

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Presidio Looks Back**

The Presidio of Monterey might have celebrated its 191st birthday this year. On Sunday, June 3, 1945, the 175th birthday was celebrated with an afternoon program held at the base of the Father Junipero Serra monument. On the program were Father O'Brien of the Santa Barbara Mission, a speech by Col. Hardy C. Dillard, CASA commanding officer and music by the Fort Ord band.

O. another Sunday, June 3, 1770, two expeditions, one by land and another by sea, met at Monterey and under the command of Don Gaspar de Portola, founded the Presidio in the name of the king of Spain.

Portola provided as much pomp and color as was possible in the wilderness of 1770. A large cross and a Spanish flag were set up at the mouth of the ravine that now bounds the post, and an arbor was built as a temporary chapel. Father Junipero Serra, most distinguished of California mission founders, said Mass.

Father Serra described the program as follows: After the service had been concluded with "Te Deum" the officers performed the ceremony of taking formal possession of the land in the name of the king, our Lord (whom may God keep.) We afterwards ate our dinner together under the shade on the beach. The whole service had been accomplished with much thunder and powder both on land and from sea.

The site upon which the first presidio was built was some distance east of the present post. Ship's carpenters, sailors, soldiers, and a few Indians, brought from Mexico, began the construction of temporary buildings. A chapel was improvised, and portals built within the stockade.

Adobe buildings in the form of a square soon replaced the temporary structures. Eventually the Royal Presidio Chapel, in the vicinity of the present San Carlos Church, added its prestige to the frontier community, most of which continued to be within the Presidio stockade. On the hill within the site of the present Presidio an earthwork was constructed. Cannons were mounted there and the defense work became known as "El Castillo" (the castle).

A pair of old cannons, a historical marker, placed there by the Monterey History and Art Assn., and the remains of the breastworks are all that remains of Fort Mervin atop the Presidio hill, the first military installation on the Peninsula. The army proposed in January 1957, it be reconstructed as a historical monument.

Fort Mervine built in 1846, the same year that Commodore John Drake Sloat seized California for the United States of America, on that Presidio of Monterey hill now occupied by the Sloat monument.

It was named for Capt. William Mervine, a member of Sloat's command, and garrisoned by some New York volunteers, and Co. F. of the Third Artillery among whose officers was Lt. William Tecumseh Sherman. Although the Fort is gone, remnants of it still mark the site. The History and Art Assn. has a very good photograph of the fort as it appeared in 1842.

Col. R. B. Mason, who commanded the Presidio in 1847, reported to the army's adjutant general "that the presidio of Fort Mervine consisted of "a redoubt in the form of a bastion, on a hill over-looking the town and the anchorage.

"It has 24-pounders. mounted, and four 8-Inch mortars on platforms . . . In the rear of the redoubt, I have caused to be constructed mostly by contract labor, a stone house 75 feet by 25 with an excellent single roof, containing ample room to store valuable ordinance stores.

In 1852 the fort was dismantled and was not reoccupied again until the Civil War when log barracks, were erected for a contingent of Union troops. The fort's name was changed to Ord Barracks, after a Lt. E. O. C. Ord, later a brigadier general who had helped to build Fort Mervine and whose name is now borne by Fort Ord.

After the Civil War, the barracks were abandoned, and the Army apparently forgot about them. In 1890, Monterey Mayor Robert Johnson wrote the War Department suggesting the fort site would make an admirable city park.

The War Department shot back an immediate reply, thanking Johnson for "calling attention to land in Monterey, which we did not know we had."

Some U.S. troops who had survived the Philippines campaign in the Spanish-American War were sent to Monterey to recover their health and the Presidio of Monterey began rebuilding. Two years later, troops moved into the wooden barracks. And from it grew the Presidio of today, and the abundance of acreage of Fort Ord.