



A History of
WORLD WAR II LARGS MILITARY TRAINING CAMP



Unveiling of Military Training Camp Plaque

Saturday 4th November 1995

Erected by

East Maitland, Gresford and Maitland R S L Sub-Branches

Written and compiled by J Crethary, Honorary Secretary
Maitland Retirement Village - Largs - Management
Committee

1st edition 22nd November 1992] (A History of Lot 3
2nd edition 6th November 1993] Dunmore Road Largs)
3rd edition 4th November 1995

The story of the development of Largs started in 1821 when George Dunmore Lang was granted 1000 acres of land, just north of the present township.

George was the second child of William and Mary Lang, of Largs, Scotland. The family consisted of John Dunmore, George Dunmore, Andrew and Isabella Vivian. (John was destined to become the Rev Dr John Dunmore Lang, the Colony's first Presbyterian minister, and also Statesman.)

Soon after George's arrival here he was granted his 1000 acres, and in the following year Standish Lawrence Harris was granted 2000 acres on the southern side of George Lang's grant.

George named his property "Dunmore", which was his mother's maiden name, and Standish Harris named his property "Goulburn Grove".

Harris came to N S W in 1822 and was appointed Civil Architect to replace Francis Greenway.

George Lang persuaded his family to come to N S W because of the potential here. John was the first to come, influenced by the promise of Governor Brisbane to support the setting up of a Presbyterian minister in Sydney, and to also assist in the building of a Presbyterian Church here.

Soon after, the rest of the family, father William, mother Mary, brother Andrew and sister Isabella, followed.

John became the Presbyterian minister, and William and Andrew, in 1824, contracted to build the first Scots Church in Sydney. This was near the present York and Margaret Streets junction.

George had been working in Sydney, and in 1824 decided to move to his grant of land on the Hunter's River. Before he left however, he was overtaken by an inflammatory fever and died on 18th January 1825. He was aged 22 years.

Eventually the land became the possession of Andrew, and with his father, mother and sister moved there and farmed the property.

Andrew and his father built a fine home which still stands.

In 1834 Andrew purchased 1400 acres of adjoining land from S L Harris. This was part of the original "Goulburn Grove", and became part of "Dunmore".

It is on this land that the township of Largs developed, the W W II Military Camp was situated, and where the retirement village stands.

In 1838, to assist his tenant farmers, and settlers around Dunmore estate, Andrew built a schoolhouse, which served also as a place of worship. This school is now the oldest continually operating public school in N S W.

Near the historical Dunmore House is a family tomb in which are buried, their mother Mary Dunmore Lang, sister Isabella Vivian Muir, her husband Robert Muir, and Andrew and Emily Lang's unnamed infant child.

Largs Military Camp 1939-1945

Largs Military Camp was one of a countless number of Military establishments in the Lower Hunter region during the Second World War.

Indications are that it became a Military establishment about May 1940. Apparently the Government rented the area from then until July 1942, when the land was acquired for defence purposes. The area occupied by the Military is shown in the Government Gazette notice of acquisition on page 3.

At present there are several cement pads remaining on the retirement village site and these would have been floors of buildings such as toilets and shower blocks. Several small bricked receptacles (about 60cm square and roughly 40cm deep), are still evident and these appear to have been part of a drainage system.

The lot at the bottom right hand corner of the plan on page 5, and marked 1 Field Company, is built on and nothing of that shown in the plan would exist now. An exception is the item marked "house", which would have been the Hawley family home and is still there.

The area in the corner on the left and bounded by Largs Avenue and Paterson Road is built on and presumably nothing remains there.

The large rectangle on the right side, and which is bordered by Dunmore Road, is made up of Lot 3, the northern half, being the retirement village site, and Lot 4, the southern half. (Lot 4 is being sub-divided and new homes are being erected there.)

At the top, or northern perimeter of Lot 3, there is a gully in which are remains of a small brick structure which appears to have been part of a drainage system.

Straddling Lots 3 and 4, alongside Dunmore Road, the map shows buildings and a tar surfaced road. (Lot 3 would start at about the middle building in this group.)

There were two entrances to the road, one at the southern end on Lot 4, and the other at the northern end on Lot 3. The road continues past the northern entrance and ends with a turning circle.

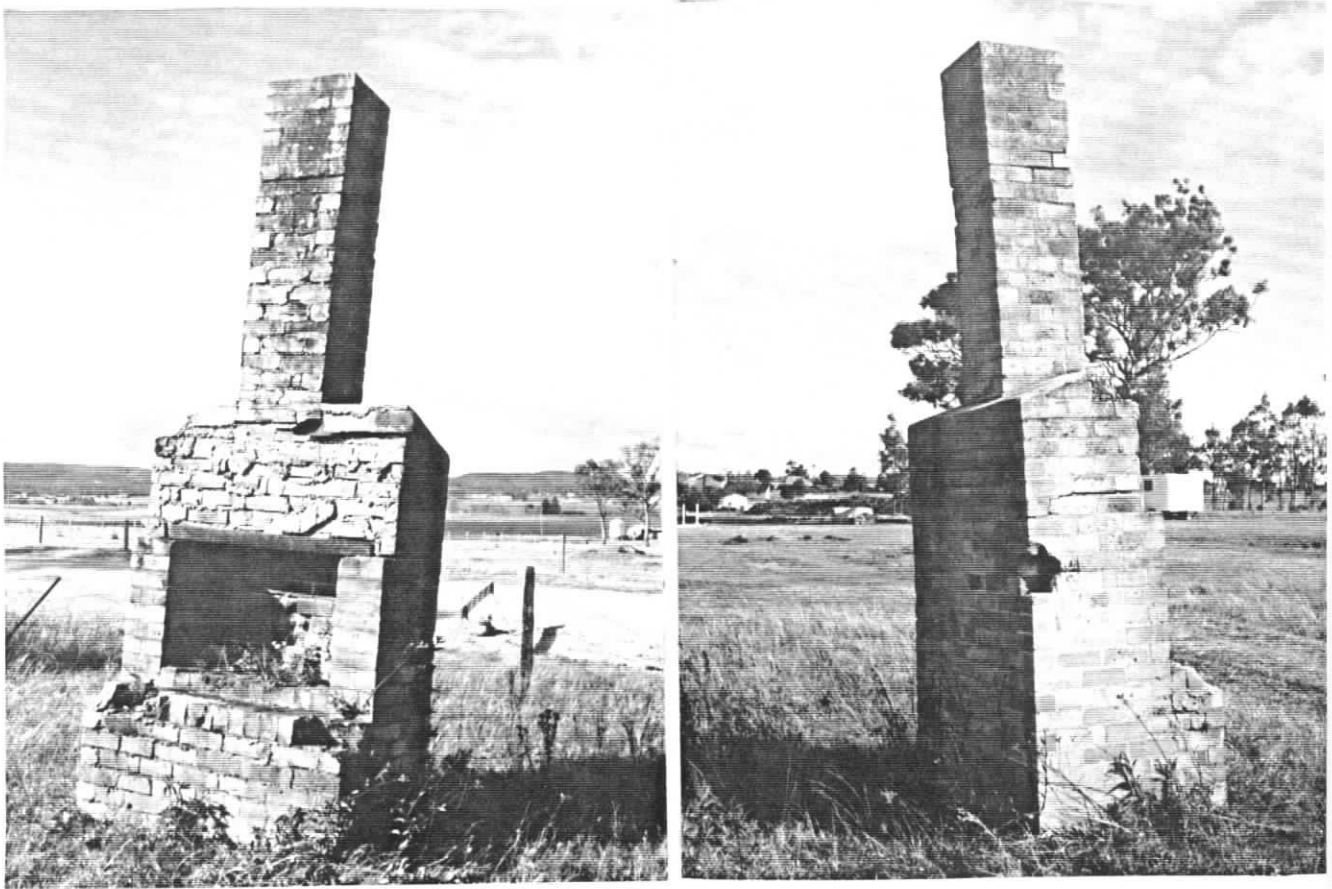
Until the start of development on Lot 4, in 1993, and the retirement village in 1994, scant remains of this tarred road could easily be seen, and the whole of the road could be traced for its full length, fifty three years after it was made.

In the area where the buildings are shown there stood, until 1993, a lonely solitary brick chimney. It appeared as a sentinel guarding the remaining remnants and memories of the past. For some time it had been showing its age by its visible "list to port", and in September 1993 it gave up and toppled over. It was the last clearly visible remains of the Military establishment, and over the years had become a landmark in the area to local and visiting people. Inscriptions on the chimney, which were not discovered until it had fallen, indicated it had been built in August 1943. It had survived for 50 years and 1 month. Its location was just a few metres south of the memorial being dedicated to-day.

The plan of the Camp shows very few buildings. This is explained by the fact that the soldiers' quarters were tents and permanent buildings were provided only for purposes of administration and stores etc.

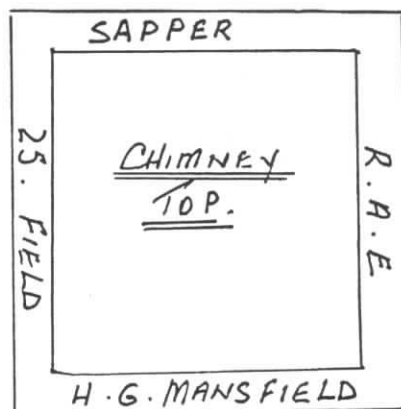
Several references have been made to Indians being in the Camp in the latter part of the war, and that they had camels with them.

The position of the Military Camp memorial is approximately at the northern end of the cluster of buildings alongside Dunmore Road as shown in the plan.



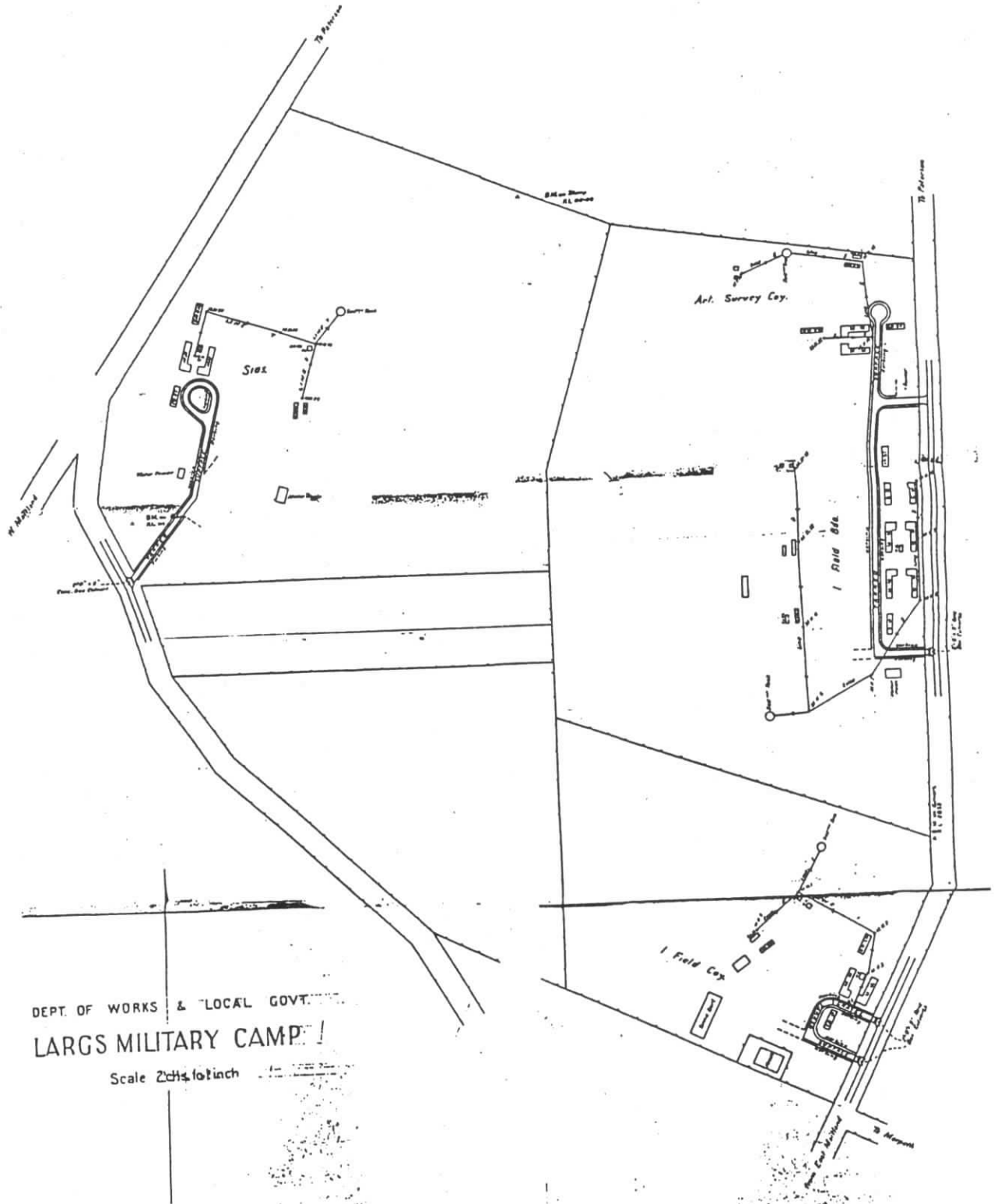
The last visible landmark of the Military Camp

Inscriptions found on
parts of the chimney
after it collapsed



ALSO
ENSCRIBED ON A SECTION OF THE CHIMNEY

SPR. H. MANSFIELD
AND
GNR. L. PUGH
BUILT THIS. AUGUST 1943
TWO. GOOD. VICTORIANS.



DEPT. OF WORKS & LOCAL GOVT.
LARGS MILITARY CAMP

Scale 2 1/2 in. to 1 in.

(Signed) G. B. Chilton
 Engineer in Charge

By authority of Council of 21-7-00
 (Held) A.W.

		7/10/42	"A" Coy H ₂ Pl. 4 Bn VDC	" "	" "	1 P/week	6	
LANSLOWNE <i>RUTHERFORD</i>	LANSLOWNE HALL							
LANSLOWNE <i>RUTHERFORD</i>	LANSLOWNE VILLAGE PUBLIC HALL	6/1/40	"A" Coy No. 3 Pl. 4 Bn VDC	1 Room (Wood)		1 P/week		DEHIRED <i>Mr ROY HIRING PRIVATE ARRANGEMENT BY VDC.</i>
LARGS <i>RUTHERFORD</i>	Lot 5, 15 Acres	10/3/50	Camp Site	Land		£26. P.A.		DEHIRED
LARGS <i>RUTHERFORD</i>	Lots 3, 4 and Part 7.	11/5/50	Camp Site	39 acres Land		£5. D.C P.A.		DEHIRED
LARGS <i>RUTHERFORD</i>	Lots 2 to 8 and Part 7 44 Acres	10/3/40	Camp Site	44 Acres Land		£3.5.0. P.A.		DEHIRED
LARGS <i>RUTHERFORD</i>	Largs/Paterson	1/7/42	Patterson Arby Range			Jump Sum £15.0.0.		30/9/42 20/7/44 DEHIRED Hired Again. Not hiring physical damage claim No further use as from 20/7/44
LARGS <i>RUTHERFORD</i>	Webbers Creek		Patterson Arby Range	Land		Danals £7.8.0 comm Claims ONLY		20/7/44 DEHIRED No hiring Physical damage claim. No further use as from 20/7/44

Location of Property *Largs* Training Area
 Name of Property *Tig Camp*

IDENTIFICATION OF LANDS.	County.	Parish.	Portion, Allotment, or Section No.	Nearest Town.	Boundaries etc.	Area.		
	1	2	3	4	5	A.	R.	P.
	<i>Dunkeld</i>	<i>Biddulph</i>	<i>lots 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 11 lots 5 & 7</i>	<i>West Haitland.</i>	<i>Public Road and Reserve Paterson's limit 611578</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>20 1/2</i>
	How Acquired, and Cost (if any).		Description of Existing Buildings (if any) at Date of Acquisition.		Reference to Correspondence, Technical Description, Plans, Gazette, etc.			
PARTICULARS OF ACQUISITION.	<i>23 Jul. 42. Lands Acquisition Act. cost £1259.</i>				<i>Commonwealth Gazette No 200/42 148/43.</i>			
	Nature of Work.			Cost.	Date of Completion.	Remarks.		
	10			11	12	13		
SUBSEQUENT EXPENDITURE BY COMMONWEALTH	<i>Raw asbestos cement and GE buildings.</i>							
	Corps Using (to be inserted in Pencil).			General Remarks. Local Memoranda.				
	14			15				
GENERAL INFORMATION	<i>Buildings being disposed of. Approx. 100 acres leased</i>							

RECORD OF DAY LABOUR, ETC., WORKS

A.A. Form P.18 A
Introduced December, 1940
(Reprinted April 1942)

Building or Work
Particulars of Work

Largo

Authority
D.F.O.
Amount
Completed Cost

Job No.
Corres. No. 212
Plans

Order No.	Contractor	Service	Voucher No.	Materials	Freight, Cartage, etc.	Wages, Fares, etc.	PROGRESSIVE TOTAL		
							£	s.	d.
		Acquisition A.H.G. No. 195 ⁴ /42	£ 1900. 0. 0.		PC 40/126				
		Completed cost.	£ 1521. 0. 2	28/12/43	W 306 D 121				



LARGS CAMP SEWING CIRCLE (Taken 1941)

Courtesy Mavis Newcombe - nee Mavis Wilcher

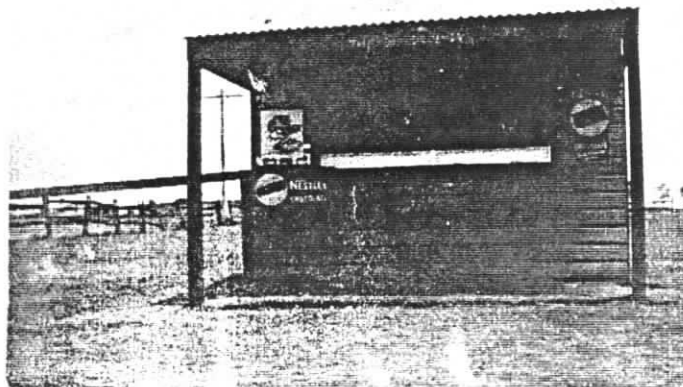
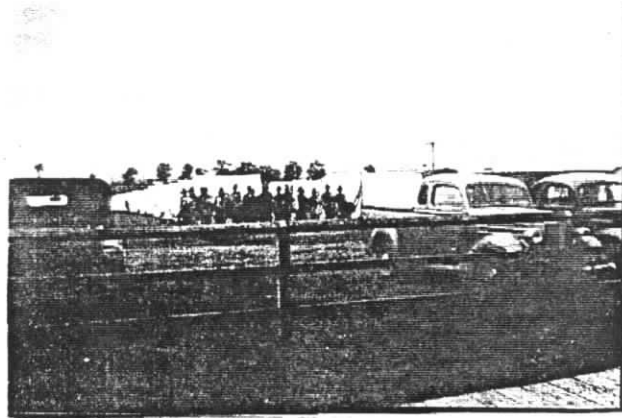
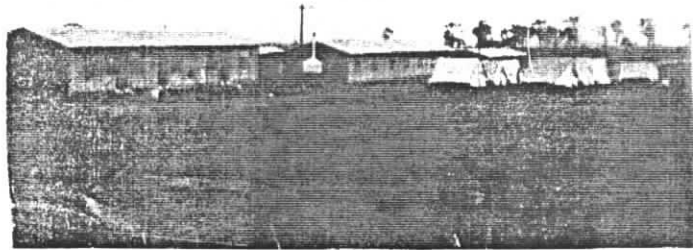
Left to Right

Jim Neimier / Dulcie Egan / Pauline McBriarty / Mrs Arthur Hipwell
 Alice Crow / Mrs G McInnes / Mrs Carter / Mrs C Wilcher / Mavis Wilcher
 / / / Eileen Garland / Irene King / Dulcie Pryke
 Seated;



Sgt K Hughes standing on Firing Range - Greta
Detachment from Largs Camp

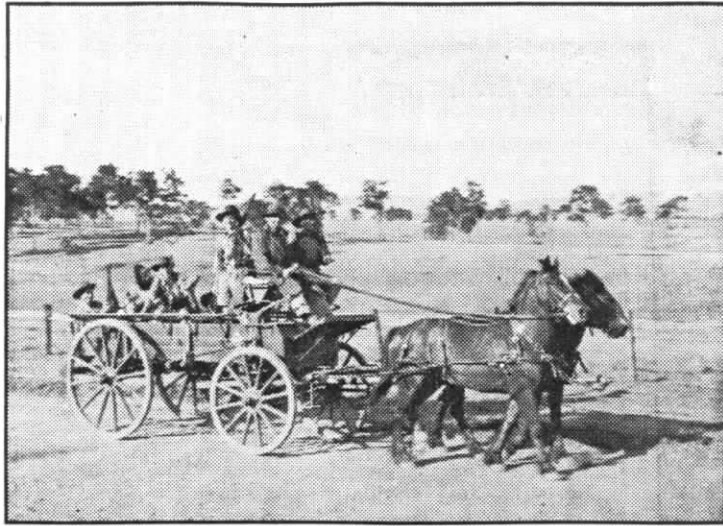
Photo courtesy Maj. (Ret) Kel Crowley



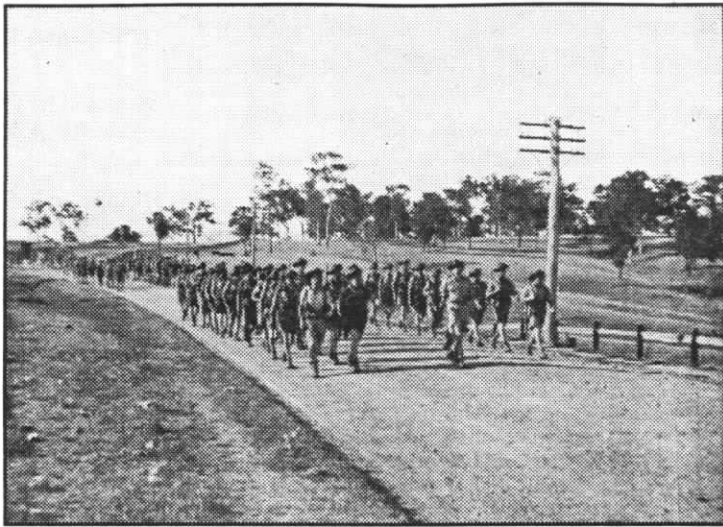
top and centre - views of the camp.

bottom - a view of the "Do Drop In".

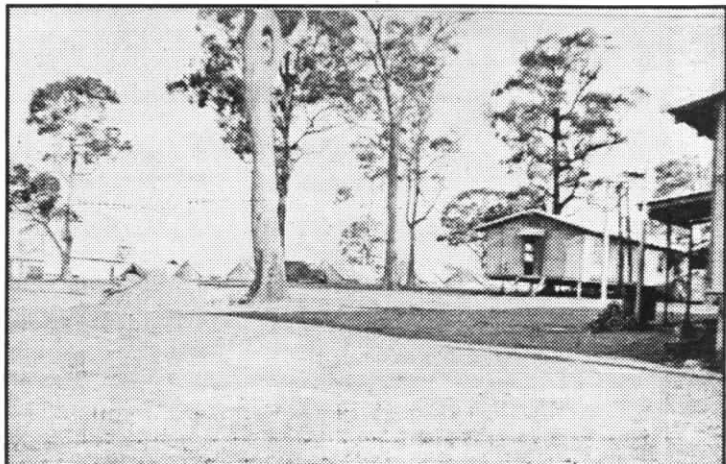
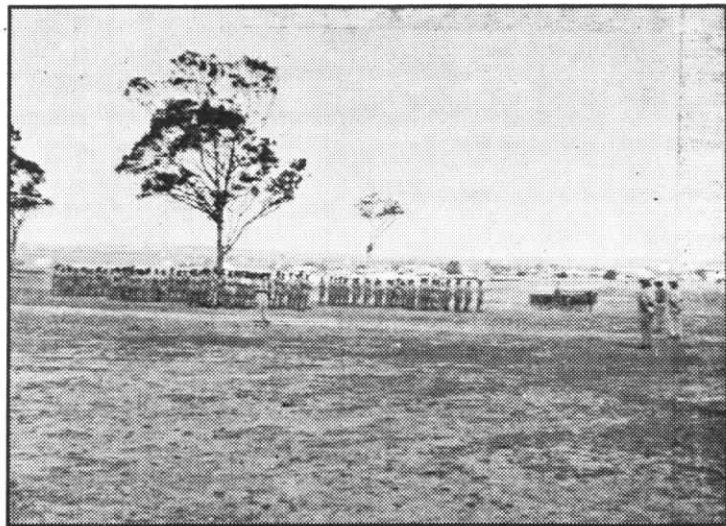
(photos courtesy Margaret Jackson - (nee Hawley)).



This page
courtesy
Maitland Mercury
October 4, 1993



■ Clockwise from top: 19th Army Field Coy's first vehicle; 19th Army Field Coy on route march in Largs area; 19th Army Field Coy on parade; buildings at Largs camp 1941; the old chimney, the last reminder of the camp. Photos courtesy of Maj. (Rt) Kel Crowley.



KEITH HAWLEY was a young schoolboy during the war and lived with his parents, his brother John, and sisters Margaret and Dorothy, next to the camp on the edge of the township of Largs.

The family had a large block of land and it was acquired by the Commonwealth for the Military Camp, along with several other neighboring blocks. The Hawley home and part of the block were separated and not taken over. Keith and his family became neighbors of the camp. A canteen was established on the front of the house property and Keith's sister Margaret (now Mrs Ed Jackson of Cessnock) and Dulcie Egan worked there. The canteen was called the "Do Drop In", and sold chocolates, sweets, drinks and ice-cream and other confectionery.

Keith remembers later in the war, Indians being in the camp, and the conspicuous turbans they wore.

He remembers an occasion when so much noise was coming from the Indian sector he thought there was a riot in progress.

Because of religion, or tradition, the Indians prepared their food in a particular manner. This preparation was carried out by themselves to ensure the correct method was used.

On this particular occasion someone noticed that a sheep wasn't killed by the customary method, that is with one fowl sweep of the sword, and the next sly attempt to finish the job, being witnessed, brought loud cries from the observers sounding their objection. Keith sought the security of his home rather than wait and see the outcome, but as things assumed a peaceful atmosphere the matter must have been satisfactorily resolved.

On another occasion Keith was to visit his aunt who lived around another side of the camp. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, and this was through the camp. Keith nevertheless took the "short cut".

It was night time and he couldn't see in the darkness when in front of him suddenly there was a blinding flash accompanied with a deafening explosion.

He didn't know the soldiers were having firing practice that night (with dummy ammunition), and Keith walked in front of some of their guns at the time they were fired. Keith "froze" on the spot, and the soldiers captured him. They had a conference and decided he would be less trouble to them if they released him and sent him home.

LEO McDONALD remembers fifty years ago the fears which accompanied a young boy growing up.

He had to ride a push bike from his father's farm at Woodville to home at Lorn, at night, via Paterson Road and past the Army Camp. Leo was aware of the Indians being there and his respect for them dictated that he should not allow himself to be caught by them, so he spent some most uncomfortable few minutes while riding past the camp.

Leo eluded them and, if to himself alone, he became a boy hero.

Mrs DOT HAMILTON of Beresfield, and her brother DOUG BUCKMAN of Weston, were school-children during the last war. They were members of a Salvation Army family, and they remember accompanying their mother, Mrs Eva Buckman, to Largs Camp with the Salvation Army Home League.

Home League members did sewing and mending for the soldiers, and were someone for them to talk to, especially if they were away from their homes and families.

DICK WRIGHT of East Maitland, passed through Largs Camp.

Dick joined up on 5th May 1940, and became a member of the 2nd Battalion at Rutherford. His family had been pastrycooks and caterers, in Morpeth, and he had naturally acquired the skills of that profession by the time he had become a soldier.

He was soon called to the office of Captain Butler and detailed to the kitchen. In those early days, the Army was making do with shearers cooks and Dick found that any intrusion by others was not welcome.

He remembers the shearers cooks cooking rice one day. The cook had half filled several dixies with rice and added water, then proceeded to cook it. The inevitable happened and soon there was more rice than they could handle. And the rice wasn't being washed before being cooked, as it had to be in those days. With some diplomatic advice Dick was able to win them over somewhat.

The Army started a catering school at Largs and Dick was the first to go there. He completed a two week school, topped his class and returned to Rutherford as a Sergeant. He was the first Sergeant cook in the Hunter region.

Dick's training included starting work between 3.00 and 3.30 a.m., having breakfast, then preparing breakfast for a battalion, consisting of 1180 Officers, N C Os and Men. This consisted of cooking 2,360 eggs plus bacon or sausages, for 7.00 a.m. breakfast, and eighty eight 3 gallon buckets of coffee. In those days coffee was made by placing coffee granules and milk in containers and bringing it to the boil then moving it to the back of the stove to simmer and kept warm until required for use.

On Friday mornings fish and chips were served for breakfast and six bags of potatoes were used to make chips for the hungry troops. When apple pie was made it was in sixty six dishes of forty pies each.

While Dick was at Largs there were four Battalions there.

Dr Sollings, of Maitland, was the Medical Officer then.

Dick returned to Rutherford, then went to Newcastle for four months and back to Rutherford. He then went to Wallgrove, in Emu Force - 53rd Battalion.

After two months there he moved to Ingleburn where he had four days leave which enabled him to have Christmas at home, returning on Boxing Day. On returning to camp his group was told to move, and on 28th December 1941, he sailed from No 11 Wharf, Woolloomooloo, in the "Aquatania", a four funnel 42,000 ton ship. It was still fitted with some of its peacetime luxury furnishings.

They left Sydney Harbour with the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth but on passing the Heads the two "Queens" turned right and sailed south, while the "Aquatania" turned left and sailed north.

While they didn't know it, they were sailing for Rabual which, after they had left had been taken by the Japanese, and they were diverted to Port Morseby. On 3rd January 1942, Dick landed at Port Morseby and while in New Guinea served on the Kokoda Trail. He subsequently served at Milne Bay, Madang, Bougainville and in 1945 was at Kapooka, near Wagga. After the atom bomb was dropped he was sent to Singapore and there helped to care for released Prisoners of War.

Dick returned to Sydney on 28th November 1945 and disembarked at No 11 Wharf Woolloomooloo, where he had embarked 4 years and 11 months previously. The day was so cold, the men who had spent 4 years in the heat of the tropics, were given three blankets each to keep them warm until they arrived at Sydney Showground where they were issued with new overcoats.

Dick was discharged on 26th May 1946, 6 years and 21 days after enlisting.

HOWARD HOLLWELL now lives at Woodville, and entered Largs Camp on 13th June 1941. He was camped near Dunmore Road for about six months, then moved to the corner of Paterson Road and Largs Avenue for two months. From there he moved to Portree, near Seaham Road, and practised building pontoon bridges. Then he moved to Ingleburn, Darwin, Wagga and Bougainville.

Howard's memories recall that his unit consisted of mainly Hunter area personnel. He also remembers Church Parades on Sunday mornings, in Largs. Men had to wear their "Sunday Best" uniforms.

Howard travels from Woodville to Largs regularly and never misses seeing the old chimney on Dunmore Road. Howard's knowledge of the camp indicates that it would have been part of the Orderly Room. It is the only building he can recall having a brick chimney. This is the first indication we have of the purpose of the last noticeable remains of the camp.

Howard became a Corporal, and at the end of his war service was discharged in December 1945.

WARREN BAMBACH, who now lives at Williamtown, was at Largs Camp and arrived there on 1st October 1941, and was a member of the 19th Field Engineers.

He spent six weeks there and this period was part of his "rookie" training, which was completed at Ingleburn.

Warren camped on the western side next to Paterson Road.

There weren't many permanent buildings as the men's living quarters were tents and the bulk of the camp was made up of these. The permanent buildings were mess huts, clothing stores and such like.

In those days guard duty included making fires to be ready when cooks started their early morning shifts to prepare breakfast for the troops. The guard had to wake the cooks in the early hours, and at 6.00 a.m. he had to sound a bell or gong to wake the troops. The gong was a metal disk which was struck with another metal piece.

On Sundays a must was Church Parade in the respective Churches in Largs. The only exemption was sickness or rostered duty.

Warren has affectionate memories of the "Do Drop In" canteen in front of the Hawley home next to the camp. He remembers the chocolates, drinks and ice-cream he could buy there.

The C.O. of Warren's unit was Captain Charlie Grahame.

After six weeks of learning about rifles, rifle drill and marching, Warren moved to Ingleburn where he joined the 23rd Field Engineers to continue his basic training. He left there on 24th December 1941 and arrived in Darwin in January 1942. He was there for the first air-raid on 19th February and stayed until August 1943.

He moved to Wagga where he spent three months, moved to New Guinea, the Solomons and Bougainville.

Warren returned to Australia in November 1944, and was discharged in 1944 to work on the family farm.

When **DOUG RANDALL** of East Maitland joined up he became a member of the 19th Field Company and went to Largs on 1st October 1941. (The same day as Warren Bambach).

Doug was camped on the Paterson Road side of the camp. He spent 6 to 8 weeks there then moved to Ingleburn to complete his "rookies" training. From there Doug went to Atherton, in North Queensland, and afterwards moved around several localities for short periods, then went to Darwin in 1943. In September 1944 Doug moved to Wagga.

The 19th Field Company was disbanded and became the 6th Mechanical Equipment Company. He then went to Bougainville and returned home in 1945.

Doug was discharged in December 1945.

BOB WHIPPS, now living at Tenambit, trained at Largs Camp. Earlier Bob had been a member of the 24th Light Horse at Rutherford, and joined the A I F in 1942.

With the mechanization of the Light Horse, Bob converted to the Australian General Transport. He moved to Largs in 1942, for 6 to 8 weeks, and while there completed a catering course. He worked in the Sergeants Mess.

Bob became a Sergeant at the end of the course.

He remembers artillery and Bren Gun carriers there, and these were over Lots 4 and 3, next to the cook houses and messes along Dunmore Road.

While at Largs, Bob lived in tents near the buildings along Dunmore Road.

On leaving Largs in 1942, Bob joined 165 Transport Company at Greta. From there his group moved by road to Gympie, then Townsville, from where they traveled by boat - those "Liberty" ships - to New Guinea, where he served at Buna, where he transferred to 133 Transport Company, then to Lae and Wau. He then went to Bougainville and Rabual.

Late in the war, when Bob was home on leave he remembers seeing Indians at Largs camp with their camels. He remembers they killed their meat by certain methods and cooked their own food.

Bob remembers their trips to Maitland in semi-trailer buses, and the "Do Drop In".

Bob returned from the war in 1946, and was discharged in April that year.

Soon after he married local girl Joan Hicks.

Joan's home was on Dunmore Road, opposite Largs Camp. She remembers Indians with their camels and recalls how the presence of the camels disturbed the horses on her father's farm.

BILL REYNOLDS of East Maitland was at Largs Camp at the time the Japanese entered the war. He was a member of the 1st Australian Field Regiment - Artillery.

The unit trained at Greta firstly, then moved to Largs where it continued training in manoeuvres.

At Largs they were camped near the chimney alongside Dunmore Road. They spent about three months at Largs and in early 1942 moved to the Nelson Bay area, then to Greta. From there they went to Pymble Golf Club, then Darwin. The unit was preparing to go on to the islands when the war finished.

Equipment used by the unit was 18 pounders, Howitzers and 25 pounders.

Bill remembers another unit camped near the waterway, at the town end of the camp, while he was there, and this group used two pounders.

KEL CROWLEY who lives at Barraba has very fond and vivid memories of his time with the 19th Field Company, which was formed at Largs.

His own words are, "It is with pleasure and a sense of pride that I pen a few lines regarding the history of the 19th Field Company and my association with a grand group of Australians. Also it is not without a degree of humility that I put pen to paper because I am only one of many who were privileged to serve with this unit".

Kel was born and bred in the country, at Barraba N S W, and received his primary education from Blackfriars Correspondence School. After this he attended a private school in Sydney, then attended Sydney University to study Civil Engineering.

The final year of his Civil Engineering course was compressed because of the war, and was completed by 13 young engineering graduates on 30th May 1941, and all were in military camps on 2nd June. Twelve, including Kel, went to the School of Military Engineering at Casula, near Liverpool, and one to the R A A F.

After three months Kel and a fellow graduate were posted to the 19th Field Company at Largs, with the rank of Lieutenant. Kel was just 21 years old, and his colleague just over 20.

Kel had seven years military training during his school life as he had joined the Cadet Corps at school when he was 14, and was a Lance Corporal in the Sydney University Regiment.

There was a difference between his previous "sheltered life" and the Australian scene upon which he was launched at Largs via the Army.

The 19th Field Company was being formed from a nucleus of Militia (part time Citizen Army), called up civilians and volunteers. Kel and his colleague were welcomed to the newly established Largs Camp in about October 1941 by Captain Charlie Grahame, Officer in Charge, 2 i.c. Lieut W Thompson, (the "Stork", because he was well over 6 feet tall), both W.W.1 veterans, Lieuts Leo Gear and Alan Taylor, and Captain Sollings the Medical Officer.

There were some temporary buildings in the camp to house the Company Headquarters, the Mess Room and kitchen, but generally living quarters, stores etc for all and sundry, were under canvass.

Also in the same camp was the 19th's "sister" Company, the 18th which was housed in a similar manner.

The troops forming the 19th were men around Kel's age, who had come from the outside real world and they knew so much - how to do things, how to make things, to fix things, to make things go, and the trickiest of all things, how to get on the right side of the Sgt Major without crawling!

During the unit's early days training was at a disadvantage. The equipment with which it was issued consisted of:- everyone had rifles, the Officers and Sgt Major sported a mixed bag of revolvers - mostly impressed from civilian sources, and were all different calibres-, some explosives, picks, shovels, axes, ropes, cables, blocks and tackle, saws, hammers and enough equipment to do minor blacksmithing. There was no welding gear, no mechanical equipment such as bulldozers, graders etc. The unit had one horse drawn wagon (see photo p 12), one utility, some motor bikes and some push bikes.

"Our main resource was our youthful enthusiasm and being fit, strong and healthy".

"During our early training period at Largs the unit carried out some construction work and one job was some fencing for the Army Remount Depot near Greta and in order to supervise the project I was allotted a mount from the horses kept there (most of which were not ridden all that often), and one morning my steed bucked in displeasure at having been put to work with me on his back. Fortunately my early rural background stayed with me for I remained in the saddle and due to my good fortune in staying put, my stocks rose with the men in my unit who witnessed the incident, for it showed I was obviously a country boy like themselves.

Towards the end of our training at Largs we did carry out some more construction work, even with our limited resources. We were engaged in building A.A. gun replacements around Newcastle steelworks, for this was the time of some shelling by off-shore enemy submarines of Sydney and Newcastle, and from memory the midget submarines in Sydney Harbour.

We camouflaged the real gun emplacements and built a number of dummy A.A. guns out of timber, which were sited on high ground to fool the enemy."

Kel remembers his first parade for his fledgling companion and himself. The troops stared at them and they stared at the troops, both wondering about the other and how they were going to make contact.

Officers were to give orders and tell the troops what to do, but initially they didn't know, or have any to give them! Long after, when the young Lieutenant and the troops had got to know and trust each other, during a relaxed period, the men told Kel that when the troops saw the two young Lieutenants walk onto the parade ground that day, "they had wondered at the time why the powers that be had sent two boy scouts to join the unit."

Another incident remembered fondly is that the Officers had been detailed to teach their troops map reading, map making etc. "So off I went with my platoon divided into 4 sections and I asked them to make a map of the roads, lanes, landmarks etc. adjacent to the camp. Off went my men in various directions pacing distances and taking compass bearings. Soon they had all disappeared and all I had to do was to view the countryside and make sure that I was at the R.V. at the appointed time a couple of hours away. In due course my men appeared and presented me with very good sketches and details of the local roads and landmarks.

It was not until a year or so later that I fully absorbed my lesson on that day. It was after I got to know the men in our unit very well, when we were together one time that they told me about the mapping exercise.

They said as I was out of sight they assembled at the nearest pub and sat in comfort over a few beers, and drew up their maps from memory -- many of the men in this unit were locals and knew every road, lane and landmark since they were children!

We all had a good laugh about the whole story".

The unit was moved to Ingleburn, North Queensland, Darwin, Western Australia and the Pacific Islands.

In spite of a poor start, when it was formed at Largs, the 19th Field Company R.A.E. "did in fact carry out many major and important works during the four years we were together. We built roads, bridges, wharves (including the major repair to the wharf in Darwin Harbour badly damaged during the first raid by the Japanese in 1942) temporary air-strips, built camps for the 6th Division troops in North Queensland which included an efficient water supply, cooking, washing and toilet facilities, a complete set (four in all) of L.O.R.A.N. (long range navigation sort of super radar) stations on shore and off shore in N.T. and W.A.

We didn't do all this because we could (or were forced to) march around the parade

ground in step, but we were able to carry out the many complex engineering tasks we were given because we were a team of very skilled, competent and professional tradesmen and I venture to suggest that we became a team based largely on the comradeship and good fellowship which developed throughout the unit with very few exceptions.

The unit had its share of tragedies, dangers and stress. Two men were seriously injured during training whilst they were at Largs Camp and in the Maitland area, many accidents with near misses of serious injury involving trucks during roadmaking in N. Queensland, (this largely brought about by having to use vehicles from U.S.A., which were left hand drive, and fitted with dual rear wheels which protruded beyond the body width of the trucks, and having to drive on the left side of the roads, and narrow roads at that, the drivers had difficulty in judging their clearances with respect to on-coming vehicles).

One Sapper was killed during bridge building in N.T., one was taken by a crocodile and frequently men were sprayed with explosives during visits from the Japanese bombers."

Kel and two other men were seriously injured in an accidental explosion during construction of one of the L.O.R.A.N. stations on an island off the Kimberly coast, and the unit suffered several casualties when on service in the islands north of Australia.

Of the social side of his military career Kel says, "Fortunately I began to get on good terms with the men and get to know some very well. One real 'ice-breaker' was the social life outside the camp, the main social centre was the West Maitland Town Hall where the ladies of the C.W.A. organised and held dances on a regular basis for the benefit of the many military units all around the area".

"I had done a bit of boxing at school and university and I remember when we were near Raymond Terrace, a boxing match was staged and I was one of the 19th's team to take on the locals. I recall also, (even though I was floored by Farmer Brown), that that was another grand social occasion and certainly an occasion which strengthened my comradeship with the men in the unit.

"Over the years we were together, first of all at Largs and then in many other camps and billets, it was not all work and no play for the boys of the 19th!

We certainly lived it up socially when and where-ever we could. I mentioned the C.W.A. dances at West Maitland, there were also many other parties and get-togethers. We always managed time for relaxation and fun and games, in particular football, both Rugby Union and Soccer and in North Queensland and the Northern Territory where we were later located the 19th had one of the strongest Rugby Union teams, and I recall in the N.T. our divisional Soccer team included 8 or 9 men of the 19th! Also in tennis we had a very strong team. Our camp in N.T. was right alongside the main road leading to Darwin, (our camp site was called the '39 mile' as it was 39 miles south of Darwin), and soon after we had settled in there was a lot of work being carried out improving this main thoroughfare by the Civil Construction Corps and I managed one day to get one of the grader drivers to level out a bit of ground for a tennis court, in exchange for a bottle of gin. This play ground became a Godsend for the tennis enthusiasts (including yours truly)."

"I remember two incidents which might have been plucked out of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta.

The unit was at Ingleburn for a time, and for a few weeks I and my platoon were sent to Burnside Homes near Parramatta, which had been taken over by the Army and which was about to move presumably, and one job I and my platoon were directed to carry out was to fill in the slit trenches which had been dug in the lawns around the many buildings.

One morning I received instructions to report to General - - - - -, the most senior commander in that part of the world, whose H.Q. was in a building in the grounds of Kings School. I was petrified as I spruced myself up wondering what dreadful crime I had unwittingly committed. I reported to the General's office at 9 a.m. sharp as directed and was slightly relieved to find a former school friend was his aide-de-camp. My old school friend appeared cool and collected and at that I surmised that I was not to be arrested and shot! I fronted up to the General, clicking heels and saluting as best I knew how. He said, "Oh thank you for coming to see me Lieutenant, I wanted to ask you to make sure that no pebbles or small stones remain on the lawns after all the slit trenches have been filled in. It is very bad for the lawn mowers you know" !!!

"The other incident was executed brilliantly one morning on a parade ground at Ingleburn camp. One of our Officers had a penchant for drilling his troops - well on

this particular occasion he was going to drill his motor vehicles! By this time the unit had progressed from one horse drawn wagon and a few bikes to some very recently issued trucks and utilities of various shapes and sizes, (some 15 or 20), and these were going to be put through their paces and knocked into shape, the latter he virtually did in reverse as you will see.

Contemplate the following scene - a large parade ground about the size or rather larger than, a big sports ground, fully sealed, where all the vehicles in the unit had been lined up side by side, on one side of the parade ground some 8 to 10 feet apart.

Our Officer took up a position in about the middle of this large parade ground. Instructions given to the drivers of the vehicles were: on the given signal, all were to advance towards the Officer, in line abreast, keeping strict dressing by the centre, just like a guards parade ground except all were mounted in vehicles !

Following the given signal the line of vehicles moved slowly forward with the Officer waving and shouting encouragement as he walked backwards. Well, the inevitable happened as the line of vehicles moved forward with each driver intent on watching the Officer in his antics and seeing him shouting instructions, (the latter of course, they couldn't hear due to their distance from the source and the roar of the motors in low gear), each driver unconsciously and automatically drifted towards the centre. Bit by bit the 8 to 10 feet gaps got smaller and smaller until finally the whole line of vehicles gently collided with a great squeaking and grinding of metal !

The actions and words emanating from the 'Fearless Leader' were something to behold and many watchers who saw all this happening (including some N.Z. infantry camped with us), were amazed beyond measure and soon the air rang with cheers and derisive laughter which simply drove the Officer into an ecstasy of frantic commands as the mechanical parade ground to a 'No Go' situation. To my knowledge this exercise has never been repeated."

Kel Crowley is full of pride of his old Army unit, and respect for the men he served with. He concludes his summary - "I learnt an enormous amount from the men in my unit, I was honoured by their friendship and the fact to a man they did all, and more, that I asked of them. My close association with many of the men of the 19th Field Company remains with me as one of the most significant experiences of my life."

A.K.Crowley, B.E., Maj. (Ret)
14th Feb 1993

Author's note; in a personal letter to me Kel wrote from Barraba, "I have a particular interest in the Maitland District as my Mother and uncles and aunts were born in East Maitland where my maternal grand parents, Cunninghams, settled in the late 19th century" "- - - - - During the brief time I was in the Maitland area in 1941, I made many good friends with the Maitland people and will always carry a soft spot for the citizens of West Maitland who looked after the droves of servicemen who descended on them during the war years.

* * *

When another edition of the history of Largs Military Camp was to be made, to mark the unveiling of the Military Camp Memorial and Plaque, on 4th November 1995, a request was made by Mr Eric Bushell, President of East Maitland R S L, for any information which could be given by ex-servicemen who had any association with the camp. Seeing this as an opportunity to record further history of his unit, the 19th Field Coy R A E, Kel Crowley submitted this further record, which is interesting and valuable to members of the unit, and to the history of Largs also.

"The initial 'memories' were generally about the lighter side of things, the shaking down to-together of a group of some 180 strangers, the 'getting to know you' (with apologies to Anna and the King of Siam), about the good times we shared and our youthful social activities and sporting abilities.

These additional notes will show the professional abilities we, as an Army engineering Company possessed and the results of there practical application, and the technical skills we collectively encompassed. The expertise and confidence in our work which developed and which I am now quite sure, surprised everyone including ourselves and the many individuals who made up this very competent bunch of skilled tradesmen, clerks, accountants and others operating as an Army construction unit.

As we settled down as a team and proceeded beyond the mastery (more or less) of the parade ground skills common to any and all infantry and military personnel in general, we began to find just what our fellow Sappers were good at and in many cases VERY good at.

While it would be too ponderous to list every skill, I'll mention just a few, and much of this list surprised everyone including the individuals involved.

Cooks: We were very well served in this regard and no one, as far as I know, ever went hungry. One special example of this important function was the cook with my unit (about 80 men) on an isolated and desolate island, who managed to produce fresh bread every morning ! His baker's oven was made from a 44 gallon oil drum, a few rocks and a few shovel-fulls of sand ! His product was so good that a small U S A unit attached to us also got fresh baked loaves. That is all they wanted from us, they had their own rations which may have been superior to ours but our fresh bread was eagerly sought after.

Administration and Quarter Master: We were fortunate to have as Orderly Room Sergeant and Quarter Master Sergeant, two men of exceptional ability and both with fantastic memories. The O R Sergeant had memorised the name and regimental number of everyone in the Company (180 or so men). In addition, in most cases he could quote from memory their home address and in some cases their next-of-kin. The Q M Sergeant knew from memory the name of everyone, and his rifle number. In some cases he could remember also his bayonet number and often surprised our Sappers when they came to hand in their gear by being told 'That's not your rifle etc.' I think our Q M could write down our daily or weekly ration entitlements to the nearest pound, or number off, to obtain them from Battalion H Q as and when required. These two gentlemen were, incidentally, the very devil to come up against in a game of Contact Bridge.

Plant Operators: Our collective skill with bull-dozer, scraper and grader, produced first class roads wherever we went.

Carpenters: Much of our building work (Company H Q, Stores, Workshops etc.) of necessity had to be carried out with round timber and bush poles (except of course when we happened to be near a U S A Stores area where there was always ample stocks of No 1 clear oregon, the latter we stole unashamedly on two counts - we were fighting the same war, and where direct action was called for and was necessary, we were also unashamedly pretty good thieves) !!! However, where there were no rich and well heeled allies or unsuspecting enemy handy, our carpenter Sappers excelled in building with round timber. Incidentally these same Sappers could also handle intricate formwork for concrete jobs and carry out joinery and cabinet making. (I still have a beautifully made wooden case, with dove-tailed joints - the lot, made to carry my several instruments and special gear, made by one of our carpenter Sappers).

Axemen: We had several skilled axemen, perhaps not surprising as some of our fellows were from the big timber country on the coast of N S W. One young man displayed exceptional skill with the broad-axe and when he had finished shaping a bridge girder, created from a tree trunk or log, one would have thought it had been cut by machine. His work was frequently admired by older and more experienced axe men. This young man (the youngest in the unit at 18 years), told us that he had been helping his Dad cut railway sleepers since he was 9 years old ! He could neither read nor write but he was a wizard with the axe and broad-axe. (The Army did something very good for him. By the time the war was over and he was de-mobbed and left the unit, he was fully literate due to in-service teaching which was always available and supplied by the Australian Army Education Unit).

Plumbers: Several of the plumbers in our unit already had their own businesses before being called into the Army and hence had a fair bit of experience shared between them. No plumbing project ever daunted them, e.g. the water supply for the camp for the 6th Division which our unit was engaged in building on the Atherton Tableland in Northern Queensland. I for one was impressed by the combined ability displayed. To me they all seemed to do the job so easily, willingly, with enthusiasm and without much supervision.

Motor Mechanics: There were several on the strength of an engineering company such as ours as we frequently had a large number of machines, trucks, compressors etc. necessary in carrying out our work. One 'genius' I'll always remember. A big man, easy going and certainly not the Coldstream Guards type. He definitely had two left feet but he had magic in his head and hands. Point him at a sickening motor or faltering engine and just by listening to it he would know exactly what was wrong with it and he would proceed to fix it ! He was worth his weight in gold, and remember he was a big fellow, so you will realise his worth to us and the unit in general. (After the war he had a very big

organisation in Muswellbrook and a major contract with the D M R to maintain all the Department's earthmoving machines and road building equipment in the area).

Welders: Always needed in the 'rough and tumble' on civil engineering construction projects, and again we were well served by our team and I recall one welder in particular who could, and did, handle everything. I remember him so well because he was with me on a very remote area surrounded with many difficulties. We were on a small island and really on our own, carrying out a big job using heavy machines. He managed to repair the cast steel main frame of a bulldozer and keep it 'alive'. Where we were, there was little chance of obtaining replacements. He was another real wizard we were so fortunate to have in our unit - successfully welding cast steel is certainly no job for beginners.

Bridging: Our 2 I.C. was a Bridge Engineer with the N S W Department of Main Roads and he was called upon to design several bridges which he did and our team of skilled technical fellows built them. A five span timber bridge was built over a tidal river not far from Darwin on the road we built out to the coastal gun battery at West Head. Built in 1944, this bridge was still in use until 1980 when this road was relocated ! The civil authorities had to demolish it, it certainly hadn't fallen down.

Another major bridging project we successfully carried out was the emergency repair to the main shipping wharf at Darwin which had been extensively damaged by Japanese bombing. A big gap had been left requiring bridging and a large sunken ship was lying on its side near the damaged area. To make the repair we supported part of our emergency bridge structure on a column built up from the side of the sunken ship, the old 'Neptune'. We displayed initiative and resource in our work in addition to getting things done.

Stonemason: Some of the projects we had to tackle required a stonemason, and here we were also 'covered'. Not only did we have one, but ours was one of considerable skill. Just to give you an idea as to how well he could perform, soon after the War he was engaged by the D M R to tackle an extremely prestigious project - miles and miles of stone-masonry finished cuttings and embankments brought about by the widening of Mona Vale Road, from Ryde to Mona Vale Beach, through 'upper class' Suburbia - Gordon, St Ives, Terry Hills, Mona Vale etc. Our stonemason's contract lasted for years and the results of his excellent work can be seen to this day. A really class job !

An extended list of trades in the 19th Field Coy includes: powder monkeys, fencers, concreters, accountants, pay-masters, drivers, motor cyclists, sail makers, seamen, scallywags and saints. In this quite random collection of part-time soldiers there was an amazing collection of skills and personalities. There did not seem to be any project the unit could not successfully tackle or anything that could not be fixed - anything from the refrigerator at Div H Q to the Company's radio and/or telephone, and even our own tennis court which we had made !

(I experienced several occasions where one of our number was 'picked' by an outsider and a 'donny-brook' resulted, with our people immediately 'closing ranks' and coming to the aid of our man).

I hasten to say we were not a bunch of angels by any means, some of us were pretty tough guys. Some got into trouble within the Army itself and got mixed up in civil strife, but not to an alarming degree. Some of us went AWOL for one reason or another, like any normal soldier. We experienced psychological problems on occasions, when the whole thing just got too much for an individual man, but on the whole we were (and still are) a good bunch of fellows.

Anyway, I like them and am very proud of them.

Now, long after the War, the members of the unit still meet for a re-union once a year. A record is kept of who has passed away and we have an organisation which still 'looks after our own'.

Many of these 'old soldiers' made a success of their lives in 'civvy street' after the War - bankers, builders, shop-keepers, mechanical and plumbing businesses, the rural industry, tailors, bakers even civil engineers ! Yours truly was a member of the engineering staff during the entire period of the construction of Warragamba Dam, the largest concrete dam in Australia, and completed in 1960. The 19th Fld Coy's star stonemason assembled a memorial monument at the dam which still stands today, and carries brass plates bearing the names of all V I Ps associated with the gigantic project - everyone from N S W, Premier of the day, Engineer-in-Chief down to yours truly who scratched his name on the back of one of the brass plates before it was fixed in position by 'my stone mason'

One of our members became Master of his Masonic Lodge at Murrurundi, a grand achievement for him and we are very proud of his success for he is one of us.

In July 1944, following an accident on a project during the War, I finished up in hospital for some 12 months and thus became a bit out of touch with things.

Following the unit's work in North Australia later in 1944, the 19th Fld Coy returned south for re-organisation and some of the original Company was sent to the islands up north where they carried out further works.

A.K.Crowley, B.E., Maj. (Ret)

15th July 1995

ANOTHER unit stationed at Largs was what was originally the 16th Light Horse. This was made up of Lower Hunter personnel. It became the 16th Motor Regiment and while at Largs was situated alongside Dunmore Road. It was there for about three months in 1941.

The unit was part of the Militia, but later became part of the A I F.

Its travels, after it left Maitland, took it to Wyong, Belmont - and Gympie and Atherton Tablelands in Queensland, and New Guinea to Bootless Bay, Johns Knoll and the Finistere Ranges.

The Umi River is remembered as it became a familiar feature due to it having been crossed several times while the unit was in the area.

IVAN ADAM of East Maitland joined the 16th Light Horse in 1937.

During 1938 and 1939 he spent three month periods in camp at Armidale. We talked about the cold weather there, and the men wore overcoats all the time because of the cold. Ivan talked about the uncomfortable train journeys to Armidale, which were a far cry from to-day's comfortable facilities.

When he made the journey by lorry it was on mainly gravel roads, not tarred as they are to-day.

Ivan entered Largs Camp in 1941, and was with Doug McKenzie. His unit was converted to a machine gun unit, and some of their equipment was water-cooled Vickers machine guns. (Later models were not water cooled). The water cooled models had their barrels set in a cylinder of water, and a container beside the machine gun supplied the cooling water.

While there they practised rifle shooting at a miniature range where the drill hall used to be, on the corner of Newcastle Road and Grant Street, East Maitland. They practised with "pea rifles", .22 calibre.

The East Maitland Bowling Club was not as big then as it is now, and the green alongside Grant Street wasn't there then.

The unit also practised with machine guns on a range at the intersection of Raymond Terrace Road and Metford Road, opposite the Catholic cemetery, and where the model aircraft field was until recently. The Maitland War Cemetery is on this site, alongside the Raymond Terrace Road.

Ivan remembers Indians being at Largs and that they would not eat meat prepared by our methods and prepared their own by their own methods.

After a short stay at Largs, Ivan's group moved to Maitland Showground. Ivan was there about six hours when he was called out and instructed he had to return to his previous employment at B.H.P. (This was a protected industry.)

The Military required all his gear, including clothing, and he was left with only his underwear, so he had to borrow clothes to go home in!

Ivan then joined the V.D.C. (Volunteer Defense Corps), which was a part time local group trained in local defense in case local emergencies occurred. This was as close as Ivan could get to where he wanted to go.

KEITH HUGHES of North Lambton is another ex member of the 19th Field Company Engineers and is now the secretary of that unit's Association whose members meet annually and are kept in touch with news of fellow members and have maintained the bond which was formed fifty years ago when they started their Army career at Greta and Largs.

His recollections are; that the 19th Field Coy RAE was formed at Largs with its sister company the 18th. The members came from an age call up in 1940 and encamped at Greta and a new intake, and the 18th and 19th were formed in 1941.

The 19th received its Basic Training at Largs. From Largs they built two gun emplacements, one at Mayfield near where the Turle Street Bridge now stands and the other at a site near the Wave Trap on Newcastle Harbour at Stockton. They also built a set of dummy guns at Mayfield West adjacent to where James' sawmill used to be.

The unit consisted of Hunter Valley men from Newcastle, Maitland, Cessnock and the coalfields and the Upper Hunter and from as far as Armidale and Glen Innes. Some came from Sydney and suburbs. Included were tradesmen carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, drivers and mechanics.

Keith started in the Army in 1936 stationed at Kurri with C Coy 2 Btn Inf under Capt Dick Post. He was taking part in an Annual Camp at Rutherford when war broke out and remained in camp until the latter part of 1940 then in early 1941 was transferred to Largs and became a member of the 19th Field Coy RAE.

There were two camps at Largs. One where the retirement village is being built and the other at the junction of Dunmore and Woodville (Paterson) Roads.

[These two camps are probably what are referred to as Top Largs and Bottom Largs, by others].

Later in 1941 they moved to Portree on the Clarence Town Road where they trained in Pontoon Bridge building on the river.

The unit left the area late in 1941 and remained together until early 1945 when it was broken up and formed into 8 MEC which went to Bouganville and were there when the war ended.

ROSS COUNSELL of Bundanoon, was a member of the 2nd Armoured Regiment, later to become the 2nd Australian Tank Battalion. His unit came from Orange Showground to Maitland Showground and after a short stay there moved to Largs about June 1942.

There they received considerable Bren Gun instruction and other Basic Training, and a lot of this was carried out in the Paterson area.

The Commanding Officer at the time was Lt Col Darcy Francis, an English permanent army soldier.

One of Ross's memories is of visiting a local sawmill to procure enough timber to build their own "Q" Store as things were still a little primitive in the camp.

Ross's unit moved from Largs to Greta and then onto Singleton, where it received tanks and received tank training.

Ross often passes the old camp site when he visits his daughter who lives at Gresford.

JOHN SAVILLE - NX132642 - now lives in Hawthorn, Victoria. John was a member of the 2nd Armoured Regiment, and recalls that the unit was stationed at West Maitland Showground and moved to "Top" Camp Largs late in May 1942. After a brief spell there it moved to "Bottom" Camp Largs and then moved to Greta, (Silver City), in June/July 1942 and eventually on to Singleton.

John retains fond memories of the Maitland-Largs-Greta areas and recently re-visited Maitland's main street and surrounding areas.

The Largs Hotel is remembered, it being walking distance from "Bottom" Camp.

John ends his letter to us with "When the 2nd moved to Greta some damage was done to Main Street, West Maitland, by our Matilda Tanks. Hope all forgiven".

MERV OGRAM of Stockton, tells us that he thinks the Largs Camp was formed in 1939-40 for the purpose of compulsory training, firstly for the 21 year old age group, and then for the 19-27 age group.

Merv was in the 1st Field Artillery with Colonel Harnett in charge and Major Hector Farquahson as 2 I/C.

The 1st Field Artillery consisted of men from Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the Hunter Valley as far as Singleton.

Route marches were carried out along the main road to the Dunmore Bridge, back towards East Maitland, the back road to Hinton and Morpeth, and on the main road from Lorn to Paterson. Field practise was held in the Paterson and Gresford areas.

After their first three months at Largs their next camp was at Greta because it

had a greater area, and they were in "Chocolate City" on the back road to Cessnock.

After his second camp Merv was transferred to Searchlights and served in Newcastle before the formation of the 70th Australian Searchlight Battery which in a short time was posted to Darwin for the Jap bombing.

The 1st Field Artillery was also sent to Darwin.

After route marches the soldiers bathed their feet in a solution of Condys Crystals to relieve their feet burns from the big boots they wore.

Another memory is that at both Largs and Greta the soldiers were allowed to bring private cars into camp, and the officers made a special car park well away from the army trucks. But this was to no avail because the trucks were still "milked".

ERIC CLEMENTS of Paterson, (NX132342), joined the Army in February 1942. He reported to the West Maitland Drill Hall and was sent to Largs where he stayed for some months. He was a member of the 1st Field Regiment.

While at Largs training was given with 25 pounder guns and troops were taken to locations at Webbers Creek, three miles west of Paterson, where target practise was carried out.

Eric remembers only a few buildings at Largs, such as kitchens, mess hall and recreation buildings, and the soldiers slept in tents.

After a few months at Largs, Eric's group was marched to Greta, for a short time, then returned to Largs for more training before being sent to Sydney, from where they eventually went to Darwin.

RAY KNIGHT of Tamworth was a member of the 1st Field Company RAE for a number of months in 1942 before being involved in a bad accident which placed him in hospital until his discharge in September 1943. Ray's unit passed out about September 1942 and went on to Darwin.

Ray is President of Tamworth TPI Social and Welfare Club - attached to Newcastle TPI.



A young Bob Thompson - now of Belmont - on the right - with a fellow soldier in the uniform of the times, 15th June 1941.

The following history of the 18th Field Co Royal Australian Engineers, A I F, has been compiled by NX153441 Sgt **FRANK WARNOCK** and NX116280 Cpl **CLARRIE CAVANAGH**.

Frank Warnock and Clarrie Cavanagh both live at Hawks Nest, N S W.

Both men began their Army career on 5th June 1941 in the 18th Field Coy and remained in the unit until discharged in December 1945.

The 18th Field Coy still participates in the ANZAC Day marches, in Sydney, behind its own unit banner.

18th Aust. Fld.
Co. AIF
Royal
Australian
Engineers
South West
Pacific Area
1939-1945
WE MAKE WE BREAK

The 18th Field Coy - Royal Australian Engineers A I F

"By 6 a.m. on the 5th June, 1941, about 250 "rookies" had reported, with a cut lunch, to the Australian Army authorities at Waverley Oval, Sydney. We were to constitute the main body of the 18th Army Field Coy., Royal Australian Engineers. We would meet up with another 50 or so, from other parts of Sydney, at the Largs Army Camp, outside Maitland. It was a cold, wintry morning and the moon and stars were giving way to sunrise. We went through some formalities, received some instruction, then were ushered onto the old "toastrack" trams on Bondi Road and tossed off at Central Railway Station. Two Warrant Officers Class 1 of the Permanent Army staff, Cleary and Thompson, escorted us. They remained with the unit during our 3 months stay at Largs and instructed us on Infantry features. They proved to be highly efficient, tough but fair, professional soldiers.

We entrained at Central and alighted at East Maitland. From there we marched as best we could - we were untrained - through Morpeth and into camp at Largs. There we were met by two Sergeants of World War I vintage. They would be our closest personal link with the "Authorities" till we broke camp. They had a different type of discipline to Thompson and Cleary, but they were still tough and we respected them.

As we got to know the personal side of their make-up, they loved to recount their experiences in the Middle East, Gallipoli and France. We joined in singing the bawdy songs they learnt in World War I, most of which could not be put to paper in this document. Oh yes, their names - Harry Elliot and Ossie Grahame. They hovered over us as we filled large hessian bags with straw (palliassees), which we deposited 8 to 9 to a canvas tent - about 12 feet square - on wooden duckboards.

Living conditions would be cramped, so we were advised that flatulence should be restricted. We were issued with dixies, a pannikin, knife, fork, spoon, 3 blankets, one kerosene wick lamp per tent, army hat, woolen underwear, and towel.

The balance of our gear came about 2 weeks later - boots, socks, Army uniform, great coat, belt and "giggle suit" (heavy cotton drill work uniform).

We had a bugler who blasted us out of bed at Reveille, 6 a.m., sounded the Last Post each night, called us onto parades, assisted of course by the stentorian blasts from the Sergeants. Most days were bitterly cold, with westerly winds whistling up the hill to our camp. Boy did we welcome that pannikin of hot coffee and biscuits each morning before roll call.

The food was basic, (no McDonalds in those days), and sustaining. Hard work made us ravenous. The morsels clung to our bellies. They were prepared by highly qualified "chefs" in a great array of dishes. Ho, Ho, Ho !

Fortunately the camp was sewerred and a special independent hygiene squad ensured the utmost cleanliness. Beer bottles of disinfectant were available to apply to our hands. Hence no outbreak of dysentery or diarrhoea.

We divided into 3 Platoons of about 80 Sappers, under the control of the 3 Sergeants, with W O 1s Cleary and Thompson never too far away. Our senior Officers comprised Major Brown, Captain Graham, 3 Lieutenants, Sgt Major Seagraves, Orderly Room and Quartermaster Sergeants. As vacancies existed in the non-commissioned ranks, alert eyes were kept on those Sappers who displayed initiative and keenness. A number were selected for accelerated and intensive training in both Infantry and Field Engineering work and for opportunities to display their leadership qualities. From this group most vacancies were filled by the end of camp.

Back to training. We were given a couple of days to settle in and were then launched initially, into the "Bull Ring" for intensive Infantry training. Our ears rang with the blasts from our instructors. "We will do it until we get it right Sappers", rang out for weeks.

"Left, right, left, right", went their bleat.

We stood to attention, rigid, chest out, stomach in, eyes looking directly ahead.

We responded to blasts of "Attention, stand at ease, right turn, left turn, about turn, quick march, - then, left turn, right turn, about turn, right wheel, left wheel, halt (very seldom)".

We learnt to move in formation and in every bloody direction.

Competition between Platoons became fierce.

To add to our woes and compound our "bullring" problems, we were issued with rifle and bayonet. The Sergeant gave us instruction and the name of every part of this "best friend". We were warned of the consequences of being unable to identify any part and its function. To point it at anyone, even if unloaded, was a punishable crime. To drop it, to fail to keep it oiled and clean was almost as bad. By the end of camp the rifle seemed to become another limb to our body.

Gradually, as our parade ground abilities and confidence grew, we went on to other features of Infantry work and added Field Engineering features - in essence they included bayonet training (boy did we make a mess of those bags of straw hung on a frame, and scream as the bayonet struck home): erection of barbed wire and concertina entanglements; tough physical training; athletics; route marches; night marches; battle formations and tactics; map reading by day, aided by compass and stars at night; the Lewis gun; grenades; shooting on the rifle range, ceremonial parades and drill. By mid-camp our confidence and abilities had increased and we noted a gentler tone in the instructors' voices - just a little though. There was also a little less profanity when we made some slight errors. "The bastards can be human", we would whisper among ourselves.

The Field Engineering was brought in gradually. We started with the pick and shovel. By commands, for the pick, we had to respond to - "Raise, strike, break, rake". Then we proceeded on to actually digging trenches and field obstacles; block and tackle; field machines - erection of timber spars; sheer legs; tripods; knots; lashings and splicing,

done by day and night; ground anchorages; spear points and water reticulation; every facet of pontoon bridging, including rowing, launching and recovery, assembling and dismantling; explosives and demolition work.

Some evening leave was granted, mainly to visit Maitland and Newcastle. Train drivers often allowed us to ride on the tenders to Newcastle free of charge. Of course we had a beer or two on those occasions. Our Corporals enjoyed a special privilege by some Royal Decree going back a long way - they could attend the Sergeants' Mess, much to the chagrin of the other ranks, as no beer consumption was permitted below Corporal rank.

On two occasions week-end leave was granted to allow us to go home to our parents and girl friends - not many 20 year olds were married at that stage.

Come September 1941, and our camp was at an end. We were told however that we could be back in some camp again before long. We were all aware that Nippon was rearing his ugly head and rattling his sabre, or rather his Samurai sword. Our fears were soon confirmed - America copped Pearl Harbour on 2nd December 1941.

We were to be in it too. Two weeks after vacating Largs we were recalled, to Narellan. There we met up with the 19th Field Company, who had been with us at Largs.

Within a few days a number of our Sergeants were despatched to the West - to Parkes, Trundle, Tottenham, Tullamore, Dubbo, Wellington, to drag in the "country bumpkins" who were to establish the 3rd and 4th Army Troop Companies. Their ages ranged from 20 to 35 years. They assembled on the various railway stations, along with their mothers, wives, younger brothers, sisters, girl friends - in fact the whole bloody town seemed to be there. As we pushed them onto the troop train there was dreadful lament - not from the "Rookies" though. They proved to uphold the great traditions of the rural area - they were tough. Some of our Sergeants were transferred to their units and assisted in their training. We were determined to be as tough as the old World War I Sergeants. A few elected to stay on; and were promoted to Sgt Major.

At Narellan, parade ground work was limited - we were qualified "Infantrymen" now. But our route marches, and cross country with compass and map, by day and night were long and arduous. We were out for days at a time, sleeping on the ground, under the stars. Fortunately our mobile kitchens found us at meal times - innovation came at a later time.

We concentrated mainly on Field Engineering, to hone our skills and to increase our confidence. Our overall fitness and endurance became top class.

By now Nippon was doing a lot of damage - we were on the defensive; and we knew we had an effective role to play. So we upped camp and turned up at Beresfield, among the Hexham Greys and black snakes. Our camp was established under the trees in camouflaged tents - about a mile north of the railway station. The mossies were so bad we resorted to burning cow pats; and managed to burn down two tents.

Our role was to maintain a pontoon bridge across the Hunter River at a site about 2 miles west of the present concrete bridge at Millers Forest. The bridge was designed to facilitate the movement of troops to the Port Stephens area, to prevent a possible landing by the Japanese, who it was felt would move south and put the BHP out of action. The bridge was not a permanent fixture - we had to be absolutely flexible and move it within an hour, should a Japanese raid be elsewhere. So each few days we would pull up the anchors holding it in place, unlink each pontoon, man them and row somewhere else - up the river, down the river, across the river. We would conduct rowing regattas, with the sweep bellowing out the time. We would also row ashore and drag the pontoons up the muddy river bank to the road, preparatory to raising them onto trucks for a more distant location if necessary.

Much of our manoeuvres were done at night - "To keep Nippon guessing".

If he did come he certainly would have planes and artillery cover.

On one occasion we had torrential rain - 12 inches falling in one day. The flatlands were flooded and we were in danger of losing our bridge. Huge logs and other flotsam, even drowned cattle and houses, crashed against the pontoons and a great bow developed in the bridge. The decision was made to unlock it at the centre and allow the two halves to swing outwards towards each bank. It was a very hazardous exercise but it was accomplished successfully.

We now felt we had graduated to efficient and confident Field Engineers. On that occasion we were fortunate, at some risk, to rescue a beautiful chestnut mare. When it was time to decamp and give way to another Unit a few weeks later, we could see it grazing happily along the river bank. We felt good.

There was by now grave concern that Nippon would invade Australia, up Queensland way, and move south. So the Australian forces began to move north to hold them off. We entrained at Maitland and arrived at Wallangarra, went by convoy to Toowoomba and encamped at Picnic Point, a scenic lookout. From this point on, the platoons were generally to operate independently. One platoon went to Warwick, another to Gatton and the rest deployed around the area.

To increase our capabilities, we built road bridges and culverts for the local Councils. Some time was also spent at Beenleigh Heads and Southport. A group went to Lanvale Point and Bribee Island for jungle warfare training and barge landing exercises. We had to be prepared to attack as well as defend. Mobility was to be the keynote. Mobile kitchens became part of our makeup.

The New Guinea campaign was now well under way and it was coming time for us to leave Australia. We regrouped and went to Townsville, some by sea, the balance by train.

Meningitis was detected on board the ship, so we all were quarantined at Sellheim - near Charters Towers. There we went on arduous route marches in our camouflaged battle dress. Our heavy engineering gear was not unpacked. We had to be ready to move at an hours notice.

Bren Guns replaced the "antiquated" Lewis gun. The Owen gun was on issue, but possession dictated the owner had to carry 300 rounds of 9 millimetre ammunition, plus all gear.

Came December 1942 and the wet season arrived. The Burdekin River rose an incredible 75 feet (22.86 metres) and disrupted the flow of troops north to Townsville, the main embarkation point for New Guinea. Movement north was dangerous, with Japanese and even German submarines stalking the coast. The order came to vacate Sellheim in haste and proceed to Townsville. We embarked on the Duntroon - after divers had inspected the hull to ensure no lurking Japanese had planted limpet mines below water level.

We arrived at Port Moresby 48 hours later, when the Japs were carrying out a bombing raid.

The war was now really on for us. As we drove away from the wharf to the huge Murray Barracks, a main staging camp, a huge banner announced "Through these portals pass the best mosquito bait in the world". How true this caption proved to be. Many of us went down with malaria from that nasty anopheles mossie. Later, when we moved across the ranges to Dutch New Guinea, we went down in greater numbers with dengue fever and tropical diseases.

At one stage we were down to 10% operating strength.

Port Moresby was to provide us with our biggest Engineering assignment to date, a 400 bed hospital, together with sewerage, for the 2/5th Australian General Hospital. Sewerage was treated through a German designed "Imhoph" tank system, which released drinkable water at its outlet - but we never deigned to drink it.

The black Papua New Guineans fortunately did all the trench digging for the sewerage system and enabled us to concentrate on the skilled work. Initially work was confined to daylight hours, but as the campaign increased in intensity and casualties increased, the order was given to work round the clock, 7 days a week. We got time off to clean our clothes, and our tents - red backed spiders, with bodies the size of peas lurked under our beds (we slept off the ground in hessian beds), and in every crevice. A couple of us were bitten, one poor bloke on a private part, while on the toilet. It was nasty but like all Aussie soldiers we could not suppress a laugh here and there.

We completed the job well ahead of schedule and moved out to a river camp. There we did smaller jobs at Platoon level. One was a light timber framed bridge of box design.

It fell down ! Good experience !!

A group went to Bomana and constructed an Army cemetery there. It stands to-day, with hundreds of graves beautifully tended by the Australian Graves Authorities. It includes about 80 members of the 2/33 Battalion, who died when an American Liberator crashed into them on Wards Drome, while they were waiting to be flown across the ranges to the dreadful campaign at Salamaua. Their bodies were initially taken to the 2/5th AGH while we were building there.

We began to split up and move as Platoons up past Rouna Falls to places like Koitaki, the gateway to the Kokoda Trail.

We erected a number of road bridges and culverts, and repaired others. It was cold up there at night and it was the first and last time we were to use a blanket in bed.

By now the Papuan and New Guinea campaign was over and the Japanese had fled across the ranges. We then went down to Port Moresby, embarked on an LST and landed

at Langmac Bay, Finschften - Dutch New Guinea. The Japanese were still putting up resistance in the area and had fighter and bomber plane support. Our immediate task was to assist in the unloading of supplies, stores, equipment and vehicles which were sorely needed for the fighting units there and some miles up the coast and inland to the base of Satelberg Mountain. On its top the Japs had mounted a 70 millimetre cannon. They had to haul it through jungle to a height of 3,500 feet (1066 metres). It overlooked a long strip of beach and harbours and was creating havoc.

Sgt Derrick was to gain his Victoria Cross on Mt Satelberg summit.

At times we were up to our waists in mud. Bulldozers had to drag heavy equipment from the beach and leave it in the mud. We finally moved by landing craft to Launch Jetty and set up camp some distance away in the scrub and coconut plantations. The fighting had now moved on and we carried out all sorts of tasks - repairing road bridges, constructing hundreds of storage buildings with iron roofs and coconut palm trunks for posts. The Authorities kept count of the felling (of trees) and we believe the plantation owners were compensated for their losses. Of course the Australian Authorities charged them nothing for us protecting them from Japanese subservience.

We constructed a huge refrigeration building, which later was also left to the Dutch owners. Some time was devoted to clearing the beaches like Scarlet and Riki River, of sunken landing craft. In some cases explosives wrapped in truck tubes were tied to steel members 12 feet below the sea level. Good swimmers and divers were given this task. Those on the surface in small boats often were seasick. Hundreds of soldiers, including United States personnel assembled when the explosives were ignited. In some cases the charge was overloaded and great hunks of steel weighing up to 50 lb went about 150 ft up into the air and rained down. Fortunately no one was hurt. The Yanks were good enough to hand out cartons of cigarettes for our display. Most of them were good blokes.

One group went up the coast to Madang on repair work.

We suffered no serious casualties, but as mentioned before dengue fever took its toll. It was a debilitating and agonizing complaint. Some suffered arthritic pain in swollen joints for months. Casualty Clearing Stations were too occupied with wounded patients to cater for us, so all we got was our own bed to recover on, plus aspirin.

Operating under those dreadful tropical conditions sapped our physical and mental resources. Many became so depressed they were sent back to Australia.

Finally our task was completed and after an 18 month "sojourn" in New Guinea, the Klip Fontaine took us back to Brisbane. We came to Sydney and proceeded on leave. We then entrained and ended up at Kapooka (Wagga Wagga) - the most advanced Engineering Training Camp possible. It was June 1943, and it was extremely cold and our resistance was low. We suffered more cases there of malaria than we had in all our New Guinea campaign. But at least we got rid of all those dreadful tropical sores and itches and scales.

The Kapooka course occupied 16 weeks and the intention was to "re-vitalize" us. Some of it was Infantry work and bloody "bullring" again. Live ammunition was used on the barbed wire assault course. But we came through O K and enjoyed the visits into Wagga Wagga, the beer, and the female company. Don't ask questions.

The New Guinea campaign was drawing to a close by September 1943 but we were positive we would be going overseas again when Australia could build up its war resources and assist the Americans in pushing the Japs out of the Pacific.

We moved back to Queensland and operated around the Strathpine, Petrie, Burpengary area. We constructed many wooden and small steel bridges for the local Councils. We spent months in the bush felling trees, snigging logs into the open and trimming them for bridging components - we became experts in the use of the axe, the adze, the crosscut saw, the broadaxe and in hauling with snigging chains and tractors. One group spent some time cutting up logs in a sawmill, under the supervision of the mill owner and his staff.

We now had a good idea of what we were being trained for. Come May 1945 and we embarked on the USS Seacat, an American troopship, and landed on Morotai.

The armada forces were assembling there. We did not know our destination but knew we would be part of an invasion force. We boarded a Yankee LST and then told we were headed for Borneo and would land off the mainland at Labuan Island. The assault on Labuan was unbelievable. It was blasted by bombers, fighters and Australian and American warships. The Infantry landed first; we went in next day. The assault was so effective the Japanese were already retreating inland when we landed. There were pockets of resistance but we escaped casualty.

Our task was to erect a large wharf to cater for Liberty ships bringing in vast

amounts of equipment and supplies for temporary storage. All the turpentine piles, transoms and decking had been pre-cut and shaped in Australia. They were unloaded onto barges and our first task was to unload them, often dragging the turpentine piles to shore with chains and bulldozers.

We commenced erecting immediately, and worked 12 hours on, and 12 hours off. In addition we did hours of sentry duty each week, took our turn in erecting cookhouses, messhuts, latrines, barbed wire enclosures and setting guncotton booby traps.

The Yankee bulldozers, trucks, jeeps and chain saws made our work easier.

The Japs broke through in force to the beach area late one night when the wharf was floodlit. We had to scatter in all directions, some diving into the water from a great height. Fortunately a Yankee Alligator Unit which defended the area with ½ inch calibre machine guns wreaked havoc on the Japanese, but they suffered some casualties, including 3 dead.

By the grace of God, we missed out.

Dozens of dead Japs lay close to us in the morning, many having committed hari kiri by placing a grenade against their stomach and slamming the pin. Overall hundreds of Japanese died that night and there was little resistance after that. We completed our task on schedule and it was good to see the Liberty Ships unloading on our wharves.

On 14th August 1945 the Japs finally surrendered. We were waiting for the day and had saved our bottled beer issue and our "Jungle Juice". Discipline was relaxed that night and we all got drunk, very drunk.

There was still a lot of cleaning up to be done and convalescent camps to be built for surviving non-Australian prisoners of war.

One platoon took off for Kuching, the capitol of Sarawak. 70,000 Japs who had surrendered were located there in a huge camp. Our job was to repair bomb damage, especially to the aerodrome, supervise a blue metal quarry and crushing plant, erect storage units and recover discarded Japanese equipment and arms. Of course we used hundreds of Japanese to do the physical work. We ourselves relaxed, drank saki and fraternised with the Malays, Chinese and Indians. They revered us for setting them free from the shackles and the dreadful conditions imposed on them by the Japanese. Many loyal (to the British) Chinese had been imprisoned and tortured.

We were treated as heroes. They cried for days when we finally had to depart and rejoin our mates on Labuan Island.

Progressively, under a points system, we were returned to Australia. A final large group boarded the Indian Prince and alighted in Sydney Harbour. Off to Sydney Showground for a physical and dental examination and issue of our Demobilisation Procedure Book, containing a full record on discharge procedures, our few entitlements, a tobacco issue, our leave credits and our War Badge. We handed in our gear at Marrickville Transit Camp, kept our uniform and boots.

This last group was finally discharged on 25th March 1946.

The bloody war was over for us !! Back to civvy life."

Frank Warnock
Clarrie Cavanagh

December 1994

Another contributor of 18th Field Coy information is **FRANK RASSACK** of Gladesville, Sydney.

Frank's details of the 18th Field Coy differ slightly from those of Clarrie Cavanagh and Frank Warnock because Frank (Rassack) had joined the unit before the other two, in Greta.

The 18th was formed at Greta on 8th December 1940, six months before Clarrie and Frank W and the boys from Sydney's Eastern Suburbs joined the unit. It was made up with boys from Hunter's Hill, Woolwich, Gladesville, Ryde, Putney, Tennison, North Ryde, Eastwood and Epping, with two from Tamworth and one from Quirindi.

In January 1941 the original 18th spent three to four weeks at "Top Largs" learning 'Pontoon Bridging', on the Williams River. At that time the unit was known as "18th Army Field Coy A.M.F." When they re-entered Largs in June, there were not many of the original members left, and these with the second intake - from Waverley Oval - were positioned at Bottom Largs.

Frank says that unfortunately he did not go overseas with the boys as he had a truck accident whilst moving camp from Beresfield to Toowoomba, in Queensland, and spent the next six months in hospital in Warwick, and was then transferred to the 113 AGH at Concord, in Sydney.

Frank remembers that during their time at Largs "some ladies (of all ages) from the town formed a sewing circle and were picked up by Jim Niemier (a member of the 18th Field Coy), in a truck and were brought to our camp to do any mending that the boys required". (A photo of the "sewing circle" and Jim Neimier appears on another page).

LLOYD BIRDSALL of Ashfield, Sydney, came to Largs Camp in early 1942, as a member of 2nd Division Signals. He was posted to "F" Section, which was attached to headquarters of the 14th Field Regt Artillery.

The Regimental Headquarters arrived in Largs from Greta in January 1942 to set up artillery defences of Newcastle. The guns were posted at various locations around the district.

The unit stayed at Largs until about April 1942 when it returned to Greta for further training. It then moved to Narellan in Sydney and sailed for New Guinea with the 14th Brigade on 26th June 1942.

JIM COLLINS who now lives at North Dorrigo reflects back to his time at Largs as "a few happy months at Largs in 1942". He originally came from the Hunter area, at Merriwa, where his family had a sheep property.

Jim arrived at Largs at 11.00 pm on 13th February 1942 after traveling from Raleigh, near Coffs Harbour, by troop train which picked up recruits from Grafton to Taree. Things were pretty chaotic - the men were given a palliase, taken to a shed with straw in it, and told to put some straw in the bag. They were then shown a tent and told "Sleep in there to-night". Thirteen men to a tent meant that some had to sleep outside. Next morning the men found out they belonged to 10th Squadron, 103rd Anti-Tank Regiment. They were issued with numbers, "dead meat" tags (identification disks), clothes etc.

Jim had spent three months in a 12th Light Horse Camp at Rutherford, the year before and found he had a head start on his mates. He was able to enjoy being able to do such things as "fall in", "stand to attention", and "march", while most others were trying to sort their left foot from their right.

Jim's group learnt that the 12th Squadron had been at Largs before them, and were now in battle stations towards Nelson Bay. Prior to moving to Largs the Regiment had been at Cowra.

The little two pounder anti-tank guns and trucks were rather slow in coming but the group improvised with rifle drill. As the camp was adjacent to the village they used the sports ground for most of their training. The camp was as well equipped as any Jim was in during his service - good showers and toilet blocks, eating facilities, and "the tucker was O K."

The group moved out into battle stations about May, covering roughly the area Raymond Terrace, Williamtown and Tomago. Troop Headquarters was at Heatherbrae. They were there when the Japanese "sent" a few shells into Newcastle, and that was as close as they ever got to action. In about August Regimental Headquarters was moved out to the Troop Headquarters, and as the enemy threat receded the whole Regiment was withdrawn to the Tomago area.

Just prior to this Jim's health began to "crack up". In June 1941 he had been rejected by the RAAF, for health reasons, and on the strength of that the 12th Light Horse didn't want him either. But when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour, the authorities became less choosy. Jim was discharged in December 1942.

The unit finished up in Western Australia, where they stayed until the war was over.

Jim was originally a "Choco", N161264, but was given the opportunity to switch to the AIF and became number NX107580.

Jim's son brought him to Largs for a visit many years later, and says, "I gazed out over the tremendous lucerne flats, and my mind drifted back to the few happy months at Largs in 1942, and felt some pride in the fact that I had made an effort for my country in that tragic time when a Jap strike appeared imminent, even if that effort collapsed on me later in the year." In 1995, when Jim Collins recalled his memories of over 50 years before, he was 75 years.

BOB O'HEARN of Charlestown lived in East Maitland and was a member of the 16th Light Horse unit which had occupied the camp site for some time, before transferring to the A I F, and joined the Armoured Division.

He enlisted at the Drill Hall, East Maitland, (next to the East Maitland Bowling Club). His number was MN8000.

Bob's unit spent two or three months training, with their tanks, in the Pilliga Forest area west of the Boggabri - Narrabri region, in 1942 when large training maneuvers were carried out in that part of N S W.

Bob's unit spent a considerable amount of time in Western Australia because of potential threats to that region.

In 1995 Bob is the State Councilor for the Newcastle District RSL Sub-Branches.

An interesting item comes from **Mrs NELL FREEMAN** (McLeod), of East Maitland.

Nell was a member of a group of young people, in the late thirties, who formed a concert party and performed each Friday night on the children's hour on Radio 2HR.

They were invited to perform for the soldiers at Largs and Rutherford Camps.

2HR had a studio above Kerrs shop in Maitland and different children and groups were invited to perform there each week.

The group members were:- Nell McLeod, Hilda Varley, Joan Wells, Joan Farley, Wally Windsor on piano, Noel Donnelly on the violin and Gordon Ross (nick-named 'ifis-whiffe') who was the comedian of the group.

DAL STEPHENS of Lorn wasn't in Largs Camp but has some memories of the location.

He remembers passing the Camp one day and seeing Indians there. Dal believes they had been Prisoners of the Japanese and were in Largs recuperating. One of them was making pancakes and passing them over the fence to the bystanders.

In about 1946 the buildings and contents of the Camp were auctioned and Dal's father bought a laundry which was pulled down and brought home in his brother Sid's 1927 International truck, where it was re-erected and used as a garage to the present day.

Dal's brother Sid delivered other buildings from the camp, around the area after the sale.

The initials N L and L W still remain on a stud in the garage.

JIM SHEEHY now lives at Campbelltown, and was a member of the 4th Light Field Ambulance, stationed at Largs in late 1942-43. While there his unit was camped close to the main road (apparently Dunmore Road). Down the road there was a hotel on the opposite side to the camp, and a hall on the same side (as the Camp) and nearly opposite the pub. Jim was not a drinker in those days but remembers the pub well because they used to attend dances in the hall, and there were plenty of partners - until the pub closed. He thinks it was about 10 pm closing, and supper came on at 9.30.

Jim imagines - in 1995 - that these two buildings would have been removed, but in actual fact they are parts of the social centre of the town.

About 400 yards inside the Camp there was a hut used as the Orderly Room, Q M Store etc. There was also another building alongside it which was the kitchen cookhouse.

Jim recalls that there must have been a pie shop handy as each afternoon a man came to the gate, with a truck, selling pies. One afternoon the men were on parade when the pie-man came and as one man everyone on parade rushed over to buy pies. That night a muster parade was called, and with their luck it was pouring rain, and their punishment for this act was a fifteen mile (24 Klms) route march. Over fifty years later Jim says, 'this is something every soldier in our unit remembers, and if any of the old timers along the road we took, are still living, they too will remember as they were bringing us cigarettes and lollies all along the way'.

Jim's unit moved to Singleton from Largs, and were attached to the 3rd Army Tank Brigade.

About fifteen members still attend the ANZAC Day marches in Sydney.

Jim finishes his letter with 'and I can assure you the residents of Largs gave us plenty of hospitality while we were there'.

TED TICEHURST, (NX115562), lives at Narara and writes that "It was with interest and no little nostalgia, that I read the article in the recent 'Reveille' in respect of the 'Memorial Dedication at Largs'. He writes that the construction of the Maitland Retirement Village would, in his opinion, be a fitting use for the old camp site.

Largs Camp was Ted's initial training venue following Universal Trainee call-up, complete with one cut lunch, on Saturday 1st November 1941.

Ted reported to the Newcastle West Drill Hall, in King Street, and with many other young fellows entrained at Newcastle and went to Largs to form the Newcastle Covering Force Signals.

Ted says, if he recalls correctly, in charge of the unit was Major Rod Earp (of Earp Bros, Timber, Newcastle).

The men trained there for six weeks. The call-up included some 15-20 Aboriginal youths from the North West districts who were required to camp separately, slightly apart from the main tent lines.

After six weeks Ted went with a wireless section to Tomago, (he thinks it was Tomago House), where they operated the 109 wireless set.

After a further six weeks they moved to the "Combined Defence Headquarters" in Orchardtown Road, New Lambton. Ted wonders if the big underground "bunker" still exists under the hill.

Ted remembers - at Largs - teaching other soldiers morse code using a mouth organ, because of the absence of any other form of training facility.

Largs was supposed to have been a three month training segment, and then back to civil life to pursue, for Ted, hopefully, a career in telegraphy in the then Postmaster General's Department (Post Office). However, on 8th December of that year, Japan entered the war and the course of Ted's life took a rather hefty twist.

Ted often wonders whatever happened to the fellows he knew there, particularly those who went to New Lambton. Names have disappeared over the years, but he knows well that all of them joined the AIF as a "unit" when they saw that the job was going to be a long one.

RON SEWELL (NX104941) lives at Mangerton (Wollongong) now, and was residing at Largs Military Camp for a time in 1942 - 1943. He was a gunner (Sig II) with the 19th Battery of the 9th Australian Field Regiment. His unit was equipped with 25 pounder artillery field guns.

Ron remembers that their leave days, or week-ends, were mostly spent in Newcastle, except when it was worthwhile to travel home to Wollongong. The men were transported to East Maitland railway station in open 'blitz buggies', and collected from there at night.

On one occasion Ron remembers, while returning by train from one of their Newcastle trips, in a 'Dog Box' compartment, and affected a little, he managed to lock himself in the compartment's toilet. His mates tried to release him but only got as far as breaking off the door handle. At this point in the Second World War Ron was only concerned of the possibility of being overcarried to West Maitland. However, at East Maitland he was rescued by the Station Assistant who freed him, in time to join his other carousing fellow servicemen in the trucks taking them home.

On another occasion, because Ron and his mates were too late and missed the troop transport returning from Newcastle, they were forced to hitch a ride with a local sanitary contractor !! Their tent mates were asleep when they arrived home, but next day they were avoided whenever possible.

Ron later transferred to the 1st Australian Naval Bombardment Group (an AIF unit) and served in Morotai and Borneo, in 1945, until the end of the war.

BRUCE COOPER now living at Terrigal, was at Largs during 1943. He was with an Artillery Regiment using 25 pounders. His unit performed a lot of training through Martins Creek and other places.

Bruce remembers that one night his group had to march to Maitland swimming pool where they had to swim the length of the pool with full gear plus with their boots on, or strung around their necks. After this exercise they had to march back to camp, still very wet. They "knocked off" a lot of watermelons which were growing alongside the roadway, and next day the owners came in to see the C O and told him about it. Come pay day everyone had to "put in" 2/- (20 cents) each to pay for the melons.

When on leave on a Saturday they would attend the Maitland Dogs.

Bruce remembers a "little old pub" at Largs, but it was out of bounds to all troops. When they left Largs, the unit went to Gan Gan, at Nelson Bay, to train on landing barges, with the Navy. The HMAS Assault was a Navy Depot. They were the first Regiment to fire 25 pounders off the barges.

Bruce left the Regiment and moved to the 2/10th A I Bn 18th Brgd 7th Division.

Bruce has been a member of Terrigal-Wamberal RSL for over 43 years, and is a life member RSL of Australia.

HARRY GEARY of Leichhardt, was a member of the 14th Field Coy R A E and was at Largs in the winter of 1941, May-June. He was camped at the top road of Largs Camp. The 18th Field Coy was in the bottom road camp. There were also one or two Batteries of an Artillery Unit there. His unit C O was the late Major Powell who stayed with the unit until the war's end. The Commander Royal Australian Engineers was "Black Jack" Mills, who commanded the 5th 9th and 14th Fld Coys RAE at Largs Camp. The Padre was Mr Jim Duffeay. A later Platoon C O was George James, who after the war became a Senior Staff Officer with the NRMA in Sydney, and is now President of the 14th Fld Coy's Association.

Harry makes special mention of the people of the Hunter Valley town, Clarence Town, who gave his unit a 'very good reception' when the unit camped there on the river banks for bridge building exercises on the Williams River, after their departure from the Hunter Valley Region Camp.

At Bathurst Camp there was heavy snow. However, the huts there were a welcome sight after spending all the Company's camps under canvas since 1939.

At Largs Top Road camp site there were only two huts, being for Orderly Room and Q Stores, and Mess Hut.

An 8mm motion film of the Company's move in a north bound troop train and also in Papua New Guinea, was made by the Company's Platoon Officer Reg Stewart, and this has since been converted to video by one of Harry's family members.

Harry provided a copy of the Unit's Association March newsletter which shows the still existent strong ties between the members of the 14th Aust Fld Coy RAE. It recalls that most of its members received the news of the end of the war at Labuan, Borneo. The unit's motto is "We Make and We Break".

Another item gives an extract from Sapper Stan Warbrick's diary regarding movements of 14 Fd Coy and reads:-

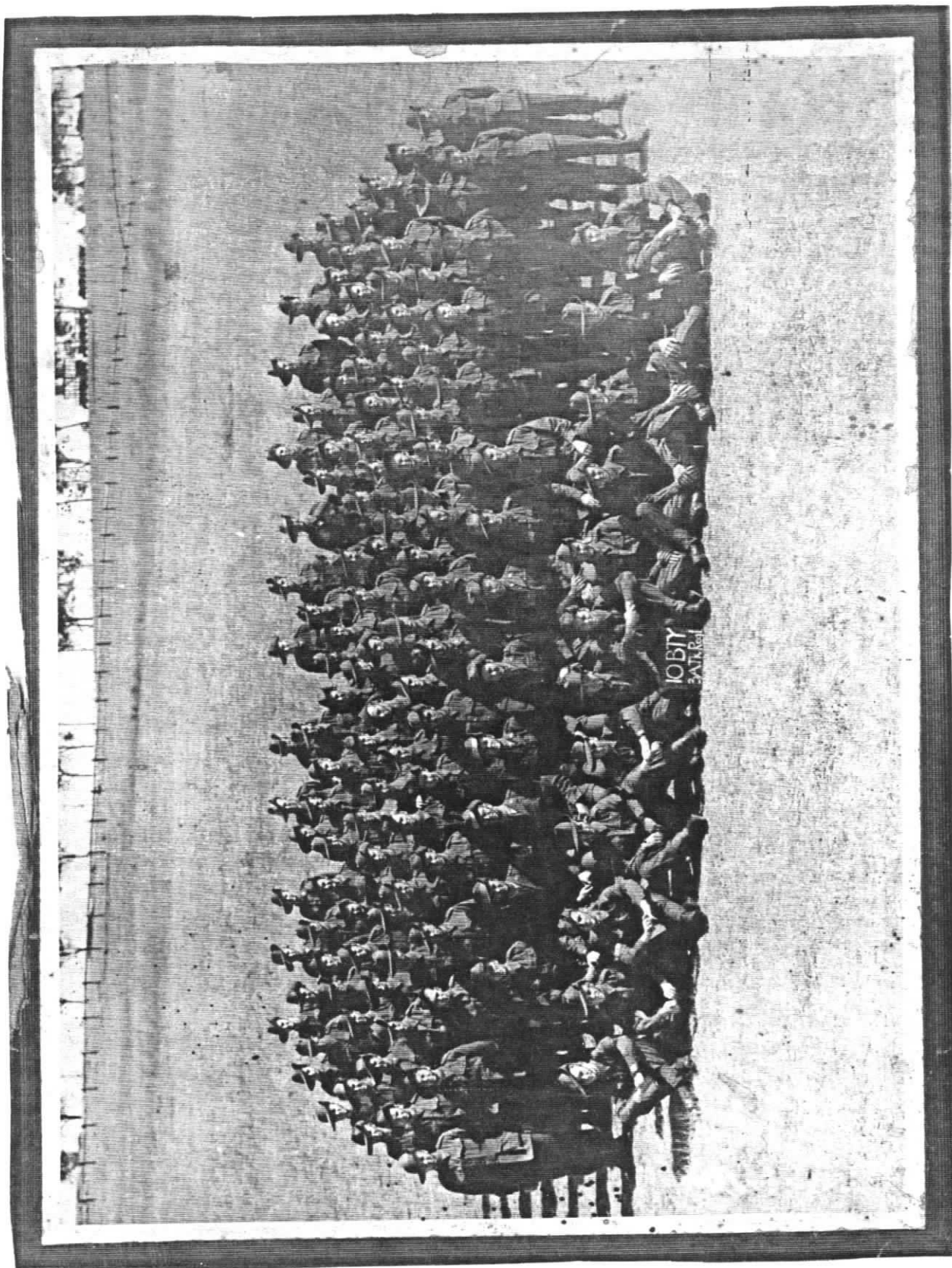
Movements of 14 Fd Coy During World War II

Left Greta	2 June 1942	0830 hrs	
Arrived Ascot, Queensland	3 June 1942	1800 hrs	
Left Ascot, Queensland	8 June 1942	1400 hrs	
Arrived Townsville	10 June 1942	1030 hrs	
Left Townsville	17 June 1942	1845 hrs	Swardenhondt
Arrived Port Moresby	21 June 1942	1800 hrs	
Left Port Moresby	26 January 1944		
Arrived Sydney	3 February 1944		
After leave went to Kapooka			
Left Kapooka	27 July 1944		
Arrived Brisbane	29 July 1944		
Left Brisbane	10 March 1944		Felix Hathaway
Arrived Morotai	26 March 1944		
Left Morotai	4 June 1944		LSD 742
Arrived Labuan	12 June 1944		

Served at Labuan until end of war.

Note: Some elements of the unit departed from Brisbane for Moresby on the John J.

The Coy came together at Nine Mile.



10 Bty 3 A Tk Regt at Largs - photo courtesy Bob Thompson, Belmont

KEVIN EVANS lives at Holmesville. During the war when Kevin was about ten years old, his family lived at Morpeth.

His father was Rev George Evans a Methodist minister. His area covered Wallalong, Thornton, Blackhill and Morpeth.

His time at Morpeth was while the Camp was at Largs and other localities around Maitland. Rev Evans organised entertainment parties, which included some of the children from Morpeth. These groups entertained troops at Largs, Greta and Rutherford Camps.

Sometimes the entertainment was by way of slides or movies and young Kevin accompanied his father and assisted with these functions. Troops appreciated the entertainment very much, Kevin remembers.

A particular advantage of these activities was that they kept the boys in camp for the night and kept them out of town where they often met up with troops from other neighboring camps when often a competition would ensue to determine which group was physically strongest. Kevin says the Officers in charge of camps appreciated the in camp activities of the entertainers.

GORDON PEPPER of Largs recalls that troops used to march about two miles to a ridge behind Mindaribba station to a firing range for practice.

Largs sports ground was the parade ground. Weekly dances were held in the Largs School of Arts Hall.

At one time dances were held every Thursday night and Community Singing was held on Tuesday nights.

BEN LIDGARD now lives at Cardiff Heights but originally lived in Sydney. He joined the "City of Ashfield Regt" and was in the 2nd Armoured Regt. This unit was equipped with "Matilda" tanks. It also had armoured cars and Bren Gun carriers.

The unit was at Orange at a critical time of the war and it was acknowledged it was too far away from any potential activity to be of any assistance and so was moved closer to where it may be needed and finished up at Maitland Showground. It was there when Newcastle was shelled. On the morning of the shelling of Newcastle Ben was in Parallel Street, near St Ethyl's School and the old bridge which crossed the railway line there, and was digging a slit trench. He remembers his activity was very popular with the schoolchildren. There was a fear though that the enemy may land nearby.

Soon after the shelling the group moved to Largs into a brand new camp.

While at Largs, the "Matilda" tanks they were using were too big for the locality and exercises with them were carried out at Greta. This involved a lot of moving backwards and forward.

At Largs also the unit enjoyed a visit from an earlier member who had been a Lieutenant when with them before. The officer had been in the Middle East and involved in successful heavy armoured fighting and on his return from there visited Largs to meet up again with his old unit. He was General Denzil MacArthur-Onslow, (later 'Sir') at the time the army's youngest General.

After leaving Largs Ben travelled to Greta, Singleton, Caboolture Qld, Narang Qld, Brisbane and New Guinea.