Norforce carries on Nackeroos tradition

JUST outside Timber Creek, an obscure war monument surprises travellers with an insight into a little-known part of Australian military history — the Nackeroos.

The Nackeroos, more formally known as the 2/1 North Australia Observer Unit, formed in 1942 as part of the strategic defence of northern Australia against the Japanese.

In forming the Nackeroos, Commanding Officer Major Bill Stanner sought men with a bush background and adventurous spirit who could live outdoors months at a time, operating in small groups on their own initiative. At its peak, more than 400 soldiers were deployed across the Top End and Kimberley, and with the assistance of local indigenous people, undertook reconnaissance, scouting and coastal surveillance tasks across the Kimberley and the Northern Territory’s sea and air approaches.

As the threat of Japanese attack eased, patrols were reduced in 1943, and the unit was finally disbanded in 1945. The spirit of the Nackeroos was revived in 1981 when the Australian Army revived Norforce.

Acknowledging the similarities between the two units and to give Norforce an identity, it was decided it would perpetuate the Nackeroo traditions, and as such Norforce officially adopted the Nackeroo orange and green “double diamond” colour patch and its unit heritage upon formation.

Territory’s military heritage on display

THE Darwin Military Museum was founded in the mid-1960s by Lieutenant Colonel Jack Haydon and members of the Northern Territory branch of the Royal Australian Artillery Association.

The association, through its numerous contacts, soon started accumulating war memorabilia from all over the Territory. Since then, several notable local collectors have also contributed greatly to the museum’s exhibits.

The museum was Darwin’s first and is housed in the original concrete command post bunker, used by the army to command the two 9.2” guns nearby.

The bunker is now fully air-conditioned and displays a fascinating array of weapons, photographs and equipment used by the fighting men and women of the day.

Opening Hours: 9:30am-5pm, 7 days a week. After hours by appointment

Telephone: 08 8981 9702

THE cenotaph

THE cenotaph overlooks the Darwin Harbour wharf area, from where all men from the Territory left during the First World War.

This is now known as the Darwin War Memorial. The high cliffs would have been one of the last familiar sights those men would have seen as they sailed off to war.

The cenotaph overlooks the harbour where so many died in the Japanese air attack on 19 February 1942 during World War II. Most significant of all, the obelisk is sited on the spot from which guns of the 14th Anti-Aircraft Battery went into action, firing, arguably, the first shots ever in defence of Australia on Australian soil.

This memorial was the first official monument of any kind erected in the NT and funds were subscribed by various organisations and committees throughout the Territory during 1920. The initial chosen site for the memorial was Liberty Square, the area in front of the Administrator’s residence.

The monument has survived the 1917 cyclone, 63 bombing raids by the Japanese during which bombs landed within its close vicinity, earth tremors and cyclone Trudy.

In 1966, the monument required repairs to severe damage caused by an earth tremor.

Territorian and Victoria Cross recipient, Lieutenant Albert Borella. Image: Darwin Military Museum

Diggers clean one of the guns at East Point

Burning oil tanks in Darwin after a Japanese air raid

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