

Historic Building Appraisal
Wong Nai Chung Gap Military Sites,
Wan Chai, H.K.

The military sites in Wong Nai Chung were constructed in the **late 1930s** *Historical Interest* as part of the overall reorganization of defences. Located at the geographical centre of Hong Kong island and overlooking the urban area along the northern shore, Wong Nai Chung Gap had long been recognised to be of strategic importance. The road over the Gap commanded the approaches to Repulse Bay and Aberdeen. Whoever controlled the Gap and the hills around it – Mount Nicolson, Jardine’s Lookout and Violet Hill – controlled the vital ground on the Island. This was the main reason for the Japanese capture of the Gap in the early stage of their invasion of the Island.

During the battle of Hong Kong in December 1941, Wong Nai Chung Gap was chosen as the site of the headquarters of the West Brigade. As darkness loomed on 18 December 1941, the Japanese began their assault on the northern sector of Hong Kong Island. The order to head for the high ground was firmly obeyed by the assault troops. After a night of fight, by dawn most of Jardine’s Lookout, Mount Bultler and the northern slopes of Mount Parker fell into the Japanese hand. At 7 a.m. on the 19th, a Japanese advance party arrived at the Gap. In the following hours, vicious engagements took place in and around the Gap, which resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. Brigadier Lawson was killed outside his headquarters and became the highest-ranking casualty during the battle. The fighting for Wong Nai Chung Gap was in the estimation of the Japanese the most intense in the entire 18 days of war.

A number of military structures could still be found at Wong Nai Chung Gap: three pillboxes (though one is difficult to get to), an anti-aircraft position, several bunkers and stores. The battery consisted of a concrete emplacement for two Bofors guns with associated bunkers and shelters which would have been used for ammunition stores and accommodation for the personnel. It is now in a ruinous condition but the remains of shell racks can be seen behind the gun positions. There may be an underground air raid shelter for the gun crew but the entrance could not be found and may be obliterated or blocked up. *Architectural Merit*

There are three remaining war shelters all similar in construction with walls of either rendered brickwork or concrete, projecting concrete roof slabs with scalloped upstand parapet walls, set back into the hillside. Some of the steel doors and windows have been removed and the openings blocked up. All the shelters seem to be structurally sound.

Other features of this site include a defensive concrete wall adjacent to the drop barrier to enable the steps leading up to the gunsite to be guarded, what

appears to be an improvised machine gun position on the roof of the shelter, and an old concrete water tank on stilts besides the catchwater path. A flat area on the east side of the access road just below the service reservoir may have been the site for a mobile anti aircraft battery. A series of grips or cutting through the bank on the west side of the access road were also observed. These may have been formed as re-entrants for defensive or counter attack purposes, or alternatively may have been intended as drainage channels for the purpose of diverting surface water into the catchwater.

There are two pillboxes, PB1 and PB2, situated in strategic position on the slope of Jardine's Lookout on either side of the catchwater which runs through Wong Nai Chung Gap. The pill-boxes are constructed in thick concrete with the roofs heavily camouflaged by rocks and the loopholes camouflaged with large exposed aggregate rendering. Two of the pictures show circular concrete turrets finished with exposed aggregate rendering projecting from the roofs of the pill-boxes. The wide apertures suggest that these turrets probably served the dual purpose of ventilation shafts and periscope conning towers for observation. The pill-boxes appear to be heavily war damaged and ruinous.

The battery structures should be regarded as having built heritage value and historical value. Since the end of the war, many of these relics of war, once a matter of life and death for their occupiers, were disappearing.

***Rarity, Built
Heritage Value &
Authenticity***

The battery structures have a role to play in the defence of Hong Kong. They remain a reminder of Hong Kong's tumultuous days. They are of great interest to military historians, and they are well known to the hikers and access to the site is not restricted.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The old battery structures have group value with the Former Wong Nai Chung Reservoir and the City of Victoria Boundary Stone laid at Wong Nai Chung Road in 1903 to define the limits of the then City of Victoria.

Group Value

There is no plans to redevelop the old battery sites so that the question of adaptive re-use does not arise.

***Adaptive
Re-use***