

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Lieutenant Colonel Roger Francis Berkeley FITZHARDINGE, ED

(1912-2007)

Roger Fitzhardinge was born at Manly, NSW, on 16 June 1912, the second of eight children to Berkeley Ross and Lucy Monica Fitzhardinge. He was educated at Manly Primary and Sydney High School and excelled at athletics, high jumping, middle distance running and rugby.

He joined the Commonwealth Bank as a trainee in 1929 and was called up for Compulsory Military Training in 1930, its last year. When his family moved to Western Australia, Roger persuaded his employer to transfer him there too. His sporting reputation went before him and shortly he was playing rugby with Cottesloe and cricket with North Perth.

Here he joined 3rd Australian Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) in 1931. Banking service interrupted his military aspirations, so he resigned 1933 to go to Geraldton having been promoted sergeant. Come WWII he rejoined the brigade for the second time, and it was Gunner Fitzhardinge who was doing kitchen and other fatigues at Rockingham when he was sent to Officer Cadet Training Unit.

He was commissioned on 21 March 1940 and allotted to 14th Battery, 2/7th Field Regiment. The remainder of the unit was based at Woodside, SA. In November, the regiment sailed for the Middle East. Their baptism of fire was west of Mersa Matruh supporting British army formations. It was here that Roger heard that his brother, Captain John Fitzhardinge (2/3rd Field Regiment, 6th Division), had been captured by an Italian submarine while trying to escape after the withdrawal of allied forces from Greece.

From December to February 1942, the 2/7th was the RA Depot Regiment at Al Maza for Middle East Command. It was here that Fitzhardinge, now Command Post Officer, trained the most skilled command post staff of the AIF. After the Battle of El Alamein in October 1942, the CRA 9th Division, Brigadier Alan Ramsay had his regiments codify their procedures for the more complex fire plans. 14th Battery's were chosen within Eighth Army as the 'standard' for timings for the engagement of regimental (M) and higher (U, V) targets. These were promulgated to every Commonwealth artillery hierarchy for use for the remainder of the war.

Following El Alamein, Fitzhardinge was appointed troop commander (D Troop), and arrived back in Perth on 18 February 1943. A medical condition checked his regimental service and in June he was appointed Senior Instructor at III Australian Corps School of Gunnery at Northam, WA. After that he was SORA 2 Fremantle Fortress, and managed a visit to Tarakan to meet with his 2/7th colleagues before being discharged at the end of 1945.

After a short period, Fitzhardinge joined the 'same' unit for the third time – 3rd Field Regiment, RAA (CMF). An additional battery was raised in 1950 and in the next nine years he trained volunteers and National Service Trainees, first as Battery Commander (Q), then Second-in-Command and finally as CO. The highlight of his service with 3rd Field was to command his battery when it fired the Royal Salute from the North Mole, Fremantle, in 1954, as Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II sailed away in the *Gothic*. No more than 20 metres away, Roger would never forget the warm smile she gave in return for his salute.

After the war, Fitzhardinge resumed his banking career and his sporting activities, which now centred on swimming and rowing. In the bank he rose to State Manager, first for Tasmania and next in WA, retiring in 1975. He was a foundation member of the Highgate RSL Sub-branch. He was also a foundation member of the RAA Artillery Historical Society of Western Australia, Patron of 2/7th Field Regiment Association (WA), and a member of 3rd Field Regiment Ex-Members Association. He made an annual 'pilgrimage' to his birthplace Manly to meet with his Sydney based 2/7th regimental colleagues.

In 1937, Roger married Dorothy Brogan, a schoolteacher, of Geraldton and four sons were born to them, Michael, Roger, Phillip and Digby. Dorothy predeceased him in 1980, and in 1981 Roger married Joy Sonter. Even though he grew frailer in his 'nineties' he marched on Anzac Day, but could not do so in 2007.

A Mass was held for Roger on 30 September at the Rossmoyne Palatine, and he died on 1 October 2007. His funeral was held that day at Karrakatta Crematorium. He was survived by his wife, sons Roger and Phillip and their families. Digby and Michael predeceased him. In his eulogy, Bruce Campbell, President of the RAA Historical Society of Western Australia, noted that: 'Through Roger's love of liberty and enduring grace he stepped to the very cliff top of society to sketch for Australian youth the monument of a patriot'.

Three of Fitzhardinge's brothers (John, Bill and Theodore) also served in the artillery.

Sources: Alan H. Smith, *Cannonball*, Journal of the RAA Historical Company, Nos. 51, pp.10-11, 22 and 68; L. Findlay, *The Westralian*. 25 October 2007; letter, B. G. Campbell, to Mrs J. Fitzhardinge, 17 October 2007.