Advanced Redoubt

National Seashore
Florida, Mississippi

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The US Army Corps of Engineers designed and built Advanced Redoubt of Fort Barrancas between 1845-1870. Its construction followed that of forts Pickens, McRee, and Barrancas. The fort's location and size downplay its importance. With Advanced Redoubt, the United States established complete control of Pensacola Bay and ensured the safety of the Pensacola Navy Yard.

Protecting a Navy Yard

Pensacola's deep harbor provided the perfect haven for sheltering the world's largest fleets of ships. The US Navy established the Pensacola Navy Yard and Depot in 1825 to construct ships and supply forces in the Gulf of Mexico. Without the navy yard, warships in the area could not operate successfully.

Congress thought Pensacola Bay important for protecting American interests in the southern regions of the country. The navy yard supported ships as they patrolled the entire Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean. Ships returned to the navy yard for supplies, training, and repair. As the navy yard grew, so did the number of employees. Two villages, Warrington and Woolsey, sprung up nearby to provide homes for workers and their families. Pensacola Navy Yard became a crucial military base, which in turn required protection. Army engineers designed four brick-and-mortar forts to protect the navy yard and harbor.

Tradition & Technology

Pensacola Bay has one entry point. Without fortifications the navy yard was vulnerable to attack. Previous battles for control of the region illustrated the strengths and weaknesses of the geography, leading to the construction of one of the most unique forts in the country. Of the United States' 42 Third System forts, Advanced Redoubt of Fort Barrancas is the only seacoast defense with no access to the sea. A redoubt is a small enclosed stronghold protecting a strategic point, and Advanced Redoubt's placement here helped defend the navy yard. With water on three sides, land based attacks could only come from the west.

Colonel Joseph G. Totten, working with Major William H. Chase to oversee construction, designed Advanced Redoubt to hold 16 cannon and space for over 100 soldiers. It also saw wider use of concrete. While concrete was not new, Totten encouraged its use because concrete was cheaper and just as strong as brick. Today, Advanced Redoubt is largely unchanged from its construction. It still stands as a testament to the legacy of coastal defence in the United States.

Preserving the Past

The Army Corps of Engineers stopped working on Advanced Redoubt in 1870. The time of brick-and-mortar forts had passed. As a result, the US abandoned the structure as a defensive fortification. It sat "closed to all but beast and fowl" for over 100 years, except for a brief Works Progress Administration restoration attempt in the 1930s. With the formation of Gulf Islands National Seashore in 1971, Advanced Redoubt came under the care of the National Park Service. It took over half a million dollars to stabilize this structure, remove damaging vegetation, and repair brick. Using the original formula of white lime, white cement, and sand, preservationists repointed the bricks where the old mortar had failed. Advanced Redoubt opened to the public on October 30, 1976 as a prime example of an unaltered coastal defense fortification. Preservation is still ongoing. The National Park Service works to ensure important structures like Advanced Redoubt remain standing. You are helping preserve the past by learning about and sharing the stories from your national parks.

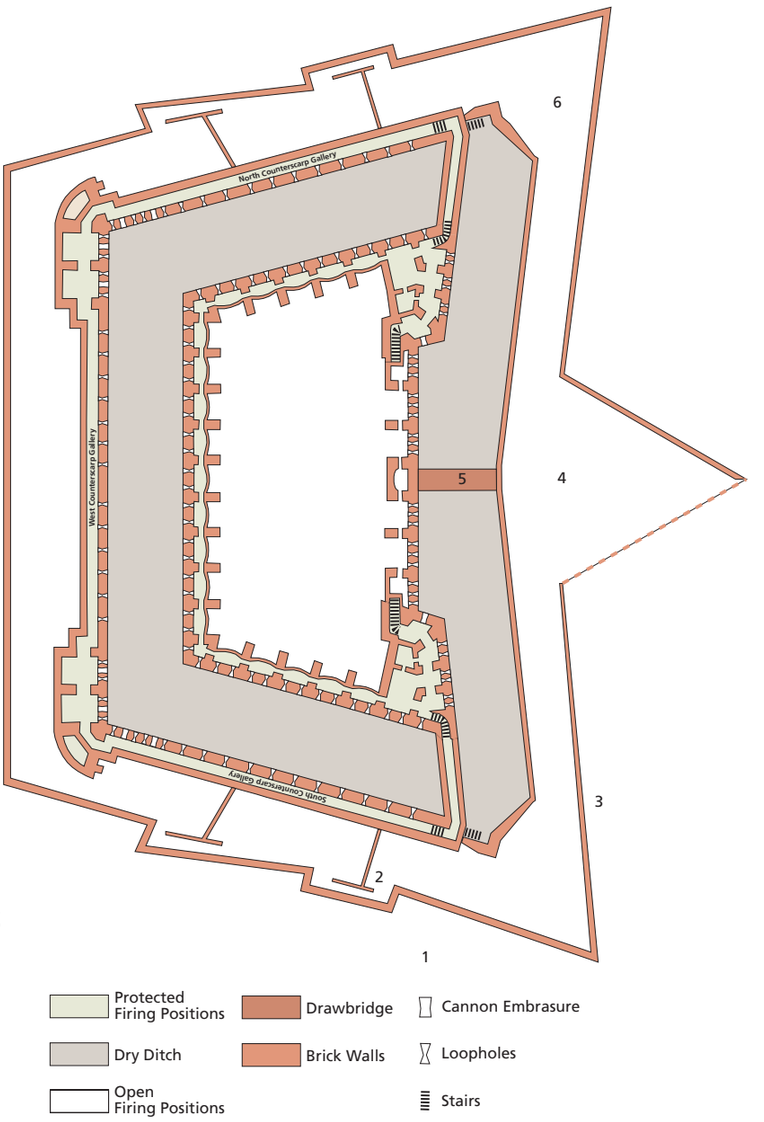
Guide to the Advanced Redoubt

Walk around the Advanced Redoubt to learn about the outer works of this fort. Do not move bricks. Help preserve your fort by practicing "Leave No Trace" principles.

Stop by the Fort Barrancas Visitor Center to learn about guided opportunities to see inside the Advanced Redoubt.

1. You are on an open slope called the glacis. As an attacker, you are exposed to cannon and musket fire from the main wall (scarp) as well as musket fire from the top of the outer wall (counterscarp). The solution is to dig a series of trenches to provide cover. The trenches must be big enough for cannon and infantry to advance.

2. As a rush of infantry from the trenches overwhelms the counterscarp, defenders would fall back to these traverses. Defenders are still protected while the attackers are now exposed. The two traverses allow the defense to fall back gradually while offering stubborn resistance.



3. At the end of the dry ditch are two windows that have been sealed with red brick. These are embrasures for cannon called flank howitzers. Cannon sized buckshot, called canister, fired down the ditch. Notice the loopholes (vertical windows in the wall) on either side. Infantry fired muskets through these loopholes while remaining protected by the wall. Anyone in the ditch would be caught in a deadly crossfire of lead bullets while facing a hail of canister from the howitzers. The brick-lined gutter is the cunette, for drainage.

4. If the enemy reaches the back of the fort (the gorge), additional musket fire came from the galleries on top of the demibastions on either side. The pitting you see today resulted from target practice by soldiers in the 1930s and 1940s.

5. Defenders raised the drawbridge when under attack to make it more difficult for attackers to enter the fort. On either side are more embrasures for howitzers, both on top and within the demibastions. Here is the deadliest crossfire of all.

6. This fort could only be taken by means of a siege, or a military operation to surround and defeat an enemy. Weeks of trenching could bring cannon up to point-blank range to pound the walls with solid shot. Debris from the collapsing walls might fill the moat and give access to the fort's interior. A siege took a tremendous amount of time, equipment, and casualties. It might be broken at any time if reinforcements arrived at Advanced Redoubt.