

# Bunkers Gas Fears Unburied

Townsville Bulletin — 24 October 2009 — Tony Raggatt

THE bunker boys are back and the tales of buried wartime wreckage just get bigger.

This time it's huge underground caverns of munitions and deadly mustard gas stashed under Castle Hill. The problem -- as it was when similar claims emerged 10 years ago of tunnels under Mount Louisa -- is a lack of evidence.

However, that has not stopped those who believe in the existence of massive World War II graveyards.

One who does contacted the Townsville Bulletin this week urging authorities to come clean.

"It worries the crap out of us that it is correct," Melbourne lawyer and amateur wartime historian Mark Rawson said of the Castle Hill claims.

"If that (mustard gas) starts to break down, then there's no way it's going to come out without killing people."

Sensational stuff but without any evidence just a lot hot air.

Certainly mustard gas was stored here during the war and there were secret tests on the impact of mustard gas on troops at the Brook Islands north of Townsville. But were as many as 300 drums of the poisonous gas stored in tunnels in Castle Hill?

The 'evidence' Mr Rawson provided yesterday was excerpts from what is claimed to have been a letter sent by a former field officer employed by the Defence Department's Defence Estate Organisation.

The officer is claimed to have been Aaron Frattner who is said to have died recently of cancer and is alleged to have written the letter shortly before his death.

The information is truly fantastic.

"It was on 16-03-2000 that I learnt of site H47-T," it says. "I received a phone call saying that I was to fly to Townsville and meet the regional D.O.D/D.E.O (Department of Defence, Defence Estate Organisation) liaison officer to be briefed on my assignment."

The assignment was to assess a cache of distilled mustard gas in tunnels under Castle Hill.

It claims a team of DEO personnel, complete with 'chem-gear', climbed down from the Castle Hill lookout at 2.30 in the morning and lowered themselves into a cavern from a vent hidden under scrub.

It continues: "We walked down this corridor then down a flight of stairs and there was this great huge hall full of 44 gal drums (I think it was a mess hall cause there (was) a kitchen (at) the other end of the hall) so I inspected these drums, all 300 of them, and ticked each one off my list and wrote my report and went back up the stairs . . ."

The information claims a 'spider's web of tunnels' on seven to eight levels exists under Castle Hill and that it was used for storage by the Army until 1980. The letter says the vent was sealed with the 'muffled thud' of explosives as they left the site and carries the warning that vents were booby trapped with 'Yankee pineapple grenades'.

The authenticity of the letter could not be verified.

The Defence Department could not respond to the claims.

Townsville Mayor Les Tyrell, like former mayor Tony Mooney before him with the claims about Mount Louisa, was not buying it without evidence.

"We need some form of documentation before we treat it seriously," Cr Tyrell said.