

Leslie Vaux Cluett

At the outbreak of World War II, I was living at home with my parents, my brother Arthur and my sister Winsome. Actually, my sister was attending the WA University studying for her BA Certificate, having taken all subjects at Albany High School prior to going for further studies and earlier attending the Mt. Barker School by bus.

Prior to World War II in 1925, Dad had selected a homestead block of land at Porongorups and soon after began the arduous task of clearing some of it, first to build a house and then to plant an orchard and get a small area of pasture so we could have a milking cow etc., so by the time World War II started we had a few acres of orchard, about 8, 2 of passionfruit and enough pasture to run a reasonable number of milking cows plus pigs and quite a variety of vegetables, potatoes, peas beans etc.

My brother Arthur joined the RAAF in 1940 and I married my wife Alison in 1941. Sadly my father died in December 1942, so that left only myself and my wife Alison to run the farm, with some help from Mum from time to time.

On the 3rd of May 1942, I enlisted in the VDC, Voluntary Defence Corp, and was discharged on the 15th October 1945. It was during this time that we really had our time 'cut out', we regularly went to the local hall every Tuesday night for about 2 hours for training and every Sunday for a full day which meant doing all the chores before we left on Sunday morning and then milking the cows etc after we came home from Mt. Barker or Albany on Sunday afternoon (sometimes evening).

When one looks back 60 years since we joined the VDC and viewed 'Dads Army', on numerous occasions, the WA version of the real thing was quite different to what we see on television. For instance, when the Japanese invaded Darwin and for a long time afterwards, the VDC did help the war effort in many ways, to mention the local scene, by the efforts of the local brigade, Albany and Mt. Barker and surrounding districts right up to Katanning and Ongerup, were able to relieve the permanent staff stationed at the 'Forts' and they were able to go to other places in Australia where they were needed.

Mount Barker's group were fortunate in having several officers and NCO's from World War I who were appointed to train us in all aspects of military exercises. As already stated this was all voluntary work. However, we were issued with a uniform, boots and rifle, a .380 or .308, I can't remember which but they were in quite good condition, but very old, were mainly used in the Boer War. Later we had .303's. We also were taught to use the old Lewis machine gun and the Owen gun.

On the lighter side or brighter, we were issued with one bottle of beer per week. I think some of us who used their vehicle to get to training were occasionally issued with some petrol ration tickets, which helped a lot. We had a gas producer on our ute which performed fairly well and definitely enabled us to get to places a little more often. It is hard to realize how short certain things were during the war which made it harder still for the ladies. Butter, meat, clothing, petrol were rationed. Tyres almost unprocurable as were numerous farm implements, and to obtain almost anything, one had to have a permit from the Government to purchase, even our gas producer.

Fertiliser was very scarce for most of the time and even for a few years after the war.

I must pay a special tribute to the ladies of our district and in particular my wife Alison who did play a big part in keeping the farms going during all those years 1939-45. Without their help and encouragement most husbands would not have been able to carry on, certainly not as efficiently, to say the least. Another point of interest regarding the women, most of them belonged to the CWA, Red Cross or other war time fund raising committees and nearly every Saturday night at the local hall, Porongorups in our case, there would be a dance to raise funds for the service men and women, camp comforts etc. etc. A large amount of money was raised during this time for the men and women in uniform serving overseas.

During the latter part of the war the Government allowed Italian Prisoners of War (POW's), to work on farms in WA, probably elsewhere in Australia. The scheme worked well and helped the labour situation considerably, we had two working for us for about one and a half years. I think most of them were quite happy to work instead of being confined to a camp all the time. There were not many restrictions applied to them.

I will conclude my very brief story on a more personal note. Alison and I had two children, John, born in September 1942 and Margaret born in August 1945. John is married to Trish and they have three children and 6 grandchildren. Margaret is married to Dudley and they have four children and 6 grandchildren. Alison and I retired to Albany in 1978. John who managed the farm after our retirement is now semi-retired to Albany, and Brad their eldest son is now carrying on the farm. During those years the farm has grown from 160 acres to about 2500 acres, so a lot has happened over 60 odd years.



Certificate

Nº 33646

Australian Military Forces
Volunteer Defence Corps
Certificate of Discharge

This is to Certify that

===== W.71500 CLUETT Leslie Vaux =====

Served in the Volunteer Defence
Corps on Part Time War Service

from the date of his enlistment on 3 MAY 1942
and until 15 OCT 1945 on which date
he was discharged from that Corps ..

Date 3 APRIL 1946.

Robert L. Hume
for Officer in Charge

W.A. Echelon & Records

Signature of Member

L. V. Cluett