



Take Post

April 2012

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



SUDA BAY CEMETERY, CRETE—LEST WE FORGET

In May 2011, Association Research Officer David McDonald and a group of friends and relatives holidayed on the island of Crete. Almost exactly 70 years earlier, the battle for Crete had been fought between allied forces, including the 7th Battery of the 2/3rd ALAA Regiment, and the largest German airborne invasion force ever assembled. David managed to visit many of the Cretan battlefields during his time on Crete, and has kindly recorded his experiences for "Take Post"

In the 2010 issue of *Take Post*, Association Secretary Colin Bragg described the Battle of Crete as follows:

'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



Hill 107, on the ridge above Maleme, and from where huge numbers of German parachutists and gliders were shot out of the sky.

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 Iralion (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.

'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.

(Continued on Page 10)

President's Report—2012 AGM

At a time in the future when the history of the Association is reflected upon I believe two recent years will be considered as milestones in what has been a long and proud history.

The first of those is 2007 when the Committee at that time led so effectively by President Ron Bryant and Secretary John Campbell had to face the reality that despite years of dedicated service time was their new enemy – one that couldn't be stopped with a shell from a Bofors gun.

The decision had to be made whether to either allow the Association to fold, or to put out a 'call to arms', in the hope that the younger generation of the 2/3rd family would step up and ensure the continuance of the Association.

As we are all aware the latter decision was made and at an initial meeting of thirteen in 2007 the Remembrance Group (the name coined by the Committee at that time) was formed charged with the responsibility of taking over the running of the Association. Five years on from that landmark decision the Association continues as a viable entity. Currently membership of the Remembrance Group stands at one hundred – a long way from the small beginnings in 2007.

The significance of this decision to invite the 'younger' generations to form a new administration thereby ensuring the continuation of the Association was brought home to me very clearly on reading the President's report of the 2/12 Australian Field Regiment Members Association which appeared in their 2011 newsletter, ironically also called Take Post.

To quote part of President Dr Hugh Melville's report to members: "It has become obvious that the 2/12th Australian Field Regiment Members Association is running out of steam, as with all such unit associations from WWII. This is simply due to natural causes i.e. deaths and the ever increasing age of its members.

Your Committee determined at its January meeting that at this year's Annual General Meeting on September 29th,

the affairs of the association would cease to function and that the Association would be disbanded".

Dr Melville continues: "This of course includes the production of Take Post which has been such a binding factor in maintaining the 'esprit de corps' of the Association. This issue will therefore be the final issue."

Clearly had it not been for the 'call to arms' made by Ron Bryant and his Committee in 2007 and importantly the positive response to that appeal, our Association may well have been in an identical position.

The second milestone year in the Association's recent history in my opinion is 2011. It was at last year's AGM that the Association website was launched.

Twelve months on the importance of this initiative cannot be overstated. As an interactive communications tool and a vehicle for presenting the 2/3rd story to a whole new audience it is proving to be a wonderful asset.

All credit for the success of this project goes to our tireless Secretary Colin Bragg ably supported by Research Officer David McDonald both of whom have devoted hundreds of hours to making the website a reality.

One associated but very tangible benefit of developing the website has been the many contributions made by members and their families of photographs, documents and other valuable material which may have been lost over time and now thanks to modern technology can be preserved and viewed in an appropriate context. More detail on the website is contained in the Secretary's report.

Together with the launch of the website last year, we were able to announce the digitisation of 'On Target' the increasingly rare book of the Regiment's history. As a result this can now be accessed via the website. These are vital contributions to preserving the history of the Regiment and the Association.

As well as acknowledging the power of work done by Colin and David in establishing and maintaining the website I want to thank the other members of the Committee who continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to

the Association and its members – Vice President Matthew Heddle, Treasurer Ann Bragg, together with Anne Rae and Graeme Heddle.

Congratulations also to Colin for sourcing material and then producing Take Post to a standard that reflects well on our Association.

Sadly each year we lose more of our most treasured asset – our original 2/3rd 'boys'. Amongst those we have lost since last year's AGM were three stalwarts of the Regiment and the Association - 'Banner Man' Dave Thomson, long term (61 years) Association Treasurer John Hepworth, and just last month, immediate Past President Ron Bryant, the driving force behind the formation of the Remembrance Group.

Fortuitously there was a feature article on Dave in last year's Take Post, which he undoubtedly enjoyed contributing to and subsequently reading. A detailed tribute to John, which featured in the Melbourne Age is reprinted in this edition. A summary of Ron's contribution to the Association is also included.

Although the ranks of the original members are thinning what doesn't diminish is the continued support and encouragement the committee receives from our 'vets' and for that I thank them most sincerely.

In summary much has been achieved since this administration was handed the baton in 2007. However there is no room for complacency. In the Secretary's report Colin notes that a number of members have not renewed their membership. This is a concern. If we are to build on the achievements to date and ensure the viability of the Association into the future we need the continued support of all members.

I am confident the Association will receive that support.



From the Secretary's Desk

After over two years of fairly concentrated activity to initially design, then to locate, obtain and scan hundreds of documents and photographs, and finally to upload all the information to the Association's web site, the last twelve months have been a little easier for yours truly and your Committee.

That does not mean we have been able to rest on our laurels, as hardly a week has gone by without the need to respond to members' correspondence and/or requests for information received through our web site. Whilst I have been able to respond to many of these enquiries, I am grateful to have had the support of the Association's Research Officer, David McDonald to deal with the more technical questions

Additionally, and on several occasions throughout the year, I was pleased to be able to meet with Association members who had contacted me to offer access to their family photo albums, and in particular, I have had the pleasure of getting to know John Marshall (7th), Dianne Schubert (daughter of Ern Cope, 8th), Jenny Welsh and Jill McKenzie (daughters of Jack Curry, 7th) and Gwen Tonkin (widow of Roly Tonkin, 7th).

2nd / 3rd Web Site

Over 1,200 photographs and documents now reside on our web site, as does the Power Point presentation prepared by Anne Rae for the 2010 AGM, and the digitised version of the Regiment's history 'On Target'.

All previous issues of "Take Post" are also available on our web site, as is the Regiment history, and minutes of all Committee meetings. Additionally, links to 30 relevant web sites have also been established.

Remembrance Group

Whilst we have been pleased to welcome new members of the Remembrance Group, it is disappointing that a number have not renewed their membership.

I can only trust that these are no more than oversights.

As is always the case, the number of surviving original members of the Regiment is dwindling and there are now only 39 original members of the Regiment, which once numbered 1,935 men.

At the date of preparing this report, the Remembrance Group numbers exactly 100 members.

Over 40 Remembrance Group members attended the 2011 AGM and reunion, as did 8 original members of the Regiment – an excellent outcome considering the clash with Easter. I know the Committee was very pleased and I am sure the former Committee and original members are equally delighted.

SENTRY'S LOG

51 members, including 8 originals, attended the 2011 AGM and Reunion held at the RACV City Club. The originals were Jack Berkley (8), Frank Hands (8), John Campbell (8), Ray Evelyn (9), John Hepworth (8), John Marshall (7), Cec Rae (9) and Dave Thomson (9).

Sadly, Dave Thomson passed away in June 2011 and John Hepworth in October 2011.

President Lynton Rose and myself attended Dave Thomson's funeral in June 2011. John Hepworth's family honoured his request for a private ceremony.

Approximately 25 marched on ANZAC Day, with **Frank Hands (8th)** "marching" in a vintage car. Fortunately, all those present were able to march directly behind our banner, despite the ANZAC Day Commemorations Council (ADCC) directive changing the order of the March.

Dave Humphreys (7th), **Rex Emmett (7th)** and Barbara Wells (daughter of **Charles Heddle, 9th**) all contacted me with offers of photographs, all of which have subsequently been uploaded to the web site.

Similarly, **Frank Hands (8th)** visited me in his "big red van" and brought with him a number of photographs, which have also been added to the web site. See the Frank Hands Story in this issue of "Take Post".

I received a lovely letter and a very

generous donation from Dot Harris (daughter of **Les Harris, 7th**) – thank you Dot, very much appreciated.

Thank you to all who have made donations to the Association, as they help us to defray the costs of producing Take Post and to subsidise the AGM / Annual Reunion costs.

Gwen Tonkin (widow of **Rol Tonkin, 7th**) wrote to me thanking the Association for including her late husband's story in the 2011 edition of Take Post. Thank you Gwen and for giving me the opportunity to access Rol's photo albums.

The "Contact Us" link on our web site started to pay dividends in May 2011, and generated five new Association members and one "lost" original.

In June 2011 Mark Harse (grandson of **Earle Webster (7th)**) contacted me via email. Mark has since become a member of the Association, and I have added Earle to our list of surviving original members – he was not previously included on my Regiment Rolls.

I have subsequently enjoyed speaking with Earle about his experiences.

On a bi-monthly basis, I attend meetings of the Kindred Organisations & Unit Associations Committee, which liaises with the ADCC, and I am pleased to report that the order of the ANZAC Day March arrangements in place up to 2010 has been reinstated, so that veterans and their descendants can march directly behind their Unit banners.

Continued on Page 5



2nd / 3rd Remembrance Group

The Remembrance Group, comprised of direct descendants of original members, was formally established in 2008 and currently has 100 members.

If you are the son or daughter of an original member and/or have children who would like to participate in the activities of the Remembrance Group, please contact Colin Bragg, Honorary Secretary on 03 9592 1642 or 0419 887 820 or send us a message through the "Contact Us" section of the Association's web site.

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



We Will Remember Them

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

VALE

Stanley Baker	(VX34961)	8
Ron Bryant	(VX32563)	8
John Hepworth	(VX45222)	8
William Hopkins	(VX32204)	9
SM Porritt	(VX24330)	8
Phil Roberts	(VX44410)	8
Stanley Rowan	(VX45142)	8
Alan Rundle	(VX58153)	9
Dave Thomson	(VX66754)	9

BATTERY

They shall grow not old,
As we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them,
Nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun,
And in the morning,
We will remember them.

Lest we forget!

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

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

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

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

In 2008, the Remembrance Group was formed to provide for the future carriage of the Association for the descendants of the 1,935 original members of the Regiment.

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

Web Site

www.antiaircraft.org.au

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SENTRY'S LOG (From Page 3)

Dave Humphreys (7th) contacted me in September advising he had been in touch with an historian concerning the War records of his (Dave's) old school (Ballarat College), and that the historian had indicated that the records in Canberra revealed the 2/3rd only had two members killed in action.

As we know that the Regiment suffered 65 KIA, Dave has asked that a younger person than he should rectify the records in Canberra.

Thank you Dave – it will be followed up.

In November 2011, Alistair Dowling (son of **Bob Dowling, 9th**) emailed me from China where he was working, and offered to provide photos taken during his father's time in the Middle East and Milne Bay to the Association. Alistair also advised he has photos of the Regiment and Battery taken at the Geelong Race Course. I look forward to receiving the photos when Alistair returns from China.

In January 2012, the Association obtained electronic copies of the Full Service Records of the Regiment's twelve most senior officers from the National Archives of Australia WW2 Nominal Rolls.

In due course, it is proposed to place appropriately edited versions of these service records on our web site.

During the year, I received correspondence from Rhonda Allison (daughter of **John Allison, 9th**), Peter Roberts (son of **Canon Phil Roberts, 8th**), Bruce Baker (son of **Stanley Baker, 8th**), and Anne Payne (daughter of **John Hepworth, 8th**) notifying the Association their fathers had passed away.

Similarly, the granddaughter of **Alan Rundle (9th)** and the families of **Dave Thomson, (9th)** and **Ron Bryant (8th)** advised me of the passing of these former Regiment members.

You will recall we included Dave Thomson's story, and a couple of excerpts from his Army issued cookbook, in last year's "Take Post"

In January 2012, I was contacted by Katrina Kittel, who is undertaking research into her father's and his fellow POW's wartime history.

Katrina had already been in touch with Bill Rudd, himself a former P.O.W. who has developed his own web site (www.aifpow.com), and Peter Brimacombe (son of ex P.O.W. **Harold Brimacombe, 7th**), but was seeking to contact any surviving members of the Regiment who may have been imprisoned with her father, or the descendants of those who may have been imprisoned with her father.

I have forwarded a letter from Katrina to the four surviving ex-POW's and to Remembrance Group descendants of former POW's.

In due course, Katrina proposes to provide a copy of her research paper to the Association, for uploading to our web site.

Interestingly, I also received an email from Gordon Tootell (son of **Stanley Tootell, 8th**) also seeking information about members of the 2/3rd LAA Regiment who were taken prisoners of war. I was able to refer Gordon to both the AWM website and to Bill Rudd's web site as well as to our own web site which has a link to the Australian Ex-Prisoners Of War Memorial, situated in the Ballarat Botanical Gardens.

Les Whelan (son of Henry Whelan, 2/4th) contacted me in February asking whether we would like a copy of his semi-fictional story of his father's time with the 2/4th in North Africa and New Guinea, and which is based on his father's diaries and poems written by his friends. Whilst Henry Whelan does not appear on our Regimental Rolls, a large number of the 2/3rd 7th Battery were transferred to the 2/4th when it was raised in the Middle East in 1941, which explains the close connection between the 2/3rd and the 2/4th.

The Henry Whelan story has been added to our web site and may be found under "Take Post", "Full Versions Of Take Post Articles"

Extracts from Russell Luckock's (son of **Charles Luckock, 9th**) paper regarding the experiences of the 2/4th at El Alamein in 1942, which appeared in last year's "Take Post", commented that whilst the article was not specifically about the 2/3rd, "the desert was the same for all".

I was pleased to be contacted by Captain Michael Squire, the current instructor in Gunnery for Ground Based Air Defence in the Royal Australian Artillery, and who asked "Given that the 2/3rd LAA Regt had such a marked experience across many campaigns of WW2, I should very much like to focus on their battle experiences if there is any way in which we could organise for my four Lieutenants and I to chat with some of the veterans of the Air Defence battles".

We are working with Capt. Squire to finalise a meeting between he and his officers and a number of our veterans who are resident in Melbourne

Because the Regiment History recorded in "On Target" is now accessible through our web site, I was able to refer Captain Squire and his officers to the site so they would have an appreciation of the experiences and activities of the 2/3rd.

We hope to have the meeting shortly after the 2012 Reunion.

The past year, with its different emphasis, has been both informative and enjoyable – and I continue to be gratified by the interest in and the support for the web site from both members and the general public.

Information about former Regiment members, be it anecdotes, stories, extracts of diaries and/or letters and/or photographs that individual families have, is always appreciated.

In particular, I have been very pleased to receive and to include extracts from the personal diaries and recollections of Ern Cope and Vern Maxwell in this edition of "Take Post"

Thank you to you all for your continuing support and encouragement and your ongoing interest in the affairs of the Association.

Colin Bragg

Frank Hands 8 Battery Soldier, Jeweller, Traveller

Born in June 1919 in Murrumbidgee, Frank loved watching the steam trains prior to the electrification of the rail line.

Frank left school in 1935 and became an apprentice jeweller, working in his father's jewellery business in the Beehive Building in Melbourne.

In March 1940, Frank joined a volunteer searchlight unit at Maribyrnong where he served for three months, but in August 1940, Frank and some of his buddies joined the AIF.

He did his basic training at Puckapunyal from August to December 1940, and went by train to Sydney where he boarded the Queen Mary en route to the Middle East.

Frank recalls that both the Queens (Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth) were in Sydney Harbour at the time and made a very impressive site.

He also recounted that the only armament on the Queen Mary was a single Bren gun at each end of the ship to ward off aircraft. Because of the speed of the Queen Mary, she did not require destroyers or cruisers to protect her from enemy ships.

Frank disembarked at Suez Canal and arrived at Hill 95 by train, where he trained on Lewis guns.

Frank and the other semi-trained reinforcements with him were to be sent to Crete, but events on Crete precluded this happening and Frank joined up with the Tobruk component of the 8th Battery of the 2nd/3rd and 7th Battery survivors from Crete.

The Battery was trained on Bofors guns and was fitted out for jungle warfare.

Frank recalls that the predictors used to aim the Bofors were "complicated".

At Easter 1942, the Battery embarked on the S.S. Andes en route for Java.

The "Andes" was armed with Bofors guns at the bow and the stern. When they arrived at Colombo, there were 52 vessels in the harbour. Convoys of between 8 and 10 vessels sailed for Java, but because of the increasing Japanese activity,

Frank's convoy was diverted to Adelaide, where he recalls he "hung around Adelaide for a while".

As a consequence of the Japanese bombing of Broome, Frank's Battery was sent to Western Australia, where they were initially located at Pelican Point on the Swan River to provide protection for the Catalina Flying Boat Squadron, which flew long distance missions between Perth and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

Frank thought that the Americans were lovely people, and remembers that they helped to construct the Bofors gun pits and welcomed members of the 2nd/3rd into their mess.

In late 1942, Frank was transferred to Pearce Air Base and subsequently to Moonyoonooka, inland from Geraldton.

Frank recalls that they were never hungry because "there were plenty of rabbits", which were trapped by Arthur Wright (a local farmer) or were attracted by Arthur's "rabbit whistle" made from a tobacco tin.

Some members of the Battery would seek out wild beehives for their honey, which was used as a substitute for sugar that simply was not available.

Frank recalled that Arthur Wright had

the movies). According to Frank, Shirley organised the wedding and all he had to do was to turn up. Frank and Shirley were married at St. Johns, Toorak in July 1944.

From Townsville, Frank was posted to Garbutt Aerodrome near Brisbane and subsequently to Charters Towers where his crew manned 25 pounders.

Charters Towers was referred to as the "Gestapo Camp" because of the 30 kilometre route marches ordered by the Commanding Officer..

Frank recalls that on one of these route marches, he and Warrant Officer Murphy detoured to a beach on the river after about 3 kilometres and there they stayed until it was time to return.

Post War

Frank's father had started a jewellery business in the Block Arcade in 1915, but relocated the business to Carnegie during the Depression.

In 1935 he moved back into the city and established his business on the eighth floor of the Beehive Building.

Frank joined his father, who renamed the business AW Hands & Sons.

Frank's brother was a dental mechanic and they worked side by side for many years.



Buna gun crew, including Colin McNaughton, G. Young, Roy Farr, W. Weston and Sgt. G. Davies

four daughters, and when members went on leave, they all wanted to visit Arthur's farm. Arthur apparently sat on his porch when the boys came visiting – with a shotgun on his knee!

At the end of 1943, Frank was sent Buna for a period of about six months, and in mid-1944 he was posted to Townsville.

He proposed to his wife Shirley by telegram (after a single date to

Frank worked until he was 80 years old, at which point he sold the business, but continues to work part-time from home.

Traveling Man

In 1961 Frank purchased a VW Kombi van so that he and Shirley could travel around Australia.



Frank's Big Red Mercedes Van, 400,000+ miles.

The Kombi was replaced with a Mercedes camper van in the mid-1960's at the then cost of \$4,000, and in which initially Frank and Shirley and subsequently Frank and a friend, travelled over 400,000 miles around Australia, including Alice Springs, Longreach, Ayers Rock and across the Nullabor.

In his own words, Frank has been "around Australia, across Australia and through Australia."

Frank has always had a special interest in Central Australia, and the Mercedes was the ideal way to fulfill his interest.

Frank, now 92, still owns and drives the Mercedes.

Frank also owned a 1926 Bullnose Morris and became an inaugural member of the Vintage Drivers Club (formerly the Vintage Morris Club) in 1958.

His Morris featured on the cover of the Centenary Vintage Driver's Club magazine 1958 – 1985.



Frank Hands "marching" in the 2011 ANZAC Day March

AWM Mobile Breda Display

For former Secretary John Campbell's 80th birthday, his son Bruce shouted him a visit to the War Memorial in Canberra to see the Tobruk display, in particular the mobile 20mm Italian Breda mounted on the tray of a Chevrolet truck. Initiated by Major Phil Stokes (8th), some gun crews used this method of mobility whilst retreating from Benghazi.



John Campbell in front of the mobile Breda display at the AWM in Canberra.

Ernest Sidney Cope, 9 Battery, VX50624, Recollections As Recorded In The National Archives

Editor's Note: I am grateful to Dianne Schubert for providing me with a copy of the interview her father, Ern Cope, recorded as part of the National Archives Audio History Program in 2003. Space dictated that the following article be heavily edited. The full version may be viewed on our web site.

Ernest Cope was born in Moe on the 15th of September 1915.

The family owned and worked properties in Camperdown, Warnambool and finally Yering. Ern was the middle child. Walter, his older brother, left the family farm to attend technical school in Warnambool and his younger brother Albert, stayed to work the family farm.

Before the war, Ern also remained on the family farm to work. By the time the war came in late 1939 his father had started work at Mildura making pipes and had left the farm in the care of Ern and Albert. Ern decided to join the Army to do his bit, and so the Cope lads decided to sell the farm at Yering.

Following the sale, Ern, wanting to do his share, joined the AIF (6 March 1941) and entered first the Tank Corps, then transferred into the 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, serving with 9 Battery. Albert also enlisted, and went to New Guinea. Walter did not enlist, but he worked in a munitions factory.

With the Army, Ern trained at Puckapunyal for about three months. He embarked on the Queen Mary from Sydney, which took his unit to the Middle East, where he fought until the Japanese entered the war.

When the Australian forces were extracted from the Middle East and North Africa to face the Japanese in the Pacific and Asia, Ern's unit was lodged in private homes in Adelaide and set up their Batteries there.

They subsequently went to Perth and then to Geraldton and Onslow, and to New Guinea, where elements of the Regiment, after it was disbanded, saw service in the Buna and Gona campaign.

The unit finally served in Borneo before returning to Australia after the war's



Ernest Sidney Cope

end. Before Ern left the Army he worked at an Army surplus store selling off extra rations, blankets, tents and vehicles. In this way he bought various Army blankets, tents and beds for his family, and later, two Stuart tanks, which he used to clear his block in Gruyere for dairying.

When Ern and his brother returned to civilian life they worked at Noogee and Toolangi cutting and carting pulp wood, and in this business they used Army surplus trucks. Ern married during this time and he bought the farm at Gruyere, which he developed as a dairy farm - carrying on his father's profession.

There was a run-in with the government in 1972 over the clearing of the Cope property, which was situated in a newly declared 'Green belt.' The Copes fought against the restrictions and continued to clear land for farming, which was necessary if they were to gain any income.

Ultimately, an agreement was reached and no action was taken.

Regarding his war service, if given the chance again to make the decision to go or not to go, Ern would choose to stay home, but he wanted to do the best thing for the country at the time.

One final point of importance regarding the tolls and benefits of military service: because Ern served with the anti-aircraft gunners, he experienced noise levels that damaged his hearing. The damage could have been prevented, or at least reduced, by issuing earmuffs or earplugs to the gun crews. (Continued on Page 14)

VALE JOHN ALBERT HEPWORTH, OBE 31/10/1919 — 26/10/2011

John Hepworth was a member of the Association from its inception in 1945 and was its Honorary Treasurer from 1948 until 2009. The Association appreciates the opportunity to reprint John's obituary, prepared by his daughter Anne Payne and Frank Bennett of the Melbourne Age, and which appeared in The Age on 28 February 2012.



John Albert Hepworth OBE
31.10.1919-26.10.2011

John Hepworth, one of the Rats of Tobruk in World War II, who went on to carve out a distinguished career in commerce and community work in Melbourne, died in his sleep at his city apartment. He was 5 days short of his 92nd birthday.

John held many significant positions in his business career, including chairman of the boards of Alfred Lawrence Holdings, the Gordon & Gotch group and R.H.P. Australia.

He retired from Deloitte Haskins & Sells in 1982 as partner-in-charge of the Melbourne office.

John was also on the board of several other firms, and a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia, becoming national president in 1974-75, and a life member in 1978. From 1974 to 1980, he was the Australian representative on the International Accounting Standards Committee, serving as its world chairman in 1978-80 – a first for Australia.

An active member of the Rotary Club of Melbourne from 1968 until his death, John was Club President in 1981-82.

John Hepworth embodied the international Rotary motto of "Service Above Self". Perhaps his most significant community service was his time on the board of management of the Austin Hospital, beginning in July 1966 at a critical point in the hospital's development.

He became the hospital's treasurer after two years and then vice-president / treasurer before becoming president of the Austin from 1974 to 1979 – a time that coincided with the hospital's expansion and integration with Melbourne University as a teaching institution.

This included establishing the clinical school and the merger of university people in key hospital positions, a process characterized as "traumatic" by one of his Austin colleagues. There were many challenges, but the Hepworth style and skill contributed greatly to the board's success in establishing the Austin as one of Australia's most progressive hospitals.

John was awarded an OBE in 1980 in "public recognition of his service to accounting and to the community, particularly the Austin Hospital".

The eldest of four siblings, John was born in Melbourne to his Belgian-born English father, Noel, and New Zealand born, Australia-raised mother, Pamela (née Hudson). Pamela was serving as an Australian Army nurse in India when she met Noel, a British (India) Army officer and they married in Poona (Pune) in July 1918 before returning to Australia.

John attended Caulfield Grammar from 1926 to 1937 and was prefect and dux of the school in his final year. He studied commerce at Melbourne University while working at the accounting firm W. H. Tuckett and Sons.

When World War II began in 1939, he enlisted in the 2nd/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, 2nd AIF, and in December 1940 was posted to North Africa, where he served for nine months as a gunner in the Tobruk salient.

As one of a hardy band of besieged Australian soldiers (along with British and Polish troops) – called collectively the Desert Rats – they came under severe and continuous attack by the German Afrika Korps and Luftwaffe.

Following Tobruk he was sent on leave to Palestine, where he began a lifelong interest in the origins of Christianity.

In 1942, after the Japanese attacked in south-east Asia, John Hepworth returned to Australia with the 6th Division and was commissioned as an officer.

Posted to Western Australia, he met Patricia Kiver, whom he married in September 1943.

At that time, he was assigned to the 53rd Australian Composite Anti-Aircraft Regiment, and was posted to New Guinea and Morotai, and participated in the invasion of Balikpapan in Dutch Borneo in July 1945.

Leaving the army in 1946, John returned to W. H. Tuckett while completing his Bachelor of Commerce at Melbourne University. (As a result of mergers, Tuckett eventually became Deloitte Haskins & Sells during John's time there.)

By 1949, his intelligence, hard work and a congenial nature ensured he was a partner in the firm, later becoming senior partner and going on to be partner-in-charge.

His many other roles included, from 1959 to 1979, treasurer of Caulfield Grammar School (where a new building bears his name), treasurer and deputy-Chairman of the Anti-Cancer Institute (1973-82), and President of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute (1988-92).

In later life, helped by his daughter, Anne, he nursed Pat through a long and difficult illness until she died in 2007.

Although increasingly frail in his final years, he continued to attend Rotary and meetings of the Accounting Standards Committee in Australia.

John was a member of the Naval and Military, Athenaeum and Australian clubs.

His daughter Anne Payne, son Douglas, five grandchildren, 10 great grandchildren and siblings Prue and Rob survive him. His brother Bill predeceased him.

IN THE BEGINNING.....

Editor's Note: Several decades before former President Ron Bryant initiated the first issue of "Take Post" (in 1988) as a means of communicating with members, the Association produced a "Regimental Bulletin". Amongst the various files and folders I inherited on becoming Association Secretary was one particularly dog-eared folder containing ten "Regimental Bulletins" produced between July 1946 and March 1956.

Dates on the "Bulletins" indicate they were initially produced on a quarterly basis. Sadly many are missing from the period 1946 – 1956 in my custody, and I have no idea whether they continued to be produced after March 1956. They are an important part of the early history of our Association, and should anyone have any more of these little gems, your Secretary will be happy to assume custodianship of them. Extracts from these early "Regimental Bulletins" are reproduced for your information and entertainment.

It is important to understand that these Bulletins were produced long before the term 'Political Correctness' was on our radars!

In due course, all ten in my possession will be uploaded to our web site.

26 July 1946

Dear Blokes,

We have had numerous requests for a Bulletin containing the latest GG (*gossip*) concerning our activities and our members - so here goes!

Since last writing, the Regiment foregathered at an Anzac Eve re-union. We had a muster of 300 members. Ballarat Bertie was present, through the good offices of the Coghlan Brothers, and added to the evening's entertainment. The ear-bashing was terrific. A few talented members attempted to give items but their efforts were drowned in the din. We were very pleased to have present some whom we had not been able to contact directly; at the same time, we were disappointed at the absence of some we had confidently anticipated would be present.

At the last meeting of your Committee it was decided to hold a dance during Show Week. The time was chosen with a view to enabling our country members to attend. Details for a really good night are now being arranged and we

will forward full particulars very shortly.

The question of holding a Smoke Night at Cup time was also under consideration. We would appreciate a few opinions from members on the subject.

DANDENONG BOOMS. The BOOMER is making daily trips to Dandenong to uphold law and order in that hamlet. Get stuck into them John!

BRAB LOCKWOOD (9 Bty) can be seen raking in the shekels at the Royal Bank Branch of the E.S. & A. Bank. After his prodigious efforts at balancing the Canteen funds at SIDI BARRANI, he is finding banking easy.

With a tinge of shame, the Committee has to confess that their Secretary, JERRY HAINES (7 Bty) has recently become a grandfather. He still appears to be in full possession of all his faculties.

The Mildura contingent which arrived for the first reunion was not in evidence on Anzac Eve. We hope that their enthusiasm has not dried up like their fruit. They can't have dried up completely because word is to hand that KARL KOSKA (7 Bty) and ROL TONKIN (7 Bty) have both produced gunners.

19 November 1946

LATEST HATCHINGS:

Pride of place must definitely go to EL-LIS KELLY (7 Bty) for producing 'twin Bofors' – two baby girls.

There seems to have been an influx of the female sex, for proud fathers of baby daughters are:

MAX CANNING (9 Bty)

CROW RILEY (RHQ)

TREVOR OWENS (9 Bty)

HARRY ANDERSON (9 Bty)

GEOFF WATSON (8 Bty)

It took an 8 Bty man (GEORGE GOWTY) to do the trick and produce a Gunner. We now hear that TOM TOOTELL (RHQ & 7 Bty) has followed his example.

TOM HAWKES (8 Bty) has been appointed Chairman of Geelong Racing Club. He is believed to be the first returned man from WW2 to be elected Chairman of a Racing Club in Victoria.

Since Bernborough has been transferred to the stud, students of racing form are eagerly following TOM HAWKES' "Jungle Trail" and the COGHLAN'S mystery horse which they have named "Ack-Ack".

PHIL HAUSER (a typical RQMS if ever there was one) has returned to his store at Redcliffs. This rationing business should be right into his barrow. Remember the queues at Werribee?

8 April 1947

HITCH-UPS

GRIFF WEATHERLY (9 Bty) stole the limelight when he married Miss Russell in an atmosphere of mediaeval splendour.

CLIVE LANGDON (8 Bty) strengthened Regimental ties when he married a sister of DALE CROOKE (9 Bty).

CHARLIE SALEH (9 Bty) otherwise known as "Schnozzle" married Miss Margaret Shirra. Here is a chance to secure some quality oarsmen.

PADDY OMAN (9 Bty) has wed and from all accounts, settled down to respectable married life. After this we feel that while there's life there's hope.

BOB PHILLIPS (8 Bty) married "PLONK" STEVENS' (8 Bty) sister. This is a real Battery affair.

CHARLIE LITTLE (an ex P.O.W. of 8 Bty) recently got hitched up at Benalla.

JACK MORPHET (ex P.O. W. of 7 Bty) was recently spliced. No details available.

June 1947

Despite the inclement weather, just on 300 rolled up which gave conclusive evidence as to the loyalty of our mates to the old Regiment.

The evening was voted, by all, to have been the best we have had yet, and we aim, with your help, to make the next one still better. Noticed among the gathering were fellows from as far north as Mildura and as far south as Warnambool, to say nothing of the large attendance from Gippsland.

As well as the usual "ear-bashing", 'Ballarat Bertie' received his share of attention (and in some cases, more than his share).

On ANZAC Day a large gathering of our members, headed by the old C.O. – John Rhoden - marched behind the Regimental Colors.

From the Apple Isle, where "Cascade" Brand reigns supreme we have news of Jim Paton (9 Bty) who is with the Union Bank at Launceston. (*Ann Bragg, current Treasurer, and daughter of Jim Paton, was born in Launceston during Jim's tenure in that fair city.*)

From Page 1

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.'

May 2011, the 70th anniversary of the Battle

Having a commitment in Western Europe at the end of May 2011, I found myself (along with my partner Noela and three other relatives and friends) spending a fortnight's holiday on Crete in early May 2011. We stayed for a week at a cottage high in the hills behind Heraklion (the capital of Crete) and a second week in a cottage on a ridge overlooking Suda Bay, further west along the north coast. Considering the achievements and sacrifices of the men of 7 Battery, and of other units of the Australian, New Zealand, British and Cretan forces involved in the Battle, along with the Cretan civilians who played such an important part in both the fighting and in protecting allied servicemen after the German occupation of the island, I was keen to visit the battlefields and war memorials.



Association Research Officer David McDonald in front of the Hellenic Australian Memorial in Rethymno, dedicated on the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Crete in 2001.

Heraklion

Heraklion (also known as Iraklio) is a busy port city. It contains almost half of Crete's population. All day and night, ferries, from little coastal ones to huge vessels carrying hundreds of passengers, cars and trucks, come and go from this busy port. The city was largely flattened by German bombing in May 1941, though there are few signs of that now. Members of B and C Troops of 7 Battery were based at Heraklion, defending its airport: 5 officers and 100 men with eight 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns. Following the German invasion, the garrison was evacuated by sea on 28/29 May 1941, with terrible loss of life when the destroyer *Hereward* was sunk, and the light cruiser *Dido* damaged. 7 Battery men were on both ships.

In the heart of the city, near the old port, is the Historical Museum of Crete containing disturbing photos of the city ruined by bombing. Nearby is the small, privately-operated, Battle of Crete Museum. Some of its displays help one to understand how the German airborne invasion worked, and the impacts on the Allied forces and civilians.

Also downtown is the impressive Heraklion RSL Memorial, a photo of which is in Colin's 2010 *Take Post* article.

Stavromenos

About 70 km west of Heraklion, along the coast, is Stavromenos, a village where Australian and Greek forces held back the German paratroop invasion for a period. In 1975 the local community erected the Australian Memorial there to commemorate the joint sacrifices of the Australian and Greeks, and in 1977 the Australian Government presented two Bofors guns, of the type used by 7 Battery, for installation at the Memorial. It was being painted and tidied-up when we visited, in preparation for the official 70th anniversary commemorations that were to take place a week or two later.

Rethymno

Another 12 kilometres west along the coast is the delightful town of Rethymno. As the Lonely Planet guide points out, this small city 'prides itself on being the cultural capital of the island with a rich musical tradition and its historic importance during the Renaissance'. Again, the old port and fortress area are fascinating spots to visit, and the seafood is a delight! Although 7 Battery was not posted to this battlefield, Rethymno is a must-visit because there is located the Hellenic Australian War Memorial Park. It was dedicated on 19 May 2001, the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Crete. A beautiful memorial in a tranquil setting, surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the city.



The impressive memorial at Stavromenos, showing one of the two Bofors guns flanking the memorial.

Suda Bay

Another 50 km west along the coast brings the visitor to Suda (Souda). Here a section of A Troop of 7 Battery was based: 2 officers and 40 men with 2 Bofors guns.

Although the town is not of much interest to the visitor, the nearby Suda Bay Commonwealth War Cemetery certainly is. Some 1,500 Commonwealth servicemen are buried or commemorated in the cemetery. Half of the burials are unidentified but bear the inscription *A soldier of the 1939-1945 war. Known unto God.* 197 Australian war dead lie there, including some from 7 Battery. As an example, I paused at the grave of 7 Battery's VX44655 Gunner D. Layton, killed in action on 24 May 1941, aged 26 years. His headstone reads *Fearless he fought beneath a deeper sky and peerless fell.*

As noted above, we stayed in a cottage with views straight down onto Suda Bay. While we were there, warships made regular voyages into and out of the bay, and I kept reflecting on the contrast between the peaceful scene below me, and the horrors of the battle and evacuation from Crete.

Maleme

24 km further west along the coast brought us to Maleme. At its airfield A troop of 7 Battery (less the section at Suda) established defences at the airport, a narrow strip running along the sea-shore: three officers and 80 men, with 4 Bofors guns. On the ridge above the town is the beautifully laid out German war cemetery. From there I walked further uphill, through groves of olive trees, to the site of Hill 107 from which the German parachutists and troop- and equipment-carrying gliders landing at the airstrip were shot out of the sky in huge numbers.



No. 1 Gun Crew Maleme 1941—Stan Watkin, Les Harris, Ron Selleck, Norm McDonald (standing), Jack Ecker, Rupert Charles, Gordon Hewitt. The aircraft in the background are U.S Brewster Buffaloes.

Battle casualties

The information board at the Suda Bay War Cemetery includes the information that '...of the total Commonwealth force on Crete of 32,000 men, 18,000 were evacuated, 12,000 taken prisoner and 2,000 killed'. The Australians among them were 271 killed in action, 18 presumed dead, 25 died of wounds, 265 wounded in action and 3,079 taken prisoner of war, a total of 3,618 battle casualties. 7 Battery losses were 49 men killed in action, 2 presumed dead, 4 died of wounds, 14 wounded in action and 106 taken prisoner of war, a total of 175 battle casualties out of a total Battery strength of about 240 men.

Other matters

We also had the privilege of visiting other parts of Crete of importance to the Regiment's combat experiences. We drove from Suda south into the central ranges, following the road that the allied servicemen walked and fought along, desperately trying to get to the south coast in the hope of being taken off from there by the Royal Navy. We sailed along part of the south coast in a ferry, from the mouth of Samaria Gorge to the embarkation point (for some of the men) at Sfakia.

Unfortunately I was not able to stay on for the official ceremonies commemorating the 70th anniversary, owing to other commitments. Information, including photos of the commemoration, is online at http://www.dva.gov.au/news_archive/2011/Pages/may.aspx.

Videos marking the event are at <http://video.defence.gov.au/?mediaId=70168191-404a-41d8-9f97-30ac1d98ae45#searchterm,o,crete,All>.

A final word.

The Cretan people were really warm and generous to us, especially the older folk whom we met in the countryside. One day, strolling through a village, a chap said to me in broken English, 'You German?'. I replied 'O'hi, Afstralia' (No, Australian). He beamed with delight, threw his arms around me, and wanted to spend the rest of the day plying me with *raki*, the local fire-water! This highlights the closeness of Australians and Cretans, comradeship forged in battle and its aftermath.

Further information

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*, 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association, [Melbourne], <http://antiaircraft.org.au/about-us/on-target/on-target>. And see other books on the Battle in the annotated bibliography at the Association's website: <http://antiaircraft.org.au/about-us/bibliography> and photos of 7 Battery in action at the photo gallery <http://antiaircraft.org.au/photo-gallery/-images/crete>.

VALE RON BRYANT (VX32563)



Born on 11 October 1918, former President Ron Bryant passed away on Tuesday 27 March 2012. A member of the Committee for 20 years and President from 2002 to 2008, Ron will probably be best remembered as one of the co-authors of "On Target", for initiating "Take Post" in 1988 and for orchestrating the passing of the baton to the "Younger Generation" in 2007. A member of the 8th Battery, he served in the Middle East and in New Guinea, before being transferred to the 2/2nd Composite A-A Regiment. Ron's final tour of duty

was to spend the six months aboard HMAS Westralia bringing troops home from the Pacific Islands. Ron's full story may be found in the 2003 issue of "Take Post".

The Benghazi Retreat and the Siege Of Tobruk —The Personal Diary Of Vernon Eric Maxwell (VX25365)

Editor's Note: A couple of years ago, Eric Maxwell, son of Vernon Eric Maxwell, 8th Battery, sent me extracts of his father's diary written during the retreat from Benghazi (known as the Benghazi Handicap) and siege of Tobruk. Eric also sent me photographs taken during the same period, as well as explanatory comments provided by former Secretary John Campbell, the late Dick Hawting and Vern's late brother-in-law Bill Schack - all from 8th Battery and all of whom served with Vern - after the diaries were transferred to a computer. The full extract of Vern's diary has been placed on our web site as have all the photos. Thank you Eric for providing this very personal insight of your father's experiences and observations.



Vernon Eric Maxwell, August 1940

MARCH 17th 1941 MONDAY

Dug a funk hole for the ringmaster, very little else. Had early morning air raid - dropped about a dozen bombs' some not far away, hit main road. (John - Funk Hole - a foxhole or small bomb shelter)

MARCH 18th TUESDAY

Continued with the funk hole in the morning. Shifted out onto the mole (outcrop of low rock jutting into the harbour) to take over some old gun for field defence or rather harbour defence. Reeled out of bed at 4:30, more HUNS (Jerry), counted twelve this morning.

(Bill - Vern and Bill were fixing two naval guns.)

MARCH 19th WEDNESDAY

Took a turn on air sentry starting at 3am. Had to call the boys out at 4:30 to listen to a dozen or so bombs explode and a few planes flying around. Cleaned two three pounder Howitzer guns ready for firing. Goodness knows what will happen to them when the first shot is fired. They are so old. We are what you call patching.

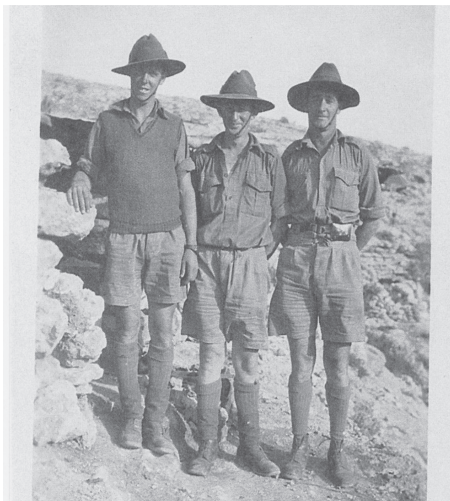
MARCH 20th THURSDAY

Started on leave but didn't get any further than HQ, as we have to go back and test the new toys - See if they fire

or blow the back off. Hope the back comes off first shot or not at all. Fired guns and they worked but goodness knows what use they would be. Went on leave a little after eleven. Went in with the officers - saved walking. Didn't stay long; Bill wasn't feeling too well. Landed back and had a sleep, ready for the night on watch.

MARCH 21st 1941 FRIDAY

Cold and windy, waves breaking over the mole. Likely to get wet to the skin any moment outside. Came off watch at six and helped with breakfast, the one nearest gets meals. Porridge (crushed biscuits soaked then made hot with milk) bacon and beans (tins) plenty of bread, very little butter and next door to no jam, Plenty of oranges. Wind got worse as day went on; by night, waves were breaking thirty or more feet above mole. We all shifted out back to HQ.



Bill Schack, Cecil Palmer and Vern outside a dugout in a Wadi not long before they moved up to Benghazi.

MARCH 23rd SUNDAY

Did usual shifts during night, nothing happened. Cleaned up new home, a great place too. Had a good hot bath, have electric light, bath and heater, stove, in fact everything of a modern home, sounds too good to last, still the unexpected does happen sometimes. They can leave me here as long as they like, only one thing wrong with the

place - sleep alone with a photo at the head of the bed if those lips could only speak, if those eyes could only see.....

MARCH 27th 1941 THURSDAY

Had breakfast with the Poms. Packed the blankets and went back to the hospital to see Lt. Jorgensen and Sgt. Davis. Afterwards we had a look around Barce, then set off back to Benghazi about 11 am. Stopped on the road and had something to eat (bread and salmon). Arrived at Benghazi at 1 pm, stayed there for a couple of hours, then back to camp only to find that my things had been moved back to HQ, so here we go again.

(Bill - Moved back to B.H.Q. in the afternoon, drove a Fiat truck 70 miles towards the front line. Had a terrible trip, a bit of a smash - hit a telegraph post when being towed in pitch black. Arrived home at 7:30am.)

MARCH 28th 1941 FRIDAY

Did very little all day. Set up my things, some were here, others were back at where we came from; otherwise did a few odd jobs, nothing worth mentioning.

(Bill - Made some bombs and blew up some fish. Ten soldiers shared 70 tins of fruit, 13 tins of milk and 50 oranges.

Third Fiat out of action - probably clutch.)

APRIL 2nd 1941 WEDNESDAY

Everyone sitting around waiting for the word; most kits loaded, still no sign of movement at midday. Four crews left early for *Regena. Felt sick all day. 6:30 all trucks loaded and scattered all around the roads. Goodness knows when we will move off. Jerry is keeping a watch on movements. Two recco planes were over half an hour ago. 8.15. Told to take our blankets inside for the night, so here we are - what's next.

*** Regena - Allied Aerodrome**

APRIL 3rd 1941 THURSDAY

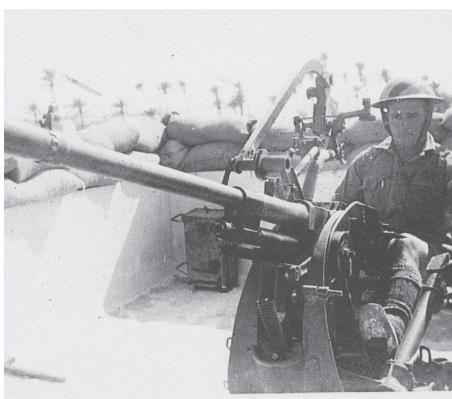
Retreat from Benghazi. Smoke from fire could be seen 50 miles away. 6:30 air raid siren going, we are given half an hour to get out, no planes about hut; we loaded our kit as quick as possible and left under clouds of smoke with explosions all around from all important buildings. All guns and ammo blown up.

All our surplus went up beside us. Stopped outside Benghazi to wait for all the trucks. The road was crowded with trucks going both ways, mostly back. Stopped for the night about 12 kilos out of Barce. Very slow going as so much traffic. Stopped once because of planes, even the wells along the road were destroyed.

(John - they did not fire on the recco planes as it would given their positions away).

APRIL 5th SATURDAY

Had a good night's sleep, packed all kits on trucks early in morning, ready to move if necessary. Left about gam, headed across country on about the dustiest road I have ever seen. We all rode on the top of the cabin, set up guns in one place then shifted inland along main route to Alex. to the bunch again; gun set to guard Div. HQ.



Vern on the Breda gun on the roof of the "Feud Ratios" Customs House in Benghazi, March 1941.

Went for a trip an hour later to 20th Brig. for four trucks; had to wait around for them to come from goodness knows where, but they took long enough about it. Roads heavy, some infantry on the march, dozens of Hurricanes on patrol. Arrived back at mid-night after a lot of travelling about.

APRIL 6th SUNDAY

Still trying to get the trucks into their place, walked for miles from one to another. Finally got them set, so that earns a sleep as I went to bed last night (2am) and was up at daylight. Trucks into night crews only for a few hours. 4pm on the run again, given 2 hours to pack and get out. Had to dump some of the heaviest gear as some trucks went to withdraw infantry. Left at 1:44 along a deserted road, caught up to traffic later; travelled all night across desert to avoid being cut off. Hundreds of trucks of all sorts doing the same, stopped at sunrise and had a cup of

tea.

(Bill - Bill attached to 56th. Brigade H.Q. Travelling towards Derna, roads blown up. Very tired after driving several nights and often part of the day. Truck not going the best).

APRIL 9th 1941 WEDNESDAY

Woke up by the sound of planes at dawn, several planes attacked Tobruk. Half an hour later twelve German planes made another attack. All passed over us both ways. In a while they were throwing the lead around here. We brought one down amongst us, others were further away, a lively half hour. Went to bed with the noise of field guns one side and the continual flash of heavy and light A-A as planes attacked Tobruk. Field guns and trucks going up in lines, stopped for the night about four miles out of Tobruk.

(Bill - Front Line position, Germans on our wheel. About 11 o'clock, 12 - 18 Messerschmitts were on their way to Tobruk; coming back, they machine gunned us - we fired, bringing 2 down. With the heavies, the total was 6. At 6 o'clock there started an artillery duel and Jerry's shells were dropping up to 100 yards from us. No shave and one wash in 14 days.)

APRIL 14th MONDAY

Called out of bed to pack as some tanks have broken through at * El Adam. It's all right to pack but where to go. Just finished when flares appeared. In a few minutes there were more flares than flies coming from all directions. Bombs were dropped all around. Later we were ordered to put on equipment and get a supply of ammo to act as support for our Bren guns. Went to all gun positions during afternoon to issue webbing; had three raids during time. Finished the day cleaning anti-tank guns.

**First major attack on Tobruk - German tanks almost reached the junction of El-Adam and Bardia Roads. El Adam was in this area.*

JULY 28th MONDAY

Artillery active this morning. They decided today that I was in the wrong crew, so another shift was necessary. This time to the most forward gun toward fig tree (approx. 1,000 metres from perimeter). Artillery all round, firing at intervals. Very active in the evening - quiet night except for the fleas and rats.

AUGUST 2nd 1941 SATURDAY

Went out to position again. Had to stop for a while on way out as shells were falling. Another lot came in about

11:30 all round us, some as close as six feet. Some more came after dinner. One of the Sigs was hit. We went out to help and another shell came over. A bit hit me on the shoulder - both of us went to R.A.P. Other chap died. I went back in stages to HQ. Half an hour after arriving, the place was



Italian ammunition dump blowing up after being hit by German bombs inside the Tobruk perimeter.

bombed, some wounded.

(Bill - Six bombs landed 5 yards from the dugout and a half a chain from Bill's tent. Vern wounded during the day. A few of Bill's Geelong coppers were killed.)

AUGUST 12th 1941 TUESDAY

Shifted down to 2/5 Field Hospital at docks hospital 2:30, stayed there until 12, then went onto a destroyer. Left Tobruk half an hour later. Bombs fell near destroyer as we went out.

AUGUST 19th 1941 TUESDAY

Goodness only knows why they can't get any decent food in this place, more like a rest camp in the desert than a hospital. Another convoy landed in to-night. To be hoped they get some extra rations and not share the bit they already have.

AUGUST 21st THURSDAY

Another convoy arrived this morning, some going also, none from this motel (Hospital ward). Meals much improved



Vern Maxwell and mate (unknown) on top of dugout. The truck where Vern was hit by shrapnel rescuing an injured Sigs can be seen in the background.

Recollections Of Ernest Sidney Cope, 9 Battery, VX50624, (continued)

In compensation after the war, the government provided hearing aids to the returned gunners.

A FEW OF ERN'S STORIES

On the old farm at Yering: "We used to send the milk to Melbourne on the train that came from Healesville. The funny thing about that was the horses that were used to bring the carts down (to bring the milk). When the train left for Melbourne it would start blowing the whistle. And the moment they'd blow the whistle those horses used to gallop - they'd got that used to the whistle. And you'd see them galloping down to meet the train."

"If the war didn't come up, I'd have just gone on farming."

"I was against all this fighting, and I wanted to do my share."

"I went to Puckapunyal for a while, about three months I guess. We got on the Queen Mary, we went to Sydney - the Queen Mary couldn't get into Melbourne because it wasn't deep enough. Then we went over to the Middle East."

Training: "Using a rifle, teaching us how to spot and fire a rifle. At Puckapunyal I remember we went marching through the open paddocks there. They used to have the big guns up there."

"Seeing as the Japs were coming, they put us on the ocean liner and sent us to Adelaide, and they put us in private homes for about a fortnight. We got off the boat and dug slit trenches around the schools and such.

The night before we got off, we had all these steel bunks in the bottom of the boat, and one of those fell over and hit me on the head. And I had this bandage all around my head.

When we marched up the street in Adelaide there were people by the hundred all watching, and I had this big bandage around my head. And this woman - I can see her now - she said 'look at that poor bloody soldier, he's been shot in the head and they're making him walk!'"

"We had three batteries, seven, eight and nine. And there were about 25 on each A-A gun. They fired about sixty 4 inch shells a minute, and the barrel of the gun used to go red-hot after you

fired one lot out and they used to turn the barrel around (and take it out) and shove the new barrel in.

And by the time that had cooled off you could use it again. Actually you were trained to do anything that they wanted you to do on that gun. Sometimes you'd have to stand on the gun and hold your foot on the pedal, and they'd give you a whack on the backside to let you know they'd fired the lot (of ammo) and you had to fill it up again."

"The training, they told you everything you had to do. And they made you do what you had to do."



Ern Cope plane spotting in Buna.

Coming off a farm, Ern was better prepared to fight the war than a lot of people from city jobs. He was a lot stronger and fitter: "One day we were lined up outside in the exercise yard. The bloke training us was a First World War veteran, and he pulled me out, and he said, 'You strip off down to your underclothes. I want to display you. Show your muscles off.' Most of them were from towns and cities and didn't have any muscles."



A Christmas card received by Ern

Ern also liked to do a bit of fishing when he was stationed on the coast in Australia. He didn't often play cards, but

many played a game called Two-Up.

"I never played Two-Up but a lot of them played it - especially when they were traveling on the boats going to the Middle East and all those places.

There was one chap that played and won a lot in Two-Up going on the boat. And when we were getting off the boat we all had our kit bags, you know, and he had his kit bag half-full of money that he'd won. Anyway, I didn't see this happen, but we had to march from the boat to the town, and he never got to the town. He dropped dead. They reckoned it was the money - the weight of the money in his pack. Whether it was a fact I don't know, but they reckoned it was a fact. He had all this money on him that he'd won on the boat.

And I'll always remember that night when we got off the Queen Mary. We had to get back on the boat, and it went out to sea as hard as it could go. And we wondered where it was going. They had got word that the Germans were coming over to bomb us, and they went out to sea as hard as they could go. And the next morning when we'd come back in, here were a few of the boats burning - that's why they'd gone out to sea. It's always stuck in my mind."

He received many letters and cakes from his family, and he wrote letters back just as regularly. He heard by mail when his mother passed away. Her sister reckoned that she never had a decent motor, after we left and went to war."

He went on tours of cities and holy places while in the Middle East, including the place where Jesus was born and the place where he was buried.

"They had these big brothels over there (in the Middle East). (Many men used to visit them), and quite a few of them got VD as well."

Ern talks about his mates and their activities on recreation leave: "I was lucky because I used to drink like a fish, and Stan wouldn't drink. And Stan was always standing behind me, we had to get in a queue

and Stan would always stand behind me and get an extra glass of beer or whatever it happened to be."

Ernest Sidney Cope (con)

They used to be able to buy crayfish for a shilling in Onslow.

In Western Australia: "The Air Force used to go out on the pier. They'd throw out a big hunk of meat with a big hook in it. And when the shark came to get it they used to shoot the shark and take it back to their cooks. Up there the tide dropped 20 meters.

A story from up in Queensland: "There were a lot of pineapples growing around, and Stan said 'Let's go for a walk through the pineapples.' Anyway we walked quite a distance and Stan said 'Come and have a look at this.' And there was a pond there and a well, and Stan was looking down and he coughed and his false teeth fell out (and went down the well). And you could hear them hit the water way down there.

Anyway when we got back he went on sick parade to get another set. And they wanted to know what happened to the other set. And a bloke said 'I suppose you were that bloody drunk you didn't know what you were doing.' And of course Stan didn't drink."

"When I came back from New Guinea I was sick as a dog. I had malaria. I had a few kicks of the football in camp, but a few blokes were going out drinking and they said 'Are you coming Copey?' And I said 'Oh yes I'll come, I can kick the football any time.' Anyway, when I got into town I was as sick as a dog. I just said to the blokes 'You just go and enjoy yourselves, I'll just sit here.'

And they went away, and I was sitting on the doorstep of this pub and these two women said: 'Look at that drunken bugger.' I'll never forget that. And when I woke up I was in hospital, I had malaria."

Ern worked at a store which disposed of old Army gear and he was able to bring home Army blankets and beds, tents and two Stuart tanks.

"I worked at the disposals, and there were quite a lot of Italians there. I'll always remember, I was having a snooze one day and one had come up and put a lighted cigarette on my leg, and I up and hooked him one.

And all the other Italians rushed over and they were going to kill me. And

anyway, I yelled out and there were quite a few of our blokes about. And that particular Italian, he went to Dandenong or somewhere, and a policeman pulled him up one day and shot him. He died."

Once, when Ern was working at the disposals he gave an offer to a fellow worker to take home a bag of Army surplus food. "Good eatin' stuff," Ern told him, "It'll save you spending money."

The man took the food home to his wife and the next day Ern asked him how he went with the Army food: "Bloody terrible, my wife made me bury it in the garden," the man replied. His wife was afraid the Army would come looking for the surplus rations and to catch the man who took them home.

When he left the Army:

Ern obtained property in Gruyere for dairy farming, with help from soldier-settler's funds on Christmas Eve, 1950. Albert got a place at Healesville. Ern bought two ex-Army tanks to clear the block for farming. He bought them for 60 pounds each. He and his wife had a lot of trouble with government authorities regarding the clearing of their land – the property was in a newly declared 'Green Belt' and large-scale clearing was prohibited.

However, he went ahead and cleared it anyway. Some lobbyists told him that he would be sent to gaol for doing it.

One of the lobbyists returned a few years later, telling Ern that although he had opposed the logging at the time, "I was one of those buggers who were trying to charge you, but by God you've made a nice farm." This difficulty sprung up in 1972 with the restraints on. "We fought," said Marge Cope. The bans were eventually lifted, and because the Copes had been on the property so long, their clearing was legalized.

"I'll never forget one day there was four, they might have come from the town. ... Anyway they come out here, and said "You've got to stop knocking those trees down." And I said "No I'm not, I won't stop knocking them down." And they said "you'll end up in gaol." And I said "Well, that's where I'll end up."

And I can always remember them, and they were talking to me and discussing, and there was four of them and the four of them said to me "You go outside and we'll discuss this between ourselves and see what we can come to." And their car was out there, and I went and got the shotgun and four cartridges. And thought to myself "By Jesus you bastards are gonna pay."

Anyway, when they came out I said "Have you come to some agreement" and they said "yes we have" and I said 'Just as well for you.' And I never told them that I was going to blow the tires off their car.

Post-war recreation: Played for Coldstream Football Club; did a lot of fishing - taught several local boys to fish.

Where his mates ended up after the war: Stan returned to farming in Berragurra (dairy farm) on a soldier-settler's block. Les Shields went to an office job and sold machinery.

Affect of military service on working life: If he could turn back time and was given the choice again to go to war, or not to go to war, "I'd say I'd stay home. But as far as going to war is concerned I thought I was doing the best for the country."



Ern Cope and mates. Ern is kneeling, front right and Dick Telford is standing at far right.

An extract from Ern's poem, which he learned at primary school:

"Now tell me all about the war
And what they killed each other for.
It was the English, Jasper cried, that put
the French to rout
But what they killed each other for I
could not well make out."

Candid Camera At The 2011 AGM and 2011 ANZAC Day March



*Standing: Jack Berkley, John Marshall, John Hepworth (dec), Frank Hands, John Campbell.
Seated: Ray Everlyn, Cec Rae, Dave Thomson (dec)*



John Campbell (left) and the late Dave Thomson (right) with Association Research Officer David McDonald.



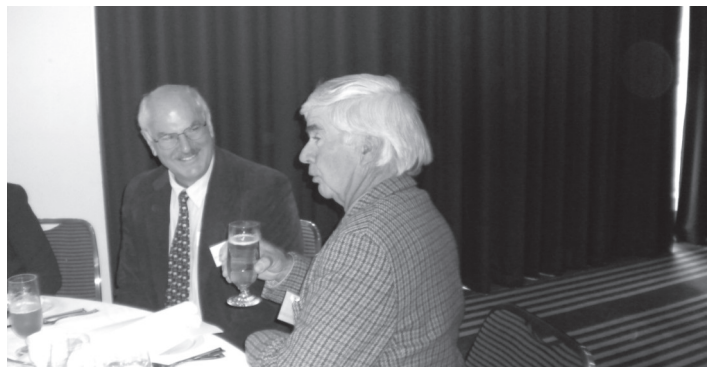
Members enjoying the food, facilities and company at the 2011 Annual Reunion lunch.



Former Secretary and President Cec Rae reminiscing with Rob Bennett (son of Max Bennett, 8th Battery).



Dot Harris, daughter of Les Harris (7th) and Graeme Heddle, son of Charles Heddle, 9th Battery with Frank Hands, 8th Bty.



Russell Luckock (son of Charles Luckock, 8th Battery) and Foster Croke (son of Dale Crook, 9th Battery) enjoying a "Fosters".



Association members participating in the ANZAC Day March. Matthew Heddle and Daniel Wanders are carrying the Banner. David McDonald (far left in hat) and David Croke (far right)



After the March—Rob Bennet, a member of the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes & Drums Band, resplendent in kilt