

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Brigadier Cyril Courtis THOMAS

(1911-1990)

Cyril Thomas was born in Bendigo, Victoria, on 17 August 1911. He was educated to intermediate level. [parents, siblings??]

In 1927, he went to Melbourne and joined the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and, for a banker, had an extraordinary career. With the exception of branch experience in Hawthorn, he was employed in capital city offices in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane in the Trading and Hire Purchase functions as a staff officer, and later inspector. This meant that he could continue firstly, Militia and later CMF careers in parallel without interruption.

Thomas joined the Militia in 1929 and served with the 39th Infantry Battalion and the 7th Field Brigade rising to the rank of lieutenant. He was commissioned on 7 November 1939, transferred to the 2nd AIF in May 1940, and posted to the 2/4th Field Regiment, 7th Division, in NSW. His regimental service in the Middle East included the Syrian campaign. On return to Australia, Thomas was appointed BMRA 7th Division for the Papuan campaign from June 1942 to July 1943. He next covered the New Guinea campaigns as SORA 2 HQ I Australian Corps until February 1944. He was twice mentioned in dispatches.

That month, Thomas joined a select group of officers sent to the UK, of whom only two were Gunners, to participate in Operation Overlord, the D Day landing. From April to July 1944 he was Counter Mortar Officer with the 53rd (Welsh) Division, 12 Corps, deployed in Normandy after D Day. From July 1944 to May 1945 he was BMRA 6th British Airborne Division in France, Holland and Belgium. While with this division he also undertook glider and parachute training.

In June 1945, he returned to Australia and the staff of the MGRA at LHQ. He also visited the Pacific Island campaigns in the Solomons and Borneo. He was discharged in July 1946, taking 2/6th Field Regiment as his last identified unit, and returned to his banking career.

Back in uniform in 1950 with the RAA Staff Group, he was promoted lieutenant colonel in 1952 to command 5th Field Regiment in Sydney, followed by 9th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment until the end of 1955. In 1956, Thomas was Superintendent of Hire Purchase in the Industrial Finance department of the bank in Sydney.

In January 1956, he was appointed Commander 1 AGRA (AA) at Georges Heights during the expansion of the CMF after the first National Service scheme. His command comprised four regiments and ancillary units. It was recorded that Thomas was particularly proud of the fact that his regiments downed six target drogues at their annual Shell Harbour camp. A year later

he was back in Field Branch as CCRA I Corps for three years. In 1959, he was appointed ADC to the Governor General for three years. His penultimate appointment was as Deputy Commander 1st Division 1961-63 followed by Chief of Staff Communications Zone 1963-65. Thomas was, along with many of his contemporaries, a victim of the dramatic downsizing of the CMF in the 'sixties'.

Colonel Thomas used his position and persuasive powers to bring about Bank personnel policies that facilitated young officers joining the CMF and, as he described it, being able to gain a commission in 18 months by dint of diligent application. This was very important to the CMF, for soon other banks and large companies, like BHP, followed suit in pay and conditions that were very attractive. Thomas was active in the RAA Association (NSW), attending the inaugural meeting and being vice-president in 1956.

Thomas's banking career continued to be in specialized areas, notwithstanding his attendance at the University of Hawaii Advanced Management Program in 1959. In 1962, he was appointed Inspector of the Commonwealth Trading Bank Administration, and his penultimate appointment was Deputy Manager for Victoria in 1966, followed by the same position for Queensland in 1968. He retired on 30 June 1974 having completed 47 years of service with the CBA.

Thomas was tall with a confident, commanding presence. He believed that training time, no matter what the occasion, should be used to extract the maximum value – an approach that often rankled with the less enthused subordinates, particularly at the end of an exercise weekend.

Thomas retired to Rye, Victoria, and died at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital on 22 September 1990, and was cremated after a committal service at the Springvale Necropolis. He was survived by his wife Myra and two children.

Sources: Army Lists, CBA media '*Currency*', April 1956, August 1969; *Bank Notes*, September 1965, August 1974; Annual Report 1971.