

Fort Moultrie

Fort Sumter National Monument
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Harbor - H



Entrance - E



Control - C



Post - P



Origins of the HECP

As Germans swept across Poland on September 1, 1939, European countries banded together as "Allies" against Adolf Hitler and Naziism. Unfortunately, the Allies were no match for the Nazi's army which rapidly devoured many European countries.

As each country fell to the invading Germans, the United States' involvement in the war grew. Many Americans wondered how long the Atlantic Ocean would be a protective barrier against the Nazis. Based on the threat of war reaching across the Atlantic to the United States coastline,

the Chief of Naval Operations H.R. Stark and the Army Chief of Staff, George C. Marshall, signed a memorandum in June 1941 establishing sixteen HECP/HDCPs (Harbor Entrance Control Posts/Harbor Defense Command Posts) to defend the United States coast.

HECP/HDCP For Charleston

One of the HECP locations was Charleston, South Carolina. A building with a clear view of all approaches into the harbor was needed. Fort Moultrie had such a structure--its World War I era signal building.

The HECP/HDCP staff consisted of two duty officers plus a handful of assistants who carried out the threefold mission of the HECP: to gather information and analyze activities along the coast; to stop unauthorized ships from entering the harbor; and to defend the harbor and surrounding areas.

To communicate with the commercial and Navy ships entering and departing Charleston Harbor, the staff used signal flags, blinker lights and searchlights. The preferred communication tool was the blinker lights.

Submarine Threat

During the early war years, German U-Boats (submarines) created an atmosphere of fear for Allied ships crossing the Atlantic even though the submarines remained outside of U.S. waters.

When the U.S. entered the war on December 8, 1941, these once forbidden waters became new territory for U-Boats to stalk.

During the first seven months of 1942, U-Boats destroyed 681 Allied ships, the majority in U.S. waters. The U-Boat attacks usually occurred at night when coastal lights silhouetted the ships into enemy targets. Favorite hunting grounds included Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.



Ships sunk Jan. 1942-May 1943. From *The Submarine and Sea Power* by Vice Admiral Sir Arthur Hazlet

Charleston's Defense

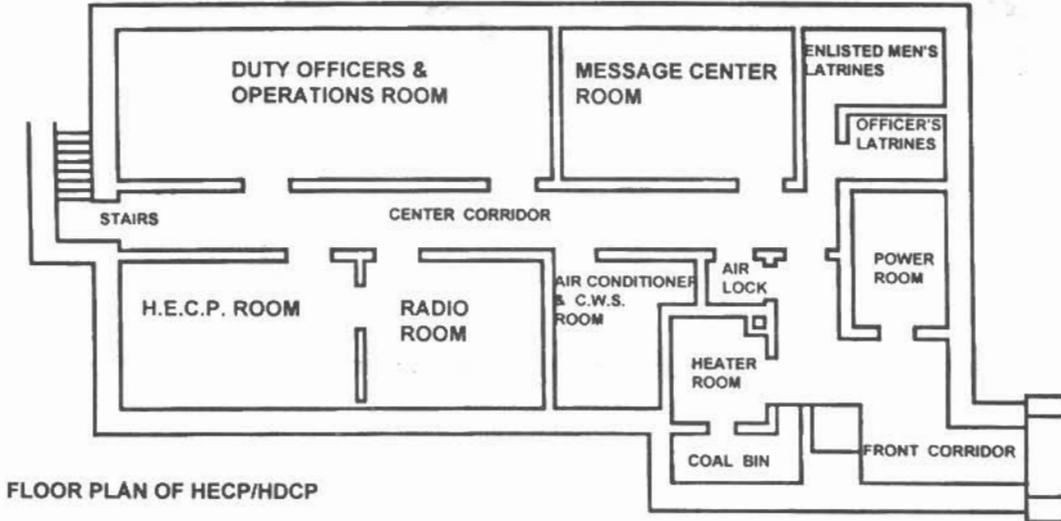
Charleston used four B-25 bombers and nine observation planes to patrol and search four times a day for U-Boats in District 6. District 6 extended from Wilmington, NC to Brunswick, GA with district headquarters located in downtown Charleston. Fort Moultrie contained the only HECP for this district. By March 1942, an inshore and offshore patrol was established for the district.

Two patrol vessels, five district patrol vessels, two Coast Guard cutters, one towing and salvage boat, and eight British trawlers defended District 6.

The realities of war struck Charleston's coast several times. In February 1942, two volunteer members of the Civil Air Patrol No. 8 or "Lucky Eight", based on James Island left for their routine

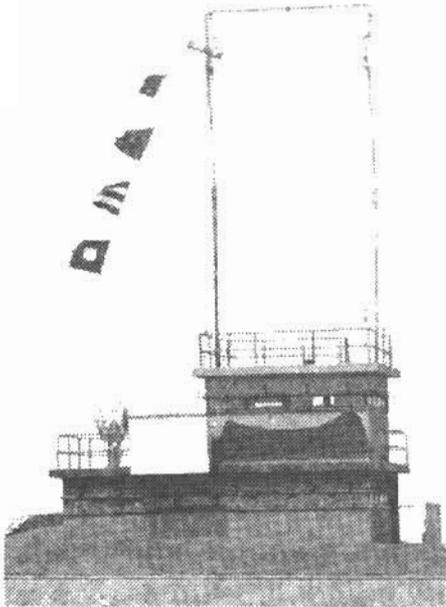
patrol of the Grand Strand (Myrtle Beach area) for U-Boats and never returned.

Other events included at least four sightings of submarines near the Charleston harbor. Also, on several occasions, minesweepers detonated mines near the harbor entrance. Plus, the harbor was closed at least twice due to the threat of German mines.



FLOOR PLAN OF HECP/HDCP

A New HECP/HDCP



With improved air warfare came a new threat of attack from dive and heavy bombers. To protect critical harbor defense structures, the military required an HECP/ HDCP to be either bombproof or splinterproof, and/or gasproof depending on the significance of the site.

At Fort Moultrie, the old WWI Signal Building did not meet the new standards; therefore, a new building was constructed to accommodate up to forty Army and Navy personnel. The building was completed and ready to use on March 7, 1944.

Operation of the new HECP was a shared responsibility between Army and Navy. The Navy operated the visual signal equipment and the radio equipment,

stood watch in the Signal Tower, and shared responsibilities with the Army in the HECP Room. The HDCP was operated solely by Army personnel. All other essential equipment was provided by the Army.

Exterior defenses included five gun batteries: four at the Fort Moultrie reservation and one at Fort Sumter (in the middle of the entrance to Charleston Harbor). An anti-motor boat boom (underwater net), located in the harbor shipping channel, provided the underwater defenses.

Since U-Boat activity along the United States coast ended, the new HECP activities concentrated on rescue work and permitting vessels passage into and out of the harbor.

Events After World War II

In 1947, the Army turned Fort Moultrie over to the state and in 1960 the fort was transferred to the National Park Service. By 1981, the HECP was restored to its original WWII appearance. Today, it can be explored as part of Fort Moultrie's self-guided tour.

Fort Moultrie is a unit of Fort Sumter National Monument and is administered by the National Park Service. For additional information, write to Superintendent, 1214 Middle Street, Sullivan's Island, SC 29482.

