A Historical Investigation into the Purpose and Uses of Fort Terry on Plum Island, New York in the Spanish American War (1898-1902)

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Research Question

What were the intended purposes and uses of Fort Terry when the US Government fortified Plum Island in the 1890s?

Methods

1. Analyze government records, newspaper articles, historical surveys, maps, timelines, etc.
2. Observe the remaining Fort Terry structures on Plum Island

Conclusions

Why Fort Terry was Built:
- Part of the Long Island Sound Fortification Project
- Strategic Value in protecting Gardiner’s Bay, Plum Gut & major ports in the Sound

What Fort Terry was Used for:
- Training & Practice Locations
- Quarantine Location for Soldiers with Yellow Fever (Aug. 1899)

Plum Island Location & Size

Location:
- 105 Miles East of New York City
- 1.5 Miles East of Orient Point, Long Island
- 12 Miles South of Old Saybrook, Ct

Size:
- 3 Miles Wide
- 840 Acres (or the size of Central Park in NYC)

Timeline (1880s-1900s)

1884 – Wealthy investors headed by Abram Hewitt purchased the island for $28,000 possibly intending to build a resort.
1897 – The US Government purchased 150 acres Hewitt, the sole owner now, and initiated construction of Fort Terry over the next couple of months.
1901 – Government purchases rest of the island for $64,700 and expanded the construction of Fort Terry.

Importance of Research

The decision to fortify Plum Island has major current implications:
- The government now owns a relatively undeveloped, prime piece of real estate in the Sound that has great environmental value causing controversy over trying to sell it to the highest bidder.

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Left: A number of the initial Fort Terry structures.
Right: Surveyors study the future site of Fort Terry.