



A BRIEF HISTORY  
OF  
WORK POINT BARRACKS  
ESQUIMALT  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

DECEMBER 1962



## HISTORY OF WORK POINT BARRACKS

Overlooking West Bay on Victoria Harbour in Esquimalt, B.C. is Work Point Barracks, the home of Canada's most westerly army garrison.

Built in 1887, it is garrisoned today by the First Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel G.G. Brown, CD.

The history of this west coast camp dates back to 1878 — seven years after British Columbia joined the Confederation of Canada and nine years before the construction of Work Point Barracks began.

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After the Russo-Turkish War, Great Britain and Russia remained on uneasy terms as a result of British policy during the hostilities. The threat of open conflict was feared both in London and Ottawa.

In February, 1878, the presence of a Russian squadron of eleven ships in the San Francisco harbour did little to dispel this fear. To the people of British Columbia the defencelessness of their position was uncomfortably realized.

Major General E. Selby-Smyth, Commander of Militia at that time, urged the handing-over of a number of 7-inch guns to the Militia from the Royal Navy base in Esquimalt. These guns, which were being returned to England, could be used for shore batteries as a show of force against any Russian threat, he contended.

Finally on May 11, 1878, Lieutenant Colonel D.C.T. Irwin, Inspector of Artillery, was ordered to supervise the construction of coastal batteries in the Victoria-Esquamalt area. One battery of three 7-inch, 6½ ton, rifled muzzle-loading guns was established at Macaulay Point. Two other batteries were authorized for Finlayson Point and Brothers Island.

Manned by volunteers -- mostly retired Royal Marines, who were familiar with the naval pieces -- the Macaulay battery was authorized and named the Victoria Battery of Garrison Artillery.

The Militia General Order (No. 17), dated 19 July, 1878, and published in Canada Gazette on 20 July 1878 reads as follows: "The formation of a Battery of Garrison Artillery at Victoria is hereby authorized to be designated the Victoria Battery of Garrison Artillery."

Thus, this terse military order heralded the birth of the Esquamalt Army Garrison.

It is interesting to note that the first public mention of the battery's activity was recorded in the Victoria Colonist on the morning of July 27, 1878, which is quoted in part: "Yesterday at 5 p.m. the first gun was fired from the battery. On Monday a salute of 13 guns will be fired by the Victoria garrison artillery."

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By 1883 the Macaulay Point defences became a battery of the B.C. Provisional Regiment of Garrison Artillery; forerunner to the present day

5th (BC) Independent Medium Artillery Battery, Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery.

It wasn't until 1887, however, that Work Point was officially chosen as the site for military barracks. While on a tour of inspection in British Columbia, the Minister of Militia, Sir A.P.C. Caron, made the selection for construction of a permanent military base. The close proximity to the Macaulay defences probably helped to influence this choice.

Long before Confederation -- when Vancouver Island was a Crown Colony -- Work Point had been named for the Honorable John Work by officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, and adopted by Captain Henry Kellett of the HMS Herald on the first survey of Victoria Harbour in 1846.

John Work was an early pioneer and Chief Factor with the Hudson's Bay Company before he retired to Victoria in 1841. In 1853 he was made a Member of the Legislative Council of the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island. He died in December, 1861, at the age of 70.

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Commanded by Major James Peters, "C" Battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery, consisting of 100 NCOs and gunners, arrived from Quebec on November 11, 1887. Their arrival marked the first time a unit of regular troops had crossed the continent over the recently constructed Canadian Pacific Railway Line.

The battery was temporarily quartered in an old agriculture building near Beacon Hill in Victoria, where it remained until construction.



at Work Point was completed.

As part of the recreational training program of that era, officers, non-commissioned officers and gunners of the battery were put to the tedious task of clearing the primeval forest at Work Point before any buildings could be erected. By the spring of 1888 construction had started.

The Colonist in June 1888 had this to say about the project; "Work at the barracks is proceeding with commendable rapidity. The three buildings are all closed in, and the roofs shingled. Between the double weatherboarding, felt paper has been introduced, so as to add to the warmth of the rooms. The buildings rest on stone foundations."

By 1891 the camp was completed and "C" Battery became its first inhabitants. They remained until the autumn of 1893 when they returned east. During the six-year period many members of the garrison left the army and embarked upon civilian careers throughout the province. The battery strength had fallen to fifty-three all ranks.

On March 30, 1894, a detachment of Royal Marine Artillery, with a complement of three officers and seventy-five other ranks, arrived from England, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel G.A.L. Rawthorne. They were to replace the departed "C" Battery and like their predecessors were destined to serve six years at the Work Point garrison.

In May of the same year, twenty sappers from the 18th (Fortress) Company, Royal Engineers, arrived from Halifax. Their job was to demolish old earth and wood batteries and to lay out and direct the building of new

concrete and earth forts.

The Royal Marine Artillery ended their stay in September, 1899, and were replaced by another British artillery unit, the 19th Company (Western Division) Royal Garrison Artillery. In the following June, the 48th Company (Submarine Miners) Royal Engineers, arrived from England along with half of the 44th (Fortress) Company, Royal Engineers.

After a short two-year tour of duty, the 19th Company, RGA, sailed for Hong Kong. The 21st Company, Royal Garrison Artillery, reached Esquimalt from Bermuda to assume the garrison duties. This company later became known as the 83rd Company. In December, 1903, they too sailed for Hong Kong and were replaced by the 58th Company from Halifax.

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During the early years Work Point was garrisoned mostly by British due, in part, to the poor discipline and training of the Canadian volunteers. Desertions were frequent, caused primarily by low pay. Civilians, including Chinese coolies and Indians, were receiving higher remuneration and the lure of civilian wages was too much for many of the gunners.

It was also during this period that the Dominion and Imperial governments found trouble agreeing on the feasibility and cost-sharing of the Esquimalt defences. Canada wanted Britain to bear the cost of maintaining the British troops, while Britain felt that part of the upkeep should be borne by Canada.



After a great deal of correspondence between Ottawa and London, Canada finally agreed on July 1, 1905, to take over all the west coast defences, thereby relieving the Imperial units of their Canadian commitment.

In 1906, 350 officers and men of the Imperial garrison departed for England. Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers, accompanied by small detachments of Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Army Medical Corps, Army Ordnance and Army Pay Corps, bade farewell to Victoria.

To replace the departing British soldiers came a Garrison Company of Royal Canadian Artillery, a Fortress Company of Royal Canadian Engineers and the Royal School of Instruction. These troops represented the first Canadian regular forces in the garrison since "C" Battery, RCA, departed in 1893.

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The next few years saw virtually no change in the complement of troops at the garrison. In 1911 the Headquarters of Military District No. 11 was established at Work Point, but it wasn't until the outbreak of World War I -- in 1914 -- that the number of soldiers increased to any extent.

Canada's declaration of war with Germany resulted in the mobilization of many militia units across the nation. Among these was Victoria's 5th (BC) Regiment of Garrison Artillery. This regiment, however, did not proceed overseas as a unit. Instead it moved into Work Point Barracks, manned the Macaulay defences and other local forts, and trained numerous

drafts for re-enforcements overseas. The 5th continued in this role until 1919, when it once again returned to militia status.

Following World War I, Canada maintained a very small permanent force. This force included the Royal Canadian Dragoons, Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, Coastal batteries of Royal Canadian Artillery -- at Halifax and Victoria -- Royal Canadian Engineers, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and three infantry regiments, which included The Royal Canadian Regiment, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Royal 22nd Regiment. Small detachments of services were also included as part of the permanent army. None of these units numbered anything close to a war or peacetime establishment strength.

In November, 1920, the arrival of "B" Company of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, under the command of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel F.H.M. Codville, MC, marked the first occasion an infantry unit was to garrison the Work Point camp.

Organized in 1914 by the late Brigadier A. Hamilton Gault and named for Princess Patricia, daughter of the Duke of Connaught, Governor General of Canada, this young Canadian regiment had distinguished itself in the First World War.

B Company was destined to spend the next nineteen years at the garrison. The citizens of Victoria adopted the company as their own and many soldiers, who later retired from the Army, became permanent residents of the Capital city.



Between the wars was a lean period for all military forces in Canada and the Esquimalt Garrison was no exception. Training was conducted with makeshift equipment and officers were hard-pressed to produce good career soldiers.

Nonetheless the parade ground performance of these troops left little to be desired and on a number of occasions the PPCLI company was called upon to supply Guards of Honour for visiting dignitaries.

By 1939 war clouds had once again darkened the European scene and Nazi Germany began its quest for world domination. World War II resulted and the PPCLI was immediately mobilized for overseas service.

Shortly after mobilization, the PPCLI detachment at Work Point was increased to two companies, plus supporting elements. On November 14, 1939, they departed from Victoria to join the remainder of the battalion at Winnipeg.

During the period between the wars, elements of both the Royal Canadian Artillery and the Royal Canadian Engineers were part of the Esquimalt Garrison.

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Work Point, from 1939 to 1945, was garrisoned by anti-aircraft batteries and served also as a training centre for overseas troops of M.D. 11. Victoria's Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's) trained here for a short period, but in October, 1940, this unit was despatched to Eastern Canada for overseas embarkation.

Military District No. 11 maintained its headquarters at the barracks until 1942, when, after more than 30 years, it was moved to Vancouver.

For a short period Work Point was also the Headquarters of the 6th Canadian Infantry Division, which had been earmarked for service in the Pacific. The surrender of the Japanese forces in 1945 precluded the use of Canadian troops in this campaign. Subsequently, the 6th Division was disbanded.

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After the Second World War, the garrison was once again manned by men of the Royal Canadian Artillery and Royal Canadian Engineers.

The Royal Canadian School of Artillery (Coastal and Anti-Aircraft) formed part of the garrison from 1946 to 1953. It was during this period, in 1949, that the artillery defences at Macaulay Point were removed, leaving only the old gun emplacements as a reminder of local military history.

In 1953 the School of Artillery left Work Point for Camp Shilo, Manitoba, where it is stationed today.

Until 1955 three batteries of heavy anti-aircraft artillery were part of the garrison. They were the 119 Battery, 127 Battery and 129 Battery. Only the 119th was stationed at Work Point, while the other two maintained Albert Head, Mary Hill and Gordon Head camps.

The 119th and 127th Batteries departed in 1955 and the remaining 129 Battery was re-organized as the 4th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RCA,



and stationed at Work Point. It was also during this year that the 3rd Field Squadron, RCE, arrived from Germany, after completing a two-year tour of duty with Canada's NATO Force.

Although the military camps at Albert Head, Mary Hill and Gordon Head were occupied by troops at this time, they were nevertheless considered part of the Esquimalt Garrison. From 1955 to 1957, one of Canada's oldest infantry units, the 2nd Battalion, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, was stationed at the Gordon Head base.

The year 1957 saw a major change take place within the garrison establishment. The 4th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RCA, left to take up residence in the artillery camp at Picton, Ontario; the 3rd Field Squadron, RCE, went to Camp Chilliwack, B.C., and the 2nd Battalion, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada left for Germany.

The 1st Canadian Artillery Maintenance Unit, which had also been part of the garrison, was disbanded on the departure of the 4th Light A/A Battery.

Gordon Head camp was closed down and is now the new campus for Victoria College, while Mary Hill and Albert Head camps were vacated to become training camps when required.

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The exodus of the Artillery and Engineers signalled the end of a garrison that had been built primarily as a coastal defence measure. In

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November, 1957, after completing a NATO tour of duty in Europe, the 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel T. deFaye, MBE, CD, arrived to take over the complete garrison duties at Work Point.

This return to Work Point by the PPCLI was likened to a homecoming by some of the older members of the regiment. And many of the retired veterans in Victoria, who had begun their military careers with the pre-war "B" Company contingent, welcomed the battalion with open arms.

The garrison is still manned today by the 1st Battalion PPCLI, but the Canadian Army commitment to NATO may mean another change of troops in the near future.

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Over the years the face of Work Point Barracks has changed considerably. Many old buildings have been razed to make room for new modern barracks blocks. A beautiful new Men's Mess Hall, with up-to-date kitchen, has been erected, and the parade square no longer abounds with egg-sized stones and gravel. The former playing field is now a smooth asphalt square which is the locale for battalion parades, drill instruction and the always popular "Trooping the Colour" ceremony.

However, the garrison has not lost touch with its proud past. Some old buildings remain and are considered in quite sound condition. The wooden structured Officers' Mess, which was the first building erected



at Work Point, is still in use and has changed little over the past eighty-five years.

A brick barrack block of the 1900 era is currently being occupied by men of the PPCLI battalion. The bricks for this old building were made in England and had to be shipped around Cape Horn to reach the Esquimalt garrison.

By historical standards, Work Point can hardly be termed an old garrison. It does not compare in age to the Quebec and Halifax Citadels, but considering the inaccessibility of the Canadian west coast of a century ago, as compared to the eastern fortification of the French-British period, Work Point's history is atleast colourful.

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