

A Brief Look Back at Camp McQuaide

Moving from Capitola to La Selva Beach,
National Guard Maintained Artillery Ranges for 40 Years

by Sarah Weston

The sound of artillery firing less than a mile from Capitola Village would no doubt cause serious panic today, but in the 1920s and '30s it was considered merely annoying. Beginning in 1926, the training site for the California National Guard's 250th Coast Artillery Regiment was located on the site of what are now the Capitola Elementary and New Brighton Middle schools.

At the time it was little more than open fields, located next to the old Santa Cruz-Capitola Airport. It was used as a summer camp for a two-week stretch of training by the 250th.

However, by 1938 local citizens had grown tired of the noise, so the camp was relocated to 400 acres of newly purchased land off San Andreas Road. It was christened in honor of Father (later Major) Joseph P. McQuaide, the Regiment's beloved chaplain who had served in the Boxer Rebel-

lion, the Spanish-American War and World War I. McQuaide died in 1924.

As with other sites around the Monterey Bay area, Camp McQuaide saw increased buildup in the years leading up to and throughout World War II, only to vanish to little more than memory a few years after victory in the Pacific.

Coastal Artillery Training in La Selva

With World War II looming and the Army expanding, the camp was developed as a Coast Artillery Training Center. From an artillery perspective it was ideally located, practically on the center shoreline of the Monterey Bay.

This allowed the towing of targets behind ships past the site, but gained a more sinister urgency during the war when Japanese submarines attacked an oil tanker off Cypress Point and later an oil refinery near Santa Barbara.

Part of the buildup was courtesy of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which

constructed San Andreas Road to the camp as well as the facilities and grounds. The new camp included a Post Headquarters, barracks, a hospital, and rows of tents.



A typical day for a recruit was being awakened at 5 a.m. for calisthenics and a couple miles of running, practice with rifles and submachine guns, and a simulated course of action with a 155 mm cannon.

About 12,000 California National Guard troops were called up between 1940 and 1941. The 250th Coast Artillery Regiment was mobilized to Sitka and Dutch Harbor, Alaska in September of 1940, where it remained until March of 1944.

One wag wrote "We each will have an 'Esky' girl to/ Keep us warm at night/ And there won't be no maneuvers/ 'Cause there's no one there to fight."

However, after the regiment was returned for retraining in 1944, its members saw action in Italy and Germany. Meanwhile, Camp McQuaide was converted to use as a stockade for stateside AWOLs and other troublemakers.

From Camp to Boarding School

After the war Camp McQuaide was considered surplus and decommissioned in 1948. The government offered to sell it to Santa Cruz County for the sum of \$1. The County was contemplating the construction of a junior college (this was before Cabrillo College), but the North County

educators did not warm to the idea of a junior college campus being located so far south. It was also offered to the State Division of Parks as the site of a state park, but that also came to naught.

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor from Chowchilla named Leal Grunke heard of Camp McQuaide's closing and proposed it to the church as a boarding academy. After much discussion within the church and with the government, title was transferred not for \$1 but for free, or in War Assets Administration terminology, "[T]he camp will be 'sold' at 100 percent discount."

The project was referred to by some as "Grunke's Folly," given that the site included more than 600 old buildings and acres of cement. However, Grunke did manage to establish what he named Monterey Bay Academy within a year. According to the school's literature, the school has now served more than 8,000 students since 1949, of whom 95 percent have gone on to college. ■