

Making the Presidio the Finest Army Post in the World

By Lyman Grimes

THE war department has decided to remodel the Presidio throughout, to spend \$5,000,000 in the task, and make the reservation keep pace with the spirit of progress characterizing the new army. Comfortable modern barracks are being erected for the enlisted men. Commodious bungalows and apartment houses are being built for commissioned and noncommissioned officers. Fine wide roads, an electric lighting system, an independent water supply and parade grounds are provided for in the new plans.

Nature has done her part by giving the Presidio a location unsurpassed by any other encampment in the country. One can not compare the flat, sandy, red hot reservations of New Mexico and Arizona, or the checkerboard camps of the east, with the wide range of hill and valley, forest and plain to be found in the Presidio. Bounding ocean and bay, with salt winds blowing directly from the west, the climate is invigorating and never too warm for comfort. But though nature has been thus prodigal, the government in the past has been niggardly. Barracks built in the eighties must accommodate the soldiers of today. Officers' row, picturesque as it is, with its pretty bungalows and flower gardens, provides shabby quarters for officers and their wives. The cottages are small, old fashioned, too near the ground, and consequently damp in winter. For the last decade a prayer has gone east to Washington for relief. Today, from headquarters, comes the answer, that the days of coal oil lamps, of leaky roofs and mildewed walls are over, and the new era is at hand.

By 1915 the Presidio will not only be the finest military reservation in the United States, but also an ornament to San Francisco, and an attraction of the world's fair. Its connection with the exposition will be particularly close, if the site selected be Harbor View. The government has already expended \$2,000,000 on it, and plans to expend \$3,000,000 more. The work is done by the quartermaster's department of the army, with Major George M. K. Williamson in charge, assisted by a civilian corps of engineers and inspectors, of which O. W. Dezen is at the head.

The Presidio lies on the northwest corner of the peninsula, commanding the Pacific ocean, the Golden Gate and San Francisco bay. Needless to say, the name comes from the early Spanish days. It means fort, or military encampment, though today in Spain presidio refers to a convict establishment.

Spain 300 years ago realized the importance of guarding San Francisco bay and ordered a military post to be established there, on the present site of the Presidio. From 1776 to 1800 it was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Pedro de Alborn, captain of the Catalan volunteers. The command consisted of 51 privates, besides a sergeant and four corporals. After 1796 the military force was augmented by a detachment of 25 Catalan volunteers and eight artillerymen. Not less than 20 of the soldiers were usually scattered in the Mission and Pueblo guards, so that before the infantry reinforcement came the Presidio had but a very small force. When parties had to be sent with dispatches against the natives or for supplies, the post was left almost deserted. From the fragmentary company accounts that have been preserved, we learn that the annual appropriations for payroll and contingent fund of San Francisco was a little less than \$10,000 a year. Supplies from Mexico amounted on an average to \$7,000 and supplies from the missions to \$5,000. At the



OFFICERS QUARTERS IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION

INFANTRY TERRACE, PRESIDIO

NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS' QUARTERS, FT. WINFIELD SCOTT



ago. A tourist seeing it for the first time imagines himself in a little South American republic, in Port au Prince rather than in California. It is a disgrace to the government that those old shacks are still there; no wonder foreign visitors are not much impressed with our military institutions. Up to two months ago even the officers' quarters were lighted with oil.

The policy of the war department changed recently. They decided to do away with the small interior posts and concentrate the military forces of the country in large contingents at strategic points. The days of Indian uprisings are over, and the upkeep of the smaller posts is too costly.

Recognizing the Presidio as a strategic point of great importance, the government plans to erect barracks enough to accommodate many additional regiments of foot, of artillery and of horse. Already 13 barracks are built and more will be under way shortly. A large number of officers' quarters have been constructed, and they lie in the form of a letter S, bordering a ravine to the south of the parade ground. They can be seen against the dark background of trees from any part of the Western addition bordering the bay. Like the quarters at Winfield Scott, they are built of reinforced concrete with tile roofs.

It is planned to build the Presidio proper in the form of a square, utilizing the old brick barracks with the addition of two more as a westerly line of the square, and providing additional barracks to the north and east. The east line is planned to come in rear of the present officers' quarters. The axis of the square is to be the new administration buildings with the officers' club and the chapel on either flank. The new officers' quarters will be built on the south line of the square and will probably follow the line into the west cantonment, more familiarly known as Tennessee hollow. These buildings will cost at least \$2,000,000 and can easily be finished by 1915.

It is confidently expected that the government will be generous during the next few years, in justice to the great event of the Panama-Pacific exposition. If the expected money be forthcoming, visitors will see here the finest army post not only in the United States, but in the world. Up to the present time congress has been very generous, \$1,700,000 for actual construction having been already expended.

In addition to the above, a pumping plant has recently been installed on Lobos creek with a capacity of 2,000,000 gallons a day. It is interesting to note that this creek formed the entire water supply of old San Francisco. It is 25.55 feet deep. An immense storage reservoir is planned to supply both the entire Presidio, Fort Mason and the army transports.

A good road system is also planned and is urgently needed. Lately an asphalt road has been built from Lombard street gate to the general hospital. Aside from this the roads are in deplorable condition. It is essential that they be put in good shape, not only to accommodate the heavy traffic in time of peace and provide good traveling for sightseers, but also to provide proper communication in time of war.

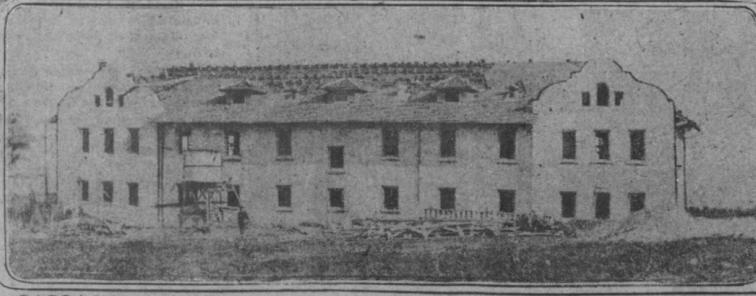
From a military standpoint the greatest drawback to the post has been the lack of proper drill ground. At present a small space a few hundred feet square near the flagstaff hardly suffices for guard mount. A few years ago the marsh at the west end of Harbor View was filled in, but not properly graded. Consequently, today this so-called drill ground is useless, marsh in summer, a lake in winter. For this reason, the Presidio has very little cavalry or light artillery. There should be two squadrons of cavalry and four light batteries of artillery.

A fact not generally known is that the Presidio has the making of the finest parade ground in the world. At present, the entire north side, from Harbor View to Fort Point is a marsh.

Splendid Cottage Quarters for Officers, Barracks for Men and Other Improvements, Costing \$5,000,000, Will Be Completed Before The Big Fair in 1915



COMMANDING OFFICERS' QUARTERS, PRESIDIO



BARRACKS AT FT. WINFIELD SCOTT IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION



OFFICERS' APARTMENT HOUSE COSTING \$20,000 AT FT. WINFIELD SCOTT

end of each year an inventory showed from \$11,000 to \$16,000 worth of goods in the Presidio warehouse.

The subject of Presidio buildings received a large share of attention and correspondence between 1791 and 1800, with but meager results. But on March 4, 1792, Commandante Sal sent the governor a description of a fort to be built accompanied by plans. It was to be built in the form of a square, three sides of which were to be occupied by adobe walls and houses, both of adobe and of rough stones laid in mud. The fourth was protected by a primitive palisade fence. All the structures were roofed with straw and tules, exposed to fire and at the mercy of the winds. Timber had to be brought 30 miles and tules nine miles. So poor was the construction and so slow the building that by the time a building was erected, repairs would have to be made on the previous one. However, the elements won the victory, for soon storm and sand demolished the fort and a new one, Castillo de San Joaquin, was erected on the present site of Fort Point.

The only relic of the Spanish conquest existing today is the small stone magazine near the flagstaff in the Presidio, used by them as a powder house. The sole relic of the Mexican regime

is the present officers' clubhouse, built of adobe, with walls four feet thick. It is in good shape today. Here the officers lounge and the Presidio hopes come off.

All that remains of the early American rule is the old brick fort at the entrance of the bay, Fort Point and the three brick ramparts on the hill above. These were used up to 1859 and then discarded.

The Presidio today consists of 1,500 acres edging the ocean and bay. It is divided into three parts, that on the west, called Fort Winfield Scott; the center, the national cemetery; and on the east, the Presidio proper. On the southern edge lies the marine hospital, and on the bay, situated near the fort, is a small lifesaving station.

The present fortification dates from 1850, while the more modern construction has naturally been built during the last 12 years. In 1850 General Graham started the reforesting of the Presidio, which was later finished by General McDowell. Up to this time shifting sands covered every portion of the Presidio. Eucalyptus seeds were imported at great expense from Australia and the trees set out in parallel rows, so that machine guns could command the space between the rows if necessary. To these two officers we owe the green forest

adorned the reservation. It is a living monument to their work and old officers say that General McDowell would turn over in his grave if he could see some of the cuts that have been made in his beloved forest.

The war department conceived the idea of dividing the two arms of the service in 1905. Consequently, the artillery occupies Fort Winfield Scott, while the infantry and cavalry rest in the Presidio proper. An appropriation of \$1,000,000 was made for the construction of the new artillery post in 1905. Preliminary work was completed when the earthquake and fire of 1906 disturbed the department plans and

forced them to use the money for the relief of San Francisco sufferers.

However, urgent need of providing adequate quarters for the artillery was recognized in Washington, so immediately after the earthquake more money was voted and work started. After much consideration, the plans drawn up by General Murray, Colonel Lundeen, former commander of the post; Colonel Biddle and Major Williamson were adopted and approved by the secretary of war.

The plans for Winfield Scott embrace the construction of 14 one company barracks, one band barracks, administration building, assembly hall, store-

house, guardhouse, etc., and 40 officers' quarters. The post is laid out in the form of a giant horseshoe, with the officers' quarters grouped in a graceful curve following Avenue A. When completed, the cost will approximate \$3,000,000. Five barracks are now completed, and five are under way. The construction is done by San Francisco contractors, who hire union men, and 600 find employment on the buildings.

The officers' quarters and barracks are particularly interesting. They are built in the old mission style, in accordance with the wishes of the merchants' association. The walls are

made of concrete, and are roofed with tiles. Should a Spaniard serving at the Presidio 100 years ago come to life today, he would not be able to place himself, if he did not have the ocean and the bay on his left hand and his right.

It has been estimated that it costs the government \$15,000 to educate an officer and bring him through West Point. In addition, it costs \$7,500 to provide him with a dwelling. This lieutenant is a second lieutenant, and married. These figures are based on the cost of the new apartment houses, each of which contains four apartments, the entire cost being \$36,000. According to army regulations, this lieutenant is allowed two rooms. According to the latest construction, he is provided with a parlor, library, dining room, two bedrooms, two bathrooms, besides a pantry, store and smaller rooms. Besides this, the government furnishes light, water and an entire set of mahogany furniture.

It costs the government about \$1,000 a year to keep a private. He lives in a barracks costing \$36,000, with room for 109 men. The average cost is \$350; quite a difference between \$7,500 on the one hand and \$350 on the other.

The Presidio proper is an old post of frame construction many years

sheltered on the south by sloping hillsides. This could be reclaimed at a cost of \$100,000 by stationing a dredge on the bay, pumping sand in as a filler. The ground available stretches 6,662 feet along the beach and 2,500 feet inland.

Should the park be decided on for the fair, the government will probably construct a boulevard at Thirteenth avenue, connecting with the city boulevard and the Presidio road system. On the other hand, should Harbor View be selected, with the fair situated between Lombard street and the bay, the Presidio on the west and Fort Mason on the east, the new Presidio and the Western Addition hills would form a most beautiful background. The proposed drill grounds could be used for athletic games, parades and maneuvers, while a grandstand, based on the plan of Berkeley's Greek theater, could furnish seats for thousands on the sloping side of the west end. Facing the bay, a marine pavilion and landing stage could readily be erected, while the visiting battleships and the Pacific squadron would find deep water within 500 yards off shore. The government could erect its own exhibition building on its own grounds and after the fair these buildings could be used to the greatest advantage.