

THE PORTSEA QUARANTINE STATION  
AND DEFENCE RESERVE

References:

- A. THE PENINSULAR STORY 'Book 1'  
Second Edition 1972
- B. THE PENINSULAR STORY 'Book 2'  
'HELL TO HEALTH'
- C. OCS QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER APR-JUN 75
- D. OCS TOUR GUIDE

Attachment:

Point Nepean Map

## PREFACE

The Portsea Quarantine Station came into being about 1852 because of the increasing number of ships arriving with passengers requiring quarantine facilities.

The full impact of this was felt when the "Ticonderoga" from Liverpool, with some 811 souls on board at sailing time, anchored off The Heads on 6th November, 1852, carrying scores of fever-stricken passengers. Word of their plight had already reached Melbourne on 3rd November, 1852, through a report from the skipper of a brig which had overtaken the "Ticonderoga". The authorities forthwith provisioned the schooner "Empire" with supplies of live stock, milk and vegetables and despatched her to The Heads, followed at short notice by the "Lysander", a quarantine hospital ship, now also equipped with stores for three months. In the meantime, those who could be moved from the "Ticonderoga" were put ashore at The Heads and sheltered under makeshift tents made from ships' spars and sails.

Some years earlier Point Nepean had been nominated to supersede the Quarantine Hospital at Red Bluff, now Point Ormond, where isolation was difficult to maintain owing to the nearness of settled areas, not to mention pangs of gold rush fever! Fortunately these plans had already been put into motion, but on far too small a scale to cope with this explosive crisis. The homes and buildings of the Sullivans and the Cannons, situated in the quarantine area, were immediately requisitioned in an attempt to ease the situation. Every effort was made to prevent the spread of the epidemic and the worst cases were placed aboard the "Lysander". However, there were 82 deaths while the "Ticonderoga" was in quarantine.

In 1852 police quarters were set up on the west side of Weeroona Bay (previously part of Ticonderoga Bay).

Construction at the Sanitary Station (later changed to Quarantine), was begun in 1854 and five double storeyed hospital buildings, boiler house, washrooms and administrative building were completed in 1857, all being built in local sandstone. The Quarantine Station was gazetted in 1854 and from this time isolation was enforced by police supervision. Originally leper and cattle quarantine sections were also included in the function of the Station. (Ref B)

The Quarantine Station eventually closed completely with the departure of the remaining staff members in November 1978.

The permanent association of the Victorian Military Forces with Point Nepean began in 1882 when construction of the defences at Port Phillip Heads was initiated. The year 1885 marked the height of the Russian War scare and in consequence there was much defence activity and Melbourne became one of the best defended ports in the British Empire.

Large sums of money were spent on artillery batteries, maps of the Port were prepared, lines of ground and electro-contact mines were made ready for placement and in some cases actually laid. Other schemes were investigated which would make provision for blocking the three main channels of approach up the bay. During Easter manoeuvres in 1886, a night exercise with torpedo boats was conducted at the Heads. The Army Torpedo Corps operated three electric defence lights, one at Point Nepean and two at Queenscliff.

In 1886 the overall scheme for the defence of Melbourne included gun batteries at Point Nepean and Queenscliff with the task of defending the entrance to Port Phillip, another at Swan Island, with mines, protecting the west channel; forts at Franklin (Portsea) and in the South Channel, together with submarine mines controlled electrically from the east room at the south channel fort (off Rosebud). Symonds Channel was to be blocked and a quantity of 2000 lb. high explosive mines were kept for the defence of the Heads at Point Nepean. These fortifications were backed by inner batteries closer to Melbourne and the Victorian Naval Forces. By 1894 Portsea had become a garrison town and barracks and forts were operating. The sandstone content of the cliffs enabled quarrying operations which resulted in many galleries, underground magazines and storerooms being constructed. The Point Nepean fortifications were manned until the end of World War Two, when the garrison at the Heads was removed and the various buildings, forts and similar declared surplus and sold for removal or stripping of salvageable components.

Until 1951 the relationship between the Army and the Quarantine Station staff was cordial but remote. The Defence Reserve of 420 acres was used for bivouacs on occasional weekends but no permanent stabling was attempted. Late in the year an agreement was reached between the Commonwealth Department of Health and the Department of the Army by which the latter was to have temporary use of part of the Quarantine Station for officer cadet training. It was expected that the Army would continue seeking a more suitable site and, if at all possible, vacate the Station by the end of 1952. Certain conditions in respect to a sudden requirement for use of the Station were agreed to by the Health Department. (These are attached). The agreement did not include No. 2 Hospital which was handed over later.

The Army failed to locate a suitable alternative site and has remained in occupation since, on a permissive occupancy basis. An area of 776 acres previously under the control of the Health Department was transferred to the Army on 8th April, 1954, at a nominal cost of £1 per acre. This increased the land held by the latter to approximately 1,119 acres. An area of 35 acres was leased to the Portsea Golf Club. The remaining 181 acres, which also contained the buildings, remained under the control of the Health Department which granted permissive occupancy of increasing numbers for Army use. Possession of the doctor's residence, staff quarters, dispensary, disinfecting and boiler buildings, plus the isolation hospital was retained.

The Army on its part, found that the existing facilities were inadequate for its needs. It embarked on various construction programmes in the period 1963-1965. Erected at a cost of approximately £300,000 were:

No. 3 Officer Cadet Barrack	1963
Assembly Hall and Library	1963
Guardhouse and Entrance gates (£3,500)	1963
Gymnasium (£25,000)	1965
No. 4 Officer Cadet Barrack (£75,000)	1965

In addition to the buildings the Army has established many gardens and lawns which greatly enhance the natural beauty of the locality. In the period May 1965 to October 1966 some 3000 pine trees and in excess of 2000 eucalypts, she oaks, bottle brush, casuarinas and other native trees and shrubs were planted as windbreaks and aesthetic improvements.

If any early settlers' ghosts, or those of the Ticonderoga dead, still walk the Quarantine Station grounds at night, they must be well satisfied with the efforts of those who have inherited their resting place.

(Ref B)

TERMS OF AGREEMENT : USE OF QUARANTINE STATION,  
PORTSEA, BY DEPARTMENT OF ARMY, 1952

1. The Department of the Army will take over the buildings known as Nos. 1, 3, 4 and 5; i.e. one of the first class Dormitories, the two third-class dormitories and the Isolation Dormitory together with the Dining Rooms and the attached kitchens; also the rooms in the Administrative Block not needed as offices by the Department, one of the Staff cottages (No. 24) the Midwifery Block and the building known as the Isolation Administrative Block (No. 9).
2. The Department of the Army will be allowed the use of the power generating plant and the bathing block,
3. The use of the buildings in Paragraphs 1 and 2 is made available to the Department of the Army on the understanding and on the condition that other premises for the Officers' Training School are found or built in twelve (12) months' time.
4. The Department of Health will retain building No.2 i.e. the remaining Dormitory in the first-class area, the Bungalow, the Staff Cottages, the Doctor's Cottage, the rooms in the Administrative Block required as offices, the Isolation Hospital and the Store.
5. The Department of the Army undertakes to evacuate the Station within twenty-four hours in cases of active quarantine, leaving all buildings - especially Dormitory No. 1 and the Kitchen attached - clean and fit for occupation by the Department of Health.

6. An inventory will be made of all beds, mattresses, chairs, tables and other furniture taken over on loan by the Department of Health, and all losses or damage will be made good by the Department of the Army on a replacement or cost of replacement basis.
7. The Department of the Army will supply all blankets, linen, crockery, cutlery, firewood and coal required for its own use.
8. The Department of the Army will reimburse the Department of Health for the cost of electric light, power and water used in occupied buildings and any extra expenses incurred in maintaining the generating plant and bathing block.
9. The Department of the Army will be responsible for the maintenance of the area taken over, including roads and lawns - the area retained by the Department of Health being that Department's responsibility. Entrance to the Station will be restricted to the two existing roads.
10. The Army undertakes not to damage Department of Health property, to prevent defacement of walls, doors or stairways or other woodwork, to prevent fire in buildings and in the scrub behind the Station, to replace all breakages and losses, and leave the Station at the same standard as when it was handed over.
11. Such officers of the Department of Health as are authorised by the Deputy Director of Health shall have the right to enter the Station at any time. The Deputy Director or Health or his authorised nominee shall have the right to inspect all buildings on the Station at any time after giving notice to the Officer Commanding the Officers' Training School, who shall detail a representative to accompany the Deputy Director or his nominee in his inspection of buildings occupied by Army personnel.
12. The Department of Health may retain staff on the Station for office duties, maintenance of buildings and the area still occupied by that Department, supervision of the Power House and fumigation plant, and the preparation of the Station for active quarantine in a time of emergency.
13. Buildings retained by the Department of Health are to be out of bounds to Army personnel.
14. The isolation of the Station and its approaches, as far as the general public is concerned, are to be preserved by the Army which shall provide sufficient supervision to exclude visitors not authorised by either Department. The jetty and beach are not to be used by pleasure craft of any description.
15. The Army to make no structural alteration to any building without the approval of the Department of Health as given in writing by the Deputy Director of Health.

16.

Outstanding works' proposals, such as electric lighting, new hot water system, sea wall repair and other works, shall be subject to an Agreement to be arrived at between the Army, the Department of Health and the Department of Works and Housing in consultation as to implementation and financial commitments. The need for a complete new telephone system will similarly be discussed by the Department of the Army, the Department of Health and the Postmaster-General's Department.

(MAP REF. A)

### FRONT GATES

As you approach the entrance to the Officer Cadet School you will observe two rather large and imposing gun barrels, each with a very interesting story concerning the defence of Point Nepean. Those stories are as follows:

Although the guns at Point Nepean never had to fend off an enemy attack, the fort lays claim to two unusual feats. It will be recalled that England declared war on Germany at 11 p.m. in London on 4th August, 1914, this being announced in Australia at 12.45 p.m. on 5th August, by Mr Cook then Prime Minister. Owing to the difference in standard time, 3 3/4 hours only had elapsed since the declaration of war in Britain. It happened that the German freighter 'Pfalz' arrived at Point Nepean Heads at 12.30 p.m. Her papers were checked again and, being in order, was allowed to proceed, guided by an Australian pilot. At 12.45 p.m. the declaration of war was flashed to Point Nepean and before the ship could reach the entrance, a shot was fired across her bows - that is, the first British shot fired in World War I was fired from Point Nepean. The 'Pfalz' then anchored off Portsea, the master and crew were interned, and the ship was renamed and became a troop carrier.

A fantastic coincidence occurred 25 years later, when the same gun, with a different barrel, fired the first shot in World War II. This occurred at 1.50 a.m. on 4th September, 1939, when the freighter 'Woniora' attempted to enter the Heads without acknowledging the recognition signal. A warning shot was fired across her bows causing her to very swiftly establish her identity. These two gun barrels now flank the entrance to The Officer Cadet School, Portsea. (Ref A. Page 62)

Inside the gates on the right can be seen several houses which were once under the control of the Quarantine Authorities until 1978.

These houses are now Married Quarters for selected OCS Staff members and the area is out of bounds to casual traffic.

### TANK JUNCTION

(MAP REF. B)

#### Sherman Tank

The tank displayed at this intersection is an American designed Sherman, first used by the British in 1942 at El Alamein.

This tank carries 3" armour, manned by a crew of 5 with a top speed of 25 mph (Ref. D)

#### Disappearing Gun

The gun mounted at the intersection is a 10" 'disappearing gun'. It was manufactured by Elswick Ordnance Coy, England and was sited at Eagles Nest, Fort Nepean in 1889.

/An experimental

An experimental gun, it weighed 32 tonnes and was the first of its type in Australia.

The gun was found half buried in the sandhills at the Point and recovered in March 1976 by 3 COMMZ Recovery Platoon (ARES) and mounted at its present site by Melbourne Workshop Coy, RAEME in December 1976.

CREMATORIUM

(MAP REF. C)

Directly opposite the OCS magazine is a track leading some 200 metres to an open Crematorium. Although very little is known about this construction, it apparently was a 'going concern'. The area is maintained by OCS ground maintenance staff.

OCS HQ AREA

(MAP REF. D)

The present OCS Headquarters complex was the main administrative headquarters for the Quarantine Station.

The tank near the OCS HQ is a Matilda tank, last used by the Australians in their advance through Borneo in 1945. Has a weight of 28 tonnes, carried 78mm armour and had a crew of 3; had a speed of 15 mph.

RSMS OFFICE

(MAP REF. E)

'SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE'

A still surviving construction from bygone years is the small underground stone dairy. Originally the cellar may have been topped with a roughly constructed one room building. This is believed to have existed from the days of the first settlers and could have been erected by orders of Edward Hobson who had a licence to graze in the area in 1837. This gentleman had a sheep run stretching from Boneo to Point Nepean. Shepherds were employed and when the sheep were at Point Nepean, these men would need shelter. Local folk lore refers to the 'Shepherd's Cottage' and it presumably was the original of the one now standing.

On takeover by the Health Authorities, and during the earlier building programme, the original structure must have been replaced by the existing sandstone. It was used variously as a dwelling and a dairy until 1897, the cows being milked on the top floor, while milk and butter was stored in the cellar. Its appearance has not changed since the early 1890s when a photograph was taken of police and Quarantine Station staff standing on the north side. (REF. B) After 1897 it was fitted out as a dispensary and used as the resident doctor's office and examination room until 1908 when the Station was taken over by the Commonwealth. Its use as a dairy was initiated by Dr J.H. Browning, resident doctor from 1885 to 1895.

The history of the building after 1908 is somewhat obscure, but it appears to have continued in use as an office and store. The cellar was overlooked until 1941 when the then Foreman Assistant-in-charge of the Quarantine Station re-discovered its existence and had it readied for use as an air raid shelter. It is still in good order and the oldest structure in the area. If one accepts the above facts of its history as correct, then it is also one of the oldest in Victoria. Currently it serves as the office of the Officer Cadet School. (REF. B.)



CEMETERY

(MAP REF. F)

On the Bay foreshore adjacent to the OCS Q complex (near No. 3 Hospital) is the site of the original cemetery for the "TICONDEROGA" dead and others.

The original burial place was poorly sited along the foreshore. Sea erosion over the years gradually wore away the bank until some graves began to collapse. Heavy storms would uncover bones and wash away markers. The staff of the Quarantine Station moved all that was identifiable to the present cemetery during December 1952 and replaced the headstones. These are all that remain to mark the "TICONDEROGA" dead.

In the leafy shadows of the station cemetery are other memorials to tragedy and death.

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF SAUNDERS, KELLY, FOSTER AND OTHER PERSONS WHOSE NAMES ARE UNKNOWN, DROWNED IN THE WRECK OF THE CHEVIOT, OCTOBER 19th 1887"

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF JOHN JERDAN, LATE CAPTAIN 43rd REGIMENT, BENGAL LIGHT INFANTRY. BORN AT KELSO, SCOTLAND 1st MAY, 1824, DIED ON BOARD S.S. BARODA OFF MELBOURNE, 1873. FOREVER WITH THE LORD"

"RUDOLF MEIER 1872"

"ELIZABETH PIKE"

" E. PIKE"

"JAMIE, SIXTH SON OF JAMES AND HANNAH WALKER, BORN 21st JULY 1857 DIED 21st DECEMBER 1860. NO MORTAL WOES CAN REACH THE PEACEFUL SLEEPER HERE, WHILE ANGELS WATCH THE SOFT REPOSE".

There are also other headstones. Some while disconnected with the Quarantine Station are in themselves historic. Two mark the last resting place of pioneer residents, Edward Skelton and James Ford. Both men arrived at the Heads in 1842, Ford taking up land at Portsea and Skelton at Shelly Beach, Sorrento..

The present cemetery is located about a mile from Point Nepean and adjacent to Defence Road. In it are buried many of the first settlers who lived between Point Nepean and Rye. A number of drowned sailors from the ships "TORNADO" (1858) and "CHEVIOT" (1897) which were sunk at the heads are also interned there.

It was used by the general public until 1890. The cemetery has a connection with the defence of the area. A memorandum from T.W.H. Holmes to the Secretary of Lands in 1912 said, amongst other things, that 'in the event of bombardment of Point Nepean, this cemetery will be the most convenient in which to bury the killed'.

It has always been external to land included in the Quarantine Station and today is still within the Defence Reserve and has recently been restored. Occasional burials occurred up to 1919 when a soldier returning from World War I who apparently died from influenza while quarantined, was buried in an official war grave.

HEATONS MONUMENT

(MAP REF. G)

An interesting and imposing monument still exists in the area where the "TICONDEROGA" victims were buried. It was erected by an Irishman named Heaton, who was engaged as a supervisor during the building of the five hospitals and other buildings within the Quarantine Station ground. He had no relatives in Australia, and decided that he would like to design a monument to the "TICONDEROGA" dead. This was built, it is said at a cost of several hundred pounds (perhaps four hundred pounds) by workmen engaged on the Government buildings. Heaton eventually died in Melbourne, and his monument remained unoccupied. It is an interesting structure, complete with vault and stone panel which was possibly to be engraved after his death. It is still blank, and the vault has of late years been filled with sand. It is possible that it was once engraved, but the weather long ago wore out the inscription.

HOSPITALS

(MAP REF. H)

Hospital No. 1 (Cadets Lines)

This building is now used as cadets accommodation and also contains the cadets TV and Billiards rooms. It was completed in 1859 but was later destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1923. This hospital was primarily designed as quarantine accommodation for first class passengers (REF: B-C-D)

(MAP REF. I)

Hospital No. 2 (Cadets Lines)

This building is now used as cadets accommodation and was designed as quarantine accommodation for second class passengers (REF: B)

(MAP REF. J)

Hospital No. 3 (Q Store)

This building is now the OCS Quartermasters Store with other ranks accommodation upstairs, it was originally for steerage class passengers (Ref: B)

(MAP REF. K)

Hospital No. 4 (ORs Club)

This building now contains the Soldiers Club with other ranks accommodation upstairs, it was also for steerage class passengers (REF: B)

(MAP REF. L)

Hospital No. 5 (SGTS Mess)

This building is now the OCS Sergeants Mess but was originally designed as quarantine accommodation for passengers in isolation with contact ailments. (Ref. B)

The following, as taken from the Annual Station Report describes the above buildings as they were in 1875.

Nos 1-5 were two storeyed detached buildings used as hospitals or reception houses for immigrants. They were built of local sandstone, rough cast and roofed with slate. Each consisted of four large wards each 60 feet long by 20 feet wide and 14 feet high from floor to ceiling. On each side at the foot and head of the inside central staircase were two small rooms, a total of four per building, each 12 feet square by 14 feet high. Each building had a verandah, balcony and upper and lower storey lavatories. Each ward and small room possessed a fireplace.

Three of the buildings were fitted with a force pump connected to a well for supplying water to the lavatories, while the remaining two on the rise were supplied by one force pump connected to a tank. Four stone-built tanks with a capacity of 40,000 gallons furnished the buildings with additional water for drinking and cooking purposes. Each building was provided with a detached earth closet of four compartments and a detached stone privy of two compartments.

No. 6 (since demolished) and No. 7 (now the OCS Armoury) which stands behind the existing No. 3 building were cookhouses, detached, built of sandstone rough cast, and roofed with slates. Each consisted of three rooms fitted with boilers, shelves and cupboards. Behind No. 4 hospital was an additional cookhouse (now Drill Wing office) similar in size to the other two but containing only two rooms. (Ref. B)

The doctor's quarters when people were in quarantine still stands and is today a married quarter. On the site of the current Administrative Headquarters stood the storekeeper's quarters, and three labourers cottages were dispersed variously behind Nos 1 and 2 Hospitals on the Hill. (Ref B.)

#### BADCOE HALL

(MAP REF. M)

This Hall was built in 1963 and later named in honour of MAJ P.J. BADCOE, VC a graduate of OCS who was killed in action in South Vietnam in April 1967.

The building is the main instructional venue of the School and contains Lecture Rooms 1 and 2 plus a Tutorium on the ground floor with the OCS Library, Conference Room and 5 syndicate rooms upstairs.

#### WAR MEMORIAL

(MAP REF. N)

This Memorial was built in 1967 from donations by staff and cadets, materials were supplied by local business houses.

The Memorial commemorates OCS graduates who have died on active service.

#### RAP - BATTLE SUB-WING

(MAP REF. O)

The large wire enclosure beside the OCS Sergeants Mess (No. 5 Hospital) houses the OCS Regimental Aid Post and the instructors of Battle Sub-Wing.

The instructors occupy what was a 2 ward Infectious Diseases Hospital, whilst the RAP was the administration and staff quarters for that hospital.

Built in 1915-16 it was the last of the facilities actually used for quarantine patients. (Ref. D.)

EMERGENCY

EMERGENCY WARDS

(MAP REF. P)

On the road adjoining Cape Road and Vanson Drive stands a group of weatherboard huts, these were built as emergency wards for soldiers returning from World War I during an influenza epidemic.

They now house Australian Department of Construction, Engineer Works Section, OCS Sportsmans Club, Lecture Room 9 and various stores components. (Ref. B. page 64).

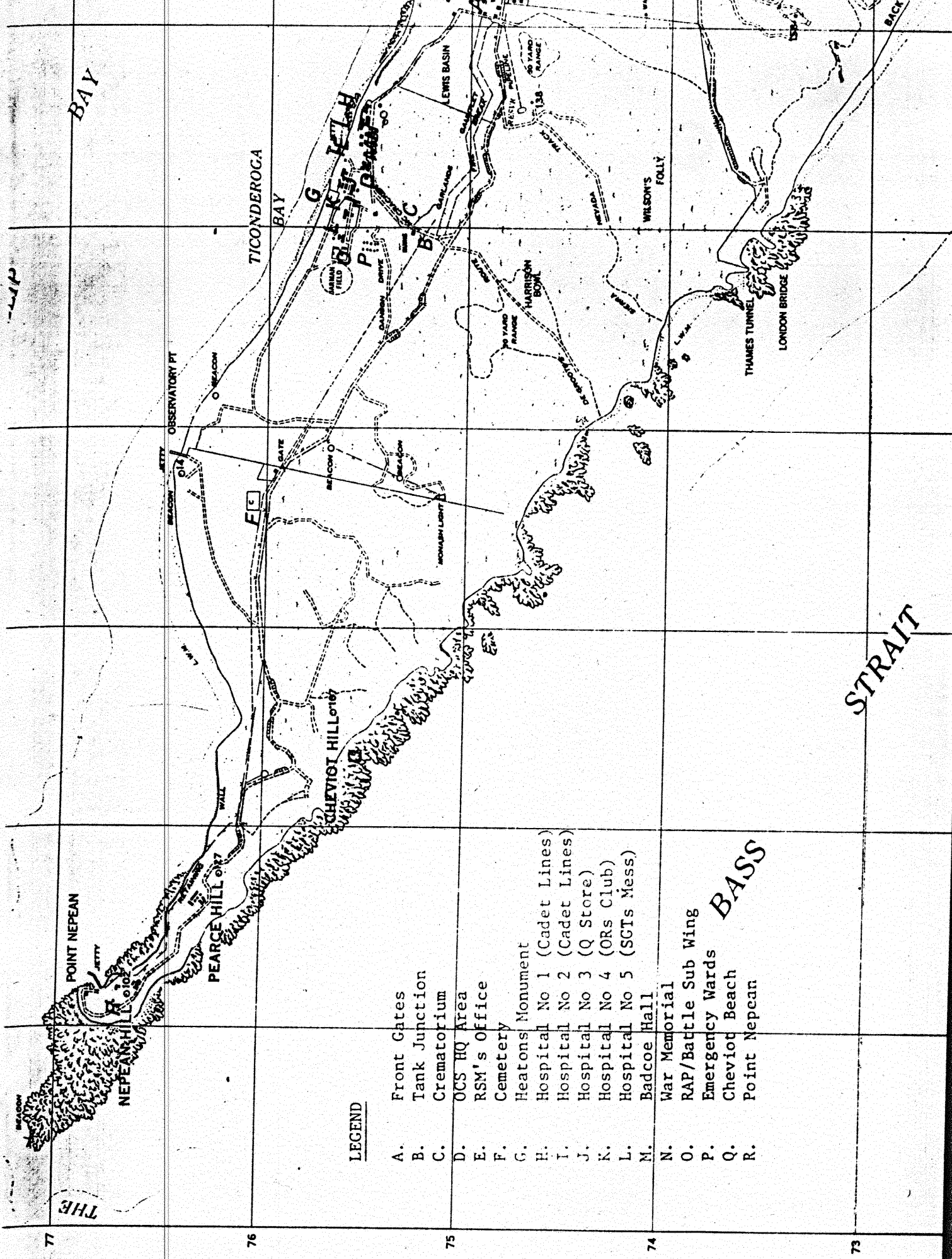
CHEVIOT BEACH

(MAP REF. Q)

Named after the CHEVIOT which was wrecked on the 19th October 1887. This was the most tragic to occur at Point Nepean. At about 9 pm on the stormy night of the wreck, the lookout at Queenscliff saw five rockets explode over the hills near the Quarantine Station. The lifeboat crew finding it impossible to get outside the Heads, landed at Pointsea and crossed to the ocean beach. They could see nothing because of the wind, spray and rain squalls. The Cheviot however, was hard aground on the rocks with nearly 59 people shut up inside, waiting for the moment when she would break up and throw them into the boiling surf. About midnight the forepart of the Cheviot broke up. Archie Laing, the third engineer was, by some miracle, washed up uninjured on a strip of sand. He staggered across the headland to the bay side where he collapsed and slept with the rain beating down on his inert body. On rousing he walked along the beach to the cattle jetty and from there to the light in a cottage near the quarantine jetty occupied by coxswain Alfred Purdy. Within were the lifeboat crew sheltering from the storm. They heard his story and set out again to the rescue, only to find that artillerymen from Fort Nepean had also been ordered out and had lit a bonfire on the beach near the wreck.

Despite the efforts of all involved in the rescue attempts, 35 lives were lost. Only a few bodies were recovered. Two drowned seamen were found on the ocean beach, plus a body brought in by the tide and washed up on the bayside. The first of these was located on 18th Nov 1887 by John Dougherty, an artilleryman, at the scene of the wreck. The next day Constable Fowler found a second body in the same area and on 23rd at Point Nepean, Constable Nolan located a third. They were all in an unidentifiable state and after a magisterial inquiry conducted by Dr Browning, were buried as numbers 8, 9, and 10 in the Quarantine Cemetery. They lie in the same grave as the three named men, Robert Saunders, aged 25 years, John Kelly aged 35 years, born and married at Skerry, Ireland and William Foster about 50 years old. The first two were seamen but Foster was a shop assistant and not a crew member. On 4th December 1887 Constable Nolan found another male body at the Sorrento Back Beach. It was unidentifiable. Another discovery was made on 29th March 1891 when human bones were picked up at Cheviot Bay. Dr Browning presumed that his findings were the last pitiful remains from the wreck of the Cheviot. Both were interned in the Quarantine Cemetery making a total of eight people buried in the Cheviot grave.

It was from Cheviot Beach that Prime Minister Harold Hold disappeared whilst skin diving on 17 December 1967.



LEGEND

- A. Front Gates
- B. Tank Junction
- C. Crematorium
- D. OCS HQ Area
- E. RSM's Office
- F. Cemetery
- G. Heaton's Monument
- H. Hospital No 1 (Cadet Lines)
- I. Hospital No 2 (Cadet Lines)
- J. Hospital No 3 (Q Store)
- K. Hospital No 4 (ORs Club)
- L. Hospital No 5 (SGTs Mess)
- M. Badcoe Hall
- N. War Memorial
- O. RAP/Battle Sub Wing
- P. Emergency Wards
- Q. Cheviot Beach
- R. Point Nepean

BASS