

Some History of 7th Australian Field Regiment 1941-1943
as seen by Gunner Stuart MildenHall NX110796

During 1942 to 1943 until its disbandment in November, 1943, the above Regiment became known as the 7th Australian Field Regiment AIF, and was part of the 8th Australian Infantry Brigade. This consisted of the 30th Battalion, the 35th Battalion, the 4th Battalion, 7th Field Regiment, Engineers, Workshops and Medical Units.

May, 1941:- Some of us called up for compulsory military training, and proceeded to Drill Hall (fronting Peshurst Street, and not far south of Victoria Avenue, Willoughby) for medical examinations.

June, 1941:- We entered Narellan Training Camp (under canvas) for 3 months military training, which, besides "run o' the mill" drill instruction included bayonet drill, map reading at night, route marches etc.. It was very cold here - frosty mornings a regular thing.

September, 1941:- Back to civilian pursuits. War in Europe hotting up.

December 7th, 1941:- Japanese bomb Pearl Harbour and push their way down Malay Peninsula and head for Australia. As a result, 7th Field Regiment found themselves in camp and in the war for the duration and 12 months thereafter. So in December, 1941 we were back in uniform and assigned to Wallgrove Military Camp.

December, 1941 to March, 1942:- Training and preparation to be in readiness continues at Wallgrove. The whole of the 8th Brigade were in training here ie about 5000 to 6000 troops.

A bit of humour:- Whilst at Wallgrove, one enterprising gentleman complete with small stove and dressed in a white coat, used to sell "hot dogs" at the railway gates at Rooty Hill Station. He used to have about a dozen or so hungry customers milling around him trying to make a purchase before the waiting bus (which took us to Wallgrove) moved off loaded to the hilt. How the bus conductor ever collected his fares in the 2 mile run I'll never know.

Getting back our enterprising vendor, (who was working entirely on his own), he would place the money, usually silver, into the hot water (in with the hot dogs) to foil patrons who may have been minded to steal his takings. I suppose when one is hungry, hygiene is a second thought, and, boy were we hungry at that hour of the night!

March to June, 1942:- The 7th Field Regiment took up Battle Stations overlooking Wollongong (facing the sea). Some troops were stationed near the top of Mount Kiera, others down on the flat at West Wollongong. Training and guard duties were the order of the day (and it was cold and wet).

A bit of humour:- Going to the toilet is a must for everybody, however, as one would expect, in the 7th, some did better than others. The chaps up on the mountain (Kiera), had a tree branch suspended across a deep slit trench as their toilet, whilst down on the flat they had earthpan covers. Privacy of course, in either case did not apply. Had it applied I doubt if anybody would have gone to the "Loo".

During the 7th's "stay" at Wollongong, the Japanese submarines came into Sydney, and some Eastern Suburbs of Sydney received a shell or two, presumably from another Japanese submarine, which "hove to" at night off the Heads.

All positions and gun pits etc. were suitably camouflaged of course.

June and July, 1942:- The 8th Australian Infantry Brigade, as a group moved north to Greta, a big transit camp near Singleton. The 7th Field Regiment, being part of the Brigade, was included in that move also.

We were accommodated here in huts, no beds of course, just palliasses and two blankets (no pillowslips). Our hopes were raised!

We were here only a matter of weeks. As usual rumours abounded. Brigadier Cameron MC addressed 7th Field Regiment and informed them that it was a "toss up" as to who went to New Guinea, ie the 7th or the 14th Field Regiment. The 14th "won" the day and were sent to New Guinea. The 7th Field Regiment, as part of the 8th Brigade was sent to Western Australia.

The invitation was given to the 7th Field Regiment to join the prestigious AIF which we did, almost to a man with but few exceptions. Hence we became the 7th Australian Field Regiment from thereon and haste was made, on the part of the troops, to sew on the grey around their shoulder colour patches, which showed that we had volunteered for service overseas, -anywhere! All this happened whilst we were at Greta Camp.

A bit of humour:- The trip across Australia by train was not your average tourist class. After 4 days and 5 nights in our train with no sleeping accommodation one begins to think that sheep were not so badly treated after all. All this of course while we were dressed in full parade dress uniforms.

July, 1942 to November, 1943:- On arrival in Western Australia we found we could have a cold shower (it was July) which some of us availed ourselves of. At least it was better than no shower at all! This was at a place called Chidlow, about sixty miles east of Perth, in a camp cut out of the bush. Here we continued our training, route marches etc., parades, lectures, and so on. We were accommodated in the conventional Army tents (six to a tent) which varied life a bit living with other fellows different to oneself. The "atmosphere" in the tent varying from congenial, to one of censure, depending on the circumstances - except when the CO, Major Kelso, or his fellow officers were around, much as a Police Car keeps traffic flowing at a regular pace - when things are distinctly different!

The 7th Field Regiment (AIF) continued its training, visiting and staying in places, varied as much in character as in their situations, on manoeuvres, always preparing, always trying to be that much quicker at setting up the "O Pip (observation Post), laying the telephones to the gun positions and setting up the gun crews in readiness to fire (if necessary).

As well as artillery training the troops of "the 7th" joined for a full week of infantry training with 35th Battalion, involving going over an assault course using live ammunition, shooting, as on a rifle range, and co-related activities.

Rumours "on good authority":- Rumour has it that fourteen men were killed while examining a Mortar Bomb! Whilst yet another rumour has it that a couple were run over by Bren Gun Carriers whilst sleeping and on manoeuvres. (To be confirmed with others of the 7th).

General Experiences 1943 in Western Australia.

The 7th was quite often on the move, - on manoeuvres, going into the wide open spaces for live shoots, operating at night sometimes, sleeping under the stars, pausing to fight a grass fire on one occasion.

Places which were visited and stayed at for longer or shorter times were Moora, Narrogin, Gin Gin, Greenmount, Pt Walter where we were obliged to do a physical assault course, but last and longest of all "the 7th" "dug in" at Geraldton.

At Geraldton, tents were placed in position and the floors of the tents (earth) were excavated down three feet. Guns were out in the dispersal areas and covered with camouflage nets. We were only seven miles from the coast.

One night an alert was sounded as a Japanese plane caused an affray up at Onslow, so everybody was out and "standing to", (ie all except the "two up" school, which I presume carried on "as usual").

On another occasion a Divisional shoot was co-ordinated. This was very impressive, so impressive in fact that the thought of the Japanese being able to penetrate such a concentration of fire-power seemed very remote indeed.

The Division came together for a full dress parade once, complete with arms at the shoulder, and led by four military bands playing as one. this was held at an oval at Geraldton (I think), and was very inspiring to even the most unemotional of us.

Geraldton was the last port of call for the ill fated HMAS Sydney which was sunk with all hands lost in the Indian Ocean.

October/November 1943:- After fifteen months of training etc., the 8th Australian Infantry Brigade was returned, by ship and train to Wallgrove camp from whence it was disbanded in November, 1943.

The troops of the 7th Australian Field Regiment, had they been given the opportunity, would have acquitted themselves well in the noblest tradition of the Australian Military History, against the invader. But such was not to be, instead some saw service in the Islands north of Australia, whilst others joined the RAAF.