

Matiu/Somes Island defence heritage

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Matiu/Somes Island was used as a temporary refuge in times of war in pre-colonial times. In the first half of the twentieth century it was the site of three defence facilities: internment camps for enemy aliens in both World War I and World War II, a degaussing station (1942–45), and a heavy anti-aircraft artillery battery (1942–44).

Refuge pa

Matiu was the site of refuge pa, places of temporary resort in times of war. Te Moana-a-kura was located at the northern end of the island and was well protected by steep cliffs on two sides and Haowhenua occupied the area where the maximum-security animal quarantine facility was built.

Internment camps

The quarantine station was used in World War I (1914–18) to hold enemy aliens regarded as a risk to New Zealand's security. About 450 men were interned on Matiu/Somes Island and Motuihe Island (Auckland) in World War I. Most of the internees were German nationals. Additional accommodation blocks were built on Matiu/Somes Island in 1916 and, in

1918, a hospital was added. A recreation area was provided on reclaimed ground on the western shore.

In World War II (1939–45) some 90 Germans, 29 Italians and 29 Japanese were held on Matiu/Somes Island by 1942. They were moved to Pahiatua in 1943 during the short period when the heavy anti-aircraft artillery battery was operational but were returned to the island in 1944.

Degaussing station

German raiders (usually merchant ships with hidden guns and other weapons) laid both contact and magnetic mines in New Zealand waters in 1940–41. Degaussing was employed to protect steel-hulled ships from mines that were triggered by the magnetic signature of the hull. The signature was neutralised by positioning the ship close to a cable through which an electric current was discharged cancelling out the magnetic field, a process that had to be repeated at regular intervals. Degaussing ranges were operated in both Auckland and Wellington during World War II. The Matiu/Somes Island range was built during 1942 and was operational by November. It consisted of a two-storey instrument and observation block with office, engine room, and store on the shore, with 12 detectors on a 410 ft (125 m) line

Figure 1. A small group of internees plus S. Hart (Quarantine and lighthouse keeper) gathered next to one of the four two-storey buildings of the Quarantine Station in the early part of World War I. (Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa 112319 1/2).



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about 3500 ft (1065 m) offshore to measure the magnetic field. It had a staff of seven, and there were an additional four to operate a launch. The service was operated by WRENS (Women's Royal Navy Service). The station was closed in 1945 and the cable was lifted and buildings sold the following years. All that remains at the site on the eastern shore south of the main wharf are some foundations and the generator mounting.

Heavy anti-aircraft artillery battery

Four 3.7-inch heavy anti-aircraft guns were mounted on Matiu/Somes Island in World War II. Further information can be found on the information sheet on *Matiu/Somes Island Heavy Anti-aircraft Artillery Battery*.



Figure 2. Interned Germans celebrating the Kaiser's birthday on the recreation area on the shoreline. Shacks have been constructed and some internees wear military-style uniforms. (Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa, F-112288-1/2).

Figure 3. The Degaussing Station. (Department of Conservation Collection)

