

A Shot Not Fired in Anger - The Regiment in WWII.

Whilst copying all the North Fort Museum records held on 7 Field, for placement on the Association website, I was delighted to read some memoirs of ex members of the Regiment who had served in WW II during their initial call up for training and the Regiments Active Service deployment to Western Australia. One particular collection of letters, *vivid memoirs and donated photo collection*, by BDR Ted Jefferson E Troop (27 Bty), were too valuable to lie hidden in some dusty cabinet. This years Yandoo supplement is dedicated to those who served during the darkest hours of WW II.

Their adventure started in September 1940 when they were called up for a 10 week period of training at the Largs training area near Maitland. Due to acute shortages of critical equipments they had no guns and vehicles, except for 24 vintage 303 rifles that *"kicked like the proverbial mule"*. Uniforms were from various eras and initial gun training was conducted on two cart wheels and a log up the middle until they received their 18 pounders and 4.5" guns. The Regiment also participated in a Brigade war loan march in Sydney.

In March 1941 members were again called up and trained at Ingleburn and were now provided with motor transport, this being improvised civilian hired vehicles as well as issued with a standard uniforms and rifles. Their training tempo was increased and manoeuvres were conducted around the Camden and Campbelltown areas. During this camp they were asked to enlist in the A.I.F, with some members electing to serve overseas with other Regiments. During this camp the batteries were broken up into troops A and B (25 Bty) C and D (26 Bty) and D (107 Bty), strength of the Regiment was some 400-500 men.



Training 1939-40 Largs



On Parade Largs 1939-40



G Truck 1940

One week after the bombing of Pearl Harbour the Regiment was called up for full time service into a camp at Wallgrove, where they took up "Battle Stations" and initially deployed to Frenchs Forest (covering Palm Beach to North Head), Mount Keira (Wollongong) and East Lakes golf course (covering Botany Bay to South Head).

The Regiment strength was now increased to about 700 as they were allocated some 200 A.I.F enlistees that formed E and F troops, these diggers were not too happy at being posted to a chocko unit as they wanted to kill Germans in Africa, however the Australian Government were secretly trying to get their Divisions out of Africa, thus no reinforcements were being sent overseas.

During this deployment the East Lakes troop conducted a live shoot into the sea which went off without drama luckily *"we blew up some fish and not a surf club"* as the various maps they used did not really agree with each other.

When deployed at East Lakes the diggers were offered a "Cooks Tour" of Sydney, the ones that took up the offer were transported to the Wharfs of Sydney and were made to unload ships, as the wharfies were on strike, *"this being the last time anyone volunteered for something"*.

In May 1942 and 1 week before the Japs attacked Sydney Harbour the Regiment was moved to St Ives Showground, lucky for the Japs as the East Lakes battery may have been involved in “Fire Mission Jap Sub” thus firing a shot in anger.

From St Ives they moved up to Greta via the newly completed Putty Road (all dirt), the convoy consisting of some 200 odd vehicles which was 9 miles long. Again on arrival at Greta they were given another opportunity to enlist in the A.I.F.

On one winters day in July 1942 the drivers were tasked to take all guns and vehicles to Centennial Park Sydney and once they arrived, found the system had forgotten they needed to feed some 200 odd drivers and NCO’s. Some food finally arrived from the showground, but this was the least of their problems as they now needed to make their way to Central to catch a train back to Greta, with some diggers catching a cab and the others walking. Most personnel arrived back at 2 am “*what a day*”. Some 20-30 personnel remained with the equipment.

Matters were kept “Top Secret” and after a few days the Regiment was told to pack up at Greta and march into the railway station where they arrived at 3 pm. Some 650 odd members of the Regiment jumped on a train heading south stopping at Albury to change trains for one heading to Victoria. They were finally told they were heading to WA. The trip took some 4 ½ days, with sleeping arrangements being any where you could find and the meals being stew, stew and yes more stew.

The WA experience started one July morning in 1942 when “we detrained at Chidlow in our batteries and marched up a bush road to our new camp area with our kit and rifles”. Once they arrived they were issued their tenting which was children’s play tents complete with Indian heads and feathers painted on the sides, maybe this was a new type of cam pattern being trialled, or the system was really doing it tough!. The tents didn’t give much protection from the elements and combined with early morning PT parades and freezing cold showers caused many members to catch colds and influenza, which meant a spell in hospital.

In August the Regiment moved to Gin Gin, some 85 miles north of Perth. Here the Regiment received it’s guns and vehicles and its own tentage. During mid September leave was being granted in 3 day blocks so diggers started heading back to Perth and the MP’s were looking out for diggers who had their buttons undone.

The Regiment conducted further training and then moved back to Perth early November to a rest camp at Bellevue. From here they conducted a shoot at Rockingham and rifle shoot at Swanbourne.



Bdr Ted Jeffreson with "Blitz" 1942



Members on leave in Perth 1942



Regt Camp Mingenew WA 1943

Later in November the Regiment deployed some 300 miles north to Geraldton to an area called Narngula, this being a barren camp area. The Regiment had to make their own mess shelters, kitchens and latrines from the local trees and grass. Water was being carted in from a local bore by water tankers known as Q5 but it had a salty taste, this contaminated water made half of the Regiment go down with dysentery until they got used to it.

Xmas 42 saw the diggers being treated to supplementary rations and being served by the officers, after a sing-song and a few beers. At the wet canteen (a caravan), beer was 6 pence a mug (big or small) It was not long till the gunner ingenuity came to play and the "Tom Blamey" glass appeared, this being a beer bottle neatly cut off at the neck and ground in sand for a couple of hours to smooth the lip.

At this position they dug their pits inside their tents for bomb protection and guns and vehicles were fully camouflaged using the local terrain. Fortnightly day leave was being granted to Geraldton and all outgoing mail was censored. The Regiment also conducted a couple of fire and movement exercises and was fully equipped, even having 3 Bren gun carriers for OP use.

During March 1943, members of Regiment organised dance nights in Geraldton and invited members of the local community as a show of their appreciation.

In March/April they pulled out of Narngula and moved back to towards Moora some 20 miles West of Dandaragin. Here again they had to build their own amenities, but they were now getting good at it. Rugby League was encouraged between the batteries and infantry battalions, with the RAP truck being always on hand.



Catching WA Crayfish



27 Bty Drill Comp Training



Tent lines Mingenew WA 1943

The CO 7, LTCOL Kelso, was heard to have said the "good book", (quoting a quick action taking 8 minutes), was rubbish and the Gunners of 7 Field could easily smash this timing. He was challenged by the Div Artillery General (ex Middle East), and the Regiment made some people eat their words by doing it in 2 minutes.

"In June 1943 we moved camp back to the banks of the Swan River near Point Walter". Day leave was granted for Perth on weekends. Whilst in this rest camp, the Regiment participated in a war loan march through the streets of Perth, *"it was a grand sight seeing the Regiment being lead by the CO, 2IC and Adjutant then by Battery Commanders and their Batteries, with every man in step, rifles all sloped at the same angle, the columns and ranks dead straight"*.

For some unknown reason, the Regiment started to receive some non Gunner type training, with amphibious, rowing long punts around Melville Water, loading and unloading guns onto punts, assault courses, and cliff climbing with ropes. This lasted for some 6 weeks, with no guns being fired..

During July the whole Regiment, guns, trucks and personnel were loaded onto a flat top rail trucks at Fremantle and railed to Marowa travelling all night. From here they detrained and traveled 50 miles in convoy overland to Mingenul where they pitched camp. "After a few days we were told to re pitch out tents in regulation lines using gun directors to make sure everything was square and in line". Guns and trucks were also re parked in the same way. There was more football, an athletic meeting and an inter troop drill competition. The Regiment also traveled to Geraldton, a 180 mile return trip just to play a football match.

In August the Regiment was involved in a Divisional shoot with 2 other WA Regiments, 72 guns in all controlled by CO 7, as he was made the Divisional Gunnery Officer for the shoot. The shoot involved selected

targets, creeping barrages and Divisional concentrations on selected targets (umm not a nice place to be. Ed.), “talk about how to get rid of ammunition”. The shoot was also watched by LT GEN Gordon Bennett.

It was the last time the guns of 7 fired in WW II and after some 2 odd years of training, still not a shot fired in anger.

The Regiment was then moved to an area near a beach where they spent a few days swimming and catching crayfish. From there they moved to Mingenew, boarded a train to Fremantle. After de-training they were given a ships boarding pass, which they placed on their hats then boarded the 13 decked Dutch ship “Nieuw Amsterdam”. The Officers and NCO’s were given luxury suites which had showers and toilets, the diggers were given hammocks on the decks. The Officers and NCO’s came off second best however as the cabins were full of bugs because the ship was on it’s way to the United States to be de-loused. The troops were given the afternoon off in Fremantle, which in those days had a pub on every corner, one would presume the Regiment had a fun afternoon...

The ship was carrying some 8000 troops including 800 German Panzer prisoners with their Pommie guards. The days were spent exercising on the decks, assisting in kitchen duties as feeding the troops consisted of about 6 meal sittings a day, listening to the Infantry bands and watching the Dutch escort ship scouting around like a watch dog and firing a few practice shots with it’s Bofor guns.

Luckily the seas were not rough and the Regiment arrived in Port Phillip Bay some 3 days later in reasonable shape. There they boarded a train waiting for them at the docks. When it pulled into Flinders St Station the diggers started whistling at the ladies going home from work, then the train reversed and they did it all again...

The train headed to Albury where they changed for the overnight trip to Sydney. They de-trained at Rooty Hill and were then transported to back to where they had started, Wallgrove.

The Regiment was then given 28 days leave and upon returning found out the Regiment was being disbanded.

Most of the SNCO’s were sent to Tenterfield to the 18th Infantry Training Battalion to convert to Infantry. Some of the battle hardened Battalions did not want Gunner NCO’s as they wanted to promote their own diggers, so Gunner NCO’s were being set up for trivial matters like dust on rifles and were charged, demoted and sent to other battalions “*The Final act of Bastardary*”. Some NCO’s decided to transfer to Commandos, Military dock sides, landing craft and some even joined the MP’s. This way they maintained their rank and were well accepted by their new units, however “*the new Corporal rank did not sound as good as Bombardier*”.

No truer words have been said than those of 107 Bty Lt Stuckey who rose from his chair during smoko and addressed his troops at the last Largs camp and said “the only good thing that came out of the war was the comradeship which grew between men”. This camaraderie still exists with the current serving and non serving members of the Regiment.

Ubique

BSM Blankets (Pat Sengos)

PS Ted later transferred to the Regular Army (NX110658) and served in New Guinea .

Note, words quoted from Teds original letters are in the “quotation marks”