

FHBRO Number 96-96

Colwood, British Columbia

**Searchlight System** - Searchlight Engine Room

603 Fort Rodd Hill Road

The Searchlight Engine Room of the Searchlight System, part of the coastal defence system for the Royal Navy base at Esquimalt, was constructed in 1898-1901. An early L-shaped addition was completed by 1905 for oil tank storage. The Searchlight System was designed by the British Royal Engineers. The original two Hornsby-Akroyd engines and dynamos provided power to Defence Electric Lights No. 1 and 2 and were replaced in 1940 by three Gardiner diesel engines which powered Searchlight Nos. 6 and 7 which replaced the defence electric lights in the same year. The earlier ventilation system required venting through two water-filled tanks sunk into the entrance ditch and pipe chimneys attached to the wall. These tanks were removed (nd), and new exhaust pipes for the simple emission requirements were located in three window openings (1940). Interior alterations include the removal of four 800 gallon tanks for water to cool the engines when the diesel engines were installed. The building is currently interpreted as part of the Fort Rodd Hill National Historic Site. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 96-96.

### **Reasons For Designation**

The Searchlight Engine Room was designated Recognized because of its architectural importance, its environmental significance and its historical associations.

The structure is partially subterranean, with two elevations exposed towards a ramp in a ditch rising to the oil tank storage room. One side has a repetitive window rhythm and an entrance off the ramp. The layout reflects the specialized accommodation for the highly technical functions and equipment. The overall expression of simple functionality in the design is seen in the exposed concrete construction and plastered and painted finishes.

The military character of the site is relatively unchanged, and is reinforced by the maintenance of the low-key, integrated relationship of the camouflaged structure to the site. The inconspicuous nature of the structure is characteristic of coastal defence design.

The structure is an integral part of the Searchlight system, and is also associated with the night-time capabilities of the Esquimalt-Victoria coastal defence capability. It is associated with the prime phases of development, which are the original planning and construction of Fort Rodd Hill, the final and most elaborate large-scale military fortification on Canada's West Coast, part of a series of related defences along the coast line to protect Esquimalt and Victoria, and with the upgrading of defences for a state of readiness in World War II.

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### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the Searchlight Engine Room resides in its overall massing, profile, construction materials, interior planning and site relationships.

The simple massing is defined by the scale and proportions of the visible portions of the ramp walls, the stepped sidewall of the structure with projecting coping, and the arched roof of the oil tank storage. The profile includes the three air exhaust shafts and the overburden on top of the roughly L-shaped single-storey structure. The structure was intended to be partially subterranean. Character resides in features expressing its role as a specialized support structure designed for housing the engines and dynamos required to power the searchlight facilities. The massing, profiles, and footprint should be respected.

The concrete formwork with plaster finish has rounded edges at openings and projecting sills. The simply detailed, plastered and painted concrete formwork used for retaining walls contributes to the functional appearance of the structure and reflects military design preferences of the period. The exterior materials should have a regular maintenance program. The wood six-over-six sash windows appear to be original and should be maintained. The functional design is expressed in the original wood entrance doors with their solid wood plank construction and heavy iron hardware.

The interior of the Searchlight Engine Room is also functionally planned with two large areas: the sheltered oil tank room and the engine room with a raised platform at one end; and, in the engine room, two small inner rooms, a test room and a storeroom, maintaining the original fittings of bench and cupboards. The original layout and accesses are intact and should be maintained.

The simple, low ground cover of the landscape and overburden emphasizes the rolling, hilly terrain of the site and should be maintained. The integration of the structure with natural features is characteristic of coastal defences.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

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