

AA.50.

S.B. 505/10/410

PROVISION OF NEW NAVAL ORDNANCE DEPOT IN AUSTRALIA.

1st Naval Member.

Submitted with reference to minute dated 3rd July 1924 from the Secretary, Munitions Supply Board, concerning the above subject.

The Munitions Conference apparently refer to Commander Mc Hardy's recommendation that Australia should provide a first class Naval Ordnance Depot.

2. It was, however, recognised by Commander McHardy that this was primarily a strategical consideration, depending on a final decision as to where the Naval Base in Australia will be. Until this is settled it is superfluous to urge the Naval Board to take action in connection with the new Naval Ordnance Depot.

3. ^{line} The policy being followed at present, which is also in ~~tune~~ with Commander McHardy's report, is to improve conditions at Sydney by removing the dangerous congestion of explosives at Spectacle Island. Arrangements ~~at~~ this end are well ~~on~~ towards completion, and will provide storage at Sydney, for an indefinite number of years and at the minimum expenditure which is necessary to ensure reasonable safety.

4. Until the question of the location of the Naval Base is decided, it is submitted that no departures from the above policy is possible.

5. A summary of action taken during the period 1903-1921 in connection with the Naval Ordnance Depot question is attached, and it will be seen that estimates for constructing a new Depot vary from £200,000 to £382,000.

6. I have not heard of the Munitions Conference before and do not think they are competent to recommend immediate action in such a costly scheme which is primarily governed by strategical considerations.

(Signed) A.S.

Director of Ordnance,
Torpedoes and Mines.

/7/1924.

SUMMARY OF ACTION TAKEN SINCE 1903 RESPECTING
REMOVAL OF NAVAL MAGAZINES FROM SPECTACLE ISLAND, SYDNEY.

See also attached précis.

- Feb. 1903 Vice Admiral A.D. Fanshawe (C. in C.) informs His Excellency the Governor of New South Wales that he considers that the inhabitants of the district in vicinity of Spectacle Island need not be under any apprehension as to their safety.
- Nov. '06 Vice Admiral W.W. Fawkes (C. in C.) in a report to the Governor of N.S.W. concurs in his predecessor's despatch and states that the suggested site at Bantry Bay, Middle Harbour, for storage of Naval Ammunition is unsuitable.
- June '18 Captain-in-Charge, Sydney, reports that suitable sites for Naval Magazine exist at Port Stevens and Bantry Bay.
- July '18 First Naval Member (Rear Admiral Creswell) endorses Captain's-in-Charge recommendation re Bantry Bay.
- Oct. '18 At Board Meeting 3rd Naval Member stated that additional permanent magazine accommodation should not be built at Sydney owing to necessity for removal of Naval Base from Sydney.
- Dec. '18 Director of Naval Ordnance (Captain Stevenson) raises objections to the proposal to establish a magazine at Bantry Bay owing to the probability of that District becoming a populous area. Flinders Naval Base recommended as a site for Main Magazines.
- Dec. '18 Admiralty asked as to probable cost of purchasing an ammunition supply ship for storage of reserve ammunition.
- Jan. '19 Naval Board decide that Magazine should be built at Flinders Naval Base.
- Mar. '19 Admiralty offer H.M.S. "MAGNIFICENT" to Commonwealth Government.
- April '19 Admiralty state cost of conversion of "MAGNIFICENT" about £180,000.
- " '19 Naval Board decide defer matter re magazines for consideration on Lord Jellicoe's visit.
- May '19 Naval Representative telegraphs that total cost of conversion of "MAGNIFICENT" estimated at £200,000. Ship would probably be presented as free gift.
- June '19 Naval Rep. notified that matter re Magazine Ship would not be proceeded with.
- Aug. '19 Naval Board draw attention of Minister to the serious position caused by lack of magazine accommodation for reserve ammunition.
- Sept. '19 First Naval Member (Rear Admiral Grant) submits statement re general position to Minister for Cabinet consideration.
- " '19 Minister notified as to approximate cost of construction of (a) underground and (b) above ground magazines, viz:- £264,000 and £225,000 respectively.
- Oct. '19 Prime Minister's Department asked if Merchant Vessel is available in Australia for utilization as ammunition storage vessel.
- Oct. '19 Reply received from Prime Minister's Department in the negative.

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- Oct. '19 Reply received from Prime Minister's Department in the negative.
- Oct. '19 Attention of Prime Minister drawn to the dangerous state which lack of ammunition and reserves places the country.
- Jan. '20 Prime Minister's Dept. asked if matter re ammunition ship has yet been considered by Cabinet.

Minister pressed for decision re above.

- Jan '20 Military Magazine at Newington made available to Navy.
- " '20 D.O.T.M. points out the undesirability of having large quantities of ammunition stored at Spectacle Is. in midst of a densely populated district. Also states other reasons as to unsuitability as a permanent main magazine.
- April '20 D.O.T.M.'s reports referred to Minister who is urged to obtain decision from Cabinet as to provision of Store Ship.
- " '20 Naval Ordnance Officer reports that owing to congestion of buildings at Spectacle Island it is almost impossible to adhere strictly to the Magazine Regulations.
- May '20 Captain-in-Charge submits proposals re making Spectacle Is. conform with the Regulations as regards "Clean Conditions".
- July '20 Captain-in-Charge informed that his scheme re Spectacle Island is approved and that provision will be made for installation of electric crane.
- Oct. '20 Captain-in-Charge asked to furnish total estimate of cost that would be incurred in making Spectacle Is. conform with the Magazine Regulations.
- Jan. '21 Captain-in-Charge reports estimate - £10,302.
- Jan. '21 D.O.T.M. reports that in addition to absence of "Clean Conditions" at Spectacle Is. the buildings are not spaced from each other as they should be and they are too close to neighbouring public buildings.
- Jan. '21 D.O.D. submits to 1st Naval Member detailed report as to unsuitability of Spectacle Is. and points out that Cockatoo Island and a large part of Sydney is in gravest danger in event of an accident at Spectacle Is. and that security cannot be obtained short of the construction of a new ammunition Depot at a suitable place. Further, stated that from the Admiralty formula the explosion of the 1,000 tons of explosives stored at the Depot would destroy everything within a radius of 3 miles.
- Jan. '21 Matter referred to Minister.
- Feb. '21 Naval Board decide that no money be spent at Spectacle Island as it is obvious that ammunition must shortly be removed. D.O.T.M. to arrange for as much ammunition as possible to be stored at Newington.
- Feb. '21 Third Naval Member submits for Board consideration certain recommendations regarding the building of suitable magazines, etc., to replace those at Spectacle Is. Also presents detailed report as to reasons why the storage of explosives at Spectacle Island should be discontinued.
- Feb. '21 Naval Board decide that matter re erection of magazines etc. at Newington should be considered and a report rendered as to total approximate cost of erection.
- Feb. '21 Naval Ordnance Officer directed that utmost care was to be exercised by all concerned at the Depot in regard to safety precautions.

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- Mar. '21 Commodore Superintendent, Sydney, reports that 21 barges would be required to stow Naval (reserve) ammunition at Bantry Bay.
- May '21 Naval Board decided, in view of the expense (£382,000) to defer consideration regarding building of ammunition barges.

Actg. 1st Naval Member submits statement re situation in connection with Magazines at Spectacle Island to Minister and suggests abandoned railway tunnels be utilized for storage of Naval ammunition.

- May '21 Reports received from Sydney as to the suitability of Otford tunnel, New South Wales, as a Naval Magazine.
- May '21 Minister directs that every precaution to guard against accident is to be taken and as much H.E. removed to other places available as early as possible.
- Sept. '21 Director of Naval Works reports that total estimated cost of converting Otford tunnel - £248,000.
- Sept. '21 Director of Gunnery Division submits report as to "Correct Location for an Armament Supply Depot from a Strategic and Financial Standpoint".
- Sept. '21 Naval Board decide that on account of financial position etc., impracticable to proceed with work at tunnel.
Director of Naval Works directed to obtain effective records of temperature and humidity in tunnels at Otford and Helensborough.
- Nov. '21 Full detailed report re conversion of Otford tunnel forwarded to Admiralty for an expression of opinion on general scheme.

(See Navy Office Files N.17/0144, 21/086, 21/0145, 21/0174).

W. 17/01144. W. 19/1456.

The following is a precis of this file: -

22.12.17. Captain Thring reports that shell stores, magazines etc at Spectacle Island are not separated by any banks; any explosion would spread to whole Island. States Magazine should be moved to a safer locality.

15. 1.18. Board form a committee to consider how to relieve the situation at Spectacle Island.

11. 5.18 Captain-in-Charge, Sydney (Capt. Glossop) reports Spectacle Island unsuitable for ammunition stowage owing to possibility of attack by bombardment or bombs, also owing to proximity of adjacent suburbs. Suggests underground magazine elsewhere, -Spectacle Island for Ordnance Depot - Regards question as of supreme importance.

23. 5.18 Captain-in-Charge, Sydney, ^{ordered} to report on possibilities of a site (a) In Sydney neighbourhood, and (b) At Port Stephens.

26.6.18. Captain-in-Charge forwards his report: There is a suitable site at Port Stephens, but as the future policy, with regard to Port Stephens is unknown, recommends that a Naval Magazine be built in the Magazine Area ^{Beauty Bay, Sydney,} ~~Beauty Bay, Sydney,~~

NOTE - An enclosure to this report gives the conclusions of the expert committee, which selected this site in 1906. At that ^{time} the committee recommended to the Naval ~~Captain-in-Charge~~ the removal of the explosives from Spectacle Island to the proposed magazine at ^{Beauty Bay,} ~~Beauty Bay~~. Admiral Fawkes objected on grounds of distance from anchorage.

25.7.18. Home and Territories ^{Dept} approached with a view to the acquisition of site in ^{Beauty Bay,} ~~Beauty Bay~~.

10.10.18. Captain Thring reviews the whole situation and recommends :
(1) Central Depot for ammunition at principle Naval Base
(2) Spectacle Island for a ready-use Depot
(3) Storage for small supply of ammunition, and also for gun-mountings for merchant vessels, at Sydney, Melbourne, and Fremantle.
(4) A Naval Magazine and Shell Store at Maribyrnong.

23.10.18. Admiral Cresswell proposes to submit to the Council of Defence the question whether Sydney or Port Stephens is to be the future Eastern Base.

It does not appear that question was ever put.

24.10.18. Meeting of Naval Board. Acting Minister states that Treasury will not agree to a large expenditure on permanent buildings. Decided that 3rd Naval Member should look for temporary accomodation.

9.11.18 Captain Thring reports no Military or State Magazines available. Proposes two alternatives:
(a) Either construct proper Magazines, or
(b) Keep no reserves of ammunition.

2.12/18. Captain Stevenson proposes Flinders as a site for Main Magazine and cites advantages. Proposes meanwhile to obtain an ammunition ship.

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Naval Representative asked to obtain an ammunition
Ship

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Board send hastener to Naval Representative re. a
ammunition ship.

Board decide that Magazine should be built at Flinders. Enquiry to be made as to best site.

- 3.3.19. Admiralty ^{offer} "Magnificent" Class Ship as Ammunition Store
- 4.3.19. Captain Stevenson does not consider "Magnificent" class suitable. Thinks what is wanted is vessel capable of supplying the Fleet.
- 4.3.19. Admiral Cresswell thinks we require both a store-ship and a carrier.
- 6.3.19. The Naval Board decide to ascertain the cost of fitting "Magnificent" class - Cost £200,000 - Vessel would be given.
- 22.4.19. Captain Stevenson recommends a definite site for Main Magazine at Westernport.
- 23.4.19. Board decides to defer matter for consideration on Lord Jellicoe's ~~xxxxx~~ visit.
- 2.6.19 Board decide to refuse ammunition ship.
- 23.8.19. Cable stopping further supplies of ammunition from England.
- 23.8.19. Admiral Grant's minute to the Minister calls attention to serious position caused by deficiency of magazine accomodation. Spectacle Island inadequate - ammunition from England stopped. The Fleet would be out of action after the first engagement. Submit that ~~it~~ ^{it} be urged to decide as to the future main base.
- 6.8.19. Board ask Admiralty whether merchant ship fitted as Ammunition Store Ship now available. Admiralty replies no, and mistake our requirements - think we require a small carrier.
- 27.8.19 Minister replies to Admiral Grant's minute, stating that it will be for consideration when dealing with Lord Jellicoe's report.
- 26.8.19. Military state they have no storage available for Naval Ammunition.
- 4.9.19. Board decide to submit a statement to Minister
- 22.9.19. Statement and Estimate for building Main Magazine (£489,000) submitted to Minister.
- 7.10.19 Government asked if they would allocate an "Isterwood" ship for Ammunition Store Ship.
- 15.10.19. Reply to the above in the negative.
- 22.10.19. 1st Naval Member asks for re-consideration of above
- 7.11.19. Prime Minister states that the matter must be dealt with by the Cabinet.
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9. 3.20. Cabinet reply that the matter is left to Sir Joseph and Senator Pearce for report.