

History of Camp Victory

Camp Victory was pastoral land, as part of the National Stock Route, and was requisitioned for Defence use as the Australian Army. Initial defence of the area was initially formed by the militia 15th Motor Regiment. Formerly the 15th Light Horse Regiment (Northern Rivers Lancers).

The 7th Division was sent home from North Africa and the Middle East, before their deployment into the Pacific. In April 1942, the 25th Infantry Brigade was stationed at what was then known as Camp Casino, having moved across from Adelaide. They conducted topographical surveys of the region to improve maps, in case of a possible invasion. A leave program was also instigated for the men who had returned from Overseas Duties. Soon the Brigade moved to Caboolture in Queensland. Brigade Headquarters was established within this Drill Hall.

15th Brigade, from the 3rd Division, replaced the 25th Brigade in late May 1942 until September 1942, but some sub-units remained until November. This was a Victorian militia unit initially and moved north from Hume Camp near Albury-Wodonga. They conducted training and exercises in preparation for a possible invasion across the beaches from Tweed Heads to Brooms Head. 57th/60th Battalion assigned to the Tweed Valley, 58th Battalion assigned to the Richmond Valley and 59th Battalion in the Clarence Valley. Military appraisals were conducted on the likely avenues of approach and potential barriers. Forced 24-hour marches were conducted from Grafton to Casino and Casino to Lennox Head, via Coraki, then tested to see if the units were still fit to fight. The unit was transferred to the AIF and followed the 25th Brigade in moving to Caboolture, who in turn moved to the Atherton Tablelands before their deployment to New Guinea. Private Clive Bettles died when his Bren Gun Carrier crashed down a 70 foot cliffs near Nimbin on the 10th of June 1942 and was buried in Casino General Cemetery.

During 1943, only the local 22nd Battalion of the Volunteer Defence Corp was the primary Defence unit within the Casino region. They conducted field exercises and utilised some of the facilities left at Camp. This was a unit created in 1941 by the Returned Services League and made up of Great War veterans mostly. Formally taken under Australian Government control, they served across the region on coast watching and garrison duties, in a series of part-time and full-time roles, until late 1944.

At the end of 1944, the Camp was formally transferred to the Royal Dutch East Indies Army for their use. They were given extra-territorial rights over the camp, enabling them to operate under Dutch authority and under Dutch law. The name of Camp Victory was given to the camp by the Dutch in the hopes of a swift victory and return to their islands. The 1st Infantry Battalion (KNIL) was posted to the camp, being brought up from Camp Darley, near Bacchus March in Victoria. This unit was of Brigade size and around 3,000 men served.

A prison was set up within the camp, to house political prisoners and Indonesian Nationalists from the Tanah Merah camp when it was evacuated from the Dutch East Indies. Some of the political prisoners were placed in a Labour Battalion, that enabled them to be placed under Dutch military law, to perform manual labour tasks around Casino and for the Dutch East Indies Government-In-Exile at Camp Columbia in Wacol, Queensland. At the conclusion of World War 2, Indonesia declared it's independence and many soldiers of the KNIL refused to take orders or went on strike around Australia. They were court-martialled and transported to Casino, to serve a variety of prison sentences. There were riots and protests that led to two deaths from shootings within the camp and one suicide. Many Australians and the Australian Trade Union movement disapproved of these actions and imposed a variety of sanctions on the Dutch Forces, such as no supply of food, transport and fuel.

For their service within Casino, there are 10 Dutch War Graves at the Casino General Cemetery on West Street near the golf course.

• Private Lublieck C.M.J.	Died 21 st September 1944	Drowned near railway bridge in Casino
• Private Pickaulina	Died 21 st October 1944	Illness
• Private Oboedarin	Died 20 th December 1944	Died in car accident
• Private Snepvangers S.H. River	Died 23 rd September 1945	Drowned in Richmond
• Private Madjarjasih	Died 30 th September 1945	Natural Causes
• Private Tadjeri Al Tarsan Military Detention Camp	Died 17 th May 1946	Accidentally shot in
• Corpoal Van Esch C.J.A. propeller blades	Died 16 th July 1946	Struck on head by
• Private Koesin	Died 2 nd August 1946	Illness
• Private Emot	Died 10 th September 1946	Suicide
• Private Soerdo	Died 12 th September 1946	Shot by Guards

By the end of 1946, the last of the Dutch Forces were able to be transported back to the Dutch East Indies and Camp Victory was officially closed on the 17th of December 1946. Many of soldiers who acted as guards, sailed on the same ships alongside the prisoners they had been guarding. Due to a lack of housing at the end of the war, several families started to squat on the site of Camp Victory. They used various sheds and buildings as homes. This caused discontent between the Casino Municipal Council and Australian Army over the supply of services to the squatters. They were eventually evicted throughout 1947 and the land given back to their original owners, with the building sold by the Australian Government by tender in 1948.