

# CASCABEL

Journal of the

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY ASSOCIATION  
(VICTORIA) INCORPORATED

ABN 22 850 898 908



Published Quarterly in  
Victoria Australia



Holding the Kangaroo Court at the Gunner Dinner

*Photo courtesy Brian Cahill*

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Submissions for the **January 2005** issue are required no later than **1<sup>st</sup> December 2004** unless otherwise arranged with the Editor.

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## The President Writes

The Gunner Ball 2004 was successfully run at the Prahran Town Hall with 101 in attendance and 30 apologies. I believe that the decision to make this an all ranks function was the way to go. I sincerely wish to thank all those who attended and helped make the occasion what it was. A few minor problems have been identified, and these will be addressed in the future. Both the venue and the caterer have been tentatively booked for the 24th June 2005. I would be very interested in any feed-back from those who attended, and perhaps even reasons others did not attend.

As is noted elsewhere in the Magazine, the date of the Annual General Meeting has been changed to Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> Nov 2004 due to a clash with the Corps Conference dates.

The agenda for the AGM will include Anzac Day format, donation to The Royal Australian Artillery Museum at North Fort, and a plaque for the Memorial Park on the old Site 17 Seymour. Additional Association social activities will also be discussed. Suggestions please.

The Reserve Forces Day march was held in ideal weather on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> July. About 25 members of the Association marched behind our banner. The march was very well organised, and the speakers at the Shrine were interesting, topical and concise. Greater support for this activity by Association members would certainly improve the day. It was pleasing to note that our banner was shown on the ABC news coverage.

St Barbara -end in December (latest information to date). During this parade the Whitelaw Prizes and the 10 MDM REGT Association Prize will be presented. This is a family day for the Regiment, and the members and families of the Association have been invited to attend.

The Golf Day is rapidly approaching. Please remember to let me know at least by the 22<sup>nd</sup> October if you are attending to play, watch, or just lunching.

My regards to you and your family





## **A Message from the Colonel Commandant**

As forecast in my last column, the 2004 Gunner Dinner was a great success and I am sure that the new format will be further improved and our Regimental Dinner will go from strength to strength. I am particularly anxious that every effort should be made to ensure that our older members be given every opportunity to attend.

In July, the School Of Artillery held a combined Formal Dinner and Ball for all ranks. This function was exceptionally well planned and executed. The benefits of having the appropriate staff and premises were evident.

In August, 2/10 held their Regimental Ball at The Powerhouse. This function was well attended, including a strong representation from the Association, and like the SOA Ball, ably supported by our Regimental Band. I must say that I have attended many Balls over the years and I have yet to see or recall a band as professional or as competent as ours. I would like to see this function return to its original pre-eminent place in the military social calendar.

The SO2 to the Head of Regiment is currently tasked, within his busy schedule, to establish and maintain a Regimental Website. This site will be up and running shortly, with many interesting links and information. He is anxious to obtain information from every source and to this end asks that the Association provided details of its meetings and activities dates. There will also be a facility to publish Cascabel on the site. He is also keen to receive written and visual input for the historical areas of the Site. If you have any items that you consider would enhance this project, please contact the Secretary. I intend to arrange an appropriate group occasion at which suitable information could be made available to the School.

On 28 August, I attended the Defence Reserves Association annual forum at Watsonia. This annual event focuses on the place of the Reserve in the defence of Australia, the recruiting and training of its members and the pay and conditions of Reservists.

The key addresses were given by Chief Of Army, Minister Assisting the Minister Of Defence and General Cooke. There were also complementary presentations by other senior members of the Defence Force, both serving and retired. Whilst much that was said has been heard before there were some encouraging statements.

In particular the following matters may be of interest.

- There was opposition to the use of the Reserve other than as sub units or formed teams.
- Better use to be made of and recognition of existing civilian skills.
- Defence must be prepared for changes in operational threat within a particular theatre
- There is to be a review of the Active Reserve Training Model.
- The Recruiting function is to be returned to locally based Units and a process of

Whilst I appreciate that some of these messages have been sent before, there appeared to be some on these items at this years conference.

Brig (R) D I PERRY

Colonel Commandant (SR)

# Membership Report

27 Sep 2004

## **Current Membership**

Life Members	218
Annual Members	83
Affiliates	46
Others (CO/CI, Messes, etc.)	11
Libraries	4
Total	<u>362</u>

Included in the above total are four Annual Members who have not yet renewed their subscription.

## **Honours**

Congratulations to MAJ Jeffrey M Lawrence who received an AM in the recent Honours List.

**The usual reminder about the proforma on the last page below the Parade Card.**

If you have not already done so, it would be appreciated if you would provide the information requested so that our files can be kept up to date. This proforma should also be used to notify us of any changes in the future.



Neil Hamer  
MAJ (R)  
Membership Co-ordinator

Contact: Telephone: 9702 2100  
E-mail: [nhamer@lexicon.net](mailto:nhamer@lexicon.net)

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## **Insurance**

### **The Association, Affiliated Associations and you**

In this day and age every activity we engage in is governed to a greater or lesser degree by the insurance industry. **This Association is no exception.**

We currently pay nearly \$900 per year for Public and Product Liability to cover our members and guests during any activity organised by the Association. The cover is \$10m with a \$1000 excess.

This includes activities such as our monthly Committee Meetings held at the Chapel Street Depot, the Gunner Dinner at the Prahran Town Hall, and any organised visits such as P&EE or field firing.

One of the benefits that is obtained from this compulsory insurance is that we can offer insurance cover under our policy to our Affiliated Associations who do not have a cover of their own. A number of these Organisations are too small to be able to afford individual insurance.

For example, if any of these associations wish to gather at the Chapel Street Depot on Anzac Day after the march, or hold a gathering in the Depot or elsewhere at any time, we can offer them cover.

If anybody requires more information, please contact our **Treasurer, SSGT Reg Morrell on 03 9562 9552**, or any other member of the Committee.



## 2<sup>nd</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment Quick Orders

Dear Gunners; This is intended to be the first of many regular pages providing information about the 2<sup>nd</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment.

I hope to keep you all abreast of the happenings of the Regiment and to get you all involved in what is going on.

### Regt Key Staff:

<b>RHQ</b> (03) 9526 4222  <b>CO</b> LTCOL P.A. Rowley <b>2IC</b> MAJ J. McGuigan <b>ADJT</b> CAPT P. Meakin <b>RSM</b> WO1 M.I. Johnson	<b>HQ Bty</b>  <b>OPSO / BC</b> MAJ S.J. Bennett <b>BSM</b> WO2 B. Munford
<b>22 Fd Bty</b> (03) 8710 2407  <b>BC</b> MAJ G. Rolfe <b>BSM</b> SGT P. Wainwright <b>SMIG</b> WO2 D. Grundell	<b>38 Fd Bty</b> (03) 5221 7666  <b>BC</b> MAJ S. Dutton <b>BSM</b> WO2 R. Schreurs <b>SMIG</b> WO2 P. Carthew

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### Current Issues

At present the Regiment is attempting to have two major symbols recognised through Army Headquarters. Your comment and suggestions on these matters are invited. If you would like to comment on either of these please contact the ADJT.

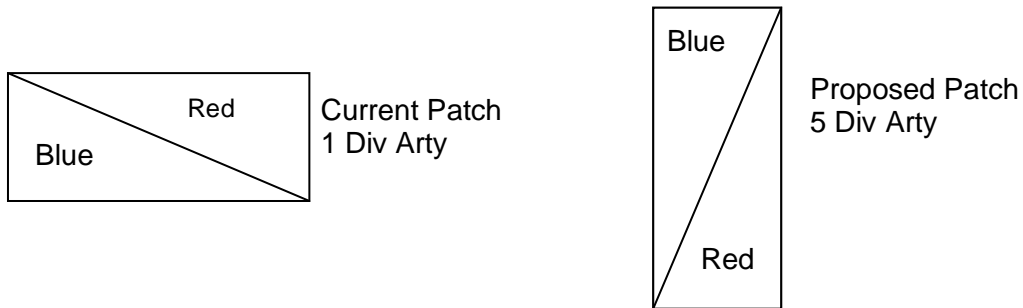
### Colour Patch

Currently 2/10 Fd Regt is authorised to wear the 1 Div Arty colour patch due to its clear links through history to 2 AFA of 1 Div during WW I. This is a clear link and is not in dispute.

The 1 Div Arty colour patch is also currently authorised for wear by two other units, being 1 Fd Regt and HQ 1 Div Arty, and having two other units wear the same colour patch as us does not achieve the aim of unique individual identification of units.

A proposal has been raised by this unit to adopt the 5 Div Arty colour patch. This is through our links to 15 AFA of 5 Div in WW I. This is through the various units that have undergone amalgamations and name changes through the history of the Victorian Artillery. While the Regiment no longer has the designation 15 in its title the links are clear.

The two patches are shown below:



### Regimental Emblem

Currently the Regiment does not have an emblem for use on plaques, signs and the like.

To rectify this, the Regiment is proposing to adopt the old badge of the Victorian Artillery from the late 1800 and early 1900 shown below:



Again, your comment on these matters would be greatly appreciated.

### Upcoming Activities

15 17 Oct Exercise CUTTLER VC. Drivers and Communicators courses

19 21 Nov Exercise DAMOUR. Artillery Live Fire Exercise

4 Dec St Barbara  
combined Dining In Night

Officers

*Ubique*

**Lieutenant Colonel Peter Rowley**

Commanding Officer

2<sup>nd</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment

Royal Australian Artillery



RAA Association (Victoria) Inc  
Corps Shop

**The following items may be purchased by mail, or at selected Association activities.**

**PRICE LIST**

<p><b>Badges, etc</b></p> <p>RAA Assn (Vic), members           \$5.00          RAA badge cuff links               \$9.00          Key ring, RAA badge                \$4.00          Key ring, RAA (Pewter)            \$4.00</p> <p><b>Ties</b></p> <p>Blue with single red gun            \$30.00          RAA Burgundy with gold gun       \$43.00          RAA Navy with gold gun            \$43.00          St Barbara Stripe                   \$43.00</p> <p><b>Books</b></p> <p><i>Kookaburra s Cutthroats</i>           \$39.00  <i>Aust Military Equip Profiles</i>       \$13.50  <i>AMEF Profile Leopard Tank</i>        \$17-00</p> <p><b>ENQUIRIES:</b></p> <p>BRIAN CLEEMAN                   (03) 9560 7116          REG MORRELL                      (03) 9562 9552</p>	<p><b>Stationery</b></p> <p>Card, RAA badge, with envelope              Christmas message               \$0.20              blank inside                       \$0.20</p> <p>Stickers</p> <p>    Bumper: <i>Gunners do it</i>                              <i>with a bigger bang</i>   \$2.00</p> <p>    Square: gold badge, red                              and blue background       \$2.00</p> <p><b>ORDERS:</b>          Most orders will require an additional FIVE DOLLARS packing and postage, which will cover one to several small items. If in any doubt concerning this, or availability, please contact one of the enquiries numbers above.</p> <p>Cheques should be made payable to RAA Association (Victoria) Inc, and be crossed <i>Not Negotiable</i>.</p> <p>Orders to:    Mr B. Cleeman                            28 Samada Street                            Notting Hill VIC 3168</p>
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**Defence sites off limits for cameras**

*January 11 1940: Canberra*

An order under the National Security act, which was issued by the Prime Minister, prohibits the photographing of any subject likely to be of use to the enemy. The restrictions apply to defence works, military equipment and public utilities. Photographs may not be made of any fortification, battery, searchlight or any other work of defence, any aerodrome or seaplane station, any assembly of any of the naval, military or air forces of the Commonwealth and of his Majesty forces, any barracks, encampment or building

occupied or in course of preparation for occupation by any of the naval, military or air forces.

The prohibition also applies to any arsenal, factory, magazine or store for munitions of war, arms, equipment or supplies for any of the naval, military or air forces of the Commonwealth whether completed in course of construction, any wireless, telegraph, signal or cable station, any wharf, dock, caisson, dock yard, harbour, ship building works or pier.

*(The Age A3 17/8/04 supplied by R Miller)*

## Loyalty Message and Response

Fellow Association Members,

On 9 July this year I sent the following message of loyalty from the Regiment to the Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to mark Royal Australian Artillery day 2004:

"The Colonels Commandant, the Head of Regiment, and all Ranks of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery convey to Her Majesty, their Captain General, their respect and loyalty on the occasion of Royal Australian Artillery Day, 1 August 2004. On this day the Regiment celebrates one hundred and thirty three years of dedicated service."

Doug Perry

I have received the following reply:

"Please convey my warm thanks to the Colonels Commandant, Head of Regiment and all Ranks of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery for their message of loyal greetings sent on the occasion of Royal Australian Artillery Day, which is being held on this the one hundred and thirty third anniversary of the Regiment.

As your Captain General, I appreciate your kind words and, in return, send my best wishes to you all for an enjoyable event on this notable occasion.

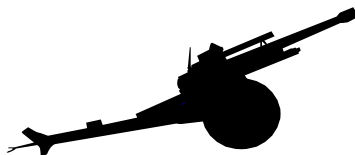
Elizabeth R"

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## 2004 Gunner Dinner Photos

Kindly supplied by Brian Cahill







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**RSVP:**

Darren Sullivan  
The Naval and Military Club  
27 Little Collins Street  
Melbourne Vic. 3000  
Ph 9650 4741

Total Payable \$
------------------

Please reserve me \_\_\_\_\_ seats for the Artillery Luncheon to be held at the Club on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2004

My Guests will be: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My Cheque is enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Charge my Credit Card: \_\_\_\_\_ Club No. \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Card \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

# RAA ASSOCIATION (VIC) INC MIXED SOCIAL GOLF DAY



To be held at the Berwick Montuna Golf Club  
Beaconsfield-Emerald Road, Guy

(Melways 212 C4)

On the Friday 29<sup>th</sup> Oct 2004

## Tee Time 0830 Hrs

**This will be our third Annual Golf Day** and we look forward to an even bigger and better field to compete for the coveted RAA Association Perpetual Trophy.

**Golfers at ALL** levels of expertise are invited to attend, including wives, husbands, partners, relatives and friends. Caddies, coaches observers and encouragers are most welcome to attend either, or both, the golf and the lunch.

**Hire clubs, buggies and motorised carts** are available from the Golf-Shop. These items should be booked directly with the Golf shop on 9707 5226 at least ten days prior. Photo ID and a deposit will be required for clubs and carts.

**The cost** for golfers is \$25.00 which covers green fees for 18 holes and trophies.

**Lunch** will be available in the Clubhouse at very reasonable prices.

**The competition of the day** will be a stableford competition for handicap golfers, and a stroke competition for non-handicap golfers. This means that you count all your strokes. Some **Special Local Rules** may be made for non-handicap golfers.

**A separate competition** for handicap and non-handicap golfers will be held if there are sufficient numbers in each field. If not, the non-handicap golfers will be given a stableford score calculated by the Match Committee.

**Non-handicap** golfers will be given a handicap at the end of the competition (by a very complicated and involved system called the Calloway System) so that all golfers have a fair chance of winning their competition. This Calloway handicap will be used to calculate the stableford points (if required). Stableford competition allocates points per hole according to handicap. This will be calculated by the Match Committee.

**Trophies** for the Best Score and Nearest the Pin (2) in both competitions will be given. Trophies will be awarded in the Clubhouse during lunch.

**So that** tee times and a number for lunch can be booked for this very busy time of the year, would you please indicate if you would like to attend, and the number of people in your group, by telephone, mail or e-mail to:

**Maj Neil Hamer, 12 Marida Court, Berwick 3806;**  
**Telephone, 9702 2100;**  
**E-mail, nhamer@lexicon.net**  
Not later than 20<sup>th</sup> October 2004.

Please include your handicap, if you have one, and the number of non-golfers who will be attending for lunch.



## A Reminisce from Walhalla

In Cascabel #68, at page 17, Col. Farley, in his Service Career, referred to an incident on a TEWT at Walhalla.

Either Graham  
separate times, in the same location!

To set the scene, the rationale <sup>s</sup>  
South East Asia hence very steep, heavily timbered country was needed for exercises Walhalla certainly filled the bill!

For those who do not know that part of the country, Walhalla is situated in a narrow, steep-sided valley in Gippsland the valley so narrow that when Stringer the valley floor, the houses change to the opposite side some even being built on stilts over the creek.

The valley walls are so steep that many graves in the cemetery are bored into the hillside, not dug in the normal way, whilst caskets had to be carried up the last stretch in the road, as horses couldn't pull the hearse up to the gate.

To create a cricket/football ground, the top was shaved off a suitable hill, and in its heyday, the Walhalla team could boast of never being beaten at football on its home ground in over 60 years the simple reason being that the locals went to the ground several hours before the game, whilst the visitors had to toil up the steep access road not long before the game, arriving so pooped they didn't recover before the game! Such was the country in which we exercised!

On the occasion mentioned by Graham or one almost identical as we returned to town in the late afternoon, C.O., Lt./Col. "Bill" Swalwell, suddenly ordered all vehicles halted, all personnel except drivers, out of the vehicles, without maps, the challenge being to find our way back, on foot, to the hotel the reward was a beer on the C.O. to the first one back!

Lt. Keith Lord and I paired off and agreed that the town lay virtually straight up and over the hill on our right, which we proceeded to climb literally hand-over-hand, due to the steepness! Finding that our estimate of location was right we came down through the cemetery as the C.Os' car passed the entrance road. Skirting a path along the back of the hotel, we went in to have the pleasure of suggesting to the C.O. that he put down the beer he was about to pick up, as it was ours! It took us sometime to convince him that we hadn't got a lift in, but he graciously handed over the rewards, despite some considerable surprise!

Groups arrived in dribs and drabs, until dinner time, when it became apparent that one whole party was missing altogether! After dinner, it was decided to take to the roads to find the last group, including then Capt. Farley. They were eventually found on the road down the mountain on the way to Erica and Moe. Asked why they were doing that, most in the party said that they had followed Capt. Farley because, being a Scoutmaster, he would know where he was going! So much for the value of military training!

As it was around the middle of the year, and after dinner, Graham's contention that the sight of senior officers enjoying their drinks on the hotel veranda was somewhat off-putting, couldn't be valid either, as Walhalla didn't have mains electricity, at that time it was too cold to be sitting outside!

I should add that this version of that incident has been checked with Keith Lord and the late Norm Cathie, both of whom agree with this one!

Ian Beith



# Royal Australian Artillery Association (Victoria) Inc.

## Annual General Meeting

Thursday the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 7.30 pm

*Oakleigh RSL  
Drummond Street Oakleigh*

*Bistro opens 6 pm*

*Light supper provided after the meeting*

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### Reminiscing a “quiet Wedding”

My contact with the late Captain Norm Cathie, who introduced me to the Association, brought back some wonderful memories of Norm’s indirect influence on my wedding.

After parade at Dandenong one night, Norm announced his engagement, much to the delight of the 2i/c, Maj. “Mick” Scarff, who had a great wish to mount a guard of honour for something - anything!

On ordering the QM to procure 24 sets of Sam Brownes and swords, he was told by Norm that the guard couldn’t happen, as he was being married in Adelaide! After calling Norm a “traitor”, Maj. Mick cancelled the order for the swords, etc.

I then jokingly, suggested to the 2i/c that he could provide a guard for my wedding. As I was no chicken at the time, his reply was that “when I got married he’d provide a 21 gun salute! The smile faded from his face as I suggested he start priming his guns, as my marriage was fast approaching a fact confirmed by Lt. Keith Lord, who was to be my best man.

The order for swords, etc., was restored, and so, despite my future wife and my desire to have a quiet wedding, the scene changed with Keith and I in full dress uniform swords and all two priests to make sure the job was well done, a large church full of people, and a gratifyingly large guard greeting us as we left the church! So much for a quiet wedding just as well we hadn’t planned a large one!!

Ian Beith



## ***The Big Guns 9.2 inch Breech loading Howitzer***

**Author: Peter Burness is Senior Curator, Gallery Development, at the Australian War Memorial.**

Article courtesy Australian War Memorial

Artillery was the most dominant of all weapons in the First World War; it set the nature and conduct of battles, transformed the landscape, and caused the most casualties. In the fighting in France and Belgium, Australian gunners were employed in every main area of British operations.

The 9.2-inch Breech-Loading (BL) Howitzer was the largest artillery piece used by Australians in the war, and remains the largest used in land battle in the history of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery. These guns, the composition of their crews, and many of the areas of their operations, were different from the rest of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF).

Only one Australian battery – the 55th Heavy Artillery Battery – was equipped with the 9.2-inch (233-millimetre) howitzers. At first, the battery had just four guns, and this was later expanded to six. The battery, and the 54th Heavy Artillery Battery, which had 8-inch (203-millimetre) howitzers, on wheels, were placed together as the Australian Heavy Artillery Group (HAG). These two siege batteries, and their headquarters, moved from Britain to France in March 1916 and became the first Australian units to go into battle on the Western Front.

Unlike other formations of the AIF, which were created from civilian volunteers, the heavy batteries had been formed mostly from permanent artillerymen of the Royal Australian Garrison Artillery, with some reinforcements from the militia; the same regulars and Citizens' force soldiers who had been manning the forts guarding Australia's ports and coastline. Early in the war, after it was decided that there was little direct threat to the coastal cities, the brigade was drawn together in Melbourne from the different states drafts, and sailed for overseas service in July 1915. On arrival in Britain the unit, with its two batteries, was numbered the 36th (Australian) HAG.

The 36th HAG was placed under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Walter "Wacky" Coxen. He was a soldier who was impressive in both mind and manner. Before the end of the war he would become the senior artillery commander of the Australian Corps. Major John Hurst was the first to command the 9.2-inch battery. His early career also followed in some of Coxen's footsteps. He accompanied the heavy battery overseas, then, in July 1916, was appointed to command the 22nd Australian Field Artillery Brigade. He returned to the heavy artillery in January 1917, taking over as commanding officer following Coxen's promotion, and remained there until the end of the war.

In England the 55th Battery took delivery of its brand-new 9.2-inch howitzers in December 1915. They were modern monsters, and the gunners spent a further two months training on them at Taunton in Somerset. The guns, which had only recently entered service, met a particular need on the Western Front. Firing from their stable base, with a high angle, a low muzzle velocity and slow rate of fire, the guns could place heavy shells on enemy positions accurately over a long range. It was possible to fire two rounds within one minute, although this rate could not be sustained.

The 9.2-inch howitzer, which had a working crew of 14 men, threw a 132-kilogram projectile almost 10 kilometres. The howitzer was fired from a fixed and stable position on a beam platform set into the ground. Moving the gun to new locations was a time-



consuming and heavy task, requiring the gun and mounting to be broken down into three main loads. The all-up weight was 12 tonnes.

There were better ways of moving the howitzers from place to place than using horse-teams. Instead, a 100-horsepower Holt caterpillar tractor hauled the transporting wagon, with two attached loads bearing sections of the carriage body. The ungainly train moved at walking pace over the cobbled roads in Flanders and France, causing heavy wear on the metal tracks, making them slippery in the frost and wet, and creating constant vibration that left drivers exhausted even over short distances.

Establishing a position for firing was a slow process. To lay the two-beam platform and assemble and prepare the gun needed a detachment of 25 men. In muddy ground it could take two days to set the platform and a further 12 hours to deploy the gun. An earth box containing about 10 tonnes of ballast was attached to the front of the gun to keep it balanced when firing.

When fired, the howitzer gave a mighty blast. In France during 1916 an Australian chaplain came too close to one gun. "I thought the end of the world had come, and I was lifted violently off my feet and thrown against the ground. I had walked unwittingly right in the angle of blast", he recalled. Despite this, the gunners did not wear ear protection and usually ended up suffering various degrees of deafness.



Australian gunners load a shell into a 9.2-inch howitzer. From this position guns fired in support of Australian troops at Pozieres in July 1916.

AWM EZ0147

Left to right: 1952 Sapper Walter Gunyon; 320 Gunner Claude McCook; 608 Corporal Leslie Frank Beagley, and 245 Sergeant Duncan McCrae MM.

The heavy artillery gunners did not see a lot of their countrymen. The two batteries were Army Troops and could be employed anywhere they were required along the front. At different times they could be under British, French, Australian or Canadian command, and sometimes also supported New Zealand, South African or Belgian troops. The batteries and their headquarters were not always together; they were mostly associated with, and developed an affinity with, British units of the Royal Artillery.



A gun of the Australian 9.2-inch battery in action at Voormezele, Belgium, in September 1917.  
AWM E00694

The 2nd Australian Siege Battery in action. Identified, background, left to right (standing): 856 Staff Sergeant F G Dobson MM; 199 Bombardier W Carlin DCM; 814 Gunner (Gnr) H C Johns; 362 Gnr W Fotheringham; 695 Gnr R H Parkes; 700 Gnr T Garry; 699 Gnr C W D McRae. Foreground, left to right: 552 Gnr J V Lawrence; 777 Gnr H J Kitching (beside Lawrence); 31687 Gnr J D Boydell; 172 Sergeant L Franks (beside Boydell); 196 Corporal G F Brown.

The separation of the heavy gunners from the rest of the AIF was evident in other ways too. Having been largely drawn from the permanent army, members of the brigade were allowed to continue to wear the “RAA” badges instead of the general service Australian “Rising Sun” that was common throughout all other units of the AIF.

The 9.2-inch howitzer battery spent less time in the Somme region than most of the Australian divisions. Its main sphere of operations was north of Arras, around Vimy, sometimes supporting the Canadians, and in Flanders around Ypres. The guns did go to the Somme in mid-1916 to support the British offensive, and were there in July, when they fired in support of the Australians’s attack on Pozieres.

During their spell near Arras in 1917, the 9.2s assisted the Canadians in their famous capture of Vimy Ridge. Then the guns moved north into Flanders in time to fire for the battle of Messines in June. This was followed by the third battle of Ypres, when all five Australian infantry divisions took part in the fighting, and again the guns were in the general area of AIF operations.



Mud was a big problem, particularly in Flanders. It was hard to get a firm base in the sodden ground. Guns became so bogged that they could not be moved, and the supply of ammunition was difficult. An example was when the Australians were eventually relieved after the Ypres fighting in late 1917 and their howitzers had to be left behind. They were handed over to the Canadians while the Australians took over some of their guns in a quieter area - "a home away from home" - before moving by night to Villers-Plouich in preparation for the forthcoming Cambrai battle.

Working the big howitzers was constant and heavy work. It was vital that the guns, or their flash, not be seen by the enemy. They were generally set up, under cover well behind the front line, to fire over long range; and they were usually fairly safe. One of the Australian officers wrote: "Thank God I am a gunner and not an unfortunate infantryman; they do have a thin time. However, when the guns were well set forward, or German heavy artillery got their range, the immobile heavy howitzers became very vulnerable.

One of the worst moments was on 4 October 1917, in the opening of the Broodseinde battle beyond Ypres, when the howitzers suddenly came under heavy shelling. The battery commander wrote: "We lost about 15 killed and 30 wounded. Had a bit of a job getting the killed and wounded away and getting the guns back into action as [they] had been a bit knocked. Most of the lads did great work". Many of the wounded had to be carried out on duckboards. Lieutenant Percy Dobson, who was there, commented sadly: "The battery lost some good men that day.

In a three-day period the battery lost a quarter of its gun-line strength, killed or wounded.

An even greater danger was a sudden enemy breakthrough, making it impossible to extract the heavy howitzers in time. This happened on 30 November 1917 when the 9.2-inch battery was located just south-west of Cambrai. The howitzers had been brought up a few weeks earlier and emplaced at night just 800 metres behind the front line, ready to be a part of a great British attack about to begin. Following a successful battle, in which tanks played a leading role, the Germans counterattacked, placing the guns at risk. The Germans retook a lot of ground. Although they were finally held, and the line stabilised, it was a disaster for some of the British artillery, with many of their guns overrun. Even the heavies further back were exposed. In the late morning, with the enemy advancing, the Australians had received the message: "Prepare to destroy your guns and evacuate". By early afternoon the battery was under fire.

The situation worsened. The Germans came on and there was no time to destroy the howitzers, so attempts were made to disable them. The breech-blocks were removed and buried. In desperation, fires were set under each gun, using the ammunition bag charges. An officer recalled: "As the Huns seemed to be north, east and south, we decided on [withdrawal] due west. Nobody knew what was happening". Finally the Germans were stopped before they got the guns. The gunners went back, and the howitzers, now burnt and damaged, were hauled away to safety and for repair. But it had been an inglorious moment.

Part of the problem throughout this ordeal was caused by the absence of the battery commander, Major Arthur Bates, who had been away for several days. A university-educated regular soldier, he had already been mentioned-in-despatches for "distinguished and gallant conduct" and had been appointed to command the battery several weeks earlier. But this day ruined his career. Dismissed from the service for being absent without permission and for failing to return during the salvage operations, he went home in

disgrace in June 1918. Command of the battery passed to Major George McDonald; when he was mortally wounded in March 1918, Major Gordon Manchester took over, commanding the battery until the war's end. Manchester had not joined the unit until October 1917, having been held back in Australia in charge of the Thursday Island defences.

The technical aspects of artillery work advanced rapidly as the war progressed. Guns of different sizes fired a range of shells, including high-explosive (HE), shrapnel, gas, and smoke. The 9.2s used HE almost exclusively. The effectiveness of these shells was increased by the new No. 106 Percussion Fuze, which was first widely adopted by the heavy batteries from 1917. This was an instantaneous fuze that detonated the shell on top of the ground before it had penetrated. Artillery work had become a precise science, although the heavy gunners still simply described their main tasks as divided between "counter-blasters" engaging enemy batteries, and "trench-punching".

In December 1917 there were changes for the Australian heavy batteries, now back in Flanders resting and refitting following the Cambrai battle. A new permanent brigade structure was announced. Batteries of 6-inch howitzers and 60-pounders were added, and, with the two existing batteries, they were now named the 36th Heavy Artillery Brigade; the 8-inch and 9.2-inch batteries becoming the 1st and 2nd Siege Batteries. The brigade was posted to the Australian Corps and it looked like the heavy gunners might see out their service alongside the AIF divisions. However, nothing came of this as most of the Australian divisions were quickly sent back to the Somme to try to stop the German advance there in March 1918, and to later be a part of the local counter-offensive. The heavy guns could not accompany them. When the Australian Corps eventually took part in the 1918 advances they were supported by 9.2-inch howitzers from British units, while the Australian battery continued its work in the north.

The German offensive of early 1918 was not restricted to the Somme. There was also pressure on the Ypres front, where the enemy made substantial gains. In early April 1918, some of the Australian 9.2-inch howitzers were overrun by the Germans near Ploegsteert Wood, where they had spent several weeks. In attempting to withdraw two guns, the gunners were defeated by the mud and slush and found that some tractors could not even pull themselves out. One 9.2-inch carriage was only hauled out by using three tractors, but little else could be done. The brigade was withdrawn towards St Omer, and was later re-equipped and back in action around Meteren.

Only the 1st Australian Division stayed on in Flanders, not rejoining the rest of the Australian Corps on the Somme until August 1918. There were some occasions when the Australian heavy howitzers fired in support of the division's operations. This work in the Strazeele-Hazebrouck sector, during May and June, was mentioned in the award of the Distinguished Service Order to Lieutenant Colonel Hurst. It was the last occasion that the guns were involved in assisting the Australian infantry. The big howitzers remained a part of the overall British firepower in the Ypres area, supporting operations there until the end of the war.

The Australian Heavy Artillery Brigade was a very small part of the AIF's contribution to the war on the Western Front. Still, it had done good work, having been heavily committed in action for a total of 860 days, during which it suffered 71 fatal casualties and had almost 300 wounded.

Some of the officers, being career soldiers, felt that their brigade's isolation from the main body of the AIF had reduced their chances for promotion. Despite this, many of them had been recognised and Coxen had risen to the highest level in the artillery - by 1918 he was the AIF's "Boss Gunner". There were little more than a dozen original officers who had come away in 1915, and from them Major George McDonald had died of wounds, and Major Charles Morris, who was 54, was returned to Australia suffering severe shell-shock, while some transferred to other units.

There were interesting characters in the ranks too; none more than Gunner Walter Schwarz. This 19-year-old felt that he would not be allowed to go to the front with the brigade because of his German name, and so he deserted while in England. But, determined to serve, he enlisted in the British army under another name. He went on to be commissioned, promoted to captain, was twice awarded the Military Cross for bravery, and received his division's card of honour four times, until he was severely wounded resulting in the loss of one leg. Before returning to Australia he confessed to being a deserter, and received a pardon from the King in 1921.

The Australian War Memorial displays a 9.2-inch howitzer in ANZAC Hall. It is a reminder of the work of this unique artillery battery and the many stories surrounding it. The big guns sometimes served with distinction in the same area as the AIF divisions, while at other important times, such as the battle for Vimy Ridge and at Cambrai, they provided Australian representation where there was little other involvement.



The Memorial's 9.2-inch howitzer. It is probable that this particular howitzer was used in action by the 55th Siege Battery in France in 1917. It is now on display in ANZAC Hall.

AWM RELAWM15742

This howitzer was received by the Australian War Memorial in 1939 and subsequently made available for proof purposes to the artillery proof range (Proof and Experimental Establishment) at Port Wakefield, South Australia (SA). It was returned to the Memorial's Sydney store in April 1949. The howitzer was then loaned to the Royal Australian Artillery at Holsworthy, where it remained on display until recovered to the Memorial in 1998. It is probable that this particular howitzer was used in action by the 55th Siege Battery in France in 1917.

## **MY SERVICE CAREER**

### **By COL Graham Farley, OAM, RFD, ED (Rtd)**

#### **Part 17 – Chief safety officer at the 1974 3 MD RAA camp, and in the UK**

In 1974 my profession took me to Birchip High School as its principal. Apart from those who said that the town was not yet ready for me, I was now living approximately two hundred kilometres from both Melbourne and Geelong. There was no question of being able to attend any nearby regional depot in view of my rank, corps and experience. Hence I expected to find myself posted to CSTU, with only the basic obligation to attend annual camp, which would presumably be at Puckapunyal.

I had already planned to take long service leave mid-year 1974, during which I would pursue some contacts with the “part-time” artillery units in the UK (or what was left of the former Territorial Army). One of the existing four volunteer artillery units was a medium regiment, which was based in the south of England. I asked HQ RAA to arrange for me to visit it both at its HQ home depot and in camp.

Back then to Birchip and its high school of about 140 students. For those without a nearby atlas, Birchip is an important township just over the regional boundary from the Wimmera into the Mallee region, north of Donald and west of Wycheproof. Mildura lies some kilometres to the northwest.

Perhaps I was not then on CSTU books, as I was asked to be the Chief Safety Officer for the multi-unit artillery camp at Puckapunyal, which commenced on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1974. I could not remember ever having been a safety officer. More often than not I would have got the task of a paying officer or orderly officer. On the gun line I had been either a CPO or an ACPO. The reader may ask as to my qualifications for being a safety officer. I would suggest that I had some experience as to what safety required. I had topped an “Obs of Fire” course at North Head in 1963. As the officer in charge of range practice, I had often given the order to cease firing for some good reason, and rarely had ever thought of using those “career-terminating” words, “IG/Director of practice responsible.

On arrival at Puckapunyal that March Saturday, I was welcomed by both MAJ (later LTCOL) Tony Furze, who was administering the headquarters cell, and MAJ Alan Hutchinson, who was SORA2 (Ops) from HQ RAA. I have retained no copies of any orders for the camp, but I presume that Alan was the regular army’s key man to prepare range documents and to make sure that everything ran according to the relevant pamphlets concerning range practices. He and I developed a very close working relationship. Both of us had a lot to lose if something went wrong through our negligence. We would spend hours checking each other’s figures and then getting the range details out in time for the daily 1600 hours safety conference.

For various reasons, the three regiments were to operate independently as it had been decided not to have an HQ RAA in camp. The Puckapunyal range was quite large enough to permit the three units (and presumably also the “Div Loc Bty” to manoeuvre and fire their guns without getting in each other’s way. The adjutants attended the safety conference and by that means, together with MAJ Tony Furze’s role, coordination was achieved.



Up until then my idea of a safety officer was of someone who was experienced as a GPO or CPO<sup>1</sup>. His arrival on the gun position was always dramatic. He would be carrying “on his back” an artillery board, the range details, a set of artillery instruments and a safety net radio, and, most importantly, the range details. The latter spelt out, with grid references, the limits of the area in which rounds may fall, together with the ricochet trace.

Times for the range to open and close would be included, together with call signs and frequencies. The safety officer would wear a white armband, which generally consisted of a length of rifle cleaning material. He might even have had an extra band tied around his cap.

During shooting, the safety officer would move up and down behind the line of the guns, using his prismatic compass to sight along the barrels of the guns. He would call out

corrections had been applied, but that the round when fired would land safely within the zone as in the range details. Most other responsibilities in relation to the shoot in progress lay with the GPO. In the event, the relationship between Safety Officer, gun position officers and the NCOs should always have been one of cooperation with a view to obtaining the most effective results.

In preparing this instalment for *Cascabel*, I thought it wise to see whether I still had a copy of „Instructions for Practice”, and I did. I even had ammendments No 1 for Australia. The pamphlet bore out my “dulled with the passage of time beliefs”. While the safety officer had a lot of checking to do, such as the charge being used, paragraph 99 (f) on page 28 clearly states: “NO action is required if the Safety Officer if a gun is laid on an incorrect line and elevation, provided that this line and elevation will not produce an unsafe round”<sup>2</sup>.

So dawned Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1974<sup>3</sup>. Both Alan and I had been woken early enough to be in the safety control room well ahead of the time that shooting would commence, which was 0600 hours. The range was declared open and safe. The guns were 105 mm L5 Pack Howitzers<sup>4</sup>. I think there had been a night occupation the night before or perhaps it



was a late afternoon one with a target having been adjusted. Neil advised me that it was the usual practice to fire two rounds Fire For Effect at the centre of the impact area at the start of each day. It was during the firing of these “warm up” periods that the incident occurred. The IG/Officer in charge of practice for the day was MAJ Tony English. The OP was on Spectator Hill.

Two of the three guns fired their rounds safely into the centre of the impact area.

The third gun was slow to report “Ready”. Perhaps there were some layer difficulties. When it did fire, the round passed over the top of Spectator Hill. As soon as it burst there came an emphatic call over the safety net, “Stop”. (Having familiarised myself with the contents of the pamphlet, I see that “Stand Fast” [either by voice or whistle] may be used in addition to “Stop” on the gun position).

<sup>1</sup> LT David Holloway was quite famous for being an R of O officer who was available for such duties in a camp

<sup>2</sup> Artillery Training, Volume III, Field Artillery, Pamphlet No. 6, Instructions for Practice, 1996, UK

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to MAJ Neil Hamer, who was in the OP party, for his view of what happened

<sup>4</sup> This gun as a result of its portable nature had a larger zone compared with the towed M2A2 105 mm gun



Neil told me that Tony English was standing under the tree on the top of the hill and the three FO's were deployed in an arc just below the top of the hillside closest to the gun position. The round passed over Tony's head and impacted about ninety metres beyond him. The three FO's all reacted by ordering "Check Firing:" at the same time or whichever was the most effective.

Just to add to the saga, Neil was told later that the signaller at the gun position was confused and replied, "Say Again". Fortunately the GPO also heard the order from the OP and gave the necessary orders to stop any further firing before another round could be fired.

Alan and I were then told by radio that the round had landed just beyond the OP. No one had been injured fortunately. Other officers in the OP included Majors Neil Hamer, John Edwards and John Morkham. Firing was finished until further notice. MAJ English was returning to camp. MAJ Hutchinson headed for the gun position and MAJ Furze for the OP. By some extraordinary source of instant intelligence, BRIG Keith Rossi, the CRA, rang the camp from his office in Melbourne to say that he heard that a training incident (not an accident) had occurred. Many years later I learnt that Alan Hutchinson had immediately rung BRIG Rossi, to make sure he did not hear about the incident from any other source.

The reader can imagine the furore that was now starting to break out. Officers were mentally drafting written reports in their heads. Key people were descending on the gun in question like bees to a honey pot. It so happened that the distance from the guns to the target and to the OP was about the same. As each officer hurried to check his signals pad and artillery board markings, it transpired that the offending gun had a two hundred mil error on its brass slipping scale, hence meaning the gun barrel was pointing incorrectly. As each officer involved endeavoured to clear themselves of responsibility, their attention started to fall on the poor gun position safety officer, who, with other gun position personnel should have spotted that the offending gun was out of parallel with the others. But the gun, even though charge and elevation were correct, was not pointing into the safe target area within the impact area.<sup>5</sup> Fingers started to point. I do not intend to provide any names of those on the gun position. But I did set out to make sure my own back was covered, for there was the possibility that some of the *guilt* might rise up the line through to Alan and or me.

In the end, a lot of lessons were learned and even greater precautions taken for the remainder of the shoots at that camp. The impact area of the offending round was picked clean of fragments for souvenirs. The person who pointed out that the second round in being fired out of a warmer barrel might well have dropped fifty metres or so shorter was told to be quiet or get ready to be a permanent safety officer himself!

The only other memorable event in the camp was the demonstration for visitors that was held on the middle Sunday. I found myself as the commentator on the PA. Having never been able to refuse the opportunity to speak publicly, I asked for as much information on the weapons and equipments as possible. The display included a Centurion tank. My mistake for the day was not to apply sun cream to my arms, and I was reminded of that for the next three or four days by the residual discomfort.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Page 13 has an illustration of "Range Safety Definitions". In it the OP is quite close to the Safe Target Area! Deja vu!

The demonstration also took place from Spectators Hill, which seems reasonable in the circumstances. At the parade, some medals were presented. One of the recipients, SGT "Georgie" Beale, the ever-ready cook, arrived by helicopter to receive his just in time. My diary notes suggest that the helicopter landed on the parade ground almost in front of the inspecting officer, but that might be stretching it too far. But it would have been the way that George would have done it. Who else could have talked the helicopter pilot into taking him out to Spectators Hill.

Prior to our family leaving for the UK, I attended the local Birchip Anzac Day parade, something that I would be doing for district parades on a fairly regular basis when I moved to Woodend. While in the UK, I was able to attend three events. The first was to present a 10 Medium Regiment plaque to the CO of 100 Medium Regiment, RA (V). This was to be in the field at the Larkhill training area. It also included dinner and a stay overnight at Larkhill. The second was to be able to include the artillery 'AT home' at the Woolwich barracks in our itinerary. Finally, just before returning to Australia, I was invited to the unit's officer's regimental dinner at Woolwich.

I took my service dress, (winter), Sam Browne belt and either mess kit or "blues" with me to England. On Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June, I arrived in Larkhill, having installed Shirley and our one-year-old son at a local hostelry. Our mode of transport in the UK was by self-driven camper van -- hardly the way that a half-colonel should arrive for a formal parade, even if it was out in the field. I think I had acquired a military map of the area, but I had grossly underestimated the time to get to West Down camp. I found myself asking the van to "give me everything you've got" to get me to the parade in time.

I did arrive before the parade commenced but I was fairly cross with myself. The presentation was duly made and the Regiment's CO presented 10 Medium with one of his unit's plaques in return. It was time to adjourn to the Officers Mess and locate the accommodation that I had been offered. Perhaps not every Australian officer dreams



about dining either at Larkhill or Woolwich, but such opportunities were high on my list. I had hardly been shown my room, when the orderly wanted to clean my shoes, lay out my uniform and generally look after me. Batmen<sup>6</sup> by this time in the Australian Army, were history. I think to save face for both of us, I asked for the loan of a clothes brush!

In mess kit, I made my way to the dining area, noting as I went the various escape routes in the event of a terrorist incident,

the IRA being the offending group at that time. The dinner protocol was as expected and one needed to be on one's best behaviour. In the way That the Surrey Yeomanry in 1966 had been an amalgam of several regiments, the 100 Mdm Regt, RA (V) was one as well. One strong sub-unit was from the Sussex Yeomanry. When the mess songs started, the same group rendered "Sussex by the Sea", to show that traditions die hard.

<sup>6</sup> I recall the "civvy" batmen that were once allocated to CMF officers in hutted camps. There was the early morning cup of tea, the cleaning of boots, the making of the bed and not much else. But it was useful pay to men otherwise out of work.

Although the requirement was for RA mess dress to be worn as distinct from the relevant Yeomanry mess kit, there was a provision that the latter could continue to be worn until it was no longer serviceable. But I was assured that the Sussex Yeomanry mess kits were being carefully preserved and handled so that they would outlive their owners! The following morning breakfast was served but it was rather late as the keys to the kitchens had been mislaid. I felt that I had experienced that one before!

On Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June the family went to Woolwich for the "At Home", which was to be held on the RA Barrack Field. I misunderstood the ticket arrangements and arrived for the evening performance, when I had been expected for the afternoon one. Had anything changed in the way I approached things!

I have clear memories of our one-year-old son being given a ride on a donkey, led by a subaltern. I purchased an RA cap for Roger. Similarly, I could not resist a circular button for the lapel, which read something like, "Im a Gunner, boom, boom".

Then the display took place. This included a musical drive by the King Troop, RHA, free-fall parachuting (from Dragon Rapides), the RA motor cycle display team, and the massed bands of the RA amongst other items. While one parachutist landed perfectly in the centre of the oval, another came down amongst the crowd in the stands. Similarly, one motor cyclist missed his cue. This unsettled the other members of the team, but they recovered to present a stunning finale ride-past. The sound of the bugle in the retreat will forever live in my memory.



The third event was the opportunity to dine with the regiment at a ladies' night at the Woolwich mess. At that stage the officers mess was being repainted, so the Sergeants mess was used. It was built and decorated on a similar grand and dignified scale. Shirley and I had completed a recce of how to get to the barracks via the South Circular Rd from Cheam. We found that it would take about an hour. Our son, Roger, was left with one of his great-aunts. On arrival at the forecourt, the underneath of our van was checked with mirrors to make sure that we were not carrying any bombs!

During the dinner the Royal Artillery Mounted Band performed. The hunting tune using the long hunting horns was quite magnificent. The celebrated routine whereby the table cloths were whisked away in a special manoeuvre took place. The dinner was a highlight at the end of our trip. A day or two later we flew back to Australia via Chicago in the USA, where I had made some friends while on a tour of Europe in 1966. Later that year, I was invited to the exercising of the Freedom of Entry to the City of Geelong, when CAPT McGregor-Dowsett was Mayor and LTCOL Graeme Standish was CO of 10 Mdm Regt, RAA. In the next instalment, I finally become attached to CSTU.