



**THE TERRITORY
REMEMBERS
75 YEARS**

Commemorating the Bombing of Darwin
and defence of Northern Australia

Brocks Creek Police Station (NT Police Museum)

The Territory Remembers

Military detention in the Northern Territory during World War II

By Graham Wilson

Prior to the outbreak of World War II the Northern Territory, which, from a defence point of view, basically meant Darwin, was very much a backwater. The first soldiers to form a permanent garrison – officers and 42 men of the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA) and Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) – arrived in Darwin in September 1932. ¹

This first small group was known as the Darwin Detachment and was administered originally by the 1st Military District (1 MD – Queensland). ² The original garrison was supplemented by a second detachment of three officers and 29 other ranks, who arrived in Darwin on 20 September 1933 as part of the Lyons Government's imperial strategy to contain the Japanese. ³ The gunners were formed into the 9th Heavy Battery, RAA and the engineer detachment was designated the 7th Fortress Company, RAE in 1936. These units now formed the Darwin Garrison. ⁴

The Darwin Garrison manned two 6-inch Mark VII guns at East Point, two guns at Emery Point and an anti-aircraft battery at Elliott Point overlooking the approaches to Port Darwin. ⁵ Three ammunition magazines were built, partially below ground, at the tip of Emery Point near the lighthouse. HQ for the Darwin Garrison was located in Larrakeyah Barracks. The barracks were developed from 1934 as one of the first major commitments to national defence in the north of Australia.

Some defence construction work began in the 1920s but it was in 1934 that work began on quarters. ⁶ In 1939 the Darwin Garrison was supplemented by the Darwin Mobile Force (DMF) and work began in earnest on the construction of a major base at Larrakeyah. ⁷ The garrison was also reinforced in 1939 by the deployment of the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Cadre, armed with four outdated 3-inch 20 cwt. anti-aircraft guns. ⁸ The defence build-up transformed Darwin from an isolated outpost into a rapidly-growing and modern town and by late 1941, at the commencement of the Pacific War, more than 7000 service personnel were based in and around Darwin. ⁹

Some of the buildings in Larrakeyah Barracks were brought from Thursday Island after the garrison there was removed. However, most of the new buildings owed their design to BCG Burnett (1889-1955), Principal Architect to Works Branch, Department of the Interior from his arrival in the Northern Territory in 1937 until his resignation in 1946. ¹⁰ The Other Ranks (OR) Mess, built in 1939, was steel-framed with louvre panels while the Sergeants' Mess, built in 1940 (and still in use today), was a two-storey Burnett design of steel frame and concrete. ¹¹ The headquarters building at Larrakeyah Barracks was one-storey of reinforced concrete with a tower which housed the air-raid siren. ¹²

In December 1940 the Militia 14th Heavy Anti-Aircraft (HAA) Battery arrived in Darwin to release an AIF unit, 2/2nd HAA Battery, which had arrived in Darwin in June, for duty in the Middle East. ¹³ The 2nd AA Cadre was absorbed into the 14th HAA Battery. ¹⁴

Military Detention – Establishments and Administration

Armies are not made up of robots but of human beings, with all of the strengths and failings of the human race. Human beings will always be human beings and soldiers will always be soldiers, and in every group of people there are always some who will offend against law and regulation. It goes without saying that the Australian Army of World War II was not immune from this. To manage the punishment and rehabilitation of military offenders, the Australian Army raised a complex of detention barracks and guard compounds around Australia.

It needs to be understood here that these facilities existed only to hold men who had been convicted of purely military offences – desertion, absence without leave, offering violence, striking a superior, escaping custody, theft of military stores and such forth. Men who committed civil offences were handed over to the civil authorities for trial and, if appropriate, imprisonment. Servicemen sentenced to undergo a period of detention were referred to as either 'soldier undergoing sentence' (SUS) or 'soldier undergoing detention' (SUD). The terms were interchangeable but 'SUS' was the more commonly used and is the term that will be used in this brief history.¹

During the war 21 detention barracks operated in Australia at various times, as listed below:

- 2/1st Australian Detention Barrack (2/1 ADB) Grovely, Queensland (subsumed 1 ADB)
- 2/2nd Australian Detention Barrack (2/2 ADB) Gladstone, South Australia
- 1st Australian Detention Barrack (1 ADB) Grovely, Queensland
- 2nd Australian Detention Barrack (2 ADB) Puckapunyal, Victoria
- 3rd Australian Detention Barrack (3 ADB) Warwick, Queensland
- 4th Australian Detention Barrack (4 ADB) Charters Towers, Queensland
- 5th Australian Detention Barrack (5 ADB) Holsworthy, New South Wales
- 6th Australian Detention Barrack (6 ADB) Orange, New South Wales
- 7th Australian Detention Barrack (7 ADB) Bendigo, Victoria
- 8th Australian Detention Barrack (8 ADB) Geelong, Victoria
- 9th Australian Detention Barrack (9 ADB) Adelaide, South Australia
- 10th Australian Detention Barrack (10 ADB) Portsea, Victoria
- 11th Australian Detention Barrack (11 ADB) Fremantle, Western Australia
- 12th Australian Detention Barrack (12 ADB) Conara, Tasmania
- 13th Australian Detention Barrack (13 ADB) Brocks Creek, Northern Territory
- 14th Australian Detention Barrack (14 ADB) West Tamworth, New South Wales

- 15th Australian Detention Barrack (15 ADB) North Tamworth, New South Wales
- 16th Australian Detention Barrack (16 ADB) Port Moresby and Lae, New Guinea
- 17th Australian Detention Barrack (17 ADB) Albury, New South Wales
- 18th Australian Detention Barrack (18 ADB) Malabar, New South Wales
- 19th Australian Detention Barrack (19 ADB) Miranda, New South Wales.

The 20th Australian Detention Barrack (20 ADB) existed on the island of Morotai in the Netherlands East Indies for a short period in 1945-1946.

Readers should note that the correct name usage for a detention barrack is 'barrack', singular, rather than 'barracks', plural.

In addition to the detention barracks, six guard compounds were raised to hold servicemen who had been placed under arrest and awaiting collection by their unit, who were awaiting trial by court-martial, who were awaiting confirmation of court-martial sentence or who were awaiting transfer to a detention barrack or civil prison.¹⁵ Soldiers detained in guard compounds were referred to as 'soldiers under arrest' or 'SUA'.

Detention barracks were commanded for local administrative purposes by the support element in their geographic region.¹⁶ This was originally the relevant Command, that is, Northern Command for Queensland and the territories of Papua and New Guinea; Eastern Command for New South Wales; Southern Command for Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania (with staff in South Australia having administrative responsibility for troops and units in the Northern Territory at that time); and Western Command for Western Australia.

In January 1941 the commands were divided into an operational and an administrative element. The administrative burden, including management of detention barracks, was assumed by the new Base HQ. Later that year the base system was replaced by Line of Communications (L of C) areas as listed below and which assumed responsibility for detention facilities:

- Northern Command Line of Communications Area (Queensland)
- Eastern Command Line of Communications Area (New South Wales)
- Southern Command Line of Communications Area (Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania)
- Western Command Line of Communications Area (Western Australia)
- 7th Military District (7 MD) Line of Communications Area (Northern Territory)
- 8th Military District (8 MD) Line of Communications Area (Papua and New Guinea).

On 9 April 1942 the system of commands and bases was abolished and replaced by the field army and the lines of communication areas were reorganised to align with the pre-war military districts, with L of C Areas established in

each of the six States on the mainland plus the Northern Territory and New Guinea. Field formations were formed as follows:

- First Australian Army – from Northern and Eastern Command
- Second Australian Army – from Southern Command
- 3rd Australian Corps – from Western Command
- Northern Territory (NT) Force – from 7 MD
- New Guinea (NG) Force – from 8 MD.

L of C now consisted of:

- Queensland L of C Area
- New South Wales L of C Area
- Victoria Lines of L of C Area
- South Australia L of C Area
- Western Australia L of C Area
- Tasmania L of C Area
- Northern Territory Force L of C Area (later NT L of C Area)
- New Guinea Force L of C Area (later NG L of C Area).

At the same time L of C Sub-Areas were raised as a means of further decentralising the administrative burden. The number of sub-areas largely depended on the size of the parent L of C Area and the actual administrative need and some sub-areas existed for only a very short time. For example, in Western Australia, besides 12 (Perth) L of C Sub-Area, 13 (Northam) L of C Sub-Area existed for a very short time (March to August 1942) apparently raised in order to manage the distribution and security of fuel and ammunition supplies in the Northam area north-east of Perth; the sub-area was disbanded in the first week of August 1942 when the 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions had reached a level of organisation and manning where they could take over the tasks previously carried out by the sub-area.

Most of the sub-areas were disbanded by the end of 1943 and their roles and tasks subsumed by the parent L of C Area; 11 (Central Australia) and 17 (North Queensland) Sub-Areas remained in operation until July 1945, largely for geographic reasons. During their existence the sub-areas had local responsibility for detention barracks and guard compounds in their areas. For example, 6 Australian Detention Barrack came under 5 (Western NSW) L of C Sub-Area for local command and administration until the sub-area ceased to exist in September 1943; and 13 Australian Detention Barrack came under 14 (Adelaide River) L of C Sub-Area.

Military Detention Facilities

Prior to May 1943 fixed detention facilities were managed and run by the military police, the Australian Army Provost Corps (AAPC). However, by early 1943 it had become obvious that the job had become so big and the system in place so complex that a new and independent service was required to administer and manage the army's higher level detention facilities. As a consequence on 1 May 1943 the Military Prisons and Detention Barracks Service (MP&DBS) was raised and fully assumed the higher detention role. ²

A war establishment (WE) had been drafted for detention barracks in 1938 (WE V/1938/133/1). However, it is not known if this establishment was used, except possibly at Holsworthy in New South Wales for a short time in 1940. The 1938 establishment was quickly superseded by a new standard establishment – WE IV/1940/702 “A Detention Barrack (to accommodate up to 100 prisoners inclusive)” – which was issued on 30 June 1940. This establishment allowed for one officer and 16 other rank staff, with allowance for additional staff if required.

In 1941 the establishments were amended to allow for two types of detention barrack, specified as Type ‘A’ or ‘B’, and each establishment allowing for a different number of staff. In 1943 WE IV/119C/1 “A Detention Barrack Type ‘C’” was issued, which allowed for a strength of two officers and 44 other ranks and was designed for a barrack to hold up to 150 SUS, with allowance for expansion to 300.

Military Detention in the Northern Territory

With the military presence in Darwin expanding the 7th Military District Detention Barrack, was formed at Larrakeyah Barracks in July 1941. The exact location of this establishment is not known. Plans exist for the Guard Room at Larrakeyah Barracks, which show that the building included six purpose-built cells with adjoining prisoner toilet and showers and an internal exercise yard. However, it is highly unlikely that this would have been used for the detention barrack.¹⁷ It is much more likely that the detention barrack, which at this time would almost certainly have consisted simply of a group of tents surrounded by a security fence, was constructed adjacent to or in the near vicinity of the guard room. This would make sense, as the cells in the guard room could be used for solitary confinement or as punishment cells.

On 7 December 1941, the date of Japan's entry into the war and the opening of the war in the Pacific, there were approximately 7300 members of the Australian Military Forces (AMF) in the Northern Territory, mostly located in Darwin, with smaller concentrations at Katherine, Adelaide River and Alice Springs. ¹⁸

In February 1942, 7 MD Detention Barrack is noted as located at Adelaide River, a small town about 115 kilometers south of Darwin on the Stuart Highway. ¹⁹ The date of the move of the barrack from Larrakeyah Barracks to Adelaide River is not known. The reason for the move is also unknown, although it could have been to free up space at Larrakeyah Barracks or alternatively to remove an administrative headache from an area now directly threatened by the enemy. While pure speculation; both are a reasonable possibility. It is worth noting, for instance, that during the Malayan Campaign in 1942 the AIF Detention Barrack Malaya was first removed from Port Swettenham to Johore Bahru due to the enemy threat and then, when the situation was seen to be desperate, disbanded and the staff and prisoners returned to their units.

On 25 April 1942, Northern Territory Force (NT Force) was raised from the headquarters of the 6th Division, elements of which had been deployed to the NT on their return from the Middle East, and HQ 7 MD. Army units were rotated through northern Australia throughout

the rest of the war, and six infantry brigades (2nd, 3rd, 12th, 13th, 19th and 23rd) served as part of NT Force at different times between 1942 and 1945. NT Force was re-designated 12th Australian Division on 31 December 1942, but resumed its original designation on 15 January 1943. This makes research on NT Force difficult as, confusingly, many of the war diaries held by the AWM for NT Force are labeled 12 Australian Division, which requires a considerable amount of cross-checking.

With the establishment of NT Force in April 1942, 7 MD Detention Barrack, at this stage still located at Adelaide River, became NT Force Detention Barrack.²⁰ The next month, however, the barrack relocated from Adelaide River to Brocks Creek, a rail siding and mining settlement about 130km southeast of Darwin. It was first reported at this new location on 30 May.²¹ At that time the only Allied unit in the vicinity was a company of the US Army's 808th Engineer (Aviation) Battalion, which was engaged on road works and departed the area in May.

Brocks Creek is located on the Northern Australia Railway line, which bisects the site of the settlement. The new detention barrack at Brocks Creek, which was established around the existing Brocks Creek Police Station, was located to the north of the railway line and until October 1944 would be the only AMF unit permanently located at Brocks Creek. This is not to suggest that the detention barrack at Brocks Creek was totally isolated. The Northern Territory, from Darwin to the South Australian border was home to an enormous number of army units throughout the war years and military units were located close to Brocks Creek in surrounding areas including Adelaide River, Daly River, Fenton, Grove Hill and Hays Creek.

The township at Brocks Creek, now abandoned and derelict, was established in the 1870s and was at one time a thriving mining community.²²

A police reserve was designated north of Brocks Creek township and the railway line in October 1897. The original Brocks Creek Police Station is believed to have been constructed during June and July 1898 and the station was officially opened in August 1898. It is believed the Brocks Creek station was constructed from material removed from the site of the decommissioned Adelaide River Police Station.

The isolated station was originally staffed by one European constable and one 'Native' constable. The station was closed during the First World War years but was re-opened in 1920 with the same staffing levels. It is believed that the old station was dismantled in 1937 and re-erected about 70m northwest of the original site in the same year. The European police officer stationed at Brocks Creek from the mid-1930s was Constable Abbott.

The police station and surrounding land were taken over by the army in February 1942 and the civilian police, including Constable Abbott, moved out. The need for a detention barrack in the era can be seen by information published in Routine Orders of 14 L of C Sub-Area (Adelaide River)²³ which advises that in the previous month the following examples of sentences of detention had been passed:

- Seven months detention for theft of cigarettes and tobacco from the Australian Comforts Fund
- Seven months detention for theft of canteen stores

- Seven months detention for theft of rations
- Three months detention for AWL
- 54 days detention for striking a superior officer.

A new facility for the detention barrack was constructed at Brocks Creek, using the police station as the administration building and orderly room. An inspection by a staff officer from 14 (Adelaide River) L of C Sub-Area in May 1942 noted that at that point in time the detention barrack was the only military unit at Brocks Creek.²⁴ The report stated that the site was 'ideal' and that 'all prisoners and staff were busily engaged on erections and cleaning up existing buildings.'²⁵ The report also notes that the area was served by three bores, which provided ample water for the site.²⁶

A barbed wire enclosure divided into three compounds was erected, concrete slabs for floors were laid and a number of Sidney Williams type prefabricated, steel framed, corrugated iron huts erected. A disposal schedule from January 1946 reveals that the barrack included:

- the original police station building
- four Sidney Williams type sleeping huts, 60 feet x 20 feet, steel framed with concrete floor (SUS accommodation)
- one Sidney Williams Type sleeping hut, 60 feet x 20 feet with 10 feet wide verandah on one side, steel framed with concrete floor (SUS mess)
- four solitary confinement cells, 10 feet x 8 feet x 10 feet, concrete floor, timber frame, corrugated iron walls and pitched roof
- one kitchen hut, 18 feet x 18 feet, timber framed, corrugated iron roof and corrugated iron and fly wire sides.²⁷

SUS bathing and washing facilities were constructed of bush timber and corrugated iron while SUS latrines consisted of 200l drums set in the ground with bush pole frame and hessian screens for privacy.²⁸

The area was harsh, far less salubrious than the coastal region at Darwin, and training and discipline were hard. One former inmate later recalled:

"When I went into Brocks Creek I got some good advice from one of the staff-sergeants, He said: 'Do everything that they tell you - doesn't matter how much it annoys you, just do it. That way you won't get into any trouble!' I came out of there the fittest I've ever been in my life, because you had to run everywhere!

"You started at daybreak with all your gear on. Can you imagine? In the tropics, with 60 pounds (27kg) on you - even your water bottle was full. You went right through the day, doing fifteen pack drills in the heat."²⁹

This quote highlights an important fact about the army's detention barracks - they did not exist primarily to punish but rather to rehabilitate. From the very outset the stated aim of the detention barrack was to turn a bad soldier into a good one. To that end, much of the time of an SUS was taken up with normal military training - everything from basic foot drill to the use of machine guns. A SUS carried out a 22-day training syllabus designed to bring him up to the standard of a basically trained soldier at the time of his release.³⁰

Soldiers committed to periods of detention up to 28 days only had to go through this syllabus once. However, soldiers committed to longer sentences often found themselves going through the training cycle several times, which inevitably led to boredom. In many detention barracks the training syllabus could be broken up with useful war related manual work. However, this was not the case at Brocks Creek and boredom at the repetitive training must have been a serious burden to the SUS.³

All new arrivals at Brocks Creek were committed to Number One Compound, subject to rigid discipline, strict training and the barest of privileges.³¹ Good behaviour and diligence were rewarded by promotion to Number Two Compound and then Number Three Compound, where discipline was still strict and training still hard, but where additional small privileges and a slightly less restrictive daily routine were enjoyed.³² The same inmate recalled:

"You could send and receive one letter a week in Number One Compound. In Number Two you could write two letters a week and in Number Three you could write as many as you liked and you got all your mail, except the parcels. You could only collect your parcels when you were released."³³

The regime outlined by the young soldier above was common to all detention barracks. Mail, both outgoing and incoming, was strictly controlled and as the young SUS noted, while inmates could receive parcels, these were held for them unopened until time of release.

As with every other detention barrack in Australian, the facility at Brocks Creek was run in accordance with Australian Military (Places of Detention) Regulations and Standing Orders, published on 30 June 1942.

This document had finally codified the administration and management of the army's places of detention. Instructions applicable to all establishments required the commandant of a detention facility to visit, as far as practicable, the whole detention barrack and see every SUS and soldier in safe custody at least once in every 24 hours (Standing Order [SO] No.9).³⁴

SO.28 to 30 dealt with complaints by SUS and included a direction that a SUS had a right to make complaints, was to be provided with opportunity to do so and was to have complaints forwarded to higher authority without delay.³⁵ Other directions included:

- Staff members were specifically ordered not to strike SUS or soldiers in safe custody except in self defence (SO.58).
- Staff members were not to use tobacco or partake of liquor within the walls of a detention barrack (SO.62).
- Letters written by SUS or soldiers in safe custody were forbidden to contain any reference to detention barrack matters (SO.99).
- The MO was to see, in the course of any given week, every SUS or soldier in safe custody in the barrack (SO.105).
- SUS were not required to work on Christmas Day, Good Friday or on Sundays, except on duties that were absolutely necessary for the running of the barrack, with Jewish soldiers exempted from this ban but not

required to work on the Sabbath (Regulation No.13 [R.13]).

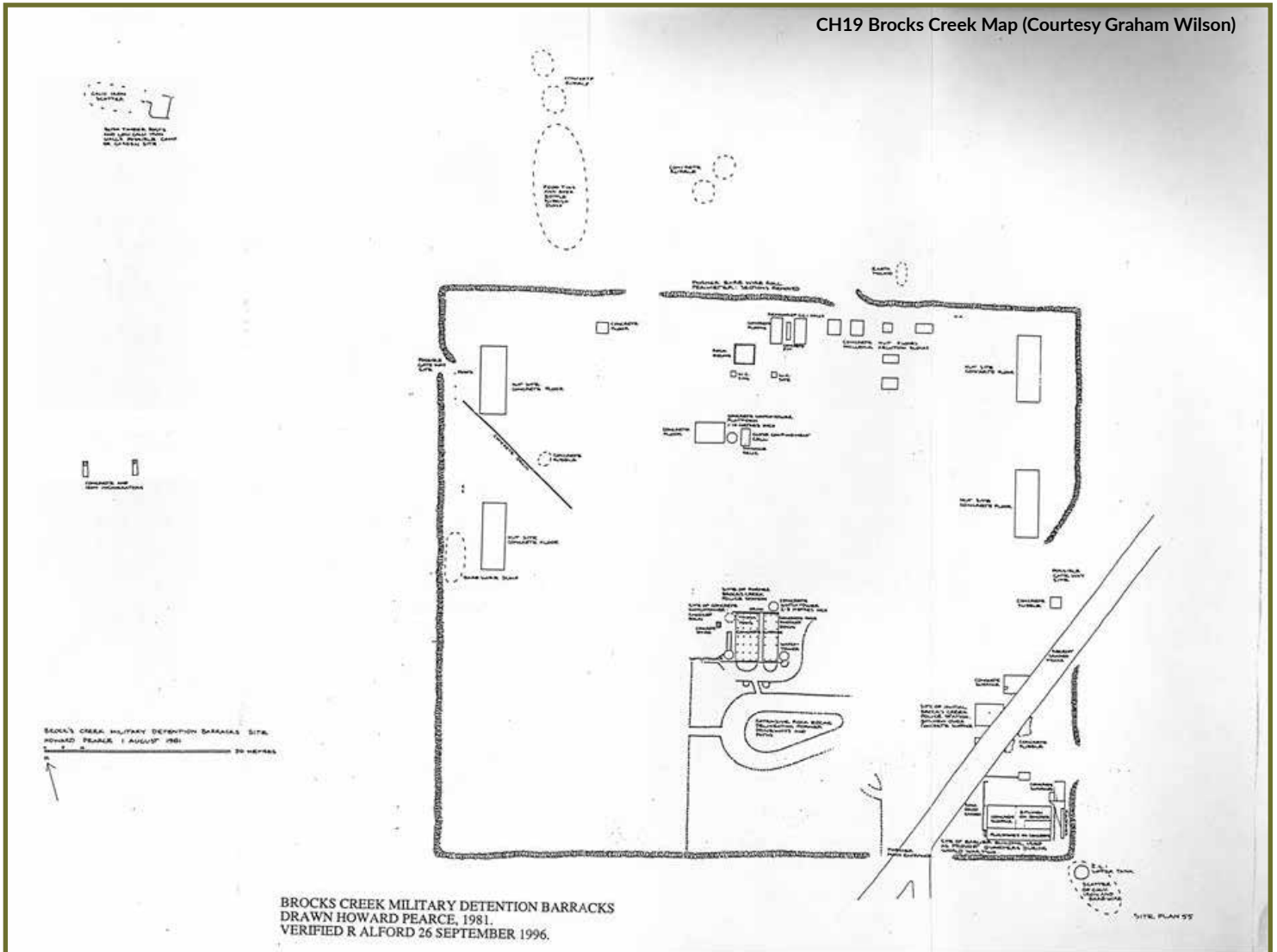
- SUS were not required to work unless certified fit to do so by the MO (R.15).

While regulations and orders proscribed the duties and responsibilities of staff and the rights of SUS and soldiers in safe custody, they also closely proscribed the duties, responsibilities and restrictions of these men.

- SUS were forbidden the use or possession of tobacco and alcohol (R.17).
- SUS were not permitted any books or newspapers, except those supplied to the barrack library (SO.150).
- SUS were subject to award of punishment diets for offences committed in the barrack (R.22, 25, 28 and 29).
- SUS and soldiers in safe custody could be placed in mechanical restraints, although only for the safety of the man himself or the staff (R.30).
- SUS and soldiers in safe custody who destroyed their own clothing could be clothed in a suit made of canvas sail cloth (R.34).
- Visit privileges (not really applicable to Brocks Creek) could be withdrawn as result of misconduct on the part of the SUS or of visitors (SO.213-215).
- All mail received by SUS or soldiers in safe custody was to be opened and read by the Commandant and could, if the Commandant so decided, be withheld (SO.221).

Mention was made above of punishments for infractions against the detention barrack regulations, orders and rules; R.21 listed the particular offences as follows:

- Disobeying any lawful order given by the Commandant or any member of the staff.
- Treating with disrespect any member of the staff, visiting officer or any person employed in connection with detention barrack, prison or works.
- Being idle, careless or negligent at work, or refusing to work.
- Being absent without leave from educational training or any parade.
- Behaving irreverently at Divine Service.
- Swearing, cursing or using any abusive, insolent, threatening or other improper language.
- Being indecent in language, act or gesture.
- Conversing without authority or otherwise holding intercourse with another SUS.
- Singing, whistling, or creating any unnecessary noise or disturbance or giving any unnecessary trouble.
- Leaving his room or other appointed place, or his place of work, without permission.
- Willfully damaging or disfiguring any part of the detention barrack or prison, or any Departmental property to which he has access.
- Committing any nuisance.
- Having in his room or possession any article which he is not lawfully entitled to have.



- Giving to or receiving from any other SUS or soldier in safe custody, without permission, any article whatever.
- Being inattentive at drill, useful instruction or educational training.
- Using or offering violence to a member of the staff or to another SUS or soldier in safe custody.
- Escaping or attempting to escape.
- Offending in any way against good order and discipline.

It would have been very hard for a man not to transgress at some stage or other against at least one of these listed offences. Vaguely-worded offences such as 'committing any nuisance' and 'offending in any way against good order and discipline' in particular would have been something of a minefield for the SUS, given that they are very subjective and open to interpretation by the staff.

On the other hand, examination of various diaries indicates that punishment for offences against barrack rules, regulations and orders were the exception, rather than the rule, suggesting firstly that most men committed

to detention tried to be on their best behaviour in order to avoid punishment and secondly that most staff carried out their duties with a sense of fairness and even understanding.

The new regulations and orders also specified a standard timetable for every detention barrack, including the NT Force DB at Brocks Creek, which is shown in **Table 1**.

This was the routine to be followed by all detention barracks. Amendments to timings were permitted in order to meet local circumstances, with the proviso that no such modification would see a SUS in his cell more than 12 hours out of 24 (SO.222). In addition no alterations or amendments could be made without the written permission of the proper authority.

In January 1943 the AMF's detention facilities were reorganised and re-titled, the former regional titles giving way to unit numbers and NT Force Detention Barrack was now titled 13th Australian Detention Barrack (13 ADB).³⁶ This would remain the title of the unit for the rest of its existence.

Table 1. NT Force Detention Barrack at Brocks Creek - standard timetable

Week Days			
From	To	SUS	Staff
0600		Reveille	
0600	0630	Dress, fold bedding, sweep and tidy cell.	Day staff parade for duty. Night staff dismiss.
0630	0635	Necessary billetmen go to work, remainder prepare for ablutions.	
0635	0700	Night tub parade to yards for sanitary purposes, ablutions.	
0700	0715	Muster, roll call.	
0715	0745	Drill and fatigues.	
0745		Parade for breakfast	Staff except those on meal hour duty, parade and dismiss for breakfast.
0745	0815	Breakfast	
0815	0830	Clean equipment and prepare for parade.	
0830		Parade	Staff dismissed at 0745 parade for duty. Staff on meal hour duty parade and dismiss for breakfast.
0915			Staff dismissed at 0830 resume duty.
1200		Training ceases	
1215	1310	Parade to dinner	Staff except for those on meal hour duty, parade and dismiss for midday meal.
1310		Parade	Staff dismissed at 1215 parade for duty. Staff on meal hour duty dismiss for midday meal.
1400			Staff dismissed at 1310 resume duty.
1700		Cease work	Day duty staff dismiss. Relief staff parade for duty.
1720		Muster, roll call.	
1730	1830	Evening meal	Staff except those on meal hour parade dismiss for evening meal.
1830			Staff on meal hour parade dismiss for evening meal. Staff dismissed at 1730 resume duty.
1830	1930	Reading, writing and general clean up	
1930			Staff dismissed at 1830 resume duty.
1930		Lock up	
2045		Lights out	
Sunset		Cell lights switched on	
2045		Cell lights switched off	
2300			Night staff parade for duty. Relief staff dismiss.
Sundays and Holidays			
0630	0745	Same routine as week days	Staff except those on meal hour duty, parade and dismiss for breakfast.
0830		General unlock; exercise in yards; Divine Service; choir practice, etc	Staff on meal hour parade dismiss for breakfast
0900			Commandant's inspection.
0915			Staff dismissed at 0745 resume duty.
1200		Warning bell, roll call	
1215		March to dinner	Staff except those on meal hour duty dismiss for midday meal
1310		General unlock; exercise in yards; Divine Service; choir practice, etc	Staff dismissed at 1215 parade for duty. Staff on meal hour parade and dismiss for midday meal.
1400			Staff dismissed at 1310 resume duty.
1715		Warning bell	
1720	2045	Same routine as weekdays	

One of the most important things to a soldier is food or 'rations'. This was particularly the case for SUS as their daily food intake was restricted entirely to issued rations, with no chance to supplement the ration in any way. There were constant complaints made during the war by SUS and former-SUS about the quantity and quality of food received. However, the 1943 detention ration scale, outlined below, compared favourably with the standard ration scale, although it was restricted in terms of what might be called 'luxuries'.

This, with minor alterations at various times, was the ration scale applicable to a SUS at Brocks Creek. While the scale was adequate – barely, bearing in mind the amount of work and training undergone by SUS – the quality of the finished product is unknown. However, as the AMF had begun training cooks properly in 1940 and as the barrack establishment included a Corporal Cook and a Private Cook, both of who were required to be trade qualified and who were responsible for feeding the staff as well as the SUS from the same kitchen, the food was probably at least edible.³⁷

Unlike many of the other detention barracks around Australia, the barrack at Brocks Creek never seems to have established its own vegetable gardens. Elsewhere in Australia such gardens provided a useful and welcome supplement to barrack rations, with excess produce sold and the profits credited to unit funds.³⁸ The SUS and staff at Brocks Creek, however, had to rely solely on what was issued to them from the army's supply depots and ration stores.

By early 1943, the number of military detention facilities and SUS had become so large that the management of the system had become beyond the capacity of the Provost Corps to manage. As a consequence, in May 1943 the Directorate of Military Prisons and Detention Barracks (DMP&DB) was raised in Army Headquarters, totally separate from the office of the Provost Marshal, and assumed responsibility for the management of all detention barracks and guard compounds from the Australian Army Provost Corps.³⁹

Table 2. Comparison of Standard and Detention Rations Scales 1943. Source: Reed Report

Commodity	Standard Ration Scale	Detention Ration Scale
	Ounces per man per day	Ounces per man per day
Coffee	1/5	-
Tea	5/16	¼
Cocoa	-	½
Bread	14	14
Wheatmeal	1	2
Flour	1	-
Rice	½	2
Curry powder	1/56	-
Mustard	1/100	-
Pepper	1/100	-
Salt	½	½
Butter	1¾	2
Suet	-	¼
Fruit, dried	1	-
Bacon	1 ½	-
Cheese	6/7	2
Fresh meat	13 5/7	12
Milk	2½	2
Baking powder	1/28	-
Jam	1¾	-
Golden syrup	¼	-
Sugar	3	1½
Vegetables, fresh	12	6
Dried blue peas	1	-
Onions	2	-
Potatoes	10	16
Fruit, fresh	-	2/7 pieces

Serving personnel who were considered suitable for continued service with detention facilities were retained and the balance were returned to the Provost Corps for re-assignment and replaced by volunteers. At this point, 13 ADB, which had been under command of HQ 14A L of C Sub-Area (Katherine), which had been raised in May 1942 to control 14 L of C Sub-Area units from Adelaide River south to Larrimah-Birdum, passed under command of HQ 14 L of C Sub-Area (Adelaide River).

In October 1944 the 77th Bulk Issue Petrol and Oil Depot (BIPOD) Platoon was established on the southern side of the railway line, directly opposite the detention barrack.⁴⁰ There is some suggestion that the staff quarters erected for the BIPOD personnel were shared by the detention barrack staff.⁴¹ By the time that the BIPOD was established, however, 13 ADB had been operating at Brocks Creek for over two years and was a fully established facility, so it is unlikely that staff would have moved into shared quarters with the BIPOD personnel.

Medical support for the barrack was provided by an Australian Army Medical Corps medical orderly on attachment, who was supplemented by the medical officer from the Regimental Aid Post (RAP) at the 'DMR Camp' at Hayes Creek; this officer visited Brocks Creek on a regular basis.⁴²

Although originally established to hold 75 men in detention, a report of 14 L of C Sub-Area dated 15 April 1943 notes that on that date 13 ADB had a staff of 18 and held 101 SUS and SUA.⁴³ While SUA were not normally supposed to be held in detention barracks, regulations allowed for this if the situation required it, with the strict provisos that SUA were not, under any circumstances, to mix with SUS, SUA were not to drill with SUS and SUA were not to be employed on prison labour.

Very little is actually known about 13 ADB as no diary has been located for the unit. Entries in various other records, however, confirm that men did escape from the barrack despite its isolation and the rugged and inhospitable nature of the surrounding terrain. On the night of 13 August 1943 Gunner HJ Donovan, SUS, escaped from the barrack "during enemy air activity in vicinity of Barracks".⁴⁴ Two further escapes occurred on the night of 16-17 August, this time an airman and a sailor. Aircraftman Yelland of the RAAF and Ordinary Seaman McKenzie of the RAN escaped sometime during the night, their absence not being noted until am on the morning of 17 August 1943.⁴⁵

That was a bad day for 13 ADB. Following on from the discovery of the escape, staff members Sergeant Starr and Acting Sergeant Lawry were suspended from duty for supplying tobacco to SUS.⁴⁶

Despite the escapes, on 20 August, HQ NT Force approved the employment of SUS from 13 ADB outside the barrack on loading and unloading of stores.⁴⁷ Also, despite the escapes and the suspension of two staff members, on 20 September 1943 the CO of 14 L of C Sub-Area, in his capacity as Visiting Officer for 13 ADB, stated that the conduct of the barrack was 'satisfactory'.⁴⁸

On 14 August 1944 the Officer Commanding 13 ADB, Lieutenant Black, faced a General Court Martial (GCM) at Adelaide River. The charges were AWL from 22 July to 1 August 1944 and "conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline" (unauthorised air travel from RAAF Fenton to Adelaide). Found guilty of both charges, Black was fined 10 pounds, awarded six months' loss of seniority and was immediately transferred to New South Wales for service with 15 ADB at North Tamworth.⁴⁹

Black faced a second GCM in Sydney in March 1945 on one charge of forgery and six charges of conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline. He was found not guilty and continued to serve at 15 ADB and then 2nd Australian Guard Compound (2 AGC) in Sydney. However, he once again faced a GCM in May 1945, this time for fraud. Although he was found not guilty of all charges, the Army had had enough of him and his commission was cancelled on 4 June 1945.⁵⁰

The war diary of the 2/10th Port Operation Company records that while the unit was en route by train from Adelaide River to Queensland in October 1944, the train was stopped and searched at Pine Creek by military police

who were looking, unsuccessfully, for escapees from Brocks Creek.⁵¹

Orders for the disbanding of 13 ADB were issued by LHQ on 17 September 1945 in LHQ DORG SM8047. Personnel of the unit were to be either discharged if eligible or transferred to South Australia L of C Area for reposting to other detention barracks in Australia.⁵² SUS who had still to serve out their sentences were ordered to be transferred to 9 ADB in Adelaide.⁵³ The disbandment of 13 ADB had been completed by 25 October 1945.⁵⁴

A barrack detention room at Larrakeyah Barracks was ordered to be raised in place of the disbanded detention barrack. Instructions for the raising of this unit, with an establishment of one warrant officer class two, one staff-sergeant (CQMS), two sergeants, three corporals and three privates (one cook, one general dutyman and one driver) were issued on 6 October 1945.⁵⁵ Examination of war diaries of NT Force for the period September 1945 to February 1946, however, indicates that the unit was never actually raised.

As a footnote, the Brocks Creek Police Station re-opened in 1946 and remained in service until 1953, when the station finally closed.⁵⁶ The police station building, and possibly other buildings on the site, was purchased by the Byrne family, who controlled the pastoral lease encompassing Brocks Creek. The old police station was dismantled and removed to Tipperary Station.⁵⁷

Conclusion

It needs to be noted that most men committed to undergo sentences of military detention during World War II were not desperate or hardened criminals. Indeed, the main crime for which men were sentenced was absence without leave (AWL). However, it needs also to be noted that many SUS at their time of their committal were either recidivists with many prior convictions for AWL on their record, or were men who had been absent for considerable periods of times, in some cases several years.

Having said this, some might consider the recording of the doings of a military detention facility as improper, possibly casting aspersions on the 'good name' of the Australian Army. However, the tendency to ignore the 'seamier' side of Australian military history forces upon us a sanitised and totally unbalanced account. Secondly, while it is tempting to suggest that the simple solution to military crime is to just discharge offenders and figuratively wipe the army's hands of them, during a time of total war when every soldier is needed, this is not in any way a really viable solution. Finally, each man enlisted into the Australian forces during World War II, whether voluntarily or compulsorily, swore an oath to faithfully serve Australia and by committing a military offence broke this oath.

On balance, the army's network of detention barracks was a necessary part of the war effort. The fact that a detention barrack was maintained in the Northern Territory from July 1941 to October 1945 probably comes as something of a surprise to most readers. Even more obscure is probably the existence of crumbling ruins at Brocks Creek, the remnants of the 13th Australian Detention Barrack, which had existed there from February 1942 until October 1945.

Afterword – 13 ADB Today

The remnants of 13 ADB, in the form of concrete floor surfaces in various locations within the rusted remnants of a barbed wire fence, 155m x 175m square, still remain at the site.⁵⁸ In 1982 a rusted iron ring was discovered set into one of the small concrete surfaces, suggesting that this was the site of a punishment cell.⁵⁹ It is something of a tragedy that the remnants of 13 ADB are located in such a remote part of such a harsh environment, as they represent the only extant remains of a purpose built World War II Australian Army detention barrack.

During the war the army used all or part of civil prisons at Tamworth and Albury in New South Wales; Bendigo, Geelong and Melbourne in Victoria; Gladstone and Adelaide in South Australia; and Fremantle in Western Australia as detention barracks, and 10 ADB was located in Franklin Barracks at Portsea. The remaining detention barracks, at Grovely, Warwick and Charters Towers in Queensland; Holsworthy, Orange, West Tamworth, Malabar and Miranda in New South Wales; Puckapunyal in Victoria; Conara in Tasmania; and Brocks Creek in the Northern Territory were all purpose built 'cages'. Of those 'cages', the only one of which any remnant is known to remain is at Brocks Creek.

While the Brocks Creek military precinct is included on the NT Heritage Register, nothing has been done to preserve the site and inevitably it will finally decay away to nothing unless something is done to preserve it.

All too often here in Australia, 'military history' concentrates exclusively on the 'good', such as the brave Anzacs fearlessly storming the beaches at Gallipoli, while totally ignoring the 'bad'. For example, an average of 325 members of the AIF listed as deserters in any given month in the UK between 1916 and 1919. This gives a very lopsided view of Australian military history and really should be corrected.

In an attempt to address this 'lopsidedness', this chapter discusses a little-known and obscure aspect of the Northern Territory's World War II military history – the Army's military detention facility at Brocks Creek.

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AWM52 5/52/4 War Diary, 2/10 Port Operation Company, Jun 1944 – Dec 1945

Notes

1. 'Servicemen' includes members of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) who were committed to army detention barracks under an inter-service agreement; inmates from the RAN and RAAF were referred to as SUS and treated

in all respects the same as soldiers, with the single exception that the parent service had the right to order a man's without reference to army authority. Foreign service personnel—Dutch, British, Canadian, American—as well as Allied merchant seamen and enemy POW (who committed offences against Australian military law) were also committed to AMF detention facilities. Interestingly, no Australian servicewoman was ever committed to undergo a sentence of detention during the war—members of the female services who transgressed (a surprising number) were quietly discharged for administrative reasons rather than being punished.

2. At lower command levels, i.e. Army (e.g. First Australian Army), Corps and Division, organic detention facilities were also operated and these remained under the control of the military police.
3. As an example, in the 12 month period June 1944 – June 1945, SUS at 7 ADB, Bendigo, carried out the following work:
 - 53,930 pairs of boots reconditioned and returned to 4 BOD for re-issue
 - 24,110 pairs of irreparable boots stripped, cleaned and sent to Salvage
 - 90,470 haversacks repaired or reconditioned and returned to 4 BOD for re-issue
 - 8700 irreparable haversacks stripped, cleaned and sent to Salvage
 - 2950 paillasses repaired and reconditioned
 - 136 protective aprons manufactured for use of SUS and staff in 7 ADB
 - 869 hurricane lamps repaired and reconditioned and returned to 4 BOD
 - 285 coils of rope sorted and re-wound
 - 3199 American kit-bag ropes sorted and packed in bundles of 10
 - 50 finger-stall manufactured for the 7 ADB RAP.

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 9. 'Larrakeyah Barracks Headquarters Building'.
 10. Ibid.
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 14. Ibid.
 15. 1st Australian Guard Compound (1 AGC), Royal Park, Victoria; 2 AGC, Randwick, New South Wales; 3 AGC, Warwick, Queensland; 4 AGC, Old Melbourne Gaol, Victoria; 5 AGC, Kissing Point, Townsville, Queensland; 6 AGC, Paddington, New South Wales (Cell Block, Victoria Barracks).
 16. Except in the case of the 20th Australian Detention Barrack (20 ADB) on Morotai in the Netherlands East Indies late in the war.
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