



DURING World War 2 Australia was under threat, mostly from Japan, and the primary methods of communication then were the written word, telegraph, telephone and the radio.

To protect shipping Royal Australian Navy warships were required to escort the convoys of ships travelling between Newcastle and the Queensland border, with bomber aircraft of the Royal Australian Air Force as escorts from the air. The escorts' task was to search for enemy submarines and attack them if detected. At this time of war, Australia was essentially on its own with no allies available for help.

Base Operations Unit No. 12 was established at Coffs Harbour in 1943 with Avro Anson and Beaufort Bombers providing air support to the shipping convoys. The Base needed to communicate with its aircraft, its control area and its Command Headquarters. Consequently, the radio communication headquarters was set up in the specially constructed underground bunker near the airfield on what we now know as City Hill. Following the air raids on Darwin and the North Coast of Australia, attack by enemy forces was seen as a real possibility. The radio communication equipment was valuable as were the personnel operating the base. To keep them safe from prying eyes or attack from enemy aircraft what better place than underground, Communication in times of war is, of course, of paramount importance. Then the Bunker played an extremely important role in facilitating communication. It is an interesting synergy today, during this time of peace that the Bunker continues to communication but in a very different way - as Australia's only cartoon gallery dedicated to the continuing exhibition of cartoons.

Initially the Bunker housed communication equipment needed to protect Australian citizens during the war. It continued to be used as a communication facility by the Civil Aviation Authority until falling into disuse in 1980.

Five years later, the Coffs City Rotary Club started a national competition for black and white cartoons that provided the basis of the major collection which exists today. As the collection grew from year-to-year a home was needed.

When the Coffs Harbour City Council was considering a proposal to redevelop City Hill as a Civic Cultural Centre, Rotarian John Champion, became aware of the derelict underground bunker.

John perceived the idea of redeveloping the bunker as a permanent home for the cartoon collection. He sold the concept to his Rotary Club and the Bunker Cartoon Gallery was born.

Since that time the collection has grown and there have been many exhibitions and functions including the annual Rotary Cartoon Awards, which have established the bunker more firmly than ever as the premier site of communication via the collection, conservation and interpretation of over 20,000 cartoon works that are the heart of the Bunker Cartoon Gallery.

Regular exhibitions, cartooning workshops and special events are held at the Bunker which is a vibrant and unique part of the local and national community and the City of Coffs Harbour is considered the 'Cartoon Capital of Australia'.

