



The Soldier’s War

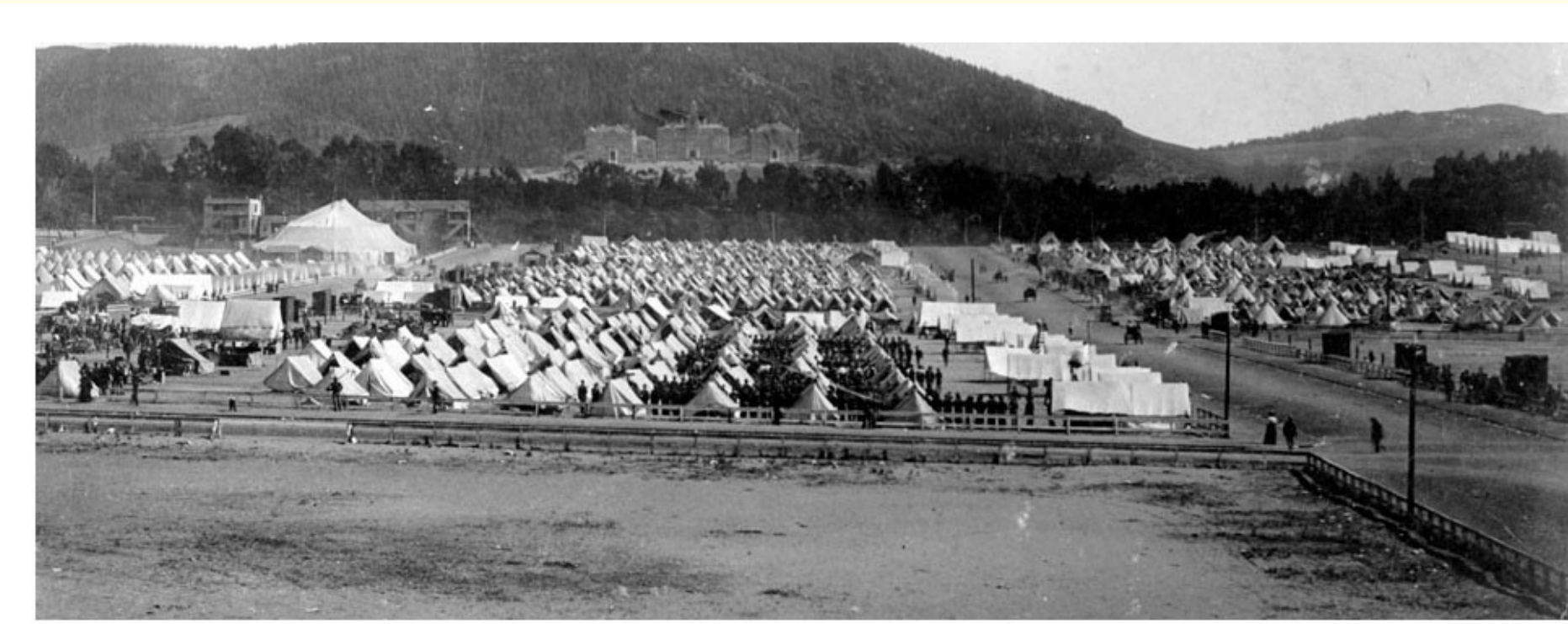
War was no stranger to the soldiers who passed through the Presidio and its outposts over the years. For nearly over years, various global conflicts brought men and women to the Army’s lands in the San Francisco Bay Area. For many, it was a last stop before shipping out to countries and places unknown. For others, it was the location they spent time in, preparing to fight and defend.



GOGA 33760



GOGA 35311



GOGA 32526

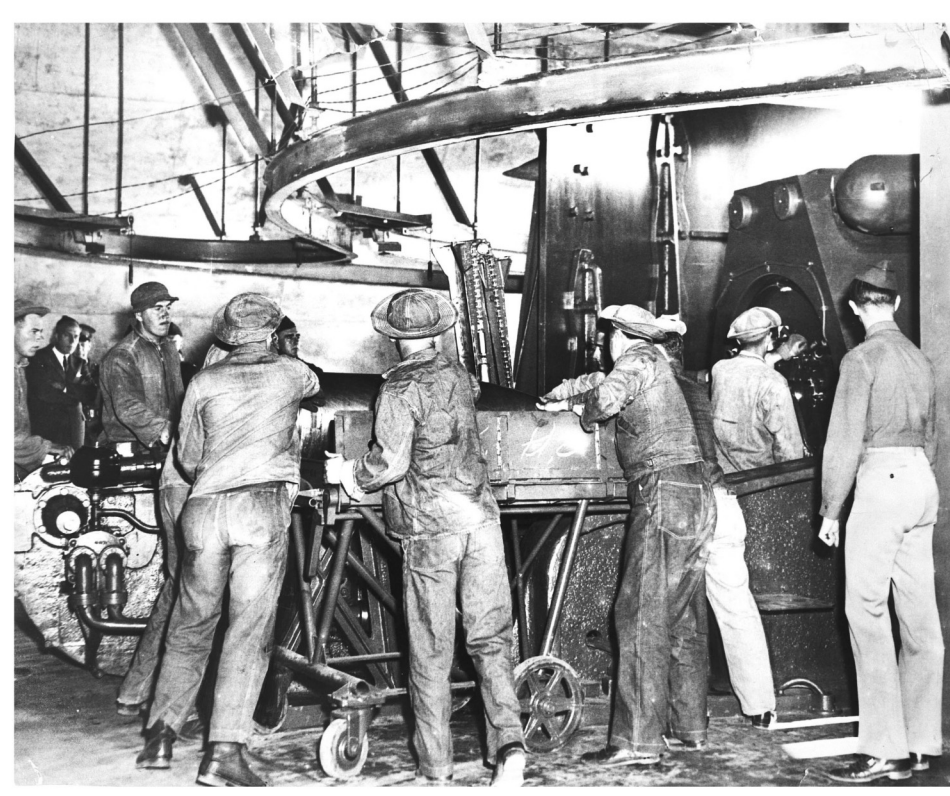
Top left: Soldier John J. Rapp poses in front of a tent at Camp Merritt, 1898. Top right: Five soldiers pose in front of a tent at a camp in the Presidio, 1898. Bottom: Camp Merritt, in San Francisco’s contemporary current Richmond district, 1898.

The Spanish American War

The outbreak of the Spanish American War in 1898 brought the first instance of mass troops to the Presidio and nearby camps. For the following two years, over 80,000 soldiers arrived and occupied the Army’s lands. With such a large number of troops present, vast tent encampments were set up on open tracts of land near the Presidio. One location in particular, Camp Merritt, located between the south border of the Presidio and Golden Gate Park, was a miserable location for the troops. With its endless amount of sand, fleas, and thick fog soldiers were tormented daily. Tents in the camps slept up to seven men, and as a result, disease spread quickly amongst the soldiers, causing the death of many men. Eventually, the camp was closed and troops were moved to Presidio grounds. The sick were moved from the Division Field Hospital to the newly erected Letterman Army General Hospital.



GOGA 17985



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Left: A Nike-Ajax missile, 1955. Right: Soldiers load a coastal artillery gun at Fort Funston’s Battery Davis, a twin to Battery Townsley, cWWII.

Defenders of the Coast

During World War II, the threat of enemy attack on the West Coast became a reality. Soldiers stationed at recently completed Fort Cronkhite were in charge of protecting the coastline with heavy artillery, ready to strike down the enemy at a moment’s notice. Battery Townsley’s two 16-inch guns, a key feature of the harbor defenses of San Francisco were capable of firing over 25 miles across the ocean. Men assigned to the battery were subjected to continuous drills, sometimes in the middle of the night, simulating a potential coastal attack. The operation required a crew of men to load the 2100-pound projectiles into the gun. While the soldiers who defended the coast with heavy artillery were essential, manpower requirements at coastal defense sites changed in the years following World War II.

With the new threat of attack coming from the air instead of the sea, the Army focused its attention on new weapons technology. The Nike-Ajax and its successor Nike-Hercules were long-range missiles capable of shooting down enemy aircraft up to 37 miles and 87 miles away, respectively. Twelve permanent launch sites were constructed in the Bay Area, receiving commands from the Mill Valley Air Force Station atop Mount Tamalpais. The individuals assigned to Nike missile sites in the Marin Headlands were part of the Army Air Defense Artillery branch of the Coast Artillery. Shifts were usually every other day, 365 days a year, 24 hours each. By 1979, the Nike missile system was considered out of date and was disbanded.