

Ian Hawthorn's Speech at the Bicentenary of Lancer Barracks Parade 21 Nov 2020

Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, fellow Lancers, past and present. It was in 1817 that the then Governor of the penal colony of NSW, Lachlan Macquarie, obtained permission from the Imperial Government in England to build a new military barracks in Parramatta.

By 1820 the construction was finished and a company of the 48th Regiment of Foot, the Northamptonshires, nicknamed the "Heroes of Talavera" and therefore veterans of the Napoleonic Wars, marched through the main gates into the Barracks.

A little known secret, hidden in the Regimental Museum's collection, but never on public display, is an 1860 Squad Book for the 60th Regiment of Foot, the East Suffolks, which provides an interesting insight into a soldier's life in 1860 Australia.

Pay – we're ALL interested in what we're paid. In 1860 the weekly pay rate for a Private in the East Suffolks – UNDER 14 YEARS OF AGE AND INCLUDING BEER MONEY – was one shilling and one penny. Under the list of REGIMENTAL NECESSARIES, I note that a pair of socks cost one shilling and tuppence, more than one week's pay for a young Private. Now, try as I might, I cannot find in the list of Regimental Necessaries – underpants. I can only infer from this that underpants were optional extras for the East Suffolks in 1860. However, the value of Necessaries in Company Store NOT Charged to Men, was the princely sum of one shilling and eight pence. So, the Quartermaster of the East Suffolks was no different from Quartermasters throughout history – unwilling to admit that he had anything in HIS stores to issue to the men.

Here's one for Colonel White, Sir. Under OFFICERS' QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS, all officers were required to know the number of nights the men were in bed! Now I trust that, when the Regiment was deployed to the Victorian border you personally, Colonel, checked how many Lancers were in bed each night and, if they weren't, it begs the question – "WHERE THE DEVIL WERE THEY?" - though it's probably best not to go down that path – what do you think, RSM?

Finally, I note in the Squad Book, that since the last half yearly return, 14 men had been Court Marshalled with a further 2 Court Marshalls pending. In contrast, 4 men were in receipt of Good Conduct Pay. Thank God for the advent of the female Lancer, which I am assuming, MUST have raised the standard of conduct of the military.

Now a quick gallop through history since the 1860's that touches on the Barracks. The Regiment now known as the 1st/15th Royal NSW Lancers first association with the Barracks and the community of Parramatta came in 1891, when "K" or Parramatta Troop was formed, with the entire Regiment moving to Parramatta in 1897. From that date the Barracks has been known as Lancer Barracks, with the almost 130 years of Lancers presence making it, we think, the longest continuous association between a military unit and its local community in Australia. It also gives rise to the Regiment's nickname, the Parramatta Lancers.

It was in 1893 that a detachment of Lancers left the Barracks to become the first Colonial troops to escort Queen Victoria through the streets of London, including the kleptomaniac Sergeant Barracluff, who "souvenired", otherwise known as "Nicked" a tassel from her coach as he escorted her – the best example of Australian larrikinism of which I have ever heard. For any disbelievers in such a dastardly act, we have the tassel on display in the Museum.

In 1897 the Jubilee Detachment represented the Lancers at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in London. At military tournaments which pitted the crème of the regular British Army against the best of the Colonial Volunteers in various skill-at-arms competitions, Sgt. Williams and

Corporal Ben Harkus of the Lancers brought back to the Barracks 2 of 6 Empire Gold Medals for the best of the best, establishing the Lancers as the most famous Colonial Regiment in the British Empire.

1899 and another first for the Regiment – the first Colonial Volunteers to train full-time, for 6 months, with the British Army in England, departed Lancer Barracks. Please note, our honoured politician guests, that they paid their own way, as the Government didn't contribute a bent ha'peny. I'm confident you will never allow such a thing to happen again! Two days before returning to England, the Boer War was declared and the Lancers Commander, Fighting Charlie Cox, in a fit of patriotic fervour, volunteered his entire command to fight for the British in South Africa – without first receiving formal approval from the NSW Government. Possibly his way of getting square with the politicians who refused to open their piggy bank – pure conjecture on my part.

In 1914 the bulk of the Lancers left Lancer Barracks to form the 1st Light Horse AIF, subsequently fighting at Gallipoli and as part of Harry Chauvel's Desert Mounted Corps, through the Sinai and into Palestine. The Regiment's home was still Lancer Barracks when, in 1945, it mounted what is to this day, Australia's largest ever armoured assault at Balikpapan in the Dutch East Indies.

In conclusion, happy birthday Lancer Barracks. May you still be here in another 200 years, still home to the Parramatta Lancers.

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