

Bunker battleground 1020 mustard-charged bombs dumped in our waters

Townsville Bulletin — 28 November 2009 — Ian Frazer

THOUSANDS of tonnes of chemical weapons from North Queensland bases was destroyed by burning or dumped at sea after World War II.

Mustard gas bombs appear to have been stored at Charters Towers, Kangaroo (near Toomulla Beach), Bowen and Talmoi Siding, 50km west of Richmond.

Geoff Plunkett writes in his history *Chemical Warfare in Australia*, published last year, that US military authorities dumped 1020 mustard-charged bombs in the Coral Sea off Townsville.

In all, 20,030t of chemical warfare munitions was dumped into Australian seas at the end of the war, according to a Defence Department report.

Last month, the department rejected the possibility of mustard gas having been stored in a Castle Hill bunker, arguing that there was no credible evidence of any bunkers having been excavated in the hill.

The ADF statement followed a Townsville Bulletin story about a former defence worker who claimed to have seen 300 drums of mustard gas in the bunker about 30 years ago.

Plunkett writes that while US policy ruled out storage of bulk chemicals in Townsville, the US Air Force held chemical bombs at Garbutt airfield from December 1943.

The US Advance Chemical Unit (Aviation), established 18km west of Charters Towers, listed 81t of bulk mustard in its inventory in November, 1943.

The US also stored chemical weapons at Kangaroo, inland from Toomulla Beach, 26km north of Townsville.

Bulk chemicals and weapons were railed and shipped through Townsville from 1942 and tested at the Chemical Warfare Physiological School in Townsville in 1942 and '43.

Defence scientists from Australia, Britain and the US found in tests at the Townsville school that chemical warfare would be four times more effective in the tropics than temperate regions.

This work continued at the Australian Field Experimental Station in Proserpine from 1944.

The RAAF also stored chemical weapons at Bowen airport and near the old wool scour at Talmoi Siding.

UN weapons inspectors are reported to be checking a cache of 144 unexploded shells, some containing mustard gas, found in September at a former US Army ammunition dumped at Columboola, near Chinchilla.