

Book Reviews

Vancouver Defended: A History of the Men and Guns of the Lower Mainland Defences, 1859-1949, by Peter N. Moogk (assisted by Major R. V. Stevenson). Surrey, B.C., 1978. Pp. 128; *illus.*

The University of British Columbia has an intimate physical connection with the Second World War. Throughout that conflict a 7-inch coast defence battery occupied a position near the western tip of Point Grey and within an arrow's flight of the main campus. Now the pedestal of the No. 1 Gun has been marked off and preserved from the omnivorous appetite of the new Museum of Anthropology. It is no coincidence that the leader in preserving this link with wartime service has now produced a most interesting and informative account: *Vancouver Defended: A History of the Men and Guns of the Lower Mainland Defences, 1859-1949*. The author, Professor Peter N. Moogk of the university's Department of History, has had the enthusiastic co-operation of many veterans and others, including Major R. V. Stevenson, historian of the parent unit, now the 15th Field Artillery Regiment.

Moogk properly begins his narrative with the surveys for the first military reserves on Burrard Inlet in 1859 and carries the story forward to 1949, by which time the last of the guns in the Vancouver defences had been removed. It is a measure of the author's careful perspective that nearly half the text is devoted to the period before the outbreak of war in 1939.

The original defences of the Lower Mainland long antedated Vancouver, the Seymour Artillery Company having been organized at New Westminster in 1866. There were continual reorganizations over succeeding decades. It is fascinating to think that when, in 1878, Disraeli and Gorchakov disputed British and Russian interests in the Near East, echoes of their argument at Berlin revived interest in strengthening the defences of our remote West Coast. In those early days it was difficult to get uniforms and equipment, let alone guns. One could sympathize with the

officer who reported in 1880 that "an artillery corps without guns is an anomaly most difficult to sustain. . . ." As late as 1889 the gunners of New Westminster fired a "royal salute" on Victoria Day with two borrowed anvils and a small charge of gunpowder! It was not until 1894 that No. 5 Company, British Columbia Battalion of Garrison Artillery/5th (B.C.) Regiment, C.A., was organized at Vancouver. After further reorganizations the 15th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, appeared in 1920, and it was this unit that was converted to the 15th (Vancouver) Coast Brigade, Royal Canadian Artillery, in 1938.

Even before Hitler marched into Poland the 15th Brigade had taken up its defensive positions: the 31st Heavy Battery at Ferguson Point in Stanley Park and Narrows North (under the north end of the Lions Gate Bridge); the 58th Battery at Point Grey, with a detachment at Steveston to guard the mouth of the Fraser River; and the 85th at remote Yorke Island, covering the northern approach to Vancouver through Johnstone Strait.

In spite of all preliminary planning, the mobilization of any unit in wartime is often a difficult process, requiring much improvisation. This was particularly true of the 15th Brigade since it had so recently been converted from a mobile to a static role. It is, therefore, pleasant to recall that the Brigade assumed its wartime duties with a minimum of dislocation. Credit for this was undoubtedly due to the unit's senior officers: the commanding officer, Lt-Col. G. Y. L. Crossley, a veteran of the First World War; his second-in-command, the almost legendary Major C. K. ("Rosie") Rosebrugh; and the original battery commanders, in particular, Major J. E. Piercy, Captain F. W. Guernsey and Captain (later Brigadier) R. T. Du Moulin. Very green and inexperienced junior officers (such as the present writer) have good cause to remember the invaluable guidance they received while struggling to master simultaneously details of gun drill, fire discipline, mess etiquette and the Manual of Military Law.

One of the most interesting chapters is entitled "Going Yorkey: Yorke Island, 1939-1945". Here we have the story of those unfortunate members of the Brigade (rotated, from time to time, with personnel in the Vancouver forts) who had to man the guns on this small, rocky island some 150 miles northwest of Vancouver. Morale was always a problem on "Little Alcatraz". As expressed in a gunner's song:

If you're on this Island long, tho' you think your mind is strong
You'll soon be climbing trees and walls.

The main armament in the Vancouver defences was located at Point

Grey (originally two, later three 6-inch guns) and Stanley Park, whose two 6-inch pieces were traded with Yorke Island's two 4.7-inch guns after Japan struck at Pearl Harbor. Two 12-pounders had an anti-Motor Torpedo Boat role at Narrows North and two obsolete 18-pounder field guns provided a farcical defence at Steveston. Point Grey Battery was primarily intended for counter-bombardment — that is, engaging hostile ships outside the immediate defences of the harbour. But the maximum range of its guns, bearing the dates 1899 and 1902, was only 14,500 yards. Initially, also, Point Grey functioned as the Examination Battery in close co-operation with the Examination Vessel (manned by the Royal Canadian Navy) which controlled marine traffic entering the harbour. Veterans of the early days at Point Grey will recall the “emergency” which arose when one of the transpacific “White Empresses” was reported to be shadowed by an enemy submarine while approaching the harbour. The battery “took post”, the gunners manned their pieces and observers strained their eyes through the range-finders, although it was never quite clear how the guns would engage a submerged submarine or, for that matter, why it would not have attacked its prey far out in the Strait of Georgia. It was another story in the summer of 1940 when the battery's 6-pounder fired many “heave to” rounds ahead of small craft (including American yachts) who rounded Point Grey blissfully unaware that they were in a “war zone”, contravening Examination regulations.

As the war progressed there were many changes in the Vancouver defences, including improvement of the Examination Service facilities and provision of anti-aircraft guns and more powerful searchlights. (The original anti-aircraft defence had consisted only of Lewis light machine-guns mounted on tripods!) The historian has not neglected some of the more colourful incidents in the wartime history of the 15th Brigade, including the bizarre sinking of an innocent freighter in 1942 by a “heave to” round that ricocheted across English Bay.

Although this excellent history is primarily concerned with the defences of Vancouver, it is a matter of regret that room could not have been found for some indication of how these defences were integrated with other fortifications on our west coast, notably those at Victoria-Esquimalt and Prince Rupert. The 9.2-inch armament at Albert Head was the most powerful armament we had on our coast; this, together with a wide variety of lighter equipment, was eventually supplemented by American 8-inch railway guns at Christopher Point in close co-operation with American coast artillery on the southern shore of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Something might also have been said about the later careers of certain gunners who left the Vancouver defences for overseas — such as Captain H. B. Carswell, who won the Military Cross in the Dieppe Raid, and Major E. A. Royce, who commanded the 1st Canadian Rocket Battery in Europe and who afterwards became a Vice-President of the Bank of Montreal.

Some errors have crept into the text. The Anglo Japanese Alliance dated from 1902, not 1911. Mackenzie King would not have been pleased to find his name hyphenated. In 1939 the popular Colonel H. F. G. Letson (later Adjutant General of the Army) commanded the 14th Infantry Brigade and Vancouver Area Defences, not Military District No. 11. It is also distressing to find a reference to “Juan de Fuca Strait”! Sixty-pounders are not properly classified as “field” guns, and no sailor would ever refer to the “near” side of a ship. There are also mistakes in page references given in the index.

On the credit side tribute must be paid to Professor Moogk for the excellence and profusion of the illustrations and diagrams, which are quite outstanding. It may be noted that some of the sketches were done by the war artist O. N. Fisher, who later accompanied and recorded the D Day assault of the 3rd Canadian Division in Normandy.

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The Squire of Kootenay West: a biography of Bert Herridge, by Maurice Hodgson. Saanichton: Hancock House Publishers, 1976. Pp. 232; *illus.*; map; index; bibliographical note.

This is a delightful book about a delightful human being. Having thus violated the reviewer's code of never saying anything completely positive, I'll have to backpedal furiously to redeem myself.

Maurice Hodgson, at the time a lecturer at Selkirk College, was commissioned to produce a biography of long-time politician and “character”, H. W. (Bert) Herridge. He had the man himself at his elbow and, as he says, the book is largely Herridge's story as Herridge remembered it, with the easy informality of the subject shining through the pages. One would need therefore to look elsewhere for a documented account of the political