



Take Post

April 2018

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

The Battle of Milne Bay – Then and 75 years on

by Ian and Anne Rae

"Here we were, anti-aircraft gunners with batmen, cooks drivers and others with a rifle each (we hoped), rain pouring down, nothing between us and the beach where the Japs were possibly going to land. The regular infantry was behind us." (CJE Rae)

Cecil Rae (VX48132), was a chronicler and story teller. He kept a diary as a young man so when he departed Australia with the Regiment in December 1940, he took a small diary with him and also his camera. In his later years he condensed his diary entries and added his photos as well as maps and descriptions so that we, his children, have a record of his war time experiences. He also used this material to contribute to the writing of *On Target: The story of 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment* in conjunction with Les Harris (VX27594) and Ron Bryant (VX32563).

In August 2017 we were very fortunate to participate in a trip to Papua New Guinea to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Milne Bay. 9th Battery ('A' and 'C' Troops) participated in the battle. So armed with Dad's diaries and photos we arrived in Port Moresby with

10 other descendants of infantry, artillery and air-men who had also participated in the battle.

Our trip was made possible entirely by Thales Australia which is an international electronics, manufacturing and systems company supplying the defence, aerospace, security and transport markets. Accompanying us was a senior historian from the Australian War Memorial, one serving and one retired officer from the army, Thales organisers and young ambassadors, and personnel from No Roads Expeditions. A Melbourne tourism company, No Roads organises trekking, re-enactment and commemorative trips to areas such as Kokoda, Milne Bay etc. They provided on-the-ground expertise and security as well as additional historical advice.

Our commemorative group arrived at Moresby on 22 August 2017. We visited the Port Moresby WW1 War Memorial and then to the wreck of the Macdhui. (See *Take Post* 2017)

The following day our group held a very moving commemorative service at the Bomana War Cemetery and laid a wreath in memory of the men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice in New Guinea.

David Horner in *The Gunners, A History of Australian Artillery* Allen & Unwin, 1995, explained why 9th Battery had been moved to Port Moresby from Townsville:



Cec's Bofors gun and crew at Milne Bay 1942



The tour group inspects a Bofors gun at Gurney Airport, Milne Bay. 2017

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. 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 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 this former comrade:

VALE

John McKenzie Hilliard

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 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 Theatre Honours from Crete, Tobruk, the Western Desert, Syria, Port Moresby, Milne Bay, Lae, Buna and Borneo. The Regiment experienced a high number of battle casualties through deaths, wounded and prisoners of war.

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

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

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

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PRESIDENTS REPORT— 2018 AGM



75 years ago at this time the Regiment had separated: Regimental Headquarters, Signals and Workshop Sections were at Berkshire Valley Camp WA, some Signals and Workshops attached to 7th, 8th and 9th Batteries. 7th Battery was providing AA defences at Geraldton RAAF station WA. Over 100 men of the Battery were POWs in Europe, having been captured in Crete. 8th Battery were providing AA defences in WA at Pearce Aerodrome near Perth; the Catalina bases on the Swan River; and at Geraldton, Onslow & Exmouth Gulf, while 9th Battery were at Milne Bay, then in the Australian Territory of Papua. In July 1943 the Regiment was disbanded and the batteries became independent.

Once again your Committee has been busy since the 2017 Reunion and AGM.

David McDonald has organised for the Regiment's handwritten Nominal Rolls to be gifted to the Australian War Memorial, allowing access to a much wider audience and ensuring their preservation. This was organised by David (see From the Secretary's desk...).

Several members of the Committee have catalogued books relating to the Regiment, AA defence or WW2, either held by them personally or on behalf of the Association.

In August, my brother Ian and I were incredibly fortunate to be selected to travel to Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Battle of Milne Bay. This battle was the first time the Japanese forces were defeated on land during their invasion of the Asia Pacific. Two troops of 9th Battery were involved in the de-

fence of Milne Bay. Organised and financed by Thales Australia, with the support of the Australian War Memorial, we found the trip to be a very educational and emotional experience for both of us. I hope we have conveyed this in our report in this edition of *Take Post*. Peter Brune's book *A Bastard of a Place – Australians in Papua* which attempts to "restore Milne Bay, Gona, Buna and Sanananda to their rightful place beside Kokoda" and describes how Blamey and MacArthur scapegoated many of the Australian field commanders to protect their own positions and lied about what actually happened. This then became legend and therefore only Kokoda is really known about.

During a visit to the 2/3rd ALAAR's memorial plaque and tree in the Shrine Reserve on Remembrance Day last year Research Officer David McDonald noticed that the base of the plaque has deteriorated. Upon our request the Shrine Trustees have organised for the plaque to be reinstated in a new concrete base. This plaque, commemorating the Theatre Honours of the Regiment, was unveiled beside an upright Simon Poplar Tree at the Shrine of Remembrance by members of the regiment and dedicated by the Staff Chaplain, Southern Region. The ceremony took place on May 4, 1997 on a very wet day. The ceremony was organised by John Campbell.



The Committee commissioned the manufacture of a small lapel badge in response to strong support at last year's AGM. It is based on the colour patch that the men of the Regiment wore. The colour patch is not unique to the Regiment, being the colour patch of the Royal Australian Artillery, 1 Aust Corps, of which the 2/3rd LAA Regt was just one unit. In the first instance the badge will be available to members at the Reunion and AGM Lunch on 21st April.

We have recently installed technology



(a SSL Certificate) on our website to ensure that all data passed between the web server and users remain private and secure. This will provide confidence to legitimate users of the website and dissuade hacking. It is an additional cost to the Association but a necessary one.

Despite instructions to the contrary from the RSL, 16 descendants marched behind the Regiment banner on AN-ZAC Day in Melbourne in 2017. The Kindred Organisations and Unit Associations of the RSL had requested that descendants march at the rear, well away from our banner. I note that in the 1998 President's report in *Take Post*, Cec Rae wrote "*The March (1997) was also well attended but as decreed by the unit associations only ex-service personnel were permitted to participate. In my opinion the younger generation should be welcomed to the March, as it is only through their interest the March will continue to remind people of the destructiveness of war.*"

Some things don't change – neither the opinion of the RSL, nor our resolve! My thanks go to the Committee and office bearers for their work throughout the year, it is a real privilege and pleasure to work with them.

Colin Bragg has once again produced another excellent "Take Post" assisted by Malcolm Wrigglesworth. Their efforts are greatly appreciated and I trust you will enjoy reading Colin's recent interviews with Dave Humphries (7th Battery) and Allen Martin (9th Battery) and be appalled as I was in reading John Purcell's (7th Battery) description of the desperate situation during the bombing prior on Crete to the invasion.

If you haven't before, consider coming to the Reunion and/or the March with your family. You will be made most welcome and by including families we will continue to "*remind people of the destructiveness of war*"

From the Secretary's Desk



Welcome and hearty greetings to all members to the 2018 2nd / 3rd ALAA Regt Association AGM and Reunion Luncheon

Throughout the year, regular contact with the Committee, and our twice yearly Committee meetings, create plenty of thoughts, ideas and plans either already in place or just needing

detail prior to implementation.

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

This year David McDonald has attended to many enquiries from members and relatives via email or telephone conversations, which makes my job a lot easier.

On occasions, and usually around Anzac Day, there are numerous phone calls or emails direct to myself regarding the 2nd/3rd or even the 2nd/ 4th.

We heard from Foster Crooke and family, thanking the Committee for the great lunch and commenting that the 2017 issue of *Take Post* was excellent to read. Foster mentioned at our reunion that our online roll had an error with the spelling of a veteran's name. A check of *On Target* and the Australian Archives verified the name was incorrectly spelled - our web site alphabetical roll section has been amended. Thank you Foster. Foster also mentioned that it might be worthwhile inviting the 2/4th to our AGM/Reunion.

Toni Boyce, daughter of Clifford John Cullen, wrote in June 2017. In 2015, Toni and Cliff travelled to PNG. They had a wonderful trip, where Clifford was surrounded by families, whose people he had fought with in the war. Toni has some photos of him at the Memorial surrounded by these local people. During the year, the NSW Vets Association contacted Toni, and they have placed a plaque in Rookwood Cemetery in the Wall of Remembrance for our fallen heroes, and also a plaque in the Woy Woy Memorial Gardens.

The Year in Review

Occasionally I receive telephone calls or emails from family members who no longer wish to hold onto photos or memorabilia. The Association is always receptive to obtaining such memorabilia depicting our 2nd / 3rd LAA war veterans. The late Alan Read's daughter, Vivienne and family, had recently sorted through Alan's papers and books, which included a number of books related to WW II, some relating to the Regiment and others more general. Additionally, there were some spare books related to the 2012 El Alamein mission that Alan

participated in. We subsequently received two cardboard cartons full of books, calendars, and other interesting memorabilia and information relating to the 2nd/4th and the 2nd/3rd, for our safe keeping. Thank you Vivienne for this generous gift. During the year, we learned of the passing of **John Hilliard (VX270684), 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.

Colin advised there were only 13 original war veterans remaining out of the 2nd / 3rd LAA Regt. This has now been reduced to 12, with John Hilliard's passing.

Nominal Rolls

The Association's original hand written Nominal Rolls have been donated to the AWM in Canberra for preservation and indexing, and to provide public access to the information contained therein. The many months wait till the offer was assessed, was expedited on the authority of a senior AWM officer, and a printed 'Deed of Gift' was signed by David McDonald on behalf of our Association. The Roll is now the property of the AWM, to be retained there, and preserved there, in perpetuity. They will provide a hyperlink from the AWM catalogue entry for the roll to our website to enable members of the public to access the Roll's contents. Fabulous outcome - makes everything we do worthwhile. Big thank you to David McDonald for being such a wonderful Ambassador for our Association.

The signed 'Deed of Gift' is now in the possession of the current Secretary for safe-keeping.

Treasurer Colin Bragg had previously photocopied the Original Nominal Roll as a record for ourselves when he held the position of Honorary Secretary.

75th Anniversary Of The Battle Of Milne Bay

President Anne and brother Ian Rae were incredibly fortunate to be selected to travel to Milne Bay for the 75th anniversary commemorations. Two troops of the 9th Battery were involved in the defence of Milne Bay. Clive Wawn from Geelong, was also on this trip. Clive's father was a Kittyhawk pilot at Milne bay in 1942, and he often used to talk about the anti-aircraft people with great affection.

Remembrance Group

The Remembrance Group continues to grow and currently numbers approximately over 90 members, of whom only 36 attended the 2017 AGM and Reunion Luncheon. In 2017 we had an original, John Campbell, who thoroughly enjoyed the AGM/ Reunion and provided the Remembrance Group with an insight into his war action and escapades. His informative talks and discussions always provide the Remembrance Group with a great deal of knowledge of what the Regiment and the Battery's within the Regiment, withstood during WW2.

Please remember to advise me or Colin Bragg (Honorary Treasurer) of any changes to your address, email and phone numbers, so we can keep in touch with further developments or events that maybe 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 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:

Marg Connell, Melbourne,

Doing family history covering a family member of her husband VX32728

Gnr Ernest Baden PREISER, 7 Bty, POW captured Crete, escaped from Italy to Switzerland. Marg.saw content about him on our website. Research sources advice provided.

Colin Harden

'Without success I've been trying to locate the history of the 53rd Australian Composite Anti-Aircraft Regiment from World War II...I would appreciate any information you have plus a Unit Colour Patch'. Information on both matters provided. The 53rd had the same colour patch as the 2/3rd LAA Regt as both were part of 1 Aust Corps Artillery.

Chris Doherty

Re NX20402 HUNT, JOHN HARDY, 1 Aust AA Regt and later a 9 Bty reinforcement: 'I am looking into his Military service on behalf of his family trying to piece together a story board of his time from embarking in Convoy 11 (28 Jun 41) [correctly US11A] until the end of the time in Labuan, Malaysia in Dec 45.' Many and diverse questions re his Middle East service. Information provided.

Marg Connell, Melbourne,

Gnr Ernest Baden PREISER, 7 Bty, POW. She advised that his service record is now available online. Requested translation of its cryptic contents, and information on what medals he would have been awarded, including POW medals, if any. Done. Subsequent correspondence re his service history.

Trevor Rockliff

Requested information on the 2/1st LAA Regt in which his father served:

'Hi Gents just got onto your site! Fantastic work! My father Leslie Henry ROCKLIFF served in the 2/1 LAA Regiment his Army # NX33969... Any help would be appreciated!' Information provided. He subsequently sent us a photo of a handkerchief that his father had sent back home during the war, beautifully illustrated and covered by the names of his comrades in arms, including his siblings.

Melissa Crowther

Re NX44115 Donald McIver ROBINSON: 'I have recently been researching my family history and have discovered my grandfather was in the 2/4th Light Anti-aircraft Regiment. I've really enjoyed reading the information on this website and I was wondering if you could tell me how I could get my hands on "From Alamein to Scarlet Beach" by Francis West?' Information on the book and the 2/4th provided.

Robyn Youl, Bacchus Marsh,

Re VX37075 Bdr Gordon Yuille LEE. 'Dad is registered as belonging to the 2/3 AAC Regiment but can't find him on your roll. I have access to an electronic copy of his poems which am currently typing if you would like a copy. They were written while on active service. How may I join? I am his eldest daughter - 72 yrs. Dad is no longer with us!' Checked. He was in the 2/6th Heavy AA Battery, 2/2nd Heavy AA Regt in the Middle East and later the bty became part of the new 2/3rd Composite AA Regt: Milne Bay, New Guinea and Borneo campaigns. The 2/3rd Aust. Composite AA Regt was also known as the 2/3rd Aust. Anti-aircraft Regiment, hence the confusion. Information sent. She sent me one of his poems, can't share them until published.

Annie Hutch

'I wondered if you could clarify whether my relative Bowen Augustus Merfield was a member of the 2/3 regiment. I have obtained his service records, see attached image, which state that he was in the 2/3 field regiment, and 4 Aust. Lt A.A. but I couldn't see his name in your Regiment Members List. Whether I have misunderstood the hand writing on the service records, but he told me he fought in El Alamein.' WX13875, information on the 2/4 LAA Regt provided.

Ally Gordon

'My grandfather Arthur Hampson was in the 3rd Australian Light A.A. I have been trying to find his service records and further information regarding his service but have only found the below link: [2nd AIF Headquarters (Middle East), registry records:] VX 18247 Gnr HAMPSON, A. - 3 Aust. Lt. A.A. Regt. - Breach of censorship [Cover letter only - 6 February 1942]

I'm unable to find anything further. Does anyone happen to know anything about the information on the link and if I can look somewhere else for information. Thank you for providing a great website too. I look forward to getting an opportunity to sit and read the newsletter in depth. Regards Ally Gordon (nee Hampson). 9 Bty, ME, Milne Bay & NG. Detailed information provided.

MILNE BAY (Continued from page 1)

"Earlier in the year [1942] Japanese elements had seized Lae and Salamaua, on the north coast of New Guinea, and later they occupied other centres such as Wewak and Madang. It took some time before Rowell [Commander New Guinea Force] and his staff in Port Moresby could fully grasp the danger posed by the Japanese thrust towards Kokoda, across the forbidding Owen Stanley Ranges. In the meantime, attention was focused on a second Japanese thrust, towards Milne Bay at the south-eastern tip of New Guinea.

As early as May MacArthur had decided to build several airstrips at Milne Bay from which planes could attack Rabual. A small garrison began to assemble, and by July it included the militia 7th Infantry Brigade with three battalions and the 4th Battery, 101st Anti-Tank Regiment, from Townsville, two 3.7-inch guns of the 23rd HAA Battery from Port Moresby, the 2/6th HAA Battery and the 2/9th LAA Battery (less one Troop), both recently back from the Middle East, and a US anti-aircraft battery. A month later further reinforcements arrived in the form of the AIF 18th Brigade with three battalions and the 9th Battery, 2/9th Battery, 2/5th Field Regiment. In addition, two RAAF Kittyhawk fighter squadrons were based at Milne Bay.

Milne Force faced immense difficulties. The area was drenched with almost continual rain, the few tracks in the area were usually impassable to vehicles, the maps were rudimentary, communications were poor, and the force had been hastily assembled. There was no clear artillery command structure and the officer commanding the 2/9th LAA Battery, Major Garfield Margetts, apparently acted as Anti-Aircraft Defence Commander."

So 9th Battery departed from Townsville and arrived in Port Moresby three days later. Several days after disembarking, the ship on which they had travelled, the MV Macdhui, was bombed by the Japanese and sunk in Port Moresby harbour. A and C Troops of 9th Battery were then transported to Milne Bay by sea while 'B' Troop remained behind to defend Port Moresby

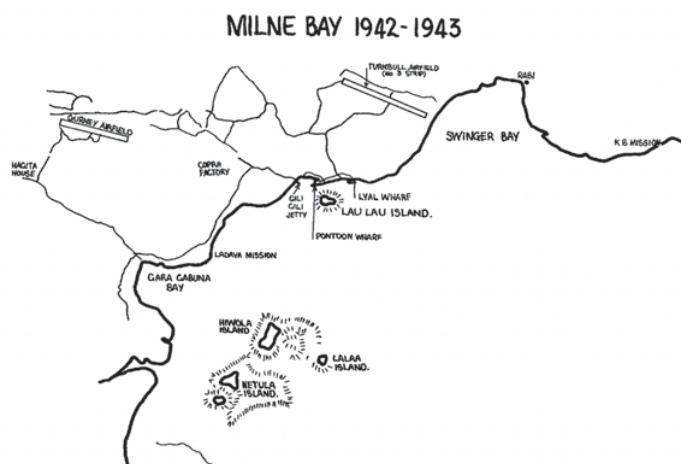


The Battle of Milne Bay was the first time that the Japanese were defeated on land in the war in the Pacific, halting the Japanese forces moving towards Australia.

Arriving in Milne Bay on 25th June, Cec wrote "There was a small flat coastal area beyond which jungle covered mountains reached to the grey skies. The Bay narrowed towards its inland reach and had small islands dotted about it."

"1430 We have pulled up our anchor & come almost alongside a makeshift wharf. We are only about 30 ft. offshore & our ship draws about 20 ft. The natives are very industrious here. Had tea & scones."

"Also in the early stages, besides being on duty on the gun we were employed as road makers and the unloaders of ships. The latter tasks had its advantages as we were able to divert some of the supplies our way which improved our standard of living. Also at this time our Battery trucks were the only ones available in Milne Bay and were used for a great assortment of duties. In particular was the conveyance of cases of beer which apparently fell off the back of the trucks at frequent intervals much to the joy of the members of 9th Battery. Also transported were perforated metal sheets for laying on the airstrips. (Marston mats) These sheets were taken to their destination, a rope tied to them and to a coconut tree, then the truck moved forward so unloading the truck."



Map of Milne Bay area taken from "On Target"

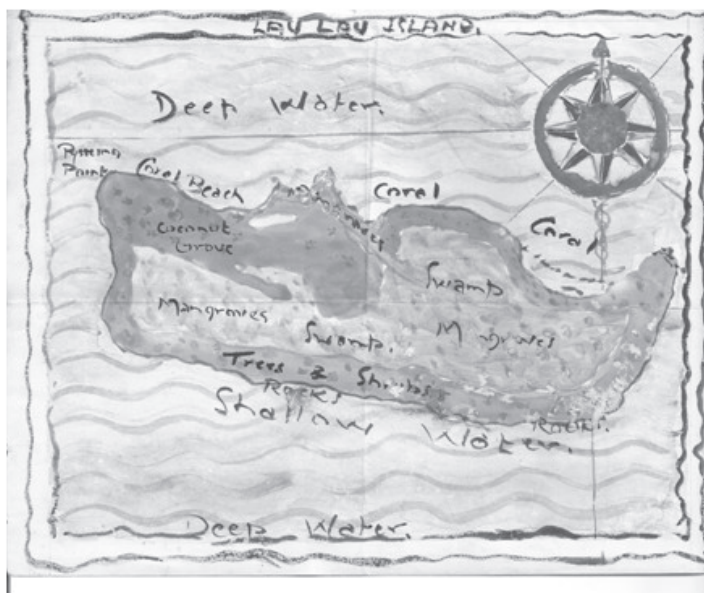
"On July 7th we were told that in the event of a Japanese landing we would be organised as infantry – not a good thought."

On 21st and 22nd July, there were large concentrations of Japanese warships at Gona and Buna, where landings were made on 22nd July. From the 4th August on air raids and strafing by the Japanese on Milne Bay became regular. The Japanese were engaged by the anti-aircraft defenses and then 75 and 76 Squadron RAAF fighters. It was not until 28th August that the full complement of ground forces arrived numbering 8,824 (Australian Army 7,459; United States Army 1,365); the infantry, however, numbered only about 4,500.

On Target reports from the 11th August Communique S.E. New Guinea "7 Zeros north of Samarai (island in Milne Bay). In an engagement 2 Zeros were destroyed and 3 damaged or hit Our losses 1 destroyed 1 damaged." (A member of Battery H.Q. recorded the losses as 3 Zeros and 3 Kittyhawks."

Red warnings were received on 15th, 17th and 20th August, but no aircraft were sighted. Also during this period, heavy rains and high tides were experienced, making conditions very unpleasant.

The War Diary of 9th Battery on records: "Command Milne Force passed to Major General Clowes". "24th August Show-



Sketch of Lau Lau Island made by Cec. "The gun was positioned at Pyraming Point on the north west corner of the island, the machine gun was situated on the east side of the island. The island was about 1½ acres in extent and was about half a kilometre off the shore to the north where the first (Pontoon) wharf was situated. This is where the Anshun was shelled and sunk. Fortunately we had been taken off the island and repositioned at Ladava Mission. I almost forgot the latrine which was situated at the end of a small jetty we had built. On the south side of the island. While sitting one could be amused by watching the coloured fish below."

ery. Cleaning ammunition but interrupted by a red warning — all clear soon after. 1455 Another red warning, about 10 Zeros flew in attempting to strafe the 'drome. Engaged by Bofors and Heavy A.A. then by Kittyhawks. Two Zeros brought down.

On the night of 25 August 1942, 2,000 Japanese marines were landed to capture the three air strips and facilities at Milne Bay. The marines landed 11 kilometres east of their intended landing area, and their intelligence underestimated the Allied numbers, believing that there no more than a few hundred troops defending the airstrip. There were actually almost 9,000 Allied troops including the air support from 75 and 76 Squadrons. Initially, the Japanese met with success. Supported by two light tanks, they advanced westward. The 61st Battalion was first into action and slowed the Japanese, although unable to hold them back. The 2/10th Battalion was moved up on the night of 27 August, but were repulsed and had to withdraw. Reaching the edge of the eastern most (No.3) airstrip on 28 August the Japanese operations fell away as they made preparations for their attack, which included landing 800 reinforcements. In the early hours of 31 August they charged the defenses of the air field. The Japanese suffered heavy losses, largely due to machine gun and artillery fire, and withdrew by dawn. Throughout their operations the Japanese were constantly harassed during daylight hours by the P-40s.

At daylight on 31 August, the commander of Milne Force, ordered a counterattack and pursued the retreating Japanese. Despite fierce fighting the Australian infantry steadily advanced along the north shore of Milne Bay.

Between 4 and 7 September the Japanese were evacuated at night from around their original landing areas. Of the 2,800 Japanese landed, only 1,318 re-embarked. It was estimated

that up to 750 lay dead around Milne Bay and the majority of the remainder were killed trying to escape overland to the Japanese base at Buna. Allied deaths included 167 Australians and 14 Americans. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E345/>

In the official records that we have read there is little emphasis placed on the impact of the Japanese naval shelling of the allied shipping (for example the sinking of the Australian vessels the Anshun, the Elavala and the Bronzewing) and the associated loss of life, and on the coastline and the wharf area which 9th Battery were defending. 9th Battery were often subject to enemy naval shelling. For example Cec's memoirs report in part that on the 26th August:

"18.50. Red Warning.

19.48. All Clear. Went to bed around gun-pit.

21.30. Awakened by shelling. Some shells landed very close to C.4. [Jim Paton] & some very close to us — very unpleasant. [My memory was that search lights were focussed on the Island and a shell or two landed fairly close. Ian Evans & I were crossing a causeway on our way to the men on the other side of the Island when a searchlight picked us up & we froze. Nothing happened]

21.50. Shelling stopped.

[Note: We later learned that a shell had landed at the base of the outside of a gun pit near the wharf.

One more meter and the crew would have been lost.]"

"29th August After tea our crew went to other side of island & were just sitting down when received word to evacuate. The fourteen of us got into the rowing boat & left.

Note: This was after removing the breech block from the gun to make it unusable.

Took up infantry positions as beach defence. (See initial quote) One cruiser & 8 destroyers are headed this way. Raining.

11.50 Large flashes on horizon we expected shells to land — heard nothing.

Mick, Hass & I are together — working as spotter between us. Sleeping in nearby tent when we can."

The following extracts from Milne Force Anti-Aircraft Weekly Intelligence Summary No.4 describe the anti-aircraft including 9th Battery's contribution to the Battle:

"1. Forces at our disposal Land Defence: For the night of 28th/29th Aug. One 40mm gun C.2 was moved from site on waterfront to a position near the junction of Routes 1 and 2 to act in an anti-tank role covering the breakthrough of any tanks from direction of No.3 Strip. This gun was moved back at dawn

"4. Action 24th Aug. Raid No.3 At 1446 Porlock Harbor reported a large number of aircraft flying N.E. to S.W All available P.40s were sent up and gun sites "Stood To" at 1500 hours. At 1523, 8 enemy fighters approached Strip No 1 apparently with the intention of a strafing attack. All gun sites heavy and light engaged the aircraft until our P.40s intercepted. Several hits were registered and 3 aircraft were probably brought down by L.A.A. fire. "All our P.40s returned safely after the action. There was no damage caused. A.A. fire effectively prevented the enemy from attacking any ground targets.

"27th Aug. Raid No.4 Gun sites were "Stood To" at 0744 hours.

At 0813 8 bombers escorted by 12 fighters (approaching). A.A. sites engaged at 0814 and effectively broke up the formation. The fighters came in towards the Strip, but were turned away

Continued on page 11

Notes From The Diary Of Lieutenant John Purcell, Troop Commander, A Troop, 7th Australian LAA Battery, 13 - 19 May 1941.

Editor's Note: Amongst the various papers I inherited when I became the Association Secretary in 2008, I found some notes written by Les Harris, 7 Battery, relating to a small pocket diary kept by Lieutenant John Purcell, 7 Battery. Some time later, I spent an afternoon with Keith Purcell, son of Lieutenant Purcell. Whilst I was with Keith, he allowed me to scan the small brown diary his father had written on Crete, covering the period 13 May 1941 to 19 May 1941 - the week before the invasion of Crete. As this issue of Take Post also includes Dave Humphreys' story, and Dave was in charge of No. 1 Gun at Maleme Airfield on Crete, I thought it was a nice juxtaposition to include Les Harris' notes and John Purcell's diary. Extracts from John Purcell's diary previously appeared in the 2006 issue of Take Post.

Les Harris Notes

"Lt. John Purcell, Troop Commander, A Troop, 7 Australian LAA Battery kept a small brown notebook diary in which he recorded events from 13 May 1941 to 19 May 1941 at Maleme Airfield. The airborne attack commenced on the morning of 20 May 1941.

During the evacuation from Sphakia, Purcell gave me the book with the names of the Australian, New Zealand and British members detailed to man positions on the track leading down to the evacuation beach at Sphakia. All troops were required to remain under cover to ensure that patrolling German aircraft did not learn that evacuation was planned to take place from the small beach area. The sentries' job on the track was to advise arriving troops of these requirements.

Recently Cec Rae mentioned that Mrs. Purcell had sent papers from John to the War Memorial Library. I was able to view these at Canberra. They were selected pages from letters written from Palestine in June and July 1941 and made reference to some of Purcell's experiences from 20 May onwards. I found Mrs. Purcell in a home for the aged and told her I had read the pages sent to Canberra. She was very happy to know they were of interest and mentioned she also had a small diary she could not find. It contained information of earlier events but was written in very small writing which she had been unable to read because she had very poor vision. Some days after my visit to her, I received a message that the notebook had been found - hidden in a dictionary. When I called she gave it to me and I immediately recognised it as the one I had been given at Sphakia and which I returned to John on board the "Kelvin" which rescued us."

The following is Lieutenant Purcell's diary:

Maleme Airfield, Crete, May 1941

**No. 1 Gun Dave Humphreys No. 2 Gun Max Whiteside
No. 3 Gun Geoff Manning No. 4 Gun Bruce Tulloch**

PAGE 1 13th May 1941 - dull, overcast, half gale blowing. 0830 inspect gun positions - all in order. No. 4 tent has been shifted; dug-out to put No. 1 tent underground well under way to completion. Drill seems improved.

1000 went on run to village of Spilia with Bdr. Mann and Gnr.

Horne who knew a little Greek. Went into house and called me later. Host wife and daughter invited three of us to meal - goats' milk cheese, snails, pickled cucumbers and Krassi. Had a little cheese and rye bread. Tried to get eggs. Cigarettes accepted as barter.

Sent Mann back to get them later. Met old man and soldier Alexei. Eventually Mann returned with Jock (*McIndoe*). Went to another house in the village and got potatoes (20 packets cigarettes) eggs (4 for a pack of 12). Treated to a drink - colorless with water. Left village; arrived back at 1230. Slept for a while. Sgt. Tonkin went to No. 1 section (*Sgt. Humphreys No. 1 gun*). DR arrived with message so went to see Hamilton and Noble (NZ). Red warning. G.O.R. reported 2 ME109s over Suda. Few minutes later 2 ME109s circled drome once and made off to NE at 8,000 feet. Returned to camp. 1920 Hurricane made forced landing at edge of drome. Appears to be in a vineyard. Still cloudy and windy. Looked at pictures I got from Jones. Reported all guns except No. 4 now working on predictors. MG set on No. 4 out of action - defective magneto.

2000 went to see how Sgt. H hand was (*bruised / poisoned?*). Apparently not yet OK for Doctor. Returned to grove at 2030 - noise of planes heard, then mg (*machine gun*) and tracer.



PAGE 2 Hun apparently. Mg fire heavy. With Jock made for No. 2 gun near road and NZ cookhouse. 2 more D215s came into view one with all lights on. Went to earth in dugout near road and heard bombs screaming down. At least 6 terrific explosions. Dust nearly blinded us. On emerging saw plane wing burning. Returned to grove, went to earth in trench beside our tent. Grove was machine-gunned again - further noise of mg and screaming bombs descending - followed by series of explosions. Stick of bombs landed just below level of lip of ridge on which grove situated. Apparently after fighter pilot's tents and Bofors gun positions near corner of grove. Situation just too hot - scared as the devil - gave orders for grove to be evacuated. Took to the grapevines over the canal. Grove machine-gunned twice more by diving planes. Check of gun positions after "all clear" - no casualties. No. 2 crew rather rattled. Don't blame them. Apparently No. 3 crew got 5 off at one end and 7 at the other but did not register hits. Did go back to tent in grove but another alarm sent us scuttling.

14 May 1941 0500. Was standing on bank of canal and heard

JOHN PURCELL DIARY (continued)

planes make two attempts to get into Suda. Guns and search lights too much for him. He came out over Maleme very high. Heard scream of bombs falling; threw myself on ground and then they hit. Got to my feet and moved to where I could see the drome. A cloud of dust down the centre indicated where the bombs had fallen across the drome. Went around and checked up all positions - OK. Understand 4 RAF Sergeants were hit by splinters and number of petrol drums punctured. Went to bed for short while and woke at dawn.

PAGE 3 15 May 1941 Having shave at 0720 when alarm went. To canal bank, fell in, crawled out and into vines. Then down the sky like meteors, waves of ME109s shooting at gun positions and planes on ground. Hell of row - Bofors firing, mg cannon going for all they were worth. Saw one plane going down - unable to tell whether friend or foe. Planes all over the sky. 3 Hurricanes and 1 Gloster putting up great show against hopeless odds. Must have been 30 ME109s at least. Second wave then appeared and tore down the drome. Noticed how they bounced away from Bofors tracer. Action lasted 30 minutes then all quiet. 1 Hurricane burning, 1 Gloster burning, 1 Gloster upside down on beach. Pilot tried to land with ME109s on his tail. He was OK. Another plane down in bushes at end of drome. Bad luck one of ours shot down by No. 4 sub. Tore around with additional ammunition. Found all with their tails up in the air all excited - all except one reporting hits. Good for nerves; alleged one plane fallen in sea. I noticed two Huns remaining in the sun all the time and dived on our planes when they came down to land. Returned to grove then up to "I" HQ - spoke to Hamilton and Noble - both serious. Noble had two bullet grazes in his leg - caught in open during action. 1430 high flying EA (*Enemy Aircraft*) dropped stick of bombs near A3 position - they fell on beach without doing damage. With Jock selected new position

PAGE 4 for Troop HQ about half mile east of drome in ravine - appears to offer good protection. P reported to me obviously badly frightened - wished to be relieved of 2ic position A2 - also Gunner H nerve case been ill for some time. Talked to P and tried to steady him - sent him down to rest a while. Kept H on Troop HQ - useless to send him to gun position. Colonel Mather (52nd LAA Regiment) arrived at Grove and spoke for a while. I asked for additional vehicle as mine had suffered as the result of bombing last night. He had Major Blythe with him and told me he was taking command of the area. I went down to our new HQ and found they were settling in. Sleep, not noted for work, was digging like a mole. Had No. 1s from all sites for conference at 1900 hours. All seemed quite bucked up with their effort this morning. W a little perturbed about his crew including P not too good and told him to try and get them settled down. Gave each No. 1 three-quarters of a bottle of rum. At 1915 hours while still in conference noise of aircraft. 9 ME109s dived on drome without warning. Machine guns, gun positions and aircraft firing. Set fire to a Fulmar and vanished with every Bofors in action. Visited positions and found all OK. No.3 claiming a ME109 with tail damaged. Dropped No. 1s and went to bed early after posting sentry and visiting NZ machine-gun position.

PAGE 5 Luxford O/C gave me all the guff about proposed landing. Moon rose late - beautiful night - ideal for bombing. Night passed off without enemy air activity. Can't believe it.

Something fishy somewhere! Had breakfast and shave when Major Kay arrived informing me that his HQ was about 100 yards away at a house. He has come instead of Blythe. Asked for certain returns necessitating visit to "I" Troop HQ. Saw Hamilton. Red warning. Talked to Drew. After all clear, returned to Troop HQ. Jock had been around all guns. Reported all OK, but they had consumed most of the rum - silly fools. Tonkin handed over horizontal fin and portion of a fuselage of ME109 alleged to have been hit by A3 crew. RAF say plane fell into sea. Good work. Went to Major Kay with remains - seems to think it a certainty. Having lunch when new officer (Parker, R. A.) attached to Major Kay put in appearance and talked for a few minutes. Our truck too conspicuous and Major Kay wants it moved - OK. Major Kay went around our gun positions with Sgt. Tonkin. All seemed quite happy. A3 produced left elevator as further proof. Am told NZ Battery of 75s and H in position near us. Good work also that 3.7 AA Battery is coming

PAGE 6 into position near us - also another heavy Battery. Day has been windy and sky now overcast - looks like rain. Jock has taken truck into Canea for pay. What we are going to spend it on goodness knows. Drops of rain. No tents up - too conspicuous.

1500 hours Jock arrived back with news local paper says that Russia has declared war on Germany and that four of Hitler's lieutenants have skipped. Seems too good to be true. May account for lack of activity here. I am not happy about the layout of the guns. We should have been commanding valleys and posted up on hills. Too close together on seaboard edge of the drome. Too easy to line up on. Luxford said proposed enemy attack by 500 troops by parachute, 5,000 airborne, 15,000 by sea. 5th New Zealand Brigade get all the dope. 52nd Regiment do not pass it on to us. Went up to AA HQ. Colonel Mather there congratulated us on planes credited by Creforce. He knows nothing of local story - said local paper not to be relied upon. Went and saw Luxford. Showed shell from ME109 cannon. Said he would visit us later. Came down and cleaned out our gin and lime. I will cut it out entirely from now on. Don't know why not. I don't like it. Went to bed.

16 May 1941 dawned a beautiful day. I awoke at 0500 - heard planes. Checked with sentry - only planes on drome warming up. Had breakfast and went up to HQ, then to "I" Troop. Talked to Hamilton and Noble who were having breakfast in their tent pit. Went down through vineyard across grove to our old position. All sandbags have disappeared. Went over to NZ grove. Donald not there so went down to A2 position - then over to A3 and A4. Red warning. Walked back below edge of drome. Talked to NZ mg men then to A1 and chatted for a while. Red warning. Met NZ Intelligence officer and yarned for a few minutes. Bought orange. Met Jock and Tonkin in truck taking around pay. Wrote letter home and Jock went into Canea. Red warning 1500 hours. Much rushing around of Hurricanes - probably Fritz on recce. Heard that two "I" tanks arrived last night. Good work. Fritz won't find it an easy job.

I still don't like arrangement of AA defences. Tonkin brought Goad back to HQ with poisoned arm. Everything poisons easily in ME. Good lad Goad - acquitted himself well as Number 4 on his gun.

1600 hours Red warning - shortly after saw 26 German bombers headed east over Maleme - JU88s. Thought we were in for it but they turned away and made for Suda. Saw hill above St. John's well pasted probably looking for the heavy AA positions

JOHN PURCELL DIARY (continued from page 9)

but they have moved out. Suda must be getting hell. Could see them moving out to sea low over the water. Suddenly planes appeared from behind Theodori Island, screaming as they dived on the drome. Hell of a row with Bofors in action - couldn't see a thing for dust. Got into truck with Tonkin and went to ammunition dump - put four boxes on board and went to all gun positions. Apparently six fighters accompanying the bombers had slipped in low over the sea from cover of the island, low over seaward edge of the drome. All except No. 4 had fired on them but no claimed hits. They were too fast. Met Colonel Mather on way back and spoke to him for few minutes then reported to Major Kay. Returned to Troop HQ. Jock and I then went down to the well and had a kerosene tin bath. Felt much better. While there, Luxford NZ MG passed through and said the "Big Show" was to be tomorrow or 19th May. HE SEEMS TO KNOW ALL ABOUT WHEREAS WE KNOW NOTHING. He promised to return. Jones came in after I went to bed to say two German prisoners were on the drome and that two ME109s were down near the end of the drome.

Couldn't understand it. Told Tonkin and Jones to take truck and find out. They returned in about an hour with cannon shells and altimeter and pieces of fabric. Hurricanes apparently shot 3 of the ME109s down when they were trying to sneak around the west while the ME110s dived from the east of the drome. Good work. Understand they also got 2 bombers over Suda. Bad!

17 MAY 1941 Awake 0200 red warning - heard planes long way off. Terrific row as tanks moved in. Took Barnes and one man from each section into Canea at 0900. Called at 156 Battery HQ. Saw Drew and Marsden, latter with arm in sling. To AIF post office. Sent cable to "Rio" then to NAAFI. Bought some tinned stuff - then "home" to Maleme. Gun crews on seaward edge not too happy about certain matters - must see what I can do. Went to "I" Troop and saw Hamilton and Noble about above matters and then reported to Major Kay. He cleared up several matters but others he had to refer on (*2 rolls of barbed wire were dumped at beach front gun sites*). Tonkin and I took wire to gun sites. Kay informed me W's gun was to be moved higher up the hill. Not too happy about W. With Tonkin went to each sub in turn. Was at Sgt. Manning's No. 3 when red warning went. Drove over bridge as we wanted eggs from village. Heard planes approaching as 23 bombers escorted by ME fighters came into view high above drome. Thought we were for it but they headed for Suda where the packet went off. The row was terrific. After a while, smoke went up - looked like oil. As nothing had happened at our end, proceeded to village and asked for Alexi. Apparently in Canea. Drove further up to turn around and kids of village crowded around. On way back met Alexi and asked for eggs. About 30 provided. Returned to camp to bed - free night without the usual interruptions.

18 MAY 1941 Beautiful morning. Recce planes over early to see Suda. Understand ammunition ship and oil tanker hit at Suda yesterday. Pall of smoke over harbour.

0950 23 bombers and 4 fighters over. Fireworks over Suda
1015 Attack on Maleme drome by D215s escorted by 4 ME109s. Anti-personnel bombs dropped on drome - Hurricane destroyed. Went around all crews and all OK. No. 1 claims 2 machines - one appeared to be a Hurricane. No. 1 crew quite happy. No. 2 only got 9 rounds off. - think they probably ducked some bombers.

Some bombers over while Jock and I were on the drome strolling along and suddenly decided to sprint for it. Landed

near GOR. Heard whistle of bombs descending, then crash but don't know where they fell. When hopped out of slit trench, there he was circling overhead. Heard bomb whistle again and made for slit trench again. Crash and EA made off to sea. Jock and Tonkin joined me and we made off towards the dust and smoke. Looked like our old position and sure enough 3 bombs had landed in the grove killing one and injuring two New Zealanders. Fell right on a slit trench near our magazine. Rotten business. Came back and reported to Major Kay. Another red warning. Another 24 bombers passing overhead going for Suda. More uproar there. Had a visit from Luxford, then went to bed. Earlier in day N put in an appearance and asked to be relieved by Horne who was willing to go. Can't understand it - N did a good job but feels as a married man with a young family he ought not to take what he calls "suicidal risks". Can't fathom why we married fools must be mixed up in this business. Hamilton came along before I went to bed and asked me to get Horne and two others from M and other subs. About an hour later M arrived in a great state and in a somewhat incoherent statement I gathered he didn't approve. He is a damned nuisance and as voluble as a magpie-----

Apparently his sub made up his mind for him. I am afraid that is generally what happens. Difficult to do anything about it now. Eventually he suggested one of the Knight twins and Stainer. OK.
19 MAY 1941 0630 7 MEs dived on drome - set fire to some oil and panted around No. 1 gun position. Haversacks, respirators and other articles in dugout were perforated. No hits recorded or claimed by the subs. No. 2 looked very rattled. W not good at all. Too much talk of these matters in all subs and Troop HQ. Must stop it. 2 more MEs over at 0715 and had a look around. Heavies opened up and did a reasonable amount of shooting. Reported to Major Kay. Returned to Troop HQ. Arranged for Jock to go down and see marines in. They are to relieve No. 1 sub for twenty four hour spell. No.1 sub very cheerful at the prospect. Tulloch reported his gun out of action - failed to run out - can't see what is wrong. While at AADC, Parker suggested sending "I" Troop artificer - accepted. Went down to see Luxford. Couldn't get any information from him. On my return 2 SDs came to hand - not very reassuring. Jock returned and reported "No. 1 sub out OK and marines in" Had gang cover tracks in plowed area. Gives show away.

This was the last entry in the diary, although a list of Australian, New Zealand, RAF and RN personnel who acted as sentries during the evacuation was included at the back of the diary. Les Harris copied some sections of the letters written by John Purcell to his wife after his return to Palestine and which related to the period after 19 May 1941, and which are now in the AWM. Specifically:

20 MAY 1941 On arriving there (*near the coast*) met a number of Dave Humphreys' gun crew. They had been relieved by a Marine gun crew to take twenty four hours rest away from the drome. They were actually at a 'rest camp' immediately behind Maleme airfield when the blitz fell and they were surrounded by para-troops. They managed to get out and could not contact any of our forces again so made for the south coast. It was decided to take a picked party back inland to try and reach the coast at Sphakia. Included in the party were Harris, Elder, Brown, Malloch, Ecker, Selleck from our Troop. Eventually we passed a steep crest with precipitous sides and entered a ravine with a steep gradient that seemed interminable with sheer walls towering above us (Samaria Gorge). This led on to the coast - *at Sphakia from where the group of 27 was evacuated.*

Editor's Note: Some very light editing was undertaken to "soften" the thoughts and comments of Lt. Purcell, who, like everyone on Crete, must have been under enormous stress.

MILNE BAY (continued from page 7)

by A.A. fire. The bombers continued up the Bay in the direction of the Mission (KB [Kristian Brothers]) where the fighting is going on.

Fighters and bombers were engaged all over the sky by A.A. fire, which had an open go as the 6 P.40s were absent on patrol. The first serious attempt to strafe the Strip was made at 0830 by 5 fighters, and during this attack one B24 on the ground was set on fire. In this and subsequent strafing attacks on the Strip L.A.A. fire claimed many hits, with almost certain destruction of 6 enemy aircraft including one bomber. Bombs were dropped near the Strip (4), the A.A. site M.3 (2) and the area where 61 and 9 Inf. Btn are engaging enemy land forces.

M.3 shot down one bomber over the sea. At 0845, 6 B26 Allied bombers flew in from the East and in an engagement with enemy fighters, one type "o" fighter (Japanese) was shot down over the sea. Later reports from the R.A.A.F. state that P.40s shot down 2 fighters, 1 dive bomber, and 1 dive bomber probable. The A.A. fire was sustained and accurate and in addition to shooting down planes, had the effect of preventing the enemy air craft from carrying out any effective bombing.

"31st Aug. Raid No.5 and at 1141 hours gun sites identified the aircraft as type "o" Mitsubishi seven in number. At 1145 M.3 engaged at a height of 15,000 feet followed by M.2 — no hits were observed...

7. General. As well as the air raids during the period A.A. sites have been very interested in the operations by land and by sea Naval shells have burst and landed very close to M.3 and M.32, and all sites have maintained patrols and "Stood To" when attack has appeared imminent. All sites particularly M.3 and M.32 on the coast have been passing valuable information re lights, flares, shipping and operations. M.3 was used in a coastal defence role. Morale of A.A. personnel has been very high throughout the one complaint being 'that Tojo is using too much naval and not enough air support for his ground forces.'

Note: M.2, M.3 etc refer to geographical positions at Milne Bay.)

The War Diary of 9th Battery records: "6th September. "Anshun" sank. "C" Troop H.Q. hut and C.2 Det gun-pit received direct hits with 4" to 6" shells. 2 "C" Troop personnel slightly wounded".

On 13th September a census of the health of the men of "C" Troop was taken. The healthiest gun detachment had five men who had not contracted malaria. There were at that time 17 members of the Troop in hospital. "A" Troop's health at that time was worse than "C" Troop. (On target)

Whilst the Battle of Milne Bay was over on early September, Cec's diary records that there were Japanese air raids daily through to January 1943 and continued less regularly through to April 1943 during which the men stood to the guns and fired when necessary. He recorded on 17th January, then situated at No 3 strip, after a bombing raid "When we looked around there were fires everywhere. A few of our bombs exploded & some petrol dumps & planes went up. An anti-personnel bomb landed about 75 yards away — a piece of the bomb took a slice out of the vertical sight & made a gash in the breech casing. Several pieces of metal landed in the pit [where (we) were sheltering]". "B" Troop joined "A" and "C" Troops in Milne Bay on 21st October 1942 and in the following year — on 4th October 1943, 9th Battery moved to Lae as part of the new 2/3rd Australian Com-

posite Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Our sincere thanks go to Thales and the organisers and for 2/3 ALAAR Association committee for making this very fascinating and memorable trip possible.

Anne and Ian Rae

References:

ON TARGET: Rae CJE, Harris AL & Bryant RK 1987, *On Target : the story of the 2/3 Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment from formation on 18th July 1940 until disbandment on 14 July 1943 and the subsequent service of 7th Battery, 8th Battery, and 9th Battery, until the end of World War II*, 2/3 Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association, [Melbourne]. Australian War Memorial Battle of Milne Bay website <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E345/>

2017 photos by Anne Rae

Old photos from Cecil Rae's photo album Cecil Rae's diaries Cecil Rae's unpublished memoirs *Me Me Me*.



Descendants, The Hon. Richard Marles and historian and re-enactment specialist from No Roads Expeditions after the commemorative service at the Milne Bay war memorial.



Ian and Anne Rae at the Bomana War Cemetery near Port Moresby.

Editor's Note: The full version of Anne and Ian's story may be found on our web site under 'Take Post', 'Full Versions Of Take Post Articles'.

THE DAVE & ALLEN SHOW - GUNNERS TALES BY DAVE HUMPHREYS 7 Bty & ALLEN MARTIN 9 Bty

*Editor's Note: In the 2017 issue of Take Post we featured the stories of two 2nd/3rd original service members - John Hilliard (who sadly passed away in May 2017) and Ian Barker. John and Ian had very different backgrounds and post war stories, but both were a POW, both escaped and were recaptured and remained a POW until the end of the war. Neither Dave nor Alan was a POW (although Dave had a close encounter on Crete), but both these country boys have interesting stories before, during and subsequent to their time in the 2nd/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.
(With apologies to Irish comedian Dave Allen)*

David Stanley Humphreys, 7 Battery, A Troop, VX35094

Born on 21 January 1921 in Beaufort, where his father was the local General Practitioner, Dave is the eldest of three children, having a younger brother and sister. He attended Beaufort Primary School and then lived with his grandparents in Ballarat whilst he attended Ballarat College where he enjoyed playing football and being a member of the rowing team. Dave matriculated in 1939 and it was always his intention to study at university level - but the war intervened.

In early 1939, Dave joined the Ballarat Militia (8th Battalion) and spent four months training at Mount Martha on the Mornington Peninsula. He sat and passed two of his matriculation subjects at the Mornington Manse of the Presbyterian Church. He spent the first six months of 1940 working for a law firm in Ballarat before enlisting as a gunner in the 2nd/3rd ALAAR on 12 July 1940 at Royal Park. It is interesting to note that Dave's Service Record has 21 January 1920 as his birthday - Dave admitted that he, like many others, put his age up by a year to ensure he was enlisted.

Allen Grantley Martin, 9 Battery, VX109471

The youngest of five brothers, Allen was born at Swan Hill on 19 July 1923. He attended Mallee Doon State School until his 14th birthday and immediately went to work on his parents' mixed farm. He worked on the farm for about three years before moving to Melbourne where he was employed by the West Footscray Engineering Company - Alan said that for the first time since leaving school he was actually paid, as up to that time he was only given pocket money.

After two years in Melbourne, Allen returned to Swan Hill as he was needed on the farm. Allen wanted to join the air force and applied to join the Empire Training Scheme, but was rejected on "medical" grounds.

Shortly after, he was called up by the Army and was enlisted at Lake Boga on 6 August 1942.

The Regiment At War—Dave

Dave became a member of A Troop of the 7th Battery of the Regiment at Werribee Racecourse where he undertook basic training - although no training was possible with the 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns as there were none available in Aus-

tralia. Each of the three Batteries trained separately and the training program was rotated so that each Battery participated in the various training regimes.

Because of his Militia training and background, Dave was made responsible for a gun crew and was able to choose his own gun crew. All members of his gun crew were older than Dave (in their late 20's or early 30's), and included Les Harris, Ken Elder, Stan Watkins, Norm McDonald, Jack Ecker, Ron Selleck, Len Jeffreys, Lawrie Brown and Rupert Charles.

Dave sailed on the Mauretania en route to the Middle East on 30 December 1940. On arrival in Colombo, he transferred to the troop carrier "Devonshire" and disembarked in Haifa and from here was taken by train to Khassa camp.

All Troop Sergeants (including Dave) were then sent to Egypt for a one-month training course on Bofors anti-aircraft guns. Dave advised he was trained by a Sergeant Rollo (an Ulsterman) attached to a British Unit stationed in the desert.

Whilst on the Bofors training program, the AIF received a number of Bofors guns that enabled the 7 Battery Sergeants to train their individual gun crews on their return to the Regiment.

Shortly after, Dave was hospitalised in Alexandria for several days. On his return to Khassa, he discovered 7 Battery had been granted leave and Dave happily related that he caught up with Les Harris in the Quartermasters Store, and that he and Les spent ten days "on the loose" in Cairo.



Dave Humphreys—Cairo 1941 (Photo by Les Harris)

On 22 April 1941, 7 Battery was ordered to proceed on the troop carrier "Ulster Prince" to Suda Bay on Crete to assist in the defence of Navy Air Bases at Maleme, Heraklion and Retimno. Arriving on Crete on 24 April 1941, Dave and his crew were ultimately despatched to Maleme Aerodrome on 4 May 1941.

Major General Freyberg, Commander of "Creforce" subsequently wrote in his foreword to the 22nd Battalion history that "The Battalion was given the most difficult task of all, to try to hold Maleme airfield". Dave and his crew were participants in this "difficult task".

Dave and his crew were involved in the Battle of Crete between 20 May and 29 May 1941, and when the order was finally given

to abandon the aerodrome, they were only 300 yards from the aerodrome when the first German paratroops landed. Dave was evacuated from Sphakia on the Royal Navy destroyer, *Nizam* and taken to Alexandria.

For the remainder of his time in the Middle East, Dave was stationed at Hill 95 and was primarily involved in the training of reinforcements at a Libyan Airfield.

7 Battery remained in Palestine until February 1942 (Dave celebrated his 21st birthday in Beirut), when all three Batteries of the Regiment returned to Australia in a flotilla of ships departing from Port Said. Dave himself travelled back to Australia on the "Andes".

On his return to Australia, Dave spent twelve months in Western Australia, initially at Pearce RAAF Station outside of Perth (where he was commissioned as a Lieutenant and transferred to 8 Battery) and subsequently in January 1943 at Geraldton RAAF Station, some 500 kilometres north of Perth.

In October 1943, he boarded the "Taroona" for Oro Bay in New Guinea, where they took over LAA defence of the Oro Bay area from an American unit.

In May 1944, Dave flew back to Townsville, where he undertook a training course at the School of Military Intelligence (MI). He spent the remainder of the war at Helidon Camp near Brisbane and at Royal Park in Carlton until his discharge on 2 September 1945.

The Regiment At War - Allen

Allen was posted to the 2/6th Battalion of the 17th Australian Infantry Brigade and was initially sent to Townsville for training, prior to departing by ship to Port Moresby. From here, Allen was moved to Wau and Salamaua where he was to spend the next six months until his older brother Edgar (Ted), who joined the 2nd/3rd on 13 July 1940, and was a Gun Sergeant in the 9th Battery of the 2nd/3rd, arranged for Allen's transfer to the 9th Battery of the 2nd/3rd.

And so, Allen became a member of B Troop, 9 Battery - Allen recalls that Gun Sergeant Charlie Street (VX70428) trained him as a gun layer on the Bofors.

Sergeant Alex Winstone, who Allen knew from Lake Boga, was also in the 9th Battery.

The 9th Battery of the 2nd/3rd had been incorporated into the 2/3rd Australian Composite Anti-Aircraft Regiment on 14 July 1943 under the command of Lt.-Col. A G Margetts, with Major J H Linden as 2 i/c.

On 6 September 1943, a large allied force, including 9 Battery, landed at Lae and Allen was stationed in Lae until his return to Australia (Townsville) on the "*Gorgon*" on 28 May 1944. From Townsville, the troops returned to their homes by train, and it was whilst he was on leave that Allen met Mavis Roberts, who was to become his wife after the war, and whose father was the manager of the local Moran & Cato store.

Allen recalled how he and some mates had acquired a large fruit cake from an American mess and were enjoying the cake under a coconut tree when a Japanese mortar hit the tree re-

moving the upper most foliage and several coconuts. After hitting the coconut tree, the mortar fell to the ground amongst the cake eaters - but did not explode!!!

After his leave, Allen and the 9th were sent to Strathpine for further training including an infantry course at the Canungra Jungle Training School.

In April 1945, the Battery embarked for Borneo and Allen spent the remainder of the war at Miri, Labuan Island and Morotai until his return to Australia on the Victory ship "*Percharg*" in December 1945. It was to be another ten months before Allen was finally discharged from the Army in October 1946.



Allen Grantley Martin VX109471

Post War—Dave

As soon as he was able, and with the assistance of the Government *Re-establishment and Employment Act*, Dave undertook an Agricultural Science degree at Melbourne University, and graduated in January 1951.

Dave worked in the meat packing industry in Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong for 14 years before moving permanently to Bendigo in 1965 with his wife Helen and three children upon his appointment as the manager of Mayfair Hams.

Although he retired in 1982, Dave was closely involved in the management of Helen's Agency business providing nursing and health care services in Bendigo, Ballarat and Mildura.

During this time, Dave was a member of the Board of the Bendigo Base Hospital for thirteen years and was President of the Board for two years.

He was also heavily involved with Legacy in Ballarat and has been involved with Legacy in Bendigo since 1965.

Continued on page 14

THE DAVE & ALLEN SHOW - GUNNERS TALES BY DAVE HUMPHREYS & ALLEN MARTIN

Sadly, Helen passed away in 1997 and Dave sold the Agency business in 1998.

Dave is a classical music lover, an avid reader, plays cribbage with different groups and loves the natural history TV channel.

He was a member of the Bendigo U3A Choir for ten years, and since 2010, was a member of the Bendigo Forever Young Choir. Having to master the modern rock genre that defines the Forever Young Choir, and attending the weekly rehearsals and performances, kept his mind active.

The Forever Young Choir started with 19 women and 6 men in 2010, and today has 55 women and 25 men in its complement, with an average age of 75 years.

Dave lived alone in his own home for 18 years with the help of weekly services, but in 2017 at the age of 96 moved to the Mirradong Aged Care Facility in Bendigo. Dot Harris (daughter of Les Harris, with whom Dave was "on the loose" in Cairo) is also a Bendigo resident, and visits Dave from time to time.

In May 2017, Dave was invited by the Pancretan Association of Melbourne to their annual commemoration of the Battle of Crete, and sent a taxi to Bendigo to bring him to the commemoration. Dave related that he had a wonderful time and that he was one of four Crete veterans at the dinner. Coincidentally, Ian Barker, whose story was told in the 2017 Take Post, also attended the commemoration.

Editor's Note: When I interviewed Dave, he had just finished reading a 600 page biography of Albert Einstein - for a second time!!! - Dave explained he needed to clarify some aspects of Einstein's life he didn't understand the first time he read the book.

Post War - Allen

Allen and Mavis were married in 1948 and subsequently had three children - twins John and Peter and their sister Kay. Allen worked with Mavis's brother Bob at the Moran & Cato grocery store in Swan Hill from 1948 to 1959.

In 1959 and borrowing some start up capital from Mavis' mother, Allen and Mavis opened their own grocery store known as Super Food Centre (*Roberts and Martin proprietors*) in Swan Hill and later opened a second store in Kerang. The Super Food stores were sold to Bi-Lo when Allen retired in 1986, although the family retained the liquor store that was operated by sons John and Peter for a number of years.

Allen sold the liquor store to Coles for their new supermarket, with the caveat that the family operated the liquor store within the new Coles complex for ten years - the liquor store is well known locally as Marty's Liquor Barn.

Allen and Mavis still live in the home they built in 1968 and since Allen's retirement, they have enjoyed travelling (they have twice circumnavigated Australia in their caravan), their family and their garden. Golf was also high on Allen's agenda having worked for so many years in the grocery / supermarket

business which limited his golfing opportunities.

Allen attended Anzac Day marches / Regiment reunions in the early days, but distance and business have limited his attendance in latter years.

Dave and Allen are two of the twelve surviving original service members of the 2nd/3rd ALAA Regiment, and it has given me great pleasure to sit and talk with and to listen to, these gentlemen.



Allen Martin at home March 2018



Dave Humphreys performing in the Forever Young Choir in 2017

THE MICE OF MORESBY



Tokyo Radio called them 'The Mice of Moresby', because, said Tokyo, they spend all their time in their funk-holes, like their brothers, the 'Rats of Tobruk'. In memory of the 55/53 Btn AIF

'Pinto', in the Moresby Army News Sheet, retorted:

Rats of old Tobruk
Or merely Moresby mice—
We've had our fill of fighting
And of hardship once or twice.
We have hugged the earth for cover
With the bombers overhead;
We have seen the bombs exploding,
Heard the swish of falling lead.
We have dived into the trenches
With our last remaining breaths,
Just a fraction of a second ahead of fire and din and death.
We have toiled and we have sweated
In the humid, tropic heat;
And we've longed for many comforts,
And fresh food that we *could* eat.

But we'll gnaw our way to freedom
And we'll nibble at the scum
Till we drive them back to Nippon
All the Hell where they belong.
And when they've learned their lesson,
Then, maybe, these foreign lice
Will remember 'Rats of old Tobruk'
And Moresby's 'Fighting Mice'.

Source: Wannan, B 1970, *Australian folklore, a dictionary of lore, legends and popular allusions*, Lansdowne, Melbourne, p. 375.



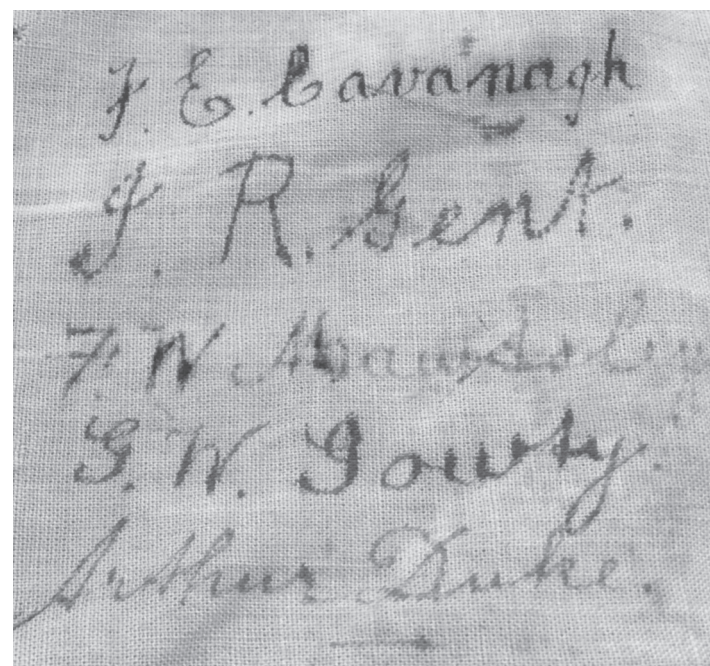
Help requested: an Italian flag captured at Tobruk

Your Association has been contacted by the TPI Association South Australia. They have in their possession an Italian flag captured in Tobruk by members of the Regiment's 8 Battery. It is in poor condition, and they propose to have it restored and mounted in their museum in Adelaide. The flag bears the names of five 8 Battery men, presumably those who captured the flag. They are:

VX33301 CAVANAGH, Frank Elliot, born in Camberwell on 8 May 1911 - 2nd/4th ALAAR on discharge;
VX40993 DUKE, Arthur, born in Ballarat on 19 August 1909;
VX31598 GENT, Ivan Ray, born Kilmore on 8 September 1913;
VX29822 GOWTY, George William, born Port Melbourne on 4 May 1911 - 2nd/4th Field Ambulance on discharge; and
VX46394 MAWDSLEY, Francis William, born in Nathalia on 29 March 1904 - 4 ALAAR on discharge.

All men enrolled in the 2nd/3rd ALAAR in June or July 1940

We are keen to contact any members of these men's families to invite them to participate in the ceremony to unveil the flag. If you have any information on these families, or on the capture of the flag, please email us at info@antiaircraft.org.au, or phone David McDonald on 0416 231 890.



Candid Camera at the 2017 AGM



Emma & Graeme Heddle (great grand daughter and son of Charles Heddle (9 Bty), John Campbell (8 Bty), Ian Campbell and Joan Curnow.



Lyndall Shields, Susan Schuman and Alison Shields, daughters of Laurie Shields



Association Research Officer David McDonald, son of Robert McDonald (Sigs), Ian Rae and President Anne Rae, son and daughter of Cec Rae (9 Bty)



Alison Shields, reading the headlines announcing the end of the war in the Pacific—part of the display provided by Graeme and Matt Heddle.



Gaye Berry and Pauline Stuart, daughters of Ron Berry (8 Battery), Matt Heddle, grandson of Charles Heddle (9 Battery), Daniel Wanders, grandson of Alan Young (7 Battery) and Tim Crooke, grandson of Dale Crooke (9 Battery).



David and Foster Crooke, sons of JD (Dale) Crooke (9 Battery) with Jenny and Bill Stokes, son of Major Phil Stokes, OIC, 8 Battery.



Emma Heddle with Foster and David Crooke, sons of JD (Dale) Crooke (9 Battery).



David McDonald and John Campbell discussing the finer points of the Regiment's history.