

Other Names	N/A	
Street Address	Gunyarra Road	Gunyarra
Title Details/ GPS Coordinates	1SP121691, 2SP121691, 3SP121691, 56SP178756	

Historical Context

The Australian Field Experimental Station (AFES) was established at Gunyarra, south of Proserpine, in late 1943. The AFES was first recommended to the Army in 1942, but implementation of the recommendation was delayed for twelve months. The AFES was approved in 1943 and the Department of Munitions, which was responsible for chemical research at the time, was given the responsibility of establishing the station. Chemical warfare was an integral part of World War II (as it had been also in World War I) and Australian military authorities – along with their British and American counterparts – saw the value in conducting chemical warfare experiments on people and training with chemical weapons. Proserpine was selected because its climatic conditions closely resembled those of the islands to the north of Australia in which Australian and American forces were currently engaged in the war against Japan. A field station was also established at Innisfail in North Queensland earlier in 1943, but this was considered a temporary measure until the AFES was constructed, although staff and equipment were transferred to Proserpine until January 1945. The AFES was one of the only facilities of its type established in Australia during World War II.

Construction of the AFES began in December 1943. The station consisted of storage huts, accommodation for 300 staff, workshops, laboratory and testing facilities and an airstrip. Chemical warfare experiments were carried out on Australian service personnel who volunteered for the task, referred to as ‘guinea pigs’. Experiments involved chemical warfare compounds such as mustard gas; gas would be sprayed from planes, or bombs exploded, in the vicinity of the volunteers. Gas chambers were even established in which volunteers would wear normal service attire and a respirator. The station was quickly deemed a success; particularly by British and American military authorities, who offered assistance to enlarge the program and which the Australian military accepted.

The station continued to operate until the end of the war in 1945. All field trials ceased by October that year; the staff was reduced to 30 by December; and stores and equipment were packed ready for transport between December and June 1946. Some of the station buildings appear to have remained on site, as late as 2008 and at least on structure on the former station appears to remain intact. The Proserpine Historical Society and the Proserpine Returned Services League erected a stone cairn at the entrance to the site in 1996, with a plaque identifying it as the site of the AFES.

Physical Description

The site of the former Australian Field Experimental Station is located approximately twelve kilometres south of Proserpine on farmland bounded by the Gunyarra Road in the north and west and Thompson Creek in the south. The site includes a forested area in the southeast, but consists mainly of cleared grassed land.

A sign post on the road reads GUNYARRA WORLD WAR II SITE and points to a memorial, a joint project of the Proserpine Historical Museum Society and the RSL Club, which consists of a large erect boulder on a concrete slab. The emblem of the Australian Imperial Forces is displayed in the top section. A plaque reading GUNYARRA • ARMY CAMP • 1944-1945 • THE 1ST AUSTRALIAN FIELD EXPERIMENTAL STATION WAS LOCATED AT THIS SITE WHERE RESEARCH ON CHEMICAL WARFARE AGENTS AND PROTECTIVE METATERIALS WAS CARRIED OUT is attached below. A small sign underneath informs about the project and lists the date 12th October 1996.

The remains of possibly one of the buildings of the former experimental station appears to be extant.

Integrity	Poor	Condition	Poor
Statutory Listings	No statutory listings		
Non-Statutory Listings	No non-statutory listings		
Inspection Date	16/4/2014		

References

Plunkett, Geoff, 2007. Chemical Warfare in Australia: Australia’s involvement in chemical warfare 1914-1945. Australian Military History Publications, Loftus.
www.ozatwar.com/locations/gunyarra.htm

Heritage Significance

Criteria	Definition
A	<i>The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the region’s history.</i>
Statement	The Australian Field Experimental Station is important in demonstrating the pattern of the region’s history, particularly the establishment of military facilities in the region in World War II. The region, along with much of North Queensland, was in close proximity to the war against Japan in Asia and the Pacific and various bases were established in the region at this time.
B	<i>The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the region’s cultural heritage.</i>
Statement	The Australian Field Experimental Station demonstrates an uncommon aspect of the region’s World War II history. While most of other defence facilities consisted of bases (such as the Catalina Hardstand in Bowen) the Experiment Station was unique as a facility to test chemical warfare. It is also rare on a national level, as there were limited facilities of its type in North Queensland and Australia more generally.
C	<i>The place has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the region’s history.</i>
Statement	The Australian Field Experimental Station has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the region’s history, particularly archaeological material and other material remnants associated with the station.
H	<i>The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organisation of importance in the region’s history.</i>
Statement	The Australian Field Experimental has a special association with the Australian military (as organised during World War II), which was particularly important in the region’s history along with Queensland more generally.

Location Map

