

YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 74

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.

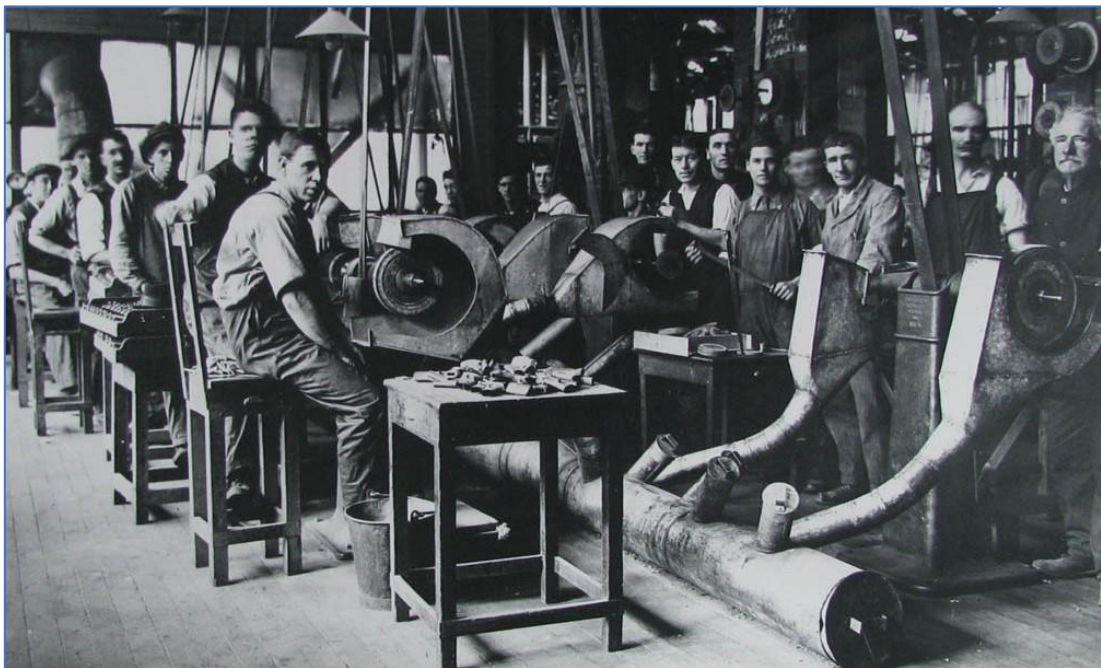
The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing will apply.

General Motors-Holden in the War

Since colonisation, a principal policy motivator of the Imperial Government was for colonies, including Australia, to provide the raw materials to feed the hungry industrial might of Great Britain. Australia was looked upon as the “Bread Basket” of the Empire. Industrialisation of the colonies was not encouraged because it reduced the market for the added value goods, which were being produced in Britain’s factories.

After the World War 1, successive Australian Governments recognised the need to build up the industrial base of the country, particularly in respect to defence requirements. As a result, by 1939, Australia was capable of producing weapons, such as the 3 in HAA gun, small arms and ammunition, clothing and many other items of equipment required to meet the defence needs.

Unfortunately, these government factories alone were unable to meet the enormous increase in the service requirements when World War 2 commenced. With the United Kingdom industry heavily committed to producing their own requirements, the chance of Australia accessing these sources was extremely limited. What antiquated and obsolescent military equipment Australia did have, was required to equip the Second Australian Imperial Force with the result the Home Army was largely stripped of materiel.



Production at Lithgow Small Arms Factory

There was also the need to help Britain rearm after the tragic defeat in France including virtually all transport and heavy weapons. Australian industry under **Laurence Hartnett, Managing Director of General Motors-Holden** who had been appointed as Director of Ordnance Production, rallied to the call to bring the small civilian industry in full production for the services. By the end of 1945 Australia was producing or had produced 2 pr and 6 pr anti-tank guns, 25 pr gun howitzers, 3.7 in Heavy AA guns, Polston 20 mm LAA guns, vehicles, aircraft, engines, ships and a host of other items.

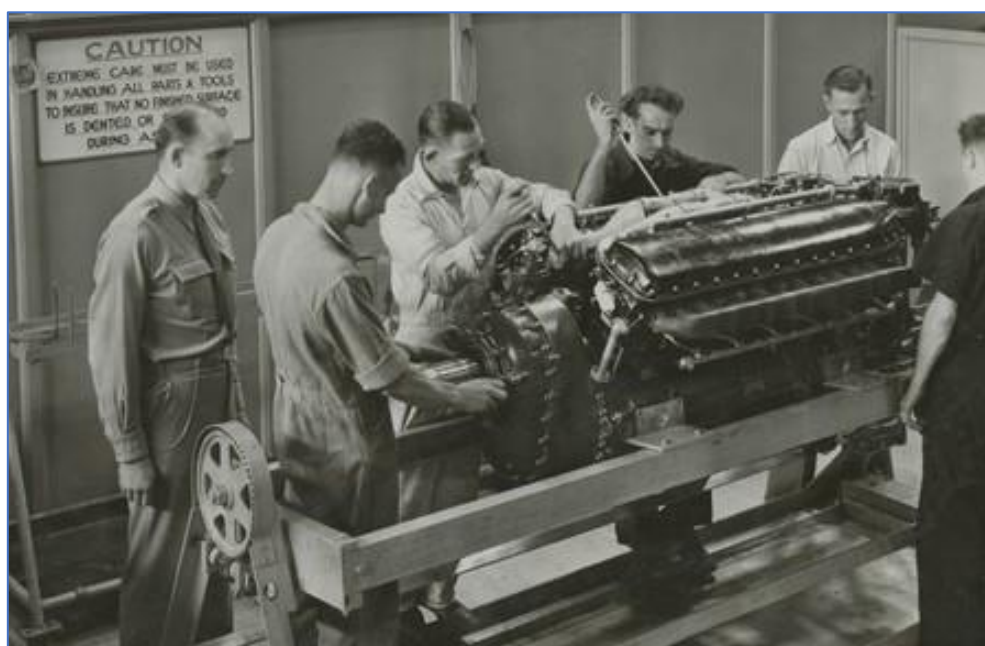
This all took time to put into operation and at the commencement of the war with Japan the situation was rather depressing. At 1 February 1942 secret documents outlined the following shortages in ordnance used by the field and AA artillery and production capabilities then available

- 3.7 in HAA guns. Deficiency of 271 guns with 8 guns per month being built in Australia;
- 3 in 20 cwt AA guns. Deficiency of 60 guns and no longer being produced;
- 40 mm Bofors LAA guns. Deficiency of 1000 guns. Manufacturing just commencing and relying on whatever equipment could be made available from Britain and Canada.
- 25 pr and 18 pr guns and 4.5 in howitzers. Deficiency of 301 guns with a production rate of 24 units per month.
- 2 pr anti-tank guns. A deficiency of 1800 guns with a production rate of 65 guns per month.

The history of GMH's part in helping to reduce those deficiencies is a example of expedient mobilisation of skills and resources, Holden's second full-scale car factory, located in Fishermans Bend (Port Melbourne), was completed in 1936, with construction beginning in 1939 on a new plant in Pagewood, New South Wales. However, World War II delayed car production with efforts shifted to the construction of vehicle bodies, field guns, aircraft, and engines.

The diversity of production was extensive:

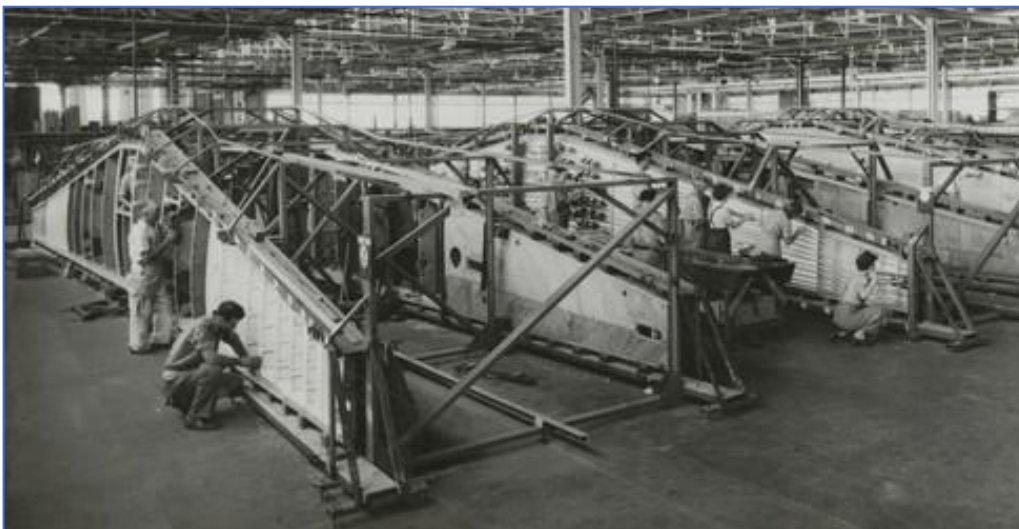
- **Three different engines (Gipsy Major Aero Engines, Naval Torpedo Engines. and Gray Marine Diesel Engines);**



- **Four different guns (2-Pdr. Tank Attack Guns, 6-Pdr. Tank Attack Guns, 25-Pdr. Gun Howitzers, and 20 mm. Polsten Heavy Machine Guns);**



- **Major Airframe Assemblies for six different types of aircraft including Wirraways, Boomerangs, Beauforts, Beaufighters, Mosquitos, and Mustangs;**



- **Eight different types of small marine vessels;**



- **Four different types of shell and bomb cases;**



- **Tents, Marquees, and Haversacks;**



- **Refrigerators and Cool Rooms of various capacities; and**



- **Motor Vehicle bodies of over 200 different types.**



LINKS FOR FURTHER ENJOYMENT

Visit the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia web site

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

<https://www.hrc.org.au/holden/publications.html>

<https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/BRG+213/121/10>

<https://www.military-vehicle-museum.org.au/museum/holden-wartime-production-not-just-cars/>

<https://airpower.airforce.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/WP12-The-Australian-Aviation-Industry.pdf>



VALE

Holden, an iconic Australian brand, got its start in 1856 as a saddle maker before transitioning to cars in 1908. General Motors bought the company in 1931. For nearly a century, the company under GM ownership produced utility vehicles but also powerful, muscular sedans such as the Monaro and the Commodore. General Motors brought Holden to an end by 2021 as it withdrew from Australia and New Zealand.

