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Fortress Sydney Manning the Guns on the C. B. Coast Men of the 36th (Sydney Mines) Battery firing a howitzer at Carap Petawawa in 1936, and the remains of a gun pedestal at Port Petrie. typical of all battery positions. INTRODUCTION by Peter N. Moogk At the Fire Command Post near Kilkenny Lake the telephone in the observation position rings. The relief Fire Commander picks up the receiver and quickly jots down the message on a piece of paper: "0435 hours; HYA 2 (Lingan) reports HIKERS (enemy infantry) landed Lingan Bay under shelter of North Head • guns useless • O.P. (observation post) overrun • am being mortared on flanks • heavy casualties--small arms ammunition low • carrying out Scheme EMMA (sabotage of equipment) before evacuation • need..." The meaning of the green lights reported to eastward and the half-inaudible thuds in the distance was clear now: a German landing party was disrupting the coastal batteries as the prelude to a naval attack. The Major pressed the alarm bell and dictated messages to the two telephonists on duty: "Advise D.P.S. (Defended Port of Sydney) H.Q. of attack; order HYA 3 (Fort Petrie) to reverse gun 2 to fire on preset coordinates at targets in grid 68-83 to cover withdrawal from Lingan; gun 1 will load with HE (high explosive) contact fuze and Chapel to do the same; both are to be on lookout for enemy vessels." A bombardier on duty at the switchboard brought in a second communication: "HYA 10 (Table Head forward observation post) reports flotilla eight miles out • 0-72 • proceeding west southwest at approximately eighteen knots • seems to be one destroyer, one small merchant vessel and four MTBs (motor torpedo boats)." The plan was now revealed: the destroyer would distract the remaining coast batteries, a minesweeper loaded with explosives would clear the path into the inner harbour, and the MTBs would tear into the convoy assembled in the southeast arm. Further orders must be sent out and this time codes are thrown to the wind. "Instruct Stubbarts' and South Bar to lay down protective barrages as an attempt on the booms is expected." "Does Scotchtown have any CROWS (enemy aircraft) on the RDF (radar)?" he asks the sergeant in charge of communications. "None?; good, request CO. of 23rd Ack-Ack (Anti-Aircraft Regiment) to release shoreline guns to engage surface targets." This was the assault for which the coastal defences of Sydney harbour were prepared; all of the measures described here had been prepared in advance and men in the forts trained, drilled, watched and waited for just this event. It was an event that never happened. The enemy was only a few miles away, as any surviving skipper of the slow Sydney-Clyde convoys can tell you. But this was a hidden enemy, a submerged enemy that refused to be lured to the surface to lob a shell into such inviting coastline targets as the Glace Bay power plant and the collieries. It was easier and safer to pick off the coal-burning ships that waddled through the Gulf of St. Lawrence at less than ten knots. Perhaps the defences of industrial Cape Breton were too successful in deterring a surface attack. By 1944 "Fortress Sydney" possessed six gun batteries equipped with rapid-firing, radar-directed weapons that covered a radius of 24 miles. In Canada only Halifax and Victoria-Esquimalt had comparable defences. What made Sydney our second



major port on the Atlantic were the coal and steel industries • both vital to the war effort; the naval installations in the harbour, and the port's role as a convoy assembly point for slow vessels. Some say that the harbour was being prepared to serve as a refuge for the Royal Navy should Britain fall to the Nazis, and the British were certainly generous in arming the port defences. Cape Breton's Magazine/33