

SPEECH BY
MAJGEN R.G. FAY AO RFD ED (RL)
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE 7TH FIELD REGIMENT 80TH BIRTHDAY AND
THE CLOSURE OF THE WILLOUGHBY DEPOT
ON
16 MARCH 1996

Your Worship The Mayor of Willoughby, Councilor Eunice Raymond, Colonel Retter, Commanding Officer, Officers, men and women of 7 Field Regiment, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for the invitation to participate in the 80th Birthday of the Regiment and to review the last parade it will hold in a Barracks which has been home to the Regiment for 67 years. In celebrating its 80th Birthday the Regiment can look back with pride at its history. The Regiment served with distinction in World War 1 and World War 2 and continues to this day in an active role as part of the Australian Defence Forces.

The Regiment (or Brigade as it was then) was raised in March of 1916 as part of the 1st A.I.F. It was quickly dispatched to England for a brief training period on the Salisbury Plains and by December that year was in France. It subsequently supported the 1st Australian Corps where it broke through the German Front which marked the beginning of the defeat of Germany.

7 Field Artillery Brigade remained on the order of Battle between the Wars as a Militia Unit and in 1939 it saw many of its Officers, Non Commissioned Officers and Gunners transfer to the 2nd AIF to fight in WW2. The depot was used for training a number of AIF Units and one such unit which has retained its association is the 2/9 Field Regiment which is represented here today.

Through the men and women who trained in the Barracks, through the many who transferred to the AIF and through those who continued to serve in the Regiment, 7 Field made a significant contribution to WW2.

Like many such Units it was disbanded for a brief period after 1945 only to be re-raised again in 1948 as part of the Citizens Military Forces. Since that time the Regiment has undergone many changes in equipment, in organisational structure and in roles. It has been through expansions, cutbacks and the turbulent time of the Vietnam War. Throughout its 80 years the Regiment has been predominantly manned by the Citizen Soldier be it the Militia - the CMF of the General Reserve. For this reason it is particularly significant that the Mayor of Willoughby is with us today. Without the support of the local community a General Reserve Unit would find it difficult to operate. The Regiment draws from the local community for much of its recruiting.

The Regiment needs to identify with the community and to be seen to be making a contribution to society. Military service, just like any other occupation is part of the fabric of our society. Your presence here today, Your Worship is tangible evidence of the community support and the close links that exist between the Regiment and the City of Willoughby. On behalf of the Regiment I would like to thank you, Your Worship and the citizens of Willoughby for their support.

What lies ahead: The past 80 years has certainly shown that change is always with us. Traditions in the Army are important but we must always be able to distinguish between what is important and we ^{retain} retain and maintain, and what has simply become a habit over time. For example those essential qualities which make the Australian soldier unique are an essential part of our Army Tradition and ethos which must never change.

They are those qualities which are identified with the Australian soldier, qualities which are enshrined in the Anzac tradition and reinforced in generations of service men and women and continue to this day. Australians can take a great deal of pride in the international reputation our Army has gained in the peace keeping and humanitarian aid tasks it has undertaken in recent times.

People realise the extent to which the courage, professionalism and training of our soldier can be tested in some of these overseas missions. Our Army is made up of professional and well trained young men and women such as you see on parade this afternoon - men and women dedicated to the defense of Australia.

When we close the gates this afternoon on the Warrane Road Willoughby Depot a new era for 7 Field Regiment will begin. What lies ahead of it in its new depot at Pymble will be the challenge of adjusting to the changes as the Australian Army is shaped to meet the needs of the 21st Century. On your behalf ladies and gentlemen I congratulate the Regiment on its parade today, on what it has achieved in its 80 years and wish it well for the future.