

Memories of Northam

By Yvonne Lawrence

My Grandfather was loading horses at Bunbury for World War 1 when he was injured and therefore did not participate in the fighting. He was a teamster so was familiar with horses. He had been brought up in the Dandenongs in Victoria.

Northam has a Memorial to George Throssell who was a Victoria Cross medallist in World War 1. At the Old Northam Railway Station in Northam there is a room displayed by the Northam Army Camp Historical Association. On the platform we have a display of one of the battles that we were given from the Fremantle War Museum. In World War 11 the men were trained at the Northam Army Camp and travelled by train to Northam where they were taken by Army trucks to the Army Camp. After the war Northam was inundated with about 6000 migrants that were housed at the Northam Army Camp or Holden Camp which was in the town of Northam. The migrants often came on assisted passages on various ships and because of this they had to work for the Government for two years to pay for this passage. After the two years they were able to seek other employment. The migrants brought with them their cultures, recipes (which was used by one of the local butchers to manufacture smallgoods) and lifestyles. Some of the families remain here today.

In my family on my father's side there were four sons at World War 11. One was a prisoner in Germany, another in Changi, one killed in New Guinea and one in the Ambulance Section. One the German POW finished his day in the Nursing Home of Lemnos. Another from Changi Prison (because they received no counselling afterwards) committed suicide on the beach near pearling sheds in Darwin. The Ambulance Section son became an Accountant and worked in one of the large motor firms in Perth.

I was born in Broome during World War 11 and when I was two was evacuated with my mother by Hercules Bomber after we had been attacked by the Japanese. We were in a ditch behind the Governor Broome Hotel which my father had purchased in 1942. Our living quarters were damaged.

After when I returned I remember walking to what they now call the Town Beach past about 100 white crosses where they had buried the people killed from the Seaplanes during the attack. I was also there in 1950 when the bodies were exhumed.

During World War 11 we had the Army housed in our stables near the ice works and cool drink factory (owned by my father). We also had Indonesian Interpreters living in the hotel and had the Air Force Wing built. Broome was used for refuelling the airplanes used to defend our coast and in Indonesia. One of the parks in Broome (where Dampier's Chest sits) was filled with forty-four-gallon drums after the war. My father used some of these to fence the one-mile farm that he purchased to grow vegetables, fruit and goats. They were filled with sand and the fence placed on top. This was to keep the kangaroos out and the goats in their paddock.

Later in 1950 to 1953 my mother had a Delicatessen in West Leederville where we made all the pies, pasties and cakes ourselves. Before, during and after the war

many ate rabbits. My stepfather brought down rabbits from Northam which my mother sold raw, baked or made into brawn and sold in the shop. Our shutters had to be up by five o'clock and no groceries (tins of food, soups etc.) could be sold until the next day. At this time there was still rationing of some goods, so you had to produce a ticket to obtain those items. Northam Army Camp was also used to train soldiers for Korea and Vietnam. Many cadets had various camps there and those called up for National Service Training. The RSL Dances and Picture Theatre during my teenage years were very crowded while the Army Camp was being used.