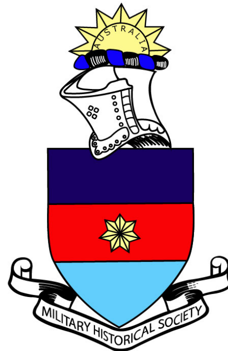
Military Historical Society of Australia
Sabretache



Copyright © 1957-2019 Military Historical Society of Australia on behalf of the Society and its authors who retain copyright of all their published material and articles. All Rights Reserved.

Sabretache policy is that the submission of material gives the Society permission to print your material, to allow the material to be included in digital databases such as the MHSA website, Australian Public Affairs-Full Text, INFORMIT and EBSCO. Reprints to non-profit historical and other societies will be approved provided suitable attribution is included and a copy of the reprint is sent to the author. Copyright remains with the author who may reprint his or her article or material from the article without seeking permission from the Society.

The Society encourages the download and distribution of *Sabretache* for personal use only and *Sabretache* can not be reproduced without the written consent of the Society.

www.mhsa.org.au

Military Historical Society of Australia
PO Box 5030, Garran, ACT 2605.
email: webmaster@mhsa.org.au

DIED AT BLOEMFONTEIN: CUMBERLAND SOLDIERS AND COMMUNAL MEMORY DURING THE BOER WAR

Clinton Johnston

On 13 March 1900, the Orange Free State capital of Bloemfontein fell to the British Army under the command of Field Marshal Lord Roberts. Perhaps fell is the wrong word. The citizen army of the Boer republics consisted of thousands of mounted infantry with newly purchased Mauser rifles, but with few regular infantry units and even fewer trained artillerymen, let alone the guns for them to fire. They were well suited to lightning attacks and ambushes, slipping away when the odds became a bit too much against their favour. So Bloemfontein did not really fall undefended, it was in effect given to the British Army. It was a huge victory for the British forces, causing rapturous celebrations in Cape Town, the capital of Cape Colony; a public holiday was announced a few days later by the mayor, and a program of festivities to celebrate the occupation of Bloemfontein was devised. This included an illuminated tramcar, limelight views of the generals and a fireworks display.[1]

Despite all the celebrations, the capture of Bloemfontein would have many implications for the soldiers and military staff that marched into that town. The forced march of the column to Bloemfontein, problems of transportation, the condition of the town itself and the efforts of enemy Boers ensured that the town of Bloemfontein would become one of the most significant sites for death from typhoid suffered by British forces.[2] The conditions that led to the typhoid epidemic in Bloemfontein during the Boer War are well discussed in much of the literature on this period; it is not the aim of this paper to re-examine these points. Instead this paper will provide an examination of the personal and communal impacts of the Bloemfontein epidemic on the Cumberland region of New South Wales, with a specific focus on the town of Parramatta. This article will therefore trace the lives and deaths of five Australian soldiers - Benjamin Harkus, Albert Smith, Leslie Hill, George Rawe and John Kelly - all of whom were fated never to return from their South African adventure. As their deaths were the result of the typhoid epidemic, and not the stereotypical 'soldiers' death, this paper will also provide an analysis of the patterns of remembering used by their communities to honour their deaths.

When the United Kingdom declared war against the Boer states, the New South Wales Lancers were participating in a military tournament in Aldershot, England. This unit was a part-time volunteer force similar to the majority of other military forces in the Australian colonies at the end of the nineteenth century. With its barracks in New South Wales' second central business district of Parramatta, a significant proportion of its members were from either Parramatta itself, or the surrounding Cumberland region. Corporal Rowland Edward Harkus was a postman, but for those few hours a week when he donned the Lancers' uniform he was the most well-known and well-liked member of his unit. In 1897, Harkus travelled with the Lancers to England for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. He received the Jubilee medal. In 1899, he again travelled to England to compete in the military tournament at Aldershot, this time with his wife and children so that they could share in his achievements.

---

1 Official Program of Activities on occasion of the Occupation of Bloemfontein. Port Elizabeth, 15 March 1900. Jas Kemsley & Co., Printers. Dixson Drawer Item 441. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

2 The term enteric fever was more commonly used in place of typhoid in military reports and letters by soldiers.

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a licence from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)

It was during this tournament that Britain declared war against Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Charles Cox, the Captain commanding the Lancers, immediately volunteered the Lancers for service. The Secretary of State for the Colonies saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of an Imperial Defence system, and approached the New South Wales government to allow the unit to serve; permission which was readily given. However, as the unit was militia, and their obligation was for service within the colony of New South Wales only, it was not compulsory for soldiers to serve overseas. In order to serve in the Boer War each Lancer was required to independently volunteer his services. Given this decisions, Harkus chose not to volunteer. Unlike most of his unit, he had the opportunity to discuss the issue with his wife before making his choice; the two decided that his loyalties lay with his personal connections at home, not with his unit or an exercise in Imperial aggression.

While the Lancers proceeded to South Africa, arriving on 2 November, Harkus returned home to jeers from a crowd that saw no reason for him, or any of the other 30 returning Lancers, not to volunteer their services for South Africa. The New South Wales Patriotic Fund, formed in the first week of November, had already overseen public sacrifices made in the creation of funds to support the soldiers and their dependants. Through making monetary sacrifices to such funds the public were able to demonstrate not only charity for those that would inevitably suffer from the upcoming war, but also their own approval for the war and the causes of Empire.3 After making such sacrifices to serve the mother country themselves, it is hardly surprising that sections of the public believed that Harkus, and the other returned Lancers, were failing to fulfil what the public saw as their responsibility as members of the colony's military forces.

While Harkus was disembarking at Circular Quay, the first New South Wales contingent was settling into military life in South Africa. Arriving at Cape Town on 7 December 1899 were the men of the New South Wales Infantry Company and A Squadron of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles who were mainly recruited from the volunteer military forces of New South Wales. Among their numbers were two Parramattans, Privates Albert Edward Smith and Leslie Charles Hill. Smith lived in Liverpool south of Parramatta in the Cumberland region, and had developed his trade as a horse breaker in the region. He had won a number of prizes for show jumping in the Liverpool and Camden shows. His horsemanship, along with his known skill with a rifle, would have been among the primary reasons he was selected for the first squadron of mounted riflemen to travel to South Africa.

Leslie Hill, however, was of a different character. Parramatta born and bred he was a compositor by trade, working for the Cumberland Argus newspaper. A member of H Company of the New South Wales Volunteer Infantry (based in Parramatta) he must have demonstrated excellent military skill in order to be selected amongst this first group of infantrymen. Like Hill, the vast majority of other men who joined the New South Wales Infantry Company would have gained similar skills through their own experiences as citizen soldiers. The weekends and afternoons they spent as citizen soldiers had helped to develop their martial skills in preparation for an attack on Australian shores that would never come.

When Albert Smith and Leslie Hill arrived in South Africa they were immediately split up. Smith rode off to join up with Major General French's cavalry, who were defending Colesberg from Boer aggression, whilst Hill and his unit were attached to the Victorian infantry units under Colonel John Hoad. In time this unit would be sent to fight on the Colesberg front.

---

3 For more information on Patriotic Funds in the Boer War period see M. Oppenheimer. "Home Front Largesse: The Colonial Patriotic Funds and the Boer War" in The Boer War: Army, Nation and Empire. The 1999 Chief of Army/Australian War Memorial Military History Conference.

Meanwhile, in New South Wales, recruitment for the second contingent was progressing steadily. Within a week of the first contingent's arrival in South Africa, New South Wales recruitment would receive a further boost. In a series of poorly executed attacks between 10 and 15 December 1899, the British Army suffered 3,000 casualties at the battles of Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso. This event, which came to be known as "Black Week" by the British public, had a severe impact upon the recruitment of soldiers in New South Wales. Citizen soldiers, who had originally refused to serve due to familial or other reasons, now began to enlist out of a heightened sense of duty, and a feeling of shame that they had not done so before "Black Week", when many ordinary citizens had argued that they should join. Harkus, after again discussing the situation with his wife, decided it was his duty to serve and departed to rejoin his unit in South Africa in January 1900, travelling with the second contingent of New South Welshmen bound for Cape Town.

With the lowering of required physical conditions for service, the second contingent recruited a number of men from various industries. George Rawe was one such man. Growing up in Lithgow he had naturally started his working career as a miner, losing both his brother and father to the trade. He was also connected to the Lithgow Volunteer Forces and, possibly through this participation, had decided to undertake a career with the police force. Once accepted into the police force he was posted to a position in Parramatta. His success as an officer saw him selected for the second contingent for South Africa. Rawe, along with a colleague who was also selected, was given a large send off at the Parramatta Masonic Hall, where his police superior Sub-inspector Latimer claimed "he had a little independence which they could not shake out of him."[4] Rawe himself said he would aim to "do his best", particularly as he wanted to dispel the rumour that "the Parramatta police [were] volunteering for the purpose of getting away from Parramatta ... He was coming back. He would never forget Parramatta."[5] He began his journey with excitement as he boarded the *Southern Cross* on 17 January with the other members of the B, C and D squadrons of the New South Wales First Mounted Rifles. Perhaps their excitement would have been dulled had they known that the Boers had ambushed a group of New South Wales Lancers and Australian Horse at Slingersfontein on the previous day. Here Corporal Frederick Kilpatrick became the first Parramattan to die in the war, his jaw shot away, while 16 men were captured and a second Australian, a Horseman, was killed.[6]

Boarding the *Southern Cross*, along with Harkus and Rawe, was John Joseph Kelly. A young athlete, he had served with the volunteer infantry and as a member of the permanent artillery before signing up with the second contingent of the New South Wales Medical Corps. Described as a "tall young fellow, strong and sinewy, without an ounce of strength upon his bones" he reminds one of the descriptions of the Anzacs later laid down by Charles Bean in his official history of World War 1 or of George Lambert's artwork *A sergeant of the light horse in Palestine* (1920). Like those who would come fourteen years later, he was a young soldiering type who wanted to serve both his home and the mother country. He separated from his unit to act as an orderly in charge of sick bay aboard the *Southern Cross*, turning his back for the time being on his athletic abilities that had won him acclaim in both running and swimming. On 20 February, Kelly wrote to his parents from Maitland near Cape Town, "I feel in first-class, and am more than certain than when I left that I will return safely, as the war will be over much sooner

---

4 Cumberland Argus, 20 January 1900, p. 11.

5 ibid

6 C. Wilcox. *Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa 1899-1902*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 64.

than I expected … I was never a day sick throughout the trip … though while on board I had to sleep in the same ward as the typhoid patients."7

Meanwhile, Albert Smith had been moved from his position in Colesberg to join up with the bulk of British forces. After the disasters of "Black Week" the British had sent in their most experienced soldier Field Marshal Lord Roberts to defeat the Boers. His ambitious plan revolved around the successful relief of Kimberley, a town the Boers had besieged since early in the war. From here he would move east, marching on the Orange Free State capital of Bloemfontein. After resupplying his troops, he would move onwards into Transvaal with the aim of taking the capital city, Pretoria. It was a bold plan that required fast movements over tough terrain. To allow for this movement Roberts minimised the accoutrements of his men, and took the risk of minimising the supply and medical aspects of the column. On 10 February, the column began to march on Kimberley, while British General Sir John French went ahead with his cavalry division to relieve the town before the column's arrival. Elsewhere at this time, the Australian infantry were instrumental in their first major action defending the Colesberg front from a vigorous attack by the Boers between the 6 and 14 of February 1900. The action costs the Australian units fifty-one casualties, six of them fatal.

After relieving Kimberly, Lord Roberts' column turned eastward to march on the Orange Free State capital of Bloemfontein. The march involved three large engagements at Paardeberg, Poplar Grove and Driefontein. The Battle of Paardeberg had begun with A Squadron of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles stumbling on to the rear of the retreating Boers. The action on 27 February, which saw the surrender of two hundred and fifty Boers, was an important victory in the campaign, as the Boer general Piet Cronjé was caught in the fight.

Just before the engagement at Poplar Grove the three new squadrons for the New South Wales Mounted Rifles caught up to the column. At Poplar Grove, 7 March, and Driefontein, 10 March, Harkus, Rawe and Kelly were introduced to combat, while the Boers made a fighting retreat in a series of final efforts to save their capital. Kelly's introduction to the front at Driefontien was later recalled by him in a letter to his parents:

> We had a big battle on Saturday ... the chap of ours that was shot, young Abrahams from Bega was shot cowardly while the Boers were waving the white flag. He died in my arms. I had him down to the doctor while he was still conscious. He only lived three minutes. He was shot through the heart.8

The Boers were swiftly collapsing, being constantly forced back. They came to the inevitable realisation that they could not continue to defend Bloemfontein without greatly impeding their war effort. As a result the Boers withdrew from Bloemfontein and Lord Roberts was able to enter the undefended capital city of Bloemfontein on the 13 March 1900.

The fall of Bloemfontein was widely celebrated throughout the British Empire. The Cape Colony held a public holiday to celebrate the event with all the festivities to go along with it. However, when the British and colonial troops entered the city of less than 30,000 people they were in extremely poor state. The lightning speed of Roberts advance through the Orange Free State had caused numerous difficulties which impacted on the ability of the column to cope with the medical and nutritional logistics of the force. Throughout the entire advance the column had had no change of clothing, minimal supplies, a reduction in the number of field ambulances from ten

---

7 Cumberland Argus, 28 March 1900, p. 2.
8 Cumberland Argus, 28 March 1900, p. 2.

to two and a reduction in transport wagons from four to two.9 This, combined with the Boers' early successful attacks on the stores of the column, saw the soldiers suffer poor rations and morale, resulting, overall, in a weakened force. Upon entering the town that one soldier described as "only a small city, not as big as Bathurst, not as pretty or substantial in its buildings" the average soldier would have received little to reinforce his morale from the capture of Bloemfontein.10

Within this weakened force Private George Rawe, like many of the soldiers, struggled to maintain an appropriate level of cleanliness. In a letter dated 27 April one of Rawe's fellow soldiers wrote "George was queer. He had had dysentery for the last week. He was black with dirt, and his toes were sticking out of his boots. I got him a bucket of water and some soap and towel ... I gave him a good tea and a drop of something strong and he said he felt like a different man."11 Nevertheless this level of improper hygiene was not uncommon amongst the column. When the polluted water of the Modder River, used as a main source of water by the British forces, was ingested untreated, typhoid was the surest outcome. The disease had already begun to swiftly spread throughout the ranks of the British and Dominion troops.

Bloemfontein was seen as the perfect location to rest and replenish the force. Here General Roberts planned to wait for supplies and fresh troops to arrive before making the 'final' push on to the Transvaal capital of Pretoria. However, when the waterworks supplying Bloemfontein were captured by a Boer action at Sannaspos, or Sannah's Post, on the night of 30 March the absence of clean water transformed the typhoid problem into an epidemic and Bloemfontein into an open space hospital. The British forward headquarters and 'refuelling' station saw buildings that should have been warehouses, turned into hospitals filled with the sick, and a few wounded from the skirmishes around the town. These poor conditions, combined with difficulties in obtaining suitable medical care and supplies, meant poor care for the men and much higher rates of death than should have been expected. Banjo Paterson, who was in South Africa as a journalist, could fortunately see the lighter side of the matter, writing:

> It is a mystery what the town will do without water, but we have blind faith in the RE (Royal Engineers) to pull us through. There is a very good swimming bath in this town ... and the water in it cannot be changed ... and the water is to be very nearly solid. One man is reported to have injured his head by diving against the water.12

On 5 April, five days after the water supply was cut off, Benjamin Harkus became the first Parramattan to succumb to typhoid. His illness lasted quite a while and throughout his ordeal he continued to worry about his wife and children. A letter written by a fellow soldier and published in the *Cumberland Argus* stated he "simply fretted himself to death ... and only the day before [he died] he expressed a desire while only half conscious, to see his children."13 A Trooper Mobbs spoke to the *Cumberland Argus* about the cause of the death of Harkus. He stated that "Ben Harkus realised his duty was to his wife and children. His critics thought his place was on the battlefield, and that expressed opinion forced him there. Will his critics now support his

---

9 S. A. Watt "The Anglo-Boer War: The Medical arrangements and implications there of during the British occupation of Bloemfontein: March-August 1900" in South African Military History Journal. Vol. 9 No. 2 December 1992. At http://rapidttp.com/milhist/vol092sw.html (Accessed Nov 2007).

10 W. A. Steel Diary 12 April 1900. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. ML MSS 2105. p47.

11 *Cumberland Argus*, 30 May 1900. p. 5.

12 R. Droogleever. From the Front: Being the observations of Mr A. B. (Banjo) Paterson. Sydney, Pan Macmillan Press, 2000. pp. 270-71.

13 *Cumberland Argus*, 12 May 1900, p. 11.

widow and orphans?"14 He clearly showed the belief that patriotism, or jingoism, inevitably leads to the disregard of private interests when they intersect or impact upon the "common good" and pride. Lacking a nationalism of their own, the colonies of Australia connected their civil pride with that of Britain through a shared cultural heritage. Ben Harkus, as the popular and skilful corporal of the New South Wales Lancers, although in the strictest terms a volunteer and thus only required to serve in New South Wales, was, rightly or wrongly, the symbol of valour and pride for the small colonial states on the Empire's periphery. Harkus remaining behind in the colony of New South Wales was seen as a betrayal of those entrusted traits. When this was tied into a jingoistic nationalism that communally limited and devalued the personal goals and desires of the individual, the result was a series of pressures that Harkus was unable to shake, despite his wife's pleas that he stay behind. This communal patriotism led the majority of soldiers who fought in the Boer War to volunteer their services, but it forced it on Benjamin Rowland Harkus through a mix of community pressure and shame.

The conditions for the troops in Bloemfontein failed to improve dramatically, even after the water was restored. It had begun hitting George Rawe who had only received a little relief from that "drop of something strong". On 10 April, he wrote to a friend in Parramatta mentioning that he had been ill for a few days with what may have been the start of a fever, but claimed "he was a good deal better and had thrown off the worst of the attack."15 Unfortunately it is not possible to build up immunity to typhoid fever, and the soldiers of the British and Dominion forces were infected over and over again. Given the conditions they were forced to live in, it is little surprise that the infection lingered. Trooper Watson Steel in his memoirs describes his experience in Bloemfontein as such,

> Without tents, or shelter of any kind ... we were compelled to lie on the cold, sodden ground, sometimes flooded completely ... Thousands were in hospital with dysentery, fever, pneumonia and rheumatism. The death rate was terrible, the ordinary cemeteries were too small to hold the number of victims, and fresh ground had to be broken."16

It was in one such hospital that George Rawe lay, having taken his last breath. He had been reinfected with typhoid and died at the age of 34, on 11 May 1900. He had only just become engaged to a Parramattan lady back home.

In the meantime the British and Dominion forces had begun their advance towards Pretoria, leaving behind those who were too sick to accompany the column. There is sound evidence to show that Leslie Hill began the March on Pretoria, but there is no record that either John Kelly or Albert Smith had. During April Kelly had become bored with the tedium that often accompanied a soldier's life during such 'refuelling' times. Writing home to his sister on 19 April he was "hoping to find yourself and all at home in the best of health and spirits", but complained "We have not made a move yet ... [and] it is monotonous lying rusty here ... there is little danger here."17 From the Boers, perhaps not, but from the conditions of the camp the inactive conditions of the troops led to complacency over the tasks, including the preparation of food and the hygiene of discarding waste, including faeces. When this was combined with communal food preparation and distribution the spread of an infection like typhoid, transferred orally through polluted water and food supplies, was a likely outcome overlooked by the authorities. Reporting on Pretoria's condition the *Times* special correspondent William Burdett-

---

14 ibid

15 Cumberland Argus 26 May 1900. p4.

16 W. A. Steel At the war in South Africa."In the Ranks of the Australians Jan. 1900 – Jan 1901." ML MSS 2105 Mitchell Library, New South Wales.

17 Cumberland Argus 26 May 1900 p4.

Coutts condemned the army, declaring "the suffering of patients was greatly increased by the inherent faults of management, bad discipline, want of initiative and a general spirit of laissez faire."18

Albert Smith would have agreed with Burdett-Coutts. At the end of April he wrote home to his brother, William, telling him how "[m]y 'cobber' and I have just been drying out clothes after being wet all night. They took our tents from us at the Orange River, so now we have had some beautifully wet nights."19 This situation most likely exacerbated his condition. He finally caught typhoid in May. By the time his brother received his letter telling William how he was enjoying the luxury of "bread and a ration of jam" Albert Smith was dying in an ill-suited hospital bed, crammed in with any number of men, suffering from their condition and from lack of room. He died on 30 May 1900. Less than a fortnight before, on 19 May, John Kelly had also died. Part of the medical corps, it is likely he spent the last days of his life treating the men in Bloemfontein, only to fall ill of the condition himself.

On 28 June 1900, the *Cumberland* printed a letter from Leslie Hill reporting he was in excellent health, a letter that was, familiarly, out of date. On the advance to Pretoria, Hill had come down sick and was sent back to Bloemfontein, where he was placed in one of the beds. He was soon sent back down to a hospital in Maitland, a town just outside Cape Town. Unlike Watson Steel,20 who over June had suffered from typhoid but had recovered well, Leslie Hill after one and a half months illness finally succumbed to typhoid on 21 June 1900.21 Leslie Hill's mother had received a letter from her son at Maitland saying that his health was improving. However, only a few hours after receiving this letter she was to receive a telegram from the Premier's Office informing her that her son was dead. Like Rowland Harkus, George Rawe, Albert Smith and John Kelly the death of Leslie Hill had an immediate and disastrous impact on those nearest and dearest to him, his family and friends. However, the communal response to these deaths was something more.

One week before Leslie Hill's death the town of Parramatta held a benefit concert to provide support to the wife and children of Rowland Harkus. A song titled 'Why weep for the Brave' was specially written for the concert and "scores of intending patrons had to be turned away from the doors."22 The celebrations were officially held in honour of Harkus himself, but because he had a wife and children there was a specific monetary edge to the commemoration. It gave residents the opportunity to show their appreciation for the deeds of Harkus, while it pulled the community in to support the wife and children both emotionally and financially above and beyond what was provided by the patriotic funds. The familial commitments of Harkus created a larger sense of loss than if he had been a single man. For this reason the communal reaction was a combination of patriotism and charity, recognising the sacrifice of Harkus and the loss to his family.

This celebration can be compared to the demonstration held a week before by the police force and members of the Masonic order, in order to pay tribute to their 'brother' George Rawe. The memorial demonstration was attended by thousands of people, in a celebration of Rawe's life, and a remembrance of his sacrifice. There was little charity involved here. It was instead a representation of a communal sense of loss combined with a heroic sense of the patriotism

---

18 Burdett-Coutts, M. P. The Sick and the Wounded in South Africa: What I saw of them and the Army Medical System. Melbourne: Cassel and Company, 1900. p17.

19 Cumberland Argus 9 June 1900. p12.

20 The memoirs of Watson Steele are quoted earlier

21 Watson Steel to Blanche Steel Johannesburg 22 June 1900 in Steel Family Papers op cit.

22 Cumberland Argus 16 June 1900. p2.

exhibited by Rawe in his life. It did not matter how he had died in the war, it only mattered that it was in war that he died, supporting the mother country.

Rawe's celebration can be placed in stark contrast to the gatherings held for the establishment of memorials after the war. Lord Roberts' dramatic march through Boer territory had brought the capitals of those countries under his control by June 1900; however it did not end the war. Predominantly consisting of mounted infantry, the Boer army did not require their capitals to fight, and they maintained a draining guerrilla war with the British and Dominion forces until May 1902. The Boers' guerrilla war only came to an end when Horatio Kitchener set up a series of concentration camps, interning Boer women and children, and applied a scorched earth policy to the countryside, depriving the Boers of both their support and supplies. This was hardly the glorious and righteous war that the Australian population expected to be partaking in. The Anti-War league was established at New South Wales in December 1901 "... [signifying] a substantial mood swing in public opinion."23

In June 1900, plans for a memorial for the fallen had begun in Parramatta. A Mr Sulman submitted a design for the memorial at an approximate cost of £500. The design incorporated four Doric columns from the Old Parramatta court house standing "at the angles of a platform reached by four flights of stairs" supporting the roof of the structure. 24 On top would be a sculpture of a fully armed and mounted Lancer. In between the columns, at ground level, would be a marble obelisk, with a mortuary urn, with the names of the dead inscribed on all four sides. The final touch would be "[s]eated and semi-recumbent figures... shown around the base, emblematic of the soldierly characteristics of the Australian heroes."25 As a foundation point in what would become Australia's history and conception of nationhood the sculpture, similar to other war memorials of the nineteenth century, would function as a "touchstone essential for the collective memory essential to nationhood."26 The fortunes, and public reaction, to the war, however, changed the dynamics of the remembering and the design of the memorial. The memorial lost the emblematic semi-recumbent figures. Instead of a large striking lancer on top, the final memorial had an outdated howitzer that the British had gifted to the colony of New South Wales in the 1860s, which had lain idle in the colony's military stores. Two even further outdated guns that were part of the gift were also used to flank the memorial. The marble obelisk which, in the jubilation of a quick victory, had appeared so enticing and correct was replaced by the sombre image of a broken column, signifying life cut short. The cost of the monument decreased with its grandeur. The original design was forecast at £500, but the final design cost the community only £100.

With the changing of the design the conceptual aspects of the memorial also changed. No longer was it a memorial to those lost from New South Wales, but rather it was restricted to the soldiers that served from the Cumberland region. On the four sides of the broken column were the names of the fifteen men, including Harkus, Hill, Smith, Rawe and Kelly, of the Cumberland region who had died at, or as a result of, the Second Anglo-Boer War. The memorial served to remember the service the region had rendered to the war. Across the top of the structure reads "Soldiers Memorial" giving a tangible link to the past and service of not just those who died, but

---

23 M. Oppenheimer. "Home Front Largesse: The Colonial Patriotic Funds and the Boer War" in The Boer War: Army, Nation and Empire. The 1999 Chief of Army/Australian War Memorial Military History Conference. Canberra: Army History Unit, 2000. Pp. 200-214. p204.

24 Cumberland Argus 2 June 1900. p5.

25 ibid.

26 J. Hargrove "Qui vive? France! War Monuments from the Defense to the Revanche" in J. Hargrove & N. McWilliam (ed) Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870-1914. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. p74.

also to those who still lived. In this way the communal remembering accommodated those that came back, serving to counter the sobriety of the broken column and the names of the dead. Through the use of the columns of the old court house the structure is symbolically connected to the civil establishment and beyond this "connected their sacrifice with the civil and military history of New South Wales."27 This connection was always deeply rooted in the Cumberland region, and therefore the connection of the military and civil establishments was specific to the role that region had played. This regional aspect is signified by the men who laid the four foundation stones for the monument. The New South Wales Governor, Sir Harry Rawson, and Austin Chapman, the federal Minister for Defence, laid two of the stones signifying the ceremonial and military aspects of the monument. The other two corner stones were laid by Joseph Cook, Member for Parramatta in federal parliament and future Prime Minister, and Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Cox, C. B., second in command of the Lancers, building on this civil and military dualism. The dual dynamics of place and memory is clearly apparent in the Governor's address. He stated that "[h]e could think of no more appropriate place than the site selected, a site so intimately connected with the early history of New South Wales."28

A smaller memorial in Liverpool to Albert Smith went through a similar development. It was suggested at a public meeting in June 1900 that a memorial to the soldiers of Liverpool be constructed, and funds quickly poured in. However, as the patriotism declined, so did the efforts of those responsible. Construction of the memorial had to wait five years, and when it was finally finished in August 1905 the memorial had become simply a memorial to the late Private Smith, rather than the soldiers in general.29 This decline in enthusiasm in turn led to a different interpretation of the commemoration of that war. The Parramatta Memorial had taken on regional aspects, underlying state and nationalist interests, represented by the Governor and the Minister for Defence. However, the Liverpool memorial had moved from the regional to the personal, underlying a shrinking of communal space as a reaction to ill feelings and distance from the events of the Boer War.

The Cumberland Region Soldiers' Memorial sits on the ridge of the landform called "The Crescent" in Parramatta Park. On the four sides of its central structure, the broken column, are four plaques that spell out the names of the fifteen men of the Cumberland region, including Parramatta and Liverpool, who gave their lives in the Boer War. Some like Lieut. G. B. Forster were killed, dying at Tweedraal on the 10 December 1901. Others like Capt. W.J.S. Rundle died of wounds at Karee Bosch on 30 July 1901. However the majority of those remembered on the memorial did not suffer such heroic deaths. Instead eight of those remembered on the memorial simply "died". Bloemfontein and Cape Town are the only locations to record multiple deaths, four and two respectively, and this is representative of the New South Wales and Australian forces. To use the First New South Wales Mounted Rifles as an example of the break up of causes of death in the Boer War, four soldiers were killed in action, four died of wounds, one died in an accident and 13 died of enteric fever (typhoid). Of these thirteen soldiers, ten died in Bloemfontein. The stories of Edward Harkus, John Kelly, George Rawe, Leslie Hill and Albert Smith are both a personal and communal history, showing a severe impact and response to the local townships of Parramatta and Liverpool. The almost celebratory aspects of the commemorations of Rowland Harkus and George Rawe represent the patriotic fervour that was still strong amongst the Australian colonies during the first year of the Boer War. The impact of

---

27 K. S. Inglis. *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 2005. p49.

28 Sydney Morning Herald 16 November 1903. p. 3.

29 J. Johnson "Boer War Memorial Lamp" at http://ebranch.liverpool.nsw.gov.au/aboutliv/boerwar.pdf (Accessed October 2007)

the fortunes of the war, actions of the British command and the high proportion of 'ignoble' deaths from sickness changed the public's opinion of the Boer War.

Just on half of the 609 Australian soldiers who died serving in the Boer War died as a result of illness. The Parramatta Boer War Memorial coped with this by using the word 'died' instead of using a description of his style of death. This represented a manner of preserving the honour of these men within the memorial for what was not a stereotypical, but very common, soldier's death. Coping with what the Boer War had become, and how it was later seen, many memorials which had encompassed large nationalist and 'imperialist' notions, such as in pride for the British Empire, were minimised from their original concepts and scaled down to levels that could be attached with personally and communally. This conceptual reduction was in turn a representation of the wider community's interpretation of the Boer War, and signifies why a nationalist mythology needed to wait for another war.

A more general memorial to the war at the Rocks, Sydney reads "The Units of the Volunteers from New South Wales who responded to the Empire's call, SOUTH AFRICAN WAR 1899 – 1902". It was not constructed until 1940. However, this is more representative of war memorialisation following, and during, the two world wars; a memorialisation that was only possible in relation to the Boer War long after discontent surrounding the action had ebbed away. Nevertheless, while the nationalist mythology could not initially accept those that died, their regional remembrance is evidenced by memorials such as those at Parramatta and Liverpool, as well as other towns throughout Australia such as Windsor and Queanbeyan in New South Wales, Casterton and St Kilda in Victoria or Mintaro in South Australia. The lives of Harkus, Rawe, Kelly, Smith and Hill and their commemoration demonstrate the discontent of a wider public, but a strong communal memorialisation that committed to a personal rather than nationalist memorialisation, evident in the structures such as the Cumberland Region Soldiers' Memorial.

--oOo--

2ND LIEUTENANT ARTHUR ERNEST CRAKER A COMPANY, 32ND BATTALION

Mike English

On Wednesday, 19 July 1916, Sergeant Craker wrote in his diary:

> I do not know whether this is the last entry or not, but I say goodbye, Mother Darling, Goodbye Annie my sweetheart, Father and Gertie, Nesta, Thelma and the little ones.

This entry was written prior to the 32nd Battalion going over the top in the Battle of Fromelles.

I first came in contact with Arthur Craker while I was young boy of about 7 or so. By that time Arthur was well into his sixties and carrying several injuries due to his war service. I would often visit him over weekends and marvel at how this man with his war injuries had returned from active service, married his sweetheart, had four children and generally led a full life. He worked in the Treasury Department and later the Taxation Department until his retirement at 60.

Arthur Ernest Craker, the son of Edwin and Mary Craker of Parade Avenue, Rosslyn Park, was born in Norwood on 21 November 1892. He was educated at Norwood Private School and later the Adelaide Training College, where he gained qualifications as a clerk.

Arthur, aged 22, enlisted in the AIF on 1 July 1915 and was allotted to A Company, 32nd Battalion. He was promoted sergeant on 16 August 1915 and embarked on HMAT A2 *Geelong* from Outer Harbour, Port Adelaide, for active service on 18 November 1915. He remarked in his diary that the send off was delightful with so many people on the wharf waving and passing on kind words of encouragement to the soldiers who were leaving for war. The band played *Auld Lang Syne* as the ship was leaving the wharf but he could not sing the high notes because of the lump in his throat. His sweetheart Annie was in the crowd to see him off which would have pleased him.

The trip over was generally uneventful with training, guard duties, games played etc. He also noted that there seemed to be plenty of gambling which he thought was disgusting. On 22 November, they sighted the Western Australian coast. The ship did not pull in to port but continued on its voyage. The days were spent with weapons training, particularly on machine guns, physical exercises and lectures on signalling. Boxing contests were also another form of physical exercise for the men and gave the men not directly involved the opportunity to keep busy as part of the audience. Unfortunately, a Private Bridger died as a result of the boxing and was buried at sea. He was the battalion's first casualty.[1]

The 32nd Battalion disembarked at Port Tewfik, Egypt and moved to Maascar camp. His first impressions were not favourable in that he thought the natives were dressed in filthy rags and would be always begging for money. The more civilized part of the town was more like he had experienced with shops, restaurants, picture shows and butcher shops etc.

On 22 December 1915, A Company was tasked to guard the canal and issued with 1000 rounds of ammunition. They proceeded along the canal where they mounted guard. On 25 December, Arthur was charged with discharging a firearm and immediately placed under arrest. He was paraded before his commanding officer and received an admonishment.

During the next few months the battalion completed route marches, weapons training, drill,

---

1 893 Private Alfred Ernest Bridger, C Company, 32nd Battalion died on 7 December 1915 and is commemorated on the Chatby Memorial at Alexandria, Egypt.

GROUP CAPTAIN ARTHUR POOLE LAWRENCE MC: A LIFE OF SERVICE TO AUSTRALIA - AIF WORLD WAR 1 AND MEDICAL RAAF

Wing Commander John Williamson, AM OStJ RAAF Res (Ret.)

The Beginnings

Arthur Poole Lawrence was born in Newmarket, Melbourne, on 12 March 1893, the son of Alfred and Edith (née Slade) Lawrence. Arthur, the second-born, had two brothers and a sister. Their father, founder of the Sydney based Australian firm Lawrence & Hanson Electrical Company, subsequently returned to England and the children were brought up by their mother.

A serious and conscientious student, Arthur was educated at Ascot Vale State Primary School, University High School and then at Scotch College, Melbourne. He enrolled into the Faculty of Medicine at Melbourne University and with academic success gaining him scholarships, graduated in medicine close to the top of his year in early November 1916. He was enrolled into the Medical Practitioners' Board of Victoria, Register No. 3181, in the same year.

With the beginning of World War 1 in 1914 many young Australians of Lawrence's vintage at that time were itching to volunteer for overseas service. So it is no surprise that Arthur Lawrence, temporarily pinned down by his undergraduate medical studies, made preparation for such service abroad by joining the AIF. On 25 August 1916, at the age of 23 years and 5 months, he applied for an AIF commission with the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC). He was appointed captain on 16 November 1916 which immediately following his medical graduation. The appointment was published in the *Commonwealth Gazette* on 28 December 1916.

Dr Lawrence was appointed as a first year medical intern to the Royal Melbourne Hospital. However, he declined that appointment because of its 12 month requirement and instead took a three month appointment at the Geelong Hospital. These arrangements enabled him to embark for "Service Abroad"[1] with the "A.A.M.C. A.I.F. Reinforcements" on 18 February 1917, at the age of 23 years and 11 months.

Just prior to all these events, on 31 January 1917, Dr Lawrence married Amy Moxon Beck, the daughter of a pharmacist, in Moonee Ponds, Melbourne.

Overseas and World War 1

The young captain's embarkation for "Service Abroad" as a "medical practitioner" was obviously processed as soon as he completed his three months at Geelong Hospital. He embarked for England on board His Majesty's Australian Transport (HMAT) *Ballarat* on 19 February 1917. His war began unexpectedly quickly. En route, HMAT *Ballarat*, 11,120 tons, a P&O vessel, was torpedoed in the English Channel by a German submarine on 25 April 1917

1 Throughout this paper, parentheses are used within the text to enclose specific words or phrases to indicate a direct *verbatim* extract from A P Lawrence's Service Record, or from the references shown in the Footnotes. As the Service Record extracts are reproduced faithfully, it would appear in some instances that incorrect punctuation was used in the Service Record itself. Elsewhere italics are used to explain some contemporary military abbreviations and his Military Cross *verbatim* citations are also reproduced in italics (*see below*)

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a licence from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)

and sank the next day.[2] To his family's knowledge Captain Lawrence was the last off the ship and there was fortunately no loss of life.

England

Captain Lawrence disembarked safely in Devonport, England on Anzac Day 1917. His service record thereafter records him as:

> "Capt M/I (*marched in*)[3] from Aust; (*sic*) Parkhouse,[4] 27/4/17".

There followed various United Kingdom medical training postings in Perham Downs and Durrington and finally to an Overseas Training Depot in England on 25 June 1917. Much later, on 2 December 1918, his wife Amy received a "form of Commission" from the AIF Base Records Office in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, which was issued by the British War Office, advising her of the appointment of her husband to the "temporary" rank of Captain in the "Regular Forces of the British Army, for retention against the time of his return from active service."

France and Belgium

Captain Lawrence was shipped to France on 19 September 1917, where he was "Taken on strength" (TOS) "1st Australian General Hospital". From there he was permanently detached to the 2nd Australian Division on 13 October 1917 and TOS in the 6th Field Ambulance, which was to be his home unit. From here until 20 January 1918, there followed a series of temporary detachments from the 6th Field Ambulance as a Regimental Medical Officer (RMO), first to the 23rd Battalion (Bn) (Victorian, 6th Brigade), then to the 2nd Division Engineers, and then to 24th Bn. (Victorian, 6th Brigade). He rejoined the 6th Field Ambulance between each of these detachments. On 30 January 1918, he was detached into the Australian Corps School for Medical Officers.

Lawrence went on leave between the 13 February and 2 March 1918, then returned to active duty in the 6th Field Ambulance. Due to illness he was admitted to hospital in a forward medical unit on 18 May and then to a small local hospital on 21 May. On 1 June, he was admitted to 20 General Hospital, Dannes-Camiers, France with "Trench Fever and a Pyrexia of Unknown Origin (PUO)".[5] He was transferred to 73 General Hospital, Trouville, France on 4 June, by now classed as "seriously ill". He was removed from the seriously ill list on about 1 July and was "discharged to duty" on 12 July.

Rejoining the 6th Field Ambulance his service record indicates without further comment that he remained there for the next four months. This period of AIF battles, destined to echo in Australian military fame, was also significant in Lawrence's military life as outlined below.

Following these momentous four months, he was detached temporarily to 24th Bn again as RMO on 10 November 1918 for 5 days.

---

2 *Australians at War*. © Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs. 2001.

3 World War 1 abbreviations used in this paper are those used in Service Records and military customs of that time. For example, although the abbreviation "RAAF" is now customarily rendered without punctuation, throughout the body of this text it is written "R.A.A.F.", as was then the custom.

4 Parkhouse was one of a number of AIF training camps and contained several depots including the AAMC depot.

5 "Pyrexia" simply means a raised body temperature. A "PUO" is a medical way of saying we do not (yet) know the cause of the raised temperature!

Captain Arthur Poole Lawrence AAMC AIF

After the Armistice of 11/11/1918

On 25 January 1919, Captain Lawrence was again temporarily detached from the 6th Field Ambulance, this time to 2nd Division Artillery Column (DAC), as RMO. He was moved from the 2nd DAC to the 2nd Pioneers on 16 February 1919. He then was required to report "on duty" to Headquarters London so he left France and disembarked at Folkestone, England, on 28 February 1919.

Recognition of distinction in the field

It is here, through these bland and unfeeling words of the service record that we get the first real indication of the gallant role that Captain Lawrence played as a medical officer under fire. The dates of his detachments to battalions of the 6th Brigade between October and November 1917, could place him in the Ypres area (where his family have believed he was) during the so-called 'Third Battle' of that salient, namely the infamous 'Passchendaele'.6 However there is no specific reference in his service record to his involvement there.

Firm records of subsequent events reveal that Captain Lawrence's conduct under heavy shell fire in the skilful evacuation of Australian wounded in the final Australian campaigns of 1918. These famous Australian series of battles, involving all five Australian divisions under Lieutenant General Monash, took place between 8 August and 5 October 1918.7 The role of the 2nd Division AIF in the triumph of Mont St Quentin-Peronne is commemorated by the splendid monument to that Division, situated appropriately beside the *Rue de Australien*, in Mont St Quentin. The village Mont St Quentin was captured by the AIF in a great feat of arms in September 1918.

The particular battle in which Captain Lawrence was involved with such distinction was in the Hindenburg Line itself..8 Lawrence's actions occurred leading up to and during the famous

---

6 " Passchendaele" was the spelling used during the time of WWI. The present spelling is "Passendale" (personal communication, Johan Durnez, Waregem, Belgium).

7 John Laffin. "Montbrehain", in Guide to Australian Battlefields of the Western Front 1916-1918, 3rd Edition. East Roseville, NSW. Kangaroo Press. 1999:156-157.

8 Laffin John. *Digger: The Legend of the Australian Soldier*. South Melbourne 3205. The Macmillan Company of Australia Pty Ltd. 1986:121 and 220.

attack and capture of the dominant and tactically critical French ridge village of Montbrehain, east of Peronne, by the 21st and 24th Battalions and the 2nd Pioneers. This engagement was the final battle of the Australian Corps on the Western Front on 5 October 1918. The diggers not only achieved this goal, but also captured 400 prisoners and then held the position against desperate German counter attacks. However the action cost in casualties 30 Australian officers and 400 other ranks.

Lawrence escaped death or wounding. What he achieved during these actions, his service record now at last speaks for itself. For the next entry is: "Awarded Military Cross, London Gaz: 31219". The gazette was dated 8 March 1919. The citation for Lawrence's Military Cross was published in the second supplement to the *London Gazette*, No. 31583, dated 4 October 1919:

> Military Cross
>
> With reference to the award conferred as announced in the London Gazette, dated 8th March, 1919, the following is the statement of service for which the decoration was conferred:
>
> Captain Arthur Poole Lawrence, MC
>
> He displayed great gallantry and able leadership on 3rd, 4th, and 5th October, 1918, during the fighting in the Hindenburg Line, north of St. Quentin, particularly during the assault on Montbrehain, as bearer captain (sic). He maintained touch with the R.A.P's in spite of heavy shell fire, and his genius for selecting routes and loading posts resulted in very rapid evacuation of wounded.

The recommendation for the Military Cross which was raised by the Assistant Director Medical Service, 2nd Australian Division and supported by Major General Charles Rosenthal Commanding 2nd Australian Division included the following paragraph which was not included in the citation published in the *London Gazette*:9

> His work throughout the period was quite outstanding time after time he went to heavily shelled locations to extricate the wounded – he was always where the danger was greatest, where the casualties were occurring, and by his coolness and courage and example, rendered the most gallant service in a very difficult situation.

Many weeks later, on 28 July 1919, his family received the following communication from the AIF Base Records Office, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne:

> Dear Madam,
>
> I have much pleasure in forwarding hereunder copy of extract from Second Supplement, No. 31219, to the "London Gazette", dated 8th March 1919, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by the undermentioned member of the Australian Imperial Force.
>
> Awarded the Military Cross
>
> HIS MAJESTY THE KING has been graciously pleased to approve the above award to the undermentioned in recognition of gallantry and devotion to duty in the field. The acts of gallantry for which the decoration has been awarded will be announced in the "London Gazette" as early as practicable:
>
> Captain ARTHUR POOLE LAWRENCE
>
> The above has been promulgated in *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, No. 75, dated 17 June 1919.

9 see http://www.awm.gov.au/cms_images/AWM28/1/122P2/0158.pdf

Yvonne Rosetti's 1918 crayon portrait of Captain Arthur Poole Lawrence MC. Note that although Captain Lawrence was an officer he wore the classic Australian slouch hat to represent faithfully the typical Aussie Digger.

Singled out

In 1918, the French Government, as a mark of respect to the World War 1 allied forces which had fought on French soil, commissioned a French artist, Yvonne Rosetti, to portray one allied soldier from each country for display in the Louvre. The Australian selected was the undeniably handsome Captain A P Lawrence, MC AIF. Ms Rosetti presented a crayon drawing to her sitter[10]

France again

Following the announcement of the award of the Military Cross, he returned to France on 6 March 1919 and rejoined the 6th Field Ambulance until 23 March. His subsequent attachments between these dates, as listed above from his Service Record, would have involved the on-going medical work that falls to the lot of all medical officers in war, long after the last shots are fired. He was then directed to report to the Director Medical Services (DMS) back in England.

The young surgeon

Captain Lawrence had by this time resolved to obtain a post-graduate surgical qualification. This is not surprising mindful of the extensive battlefield, casualty, and allied hospital surgical experience he would have gained in the preceding 18 months. His service record indicates he was granted Non-Military Employment (NME) leave from late March until 7 October 1919 for the stated medical purpose of attending the Royal Infirmary in Glasgow.

---

10 Woden Valley Sub-Branch R.S.L. The Serviceman, Special Eddison Park Edition No. 7 ("The Anzac Edition"). Canberra. 1998:10.

It was about this time that Arthur cabled his young bride in Melbourne and asked her to join him in England. They had not seen each other for two long years since he embarked from Melbourne. She arrived in England a little later in 1919, to the great delight of them both, following a voyage from Sydney, via New Zealand and then across Canada.[11] They had their delayed honeymoon there in England and Arthur began what was to be a six months Glasgow course preparation for his examinations for a Fellowship in the Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh (FRCS [Edin.]), with his wife by his side. But fate took a hand with those plans!

His strength of character in Scotland

In the words of Arthur's younger son (Dr Stephen Lawrence) the following events took place in Edinburgh:

> He was above all a man of honour. When about to sit for his FRCS in Edinburgh, the Warden of the College asked him for afternoon tea the day before the exam. On some pretext the Warden left him alone and to my father's dismay, he saw that the exam paper for the next day was on the table in front of him. On the Warden's return, my father told him that he had done my father a great disservice, for he could not sit the exam after this experience and he would have to stay in Glasgow for a further six months until the next sitting. This he did.

So of necessity, when Arthur's previous NME leave period had expired he immediately obtained an extension until 21 January 1920. That extra time allowed him to gain his FRCS (Edin.), a considerable achievement on the heels of all that he had been through during those previous two and a half years.

Homeward bound

Lawrence reported as Medical Officer to the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General (DAAG) in England on 22 January 1920 "for disposal", and he and the now pregnant Amy embarked on 22 January 1920 for Australia on board the former German vessel, the *Fredericksberg*.[12] They arrived in Melbourne on 9 March 1920, undoubtedly to a joyful reception.

Captain Arthur Lawrence's AIF appointment was terminated in Melbourne on 21 April 1920. Arthur and Amy's first child, a daughter, Patricia, was born on 22 June 1920.

Not a Civilian for long

In 1920, only a few short months after the four operational and the four training squadrons of the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) of WW1 had been disbanded, following their return to Australia, the decision was taken to establish an Australian Air Force.[13] The AFC had been part of the Army. The establishment of this new Australian Air Force occurred on 31 March 1921 with approval to use the 'Royal' prefix approval by His Majesty King George V on 13 August 1921. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) was based at Point Cook, Victoria.

---

11 The eastern direction chosen for this journey seems curious, as hostilities had by then ceased?

12 The '*Fredericksberg*' was a converted captured German vessel. During the journey back to Australia it had on board many German prisoners and on arrival in Fremantle, the ship's crew refused to sail on unless these prisoners were taken off.

13 Walker A. S. Medical Services of the R.A.A.F. in, Medical Services of the R.A.N. and R.A.A.F.; Part 11. Canberra. Australian War Memorial 1961:173-179. According to some other sources, in 1920 the Australian Air Force was initially termed the "Australian Air Corps".

Squadron Leader A P Lawrence MC RAAF in 1921

In 1920 Dr Lawrence had been appointed as the Medical Officer to the Point Cook Flying School. He was appointed to a commission in the Medical Branch of the Permanent Air Force with rank of flight lieutenant on 31 March 1921, the day the RAAF was established.14

On 28 May 1921, Arthur and Amy welcomed the arrival of their second daughter, Suzette.

Soon afterwards, the medical services of the RAAF were born modestly at Point Cook on 1 July 1921 with its inaugural sole (Senior) Medical Officer the freshly promoted Squadron Leader A P Lawrence MC FRCS (Edin.).

Royal Assent to the *Air Force Act* 1923 was received on 1 September 1923, which gave the RAAF equal status to the Royal Australian Navy and the Australian Military Forces (at least theoretically!).

A possible first military aviation medicine flying experiment in Australia?

Squadron Leader Lawrence was in charge of the Point Cook "sick quarters" - which was simply a small hut. However with his enquiring mind, he quickly became interested in aspects of aviation medicine, in particular in the selection of recruits for flying training and in the little understood problems that then beset high altitude flying.

---

14 Walker A. S. Medical Services of the R.A.A.F. in, *Medical Services of the R.A.N. and R.A.A.F.; Part11.* Canberra. Australian War Memorial 1961:173-179.

One day his attention was caught by two flight lieutenants in a DH9 aircraft[15] after they had landed from a flight to a claimed altitude of 28,000 feet without oxygen supplement.[16] One airman was visibly centrally cyanosed[17] and both showed other clinical signs of hypoxia (lack of oxygen). They remained rather unwell for the next few days. Typically, Lawrence then persuaded a squadron leader to take him up to allow him to study the effects of high altitude without supplementary oxygen on himself. At a confirmed altitude of 22.000 feet Lawrence identified the clinical signs, symptoms and effects of hypoxia in himself, finding that he was quite unable to think or observe accurately.[18] This may have been the first aviation medical experiment conducted while flying, in Australian military history?

A career in ophthalmology

In 1922, along with the RAAF expansion, Lawrence was relocated to Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, and appointed as the first Director of Air Force Medical Services.

On 3 March 1923, Amy and Arthur's third child, William, was born.

At this stage Arthur decided to study ophthalmology (the study of the eye and its diseases) - perhaps influenced by his RAAF role in flight crew selection and by a specialty clearly of relevance to the RAAF Medical Services. So he sailed to Moorfields Eye Hospital in London on 27 July 1924 under Air Force authority, to study for his post-graduate qualifications in ophthalmology. Arthur worked en route as the ship's doctor on board SS *Jervis Bay* (a ship later to claim great fame during World War 2).[19] Amy followed a short time later on SS *Bendigo* to join Arthur in England, while the three children remained with close relatives in Melbourne.

Arthur was once again successful with his post-graduate examinations and obtained his Diploma in Ophthalmological Medicine and Surgery (DOMS [London]).

Inter-Service politics back in Australia

Squadron Leader Lawrence returned to Melbourne on 5 October 1925, as both a qualified general surgeon and specialist ophthalmologist, and as the Director of the Royal Australian Air Force Medical Services at Air Force Headquarters, Victoria Barracks, with the right of private practice in Ophthalmology. He conducted his private practice from 120 Collins Street, Melbourne (next to the Independent Church).

In his Air Force role Lawrence soon became involuntarily caught up in the political wrangling among the service chiefs, particularly by the Army, which wanted to amalgamate the Naval and Air Force Medical Services under its own control. This Lawrence and his naval counterpart firmly resisted, despite interminable committee meetings and reports at Federal Ministerial level.

---

15 The more accurate designation of this aircraft, i.e. whether a DH9 or a DH9A and its subsequent series numbering, are not known to the author?

16 The accuracy of this altitude was doubtful, for altimeters of that time were not completely reliable, especially at higher altitudes. In addition both airmen's abilities would have been seriously affected by hypoxia!

17 "Central cyanosis" is the serious clinical sign of a visible blue discolouration, particularly of the lips and tongue, due to inadequate oxygen supply to the vital organs of the body. Its significance was neatly expressed by the Queensland neurosurgeon, Dr Ken Jamieson: "*If the lips are blue, the brain is too!*".

18 One can only wonder how the pilot also felt and how safe his flying was at the time! If this early experiment was ever published its whereabouts is not yet known to the author.

19 The ss *Jervis Bay*, converted from a merchant ship and fitted with just seven 6-inch guns in 1939 to become HMS *Jervis Bay*, in November 1940 gallantly engaged the German pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer* in unequal combat in the Atlantic, to protect the allied convoy it was escorting. HMS *Jervis Bay* was left a blazing wreck and her Captain, Captain Edward Fegen RN (awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously), and many of her gallant crew were killed in action, in this courageous naval action.

For example, following a decision made at a conference on 9 November 1925 that amalgamation was simply not workable, he participated, at squadron leader rank it should be noted, an equivalent rank to major, in a sub-committee with the then two other Directors of Medical Services (Navy – Surgeon Captain C A Gayer Phipps, and Army – Major-General G W Barber). This sub-committee submitted its report two days later, advocating "cooperation" rather than "amalgamation" (even though Major-General Barber in a "minority report" continued to urge "amalgamation"). Reading between the lines, one can only imagine the difficult discussions that must have taken place in that sub-committee!

While all these heavy debates were going on, Air Force Medical Services were undergoing a steady expansion. This included the establishment of sick quarters at Point Cook and other RAAF bases, and rapid, world wide advances in aviation medicine. On 1 July 1927, amidst all these stresses Squadron Leader Lawrence was promoted to Wing Commander.

However control by the Army Medical Services was ratified by the Minister for Defence, and as part of the consequent reshuffle, Lawrence's commission in the Permanent Air Force was terminated on 24 September 1928. He was appointed the next day, at the same rank of Wing Commander, to the Citizen Air Force. His official appointment was now as "Part-time Deputy Director of Medical Services (Air)" (DDMS (Air)), answerable to the Director-General of Army Medical Services. By December 1928, the RAAF medical appointees numbered six officers, including and commanded by Lawrence.

Also at this time, Arthur and Amy's fourth child, Stephen (Steve), was born on 20 December 1929.

During these and ensuing years Lawrence headed a continuing expansion of Air Force Medical Services, weathered the reduction in Air Force numbers and budgets during the great depression, and attempted to correct the lack of liaison with the RAF in the rapid advances occurring in aviation medicine. He was promoted to Group Captain on 1 August 1933.

However when his advocacy for himself and a full time Squadron Leader on his staff to be sent on exchange to the RAF in England was rejected by the Air Board, he tendered his resignation from the RAAF. It was accepted on 20 November 1935. So ended Dr Lawrence's distinguished military career on behalf of his country.

The personal costs of many stresses

Around this time the accumulation of the many years of stress began to take its toll on Group Captain Lawrence's health. First there was the indelible mental and emotional imprint of the Great War, the terrible injuries, slaughter and suffering of so many young Australians in the prime of their lives which he had witnessed while under fire. Added to this were the horrific surgical and relatively rudimentary anaesthesia situations in which he would have been involved as a young doctor. Following this was the acute pressure of his post-graduate exams and the raising of a young family of four children through the depression years. Superimposed upon all this was the protracted turmoil in which he became innocently embroiled at senior medical military level, trying to obtain justice for the expanding RAAF Medical Services which he, a conscientious and responsible leader, headed and guided with skill.

The result, understandably, was that Lawrence's health declined and required that he take a significant break from his work and duties. Following a period of rest and recuperation he fortunately recovered well and embarked with his customary vigour on the next phase in his life.

Civilian life and activities

Thus, after a varied, committed and distinguished military life in the AIF and then the RAAF, spanning a terrible world war and 18 tumultuous pioneer years and achievements, Dr Lawrence returned to civilian ophthalmological practice in Collins Street, Melbourne. He conducted his practice successfully for 30 further years. To expand his private practice he would spend five days in the first week of each month providing valued specialist ophthalmological services to various Gippsland towns.

A small bronze relief of A P Lawrence MC in WWI uniform,
in the possession of his son, Dr Stephen Lawrence.

His family report that he subsequently never wore his uniform during this time and chose not to march on subsequent Anzac Days. No one can recall him ever wearing his medals after his military life was over.

Other personal accomplishments

Arthur Lawrence was reasonably fluent in French and German and he played the piano competently by ear. In his ophthalmology work he was again meticulous. His operating scalpels were always sent to England for sharpening. Upon their return he would test them by dragging the unweighted blade lightly across a small piece of pig skin stretched to make a miniature drum. If the blade either failed to slice the pig skin or permitted his fingers to slide, that scalpel would be sent back to England. Dr Steve Lawrence also reports that his father gave up playing tennis in case that activity caused his hand to develop a tremor during his ophthalmological surgery.

Arthur and Amy's family of four children, two girls and two boys, grew up, married and raised families. One daughter became a physiotherapist, another worked for stockbrokers, and both

sons graduated in medicine. The elder son, William, briefly absconded as a medical student and tried unsuccessfully to enlist in World War 2 while under age. One of Arthur's sons-in-law, James Hume, served with distinction and was seriously wounded in action as a Royal Australian Navy (RAN) officer during World War 2 . He retired as a Commander RAN.

Group Captain Dr Arthur Poole Lawrence, MC FRCS (Edin.) DOMS (London) died in Melbourne on 19 January 1966 at the age of 72 years. Three of his children survive at the time of writing; his eldest son, William, died peacefully in his sleep in 1987. Although no great-grandchildren were born before Arthur died, his progeny now number twenty grandchildren and thirty-seven great grandchildren.

He was interred in a private grave in Templestowe Cemetery, Melbourne on 20 January 1966.[20]

His was an heroic life, spent in both the AIF and then the RAAF with distinction, in the cause of his country. The RAAF and its Medical Services in particular remain indebted to him for his pioneering and far-seeing influence at a critical time in their evolution. Australia should remember him with honour and gratitude.

Concluding Comments

In 2003, the writer stumbled upon the significant early Point Cook achievements of then Squadron Leader Lawrence, recorded in Dr Allan Walker's nationally valuable publication. When the writer sought further information about this Officer from various likely sources within the limits of his own resources, he was surprised to strike repeated blanks. In the absence of the writer's knowledge of any other previously documented accounts of Group Captain Lawrence's life and achievements, there appeared to be an inappropriate gap for such a significant military and medical life? The writer would be most grateful to learn if Group Captain A P Lawrence's military life (other than those in Dr Walker's seminal 1961 publication) has been documented elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the detailed support, information, and encouragement of Group Captain Lawrence's family, especially that of Commander (RAN Ret.) Jim and Mrs Suzette Hume (née Lawrence), Dr and Mrs Steve Lawrence and their son, Dr John Lawrence. Between them they supplied many WW1, Air Force and family details and photographs, kindly reviewed and corrected the draft writings and patiently answered many questions. Gratitude is also expressed to Pat Hall who provided valuable general Air Force details. Johan Durnez in Belgium, kindly assisted with some details relating to WWI terminology. Finally the manuscript was expertly reviewed by friends Colin Simpson and Peter Harvey, both prominent members of the Military Historical Society of Australia.. Their input significantly improved the accuracy and readability of this report. Any deficiencies and inaccuracies remain the responsibility of the author's alone.

--oOo--

20 Lawrence's wife Amy died on 6 August 1966 and is interred in the same grave with him, in Templestowe Cemetery.

WAR AT THE END OF THE WORLD
THE CHACO WAR–BOLIVIA v PARAGUAY 1932-35

Graham Wilson[1]

We tend to think of South America in the 20th century as being perennially unstable, with the various republics constantly at war with each other. The truth, however, is that while regional tensions and border clashes were a regular happening, the only major, conventional conflict fought on the South American continent in the 20th century was the Chaco War, fought between the two land locked nations of Bolivia and Paraguay for control of an arid wasteland known as the *Chaco Boreal*. This war lasted from 1932 to 1935, wrecked the economies of both countries and cost the lives of over 100,000 men, yet it was largely unremarked on at the time and largely forgotten today (except in Bolivia and Paraguay, of course).

One of the more unfortunate aspects of the relative obscurity of the Chaco War at the time it was fought was the fact that the conflict brought out a number of very valuable lessons. In some ways the Chaco War can be viewed as (and is sometimes referred to as) the Spanish Civil War of the Americas, as to a certain extent the war was a testing ground for tactics and procedures that would be used in the upcoming Second World War. However, due to the very obscurity of the conflict, these lessons, which would have been valuable in the early stages of World War Two, were either totally unnoticed by the outside world, or ignored, or forgotten.

Not only was the Chaco War the only conventional war fought in South America in the 20th century, it, along with the contemporaneous Spanish Civil War, was very much a testing ground for World War Two, many valuable lessons coming to light during the conflict. Unlike the Spanish Civil War, however, which was fought in the glare of world publicity and from which many valuable lessons were gleaned for the forthcoming global conflict, the Chaco War was all but unknown at the time and many lessons that came to light, lessons which would have been applicable to the conduct of war in places like Burma and Malaya, went unnoticed and unheeded.

This article will examine this little known war and hopefully tease out a few of the missed lessons.

***

The first question that springs to mind, of course is, 'What in the world is a 'Chaco'?

The answer is, the Chaco is an area of wilderness, about 647,000 square kilometres in size, straddling Bolivia and Paraguay and also intruding into north-eastern Argentina, which is referred to as the 'Gran Chaco' or 'Chaco Boreal'. The 'Chaco' itself is a corruption of the Quechua Indian word '*chaqu*', which means 'hunting' or 'to hunt', so Gran Chaco means 'big hunting' or 'good hunting', and 'Chaco Boreal' means 'hunting forest'.

The last is a trifle misleading, as it suggests that the Chaco is a land of plenty, teeming with game. Nothing could be further from the truth. While the region is famous for its biodiversity, the Chaco is in fact incredibly inhospitable, marked by sparse vegetation, extreme temperatures and very little water. The terrain of the Chaco ranges from flat, sparsely vegetated alpine plains

1 This article has been adapted from a paper presented to the ACT Branch of the Military Historical Society of Australia in Canberra on 24 November 2008.

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a licence from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)

in the north and west towards the Andean foothills, to arid, open savannah further to the south, to thick, tangled arid scrub and jungle. All in all, this is a pretty unprepossessing patch of dirt and at first glance, not something to spend your nation's wealth and lives on.

Even today the Chaco is sparsely inhabited, largely due to the scarcity of potable water. The only inhabitants are Indians, Toba, Mbaya, Guaihuru and others, who are largely shifting agriculture farmers and hunters, and German Mennonite colonists, who farm and herd the central Chaco.

Having said that, we come back to the question, why in the world did Bolivia and Paraguay fight a murdering great war in this wasteland?

The first reason was national pride and antipathy. The area in question had never really been defined or agreed and both sides claimed it. Bolivia based its claim on the historical notion that the region had originally been part of the Spanish province that eventually became Bolivia. As Paraguay hated the Spanish only slightly less than it hated the Portuguese, this claim didn't impress them all that much. For its part, Paraguay based its claim, fairly reasonably, on the notion that possession is nine-tenths of the law, noting that the only development in the region had been carried out by Paraguayans or people entering the area with Paraguayan permission and that the produce of the region was vital to the largely agrarian-based Paraguayan economy.

The second reason is that both countries are landlocked. Bolivia is totally landlocked, surrounded by Chile, Peru, Paraguay and Argentina, with no outlet to the sea. Bolivia did originally have a small Pacific coastline that included the seaport of Antofogasta, but she lost this in an untidy little three way conflict between herself, Peru and Chile in 1883, known as the War of the Pacific, with Peru ending up with a chunk of northern Bolivia, while Chile managed to take a bit out of Peru and also take all of Bolivia's coastal provinces. Needless to say, the lack of an outlet to the sea makes things somewhat difficult for Bolivia (although, believe it or not, Bolivia still has a navy, including a marine corps!).

Paraguay is also landlocked, in that it does not possess an oceanic littoral. Unlike its neighbour Bolivia, however, Paraguay does have access to the Atlantic Ocean via the Paraguay and Parana Rivers. Both of these rivers are wide enough and deep enough for quite large, deep-draught, ocean-going ships to make their way all the way up to the Paraguayan capital of Asuncion, which is in fact a large and busy maritime port. Paraguay also has a navy, however, unlike the Bolivian Navy, it is not a joke. Whereas the largest ships in the Bolivian Navy are a pair of 150 ton, unarmed hospital ships and the largest fighting ships are a handful of 5 ton patrol boats armed with a single .50 calibre machine gun, the Paraguayan Navy operates two well armed and well maintained 650 ton converted minesweepers, as well as the training and transport ship *Guarani*, a converted merchant vessel of over 1,000 tons deadweight which has been regularly employed on ocean-going training trips for Paraguayan naval cadets and on commercial voyages as far afield as France.

Bolivia didn't have an outlet to the sea, but Paraguay did. Bolivia, whose economy was heavily based on mining and which was dependent on the goodwill of its neighbours to provide access to national rail networks for all exports and imports, was desperate to obtain its own outlet to the sea. Obviously, if she took full control of the Chaco this would leave her commanding the northern banks of the Rio Paraguay, which in turn would give her access to the sea. So, for Bolivia it was a matter of securing its long sought after outlet to the sea, while for Paraguay it was a matter of pride of possession, along with fear of what effect the loss of the Chaco would have on its fragile, agrarian economy.

Finally, both sides wanted whatever untapped resources were in the area, and this brings us to a third reason why this bloody war was fought – oil. In the late 1920s it had been decided that

there were probably substantial oil deposits in the Chaco and major oil companies were in competition for the drilling and exploitation rights. However, since the area was contested and sovereignty not established, the oil companies needed to have someone firmly and unambiguously in possession of the area so they could negotiate with them. It has been theorised that to a large extent the Chaco War was a proxy war, fought on behalf of the Standard Oil Company of the US and Royal Dutch Shell by Bolivia and Paraguay respectively, the company backing the winning side being the one to get access to the oil deposits in the Chaco. While there is no concrete proof of a definite plan on the part of either company, it is a fact that Standard Oil was a power to be reckoned with in Bolivia and Royal Dutch Shell enjoyed the same position of power in Paraguay, and it is a fact that both companies helped to bankroll the war, arranging and guaranteeing loans with Canadian, British and European banks for their respective host nations to purchase arms, ammunition and aircraft.

Clashes between the two countries began as far back as the mid-1920s, with the first major incident being the killing of a Paraguayan Army officer in the disputed border region on 25 February 1927. On 14 December 1928, still with no declaration of war, Bolivian troops captured the Paraguayan military settlement at Fortin Boqueron. This was a precursor to a planned pre-emptive invasion of Paraguay, however, in January 1930 Paraguayan intelligence uncovered enough evidence to publicly expose Bolivia's plans and the invasion was shelved under pressure from Argentina and Brazil.

On 4 March 1931 Dr Daniel Salamanca, a compromise candidate, succeeded to the Bolivian presidency following a factional dispute. Salamanca was a well known 'hawk' in the matter of Bolivian/Paraguayan relations and his personal motto when he took office was *Pisar fuerte en el Chaco!* ('We must stand firm in the Chaco!').

Using a time honoured South American technique (and financed by Standard Oil) Salamanca used the Chaco dispute to distract the Bolivian people from the country's economic woes and the government's autocratic actions and to this end Salamanca authorised and encouraged Bolivian military encroachments into the Chaco. This would lead to the final event that would see the outbreak of open, full-scale warfare. This was a Bolivian Army expedition deep into the Chaco in July 1932, which stumbled upon a hitherto unknown source of precious fresh water, Lake Pitiantuta, the ideal place for a fortified military settlement or *fortin*. Unfortunately for the Bolivians, however, Lake Pitiantuta was already garrisoned by the Paraguayans and a battle ensued, which eventually saw the heavily outnumbered Paraguayans withdraw. For all intents and purposes, Bolivia and Paraguay were now at war.

At this point it is worthwhile to examine the military balance between the two nations at the start of the war, and this is shown in the table below.

	Bolivia	Paraguay
Population	3,000,000	880,000
Army Establishment	8,860	Establishment 4,311
Actual	6,418	3,769
	6 x 'Divisions':	3 x 'Divisions':
	13 x Infantry Regiment (Battalion)	5 x Infantry Regiment (Battalion)
	5 x Cavalry Regiment	3 x Cavalry Regiment
	3 x Artillery Groups	3 x Artillery Groups
	4 x Engineer Battalion	1 x Engineer Battalion

Table 1 – Comparison of Bolivian and Paraguayan Forces 1932

As the table shows, on paper Bolivia had overwhelming advantage. Not only did it have a population three times the size of Paraguay's and an army twice its size, it had a more diverse and industrialized economy than Paraguay (which was almost entirely agrarian). In addition, besides being larger than Paraguay's army, the Bolivian Army was, in relative contemporary South American terms, well equipped, well organised, well armed and well trained. Much of this was the work of one man, Hans von Kundt, a former German Army officer who had first come to Bolivia in 1908 as a member of a German military mission sent to modernise and reorganise the Bolivian Army. In 1911 he had set up and commanded the Bolivian Army Staff College. In 1914, along with the rest of the German Military Mission, he returned home to fight in the Great War, during which he rose to the rank of Lieutenant General and commanded a corps on the Eastern Front. At a loose end after the war, in 1921 von Kundt accepted an invitation to return to Bolivia and take command of the army. On the face of it this was a good move for the Bolivians as von Kundt was well known and well respected in the army and was a competent and efficient officer. He was particularly well liked by the enlisted members of the army because, unlike the average native born Bolivian officer, he paid close attention to the welfare and well being of the troops, something the average Bolivian grunt had previously not had much experience with. Unfortunately for both the army and von Kundt himself, the German officer involved himself in some rather inept political meddling in 1930 that saw him dismissed from the army, but his work had largely been done.

So, at face value, Bolivia was holding all of the cards. Looks, however, can be vastly deceiving.

In the first place, while the Bolivian Army was undeniably better armed, better organised, better equipped, better trained and better dressed than the Paraguayan Army, it was actually armed, organised, equipped, trained and dressed to fight a war in Europe, not a war in the Chaco. This was reasonable enough, given von Kundt's own background and training, however, it was to have dire consequences for the Bolivian Army. For example, unlike the Paraguayans, who dressed in light cotton drill with light cotton sun hats and as often as not went bare foot, Bolivian soldiers went to war in heavy serge uniforms, field caps and boots, just the sort of thing you don't want to be wearing in somewhere like the Chaco.

A second problem for the Bolivian Army was that the bulk of its recruits were Indians recruited from the Altiplano, the Andean foothills, and they were spectacularly unsuited for service in the arid lowland Chaco.

Thirdly, while both sides would rely largely on conscripts to fight the war, there was a world of difference between the commitments of the troops on each side to the war, a commitment largely reflective of their relative societies. Bolivia was very much a stratified and divided society, with government and the economy in the hands of a small moneyed European elite and with a yawning gap between this group and the rest of society, which was basically made up of illiterate or at best semi-literate Indians who had little or no sense of country. The bulk of the peasant population felt little if any bond to Bolivia itself as a concept, their loyalty being to their clan or immediate region at most, Bolivia being an alien concept to them. These men, many of whom had to be dragged by the government out of their homes, often at gun point, to be sent to fight in a war they had no interest in, against people they had never heard of, for a government they had no loyalty to, made poor soldiers at best.

On the other hand, for various historic reasons, Paraguay was the most racially homogeneous nation in South America, over 90% of the population being able to claim Guarani blood. This was very much the result of the dreadful events that had seen the creation of Paraguay at the end of the 18th and into the early 19th centuries. Paraguay was founded largely by educated Guarani Indians who had been forced off their highly civilized and highly developed Jesuit run missions

in the 18th century. The Guarani had been taken under the care of the Jesuits in the 17th century and under this care had developed a highly literate and highly sophisticated society which included a well developed system of schools and hospitals and large, successful communal farms. This had been anathema to the planter dominated Portuguese and Spanish colonial governments, who coveted not just the Guarani farms and plantations, but the Guarani themselves, who they viewed as a ready source of slave labour for their *latifundias*. Their solution to the problem was the orchestration of a series of incidents that saw the Jesuits expelled from Brazil and La Plata, the Guarani missions torched and the lands seized, and the Guarani themselves hunted as slaves. To the fury of the planters, however, the Guarani refused to go quietly and not only resisted but engaged in a mass migration across the Parana River into the wild country beyond, where they set about establishing their own nation and resisted all attempts to subdue them. This would eventually evolve into the nation of Paraguay, which would declare its independence in 1811, one of the first republics in South America.

Under its first three presidents, Francia and the two Lopezes, father and son, Paraguay became an incredibly inward looking country and until the end of the War of the Triple Alliance in 1870 could probably be best described as the contemporary North Korea of South America. The elder Lopez in particular was virulently opposed to outside influences. He expelled all but a few foreigners from the country, severely restricted entry into the country and forced the few foreigners who remained to intermarry with Guarani. Although his policy was slightly eased by his son, the end result was that by 1932, and indeed still today, Paraguay was the most racially homogeneous nation in South America. Couple this with intense patriotism and an even more intense hatred of outsiders and it can easily be seen why the average Paraguayan grunt was better suited to fighting the Chaco War than the average Bolivian grunt.

Having set the scene, let's now look at the war itself.

In an attempt to simplify what was quite a complex conflict, it is probably useful to divide the Chaco War into five major periods:

- Boquerón Campaign (September 1932)
- Nanawa Campaign (January – July 1933)
- Campo Via Campaign (October – December 1933)
- El Carmen-Irendagüe Campaign (August – December 1934)
- Andes Campaign (April – May 1935)

At the outbreak of the war the Bolivian government hastily recalled Hans von Kundt and placed him in command of the army. The Paraguayan Army was commanded by General Manuel Rojas, a cautious officer who would eventually be replaced by the energetic and daring Colonel Felix Estigarribia, who would eventually rise to the rank of general and emerge as the best senior commander of the war.

Both sides had begun mobilisation immediately on the outbreak of war, however, while Paraguay instituted full mobilization and quickly increased the size of its army to 28,000 men, which allowed it to deploy three strong divisions into the Chaco, Bolivia was far slower to build its forces to a reasonable size.

The first major clash of the war occurred in September 1932 when the Paraguayans launched an assault on the Bolivian position at Boqueron. It will be remembered that this was the former, weakly held, Paraguayan position that the Bolivians had taken in July, thus precipitating the war. By this stage, the Bolivians had built up the garrison at Boqueron to about 1,000 men and the fortin managed to hold out for three weeks against the Paraguayan assault but the Bolivians were eventually forced to surrender when they ran out of ammunition and water. At first glance it might appear bizarre that the Bolivians ran out of water, given that the fortin at Boqueron had

been established to control the only major source of open ground water for hundreds of kilometres. However, while there was a lot of water there, it was outside the defences of the fortin and the besieging Paraguayans simply cut the besieged Bolivians off from the water.

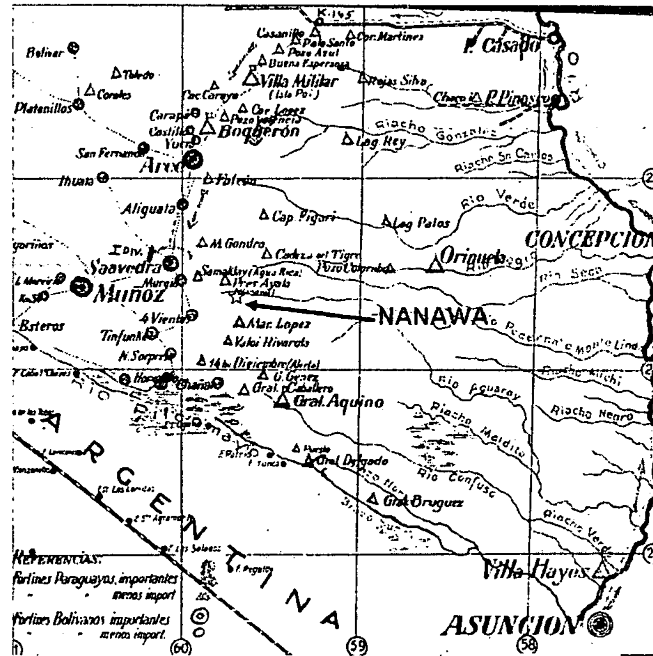
Following the capture of Boqueron, the Paraguayans quickly moved to capture Bolivian posts at Toledo and Platanillos and hotly pressed on the heels of the retreating Bolivian Army towards Ballivan, the last major Bolivian stronghold in the Pilmcomayo Sector. The map below shows Boqueron, Toledo and Platanillos, although Ballivian, unfortunately, is not on the map, being just of the image to the left.

Map 1 – The Southern Chaco Showing Boqueron (1), Toledo (2) & Platanillas (3)

The final retreat of the Bolivians to Ballivian effectively ended the Boqueron Campaign, the first phase of the war. Both sides now paused to regroup, reinforce and take stock of the situation. It is safe to say at this point that the war had not begun well for Bolivia. This would, however, change in late December when the Bolivians would go on the offensive.

Under the energetic Hans von Kundt the Bolivian Army had been strengthened and reorganised, increased in strength to 24,000 men and at the end of December 1932 the Bolivians went on the offensive, managing by sheer weight of numbers to drive the Paraguayans back towards the Rio Paraguay.

The Bolivian aim was to breach the Paraguayan defensive line that was anchored on Nanawa (see Map 2). Once this line was broken, von Kundt planned to use the relatively well established Paraguayan road system to drive south and capture Asuncion, or at least to threaten it. To support his planned operation, against what he believed to be lightly held and poorly prepared positions, von Kundt committed Bolivia's small armoured force of Vickers light tanks, supported by engineer assault units equipped with recently acquired flame throwers and by fighter bombers of the Bolivian Air Force.



Map 2 - Nanawa

From early January 1933 until the end of June the Bolivians drove steadily south. The Paraguayans for their part fell back onto a series of prepared positions and inflicted a steady stream of casualties on the attackers. The Bolivians reached the Nanawa line at the end of June 1933 and prepared to mount their major assault in the first week of July. Bolivian plans, however, were based on faulty intelligence. The supposedly poorly constructed and weakly held Paraguayan positions were in fact far more strongly built than the Bolivians expected, the construction having been supervised by several former White Russian officers who had fought in the First World War and settled in Paraguay. In addition to the strength of the defences, the Paraguayan garrison almost equalled the attacking Bolivian force in size. Finally, Paraguayan intelligence, which consistently outperformed its Bolivian counterpart throughout the war, was well aware of von Kundt's 'armoured surprise' and Paraguayan artillery was well supplied with anti-tank ammunition.

The results, for the Bolivians, were predictable. Nanawa was very much a pivotal battle of the war. Hans von Kundt had made a number of extravagant and grandiose promises to the Bolivian political leadership and high hopes were held for the campaign. The Bolivians had convinced themselves that they had the Paraguayans beaten and that they would shortly enter Asuncion, or at least be in a position to bombard the city and dictate terms to Paraguay. The Bolivian assault was launched on the evening of 3 July 1933. For some reason, despite his experiences in the First World War, von Kundt chose to mount a series of frontal assaults on the Paraguayan lines, trusting in his faulty intelligence and his supposed secret weapons to carry the day. The Paraguayans, however, refused to budge and defended their positions ferociously. By the time the Bolivian offensive petered out in the afternoon of 7 July, over 2,000 Bolivian soldiers were dead, most of the Bolivian armour had been destroyed or captured and the Paraguayan lines were still intact. Nanawa was the beginning of the end for von Kundt, as the Bolivian Army's native senior officers now questioned his abilities. Nevertheless, he remained in command at this point and succeeded in rallying his battered forces as they settled down to static trench warfare on the Nanawa front.

During this period of static warfare, in October and November 1933, the Paraguayans dominated the field, carrying out active and aggressive aerial and ground patrols, reconnaissance and probes and as a result they located a number of weak spots in the Bolivian defences. In particular, they discovered that the Bolivian left flank in the vicinity of Campo Via was totally exposed. With this information at his disposal, the talented and aggressive Paraguayan commander Estigarribia, by now a general, commenced a build up forces in the vicinity of Campo Via. This Paraguayan build up was quickly detected by Bolivian aerial reconnaissance, however, von Kundt dismissed the reports as alarmist and refused to either reinforce his lines or strengthen his left flank.

On 3 December 1933, Estigarribia launched a surprise attack on the Bolivian left flank, which quickly crumbled, allowing Paraguayan mounted units to sweep around in an encircling movement that saw the Bolivian 4th and 9th Divisions surrounded in what became known as *El bolsillo Campo Via* or the Campo Via Pocket. The Bolivian commander, von Kundt, was slow to react to the Paraguayan attack and did not launch a counter-attack until 10 December. This attack, however, was badly planned and even more badly coordinated. The attack was broken up by their own aircraft as Bolivian bombers, acting on faulty information from the ground, bombed the leading elements of the Bolivian attack, forcing a general retirement. The next day, about 8,000 men of the beleaguered Bolivian 4th and 9th Divisions surrendered.

Campo Via was a huge military disaster for Bolivia, their worst individual defeat of the war. In addition to 2,600 soldiers killed and almost 8,000 taken prisoner, the Bolivians lost to the Paraguayans 8,000 rifles, 536 machine guns, 25 mortars, 20 artillery pieces and a huge stock of ammunition. Bolivia's loss was Paraguay's gain, with the captured weapons and ammunition ensuring that the Paraguayan Army was able to stay on the offensive. Campo Via was also von Kundt's last chance as far as the Bolivian government was concerned. President Salamanca unceremoniously sacked the German general and replaced him with the Bolivian General Enrique Peñaranda Castillo. Peñaranda acted quickly to extricate what troops he could from the mess that von Kundt had got them into. Under his command the remnants of the Bolivian Army withdrew in reasonably good order to strong positions around Ballivian.

At this stage of the war Bolivia had lost 14,000 men dead, 32,000 wounded, 10,000 prisoners and 6,000 to desertion. Along with the human loss, the Bolivian Army had lost over 12,000 rifles, 800 machine guns, 25 mortars and 20 pieces of artillery. The losses in men were made up by a general call up of all available men and the material losses were made good in a hasty buying spree that saw the Bolivian Army receive 45,000 rifles, 500 machine guns and 50 artillery pieces. These items all arrived during the month long truce that followed the Campo Via campaign and commenced at midnight on 19 December 1933.

Paraguay, in the meantime, was suffering from the first time a problem that had plagued the Bolivians for the whole war to date, namely overstretched supply lines. Having pushed the Bolivians back to Ballivian, the Paraguayans were now much further from their base of supply in Paraguay than they had previously been and as a consequence they also used the respite of the post Campo Via truce to reinforce and re-equip.

In May 1934 Colonel Bilbao la Rioja took command of the Bolivian Army in the field and in what was probably the most successful Bolivian operation of the war managed to cut off and surround a portion of the Paraguayan 2nd Division at Cañada Strongest. Although surprised, the Paraguayans reacted quickly and managed to extract themselves from the trap, losing about 500 dead and 1,500 prisoners in the action. Although the action at Cañada Strongest was relatively insignificant in the overall scheme of things, it was the biggest Bolivian victory of the war and was widely celebrated throughout Bolivia, while also cementing Rioja's reputation as the best Bolivian field commander of the war.

Uncharacteristically put on the defensive by the their set back at Cañada Strongest, the Paraguayans fell back about fifty kilometers and sorted themselves out.

About this time, President Salamanca of Bolivia, who had been becoming more and more erratic and autocratic in his behaviour, was removed from officer by a junta led by General Peñaranda. Although Peñaranda was now the effective head of the country and would assume the mantle of president after the war, for the time being he and his fellow officers considered it expedient to set up Salamanca's compliant Vice-President as the notional head of state and this arrangement lasted until the end of the war.

In the field meanwhile, the Paraguayan commander Estigarribia was reacting to Bolivian moves, sending his 6th Division north to capture the town of Irendagüe, again outflanking the Bolivians. The Bolivians fell back towards the Andean foothills, regrouped and launched a strong counter-attack with three divisions and a cavalry brigade, which quickly forced the Paraguayan 6th Division back.

In November 1934, after regrouping and resupplying, Estigarribia launched another assault on the Bolivians, this time at El Carmen. Once again taken by surprise, the Bolivians at El Carmen, the Bolivian Army Field Reserve, were defeated, with 2,000 Bolivians killed in the battle, 4,000 captured and two entire Bolivian division annihilated.

Still reeling from their defeat at El Carmen, in early December the shaken Bolivians were again outflanked, this time at Picuiba, and were forced to retreat into the Chaco desert, opening the way for the Paraguayans to recapture Irendagüe and consolidate their hold on El Carmen. In one of the most horrific incidents of the war, the retreating Bolivians ran out of water in the parched desert and it is thought that of the 5,300 men who had managed to escape the Paraguayan encirclement, 2,000 died of thirst. Witnesses recall coming across the bodies of dead Bolivian soldiers, their heads buried in holes in the sand where they died in a desperate attempt to find water underground.

By 10 December 1934 the3 Bolivians had abandoned their positions at Ballivian and had been pushed back to the Andean foothills. The war was entering its last phase.

The end of 1934 saw the Bolivians more or less completely withdrawn from the Chaco into the Andean foothills, concentrated around Villa Montes. Early in 1935 two minor Paraguayan incursion into Bolivia were fairly easily repulsed. The last major push of the war occurred in April when two Paraguayan divisions cross the border and attempted to take the mountain passes in the vicinity of Villa Montes. A combination of overextended Paraguayan supply lines, total unsuitability of Paraguay's bush fighters to warfare in the mountains, and strong Bolivian counterattacks by the 2nd Corps and the Cavalry Corps saw the Paraguayans thrown back into the Chaco.

This was, for all intents and purposes, the end of the war. Both sides were financially and physically exhausted – the Paraguayan Air Force, for example, was down to six operational aircraft and the Bolivian Air Force was not much better off. The belligerents were thus both probably relieved when Argentina, which had largely sided with Paraguay during the war, stepped in and pressured Bolivia into requesting an armistice. This was formally signed on 12 June 1935 in Montevideo and hostilities officially ceased on 14 June 1935.

A Neutral Military Commission made up of officers from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru, under the command of the Argentine General Pitta, was set up to oversee the cease fire and supervise the withdrawal of Paraguayan troops from Bolivia and the repatriation of prisoners of war. Under the terms of the armistice, both sides were required to reduce the strength of their army to 5,000 men. However, while agreeing to the armistice, Paraguay was clearly the victor in

the war, having forced the Bolivians completely out of the Chaco and demonstrated both the will and the ability to carry the war into Bolivia itself. As a result of this, during the armistice and the ensuing peace negotiations Paraguay, with the tacit support of Argentina, was largely able to dictate the terms and ended up in possession of almost the entire Chaco. A peace treaty was finally signed in Buenos Aires on 21 July 1938.

The Chaco War was over.

A number of valuable lessons came out of the Chaco War. The first of these is that, in a reversal of the Napoleonic maxim, quality has a quantity of its own – although generally outnumbered and out gunned, the Paraguayans were rarely outmaneuvered or outfought and consistently outperformed their Bolivian opponents.

The second lesson was the need for good logistics – for most of the war the Paraguayans, fighting close to home, excelled at this. They used the Parana and Paraguay Rivers to quickly move troops and stores to the seat of war. Their industrious engineer corps developed a network of roads and light railways in the Southern Chaco that allowed them to quickly resupply and reinforce their formations, as well as evacuate their wounded. For most of the war the Bolivians were at the end of an overextended supply chain and suffered accordingly. It is telling to note that at the end of the war, when the Paraguayans were placed in the same position, that is, fighting at the end of an overextended supply chain, they performed markedly less well than they had earlier in the conflict, whereas the Bolivians, fighting on their own soil, close to their heartland and operating almost on interior lines performed far better than had for the rest of the war.

Thirdly, a number of lessons that would have been pertinent to Allied armies fighting in Burma and Malaya in 1942 came out of the war, including the need to be able to operate away from roads and the extreme difficulty of operating armour in close country. Another lesson learned was the inadvisability of tying troops down in fixed defensive positions and thus allowing a more flexible and mobile enemy to surround or bypass you, a lesson bitterly learned by the Bolivians.

The Bolivians also learned again, the hard way, the lunacy of mounting frontal assaults against prepared positions. At first glance, it appears odd to the point of bizarre that a World War One veteran like Hans von Kundt would have employed frontal assault tactics twenty years after they had been shown to be ineffective on the Western Front. However, it must be remembered that von Kundt's World War One service had been on the Eastern Front, which had been far more mobile and fluid than the Western Front and where frontal assaults, properly mounted with plenty of artillery preparation and support had been successful and relatively uncostly.

At least some people seem to have paid attention to the lessons of the Chaco War. The encirclement and destruction of the Bolivian 4th and 9th Divisions in the Campo Via Pocket eerily presaged the destruction of Germany's Army Group Centre in 1944. The Paraguayan operation at Campo Via was almost the Soviet Union's Operation 'Bagratian' writ small.

While both sides had been effectively bankrupted by the war, their economies in ruins, the human cost of the war had also not been small, as the table below shows.

	Bolivia	Paraguay
Forces Mobilized	250,000	150,000
Killed and Missing	55,000	40,000
Wounded and Sick	170,000	90,000
POW	12,500	2,500

Table 2 – The Human Cost of the Chaco War

As the table shows, Bolivia mobilized about 250,000 men during the war, compared to Paraguay's 150,000. Bolivia lost about 55,000 men killed or missing, suffered 170,000 wounded and sick and had 12,500 of its men taken prisoner. For its part, Paraguay lost about 40,000 men killed and missing, about 90,000 wounded and sick and about 2,500 POW. Underlining the harshness of the environment in which much of the war was fought, of the 95,000 or so men who died in the war, it is estimated that 10,000 died of thirst during the various campaigns. With estimate pre-war populations of 3,000,000 (Bolivia) and 880,000 (Paraguay) respectively, to say that the human cost was grievous is to court understatement. Despite the horrendous casualties both sides suffered and the intense propaganda efforts of the respective governments to demonize the foe, at the soldier level there does not ever seem to have been too much bitterness. Prisoners on both sides, for example, tended to be reasonably well treated, Red Cross reports indicating that failures to provide adequate food, clothing or housing for prisoners generally being the result of either a genuine lack of the requisite commodity on the part of the detaining power or just ignorant neglect, or a combination of both, rather than any sense of vengefulness. A good example of the lack of hatred at the basic soldier level occurred after the Battle of Nanawa when the Paraguayan commander Estagarribia was touring the battlefield. He discovered that each of the 2,000+ dead Bolivians on the field had a *Modelo Paraguayano 1927 Oviedo* rifle, the standard Paraguayan infantry weapon, neatly placed upon the body. When Estagarribia asked the meaning of this bizarre sight, he was told that the victorious Paraguayans had taken the good 'Vickers rifles', as the Bolivians called their Czech produced Brno Mausers, and left their *Oviedos* as a mark of respect for the valour of the dead.

Besides the human cost, as noted above, both countries were financially ruined by the war and the unsatisfactory outcome for Bolivia would eventually lead to a complete shift in politics in the country as the embittered Indian sub-class move to wrest power from the Spanish elite. While Paraguay was just as financially affected by the war as Bolivia, it was able to recover more quickly, as a result of extensive Argentine investment in the agricultural development of the newly acquired territory in the Chaco.

The Chaco War would have to qualify as one of the least known major conflicts (major in terms of length and number of casualties) of the 20th century, little known at the time and largely forgotten today. It is also one of the most interesting. One of the main features of this little known conflict is the number of lessons pertinent to the upcoming world war that were either not noticed at the time or were quickly forgotten, only to have to be painfully relearned several years later.

Bibliography

English, Adrian J., 2007 *The Green Hell: A Concise History of the Chaco War Between Bolivia and Paraguay 1932-35*, Spellmount Publishers Ltd, Staplehurst, Kent, UK.

Farcau, Bruce, 1996 *The Chaco War: Bolivia and Paraguay 1932-1935,* Praeger Publishers, Westport, Connecticut, USA.

Kain, Ronald Stuart, 1935 'The Chaco Dispute and the Peace System', *Political Science Quarterly,* Volume L., No.3, September, Academy of Political Science, Columbia University, New York, New York, USA, pp.321-342.

Reynolds, Dan, 2008 'Rifles of the Gran Chaco War', *Carbines for Collectors History and Small Arms of a World at War,* http://www.carbinesforcollectors.com/granchaco.htm'

Scheina, Robert L., 2003 *Latin America's Wars Volume II: The Age of the Professional Soldiers 1900-2001*, Potomac Books Inc.

--oOo--

"GOODBYE BELS": THE STORY OF THE BELCONNEN NAVAL TRANSMISSION STATION

Rohan Goyne

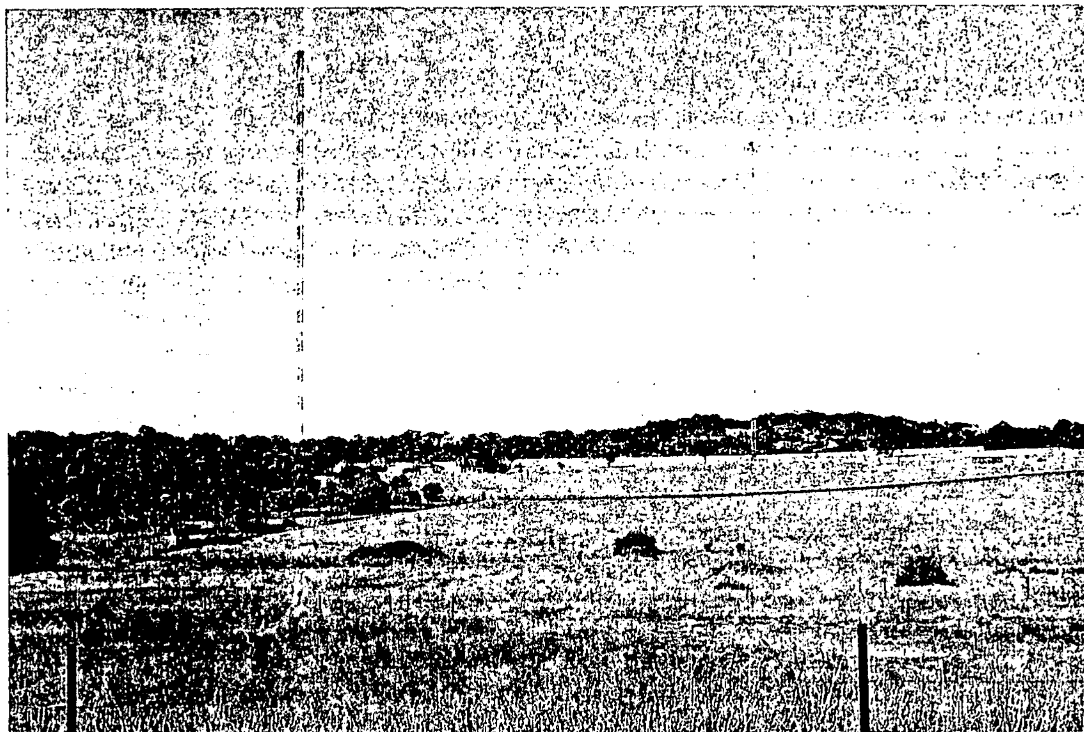


Fig 1 :Belconnen Naval Transmission Station December 2006:.photograph by author.

The month of December 2006 was marked by the loss of part of Australia's military heritage with the demolition of three 600 ft, low frequency transmitter aerial masts at the Royal Australian Naval Transmission Station at Belconnen, Bels, in the Australian Capital Territory. This tragedy past mostly without comment in the media and the broader community. At a time when the Commonwealth Government is providing significant funding to allow for the archeological survey of the AE2 in the Sea of Marmara in Turkey, part of Australian's military history located within the boundaries of the national capital, Canberra, was dispensed with without a thought. If the three aerial masts were located on the Gallipoli peninsula I suspect the outcome may have been very different indeed. This article is a belated attempt to put the military history of Bels into its rightful place in the Australian military lexicon.

Why Canberra? - the station site

The first shore based naval radio facility was established by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) at the Flinders Naval Depot in Victoria. A need for an extended facility was identified to provide coverage of certain areas in low frequency (long wavelength) transmissions. In 1925 the Commonwealth Navy Board recommended the construction of strategic wireless stations at Canberra and Darwin.

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a licence from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)

The stations were expected to make possible communication with the British Merchant Navy or fleet shipping across the globe. In 1935, the Commonwealth Government decided to erect radio receiving and transmitting stations in Canberra.

Canberra is located 120 kilometres inland and so considered safe from naval bombardment. The site was also considered less vulnerable to attack by the Japanese than other British wireless stations in the Pacific.

The receiving station, HMAS *Harman*, was located near Queanbeyan, NSW on the ACT side of the ACT/NSW border. The transmitting station Bels was located at Belconnen.

The receiving and transmission stations were separated to the reduce interference. Plans were approved in September 1938 and the construction of Bels commenced in November 1938 by Standard Telephone Ltd with the assistance of the Department of Interior.

The construction of the receiving station at HMAS *Harman* commenced in early 1939.

The first elements of the Royal Australian Naval contingent to man both stations arrived at Bels in March 1939 with thirty officers and ratings. Ultimately, the contingent would rise to 200 officers and ratings at both stations.

The opening of Bels was reported as "the base was the most powerful short wave naval wireless station in the British Empire and the largest naval or commercial station in the southern hemisphere".2

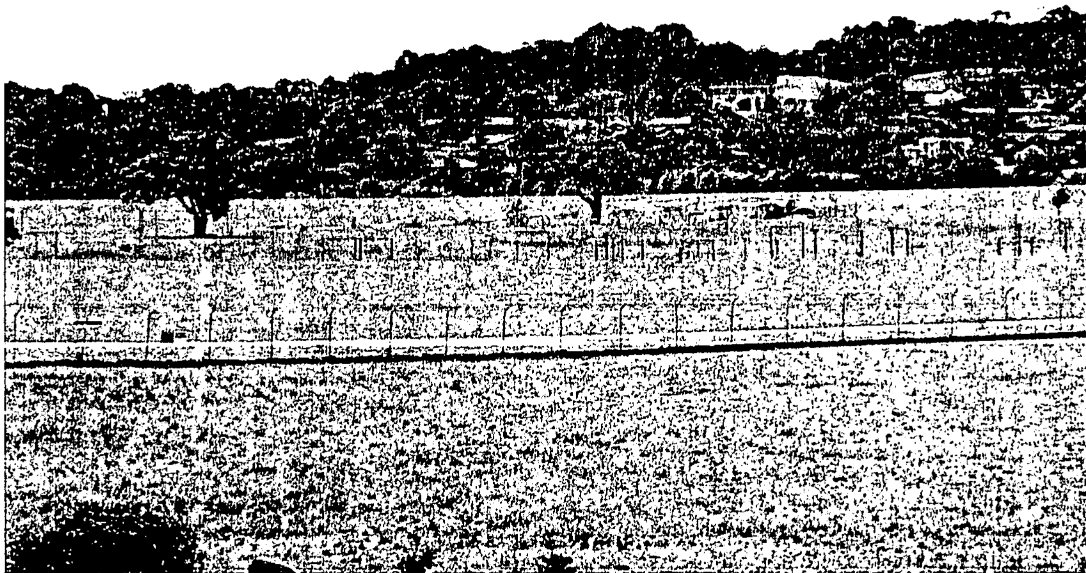


Fig 2 One of the 600 ft aerials after demolition at "Bels": photograph by the author

2 *The Canberra Times*, 12 April 1939.

The station is operational

The first transmission from Bels was made on 22 December 1939. The first transmissions were made utilising a series of Rhombic aerial arrays. These aerials were directional and named after the bases to which they transmitted. The station contained the 200 kilowatts transmitter which operated at low frequency. This was designed to be able to break through the interference encountered over long distances and to be received by submarines. To achieve this three 600-ft high aerial masts set a quarter of a mile apart to support the massive radiating aerial sited east-west to maximise transmissions into the Pacific and Indian Oceans were erected.

In January 1941, the three 600 ft masts were completed. To camouflage Bels it was made to look like a working farm from the air. Small farm buildings were placed about the site including observation stations. In 1995 the low frequency transmitter, Bels 44 was decommissioned.

A sad end for Bels

In November 2006 my attempt to gain access to the decommissioned site to document the three aerial towers in situ for this article was unsuccessful.

It is interesting to note that the only other low frequency naval transmission station in the world in Sweden has been placed on the world heritage list for its protection. Why Australia's military heritage appears to be less significant is difficult to fathom?

--oOo--