

**RAISING THE 7th FIELD ARTILLERY BRIGADE, A.I.F.,
AT "THE WARREN", MARCH, 1916**

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The 7th Field Artillery Brigade, A.I.F., was raised following the decision taken late in 1915, by the Australian Government in consultation with the British Government, to expand the Australian Imperial Force from three to six divisions. The brigade now known as 7 Field Regiment, Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery has had a continuing existence, apart from two demobilisation periods, since 1916 and is a unit of the Army Reserve with its headquarters at Warrane Road, Willoughby, NSW.

Laurie Hindmarsh enlisted in the 7th in October, 1948 after serving in another corps in the second Australian Imperial Force during the Second World War. He was a member of the regiment for thirteen years and recognised the contribution that it had made to Australian military history. Laurie left the regiment as a major and is writing a full history of the regiment for the Regimental Association. The article that follows is an extract from the manuscript.

The 7th Field Artillery Brigade came into existence on 17th March, 1916 at "The Warren", an estate at Marrickville, a suburb of Sydney. "The Warren" was headquarters for the Australian Field Artillery in New South Wales under the command of Lieutenant Colonel R. St.J. Pearce, V.D. (Volunteer Decoration). It was from "The Warren" that drafts of reinforcements recruited in NSW were despatched overseas.

Lieutenant Colonel Pearce was appointed to command the 7th Field Artillery Brigade on 17th March, 1916 and immediately set about interviewing applicants who wished to join the new unit. An experienced militia officer as evidenced by the award of the Volunteer Decoration the applicants finally selected by him laid a foundation that has endured to this day.

Artillery was a popular arm because it was mounted and also, for those days, technical. In addition to gunners and drivers there were postings for signallers, ~~directormen~~ (a director is a survey instrument for measuring horizontal and vertical angles), rangetakers, farriers and clerks. Lieutenant Colonel Pearce could afford to be selective, and when assessing each applicant took into consideration the ability to ride, education and occupation in civil life.

Bombardier Hugh Lewis-Hughes talking in 1987 recalled his interview with Lieutenant Colonel Pearce. Lewis-Hughes graduated from Hawkesbury Agricultural College at the end of 1915 and enlisted at "The Warren" with about twenty fellow graduates. The fact that Lewis-Hughes and his friends were Hawkesbury graduates pleased the Colonel because with their training in animal husbandry they would be valuable members of a mounted unit. The Colonel asked him if he thought that he could manhandle a gun out of a ditch. Lewis-Hughes assured the Colonel that he could, however he was posted to the Brigade Ammunition Column, no doubt because of his qualifications.

Men enlisting in late 1915 and early 1916 were perhaps more thoughtful than those who had rushed to recruiting centres at the declaration of war and this is not said in any derogatory sense. This second flood of recruits comprised generally mature types who in view of the unsatisfactory news from the war theatres and the lengthy casualty lists had no illusions as to what they were going into; the 153rd casualty list published in the Sydney Morning Herald on 17th March, 1916 took six columns on a page of eight columns. All those enlisting considered that they had a duty and were prepared to put ambition aside; some had waited to complete studies, others had waited until they were 21 so that they could enlist for service abroad without parental consent.

Typical original members of the 7th were Bombardier Hugh Lewis-Hughes previously mentioned, aged 20, Driver Eric Wynn, a bank officer aged about 23, Trumpeter Dan Herbert aged 23, Gunner Frank Neilson aged 23, Gunner Vince Kernahan aged 23 and his friend Gunner Jim Carlton aged about 26. One interesting personality was Gunner Jim Black who gave his age as 39 years and 11 months, but who was over 40. Black re-enlisted in a Garrison Battalion in 1941 giving his age as 55; he was discharged in 1942 when the authorities found that he was then actually 65.

BGS
Lieutenant
Command Post
Assistants
Civilian

Many of the men had been in the A.I.F. for six months or more; one writer said that some of them felt that they would never serve overseas. Some of these men had already been allocated to reinforcement drafts before transferring to the 7th. One particularly strong group came from the 2/4 D.A.C. (4th Reinforcement for the 2nd Division Ammunition Column). This group included Gunners Jim Black, Jim Carlton, Alf Heesh and Vince Kernahan.

Most men joining the Brigade would already have experienced some elementary military training following the introduction of compulsory part-time home service in 1910. It can be assumed that most if not all of the officers had previous militia service. As mentioned previously the C.O. had had long service. The battery commander of the 26th Battery, Captain T.A.J. Playfair, had enlisted in the militia in 1909 and was commissioned prior to the outbreak of the war. Captain Playfair served on Gallipoli with the 1st Field Artillery Brigade, was twice wounded and after the second wound was invalided back to Australia with a fractured skull. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel at the end of the war and to Brigadier in the Second World War.

The selection of non-commissioned officers (N.C.O.'s) presented a major problem to the Commanding Officer. An account in the "7th F.A.B. Yandoo" Volume III, published in February, 1920, said: "Most of the citizen forces were already fighting on Gallipoli or occupying some staff position in Australia. N.C.O.'s therefore were selected for accomplishments other than military knowledge; some for personality, some for sheer hide. The first qualification secured quality and the latter quantity. A plausible personality in a credulous community profits by impressing those around him by his own importance".

The account went on: "The types of N.C.O.'s herein described were commonly met with at the period described but fortunately for the future of the brigade they were not all of that stamp. Many gained promotion through sterling worth, tact, firmness in handling men, ardour for the efficiency of the brigade, and good solid work. It was the former type, however, that began by losing the respect of the troops, lost influence over them, exposed themselves to ridicule and were largely responsible for the inception of the wily art of swinging the lead or the science of avoiding work without detection".

One N.C.O. who certainly was not of "the former type" was the Regimental Sergeant Major, Warrant Officer Squair. He is immediately identifiable in the group photograph of Brigade Headquarters personnel taken in 1916 sitting bolt upright in a perfectly fitting uniform. He looks the complete professional and was the complete professional according to Bombardier Hugh Lewis-Hughes who spoke of him with great respect in 1987.

The troops enlisted for the duration of the war and four months thereafter. Whilst in Australia they were paid at the rate of 5 shillings per day. On departure for service overseas, the daily rate increased to 6 shillings per day of which 1 shilling was deferred. Married men were required to allot

$\frac{2}{5}$ of their pay to their wives. A separation allowance of 1 shilling and 5 pence per day and $4\frac{1}{2}$ pence per day for each child was also paid to the wife. Assistance from patriotic funds enabled the wife's amount to be increased to 1 pound 10 shillings and 11 pence per week with additional amounts for children. The separation allowance was increased to 2 shillings per day for wives and 6 pence per day for each child in April, 1918. The rates of pay and allowances approximated average wages at that time.

The establishment of a field artillery brigade at that time provided for seven hundred and thirty one officers and other ranks, and five hundred and thirty nine horses. The brigade was organised as a headquarters, (which had a command and administrative function) four batteries and an ammunition column. Each battery comprised four sub-sections, each armed with an 18-pounder gun. There were over a hundred wagons of various types; telephone wagons, mess carts, general service wagons and limbered ammunition wagons. The unit was entirely horsedrawn.

The Australian Government did not undertake to train or equip the brigade; however there were sufficient guns and horses and open space at "The Warren" to enable some elementary training to be carried out before sailing for England.

"The Warren" was the name of what was originally a 58 hectare property, with a frontage on Cooks River, owned by Thomas Holt, a prominent Sydney businessman and New South Wales politician of the nineteenth century. In 1854 he built a mansion which had some resemblance to a castle on the property. This building stood on the eastern side of today's Mansion Street, opposite Bay Street in what is now the suburb of Marrickville, Sydney.

It seems unbelievable today that Holt raised rabbits commercially on this property for the Sydney market and it is thought that the estate received its name from this enterprise.

In 1883 Holt returned to England and the property was subdivided. In 1886 the mansion and remaining 5 hectares were purchased by the Catholic Church and occupied as a convent by nuns of the Carmelite order.

All that remains of "The Warren" today are two towers that were re-erected in Richardson Park, overlooking the Cooks River, in 1968. There is a commemorative plaque in Richardson Park and the estate is remembered by Warren Road and Mansion Street.

Early in the First World War the property was taken over for military purposes and was used as headquarters, Australian Field Artillery in New South Wales. It was here that recruits for the Australian Field Artillery, A.I.F. were given some basic artillery training, allocated to reinforcement drafts, and shipped overseas. The open space surrounding the mansion accommodated the tent lines, gun parks, wagon lines and horse lines. A photograph shows tent lines occupying what at one time would have been the front lawn.

The account in the "7th F.A.B. Yandoo" Volume III described the main building: "Those grim, grey walls of the old convent building within which were the quarters of the officers and the orderly room, now once more echoed with confessions less reliable no doubt than in former times, for it did not profit a man to tell the truth when he had been absent without leave for nearly a week without good reason. A sentry paced up and down the verandah in front of the building, his duties being to prevent unauthorised persons from gaining admittance to the august presence of the Colonel and to salute all officers, presenting arms to field officers ("anything above a major", as the vernacular of the sergeant of the guard had it) and bestowing a dexterous wink on an occasional gunner who entered the doorway to gain access to the telephone under the stairs." Here the author must say that the sergeant was in error, the order should have been "anything above a captain"; perhaps the error can be attributed to the N.C.O. problem.

From the point of view of the gunners the authorities could not have made a better choice when selecting "The Warren" as headquarters, Australian Field Artillery. Within reasonable walking distance of the tramline on Illawarra Road and Tempe railway station, the gunner hurrying on leave could expect to be in the city within 30 to 45 minutes. The artillerymen had a distinct advantage in that regard over the infantrymen in the camps at Liverpool and Casula. The "7th F.A.B. Yandoo" account refers to the sound late at night of "the whistle and puffing of the train as it leaves Arncliffe station". How many readers of this article can remember travelling in metropolitan trains hauled by steam locomotives?

A 15 pounder gun stood in front of the mansion and was fired each morning (blank ammunition) at 6.00 a.m. reveille. The gun probably saw service with "A" Battery during the Boer War. Was it the gun that sixty years later was to form part of the equipment of the horsedrawn detachment formed by 7th Field Regiment R.A.A. at Willoughby? This latter gun with its limber now has pride of place at the regimental headquarters.

Once enlisted, the gunner expected to be issued with a complete uniform and kit. Service dress for other ranks at that time comprised slouch hat or forage cap, service dress jacket, breeches, boots, leggings, spurs, bandolier, Australian Commonwealth Military Forces hat and collar badges and metal A.F.A. (Australian Field Artillery) and Australia shoulder titles. When the hat was turned up at the side and all leather and spurs were highly polished the effect was impressive.

The "7th F.A.B. Yandoo" account hints at graft in connection with the issue of service dress on enlistment, it not normally being available for two or three weeks unless "of course, he happened to be engaged to the sister of the Q.M.S, or sufficiently financial to become his friend". No doubt shortages of equipment contributed to this undesirable situation accentuated by the shortage of efficient N.C.O.'s. Working dress was dungaree jacket and trousers and floppy white hat; the old style cricketing hat.

?
No

The "7th F.A.B. Yandoo" account gives the impression that discipline was slack and that training was lackadaisical. If this was the case, it can be attributed in part to the fact that "The Warren" was basically a reinforcement depot and to the shortage of experienced N.C.O.'s. However as far as the 7th Field Artillery Brigade is concerned, it can be assumed that such shortcomings were taken in hand from the time the brigade was raised. Bombardier Lewis-Hughes in 1987 insisted that the training was taken seriously and certainly the appointment of Warrant Officer Squair to the brigade would have helped considerably.

This assumption and Lewis-Hughes' recollection are supported by an entry in the diary of 107th Battery (formed in England), referring to the time at "The Warren", which says "The training was carried out in the usual manner, mostly at Undercliffe Park, which was a level stretch of grassy land through which ran the stream known as Cooks River. Physical drill, marching, signalling, gun-laying and standing gun drill were the most important features of the battery's training. The mounted drill followed in which the drivers received a good insight into their part of the work in connection with the field artillery". Just for good measure guns were manhandled up and down the steep slope leading to the level ground beside the river.

Accommodation for Brigade Headquarters and the officers was provided in the mansion whilst the gunners were accommodated in tents of the traditional Australian "bushman" type. There are numerous photographs of groups beside their tents and it is obvious that a professional photographer toured the lines and photographed carefully posed groups wearing forage caps and service dress.

Rations seem to have been adequate, and whilst the "7th F.A.B. Yandoo" account mentions stew, no lasting impression remained with Bombardier Lewis-Hughes. He did say that there was a shop just around the corner and if you wanted something extra you just hopped over the fence, and then went on to mention "biscuit porridge". Nothing changes in the service; the author of this article was served biscuit porridge twenty-eight years later, on the first morning at the recruit training centre, Cowra, after an overnight rail trip from Sydney. Bombardier G.M. Rice (3rd Battery, 1st Field Artillery Brigade) refers in his diary to a disastrous first meal at the Showground in November, 1916; "Stewed rabbit, which unfortunately for us - the cooks had omitted to take out the inside and a good proportion of the hair". Hopefully the gunners of the 7th were spared horrors such as this.

From the leave point of view "The Warren" was ideal. Leave appears to have been the normal thing after the day's training. One can visualise the stream of khaki clad figures hurrying down Premier Street, boots, leggings and spurs gleaming, to catch the 4.57 p.m. from Tempe to Central there to disperse to homes, meet girl friends, have a meal, go to a show or to find a drink.

But this pleasant existence was soon to come to an end. The 7th paraded at "The Warren" for the last time at about 5.00 a.m. on the morning of

11th May, 1916. The Commanding Officer said a few well-chosen words and then at 5.15 a.m. they marched out the gate to Victoria Road, there to clamber aboard special trams which would take them on the first leg of the journey to the great adventure. The remainder of the men in camp turned out to see them off and hundreds of local residents lined the streets on the way to the tram line.