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# Puckapunyal Army Camp

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## Location

Seymour Toorborac Road, PUCKAPUNYAL VIC 3662

## Municipality

MITCHELL SHIRE

## Level of significance

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## Heritage Overlay Numbers

## Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - January 1, 2006

National Estate

Statement of Significance : Puckapunyal Army Camp was first established by the Commonwealth government in 1939, in preparation for the Nation's contribution to World War II. Puckapunyal was the culmination of Victoria's main defence training facilities in the Seymour area. Puckapunyal is today Victoria's largest military training facility and is also one of Australia's most significant defence establishments. It played a vital role in preparing Australian troops for battle in three major international conflicts: World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. It was also the accommodation and training venue for Victorian participants in the National Service scheme and the controversial Conscription ballots in the 1960s (Criterion A4. Historic Themes: 7.7.1 Providing for the common defence; 7.7.3 Going to war).

The Cantonment at Puckapunyal is significant for the grid system upon which its layout was developed. Although there have been considerable changes to the Cantonment and its grid system, as set out during the World War II period, the original axis and layout of domestic, administrative and parade ground facilities, is still highly evident (Criterion D.2).

Puckapunyal Army Camp is significant for its close association with generations of Australian troops and their families, most of whom have come from Victoria. It has been associated with members of Australia's standing army, as well as ready reserves, cadets, National Service personnel and, during the Vietnam War, those who were conscripted into the army via a nationwide ballot. It is also an important place for present-day survivors of the 17th Brigade, the first Victorian contingent to be sent on overseas service in World War II (Criterion G.1).

The surviving World War II buildings - the former Camp Headquarters and the 21 Construction Squad's compound - in addition to the original grid system of the Cantonment, are the last remaining physical reminders of Puckapunyal's contribution to the war effort in this period (Criterion B.2).

#### Statement of Significance : NATURAL VALUES

Puckapunyal contains a large and excellent example of Box-Ironbark Forest (Northern Goldfields) communities and good examples of Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland; Creekline Grassy Woodland communities; Buloke Woodland; White Box Woodland; Long-leaf Box Woodland; Native Grassland; and Wetland Herbfeld all of which are restricted in Victoria.

At the time of European settlement, box-ironbark forest and woodland covered the inland slopes and plains from western Victoria to southern Queensland. Since then, 85 per cent of this ecosystem has been cleared in Victoria. Box-ironbark forests are poorly represented in reserve systems and have been substantially modified by forestry and mining activities.

The Range West and Graytown sections of Puckapunyal contain some of the largest remnants of box-ironbark forest in Victoria covering approximately 14,000 hectares. These areas of Puckapunyal provide a contiguous habitat with the Rushworth-Heathcote State Forest (incorporating Mount Black Flora Reserve/State Park, Whroo-Costerfield State Forest, Redcastle State Forest, Mt Ida Flora Reserve, Rushworth Forest Reference Area, proposed Whroo Nature Conservation Reserve) to the north and the Goulburn River Red Gum corridor, forming part of a crucial wildlife corridor comprising the largest remaining block of Box-Ironbark forest in Victoria.

Box-ironbark forest supports an assemblage of species from both Bassian and Eyrean biogeographical zones as well as many Box-ironbark 'stronghold species' which are not found in other habitat types, many of these species are threatened either nationally or in Victoria.

Puckapunyal Military Area contains the nationally vulnerable Trailing Hop-bush (*DODONAEA PROCUMBENS*) and Clover Glycine (*GLYCINE LATROBEANA*) and four species which are rare or threatened in Victoria: Buloke Mistletoe (*AMYEMA LINOPHYLLA* ssp. *ORIENTALE*), Swamp Diuris (*DIURIS PALUSTRIS*), Large Rustyhood (*PTEROSTYLIS MAXIMA*); and Western Golden-tip (*GOODIA MEDICAGINEA*). An additional 116 plant species are of regional significance

Puckapunyal is exceptionally diverse in native fauna for central Victoria, supporting 25 mammal, 182 bird, 11 frog and 7 native fish species.

The area contains the nationally endangered Swift Parrot (*LATHAMUS DISCOLOR*) and Regent Honeyeater (*XANTHOMYZA PHRYGIA*) which is critically endangered in Victoria an additional five bird species which are threatened in Victoria: Australasian Bittern (*BOTAURUS POICILOPTILUS*), Little Bittern (*IXOBRYCHUS MINUTUS*), Bush Stone-curlew (*BURHINUS GRALLARIUS*), Barking Owl (*NINOX CONNIVENS*), Powerful Owl (*NINOX STRENUA*).

The area contains the Squirrel Glider (*PETAURUS NORFOLCENSIS*) and the Tuan/Brush-tailed Phascogale (*PHASCOGALE TAPOATAFA*) which are threatened in Victoria. The area is a key location for the Common Dunnart (*SMINTHOPSIS MURINA*) and Fat-tailed Dunnart (*SMINTHOPSIS CRASSICAUDATA*) which are poorly known in Victoria.

Puckapunyal contains four freshwater fish species of rare or threatened in Victoria: the Golden Perch (*MACQUARIA AMBIGUA*), Freshwater Catfish (*TANDANUS TANDANUS*), the upper Wannon River Blackfish (*GADOPSIS MARMORATUS*) and the Mountain Galaxias (*GALAXIAS OLIDUS*).

In addition to the military facilities at Puckapunyal, there are several significant cultural features within its boundaries that pre-date the site's military function. In particular there are two former pastoral station homesteads, as well as archaeological remnants from the gold mining and forestry industries. The archaeological remains of the former Puckapunyal township, which existed in the late 19th Century, are also present, to the west of the present-day Cantonment.

The Whitechurch Homestead was included in the Commonwealth's original 1939 land purchase. It comprises a 19th Century vernacular wattle and daub construction dwelling, with brick chimney and galvanised iron roof. The complex also comprises a pise kitchen building and several weatherboard sheds, and a shearing pavilion of drop-

log construction.

The Range Homestead was part of a portion of land purchased by the Commonwealth for Puckapunyal in 1966. The main house is constructed from stone with a mud mortar, with a relatively new corrugated iron roof. Outbuildings in this complex include a shearing shed, machinery shed, lavatory, underground water tank and well. The shearing shed is built with a tree trunk frame, and roofed with galvanised iron. The lavatory is rendered pise. The homestead is believed to date to the 1895-1905 period.

While not explicitly connected with Puckapunyal's military function, these homesteads and other remains provide important insight into the site's pre-Army history.

Heritage Study/Consultant Mitchell - Mitchell Shire Heritage Study, Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd, 2006;

Hermes Number 127240

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

### National Estate DESCRIPTION

An ongoing process of modernisation has led to the replacement of a majority of Puckapunyal's original 1940s structures. Most of the original mass produced and semi-temporary timber and iron structures, known as 'P Series' huts, were replaced by more modern brick structures in the 1960s and 1970s. The only survivors are the former camp headquarters (now a Military Police post) and the 21 Construction Squadron's compound. The Three Camp Hospital, one of the original hospital buildings, has recently been demolished to make way for a new medical facility.

Nonetheless, the main grid system along which the main Cantonment was set out is still discernible, and stands as the most significant reminder of both the history of the camp and the Australian men women who have served their country here.

The Cantonment is an area in the south-eastern corner of the camp that serves as the administrative, domestic and commercial centre of Puckapunyal. Not unlike a small country town, it contains residences for both families and single soldiers, a school, churches, post office, shops and a cinema. It differs, however, in the presence of parade grounds and the military-specific grid along which much of the cantonment is set out. Nonetheless, the grid has been substantially redeveloped since the 1940s, including the establishment of married quarters in a separate section of the Cantonment and several new sections being constructed off the main axis. The grid still retains much of its original character, however.

The Cantonment generally lies on an East-West axis in its rectangular grid. The grid contains six independent accommodation blocks, each measuring around 160 by 175 metres. Within each of these blocks lie hundreds of accommodation blocks, laid out in regimented rows. Opposite these accommodation blocks are mess and recreation blocks, adjacent to which are several parade grounds. Across the main thoroughfare to the south of these parade grounds in a non-military precinct, post office, chapels and cinema.

The Cantonment is approached via the Seymour-Tooboora Road. Puckapunyal's married quarters are located to the west of this entrance road, some distance from the main grid. Civic amenities, such as the shops and school have been constructed in this area.

The Cantonment currently accommodates domestic and administrative functions, as well as providing permanent bases for the Armoured Regiment and school, the catering school, hospital, the Engineer Squadron and the Administration and Logistical Support Squadron.

Description : Puckapunyal Military Area is situated 10 kilometres west of Seymour on the northern slopes of the Central Victorian highlands. It is rolling country varying in altitude from 130m in the north-east to 413m in the south. Extensive flats occur along the major creek lines, especially in the north. At least 14,000 hectares is box-ironbark forest and woodland and there are extensive areas of unimproved wooded pasture land.

Puckapunyal is the largest military range in Victoria, and one of the largest in Australia. It currently hosts activities such as artillery firing (since the relocation of the Artillery Centre from North Head in NSW), tank and armoured vehicle training, RAAF bombing and strafing exercises (and other air support manoeuvres), mortar and grenade training, transport driver training and infantry exercises. During the Vietnam War, the Range contained a full scale replica of a Vietnamese village, which assisted the training of troops for village combat. This replica village no longer exists.

The main grid system along which the main Cantonment of the Army Camp was set out is still discernible, and stands as the most significant reminder of both the history of the camp and the Australian men and women who have served their country here. The Army Camp and Cantonment are recognised by the Commission as a significant sub-area of the Puckapunyal Military Area (Register of the National Estate database number 18325).

The Proof and Experimental Station near Graytown is still in use, for the purpose of scientific test firing.

Puckapunyal forms part of the mid Goulburn River catchment, with most of the area drained to the north and north east by the tributaries of the Gardiner and Major Creeks which subsequently flow into the Goulburn River. The area is generally hilly, with small areas of high relief at Mounts Kappe and Puckapunyal in the south, and quaternary alluvium occupy the drainage lines and valleys. Marine sedimentary rocks of the Silurian-Devonian (Palaeozoic) ages underlie the place. Long tongues of basalt follow old valleys near Kilmore and Broadford. The oldest landforms are the high, steep ridges of Mt Puckapunyal and Robertson Ridge, which consist of hard-metamorphosed sandstone.

The eastern section is predominantly open grassland with large areas of open woodland and small patches of scattered forest along watercourses and ridgelines. The western section consists mainly of closed forest interspersed with open grassland. Most of the grassland has been sown with introduced perennial pasture species but small pockets of native grassland persist. The forested areas are dominated by red ironbark (*EUCALYPTUS TRICARPA*) and red stringy bark (*E. MACRORHYNCHA*) on the ridge tops with red box (*E. POLYANTHEMOS*), grey box (*E. MICROCARPA*) and longleaf box (*E. GONIOCALYX*) tending to dominate the mid-slopes. Grey box, yellow box (*E. MELLIODORA*) and yellow gum (*E. LEUCOXYLON*) and white box (*E. ALBENS*) occur on the lower slopes with river red gum (*E. CAMALDULENSIS*) beside the creeks and wetlands. The eastern section is notable for its large remnant ironbark stands and the abundance of grass trees (*XANTHORROEA AUSTRALIS*). Small remnants of buloke (*ALLOCASUARINA LUEHMANNII*) occur within the area.

Box-ironbark forest supports an assemblage of species that includes many specialist forms not found in other habitat types. These forms are well represented at Puckapunyal, which contains some of the largest remaining box-ironbark forest remnants in Victoria (approx. 14,000 hectares) and provides a contiguous area of forested habitat with the adjacent Whroo-Costerfield State Forest. Most of the large box-ironbark remnants are in the Range West and Graytown areas of Puckapunyal Military Area, including a large (108 hectare) old growth site.

760 vascular plant species have been recorded at Puckapunyal, 499 of these are indigenous. Approximately 170 non-vascular plant species (fungi, lichens, liverworts & mosses) have been recorded in PMA.

Approximately 250 species of vertebrates are known to occur at Puckapunyal Military Area, including 25 (9 introduced) arboreal/terrestrial mammal species, 9 bat species, 191 (9 introduced) bird species, 17 reptile, 11 amphibian and 11 (4 introduced) fish species.

This exceptionally diverse fauna for central Victoria reflects the location of Puckapunyal across a distributional disjunction between northern (dry habitat) and southern (wet habitat) Victoria, the presence of a high diversity of habitat types, and the presence of large remnants of forested habitat. Eyrean species, such as budgerigar, rainbow bee-eater, common dunnart and Gray's blind snake, with predominantly inland distribution reach the edge of their southern range limits in the area. Bassian species, such as the sugar glider, crimson rosella and powerful owl, which have a predominantly mountain or coastal distribution, reach their inland limit in the area.

Puckapunyal Military Area provides habitat for several box-ironbark 'stronghold species', many of which are threatened either nationally or in Victoria. Box-ironbark specialists found at Puckapunyal include the Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater, tian (brush-tailed phascogale), squirrel glider, barking owl, white-bellied cuckoo shrike, black chinned honeyeater, Bush Stone-curlew, diamond firetail finch and fuscous honeyeater. The wetlands and watercourses of Puckapunyal provide habitat for water birds such as the Great Egret, white-faced heron, Australian bittern and little bittern, a number of frog species including the barking marsh frog and common froglet, and a suite of native fish including the Golden Perch, Freshwater Catfish, upper Wannon River Blackfish and Mountain Galaxias.

Substantial populations of eastern grey kangaroo and emus (reintroduced in 1973) also occur in the Range.

In addition to the military facilities at Puckapunyal, there are several significant cultural features within its boundaries that pre-date the site's military function. In particular there are two former pastoral station homesteads, as well as archaeological remnants from the gold mining and forestry industries. The archaeological remains of the former Puckapunyal township, which existed in the late 19th Century, are also present, to the west of the present-day Cantonment.

The Whitechurch Homestead was included in the Commonwealth's original 1939 land purchase. It comprises a 19th Century vernacular wattle and daub construction dwelling, with brick chimney and galvanised iron roof. The complex also comprises a pise kitchen building and several weatherboard sheds, and a shearing pavilion of drop-log construction.

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While not explicitly connected with Puckapunyal's military function, these homesteads and other remains provide important insight into the site's pre-Army history.

The site of the former Graytown POW Camp falls outside the boundaries of the Puckapunyal Army Base.

Condition and Integrity : Puckapunyal Military Area (PMA) has been extensively rehabilitated since Defence acquisition and areas of native vegetation are now generally in good condition. Land use prior to Defence acquisition included mining, timber getting/forestry and extensive grazing. Sheep have been removed from the area and cattle grazing is used to control grass growth as the Range East district contains extensive areas of improved pastures (approx. 47% of the training area). A range of feral pests (foxes, cats, rabbits, rats, etc) and weed species occur within PMA.

Armoured vehicle and live firing impacts within the training area include: soil compaction, accelerated soil erosion, gullying & bank collapse of watercourses, fire and physical and noise impacts from ordinance. Other field training activities generally have low-level localised impacts.

Defence has an active environmental management program for Puckapunyal Military Area which addresses fire management, erosion, weeds and feral animals, air and water quality, and provides long term monitoring of the ecological status of the training area. Rehabilitation, 'no go', and 'no impact' areas have been identified within PMA and are monitored by Defence. An assessment has not been undertaken of chemical, heavy metal and unexploded ordinance (UXO) contamination. Defence has a current Environmental Management Plan (1998) for the PMA, has developed an Environmental Awareness and Management Handbook for distribution to users of the base, and has produced a State of the Environment Report (2000) for the base.

(Defence, Puckapunyal Military Area State of the Environment Report 2000).

## **Veterans Description for Public**

The Puckapunyal Army Camp was first established by the Commonwealth government in 1939. In 1942, the Camp saw the raising of the first Victorian contingent, the 17th brigade, to be sent overseas in the Second World War. As a camp with an extensive range attached, it was the permanent or transient home for infantry, artillery and armoured units, as well as many specialist and support troops. After the war, while other camps were abandoned or converted to other uses, Puckapunyal actually expanded to become the biggest army camp in Victoria. The universal 90-day national service scheme of the 1950s meant that a generation of Victorian men passed through the galvanised iron huts of Puckapunyal in those years.

Puckapunyal Military Area is situated 10 kilometres west of Seymour on the northern slopes of the Central Victorian highlands. It is rolling country varying in altitude from 130m in the north-east to 413m in the south. Since colonial times, the Seymour/Puckapunyal area has been a major focus for military training in Victoria. The area was used for training civilian militia, in the days when the Australian colonies had to rely substantially on volunteer forces for their defence. In 1910, Lord Kitchener toured Australia as a military adviser to the new Commonwealth and recommended the Seymour district as an ideal training and marshalling location for Victorian contingents in times of war or emergency. This recommendation was based largely on its central location and excellent access to Melbourne and other country districts via rail. In response, the Commonwealth began leasing and purchasing property in the region, which became the prime focus for defence training in Victoria.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, there were several army facilities in and around Seymour, and these multiplied dramatically during the course of the war, especially with large numbers of American troops either stationed here or passing through. The Commonwealth purchased 14,119 acres in 1939, at Puckapunyal at a cost of over 72,000 pounds for the location of a new artillery and infantry range. A camp area was established in the south-eastern extremity of the base, stocked with the standard mass-designed corrugated iron buildings found universally throughout Australian military camps of the era.

With the outbreak of the Korean War, Puckapunyal once more became the prime focus of military training in Victoria, for both the standing army and recruits through the National Service scheme. From 1965 to 1972, Puckapunyal was once again a major training establishment for recruits under the controversial conscription ballot scheme during the Vietnam War. This time the scheme called for a ballot of eligible twenty year olds for service in the army for two years. The Australia army's on-going modernisation process since the Second World War has meant that most of the wartime buildings have been demolished or removed. Apart from scattered examples such as the former Camp Headquarters and the 21 Construction Squad's compound.

At present the Puckapunyal area is the home of specialist regular army units and is the major training area for reservists. It currently hosts activities such as artillery firing (since the relocation of the Artillery Centre from North Head in NSW), tank and armoured vehicle training, RAAF bombing and strafing exercises (and other air support manoeuvres), mortar and grenade training, transport driver training and infantry exercises. During the Vietnam War, the Range contained a full scale replica of a Vietnamese village, which assisted the training of troops for village combat. This replica village no longer exists.

The Royal Australian Armoured Corps, which trains personnel in all forms of armoured warfare, has the longest continuous association with Puckapunyal, having served there since 1942. The Proof and Experimental Station, on the northern perimeter of the range, has also been an important facility in the test-firing of experimental military technology since 1951. Puckapunyal today remains one of Australia's largest and most significant Army bases.

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*