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The army in camp at Narellan in WW2

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The army in camp at Narellan in WW2

Abstract

Once the army moved into Narellan Military Camp it commenced operation and became part of the wartime scene during WW2. Men were seen marching all over the district, there were mock raids and the men practiced firing small arms. The camp is an important part of the story of Narellan during war as thousands of men, and some women, moved through the camp on their way to somewhere in the theatre that was the Second World War.

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Aerial View Narellan Military Camp c. 1941 (Camden Images CHS)

Once the army moved into Narellan Military Camp it commenced operation and became part of the wartime scene during WW2. Men were seen marching all over the district, there were mock raids and the men practiced firing small arms. The camp is an important part of the story of Narellan during war as thousands of men, and some women, moved through the camp on their way to somewhere in the theatre that was the Second World War.

Militia Units

Universal trainees appeared at the camp in December 1941. They were part of the militia as tensions increased with Japans entry into the war in December 1941 and uncertainty increased. In October 1939 Prime Minister Menzies introduced compulsory military service for duty within Australia. Unmarried men 21 years in the year ending 30 June were called up for three months' training with the militia. Menzies wanted the militia to maintain a strength of 75,000 to meet the demands of the 2nd AIF and withdrawal of men who were in reserved occupations. Menzies stated in November 1940:

“ *there is, I believe, a growing recognition of the fact that military training for the defence of Australia should be a normal part of our civic life, and that if it is to be just and democratic, it should be made compulsory.*^[1]

Militia units were created and equipped and some were deployed to sensitive areas. According to Milsearch in 1941 some units were deployed operationally to cover the likely Japanese landing beaches in the Newcastle – Sydney area. One unit established at the Camp at this time was the 2nd Australian Army Troops Company Royal Australian Engineers. This unit was almost solely involved in preparing route denial charges designed to frustrate enemy deployment inland following expected Japanese beach landings both north and south of Sydney. Narellan Camp also seems to have served as an assembly area at this time for units of the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades.^[2]



Tents in the bush Narellan Military Camp 1942 A Bailey

Training Ranges

There were three ranges for training purposes that Milsearch has identified – a grenade range, a 600 yard range, and a 30 yard small arms range.

The grenade range was located on a small hill adjacent to the old Oran Park Raceway and now covered with houses. The range was used for training hand grenade throwing and was constructed in late 1940.

The 600 yard range has been variously described as Narellan Rifle Range, Cobbitty Range or the rifle range Cutt Hill Cobbitty. The range was located north-west of the camp and is described as 'being three and a half miles west along Cobbitty Road from the junction with Bringelly Road, then north along dirt roads to the range'. There were fifteen targets at 600 yards for small arms training and the range was constructed in July 1942. There are indications, according to Milsearch, that there was another 30 yard range on the site in 1941.

The 30 yard small arms range was located in a 'disused quarry at the foot of water tanks on the right of the road from Camden to Narellan'.



Camp Admin block Narellan Military Camp 1942 A Bailey

Training with a difference

In 1942, according to Arthur Colman, the 2/1st Light Tank Squadron attacked RAAF Camden Aerodrome in a night exercise, and it is reported that they frightened the wits out of some of the RAAF personnel by charging over them in their slit trenches. As well, there was similar exercise in daylight (they had the only 2 light tanks in NSW). In the 10 weeks this unit was at Narellan they had instruction in small arms, map reading, truck driving and maintenance. As well there were the long route marches over all sorts of terrain to keep the men physically fit. For instance exercises by 'Shanks pony' and truck to such places as Wallacia, Mittagong, Nowra and the Kangaroo Valley area.^[3]

Jim McIntosh reports that the Army had exercises over the whole of his property of Denbigh but they would always ask could they come onto the farm. He remembers that the tanks always 'tore up a lot of grass' but they were pretty careful not to disturb cultivated areas. In addition he recalls the Camp had trenches in the hills on the northern and north-western side of the camp adjacent to Denbigh.^[4]

At Cobbitty Fred Small reported that the soldiers would frequently have marches through the village. A short march would be from the camp to Cobbitty Bridge over the Nepean River with groups of 40-50 troops. Larger groups of between 300-400 men would march through the village 2-3 times per day.^[5]

Diary of a soldier

The diary of Andrew Heyward^[6] of the 2/1 Independent Light Tank Regiment gives some of the character of activities at the camp.

Date	Activity
31 December 1941	Arrived at Narellan from Tamworth by bus and train – last camp in tents along Narellan Road
4 January 1942	Route march through Camden
5 January 1942	Major-General Northcote told the unit was not going to Malaya – anticipated what was going to happen to Singapore
6 January 1942	– 22 miles route march to Menangle
8 January 1942	Left camp with full packs marched through Cobbitty, Camden ended up at The Oaks Public School
12 January 1942	0330 – Reveille – full packs marched towards Penrith and ended up at a large waterhole – Warragamba
16 January 1942	Full pack march to Stanwell Park – storm about 1800 – came back in trucks
21 January 1942	up 0430 – exercise with trucks at Wallacia
23 January 1942	Rifle range – Narellan
3 February 1942	Unit ground attack exercise on RAAF Camden drome- I went right around river bank to enter up through vegetable garden and buildings nearby
11 February 1942	Anzac Range – Moorebank
16 February 1942	4 days exercise to Moss Vale, Jervis Bay, Nowra, Kiama, Bulli, Picton, Bowral
20 Feb, 1942	Used first 10 Owen guns on Narellan range
26 Feb, 1942	Driving exercise to Valley Heights
2 Mar, 1942	4 day stint in Blitz wagons – Wallgrove, Penrith, Windsor, Richmond, Rossmore – did a night march through Campbelltown to Wedderburn then marched to Menangle and Blitzs back to camp – at Narellan we did lot of Morse vehicle maintenance, gunnery training in camp
16 Mar, 1942	Left Narellan camp for exercises on way to Singleton camp via Menangle, Richmond, Wilberforce

[1] <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs162.aspx>

[2] Oran Park Precinct: (Narellan Military Camp), Historical Review and Preliminary Investigations for Munitions Contamination, Milsearch/Growth Centres Commission UXO Study, 12 February 2007.

[3]. Arthur Colman, Letter to ICW, 14 November 1986, 15 January 1987; Mort Maiden, Letter to ICW, 6 June 1987;

[4]. Jim McIntosh, Interview, 10 November 1987

[5]. Fred Small, Interview, 13 January 1987

[6]. Andy Heyward, Letter to ICW, 6 January 1987, 7 May 1987;

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