



at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



Above and below: Images from the Tom Lennon Collection (RW1574/232).

What you should know

- The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building at the South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue.
- Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour, including copying and postage.
- For further information, phone 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au or visit the website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.

apooka is located less than 10km south-west of the city of Wagga.

The name "Kapooka" is derived from the Wiradjuri word meaning

"place of wind".

This site on the southern slopes of the Pominalarna Reserve has had a long military history since World War II.

The land was first acquired by the defence forces in May 1942 under the National Security Regulations and was originally chosen due to its proximity to the birthplace of Field Marshall Sir Thomas Blamey at Wagga.

Kapooka then became the major site for the Royal Australian Engineers Centre, combining six of the seven engineer training centres, in order to increase efficiency and reduce the staff and equipment required around the country.

From July 17, 1942, many thousands of AIF engineers were trained in basic soldier skills and fieldwork at Kapooka.

By 1943 there were 8000 troops stationed at the camp, which had become one of the largest military camps in the Commonwealth.

Throughout the duration of World War II, over 47,000 soldiers graduated from Kapooka.

As the war drew to an end, Kapooka saw its own tragedy. On May 21, 1945, an explosion in a demolitions training bunker killed two instructors and 24 trainees.

A further two were injured, one of whom later died from his wounds.

The funeral held for the



instructors and trainees was the biggest Wagga had ever seen.

In December 1945, troops were withdrawn from Kapooka leaving only a skeleton staff of less than 100.

The functions of the facility were absorbed into the School of Military Engineering at Casula in Sydney.

Kapooka continued in this state until it was decided to reopen as a military training centre in late 1951.

The First Recruit Training Battalion (IRTB) was established in November 1951, with Lieutenant Colonel VE Dowdy appointed as the first commanding officer.

IRTB was joined by Second Recruit Training Battalion (2RTB) during 1952 and 1953 in temporary buildings on the ridge south of the main camp.

The Intelligence School and Central Instructors School also operated out of Kapooka during the 1950s, however by 1957 IRTB was once again alone at Kapooka.

1962 was a big year for Kapooka with a rebuilding and expansion program, which gave the Army

recruits facilities equal to the best in Australia and increased the camp's capacity to 1200 recruits.

Since that time, Kapooka has provided basic military training to countless recruits.

During the war in Vietnam, from 1965 to 1972, Kapooka saw over 10,000 national service recruits and regular army soldiers receive basic training.

Currently, recruits spend a total of 11 weeks at Kapooka undertaking basic training.

Freedom of the City IN NOVEMBER 1962, Kapooka was granted "Freedom of the City of Wagga" in recognition for 21 years of the camp's existence, and keen interest in the affairs of the city and having given valuable, practical and unselfish services in times of civil emergencies.

"Army Week," as it was called, began on November 14.

Shop windows were decorated with toy soldiers and field guns, with numerous entertainments during the week which included a band concert, a civic ball at

Kyeamba Smith Hall and an air pageant over the Uranquinty Air Field.

The official ceremony was held at Bolton Park on November 18, followed by a parade down Baylis and Fitzmaurice streets, with the Salute taken by Mayor Alderman JJ Jack at the cenotaph.

The ceremony placed special emphasis on the ties between the local community and the Kapooka Military Base.

More than 600 officers, men and service women took part in the ceremony.

The parade with swords drawn, bayonets fixed and beating drums was led by Lieutenant Colonel MB Simkin, in his last official role as commanding officer at Kapooka.

It was reported that the troop's marching was precise, their drill perfect, and their dress immaculate.

Since then, some notable changes have taken place at Kapooka.

Such as in 1985 when Kapooka became responsible for training female recruits, and in 1993 with the additional responsibility of training reserve recruits, in addition to the Army's regular recruits.

On December 1, 1998, the First Recruit Training Battalion was changed to an Individual Training Centre and its name altered to the Army Recruit Training Centre (ARTC), which is appropriately called the "Home of the Soldier".

Compiled by Claire Stewart
References: Morris, S. (1999) Wagga Wagga A History; Website: The History of the Army Recruit Training Centre - <http://www.defence.gov.au/army/artc/genInfo.cfm>; The Daily Advertiser - 3/11/1951, 5/11/1951, 7/11/1951, 3/11/1962, 8/11/1962, 14/11/1962, 16/11/1962, 17/11/1962, 19/11/1962.