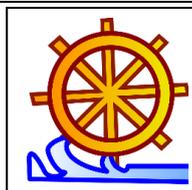




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Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

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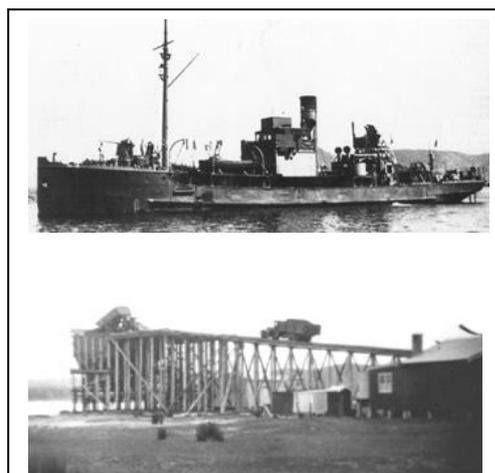
WHEN WAR CAME TO THE LAKE



Many young men and women from our local area enlisted in the armed forces and fought overseas to defend our freedom during World War II (1939-1945). Some were never to return. On the home front, ordinary men and women took part in the extraordinary measures necessary to defend our community against attack. After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour in December 1941, they began their assault on the Pacific, conquering hundreds of islands including New Guinea. By mid February, 1942, Darwin had become an important Allied base. Japanese bombers launched two attacks on Darwin; inflicting a heavy toll on personnel and civilians; the town, harbour and airfields. One of several ships

destroyed or damaged in the harbour was the "Gunbar", previously a Lake Macquarie collier. It had been built for the North Coast Navigation Company and regularly visited the Cam coal loader at Blacksmiths on Swansea Channel, until requisitioned by the Navy for war service, chartered for 120 pounds a month, in December 1940. At first based on the south east coast of Australia; then West Australian coast, before being based in Darwin, as an auxiliary minesweeper. Despite damage and casualties from the Japanese air raid, the *Gunbar* stood by and evacuated the crew of the stricken *MV Portmar*. She is believed to be the first vessel bombed in Darwin.

General Macarthur arrived and appropriated a fleet of small ships to carry men and supplies around the Pacific Islands. There were fishing trawlers, trading vessels, colliers, tugs, schooners and ketches, many from Lake Macquarie. Cam and Sons, who owned North Wallarah Colliery at Swansea lost almost their entire large fleet of fishing trawlers from Sydney; and colliers to active service. Many of the Captains and crews accepted the opportunity to join their ships for wartime service.



Gunbar; Coal loader Swansea Channel

VALE

GEORGE BOYD: A LIFE WELL LIVED.

14/10/1935 – 27/3/2020

KEEPER OF SWANSEA'S HISTORY;

AUTHOR, STORYTELLER.

RIP



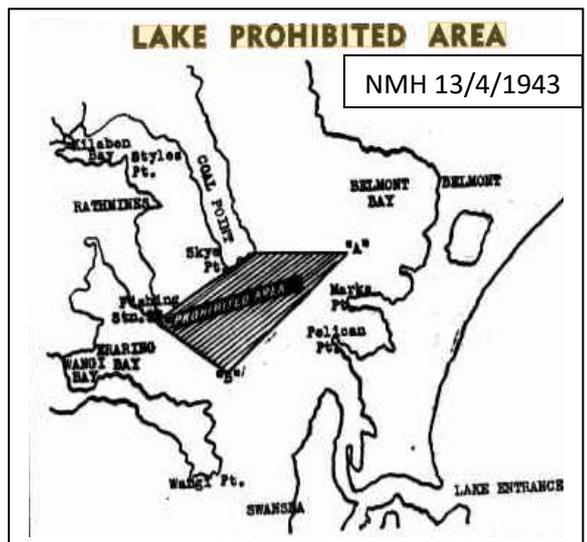
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As our usual places of distribution are closed at the moment, please share / email our newsletter to friends you think may be interested. If a printed copy is needed please contact us with details and we will try to get a copy there if it is nearby.

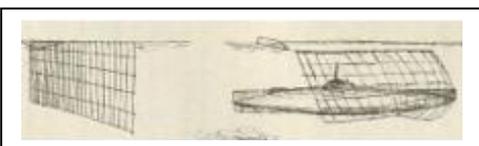
CLOSER TO HOME ON THE EAST COAST

Leading up to June 1941, five ships were sunk by enemy mines along the NSW coast, believed to have been laid by the German raider "Penguin". MV "Nimbin" was about 8 miles off Norah Head and went down with the loss of her Captain and 6 crew. HMAS Warnambool rescued survivors from a number of ships, including the US Liberty ship "Lydia M Childs" which was torpedoed by a submarine 90 miles east of Newcastle, on April 27th, 1943. 11 Australian ships and 130 merchant seamen had been lost, by April 1943. As a result, the RAAF air base at Rathmines was upgraded for observation and anti-submarine patrols along the east coast. They often dropped practice smoke bombs into the lake at the southern end of Pulbah; and live bombs east of Bird Island off Budgewoi. Many dangerous missions were flown as far as New Guinea, and Fiji. RAAF search and rescue "Crash Boats" were often seen speeding along Swansea Channel. 2 Government dredges were sent to make deep water lanes for the crash boats. At the Coon Island end it became known as the "Air Force Channel". These boats also had another function – to make several fast runs along the take-off path ahead of departing aircraft to chop up the water to break the "Surface Tension" if it was a calm, still day with smooth water. This created less drag and therefore easier and greater acceleration on take-off.

In June 1942, Sydney Harbour encountered 3 Japanese midget submarines which sank the converted ferry "Kuttabul". Next it was Newcastle's turn, enemy shelling aiming for our shipyards, steelworks and Fort Scratchley. Fortunately, there was little damage and Fort Scratchley was able to return fire from its guns. There was now a real fear the Japanese might attempt to enter Lake Macquarie or make a landing on Nine Mile Beach, using it as a back door to Newcastle. All boats in and around the Lake were impounded and moved to the western side of the lake. If an invasion were to eventuate, they would be destroyed. Ship builders and fishermen needed special permits to operate small vessels to be able to continue their work. In April 1943, part of Lake Macquarie was declared a prohibited area to all civilian craft. Only service vehicles would be able to enter the area before Kilaben Bay, stretching between Coal Point, and Fishing Point; and some 2 miles east. Anyone encroaching the area was fired upon (even fishermen!). The **Lake Macquarie anti-submarine net** was built across the entire width of Swansea Channel from Grannies pool at Blacksmith's across to Lucy's Wall. It was built as part of the defence line for Newcastle and to protect the RAAF flying boat base at Rathmines. Poles were driven into the bed of the channel to support a net of steel cables, like a fence. A gap was left in the net to let the small colliers transporting coal from the Blacksmiths Loader and the Crash Boats through, by leaving a section of the net lying down flat on the bed of the channel floor. If required that section could be quickly raised by winches. It was discovered that M27, the 1st "baby sub" in Sydney Harbour, had entangled props and attempted to cut through the net with a sawtooth metal cutter.



Swansea Channel; Air-craft carrier passing through Sydney Harbour anti- sub boom net; net Diagram



LOCAL DEFENCES

It was anticipated that the Japanese Army may try a beach landing between Belmont and Swansea Channel. To bolster defence measures, the 8th Garrison and 32 Brigade of the Army were responsible for the defence of the southern perimeter Newcastle, stretching from Adamstown to Blacksmiths and were stationed at Blacksmiths, Jewels and Gateshead. The hind dunes south of Redhead were densely overgrown and were used to train soldiers for jungle warfare. They excavated a maze of trenches between Swansea Heads and Caves Beach; and at Blacksmiths. An extensive barbed wire fence beach defence system extended from Redhead to Swansea Channel. Several **“Pill Box”** (Machine gun posts) were constructed at strategic positions along the beach, one located on Blacksmiths side of the submarine net.

A major defence was the **“Tank Trap”**, built at Belmont South parallel to Cold Tea Creek. The winding little creek was dredged and straightened. The bridge over the creek on the Highway was replaced by one that could be quickly collapsed if 5 bolts were removed. The creek – now a ditch, was extended across the lagoon to the eastern side. On the northern side large wooden poles also known as **“Dumble Tank Stops”**, were sunk deep into the mud, about a metre apart to form a defence line against tanks. The sand dunes between the lagoon and the beach were defended by 2 interlocking lines of concrete pyramid-shaped concrete block tank traps more than 1.7 metres high. (**“Dragons Teeth”**). Thick cables joined the pyramids, so that attempting to push them would encircle the tank with more pyramids. Scrub south of the ditch was cleared so that enemy forces would not have any camouflaging cover.



Barbara Cartwright’s memories of living at Blacksmiths during the war years:

“....Periodically we had to do air raid practice, the shelters were about 100ft long, dug into the ground and covered with curved corrugated iron. These shelters were in a paddock at the back of the Darby Street factory. We were all keen dancers and we would dance across the street to the shelters, climb over the sand bags, get settled in, then start a sing-song. There was only one other occasion we were allowed out of the factory, that being to see the landing, at Newcastle, of a Lancaster Bomber which was touring Australia to promote the sale of War Bonds. This was of course “G. for George.”

You might recall Newcastle was shelled by the Japanese, from submarines, the shells being intended for the Steel Works or Zara Street Power Station, however they were poor shots and the shells landed near the hospital. Some of my work mates lived near the hospital and when they came to work the next day, they told us all how they had spent the night in the Air Raid Shelter in Hunter Street.

Also, during the war, glass was removed from the bus windows and replaced with tin. There was a lot of confusion at this time with people getting off at the wrong stops in the evenings.

My family lived at Blacksmiths right on the beach and our windows had to be pasted with newspaper or brown paper, both to prevent any light shining out to sea, or in the event of a bombing to prevent the windows shattering.

Soldiers from the 4th Australian Infantry Battalion came and occupied the beach, they built trenches and erected hessian fences all along and even built a pill-box type “fort” which has since been pulled down. They also took over our one and only community hall, so that put a stop to the dances for a while.

Soldiers also guarded each end of the Swansea bridge, it being part of the Pacific Highway and the only bridge across the lake.

A submarine trap was placed across the Swansea channel, just east of the bridge and when the local fishermen went to sea Mr. Wally Mitchell had the job of opening a section of this trap to allow the boats through..... “



Pill Box Machine Gun Post at Blacksmiths overlooking sub net

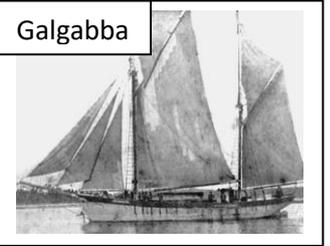
Source: G & N Boyd, ‘When the War Came to Lake Macquarie’

MORISSET HOSPITAL MEMORIAL CHAPEL.

SOURCE: "A Private World on a Nameless Bay".

On the far side of the lake, **Morisset Hospital Precinct** mental health care facility also had a role to play. It was named after James Morisset, commandant of the second convict colony at Norfolk Island, 1829 - 1834. In 1906, a small group of attendants and patients living in tents began clearing the land the Government had set aside to ease overcrowding in Sydney institutions. A jetty and a dam were built; and supplies were brought by boat. The Newcastle Herald reported in August, 1908 "....the wharf is a substantial one, about 300 feet long, traversed by tramway rails, which run right to the building. On the occasion of the writer's visit, the ketch Galgabba, a Swansea built craft, was being unloaded of a miscellaneous freight.... " It was the first ship built by James L. Boyd on the shores of Swansea Channel, a little south of Tom Humphreys reserve at a cost of £120 (\$240) and launched in 1900. Along the left side of The Avenue, the main road into the hospital, Norfolk Island Pines stand where the Gatekeeper's cottage and gates once stood. An air raid shelter was built near the cottage in WWII; and Box Brush and Turpentine trees were planted in memory of the fallen soldiers who had been employed there. As the hospital progressed from Calico Wards on wooden frames in early days, so did the setting. The hospital became known for beautiful lawns and gardens, hosting the "Festival of Flowers" which coincided with the gladioli blooms for which it was noted. It became virtually self-sufficient with vegetable gardens, orchard, dairy, piggery, peacocks, sawmill, fishing fleet. Staff comps in cricket, tennis, football, hockey, bowling were organised. During WWII staff enlisted and served in the Desert, Dunkirk, Tobruk, Changi. Of the many servicemen who returned suffering from disorders caused by the horrors of war – some would have received treatment here. After the war a large group of staff and the community raised money for the building of a chapel in a picturesque spot on the foreshores of the Lake. In 1954, the foundation stone for the Chapel was laid by Lt-General Gordon Bennett, for all denominations. It was dedicated to the fallen hospital staff in WWI and WWII. It was mostly built by staff and tradesmen who were patients. The thoughtfully designed stained glass windows were donated by nursing and laundry staff and the RSL; the lectern and seating for 220 by BHP. The dedicated community and staff witnessed completion of the building of The Memorial Chapel; the first wedding was celebrated in 1958. The Morisset mental health facility received State Heritage Listing in 1999.

Galgabba



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