

# Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

## Lieutenant General Cyril Albert CLOWES, CBE, DSO, MC

(1892-1960)

In 1911, Cyril and his brother Norman Clowes entered the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Graduating on 14 August 1914, Cyril was appointed lieutenant in the AIF and posted to the 1st Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) and commissioned in the Permanent Military Forces (PMF). He embarked for Egypt in October. At Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 he directed naval gunfire support as a forward observation officer. Although wounded - and rendered partially deaf for the rest of his life - he quickly established a reputation for thoroughness and competence. In Egypt in 1916 he was made Staff Captain, 2nd Division Artillery.

In June 1916, as divisional trench mortar officer at Bois Grenier in France, Clowes assisted raiding parties while under heavy shellfire and was awarded the Military Cross. He was promoted major in January 1917 as BMRA, 2nd Division. For successfully positioning nine brigades of field artillery at Villers-Bretonneux in August 1918 he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. He was also awarded the Serbian Order of the White Eagle and twice mentioned in dispatches. He returned to Australia in April 1919 and his AIF appointment terminated on 28 June.

Promoted captain and brevet major in the PMF, from 1920 to 1925 Clowes was an instructor at Duntroon. He performed staff, training and regimental tasks for the next eleven years. Advanced to lieutenant colonel in January 1936, he sailed for England in that year to undertake the long gunnery staff course. On return in 1938 he became Chief Instructor, School of Artillery, Sydney, and in August 1939 took charge of the 6th Military District (Tasmania). He was promoted substantive colonel on 2 November and seconded to the 2nd AIF as a temporary brigadier and appointed CCRA, I Corps, on 4 April 1940, he arrived in the Middle East in December.

In northern Greece in 1941 Clowes demonstrated his capacity for command. On 14-16 April three fast moving German battalions, opposed only by the New Zealand 21st Battalion, threatened the Anzac Corps' eastern flank. Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Blamey sent Clowes to the Pinios (Tempe) Gorge to retrieve the situation. Calm, taciturn - his nickname was 'Silent Cyril' - pipe smoking, organised and organising, and able to convey a point simply, Clowes told the 21st that it was to stay put until reinforcements arrived, 'even if it meant extinction'. He rallied the flank, allowing the main force time to withdraw.

One of a number of senior officers brought home to Australia to sharpen the leadership of the home forces, on 7 January 1942, Clowes was promoted temporary major general and given command of 1st Division, which was positioned to defend the Sydney-Newcastle region. On 21 July, the Japanese landed in Papua at Gona and Buna.

Although gazetted to command New Guinea Force, Clowes was ordered to Port Moresby as commander 'C (later Milne) Force'. He flew to Milne Bay on 22 August 1942 and assumed command just four days before the arrival of the enemy invasion force. Clowes fought the

ensuing battle with considerable advantages but it was hard fought under difficult conditions and it was the first defeat inflicted on Japanese forces on land. He got little reward for his efforts and spent the rest of the war in Australia.

Predeceased by his wife and survived by their daughter, Clowes died on 19 May 1968 at Repatriation General Hospital, Heidelberg, and was buried with full military honours and Anglican rites in Springvale cemetery.

Sources: David Denholm, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 13, pp. 446-447. C. E. W. Bean, *The Story of Anzac*, Vol. II, p. 157; G Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, pp. 95-97; D. Horner, *The Gunners*, 1995, pp. 88, 202, 213, 29-30, 248-9, 253, 281,287, 338-9, 354, 397.

For more information follow this link: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/clowes-cyril-albert-9768>