OLD ALBION PARK 1900-1925—SOLDIERING IN PEACE & WAR:

Ever since the forming of the Australian Lancer Troop at Albion Park by Major E. H. Weston there was never any lack of recruits, largely from the sons of farmers; it was an opportunity to maintain and show off a good cavalry horse at the monthly parades and to compete in the occasional military tournaments at tent pegging and tilting the ring with lances and at lemon cutting and cutting the Turk's head with sabres plus horseback wrestling and rescue races. Then there was the annual military ball, all polished buttons and badges and a brass band.

Eventually a quick firing pom-pom was added to the troop and the cliff around Yellow Rock received many a plastering of shellfire.

In the early teens of this century its officers included Colin Fuller, Theo. Grey, Hector and Jack Raftery. The first named, as Colonel Fuller for a time commanded the 6th Australian Light Horse overseas.

The unit eventually became the 21st Australian Light Horse Regiment with Headquarters at Arncliffe and troops at Bulli, Albion Park, Jamberoo, Kiama, Be.ry, Nowra, Kangaroo Valley and Milton; annual camps were held at Liverpool and Nowra but the depression of the early thirties and resultant retrenchment of defence forces saw the end of the unit.

Except for the appalling casualty lists, World War I had no such impact on the community as the second World War; petrol, food and clothes rationing, direction of manpower and other restrictions, were unknown.

Enlistments from farmers were not high, more coming from labourers and State Boys plus a few from the business community. The army was the only service open to general enlistment; there was no air force recruiting, as most entrants to the new Australian Flying Corps transferred from the infantry or cavalry after going overseas; the Navy was already manned and few ships were added during the war; and there were no women's auxiliary services.

Radio broadcasting and T.V. lay in the future; newspapers only had to be relied on for word of the progress of the war. These generally appeared with banner headlines reporting “Mighty Naval Actions” or “Forty thousand Enemy killed in one Attack,” so rumours abounded; a frequent one was that the battle-cruiser HMAS Australia and several light cruisers had returned to Sydney with funnels burnt off by furnace heat after a high speed chase and action in which several enemy ships had been sunk.

Spy scares followed the reputed flashing of signals seawards from the coastal range, and the Light Horse regiment was at times out on bivouac and rumoured to be looking for enemy agents.

A feature of the recruiting campaign was the various marches converging on the city from remote country centres and snowballing in numbers as men joined up en route. The first—the “Cooees”—started from Gilgandra with a handful of men and a scratch band and moved in trucks to the outskirts of each town; they would then march in to a local hall, hold a recruiting rally at night and march out next morning plus any recruits, who would continue on to the city and then be allowed home to settle their affairs.

One such trek—the “Waratahs”—started from the far South Coast
and was 200 strong when it reached the Agricultural Hall in Albion Park. Hay was supplied to fill sleeping bags and the district turned up in force to provide a hot meal, a few items for the concert afterwards and then, following a recruiting speech, a few locals came on stage as volunteers and marched off next day. The members of that march were all assigned to one unit, and suffered dreadful losses in France.

In one of the War Loan drives, two lorry chassis covered in with plywood to resemble tanks and carrying several Treasury officials, toured the country, and again the district flocked in to buy bonds and help finance the war.

The first local soldier to return from overseas for discharge after stopping a Turkish bullet at Gallipoli was Bob Parkinson, and what a welcome he got! He stepped from the evening train to find the station yard crammed with horse drawn vehicles and two motor cars, in one of which he headed a procession to the Agricultural Hall where tables, loaded with edible ammunition, awaited the attack. Afterwards a long series of speeches by the mayor, stationmaster, headmaster, postmaster, bank manager and storekeeper plus thanks from Bob and his father must have left the warrior wishing that he was back in the front line.

In somewhat similar fashion the same welcome was turned on as others returned and the war years rolled on, and culminated in a mighty general welcome to all when the war ended and the troops came home.

Various concert parties formed of wounded returned men were set up and visited country towns on recruiting and fund raising drives, one of their number usually being a recent V.C. winner. Members would be billeted for the night with local residents—in that there was no lack of offers.

One such party to visit Albion Park was known as the “Gallipoli Strollers” and included Marsh Little who composed “Boys of the Dardanelles,” Harley Cohen, composer of several wartime hits, and Bert Earl, one time pianist for Nellie Melba.

All these activities, together with infantry and Light Horse training camps at Kiama, gave the area its main contact with the war.

—B. E. WESTON.

IT MAKES YOU WONDER:

Have you ever seen a reproduction of Hieronymus Bosch’s painting, “The Garden of Eden”? Among the creatures depicted (at about five o’clock from Adam) is a bird which looks suspiciously like a lyrebird (not depicted with photographic accuracy, certainly; but as good a likeness as some of the drawings sent back to England after the “pheasant” was discovered at Mittagong in 1798).

Hieronymus (what did his friends call him for short?) flourished in what is now southern Holland about the end of the fifteenth century. The lyrebird, according to the “Australian Encyclopaedia,” is confined to Australia (and a fairly limited area of south-eastern Australia at that) and has no near relatives anywhere. How did Hieronymus know there were lyrebirds in Eden? Even Hargrave’s theory of Spaniards on the Shoalhaven wouldn’t account for that.