



# Military history

Painting: Artist unknown.  
Photos: Alexander Turnbull Library.

At the top of the hill you can see the WW2 gun emplacements. The command post had a spotter's telescope, height and range finder and a predictor. Information could be relayed to the gunners in each emplacement so that all guns were trained on the target area. The trenches carried the cables. The guns were manned by 50 men from January 1943-September 1944 but never had to be used.

- ? **Why do you think Matiu/Somes was an important site for anti-aircraft gunners to be stationed?**  
*Matiu/Somes Island has always been seen as important for defence with its full view of the harbour.*

During both world wars the New Zealand government, called many of the foreign people living here at the time "enemy aliens". They were taken away from their families and held prisoner (interned) on Matiu/Somes Island while the war was on.

Prisoners used the barracks and hospital that were built earlier for human quarantine.

Daily routines for the prisoners consisted of drill (exercise), road-building, gardening and fishing. Spare time activities included paua shell jewellery making, writing a weekly camp newspaper, snaring birds, swimming or playing cards. Some prisoners tried (but didn't succeed) to escape by swimming or stealing a boat.

- 👉 **Imagine what life must have been like, suddenly isolated from your family, work, business, home.**
- ? **What would you have done?**  
*Look for natural resources on the island that you could use for crafts.*
- 👉 **Imagine you were a prisoner here. Plot your escape.**  
*Look for the shortest route to the mainland.*
- ? **What could you use to help you, check currents, where will you land, where will you hide when you reach the mainland?**

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