

# *Gunner of Renown*



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

## **Colonel Richard Ormond CHERRY**

**(1903-1995)**

Dick Cherry was born on 6 June 1903 at Malvern, Victoria, the fourth of five children. His father, Thomas, was the Foundation Professor of Agriculture at Melbourne University (1911), and his mother Edith (nee Gladman) was also a graduate teacher.

Dick was educated at Adwalton and then Melbourne Grammar. He matriculated in 1921 with First Class Honours in mathematics and won a scholarship to Ormond College where he enrolled in Engineering in 1922, and the next year he switched to Science. He graduated BSc in 1925 with an Exhibition to do his Masters which he completed in 1927. So began a continuous college residence of 11 years (a record) as undergraduate, graduate and tutor. Cherry gained admission to the Institution of Radio Engineers as an Associate Member, and in 1929 he joined the Commonwealth Radio Research Board and specialised in measuring the strength of radio signals.

Cherry enlisted in the Melbourne University Rifles, and was commissioned in November 1923. He transferred to Artillery Survey and was promoted captain in May 1927 and major in November 1936 as OC of the 2nd Artillery Survey Company. His talent, leadership and drive to achieve a satisfactory level of training was noted, notwithstanding many calls on his time.

On 24 April 1940, Brigadier Cyril Clowes, CCRA I Australian Corps, invited him to form the 2/1st Survey Regiment and he was promoted lieutenant colonel. Most of the men were recruited from the 1st (Sydney) and 2nd (Melbourne) Artillery Survey Companies. Cherry interviewed most of the recruits and took an active role in their placement to utilise each soldier's unique talents and education. He was a man of high integrity and strong religious faith and his manner was strict, authoritarian and Spartan. Perceptive gunners appraised their leader, liked what they saw, and dubbed him 'Uncle Dick'.

Cherry's unit embarked on HMT 'Queen Elizabeth' in April 1941 and arrived in the Middle East in May. Within three months it was widely spread over Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, but suffered key equipment shortages and could seldom show its potential. The 2/1st deployed flash spotters and sound rangers once in the Syrian campaign near Damour, and a SR detachment to Tobruk for six weeks. Cherry was critical about 'the system' that frustrated his training efforts. Following the unit's return to Australia in March 1942 the General Staff decided that survey and flash spotting batteries would be more appropriate for Jungle Warfare. On 16 August, Cherry's command was removed from the Order of Battle. Of this sad event he later wrote that:

'it is a lasting regret that the very high standard of performance reached should have been of so little value to Australia at war.'

Cherry was promoted colonel in December 1943 as Staff Officer Artillery 1 in MGRA Branch at AHQ in Melbourne where his expertise in radar technology was invaluable. After the war he was prominent in the regimental association, being Patron until his death on 13 January 1996. He married Alice Varley in 1932 and had a family of three sons, all of whom survived him. He was a superb athlete and sportsman, excelling in cricket, squash, tennis, billiards and rowing. He played Rugby for Victoria. He retired from Melbourne University in 1968.

Cherry was a devout member of St. John's Anglican Church at East Malvern for over 50 years performing a multitude of good works for his parishioners until his death at age 92.

Sources: Edward Cherry, Eulogy; pp; Correspondence, Messrs. Edward Spreadborough, Karl Robertson; Alan H. Smith, '*Cannonball*', *Journal of the RAA Historical Company*, No. 50, pp.12-14.