

EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Visitor Center

Displays and photographs provide insights to what the fort looked like when it was an active military post.

Hours: October – April, 10am – 4pm
May – September, 10am – 6pm

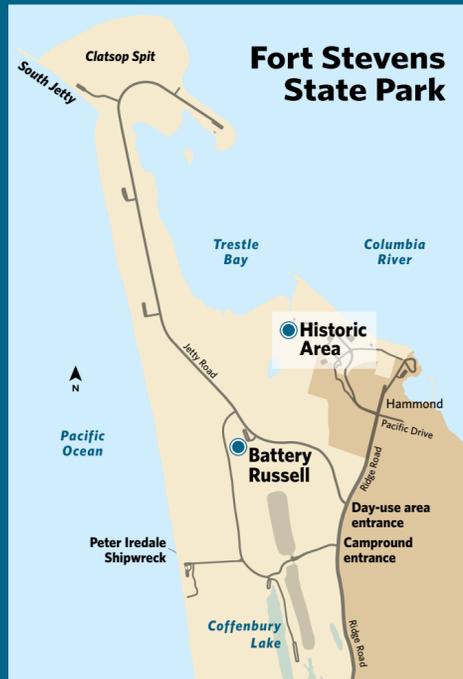
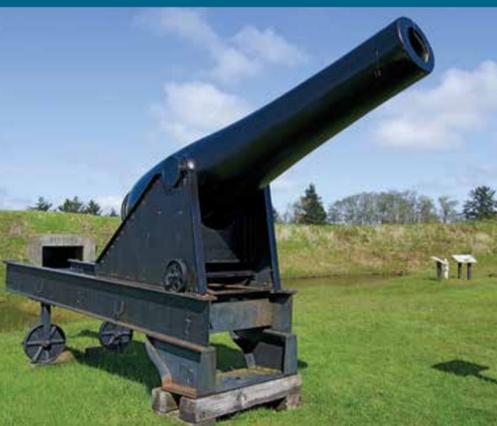
Guided Tours

Check the Visitor Center for a schedule of guided tours. The guardhouse is open to the public during the summer on a limited schedule.

Support Fort Stevens

Friends of Old Fort Stevens sponsors tours of the Historic Area and has been actively involved in reconstructing the earthworks, Civil War era-cannons, and various other projects. Information: visittstevens.com.

Civil War Rodman Cannon



stateparks.oregon.gov
800-551-6949



Printed on Recycled Paper

All information or fees subject to change without notice. This brochure is available in alternative formats upon request. Call 1-800-551-6949. Oregon Relay for the hearing impaired: dial 711.



Fort Stevens State Park

HISTORIC MILITARY SITES



Ready, aim, fire! Soldiers practice firing from Battery Russell.



Fort Stevens may be a peaceful park today, but it was once an active military base and the target of a surprise Japanese naval attack during World War II.

Originally built in 1864 toward the end of the Civil War, Fort Stevens stayed active through the Spanish-American war and World War II. All but one of the fort's nine concrete batteries were constructed between 1897 and 1904.

Shortly after World War II, the Army demolished many of the buildings and closed Fort Stevens. Although the guns have been removed, their concrete emplacements remain. Today, Oregon State Parks preserves these remnants of early 20th-century U.S. military history.

Eight batteries were built along the Columbia River, in today's Historic Area. The ninth, Battery Russell, was emplaced about a mile southwest of the main fort, facing the ocean. This brochure serves as a self-guided tour of the Historic Area and Battery Russell.

Battery Russell.



This June 23, 1942 article documents the Fort Stevens attack.

EXPLORING BATTERY RUSSELL

Built in 1904, Battery Russell was a later addition to the large military installation at Fort Stevens. It was built south of the other batteries, facing the ocean, to expand the fort's network of artillery. Each of Battery Russell's two 10-inch rifles was manned by a team of 35 men. A well-trained gun crew could fire a 617-pound shell up to 8 miles away, once per minute.

Fire Control Hill and Squirrelville

The dunes south of Battery Russell marked the highest point at Fort Stevens, with a clear view of the ocean and the river. Thus, this was the perfect location to scan the battlefield for enemy vessels. Called Fire Control Hill, this is where orders were coordinated for all guns at Fort Stevens as well as Washington's Fort Canby and Fort Columbia.

Throughout the 1930s, Battery Russell was the practice battery for the 249th Coast Artillery Regiment with the Oregon National Guard. Only after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 was Battery Russell manned on a regular basis. Because it was about a mile from the main fort, primitive housing was hastily constructed for the gun crews in the wooded area behind the dune. This area was known as "Squirrelville" to the soldiers who were rotated in and out every two weeks.

Attack!

At about 11:30 p.m. on the night of June 21, 1942, an Imperial Japanese Navy submarine surfaced just south of Fort Stevens and began firing shells in the direction of the fort.

Soldiers scrambled out of bed and raced to their posts. They located the submarine by its gun flashes, but were told to hold fire. It's unclear

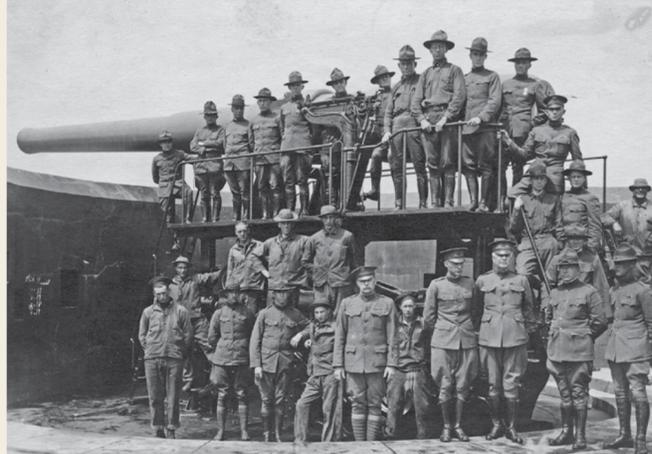


Photo of the 2nd Coast Artillery unit from Coos Bay that became part of the 249th Coast Artillery Corps of the Oregon National Guard.

why the order was given—we can only speculate. Perhaps those on Fire Control Hill thought the sub was beyond the reach of the guns, or the harbor defense commander may have wanted to avoid revealing the precise location of the fort and the extent of its arsenal.

Fortunately, most of the I-25's shells landed harmlessly in isolated swamp and beach areas, although several did hit near Battery Russell. A regional newspaper at the time said that the sub "peppered the Fort Stevens area... for approximately sixteen minutes" before it ceased firing, submerged, and retreated beneath the waves.

Aftermath

All told, approximately nine shells were fired at Fort Stevens. A monument now marks the site where one of the shells landed along DeLaura Beach Lane, creating a 5-foot crater. Although there were no casualties, and the shelling caused minimal damage to property, it alarmed local residents about the possibility of further attacks or even an invasion.

The attack marked the only wartime action at Fort Stevens. The incident also took on heightened historical significance: it became the first U.S. mainland military base to be fired upon by a foreign power since the War of 1812. It still holds that distinction.



Soldiers used telescopes to survey the sea for enemy targets. They would phone the coordinates to the gun battery's plotting room.



A crater resulting from the shelling. Courtesy of National Archives.

Battery Russell Today

After 40 years of protecting the harbor, Battery Russell fired its last shells on December 1944 in a closing ceremony as it was replaced by the more modern Battery 245 to the northeast. That shot also marked the last time that type of rifle was fired in the U.S.

Today Battery Russell is home to the Pacific Rim Peace Memorial, which is dedicated to the American and Japanese soldiers who were involved in the shelling of Fort Stevens and which calls for an everlasting peace between their two countries.



The guns at Battery Russell fired 10" diameter shells that weighed approximately 620 pounds.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Harbor Defenses of the Columbia River: The U.S. Army built three forts to guard the entrance to the Columbia River: Fort Stevens, and Washington's Fort Canby and Fort Columbia. Fort Stevens served as headquarters, from which the U.S. Army Coast Artillery Corps coordinated all military actions at the three forts.

Gun battery: One or more artillery weapons — such as cannons and missiles — fixed on mounts or carriages and often grouped together for strategic defense. These weapons could be moved for aiming, but were otherwise anchored in place. Fort Stevens has nine batteries.

Disappearing carriages: From the 1890s through 1904, guns were mounted on a disappearing carriage that raised the gun above the parapet for firing, then retracted into the gun pit to provide cover while soldiers reloaded. Most coast artillery emplacements used a barbette or pedestal mount after 1904 through WWII.

Parapet: A protective wall.

Mortars: Artillery that fires in a high arc; could be either smoothbore or rifled.

Fire Control System: A strategy for predicting an enemy's future location in order to hit a moving target. Usually spotters gathered coordinates and relayed them to a central location, where a team used conversion charts and slide-rules to plot enemy location, direction of travel, and speed on large maps.

Casemate: A subterranean or covered location that provides protection from artillery or bombs.

A photograph of the I-15, a submarine from the same class as the I-25.



FORT STEVENS STATE HISTORICAL SITE

A self-guided walking tour of the Historic Area begins at the Visitor Center and takes you on a loop through the grounds. The tour is divided into two segments, each taking about 1.5 hours.

1 War Games Building (1911)

Today's Visitor Center was once the war games building, where artillerymen regularly practiced mock battles on a large, lighted table map of the harbor in preparation for a real attack.

2 Battery Pratt (1900)

Built after the Spanish-American war, this battery remained active until 1943. Armed with two 6-inch rifles on disappearing carriages, Battery Pratt was designed to protect the submarine mines in the river, and to stop enemy ships from going up the Columbia River. The gun you see today is a replica of the 6-inch rifles that were once mounted here.



Soldiers reloading a 10" disappearing rifle from behind the parapet, or wall, of Battery Russell.

3 West Batteries (1896)

The West Batteries were the first concrete emplacements to be installed at Fort Stevens, during the Spanish-American war. They featured the latest technology: six 10-inch rifles, each positioned on a disappearing carriage. The West Batteries contained Battery Mishler, Battery Lewis, and Battery Walker.

4 Battery Mishler (1898)

This emplacement was originally an open battery like the West Batteries. But its unique guns made it a rarity in coast artillery design. It featured All Around Fire (A.R.F.) guns, named for their 360° movement capability that allowed firing in any direction. The only similar emplacement in the U.S. was on the Texas coast.

Battery Mishler was only in operation for about 18 years. At the start of World War II, the Army covered the two gun pits. With its maze of tunnels, cave-like chambers, and thick concrete walls, it was the ideal joint command center for the three forts.

Check the Visitor Center for a schedule of guided tours during the summer.



Battery Mishler was an open battery until it was covered in concrete during WWII.

5 Parados (1896)

The French-named and designed parados refers to the manmade embankment of earth at the rear of the west batteries, built to protect soldiers from an enemy approaching from the rear. The Army installed a railroad trestle to transport building materials.

6 Battery 245 (1944)

The last battery to be emplaced, Battery 245 featured the modern "200 series" of gun batteries that used radar to improve accuracy in foul weather and fog. These new guns could fire 9 to 15 miles away. Battery 245 came into service in December 1944, just as the outmoded Battery Russell fired its last round.

To continue, follow the Jetty Trail down the slope toward the river.

7 Machine Gun Emplacements

This enclosed concrete machine gun emplacement was one of six spaced widely along the beach and Columbia River. These short-range guns guarded the shoreline, should enemies land on shore.

8 Forts Columbia and Canby

From 1898-1947, Fort Stevens served as a headquarters for the three forts comprising the Harbor Defenses of the Columbia River, which also included Washington's Fort Canby and Fort Columbia. Together, the three forts formed a military strategy known as a "triangle of fire" overseen by the U.S. Army Coast Artillery Corps.

On a clear day, Fort Columbia's cluster of structures can be seen on the hillside across the river. Fort Canby is part of Washington's Cape Disappointment State Park. Its location is marked by Cape Disappointment Lighthouse at the river's mouth.

9 Jetty Trestle and Clatsop Spit

The trestles before you are from a railroad built for constructing the South Jetty in the 1880s. Workmen used the railroad to transport tons of rocks to the mouth of the river. The jetties on either side of the Columbia stabilized and deepened the river channel, making it safer for ships to pass. The South Jetty also trapped sand as it washed seaward, moving the shoreline about a mile further out to sea and creating Clatsop Spit.

The Army used the railroad again during World War II to transport gun crews to the gun emplacements that were hurriedly installed at the South Jetty after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

10 Clatsop Village

This is the approximate site of a Clatsop Indian village known as Neahkeluk, which translates into "place where salmon pemmican was made." It was the largest village in the area, used as a summer base camp for fishing and trading. During the latter part of the Civil War when the government began constructing Fort Stevens earthworks, the indigenous people who still lived in the area were forced to move.

11 Parrott Rifle at Battery Scott

This is a replica of the infamous Civil War-era Parrott Rifle. Five of these guns were mounted on the Fort Stevens earthworks. The borehole of the Parrott Rifle's gun barrel featured spiral grooves, as opposed to Rodman cannon's smooth bore. This construction put a "spin" on an elongated shell. Unfortunately, the gun tubes often burst, seriously wounding or killing gunners.

12 Original Earthworks (1863) and Battery Freeman (1902)

Fort Stevens began as an open, earthen fort known as an earthworks, the only installation of its type on the West Coast. The nine-sided earthworks contained 26 guns, including seventeen massive Rodman cannons, considered the most powerful weapons of their day. At the turn of the century, the Army installed Battery Freeman, a concrete battery inside the original earthworks, armed with safer, more accurate guns. During World War II, the Army leveled the battery to create a parade ground. The Friends of Old Fort Stevens organized and sponsored the reconstruction of the earthworks between 1989-91.

13 Mine Casemate (1898)

The mine casemate first served as the control center for the fort's submarine mine field, designed to prevent enemy ships from entering U.S. territory. The Army converted the casemate to a radio transmitter during World War II, when it moved the minefield closer to the mouth of the river. Fort Columbia controlled the new minefield; Fort Stevens stored all supplies and was in charge of planting and maintaining the mines. The two forts planted only one minefield, but no enemy vessel entered the river to challenge it.

14 Battery Smur (1902)

This battery was designed to protect submarine mine operations in the Columbia River with its two 3-inch rapid fire guns. Gunners could fire 12 rounds per minute. Gun 1 features a real 3-inch gun tube from a coast artillery fort in Virginia.

To continue this leg of the walking tour, return to the MINE CASEMATE and follow the map.

15 World War II Barracks

None of the buildings remain, but this area once hummed with activity. Prior to World War II it was a field used for drills and sports activities. As war clouds gathered, the Army hastily assembled the barracks, never intending them to be permanent structures. The foundation remnants you see were for the boiler room and the restrooms. The two-story barracks housed up to 65 men.



World War II Barracks

16 Switchboard Room and Test Tanks (1922)

This bomb- and gas-proof building was the center of all communications for The Harbor Defenses of the Columbia River. A large switchboard transmitted messages via a network of armored cables connecting the forts on both sides of the river.

The structures in front of this building held water tanks used to test electrical cable for the submarine mines.

17 Guardhouse

The guardhouse was the center of activity for the fort. Guards gathered here to report for duty and take orders. It also had a cell block for errant soldiers. Assaults, theft, drunkenness, and desertion were the most common offenses — and were notably more frequent after payday. Punishment at times included unpleasant daytime duties under escort.

18 Artillery Engineers' Building

Artillery engineers and staff calculated a rifle's range, or field of fire. They had to consider atmospheric pressure, wind speed, tide levels, and temperature — all of which could affect the speed and range of artillery shells. This information was then posted on large maps in each battery's plotting room.

19 Battery Clark (1899)

This was the only mortar battery at Fort Stevens. At the time, mortars were considered the most lethal weapon in harbor defense. These stubby weapons fired shells in a high arc, shot gun style, with a goal of landing squarely on the deck of an enemy ship. Battery Clark was inactivated in late 1942; by then mortar fire was already too slow to reach the faster moving ships of World War II.

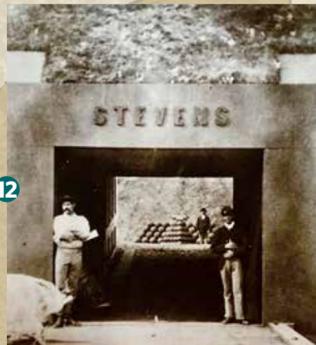
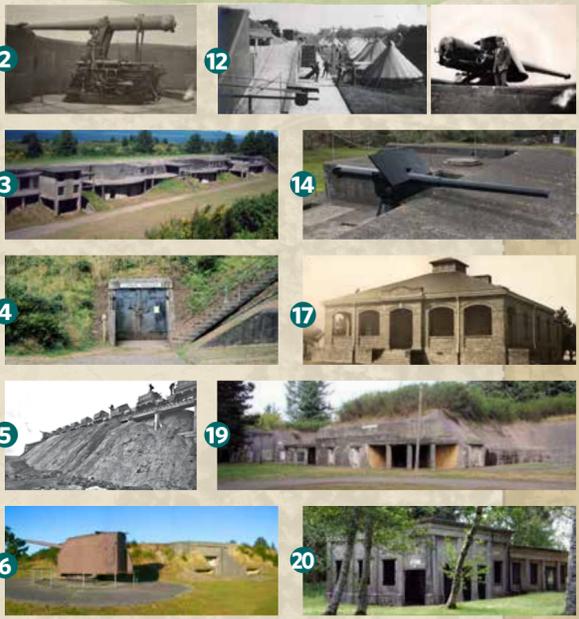
20 Central Power Plant

This facility powered most of the fort with steam-powered engines that turned electrical generators. The plant operated from 1911 to 1921, when the fort connected to commercial power.

21 Battery Clark Command Station

This six-story observation station served as command post and base end station for Battery Clark. Several range-finding instruments were located on the top floor. Observers shared information on enemy ship movements with the gun crews of Battery Clark. This helped the gunners fire more accurately.

Fort Stevens State Historical Site



The Earthworks was accessible from a guarded sallyport.



9 Jetty Trestle and Clatsop Spit.