

Good morning, and thank you Don,

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge

Mr Laurie O'Meara AM - Chairman - Rottnest Island Authority

Mr Owen Peake, Chairman - Engineering Heritage Australia

Mr Don Young Chairman - Engineering Heritage Western Australia

Senior Defence representatives

Capt. Brett Dowsing - CO HMAS Stirling

FLT LTD Phil Jones - RAAF Base Pearce

Distinguished guests, engineers, historians, friends of the guns, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank both Mr Don Young and Professor Mark Bush for the kind invitation to say a few words 'military' about today's important and significant commemoration ceremony – recognising the Rottnest island WWII coastal facilities as a national heritage landmark.

The significance of this coastal defence facility, is that it remains, and now will remain forever - as the only intact site in Australia out of the seven 9.2 coastal gun batteries of the 1930's – WWII era and more importantly one of the few remaining in the world.

Historically the protection of a country and its ports with coastal artillery has been a long standing practice and one that has stood the test of time. The deterrence function of shore batteries against marine invasion and naval interdiction has been a principle of a national defence plans, longer than the history of this country and in - inheriting the British empires defence policies the protection of naval ports to serve what was then the largest maritime nation both mercantile and military was applied to the ports like Fremantle.

The construction of these two batteries, the primary - two 9.2" guns (h1 and h2) at Oliver Hill and the secondary 6 inch gun battery were commenced in early 1936 with start of the construction of the 9.2 emplacements. These were finished in Dec 37, with both the 9.2's installation completed by 1938, the six inchers were also installed and proofed during the same time with both batteries operational by 21 Nov 38 – in less than 1 year Australia would be at war. The guns were designed to protect the approaches to and from the port of Fremantle against enemy ships shelling the port, the ships and the important port facilities. Although manufactured as naval guns in 1901 and 1902 their range of 30k and heavy shell would have been devastating against light surface ships, cruisers and raiders that were then assessed as the most likely maritime threat.

The port of Fremantle played a vital role during WWII being the major base for American, British and Dutch submarines. They operated extensively in Japanese waters interdicting Japanese shipping, dropping of commandoes and were for a long time the only allied presence in Asian waters. It was the major port for warships operating into the Indian Ocean providing them with

essential logistic support and minor repair facilities. For the army it was for many the last site of home before a long trip to the war in the Mediterranean and Europe and more importantly the first sighting of Australia on their return – it needed to be protected.

The threat from Japan was real most of you know that three Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney harbour and attacked shipping on the 31 May 42. Japanese submarines operate relatively freely in the early war years; they shelled Australia on several occasions Newcastle, Sydney on the east coast and closer to home in Geraldton to our north. There is absolutely no doubt that the 9.2's and the pair of six inches deterred any similar attempt to shell Fremantle. – I would certainly not want to be a Japanese gunner standing on an open deck engaging in a gun duel with these 9.2's or the six inchers.

The insurance policy that coastal artillery afforded, the ports of Australia was a good investment and the mere fact that these guns never fired in anger is perhaps testament to their value as a deterrent.

Rottnest island although not quite an overseas posting would have been welcomed by the gunners, as they were at least close to home, the challenge of boredom; long hours of scanning vacant horizons for smoke, mainmasts and silhouettes of warships would have been interrupted by routine maintenance drills, the excitement of the occasional live fire practice and less so – the visits and inspections by senior officers like me and Capt. Dowsing.

WWII and these two batteries represent the culmination of coastal guns. With the ascendancy of air power and today's precision ordnance their survival like their contemporary battleships and cruisers of WWII has been relegated to scrap yards and the sea. Fate, apathy and the developer's bulldozer was now these guns' greatest enemy. Fortunately for us and our future generations these monuments to the past, reminders of our military heritage have defenders like the engineers of Australia and the artillery historical society. They have collectively recognised the importance and significance of these guns - saving them for future generations to visit between beaches, bakeries and quokkas. With Remembrance Day but one day away, one cannot help reflect when standing on the parapet, taking in the same view of the setting sun on the same horizon that was shared by these crews that served these guns over 70 years ago. With their menacing barrel pointing out to sea we are reminded of the intent and purpose of these guns and although they were never asked to speak in anger they stand today as a mute but impressive reminder of a bygone age were coastal artillery and the men and women that serviced the guns dedicated themselves to protecting Australia.

Thank you