

## BRITISH COLUMBIA MILITARY HERITAGE SITES

The theme for Heritage Week 2004 (February 16 to February 22) is "Defending Canada: Heritage of Military Places".

From the militia drill halls and reserve regiments in every town across B.C., to the huge naval base in Esquimalt, and the defence emplacements along the coastline, the military has shaped our province and our communities. The earliest mapping of the BC coast was carried out by the Royal Navy. Royal Engineers laid out the first town sites and roads. Every major BC community has an armoury, which, in addition to being an imposing architectural presence in small town BC, were also often a focus for social life. The legacy of Second World War construction of airfields, bases and fortifications on Canada's west coast has left a mark that is present to this day.

Listed below are just some of the important military places in BC. We encourage local heritage organizations and enthusiasts to find out about historic military places in your own communities. Even those communities that have no obvious military landmark structures or civilian buildings with a military past are almost certain to have some monument, memorial or cenotaph, as testament to those who served and possibly gave their lives in defending Canada.

### Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley



*The Beatty Street Drill Hall Image Courtesy of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Real Property Management*

#### **Beatty Street Drill Hall** 620 Beatty Street, Vancouver

Located downtown, the Beatty Street Drill Hall has always housed Vancouver's and British Columbia's senior militia regiment, The British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own). The building itself was opened in 1901 to provide a permanent structure for the military in Vancouver. The drill hall was built of sandstone from Gabriola Island in an imposing castle-like building with three-and-a-half foot thick walls. It includes offices, a parade square and store rooms. A firing range and bowling alley are located beneath the drill square. Collected on the walls is the history of the regiment, including brass plaques commemorating the three major wars that members of the regiment have fought

in, as well as plaques of gratitude from a grateful Dutch government for action in the Second World War. The Beatty Street Drill Hall is an outstanding example of early twentieth-century architecture as well as a vivid reminder of Canada's military past. Home to many historical military units, the structure carries on this tradition and is now home to Vancouver's army cadets and army reserves.



*The Bessborough Armoury Image Courtesy of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Real Property Management*

#### **Bessborough Armoury** 2025 West 11th Avenue, Vancouver

Construction of the Bessborough Armoury began in 1932 for two units, the 15th Field Brigade, Canadian Artillery, and the British Columbia Hussars. The building formed the hub of military activities in Kitsilano during World War Two, serving as a local army headquarters. Now the building is home to cadets and the reserve 15th Field Regiment, RCA.



#### **HMCS Discovery**, Deadman's Island Coal Harbour, Vancouver

The island adjacent to Stanley Park in Coal Harbour has been the location of a battle between native tribes, a cemetery and the scene of an altercation called the Ludgate Affair between police and loggers in 1899 and 1909. The island has always been important to Vancouver, given its desirable location and proximity to the city. Taken over by the military for the purpose of harbour defence early in the twentieth century, the island was only truly built upon in 1942 when it became a military base for the defence of Vancouver harbour. The mock Georgian main administration building for the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve was built in 1942 as well as the current bridge over to the island. The island was further developed with the construction of the Torpedo Anti-submarine Division in 1943. Temporary barracks for members of the Women's Royal Naval Service, or WRNS, were also completed on Deadman's Island, in addition to existing facilities in the local YWCA. At the end of the war, Deadman's Island was used to coordinate the demobilization and return to civilian life of service members in the greater Vancouver area. Deadman's Island is still owned by the government and is home to Vancouver's naval reserve unit, HMCS Discovery. Almost all of the World War Two buildings remain but have changed function; for example, the present Chiefs' and Petty Officers' Mess is situated in the old WRNS building. For those granted access to the island, the building also contains an impressive naval museum in the Vancouver Naval Museum and Heritage Foundation.



**Jericho Garrison**, former RCAF base  
Jericho Beach, West 4th Avenue, Vancouver

The area from Trimble Street to Highbury Street and 8th Avenue has a distinguished military heritage. The federal government gained the property first in 1920 for the purpose of establishing a sea-plane base. The early base was tiny, given the post-World War One refusal to spend money on the military. But in 1924 the base was expanded to provide hangars, offices, barracks and headquarters to the young RCAF. The RCAF presence on the coast was increasingly seen to be useful as the planes of Jericho Beach performed many functions on the Pacific coast, such as smuggling, narcotics and fisheries patrols, as well as vital surveying work.

World War Two brought a massive increase to the Jericho Beach naval air station. Even before the war, in 1937, Jericho had been established as the control point of all western flying operations. Fears of Japanese invasion prompted the construction of many satellite stations with Jericho Beach providing the main base and headquarters for all Pacific bases. Existing buildings such as the Jericho Golf Club clubhouse were pressed into military service, in this case as the joint headquarters for the army, navy and air force. The building housing the BC School for the Deaf and Blind was used as an air force barracks for personnel serving at Jericho Beach. The impressive Aberthau building on 4397 West 2nd Avenue became the officers' mess of the base. In 1941, many buildings were constructed to house and administer the base. The base was also expanded across 4th Avenue between Camosun and Highbury streets to contain the Joint Services Headquarters, responsible for coordination between army, navy and air force in British Columbia.

After the war in 1947, Jericho Beach was made a permanent military installation and the headquarters of the army in BC. While all of the territory north of 4th Avenue was returned to the city of Vancouver when the base closed around 1976, several buildings have survived destruction, such as the enlisted men's barracks, which is now a youth hostel, the old base recreation hall used as the Jericho Arts Centre and the officers' mess, now the West Point Grey Community Centre. The administration building at 4050 West 4th is the Headquarters of the 39th Canadian Brigade Group which administers all the reserve units in B.C. and is also the home of the 12th Field Ambulance and the 744 Communications Regiment. South of 4th Avenue there remains a small base with a support component and housing for the 12th Medical Company. The base consists of a 1941 office building, several small wartime service buildings and sixty-six domestic quarters. For those granted admission to the base, of particular note is the 12th Medical Company Museum.



*The Seaforth Armoury Image Courtesy of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Real Property Management*

**Seaforth Armoury**  
1650 Burrard Street, Vancouver

Located on Burrard Street is the armoury of Vancouver's Scottish regiment, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada. The impressive structure was built in 1936 with funds raised by private subscription on an old First Nations reserve in what was formerly an undeveloped part of Vancouver. During the second world war, the Seaforth Armoury was home to the Seaforth Highlander's Women's Auxiliary, which coordinated support services for the regiment. Today, the striking building continues to accommodate

the Seaforth Highlander Regiment, and also houses Army and Air Cadets



## Vancouver and Point Grey Fortifications

From the very beginnings of the City of Vancouver, the area at the point of Burrard Inlet was set aside as a government reserve, should the need come to defend the harbour against a foreign invader. In 1887, the City of Vancouver was given the untouched wilderness as a park. However, in 1914, two obsolete naval guns were established at Siwash Rock to defend the harbour approaches against a perceived German threat. The evident absence of any real threat saw the removal of the ramparts and guns later in 1915. Though the aboveground structures have been removed, one can still trace the remains of a concrete bunker that dates back to the World War One fortifications. There is also a most impressive monument erected in 1920 to the 190 Japanese-Canadians who answered their adopted country's call to arms in 1914 and the 54 who gave their lives for Canada.

The Second World War brought a renewed focus on defence for Vancouver against the Japanese threat. Defensive fortifications were quickly thrown up at Ferguson Point, manned by 31 Battery of the 15th Coast Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery. A searchlight emplacement was located on the bluff above Siwash Rock, which remains today.

The swimming area at Third Beach was also home to a wartime base for the Canadian Women's Army Corps, or CWACs. The base provided accommodation and training buildings for 300 CWACs throughout 1944. In addition, the old Royal Vancouver Yacht Club building provided the first headquarters of Vancouver's Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve detachment that was later to become HMCS Discovery. The unit later moved to the Vancouver Rowing Club Clubhouse, itself a beautiful municipal heritage building.

After the war, the Stanley Park batteries were quickly disposed of. A much ignored fact in Vancouver history is that the return of these defensive reserves to the city was responsible for the creation of public parks such as Vanier Park.

In 1947, Ferguson Point was returned to the city and the structures of the battery were demolished; however the underground tunnels and magazines still exist but are sealed shut. One building has survived the test of time - the Stanley Park Tea-Room was the Ferguson Point Officers' Mess in World War Two. Siwash Rock was again abandoned; although a bunker and searchlight position still stand as reminders of the extensive construction that went on during World War Two. One of the nicest spots in the park is the Garden of Remembrance situated behind the Pavilion, a contemplative garden created in 1948 by the Air Force Women's Auxiliary to commemorate the sacrifice of airmen who died in World War Two.

The Point Grey Battery on the cliff above Wreck Beach was the principal battery defending the Port of Vancouver. No.1 - 6 inch gun emplacement has been restored and is the only restored coast defence site on the B.C. Mainland.



## Former Canadian Forces Base Chilliwack (Camp Chilliwack)

Keith Wilson Road, Chilliwack

The military has a long history in the Chilliwack and Sardis area. In 1858, the Royal Engineers established a temporary base here to support mapping expeditions. These expeditions were the source of the log structure now at the Fell Armoury in Vancouver.

The outbreak of the Second World War led to the creation of an army engineers base at Sardis, south of Keith Wilson Road at Vedder Crossing, in 1942. Throughout the war, the base trained thousands of engineers, who were largely responsible for the construction of the base's buildings. After the war, the Canadian army engineer school was formed at Chilliwack, and an officers' training facility was opened later. At its postwar height, the base was home to 1,000 soldiers and slightly fewer civilians, which amounted to 15 per cent of Chilliwack's population.

In 1995, the base was effectively closed, retaining a small support component and accommodation for the 6th Field Engineer Squadron. Today, only a small part of the former base is used by the military. Some of the wartime buildings still exist and are used by the RCMP and private companies involved in an education and research park. The base continues to form an integral part of the Chilliwack community through its history. The All Sappers' Cenotaph at Vedder Crossing in Sardis commemorates of the engineers who served at one time or another at the Chilliwack base.

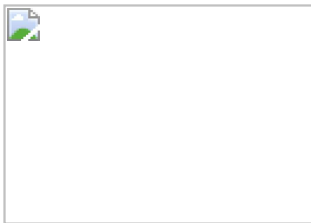


## Fort Langley

Township of Langley

*Fort Langley in the 1950s*

*(Click thumbnail to view larger photo)*



Built by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1827 to protect the fur trade in Lower B.C. The complex included a high wall and various wooden buildings for accommodation, storage and administration. Fort Langley was the centre of early development of the B.C., playing a key role in the settlement of the Mainland and maintaining British rule.

In 1839, the fort was moved to be closer to agricultural land. However, it was soon destroyed by fire and rebuilt at another location, where Fort Langley National Historic Site was recreated in 1957, and remains an important heritage resource in BC.



### **The Armoury**

530 Queen's Avenue, New Westminster

New Westminster's armoury was constructed in 1896. Simply called the Armoury, it is the oldest continually functioning facility of its kind in BC, and an impressive structure at that. Following the first drill hall built in 1866, the Armoury was designed to last, and continues as the largest wooden hall structure in BC. The Armoury has served the Royal Westminster Regiment in its various guises throughout its history. Today, the Armoury provides accommodation to cadets and the reserve infantry Royal Westminster Regiment.

