

YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 52 TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing to present interesting features from the collection and their background stories.

The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing will apply.

Preparing for Centennial of World War Two 16 Battalion Photograph Album



The photograph above is of the Pipe Band of the 16th Battalion, the Cameron Highlanders of Western Australia. It was taken in January 1940 and is accompanied by an attachment with the names of the sitters. The photograph is from an album in the collection of the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia. The album was created by Gordon Ager, (later WX29751).

The album contains an annotated photographic record of Battalion camps on Rottnest in Easter 1937 and from 7 October to 5 November 1939. It later continues to record the Battalion in Darwin and New Britain. This album is an example of one of many private photo albums currently being digitised and documented in the Archives of the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION



The Cameron Highlanders continue the long tradition, which pre-dates Federation, of a kilted unit in Perth. The 16th Battalion was originally raised in September 1914. It was landed at Gallipoli the following year, also seeing service in France. The battalion was disbanded at the end of the war, then re-raised as a Citizen Military Force unit. It amalgamated with the 11th Battalion in 1930. A new 16th Battalion was raised in 1936 as the Cameron Highlanders of Western Australia. This battalion formed part of the garrison of Darwin in 1943 and took part in the New Britain Campaign from November 1944 until the end of the war.

E Company Sigs Section, still kilted, Melville Camp 1940

In the lead up to the centenary of the start of World War One, historians, locally, nationally, and internationally showed renewed interest in diaries, personal reminiscences, records and photographs relating to the war both on active service and at home. Many of these records had been lying in quiet repose in museums and archives and for many years had attracted limited interest. The Great War was seemingly well documented through the official volumes and regimental histories commissioned and written in the immediate decade after the Armistice.

Time marches on, and new research tools, digitisation, spreadsheets and editing programs have provided the means to examine these collections from new perspectives. A new generation of researchers have been able to identify varied and individual experiences, to document chronological sequences, and to collate them into new and compelling histories of war-time service and sacrifice. Diverse elements held in the distributed national collection from private sources, through regional museums to national institutions could be and have been brought together, often for the first time. The result was a continuing release of publications relating to World War One.



Beginning in 2010 and continuing for the next decade, the Army Museum of Western Australia experienced unprecedented interest in its collection and archives relating to World War One. This interest had mutual benefits. Not only did access by researchers provide elements and detail for their new analysis but it also alerted the curatorial and archive staff to the significance of many hitherto relatively undocumented areas of the

collection.

Corporal Gordon Ager (centre) on the Ghan enroute to Darwin



Interior of Sergeants' Mess, Darwin

With this experience in mind, the Army Museum of Western Australia from 2015, initiated a proactive program to prepare for research activity expected to increase in 2035 relating to the centennial of the start of World War Two. The intent was to have collection items digitised, documented and accessible for this anniversary. The need for contemporary accounts of individual and unit service was estimated to be even greater than that of World War One. As the recent 6 volume publication, *The Unit Guide* by Graham Mackenzie Smith, has shown, there were over 6000 units involved in the Army alone from 1939-45 with fewer than 600 having documented histories. Clearly there are many more stories which could be told and documented with personal experiences.

To prepare its collections for access by future historians of World War Two experiences, the Army Museum program has multiple elements. As a Foundation, with the support of the Australian Army History Unit, the storage infrastructure was put in place through the access of two modern compactus units and other elements of contemporary archival storage materials. This program is progressively continuing through the purchase of map and photographic storage cabinets. Unit associations and individuals were advised of an open repository policy to receive records and newsletters for secure storage when the association ceased to operate. These items would be safely conserved and progressively documented and digitised as resources permitted.



*Troopship Evangeline,
Jacquinot Bay
New Britain*

A key element in the documentation process is accurate record management. The existing Army History Management System used for electronic collection management across the Australian Army History Unit was expanded with a local system focused on photographs and personal documents. An accelerated program of digitisation of records and photographs has been initiated. As this work has been progressing, partnerships for access programs have been put in place through Family History WA, Collections Victoria, CollectionsWA and Trove. All of these initiatives will permit researchers to become familiar with the research resources available through the Army Museum of WA as they are brought on-line.



Local delivery of rations, POL and ammunition in New Britain

Volunteers form the basis of this initiative, with work ongoing to receive, catalogue, index and digitise past, current, and future donations. A target completion date of December 2029 provides an indication of the magnitude of the task of processing the holdings to date. With new donations, it will be an ongoing but achievable task.

The completed work will be the contribution of the current generation of Army Museum volunteers to honour the service and sacrifice of Western Australians during World War Two by making these records easily available for the future researchers and writers in the lead up to the centenary of the start of that conflict. **Lest We Forget.**

LINKS FOR FURTHER ENJOYMENT

Visit the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia web site

<https://armymuseumwa.com.au/>

[https://www.birtwistlewiki.com.au/wiki/16th_Australian_Infantry_Battalion_\(Cameron_Highlanders_Regiment\)](https://www.birtwistlewiki.com.au/wiki/16th_Australian_Infantry_Battalion_(Cameron_Highlanders_Regiment))

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U56098>

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/58f7ac6cd0ce932bf0021691>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51456>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C77535>

https://history.army.mil/documents/WWII/wwii_Troopships.pdf



16 Battalion AIF Sergeants' Mess Darwin 1943

Check out the recently launched Western Australian Military Digital Library at

<https://www.wamdl.com.au/Home>

The Western Australian Military Digital Library is a joint project of the Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc (trading as FamilyHistoryWA) and the Army Museum of Western Australia Foundation with the purpose to create a digital public library relating to Western Australia's military heritage.

The vision is to create a digital public library that reveals the many unique and previously unseen historical records and personal papers relating to Western Australia's military heritage in order to make them freely and widely accessible to a state, national and international audience.'