



TAKE POST!

NEWSLETTER OF THE 2/3RD
AUSTRALIAN LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT
REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

April 2007

President's Report 2007

- Hearty greetings to members of our Association and to your families in the 67th year since our Regiment was formed.

We are pleased that we have been able to book the Naval and Military Club again for our A.G.M. and Reunion lunch on the 24th April. It is very suitable for our purpose, being located at 27 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, in easy walking distance of Parliament Railway Station, and of trams in Collins and Bourke Streets.

Do come and enjoy the outing at this subsidised lunch at this first class venue. Dress—jacket and tie please! See the enclosed booking slip and return it to John Campbell as we must have a firm booking.

Hon. Secretary John Campbell has had a few setbacks but fights on. Our thanks go to him, to Hon. Treasurer John Hepworth (60 years in this job!), to other members of the committee and to Ron Berry who maintains our computer records essential for keeping the show going.

Last year we asked our members to indicate those who

still wished to receive our Newsletter *Take Post*, as we realised that some would no longer require it. About 120 wished to remain on our mailing list, so we will try to keep it going for the time being.

I remind our correspondents that we require your newsy items or contributions. If you notice one Battery or another getting the most coverage, that is because that Battery is sending more material. We record again our best wishes to the men and women who have been representing Australia in conflicts, peacekeeping and policing abroad and to our firefighters who have been sorely tested for long periods.

I hope to see many of you at the reunion and Anzac March.

You will see a Notice with this Newsletter that carers will be welcome at the reunion. There is also an important Notice on 'LOOKING AHEAD!'.

Best wishes for 2007.

Ron Bryant

REUNION NOTICE

The Anzac Reunion will be held on Tuesday April 24, 2007 from 12 noon until 3:00 pm (room is not open before 11:30 am).

Cost of annual subscription, lunch and drinks is \$30 (being highly subsidised). Payment is required to confirm booking.

Please see the enclosed notice regarding lunch arrangements. The venue is the same as last year:

The Naval and Military Club
27 Little Collins St, Melbourne

John Campbell, Hon Secretary

NOTICE OF MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held at:

The Naval and Military Club
27 Little Collins St, Melbourne

at 11:45 am, Tuesday April 24, 2007 (room is not open before 11:30 am).

The AGM is held just prior to the Anzac Reunion. Members are reminded that nominations for Committee must be lodged with the Honorary Secretary 14 days before meeting.

John Campbell, Hon Secretary

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

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

	Bty
Vale	
R Berry	8
C Neilson	
F Parkinson	
E Cope	8
S Young	
D Carty	9
JJ Crowley	Wk.Shops
Col. Reilly	8
Col. McNaughton	8
John Williamson	
Keith Fryer	
Charlie Kruger	8
R Lowe	9
Ron Walsh	7
Roy McClaren	7

Lest we forget

2/3RD AUSTRALIAN LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

President:

Ron Bryant
6 Blanche Ave, Parkdale Vic 3195
Phone: 9580 2494

Vice President:

Les Harris

Immediate Past President:

CEC RAE

Hon Secretary:

John Campbell
PO Box 205, Mentone Vic 3194
Phone: 9583 8756

Hon Treasurer:

John Hepworth

Newsletter Editor:

Ron Bryant

Committee:

Ian Rutter
Dave Thomson
Bruce Tulloch
Harry Sauerberg
Mal Webster

MELBOURNE ANZAC MARCH 2007

We should assemble at 9:30 am in Swanston Street (west side) between Flinders Lane and Collins Street directly behind 2/2 Heavy Ack Ack. On reaching the top step of the entrance to the Shrine forecourt, please march to attention. ('Eyes Right' will be ordered at the Eternal Flame, not abreast of the official party). Men in civilian clothes will remove headgear and carry over their left breast. Uniformed officers will salute.

Guidelines issued by kindred organisations and unit associations to descendants:

1. Marchers should be neatly and respectfully attired. (Sporting pullovers, torn dirty jeans and running shoes are not appreciated.)
2. Descendants marching for a deceased family member should be restricted to one member; extended families lengthen the march unreasonably. The deceased's medals should be worn on the right breast. Descendants should march at the rear of the assembled veterans. Please march 8 abreast.
3. Every effort should be made to keep in step with the band and other veterans.
4. Large photos of deceased veterans carried by descendants are not appropriate.

ON TARGET

We received requests from member's descendants for the Regiment's history, *On Target*, but we have no further copies. If you have a copy which is no longer required, perhaps you could get it to our Secretary. If you happen to be a loner now with no family wanting your copy, don't let it be thrown out.

The Association will recycle it for you.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION

To continue to be a financial member of our Association just fill in the enclosed remittance slip, add your cheque of \$5 and post it to:

John Campbell
PO Box 205, Mentone, Vic, 3194.

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

A Tale of Five Priests

Terry Gleeson, a member of 2nd/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Signals, has brought to our attention the names of four reverend gentlemen who have been associated with Anti-Aircraft Regiments.

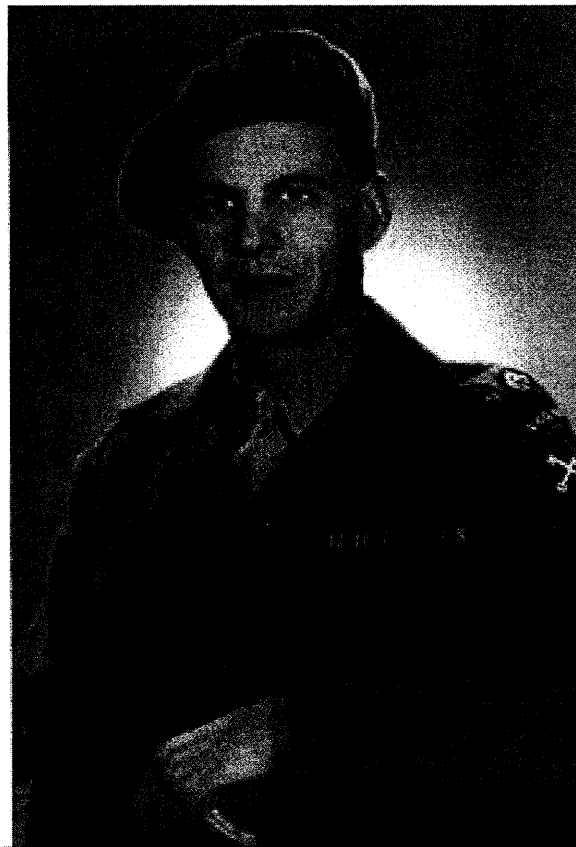
The first is Canon Phil Roberts of our 8th Battery whose interesting story was related in our first issue of *Take Post* in 1988. Some of our readers will recall that Phil, as a nineteen year old bombardier, was in charge of a Breda gun-crew during the Siege of Tobruk. He gained his commission in the Middle East, going on to India and then with the Occupation Force to Japan.

This was followed by an adventurous career with the British Army, including Service with the famous Royal Horse Artillery.

Later, he felt the call to a very different vocation. After intensive study and training he was ordained as an Anglican priest in historic Salisbury Cathedral. His vocation with the Church was equally varied as his military career - too detailed for this magazine but worthy of a biography. Canon Phil has now "retired" but still retains a wide variety of interests and activities.



Canon Phil Roberts at Salisbury Cathedral, 1975.



Major Phil Roberts, 1946, in Dorset Regiment.

The next former anti-aircraft soldier Terry mentioned is Father Bill Robley. Here is an extract from a recent newspaper article written by John Mulcair:

Father Bill Robley was born in Lithgow, NSW in 1924 and left school early to train as a Morse code operator with the Postal Service. He joined the Army in 1942 to become a radio operator with the 2nd/3rd Anti-Aircraft which saw service in Borneo and New Guinea. After the war he was inwardly restless—perhaps his wartime experiences influenced his decision to enter the priesthood. Bill's early education had ended before the Intermediate Certificate so it was a long road for him to travel to attain the high standard required for the priesthood. He undertook instruction in Latin, Greek, French and Physics.

Father Bill (as he prefers to be called), was ordained a priest fifty years ago in St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. During his calling he has had occasion to deal with some rather unusual characters. However, he says, "Being able to offer support to people in good times and bad has always been deeply satisfying."

Anti-aircraft regiments appear to have had some sort of attraction to theologians. Pope John Paul, born Karol Joseph Wojtyla, was a signaller in a Polish anti-aircraft regiment. The present Pope Benedict XVI, born Joseph Ratzinger, served in a telecommunications post in an anti-aircraft regiment in Germany. His unit went to Gilching to protect the jet fighter base and to attack the Allied bombers as they massed to begin their runs towards Munich. Pope Benedict's father was a bitter enemy of Nazism because he

believed it conflicted with his faith. Joseph Ratzinger served in the German Army for about three years, eventually deserting in 1945 in the last weeks of World War 2. On repatriation he joined a Catholic seminary in Freising.

Perhaps we could feel a bit uplifted having served in a similar vocation as these gentlemen of religious persuasion.

Whilst on the topic of dignitaries of the Church we should mention that Terry Gleeson's son, Terence Patrick is a priest. He was ordained in 1980. After ten years in Wollongong he joined a Monastic Order in Brooklyn, U.S.A., hoping to establish an Order in Australia; but his dream was never realized.

In 2005, after performing religious duties in New York, Terence became Rector of St. Stephens, Vermont, a university town famous as the home of the Von Trapp family of the "Sound of Music."

Terence was in New York on 9/11, the day the World Trade Centre was attacked by Islamic terrorists. He returns to Australia regularly and has baptized eight Gleeson grandchildren and four great grandchildren. Terry senior, and his wife Marie, went to New York for their 50th wedding anniversary where Terence celebrated Mass for them.



Father Bill Robley.

A Memorable Trip

September 1941.

Departure from Tobruk on the HMS *Griffin*. (Extract from a Gunner's diary on the evacuation of the 8th battery)

27th September. The main party of our Battery embarked on the British destroyer HMS *Jackal* last night to head for Alexandria. Earlier, we had left our guns to the Irishmen, so we could join the main group of the battery. In the evening, 'Bardia Bill', the long-range enemy gun opened up and a plane bombed the harbour seemingly as farewell gestures. By the time we reached the small jetty at the end of the harbour, in darkness, all was quiet.

Whilst waiting, talking in subdued tones and without lights, to board our destroyer which was unloading food and ammunition, I reflected on our time during the Siege of Tobruk. We had lived, six men or so at a time as a crew by our gun for close on six months. Despite intense heat in the desert, flies and fleas, storms, limited water and food, being shelled persistently by enemy artillery and bombed and machine-gunned from the air, the lonely conditions and rare relief from the job, we had lived in harmony with each other. I suppose it was the adversities and risks which fostered the mutual support for each other. The only despondency, which rarely emerged anyway, was the sense of unfairness at having to fight back with poor quality cap-

tured Breda guns instead of with the efficient Bofors guns we had expected, against sophisticated bombers and fighters armed with bombs, cannon and machine guns. Phil Roberts, Dick Ince, Jack Buntz, Nap Croft and I had been the basic gun crew throughout our time in the Siege. We had relied on each other implicitly.

At 2330 hours, we silently boarded the British destroyer HMS *Griffin*. The destroyer sailed at midnight in a beautifully calm sea. Although some of us had felt like staying on to avenge our mates who had just been killed and wounded, as the *Griffin* picked up speed, we realised we were glad to leave Tobruk as we were all tired. The destroyer is cutting through the water like a great speedboat at 31 knots. The sailors gave us white bread with jam and cups of hot coffee before we settled down to sleep on the crowded deck for a few hours. We are all packed so tightly, there appears little room for the patient sailors to work.

28th September, 0700 hours. After an attempt at dawn by Italian bombers to hunt us down, they were pushed off by a couple of RAF Hurricanes. Soon after, we cruised gently into the harbour at Alexandria.

Anonymous.

April 2007

From the Secretary's desk 2007

If my memory serves me right, this is the 60th year the Unit has been represented at the Anzac Day march in Melbourne. A photo of those marching in 1946 was published by your Editor in *Take Post* of 2002. Were you in that photo? I wonder if we will be represented in the 2012 march, I hope so.

Our request last year as to those still requiring to receive *Take Post*, brought a quick response from 120 recipients. The responses came from members, and a variety of family members. Thank you for your response and *Take Post* will still come to you as long as our fingers and brain hold together!. This response will save paper and postage costs.

Frank O'Toole 9th and his wife, write that they are still on the farm but no longer farming, 'just keep the garden going and the rest tidy'. Thank you both for your letter.

Margot Warren, daughter of **Jack Phillips 7th**, still enjoys getting *Take Post*, thanks Margot. I have received many donations this year, thank you all for that, it does keep the wheels turning at this end.

It was great to welcome **Rob Bennett** and his wife to our reunion lunch last April. Rob attended in memory of his father **Max Bennett 9th**. You were both very welcome Rob. Mary Woodfield daughter of Ken Elder RHQ enjoyed reading the article on Crete. Ken was one who travelled 'that inhospitable road to the beach'. I'm glad that you enjoyed the read Mary.

Alec Barnett 8th wrote reminding us that it is just 65 years since 8th Battery took part in the Benghazi Handicap during which about 35 members, including Alec, were captured. Good to have a reminder Alec.

David McDonald, son of **Robert McDonald Sigs** writes from his home in Canberra, wishing our members well and that a reasonable number were able to march. I must say David, there were only about 8 members who marched last year, but we were ably supported by a good number of adult children of members.

David Crooke, son of the late **Dale Crooke 9th**, wrote to me to make sure that he still got *Take Post*. You sure will David. **Ina McGillivray**, widow of **Malcolm McGillivray 8th** writes that she is now housebound, that's tough Ina, but do keep smiling, and thank you for your letter.

Esme Curtis, widow of **'Killer' Curtis 9th**, writes to let me know that all 'Killers' mates have passed away and she relies on *Take Post* to keep her up-to-date with the Unit news. Esme sends her best wishes to **Cec Rae 9th**. Thank you for your letter Esme.

Daphne Block, widow of **Arthur Block 9th**, sent from Arthur's ten grandchildren, a donation in Arthur's memory. Please give our thanks to each of the grandchildren Daphne, it is much appreciated.

Jack Leaker 9th wrote expressing appreciation at receiving *Take Post*. It's all a part of the service Jack!!

From **Kevin Grey sec. 2/3rd Comp AA Assoc.** the regular newsletter of that Association, advising me that the sick parade is distressingly long. That seems to be the story all over Kevin, even so, it is good to get your news from Sydney.

Dan Hawkes 9th sent greeting to all the 2/3rd boys, and tells me 'he is just hanging on the perch', I am glad to know you can still do that Dan. **Joyce Ritchie** daughter of **John Hipworth**, also sent a donation in memory of her dad, thank you Joyce, he will be remembered by those of us still around.

Arthur Spiller RHQ was 93 last August. Congratulations Arthur. Thank you Gwen for being the secretary and conveying the message that Arthur still enjoys getting news from *Take Post*. **Dick Coggins 7th**, sent me the eulogy given at Col Reilly's funeral. Thank you for that Dick.

I visited **Darcy Edwards 8th** during the year. Darcy is now living at Mentone Gardens Nursing Home where his wife is also living. Darcy is on 24 hour oxygen, and it was good to have a chat with him.

Edie Russell, widow of **Jim Russell 7th**, is still keeping the RSL at Tatura running. Edie is, and has been, the President of the Ladies Auxiliary of the RSL for some 30 years. Good one Edie, it takes the ladies to make a show go!

It was good to hear from **Duncan McPherson 9th** again this year. Duncan had a successful throat cancer operation in 2001, and despite having smoked 40 cigarettes a day, which probably contributed to the cancer, still has a good sense of humour about it all.

Last but not least, I had another good letter from Noosa, **Bob Phillips 8th** with little sight does a great job, and thank you Phyl for all the reading you do for Bob, I know he appreciates it greatly. My dining room table is littered with paper, she 'who must be obeyed' needs to set it ready for visitors, so I must go for now. As I sign off, I wish you all good health and happiness.

Regards to one and all.

John Campbell Hon Sec.

Resurrection in 1945

by Ian Rutter

I was taken prisoner in the battle for Crete and so ended a military career that didn't rise to any glorious heights, but instead took me to Athens, Salonika and then to a vast P.O.W. compound in Hammelburg, Bavaria. It was not the sort of experience that I expected and accommodation and other facilities were well below par. I languished at Hammelburg for over four years and then the big day we had all dreamed about for so long arrived at last. The Allied invasion was reaching us. To our astonishment an American tank arrived outside our barracks. All the German guards disappeared. There was wild excitement and then the tank thought better of it and took off. The guards reappeared!

This led to a long march south and eventually to a spot I thought must be near Wurzburg. Then came extraordinary scenes. GI's sitting on tanks throwing chocolates, Germans pleading with us to take them prisoner. The American tide passed through and over the next few days the prisoners were loaded into Lancasters and despatched to England. I remember being quite nervous. We were in close formation and the wing tip of our plane seemed to bob about perilously close to the wing tip of the plane next to us. I felt it would be a great pity for anything to happen at this stage—just when freedom was in sight.

We landed on the South coast of England near Tangmere and were taken by bus to Eastbourne. It would always be a beautiful trip, but to a liberated P.O.W. accustomed to unrelenting drabness, it was breathtaking. Lush green hedges and trees neatly clipped back from the winding road—and the first real surge of freedom.

We were bound for Lord Gowrie's old home. Our previous Governor-General had opened it as a rest and recreation spot for returning P.O.W's—somewhere to draw a deep breath. It had all the facilities to make life pleasant, artists and entertainers came down from London to play and sing around the piano. It also had a notice board crammed with invitations.

The Duke of this and the Duke of that offered holidays on their estates and eminent people all over the place flooded us with invitations—usually for a week. There

were no restrictions, we could go anywhere. England was our playground, I just had to remember my ship sailed in six weeks time and I'd better not miss it!

I was a bit reluctant at first to sign on for a week anywhere. How could I choose from this welter of offers? I hadn't been faced with a decision like this for a long time. It was easier to jump on and off buses and trains and just travel about. But I was with friends from the prison camp and they all had different ideas and I found that the places we usually saw were the pubs. Much as I like a beer I imagined there were better things to do in my precious six weeks.

So I accepted one of the invitations which sat in an obscure corner of the notice board and cut adrift from my friends. It was a week to live in Balliol College, Oxford, as a student.

It was a remarkable sensation to leave the busy Oxford St, go through the big gates and enter this world of learning. The cool green quadrangle and the stillness. I felt it wouldn't be difficult to study here. Classes would have about forty or fifty, made up of servicemen from Army, Navy and Air Force, drawn from Allied servicemen involved in the war. The mornings were to be taken up with discussions and lectures on subjects like Post War Reconstruction, The United Nations, which was in its formative years and anything else that our little brains could absorb. The afternoons were devoted to social things like a trip to Stratford to see a play of Shakespeare's at the new Theatre, or a ballet, or a conducted tour around the other colleges.

The idea was that Balliol would draw out the serviceman's views on post war problems, and in return, supply a history and atmosphere of Oxford. It would give him the opportunity to see the life of a student for just one week, and, who knows, he could sleep in the bed that a previous Prime Minister tossed around in!

I returned to Gowrie House, it had been a memorable week, a week very well spent. The period in England, after release, cannot be described. I was let loose, there were no ties, the authorities didn't want to know me for six weeks. Everyone in England was going out of their way to look after the young fellow in the slouch hat.

The Sentry's Log

Our Hon. Treasurer John Hepworth intends to be at Gallipoli on Anzac Day on a visit with his son and daughter-in-law, to the old battlefields. He also expects to be visiting Benghazi, Tobruk, Sollum, Alexandria and Cairo. We trust that they have a great trip.

We have asked John to let us have a story of his nostalgic journey for next year's *Take Post*. Last year's *Take Post* included a story by Isa Fellows (widow of Gordon Fellows) describing her journey to Crete. Isa read our review of the book *Escape from Crete*. Here are her comments on that book:

'I felt that after our visit to Crete, I could follow some of Charles Jager and Ben Travers' journey—and what a journey it was! I kept my map of Crete beside me when reading and was able to follow some of their journey but a lot of the small villages of course are not marked. What a wonderful comradeship they had and I wonder if they kept up their friendship when they came back to Australia.

The villagers of Crete were wonderful to the Australians and we owe them a great deal of gratitude. To escape twice from the Germans was a real feat and the journey from Crete to Africa an epic, due mainly to the efforts of the excellent skipper. Don't you think it would make a very good movie? It would surpass films like *The Great Escape* and a lot of other War stories.'

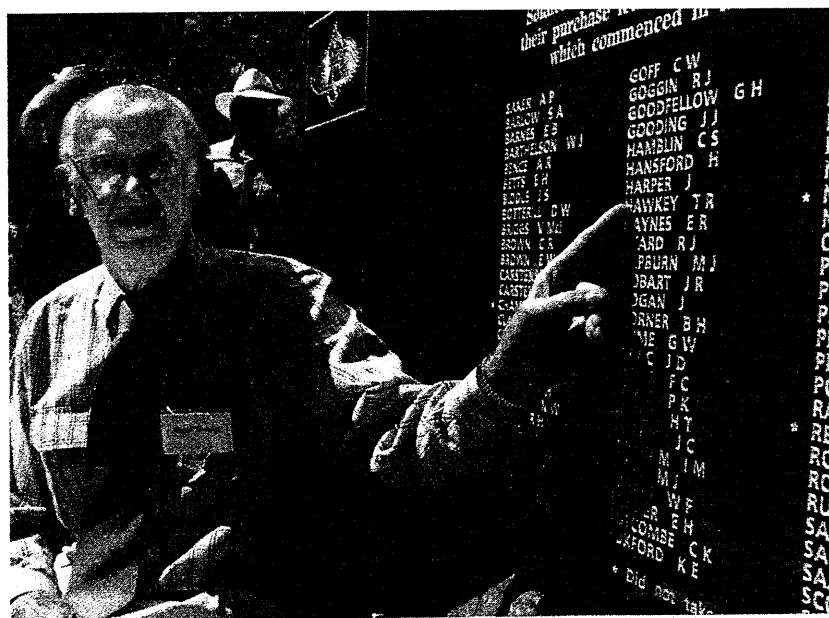
(We recommend the book by Jager and Travers which used to be about in paperback.)

Ralph Hawkey (8 Bty) after WW2, an original soldier settler in the Nathalia area, identified his name on the memorial in Nathalia Memorial Gardens which honours the settlers.

Despite hardships in the early days, the Soldier Settlement of 97 farms in Nathalia District, with good planning and creative hard work, became a resounding success in developing the area.

Ralph and his late wife Phyllis developed their block from bare land into a viable farm with beautiful gardens.

Ralph retired some years ago from farming and now resides at Ave Maria Village, 25 Graham Street, Shepparton.



Ralph Hawkey in Nathalia Memorial Gardens.

Picnic at Tobruk (1941)



The happy
hour

Digging holes to play
'Hidey' in



Sunbathing

Picnic at Tobruk (1941)



Air conditioned 'en suite'



A bathing beauty



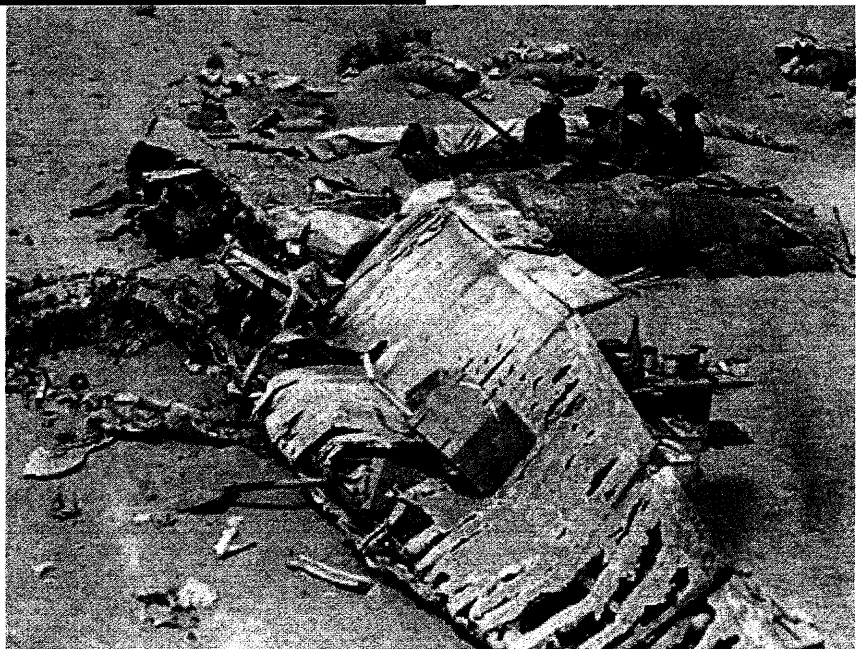
Drowning fleas

Picnic at Tobruk (1941)



Joy ride in a Bristol
Blenheim

Recycled aircraft



The swimming pool
at the Harbour

Picnic at Tobruk (1941)

Cleaning the gun after duckshooting



We made those Germans run! (Chasing us in the retreat from Benghazi)



Heading to sea for some water skiing

Book reviews

Tobruk by Peter Fitzsimons

The book *Tobruk* was published in 2006 and soon became a best seller of non-fiction. It represents 2 years of work gaining information from old soldiers, or their diaries or letters—German, Australian, British, Italian, Polish, and from their descendants.

It is a rather unusual book, as it is not a precise war history, but a story of the remarkable events leading up to the Siege of Tobruk, of the Siege itself, the aftermath, ending with epilogues of great interest. In the Author's own words he aimed to give the book a novel-like feel, occasionally using a little poetic license, to construct virtual scenes and records of conversations of participants in dramatic events.

Of course, it is impossible to describe experiences of every type of unit in the field; but I was disappointed in the limited content about the Australian field artillery and light anti-aircraft units.

Younger generations of writers on the Siege usually give credence to the *Bush Batteries* and this makes a good story. These groups of men including cooks, drivers, batmen and others would get hold of captured Italian guns of dubious age and efficiency, together with old ammunition, which was plentiful, and set themselves up as enthusiastic gunners. Their gunnery was rough, generally looking along side of the barrel with a hopeful view of landing their shells into enemy lines; but at risk to themselves from premature exploding shells from such old equipment. Their activities were regarded as good fun, or even recreation. Throwing any hardware at the enemy was at least good for the morale.

In some descriptions of the 'bush batteries' the impression could be gained that they were the only regular Australian artillery.

At Tobruk, the 2nd/12th Field Regiment, were the only Australian full-time gunners.

The 2nd/12th Field Regiment used old British guns of World War I vintage or captured enemy equipment, while the 2nd/8th A.A Battery used captured Italian Breda light anti-aircraft guns. These units fired tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition in a professional manner, creating significant damage to enemy units and aircraft; but received no mention in this book other than some remarks about a cook in some trivial incident with Arabs in Benghazi.

British field artillery and anti-aircraft were acknowledged, and deservedly so. Most of the stories of Units are about Australian infantry who bore the greatest



and most dangerous burden of defence throughout the Siege.

Peter Fitzsimons' book with its colloquialisms and wide coverage of events is the most readable book about the Siege of Tobruk which I have read. It is usually available in public libraries. Price at bookshops is about \$50, but I have seen copies for about \$40.

R.K.B

P 2006, *Tobruk*, HarperCollins, Pymble, NSW, \$49.99.

A Cuppa

'Could you make me a cup of tea?'
The old digger asked, plaintively.
Arthritis ridden, I slowly stood,
Put on a smile—tried to look good.
'I'll make one for you,' I told him,
And, on his face dawned a slow grin.
While strength is mine, I'll always do
A favour for a man like you.
Your mind now wanders to the past,
War years are with you, while life lasts!
I stir the tea, reflectively,
An Anzac's daughter - Gunner's wife,
Gives one a different slant on life.

By Constance Little, widow of Charles Little Dec'd.

(The 'old Digger' was Col. McNaughton, 8 Battery)