

Chemical experiments in the Eighties

Story: LEN ASHWORTH

The military was still 'messaging about' with sinister mustard gas projects at the Marrangaroo Army Camp as recently as the 1980s, according to an informed source.

The informant, who can not be named, was a member of the Regular Army stationed at the then 223 Supply Coy at Marrangaroo.

He contacted the *Mercury* after reading last week's feature article relating to mustard gas storage at Marrangaroo, Clarence and Glenbrook railway tunnels during World War II.

"I was a Digger stationed at

Marrangaroo 20 years ago," he said.

In the late 1980s members of the Ammunition Technical Staff were at the base on a project to 'make safe' the handling of mustard gas bombs.

He said that soldiers were outfitted in thick rubber suits and gas masks during the training.

It had been a secretive operation.

Referring to a claim by a Wallerawang resident to have found around that same time thousands of drums containing an unspecified poison hidden in the bush on the nearby Newnes Plateau, the

informant said this could well have come from the Marrangaroo base.

"They had heaps of heavy plant and equipment at the base at that time and there was stuff being taken up into the hills all the time," he said.

On a lighter note he said a former soldier from Marrangaroo had told him many times how a number of Army Harley Davison motorcycles, still in their packing cases, had been placed in caves on the department's property after the war.

In more recent years our informant was keen to track them down but when he

attempted to make inquiries through the Defence Department records in Canberra he was told it was 'none of my business'.

He said the Marrangaroo military depot clearly hides a lot of secrets.

The depot was for much of its life an ammunition storage and transport facility.

Several years ago this role was transferred to a base in the Hunter Valley and since that time Marrangaroo has had a training role instructing Army, Navy and Air Force personnel — including SAS commandos — in the handling of explosives.