

## HISTORY

**S**TANDING on the crumbling train platform at Terowie is to marvel at how history can so swiftly pass you by and leave you behind.

These days, Terowie is a dot on the landscape. Just another small town, 200km from Adelaide on the highway heading into the north of South Australia. Blink and you'll miss it.

The railway platform has been long abandoned. The small station house is falling to pieces and surrounded by a steel fence. The rail lines have been swallowed by grass and weeds. A train hasn't passed this way since the 1970s.

It feels unloved. Forsaken.

But it wasn't always the case.

Strange as it now seems, it was here on this forlorn platform the most famous soldier of his age, General Douglas MacArthur, stopped on March 20, 1942, after he had fled the Philippines and issued his most famous dictum: "I shall return".

Or to replay the line in full: "I came out of Bataan and I shall return".

Why Terowie?

More than 70 years ago, towns such as Terowie and Quorn, 165km further along the track, were vital hubs in the Australian war effort. The Mid North was a bustling rail

point of the composite sleeping car's career was carrying MacArthur to Terowie.

Terowie was what was known as the "break of gauge". It was where the narrow gauge railway that came down from Alice, met the broad gauge that continued to Adelaide. During the war, Terowie Oval was turned into an army camp, complete with its own jail. A munitions dump was also built. At its peak, the population of Terowie was around 2000 – about 10 times what it is today.

MacArthur's car is still wheeled out now and again to run on the railway, and treasurer Jeremy Browne says it's a "living piece of Australian history". Browne is a rail enthusiast. He recoils slightly from the term trainspotter but is a founding member of the society, formed in 1973 to preserve the state's rail history.

In the same shed as the MacArthur car sits another little piece of that history. It's known as Car 5 and was deemed to be just an ordinary example of a rail car when Browne found it in a back paddock near Terowie in 1977. He offered the farmer \$600, which won him the carriage and a tow by tractor to the sheds at Quorn. There, Car 5 sat quietly gathering dust until five years ago when it was earmarked for restoration.

When some of the masonite was





point for troops heading north and south, east and west, and for stock trains and coal trains carrying vital supplies to keep the war effort running.

Yesterday marked the 70th anniversary of the Nazi's surrender which heralded the end of World War II in Europe. The war in the Pacific, which MacArthur would direct from Australia, wouldn't end for another three months.

But back in 1942 the end of the war was a lot more difficult to forecast. MacArthur had arrived in Australia after fleeing the

removed from the... was revealed. There, scratched in the wood panelling below, were carvings – graffiti really – left by some of the thousands of World War II soldiers who had used it to travel to and from the conflict.

"It is railway history and it is Australian history," Browne says. The society has launched a search to try to find relatives of the men who left their marks long ago.

But the carvings are just another indication of what dynamic places Quorn and Terowie were in the 1940s.



# The little towns **THAT COULD**

words **michael mcguire** pictures **dean martin**

Philippines in ignominy as the Japanese swept through the country. He and his family had jumped on a PT boat and boarded a US B-17 bomber from Mindanao to Batchelor Field just south of Darwin. At that point, the legend goes, his wife, Jean, had decided she had enough of flying and demanded a new mode of transport for the family, which included the couple's four-year-old son Arthur. (Yes, really).

A flight was taken to Alice Springs but then the family and entourage boarded a private train to Adelaide.

In a shed on the edge of Quorn owned by the Pichi Richi Railway Preservation Society sits one of the carriages MacArthur travelled in all those years ago.

It was made in Port Augusta in 1929 and was in service until 1980, but the high

John Mannion is an Orroroo farmer and an amateur historian of the Central Australian Railway. His mother was from Quorn and his farmer father worked as a shearer during the war years. His grandfather drove trains. Mannion loves telling the stories of those who worked on the rails because they were "just largely pretty unsung sort of blokes".

Before the war, around four trains a week would use the single track that pierced its way into Australia's heart. At its peak during World War II that rose to about 50 a week.

"While the war was on, life still has to go on normally for all those cattle stations," Mannion says. "It put a hell of a load on the little narrow gauge railway from Terowie to Alice Springs."

"Quorn was a busy railway place. You had the line from Port Augusta to Quorn, from Peterborough to Quorn, and Quorn to Alice Springs."

Although it's likely most of the population of South Australia would have been largely ignorant of all that was happening in their backyard.

"I don't know whether the general public knew much about it because it was fairly secretive," Mannion says. "Military trains had gazetted numbers and it wasn't publicised when they were running or anything like that."

Standing in the forecourt of that same Quorn railway station today you can still feel a sense of that history.

The venerable nine-tonne crane across the tracks was there back then. The old

water tower advertising Fry's cocoa powder still sits high above the yard.

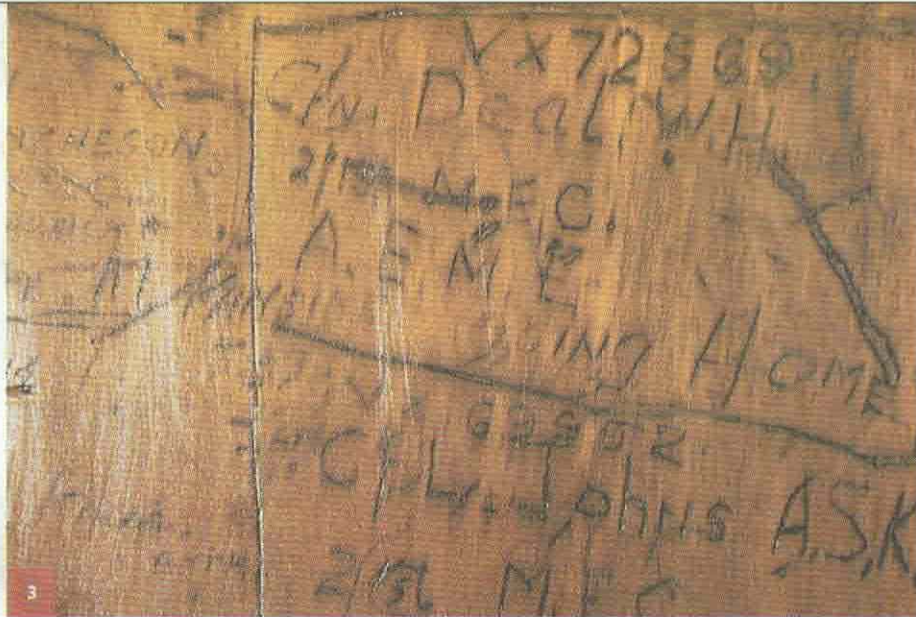
The refreshment rooms adjoining the old stone station were where volunteers from the Country Women's Association initially served hot meals to the soldiers who passed through Quorn.

If you are looking for the ultimate example of a country town coming together with community spirit for the greater good then Quorn in the 1940s is the place to stop.

It all started with Pearl Hatswell who fed two soldiers in Quorn in 1940 and realised how appreciative the passing troops would be of a good home-cooked meal on the way to the war. It would be the last one many of them would enjoy.

Hatswell rang Keswick Barracks, offering the services of the Quorn CWA to help feed





1 Troops in Quorn during World War II 2 General Douglas MacArthur, wife Jean Marie and son Arthur in Terowie in 1942 3 Graffiti by soldiers found on an old rail carriage 4 Pichi Richi Railway Preservation founding member Jeremy Browne 5 Shirley Hughes (front) and Lois Chopin, who worked tirelessly to feed soldiers who passed through Quorn during the war



“ THE ONES GOING UP HAD NO IDEA WHAT THEY WERE GOING INTO. THE ONES COMING BACK KNEW...

A day's supplies consisted of three cases of oranges, 60kg of sausage meat, 5kg of butter, a case of condensed milk, two cases of apples, a bag of potatoes, seven trombones, a case of tomato sauce, 40 loaves of bread and five dozen eggs. The bread all had to be cut by hand and almost 14 litres of custard were made.

Arthur Beale, from Morwell in Victoria, was an 18-year-old soldier when he passed through Quorn on his way to his post in Darwin. The 92-year-old Beale remembers the food being very welcome after surviving on army rations.

“The ladies there gave us a beautiful roast meal, it was very well done,” he says. He adds that it was the last decent meal he would get for a couple of years.

Sourcing the food was a constant problem. The CWA raised money and there were donations from farms and shops. When the CWA started its mighty effort it had £2 in the bank. By 1943, it was spending £2235 a year feeding the troops. In today's money that equates to around \$180,000.

Lois Chopin, too young to cook, did the sweeping and served up meals. She would occasionally jump on the end of the bread line if volunteer numbers were short.

She remembers that the soldiers were grateful for a little touch that reminded

Australia erected memorials proudly displaying the names of the honoured dead. Yet for those who were not there it is perhaps difficult to fully comprehend the impact this had on those communities.

More than seven decades years on, Hughes, 92, still remembers the sadness delivered to Quorn all too regularly.

“We did lose a lot of young boys,” she says. “Every town did.”

Hughes also remembers the night the evacuees from the bombing of Darwin in February 1942 arrived in Quorn.

“I think they were just bewildered,” she says. “I felt so sorry for them, getting down here and it was freezing cold. They didn't have their clothes they just had to come out. That was about 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning.

“We were never ever really told that Darwin was bombed. I never knew that people had been killed.”

Linda Bertram was a girl in Terowie and remembers the army camp in the town as well as the dancing in the streets when peace was declared.

Now the state president of the CWA, Bertram says the organisation was active throughout South Australia and had around 17,000 members by the end of World War II.





## Some 70 years ago, rail towns Terowie and Quorn found themselves playing a key role in the war thanks to the tireless efforts of the towns' women

the tens of thousands of soldiers who would soon be passing through the little town.

It was a service that became an institution. By one count, the volunteers of the CWA served as many as 360,000 hot meals to the soldiers who passed through Quorn.

It was a massive undertaking. Trains would come in at all hours of the day and night. The women would look for the smoke from the trains in the distance to know when to start cooking.

There were usually around 300 troops on each train and the enterprise became so large it outgrew the refreshment rooms and the soldiers were sent on a five-minute hike across what was called the Digger's Bridge to the Memorial Hall beside Quorn Oval.

Sisters Shirley Hughes and Lois Chopin were young girls when the trains came

through Quorn. Shirley was 16 when the war started in 1939, Lois was nine years younger.

Both helped out at the Memorial Hall. Their father was a blacksmith on the locomotives, and had served in World War I and they became involved through their mother who was in the CWA.

Now 83, Lois says the women cooked for the soldiers in very basic facilities. "It was open each end," she remembers. "So, if rain came, it came in this way, if the dust came, it came in this way. How those woman ever managed it I don't know."

The menu was fairly predictable; it had to be when you were cooking for 300 at a time. A typical serve consisted of rissoles, mashed potatoes, peas, pumpkin and gravy, a cup of tea, and plum pudding with custard.

between those that were leaving to go to war and those that were returning, having experienced the brutality of conflict.

"The ones coming back were twice as grateful (for a meal) as the ones going up," she says. "The ones going up had no idea what they were going into. The ones coming back realised what they'd been through and they were... very pleased to see us kids."

It was an exciting and energetic time in Quorn. But it was also a time of war and death. Country towns all over South

Adelaide Railway Station, where Alma Giampaoli assisted as a 14-year-old in 1944.

"We had jokes with the soldiers and helped out as best we could," Giampaoli says. Helping often meant serving pies, pasties or sandwiches, and milkshakes.

Giampaoli also says the carvings that were found in Car 5 at Quorn would have been made using the penknives every soldier carried attached to his uniform.

But it wasn't only food and company the CWA supplied.

It also had a contract to make camouflage nets for the Army, which CWA volunteers would make in their spare time.

It was emblematic of the way, Bertram notes, the country pulled together in that terrible time of war.

"Women had to step in and do what the men did when they went to war," Bertram says. "It boosted people's morale to think they could join in and help, they felt as if they were doing something." ●

