

Firing at Camp McQuaide



An artillery military reservation — a very unusual sight in Santa Cruz County, or for that matter in the state of California.

Photo provided by Richard Nutter

Camps
by Carolyn Swift

Richard Nutter of the Soquel Pioneer and Historical Society recently brought the Capitola Museum a rare photograph of the artillery guns at the summer encampment of Camp McQuaide in Capitola.

Evidently, the 63rd Coast Artillery Regiment had first set up an anti-aircraft battalion on

Delaware Street in Santa Cruz in the fall of 1924. The site was so bad the Army told Mayor Fred Swanton it wouldn't be back unless he could find a better field.

So the only anti-aircraft base on the California coast came to Capitola in 1926, first as the 63rd Coast Artillery and then as the 250th Coast Artillery.

Permanent barracks for the summer encampment were built along Park Avenue, near El

Salto Resort. Every summer, the guns would fire at targets attached to airplanes that flew from Hihn's Field, the eventual site of the Capitola Airport.

Camp McQuaide was evidently named for a National Guard Chaplain, Joseph P. McQuaide, and was the only military reservation in the United States to be so named. According to Donald T. Clark in *Place Names of Santa Cruz County*, McQuaide was born in 1867, and was a graduate of

Santa Clara University who served both in the Spanish American War and World War I. He died March 29, 1924, about the time the encampment was founded.

Camp McQuaide stayed in Capitola every summer through 1936, when the announcement was made that it had worn out its welcome. Piqued, the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* slapped the wrists of local poultry ranchers who had complained.

"Poultrymen in the Capitola region who used to complain that the noise of the big guns kept their hens from laying and frightened the chicks nearly to death, can rest without fear of further demoralization of their feathered flocks," it announced in a September issue.

In 1938, Camp McQuaide moved to a new site between Manresa and Sunset beaches on San Andreas Road, and is today the home of the Monterey Bay Academy. □