OCTOBER MEETING:

The following is a resume of portion of the paper delivered by the Honorary Secretary, Mr. D. B. Ellson, entitled “The Outline History of the 34th Battalion (The Illawarra Regiment).

Although the army commenced its associations with the Illawarra in 1826, the first volunteer unit, a Coast Artillery Battery, was not raised until the late 1880’s. Details of this unit, and also of the squadron of Light Horse formed by the New South Lancers in 1901, appear to be scanty.

The Commonwealth Government in 1903 assumed responsibility for the defence of Australia. The New South Wales Militia Unit in the South Coast Region were absorbed in the elements of 3 units: 1st, 2nd and 7th Australian Infantry Regiments. (G.O. 169/1903 and G.O. 252/1903.)

In 1906 the 7th Australian Infantry Regiment changed its name to St. George’s English Rifle Regiment with its Headquarters at Wollongong. Training centres were established at Nowra, Kiama, Wollongong, Corrimal, Woonona and Thirroul.

The introduction of Universal Training in 1911 caused some reorganisation of units, and in 1912 one company of each of the 1st and 2nd Regiments together with 3 companies from the St. George Regiment were formed into the 39th Infantry Battalion (MO’s 277 and 428 of 1912). In the following year there was another change, 3 companies of the 39th became the 37th (Illawarra) Infantry Battalion (M.O. 403/1913).

The formation of the 37th Battalion caused the disbanding of the Coast Artillery Battery. Headquarters of the Battalion were at Kiama and 9 training centres extended from Nowra to Helensburgh. During World War 1 its garrison duties included the guarding of the bridges at the Hawkesbury River, Como and Nowra. At the same time it
maintained its responsibility for Universal Training in its various centres.

In 1918 a change of designation of areas, units, etc. took place in order to maintain the traditions and perpetuate the records made, and distinctions gained, by the A.I.F. (M.O. 364/1918). One result was the redesignation of the 37th (Illawarra) Infantry Battalion to the 2nd Battalion 34th Infantry Regiment (Illawarra Regiment) so that it could inherit the honours of the 34th Battalion A.I.F.

The re-organisation of 1921 saw the 34th Battalion (no territorial title) become part of the 2nd Division (M.O's 95 and 172 of 1921). All the depots except those at Wollongong and Bulli were closed while new centres were established at Sutherland and Miranda, with the Headquarters at Sutherland. Three years later, in 1924, the Headquarters were shifted to Hurstville and it was here that the Governor of New South Wales, His Excellency Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair K.C.B., M.U.O., presented the Battalion with the Queen's and Regimental Colours.

Australian Army Order 132 of 12th March, 1927, confirmed the use of the territorial title, The Illawarra Regiment.

In 1938 the Battalion Headquarters were transferred to the Old Court House in Harbour Street, with companies being raised at Wollongong, Bulli and Nowra: one platoon of the Nowra Company was at Kiama.

The Battalion was mobilized on the outbreak of the 2nd World War. During October, 1941, it commenced full-time duty and on the 8th December it moved from Ingleburn to Wollongong for coastal defence duty, between Thirroul and Port Kembla. Here it remained until August, 1942, when it shifted to Narellan for 3 months, before moving to Rutherford. It was then amalgamated with the 20th Battalion to become the 20/34th. This composite unit was disbanded in May, 1944.

The Colours were Laid Up in Goulburn Cathedral in 1942 for the duration. They remained there until 1948 when the Wollongong Company of 3 Battalion, Headquarters Canberra, transferred them to St. Michael's Garrison Church. The Colours were again taken into service by the Illawarra Regiment which was reformed in 1951, due to the introduction of National Service.

The Commanding Officer was Lt. Col. P. K. Parbury, D.S.O., M.C. To help volunteer recruiting, an alliance was formed with a Scottish Regiment, the King's Own Scottish Borders. The Regiment also acquired a pure-bred Shetland pony, Corporal Jackie, as the Regimental Mascot.

The next Commanding Officer was Lt. Col. H. G. McCammon, M.B.E. The Regiment was fortunate in that Col. McCammon was able to renew its alliance with the Border Regiment (the former 34th Regiment of Foot). The association between these two Regiments had existed many years before World War 2.

The final Commanding Officer was Lt. Col. J. F. Lavan, M.C.

In a very fine ceremony the Governor of New South Wales, His Excellency, Lieutenant-General Sir John Northcott, K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., C.B., presented the Battalion with new Queen's and Regimental Colours in May, 1957. On Sunday, 16th November, 1958, the Old Queen's and Regimental Colours were Laid Up in St. Michael's Garrison Church.

Wollongong witnessed an unique ceremony on Sunday, 8th March, 1959, when the Freedom of the City was conferred on the Illawarra Regiment.
This year the 34th Battalion (The Illawarra Regiment) was removed from the Order-of-Battle of the Australian Army, most likely for all time. The re-organisation of the Army, using the Pentropic Division Establishment, brought this about. In its place, B Company, 3 Royal New South Wales Regiment has been formed, and it is keeping its territorial affiliation by being known as the Illawarra Company. The Queen’s and Regimental Colours were stored in the Garrison Church on Sunday, 14th August, 1960.

The author would like to hear from anybody who can provide additional information on the 34th Battalion (The Illawarra Regiment), or its antecedents in the South Coast Region.

APPEALS FOR FUNDS