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# The army arrives at Narellan

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# The army arrives at Narellan

## **Abstract**

An often forgotten piece of Narellan's military heritage is the Narellan Military Camp. It lasted for around seven years during and after the Second World War. Thousands of troops passed through it on their way to somewhere else as the lives of these young men, and some young women, were changed forever. The camp was part of the defence arrangements for the eastern part of Australia. There were many military camps in the Sydney area, as well as a range of defence installations for the navy and air force. There were several camps and training areas used by the military and Narellan was only one of them. Other included Ingleburn, Liverpool, Wallgrove, and elsewhere.

## **Keywords**

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Tented Narellan Military Camp 1941 (AB)

An often forgotten piece of Narellan's military heritage is the Narellan Military Camp. It lasted for around seven years during and after the Second World War. Thousands of troops passed through it on their way to somewhere else as the lives of these young men, and some young women, were changed forever.

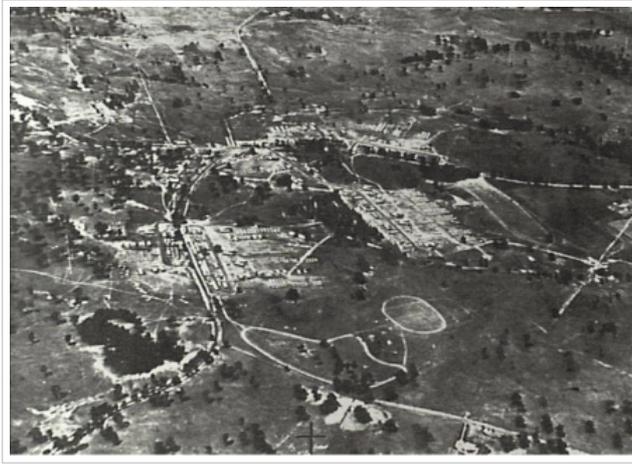
The camp was part of the defence arrangements for the eastern part of Australia. There were many military camps in the Sydney area, as well as a range of defence installations for the navy and air force. There were several camps and training areas used by the military and Narellan was only one of them. Other included Ingleburn, Liverpool, Wallgrove, and elsewhere.

There were number of defence installations in the local area apart from Narellan Military Camp and the others included Camden Airfield which catered form RAAF and RAF squadrons, Eastern Command Training School at Studley Park at Narellan, the military at Camden Showground, The Oaks Airfield, Menangle Race Course used by the military then the RAAF and a range of subsidiary sites across the district that included emergency runways.

The Narellan Military Camp was used from about 1940 to 1946, with the main camp completed for occupation by April 1941. The camp was located on the corner of the Northern Road formerly Bringelly Road, Cobbitty Road and Oran Park Road now Dan Cleary Drive in an area that was known as Greens Corner. The camp site was given back to civilian use in October 1946.

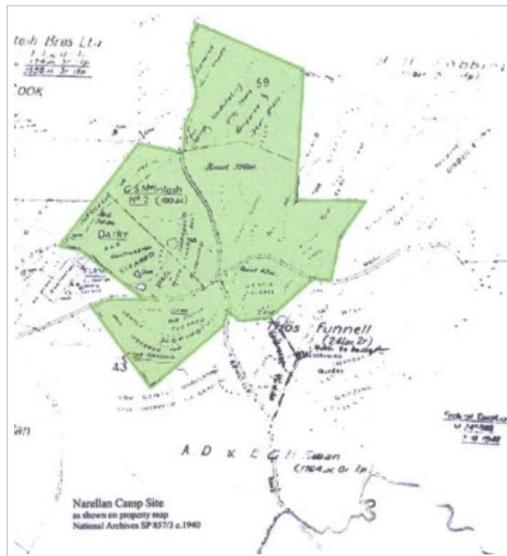
The details of the properties resumed by the Department of the Army included:

- 260 acres of HH Robbins of Oran Park (2200 acres) compensation for disturbance £2210 and rental value of 8/6 per acre pa;
- 40 acres of Thomas Funnell (241½ acres), which included the provision of a dam and a quarry for a miniature rifle range, compensation for disturbance £360 and a rental value of 9/- per acre pa;
- 80 acres of CS McIntosh (100 acres), part of No 2 Dairy Farm (246 acres), of McIntosh Bros of Denbigh, compensation for disturbance £800 and rental value 15/- per acre pa;
- 77 acres of McIntosh Bros Ltd, part of No2 Dairy Farm (246 acres) of Denbigh (2598 3/4 acres) compensation for disturbance £870 and a rental value of 15/- per acre pa, as well as 24 acres for a sillage area for which no compensation was paid as there was continued grazing;
- 100 acres of AD & EGH Swan (1764 acres) compensation for disturbance £1000 and a rental value of 10/- per acre pa, as well as a pipeline easement of £10pa.<sup>[1]</sup>



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

Official documents describe the site as mainly gently undulating formerly timbered with gum, box some apple and ironbark but had all been improved for grazing and in some cases cleared for cultivation. The soil was of a red clayey nature overlying Wianamatta shales. The valuation report stated that the required area was about 557 acres plus a sullage area of 24 acres and easements over land occupied by the reservoirs, a quarry and pipelines. This effected 5 holdings including a property owned by the McIntosh Bros, Denbigh, (first class grazing land), which was a stud for breeding dairy cattle as well as a functioning dairy farm. [\[ii\]](#)



Leased area at Narellan Military Camp NAA

The camp was planned to accommodate around 3,500 troops under canvas, while it has been reported that for short periods it held many times this many troops. While built as a tented facility wooden huts were erected for administration, storage, messing and recreation purposes with ablution and latrine facilities.

The site was pegged out in November 1940, and was officially acquired in May 1941. The camp was built by Commonwealth Construction Corps and only took a short time. [\[iii\]](#) According to some reports the camp turned into the largest tented camp in Australia.

The NSW DMR supplied the gravel for the camp roads, the Camden Municipal Council supplied the electricity, [\[iv\]](#) and an horse drawn mower for keeping the grass down to reduce the risk of fire and provided drainage works. [\[v\]](#) Eventually there were three firing ranges built in and around the camp for basic "all arms" weapons training was conducted by units transiting through the Camp, comprising rifle and other side arm live firing practices and live grenade throwing. [\[vi\]](#)

According to Alan Bailey, who was attached to the Headquarters Unit as a transport driver, there was camp headquarters, cook houses, showers, latrines, quartermasters' store, hospital buildings and the canteen. All the buildings were made of timber, with the exterior being stained cypress pine weatherboard. There was miniature rifle range near the water tower, on Harrington Park, (mounds are still visible today). [\[vii\]](#)

One former soldier described the camp as just 'one big paddock' while another had memories sitting in the rear lounge of the 'Old Pub' (the Narellan Hotel). According to him the land rose gradually in the west to finish in a small ridge with an old water tower on top and the camp the other side. [\[viii\]](#)

In 1942 it is reported that there was tented accommodation for troops on the southern side on Camden Road between Narellan and Kenny Hill, in the vicinity of Curran's Hill. [\[ix\]](#) Arthur Colman always recalls the mournful call of curlews night after night at the camp, [\[x\]](#) while Sir Eric Willis (former Premier of New South Wales) stated that for the few days he was at the Camp it was not a very exciting place. [\[xi\]](#)

Notes

- [ii]. AA:SP857/53 B534, Letter from Land Valuation Committee to DAD Hirings, Eastern Command, 14 October 1941
- [iii]. Australian Archives (NSW): Dept of Army; SP857/53 B534, Correspondence relating to property matters of the Dept of Army – Narellan Camp Site, 1941-1946, Valuation Report, 3 October 1941
- [iiii]. AA:SP857/53 B534, Letter from Major Martin, AMF to the Secretary, Land Valuation Committee, 7 May 1941
- [iv]. *Camden News*, 5 December 1940; Camden Municipal Council Minutes, 13 January 1941, 24 February 1941, 12 May 1941
- [v]. Camden Municipal Council Minutes, 22 September 1941; *Camden News*, 2 October 1941
- [vi]. Oran Park Precinct: (Narellan Military Camp), Historical Review and Preliminary Investigations for Munitions Contamination, Milsearch/Growth Centres Commission UXO Study, 12 February 2007.
- [vii]. Alan Bailey, Letter to ICW, 11 August 1988
- [viii]. Peter Geoghegan, Interview, 14 January 1987; Ron Cox, Letter to ICW, 7 January 1987;
- [ix]. Alan Bailey, Interview, 1 November 1992
- [x]. Arthur Colman, Letter to ICW, 14 November 1986
- [xi]. Sir Eric Willis, Phone Conversation, 4 January 1988

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