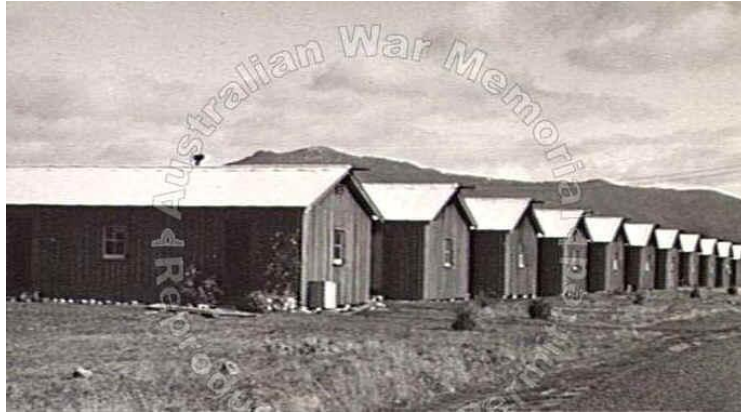


BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BRIGHTON ARMY CAMP.

By

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The Brighton Army Camp has a long, long history, full of notable events and a never ending cast of colourful characters that passed through its gates. Sadly it is no more and an amazing piece of Tasmanian military and social history has gone. It is very important that the Tasmanian community does not lose its memory of this incredible piece of our heritage.

The Brighton-Pontville area is very old. Indeed, along with other sites, Brighton was once considered to be a good place for the capital of the colony. Brighton was named by Governor Macquarie; why he should name it such, being so far in land, can only be surmised. In the 1820s the convict-made road to Launceston was being constructed. By 1822 it had been pushed to Constitution Hill. In 1830 the first bridge was constructed at Pontville and the notorious bushranger, Michael Howe roamed the area, robbing the home of Thomas Hayes in the Bagdad Valley as early as 1816.

Brighton became an important military camp in those early days because of the threats posed by various sources. Its military history is long indeed. In fairly recent times, the military camp as we knew it, came into being at the beginning of World War One. War with Germany was expected, so on the 2nd August 1914 orders were issued to the local artillery by the State Government "*to be in readiness for action*". Then of course, a few days later, war was officially declared.

The campaign to recruit soldiers for the First Expeditionary Force began immediately. On the 13th August a training camp at Brighton-Pontville was established under the command of Major R.P. Smith. They embarked from Hobart on the 20th October 1914 on the transport vessels *Geelong* and *Katuna* to go to war. So the history of the camp goes back at the commencement of the First War.

After the First Expeditionary Force had left our shores, recruitment began in earnest. However, on Saturday 19th September 1914, removal of soldiers to another site at Claremont began. It was judged by the authorities at the time that the Brighton-Pontville site was unsuitable, owing to the inadequate water supply and other disadvantages, such as distance from the capital. The Army Camp at Claremont itself is another major story. Between the intervening years of the two world wars, the site was not unoccupied for it was farmed.

In 1931 the Brighton site became the south's first aerodrome where the Royal Mail was delivered with one of the pilots being none other than our Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith. In November of that year, the first Empire Airmail flight to England occurred by the Australian National Airlines. As said, there was been a never ending line of colourful characters.

War clouds loomed again and in 1939 the Commonwealth Government acquired the land for a permanent army camp. Here many thousands of Tasmanians did their military training before taking off for the war either in North Africa or the Pacific. How many stories can be told? It was pretty spartan life for those accommodated, but it served a vital purpose.

It was very large complex with many huts accomodating the men, besides a recreation hut, a hospital and administration huts. They were simply constructed; single storey, with weatherboard and corrugated, galvanised iron.

One who trained there during the early part of the war was Keith Farrell, who told the author that at one time the whole camp was evacuated. He said, *"While I was at Brighton we did several manoeuvres and at one stage it was considered that someone had parachuted into Brighton camp and the camp was evacuated and transferred to a bush area near Richmond. It was a false alarm and we went back to Brighton camp and from there we did manoeuvres in the Llanherne Cambridge area."* Keith went on to join the RAAF.

In 1959 the concrete guardhouse defining the entrance gate was erected.

From February 1944 it housed 850 Italian Prisoners of War for two years. After the war from 1952 the National Servicemen were stationed here and prior to that, refugees from Europe were also housed.

After the 1967 bush fires it was used as a shelter for people left homeless by the disaster.

In 1999, under the name "Tasmanian Haven Centre" the camp housed 400 refugees from war-torn Kosovo in Eastern Europe.

Over the years it had been used for cadet training including cadets from the Royal Australian Air Force.

The camp was closed in 2006. It was later sold to a private developer for “a song”. In the 10th September 2013 vandals destroyed by fire one of the historic old weather board buildings. (see photo below)



An era has now passed. The historical significance of the site cannot be underestimated. Not so long ago after its closure it was suggested it would be a good site for a fun park. That obviously did not eventuate.



New Anzac Park Brighton at the site of the once Brighton Army Camp. Reg Watson photo.

On ANZAC Day 2015 a new park to the memory of those who served was unveiled.

- Reg. A. Watson