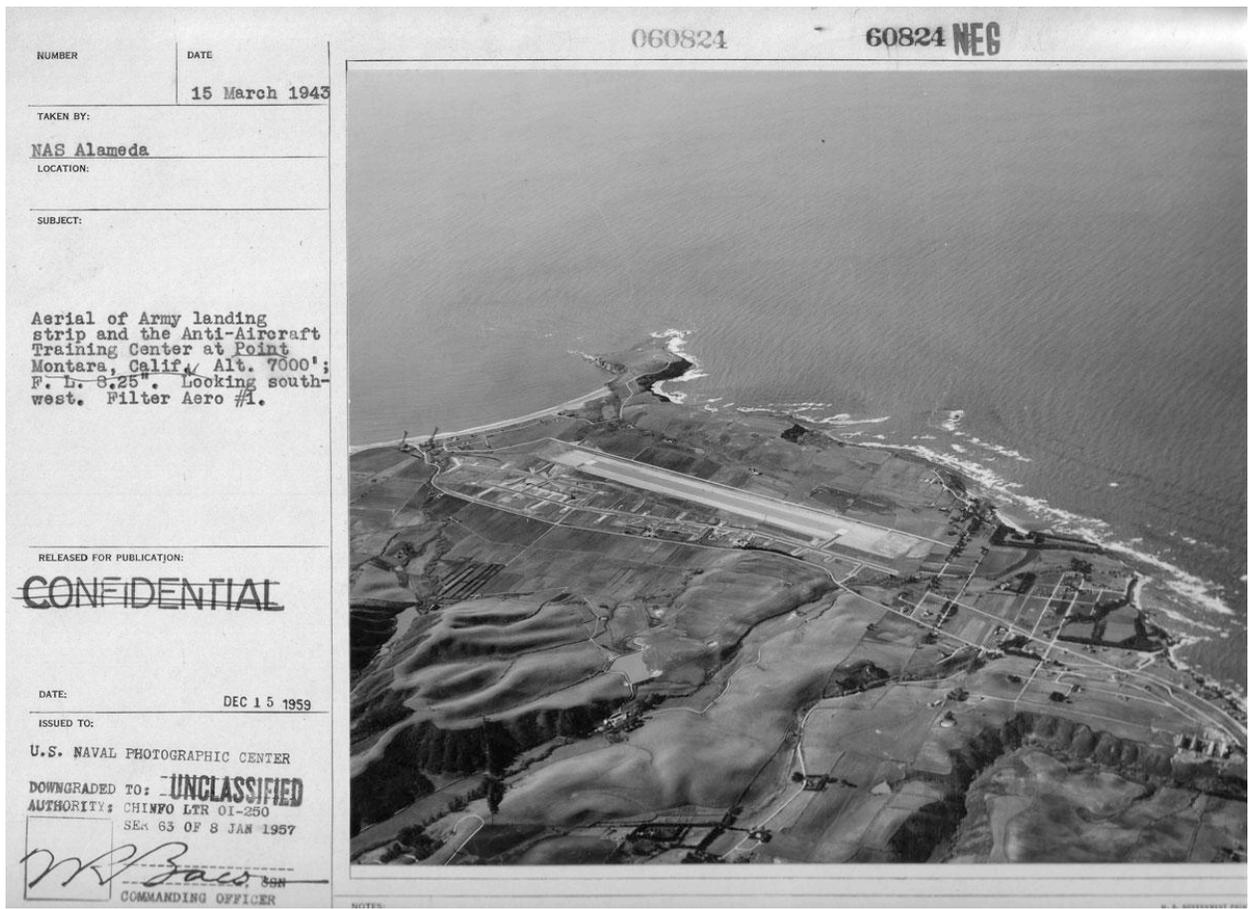




Sensible planning and protection for the San Mateo County Midcoast

# Point Montara History

During WWII, the U.S. Navy operated a top-secret Anti-Aircraft Training Center at Point Montara. They trained over 320,000 men to use anti-aircraft weapons at this facility from 1942-1945. Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), some of the very first female military pilots, towed targets and also flew "mother ships" that radio-controlled target planes over the ocean, allowing men to practice shooting at them with various anti-aircraft weapons. Smaller (model-sized) radio-controlled drones, newly introduced to the military during WWII, were also used as targets later in the war.



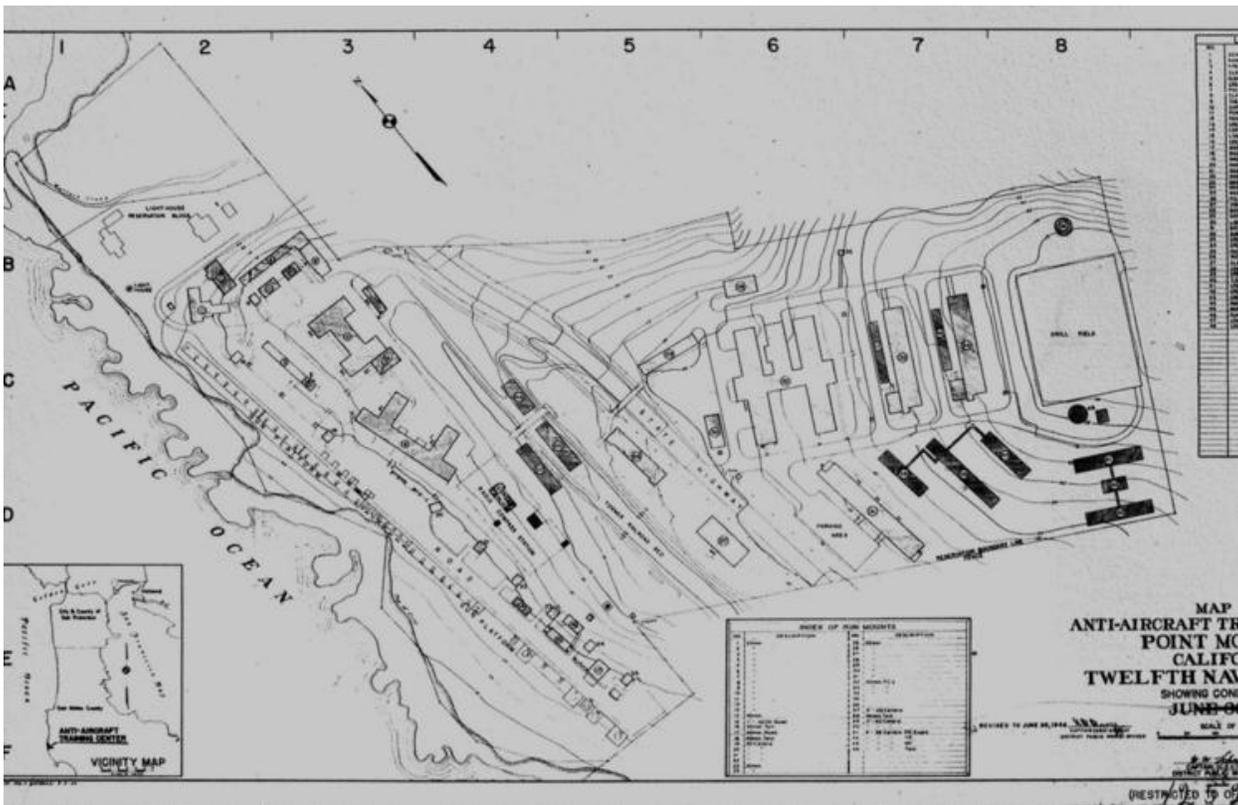
Point Montara buildings are in the lower right in the image above. Photo credit to MilitaryMuseum.org.

The training center was a large complex with 48 permanent structures, housing over 1,500 men during WWII. It was located next to the Montara Lighthouse, extending south to include today's



*Sensible planning and protection  
for the San Mateo County Midcoast*

Montara Water and Sanitary District (MWSD) and extending east to include Farallone Heights in Moss Beach. The complex included 44 gun mounts, ammunition bunkers, a drone hanger, barracks, a large subsistence building, classrooms, a theater, a library, a parade ground, and various other structures.



Point Montara Anti-aircraft Training Center map from 1945.

Eighteen structures were on Farallone Heights, currently bordered by 16th Street, Carlos Street, Sierra Street and Lincoln Street in Moss Beach. These structures included most of the barracks, a drone hanger and a large subsistence building. Although abandoned by the Navy soon after the war, most of the foundations of the Farallone Heights buildings are still evident today, as is a large drill field beginning at the northwest end of Buena Vista Street and bordering the west side of Lincoln Street.



*Sensible planning and protection  
for the San Mateo County Midcoast*

Sailors and Merchant Marines gained practical experience using anti-aircraft guns at Point Montara. Anti-aircraft drills were conducted with live ammunition, using the latest advancements in anti-aircraft weapons technology. These guns and targeting systems were mounted on the bluffs of today's MWSD property, just south of the Montara Lighthouse. In addition to the gun mounts, twenty-five of the facility's structures were located there and some of them or their foundations are still present today.



Point Montara Subsistence Building and other buildings on Farallone Heights during WWII.



*Sensible planning and protection  
for the San Mateo County Midcoast*



Gun mounts at Point Montara on the bluffs just south of the Lighthouse during WWII.

“In 1942, the U.S. Army Air Forces desperately needed pilots for the two-front war that no one was sure they could win. They ...also needed pilots to fly planes from factories to training centers and points of embarkation on each coast. Desperate for women to fly, the AAF decided to bring them in as civilians, just as they did some men, and work out the bureaucratic details later. ... But their semi-civilian, semi-military status wasn't working. The women were stuck between the two worlds. They had to buy their own insurance. If they were injured, they were sent home to care for themselves with no help from the government. ... And yet while serving, the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) were treated as officers wearing uniforms. ...They did the same work as male AAF pilots serving stateside, with safer flying records and faster aircraft deliveries than the men.” Source: The Atlantic.

For training at Point Montara, WASP flew modified A-24 dive bombers to tow target sleeves and UC-78 “mother ships” to radio-control PQ14 target planes from what is now Half Moon Bay Airport. A-



*Sensible planning and protection  
for the San Mateo County Midcoast*

24s were by then considered obsolete as dive bombers, but had the power and maneuverability to tow heavy target sleeves. Tiny PQ-14s were just big enough to allow a pilot to fly them manually for ferrying to different locations, but they were controlled by radio as drones for target practice. To control them, one WASP would fly a mother ship directly above the PQ14, while a second WASP would pilot the PQ-14 remotely at an on-board flight station, utilizing a top-secret television camera and monitor. Towing targets or flying close to radio-controlled target planes was pretty dangerous, as there were accounts of gunfire hitting the target tug or mother ship. Such accounts even included a few men firing at the planes purposely out of boredom or mischief. In any case, “women flying military planes was groundbreaking.” Source: Moss Beach by June Morrall.



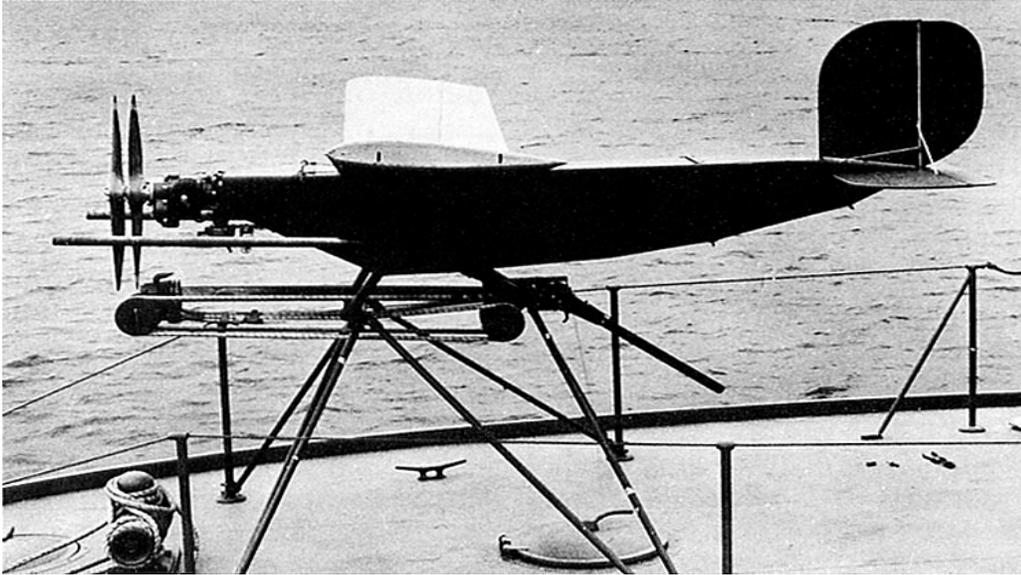
Women Aircraft Service Pilots (WASP) who flew target-towing and target-controlling planes at Point Montara.

Our country was slow to recognize the bravery and sacrifice of these pioneering female pilots, who served at Point Montara and other locations, risking their lives to train our servicemen and ultimately enabling us to win the war. Finally recognized as veterans in 1977, the WASP were subsequently awarded the WW II Victory Medal in 1984 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 2009. Source: Wikipedia.

In addition to PQ-14 drones, the Navy also employed the very first radio-controlled “model” drones as targets later in the war. They were named “Target Drone Dennys”, or TDDs, after actor Reginald Denny, who owned the Radioplane Company that supplied over 15,000 drones of various models to the Army and Navy during WWII. The 8-foot long TDD was a simple aircraft, launched by catapult and recovered by parachute should it survive target practice.



*Sensible planning and protection  
for the San Mateo County Midcoast*



TDD-1 with shock cord launcher. Source: Hargrave: The Pioneers: Aviation and Aeromodelling.

The Point Montara Anti-aircraft Training Center featured the latest in top-secret anti-aircraft weapons technology and was progressive in its use of female pilots and drone aircraft. This facility undoubtedly contributed significantly to the war effort and is an important part of our national and California coastside history.

Resist Density is advocating for the land at Farallone Heights to be preserved as a community park to protect our local coastal environment and to honor those women and men who served at Point Montara over 70 years ago.