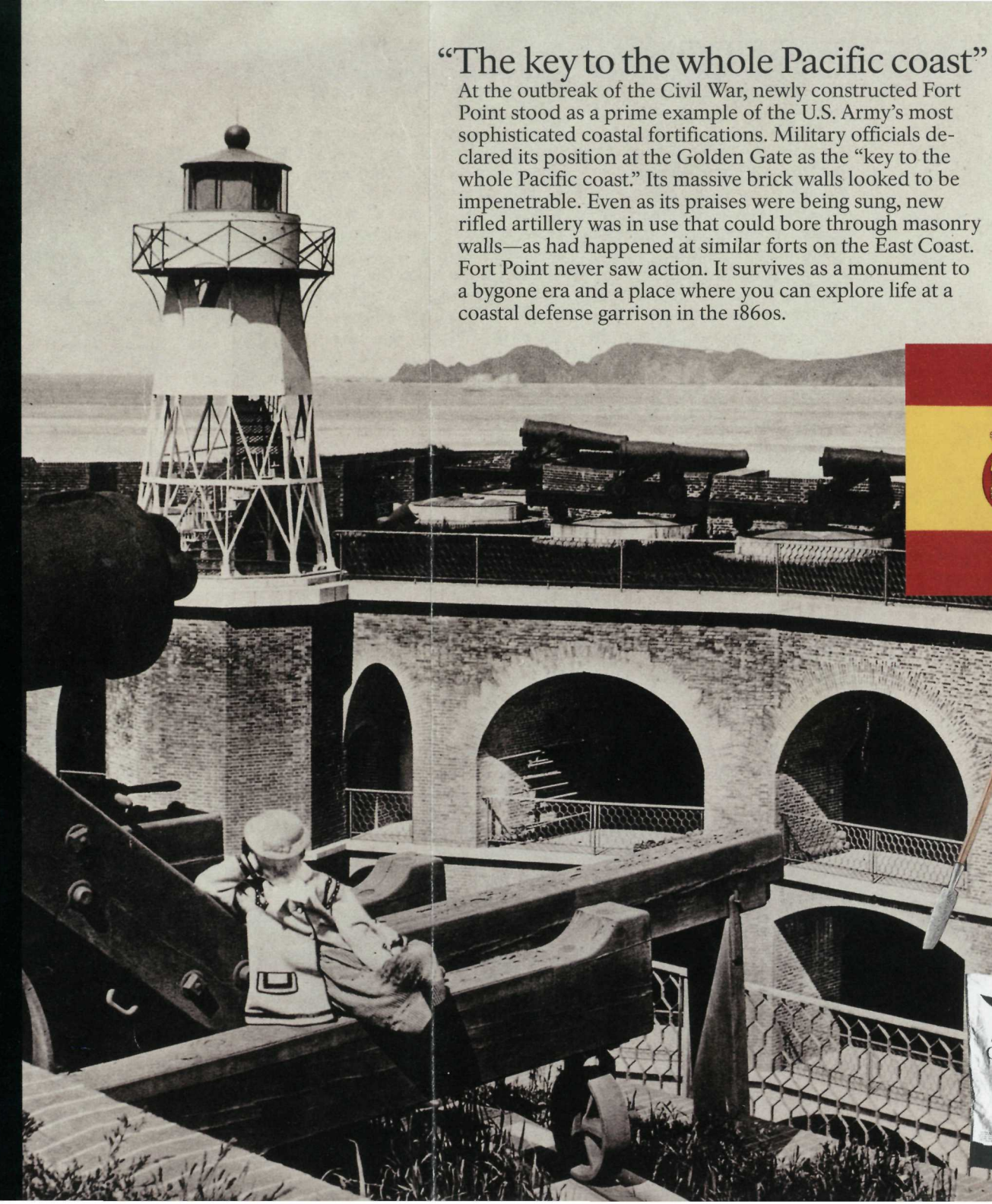




"The key to the whole Pacific coast"

At the outbreak of the Civil War, newly constructed Fort Point stood as a prime example of the U.S. Army's most sophisticated coastal fortifications. Military officials declared its position at the Golden Gate as the "key to the whole Pacific coast." Its massive brick walls looked to be impenetrable. Even as its praises were being sung, new rifled artillery was in use that could bore through masonry walls—as had happened at similar forts on the East Coast. Fort Point never saw action. It survives as a monument to a bygone era and a place where you can explore life at a coastal defense garrison in the 1860s.



Left: Fort Point, 1870. Above: Ohlone Indian and canoe.



FLAG RESEARCH CENTER

The Castillo de San Joaquin
In 1769 Gaspar de Portolá's overland expedition reached San Francisco Bay. By 1776 Spain had established the area's first European settlement, with a mission and a presidio (military post). Fearful of encroachment by the British and Russians, Spain fortified the high white cliff at the narrowest part of the bay's entrance, where Fort Point now stands. The Castillo de San Joaquin, built in 1794, was an adobe structure housing nine to 13 cannon. The little fortress guarded the Spanish colony until 1821, when Mexico won independence from Spain and gained control of the region.



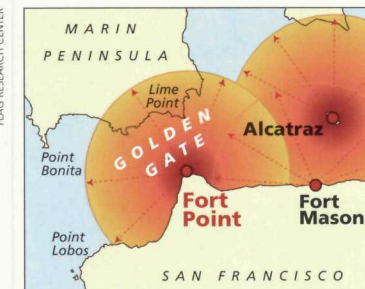
Above left: Spanish flag from 1793; Spanish soldier, 1770s. Above: Mexican flag; left: Bear flag, symbol of the 1846 revolt during which U.S. citizens in California banded together to overthrow Mexican rule.

Sentinel at the Golden Gate

The entrance to San Francisco Bay has long been the site of human habitation. The earliest residents of the area, ancestors of the Ohlone and Miwok peoples, depended on the bay's waters for food and transportation. There is evidence from about 4,000 years ago of an Ohlone village located about a mile from Fort Point along the shore.

In 1835 the Mexican army moved to Sonoma and the castillo's adobe walls were left to crumble in the wind and rain. War broke out between Mexico and the United States in 1846. On July 1, U.S. Army officer John Charles Frémont, along with Kit Carson and a band of 10 followers, stormed the castillo and spiked the cannons. They discovered that the fortress was empty.

After the United States prevailed in the war against Mexico in 1848, California was ceded to the U.S. The gold strike that year at Sutter's Mill on the American River lured tens of thousands of prospectors. Most of the "Fortyniners" arrived by sea, making San Francisco the major West Coast harbor as of 1849. When California became the

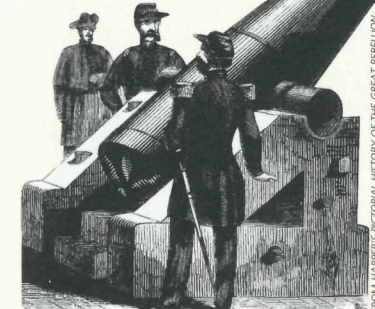


Top: Third System seacoast defenses on the eve of the Civil War. Above: San Francisco Bay's defenses (red dots) at Fort Point, Alcatraz, and Fort Mason. Circles indicate the range of fire—about two miles—for each fortification.

31st state in 1850, the U.S. Army and Navy officials recommended a series of fortifications to secure San Francisco Bay. Coastal defenses were built at Alcatraz, Fort Mason, and Fort Point (see map below left).

Fort Point and the Civil War

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began work on Fort Point in 1853. Plans specified that the lowest tier of artillery be as close as possible to water level so cannonballs could ricochet across the water's surface to hit enemy ships at the waterline. Workers blasted the 90-foot cliff down to 15 feet above sea level. The structure featured seven-foot-thick walls and multi-tiered casemated construction typical of Third System forts (see diagram on the other side of this brochure). It was sited to defend the maximum amount of harbor area. While there were more than 30 such forts on the East Coast, Fort Point was the only one on the West Coast (see map at left). In 1854 Inspector Gen. Joseph F.K. Mansfield declared "this point as the key to the whole Pacific Coast...and it should receive untiring exertions."



A 10-inch Columbiad cannon at Fort Sumter, South Carolina. Two of these cannons were mounted at Fort Point during the Civil War.

A crew of 200, many unemployed miners, labored for eight years on the fort. In 1861, with war looming, the Army mounted the fort's first cannon. Col. Albert Sidney Johnston, commander of the Department of the Pacific, prepared Bay Area defenses and ordered in the first troops to the fort. Kentucky-born Johnston then resigned his commission to join the Confederate Army; he was killed at the Battle of Shiloh in 1862.

Throughout the Civil War, artillerymen at Fort Point stood guard for an enemy that never came. The Confederate raider CSS *Shenandoah* planned to attack San Francisco, but on the way to the harbor the captain learned that the war was over; it was August 1865.

Severe damage to similar forts on the Atlantic Coast during the war—Fort Sumter in South Carolina and Fort Pulaski in Georgia—challenged the effectiveness of masonry walls against rifled artillery. Troops soon moved out of Fort Point, and it was never again continuously

occupied by the Army. The fort was nonetheless important enough to receive protection from the elements. In 1869 a granite seawall was completed. The following year, some of the fort's cannon were moved to Battery East on the bluffs nearby, where they were more protected. In 1882 Fort Point was officially named Fort Winfield Scott after the famous hero from the war against Mexico. The name never caught on and was later applied to an artillery post at the Presidio.

Into a New Century

In 1892 the Army began constructing the new Endicott System concrete fortifications armed with steel, breech-loading rifled guns. Within eight years, all 102 of the smooth-bore cannons at Fort Point had been dismantled and sold for scrap. The fort, moderately damaged in the 1906 earthquake, was used over the next four decades for barracks, training, and storage. Soldiers from the 6th U.S. Coast Artillery were

stationed here during World War II to guard minefields and the anti-submarine net that spanned the Golden Gate.

Preserving Fort Point

In 1926 the American Institute of Architects proposed preserving the fort for its outstanding military architecture. Funds were unavailable, and the idea languished. Plans for the Golden Gate Bridge in the 1930s called for the fort's removal, but Chief Engineer Joseph Strauss redesigned the bridge to save the fort. "While the old fort has no military value now," Strauss said, "it remains nevertheless a fine example of the mason's art.... It should be preserved and restored as a national monument."

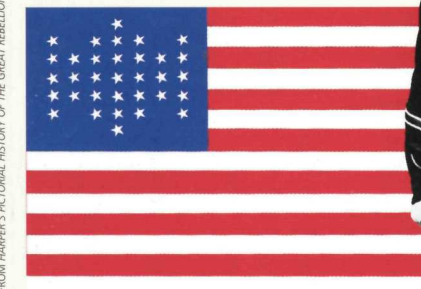
Preservation efforts were revived after World War II. On October 16, 1970, President Richard Nixon signed the bill creating Fort Point National Historic Site. The fort tells the story of its years spent guarding the Golden Gate.

Planning Your Visit

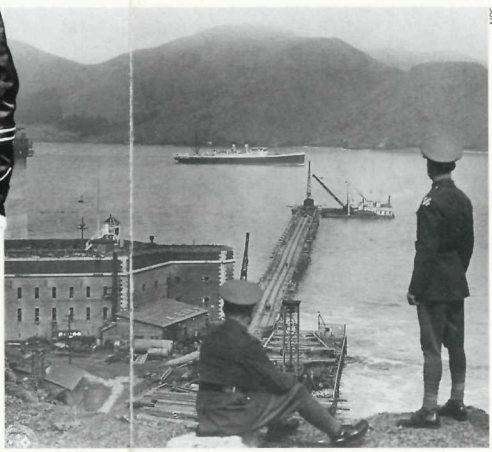
Fort Point National Historic Site stands beneath the southern end of the Golden Gate Bridge (see below). Parking is limited. For public bus information and current park hours of operation call 415-561-4395, 415-556-1693, or TDD 415-561-4399.

The fort is closed on Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The fort is wheelchair accessible on the ground floor, including the theater. Visitor activities include a brief introductory film, cannon-loading demonstrations, and guided and self-guiding tours.

More information:
Fort Point
National Historic Site
P.O. Box 29333
San Francisco, CA 94129
415-556-1693
TDD 415-556-0505
www.nps.gov/fopo



Above: The 33-star United States flag, in use for the first half of 1861. Right: 1860s Federal coastal defense soldier's dress uniform.



Golden Gate Bridge tower foundation construction, 1933.



Fort Point beneath the bridge.

"The admiration and pride of the Pacific"

Between 1817 and 1867, the nation's coastal defense system included some 30 forts along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts; Fort Point was the only fort of this era built on the West Coast. An 1857 newspaper article praised the fort's "solid masonry of more than ordinary artistic skill.... We venture to predict it will be the admiration and pride of the Pacific."

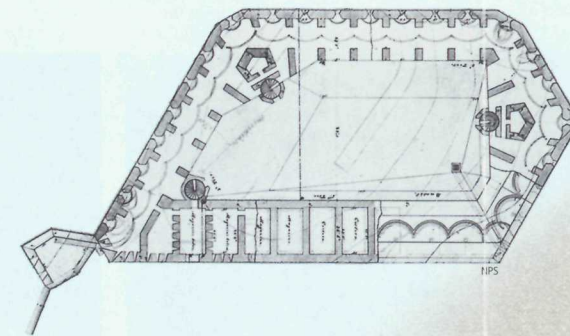
This illustration by artist Richard Schlecht shows many facets of its construction and how it might have been used under ideal conditions. As you tour the fort, remember that in addition to serving as a heavily armed fortification, it was home to hundreds of men.

Design and Construction

Fort Point is an excellent example of a Third System coastal fortification, a system adopted after the War of 1812 to protect major U.S. harbors. The plan below was drafted before the east and west bastions were added. The fort had three tiers of casemates (vaulted rooms housing cannons), and a barbette tier with additional guns and a sod covering to absorb the impact of enemy cannon fire. The only entrance was a sally port with iron-studded doors. Work began in 1853. Since few local sources of building materials were available,

granite was imported from as far away as China before engineers gave up the idea of stone. Some eight million bricks were made in a brickyard nearby.

As soon as it was completed, Fort Point needed modifications. Civil War battles at East Coast forts proved that masonry could be destroyed by rifled cannons. As of the 1870s Battery East, a great earthwork atop the bluff just to the southeast, bolstered fortifications at the point.



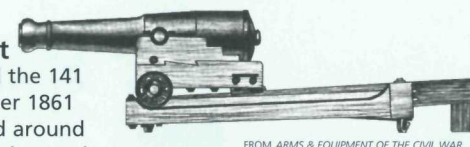
Lighthouse

This is the third lighthouse built at this site—a natural promontory from which to guide mariners through waters that can be treacherous in fog. The first was demolished shortly after construction in 1852 to make way for Fort Point.

The second, north of the fort at the tip of the point, suffered from constant erosion. The present lighthouse was used from 1864 until 1934, when the foundation for the Golden Gate Bridge blocked its light.

Artillery and Hotshot

Fort Point never mounted the 141 cannon planned. By October 1861 there were 69 guns in and around the fort: 24-, 32-, 42-pounders and 10- and 8-inch Columbiads (right). After the war, the Army installed powerful 10-inch Rodman guns in the lower casemates; these could fire a 128-lb. solid shot more than two miles. At its greatest strength, the fort mounted 102 cannon. In

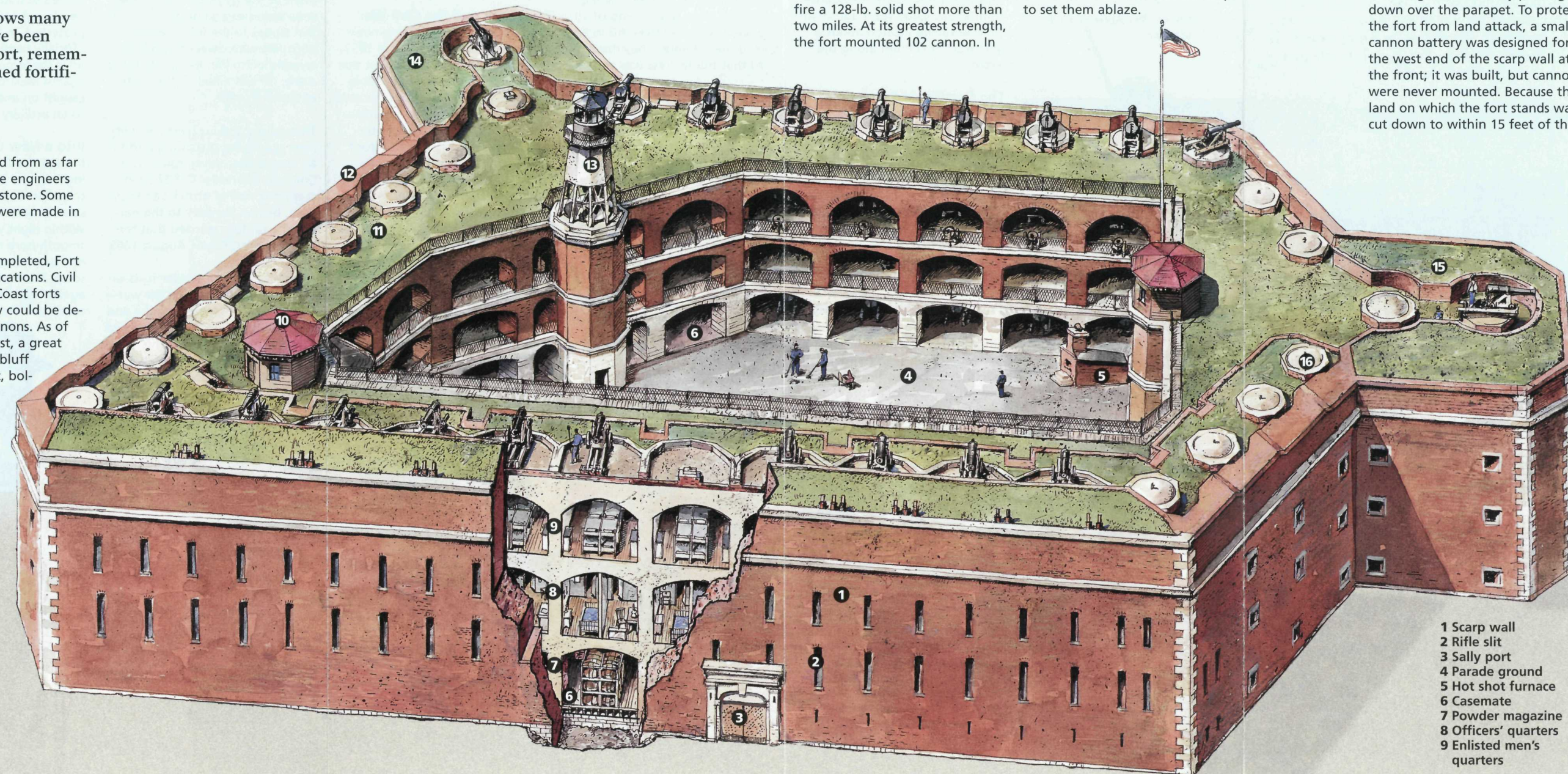


addition the fort had "hotshot" furnaces: iron cannon balls could be heated red hot, loaded into a cannon, and fired at wooden ships to set them ablaze.

Bastions and Seawall

Each of Fort Point's bastions held 15 small cannon to discourage attackers from scaling the fort. By protruding from the main structure, the bastions allowed defenders to fire from a protected position along their own walls rather than revealing themselves by peering down over the parapet. To protect the fort from land attack, a small cannon battery was designed for the west end of the scarp wall at the front; it was built, but cannon were never mounted. Because the land on which the fort stands was cut down to within 15 feet of the

water, a seawall (right) was needed for protection. This 1,500-foot-long structure is an impressive engineering feat. Granite stones were fitted together and the spaces between them sealed with strips of lead. Completed in 1869 the wall held fast for more than 100 years against the Golden Gate's powerful waves until it began to give way in the 1980s. The National Park Service rebuilt the wall and placed boulders seaward to deflect the force of the waves.



- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Scarp wall | 10 Penthouse |
| 2 Rifle slit | 11 Barbette tier with sod covering |
| 3 Sally port | 12 Parapet wall |
| 4 Parade ground | 13 Lighthouse |
| 5 Hot shot furnace | 14 West bastion |
| 6 Casemate | 15 East bastion |
| 7 Powder magazine | 16 Cannon mount |
| 8 Officers' quarters | |
| 9 Enlisted men's quarters | |

Garrison

During the Civil War, as many as 500 men from the 3rd U.S. Artillery, the 9th U.S. Infantry, and the 8th California Volunteer Infantry were garrisoned here. Stationed thousands of miles from the major theaters of combat, the men spent their days in a routine of drills, artillery practice, inspections, sentry duty, and maintenance chores. Enlisted men bunked 24 to a casemate on the third tier; officers had single or double quarters one tier below. To supplement coal heating fuel, soldiers gathered driftwood from the shore. Bvt. Maj. William Austine, the fort's commander, summed up conditions in an 1861 report: "During the summer months the post is enveloped in fogs, and dampness and high winds constantly prevail, and consequently rheumatism and severe colds are very common."



Above, from left: Army trumpet, playing cards, U.S. Army issue tin cup, clay pipe, Federal artilleryman's forage cap.

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