

ALBERT HEAD

Site: 220 acres extending almost a mile out into Juan de Fuca Strait; located 5 miles Southwest of Victoria. By road, it is 11 miles from Signal Hill.

Geology:

1. Soil is primarily volcanic in origin with granite outcroppings;
2. It has grassy steppes and mature conifers and arbutus trees.
3. Its highest point is 200 feet above sea level.
4. There is no fresh surface water within the area.

Name: It was named in honour of HRH Prince Albert in 1846.

Visited:

1. in 1790 by Spanish Navy.
2. Cairns located on site believed to be holding remains of settlers who came long ago from Mongolia or Polynesia.
3. 1846, A Mexican, under Spanish rule, SubLieutenant M.Quimper, wrote a diary on tree bark, "take possession of farthest roadstead which I named Valdez y Bazar (Royal Roads) and I "fired repeated salutes." In Nautical terms, a "Road" or a "Roadstead" refers to a 'safe place of anchorage'
4. 1916 site of a massive quarry operation removing huge blocks to construct the breakwater at Ogden Point.
5. Remaining rock-face was/is used as rappel site for teaching rock-climbing techniques.

In 1938 , with the threat of war looming, the Canadian Department of National Defence acquired and developed the site as a key part of the Coastal Defence System. \$1,000,000.00 was available for the developing of bunkers.

The site was cleared of trees. Contractors came to the site to dig out tunnels for the three, soon to be built, Underground Batteries.

The defence was to be a 9.2 gun located above ground in each of the fortifications. This Battery complex was to replace the deteriorating one at Signal Hill. The 9.2 inch guns were taken from Signal Hill as well.

The tunnel ran to all three sites and hatches opened as escape routes.

Wind monitors were located at various points on the grounds to provide information to the gunners as they prepared to fire.

An anecdote about one of the guns, tells of how the gun, which had come from Gibraltar, had been so well waxed to keep it from deteriorating, that, after firing, the men whose job it was to clean the barrel, had a dreadful time doing so. Upon receiving a tip, they began to use a new cleaning method: pour a gallon of gasoline down the shaft, throw in a match, and poof, all the wax and everything remaining, dissolves and can easily be poured out.

This 'fort' was totally self-contained and linked by telephone to Fort Rodd Hill and Mary Hill with the observation post on Triangle Mountain.

For the first year of the war, the 8 to 10 men whose job it was to keep the gate secure, were housed in a former residence, at the outskirts of

the base. When the guns were fired, the reverberation was so intense that areas of plaster on the ceilings would drop off. Sorry was the fellow who happened to be asleep on his cot when the gun fired.

1939 was the start of a new focus in coastal defence activity:

1. part coastal defence
2. part preparation for overseas service

The realization that equipment to properly defend the coast was just not going to be available, was the underlying basis for the change.

Examples of situation:

- Heavy Artillery Batteries, #'s 55,56,60 were 'manned'
- no anti-aircraft gun defences
- no mobilization plan
- no defence plan
- Batteries were all in deteriorating condition
- Stores in wrong places but no transportation available to move them
- 200 volunteers signed in (1/3 were soon released) but there were inadequate or non-existent accommodations (stories are told of men sleeping in apple orchards)
- Communication was almost impossible (at Albert Head the only phone belonged to the Construction Company doing the site work)
- With the call for mobilization, 2 divisions were sent to Eastern Canada. A call-in for all rifles, boots, clothing further decimated both morale and the stores.

After WW 2 declared on 1939.09.10

- Third 9.2 inch gun arrived
- All three guns were remounted on 30 degree mountings which increased their range by 10,000 yards.
- Radar was in place to update target locations and to aid in the control of firing.
- Establishment of the Fortress Ranging System using Long-Base Observation Posts.

Buildings

AH 1002. Battery Plotting Room. Built 1939. Vacant. Telephone lines did run through the building to serve Rocky Point and Mary Hill areas. Roof: camouflage of blasted rock and rubble. Ventilation shaft serves as escape hatch.

AH 1004. Master Gunner's office. Built 1940.

AH 1011. Power Plant. Built. 1940. Building is drained and vented; isolated from other buildings. All windows and doors are protected with steel shutters.

AH 1012. Ablution Building. Built 1940.

AH 1014. Sick bay. Built. 1940.

AH 1015. Kitchen and Mess hall. Built. 1940.

AH 1017, 1018, 1019, 1020, 1021, 1022, 1023, 1028 (1938).

Quarters. Built. 1940.

AH 1024. Searchlight building. Built 1940.

Concrete with steel pan roof framing and concrete roof finish. Net area: 247 sq. Ft.

AH 1065. Electrical vault. Code 9306. Old tunnel

1943. Batteries closed and personnel withdrawn.