

## YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 35

### TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



*The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open three days per week, Wednesday through Friday. The Museum will be closed from 19 December until 6 January 2021 to provide a well-deserved break for our volunteer attendants, guides and curatorial team*

*This is the last Virtual Visit for 2020. The series will be continuing again in 2021 to present interesting features of the collection and their background stories.*

### 2/1 AUSTRALIAN GENERAL HOSPITAL IN MERREDIN



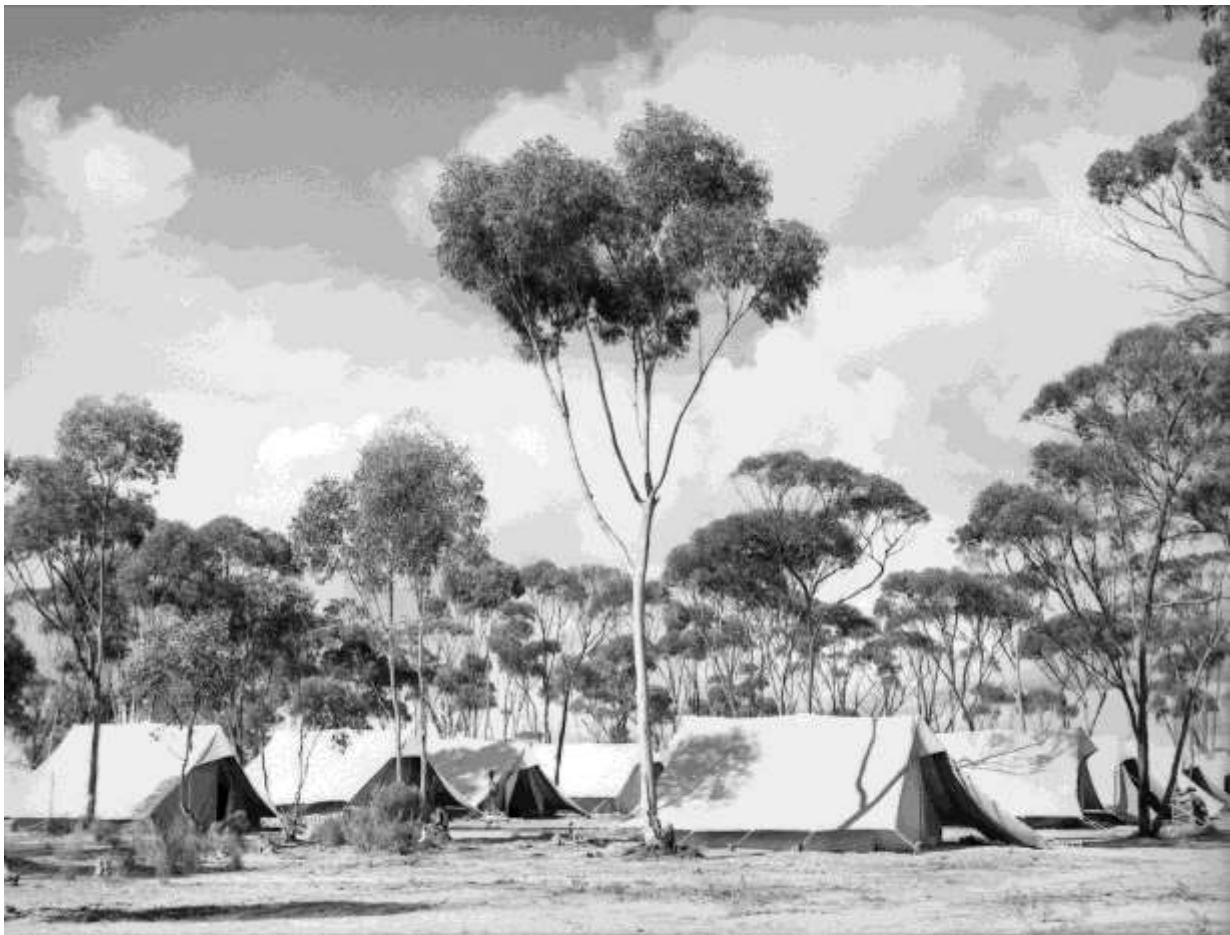
On 8 March 1942, the main body of 2/1 Australian General Hospital boarded trains for El Kantara, and then after crossing the canal, trains in Ismailia for Port Tewfik. Here they boarded the *SS Laconia* for Bombay where they were transhipped onto one of the following ships -*Devonshire*, *Duntroon*, *Katoomba*, or *Holbrook*, returning to Fremantle via Colombo, Mombasa, and Durban, a total journey of 12 weeks.

Following two weeks leave, the hospital began to gather in Western Australia where they established a tented hospital in Merredin. The male staff were required to construct the hospital, so the nursing staff remained for a time in Guildford where they established a temporary 250 bed hospital in the Guildford Grammar School. Located on the north-eastern fringes of Merredin, the Hospital was located at a junction in rail lines, with plentiful water courtesy of a large dam connected to the Goldfields water pipeline. In mid-1943 the hospital withdrew from Merredin and moved to NSW



The Central Eastern Wheatbelt played a significant role in preparing for the defence of Australia in World War 2. Merredin hosted an Army Field Hospital and many RAAF installations, while Nungarin had a large Army Ordnance Depot based near the town. A major flight training base was located at Cunderdin.





An area of lightly wooded land at the base of Merredin Peak was cleared and a tent hospital erected. The wards consisted of 24 large tents, each holding 20 patients. The staff lived in smaller tents, each containing four or six camp stretchers. At the beginning the floors were simply dirt but these were later replaced with timber. Kerosene lamps were used until electricity was connected. The corrugated iron ablutions block, consisting of showers, wash troughs and deep trench latrines, was located in front of the wards.

The 221 patients who were admitted in 1942 were joined by another 267 in January 1943. They were transported to Merredin by special ambulance trains and then transferred to the hospital by ambulance. The staff consisted of five medical officers, 9 other officers and 188 enlisted personnel.

Ultimately the expected invasion of Australia did not occur and in August 1943, the 2/1 Army General Hospital left Merredin, first for Port Moresby and then the Solomon Islands. It returned to Australia in 1945.

The hospital site can be visited today as part of a National Trust of Western Australia Golden Pipeline drive trail

<https://www.goldenpipeline.com.au/place/merredin-peak-military-hospital-site/>

<https://www.australiasgoldenoutback.com/business/attractions/merredin-army-general-hospital-site>



During 1941 the Western Australian Government Railways (WAGR) prepared an ambulance train which they handed over to the Army in March 1942 to be manned by the **10th Australian Ambulance Train** which had been raised at Helena Vale, and this remained their base for the rest of the war. Little use was made of the whole train, with a carriage or more added to regular trains on both the WAGR line from Mullewa to Northam or the Midland Railway Company's line from Mingenew to Midland Junction. Carriages were based at Mullewa and Mingenew to facilitate transport to and from Geraldton. Similarly carriages based at Helena Vale were used to operate from Fremantle to Northam and Merredin. With the reduction of troop numbers in Western Australia, individual carriages were returned to the WAGR until the unit was disbanded in March 1945.

*Content has come from The Unit Guide - Volume 4 - The Australian Army 1939-1945, page 4.173 - Graham R McKenzie-Smith - Big Sky Publishing - 2018*

You can read more about other WW2 military sites in the Wheatbelt at the link below  
<https://www.wheatbelttourism.com/heritage-the-arts/military-history-of-the-wheatbelt/>

Well worth considering a family visit during the school holidays