



Source: World War 2 Museum via HSMB.

WW2 Baywood Park Training Area

*This is the first in a two-part series on the history of Baywood Park Training Area.
Published Jan 15th, 2026*

The attack on Pearl Harbor jump-started Morro Bay from a backwater village founded in 1872 into a wartime port and Pacific Theater troop training base. Morro Bay prepared G.I.s to island-hop their way across the Pacific securing island air bases close enough to launch direct strikes against the Japanese homeland.

To prepare the training base the Army Corp of Engineers built the harbor and Embarcadero infrastructure 1941-1943. During the war the Embarcadero and its T-piers thrived with military activity as Morro Bay beaches prepared G. I.s for the shores of Iwo Jima.

Meanwhile nearby Camp San Luis commandeered the estuary and its shoreline, including Morro Bay and the lower Los Osos Valley eastward nearly halfway to San Luis Obispo. The army designated the 9,000 acre Los Osos valley tract the Baywood Park Training Area, BPTA for short. Between the summer of 1943 and the fall of 1945 the BPTA was the field training area for nearby Camp San Luis Obispo amphibious assault troops. It provided a live fire ordnance practice range for small arms, grenades, anti-tank Bazookas, and artillery, and ample open space for military vehicle and tank practice maneuvers.

Thanks to the Army Signal Corps photographers who documented wartime Morro Bay, and thanks to local historian Tom Wilmer who assembled their stills into a video, we can have an on-line pictures-are- better- than- words virtual overview of what went on in the BPTA. Visit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOzd1QILsr4>

Several years of basic training maneuvers and shooting practice left the BPTA largely a waste land littered with still-live ordnance. It took several post-war army demolition team sweeps to clear the area safe enough for civilian development. Seven decades later hikers still come upon spent small arms brass, and occasionally bigger war souvenirs better left untouched but reported and Army ordnance surveys are still underway. Some Montana de Oro trailheads post up-dated warning signs advising hikers to remember the 3Rs of ordnance safety: Recognize, Retreat, and Report.

Once the BPTA was declared relatively safe Los Osos developed rapidly and haphazardly. The area was unincorporated county land barely overseen by county officials focused elsewhere. Inexpensive Los Osos tracts attracted a varied population of surfers, artists, hippies and others who were willing to trade civic amenities such as sewers and paved streets for lower property taxes and little or no zoning oversight.

Los Osos developed a rich cultural life but had little sense of community cohesion until after 1988, when groundwater contamination from thousands of septic tanks led the California Coastal Commission to impose a 30 year building moratorium. Strident sewer opposition created Los Osos community consciousness. Eventually the sewers won and hot tempers cooled, leaving behind the next chapter in the history of the BPTA: a thriving- but still zealously unincorporated – suburban community of over six thousand households and nearly fifteen thousand people.