



# Take Post

April 2010

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

## Night Raid

### IT'S ON!

It's on! It's on!  
You so & so, son of a gun.  
Get that ammo,  
and make it snappy.

Number eight and  
number seven,  
point that barrel  
up to Heaven.

Zeros comin'  
so let's be happy,  
we're gonna make  
that Jap "slap-happy".  
Anonymous

On the hill dim forms lie sleeping, a lonely picket stands near the field telephone. It is a clear night, the picket being outlined by the faint reflection of a pale moon.

The silence is interrupted by the not-too-loud buzz of the instrument... the voice of the picket is just a quiet drone... he quickly hangs up the receiver and turns.

#### "Take Post!"

No longer can the sleepers hide from realities in slumber; they stir, stumble up, heavy in sleep, but their movements become direct and purposeful.

Sound locators are quickly in action. Bearings are given quietly but clearly. **"Target seen!"** - louder, this from the spotter. The sound of planes is evident now to the human ear. Now it is necessary to shout. **"Expose!"** cries a voice.

There is a loud sizzling hiss and a finger of light points upwards. Searching, ever searching, they feel around the edges of clouds. Many lights now, all searching, mostly in one direction (sound locators seldom lie).

Suddenly, as if jammed, one beam remains almost rigid - almost, but not quite. It is slowly following silvery

wings thousands of feet up there. Number 4 calls **"On Target!"** as all the beams concentrate, like ribbons on a maypole.

A searchlight man cannot hide his position in the darkness. His job obviously advertises his location, and it is with anything but a feeling of safety that he carries on through the raid, high up there for all to see. He has to face the hazard of the bombs and the hazard of falling shrapnel from our own guns - the guns that depend on his skill to locate and hold the enemy in an all revealing circle of light.

"LIGHTS."

## 2/3rd Remembrance Group

The Remembrance Group established in 2008 now has in excess of 80 members, and the Committee is anxious to increase the existing membership.

If you are the son or daughter of an original member and/or have children who would like to participate in the activities of the Remembrance Group, please contact Colin Bragg, the Honorary Secretary on 03 9592 1642 or 0419 887 820.

It is not an onerous role and costs only \$15.00 per year to participate. Your support is important if the men and the deeds of the 2/3rd are to continue to be remembered and promoted into the future.



## We Will Remember Them

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

### VALE

John Anderson  
Terry Butler  
Tom "Jock" Carmichael  
FJ Cresp  
Jim Goddard  
Harry Goodwin  
AA Harris  
AL (Les) Harris  
LW (Les) Shields  
Frank Wadley

### BATTERY

7  
9  
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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!**

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

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

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

The Regiment Association was formed in 1945 and has been active in commemorating and celebrating the history of the 2/3rd ever since.

In 2008, a Remembrance Group was formed to provide for the future prosperity of our organisation in the hands of the children and grandchildren of our original members.

The 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment is an unincorporated association run by a voluntary Committee of Management.

### Office Bearers 2009/10

#### President

Lynton Rose  
1 / 5 Cloris Avenue  
Beaumaris VIC 3193

telephone: 03 9599 2264  
email: rhondalynton@optusnet.com.au

#### Honorary Secretary

Colin Bragg  
Unit 2 / 81 Well Street  
Brighton VIC 3186

telephone: 03 9592 1642 / 0419 887 820  
email: abr18751@bigpond.net.au

#### Vice President

Matthew Heddle

#### Treasurer

Ann Bragg

#### Committee

Graham Heddle  
David McDonald  
Anne Rae

#### Newsletter Editor

Colin Bragg

#### Keeper of the Banner

Dave Thomson

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# What did you do in the war Dad?

## Secretary's Note:

Alan "Bushy" Read (9) sent a number of photos relating to the R'n'R activities of the 9th Battery during their time in Egypt in 1941, along with lengthy notes that embellish the Regiment's official history.

Here are a few excerpts of Alan's notes, the full version of which are available online. The notes are best read with a copy of "On Target" at close quarters!

## P.19 (after "smallest island")

January 26 was my 21st birthday. At night we went to the "two-up" school in the bowels of the ship. Stinking hot. Watched the game, and after tails came up four times, I bet heads. After three more tail throws I was broke. Jack Hawke and his mate (7th) commiserated and reckoned I couldn't possibly lose on my 21st.

So, they would put up the money, but any profits would be split. I came in again after nine tails. Three more tails saw the end of our arrangement they were broke too! There were two blokes backing tails throughout ended up with most of the Indian rupee notes on the ship. Jack Hawke, a gun loader, was later killed on Crete.

## P.25 (after "not too vigilant")

Amariya staging camp was undoubtedly the worst camp imaginable. Tents were laid out in real desert - plenty of wind and dust.

At night many nicked off into Alexandria. One night I returned late to find a note pinned to my bedroll - "No matter what time you come in, report to the Battery Sergeant Major".

Thought it was a joke, but was assured by one of the chaps who was awake that it was "fair dinkum". Wondered what sort of trouble I was in! But the BSM merely ticked my name off a list. Apparently the CO had been in Alexandria and was surprised by the number of unit colour patches he saw (no leave had been granted). He ordered a roll call and was to be advised next morning of the miscreants. Thanks to a "generous" BSM., none of 9 Battery was listed as AWOL.

## P.231 (after "paper work")

We were the only Australian troops (except for a few Anti-Tank chaps) in the Egypt desert. 9 Bty was under UK control including rations. Our cooks were appalled at the meagre rations, so I increased Battery strength by 30. After a couple of days I confessed to Captain Margetts - 2IC of the Battery - what I had done. He merely said, "I don't want to know or hear about it".

At times, some of the Tommies came to our HQ for a feed - they noted that our rations seemed to be superior - we said that it was we had better cooks!

## P.247 (after "re-equipped")

Before Battleaxe commenced, HH

(Major Hughes-Hallett) had the two Battery HQ sedan cars modified. German planes favoured strafing staff cars! He had one with the back cut down so it looked like a ute - he sat in the back in the open. Not so good!

So the second was modified so the front section was cut down with the driver in the open. There was a roll of canvas at the back of the driver, theoretically to keep the dust out of the back part. I rode in this once - dusty, hot as a furnace. Later, in Syria, HH was "ticked off" for destruction or mutilation of Army property.

## P.248/249

Tiffy Meares, Doug Pulsford, Geoff Clucas and I teamed up. I was treasurer, paid for everything and claimed the next instalment of 5 pounds Egyptian as required. Thought I would show my local knowledge (I'd been in Cairo four years earlier) and visit Tutankhamen's treasures, but the museum was closed for the duration.

Other places, such as Shepherds Hotel, Mena House Hotel, were out of bounds - officers only. There were troop fights at night - South Africans, NZ, UK and Australians would change sides as the mood (and drink) suited them, but no lasting damage was done!

We stayed at a hotel - booked in a bit late - shared with another four - four in beds and four on mattresses on the floor. I thought it was a troops only hotel, so wandered to the bathroom in the raw with towel over my shoulder. Great surprise on return (with towel around my waist) to meet ladies in the corridor on their way to the bathroom.

We had a great break, played tennis at the Gazera Sports Club, where the ball boy would dash off and come back with cold beers. The other memorable effort was to climb to the top of the Giza pyramid - at least Doug and I made it.



Tennis at the Gazera Sports Club - Tiffy Meares, Geoff Clucas & Bushy Read

# President's Report

This year marks an important anniversary in respect of the 2/3rd. In July 2010 it will be seventy years since the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti Aircraft Regiment was formed in Melbourne during those dark days of 1940.

I'm sure for many of the original members whose memories of that time are still so keen today, it would be hard to believe that seventy years have passed since they joined up as young men back in 1940.

Their experiences and recollections of their time in the 2/3rd provide us with an invaluable link to the past and form an integral part of Australia's war-time history.

With each year that passes the importance of preserving and communicating the 2/3rd story increases.

Recognising this fact themselves a small group of original members proposed the writing of the unit's history and in 1987 the book "On Target – The Story of the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment" was published.

The decision to produce a book of this significance was an enlightened one and today the remaining copies are valued possessions of original members or their families.

The downside of this however, is that because most books still in existence tend to be tightly held within the extended 2/3rd family, the opportunity to communicate the rich history and heritage of the unit to a wider audience is diminished.

Hopefully this is about to change as we prepare to launch the official website of the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. This has been a key objective of your committee since taking over the running of the Unit Association in 2008.

The website will make the history of the unit, theatres of operation, personnel and much more, available to anyone who can access a computer, be that

computer at home, in a state or municipal library or an internet café.

It is expected to have wide appeal but significantly it should resonate well with the younger generation who take this method of accessing information for granted. Clearly it is the young we need to reach with our story to ensure it lives on into the future.

Assuming the website evolves into the kind of vibrant entity we anticipate, it would be nice to think that at some point in the future, 2010 and the creation of the official unit website might be viewed in the same positive light and of similar significance to the decision taken in 1987 to publish 'On Target'.

As we prepare to 'go live' with this venture, I must pay a special tribute to our Honorary Secretary Colin Bragg for the hours of work he has put in to gathering material from original members and their families and scanning hundreds of photos and documents for inclusion on the website. A super job. This in addition to the many other tasks he has carried out so effectively during the year in his role as Secretary.

Whilst on the subject of technology and communications, I want to congratulate committee member Anne Rae for the wonderful powerpoint slide show she has produced comprising over 120 photos of the unit. Initially this was designed for screening at the AGM/ Reunion Lunch but on seeing the final product the committee felt it should also be incorporated into the website when possible.

As is customary at this time each year, I would like to acknowledge all members of the committee for their time, involvement and commitment to the cause, Secretary Colin Bragg, Vice President Matthew Heddle, Treasurer Ann Bragg and committee members Ann Rae and Graeme Heddle, not forgetting our valued Canberra correspondent David McDonald. My thanks to you all.

To the most important group – the

original members. On behalf of myself and the Committee, thank you as always for giving so freely of your time, for your wise counsel and for your encouragement. You and those of your comrades no longer with us are the reason we do this.

In conclusion I want to draw attention to one other significant anniversary for the 2/3rd. In July of this year the Unit Association will turn 65 having been formed in July 1945.

On page 335 of "On Target" at the bottom of the page headed 'The Association', the entry concludes with the words written in 1987: "The Association continues in strength".

I am pleased to be able to report that in 2010, sixty five years after its' formation, the same can be said :

## **The Association continues in strength.**

Good luck and best wishes to all.

**Lynton Rose**

### *On the cover:*

*Extracted from a publication entitled "On Target", which was written and illustrated by Men of the Front Line Services and published by Angus & Robertson Ltd in 1948.*

*The publication records the experiences and words of the American and Australian Anti-Aircraft Brigade in New Guinea.*

*The article was compiled by the our unofficial historian, David McDonald*

# From the Secretary's Desk

I wonder if you ever wonder what an Honorary Secretary does between AGMs and Reunions.

As I conclude my second year as the Association's Honorary Secretary, I now have a thorough understanding of the issues my predecessors dealt with in their capacity as Honorary Secretaries – sadness, appreciation, meeting and event co-ordination, records maintenance, written correspondence and telephone communications.

My conversations with, and letters from, original members and/or their families have ranged from sadness when advising of the passing of another original, to happiness when I hear how much they enjoy receiving "Take Post" and how much they appreciate the Remembrance Group is continuing to honour the activities and traditions of the 2nd/3rd.

So, what I have been doing?

## Remembrance Group

From an initial gathering of 13 interested persons in August 2007, what we now call the Remembrance Group numbers in excess of 80 members and growing.

Not only is the "old guard" delighted with the interest in the Regiment from the descendants of the original members, your Committee is very appreciative of the increasing interest and membership. Thank you to each and every one of you.

The establishment of the web site and the introduction of the mid-term report reflect your interest in the Association and are seen as practical ways we can maintain the momentum.

## Crete

As part of our long planned overseas holiday, Ann and I spent four days on Crete where the 7th Battery was engaged in ferocious battles and subsequent evacuation in 1941. The majority of the Regiment's casualties and prisoners of war were incurred on Crete and there are a number of memorials on the island.

The battle of Crete is well told in the Regiment history "On Target" and has been the subject of numerous articles in Take Post over the years – all of which are accessible through the Association's web site.

A summary of our time on Crete is contained in this edition of Take Post.

## Sentry's Log

During the past twelve months, I have had several meetings with **Ron Bryant**, **John Campbell** and **Cec Rae** over the past twelve months. Whilst primarily associated with gathering photos and documents for the web site, I find that whenever I am unsure of facts or events, I can turn to them for advice and clarification. Thank you for your continuing support. Thank you to all of you for the lunches and coffees I have enjoyed whilst in your company. I also met with Dot Harris (daughter of the late **Les Harris (7th)**) on several occasions, who made her father's extensive photo collection available.

**John Hepworth** has been another I can rely on if I need any advice regarding the finances of the Association.

Each of these former office bearers has had health problems throughout the year, but is battling on in the tradition of old soldiers.

I spent a very pleasant afternoon with **Roy East (7th)** at the retirement village where he now lives in North Croydon. Whilst my primary purpose in meeting Roy was to view and scan his photographs and documents, I found him to be a most interesting person with a great deal of knowledge. In addition to joining up his grandson as a member of the Remembrance Group, Roy also made a very generous donation to the Association.

I also met with **Tom Dusting (9th)** to scan photos. Tom asked if **Bert Langley (9th)**, a member of the Occupation Force in Japan with Tom, and now living in Mornington, was on my membership lists. This was a bonus as Bert was not on any of my mailing lists – he is now.

**Bill Garrigan (7th)** and a former PoW

rang to advise that due to his wife's dementia, they were now in separate aged care facilities.

**Alan "Bushy" Read (9th)**, sent me a number of photographs and recollections of the activities described in "On Target". Alan transferred from the 2nd/2nd Heavy to the 2nd/3rd Light and was a great mate of **Jack Berkley** and the late **Harry Sauerberg**.

Alison Shiels rang to pass on the sad news that **Les Shiels (8th)** passed away on 21 October 2009.

**Dave Thomson (9th)**, the Association's Banner Keeper, rang to advise that **Tom "Jock" Carmichael (9th)** had passed away in December. In response to a comment by Dave Thomson that he thought he was the last surviving member of the 9th, I checked the records and can report there are 13 surviving members of 7th Battery, 17 from 8th Battery and 19 from 9th Battery. There are also single surviving members from RHQ, Signals and Workshops.

During the year I received phone calls, letters or emails from Diane Schubert (daughter of the late **Ernest Cope (8th)**), Graeme Hawkins (son of **Raleigh Hawkins (7th)**), Shirley Clay (daughter of **Tom Wills (7th)**), Marg Woodfield (daughter of **KW Elder (RHQ)**), and David Croke (son of **JD Croke (9th)**), all seeking to join the Remembrance Group themselves or requesting information be sent to other family members with an interest in joining.

I have enjoyed my role with the Association over the past twelve months and would really appreciate receiving information about former members of the Regiment, anecdotes, stories, extracts of diaries and/or letters and/or photographs that individual families may know of and which we could use as the basis for articles in future issues of "Take Post", or to expand the photographs and information on the web site.

**Colin Bragg**

# Gunner Fryer

(NX10917)

## Part Two: Back Home 1942, then New Guinea

### Back Home 1942

In February 1942 the 2/3rd AA Battery left the Middle East on the Andes, a 23,000 ton ship, stopping briefly in Colombo, Ceylon.

The troops landed in Adelaide on 17th March 1942 to be billeted out by local families. Gunner Fryer, his good mate Bill Hillman, and two Tasmanians were fortunate to be accommodated by Henry Silk and his wife in a large house in Paradise.

Henry ran a string of betting shops in Adelaide prior to the War but they were closed down during the hostilities. The betting went 'underground' to a series of SP operations in local hotels and Gunner Fryer was delighted to help Henry collect proceeds at these establishments.

After 5 or 6 weeks, the anti-aircraft men were off to defend Perth, the first of four slow crossings of the Nullabor Plain by train for NX10917. At a camp just north of Perth, a friendly local farmer gave their gun

troop some 40 rabbit traps. The setting and re-setting of these helped relieve the tedium at night. A few rabbits were eaten each day to supplement their diet, and a few sold in Perth along with the skins for "beer money".

After a period of time near Perth, these gun troops of the 2/3rd AA Battery were scattered along the Western Australian coastline at strategic locations, such as Pearce Air Force Base, where for the next 5 or 6 months, in Keith's words, "nothing much happened".

One interesting episode during the time in Western Australia was when a leave pass for one week was granted. The one week was the time that could be spent back in Sydney. Getting the 3,000 odd kilometres there and back was a real adventure, involving two more Nullabor crossings.

The trip back from Sydney was very slow and, with no available spare spaces on the train from Adelaide to Perth, Keith spent three



In Western Australia, Keith Fryer (back row second right) with others of 2/3rd AA Battery.

weeks stranded in the grandstand at the Adelaide Cricket Ground, where "you could hear the lions in the zoo roaring at night!"

By the time he had returned to Pearce, the Army had decided that it was time to move everyone again. In fact, the Army had re-organised their anti-aircraft units, and the 8th Battery became an independent airborne battery.

The objective was that dismantled Bofors guns would be transported with their gun crews in DC3's to defend airstrips. So, in July and August 1943 the gunners went by train slowly to Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and eventually Townsville, again defending an airfield.

### New Guinea

On 4th December 1943 the 2/3rd AA Battery embarked on the 12,000 ton Katoomba and sailed to the northern side of Papua New Guinea, landing near Buna.

Buna was not too far from where the fighting along the

Kokoda Trail had nearly defeated most of the Japanese land forces.

In Buna the 2/3rd AA Battery were part of the 8th Division of the Australian Army. Their task was to secure the safety of barges landing supplies from American supply ships by providing anti-aircraft fire against the raiding Japanese Air Force.

Conditions just behind the beach were dismal. It was a swamp all the way to the Owen Stanley Mountains and the Kokoda Trail, so a "raft" had to be built from sand-bags for the gun emplacement and the tent. Of course, being near the equator, it was always hot and humid during the day with a storm every evening.

By this time, Gunner Fryer had reduced his entire clothing stocks to 2 shirts, 2 trousers and one pair of boots. One set of shirt and trousers was always washed waiting to dry, the other set being worn wet with sweat or rain.



Bill Hillman, Keith Fryer and 2 Tasmanians in Adelaide, after a swim in the Adelaide water supply.

# The story of Gunner Fryer (Part Two)...

To relieve the tedium of heat, humidity and mosquitoes (not to mention scrub typhus, malaria, dysentery, dengue fever, and occasionally sitting in a 44-gallon drum of Condy's crystals to relieve the itch of tinea), some minor activities were undertaken.

Wild pig shoots were sport, with Aussie soldiers often acting as guides for visiting American sailors who wanted 'a piece of the action'. Some illicit 'jungle juice' stills were built, using any available vegetable scraps, dried fruits, golden syrup, sugar, lemon cordial and water. The alcohol was ready if it would ignite when a match was put to a spoonful!

To further relieve the tedium, a betting and book-making system existed amongst the gun emplacements. Sergeant Bluey Page arrived with 12 pounds and Keith had 6, so they decided to 'inherit' the betting operation established by the departing 17th Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Keith's wife would send him the acceptances for the weekend races as soon as they were published, and starting prices would be set, given the sound knowledge that Keith possessed of the horses' previous form. It did

not seem to be an extremely lucrative business, but kept the gunner's minds alert.

"I think at the end, we had about 15 pounds each", Keith said in 2005.

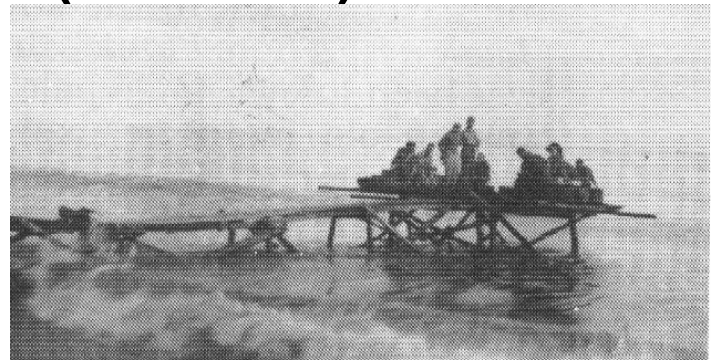
An incident involving the ocean was the unexpected collapse of the 'T-shaped' jetty which had served as a toilet. Several uniformed men, sitting relaxed with their trousers around their ankles at the end of the wharf suddenly found themselves unpleasantly immersed when their toilet collapsed beneath them.

The exact moment was not captured on film but the accompanying photograph proves it was not one of the war's more apocryphal stories.

## Home Again 1944

By mid 1944, the war had moved on, and it was not necessary to keep the Bofors at Buna. The guns and crews were loaded onto the Duntroon, arriving in Australia on 9th June 1944.

By now, most of the men were a yellow colour from the atebine anti-malaria tablets. With the effects of the tablets wearing off, it was estimated that 30% of his Battery fell ill with either malaria or dengue fever.



The "toilet jetty" shortly before it's collapse.

Not to be outdone, Gunner Fryer got both at once and had a 3-week spell in a hospital at Chermside near Brisbane.

Upon recovery, the Bofors were set up at airfields and beaches along the coast from Brisbane to Tweed Heads. There were many troops either in the Brisbane region or passing through, so again sporting events such as athletics were organized "almost on a daily basis".

Gunner Fryer again showed his prowess at the 100 yards and, using some of the proceeds from the New Guinea book-making operation, managed to place a bet of 3 pound each-way at odds of 12 to 1 in a big 440 yards event. Leading "until the shadows of the post", he was narrowly beaten into second place by an 18-year old who had won the Melbourne GPS 440 event only 3 months earlier. Not a bad run for a recuperating veteran who was more than 10 years senior to the new recruit!

Gunner Fryer was returned to Sydney where in December 1944 and January 1945 he attended courses leading to the qualification of a Teacher of Anti-Aircraft gunnery. He attained top marks in those courses and in that capacity he taught gunnery drills and practice to officers at a military

establishment near Randwick. This meant he could get home leave 2 days a week. He was discharged after hostilities had ceased on 8th November 1945.

## Acknowledgement

"On Target, the story of the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment" by CJE Rae, AL Harris and RK Bryant, 1987, has provided some factual information and photographs and is gratefully acknowledged.

## Postscript

Keith Fryer was my father. I am proud of his achievements and fortunately decided to record some of his adventures shortly before his death at age 90 in 2006.

I was born 9 months and 3 days after Gunner Fryer's discharge, therefore qualifying myself as a true post-war "Baby Boomer".

## John Fryer



Final day in uniform.



Digging a well for water (left) and a home made still for "Jungle Juice".



# Our Libya Trip

by Ken Butterworth, President - Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes & Drums

*Rob Bennett passed on this wonderful narrative of the Rats of Tobruk Pipe Band's visit to Libya in late 2009.*

I must admit that when the email arrived we were absolutely amazed. It was from Vitaly Miranov inviting our band to Tripoli to perform in a series of Edinburgh Tattoo style performances celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Great Alfatah Revolution and the coming to power of Muammar Gaddafi.

The opportunity provided an all expenses paid trip but also the promise of a visit to Tobruk, where we would conduct a remembrance service in the cemetery where many Australians are buried, including the first Australian awarded a Victoria Cross in World War II, Corporal John (Jack) Edmondson.

**25 August** We departed Melbourne with a compliment of one Drum Major, fourteen Pipers, ten Drummers, and five others which included the President, Secretary, and two chaperones for our junior members.

On arriving in Tripoli, we were met by a Libyan Government Official and Tom Yates, the Australian Consul General who ushered us through customs. Tom had been invaluable in the lead up to our trip and even more so when we finally touched down in Tripoli.

**28 August** Rehearsals got under way at the Libyan Naval Academy which is not far from the resort. As there were only two Pipe Bands we were usually left standing around waiting for the Military Bands sorted themselves out. Of course, the Pipe Bands march on and get it right the first time.

The performances were held in Green Square in Tripoli which if you "google" it you will see an old fort on one side of the square. The Bands were to march on from the opposite side of the square and form up on either side of the Austrian Band for the finale, where we would play MacPherson's Lament with the Military Bands. All the dignitaries would be seated in grandstands with their backs to the fort.

We were told of a rehearsal of the finale on Green Square commencing at 2300hrs and finishing at 0300hrs. The buses arrived at 2100hrs and after a harrowing trip in to the city with a police escort, we arrived at 2300hrs.

This trip would normally take any sane Aussie around twenty minutes, however, we were in Ramadan, which means most things don't happen until after sunset. The roads were absolute chaos and the city was teeming with people. Shops and restaurants were doing a roaring trade.

The military did a great job keeping the general populace out of the way and our five non-performers did a good job keeping an eye on our equipment and providing water to our band. The temperature is still in the high twenties even at this late stage, climbing to the high thirties and low forties by day.

This night was so frustrating with many false starts, then the Pipe Bands not being required at all, and the Military Bands having no end of trouble getting their performance together. Finally they sent for the buses at 0130hrs.

**30 August** On this afternoon we were feted with a visit by Tom Yates, the Consul General for Australia in Libya, and Tim Fischer AC, former Deputy Prime Minister and Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, here as the Australian Government Representative for commemorations.

After a photo session and a few tunes on the pipes, it was off to dinner before changing in to uniform for the full dress rehearsal on Green Square.

The rehearsal started at 2200hrs and we arrived back at our accommodation at 0300hrs, however the night was certainly not without drama. One of our 16 year old side drummers, had to be taken off in an ambulance after coming down with severe stomach cramps, most likely brought on by the heat, lack of normal diet, and the strenuous schedule.

The other problem we had was the

crowd. Both us and the Kiwis were marching on from a small street perpendicular to the main square. This street is flanked by two large restaurants and another smaller square which is a seething mass of humanity. They were all pressing in on us wanting photos, and just being curious.

At one stage it was so bad, we had to be rescued by security, who threatened to wade in with batons. In the end we had to move out on to Green Square to escape the crowd. Rehearsals finished around 0230hrs, so it was 0330hrs before any of us got to bed.

**31 August** Off to the Naval Academy at 1500hrs to iron out any bugs from last night's rehearsal, then back to the resort for dinner. After dinner we hastily donned full kit and on the buses for a 2100hrs departure. The whole of Green Square and its' surrounding streets had been placed in lockdown with no public entry, and all businesses closed so there would be no repeat of the previous nights fiasco.

Once on to the parade ground, the wheels really fell off. I don't know how it sounded from inside, but standing on the side lines was bad enough. Anyway, with very little rehearsal time left before tomorrow's big parade, the officers need to sort something out. We also had our photo taken with the band of the French Foreign Legion, an opportunity not to be missed.

**1 September** The day of the big parade dawned. On to the buses at 1600hrs for our usual kamikaze ride in to the city. Once there however, we had a substantial walk to our usual start point due to the lockdown of Green Square and its' precinct. Everyone was patted down and all instruments searched - even the canisters inside pipe bags. A helicopter flew overhead and there were snipers and soldiers on the rooftops. Security was unbelievable.

The parade started with a fly-over of all sorts of military aircraft. The Military Bands went on and played continuously for over an hour, while troops from



various nations marched past. Finally came all the army weaponry, including mobile rocket launchers, massive field guns, tanks with their enormous rumble followed by missiles mounted on the back of massive trucks.

Finally, we march on with the Kiwis to join the brass bands. The two Pipe Bands then went straight into 'Scotland The Brave' and 'Black Bear'. At a designated point, we cut out and the brass bands struck up, did a left turn, and marched off. It was all over, so back on the buses for a late dinner.

**2nd September** Another complete rehearsal back at the Naval Academy with the afternoon spent swimming before the big show. Upon arrival at Green Square, we were ushered to our starting point after clearing security. The evening started with an artillery salute of forty rounds, followed by one of the most impressive fireworks displays seen.

What was most disconcerting to us was this took place no more than seventy-five metres from where we assembled. One could just envisage a drummer screaming down the road with their feather bonnet ablaze. Finally, our two bands marched on and everything came together on the night as they say. The finale also went off without a hitch, which pleased the organisers no end.

**3rd September** After a day trip to Bab Al Aziziya, our band joined the entire cast of the previous night's performance at a civic reception. After another fireworks display and some local entertainment, we were presented with a certificate for all members commemorating the visit, and the Band received a medal especially struck for the occasion. They arrived home at 0210hrs.

**5th September** This morning we woke at 0500hrs for an early departure to Tobruk. On arrival at Tripoli airport, we caught up with Tim Fischer and Tom Yates. We were also joined by the British and Maltese Ambassadors.



The famous fig tree at the Tobruk Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery.

We were ushered aboard our charter jet for the hour and twenty minute flight. We flew out over the Gulf of Sidra and directly over Benghazi. On touching down in Tobruk, we couldn't help but note half a dozen MIG fighters parked on the runway.

After arriving at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, the band paraded to the Australian Memorial where the dignitaries awaited. We conducted a very moving ceremony with speeches, wreaths laid, and letters from home read.

I then read the Ode, Bruce Macfarlane played the Lament, followed by a minute's silence. David McNamara played the Australian and British National Anthems before the band retired and broke off. It was time to disperse and visit various graves. We then moved on to the Knightsbridge

Cemetery passing the magnificent harbour and the German War Memorial.

Finally we visited the famous fig tree, under which is a cave used by the Australians as a Regimental Aide Post during the Siege. By then it was time to return for the flight back to Tripoli.

At the airport as we prepared to leave Libya, we said our final farewell to Kamahl our interpreter, and Tom Yates who had come to see we got off okay. Finally, let me conclude by saying that without Tom this trip may have not happened. He worked behind the scenes to procure our visas, and I suspect the trip to Tobruk. He was there for us whether it was changing currency, obtaining sim cards for our phones, and our general well-being. THANK YOU TOM!

#### **Secretary's Note:**

*Heavy editing of this story was required for space reasons—the full version is online.*



Members of the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes & Drums Inc at Tobruk.

# Crete Revisited



Bofors Gun stands guard at the Stavromenos Memorial

*As part of our overseas holiday last year, Ann and I visited Crete, primarily because of the role the 2nd / 3rd played in the crucial battle for Crete in 1941.*

## Crete – The Island

Crete is the largest of the Greek Islands, located in the south of the Aegean Sea. The island has mountainous landscapes, beautiful beaches and rocky coves, charming towns & villages and historic ruins.

## The Battle for Crete

In May 1941, 7 Battery of the 2nd/3rd Light anti-Aircraft Regiment was involved in the largest German Airborne operation of the war. It was to be the first and last time in history that an island was taken by airborne assault.

Afterwards, Crete was dubbed the graveyard of the Fallschirmjäger (German Parachutists); they suffered

nearly 4,000 killed and missing in the assault. It was also the first time the Germans had encountered stiff partisan activity, with women and children getting involved in the battle.

A total of 500 JU-52's and 70 DFS-230 light assault gliders were used to drop 8100 men on Crete - 1,860 at Maleme, 2,460 at Hania, 1,380 at Rethymno and 2,360 at Iracilion (Heraklion).

Crete was chosen because of the British airfields on the island. Securing Crete would be tantamount to driving the British out of the Eastern Mediterranean and the first step towards Cyprus and the Egyptian Delta.

The allied troops on Crete (3 British battalions, 2 New Zealanders Brigades, 8 Greek Battalions and 6 Australian Battalions) had been aware of the

impending assault through Enigma intercepts. The Germans had been provided with inaccurate intelligence and dropped into stiff resistance of nearly three times the amount of men they were expecting.

The Battle for Crete lasted for approximately ten days with heavy casualties on both sides. However, the Royal Navy was able to embark some 16,000 men and return them to Egypt (including 90 men from 7 Battery). The majority were evacuated from Sphakia with a smaller number withdrawn from Heraklion.

Subjected to severe losses and constant harassment by German aircraft, the Royal Navy performed the evacuation over a period of four nights.

## A Tourist's Perspective

We flew into Heraklion Airport from late in the afternoon and checked into the our hotel. Heraklion is the capital of Crete. The weather was warm, and shorts and sandals were the order of the day.

The first impression was one of a city that was undergoing massive reconstruction, until we discovered that the authorities have a rather quaint planning law that allows people to build in stages, depending on what they can afford at the time.

For this reason, many buildings in Heraklion have been completed to the ground floor level and have reinforcing rods projecting into the sky from the top of

the completed ground floor – ready for the next level.

Our local Government By-Laws officers would have a field day in Heraklion! Cars and motor bikes seem to be able to park wherever they can find a space, which often means they park on the footpath, facing in the wrong direction.

The footpaths themselves are a major health hazard as it was rare to find a stretch of level pavement anywhere in the CBD. Many footpaths have trees growing out of them or the branches from adjacent gardens growing over the foot paths. Walking down town required eyes in the front, back and sides of your head.

The port of Heraklion is a fascinating place with its ancient fort, mediaeval Moorish mosque, the incredibly crowded local fishing boat berths and the constantly active inter-island ferry terminals.

Ferries range in size from massive car carrying ferries to the "Flying Cats", which are very fast catamarans and which we used to travel to Santorini and Paros when we left Crete.

Churches are one item that are not in short supply on Crete, and there are many old and beautiful churches throughout the island.

It was on one of our walks that we discovered a magnificent memorial, presented to Greece by the Returned Services League of Australia and the New Zealand Returned Services



Ann (daughter of Jim Paton) takes charge at Stavromenos Memorial

Assoc, commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of the Greek Mainland and Crete.

The memorial, made from beautiful stone, features a central column with bronze statues. The perimeter of the memorial is defined by walls made from the same stone, into which are inset the most incredible bronze reliefs, each depicting aspects of the Battle.

It was our intention to visit the Rethymno memorial, the Suda Bay Cemetery and Maleme Airport, where the 7th Battery was actively engaged during the Battle for Crete.

Unfortunately, we were unable to locate the Rethymno memorial and the distance to Maleme and Suda Bay meant we were unable to visit these places.

We did however locate the memorial at Stavromenos, which commemorates "The Courage of Australian, Greek & British Servicemen and Cretan Patriots Who Fought and Fell In Battle Near This Place Between 20th And 30th May 1941".

The memorial again comprises a tall column with a perimeter wall, on which plaques recognizing those engaged in the action are attached.

On each side of the column are well maintained Bofors guns. Sadly the memorial itself was in need of maintenance, but its location overlooking the Aegean Sea compensates.

Our driving tour took us to several Cretan villages clinging to the mountainous terrain and we enjoyed afternoon tea in the beautiful village of Spili.

Similarly, our tour took us to small villages on the water's edge. At one of these villages, it was only after we had walked down to the beach that we realised we had accidentally wandered onto a nudist beach – we didn't join them.

We spent a day at the Palace of Knossos, which even in its ruined condition, is an impressive structure. To start with, it is massive and a whole day is necessary to tour the ruins properly. Some restoration work on the Palace is underway, but it can never be fully restored given the sheer size of the complex and the extent of the damage.

It is thought the palace was demolished by a huge tsunami some 4,000 years ago and it is further claimed it was the same volcanic eruption that created the magnificent and famous

caldera on the island of Santorini that caused the tidal wave that ruined the Palace of Knossos.

We enjoyed our time on Crete, and despite some of the challenges, we enjoyed exploring the history and ruggedness of the island, the charm and beauty of its villages and the friendliness of the people.

We were moved that the contribution of the Australian Infantry Forces, including the 2nd/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, is so widely recognised and acknowledged throughout the island.

We were lucky to be able to visit and appreciate the memorials at Heraklion and Stavromenos and encourage you to do the same should you get the chance.



The beautiful stone memorial at Heraklion

# Vale Les Harris

7th & 8th Battery

Arthur Leslie Harris died on 7 May 2009, aged 98 years. Les, as he preferred to be addressed was a country boy, enjoying all the pursuits of a country boy, including cycling, camping, shooting and fishing.

Les qualified as a school teacher and his country upbringing combined with his teaching background were to become great attributes for a soldier.

Les served five years in the Australian Infantry Forces during World War II, with his first experience of active service being on the island of Crete with the 7th Battery of the 2nd/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

He, like many others, was lucky to survive the Battle of Crete, in bitter fighting against highly trained German airborne troops and elite paratroopers who were better armed and trained than the Allied forces.

Les was with a Bofors anti-aircraft gun crew at Maleme Aerodrome, which was a key strategic asset. After fighting back against bombing and machine gunning from German aircraft for several days, Les and his crew were relieved for a break from hostilities.

All the relieving crew were either killed or captured.

When the Germans, at great cost, eventually gained the upper hand, it became a matter of every man for himself. So with other retreating troops, Les set off to walk across some 80 miles (120km) of mountains to the south coast of Crete.

Surviving this arduous journey (aided by gifts of food from Cretans at the risk of their own lives), Les was fortunate to be evacuated by the Royal Navy. Sadly, many men had to be left behind and became prisoners of war.

Of the 252 men in Les' 7th Battery who went to Crete, 55 men were killed and 107 were captured. Les was one of only 90 men who were picked up by the navy.

Les returned to his Regiment in Palestine, eventually returning to Australia because of the threatened Japanese invasion. He served in Western Australia at Exmouth Gulf Submarine Base and at the Onslow RAAF Base.

Having received his Commission as a Lieutenant, Les was transferred to 8th Battery, which commenced training as an airborne anti-aircraft unit to be used at newly captured airstrips.

The unit was never used for this purpose, but the Battery was sent to New Guinea. After attending a Gunnery Course at the Randwick School of Artillery, Les was retained as an Instructor. After the war, Les returned to teaching, eventually rising to the position of Inspector of Schools.

Les retained his contacts with his old Regiment and was a member of the Committee of the Association for many years.

Les was one of the three co-authors, with Cec Rae and



Top: Les Harris (right) with Jack Ecker, Ron Selleck, Bill Malloch, Ken Elder & Laurie Brown on board HMS Kelvin, 1941  
Centre: Les Harris (far left, middle row) and friends.  
Bottom: Les Harris (front seat), 2005 Anzac Day March

Ron Bryant, of the Regiment's history "On Target".

Les also served Melbourne Legacy for 52 years, and assisted the families of deceased veterans, mainly in the education of their dependants.

Arthur Leslie Harris, a modest man of many parts, was a very respected soldier.

*With thanks to Ron and Doreen Bryant.*