

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with
Joseph Botti, 7th Coast Artillery, Battery B
1927-1929
Interviewed by Tom Hoffman, NPS
August 3, 1975
Transcribed by Mary Rasa, 2011



Soldiers ready a gun at Nine Gun Battery for firing.



Soldiers insert ramrod into Battery Kingman's gun.

Images courtesy of NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

JB: ...of '27 got out of here February of '29.

TH: This is your service period here, right?

JB: That's right. And from here I was on the mine planter.

TH: I see.

JB: *General EOC Ord* which was a mine planter and then from mine planter I was over to Fort Hamilton and that's where I got discharged from.

TH: Alright. I would just like to mention that I am talking to Mr. Joseph Botti today and we are standing here on the Parade Ground here right by the flagpole and this is Tom Hoffman and today is August 3, 1975. This is for our records so we know what day it was. And this was your service period. Was it a two year service period here?

JB: No. It was actually a three year period but here I was only here two years.

TH: And you were telling me some interesting things about that Guardhouse (Building 28) as we start here.

JB: Yes, that was, that was where we started our Post # 1 was in back of Headquarters down in back of the Officers' buildings around the Hospital and back along the (Sandy Hook) Bay and report back to the Guardhouse.

TH: This was walking a beat with a rifle?

JB: That's right.

TH: And what was your uniform at that time?

JB: Leggings, tight pants, leggings, high collar.

TH: Was that that brown khaki uniform?

JB: That's right. OD (olive drab).

TH: Was that like my campaign hat too?

JB: Well, sometimes you used a campaign hat and sometimes you used a cap.

TH: I see. Now, we are going be walking across this parade field. I think its up to you would you like to go along Officers' Row over to your old barracks.

JB: The barracks I think is better off because they are all the same.

TH: Now, you were in the organization of the 7th Coast Artillery.

JB: The 7th Coast Artillery, Battery B.

TH: And right here as we pass this site this is where they had the salute cannon.

JB: The salute cannon was there.

TH: And what was the regular routine? How did your day start in the Coast Artillery days?

JB: Well, you got up the morning for reveille.

TH: What time was that?

JB: 5:45 (am). After reveille you went in, cleaned up, and first formation went down for breakfast. And then after that you would come out on the police detail, of course, pick up cigarette butts and stuff. And then out to you assigned duties.

TH: What would they be, varying?

JB: Well, down to scraping the paint of the projectiles, repainting them, polishing the rotating bands, cleaning the guns and then they had diesel engines for the generators in the magazines which was quite a job.

TH: And you had to keep those in working order?

JB: Yeah. Well, they had regular mechanics for that.

TH: I see.

JB: The MRS (Motor Repair Service) which was way back at the other end.

TH: You mentioned that the projectiles were painted. Was there any reason for this?

JB: Every year as soon as you got through scraping them and painting them you'd start at the other end and do it all over again.

TH: What was the reason to painting them though?

JB: To keep them in shape. I guess to keep us busy or something.

TH: I see. Okay, we are approaching the barracks buildings here.

JB: This was Headquarters Battery. (Barracks 25)

TH: Headquarters Battery, 7th Coast Artillery here?

JB: That's right. Yeah. That's where you had your band.

TH: The band, what about the band?

JB: Oh, we had a good band here, a very good Army band.

TH: Well, they were stationed in this building or...

JB: Yeah. Headquarters. They had a big band here.

TH: About how many men would you say that was?

JB: Probably about 40-50.

TH: In the morning, I take it that all the men were living in these quarters in the barracks.

JB: Oh yeah. They would all be out in front in the field for reveille and would report to the Commanding, the OOD, not the Commanding Officer. The OOD.

TH: The Officer of the Day.

JB: Yeah.

TH: Would you line up on these small sidewalks here right in front of the barracks or was it right out here on the grass?

JB: Right on the grass. Oh yes, they would be right out here so they could see because the OOD, the officer would come out of his house and you could see him up there.

TH: Right.

JB: Or, of course, it could have been one of the officers was a single man coming out of the (Bachelor) Officers' Quarters.

TH: Was this for morning inspection?

JB: No. Not for inspection, for reveille.

TH: This reveille, you just come out and line up?

JB: At reveille, you just report how many men was missing if any.

TH: Alright the second building in the row here is that you went through the different letters...

JB: But this one here I don't remember what the heck this one was. One of them was Headquarters, I don't remember the other.

TH: The last building down in barracks...

JB: Was Battery B.

TH: Alright, that's Building 74.

JB: I don't know about the numbers. I know it was Battery B. You went in the front door you had your offices on the right, your mess hall on the right, your recreation hall on the left and, of course, a couple of sergeants had their rooms down there, the mess sergeants. And down in the basement we had for training. We had the supply room, the boiler room, company barber, company tailor, upstairs you had two squad rooms; the small squad room with sergeants' rooms in the hallway and then the big squad room and that was...

TH: What did it appear like, your layout where you slept?

JB: One big squad room.

TH: Everyone slept in one big room?

JB: One big squad room, well, we had two. We had a small one and a big one. Here, there was two companies in the U (74) Building B and D. On rainy days you would come out on the porch and drill on the porch.

TH: This is the "Manual of Arms" sort of?

JB: Yeah.

TH: I see.

JB: The breaking down of your pieces and putting them back together and all like that Army routine. See, they enclosed in (the porch before rehab in the early 1990s). That wasn't enclosed in. It was all open porches.

TH: Right. There is a green enclosed porch with all the windows.

JB: Right. It was an open porch.

TH: How would you get over the different batteries? In fact, can you recall which one you served out on? Was that going back to down below?

JB: You mean...

TH: The actual guns.

JB: Each company, each company had their gun sections and you would march out. Oh yes, you would march out. The only trucks, they had in them days was the Acme truck which was today's weapons carrier and the big old liberty trucks and that was it. And a couple of old Mack's we used to (inaudible)

TH: What would they use those for around here for those different purposes, just general construction or...?

JB: No, the big trucks we used to use, heck, we used to go to ball games over in Red Bank.

TH: Transportation?

JB: Football games, yes. And your weapons carriers, heck, mess sergeants used to use them to go out and buy fruit and vegetables and different stuff. Oh sure.

TH: Could you recall perhaps the different 7th Coast Artillery batteries that served on the different guns out here because you mentioned Battery...

JB: Well, Kingman and Mills, I remember. What ours was over here I don't know but ours was the 12-inch and I know Battery Granger. I don't remember what the names of them are.

TH: As we go by we will make stops there. That should help you remember.

JB: Oh yeah. Oh sure.

TH: I am trying to find out... Battery Granger is located out there.

JB: Halfway down back down further.

TH: Yeah.

(Tape stops.)

TH: We are standing here in the U shaped parking lot of Building 74.

JB: And in the center of it was nothing but a flower garden. Just a driveway going around.

TH: And I know who was responsible for keeping it clean; the soldiers.

JB: It had to be. It had to be. Of course, this wasn't paved. The (inaudible) used to be right out here.

TH: This was nothing but a dirt road at the time?

JB: The back road here. (Magruder Road)

TH: I see. Is this the road you would go marching down to the different gun batteries?

JB: No. We usually go down along the front.

TH: The Parade Ground front.

JB: Yeah. Down along the front and down past the old livery stables. It was the stables rather.

TH: I see. Okay, we will walk down here back down behind all these barracks buildings and from Building 74. Here, this was your...

JB: And it was never too hot. Believe it or not because you had your windows open on bottom on one side and open on top on the other side.

TH: And this would ventilate...

JB: And you would be surprised how it ventilated, yeah.

TH: Looking at the different wings here. Whereabouts were you?

JB: Right up in the corner here.

TH: Right. That would be the southwest corner?

JB: That's right. I was #1. Right in back of the rifle rack in the big squad room.

(Tapes stops and starts.)

JB: We used to go down to the dumps and pick up old motorcycles from World War I. Bring them up here and repair them and ride them around.

TH: Really?

JB: Oh, yeah.

TH: They just threw everything out?

JB: They just throw it out.

TH: Just before I forget, I would like to know like from Building 74 what batteries were in there?

JB: In this U shaped building was Battery B and Battery D. This was Battery C.

TH: I see. That's Building 22.

JB: And the other one was Battery A and then the other one was Headquarters. This one I don't remember what the heck this one was.

TH: I understand. The smaller buildings like Building 55 here was a mess hall.

JB: It could be. I mean I don't remember what this one was. I don't remember. In fact, I don't remember what the heck that was.

TH: A lot of the construction down here. All these buildings were added on. (South of Building 74 there were WWII era buildings that were torn down in the 1990s.)

JB: Well, I mean this one here. I don't remember this one. I remember the building but I don't remember what the heck it was.

TH: I see.

JB: No. MRS was way down.

TH: Right back over here behind all the barracks buildings, we have got the Mortar Battery. Do you recall the mortars that were?

JB: Oh yes. Oh yes.

TH: Did you ever drill on these or what was your role?

JB: We fired them.

TH: Actually fired these off.

JB: Oh sure. I'll give you the name of those darn things. Disappearing guns, barbettes.

TH: Barbette.

JB: Barbette, disappearing carriage, 12-inch. Short rifle would come up over the berm and come right back down again. And the percussion on that, boy was terrible. Make you feel like the flesh come off your legs.

TH: When they actually went off?

JB: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. This was all living quarters down this way.

TH: I was wondering about the Mortar Batteries here. Did you ever work on those or did you have specific gun batteries to work on.

JB: No. We all had our own batteries to work on. And I know that ours was way down in back of those barns. So, these here I don't know what it was. Now, we used to have one pit over here or down here that used to be the pistol range.

TH: Down this road right here?

JB: Down in the back right here used to be the pistol range and the automatic rifle range and that's how I got knocked on my ear.

TH: What happened?

JB: Well, we had a smart sergeant. I didn't know I had an easy job with the automatic rifle. The other ones all had the old 1903s Springfield Rifle). Gets me down the range and everybody is firing. "Okay buddy, your turn now." And like a jerk I put the thing up to my shoulder and pull the trigger. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boy, that knocked me on my ear. I didn't know. What the hell did I know? You aren't supposed to fire them on your shoulder. You have to cup them on your hip. And that is the way you are supposed to fire them.

TH: Was it down this road? This is Gunnison Road here.

JB: Yes. I believe it was right down in the bottom here. Yeah, from the tower right back in here. But this I don't know too much about what was in here, but in the back it could have been...

TH: Behind this Mortar Battery here?

JB: It could have been I guess almost twenty years ago.

TH: Yeah. What period are we referring to? You said twenty years ago. This was World War II?

JB: No. I actually come here in '27 and went out of here in '29.

TH: Right. But you mentioned the World War II period earlier back at the Visitor Center.

JB: Well, I was in the service, but not here.

TH: I see.

JB: No. Not here.

TH: I am mentioning, you know, the interesting fact about Kingman and Mills and how you used to get back down in there. How did you go about doing that?

JB: By train. We went down by train with the Mack. It had railroad wheels on it.

TH: The truck.

JB: Yeah. It used to pull two coaches on it and then from the tracks we used to walk over.

TH: Were these guns fired off? When you would do this drilling would you just go through a practice drill without firing the guns?

JB: Mostly it was maintenance.

TH: Just keeping the guns in...

JB: Well, no and every year or so that you fired.

TH: I see.

JB: Like we would be testing new shells for the Navy or whatever new shell they happened to be coming in with. In fact, we even left here and went to Aberdeen, Maryland to fire a 16-inch gun, railroad guns.

TH: Railroad guns.

JB: See the fellows would work and that was the PX.

TH: That building in there right.

JB: That was the PX. He was the tailor, the Post Tailor and the Post Barber.

TH: This is Building 58 here.

JB: I believe it was this one here or that one over there. I believe it was this one here because it was near the PX.

TH: Which gun batteries were you on that were fired off if you can recall if you were down at Mills when...?

JB: Oh yeah, well not Mills, ours was Kingman.

TH: Kingman.

JB: Oh yes. We fired Kingman and we fired the ones over here. They were considered the rifles and these ones here were the disappearing guns. Usually there were only four guns to this pit over here and we never had anything to do with this because we were over in the other section. We weren't assigned to this.

TH: But you did mention that you did fire them off.

JB: Oh yes.

TH: Not here but...

JB: Yeah, Fort Terry.

TH: That's up on New York (Long Island) Sound.

JB: Oh yes, up on New York Sound.

TH: Now how did you go for that?

JB: We went up on boat from here.

TH: Right from fort Hancock?

JB: From Fort Hancock and we used to go up on, I believe it was either two weeks or fifteen days and stay up there. Which they also had beautiful barracks like we had down here and it was very nice up there.

TH: So, how would you go through a drill? Do you recall loading these things up because we have got photographs here in the book?

JB: Yeah, well you have on these things here. I am not too sure of but on the ones we had you had from the magazines you had an elevator coming up. In fact, if we go over there I think we could see it.

TH: Right.

JB: On this conveyer type elevator the shell...

TH: Right on the disappearing guns.

JB: Your shell would come up.

TH: Right.

JB: It would come out of the wall onto a carriage and then they pushed the carriage up to the back of the gun. And then a group of men with the ramrod would push the shell in. And then the next carriage would come up with I don't remember five foot long, six foot long bag of powder and then ram this up in back and then insert the primer to ignite it and fire it.

TH: You were say, though that's the disappearing gun carriage but on these mortars there was no place where they could recoil.

JB: No. They just recoiled right to here and the percussion was rough because there was no place for it to out. It was cooped right in here.

TH: Those mortar batteries you had to clear. You were saying the men would have to clear out.

JB: Most of the men would clear and the only thing you would actually have there after you were set was your gun commander and I believe they still called them the # 3 man. The man that fired the gun. He inserted the primers and fired the gun.

TH: I see.

JB: And it was done with electronics, electrically or with lanyard.

TH: I guess the velocity of the shell leaving the cannon barrel itself was slow because we have got this photo.

JB: Yes. You could see the picture and you could see the rotating band when it would come off.

TH: It would actually split?

JB: It was a brass rotating band.

TH: Yeah, on the base of the shell.

JB: Yeah. It would come off and you could hear that thing singing.

TH: It would make a whirling sound.

JB: It would scare the heck out of you. Yeah. You didn't know if it was going to come back at you or go ahead.

TH: I am just curious why you were taken up to Fort Terry although they had the mortar batteries right here?

JB: I don't know. I don't know.

TH: You were just taken up there.

JB: Taken up by boat. What boat did we go up? I think if I am not mistaken I think we went up on the *General EOC Ord*.

TH: That took you up for this firing. I am just wondering what was your duty? Do you recall?

JB: On the guns?

TH: Yes.

JB: #3 man.

TH: You were firing them off.

JB: I was #3 man.

TH: How was that done, firing these mortars off?

JB: You have a primer which was a little bit longer than a 12 gage shot gun shot and you insert in your breech.

TH: There is a special place for it in the breech?

JB: Oh, yes definitely. And then it was either fired electrically as I say or manually. It all depends on what was used.

TH: Right. What would be in that primer? Would it be gun powder?

JB: Yes. Yes. Yeah, very high explosive gun powder.

TH: And this is how they would run all the ammo down on these railroad tracks?

JB: (inaudible)

TH: Was it something like this at Fort Terry also, something like this pit arrangement?

JB: Yes. Yes. It was something like this. You had your magazines where you kept your ammunition. This would just make it easy for delivering it to us.

(Tape stops and starts)

TH: This building right here 70, can you recall the use of this when you were here?

JB: No. Really I can't.

TH: Because it is right behind the Post Jailhouse. We will be going in there.

JB: I really don't know to tell you the truth. I know there was a Quartermaster Building. This building, I don't know what it was.

TH: The quartermaster would probably have what there?

JB: The Post Quartermaster had beds and...

TH: Uniforms?

JB: Uniforms and clothes and stuff like that. See, in them days the clothes were allowed so much a day for your clothes. When you come in they allowed so much for clothes and they gave you whatever they issued you and after that you got so much a day for your clothing allowance so unless you grew, the more you had coming. This probably was, no this was not the Post Exchange. The Post Exchange was over there.

TH: Oh, back right here in the no...

JB: No. This was the Post Exchange. (Building 53)

TH: At that time right. They probably changed it around.

JB: Yeah, because I know this. What this was I don't remember frankly.

TH: Was there bowling alleys in one of these building?

JB: There was bowling alleys, but if it was in this building I don't know.

TH: What was your rations? How much were you given?

JB: 33 cents a day at that time per man. Yeah. 33 cents a day.

TH: How did this work out? Would this money go towards for buying...

JB: That was for everything.

TH: For everything?

JB: That was for everything and at that time the mess sergeant went out and bought a lot of stuff in the civilian markets, meats and stuff and a lot of stuff come from the Post Commissary. That was up here someplace too.

TH: Right along this row up here.

JB: There you are. There is your 12-inch.

TH: Which one is that?

JB: That's this big one.

TH: The red and yellow.

JB: Yeah.

TH: Because I have measured that and it is roughly almost 16 inches in diameter.

JB: That's a 12 inch shell.

TH: Well, how does it, I can't understand then?

JB: That's a 12 inch shell. Well, wait a minute you are trying to measure it coming around?

TH: No. I measured it. Well, we have another one at Battery Potter and I put a ruler across the bottom.

JB: Yeah Battery Potter, that brings back memories.

TH: No. I was just thinking that there is another one just like this.

JB: This could be a 16 (inch shell).

TH: Because there is two there. It's another one of these and there is a yellow shell here at Potter.

JB: These bands used to be polished. They had to be polished. All this paint, it had to be scraped off and painted and put back in racks. Well, they used to cut down on rations I told him. We used to go down the bayside with boots, flashlight and bushels. Pick up frost fish, whiting and that is what we would have for Friday and then we would have money enough for chicken and pie on Sunday.

TH: I see.

(Tape stops and starts again.)

JB: This is the corporal of the guard's room . (Inside Building 28)

TH: Off to the left, the first room on the left.

JB: Off to the left and I believe there was a men's room.

TH: There's a men's room in there.

JB: Well, it was over there then.

TH: On the right hand side.

JB: This is where we had our cots, no beds, cots.

TH: Right here in this main room where the artifacts are now.

JB: Cots, that's all. You would go out. You would walk your two hours come back in and sleep for four until 6:00 in the morning. Then the last shift that would come off, they slept for awhile and the ones that slept took the prisoners out to eat at the mess hall. Wherever that was for them and then we would go out on work details with the prisoners for the rest of the day. 4:00 you would change shifts.

TH: I see.

JB: And then new guard would come in and take over.

TH: What was your shift that you were mentioning earlier when we came in?

JB: Well, that varied.

TH: I see.

JB: It all depends on how you fell in line.

TH: I see.

JB: See, you were inspected every time before you came on guard. Your uniform, your rifle, you was really inspected and then you took over. You come in and the other guards would come out and relieve you and you would walk and took their place.

TH: I was wondering what were these fellas in for, a variety of charges?

JB: A variety of charges, AWOL, a variety of different things. A lot of different things.

TH: What was it like in here with the prisoners in the back?

JB: They didn't bother us.

TH: Always quiet?

JB: Well, they would get a little noisy once in a while but that didn't bother us.

(Tape stops and starts again.)

JB: And your elevation detail you had your gun pointer up alongside of the gun.

TH: Like in this photograph.

JB: That's right which he happens to be the gun commander, he is the gun pointer. # 3 man would be way over on the side and when they closed the breech this one here looks like its going. When they closed the breech and you wait for orders to fire gun #1, gun #2 whatever it happened to be.

TH: You were saying you were just a young fella then.

JB: Oh yes. I was only a kid.

TH: How old were you?

JB: 16.

TH: 16 on these guns.

JB: Oh yes.

TH: Well, what about that primer episode?

JB: I fired, we fired the day we come to fire the real charge. I thought it was kind of funny. It was only the gun pointer, the gun commander and myself. I thought, "Where is the rest of them." I couldn't see the rest of them. When we fired that gun I jumped off the traverse and run back to the barracks.

TH: Why? It scared you?

JB: Oh heck yes.

TH: And it was a real charge in size?

JB: Oh, yes and then they brought me back to the gun and put me underneath on the (inaudible) seeing it like this you don't notice it. When they put you down on that gun that scares the hell out of you, boy.

TH: That recoil, it shook the area.

JB: Actually, it wasn't as bad underneath the gun as it was on top.

TH: You mean right up on the..

JB: It was just the thought of getting there. Oh yes.

TH: Go back right in here.

JB: You know, the Post Exchange checks.

TH: How did you use those?

JB: Well, we were making \$21 a month. You were allowed to draw \$7 in canteen checks, what we called canteen checks. They were for the Post Exchange. If you made \$30 as a PFC you were allowed \$10. That as the way you... you couldn't get away from paying them because when you went to the pay office which (was) at the theater, you would come in, you sign, you got your pay, the first table was your Post Exchange. Paid that right away. The next table would be your Post Tailor, Post Barber, then your Company Barber, your company and in fact, even from outside, we used to have these fellas come in from New York. Sheeny Joe we used to call him and he would sell you anything from a suit to a needle. Anything at all that you wanted. He was on the end of the theater. When you come out if you had any money left you paid him. Nobody got away with nothing.

TH: What about the plates? Is this the type of plates? We found them all out in the sand dune. I guess they used to throw everything out.

JB: No. That was the type of plates. Yeah the type of plates.

TH: Over here in this case we have got some Coast Artillery insignia. I was wondering if this...

JB: See this, this is D, there is B, see 7th Coast.

TH: This little button here. See, Coast Artillery. That is the brass collar, for the high collar?

JB: These here?

TH: Yeah the ones we are looking at.

JB: Yeah. You had US on one side and your attachment on the other side.

TH: So that US #7 that was...

JB: That was your 7th Coast Artillery.

TH: And then the others are for the company letters.

JB: That's the company, that's right. That's your clips for your M3s

TH: This insignia, the cloth here with the red.

JB: I don't know. I have no idea because these here used to go on your hat, your cap. This is Greek to me.

TH: Over here is some friction primer and also the electric primer.

JB: Yes, see that is the type of primer used for your electric.

TH: That was filled with gunpowder.

JB: Yes. This here was nothing but gunpowder to ignite the charge of your big powder bag.

TH: Well, when they say electric I don't understand how it was?

JB: Well, it could be battery or your gun position had electric.

TH: The electricity would...

JB: From your generators downstairs.

TH: And all you had to do was press a button and it was charged off.

JB: And it would go off.

TH: By electricity?

JB: Yes.

TH: What about that fuse ring? Could you fill me in on that? I noticed that it is bent out of shape.

JB: Not really. I can't. No. Not really. This always got me.

TH: The padlock

JB: Yes. The padlock. I don't care where you went in the Army. It was always the same padlock and the same key.

TH: Everywhere?

JB: Even in World War II. They would want you to sign for something. Whoa, fella I ain't signing for that lock. Every key is the same

TH: In the Army.

JB: Yeah.

(inaudible talking)

TH: The letters are quite fascinating.

(tape stops and starts again.)

TH: We are back in the cell room and the three smaller ones are solitary confinement.

JB: These, yes these are the solitary confinements.

TH: Did you ever lock anyone up in here?

JB: No. I didn't.

TH: But you were always on guard out front. I see, when you got the detail.

JB: You pull you tour of duty.

TH: Right. Guard duty.

JB: Actually the men who were off duty were the men controlling this. You had your corporal of the guard was actually in charge here. The sergeant of the guard stayed back in his barracks. He was only called if you needed. The corporal of the guard was the guy who controlled everything at nighttime.

TH: What about these larger cells were there beds in here?

JB: Yes. There were a few bunks in there and they were always pretty well filled up down there.

TH: Really?

JB: The type of ...

TH: This was an area where they would put the food in to keep it warm. (warming ovens from Officers' Row houses were on display at the Museum.)

JB: See while I was here they didn't feed them down here. You march them out and march them to a mess hall.

TH: Would they be in chains by any chance?

JB: No.

TH: But under guard.

JB: Under guard, yes. That's when everybody went. All your guards went out. The mess hall you wait and they ate. You brought them back and then you went out on your regular duties.

TH: I see.

(Tape stops and starts again.)

JB: Pay hall. That was every thing we used to have boxing matches over there.

TH: Over at the theater.

JB: At the theater, oh yes.

TH: The present theater across the small parade ground? (It was an earlier theater, most likely the Liberty Theater built in World War I. The present theater was built after Mr. Botti left Fort Hancock.)

JB: Yeah. I got my ears pinned back up there.

TH: What happened?

JB: I got beat...

TH: Beat up?

JB: Oh yeah. A little boy by the name of Tom Heany. I will never forget him. He put that last jab in my face and I just couldn't get away from it.

TH: You used to have fights in there, not for professional but...

JB: Anytime you got caught. See there was to be no fighting. So anytime you got caught fighting they would tell you, "Now look there was 30 bucks in it." The winner would split or take all and there was never a split. The winner took all.

TH: What about the Parade Grounds here. There is a smaller one and a larger one.

JB: Well, this one here I never knew too much about.

TH: The smaller one here?

JB: But the big one I knew all your field inspections and everything else.

TH: How about parades or drills, was it a drill field?

JB: Oh yes. Oh yes.

TH: You would go up through the “manual of arms” by companies?

JB: By companies. Well, like when you had your monthly inspection one company would have calisthenics, another would have rifle inspection; another company would have something else. Everything each one had something different.

(Tape ends and starts again.)

TH: We are just talking about entertainment besides the fighting and I just came back this field back here was...

JB: Was used for baseball.

TH: Did you break down into companies for this?

JB: Well, you had your company teams and you had your Post teams. Then you had your bowling, you had your basketball teams.

TH: I am wondering about the boat that would take you up to New York City. That was for your leave. You could enjoy a nice time in New York City.

JB: Well, not only that. This was to bring different Army personnel back and forth too.

TH: I see.

JB: They would go over, like we pulled into the battery one time. It was either the battery or an Army base.

TH: Up in New York City.

JB: And it was rough. And the Captain of the ship he could order that ship away from the docks. Once you took your ropes off the pilot was the boss. So the captain would tell him, take off. So he would have to bring the boat out and turn it right around and bring it back in again. We had done this four or five times and he gave up. He wouldn't go out it was too rough.

TH: I was thinking when I thought about entertaining I thought about movie stars or anyone like that.

JB: No. Not in them days.

TH: It was strictly Army living

JB: Not in them days you didn't have.

TH: I see. One more thing about Army life then, what about Officers' Row, were you restricted from going over to...?

JB: Oh yes. Oh no, we didn't go over there unless...well they had their orderlies that went over there and took care of them but you didn't go over there unless you were on a detail or something.

TH: Did you ever work around their houses on a detail?

JB: Not around the houses. I would be out with the garbage detail picking up the garbage. That was with the prisoners, you know.

TH: Yes, that's right.

JB: Picking up all that stuff but I never worked in the houses. And we never had no waiting bus stops neither. We had a bus stop. You missed that last one at 12:15 at night you walked six miles to get in.

(Tape stops and starts again.)

TH: We are standing in front of Battery Potter now and looking back across towards the bayside the open mess hall was when you were here what was the used for?

JB: I don't know what that was. I don't know what that was but I know the one alongside was the stables.

TH: Which building is that then? Was it standing in here, in this?

JB: No. Right back up in here was the stables in fact there was even a home for the sergeant who was taking care of them, the stables. I can't think of his name off hand. And then there was a lot of small barracks up here, not barracks little small homes for your sergeants.

TH: The NCOs.

JB: Yeah. Yeah. In fact in 1928, down in Battery Kingman we had a sergeant by the name of Patrick Lane, darn near got killed down there. He got wedged between the freight train and the door, the big door going into the magazine. But he pulled out of there alright.

TH: This is Battery Potter.

JB: This is Battery Potter. This is our oldest, oldest 12-inch gun.

TH: And they were up here.

JB: Yep.

TH: Now, wait the 12-inches were still up here when you were here.

JB: Oh yes, definitely we fired them. (The guns were removed by then. Mr. Botti corrects himself later, see below.)

TH: Up on top.

JB: Oh sure.

TH: Are you sure of this because I read where they...

JB: Oh no, no, no. We fired them. We tested Navy shells here.

TH: Right on top of Battery Potter.

JB: Yes, sir.

TH: What was the operation here once again because I can see the railroad tracks?

JB: The tracks I don't know but inside once you got inside you have your magazines there that once had your engines and your generators. You had your magazine on this side of it which had your shells. Then you had your powder room where you used to bag your powder there was wooden shovels.

TH: Yeah. So they wouldn't scrape.

JB: That's right.

TH: And cause sparks.

JB: It was all electric. It was a very poor electric job but it was electric job but it was an electric job.

TH: The generators were back down here?

JB: Back down in one of the magazines.

TH: Off to the side, I see.

(Tape stops and restarts.)

JB: Yeah, but not that much.

TH: Now, that we got up on top of Battery Potter here you said the guns were still here when you served.

JB: Oh yes. Yes. We fired them here.

TH: They weren't truly disappearing though. They were gun lifts though.

JB: Yeah. But when you got ready to fire they would come up and fire and go back down again. They were disappearing carriages.

TH: But they weren't behind this wall. This wall was too small to hide the total gun.

JB: Well, you could actually see it.

TH: Yeah.

JB: But from the water you couldn't see it. Yeah from the water you couldn't see it.

TH: Well, I don't know I am confused. I have had a person come up here and tell me that these were up here back in 1910. These little huts right here.

JB: I wouldn't doubt it.

TH: Well, but what I can't understand is how the guns can be right here. Down there is Richardson, Alexander, Halleck and Bloomfield. That long road there was nine disappearing guns there.

JB: That's where we were right over in here.

TH: Well, then it wasn't on top of Potter.

JB: No. No. It was over there.

TH: You were over there, see.

JB: Yeah, it was all in a row.

TH: Because this was a sighting station, see. It was here for a number of years.

JB: No. No. It had to be over there. I was looking. I was trying to see where the hell I could have jumped off.

TH: That's when you got frightened?

JB: Yeah. The guns was almost all the way to the edge of the (inaudible).

TH: Okay, then from here.

JB: Oh course, these barracks here are all new. (There were WWII barracks still standing at the time of this interview between Battery Potter and Nine-gun Battery.)

TH: Yeah.

JB: I don't know about that.

TH: So, see you got a little bit confused. You didn't serve here.

JB: No. Not in Potter. There was nobody here.

TH: Back there.

JB: Yeah.

TH: Okay, we will just take a little ride over there and go into the gun pits. (Tape stops and restarts.)

TH: We got a little confused because it has been a long time since you were out here but now we are standing on the gun pit that was known as battery Richardson here.

JB: I don't know if we were in Richardson or the one over. It was one of the 12-inch guns. It was a 12-inch pit and this was the old disappearing carriage.

TH: Now, you were stationed right down in that area.

JB: In the bottom on traverse detail yes.

TH: And what would you do down there?

JB: Traverse the gun. You have your plotting room downstairs and they would send you up different measurements and you would set your gun accordingly. See everything comes to the gun, the gun commander and he in turn would relay it and you set you gun accordingly.

TH: I see.

JB: You know your elevation, traverse, and whatever you needed.

TH: I was just wondering what were these huts for these little huts for observation?

JB: The gun commander could stand right there and look out.

TH: I see. Right.

JB: Can look right out and this was your elevator right here. See your shells used to come right out and right into this...

TH: Cart.

JB: Cart they used to have, right into the cart. See everything was taken out of here.

TH: Yeah, they stripped it.

JB: But come right into the cart, push over the cart, come right into the gun and ram it into the gun and then you had your powder and that would go right in back of the shell.

TH: And how many men would you say were needed to go through the whole operation of ramming, setting, plotting?

JB: If I am not mistaken I think on a ramming detail I think there were seven or eight men. Of course, then you had your #3 man you have your traverse detail, your elevation, your gun. I think it was about 14 men.

TH: I have read somewhere where it was like 15 or 20.

JB: Well, I have come pretty close.

TH: That is probably not even counting the men downstairs, right.

JB: Well, I am counting up here at the gun itself.

TH: Right.

JB: I think the #3 man he was way over against the wall because he controlled the firing of the gun. He only come over to the gun when it was time to insert...

TH: The primer.

JB: The primer. That's why I thought I had such an easy job. I had that leather pouch, you know and watch these other guys breaking their backs.

TH: When you drilled on the gun was it in overalls?

JB: Regular fatigues. Yeah. Regular fatigues, yeah. Oh yes.

TH: About how often did you come up and drill? If you could recall?

JB: Well, we were over here everyday during the week but not as a drill, just as a cleaning detail.

TH: I see. Cleaning.

JB: You had your men working on your gun cleaning them. They had to be swabbed out and cosmoline and all that junk they used to use on them and then you had your detail for downstairs plus you had your guard details and your regular details for your post.

TH: I am wondering after a busy day, you know, when the day was over was there a guard posted walking a beat around here?

JB: Well, we used to have right from the Guardhouse you walked a post.

TH: Walk a post.

JB: You had four, I think it was four posts. #1 was the Officers' Quarters, Battalion Headquarters, and the Post Hospital and back to the Guardhouse. #2 took in around the theater and all them places up the Officers' Quarters and buildings up there. #3 took down along the Quartermaster and the Bakery and the Stables and back down in here someplace and #4 took the MRS which is back in here someplace.

TH: You mean toward where that water tower is, the post water tower?

JB: Yeah, there used to be the motor repair service they called it. The MRS that was back over in here someplace.

TH: You are saying when you walked the beat over to the hospital you would duck in there.

JB: Duck in there and back of boiler room and warm up during wintertime and just hope you didn't get caught.

TH: Yeah. So, yeah you were telling me about the seasons. It was cold in winter.

JB: It was a son of gun in the wintertime and the mosquitoes would carry you around in the summer. Oh yes.

TH: About what time would you be up here cleaning or would that detail vary also?

JB: Well, it all depended but no. Most of the time we used to get here 8:30, 9:00. And you would stay here until around 3:00, 2:30, 3:00. Go back in clean up. Did you see that beautiful red bird?

TH: Flew right down in the pit.

JB: Yeah.

TH: This is how they would pipe in the electricity, right on these large cable wires.

JB: Yes. Yes. I know I had seen it.

TH: The indentations in the wall by any chance. Oh it's a cardinal.

JB: That was lights. That was your lights.

TH: Right in the indentations here right.

JB: Yeah.

TH: And we have all been stumped you probably don't recall because nobody can, these rings.

JB: I have no idea, no idea. I see they have got these all the way around. Whether they were just to hold the gun down, secure the gun or what. I have no idea.

TH: Did they ever put tarps around them and perhaps have.

JB: No. We had regular covers, gun cover, which had to be on every time you left the gun. It was covered. See that walkway from downstairs and that alleyway must have been for the officers coming up and one of these doors probably this one here.

TH: Yeah that one.

JB: That's not that was where they kept the carriages I guess.

TH: The gun carts.

JB: Yeah. Because it was just like a rack. You would fall right into the rack down the blind right up to the gun and just ram it.

TH: So, how would you go through an actual drill. You would bring out that projectile. It would all be rammed up with the gun powder.

JB: Well, your gun was cleaned out first.

TH: Right.

JB: Before you had done anything it had always had to be cleaned out. You cleaned it out first and you went through a dead drill, a dry run as they called it and then you would bring your gun up, load it, very seldomly put the charge in it. Like when we had just a dry run they would throw just the shell in there. No powder and then the primer and then we would just blast the primer. Because the gun itself you couldn't explode that thing anyhow it had nothing in it.

TH: Right.

JB: It was just a shell, a projectile.

TH: What did you think of the guns? Was it outmoded even by then or was it still a pretty good weapon?

JB: I don't know. I liked them. In fact I like these disappearing better than I like the long guns.

TH: Really

JB: Oh yes. Yes.

TH: The long guns being Kingman and Mills Battery.

JB: Kingman and Mills, yes. I don't know if they had anymore. I know then too because A Battery had Mills and we had B. We had Kingman.

TH: Right here at Fort Hancock did you actually shoot projectiles out into the ocean at targets?

JB: Out into the ocean at targets and a boat would be pulling a target.

TH: That would be once a year perhaps with a real live...

JB: Well, it all depends on what they had to do. In fact I was up here. I know I fired them four or five times. Sure I fired them four or five times I know I jumped right from this corner here I jumped right the hell off and I took off.

TH: That was the first time.

JB: Yeah. And I don't know if it was this section here or one over down below. I don't even know.

TH: Well, see there is a pit of nine and we are at the south end of this continuous line. This is about a thousand feet long.

JB: That what I said I don't remember just which one it was.

TH: But there are nine gun pits and they all look like this. You were saying before..

JB: Well, they vary in sizes.

TH: Yes, right.

JB: They varied in size. In fact from the furthest end down was...

TH: The was smaller...

JB: Was Granger or something like that down there?

TH: There is Urmston and Morris up there. There's little gun pits I think.

JB: They were 4-inch guns.

TH: 4-inch guns.

JB: 4-inch guns and then you had your 6-inch guns.

TH: Battery Peck.

JB: And then you had your 8-inch, your 10-inch and then your 12's. Your 12's are on this end.

TH: I see right down on Battery Richardson there.

JB: Yes. This was a 12-inch.

TH: Just this little spot I would like to point out perhaps you know right here where this ladder goes into this little pit.

JB: Well, it was strictly for observation.

TH: Observation.

JB: I imagine that's what it was.

TH: Didn't they have a long special type of binocular or something up here in these pits because it looks like they have got here a little stand to mount binoculars of some sort.

JB: I don't know. I don't know. I know they used to have the plotting room.

TH: That would be downstairs below us.

JB: Downstairs be all the rooms, well it's the same way as down at Kingman and Mills.

TH: Yes.

JB: They had a big plotting room down there and down there I worked as a range collector.

TH: Okay.

JB: So, I never fired the guns down there.

TH: I see.

JB: Strictly an inside man.

TH: We are almost out of tape but now we are standing at Battery Kingman of course it didn't have the concrete over us at that time but the guns were right here in the pit areas.

JB: In the pit area.

TH: And those were the 12-inchers.

JB: These were 12-inch and the long canons. They were long ones, yeah. This is really fascinating. I have really enjoyed this.

TH: Well, we are glad you came by and hope you come back again.

JB: Terrific after all this time since 1929. That's a couple of years. (laughter)

END OF INTERVIEW