

WWII ARMY CAMP, BIBRA LAKE (SITE)

B Considerable significance



LGI #

PIN No.

LOT/PLAN DIAGRAM

LOCATION

Hope Road, Bibra Lake

OTHER NAME(S)

CONSTRUCTION DATE(S)

1943 (demolished 1945)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

WWII Army Camp (site), Bibra Lake, is significant for its associations with the area’s role in defending the western coastline during World War II.

WWII Army Camp (site), Bibra Lake, is significant for its possible association with the Australian Women’s Army Service and their critical role during World War II.

WWII Army Camp (site), Bibra Lake, is significant for its archaeological potential for increasing our understanding of a World War II army camp.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVENTORY

WWII Army Camp (site), Bibra Lake, is significant for its educational potential to assist people to further understand the development of such sites during World War II.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

WWII Army Camp (site), Bibra Lake, comprises the ruins of a World War II army camp. Although all prefabricated buildings and infrastructure were removed immediately after the War, there are sufficient traces on the surface to identify latrines, shower blocks, and tracks.

The traces of the camp extend over an extensive area, but there is no evidence that they have ever been investigated archaeologically, and no plans of the camp are known to exist.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS

Walls

Roof

Other

ORIGINAL USE

Military

Barracks

CURRENT USE

Vacant / unused

Vacant / unused

HISTORIC THEMES

Outside influences

World Wars & other wars

HISTORY

Military records indicate that the Regimental Headquarters for 116LAA Regt (116 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment) were located in Bibra Lake.

A Commonwealth Disposals Commission Auction Notice, published 16 September 1945, identifies the site as Lot 7, Searchlight Station 10, Bibra Lake corner of Warwick and Dixon Roads, with the following items from the site auctioned at the end of the war:

- *Combined Kitchen, Mess and Recreation Room, in sections, weatherboard, corrugated asbestos, skillion roof, wooden floor in sections» with lean-to at back;*
- *Latrines, sheet asbestos; GI skillion roof, timber frame, cement floor;*
- *Ablutions, sheet asbestos, G.I., G.I. skillion roof, timber frame, cement floor, cement bath; Engine Shed, GI, timber frame, cement floor, no .engine) ;*
- *Command Post (underground), timber;*
- *Cement Slabs, Barbed Wire fence;*
- *2,000 gal tank on low stand;*
- *Tank on stand (heavy bush timber) approx. 10ft high with 6in x 1.5 inch decking, piping and ball valve;*
- *Bore, approximately 225 feet, casing 1.5 inch lead-off (engine room built over bore);*
- *Septic System, three pedestals and cisterns;*
- *180 foot and 60 foot 1.5 inch piping.*



LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVENTORY

A number of accounts from residents of the area during the war document the presence of:

- An army camp at this location on Hope Road
- AWAS at the camp and in the area
- Searchlights seen at the camp

Historical aerial photographs indicating distinctive tracks through the area that are not associated with a farm or property.

However, the exact type of army camp, the likely occupation of the site, and the scale of the site cannot be confirmed at this stage.

Based on the evidence available (August 2015) here are two key possible uses for the camp:

1. Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Station manned by the AWAS
2. Regimental Headquarters for 116LAA Regt with 116LAA Regt Sig Sec co-located, and AWAS attached to Regt HQ and signals section.

There is some evidence suggesting that the site was an Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Station manned by the AWAS, which includes written accounts from four residents of the area at the time.

In October 1942 approval was given for the expansion of the anti-aircraft defences in Cockburn Sound. As troops were now needed to fight in New Guinea, there were minimal numbers of men left to defend the western coastline. Therefore, more women were recruited to Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) to be trained for the Artillery Corps. Recruitment commenced in July 1942. Training included use of .303 rifles, the Bren Gun for guard duty, identifying aircraft, and technical issues such as operating lamps, generators, and communications.

Although the 'searchlight girls' were supposed to be non-combatants, as more men were transferred from the coastline defences, the responsibility for firing guns now lay with the women. On completion of training the AWAS women were posted to gun and searchlight stations.

The Government Disposal Auction Notices refer to the site as a 'Searchlight Station', and there are a number of submissions received from residents of the area at the time that searchlights were seen from the site.

However, there are no military records confirming its use as a Searchlight Station and the site is not included in the monthly Location Statements that show the location of all AA searchlight positions throughout the war.

It is also noted that there was another army camp site in North Jandakot which is known to have had searchlights (confirmed in military records), therefore it is possible that eyewitness accounts from former residents of the area having seen searchlights could have been from the North Jandakot site. It is also possible that mobile searchlights were used at the site (and others in the area) on occasion.

There is also evidence available suggesting that the site was the Regimental Headquarters for 116LAA Regt (116 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment) with AWAS attached. This evidence includes:

- Military records (monthly Location Statements) which note the site as the HQ 116 LAA Rgt.
- Specific statement in Eileen Tucker's book 'We Answered the Call' (1991).

However, an archaeological investigation would be required to determine the exact use, size and occupants of the camp.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVENTORY

In October 1945, all of the buildings on the site were auctioned, along with any water tanks, piping, and other structures associated with the camp. Aerial photography from just a few years later suggests the removal was effective, since no trace of the camp is visible.

In 2015, the former camp is now part of Beeliar Regional Park.

Other World War Two army camps and Searchlight Stations in the Perth Metropolitan area included:

- 55 Australian Battery, Alfred Road, Swanbourne
- Searchlight Station 6, corner Victoria & Manning Streets, Mosman Park
- 108 Searchlight Troop, Bay View Terrace, Mosman Park
- AASL Station 15, Mt Brown, Naval Base
- AASL Station 11, North Jandakot
- Searchlight Stations 7 & 136, North Lake Road, Applecross
- Military Camp, Point Walter (City of Melville)
- Army Camp, Gentle Rd, Medina/Calista (City of Kwinana)
- Leighton Battery, Mosman Park – included searchlights and had AWAS working at the site.
- Chidlow Army Camp, Shire of Mundaring

ARCHITECT/DESIGNER -----

ASSOCIATED PEOPLE -----

CONDITION Archaeological site / ruins only

INTEGRITY Low

AUTHENTICITY High

OTHER LISTINGS

HCWA No. -----

Register National Estate -----

National Trust WA -----

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Tucker, Eileen, *We Answered the Call* (1991)

Sunday Time, 16 September 1945

Daily News, 17 May 1944

Daily News, 6 August 1945

Westralian Worker, 28 September 1945

Information provided by Graham McKenzie-Smith –
Military Historian

Written accounts from residents obtained in 2015:

- Ugo De Marchi
- E. Masdada
- Kay Hyde
- Noela Johns



LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVENTORY

ASSESSOR(S) NAME History Now and City of Cockburn
ADDITIONAL NOTES -----
DATE OF LAST ASSESSMENT August 2015



WWII Army Camp (site), June 2015



WWII Army Camp (site), June 2015



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