

YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 28 TO THE DEFENCE HERITAGE STORIES OF ROTTNEST ISLAND



The Virtual Visit series was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic when Rottneest Island was closed to the public due to social distancing restrictions and periods of use for quarantine from March to June 2020. The intent was to maintain a connection to the Island by exploring stories of interest and offering links for self discovery.

Now that the Island is once again open to visitors and guiding services are being gradually re-established, these Virtual Visits have been

retained as part of an archival record for future

CAPTAIN HUSSEY REMEMBERS (1) -COAST DEFENCES AND A ROTTNEST WEDDING



This is the first of a series of three Virtual Visits based on archival material attributed to Frank Hussey.

Betram .Frank.(Frank) Hussey was born in Menzies, WA in 1907 and attended Guildford Grammar School 1920--1923. He entered the Royal Military College, (then located in Melbourne) in February 1924, aged 16 years 10 months, the minimum age for admission. He graduated from the RMC in December 1927, first in his class of 14, winning the Kings Medal, and then completed a Bachelor of Engineering degree at Sydney University in 1930.

The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia has in its archive, a short, typed account entitled *Coast Defence Construction in the 1930s*. The document is inscribed "by Brigadier Hussey". In the document, Frank Hussey provides details of the design, contracting and construction of the coast defence installations on Rottneest. At that time the Australian Department of the Interior was based in Customs House, Circular Quay, Sydney. Hussey relates that in 1935, Lieutenant Colonel Eric Scriven was

seconded to the Department to establish a Coast Defence Design and Construction Section. Early in 1934, Hussey, then a Lieutenant joined him.

Both Scriven and Hussey remained with the Department of the Interior until after the outbreak of World War 2 in 1939. Scriven remained with the Department when it moved to Canberra and controlled all coast defence design and construction. Hussey, now a Captain was on Rottnest Island from mid-1935 until the end of 1937. He was joined by Lieutenant Mervyn Brogan who spent the six months of his practical engineering course on Rottnest in 1936-37



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

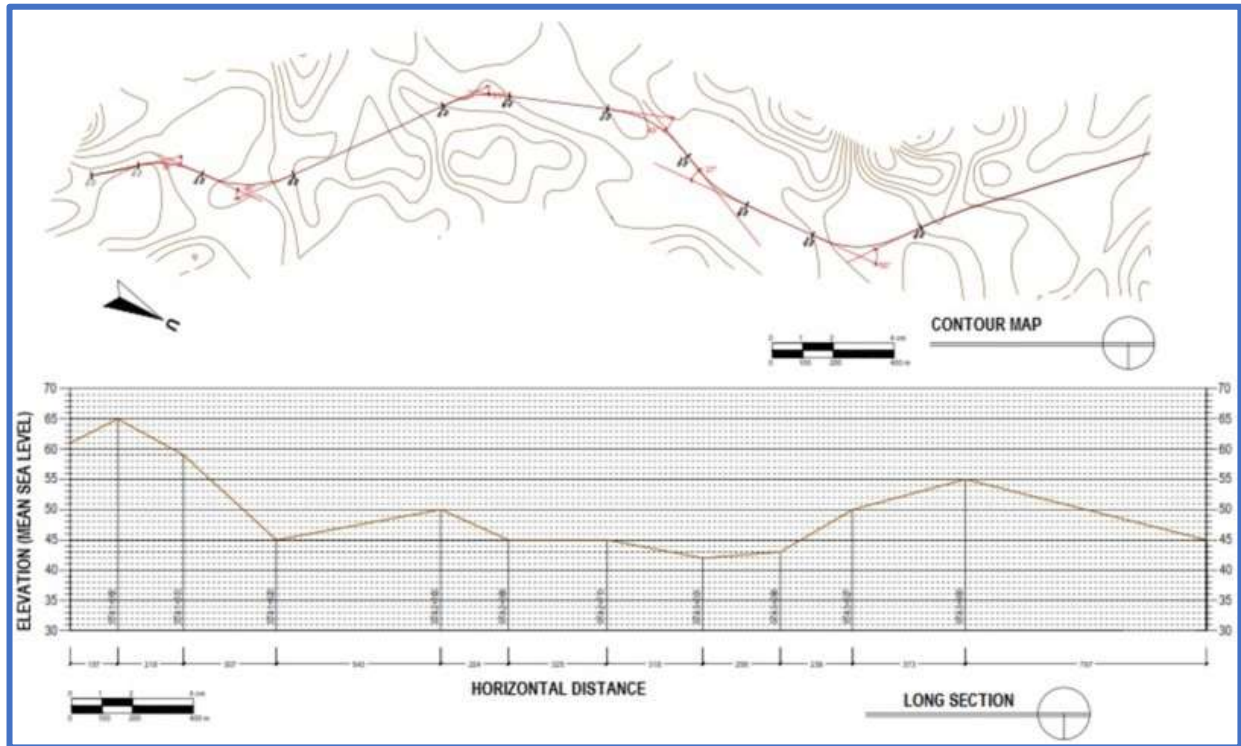
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Rottnest Island, WA. Major Eric George Bennett Scriven (left), Australian Staff Corps Supervising Engineer, Lieutenant Colonel Gwynydd Purves (Merry) Wynne-Aubery Meredith (leaning against truck), Command Coastal Defences 5 Military District and Officer Commanding 6th Heavy Battery, Major David (Davo) Leslie Davies MC, Chief Instructor School of Artillery and Captain Bertram Frank Hussey (sitting in back of truck), attached to the Department of Interior and responsible for fortification construction on Rottnest Island and Mrs Hussey (front) at Narrow Neck.

All major works for coast defence were done by contract. Drawings and specifications for the battery locations and other civil engineering works were prepared by the Coast Defence Section and those for brick construction were done with the assistance of the Architectural Sections of the Department of the Interior. In the archived document, Hussey goes on to describe the construction of the 3 foot 6 inch gauge military railway,

“Preliminary design and contract documents were prepared by the Coast Defence section in Sydney using a contour survey, A contract was let in Perth for its construction using rails, turnouts and some old rolling stock recovered from the old naval base several kilometres south of Fremantle [Henderson]. The only new material were sleepers. Sand was used for ballast. While the contract procedures were taking

place, the centre line was surveyed, adjusted as necessary and pegged. The railway line started at the seaward end of the jetty and went to the battery site at Olivers Hill with a branch line to Bickley Barracks. Later it was extended using day labour to quarries, gun sites, other construction areas and the Bickley Battery site."



In a later interview recorded in 1981, Frank Hussey described some of the challenges that had to overcome in constructing extensions to the railway line:

"A very large problem was to stop the embankments blowing away, What we did was peg down lots of ti-tree, and after trying various other things we found that by far the best thing was the Rottnest daisy, to get that growing on the banks."



In the middle of his time on Rottnest and amidst myriad supervisory responsibilities, Frank married Hilda McCue of Rockdale NSW on Tuesday 3 March 1936. The ceremony took place in the Music Room in the hostel on Rottnest. Captain K. Hall was the chairman at the reception. Hilda cut the cake with Frank's military sword. Considerable media fuss was made of this "first military wedding on Rottnest".

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/37778931?searchTerm=Hussey>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/85720130?searchTerm=Hussey>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/233581879?keyword.mod=any&keyword=Husset%20McCue%20Rottnest&date.from=1936&date.to=1936&startPos=20>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/58764110>

FOLLOW ON

In April 1940 Hussey was promoted to the rank of Major and appointed Chief Instructor at the School of Military Engineering (Fortress Wing), Georges Heights, Sydney NSW. During the war years he rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and in 1955 he was Chief Engineer at Victoria Barracks, Sydney. He retired from the army in 1960 with the rank of Brigadier and immediately joined the Major Construction and Hydraulic Undertakings Branch of the Public Works Department, Western Australia. During 1960 – 1963 he was based in Kununurra supervising the construction of the civil engineering works of the Ord River Diversion Dam, the first stage of the Ord Irrigation Project.

The **Department of the Interior** was an Australian government department that existed between April 1932 and April 1939. It was the first so-named Australian

Government department to be created, and was replaced by the Department of the Interior (II). Amongst its many and diverse responsibilities were public works and services.

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