

Wally's World War Two

Walter "Wally" Bates
As told to Ed Jerue

During the Second World War, Walter "Wally" Bates served in Battery D, 10th Coast Artillery Regiment, at Fort Church, RI, rotating between base and stations at Warren Point, RI, and Gooseberry Neck, MA. I interviewed Wally during the CDSG meeting at New London in 2003 and we toured Fort Church and Gooseberry Neck as well as Warren Point. This account of Wally's experiences is based on a tape recording, information exchanged at the sites visited, and phone calls. Wally also sent me several sketches of the Gooseberry Neck site drawn from memory.



PFC Walter Bates, U.S.
Army, coast artillery,
1942-45.

When I graduated high school in 1940, the draft was hanging over the head of all young men when I got a job operating a grinding machine producing ball bearings. In late 1942, when I was 20 years old, I was drafted. On October 17, 1942, I got on a train with a bunch of other guys from the Norwalk, CT, area. I was so naïve, I didn't even shave yet; the guys drafted with me seemed so much more mature and wise to the ways of the world. We ended up at Fort Devens, MA, where we spent three freezing-cold days and nights.

We were still wearing our "civvies" (civilian clothing) when we were loaded on a steam train that ended up at Newport, RI. When we arrived at night, waiting army trucks drove us to our destination, which turned out to be Fort Church.

Fort Church

The next day we found we were at Fort Church, Little Compton, Rhode Island. There was a lot of construction work going on; I saw a large building under construction, which was to be a barracks. The fort had some barracks built for the soldiers, but the army had also taken over some of the old homes on the site.

I was assigned to the Dunn House Barracks, one of the older homes. This housed 30 men and was very nice, with wide-board floors. I had a separate entry to my semi-private room, which I shared with one other guy. "It was a good setup." The mess hall was nearby, as well as a dayroom and a library. The

PX (post exchange) was next to the base canteen. I didn't even know what "PX" meant, until one of the guys wised me up. The first day at Fort Church we were issued our uniforms and equipment. We found out about First Sergeant Monroe, the man who set the duty roster. We thought of him as a very important man and all steered clear of him.

I was assigned to Battery D, 10th Coast Artillery Regiment, which manned Battery Gray, the 16-inch gun battery. The rest of the regiment manned the other guns and provided services. They gave us a tour of the base and we toured the 16-inch emplacements, which were fascinating. The guns had thick steel shields and the camouflage nets were all up. They took us through the ammunition storage rooms. They would practice, moving the shells by the overhead rails - loading, elevating, and firing the guns.

It was all considered very secret; we were told not to mention anything about the guns in our letters. They took us to the plotting room, whose walls were decorated with maps showing the fields of fire for the guns. I never did get to see the guns being fired. They were trial fired once while I was home on leave, during the summer of 1943. A clerk in the office mentioned that the guns had been fired three times before I arrived.

We were issued our field packs and rifles and told to remember our rifle number or we were "in deep doodoo." I remember my rifle number to this day, 65 years later. We were issued M-1 rifles, which were new at the time. We were taught to clean our rifles and to take good care of them. We worked on our rifles all day. Rifle training was at the small arms range on Fort Church, west of Battery Gray.

I found out I was to be an observer at a base end station. I had never heard of a base end station; they took us down to Warren Point in a truck to see a base end station and we saw this big concrete tower with a telescope inside it. We were told to be always alert and watchful, never to sleep on duty, and if we saw anything moving on the water, we were to identify it and write it down in the logbook. That was our job; we were observers. We reported in to battery command - I guess it was the battery command. "It was a kind of dull job," but it was all new to me and I was interested in doing a good job.

I found out I was to be on a rotating schedule between the base end stations at Warren Point and Gooseberry Neck. We were at a station for one to two weeks, and then brought back to Fort Church. When they brought us back to the main post:

It was difficult to keep up - while you were out at the station they were at the fort doing their routine of marching and doing rifle practice. You were at a big disadvantage being out at a station. When you went back to the main fort, you did what everyone else was doing. Drilling with full field packs, going to the beach and jumping into the water to see if you could swim. The army was really gung ho at first, as victory in the war became apparent, they started taking men and sending them off to intermediate camps for training and then off to Europe. They took untrained artillerymen and put them into the infantry, some were at the Battle of the Bulge. They all got a stripe, when I got a stripe after eight months, I thought something was up.

We were at Fort Church for one to two weeks and then they sent us out to a base end station. It was always a station for Battery D, Battery Gray's 16-inch guns. While back at the fort, we were assigned to the plotting room.

I spent a lot of time at the table with the earphones receiving information from guys reporting in from Gooseberry Neck and Sachuest Point. You would move the arms according to the information sent in, and they would track the target. There was a big target that they would tow up and down Buzzards Bay for practice. When you were at a base end station, you would track the target and phone in the azimuth when a bell rang. This was a gong [time-interval] system that would ring at the same time at all the stations. Each man at the plotting board was assigned to one specific station.

Sergeant Mitchell was a regular army man who knew everything - how to plot, how to drill, how to blow the bugle in the morning and at night - he was a jack-of-all-trades. No one fooled around

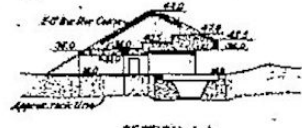
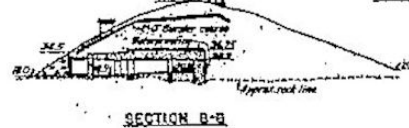
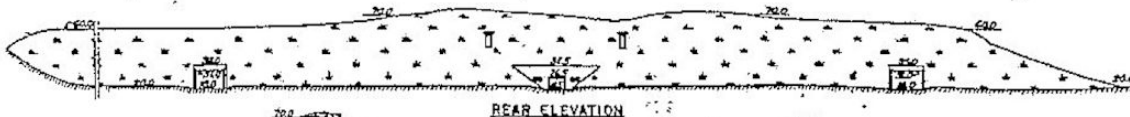
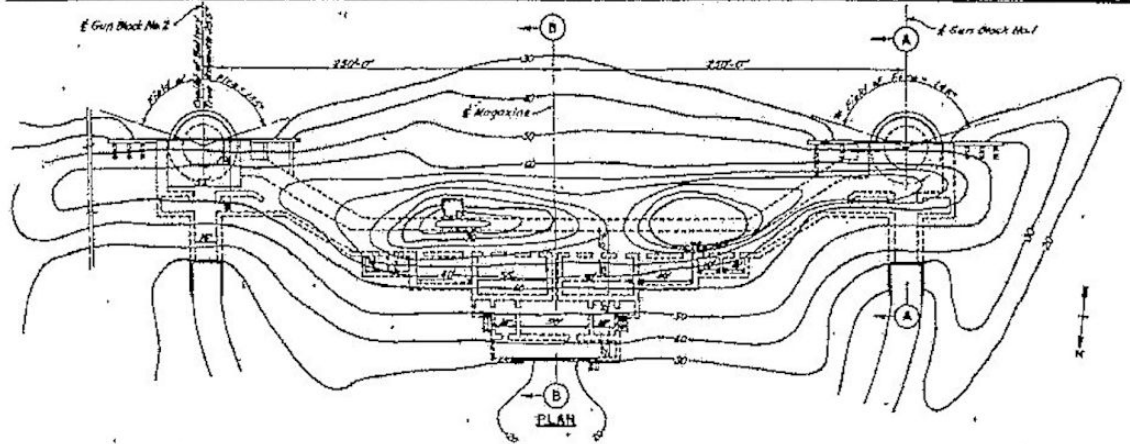
REPORT OF COMPLETED WORKS
BATTERY PLAN

HARBOR DEFENSES OF NARRAGANSETT BAY
FORT CHURCH, R.I.
BATTERY GRAY

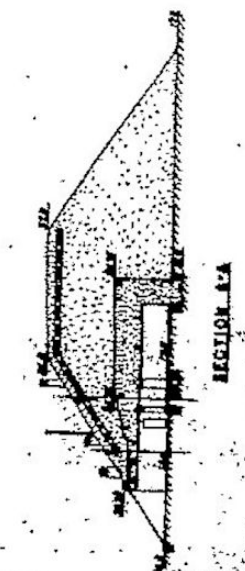
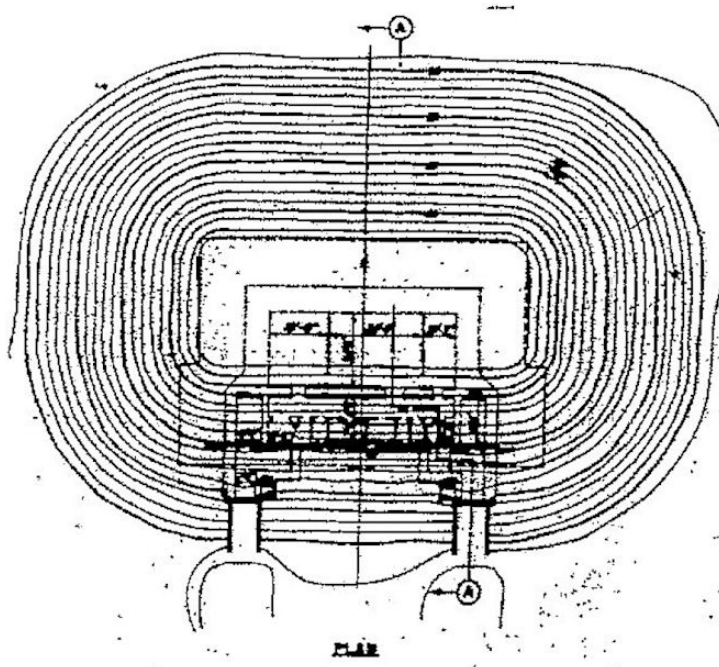
No. of guns, 2 - Caliber, 16" - Carriage Barbets

Form 7 Corrected to June 1, 1942

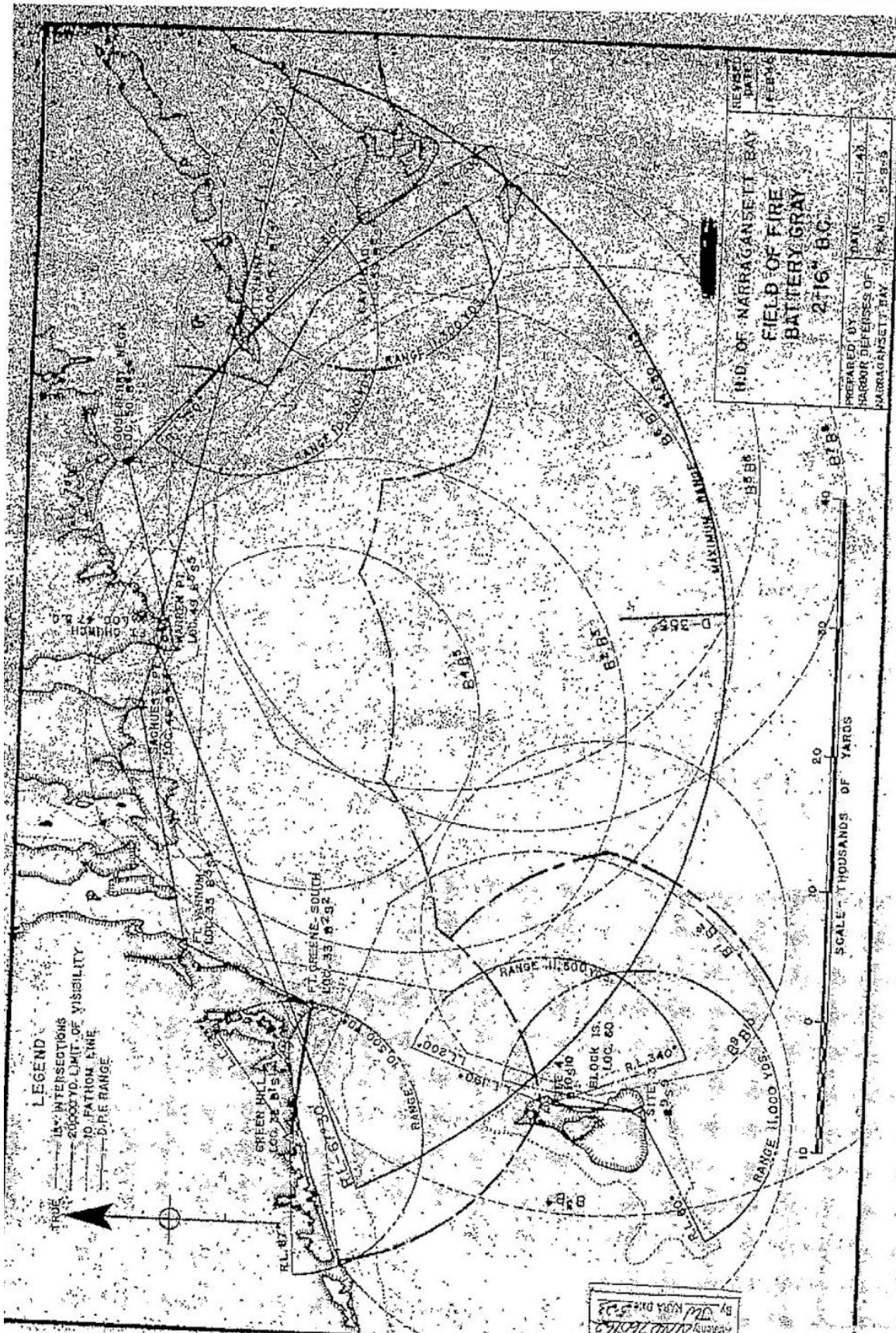
0 50 100 150 200 250 300



Elevations refer to Mean Low Water Datum.



Plotting and Staffboard Room
BATTERY GRAY
FORT CHURCH, R.I.



with him. He always wore his garrison hat. I tried to make an impression on him by making my bunk perfectly and trying to help others. "It didn't make an impression on him, he just snarled at me."

I realized from looking at the maps on the walls that there was a bunch of base end stations around Narragansett Bay. The geography of the bay became of great interest to me. There was a station on Martha's Vineyard, which was way out, and another at Cuttyhunk. These were all places I hardly knew existed. I found out that they were part of a huge network, Warren Point, Sachuest Point, Gooseberry Neck, down to Point Judith and Block Island; I realized that I was part of this big plan of stations.

One of the most important events in the plotting room was the arrival of the computer. Everyone was talking about it, but I didn't even know what a computer was. It arrived at the plotting room, a huge piece of equipment maybe 12 to 15 feet long and 6 feet high, with gauges and dials and cranks. The information would be phoned into the plotting room and they would crank the data into the computer. I don't know what happened to that computer. I worked on it a few times, but I was usually out at the base end stations. The output was information to direct the fire of the guns.

We were not supposed to talk about what was at Fort Church, or include any information in our letters. No one was supposed to know about the 16-inch guns, but they all knew; they had seen them carted through town. I took it all very seriously; I think most of the guys did. I had a friend in New London who was very interested in what I was doing. I had to disguise the information in a letter, saying that the guns were the same size as on the battleship *Maryland*. He knew his battleships and so the guns at Fort Church were 16-inch.

We would write "free" on the envelope - there was no postage for servicemen. My pay was \$50 a month; I sent my mother part of my pay all the time I was in the army. She put it aside and bought war bonds with it. I didn't know about this until years later she dug out those old bonds that she had stashed away. I got my first car with some of those war bonds.



Left-Battery Gray, Fort Church, c. 1946. *Walter Bates*

Above-Dunn House barracks, Wally's home at Fort Church, c. 1946.
Walter Bates

There was always something to do. We were always drilling, marching, or hanging around the barracks, horsing around. Sunday was a day off, not like where the war was going on. We would go into Little Compton to the Protestant church and the Catholics would go to Tiverton for services there. The army provided transportation to and from church. There was also Macy's Bus Line, which ran into Fall River, about an hour away. Sometime we went there.

At Fort Church, a big old building with a few old rickety chairs and a few magazines was a library and day room. They would make some intellectual guy the librarian; he would be there at certain times during the day. There was no place to buy beer on the base, but there was one place down near Warren Point, a saloon called "The Forecastle."

I really enjoyed my time in the army. There was structure; somebody told you what to do and there was not a lot of free choice. You were taken care of, fed, clothed, given shelter. They told you when the meals were served, when you were on duty, when you had a pass - you didn't have to worry. That I liked.

When we were assigned to a base end station for the first couple of days there was a sergeant whose job was to show how to use this piece of equipment, the azimuth instrument - how to balance it and to make sure it was doing what it should. Azimuth was a word that I had never heard. It was quite exciting down there when a northeast storm blew in; huge waves would break on the rocks below the tower; the ocean was really an awesome thing.

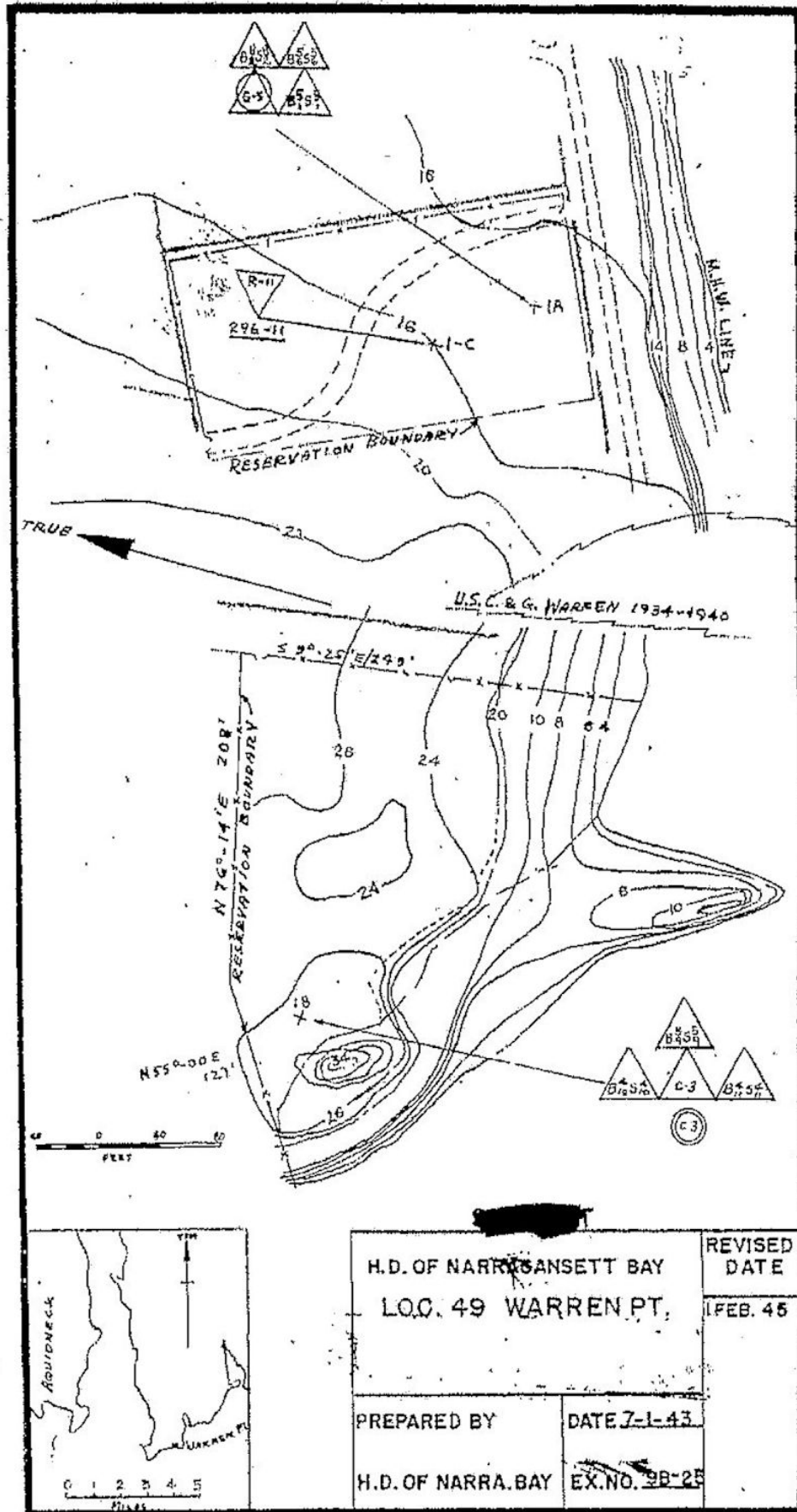
You were on duty by yourself, just one man on duty all the time. Four guys took turns manning the tower 24 hours a day. We were on for four hours, then it was someone else's turn. You called in any sightings to central headquarters so that they had a record of it. After awhile I reported everything; they were annoyed with my reporting too much. I was accused of even reporting a leaf floating on the ocean. There was a light in one corner of the tower, but everything was supposed to be blacked out.

I was only stationed at Warren Point and Gooseberry Neck. I never got out to Cuttyhunk. There were no observers stationed at Cuttyhunk or Block Island. The manned base end stations at Warren Point, Gooseberry Neck, and Sachuest Point were the original stations, the first three manned. There was also a manned station at Beavertail - I was never assigned there - and manned stations at Point Judith and Fort Varnum.

Officers would show up unannounced at any time, to check up on the stations. You had better not be caught sleeping by the officers. It was easy to go to sleep while on duty, especially at night. After scanning the ocean - you couldn't see too much at night - it was very tempting to lie down on the floor and take a nap. I got caught once by Sachs, a big Polish lieutenant. Fortunately, he was a nice guy and overlooked it. He looked in and turned his head the other way. The lieutenant was in charge and traveled around by jeep; he seemed to be everywhere. In late November 1943 world events changed - the pressure was off, and things started going downhill from there.

Warren Point Military Reservation

When I first arrived at Warren Point in November 1942, they were building a new barracks. The barracks building had two floors and housed approximately 30 men. I recall the sergeant saying that the previous winter (1941-42) they were housed in tents and did their observing out in the open. The base end station was so new the electrical work had not been completed. I recall Mr. Lee was doing the work. I got a pass home about the week before Christmas. Someone sent me a box of Robert Burns cigars for Christmas. They had a big mess hall at Warren Point; I think I spent my second Thanksgiving there, or maybe it was Christmas.



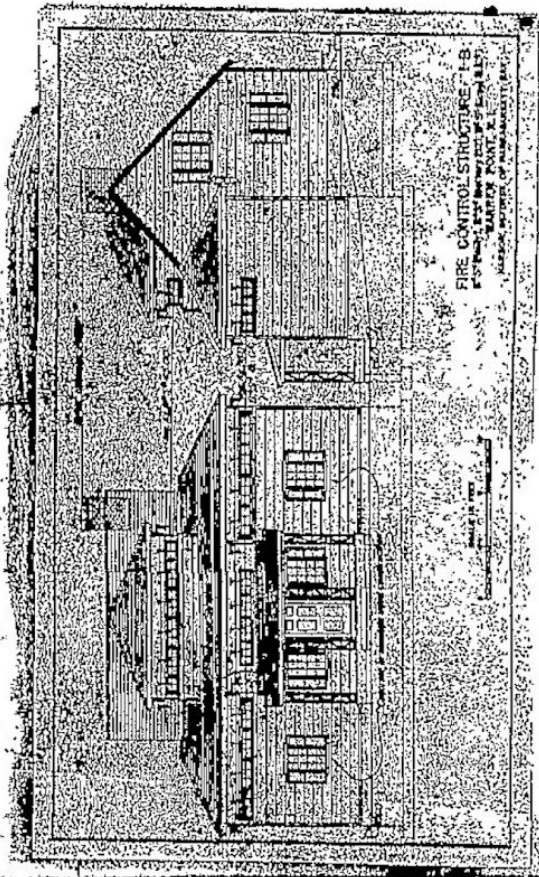
REPORT OF COMPLETED WORKS -- SEACOAST FORTIFICATIONS.
(Fire control or Torpedo Structures)

HARBOR DEFENSES OF Narragansett Bay
Church (Warren Pt. Res.)
STRUCTURES: Lt. Col. Btry. Reilly, 5th Stry. 212
Btry. S. Btry. Gray, and Groupment C2

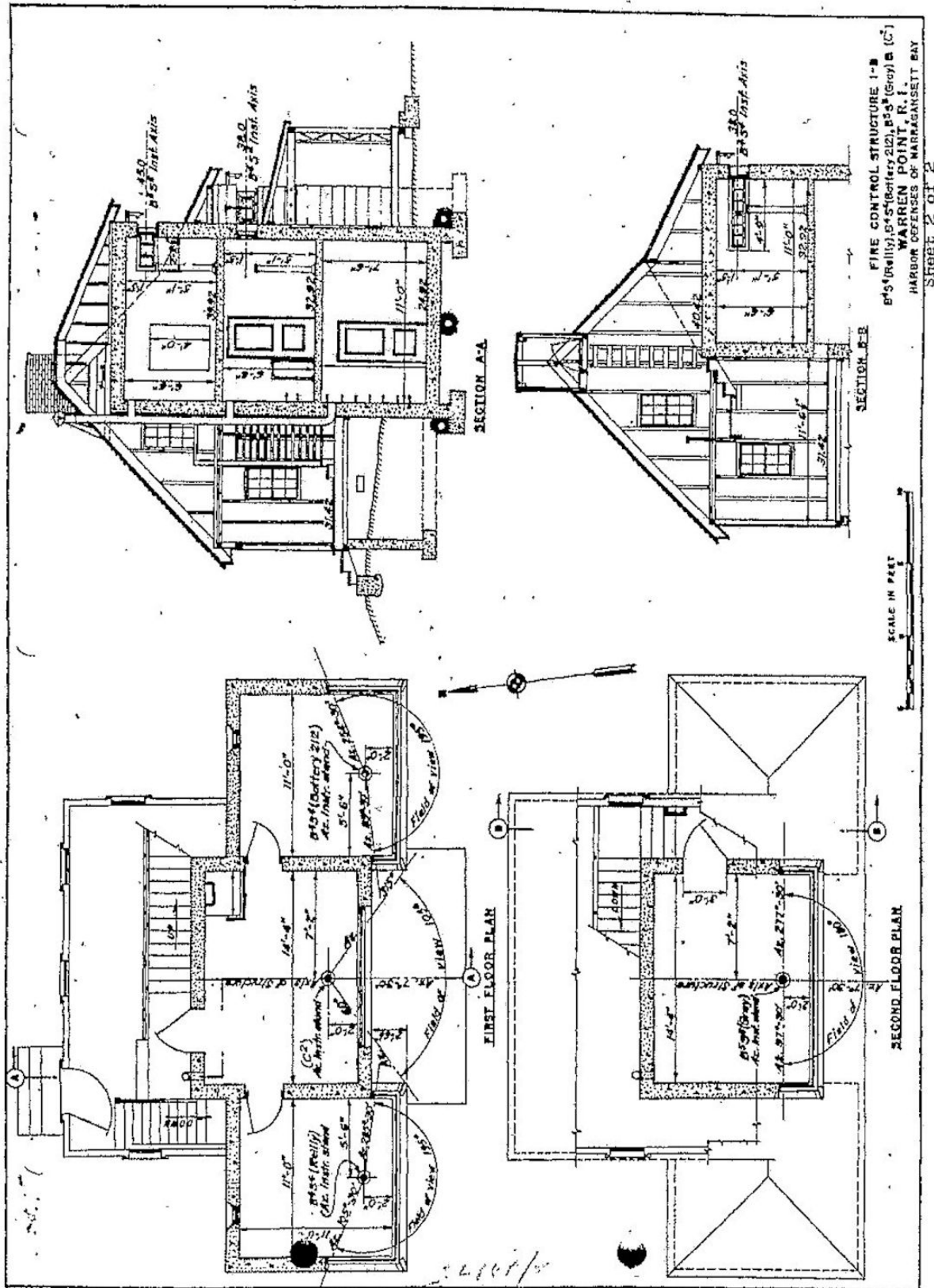
Corrected to July 1, 1942

Form 2.

STRUCTURE:	INSTRUMENTS AND EQUIPMENT:	Azimuth
Location	Type of observing inst. Type of plotting board	---
Date of transfer	DATA TRANSMISSION	Telephones
Cost to that date	Type of	---
Type of construction	Date of transfer	---
(a) Roof	Cost of data transmission equip.	---
(b) Remainder of bldg.	For tide stations give descrip- tion of tide gauge	---
How concealed	For datum points give Forts from which visible	---
How protected	For dormitories give sta. served	---
Height above concealment	For cable hut give S.C. type	---
Height above protection		
Conspicuous at yards.		
ELECTRIC CURRENT:		
Source of		
Kilowatts required		
Type of lighting fixtures		
HEAT:		
How Heated		
WATER & SEWER:		
Connected to water mains		
Connected to sewer		
Type of latrine		
Permanent or temporary inst'n		
Present condition		
REFERENCE:		
Reference of site		
Reference of instrument axis		
Type and capacity of crane		
Max. dim. of reel handled		



Eng. Dept. 1941 Ferry Card #18



Each station was independent and could survive on its own for a couple of weeks in an emergency. When I was at Warren Point, I heard the 155 mm guns at Sakonnet Point being fired, but I never got up close to them. There was a truck driver named Shorty who spoke Italian and was always swearing in Italian, words that I had never heard before. I did pick up a few of them. Shorty was one of the drivers for the regiment, I was an observer, some were gun crew, we all had titles. The army always provided a truck to take us out to the base end stations and back to fort, or to anywhere else.

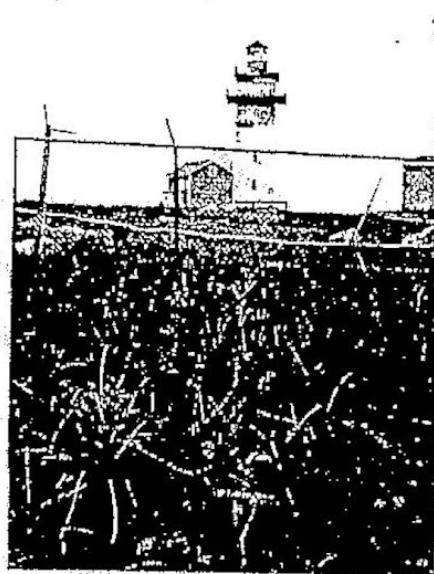
Gooseberry Neck Military Reservation

Gooseberry Neck is south of Westport, MA. Formerly an island where goats were raised, it was connected to the mainland by a causeway in 1924. The peninsula's summer homes were all destroyed by the hurricane of 1938, but there are still traces of foundations and trails that were formerly roads for the houses. In 1941-42, the army took over the land by eminent domain; the causeway was enlarged and Gooseberry Neck became a peninsula. Gooseberry Neck is now part of the Horseneck Beach State Reservation and open to the public.

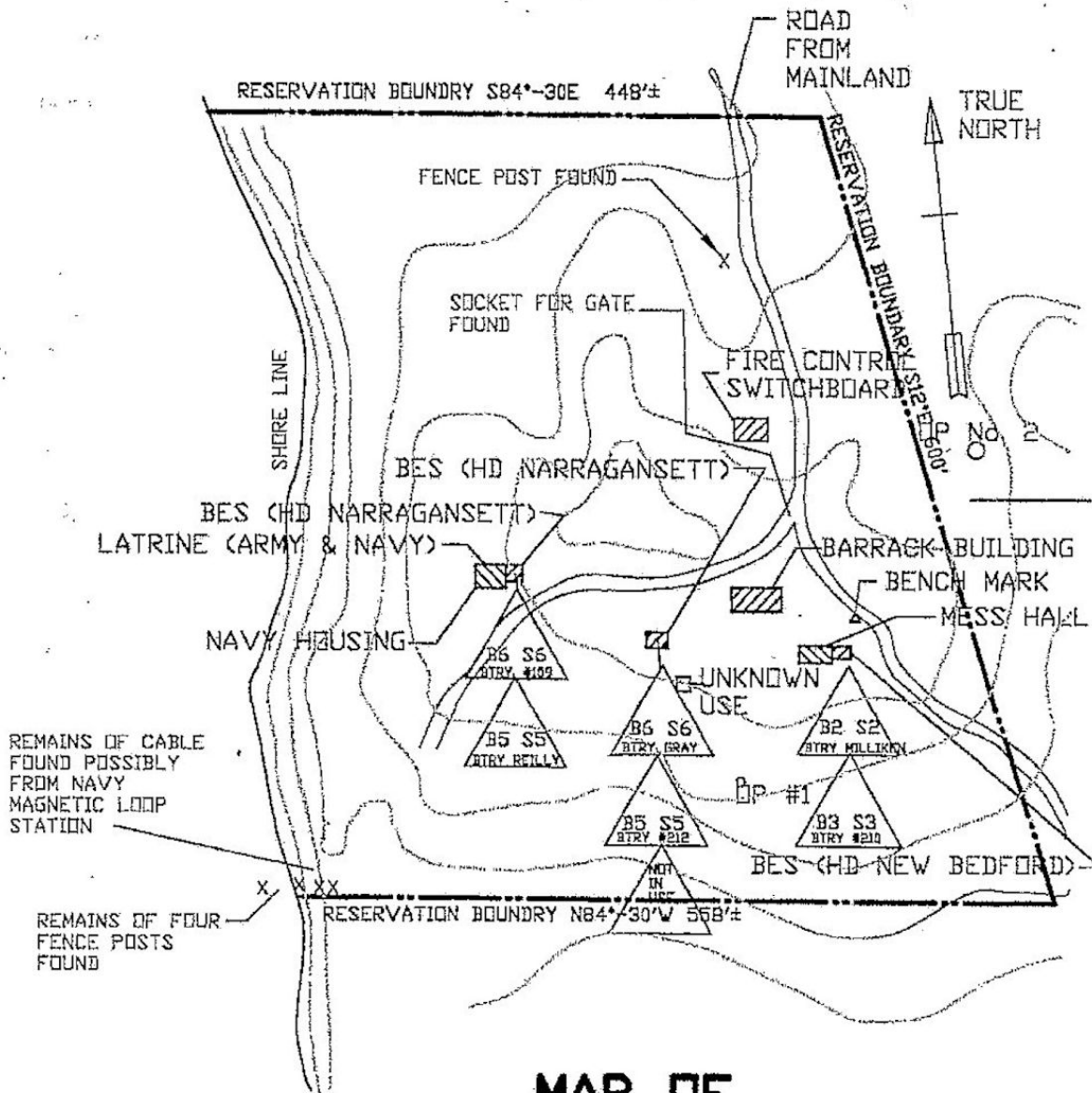
Gooseberry Neck had three base end stations. I was assigned to the middle station. The roof had a wooden structure to make it look like a lighthouse. The B6/9-S6/9 station for Battery Gray where I worked was on the top observation level. The B5/11-S5/11 station for 6-inch Battery 212 at Sakonnet Point was in the middle level; the bottom level was not used. As far as I know the top level was never used for any battery other than Battery Gray. The tower, never painted, was left as bare concrete.

The station to the west, disguised as a cottage, had two observation levels. The top level was for 16-inch Battery No. 109 at Fort Greene, which was never completed. This station had the base latrine and shower added on to it. An attached building built as part of this station was used by the navy to house personnel assigned to the U.S. Naval Magnetic Loop Station, Gooseberry Neck. I remember seeing them, but I never associated with them. I assumed they were operating some kind of a communications facility.

The easternmost station was also disguised as a cottage. Possibly this was a barn-like building similar to the structure at Sachuest Point. It had stations for the Harbor Defenses of New Bedford on two levels - the top level for 12-inch Battery Milliken at Fort Rodman and the lower level for the 6-inch



Gooseberry Neck, looking south, c. 1946. L-R: Detachment barracks, BES 1D disguised as lighthouse, BES 1B. *Walter Bates*



MAP OF GOOSEBERRY NECK MILITARY RESERVATION

HARBOR DEFENSES OF
NARRAGANSETT
SITE 50
NO SCALE

1-MAP BASED ON ANNEX B, HARBOR DEFENSES OF NARRAGANSETT BAY EXHIBIT NO. 9-B-26
GOOSEBERRY-
DATED 15 JUNE 1943, REVISED 1 FEBRUARY 1945.
2-FIELD INSPECTION OF THE SITE 16 JULY 2004 BY ED JERUE

guns at Mishaum Point. The cottage part of the building was used as a mess hall for the reservation. This station is now gone.

A buried, concrete fire control switchboard was to the north. I never knew what was in there. I saw some guys hauling sacks of potatoes from there to the mess hall; I assumed that it was used for food storage. We had a cook, John, with his assistant named Stegman. There was a kitchen and a dining room; we had the same set-up at Warren Point and Sachuest Point.

The pictures I took in 1947 show a small structure that I don't remember apparently located in front of the central tower. Possibly, it was an emergency generator. There were supposed to have been searchlights located at the neck, but I don't remember seeing them. I have never walked around the perimeter of Gooseberry Neck. The barracks located to the east of the central tower and north of the New Bedford base end station housed 30 men as I remember; it had a day room at the south end. The picture shows a two-story barrack, but I only remember a one-story building.

Along the edge of the beach just before the causeway to Gooseberry Neck was Stacia's Restaurant. The owner was an old white-haired grandmother; her daughter was the bartender. I wasn't really interested in her, but the guys ribbed me all the time. They had me having an affair with her, but it was just a friendship. My best friend Bob "Scotty" Scott and I used to go there; we were more "civilized" than the others and they took us back into the kitchen and gave us hot meals. There was a jukebox and a dance floor. The "Beer Barrel Polka" and all the other popular WW2 songs were on it. "Pennsylvania Polka" was the popular song then; I remember Bing Crosby crooning "White Christmas." The restaurant was washed out in 1944; it was washed out two other times and then they gave up on it. Only the floor slab remains. The bartender still lives nearby; she got married and has a rooming house. In modern times, I rent a room for a few days and go around the area, visiting the old base end station. She was surprised to see one of the ex-soldiers show up after 50 years.

Once the army sent me to Fort Adams for a course in signaling, using wigwag flags. I received a certificate for that; it's still around somewhere. We were sent to Fort Adams another time, but I don't remember for what. I was impressed with the construction of Fort Church, being disguised as a village. I guess the closest to it in construction would be Fort Greene.

I was discharged out of Fort Devens while the war was still going on; they gave me a railroad ticket back to Darien, where I had been inducted, and I went back to work at the munitions factory where I had been working when I was drafted. They trained me to do paperwork in the office, which was a bore. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life doing factory work. The G.I. Bill had just been passed, so I started school at New York University (NYU) in downtown New York City. I spent three years studying industrial management; the fourth year I changed my objective and got two more years at a teachers college in Connecticut. The G.I. Bill paid you all kinds of money for tuition, books, and different courses. I had more money then than ever before.



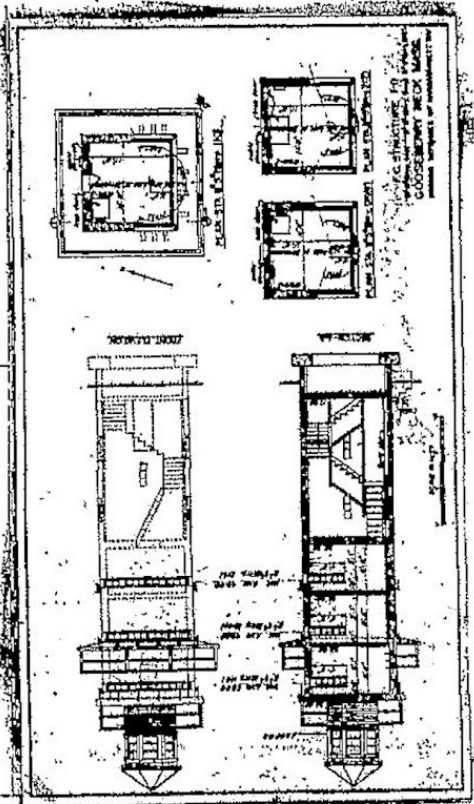
Stacia's Restaurant, Gooseberry Neck, c. 1946, Walter Bates

15 No 1
 HARBOR DEFENSES OF Narragansett Bay
 GOOSEBERRY NECK RESERVATION
 STRUCTURES - B. SC. (BERRY, STRAW) Site 1-2
 Spare & B5 S¹/₂ (BERRY, 212) (F. Charon)

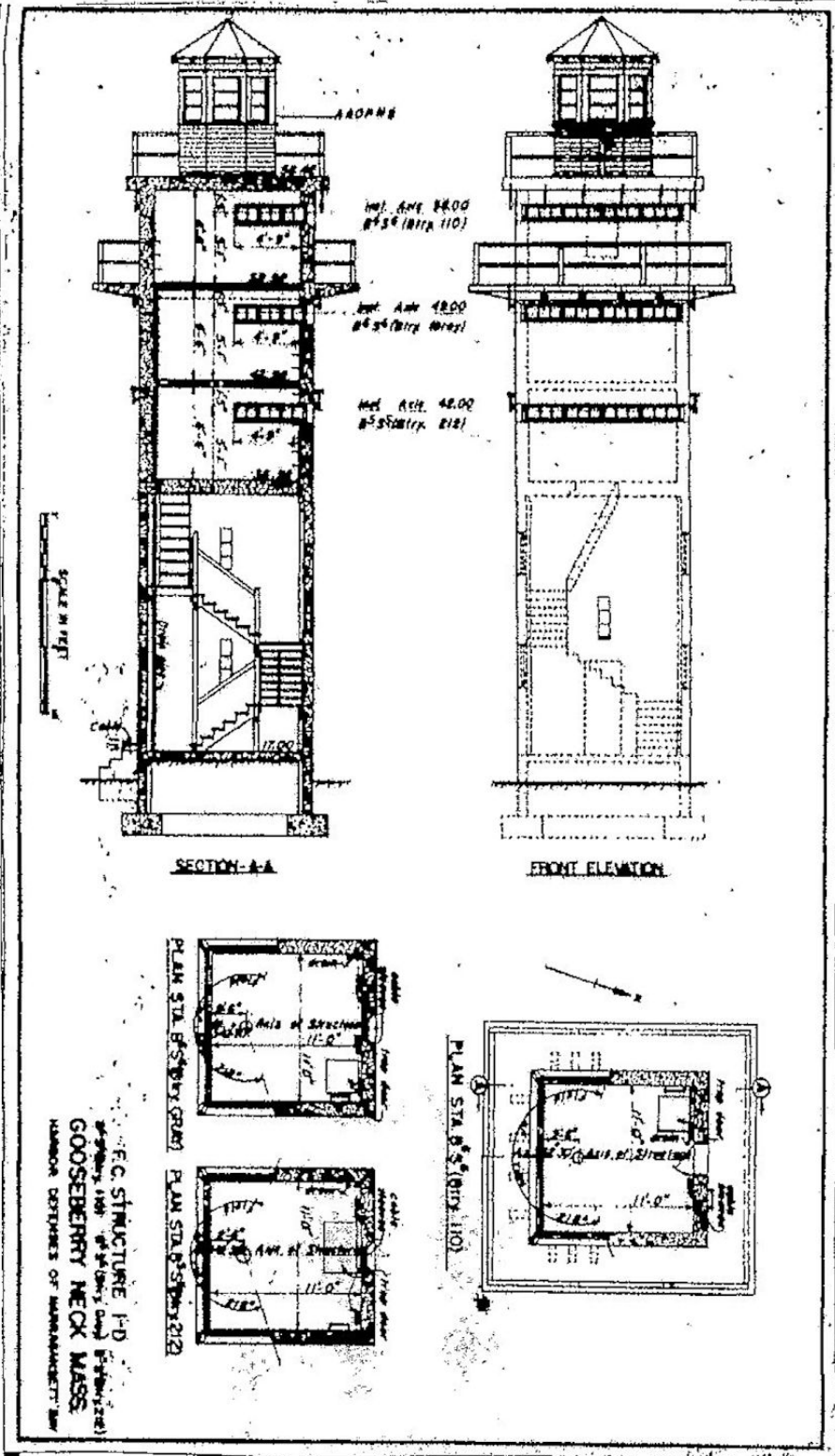
REPORT OF COMPLETED WORKS - SEACOAST FORTIFICATIONS.
 (Fire control or Torpedo Structures).

Form 2. Corrected to November 1, 1942

STRUCTURE:	Center of Res.	INSTRUMENTS AND EQUIPMENT:
Location	August 29, 1942	Type of observing inst. Type of plotting board
Date of transfer	\$8,690	DATA TRANSMISSION
Cost to that date	Lighthouse	Type of
Type of construction	Concrete & Wood falsework	Date of transfer
(a) Roof	Concrete	Cost of data transmission equip.
(b) Remainder of bldg.	Simulated lighthouse	For tide stations give description of tide gauge
How concealed	Concrete	For datum points give Forts from which visible
How protected	Not applicable	For dormitories give sta. served
Height above concealment	Not applicable	For cable hut give S.C. type
Height above protection	Not applicable	
Conspicuous at yards	Commercial Power	
ELECTRIC CURRENT:	1.2 KW	
Source of	Engineer Department	
Kilowatts required	None	
Type of lighting fixtures	No	
HEAT:	Ec	
How heated	None	
WATER & SEWER:	Permanent or temporary inst' in	
Connected to water mains	Permanent	
Connected to sewer	New	
Type of latrine	Mean Low Water	
Permanent or temporary inst' in	None	
Present condition		
REFERENCE:		
Reference of site		
Reference of instrument axis		
Type and capacity of crane		
Max. dim. of reel handled		



944 Bay Point & 7th Dept., Project A-1-27



After the war, I came back to the Narragansett Bay area for nostalgic reasons. I returned to Fort Church and saw the guns again. I got into Fort Varnum, still an active harbor defense installation then and a very hard place to get into, and Fort Getty, and learned as much as I could about the Harbor Defenses of the Narragansett.

The first time I went back to Fort Church, the war was over in Europe and I was out of the army. I got into a car and drove out to Warren Point, the first time I had gone back. There was still a bunch of guys there for the 6-inch guns. I had dinner or some other meal with them. I am sure they were wondering why I came back, now that the war was over.

In 1947, I went back there with a friend who had a camera. He took the pictures that show Battery Gray and various buildings of the fort. There was no garrison then; the guns were sitting in the casemates with canvas over the muzzles. There were one or two caretakers at the battery site. The caretaker would try and scare you away, but he talked with me, telling me stories. Then I got into the habit of going back year after year. I thought, "what a shame." Seeing the empty emplacement, I felt bad about it. Battery Reilly was also dead. I went out to Warren Point, which was no longer manned. By 1947, the army was basically out of there except for a caretaker. The battery was changed to Battery C, an antiaircraft unit; some of the men were assigned to Fort Adams, others were sent to Fort Hood, TX.

