

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Colonel Jack Neville Lucas ARGENT, OBE, OAM, ED

(1905-2004)

Jack Argent was born at Darlinghurst, NSW, on 26 April 1905 to William John Argent, carpenter, and Ethel Georgina Goodwin, midwife of Sydney. One of seven children, he was a gifted athlete, cricketer, footballer and an enthusiastic Boy Scout. As a scout he travelled to the World Jamboree in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the Imperial Jamboree in Britain in 1924.

On graduating from Arthur Phillip High School he joined the Commonwealth Bank and studied accountancy but soon followed his father into the building trade, and at weekends became a talented rugby league footballer. Football became a passion after his early playing career with the local Endeavour XIII. In the 1930s he campaigned to have a Parramatta side included in the Sydney Rugby League Competition but the war intervened.

In 1923, Argent joined the 21st Field Artillery Brigade, a militia unit designated to support a cavalry division. He was a keen and conscientious volunteer, being commissioned in March 1929 and promoted captain seven years later. He was promoted major and appointed battery commander in 1940. The 2/3rd Anti-Tank Regiment was formed in July 1940, at Warwick Farm Camp (near Liverpool) and Argent took command of the 12th Battery and quickly learnt how to protect infantry and armour from enemy armoured cars and tanks.

The 2/3rd Anti-Tank Regiment (with four batteries - 9 to 12) arrived at Julis camp, Palestine in 1940. The unit had its share of excitement, both calamitous (the loss of 11th Battery men and guns at Mechili to General Rommel's Panzer forces) and sublime. Argent's battery meanwhile was used as part of small, all-arms mobile forces (also known as Jock Columns). In May and June 1941, 12th Battery knocked out six tanks, three armoured cars, an anti-tank gun, many soft skinned vehicles and one aircraft. They took 126 prisoners for the loss of one man wounded and Argent's battery became known as the 'lucky 12th'. His regiment was part of the 9th Division and contributed handsomely in the First and Second Battles of Alamein.

On return to Australia, he commanded the regiment from September 1943 to October 1946. In June 1945, the regiment took part in the Operation Oboe, and, temporarily re-roled as infantry, helped mop up Japanese forces in British North Borneo (Malaysia) until the finish of the war. Argent was designated to take the surrender of Japanese forces on Natuna Island but the task was cancelled. He was twice mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Efficiency Decoration.

Post-war, he joined the CMF and, after a stint in the CMF Staff Group, raised and commanded the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment at Belmore in 1947. He persuaded many of his former officers and NCOs to join the new regiment providing a strong cadre of experience.

Argent was awarded the OBE in 1951 and was recognized as a 'leader who was close to his men, understanding, enthusiastic and energetic ... who possessed those qualities which bonded men together as a team and brought out the very best in them'. He retired in 1952 and was promoted colonel. His unit was later equipped with 4.2 inch mortars (as a light regiment) before converting to 25 pounders. The unit was re-designated 23rd Field Regiment in 1957.

Argent could now devote his energies to his great sporting passion, rugby league, without forgetting his ex-service mates. He held official positions in a number of sporting and social organizations, including President of Parramatta Leagues Club and Carlingford RSL Sub Branch. He was secretary/manager of Parramatta Leagues Club for many years and built their clubhouse – known locally as the 'house that Jack built'. He was a long term member of the NSW Rugby League and later the Patron. He was also appointed manager of the 1959 Kangaroo Rugby League team that toured Britain, one that included seven very well-known players. His "ramrod disciplinarian of the old school" approach was at first resented, but Argent gained their respect by his plain speaking.

He edited and was a major contributor to his regiment's history "Target Tank" under the *nom de plume* "Silver John". It complements Barton Maughan's official history by giving much greater detail of anti-tank gunner, infantry and tank cooperation in the Western Desert and in North Borneo. His BSM, WO2 Alan McIlrick, won the Military Medal posthumously at El Alamein.

Argent was patron of his regimental association, a councillor of the 9th Division Association, then vice president and chairman, and at age 98 he led the 9th Division in the 2003 Sydney Anzac Day Parade – standing to attention in an Army Land Rover. He died on 18 August 2004 and was accorded a military funeral from All Saints Church, Parramatta North. He married first Winifred Rose Claxton in 1928, Vivienne Unsworth in 1961 and Dorothy Argent in 1976 and was survived by his five sons, one daughter and a step-daughter.

Sources: *Army Lists*; Barton Maughan, *Tobruk and El Alamein*, AWM Official Series, Army, Vol III, *passim*; G. Long, *The Final Campaigns*, AWM Official Series, Vol. 7, pp.555-565; J.N.L. Argent, 'Target Tank – the History of 2/3 Anti Tank Regiment, RAA'; R. Argent, 2/3rd Anti-Tank Regiment AIF Association Newsletter, November, 2004; A. Bryant, *Eulogy*, reported in 'Gunfire, Newsletter of RAA Association, No. 9, Issue 3/2004'; Stephen Gapps, *Obituary*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 August 2004. Alan H. Smith.