THEY SHALL NOT PASS

To those of us who were in the late teens and older at the start of World War II, the events of those six years of strife still seem as yesterday but when it is realised that a person now aged forty was only two years old when the war started in Europe it is obvious that it is outside the memory of two-thirds of people now living.

This is borne out when having recently acquired a copy of the "History of Berkeley" — the small fishing village at the nor-west corner of Lake Illawarra which had existed as an isolated community until swallowed up by the large housing project built around it after the war — I found it stated that the concrete breakwater and small boat harbour at the foot of the former main street was built by the army at the start of the war in the Pacific as a basin into which all small craft on the Lake could be impounded and if necessary destroyed in the event of a Japanese landing in the Shellharbour region and subsequent advance on Port Kembla. On making local enquiries I found this to be the general belief.

When the Japanese were initially supreme in the Pacific it was considered that the Wollongong-Port Kembla industrial complex was a prime target and defensive measures were set up.

Fort Drummond, armed with two 9.2 inch guns, was built near Wollongong to command the seaward approaches to Port Kembla.
and anti-aircraft batteries ringed the heavy industries. In addition the Main Roads Department was given the job of building three strategic roads to serve the coast: these being Mt. Keira to Wilton, Mt. Ousley to the top of Bulli Pass and Heathcote to Liverpool. The cliffs at the zig-zag at the top of Macquarie Pass were drilled for explosive charges designed to block the road with fallen rock; the bored holes are still in evidence at the lower elbow.

To block the advance of enemy tanks and wheeled vehicles in the event of a landing south of the Lake an anti-tank ditch was dug from Brownsville to the west shore of the lake; then continued across the shallows in the form of a double row of driven timber piles and finally as a twin row of pyramidal concrete tetrahedra weighing 3 tons each, which extended out towards Hooka Is. until the final half dozen of the six hundred involved stood in six feet of water.

Another six hundred were similarly placed in Griffin’s Bay on the eastern shore at Kemblawarra and continued with a water filled ditch out to the ocean sand dunes.

North of Wollongong another ditch was dug across the coastal plain from the foothills to the sea, passing between Corrimal and Bellambi. In all the Main Roads Board spent ten million dollars on these measures which with wages at less than ten dollars per week covered a mighty programme.

Some of the work stemmed from the panicky and often woolly thinking engendered by fears of invasion and was also instanced in Queensland where, from troop trains going north, we saw that name boards had been removed from railway stations in order to confuse the Japs but in many cases the name of the township remained painted on the roof of a nearby hotel or store.

With the defeat of Japan and the end of the war in 1945 these defensive measures had never been put to the test. Guns and search-lights were dismantled and taken away from the anti-aircraft battery sites but the tank traps remained with the rows of wooden piles and concrete tetrahedra intruding into the lake for a quarter of a mile on the east and west shores.

Following repeated requests from the Berkeley fishermen that the obstructions be removed and their grounds restored to normal status and after a lapse of seven years the Commonwealth Department of Works called tenders in 1952 for the removal of the piles and tetrahedra; the latter to be shifted to Berkeley and so placed as to form a breakwater and a small boat harbour.

Here I came into the picture. When demobilised at the end of the Pacific war and after fourteen years pre-war residence in New Guinea I found it almost impossible to buy or build a house in N.S.W., wartime controls and restrictions still operated on all building materials.

As my army engineer unit in New Guinea had built over a score of large wooden lighters at Port Moresby for cargo working I decided to apply my know-how to a long-held ambition to build a house boat. My application to the authorities for a permit to buy the neces-
sary timber caused some confusion, there were no regulations dealing with release of materials to build a floating home and accordingly a permit was issued.

Suffice to say the hull was built and launched at Windang and a commodious three bedroom residence erected thereon fitted with every convenience and electric light plant. Moored in the channel at the entrance to Lake Illawarra it was my home for some years.

The time eventually came when life afloat was no longer convenient, I wanted to live on dry land and my chance came when tenders were called for the removal of the obstructions.

My quote was accepted and with the help of my brother Rupert, then and still a resident of Dapto, the superstructure was removed from the houseboat and the hull then converted to a hoisting and transporting role by fitting a mast and swinging derrick equipped with a power winch. A powerful towing launch was bought to complete the rig.

Work commenced under adverse conditions, a winter of unusually strong westerly winds, the upshot being that the wooden hull took such a battering against the concrete blocks that it opened up and sank. Declared a total loss by Lloyd's agents, insurance was paid and a replacement steel hull was built by a Port Kembla firm in two longitudinal halves which were launched in the lake, bolted together, and equipped with lifting gear as before.

Suffice to say the twelve hundred tetrahedra were lifted, transported to Berkeley and placed to form the breakwater, and resultant sheltered anchorage that exists today.

The steel hull was subsequently converted to a suction dredge and used to cut an intake channel for the cooling water at Tallawarra power station.

Finally it was hired to Thirlwell McKenzie and taken to Port Kembla where it was used in demolishing a small jetty and was then left at anchor. The hatches were by some oversight left open and choppy seas came aboard one night and barge No. 2 sank in the turning area used by iron ore ships. Requested to remove it as a matter of urgency, a diver attached a hawser to one of the bollards and a tractor dragged it ashore, tearing out the bottom in so doing. The story ends with my receipt of a cheque from the hirer in compensation and the reduction of the mangled remains into scrap for the steelworks.

—BERT E. WESTON.