

"TAKE POST!"

Newsletter of the
2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft
Regiment Association

April 1997



Members at the 1996 Anzac Reunion

*Top Row:- Peter MacGeorge (7), Phil Bannister (7), Mal Webster (7), Doug Simson (8), Ed Pitman (9).
2nd Row:- Killer Curtis (9), Duncan Sinclair (9), Ern Cope (8), Bill Schack, Brian Layton (7), Len Woolcock.
3rd Row:- Ian Evans (9), Bruce Tulloch (7), Jack Henry.
Front:- Spud Murphy (9), Dave Thompson (9), Pancho McDonald (9), Max Bennett (9), Reg Goldfinch (9).*

REUNION NOTICE

The Anzac reunion will be held on **Thursday, April 24, 1997**, from 12 noon until 3:30 pm (doors open not before 11:30 am), lunch and drinks provided. The subscription this year is **\$20** (again subsidised by the Association).

The venue is the same as last year — the **Air Force Convention Centre, 4 Cromwell Rd, South Yarra**. (Access to the car park is from Cromwell Road).

John Campbell, Hon Secretary.

NOTICE OF MEETING

The **Annual General Meeting** will be held at the **Air Force Convention Centre, 4 Cromwell Road, South Yarra** at 11:45 am (doors open not before 11:30 am), April 24, 1997. The AGM is held just prior to the Anzac reunion.

Members are reminded that nominations for Committee must be lodged with the Honorary Secretary 7 days before the meeting.

John Campbell, Hon Secretary.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

*It is with sincere regret
that we report
the passing
of former comrades:*

Noel Hammond	
A. J. Beath	
T. G. Chadwick	7 Bty
R. P. Noble	
W. P. Morrissey	7 Bty
Richard Smith	7 Bty
W. T. (Bill) Knight	7 Bty
R. Catchlove	9 Bty
Ron W. Morris	8 Bty
V. R. (Vic) Kent	
W. (Bill) Sexton	9 Bty
Hector G. Bird	9 Bty
Joe Oddy	9 Bty
Jack Allan	9 Bty
Tom H. Murphy	9 Bty
A. B. McCall	8 Bty
Fred Crees	9 Bty
M. Ampt	8 Bty
A. K. (Keith) Guy	8 Bty
T. H. Russell	
A. (Bill) Hillman	8 Bty
R. C. (Bob) Vansittart	7 Bty
Ron Carlson	
Geoff Clucas	9 Bty
Laurie Brown	7 Bty
Les (Runner) Williams	8 Bty
D. M. B. Fitzhardinge	9 Bty
James Carpenter	RHQ.
Don Coghlan	9 Bty

Lest We Forget

SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE

Shrine guided tours of about one hour duration are available to groups of up to 20 people, free of charge. Volunteer guides describe many unique features of the Shrine and its associated memorials.

Tour times are 10:30 am and 2:30 pm, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Bookings are essential, phone 9654 8415.

2/3rd AUSTRALIAN LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT ASSOCIATION.

President: CEC RAE.

Hon Secretary: JOHN CAMPBELL,
Box 205, PO Mentone, Vic.3194. Phone 9583 8756.

Assistant Secretary: BRUCE TULLOCH

Hon Treasurer: JOHN HEPWORTH.

Newsletter Editor: RON BRYANT.

Committee:

BERT BAGLIN : LES HARRIS : DICK HAWTING
DAVE THOMSON : ROY THOMSON
JACK CRITTENDEN : MAL WEBSTER

W.A. Contact: GORDON CONNOR.
6 Exton Place, Spearwood, WA 6163.

ORDER OF THE ANZAC MARCH

We will assemble (as last year) in Flinders Street, Melbourne, on the east side of Swanston Street. It is estimated that 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment will move off at about 9:30 am.

"Eyes Right" will be ordered at the Eternal Flame — *not* at the official party. From this year, the order of March will remain as Navy, Army, Air Force.

The March is for veterans. Children and grandchildren are not permitted to participate. (Children and grandchildren of World War One soldiers and sailors may march in the World War One Section).

Parking will be severely restricted in Birdwood Avenue all day — including the Dawn Service.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL TOURS

The Australian War Memorial is offering a range of tours, including Gallipoli and Western Front, Borneo, Vietnam and a European Art tour to cater for travellers with specific interests.

The costs are reasonable, as each tour is accompanied by experienced curators and historians from the War Memorial. Also included are flights direct from most major capitals, ground transport, transfers and first class accommodation at the 3-star plus level. Most meals are provided and the venues have been specially selected to enable you to experience the quality cuisine and provincial charm of the areas visited on tour. Participants also are able to customise their travel arrangements at the conclusion of the tour.

If you require additional information, please contact Lucy O'Donnell, Tours Coordinator, Australian War Memorial on (06) 243 4392 or write to GPO Box 345, Canberra ACT.

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The 1996 Reunion was enjoyed by the usual number of members despite the loss of fellowship of so many of our comrades. Gunners came from near and sometimes far away. The March was also well attended and it was gratifying to see the number of younger generation marching with us. This year, unfortunately, the official request is for no children to march!

There was great excitement at this time ten years ago when it was not known whether the book "*On Target*" would be delivered by the printers in time for distribution at the Reunion. There are now no copies available; but should anyone wish to read the book your local library should be able to arrange for an inter-library loan, as several libraries secured copies.

At our last Committee meeting it was discussed whether we should accept an invitation to mount a plaque on a Bofors gun at the North Balwyn Sub-Branch of the RSL; and whether we should apply to the Shrine Trustees for a Tree in memory of the Regiment together with an appropriately worded plaque. The Bofors gun project has been completed (see the later article and photo). We will report on the Memorial Tree at the Reunion.

On September 5, nine of us attended a wreath laying ceremony at the Shrine of Remembrance to commemorate the Battle of Milne Bay. After the ceremony some of our members proceeded to a luncheon at the Air Force Memorial Centre, South Yarra. The events were organised by the Royal Australian Air Force Association and will be repeated this year. Interested members should contact the Association on 9826 8573 in August for details. Our Regiment was acknowledged as being represented through Max Bennett.

On December 3, 1996, John Ballantyne, Col Reilly, Dick Plant and Ken Lloyd were invited to the School of Artillery, North Head, Sydney, there to relate some of their wartime experiences to a contingent of South Australian NCOs who were being instructed in anti-aircraft ground to air missiles. A letter of appreciation was received by our members from Major Gregory V Marinich, Instructor in Gunnery (US) Air Defence.

Over many years Ron Berry of Beaumaris and Max Parsons (ex 2/12 Field Regiment) have assisted the Association, in a voluntary capacity, to produce *Take Post*. Ron produces the address labels and keeps the address records up-to-date; Max and Linda use their sophisticated computer equipment to prepare the newsletter for the printer. We appreciate their great assistance.

I thank the Committee for their work and support throughout the year. I look forward to seeing as many members as possible at the Reunion.

Cec Rae

JOTTINGS FROM THE SECRETARY

I have received letters from old mates from all Batteries and many from wives and family members after the death of their loved one. They bring back many memories of events of years ago.

In a letter from **Vic Kent's** daughter, **Ann Lee** said she would appreciate hearing from anyone who knew and served with her Dad. Ann's address is 36 Orange Grove, Castle Hill, NSW 2154.

I have answered many questions asked by **Eric Maxwell**, son of **Vern**. Others in our Association have also helped Eric, so he has a picture of his Dad's service not previously known to his family. We caught up with **John Graham** of Sydney who advised us of **Bob Catchlove's** death. **Beryl**, widow of **Raleigh Hawkins**, wrote to tell us that Raleigh would have been proud to know that his grandson Simon graduated from Duntroon and the ADFA and is now in the Artillery in Adelaide. (We're proud to know that too). We received a nice letter from **Gwen**, widow of **Rol Tonkin** (7). Rol was Mentioned in Despatches for his secret operations in Prison Camp. Whilst working for MI5 he was also awarded the French/German Star.

Alan Bussy Read in Buderim wrote to say he couldn't recognise **Hughie Hill** and **Norm Marshall** from photos in *Take Post*. So! Fifty years later! **Hec Bird** hasn't been so good. **Dave Owens** sends his regards to old mates. **George Bartlett**, Workshops, finds it a bit too far to get to reunions. **Ted Sands** actually recognised himself in *Take Post*. **Bill Cassidy** (7) has told his story of 4 years as a POW to his son Barry. Good to see **Bill Schack** at the last reunion — keep coming Bill.

Rod, son of **Richard Smith** (7), attended the last reunion and found two of Richard's mates who were able to relate some stories to Rod.

If anyone did not get a copy of "On Target" copies are available at Eastern Regional and Parkdale Libraries and we know several members presented copies to other libraries.

The December 1996 "Mufti" had a two-page spread on **Neil Anderson** (7) and a photo of the Dirty Thirteen; it's well worth reading

Were you camped at Caboolture? A history is being written by **David Sinclair** of 3 Henzell Street, Redcliff, Qld. 4020. A display of a Bofors in a gun pit is about finished. David would appreciate any photos taken at Caboolture (with captions). If you are able, do help this great effort of the Caboolture Historical Society,

Did any POW's Europe who contacted Dr. Barter in Canberra receive an acknowledgment from her? If so, would you please let me know by adding a note on your Reunion response note.

John Campbell.

ESKIMO NELL

8th Battery gunners who were in Derna, that attractive little port in Libya, in 1941, will remember the small ship *Eskimo Nell*, captained by Lt-Commander Duff. He was mentioned in our history "On Target" (refer p 160).

The excellent book "Tobruk" by Anthony Heckstall-Smith (publisher: Anthony Blond Ltd, London — great reading if you can get a copy from your library) narrates subsequent incidents of the colorful career of Duff and his *Eskimo Nell*:-

The *Eskimo Nell* was one of six little sponge-fishing vessels which we had captured early in 1941; four in Tobruk and two in Derna. The Navy used them for all manner of harbour duties such as ferrying troops to the destroyers and salvage work.

One by one they all fell victims to the violence of the enemy and the elements. F1, having been damaged by near misses, was moored alongside a wreck at Tobruk and lived on for a time as a gun-site for two 20-mm Bredas manned by the 38th Light AA Battery. But one day after she had been repaired, 'Bob' Blackburn, who had been captain of the *Ladybird*, took F1 out to sea to save the crews of two landing craft that had been bombed. It was blowing hard and no sooner did she strike the seas than her stern post fell to bits and she sank. Blackburn and his crew were left swimming well within range of 'Bardia Bill'. But the latter's gunners had the decency to leave them alone to be rescued by a mine sweeper.

F2 was destroyed by the Stukas while hauled up on the slips, F3 blew up on a mine, while F5 and F6 were wrecked in a sandstorm. But F4, old *Eskimo Nell*, survived the siege.

When Derna fell to Rommel, Lt-Commander Douglas Duff, RNR, sailed her eastwards, with three 7-mm Bredas and a 7-pounder anti-tank gun mounted on her deck. On the voyage she fought a duel with an Italian submarine and forced it to crash-dive. Later, off Bardia, she was mistaken for an enemy by the gunboat Aphis and came within an ace of being blown out of the water. In this action Duff was wounded, but *Eskimo Nell* again survived to reach Alexandria. Refitted, she sailed for Tobruk with a mixed cargo, which included a consignment of land-mines, and ran the gauntlet of the Stukas in 'bomb alley'.

There was something about her high prow and rakish stern that appealed to the eye of Captain Smith and caused him to keep her at Tobruk. She was a proud little ship, and her name which was inscribed on her wheel house was fashioned in metal studs from Army boots. She was known to very man in the garrison, and since she ferried thousands of soldiers ashore on their arrival and carried them out to the destroyers when they were relieved, she was their first and last link with the fortress. During her life she must have survived more bombs and shells than any other single ship in the Royal Navy.

WAR TIME MEMORIES OF MARBLE BAR

Dedicated to the memory of Jack Armstrong

by Signaller Terry Gleeson

On the breaking up of the 2/3rd Light AA Regiment in 1943, a number of former members of that Unit were transferred to a Composite AA Regiment under the command of Lieut-Colonel Rhoden, responsible for the Defence of American Air Bases in the north west of Western Australia.

My Unit was sent to Corunna Downs, a cattle/sheep property located about 20 kilometres from Marble Bar, which was owned by the Drake-Brockman family, well known in Western Australia in the Legal, Judicial and Parliamentary life of that State.

The Air Force Base located there was known as No.73 Operational Base and, from there operated the 380th Bomber Group of the United States and No.25 Squadron of the RAAF Flying Liberator Bombers. The tactical advantage of this Base was that the Bombers flew over the ocean to their targets in the Celebes and Java, thus avoiding detection by land based Japanese Fighter planes. No mention of this Base was ever made in the press or radio. Its location was never discovered by the Japanese.

We eventually took part in the Borneo Invasion, landing on Labuan Island on the 10th June, 1945.

Support for that landing was given by the very same Bomber Groups from Corunna Downs.

The conditions endured by the Troops at Corunna Downs were considered to be the worst they had suffered during their service in the Middle East and later in the Pacific. Located in sandy and spinifex ridden country in the Pilbara with the temperature between 100 and 120 degrees Fahrenheit, the brackish bore water was often too hot or salty to drink. Water was pumped from bores during daylight hours, showers were impossible because of the high water temperature.

On medical direction, any sport played had to be finished by 9:00 am. Fresh food and bread was unknown and meals were a continuous diet of tinned food. On occasions a stray beast was slaughtered, but because of the heat, blow flies, lack of refrigeration and butchering skills, that exercise usually ended up in disaster.

73 Operational Base was in use between 1943-45. Today, over 50 years later, it is hard to visualise the activity that took place in this lonely and desolate area. Remnants of the Base still remain, the cracked bitumen runways are still visible, also the skeletal remains of the RAAF buildings.

Sadly, the location and importance of this Base in the Pacific War is relatively unknown in Western Australia.

Corunna Downs is mentioned in the book *My Place* by well known Aboriginal author, Sally Morgan, and in the *Bush Tuckerman* TV Series.

A DIFFICULT ROUTE TO CAPTIVITY

A rescue force of three cruisers and six destroyers evacuated 4,000 men from Heraklion, leaving port at 0320 hours. The steering of the destroyer *Imperial* jammed as a result of earlier bomb damage. Delay was caused through transferring the *Imperial's* 900 men to the destroyer *Hotspur*, before sinking *Imperial* with torpedoes.

Early in the morning of May 29, daylight found the convoy still in the dreaded 'Bomb Alley', the Kaso Straits. A couple of German reconnaissance planes spotted the ships which soon came under constant air attacks by over 100 aircraft, including Stuka dive bombers, ME110's and Dorniers. These savage attacks inflicted great casualties and were maintained against the Naval convoy until 1500 hours. At around 0630 the *Hereward* was immobilised by a Stuka dive bomber which struck the ship with a direct hit down one of the funnels.

Abandon Ship!

We were told to make our way up to the top deck where the order was given "to abandon ship; every man for himself". Incredibly, there was no sign of panic or fear amongst us. We seemed strangely stoical, or maybe we were tired and numb from the events of the past few weeks. There was some difficulty negotiating a narrow ladder leading to the top deck. We helped each other.

On arrival topside I was amazed at the number of men already in the water, amongst a film of oil. Enemy planes (ME110's) were flying around the ship, strafing and I remember quite well seeing the tracer bullets ricocheting off the ship. The only gun, a 4.7 not immobilised, fired a shell on a low trajectory at a low flying plane; the shock from this gun almost knocked me off my feet. Looking around I noticed the AA crews seemingly just lolling at their posts, no doubt all dead. I watched a naval officer with a revolver mercifully end the suffering of one badly mangled sailor held together in a canvas support jacket.

No Life jackets.

The killer bomb from a Stuka had penetrated through to the engine room bursting steam pipes which in turn inflicted shocking burns to exposed body parts of the engine room personnel. As all lifeboats had been destroyed, all floatable or buoyant materials such as chairs, stools, tables, planks were tossed

overboard, together with a few Carley floats. Ironically, it was the only time we troops were not issued with a life jacket, which would result in a number of drownings.

Mayday.

With enemy bombers buzzing around like angry wasps, I could see the rest of the convoy heading off into the distance. The decision had been made not to risk further lives. A few days earlier, whilst rendering

help to survivors from the sunken destroyer *Greyhound* the British cruisers *Gloucester* and *Fiji* were also sunk by the Luftwaffe. However, it was quoted to us afterwards that a "May Day" message was radioed from the convoy that there were men in the water needing assistance.

Being still in the Kaso Straits, we could see land in the distance on both sides; some estimates put it between 16 or 20 miles away. It was still too far to swim unaided. Nevertheless, it certainly reassured me and gave me confidence that I could make it, having in mind that I once swam over a mile downstream in the Yarra River close to Melbourne. My next

move was to divest myself of all clothing, except a shirt and singlet, I neatly folded the clothes and placed them on the deck with the 'old, trusty friend' my tin hat on top, the army training still very much to the fore.

Ropes had been fastened to the ships rails. Men who could not swim were clinging to these ropes, some drowning quickly beside the ship. Others with the same problems elected to stay on board and go down with the ship. One soldier in particular, with full gear and a Bren machine gun strapped across his shoulders jumped into the sea and went straight down.

A Gallant Ship goes under.

Having watched a mate perform a very ordinary plunge from the deck as he dived overboard I decided to lower myself into the water by rope and maintain some dignity. After discarding my shirt, I swam a fair distance from the stricken ship, now broken and wallowing aimlessly in the sea. I was mindful that a sinking ship can drag all those close by under, in its final vortex. However, it was some time later, with the help of some well placed charges of explosive before that gallant ship eventually went to her final resting place.

In our Unit history "On Target", we read of the evacuation from Crete on 29th May 1941 by the Navy of men from our 7th Battery and from other Units after the German airborne invaders had won the day, albeit at tremendous cost.

Most of us would agree that the episodes of the bombing of the ships and the sinking of HMS Hereward were amongst the most dramatic in the history of our Regiment.

In our Newsletters, we have published further accounts of the events of that time.

Mal Webster of 7 Battery lent us his remarkably detailed wartime diary. With his kind permission, we have extracted this account of the sinking of the Hereward and of subsequent events up until when Mal became a POW.

A Difficult Route to Captivity (cont):

After swimming around I came to a Carley float and managed to clamber on board, helping to paddle it. Soon most of the float was under water from the weight of the men on board and those climbing onto it. One of those clinging had a nasty looking shrapnel wound to his face so I changed positions with him to let him aboard.

Whether he survived, I never found out. Still confident I could swim back to the land, I foolishly left the Carley float.

In the meantime, our gallant troop commander, Lieutenant Jim Mann, was swimming around, strongly encouraging and helping men in the water. He refused to take up a position on a Carley float, leaving it for another man. Sadly, he was not among the final survivors. Once again we had lost a fine officer. "Jim, did I ever thank you for the risk you took to locate me that night of May 20th? I still wonder."

German planes continued to buzz around; some even strafed us in the water. I remember 'duck diving' under the water to avoid the bullets. A Dornier dropped a stick of bombs in the water; whether they were intended to hit the stricken *Hereward* or maim those swimming away, I will never know. The bombs, as they exploded, felt like an electric shock as they jarred my body. I felt no resentment to the attackers as war is war. There are very few niceties associated with these situations.

The Red Cross.

Next, a remarkable, and I felt miraculous happening occurred. This resulted in the saving of many lives. An Italian float plane, clearly marked with well known Red Cross markings, arrived overhead and dropped some flares. I looked up at the plane, not realising it's significance and the major role the Red Cross would play in my salvation, and for many of those in the water, not only then, but in the years ahead. With its arrival the German planes coincidentally left the scene; probably to refuel and rearm on close by Scarpanto and thus continue the relentless attacks on the rest of our convoy, which had long disappeared from our view.

Later, I was to learn that the International Red Cross, although it's headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland, had its origins in Italy: The Red Cross movement had its beginnings on the bloody battle field of Solferino in Northern Italy in 1859. Henry Dunant, a Swiss, appalled at the suffering he witnessed, rallied the women of a nearby town to help bring comfort to the wounded of both sides. From this incident grew a world wide movement of more than 230 million people, committed to the care of victims of conflict or disaster. All Red Cross action in the world today is motivated by the ideals of Henry Dunant.

Whilst swimming away from the Carley float I found a plain cork life jacket in the water, which fitted around my neck. Soon it played havoc by chafing a lot of skin off my chin and neck, causing it to bleed. I foolishly made yet another mistake by discarding this hard cork life jacket.

Strangely, my mother told me later that I had come to her, in a 'dream', that very day, saying I was in trouble in the sea. Also, she said that there were some wounds on my throat, which I was clutching. Admittedly, I had been chafed on the neck and was

suffering from a very sore throat caused by the salt water and the rough seas. These uncanny intuitions seem incomprehensible. At the time I did not recall thinking of my family at home in Australia; maybe it was my sub-

conscious at work. I was too busy in the direction of survival. Sometimes, as I swam towards the land which now seemed much further away, I could hear distant cries for help.

I became very tired and cold when I, fortunately, came across an English sailor paddling along with a wooden plank, approximately 10 feet long by 2 feet wide. On asking him courteously if he would mind by joining him, as I was 'dead beat' he said "certainly". Shortly afterwards another sailor joined us. The board would not support us but provided a lot of buoyancy as we swam with it. To add to my personal worries my now exhausted muscles cramped up badly in both my thighs and legs. These attacks doubled up my legs completely. One sailor told me to straighten them out and keep kicking them. It was agonising to do this, which in turn would send everything numb from the waist down. Forcing myself to keep kicking, the cramp would go away for awhile. In all, four cramping attacks certainly weakened my physical condition.

The sea roughened and a strong cross current prevented us from making headway towards land. It seemed almost hopeless. One sailor just drifted away, never to be seen again. I can well remember his very dark brown eyes, so stoic and sad. I asked the other sailor did he think we would make it; he laughed and said "lets keep kicking".

Exhaustion.

Last thing I remembered was working my very tired legs and swimming ever onwards with one arm holding on tightly across the plank. In the corner of my right eye I can see a cross. Pondering about it later, it must have been the 'cross tree' mast on the Italian Navy MAS motor torpedo boat that salvaged me from the sea. I do not recall being fished from the water. Maybe I hung on to that life saving plank, even though unconscious from sheer exhaustion. One of my mates, Bill Garrigan, who had been picked up earlier recounted that he watched the Italian sailors drag what he thought was my dead body from the sea and

“I was dead beat”
An understatement by
Mal Webster.

drop it on the deck. Much to his surprise they left me there. It appeared that when a body was pulled from the water it was immediately tossed back if dead.

After the five or more hours spent swimming in the Kaso Straits, I was to spend another two hours lying unconscious on the deck of the Italian MAS. On gaining consciousness, the first person I recognised was Bob McDonald, sitting opposite me, looking like a ghost in the small cabin of the boat. I did not speak but staggered up a few steps onto the open deck. As I reeled, the sailors held onto me; I was in a dazed condition and looked at the torpedoes slung on the deck. For a moment, I thought the sailors were Greeks with their tanned and swarthy appearances. It was some time later, when my head cleared, that I realised I was now well and truly 'un Prigioniero di Guerra' (POW) of the Italians.

To Scapanto.

We had entered a harbour and were fast approaching a jetty on the island of Scapanto. Feeling groggy I laid down on the deck for a few minutes before being helped off the boat by Italian soldiers, who also gave me a blanket to put around me as I wore only a short athletic singlet. There were quite a few of us rescued from the sea by Italian motor torpedo boats. We could only feel grateful as they had travelled 80 miles from Scapanto to pick up the survivors from the Hereward. No doubt it was that Italian Red Cross seaplane that prompted the rescue mission.

One or two of the Carley floats were found later by an Italian destroyer, which brought those saved to a total of 236 men, according to my diary, although two of these men would later die in a Rhodes Island hospital from exposure. One of these was Sgt Ossie Bossence from our 7th Battery, who still rests on Rhodes Island, (Rhodes War Cemetery.)

Many Casualties.

Of the *Hereward's* complement, 4 Officers and 72 ratings were lost, either killed on board or drowned. With the loss of troops, mostly from drowning, the number of men lost exceeded 250, whilst another 234 men became POWs. Regarding the English sailor who let me share his plank I did not see him again either. Maybe he was a Naval Officer and therefore went to an Officer's camp or just floated away asleep before rescue. Thinking about it all, I was a very fortunate survivor indeed. Some guardian angel protected me despite my foolishness in leaving the Carley float and discarding the cork lifejacket that I had found floating in the sea.

We walked through the main street of Scapanto, a tired and bedraggled bunch, scantily dressed in singlets or only underpants, some completely nude and badly sunburned. Every now and then we needed to rest, such as our tiredness. Women and children

watched us move by, looking genuinely sorry and showed pity and compassion. After a short distance, we arrived at a large stable-like-building where we laid down, or sat, resting on straw.

Most of us were suffering from a raging thirst, our throats were dry and raw from the salt water. Our thirst seemed unquenchable as we literally drank the place dry of water. A meal of bread and pasta was given to us. I couldn't even taste it because my throat was so sore and dry. Then an embarrassing attack of diarrhoea forced me back into the sea to cleanse my soiled body. Drying in the warm sun soon made me feel a little, better, but still desperately tired. It was interesting talking amongst ourselves, of our experiences following the order to abandon ship.

How easy it was to fall asleep in the sea from sheer exhaustion and just float away, even from a Carley float. The survivors spoke of the absence of fear, the hopelessness of trying to swim back to Crete, a target too far away. Having the land in view probably cost the lives of the strong swimmers. It appeared no one reached the shores of Crete; the strong cross currents of the Kaso Straits would have made the task impossible. We talked of those good mates with whom we had shared so much together, and who were now gone forever.

Mal with others was taken to the island of Rhodes to continue his experiences as a POW.

His diary records many matters of important history including his dangerous living in North Italy as a member of Italian Partisan forces which he joined after escaping from his POW camp, then going on to fight Italian fascists and the occupying Germans until the end of World War 2. All of this is indeed another remarkable story.

PLAN AHEAD

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has prepared an excellent information folder entitled "**Planning Ahead**" — a comprehensive guide to putting your affairs in order. Amongst other things it contains information on legal issues, financial planning and housing.

Single, widowed or married persons should fill in the personal information sheets and confidential record forms **now** as the information could prove of great help to your family or executors in the difficult time following a bereavement.

Executors of a will experience many problems in preparing the estate for probate — a set of completed documents such as are included in "**Planning Ahead**" would simplify this task.

If you would like a copy, write to the Department of Veterans' Affairs, GPO Box 87A, Melbourne 3001 or telephone (freecall) 1800 113 304.

MEDALS AND CLASPS

Widening of eligibility criteria.

The Medals Section staff has asked *Take Post* to advise members of changes to the eligibility periods for certain service medals.

We have been requested to ask you to carefully read the qualification requirements (especially the dates!) before rushing to apply.

Most of our members have the medals and stars for the areas in which they served **but some failed to qualify** because the end of the war prevented them completing the qualifying period of six months — reduced time requirements may now make them eligible.

1939/45 Star: Awarded for 6 months service in the Pacific theatre of operations between 8/12/41 and 2/9/45. **Now approved:** Entry into operational service in the qualifying area during the last 6 months of the period, provided the member was still in the area on 2/9/45. (Also for service in Northern Territory between 19/2/42 and 12/11/43).

Africa Star: Awarded for entry into operational service in North Africa, west of the Suez Canal, between 10/6/40 and 12/5/43 inc., or for entry into service in Syria during the Syrian Campaign: **8/6/41 to 11/7/41.**

Pacific Star: Awarded for entry into operational service in the Pacific theatre of operations between 8/12/41 and 2/9/45

Australian Service Medal 1939/45: Awarded for 30 days full-time or 90 days part-time service in Australian Defence Forces between 3/9/39 and 2/9/45.

The "**new**" 1945-75 Australian Service Medal is approved by Her Majesty the Queen — details are as follows:

AUSTRALIAN SERVICE MEDAL 1945-75 with Clasp.

(Please note qualification period is after the WW2 ceasefire).

Japan: 30 days service in Japan with BCOF, 3/9/45 to 28/4/52.

Korea: 30 days service in Korea, Japan or Okinawa, 28/7/53 to 26/8/57.

Thai/Malay: 30 days service on Anti-Terrorist ops on Thailand-Malaysian Border, 1/8/60 to 16/8/64.

PNG: 30 days service in Papua New Guinea (Papua or New Guinea), 3/9/45 to 16/9/75.

(There are various other areas of qualification, such as Thailand 1962-68, Kashmir 1948-75, West New Guinea 1962-63, Indonesia 1947-51, ME 1948-75, Berlin 1948-49, FESR (Navy) 1955-71, but it is most doubtful if these could interest our members).

Having very carefully checked your periods of service in the areas shown above and found that you are entitled to a medal or clasp, applications should be

made in writing to the Medals Section and the address is as follows:—

Medals Section,
Soldier Career Management Agency,
GPO Box 393D
Melbourne Vic 3001.

Applications should include Army number, Full name and initials, Unit, medal or clasp you believe you should receive and details of the dates and place of service.

If in doubt, enquiries may be made to Army Medals Section — phone 1800 065 149.

BORNEO: If you served for 30 days after 3/9/45 in Borneo this area of operations has **NOT** been included (YET) — **so don't apply.**

THE ITALY STAR

We asked Peter Brimacombe, son of Harold Brimacombe for information on how he obtained the Greek Medal and Italy Star due to his father. This is his reply:—

My father Harold Brimacombe died in August 1989 without ever making an application for his Army service medals, so I decided to apply for them and wrote the first of what turned out to be many letters over two years. Initially I contacted Australian Army records office (CARO) to ask for a copy of his service record and details of his medals entitlement. Next was the Veterans' Affairs office to make arrangements to view his file and later, I wrote to a couple of the Italian families that had given him food and shelter during his time as an escaped POW in Italy.

After his service documents and 5 medals were received, Mal Webster informed me that Harold should have also been entitled to the "Greek Medal" and an "Italy Star".

The Greek Medal application was easy to process, it only required an Australian Army "*certificate of service*" confirming his time on Crete (prior to being rescued/captured by the Italians from the sea off Crete in May 1941). CARO issued the necessary certificate which we lodged with the Greek Embassy along with a written request for the medal to be issued.

Obtaining the Italy Star was much more difficult. Particularly due to the requirement to *prove service with the Partisans between 11/6/43 and 8/5/45*. Exhaustive searches of Australian Army records and the Canberra War Museum archives produced no information at all. I wrote letters to the RSL in several states and while they published my letters, no useful information came from them either. The Australian Ex-POW Association couldn't help me, and the Italian Partisans' Association both here and in Italy could not

even verify his involvement with them from their scant records. Although I was able to trace several other Australian soldiers that my father had been known to be with, none were alive to confirm or support our medal claim.

Italian Partisans with whom he was known to have had direct contact had also died, but their wives, sons and daughters were able to provide me with some information about his comings and goings from their homes, including the names of several other soldiers he was with.

I next wrote to the British Defence Archives in the hope that they may be able to locate (and release) information from their debriefing files. We understood that British Officers had debriefed him at Naples late May or early June 1945. Their reply confirms and supports the earlier information we had been able to obtain, mostly from Italian civilians, and we now have the *Italy Star*. While it is not a complete story, it is nevertheless a story, and we were delighted to read it after all this time.

Should any of your readers wish to make similar applications for information from the British Defence archives, the information sheets and application forms I have enclosed will enable them to initiate a search. I will gladly assist any that require further help if they care to contact me.

Peter Brimacombe

Our thanks go to Peter for his efforts and information. Ron Bryant has several copies of the application forms mentioned by him. If you feel you qualify for the Italy Star, write to Ron at 6 Blanche Avenue, Parkdale 3195 or direct to Peter at 4 McLeod Street, Doncaster 3108.

POW MATES MEET AGAIN

When Clyde Hilzinger made his first trip to Melbourne he did more than just check out the local sights. The 10-day coach holiday became the reunion of a lifetime when he picked up a copy of Progress Press, April 30, while out walking in Hawthorn.

The front page picture featured North Balwyn RSL veteran Bruce Tulloch, who Clyde last saw in 1944, when the two men were in a German prisoner of war camp in Bavaria. Bruce Tulloch and other veterans were pictured attending a dawn service on Anzac Day.

"My wife and I were walking back to the motel and I saw a paper on the street so I picked it up," Mr Hilzinger, 76, said last week from his home in Yamba on the NSW north coast.

"I got back to the California Motel, read the story and wondered if it was the same Bruce Tulloch who was a POW with me in Germany. I got the manager to ring all the Tullochs in the phone book — it was the moment of my life to meet him again".

"Bruce and I were cuddling like I don't know what.

I've got a lot of respect for him. There was a busload of about 40 of us having dinner and they were all clapping and cheering."

The emotional reunion saw the former friends swapping stories and promising to meet again.

Mr Tulloch, 78, who lived in North Balwyn for 40 years before moving with his wife, Betty, to an East Doncaster retirement village, served with the 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. He was captured in Crete in 1941 and spent the rest of the war in the Hammelburg POW camp.

"I never thought I'd see him again," Mr Tulloch said. He said their reunion, in Hawthorn, was "fantastic. It brought back so many memories,"

The men worked as farm labourers in the village of Masabach, where the townsfolk were very anti-Nazi, Mr Hilzinger recalled.

He said that when an escape attempt by some POWs went wrong, a harder regime was instituted at the camp.

"A new rule came in that we weren't allowed to open our Red Cross parcels after 1.30pm," he said.

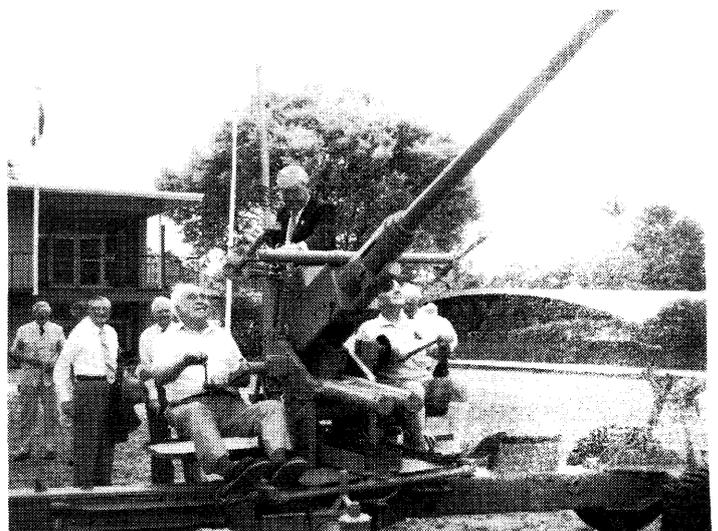
"The people Bruce worked for were very nice people and one Sunday he returned late from a celebration they had invited him to (unlike many POWs, prisoners at Hammelburg were not confined to camp).

"When he got back and wanted to open his Red Cross parcel, the guard wouldn't let him and started getting stuck into him."

Mr Hilzinger also said he and a fellow POW from Queensland rescued Mr Tulloch and took him, bleeding, through the village to a local doctor.

"That was the last I saw of him. I knew he'd gone to hospital but I never knew if he survived the war until last month," he said,

In action at North Balwyn!



Keith Rossi, Les Harris, Mal Webster, Les Stephens, John Campbell, Frank Washbourne, Jack Crittenden.

For more information about this "action" picture see page 12

THE SENTRY'S LOG

During a visit to Adelaide, **Les Harris** contacted **Laurie Brown** and **Murray Takasuka**. Laurie is reported to be as cheerful as ever in spite of back problems which seriously hinder his activities. "Taka" recalled his period at the Randwick School of Artillery where he attended a course with **John Campbell**. Taka's health has caused him problems; but he looks forward to being able to attend another re-union in Melbourne.

Since the last re-union, **Tom Dawson** and **Frank Washbourne** visited **Mac McGillivray** at his retirement village and he was going well, although they thought Mac could enter a lightweight event now. **Keith Wallace**, **Dick Hawting**, **Runner Williams** and **Frank** visited **Harry Reid** at Garfield and lunched at the local, where they fought the battles over again.

Stan Baker (8) telephoned to advise that **Bill Hillman** had passed on, at the age of 81 years. Stan is keeping well looking after his house and gardens at Tweed Heads. He has given up caravanning since wife his died a few years ago.

George Howat (8) has had a stroke but is battling on. **George Young** (8) has been at Kyneton Hospital for a few years; but seems to be slipping. **Jim Russell** (7) has also had a stroke and is at the Jones Nursing Home at Murchison.

Terry Gleeson who was a Sig with the Regiment reported in and said that he and his wife are well and keep busy giving a hand to look after the grandchildren. Terry said that **Bill Waddell** has not been so good.

Rockhampton's Rats of Tobruk Association has a vision - a shrine of remembrance that will also serve the community as a pleasant parkland retreat. Rockhampton Council bequeathed about 2,000 square metres at the corner of Alma and Albert Streets to the Association. The plan is to have a cenotaph - a replica of the one at Tobruk - surrounded by lawns, gardens and walkways.

Mal Webster (7) has his most comprehensive and detailed Diary in print. We are fortunate to have an extract from it in this issue telling something of his dramatic experiences after HMS *Hereward* was bombed and sunk. **Bill Dellar** (7) also has his POW and other experiences in print.

Alex Barnett (8) has his story of POW days up to proof stage. His wife Lois has been very ill; but has been progressing slowly. In Lois' absence in hospital, Alex developed some flair with micro-wave cooking. Amongst other things, he discovered (using his pharmaceutical training and his POW experience) that the rendering of beetroot leaves provided a palatable source of magnesium.

A Flashback to the Middle East



"Fatima, I wish you'd tell your Auntie there are no more vacancies!"

REMINISCENCES OF A REO

by Gunner Frank Hands.

Our mob arrived at Camp 95, Palestine, after the 8th Battery's arrival back from Tobruk late in 1941. Old and new gunners got to know each other, new crews were set up and some old friends departed to new units. I felt lucky to be picked for Arthur Duke's crew in 8th Battery, with Arthur Wright as a co-gun layer. Arthur and Roy Farr kept a fatherly eye on me and I learnt a lot from them.

Needing a hair-cut, I was sent to "Sonny" Payne. I had pictured him as a nice blond Adonis. If Sweeney Todd had walked out of the tent to greet me, I wouldn't have been more surprised at this big, dark, tough-looking bloke.

There was a call for an inspection parade. Sergeant-Major Bill Kerr screamed out — "Gunner McFarlane, double-up, you're holding up the parade!" Sandy, not be upset, replied, "Ah Bill, you can't expect an old bloke like me to double-up," to the merriment of everyone including the officers.

That was a cold Christmas to New Year, with snow all about, and no hot water for the showers. I can still see Geoff Davies squatting under a tap in the tent lines, being braver than most. Being so cold, I don't think the tents were malodorous, but I still remember the smell of toast done on the primus stoves. George Howat was one of our crew. I was most impressed by

his eloquent language such as "the hills where I came from were so steep, the blowflies wore crutching straps", or when George Spilker was practising with his guitar in the next tent, George shouting out "you sound like a billy-goat piddling in a tin can." I liked his crow calls, "wark wark, I'll have his eyes, you can have his arse".

The passing of Ron Horner jogged my memory on when we were sited at Pelican Point during the "Battle for Perth", with Arthur Duke in charge. As we reckoned that the US Navy Catalina group had us well covered and the enemy was over 1,000 miles away, we didn't bother posting night guards at the gun. On enquiry, Arthur Duke reported that the gun was in an excellent position with 360 degrees vision and we had good quarters and food. BHQ officers arrived to inspect such a good position. To the crew's amazement the gun sights were missing, so we all got 14 days detention, and had to put on sentries at night as well as day.

After a week of this, missing out on our beauty sleep, George Howat suggested installing a trip wire, so we located wire, alarm bells and hacksaw blades which were wired up to the gun tractor. We slept peacefully for several nights until late one night, the bells sounded and gunners came running, shouting "Halt, who goes there"! The culprit was caught, an owl, which was put into the bed of Ron Horner who was drinking in town. When Ron arrived home to see his bed blankets flapping up and down, he thought he had the DTs. We all had rooms in the sea scouts' building. Don R, Bill Brasher would drive his motor bike into his mate's rooms with motor revving hard after his mates' drinking sessions.

The Americans of the Catalina flying boat were a generous lot. We were free to call in at their mess if late home, for supper, where there were half a dozen varieties of icecream and beautiful coffee on tap.

Ah well, it was a tough battle in Perth, letting loose a few accidental shots across to Applecross, but we survived, although we did lose a number of Victorians to WA following their marriages to Perth girls.

MORE ON THE BOFORS RBS-70

from "The Gunners" by David Horner.

In 1986, the Army was given approval to purchase nineteen units of the RBS-70 very low level air defence system as well as training simulators from the Swedish Bofors Company. The weapon was a surface to air missile system with an intercept range of five kilometres to an altitude of three kilometres. The missile was guided along a laser corridor as the operator kept the cross-hairs of his sight on the target.

According to the Defence Report for 1985-86 its unique guidance and laser fusing system made it virtually immune to known and foreseen counter measures. Man-transportable, it was fired from a light weight stand.

A detachment with two fire units was deployed on HMAS Success during the 1990-91 Gulf War.

The Bofors RBS-70



The Missile in Action

"THE GUNNERS" -

A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY

by David Horner

This first complete history of Australian Artillery begins with the formation of volunteer artillery units in the 1850's. It tells of Australian gunners in wars from the time of the Sudan War up until the Gulf War. There are many references from our history "On Target" and to our Regiment's activities. The following paragraphs are extracted from "The Gunners":-

The Second World War in Retrospect

The Second World War marked the high point in the history of the Australian artillery. In the First World War the Australian artillery deployed the largest number of units together in action at one time, conducted sustained operations over several years, and suffered heavy casualties - 3,101 gunners died out of the total Australian deaths of 59,342. During the Second World War, however, the artillery raised the largest number of units ever to exist in the history of the Regiment. It had the greatest diversity of weapons and unit types, it was deployed to the largest number of theatres, and it played a crucial role in the defence of Australia against possible invasion. Most of the coast artillery and many of the anti-aircraft units in Australia did not see action, but it will never be known to what extent their presence dissuaded the Japanese from attacking. During the Second World War 2,297 Australian gunners died, out of an overall total of 30,289 Australian servicemen and women who died from other than natural causes.

By mid-1942, at which time the Australian Army had its greatest number of units, the artillery had raised 34 field regiments, fifteen anti-tank regiments, three independent anti-tank batteries, three medium regiments and three survey regiments. To control these field units there were two army artillery headquarters, three corps artillery headquarters and ten divisional artillery headquarters. One divisional artillery headquarters, two field regiments and one anti-tank regiment were prisoners of the Japanese.

The expansion of the anti-aircraft artillery was even more marked and by late 1942 there were 2 HAA regiments, 11 LAA regiments, 16 independent LAA batteries and 33 static HAA batteries. One of the anti-aircraft batteries had been captured at Rabaul. There was a major anti-aircraft headquarters at Sydney and around Australia there were the headquarters of eleven anti-aircraft groups, with their associated operation rooms. Thirty-four AASL batteries transferred to the artillery in 1943.

Some idea of the magnitude of the artillery can also be grasped by the fact that during the war there were a total of 34 brigadiers in artillery appointments. Exactly half of these were regular officers.

During the Middle East campaigns the artillery had been employed according to British doctrine and had reached its peak of effectiveness in the battle of El Alamein. The campaigns in the Pacific posed new problems, and the Army struggled to determine how artillery could be best employed in the jungle.

The book is of great interest to anyone who has been a Gunner. The Author, Dr David Horner, was well qualified to write this history. He had 25 years service with the Army, his last appointment being on the staff of the Joint Services Staff College. He has written fifteen books on military matters.

"The Gunners" is probably available at your public library.

A BOFORS AT NORTH BALWYN

As a result of negotiations by our Bruce Tulloch, some twenty members of the Regiment and friends attended the Dedication and unveiling of a bronze plaque commemorating the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-aircraft Regiment on February 21, 1997. The plaque is mounted on a Bofors gun which has been painstakingly restored by members of North Balwyn RSL under the supervision of Ron Campbell, and which now stands in their grounds.

Members of the Regiment were heartily welcomed and provided with a splendid lunch by President Frank Kuffer and members of North Balwyn RSL.

Our President, Cec Rae, thanked the RSL members

for their hospitality and for the opportunity of allowing our Regiment to "to leave its mark for posterity in their grounds". Brigadier Rev Monsignor Gerald Cudmore led prayers of commemoration for the fallen, with the message "to draw all peoples of the earth into a holier and saner relationship and goodwill between nations".

Crack gun detachment at North Balwyn.



L-R: Harry Reid, Ron Bryant, Les Stephens, Les Harris, Mal Webster, John Campbell, Bruce Tulloch, Jack Crittenden, Frank Washbourne.

Brigadier Keith Rossi, Vice President of the RSL Victoria, himself a gunner and a most knowledgeable one at that, eloquently outlined the history of the Regiment before he unveiled the plaque which is engraved as follows:

2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Successes achieved by German dive-bombers and strafing aircraft early in WW2 created an urgent demand for light anti-aircraft artillery to combat the menace.

The 2/3rd Light Anti-aircraft Regiment established in 1940 was the first such unit in the AIF.

Its members had active service in the Western Desert, Tobruk, Crete, Syria, Australia, New Guinea, the Islands and Borneo, using Bofors Guns.

In Crete, 7th Battery contributed to the massive losses which nearly cost the Germans their first defeat on land. Using captured Italian guns, 8th Battery participated in the Siege of Tobruk, earning the right to share the proud title: *Rats of Tobruk*.

9th Battery operated in the Western Desert and Syria. Later they provided L.A.A defence at Milne Bay (where the Japanese suffered their first defeat) and at Port Moresby, Lae and Borneo.