

# NEWCASTLE FORTRESSES

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During World War 2, Newcastle and the surrounding coast between Nelson Bay and Swansea was fortified by Defence forces to protect the east coast of New South Wales against the enemy, in case of attack from the Japanese between 1940 and 1943. There were the established Forts along the coastline, including Fort Tomaree, Fort Wallace (Stockton), Fort Scratchley, Nobbys Head (Newcastle East) and Shepherd's Hill (Bar Beach) and Fort Redhead. The likes of Fort Tomaree (Nelson Bay), Fort Redhead (Dudley) and combined defence force that operated from Mine Camp (Catherine Hill Bay) came online during the Second World War to also protect our coast and industries like BHP from any attempt to bomb the Industries as they along with other smaller industries in the area helped in the war effort by supplying steel, razor wire, pith hats to our armed forces fighting overseas and here in Australia.

With Australia at war overseas the Government of the day during the war years decided it was an urgency to fortify our coast line with not only the Army but also with the help of Navy and Air- Force in several places along the coast. So there was established a line of communication up and down the coast using all three defence forces involved.

Starting with Fort Tomaree and working the way down to Fort Redhead adding a brief description of Mine Camp and the role of the RAAF, also mentioning

where the Anti Aircraft placements were around Newcastle at the time of WW2.

### FORT TOMAREE

Fort Tomaree was situated on top of Tomaree head just south of Nelson Bay. It came online during 1942 as part of fortifying the Newcastle Fixed Defences. It was also known as Tomaree Battery. Although the large guns never fired in anger they were there at the ready.

There were two heavy 6 ins guns (152mm), two 3 pounder guns for the surf battery, observation posts, light weapons, mortars and machine gun pits an anti aircraft site plus a searchlight site. These were there to protect Nelson Bay and the surrounding coastline these were operated by the Army.

Also the Army was assisted by the Navy RAN Station 307, who had a two fixed Torpedo tubes at the base of Tomaree Head as a back-up if the large guns operated by the Army up on top of Tomaree head could not destroy any enemy ships in the area. The RAN manned this throughout their stay. The Navy also had several, heavy weaponry in store which consisted of: Minefield observation systems, Anti torpedo nets, an Indicator Loop, Hydrophones. The Signal station at Nelson Bay was also run by the RAN at the time.

The RAAF: 20 Radar Station. (Early warning Radar) was also located on top of Tomaree Head it also was there to assist the Army by providing information to the military of any activity in the area using their early warning radar systems. Their site consisted of barbed wire entanglements and an observation post. They provided the power to run the radar and there was also enough power to supply the living quarters of the three defence forces.

The three defence quarters were where today stands Tomaree Lodge which is now owned by the Dept of Health but once owned by the Australian Defence until 1949. According to the Tomaree War Diary (NAA) the Army had a Morse Code channel established between Tomaree Battery and Fort Wallace.

Tomaree Battery operated between 1942 and 1944 before it was demobilised. Gan-Gan Army Camp at Anna Bay was the staging and training areas for the troops where they lived in tents.

## FORT WALLACE. (Fort Stockton)

Originally known as Fort Stockton by Lord Kitchener it was later renamed Fort Wallace after Colonel Robert Wallace as a mark of respect for his work and dedication to Newcastle and it's Military. This was in 1915 after the death of Col Wallace. Fort Wallace is situated just south of Stockton Hospital for the Disabled.

It was decided in 1913 that a new fortification be built at Stockton due to a blind spot between Stockton and Fort Scratchley via Nobbys Head. Fort Wallace like Fort Scratchley now had the 6" B.L MKVII installed it wasn't until 1915 that Fort Wallace did its first test firing of these guns.

Fort Wallace was manned during WW1 but when the war ended the Fort was relativity unmanned by the Army.

With the approach of the Second World War Fort Wallace was again brought back online. This was 1939 where the 9.2 inch guns were installed at the Fort, replacing the 6 inch guns this work was carried out in 1939-40. The 6 inch guns were then transported to Rabual in Papua New Guinea. From December 1939 to August 1942 saw the most active time of Fort Wallace with the shelling of Newcastle on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1942 by a Japanese submarine. Unfortunately the 9.2" guns at Fort Wallace could not gravitate low enough to fire on the sub. The Fort was manned by the Army as part of 113<sup>th</sup> Artillery in conjunction with Fort Scratchley.

Wallace had several significant buildings and infrastructures being the underground plotting room, accommodation for military personnel, a wireless communications hut, 2x 9.2" gun emplacements, Observation posts Officers Mess and quarters, AWAS living quarters, Drill Hall, and water pump shed plus access to hospital that became the married quarters, 2 x Searchlight emplacements, an engine room, and a guard house.

By the end of WW2 Fort Wallace once again closed down and the 9.2" guns were removed in 1963. Fort Wallace was left unattended until 1967 when the RAAF 130 Signal Squadron moved into Fort Wallace. The last members of the RAAF left Fort Wallace in 1993 and Fort Wallace was then classified as no longer being needed for Defence purposes.

## NOBBYS HEAD & STOCKTON BATTERYS.

Nobbys Head was known as Rail Battery and was a part of the Fort Scratchley 113 RAA. Their job was to be lookouts in the observation post at the base of Nobbys Head during WW2. The close defence system of the Hunter River itself consisted of 2 x 3 pound Q.F. guns one on the southern side of the breakwall (code Rail Section) with the other across the channel at Stockton (Dune section) One of the Heavy A.A. Batteries (with 3.7" guns) was also sited next to the harbour entrance (Wave Battery) in a dual purpose A.A. / Anti Shipping role.

Over on Stockton side of the harbour another Wave Battery was set up near the wave trap in Pitt St Park near the harbour entrance. Fort Wallace and Wave Battery on the Stockton side was supported also by Dune Battery which consisted of two guns and a small radar station known as Wipers this allowed plotting communication with Fort Wallace, Fort Tomaree , Fort Scratchley, Shepherds Hill and Fort Redhead.

During a storm in October 1942 the two guns on Stockton Beach (Dune Battery) were undermined and abandoned.

Later all 4 guns used between by these Battery's were replaced with twin 6 pound 10wt emplacement sited at the foot of Nobbys Hill that covered both the river entrance and the boom defence. On the Nobbys break wall one gun was placed at the base of the Nobbys Head and the other one was placed 100yds from the first gun Over on Stockton side two similar guns were placed at the Wave trap.

The Rail Battery quarters were on the shore below the first gun and their food came from Fort Scratchley in a hot box. Nobbys head had the only searchlight that sat above the guns. Their prime defence was against the attack of Motor Torpedo Boats, which would inflict great damage if they sank a ship in the narrow channel of the river.

The Nobbys Head Battery was demobilised after WW2 in 1945.

## FORT SCRATCHLEY



Fort Scratchley stood proudly on Signal Hill as it was known back then. In 1855, before the Fort was built, the first unit was raised by Scott and Bolton (incidentally two city streets bear their names). Their uniforms were made by their wives. England had a fear that the Russians were coming and that the colony had to be protected from invasion.

Lt Peter Scratchley was sent on orders from England to fortify the East coast of Australia and the colony of Newcastle. Lt Peter Scratchley designed the fort and work started in 1882 and was completed by 1886. The Armourment held at Fort Scratchley as it was named in recognition of Lt Peter Scratchley

consisted of 3 x 9" RML Guns, and 4 x 80lb RML Guns. These guns were strategically situated both overlooking the harbour entrance in those days Nobbys was still just an island. By 1892 the Fort acquired 3x 8" Breech Loaders, 1 x 6" Breech Loader, 3 x 1.5 "Nordenfeldt QF Guns and 2x 45 .5 barrelled machine guns for land defence. Then in 1894 the Fort added 3x6" B.L MK V (these were known as the disappearing guns) which remained in service until 1925.

Then in 1911, 2x6" B.L MK II guns were added to the Armoury (these remained in service until 1962.

Fort Scratchley had buildings that housed the Commandant and men. There was a Mess Hall, Kitchen, Laundry, Guard House and Barracks, The Fort's tunnels had several rooms that held the shells for the guns as well as other supplies that were needed to make sure the guns were well maintained and were ready at a moment's notice. These buildings are still in existence this very day.

Shortly before WW1 broke out the Maritime Signal Station that also stood on signal hill was dismantled and removed to Nobbys Head by this time the breakwall had been finished. With this happening a modern day Battery Observation Post (B.O.P.) could be built where the old signal station used to be. By now the likes of Fort Stockton were coming online Fort Stockton's original position was near the northern side of the harbour entrance. However when Lord Kitchener inspected Fort Stockton it was found to be too close to Fort Scratchley and with Nobbys Head being in the way would cause a blind spot. Later in 1915 Fort Stockton became Fort Wallace named after Colonel Robert Wallace and was re-located a further 3000yds up the beach to where it sits today.

During WW1 Fort Scratchley was constantly inspected during the early year of the war as it was thought that the Germans might try and attack Newcastle. The number 2 gun was used as the Examination Gun. It could fire on any ship that breeched the wartime shipping regulations those being if a ship couldn't or wouldn't, give its proper identification code when it was challenged as it entered the harbour or if the ship failed to stop outside the port to allow a Naval Examination vessel to confirm its identity then a cast iron practice shot

would be fired across the bow of the ship. If no response it was then classed as an enemy ship. Fort Scratchley played its part protecting Newcastle Harbour in WW1.

Once WW1 had ended Fort Scratchley re accessed the armoury and decided that it was time to replace the disappearing guns and by 1925 they were removed so that Australian defences could go forward and modernise their defences even further. With tensions rising once again in Europe during the 1930s once again Fort Scratchley would play a role in the defence of Newcastle NSW.

By 1939 when WW2 had started there was an urgency to once again bring Fort Scratchley with the help of Fort Wallace and Shepherds Hill back to full capacity. At the of 1940 smaller Forts along the East coast of Australia would be added and Newcastle was no different as here was multiple heavy industries in the vicinity of Newcastle harbour including BHP, and other industries who were contributing to the war effort by producing tempered steel etc for the making of shells, razor wire, pith hats that were supplied to the troops of the Commonwealth both in Australia and overseas. Newcastle had to protected because of these industries so the likes of Fort Tomaree, Fort Redhead, even adding the likes of Mine Camp (Catherine Hill Bay) and Wangi ,Wangi to the list to help keep the menace away from our industries. The smaller Forts/Battery's were run by combined defence forces being the Army, Navy and Airforce.

In the early hours of the morning at 2.15 am on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1942 the war came to Newcastle NSW and Fort Scratchley sprung into action, firing four rounds from both its 6" MK II guns in defence of a midget Japanese Sub that had been lurking off Newcastle. The Battery at Fort Scratchley could not actually see the sub through visual contact and the Searchlights from Rail Battery as well as Wave Battery and the searchlights from Fort Scratchley were unable to pick it up neither so they calculated the firing of the guns from whence the sound of the shells and glow of the firing position of the sub landing shells around it. Only 2 shells exploded the others never where landed in BHP Parnell Place near the north side of Newcastle Baths. The midget sub left without leaving too much damage no people were killed just a few injuries.

Fort Scratchley was the only Fort in Australia to fire its guns in anger during WW2.

Once WW2 was declared over in 1945 the Fort was handed over to the CMF in 1952 where young men and women were given basic training in National Service as it was still a part of the Australian Government's plan to make sure that our Nation and Newcastle was ready in case the war came to Newcastle NSW once more.

1975 saw the last official Battery stationed at Fort Scratchley known as 113 FD R.A.A. With the very first being, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battery Volunteer Artillery. During WW2 the battery at Fort Scratchley was known as, 113th Hvy Bty R.A.A. (M) (Scratchley Bty) and Newcastle Coastal Fixed Defence..

### SHEPHERDS HILL.

In 1885 Admiral Tryon (Commander-in Chief) inspected the fortification in Newcastle. He was so impressed with what he was that expressed that Newcastle should have a second fortification somewhere south of Fort Scratchley to strengthen the defence around the city. He chose a site that was south on a hill that was of nearly equal height to that of Fort Scratchley this site was known as "Shepherds Hill" plus it also had an excellent 180 degree view of the coastline both to the north and the south of the Hunter River.

By 1887 and as a result of the Admiral's report a Major General Richardson dispatched 2 x 8" B.L. guns of 12 tons with fittings that had arrived from England to be transported to Newcastle and placed in storage there until required. It would be another twelve months before the official site was chosen as the place for the Shepherds Hill installation.

The Shepherds Hill compound was started in 1890 and was completed by early 1892 with the first of four test firings of the guns. In 1894 a "Sham Fight" was

conducted at Shepherds Hill to test the occupying Battery that they could handle these guns if needed be.

By 1910 alterations were made to the guns at Shepherds Hill and at Fort Scratchley where the disappearing guns were replaced by the more modern 6" MKII guns as these guns could pivot on its mountings and were a lot easier to prepare in case of a naval attack.

With WW1 on the rise the new Fire Commander's post was constructed up on Obelisk Hill above King Edward Park as it gave a much better view of the approaches to Newcastle itself. From here Fort Scratchley and Shepherds Hill were basically controlled and it would become known as Reserve Battery. This Battery only came in to being during wartime.

WW1 saw Shepherds Hill relatively quiet like Fort Scratchley but it remained on alert in case of Naval attack.

WW2.

With hostilities on the increase overseas and with the Japanese on the march south in the Pacific taking Singapore, the Philippines and ever heading south to New Guinea and eventually arriving on Australian shores in early 1942. The government of the day formally recognised that Australia needed to strengthen its defences as being urgent.

Work started in 1941 to do just that, with Newcastle Defences being upgraded to protect the Industries around the Newcastle as they were supplying steel to the armed forces, navy and air-force. The measures taken were to place a Early Warning Radar (E.W.R) on Shepherds Hill along with Navy and Army assisting. This was installed in a blockhouse and it first started operating in January 1942. It was used under classification as a Ship Detection Radar. This

radar replaced the A.W. (Air Warning). In the “fortifying “ of Newcastle Defences an “Emergency Battery” was established and was set up just south of Shepherds Hill. Here 2 x6” MKII B.L. guns were installed on the cliff face just to the south of Shepherds Hill. At the same time to the north another 2 x 6” MKII B.L. guns were installed up on King Edward Park. This Battery would become known as “Park Battery”.

Back on Shepherds Hill, a Battery Observation Post (B.O.P.) and a Searchlight (D.S) were added to the Blockhouse. This would be the control point for both the guns and searchlights from both Park Battery and Shepherds Hill Battery stationed there. The Observation Post consisted of more than 3 levels.

Top Level: Originally Fortress Observation Post (F.O.P.) became Instrument Room for Early Warning Radar (E.W.R.)

Second Level: Post for Fire Commander and at night Officer Commanding Searchlights. Battalion Observation Post (B.O.P) for Fort Wallace 9.2” guns plus Fortress Observation Post (F.O.P) position. Also on this level in the far corner of the B.O.P was Port War Signal Station manned by the R.A.N. personnel.

Third Level: Searchlight directing station for Park Battery 6” MKII guns.

Fourth Level: (Bottom) Battery Observation Post, for the Park Battery 2 x6” MKII guns.

Up above the Blockhouse sat the E.W.R Antenna that used in conjunction with Fortress Observation Post for range finding and plotting ships travelling up and down the coast off Newcastle.

Evidence shows that the installation on Shepherds Hill during WW2 was operated by the Army, Navy and Air-Force all working together to protect

Newcastle from enemy attack from not only the sea but also by land and air. Shepherds Hill battery's never fired their guns in anger but they stood ready in case they were needed to go into action.

Shepherds Hill, Park Battery and Emergency Battery were stood down at the end of WW2 with only the reservists remaining until a decision was made in 1965 by the Australian Government to purchase the Shepherds Hill site from Newcastle Council, placing it in the hands of the National Trust. On 1985 Newcastle Council received a national Estate Grant to conduct a Conservation Study of the area. This study was completed by 1986 and this site remains in the hands of the National Trust today. It is maintained by the council and the Cottage once more occupied by Maritime this time civilian known as: Coastal Patrol Australia. Today not much remains from what was known as Shepherds Hill Fortification only derelict buildings, reminders of where the 6" gun emplacements were and the cottage.

## FORT REDHEAD

As part of the coastal Fortifications of the East Coast of Australia, and to support the complete fortifications of the Newcastle area, a Battalion known as 8th Garrison was raised in April of 1942 to protect the coastal entrance to the north of Lake Macquarie; among the reasons that Fort Redhead was set up there was the fact there were several important Coal Mines in the immediate vicinity and also to protect any access of the Japanese by amphibious vehicles on the beach both at Redhead and Glenrock Lagoon north of Redhead but south of Shepherds Hill. This would become one of the sites of the four Forward Observation Posts for Newcastle.

This Fort was built on Little Redhead Point several miles south in direct line of Shepherds Hill and Fort Wallace. With Fort Wallace having installed a Depression Position Range Finder (D.R.F) which could accurately plot position, speed and course of any target Forward Observation Posts (F.O.P'S) were constructed at Fort Redhead.

With Redhead being several hundred feet above the beach, the 9.2" guns were able to cover the beach below with ease. As the 9.2" gun had a long trajectory at 45 degrees, these shells could be lobbed over the head.

There was a story going round that Japanese reserve food rations were found on the beach at Redhead, but also reported sightings of a possible German party landing at Yondaio 10 miles to the south of Redhead.

The garrison that were stationed at Fort Redhead was demobilised at the end of WW2. Today only what remains of this Fort is the remains of what is believed to be corrugated iron lined trenches, a machine gun nest and ammo storage dump (in a cave nearby).

## MINE CAMP. (CATHERINE HILL BAY)

All though Mine Camp was originally a small mining camp for the local mine in the area, during the Second World War it was taken over by the RAAF. Their role as part of the Fortifications of Newcastle was to relay through the use of Early Warning Radar (E.W.R) the plotting of both ships and aircraft along the coast from Fort Tomaree and Redhead inland to Rathmines and Singleton.

With Fort Tomaree being supported by RAAF as well as the Army and Navy also Shepherds Hill, this radar system was an asset to all three Defence forces in the protection of Newcastle and surrounding areas during WW2. The radar operators were mainly the WRAAF. Their job was to plot both ships and aircraft and to relay and report any suspicious activities to the Forts, and Operators up and down the coast at the time. Mine Camp had two Radar Towers one to the north and one to the south of Mine Camp known as Radar Station 208.

By the end of WW2 Radar Station 208 as withdrawn from service as it wasn't needed anymore.

## ANTI AIRCRAFT BATTERY'S

With the fortifications in place along the coast it was further decided to add extra protection to Newcastle and surrounding areas but also to the local industries that were supplying material to the war effort; like razor wire, steel for the making of bullets and a massive amount of helmets not only for our troops but other countries including England and India at the time of the war.

These anti-aircraft battery's both light and heavy were situated around the city in the suburbs to add some extra fire power if needed. The main places these Anti-Aircraft Battery's were situated at: Mayfield West in Werribi Park ( Heavy and Light gun Battery as well as a Searchlight.) also Lambton Park, Glebe Hill (Merewether), King Edward Park and at Stockton all these Anti-Aircraft Battery's had both Heavy and Light artillery. Mayfield West (Werribi Park) had four guns these were operated by the A.W.A.S (Australian Women's Army Service) and they were housed in a house close by in Buruda St. All the Ack-Ack emplacements were members of the 18<sup>th</sup> Heavy Anti- Aircraft and at Stockton it was members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. An Anti- Craft Battery was also stationed over on Moshetto Island near Mayfield West and was manned by men not women as it was very close to the likes of BHP and other industries.

Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battery's were situated at Beresfield, Charlestown, Fullerton Cove, Glebe Hill (Merewether), Mayfield, New Lambton, Newcastle Showground, Raymond Terrace, Redhead, Stockton, Tomago, Wallsend, and Williamtown. Coastal Searchlights lined the coast from Shepherds Hill to Port Stephens. The 60<sup>th</sup> Searchlight Company were also placed at Redhead, Glebe, Glebe Hill (Merewether) , Wallsend, New Lambton, Charlestown, Mayfield West (Tourle St), and Beresfield.

When the threat to Australia had passed the Anti-Aircraft Battery's were disbanded by 1944.

In 1942 women were recruited into the A.W.A.S. their job being to staff and operate the local searchlights and anti-aircraft guns around the city and in the suburbs of Newcastle and surrounding areas.

There searchlight companies also scattered throughout the area and some unlikely areas where they could be found was Woodberry, Duckenfield, Fullerton Cove, Stockton, Lemon Tree Passage plus hidden in the cemetery at Raymond Terrace. These units were manned by the 51<sup>st</sup> Anti-Aircraft Battery.