



# Take Post April 2021



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

### The 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk—11 April to 7 December 1941

#### Introduction

The year 2021 is highly significant for the Regiment Association as it marks two important anniversaries. The first is that it is the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Australian Artillery. As the Australian Artillery Association explains, 'On 1 August 1871, the NSW Colonial Secretary's Office proclaimed the raising of a Permanent Military Force that included one battery of artillery, to be called the 'New South Wales Artillery' (<https://australianartilleryassociation.com/>).

The second significant anniversary is that 2021 marks 80 years since the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Aust Light Anti-Aircraft (LAA) Regiment arrived in the Middle East theatre of war, rapidly being deployed to combat zones.

11 April 1941 (Easter Friday) is traditionally taken as the date upon which the Siege of Tobruk commenced. The Regiment's 8<sup>th</sup> Battery served with distinction throughout the Australian Army's five months in Tobruk, under siege. On 11 April, the other elements of the Regiment were also in the Middle East: RHQ, 7<sup>th</sup> Battery and 9<sup>th</sup> Battery were travelling from Khassa Camp in Palestine to the staging camp at El Amiriya in Egypt. The following week, 7<sup>th</sup> Battery embarked for the disastrous Crete campaign. The men of Signals Section and Workshop Section were at RHQ or attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> Batteries.

Over the years, the Regiment Association has written much about the Middle East campaign and the Regiment's involvement in it. Here we focus specifically on the Siege of Tobruk. The Regiment's official history, *On Target* (Rae, Harris & Bryant 1987), provides full details on the Regiment's roles in the Middle East campaign in general, and in the Siege in particular. I will not repeat those details, but instead focus on some specific elements that I hope will be interesting to the reader, and perhaps new to some. But first, the Melbourne-based Rats of Tobruk Association provides as a succinct summary of the Siege, and its significance:

*By 10 April 1941, the German and Italian forces under the command of Lieutenant General Erwin Rommel had surrounded the Tobruk garrison which was being defended by British Commonwealth forces including more than 14,000 Australians, under the command of Major General Leslie Morshead. Along the perimeter the first shots were ex-*

*changed. The siege had begun. Heavy fighting continued for 242 days. It was an epic battle and despite heavy casualties, the Tobruk garrison was held. Finally, on 7 December 1941, Rommel was forced to abandon the siege. This was one of the longest sieges in British military history and gave rise to the legend of the mighty 'Rats of Tobruk' (<https://ratsoftobrukassociation.org.au/>).*



AWM Tobruk Harbour Diarama

#### Background and context

The 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Division composed the key defenders of the garrison, along with British, Indian and Polish troops, and some air support (though the Germans commanded the skies). Three Australian artillery units were there: the 2/12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment (less 1 Battery), and 8<sup>th</sup> Battery, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> LAA Regiment. Importantly, although the Field Regiment and the Anti-Tank Regiment were equipped with their guns, this was not the case with respect to 8<sup>th</sup> LAA Battery: it had not been issued with the 40 mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns that should have been their weapons, and had to make do with captured Italian guns, predominantly 20 mm Breda guns, nothing like as effective as the Bofors would have been. (British AA gunners at Tobruk were equipped with their 40 mm Bofors guns.)

What is the significance of the town of Tobruk? Why was so much effort, and so many casualties, expended in defending it against what seemed to be the invincible German Afrika  
*Continued on page 6*

## 2nd / 3rd Remembrance Group

The Remembrance Group, comprised of direct descendants of original members, was formally established in 2008 and today numbers almost 100 members.

If you are the son or daughter of an original member and/or have children who would like to participate in the activities of the Remembrance Group, please contact Malcolm Wrigglesworth, Honorary Secretary on 03 9726 0803 or send us a message through the "Contact Us" section of the Association's website: [www.antiaircraft.org.au/Contact Us](http://www.antiaircraft.org.au/Contact Us). It is not an onerous role and currently costs only \$25.00 per year to participate. Your support is important if the men and the deeds of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> are to continue to be remembered and promoted into the future.



## We Will Remember Them

Lt. David Stanley Humphreys	VX35094	7 Battery
Gnr Joseph Hamilton (John) Marshall	NX20486	8 Battery
Gnr Ian Francis Barker	VX31735	7 Battery

They shall grow not old,  
As we that are left grow old.  
Age shall not weary them,  
Nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun  
And in the morning  
We will remember them.

**Lest we forget!**

In 2014, the Association made a submission to the Australian War Memorial in partnership with the National Library of Australia, to include our web site in PANDORA, Australia's Web Archive. PANDORA was established by the National Library in 1996 to enable archiving and provision of long term access to on-line Australian publications. As a PANDORA partner, the AWM identifies, assesses, selects and catalogues sites of relevance to Australian military history. Based on our submission, the AWM assessed our web site to be of relevant military history, and authorised the National Library to add it to the PANDORA Archive.

## 2nd /3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association

Take Post is published by the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association for the benefit of members and friends of the Association.

The 2nd/ 3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was raised in Melbourne in 1940 and served with distinction in World War II, with Theatre Honours from Crete, Tobruk, the Western Desert, Syria, Port Moresby, Milne Bay, Lae, Buna and Borneo. The Regiment experienced a high number of battle casualties through deaths, wounded and prisoners of war.

Formed in 1945, the Regiment Association has been active in commemorating and celebrating the history of the 2nd/3rd ever since.

In 2008, the Association's Constitution was amended to allow descendants of the original 1,935 members of the Regiment to become members of the Association and to provide for the future carriage of the Association.

The 2nd/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association is an Unincorporated Association managed by a voluntary Committee of Management.

### Website

[www.antiaircraft.org.au](http://www.antiaircraft.org.au)

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# PRESIDENT'S REPORT— 2020 AGM



What an unusual year it has been with the 2020 ANZAC Day March cancelled, as well as our 2019-20 Annual General Meeting, reunion and lunch, due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

With no official March and with the lockdown confining us to our homes, the ingenuity and com-

mitment of members came to the fore. I received a messages from a number of members regarding the way that they and their families had commemorated ANZAC Day, mostly with personal and family dawn services conducted at the end of driveways.

This year the RSL has determined that only current veterans are permitted to participate in the ANZAC Day March and that banners belonging to Associations such as ours, must be delivered to the RSL, to be carried by scouts in a massed display. This arrangement is ostensibly due to the requirement to manage the total numbers participating in the March to less than 5,000 people.

The Committee has decided that as our fathers and grandfathers treasured the Regimental banner we are not prepared to hand it over for others to carry, where its safety and care is beyond our control. Thus the Regiment will not have a presence at this year's March. However I trust that the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccination program will see us again participating in 2022.

It is with pleasure that I welcome Allicia Rae, granddaughter of Cec Rae (9<sup>th</sup> Battery), who kindly volunteered to assist with organising the AGM, reunion and lunch and has been co-opted to the Committee for 2020.

This *Take Post* is again jam-packed with interesting stories and information and I congratulate Colin Bragg on another excellent edition. As this year is the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the siege of Tobruk, the feature article relates to the Regiment's and in particular, 8<sup>th</sup> Battery's role in that event. The war diary extracts of Gunner Leslie Miller (8<sup>th</sup> Battery) provides us with the first-hand and personal experience of a Rat of Tobruk at that time.

My sincere thanks go to the Committee members for their work throughout the year to ensure that the story of the men of the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and particularly those that didn't return, is not forgotten.

Anne Rae

*Editor's Note: The poem below was sourced from "A Padre with the Rats of Tobruk" by Chaplain JC Salter*

## TOBRUK

There's a battle-scarred town that stands by the shore,  
On the edge of the brown desert sands;  
Though we who have known it may see it no more,  
Yet firm in our memory it stands.

And it is not because of its beauty or fame,  
Or its buildings, or treasures, or arts;  
It is battered and broken and torn; yet its name  
Stirs the blood in Australian hearts.

Around it for miles on the Libyan plain  
Lies the wreckage and litter of war,  
For the red tide surged round it again and again,  
And racked it and tested it sore.

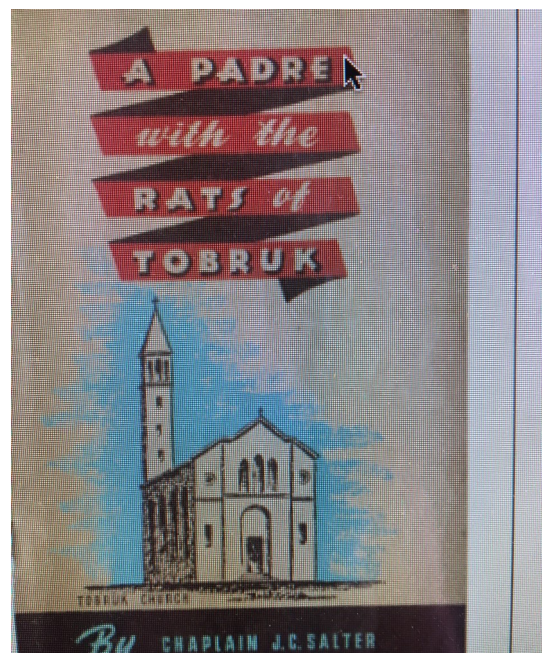
The Sons of the Anzacs for months held that post,  
And the shock of attacks there they took,  
As they clung to that strip of bare desert - bound coast  
With its centre - the town of Tobruk.

In vain were the efforts to smash its defence,  
That outpost took blow upon blow;  
But withstood all assaults, though at what an expense  
The graves of the garrison show.

For behind that rough wall of oil-drums built low  
Lie buried the men who have died,  
Rough-shapen brown mounds, and there row upon row,  
Crosses mark what the desert would hide.

And because of our comrades who lie in that plot,  
Mingling their dust with the sand,  
Making forever of this hallowed spot  
A bit of their own native land.

We cherish this place: In our memories it lives,  
And I'm willing to swear on the Book  
To those left to mourn them, a glory it gives  
To the battle-scarred town of Tobruk.



# The Sentry's Log . . . . .



## Sentry's Log By David McDonald

As the Association's Research Officer I have the pleasure of responding to requests for information about the Regiment and its members. Many of these are quite straightforward, with descendants seeking information about relatives who served in the Regiment or in other anti-aircraft units. I am usually able to provide them with information about how to find out what they are looking for, particularly through accessing the person's service record at the Australian Archives.

<http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/SearchScreens/BasicSearch.aspx>

Another option is to review the relevant sections of the Regiment's history, "On Target"

<http://www.antiaircraft.org.au/about-us/on-target/on-target>.

A useful source for interpreting the service record abbreviations is the National Archives web page 'Common abbreviations found on service records' at

<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/Explore/defence/abbreviations.aspx>.

Another is the Australian War Memorial's online 'Search for abbreviation or acronym':

<https://www.awm.gov.au/glossary/>

Their encyclopedia also helps:

<https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia>

Please contact me at:

[info@antiaircraft.org.au](mailto:info@antiaircraft.org.au) if you need further assistance in understanding the service records.

*The following are examples of the enquiries received from members and interested persons through our web site:*

## Ken Greenwood

*'As a Community project I'm researching locals who served in WW2, for our 75th VP Day Commemorations. Sought info on NX21823 William Walter RICHARDS, 9 Bty ex 1 Aust AA Regt. Information provided. The community is Telegraph Point just north of Port Macquarie NSW. Ken subsequently advised that our Association was acknowledged in the documentation/display they prepared.*

## Jeff O'Donnell

*'Hi i have inherited a ww2 german officers fotoalbum diary his name is karl sigall he was in the afrika korps during ww2 he was with the 7/71 Luftwaffe flak motorized company transportation i have had the diary translated by a german woman here in brisbane i would like to no what particular sections were there within the company i no there was logistis officer signals officer transportation officer there were six ieutenants and a major he was a leuitant general i have tried to find and searched goggle but there is nothing that i can find about the different officers commands could you please help as i am trying to write the book on karl appreciated jeff.'*

I sought clarification of what info he wanted from us. No response received.

## Karral Miller

*'I am the daughter of George Arthur Miller VX46281 who fought with the 2/3 LAA Regiment and served in Tobruk and New Guinea. I have become very interested in his Army story after transcribing the diaries of his brother, Les, (VX46271) who was in the same gun crew and with my father throughout the war.*

*I would like to join the Association. How do I go about doing this?'*

Colin responded. Karral joined the Association and undertook to discuss with her family our potential use of the diary's contents.

## Patti Green

*Re VX34003 Gnr Joseph Thomas Carlyon, 7 Bty, POW*

*'My father was a member of the 7th Battery and was taken prisoner on Crete and spent the rest of the war in*

*'Stalag's. He was part of the group from Stalag 344 Lamsdorf that was marched to Berlin ending up in Stalag XIII C that was liberated by the Americans.*

*It would be an honour to be part of this group, please let me know how I can join. Thank you Patti Green'. Colin responded re membership, and Patti subsequently provided extra information about her father's movements as a POW in Germany.*

## Catherine Westerland

*Questions about the uniforms worn by the members, re her grandfather VX31385 John Edmund Phillips (John Edward Phillips at Aust Archive and AWM), 7 Bty, KIA in the Crete evacuation. Info provided. Subsequent correspondence about an indexing error in his name at Aust Archives and the War Memorial.*

## Kate Houghton

She had a copy of *On Target* that Ron Bryant gave to her parents, and was willing to donate it. We suggested she send it to the Association to pass on to the next descendant who is seeking a copy.

## Sally McLeod

*I would like to thank your organisation so much for the information and stories put together in this article [a chapter in On Target]. It was just amazing to read the details.*

*I have searched for years for information on the Battle of Crete and specifically information on the role of HMS Hereward. The best I have been able to manage is a paragraph at most or a sentence or two or nothing in a whole book. I did not know about your organisation or the role founding members took in the Battle of Crete and their connection to the Hereward. It was also fascinating to learn about the connected stories of HMS Hereward and HMS Dido. My Grandfather was on HMS Hereward, He made it into the water (was seen by a friend in the water) after she was hit in May 1941 but that was the last known of his life.*

*Can you please tell me if the pdf 'Heraklion-Evacuation' was a chapter in a published book and if so, could I please know the title of the book?'* Information provided.



# ...and the Secretary's Desk

## Gavin Lee

### Chairman, MCC Military Veterans Group

MCC is Melbourne Cricket Club. Gavin wrote to Anne Rae seeking information on VX14000 Lieutenant James Gilbert Mann, B Troop, 7 Battery, who died in the sinking of HMS *Hereward* during the evacuation of Crete. He also sent us two photographs of Lt Mann. Information provided.

## Neville Marsh

*'I would like to use the photo which runs in your banner labelled "Milne Bay New Guinea 1943" in a publication about World War 2 service men from Queensland. I believe the image shows a Kittyhawk landing near a Bofors gun at No. 1 Airstrip at Milne Bay. Can you please tell me the source of this image?'*

Information provided: AWM <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C10258>.

## Brooke Miller

*Enquiring about a relative VX110819 Joseph Francis Ecker. Advised that he was not a member of the Regt, and how to request his service record. Possibly a brother of VX46234 Bombardier John "Jack" William Ecker, 7 Bty.*

## Webmaster, Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Assn

I wrote 'I note the unit patches page <https://www.ratsoftobrukdscendants.org.au/> contains an error regarding the 2/8th Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Battery of the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The Battery (which served in the Siege) is listed under '9th Australian Division (RAA) Royal Australian Artillery' with the colour patch of that formation. However, the Battery (as part of the Regiment) was not in 9 Div, it was part of 1 Corps Artillery, RAA. The colour patch of 1 Corps Artillery, that they wore, is on our website <https://www.anti-aircraft.org.au/>. Being a second AIF sub-unit, the pale border of the colour patch was actually grey.' The webmaster acknowledged that the Battery was not part of 9 Div., but grouped various sub-units for convenience.

## Patti Green

Queries about obtaining copies of photos on our website showing her father, VX34003 Gnr Tom Carlyon. Colin re-



Hearty greetings to all members of the 2nd / 3rd LAA Regt Association and welcome to the Association's Annual General Meeting and Reunion Luncheon. As has been the case for several years (since our website was established), most enquires are received through our website or by email. The Association Research Officer David McDonald handles the more detailed responses. (Please refer to the Sentry's Log for some examples of enquires in this year's Take Post)

This past twelve months little correspondence has directly come across my desk apart from the odd phone call or email towards the end of the calendar year in 2020.

One such phone call was from Kate Houghton who had a copy of *On Target* given to her parents by former President Ron Bryant. The book, signed by all three of the joint authors - C.J.E Rae, A.L. Harris and R.K. Bryant - also contained a typed history letter from Ron. Further to some discussion, Kate donated this valuable signed copy of *On Target* to the Association for safe keeping, and for passing on to a descendant of an original service member of the Regiment. We are very grateful for this generous donation.

### The Year in Review

I continue to receive phone calls from descendants of members of other anti-aircraft regiments seeking identification of former war veterans. These calls frequently reflect that:

- Most WW2 Associations have been wound up, or have not existed.
- Very few Associations have a website, particularly Australian Anti-Aircraft Regiment Associations.
- A Web search under "Anti-Aircraft" will invariably bring up our 2nd / 3rd web site.

Whilst unable to answer all these en-

quires, we do endeavour to provide sufficient information for them to be followed up by the enquirees. The repetitive nature of many enquires are now handled via our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) component of the Association's web site.

During the year 2020 / 2021 the Association was advised of the passing of the following original service members.

**John Marshall (NX20486) 8 Battery**  
**Dave Humphreys (VX35094) 7 Battery**  
**Ian Barker (VX31735) 7 Battery**

The passing of these veterans leaves the Association with only one surviving original member of the Regiment with whom we are in regular contact - out of 1,935 members who fought with the 2nd / 3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment during WW2. There are possibly another four surviving war veterans, but we have been unable to contact them for several years.

### Donations

The Association continues to receive donations from members, enabling us to continue to underwrite the cost of the AGM/Reunion, and undertake maintenance of our web site, produce *Take Post* and to fund any unscheduled technical up-grade to our site. Thank you to all members who have made donations throughout the year. The Association is very grateful and appreciates all donations to enable the continuance of this wonderful Association in remembrance of the original members of the 2nd / 3rd A.L.A.A. Regiment.

### 2nd/3rd Website

The Association web site is working well. With enquiries dealt with by Treasurer Colin Bragg and Research Officer David McDonald who maintain a regular watch on day to day activities. More technical aspects are referred to Malcolm Romano from Designsense Web, for action.

### Remembrance Group

The Remembrance Group continues to remain the around the same numbers, approximately 90 members, of whom 50 attended the 2019 AGM/Reunion Luncheon... a very good attendance. In 2020 the Association AGM/Reunion was cancelled in April, due to the Government Covid-19 restrictions on gatherings and

**Continued on Page 8**

## The Siege Of Tobruk (from page 1)

Korps? Prior to its occupation by the Commonwealth forces it was an Italian garrison town:

*Tobruk was a sand-blown outpost on the edge of the Libyan Desert, a terminal recess where the heat, rats, flies, sand fleas and boredom turned all hope in the garrison in one direction—to escape—and all ambition rested on one word—repatriation. But Tobruk was destined to be a prize, to be fought for again and again in the next two years, with a ferocity that could only be explained by its strategic location than other military charms: it had a deep water harbour, a plentiful supply of subterranean drinking water and it was a 'fortress' of sorts. Tobruk was the only good harbour between Benghazi and Alexandria; it possessed the only good water supply between Derna [in Libya] and Mersa Matruh [in Egypt]. No army could press on to Suez with Tobruk in the hands of the enemy, for that could mean an end to supply lines, encirclement and ruination (Cochrane 2005, p. vii).*

In late 1940 the Italian forces from Libya advanced east until they had crossed the Egyptian border, but stalled there. The 'British' Western Desert Force (including the 6<sup>th</sup> Australian Division) hit back, defeating the Italians in battle after battle along the coast and desert to south of Benghazi in Libya. The Regiment's 8<sup>th</sup> Battery followed 6<sup>th</sup> Division to Benghazi, providing AA cover at diverse locations along the coast. This Desert Offensive was a brilliant success, but inadequate military resources meant that those successes were not able to be maintained. The Australian 6<sup>th</sup> Division was transferred to Greece to fight the invading German forces, and was replaced by the under-trained and under-equipped Australian 9<sup>th</sup> Division. Experienced, well-equipped (especially with armour) German troops were moved from Europe to establish Rommel's Afrika Korps. It forced the Commonwealth troops back east, with heavy losses to the latter. The decision was made that 9<sup>th</sup> Division, with support from British gunners and a small complement of Indian soldiers, was to hold Tobruk and thus hold the enemy's advance for at least two months—to buy time for the assembly of reinforcements, armoured troops in particular, for the defence



Engineers in a dugout furnished with bits from wrecked ships. AWM Photo 009515

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

009515

of Egypt' (*op. cit.* p. xii). The Siege of Tobruk had commenced.

### The Siege

For some, the term 'siege' may connote people hiding behind walls, or another form of perimeter, while an outside enemy tries to breach the defences. Nothing could be further from the truth regarding this siege! Lt Gen Morshead

gave unequivocal orders to his men:

*On the evening before the withdrawal into Tobruk, he had called his brigadiers together. 'There'll be no Dunkirk here,' he had said. 'If we should have to get out, we shall fight our way out. There is to be no surrender and no retreat.' So each unit, as it had moved into its allotted position within the perimeter had been told (and had heard with relief) that this time it would hold its ground and give the enemy no quarter (Maughan 1966, p. 159).*

On 11 April (the first day of the siege) Morshead's headquarters issued in operational order that ... decreed that active infantry patrolling should be carried out in all sectors with the utmost vigour, so inaugurating that aggressive patrolling policy pursued relentlessly throughout the siege. The garrison at once asserted its mastery over no-man's land during the night hours and never lost it, keeping the besiegers' front-line infantry continually on the defensive (*op. cit.*, pp. 137-8).

And on a lighter note, with an underlying seriousness to it: on 13 April, German aircraft scattered leaflets over the fortress. These read:

*'The General Officer Commanding the German forces in Libya hereby requests that the British troops occupying Tobruk surrender their arms. Single soldiers waving white handkerchiefs are not fired on. Strong German forces have already surrounded Tobruk and it is useless to try and escape.' Morshead, in a report written a few days later, commented that because of the prevailing dust and of the need to ration water for essential purposes, no white handkerchiefs were available [!]' (*op. cit.*, p. 145).*

As noted above, the German forces were far superior to the defenders in terms of numbers of men, amount of armour, and battle experience. In addition, they had overwhelming air superiority, with the Luftwaffe far outnumbering the fighting planes of the Royal Air Force. This meant that the work of the anti-aircraft units was critically important in protecting the ground forces, including the infantry, the armour, and the other guns.

### The Gunners

Let us return to the anti-aircraft gunners of 8<sup>th</sup> Battery, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Aust LAA Regiment. We are fortunate that two of them, who for decades were leaders of our Regiment Association, published their memoirs/diaries. They are Ron Bryant's *A gunner's tour in World War 2* (2010) and John Campbell's *To cut a long story short: a memoir* (2013).

John Campbell described the challenges of combat, the awful loss of life, and the boredom of waiting between actions. On the third of these topics, he wrote:

*A lot of the time it was just boring and hot. I remember in this particular gun site we had our gun with sandbags around it to protect us when we are on the job but for living quarters somehow or other all we had was a big sandy coloured tarpaulin we'd scrounged from somewhere, draped over some empty 44 gallon drums. We stood some of those up and we put others around the edges and we put this whole tarpaulin over the drums and that is where we spread our blankets and where we ate. It was only 44 gallons drum height. I remember lying in there one day in the midst of one of those very, very strong dust storms which just came out of nowhere. The sand was so fine it was like powder and it would leak in everywhere. It did not matter where you were, it would get everywhere. Everything just dies during a sand storm. No action, no anything, so you just go down and rest.*

When we move later in the day after the storm had died down, everything, just everything inside was covered with this powder. It was in your eyelids, in your ears, everywhere. When you stood it would drop off you (Campbell pp. 85-6). Ron Bryant described how 8<sup>th</sup> Battery travel by sea from Egypt to Tobruk in February 1941, moved west as part of the rout of the Italian forces to Derna and Benghazi, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Division's fighting retreat to Tobruk in early April. Six weeks later he wrote in his diary:

*Word has been received that the thirty men of our Battery who were posted missing during the retreat from Benghazi, were captured by the Germans. Gunner Les Wilkins, a despatch rider, made a break for it on his motorcycle, but was shot. He died of wounds a few hours later. The remainder are now prisoners-of-war.*

*31<sup>st</sup> May. It's been terribly hot lately and we've been feeling very tired. The water ration is meagre. We try and finish the work of gun and ammunition maintenance by 10am, then keep to the shade of our dugout, such as it is, being a cover of canvas or sheet iron with some sand over it. Jerry belted us with his artillery, landing two huge shells outside the pit, and putting another 20 or so around the dugouts, tearing clothing and holing petrol tins. We moved the gun a few hundred yards.*

*1<sup>st</sup> June. We worked until midnight last night digging new dugouts and building a new gun pit. The heat is terrible. Water is scarce. We tried chewing raw potatoes to ease the thirst but they tasted most unpleasant.*

*Twenty-five Stukas attacked the Harbour. We fired at three, hitting one, which crashed in flames just outside our lines. The anti-aircraft shot down three planes in this raid (Bryant pp. 31-32).*

### What was it like in the gunpit?

*On Target* quotes an un-named 8<sup>th</sup> Battery gunner in answer to this question:

*One Gunner wrote of a typical action: — 'We get a sinking feeling in the stomach as we watch the dive-bombers circle around the area, then turn towards us. Although it is supposed to be a crime to smoke at the gun, most of us are smoking by this time to help us to keep calm. Down screams a Stuka in a spectacular, almost vertical dive. Cigarettes thrown away now we wait until it's well within range, perhaps 3,000 feet. Looks as if he's on to us. Fire! Smoke, flame, pounding guns, dust, exploding bombs, anti-aircraft shell-bursts, gun stoppages, cursing, ejecting jammed shells, firing again, hits, then it's generally all over in a few lively minutes. All hands get on to checking the gun, reloading trays of shells and tossing hot empty shellcases from the gunpit. Luck has been with us, but sometimes we wonder if it's being stretched a bit far. As the planes come at us, we don't feel too happy, but once our little gun is firing away, all's well and it's exciting enough. After the excitement subsides, we return to our digging, eating, reading, writing or just yarning' (Rae, Harris & Bryant 1987, pp. 188-9).*

Departure from Tobruk

*On Target* provides some key statistics: 'Lieutenant Roy McCartney of the Military History and Information Section in the Middle East reported that during this Siege, the 8<sup>th</sup> Battery shot down 23 enemy machines. 14 more were probably destroyed. 60 were badly damaged and 100 others were hit' (*op. cit.*, p. 203).

The authors go on to point out that:

*The Tobruk Garrison had numbered from 22,000 to 23,000 troops in the fighting units, some 14,000 of whom were Aus-*

*tralian. 776 Australians were killed in action or died of wounds. 2112 were wounded. 1019 were captured or were missing, making a total of 3,907 casualties. Tobruk mark the turn of the tide. Until April 1941, the German blitzkrieg tactics with fast armour and dive-bombers had never been countered. No force or fortress had previously withstood the Nazi assault. The Tobruk Garrison gave the German land forces their first defeat of the Second World War (op. cit., pp. 204-5).*

In late September 1941, the main party of 8<sup>th</sup> Battery moved to an assembly point near the Tobruk Harbour for embarkation at night on a Royal Navy destroyer. Tragically, on the morning of 25 September, a German aircraft bombed the camps of both the 8<sup>th</sup> Battery men and the Irish LAA gunners who were to take over the 8<sup>th</sup>'s guns. Four of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battery men were killed and eight wounded. The Irish gunners suffered six killed and 13 wounded. It was a tragic departure for the Battery from Tobruk. On 26 September the main party from 8<sup>th</sup> Battery embarked on the destroyer HMS *Jackal* for Alexandria in Egypt. The rear party departed the following evening on HMS *Griffin*.

### Conclusion

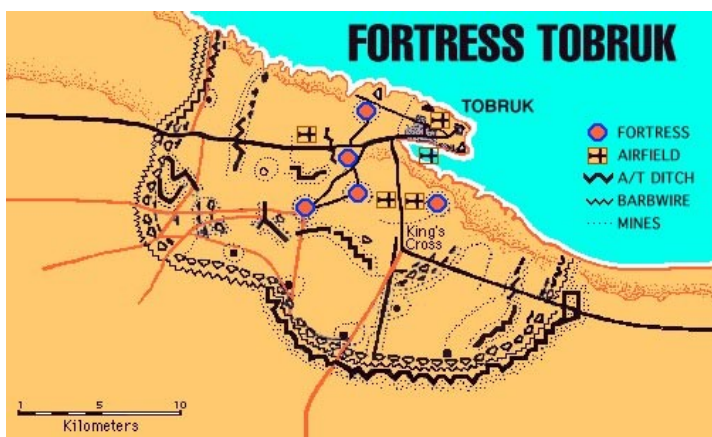
This year, 2021, is the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Regiment's first experiences of combat, and its first casualties in the form of deaths, woundings and captures by the enemy. With 11 April being commemorated as the date of the commencement of the Siege of Tobruk, this article has focused on the Battery of the Regiment that served with such distinction during the Siege. At the same time, we acknowledge with gratitude the fortitude, suffering, and achievements of all the men of the Regiment, and also remember their families at home during those difficult times.

*Lest We Forget.*

Author: David McDonald, Research Officer, 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Aust LAA Regt Association

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## Secretary's Desk (continued)

distancing measures for meetings in venues such as the RACV. These restrictions have now been eased, and we are now able to conduct our regular AGM/Reunion for 2021.

In 2019 we had two original service members, John Campbell and the late John Marshall, who thoroughly enjoyed the AGM/Reunion and Luncheon.

Please remember to advise myself or Colin Bragg (Treasurer) of any changes to your address, email and phone numbers, so we can keep in touch with further developments or forthcoming events.

## Shooting Through

*Shooting Through* is a book written by Katrina Kittel on Campo 106 escaped POW's after the Italian armistice. On Saturday 29th February, 2020 I attended Katrina's book launch at (ROTA) Tobruk House, Albert Park in Melbourne on behalf of the 2nd/3rd. My father was one of 90 POW's in this Campo 106.

This book is also dedicated to the late Bill Rudd who died on the 29th October, 2019, whose POW experience parallels my father's and many of the POW's on the run in Italy. Bill was an authority on POW history in Europe. *Shooting Through* is thoroughly researched and well written, presents a window into the soul and decision making of the POW's in their relationships with themselves, authorities and local Italians.

The book gave me an insight and better understanding of how my father and others survived as a POW, while trying to cross over the Alps/Italian border to freedom in Switzerland. My father never discussed his war experiences with family... sworn to secrecy amongst the veterans, and he always kept it to himself.

For orders, and signed copies of this book, email the author: [Katrinakittel9@gmail.com](mailto:Katrinakittel9@gmail.com) or buy through online re-sellers listed here: <https://www.echobooks.com.au/history/shooting-through/>

Malcolm Wrigglesworth, Honorary Secretary.

## The Regiment's War Diaries Online

In the past, the Association's Committee has approached the Australian War Memorial (AWM) requesting that they digitise the Regiment's war diaries. We even offered to pay to have this done. The AWM declined our offer, advising that they have a long-term project to digitise all the war diaries in their possession.

The good news is that the AWM has recently published an extensive range of the Regiment's war diaries online. They are accessible via the page headed *AWM52 Class 4 – Artillery* <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1360966>. There you will find three separate sub-classes:

AWM52 Subclass 4/11 - Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1361116>

AWM52 Subclass 4/12 - Light Anti-Aircraft Battery <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1361110>

AWM52 Subclass 4/13 - Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Comp) i.e. composite AA regiments <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1361247>

Also of interest is the formation under which the Regiment operated: AWM52 4/14/5 - *Headquarters 1 Anti-Aircraft Brigade, 1 Australian Corps* <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2660831>

The contents

Note: many of these files are huge, e.g. over 400 MB. They are in high resolution format owing to the poor condition of many of the original documents.

The *Regimental Headquarters'* (RHQ's) diaries are the most comprehensive; find them at AWM52 4/11/2 - 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2660276>. They are in 26 individual files, most of which cover one or more months, commencing with Jul-Oct 1940 and ending with Jul 1943, when the Regiment was disbanded. Some of these files include documentation from subunits, including Signals and Workshops which were attached to RHQ, to some extent.

The individual *Batteries'* war diaries are far less comprehensive. They are at AWM52 Subclass 4/12 - Light Anti-Aircraft Battery <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1361110>.

AWM52 4/12/4 - 2/7 Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Battery <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2660428> covers just Jul-Aug 1943 and Jan 1945 as part of 2/2 Composite AA Regt.

AWM52 4/12/5 - 2/8 Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (Airbourne (*sic*)) <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2660431> covers Jul-Dec 1943 and Jan-Sep 1944.

AWM52 4/12/6 - 2/9 Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Battery <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2660434> covers Jul-Aug 1942, Sep-Dec 1942, Feb-Mar 1943 & May-Aug 1943.

The *Composite AA Regiments'* diaries, of which two of the batteries became parts, are more comprehensive:

AWM52 4/13/2 - 2/2 Australian Composite Anti-Aircraft Regiment (includes our 2/7 LAA Battery) <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2660643> 12 files covering Aug-Dec 1943 to Sep-Nov 1945.

AWM52 4/13/4 - 2/3 Australian Composite Anti-Aircraft Regiment (includes our 2/9 LAA Battery) <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2660679> 16 files covering Sep-Oct 1943 to Aug-Nov 1945.

The war diaries for *Signals Section* and *Workshops Section* are not provided.

The Association is grateful to the Australian War Memorial for making these materials available online for research and commemorative purposes.



*Rats Of Tobruk unofficial Medal*



## Extracts Of The War Diaries Of Leslie Arnold Miller (VX46271)

*Editor's Note: The Association received an enquiry from Karal Miller, the daughter of George Arthur Miller (VX46281) as a consequence of her transcription of her Uncle Leslie's War Diaries. Not only did Karal become a member of the Association, but she kindly sought permission from the Miller family to let us include extracts of her Uncle's diaries in "Take Post". Both her father and her uncle served with the 2nd/3rd in Tobruk and in New Guinea. These diaries were written by Gunner Leslie Arnold Miller, VX46271, 8th Battery, 2/3rd LAA Regiment.*

*Les grew up at Charleroi, a rural area in north-east Victoria, the third son of nine children (eight boys, one girl).*

*On 25th July 1940, he went to Melbourne with two of his brothers, George and Ernie, and four friends from the same region, and enlisted in the AIF at Caulfield.*

*He and George were assigned to the 3rd Light Anti Aircraft Regiment and remained together, even in the same gun crew, for the duration of the war.*

*The complete unedited diaries of Les Miller may be found on the Association's website under Take Post / Full Versions Of Take Post Articles.*

### 1941

Left in the *Mauritania* from Port Melbourne 29th December 1940. Cleared the heads 8.30am after staying in the bay overnight December 30th.

31st December Picked up the rest of the convoy at sea. They were *Queen Mary*, *Awatea*, *Aquitania*, *Mauritania*, *Dominion Monarch* and the cruiser *Canberra*.

7th January 1941

At sea. Have not been sea sick yet. Personnel in our cabin are Charlie Little, Allan Murphy, Gordon Austin, Jim Bryant, Jack Confait, Don Ryan

12th January 1941

Landed at Columbo. Viewed Columbo from the boat all day. Changed over from the *Mauritania* to the *Devonshire*. Very hot weather.

13th January 1941

Went on leave to Columbo. Drove round in a bus seeing the sights. Arthur Sutherland was with George and I. Drank a few bottles of beer. Alf did not get his leave till the next day. Came back to the boat just on dark.

14th January 1941

Sat in harbour and fumed a bit because they would not give us more leave. Watched the *locals* diving for silver coins in the water-at this they are very adept.

16th January 1941

Left 12 o'clock from the harbour. There are fifteen boats in our convoy now. The only original ship to come with us is the *Dominion Monarch*- the rest stayed at Columbo.

27th January 1941

At sea. Celebrated my birthday with some beer. Alf and Arthur joined us.

28th January 1941

Anchored at Port Suez but very foggy. Entered Suez Canal 3pm. The entrance was magnificent. Further on desert on one side, plenty of camels. The other side trees and palms. Passed the Australian War Memorial. Turned very cold.

29th January 1941

Arrived at Port Said 4.30pm and left again at 5.30pm to cross the Mediterranean. Port Said is the prettiest place I have seen so far. There was a strict blackout.

30th January 1941

Arrived at Haifa at 10.30am. Have not been ashore yet. The place looks very modern. The place looks as though they have copied the design of the American buildings. We were to have got off for our destination but ordered to stay on board for the night.

31st January 1941

Left the *Devonshire* at 12 noon, boarded the train at 1.45pm, arrived at our destination at 6.30pm.

Saw beautiful green fields and orchards on the train journey to Khassa. Amused at the primitive methods of the Arabs ploughing with wooden ploughs.

1st February 1941 Saw us settled in our new camp at Khassa. Received a letter from Mum. Very pleased to hear from home.

4th February 1941

The Prime Minister Mr Menzies visited us at our camp. It seems a very strange land.

5th February 1941

The news broke to us that the 8th Battery were moving to the forward area of Libya to take over the ac-ac guns. While waiting for the order to move proper the air raid alarm sounded. There was a great scatter for shelter. A little after, the all-clear sounds.

6th February 1941

Left our camp, Khassa, for the forward area at 9pm. The Colonel told us we had drawn the plum. I wonder.

9th February 1941

Went on guard duty and was very amused at the Libyan troops singing and dancing. A lot of boys putting their meals over the side. The ship is a very dirty vessel.

10th February 1941

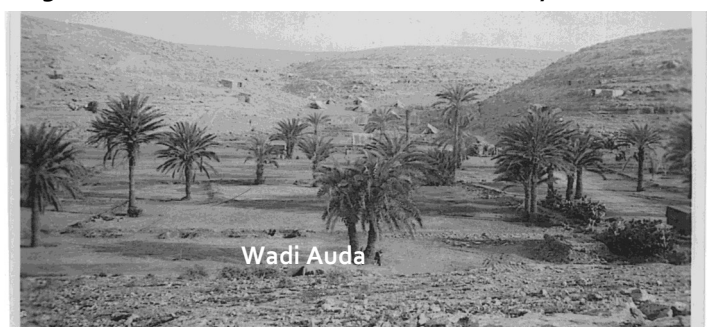
Pulled into Tobruk but never went ashore owing to one of the Libyans getting sick. Saw seventeen ships and one plane sunk in the harbour. Believed to be 51 sunk vessels there all told, all Italian vessels.

11th February 1941

At 7pm went ashore. George and I were guards on the baggage party. Passed damaged and burnt trucks by the dozen on our way to the camp. Retired for the night at 12 o'clock.

12th February 1941

Woke in the gorge, Waddy Ody they call it. Saw dozens of dugouts and there were a few forts battered by the Australi-



ans two weeks previous. There are hand grenades and rifles, ammunition, all Italian, scattered everywhere. Tunic bandoliers, well dash it all - things are too numerous to mention.

13th February 1941

George and I with three other mates went into Tobruk and gave the town the once over. Had tea with the Tommy soldiers. We ran into Don Ballard in Tobruk. Came back to camp in the dark and finished up the night on a bottle of LLB [*Lemon, Lime & Bitters*] presented to us by Sgt Gallagher.

## War Diaries Of Les Miller (VX46271) from page 9

6th February 1941

George and I visited the naval fort and viewed all the big guns. The Italians must have spent a power of money. Underground passages running from one gun to another.

17th February 1941

Went out for a route march and general scrounging day. In the afternoon went for a swim in the sea and spent the rest washing. Damn it, I wish I had got married- I'd send it home to her to do.

20th February 1941

At last they have given us guns to use, six arrived this morning but they are captured dago guns. They seem al-



*George Miller (standing left) and Les Miller (front right)*

right. In the night a party of us went out scrounging for food and three of them got lost and arrived home after daylight. Must say we get a lot of fun out of this scrounging.

22nd February 1941

In the afternoon went over to some Scotch pals and they informed us they expected a raid on Tobruk at daylight and we got it. Drank 14 bottles of Abbotsford with the Scotch boys.

23rd February 1941

Viewed the air raid at daylight, a very impressive sight. The ac-ac shells were bursting all around one plane. A little while after three Hurricanes zoomed over us in pursuit and according to reports shot one down. In the afternoon went to base guard at the food dump. Spent a good night but, by hell, that rum had some kick in it.

24th February 1941

Came off guard at 7am and came back to the camp with a lot of extra tobacco. After dinner fired our first shots out of the ac-ac guns. At 7pm a German raid over us. Ac-ac gun from Tobruk went into action and fired shells by the dozens. Between them and the searchlights it was a magnificent display. Our subsection manned our gun thereby gaining the distinction of going into action first. They dropped some bombs. Bombs hit the bakehouse killing twenty people.

28th February 1941

Left our camp at 10am for Benghazi. Passed through Derna at 5pm. George very sick with the backyard trots. Camped a few miles out of Derna.

4th March 1941

Moved to our gun position out on the pier. A very hard day sand bagging the gun pit. Have a cosy little hut for the gun crew. They are Sergeant Gallagher, J Courtney, H O'Donnell, A Sinclair, G Miller, L Miller. No enemy activity.

6th March 1941

A very nice morning. At 10am the German plane came over and did the ac ac open up on him. Our gun fired 84 shells at him alone. That night at 8.50 heard two explosions and raced out of the hut to hear another plane over but never sighted him. About ten minutes another alarm then a little later, another. Our gun kept silent, they were too high up.

8th March 1941

At 8pm over came enemy aircraft. We opened up on them. They dropped about twelve bombs, some about three hundred yards away but no damage done. Our gun fired 96 shells. Another alarm but no action. Our lucky day. At 8.30 over came the bombers and five bombs dropped in the sea less than 100 yards away and more further on. Our shots appeared to be hitting him. I don't want to be that close to a bomb again. Not ever. In the day I was acting no 1 of the gun team. I was in the firing seat both raids. The Navy reported the plane down in the sea.

13th March 1941

Two air raid alarms in the day time but no action as planes were not sighted. Just as well for the enemy as we would have shot them to pieces, at least I reckon so.

14th March 1941

Moved from our gun pit to another gun on top of Customs house. The whole house to six of us, electric light and furniture in every room. Is it any plum living like kings. There is an electric buzzer from the gun to our sleeping quarters. Also we have a piano.

19th March 1941

Roused out of bed by the sirens. Enemy planes dropped 12 bombs at 4.10am. they were too high for action. All told there were 36 bombs dropped round the rest of the town. Rest of the day quiet up till 8.40pm. Had some fun swapping tea and cigarettes with the Arabs. Did some fair bargains too.

21st March 1941

Brother Ernie's birthday. I wonder where he is at the moment. Benghazi free of raids this morning, first for some time. Still in bed sick but feel much better.

In the evening Sergeant Cavanagh and Frank Maudsley arrived at our house injured. They were almost washed off the mole with the high seas. They were cut about a bit and lucky to be alive. Received word that we had to move 20 miles but the Major said George and I had to stay behind as we were sick.

29th March 1941



*Sgt. Gallagher, J Courtney, H O'Donnell, A Sinclair, George Miller, Les Miller*

George and I back with Sgt Gallagher's old crew. Shifted to the other side of the town on 18 pounder naval guns. Shifted into billets with some Tommy soldiers.

1st April 1941

Nice day, same routine gun drill. Like this place very much. The meals are good and we are getting our mail more regular. We watch the Arabs blowing up good hauls of fish. The enemy have left us alone for some time now. Just about to

start tea when a bomber flew over. We thought he was our own until he dropped a stick of bombs about 400 yards away. In the night we got orders to pack our things ready to evacuate.

**War Diaries Of Les Miller (VX46271) from page 10**

ate Benghazi, then told to stand by our guns as the Germans were advancing.

2nd April 1941

Still on alert, ready to move. A lot of the other troops already moved out. They rushed the armoured division up to the front and reports are that they are holding them.

3rd April 1941

At 8.30 they started to blow up guns and petrol. Then we got word to blow ours. So we rammed one up the breech and one down the end of the barrel. Sgt Gallagher and I got a long wire on the guns and fired them. Pieces of gun blew in all directions. 9.30 we evacuated Benghazi. The dense smoke pouring up from the petrol dumps made a magnificent sight. There was a great scatter from the convoy as a bomber was sighted but it turned out to be our own. Camped on the road just out of Barce and in the night word came round that if we did not move we would be German prisoners. So, by heck, we moved.

5th April 1941

Stayed the night at Annunzio. We are waiting for an infantry brigade to come up then we move on towards Tobruk. We are now ac ac for the 9th Division.

6th April 1941

Our things are ready packed to move at a moment's notice. Things look very bad. Moved on 20 kilometres. There is still no opposition from the air. The Hurricanes are doing a great job. We were told that they shot down 17 Jerry aircraft. Evacuated our camp at 6.30pm and travelled all night. What a trip, over rough desert roads. There are thousands of buses moving along. The Huns are very close behind us. We are getting close to Tobruk. There are 4 gun crews missing. They were sent back to guard a pass. We are living in hope of them joining us later.

*Les did not write in the diary for two months probably because this was a time of intense action. Lieutenant General Leslie Morshead, in a speech delivered at Victoria Barracks, Sydney in 1947 (AWM), spoke of this period of time at Tobruk: The last week of April was duly marked by waves of up to forty dive bombers, escorted by fighters, attacking target after target, paying special attention to the brigade in reserve, Pilastrino, port installations and most of all shipping.*

19th June 1941

Another dusty day. Still living in holes like rabbits. Quiet as far as aircraft. Some artillery fire. Life getting very monotonous. It's great being at Tobruk surrounded by the enemy.

24th June 1941

Early in the morning the Germans put over the longest artillery barrage that I have seen from them. Must have been fully 600 shells landed to our right. 11am twelve dive bombers dived on Tobruk but the barrage that they met was terrific. Four were shot down, one came back over us low, smoking. All the light ac ac guns opened up on it but he just made his own lines. Our gun fired 30 shells then jammed. Got a canteen order from the Kiewa BF. The artillery very active on both sides in the evening. Three high level bombers dropped bombs on Tobruk, Several reco planes as well.

23rd July 1941

Extra dusty day. Some planes over dropping bombs. Plenty of artillery fire from our guns and a little from the enemy.

24th July 1941

A frightful day. Dust so thick you couldn't see five yards.

25th July 1941

Been in the Army twelve months today. Very few aircraft over. A fair amount of artillery fire on both sides.

3rd August 1941

At 2.25am the troops in the front line made a push. The din from the artillery was terrific. Never stopped until after daylight. The guns close to us fired over 1000 shells. At 10am an Italian G50 fighter flew over us low. All our guns opened up and he was shot down about half a mile away. It was a Bofors that got in the fatal shot. It was a thrilling sight to see him rolling over like a leaf. He burst into flames as soon as



he hit the ground. At 7pm over flew the Luftwaffe, twenty two in all dived in from three directions. Bombs and machine gun bullets landed all around us. Our gun jammed on the first shot but we got her going and fired sixty shells. Our gun hit a plane, flames pouring out of him as he flew away.

12th August 1941

Clear day. At 10 am a bomber flew over and hit a dump of Itie shells about a mile from the MDS [Main Dressing Station]. Shells exploded for hours. The concussion when a good few shells would go off at once used to shake the dirt of the side of the MDS cave and nearly knock us off our feet. The noise was deafening and dense clouds of smoke kept rolling up in the sky. Four chaps were killed when the bombs were dropped but they could not get near them for hours after. They had two more goes in the evening to hit the rest of the dump but the bombs hit wide of the mark. Heard from Sam that the boys had shifted from the cave back to our old position. About fifty bombs dropped through the night.

13th August 1941

Clear day. Still at the MDS with boils. Over came an enemy bomber and let bombs go right on top of an ammo dump. The shells kept exploding and kick up a terrible din. Planes annoyed us dropping bombs through the night. The heavy ac ac kick up a frightful racket.

23rd August 1941

Left RHQ early in the morning to go back to our gun. My turn at cooking. The Polish troops have taken over from the 51st RA. Our artillery was very active. Saw two bombers over for the day. Got a letter from Auntie Alice. George has been gazetted as a gun layer.

24th August 1941

Nice clear day. Several high level bombers over. The Poles have been tossing a lot of shells over at Jerry. At 4.30pm we heard the familiar roar of the Stukas. Over came twenty of them and dived on the harbour. They hit a dump of some

Continued on page 14



## A Brief History Of Helmets

*Editor's Note: The following (edited) article by Rod Wilson was sourced from the May 2020 edition of the 2/24 Infantry Battalion magazine "The Furphy Flyer In Mufti" and our thanks go to the Secretary of the 2/24th for giving us permission to re-print sections of the article.*

### Second World War Officers' Caps, Drivers' Caps and Steel Helmets

The caps of Australian officer in WW2 generally followed the same basic pattern of the standard WW1 cap. Indeed some early WW2 officers wore their old caps for the second time and some younger officers wore their father's caps in remembrance of their



service during WW1.

Made in Melbourne, this 1916 dated cap was worn during WW2 by a Lt of the 2/5th Infantry Battalion. It has been rebadged with a WW2 badge. The buttons for the chin strap are British WW1 'General Service' buttons.

As was the case during WW1, officer's uniforms were largely purchased from private tailors at the officer's expense. However the Commonwealth Government Clothing Factory in South Melbourne also produced officer's uniform. For security reasons they no longer used the initials CGCF on their garments, but the code 'MTX' which stood for Melbourne Textiles.



A special 'Driver's Cap' was produced early in WW2 especially for transport drivers. This was a throwback to the early WW1 OR's Service Dress caps that had a leather bound peak.

Generally of an officer's style and cut although of coarser wool, the driver's caps main distinguishing feature was the leather binding on the outer edge of the peak. An early WW2 example of an Australian 'Driver's Cap'. This example was worn in the Middle East by an AIF Transport Driver.

### Steel Helmets

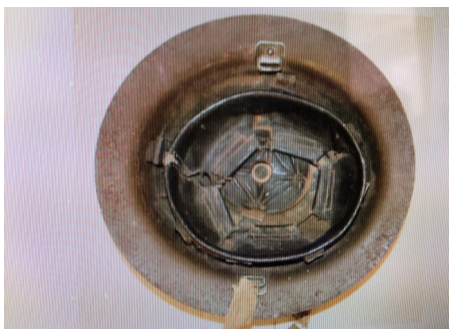


In 1916 the 'Brodie' Mark 1 steel helmet had been introduced into service. Nicknamed the 'Salat Schussel' (salad bowl) by the Germans it remained in service with minor improvements right through to the end of WW2. The Australian soldier's 'tin lid' was different in a few ways to that worn by his Tommy counterpart. The British 'Tommy' wore a UK manufactured helmet whereas the Australian Digger wore a helmet manufactured entirely in Australia.

Two million Australian made helmets were produced during the war by the 'Commonwealth Steel Company Limited' located in Waratah near Newcastle NSW.

They had liners produced by the 'Dunlop Rubber Company Limited' of Sydney.

Australian produced helmets unlike their UK counterparts had raw rims. UK produced helmets always had a demagnetized steel edging around their outer edge.



When they first went overseas the 6th Division and the 9th Division were equipped with Australian made Mark 1\* helmets. These had a liner which was a greatly improved version of the original WW1 liner. This new liner was removable and had a spring loaded webbing chinstrap which was

permanently attached to the bowl.



The helmets left the factory painted a flat green but the men in the desert soon camouflaged them by painting them with the sand yellow 'Dulux' paint issued for camouflaging vehicles, weapons etc.

Some men even poured a handful of desert sand over the paint while it was still wet to add to the camouflage effect.



A Tobruk veteran. This helmet was worn by Sgt John Crompton of the 2/24th Battalion in Tobruk. He commented that the shrapnel hole in the brim was 'a gift from the Germans'. A close up of the small shrapnel ding in the visor of Sgt Crompton's helmet. His helmet undoubtedly saved him from a nasty wound or even death.



Australian civilian services such as the Police, ARP, Fire Brigade etc also utilised the Mk II helmet. These were factory finished in black with the appropriate lettering stencilled in white onto the front and rear 'Police' for Police, 'W' for Air Raid Warden, 'C' for ARP Control etc.

## A Holiday Alternative In Covid Times

*The provenance of this document:*

*It was received by the Association in May 2020 from Ian Rule, the son of VX29323 Lt Walter Charles Rule. Lt Rule enlisted in the Regiment in Melbourne in June 1940 and was posted to 2/3 Lt AA Regiment where he became part of 9 Battery. He served in the Middle East, and returned with the Regiment to Australia in early 1942. After the Regiment was disbanded in July 1943, 9 Battery was transferred to Milne Bay where, on 01 Sep 1943, it became part of the newly formed 2/3 AA Regiment (Composite), also known as the 2/3 Composite AA Regiment and simply the 2/3 AA Regiment. That unit, including its 9 Battery, saw further service at Milne Bay, New Guinea, Labuan and Brunei. In the latter part of his career with 9 Battery Lt Rule was the Officer Commanding C Troop, and spent some time acting as Battery Captain.*

*Ian Rule found a typed document, reproduced here, among his father's papers, and kindly shared it with our Association.*

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Here we are at mess on the Id

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supplied if you are at all nervous.

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C/o "The Mudhole",

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A.G.H. Mitchell, (whose recent promotion earns him 6d. per day extra as from August 14), or

K.A. Quin, late of G.O.R. (this of course is not a recommendation for Mr. Quin, but he is a good fellow in spite of his recent past.).

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Accept no substitute.

### Glossary

M 3 AA gun site number M 3 at Milne Bay

G.O.R. Gun Operations Room

P40 RAAF Kittyhawk fighter aircraft (USA manufactured)

M 201 Unsure. Possibly the number of a gun site? A searchlight site? Other?

E. Van Philp VX18007 Lt Evan Stanley PHILP, 2/3 Comp AA Regt

Major R. R. Smith VX26857 Maj Robert Rennie SMITH, posting at discharge 2/2 Hvy AA Regt

Dudley Flats A slum area in Western Melbourne at the time

K. Krohn VX58329 Capt Keith KROHN, 2/3 Comp AA Regt

A.G.H. Mitchell ?

K.A. Quin VX25001 Kenneth Aloysius Quin, posting at discharge 2/6 Hvy AA Regt



...then moved to a site on the beach.



**War Diaries Of Les Miller (VX46271) from page 11**  
kind. There was an explosion and flames leapt in the air. The ac ac fire was very severe and prevented them from diving lower. They were all too high for us and not one came our way. There were two planes brought down. The days are much cooler now. Wrote to Mum.

1st September 1941

Hot, clear day. Inspected by the BC [*Battery Commander*] at 11am. He had just left our gun and went to the one further on when the Luftwaffe dived on Tobruk. All our guns opened up on a plane flying back over us low. While we were firing another lot dived on us from the back. We swung around and opened on them. We could see the bombs coming straight at us. Machine gun bullets were whistling round us, some tore holes in the sand bags on our pit. They dived on all our positions and the artillery. One stick of bombs dropped right across our pit and landed fifty yards from us. Another lot burst eighty yards. The concussion nearly blew us off our feet. Further on all the other guns had bombs fall round them. Bomb shrapnel flew everywhere. The only casualty near us was a Polish soldier. A bomb blew the dugout in on him. We saw him stagger out with all the hair burnt off his head and wounded in the shoulder from the shrapnel but not badly. The official version was that there were 129 planes in the raid. There were dozens of high level bombers as well. We couldn't see anything for smoke and dust for nearly quarter of an hour. The concussion and noise is really more than a human body can stand. We fired sixty shells and our gun jammed. We hit one plane and sent it away smoking. We went and had a look at the bomb craters. They were everywhere.

15th September 1941

At 9.30 heard a roar, looked out and there was a Ju 88 flying towards us. I was in the middle of cleaning the gun so we could not fire. We cursed some. He dropped his bombs about a mile away.

Several high level bombers over. The heavy ac and light ac fired on the Ju 88. Artillery very active. We were in the middle of tea when there was an awful thump in front of us. We thought it was bombs and raced to the gun but it turned out to be heavy shells. One shell hit a 2/12 truck beside us and killed ten men. Shrapnel flew all round us and put holes in one truck. A lot of the shells landed less than 60 yards from us and our knees were knocking. It was a frightful sight watching men get killed.

25th September 1941

Clear day from dust but very cloudy. Early in the morning a high level bomber dropped out of the clouds and let his bombs fall on RHQ. Doug Simpson told me about it when he came round with the water cart and that three men of ours were killed and six injured. Six men of the crowd that were relieving us were also killed and a few injured. The three chaps of ours that were killed were Jimmy Cowie, Val Morrow and Sammy Hartingham. I got a great shock till I learned George was safe. Very sad to get men killed a few days before going out.

27th September 1941

Left the gun at 12 o'clock and went to RHQ where all the rear party were assembled. The enemy were shelling the harbour all the evening but they were nearly all duds. Went down to the wharf and got on the destroyer *HMS Griffen*. Pulled out at 12pm. There were four destroyers in the convoy, had a marvellous trip. Got very sick several hours before I got on the boat, think I have the fever.

28th September 1941

Early in the morning, still on the destroyer. At 7.30am a bomber flew over and let a bomb go at us but missed. Funny thing, ten of our planes met us at daylight and had just left when the bomber attacked. Got into Alexandria at 12.30. Got in buses, went through Alex to Amaria. Stayed there for a few hours. At 9pm marched to the station and what an awful march with full pack. Travelled all night and got to El Kantara on the Suez Canal at 5.50am. Crossed the canal and



had breakfast at Kantara.

30th September 1941

Left Beit Jirga early and went to Hill 95 where the rest of the 8th Battery and the 7th are. Met George and the rest of the boys. Got hit in the eye with a rifle as a chap unslung it. Met some 7th battery chaps that I knew. Like Hill 95, glad to be out of action.

**1942**

11th February 1942

In the morning packed everything ready and moved out of our tents. Just laid round in the sun all day. Went to the pictures. Met Don Malson. At 10.30 moved out of the camp per bus and went to Gaza station. Left at 12.45 for El Kantara.

12th February 1942

Arrived at Kantara at 9.30am. Crossed the Suez Canal and got on the train for Geneifa. Got off the train and started to march with all our packs but transport met us after doing a mile. Arrived at Geneifa at 3.30. Had a good night at the canteen. There was plenty of beer.

16th February 1942

Went for a route march to the top of a steep hill. Got a wonderful view of the Great Bitter Lake. We were told that Singapore had fallen. I would give anything to know how Ernie is. Had a few beers in the night at the canteen. There are dozens of aeroplanes flying round here.

17th February 1942

Had three parades in the morning. Got issued with a day's rations for the next move. Had some beer in the night. Told we had to get up at 5am in the morning ready to move out.

18th February 1942

Moved out of Geneifa at 7am and travelled to Port Tewfik. Got on a barge and went out to our boat, the *Andes*. Liked the ship very much. The boat moved out of Port Tewfik at 4pm. A lot of troops on board and everyone guessing where





we are going.

1st March 1942

Still in Colombo harbour. And no leave. We are bored stiff. Officer can get off but the poor old Gunners can't. None of the men have any money. I brought two small elephants. If I had money I would have brought a few souvenirs. Very hot and stifling. Australian nurses came aboard.

2nd March 1942

Still in Colombo but I think we will soon move and the destination I think is Aussie. Often think of Ernie and wonder how he is. At 2.45pm we pulled out of the harbour along with the Strathallan, Durban Castle, Orcades and a cruiser. They paid us £1.0.0.

10th March 1942

Got up early but no land showing. At 6am sighted land. Dropped anchor a fair way out in the harbour. Pulled into the wharf at Freemantle (*sic*) just before dark. The band was on the wharf to welcome us. It is great to see Aussie again. The West Australian chaps were let off the boat for the night. Got two letters from Lila, one from Mum, one from Cath Wilson. Two letters from the Kiewa Butter Factory.

11th March 1942

Just sat in the boat and gazed at Freemantle. 12.30 pulled away from the wharf, went out into the harbour and dropped anchor. There are a few American warships about including ten submarines. At 6.30pm pulled out from Freemantle, don't know whether the next stop is Adelaide or Melbourne. The Army is sending telegrams to our next of kin. We are all feeling very happy.

16th March 1942

Woke up on Australian soil. Still feel very sick. They treat you well here. Nurses, VADs look after us. I don't like their idea of waking you at 4am to wash you. Too damn early for me.

23rd March 1942

Walking around the show ground in the morning. In the evening I got my discharge from the hospital. The ambulance took me out to our RHQ. The billeting officer took me out to see where George is staying and the people agreed to take me in also.

*The diary finishes here. Les and George were transferred to 2/8 Australian Light Anti Aircraft Battery (Airborne) on 12th July 1943 and, after three month's leave, headed for Queensland. They embarked SS Katoomba at Townsville on 3rd December 1943 for Buna, New Guinea. After serving for eighteen months, they returned to Townsville aboard SS Ormiston on 10th June 1944. In November they were transferred to the 2/2 Composite Anti-Aircraft Regiment, after the 2/3 LAA Regiment was disbanded.*

*They remained in Queensland until Les was discharged on the 12th December 1945 and George on 19th December 1945. They went back to their family at Charleroi.*

*Their brother Ernie (VX46268), who also enlisted on 25th July 1940, was with 2/29 Infantry Battalion when it was captured during the defeat of Singapore in February 1942. He spent time in a POW camp in Changi and then in Japan where he was put to work in the mines. He survived to return to Australia in October 1945. He was discharged on the 20th February 1946.*

*An older brother, Charles Edward (Ted), (VX762320), hearing of the capture of Singapore, told his wife that he was "going to find Ernie" and enlisted 20 February 1942. Tragically, he died 19th September 1942 of pneumococcal meningitis at training camp in Queensland.*

## Master Gunners

*A couple of years ago, Rob Prideaux submitted a query regarding a badge his father (RM Prideaux, VX45370, 8 Battery), wore on his uniform above his Sergeant's stripes.*



*Rob's query was referred to Matt Heddle who is involved with Military History Societies and Research Officer David McDonald.*

*Matt advised: it was a Master Gunner badge issued in WW1 and WW2. Centuries ago they were the fabricators, i.e. craftsmen who made them and did the complex maintenance. In more recent times these soldiers are called armourers, workshop units, and in civil life, gunsmiths.*

*They were worn by Australian troops in WW1 & WW2. In their day, they were awarded as a proficiency badge - in WW1 there were proficiency badges for drivers, saddlers, machine gunners, field medical personnel, etc.*

*The badge was worn by the gun detachment Battery commanders and often awarded to the No. 1's of the gun crews - the fellows calling the shots. e.g. Sergeants calling directions as to what type of ammunition to load.*

*In WW2 there were Australian gunners who had them before leaving for overseas service in the early years of the war. But as the war years went on, their uniforms were "modified" - sleeves were rolled up or cut off - sometimes just shorts, helmet and a singlet. Additionally, with the importance of each man learning each other's job, and with field promotions and with new gun Regiments being formed while overseas, there was less importance placed on the badge.*

*Many of the anti-aircraft personnel had Army training previously before the light anti-aircraft Regiments were formed, and this would explain why some would have a Master Gunner Badge.*

*David further advised that: gun detachment commanders (gun sergeants) used to wear the badge above their chevrons (three stripes).*

*A comprehensive article on the history and wearing of the badge has been published recently, and is available online: Glyde, K 2020, 'An honorary distinction: the arm badge of the Royal Australian Artillery', [https://www.australianartilleryassociation.com/publications/cannonball\\_winter\\_2020](https://www.australianartilleryassociation.com/publications/cannonball_winter_2020). Cannonball: Journal of the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company, no. 97, pp. 25-33. Commences: 'Between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, senior non-commissioned officers (NCO) of the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA), and its Colonial predecessors, of the rank of sergeant and above; Warrant Officers (WO) of the RAA and the Australian Instructional Corps (AIC) holding the appointment of Master Gunner; Continued on page 16*



## Candid Camera



Anzac Day 2020



Anzac Day 2020



John Campbell, 8 Battery with the late John Marshall, also 8 Battery, taken at the 2018 Annual Reunion

**Master Gunner continued from page 15**  
*and WO of the AIC allotted for duty with artillery units, were distinguished by a badge depicting a 19th Century field gun worn in conjunction with their badges of rank. Sadly this unique distinction lapsed officially in 1952 and was abolished completely by 1965. . It is the intent of this article to provide a history of the badge during the period it was worn in Australia, both officially and unofficially, as an addition to the insignia of rank' (p. 25).*



### DARWIN DUNNY

**Bombing of Darwin Day Anniversary February 19.** The 14th Anti-Aircraft Battery was one of the few Militia anti-aircraft units in Darwin at the time of the first raids on 19 February 1942—make up your own photo caption!