

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Wilbert Thomas (Darkie) Hudson MM

1920 – 2002

By Kevin Browning, OAM



Wilbert Thomas Hudson was born at Merrylands, near Sydney, on 17 December 1920, the son of Bert Hudson and Wilamena nee Preston. He was working on the knitting machines at the Woollen Mills for the Stirling Henry Company when on 5 April 1940 *'Like so many Anzacs, I joined up because my mates were all going down and joining up, we thought it might be a big adventure, and anyway it would be a job'*.

After recruit training he was posted to George's Heights to be trained as a heavy anti-aircraft gunner. Then followed a posting to the 2nd Heavy Anti-aircraft Battery in Darwin at a gun site at Berrimah located adjacent to the HMAS Coonawarra Communication Station and near the RAAF Base. On his arrival at the unit he was given the nickname 'Darkie' by which he was then known for the rest of his life. At this time the unit was constructing the gun sites and received training on the 3.7 inch anti-aircraft gun and the Lewis machine gun (not with live ammunition as Army HQ wouldn't allow it). He suffered two bouts of Dengue Fever and spent some time in hospital.

On 19 February 1942 the alarm sounded. At the time Darkie was having a shower. Grabbing his tin hat, boots and a towel he raced to his position near the Command Post where he manned a Lewis Machine Gun. As the Japanese staffed the position he found he had a field of fire so he moved into the open and set it up on a 44 gallon drum. But still he could not get sufficient elevation. His number 2, Gunner Garner, placed the gun on his shoulder and as a Japanese pilot came in on a low level staffing attack Darkie was able to pour accurate fire into the plane until it crashed. The plane was not the only thing to fall to the ground during the attack, Darkie's towel had also gone south.

He remained at Berrimah for subsequent air raids but was then attached, with other members of his Battery's anti-aircraft machine gunners, to 14th Heavy Anti-aircraft Battery to defend the Harbour Oil Installation near the wharf in Darwin. On 16 June 1942 the Japanese bombed the tanks and ruptured some setting them on fire. Darkie, Gunners Ron Crake and Jack Ryder were rescued but had received severe third degree burns. They were hospitalised at Adelaide River where through outstanding care by the doctors and nurses they recovered sufficiently to be transferred to Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, Melbourne. The three of them came to be known as the 'Burn Boys'.

Upon recovery Darkie was posted to anti-aircraft sites in Sydney and discharged from the Army on 9 November 1943. He returned to Stirling Henry Company but left this job as his nerves were very bad. He married June Catto at St Marks Church, Granville on 2 June 1945 and settled in Greystanes where they built a house.

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And after holding several jobs including postman and with the Water Board he settled into a job with the Attorney General's Office in Sydney where he worked for 22 years until retiring in 1983.

For his actions on 19 February 1942 he was awarded the Military Medal, the first bravery awarded to be awarded for action on Australian soil. It was presented to him in Sydney by the Governor General in 1945.

Wilbert Thomas (Darkie) Hudson passed away on 7 July 2002. He was survived by his wife June and children Robert and Wendy. A memorial was unveiled to him by the Mayor of Holroyd City Council on 13 February 2010 in a park opposite his home.



Wendy, June and Robert