

Statement Of Significance

Summary

Fort Baker is nationally significant under Criteria A and C for the years 1867 to 1946, representing the period from the initial military construction on the site to the deactivation of artillery following World War II. The district includes a wide range of designed and vernacular historic landscape features including vehicular and pedestrian circulation systems, topographic features, buildings, batteries, small scale features, and vegetation developed by the U.S. military during their inhabitation of the site.

Criteria Discussion

Fort Baker was listed on the National Register on December 12, 1973, as part of the nationally significant "Forts Baker, Barry and Cronkhite" National Register Historic District, which comprises an area of 2,279 acres in Marin County. It is listed under Criterion A, with its significance deriving from the coastal defense history of the site. This CLI has found Fort Baker also eligible under Criterion C for the distinctive construction and integrity of its Endicott-era military structures. The district also includes thirty-two features that contribute to the pending multiple-property Seacoast Fortifications of San Francisco Bay study, which may be eligible for listing as a National Historic Landmark. Lastly, portions of the Golden Gate Bridge and an associated historic motor road lie within the bounds of Fort Baker. The Golden Gate Bridge has been determined eligible for listing as a National Historic Landmark. Study of the bridge-associated historic motor roads is incomplete, but may include identification of other historic resources when completed.

The importance of the site under Criterion A is summarized in the National Register Nomination Form which states:

"This area is unique in that there are standing many of our earliest coastal defense artillery batteries, significance in tracing the development of the American coastal defense system...This land, strategically located in Marin County, commands early observation of the Bay entrance. In 1866 Forts Baker and Barry were acquired by purchase to be used for military defense. Fort Cronkhite was acquired in the same manner in 1914, being legally considered a portion of Fort Barry until officially designated as Fort Cronkhite in 1937. The fortifications proposed for construction on this land were to augment those at the Presidio of San Francisco, in order to prevent successful passage of hostile ships through the Golden Gate into the San Francisco Bay.

At the time of these purchases, relations between the United States and Spain were deteriorating. The American government believed a stronger coastal defense system was needed to protect U.S. ports from hostile attack. Growing out of the Endicott Board's review of our defenses, a period of battery and defense building began on this land. The first phase of building, called the Endicott period, witnessed the expanded construction of batteries. These emplacements were constructed from the westernmost tip of the land east to the Bay, in a system of one battery backing up the next one, which offered complete protection from outside the Gate to inside the Bay. Upon completion of the main phase of battery building, ancillary structures were erected, observation posts and garrison buildings.

By 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt felt a review of all battery building was needed, and in 1906 Secretary of War William Howard Taft submitted his findings. The recommendations suggested in this report consisted mainly of modernizing the fortifications with searchlight equipment and fire control. With improvements in expanded communication techniques, the army was able to coordinate the batteries by relaying data from observation posts situated around the harbor mouth to the various battery fire control centers, each of which housed a primitive mechanical computer, in order to coordinate the

direction and range of fire. Other than searchlights and fire control, little change was initiated in the pre World War I period.

By 1914 those guns mounted in the 1880s and 1890s were no longer considered full-powered. Although dominance of fort over ship was threatened by the advance of the modern navy and naval equipment, land fortifications still held the upper hand since they had greater steadiness and fire control techniques, and most importantly no weight limitations. Yet with the advance of the navy, capitalized with the new Queen Elizabeth Class English ships, which could outrange many of our coastal weapons, drastic revision of our fortifications was needed.

During the period between the two World Wars, (1918 – 1941) the fortifications at Forts Baker, Barry and Cronkhite were continually modified to keep abreast of the increased range and fire power of naval ships.

In World War II (1941 – 1945) these fortifications were again modernized with anti-aircraft defense systems and defense against motor torpedo boats. New batteries were built at this time supplied with these modern installations, supplemented with the appropriate ancillary facilities, including searchlights.

From World War II until the present, batteries of ground to air missiles were provided on these three forts to defend the San Francisco Bay area against hostile aircraft. There are two of these NIKE Missile sites, both built in 1955.

Of all the batteries built for coastal defense, only two have been destroyed. There remain fifteen fortifications in good structural condition, now all disarmed. These batteries span five systems of defense against attack. The equipment ranged from smoothbore muzzle-loading guns to rifled, breakloading guns, including emplacements for 155mm. anti-motor torpedo boat and 90mm. anti-aircraft guns.

The batteries, many built almost a century ago, stand in good structural condition, which testifies to the toughness of their high-quality concrete and steel material. These emplacements are not only monuments to the age of coastal artillery, but they stand firmly in their place on the broader evolution of both San Francisco defense and the growth of our national defense system.”

In addition to significance under Criteria A as listed in the existing National Register documentation, the CLI also finds Fort Baker eligible under Criterion C. This determination is based on the distinctive construction “characteristics of a type, period or method... or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.”

As a group, historic buildings at Fort Baker display four primary architectural styles based on standardized plans developed by the Army, and are good examples of military architecture widely used throughout the country in the early twentieth century. Buildings constructed during the Endicott era exhibit characteristics of a simplified Colonial Revival style with clean, simplified lines, and minimal use of applied decoration. Most of the buildings erected during this period were constructed either of brick or were wood-frame with horizontal wood siding and gabled, slate-tiled roofs. A few buildings reflect the Mission Revival style, which was instituted in the Presidio and throughout West Coast military installations in the late 1920s and 1930s. Representatives of this style include FB502 and FB409. Mission Revival-styled buildings featured stucco walls painted white and red composition roof shingles. As the Mission Revival style was applied to buildings at Fort Baker, the dark-colored buildings were repainted white and red composition shingles replaced the original slate roofs. During WW II mobilization, a fourth style was used at Fort Baker. These buildings took the form of understated residential and industrial structures to house troops (FB507) and carry out specialized tasks related to

harbor defenses (FB407 and FB670).

Analysis of Landscape Integrity

The National Register program identifies seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Retention of these qualities is essential for a property to convey its historic identity or evoke its appearance during a significant period in history; however, all seven qualities are not required in order to convey a sense of past time and place. The CLI provides additional documentation related to these aspects, particularly that of “setting”.

Location

This aspect of integrity refers to the place where the landscape was constructed or evolved into being. Although boundary of Fort Baker was originally included within the larger Lime Point Military Reservation, the location has remained fixed. In addition, the boundaries of Fort Baker have remained in place since 1905, therefore the aspect of location remains intact.

Design

The combination of elements that create the form, plan, spatial organization, and style of a cultural landscape or historic property fall under this category. The landscape reflects the historic function as a military post through the layout, which is especially visible at the parade ground, batteries and remnant waterfront facilities. Buildings reflect the architectural styles widely used by the Army throughout the country during the Endicott era, including a simplified Colonial Revival style, as well as the Mission Revival style, instituted on the West Coast in the late 1920s and 1930s. Consequently, Fort Baker retains the aspect of design reflecting the entire period of significance, from 1867 to 1946.

Setting

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property that illustrates the character of the place. Fort Baker's setting has remained relatively consistent with respect to the natural landforms, including a small harbor, elevated terrain, as well as the grasslands and coastal scrub. Because of this, Fort Baker retains the aspect of setting.

Materials

All types of construction materials, including paving, plantings, and other landscape features as well as the materials' placement in the landscape is considered in evaluating this aspect of integrity. The quality, condition, and placement of the materials found at Fort Baker are mixed. While many of the historic materials are extant, such as roads, buildings, and the windbreaks, some have been lost. One illustration of this is the loss of trees composing the allee around Murray Circle. As a result, the aspect of materials is diminished yet it continues to contribute to the significance of the district as a whole.

Workmanship

The aspect of workmanship refers to the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular period. Under National Park Service management, Fort Baker does not receive the high level of landscape maintenance that the U.S. Army was once able to direct toward the property. In spite of constrained maintenance resources, including the elimination of much of the laborious handwork required to maintain beds of annual plants and thriving shrub borders and foundation plantings, the Fort Baker landscape remains reasonably well cared for. Further, the remaining buildings and structures at Fort Baker continue to display their methods of construction, particularly of the residential and military features, representing a number of different construction methods including wood construction, poured concrete, and brick masonry. As a result, Fort Baker retains the aspect of workmanship.

Feeling

A property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period is evaluated under this aspect of integrity. Through the military hierarchy revealed through the arrangement of buildings around the parade ground and the secluded location, Fort Baker retains its quality as an isolated military enclave apart from the surrounding communities. The aspect of feeling, therefore, contributes to the integrity of the landscape.

Association

This aspect of integrity refers to the direct link between the significant historic event, period, person, design, etc., and the cultural landscape. The Fort Baker landscape retains a strong connection to its military past, and through the retention of its physical features that date from the period of significance, establishes a link between the landscape and those events responsible for its development. The buildings, structures, vegetation and other features continue to represent all major eras of the site history associating what remains today with the history of Fort Baker.

Integrity of the Property as a Whole

Fort Baker continues to possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. While the aspects of materials and workmanship have been impacted by the reduced maintenance schedule, they are only diminished, not missing. Overall, most character defining features within the seven aspects of integrity survive from the period of significance and therefore, the Fort Baker landscape retains integrity.