



**The Military History of the  
“Southern Amberley Road”  
(Main Entrance Road to RAAF Amberley)  
Dedicated as an “*AVENUE of HONOUR*”  
14<sup>th</sup> December 2018**



- Prior to European settlement this area we now know as “Amberley” was originally known as “Jeebropilly” (1<sup>st</sup> Nation Yuggera peoples language name for “The Swamp of the Sugar Gliders” - where “*Jebro*” means ‘*Sugar Glider*’ and “*Pilly*” means ‘*Swamp*’).
- This section of the West Moreton region opened for settlement in 1850’s and was settled by English & German migrants who established their farms along the “Old Toowoomba Road” where it traversed “Jeebropilly” 3 miles west of Ipswich.
- The area was incorporated into the “Willowbank Sheep & Cattle Station” in the 1860’s which adopted its name from the prolific number of Willow trees growing along the banks of the Warrill Creek. These are “Napoleon Willows” originally planted from a sprig taken from the Willow Tree that shades the grave of renowned French military leader Napoleon Bonaparte located on St. Helena Island in the South Atlantic.
- On the sale of “Willowbank” into smaller portions in the early 1880’s, this area north of Warrill Creek was named as the locality of “Amberley” after the selection taken by the early English pioneering Collett family who named their farm “Amberley” after the county they came from in Sussex in England.
- In this late 1880’s era, a road was also established to enable travel south to Warwick and to also serve the established farming areas of Amberley, Willowbank & Ebenezer. It joined the “Old Toowoomba Road” (now named the “Amberley-Rosewood Road”) at “Sand Ridge Crossing” (a bog area named by bullock team drivers) adjacent to where the “Warrill Creek School” was later established in 1888 and became known as the “Southern Amberley Road” (a roadside white post marker on N/W kerb still remains).
- Initially the Amberley settlers grew cotton to export to the north US Union Army to make their American Civil War uniforms as the Confederate Army controlled the US cotton fields to the south.
- In 1860, Queensland’s first Defence Force, the “Ipswich Troop of Mounted Rifles”, was established in Ipswich and no doubt enlisted country horsemen who had travelled this road.
- In 1903 the “Warrill Creek State School” was renamed the “Amberley State School” and remained as the community ‘Gate keeper’ at the north/west end of the “Southern Amberley Road”.
- 1914 saw the outbreak of WW1 and many of the 23 young men who enlisted from the Amberley district would have travelled this road to sign up.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> man to enlist was a Private Clifford Phister on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 1915 who later died of wounds while a Prisoner of War during fighting on the Western Front.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> man Killed in Action was a Private Samuel Bolton who died on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1917 while engaging the enemy at Anzac Ridge at Ypres Sector on Belgium Battlefields.
- On the 14<sup>th</sup> December 1917, the “Amberley Boys” Honour Stone (erected by a patriotic Amberley community) was unveiled and dedicated on its original location adjacent to the “Amberley State School” on the west side corner at the north entrance to the “Southern Amberley Road” and cemented this road’s history synonymous with honouring our serving and fallen Servicemen.

2.

- On the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1919, an “Amberley Boys Welcome Home Social” was conducted at the Amberley Congregational Church to welcome home the 1<sup>st</sup> of the District’s Returned Servicemen, and
- On the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1919 an “Amberley Expresses Gratitude – Welcome to Returned Soldiers – Enthusiastic Function” was conducted at the “Amberley State School” on the “Southern Amberley Road” to give recognition to all the Returned and Lost “Amberley Boys”, and
- On 7<sup>th</sup> May 1920, a final “Amberley Soldiers Welcomed Home” Patriotic Concert was held at the Amberley School.
- In 1938, lands at “Jeebropilly” were acquired by the Australian Government and gazetted for Defence purposes to construct RAAF Amberley Airfield.
- On 17<sup>th</sup> June 1940, RAAF Amberley commenced operations with No. 24 Squadron and No. 3 Service Flying Training Squadron with the Main Entrance to the new RAAF Base Amberley being located adjacent to the corner of “Old Toowoomba and Southern Amberley Roads”.
- At this time the “Old Toowoomba Road” still crossed the RAAF Amberley Airstrip E/W and the “Southern Amberley Road” was still publically traversed on its alignment west of the base perimeter.
- During the period of WW2, a further 19 local Amberley lads enlisted into the Australian Armed Forces.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> to enlist on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1936 was Chief Petty Officer Gustave Thaler RAN who served on the HMAS “Napier” in Mediterranean & Eastern Waters.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> Amberley lad to join the RAAF on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1940 was Corporal James Parkes who was posted to No. 3 SFT SQN here at RAAF Amberley on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1941 and later served as a Cook with No. 8 Squadron during combat operations in New Guinea.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> of these men Killed in Action was a Private Herbert Crocombe who died at sea on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1944 as result of combat action in the Labuan area of New Guinea.
- During WW2 a Communications Bunker/Command Post linked with General MacArthur’s Headquarters in Brisbane was constructed and operated midway along and west of “Southern Amberley Road” and was locally known as “Frogs Hollow”.
- In July 1942, the Army’s No. 391 Heavy Anti-aircraft (3”) Gun Station was installed on the ridge to south and above “Frogs Hollow” to guard the base from potential enemy aircraft raids and later removed post WW2.
- Post war on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1951, the Amberley stretch of the now “Cunningham Highway” (originally named “Warwick Road”) was gazetted for construction to link with the “Southern Amberley Road” to provide an alternate sealed road accesses west to Rosewood and south to Warwick in lieu of the E/W crossing of the RAAF Amberley Airstrip and also providing an improved all weather access to the base.
- In the 1960’s, Vick and Val Ashton purchased and farmed land along the “Southern Amberley Road” and built a home and raised their family alongside the southern entrance. This location which adjoins the junction with the “Cunningham Highway” has now been officially named as “Ashtons Corner” in recognition of the Ashton Family’s legacy of community support to RAAF members and families.
- Also circa late 1960’s, USAF elements occupied “Frogs Hollow” and operated the facility as a ‘secret’ communications centre to support “OMEGA” low frequency radio communications to USN Submarines and also to support USAF operations in the recovery of NASA’s 1<sup>st</sup> Luna Landing returning Capsule splashdown in the South Pacific.

3.

- In 1967, the 1<sup>st</sup> post war major restructure of RAAF Amberley commenced in preparation for F-111 Bomber operations and No. 5 Airfield Construction Squadron was tasked to rebuild and extend the RAAF Amberley Main Airstrip.
- In 1969, on completion of this task, No. 5AC SQN was then tasked to rebuild and realign the “Southern Amberley Road” to the road we know today and also included the construction of a round-about for a new southern entrance to RAAF Amberley to align with “F-111 Drive” on the base.
- In the early 1970’s, A Canberra Bomber was mounted as a ‘Gate Keeper’ on the east side of the “Southern Amberley Road” at the new base entrance and gave statute recognition to all at RAAF Amberley who had served in the Vietnam War conflict.
- In the early 1990’s the RAAF Amberley Chaplains established the “RAAF Amberley Memorial Gardens” alongside the “Southern Amberley Road” at the entrance to the base which provided a place to reflect on all those who died in service at RAAF Base Amberley and other contingencies.
- (2001 >) Circa the Middle East Area of Operations contingency, the “Southern Amberley Road” provided a recurring carriage way to return the bodies of fallen Australian Servicemen through a corridor of respectful Australian citizens aligning the road side to give a nations salute to the cortège.
- In 1997, Cr. Charlie Pisasale of the Ipswich City Council initiated a project to plant an avenue of trees along both sides of “Amberley Southern Road”.
- In 2010, RAAF WOFF George Hatchman (as President of the Willowbank/Amberley Area Residents Group) organised for the “Amberley Boys” Honour Stone to be relocated to its current position at the “RAAF Amberley Memorial Gardens” where it now stands proudly adjacent to the “Southern Amberley Road” as a permanent witness to the passing feet and memorial resting place of many Australian Servicemen.
- In recent years, RAAF Amberley has gone through a further major restructure resulting in the realignment of the RAAF Amberley perimeter fence with relocation and installation of the Main Entrance Guard Post to its current location further south along the “Southern Amberley Road”. This has resulted in the north section of “Southern Amberley Road” now being included within the base perimeter.
- In June 2018, (RAAF SQNLDR Ret) Ian Dainer, a member of the Joint Ipswich Region Commemorative Committee Centenary of ANZAC (JIRACC), advocated that the Southern Amberley Road should be dedicated as an “Avenue of Honour” in a joint ceremony involving RAAF Amberley and Ipswich City Council.
- On the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2018, “Southern Amberley Road” was formally dedicated as an “Avenue of Honour”, coincident with the 101<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the dedication of the original “Amberley Boys” Honour Stone which was unveiled in 1917.
- A ‘Gate Keeper’ F-111C Bomber aircraft now silently guards this entrance and makes its own statement as to the area’s proud Military History and recognition of the “Southern Amberley Road” to be truly an “AVENUE of HONOUR”.

George HATCHMAN (RAAF WOFF Ret)  
President - Willowbank Area Residents Group, &  
Historian - RAAF No. 23 (City of Brisbane) Squadron Association  
14<sup>th</sup> December 2018

Avenue of Trees Planted 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1997 >

