

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
Fort Hancock veterans and family recollections

Editor's note: (The following was printed in newsletters of the Sandy Hook Veterans' Society. Spelling correction and other editing has been done of the text.)

Grains of Sand Veteran Newsletter, Winter 1989

John T. Beck

John T. Beck served with the 52nd Coast Artillery at Ft. Hancock.

"I enlisted March 10, 1942 and was sent to Fort Hancock within 24 hours by ferry boat. I was assigned to Company C, 52nd Coast Artillery Regiment. We had a 1st sergeant I think his name was Yedding. He was short and fat, but was a nice guy. I remember Col. Ham ("Cherry Nose") who always had a red nose and General Gage, a great guy. I played on the baseball team against the New York Giants, Yankees, Boston Red Sox, and Chicago Cubs, with Lt. Joe Osmanski, a Holy Cross All-American football player. King Kong Keeler hit that ball so far it flew beyond the flagpole. We had retreat every night and on Sunday afternoon we had a complete service on the Parade Ground. I still have many Fog Horn newspapers and a list of some of the men who signed our program. For a while I was assigned to the 245th Coast Artillery Search Light Tower Bn., but we were never told that the 52nd was disbanded and we were scattered. After this I was sent to Camp Davis, North Carolina."

Pierce W. Timberlake

Pierce W. Timberlake lived in Quarters 10 while his father served as a commanding officer of Battery A, 7th Coast Artillery from 1924-1927.

"A star shaped fort, long disused, was located in the area between Batteries Potter and Granger. Trucks, ambulances, an armored train from the WWI battlefields, and a quartermaster supply area were located to the north of Sergeant's Row. Another lighthouse was situated near Building 3. My brother Ted nearly drowned off the seawall in front of our house. Lt. Saverior Hardy Savini who lived in the BOQ, Building 27 rescued him and received the Congressional Lifesaving Medal in 1925, but died in 1927 at the age of 28 from complications after the rescue. I learned of Ted's near drowning while returning from school at noon on the Post Bakery truck which carted kids home at noon. On certain occasions, the driver would stop by the Post Bakery and we would eat hot baked bread on the way home. The Post Theatre showed all the current silent movies. One evening, my mother who played piano to accompany the movies, was not paying attention and was banging away at "Collegiate" while Rudolph Valentino was dying in a cave scene! When movies were not available, boxing matches were held in the Theatre. Payday was a big event at Fort Hancock. The four battery buglers gathered at the Flagpole and blew "Pay Day" and the four batteries of troops marched to the Theatre to be paid their \$21.00 a month minus canteen checks, payment to the Old Soldiers' home, and the laundry tab. I watched my dad pay off his troops one day. He sat at a big field

desk, with a .45 caliber gun by his side and the pay roster. Nearby was the 1st Sergeant waiting with the list of canteen checks and laundry bills.”

Earl Engebretson

Earl Engebretson served with F Battery, 245th Coast Artillery from 1941-1944.

“I remember the explosion of the (*USS*) *Turner* on January 3, 1944. A piece of the railing came to shore where we had some 90’s (mm guns). Several of us took a small piece of the railing for a souvenir.”

Frank W. Lenart

“Back in the early days at Fort Hancock, I was one of the handful of drivers who helped drive the dump trucks from the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camp to Twin Lights, making ready for 16 inch guns in Highlands.”

John A. Healy

John A. Healy served in Battery A, 7th Coast Artillery from July 1939 to January 1941.

“Our barracks, Building 102, was across the road from some wooden buildings used by the 245th Coast Artillery during summer training. I remember four battery commanders; Captains Gilbert, England, Woodward, and First Lieutenant Lawlor. Our 1st Sergeant was Mickey Bryson. Two of the line NCO’s were Covington and Organ. The battery’s primary mission was mine planting, but I also recall being on gun cleaning detail, at one time or another at Batteries Kingman and Mills. We also cleaned and chipped paint on the 3-inch rapid fire guns at the opposite end of the Hook from Kingman and Mills. It was great to spend a summer day overlooking the ocean. The view was spectacular. Work in the mine-planting outfit was backbreaking. Everything was heavy: the mine anchors, the mine cases, the figure eights, and especially the cables for the mines at the extreme ends of the minefields. Hoisting cable reels from their storage tanks took considerable strength and even more agility as you operated the chain hoists from a narrow trestle across the water filled tanks. Sometimes the combined weights of the water soaked reels and the heavy cables proved too much for the chain hoist’s hook. The days we planted usually began at 4 a.m. and ended anywhere from 4 to 9 p.m. Pay call was in the gymnasium at 8:30 a.m. Once paid, you then paid for what you ‘jawboned’ during the month: laundry, haircuts, movie tickets, etc. I was a member of the cadre which formed Battery F, 7th Coast Artillery. The unit moved to Fort Tilden where we manned 3-inch AA Battery. I remained with Battery F until June 1942 when I was transferred to a 90 mm (gun) outfit in Texas. Six months later I shipped out to the Pacific Theatre and remained in the service for thirty years until retiring in 1969.”

Anthony W. Michna
Anthony W. Michna served at Ft. Hancock in the Battery A, 7th Coast Artillery
from 1939-1945.



Top: Outside Barracks 102 with members of Battery A, 7th Coast Artillery.
Bottom: 7th Coast Artillery Plotters in Mine Casemate.
Photos are courtesy NPS/Gateway NRA from Mr. Michna's photo album.

“I was at Fort Hancock for nearly six years, December 28, 1939 through October 15, 1945. At first, I was in Battery A, 7th Coast Artillery and later we were switched into A Battery, 245th Coast Artillery. Mickey Bryson was out top kick until his death. I believe he had only three months to go before a thirty-year retirement. He was a tough nut. My rank was staff sergeant and I was the chief plotter in charge of the entire mine planting positions and firings. I was down near the Coast Guard Station in a place called the casemate where the plotting board was and all the mines were hooked into it.

I spent five years and nine months in the Coast Artillery at Fort Hancock. First in A Battery, 7th Coast Artillery and then later on they activated the 245th Coast Artillery in Brooklyn and they were sent to Fort Hancock for active duty. At first us Regular Army men didn't think that was so great, putting us with a National Guard outfit, but it turned out okay. I arrived from New York on the *Ord*, December 29, 1939 and was put in Battery A. At that time, there was hardly anybody on the Post. They just did away with the cavalry, and were starting to build up the Post again. I arrived on a Friday around 11 p.m. and everybody was running around cleaning and polishing as they were going to have an inspection the next morning. That was pretty near enough for me to turn around and go back home! Sergeant Bryson was our top kick and what a tough nut he was. All our officers were West Pointers and all Army. The rules were strict, but you were proud to be a soldier. Our main job was to mine New York Harbor. We had reels and reels of cable stored in water tanks. Somebody got the bright idea that about 100 feet of cable should be cut off the other end so we had to re-roll the cable onto another reel, only by hand could this be done. We were just a slave outfit, handling TNT, anchors, cables, and mines. If another outfit had to punish somebody, they would send them to us for hard labor. In the meantime, I made corporal. War broke out and myself and three other corporals were assigned to instruct the first draftees. Tent city was pretty cold and snowy. We slept in cots and just had pot belly stoves. Sometimes it was so cold I put an extra mattress on top of me to stay warm! Master Sergeant John Bagley was in charge of the Mine Casemate. Men that worked in the plotting room were Frank Soloway, Joe Enot, Bud Warner, Fuchs, and Johnson.”

Harold P. Goodrich

Harold P. Goodrich served in Battery E, 52nd Coast Artillery from
December 1937 to December 1940.

“I attended the clerical course at Fort Monroe, Virginia and became Battery Clerk of Battery E. During the period I served with Battery E, I had several interesting assignments. We stood Guard of Honor for the King and Queen of England in 1939. We took our 8-inch guns to Lewes, Delaware on a firing exercise. We went on maneuvers in 1940 at Dekalb Junction in Northern New York State, and as a temporary trucking unit we were the first Army unit to test and use the forerunner of the later famous 4 x 4 Army Jeep when Willys lent us three small sedans. We were assigned TDY to Fort Dix, New Jersey to fill in for the 18th Infantry when they went on maneuvers, and while there we were the first troops to occupy the newly completed permanent brick barracks on Post. The commanding officers of Battery E during my tour were Capt. H. P. Hennessey, Captain Fred Woods, and Lieutenant Hildebrandt. Our First Sergeant was Melville

Johnston. The Post Chaplain was Colonel Simoni. The Post Surgeon was Captain Kirkman who removed my appendix at the Post Hospital in 1939.”

Dorothy Johnston Crumlish

Dorothy Johnston Crumlish was born on Sandy Hook in the early 1900’s and her father Robert M. Johnston was a 1st Sergeant in charge of ordnance.

“One of ten children, I attended the little old school and Helen Zee was my teacher. We left there in 1909 when my father went to the Philippines. The picture of the Rodman Gun brought back memories of the happy days we spent climbing on it. My brother Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Johnston, was one of the last commanding officers at the Fort.”

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Eugene A. Kinsley

Eugene A. Kinsley was a supply sergeant for Battery F, 245th Coast Artillery.

“When the 245th Coast Artillery was federalized in September 1940, I was private first class in Battery F. Before the end of November, I was elevated to the position of supply sergeant and eventually promoted to staff sergeant. We had many good times as guests of the West End Casino and Hotel. I remember one time there, participating in a novelty-swimming race along with Corporal Lambert and PFC Keller against a team from Fort Monmouth. We won. In July 1941, the 245th Coast Artillery Band gave a concert which was broadcast over radio station W.E.A.F. Also in that year, we marched in review for Brigadier General Gage and his guest of honor, Miss Lana Turner, Hollywood’s Sweater Girl. She was presented with a large floral bouquet and voted, ‘The Sweetheart of Sandy Hook.’ A preliminary meeting was held in my supply room with Sergeants Buccaria and Schneider and a Mr. Frank Symons, adjutant of the New York Department of Army and Navy Union. A short time later at the Post Playhouse, a new Army and Navy Union Garrison was formed. It was named the General Gage Garrison, number 245. He and his staff were guests at the formal installation of Officers by Frank Symons. Main officers elected were Sergeant A. Buccaria as Commander, Sft. E. Stankovich as Vice Cmdr., and Sergeant F. Schneider as Jr. Vice Commander. I was a charter member but lost contact after discharge in 1943. When I left, Corporal Bachner was promoted to replace me. He was a well liked fellow, but among his fellow Non-Coms he was known as ‘Corporal Muzzle Cover’. One day, when Corporal Bachner was in charge of the reveille gun detail, through someone’s oversight, when the shot was fired the muzzle cover was blown off. Hence the good-natured nick name.”

Frank Feola

Frank Feola was a member of the band for the 52nd Coast Artillery from 1942 till 1944.

“I can tell them, I was stuck on that Hook for over 18 months. Worked like hell day and night, seven days a week! I had to get married to get my first pass and furlough just to get off that wonderful Hook. Sky, Sand, and Water! We had the bus at 5 a.m. or the

cattle boat to the Battery. I was assigned to the 52nd Coast Artillery Railway which I was happy to go to, because the Regimental Headquarters allowed me to get into the band. I was a drum major and played sax, bell drum, cymbals, and was bugler.”

Robert E. Russell

Robert E. Russel was a Sgt. in the 245th Coast Artillery.

“I enlisted in Battery L, 245th Coast Artillery in 1925 when Harold J. Wrigley (Wrig) was a 2nd Lieutenant and the emplacement officer when he fired the ‘big guns’ and the 245th fired the biggest guns in the Army. When Wrigley was promoted to 1st Lieutenant of Battery L, I was the corporal guidon bearer. When command of Battery M was assigned to the newly commissioned Captain Wrigley, he found he had inherited its former Captain’s neglect. With the help of we, older soldiers, however, Captain Wrigley brought Battery M back to becoming one of the best batteries in the regiment! Under his inspired leadership, we won the respect of the entire regiment and when the 245th was called to repeat duty at Fort Hancock in 1940, Battery M had already established an enviable record. For my money, there was no finer officer than Captain Harold J. Wrigley!”

Rush Greenough

Russ Greenough served in Battery E, 52nd Coast Artillery starting in 1939.

“I enlisted in the Army April 28, 1939. I was sent to Fort Hancock and I arrived at 9 a.m. on Saturday, April 29, being assigned to Battery E, 52nd Coast Artillery. I was put to bed on someone’s bed who was on guard duty that night. He awoke me about 2 a.m. wondering why they let me stay there and after an explanation by the night CO he understood. The following morning I took some pancakes from a plate I was passing and got chewed out for shortstopping. Never again. The 1st sergeant. was called ‘Barracuda’ but he wasn’t that bad. I recall Max Duze’s tailor shop. He was stout, a good man. After some more basic, I was assigned to Post Headquarters as a typist. Colonel Magruder was Post Commander. I was a 1st and 6th PFC. I remember more than once walking the seven miles from Highlands to the barracks because the PX bus had stopped running. I was assigned to the Honor Guard for the King and Queen of England who came from the train at Long Branch through the Post to a ship that took them through the New York Harbor (June 10,1939). They were with President Roosevelt. In June 1940, orders were sent transferring me to 39 Whitehall St., New York City, 2nd Corps Recruiting District because Colonel Magruder had been assigned to that command. I returned to Fort Hancock many times for visits but a lot of the personnel had been assigned to Fort Dix, New Jersey to reactivate the Post for the future. Fort Hancock hold a lot of nice memories never to be forgotten. I was discharged on October 11, 1951. No regrets.”

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John Joseph Patrick Mulhern

John Joseph Patrick Mulhern grew up on Sandy Hook
as a civilian dependent from 1908 to 1927.

“The only black family on Sandy Hook, civilian or military was the Campbell’s. I knew their children, Howard and Hazel well. My mother helped Chaplain Arnold who lived in Quarters 7 occasionally. Mr. and Mrs. Campbell were hired as cook and housekeeper at the Coast Artillery Officers’ Club. The second Officers’ Club was for Corps of Ordnance Officers. My mother came to know the Campbell’s and she asked if I could help Hazel and Howard with schoolwork. A couple of times a week I’d go to their home and help. At the end, Mrs. Campbell always had a big piece of strawberry shortcake or lemon meringue pie with a big glass of fresh milk. That was my compensation for tutoring. The last I heard of them was in the 1970’s. Howard came back to visit former teacher, Pearl Murray Masciale in Highlands, he wanted to see the desk that he had sat at in Fort Hancock school and she had it. We heard that they had lived on Eastern Long Island, but could not locate the Campbell’s later. An Indian on Sandy Hook was Private Jack Frost who worked for my father as a fireman at the pumping station. He drove a motorcycle bearing the trademark, ‘Indian’. Whenever we would go out with Sergeant Fitzpatrick or Frost, we would push it as often as it would be running, as the motorcycle were never in first class running condition!

My teachers at Sandy Hook, Mrs. Zea and Miss Mac Donald, they tried! You see my father, a civilian employee of the then War Department was assigned to Fort Hancock in 1908. We lived there at Horseshoe Cove until 1927 when Dad was reassigned to Mitchel Field, New York. That same year I graduated from Rutgers as a bachelor of letters and was on my way to make my mark in the world. We had always been Army gypsies, but we always had an anchor. There is an old saying that once you get sand in your shoes in New Jersey, you always come back.”

H.L Grant

H.L Grant served at Fort Hancock in the early 1960’s.

“My Army career of 24 years took me many places, and I met many people, but there are no fonder memories than the ones from Sandy Hook. I was fortunate to go to the 4th Missile Battalion, 71st Artillery Headquarters on July 5, 1961. Oh, those beautiful summers with many off duty hours spent on the beach, roaming the dunes and old gun emplacements, surf fishing, and crabbing at low tide. Even the winters with that continuous raw cold winds weren’t all that bad. I have fond memories of drinking 15 cent draft beer at the Highlander Hotel or being entertained by the talking Mynah birds at the bar with a Jim Bishop corner in Sea Bright. Headquarters Battery was a small 90 unit with much spirit and camaraderie.”

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Charlie Clarke

Charlie Clark served for the 245th Coast Artillery from September 1940 through January 1943.

“I served with the Battery K and HQ Battery, 245th Coast Artillery arriving as a private and departing as a staff sergeant. When our regiment arrived in September 1940 we were housed in tents awaiting barracks building. An early memory is the departure of Battery B, 52nd Coast Artillery for Panama. The band on the dock played a tune, the leading words which are, ‘Over the seas let’s go men’. It was great on a clear day to view Coney Island from Battery Peck or see even further if assigned as fire guard atop Gunnison tower. During 1942, Colonel Charles Glime was reassigned to Burma and the NCO’s held a farewell dinner for him. The 1st Sergeant of Battery A and myself drove a jeep to New York City, up Fifth Avenue to 40th street to buy the binoculars for his farewell gift. On 5th Avenue, people waved and some applauded us just for being soldiers. During 1942, gun crews were on 24-hour alert at the sandbagged batteries. More than once, numerous dead fish floated up on the beach creating a heavy stench. Some of us presumed this was caused by depth charges hurled at lurking U-boats in nearby waters. I carried the national colors in regimental parades, but on the weekends when the color guard went to New York City, a taller sergeant replaced me. The color guard appeared before a live audience at a broadcast theatre airing the, ‘This is the Army’ radio show. I rode the *ORD* as a passenger to Brooklyn Army Base and the harbor defense ship used as a ferry many times through the chain stretched across the Narrows.”