Local Heritage Places

Heritage Citation

WWII Anti-aircraft battery

Key details

Also known as	6 (385th) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery/Gun Station
Addresses	At 50 Pritchard Street, Lytton, Queensland 4178
Type of place	Defence site
Period	World War II 1939-1945
Lot plan	L1_SP282377; L2_RP123275
Geolocation	-27.413128 153.153761
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 January 2004 Date of Citation — July 2003
Construction	Walls

People/associations	members of the 6 385th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery (Association)
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (C) Scientific; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (F) Technical; (H) Historical association

The 6 [385th] Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery (or 6 HAA Group) was constructed in 1942, in an effort to monitor and prevent aircraft entering Brisbane airspace and using the Brisbane River as a navigational aid when conducting reconnaissance. It retains four gun emplacements complete with magazines, plus the control room which is characteristic of Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries built in Brisbane and elsewhere in the state.

History

The 6 [385th] Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery (or 6 HAA Group) was constructed in 1942, in an effort to monitor and prevent aircraft entering Brisbane airspace and using the Brisbane River as a navigational aid when conducting reconnaissance.

The 6 HAA Group was a collection of “A class” (four static guns) defensive positions. These included;

Colmslie [385] (which became Lytton), Victoria Park [386] Balmoral [387], Pinkenba [388], Hendra [389], Hemmant [390], Amberley [391], and Archerfield [392].

These were built to provide protection for nearby Australian and US naval facilities located along the Brisbane River, including the nearby airfield.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, Australia’s focus in the war turned to the Pacific. After the raid on Darwin in February 1942, many felt that as Brisbane was the largest city in Queensland, it would be the next to experience a large-scale raid by the Japanese. The city was already designated as a staging point, with a significant US build-up underway, and the best port facilities in Queensland. Due to Brisbane’s distance from the front line, it could not be raided by land-based bombers, which had added to the devastation in Darwin. Thus any bombing attack would originate from aircraft carriers or long range Kawanishi flying boats, at this stage little known of by the Allies.

Between March and July 1942 the Japanese conducted regular reconnaissance missions over Cairns and Townsville using long range twin-engined aircraft. Townsville was actually bombed three times in late July and the town of Mossman once. During the Townsville raids, A Class stations of 16 HAA (X and Y Batteries) fired on raiding Kawanishi flying boats. While the Japanese were able to penetrate Australia’s defences on these occasions, the May Battle of the Coral Sea prevented Japan from completing its objective of achieving large scale carrier based raids along the Queensland coast.

Although Brisbane was never bombed, reconnaissance missions, such as those from submarine based floatplanes or Kawanishi’s are likely to have occurred. Similar missions were conducted and have been documented over East Coast towns from Cairns to Hobart. Sightings of aircraft capable “I” class submarines in deep water passages near Bribie and Moreton Islands have been recorded, and it is highly likely that similar intelligence gathering missions occurred over Brisbane. Depending on the completion date for the battery, it is

highly probable that 6 385th HAA either sighted or were involved in action against Japanese reconnaissance aircraft during 1942-43.

In a secret memo dated 14 August 1942 addressed to Captain Fletcher from the Chief of the General Staff, the reasons for constructing the Lytton battery are revealed,

> In view of the necessity for protecting the Naval berthing area at PINKENBA, it is considered that the concentration of guns around the city is relatively unjustified. The existing layout with your proposals have been re-examined and the following is regarded as meeting requirements Gun Station H (LYTTON).
> To be sited on LYTTON flats to avoid being masked by (the) convent and to increase density over eastern approach to PINKENBA.

The reinforced concrete and cinder block gun emplacements at Lytton are octagonally shaped. The surrounding magazine/store rooms originally housed a sandbagged entry point with more bags placed on the magazine roof. Rooms contained rifle racks and anti gas equipment, 280 rounds of ammunition for the AA gun and canvas flap doors for the perimeter entrances. Hidden from aerial view, three separate underground magazines provided cool storage for high explosive rounds (since demolished). The positions were armed with four 3.7-inch static AA guns. Introduced in 1937, these were the standard medium anti-aircraft gun for the British Army between 1938 and 1956 and weighed over 10 tonnes. They were capable of firing 10-12 rounds per minute to a height of 32,000 feet (9754 metres). A gun crew usually consisted of 10-12 men.

The guns were controlled by a centrally located, semi-underground command post/plotting room. This contained instruments such as the spotter’s telescope, a height/range finder (Lytton used a No.3 Mark IV Type UB7 Rangefinder), and a predictor. Basically an early computer, it was manually programmed to follow a target and took into account it’s course/speed as well as the projectile's direction/velocity, with the object of predicting a future position where the two would meet. This information was relayed automatically to the gunlayers in each emplacement so that all guns were trained on the target area. Each gun had to be in sight of the height predictor, which could be no more than 10 feet above or below any gun. Further displacement caused errors, as the predictor could only solve deflection (angle).

As predictor-control required the setting-up of a heavy generator as well as the alignment of the guns to coincide with that of the predictor, it was preferred mainly for static positions. To find the height of an aircraft, a separate height finder was used. Fighter Sector Headquarters relayed sightings of suspicious aircraft to the command post for action, which in turn was in communication with observer units.

Personnel at the site consisted of both 6th Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft and VDC (Volunteer Defence Corp) personnel from mid 1943. AWAS (Australian Women’s Army Service) were involved in operating instruments such as range finding and spotting, but generally not in the firing of the guns. In 1944 personnel on the battery had diminished to a care and maintenance role and for training purposes. By January 1945 385 Aust Hvy AA is listed as ‘‘Scale C’ Manning, with Lytton being disbanded. In August 1945 all HAA sites in Brisbane were disarmed.

Description

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. Visible ones have the lettering "**FYT45 HA 1942 1189**" cast on their surface. Around the gun were arrayed the ammunition lockers, some of which still contain remains of the ammunition racks. Separate semi-underground magazines were still intact in the late 1960s, but these appear to have since been demolished.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014.* It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

for its role in the air defence of Brisbane during World War II.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage

as the most intact 'A Class' heavy anti-aircraft gun site remaining in the Brisbane area.

Scientific

CRITERION C

The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the city's or local area's history

as further research through the Australian Archives and the 385th Unit Diary may reveal if the unit was involved in action against enemy reconnaissance aircraft.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

it retains intact four gun emplacements complete with magazines, plus the control room which is characteristic of Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries built in Brisbane and elsewhere in the state.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as an example of military fortified architecture using both reinforced concrete and locally made cinder block.

Technical

CRITERION F

The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technological achievement at a particular period

as a modern facility in 1942 designed to locate and destroy enemy aircraft, which consisted of a height predictor, range/height finder and modern 3.7 inch guns set in a fortified position.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

for its association with members of the 6 385th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery.

References

1. Australian War Memorial Photograph Database
2. Commonwealth Archives Records ‘HQ Brisbane Fortress AA Defences & Coast Artillery 1942 - 1945’
3. Environmental Protection Agency Cultural Heritage Branch Citation 602084, ‘Mount St John Anti Aircraft Battery’
4. Environmental Protection Agency Cultural Heritage Branch Citation 601353, ‘6 (390) Australian Anti-Aircraft Battery Hemmant’
5. Heritage Unit Article Files
6. Spethman, D.W. Fortress Brisbane: A guide to historic fixed defence sites of Brisbane and the Moreton Bay Islands, the author, Brisbane, 1998

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