



Take Post

April 2013

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



AUSTRALIAN VETERANS AT EL ALAMEIN STATION—OCTOBER 2012

Alan "Bushy" Read, 9 Battery, 2/3 Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and also 2/4 Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment is standing (with cane) fourth from the left in the front row. Photo courtesy of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Editor's Note: Knowing I am always on the look out for material for "Take Post", Alan "Bushy" Read contacted me and asked if I would be interested in receiving a copy of the documentation relating to his recent visit to El Alamein as part of an Australian veterans group which attended the 70th Anniversary Commemorations of the North Africa campaigns in October 2012. Whilst this is Alan's story, it is equally the story of thousands of young men who took part in the North Africa campaigns.

In October 2012, a group of 21 Australian veterans made a memorable journey back to the places where they had fought 70 years ago during World War Two.

Twenty-one veterans, from across the country, and including our own Alan Read, and Clyde Towler of the 2/4th, travelled to Egypt to commemorate the

70th anniversary of their service in the North Africa campaigns and, in particular, the Battle of El Alamein.

During their journey, they attended commemorative services at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission El Alamein War Cemetery and the Australian 9th Division Memorial to honour the more than 3,000 Australians and their Allied mates in arms lost during the North Africa campaigns.

Their journey culminated in a visit to the Al Minhad Military Base in Dubai where they spent time with their modern day counterparts, current serving members of the Joint Task Force 633.

The North Africa campaigns saw some of the most ferocious fighting of the War with the Allies pitted against Ger-

man and Italian forces. Following major actions at Bardia, Tobruk and Syria the fighting moved to El Alamein.

The Battles of El Alamein were fought between July and November 1942, with the second and final battle consisting of 12 days of brutal fighting from 23 October and involving Australians of the 9th Division 2nd AIF. They were tasked with holding the northern flank against the German assault while the British forces breached the enemy line on the southern flank.

While ultimately a success, the El Alamein campaign was extremely costly for Australia, with more than 1,000 killed, almost 200 listed as missing in action and more than 3,600 wounded.
(continued on Page 11)

2nd / 3rd Remembrance Group

The Remembrance Group, comprised of direct descendants of original members, was formally established in 2008 and currently has 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 Colin Bragg, Honorary Secretary on 03 9592 1642 or 0419 887 820 or send us a message through the "Contact Us" section of the Association's web site.

It is not an onerous role and currently costs only \$20.00 per year to participate. Your support is important if the men and the deeds of the 2nd/3rd are to continue to be remembered and promoted into the future.



We Will Remember Them

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

VALE

JR (Jack) Berkley (VX36173) 8
JW ("Nap") Croft (VX 33235) 8
BA (Bruce) Tulloch (VX27530) 7
HB (Hugh) Finn (VX131867) 9
DJ Dan Hawkes (NX10808) 9

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!

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

Take Post is published by the 2nd/3rd 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 Battle 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.

Web Site

www.anti aircraft.org.au

Office Bearers 2012/13

President

Lynton Rose
1 / 5 Cloris Avenue
Beaumaris VIC 3193

Telephone: 03 9599 2264
Email:
rhondalynton@optusnet.com.au

Honorary Secretary

Colin Bragg
Unit 2 / 81 Well Street
Brighton VIC 3186

Telephone: 03 9592 1642

Vice President

Matthew Heddle

Honorary Treasurer

Ann Bragg
Unit 2 / 81 Well Street
Brighton VIC 3186

Committee

Graham Heddle
David McDonald
Anne Rae

Newsletter Editor

Colin Bragg

Association Research Officer

David McDonald

Keeper of the Banner

Matthew Heddle

Take Post has been printed by Bizworks and Freeman & Read Printing,
Shop 1 (Rear), 72 Church Street, Brighton, Victoria, 3186.
Telephone 03 9592 9093

PRESIDENTS REPORT- 2013 AGM



Every so often in life you find yourself witnessing or being part of an event which has a profound impact on you. For me and I suspect all those present, such an event was the Air Defence Luncheon which took place in May last year. This was a gathering of a small group of regular Army personnel coming together with a select group of 2/3rd veterans.

The Army contingent (Royal Australian Artillery) comprised four young lieutenants Pru Connell, James Easton, Jimmy Nguyen and Sam Rynne who were in the final stages of their officer training and their C.O. and instructor Captain Mike Squire. The young officers who I estimate were all aged in their twenties were training in gunnery for ground based Air Defence.

Representing the 2/3rd were Cec Rae, John Campbell, Ian Rutter and John Marshall. Accompanying this impressive group were Cec's son Ian, Secretary Colin Bragg and myself. The setting was around a long table in the quiet surrounds of the wine cellar of the City RACV Club.

This gathering resulted from an approach made by Captain Squire to our Association that his officers meet with a group of WW2 anti aircraft veterans to hear first hand how 'Air Defence' as it is now known, was conducted at that time.

Over a long lunch the two groups interacted, generally with one of the young lieutenants in deep discussion with one of our 'boys'. During the course of the afternoon these pairings would change or become a small group. The intention at all times was to keep the mood intimate and relaxed with a lack of formality to encourage conversation.

For my part I found it a very special

experience to move quietly around the room observing the mutual respect and genuine warmth that was evident between those present as they exchanged information, experiences and anecdotes punctuated by frequent bouts of laughter. A selection of photographs taken on the day appear in this edition of Take Post and on the website and capture some of the atmosphere of the occasion.

The highlight and only formality of the afternoon was the presentation by Captain Squire to each member of the 2/3rd contingent of a highly polished, pristine condition Bofors shell as a thank you for their time and willing participation. This was a wonderful gesture which surprised and delighted the veterans.

If this group of young lieutenants and their C.O are at all representative of the current crop of officers in the Defence Force then we are in good hands and the ADF has much to be proud of. As always our 2/3rd boys were a credit to themselves, the Regiment and the Association.

I stated at the outset what a profound effect the event had for me – it was very moving to witness the dignified coming together of two groups so different in age and experience but united by a common bond. I felt privileged to have been present at such a unique and memorable occasion. My thanks to Captain Squire and Colin Bragg for making the proposal a reality.

Over recent times much attention has been focused on the development and launch of the Association website. The website together with the digitization of 'On Target' are two important examples of the new world of electronic archiving and communications.

As we become more familiar with this new world and marvel at its speed and convenience we can also be lulled into a false sense of security that such electronic data is permanent and safe. Our indefatigable Secretary had a rude reminder of how fragile this digital world can be when late last year our website was the target of a hacker resulting in the site being taken down for a month. Colin and I speculated that the hacker might have been the disgruntled de-

scendant of a WW2 Luftwaffe pilot shot down by a 2/3rd Battery! However while the rest of us were enjoying our Christmas and New Year, Colin endured a very tense few weeks in constant communication with our website technicians trying to ascertain the extent of the damage, if it could be restored and what new security would be required to prevent a reoccurrence.

Fortunately the damage was minimal and the website was repaired albeit with new layers of security protection. On behalf of the Association I want to thank Colin for 'taking one for the team' during that stressful time and to also thank those members who so willingly donated to the cost of the website repair. The website is an unqualified success and figures produced by David McDonald at our last committee meeting show the number of hits continues to increase.

An overall snapshot of the Association currently indicates that it is tracking well in most key areas. One area of concern however is the number of members who are not 'financial', a fact highlighted in the Secretary's Report. I have emphasised previously how important it is for all members to 'be on board' in order to ensure that the Association remains viable into the future and is able to undertake initiatives such as those introduced in recent years. The financial contribution asked of members is not great but it is vitally important.

As is customary at this time of the year I want to thank all members of the Committee for their continued support and involvement – Anne Rae, Ann Bragg, David McDonald, Graeme and Matthew Heddle and of course Colin Bragg for his outstanding work as Secretary, production of Take Post and for putting such a professional stamp on all aspects of the Association.

I conclude with this thought. Recently over a very enjoyable morning tea with Cec Rae he described the relationship between the men of the 2/3rd as a 'brotherhood' such was the bond that existed and still does between them. As one of the small group charged with the responsibility of taking Association forward, I consider it an honour to be able to serve such a special 'brotherhood'.

From the Secretary's Desk



All my working life I kept what I referred to as my "Day Book" next to the telephone or beside the computer, so that I could summarise conversations or note any items of interest that may be useful at some future time.

When I became the Honorary Secretary of the Association, I adopted the same approach, except that I call it my "Log Book" and I keep it on my computer. It is where I keep brief summaries of letters, telephone conversations I have or emails I receive during the year. It makes the production of the annual Secretary's Report and Sentry's Log so much easier.

Whilst I still get occasional letters, most of the enquiries we receive now come through our web site (except when it was off line for about four weeks in January, caused by an attack by an Indonesian hacker on our web site hosting organisation).

Sadly, written letters tend to inform me that another of our veterans has passed away, and over the past twelve months, I received notification of the passing of **Jack Berkley (8)**, **Hugh Finn (9)**, **Dan Hawkes (9)** and **Bruce Tulloch (7)**.

Doreen Bryant, wife of our late former President **Ron Bryant (8)**, contacted me to tell me she had received a phone call from John Croft (son of **Jack "Nap" Croft (8)**) advising that "Nap" had passed away. I subsequently had a long conversation with John Croft who confided that "Nap" didn't talk much about his wartime experiences or the Association, but that he (John) was really interested in becoming a member.

I have again enjoyed some lengthy, informative and entertaining telephone conversations with **Dave Humphreys**

(7), **Bert Langley (9)**, **Alan "Bushy" Read (9)** as well as with former Committee members **Cec Rae (9)** and **John Campbell (8)** – more on these conversations in the Sentry's Log.

Throughout the year, I was pleased to be contacted by a number of Association members with offers of photographs, including Graeme Guy (son of **WH Guy (9)**), Lyn Walsh (daughter of **Frank O'Toole (9)**), Shirley Brown (widow of **Laurie Brown (7)**), and Adam Elliot (grandson of **John Malone (9)**). John Fryer (son of **Keith Fryer (8)**) kindly provided me with some spare copies of early editions of "Take Post".

Later in the year, John advised that his mother Trixie had passed away after a fall at her home – Trixie was a great supporter of the Association.

Once again the Association received a number of very welcome donations, which assists us in keeping the annual subscriptions low and enables us to underwrite the cost of the Annual Reunion Lunch and the production of "Take Post". Thank you to all who made donations during the year, but special thanks to Esme Curtis, Dot Harris, Cec Rae, Gwen Warren and Rosemary Weatherley.

2nd / 3rd Web Site

During the year we uploaded all the early Regimental Bulletins that were in our possession to the web site – they provide a fascinating insight into the life and times of former Regiment members in the ten years after the war – it is a great pity we have so few of these gems.

As is the case after the AGM and Annual ANZAC Day March, photographs of these events are uploaded to the web site, and other items of historical interest are added as they are compiled or become available throughout the year.

All of the photos taken at the Air Defence Luncheon in May have similarly been uploaded to the web site

When I assumed the Secretary's role, I inherited a file full of "lists" and it continues to be the source of "rainy day" activities – for example, who was actually on Crete during the Battle of Crete,

who was captured on Crete, who was transferred from the 2nd/3rd to the 2nd/4th and who was on what ship when the Regiment returned to Australia.

The full Regimental Roll has recently been added to the web site.

I have still have many lists to be added to the web site, and as time and inclination allows, they will be added under the Regiment History.

Membership

Again, we have welcomed new members of the Association over the past twelve months, with the number of descendants now numbering just on 100. However, I am at a loss to explain the non-renewal of memberships.

At the date of publication of the 2013 Take Post, there are only 34 surviving original members of the Regiment. There are nine former members of 7 Battery, nine of 8 Battery, twelve of 9 Battery and four of Workshops / Signals.

Widows of former original members account for a further 20 members.

SENTRY'S LOG

54 members, including 6 originals, attended the 2012 AGM and Reunion held in the Bourke Room at the RACV City Club in Melbourne. The originals in attendance were **John Campbell (8)**, **Ray Everlyn (9)**, **Frank Hands (8)**, **John Marshall (7)**, **Cec Rae (9)** and **Earle Webster (7)**.

Approximately 20 members marched on ANZAC Day, and as indicated in the Mid-Term Report, for the first time since the end of WW2, none of our original members participated. Whilst the changed assembly point, appalling weather conditions and the number and advancing age of the remaining originals were factors in the low turnout, I couldn't help but get the feeling that the end of an era was also being signalled.

Early in the year, I received a lovely letter from **Hugh Finn (9)**, in which he asked in his beautiful hand writing to be deleted from our mailing list as "my eyes are 'kaput' and my brain is follow-

.....and the Sentry's Log

ing close behind (bad grammar here ending a sentence with a preposition" Hugh added "I still have my Pay Book and Discharge Book issued in the 40's".

Sadly, later in the year I was advised that Hugh Finn had passed away.

As reported in the Mid-Term Report, President Lynton Rose, Ian Rae (son of Cec Rae [9]) and myself accompanied John Campbell (8), John Marshall (8), Cec Rae (9) and Ian Rutter (7) to a luncheon with five serving officers of the Royal Australian Artillery held in The Cellar at the RACV City Club.

The animation of the discussions between the veterans and the serving members as they re-lived former experiences and explored modern warfare was something to behold and the afternoon flew by.

All the Association members present commented on the success of the occasion and I know from subsequent conversations with Captain Michael Squire that he and his four Lieutenants (Pru Connell, James Easton, Jimmy Nguyen and Sam Rynne) equally enjoyed the afternoon.

The presentation of the highly polished 40 mm Bofors shells to the veterans was a highlight of the afternoon. (see photos on page 15).

In April I had a very lengthy conversation with **Dave Humphreys** about his Crete experiences. Dave was the sergeant of the No. 1 gun at Maleme and his crew consisted of **Les Harris, Ken Elder, Stan Watkins, Norm McDonald, Jack Ecker, Ron Selleck, Len Jeffreys, Lawrie Brown and Rupert Charles**.

Dave also advised that:

- **Clarrie Helmore** was attached to his gun crew, but was killed in action
- **Earle "Slim" Webster** was a reinforcement for his gun crew and that Earle was a "pretty good pugilist"
- He was a good friend of **Bruce Tulloch** (who also passed away later in the year)
- After Crete, he was evacuated to Palestine and subsequently spent 10 days 'on the loose' in Cairo with **Les Harris**

Dave still sings in a choir with an average age of 72 years
Valda Malloch (widow of **WG (Bill) Malloch [7]**) sent me a lovely card with some very kind words complimenting the Association on the work it is doing to preserve the memory of the Regiment – thank you Valda.

Enquiries were received from the grand children of **William Morrissey (7), John Confait (7), George Pope (8), Alan Rundle (9)** and **Percy Mortimer (Reinforcement)** seeking information about their grand fathers and on becoming members of the Association.

In July **Bert Langley (9)** rang me to advise that a recent publication entitled "Australians At War – From The Beaches of Gallipoli to the Snows of Afghanistan" was available in Target Stores and it featured "our" Milne Bay photograph on the cover.

Bert, who was 88 in August (a young fella) advised me his No. 6 gun crew consisted of **Dave Humphreys, Pancho McDonald, Frank Johnson, Alby Tyers, Eric Forrester, J McCoy, J Williams, Tom Dusting** and 'a fellow called **Holland or Hollander**'.

Bert also told me he went to Japan after the war as a member of the Occupation Forces as did Phil Roberts (see Phil Roberts Vale on Page 10).

Throughout the year I received several enquiries relating to the medals that fathers and/or grandfathers were entitled to wear.

Most of our members would be entitled to the 1939-45 Star, the Africa Star, the Defence Medal, the War Medal 1939-45 and the Australian Service Medal 1939-45.

Those members who fought in Papua, New Guinea and/or the Pacific Islands would also be entitled to the Pacific Star.

Photographs and criteria relating to the medals are on the web site.

Such an enquiry was received in September from Graeme Smith who contacted me with a request for information about his uncles (**Lawrence Wollin Smith [8]** and **Charles Verdon**

Smith[8]).

With some valuable assistance from former Secretary, **John Campbell [8]**, we were able to advise Graeme that both his uncles were captured during the Benghazi Retreat – because they spent the rest of the war as Prisoners of War, they did not participate in any action in New Guinea and therefore were not entitled to the Pacific Star.

It was interesting to receive a number of requests relating to the location of Memorials on Crete from descendants of former Regiment members who were planning to visit Crete.

There are six memorials on Crete commemorating the conflict that occurred on the island in 1941. They are located at Heraklion, Rethymno, Stavromenos, Maleme (Hill 107), the monastery at Preveli, and at Sphakia Beach. In addition, there is a significant war graves cemetery at Suda Bay.

The 2010 issue of Take Post contains a summary of our visit to Crete in 2009 and the 2012 issue contains a similar story relating to David McDonald's visit to Crete in 2011. Both articles refer to the memorials on the island.

Whilst the past year has been a "steady as she goes" year, there remains a lot of hand written information and old typed (on a type writer) reports which we will in time digitise and upload to the web site.

For me personally, the year has been informative, enjoyable and challenging, and I continue to be gratified by the interest in and the support for the web site from both members and the general public.

As usual, any information about former Regiment members, be it anecdotes, stories, extracts of diaries and/or letters and/or photographs that individual families may know of and which we could use in future issues of "Take Post", or to expand the photographic and document collection, is always welcomed.

My thanks as always goes to you, the members of the Association, for your continuing support and encouragement.

Diary and Recollections Of Sergeant Hugh Hill (VX31621), 8 Battery, 2/3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Corps Troops.

Editor's Note: I am indebted to Vice-President Matthew Heddle for providing me with a copy of Hugh Hill's diary and recollections. Readers should be aware the diary was written by a young man, is colorful in its language and was written prior to "political correctness" being in vogue.

Whilst the following is an extract, the complete diary is available for viewing on our web site.

I have inserted a number of photographs from our website to embellish the text-only diary.

WERRIBEE TO PORT SAID

29 December 1940 Left Werribee at 6.30 and embarked HMT MAURETANIA at 8 am. Sailed down Bay and anchored at night. Sailed through heads at 7.30 am; arrived at rendezvous and picked up escort and convoy at 2 pm, consisting of Mauretania, Dominion Monarch to starboard, Aquitania in centre, Queen Mary and Awatea to port. HMAS Canberra as escort.

16th January 1941. Left Colombo. Thirteen troop ships and 2 escorts - HMS Good Hope and a merchant cruiser. Later on picked up two large vessels. Reached the Red Sea. The surrounding country is very rugged. Sea was dead calm. Weather mild.

28th January 1941. Reached Port Suez. Anchored in the Bitter Lakes (in the middle of the Suez Canal) and, later, proceeded up the Suez Canal. Anchored for the night in the canal, and proceeded in the morning.

PALESTINE

30th January 1941. Arrived at Haifa. Held up for 24 hours - some mix-up with English army saw a mine explode for the first time. Hear that El Contara and Port Said had been bombed, saw a ship lying on its side - it had been tampered with by 5th column, probably the Arabs. The bottom got blown out of it. The name of the ship was SS Patria. About 600 Jews got drowned on that.

EGYPT AND CYRENAICA

31st January 1941. Arrived at our camp. Railway carriage caught on fire. Had our first decent meal since leaving Mauretania... bully beef.

5th February 1941. Awakened 6.30 - very important news. Addressed by Colonel and told we were going on active service up to Libya. Sat around all day - great excitement - 8 Battery was only one selected. After all that, nothing happened. Typical army.

6th February 1941. Told in morning that we were going at night; also that we were going to use captured Italian AA guns. If we go it will be the first time that technical troops will have gone into action with no training whatever - so far we haven't seen any AA equipment. Struck tents today and entrained and after shunting arrived at El Kantara. Had best meal since leaving Australia. Crossed canal by punt, entrained at El Kantara West 8 am and sat in the train until 2 pm. Set out for Amariya at 2 pm. 15 miles west of Alexandria.

8th February 1941. Detrained and stood on the pier until 3.30 pm. Embarked on Polish steamer "Warszwar" with Tommies. Crammed in like sardines. Rotten conditions, though food is not too bad - bread, margarine and bully. At Alex the harbour was full of warships - several had been hit by bombs.

One ship had the stern blown right out level with the rear turret.

and quite a few aground. The whole harbour is covered in oil, one oil tanker on fire and all the ships aground had been burnt out. One sea plane is floating about, shot to pieces.

The "San Giorgio", an Italian heavy cruiser has been blown in halves, and burnt out, destroyers are lying everywhere. Just funnels and masts showing above the water. Marched out 4½ miles to large ravine, Wadi Auda. Camped in open for the night. Had a lot of trouble with Pommie officer about blankets. Told him to go to hell.

12 February 1941. We were allowed to poke around all day looking for stuff. All around the hills SAA rifles and MG's and grenades, clothing and equipment. Hundreds of burnt out MT's - large 8 and 10 ton trucks - all Italian. There was no severe fighting around here close to the town. The fighting was 10 miles out.

Shifted our camp ½ mile today. Now that we are settled in Libya we are much happier. Though the war here is nearly over - in less than a week we have been in 4 countries - Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Libya.

18th February 1941. Found a large dump of our stores at night time. We went into Tobruk; got a ride out in a



Tobruk Harbour diorama—Australian War Memorial

10th February 1941. We are anchored off Tobruk. Stayed out at sea all day on account of the mix-up with the Tommy army.

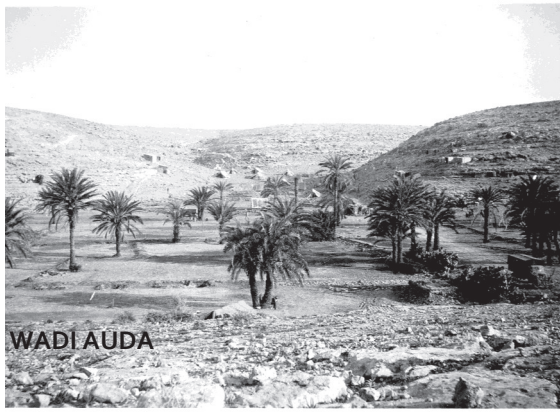
11th February 1941. Moved into Tobruk harbour at 10 am. The harbour is an awful mess. Ships sunk everywhere

truck - nearly got lost. Had a hard time to find the road. Got home in the finish.

19th February 1941. Went over to the dump with kit bags, etc. Got into the top end amongst the oranges.

(continued on page 7)

Had a meal of them and filled our haver-



at 1 p.m. Italian people still there. Didn't look very pleased with themselves. Stopped on outskirts of Benghazi until 6 p. m. - moved through the town and moved into barracks. Drove forward pulling down verandahs - hell to paycranky Wogs!

BENGHAZI

Benghazi comprises new town and old town. New town was beautiful. The sweep of the Boulevard with its statues of copper, Romulus and Remus and the she wolf mounted on marble archway. The copper war memorial to those killed in the Turkish war. The mausoleum - the bones of the dead were neatly packed in glass boxes - leg and arm bones placed inside rib cage. Skull in front. His name, rank and number. Terrific artificial harbour. Old town concrete 2-roomed houses surrounded by high concrete walls. No gardens - dusty and dirty.

sacks. Then moved to bottom end and left Pucka and Cyril minding our oranges and Lew and I went in. Had just found pork sausages. Had 2 tins inside our giggle suits when they fired 2 shots over our heads.

You never saw the likes. About 300 men tore out of the dump and got for their lives. Tins and cases were dropped everywhere. Never saw a funnier sight in all my life. Everybody in the Battery was there unofficially. They could have marched the whole Battery over. Have had a wonderful feed today.

20th February 1941. Got 6 Breda AA Guns.

22nd February 1941. Went over to English AA battery. Had a great time. Had 37 guns around harbour of Tobrukh, They had fired on Fritz just before we got there. Got 1 bottle of beer (Tommie rations - unreal - something special) with our midday meal. That made it worth while.

23rd February 1941. Day starts with Fritz coming over. AA and Breda put up a great display of fireworks. Minesweeper hit a mine in the harbour and sank in 2 minutes. 27 lives were lost 3 men were saved. Convoy came in and landed Australians and Tommies. Cold as hell. It was a Sunday into the bargain, Sunday in the Army was a miserable day. RC's would go to church in the morning and get the rest of the day off. We'd work all morning and still not get the afternoon off. Have to polish everything.

1st March 1941. Arrived at Derna at 5 p.m. Pretty spot. We approached from about 2,000 feet to a Wadi - Wadi Derna. Big Wadi comes down from the mountains. It is a walled town. It has not been damaged much. Has been machine gunned from air. One ship was sunk in the harbour. Left our camp outside Derna at 7.30 a. m. Arrived at Barce

4th March 1941. Went out in truck to get Breda guns, and had a good look at the town at the same time. It has been damaged in places. Bombs and machine guns.

9th March 1941. Air raid at 5.45 pm. Plane passed high over gun position and dropped bombs on aerodrome. One burst and two delayed action. I opened fire at extreme range at 9,000 feet. Good shooting. Tommies near us said it was the best they'd seen. English captain came across from other side of the bay and congratulated us. Own officers came down later and weren't too pleased. I told them where to go!

11th March 1941. Got my first leave since leaving Australia. Had a great day - as far as run goes, anyway. Nothing to eat in town except spaghetti and eggs. Only thing to drink was wine, cost me 35 piastres - gyppo money. Alarm in morning. Fritz came over again. 1 plane. 25,000 feet. Got home 6.30 pm and went to bed. Got mail, 6 letters - only had time to read one when alarm given 8.20 pm. Fritz gave us hell. Dropped 40 bombs. We fired 97 rounds - best performance so far. All clear after 2 hours and 20 minutes.

12th March 1941. Lucky day - got bitten in the eye by an insect - can't see out of it. Had dysentery again - can

hardly walk.

14th March 1941. Storm blowing - waves crashing over the breakwaters. Mine blew up at 6 am. Felt much better today. Occasional pains. Shifted to new position on central mole. Good quarters. Electric light. The house looks very nice with a light and sheets on the beds. Broke a tooth off my plate eating bread.

17th March 1941. Was my unlucky day. Slipped and fell into sea at 6.00 am - cold and miserable. Got wet up to the armpits. Cut some wood to get warm and sliced my thumbnail in halves. Had air raid at 4.15 am - no alarm sounded. Woke up when first bomb exploded. Never got such a start in my life. Planes dropped 5 only.

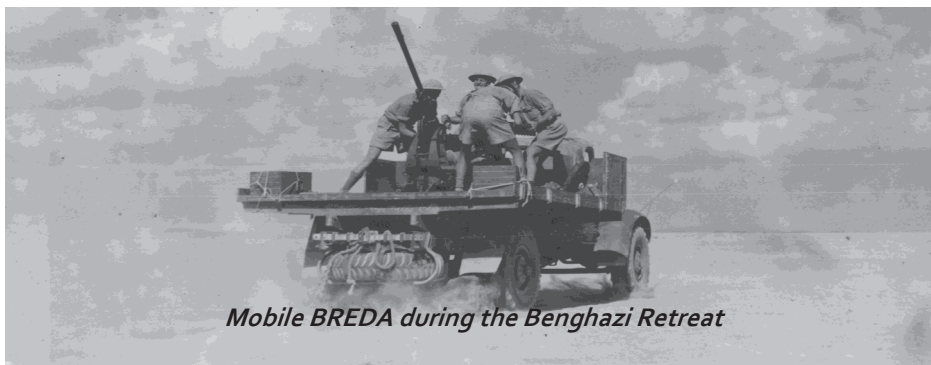
22nd March 1941. Going to new positions about 12 miles west of Benghazi. Passed through Benina. Saw aerodrome. A few machines damaged and some burnt out. Told then we had shot the tail off a Bristol Blenheim. Quartered in an Itie ammo dump. Had narrow escape from losing arm here. Ammo of various sorts were stacked in concrete shelters, and consisted of anything from flares to 250 lb aerial bombs. 4 of us - Lew, Mocha, Cyril and myself were having a look around, and I picked up an aeroplane flare and took the cap off and saw the fuse burning and told them to get out. We could have been killed. Got about 2 yards before the first explosion and then the second and third shell filled the shed with smoke. No casualties except skinned arms, shins, sore heads. Pinched a sheep last night - first fresh meat for weeks. Wogs will be mad when they find out.

23rd March 1941. Still resting. Supposed to be defending 20th Brigade HQ. Have no guns - left our own at Benghazi for harbour defence.

30th March 1941. Wog kids tapping Itie shell on nose. Usual result (I must have been getting cynical). Pucka grabbed the spade and buried the kid. Mucktah (head of the village) stepped in and took control.

On these 75's (75mm guns) at North Point we fired shrapnel shells and our job was to fire both guns at 8 o'clock so HQ British knew we were out of bed. Drill was load guns, get into dugouts and pull telephone cable tied to lanyard. Never knew when the bloody guns would burst.

(continued on page 8)



Mobile BREDA during the Benghazi Retreat

1st April 1941. Ordered over to come off the guns and retreat from Benghazi. Working like hell. We were on top of the Benghazi Railway Station. Getting guns down from buildings. Got to bed at 4.30 am - up at 6 am.

3rd April 1941. Packed and ready to move again. Sent on detail to North Point. Blew up the field guns. Everything of value in Benghazi has been destroyed. Petrol, coal dumps, all shipping and workshops. We blew up two 75's. Engineers set fire to everything in town - smoke for miles.

TOBRUCH

Left Benghazi and camped at Tobra. Saw our first refugees. Men, women, kids, the old and feeble – couldn't help them. Keep moving were the orders. Complete petrol convoy attacked from air and burnt out.

6th April 1941. E Troop 8 Light AA Bty had 2 wounded and 30 missing Derna. My gun and Gallagher's were only two survivors to reach Tobruch. He shot through. I took inland route - nearly got caught by Jerry. O'Connor and Neame (Generals) were just in front of me. 10 o'clock at night they were taken POW. Came through in a Humber Super Snipe staff car with their lights on. We yelled out "Put off your bloody lights". They had the windows shut reading their notes (interior lights on) and didn't hear us. There were four in the car – two in the front and the two Generals in the back. Jerry gobbled them up.

7th April 1941. Today we are on 26 Brigade HQ. On 6th were on 9 Div HQ. Had to destroy a lot of kit. Moved to Tobruch on 7th.

8th April 1941. 10 am 9 Jerries came over. My gun was the only one in action. Shot Messerschmitt down in sea. Had stoppage. Also hit another one ME110 after its tail had been shot off by McKillen's crowd. It crashed in front of

gun. Got surviving souvenirs. All were confiscated by intelligence. Moved into position 9th Div HQ area. Gun right over advance dressing station. They were in tunnels a couple of hundred feet underneath us at the bottom of the escarpment. Got very pally with them, and lived well on hospital rations. The reason why! Clouds of dust. We often tested that gun about dinner time and lived well for those few months in Tobruch. I know from experience - later I received treatment for a busted knee - 2 glasses of brandy from the MO - dust trickling down - kerosene lamps for illumination - and doctors cutting a bloke's arm off. I needed the brandy!

Good Friday. Easter battle. 9th Div HQ area. We got all the raids. Fired all our ammo HE (High Explosive) - 4,000 shells. Had to use our armour piercing. Said to the gunners "What goes up must come down, and I hope to Christ it lands on Jerry. Terrific battle - 5 planes crashing at once. Dust, fire, smoke - can't see anything. Gun running hot. Haven't had a wash for a week.

18th April 1941. Sandstorms - visibility nil on each flat. On edge of escarpment no dust for probably 50 yards all around. ME110's would hug the edge of the escarpment on level with our gun. 4 at a time, pilots wearing goggles and leather helmets - we could see them clearly - rear gunners swinging machine guns from one side to another. BEAUT - we set our trap. We'd take all the blankets off the gun when we heard them and wait until they flew past. Then straight up them with probably 50 shells. Worked well until they sent in 75 bombers and 10 fighters - that shut us up.

4th May 1941. Had 5 raids for the day. Big raid at 6.75 - bombers and 10 fighters. They bombed 9th Div HQ which we were defending. Divvy HQ was in tunnels. They flattened us. We also copped

it and the medical dressing station besides. Ambulance and cars wrecked. We got 5 bombs all within 30 yards of the gun pit. All knocked out by concussion - no injuries.

The gun pit was just a circle of rocks 3 feet high. Ammo boxes built into walls. Blankets to keep dust out of gun stored outside pit - sleeping on rocky ground outside pit - pinched asbestos sheeting for roof. Low wall of rocks at our feet. Rough living. Pet rat lived in wall of gun pit. Sleek and glossy - would run over us at night - bite our hair for the grease. Nothing to wake up and he'd be sitting on your chest. Dust storms - we would wear our respirators to try and get relief - lift the chin piece to let the sweat out - walked out of the pit one day in a sandstorm (to answer a call of nature) and arrived back 2 days later. Moved into the first truck I saw - unwritten law - food and water. Every truck was provided with food and water. Moved into truck and slept there. You can get lost quite easy in a sandstorm. Sometimes we would have blokes stay with us for several days before we knew where they belonged.

8th May 1941. Found out today that I had 3rd stripe. It will go through when we get back to Egypt. Had message from Menzies and Blamey - apparently we are all heroes. I don't think! Some talk about mentioned in dispatches but haven't heard anything more.

Night bombing in Tobruch.

The ships would come in at midnight. Destroyers, cruisers, merchantmen. The navy would move in and out and off. Two hours to unload and off home. The merchantmen would just tie up alongside the wrecks. The engineers - dock parties - would cover them up with camouflage. Jerry would bomb all night - they'd hit a petrol ship, which would illuminate the harbour and away we'd go. It would light up everything. Normally they'd just drop flares, but once they hit a ship every German pilot would be dragged out of bed to drop bombs. Many a ship was hit. We got no sleep when that happened. Days and nights without sleep - we were rooted!

1st September 1941. Anniversary of the day Germany declared war on Poland. Jerries decided to impress us and the Poles, who have taken over from the Aussies on the field guns. The Poles were mainly artillery and infantry.

(continued on page 9)

The number of planes hasn't been estimated, but it was over 100. They gave us a tough time for a while. Bombed Tobruch from end to another - not much damage. Guess what? At mid-night the Poles fired every artillery piece they had. Our artillery had been rationed to 20 shells a day. Poles used up ALL the ammunition we had. Jerry fired every artillery piece back at us Aussies. Stood to until daylight. Over 100 planes sorted out Tobruch – pretty tough – they nearly got us that day!

5th September 1941. Birthday today - 21 years - had a packet of milk biscuits. Haven't been too good for the last few weeks.

Good news - warned to move on the 23rd September. Men went into rear HQ straight away. We were relieved by an Irish Regiment. They got a hell of an education. Been in Alexandria for two years. Flies, fleas and dust didn't suit them - or the rations. Gun drill was terrible. The relieving crew had a lot to learn - I stayed to train them.

25th September 1941. A German JU 88 bomber swooped on rear HQ. We lost 4 dead and 5 wounded. The Irishmen had 9 dead and 11 badly wounded. It was bad luck. Gunners Jim Cowie, Don Evans, Sam Hardingham and Val Morrow were killed. It was a very sad day for the 8th Battery.

26th September 1941. Left Tobruch on the destroyer "HMS Jackal" a little after midnight. Had a wonderful trip to Alexandria at 36 knots. Saw what was left of the Mediterranean fleet. I was very pleased to get out of Tobruch, even though we had bit of fun at times. Went by train to Amariya and later started by train to Palestine. We have settled down at Hill 95 now and are having a good time. The food is lovely and plenty of it and BEER in large quantities.



14th January 1942. Told of transfer to new regiment. Had night out with the old 8th Battery gun crew. Don't remember getting home.

FIRST BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

THE AIR FORCE

An army in retreat is a terrible sight. Getting to Alamein, hundreds of air force vehicles passed us. We were advancing and they were getting back to the delta. Vehicles loaded with every spare part the air force ever had – wings, petrol tanks, the whole issue – vehicles were loaded – blokes asleep everywhere. Got to El Alamein and the British took command of the air then. **2/4 Lt A-A** was formed after Tobruch. Many from 7, 8 and 9 Bty NCO's and specialists. When the 2/3rd sailed to Australia it was formed plus any hospital cases. Training Palestine - later at Haifa with British Regiment – approx. 2 months. Next Syria, Aleppo and Homs near the Euphrates and Turkish border. Recall to Egypt. Day and night to Alamein – Hill of Jesus. Ruin Ridge, 4 attacks lasted about 1 month. After Ruin Ridge I became attached to the NZ's and the Indian Division.

We could see Jerry in the moonlight, but we couldn't fire back as it would have given away the British position. Jerry didn't know if he was shooting at anything - could have been his own side - but he got right on to us. One of my best mates was killed that night - he got 7 bullets straight in his chest. He was sleeping under a truck.

THE PADRE – Two months before Xmas – Early October 1942

Before Xmas they would come around with a big truck full of samples of Xmas presents for us to select what we wanted to send to our family and friends.

The Padre called in with the Xmas presents truck. Asked if he could play some records on a gramophone he had with him. OK. Xmas Carols. Looked around and 18 Stukas were looking our way. I promptly lost interest in "Hark The Herald Angels Sing" - gave gun order and engaged enemy, thus gave our position

away, and it was on! Gunner Shepherd fell over and I thought he'd been wounded. Instead he fell over the padre who didn't know what was going on -- did I give the Padre a serve! Never saw a bloke run so fast - easily broke the 4-minute mile. Cleaning up, things were rather quiet. "What's the matter?" I asked. Gunner Shepherd said "You needn't have been so hard on the Padre." Puzzled me a bit - found out I'd told the Padre to "Get the f...ing hell out of here".

SECOND BATTLE OF ALAMEIN – PRIOR TO THE ATTACK THAT NIGHT

23 October 1942 On that evening at dusk I had to go to map reference such and such. A mud map - just drawn in the sand. Nearly fell over. A full formal mess of 51st Highland Division officers' mess. Hell - trestle tables, waiters, regimental bands (5 of them), silver trophies, etc. All the regimental silver and port.

A good many of them died that night. They had their mess and went straight into attack. Everybody attacked at 20 to 10 that night. It was a hell of a battle. Unreal.

2nd January 1943. Arrived in Palestine. Nieu Serat con camp on 3rd January. On the 5th was admitted to the 6th AGH with jaundice. Having jaundice feels like giving birth to a coil of barbed wire. Your stomach swells and it's agony. Transferred to the 66th British General Hospital on the 16th. Had a rotten time. Glad when I was discharged. Left by train for Egypt on the 28th, arriving on the 29th at El Shatt reception camp. Only 5 miles from Tewfik. Looks like home now.

31st January 1943. Left El Shatt and moved by cattle trucks to the breakwater. Boarded HMS Queen of Bermuda at 10.45. Have bunks for sleeping and meals are very good.

1st February 1943. Left Tewfik at 7. 15. (Thank God)

2nd February 1943. Was admitted to ship's hospital with probable relapse of jaundice. The weather is much warmer than either Egypt or Palestine.

BACK IN AUSTRALIA

3 weeks in Milne Bay. Then to Lae — beach landings. 3 weeks later Finchhafen. Battle of Sattelburg. Madang, then Australia. Peace.

Vale Gunner JW Croft (VX33235)



A member of 8 Battery, "Nap" was an inaugural member of the Western Australian Branch of the Association when it was formed in 1988, and continued to participate in the informal gatherings of the WA members until recent years.

The photo above, taken in Tobruk, and dated June 1941, shows "Nap" grabbing a rare chance to wash some clothes.

"Nap" had saved enough of his litre a day water ration to give some of his basic kit a wash. Washing was hung out to dry on a low slung washing line - for a very good reason.

With the flat terrain at Tobruk, anything standing higher than three feet of the ground would draw artillery fire as being unnatural, and therefore enemy. For most men at Tobruk though, a wash in the ocean would be the closest they got to clean clothes.

Other members of the Regiment have claimed to have done their washing in petrol — cheap and plentiful!



Phil Roberts and "Nap" Croft cleaning a captured Italian 20mm Breda anti-aircraft gun in 1941. Photo Ron Bryant

Vale Gunner Phil Roberts (VX44410)



Phil Roberts was a Bombardier at Tobruk, also with 8 Battery.

Some of the experiences of Phil's crew are related in the 8th Battery's story in "On Target". He left 8th Battery after it was withdrawn from New Guinea to join a small group of Australian officers sent to India to serve with the British Army.

Shortly after an intensive 8 week training period, and also shortly after Japan surrendered, Phil discovered the Dorsetshire Regiment was going to Japan as part of the occupying force, and was granted permission to join them.

After Japan and a stint in Malaya and Indonesia (where he became the temporary British vice-Consul), he spent four years in the U.K. directing gunnery training, was posted to Hong Kong for two years and then to the Middle East to guard the Suez Canal and finally to Cyprus for a year.

He then decided to become a priest., and after rigorous training, was ordained in Salisbury Cathedral by a great Bishop who understood him. The Bishop won a decoration for bravery in each of the three Services during the War. During his ordination, Phil had watched the Canons of Salisbury proceeding to their stalls in the Cathedral and had thought how old and venerable they looked.

Ultimately Phil became a Canon himself. Phil served as a curate in Salisbury, then back home to Australia after his two sons were born, for a three year contract as Vicar, first at Beaumaris and then Mont Albert. He was recalled to England to the Wiltshire county town of Westbury, then as Rector of Dorchester, the "capital" of Dorset, where he met up again with many of his friends from 'the Dorsetshire Regiment'.

He tried to help the kids on drugs from the King's Road and hardly a day passed without someone needing a helping hand - not all of them poor. He soon discovered that everyone has problems. Phil became so used to surprises that he just accepted it when he looked at his congregation one Sunday morning and thought "Gosh - the Queen's in the Church". In fact, it was Princess Margaret.

Phil retired in 1987, but remained a Canon of Salisbury Cathedral, reminded of his "gunner" days by a small brass cannon, complete with cannon balls, given to him in Dorchester when he became a Canon in 1973.

The above is a very abbreviated version of Phil Roberts' story, which appeared in its entirety in the 1988 edition of Take Post.

(continued from Page 1)

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Hon. Warren Snowden MP, joined 21 Australian Second World War veterans who helped defeat the Germans in North Africa in 1942, in honouring lost mates at commemorative services in El Alamein, Egypt in October 2012.

Mr. Snowden said the services at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission El Alamein War Cemetery and the 9th Division Memorial marked the 70th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the North Africa campaigns, including the decisive Battle of El Alamein.

"We paid tribute to the efforts of the Australian servicemen and women in North Africa; their great victory alongside Allied counterparts; and the loss of some great mates in arms they left behind 70 years ago," he said.

Many thousands of Australians served in the campaigns in North Africa and Syria during the Second World War in major actions at Bardia, Libya in January 1941 and the siege of Tobruk from April to December 1941, Syria from June to July 1941 and El Alamein from August to November 1942.

At El Alamein the Allies launched a major offensive that would force the Germans to ultimately abandon their campaign in North Africa. This final action was not without cost – between July and November more than 1,000 Australians were killed, almost 200 listed as missing in action and more than 3,600 wounded.

Mr Snowden said the 21 veterans were aged between 88 and 95 and came from all over Australia.

"Bushy" Read embarked for overseas service with the 2nd/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in December 1940, celebrating his 21st birthday on the ship. Arriving in the Middle East in January 1941, he initially served with the 2nd/3rd in Palestine, Syria, Egypt and the Western Desert and transferred to the 2nd/4th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in January 1942.



The 2nd/4th Regiment was formed from 26th Anti-Tank Company along with drafts from AA regiments in the Middle East including 2/1st and 2/3rd Light AA and 2/2nd Heavy AA Regiments. It joined the 9th Australian Infantry Division in Palestine upon raising. It went with the Division to Egypt in June and served with it on the Alamein line until early November 1942. It returned with the Division to Australia in January 1943.

The Regiment landed at Finschafen on 22 September 1943 under 9th Australian Infantry Division. 11th Battery supported 7th Division in the Ramu Valley. The Regiment was located at Sattleberg during October and November 1943. It returned to Australia with the Division in December 1943. It then became part of I Corps Troops and was located at Atherton, Queensland

in December 1944.

Alan served with the 2nd/4th LAA Regiment in El Alamein as a gun sergeant with a team of about ten men. He vividly remembers the first few times he encountered the Stuka aircraft scared the 'living daylights' out of him as they screamed down towards their target, but his team harried them so that the planes were forced to drop their bombs at a higher altitude. Alan recalls danger was ever present in El Alamein – even when sleeping in their dugouts, men could be hit with airbursts or 'daisy cutters' from German shells. Men dug in, and slept with their heads under half a sheet of galvanized iron. Alan found this arrangement too claustrophobic, so he slept in the corner of the gun pit.

Alan was commissioned as a Lieutenant in November 1942 and returned to Australia in February 1943. Still with the 2nd/4th, he sailed to Milne Bay for specialised training, serving in New Guinea until March 1944, when he returned to Townsville. He attended the 4 HQ Gas School in November 1944, after which he left the Unit for discharge.

Alan was discharged as a Lieutenant in March 1945.



Veterans inspecting a model of the Battle of El Alamein. Alan Read far right. Photo courtesy DVA

Battles of Kokoda and the Beachheads

(Source: Department of Veterans' Affairs)

While some Australian troops were fighting on the battlefields of North Africa, others were fighting closer to home against the Japanese in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

The 70th anniversaries of two key PNG battles were marked with a commemorative visit in early November.

A group of Australian veterans representing all Australians who served and died during the Battles of Kokoda and the Beachheads returned to PNG for a week of commemorative activities.

The veterans were welcomed by local villagers of Popondetta and participated in a commemorative service at Popondetta Memorial to honour the service and sacrifice of the more than 1,200 Australian troops and more than 200 who were wounded in the Battle of the Beachheads.

The veterans also visited the Port Moresby (Bomana) War Cemetery, where they paid tribute to the more than 330 Australian service personnel of the Second World War who didn't return home.

After Kokoda, the fighting moved to the beachheads where the Australians and Americans joined together to attack Japanese positions at Buna, Gona and Sanananda. With increased supplies, reinforcements and air support, they took all three strongholds by January 1943 and ejected the Japanese from the beachheads of Papua.

8th and 9th Batteries of the 2/3 were involved at Buna.

Henry Whelan (QX11914) of the 2nd/4th ALAA Regt.—His Story

In February 2012, Les Whelan emailed me advising he had written a semi-fictional story of his father's time as a member of the 2nd/4th Light A-A Regiment in North Africa and New Guinea. The story is based on his father's wartime diaries and includes poems written by his friends. Because of the close connection between the 2nd/3rd and the 2nd/4th, I had no hesitation in accepting Les's kind offer to use extracts of his story in "Take Post". The full story (all 26 pages) is available for viewing on our web site.

Although this story is fictional it is based on the factual exploits of 11 Battery, 2/4 Light Ant-Aircraft Regiment, Second A.I.F., as recounted in the book *From Alamein to Scarlet Beach: The History of 2/4 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment* by Francis West, Deakin University Press, 1989, and Henry's notebook / diary. The *Queen Mary* poem is taken from the final copy of the *Q.M. Daily* which Henry kept and brought home.

Henry sent home a series of photos he took in Syria. Acknowledgement is given to the National Archive where Henry's Military Records are now held.
Les Whelan – Henry's son

Henry's mates mentioned in his diary include:

SX12301 Gnr H.J. Richards (Rich) – Rich returned to his wheat farm in south-west South Australia.

VX23811 L/Sgt J.B. Iverson (Jack) – Became a first class cricketer playing for Victoria and then Australia as a spinner. Jack quit cricket, suffered from depression and committed suicide in 1973 on the Anniversary of the battle of El Alamein (24th October).

WX14267 L/Bdr Dyer. E (Jim) – Wrote the poems quoted except the *Queen Mary* one. Henry wrote Jim's poems in his diary.

NX30716 Pte Madden, T. - Henry wrote this name and address – Denham Av, Kootingal, NSW, near Tamworth – in his diary. Pte Madden's name appears on the War Memorial in Kootingal.

WX15685 Gnr. King, A.T. (Tony);
WX14660 Bdr Larsen, T.S. (Tom);
WX15589 Bdr Mainard, R.E. (Ron) – Henry wrote these names on the back of the photograph showing 11 Battery practicing loading Bofors onto Landing Craft probably at Cairns in 1943.

QX18271 Gnr Dorricott A.J. (Alf) – Went shopping with Henry in Beirut and had his photo taken with Henry which was sent home to his wife, Marg.

WX13951 Gnr Thompson R.W. (Ron);
WX11906 Gnr Treasure E.H. (Lofty) mentioned in Jim's poem *The Mechanics Lament*.

Henry stood looking at the darkened shape across the Harbour, the three funnels silhouetted against the after-



AJ (Alf) Dorricott and Henry Whelan shopping in Beirut.

noon sky. This was one of the world's great ocean liners, the *Queen Mary*. On the morrow he and his mates would be boarding and leaving Australia for the Middle East.

It was 1941 and the Regiment was to embark to join the 9th Division in North Africa. Henry wondered if this great ship was anything like the one his father had come to Australia in from Ireland many years before. "Come on mate, we'll miss the train," Rich called and Henry turned and joined the others. His mind wandered as they headed for the station. It was only a few years ago he had met Marg, married and now had two boys. But war had come and so it was off to Townsville to join up. Then by train to Sydney, artillery training, army stuff to learn and an uncertain future to face.

They entrained to the Harbour and on to the huge ship. It was November and the weather was hot as they steamed to Jervis Bay and on to Freemantle to embark more troops. From there it was on to Trincomalee in Ceylon before arriving in Suez towards the end of November. Life on the ship was full of activity. There were boxing tournaments, concerts, and even a daily newspaper. One of the troops expressed his thoughts through a poem.

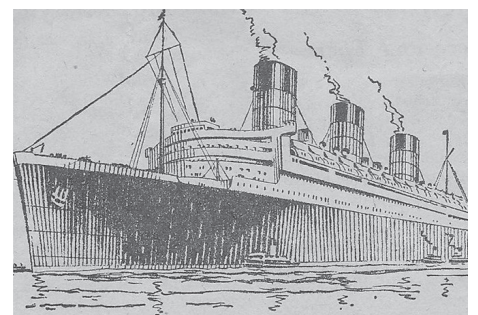
*These paneled walls once took a richer hue
As beauty, wealth and rank sailed smoothly on;
Film stars and magnates, dukes, and princes, too,
Dined, wined and danced, and dim lights*

*softly shone
On lovely shoulders, bare
above rare gowns,
And portly backs of gentlemen in tails.
No cares these travelers had, no wrinkling frowns,
To check the champagne flow from ice-packed pails.
Soft-footed stewards, hastening to and fro,
Answered their calls, and left with courteous bow.*

*Luxury, wealthy case and brilliant show
Marked the great ship from stern to speedy prow.*

*Those glamorous days have passed like leaves afloat,
A nation's wealth of manhood rides the tide –
The sons of hardy sires, who earlier wrote
Themselves an epic, sail on side by side.
Bronzed warriors from a distant, sun-drenched earth
Now throng the ship and climb the state-ly stairs –
The couch of magnate now a soldier's berth.
And homely beer and stew their modest fare.
No film stars now, but nurses in their stead,
Whose beauty is a kind that cannot age.
This liner, with an escort out ahead,
Speeds o'er the seas to write another page.*

Henry and his mates were on a 'cruise ship' enjoying the tropical weather, heading for Ceylon for refueling. They were going to Africa. "Read a story about Africa," Henry said quietly, "something about King Solomon and Mount Kilimanjaro." "We're not going there, I hope," Bert replied, "I hate bloody heights!" "Don't you idiots listen," Rich exclaimed, "The Lieutenant



said we were going to NORTH Africa, bloody desert, flies and Arabs.” However on the twenty-second of November they disembarked and set off to establish camp in Palestine. This was to be their home for the next month or so as they formed Batteries and trained for their role in any battle.

Eleven Battery was one of the three 2/4 Light Anti-aircraft Regiment batteries now in the Middle East and slowly new mates were being made, friendships renewed and things found to fill in the time. The Padre offered a friendly shoulder to anyone in need, and the Battery Commander attempted to organize activities to keep his troops occupied. “Let’s have a game of footy,” Charlie suggested. “Not that bloody aerial ping pong you Vics play,” Arthur replied, “it should be tackle like Rugby.” “Not that poofy Rugby Union, private school stuff,” Jim responded. “Let’s just get out there and have fun,” Henry suggested.

The field was rough, sandy and hot and there were no goal posts, but the boys enjoyed a game of their own invention. It wasn’t soccer, or Aussie Rules or either Rugby type – they just had fun. It may have been fun, but it was also rough. There were some heavy tackles, pushes and all with lots of laughter.

Then in the last week in January the CO received orders that Eleven Battery was to leave for Beirut to form part of the defense of the city.

But Beirut had its drawbacks as there were charges for misbehaviour, and an increase in Venereal Disease.

At last the CO arranged for the Battery to ‘borrow’ some British Bofors to practice on and the Gunners carried out drills to bring the gun in and out of action, target laying, loading and unloading, making safe, dealing with stoppages and misfires, changing barrels and using Predictors. This was, all of course, without actually firing the guns. The Gunners were delighted to have some actual hands-on experience but the driver/mechanics were still pretty bored with little to do.

In late March the regiment was informed that twelve Bofors and their ‘tractors’ were available for issue.

When the other Batteries went to collect their ‘new’ equipment they found that eight three ton lorries, four One tonners, one 30cwt and one 15cwt lorry and fifteen motorcycles were included. There was jubilation among the Gunners but the driver/mechanics were not so happy. All the transport equipment had been well used and in poor condition. The Workshops were busy carrying out maintenance and in early April when 11 Battery returned from Beirut the Regiment was at last complete because more Bofors had been issued.

On the First of July, 1942 Jack called his drivers together and announced, “We are to move to Egypt,” he told them, “to defend Cairo from the Huns’ bombers.” “Are the Egyptians like these wogs here?” Barney asked. “No,” Lofty responded, “they’re all like Cleopatra. Haven’t you seen them movies?” “Will we see the pyramids?” Henry asked. “I don’t bloody know,” Jack said, “just get ready to move at 1400 hours.”

By July 5 they reached camp at Amiriya to join the other Batteries. It was now obvious to all that they were a long way West of Cairo. Unknown to most the orders had changed and the 2/4th was now to defend Alexandria.

By the end of August the German attacks had slowed and there was an uneasy quietness. The Germans meanwhile were engaging in a psychological war against the troops. “Hey! Look at this,” Ron shouted as papers floated down from above. The Germans had dropped leaflets which said, “You are defending El Alamein box, what about Port Darwin?” The leaflets had Boomerang or Platypus insignia on them designed to make the Aussies homesick. Another leaflet worried Henry as it said, “The Yanks are having a good time in Aussie, what about you?”

Most of the Aussies laughed at the leaflets and pocketed them as souvenirs. All the battery knowalls were now convinced that ‘something’ was coming but they were unaware that the Eight Army Commanders had by now drafted battle instructions for what was to become one of the greatest battles of World War 2.

October was a month of preparation. 11 Battery was at first to be held in defence mode but late in the month they were given a rousing speech by Montgomery. It was relayed via a pamphlet

to the boys. “I told you Monty would let us know what’s going on!” Pete said. They were told that at between 2200 and 2300 hours on the night of the 23rd the battle would begin.

Next day after an uncomfortable night camouflaged and dug in or sleeping under their trucks 11 Battery got ready for what was to come.

Henry looked at his watch. It was a around 9.40pm and he stopped the truck in the darkness. Suddenly his ears were blasted by the biggest artillery barrage ever launched.

For fifteen minutes the barrage continued and then sudden silence. “Is that it?” Henry wondered. He started the truck up and headed off again. After about five minutes the guns opened up again in a creeping barrage as the infantry advanced and he finally found his Troop and spent the day advancing the Bofors to protect the troops and armour from air attack. This was the battle of El Alamein and the next day, the 25th, was his 28th birthday.

The next weeks brought sleepless nights as the German planes strafed and bombed the advancing Allies. The Bofors fired constantly as wave after wave of dive bombers attacked. 11 Battery tasted success as a plane plummeted in flames and smoke. “Got one! Nazi bastard!” one Gunner shouted as the German plane disappeared over the horizon in flames. Jack kept his drivers busy as the battle lines advanced. By the first week of November the fight was almost over. 11 Battery found itself in German territory, now littered with destroyed tanks, trucks, guns and soldiers’ kit.

On December 22nd the 9th Division assembled on ceremonial parade. Ten thousand men with bayonets fixed advanced in review order and the Last Post was sounded. General Alexander, the General Officer Commanding Middle East addressed the gathering in an emotional speech congratulating them *(continued on page 14)*

on their bravery and commitment. A copy of the speech was given to every man and Henry neatly folded his and placed it in his diary to take home for his sons to read.

New Year came and on the 3rd January it was confirmed that the 2/4 LAA Regiment was returning to Australia. The men were elated and that day all guns

Henry Whelan's Story (continued from page 13)

and tractors, trucks and equipment were returned to Ordnance. Preparations began for the journey home. All the men were issued with new uniforms, the first new clothes they had been given in over a year. Henry was delighted to be heading home where he would see his sons. Robert was now almost four and Leslie a little over two years old.

Like their journey to the Middle East the men were to travel on one of the world's great ocean liners, the *Ile de France*. Six thousand five hundred troops were on board as she sailed through the Red Sea and into the Indian Ocean. The weather was stinking hot and the latrines leaked down through the decks making it unbearable. "I'm going up on deck to try to get some sleep," Lofty announced. The others followed enjoying the cooling breeze coming off the ocean.

At the end of February the *Ile de France* tied up at Woolloomooloo. On the next day a pale and unsteady Henry disembarked and with the other Queenslanders, set off for the train to Brisbane.

For the next five months the 2/4 LAA Regiment readied itself for a different war. There would be tropical heat and rain, Japanese rather than Germans, malaria and other health issues they had not encountered in the deserts of the Middle East.

Out of the blue, Henry's Troop was told to move to Cairns, for amphibious training. The whole battery was to follow to train with an American group in loading Bofors onto and unloading them off Landing Craft.

Most of 11 Battery was in Port Moresby by the middle of July. Numerous stores and trucks and other vehicles were needed for the Regiment but there

weren't enough planes. Even finding enough transports for the guns was a problem. Henry and the others waited in Cairns and at the end of the month they embarked on the S.S. Duntroon for another sea voyage, this time to Port Moresby.

After a week, Henry finally cracked and when reveille sounded he refused to get up. Jack came in and asked, "Are you alright mate?" "No, I'm bloody not and I'm not doing anything today. I want to go back to Aussie!" Henry responded. "Listen mate, get out on parade or you're on a charge!" "Don't care," Henry said. Next day Henry was charged with 'Conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline' and paraded before the CO. "What have you got to say for yourself?" the CO asked. "Nothing, Sir," Henry replied. By now his mates had talked to him and settled his mind down. They all felt lousy, fearful and dispirited and told Henry he was not alone. "OK!" The CO said, "The award is 'Suitably admonished and returned to the ranks. Now listen soldier, we're all in this together and the sooner we get the job done the sooner we will all be back in Australia.'" Henry sighed in relief, saluted, and marched out. "I still think this bloody war stinks!" Henry quietly whispered under his breath.

Christmas came and despite regular attacks of malaria the boys were fine. There had been no casualties and a number of Jap aircraft had been shot down by the Bofors. Then until the middle of January there was sporadic action from more dive bombers. "These bloody Bofors are made to fire into the sky but when the Zeros come in at a hundred feet we have to almost fire into the ground!" Henry said.

New Guinea was proving a major effort for Henry as his health was poor, and although he was a boy from North Queensland he hated the tropical humidity and mosquitoes of New Guinea.

By the end of May, the 2/4 was to be withdrawn and taken back to Australia. The ship picked up 10 and 12 Batteries and then sailed south to Port Moresby for 11 Battery and home to Brisbane. But not Henry! He was detailed to remain with a small group as a rear party and it was not until the 6th of June that he boarded

the old coastal steamer, *S.S. Ormiston* and headed for Townsville.

But Henry's war was not over and at the end of his leave he once again boarded the train north to the Atherton Tableland where the Regiment was to reassemble. Back in Camp the unit came together and again rumours spread. "We're off to Borneo!" Fred assured his mates. But many of his mates were showing signs of their time in New Guinea as malaria was rife. Throughout September Henry spent most of his time in hospital with malaria.

The troops were more and more disillusioned as it seemed the 2/4 LAA Regiment was not needed anymore even though officers tried to assure the men that the continuing training and exercises would have them ready should they be required.

It was early May and the war in Europe was over. At this time the 7th Division and the 9th Division moved back overseas but without the 2/4 LAA. The boys were despondent after having endured first the heat and dust of the desert and then the sultry tropical heat of New Guinea they were obviously no longer needed. To make it worse the Regiment was split up. One Battery went to work on the Cairns waterfront but Henry's Battery was given an even more degrading task.

"What?" Jack exclaimed, when the Officer told him of what they were to do. "You expect these men to become navvies after what they have been through?" "Orders are orders," the Officer replied. "Get the trucks rolling." The men were to dismantle the camp at Ravenshoe, all the huts and structures.

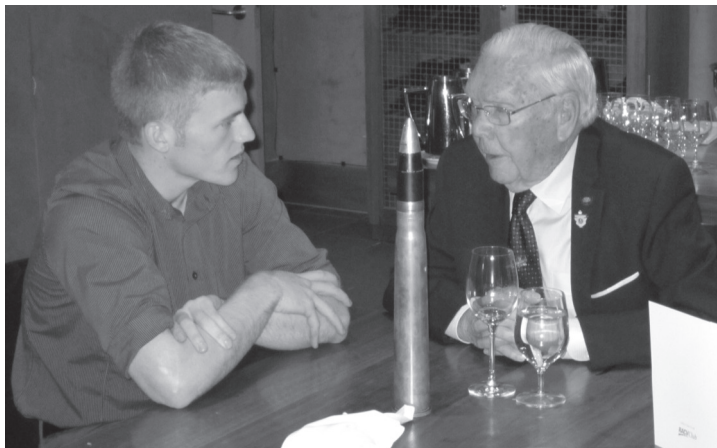
In July as the war moved closer to Japan it was now obvious to all that the 2/4 LAA had finished its war service.

It was not until October 24, the day before Henry's 31st birthday, and the anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein that the Regiment was officially disbanded. The discharge of the troops was to be orderly and the troop trains ran constantly taking Henry's lot back to Brisbane. He arrived at Wacol to hand in his gear and then to Redbank for his official discharge on the 9th November 1945. Henry had spent 1,612 days in the AIF with 798 days overseas and 672 days in Australia.

Henry's war was over.



AIR DEFENCE LUNCHEON—MAY 2012



Lieutenant James Easton with John Campbell (8)



Lieutenant Pru Connell with John Marshall (8)



Captain Mike Squire with Ian Rutter (7) and Cec Rae (9)



Lieutenant Jimmy Nguyen with Cec Rae (9)



Lieutenants Pru Connell, James Easton and Sam Rynne with John Campbell (8)



Four Air Defence Lieutenants and two 2/3rd veterans



Capt Mike Squire discusses an item from the Regimental history "On Target" with Ian Rutter (7).



Rear: President Lynton Rose, Lt Sam Rynne, Lt James Easton, Lt Pru Connell, Capt Mike Squire, Lt Jimmy Nguyen, Ian Rae, Secretary Colin Bragg. Front: Cec Rae (9), Ian Rutter (7), John Marshall (8), John Campbell (8)

Candid Camera At The 2012 AGM and 2012 ANZAC Day March



Secretary Colin Bragg (right) with Earle Webster (7) and Ruth Harvey (grand daughter-in-law)



Rhonda Rose (wife of President Lynton Rose) and Kaye Huggins (daughter of Cec Donnelly [9])



WW2 memorabilia (and souvenirs) provided by Graeme and Matthew Heddle, courtesy of Werribee RSL.



A group of our lady members waiting for the March to commence - Rear: Ann Bragg (daughter of Jim Paton (9)), Anne Payne and Lisa Foran (daughter and grand daughter of John Hepworth (8)), Front: Joanne & Dana (grand daughters of Alan Rundle (9)), Anne Rae (daughter of Cec Rae (9)) and Gaye Berry (daughter of Ron Berry (8)).



Earle Webster (7), John Marshall (8), Frank Hands (8), Cec Rae (9) and John Campbell (8). Ray Everlyn (9) was also at the Reunion Lunch, but was not present when the photo was taken.



Margaret and Malcolm Wrigglesworth (son of Bill Wrigglesworth [7]), Assoc'n Research Officer David McDonald (son of Robert McDonald (Signals)) and Stephen Welsh (son-in-law of Jack Curry [7]).



A view across the Bourke Room at the RACV City Club.



Daniel Wanders (grandson of Alan Young (7)) and Matthew Heddle (grandson of Charlie Heddle (9)) carry the banner across the Shrine forecourt.