

THE ARTILLERY NEWS.

MARCH 2006 – MAY 2006



Official Correspondence.

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R.A.A.A.T. HISTORICAL WING

FACES FROM THE PAST

The Internet address book of the old 6th Field Regiment "A *Tasmanian Gunner's History*" site is still in operation and is checked periodically for incoming mail from those interested in that era.

I recently received an email from a Victorian lady who supplied me with several photoscans of three former artillerymen – one was her uncle - who were originally part of the Tasmanian/Victorian composite 2/8th Field Regiment, R.A.A..

Perhaps they may be remembered – or known of – by our members or families.

"Thank-you for this very informative web-site. I have been researching my Uncle's War Service History for a few years now, and this is the first time I have been able to find anything in-depth about his Regiment ie:- 2/8th Field Regiment. I have my Uncle's Service Records and a few photo's. Until now all I have had is what my Mother has told me and what I have been able to

get from the War Memorial. My Uncle's name is, Frank Ivan (Hock) Sidebottom, No.VX23606. I have also a photo of a Bill Margison No. TX3180 taken with my Uncle in Beirut and another of a Roy Scott No. TX3071,taken in Palestine. Roy came home to my Uncle's place with him when they came back from the Middle East. My Uncle left the 2/8th on the 19th April 1944 and joined the 1st Naval Bombardment Group with the 6th Division. He then went to Morotai and was promoted to Lance Bombardier. My Uncle was discharged from the Navy on 11th March 1946. Thank-you for the extensive research you have put up for people like me to be able to follow our ancestors' war service history."

With her permission, I am publishing these scans as part of the Historical Wing's effort to preserve part of the history of Tasmanian Artillery.

As members of the families of these 2/8th Field Regiment gunners may still be living within Tasmania I have also asked permission to pass on copies of the photos to them if they express an interest – and this has been granted.

These three names and photos may stir a few memories of a time of great hardship as well as great companionship - and even a bit of fun.

The gunners portrayed are Victorian Lance Bombardier **Frank Ivan (Hock) Sidebottom VX50797** (later he transferred to the Navy as a member of the 1st Australian Naval Bombardment Group), and Tasmanians **William (Bill) Alfred Margison TX3180**. (originally from Cornwall,Tas.) who was mentioned in Charlie McKenzie's book '**GIMME THE GUNS,**' and **Roy Oliver Scott TX3071** (originally from Mole Creek, Tas.).

The Australian War Memorial records state that Victorian Frank Ivan 'Hock' Sidebottom enlisted in 1940 at age 20 but, in fact, he was 17 when he joined up for the 'big adventure'. Signaller-Driver Bill Margison was 21, and Gunner Roy Scott was the oldest at 23 years old.

All three survived the El Alamein experience and other adventures and eventually returned home to their families in 1945 and 1946.



Frank Sidebottom and Bill Margison in Beirut – probably February 1942.



**Tasmanian, Gunner Roy Scott in Palestine
L/Bombardier Frank Ivan Sidebottom (age 17) at enlistment**

ARTICLE

The 51mm Bronze medallion (shown below) was produced by Hafner Mint in Melbourne for the Murray Memorial Committee of Evandale, Tasmania.

It was one of the features that the Memorial Committee organised to celebrate the exploits of a real hero. His full story has already been recorded in other publications (extracts below) and in the biographical books titled 'Mad Harry' and 'Murray VC'.



As a member of the Royal Australian Artillery Association of Tasmania - Historical Wing and an ex-gunner with the 6th Field Regiment R.A.A., I had certainly heard of Harry Murray, V.C. and his early Launceston Artillery connections, but it was only just the 'bare bones' of the man - it was time for me to give him some more substance. The idea was initiated after a visit to Evandale's Local History Centre

some years ago to check details of one of my own great-uncles from Evandale who followed in Harry's footsteps - albeit less prominently - to Gallipoli and France

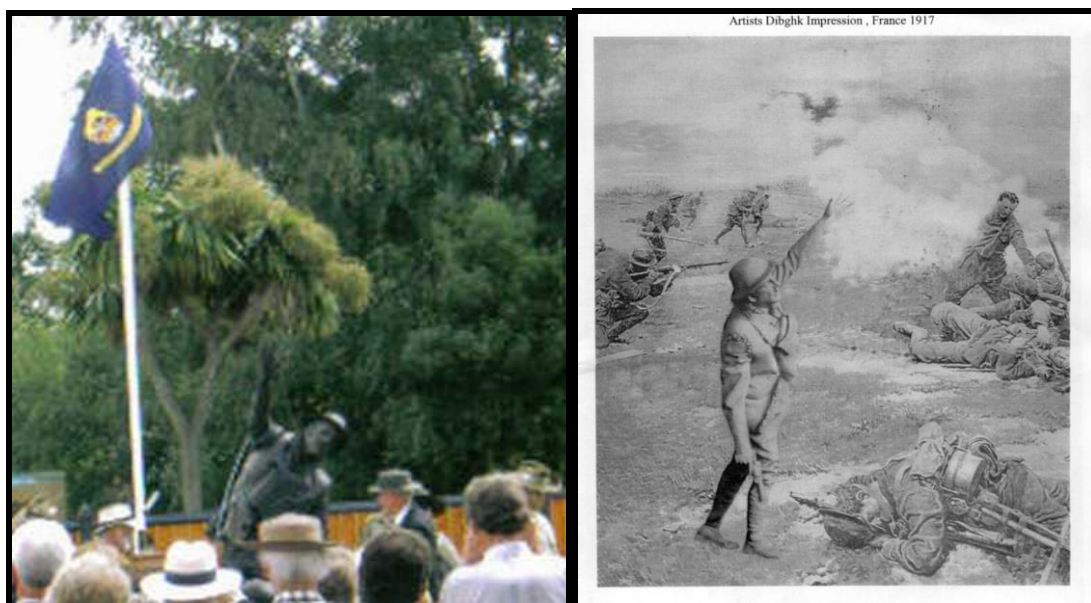
A very pleasant 'phone conversation with that very obliging local historian, former **Lt. Colonel C. David von Steiglitz - OAM, RFD, ED** of Evandale, who is currently Chairman of the Memorial Committee, made me realise that we were beholding before us a man who deserved all the military honours that had been bestowed on him.

THE BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE



On 24th February, a larger-than-life bronze statue, sculpted by international artist Mr. Peter Corlett, of **Lt. Colonel Henry 'Harry' William Murray** – a man larger-than-life - was unveiled in Evandale by **Major-General Michael Jeffery AC, CVO, MC**, Governor-General of Australia, also a returned soldier and a distinguished man of medals, who stated that he “stood in awe at Harry Murray’s exploits”, in horrendous conditions, under fire during WWI.

The statue is of a steel-helmeted man frozen in the action of having just thrown a grenade and with a revolver in his hand. A dramatic portrayal straight from the battlefields of 1917 France - taken from an artists impression.



Harry Murray became the most highly decorated soldier in Australia and the British Commonwealth and is claimed as Evandale's most distinguished son. His awards consisted of the Victoria Cross (VC), Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (CMG), Distinguished Service Order - and Bar (DSO), Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM),. Mentioned in Despatches 4 times (MID****) and the Croix de Guerre along with his entitlement of campaign medals - the 1914-15 Star, the War Medal, the Victory Medal with Bronze Oakleaves, the War Medal 1939-45, the Australia Service Medal 1939-45 plus the King George VI Coronation Medal and the Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal. He was also recommended for the American Distinguished Service Medal for his contribution in training American machine-gunners at the Front but the award process was never completed.

It is interesting to note that Harry Murray is not officially on the Tasmanian list of V.C. winners because of his place of enlistment.

Born on 1st. December 1880, in a cottage at 'Clareville', where Launceston Airport now stands, Henry William Murray was the 8th. of nine children born to the wife of a farm labourer, the late Mr. E. K. Murray. The family eventually moved on to a property, 'Northcote', near the village of St. Leonards on the outskirts of Launceston, where Harry grew up and was well known as a young man. Harry's grand-father had been a convict so it is evident he came from relatively humble stock. Harry's mother had been a former Miss Littler, and two of her nephews, Harry's first cousins, would also distinguish themselves during the 'War to end all Wars'!

Harry had moved to West Australia and found work in the timber industry as a Bushman, and it was there that he enlisted on 13 October 1914, at age 34 - although he gave his age as 30 on his Attestment Form because he thought he might be rejected or parted from his mates as being too old for combat.

He started out as a machine-gunner with 16th Infantry Battalion A.I.F. and 20 days after his unscathed Gallipoli landing, he and his best friend Percy Black had already both been wounded by the Turks while maintaining their machine-gun under murderous fire - and he had been promoted to Lance Corporal.,.

Murray rose extremely rapidly through the ranks due to his own personal bravery and dedication to duty. On August 8 he was wounded again, and, on August 13 1915, he was promoted from Lance Corporal to Sergeant to Second Lieutenant in the one day of bitter fighting and, by March 1st. 1916, in Palestine he gained further promotion to Captain.

Along with other members of the A.I.F. forces he eventually ended up in Europe fighting the German Central Alliance forces under the most terrible of conditions. Shortly after his arrival in France, during mid-September 1916, it was reported in the '*London Gazette*' that Captain Murray was again wounded twice, this time in the thigh and back.

In all, he was wounded 5 times during his great adventure, and on his Casualty Form - Active Service B.103 - a notation is said to have declared - '*Unfit for further service*' - but it didn't stop Harry, who just ignored it and went back into action.

He had actually turned 36 years old when he won the Victoria Cross, on 4/5th. February 1917, at Stormy Trench, which was N.E. of the village of Gueudecourt in France, and the following citation gives an insight to this gallant man's actions that earned him the right to wear the V.C. with pride.

CITATION: *For most conspicuous bravery when in command of the right flank company in attack. He led his company to the assault with great skill and courage, and the position was quickly captured. Fighting of a very severe nature followed, and three heavy counter-attacks were beaten back, these successes being due to Captain Murray's wonderful work. Throughout the night his company suffered heavy casualties through concentrated enemy shell fire, and on one occasion gave ground for a short way. This gallant officer rallied his command and saved the situation by sheer valour. He made his presence felt throughout the line, encouraging his men, heading bombing parties, leading bayonet charges, and carrying wounded to places of safety. His magnificent example inspired his men throughout. (London Gazette: 10th March 1917.)*

He had an ability to bring out the best in troops under his command. and he became (*affectionately*) nicknamed 'Mad Harry' - it was said that his Company would follow him anywhere and die for him to a man.

Harry enlisted again during WWII and, by putting his age down once more, he was accepted - but he was ruled 'not suitable for combat', however, because of his record and his determination to serve, he was given a command in Queensland's home defence units.

Eventually, he was discharged, on 8 February 1944, after being commanding officer of 26th Infantry Battalion AMF and the 23rd Queensland Regiment, Volunteer Defence Corps, due to ill-health from the results of his WWI wounds.

Time had caught up with Harry but it didn't slow him down much and he contributed much to Australia in his civilian capacity over many years

On 7th January 1966, in Queensland, Harry was a passenger in a car driven by his late wife Nell that was involved in a crash. He was taken to hospital where he suffered a heart attack brought on by the trauma and he died the same night.

He in his 86th. year.

Harry was an unassuming and humble man - a genuine hero in the true sense of the word.. He often said that his 6 years of training with the Launceston Artillery from 1902 – 8 gave him the discipline and sense of duty that he displayed throughout his military career and it is because of this connection, as a fellow Tasmanian ex-driver-gunner, we salute Lt. Col. Harry Murray as our 'bravest of the brave' and it was an honour to be invited to the unveiling of his statue.

All R.A.A.T. members were invited to the unveiling and many made the effort, on an extremely hot and humid afternoon, to attend and witness this honour bestowed on a former Launceston Artillery gunner who went on to achieve a greatness he actually felt embarrassed with.

Members seen in the crowd included Chris Talbot, Barry Bastick, Norm Andrews, Charles Tee, Gunter Breier, Lloyd Saunders, Rick Wood, Max Frost, Marc Smith, Frank Stokes, Bill Hoyle, Ray Brown, Peter Patmore, Ernie Harrington, D. Parker, Bevan Filce, David Ezzy, Joe Ferguson, Hans Piatek, Ray Tilley – I know there were quite a few others so, please – *with my memory of the afternoon slightly cooked by the heat* - forgive me if I omitted some names I shouldn't have.

LEST WE FORGET



A section of the large crowd gathered to honour a Tasmanian-born hero.



**WO1 Joe Ferguson, Major-General Michael Jeffery AC, CVO, MC.
(Governor-General of Australia and Lt. Col. C. David von Steiglitz OAM,
RFD, ED. (Chairman of the Murray Memorial Committee)**

Main References.

'**The Examiner**' 'The Great War. The Anzac Tradition.' Copy of article dated March 1917, (reprinted April 25th. 1989).

'**Tasmania in Focus.**' *Southern Cross Television* interview featuring local historian **Mr. C. David Von Steiglitz.** (1998).

Australian War Memorial. *AWM* on-line Internet site of V.C. winners.(Details originally extracted Jan.1999)

Mr. C. David von Steiglitz. Personal recollections and documentation. (Jan. 1999)

Various pamphlets - produced by the **Murray Memorial Committee**, Evandale 2006.

GUNNERS DINNER

The Gunners Dinner will be held on 3rd June 2006. The invitation that is attached should be returned ASAP, with the cost of the meal included, to our Secretary so that seating can be officially arranged. This Dinner is by invitation only.

The Artillery News.

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