

# ABC NEWS

## Port Stephens World War II bunker explorers find buried artefacts, but unanswered questions remain

ABC Newcastle By Robert Virtue

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PHOTO: Mr Tennyson hopes to return to the site in 2018 to continue his search. (ABC Newcastle: Robert Virtue)

**The hunt to uncover military secrets in a New South Wales coastal town has delivered some answers, but has left other questions unanswered.**

During World War II, the United States military established a base in Port Stephens, north of Newcastle, to help fight the lurking threat from the Japanese.

Throughout 2017, explorers Charles Tennyson and Mark Rawson excavated part of a park at Fly Point in Nelson Bay, with approval from authorities.

They were investigating the possibility a bunker and other artefacts the US defence force left behind at the end of the war were buried at the site.

"We haven't found exactly what we're looking for, but we have proven the fact there is something there," Mr Tennyson said.

"We found lots of evidence. We're able to explain a lot of unanswered questions, and we have tightened our search area, so hopefully 2018 is going to be very exciting for Nelson Bay."

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PHOTO: Mr Tennyson also uncovered large chunks of pink andesite rock buried at the site. (Supplied: Charles Tennyson)

## Twenty years of research

The duo has researched the site for about 20 years.

Mr Tennyson became interested in the mystery after hearing the memories of his mother-in-law, who had lived in the area during the war.

She had recounted stories of having to use secret passwords to travel on a patrolled road to get to her house, and seeing trucks coming and going out of an underground tunnel at the site.

In 1997, the explorers conducted initial scans of the site. The readings found there were items buried below the surface.

After much speculation, the 2017 excavation revealed answers to some of their questions.

"What we found out is that hill that we're dealing with ... the entire hill is made of sand," Mr Tennyson said.

"The sand is actually from the road that the American military built in 1942-43 from Bobs Farm to Salt Ash. That sand matches the sand from that area — so that's [suspect].

"We have proven it is a military site."

## Military artefacts uncovered

The explorers also found military artefacts buried beneath the surface, including ship ballasts, a Jeep chassis and parts from 1942, a 50-calibre copper machine gun strip, engine blocks, and other chunks of concrete rubble.

Mr Tennyson said the amount of Pink Andesite rock that had been discarded in the area made the explorers believe the site was quarried.

Their ground penetrating radar scans and excavations also found a brick foundation inside the 'quarry' which did not appear on military maps.

Mr Tennyson said it could be an ammunition storage facility.

"This is a 10-foot by 30-foot-long foundation," he said.

"It doesn't make sense having a building in a mined-out quarry, sticking up on brick supports; it brings more questions than answers.

"They put it in a quarry so if something gets bombed, or just something goes bang, it's in the ground, so there's less damage made to nearby buildings and people," Mr Tennyson said.

The explorers have so far dug down about three metres underground. Several non-WWII period items were found closer to the surface, including beer bottles from the 1970s and a golf ball from the 1960s.



PHOTO: A Jeep chassis from the 1940s was uncovered at the Port Stephens site. (Supplied: Charles Tennyson)







**PHOTO:** A buried concrete slab, which was not identified on military maps was uncovered. (Supplied: Charles Tennyson)

## More questions to answer

Mr Tennyson said he was surprised by what had been found so far.

"We're definitely not disappointed," he said.

"Every time we go there, we get more information, more data, more clues for us to work with.

"This isn't an easy situation, it's always hard — every single type of site like this.

"With the clues that we have, we're confident we're in the right area. The number one question that we need to answer for the benefit of Nelson Bay, Port Stephens Council, and that marine park, is to explain why all the mine tailings are in that immediate area, and where they came from."

With about 50 per cent of the 'quarry' site explored, Mr Tennyson said his team would return in 2018 to continue the hunt.

"We have also identified another magazine used for the bombs and bullets, right next door to this magazine. We're talking not even 10, 12m away from Point A to Point B," he said.

"[There's] something [suspect] there; there's a lot of sink areas, there's a lot of Pink Andesite tailings that are still bubbling out of the ground and in front of the road, right at that site too.

"We do have quite a good area to keep researching, to try to find some type of opening at the Andesite level, to hopefully find an entry point.

"We're not taking our foot off the peddle on this. We're going to keep going as fast as we can.

"The snowball's very small on top of the hill that's just been kicked. It's gaining speed, and momentum, and size, rapidly.

"It's just one of those things — once it goes, you just can't stop. It's kind of like a bug.

"There're answers that need to be done, and we're just going to do our best to try to help out that area."

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