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NOV-DEC

WAR ON OUR DOORSTEP

2023

The events of 1942 reinforced the need for Australia to be ready to protect and defend from predicted attacks by Japan, particularly to the Top End, the East Coast and the Newcastle area.

Fall of Singapore, February 15, 1942. Until then Australia had traditionally depended on Britain for its defences. In the 1920s Britain, supported by Australia, made the strategic decision to build a huge naval base on the island of Singapore to protect interests in the Pacific region against Japan. When war came, Britain concentrated its forces in Europe and on self-defence, leaving one squadron and 2 battleships to defend the east. Both were sunk in Dec. 1941. The Japanese moved very quickly through Malaya; and then captured Singapore. This forced a rethink of where our alliances should lie, - with the USA in the Pacific.



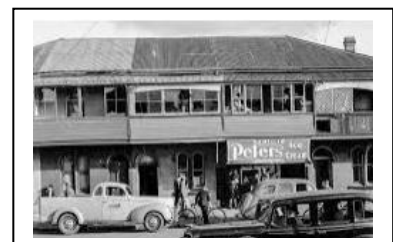
Darwin Air Raids, Feb 19, 1942. Two air raids were carried out by Japan that day. The first raid by 188 aircraft launched from 4 aircraft carriers in the Timor Sea took Darwin by surprise. Two hours later 54 land-based bombers targeted the airfields. 243 people were killed; ships, buildings and infrastructure were destroyed. After two weeks Broome bore the brunt of another attack and 70 people died. Over 60 more raids were carried out over the next 21 months. Australia feared being invaded, increasing defence strategies. It was only learned after the war that Japan did not intend to invade Darwin, but destroy the military base, air fields, town centre and harbour, so Australia couldn't aid Timor and Java.



Sydney Harbour, May 31, 1942. 2 Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour where Allied warships were anchored. The first sub's propellers entangled with anti-submarine nets. On realising they could not free the sub; the 2 crewmen chose to die "with honour" firing demolition charges which destroyed their vessel. The second sub, missed its target of destroying USS Chicago, sinking instead the ferry Kuttabul with the loss of 21 lives. It was found wrecked many years later off the northern beaches. The following morning, June 1, a third sub was detected and hit by depth-charges from patrol boats; the crew died from self-inflicted shots.

Shelling of Newcastle, June 8, 1942. On orders to shell BHP steel and shipyards, 34 shells were fired by Japanese sub, I-21, but caused little damage, no casualties. Fort Scratchley guns returned the fire.

Sources: IWM.org.au; naa.gov.au; navy.gov.au; G Ray



- 1942 Pacific war 1
- Fortress Newcastle 2
- Redhead 3
- Iron Knight 3
- MV Krait 4

Thank you to Pat Conroy and staff, kindly supporting our community; and encouraging the preservation and sharing of our heritage.

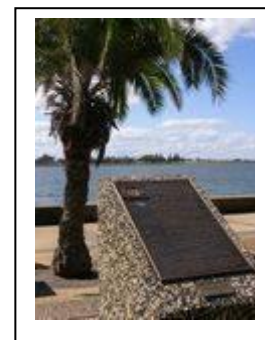
It soon became apparent with Japan's increasing aggression in the Pacific, their occupied territories were approaching closer and closer to Australia. It was feared that Australia faced being invaded and needed to be prepared. The protection of Newcastle was vital. Although the population was only c.100,000 at the time, her industries and resources were imperative for Australia's war effort. A ring of defence with tens of thousands defence force personnel was developed from Port Stephens in the north, to Singleton out west, and Tuggerah Lakes / Terrigal down south. The main southern defence line was at Cold Tea Creek, Belmont.

FORTRESS NEWCASTLE.

Newcastle was protected by a ring of military installations: - 4 forts, 5 army bases, 4 training camps, 2 naval bases, 2 RAAF bases, 7 anti-aircraft guns, and 5 radar stations. At the centre of this attention were the war manufacturing industries and the supply of coal, critical for ships powered by steam.

A plaque along Wharf Road, the Harbour Foreshore commemorated the contribution.

"This Plaque Honours The Contribution Of Newcastle's Industries And Their Employees To World War II. They Worked 24 Hours A Day To Supply The Nation's Industrial And Military Needs, Making Australia Less Reliant On Imports."



BHP - Ferro alloys, magnesium, ferro-zirconium, tungsten carbide

Lysaghts - Portable aircraft hangers, pontoons, machetes, nose cap spinners for Beaufort and Mosquito aircraft. Over 45,000 Owen machine guns, bullet proof steel plate and steel for helmets, aircraft and Anderson air raid shelters for Britain.

Rylands - Barbed wire used at Tobruk and Singapore, and wire for telephone field cables, gun parts, aircraft bolts, and anti-submarine and torpedo nets including the net that captured a Japanese submarine in Sydney Harbour in 1942.

Stewarts and Lloyds - 18, 25, and 60 pounder, 6 inch naval, 4, 5 and 6 inch howitzer, 5.5 and 3.7 inch anti-aircraft shells, and tubes for 3.7 inch anti-aircraft guns, Bofors and 25 pounder guns.

Commonwealth Steel - 180 types of special steel including Australia's first stainless steel and 2 million steel helmets for the Australian, New Zealand and Indian armies.

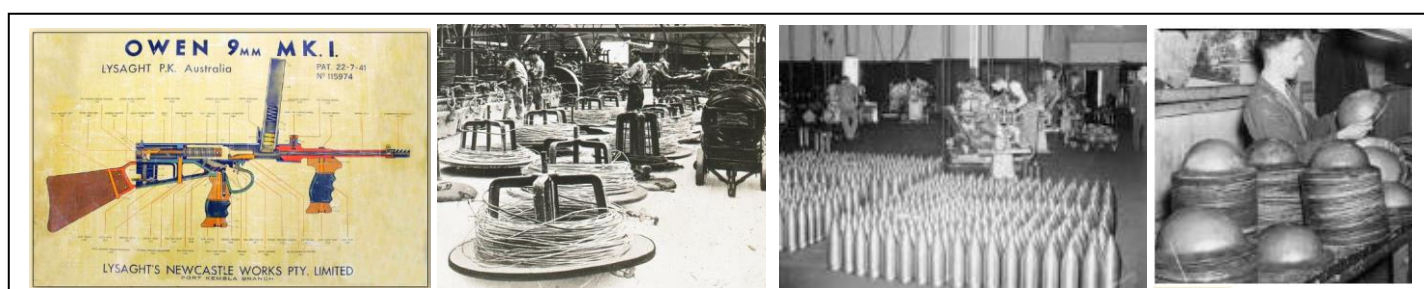
Newcastle Chemical Company - Chemicals to aid industries and drugs to fight tropical diseases.

Goninan - Refrigeration barges, Bren gun carrier parts

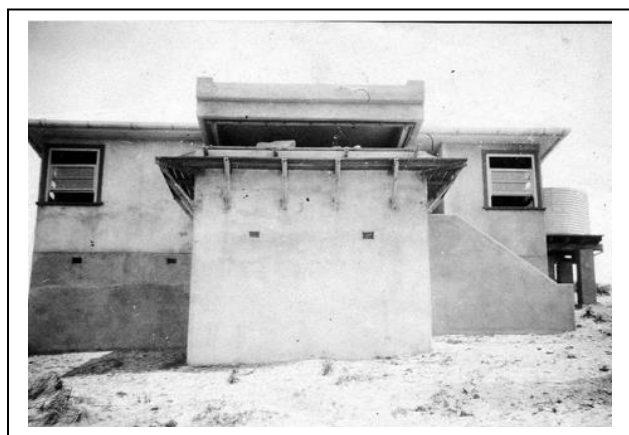
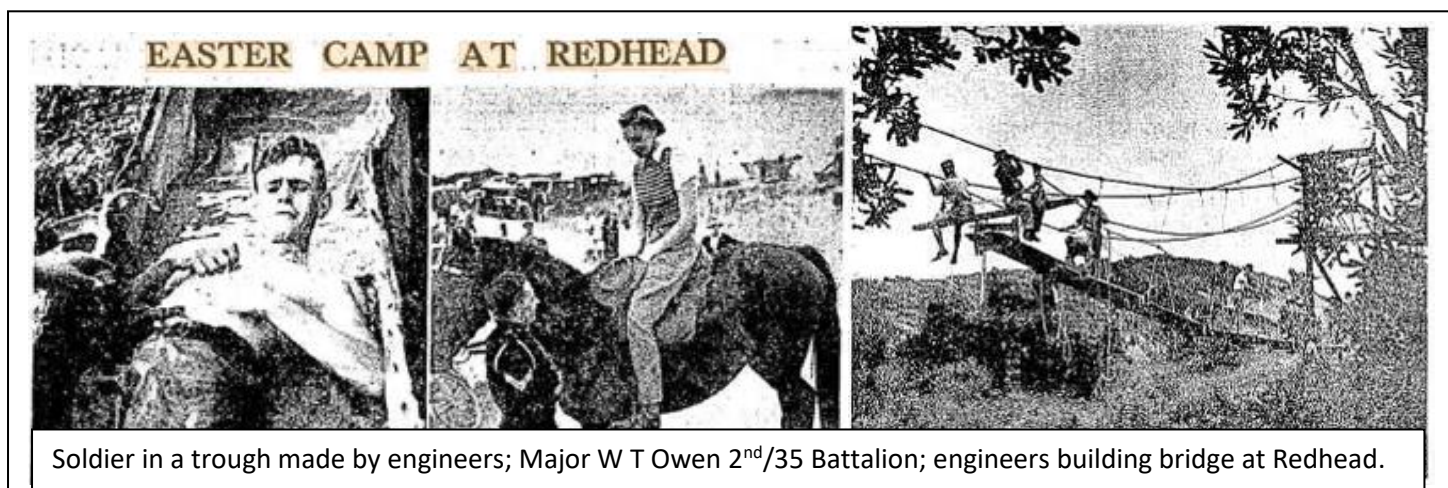
H.R. Hayman and Sutcliffe Manufacturing - More than 2 million articles of military clothing.

Also Involved in the War Effort were Henry Lane, Sulphide Corporation and Cardiff Railway Workshops.

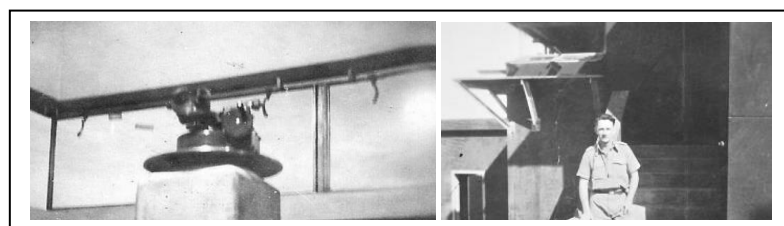
In 1943, BHP and Related Industries Employed 17,500 Compared To 3,800 In 1932. The War Saw Women Work in Heavy Industry for The First Time, in February 1942 at Rylands and in August at BHP. About 2,000 Women were Employed between 1942 – 1945" Sources: Monument Aust, UON, Newcastle Industrial Heritage Assoc.



REDHEAD played an integral role in the defence network as a militia training camp and observation post. As increasingly aggressive moves were made by Germany, Italy and Japan, Australia stepped up defence training. In April 1939, before the official declaration of war, a large training exercise was set up 2 miles south-west of Dudley, near Redhead. The vegetated sand dunes and dense jungle-like patches, bordering on Jewells Wetlands were an ideal environment. 600-700 men from various bases in the area travelled by train to the Lambton B colliery stop, then marched to the campground and set up their tents. Water was pumped from a freshwater stream; and telephone communications established. Mr John Jones, the local storekeeper at Dudley had secured the contract to supply meat, vegetables, and groceries. Bread was supplied by Mr W. Arnott jun. Various exercises included signalling with lamps and flags in the terrain of low bushes, and tactical operations. The engineers had to construct a 150 feet bridge, over a gully. By using 4-inch wire cable, bolting telegraph poles and sleepers together, the suspension bridge was built and crossed by all the troops. Other activities involved firing, demolition, wiring, digging trenches. While swimming one afternoon 2 soldiers had to be rescued by Redhead Surf Life Saving Club. Exercises continued throughout 1939. In November defensive coastal manoeuvres took place in unknown territory between Redhead and Terrigal, involving river crossings, night movements, field firing and digging in. It was conducted under active battle conditions wearing full kit, helmets, and gas masks. No smoking, talking or lights were allowed. *Source: Newcastle Morning Herald*



Fortress observation post at Redhead, NSW, 1945. Redhead was the site of an anti-aircraft gun emplacement and observation post. Before it was dismantled at the end of WWII, it supported the defence network. *Source: UON*



The sinking of 41 merchant and naval ships

along the East coast of Australia, reinforced the need to strengthen protection. Of high importance to Newcastle was the ***Iron Knight***, which was sunk near Montague Island on the south coast 80 years ago. The *Iron Knight* was one of 3 BHP cargo steamers which was delivering iron ore from Whyalla to Newcastle. Ironically, it was torpedoed in **Feb 1943** by the same sub, I-21, that had shelled Newcastle the year before. The intended target was actually one of the escort ships, HMAS Mildura and Townsville. Of the crew of 50, only 14 survived. David Dial's research revealed that 19 of the merchant seamen came from Newcastle area.



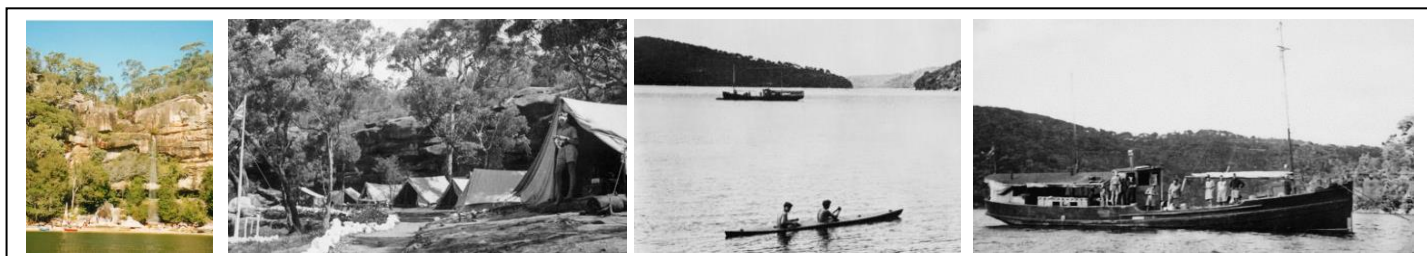
THE KRAIT

MV Krait started life as an ordinary, wooden Japanese fishing boat, c. 20 meters long, called *Kofuku Maru*. She was commandeered to rescue over 1000 evacuees from the fall of Singapore and ships sunk in the area. British officer, Major Ivan Lyon, came up with a daring plan to go behind enemy lines to disrupt Japanese shipping and supplies in Singapore harbour. She was renamed *Krait* after a deadly species of snake.

A special unit of young, intelligent, resilient, and tough men from the army and navy was formed in Australia. It would become known as Z force. Selected recruits received intensive training for the dangerous, top-secret missions. Their wives and families could not know; even they weren't told.

Fraser Island was the main training base for covert operations commandos. They learned jungle craft, survival techniques, living off the land, canoeing, explosives, unarmed combat, camouflage. They were trained to kill.

An elite group of 14 men were selected for **Operation Jaywick** and relocated to Refuge Bay at Broken Bay on the Hawkesbury. They camped at the top of the cliff, 4 to a tent, 2 meals a day; no cigarettes, no alcohol, no women for 3 months. The waterfall provided fresh water; a rock crevice the toilet. The training on weapons, combat, and physical fitness was intense. Canoeing practice took them across Broken Bay and up and down the Hawkesbury. Two-man collapsible canoes, *folboats*, took them on training missions along the coastal lakes linking Tuggerah Lake and Lake Macquarie, as far as Cockle Creek, carrying their canoes overland between the lakes.



They sailed slowly up the coast to Cairns, then across to Exmouth, WA, where they learned of their mission as they headed towards Singapore. They would sail as close as possible to Singapore Harbour, drop 6 men in 3 folboats, to attach limpet mines to sink or badly damage Japanese ships and their cargo. They would row the 50km by night, camp amongst mangroves during the day; rendezvous in 14 days. The canvas covered canoes were light, easily collapsed and reassembled, The Japanese designed and built *Krait* was ideal to blend in and not be suspicious. Life on board was very disciplined. They would smear themselves all over every few days with Helena Rubinstein black dye and wear sarongs to give the impression of Malayan fishermen. No cigarette butts were to go in the water. Cans of food carried no labels, replaced by coded numbers according to their contents. They were given cyanide tablets in case of capture – consumption was optional.

Paddling was hard work, as the men's muscles had not been used onboard. They endured blistered hands, raw backsides, mud, heat, and mosquitos as they silently progressed to their destination over 3 nights. The magnetic limpet mines had to be attached under water in a harbour that was brightly lit and patrolled by the Japanese army. The mines were set to explode on 7 ships at c. 5 am, **September 26, 1943**. Whilst some 40,000 tons of cargo were lost, the greatest damage was psychological as Japan realised they were not invincible. The men returned successfully and were sworn to secrecy. All documents were destroyed at the end of the war.

After WWII, *Krait* carried timber in Borneo, until she was found in the late 1950's. Public fund raising financed her return to Australia, 1964, welcomed by 20,000 people. She was operated by Volunteer Coastal Patrol for patrols, searches, rescues, and education; and visited Lake Macquarie. She is now a war memorial, restored and managed by Aust. National Maritime Museum, Syd. Sources: AWM; ozatwar; tij.tv; ANMM

