

Matiu/Somes Island Heavy Anti-aircraft Artillery Battery

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The five concrete structures on the levelled hilltop on Matiu/Somes Island represent a command post and four gun positions. They are the remains of a World War II (1939-1945) Heavy Anti-aircraft Artillery (HAA) position. One gun emplacement has been damaged, but the structures are otherwise much as they were when they were decommissioned by the army after the war.

What was the role of heavy anti-aircraft artillery?

The role of HAA was to combat high flying enemy aircraft. The guns used on Matiu/Somes Island were 3.7 inch calibre and could punch a shell to 10,000 feet in 14 seconds. A rate of fire of 10-

12 rounds per minute per gun was usual. The command post housed instruments such as the spotter's telescope, a height and range finder, and a predictor. The predictor combined information on the distance, course and speed of the enemy to determine where to train the guns and the fuse-setting required for the shells. This information was relayed automatically to the gunlayers in each emplacement so that all the guns were trained on the target area. The trenches carrying the cables linking the gun positions to the command post are still clearly visible on the ground surface. In the open centre of each gun emplacement is the holdfast (securing bolts) set in a concrete slab which were used to secure the gun. Around the gun were arrayed the ammunition lockers, some of which still contain remains of the ammunition racks.

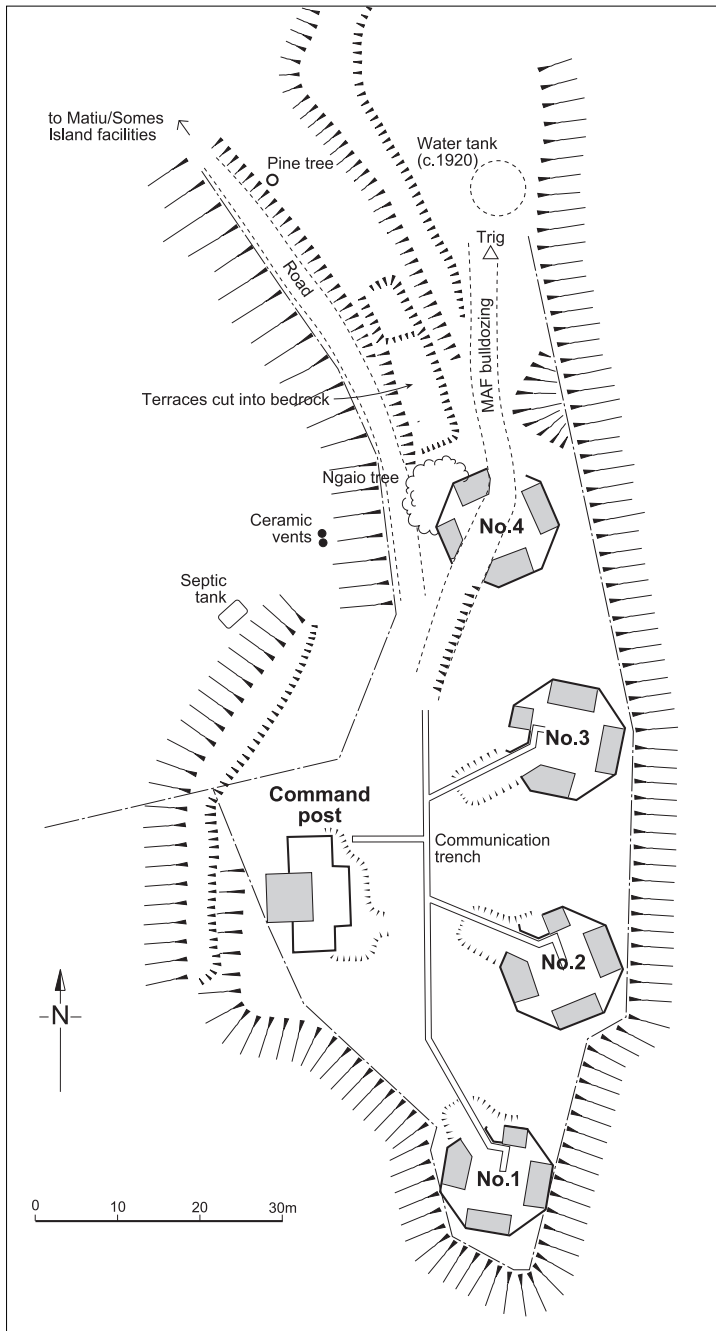
When was it built and why?

Six HAA positions were built on high ground in a ring around the port of Wellington between the middle of 1942 and early 1943. The hilltop site on Matiu/Somes Island was levelled in early November 1942 and the structures were completed some weeks later. The work was done by a private contractor, and the contract was supervised by the Public Works Department. The position

Contemporary photograph of a 3.7 inch gun and crew at drill.



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Plan of Matiu/Somes Island heavy anti-aircraft artillery position.

was manned from January 1943 to September 1944 but did not have to go into action. The HAA emplacements were built at a time when the war in the Pacific was finely balanced. Heavy losses were inflicted on Japanese naval forces at the Battle of Midway (3-6 June 1942) but the massive build up of the armed forces of the United States, which would eventually prove decisive, was still getting under way. By early 1943, however, the capability of Japanese forces to attack distant targets had been severely curtailed.

How common are they?

Twenty-one HAA positions were built in New Zealand during World War II. Sixteen of these positions have been largely or completely destroyed. Of the six positions in Wellington, three (Brooklyn, Point Halswell and Matiu/Somes Island) still survive substantially intact.

Who manned the guns?

The guns were manned by about 50 men of the 104th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, New Zealand Army, under the command of Captain E. James. A gun crew consisted of 10-12 men and a similar number were needed to crew the command post. Accommodation and other facilities were provided in the quarantine station buildings situated nearby. The quarantine station was used through much of the war as an internment camp, but the internees were removed during the period when the guns were manned because the Geneva Convention forbids prisoners being held in an area likely to become a target or the scene of fighting.

TECHNICAL DETAILS

calibre:	3.7 inch	(94 mm)
weight of gun:	10 tons	(11.5 tonnes)
muzzle velocity:	2,600 feet/second	(810 metres/second)
effective ceiling:	about 32,000 feet	(9760 metres)
weight of round:	63 pounds	(28.6 kg)
weight of explosive:	21 pounds 12 ounces	(9.8 kg)
lethal area:	60 feet	(18 metres)

Further information: Tony Walton, Kevin Jones, Richard Nester and Vanessa Tanner: A heavy anti-aircraft artillery position on Somes Island. *Forts And Works* 6, December 1998.