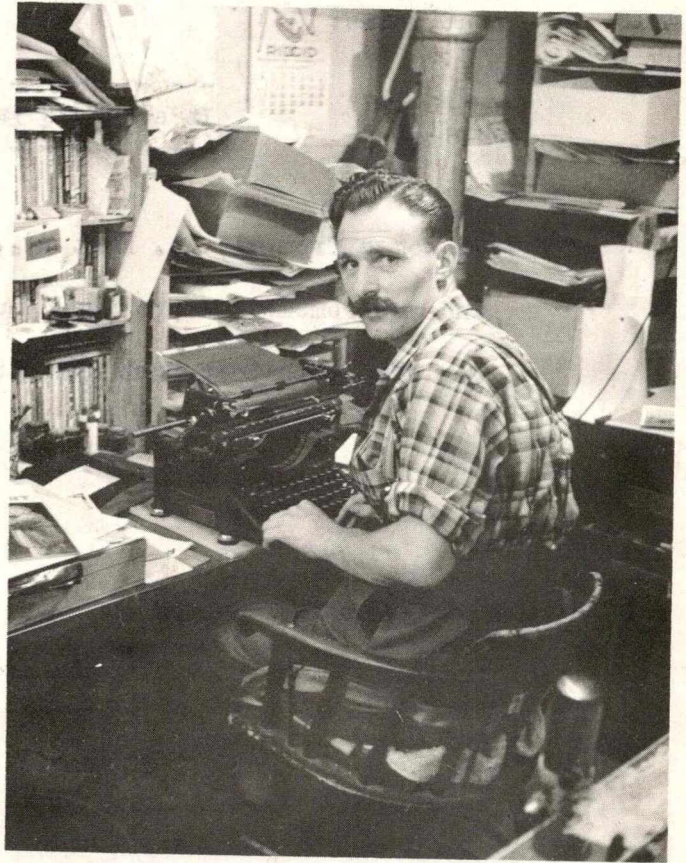


# SPY RAY



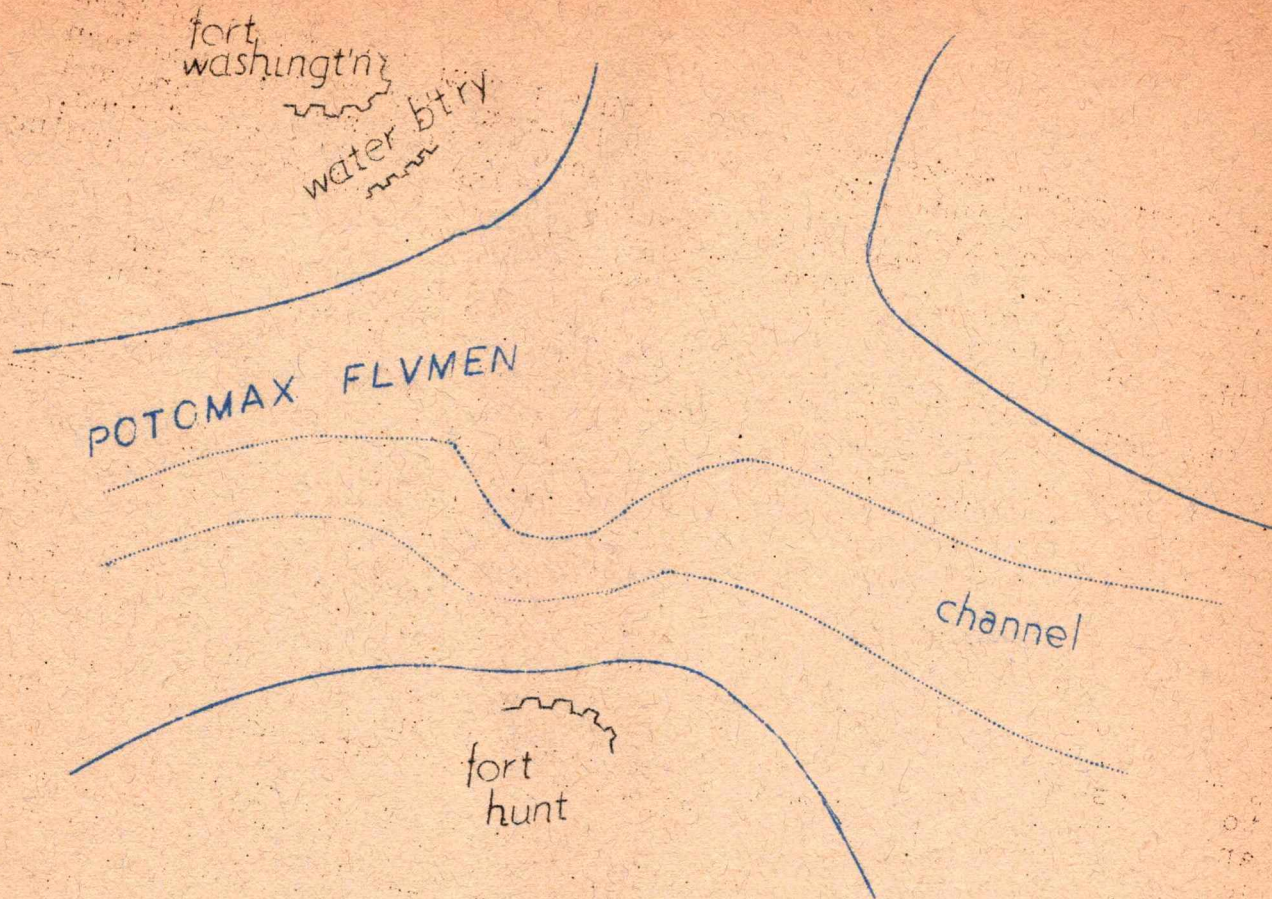
JOHN BERRY APPRECIATION ISSUE!

SPY RAY is published for the 62nd SAPS Mailing.

It is Operation Crifanac COXX, and you know what  
that means:

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It's Eney's Fault  
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It comes from 417 Ft. Hunt Rd., Alexandria, Va.,  
and you remember I promised you before to tell  
you what this Fort Hunt that the road is named after was.



1. You see, the problem the newborn United States had to deal with was this: the roads and trails were so abominably bad that all our important carriage had to be by water; when we were building our capital at Washington it was actually quicker to make the voyage by sea (in a sailboat, at that) around the Capes of the Chesapeake than to take stage overland from Philadelphia to the port of Alexandria...

But I'm getting ahead of myself. When the United States was formed and we set up a non-affiliated capital city -- a device for shunning the state jealousies that had been such a plague under the Articles of Confederation -- one of our natural precautions was to set up defensive works covering the main entrance to the patch of subtropical swampland where the Acropolis of Republican Freedom, sir! was to Arise. Practically, this just amounted to guarding the river that emptied into Chesapeake Bay and thus into the sea. The great naval base at Norfolk was some protection for the Chesapeake as a whole, but in the titanic wars of the French Revolution, in which either of the contestants could have stepped on the USA and never felt the leavings on their boots some sort of fortified defense was needed, too.

So just below the last port near Washington, at almost the last spot where contemporary guns could shoot clear from one bank to the other, the government set up a pair of good second-class fortresses: Fort Washington on the north bank, and Fort Hunt on the south bank.

At first these works were armed with a pickup lot of odd calibre guns; obsolete things like long 6- and 9-pounders which, in modern military establishments, were being replaced by howitzers on land and carronades by sea. We were doing the same thing in our naval forces, for that matter; knocking together anything that would float and arming with the weapons that had been fashionable in '76.

The truth, naturally, was simply that the United States was too underdeveloped to stand on its own feet militarily; when the first homogenous battery was installed, during the first years of the XIX Century, they were bought in England and bore the royal GR monogram. (For the matter of that, so were & did the gun-deck batteries of the Constitution-class frigates of the first trio...something which brought out just the sardonic jokes you'd expect.) The fortress batteries were all replaced with 18-pounders, the standard heavy-cruiser's gun; the little water battery covering the only good landing beach had 12-pounders. These lighter pieces -- which meant quicker-firing, in the days of hand served artillery -- were good enough to prohibit any attempt by boats to get ashore; on the opposite side, Fort Hunt was covered by bluffs and marshes. The forts themselves had furnaces for heating their cannon balls red-hot; before shell percussion fuzes were developed, this was the most effective known discourager for tar-soaked wood warships.

What with the hide-your-head pacifism of the first Democratic administrations, defensive installations -- I mean really defensive ones, incapable of being used for offensive war -- like the idiotic gunboat fleet had first claim on what (insufficient) equipment there was; as purely protective structures, Fort Hunt and Fort Washington had claim on our earliest home-built heavy guns, and received the first batches of our experimental 24-pounders. These were battleship guns, but cast in iron rather than gunmetal bronze; armed so, our fortresses were as strong as anything in North America.

Well, on paper they were; it wasn't until the War of 1812 had been under way a couple of years that we began turning out cast-iron cannon free of the nasty inclination to blow up at awkward moments, though, so I more than suspect that it's lucky the first batches turned out were never fired in earnest. (I can't find any definite record of one of the fort guns blowing up, though the Alexandria Gazette notes four men hurt at "gunnery practice" on 18 July, 1808.) Wouldn't you know that the dirty Limejuicers, with typical foreign guile, would come to Washington by the overland route?

At the Battle of Bladensburg, where our militia performed about as they usually did in the field, the "army" covering Washington was driven off; only the work of the navy gunners -- who had been meant as the crews for two frigates building at the Navy Yard here -- and a plucky stand by the infantry of the Marine Detachment allowed the President to get away to Virginia. Washington was burned out in revenge for a raid on Toronto. (These were the days when generals who destroyed civilian and noncombatant property were expected to have an excuse.) A force pushed far enough down river to place Alexandria under contribution (as the euphemism went), but that marked the limit of movement in this direction. There was nothing beyond worth bothering with, and an

awkward incident back in '75 had discouraged the British Army from trying assaults on American fortifications just for kicks. Ghod only knows why the militia who, at many other places than Bladensburg, upheld their reputation as the fastest running soldiery in the world had this way of standing firm the moment they got even a trifling breast-work or log fence in front of them! Nevertheless, they did, whatever the explanation, and the British fought shy of frontal assault on their prepared positions when possible.\* That this particular force was right to do so was proved a little later; after burning Washington they moved on Baltimore, at this time the great privateer port of America. There was no way around the forts there; the British attacked them and were beaten off with heavy loss, including their commanding general. A prisoner named FS Key wrote a song gloating about it rather rudely.

The burning of Washington was a real blast in the ass for us, but almost simultaneously (by the standards of communication/USA/1812) the Lake Champlain fleet delivered an absolute knockout to the British squadron there; with Perry's earlier victory on Lake Erie this closed the road from Canada, since transportation in the North Woods was even more strictly bound to the water than that along the coast. The fight with America wasn't worth the effort of sending major forces across the Atlantic to take one of the great port cities by plain assault-and-damn-the-cost; with no base, though, the war had to sputter out and presently did.

In the long oceanic peace that followed 1815, the two covering forts got bare maintenance-attention; each got a couple of 32-pounder Columbiads at the time of the war scare of 1823, but nothing more till 1861. Columbiads were an early attempt to break out of the limitations the smoothbore black-powder cannon had reached as early as the Revolution; the direct method of increasing calibre had reached limits of its own by the time of Trafalgar, where both sides had individual ships with the heaviest armament practical with solid shot, and the attempt to introduce a new weapons system with the Congreve rocket had been unsatisfactory. The Columbiad gun approached the problem of getting better performance from black powder by a refinement of technique; it was made to closer tolerances, putting more of the pressure of the propellant to work.

So when the War of the Slaveholders' Rebellion burst over us Fort Hunt was slightly outdated. The rebel capture of the great naval base at Norfolk was a shock; but the Navy shifted to nearby Fortress Monroe and Washington's river defenses were not refurbished for a while yet. At one point Fort Hunt was the furthest-south Union position in the area, when the rebs hoisted their flag over Mount Vernon (four miles down the river road from Fort Hunt) and the loyalist government-in-exile of Virginia was driven to Alexandria. Even after the Washington Perimeter, in 1862, became the most extensive fortified area in history Fort Hunt was an outwork beyond it. The southernmost posts were about five miles above Fort Hunt. Any of you who've been to my place recall

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\*You might guess that being under cover encourages men to stand fast, but 'tain't so. The French in Europe were bad medicine in the open, but not worth much in trenches, somehow; Pakenham had served against them in Spain and found that frontal assault on their lines worked fine. Then he tried the same thing on Andrew Jackson & Co., and that, friends, is why the Battle of New Orleans was an American victory.

that ridge about two blocks from the back porch? Well, the southernmost work that was reckoned in the Military District of Washington was up there, just behind where the Methodist church is now.

Fort Hunt, however, was still important and became more so when it developed that the Confederates were building a shotproof ironclad battery on the salvaged hull of the frigate Merrimac. American manufacturing had come far from the days when we had to order our coast-defense guns from England; it was as easy as kiss-my-hand to rearm Fort Hunt with a powerful battery of new Dahlgren and Parrot guns that were able to knock out anything unarmored that floated. Thus refitted, Ft. Hunt covered both the river road to Mount Vernon and Fort Hunt Road in addition to the river channel; it could even lay down interdiction fire on the Richmond Highway. These were the only roads out of Alexandria to the south that were capable of bearing artillery.

At First Bull Run the Confederate armies were so disorganized by their victory that there was no question of their advancing against Washington; in none of the other battles was the Union army badly damaged enough for a stroke at Washington to be risked by Lee. When the long-feared stroke did come in 1864, it was no victorious advance, but a desperate ploy to distract the Federal army which had clenched its grip on Richmond. Jubal E. Early marched up the Shanandoah and -- wouldn't you know it? -- advanced on the city from the Maryland side.

Things were rather sticky for a few hours there; the forts out to the north had nothing in them but some short-service local militia. In the first exchanges, President Lincoln qualified as the first American president to come under fire in the field; but the brief artillery exchange was really all there was to the battle. Early hadn't any idea what kind of troops were manning the defenses, and they were pitching 100-pounder rifle bolts and IX-inch Rodman shells back in return for the shot from his field pieces. He began to set his men in order for an assault in form; the pause gave just enough time for Wright's VI Corps, which Grant had rushed to the rescue, to march from the 7th Street wharves to the Hyattsville perimeter. When Early was ready to start the main event, he found the veterans of the Army of the Potomac deployed about a mile and a half north of Bob Pavlat's house and recalled that he was there for a raid, not a fight.

That was the last real threat the Rebels offered to Washington; Sheridan presently ran down and broke up Early's army. The last slight threat befell when the Confederate armored squadron in the James River below Richmond sortied in one final desperate attempt to go down fighting. They never really had a chance to get around the Peninsula into the Potomac; as it happened, the new double-turret monitor Onondaga intercepted them before they were out of the James and stove in their ribs with her 200-pounder rifle bolts.

Two causes led to Fort Hunt's decay very quickly after the Civil War. For one, the muzzle-loading gun was finished, and so was grain powder. The Dahlgren gun was built to suit the pressure curve of black powder in the traditional form, which really was powderlike in consistency; Dahlgren had made it that way to get the maximum thickness of

metal where it was needed instead of using the old barrel-form of a slightly tapered cylinder. People called them "pop bottles", and they did look like something Pepsi-Cola would come in; but they were 'way ahead of anything else in the world, so Dahlgren didn't care if they wound up looking like radishes. With Rodman's development of grained powder, which was progressively burning instead of tending to go off all at once, initial pressures could be lower and also longer sustained, and much lighter guns could rival the performance of the Dahlgren. The clincher here was the development of effective breechloading devices; this made possible not only a higher rate of fire, but really effective rifled cannon. The Parrot gun was a case of the gimmicks resorted to before breechloading; it was fitted with a skirt-shaped copper band which was expanded against the rifling by the blast of the propellant -- so the shell just lay loose in the gun before it was fired, and had a depraved habit of sliding out if the piece was fired downhill or were on the deck of a tossing ship.

The other rabbit-punch was a piece of Sheridan's cleverness. The Congresses after the Civil War were more interested in waving the bloody shirt than in meeting the needs of present defense; the Indian Wars on the plains were, very largely, possible only because we had no adequate forces out there...5,000 cavalry, to hold the peace in an area larger than Europe! Sheridan's forces were effectively pinned to the forts covering the great rivers and trails; but he knew a trick or two for cases like that. Failing to get reinforcements authorized by Congress, he abruptly stripped the coast defense forts in the East of their coast-artillery regiments and moved them west as garrison troops. With the field force thus set free, about 3,000 cavalry and infantry, he made a vigorous winter campaign that knocked the Cheyenne out and pacified the Souix. But even success wouldn't persuade Congress to divert funds from the public pork barrel to an UnAmerican institution like the armed forces; the upshot of it was that the coast defense fortifications were never re-manned, and rather rapidly decayed. And that was effectively the end of Fort Hunt as a serious military factor.

It played a certain part in the Spanish-American war, but it was as a frivolous military factor, so to speak. When Cervera's squadron put out to cross the Atlantic, the coastal cities had the sort of panic that makes one ashamed of the human race. The War & Navy Departments, however, were in a favorable position here; there is a certain advantage to counterbalance the difficulties of dealing with political types who know nothing of military matters. In this case, the panic button crowd was ployed by stuffing the worthless Civil War forts with green militia; the slightly more intelligent ones who wanted to keep half-a-dozen battleships in New York harbor to deal with Cervera's four cruisers were befooled by dragging a flotilla of antique wooden-frame monitors out of mothballs and sending them up to Look Impressive where the population could see them. Now I think of it, the complete success of this kind of thing sort of makes me ashamed of the human race too.

Fort Washington wasn't in on this farce, because it had been made a monument and restored to its early appearance, which took it out of circulation; it's still a memorial park. Fort Hunt, I suppose, was enough to calm the locals. That was its last even pseudo-warlike em-

ployment; in the First World War some ambitious patriot made a pile of money by putting in concrete emplacements for three six-inch gun turrets, but it was the sort of thing that should have been investigated after the war and never was; construction was stopped when it dawned on somebody that U-boats would never try to come up the Potomac River.

In the Second World War the place was made into a prisoner-of-war camp; after that it was turned over to the Department of the Interior, which turned the camp area into a picnic grounds and used the battery and magazines for storage. I was up there a few months ago on a hot dog roast; the fire control tower is almost hidden by a clump of pines and the asphalt glacis of the gun positions has a perfect mattress of vines growing all over it. Honeysuckle, mostly, I believe.

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"Get your chicken at the station...?"  
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SOME COMMENTS THAT NEEDN'T WAIT ON MAILING 61:

OUTSIDERS My surprise was becoming part of another generation? Mighod, it sure is. I was certain I'd never been that careless. \*\* The SAPS table had two OEs and one XOE, nyah! Of course one of the OEs was in another APA, but...

HOBGOBLIN It's interesting to know what Terry Carr meant when he invented the phrase, but after all it's the current use as a coverup that's important. Still, seeing how often Dad Rite's been smacked across the muzzle with the rolled newspaper he can be forgiven for nervousness...

SPELOBEM What were those articles of Warner's on copyright and libel? I didn't know he'd set up to compete with Spear.

I had a typo there, if you worry about the odd spacing. \*\* The tirade SAPTERRANEAN against Hulan is a good instance of just the sort of baseless noise it denounces. There are sound sources of information which indicate that sterilization of the planet is not possible with present stocks of nuclear weapons; who made the estimates that it was? You say there are people who point with pride to this situation and some who view with alarm, but who? Is the pointing with pride being done by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or the American Legion? Is the viewing with alarm being done by the Pugwash Conference, or the Easter March crowd? If you don't set the good example, where do you head in clobbering Hulan for unsupported statements?

WARHOON Judging by the appearance of those Stenofaxed illos, I guess you're right in disclaiming a perfect knowledge of art. With the cost of WRHN and your obvious intention to make a point, I wish you'd staked yourself to some litho work there. \*\* Your worry about the Trimbles (:officialdom) accepting the story that you were a hoax is not altogether unfounded. I myself was challenged to prove my existence when the DC fans put it about, in 1951, that I was a penname for localite Robert Briggs. And my fan production could have been done by one person and not a committee of MENSA members, too. \*\* By absolute (visual) art I meant pictures which stood on their own. Structure and composition aren't the point; "Invasion of the Birds" would have been striking even without the explanatory title, while your cartoon of the Yiddishprachen Ku Kluxer demanded recognition of what speaking Yiddish implied about race and what the KKK's views on the subject were. A yet better illustration: Rotsler's captionless spot drawings as against the sketch-with-punch-line of his Phallic Symbol Man cartoons.