**Bathurst Army Camp 1940-47**

**DIRECTIONS**
After leaving Bathurst Visitor Information Centre follow the highway east over the Evans Bridge to Kelso. At the second set of traffic lights turn left into Boyd Street which leads to Limekilns Road. Continue for about 6km to the entrance of what is now Heritage Park-home of the Bathurst Sheep and Cattle Drome. From 1940 to 1947 this was a place of learning, not about farm animals but about war. Men ranging in age from 18 to 45 years were trained here in preparation for active duty overseas in World War II. At the entrance you will find memorials to the Army units that trained in Bathurst. A service is held at this spot on Anzac Day each year.

**Reasons for an Army Camp**
The camp was originally built to accommodate the 1st Armoured Division. However nearby farmers opposed this idea as they could see tank manoeuvres disturbing grazing stock and causing damage to the surrounding environment. When the army hierarchy realised that tank exercises would be restricted it was decided that the camp would become an infantry training centre.

**The Barracks**
To the right of the entrance are two sheds which were part of the old army camp. Further along the road, past the cattle grid on the right is where 'J' Block was once located. The foundations you can see on your left are part of the transport depot and workshops.

The original barracks were made from galvanised iron and had no insulation. On sunny days they were extremely hot inside but freezing cold at night. The troops slept on palliasses (hessian bags stuffed with fresh straw). During the cold winter months they were issued with four grey blankets and slept in 'long johns' under their pyjamas along with any other clothing that did not restrict their breathing. However the army was not always so tough on its men - during the winter months they were allowed to sleep in till 6.30am instead of 6.00am!

The camp was vast, spread out along the main road with a few arterial roads and capable of holding 5,000 troops. Imagine how long it would take to walk from one end of the camp to another. At Heritage Park’s main office there is a map which shows the lay-out of the army camp.

**Surrounding Communities**
This was not a holiday camp and the troops spent most of the time camping outdoors. They went on long route marches and carried out mock battles with each other. On many winter mornings troops on training exercises woke up to find their blankets coated with thick white frost. While doing all this training they discovered the beauty of the Central West and were welcomed by other communities such as Blayney, Lithgow, Cowra and Orange.

**Other features**
At the top of the drive where the Sheep and Cattle Drome is now located only one building from the old Army Camp remains. It is located behind the main office building. This was the canteen where the soldiers were able to purchase luxury items or have a drink.
Out the back on what is private property today appears to be a bunker but it was actually used for grenade throwing. Troops were positioned in the brick sheds at the end of the double-brick wall while a 'nervous' soldier accompanied by an instructor threw what was probably his first grenade. Behind the wall about 20 feet back for safety purposes was an observation post for another instructor.

UNITS THAT TRAINED AT BATHURST

7th Division
The first soldiers to arrive at Bathurst were elements of the newly formed 7th Division which was later to become the 9th Division. In the Middle East these men were allocated to the 9th Division. The battalions included the 2/13th and 2/17th Infantry with the 2/4th Anti-Tank Regiment. These units trained at Bathurst from May to October, 940.

The training conditions these troops endured in the harsh Bathurst winter were a stark contrast to their overseas destination - the Middle Eastern countries of Libya and Palestine.

After joining the 9th Division Corporal John Edmondson of the 2/17th became the first Australian to win a Victoria Cross against the German Afrika Korp in the Easter Campaign of 1941. By the end of the war the 9th Division had become the most decorated unit of the Second AIF.

8th Division
With the departure of the Middle East contingent new troops arrived at Bathurst. Elements of the 8th Division started to arrive in November 1940. This included the 2/18th, 2/19th and 2/20th infantry battalions. By February 1941 they had been joined by the 2/26th, 2/29th and 2/30th. These soldiers experienced a beautiful summer in the Central West which in one way suited their overseas destination of Singapore.

The men of the 8th Division were unaware of the fate that lay before them when they sailed. The 2/30th ambushed a Japanese battalion at Gemas Road (Malaya) wiping them out and destroying eight tanks. Lt-Colonel Anderson commander of the 2/19th was awarded the Victoria Cross at the Battle of Muar in January 1942. They all distinguished themselves in battle before surrendering to the Japanese on 15 February 1942 spending the rest of the war as POWs.

The friendly locals
During their stay at the camp the soldiers made many friends among the Bathurst residents. The men sent to Malaya, in particular, received lots of mail with the Bathurst post stamp on it. Many did not make it back to the shores of Australia but some of those who did chose to settle in Bathurst. Bert Johnson a soldier who trained at Bathurst returned, "because of its appeal, its beauty and its lifestyle".

So take a look at history!
Take a drive out to the old Army Camp and see where these men who made history were trained.

If you have more time...
Visit Bathurst's war cemetery where local soldiers who died in the war or were killed while training were laid to rest with full military honours. To get there return to Bathurst and follow the Great Western Highway towards Orange. Bathurst Cemetery is located on the edge of the city on the right hand side of the road just past the golf club. The War Cemetery is a small fenced area behind a hedge next to the old section of the cemetery. Park your car in a safe place beside the road and take the time to read the tombstones.

Of the 32 WWII graves in Bathurst eighteen are located in the War Cemetery. Many of these men lost their lives while training or working at the Army Camp. If you look carefully you will find the graves of three men who died on 3 June 1946 - after the war had officially ended. These soldiers were sappers (explosives engineers) who were cleaning up at the Army camp before moving out. They were dismantling a wood heap, when a passing truck detonated an unexploded shell. Four men who had survived the war died that day.

The information on this sheet was researched by Anthony Fisher, a student in Applied History at Charles Sturt University - Mitchell. Publication of the leaflet was funded by a joint grant from Bathurst and District Tourism Committee and Department of Planning under the 1992 Heritage Assistance Grant Program.

BATHURST VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE
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