

**VICTORIA'S MILITARY HERITAGE:
AN OVERVIEW AND INVENTORY
OF COMMEMORATIVE
MONUMENTS**



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SITUATION BRIEF # 14

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This brief, and the accompanying data base of monuments and memorials, provides a starting discussion point for considering the military heritage of the Victoria region. It can be divided, by seniority, into navy, army and air force.

British Royal Navy

The British Royal Navy presence on the BC coast dates from 1842 until 1905.

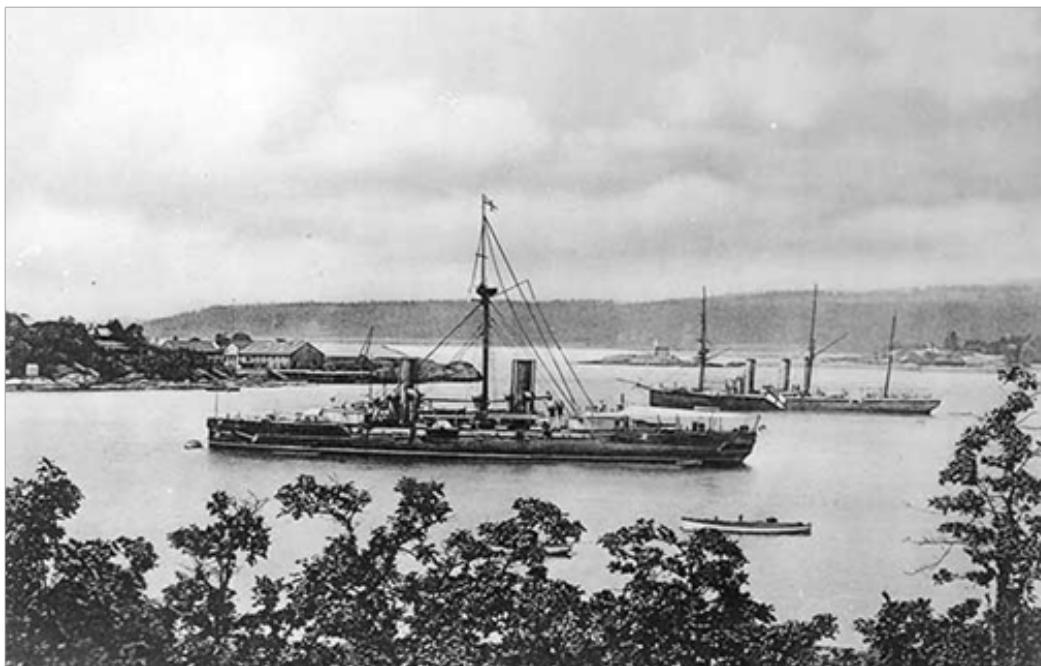
The economic, strategic, and political significance of the West Coast of the Canada was clearly understood by the British and Colonial Governments. The establishment of a permanent naval yard adjacent to Esquimalt Harbour and the city of Victoria established this region's primary importance to the Empire and replaced the Royal Navy Base in Valparaiso, Chile. The Naval Dockyard became the home of the Royal Navy's Pacific Station and the only Royal Naval base in western North America. The navy presence played a vital role in the development of the Province of British Columbia.

The Royal Navy provided coastal defense during several key periods, the Fraser River Gold Rush (1858), San Juan Island Pig War (1859), the Great eastern Crisis (1877-78), World War One (1914-1918), World War Two (1939-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953).



Royal Canadian Navy

The Canadian Navy was founded by the Navy Service Act in 1910. In November 1910 HMCS Rainbow arrived in Victoria and the naval base at Esquimalt was transferred from British to Canadian authority. Canada assumed the duties of a senior partner in the Empire-Commonwealth formation and the interests of North American powers in the Pacific.



Artillery

Royal Marine Artillery, Royal Garrison Artillery, and the 5th (BC) Field Artillery Regiment provided protection for the Navy base and necessitated in the creation of Fort Rodd Hill (1864, 1877-78 & 1894-97), Fort Macaulay (1894-1897) and the Dockyard. The Belmont battery was added in 1900. Other Batteries were at Mary Hill, Albert Head and Signal Hill.



British Army, Canadian Militia and Canadian Army

“C Battery” were the occupants of the “First Troop Train” to cross Canada on the newly completed C P Railway. It was a historic moment for Victoria and Esquimalt when they arrived and stayed in the Old Agricultural Halls in Beacon Hill. At Work Point they established a home for the “first Permanent Force unit” on the West Coast of Canada. Work Point Barracks became the home of Military District 11 (each Province in the Dominion had one). This headquarters for MD 11 (BC) was in continuous use through 2nd WW. The Chiefs of Staff had their headquarters there for Pacific Command with Maj.-Gen G.R. George Pearkes in 1942. The Canadian Women’s Army Corps (CWAC) was first established at Work Point by Lt.- Col. Joan Kennedy in Aug. 29 1941. (there is a plaque

commemorating her outside the Navy and Military Museum at Naden).

Independence from the United States is a theme of importance, promoting the creation of the Militia and defense of BC 1871-1914. 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles battalion (1914), and 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish), Canadian Scottish Regiment (1912).



Royal Canadian Air Force

Patricia Bay Airfield was a component of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (1939-1945). At one point the Airfield was “the third largest station in Canada. Approximately 10,000 military personnel passed through Pat Bay, and at any one time, 3,500 could be enrolled in the operational training programs. Aircrew, ground crew and support personnel participated in the training programs. This was the last step in their training, and graduates would be posted directly to operational squadrons.”



RCN College HMCS Royal Roads, Canadian Services College Royal Roads, Royal Roads Military College

In 1940 the Dunsmuir Estate of Hatley Park was purchased by the Canadian Government and used to train Officer Cadets until 1995. It is now Royal Roads University. The site was declared a National Historic Site in 1995 and a plaque installed in 2000.



The Reserves

The regiment originated on 3 September 1912 when the 88th Regiment, Victoria Fusiliers, was authorized. As the English citizens of Victoria promoted and served with the Victoria Fusiliers, the Scottish citizens of Victoria desired a separate regiment for themselves and thus, after filing their petition on 15th August 1913, the Gordon Highlanders was formed.

The Menzies Street Drill Hall adjacent to the Parliament Buildings was constructed in 1894 is one of the oldest in Canada. It still stands a memorial to its early inhabitants, the 5th Field Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery and 88th Regiment Head Quarters.



When constructed by the federal government in 1914-1915, the Bay Street Armoury and Drill Hall was one of the largest and most up-to-date in the country. Its scale reflects the dramatic increase in military participation following Canada's strong performance during the South African War, while the exuberant design expresses the city's long and enthusiastic support of the volunteer militia. The Bay Street Drill Hall was built during the militia building campaign of 1896 to 1918, during which over 100 drill halls and armouries were erected across the country. The purpose of this campaign was to expand the visibility of the Canadian militia following its successful involvement in the South African War and in preparation for the First World War.



Since 1915 the armouries have housed the successor regiments of local militia: the Fifth Regiment of artillery, the 50th Gordon Highlanders of Canada and the Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's (formed in 1920) which remains the primary reserve regiment based on Vancouver Island. The 5th (BC) Artillery Regiment Museum is located in the armoury. The museum's artefacts reflect the history of 5th (British Columbia) Field Artillery Regiment, RCA and associated units from 1861 to the present day.

Military Heritage Commemorations

Victoria's rich military heritage is commemorated throughout the region by an extensive network of museums, historic sites, plaques along with building and street names.



The major sites include the HMSC Esquimalt Naval Base and administrative quarters at adjacent Naden on Esquimalt Harbour. The base was established by the Royal Navy in 1865. It contains over 60 federally listed historic structures. Some structures date from the Royal Navy Pacific Squadron days. The graving dock is the oldest in use on the West Coast. St. Georges, the naval garrison church was moved to the border just outside the base. The second most important site is Work Point Barracks built in 1887 at the entrance to Victoria Harbour. It was the HQ of Canadian Forces Military District 11 (British Columbia) and command centre of “C” Battery, Canadian Artillery. The earliest comprehensive defensive infrastructure consisted of a series of coastal artillery batteries, the earliest of which was Macauley Point(1887, preserved as an historic site) with others added over the years (Belmont, Duntze Head, Signal Hill).



The largest and most impressive of these coastal defence structures however is Fort Rodd Hill at the western side of the entrance to Esquimalt Harbour. Built in 1895 for its massive 6 inch disappearing guns, this is now a fully interpreted National Historic Park.

The stories of the region's military history are told in a number of local museums. The British Columbia Maritime Museum was established as the Royal Canadian Naval Museum at signal Hill in 1955 and moved to Bastion Square, Victoria, in 1965. It now covers both British and Canadian naval history in the Pacific as well commercial and recreation shipping. The CFB Esquimalt Naval Military History Museum in Esquimalt occupies a group of historic administrative buildings at Naden and was founded in 1977 moving to its current location in 1985. It focuses on the history of the base.

The Bay Street Armoury houses the Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's) Regimental Museum. On the Saanich Peninsula are two museums. The Ashton Armoury Museum established in 1994 covers the signals, medical, and military police units of the Canadian Armed Forces with a special focus on Peace



Keeping. The presence of the Royal Roads Military College on the Dunsmuir Estate at Hatley Park from 1940 to 1995 is covered by a small museum in the Castle. Fort Rodd Hill National Historic Park is the largest of the local military commemorative institutions.



Throughout Victoria municipal cenotaphs, grave monuments, sculptures and plaques reinforce community memory of the events and personalities in “service to country”. Buildings (George Pearkes Recreation Centre) and street names (from Capt. James Cook to General Arthur Currie) further imbed this military heritage. These range from the HMS Sutlej obelisk in Pioneer Square(1866) and Commonwealth graves in Ross Bay Cemetery, the Parliament

Buildings cenotaph (sculpture by Vernon and Sidney March, 1925), Ship's Point tableau sculpture, "The Home Coming" (artist Nathan Scott, 2009) to the Pat Bay Air Port "Lost Airmen of the Empire" (artist Illarion Gallant, 2017. See cover photo.)

Over 50 have been catalogues in the attached document (**Situation brief #14.1**)

Observations

- The military history of Victoria is one of the most powerful threads in Victoria heritage landscape. The Victoria World Heritage project has made a masterful start at cataloging the tangible aspect but more needs to be done.
- Interpretation both by way of events and personalities selected for honouring favours both a colonial bias and to some degree glorification over a more nuanced approach investigating the roles of minorities and lessons to preference ploughshares over guns.
- A comprehensive guide to the regions military heritage is sorely needed to bring the many threads together.



"The Home Coming" Nathan Scott sculpt. 2009

Resources

Tim Cook. *The Fight for History*. Penguin Random House, Toronto, 2021.

Frederick V. Longstaff *Esquimalt Naval Sate: a history of its work and defenses*.

Clarke & Stuart, Vancouver, 1953.

https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/CFB_Esquimalt#Architecture