

FORT SCRATCHLEY RETURNS FIRE



Fort Scratchley is situated on the eastern end of Newcastle on the site originally named Braithwaite's Head by Lieutenant John Shortland. Convicts created Australia's first coal mine here in 1801.

The Fort is a remaining example of late 19th century closed work fort complexes in NSW.

To protect the coastline in the event of an attack in 1828 an eastern battery named Fort Battlesticks was constructed, and the site, after being handed over to the Army in 1843, became known as Signal Hill.

Further fears of an enemy attack saw a permanent facility completed and it was renamed Fort Scratchley after Lieutenant Peter Scratchley who was responsible for planning the permanent facility.

The first guns were mounted in 1866 to protect the Newcastle Harbour entrance. They were 32 pounder smooth bore guns and were replaced in 1874 by 68 pounder guns. 1877 saw recommendations for three 9 inch rifled muzzle loading and four 80 pounder guns to be installed.

In 1881 construction of the fort commenced. Construction was of reinforced concrete and brick, and blended into the hillside to expose a minimal area to attack. Designed by G.A Orell, the Fort was built by a local builder James Russell. In 1886, additions such as a new soldiers' barracks and stockade were made.

On the 8th June 1942, the Japanese submarine I-21 bombarded Newcastle for almost 20 minutes.

The attack commenced at 2.15am and a total of 34 shells were fired from a position at sea of 9,000 meters. Most of these shells landed near the power station and customs house and although all but one shell failed to explode, some damage was caused to buildings and houses.

The attack finished a few minutes after the guns at Fort Scratchley fired four rounds in reply.



Some Further information on the Japanese raid on our coast

At about 2.15 am on 8 June 1942, Japanese submarine I-21 under the command of Captain Kanji Matsumura, shelled Newcastle. I-21 had travelled across Stockton Bight and positioned itself about 9 kms north east of Newcastle. I-21 travelled eastwards firing almost directly across the stern of the submarine. Their orders were to shell the Newcastle shipyards at Carrington. It is possible that it may have also targeted the BHP Works at Kooragang Island, Fort Scratchley and a large BHP-owned iron ore bulk carrier ship, the "Iron Knight" (4,812 tons), which was moored at the steelworks docks.

The "Iron Knight" was used to transport raw materials from BHP's Whyalla iron ore mines to the Newcastle steelworks. The "Iron Knight" eventually succumbed to the Japanese 8 months later when it was sunk by Japanese Submarine I-21 on 8 February 1943 approximately 15 miles off Montague Island, New South Wales with the loss of 36 crewmen of her complement of 50 men.

The Japanese gun crew broke out 20 shells (5.5" shells) from the ready locker. They also brought up another 14 rounds from the armoury below decks. 8 of the shells were "illuminators" or "star shells". All 34 shells were fired at Newcastle. After 13 minutes of firing, the guns at Fort Scratchley returned fire with 4 rounds. I-21 continued firing for another 3 minutes until all 34 shells had been fired.

The shelling caused minimal damage and no casualties

Fort Scratchley Battery could not locate the Japanese submarine in any searchlight beams, located it by observing its gun flashes at bearing 067 degrees and approx 5000yds. Four rounds were fired from Fort Scratchley Battery. After the fourth round was fired, there was no answering fire from the submarine. Personnel at Fort Scratchley reported that some Japanese rounds fell to the left of their battery into the harbour and others appeared to pass overhead.

Locations of some of the 34 shells fired at Newcastle

Shells that exploded

Lloyd & Sons Office Building (The shell landed on the footpath outside the office. It was soon declared safe and was kept by Lloyd & Sons as a door-stop for the front door of their Mayfield shop.)

The Tram Depot. (Now the site of Queens Wharf Cafe's & Ferry Wharf, the shell landed just next to the Depot.)

The Remaining Shells (landed in Newcastle Harbour. Several exploded in a fountain of water while the rest sank to the bottom where they still remain.).

Shells that did not explode

Parnell Place.- The shell hit several houses on the street. This was about only one block from Fort Scratchley.

The B.H.P Steelworks - A shell landed in a storage shed at the steel works causing little damage

The Northern Wall of the Newcastle Ocean Baths. -The Ocean Baths, situated just down the hill from Parnell Place, next to Newcastle Beach was the site of the 3rd explosion. The shell, landed between the bath's northern wall & the rock pools that spread between the baths & Nobby's Beach. The explosion caused no damage.

Nobby's Breakwall -This shell exploded on the side of Nobby's Breakwall. It is said to have caused no damage.

The Remaining Shells - landed in Newcastle Harbour. Several exploded in a fountain of water while the rest sank to the bottom where they still remain

Not long after the shelling started, a group of residents set up a search light at King Edward Park that was established for the cause to help Fort Scratchley locate the Japanese submarine. It proved useless since by the time it was fully set up, the submarine had gone and the surprise raid was over.

Extracts from Fort Scratchley War Diary

Time Line: June 8th 1942

12:45am	Air-raid warning - red
1.19am	Air- raid warning - yellow
1:21am	Air-Raid warning - white (all clear)
2.17am	Sounds of gun fire - alarms sound
2.19am	Fort battery on alarm station. White flares and gunfire spotted.
2:20am	No visible target in search light beam.
2:26am	Fort battery opens fire on enemy vessel; not visible in any beam, but located by gun flashes at bearing 067 degrees and approx 5000yds. Four rounds fired from battery. After fourth round fired, no answering fire from enemy. During action rounds fall left of battery into harbour - others appeared to pass overhead.
2:31am	No. 2 gun out of action - LBM (lever breech mechanism) damaged.
3.07am	Guards posted over unexploded shell (which) also smashed electricity wire in street (Parnell Place)
5.42am	Port closed to outward shipping till daylight June 9th. Port is open to inward shipping - advise Nobby's (lighthouse).

When World War Two broke out, Novacastrians were told that it was a good idea to keep fragile windows open or replace them since the guns of Fort Scratchley were so strong the every window in the city's east end could be shattered. Most ignored this advice and when the guns were fired in the early hours of that morning most windows in the city cracked or smashed.

In February 1944, the Japanese submarine, I-21 which attacked Newcastle was sunk by an American vessel near Gilbert Islands in the Pacific.

It was also reported that Japanese planes had been mapping and spying on Newcastle since early May 1942. They had also reportedly recovered British maps of the area and used them to plan the attack