THE LASTING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAVAL DEFENSE STATION
IN WORLD WAR II SAN PEDRO

by

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This thesis is dedicated to

Papa, and our harbor cruises.
Acknowledgements

In the summer of 2017 two significant developments in my life occurred; I began my position at Point Fermin Lighthouse Museum, fulfilling a long-standing promise to myself that I would become a lighthouse keeper. The second, I wandered USC’s campus and eventually found myself in Trudi Sandmeier’s office discussing the Heritage Conservation program I had been searching for. These could be acts of fate, just a series of fortuitous events, or it could be that inner self that seems to put us in the right place, at the right time, for the right things to happen. Whatever you may call it, I will be forever grateful that these events have led me to incredible mentorships and opportunities.

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Table Contents

Dedication ........................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................... iii
List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... vi
Abstract ............................................................................................................................... vii
Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 1
Chapter One: Military and Industrial Development in San Pedro ........................................ 6
   Early Harbor Development ............................................................................................ 6
   Development and Harbor Occupations 1897-1918 ....................................................... 9
   World War I and Post-War Development 1914-1940 .................................................... 10
Chapter Two: Bethlehem Shipbuilding, Channel Heights, and Point Fermin Radar Tower 15
   A Fragile Landscape ................................................................................................. 15
   Role of World War II Structures in San Pedro ............................................................. 16
   Role of the port During World War II ......................................................................... 17
   Bethlehem Shipyards ............................................................................................... 18
   Bethlehem Shipyards Today .................................................................................... 20
   Channel Heights ....................................................................................................... 21
   The Erasure of Channel Heights ............................................................................ 24
   Lookout and Radar Station at Point Fermin ............................................................... 25
   Removal of the Lookout and Radar Tower at Point Fermin ...................................... 28
   Heritage Conservation Lessons ............................................................................... 28
Chapter Three: The Naval Defense Station ..................................................................... 30
   Mobilization ............................................................................................................. 30
   Wartime Use ........................................................................................................... 31
   Construction ........................................................................................................... 35
   Character and Treatment of Temporary Military Structures .................................... 41
   Point Fermin Historic District and Rehabilitation Recommendations .................. 42
   Why This Place Matters ......................................................................................... 46
Chapter Four: Gentrification and Historic Resource Relationships in San Pedro Today 48
   Post-War Relationships with the Built Environment ............................................... 48
   Community Building: Heritage Conservation Successes ........................................ 48
   Gentrification ........................................................................................................... 50
   Revitalization in Practice ....................................................................................... 51
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 54
Further Research Questions ............................................................................................. 55
Bibliography ...................................................................................................................... 57
### List of Figures

1.1 Workers Progress Administration Land use survey ............................................................ 4
1.2 Ariel of Point Fermin, 1934 ................................................................................................. 5
1.1 Map of Rancho San Pedro, 1850 ....................................................................................... 7
1.2 Daguerreotype of the harbor, 1850 .................................................................................... 8
1.3 View of the Naval Fleet in the Port of Los Angeles, 1919 ................................................. 11
1.4 View of the Port of Los Angeles, 1921 ............................................................................. 11
1.5 Map of Bethlehem Shipyards, 1943 ............................................................................... 20
1.2 Context view of Channel Heights—Photo by Julius Shulman, 1940’s ................................ 23
1.3 Context view of Channel Heights—Photo by Julius Shulman, 1940’s ............................... 24
1.4 Point Fermin Lookout Station Post-WWII ................................................................. 27
1.5 Radio and Radio Communications map of the Southern California Coast, 1944 .......... 32
1.6 Recorded oral history from W.C. ‘Wink’ Cumberlain ..................................................... 33
1.7 Navy Department permit for the construction of the Naval Defense Station, 1941 ........ 34
1.8 Context view of the Naval Defense Station ...................................................................... 35
1.9 West elevation view of the Naval Defense Station .......................................................... 36
1.10 South elevation view of the Naval Defense Station ......................................................... 37
1.11 South elevation interior perspective from the Naval Defense Station ......................... 38
1.12 Interior of basement featuring the radio communications desk ...................................... 39
1.13 Interior view of vandalism of the Naval Defense Station ............................................. 44
1.14 Point Fermin Historic District Boundary map, 2020 ....................................................... 46
Abstract

San Pedro is a community within the City of Los Angeles sitting at its most southern boundary. Historically tied to the development of the Port of Los Angeles, San Pedro hosts a multi-layered cultural landscape of social and economic developments, with significant periods denoted by military usage of the Port. This analysis focuses on the historic context, and preservation discussion around San Pedro’s World War II Era Naval Defense Station, known locally as the ‘Coast Guard House’ located at Point Fermin. The station served in two capacities during the war, the first being as a Naval radio communication station from 1942 to 1944 and then transitioned to a Naval direction detection station in 1945. Today, the station serves as one of the remaining architectural vestiges of San Pedro’s WWII landscape, holding space for potential community revitalization efforts as a strong contributor to an architectural narrative disappearing to rapid gentrification.
Introduction

Change is a constant in Los Angeles. Periods of development and redevelopment are constant in the sprawling urban landscape. In the city’s port town of San Pedro, this story is also intertwined with the area’s military history. The jurisdictional linkages between Los Angeles and the Port were formalized in 1906, when Los Angeles annexed the Harbor Gateway, a corridor along present day I-110 forming a long connective strip between the city to the Pacific through Wilmington and San Pedro. In 1909, San Pedro was incorporated as part of the City of Los Angeles, effectively linking Port resources with the city.¹ This thesis offers historical contexts and heritage conservation discussion around the efforts made by the city to steward the recently acquired World War II-era Naval Defense Station at Point Fermin, a place that was responsible for critical navigational aid and harbor defense. Though the station is offered a level of protections under the City of Los Angeles, there is still a threat of erasure of this resource if plans are not made for its long-term continuation within the community. By providing a better understanding of military construction method during WWII, and what should be the methods of analyzing and understanding the station’s significance this thesis may contribute to the future of adaptive reuse of the Naval Defense Station.

The community of San Pedro is inextricably linked to the Port of Los Angeles. The first chapter of this thesis lays the context for the Port to understand how its periods of development primed it for Navy use, making it a critical hub for production during WWII. (Figures I.1, I.2) The significance of the harbor’s development laid the foundation over time for both economic and military advantages. The interactions between WWII mobilization and the Port were made

possible through its existing World War I infrastructure. Finally, this chapter looks at the interim years between the wars that allowed for the efficient installation of critical WWII operations.

The second chapter is a discourse about the erasure of contemporaries to the Naval Defense Station within San Pedro’s WWII landscape. Three brief case studies of Bethlehem Shipyards (1941), Richard Neutra’s Channel Heights (1941), and the Lookout tower and Radar Station at Point Fermin (1942), illustrate how heavily altered San Pedro was during this time, making WWII one of the Port town’s most defining eras. This chapter seeks to clarify an understanding how the resources from this period have lost visibility within the community overtime, and how that emphasizes the importance of the station’s reuse moving forward.

The third chapter focuses specifically on the Naval Defense Station itself. Its significance within the WWII San Pedro narrative is analyzed through its usage, construction, and preservation perspective. In applying the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for rehabilitation, and the station’s specific military intentions, it provides insight on ways for this structure to thrive for future community use. Although much of the explicit history of Naval Defense Station remains classified, what is clear is the critical and strategic role the site played in the WWII story of San Pedro. Lastly, this chapter discusses the current state of the station as part of the recently formed Point Fermin Historic District.

The fourth chapter of this thesis presents the current heritage conservation climate within San Pedro. The community has a strong collection of historic districts and individual historic resources. In contrast to the community revitalization efforts with projects driven by outside developers or agencies, the urgency to address the preservation needs of the Naval Defense Station are more acute. This chapter seeks to illuminate the adaptive reuse potential of this resource.
A full understanding of the Naval Defense Station will be an ongoing project moving forward with the preservation and adaptative reuse goals under the of the City of Los Angeles as a contributor to the Point Fermin Historic District. While evidence of exactly what took place at the station between 1942 and 1945 may never be fully understood, it is a pivotal aspect of WWII in Los Angeles. It is the objective of this thesis to support projects surrounding the station and its continued role within the community.
Figure I.1: Land use illustrating San Pedro’s boundaries Works Progress Administration, 1939. Source: University of Southern California Libraries.
Figure I.2: Arial of Point Fermin in 1934, eight years before the Naval Defense Station was constructed. Source: Water and Power Associates, 2022.
Early Harbor Development

The Port of Los Angeles is a defining feature of San Pedro's landscape as one of the world’s largest and most productive ports. With Los Angeles expanding throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Port reflected the demands of a growing community. As the harbor itself was developed and re-developed, the Port’s commercial success would prove critical for its use as a military stronghold over time. San Pedro in effect would adapt itself for harbor defense throughout periods of conflict, building infrastructure that would allow for the military branches to continue there today.

Spanish missionaries utilized the harbor as a trading post for receiving goods from Spain during the latter part of the eighteenth century. From 1769 to 1770 the Portola Expedition, an endeavor also backed by Spain, made European contact with California. The members of this expedition were eventually granted significant land concessions throughout the southern California region.\(^2\) These concessions included the Rancho San Pedro, Rancho Los Cerritos, and Rancho Palos Verdes land grants. Combined, these rancheros spanned 84,000 acres and included the present landscape of the Port of Los Angeles. Rancho San Pedro was granted to retired soldier Juan José Dominguez in 1784.\(^3\) (Figure 1.1) The grant included a sandbank strip that

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\(^{3}\) Rancho San Pedro was the first Spanish land grant in California. Juan Jose Dominguez who was part of the Portola expedition was granted 75,000 acres in 1784 by King Carlos III of Spain. This land included the entirety of what is today the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. The family maintains portions of this original land grant today. Dominguez Ranchero Museum, *History of Dominguez Ranchero Adobe Museum* (Dominguez Ranchero Museum, 2022).
acted as a natural jetty. This essential geographical feature functioned as a kind of natural breakwater, protecting the harbor from the open ocean. This critical component made it possible for future development and dredging of the harbor.

In 1822, Mexico—now independent from Spain—lifted the trade restrictions that had been in place, creating the first period of rapid development in San Pedro centered around the success of the harbor. In 1834, the Sepulveda family gained control of a significant portion of Rancho San Pedro and constructed a landing and dock at the harbor. By the time California

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joined the United States in 1850, San Pedro was already a trade and transportation hub. (Figure 1.2) This Americanization period led to a rapid increase in traders, settlers, and economic interests in the harbor, necessitating further developments to the harbor to accommodate the number of goods and people in the greater Los Angeles area.²

Phineas Banning arrived in San Pedro in 1851 from Delaware. Today he is known as the “Father of the Port of Los Angeles” and is credited with recognizing the commercial potential of the harbor. By 1857 Banning had constructed docks for shipping that profited from importing and exporting goods in Los Angeles. Much of Banning’s early profit came from two primary routes of the southwest gold fields that terminated at the harbor: the Gila River Trail and the Old

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Spanish Trail. He took advantage of this, establishing a fleet of small vessels to carry materials from the harbor to the expanding San Pedro waterfront. In 1869, Banning recognized the potential of rail transportation between the harbor and Los Angeles. The subsequent Los Angeles and San Pedro Railroad (LA&SP) established the first reliable route for moving goods from the harbor to greater Los Angeles. In 1872, the LA&SP railway was purchased by the dominant Southern Pacific Railroad, establishing the systems used to move cargo from the Port today. This focused development and transportation improvement to and from the Port significantly contributed to Los Angeles's rapid growth. As a direct result, Los Angeles saw an increase in population due to booming commerce and a ready workforce.

Development and Harbor Occupations 1897-1918

This commercial boom and growth of Los Angeles lead to the formal federal establishment of a port. In 1897, after years of surveys and studies as part of a long deliberation in what became known as the 'Free Harbor Fight,' the federal government agreed to provide aid to the City of Los Angeles in establishing the official Port in San Pedro. In 1906, the City of Los Angeles annexed San Pedro, expanding its boundaries to the coast in preparation for opening the Panama Canal and all the economic benefits it would bring. In 1907, the Port of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Harbor Commission were formally established. The first in a series of periodic Port improvements began and would span over the next decade. The projects were expansive and ambitious; constructing a new breakwater nearly three miles along the Main Channel was a monumental construction and engineering effort, drawing resources from San Pedro,

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7 Santa Monica had been a contender, backed by railroad baron Collis Huntington, but ultimately ceded. William F. Deverell, *The Los Angeles 'Free Harbor Fight*, (California History vol. 70, 1991), 12-29.
Wilmington, and Catalina Island. In 1913, Angel’s Gate Lighthouse was constructed at the end of the breakwater to guide ships into the expanding Port safely. The Port of Los Angeles was named the world's largest lumber importer. The remaining marshland in the Port was dredged to construct land for wharves and warehouses. The first occupants of these new structures were shipbuilding companies.  

World War I and Post-War Development, 1914-1940

America's involvement in World War I began on April 6, 1917. The Panama Canal had officially opened three years prior in 1914, and with wartime development, closed for the duration and several years following the conclusion of WWI in 1918. These two events shaped the Port, shifting its focus from shipping to wartime production efforts. The United States Navy established a presence in the Pacific and developed a base in San Pedro primarily as a training station. (Figure 1.3) This station was the first of several military operations in the harbor. The Port of Los Angeles and the Port of Long Beach focused on shipbuilding in response to the federal government pushing for strengthening maritime technologies and fleets. (Figure 1.4) This effort includes the prominent Southwestern Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, responsible for generating a large amount of the Pacific fleet.  

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9 Jones and Stokes, San Pedro Waterfront Redevelopment Project, (Los Angeles Harbor Department, 2000), 10.
Figure 1.3: A view of the Naval Fleet in 1919. Source: Water and Power Associates. 2022.

Figure 1.4: View of the Port of Los Angeles in 1921. Source: Water and Power Associates. 2022. Early Views of San Pedro and Wilmington, 2022.
After WWI, the Port saw an intensified and focused period of change. Bethlehem Steel Corporation purchased the former Southwest Shipbuilding Company and all associated facilities in 1922, then known as Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation. This shift in ownership was a catalyst for the new development of the Port post-WWI. In 1923, a $15 million bond issue was passed, and as a result, the Board of Harbor Commissioners was incentivized to begin improvement projects that lasted for the next decade.\(^\text{10}\) These projects were responsible for significant changes to the Port landscape, including new wharves, roads, bridges, cargo, and passenger facilities, and most prominently, the widening and dredging of the Main Channel to allow for increased production of larger cargo ships. During this time, Terminal Island expanded to almost double its previous area, and a new transportation point called Henry Ford Bridge was completed in 1924, providing accessible vehicle transportation to and from the Island. \(^\text{11}\) In contrast, the Port built up and improved to grow its economic and military potential, which also meant discarding aspects of the Port. Deadman's Island, which had always been an issue to vessel safety sited at the mouth of the Main Channel, was removed with dynamite. The debris from the obliterated Deadman's Island was used to construct an adjunct property to Terminal Island, Reservation Point.

The development of landfill in the Port around Terminal Island created transportation options within the Port, both vehicular and air. Through the Works Progress Administration funding, the U.S. Navy and the Port invested in improvements to the field, including new runways, hangers, special accommodations for seaplanes, and a breakwater jetty for mooring. The first airfield was Allen Field, established in 1928. It was known as California's first air and

\(^{10}\) Jones and Stokes, 2000, 10

\(^{11}\) Ernest Marquez, and Veronique de Turenne, *Centennial Port of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Port of Los Angeles), 136-152.
sea airfield and was composed of a runway, pier, and sea-plane runway. Notably, the field was utilized as a military and commercial facility but backed by the Harbor Commission's understanding that the U.S. Navy would primarily utilize it. In 1935, the Navy signed a 30-year lease with the Port and the airfield was renamed Reeves Field for Admiral Joseph M. Reeves, the then-commander-in-chief of the United States Fleet, who was interested in building the U.S. Naval Aviation program.

Significant improvements to the Port included infrastructural elements that allowed commercial business and the U.S. Navy to function within this space. The Harbor Commission continued its work in making significant alterations to the sewage system to replace a minor disposal system that had been put in place in 1915. From Wilmington to East San Pedro, a more comprehensive sewage management plan was implemented to accommodate the rapidly growing fishing industry and workforce. The fishing industry had become a problem as it began polluting the bay and was an unpleasant health hazard. This led to the construction of the Terminal Island Treatment Plant in 1935, specifically to manage all the Port's waste production.

One of the most crucial elements of the Port’s economic development during this period was the discovery of oil fields in 1923. Oil production became one of the most significant contributors to the Port's economy and made it attractive to military operations. Oil shipment increased 250 percent between 1923-1924. Regional companies such as Standard Oil of California, General Petroleum Corporation, and Union Oil Company were the major contributors to the expanding-built environment of the Port. New facilities were constructed through

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13 Jones and Stokes, 2000, 11-12.
14 Los Angeles Times, Honor Paid to Reeves, March 27, 1936.
16 John M. Houston, The San Pedro City Dream: An Account Made up of Extracts from the Minutes of the City Board of Trustees and Items from the Newspapers of the Time Vol. 2., (San Pedro Historical Publications, 1982).
Wilmington during the 1920s, and storage facilities were installed on Terminal Island. These storage facilities could load four tankers simultaneously and be, in addition to the dock-side terminals, also constructed around the boundaries of Terminal Island. The placement of General Petroleum's facilities proved economically strategic as it efficiently provided services to fishing vessels and more extensive tanker needs.

During this post-war period, trade restrictions were lifted, and the Port returned to a busy trading hub. Lumber and oil were the most significant commodities, and though the Port moved a variety of products, most of the facilities were focused on lumber, oil, fish, and shipbuilding. Additional facilities and wharves were approved for construction in 1923 to accommodate new economic demands as part of the harbor improvement bond measure. In 1930, harbor traffic began to slow due to the stock market crash at the end of 1929 marking the beginning of the Great Depression. Necessary improvements continued, including new breakwater and passenger terminals, completed in 1937, backed by the Harbor Commission.¹⁷

The Port is a unique landscape within Los Angeles, defined by change and progress. Today, the Port of Los Angeles is a monolith, a global shipping center with multifaceted industrial, commercial, and military installations. Much of the Port as it was pre-1960 is erased from the built environment. The older, historical aspects of the fishing industry, shipyards, and sea-plane airfields that gave definition to its overall character and the people who cultivated those spaces are lost to new technologies and rapid development.

Chapter Two: World War II Contributions to the Built Environment: Bethlehem Shipbuilding, Channel Heights, and Point Fermin Radar Tower

A Fragile Landscape

San Pedro’s historic resources exist in a fragile landscape, and this is extremely true for its WWII built environment. San Pedro’s WWII resources exist in an urban and industrial cultural landscape. This poses unique challenges and opportunity for approaching heritage conservation in an environment subject to constant re-development. These resources are within a working and innovative port, whose priority is commerce, not heritage conservation. This fragility then brings forward the necessary conversation that aging structures have the potential to be embraced with adaptability, adding positive contributions to the community through the built environment in San Pedro. It is the fragility itself that needs to be addressed to successfully move forward.

Looking at three contemporaries of the Naval Defense Station and their differing treatments and circumstances illustrate some of the challenges facing this historic resource. Bethlehem Shipyard, located within the Port is an example of the effects of benign neglect on a historic resource. Secondly, the Channel Heights housing project, a master work of design, can only be characterized as a devastating illustration of loss. Its erasure is an example of just how much a community can lose. Finally, the Lookout and Radar Tower at Point Fermin Lighthouse was a modification to an existing historic resource, and its removal creates an unexpected discourse about the role modified structures play within a historic landscape.
Role of World War II Structures in San Pedro

The effects of WWII on the American home front manifested in a variety of ways from consumer goods to movies, and most visibly to the built environment. WWII marks a major shift in California’s role in industry, and San Pedro’s contributions as a ship and aircraft manufacturing hub played a key part in this transformation.18 The resources developed during WWII were entirely based to accommodate wartime needs, be it production, defense, or housing. This period in San Pedro was entirely focused in supporting the military in the Pacific Theater.19

Military construction during this period was centered around logistical considerations. There was a tremendous need to efficiently manage resources, and special consideration was given to the military construction. New facilities were a necessity to accommodate the rapid expansion rate of enlisted men, laborer, and their families alike. Because construction largely consumed what was considered critical wartime material, economic considerations were given a tremendous amount of weight.20 Government and military backed construction then became a balance between adequate facilities and how to use as little resources as possible. Temporary construction became the preferred method of meeting these wartime needs, except when it came to industrial facilities where temporary construction methods were not feasible.21

The role of the built environment was essential for the war effort, and to accommodate this, construction was kept as simple as possible. It is significant to note that driving design principal from this period had more emphasis on construction method than design. This created an architectural moment of focused innovation, finding solutions for rapid expansion while

19 Lotchin, 1994, 400.
complying to the rationing of materials.\textsuperscript{22} The approaches in the preservation of WWII resources, and their further consideration of adaptive reuse moving forward play an instrumental role in the identity of San Pedro.

\textbf{Role of the Port During World War II}

The Port of Los Angeles was the most significant and closest American port to the Pacific Theater during World War II. The war years brought the next wave of dramatic changes to the Port and San Pedro. Military activity defined the entire harbor area both physically and socially. San Pedro found a new purpose and made nationally significant contributions during this time.\textsuperscript{23} Ship and aircraft production facilities in the port and surrounding area were in a non-stop production cycle. Between 1941 and 1945, fifteen million tons of war equipment was manufactured in the Port.\textsuperscript{24}

This high production rate was made possible by the thousands of people who now composed the wartime labor force at the Port. To accommodate this influx of both production and labor, national wartime mobilization efforts were put into place.\textsuperscript{25} These mobilization accommodations came into effect as early as 1939, preparing a landscape and labor force for war.\textsuperscript{26} The federal government supported the construction of various facilities that were executed almost instantaneously. These structures ranged from housing to warehouses and were designed

\textsuperscript{22} U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Accessed October 2022.
\textsuperscript{24} ICF Jones and Stokes, 2008, 5.
\textsuperscript{26} Loechl, 34.
to serve specific temporal wartime needs. An average military building project was predicted to last five to seven years using available non-critical materials such as ready-cut lumber. 27

Bethlehem Shipyards

Bethlehem Shipyards, later known as Southwest Marine, is a neglected and significant site of wartime production. Shipbuilding and repair became an official industry with the 1916 Shipbuilding Act, which was under the Merchant Marine Act.28 This established the United States Shipping Board, which intended to strengthen the merchant marine fleet, a primary concern during WWI. This combination of legislative and wartime needs was the catalyst for officially establishing the Navy at the Port of Los Angeles, bringing significant economic benefits. By 1930, fourteen shipbuilding and maintenance yards populated the Port. Every shipyard in the Port boundary by 1940 was dedicated to the construction and manufacturing of ships for the war.29 The yards were contracted by the federal government for the duration and were expected to produce at rapid rates. Larger shipyards, such as Bethlehem Shipyard, produced large military vessels, while smaller yards could contribute to producing other Naval artillery, such as minesweepers. In 1941, government shipbuilding contracts at the Port of Los Angeles totaled at $333 million.30

In 1917, Southwestern Shipbuilding was established at Berth 240 on fifty acres at Terminal Island after securing a contract to construct twenty-three ships to contribute to WWI

29 City of Los Angeles Harbor Department, Addendum to the Berth 240 Transportation Vessels Manufacturing Facility Project, Final Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration, (San Pedro Environmental Management Division, 2020).
Naval efforts.\textsuperscript{31} In 1921, after a considerable reduction in space and production, Southwestern Shipbuilding was acquired by Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation. Bethlehem quickly integrated repair services in addition to building and added a dry dock brought down from its San Francisco location to San Pedro. By 1924, with the continued expansion of facilities and dry dock space, Bethlehem could accommodate larger ships.\textsuperscript{32} Eventually, the Bethlehem Shipyards campus would come to include facilities that contributed to its efficient, self-reliant capabilities for quick repairs and high construction rates; a boilermaker shop, carpenter shop, electrical shop, joiner department, machine shop, marine-machine shop, pipe ship, rigger shop, plate shop, pattern shop, and blacksmith shop. (Figure 2.1)

Bethlehem had other facilities nationwide including Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; and Alameda, California.\textsuperscript{33} The yard at Terminal Island was one of the smallest at just 3,000 feet of berthing space, and in 1940 received $4.24 million from the Maritime Administration for assistance in outfitting the shipyard for construction and repair of destroyers.\textsuperscript{34} This resulted in an increase of facilities, primarily on the south end of the Bethlehem campus. Preexisting facilities were updated if they met standards for WWII production with a significant portion demolished primarily on the north end. Bethlehem was a major employer between 1941 and 1945, with more than 90,000 workers building and repairing destroyers for the Navy and Merchant Marines. Due to space and ample workforce, Bethlehem would produce twenty-six destroyers during WWII. \textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{31} SWCA Environmental Consultants, 2011.
\textsuperscript{32} ICF Jones and Stokes, 2008, 10.
\textsuperscript{33} ICF Jones and Stokes, 2008, 11.
\textsuperscript{34} ICF Jones and Stokes, 2008, 11.
\textsuperscript{35} The U.S.S. Cassin Young, one of the twenty-six destroyers produced at Bethlehem Shipyards has been restored and preserved as a national historic landmark. She currently resides at Charlestown Naval Yard at Boston National Historical Park. Jones and Stokes 2000, 11-15.
Bethlehem Shipyards Today

Post-WWII, the defense contracts that had allowed Bethlehem to re-outfit its yard were canceled, resulting in widespread layoffs and a drastic decrease in shipbuilding activity. There was a period of resurgence during the Cold War in the early 1960s, which resulted in the demolition of several WWII shipbuilding areas. Bethlehem Shipyards was sold in 1981, becoming Southwest Marine, which continued in ship repairs. The yard was identified as a National Register-eligible district with sixteen contributing structures and other elements, ten of

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which were constructed in 1941 and the remaining in 1918.\textsuperscript{37} Over six years, it was saved from demolition against a proposed Port project to deepen the main channel in 2006, which would result in the demolition of two slips, among other impacts. In 2011, after a second years-long effort to return Southwest Marine to ship-repair usage, the Port and the Los Angeles City Council rejected the reopening.\textsuperscript{38} The slips at the shipyard were dredged, and the remaining structures ranging from warehouses to workshops currently sit abandoned and decaying. Neglect is not loss, but it leaves much to be desired.

\textbf{Channel Heights}

Channel Heights is a lesson in how neglecting a resource, even one so clearly significant, can result in the ultimate loss. Although no longer standing, the Channel Heights housing development was designed by the Los Angeles-based master architect Richard Neutra. Neutra is one of the most influential architects of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{39} Neutra was constantly experimenting and embracing technology in his work while following his guiding principle of connecting to nature. He called this essential component of his style “biorealism,” described by Neutra scholar and architect Barbara Lamprecht as “…design exploited, with great sophistication, the realm of the senses and interconnectedness to nature that he believed fundamental and requisite to human well-being.”\textsuperscript{40} Over the course of his career, his work encompassed residences like the Lovell Health House (1929), school campuses such as Palos

\textsuperscript{37} SurveyLA, 2019.
\textsuperscript{38} SurveyLA, 2019.
\textsuperscript{40} Barbara Lamprecht, \textit{Neutra: The Completed Works}, (Tashen, 2000).
Verdes High School (1959), which borders San Pedro, and multi-family housing like Channel Heights (1943).\(^{41}\)

Neutra was originally contracted by the Federal Public Housing Authority (FHPA) for the City of Compton to construct inclusive, integrated housing for working-class Angelenos called Amity Village. After the United States entered WWII, the project shifted from Amity Village to what would be known as Channel Heights.\(^{42}\) It was relocated from Compton to San Pedro as housing for defense workers at the shipyards in the Port under the Lanham Act of 1940, which was implemented to provide infrastructural support on the home front.\(^{43}\) Channel Heights was one of five Lanham Act projects in Los Angeles during WWII, and it would become one of Neutra’s most famous worker housing projects, functioning as a model of its type.\(^{44}\)

Built in 1943 on 160 acres off Western Avenue, Channel Heights included 222 residential structures collected into three blocks, housing a total of 600 families. The residences were composed of alternating one-story duplexes and two-story, four-family units. Materials were consistent with Neutra’s organic style using stucco and redwood, with interiors intentionally crafted with a soft color palette of blues, greens, and yellows.\(^{45}\) Channel Heights functioned as a community meeting place, including school buildings, a nursery, an arts center, and a

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\(^{41}\) Richard Neutra was born in Vienna in 1892, where he was inspired by the work of architect Otto Wagner. After his service during WWI, he returned to Vienna in 1917 to complete his studies at Vienna University of Technology. Encouraged by his mentor Adolph Loos after seeing Frank Lloyd Wright’s work, and fellow Austrian born architect R.M. Schindler, Neutra decided to immigrate to America. He spent a period at Wright’s Wisconsin Taliesin studio before arriving in Los Angeles in 1925. He was known for his experimental approaches and embracing new technology into his work. He retired in 1968 spending his last years in Germany where he died in 1970. Los Angeles Conservancy, *Richard Neutra*, (2022), Accessed October 2022.


\(^{43}\) The Lanham Act of 1940 was legislation that provided federal funding for wartime related infrastructure support such as child-care, and support for women employed in defense related occupations. Chris M. Herbst, *Universal Child Care, Maternal Employment, and Children's Long-Run Outcomes: Evidence from the US Lanham Act of 1940*, (Discussion Paper, Bonn, Germany: The Institute for the Study of Labor, 2013).


\(^{45}\) Drexler and Hines, 1984.
marketplace. Before it opened for occupancy, it was photographed by famed architectural photographer Julius Shulman who exposed the development to an international viewership. Channel Heights was featured in prominent architectural publications such as California Arts and Architecture (1944), and L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui (1946). In 1945, Shulman’s photographs of Channel Heights were featured as part of New York’s Museum of Modern Art exhibition, “U.S. Housing in War and Peace” as one of the best-designed housing war projects. (Figures 2.3, 2.4) Channel Heights was recognized as a masterwork in its own time and was an essential piece of Neutra’s canon.

Figure 2.2: Context view of Channel Heights in the 1940s. Photographer: Julius Shulman. Source: Channel Heights Housing Project, 2022.

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46 Drexler and Hines, 1984.
48 Neutra, Channel Heights Housing Project, Accessed October 2022.
Figure 2.3: Context view of Channel Heights in the 1940s. Photographer: Julius Shulman. Source: Channel Heights Housing Project, 2022.

The Erasure of Channel Heights

The postwar Housing Act of 1949 provided for the continuing support of affordable housing in Los Angeles so that Channel Heights and spaces like it might thrive.\textsuperscript{49} The McCarthy era and its fear of socialism effectively ended that vision. Instead, the government sold Channel Heights to private developers, turning the homes into rental units that were poorly maintained.

and the celebrated housing complex fell into disrepair. By the late 1980s, most of the units were demolished, and a select group of ruins remained. Today, single-family housing is currently under construction at the former Channel Heights site. Channel Heights is one of the most devastating examples of vanishing WWII resources within the community. Its design, community ideals, and experiments in wartime preparedness held such promise for communities everywhere.

**Lookout and Radar Station at Point Fermin**

The lookout and radar station at Point Fermin existed as a temporary wartime modification to an existing historic structure, Point Fermin Lighthouse, which was constructed in 1874 to serve the Port of Los Angeles. The lighthouse is situated at the most Western point of what is today Point Fermin Park, at 807 West Paseo del Mar, and it is this point that serves as the natural entrance to the harbor. The lighthouse is a stick-style two-story Victorian with a central tower. The tower sits at a fifty-foot elevation with the lighthouse sitting on a 120-foot cliff. The light station was manned as an active lighthouse until December 9, 1941, when its fourth-order lens was removed from the gallery in the tower as a result of the attacks on Pearl Harbor two days prior. In 1942, the Navy adapted the light for wartime use as a radar and radio communication station. To accommodate the Navy, the lighthouse was painted in regulation army green, and the gallery at the top of the tower that once held the fourth-order Fresnel lens was removed. In its place, the Navy constructed a structure that would function as a lookout

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52 Point Fermin Lighthouse Archives, 2022.

53 Point Fermin Lighthouse Archives, 2022.

54 Point Fermin Lighthouse Archives, 2022.

room and house radar equipment. This radar room was referred to by the Coast Guard as a ‘lookout shed’ and by local San Pedro residents as the “chicken coop.”

Radar was first successfully tested in the United States in 1934 at the Naval Research Laboratory by American Robert M. Page. Radar is a detection device that provides information on the range, and elevation of objects. It played a crucial role in the war by giving defenses early warnings of possible incoming attacks ranging up to eighty miles away. Radar was adapted for multi-use during the war, including aircraft, searchlights, and ships. Overall, this newer technological development had a heavy influence on strategy for both Allied and Axis forces during WWII and arguably shifted the course of the war.

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58 Radar during this WWII period depended on a semiconductor crystal functioning as a rectifier, sending out a radio wave and analyzing the reflected wave after it bounced off any objects in the air. The rectifier would interpret the reflected signal into a legible current on a screen. These early conductors proved to be slow to pick up rapid shifts in radar which was a major area of study well into the post-WWII era. Imperial War Museums, How Radar Changed the Second World War, Accessed November 2022.
Radar stations did not follow a uniform style as other military structures might have. California was a central piece for managing the activity of the Pacific theater, and there were many radar stations up the coast. These stations were disguised as homes, barns, or whatever suited the landscape best. These structures had to be able to house all the radar and accompanying equipment while having room for two to four persons to run it. The lookout tower at Point Fermin was in a prime location due to its relationship to the Port and location at the foot of the Army’s Fort MacArthur. The structure itself was composed of a shed roof, and redwood

59 Loechl, 2009.
siding, with wood-cased windows facing west out to sea and flanked by an additional set of north and east-facing windows.

Removal of the Lookout and Radar Tower at Point Fermin

The lookout tower at Point Fermin is an example of wartime adaptation of the preexisting-built environment. It was efficiently constructed for specific Navy use, and when the Coast Guard replaced the Navy there in 1946, its purpose became more ambiguous. In 1974, the lookout room modification was removed for Point Fermin Lighthouse’s centennial, and the lighthouse was restored through community efforts to its original 1874 lantern gallery.\(^{61}\) The lookout room is an example of a success story for community-led historic restoration and preservation practice. While the 1874 interpretation of the lighthouse is without question the most significant, it doesn’t take away from the fact that the WWII layer is almost entirely erased from the tangible narrative. Its removal elevates the importance of remaining WWII resources throughout San Pedro.

Heritage Conservation Lessons

There is much to be learned in the ways these WWII resources are facing or have faced erasure from San Pedro. What remains of WWII in San Pedro is promising, but it is under threat of vanishing. In the span of eighty years, a city and Port entirely redeveloped for war has a vanishing physical heritage from that period. Bethlehem Shipyards within the Port is arguably the most susceptible to demolition, given the nature of an ever-changing place of commerce. The

\(^{61}\) Point Fermin Lighthouse Archives, Accessed 2022.
lookout and radar tower at Point Fermin existed in a place of limbo in the postwar period, and its eventual removal can be viewed as a positive victory. Still, its architecture was never acknowledged as a significant layer during this impactful time. Arguably, the greatest loss to San Pedro and the larger Los Angeles narrative is Channel Heights. Neutra’s experimental workers’ housing project could have been a guiding example in approaches to urban development and preservation practice in its promotion of space and community if it was given the chance to continue. These temporary or semi-temporary, rapidly executed military-funded structures have had long-reaching impacts on San Pedro’s overall growth. Their absence effectively elevates the few remaining resources’ significance and contributions to the WWII narrative in San Pedro.
Chapter Three: The Naval Defense Station

Mobilization

The Office of War Mobilization (OWM) was an agency within the U.S. government formed during WWII to connect all governmental departments in a unified war effort. The U.S. military had these ‘mobilization’ plans in place for each service branch to be implemented in the event of a threat to national security, such as a war. These mobilization plans allowed the federal government to implement a draft for servicemen, and the means to train, house, and outfit them. This process required the production of war materials, which included the construction of military bases and related structures. Between 1939 and 1946, $20.2 billion was spent in the U.S. for the construction of various military facilities. These facilities were constructed quickly to serve specific purposes for the duration of the war and were never intended as enduring architecture, instead, they were often designed with experimental material to be intentionally expendable. Despite this fact, many of these resources still exist and contribute to the built environment. The Naval Defense Station at Point Fermin is a prime example of Naval facilities built under mobilization.

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63 Loechl, 2009.
65 Harrison, 1988, 175.
Wartime Use

The eight-month period leading up to the attacks on Pearl Harbor were a critical time for Allied preparedness. A permit issued on May 22, 1941, from the Treasury Department responding to a request from the Chief of Naval Operations details a request for the installation of an operating station for the management of “underwater detection equipment for the San Pedro area”, which included radio instruments and shelter house.66 (Figure 3.3) This is what would become the Naval Defense Station. Civil Corps Engineers completed the construction of the station in mid-1942 under the Navy Bureau of Yards and Docks.67 The station would prove to have a multi-faceted use in the Navy’s effort for home-front defense. Originally a Naval radio communication station and barracks, its primary purpose was to “increase coastal navigation support for the Port of Los Angeles and to improve the monitoring of coastal defense during the war.”68 (Figure 3.1) There are documents that provide evidence that the station interacted with the adjacent Army-run Fort MacArthur communicating coastline activity.69 In 1945 the station slightly shifted use and was primarily utilized as a Naval direction defense station.70 Twelve Naval officers would be stationed at the barracks at one time, sharing a main bunk room. They called themselves the “Defensive Dozen.” 71 (Figure 3.2) The officers would take shifts in a twenty-four-hour surveillance cycle to monitor underwater acoustics, listening for Axis submarines. Acoustics would be recorded through a fifteen-sonar buoy system with attached hydrophones and thirty-foot cables at the entrance of the Port.72 There were numerous recorded

66 Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1941, Accessed 2022.
67 Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1941, Accessed 2022.
69 Fort MacArthur Archives, Accessed of 2022.
and confirmed submarines that posed potential threats at the time, which was considered
classified information. Today, this information remains unavailable to the public. Notably, this
hydrophone system was a precursor to Sound Surveillance Systems that was heavily relied upon
during the Cold War era.\textsuperscript{73} After the conclusion of WWII, from 1945 through the 1950s, the
station continued as United States Coast Guard Officers Quarters and then transitioned again as a
U.S. Coast Guard Well-Being and Recreation Cottage, available for rent until 2010.\textsuperscript{74}

Figure 3.1: A 1944 radio and radar communications map of Southern California, Catalina, and Santa Barbara Island. This map illustrates each radio locations range including Point Fermin. Source: Dan Eagle Collection, Fort MacArthur Archives, 2023.


\textsuperscript{74} Kristen Heather, \textit{George Audette interview}, (Point Fermin Lighthouse Society, 2022).
Figure 3.2: A recorded oral history by W.C. ‘Wink’ Cumberlain who was station at the Point during WWII, and details what life was like around the Naval Defense Station. Source: Point Fermin Archives, 2022.
CONFIDENTIAL

The Honorable,

The Secretary of the Navy.

By dear Sir: Secretary:

Pursuant to the request of the Chief of Naval Operations in letters dated April 24 and May 10, 1941, File Reference GRO disc No. C52-91698 and D-99-91698, respectively. relative to occupancy of a portion of the Joint Permanente Coast Guard Reservation, California, for installation of a loop operating station in connection with underwater detection equipment proposed for San Pedro area, this Department is pleased to enclose herewith a reversible permit for use of a site on the reservation selected for the instrument and shelter house.

This Department also will make no objection to the Navy Department making connections to facilities available on the reservation such as telephone, light, power, water and sewage provided that any expense in connection therewith will not devolve upon the Treasury Department.

Very truly yours,

HUBERT E. GASTON
Assistant Secretary of the Treasury.

Copy to:
Capt. W. H. Shea,
Coast Guard Liaison Officer,
Room 2516,
Navy Department,
Washington, D. C.

L-626
MAY 22 1941

Incl. 5-15-41.

Source: Records of the U.S. Coast Guard Lighthouse Service, Lighthouse Files, 1790-1939.

Figure 3.3: This document is a permit issued from the Treasury Department to the Coast Guard Liaison Officer under the Navy to establish the construction of what would become the Naval Defense Station, also sometimes referred to as the Naval Detection Station, to implement ‘underwater detection equipment’ around critical points of San Pedro leading to the Port. The permit is notably issued on May 22, 1941, seven months prior to the attacks on Pearl Harbor, supporting the infrastructural developments of mobilization plans to prepare for the potential of a national attack.
Figure 3.4: Context view of the Naval Defense Barracks from Point Fermin Lighthouse facing Southwest with Catalina Island on the horizon, 2019 Source: Author.

Construction

Located between two base end stations, the Naval Defense Barracks is a one-story-over-basement, wood-frame building measuring 23 feet by 53 feet.\(^75\) It has a side-facing hipped roof with small overhanging eaves. There are two entrances on the north elevation, with one being the primary entry to the rest of the structure, while the door to the left, the primary entrance, accesses the basement. (Figure 3.4) The interior of the basement remains largely intact to its original construction, which includes a built-in desk designed for housing radio communications equipment. (Figure 3.8) There is a vinyl siding on one portion of the basement that was likely

\(^75\) Base end stations are typically located around larger military complexes to provide the most advantageous firing range, with the idea that you could triangulate against a potential threat. National Park Service, Batter-Osgood Farley National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, (United States Department of the Interior, 2020), 17.
added in 1965. On the east side of the building, there is a distinctive five-sided observation room with a 180-degree view toward the Port. The observation room is where officers would be stationed in shifts over a twenty-four-hour cycle. The south elevation features another entrance door with a wooden deck that was added in 1965. (Figure 3.6) The west elevation once featured a chimney that was removed in 2004. (Figure 3.5) No original window treatments remain, being replaced with vinyl sliding windows by the early 2000s. (Figure 3.7) The interior is also heavily altered and sustains substantial damage from vandalism. There are no building records available to inform of any alterations to the barracks over time; however, it retains strong overall integrity.

Figure 3.5: West elevation, with chimney outline still visible. 2019. Source: Author.

Figure 3.6: South elevation view 2019 Source: Author.
Figure 3.7: View from South elevation featuring interior perspective on vinyl sliding windows, 2019. Source: Author.
The Naval Defense Station is distinctly a non-prefabricated structure. Prefabrication had become more common by the turn of the century, primarily with companies like Sears and Montgomery Ward providing ready-to-order homes. While some of these prefabricated units could be purchased by defense contractors, this was not a practical method for larger-scale military needs because pre-fabrication relied heavily on local labor to build and assemble and would not be able to deliver a completed product for large-scale projects on short notice. The

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U.S. military found that prepared materials, namely ready-cut lumber that was delivered to the site, proved to be the most effective ways to install structures.\(^8^0\) The Navy, and other branches of the military-related barracks constructed during the mobilization period of WWII, had to be designed in a standardized way, and were categorized as either 700 or 800 Series.\(^8^1\) The Naval Defense Station was part of the 700 Series, with modifications that blended the design to look consistent with the residential architecture of the area to not look as obvious along the coastline.\(^8^2\) Each Naval company required specific structures to accomplish specific duties while also accommodating living quarters. This typically comprised an assortment of accompanying buildings, command post, supply room, mess hall, and an appropriate number of barracks. This was part of the promise president Franklin D. Roosevelt made at the onset of the war, that soldiers would be adequately sheltered during their service, even in these temporary structures.\(^8^3\)

These WWII structures, based on previous renderings from the 1917 mobilization series, went through modified designs through the 1930s.\(^8^4\) The advisory Architect of the Construction Division, Maj. Elsmere J. Walters, is credited with categorizing these buildings as “Theater of Operations” (T.O). Designed with the intention of being temporary, well-constructed, and consistent as possible, T.O. buildings became a mainstay of military planning.\(^8^5\) Architecturally, stud construction was used versus plank framing and concrete foundations were used, an improvement over WWI-era timber posts. Using exterior sheathing and subfloors created less draft and potential for water-related damage. Notably, this was the first military test of

\(^{84}\) U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1997.
composition board and plywood construction, aided by the developing of stronger resins. All 700 Series buildings were painted in ivory-colored enamel coating, regardless of use or rank. Doors, framings, and aprons were all painted a light grey.\(^{86}\) These changes from the WWI Series 600 allowed these WWII Series 700 temporary structures the ability to last longer than their predecessors. The life span was an estimated five to seven years—the Naval Defense Station is now eight decades without serious exterior alterations or improvements.\(^{87}\) The ability to construct these buildings efficiently was critical to the overall success of these designs. Simplicity was necessary due to the dependence on unskilled labor for the building process.\(^{88}\) Both the 700 and 800 Series used platform framing techniques, meaning floors are framed separately. Pre-cut lumber and stock doors and windows were used uniformly.\(^{89}\)

**Character and Treatment of Temporary Military Structures**

Historic military landscapes and individual military resources require a holistic approach when being evaluated, considering their complex, layered historical associations. National Register Bulletins that best guide the evaluation and documentation of these resources are evaluation of historic landscapes (Bulletin #18), rural historic landscapes (Bulletin #30), battlefields (Bulletin #40), and contributing and non-contributing properties (Bulletin #14).\(^{90}\) These provide a framework for understanding military relationships between the landscape, architecture, and overall historic narratives of these unique sites. In the case of WWII resources,

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most of them were primarily built for defense or in support for combat. In addition to the National Register Bulletins, they are primarily evaluated under permanent or temporary guidelines for the National Register of Historic Places.  

The Naval Defense Station is considered part of the temporary mobilization WWII construction pattern. To shift categories from temporary to either permanent or semi-permanent, they must have undergone some modifications or continued use over time. These structures should, however, be measured against the historic contexts of WWII temporary construction standards. These temporary wartime structures are defined more by construction method than strictly architectural style. Temporary military structures can be defined as a building type that is intentionally constructed to be used for short periods of time, with a typical life span of five to seven years, to meet a variety of military needs from warehouses to barracks. Temporary structures were distributed under two divisions, The Quartermaster General, and the Army Corps of Engineers, with the Naval Defense Station being under the latter. These divisions followed five main principals in executing all types of temporary structures in wartime conditions: speed, simplicity, conservative materials, flexibility, and safety. This allowed for standardized construction plans regardless of where these structures may be erected.

Point Fermin Historic District and Rehabilitation Recommendations

Currently, the Naval Defense Station sits on the Point in a state of neglect. It is, however, a strong candidate for rehabilitation and eventual adaptive reuse that would allow the station to

interact with the community in a multifaceted way. This is supported by its pivotal inclusion in
the Point Fermin National Register Historic District in 2020.96 (Figure 3.10) The Point Fermin
Historic District was formed to unify the linkages between military and navigational aids on the
point, creating a cohesive narrative of significant contributions to the military landscape in San
Pedro. The period of significance of the district is 1916 to 1944 and was considered under
criteria A: property that is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the
broad patterns of our history.97 The Naval Defense Station is included as one of five contributors
to the district. The other contributors include Battery-Osgood Farley (1916-1919), Radio
Compass Station Generator Building (1920-1924), and two U.S. Army Base End Stations
(1920).98 In terms of historic protections, a district allows for oversight from a city to deny
alterations, or demolition, review proposed design overview regarding new construction, and to
maintain overall compatibility with the unique character set within the district boundaries.99 That
means for, now, the station and its companion historic resources, have achieved a level of
recognition of their pivotal role within the community of San Pedro. The historic district
designation does not guarantee however any commitment for rehabilitation or treatment plan for
reuse. The station remains under tremendous threat. In this moment, the station sits on the Point
deteriorating under the harsh effects of saltwater, weather, and repeated vandalism. These
combined factors need urgent solutions that could be addressed through investment in
rehabilitation. The community views the station as a derelict building, its significance lost to the
casual passerby.100 Through applying a rehabilitation treatment plan, this would not only

97 National Park Service, 2020, 1.
99 California Office of Historic Preservation Department of Parks and Recreation, Drafting Effective Historic
Preservation Ordinances, Technical Assistance Bulletin #14, (California State Historic Preservation Office, 2022),
100 Point Fermin Lighthouse Museum, 2022.
physically renew the life of the station but would bring it back into community consciousness as part of their shared history.

![Image of vandalism](image)

Figure 1.9: Interior view of vandalism. While the interior walls spray painted here with graffiti are not contributors to the Naval Defense Station’s overall integrity, it does serve as an invitation to more harmful treatment that could damage the structure overtime. Currently, all the windows have been boarded to keep trespasser out of the vacant station. Source: Author.

The Secretary of Interior Standards defines the treatment of rehabilitation as, “the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical cultural, or architectural values.”\(^{101}\) It is this approach that would best accommodate the needs of the Naval Defense Station.

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Defense Station. Under this treatment, it is recommended that any material original to 1942 be maintained and protected. This would mainly consist of the wood framing, primary façade, and elevations. Arguably, the feature that contributes the most to the identity and use of the station is the built-in radio equipment desk that resides in the basement. The entire purpose of the station was to house the detection instruments which this desk was explicitly installed for. In maintaining its radio equipment desk location and material, it would be preserving the essence of the station’s purpose. The interior of the station, apart from the floorboards and fireplace, has been heavily altered or vandalized to the point of severe damage. (Figure 3.9) Both the current state of the building interior and its simple layout lends itself to multiple adaptive reuse possibilities, including as a community event space. Allowing community access to the station would be instrumental in its long-term survival. If this place was integrated into the community in an active way, that would bring opportunity and awareness to its significant contributions to the WWII landscape that are slowly being erased.

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Why This Place Matters

The essential question within heritage conservation practice poses of approaching any resource is, why does this place matter? Factually, framing space as; homes, neighborhoods, or the inhabitants...
themselves, can define place. Place can also be distinguished by the intangibles of social dynamics, organizations, or by its measures of time, events, and memories. In essence, there is no strict definition of place. It can be all of these or none, and if there is one defining aspect to place, is that it is entirely dependent on how it experienced.

In Los Angeles, with its expanse of urban sprawl, the opinions on what the city is or isn’t, are endless. One of the most common and most alarming opinions is a ‘lack of history’, which is to say its lack of narrative and memory. This assumption coupled with the idea that Los Angeles communities aren’t communities at all, but transient residents haphazardly grouped together, is tragic. It may have gotten this general reputation due to the newness of Los Angeles, which is not a comment about its age, but more about its commitment to looking forward. This forwardness allows the landscape to embrace the traditional, to innovate, to be contradictory. It is a city capable of adaptation, and because of its dynamism it creates the very opportunity for discourse on new approaches to place.

The discussion of the Naval Defense Station as a resource so far has centered around the tangibles of its contexts and its integrity, and the nature of its architectural circumstances. The greatest value these aspects contribute is how it supports placemaking within San Pedro and extends to greater Los Angeles. The station matters because more than anything else, it is part of what makes this community a home, and its shared experience of being of this place is a language the people of this community can understand.  

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Chapter Four: Gentrification and Historic Resource Relationships in San Pedro Today

Post-War Relationships with the Built Environment

In 1946, the Navy returned the command of the Port to civilian use. In this postwar period, San Pedro, like the rest of Los Angeles, underwent intense redevelopment.\textsuperscript{104} Immediately after WWII, the Los Angeles Harbor Department formed a board launching a port restoration program. It was through this program that some WWII structures were improved, but many more were removed or significantly altered.\textsuperscript{105} Today, this is further stressed by the gentrification that threatens San Pedro. Understanding the nuances between community revitalization and gentrification can empower heritage conservation efforts that build toward a community’s sustainable future.\textsuperscript{106} In identifying the relationships between the impacts of heritage conservation and the role of revitalization, community activism is key.

Community Building: Heritage Conservation Successes

It has been well-documented that heritage conservation benefits communities in interconnected, multifaceted ways. Essential urbanist Jane Jacobs famously argued in \textit{The Death and Life of Great American Cities} that a community thrives in old buildings, contributing to a sense of permanency.\textsuperscript{107} The ‘Hey Rookie Pool’ at Fort MacArthur, which sits on the hillside overlooking the Naval Defense Station, is one example of the community thriving with historic

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\textsuperscript{104} Port of Los Angeles, \textit{History}, 2022, Accessed October 9, 2022.
\textsuperscript{105} Port of Los Angeles, \textit{History}, 2022, Accessed October 9, 2022.
\textsuperscript{106} Port of Los Angeles, \textit{History}, 2022, Accessed October 9, 2022.
\end{flushleft}
space. In 1942, funds for the construction of the swimming pool at the Army base were raised from a performance titled of the same name, ‘Hey Rookie.’ The show was developed at the beginning of WWII. It was routinely performed by members of the Fort MacArthur Garrison for men stationed at other harbor defense bases in Los Angeles to increase morale. The swimming pool was opened in 1943 and designed in the Art Moderne style. In the pool’s post-war years, it served both the military and the public. In 1982, the Army left Fort MacArthur and the pool was now under Los Angeles Parks and Recreation, eventually closing in the 1990s. For the next twenty years, it suffered from vandalism and deterioration, like the current state of the Naval Defense Station. In 2015, the ‘Hey Rookie Pool’ through the Fort MacArthur’s Museum Association on behalf of the City of Los Angeles won a $6.9 million dollar grant bid to create an adaptive reuse plan for the swimming pool. Today it exists as a treasured and heavily used community resource in its restored life as a swimming pool, contributing to the continuation of the WWII landscape.

Another recent example of community investment in heritage conservation is Walkers Café, which opened in 1946 and closed in 2021 on Paseo del Mar directly adjacent to Point Fermin Park and the Naval Defense Station. The building began as a local family-owned grocery store in 1915 and would take on several different commercial businesses over its life. It was most famous within San Pedro under its ownership by Bessie and Raymond Walker, who established the Walker’s Café. Locals have consistently affirmed it as an important part of the area’s identity and experience. After the café’s closure in 2021, the San Pedro Coastal Neighborhood

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Council led a successful effort to designate the building as a Historic-Cultural Monument under Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.7 in December of 2021.\textsuperscript{113} Currently, Walkers Café is in the process of creating a supported adaptive reuse plan.\textsuperscript{114} Both of these heritage conservation projects feature local initiatives establishing that these places matter to the local memory. They also provide context to the Naval Defense Station as contemporaries that have found heritage conservation success through community activism. It is hopeful that if these are how neighboring resources are treated, that the station will also find itself in the same position of community support.

**Gentrification**

Rapid gentrification has undeniably come for San Pedro exacerbating any neglect within the historic built environment. Gentrification typically comes with reinvestment of resources with the intention for a greater economic return, be it in residential homes or in introducing corporate entities in areas where there were previously occupied local businesses. These shifts disenfranchise communities and, with it a loss of inherent knowledge of place. In San Pedro, one of the more concerning projects is a new $155 million dollar waterfront development project called “West Harbor.”\textsuperscript{115} It foreshadows how the most current layer of gentrification will manifest throughout the Port town in the future. The project sits on the razed 1962 Ports O’Call Village, which consisted of locally owned storefronts, restaurants, and seafood markets. The West Harbor project has a projected completion date of 2024 to be carried out over three

phases. Instead of local collaboration or input that was encouraged at the beginning of the development, this project has been rife with contentious and difficult conversations about the role of residents as it moves forward. The developers, Ratkovich Company and Jerico Development, despite being based in Los Angeles, are choosing to incorporate large restaurant and retail chains in the newly constructed structures. It is a drastic contrast to the character San Pedro has cultivated as a small and interconnected neighborhood. While this might seem initially unrelated to the discussion of remaining WWII resources, the large-scale West Harbor project brings dominating businesses that do not have direct returns to the community and takes away from San Pedro’s overall character. Without community, there are no stewards to interpret and impart value to the historic landscape.

Addressing gentrification as it is aggressively encroaching is important to any community with heritage conservation considerations. San Pedro fortunately already has a collection of dedicated groups who understand how valuable the historic built environment is to the survival of the San Pedro community. Adding tools like historic districts, and literacy on how this community can continue to be revitalized will better empower residents to understand their changing environment. Often, change is slow and happens in small shifts. For residents, there needs to be an added sense of urgency before the landscape becomes unrecognizable to the people who inhabit it.

**Revitalization in Practice**

In 1956, Canadian anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace published his work, “Revitalization Movements” describing how cultures can adapt “deliberate, organized, conscious
effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."\textsuperscript{118} Wallace’s work echoes contemporary definitions of community revitalization, that being the intentional efforts to bring a quantifiable positive impact to a community, usually in higher employment rates, access to healthcare, community services, transportation, and affordable housing. The relationship between heritage conservation and community revitalization is just as connected to economic benefits as it is cultivating space to bring people together. Reuse of historic space creates an investment in both a historic narrative, as well as the commerce that sustains the place that this community calls home. In identifying the kinds of businesses that have taken shape here there, it could model solutions for approaches to carry the Naval Defense Station into the future.

In recent years, San Pedro’s revitalization efforts resulted in adaptive reuse projects supporting efforts to cultivate a healthy and connected community. San Pedro’s proudest effort opened in 2012. Alta Sea at the Port of Los Angeles located at the Port’s historic Warehouse 58, 59, and 60 is a 35-acre campus at the Port with the mission of creating ocean-based climate-change solutions. They are active in community empowerment and outreach, working with local educators and schools in underserved areas. \textsuperscript{119} This San Pedro flagship of how these adaptive projects can thrive with the changing landscape gives a framework for how other resources can also move forward in the community.

The reuse of Warehouses 9 and 10 on 22\textsuperscript{nd} Street, a short drive from the Point Fermin Historic District, are also models of adaptive reuse and community revitalization.\textsuperscript{120} The warehouses were constructed for WWII as part of the same wave of mobilization construction as the Naval Defense Station. They were used for general cargo from the Port in their post-war

\textsuperscript{119} ICF Jones and Stokes, 2008. 89-91.
\textsuperscript{120} ICF Jones and Stokes, 2008. 89-91.
period with a few years of vacancy before the plans for Crafted at the Port of Los Angeles were announced in 2011 to move into the space.\textsuperscript{121} The agreement for the 25-year lease feeds back directly to community artists and brewers. One half of the 140,000 square foot property is dedicated to vendor stalls act as a local marketplace for a variety of artists and sellers. The other half of the property is a locally owned brewery serving craft beers. This venue has proved to be sustainable for the businesses and has now become part of the local feel and identity. This project was backed by the Port of Los Angeles, who for this project have stated their continuing commitment to a sustainable community.

Heritage conservation itself holds multifaceted values that when brought together, create, and support healthy communities. The blending of aspects of culture and aesthetic, education and memory, historical narrative, can sustain a sense of community. Revitalization allows for historical linkages to survive. In looking at what San Pedro has started to accomplish in its approach to its historic resources, and especially its WWII resources, like the warehouses, and Hey Rookie Pool, there is hope that those models will extend to the Naval Defense Station.

\textsuperscript{121} ICF Jones and Stokes, 2008, 89-91.
Conclusion

Evidence of San Pedro’s WWII narrative has deteriorated over the past eighty years. The increased invisibility of these resources can be in some way attributed to the Port being an epicenter for continuing commerce and inherently moving forward through development and redevelopment. The addition of the Point Fermin National Register Historic District hopefully means that as heritage conservation practice becomes more prevalent in the community, the incoming gentrification may be balanced by the authentic local historic districts and historic resources. Writer Charles Bukowski known for his direct style, lived in San Pedro from 1978 until his death in 1998. He encapsulated the attitude of San Pedro in this excerpt from his poem “Be Angry at San Pedro,”

"I never heard of Jeffers," she says.

"you never heard of Big Sur? Jeffers made Big Sur famous just like D. H. Lawrence made Taos famous. when a great writer writes about where he lives the mob comes in and takes over."

"well you write about San Pedro," she says.

"yeah," I say, "and have you read the papers lately? they are going to construct a marina here, one of the largest in the world, millions and billions of dollars, there is going to be a huge shopping center, yachts and condominiums everywhere!"
"and to think," my woman says smiling, "that you've only lived here for three years!" 122

While Bukowski is not to blame for collective community erasure, if there is anything to learn about the successes of San Pedro’s WWII environment moving forward, it’s that it takes patience; patience to connect the community, for the patience and time for details to emerge from hidden archives, and the patience to accept when those efforts may lead to unsuccessful outcomes. It is encouraging to witness heritage conservation leading many community efforts. The Point Fermin Historic District will hopefully be able to support more projects within San Pedro, encouraging multifaceted adaptive reuse approaches to heritage conservation. This community has so much to offer, in both heart and resources, all that is needed are tools like historic districts to empower this community. Today, the Naval Defense Station sits in that threatened liminal space between designation under a historic district and its future rehabilitation and reuse.

Further Research Questions

The Naval Defense Station leaves many gaps in its context due to a lack of available information by the U.S. Navy. Documents detailing exactly what was accomplished at the station have either not been released yet, or likely were destroyed due to the classified nature of operations taking place. Discussions with WWII veterans and interviews with the community also alluded to classified information and were not disclosed. The more elusive details of its full use during WWII arguably elevates its significance, making it an essential aspect of the Point Fermin Historic District, San Pedro, and greater Los Angeles. What might those missing details

122 Charles Bukowski, Be Angry at San Pedro, 1981.
of its use contribute to the community’s understanding of the station? Secondly, as the future takes shape for potential adaptive reuse of the station, how best should that space be utilized? Furthermore, how much can a community shoulder when it comes to its adaptive reuse? How much input should this community have in carrying the station forward? Perhaps all this space needs is the time and space to thrive with renewed community interest and use. It is interesting that while these temporary structures had an expiration of five to seven years, there was no plan to remove them. The station’s ability to endure at Point Fermin is a heritage conservation study that will develop over time.
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