

FORT KOBBE



Originally called the Bruja Military Reservation¹, Fort Kobbe was on the west bank of the entrance to the Pacific end of the Canal, on the Bay of Panama, and across the water from Fort Grant/Amador. Despite lasting until the end of the US Army presence in Panama in 1999, and with considerable remnants of it still existing, Fort Kobbe is perhaps the least known of the forts constructed to defend the Canal.

Beginning as a small defensive position in 1918, it was established as a permanent separate military post in 1928², as part of the postwar Canal defence augmentation program, and as a post of the Army's Coast Artillery Corps.

It was redesignated as Fort Bruja on 2 February 1929, being then around 1,804 acres (730 hectares) and was incorporated as a sub-post of Fort Amador from then until 1941.

¹ *Bruja* means “witch” in Spanish.

² Executive Order No. 4947 of 11 August 1928 established Bruja Point Military Reservation. This was repealed and replaced by Executive Order 8354 — Fort Kobbé Military Reservation of 25 February 1940.

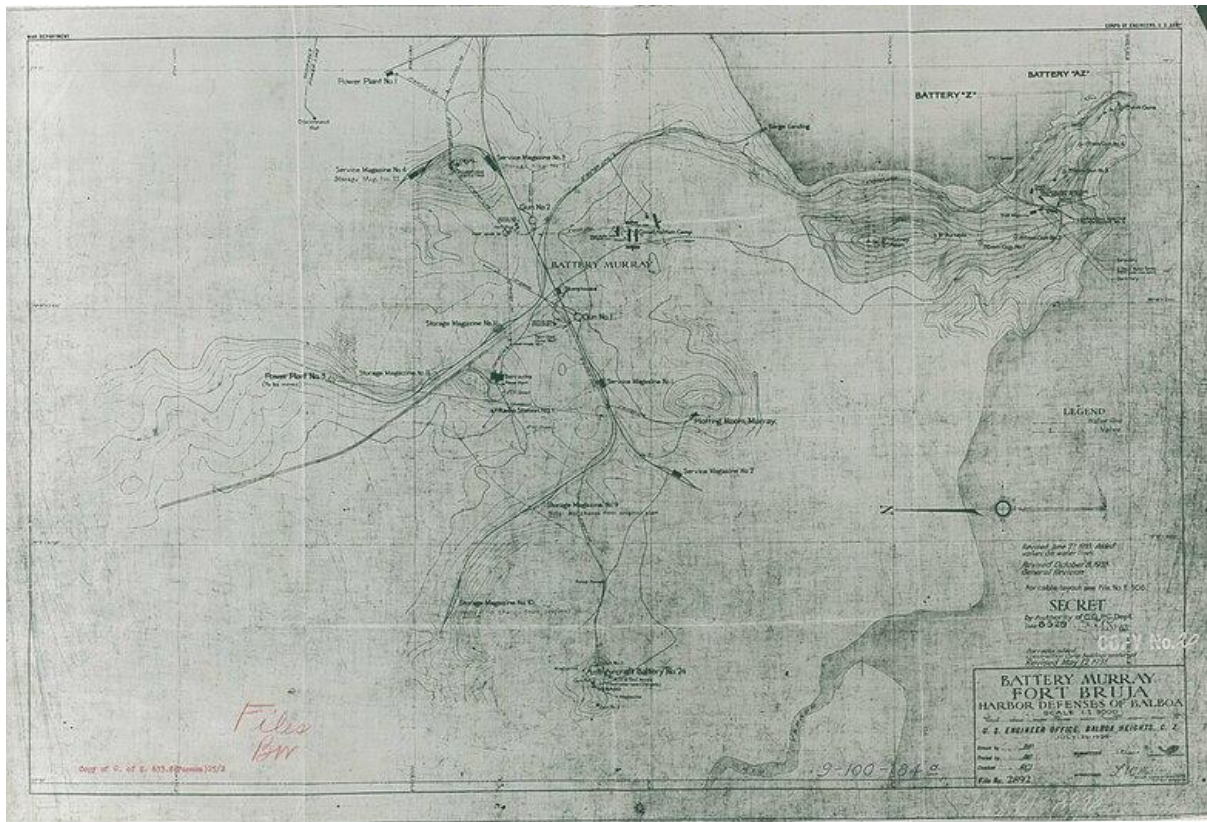


Most of the site was renamed Fort Kobbe, Canal Zone in 1932³ (named for Major General William A Kobbe, who had died in 1931), with the remainder becoming Bruja Point Airfield⁴,

³ War Department General Orders No.4, 1932.

⁴ Being named for a Major General William A Kobbe, an artillery officer from the Spanish-American War and who had died in 1931, and in recognition of his contributions as an instructor in the development of tactical

later renamed Howard Field.⁵ When a new airfield was required in the Canal Zone, to complement France Field and Albrook Field, the area most suitable had been seen as the Venado River valley, then a part of Fort Kobbe.



Battery Murray at Fort Bruja in 1929

The fort remained primarily a Coast Artillery Corps post until World War 2 (though its gun batteries were maintained in caretaker status until 1939).⁶ Most of the area around it was uninhabited (being part of the Panama Canal Zone watershed), and even with developments in recent years large areas remain untouched.

doctrine on the employment of artillery. He had served as a member of the Isthmian Canal Commission, which oversaw construction of the Canal.

⁵ For the background on Howard, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-in-world-war-2-howard-field-a-last-outpost/>

It became a separate post in 1946, becoming Howard Air Force Base in 1947.

⁶ <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/OrderofBattle1.pdf>



Residential quarters at Fort Kobbe

In 1923, the War Department approved a set of changes and improvements to the Canal defences, which included placing what became Fort Kobbe on a permanent basis. However, budget cuts in the period between the wars meant that only part of the plan would be implemented, but long-range 16-inch (406 mm) naval guns were eventually installed at Fort Kobbe by 1929.⁷ These were intended to defend the approaches to the Canal and Balboa harbour. They were casemated in 1942⁸, remaining in place until 1948. They were located near Bruja Point and Batele Point, in Batteries named Murray and Haan respectively.⁹



View of family housing area, barracks and airfield. Pool and theatre upper right. (credited to US Army photographer)

There was also Battery 6 with 90 mm anti-motor torpedo boat guns from 1943 to 1948 on Batele Point.¹⁰ This mainly covered the shipping channels to Balboa and the Canal, as well as the “Fortified Islands” (i.e. the islands on the

⁷ https://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/pcm/usmilitary_and_canal.aspx

⁸ A casemate, in this context, being an armoured (or concrete) gun emplacement structure.

⁹ Having decided to fortify the Canal, a Joint Army-Navy Panama Canal Fortification Board was established by the Secretary of War on 10 October 1909. This Fortification Board, members of which included Brigadier General Arthur Murray, Chief of Coast Artillery, and Major William G Haan, Coast Artillery (and for whom Batteries Murray and Haan at Fort Kobbe were named), presented its findings and recommendations to the Secretary of War on 22 April 1910: <http://gozonian.org/2006data/2006hist/FortAmadorHistory.htm>

¹⁰ Adopted by the Coast Artillery Corps as part of the 1940 Modernization Program as an anti-motor torpedo boat weapon, the 90 mm Gun M1 was a dual-purpose gun, developed mainly for anti-aircraft use. It was adopted as it was already in use with the Army, and it could also be used in a secondary anti-aircraft role. A new mount was developed for sea coast defence, a simple pedestal design that weighed two tons. The gun needed a 15-man crew and fired a 24 lb (10.8 kg) AP shell to a maximum range of 19,500 yards (17.8 km).

other side of the approaches, and connected by a causeway, that comprised Forts Grant and Amador).

In addition, Battery 3 and Battery 3A (aka Battery Z) on Bruja Point had four 155 mm guns, also installed after World War 1; and Battery AZ at Bruja Point had two mobile 75 mm guns (it originally had 2 x 4.7-inch guns, but these were replaced in 1919). Also present were anti-aircraft defences with 3-inch (76.2 mm) guns, manned by the 73rd and 83rd Coast Artillery (AA) Regiments, with supporting searchlights.¹¹

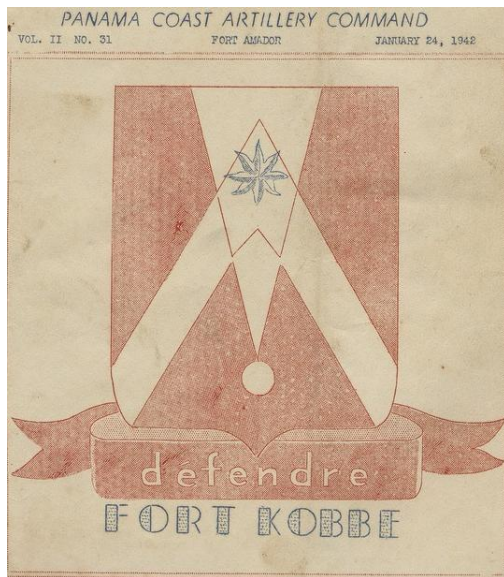
In 1948, all the big guns were removed, but the site remained under Army control until 1999.



A 155 mm or 75 mm gun mounted at Bruja Point in the late 1920s or early 1930s. Seen in the photo is a steam locomotive and steam crane used in support of moving and lifting projectiles. The Fort Kobbe railroad was the last military trackage built.¹²

¹¹ <https://cdsg.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/FORTS/CACunits/CACreg1.pdf>

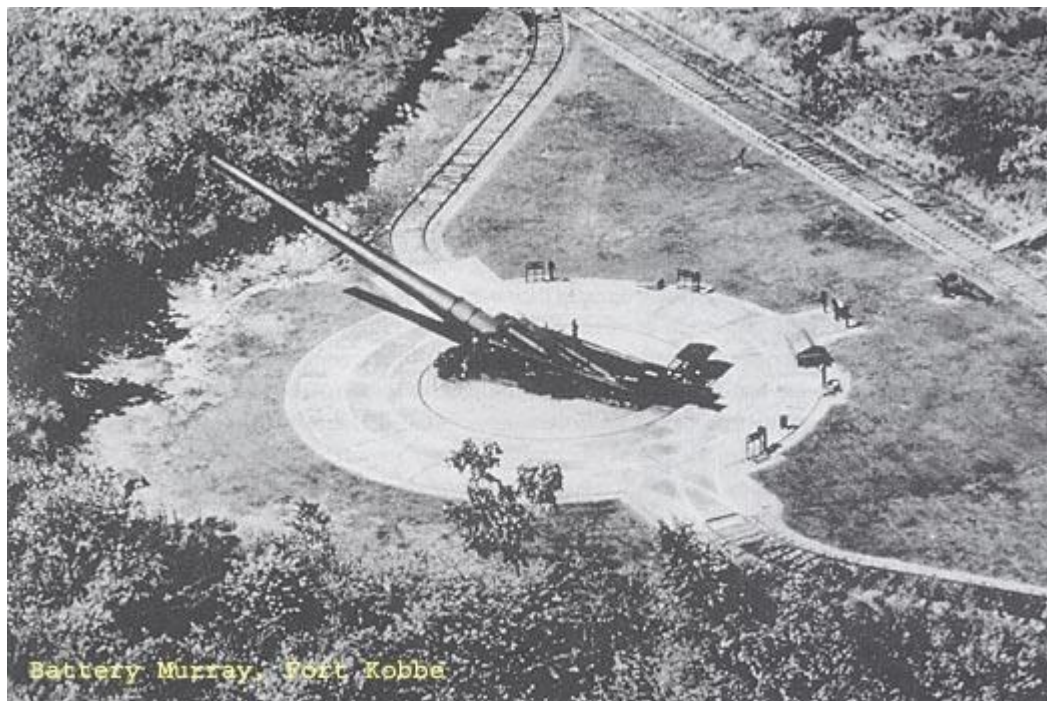
¹² <https://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Photos/photoof945.htm>



Fort Kobbe NCO Club token

THE 16-INCH GUN BATTERIES

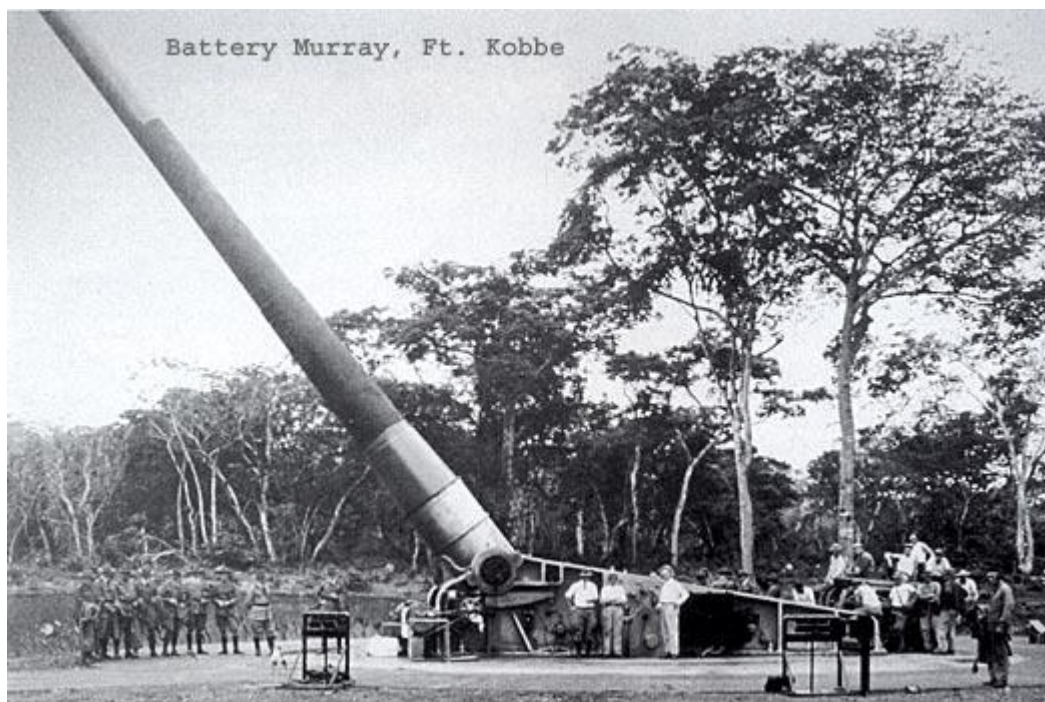
The 16-inch guns were the largest employed in the defences of the Canal, and were present in only three batteries – two of these being at Fort Kobbe. The other battery housed a single example of the older Model 1895 gun and was situated in Fort Grant on the opposite side of the Canal entrance.



The Mark IIMI gun installed at Fort Kobbe weighed 154 tons and had become available following the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, which had led to the cancelling of the battleships for which they were intended as the main armament. The four guns at Fort

Kobbe were among 20 transferred by the US Navy to the Army. They were not as powerful as the Army's own M1919 16-inch gun, but were nevertheless more powerful than the 14-inch (355 mm) guns employed in other forts, or the older 16-inch one at Fort Grant.

They were mounted in a 322-ton long-range barbette carriage¹³ that allowed a 360-degree traverse (until Battery Murray was casemated during World War 2). Having a 45-man gun crew, each could fire a 2,224 lb (1,008 kg) armour-piercing (AP) shell to a maximum range of 45,150 yards (41.3 km).¹⁴



Battery Murray

This was located about two miles (3.2 km) inland of Bruja Point¹⁵. The battery components were dispersed for protection against attackers' fire, with a light railway system used to transport shells for loading.

Due to the long range of its 16-inch guns, the Battery required several fire control stations, ranging from Flamenco Island to Taboga Island.

¹³ A barbette carriage is one on which a gun is mounted to fire over a parapet instead of through it, thus providing some protection for the gun and crew.

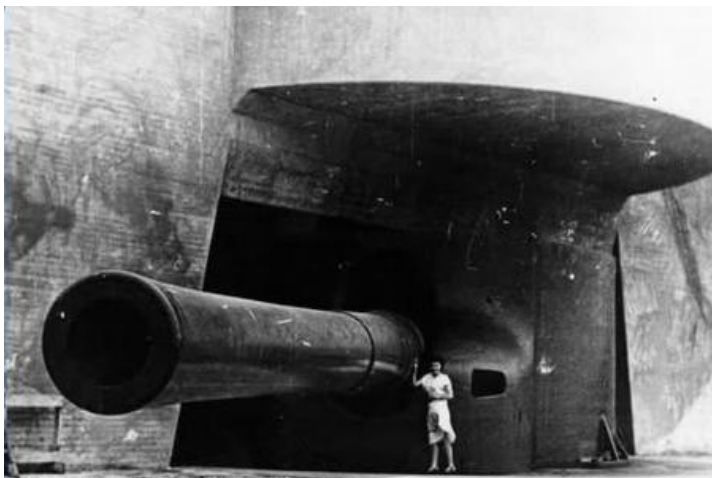
¹⁴ *The American Defences of the Panama Canal* by Terrance McGovern (Nearhos Publications, 1999). In contrast, the Model 1895 gun at Fort Grant, though also a 16-inch gun, had a maximum range of only 22,600 yards (20.6 km).

¹⁵ it can still be visited, just down the road from the former Howard Air Base - now Panama Pacifico International Airport.

Construction began in 1924, and was completed in February 1929 at a cost of \$521,600.

It remained active throughout the 1930s and until March 1942 (although in caretaker status to 1939), when the guns were casemated using steel-reinforced concrete, which severely limited possible traverse to just 140 degrees.

The two guns were removed for scrapping in 1948, with the site retained for storage until US forces withdrew from Kobbe and Howard in 1999.



Battery Murray after being casemated

Battery Haan

This was to the east of Battery Murray and, like that one, and due to the long range of its 16-inch guns, required several distant fire control stations.

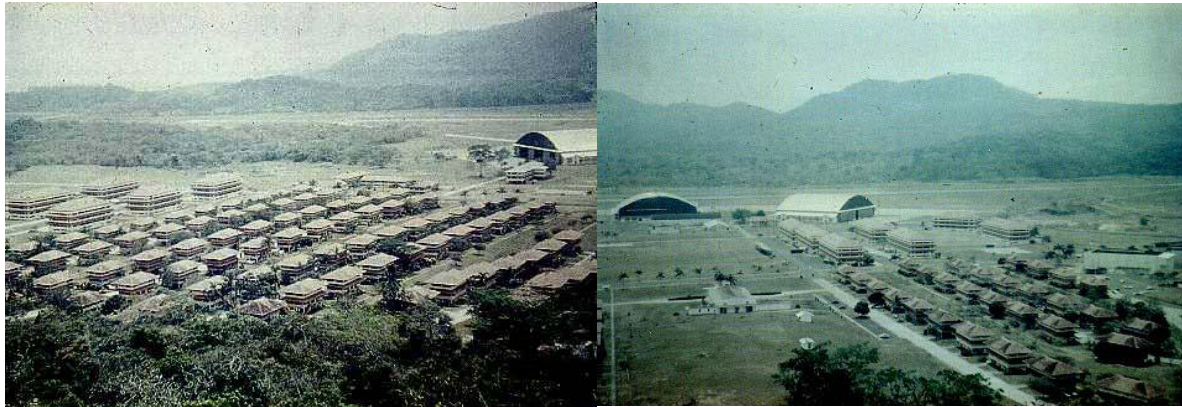
Construction began 1928, and completed in February 1929 at a cost of \$538,041.

It had been intended that it should be casemated like Battery Murray during World War 2, but this was never carried out, although the guns remained active throughout the war.

In 1948, the two guns were removed, with the area used for infantry training and, later, as a radio antenna field, with some of the former battery facilities used by the Army for other purposes until the US forces left Kobbe and Howard in 1999.¹⁶

¹⁶ *The American Defences of the Panama Canal* by Terrance McGovern (Nearhos Publications, 1999).

As part of the considerable expansion and improvement of Canal defences in the final years of peace¹⁷, Fort Kobbe was expanded from 1940, becoming a 3,953 acres (1,599 hectares) site, and from June 1941 it became separate from Fort Amador as part of the independent post that also included Howard Field at the time.¹⁸



In 1942, a practice firing point was established at Venado Beach, near Fort Kobbe, for the 3-inch (76.2 mm) anti-aircraft guns.¹⁹

In October 1943, Fort Kobbe was designated a ground force post, with its commanding officer having control over the entire Military Reservation.²⁰

From 1944, the Coast Artillery Corps units were withdrawn, as the big gun defences of the Canal Zone were run down.

¹⁷ in 1939, in the light of the worsening world situation (and the realisation of the critical condition of US defences in general), a plan was approved that included, in respect of Panama, a commitment to rapidly complete planned defensive installations, improvements to the security of the Canal and an enlargement of its locks (to allow the passage of larger vessels), although the latter element (known as the Third Locks Project) was subsequently dropped. By 31 December 1940, troop numbers in the Panama Canal Department, the US Army command in the Canal Zone, had reached 27,850, up from 13,000 a year earlier, and 21,000 in April 1940. The total cost of defence preparations for World War 2, including the bases in the Caribbean, was approximately \$1.36 billion at then-current prices.

¹⁸ <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022175/00001/pageturner#page/43>

¹⁹ In 1948, the US Navy began bulldozing of the area, to provide topsoil for the lawns of the 15th Naval District grounds. In doing so a pre-Colombian archaeological site was uncovered

²⁰ https://www.kobbekids.com/HTML/history_of_fort_kobbe.htm



KOBBE BEACH

There was a beach in the south-east corner of the fort going into the Pacific Ocean. The beach was protected by a large shark net, as it was understood that the waters in that part of the Pacific were shark-infested. The tidal range was almost 12 feet (3.6 metres), and the beach was not a pristine site. Nevertheless, it was favourite place for bathers, used by US forces personnel and civilian employees from the Canal Zone.

However, the regulations of the US authorities prohibited access to people classified as part of the Silver Roll, meaning that access was limited just to those on the Gold Roll – effectively meaning largely white, US persons.²¹

As noted below, in the 1960s the beach was used to test mines contained nerve gas.

²¹ <https://www.elistmpty.com/2020/04/la-playa-de-kobbe-o-kobbe-beach-club-un.html>

The Gold and Silver Roll system, ostensibly only concerned with wage scales, and only finally abolished after the 1955 Treaty, was a means of applying segregation and discrimination between (in effect) white and non-white, and between US and Panamanian peoples. More subtle discrimination continued long after 1955.



In 2012, the *La Estrella de Panama* newspaper reported on the demise of Kobbe Beach, saying that not even its name remained. The beach was under US control until November 1999 and in 2003 it became part of a hotel complex and changed its name to become Playa Bonita. The article made the point that, after years of restrictions imposed by the US military, free access to the beach should have become possible. However, such access lasted only three years and, in 2003, the then Interoceanic Region Authority (ARI) awarded four lots to a businessman for development as a beach resort.²²

Today, the imposing Westin Playa Bonita occupies part of the site, and is even visible from the Causeway across the bay. Alongside is the Dreams Playa Bonita, a Hyatt beach resort complex.

²² In 2004, the Supreme Court ruled that the award of the lots were null and void, and remained so in 2012. <https://www.laestrella.com.pa/panama/nacional/kobbe-publica-ENLE373711>



Westin Playa
Bonita

THE FORT KOBBE HOSPITAL

By the 1930s, it had been decided that there was a need for independent hospital facilities for the military in the Canal Zone.²³ Therefore, in 1939, the US Congress approved funding for the construction of three Army hospitals at Fort Clayton, Fort Gulick²⁴ and Fort Kobbe.²⁵ These “sector hospitals” were to meet the local military demand as well as the anticipated expansion of “*hospital requirements of the armed forces*” associated with the combat in the Pacific theatre.

In January 1942, the 210th and 218th General Hospitals of the US Army embarked for Panama, to join the Station Hospital there.²⁶ Until the hospital at Fort Clayton Sector Hospital opened in 1943, military personnel had to rely upon the Canal Zone Government for hospital space and treatment.²⁷

²³ The entire US Army Medical Department in June 1939 consisted of only four Medical Regiments (two of which were stationed overseas, one being in the Canal Zone): <https://www.med-dept.com/articles/ww2-military-hospitals-zone-of-interior/>

²⁴ The Fort Gulick Sector Hospital, which had a capacity of 401 beds, was later converted into an educational/training centre (the School of the Americas), and what later became the Fort Gulick Guest House was originally nurses' quarters: <http://bdigital.binal.ac.pa/bdp/an%20american%20legacy4.pdf.pdf>

²⁵ The 201st Army General Hospital at Fort Gulick, was reorganised and redesignated as the 368th Station Hospital on 1 April 1944; and the 218th at Fort Clayton, was reorganised and redesignated as the 333rd Station Hospital on 1 April 1943 (and back to become the 262nd General Hospital on 1 April 1944). The 267th General Hospital was organised at Fort Clayton on 7 February 1947, and the 368th Station hospital at Fort Gullickson on 22 November 1948.

²⁶ <https://www.med-dept.com/articles/ww2-military-hospitals-zone-of-interior/>

²⁷ <http://bdigital.binal.ac.pa/bdp/an%20american%20legacy4.pdf.pdf>

There was to be a 60-bed hospital (which remains, abandoned and empty) at Fort Kobbe. Although ready for use in June 1943, this never functioned as originally intended, but served as a dispensary throughout World War 2.

It can still be visited, although derelict, and a ghost being increasingly taken back by the jungle.



The abandoned hospital at Fort Kobbe in 2023 (my photo)

HOWARD FIELD

Howard Field, which was originally part of Fort Kobbe, expanded dramatically from 1940 in the modernisation program. 10,000 acres (4,047 hectares) of impenetrable vegetation at Howard were transformed into a *“thriving, highly-industrialised city of 5,000 inhabitants”*.

The work was completed in less than a year and it became an independent installation in June 1941. More than 85,000 square yards (71,070 square metres) of concrete were laid by Panamanian labourers in 21 days.²⁸

In 1952, another portion of Fort Kobbe (the Bruja Point Air Base) was officially separated and made part of Howard Field²⁹.

²⁸ <https://media.defense.gov/2015/Apr/02/2001329844/-1/-1/0/AFD-150402-022.pdf>

²⁹ <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022175/00001/pageturner#page/43>

THE STRIKING FORCE

Until 1943, the US Army maintained and trained a long-distance striking force as part of the Caribbean Defense Command based on the Canal Zone. This involved parachute troops and airborne infantry intended for potential use elsewhere in the Central or South America or in the Caribbean, should the need arise.³⁰

The 550th Airborne Infantry Battalion was an independent airborne forces unit, formed at Fort Kobbe - originally as an air landing unit, rather than a parachute or glider landing unit. It was associated with the 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion, that would have normally preceded it in any assault.

In 1943, as threats in the region diminished, the Battalion was redesignated as the 550th Glider Infantry Battalion and departed Panama for Sicily, where it trained in preparation for the invasion of Southern France (Operation *Dragoon*) in 1944, as part of the 1st Airborne Task Force. It was later transferred to England and took part in the Battle of the Bulge in late 1944, before being disbanded in Belgium in March 1945.

Most of the 501st Parachute Infantry Battalion had been stationed in Panama since mid-1941, but moved to the Pacific in late 1942. However, its Charlie Company was detached from the Battalion and stayed in Panama, forming the nucleus of the 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion at Fort Kobbe, with the main element arriving by troopship from the US in early 1943. This nucleus provided a base of experienced officers and NCO for the Battalion, which began its training in the jungles of Panama in January 1943.³¹

The 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion was officially formed at Fort Kobbe in November 1942 (although their parachute training took place at Fort Benning in the US). Its formation and intended use was as part of a plan to land the Striking Force in Vichy-controlled

³⁰ For more on the intended use of the Striking Force, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-in-world-war-2-the-striking-force-martinique-and-gliders-in-the-jungle/>

³¹ https://dothaneagle.com/eufaula-tribune/news/history-of-the-551st-parachute-infantry-and-their-demise-at-the-battle-of-the-bulge/article_03b2b41e-d314-11e8-8776-bb24e86db10f.html

Martinique.³² When no longer required for this operation³³, it was instead moved out in August 1943 and eventually shipped to Europe, where it was badly mauled in fighting in Belgium in January 1945, with survivors being absorbed into the 82nd Airborne Division, before being formally deactivated later that month.



POSTWAR

In August 1946, Howard Field and Fort Kobbe were officially separated, though the former continued as a US Army Air Force (USAAF) base until all air units were withdrawn in 1949 (by which time it had become a US Air Force base, this new, independent force having been established in 1947).³⁴ An arbitrary line gave control of the northern end of the area to Howard Field, and Fort Kobbe (under command of the commanding officer at Fort Amador) was given control of the southern end of the Military Reservation.

³² Martinique was governed by the Vichy Government after the Fall of France in 1940, and was used by German U-boats during the Battle of the Caribbean in 1942. However, Free French forces took over on the island on Bastille Day in July 1943. In May 1943, the 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion had been put on alert at Howard for a possible parachute landing on the island.

³³ The French Admiral in charge of the Vichy forces on Martinique learned of the impending US operation, and promptly fled the island, turning over control to a US Navy Admiral.

³⁴ In fact, the USAF had been formed, replacing the USAAF, in 1948.

As mentioned, the 16-inch guns were removed for scrapping in 1948, with the Coast Artillery Corps itself being disbanded in 1950.



Postwar postcard of the base theatre at Fort Kobbe

Also in 1948, the US Navy began work to remove topsoil from part of the Fort Kobbe military reservation at Venado Beach. In doing so, it uncovered an important pre-Colombian archaeological site, near the river

entrance. This was then excavated by archaeologists in the early 1950s, and was found to be part of the Gran Coclé culture of the region, and the site is notable for its large number and variety of burials and grave goods, especially those with offerings, as well as evidence of human sacrifice. Radiocarbon dating places the principal occupation of this site at AD 200-900.³⁵

The 33rd Infantry Regiment, which had been based in the Canal Zone from 1916 until moved out in 1944, was reactivated at Fort Kobbe in 1950 and assumed responsibility for the whole post, including the US Army's then only Jungle Warfare Training Center, as well as Howard Field.³⁶ The regiment was deactivated and redesignated as the 20th Infantry in May 1956, which was reorganised and redesignated on 15 November 1957 as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battle Group, 20th Infantry, to complete deactivation from this base on the 8th August 1962.

In 1952, a portion of Fort Kobbe (the Bruja Point Air Base) was officially separated and made part of Howard Field.³⁷

³⁵ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-antiquity/article/abs/suicide-sacrifice-and-mutilations-in-burials-at-venado-beach-panama/1121DAE08D02EFA83C14F036D7382D0F>

³⁶ https://www.kobbekids.com/HTML/history_of_fort_kobbe.htm

³⁷ <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022175/00001/pageturner#page/43>

Fort Kobbe continued to house Headquarters and some units of the 193rd Infantry Brigade, the main combat unit of the US Army in Panama, with one of its three infantry battalions and an engineer battalion.

By the 1980s it was a relatively small post, and housed a parachute battalion, an artillery battery, a 6-gun battery with a light reconnaissance and search section, an engineer company, and a helicopter battalion. In 1986, the engineering company expanded and took Fort Kobbe as its headquarters to deploy throughout Central America on humanitarian and infrastructure projects. It played a part in the US invasion in 1989 (see below).

On 31 December 1999, the post was formally decommissioned and turned over to the Government of Panama.

CHEMICAL WARFARE TESTS

In 1962, the US Army established a research and development office in Panama, which in 1964 became the US Army Tropic Test Center.³⁸ It acquired land for its use from both the Army and the Navy, eventually using 55 sites, with all but one in the Canal Zone.³⁹ There were tests during 1964-68, said to involve VX nerve gas mines, rockets and projectiles and sarin-armed rockets. These tests involved seeing how different climates affected materials, and did not necessarily involve use of firing of any weaponry. Among the weapons tested were M23 landmines, which contained the VX nerve agent⁴⁰, with 24 delivered to the Canal Zone in 1964. Some of these mines were exploded on the beach near Fort Kobbe (and the town of Veracruz) – the incoming seawater being relied upon to neutralise the agent.⁴¹

³⁸ During the war, the US Army had conducted extensive chemical warfare tests at San Jose Island, and chemical weapons, such as mustard gas, had been an integral component of the intended defences of the Canal until at least World War 2. For more on chemical weapons use in Panama, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-in-world-war-2-mustard-gas-and-chemical-defences/>

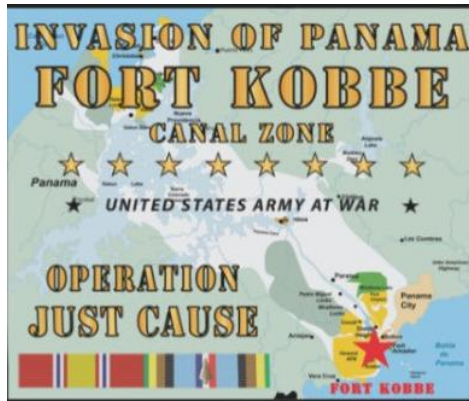
³⁹ The one site that was outside the Canal Zone was the airbase at Rio Hato.

⁴⁰ Five inches high and 13 inches in diameter 12.7 x 33 cm), these contained 10 lb (4.5 kg) of VX – enough for a theoretical half-million lethal doses.

⁴¹ *Emperors in the Jungle: The Hidden History of the U.S. in Panama* by John Lindsay-Poland (Duke University Press, 2003).

OPERATION JUST CAUSE

US forces were still present in the Canal Zone area in December 1989, when President Bush launched Operation *Just Cause*, an invasion designed to topple the regime of the dictator General Manuel Noriega. Howard Air Base was also an important point of arrival for forces deployed from the US during the invasion.



Still at Fort Kobbe was the 1st Battalion (Airborne) of the 508th Infantry Regiment.⁴² During the months leading up to the invasion the took part in numerous operations which were intended to show that US forces were exercising their freedom of movement as defined in the Canal Zone Treaties of 1977 which had

ended the Canal Zone and provided for the eventual handover of the Canal in 1999. These would involve movement by road or helicopter from Fort Kobbe to neutralise Panama Defense Force units based there Amador (and where US dependents still lived in the accommodation of former Fort Amador).⁴³ The 1st Battalion (Airborne) of the 508th Infantry Regiment composed Task force BLACK DEVIL, part of Task Force BAYONET.⁴⁴

Prior to the invasion, and following the failed coup attempt against Noriega in October 1989, while the US did not directly involve itself in the coup, elements of the 1st Battalion moved into Amador to prevent the Panama Defense Force 5th Company from departing to assist Noreiga in Panama City.

During the invasion itself, as it had often planned, the unit moved into Amador, by air and land.⁴⁵ US Navy SEALs also departed by boat from a nearby beach to mount an assault on Paitilla Airport on the other side of Panama City.⁴⁶

⁴² Old street signs at the former Fort Kobbe can (just about) be seen to include airborne symbols.

⁴³ The troops are also said to have practised assaults on Amador. The freedom of movement operations were known as "Sand Flea" operations.

⁴⁴ *The United States 1989 military intervention in Panama: a just cause?* by William Harrison Huff IV of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College (LSU Master's Theses 2884, 2002):

https://repository.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3883&context=gradschool_theses

⁴⁵ <https://reddevilsofpanama.com/operation-just-cause.html>

⁴⁶ https://arsof-history.org/arsof_in_panama/pdf/gen/cmhPub_55-3-1.pdf

HANDOVER TO PANAMA

Fort Kobbe, along with the air base at Howard, reverted to Panama in November 1999.

Large parts of it became an international business park and the mixed-use residential community of Panama Pacifico⁴⁷, and the former garrison area is now the town centre.⁴⁸

Part of the former military reservation now have hotel complexes (beach resorts), while the former Howard Air Base is now the Panama Pacifico International Airport.⁴⁹



US Army bus stop still standing at the former Fort

⁴⁷ <https://www.panamapacifico.com/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.northamericanforts.com/East/cz.html>

See also: https://www.kobbekids.com/HTML/history_of_fort_kobbe.htm

⁴⁹ Old North American military bunkers located in the corners of the Panama Canal for tourist purposes by Eva Lisary González Pinilla (Universidad de Panamá, Departamento de Historia, Panamá): <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1437-106X>

THE PRESENT DAY

The Fort Kobbe/Howard area now includes the Panama Pacifico Special Economic Free Trade Zone. This covered some 1,400 hectares (3,459 acres), with scores of companies including those operating as distribution centres, or in light manufacturing, and back-office and call centre services. There is also housing and other community services.⁵⁰ The airport, which was the former Howard Air Force Base, reopened in 2014 and is known as Panama Pacifico International Airport (BLB), and Wingo Airlines uses it. The James Bond movie, *Quantum of Solace* used the base as a double for an airport in Bolivia.⁵¹



Continuing the name of the former fort, the Fort Kobbe Vaults Panama is a private and secure storage facility located in the Zone.



⁵⁰ <https://www.panamapacifico.com/en/>

⁵¹ <https://coronadoconciiergepanama.com/the-history-of-howard-air-force-base-and-panama-pacifico/>

Battery Murray in 2023 (my photos)



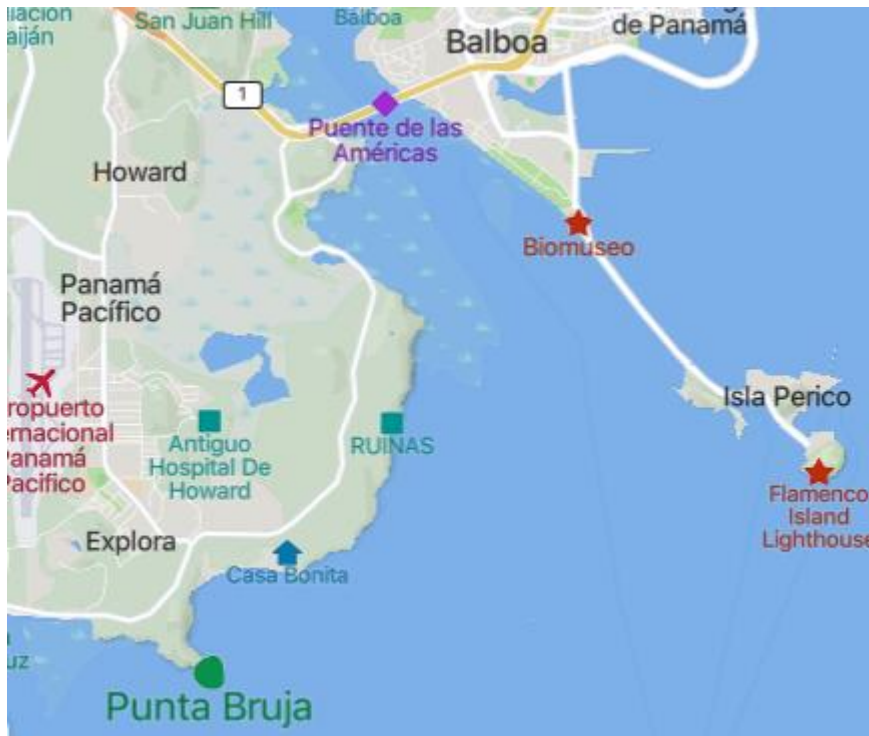
Side view of Battery Murray providing some idea of its size



Abandoned bunker



Abandoned housing



Ray Todd
Panama City
Republic of Panama
6 January 2025



