

A SHORT HISTORY OF FORT WYNYARD. TABLE BAY DEFENCES

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Relatively little has been written about the history of the coastal defences of Table Bay. Although K. W. Maurice-Jones's book *The History of Coast Artillery in the British Army*¹ appeared in 1959 and articles about South Africa's coast gunners were published from time to time. This is hardly surprising since they remained operational until 1955 when the South African Marine Corps was disbanded and the batteries were transferred to the South African Navy for care and maintenance.

By consulting the Fort Record Book of Fort Wynyard, copies of Board of Ordnance Reports provided by the British Army Records Centre as well as copies of letters from Documentation Service, SADF and the help from Miss Fiona Barbour of the McGregor Museum in Kimberley and other sources this short history of Fort Wynyard could be compiled.

Fort Wynyard or Wynyard Battery, which overlooks Grainger Bay, is the headquarters of the South African Navy's Cape Town Coast Artillery Maintenance Unit. Like some of our other coastal fortifications it was built on the site of an earlier work, Kyk-in-de-Pot Battery, which is believed to have been built by the Dutch East India Company in 1750 and was operational in 1795.² In December 1810 Kyk-in-de-Pot Battery was described as 'a redoubt of an irregular figure' which was armed with 'four 24 Pounder Brass Guns mounted on stone platforms'. The 'furnace for heating shot was in good order'.³

In January 1862 diplomatic relations between the United States and Great Britain were dangerously strained and a Royal Artillery company was withdrawn from the Eastern Frontier to man the battery which had recently been re-armed with modern heavy guns. A party of one hundred convicts from the nearby Breakwater Prison started work on the improvement of the earthworks in the battery on 3 February 1862. In the following month the battery was armed with 68-pounder guns. A report in the *Cape Argus* of 8 March 1862 'announced that a detachment of the Cape Volunteer Artillery had exercised on the guns at the fort, which would in future be known as Fort Wynyard after the General Officer Commanding and Acting Governor, Lieut-Gen R. H. Wynyard'.⁴



Lieut-Gen R. H. Wynyard, CB, (Source: Cape Archives)

Lieut-Gen Robert Henry Wynyard, CB (1802-1864) was commissioned in the British Army in 1819. He served in New Zealand from October 1845 until January 1847 in command of the 58th Regiment. (Later 2nd Battalion, The Northhamshire Regiment) Gen Wynyard was the second senior officer in Home Heke's War and was created a Companion of the Bath in 1846. In 1858 he was promoted to the rank of major-general and made General Officer Commanding and Lieutenant-Governor of Cape Colony. He acted for this periods as Governor of Cape Colony from August 1859 to July 1860 and again from August 1861 to January 1862.⁵

In 1867, the fortifications of Table Bay were described as 'generally in bad condition and quite unfit to resist attack by heavily armed ships of war'. There was 'no protection from shell firing'.⁶ The batteries were 'fully armed with 75 pieces of smooth-bore ordnance in serviceable condition'. There were '47 smooth-bore guns in reserve. The proportion of made-up ammunition ranged from 50 to 150 rounds per gun . . . in cases or barrels'. The magazines were dry and of good capacity holding 900 barrels of powder. The force of 37 men available for manning the defences was considered 'totally inadequate'.⁷ Similar reports about the shortcomings of the defences of Table Bay were to be submitted from time to time throughout the operational life of the

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battery as successive governments struggled with the problem of keeping its armament in line with the latest developments in naval gunnery.

The fortifications were still considered inadequate in 1868 and it is recorded that Fort Wynyard was not fully armed. The magazines at Cape Town were 'not very favourably situated, being principally in the casemates' which 'would have to be emptied in the event of hostilities'.⁸

Fifteen years later it was reported that the Royal Artillery ordnance, carriages and platforms at the Cape were in a satisfactory 'state and supplied with the authorised proportion of side arms and small stores'. The ammunition was also in good condition but the quantity kept in readiness for immediate use at Fort Wynyard was less than demanded by regulations because the inadequate fastenings to the lamp recesses and issuing hatches of the cartridge and shell stores made them unsafe.⁹

The Table Bay Defences consisted of 'six separate forts and batteries armed with 11 rifled and 58 smooth bore guns.'¹⁰ The cartridge and shell stores at Fort Wynyard were completed by the Royal Engineers in the earlier part of 1883.¹¹

Fort Wynyard was remodelled in 1887 as part of a programme for the modernization of the defences of Table Bay. The estimated cost was £1 0936 and actual cost was £9518 of which £2067 was charged to Imperial Funds for technical fittings and £7451 paid by the Cape Colonial Government. These figures do not include the cost of unskilled labour performed by convicts. Work commenced on 18 January 1888 and was completed on 13 April 1892.¹² Fort Wynyard was 'entirely constructed by convict labour in respect of slopes, earth movements, breaking stones and preparing concrete, etc.'¹³ During 1890 convicts 'performed the whole of the unskilled labour and a portion of the skilled labour at Fort Wynyard.' The Commanding Royal Engineer reported 'that on the whole the convicts' labour had been very satisfactorily carried out . . .'¹⁴ In 1889 the fort was armed with two 7-inch 6½ ton Rifled Muzzle Loading guns on circular 'C' Pivot racers and two 9.2-inch Rifled Breech Loading guns on High Precision mountings. Eight years later the two Rifled Muzzle Loading guns were dismantled and work on new emplacements for 6-inch Quick Firing guns began. The mountings were completed in November 1899 and the guns (A1 and A2) were mounted in 1900.¹⁵



Number 3 emplacement at Fort Wynyard in December 1889.

At the beginning of the 20th Century a new assessment of the probable threats to Britain's coastal defences at home and abroad foresaw danger from long range bombardment by battleships or heavy cruisers, 'bombardment at medium range by light cruisers', the attempted destruction of naval obstructions or the blocking of port or harbour entrances and night attacks by torpedo-craft. To counter these threats four guns were to be employed: 9.2-inch Breech Loading, 6-inch Breech Loading, 4.7-inch Quick Firing and 12-pounder Quick Firing.¹⁶

At the Colonial Conference in London in 1887 it had been decided that Great Britain and Cape Colony would share the future costs of the defences of the Cape Peninsula. On 9 March 1904, the General Officer Commanding Cape Colony, Major-General H. S. G. Miles, CB, CVO, advised the Governor, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, GCMG, that the War Office had approved the transfer of two 9.2-inch guns Mark IV from Craig Battery and two 6-inch Quick Firing guns from Fort Wynyard to Lion Battery on Signal Hill. When the Cape Government suggested that the British Government should bear the whole cost until such time as the Cape could pay its share, the Army Council replied that the request could not be granted and that existing ordnance and fortifications were adequate.¹⁷

Doubts about this somewhat surprising volte-face led to an inspection of the Cape's fixed defences by General Sir John Maxwell on 16 January 1906. General Maxwell reported that the disposition of the Table Bay defences left much

to be desired and described Craig Battery as useless because the Breakwater completely obstructed its field of fire. General Maxwell felt that the earlier Imperial proposal to move two 9.2-inch from Craig Battery and two 6-inch guns from Fort Wynyard to Lion Battery and two 4.7-inch guns from Craig Battery to Fort Wynyard would strengthen the defences of Table Bay. He pointed out that the guns at Fort Wynyard could not be fired in peace-time without causing damage to nearby buildings.¹⁸

The development of *HMS DREADNOUGHT* and the super-Dreadnought class battleships after 1905 made it necessary to re-assess the probable coast artillery threat and a committee under the presidency of General Sir John Owen was appointed in 1906. The Owen Committee condemned outdated Rifled Muzzle Loading and Rifled Breech Loading guns because they were 'useless against modern warships' and required too many manning details. The Owen Committee confirmed that the four types of guns selected early in the century were the most effective ones at that time, though it was realised that the 9.2-inch gun would probably not be able to counter the latest battleships.¹⁹ With regard to Cape Colony, the Committee reported that the fixed defences of the Cape Peninsula could be greatly reduced in future because the probable threat was judged to be one cruiser and not three. Differing views and lack of funds resulted in no changes before the outbreak of the First World War.²⁰

In his report on his inspection of the Royal Garrison Artillery, Cape Colony District in 1908 Major-General J. C. Dalton mentions that the two electric fighting lights for the 6-inch Quick Firing guns at Fort Wynyard were 'mounted on trucks and kept in a shed in the harbour. Power was supplied from the engine house which was of the usual type and was erected by the Royal Engineers.'²¹ In 1912 it was thought that £1 100 would be required 'this financial year for Electrical Lighting and Search Lights, Fort Wynyard.'²²

In May 1914 the War Office undertook to modernise the Table Bay Defences and advised the South African Secretary for Defence that the two 6-inch Quick Firing guns at Fort Wynyard would be replaced by two 6-inch Breech Loading Mark VII guns and that another similar gun would be issued as a reserve. All three guns were transferred from Sierra Leone and in order that they might be 'adapted for use with the carriages

now held (2 at Wynyard and 1 at the Castle) three cradles' were sent with the guns.²³ The two guns (F group) were mounted in haste because World War I had broken out on 4 August 1914. Work on the concrete emplacements started in September 1914 and was completed late in October that year. The guns were mounted by mid-December and test rounds were fired three months later. Both emplacements and mountings stood up to the ten test rounds and subsequent practice shoots 'extremely well'. Guns A1 and A2 were renumbered B1 and B2. 'In 1914 the two 9.2-inch guns (High Precision Mountings) were dismantled and removed.'²⁴

During the First World War the battery was manned by Garrison Artillery, Engineers and an Infantry Regiment. On 4 August 1914 the garrison consisted of the Royal Garrison Artillery, Cape Garrison Artillery, Royal Engineers and 2nd Battalion East Lancashire Regiment.²⁵ Most of the British Garrison left South Africa on 27 August 1914 and the Royal Engineers were replaced by men of the Cape Fortress Engineers which were raised at Cape Town in September 1914.²⁶

Late in January 1915 a detachment of Cape Town Highlanders took over a post in the fort where they served for some three months before embarking in the *SS CITY OF ATHENS* for Luderitzbucht.²⁷ In February 1916 all the Royal Garrison Artillery personnel left for England and the Cape Garrison Artillery assumed responsibility for Fort Wynyard and the other batteries. Accommodation at the fort was adequate and most of the artillery and infantry garrison lived in tents pitched outside the fort. In November 1917 a 15-pounder Breech Loading Cannon converted to an Anti-Aircraft gun and a Maxim gun on an Anti-Aircraft mounting were provided to augment the armament of the battery.²⁸

On 1 December 1921 the Union Government assumed responsibility for the landward defence of South Africa and the newly formed South African Permanent Garrison Artillery commanded by Lieut-Col B. C. Judd, OBE and Permanent Company of South African Fortress Engineers took over Fort Wynyard from the Royal Garrison Artillery.

Between the two World Wars training of the Cape Garrison Artillery continued and fort manning were held every year. A newspaper report of 1 March 1929 records that the shooting season extended from January to March 1929 and that the highlight of the practice shoots was the

Carruthers Trophy Competition. Gunners from two companies of the SA Permanent Garrison Artillery and three of the Cape Garrison Artillery competed for the trophy. The two 6-inch guns fired practice rounds at a moving target 'consisting of three floats (representing a light cruiser 300 feet long') towed by a tug. A winding gear in the tug made it possible to vary the speed of the target from dead slow to 20 knots. Battery Commanders directed operations telephonically from Signal Hill. In two of the four shoots the gun

detachments of 13 men and one officer wore gas masks in order to prepare themselves for gas warfare.²⁹

On 3 September 1939 Great Britain declared war on Germany. By 19h00 the guns of Wynyard Battery were manned by 'mixed detachments of Permanent Force, Cape Garrison Artillery gunners' and a handful of young men of the Special Service Battalion. The Cape Garrison Artillery had been called up earlier that day.³⁰



One of the two 6-inch Breech Loading Mark VII guns at Fort Wynyard early in World War II. Sgt-Maj Wollands, one of the best known Permanent Force instructors, stands on the right with hand on hip. (Source: Col N. D. Orpen)

During World War II Wynyard Battery was Cape Town's Close Defence and Examination Service Battery. In the former role it could be 'fought at all four cases of laying, there being provision of the necessary Battery Observation Posts and range-finding instruments for that purpose.' Its Examination Service Battery role stemmed from its closeness to Table Bay harbour, the good view of the Examination Service Anchorage and the fact that it was not adversely affected by mist and fog in winter. The Examination Service Battery and Vessel were responsible for the certification and admittance of merchant vessels into the port and the Examination Service Anchorage. Any ship passing the final line of arrival was to be stopped by a bring to round across her bow from the battery and thereafter to be engaged unless she heaved to.

As in World War I there was at first insufficient accommodation for the garrison for the battery and men were housed in the damp Long Gallery, a store in the casemate to the left of the entrance to the fort and in other unsuitable places. Some months later adjoining municipal land was leased and wooden hutments were erected there.

The armament of the battery was augmented in March 1940 by two 12-pounder 12cwt Mark II guns on S2 mountings which were provided by the Royal Navy as a defence against Motor Torpedo Boats and to fire bring to rounds at close ranges below 7000 yards. In June 1940 one Twin Lewis Machine Gun was mounted to defend the fort against low flying aircraft. The 6-inch guns (F1 and F2) were renumbered G1 and G2 in June 1943.³¹

The shields on the two 6-inch guns were built at the Railway Workshops at Salt River and were added during World War II.

Operational needs resulted in a dramatic change in the composition of the manning details of the battery. Coast gunners under the age of 35 were drafted to 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade for the first time on 5 September 1940 and this practice was continued.³² Older men were retained to man the Union's coastal defences. In April 1941, the SA Garrison Artillery, a reserve regiment of part-time volunteers was raised. Duties were arranged on evenings during the week and over week-ends so as to relieve the full-time volunteers.

The first Coloured gunners were drafted to the battery on 3 November 1941. Subsequently all the white gunners were replaced and only white non-commissioned officers and officers were retained. On 26 June 1942 Women's Auxiliary Army Service artillery specialists were posted to the battery to release male personnel in the Battery Observation Post for service elsewhere.

In December 1942, two new searchlights emplacements replaced those at Mouille Point which were taken over by Lion Battery. The engine room (22 kilowatt Lister engines) remained in Wynyard Battery. In 1946 the Lion Battery Directing Station was transferred to the Wynyard Battery Observation Post. Wynyard Battery remained operational until the end of the war with Japan on 14 August 1945 and the last war-time volunteer was demobilised in April 1947 when the first post-war fortress manning by the Active Citizen Force was held.³³

Fortunately Warrant Officer I. H. J. Kokott, who had served as an instructor on the 6-inch guns of Wynyard Battery in August 1940 was appointed Warrant Officer-in-Charge of Fort Wynyard Coast Artillery Maintenance Unit in October 1968. Mr Kokott quickly set about restoring the battery to something close to its former glory and in 1976 Fort Wynyard was declared a National Monument.



Entrance to Fort Wynyard today. In the old casemate on the left is the 'Long Gallery' which was originally a Royal Artillery store and was used as a barracks early in World War II.

Although the guns of Wynyard Battery never fired a shot in anger, the importance of the coastal defences of the Cape Peninsula should not be overlooked. To the Royal Commission on Colonial Defence in 1881 it seemed that 'the safety of the whole empire might hang one day upon control of the naval base at Simon's Bay and the South African shores.'³⁴ Dr Paul Kennedy has described Cape Town as 'perhaps the most important strategical position in the world in the age of sea power.'³⁵ Nor should the distinguished war records of South Africa's coast gunners be forgotten. Maj-Gen W. H. E. Poole, CB, CBE, DSO and Brig P. de Waal, CB, CBE are probably the best known.

Today Fort Wynyard and the surviving batteries in Cape Town and Simon's Bay remain as monuments to South Africa's coast artillery era which ended in 1955 and the men who built and manned them.

Foot-notes

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3. *Report of the State of the Forts and Batteries and Field Ordnance composing the Ordnance Establishment in the Colony of Cape of Good Hope December 1810*, Cape Archive, VC 214 (WO 44/65).
4. N. Orpen: *Gunners of the Cape* Cape Town, p. 12.
5. Unpublished thesis on Lt-Gen R. H. Wynyard, CB, by J. G. Wynyard.
6. *Annual Report. Board of Ordnance, 1867*.

7. *Ibid.*
8. *Annual Report. Board of Ordnance, 1868*.
9. Letter from Officer Commanding Royal Artillery in South Africa to the Deputy Adjutant General in South Africa dated 10 March 1883.
10. Letter from Officer Commanding Royal Artillery in South Africa to the Deputy Adjutant-General, Cape Town dated 11 May 1883.
11. Letter from Officer Commanding Royal Artillery in South Africa to the Deputy Adjutant General Cape Town dated 29 November 1883.
12. Fort Wynyard Plan 387, Cape Archives M1/2424.
13. *Cape of Good Hope: Reports on the Management and Discipline of Convict Stations and Prisons for the Year 1889*, Cape Town, p 5.
14. *Cape of Good Hope: Reports on the Management and Discipline of Convict Stations and Prisons for the Year 1890*, p 3.
15. Fort Wynyard Fort Record Book.
16. K. W. Maurice-Jones, *op cit*, p 171
17. J. Ploeger: *Suid-Afrikaanse Verdedigingskemas 1887-1914* (*Militaria* 1/5, 1969 p 33-34)
18. *Ibid*, p 35-36.
19. K. W. Maurice-Jones, *op cit*, p 172.
20. J. Ploeger, *op cit*, p 26.
21. *Report by the Inspector of Royal Garrison Artillery on his Inspection of the Royal Garrison Artillery, Cape Colony District, 1908*, p 8.
22. Letter from Under Secretary for Defence to The Chief Royal Engineer, Cape of Good Hope District dated 18 November 1912.
23. Letter from Major-General i/c Administration, South Africa to Secretary for Defence dated 22 May 1914.
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25. *Ibid*.
26. Major G. Tylden, *The Armed Forces of South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1954 p 53.
27. N. Orpen: *The Cape Town Highlanders* Cape Town, 1970, p 78.
28. Fort Wynyard Fort Record Book.
29. *The Argus* 1 March 1929.
30. N. Orpen: *East African and Abyssinian Campaigns*, Cape Town, 1968, p 1.
31. Fort Wynyard Fort Record Book.
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