

Fast Facts: HDNY in WWII

From 1940 to 1945, each month between 40% to 60% of all US Shipping to Europe left from New York Harbor. The other key harbors were Portland, ME; Boston, MA; Chesapeake Bay, VA; Sonny Point (Charleston), SC.

Over 1,000 ships were sunk in the Atlantic by German U-Boats and surface ships

In March 1943, approximately 926,000 tons of Allied shipping was sunk in the Atlantic - about half of that was fuel - about three Exxon Valdese tankers

German U-Boats landed saboteurs on US shores on two occasions.

German U-Boats mined the entrance to NY Harbor at least once, possibly twice.

A gun strike on substations of the fledgling US electric grid was feasible - a serious threat to NYC and Philadelphia industrial capability

There were approximately 13,000 combat soldiers assigned to the HDNY - approximately 5,000 of them at Fort Hancock.

HDNY Harbor Defense Forts

Fort Hancock (HQ)
Navesink Highlands

Fort Wadsworth (Staten Island)
Miller Field
Swineburne Island

Fort Hamilton (Brooklyn)

Fort Tilden (Long Island)
Norton Point

Fort Totten (Queens)

Fort Jay - Governor's Island (Forts Schyler and Slocom were disarmed)



Army Coast Artillery Branch Insignia

HDNY Key Headquarters Organizations

Harbor Defense Command Post (HDCP) - Located at Fort Hancock in Mortar Battery
Joint Army/Navy operations - Army Brigadier General in command

Harbor Entrance Control Post (HECP) - Main HECP at Fort Wadsworth
Advance HECP #1 at Fort Hancock at Battery Potter (incoming shipping)
Advance HECP #2 at Fort Tilden (exiting shipping)
Joint Army/Navy operations - Navy Captain in command

Battery Gunnison/New Peck works for both HECP and Group 1

General Battery Operation SCRIPT

Examination Battery Duties: Starts with Coast Guard and Navy control from HECF Challenge ship via blinker or semaphore (not radio - sub can triangulate) - heaves to - inspected (not hijacked for ~2 month channel block) - then escorted thru minefield - Narrows submarine net opened - ship goes thru, net closed. Repeat If not heave to or bad ID - "Harbor Exam Battery, Fire One Bring To Shot". This is essentially 1 warning round (inert shell) Waterspout gets attention (may be language problem from international crew or US Navy ignoring) If not resolved, will open fire with High Explosive or Armor Piercing "destructive fire". Battery Gunnison/New Peck fired on 13 ships between Sept 1943 and Sept 1944.

Fire Control: Observers are at 2 points - trigonometry base line (big silver rounds - room is big arm) Ob. 1 calls plot arm 1 with azimuth (compass reading in degrees) and aligns arm with degree mark on table rim. 2nd Obs. Does same. Intersect is where they cross. Make dot on paper. 15 seconds bell - new dot. 1 minute draw line with small ruler - know direction + speed from ruler. Other arm gives distance. Other stations work air temp, humidity, wind speed, direction, + for big guns earth rotation. Information transmitted to guns. 2 Spotters would report shell splashes for corrections. Observers do ships, Spotters do shell splashes

Telephone communications: The EE-91 telephones allow Spotters, Observers, Arm Operators, Guns, Battery Commander up top, Correctors to talk without yelling. The EE-91s were designed at Fort Monmouth and tested at Fort Hancock. The BD-95 switchboard powers all the phones with 22 Volt DC current. All phone equipment is WW2 and works (both hand held and chest talkers).

Chemical Warfare Equipment: The overhead pipes are part of the air filtration system to ward off enemy attacks. As are the personal weapons (deactivated) Individuals have their own gas masks always within arms reach. There is a decontamination chamber on the left. All soldiers wore gas masks.

Anti-Aircraft was a Coast Artillery Mission: There were numerous Anti-Aircraft batteries around Fort Hancock and in the Highlands. Battery Gunnison/New Peck had two 40mm AA guns.

The Threat: Aside from channel block, there could be Commerce Raider ship attacks, sub attacks, saboteurs and spies, WW2 Zodiac attacks, beach raids. Nothing did happen except a Nov 1942 sub laid mines in NY Harbor, closing harbor for 2 days. Had to get wood hulled mine sweeper to defeat magnetic mines. The threat of naval surface attack ceased with the sinking of the German Battlecruiser Scharnhorst in December 1943 and the Battleship Tirpitz in Feb 1944.

Change in threat: Many Coast Artillery soldiers were sent overseas as the fear of sea and air attacks subsided in the spring of 1944. The soldiers were also used to defend against other types of attacks. The 245th Coast Artillery Regiment became a Battalion (lost 66% of strength).

New York-Philadelphia Sector
New York Subsector
The Harbor Defenses of New York

Chain of Command

President of the US - Franklin Delano Roosevelt
Secretary of War - Henry Lewis Stimson
Army Chief of Staff - General George C Marshall
Eastern Defense Command Commander - LTG George Grunert
NY-Phila Sector Commander - MG Homer
NY Sub Sector/HDNY Commander - BG Phillip S Gage
Fort Hancock and 245th Coast Artillery Regiment Commander - COL
Joseph C. Haw

Major Army Units at Fort Hancock - OCT 1943:

HQ and HQ Btry, Harbor Defenses of New York
7th Coast Artillery Regiment (less 2nd Battalion)
245th Coast Artillery Regiment (HD) (Less Battery L)
265th Coast Artillery Regiment (HD)
A Battery, 288th Coast Artillery Battalion (Railway)
5th Mine Planter Battery (USMP Ord)
19th Mine Planter Battery
1225th Army Service Unit
Fort Hancock Medical Detachment (Hospital)
95th Ordnance Company (Railway Artillery)
22nd Quartermaster Company (Truck)
113th Infantry Regiment (HHC[-] at Ft. Wadsworth, Det HHC at Fort Hancock, rest
spread around southern NY/NJ/DE)

Fort Hancock, NJ

Fort Hancock is named in honor of the memory of Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, U.S. Army, who served with distinction in the Mexican War and the Civil War, and who died 9 February 1886. The installation was officially named Fort Hancock 30 October 1895, having previously been known as the Fortifications of Sandy Hook. The Fort is situated on the Sandy Hook peninsula, located in Monmouth County, New Jersey, and guards the outer entrance to New York Harbor. The first parcel of land for the site was acquired by the Colony of New York in 1762 at that time for a lighthouse, and additional parcels were subsequently acquired until the entire peninsula was purchased outright by the Federal government after the War of 1812 in 1817. Construction of the modern fortifications began in 1890 on the site of the old mine casemate that dated from 1880. This was followed with the first all concrete gun and mortar emplacements in the nation. Construction of the Main Post cantonment began in 1896. The permanent garrison was not established until 1898 under command of Lieutenant Colonel Tully McCrea of the Fifth Artillery.

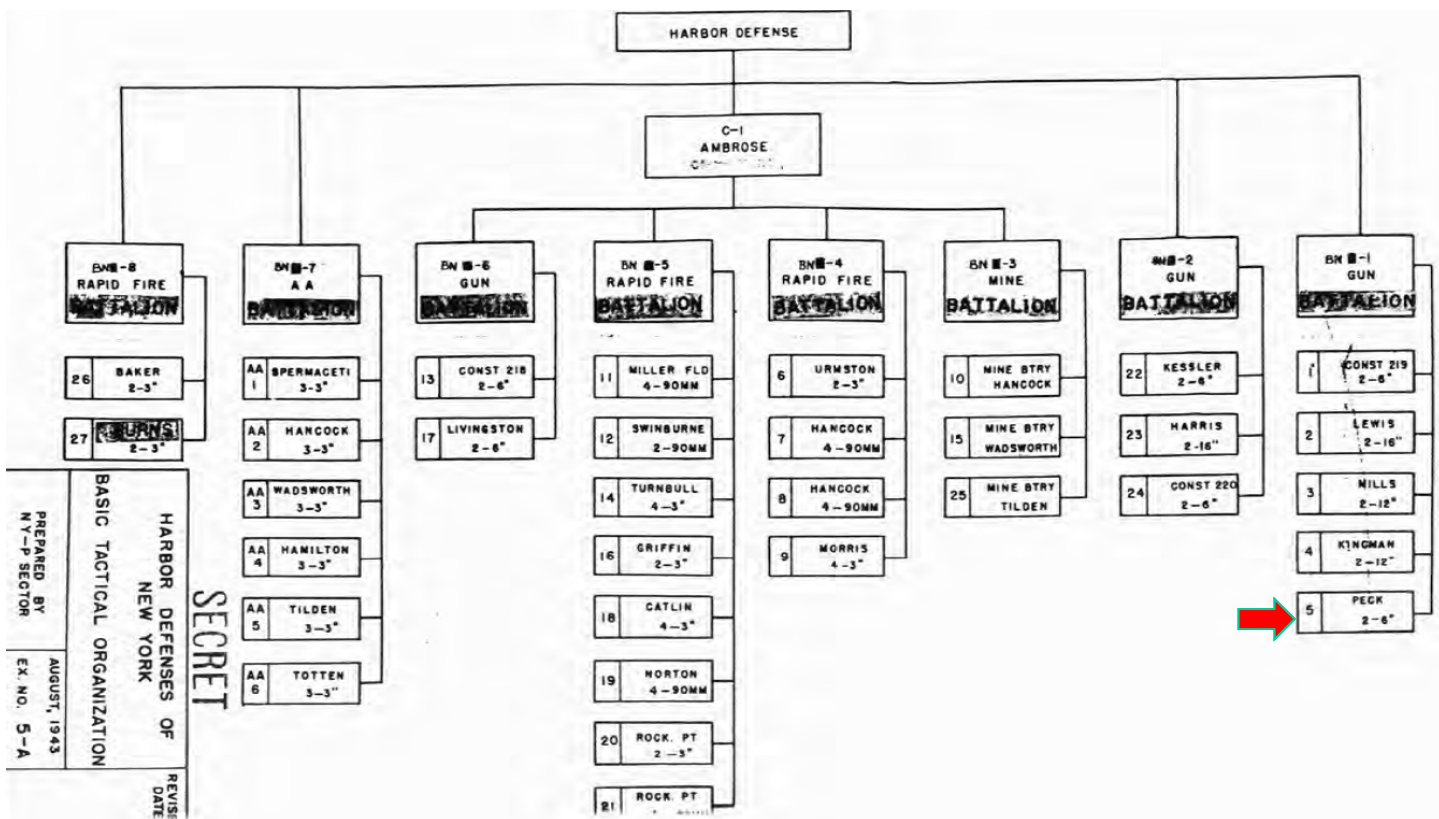
Battery McCrea at Ft. Drum, Philippine Islands, was named after LTC McCrea.

New York Sub-Sector Organization

Effective 4 May 1943

"I am responsible for the safety of twenty-million people and the industrial heart of the nation"

BG Gage, Commanding,
New York Sub-Sector
Harbor Defenses of New York



4th Coast Artillery District
New York/Philly Sector



2nd Service Command



Harbor Defenses of New York



245th Coast Artillery Regiment
(Harbor Defense), NY NG

Harbor Entrance Control Post

The Harbor Entrance Control Post (HECP) is responsible to maintain the free movement of shipping in and out New York Harbor.

The Advanced HECP #1 at Fort Hancock is responsible for the following tasks:

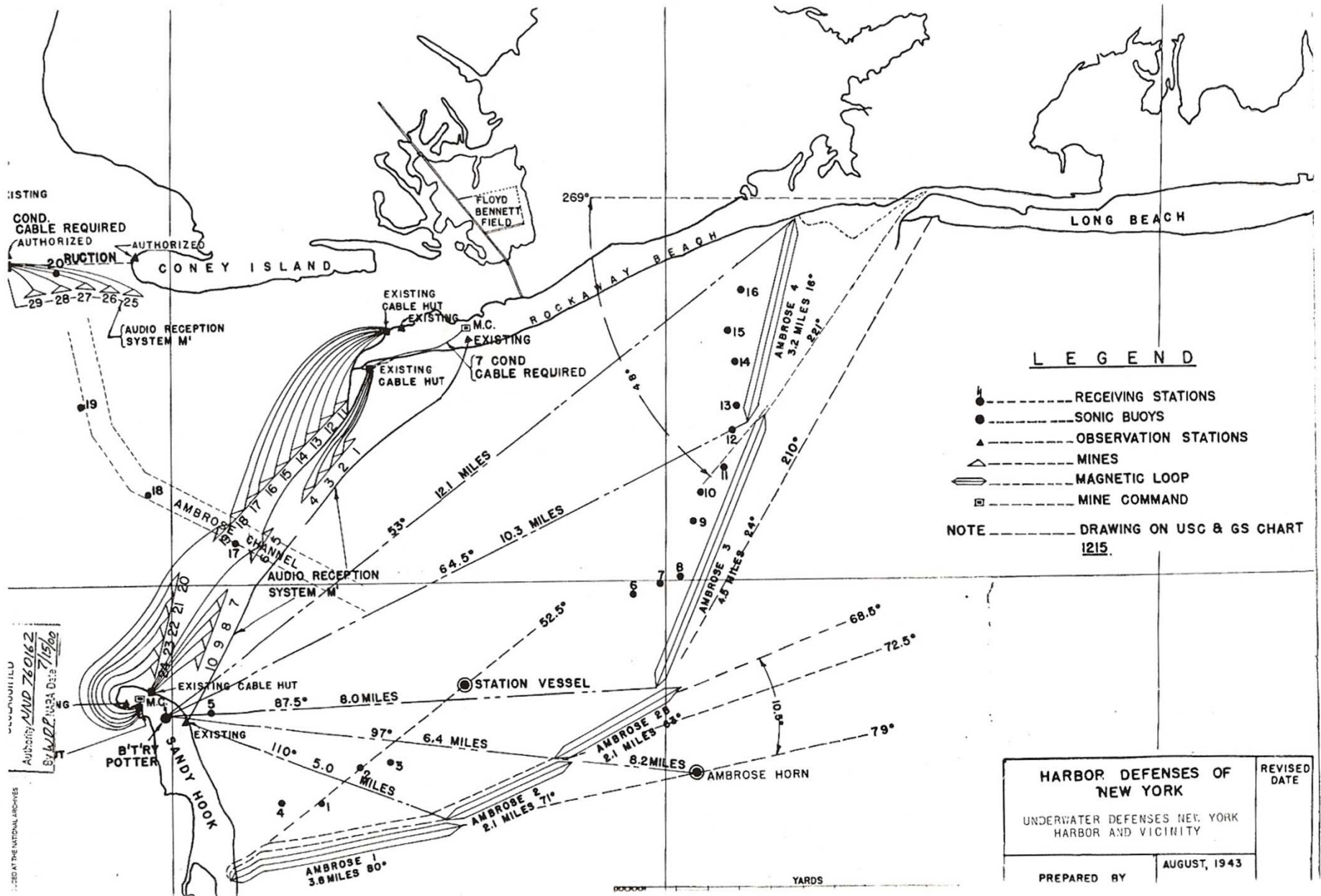
- A) Maintaining control of shipping entering the harbor.
- B) Protecting Ambrose Chanel from Axis attack.
- C) Preventing blockage of Ambrose Chanel
- D) Detecting threats to shipping entering and departing the Harbor and alerting the Harbor Defense Commander and Naval Inshore Patrol to potential threats as the materialize.

The Advance HEPC #1 is located in former fire control stations on top of Battery Potter at Fort Hancock, Sandy Hook.

The top of Battery Potter provides a high vantage point to observe the actions occurring within and around Ambrose Chanel and the Ambrose Light Ship (Examination Vessel).

Between October 1943 and September 1944 at least twelve ships were fired upon by Battery Gunnison/New Peck in its Exam Battery mission. Nine of these ships were US Naval vessels. *SOURCE: History of the Harbor Entrance Control Post, Fort Wadsworth, NY - 1945, Pages 11-12.*

Entrance to HDNY



HECP and Battery Gunnison/New Peck

From the 1945 History of Fort Wadsworth HECP

Tactical #5 (Battery Gunnison/New Peck) is tasked as the Examination Battery for Advance Harbor Entrance Control Post #1. The battery's duties are as follows:

The Examination Battery supports the Examination Vessel (Ambrose Light Ship) and is designated as such by the Army Commander of Harbor Defenses. It is in constant readiness to "bring-to" vessels which fail to comply with orders from the "Examination Vessel" and enforce obedience to the restrictions imposed for conducting the examination of entering vessels.

The guns of the Exam Battery are always manned and ready for immediate action. A gun should be kept trained on an incoming vessel until she has hoisted the correct "special signal" which will indicate that she has been passed as friendly by the Examining Officer or that she has been placed under control of an armed guard. A few rounds of Plugged Shell should be kept available near the gun to "bring to" vessels. This ammo is separate from the service ammunition so that there may be no danger of confusing them.

The Exam Battery should keep a station watch on the Examination Vessel and on merchant vessels entering the port. All officers and enlisted men manning the Examination Battery should know the position and limit of the Examination Anchorage, mine fields, net, booms, dangerous areas, prohibited anchorages, etc.

The responsibility for opening fire with the Exam Battery or any other shore battery manned by the Army rests with the Army, but the HECP or the Examination Vessel may request the proper Army Authorities to open fire if such is deemed necessary to enforce the regulations for the control of traffic entering the port. A request to "bring-to" a vessel should unhesitatingly be made under the following circumstances:

- a) If the incoming vessel disregards the orders signaled to her by the Examination Vessel.
- b) Should a vessel disregard a warning shot across the bow, the Exam Battery should open fire with shell on her and this should be a signal for other batteries to open fire also.

Exam Battery Alert Schedule Info

From the 1945 History of Fort Wadsworth HECP

- 1) The schedule of ready duty batteries and searchlights herein are effective at 0800, 1 May 1943. Batteries, sections, and light detachments will stand relieved only when cleared by the Army Duty Officer, Advance HECP No. 1.
- 2) Battery No. 5 (Battery Gunnison/New Peck) will operate all ALERT No. 1 duties and challenge functions for Advance HECP No. 1. The range and firing sections, Battery K, 245th Coast Artillery, and Battery B, 265th Coast Artillery, will operate under ALERT No. 1 continuously. Batteries D and F, 265th Coast Artillery, will alternate 2-A duties. Alert duties will be assumed at 0800 on dates scheduled.
- 3) Searchlights as indicated in paragraph 7b below will be on a three (3) minute alert during hours of darkness. Other lights will be on a ten (10) minute alert. All searchlights will be tested prior to dusk upon arrival at stations and reported to the Harbor Entrance Control Post. Should any light not be in order, full details will be given at the time of the report to the Harbor Entrance Control Post.
 - a. Power plants on the three (3) minute alert will be kept at operating temperatures. Power plants of other lights need not be kept at operating temperatures after initial testing of lights.
 - b. Telephone operators of lights only on three (3) minute status will be alert near the telephone. Light details on ten (10) minute status need not remain awake provided they can be alerted in sufficient time to place the lights in section within ten (10) minutes after receipt of an alert.
 - c. Twenty-four hour security guards will be maintained at all lights except where specifically exempted by this headquarters.
- 4) All batteries, sections, and detachments on ready duty status will be thoroughly familiar with the SOP for Examination/Ready Duty Batteries.

Exam Battery Procedures

From the 1945 History of Fort Wadsworth HECP

1. Alerting of Batteries - The Examination Battery Maintains one (1) gun crew and, sufficient range personnel to secure necessary firing data on a twenty-four (24) hour alert basis. The gun crew remains at ease in tents or surrounding area of the Gun emplacement. If the Harbor Entrance Control Post Duty Officer observes that the Navy is having difficulty during challenging operations, he will order the range crew to track the ship being challenged. When the Navy gives the ship orders to halt, the gun crew will be alerted to man the gun.
2. Assignment of Target - the Guardship notifies the HECP at Fort Wadsworth by radio of ships failing to stop when ordered. A brevity code is used giving the class of ship and its location (local grid code). The Duty Officer immediately relocates the target and gives the position to the battery in azimuth and range. When possible, by observation, the following additional information is given:
 - a) Hoist being flown, direction of sailing, if there is more than one (1) ship in the area, and the position of the ship in the column. In order to assist other personnel of the battery not having oriented instruments, the number of the nearest buoy to the ship is also given. A typical order is as follows:

“Target 1 YMS azimuth 3600 mills, Range 6000 yards as of 1300, inbound Ambrose Channel, near buoy #7, Hoist JAS, fire 1 bring-to shot with inert ammunition”.
 - b) In the event the target has previously been assigned to the range crew, the description and location of the target are not repeated. For destruction fire, the order given is:

“Destruction fire with armor piercing (high explosive) ammunition, begin firing”.
3. During the process of tracking, the position of the target was verified by securing simultaneously plots from HECP #1, the Examination Battery, and if possible, the Guard Ship.
4. The Battery has a standing order to immediately track fast moving targets, PT's, submarines and amphibious craft. The observer must keep the Guardship under surveillance for any type of signal at all times.