

Field Guide to Coronado History:

Guns of Star Park-II

By Bruce Linder

Not only is there a machine-gun-looking Mitrailuse gun of French or Belgian manufacture in Star Park but there is a plain, very-old-looking cannon there as well.

A small signage plate attached to the cannon indicates that it was a June, 1924 donation from Major General Joseph H. Pendleton. The cannon had come from the fortifications of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and had been captured by United States Marines in 1916. This brass muzzle-loading gun had been originally manufactured in 1851.

The American occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1916 was one of several Latin America incursions undertaken by American forces during this era. In this case, a military coup had toppled the national government and American naval and Marine forces were sent to restore order.

Pendleton, at the time, held command of the Fourth Regiment of Marines stationed at North Island when he received orders to head to the Dominican Republic. Ultimately, Pendleton assumed command of all Marines in-country and, for a time served, as Military Governor in Santo Domingo.

A mystery, though, still lurks with these guns, one that CHA is still researching – and anyone who may know more about these histories should let us know at Archivist@coronadohistory.org.

General Pendleton formally retired from the Marine Corps in June 1924. That was also the date that the Coronado Board of Trustees (an early form of today's City Council) accepted Pendleton's gift of the Santo Domingo brass cannon. But in reporting on the Board's proceedings, the Coronado Journal wrote that: "The matter of placing (the cannon) was discussed (at the Board of Trustees meeting), and

the suggestion of the city manager that it be placed in the East Plaza (Spreckels Park) directly opposite the Public Library, where it can be seen from Orange Avenue, was accepted ... It was also decided to provide a bronze plate containing the history of the piece and also one to place on the gun now in Star Park.”

So seemingly, the donation of the “Grapeshooter” Mitrailluse gun occurred before General Pendleton’s retirement in 1924. It may still have come from General Pendleton but it would have been when he was on active duty, which would have raised complications or questions.

Ultimately, as we all know, the Santo Domingo cannon was not placed in Spreckels Park but made it’s way to Star Park. A fuzzy picture of Star Park taken in the mid-1930s and held by CHA does appear to show the cannon there.

We already know that the brass plate on the Mitrailluse gun is wrong – it is almost certainly French and not Belgian and its manufacture was probably fifteen or more years later than what is indicated. Now, there may also be some uncertainty on when and how that gun came into the city’s possession. Remember, let us know if anyone may have further information on this mystery and quandary.

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