

The Examination Service

The contents of this document was written by Colonel B.D.Cotton – stationed at Grey Point Fort in 1937

The Examination Service was an organisation designed to identify and to ascertain the character and intention of vessels (other than certain special vessels such as Royal Naval craft provided with “Private Signal”) seeking entry to a defended port. Its function was to ensure that the defences prevented a suspicious or unfriendly ship entering the port.

The Service was operated by the Examination Vessel which was charged with the duty of meeting and examining all incoming ships at a port other than warships and those supplied with the “Local Recognition Signal”. The Examination Vessel carried the Examining Officer and was manned generally with Royal Naval Reserve or Mercantile Marine Reserve personnel. It was supported by the guns of the Examination Battery.

The Examination Battery was a battery especially designed to support the Examination Service. It also formed part of the coastal defence of the port. One of the guns in the Examination Battery (the Examination Gun) has a 24hr lookout and the gun detachment was at immediate readiness, the second gun of the Examination Battery was at two minutes readiness.

An area of water covered by the Examination Battery’s gun was designated the Examination Anchorage into which war ships which could not be identified or admitted to harbour without examination would lie at anchor. Detailed examination of these ships was carried out in the examination anchorage. There was also established at the Examination Battery, a Port War Signal Station (PWSS) whose functions was to identify and control the passage of all British and Allied war and other vessels in possession of the “Private Signal” and “Local Recognition Signal”.

The defences of the PWSS were generally manned by retired Royal Marine or Royal Naval signallers who communicated with the vessel by Aldis lamp.

The “Private Signal” was passed by code to appropriate British and Allied War vessels and to the Examination Battery through Naval channels. It was changed frequently and applied to all ports.

The “Local Recognition Signal” was passed to the Examination Vessel and the Examination Battery by the local Naval Headquarters (Belfast Lough Naval HQ – located in Belfast Castle) and was particular to that port. It was also changed at frequent intervals. The signal was issued to minor war vessels or allied war vessels not in possession of the “Private Signal” to enable them to pass through the defences without undergoing the full examination procedure. It was also given to specified fishing and other small craft based at the port.

All other vessels had to conform to the examination service procedure which required an incoming vessel to close on the Examination Vessel and identify itself, on being satisfied as to the authenticity of the vessel, the examination Officer would permit the vessel to proceed into port. If the Examination Officer was not satisfied with the vessel’s credentials, that vessel was directed to the Examination Anchorage for examination. Once such a vessel has anchored in the Examination Anchorage, the bearing and range from the Battery was narrow and the vessel was not permitted to move without the authority of the Examining Officer.

As a vessel approaching within the range of the guns of the Examination Battery (10,000 yards in the case of the 6 inch guns) the Duty Officer in the Battery Observation Post gave the order "Examination Gun take post" and the necessary orders were given to lay the examination gun on the approaching vessel. If the approaching vessel signalled the "Private Signal" or the "Local Recognition Signal" to the PWSS, the Examination Gun Crew, were stood down.

In other cases the approaching vessel had to close with the Examination Vessel and the Examination Gun continued to be laid on the vessel until the vessel hoisted the "Special Signal" or dropped anchor in the Examination Anchorage. In the event of the approaching vessel failing to conform to the correct procedure, orders were given to the Examination Gun to lay off 5 degrees ahead of the vessel and a flat head round was fired across its bows, if the vessel failed to stop it would be engaged until sunk or heaved to.

The examination gun was always loaded with a flat head round; the object of the flat head round was to ensure that the round did not ricochet on the water.

Unfortunately the first and only round fired in anger from Grey Point Fort ricochets across the bows of the S.S. Hayward who failed to give the recognition signal.

On the 4th September 1939, the steamer S.S. Hayward passed by the examination vessel and would not obey two orders given by Major Spragg (M.C. RORO) Staff Officer Fixed Defences Grey Point Fort)).via the naval signaller, the plugged round splashed in front of the vessel and ricochets on the water eventually making some architectural adjustments to a walled enclosure of an nunnery close to the Beltoy Road, Kilroot, near Carrickfergus on the other side of the lough, later in the war the Kilroot Battery returned the compliment by firing a plugged round over the house belonging to Colonel Greeves (Company Commander- Grey Point Fort) and pruning a few trees in Crawfordsburn Forest.

Through research the following document was found at Carrickfergus Council Archives dated 6th November 1939 confirming that an incident occurred on the 4th September 1939 regarding shots being fired over the Carrickfergus area.

It was decided not to take any action in the matter and the Clerk was directed to warn the driver of the car against any further breach of the regulations.

Circular Letter dated 23rd September, 1939 from Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the effect of War on Contracts entered into by local authorities, read.

FOOD CONTROL COMMITTEE.

The Clerk intimated that he had received resignations from Messrs. R. B. Lee, L. K. McGookin and F. V. Simpson as members of the Food Control Committee.

Proposed by Councillor MacCandless,
Seconded by Councillor Kirkpatrick, &
RESOLVED That Messrs. Joseph Beattie, William Milliken and Robert Thompson be appointed to fill the vacancies on the Carrickfergus Food Control Committee.

PUBLIC CONVENIENCE.

Proposed by Councillor McGookin,
Seconded by Councillor Truesdale, &
RESOLVED That the Clerk be directed to ask the Ministry of Home Affairs for permission to borrow the amount spent in excess of £400 on the Public Sanitary Convenience.

Councillor Milliken mentioned for Council's consideration the question of payment of a War Bonus to Council's employees.

The Chairman read a letter which he had received from the G. O. C., Northern Ireland District expressing regret in connection with the shots which were fired over Carrickfergus on 4th September, and intimating that he would do all in his power to prevent a recurrence of the unfortunate incident.

The Chairman stated that Major Dobbs had gone to a lot of trouble in this matter and that he had had an interview with the G. O. C. regarding the incident.

Reference was also made to a question raised by Major Dobbs in the Ulster Senate with respect to travelling permits.

Proposed by Councillor Malone,
Seconded by Councillor Patterson, &
RESOLVED That the Clerk be directed to convey to Major Dobbs the Council's best thanks for the able manner in which he dealt with the matters referred to.

The Clerk was directed to write to the Military at Greenisland and Kilroot with respect to the use of the various club rooms in the town.

The Chairman undertook to speak to the Police with respect to the matter of Military lorries being driven in North Street.

DOCUMENTS.

From Shops Inspector - report on Shops Act (Weekly half-holiday Order) for September, 1939.

W. J. MacCandless

CHAIRMAN.

6th November, 1939.