

The Regiment

The order to form a regiment, to be known as 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, came from the Commander Royal Artillery, 1st Australian Corps, 2nd A.I.F.

The Regimental War Diary records on 18th July, 1940:

"Major J. W. Rhoden 2/ic 2/2nd Medium Regiment appt to command Regiment Lieutenant A. F. Young selected as Adj., Capt A. Michaelis selected as Q.M. H.Q. established at 425 St. Kilda Rd.; temporarily prior to going to Geelong where Regiment will be quartered."

As anti-aircraft guns were to be used for the first time in the Australian Forces, three new regiments were to come into existence; namely the 2/2nd Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, in the main recruited in Victoria, already in camp at Puckapunyal, Victoria; the 2/1st Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment recruited in New South Wales; and the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment to be recruited in Victoria.

It was understood at the time that the "Heavy" Regiments would use 3" and 3.7" anti-aircraft guns and the "Light" Regiment 40mm Swedish Bofors anti-aircraft guns.

The officers of the Regiment were then selected:—

Captain A. F. Young — Adjutant

Captain A. Michaelis — Quartermaster

Captain P. G. Hayes — Regimental Medical Officer

Major J. A. Hipworth — Command 7th Battery

Major P. W. Stokes — Command 8th Battery

Major C. L. Hughes-Hallett — Command 9th Battery

Captain A. Baglin — Battery Captain 7th Battery

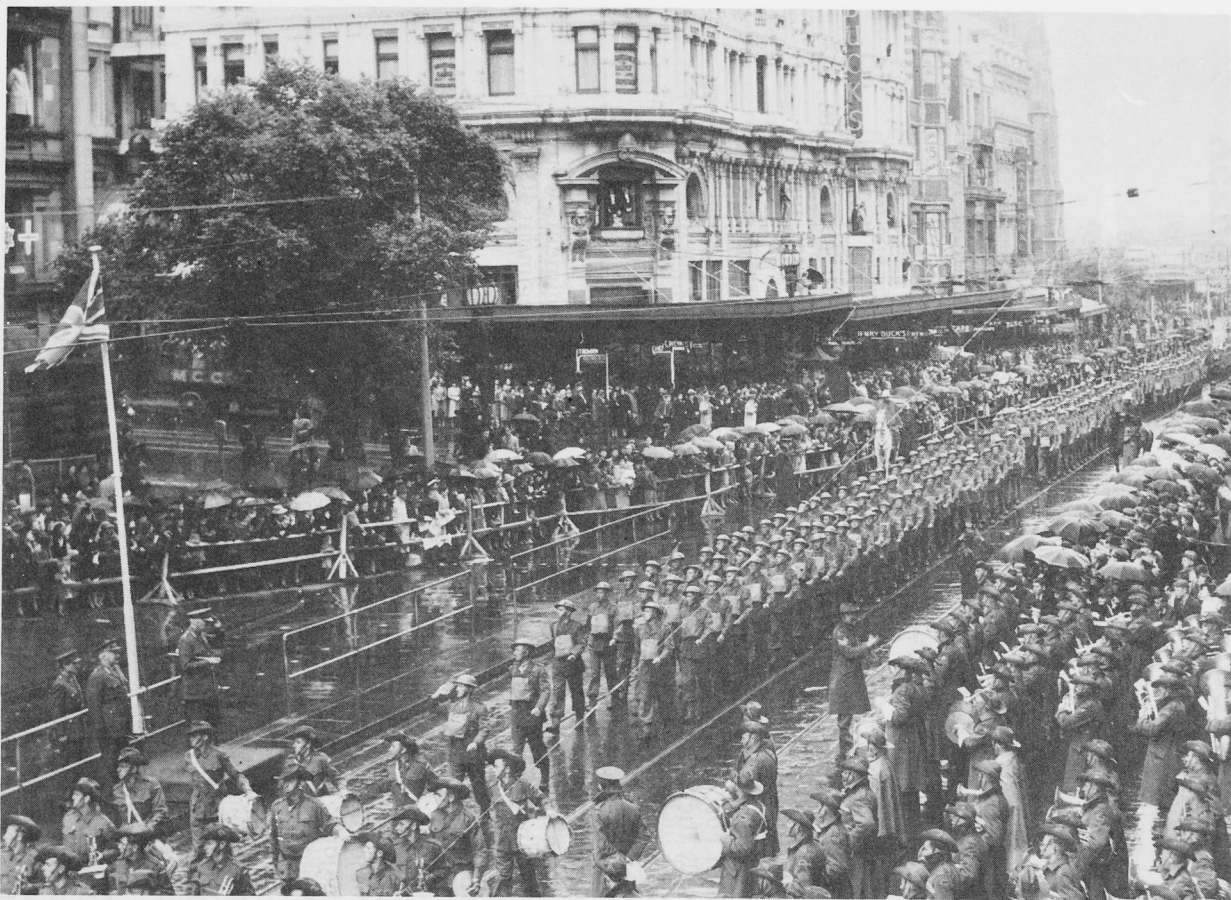
Captain F. H. Jorgensen — Battery Captain 8th Battery

Captain A. G. Margetts — Battery Captain 9th Battery

The recruitment of men for the Regiment then proceeded from Recruit Reception Depots, on 22nd July from Geelong Racecourse, on 23rd July from Caulfield Racecourse, and on 24th July from Royal Park, Melbourne.

The War Diary records that on 29th July an inspection was made of a site at Seymour and on the following day an inspection was made of a site at Werribee as an alternative.

The site at Werribee was chosen and Lieutenant-Colonel Rhoden



2/3rd L.A.A. Regiment parades past saluting base outside Melbourne Town Hall prior to embarking December, 1940.

was advised that the Werribee Racecourse was to be prepared as a Training Camp for the Regiment. This venue was selected to facilitate close co-operation with the R.A.A.F. at Point Cook and Laverton and to enable members of the Regiment to gain knowledge in estimating the speed of an aircraft and aircraft identification.

An advance party moved into the Werribee Camp on 20th August and, on completion of the work, the selected personnel from Royal Park, Caulfield Racecourse and Geelong Racecourse were marched into Camp on 27th August.

7th Battery was accommodated between the seating on the outside of the grandstand and 8th Battery located below the grandstand and in tents.

The grandstand was wooden and old. This, with the troops' bedding of straw, necessitated a strict ban on smoking. Fortunately there were no accidents.

9th Battery was installed in the stables and in tents. The horses and their excreta had been moved out prior to the troops moving in.

Most of these men had joined the A.I.F. about June or July, although many had served in school cadets and Militia units prior to enlisting. The disintegration of France and the evacuation at Dunkirk had brought home to them the seriousness of the situation in Europe after the quiet of the "phoney war". There was a strong urge to assist the United Kingdom from whence most forebears had come, and of course there was peer group pressure and the sense of adventure.

The ages ranged from 18 years (the required age for enlistment, although there were certainly some below that age), to some well over 40 years of age.

So these men came to Werribee to be fitted into their positions within the Regiment, which comprised:

1. Regimental Headquarters, including Regimental Medical Officer, Chaplain, Quartermaster and staff, Pay Sergeant, Postal Orderly and others attached from their respective services, but now part of the Regiment;

2. an attached Signal Section, being members of 1st Australian Corps, but known as 2/3rd Aust. L.A.A. Regiment Signal Section under command of Captain N. W. Trainor, came mainly from New South Wales;

3. an attached Light Aid Detachment (L.A.D.) or Workshop Section under command of Captain R. Massina, also came mainly from N.S.W. enlistments. The parent body was later to be known as Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (A.E.M.E.);

4. 7th, 8th and 9th Batteries consisting each of a Battery Headquarters and three Troops with Troop Headquarters. Each Troop comprised approximately eighty officers and other ranks, making the approximate total complement of the Battery 250 officers and



On Board H.M.T. "Mauretania".

other ranks.

The Troops were named respectively A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, or Able, Baker, Charlie, Don, Eddie, Freddie, George, Harry and Ink Troops.

All troops of this Regiment were to be commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel J. W. Rhoden. Attached personnel would look to their particular service authorities for technical guidance.

Provision was made at the Camp for amenity services such as officers', sergeants' (in the Totalisator) and other ranks' messes. A Salvation Army Red Shield Hut was opened on 23rd September. Brigadier A. S. Munro, a senior Salvationist, was brought out of retirement to administer this amenity and he took great pride in adopting the Regiment. A man loved by all; his assistance in matters of welfare and his devotion to his fellow-man caused him to be held in the highest esteem, and he was certainly a part of the Regiment. It was a sad time for him when he could not travel overseas with the Regiment because of his age.

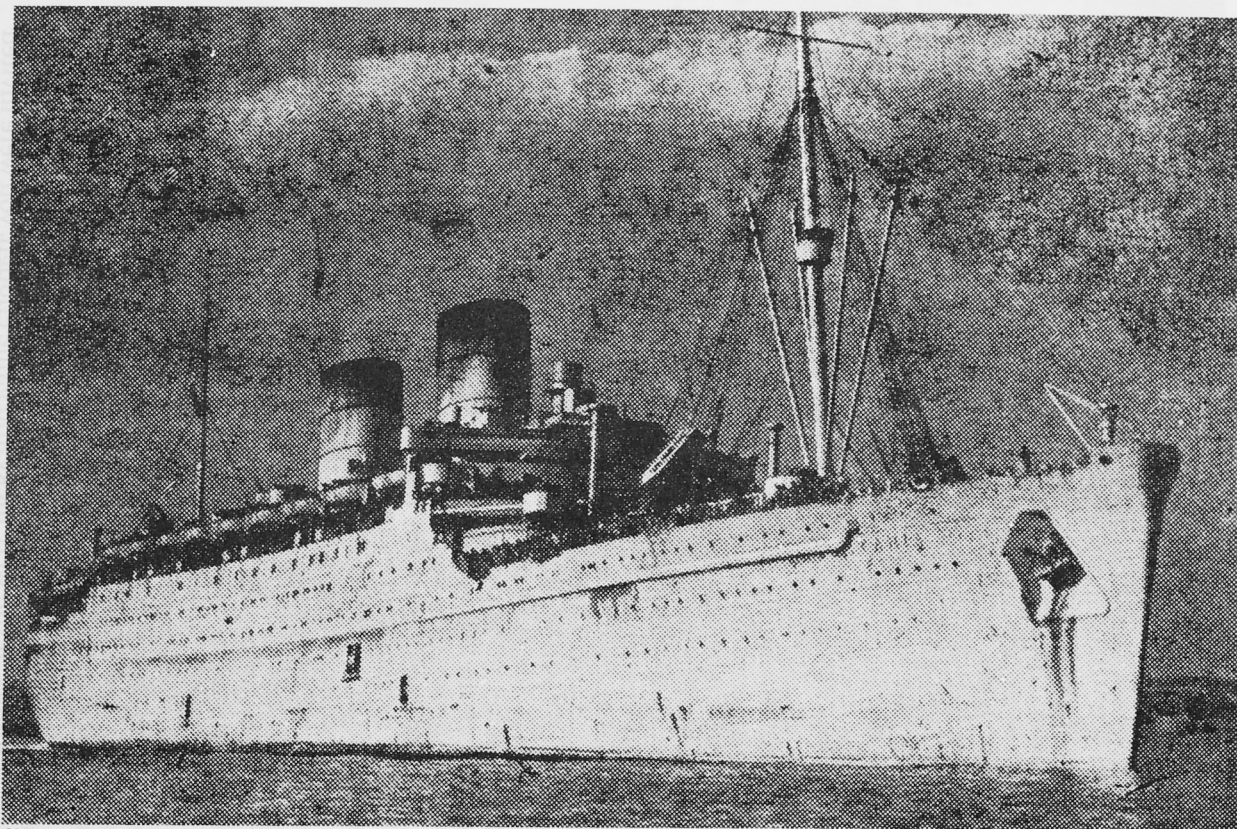
Training commenced in earnest, but not on the Bofors anti-aircraft guns with which the Regiment was to be equipped. The troops were shown photographs of the potential equipment. As no Bofors were available, training was on Vickers machine guns with anti-aircraft mountings, although much of the training was in its use as an infantry weapon. The local area became well known to the troops with innumerable route marches and training in map reading. Physical exercise and drill made up the training.

Leave to Werribee township was granted reasonably liberally, the favourite "watering" places being the Racecourse Hotel and the Bridge Hotel. Good meals were obtainable at these hotels, but sometimes the drinking went on after closing time, which was 6 p.m. Unfortunately some of the men were caught by the police drinking after hours in the Racecourse Hotel. Some of the accused chose to be defended by two of the Regiment's young legal eagles, but to no avail. Fined £2/-/-.

On another occasion the Battery was on parade, and the morning roll was being called, when on to the parade ground wandered a gunner fully dressed, but not regimentally dressed so to speak. The attire was completely feminine from the hat to the dress, to the shoes. The gunner was hurriedly removed from the parade ground and put to bed to sober up.

Leave to Melbourne was also granted from late Friday afternoon to 2359 hours on Sunday. Immediately after being dismissed, there was a cloud of dust from those lucky enough to possess cars. Those not so fortunate had to travel by train.

Sometimes at night a few gunners would go to the nearby landing field, where the trainee R.A.A.F. pilots practised night take-offs and landings. If you were lucky and game enough, you were invited



H.M. Troopship MAURETANIA

to take a flight over Melbourne. The planes were Avro Ansons and did not provide much comfort for passengers, nevertheless it was all very exciting, especially if it was a gunner's first flight.

Werribee Racecourse as a camp had its advantages in being close to the City, but it also had its disadvantages. The Carter Brothers, who had at that time one of the biggest poultry farms in Victoria, besides producing eggs also produced a strong smelling poultry manure, which was quite unpleasant when the wind was in the wrong direction. The other problem was the Sewerage Farm, which also produced nauseous odours from time to time.

A few weeks before embarkation orders were received, the Regiment travelled by train to Melbourne in full marching gear. On arrival at Spencer Street, the Regiment was called to order and marched through the City. The troops wore steel helmets and respirators as part of their dress. It was a grim affair and not many of the bystanders cheered, as most were made aware that the sight of these men going to war was not to be regarded lightly. However, there was one bright incident as one Troop had to change direction, the command was given loud and clear "*--- Troop! Right Wheel! No xxxx it! Left Wheel!*"

Rumours abounded that the Regiment would soon be going overseas, and finally two weeks pre-embarkation leave was granted. This period took in Christmas, which was to everyone's delight, but did not include New Year's Eve, as the A.I.F. had other things in mind.

Then it was "on", and to quote from a gunner's diary:-

"Sunday, 29th December, 1940. Up at 0100 hours emptied our palliasses of straw and had breakfast at 0300. Entrained at 0600 at Werribee Racecourse Station and arrived at 0645 at Spencer Street Station where we had two pies and a cup of tea. We boarded the ship ("Mauretania") at about 0800 and went to our quarters, bunks in the forward cinema, but some men were in cabins holding 8 men. Some cabins still had luxurious fittings, tapestry covered walls, electric fan, hot and cold water, marble bath and toilet. We had to remain on the uppermost deck all day until we left Port Melbourne at 1700 and anchored off Dromana for the night. All port holes blacked out."

It had been a long day, a day of "Pick up gear", "Put down gear", "Pick up gear", "Put down gear". The train had taken the troops to Station Pier right beside H.M.T.K. 307, "Mauretania". At that time the "Mauretania" was the largest ship to come up the Bay with little to spare under the keel. The troops packed the upper deck where they could gaze over Melbourne, while the cars lined alongside the foreshore and the small craft sailing in the vicinity gave evidence that this occasion was not on the secret list.

The Regiment's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel J. W.

Rhoden, had been appointed O.C. Troops "Mauretania", and had the following units under his command:—

- 67 Light Aid Detachment
- 1 Corps Petrol Park
- 2/43rd Infantry Battalion
- 4 Australian General Hospital
- 2/6th Field Ambulance
- 2/8th Field Ambulance
- Australian Army Nursing Service
- Details of 9th Division Petrol Company and
Royal Australian Navy.

Reinforcements —

- 2/6th Infantry Battalion
- 2/1st Machine Gun Battalion
- 2/12th Infantry Battalion

With other small detachments, the total number of service men and women was about 5,000.

The next morning the "Mauretania" left the anchorage off Dromana at 0730 hours, all clocks having been put back half an hour, and cleared the Heads at 0830 to join the rest of the convoy which comprised the "Queen Mary", "Aquitania" (four funnels), "Dominion Monarch", "Awatea" and the escorting vessel H.M.A.S. "Canberra".

Some of the troops became sea sick, but many who did not, enjoyed the meals provided.

The convoy headed south of the shipping lanes, to arrive in line ahead off Fremantle on 3rd January.

Fortunately, the "Mauretania", "Dominion Monarch" and "Awatea" were of shallow enough draught to berth at Fremantle, while the "Queen Mary" and "Aquitania" had to stand off, which was unfortunate for the troops on board, as they did not get leave.

The "Mauretania" berthed at 0930 and the troops were off on leave by 1230, making a bee-line for the pubs, to visit friends, or to revel in the flesh pots of Roe Street. Before leaving the ship, the C.O. issued a stern warning "*Don't do it Chaps, it's not worth it*", to the accompaniment of blown up condoms floating in the air.

The people of Fremantle and Perth were very philosophical about all these thousands of men let loose in their cities; in fact they did their utmost to give them a good time before they left Australia. It was a beautiful day of weather and welcome.

The troops who came back in reasonably good condition were placed on train piquet to assist those not in a good condition to get off the leave train and back on to the ship. The following day the ship was still tied up to the wharf, but no leave was granted. However some of the more adventurous managed to slip off the ship

and make their way to a nearby pub.

It was not until 1700 that the ship drew away from the wharf, and from Australia, anchoring just outside the river until 0700 the next morning, as though reluctant to leave.

Sunday, 5th January was very calm, which was probably just as well after the excesses of Perth. To brighten the troops' day there was a church parade and a Comforts Fund issue of chocolate. The Australian Comforts Fund was a government agency for the collection of funds and the purchase and distribution of goods to the troops. The word had passed round that the ship would berth in Colombo in six days time.

The fine weather experienced in Perth continued, allowing the men to enjoy their meals.

The former British radio announcer who transmitted German radio propaganda was known as Lord Haw Haw, because of his very English voice. The radio on the "Mauretania" had received an announcement by Lord Haw Haw to the people of Australia to the effect that the "Mauretania" had been sunk by German submarines and that the relatives of the troops on board would be very upset, as there were no survivors – a message designed to lower morale of the home front. Meanwhile morale on the ship was excellent, some of the "garbage guts" managing to get into all six meal sittings, necessitated because of the large number of troops aboard. To counteract the soft living on the ship physical training, or P.T. as it was known, was the order of the day. However, the "Mauretania" was a large ship and there were many places to hide, so the attendances at P.T. classes were not good. One instructor was christened "Slowly up and quickly down", for his efforts in calling the exercises.

Another popular exercise was the raising and lowering of the head, as the pennies rose and fell in the games of "two up" or "swy". Some of the players who had "exercised" all night had to sleep during the day, to overcome their exhaustion. If only the enemy had known! One player, hooked on the game was kneeling on a roll of £1,000 after an exciting winning break. He was urged by his mate to quit whilst in front, but he refused as he wanted to build his bank to £1,500. He didn't, and came away losing £700.

Of course it was not all fun; occasionally there was a submarine piquet (watching the flying fish), latrine fatigue, galley fatigue, mess orderly and so on. Some men of the Regiment were allotted to Vickers machine gun crews as anti-aircraft defence.

The convoy made a magnificent sight, with three of the world's larger ships: "Dominion Monarch" a moderately large ship, and the "Awatea" a smaller ship but known as the "Greyhound of the Tasman", having held the record for the Australia/New Zealand run. The speed of these vessels and the protection of the "Canberra" were

thought to make them reasonably safe from submarine attack.

On Wednesday, 8th January the troops were given a reminder that there was a war on, when the ships' sirens sounded, the cruiser "Canberra" swung around the "Mauretania", let her scouting plane loose, and then made a complete circuit of the convoy. Was it "fair dinkum" or was it just an exercise?

Some days out of Fremantle, a "short arm" inspection was made by the Medical Officer, to find out whether any of the boys had collected something in Fremantle that they did not want. Pity the poor M.O. viewing all that "pride and joy". Some were ordered circumcision.

Life jackets were carried at all times, but they were not to be used for sitting on, as it was explained that the kapok with which they were filled would disintegrate and be of no use in the water.

By this time, the troops had learnt a few nautical terms such as "port" and "starboard", "bow" and "stern", but one sergeant always referred to the bo'sun as the boat's swain. The ogre of the ship was the Master-at-Arms, who was responsible for police duties on board. He was held in some awe and was a good man not to know.

As the convoy approached Ceylon, the days became much warmer. Some of the troops took to sleeping on deck, and no wonder, as the humidity between decks sometimes registered 94°.

The troops on deck on the morning of Sunday, 12th January sighted the land of Ceylon, and shortly afterwards the ship anchored in Colombo Harbor. The rest of the convoy followed, with the exception of the "Queen Mary" which had left the convoy the day before.

The harbor was full of shipping. From the deck of the ship, Colombo looked fascinating with its huge sign "Ceylon for Tea" prominently displayed. Ceylon as a colony administered by the British was still Empire.

The troops eagerly awaited leave, but this was not to be until the next day. Meanwhile there was much trading between the troops on the ship and the natives in their boats below. There were cries of "Senda money" from the natives, when there was no money forthcoming after the bargaining for pineapples, bananas, coconuts and elephants (not real ones) had been completed. The goods in a canvas bag were hauled up by rope to the deck. "Senda money" went on for some time until the natives decided on the money first, then the goods. Comforts Fund cigarette issues were good currency, as well as Australian notes.

The Regiment was given leave at 0900 on Monday. The troops were taken ashore in motor launches, assembled on the wharf, marched up to the Galle Face Green near the British Army Barracks, and dismissed. Then the fun was on: rickshaw rides and races, hire

cars to Mount Lavinia, some even to Kandy, shopping in Colombo, and for some, dinner at the Galle Face Hotel, a Victorian style building with excellent food and Australian beer.

The troops were accosted by the native population asking them for money or to purchase very poorly made articles.

Dodging the betel nut spittle on the roads and footpaths, they managed to get back to the ship without parting with too much of their money.

On Tuesday afternoon it was "pack up gear", "pick up gear", assemble on the sun deck, wait in limbo until 1600, when the Regiment was transferred by lighter to H.M. Troopship "Devonshire"; and what a comedown that was!

The "Devonshire" was built for the Bibby Line as a ship to transport British troops to and from England and India. As the song so aptly says "There's a troopship leaving Bombay bound for old Blighty's shore heavily laden with time-expired men - - -". Well, this ship was heavily laden, but with Australians, not British, and the Australians did not think much of British Army troopships.

The first surprise was that the troops were expected to swing their hammocks over the mess decks, navy fashion. What! eat and sleep in the same area? Not on your life, so as many as possible chose to sleep on the open deck.

The second surprise was the bread which appeared to be made more of weevils than flour. Although the ship was only eighteen months old, it was rumoured that it had not been revictualled since its commissioning. There was a war on and she had not returned to her home base since that time. The meat had grown old and fruit was missing from the menu.

The third surprise was the bulkhead doors. The ship was divided at intervals by bulkheads, so that in the event of a torpedo hitting the ship, the damaged section could be sealed off. It was your bad luck if you happened to be in the sealed-off area. The sealing-off process was practised several times, this being to the accompaniment of the sounding of a klaxon horn and the scurrying of troops.

There was a very small canteen on board with nothing much to sell, except for some English sweets and beer. The beer was out of this world, or out of Australians' world; it had the consistency of treacle and a taste very unlike that of beer. Only a few hardened drinkers took the risk, and they voted it was not worth it.

The O.C. 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was again appointed O.C. Troops. There were other units on board, making about 1,600 troops all told.

On leaving Colombo, the convoy included, "Devonshire", "Lancashire", "Ismalia", "Khedive", "Rhona", "Christian Hugeson",

"Awatea", "Dominion Monarch", "Ranee", "Theuland", "Castle Indaal", "Dilwarra", "Nieuw Zealandia" and escorts H.M.S. "Cape Town", H.M.S. "Kelly", H.M.S. "Kimberley", H.M.S. "Kashmir". The convoy made an impressive sight and a wonderful target, except in that all ships were continually changing station. It could be bad enough at times during the day, but at night it was frightening. All shipping was blacked out at night, so everyone was extremely careful not to show a light. Had they done so, their fellow passengers would not have let it happen again. It was reported that a Japanese ship had sailed through the convoy the day after the convoy had left Colombo.

A day for washing clothes was allocated to each Battery, there being very little water to spare. If you were lucky, one of the Lascars would oblige for a nominal sum. The Lascars were members of the crew recruited in India, and were common on British ships. These members were of the Moslem faith, and assembled on the afterdeck each evening at sunset to pray towards Mecca. How they managed with the ship zig-zagging cannot be guessed, but no doubt they had a special dispensation from the Almighty.

Gavan Hayes, the R.M.O., recalls:

"Half way across the Indian Ocean one of the Indian troops on board required an urgent operation on his ruptured gastric ulcer. The "Devonshire" steered satisfactorily as long as it was held on course with a severe list to starboard, but when the list was adjusted it steered badly. As the operation had to be performed at once, the ship's captain was requested to right the ship otherwise the patient's legs would most likely fall off the table. The captain was greatly relieved when he was told that the operation was complete and he could revert to the original list."

Captain Hayes recalls another incident on the "Devonshire":
"On this ship I well remember having to condemn a boiling cauldron of mince meat because of the putrid odour coming from the galley."

"Colonel Rhoden, who was O.C. Troopship, replaced the galley staff with cooks from his own unit, and we all arrived safely at Haifa!"

Arabic lessons were attempted, but as there were no competent instructors, no great advancement was made; this was to come later.

On the 22nd January a ship was sighted south of the convoy, and later in the day three destroyers joined the convoy, which by now was in the Gulf of Aden, and within range of Italian forces in Somaliland. The order was given that troops were to carry their steel helmets, water bottles and life jackets at all times, in case of attack by submarine or Italian bombers. In fact a plane did fly over the convoy the following day, but fortunately it was "one of

ours”.

A crew from the Regiment was trained by a naval gunner in the use of the 3" A.A. gun mounted on the stern of the "Devonshire". Italian aircraft had attacked previous convoys from Massawa, and the crew looked forward to some action, but the only plane flew so high as to be out of range. As consolation, permission was granted to fire two rounds. The first round so rocked the gun mountings and scared the Indians below that the second round was not fired; but the Regiment had fired its first shot.

Two days later the convoy passed by three islands, two of which were over 1,000 feet high. There was a lighthouse operating on the smallest island.

The convoy passed on into the Red Sea, where two destroyers and a light cruiser departed, having safely escorted the convoy through the danger zone. The land looked very forbidding, with some high barren mountains; in fact all the land appeared devoid of plant life. The ships entered the harbor of Port Suez at around 2100 on Monday, 27th January, 11 days from Colombo. There was no moon and it was cold for those sleeping on deck.

The "Devonshire" anchored off Port Suez at 0700 the next morning, amongst a varied assortment of shipping including many tankers. Ports viewed from the deck of a ship always look more glamorous than they actually are on arrival. Suez was no exception; it looked a very modern city, this impression being possibly given by the Arab style of building. To the left of the city there was a group of camouflaged oil tanks, then the eye went to the Ataq Mountains to the east, rising to 871 metres at the highest point. Rumour had it that the Regiment was to disembark here, but this was not to be, as the "Devonshire" weighed anchor just after lunch and entered the Suez Canal.

On the left bank there were quite good-looking houses, but on the right hand side the land stretched away flat and barren. The area was called El Shatt!

At dusk and about 15 miles up the Canal, the "Devonshire" entered the Little Bitter Lake and anchored. A cold night required three blankets to keep warm.

The next morning the sun shone out of a cloudless sky and the air was fresh. On the left bank trees had been planted and a good bitumen road constructed on top of the bank.

The few cars travelling along the road were greeted with yells from the men on the ship. There were a few troops stationed along the sides of the Canal, including some manning Bofors guns, the first the men of the Regiment had seen.

At intervals there were stations for the direction of shipping. The ship passed through Lake Timsah, past the War Memorial to the troops killed in the 1914-18 War, past the town of Ismailia where

the hospital ship "Manunda" was tied up, and Kantara, then on to Port Said, arriving there at about 1600 hours.

The ship tied up there, and when the majority of the troops moved to its starboard side to have a look at Port Said, the "Devonshire" began to list. A submarine was also in port. The naval establishment buildings were camouflaged, and as darkness fell the city was blacked out, with motor vehicles using dim blue headlights. When it was quite dark the "Devonshire", one other ship and a destroyer quietly slipped out into the Mediterranean. "Full speed" was the order, the ship shook and tossed a bit, but after an uneventful night, arrived in Haifa the next morning, having travelled about 200 miles. The troops were informed that Port Said had been heavily bombed that night. Jerusalem had also been bombed. They were also told that the ship had passed over an unexploded bomb in the Canal.

Haifa, from the ship, appeared to be a good, clean modern city. There was a ship in the harbor on her side. Later it was discovered that the ship was the French-owned S.S. "Patria", which had been in Haifa harbor when France capitulated to Germany in June 1940. It had been commandeered by the British military authorities for future use. The future use was the proposed transfer to Mauritius of about 1,000 Jewish people who had entered Palestine illegally. In spite of the best surveillance, there was smuggled aboard a quantity of explosives. The morning when the ship was due to sail, an explosion in the ship's hold, in the coal bunkering area, blew a large hole in the ship's side below water level. The ship heeled over and settled on its side. Those in the hospital section were drowned, as were also some of the ship's staff and several Palestine Policemen.

The Regiment was assembled on deck at 0930 with all gear. Each man's kit consisted of three blankets, water bottle, haversack, respirator, steel helmet, hat fur felt, sea kit, universal kit, rifle and bayonet, and serge uniform of trousers and jacket. In the universal kit were woollen underwear, long johns and singlets, towels, shirts, personal gear and odds and ends. Some had more odds and ends than others.

After waiting on deck for more than two hours, the men were told that, as they had arrived a day early, they would not be disembarking that day. It was "pick up gear" and return 'tween decks, together with quite a few nasty words about the "Organisation".

Better luck on Friday, 31st January, when the Regiment made its landing in Palestine. About 1030 the troops were assembled on the wharf, but as usual nothing happened until 1300, when the Regiment boarded a troop train. In the yards were some other carriages with "Wagon Lit" painted on their sides, possibly escapees from the famous Orient Express. Each man received a bun and an orange

(Jaffa orange), which were greatly appreciated after the "Devonshire teas".

The train travelled south along the coast with hills on the left. The soil on the small coastal plain was a dark loam, and the fields were marked out with stones, not fences. A cereal crop was growing in some fields.

As the train moved further south, the country gave way to orange groves, with the trees bearing a beautiful crop. Australian eucalyptus had been planted in this area and gave a touch of home.

The town of Lydda, inland from the sea, was passed through at 1630. There were air raid shelters and camouflaged buildings everywhere.

Travelling onwards the train arrived at El Majdal at about 1900 where the Regiment was detrained. Into civilian trucks and on to Khassa Camp, where tents had been erected by the men of the 2/16th Infantry Battalion, who had prepared a splendid army meal of bully beef stew. Bully beef had never tasted so good, after the abominable meals on the "Devonshire". Thank you, men of the 2/16th Infantry Battalion, you certainly raised the morale of 2/3rd Light A.A. Regiment!

The morning light showed that the camp of tents was situated on undulating former grazing land interspersed with some channeling, known locally as wadis. The beds of cane were on bare earth. Slit trenches against air raids were quickly dug. These trenches later were to become a hazard to those who had consumed too much liquor at the canteen.

The first mail from home was distributed on the day after arrival, bringing joy to most, but worry to others.

Tuesday, 4th February brought two items of great importance; one was the visit of the Prime Minister of Australia, the Right Honourable Robert G. Menzies, K.C., who was making a tour of inspection of the Australian Imperial Forces camp. There was a great scurry in the camp to tidy the area and the troops before the inspection, but R.G. moved so fast that he would not know whether he was inspecting Australian or British troops. The War Diary records the second great event; "*Warning Order 9th Div 1st Battery to be placed 12 hours notice to move forward area Libya man A.A. guns 8th Battery ordered to get ready*".

The weather was perfect the next day. Some of the troops did a route march through Julis Camp, another larger A.I.F. camp, and through some of the local countryside. There was a Comforts Fund issue of tobacco, papers, soap and razor blades which were not an Army issue and they were in short supply in Australia, so it was always a scrounge to have sufficient on hand. There was an air raid warning at 1700 when the troops were messing. The slit trenches were occupied promptly, but the "all clear" was sounded soon

after.

On 6th February, the War Diary records: "1800 8th Battery moved out 8 officers 208 O.Rs. Destination Libya". So away went 8th Battery, no training and no equipment. The story of 8th Battery will be told in a separate chapter.

Things were starting to happen. Again referring to the War Diary: "8th February – 9 Officers, 26 Sergeants, 28 O.Rs. left for Egypt: 5 L.A.A. Battery Alexandria, 6 L.A.A. Battery Pt Said and Suez". This movement of selected officers and N.C.O.'s and men had been arranged by H.Q. Middle East to enable training on the 40mm Bofors guns and predictors of the City of Edinburgh 2nd L.A.A. Regiment. Typical Scots hospitality and sound training was extended to these men.

Previously, at the first Regimental Parade drawn up in serried ranks on the side of a hill, "the Boomer" (the C.O.) instructed the troops on the thieving habits of the local population known as WOGs. Advice was given to chain rifles to the tent poles and for the nightly guards to be extremely vigilant. It was all taken very seriously, until a voice said "Take a look over the hill Allan, to see if the enemy listens", Allan being Allan Young the Adjutant. The situation was in fact serious. The British at that time had a mandate over Palestine, and the British Army and the Palestine Police were attempting to stop the Arabs and the Jews shooting one another and also the British.

Jewish refugees from Europe were attempting to illegally enter Palestine, mainly by ship. Naturally, .303 rifles were at a premium to assist the fight between the Arabs and the Jews. It was a court martial for any A.I.F. man who lost his rifle.

Meanwhile, to even things up, the men were thieving all the oranges they could get from the orange groves. These were often surrounded with barbed wire to prevent Jewish terrorists from shooting up the plantation.

Instructions to troops taken from a gunner's notebook—

1. *If an Arab does not stop on calling halt, shoot him.*
2. *Any Arab who has any firearms, immediately seize him and bring him in.*
3. *Forget standards of sex in Australia. (What were they?)*
4. *Any officer stopped by guard must produce pay book and identity discs.*
5. *Poles and Czechs speak perfect English.*
6. *Country teeming with spies especially in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem – girls used.*
7. *When a house was raided there were found 2,000 colour patches, shirts and shorts. (As a gunner said, "Now we know where our shirts and shorts had gone").*
8. *When taking a hot bath on leave, keep an eye on your*

colour patches.

Palestine was very interesting to the troops, as the majority had never been out of Australia before and a great number not even out of their own State. With leave to Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, Tel-Aviv and Rehovot, there was a great deal to look at and wonder about. Coming through the outlying area of Jerusalem and seeing the walled city of Old Jerusalem was a memorable experience. There were no cars in the Old City, as all streets were stepped, however donkeys and mules could manage quite well. There was plenty to see – the Mosque of Omah, the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, until the "Tourist" was satiated with the viewing of holy relics.

Tel-Aviv on the coast, was in strong contrast, having been built in recent years, clean, modern and predominantly Jewish.

It was an order from above that the Other Ranks should not be allowed spiritous liquors, so when on leave the O.R.'s defied the order and drank whisky, gin, and other spirits from tea cups. The other joy on leave was to have a hot bath, haircut and face massage. All "very sweet, very clean, very hygiene" as the locals so aptly put it.

Some times the route marches were through Arab villages with their prickly pear hedges, tumble-down mud-brick houses, the dung heap in the middle of the village, overladen donkeys, children in the Arab dress calling "bucksheesh", and the smell.

There were no shower facilities in the camp. A special parade was held periodically and the troops marched half a mile for the big clean up. Another diversion was to "go to the pictures" at Julis Camp. The screen was in a huge hangar-like building, but it was very difficult to see the screen and what was on it, owing to the smoke exhaled by the hundreds of smokers.

Tuesday, 18th February, 1941 was the big day when four Bofors 40mm A.A. guns and four Morris six-wheeled gun tractors arrived. As previously related, the Regiment had no training on Bofors. The first guns to be seen were a few stationed on the Suez Canal, so it was indeed a great thrill to see this equipment arrive. At last there was something to train on. Just to take the gloss off the event, pits had to be dug for the guns. Orders were read out on parade that hats fur felt could be worn while digging the pits. A voice from the rear asked "*What about pants short?*" The troops had been issued with shorts, but the order to wear them had been long delayed.

The officers and men who had been sent to the Canal Zone for training returned to camp on 27th February and training the gunners commenced in earnest, but was interrupted by three days of rain.

The Regiment was busy on 15th March erecting tents for occupation by 2/2nd Australian Heavy A.A. Regiment (3.7 guns), the majority of the members being Victorian. The Regiment moved in

two days later, the rumour being that the railway at El Kantara had been blown up. There were the usual cries of "You'll be sorry", which was the greeting accorded to all newcomers.

Towards the end of March, there was a rumour that 7th Battery would be static and 9th Battery mobile, and that 9th Battery's equipment would arrive in five days time. In due course on 7th April, six Bofors A.A. guns arrived complete with Morris 6-wheeled tractors. Six Chevrolet 3-ton trucks also arrived. These were allocated to 9th Battery. Twenty-five men were transferred from 9th Battery to 7th Battery. The next day the men of the Regiment were alerted to move out on the week-end of 11th to 13th April.

The Regiment had been posted to "Lustre Force" to take part in the defence of Greece, and was ordered to proceed to Amariya, a staging camp near Alexandria, in Egypt, to await embarkation. The guns, trucks, and other equipment with personnel were to proceed by road. The remainder of the Regiment was to travel by train.

Those men with the guns and equipment left Khassa on Good Friday, 11th April, 1941. As the convoy moved south the country became more arid. The night was spent in a disused A.I.F. camp, moving out at 0330 the following morning, passing through hills covered with very light scrub.

The convoy crossed the border into Egypt at El Abn Aweigila, arriving at the Suez Canal at lunch time crossing on a pontoon bridge, and on to Ismailia, a pleasant town with shady trees and gardens.

The men enjoyed the restaurants and bars in the town after travelling across the desert.

The next day was Easter Day and the convoy left early the next morning, reaching the outskirts of Cairo late in the afternoon. Here the peasants grew barley and other crops close into the built-up areas.

The people gave the men a wonderful reception and some attractive girls were noticed in the crowd.

The mighty Nile was crossed and the vehicles came to a halt at Mena Camp, beside the Pyramids, where the men camped for the night.

After an early morning start, the convoy travelled on a good bitumen road through a sandy desert with a severe sandstorm making visibility extremely difficult.

Amariya Camp, about ten miles from Alexandria, was reached in the early afternoon.

Gunner Hepburn tells of the train journey from Palestine:—

"One of the train's many stops was at a station where we were introduced to the popular Egyptian cry 'Eggs a bread — Spanish Fly'.

"Further on the train stopped for at least half an hour at a point where the line ran next to a "sweet" water canal and beyond the canal a dusty earth road ran beside. Along the road came a camel with an embroidered tent on its back, followed by a procession of local characters in all their finery, followed by a raggle taggle of less well-to-do folk. Someone with knowledge of these things said it was a wedding procession and that the happy couple were in the tent on the camel's back. We had enough 'dog' biscuits with us to sink a battleship, and some genius threw a packet into the procession. There was a scramble for it. Then someone threw some packets into the canal. The ragged mob went after them into the water without hesitation, followed soon after by the 'posh' folk holding their fine clothes shoulder high to keep them dry. If the bride and groom were on the camel as stated then they missed out on the bikkies. Perhaps there were more interesting things to do."

John Brown's diary records on 15th April: "Nothing to do again today and after cleaning up after yesterday's dust, spent the rest of the morning packing up for Greece... have to be ready to move at any time."

On 18th April: "Have been hearing reports that soldiers have been returning from Greece because there are now no loading ports, but we don't know the truth of these reports."

On 21st April: Found out this morning that we (9th Battery) were destined for the desert."

In fact the last sailing of "Lustre" Force convoys to Greece was 21st April (R.A.N. Official War History), and the evacuation from Greece commenced on 24th April.

Although leave was not given to Alexandria, a lot was taken provided the M.P.'s (Military Police) were not too vigilant.

Meanwhile, 7th Battery had been ordered by H.Q.M.E. to proceed to Crete to take over the air defence of British Navy Air Bases on the island, to await the arrival of the Royal Marine Base Defence organisation from Great Britain.

7th Battery moved out of Amariya Camp on Tuesday, 22nd April. The story of 7th Battery is related elsewhere.

R.H.Q. and 9th Battery, with camouflage nets at the ready and trucks stripped down ready for embarkation, had been informed that the move to Greece had been cancelled. H.Q.M.E. then ordered the Unit to the desert to join Western Desert Force.

The War Diary of 23rd April records: "R.H.Q. 9th Battery, Signals, Workshops, R.A.S.C., moved out Amariya ordered come under command Desert Force El Daba".

With a convoy of about fifty trucks, the unit moved out along the desert road. The road followed close to the Mediterranean Sea, with the desert stretching away on the other side. Empty petrol tins on

both sides. R.H.Q. and ancillary troops stopped at Abu Haggag. The C.O., Lieutenant-Colonel John Rhoden, was given command of:—

37th L.A.A. Battery R.A.

38th L.A.A. Battery R.A.

3rd South African L.A.A. Battery U.D.F.

When R.H.Q. later moved to Mersa Hawala, he was given command of one battery Lord Londonderry's Irish Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, 23 Hong-Kong, Singapore Heavy Battery (Indian Troops with 3.7 A.A. guns known as the Honkypores), and units of the Royal Army Service Corps.

R.H.Q. remained with these units until 20th July, 1941 when, as a result of the formation of the British 8th Army, Lieutenant-Colonel Rhoden handed over to Lieutenant-Colonel Helsby of the 2nd L.A.A. Regiment R.A., and proceeded to Hill 95 in Palestine where the Regiment was to be reinforced. R.H.Q. arrived there on 26th July after leave in Cairo

9th Battery had been placed on air defence of aerodromes in the Desert and had taken part in Operation "Battleaxe", an attempt to relieve Tobruk. This story will be elaborated upon in a separate chapter.

On 27th July, 7th Battery was once again under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel J. W. Rhoden. 8th Battery was still in Tobruk. On this day, 9th Battery passed through Hill 95 only to stay long enough to greet old friends, have lunch and be told by Lieutenant-Colonel Rhoden that the Battery would proceed to Beirut.

By the end of September, there were in Palestine:

2/1st Heavy A.A. Regiment without guns or vehicles,

2/2nd Heavy A.A. Regiment without guns or vehicles,

2/3rd Light A.A. Regiment with R.H.Q., remnants of

7th Battery without guns or vehicles, and

8th Battery without guns or vehicles.

8th Battery had arrived from Tobruk on 29th September. Also on that day 9th Battery arrived from Beirut and camped the night at Hill 95, on its way to the Canal Zone in the Suez area.

With the return of 8th Battery from Tobruk, H.Q. 2 A.I.F. had decided to bring 2/3rd Aust. L.A.A. Regiment up to strength from members of 2/1st H.A.A. Regiment and 2/2nd H.A.A. Regiment.

Chaplain C. K. Daws joined the Regiment on 9th January, 1942, replacing Chaplain Inwood, who had been with the Regiment since Werribee days. Chaplain Daws was later to become Chaplain-General of the Australian Forces

On 15th January, the personnel to join the newly formed 2/4th Aust. L.A.A. Regiment arrived at R.H.Q. from 9th Battery and from the Artillery Training Regiment. A send-off was given by R.H.Q. for the officers and sergeants. No doubt the O.R.'s made merry also.

Towards the end of January, orders were received by R.H.Q. to proceed, together with 7th and 8th Batteries, to the Suez Transit Camp. 9th Battery was already in the area.

The Regiment assembled at Suez for the embarkation of personnel, guns, tractors, trucks, equipment, ammunition and stores. Of the Regiment's thirty-six guns, thirty-three were to be mounted on freighters as anti-aircraft defence; one to be non-operational on a freighter, and two to be mounted on the "Andes", as anti-aircraft defence.

Embarkation commenced with two "I" Troop guns at Port Said on 4th February, and continued through until March.

The ships involved were:—

Ettrickbank	Havildar
Clydebank	Tai Yin
Shillong	St. Essylt
Empire Pintail	Garmula
Cape Wrath	Orcades
Empire Oriole	Pundit
City of Hankow	Tricolor
Nurmahal	Trevilly
Anna Odland	Industria
Ittersum	Westmoreland
Rajula	Silver Maple
	Somerville

Most of the ships on which the men of the Regiment returned were unescorted, except for a few hours after leaving a port. The ships dispersed and travelled at their own maximum speed which in some cases was not very great.

Each ship had its story to tell. Some ships were diverted to Cochin, on the Malabar coast of India, and some to Colombo, Ceylon, where their captains awaited instructions.

The "Orcades" had arrived at Oosthaven in the south-west of Sumatra, on 15th February. Singapore had fallen that day. "Orcades" was recalled to Colombo on 21st February.

Eventually the ships in the ports of Colombo and Cochin left for a destination then unknown to the troops on board, until a day or two later they were told the destination was Australia.

As the unescorted ships travelled across the Indian Ocean to Australia, some experienced moments of anxiety. One ship sighted a cruiser, but this turned away when identification had been made. A submarine surfaced behind another freighter. As no action was taken, it must have been friendly.

News was received that Broome and Wyndham had been bombed by the Japanese on 4th March.

It was about this time that the faster vessels had reached Fremantle, much to the delight and relief of those on board. There

were only a few more days travel to Adelaide, where the men awaited the pleasure of the wharf laborers to be unloaded.

Eventually the men were accommodated in private homes where they were made very welcome.

The main body of the Regiment, together with H.Q. 7th Division, and a British General Hospital bound for Ceylon, on 18th February embarked at Suez on the 20,000 ton ship H.M.T. "Andes". The "Andes" was a British passenger ship built just prior to the outbreak of the war, and was still on her maiden voyage. The Regiment's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel J. W. Rhoden was appointed O/C Troops.

One of the men manning a Bofors on the ship tells of life on board:

"We slept on deck, arising before 6 a.m. to avoid being washed away by the ship's crew with hoses. After a wash and a shave, we would go down to the noisy, packed mess for a good breakfast. With the ship being so crowded, life was relaxed with lectures, reading, sun bathing, games of solo and bridge, aircraft watches from the gun position, and occasionally the luxury of a sea water bath."

The "Andes" arrived in Colombo on the morning of 27th February. The harbor was crammed with ships – warships and shiploads of refugees from the Pacific theatre of war.

The A.I.F. in operation "Stepsister", was destined for the defence of the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). When Singapore fell on 15th February, Wavell regarded the successful defence of Java and Sumatra as being very doubtful and recommended the diversion of the Australian Forces to Burma. Mr. Churchill, the British Prime Minister, on 22nd February, sanctioned a diversion of the leading ships in the "Stepsister" convoy to Burma. On the instance of General Sturdee, John Curtin the Prime Minister of Australia, resisted Mr. Churchill's command and insisted that the A.I.F. be returned to defend Australia.

In the afternoon of 2nd March, the "Andes" left Colombo with three other ships – "Orcades", "Strathallan" and "Durham Castle", escorted by the cruiser "Southampton". The events that had previously happened to the "Orcades" are told in the Workshops story.

The next day the troops heard the news that Wyndham and Broome had been bombed by the Japanese. On 4th March they were addressed by Brigadier-General Wilson of the U.S. Army, and Major-General Herring in charge of 6th Division. The destination of the ship was given as Australia. The following night the "Andes" left the convoy and escort.

On 10th March the troops sighted Australia once again, berthing at Fremantle wharf at 1900, whereon the W.X.'s received night

leave.

The "Andes" left Fremantle on the evening of the next day and headed for Adelaide. Field service uniforms were re-issued, and on 15th March the "Andes" berthed at Adelaide. The troops were disembarked the next day, were given lunch, and transported by trains to private billets in the suburb of Paradise.

A very warm welcome was given to the troops by the people of Adelaide. Regimental H.Q. was positioned at Campbelltown, with guns, tractors, trucks and equipment assembled on the Oval at Paradise.

There were many telephone calls to loved ones at home who had not heard from their men during several weeks of anxiety. Some ships with troops and equipment had been diverted to the Dutch East Indies and had fallen into Japanese hands.

On 18th March, R.H.Q. received orders from Brigade that 7th and 8th Batteries with R.H.Q. were to be sent to Western Australia and that 9th Battery was to be sent to Port Moresby.

On 22nd March, Lieutenant-Colonel Rhoden flew to Perth, to take command of the air defence at Pearce, Geraldton and Exmouth Gulf, the American Air Base at Nedlands, and the submarine base at Exmouth Gulf.

On that day also, there was a message from Major Hughes-Hallett requesting the transfer of personnel to a new regiment to be known as 112 Light A.A. Regiment A.M.F.; and on the 25th March this was done.

There were at this time many ships, on which 2/3rd Regiment troops were travelling which had not yet arrived in Fremantle or Adelaide. Amongst these ships were the "City of Hankow", "Nur-mahal", "Ittersum", "Havildar" and "St. Essylt". Those ships with 7th and 8th Battery personnel on board were unloaded when they arrived in Fremantle and awaited the Regiment from Adelaide. One ship was well and truly stopped in Fremantle, as the War Diary records:— "*Apr. 1 Capt Davis and personnel "St. Essylt" placed in quarantine Perth*".

Except for those still at sea, the Regiment paraded on 31st March, with the three Batteries being on parade together for the first time in over twelve months. It was also the last time the Regiment of three Batteries would be on parade together.

The War Diary of 4th April curtly records:— "*350 personnel to proceed on Home Leave and leave on train*".

A gunner's diary elaborates:—

"Wednesday April 1 — On the 0930 parade the VX men were separated from the NX men and leave looks very near. Waited around in drizzling rain until 1200 when we were told that we were definitely getting leave, i.e. VX numbers. All very excited,

we are to report to the Glenroy Oval at 1400. Had a hurried lunch, Mrs. James packed us some sandwiches, we scrambled our packing and away we went. About 1500 we left the Oval in A.S.C. trucks and went to a suburban station. Waited around until 1640 when we boarded a special train. Plenty of room. Light refreshments at Murray Bridge."

When the train arrived at Spencer Street the next morning, the troops received a great welcome from their friends and relations.

That glorious leave lasted until the afternoon of Friday, 10th April when the men boarded the train at Spencer Street, to return to Adelaide where they were warned of an impending move. In fact 9th Battery moved out on 12th April for Queensland. On 14th April, R.H.Q. and 7th and 8th Batteries moved to Perth by train, and joined those who had been disembarked at Fremantle and were already manning gun sites. 7th Battery was stationed as A.A. defence at Pearce, and 8th Battery at Crawley Bay.

Lieutenant-Colonel Rhoden writes:— "*After a reconnaissance of these places 7th Battery was ordered to be responsible for Pearce and the 8th Battery for Geraldton, Nedlands and the Exmouth Gulf with H.Q. at Nedlands Junction.*"

The subsequent history of 7th, 8th and 9th Batteries is told in the following chapters.

4th June, 1943 saw the commencement of the breaking up of the Regiment, when 7th Battery received instructions to transfer to 152 Aust. L.A.A. Battery at Geraldton 6 x 40mm Bofors. Movement Control Instructions dated 25th June ordered the transfer of the Battery from Western Australia Lines of Communication Area to the Victorian L. of C. Area by rail; and on 2nd July two officers and 110 other ranks departed from Fremantle for Melbourne.

On 3rd July, R.H.Q. received the following instruction:—

"H.Q. R.A.A. 3 AUST. CORPS ADM. INSTN. No. 10. H.Q. 2/3rd Aust. L.A.A. Regiment (less C.O.) will be transferred to H.Q. 121 Aust. L.A.A. Regiment C.O. to temporary H.Q. R.A.A. 3 Aust. Corps 2/3rd Aust. L.A.A. Regiment will select 7 Officers and 137 O.R.'s to be known as 2/8th Aust. L.A.A. Battery (Airborne) Signals Detachment to 109 Aust. L.A.A. Regiment. To be completed by 14th July, 1943."

Lieutenant-Colonel Rhoden was appointed to command a new Composite (Heavy Establishment) A.A. Regiment under command 3 Corps in Western Australia. This Regiment comprised two Heavy A.A. Batteries and 3 Light A.A. Batteries responsible for the air defence of American Air Bases at Exmouth Gulf, Noonkambah, and Corunna Downs in the north-west of Western Australia, until disbanded at the end of the war.

COMMANDING OFFICER'S LETTER TO THE REGIMENT MARKING
ITS FIRST ANNIVERSARY.

18 July, 1941.

TO OFFICERS, N.C.O.'s & MEN
OF 3 AUST. LT. A.A. REGT.

On the first anniversary of the formation of the Regiment, wheresoever you be scattered over land and water, I send you greetings and commendation for the magnificent work and devotion to duty shown by all ranks.

Most of us have lost many good friends during the stress of battle and I charge each and every one of you to remember them when engaging the enemy. Their loss must be avenged and the score evened. Our aim must be an enemy plane for each member of the Regiment dead or missing.

The record of the Regiment since its formation has been a very proud one which has been enhanced since it has been engaged in battles. Its fame and name have been spread throughout the units of all arms of the British Commonwealth of Nations with which it has been serving.

This has been brought about by the discipline and loyalty and esprit de corps which exists in the Unit. I charge each newly-joined member of the Regiment to at once imbibe these attributes and each original member to continue to uphold these principles.

The Regiment through no fault of its own has been separated on occasions from some of its Batteries, but all ranks look forward to the time when it will be together again.

I desire to thank all Officers N.C.O.'s and Men for their loyalty and magnificent work during the past year and look forward with hope that our second anniversary may be held under more peaceful circumstances.

JOHN W. RHODEN,
Lt.-Col.,
C.O. 3 Aust. Lt. A.A. Regt.