



# Artillery WA



Official Newsletter of the Royal Australian Artillery Association of WA (Inc), RAA Historical Society of WA (Inc)

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## MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER GUNNER ST JAMES'S PARK

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR ANDREW GREGORY KBE CB DL

"I know that all current and former members of the Royal Regiment of Artillery and the Royal Artilleries of the Commonwealth are greatly saddened to hear of the death of our Captain General, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. As the longest serving British Monarch in history, Her Majesty's unquestioning duty and dedication to the Nation, to the Commonwealth and to Her Armed Forces will be deeply and profoundly missed.

Her Majesty's interest in, and engagement with, all aspects of Her Royal Regiments throughout Her reign has been of the greatest importance. As the Nation and the World mourns, our thoughts are with His Majesty The King and all members of the Royal Family; I know that I speak on behalf of all current and former members of the Royal Regiment of Artillery and the Royal Artilleries of the Commonwealth in offering our deepest and most heartfelt condolences at this difficult time."

**GOD SAVE THE KING**



## NOTICE BOARD

**Web Site:** <http://www.artillerywa.org.au>

### ITEMS FOR PUBLICATION IN ARTY WA

Items for inclusion, and which are regularly needed, should be submitted to the Editor Bob Arnold at [arnold353@bigpond.com](mailto:arnold353@bigpond.com)

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### WELFARE FUND OFFICER

John Blylevens is the Association's Welfare Officer. Anybody that needs to discuss any welfare funding can contact John via email [info@artillerywa.org.au](mailto:info@artillerywa.org.au) or telephone 043 869 5711. Access to funds can be made by applying in writing using the Welfare Fund Application Form which is available on request from the Treasurer. The Association reminds members that access to the Fund to help Gunners financially at a time of need is strictly confidential and all applications are treated as such.

### RAAHS BUSY BEES

**Last Saturday of each month excluding December**

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### LEIGHTON BATTERY OPEN DAYS

Sunday 10am-3pm  
Adults \$10, Children \$4.

### OFFICE BEARERS

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##### President

Bob Farrelly

##### Vice President

##### Secretary

John Blylevens

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#### RAA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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David Carter

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#### Committee Persons

Matthew Adams

Phillip Rowson

James Archibald

Ian Randles

##### IT Consultant

Stan Davies

##### Curator

Don Rae

For those who need a reminder – subs are due on the First of January each year and may be paid directly to the treasurer or may be made direct to the Bank Accounts:

RAA Historical Society – BSB 066 103 Account No 0090 3744

## ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Fellow Gunners,

#### **Vale - Queen Elizabeth II, Our Captain General**

We were saddened to hear of the death of our Captain General, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Her service to country and the Commonwealth cannot be questioned.

We offer our deepest condolences to the Royal family at this difficult time.

#### **150<sup>th</sup> celebration of formed Artillery in Western Australia**

2021 was the celebration of 150 years of Artillery in Australia. In 2022 we have the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of formed Artillery in Western Australia. On 1 July 1872 the Union Troop of Western Australian Mounted Volunteers commenced parading as the Western Australian Troop of Volunteer Horse Artillery. The official gazettal followed on 21 January 1873 when the change appeared in the *Government Gazette of Western Australia* with redesignation of the Troop to an artillery unit.

Whilst the historians may argue which is the official date, 1 July 1872 has always been acknowledged as the BTY Birthday in WA and we take the opportunity this November and December to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This is a significant milestone to celebrate and I hope you will join me at Gunner's Day and at the Feast of Saint Barbara in celebrating this important milestone.

#### **Gunners Day 2022**

Our next event is Gunners Day to be held on **Sunday, 6th of November**. We will form up at St Mathew's Church, Stirling Square, Guildford at 10.00 am and step off shortly thereafter.

After the march we will have refreshments in the Church Hall and after to the Rose & Crown hotel to continue our camaraderie. In recent years the ex-serving members have been a bit thin on the ground. I would encourage all Gunners to attend and get on to your mates and encourage them to attend particularly as this is a 150<sup>th</sup> celebration event.

#### **Feast of Saint Barbara**

The Feast of Saint Barbara is to be held on **Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> of December**. I am pleased to advise that BRIG Brett Chaloner CSC, COMD 13 BDE will be an official guest. I am still waiting to hear from BRIG Neil Sweeney AM, Colonel Commandant 9 REGT.

The Feast of St Barbara is open to all serving, retired and ex-members of the Royal Australian Artillery, those who served in RAA units, and will include partners and guests.

The Dinner is a fabulous time for catching up with Gunner mates and will incorporate the presentation of the "Best Gunner Award".

The Association's annual award for the most outstanding soldier will be presented at the dinner. Invitations are out and I would encourage you to reply as soon as possible.

I look forward to seeing you on Gunner's Day and at the Feast of Saint Barbara.

Ubique,

Bob Farrelly

LTCOL (R)

President, RAA Association

## ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT HEADING INTO SPRING 2022

My view of events concerning Society operations since May

The RAAHS has its core collection of ordnance, which we continue to look after carefully. We happen to have an extra 25 Pounder Gun/Howitzer in good condition. At the last AGM members authorised the Committee to release it for sale.

The Committee has now sought expressions of interest from the community. A reserve price has been set. The Committee will not permit this item to be sold as a "fire sale". If no private buyer meets the reserve price we will consider going to auction as a last resort. Proceeds from a successful sale will be invested into the on-going development of the 5.25" project.

Recently posted on the net is a two minute clip on the Battery and its supporting tunnels. This was done by an ABC employee using a steady camera- your President starred in part of it! Here is the link: < <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-06-17/wwii-history-preserved-at-Leighton-battery-fortress-Fremantle/101139256>>.

The Battery site had enjoyed a long run free from graffiti- until May. We then had to remove some spray scribble from the 5.25" site. We had already coated the surfaces with a wax based wash which meant the scrawling was easily shifted- another coat of the wax liquid was then re-applied.

The Harbour Battery emplacement and two support buildings (south mole), have now received physical attention. The concrete cancer is fixed, and a disruptive pattern camouflage scheme has replaced the nasty graffiti seen earlier. ( I hope that a wax based product has been applied to its surfaces!) Hopefully F.P.A. will have a panel installed to educate the public about the " Twin Six " battery's role in the defence of the harbour approaches in W.W.2.

Our tunnel complex continues to generate steady trade each Sunday. At the conclusion of each tour a Guide explains the role of the nearby 5.25" weapon system. The completion of our replica turret and barrel is now imminent. We are increasingly excited about its arrival! The difference in appearance between it and the 6" weapon system will be pronounced. The T.O.M.P/ Contractor and I met on site to inspect the decades old cracks to the concrete skirt above the gun floor. Remedial action to fix the resulting winter leakage into the interior space will occur during a period of dry weather this year.

At the August Committee Meeting I had the pleasure of presenting to member Jim Archibald, the Society's highest award for services rendered to RAAHS. Jim was the formative developer of the post-Covid Leighton Battery tour format- which has proven a winner. Many hours of technical work were involved. Jim ( a long term member), also has attended many busy bees, is a tour guide and a Committee Member. Our thanks to you Jim- keep up the good work! I also wish to also recognise Wendy Archibald's previous valued work as a Cashier at the tunnels.

*My regards to you all*

*David Carter*

## **BEREAVEMENTS**

Since the publication of Edition 2, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, the Society has lost three of its long serving Members, all three were Vietnam Veterans and each contributed in his way towards the success the Society has enjoyed over the years of their voluntary service. They will be sadly missed.

### **JAMES ALEX CLEMENTS 16.04.1943 – 08.07.2022**

Jim enlisted in the Australian Regular Army on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1960 – Regimental Number 54113. He was allotted to Artillery and served in 106<sup>th</sup> Battery 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment RAA in Vietnam 1970 – 1971. His final posting before resigning from the ARA on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1980 was Sergeant Major Instructor Gunnery at 7<sup>th</sup> Battery 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment at Hobbs Artillery Park Karrakatta.

Jim made many friends in this posting and transitioned to the ARES for a period of 18 months. Jim joined the Society on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1990 and for years was a regular volunteer at the Wednesday Action Group – The WAGS!

Jim is survived by his wife of 57 years, Joan and daughter Joanne and son Stephen. Sadly, son Darren predeceased Jim.

### **LES ROBERT HERBERT 22.05.1945 – 05.08.2022**

Les was conscripted into National Service Third Intake 1966 – Regimental Number 5714514.

After completing “Rookie Training” Les was selected to attend the Officer Training School at Scheyville and on graduating he was allotted to Artillery and posted to 108<sup>th</sup> Battery 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment RAA in Vietnam 1967 – 1968.

On completion of his obligation Les transitioned to the Army Reserve and served in 7<sup>th</sup> Battery 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment at Hobbs Artillery Park Karrakatta and HQ 2 Australian Task Force.

Les joined the Society in 2003 and generously offered his extensive services in support of the Society.

Les was married to Margaret in 1965 and was the proud father of John, Julie and Uma. He later married Diane in 2006 and had two stepsons, Sean and Derrick

### **EDWIN JOHN SANDERS 20.03.1949 – 23.08.2022**

John was conscripted into National Service – Regimental Number 571 7466

After completing his “Rookie Training” John’s Corps preference was Royal Australian Engineers and he was allotted to 17 Construction Squadron RAE in Vietnam 1972.

On return to Australia John transitioned to the Army Reserve and served as a Senior Driving Instructor in 7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, 28<sup>th</sup> Independent Rifle Company and 36 Water Transport Squadron.

John joined the Society on 16.12.2001 and very shortly after he demonstrated his skill as a Photo Archivist and completely transformed the Society’s extensive collection of photographs into a professional archive.

John is survived by his wife of 50 years, Daphne and daughter Kylie and son Ashley.

*They shall grow not old*

*As we that are left grow old*

*Age shall not weary them*

*Nor the years condemn*

*At the going down of the sun*

*And in the morning*

*We will remember them*

**LEST WE FORGET**

## **SALUTING THEIR SERVICE on ROTTNEST ISLAND**

Rottnest voluntary guides association will commemorate the 80th anniversary of the AWAS Australian women's Army Service first deployment of women to Rottnest Island during World War Two with a special weekend.

**Saturday, 8th and Sunday, 9th October 2022 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM**  
**at Historic Kingstown Barracks, Rottnest Island**

Many Western Australians know little about the importance of the military history of Rottnest island and its part in the defence of WA

Rottnest Island was part of Fremantle Fortress, the combined Coastal Defences protecting Fremantle Harbour and submarine Base during World War 2. The women carried out a variety of technical tasks to assist with this defence.

RVGA will celebrate the contribution of the Rottnest Island Women's Service. Other serviceto be embraced in this commemoration will be the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service. Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF) and the Australian Army Nursing services. (AANS)

This event sponsored by Rottnest Island Authority, will highlight the rich military history Rottnest offers and explain the important role women played in this history. Soon after the Second World War began, women from all over Australia signed up to serve their country. They moved into roles supporting Australia's military activities, roles that had previously been undertaken by men. This change in roles also changed the way Australian women were represented in the media of the times.



This commemoration is also a great opportunity to focus on the role of the Military in defending our Nation.

The event will start on Saturday at 10:00 AM with a welcoming ceremony. Saturday afternoon and Sunday will be more family focused with interactive activities using key communication techniques from the war period. Island visitors will have an opportunity to try their hand at using semaphore flags, send messages using Morse code and operate Signal lamps.

Throughout the weekend there will be interpretive displays and activities including a guide stationed at Signal Ridge and extra guided tours at Bickleigh Battery

The interpretive displays will include photographs of many of the women who served on Rottnest. Some of the women in the photo have not been identified. This may be of particular interest to the many descendants of those women.

Come along and explore the important role women played on Rottnest island during WW2

**Contact:** Lyn Le Provost

**Email:** [lynleprovost@gmail.com](mailto:lynleprovost@gmail.com)

**Phone:** 0418915227

**Website:** <https://rvga.asn.au>



## LESSONS LEARNED AT LEIGHTON BATTERY PUT TO THE TEST ON THE BIBBULMUN TRACK

I have fond memories of the day in 1989 when my dear old dad (**THE CURATOR**) proudly announced that a system of underground tunnels had been unearthed at Buckland Hill, marking the birth of RAAHS and a team of committed volunteers who no doubt wondered more than once what the heck they'd got themselves into!

Even I allowed myself to be roped into a handful of hot and sweaty busy bees, relocating a mountain of rubbish from downstairs to upstairs – the task of restoring the site to its former glory never looked more daunting.

But the support and camaraderie amongst the band of volunteers was inspirational, no more so than late one afternoon when one of the cast “threw a thong” and was very nearly crushed under the weight of a massive timber beam as he soldiered on up the slope.

Needless to say, David (**THE PRESIDENT**) chose more appropriate footwear for future visits, despite the fact that his thongs may well have adhered to prevailing Health & Safety guidelines 30 years ago!

Fast forward 10 years to September 1998 and, following the completion of a new section of track between Walpole and Albany, the current alignment of the Bibbulmun Track was officially opened, presenting us all with a world class walking track extending from Kalamunda in the Perth foothills to Albany on the south coast. At that time, a total of 49 timber shelters were provided along the way, together with appropriate track signage and trailheads and even a couple of canoe sheds!

Keen to experience this wonderful track my wife and I invited **THE CURATOR** to join us on a short guided day walk organised by the Bibbulmun Track Foundation (BTF). The so called “L-Plates Pub Plod” covered a total distance of about 12 kilometres around Mundaring Weir, finishing at the Mundaring Weir Hotel and I'm delighted to report that all three of us made it back to the hotel in time for lunch.

A few years later my wife and I relocated to Albany on the beautiful south coast, and I soon realised just how much I missed the volunteer hours spent at Leighton Battery, which by then had been formally opened to the public. Living, as we were, in such close proximity to the Bibbulmun Track I didn't have far to look for the perfect substitute!

In the years since the official opening, much of the day to day maintenance of the track has been undertaken by around 300 volunteers, all of whom are registered with the BTF. The track itself is broken down into 151 “bite size bits” and volunteers or teams of volunteers are allocated one of these sections (typically around 8 km in length) to look after. I was fortunate enough to be given a section at Peaceful Bay, extending east from the town site to the Irwin Inlet with some outstanding views along the way.

Over the years I have managed to assemble a small team of like minded individuals and together we have visited our section of the track three or four times a year, attending mainly to overgrown vegetation and fallen trees. If we encounter a job too big for us to complete safely, we report the issue to the local Parks & Wildlife office for their attention.

The crossing of the Irwin Inlet by canoe is a bit of a highlight for most walkers:-



*A canoe shed is located on each bank*



*The perks of being a maintenance vollen*

Not happy with simply maintaining the track, our group were also determined to walk as much of the 1000 kilometres between Kalamunda and Albany as we could. As we were all still working for a living the biggest hurdle to overcome proved to be actually finding the time to do it.

But determined we were and after four or five years we all successfully completed the journey. Some sections were completed over long weekends, whilst our longest walk meant spending 13 days on track between Dwellingup and Kalamunda – although we did have two food drops along the way. We lost count of the number of “car shuffles” involved!

Call me silly, but I actually went on to complete another sectional end to end, much of which was achieved as a volunteer guide. The BTF offer a variety of guided day walks and overnight walks each year aimed not only at beginners but also those who might be piecing together their own end to end and prefer the security of group travel.



*Taking a break – Albany Wind Farm*

Next year the track celebrates 25 years of use and as you can imagine, the elements have taken their toll. Not only are the fixed structures showing the signs of age, but extended sections of the track along the south coast have been impacted by wind erosion over the years and require considerable stabilisation work in order to maintain a safe and quality walking experience into the future.



*Eroded & damaged steps Peaceful Bay*



*Track erosion at Boat Harbour*

The BTF work closely with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions - Parks & Wildlife Service (DBCA) who have ultimate responsibility for the track, which is after all a State asset that is freely available for everyone to use. Some years ago the BTF and DBCA prioritised a number of **SUPPORT VOLUNTEER PROJECTS** to address these issues and already there have been several successful campaigns at Conspicuous Cliff and Quarram Dunes on the coast between Denmark and Walpole. Each campaign involved 10 to 15 volunteers, most of whom travelled from Perth for four days of hard labour.



Thanks to the support of a WA Government “Natural Resource Management Grant” the most recent campaign got underway at Boat Harbour earlier this year to address erosion by means of various stabilisation techniques and construction of stairs in the worst affected spots. The scope of work involved at Boat Harbour is fairly typical of each of the earlier campaigns::

- A total of 10 tonnes of material is assembled at DBCA Walpole Depot and in February a team of volunteers drill, saw, sort and stack 33 individual loads of treated pine logs and risers, star pickets, track pad, mesh netting, hand tools and nuts and bolts.
- A separate team of volunteers heads out to the work site at Boat Harbour (extending over 10 km or so) and marks each of the 22 stockpile locations with flagging tape and records the GPS fix for each of them.
- The loads are trucked by DBCA to a paddock at Parry Beach and a local helicopter contractor is engaged to drop each load at the designated stockpile location.



*Loads ready for airlift to work sites*



*Oops .....No damage done!*

Campaigns in may and June have now been completed and the results are most impressive. The remote (4 WD only) work sit locations involve about an hour of travel to and from the accommodation provided in Peaceful Bay. Further campaigns are planned for July and September



*Track P:ads and steps set out on site*



*Finished Product Boat Harbour*

Despite the hard worker, each of these outings is notable for the support and camaraderie of fellow volunteers, most of whom to share somewhat of a passion for a glass of red wine at the end of a long day on the track; whilst thongs on the track are a “no - no” the similarities between Leighton Battery and the Bibbulmun track.

(Article courtesy Ian Rae)

Ian and his wife Veronica have been Members of the Society for 32 years)

## FROM GALLIPOLI AND FRANCE, WAR HERO'S

### MEDALS HELD

#### "BACK WHERE THEY BELONG"

*Reproduced from an article by Paul Garvey WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN 30.July 2022*

**T**he medals of a legendary Australian World War 1 general who served in Gallipoli and France will finally be returned to Australia.

John Joseph Talbot Hobbs was arguably Western Australia's most decorated soldier and also left a legacy across Perth, designing some of the city's most beautiful buildings as well as the State War Memorial in Kings Park in a distinguished career. But the medals he collected during his dedicated service migrated with some of his descendants to England decades ago.

The medals will be returned to WA in the coming weeks after they were purchased at auction in London this week by Perth military antiques dealer Jamey Blewitt. The medals sold for 43,400 pounds (\$75,500) including auction fees at London auction house Spink.

Hobbs migrated to Australia in 1887 and swiftly became one of the most prominent architects in Perth, where he designed many of the grand homes and buildings that blossomed out of the fortunes being made in the WA gold rushes.

He was among the first ashore at Gallipoli, where he was in charge of the artillery throughout the conflict.

His own son Mervyn also served at Gallipoli as a gunner.

Hobbs distinguished himself on the Western Front later in the war, commanding the Australian Artillery when Pozieres was captured and commanding the 5th Australian Division in the famous actions of Polygon Wood.

He also helped plan the capture of Villers-Bretonneux and was involved in the breaking of the Hindenberg Line.

In the final stages of the war, he succeeded John Monash as an acting Lieutenant-General.

His post-war legacy was just as significant, designing the war memorial in Kings Park as well as Australian Imperial Force Memorials in France and Belgium.

Many of the Perth buildings designed by Hobbs still exist, including the Weld Club and the recently refurbished Newspaper House in the Perth CBD and St Georges College at the University of Western Australia.

Hobbs' great grandson, Ewan Puckle Hobbs, told the Weekend Australian that the proceeds of the sale would fund a trip to Perth by the extended Hobbs family who are in the UK, in 2024. The visit will allow Hobbs' great-great-grandchildren to connect with the Hobbs descendants who still live in Perth.

Mr Puckle Hobbs said the decision to sell the medals had been a difficult one for the family, but he believed the upcoming Perth reunion would open the eyes of the family's youngest generation to the general's historic legacy and their deep connection to WA.

"The personal relationships we can create for that generation will be far more valuable than the medals themselves," he said. He also said the medals would now be back where they belonged. "I feel very much that they are part of Australian history and they should be back in Australia".

Mr Blewitt, meanwhile, said he could not believe his eyes when he saw the medals in an auction catalogue. He had never seen a group of medals from an Australian general up for sale before. He said he had already received offers for the medals that were well above what he paid for them, but can't see himself ever parting with them.

## WEST AUSTRALIANS IN THE FIRST BATTLE OF BULLECOURT

(10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> April 1917)



Dr Mike Galvin RFD, having served as a doctor in the Australian armed forces and being a military historian in his spare time, developed an interest in the Australian involvement in the First World War. He is the archivist and historian for the Claremont branch of the RSL. For our 8<sup>th</sup> April meeting (just before the anniversary of the first battle of Bullecourt) he gave a talk about the West Australian involvement in this ill-fated action and, in particular, the involvement of the 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Australian Imperial Force.

The Battalion was formed in 1914, and was composed, initially, of 50% WA and 50% SA recruits with the Headquarters group and all of the machine gun element coming from WA and was commanded by Col. John Monash. It was part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), which formed in Melbourne and, unlike much of the rest of the AIF, sailed from Port Melbourne.

The Brigade was deployed initially for training in Egypt before being deployed to Gallipoli, landing there on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1915 and remaining for the remainder of that campaign. The battalion suffered heavy losses on the Dardanelles with replacements all coming from WA. After withdrawal from the Dardanelles, the battalion returned to Egypt and was split into two following a policy to split the battalions which had fought in Gallipoli in order to form a second army division. The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade then served with the British Expeditionary force on the Western Front in France and fought in the battles of Pozieres and then Mouquet Farm in August and September 1916 with further heavy casualties. Again the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion losses were made up from WA, such that, by 1917, it was considered a Western Australian unit. All told there were 22,000 Australian casualties from these two battles.

After the fighting at Mouquet Farm, the Battalion were rested with little fighting through the winter of 1916–1917, mainly due to bad weather – it was the worst winter in Europe for 50 years.

In the spring of 1917, the fighting intensified with the British Third Army engaged in major battles around Arras. A number of diversionary attacks were planned to the south of Arras to relieve pressure on the Third Army including one at the village of Bullecourt, some miles to the NE of Pozieres (planned for 10<sup>th</sup> April).

The Germans had withdrawn to “high” ground near the village (around 150 feet above surrounding plains) while maintaining forces on lower ground in front. They based themselves in villages and farms like Bullecourt (as they had in Pozieres and Mouquet Farm) which provided good fortifications in the deep cellars of the houses and farm buildings from which the Germans could supply and man their lines.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the AIF, headed by 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, was tasked to attack the German forces at Bullecourt and to try and capture the village as a starting point for flanking actions along the German lines. These comprised a complex of zig-zag trenches to the west and south of the village and were, in turn, protected by wide swathes of barbed wire in geometric patterns some distance in front of the trenches. The barbed wire (manufactured in Sweden) was very thick, dense and tangled making it extremely hard for infantry to cross, especially under fire.

Normally, the wire barriers would be breached by an intense artillery bombardment, but with little Australian artillery available and what British artillery there was mainly 18-pounders, which are useful against personnel and unprotected targets but was not that effective in breaching the barbed wire defences nor the penetration to destroy the bunkers in the village cellars – particularly when covered by rubble from the demolished buildings. The decision was, therefore taken to use the recently intro-

duced tanks to flatten the wire using their wide tracks, creating paths for the infantry to advance through. Thirteen tanks were available to support this action, of which three were unarmored training vehicles.

In early 1917, Tanks were still in their infancy and were lightly armoured at best (providing protection against small arms and some limited protection against armour piercing rounds) and were rather unreliable, very slow and noisy. Although their rhomboid shape was designed for traversing WW1 themed and craters in “no man’s land” and for crossing trenches, they could still get stuck, leaving them vulnerable to artillery and mortar attack.

The attack was planned for 10<sup>th</sup> April, but late arrival of the tanks delayed it for 24 hours. At this point, the 16th Regiment had a complement of 20 officers and 797 other ranks.

The actual attack on Bullecourt took place on 11<sup>th</sup> April. Of the 13 tanks, 12 made it to the battlefield (later than planned), and none survived the battle. The machine-gun barrage that was intended to mask their approach failed to cover the noise of their approach, their dark colouring made them very conspicuous against the snow on the ground and, being very slow, they were easy targets for artillery. Some broke down or got stuck, others veered off course on the featureless terrain and only a few managed to breach the wire barriers. Although some of the 16th Battalion reached the German trenches, the attack failed.

The Battalion’s losses during this battle were 17 officers (of whom 9 were captured) and 623 other ranks of whom 362 were POW’s (including Mike’s great uncle Bert). Usually, the Germans treated POW’s reasonably well and were provided with the same rations as German civilians. However, the unwounded prisoners taken at Bullecourt were called Prisoners of Respite and held at Fort McDonald in Lille. They were treated very badly, given little food, no blankets, only wood-shavings for bedding and had to work for 12 hours a day on the German defences within range of the British artillery. They were not notified to the Red Cross and so didn’t receive any Red Cross parcels or food. A number of the prisoners died while at Fort McDonald, including one who was shot while scavenging potatoes, others from sickness and several from artillery fire while working near the German lines. After about six months, the survivors were moved to a large camp at Limburg and those below the rank of Corporal were broken up into “commandos” or work details to replace the German workers absent fighting the war. Ranks above sergeant were not required to work although they could be asked to supervise the work details. Otherwise, they had little to do and suffered greatly from boredom.

Many of the POW’s died in captivity, some 14 in France and Belgium, buried as near as possible to where they died, and 16 in Germany (two died after armistice day and were classified as ex-POW’s) – mostly from Typhus or Tuberculosis. The bodies of those dying in Germany were moved to four designated cemeteries in Germany (Hamburg, Cologne, Berlin South West and Niederzwehren) where possible. Where the bodies could not be found, memorial gravestones were placed in the appropriate cemetery carrying the legend “*Their Glory Shall Not Be Blotted Out*” (written by Rudyard Kipling who was then an Imperial War Graves Commissioner). Others, injured too badly to rejoin the war, were repatriated through the Red Cross via either Switzerland or Holland. Those sent to Holland were shipped to Ripon in Yorkshire and thence to the Australian Headquarters. Those sent to Switzerland were detained there (in some comfort) for the remainder of the war.

Although very few POW’s escaped during WW1, a couple from the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion did manage to do so. One, Lance Corporal Parsons, re-enlisted as a Trooper in the Light Horse. Another escaped but was recaptured and a fourth escaped into Holland just as the war ended

Uniquely, the remnants of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion agreed to subscribe to a fund to assist the Red Cross in providing food parcels for the Battalion POW’s, collecting a total of £1,244, 3s, 5d during the remainder of the war.

The 16th Battalion still exists as an Army Reserve Battalion based at Irwin Training Centre, Karakatta.

*Author’s Note: Whilst the Australian Brigade received notification of the delay, the 2nd West Riding Brigade did not and attacked as planned on 10<sup>th</sup> April but, not being able to penetrate the wire, were repulsed.*

*With thanks to E Goodchild*