

# Otago military history

## X marks the spot

Fort Taiaoroa is situated at Taiaoroa Head at the entrance of the Otago Harbour.

## Digging deeper...

The six-inch 'disappearing gun' at Fort Taiaoroa is mounted so that it can be aimed while underground. It then lifts up to fire before returning automatically back underground by the recoil for reloading.

## Digging deeper...

The Otago Regiment that fought in World War One was made up of battalions from Otago, North Otago, South Otago and Southland. Sergeant Dick Travis, from Southland, New Zealand's most decorated soldier, earned his medals, including a Victoria Cross, serving in this regiment.

Taiaoroa Head features prominently in the military history of Otago. Māori settlers had a fortified village (pā) on the site, and it was here that Fort Taiaoroa was established in 1885 to counter the perceived threat of invasion from Tsarist Russia.

This fort is now a museum where one can stroll through the old tunnels and take in the view from the Battery Observation Post, still with many of its original fittings. A highlight is the Armstrong Disappearing Gun, the only one of its kind in the world that is still in working order and in its original position.

When New Zealand became a British Colony in 1840, England was expected to protect us from enemies. But by the 1870s, we were made responsible for our own protection and a strategy was established and put in place for defending our major ports, including Fort Taiaoroa. In the late 1800s, the greater portion of New Zealand's military forces was made up of volunteers. The Otago Volunteers were formed in 1860 and took part in the Boer War of 1889-1902 in South Africa. New Zealand abolished the volunteer system in 1909 in favour of compulsory service in each of four military districts. Soldiers from Otago fought with distinction in both World Wars including Gallipoli and France in World War One. In World War Two, men from Otago and Southland were predominantly attached to the 20th, 23rd and 26th battalions, serving in the Middle East, and with the 30th and 37th battalions serving in the Pacific.

A true naval presence was not established in the south until the 1920s with the establishment of the Otago Division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. During World War Two, over 300 men who trained in the Otago Division served in the Royal New Zealand Navy.



New Zealand Army hat badge



New Zealand Rough Riders from Otago and Southland



Photo: ODT www.otago.museum.nz