to say, we relied on the plotting board and visually tracking the target. Generally, that was thought quite acceptable because the navy couldn't do any better with the fog than we could. But they did develop radar to the point where they could track a target. And we actually had a firing with it.

By that time, before the plotting board, you either had a deflection angle on a sight, which would aim the gun far enough ahead of the target to reach it when the target gets there; or you could use the azimuth circle and then you'd range drop for the range. Then they developed these synchronous motors to set a moving dial for elevation and a moving dial for the azimuth in connection with radar tracking of the target.

We actually conducted one shoot with Battery Davis. As a safety officer for it, I don't remember that I was too well prepared for it, because nobody gave me much information. But, at any rate, we'd picked a foggy day; we couldn't see the mine planter towing the target. They had a special reflector on the target that gave a good signal for the radar. They started firing, and nobody could see anything. And the target, of course, was under the overcast. They [the men on the tow boat] could see the target being towed, so they could just plot the positions of the shots. But I never did hear what the final results were. They weren't as accurate as they were with the other method. But this needed more fine tuning, I would imagine.

The crew on the gun, for the elevation, had a moveable pointer. All they had to do is keep the gun pointed to match the pointer. And for azimuth, there's a control that controls the motor turning that big turntable. All they had to do was match the pointer, and that's all—they didn't have to wait for the bell to fire. They could fire any time. That data was good continuously. At other times, you had to fire on the bell; because that was your predictive point.

The plotting room [PSR] behind Battery Townsley did have gas proofing, so they could seal it and they could keep air pressure inside. We didn't use it, but it was there to use. I don't remember much about it now. Poison-gas attacks didn't prey on my mind. The way the wind blows there all the time, we didn't think that we had much problem with gas.

At the battery, we had gates. There was a big kind of gate with a smaller gate back of each gun, that's where the troops went out mostly, that I can remember; because it was right at the end of the corridors for both ways to go out. I think this is the way they went in and out.

We kept on with our retreat ceremony every day. That's just part of living in the military. We had formations right out there in the road right in back on the battery.

Fort Scott was considered a good coast artillery post, but when I look back on it, I don't know if I agree. All those peacetime years, there was so little money for training. They had skeletonized troops, maybe 90 men in a battery. A lot of their time was spent just on housekeeping duties; mowing the grass or policing, guard duty. And the officers had no ability to train. The captain would go down and sign the morning report in the morning and then go out to do something and he'd go back to his quarters, if he wanted to, I guess. You know, this was boredom.

Then you brought up a group of reserve officers who were highly motivated to get going and they're college graduates, mostly. I think they did yeoman's duty as far as the harbor defenses. And I'm sure the 35th Infantry was the same way. I know one of my classmates in high school was captain in the 35th Infantry and very competent, a graduate of Oregon State.

As far as my contribution to the defenses of San Francisco, as I look back on it after the passage of some 50 years, I'm confident that I certainly had been able to perform my duty very capably. I don't see any problem with what I had to do. It's just a matter of training and responsibility. I think the CCC training I had helped me a lot with dealing with people as a captain. I always look back on it as sort of a rewarding time, because you were responsible for 200 men, and there are a lot of things you can do for them.

I remember one of our best trainee, as far as knowledge of what he was doing, was a man that had badly crossed eyes-very conscious of it himself. You'd go talk to him, his eyes would start dancing and he'd look very nervous. But I found out the inspectors that come by, they'd pick him out right away. So I put him in the front rank every time, and every time they'd hit him. And he had every answer. They never asked anybody else. At any rate, he had some problem with his eye and started going to the post infirmary. He went to Letterman Hospital, which was handy and they had more specialists, more doctors, a lot of reserve medical doctors on active duty. They were very competent people. The man that saw him was an eye surgeon. Whatever it was, he finally said, "You know, I can correct your eyes." They did correct it. It was hardly noticeable, and it changed his whole character. He lost his nervousness. His eyes didn't dance. He was very confident. He was one of our first sergeants, the first man I promoted to sergeant.

As battery commander, you have pretty much a freelance of who you promote. You just send in your recommendation to headquarters, and they issue an order and that's it. The battalion commander generally has some say about the first sergeant, but I had no trouble with mine.

I remember a first sergeant, a man who was ready for retirement. He'd been a caretaker at Fort Miley for years and years, when it was just a caretaker place because they kept the armament there. And he also had an interesting story-it's right next to the golf course there, and these golf balls keep coming over, and he had a hard time keeping the kids out. He told me about one time he locked one of them up in one of the data booths there at the mortar battery. You wouldn't dare do a thing like that now, but that scared him silly. But he said he got enough golf balls to buy a used car. Just go down to the pro shop.

But, anyway, I remember on the morning inspection of the barracks, that the sergeant, a staff sergeant, had his own little room at the end of the barracks. Up on his shelf, he had about eight or nine books on English History, Mathematics. I asked him and he said, "Well, everybody's right from high school, but, I've studied all these books." He was later my first sergeant, and he was topnotch. He could be an officer any day. His name was Matthews. Of course, even the reserve officers weren't enough, so we were sending a lot of men to Officers Candidate School. I kept nagging him for that, and he kept saying about another sergeant. He said, "How about Hatten, he got washed out." I said, "Well, I know why he got washed out; because he's got a short fuse, and you can't be that way and be an officer. He blew up one day and they just washed him out." Well, he wouldn't take it and wouldn't take it. Then he went out later with, I guess, the infantry, in the South Pacific. Anyway, he got a battlefield promotion, second lieutenant. You couldn't miss that man.

Battery E had quite a few people that went to Officers Candidate School. In fact, my battalion executive officer was a first sergeant before the war; and I think he may have been a warrant officer. But he went to Officers Candidate School, and he never even graduated high school. But he was a real leader and very competent. And he finally ended up at SHAEF. He had a real knack for getting things done. He was a doer.

One Monday morning, I got a call that three of my men were arrested by the police. I guess the MPs told me about it. I asked, "When are they going to be in court?" They said in the morning. I said, "Okay. I'll be down there." So I went down to the court. In those days, I could park the car near it. At any rate, Theresa Michael was the municipal judge, I guess. She had a very nice reputation. So before the court started, I went up to her and said who I was and what I was there for. She said, "Well, just wait here by the bench and we'll see what's going on."

They finally brought in the three boys, and the patrolman got up to testify. And he was rambling on about the boisterous comments. The judge told me, "He doesn't know what he's talking about. Case dismissed." So I picked 'em up and took 'em back. All they were doing was - they hadn't even been drinking, just feeling good - and they were happy-go-lucky on one of the avenues out there in the Richmond district. They were on foot because they could walk to Fort Miley. They were arrested for no reason at all.

This was the public's image of military people before the war. The military police took over most of the problems in San Francisco, the police didn't do anything; they got out of the picture. I know we had problems in Sausalito, and in Marin County they didn't like military personnel in public, I guess. They were trying to angle, I think, for MPs to take over duty in Marin County, and the MPs didn't want it. They were stretched too much.

One of my sergeants was driving in Sausalito, trying to find an address. I guess he might have weaved a little there, but the patrolman arrested him. I remember that call. They finally let him go. They didn't charge him with anything. But there was that sentiment. I remember I talked with someone and said, "These are your sons that are here. What did they do that for?" But particularly Mill Valley was kind of what you call an upscale English background? I don't know. They had their own feelings about that, and it wasn't too good. But it changed. It changed as the war progressed. As people were making sacrifices, they changed. Everybody changed.

We were responsible for the defense of the San Francisco Bay area from an enemy attack, and this was a possibility in view of the fact that we had no navy to protect us, which would be our first line of defense. There was always a chance, and we have to be conscious of the fact that they [the Japanese navy] could make a serious threat towards us, and we were prepared. We were prepared.

Even in June, when they attacked Midway, they had the capability of going anywhere they wanted, and but for the fact that we had cracked the code, there could have been a disaster there, both Midway and in Alaska. And the Japanese had very realistic thoughts of dictating a peace in Washington. That's what they said.

We had a lot of submarine alerts. I remember the first night or so, we got notice that the navy and shore patrol had detected a submarine coming in the Golden Gate. I think this was before the submarine net was down. Well, that was a little bit of excitement, but it finally filtered out that it wasn't so. They had a lot of false alerts, I'm sure.

After the war was over, I stayed on until 1946. In June when I was still there, one of the officers that had been on duty there was in Japan, and he was present at some of the debriefings of some of the Japanese officers. One Japanese sub commander mentioned that he had approached the Golden Gate, giving the date and time. We rushed down to the harbor defense control post and looked it up in the log and, sure enough, it checked with one of the alerts. So that's the only thing we ever confirmed.

After VJ Day, well, I could leave, but I was debating whether to stay in the service at the time. I didn't know what the future would be. My children were in school at the time; and I thought, well, at least I'll wait until June. I said, "I will sign up for another six months if you'll let me stay here," and they agreed. At any rate, they did offer a chance to get a permanent commission in the army, but, in the meantime, I wanted to get out; I had to go out in June. So I went to Camp Biel for separation.

At that time, I put in an application, but there weren't very many openings in the regular service for lieutenant colonels from the coast artillery. So I wasn't accepted at that time. I think they did take a few officers that went into what finally became the Air Force and ballistic missiles, because they felt some relationship with artillery, but there were very few. I know one who went down there to Texas [Ft. Bliss].

At any rate, I went back to my work with the Franchise Tax Board as a supervising auditor and finally retired in 1972 as a tax administrator. I did continue, of course, active in the reserves because I wanted to stay available, and in the reserves, your retirement age is 60. I finally got my retirement there with almost 10 years of active duty, so I apparently got extra compensation on my retirement.

Notes

1. It is not clear from the interview whether he was speaking about his service as an enlisted man with the 250th CA or as a reserve officer attached to the 6th CA.
2. Colonel Schonher's daughter later recalled that after her father got a telephone call, he left home and did not return for three or four weeks. With luck, the trip from his quarters to the battery could be accomplished in 15 minutes.
3. The 6th CA Regiment was inactivated October 18, 1944, and the 1st Bn, 6th CA, became the 6th CA Bn. The battalion was inactivated September 15, 1945.
4. The 65th CA Regiment was activated June 1, 1938, at Fort Winfield Scott and inactivated on May 10, 1943. The 1st Bn was redesignated the 65th CA Bn. It left the San Francisco POE on July 12, 1943, for Alaska, and was inactivated January 26, 1945, at Camp Hood, TX.