

History and Environment of Farallon Heights

Location

Farallon Heights is an 11-acre undeveloped site (parcel number 037-022-070) on the northern edge of Moss Beach, an unincorporated coastal town in San Mateo County, California with a 2010 population of 3,103¹.

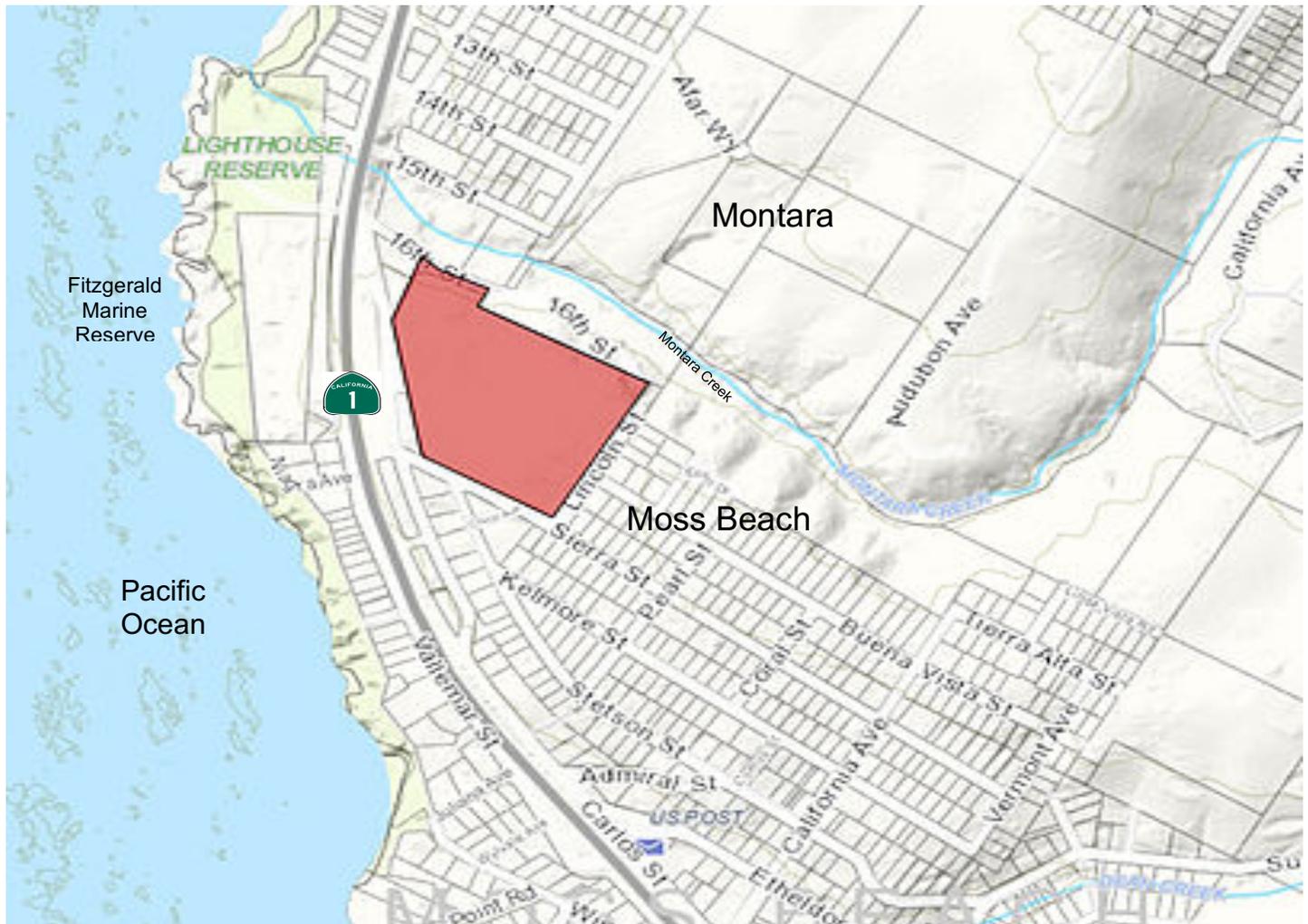


Figure 1. Northern Map Section of Moss Beach, CA, indicating the location of Farallon Heights in red.

The site is bordered by 16th St on the north, Sierra St on the south, Lincoln St on the east and Carlos St on the west (Fig. 1). It comprises a large hilltop area with a maximum elevation of approximately 200 feet at the eastern end, sloping down to approximately 130 feet at the western end. The entire Farallon Heights site has been designated by the California Geological Survey as a landslide zone (see Appendix A). The north side of Farallon Heights has a steep bank, sloping down to an elevation of approximately 100 feet at the site boundary on 16th St. Most of the north slope is a liquefaction and landslide zone. Montara Creek runs through the center of a riparian

¹ 2010 Census (https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk).

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corridor parallel to the site and less than 100 feet away. This creek drains into the federally protected Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, just north of the Point Montara Lighthouse. The Montara Creek riparian corridor is an environmentally sensitive habitat area (ESHA) as defined by Policy 7.7 of the San Mateo County Local Coastal Plan (LCP) and is protected pursuant to Policy 7.11 of those policies from any land use or development which would have a significant adverse impact to the corridor.

Early History

Little is known about Farallon Heights prior to the 19th century. There is recent evidence that it was a midden site used by native Americans², who lived in the area for thousands of years before the Spaniards arrived. The first recorded ownership of the area indicates that it was part of Rancho Corral de Tierra, a Mexican land grant given to Francisco Guerrero y Palomares in 1839. This grant was subsequently honored by the United States and the state of California and recorded in 1860 by the US Survey General. Rancho Corral de Tierra was divided into 4 lots in 1867, with the northernmost lot 4, including today's Montara and Moss Beach, designated as Denniston Rancho by San Mateo County. This rancho was further divided into many numbered parcels which were collectively called Half Moon Bay Colony and these parcels were offered for sale in 1879 by the Guerrero/Denniston family (Fig. 2).

² County of San Mateo Planning and Building Department Staff Report to Planning Commission, dated January 22, 2020 ([https://planning.smcgov.org/sites/planning.smcgov.org/files/events/PC-PLN-2018-0264-MidPen \(Cypress Point PUD\) - complete.pdf](https://planning.smcgov.org/sites/planning.smcgov.org/files/events/PC-PLN-2018-0264-MidPen-Cypress-Point-PUD-complete.pdf)).

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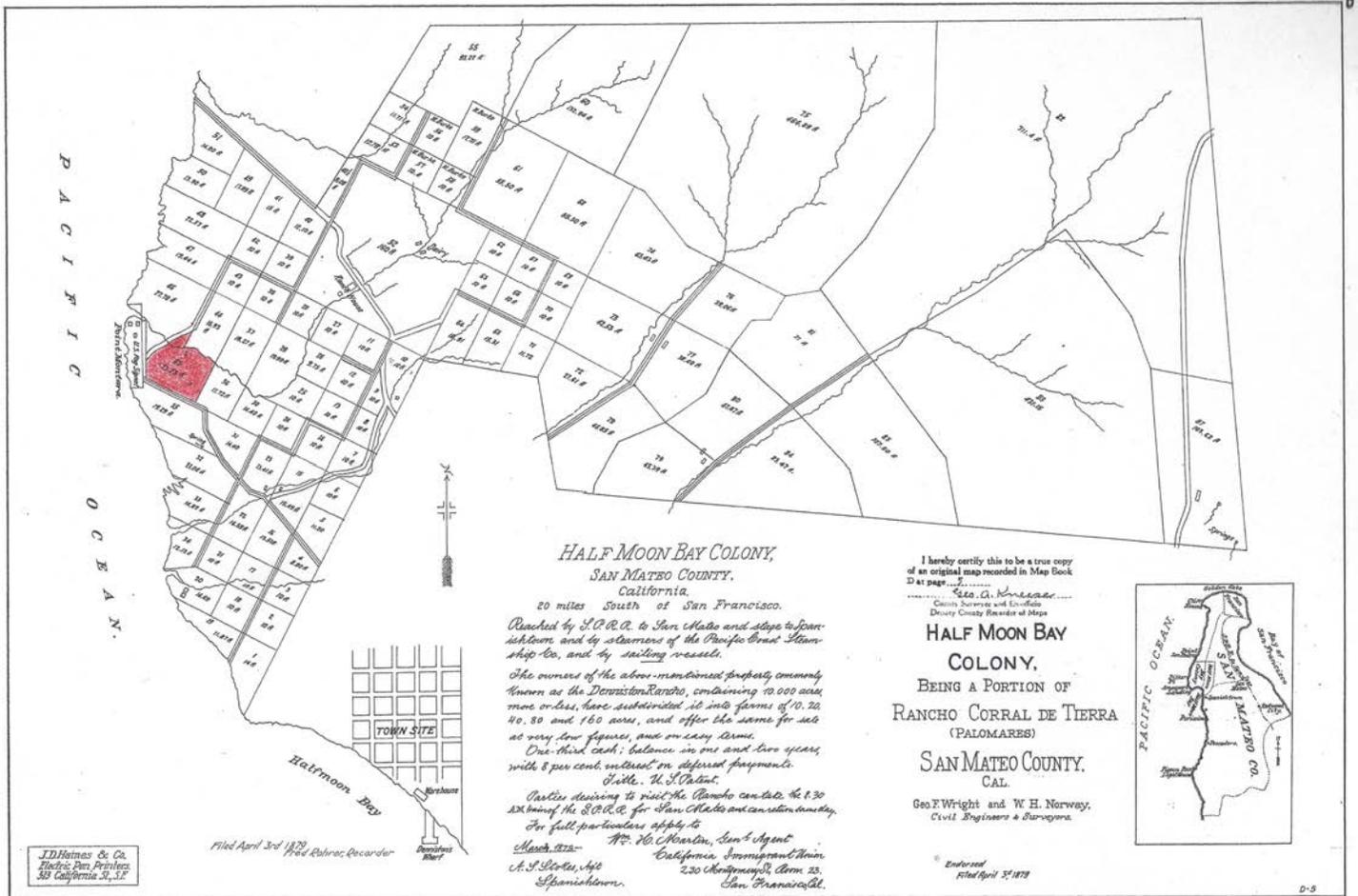


Figure 2. Half Moon Bay Colony, established as a subdivision of Denniston Rancho in 1879, includes today's Montara and Moss Beach. These lots were offered for sale. Note that lot 45 and a portion of lot 46 (shaded) include the Farallon Heights site.

Several lots of Half Moon Bay Colony were purchased by the California Suburban Home Company (CSHC), a land developer in the late 19th century, in anticipation of selling residential property to an influx of visitors brought to the coastside by the promise of a new railroad. Up to that point all coastside land in the area was used almost exclusively for cattle grazing. CSHC further subdivided the property into small residential lots and designated new county streets connecting them. Half Moon Bay Colony lot 45 and a portion of lot 46 (shaded area in Fig. 2) was designated as "Farallon Heights" in 1909 (Fig. 3). Although most of the lots were sold, it is not known if any were ever developed. The close of the Ocean Shore Railroad in 1920 re-isolated the coastside and severely restricted the influx of new residents for many years.

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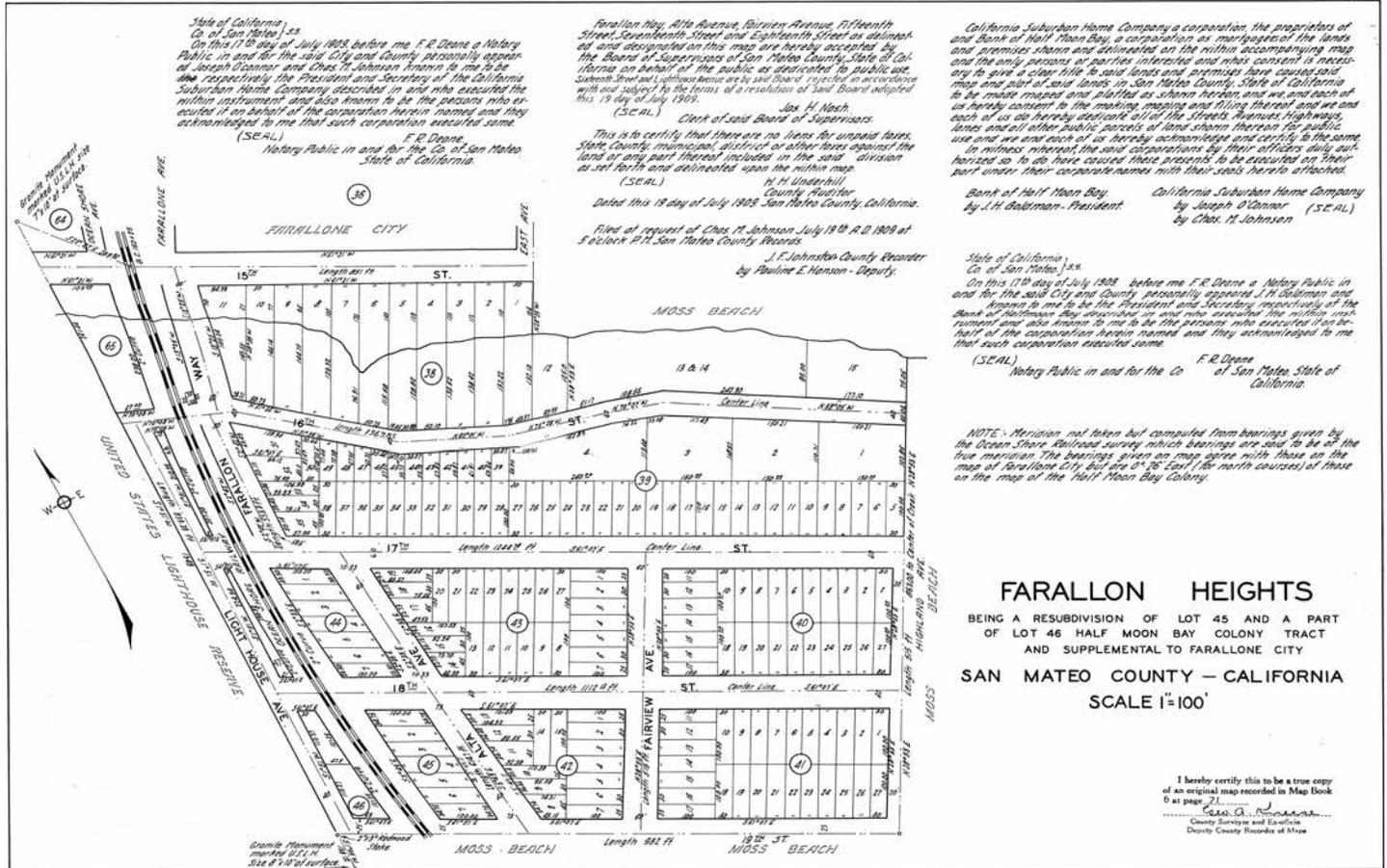


Figure 3. Farallon Heights Subdivision in 1909. Note the presence of the railroad tracks where Hwy 1 is now.

World War II History of Farallon Heights

Shortly after the start of WWII, the U.S. Navy established a top-secret anti-aircraft training center (AATC) on the Point Montara Lighthouse Reserve property, west of Farallon Heights. All of the guns and ammunition magazines were located south of the lighthouse on the bluffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The original site also included a crew barracks and several training and classroom buildings. The Navy subsequently decided to expand the facility and bought the entire Farallon Heights Subdivision through a Declaration of Taking in June, 1943 (Fig. 4).

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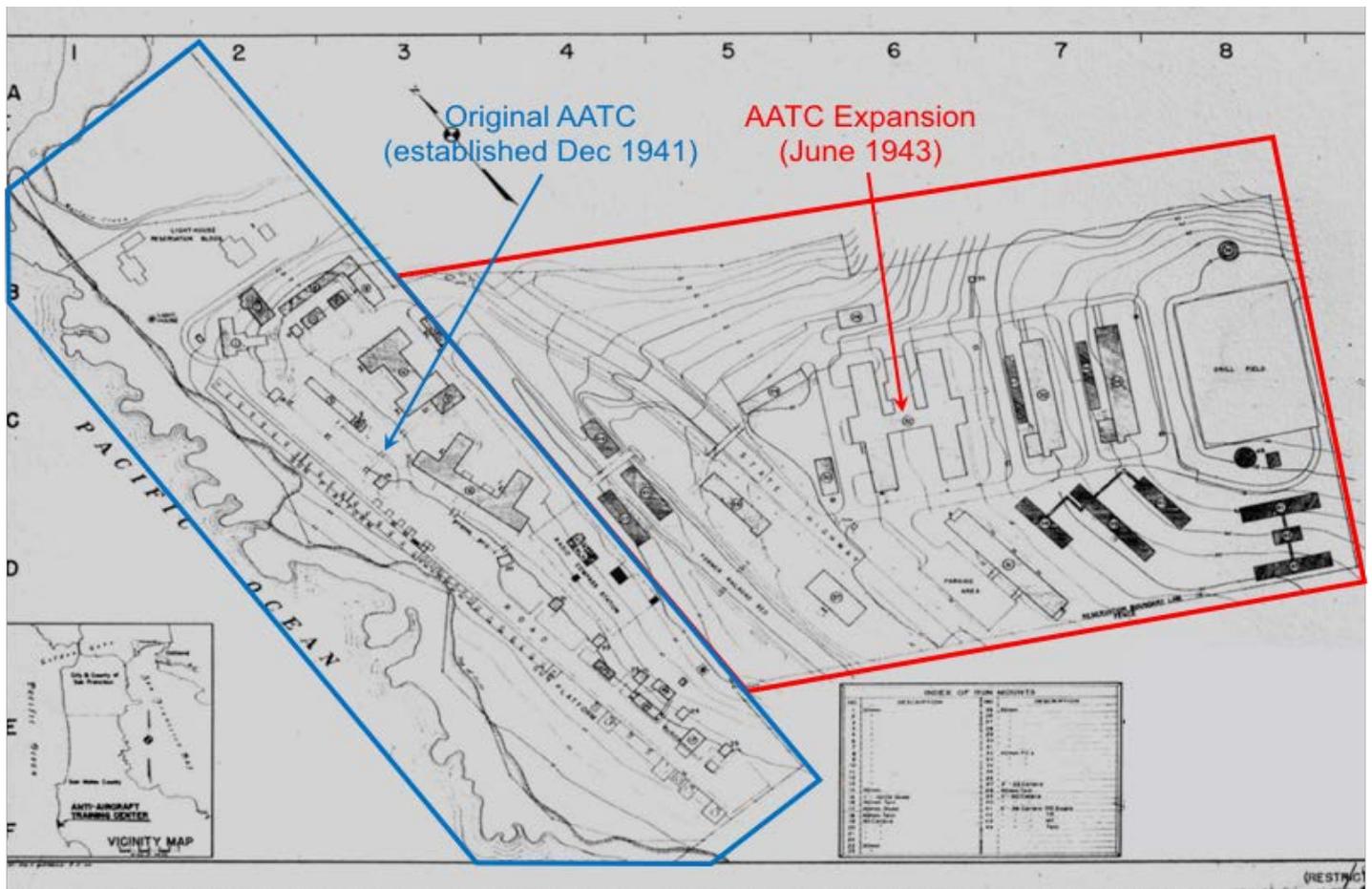


Figure 4. Map of the U.S. Navy Point Montara AATC near the end of WWII. The Farallon Heights area is outlined in red.

The expanded Point Montara AATC housed over 1,500 men and trained over 320,000 men on the then-latest technology in anti-aircraft warfare during WWII. The military buildings on the Farallon Heights site included a boiler room with underground fuel tank, an incinerator, a gas pump and vehicle service area, garage, several barracks and a subsistence building (Figs. 5 and 6). The Navy also built an on-site water system with a 75,000-gallon water tower, a 100,000-gallon storage tank and underground pipes connecting to supply wells at the Half Moon Bay Airport.

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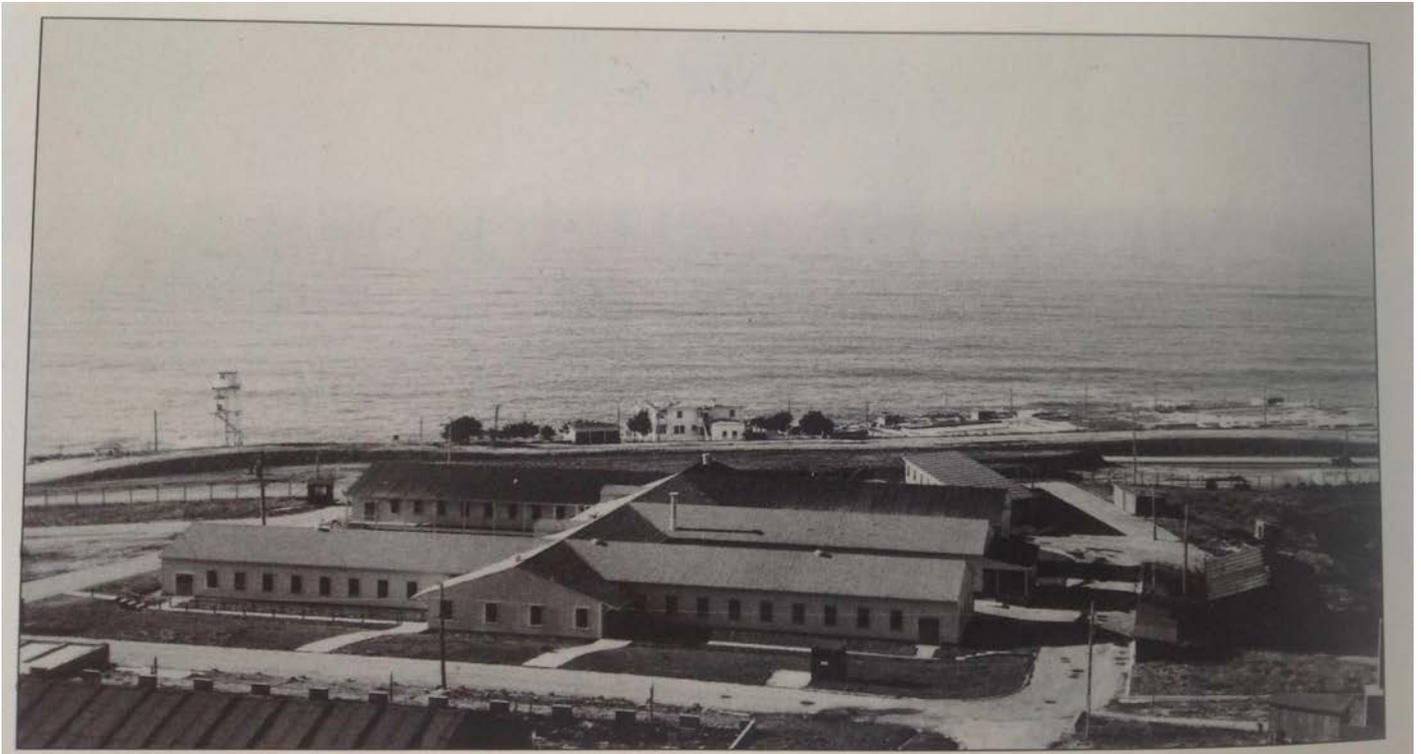


Figure 5. Photograph of the U.S. Navy Point Montara AATC near the end of WWII. View is looking west from the Drill Field on the eastern side of Farallon Heights. The Subsistence Bldg, the largest building on the site, can be seen in the center of the photo.

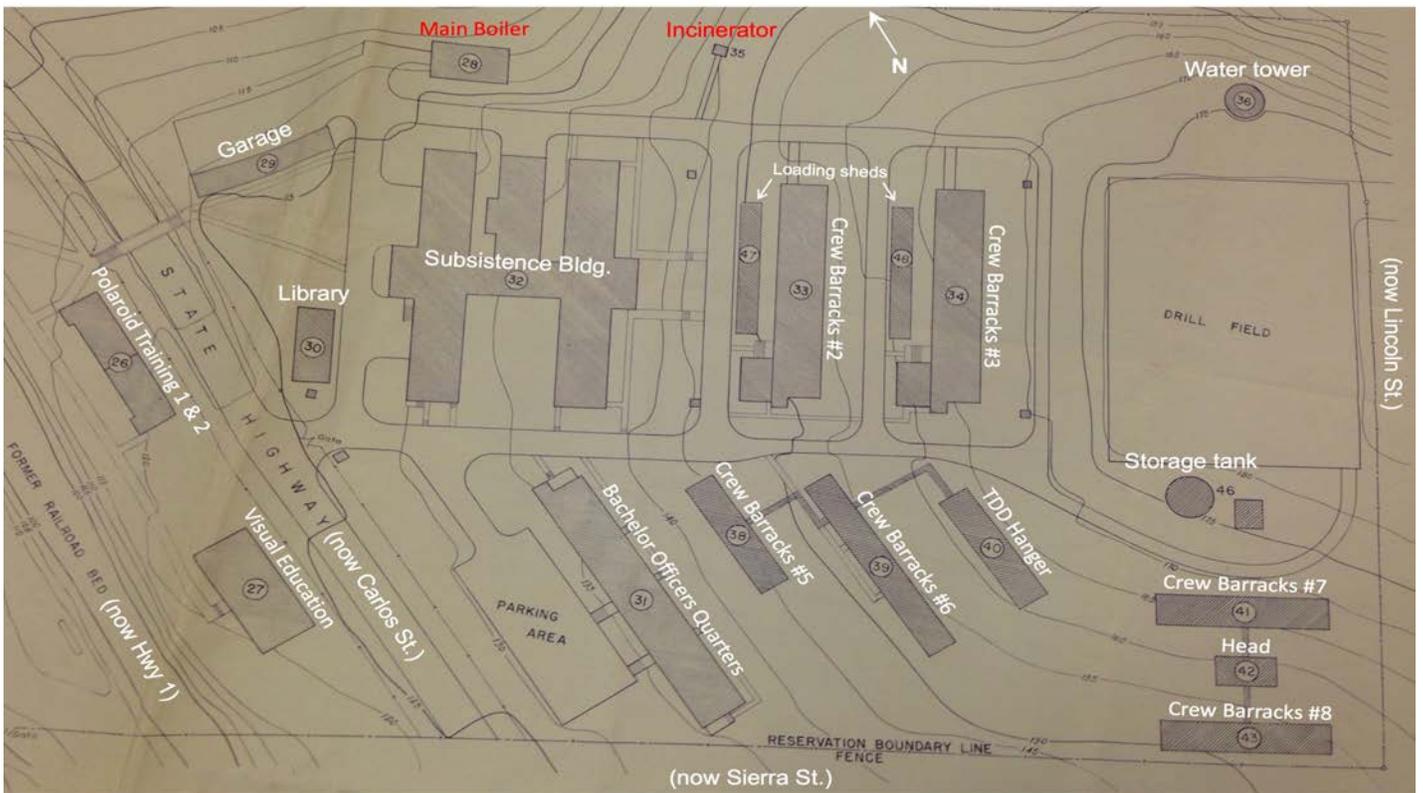


Figure 6. Map of the Farallon Heights Portion of the U.S. Navy Point Montara AATC.

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The Navy abandoned the AATC in the fall of 1946 and the land and all buildings were offered for sale shortly thereafter. The Farallon Heights property, including the incinerator, water system and most of the buildings were sold to the Montara School District in 1948. The remaining buildings on the site were sold for salvage to various other buyers. The boiler room was sold to San Mateo County. It is not known if they removed the underground fuel tank.

Original Site of Farallone View Elementary School

The Montara School District built the first Farallone View Elementary School on the foundation of the Navy's Subsistence building (Fig. 7). The school continued to use the incinerator, but sold the on-site water system to Citizens Utilities Company of California (CUCC) in 1958. The school remained in operation at this site until 1962, whereupon it was closed and moved to Montara.



Figure 7. Farallone View Elementary School circa 1960. Note the Point Montara Lighthouse in the foreground.

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Subsequent History of the Site

The abandoned schoolhouse and remaining buildings burned down shortly after the school closed, leaving the concrete foundations as seen today (Fig. 8). The fate of the incinerator and any ashes or waste contained therein is unknown.

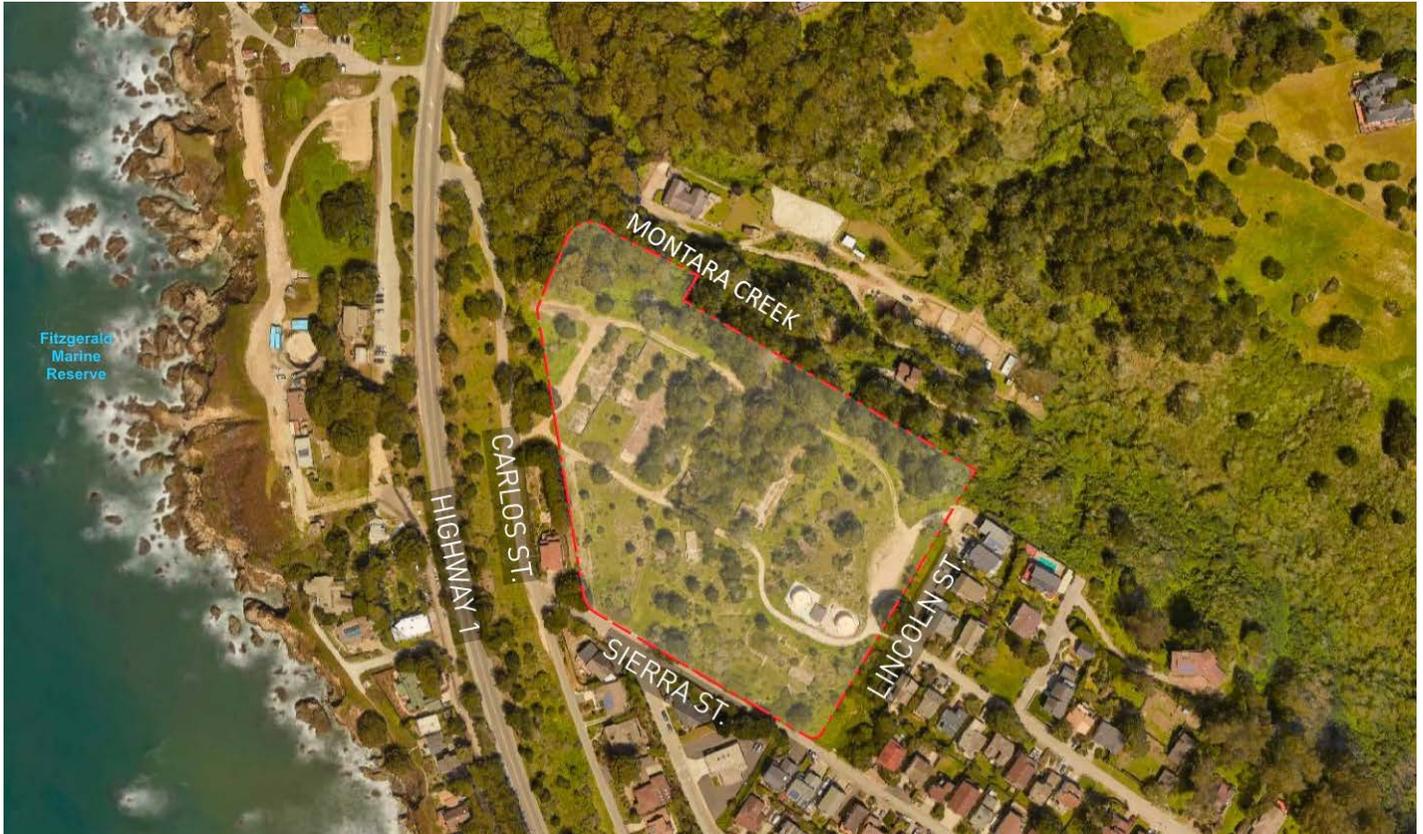


Figure 8. Aerial View of Farallon Heights in Moss Beach, CA (parcel number 037-022-070).

The property changed hands several times from 1964-1969, except for the water system which remained the property of CUCC. The lots and streets were abandoned by the county in 1969 and the California School Employees Association (CSEA) acquired title to the property that same year. CSEA had planned to build a conference center there but later decided not to do so.

In 1985, Farallon Vista Associates proposed a 148-unit housing development on the site. Although approved by the county, the project application was subsequently withdrawn due to a lack of water supply in the area at the time. With the exception of two wells dug by Farallon Vista Associates, which alone were insufficient to meet the proposed project's water demands, no other development occurred on the property at that time. Montara Water and Sanitary District (MWSD) acquired the water system from CUCC in 2003 and built a second 100,000-gallon tank next to the first. The tanks and

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associated pump house are still owned and operated by MWSD and supply water to a portion of Moss Beach.

Although still owned by CSEA and largely neglected since 1985, the Farallon Heights site has been used by the local community as a local park and walking trail. In the early 2000's, local residents constructed a concrete skateboard park for local children near the northwest corner of the site (Fig. 9).



Figure 9. "Moss Beach Ruins", a skateboard park built by local residents in the early 2000's.

This park, dubbed "Moss Beach Ruins", was used for many years until it was demolished by CSEA in 2014³. After demolition, the depression left by the removed

³ "Hidden skate park faces perils of popularity", Half Moon Bay Review, March 27, 2014 (https://www.hmbreview.com/news/hidden-skate-park-faces-perils-of-popularity/article_0007993e-b5fe-11e3-8263-0019bb2963f4.html).

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concrete filled with water following heavy rain events. This body of water remained through most of the winter and spring every year, resembling a wetland area. This area was recently filled in and an earthen dam built in front of it, presumably to dry up the area and prevent it from refilling with water. In addition, the entire Farallon Heights site has unfortunately been increasingly used in the last few years as a dumping ground for garbage, furniture, appliances, diesel fuel, oil, riprap and landfill.

Aside from the water tanks, extensive refuse and makeshift trails, the site is almost completely overgrown with trees, shrubs and grasses of many varieties, consistent with that of other local coastal open spaces (Fig. 8). As such, it is and has been home to a variety of animals, including deer, fox, coyote, rodents, snakes, hawks and other birds. Sightings of endangered species have been reported, although none have been definitively confirmed to date.

Environmental Issues

Given the military history of Farallon Heights, the site's long-subsequent neglect and use as a makeshift dump, it is possible that some level of toxic contamination exists there. The types of toxins that may still be present, based on what is known about the activities and materials used at the Point Montara AATC, relative to similar operations at other military sites and contaminants found there, are as follows:

- Asbestos (also used in construction of the school and still visible on site)
- Metals (lead, mercury, silver, chromium, arsenic, barium)
- Fuel (gas, diesel and residual rated organics)
- Motor oil
- PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls)
- PCE, TCE (polychloroethylene, trichloroethylene)
- Organic solvents (benzene, toluene, xylenes)
- PAHs (polyaromatic hydrocarbons)
- DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane)
- Dioxins (polychlorinated dibenzo para dioxins (PCDDs) and polychlorinated dibenzofurans (PCDFs))

An extensive search of Navy records obtained from the National Archives, as well as by Public Records Act (PRA) request to the Navy and Army Core of Engineers (COE), produced no records to indicate that the Farallon Heights site was ever tested for toxins or cleaned up by the military.

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In 1985, Farallon Vista Associates submitted an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to San Mateo County as part of a housing development proposal that was subsequently withdrawn. Although the prior existence of the Navy AATC on the site was noted in that EIR, there was no mention of the possibility for contamination and no testing or remedial action was done.

In 1989, CUCC contracted Triad Environmental Systems, Inc. to abate asbestos in and around the pump house next to the water storage tank. Following completion of their work, a site inspection by Triad's foreman indicated that "asbestos-containing materials have been detected in other areas of the premises" (see Triad letter to CUCC in Appendix B). Although reported to CUCC, it is not known if any notice was given to the property owner CSEA or if any subsequent asbestos abatement was done elsewhere on the Farallon Heights property.

Land Development Concerns

Our knowledge and regulation of environmental issues have advanced significantly since 1985 and thousands of former and current military bases have been or are in the process of being cleaned up as a result. These cleanups are typically overseen by the Army COE to ensure that they are informed by the type of military activity and potential contaminants at each site and that they are done in accordance with federal EPA regulations. In California, environmental standards and requirements are generally stricter than those of the federal government and environmental evaluations and cleanups are typically overseen by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC).

Any future plans to develop the Farallon Heights site should consider its prior military history relative to its potential for environmental contamination. Recent evidence that the site is an earthquake-induced landslide zone and that the site's north slope is subject to liquefaction⁴ should also be considered as an added risk to the environment. Activities that disrupt the soils on the Farallon Heights site (excavation, clearing, grubbing, grading, landslides, etc.) will likely create exposure pathways to residual contaminants if present. Exposure of such contaminants would lead to their release into the air and run-off into the adjacent Montara Creek. Land development activities done without appropriate abatement would risk pollution of the community's air and water, as well as the waters of the federally-protected Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.

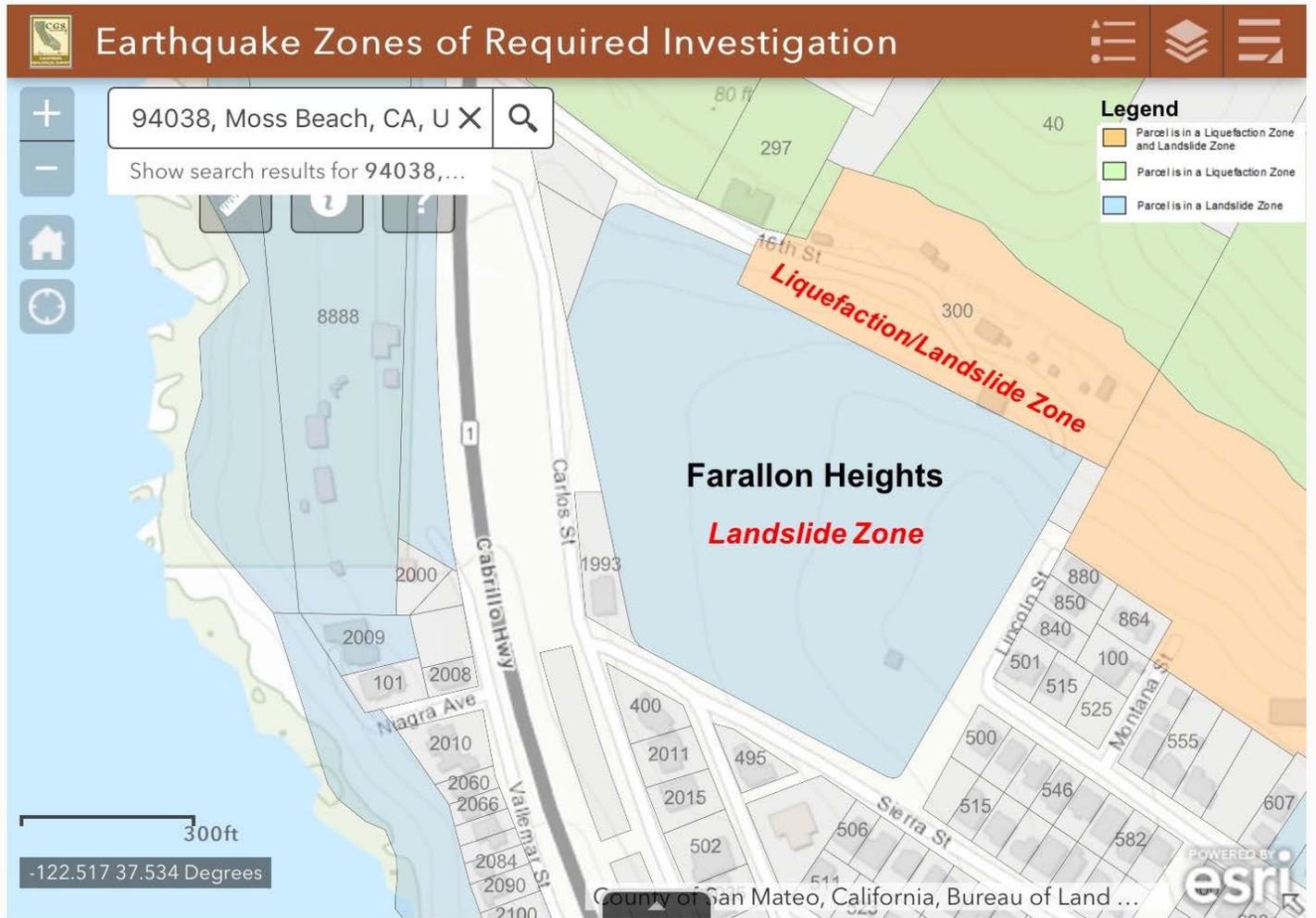
⁴ New earthquake map for San Mateo, Contra Costa counties shows vulnerable areas (<https://www.mercurynews.com/2019/04/05/earthquake-maps-for-san-mateo-contra-costa-counties-show-vulnerable-areas/>).

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Therefore, prior to any development of Farallon Heights, a new and thorough environmental assessment should be done which takes into account that this land was a formerly used defense (FUD) site and may be contaminated. Determination of potential contaminants, development of test locations and protocols, review of test results and recommended remedial actions should be overseen by the California DTSC, in order to assure that environmental and human health is protected.

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Appendix A. 2019 Earthquake Zone map of Farallon Heights. (Source: San Jose Mercury News, "New earthquake map for San Mateo, Contra Costa counties shows vulnerable areas", April 5, 2019. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2019/04/05/earthquake-maps-for-san-mateo-contra-costa-counties-show-vulnerable-areas/>)



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Appendix B. 1989 Letter from Triad to Citizens Utilities Company.



TRIAD

ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS, INC.

Lic. #521717

November 1, 1989.

Mr. Jim Bentley
CITIZEN'S UTILITIES
600 San Lorenzo Avenue
Felton, CA 95018

Dear Mr. Bentley,

Thank you for the opportunity to serve your recent asbestos abatement needs at the Citizen's Utilities property at 8485 Cabrillo Highway, Montara, California.

We have completed the work contracted, but our foreman indicated that asbestos-containing materials have been detected in other areas of the premises. Therefore, we feel it is our responsibility to make you aware of this situation.

If you should have any other questions, or require any further information, please do not hesitate to call the number below.

Sincerely,

Olivia Kim Phung
President

OKP/ld

RECEIVED

NOV 06 1989

CITIZENS UTILITIES COMPANY
FELTON, CALIFORNIA

2739 Alhambra Avenue Martinez, CA 94553 (415) 370-9470 (800) 634-7632 FAX (415) 370-7117