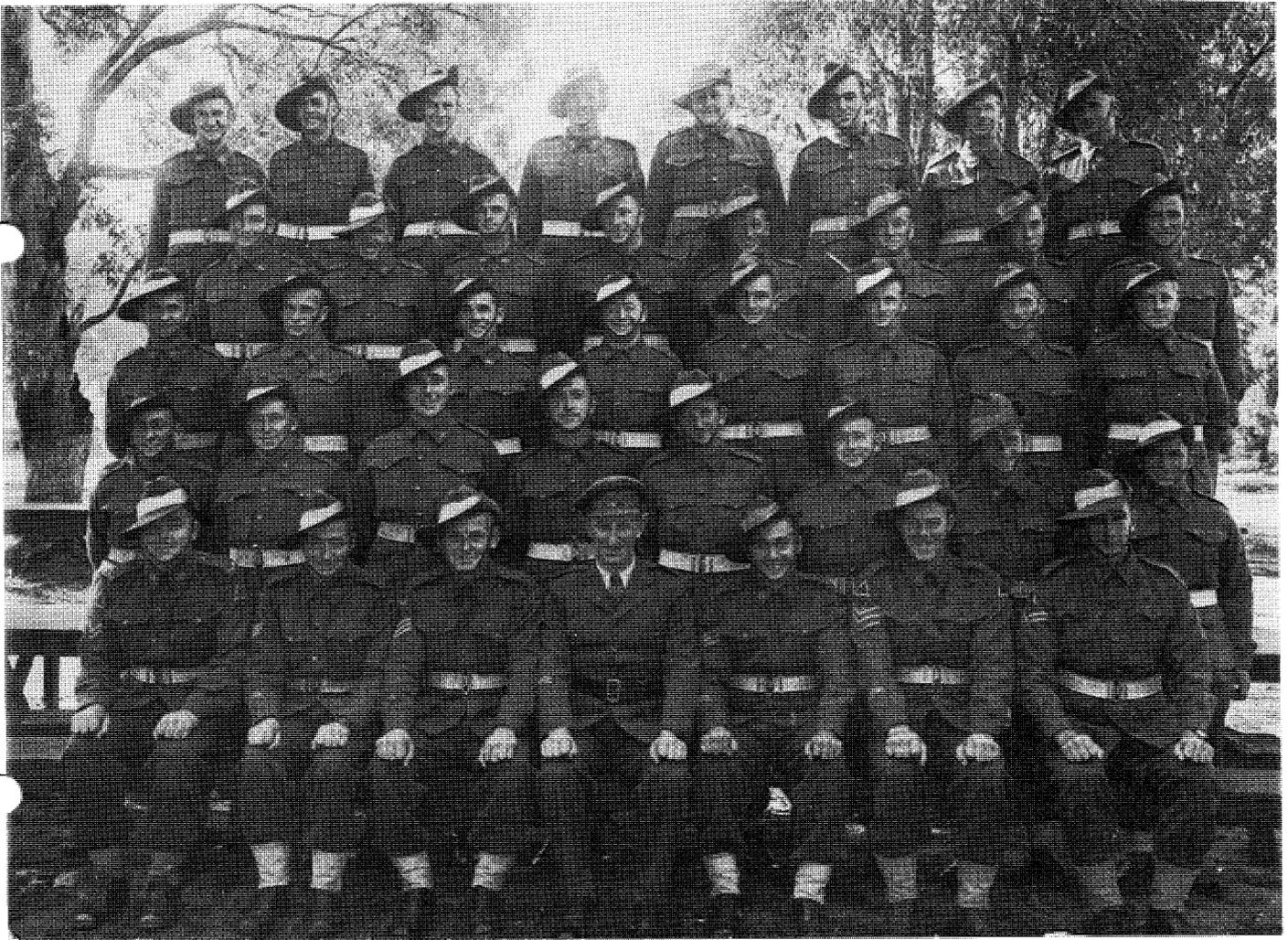


"TAKE POST!"

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

April 2002



C Troop, 8 Aust Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (Airborne) at Melville WA – July 1943

REUNION NOTICE

The **Anzac Reunion** will be held on **Wednesday April 24, 2002** from 12 noon until 3:30 pm (doors do not open before 11:30 am). The cost of Annual Subscription, lunch and drinks is **\$25**. Please see the enclosed notice regarding lunch arrangements.

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 Rd).

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, Wednesday, April 24, 2002

(doors do not open before 11:30 am)

The AGM is held just prior to the
Anzac Reunion.

Members are reminded that nominations for
Committee must be lodged with the Honorary
Secretary 14 days before the meeting.

John Campbell, Hon Secretary.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

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

	Bty.
Jack Curry	7
Alec Rawlings	9
Herb Hay	8
Dale Crook	9
Frank Keane	9
Roy Saunders	9
Hughie Hill	8
Bill Carson	7
Andy Andison	9
L.R. Chitts	
Doug Davis	7
Reg Swift	9
John Nicholson	7
Bill Cormack	9
Jim Russell	7
B. Cheong	9
Alan Henstridge	8
A.R. Harper	7
A.M.L. (Alan) Westbrook	9
R.E. (Vard) Brown	W/S
Jasper Coghlan	9

Lest We Forget

MELBOURNE ANZAC MARCH 2002

The numbers of our men who march behind our banner in Melbourne on Anzac Day are declining. Last year we had about 23. Look at the photo in this issue of the marchers in 1946! The possibility of mergers with other Anti-Aircraft Regiments has been suggested; but as we have pride in our own banner, we still wish to march as our own Regiment. Although appreciating that some of our members march in suburbs and country towns and that others are no longer able to manage the distance of the Melbourne March, we would like as many of our members who can make it, to come in to the city to march with your mates.

We heard of a comment by one of our members who joined the Regiment in Palestine – he said that he was not engaged in action, so he was reluctant to march. Let us be clear that we don't march to get accolades for actions that we may have been in. The March is a pilgrimage in memory of all of our friends from all units and services who are no longer with us. Every man who voluntarily joined our Regiment answered the call to arms and was on active service from the time he boarded a ship. He was submitting to orders to go anywhere in the world to carry out his duties. After embarkation, our area of service and our individual destiny were not in our own hands. We were on the wheel of chance as to where we could finish up.

In these days of multi-culturism, the March is attended by enthusiastic people from many countries. Amongst these are numerous young people who obviously pay their respects and seek to learn something of the wartime sacrifices. They should be encouraged.

It is worthwhile keeping the knowledge and memories of Australians at war alive, so if you can – do as you did in the 1940's – join in!

Descendants of Veterans in the Anzac Day March

At the Committee Meeting of Unit Associations held at Anzac House on 11 February 2002, it was agreed that descendants of veterans are not to be encouraged to participate in the Melbourne Anzac March. Associations are to accept responsibility for determining who shall be included or excluded.

**2/3 AUSTRALIAN LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT
REGIMENT ASSOCIATION**

President: JACK CRITTENDEN

Vice Presidents: LES HARRIS, RON BRYANT

Immediate Past President: CEC RAE.

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

Assistant Secretary: BRUCE TULLOCH
Phone 9841 8424

Hon Treasurer: JOHN HEPWORTH.

Newsletter Editor: RON BRYANT.
6 Blanche Avenue, Parkdale, Vic 3195

Committee: IAN RUTTER, DAVE THOMSON
FRANK WASHBOURNE MAL WEBSTER

* * *

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

ASSEMBLY AT MARCH

Members of 2/3rd Light Anti-aircraft Regiment will assemble as usual in Flinders Street on the east side of Swanston Street. It is estimated that our Regiment will move off at about 9.40 am. Although it is recommended that men will march ten abreast – it is usual for smaller groups to march eight abreast.

On reaching the top step of the entrance to the Forecourt, you are asked to march at attention. "Eyes Right" will be ordered at the Eternal Flame (not abreast of the official party) and men in civilian clothes will remove headgear and carry over the left breast. Uniformed officers will salute.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION

Naturally you wish to be a financial member of our Association and the treasurer can grant your wish – just fill in the enclosed remittance slip, add a cheque for \$5 and post it to **John Campbell PO Box 205, Mentone 3194**

If attending the Annual Reunion, subscription is included with the cost of lunch and drinks. Our thanks to those who forward their \$5 with welcome accompanying letters.

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I start this report to you I realize that very soon I shall have the pleasure of catching up with old mates again at our reunion – mates who can share old memories with you. Some members will no doubt be finding it difficult for health reasons to attend on the day. However, I hope we can maintain a good attendance.

During the year there were several important functions that concerned our members. Two of these were particularly interesting to 7th Battery.

In May, the Greek government invited a group of 20 veterans from Australia to visit Greece and Crete to commemorate the battles fought on their soil. On Sunday 13 May I was invited with many others to a very special function at the Melbourne Town Hall to farewell those chosen to make the journey. One of the lucky ones chosen was Ian Rutter from 7th Battery and you will read his report on the trip in this bulletin.

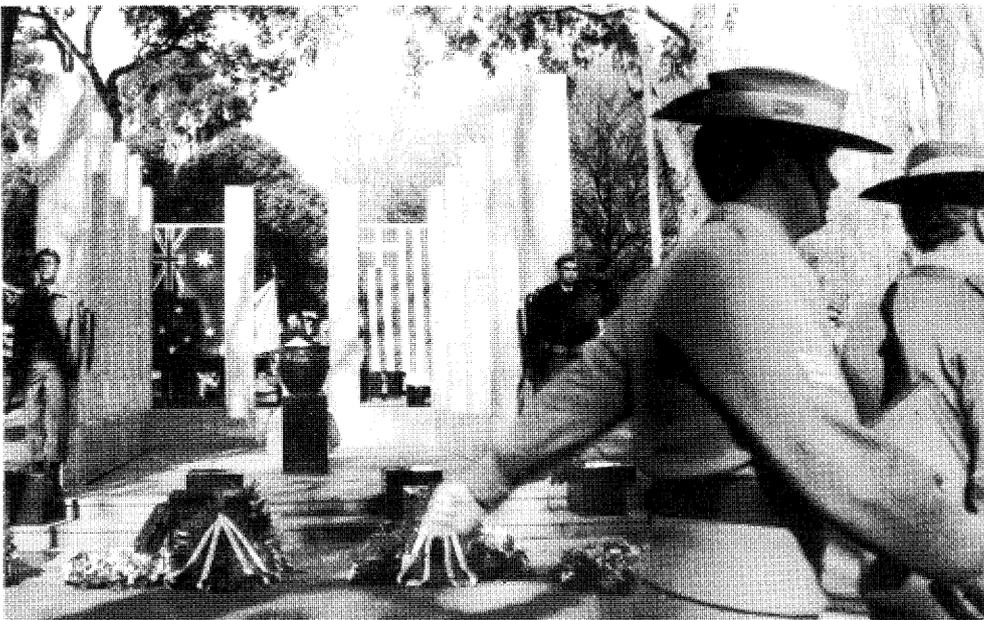
On 2nd September the Australian Hellenic Society dedicated a beautiful memorial to those who fought on Greek soil. This memorial is situated in the Domain Gardens close to Birdwood Avenue in a very attractive setting. If you are in the area it is well worth a visit.

Finally I must extend my thanks from us all to our helpful and hardworking committee members — particularly our secretary John Campbell, the *Take Post* editor Ron Bryant and treasurer John Hepworth. We all appreciate their efforts on our behalf. Don't forget to try and keep yourself fit for the Anzac Day March on the 25th of April. Cheers for now.

Jack Crittenden

AUSTRALIAN HELLENIC MEMORIAL

Several members of our Regiment attended the dedication of this fine memorial, situated near the approach to the Shrine, on 2 September 2001. The memorial commemorates 17,000 Australian men and women who served in Greece and Crete during World War 2.



The Minister for Veterans Affairs, Bruce Scott, with Hellenic Armed Forces Maj-Gen Christos Tzaros unveiled the memorial.

Members of the Greek Presidential Guard took part in the ceremony alongside Australian Defence Force personnel.

The memorial features 12 solid-marble columns, a crypt and a vase decorated with olive and gum-tree branches.

After the event, our members were welcomed at the Greek Consulate.

(Photo by courtesy of The Age)

THE SENTRY'S LOG

On a visit to the Australian War Memorial at Canberra in November last, Ron Bryant was pleased to see on display an Italian 20-mm. Breda Light Anti-aircraft gun, as used by the 8th Battery in Tobruk.

After studying it with great interest, he demonstrated his love/hate opinion of it by saying, "What rotten equipment. Who will ever forget clearing those frequent stoppages while in action". Nevertheless, as there was not a lot of information about the gun, he sent to the AWM details and old news-cuttings about the use of the Bredas by 8th Battery and of the results obtained with them [including the score of 23 enemy aircraft shot down, 14 more probably destroyed, 60 badly damaged and 100 others hit.] He also suggested that a better location for the gun would be in the North Africa – Tobruk display [near a captured German anti-tank gun].

Ron received a letter of thanks for the information on the Breda. Its permanent placement is to be considered by the AWM Head Curator who took the opportunity of reporting that their collection of artifacts and relics from North Africa is not large. In particular, their holdings for Tobruk and El Alamein are quite small.

In case our members can assist, we quote from the Head Curator's letter: "Should you, or any of your comrades hold material that would benefit the collection, you might like to consider donating it to the Memorial. Items of an historical or human interest nature, particularly anything with a story attached, are still sought. I would be pleased to discuss this further with you if you wish".

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

2002 is well on the way, I wonder how many of us thought we would ever see another century! I have had plenty of correspondence again this year [keep it coming] and I will endeavour to pass on snippets of it to you:

On a visit to Melbourne from Perth, **Alan Lowe** (8th) rang me. Alan has been AWL for many years, hopefully he has been able to contact **George Howat** (8th) by now. **Ralph Hawkey** (8th) sent me the front page of the *Cobram Courier*. Ralph was honoured with an article and photo, he also placed the wreath at the RSL service on Anzac Day.

Ursula Clements (7th) keeps in touch with **Tom Tootells'** daughter Maree, and recently loaned her copy of "On Target" to **Ralph Callister's** (8th) grandson.

Bob Phillips (8th) writes from Noosa, 'Take Post is a credit to the Editor, it renews the spirit of mateship and personal relationships developed many years ago'. **Terry Gleeson** (Sigs) sends greetings to **Cec Rae** (9th) and **Frank Washbourne** (8th). Have you caught up with **Arthur Spiller** (RHQ) yet Terry?

Rex Emmett (7th) is not able to attend our reunion as he runs the *Ouyen Dawn Service*. Good on you. Being a devil for punishment, Rex rejoined the services in 1949 as a Sergeant Instructor and later became the RSM, [**Hamilton "Horsey" Hayes**] was the RQMS. Rex then became a member of the 1953 Coronation Contingent, spending 6 months travelling the world and having the opportunity to visit, [to name a few places] Tobruk, Malta and Gibraltar. You certainly won the raffle Rex!

Laurie Bell, our 2/1st AA Regiment [Composite] odd bod, wrote expressing his pleasure in being able to march with the 2/3rd, Laurie also enjoys "Take Post" – I hope you are with us this year Laurie.

Margaret Warren, daughter of **Jack Phillips** (7th) was excited to see the 7th Bty photo in the last issue. Jack was KIA and Margaret did not know her father and wasn't able to find Jack. If any member can identify him please let me know.

Linda George writes to say that **Geof** (9th) is in Allawah Special Care Hostel in Yarrowonga. Members would be welcomed but Geof can't remember names. **Bob Westcott** (9th) through illness, cannot get out, but sends his regards and congrats to the Editor.

Dan Hawkes (9th) found the article in last year's "Take Post" brought back many memories of **Cec Rae**, "**Chook**" **Carmichael**, **Darkie Patterson**, **Keith Wilson** and the **Coghlan** boys, all of 9th Bty.

Ida Worsley (7th) tells me of her 3 generations of Defence Force personnel – Frank her husband WW2, son Ian a Vietnam veteran, then her grandson Adam is a Duntroon graduate and now of Captain's rank. Ida also keeps in contact with **Joyce Ritchie**, [**John Hipworth's** daughter], **Beryl Hawkins** (7th), **Win Parker** and a number of others. At 87 you are doing very well Ida.

Patricia Sullivan (9th) saw in the last issue of "Take Post" that **Grif Weatherly** still has a twinkle in his eye. **Dick Coggins** is hoping to get respite care for his wife and be with us this year. We look forward to seeing you then Dick.

Gwen Tonkin (7th) relived the "Prisoners Dream of a Good Dinner" printed in the last issue, as she was there and still has the original pencil written menu.

George Roberts (8th) missed his usual visit from **Bluey Page** (8th). Where did you get to Bluey? George was able to get to **Doug Simson's** (8th) funeral in Casterton, as the Regiment's representative.

Jessie Esler (7th) enjoyed seeing the photo of **Doug Davis** (7th) as one of our nonagenarians.

Terry Butler (9th) sends greetings to his old mates – **Alan Rundle**, **Ted Guinness**, **Darkie Patterson**, **Frank O'Toole**, [the billy tea man] and **Cec Rae**. **Ron Walsh** (7th) writes from Tassie, "have a drink for me".

Thank you **Howard Vippond**, I was pleased to be able to send back issues of the magazine, and yes, my health is OK now. **Gwen Kruger** sends greetings on behalf of **Charles** [now in full time care] to **Ron Bryant** and **Bluey Page** (8th).

David Carty (9th) has cleared up a mystery – the "tal. young kid" in a last issue story was not **Ron Bryant** but our President **Jack Crittenden**. **Ted Guinness** (9th) now 92 recalls being in A Troop with **Neil Anderson** as gun sergeant followed by **Arthur McClintock**. Good memories.

Roy McLaren (7th), a POW, sends his regards to all members. **John C Ballantine** (9th) could not make the reunion last year so sent \$5 in memory of "**Killer**" **Curtis**. **Joyce Ritchie** sent a donation in memory of her dad **John Hipworth**.

George Bartlett (workshops) sends his best wishes to all. **C.D. Farrow** sent a photo of a 'Typical Desert Camp'. Greetings were sent by many more, including **Alan Read** (9th), **K. Walsh** (7th), **Joan Paton** (9th) and **Constance Little** (7th).

Thank you for the many donations to the funds, these are vital in keeping the Association going and enabling us to communicate with you all.

My personal regards to you all

John Campbell Hon Sec.

"On Target"

We receive occasional requests (usually from member's descendants) for the Regiment's history **On Target** but we have no further copies. If you have a copy which is no longer required by you or your family, perhaps you could get it to our Secretary.

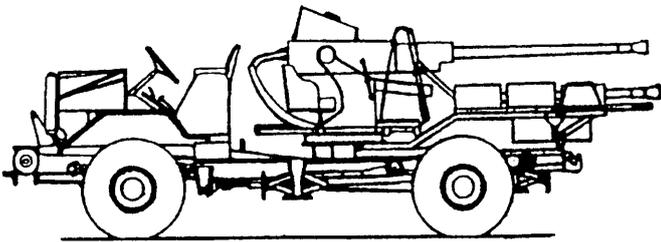
If you happen to be a 'loner' now with no family wanting your copy, don't let it be thrown out when you fall off the twig. The Association will recycle it for you.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations & special thanks to these members and honorary supporters who are still 'in action' :

John Hepworth	Treasurer for 55 years.
Cec Rae	Past President, Hon Sec and 53 years on Committee.
Bruce Tulloch	Committee-man for 53 years.
Dave Thomson	Banner Custodian and Bearer at the Anzac March and Committee-man for 50 years.
Gordon Connor	Our link-man in Western Australia for 15 years.
Ron Bryant	Editor of <i>Take Post</i> for 15 years.
Ron Berry	Keeper of our computer address records for 14 years.

Committee-men with over 10 years service are: – Les Harris (16 years); Tom Dawson (16 years); Jack Crittenden (11 years) with two years as President; Roy Thomson (11 years); John Campbell (not 10 years yet but doing a sterling task as Hon Sec). Also Max & Linda Parsons 'computer set' *Take Post* for 10 years.



The Bofors Self-propelled C9/B

These Bofors built by Nuffield in 1942, despite being more mobile over rugged terrain than the trailer-mounted guns and quads, were not readily accepted by the British authorities. The guns could be in action in 7 seconds from a speed of 30 mph. Note the handy spare barrel.

Some were flown in gliders to France after the "D" Day landings and used to seize and hold bridges across the Rhine River. These would have been handy in our desert work!

The WA Troop reports in

Gordon Connor states that *Take Post* is appreciated in the West. Our congratulations to Gordon on being made a Life Member of the W.A. State Branch of the R. S.L. *Gordon and wife Gwen are still mobile despite some health problems.*

Last year, George Howat tripped over a mat, breaking two ribs and chipping his collar-bone. *Join the club George.* Who amongst us hasn't had a heavy fall. We all have to walk a little slower and watch out for those little ridges in the path.

Time is taking its toll. Only about 10 members attend the W.A. functions these days.

Obituary

Mrs Patricia Guest, 8/11/1912 - 8/1/2001.

Patricia Guest was at the heart of social, artistic and political life of Melbourne for half a century.

In 1936, she wed Chester Guest, who as a Lieutenant became commander of Eddie Troop in our 8th Battery. During the 'Benghazi Handicap' in Libya, in 1941.

Chester was captured by the Afrika Korps and became a Prisoner-of-war for about 4 years. Also in 1941, at the inaugural meeting of our Regiment's Welfare Fund, Mrs Patricia Guest was appointed secretary. The wives, mothers and sweethearts of the absent men worked hard raising funds for the welfare of men of the Regiment by operating a tea-room in Melbourne. Patricia Guest was a lady of the world with numerous close friends from all walks of life, including the art world, music, politics and the business world.

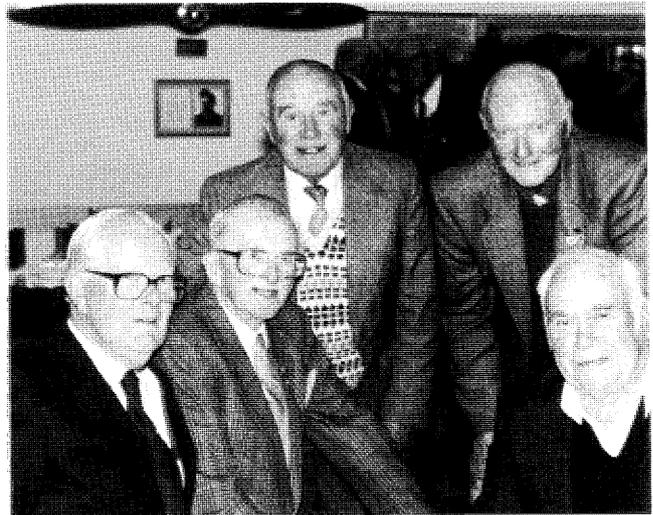
Chester Guest died in 1970 after a distinguished business career. To Patricia Guest's family, we offer our condolences.

New Veterans' Affairs Minister

The Federal Member for Hughes, Mrs Danna Vale, has been appointed as the new Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence – Senator Robert Hill.

Mrs Vale practised as a Solicitor from 1988 to 1996. She comes into the portfolio as a member of the Government's Defence and Veterans' Affairs Policy Committee and with a great deal of experience with ex-service organisations and defence matters.

The new Minister replaces Bruce Scott who returns to the back-bench as a result of a change in the proportion of National Party seats in the Coalition.



Friendship personified — 2/3rd mates.

*Standing at rear: Les Shields and "Blue" Page.
Seated : Frank Hands, Les Harris, Les Stephens.*

ALEX BARNETT'S BOOK PUBLISHED — at last!

Alex Barnett (8 Battery) worked hard at surviving as a Prisoner-of-War of the Italians and Germans from 1941 to 1945. We congratulate him on his recent years of hard work on his admirable book - "Hitler's Digger Slaves" which is now available for purchase.

Brigadier Keith Rossi AM, OBE, RFD, ED, wrote the foreword for the book, and, with his kind permission, we now present his foreword as a concise review of Alex Barnett's book which we heartily recommend:-

"About a metre of shelf space in my library is occupied by books about the experiences of Prisoners of War. Almost all of them are about captives of the Japanese, a few about the German experience and none about those Australian servicemen who were unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of the Italians.

Alex Barnett's book overcomes that shortfall with a revelation of the appalling behaviour of the Italians that will surprise those who have thought of them as benign captors.

The author and his comrades were captured when barely out of the starting gate of the race titled by the Australian Ninth Division "The Benghazi Handicap" – the withdrawal of the British and Australian force to Tobruk before the might of Rommel's Afrika Korps.

Almost immediately the captives were subjected to treatment that failed by a mile to conform to the Geneva Convention to which both Germany and Italy were signatories. Shipped to Italy, the prisoners were incarcerated at Gruppignano Camp near the Austrian border.

The author describes vividly the nobility of spirit exhibited by the camp inmates as they sought to rise above the indignities imposed on them by the pompous, sadistic camp commandant for the two years he imposed his dictatorial rule on them.

With the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, the German Army seized the prisoners and moved them first to Germany, then progressively to Poland, to Czechoslovakia and back to Germany before Alex and his mates were finally liberated by the 7th Armoured Division, the same *Desert Rats* who had fought alongside them in the North African campaign four years earlier.

In the course of an address to his generals on the eve of the German invasion of Poland, Adolf Hitler said,

"Be harsh and remorseless. Be steeled against all signs of compassion! We are not concerned with having justice on our side, but solely with victory. The victor is never called upon to vindicate his actions."

Confident of victory, the German and Italian captors abandoned the humanitarian behaviour ingrained in them by nearly two thousand years of exposure to Judo-Christian cultural values, to inflict extreme physical and mental punishment on their prisoners.

But the prisoners did not succumb – they fought on to retain their self-respect, some died in the attempt, many still bear the scars today.

But they triumphed!

This book makes one proud to be Australian.

Keith Rossi

The book, "Hitler's Diggers Slaves" may be obtained by ordering from Alex Barnett at 2 Hassell Street, Port Macquarie, NSW, 2444. Please enclose a cheque for \$27 which includes the cost for postage.

Members of 2/3 Aust Lt AA Regt



THE INDIANS IN TOBRUK WERE FINE SOLDIERS

Many gunners of 8 Battery will recall meeting members of the Indian Army at Tobruk. Take Post has borrowed the following quotes from the history of the 18th KEO Cavalry. We thank the authors for their kind permission.

The NCOs and men of the 18th Cavalry, Kaimkhanis, Rajputs and Jats were full of self-confidence, always smiling and justly sure of their superiority over their opponents. While at Tobruk, force of circumstance turned the cavalymen into a mixture of infantry, field gunner, anti-aircraft gunner, sapper, miner and artificer.

The 18th KEO Cavalry was part of that famous Motor Brigade which held out against the combined German and Italian forces at Mekili in Cyrenaica thus foiling the enemy's attempt to intercept the British and Australian forces withdrawing from Benghazi.

The 18th was placed under command of 9 Aust Division on 8 April, 1941, as its divisional cavalry for the defence of Tobruk. At 2300 hrs on 10 April, they received the order for general withdrawal within the perimeter of Tobruk. The garrison then consisted of five infantry brigades, one tank brigade, supporting artillery and other arms while the enemy surrounded the perimeter with at least four divisions. All exits from Tobruk were closed and mined that evening – the Siege of Tobruk had begun.

The Indian Regiment was allotted a 5-km portion of the western perimeter to hold and it remained responsible for its defence unrelieved till its evacuation from Tobruk on 27/28 August '41. The regimental perimeter extended from the sea in the north to just over a kilometre short of the road to Derna and contained 11 posts from S45 to S29.

Like the Australian infantry, the Indians carried out aggressive raids into the enemy lines by night and it was

these evening raids and the enemy artillery fire in retaliation, which made a British gunner inform his duty officer (who had ordered "Stand to") that "*It's alright, Sir, it's only them Indians having their private war*".

On one occasion in July, the enemy retaliated by a strong raid on one of the Indian posts held by 23 men. About 100 enemy advanced, under cover of heavy mortar and MG fire. As they reached the Indian Sangar area, Jem Jage Ram shouted in English: *No. 1 Company Charge!* All the Jats rushed out – the enemy's nerves were already shaken by a previous night raid and this was now too much. They broke and ran so fast that the Jats couldn't get within bayonet distance of them.

The 18th Cavalry War diary contains the following:

Active patrolling up to and behind the enemy's lines has been carried out with great success. It was from the months of steady patrolling and from the friendship and close contact, which had sprung up between our men and the Australians that, tales of prowess and aptitude of our soldiers [Indian Cavalry] on night patrol began to circulate within Tobruk.

As General Auchinleck said:

The exploits of innumerable patrols carried out almost nightly by the Cavalry and infantry units of the garrison deserve the highest praise. Not only did these patrols collect most valuable information and numerous prisoners but they were in large part responsible for making it possible to hold a perimeter thirty miles long with only seven battalions and one cavalry regiment in the front line.

nt who marched on Anzac Day 1946.



A Journey into the Past – George Ian Rutter
Mission to Greece and Crete, May 2001

Ian Rutter, 7th Battery, was nominated by Legacy for the Mission to Greece and Crete in May 2001. We are privileged to have Ian's account of his journey and related memories.

At the invitation of the Greek Government a mission was formed to commemorate the battle for Greece and Crete sixty years ago, It was headed by the minister of Veteran Affairs, the Hon. Bruce Scott and comprised twenty veterans – 17 men and 3 war widows – drawn from all parts of Australia. It included a Support Group made up of a medical team of four, three members of administration, a media liaison officer, a ceremonial co-ordinator and a historian.

Maj-Gen Paul Stevens was the Mission Director. Maj-Gen Peter Phillips, Federal President of the RSL, and Rear Admiral Guy Griffiths, National Chairman of the Australian Veterans Council, accompanied us.

We assembled at the Radisson Hotel, and, like new schoolboys at a new school, waited to be briefed by the Head. It was the first of many briefings to be spread over the next twelve days. Then we dressed up in our new uniforms, reefer jackets, medals and ties. The Minister hosted a dinner at the Officers' Mess, Victoria Barracks. As the Prime Minister's farewell at the Town Hall was to be held next morning, the evening was short. A few speeches; and then back to the hotel.

The day dawned. We arrived at the Town Hall where quite a crowd had gathered in the street although it was Sunday morning. Red carpet lined the steps – the band struck up and the Guard of Honour presented arms.

Slightly embarrassed I made my way towards a line of dignitaries at the top of the steps. There was the Prime Minister. He held out his hand. 'Hello Ian,' he said, "Best wishes. "Thank you, Prime Minister," and then to the band accompaniment we filed up onto the stage and looked for our seats.

One by one we rose and were introduced. A school choir sang the Greek national anthem and a young woman sang 'Advance Australia Fair' accompanied by the naval band. Then we mingled with family and friends in the body of the hall.

Changi Chapel

At 1600 hours our plane left for Singapore. Our first ceremony took place at the Changi Chapel and Museum which was only opened in February 2001. The old prison had been demolished. All the messages carved in its stone walls had gone and I felt that an important part of history had been lost

I watched the Catafalque party standing silently, arms reversed, throughout the service and thought of the prisoners and their mental fight to find a glimmer of hope in a hopeless situation, Without it they were lost. The war was going badly when they were taken.

A choir of young girls from the International School sang at the wreath-laying ceremony. They were children of diplomats and officials from all over the world then stationed in Singapore. Afterwards many of the girls were eager with questions about the Greek campaign. They were mature and extraverted and I was surprised that a school could blend so many nationalities with this result.

That evening the Australian High Commission held an informal reception – a barbecue prepared by three cooks who took their responsibilities very seriously and only lost their worried looks when dinner was over. The High Commissioner was about to finish his term in Singapore. I asked him if he didn't feel some relief to be getting back to a cooler climate and easier communication where things didn't have to be interpreted, but he said that he spoke Mandarin Chinese, He liked a game of golf and much to my surprise I learnt that Singapore had twenty-two courses.

Kranji War Cemetery

Next morning, after a group briefing and early breakfast, we left the hotel for Kranji War Cemetery where a commemorative ceremony was held. At the close of the service we spent some time wandering through the cemetery grounds looking for names among the graves, while an ever-attentive medical team plied us with bottled water and shepherded us into shade. Support Group was taking no chances.

That afternoon we were taken to the 'Battle Box'. Fort Canning was part of Command HQ during World War II and *Battle Box* is the name given to a section underground. With audio and video effects and specially crafted figures, it depicts the closing stages of the surrender of Singapore. Replicas of General Percival and his generals struggling in a final meeting to find a way out of a hopeless bungle. It is very life-like – very dramatic and very sad. Japanese strength was only one third of ours, How did it happen? .

Afterwards, for some light relief we went to Raffles and explored the huge, recently-renovated hotel. Ghosts of a bygone age still loitered in the lounges. I found a long queue of people in the scrimmage for afternoon tea and eventually snared a big pink lamington just like the ones at home – then back to our hotel. Bags to be packed and put outside our rooms. The next time we would see them would be in an Athens hotel –

So this is Athens.

I'd hardly seen Athens as a POW. Just a glimpse from the back of a German truck. Pollution hung heavily over the city and my first impression was of a weary drabness. Not a park, not a tree, and the buildings along the airport run seemed to be crumbling away like decaying teeth.

The bus edged its way into the thick of a big traffic snarl. There was a strike on, but eventually we were washed up at the entrance to the Athens Plaza Hotel. We poured out of the bus into an atmosphere of leather lounges, marble floors and tiny lifts. We shared rooms and my room-mate quickly made for the mini-bar, which he was always keen to inspect. For him the next few days would bring back vivid memories. During the evacuation from Greece he was under constant air attack on the mountain road to the sea. Each man of the group had particular memories that, in many cases, were of mates who hadn't made it to the sea.

We walked to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier which was close by and, after laying a wreath, boarded our bus for a ceremony at Phaleron. The Commonwealth Cemetery at Phaleron is in a very busy area – overlooked by flats – and bordered by steady traffic. Rows and rows of crosses line the slope towards the Memorial and so many graves have no names. There seemed an added poignancy in a grave without a name.

The last strains of the bugle died in the air – the Catafalque party dismounted and we all quietly walked back to the bus.

Guests of the Ambassador

That evening the Australian Ambassador hosted a reception at his residence. The bus wound its way tentatively towards the crest of a hill overlooking Athens. The lights of the city had come on and from rolling hills and gardens we looked down on the scene below.

The media was there in force. A girl reporting for Channel 9, guided me into a quiet corner of the garden, and started her questions, but we were only half way through when Paul Stevens grabbed me. The speeches were about to begin and I had to respond to the Ambassador.

The Minister spoke, then the Ambassador, and now it was my turn. I took the microphone and looked out at the guests spread across the lawns. What a change in circumstances! Here I was, a guest of the Ambassador.

Memories rekindled

The last time I had seen Athens had been from the back of a German military truck overloaded with dirty, half-starved POWs. I told the story of my previous visit – how the trucks were stopped in the middle of the city so that we could be shown off to the local people. Their unexpected reaction – how they ignored the guns, demonstrating, rushing the trucks, throwing biscuits and bread. Shouting encouragement. As we left I saw them lined up against the walls, forced to hold their hands high above their heads until they fell, exhausted.

The following day there was a trip into the mountains to Brallos and Thermopylae. Brallos was a name I couldn't forget. As prisoners we had been systematically starved and Brallos took us down to bedrock.

The bridge had been blown by our retreating troops. That meant leaving the cattle trucks taking us to Salonika and marching over the mountain and down a road that almost wound back on itself in endless loops. Half the men had dysentery and their march was punctuated with sharp dashes to keep ahead of the bayonets and gain much needed time. When we reached the valley another cattle truck seemed almost a luxury.

I stood on the edge of the road looking down, trying to remember some landmarks, but there were none. It was not the same. The mountains were at peace – there was no menace in them now. This had been a road churned up and littered with destroyed transport and dead animals.

We moved on to Thermopylae and a service was held in memory of those who tried to hold back a German onslaught that could only be delayed. They played a significant part in the evacuation of fifty thousand troops between the 24th and the 29th of April, 1941.

After a very full day we made our way back through the mountains escorted by two police cars. Motorbikes replaced the cars when we reached the outskirts of Athens and the bus was drawn through the traffic, like thread through a needle.

An early start

The wake-up call came at 0430 hours. Again, bags were packed and we were off to Olympic Airways and Crete. The plane trip took less than an hour. As I sat looking down I imagined the feelings of a German paratrooper sixty years before. He sat hooked up – waiting, and here it was. Shortly he had to jump, into unknown mountains. He had been well trained but this was different. Guns in the trees would be trained on him coming down. He could be shot. He could be strung up in the trees, unable to move with all his harness – like a great beetle on its back. What then?

Heraklio airport is the only airport on Crete but sixty years ago there were three airstrips and, to hold the island, the three airstrips had to be held. At Heraklio the parachute invasion was a disaster for the Germans but eventually the town was made to suffer with devastating air attacks.

Commemorative ceremonies were held at Stavromenos and Misseria Beach, and we were welcomed by the Nomarch of Rethymno.

On our way to Hania that day we stopped for lunch at a restaurant on the coast. It was set under canvas canopies on the edge of the water. I plopped into a vacant chair. By way of conversation I said something about golf to my neighbour. "Do you play?" "Yes." He liked the game but was dreadful at it – absolutely hopeless. Handicap was twenty-seven. "Same as mine," I said, a little distantly. Conversation flourished from then on. "What do you do?" I asked. "Oh, I'm the Opposition Veterans Affairs Minister." You never knew who you would bump into.

Continued overleaf

A Journey into the Past [continued]

Then, on to Hania, We checked into the Kydon Hotel and had two hours before leaving to attend a New Zealand ceremony at Galatus village. The memorial was in the centre of the village but a big crowd had gathered and it was difficult to see anything. We waited patiently in the solemn prelude to the service when suddenly there were bloodcurdling screams outside. Everyone stiffened in the expectation that there was dirty work afoot. Then into the centre of the assemblage leapt six Maoris, eyes bulging, teeth bared in ferocious snarls, waving solid wooden staffs to clear a path for the New Zealand Prime Minister. One photographer was not nimble enough and collected a whack on the side of the head, which took his mind off the job for a minute or two. This was the Haka, I had never encountered it before.

As we couldn't see or hear very much and had to stand, our Support Group, at the risk of a diplomatic incident, guided us back to the bus and then to the Panorama Hotel where dinner was hosted by the Community of Nea Kydonia. It would seem that we did a lot of eating but almost all our ceremonies were on the coast and the sea does stimulate the appetite.

The Memorial at Rethymno

One of the focal points of the whole Mission was the Dedication of The Hellenic-Australian Memorial at Rethymno. The Royal Australian Navy Band played and we were taken to seats in front of the Memorial. The Catafalque party was mounted and the Mayor of Rethymno welcomed the guests. This was followed by a message of greeting by the Administrator of the Northern Territory.

In a prologue Paul Stevens spoke of the courage and compassion of the Greek people who risked ruthless reprisals to shelter and care for hundreds of Australians attempting to escape. Equally the Greek people recall with fondness Australian men and women who came to help them in their fight for freedom. The new Memorial symbolizes this. Two flanking pillars portray Greek soldiers and civilians, and a centre pillar of polished, black granite from South Australia to portray Australian forces.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs gave an address and, together with a representative of the Greek Government, unveiled the Memorial.

Our first gun position

I was getting near the heart of things – areas that had personal memories. Souda Bay was where we'd set up our first gun position. The bus continued on past the cemetery, the driver looking for a parking spot, but there was a big crowd and we had a long walk back to the Memorial. Seats for the service we were to attend were all taken but as usual the local people insisted on us taking their seats. My mind wondered as I looked down the manicured lawns of this most beautiful cemetery – I suppose there is a sadness in all beauty. Out across the bay – was this where we had landed?

I remembered the Flying Fortress planes starting up in the morning before the sun turned the snow-covered mountain peaks crimson. The service was over. We walked between the crosses looking for names we might have known. The Memorial towered above, watching over the sleeping thousands.

A Naval reception

Down in the bay the HMS *Richmond* was berthed and we were invited to a reception. On arrival we were piped aboard and welcomed by the Captain. The deck was awash with white duck and gold braid. I leaned on the rail, a drink in one hand and a mystery in the other and decided I quite liked life on a ship as long as it didn't put to sea.

I was reaching for a salmon rissole when an army officer, clanking with medals came alongside. "*Would you like to meet the Duke of Kent?*" he whispered conspiratorially. I hastily put down my rissole and followed him. The Duke was very amiable and asked me about my experiences on Crete. A vivacious woman with him joined in the conversation and it was only when I rejoined the group that I realized she was the Prime Minister of New Zealand. People disguised as generals and admirals kept appearing and disappearing all night. Then the farewells and back to the bus waiting on the wharf.

The Minister had to return to Australia and hosted a farewell breakfast. We left for Rethymno where we visited a school of police cadets and took part in a parade. We were each presented with medals and a certificate to commemorate the part Australians played in the Battle for Crete. The commander of the school then hosted a lunch before we returned to our hotel.

For me, the visit to Maleme that evening was the most stirring part of the whole trip. The Maleme airstrip was where my gun had been. The hill above it was where I had fought alongside the New Zealanders and that was the spot where the Battle for Crete was lost.

Parachutists in re-enactment

An estimated five thousand people witnessed the re-enactment of the parachute landing. We were taken to seats to watch this symbolic display. Fifty parachutists dropped close by and were engaged by troops in a mock battle. Planes screamed overhead and the thunder of guns and flares created an illusion of battle.

As I watched, it all came back. The days before the invasion. The murmur out to sea becoming louder – the small cloud on the horizon getting bigger. Then suddenly the wail of sirens. "*Red alert! Red alert!*" The drumming noise of a hundred planes. There they were! We could see them now. The noise had become a roar ... they were splitting into three formations – one coming straight for us – the other two behind the hill turning to dive out of the sun.

Then came the invasion. General Freyberg, standing on a hill at Souda Bay watching the bombers and the massive aerial bombardment, became aware of a greater

throbbing, and out to sea picked out hundreds of planes – tier on tier – coming towards him. Here were the slow-moving transport planes he was expecting. They came in over our heads at Maleme in a shattering roar and suddenly the sky was full of white confetti as the parachutists came floating down. Gliders were coming in low looking for a landing and many finished in the trees, It was eerie to be revisiting a place filled with such vivid memories.

One of the Support Group sat down beside me, “*How are you doing?*” he asked. “*Fine.*”

Afterwards there was a march past. The army, navy, bands and the veterans stepping out like real soldiers. There was a traffic jam when it was all over. When our bus had been extricated from the chaos of cars and bicycles we relaxed at the Paradise Hotel at a dinner reception by the Nomarch of Hania. More than one thousand guests dined that night. The Paradise Hotel rises from a circle of floodlit pools – a big amphitheatre.

Bags were packed and put outside our rooms. The uniform for the next day was informal – polo shirts and hats, Support Group had made sure our laundry was returned to us in time.

Sixty years ago

The road to Sfakia wound up through the mountains – the first time we had left the coastal strip since arriving in Crete. Sixty years ago, for many of the men, this was the way to their second evacuation – Greece and then Crete. They trudged up into the mountains. Would the pink and white oleander have been in bloom? They wouldn’t have known. Their thoughts were concentrated on the sky, the whistle of a bomb or the sudden screech of a diving Stuka with its chatter of machine guns. From the crests they had looked down at Sfakia with desperate hope and waited for the British Navy to do its wonderful best.

When we arrived at Sfakia a service was held at the memorial on the water’s edge. A simple service in a simple little village, The Nomarch said in his greeting that his people would never forget that Australians had come from the other end of the earth to help them. Again we felt the sincerity and warmth of the local people at our ceremonies.

Several of our veterans had been here before. They would remember it as a dreadful place ... waiting on the beach to see if the Navy could take them off, constantly being dive-bombed and running the gauntlet to the ships. Ships being sunk and bodies washing in the waves.

On the way back to Athens we called on the monks of Preveli. The monastery had fed and sheltered men escaping over the mountains after the general evacuation, The head of the monastery had organized the escape of small groups at a time. Men were distributed over nearby villages in the hills while the monks contacted British submarines offshore. Then a time and a place were determined for them to be taken off.

We had lunch at the monastery and then continued to the airport at Heraklio and the flight to Athens. Back in the lounge of the Athens Plaza we slipped from the past to the present.

The night before we left for home we had a farewell dinner on the roof of a restaurant in Piraeus, it was a light-hearted evening but there was a twinge of sadness.... the trip was coming to an end. It was not so much that the travels were over but so many good friends were to be lost. The chances of meeting again, drawn as we were from all over Australia, were slim.

The doctor arrived for the occasion behind a big black moustache and proceeded to distribute Greek hats to everyone. There were speeches that no one could hear but it didn’t matter. The time for speeches was over. My room-mate got up and started a singsong, complete with Al Jolson body language. It was difficult getting him to his feet but even more difficult getting him to sit down.

A quick look at the Acropolis

Last day – dress informal, just polo shirts and hats. We waited for our afternoon flight home by filling in the morning with a visit to the Acropolis. This seemed casual treatment for one of Athens big drawcards but we had not followed the usual tourist agenda. It was a long hike up the steps to the top of the Acropolis.

We had a young woman guide who started telling us all about the deities – how Zeus punished man by asking Hephaestus to make a woman. I was a bit interested in this but when our guide really drew breath I got lost in a torrent of mythology and a deadly languor overtook me. I had a quick look around, studied the scaffolding, the eroding pillars, marvelled at the antiquity, and with downcast eyes, sidled back to the comfort of the bus.

Home again

From Athens to Singapore was first class. There had been some problems with the bookings and some of us were moved up a grade. From Singapore to Melbourne we had to slum it again in business class! On arrival at Melbourne airport a customs officer welcomed us and was almost apologetic about the necessity for some formalities. He asked if we would mind posing for a group photograph.

The group farewells had been said before but I was reluctant to leave. We were not likely to see one another again. The Mission had surely been a success. Greek and Cretan people had been so welcoming. The Support Group had not lost a soul. The Repatriation Commission and Veterans Affairs had a human face and were no longer just government departments but bodies of people we had been lucky to meet.

The veterans returned with a wonderful experience to remember.

Ian Rutter



We have received a request for the loan of a Bofors Operations or Maintenance Manual. Please contact the editor if you can assist.

THE OWEN GUN STORY

Reproduced from "Comradeship", the 2/14th Infantry Battalion Newsletter, with thanks.

Evelyn Owen, a young Australian inventor, especially of guns, first took his invention to Victoria Barracks, Sydney, before the war started. He was told by a colonel that the Australian Army had no use for submachine guns and if they ever did it would be on British advice and with a British made weapon.

Disgusted, Evelyn shelved his invention and enlisted in the AIF with his brothers Julian, Peter and David. Evelyn took his gun, a wheel magazine experimental type to camp at Ingleburn and demonstrated it to the 2/17 Bn officers. The CO requested Army Invention Services (AIS) to examine the gun but, before this could happen, the unit was given embarkation leave before sailing to the Middle East.

Whilst on leave Evelyn took his gun to the beach and fired a few bursts out to sea. This action came to the notice of the Manager of Lysaghts P/L, Port Kembla, who initiated moves to send Owen from his unit to the AIS in Melbourne. After much red tape and opposition from certain quarters, Lysaghts were given an experimental contract to manufacture 100 guns of a modified design, subject to a successful firing test.

On 29 September 1941 the Sydney Daily Telegraph reported on the test:

"The Owen Submachine Gun passed all tests with flying colours, the gun was showered with sand to simulate Middle East conditions, buried in earth, plunged into a tank of water, and immersed in a gluey mess of thick clay. Tested against the American Thompson Gun and the British Sten, the Owen was the only weapon that continued to fire under all conditions."

This report only served to add fuel to the opposition's attempt to boycott the introduction of the gun. The *Top Brass* and some Government members could not accept that an Australian civilian and a firm that manufactured roofing iron could possibly build a better

gun than the British, or even the Americans. At one stage it was considered charging Owen with treason for demonstrating the gun at a War Loan Rally.

Left to Blamey and his supporters, the Owen Gun would not have been used at Milne Bay. He was furious when told Owen Guns were in action in New Guinea and ordered no more were to be forwarded.

Pro Owen Gun supporters had a secret meeting in Canberra with Prime Minister Curtin and told him that Blamey was not acting on military grounds and went on to say that his motives will forever be fingered by the curious. Evelyn Owen in an interview threatened to name opponents of his gun who were under the thumb of outside interests.

Eventually Owen won the day, and Lysaghts produced 45,779 guns. By this time Owen was disenchanted and withdrew from the world to a log cabin south of Wollongong and began building a small sawmill so his brothers would have employment when the war ended. His dreams of this venture vanished when the Government taxed him \$8,600 on his \$11,250 in royalties – the Government had saved \$2,981,942 by equipping the Army with Owens instead of Thompsons.

Information was given to police that an illicit still was operating in the vicinity of Owen's cabin – no still was found, but a bottle of home brew was found in his cabin. He was subsequently fined \$25 and a similar amount for having a submachine gun in his possession.

The spark of life had left him by this. His invention had brought him nothing but trouble. By this time he was drinking heavily. His brothers had returned and came to visit him. That night he drank a bottle of whisky and died in Wollongong Hospital on 1 April 1949, aged 33 years. The Owen Gun went to Korea in October 1950 where it functioned faultlessly; to the Malayan Emergency in 1955 and to Vietnam in 1964.



Original Officers of 2/3 Lt AA Regiment.

Left: Lieutenant Colonel J W Rhoden CO.

Top row: Majors J A Hipworth, P W Stokes, Captains B A Baglin, F H Jorgensen, P G Hayes, A Margetts, A F Young, Adjutant Lieutenant R Coggins. **Bottom row:** Lieutenants J D Croke, L J Davis, J L Donaldson, K Dyer, D B Fitzhardinge, J C Guest, T J Harris, R V Harry.

