

Historic Building Appraisal
Cape D'Aguilar Battery,
D'Aguilar Peninsula, H.K.

As early as 1910 the Inspector-General of the forces in London proposed the construction of a battery at the southeastern end of D'Aguilar Peninsula on Hong Kong Island. However, the local British commanders were of the opinion that the southern tip of the D'Aguilar Peninsula was too isolated for a battery to be constructed, as its own defence would constitute a major problem. Thus in the following two decades the proposal to construct a battery there was never implemented. *Historical Interest*

In the mid 1930s, with the revision of the defence plan for Hong Kong, the earlier proposal for constructing yjr Cape D'Aguilar Battery (鶴咀炮台) was resurrected. After lengthy discussion the military reached the decision to construct two batteries (namely, Bokhara Battery and Cape D'Aguilar Battery) on the peninsula. Both Cape D'Aguilar Battery and Bokhara Battery came under the Eastern Fire Command.

Cape D'Aguilar Battery was built in **1939**. It was located in the centre of the ridgeline on D'Aguilar Peak, not far from Bokhara Battery which was supposed to be the more effective of the two, and was armed with two 9.2 inch guns. Relatively minor in scale by comparison with Bokhara Battery located below, Cape D'Aguilar Battery is equipped with two 4 inch guns supplied by the Royal Navy. At the outbreak of war in December 1941, Cape D'Aguilar Battery was manned by First Battery, Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (Officer Commanding: Captain G.F. Rees), whilst Bokhara Battery was manned by the 30th Coast Battery, 8th Coast Regiment, Royal Artillery.

On 19 December 1941, in the face of extreme pressure from the Japanese the gunners at Cape D'Aguilar Battery were ordered to destroy their emplacements and retire from their positions. After the demolition, all members withdrew to Stanley and continued to fight from there until the surrender.

The location of the battery buildings have been highlighted in yellow on the HKG 1:1000 survey sheets attached to this report. The buildings are fairly widespread and originally would have been intended for a variety of purposes such as magazines, stores, barracks, observation posts, pillboxes, etc. There are a surprising number of battery support buildings for an improved battery and this is probably due to the necessity of accommodating sufficient troops, stores, and ammunition at this remote site. Some of the structures on the lower slopes are easy to get to due to well kept paths to the numerous *Architectural Merit*

communications masts erected on the site. However not all the structures were found and therefore a full detailed architectural appraisal has not been possible.

Gun Emplacement: Two circular gun sites situated one above the other is shown on survey sheet No. 15-NE-20A. Curved blast walls or retaining walls at the rear of each emplacement are shown, also two small square structures above and behind the uppermost emplacement. To the south-west and lower down the hill there is a group of battery buildings but what exactly they were is not clear. All the structures are marked 'R' for ruin on the survey sheet and according to Ko & Wordie's book "Ruins of War" much of the site is covered with thick vegetation. There are no footpaths, tracks or steps leading to the gun emplacements and they were not inspected on the Volunteer's field visit so that the present physical condition is not known. Both guns were destroyed by the HKVDC First Battery before they pulled out in 1941.

Battery Command Post: The largest structure found by the Volunteers is believed to have been the Battery Command Post (BCP). It is situated below the gun emplacements stepped between the 128 and 130 metre contours. It appears to be built in concrete (or rendered brickwork and concrete) with the observation room at the southern end and several interconnecting rooms purpose unknown behind. The parapet walls to the roof are wavy or undulated presumably to break up the outline of the structure to camouflage it from aerial photograph. An external flight of steps leads up to a mezzanine floor. No original windows or doors appear to remain and only the broken concrete leg support of the plotting table were seen. The window openings each had cured label moulds over them reminiscent of pediments in classical style architecture. Several smaller buildings are situated near the BCP and probably served as latrines and cookhouse.

Searchlight Emplacements: A pillboxes type structure was observed on a rocky promontory (marked 'Flat Rock' on survey sheet No. 15-NE-19B) below Hok Tsui Lower Village. This is believed to have been a searchlight emplacement for the battery however the only footpath leading to it is along the coastline from the north. There may be a corresponding emplacement situated on a spur below the tennis court shown on survey sheet No. 15-NE-20C. Neither structure was visited by the Volunteers on their field visit and identification of them as searchlight emplacements is conjecture and open to correction.

Miscellaneous Structures: Several more miscellaneous structures are situated below BCP just above the 100 metre contour. A group of 2 to 3 structures connected to the BCP group of structures by a well defined footpath on the survey sheet were not found, but another group to the east of this

position were found comprising an ammunition bunker, a forward observation post, a pillboxes and a defensive blockhouse. All had the original doors and windows missing, but two of the structures appear to have been taken over by squatters. All were built in concrete or rendered brickwork. The Volunteers observed several other military looking structures in and around the village of Hok Tsui which appearance to be utilized by the villagers for various purposes.

Cape D'Aguilar Battery should be regarded as having historical value as well as built heritage value. Since the end of the Second World War, many of the relics of war, once a matter of life and death for many of their occupiers, were quietly disappearing.

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

Cape D'Aguilar Battery has a role to play in the defence of Hong Kong. It remains a reminder of Hong Kong's tumultuous days and a corner of serenity amidst the commotion of present day Hong Kong. The old military structures are of great interest to military historians, and they are well known to the hikers as access to the site is not restricted.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

As far as is known there are no plans to redevelop the old battery site so that the question of adaptive re-use does not arise.

***Adaptive
Re-use***