

# Hinterland Communities Built by Soldiers

History, though often bent and distorted through a prism of time, can be full of surprises. Beginning way back in the 1880s, many buildings, infrastructure and communities around the Sunshine Coast and its hinterland are a result of military presence, says local military historian, Ian Curtis.

4

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In 1942, during World War II, there were thousands of soldiers on the Sunshine Coast, says Ian Curtis, who trained at the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, when he was 18.

Upon graduating, he spent 16 years in the Royal Australian Infantry Corps, serving in a number of battalions, eventually specialising in military training. Now retired, he has been diligently researching the military's involvement with the hinterland.

In the 1880s during the Russian Scare, an observation tower was built by Mr Bulcock, at his own expense, and a telephone line was erected from an observation post near the Caloundra Lighthouse, through virgin scrub, to Landsborough.

"Some of the people who lived there volunteered to man the lookout in case Russian ships started to come down the coast and maybe attack Australia. Now, that dissipated and never happened," explains Ian.

Then with the advent of World War I came the introduction of Soldier Settlement Schemes, turning Beerburrum into a place of minor note. Although the scheme was abandoned in 1929, a significant number of returned soldiers took up the offer to turn the shadows of the Glass House Mountains into the rich pineapple

▼ Military historian, Ian Curtis, is researching the military's involvement with hinterland development



farming country it is today.

Peace Memorial Park, Landsborough, with its ornate gates, was specifically purchased for the purpose of commemorating the First World War. Later in World War II, the park was used by the Australian Army Medical Corps (2/6th Field Ambulance) and is now a sporting field.

By 1942, the threat of the Japanese invading Australia was very real, making the D'Aguiar Range a line of defence. Many of the hinterland hilltops, with their clear view of the ocean and therefore, approaching ships, were dotted with lookout posts.

In support, troops were stationed at Caloundra, Peachester, Woodford and Kilcoy, often for training before being deployed to New Guinea.

"Caloundra was a secure town – you had to have a pass. If you weren't in the service, you had to have a pass to go in. There were checkpoints out on the highway and in certain parts of town.

"The 2/1st Machine Gun Battalion was sent to Peachester. There was nothing there when they arrived, so they built a camp in Peachester over seven days. They, as part of their training, sent every one of their platoons on a 90-mile five-day march.

"There are a lot of stories right across the hinterland of people being out working and all of a sudden, soldiers appear out of nowhere. Some lost ... others on their way from point A to point B. They would be found sleeping overnight in empty halls and churches."

Often, the local women would feel sorry for them, and invite them in for a meal, says Ian, and apparently, a couple of blokes went back a few times to 'get lost'



Peace Memorial Park, Landsborough was acquired to commemorate WWI



◀ Ian Curtis, seated 2nd from right, when he was the Officer Commanding, Army School of Instructional Training, 1986

because they knew they were going to get well fed!

Other amusing antics involved school teachers, with one local chap from Bald Knob who had a reputation for being a bit of a daredevil, signing up with the Air Force.

"During his training, he used to fly over the school and dip his wing and the kids would go out and wave.

"That was a common thing ... school teachers ... if they were ever doing training around where they had taught, they'd just fly over the school, and come down low over the school so the kids could see them."

One of the challenges faced by the military back then was how to move large masses of people, both civilian and military, through scrub, to safety if the coast was attacked by the enemy.

"Engineers went through and built missing parts of roads, for instance, to get between Bald Knob and Peachester. They actually joined the roads together because of that threat."

As a result, the Maleny-Stanley River Road was improved, as well as the connecting road down the '4000' range at Cedararton, along with Devil's Elbow Road, Curramore.

Sonny Turner, an ex-serviceman, became responsible for much of the early development in Beerwah when he began a real estate business. The Beerwah War Memorial now stands in Turner Park, named in his honour.

In the Maleny area, three buildings with a military connection include the RSL Hall – the former gym/picture theatre from Maryborough RAAF Base – which was dismantled and moved to Maleny and rebuilt with volunteer labour in the late 1940s; the old church building now occupied by Trilogy Tax; and Brightside Guest House at Bald Knob (behind the caravan park).



The building that houses Trilogy Tax was originally a chapel in the Enoggera Army Barracks

The guesthouse was used as a rest and recreation centre by service women in World War II, while the old church was originally built as a chapel for the Enoggera Army Barracks.

Soldiers opened the country, says Ian. "They took on and built farms, started businesses particularly up here in the hinterland, and they did a lot of volunteering, right up to our last lot of veterans from Afghanistan."

This ANZAC Day, we remember all our soldiers – the fallen, the wounded, and those who returned and built our communities.

Lest we forget. 🇺🇲