



# Take Post

April 2017

## Newsletter of the 2nd/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Assoc'n

### A Tale Of Two 2nd / 3rd ALAAR POW's

*Editor's Note: In February this year, I was fortunate to be able to interview two original Service Members of the Regiment - Ian Barker (VX31735) of 7 Battery and John Hilliard (VX27064) of 8 Battery. Both Ian and John were POW's - Ian was captured during the Battle of Crete and John during the Benghazi Handicap. Both escaped from POW camps and both were recaptured after a week on the run. Whilst their pre-war and post-war stories are very different, their wartime experiences are very similar. Their recall of dates, people and events was crystal clear, and the Association is pleased to present their individual stories.*

#### Backgrounds

One of twelve children, Ian Francis Barker was born in



Yackandandah on 23 August 1919, and attended the Bullhead School near Tallangatta until aged twelve. Adhering to his father's maxim that "knowledge was more important than wisdom", Ian worked on his parent's and family farms near Tallangatta, until just before his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, when he enlisted in the Australian Army on 27 June 1940 with the rank of gunner as a member of "B" Troop of the 7th Battery in the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> ALAAR.



Born in Auckland, New Zealand on 15 September 1918, and coming to Australia as a child, John McKenzie Hilliard grew up in Terang, where his father was a Bank Manager. John attended Terang High School, before moving to Melbourne to live with his grandparents and attending Camberwell Grammar School and Scotch College. Employed by Smith Johnson & Co (later to become Peat Marwick Mitchell) as an audit clerk, John was just two subjects short of qual-

ifying as a Chartered Accountant when he enlisted in the Australian Army on 20 June 1940. John had earlier enlisted in the Militia Forces on 29 November 1939 because he understood the country was "getting ready for war".

Initially posted to an Army Service Corps Unit at Puckapunyal, John applied for, and was granted, a transfer to join the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>, where he became a member of "E" Troop of the 8th Battery of the Regiment at Werribee Racecourse where he undertook his basic training – albeit the Regiment did not have any anti-aircraft guns.

Ian undertook his initial training at the Geelong Racecourse before the Regiment moved to Werribee Racecourse.

#### To War

Ian and John embarked on the "Mauretania" for the Middle East on 30 December 1940, ultimately arriving at Amiriya Camp near Alexandria, via Fremantle, Colombo, Port Suez, Haifa, Khassa Camp, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

On 11 February 1941, 8 Battery arrived at Wadi Auda near Tobruk, but on 28 February were dispatched to Derna, Barce and Benghazi to provide anti-aircraft support using captured Italian 20mm Breda anti-aircraft guns.

Following the fall of Greece and the transfer of the German Afrika Korps to Tripoli, 8 Battery was ordered to evacuate and return to Tobruk. The "retreat" was to become known as the "Benghazi Handicap". John was a member of a group of allied soldiers who were to become known as the "Breakfast Brigade" - because they were captured whilst having breakfast on the morning of 7 April 1941 during the retreat to Tobruk. Recognising that the group was outnumbered and outgunned, Lieut. Col. "Spike" Marlan, Commanding Officer of the 2/15 Infantry Battalion, to which a part of "E" Troop had been attached, surrendered to the German forces - and so began John's four years as a POW.

Meanwhile, 7 Battery had been ordered to proceed to Crete to defend the aerodromes at Maleme, Heraklion and Retimno. The Battery arrived at Suda Bay on 24 April 1941, the same day as the evacuation of Greece had begun. Thousands of Australian, British, New Zealand and Greek soldiers, airmen and sailors of all ranks landed at Suda Bay on the night of the 24 April and throughout the 25<sup>th</sup> and following days. On 26 April, 7 Battery HQ, "B" and "C" Troops were moved to Heraklion to defend the town and airfield.

The Battle of Crete commenced on 20 May 1941. After 8 days and against overwhelming odds, Brigadier Chappel, the Heraklion Section Commander, received orders to evacuate some 4,000 men on a convoy of Royal Navy cruisers and destroyers.

*(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 over 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

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

### VALE

PJ Phillip Hurst

### Sub-Unit

8 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 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 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.

### Website

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

### Office Bearers 2016/17

#### President

Anne Rae  
45 Darebin Street  
Heidelberg Vic 3084  
Telephone: 03 9459 9439  
Email: [arae26@hotmail.com](mailto:arae26@hotmail.com)

#### Honorary Secretary

Malcolm Wrigglesworth  
31 Savanna Drive  
Mooroolbark Vic 3138  
Telephone: 03 9726 0803  
Email: [msmtwrigg@hotmail.com](mailto:msmtwrigg@hotmail.com)

#### Vice President

Matthew Heddle

### Honorary Treasurer

Colin Bragg  
Unit 2 / 81 Well Street  
Brighton VIC 3186

### Committee

Ann Bragg  
Graham Heddle  
David McDonald  
Lynton Rose

### Newsletter Editors

Malcolm Wrigglesworth  
Colin Bragg

### Association Research Officer

David McDonald

### Keeper of the Banner

Matthew Heddle

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# PRESIDENTS REPORT—2017 AGM



This year, we remember that seventy-five years ago, the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment departed the Middle East for Australia. Singapore had fallen to the Japanese and Australian Prime Minister Curtin insisted that the Australian troops come home as Northern Australia had been bombed by the Japanese. The men, having been away from home for more than a year disembarked in Adelaide and were billeted with families there. Regimental Headquarters and all three batteries paraded together for the last time. After disembarkation leave at home, RHQ, 7<sup>th</sup> Battery and 8<sup>th</sup> Battery (men, guns & equipment) travelled by train from Adelaide to Perth to provide air defences in WA and 9<sup>th</sup> Battery departed Adelaide for Queensland for jungle training, after which it travelled via Port Moresby to Milne Bay.

2017's "Take Post" is again full of fascinating articles and my congratulations go to our editors Colin Bragg and Malcolm Wrigglesworth on another excellent production.

Our cover story juxtaposes the stories of two Prisoners of War (POWs) from the Regiment, Ian Baxter and John Hilliard, whom Colin recently interviewed. Coincidentally, I recently read Barrie Cassidy's book *Private Bill: In Love and War* (2014 Melbourne University Press) and was astonished to discover that Barrie's father Bill was a member of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battery, 2/3rd ALAA Regiment (VX32438). Barrie, best known as the host of ABC's *Insiders* program, writes a compelling story of Bill's arrival on Crete on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1941, his subsequent

wounding and capture during the battle of Crete, and his four years as a POW. Like many of the men, on his return home to his wife and family he spoke little of his experiences and of the brutality and horror of war, his attempts at escape and the retribution that followed. Similarly, his wife Myra only revealed after 50 years the loneliness and loss that she felt when he was missing in action and the secret that she had kept for all those years. This is a moving, well written story and includes some references to men and activities of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> ALAAR.

The 1942 account of the Battle of Crete from the German context from the "Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung" on page 8 of this edition provides the contrasting German perspective on the Battle written just 12 months afterwards. Page 12 contains an excerpt from a book *Wrecks & Reefs: Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea* regarding the MV *Macdhui*. My father recorded in his diary boarding the *Macdhui* on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1942 with 9<sup>th</sup> Battery. It sounds like the boat journey was a wonderful holiday from the bully beef and spuds they had been living on in Townsville. He wrote "*The ship is quite nice and we are well situated near all conveniences. There is a wet bar on board.*" He describes the trip, the excellent food and "*we had pure white table cloths, lovely silver cutlery, which we would have like to have souvenired but didn't.*"

The Battery disembarked on 15<sup>th</sup> June. 17.30 Arrived in Moresby Harbour – only one small jetty so we have to wait for a ship unloading there to leave.

18.00 Had dinner before we left – very nice. Driven out to the 3 mile 'drome in trucks.

June 16. Up at 7 & we were rather surprised to find the country so nice. It could almost be around Fern Tree Gully. Quite a few gum trees around. Along a small range of hills to the south are some bomb craters nicely spaced.

In his memoirs Dad also wrote "*Meanwhile Jim (Jim Paton VX48145, Dad's mate) was not so fortunate as he had been detailed with several others to travel with our guns and equipment on the ship Karsik. This ship flew the Dutch flag and had been captured by the*

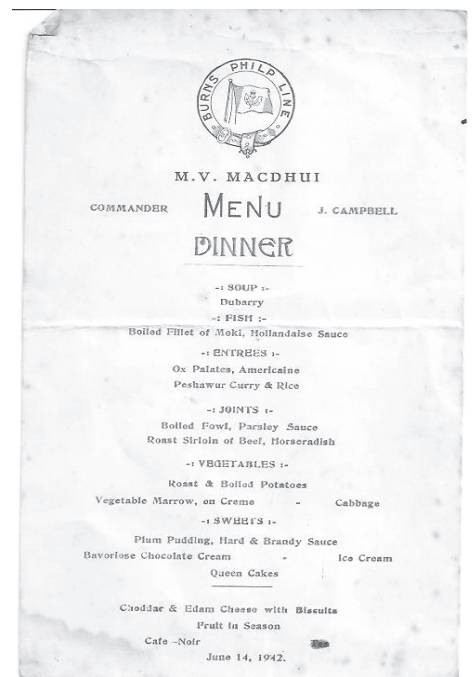
*Dutch from the Germans on the outbreak of war. Her skipper was a rotund Hollander who enjoyed his Bols gin.*

*On 17<sup>th</sup> June, 18 Japanese bombers escorted by fighters dropped several bombs around the Karsik and the Macdhui. The Macdhui was hit and was run ashore, but was of no further use and to think of all those lovely meals we had enjoyed on her and the silver we should have souvenired.*

*Remember Jim Paton and his mates were on the Karsik. Jim told me after the bombing that the bombs had missed the ship by good luck and the adroitness of the captain. However the men on the ship had several bad moments and it was at this time Jim took up smoking to steady the nerves. Apparently one of the Malay crew was calling to Allah for help and no doubt there were some silent prayers said to the Almighty. Jim spent two days on the Karsik being a target for the bombers. It would have been just too bad if the Karsik had been hit as all our guns, trucks and some of our men would have been lost."*

This year will also see a different format for the Anzac Day March in Melbourne with descendants instructed to walk at the rear of the march rather than behind our Regimental Banner. This was not what our fathers and grandfathers wanted and I hope that the RSL will reconsider their instructions in the future. I urge you to continue to join together in the memory of the men of the Regiment and in particular those who did not return.

**Anne Rae — President**





# From the Secretary's Desk . . . . .



## Secretary - Malcolm Wrigglesworth

Welcome and hearty greetings to all members to the 2017 2nd / 3rd LAA Regt Association AGM and the Regiments Annual Luncheon.

This is my third year as Secretary, and again the year has flown quickly. For me personally the last year has been rather eventful, with the hospitalisation and passing of my mother Betty Wrigglesworth, in early October 2016. Betty was the wife of deceased Veteran W.A. Wrigglesworth of the 7th Battery. She often attended our AGM and Annual Luncheon until last year when due to health reasons was unable to attend. Mum enjoyed these luncheons and catching up and renewing friendships formed with war widows and remembrance members over many years.

Towards the end of last year my thoughts turned to the preparation of this year's AGM, annual reunion arrangements and Anzac Day March, the preparation and production of "Take Post" and what information I have for the Secretary's Report.

### **Correspondence**

As has been the case in recent years, most enquiries are received electronically through our website or direct to myself, Treasurer Colin Bragg or the Association's Research Officer David McDonald.

This year much of the correspondence from members and relatives has been attended to by David McDonald via email, webmail or telephone conversation, which has made the Secretary's job a lot easier.

On occasion, usually after Anzac Day,

there are phone calls or emails direct to myself, enquiries regarding the 2nd/3rd or even the 2nd/ 4th, and so I will pass on some of these 'happenings'.

Annette Hyde emailed to inform the Remembrance Group that her Dad Laurie Brown was in the 7th Battery, and that she was off on a cruise which would allow her to fly to Crete to spend some time looking around the area where her father was stationed. Annette has the Regimental history, "On Target" book, so had some background information. Research Officer David McDonald also provided helpful additional information to Annette.

The Committee received a congratulatory letter from Doreen Bryant (wife of the former late President, Ron Bryant) which was written soon after Anzac Day 2016

Here is a extract of Doreen's letter:-

*"It is high time I put typewriter to paper and dropped you a line to compliment you and the committee on the excellent effort at last Saturday's A.G.M. and luncheon. It was so well planned with interesting interludes to keep us all on our toes.*

*The effort you all put into the event - such planning and attention to detail. Matthew with his presentation - I, for one, had never given much thought to the intricacies of what a service person has to wear/carry, and young Emma with her air warden act - so good.*

*I also found David McDonald's talk about the Australian involvement in Assyria most enlightening, I don't think I ever knew about that either.*

*Well there are many other things I could note - the effort put into "Take Post" - excellent - the "Welcome Committee" as we entered plus the running of the Association throughout the year.*

*Well done and my thanks and congratulations to all of you. The "boys" would be proud of you."*

Kim Taunt contacted us advising he had 7<sup>th</sup> Battery photos that may be of interest to the Association.

### **The Year in Review**

Occasionally I receive telephone calls or emails from family members who no longer have a need to hold onto photo memorabilia. The Association is always receptive

to obtaining such memorabilia depicting our 2nd / 3rd LAA war veterans.

Throughout the year, we were advised of the passing of original service member **Philip Hurst (VX5862) 8th Battery**. These are sad and regrettable events and we should be grateful that these men returned home to their families to live and lead long lives, and provide inspiration for the future generations.

### **Donations**

The Association has again received donations from members, which enables us to provide for unscheduled technical maintenance of our web site, to allow us to provide the administrative services, to produce and print "Take Post" and to help us offset the costs of the AGM and Luncheon.

I would like to thank all members who have made donations throughout the year, and in particular Dot Harris, Foster Crooke, Daniel Wanders, Trish Slatery and her sisters Georgia and Sally, Lynne Chitts, John Hillard and Rosemary Weatherly.

The Association appreciates all donations which enable the continuance of this wonderful Association in remembrance of the original members of the 2nd / 3rd ALAAR.

### **2nd/3rd Website**

Over the past 12 months Malcolm Romano of Designsenseweb has continued to provide technical maintenance of the Association's web site, and undertaken any significant alterations or amendments requested by David McDonald or Colin Bragg.

### **Remembrance Group**

The Remembrance Group currently numbers approximate 90 members, of whom 48 attended the 2016 AGM and Reunion Luncheon. Unfortunately we did not have any original Service Members at the 2016 Reunion, due to prior commitments or being unwell on the day of the AGM / Reunion.

The Association Committee was pleased with the ultimate attendance, particularly considering the very low initial acceptance rate. All who attended thoroughly enjoyed a well presented and entertaining reunion.

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 events that may be forthcoming later in the year.

# .....and 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/SearchNRetrieve/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>.

Pleasingly, a number of the enquirers have already accessed these resources before contacting the Association, and write seeking further details.

If you have accessed online service records at the National Archives website you will have seen that most of the contents are handwritten—and sometimes close to illegible—and all contain abbreviations.

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:*

**Joshua Thomas** wrote: 'I am the eldest grand child descendant of John Alexian Confait. John Confait VX44338 summarised his movement through locations of

imprisonment - "Tripoli, Italy, Austria, Germany, Poland." I have taken a lot of time and pride researching my great grandfather's efforts. I have purchased a original copy of hitters digger slaves. I would love to represent my grandfather who past away in any up and coming Anzac day events and meet other people or relatives who served with this regiment to celebrate their legacy. I would like to know if there is a section for 2/3rd L. A. A IN MELBOURNE for the Anzac day parade and any other gathering of the regiment I can attend?' Details provided.

**Martine Shqau:** 'My grandfather who is 97 was interested if there are any other members of his regiment still alive. I thought to try my best to find as much information for him as I can. He used to attend the ANZAC day march with his regiment in Sydney but has not been for quite a few years due to living in Goulburn. I would love to take him to a reunion if there is one.' Referred to the NSW Branch of the RAA Assoc

<http://www.artillerynsw.asn.au/contactus.htm>

**Leon Perry:** 'Hi could you please help find service records for Russell Perry (my pop) his regiment Gunner 2/3 Australia composite anti aircraft regiment. he has passed away some time now and my dad has little records of his deployment.vx146237.' Info provided.

**Luke William Young:** 'I am a grandson of George Gilbert Young who served in WW2 with the 2nd/3rd in the 8th Battery. His service number is VX51234.' Wants to join the Association. Info sent.

**Julie Bignell:** 'I am researching my fathers' war history. His Service records indicate he was with the IAA Reinforcements sent to the middle east on13/9/41 and then over the next few years variously with this regiment and the 2-3 AAB in NT. He was a gunner. Any information would be gratefully received.' NX38548 and later reenlisted in 1951 number 33785.

**Peter Davidson:** Advised that the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Lt AA Regt had a reunion today but 'we were an association but no longer now'. Asked 'Is the 2/3 related to the 2/4 if not perhaps something could be addressed.' Referred to Committee.

**Annette Hyde:** 'My Dad Laurie Brown was in the 7<sup>th</sup>' – requests Crete info. Done.

**Sue Murray:** 'I am looking for any information and photos of Allan Noel Ryan -

NX178715. Is the group photo of the 9 Anti Aircraft Battery available for purchase and do you have the names of the men in the photos?' Done.

**Patricia Malloch:** 'My father Bill Malloch was a member of your Regiment, I am interested in purchasing a copy of On Target. Is this possible?' Replied re digitised version.

**Robert Fisher:** Asking about his late father John Wallace Fisher VX38827, 2/1 AA Regiment. Info on the unit sent.

**Bruce Taggart:** Researching the Military Service record of his maternal grandfather, Ronald William Stephenson Beck, Service Number NX22190, who enlisted in the 2/2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Info provided.

**Kim Taunt:** From 2/2 Field Regt Assoc, sent photo of 7 Bty men, including three KIA on Crete. Acknowledged.

**Ronald Stark:** He is 2/2 Fd Regt Assoc. Sent photo of WOODWARD, HT VX37950 Bdr 7 Bty POW (captured Crete?) – in group photo that Kim Taunt sent us on 05 Oct. Has newspaper cutting re him as POW; requested.

**John Brew :** Can you pls interpret what words mean on the WW2 Service record of a relative of mine? His name was George Wood Menzies and he was transferred to 2/4 Light AA in the ME on 20.1.42. Then on 8.8.42 he was transferred to 2/8 AFA and five days later to 42 BGH and was then taken on the strength of the 2/4 LAA Regt on 26.8.42. What does AFA and BGH mean pls? Response: 2nd/8th Field Ambulance/Australian Field Ambulance, AAMC and 42nd British General Hospital which was in Cairo.

**Jan McNeill:** Her father Roy East VX45822, 7 Bty. '...served in Crete then captured and ended up POW in Germany. Hoping to find some more details about this part of his life through you. I have some letters he wrote while training and after arriving in Palestine. I am happy to become a member and would also like to attend the annual dinner in April.' Colin responded that he had met Roy, scanned some of Roy's photos, and that Roy had made a substantial donation to the Association.

**John MacMillan:** Re his father CV Macmillan, 'Known to his mates as Dick Macmillan' was a member of the unit – yes though we have him as 'McMillan'; website to be corrected. VX35142 Macmillan CV, L/Bdr, REO to 8 Bty 2/4<sup>th</sup> LAA Regt. Wants to join. Info provided.

## A Tale Of Two 2nd / 3rd ALAAR POW's (con)

Most of 7 Battery initially boarded the Royal Navy destroyer, HMS "Hereward", and were then transferred to the Royal Navy cruiser HMS "Dido". But the majority of "B" Troop, including Ian Barker, remained on "Hereward" when the evacuation convoy put to sea at 3.20 AM on 29 May 1941. At 6.25 AM, "Hereward" received a direct hit and all on board were ordered to abandon ship.

Many lives were lost and many men were injured as a consequence of the bombing, and many more were drowned – Ian's father had taught all his children "how to swim and to stay alive in the water without panicking" and he attributes his survival to his father.

Ian was unconscious when he was subsequently picked up by an Italian Motor Torpedo Boat and only regained consciousness "when alcohol was poured down my throat" - and so began Ian's four years as a POW.

### Prisoners Of War

Ian Barker spent some two years in Italian POW camps, initially on Rhodes Island and then in a transit camp at Bari in the "toe" of Italy. From Bari, Ian was moved via another transit camp at Capua to Prato all'Isarco, about 5 kilometres from Bolzano and about 60 kilometres south of the Brenner Pass. He spent some six months preparing and maintaining rice paddy channels and banks in the rice-growing valley between Milan and Turin. Local Italian women planted the rice, and Ian recalls that the women were always singing "to take their minds off their aching backs".

Ian's friend "Bomber" Mannix organised entertainment and concert parties for the prisoners to "get some laughter into the camp". A choir was formed and singing competitions were held regularly.

The POW camp was close to the paddy fields, with only a small gate between the camp and the rice paddies. Ian and three mates (Mick Wilson from WA, Bryce Jones from NSW and Ernie Berg from Queensland) hatched a plan to escape, and began accumulating chocolate from Red Cross parcels and scrounging old clothes.

On the day of their escape, they made sure the gate was not locked and that they were at the starting end of the daily head count. When the guards had counted them and moved on down the line of prisoners, they quickly went through the gate and threw themselves into the water in the rice paddies. To avoid being tracked by dogs, the four men walked through the water until they felt it was safe to seek somewhere dry to hide.

Ian and his mates only moved at night and they took it in turn for one of them to forage for food by day. Bryce Jones had long red hair that showed under his peasant cap, so it was decided he had to have his hair cut short - Ian volunteered to cut Bryce's hair.

After a week, and after crossing an icy mountain stream, they reached a village on the Swiss border where they had to cross two bridges laying between them and freedom. Waiting until darkness fell, they successfully crossed the bridges, and had only 50 yards to go to reach the thick forest on the Swiss side, when floodlights were turned on and they were re-captured. Ian believes a local villager had given them away.

The four escapees were loaded onto a utility truck and taken to Milan, but on the way as the truck descended a mountain, the brakes failed. In an attempt to slow the truck, the driver deliberately crashed the truck into the mountainside - Ian and his mates jumped out of the truck and escaped - this time they were re-captured quickly and ultimately arrived at Stalag XVIII A in Austria.

Ian spent two years in Stalag XVIII A and was forced to work in a steel factory bending hot sheets of metal after they came out of the blast furnace. As the camp was some 200 yards from the factory, the prisoners had to walk to and from the factory through heavy snow during the winters. Ian continued to be held at Stalag XVIII A until the end of the war.

After his capture, John Hilliard was held in a Wadi for several days and then moved initially to Derna and then to Tripoli by road. From Tripoli, John was transported on the SS "Vittoria" to Capua in Italy. After Capua, he was moved to Salmona for a short period and then to Bolzano where he and other prisoners were housed in a disused brewery. John recalls that whilst he was at Bolzano, a number of 7 Battery POW's arrived - it is likely that John and Ian were in the same camp at the same time for a brief period.

In October 1941, John was moved to Prigione di Guerra 57 (PG57) near Udine. He was forced to work maintaining and repairing railway lines, which were a constant target of allied air raids. As a consequence of the Italian surrender to the Allies in October 1943, and after two years in PG57, John was transferred to a working camp at Marburg in Austria, near the border of Italy and Slovenia. In late May 1944, John and five others escaped, and like Ian Barker, travelled only at night and foraged by day. Unfortunately, John and his companions were captured at midnight on 5 June 1944 in a local Slovenian village - it is probable that they too, were betrayed by a local villager.

John was taken by train to Innsbruck in Austria where he was interrogated ("they didn't pull out my fingernails") in an effort by the Germans to extract any information relating to local support groups. From Innsbruck, John was taken to the Wolfsberg Punishment Camp (a sub-camp of Stalag XVIII A), and worked in a Nazi textile mill at Lietzen until the end of the war.

### Freedom

British 8th Army forces liberated Wolsberg on 11 May 1945. John and others, advised by an officer that their camp was in the Soviet zone, decided to head for Munich. They boarded a truck with refugees and drove to Munich Airport where they boarded an aircraft and were taken to Eastbourne in England.

After a month or so, John embarked on a ship, which brought him home via the Panama Canal, New Zealand and Sydney. From Sydney, a train brought him and other returning soldiers to Melbourne, where he was de-mobbed at Royal Park.

Meanwhile, at Stalag XVIII A, Ian woke one morning to discover that all the German guards had disappeared, and with other prisoners, simply walked out of the camp. Ian had not gone far when he and a few mates discovered a brand new black Mercedes Benz German staff car with the keys in the ignition. They drove the car to the American lines where U.S. General Patch shook the hands of every prisoner of war and then advised Ian that the U.S. Army needed the Mercedes more than he did, and promptly confiscated the car.

Ian was taken by truck to Salzburg, where he spent several



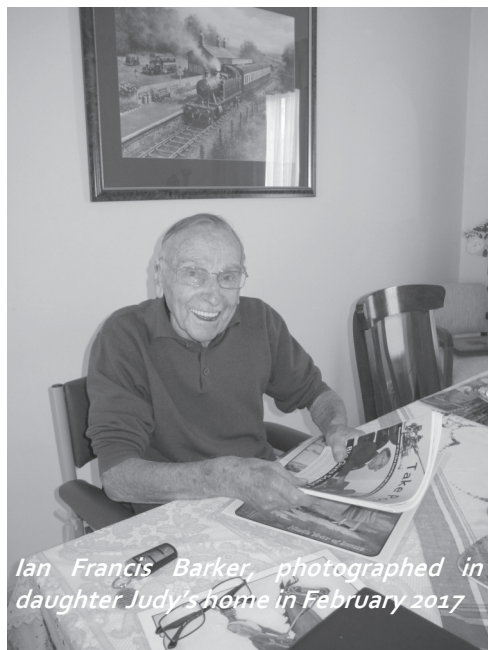
weeks recuperating before being flown to Eastbourne in England. Ian was billeted with an English policeman and his family for a week and discovered that the children had never had canned fruit. Prior to departing England to return home to Australia, Ian made up a food parcel (including canned fruit) from the Australian PX store and arranged to have it delivered to the family.

Ian also travelled home through the Panama Canal, but enjoyed a three-day stopover in Honolulu and Waikiki Beach prior to stopping in New Zealand and disembarking in Sydney. As with John, Ian boarded a train for Melbourne, via Albury, and

ultimately arrived at Royal Park where he was demobbed.

#### After The War

Ian elected to stay in Melbourne after the war and decided to investigate opportunities under the Re-establishment and Employment Act, which came into force in August 1945. One of the apprenticeships on offer was hairdressing, and having had some "experience" in



*Ian Francis Barker, photographed in daughter Judy's home in February 2017*

cutting hair (see above) Ian began a two-year apprenticeship, learning his trade in a hairdressing shop owned by his neighbour in Flemington.

Having learnt the fine art of cutting, styling and shaving, Ian qualified as a hairdresser. In the meantime, Ian had met and married his wife Virginia (called "Penny" by Ian) in 1947 and subsequently had two children, Randal and Judith. Virginia's health problems necessitated a move from the city and until his retirement in the early 1980's, Ian was a hairdresser in the Belgrave Hairdressing and Sports Store.

Ian played football for the Belgrave Football Club for many years, and enjoyed premiership success.

Ian and Virginia were heavily involved in their church and both loved their garden and walking in the Dandenong Ranges. Ian was also a keen stream fisherman.

Son Randal was called up during the Vietnam War and served in Queensland. Ian's Grandson Lee served with the Australian Army in East Timor. Sadly, "Penny" passed away in 2010. Ian has a clear memory of his time in the Army and commented that "life in the Army was wonderful because of the fellowship, camaraderie and friendship, and because we were all doing the same job"

John returned to Smith Johnson & Co, completed his Articles, and qualified as a Chartered Accountant. He became the second Treasurer of the Association in April 1946 and served in this position until September 1948. His good friend and successor as Association Treasurer was John Hepworth, who served as the Association Treasurer for 61 years until he retired in April 2009. John (Hilliard) became auditor of the Associa-

tion's Welfare Fund until its transfer to Legacy and RSL Welfare.

Both Johns would become Partners at their respective firms (John Hilliard at Peat Marwick Mitchell and John Hepworth at Deloittes) and would regularly travel to Institute meetings in Sydney together. As they lived very close to one another, the two Johns alternated the driving from home to Tullamarine to attend Institute Council meetings in Sydney.

John married Joan in December 1947 and they had two sons, Philip and Andrew. Philip followed his father in becoming a Chartered Accountant, and was a Partner of Coopers in Hong Kong for many years. Andrew was involved in the clothing industry for many years. Sadly, Joan passed away in 2011.

John was admitted as Partner to Peat Marwick Mitchell in 1954 and remained there until his retirement in 1980. He was appointed an Officer in the Order of Australia in 1981 for services to the accounting profession. John was invited to join the State Council of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in 1962 and served on the Council until 1975, during which time he became State Chairman and served on the National Council and Executive Committee.



*John McKenzie Hilliard—photo taken at around the time of his retirement in 1980*

In addition, John served the community in a variety of positions, including as a Councilor of La Trobe University, as Treasurer of the Heart Foundation of Australia and the Australian Red Cross and served on the Council of the Victorian Professional Golfers Association. John is included on the list of the 25 oldest living Old Boys published in Great Scot, the Journal of Scotch College. (as at October 2016)



*Ian's medals and the Stalag XVIII A POW tag, No. 8674, he was issued with on his capture and imprisonment.*

John and Ian are amongst the twelve surviving original Service Members of the 2nd/3rd ALAAR.

# An Account Of The Battle Of Crete From The "Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung" on 20 May 1942 On The First Anniversary Of The Battle.

*Editor's Note: Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (DAZ) was a German newspaper printed between 1861 and 1945. A hand written translation of an article that appeared in DAZ on 20 May 1942 was included in a large folder of "useful information" I inherited from former Secretary, John Campbell, way back in 2008. I don't know who the translator was and I am unsure (hand writing) of some of the Cretan place names mentioned in the article.*

A year ago on the 20th May the announcement of the German attempt in Crete startled the world. Today for the first time we publish an account of the 13 days fighting, from the pen of a German officer who took part.

Already on the 20th May the Swastika flew on the Acropolis. In the south, in parts of the Peloponnese, a second Dunkirk had just taken place and the last British troops had been driven off or taken prisoner of war.

As a last bulwark, as a bar to the Aegean Sea and as a corner stone of his position in the Mediterranean, the enemy was left with Crete. A glance at the map will convince one of the strategic importance of this island as a connecting point between North Africa and the southeast mainland of Europe. As a junction for sea traffic, and also a gate to the Aegean Sea, its importance is obvious.

Already in February 1940, the British had commenced to prepare Crete as an air and naval base for attack in southeast Europe and as an advance position in the defence of Egypt and the whole of the Middle East.

It was not without reason that Mr. Churchill said "We are concentrating all our defensive power on Crete. We intend to hold this important base until the death without thought of retreat."

However Crete had the same importance for Germany as a stepping stone to North Africa and to bring our air force within striking distance of Egypt. But Crete is an island 100 kilometres from the nearest point of the mainland and a good deal further from a usable harbour.

Their objectives were the four main points of the island - Maleme, Chania, Rethymno and Iraklion with the object of facilitating the landing of air borne troops in large numbers.

Mr. Churchill said "Our staff on Crete already knew on the 16th May that an attack was imminent." But this knowledge was of no avail.

The first parachutists were met with a murderous fire from the British, New Zealand and Australian troops from their specially prepared defensive positions. Once on the ground they immediately made for their weapon chests and assembled themselves.

The experiences of a Major will give some idea of the horrible difficulties of the undertaking. He landed 5 yards from an enemy machine gun nest and rolled over into a hole remaining there for 25 minutes until the machine gun had been moved to a fresh position.

He was then free and roamed around the vine fields searching for his men. By evening he had found a dozen. While at Maleme to the southwest of Chania, to the east of Rethymno and at Iraklion strong forces of paratroopers had been dropped and fierce fighting was in progress.

When on the first day Maleme aerodrome fell into our hands, a decisive blow had been struck, but reports from the remainder of the fronts were uncertain.



The supremacy of the British navy numerically put all thoughts of a sea borne attack out of the question. However, during the first four days of May our staffs were working feverishly to make possible the carrying out of the Fuhrer's order - "Crete must be taken."

In the early hours of the 20th May 1941 paratroops and air borne troops prepared for the first attack.

Even at Maleme we were still being subjected to furious rifle fire, machine gun and artillery fire initially from a heavy gun skillfully placed in the mountains behind the aerodrome.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May the bombing and machine gun attacks by the German air force on the eastern flank of Maleme reached a crescendo. In the late afternoon of the second



## DAZ Version Of The Battle Of Crete (Continued)

day the first Battalion of mountain troops was landed by aircraft on Maleme aerodrome despite the fact that the landing ground was full of bomb craters. Some were crash landed on the beach, their first duty being to advance against the enemy artillery bombarding the aerodrome.

The third day swarms of Junkers transport planes arrived carrying mountain troops and pioneers and the area was covered the whole of the day by clouds of red sand dust caused by the Junkers landing and taking off. The enemy subjected the aerodrome to bombing attacks, but without hindering the operations.

From other fronts unpleasant news comes to hand. At Rethymno and Iraklion exceptionally heavy pressure was being put on our troops by the British. Already on the 19<sup>th</sup> May light sailing craft had put to sea from Greece with part of a Mountain Division to bring them within range of the fighting area for when they were required. But these light craft had been turned back by superior naval forces. Later news reported that mountain troops, who had been used at Varvick and in France, and who had broken through the Metaxas Line, had set foot on Crete.

On the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, a Junkers plane was crash landed at Maleme with Major General Lingel, the commander of the mountain troops, who took over command of the island. He immediately set to work to establish three bomber squadrons to attack the British troops, who were to the east of Maleme. Gruesome stories came to hand concerning parachute troops who had been taken by the native Cretans and maltreated.

In the meantime the British fleet around Crete had been attacked by the Luftwaffe, their supremacy broken down and had been driven out of the area. Seven cruisers, eight destroyers, one submarine and five speed boats had been sunk, and in addition one battleship had been damaged. The Italian High Command reported the damaging of another four cruisers. Mr. Churchill was forced to admit that owing to the relentless attack of Stukas, all the British Hurricane fighters had been withdrawn. Thus the Germans had gained both air and sea supremacy and land supremacy would automatically come.

On the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> the British carried out prolonged attacks on the aerodrome at Maleme, doing damage only to the twisted remains of British machines and to transport planes which were already damaged beyond further use. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May the mountain troops made their first contact with the parachutists dropped in the Galatos area.

The prison of Crete will strike a chord in the memory of every soldier who fought on the island. Here strong forces of parachutists had been dropped, among whom was Max Schmelling. They stormed the heights of Galatos in vain.

The prison itself was in our hands - a white dash amid a sea of dark green olive trees and grape vines. Our troops had been greeted there with fluent German by the wife of the prison keeper, who was performing cooking duties for a medical unit stationed there.

There were great scenes of greeting between the Alpine and parachute troops at the Galatas prison. At the same time our

mountain troops had pushed through to the coast to the west of Maleme. After a Stuka attack on the British and Greek troops stationed there, the town of Kastelli was stormed and taken, after which the troops pressed into the centre of the town where our own troops were held prisoner.

From this period the defence plans of the enemy became very clear. It was concentrating in a wide curved sweep from the coast near Galatas to Alikianos in the southern mountains. The British rear, was advancing over the mountains and breaking down upon the enemy to the east of Suda in order to break down the Chania and Rethymno line of communication.

The first Sunday of the attack dawned - the day will be known as the "Day of Galatas" in the history of the war. The temperature was 104 and the discomforts were increased by the weight of equipment, uniforms and steel helmets. The outskirts of the town had been taken and by sunset a house to house battle was being fought. Galatas in itself is a natural fortress, and the fighting continued into the night with heavy losses on both sides.

By the next morning the enemy had withdrawn to fresh defensive positions and camouflaged himself anew. Both in the west and south the day had been one of success.



Waiting For Evacuation From Sphakia Beach

## DAZ Version Of The Battle Of Crete (cont.)

Kastelli had been taken and also Palaiochora on the south coast.

After the break in the British defense on the Day of Galatas, the UTZ Company of the mountain troops pressed on through Galatas and at the same time parachute troops advanced on the coastal area. Galaxia and Prevelli were taken after hard battles, the enemy was gradually pushed back and eventually they were driven off their last defence position in the hills around Chania.

However the enemy continued fighting with dogged determination in his efforts. It was about this time Mr. Churchill made a statement in the House of Commons that the battle of Chania rages with indescribable fury and General Freyburgh's still doing well.

Loud applause greeted this statement but Mr. Churchill cut in with another remark – "At the moment I speak the success of this heroic action is not finally assured." The result on the contrary was to be quickly known.

On the morning of the 27th after an aerial attack by Stukas on Chania and the outskirts, the town was stormed from all sides. After the defenders were chased back from one defensive position to another, the last stand was broken down. At 2.00 o'clock mountain and parachute troops entered the town from all sides.

The Swastika was hoisted on the Town Hall in the market square and the proud message was sent to the Fuhrer - "Berchlesgarden Battalion has taken Chania at the head of parachute troops. The Swastika is flying on the Citadel"

But there was to be no respite for the troops as the enemy appeared to be weakened, he must be pursued with all speed. By 5.00 PM of the 27th the Burgomaster of Suda Bay had handed over the town to our army, and Suda Bay which had been used by the enemy as a naval base was once more free. In the large natural harbour of Suda Bay were the wrecks of tankers, and merchantmen were smouldering. The guns of the British cruiser "York" were seen pointing skywards in an empty threat.

After Aukiono? had been stormed our troops advanced across wild mountainous country without any natural supply of water and no paths or roads where there was any hope of supply vehicles with food supplies or reinforcements reaching them.

The journey was across steep and precipitous country. As they marched along no man spoke, all their strength was needed for the task in hand. Their loads were heavy, as each man carried a rucksack of equipment and stores, some with their belts of machine gun ammunition around their necks while others of their comrades carried the machine gun.

The heat of the sun was scorching and there were no plants or flowers growing to give pleasure to the eyes. There was no green turf and every type of plant life had been scorched by the tropical sun. The eyes burned and smarted with the strain and the sweat poured from the brow with such exertions, and everyone's uniform was wet and heavy with perspiration.

By the evening of the day on which Chania was taken (27th) the Company reached a position west of Stylos on the flank of the retreating enemy.

On the morning of the 28th our troops reached Chrafia where the resistance of the retreating troops was broken down, and again the rearguard troops were dispersed. Stylos, where at the same time our troops attacked from the rear and after a hand-to-hand battle, the enemy were captured by the small Krakow Mountain Company. During this operation two British tanks were destroyed and the way was opened to the main body of the advanced troops. One Battalion of the enemy was taken prisoner and the remainder fled.

The next battle took place west of Chania. The enemy continued using every defence possible in mountain warfare, but on the morning of the 29th was still retreating with all speed toward Sphakia, a village on the south coast where his ships were ready to carry out an evacuation.

The infantry of the mountain division pressed hard on their heels and in the meantime parachute troops who had been dropped on the 20th opened up the way to Rethymno. They had found themselves in between the seashore and the road east of the town. They had held out for nine days despite night and day attacks by the Australian force, which surrounded them supported by artillery and tanks, and despite the intense heat, thirst and hunger.

Their first supplies of food after eight days had been picked up from vehicles left abandoned by the enemy and it was in this manner that they obtained their first provisions of food since landing.

On the morning of the 30th May the enemy who were well entrenched toward the east of Rethymno continued their resistance, but weakened when 1,200 Australians surrendered to the mountain troops and left the British in the lurch.

Iraklion - On the 28th British troops had been evacuated by sea as the aerodrome could no longer be used leaving the defenders wide open to our aerial attacks and the parachute troops were able to capture the town and fort without a battle.

The advance continued and at Kalo Chorio our troops made contact with the Italian forces who had landed in the meantime and by nightfall reached Kerapatin? on the south coast.

The final act of the British drama of Crete took place at Sphakia.

The German troops who pursued the enemy were able to reach Alkempos on the 29th and made contact with the rearguard of the enemy.

The route from there was ideal from a defensive point of view, winding through mountainous country all the way climbing steeply towards the coast where it dropped suddenly in a series of sharp terraces.

## DAZ Version Of The Battle Of Crete (cont.)

By this time the British had destroyed all Bren carriers and other vehicles leaving them strewn along the roads.

On the 31st the advance continued to Askypotos, and the weather and the nature of the ground continued to demand the last ounce of energy from our troops, but eventually commanding positions were secured for our artillery and mortars.

The achievement of transporting the guns to these positions took several hours and as the strength of the enemy concentrated in this south coast area was known to be considerable, the employment of Stukas was considered necessary.

When Whitsun Sunday dawned the British on the seashore below had been disillusioned about the strength of their own navy. The Mistress of the Seas had left them in the lurch - no ships could be seen and not even a sail was in sight on the horizon. The German air attack had done its work and had had its effect, as at 8.00 o'clock after a mortar attack from the heights above, white flags could be seen flying.

At 10.00 AM Tourilos was taken and shortly after midday Sphakia was occupied and by nightfall Latya was also captured. By this time thousands of English and Dominion troops were wending their way towards transport camps. Thus the Battle of Crete was ended after twelve days of the heaviest fighting against heavy odds of terrible heat and an exceptionally tough enemy.

Naturally this operation cost us dearly and the sacrifice of men.

**But it had to be.**



HMS Kelvin, on which a number of 2nd/3rd were evacuated from Crete.

*Editor's Note: The lead story In the 2012 issue of Take Post related to the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Crete. It noted in particular that it was to be the first and last time in history that an island was taken by an airborne assault. Afterwards, Crete was dubbed the graveyard of the Fallschirmjager. The Germans suffered some 4,000 killed and missing in the assault. A total of 500 Junkers and 70 light assault gliders were used to drop 8,200 men on Crete—1,860 at Maleme, 2,460 at Hania, 1,380 at Rethymno and 2,360 at Heraklion.*

## From The Australian Army Cooking Manual

*Editor's Note: In the 2011 issue of Take Post, we included a couple of recipes from the Army Cooking Manual, which the late Dave Thomson (9 Battery) had "bequeathed" to the Association. We thought the culinary aficionados amongst you would enjoy some more of "Dave's Delights"*

### Toad In The Hole

Ingredients: 2 1/2 gallons milk or half milk and water, 7 1/2 lbs flour, 18 ozs. of egg powder, salt and pepper, sausages or other cooked meats.

Method: Soak egg powder in 1 1/2 pints of cold water for 1/2 hour. Mix the milk and flour into a batter, and salt and pepper to taste, stir well and let stand for 1/2 hour.

Fry sausages, put them in a baking dish with two heaped kitchen spoons of hot fat. Add the batter to cover sausages and bake in a hot oven until nicely browned. Serve with gravy.

Small pieces of any cooked meats may be used in lieu of sausages.

### Onion And Tomato Pie

Ingredients: 10 lbs. onions, 10lbs tomatoes, bread-crumbs

Method: This is a very simple and popular dish. Peel 10 lbs. onions and put into boiling water and leave for 2 to 3 hours. Don't cook on fire. Drain, dry, slice and fry in butter till lightly browned. Butter a baking dish and fill with alternate layers of tomatoes and onions, seasoning with salt and pepper and bread-crumbs.

Finish with a good layer of breadcrumbs and cheese, which has been passed through the mincer. Bake in oven until top has a nice browned effect.

### Cheese Tart

Ingredients: 7 lbs. pastry, 6 lbs. cheese, 2 1/2 gallons of milk, 3 1/2 lbs. egg powder, 3 lbs. onions, 3 lbs. bacon, salt and pepper.

Method: Soak the egg powder in 4 pints of cold water for 1/2 hour.

Line baking dishes with rolled pastry.

Grate or cube cheese and place on top of pastry.

Fry onions and bacon (finely chopped), add to cheese.

Add soaked egg powder to milk with salt and pepper, stir well, pour over cheese, etc., and bake in a moderate oven until set.

Note: This dish can be served as an entree. The bacon and onions can be omitted if not on hand.



## MV MACDHUI

*Editor's Note: I recently came across a book written in 1994 by Neil Whiting entitled "Wrecks and Reefs, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea". It is a book about shipwrecks around the New Guinea coast, and one of the chapters relates to the wreck of the M.V. Macdhui, on which 9 Battery travelled from Townsville to Port Moresby in June 1942.*



### HISTORICAL NOTES:

The "Macdhui" was built in 1930 and named after the Scottish mountain Ben Macdhui. She weighed 4,561 tons and was 104 metres long and had a beam of 15.6 metres wide.

In February 1932 Burns Philp (the owners) placed advertisements in newspapers advising that the Macdhui would be doing trips from Sydney to Papua, Bougainville and other parts of New Guinea. The round trip would take approximately 34 days and cost £55 in First Class. It appears to have been fairly popular, the June 1932 trip was fully booked well before its departure.

From early 1942 the Macdhui was used to move troops from Sydney to Port Moresby.

Pages 264 - 267 of "On Target" describes in some detail the embarkation of 9 Battery on the Burns Philp ship M.V. Macdhui in Townsville on the 12th June 1942 for the voyage to Port Moresby, the subsequent disembarkation on 15 June 1942 and attacks by Japanese aircraft on the M.V. Macdhui and the Dutch vessel "Karsik" which was carrying the Battery's guns, trucks and equipment.

The Battery's primary objective was contained in Operational Instruction No. 17 of 15 June 1942, which read in part, as follows:

*"An aerodrome is to be constructed at Gili Gili at Milne Bay. A party is being despatched from Port Moresby at an early date to construct and defend the aerodrome. The code name for this operation is "FALL RIVER". The following is the composition of the party: Major Margetts, O.C.; 9th Battery; one company 46 U.S. Engineer Regiment; det. N.G.F. sigs; one company 14th Inf. Bde; one M.G. pl, 14 Inf. Bde; det. A.A.S.C.; special hospital U.S.A.F.I.A.; det. A.A.O.C. 14 Bde will be prepared to send a second rifle company at a later date, at 48 hours notice, should additional defensive troops be required"*

*"The role of the garrison will be:*

- (a) to construct the aerodrome*
- (b) A.A. defence of aerodrome*
- (c) ground defence of the area against paratroops or small raiding parties by land or sea*
- (d) provision of such guards as may be required for the protection of equipment supplies, etc*

*(e) in the event of an overwhelming force being brought to bear against the garrison, it will inflict maximum loss on the enemy before withdrawal.*

"On Target" records "The guns and equipment of "A" and "C" Troops were loaded on the "Karsik" on 16th June, with "C" Troop manning its guns on the deck.

Seventeen enemy planes flew over that day with the heavy anti-aircraft guns engaging.

At 0945 the following day 18 bombers escorted by fighters flew over Moresby and dropped several bombs around the "Karsik" and the "Macdhui", the "Macdhui" being hit amidships, causing some casualties. Loading of equipment had to be suspended.

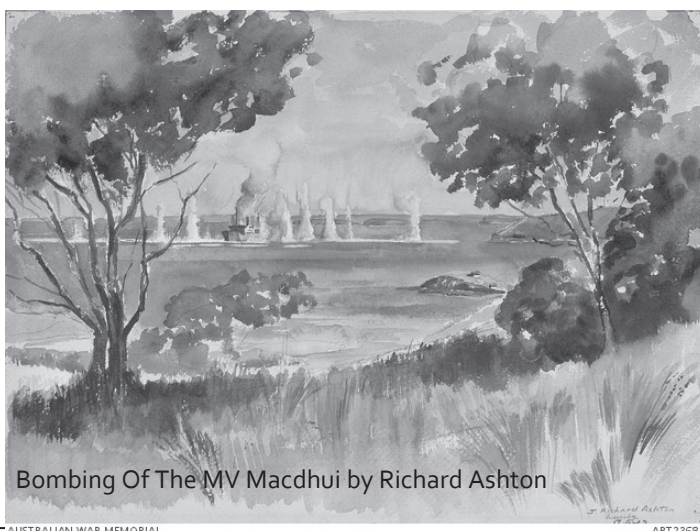
On the same day, 18 enemy bombers escorted by Zeros bombed Port Moresby harbor. The 36th Australian Infantry Battalion history records the event:

*The "Macdhui", a beautiful Australian ship, was one (of four) of those in the path of the bombs, which straddled her making what appeared to be some direct hits. The explosions raised a huge curtain of water, which temporarily obscured her from view. As the spray subsided the watchers saw smoke rising from the ship. In an instant she was on fire; first in the middle; then at one end; then at the other, she was doomed. She had suffered four direct hits. Members of the "Macdhui" crew, and some troops who were aboard, dived over the side. Launches sped to their rescue. The watchers saw the ship list over and sink in the middle of the harbour."*

*"The sinking of the "Macdhui" occasioned quite a number of casualties, including some officers and other ranks of the 39th Battalion, who had been included in working parties unloading cargo from the holds of the ship."*

"On Target" continues: "Meanwhile the men who had arrived from Townsville on the "Karsik" were still on her and had come through the bombing unscathed. As one gunner reports:

*"On board the "Karsik" there was a funny side to the two bomber raids on Port Moresby harbor. The Malay bosun had a pet pigeon. Immediately the air raid warning sounded the bosun, with pigeon on shoulder, would move to the open fo'castle where he would carefully lay out his praying mat and begin bowing up and down in earnest prayer. This he continued to do for the duration of both raids and there were two 9th Battery characters close by exhorting the Bosun to 'put in a word for me, mate'.*



## MV MACDHUI (continued)

*Perhaps this was the secret of the survival of the "Karsik" which as far as known, saw the campaign through.*

*Not so funny was the fact that the "Karsik" had been partially loaded with aviation fuel and ammunition. "*

In "Wrecks And Reefs", Neil Whiting writes:

*"At Townsville, one hundred and fifty four troops boarded and the vessel departed for Port Moresby, arriving at 5.00 p.m. on June 15. After waiting for another ship to depart, the "Macdhui" berthed and commenced to disembark the troops and discharge the equipment. Work continued throughout the night.*

*At 6.00 o'clock the next morning, the "Macdhui" was moved out into the harbour to make way for another vessel on a special mission. Discharge was continued at anchor in the harbour with the cargo unloaded onto lighters. Work had not been long in progress when the air raid alarm sounded. The Master, Captain J. Campbell, weighed anchor and manoeuvred the vessel to evade attack.*

*After the "all clear" was sounded, the vessel returned to anchor and continued to discharge the cargo into the lighters. At daylight on June 17, Captain Campbell shortened the cable in the event of an air raid and at 9.45 a.m., the alarm sounded.*

*This was the sixty first air raid on Port Moresby. The Captain at once weighed anchor and proceeded to a position north west of Paga Hill to manoeuvre under the protection of a heavy anti-aircraft battery. At approximately 11.00 a.m., eighteen bombers came in at 21,000 feet. The battery's anti-aircraft fire was low and trailing and the Japanese were able to drop their bombs. One, of an estimated fifty-six bombs that were dropped, scored a direct hit on the after bridge. The bomb passed through three decks to the first aid station in the dining saloon where it exploded, killing the surgeon, Dr. C. Tunstall, two crewmen and a soldier.*

*When the attack ended, the "Macdhui" had many holes in her sides, but was still afloat, and the damage was considered to be repairable. The vessel moved to the main wharf to complete unloading and to clear the wreckage, but the following day the bombers returned. Again, Captain Campbell endeavoured to escape by manoeuvres, but this time the bombing was extremely accurate and four of some sixty-eight bombs that landed around the ship, scored hits.*

*One of the bombs exploded on the poop, killing the gun crew and rendering the steering useless. Two others exploded in the holds, setting fire to fuel drums and causing fierce fires to break out. These sent columns of flames leaping 30 feet above the hatches. The "Macdhui" was doomed. The vessel was sinking rapidly by the head and taking on a list to port. The captain headed the vessel toward shallow water and ordered all life boats to be lowered into the water.*

*The engines were stopped by means of a control lever on deck, and as the Captain returned to the bridge, the vessel received a fourth direct hit on the starboard side. The violence of the explosion threw Captain Campbell from the bridge to the boat deck, where he sustained serious burns and shrapnel wounds.*

*On recovering from the blast, the captain ordered the engineers out from below and the vessel was abandoned because of the danger of explosion.*

*Three RAAF medical officers, in company with several orderlies, had been watching the attack from the hospital on the hillside overlooking the harbour. They hurried to the waterfront and set out in a launch towards the burning vessel. Seeing the "Macdhui's" crew taking to the boats, they realised that the vessel was being abandoned.*

*The "Macdhui" was mortally wounded, burning fiercely from bow to stern and sending great palls of smoke high into the sky. Eventually, the stricken vessel settled on the bottom close to the reef and heeled over onto her port side.*

*Ten of the crew of seventy-one were killed, along with five Australian gunners from the 39th Battalion. The loss of the "Macdhui" was a great blow to the morale of Australian troops in Port Moresby. Until then, it had been the only regular and reliable link between Australia and Port Moresby.*

*For the remainder of the war, one of the bells from the "Macdhui" was used by the RAAF Marine Section to sound action stations for air-sea rescues. Another bell was removed in 1946 by a Chaplain of the RAAF, Samuel Ramsden, who had ambitions of becoming a clergyman at St. John's Anglican Church in Port Moresby after the war. The bell, which had been obtained without authority, lay in the church storeroom for some time.*

*Finally, Canon Harold Palmer, who was embarrassed with their acquisition, wrote to the General Manager of Burns Philp at Samarai, Mr. George Aumuller, and the bell was graciously donated to the church. The bell was erected in the tower of St. John's Cathedral and to this day still calls parishioners to worship.*



*In 1967, the mast had been removed and, in 1971, this was erected outside the Royal Papua Yacht Club as a memorial to those who died. Plaques at the foot of the mast commemorate the loss of the ship and the crew members. Each year, on Anzac Day, members of the Royal Papua Yacht Club lay wreaths in memory of their sacrifice.*

*In 1979, the ashes of the late Captain Campbell were laid to rest with his ship. Trevor Kerr, vice-commodore of the Royal Papua Yacht Club, tells of a supernatural experience when the ashes were distributed at the wreck site.*

*There was not a ripple on the surface or current drift to break the calm when the United Church Minister upturned the urn containing Captain Campbell's ashes and scattered the contents into the sea.*



## MV MACDHUI (continued)

*The ashes initially clouded the water as was to be expected, but almost immediately condensed into a form similar to a teardrop. Then, the most amazing phenomenon occurred. The teardrop cloud quite rapidly crossed the six metre intervening gap between the boat and the "Macdhui" and disappeared into the hull.*

*Captain Campbell had returned to his ship."*

The wreck of the "Macdhui" is a feature of Port Moresby harbour and is plainly visible from the town area. For a closer inspection, take the harbour road to Kanudi and the wreck can be seen in the water several hundred metres from the shore. (As at August 2015)



Photos of the MV Macdhui's mast and bell were sourced from the Malum Nalu web site.

[malumnalu.blogspot.com.au](http://malumnalu.blogspot.com.au)



## LIGHT A. A. GUN

You may talk of the old Navy and the Air Force boys in blue,  
And about their great equipment that always looked so new,  
But have you stopped to ponder on those boys whose backs  
are browned,  
Through nursing those light ack-ack guns, spread-eagled on  
the ground.

Have you observed the ginger that those spiteful guns possess?

And seen the tracers flying, at speeds beyond your guess?  
And have you seen the ammo boys a-dodging in the dust,  
To feed the little ack-ack gun in which they put their trust.

Ever seen the smiling faces after Zeroes have come in?  
Yes, the faces of the gun crews in the smoke and dust and din,  
And after Mitsubishi have dropped their bloody lot  
You'll find them still there smiling - to give Tojo all they've got.

A pilot sometimes needs us, when a Zero's on his tail,  
His cannon and machine-gun jammed, and things look pretty pale.

So he heads in our direction, and old Tojo follows fast.  
Old Tojo makes his one mistake - and that one is his last.

And hark! O Merchant Navy with your holds full of supplies,  
When you're unloading all you've got right under Tojo's eyes,  
Have you ever looked around you whilst your winches strain  
and snort,  
At the dinky little ack-ack guns that guard you while in port?

Now all war correspondents, when visiting the fronts,  
They write up naval battles, or the Air Force and their stunts,  
When putting pen to paper about places held, or won,  
They'll find a lot of credit due - to our little ack-ack gun.

H J Harrowell, Captain

*Extracted from "On Target" With The American and Australian  
Anti-Aircraft Brigade In New Guinea*

*Written and illustrated by men of the front line services*

*Published by Angus and Robertson Ltd, Sydney and London,  
1943*



## ALAMEIN XMAS SHOPS

In the Australian sector of the Alamein battle-front amid all the paraphernalia of war, there stood late in 1942, a shop. It was unpretentious, surrounded by sand, and was in a water-soaked dug-out, shored with scrap timber and adorned with a model assortment of tins and galvanized iron. Still it was a shop. It was Father Christmas's most advanced supply depot in the Western Desert. On plank tables covered with blankets were silks, dress materials, silk stockings, linen table services, handbags, and all the hundred and one alluring articles, which go to make up a gift shop. The familiar odor of a well-stocked emporium - that mingled scent of divers goods - triumphed over the dank earth.

Men from the front line, a few hundred yards away, bumped and shouldered about the cramped space, scuffling on the mud floor. Hands which had been tending machine-guns and mortars but half an hour before, fingered silk scarves and dress materials, exploring the secrets of texture.

The scene lacked the gaiety of Christmas shopping at home, with its crowds and children tired with wonderment, but it did have something - there were no parcels to carry! The postal orderlies saw to that. Once their purchases were made and wrapped ready for dispatch, the Christmas shoppers shouldered their rifles and filed back to their weapon pits.

In the many Australian units that opened these gift shops trading went on for several days. A few men only could be released at a time from the front line. They would tramp into the battalion headquarters, visit the pay sergeant on duty near the shop, and make their purchases.

A wartime army can supply experts in most things, and this time there appeared from the mass of khaki, men who had been buyers for Australian retail firms, warehousemen and shop assistants. Goods were brought from warehouses in Alexandria and hauled to the front where the shop assistants dropped their rifles and took charge.

The most marked effect war has had on Christmas has been to deepen its significance particularly for men fighting far from their homes. This opportunity to buy gifts in token of the season gladdened more hearts than mouths will admit.

The enthusiasm of the men may be measured by their response. One shop took nearly 2,000 pounds Egyptian, equal to 2,500 pounds Australian and most of the others sold goods valued at more than 1,000 pounds Egyptian.

Not all of these shops were in the front line, for the idea quickly took hold in support areas. One field ambulance unit hoisted a tent to display its goods; resting battalions used 3-ton trucks or anything else that could be spared.

This desert Christmas shopping became real news to the troops, and the unit news-sheet of one battalion produced an "Extraordinary" edition. The editor did what few daily newspapers will do-give free advertising space. Obviously in league with the proprietor of the "Battalion Gift Shop", he declaimed, "We have no expensive shop rent, no costly neon signs or heavy advertising expenses so that we're able to sell at cost price. Our shop is no plate-glass fronted structure, it is just the usual dug-out-Western Desert Model, Mark I, and is situated in Sharier el Mud Patch.

"Enter the door of this humble dug-out and you are immediately transported to the basement of one of Cairo's leading emporiums. Well! It's our story and we're sticking to it. These goods are available to you by special arrangement with Saida George, and many other well-known firms at home and abroad.

"Purchase your gift, with special advice from these trained shop-walkers and assistants" the editorial exhortation continues. "The quartermaster will come to light with paper and calico (that's more than you will get in Aussie). We'll supply greeting cards with every purchase; we'll even provide a censor.... With your purchase completed, back you go to the luxury of your front-line homes and Jerry won't even know you've been away. That is what is known as Simplicity Shopping."

And then the war obtrudes again, "A word of warning. Disperse! We don't want Jerry shells as souvenirs."

Many strange war stories have been bred at Christmas. Some of them are apocryphal, but all serve to illustrate the season. They range from the icy slush of the last war's Russian Front, where Germans and Russians sang "Silent Night, Holy Night" over No-Man's-Land, to the mud of Flanders, and the sands of the Middle East. They may include stories of gift shops, with or without Father Christmas's pine trees and candles, but these Alamein desert shops will surely keep a place in Australian memories.

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*Khaki & Green - With The Australian Army At Home And Overseas, 'pp. 10-12, 104'.  
Published for The Australian Military Forces by the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, ACT, 1943*



## Candid Camera at the 2016 AGM and Reunion Lunch



*Alan Gorman (9th) with daughter Sharyne O'Grady.*



*Treasurer Colin Bragg addresses the AGM and remarks on the "discovery" of original member Ian Barker (7 Battery).*



*Russell Luckock, (son of Charles Luckock, 8th), Roger Stephens (nephew of Jim Paton, 9th) with President Anne Rae (daughter Cec Rae, 9th)*



*Emma Heddle, Matt Heddle (great grand daughter and grandson of Charles Heddle, 9th), and Rob Bennett (son of Max Bennett, 8th)*



*Margaret & Malcolm Wigglesworth at rear, President Anne Rae, Research Officer David McDonald, Pat Thurbeck.*



*Members carrying the Regimental Banner*



*Matt Heddle (grandson Charles Heddle, 9th) demonstrates the uniform and equipment used by the 2 / 3rd*



*Daniel & Luke Wanders, grandson and great grandson of Alan Young (7th)*