

Follow the Major's inspection route

Fort Rodd Hill National Historic Park

Victoria, British Columbia



Entry



Upper Battery



Warrant Officer Quarters
World War II Hut

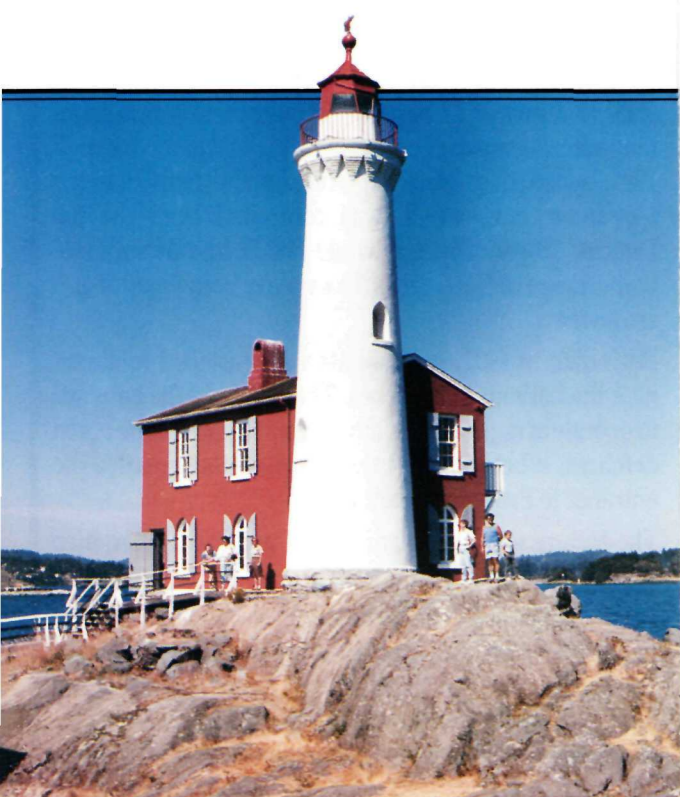


Lower Battery



Searchlight Engine Room

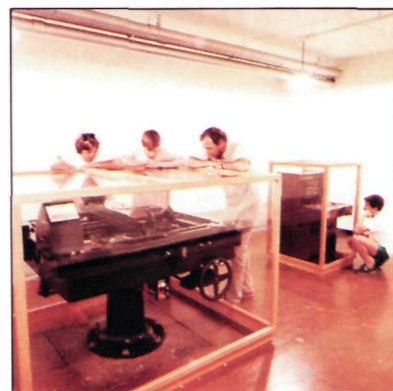
Fisgard Lighthouse National Historic Site



Belmont Battery



Searchlight No. 7



Fortress Plotting Room



Fisgard Lighthouse National Historic Site



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Fort Rodd Hill National Historic Park



FORT RODD HILL A Story of Coast Defence

Fort Rodd Hill is a national historic park administered by Environment Canada, Parks. The park protects heritage resources and encourages public understanding of the Victoria-Esquamalt coast defences. These defences, which included Fort Rodd Hill, protected the two harbours from naval attack between 1878 and 1956.

Warships of the British Royal Navy began to use Esquamalt Harbour in 1848 while patrolling local waters. When British Columbia became a province of Canada in 1871, Esquamalt continued to be a station of the Royal Navy's Pacific Squadron with Canada being responsible for its defences. Esquamalt soon became one of a chain of 12 coaling stations encircling the world on which the steam driven warships of the Royal Navy depended. It was vital that the coaling stations be protected from enemy attack.

Growing international threats led to the construction of temporary coast defences around Victoria-Esquamalt in 1878. These defence installations were manned by Canadian militia. Further threats prompted a Canadian and British joint agreement in 1893 to construct more modern and permanent defence installations with a garrison of British troops.

Three separate batteries, Upper, Lower and Belmont, were built at Fort Rodd Hill between 1895 and 1900 and equipped with modern guns. Subsequently, the Royal Navy's Pacific Squadron was reduced and the British garrison was withdrawn in 1906. All the forts of the coast defence then came under the command of the Canadian forces.

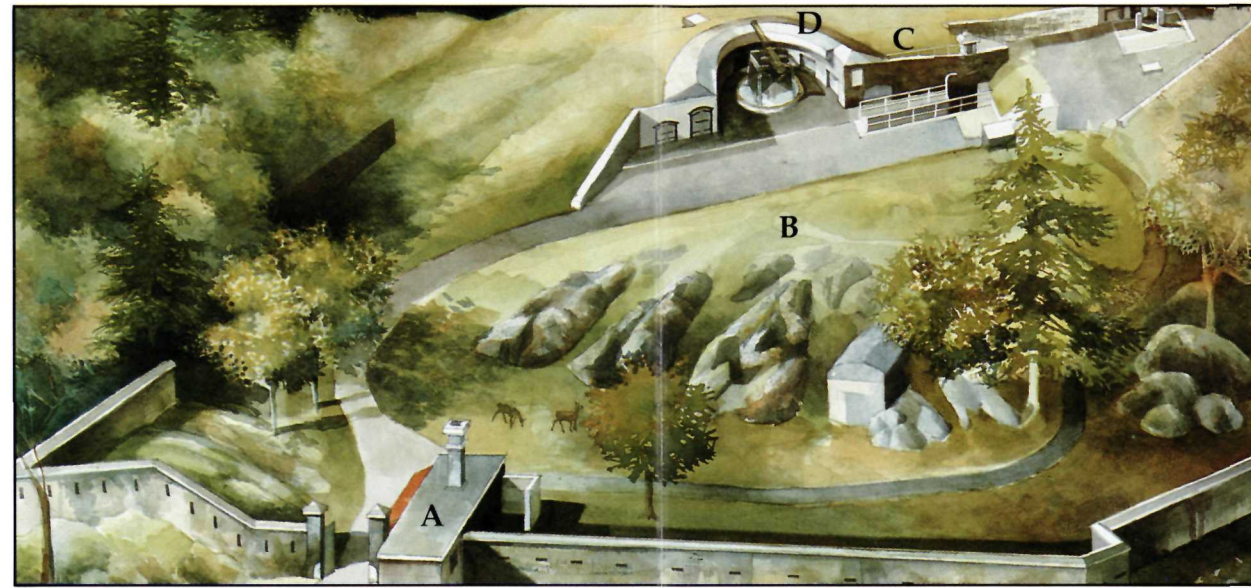
Fort Rodd Hill continued to be an active military station until 1956. By that time more sophisticated weapons, such as long-range missiles, had made the coastal defence guns obsolete.

The Victoria-Esquamalt area was never attacked, quite possibly because no enemy ship wished to challenge such a strong defensive position.

Fisgard Lighthouse

During all the years of threats and upheavals, one lone sentinel faithfully stood at the entrance to Esquamalt Harbour. Fisgard Lighthouse, the first permanent light on the Canadian Pacific coast, was built in 1860. It is now a national historic site and continues to guide vessels through the confined passage. Interior exhibits tell the story of the west coast lighthouse system.

Upper Battery



A GUARDHOUSE

The guardhouse is restored to the 1900 period. On display are Royal Marine Artillery uniforms, Martini-Henry rifles and Slade-Wallace field equipment.

B THE RAMPARTS

From this high point, the sea approaches to Esquamalt Harbour can be seen.

C UNDERGROUND MAGAZINE

Beneath the gun emplacement is the magazine for the storage of shells and cartridges.

D 6-INCH GUN BARREL

This is the original barrel from the Upper Battery 6-inch coast defence gun. It is mounted on a display base.



The uniform illustrated is of the British Royal Garrison Artillery who manned the coast defences from 1899 to 1906.

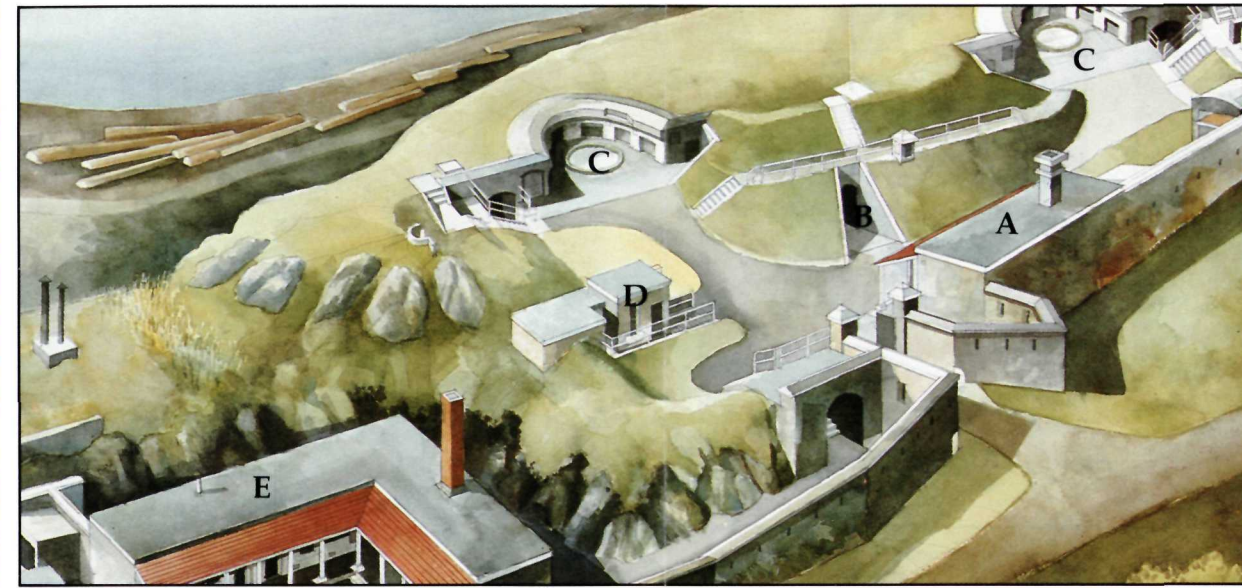
This battery was built by the British Royal Engineers between 1895 and 1898 and was constructed according to British War Office plans.

Upper Battery was designed to accommodate one of the three 6-inch breech loading disappearing guns allocated to Fort Rodd Hill. The other two were in Lower Battery. As well as the gun emplacement, the battery has an underground magazine, a shelter for duty personnel and an artillery store. It is surrounded by a defensible wall and barbed wire with a guardhouse at the entrance gates. Rifle fire could have been directed at invaders through the loopholes of the wall. When off duty, the men were accommodated in Casemate Barracks, near Lower Battery.

The Victoria-Esquamalt coast defences were originally garrisoned by C Battery Canadian Artillery and then by a Royal Marine Artillery detachment which arrived in Esquamalt in 1893 as part of the Canadian-British agreement. Six years later, they in turn were replaced by successive companies of the Royal Garrison Artillery, who remained until the total withdrawal of the British Forces in 1906 when the garrison was once more wholly Canadian.

Each garrison conducted training courses for the local militia artillerymen on the guns and equipment of the defences. The battery was fully manned in the First World War. The gun was dismantled in 1942.

Lower Battery



A GUARDHOUSE

The guardhouse is restored to the First World War period. On display are Canadian Garrison Artillery uniforms, a short magazine Lee Enfield rifle, a long Lee Enfield rifle and guard duty equipment.

B UNDERGROUND MAGAZINE

The tunnel leads to the magazine where the ammunition for the 6-inch guns was kept.

C GUN EMPLACEMENTS

The 6-inch disappearing guns were located in these emplacements.

D ARTILLERY & SHELL STORES

These structures housed spare gun parts and tools and, occasionally, small arms ammunition.

E CASEMATE BARRACKS

This barracks was intended to accommodate the soldiers who would man Upper and Lower Batteries in time of war.



The uniform illustrated is of the Canadian Garrison Artillery and the Royal Canadian Artillery who manned the coast defences from 1906 to 1939.

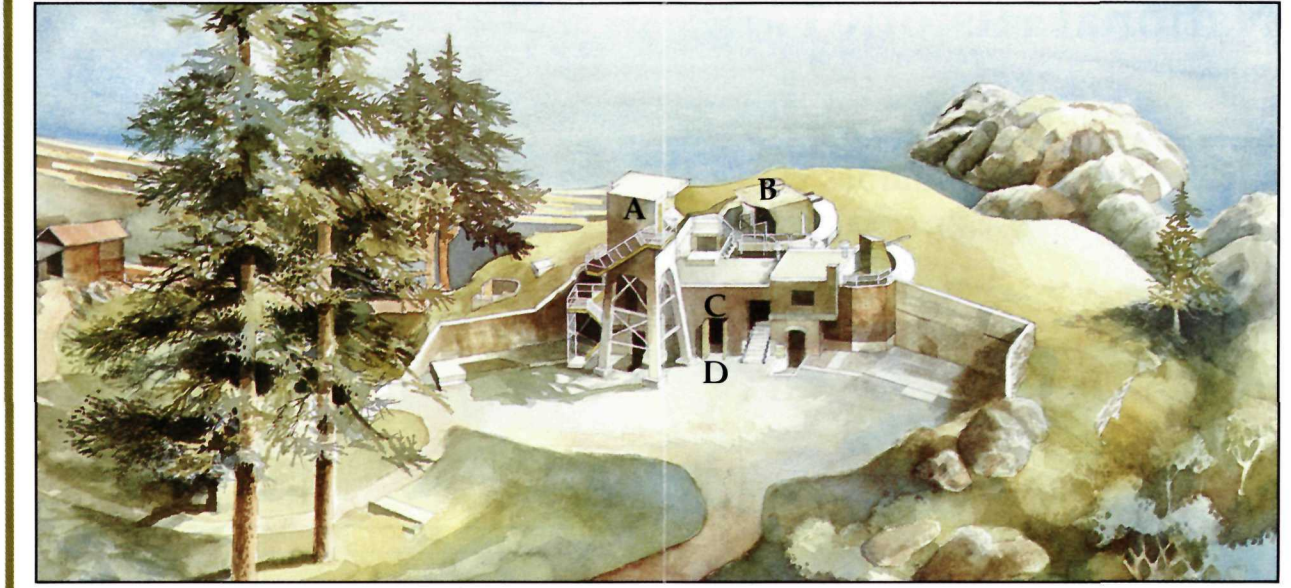
This battery was built at the same time as Upper Battery. A much larger fortification, it was designed to accommodate two of the three 6-inch guns on disappearing carriages that were assigned to Fort Rodd Hill.

These large weapons fired shells with a six-inch diameter weighing 100 pounds each. The guns were mounted on disappearing carriages which allowed the barrels to be lowered behind the protective wall while being loaded. The guns were raised above the level of the wall to fire. They had a maximum range of 10,000 yards.

Lower Battery has an underground magazine, guardhouse, crew shelters, artillery stores and a defensible wall on its landward side. Casemate Barracks housed off-duty personnel of both Lower and Upper Batteries.

During the First World War the battery was manned by Canadian troops. Between the wars, training exercises and summer camps were conducted. The guns were dismantled early in the Second World War. A light anti-aircraft gun was then installed in the left emplacement until 1945.

Belmont Battery



A DIRECTOR TOWER

From the upper level of this tower, the battery commander had a clear view of the harbour approaches and could control the fire of the twin-barrel 6-pounder gun.

B GUN EMPLACEMENT

In 1944, the twin-barrel 6-pounder gun replaced two 12-pounder guns.

C ARTILLERY STORES

Artillery equipment was stored here. On display are Royal Canadian Artillery battledress and fatigue dress and a Vickers machine gun.

D THE MAGAZINE

Below the gun position is the magazine where ammunition was stored.



The uniform illustrated is of the Royal Canadian Artillery who manned the coast defences during the Second World War.

Belmont Battery was constructed in 1898 to prevent attack by fast torpedo boats. These small craft could manoeuvre around the fire of heavy coast guns and attack ships at anchor.

The first battery armaments were two 12-pounder quick firing guns. They were capable of shooting a 12-pound shell at a rate of 15 rounds per minute to a maximum range of 8,000 yards. These guns remained in service until 1944, when they were replaced by the twin barreled 6-pounder gun, which was controlled from the tall Director Tower. This gun could fire 72 rounds a minute with a range of 5,500 yards. Example of both types of gun are on view.

Beginning in 1902, searchlights were installed to illuminate the harbour approaches. They allowed the batteries to operate at night against any attempt to breach the boom defences, submarine nets and minefield that guarded the entrance to Esquamalt Harbour.

The battery was fully manned by Canadian artillerymen throughout both world wars.

After the Second World War, Belmont remained operational. However, by 1956 the battery weapons that had so adequately guarded Esquamalt Harbour and the naval base, were no longer considered effective.