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# Wilson's Promontory Tidal River Memorial Pillar



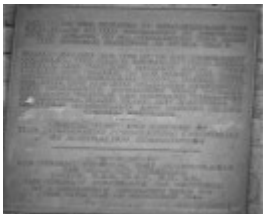
Tidal River Commando Memorial.jpg



National Commando Memorial Tidal River, Wilsons Prom.jpg



Wilson 1.jpg



Wilson 2.jpg



Tidal River Veteran Commando Parade.jpg

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## Location

Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory, SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE

## Municipality

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE

## Level of significance

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## Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

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Construction dates 1940,  
Hermes Number 126767  
Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

Large memorial cairn.

## Usage/Former Usage

Memorial Cairn

## Veterans Description for Public

The Wilsons Promontory Tidal River Memorial Pillar was erected to commemorate the birthplace of the Commando in Australia and in memory of all those Commandos who made the supreme sacrifice in the Second World War. It was dedicated on 16 November 1964 by the Lieutenant Governor of Victoria Lieutenant General Sir Edmund Herring and raised under the auspices of the Commando Association (Victoria), by Australian commandos. The restored memorial was rededicated by the Premier of Victoria, John Brumby, on 18 November 2007.

Military Mission 104, led by Lieutenant Colonel J.C. Mawhood, arrived in November 1940 with the idea of raising and training British style 'special' or 'commando' units, which had proved successful in operating against German-occupied Europe. The Australian Army decided to raise four 'independent' companies and train them at the innocuously named No. 7 Infantry Training Centre at Wilson's Promontory, a national park since 1898. It was an isolated area of high, rugged and heavily timbered mountains, precipitous valleys, swiftly running streams, and swamps, sand dunes, thick scrub, bays and cliffs.

From 1941 to 1942 there were two camps at Wilson's Promontory. No.1 Camp was in two sections at Darby River adjacent to the present day Lilly Pilly car park. A chalet for visitors had been built south of the Darby River bridge in the 1930s after the road was constructed, and this served as the campsite for officers. When fully established, the section north of the river had floored tents to sleep thirty-five NCOs and sergeants, forty-six corporals and sixty-two other ranks. Both camps had mess huts, lecture huts, ablutions, latrines, a combined kitchen, six bed camp dressing station, a signals workshop and explosives store. No.2 Camp was at Tidal River camping River:

*"All that was there as we approached the Prom on the right hand side was an administration hut, a cook house and the showers and mess hall. This was virtually all there was there. On the left hand side was virgin scrub and they said, 'Dump all your kit bags here', and within half an hour you were covered in sand. 'Well there's your camp area; there's your tents. You go over and bash the scrub down and pitch your own tents.'" (Harry Levey, 2/5th Independent Company, quoted in Pirie 1996).*

The Prom was "ideally suited for training troops who might fight anywhere from the Libyan deserts to the jungles of New Guinea, the only drawback being that in winter...the climate was often more polar than tropical", as Captain Freddie Spencer Chapman, instructor in fieldcraft, wrote later. He wrote that in the beginning:

*"We talked vaguely of guerilla and irregular warfare, of special and para-military operations, stay-behind parties, resistance movements, sabotage and incendiarism, and darkly, and still more vaguely of 'agents'; but the exact role of the...Independent Companies had never been made clear." (Chapman 1948)*

The role of the Independent Companies would be:

*"to stay behind, live off the country or be provisioned from the air, and be a thorn in the flesh of the occupying enemy, emerging in true guerrilla style to attack vital points and then disappear again into the jungle. We also*

*visualised long range penetration of the enemy lines by parties highly skilled in fieldcraft and living off the country that they could attack their targets and get back without getting detected."* (Chapman 1948)

The first three companies had completed their training by the second half of 1941. Initially destined for the Middle East, with the Japanese threat growing, they were deployed in the islands to the north. The 2/1st Independent Company (sometimes just known as the 1st) was sent in sections to Manus, New Ireland, the Solomons and New Hebrides. The 2/2nd was sent to Timor, and the 2/3rd to New Caledonia.

The 1st to 8th Independent Companies, the colour patches of which appear here and on two New Zealand Units, were formed and trained in the Darby and Tidal River areas. Subsequently, Commando Training was continued thereafter at Canungra, Fraser Island and elsewhere in northern Queensland and Garden Island, Western Australia.

*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/>*