

Forgotten Monument of the Past

FORT MACAULAY

In 1878 a fort was carved out of the rock and earth of Esquimalt's Macaulay Point. Since then, through two world wars, for almost a century, Fort Macaulay has guarded the entrance to the twin harbors of Victoria and Esquimalt.

Now its once stalwart batteries are crumbling, overgrown with grass and bushes, its walls covered in obscene graffiti. It is a forgotten monument to the past, remembered only while useful. An inanimate MacArthur.

The outbreak of the Russian-Turkish war in

1877, threw Europe into a turmoil. Russia's advances by the following year had threatened to cut off Britain's connections with India, and it seemed almost inevitable that the British Empire would be drawn into the conflict.

So, when a squadron of five Russian warships anchored in San Francisco Bay in February, 1878, Victoria businessmen feared the worst. Local banks frantically transferred their cash and securities across the strait to Port Angeles.

A few days later, a lone warship, the Russian Kreyzer, anchored in Esquimalt harbor. C. N. Nasimof, the captain, claimed to have been forced in by bad weather for a refit and professed to be ignorant of the pending threat of war. The next day, though, he slipped out of harbor, leaving local recruiting stations overrun with volunteers.

That afternoon gun platforms were being dug out of the rocks at Finlayson and Victoria points below Beacon Hill. Platform guns on naval car-

riages were mounted there the following day and construction was begun on earthworks on the bluffs above the foreshore.

Civilian laborers working 11 hours a day, seven days a week, had completed earthwork batteries at Macaulay Point and Brothers Island by Aug. 30, 1878.

Fort Macaulay was armed with three seven-inch guns on naval carriages. The gun emplacements were sunk two and a half feet into the ground and Fort Macaulay's first guns were pointed out to sea. Post and rail fences were built behind them to keep cattle out of the fort.

Twenty years later, by an agreement between Britain and Canada in 1893, Major H. H. Mairhead of the Royal Engineers arrived in Victoria. He began preparations for extensive work in the Pacific forts.

The following year, 20 Sappers of the 18th (Fortress) Company from Halifax began work on Fort Macaulay. They demolished the obsolete earth and wood batteries, replacing them with stronger concrete and earthworks.

Fort Macaulay was completed by the Royal

By Iain Lawrence

Engineers in 1895 and three six-inch disappearing guns were fitted there in June of the following year.

At that time Esquimalt was the headquarters of the Royal Navy in the North Pacific and three or four warships were almost constantly anchored in the harbor. Then just a small town four miles from Victoria, Esquimalt consisted of one street with landing stages at the head end. A single road travelled by electric tram car connected it to Victoria.

To assist Fort Macaulay in serving the vital function of guarding Esquimalt harbor and its major dockyards from attack by sea, Fort Rodd Hill was built on the western shore of the harbor's entrance.

Then, in 1906, the Royal Navy abandoned Esquimalt as a fleet base and the Royal Garrison Artillery followed later in the same year, leaving coastal defence to Canadian troops.

By the outbreak of the First World War, responsibility of the manning of Fort Macaulay had fallen to the 5th (B.C.) Coast Brigade.

The Fifth had its roots in Victoria when, in 1865, Victorian businessmen raised a volunteer rifle corps to defend the Colony in the unlikely event of attack.

Throughout the First World War, Fort Macaulay was garrisoned by men of the Fifth Regiment. The war was distant, however, and remained far removed from Victoria. The home front, although prepared, was never threatened.

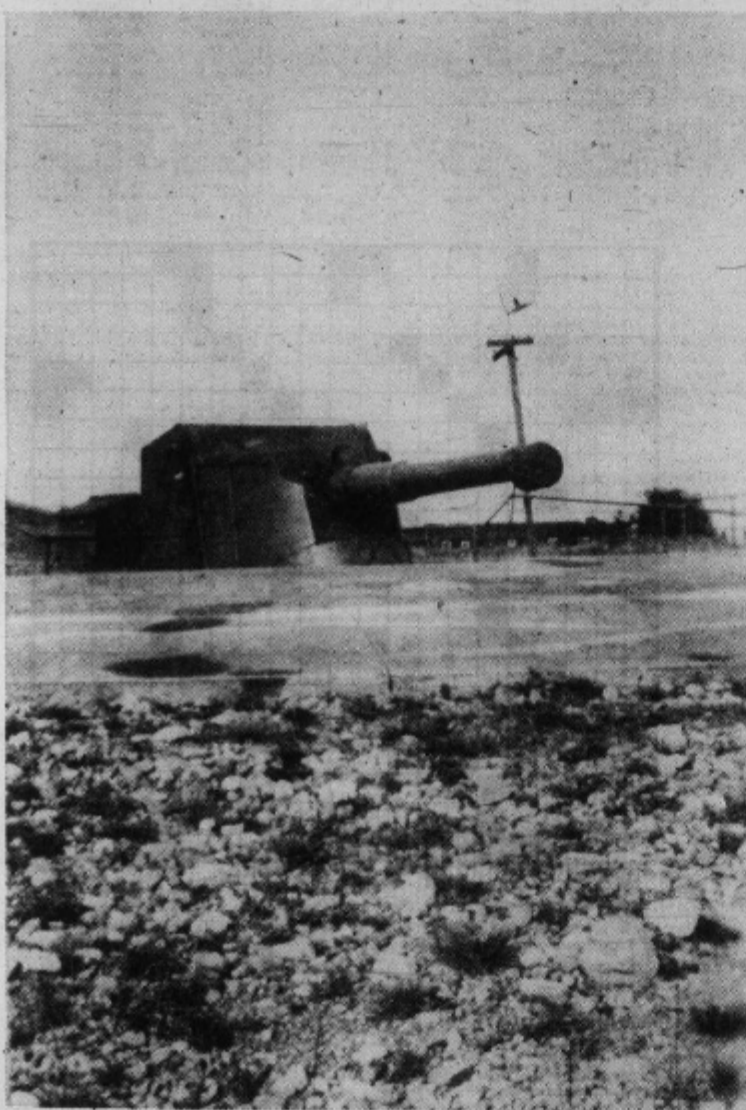
Two of Fort Macaulay's six-inch disappearing guns were removed in 1923 and replaced by two quick-firing six-inch guns. One of them, mounted in the centre battery, was taken from the deck of a Canadian warship. Both HMCS Rainbow and HMCS Aurora are recorded in various sources as supplying this gun. HMCS Rainbow was decommissioned and scrapped in 1920 while HMCS Aurora began service as a training vessel in a half-flotilla of destroyers the next year. She left Esquimalt for Halifax in early June, 1921, just three months after her first appearance in Victoria.

In preparation for the Second World War, Fort Macaulay was again re-armed in 1938.

All three guns were removed and replaced by two modern breech-loading six-inch guns capable of a maximum range of 14,000 yards. Number two emplacement, the centre of the three, became the war shelter. Anti-aircraft guns were installed and a huge rangefinder was mounted on the roof of the battery command post on the hill top.

Soon after Pearl Harbor, Japanese submarines began sinking shipping up and down the west coast from Mexico to B.C.

On Sunday, June 7, 1942, a small American freighter was sunk by a single Japanese torpedo in Juan de Fuca Strait 40 miles west of Race Rocks. Fifty of the crew were rescued from the icy waters,



FORT MACAULAY'S QF six-inch guns watched over Strait in 1937.

PAGE 12—The Daily Colonist Sunday, January 9, 1977



FOR OPENING OF PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY July 29, 1878, Fort Macaulay fired 13-gun salute.

one died, and the war had been brought to Victoria's doorstep.

Frightened Victorians built themselves concrete bomb shelters and dug slit trenches out of their gardens. Passenger steamers to Vancouver travelled without running lights and carried heavily timbered and padded pilot houses.

Everyone was suddenly conscious of Japanese submarines watching the activities from just beyond the breakwater. Barbed wire was strung in macabre coils across Macaulay Point.

Soon afterwards a Japanese submarine, the I-26, surfaced off shore just 150 miles from Victoria. It erratically and ineffectively shelled the lighthouse at Estevan Point, since the shells fell five or six miles inland, it is quite likely that the submarine's commander thought himself to be off Pachena Point to the south and was aiming at Bamfield cable station. In any event, I-26 was sunk sometime later at Guadalcanal.

Then, on June 6-7, 1942, after heavy and continuous bombardment, the Japanese invaded the Aleutians holding two islands, Kiska and Attu.

Only 1,500 miles from Victoria, the war was dangerously close. Victorians were taught air raid defensive measures, issued gas masks, and practiced frequent black outs. Once again, the forts were re-armed.

Fort Mary Hill, 600 feet above the quarantine station at William Head, and equipped with six-inch guns on 15-degree mountings in August, 1943, controlled the water from Sooke Inlet, across the Strait to Port Angeles.

Fort Macaulay, manned by the 60th Coast Battery, took control of the outer and secondary defences of the fortress area with its close defence battery installed in 1938.

Though now lost in history, the 2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery backed up Fort Macaulay. Its four 3.7-inch guns and plotting room stood between Anson St. and Macaulay, north of Munro. Now there are only houses there.

For more than a year, the Japanese held their Aleutian outposts. When the Americans and Canadians landed on Kiska, Aug. 15, 1943, they found it abandoned, although Attu had fallen three months earlier only after heavy fighting.

By the end of the Second World War, Fort Macaulay and eight other batteries defended the twin harbors of Victoria and Esquimalt.

Fort Rodd Hill's Belmont Battery defended the western side of the entrance to Esquimalt harbour. The fort's upper and lower batteries, dismantled before the Second World War, dated back to 1896.

Other batteries at Christopher Point, Mary Hill, Albert Head, Dantze Head, Black Rock, Golf

Hill and Ogden Point, comprised the defences, supported by 17 searchlight posts from Clover Point to William Head.

Five Fortress Observation Posts from Mount Tolmie to Church Hill, directed-fire out into the Straits under the direction of a Fire Command Post on Triangle Mountain and a Fortress Plotting Room at Fort Rodd Hill.

After the war, the Fifth was demobilized and returned to its traditional peace time role of Non-Permanent Active Militia.

Fort Macaulay, along with the rest of the Pacific defences, was declared obsolete in 1966. Its guns were removed and everything except the structures themselves have long since vanished.

Its concrete batteries remain in silent affirmation of the past, an awesome monument to an un-fought war.

Tangled coils of rusted barbed wire, empty rubble-strewn barracks, and corroded iron gun

mounts are all casualties of the continuous attacks of winter storms.

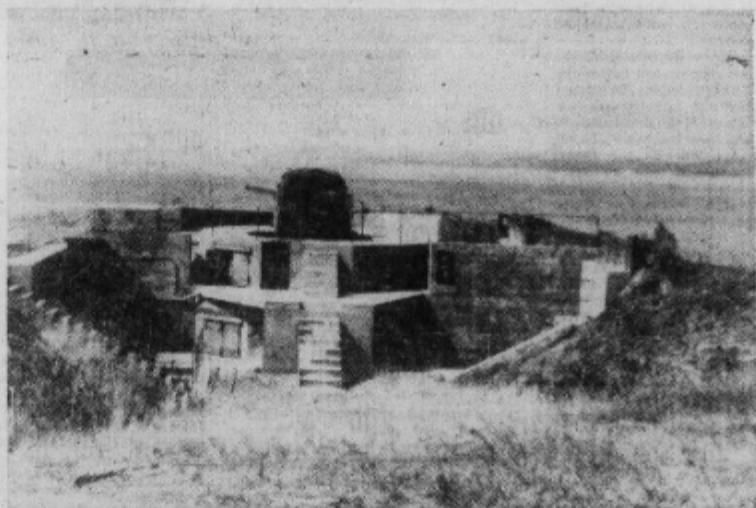
Deep under the gun mounts, the dungeon-like magazines are dark and ugly. The shell recesses are welded shut. The earthworks are still evident, though overgrown with contorted little windswept bushes.

Troops once marched proudly on the flats around Fort Macaulay and men of the Fifth kept a watchful six-year guard from their halitop post in the face of war.

Today only deserted buildings and infrequent strollers maintain their lonely vigil. But Fort Macaulay is most impressive in its state of lonely desolation.

It deserves better, though, after almost a century of faithful service.

NOTE: The historical photographs are credited to Fort Rodd Hill historic records section with all my thanks for their help.



FORT MACAULAY, 1947

Sunday, January 9, 1977 The Daily Colonist—PAGE 13