

Via Australia to New Guinea

Many of the Regiment travelled on the "Andes" which made a fast passage to Australia, where the early arrivals in Adelaide were granted home leave to Victoria.

As the scattered ships approached land-fall, the thoughts of all the men were of leave, home and loved ones, and of how they would be greeted. The welcome sight of United States reconnaissance planes, out from Fremantle, was reassuring, but there were delays before unloading began. One diary entry from a traveller on the "City of Hankow" reads: *"We were delighted to move into the same wharf from which we had sailed, but if any welcome was expected there would have been sad disappointment. The wharf was strictly guarded and everything was quiet. The wharfies took one and a half hours for lunch which 'knocked' us."*

After their period of service under strict discipline, often with meagre rations, in harsh living conditions, and great danger, the returning servicemen experienced frustration and great difficulty in adjusting to the civilians' attitudes to so many matters, which seemed either of desperate national importance, or were utterly trivial to the returning soldier.

Colonel Rhoden was at Fremantle to welcome the first 7th Battery guns ashore there from the "City of Hankow". He went with them to Pearce R.A.A.F. Station out of Perth, where they and the other members of the Battery, as they arrived, were to provide anti-aircraft defence. Many guns were unloaded later in Adelaide and moved by rail to Perth.

The men were disappointed that they could not take home leave immediately. They had to be satisfied with the message they were able to send gratis by telegram: *"Arrived safely. See you as soon as leave is available."* N.C.O.s were given a pay advance of £5 and Gunners £3 with shore leave as compensation.

Gunner Arthur Miller remembers: *"Ned Nolan and I tried to book in at the Adelphi Hotel. No luck apparently because of rank. Ned went to a nearby phone and booked rooms for 'Colonel Johnson and his staff officer who would be arriving in town.' Ned then called to pick up the key for Colonel Johnson. We spent the night in a lovely suite with phone calls home. I think Ned forgot to pay."*

Conditions at the R.A.A.F. base at Pearce seemed to the gunners to be a home away from home. W.A.A.F.S. waiting on tables made the men feel that army life had suddenly become easy, with food, as one man recorded, *"beyond belief."*

They were amazed that their R.A.A.F. colleagues should

complain about their food and conditions, and came to the conclusion that they were just "*spoilt boys*", as one soldier wrote.

The arrival by plane of General Macarthur and General Gordon Bennett on 6th April stressed the importance of the unit's role in defence of the R.A.A.F. base at Pearce.

By the 14th April, all the 7th L.A.A. Battery's guns were in position around Pearce aerodrome, and within days the Battery was again at full strength.

Japanese victories to the north in Malaya, the proximity of Sumatra and Timor, and the destruction caused at Darwin and along the West Australian coast stressed the importance of efficiency in anti-aircraft defence.

Serving alongside the R.A.A.F. was a new pleasant experience for most gun crews and co-operation with the Americans, which involved training in the use of the Bofors for their newly-arrived units, was appreciated by all.

Life for service-men situated in the midst of civilian communities inevitably results in problems when the restrictions of military life become very apparent. The friendly people of Perth, however, made the troops welcome, and a number of 7th and 8th Battery found their brides in the West.

7th Battery moved from Pearce aerodrome to the Geraldton R.A.A.F. station 300 miles north of Perth on 10th January, 1943. American PBY5 Catalinas provided coast patrols from this area while Avro Ansons, training pilots, operated day and night from the airfield.

Daily routines to improve efficiency continued in anticipation of the chance to contribute to the defeat of the enemy. That opportunity appeared much closer with orders received on 5th June, 1943 that 7th Battery should transfer 6 x 40mm Bofors at Geraldton to 152nd L.A.A. Battery.

The Movement Control Order of 25th June transferred 7th L.A.A. Battery from Western Australia Line of Communication Area to the Victorian L. of C. area, by rail.

The ranks of 7th L.A.A. Battery were thinned when officers and N.C.O.s were posted to new anti-aircraft units, including 109th L.A.A. Regiment, 113th L.A.A. Battery, 116th L.A.A. Battery, 121st L.A.A. Battery, and the 2/8th L.A.A. Battery (Airborne).

The remaining 2 officers and 100 other ranks departed on 2nd July from Fremantle en-route to Melbourne, where the unit was disbanded from 9th July to 5th August while personnel took leave.

Departing from Melbourne on 6th August, 7th Battery arrived at Helidon near Brisbane on 9th August and as from 24th August, 1943 was designated 2/7th Aust. L.A.A. Battery, 2/2nd Composite A.A. Regiment (L.E.) under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Dalton.

The following day, 7th Battery prepared the camp site for 2/8th Aust. L.A.A. Battery (A.B.) who were welcomed on arrival by Brigadier Neylan.

7th Aust. L.A.A. Battery Workshops also came under command of 2/2nd Comp. A.A. Regiment.

A visit by Lieutenant-Colonel Hipworth and Lieutenant-Colonel Baglin (formally the original C.O. and 2i/c of 7th L.A.A. Battery) on 8th September, provided a happy reunion of 7th and 8th men before 2/8th Aust. L.A.A. (A.B.) departed two days later for Buna in New Guinea.

7th L.A.A. Battery followed on 22nd October, 1943, on the "Taroon", after calling at Gili Gili wharf Milne Bay (where 9th L.A.A. Battery served for an extended period), reaching Oro Bay on 26th October. There the battery took over L.A.A. defence of the Oro Bay area from a U.S.A. unit.

7th L.A.A. Battery met up again with 2/8th L.A.A. Battery when they moved to Buna on 28th February, 1944, to occupy positions along Buna Beach and at Cape Endaiadere to protect convoys for troop landings at Cape Gloucester, Arawa and New Britain.

The strength of the airforce operating in the area from Dobadura airfield was such that the threat from mosquitoes, rat-spread scrub typhus, and fleas was greater than that from enemy action.

On 4th May, 1944, the 7th left Buna to embark on the S.S. "Bath" for Townsville. On disembarkation the unit moved to the Staging Camp at Julargo, nine miles from Townsville.

On 13th May, the unit then moved to Kaling Staging Camp. Next move on 18th May was to Brisbane en route to Melbourne and home leave.

After commencing from Melbourne on 28th June, the return journey ended at Brisbane on the 30th; then at Strathpine Camp with 7th Division on 1st July, 1944, to be followed by training at the Canungra Jungle Warfare Training School from 21st August, 1944.

On 2nd September, 1944 Major K. Dyer was appointed O.C. 2/7th L.A.A. Battery, Captain Girdwood 2i/c, and "C" Troop was to be formed from 2/8th L.A.A. (A.B.) with Captain McGillivray in charge.

At the R.A.A.F. base at Archerfield near Brisbane, the unit specialised in the use of the Bofors as an anti-tank weapon at the Flinders Anti-tank range, as well as engaging in practice shoots in co-operation with the R.A.A.F. at Archerfield.

On 12th October, 1944, the unit was attached to 1st Australian Task Force and placed on "Notice to Move". It was anticipated the destination was Morotai.

8th Battery arrived from Buna on 16th October and the units came together at Archerfield on 25th October, 1944. Numerous exercises followed around the towns of Caboolture, Redcliffe,

Caloundra, Burleigh Heads as well as sessions at Coolangatta and Tweed Heads.

7th Battery joined the rest of the Regiment on the 25th January, 1945 at Caboolture, where postings and discharges during the following months scattered unit members. Following the end of the war on the 15th August, 1945, the process of disbanding 7th Battery was completed on the 3rd September, 1945.

Those who still remained in the Strathpine Camp departed for G.D.D. Melbourne on the 30th October. Gunner John Anderson who was in this party recorded in his diary: "*7th Aust L.A.A. Battery was broken up and we arrived at Yerrongapilly and thence to Clapham Junction before leaving for Melbourne on the 2nd November, 1945. Arrived at Camp Pell on 4th November, then to G.D.D. Watsonia and leave till 9th November. After further posting I was discharged from the 2nd A.I.F. at 2.30 p.m. on 18th April, 1946.*"

The opportunity for a reunion of the survivors of all who had served with 2/7th Aust. L.A.A. Battery had to await the return of prisoners-of-war.