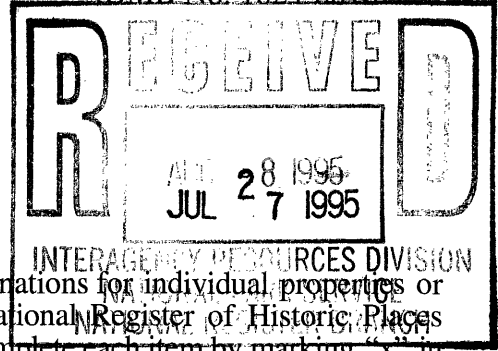


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties or districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property be documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse

other names/site number: Ag-J-1; "German-type" Blockhouse

2. Location

street & number n/a not for publication   
city or town Saipan Island vicinity Agingan  
state Saipan code 77 county n/a code \_\_\_\_\_  
zip code 96950

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this xxx nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CRF Part 60. In my opinion, the property xxx meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant xxx nationally  statewide  locally  (\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

7-26-95

CNMI Division of Historic Preservation

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria (\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

=====  
4. National Park Service Certification  
=====

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
    \_\_\_ See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the Nat. Register  
    \_\_\_ See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for Nat. Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson H. Beall      8-25-95  
Entered in the  
National Register

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper      Date of Action

=====  
5. Classification  
=====

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State (Commonwealth)
- public-Federal

Category of Property (check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u> buildings
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u> sites
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u> structures (wall)
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u> objects
<u>  2  </u>	<u>  0  </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register n/a.

Name of related multiple property listing (enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) n/a



=====

8. Statement of Significance

=====

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- xx A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- \_\_\_\_\_ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- xx C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or components lack individual distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- xx D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ B removed from its original location
- \_\_\_\_\_ C a birthplace or a grave
- \_\_\_\_\_ D a cemetery
- \_\_\_\_\_ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- \_\_\_\_\_ F a commemorative property
- \_\_\_\_\_ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

military

engineering

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

March to June 1944

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

June 15-18, 1944

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Japanese

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

Unknown: unidentified Japanese military personnel

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets). (see continuation sheets)

=====  
9. Major Bibliographical References  
=====

Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets. (see continuation sheet)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CRF 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Building Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

=====  
10. Geographical Data  
=====

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>55</u>	<u>360510</u>	<u>1670960</u>
2	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet). (see continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

=====  
11. Form Prepared by  
=====

Name/title Scott Russell, Deputy Historic Preservation Officer/Staff Historian

Organization: Division of Historic Preservation date 7-26-95

Street & number c/o CCA telephone (670) 664-2121

City or town Saipan State MP Zip Code 96950

=====  
12. Additional Documentation  
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the properties location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of this property

=====  
13. Property Owner  
=====

Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO

Name Division of Public Lands, CNMI Government

Street & number Saipan, MP telephone \_\_\_\_\_

City or town \_\_\_\_\_ state MP zip code 96950

=====  
Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Narrative Description**

**Environmental Setting**

The Agingan Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse is situated at the mid-point of Unai Dankulo Agingan (Big Agingan Beach) on the southern coast of Saipan Island approximately 20 meters inland from high water mark. Located a few hundred meters to the west, separated by a rocky section of the coastline, is Unai Dikiki Agingan (Little Agingan Beach). These two beaches comprise an area of Saipan traditionally referred to as Agingan. The bunker is built atop a low rock outcropping which protrudes from this portion of Unai Dankulo Agingan. Soils in the area consist of a thin humus layer overlaying deposits of marine deposited calcareous beach sands. Vegetation consists of typical beach strand species including banalo (*Thespesia populapa*), gagu (*Casurina equisetifolia*), tangantangan (*Leucacna leucocephala*) and various weeds and grasses. Elevation of the ground upon which the blockhouse sits is approximately three meters above mean sea level.

**Description of the Property**

The blockhouse is of reinforced concrete construction and built to standard specifications. The Agingan blockhouse is one of three built on Saipan. Other examples are located at Unai Obyan and at Unai Laulau. During World War II this class of fortification was commonly referred to as a "German-type" blockhouse presumably since it resembled, on a small scale, blockhouses built in Europe (Russell and Fleming 1985:37). Wall and roof thickness measure 1.22 and 1.10 meters respectively. The structure is semi-circular in shape with a radius of 6.12 meters and an exterior height of three meters. It possesses four firing ports designed to accommodate 20mm cannons. Its cannons are not extant. Each firing position is pie-shaped and divided by a concrete wall measuring 40cm thick. The gun embrasures are 1.79 meters wide by 80cm meters high, stepped down to 84cm by 80cm at their smallest. Each firing port was equipped with a sliding steel shutter to protect the blockhouse's occupants during enemy shelling. The shutter was raised by means of a pulley system operated by the gunners inside the blockhouse to allow for the gun to fire. The steel shutters are no longer present but the steel track frames on the exterior of the firing ports are extant. The cable pulley system are also missing. Entry to the blockhouse is via a doorway fitted with a heavy steel door (25mm thick) located at the rear of the structure. Approach to the door is restricted by a concrete wall and protected by a machine gun port. The concrete wall makes it impossible to directly attack the door without exposing the attacker to covering fire from the defensive firing port. In the center of the blockhouse is a semi-circular-shaped ready ammunition storage area of reinforced concrete construction. Access to the ready ammunition storage area was via a small opening equipped with a heavy steel door. Located on top of the roof at center point is a circular steel observation cupola. The steel is 25mm thick and possesses a series of long, narrow slits permitting the observer to direct gunfire while enjoying limited protection from enemy fire. Access to the observation cupola is via the top of the ready magazine room. Occupants of the blockhouse were provided protection from concrete spalling and splintering during battle by a layer of "rockwool" and cedar wood siding attached to the interior walls by means of wooden

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squares recessed into the concrete walls. Today, small traces of the rockwool insulation remain as do the mounting squares. The wooden paneling, however, is gone. Exterior camouflage was achieved by placing soil on top of the bunker's roof and planting it with local ground cover. At present, the top of the blockhouse is covered by weeds and small shrubs which have taken root in a thin layer of soil. The sole related architectural feature associated with the blockhouse is a coral rock and concrete wall. This wall is roughly L-shaped and is located eight meters seaward of the bunker. It is approximately 37 meters long. Its height ranges between 40cm and two meters. The wall's width ranges between 90cm and 1.5 meters. Its exact function is not known but it possibly served as a breakwater to protect the bunker and its occupants from high waves during storm events. It may also have been intended to protect the blockhouse from water-level fire. The blockhouse is in very good condition. With the exception of missing firing port shutters and most of the rookwool and cedar insulation, and the presence of some minor graffiti, the blockhouse is in an excellent state of preservation. No alterations have been made to this structure since its construction. Currently, the blockhouse falls within the Agingan Beach Park and is a popular tourist attraction. Since no development has been undertaken in the beach fringe area, the Agingan Blockhouse retains its historical integrity. Agingan Beach, which the blockhouse was built to defend, remains unchanged from its 1944 appearance. Of the three 20mm cannon blockhouses built on Saipan, it is the most complete and best preserved example.

**Historical Overview**

At the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific, Saipan was a part of Japanese mandated Micronesia. The Saipan and the rest of the islands of the Marianas Archipelago (except Guam which remained a U.S. Territory) had been awarded to Japan by the League of Nations following the end of the First World War (Russell 1994:4). Although the League's mandate forbade the fortification of the islands, the Japanese Navy did undertake limited military construction on Saipan during the period 1934-1940, including Aslito Naval airfield, troop barracks, a seaplane base and gasoline storage tanks were also built during the immediate pre-war period. Additionally, in February 1941, four gun positions of reinforced concrete were constructed on Saipan (Crowl 1960:54).

For the first three years of the war, Saipan served the Japanese as a staging area for materials, equipment and troops bound for battlefronts well to the east and south (Russell 1994:11). The island was garrisoned by less than 1,000 military personnel and defensive fortifications needed to repel a major enemy invasion were virtually non-existent. With the fall of the Marshall Islands in early 1944, however, the Marianas became a front line position in the Absolute National Defensive Sphere (Peattie 1988:280). The Japanese civilian and military leaders realized that should Saipan, Tinian and Guam fall into American hands, the home islands would be exposed to bombing attacks by the giant B-29 Superfortresses. The defense of the Marianas, therefore, was assigned highest priority.

To defend the islands, the Japanese rushed troops, equipment and supplies into Saipan beginning in early 1944. American submarines operating in the area took a heavy toll on



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Japanese shipping but by early June over 30,000 troops were landed on Saipan. Many, however, arrived injured and without weapons and supplies (Peattie 1988:282).

The major Japanese defensive construction program began in March 1944 and continued until the eve of the American invasion three months later. It was under the overall direction of Lt. General Yoshitsugu Saito, commander of the 43rd Infantry Division. With 30,000 men on island, manpower was not a problem but this emergency construction program was greatly affected by the scarcity of building materials, particularly concrete and reinforcing steel. As one observed noted:

“We cannot strengthen the fortifications appreciably now unless we can get materials suitable for permanent construction . . . no matter how many soldiers there are they can do nothing in regard to fortifications but sit around with their arms folded . . .” (Crowl 1960:62).

The lack of construction materials together with the lack of time affected the Japanese defensive fortification program in several ways (Denfeld 1992:1-2). First, many concrete structures such as pillboxes and bunkers were built to sub-standard quality. This resulted from the lack of cement and reinforcing steel, the heavy reliance on sea water in the concrete mix and the general rush to complete the fortifications before the American invasion. Moreover, due to time constraints, many fortifications were either not completed by the eve of the invasion or had not had their weapons emplaced (Anon. 1944:1). A final consequence was the reliance on readily available materials and the resulting modifications of standard fortification designs. Particularly prevalent were defensive positions which were built with natural materials such as coral rocks and coconut logs and the use of natural features such as caves, fissures and rockshelters. The Japanese skillfully modified their standard designs and achieved some well-camouflaged positions which escaped initial detection by pre-invasion intelligence. The poor quality of reinforced concrete structures, however, made it easy for them to be penetrated by American naval bombardment and many were to be destroyed during the preinvasion shelling.

In accordance with the established Japanese defensive doctrine of the time, Saipan was to be defended at the beaches (Russell 1994:12). Enemy landings would be opposed at water’s edge by strong coastal defenses. Should the enemy succeed in establishing a beachhead, a strong counter-attack would be launched during the night of the first day to throw the invaders back into the sea. Little effort was directed at developing defenses in depth or for systematically using Saipan’s rugged terrain to its full defensive potential.

The Japanese suspected that the American invasion would take place somewhere along the protected western shoreline where the terrain was generally flat. As a consequence, the bulk of their defenses was concentrated in this area. However, other beach areas such along the southern coast at Agingan and Obyan and the protected beaches at Laulau on the eastern coast also required defenses and fortifications were constructed there as well.

The Agingan Japanese Blockhouse was the centerpiece of Japanese defenses in the Agingan Beach Area. It was probably constructed during the main defensive effort between March and June 1944. It was intended to emplace four 20mm cannons which would lay fire on

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American troops should they attempt landings at Agingan Beach. Supplementing the Agingan Japanese blockhouse was one 20mm cannon pillbox (single embrasure) located inland and to the west, and several concrete and coral rock machine gun pillboxes built into the rocky point between Unai Dankulo Agingan and Unai Dikiki Agingan.

On 15 June 1944 two American Marine divisions were landed on the beaches along the southwestern shore of Saipan in the opening move in Operation Forrager. This operation called for the capture of Saipan, Tinian and Guam so that the islands could be transformed into giant airbases for the strategic bombing of the Japanese home islands. In all, over 60,000 Marines and soldiers participated in the assault on Saipan. On 17 June, the 27th Infantry Division came ashore at Afetna to reinforce the Marines and assist with the capture of objectives in southern Saipan. No landings were made in the Agingan area whose beaches were code-named White One and Two. The Agingan bunker was captured on 18 June by Army troops. It was found to possess no weapons and had not been detected by pre-invasion intelligence. As a result, it had escaped naval shelling and was in excellent condition. Shortly after its capture, the bunker was inspected by an Army Engineer Battalion as a part of an island-wide study of Japanese fortifications (Anon 1944:3). The report stated that the Agingan blockhouse showed no signs of ever having weapons emplaced but was used to store several dozen anti-boat mines.

After 25 days of hard fighting, Saipan fell to American troops. By October, 1944, Isely Field, the island's primary B-29 facility, was operational. Soon after, American bombing raids against the Japanese home islands began. B-29 raids went on round the clock until August 1945 when atomic bomb attacks launched from nearby Tinian forced a Japanese surrender.

The loss of Saipan and the near total annihilation of its 30,000 man garrison represented a major strategic setback for Japan. Its inner defensive perimeter had been pierced and the home island would soon be vulnerable to destructive bombing attacks that would eventually lead to final capitulation. Further, the losses suffered during the Battle of the Philippine Sea essentially drained Japan's naval air power in the Central Pacific theater. The defeat at Saipan came as a profound shock to the Japanese military leadership and the general public and led directly to the resignation of Prime Minister Tojo and the fall of his government.

After the fall of the Marianas, Japanese defensive strategy underwent a fundamental change. Henceforth, defense was to be in depth (Russell 1994:29). American landings, for the most part, would not be contested at the beaches. Rather, positions would be established in areas suited for defensive warfare. There were to be no more wasteful counter-attacks. The results of this new policy were to be seen in the higher American casualty figures on Peleliu, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance**

The Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse is considered significant under three National Register criteria. These include Criteria A,C and D. These are discussed below:

**Criterion A**

The Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse is directly associated with the monumental events of World War II in the Pacific. Saipan was the key island in the Marianas chain and the first to be assaulted by American forces. The Japanese also recognized its importance and defended it with over 30,000 men. The ensuing 25-day battle ranks among the bloodiest of the Pacific campaign. American casualties were 3,126 killed and over 14,000 wounded. The Japanese lost nearly their entire garrison. The blockhouse was among the hastily-built fortifications with which the Japanese intended to execute their prevailing defensive strategy which emphasized defeating the enemy at the beach. It was captured by elements of the 27th Infantry Division during early fighting in southern Saipan. With the loss of Saipan, the Japan's inner-defensive ring was breached and the home islands exposed to deadly B-29 bombing raids. The fall of Saipan forced the resignation of Japanese Prime Minister Tojo and the fall of his cabinet. It also resulted in significant revisions to the prevailing Japanese defensive doctrine. The defeat-them-at-the-beach strategy was replaced by one which emphasized defense in-depth. Rather than lose men in vulnerable coastal fortifications and wasteful counter-attacks, the Japanese would remain within well-camouflaged interior positions and fight fiercely for every foot of territory. This change in strategy is evident in the terrible battles fought at Peleliu, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. From the American perspective, the capture of Saipan, and later Tinian and Guam, allowed for intensive bombing raids to be carried out against targets in Japan. At the height of bombing operations, Marianas-based B-29s were capable of destroying a Japanese city each night. By war's end, most of Japan's urban areas had been destroyed. The atomic attacks, launched from nearby Tinian, forced intervention by Emperor Hirohito and the end of the most costly conflict in mankind's history.

The Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The blockhouse is located at Unai Dankulo Agingan and possesses a panoramic view of the reef flat, the Saipan Channel and Tinian Island. The surrounding area is undeveloped and has changed very little over the past fifty years. Indigenous vegetation is present and no modifications have been made to the blockhouse or to its immediate environs. If one was to enter the blockhouse and look out its gun ports, one would see virtually the same scene as did its Japanese defenders. The blockhouse has remained unmodified; the scars of shellfire which mark its exterior walls gives the visitor a very good feel for what the battle must have been like.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)**

**Criterion C**

The Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse embodies the distinctive characteristics of Japanese fortification construction undertaken during a three-month period from March to June 1944. The blockhouse was built to a standard design but under very difficult conditions and very likely to substandard specifications. Observations made of concrete exposed in spalled areas reveal that the concrete was made utilizing coral rock aggregate rather than the more durable volcanic aggregate. Volcanic rock was added to concrete mix used to construct reinforced military buildings on Saipan built before or during the first few years of the war when quality construction materials were readily available. The spalled areas resulted from the oxidation and expansion of reinforcing steel. This suggests that sea water was used during mixing or that rushed working conditions caused construction workers to place reinforcing steel too close to the surface of the pour. Finally, the fact that this blockhouse was never emplaced with weapons makes it characteristic of the fortifications built during the last few months before the American invasion.

As stated previously, the Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse is in an excellent state of preservation. With the exception of modern graffiti and absence of firing port shutter and insulation, the building is totally intact and unaltered.

**Criterion D**

The Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse has yielded information important to the study and understanding of World War II events on the island of Saipan. The building was first inspected immediately following its capture by an American Army engineer battalion (Anon. 1944). During this inspection, detailed plan and elevation views were produced. The fortification was found to contain no weapons. The blockhouse was recorded a second time during an archaeological survey of the Agingan area carried out by Russell and Fleming (1985). Historical background information was presented in the final report and the property was recommended for National Register nomination. The fortification was also examined by Denfeld during his study of Japanese fortifications in the Central Pacific Area (1992). The study of this particular fortification has added to our general understanding of Japanese defensive strategy and construction techniques employed on Saipan during World War II. In addition to information previously generated, the future study of this site will allow significant research topics to be addressed. Specifically, data generated from the study of the Agingan blockhouse will permit an analyses of the differences between Japanese fortifications

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constructed on Saipan, Tinian and Guam, with those built on Rota, an island which was by-passed by American forces. As a result, Japanese troops on Rota were provided with an additional fourteen months to construct defensive fortifications. How exactly did fortification design and construction evolve on Rota? The large, well-preserved sites on Rota, such as the one at Ginalagan, offer an interesting contrast to those built on the islands which were assaulted in 1944. Sites such as the Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse will permit this topic to be examined in greater detail.

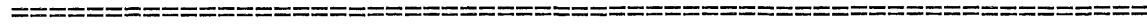
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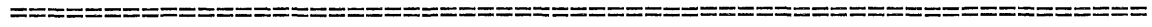
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**Boundary Description**

Boundary for the Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse is an imaginary line which on the north, east and west sides parallels the exterior walls of the blockhouse at a distance of five meters and on the south side parallels at a distance of two meters the seaward side of the rock wall.

**Boundary Justification**

This boundary incorporates the blockhouse, the associated coral rock wall and the rock outcropping upon which the blockhouse is constructed.

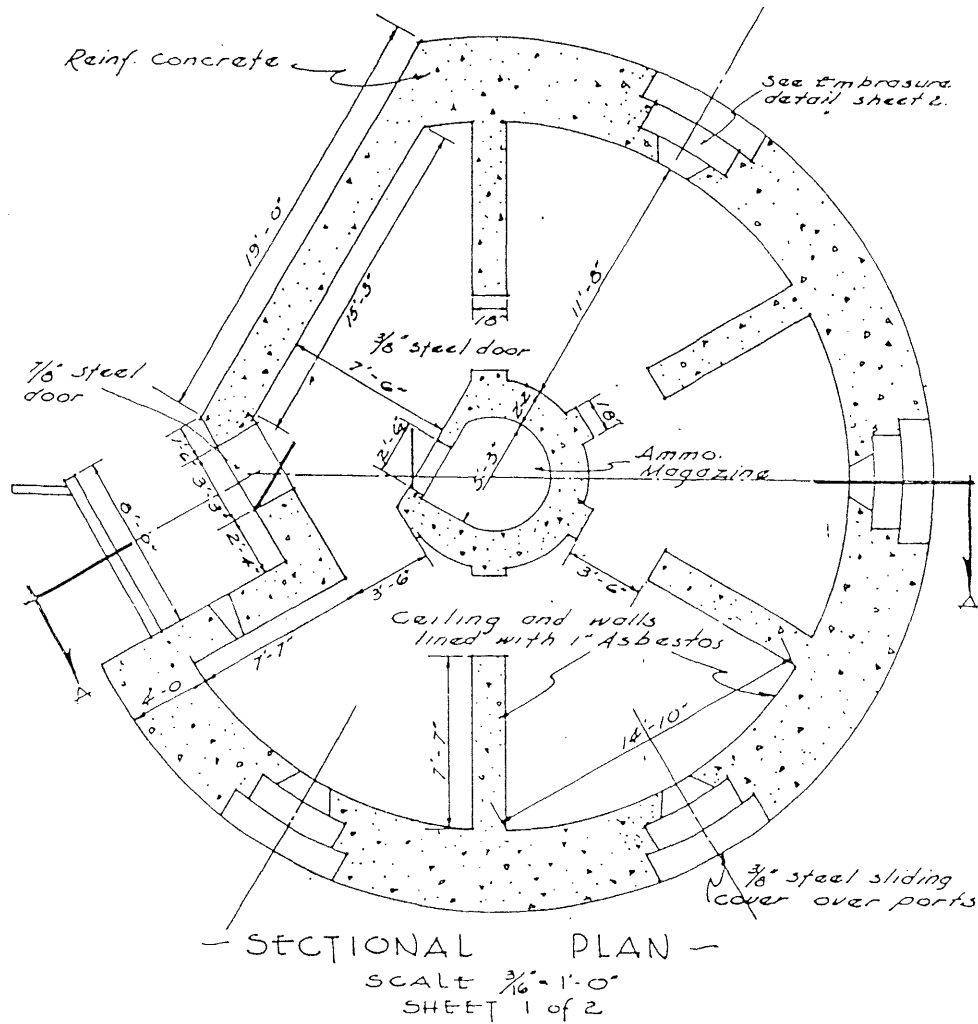
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Plan View of Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse (Anon. 1944)



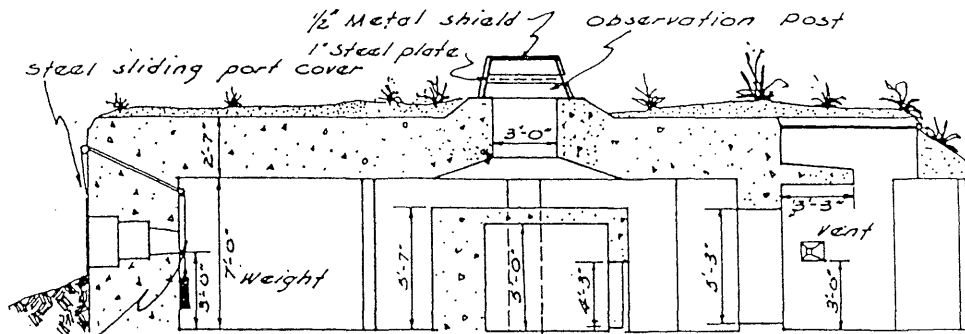
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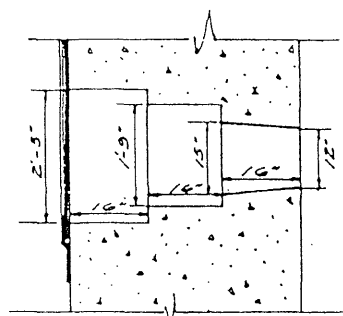
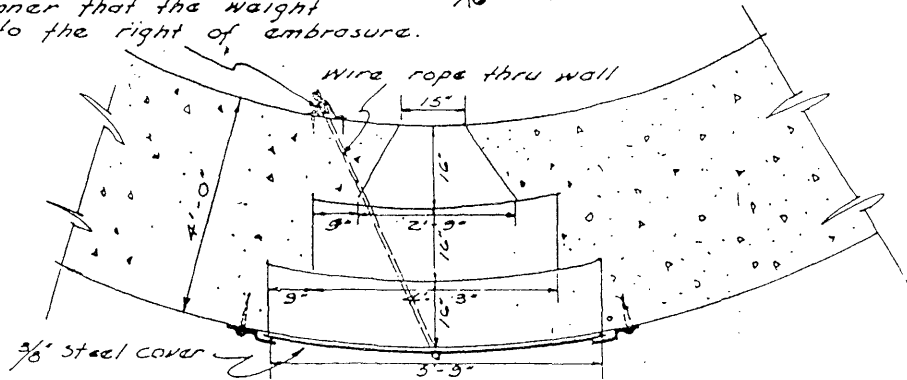
Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse  
name of property

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Wire rope fastens to center of port cover but passes thru the wall in such a manner that the weight is to the right of embrasure.

**SECTION - 'A-A'**  
SCALE  $\frac{3}{16}'' = 1'-0''$



**DETAIL of EMBRASURE**  
SCALE  $\frac{1}{2}'' = 1'-0''$   
SHEET 2 of 2.

Section View of Japanese 20mm Cannon Blockhouse with embrasure detail (Anon. 1944)

