WORLD WAR TWO MILITARY INSTALLATIONS ON THE SOUTHEAST COAST OF MAURITIUS: A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION

In World War Two (WWII) the island of Mauritius, which had been a part of the British Empire since 1810, became an important base for the Royal Navy fleet in the Indian Ocean: first as a Royal Navy Air Station principally for hunting Japanese and German submarines, and also as a centre of communications.[1] A number of installations were constructed for coastal defence in the event of bombardment or attempted invasion as well as for the storage of fuel and ammunition. The financial burden and the cost in manpower to the small colony of Mauritius would have been substantial. No comprehensive record of these defensive structures, or of the military landscape exists, although there are some records scattered amongst various archives in Mauritius that have yet to be collected and collated.[2] Constructed 70 or so years ago most of these structures are now to a greater or lesser degree ruinous because the reinforced concrete from which they were largely constructed has degraded with time and, more seriously, has often split apart as iron reinforcement has corroded. Vegetation too has taken its toll as roots split walling apart. Modern development poses several threats. These include new National Coast Guard installations at Pointe Diable, both on the elevated nose of the ridge and at the foot, encroachment by garden agriculture, and the robbing of basalt blocks.

The purposes of this preliminary survey of extant remains along the southeast coast were, firstly, to assess the extent of the remains; secondly, to gauge their condition; thirdly, to make recommendations concerning their cultural heritage value; and lastly, to begin a photographic and written catalogue. It is hoped that dissemination of this report on the internet will stimulate further research, and that it might elicit memories and memorabilia from those who served; and also from others, younger, who remember something of installations when they were in use. Here some progress has been made, but there is more to be done. Finally, it is hoped that the Recommendations at the end of this report will result in the development of policy and action towards the sustainable preservation of some parts of this important chapter in the history of Mauritius and its transition from colony to republic.

We are most grateful to the National Heritage Fund (Mauritius) for support, to SOS Patrimoine for a grant towards transport and research costs, to the Mauritius Museums Council and to Mr Kedu at the National History Museum in Mahébourg for permitting intern students Neha Naiko and Sandra Rivière to participate in January and February 2013. This report takes cognisance of archival research and research into oral history conducted by Maya de Salle-Essoo, together with our own documentation of the structural remains, all conducted for the Currimjee Jeewanjee Company Ltd in connection with the development of a resort hotel at Le Chaland. Here, however, we have not duplicated descriptions and photographs contained in Le

[1] Jackson 2001, see also Maurice-Jones 1957 chapters 22-25.
[2] Jackson apparently made a search in the main archives in the UK in which little was found.

Chaland Reports. Vikash Tatayah at Mauritius Wild Life Fund and Nik Cole of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust provided maps of Ile aux Aigrettes. Overviews of work previously carried out by the authors at Ile de la Passe and Pointe du Diable together with observations made on more casual visits to other sites have been included here.

We would like to acknowledge the advice and collaboration of Radhakrishna Ramasawmy and Yann von Arnim who have freely shared their deep knowledge and insights. Peter Millar, who was a Royal Navy pilot based at Plaisance, shared reminiscences with us and, together with his son Patrick Millar, kindly showed his photographs taken at the end of the war. Any investigation of coastal defences in Mauritius owes a tremendous debt to Philippe la Hausse de Lalouvière who not only instigated research but who was responsible, in part as the first director of the National Heritage Trust, for having the more important sites, namely Ile de la Passe and Pointe Diable, registered as National Monuments.

The precise function of many structures reported on below has not been ascertained. Where function is obvious, or has been established from oral or written sources, it is given, otherwise the terms building, structure and installation have been used as appropriate.[3] Another uncertainty is the extent to which standing remains represent the totality of what was built. On Ile de la Passe, Ile aux Aigrettes and at Le Chaland many building platforms are extant. At Le Chaland, however, a good number have long since disappeared beneath what is now the Shandrani Hotel and the airport. Similar platforms have been seen at Bois des Amourettes and also at Pointe du Diable, both on the top of the bluff and associated with the WW II gun emplacements, but no comprehensive search has been made. There may very well have been similar structures on and behind the 18th century French Batterie de la Reine at Vieux Grand Port, as well as at Pointe aux Feuilles. Some of these more ephemeral buildings remains might very well be found in the course of more intensive investigations. Structures visible on the ground are often difficult or impossible to locate on Google Earth because of tree cover.

Geography and Strategies

In part this study is one of military landscape and seascape, the one merging into the other with islets surrounded by water but occupied by coastal defences.[4] Because the defences themselves were integrated in design, as well as for the purposes of command and control, each individual structure needs to be understood as a component of the whole. At the outbreak of the war the coastal defences of Mauritius were manned by imperial troop supported by the Mauritius Territorial Force. In September 1942 the Western Indian Ocean was transferred from India Command to the East Africa Command, as a consequence of which the defences of Mauritius were upgraded. The Mauritius Coastal Regiment of the Mauritius Artillery was formed in December of that year. In 1943 the Mauritius Defence Scheme was updated with all Mauritian armed forces falling directly under the imperial government and strengthened by the assignment of a new battalion of imperial troops. For the purpose of defence the island was divided into two: Grand Port and Plaisance which included the Mahébourg Bay and Royal Naval Air Station, and the area of Port Louis including Baie du Tombeau, the latter being the principle base for Catalina flying boats engaged in submarine hunts. In 1945, the Royal Naval Air Station aerodrome at Plaisance, HMS Sambur, was handed over to the Royal Air Force (RAF). This survey is concerned with Grand Port and Plaisance.

[3] Maurice-Jones 1957 and Osborne 2004 are useful for military terms.
[4] The summary that follows is based on Jackson 2001, particularly chapter 3.

Geographic scope of the survey is the bay of Grand Port, the deepest and most protected natural harbour in the Mascarenes (Fig. 1). It extends from Pointe aux Feuilles, which appears to have been the northern limit, to Pointe Vacoas at the southwest, where the fringing reef gives way to cliffs washed by the ocean. It includes three islets, Ile aux Aigrettes in the lagoon off the military camp at Pointe d'Esny, Ile de la Passe guarding the main entrance through the reef, and a lookout at the civilian lighthouse on Ile aux Fouquets. These perhaps were, or were intended to be, the most important defences in Mauritius. Port Louis was defended because it was, after all, the capital and the port from which civilian supplies, such as food, came in and from where sugar was exported. RAF Catalina flying boats made use of Grand Port although their main base was at Baie du Tombeau.

The concentration of the defences around Grant Port resulted from geology that provided the same circumstances and opportunities that had first attracted the Dutch to establish Fort Frederik Hendrik in the seventeenth century, followed in the 1720s by the French at Fort Bourbon atop the ruins of the Dutch defences: deep anchorage and a sheltered bay. The disadvantage of prevailing wind that caused relocation to Port Louis diminished after the advent of steam. Ile de la Passe, home to 100 Mauritian soldiers for much of the war, protected, as it name suggests, entrance through the pass at the same time as providing a forward base against enemy ships.

Survey Methods and Progress

Much of what follows has been adapted from other work, especially the detailed survey conducted by the authors at Ile de la Passe, an impact study of proposed development on part of the Le Chaland site, records of Ile aux Aigrettes provided by Mauritian Wild Life, and earlier reconnaissance made with Earthwatch volunteers and students from the University of Mauritius at Pointe du Diable. However, most of the preliminary survey conducted along the coast between Mahébourg and Pointe du Diable was done specifically for this report. Of particular note is the building at the mouth of the Rivière Champagne, adjacent to the Monument to commemorate the first Dutch landing, and the extensive structures at the Batterie de la Reine immediately north of Vieux Grand Port, and at Bois des Amourettes. More is to be done at all of these places.

Following an overview, this report progresses from Pointe aux Feuilles at the north to Le Chaland at the southwest. Most of the structures can be seen on Google Earth images although some are partially or totally obscured by a canopy of vegetation. There were two main methods of identification. The first was to visit known sites and to identify other sites on the ground that could then be plotted onto Google Earth imagery. The other was to search Google Earth for possible structures which were then visited. This latter procedure is not straightforward because modern concrete roofs are not distinguishable from WW II ones on the imagery, and also because of vegetation cover. An added difficulty is that some WW II building platforms have been used as bases for more modern buildings. It has frequently been helpful to use the historical imagery facility on Google Earth because of differences in cloud cover as well as in the rotation of sugarcane harvest and planting. It seems possible that a study of the materials used for each structure will reveal significant differences. Such differences at any one site could be chronological, but it may also be that different types of structure required particular materials. Because it appears to be very unlikely that any official documentation has survived from the war years it would be worth investigating this materials based approach. Obvious clues are the use of precast cement blocks rather than cut basalt for corners, different types of iron reinforcement (e.g. bars and mesh), Portland cement and lime mortar.

The principle means of recording has been photography. It is anticipated that post-war maps marking the location of many of the structures can be found in the archives, and a search should be made before embarking on a new program of mapping. However, an assiduous search for Le Chaland, and less intensively for related sites, made by Maya de Salle-Essoo was not productive for the war years. Individual structures have not been measured or described in detail for want of time and resources.[5] No attempt has been made to clear vegetation or to clean structures other than at Ile de la Passe and Le Chaland.

Overview

The east coast of Mauritius was protected by four WW II batteries, each equipped with guns and searchlights.[6] This report does not include a study of armament and tactics, a specialised military subject beyond the competence of the authors. Rather, it is an assessment of the heritage value of what remains today.[7] Batteries at Pointe aux Feuilles, Pointe du Diable, Ile de la Passe and Ile aux Aigrettes were all manned by No. 2 Coast Battery (Fig. 1). There was a Fire Control post on the summit of Pointe du Diable, and a lookout on the lighthouse on Ile Aux Fouquets.[8] On Ile de la Passe and at Pointe du Diable there are some structures built two phases, the first of which was most probably, but not certainly, constructed in the first years of the war, before the Civil Labour Corps were established in 1942.[9] The 6" guns were installed in May 1942. A jetty, pumping station and pipes with mooring point, five Royal Navy fuel tanks and associated facilities were constructed at Bois des Amourettes. Defensive structures and lookouts were built on the old French Batterie de la Reine and on the slope of Lion Mountain behind. According to local information (see below) the tanks were never used for fuel. The Royal Navy Air Station, HMS Sambur, at Plaisance has mostly been built over but remains of a substantial camp still exist. Between Pointe Vacoas and Blue Bay, mostly to the southwest of what is now the Shangrani, formerly Le Chaland Hotel complex, is a very large number of building platforms some or all of which seems to have been the camp built to accommodate (some of) the 7000 men recruited for the Civil labour Corps in 1942. Later, perhaps from 1949, this camp was used as the training base for the Royal Pioneers Core where Mauritian and other volunteers were trained before being sent elsewhere to serve the British Empire.[10] The Royal Pioneers were disbanded in 1956 following the Suez Crisis.

[5] See "Conclusions and Recommendations" at the end of this report.
[6] Hausse de Lalouvière 1998b, 64-65; Lenoir 2005, 21; Bhoonah 1012, 98.
[7] For tactics, guns, searchlights, rangefinders and much more see Maurice Jones 1957.
[8] Hausse de Lalouvière 1998b, 65.
[9] Jackson 2001, 66-68. No records or accounts of 20th century defences on the southeast coast of Mauritius before WW II have come to our notice, see e.g. Maurice-Jones 1957 in which only Port Louis is listed as having defences.
[10] Most of the Mauritians were apparently posted to Egypt, Sudan, Libya and elsewhere in North Africa, with some sent to Palestine.

Figure 1. Overview of the survey area.

POINTE AUX FEUILLES

Figure 2. Pointe aux Feuilles with a WW II buildings indicated. Gun pits and other structures, if they still exist, have yet to be located. Google Earth

Pointe aux Feuilles was the northernmost of the four batteries guarding Grand Port bay. As can be seen in Figure 1 it is located directly opposite the North Entrance through the reef. It thus commands the channel which leads to the mouth of Grand River Southeast as well as the channel running to the south past Pointe du Diable to Grant Port (Fig. 3). According to Philippe la Hausse de Lalouvière there were "fuel reserves, searchlights, two 6" MkII CP and two 90mm 3^0FL guns".[11]

Six structures have been identified (Fig. 2). The two observation posts on the sea are of standard type. The northern one has partially collapsed into the sea (Fig. 4) but the southern one is intact (Fig. 5).[12] In the fields behind are two adjacent concrete structures (Figs 6 to 8). One is a generator room with part of the machine bed visible, the other, built back into the slope, comprises a row of five rooms with a corridor at the rear. The corridor had doors at both ends, its rear wall is battered. The three rectangular central rooms each have a window which looks out onto the back wall of the generator room. The end rooms, which project forwards by a few feet, are windowless. This appears to have been magazine for ammunition. On the slopes above are two observation posts. They are probably of identical design but it was only possible to visit the northernmost one (Figs 9 to 11). This is rectanuglar with a lightweight sloping roof (not of concrete) and a long open front. Low concrete piers seem to have supported a viewing platform. Philippe la Hausse de Lalouvière mentions a semi-buried barracks which has not been located. More critically, we were no more successful than la Hausse in finding the gun pits. Work needs to be done in the field with the help of local landowners as well as a search of the archives.

Figure 3. Pointe aux Feuilles with Pointe du Diable behind seen from the 18th century Batterie de la Grande Rivière Sud-Est. GDS 2012 0923

[11] Hausse de Lalouvière 1998a, 29 with note 38.

[12] These two observation posts are identical in design to the northernmost one at Pointe du Diable and the pair on Ile aux Aigrettes.

Figure 4. Two views of the northern observation post at Pointe aux Feuilles showing how the front has collapsed as a result of coastal erosion. GDS 2012 0968 and 0970

Figure 5. Two views of the southern observation post at Pointe aux Feuilles showing basalt masonry, precast concrete blocks, and the iron mesh reinforcement and corrugated shuttering used to make the roof. GDS 2012 0968 and 0970

Figure 6. Pointe aux Feuilles, the generator room at left with the magazine cut back into the slope behind. GDS 2012 0990

Figure 7. Generator room.
GDS 2012 0993

Figure 8. Magazine corridor.
GDS 2012 1006

Figure 9. Pointe aux Feuilles, the northern observation post on the slope with the summit behind.
GDS 2012 1017

Figure 10. Pointe aux Feuilles, the northern observation post with steps. GDS 2012 1016

Figure 11. Interior of the northern observation post with doors at either end, low pitch of shed roof seen in far wall and pier to support raised viewing platform. GDS 2012 1013

POINTE DU DIABLE

Pointe du Diable protected the deep channel leading to the bay of Grand Port from the North or Danish entrance (Figs 1 and 3). There was a major battery, Batterie de Bourbon, from the 1750s. Installations were partially destroyed and the guns spiked by Willoughby between the Battle of Ile de la Passe and his defeat at the Battle of Grand Port in August 1810. Later British plans to revamp it seem not to have proceeded past the planning stage. A small metal sign affixed to the front of the generator hall by the modern road reads "Ruins of 1939-45 war buildings Protected by law as a National Monument". Pointe du Diable was declared a National Monument in 1998. Nevertheless, communication masts have been erected on the Fire Control Post on summit, a National Coast Guard radar mast and buildings over where French buildings were perhaps located, and the French battery poorly renovated by the Ministry of Environment, all without any regard for the heritage status and without National Heritage Fund consultation.

In WW II there were several components to the military installations. Some were at the foot of the bluff, some on the slopes and others on the summit (Figs 12 and 13). Vehicular approach to the summit was by way of a road along the ridge from the lowest point of the saddle, as can be seen on Figure 12. Zigzagging footpaths between the battery and the summit can be traced on Google Earth imagery. There are two phases to the defences at the base of the bluff that are easily distinguished by building materials and techniques. The earlier phase, traces of which can be seen in the four observation posts located on the edge of the shore facing the North Entrance and in the generator room located at a more protected location to the south, were of basalt with, in larger buildings, precast tie blocks incorporated into the walls. Basalt quoin stones have drafted edges while all stones are neatly squared. At Pointe du Diable the five buildings of this phase that it has been possible to identify were all modified with reinforced concrete. Exactly the same sequence can be seen in four structures on Ile de la Passe, namely the Observation Tower, the Central Building, the Searchlight Building and the Underground Generator Halls.[13] It is thus clear that this first phase at Pointe du Diable and on Ile de la Passe formed part of one and the same scheme of defence. Similar distinctive building materials and techniques have not (so far) been identified elsewhere, e.g. on Ile aux Aigrettes. Negative evidence points towards the tentative conclusion that this first phase is to be dated to the early years of WW II, before the raising of the Civil Labour Corps in 1942. Other possibilities suggested by Philippe la Hausse de Lalouvière are 1895 or soon thereafter, in the wake of an electric system being installed at Fort George in Port Louis, or perhaps the Great War.[14] However, neither Maurice-Jones nor Jackson mention any such not insubstantial investment and planning.[15] This problem of dating will be addressed again in the description of Ile de la Passe.

[13] Summers and Summers 2002.
[14] Hausse de Lalouvière 1998a, 64.
[15] Maurice-Jones 1957; Jackson 2001.

Figure 12. Pointe du Diable with WW II road along ridge.

Figure 13. Pointe du Diable WW II features.

Figure 14. Pointe du Diable from the sea in 2006: Fire Control Post on the summit, the WW II battery showing white amongst the trees, the generator hall with four windows left of centre and the French Batterie de Bourbon on the shore. md06nc0111

Figure 15. Pointe du Diable, three of the observation posts on the shore seen from the sea in 2006, the fourth is behind the trees at left. md06nc0122

Structures on the Sea Frontage

As can be seen in Figure 13, on the north side of the bluff end, either side of the modern road, perched on the edge of the low cliff are four buildings. All four belong to the earlier phase of construction just mentioned and seem to have been identical. In the secondary adaptation the northernmost of the group, perched immediately above the shore, was converted into an observation post of the same design as the pair at Pointe aux Feuilles and those on Ile aux Aigrettes. The other three were provided with new roofs, doors and windows. New cement floors with channels for electrical wires are found in each.

Figure 16. Pointe du Diable with the four observation posts on the shore. The post at centre in the middle ground was altered to the standard design while the other three had doors and windows modified. GDS 2012 1025

Figure 17. The four observation posts on the shore looking south. The post in the foreground was altered to the standard design. GDS 2012 1037

Figure 18. The standard observation post on the shore showing the two phases. Original corners were of basalt with drafted margins rather than the later precast concrete blocks. Here the light coloured corner stones next to the road have been painted by the highways authority. GDS 2012 1034 and 1036

Around the corner to the north, marked 'Revet' on Figure 13, is a masonry lined revetment cut back into the base of the hill which seems to be very similar to that in which the generator room was constructed (see below). Vegetation needs to be cleared in order to reach a proper understanding of this structure which seems to have been a significant component of the WW II installations.

Figure 19. Front façade of the generator building at Pointe du Diable showing the two building phases. Note that the window at left is different. GDS 2012 1020

Figure 20. Interior of the generator building at Pointe du Diable looking through the window in the north wall. GDS 2012 1081

Electricity for the searchlights that swept the North Entrance and the channel was provided by three diesel powered generators installed in the larger, rectangular, building further to the south, on the west side of the present road (Figs 19-20). This generator room was constructed on a terrace cut back into the base of the slope behind. The terrace cut is lined with a battered basalt and mortar revetment wall similar to the one further north just described and to revetments at the battery described below. Examination of mortars might provide a clue to the sequence of construction, i.e. which phase the revetments should be ascribed to. The generator room itself, as noted above, also went through two phases of construction. In the second phase the basalt corners were removed and two vertical cuttings were made in the basalt walling for the insertion of reinforced concrete columns to support horizontal beams that carried a new reinforced concrete roof. Unlike buildings on Ile de la Passe there is no reinforced concrete ring beam. The single door in the south wall was revamped with reinforced concrete while windows and air vents were added or altered.

Continuing south to the corner of the bluff to just past the road to the battery, a little above the modern road, stands a small basalt building behind a building platform that is obscured by vegetation (Fig. 20). Basalt blocks with drafted edges rather than precast cement blocks were used at the corners, but the walling is of uncut stone. Thus the style is different to other WW II buildings along the shore, but very similar to some structures at the camp on the summit. It was not possible to inspect the interior because the building has been revamped and is now used by the National Coast Guard.

Figure 21. Basalt building at the south corner now used by the National Coast Guard. GDS 2012 1082

The WW II Battery and Associated Buildings

The WW II battery is situated to the west of and a few metres above the modern road, separated from it by trees (Fig. 22). Weaponry comprised two 6" Mk VII BL guns. There are several associated buildings terraced into the hillside. Today these emplacements and related features are home to goats, chickens and geese, or used as stores and workshops. This entire complex appears to have been of one build.

Twin gun pits with semicircular fronts and aprons, all of concrete, retain their iron holdfasts (Figs 23-26). Pairs of ready-use ammunition lockers, now doorless, are located either side of each gun. Drainage channels, cable ducts and other features are preserved. The emplacements were constructed on a level terrace cut back into the hill slope and revetted with basalt walling that include precast concrete blocks used for corners.

Immediately south of the emplacements, dug into the slope behind, is a building now used as a workshop (Figs 26-27). It was not possible to enter, but it might well be that this was a crew shelter. Further south again, but facing west across the terraced area, is another building comprising several rooms (Figs 28-30). Now used for animals, it was again not possible to enter at the time of the visit, but both a generator room and a magazine for ammunition are possible functions.

Figure 22. Gun pits showing the elevated position with the old French battery on the sea front at left and the new National Coast Guard radar mast. GDS 2012 1047

Figure 23. Gun pits at Pointe du Diable looking south. There are ready-use ammunition lockers either side of each pit and a revetment at the rear. GDS 2012 1043

Figure 24. The southern pit and revetment showing precast corner blocks. A corner of the roof of the Battery Observation Post is just visible at top centre. GDS 2012 1070

Figure 25. The southern pit with sloping apron, ready-use ammunition lockers and the iron holdfast for the gun. GDS 2012 1067

Figure 26. The southern emplacement with semi-buried building now used as a workshop.
GDS 2012 1072

Figure 26. Semi-buried building at the battery now used as a workshop.
GDS 2012 1075

Figure 28. Building just south of the battery now used for animals. GDS 2012 1057

Figure 29. South side of building shown in Figure 28. GDS 2012 1058

Figure 30. South side of building shown in Figure 28. GDS 2012 1059

Figure 31. Battery Observation Post midway up the slope from road to summit. GDS 2012 1054

Battery Observation Post on the Slope

Approximately midway up the slope from the modern road to the summit is a Battery Observation Post. (Figs 24 and 31). Construction and materials are not dissimilar to those used for the Fire Control Post on the summit (described below). Of particular note are the iron beams used to support the projecting roof and the iron railing on the front, below the viewing platform. Similar iron rails were used to support both the concrete roof of the Observation Tower and the asbestos-walled toilets that overhung the sea on Il de la Passe.

The Trench and Associated Features on the Southern Slope

A stone lined trench and related feature can be seen on figure 5. While materials and construction leave no doubt as to the WW II date of these features, function is uncertain. Walling is obscured by dense vegetation so that cleaning is required before a full inspection can be made. It is possible that these features were associated with water collection.

Fire Control Post on the Summit and Military Camp on the Ridge

On the summit is the concrete Fire Control Post which would have housed the range finder. From here gunners at all of the east defences would have been given instructions on where to aim against enemy ships beyond the reef (Figs 14 and 32). In the event of an attack the entire system of defence from Pointe aux Feuilles to Ile aux Aigrettes was to be controlled from here. The building is intact but now has a telecommunications tower built on it (Figs 33-37).[16] Views are spectacular. Buildings and features are described from the fire command post at the eastern end to the sentry building at the west. Other structures and building platforms, presumably including barracks comprising stone bases, ravenal walls and corrugated or thatched roofs, are hidden in the vegetation. Standing structures are of rectangular basalt blocks with Portland cement door and window frames, except for the fire control building. The sentry and toilet blocks are both built in a completely different style, presumably being constructed at a slightly different time. There are no tie blocks and no indication that any of these buildings on the summit and ridge at Pointe du Diable were modified. Vegetation is dense but not impenetrable, some low vegetation would need to be cleared in order to locate and record building platforms. No plan of the structures has been found, but further archival work might yet turn one up. Much of the reinforced concrete, especially roofs, are perilous. The light pitched roof of the large building, perhaps the Mess, has entirely gone. There is a well preserved path and flight of steps from the camp to the Fire Control Post. On the small rock outcrop at the peak there is a small Hindu shrine which sees occasional use. Access other than on foot requires a four wheel drive vehicle. The path has been revamped in recent years in connection with the masts on the summit. No shred of evidence, such as pottery sherds, to indicate pre WW II activity has been found, perhaps surprisingly given the strategic position and the importance of the French battery on the shore below. The current land owner(s) have not been identified.

[16] For a colour photograph taken from the air before construction of the communications masts and related installations see Hausse de Lalouvière 1998, 32.

Figure 32. The Fire Control Post is at far right The modern telecommunications tower obscures the generator room which is at a lower elevation. Moving westwards along the path is a second generator room hidden by trees and then built cistern which is clearly seen. To the south lies a large complex including the building that sported a double pitched roof. Further west again, on the north side of the path, is the rectangular toilet block. Still further on, partially hidden by vegetation, is the guard post. Other structures are evident, but these have yet to be investigated on the ground.

The Fire Control Post (Figs 33-35) comprises several rooms behind the observation deck. It is now used as part of the telecommunication system and thus not accessible without arrangement. In 2005 and 2007, as can be seen from the illustrations, the reinforced concrete was in a poor condition. It was not re-examined in 2012. A small mast has been put up on the building while a much larger mast has been erected next to it.

To the northwest, at a lower elevation, stands a building containing a concrete bed for a single generator (Figs 36-38). A flight of concrete steps lead up to the single door. A second generator room, now hidden by vegetation, is situated on the south side of the path before the cistern (Figs 39-40). The cistern (Figs 39-40) is still serviceable.

Figure 33. The view from the Fire Control Post on the summit of Pointe du Diable with the North Entrance in the background. 07mdnc0212

Figure 34. The Fire Control Post on the summit of Pointe du Diable in 2005. md05nn0111

Figure 35. The rear of the Fire Control Post as it was in 2005. It is little changed today.
md05nn0108

Figure 36. The generator room in 2005 with the side of the Fire Control Post above and to the right. md05nn0124

Figure 37. The generator room with the telecommunications mast behind in 2007. 07mdmc0225

Figure 38. Interior of the generator room with machine bed. 07mdnc0224

Figure 39. The second generator room. 07mdmc0227

Figure 40. The second generator room at left and the cistern, looking west. 07mdmc0228

Figure 41. The stone building with double pitched roof and verandas in 2007. md07nc0121

Figure 42. The second stone building in 2005. md05nn0146

At the centre of the camp is a complex comprising two buildings. That at the back, i.e. furthest from the path, was provided with a double pitched roof and verandas (Fig 41). Walls are topped by concrete beams to which the roof, perhaps corrugated metal on a metal frame, was attached. The structures in front (Fig. 42) may also have carried pitched roofs but there are no stone gables. In both buildings the door and window lintels and sills are of precast concrete while jambs are basalt. It is tempting to think that these two buildings served as offices and / or as the officers' mess, but this can only be surmise at this preliminary stage of investigation. The main building is certainly grander than anything else that has been seen in the course of this survey. Vegetation has grown very considerably since 2005 and a great deal of rubbish and building waste has been dumped from construction of the telecommunications mast.

The toilet block was built in a completely different style (Figs 43-44). Only the corner stones were cut. Both the roof and the internal partitions are of reinforced concrete built with corrugated sheet shuttering. It is entered via a short flight of concrete steps. There are presumably cess pits hidden in the undergrowth behind.

Built in the same style is the sentry or guard post at the entrance to the camp along the ridge. As well as guarding the entrance, as is made clear by the position of the loopholes on the front corner. The rear room has high iron-barred windows on the three external sides. It did not, however, have a concrete roof.

Figure 43. The toilet block. 07mdnc0234

Figure 44. Interior of the toilet block. 07mdnc0232

Figure 45. The sentry building at the entrance to the ridge top camp. GDS 2012 1205

Figure 46. Interior of the sentry building. 07mdmc0236

BOIS DES AMOURETTES

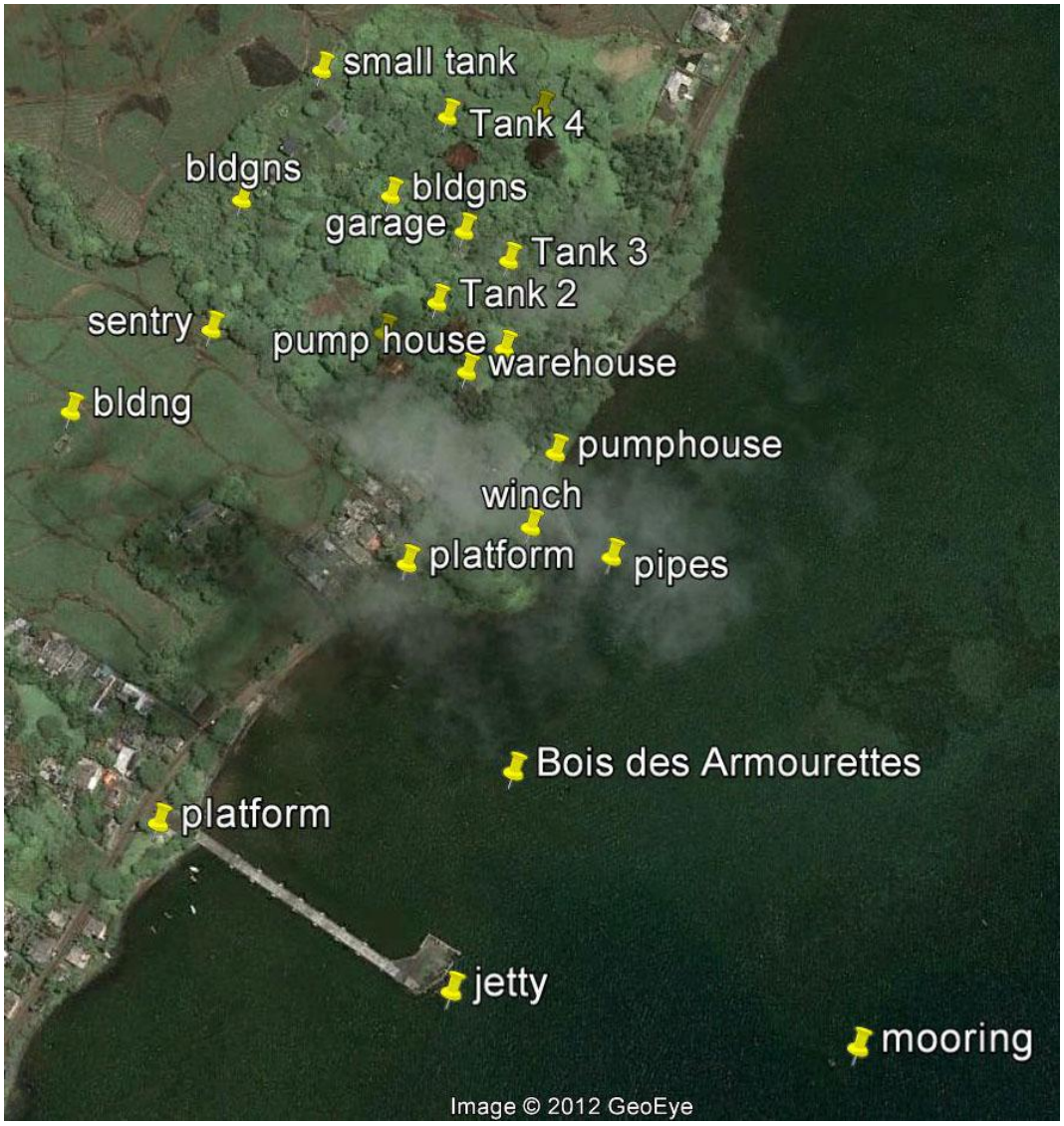

Figure 47. WW II installations at Bois des Amourettes, Google Earth.

At Bois des Amourettes a Royal Navy facility was constructed for the storage of fuel (Fig. 47). Construction began in 1942 and was undertaken by the Civil Labour Corps for the Royal Navy. The site was extensive and bears testimony to the size of the investment that was made to defend the Empire. By 1942 the principle threat was perceived as coming from Japan, although German submarines were also active in the Indian Ocean. Thus the facility at Bois des Amourettes was constructed for search operations by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force rather than for the purpose of coastal defence.

One local man, Roger Matambi, remembers the construction and was kind enough to provide very helpful information. Although he was only a boy when the war broke out, in 1952

he signed up for the Royal Pioneer Corps, serving the British Empire in Egypt and Sudan until 1956. According to him, the tanks were never used to store fuel. They were filled once with seawater to measure capacity (and presumable to ensure that they did not leak) but not with fuel which, for the Catalinas, was stored in barrels by the jetty. After the war, he told us, the tanks were used for molasses! Subsequent enquiry confirms that the tanks were never used during WW II, and never at all used for fuel.

The Jetty

The jetty (Figs 48-50) was constructed in WW II and revamped on several occasions since then. Local fishermen say that the water used to be much deeper than it is today. This is presumably a result of silting caused by the jetty itself. The WW II jetty was L-shaped with a small guard post on the end (Figs 52-53). It is of reinforced concrete casemate construction (Fig. 56) filled with basalt rubble which was taken from the terraces that were dug out of the fuel storage tanks on the slope behind (see below). There were inlets or channels to let water through, to which precast concrete pipes were added much more recently. The end of the Jetty is in poor condition, part having collapsed (Fig. 54) and been repaired with an inferior basalt and cement wall (Fig. 55). Walls of the structure on the end are built entirely of precast concrete blocks. The base on which it stands, the roof and lintels are all of reinforced concrete. The concrete base is larger than the building, this platform apparently being the only portion of the jetty that was provided with a smooth surface, the remainder being crushed basalt. The current concrete surface and the concrete balustrades are all of recent date (Figure 51).

At the shore end of the jetty, on the south side, are large WW II building platforms that are now used as car parking space. This is where barrels for fuel for the Catalina flying boats were stored. There are further poorly preserved features to the south, where there is a more recent kiosk, which it is not possible to make sense of.

Figure 48. Bois des Amourettes jetty from the north. GDS 2012 0704

Figure 49. Bois des Amourettes, the north side of jetty showing the precast concrete pipes added to ends of the original inlets. GDS 2012 0704

Figure 50. Bois des Amourettes, the south side of jetty. GDS 2012 0575

Figure 51. Bois des Amourettes jetty with, from left to right, the lighthouse on Ile aux Fouquets, Ile Vacoas and Ile de la Passe on the horizon. The structure at the end dates to WW II at which time the surface was stone. The concrete surface and balustrades, like the inlet pipes, were added in the second half of the 20th century. GDS 2012 0348

Figure 52. Bois des Amourettes WW II building on the jetty end. GDS 2012 0365

Figure 53. Bois des Amourettes, seaward side of the WW II building on the jetty end. GDS 2012 0379

Figure 54. Bois des Amourettes, the collapsed WW II jetty end. GDS 2012 0594

Figure 55. Bois des Amourettes, the collapsed corner of the WW II jetty with the imprints of corrugated metal shuttering and the recent basalt revetment. GDS 2012 0593

Figure 56. Bois des Amourettes, the arm WW II jetty with the imprints of corrugated metal shuttering employed to make concrete casemates. The mooring point in the sea can be seen at top left. GDS 2012 0591

Fuel Unloading and Storage Installations

Fuel unloading and storage installations at Bois des Amourettes that have been identified in this preliminary survey include a mooring and intake platform at sea, a pair of pipes, a pump house on the shore, a slipway and winch on the shore, a building platform on the shore, a pump house and a warehouse in the trees just behind the modern road, five fuel tanks and various buildings of the camp behind the tanks including those in the current grounds of the National Coast Guard and in the sugar cane field to the south. These are indicated on Figure 47.

Mooring Platform, Intake, Jetty and Pipes

Constructed at sea close to the edge of the channel where tankers could anchor is a substantial iron platform (Fig. 57). A pair of iron pipes with thick rubber coating ran from this to the pump house behind the modern road. On historical Google Earth imagery the pair of pipes resting on the lagoon bead can be clearly seen. Ashore the pipes rested on concrete piers, each made of three precast blocks, built on the narrow jetty (Fig. 58). The south side of the concrete jetty is protected from the long-shore current a revetment of looses basalt. Here one of the two pipes has been removed for use in supporting the modern road where it crosses watercourses. Many sections of pipe, some still retaining the thick rubber coating, are to be found in position while others are dismantled and stacked next to the main pump house.

Figure 57. The platform at sea. mbcg0308

Figure 58. Bois des Amourettes jetty from the north. GDS 2012 0782

Winch and Slip

South of the pipe jetty, hidden by mangrove and trees, is a slipway at the end of which is the concrete and iron base for a winch (not illustrated). This was presumably used to haul small boats ashore.

Platform

Yet further south, now in a vegetable garden, is a large building platform of typical WW II type (not illustrated). It measures 16 by 4.75m. It was entered at the centre of the south end by a flight of three steps. An internal division with a large door occupied approximately the innermost third of the building. Function is unclear. There may very well be other structures on this part of the shore which more intensive survey would reveal.

Figure 59. Bois des Amourettes the small Pump House on the shore. GDS 2012 0784

Pump House on the Shore

The pump house on the shore comprises two long rooms beneath a lightweight double pitched roof (Fig. 59). The narrower rear room, on the landward side, appears to have been open on the long side. The concrete base is substantial, in keeping with a structure housing machinery. Walls are built entirely of precast concrete blocks. There are fittings for two pipes, of smaller bore than the main ones leading from the sea which bypass the building. The exact purpose of this pump house is unclear.

The Warehouse

The warehouse (Figs 61-62,1) is a large rectangular building with a double pitched roof. Walls are of uncut basalt with corners built of precast concrete blocks. Doors and windows are of reinforced concrete. The northwest corner was partitioned off, with its own external door, to serve as an office. The existing and very ruinous metal roof structure and corrugated metal sheeting is of more recent date, as is part of the flooring and possibly the metal bars in the windows. Even more recently some of the doors have been blocked.

At the back of the southern end of the warehouse is a small toilet block made of precast cement blocks which have unusual surface rendering. There are presumably associated cess pits and so forth in the undergrowth. To the south of the toilet block is a circular platform covered with low vegetation. The purpose is not known, but from it a flight of steps leads up the steep bank enclosing the forward group of three large fuel tanks. These steps, which are in the form of a concrete ladder (treads but no risers) appear to stop on the bank top. Here the vegetation was too hostile for further investigation to be made. An identical concrete ladder was found to the northwest of the pump house, and there are doubtless others giving access to the second set of tanks. Full investigation and recording of these installations will require clearance of dense undergrowth.

Figure 60. The Bois des Amourettes Warehouse from the road. GDS 2012 0779

Figure 61. The Warehouse, interior with front at left. GDS 2012 0748

The Pump House

The pump house is a low rectangular building with a double pitched roof (Fig. 62). Construction techniques and materials are exactly the same as those found at the warehouse just described. The front façade has a wide central doorway flanked by pairs of windows. The rear wall contains five equidistant windows and a doorway to the generator room. The roof, largely collapsed, comprises corrugated asbestos sheeting supported by a timber frame. This is perhaps, but not certainly, original. Of the same date, whether or not that is WW II, are the wooden window frames which swivel horizontally so as to provide ventilation without letting in excessive moisture. Built against the northern end of the back wall, accessed directly from the main room, is a small room containing a single concrete generator bed. This room has a concrete slab roof. While this room was clearly added it can be assumed that the installation of a generator in this position was part of the original scheme.

The pump house contains a Ruston-Hornsby Class 'HR' 2-cylinder horizontal, open-crank oil engine at the south end (Figs 64-65).[17] RUSTON LINCON ENGLAND is embossed on one side and the Ruston-Hornsby badge is attached. At the north end is the pump (Figs 63 and 66-67). The valves are marked Crane-Glenfield who were probably the manufactures of the pump itself. The engine drove the pump which was intended to pump fuel into the five storage tanks on the hillside behind.

Outside there are various associated features in addition to the extant piping. These include a valve at the south end (Fig. 69) and various valves at the north (Fig. 62 at right). The machinery is rusting and incomplete but, even if it could never be made to work again, it is

[17] http://www.oldengine.org/members/ruston/history3.htm

certainly not past preservation. The building too, apart from the roof, is sound. There is a stack of pipe sections to the right of the pump house as well as much piping still in place.

Figure 62. The Bois des Amourettes Pump House from the road. GDS 2012 0778

Figure 63. Bois des Amourettes Pump House showing the Pump with the Ruston diesel engine at right and the central doorway. GDS 2012 076

Figure 64. The Ruston diesel engine on a concrete bed, rear wall at right. GDS 2012 0754

Figure 65. Bois des Amourettes Pump House, Ruston diesel engine on concrete bed, front wall at left. GDS 2012 0758

Figure 66. Bois des Amourettes Pump House, the Pump with collapsing roof. The generator room added to the back is accessed via the doorway in the far corner. GDS 2012 0753

Figure 67. Pump with outlet through end wall at right. Asbestos corrugated sheeting, fallen from the timber framed roof, could be original. GDS 2012 0753

Figure 68. Pump House, added room with generator bed. GDS 2012 0778

Figure 69. Bois des Amourettes Pump House, external valve. GDS 2012 0752

Fuel Storage Tanks and Associated Features

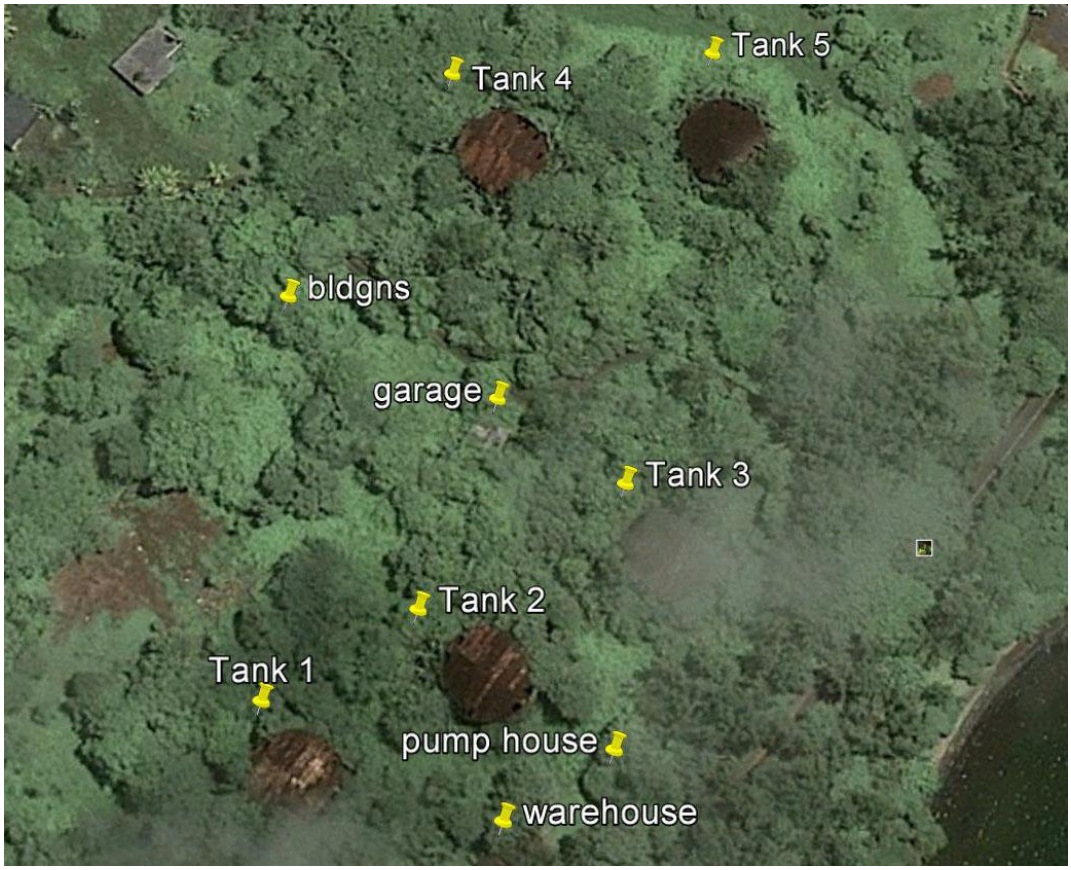

Figure 70. The five fuel tanks at Bois des Amourettes. Google Earth.

In all there were five fuel tanks (Fig. 70). The three at the front were built on one terrace, the two at the back on another. The creation of these terraces, all dug out by hand by the Civil Labour Corps in 1942, involved a huge input of man power. Some of the basalt that was extracted went to make the infill of main jetty and, doubtless, the much smaller jetty for the twin pipes. The majority of the excavated material, however, was used to make two substantial enclosing banks, one around the three tanks at the front and a second around the two at the rear. These tall, steep sided, flat topped banks are not seen on the satellite imagery but are starkly obvious on the ground. Remains of a winch were found (Fig. 74) on top of the forward bank, and there are doubtless other installations connected with the erection and use of the tanks. These banks would have afforded considerable protection in the event of naval bombardment, but their primary intent would have been to contain and limit damage in the event of an accident or of successful attack by air or sea. To the layman they appear vulnerable and although today they are very largely obscured by vegetation they would have been conspicuous when first built. Presumably they were, or were intended to be, coved with camouflage netting.

Each tank rests on a concrete base. Today they are rusting and unsafe (Figs 71-73 and 75). Vegetation is sufficiently dense to dissuade the casual visitor, as are the mosquitoes, but there is no fence.

Figure 71. Bois des Amourettes fuel tank. GDS 2012 0750

Figure 72. Bois des Amourettes fuel tank. GDS 2012 0774

Figure 73. Bois des Amourettes tank outlet GDS 2012 0769

Figure 74. Bois des Amourettes winch on the bank top. GDS 2012 0776

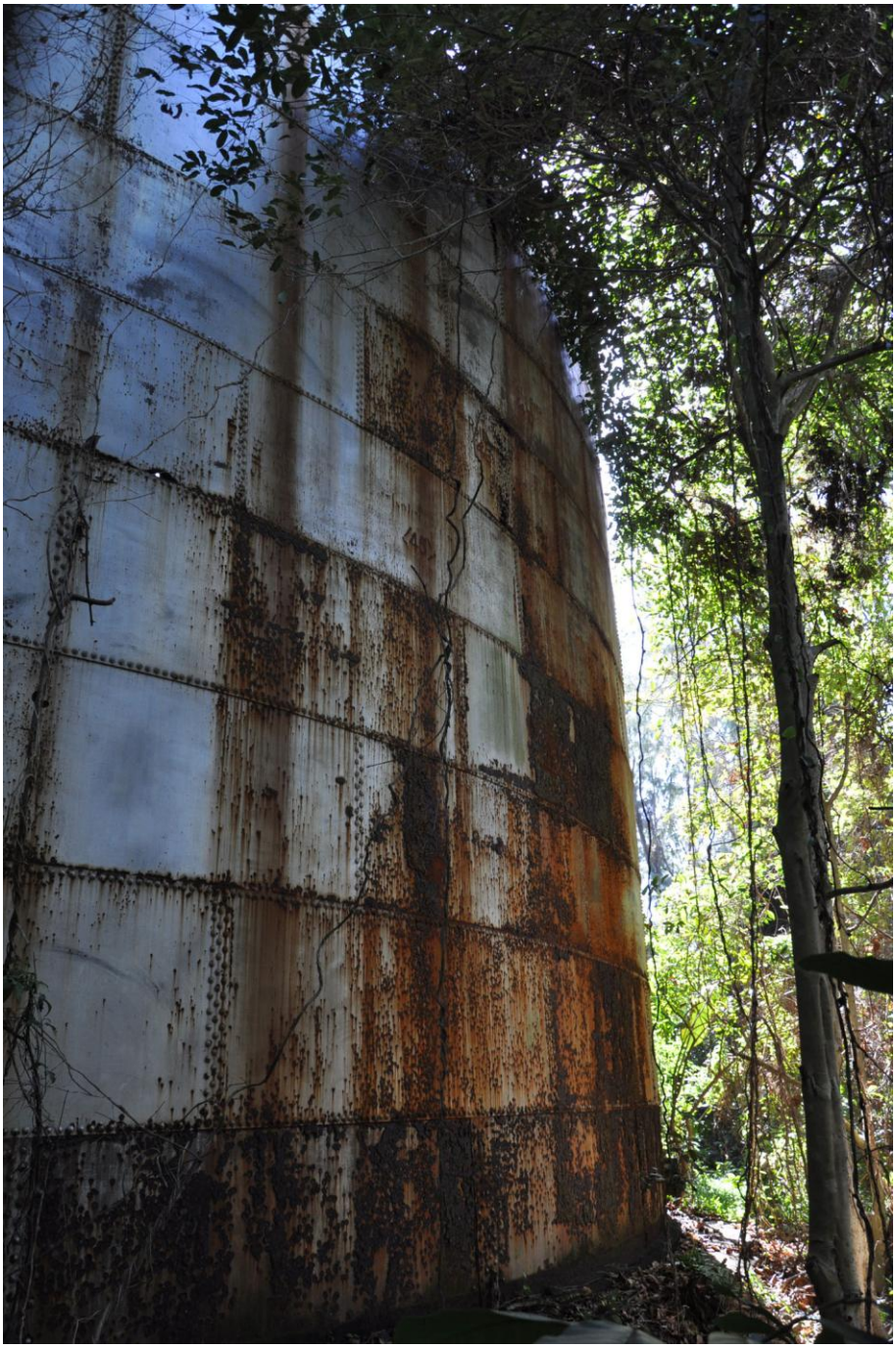

Figure 75. Bois des Amourettes fuel tank. GDS 2012 0767

Buildings Behind the Tanks

A road runs up from the pump house to the National Coast Guard facility on the slope above the tanks. Of WW II origin this road is now tarmac. WW II ruins in the dense vegetation include a garage and a block that was later used to house workers. The National Coast Guard station was formerly the school for Bois des Amourettes. It appears that some of the school and Coast Guard buildings were constructed on WW II foundations (Figs 47 and 70). There is much to do here if the entire complex is to be recorded.

Buildings in the Sugar Cane Fields

There are two buildings. One is a small sentry post constructed on uncut basalt with typical precast concrete corner blocks (Fig. 76). The other, to the south and slightly more elevated is a large rectangular building platform, entered via a broad set of concrete steps now very broken. on which was erected a more recent house that now lies derelict (Fig. 77). This later house has reinforced concrete columns at the corners rather than WW II style precast blocks. The function is unclear, but its distance from the fuel tanks is surely significant. It may very well have been hidden from view by vegetation in the 1940s.

Figure 76. The sentry post in the cane fields behind Bois des Amourettes. GDS 2012 1086

Figure 77. The WW II building platform in the cane fields behind Bois des Amourettes with the later, now abandoned house on top. GDS 2012 1097

BATTERIE DE LA REINE

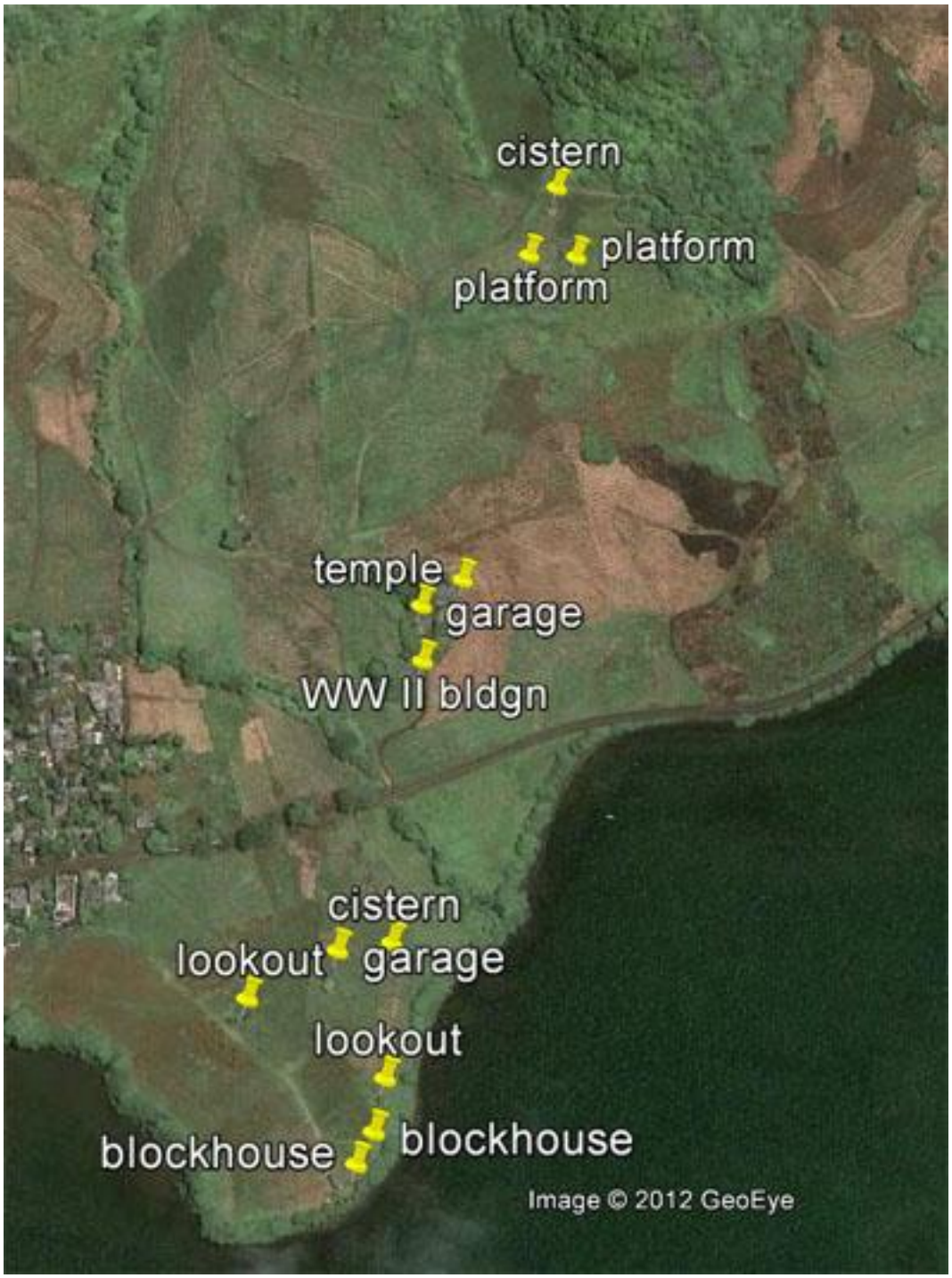

Figure 78. WW II defences on and behind Batterie de la Reine at Vieux Grand Port. Google Earth

At Vieux Grand Port, north of Fort Frederik Hendrik and north of the modern village, on a very prominent low buff, was the French period Batterie de la Reine. Here a set of WW II defensive buildings was erected (Fig. 78-80). Related structures were built on the slope behind. There were no big guns. The intention was presumably to guard against fast moving light attack craft in the channel between the Batterie de la Reine and Ile aux Aigrettes. The orientation of the two blockhouses indicates the anticipated direction of attack. It is likely that building platforms for lighter structures have not been detected. Buildings on low terrain to the south of the modern road include two blockhouses, two lookouts, a garage and a cistern. On the slope behind, where a small temple now stands, were several buildings that were reused after WW II. These include a garage and at least one stone building. Higher up the slope, now in cane fields, are two building platforms and a cistern.

Figure 79. Looking down from the platforms, Batterie de la Reine is where the trees are on the shore. The pair of blockhouses are towards the left, a lookout on the edge of the ploughed area, garage right of centre, and cistern in bushes spanning the field edges; the other lookout is behind trees at right. GDS 2012 1148

The Blockhouses

The two blockhouses are of identical design, rectangular with angled fronts to deflect incoming fire pointing seawards (Fig. 81) and protected entrances at the back (Fig. 82). Loopholes set high in the walls were for ventilation and lighting (Fig. 83). They are built of uncut basalt with reinforced concrete columns at corners, low ring beams and concrete slab roofs. Load bearing reinforced concrete columns rather than the more usual precast concrete blocks were probably used because of the angled corners at the front, but similar columns appear to have been used for the buildings by the temple, although not for the two observation posts and the garage close to the blockhouses. These differences in materials and building methods, together with others mentioned above, suggest that it might be possible to determine the sequence of construction for most of the east coast defences.

Figure 80. Batterie de la Reine from the sea looking northeast to the backs of the blockhouses with lookout at left. mb12cg0214

Figure 81. The fronts of the blockhouses with Lion Mountain behind. GDS 2010 1201

Figure 82. The backs of the blockhouses. GDS 2012 0821

Figure 83. The southern blockhouse. GDS 2012 0812

Figure 84. The two blockhouses and the northern lookout. GDS 2012 0798

The Lookouts or Observation Posts

Two apparently identical buildings, one the east side close to the block houses and one in the gardens in the centre of the area (Figs 78-79). There is a central door, a large window in each side wall and shed roof. The door, at the front, faces the sea. They would seem to overlook the two tracks leading to the blockhouses, one running parallel to the shore from the northeast (Figs 84-86), the other across the centre of the area (Fig. 87). The corners and architraves are of precast cement blocks, as are lintels (but not sills). Walls are of uncut basalt, the stones being of relatively small size. The northern building was provided with a timber frame to support a light roof. The iron ties that anchored the beams to the wall top are set into concrete (Fig. 86 at left)

Figure 85. The northern lookout with the garage in the middle distance and Lion Mountain behind. GDS 2012 0808

Figure 86. The two lookouts showing precast corner blocks and lintels and basalt masonry style. The northern structure, at left, has metal anchors for a timber framed shed roof, while the building in the garden seems to have been re-roofed. GDS 2012 0805; GDS 2012 0822

The Garage

The garage (Figs 78-79, 85 and 87), is of the same construction as the lookouts except that it was provided with a flat slab roof of reinforced concrete.

Figure 87. The garage. GDS 2012 0799

Buildings in the Vicinity of the Temple

Some little way up the slope to the west of the modern road lies a small temple. Adjacent to it are at least two WW II structures that were later reused and are now in a perilous condition. The first was partially built of reinforced concrete with a slab roof (Fig. 88). It was added to with hollow blocks, in modifications which may have turned an open back into rooms. The second (Fig. 89) is now a double garage, which was very possibly its original function. Here reinforced concrete columns were preferred over the more common precast cement blocks, probable because of the need to support heavy concrete beams and slab roofs. There seem to be several styles of basalt masonry which it was not possible to examine without cutting back vegetation. Safety would be the first consideration in further investigation, and local knowledge would perhaps be helpful in understanding the sequence.

Figure 88. WW II structure reused as a dwelling, now abandoned. GDS 2012 0828

Figure 89. WW II Garage still in use. GDS 2012 1121

Building Platforms and Cistern in the Sugar Cane Fields

Two stone building platforms are terraced into the upper slopes in what are now cane fields (Fig. 90). The basalt is uncut and corners are of reinforced concrete rather than precast blocks. It is thus reasonable to see these structures as being built at the same time as those by the temple and probably also the blockhouses near the shore. The platforms are now largely obscured by field stones that have been heaped up on them as well as by vegetation. The southern platform is much the largest. The only clue as to function is that the north end of the larger structure was clearly given over to washrooms, seemingly including shower units (Fig. 91). It is plausible to think that these were barracks, and that they were perhaps built in from the shore where they were hidden by trees. Yet further upslope, between the two platforms, is a cistern (Fig. 92).

Figure 90. The front of the large platform with the smaller platform at far right. GDS 2012 1128

Figure 91. North end of the large platform. GDS 2012 1139

Figure 92. The Cistern. GDS 2012 1140

Enigmatic Building to the West

Figure 93. Building of unknown date and purpose to the west. GDS 2012 1153

Figure 94. The same building looking towards the mountain. GDS 2012 1152

West of the temple, next to a modern house, is a small basalt building with a concrete roof (Figs 93-94). The walls are of squared stone with faced quoin stones and lintels. The original roof was slanted, the adaptation to a flat roof also being made of basalt with a concrete vent. Neither date nor purpose have been ascertained; the building could have been military in one or more of its pre-modern phases, but was not necessarily so. It is not dissimilar to the building at Pointe du Diable shown on Figure 21.

LOOKOUT ON LION MOUNTAIN

On the first joint of the western claw of Lion Mountain is a lookout post that was built to scout for enemy aircraft (Fig. 95). It was accessed via the field road that leads up from the Batterie de la Reine past and above the structures just described, much of which is to this day surfaced with concrete from the time of the WW II defences. This road ends at the base of an impressive flight of steep stairs, with several turns (Fig. 96). The stairs are in good condition, the small lookout post less so. The projecting front of the observation had sides at 45 degrees to permit views along the coast as well as directly forwards. The post was built on a rectangular base that provided a shaded area in front. If there were additional amenities they were not obvious on a rather rushed visit. Today the steps are used by hikers ascending Lion Mountain.

Figure 95. The lookout post for enemy aircraft on Lion Mountain. GDS 2013 1139

Figure 96. Hikers ascending the lower portion of the long flight of concrete steps leading to the enemy aircraft observation post on Lion Mountain. GDS 2013 1132

RIVIÈRE CHAMPAGNE

Figure 97. The large building, perhaps WW II, at the mouth of the Rivière Champagne.

A large concrete building with a double pitched roof and several flat-roofed appendages is located to the north of the mouth of the Rivière Champagne (Figs 97-101). This complex, or the larger part of it, seems to date to WW II. It lies to the east and below the modern road, which is at a greater elevation than the top of the later corrugated metal roof. On the north side is the small jetty leading to the monument commemorating the first Dutch landing in Mauritius (Fig. 98). The Jetty does not appear to be of WW II date. On the opposite side of the modern road is tall cylindrical cistern built of cut basalt (Fig. 104). This is not obviously a WW II construction, but if older it would surely have been reused. The shore is now part of a program of mangrove restoration in the estuary. It is not easy to now understand the immediate terrain because construction of the modern road and bridge has replaced the earlier crossing of the secondary river mouth. Figure 102 shows the structure in relation to the shore and water line. It is obvious that the complex was associated with a sheltered and hidden landing place for the unloading of materials.

There is nothing to suggest that any part of the building complex predates WW II, all building materials and methods being entirely consistent with that date. The main structure was reused after the war, as evidenced by the red corrugated metal roofing. The complex is now in ruins as the reinforced concrete breaks up. Invasive vegetation is kept under some control.

On Figure 97 what appears to be a quay can be seen a little to the northeast. This is not now visible from the road and an attempt to visit was foiled by vegetation and swampy ground. It is almost certainly more recent.

Figure 98. Large building complex, probably built in WW II, at the mouth of the Rivière Champagne with the monument commemorating the first Dutch landing at right and Lion Mountain in the background. (GDS 2012 0741)

Figure 99. The complex looking seawards from the road. (GDS 2012 0723)

Figure 100. The south side of the complex. (GDS 2012 0740)

Figure 101. The north side of the complex. (GDS 2012 0733)

Figure 102. The east end of the complex showing its relation to the shore, with later wall in the foreground and the modern jetty to the Dutch landing monument. (GDS 2012 0732)

Figure 103. The east end of the complex with later wall in the foreground. (GDS 2012 0736)

Figure 104. Stone-built cistern at the mouth of the Rivière Champagne, on the west side of the road opposite the WW II complex. Date of construction currently unknown. (GDS 2012 0742)

ILE AUX AIGRETTES

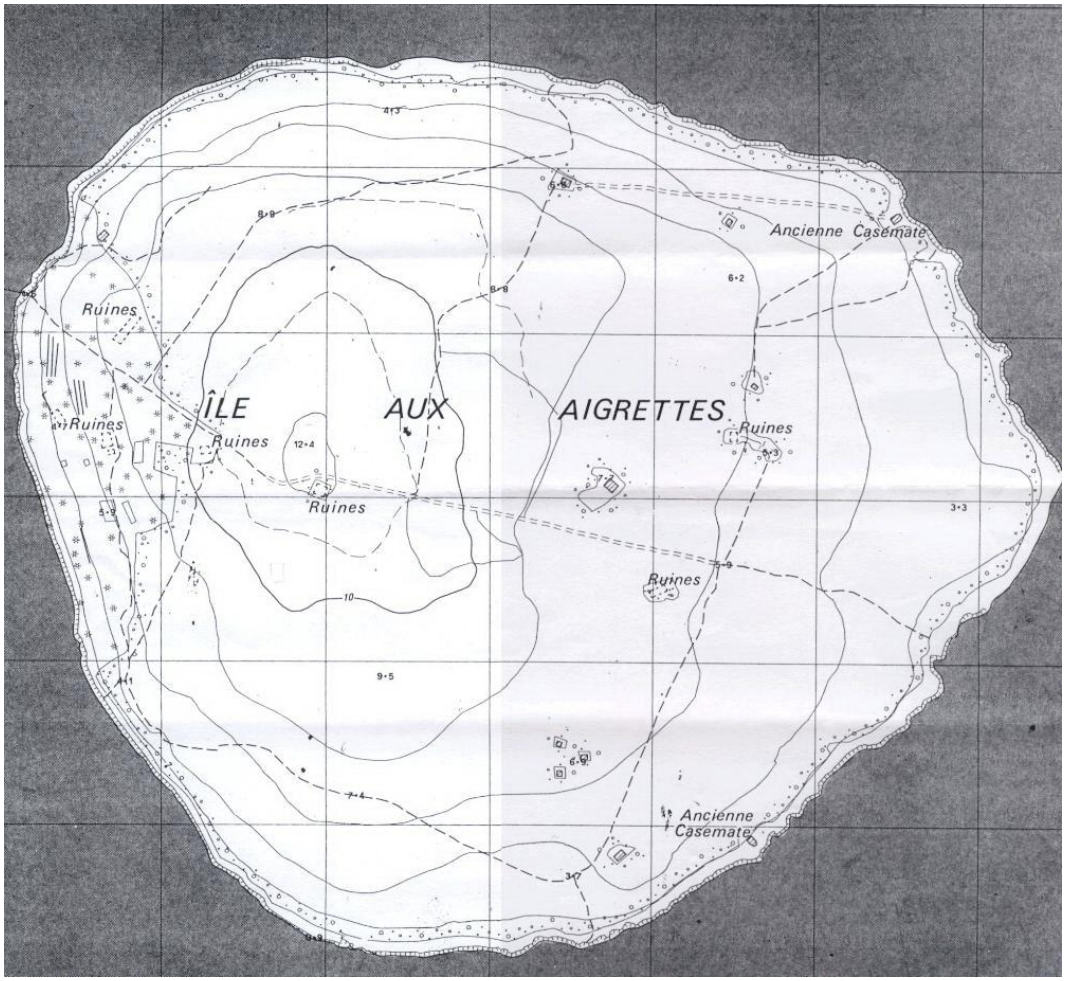

Figure 105. Map from the Ministry of Lands and Housing provided by Nik Cole.

No survey has been made of Ile aux Aigrettes. The islet is now a nature reserve run by the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation. This islet, which lies in the lagoon close to the mainland, was the southernmost of the four WW II batteries along the east coast. Figures 105 and 106 show the 28 or so building remains. Some of the building platforms have been reused for the visitor centre, accommodation, research and breeding programs. The two lookouts are labelled "Ancienne Casemate". Over 100 Mauritian soldiers served here, as they did on Ile de la Passe. Of these about 15 would have been required to man each of the two guns.[18]

The shore base was at Pointe d'Esny, where the Club House and jetty are today. Apart from the core of the jetty nothing can now be seen.

[18] For earlier civilian structures see Summers and Summers 2003.

There were two 6" Mk VII BL 12 pounder guns, like on Ile de la Passe, and two 90mm 3^0 FL guns (Fig. 107).[19] These, marked with the crest of King Edward VII were made in 1902 for British battle ships and reused for coastal defences in WW II (Fig. 108). Pictures of one gun being transported to the islet are in the possession of the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (Fig. 109). Of these, one of the 6" is still mounted and is a feature of the tourist trail while the other lies where it was abandoned. According to Peter Miller (in conversation February 2013) this second gun was never installed because the lack of utility of these weapons was quickly understood. The two observation posts on the edge of the islet are now in very poor condition (Figs 110-111). The roof of one collapsed soon after these photographs were taken. These are exactly the same design as the two at Pointe aux Feuilles and one at Pointe du Diable described earlier in this report. Some small structures, were built of imported bricks and reinforced concrete roofs, others had ravenal walls and thatched or corrugated roofs on stone and cement platforms.

Figure 106. Ile aux Aigrettes on Google Earth.

[19] Hausse de Lalouvière 1998, 31 with note 1.

Figure 107. The mounted gun on Ile aux Aigrettes. http://www.flickr.com/photos/9977224

Figure 108. The dismounted gun on Ile aux Aigrettes with its mark of King Edward VII. http://www.flickr.com/photos/9977224

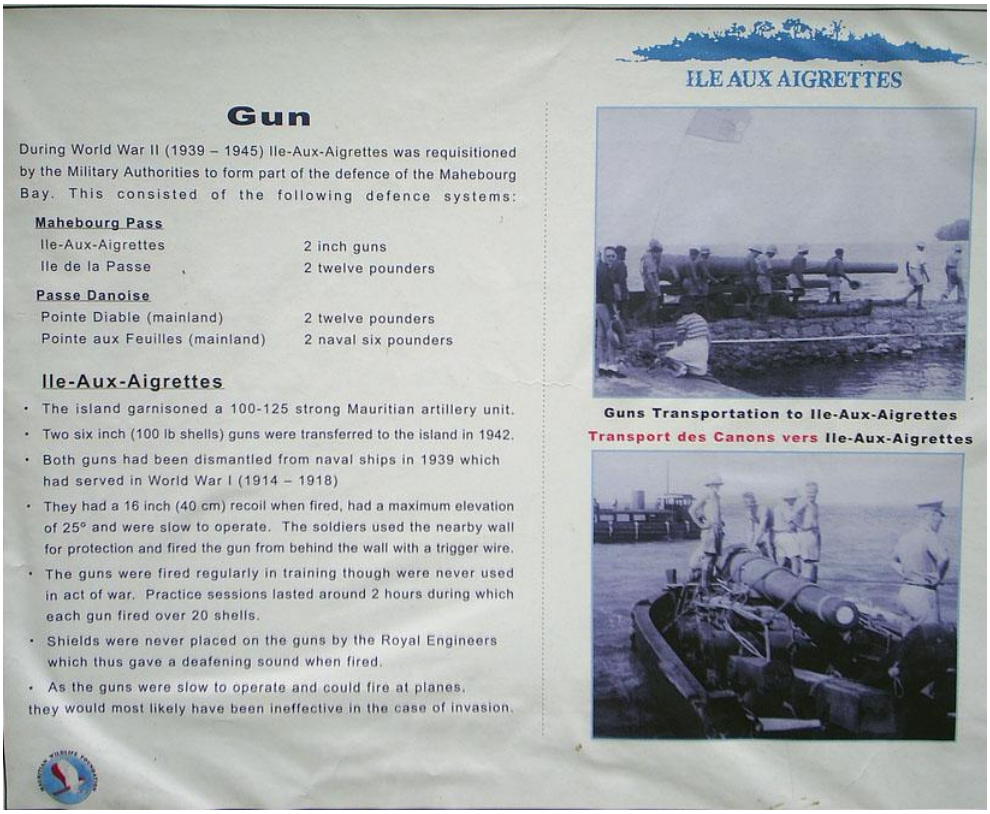

Figure 109. MWF panel about the guns on Ile aux Aigrettes. The top picture shows one 6é gun being moved down the jetty at Pointe d'Esny with a part of Ile aux Aigrettes just visible at right.

Figure 110. Ile aux Aigrettes northeast observation post. GDS 2012 P8050013

Figure 111. Ile aux Aigrettes southeast observation post.GDS 2012 P8050014

ILE DE LA PASSE

Full records of the structures on Ile de la Passe have been made by the authors.[20] During much of the war some 100 Mauritian soldiers, commanded by white officers, served here. In 2012 two buildings, the Store House and the Observation Tower were restored by the National Heritage Fund. As of February 2014, although and more work has long been planned, no management plan is in place. There is no good reason to repeat here what is readily available. However, a short summary, together with a very brief new synthesis of the WW II remains, may not be out of place.

There are two phases of construction. The first, apparently dating to the early part of the war, includes the Observation Tower, Central Building, Searchlight Building and the Underground Generator Halls. Presumably some of the building platforms also belong to this first phase. All were modified in the second phase, begun in 1942. The Central Building was provided with a second room and all buildings, including now the old Store House, given slab roofs of reinforced concrete. Two 6" Mk VII BL 12 pounder guns, like those on Ile aux Aigrettes pictured above, were mounted on holdfasts in twin semicircular gun pits with broad aprons. Ready ammunition lockers were located beneath the berm behind the earlier parapet of French period Upper Battery. The two searchlights were presumably located in the iron lined holes at each end of the battery. The Central Building provided shelter for the gun crews. The old Powder House was presumably used as a magazine for ammunition. There were generators either side of the rear of the islet, in the Store House and in the Underground Halls. The cistern was relined, but not used for everyday needs for which water was brought from the mainland. All other buildings, including barracks, mess, kitchen, officers quarters, offices and stores were of ravenal with corrugated asbestos and tin sheets used where needed.

WW II defences on Ile de la Passe are of secondary importance to those of the French Period (1757-1810), but they nevertheless bear witness to an important part of the history of Mauritius and permit a better understanding of the entire scheme of east coast defence than obtainable from any other point.

[20] Summers and Summers 2002; 2008.

LE CHALAND

Figure 112. The site at Le Chaland extended from Blue Bay to Pointe Vacoas. It included the Royal Navy Air Station (HMS Sambur) and perhaps the camp for the Civil Labour Corps.

The authors have made an extensive report on Le Chaland in connection with the proposed development of a new hotel. Most of what was constructed for the Royal Navy Air Station, which was handed over to the Royal Air Force in 1945, has long since disappeared beneath the modern airport and what is now the Shandrani Hotel (Fig. 112). What survives is to the southeast of the hotel land, but even here some structures have vanished beneath structure belonging to the national coast Guard and the Police Diving School. Building platforms do exist on the sand dunes and in the dense vegetation behind. full recording of these is in hand. One of the largest complex of platforms is located to the southeast of the land requisitioned in 1942. This land, leased to the Admiralty after the war, was used for the Pioneer Corps from the time that it was transferred to Le Chaland, perhaps in 1949, until they were disbanded in 1956. This complex was taken over as the Naval Leave Center for the HMS Mauritius shore base in Vacoas (Figs 113-115).

New is the realisation that the greater part of this huge complex of buildings which stretches from the public beach to Blue Bay was probably the camp for many of the 7000 men conscripted into the Civil Labour Corps in 1942 for construction for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

Figure 113. WW II building platforms later reused as the Beach Club. GDS 2012 0858

Figure 114. WW II building platforms later reused as the Beach Club with NCG buildings behind. GDS 2012 0864

Figure 115. Hostpiatl building platforms later reused as the Beach Club with NCG buildings behind. GDS 2012 0863

In 1944 the camp was extensively revamped. New toilet and shower blocks were built, kitchens extended and improved, and other modifications made. Graffiti in wet cement date the installation of the washrooms to July 1944. Much of the camp seems to have been revamped for the transference of the Pioneer Corps from their at Bell Village, just south of Port Louis, to Le Chaland which probably happened in 1949.

THE CYCLONES

In 1945 three cyclones hit Mauritius in rapid succession: 16-17 January, 2-3 February, 7-8 April (Hazareesingh 1948). Of these the first was particularly devastating while the second was fiercest over the south of the island. This calamity coincided with an outbreak of poliomyelitis. A fourth cyclone hit the following year.

It is likely that many of the structures built of ravenal, thatch and sheeting were badly damaged or destroyed, and that few were rebuilt. However, no documentation relating to military infrastructure has been found in the archives. At Le Chaland some structures were reconstituted for the Royal Pioneers, but it seems probable that the islets were abandoned following this disaster.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The east coast of Mauritius, the Royal naval Air Station at Plaisance, some of the islands and the extensive camp at Le Chaland are significant physical reminders of the complex and

evolving relationship between Mauritius and the British Empire during the course of WW II. While Mauritius itself was not attacked there was a strongly perceived threat until the Battle of Midway in June 1942. Mauritius was, however, of significant importance in the hunt for enemy submarines and warships in the western Indian Ocean. Additionally, it was an important link in communications and a weather station for the Royal Navy planes and the Royal Air Force. As elsewhere in the empire, the loyalty and sacrifices made by the colony were of significance in the gradual transition from colony to republic. The remains are of importance for several reasons some of which are listed below in no particular order.

1. They demonstrate the scale of expenditure, both financial and manpower, that were invested by the Mauritian people and by the imperial government.

2. They witness a determined effort, on the one hand, to fully involve the colony in Britain's war while, on the other, providing weaponry commensurate with the limited threat of invasion.

3. They document the intention of using Mauritius as a significant base for the storage of fuel (and weaponry) for the eastern fleet, an investment that was never used.

4. They shed much light on the development of coastal defences, and particularly on the interesting question of what was designed locally and what was imposed from the general command, with insights as to how military standardisation increased between 1939 and 1945.

5. The defences are relatively well preserved (although much is rapidly decaying past the point of all repair). Of importance is that the majority of the integrated system of coastal defence is extant (rather than isolated elements).

For all of these reasons, and doubtless others of a more military character, a very strong case can be made for fully recording of what is left. This is especially so because, as far as it has been possible to ascertain, very few civilian records, and no military records have survived from the war years. A much greater difficulty is encountered when it comes to deciding what policies to suggest for preservation and valorisation. Mid-twentieth century military defences were not designed to be aesthetically pleasing, nor were they intended to outlast the end of the war. Thus these remains form a significant part of Mauritius' heritage, and indeed the heritage of the empire and its enemies. But, regardless of the stunning land and seascape in which they are set, they are not of themselves things of beauty or splendour. Recording is urgently needed because the reinforced concrete is deteriorating at an accelerated rate as the iron decays. A good record is required before priorities can be established. It is hoped that this report goes a considerable way towards that end regardless of its preliminary and necessarily superficial nature. Construction of a heritage policy needs to be realistic, not least because any intervention has to be sustainable.

Historic Trails

Grand Port Bay holds very many attractions with assets that include the scenic, wild life, and historic. In developing the idea of tourist trails some of the remains from WW II would add a dimension that provided additional variety. Approaches to many places can be made by sea as well as by road. Some elements (e,g, Ferney Valley and Kestrel Valley) are already on a

sustainable commercial footing. Others, such as Fort Frederik Hendrik, do not receive the number of visitors that they deserve.

Islands

There are three islands of significance, all of which are already covered by existing or developing policies. Ile aux Aigrettes is currently managed by the Mauritian Wildlife Fund, a situation which can confidently be expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Ile de la Passe falls under the National Heritage Fund which is in the process of restoring structures and implementing management. Ile aux Fouquets, of much more significance for its civilian lighthouse than for anything WW II, is not under threat and will eventually be more satisfactorily managed than it is today.

Mainland Coastal Batteries at Pointe aux Feuilles and Pointe du Diable

Vestiges at Pointe aux Feuilles require more intensive survey and more detailed recording than has been possible up to now. One specific problem is the location of the gun pits. The prominent features are the two lookouts on the shore, one of which has partially collapsed. More important, because it is the only example so far known, is the magazine in the gardens behind.

Pointe du Diable is a registered National Monument, something that has not prevented the erection of masts and inappropriate restoration. Firstly, there is a need to fully document the visible buildings and defensive features on the slopes and on the ridge behind the summit. It is certainly possible to envisage this site being transformed into a considerable heritage asset which would not be unsustainable. Secondly, decisions need to be made about exactly how many of the French and British period remains are included in the National Monument register. Thirdly, decisions need to be taken as to how many of the remains should be preserved, a decision that will necessarily include drawing up priorities for preservation and restoration (i.e. stabilizing ruins and restoring standing buildings), and what should be reduced or demolished (e.g. the dangerous, partially collapsed, reinforced concrete toilet block). Fourthly, landownership needs to be established, especially for the WW II battery now used to house domestic animals.

The minimalist possibility is to restrict preservation to the French battery and the standing buildings either side of the modern road. This would result in the eventual loss of the other features, which would be regrettable. A visionary approach that could turn Pointe du Diable into a very fine and attractive tourist asset would be to re-route the main road between Bambous Virieux and Petite Sable so that it runs over the saddle, as it did in the 18th and earlier 19th centuries. Parking at the top of the saddle would provide access to a short, easy, walk along the ridge to the summit. Views are spectacular. At least one of the WW buildings could be used for a guard and for retail, which another could be converted into restrooms. At the foot of bluff the use of the modern road would be restricted to local and tourist traffic with tight speed regulations. WW II buildings and features could be restored. as could elements of the French defences. The footpath from the WW II gun pits to the summit could be reconstituted for the more adventurous visitor. Such a venture could certainly be made sustainable and perhaps even profitable.

Bois des Amourettes

That there is a need for a full survey, combined with archival work, of the military installations at Bois des Amourettes does not need to be stressed. What to do is more difficult. Fuel storage tanks, long abandoned, are rusting away. They are dangerous and unfenced. The jetty is used and periodically maintained, and has thereby lost much of its WW II authenticity.

Features that could easily be restored and included in a heritage itinerary are the warehouse and the pump house, the latter together with its machinery. Perhaps this could be a centre for local appreciation and education, particularly for children, more interactive and dynamic than traditional museums, with also a facility for the tourist with some interest in the 20th century history of Mauritius.

Le Chaland

Portions of the Le Chaland site that survive today are divided between land scheduled for new hotel development, the major WW II foundation of what was later the Royal Navy Beach Club on what is now the public beach although still designated National Coast Guard land, and the building platforms in land designated for the new National Coast Guard training centre and Police Diving School. Planning procedures are being followed, recording of remains is in hand, and preservation of building platforms is included in proposals.

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