

## Welcome to the Port Kembla Breakwater Battery Military Museum

The Breakwater Battery Military Museum was established in 1988 to showcase the important military history of our region.

The museum building was built in 1939 and was once the World War II headquarters and command post for the Breakwater Battery fort complex.

In 1939 construction began on two large gun emplacements which are still located to the east of the museum.

These gun positions overlooked the approaches to Port Kembla Harbour and housed two ex-Naval guns which could fire 6 inch shells over sixteen kilometres.



By 1942 the area housed not only the command post, numerous army huts, search lights and anti-aircraft guns, but also underground control rooms which had been built to assist in the defence of Port Kembla Harbour and nearby industries.

Other defences were also established at Hill 60, Port Kembla and Fort Drummond in Wollongong.

At its peak strength during World War II, Breakwater Battery had 120 troops (both men and women) from the Army, Royal Australian Artillery and the Volunteer Defence Corps.

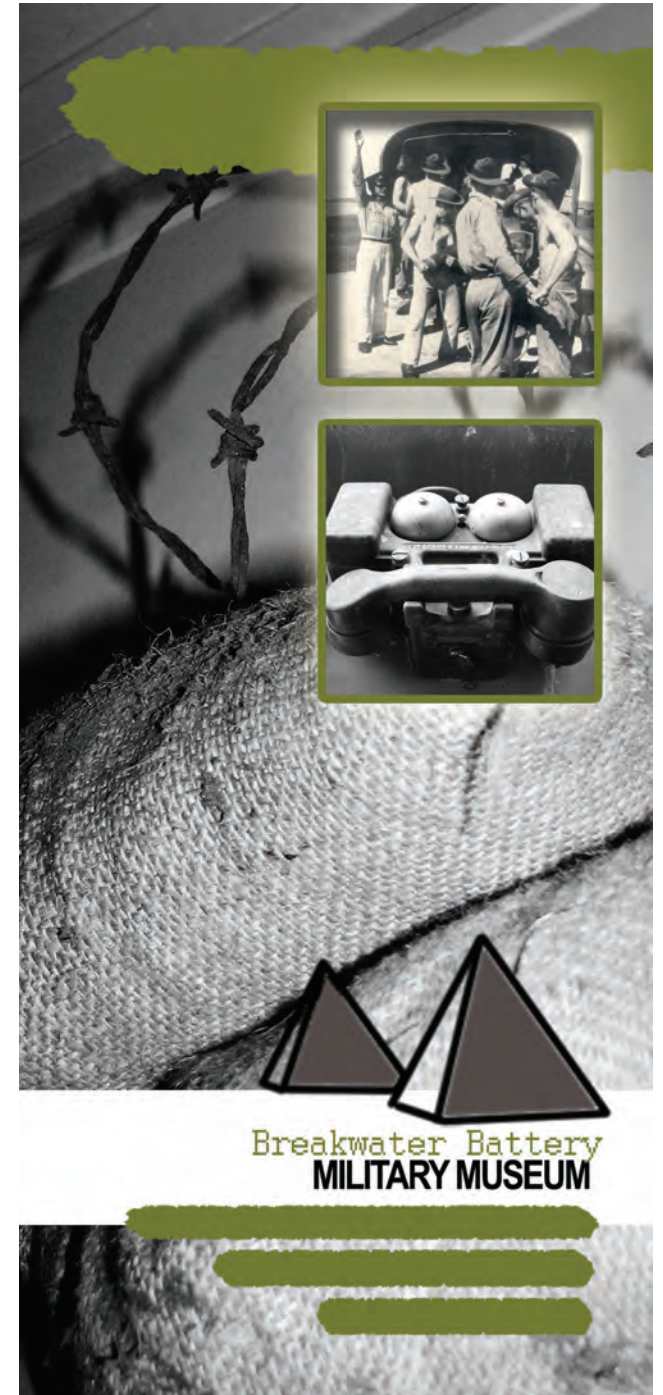


**Breakwater Battery Military Museum**  
Port Kembla Heritage Park  
Foreshore Road  
Port Kembla NSW 2505  
Ph: 02 4274 4119

10am-2pm,  
2nd and 4th Sundays of every month.

Adults \$3  
Pensioners & Children (under 15) \$1

Group tours & school excursions  
are available by appointment.



## Was Port Kembla considered a threatened target?

Yes. Attacks on Port Kembla Harbour were considered a high possibility. The port itself would have provided a safe harbour and land base for an invading force, just to the south of Sydney with good transport facilities available.

To protect Port Kembla Harbour a small naval base with examination and boom gate vessels based at the jetties as well as construction of the Breakwater Battery and gun emplacements.

The port was involved in the importation of raw materials (e.g. iron ore) for use by the local industries in producing steel, munitions, cables, ships etc. Finished products and raw materials were also shipped from Port Kembla to their final destinations.

## Were any ships lost due to enemy action off the port?

Japanese submarines were very active off the east coast of Australia with ships running the gauntlet of at least five 'I Class' submarines which patrolled off NSW.

Between 1940 and 1944 twenty-two ships struck mines or were torpedoed off the coast of NSW resulting in the loss of 244 lives.

In June 1942, the MV Echunga and MV Orestes came into contact with submarines directly off Port Kembla but managed to escape. A month later the George S Livanos and the MV Coast Farmer were both sunk near Jervis Bay.

The last recorded sinking of a boat by submarine action off the east coast in WWII was the Robert J Walker, an American vessel which was torpedoed and sunk on 24th December 1944 by a German long range submarine, U-862, travelling from Africa.

## How did WWII affect ordinary people living in the Illawarra?

Many local men enlisted in the armed forces. Local industries including mining, transport and agriculture had to be kept in full production to support the war effort and some industries were protected to keep men from enlisting, however for the first time many women entered the workforce training in previously men-only roles.

The Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) was made up of WWI veterans and men in protected industries. They were trained to man the defence weapons at Kembla Fortress in case of an invasion and perform guard duties in the area.

Air raid wardens were appointed for all areas. They were trained to assist people cope with air raids. Young boys were trained to assist the wardens with communications and used as runners to pass on messages. Air raid shelters were built in Port Kembla in various locations.

## Was Port Kembla ever attacked?

Although the Breakwater Battery itself was never attacked by enemy forces there was much Japanese and German U-boat activity off the coast of NSW which resulted in dozens of Allied ships being sunk with the loss of hundreds of lives.

At night enemy U-boats could be seen signalling to each other with flares. Twice Japanese spotter planes flew over Port Kembla looking for targets.

Several servicemen died in training accidents, aeroplane crashes and a mortar bomb explosion. Many troops that served at the Breakwater Battery went on to serve in active Army posts all over the world.

## The Owen Gun

The Owen sub-machine gun was invented by Wollongong resident Evelyn Owen.



Evelyn tried to interest the army in his invention which could fire repeatedly even after being dropped in mud, having sand blasted at it and being burnt but they didn't believe such a weapon was necessary.

On 28th May 1940 Evelyn enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force and was posted to the 2nd/17th Battalion. While on leave in September 1940 the gun came to the attention of Vincent Wardell, manager of the Port Kembla plant of Lysaghts. Wardell, recognising the significance of Evelyn's invention referred the matter to the Minister for the Army.

Evelyn was seconded immediately to the Central Inventions Board and testing on the weapon was undertaken. The gun proved to be almost impossible to jam and following a large Army order immediately went into full scale production at Lysaghts, Port Kembla in 1943. The production line employed 83 women and 30 men.

The Owen gun used primarily by Australian troops proved to be very reliable and was so popular it became known as the 'Diggers Darling'. A total of 45,479 Owen guns were produced at Lysaghts.

WWII Anti-tank blocks, Heritage Park Port Kembla

