



M LITHGOW 131 Years of Publication Servicing the Community MERCURY

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10 2009 Phone 6352 2700

lithgow.yourguide.com.au Issue No 722 \$1.40



NO LONGER DEADLY: Some of the thousands of items of wartime ordnance unearthed during the Marrangaroo Army Depot decontamination

MARRANGAROO'S DARK SECRETS WERE BROUGHT ...

Into the light

**Story and photo:
LEN ASHWORTH**

A decontamination project that unearthed the evidence of the Marrangaroo Army Depot's secret

war from the dark days of decades past is nearing completion.

The old 223 Supply Coy, as it was known in post war peacetime, last year revealed for the first time

that the clandestine rumours circulating for more than 60 years were more than just so called phantom whispers — the depot during World War Two really had

been a storage and distribution facility for chemical weapons.

The American-manufactured mustard gas and phosgene bombs

▷ Continued Page 2

Army depot clean up confirmed no threat to the neighbourhood

▷ From Page 1

were intended for use as a last resort to match the enemy's similar reported arsenal should Australia face a land invasion from the advancing Japanese Army.

The nation never admitted to the wartime possession of such weapons until last year when it was confirmed the Marrangaroo base and disused railway tunnels at Marrangaroo, Clarence and Glenbrook had all been used in storage.

Some of the troops who had served on these sites and dealt with leaking armaments still had the scars of their secret service to prove it all.

Last year the government commissioned a survey to determine what, if any, wartime residue remained at Marrangaroo.

The initial survey was hampered by a lack of official records, such was the level of secrecy, but soon revealed there was plenty to be discovered.

Experts in the field of clearing unexploded ordnance, Milsearch, were engaged to decontaminate the portion of the Army depot closest to the depot buildings and to the residential areas of Marrangaroo.

The program began last year and was all but completed — for the time being* — in recent days.

Because the team was uncertain about just what lay below the ground the work was carried out within the strictest safety procedures and with local emergency services programmed for quick response in the event of an emergency.

It all went off without a hitch, despite one or two scares that proved to be false alarms.

At the end of the program the Milsearch team had excavated 300 x 250 lb light case chemical weapon bombs, 70 x 30 lb such bombs, 4000 x 30 lb incendiary bombs, five million small arms bullets, a number of 250 lb and 150 lb anti submarine bombs, several thousand marine markers, 30 x 25 lb armor piercing projectiles and 5000 bomb fuses.

All had long ago been neutralised and had no explosive content apart from a very small amount of residual white phosphorous located in one of the incendiaries.

There was also .60 tonnes of other scrap metal removed.

Another pleasing aspect was that it had been determined that there had been no heavy metal contamination of the surrounding area.

The report of a successful Mission Accomplished was outlined at a function hosted by Milsearch at the Workmens Club last week when the company made presentations to thank the various individuals and organisations who had played support roles over the past nine months.

Awards went to the local emergency services, the Lithgow Hospital, GHD (Newcastle) Consultants, Enviro Land Contracting, the proprietors of the Black Gold Cabins at Wallerawang (Robert and Linda Cluff) and various sub contractors including Joe Inzitari Electrical, Geoff Meyer surveyor and scrap metal contractor Dennis Cooke.

There was also an award to the Lithgow Mercury that had acted as the main conduit of information on the project between the decontamination team and the public.

The gathering was told that all that remained to be completed was to 'back-fill the holes and re-plant some trees'.