

South Beach Pill Boxes



Location: South Beach, near Kaitoke Stream,
Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga List Number:

Physical Description: the structure is low, has a flat roof and is single storied. It has a truncated 'Y' shaped plan with a narrow slot opening towards the airport and other smaller openings on each side.

The remains of at least four other pillboxes are located along South Beach (and Languard Bluff Beach).

Other known names: Wanganui District – PB No. 19 (Pilot House) - 28

Current Use:

Former Uses: Pillbox

Heritage Status:

District Plan Class: Class B

Architectural Style:

Date of Construction: 1942

Materials: Concrete

Registered owner:

Legal Description:

Register Item Number:

101

Building Type:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Recreation
- Institutional
- Agriculture
- Other

Significance:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Cultural

Thematic Context

- Early Settlement
- Residential
- Industry
- Agricultural
- Commerce
- Transport
- Civic/Admin
- Health
- Education
- Religion
- Recreation
- Community
- Memorials
- Military

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

History: During World War 2, the port at Wanganui was highly active and classed as a secondary port requiring coastal defences.¹ Defence experts thought the most likely attack on New Zealand would be from a Japanese raiding ship.² A coastal artillery battery was positioned on Languard Bluff, consisting of a 5 inch ex-US naval gun.³ A large bell was placed on top of Lundon Park.⁴ Blockades and other fieldworks were positioned on the key roads around the port with the intention of preventing the enemy from being able to progress inland via the roads.⁵ These included tank traps on Heads Road near the soap factory, Puriri Street and Mosston Road.⁶

A network of pillboxes were constructed along the whole coastline, positioned so that their fields of fire overlapped.⁷ "Pillboxes", a term coined in 1917, were fortified machine gun posts constructed by the Army and Home Guard as an emergency defensive measure.⁸ Some 340 pillboxes were constructed across the country in 1942 and 1943.⁹

Twenty-eight pillboxes were planned for Wanganui, although only five had been completed by the Public Works Department by 23rd February 1943.¹⁰ A further eighteen were completed in March 1943.¹¹ Most of these were of the "Arrowhead" type, due to their shape being similar to that of an arrowhead.¹² This style of design was the preferred choice for the Wellington district.¹³ It allowed for a heavy machine gun at the head of the structure and three or more riflemen on the wings.¹⁴ Known as the "T49", plans for this type were drawn up in February 1942.¹⁵

¹ Sole 2008 p.200; Waters 2005.

² Sole 2008 p.40.

³ Waters 2005.

⁴ Sole 2008 p.40.

⁵ Waters 2005.

⁶ Sole 2008:202.

⁷ Sole 2008:200.

⁸ Cooke 2000:766.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Waters 2005.

¹³ Cooke 2000:768.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

Several "Round" pillboxes were also constructed, with one surviving example located near Morgan Street. This type was unusual in the North Island, as these were commonly built in the South Island only.¹⁶ The prefabricated pillboxes were based on a precast reinforced concrete pipe design from Hume Pipe Co. of Hornby which was intended as cheap and quick manufacture although was ultimately rejected by the Army.¹⁷ The revised PWD design, by Bob Semple, was made from two diameters of precast steam-cured reinforced concrete piping, with a small cavity between filled with 2 inches of bitumen.¹⁸ The structure was sunk vertically in the ground far enough to leave just the weapon port (a light machine gun only) visible.¹⁹ The top was covered by heavy concrete 20inch thick slabs, while a narrow door allowed entry for a two-men crew.²⁰

Sandbags and earth protected and concealed the structures, and the roofs were covered in turf and camouflage netting.²¹ Tunnels connecting the structures were made of concrete with manuka and scrub poles and covered with scrub.²² Inside the pillboxes, a machine gun would be mounted on a heavy table.²³ Bunks were also fitted along the back walls.²⁴

The coastal defences were manned by members of the Home Guard, New Zealand's last line of defence.²⁵ There were two platoons of D company in the Castlecliff Home Guard.²⁶ Typical exercises including digging slit trenches and manoeuvres with the regular forces.²⁷ The Castlecliff Beach was fenced off with barb wire and patrolled by the soldiers, with the only entrances being via Morgan and Rangiora Streets.²⁸

¹⁶ Waters 2005.

¹⁷ Cooke 2000:768.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Sole 2008 p.200.

²² Sole 2008 p.200.

²³ Sole 2008 p.200.

²⁴ Sole 2008 p.200.

²⁵ Sole 2008 p.203.

²⁶ Sole 2008 p.204.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

The threat from Japanese invasion existed until 1943.²⁹ After this time, the Home Guard forces were wound down and beach defences abandoned.

Children growing up in the post-war era recall playing in the pillboxes and connecting tunnels.³⁰

At least four pillboxes still exist along the South Beach in the vicinity of the airfield and Kaitoke Stream.

One arrowhead pillbox is located on the southern edge of the Wanganui River, north of the airport runway.³¹ It is located on a track past some army huts, on a bearing of about 280 degrees, looking towards the coast.³²

One arrowhead pillbox is located on the eastern side of the runway at Wanganui Airport, about 2/3rds the way between the southern end of the runway and the main passenger terminal.³³ There are possibly two more pillboxes around the airfield.

Another pillbox is located by the mouth of the Kaitoke Stream.³⁴ This one has largely subsided into the sand.

One pillbox is located on private property near the Kaitoke Stream.³⁵ This is the pillbox identified above.

Architect/Designer:

History of changes:

Date Period: 1940s

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Sole 2008 p.42.

³¹ Waters 2005.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

Rarity / Special Features: The **Integrity:**

structure is one of a number of similar WWII military defence positions throughout New Zealand in general and Wanganui in particular.

Representativeness: The structure is one of a number of similar WWII military defence positions throughout New Zealand in general and Wanganui in particular.

Context/Group Value: The structures form part of a nationwide group of WWII military locations throughout New Zealand, a number of which survive today.

Diversity (Form and Features): **Fragility / Vulnerability:**

Summary of Significance:

Architectural Qualities

This circular pill box is a functional military design associated with the defence of Wanganui. There are two surviving designs of pill boxes one of which may have been locally designed and manufactured and the more sophisticated pillboxes were designed by the military. The construction of the pillbox is representative of the use of reinforced concrete for wartime structures built in the 1940s.

Historic Qualities

The structure is one of a number constructed near Wanganui as the town was considered a potential location for Japanese attack. Its likely local design and construction is indicative of the volunteer work carried out throughout wartime, particularly that of the Home Guard.

Reference Source:

Cooke, P. 2000. *Defending New Zealand – Ramparts on the South Seas 1840s-1950s*. Defence of New Zealand Study Group, Wellington.

Waters, D. 2005. "Wanganui Gun Emplacements." From "Capital Defence: Wellington's Built Military Heritage" website URL:

<http://capitaldefence.orconhosting.net.nz/prfiles/post1930/wngpil1.htm>.

Sole, L. 2008. *Castlecliff: The Community on the Coast*. H&A Design & Print, Wanganui.

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

Associated Pictures:



Pillbox on river south edge, north of Airport, Languard Bluff (Waters 2002).



Pillbox on south runway, Wanganui Airport (Waters 2003).

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui



Pillbox on Airport land across from Coastal battery (Welch 2004 *vide* Waters 2005).



Pillbox by the mouth of the Kaitoke Stream (Welch 2004 *vide* Waters 2005).

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

Wanganui District - 28 total

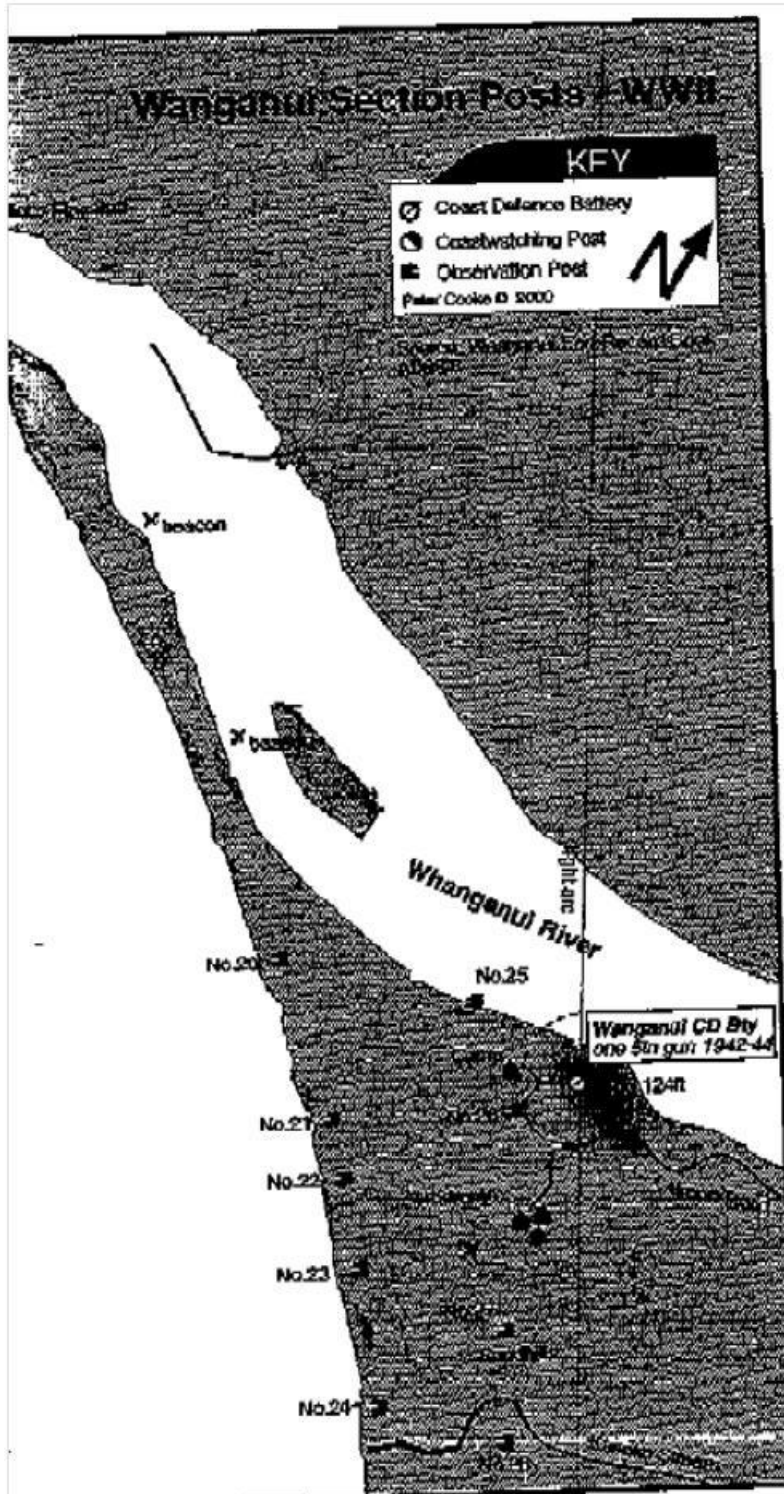
- 1? Mowheau Beach, Kai Iwi [still there, just]
- 2-19? Castlecliff Beach [many?]
- 19? Pilot Station, Wanganui River
- 20 Landguard Bluff beach, northernmost
- 21 Landguard Bluff beach, seaward of aerodrome
- 22 Landguard Bluff beach, seaward of aerodrome
- 23 Landguard Bluff beach, seaward of aerodrome
- 24 Landguard Bluff beach, northward of Kaitoke Stream mouth
- 25 Wanganui River, east of Landguard Bluff [survivor]
- 26 Wanganui River, in front of coast defence battery on Landguard Bluff
- 27 on sandhill inside aerodrome perimeter
- 28 east of Kaitoke Stream, by aerodrome

List of pillboxes from Cooke (2000:769).

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui



Map of pill boxes along South Beach (Cooke 2000:776)

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Nick Cable