

# **DARWIN BOMBED**

An A/A Gunner's reflections

Jack Mulholland

*With a foreword by  
the Hon. Austin Asche*

**Darwin Bombed**

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*The cover illustration is a copy of a painting by war artist Roy Hodgkinson.  
Gun Crew of the 14th Heavy Anti Aircraft Battery – Darwin 1942*

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## Acknowledgements

What follows has been completed at the insistence of my late wife Esmæ, an anti aircraft gunner herself, and completed with the patient assistance of my son Ross.

I wish to thank the Honourable Austin Asche, former Administrator of the Northern Territory, Judge and very prominent Australian, for his kind Foreword to my book.

My thanks also to Denis Michael Sheppard for allowing me to lay waste to his photograph album and for the friendship of ex members of the 14th Heavy Anti Aircraft Battery over the last 65 years for which I am more than grateful.

## Dedication

*This book is dedicated to all  
Those who served their country,  
Not necessarily with glory,  
Not necessarily with distinction,  
But with honour,  
They did their duty in a time of war.*

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## Author's notes

There have been a number of books written about the war in the Northern Territory during 1942-1943. In the following years the media have also covered that period in a number of ways, which in some cases were narrow and misinformed.

After the first air raids on the 19th February 1942 the government decided to heavily censor the news releases. It was felt that a complete release of the severity of the raids would impair the nation's morale. That censorship has affected the history and reporting of that period. With the passage of time, reports and memories have resulted in some inaccurate verbal and written accounts of the war, and there has been a lack of public information. It is of concern that our people are well aware of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour but are mostly ignorant of the attacks on our mainland.

Because the action took place in Australia, the government of the day held a royal commission, which highlighted the deficiencies and shortcomings of the event. The conduct of many actions in World War II would not have stood up to a scrutiny as was levelled at Darwin. Microscopic inspections into administration, communications, preparedness, and the adequacy of arms and men were sure to illuminate problems. There would have been not many engagements where there was a surplus of arms and men. From that report, which

was lacking in appreciation, has stemmed an erroneous impression. It reflected on the overall conduct of the defence forces and the reaction of the Darwin townsfolk.

It would seem that the royal commission report might have been the base for a speech made by one of Australia's leading citizens, in 1955, to the Northern Territory Parliament. The speech contained some indiscriminate and inappropriate remarks concerning the behaviour of civilians and defence personnel during and after the first raids. The remarks lack an effort to analyse them or to understand the circumstances at the time, and have given a false basis for many of the comments that followed.

No doubt some of the above caused a fifty years delay in any official acknowledgement of those who defended Darwin during the Japanese raids.

This book deals mainly with the anti aircraft service in Darwin from 1940-1942. The year 1942 is unique in Australian history, as since our arrival in 1778 our land had not been attacked by another nation.

I found it an extremely interesting period being in Darwin with the civilian population for fourteen months prior to the raids. I have since gained an affinity for that city at the Top End.

A question of concern to me was should this book be written as a unit history or told in personal form. The latter was chosen. I apologise for any errors –chronological or otherwise and shall be happy to be corrected. Terms and measurements of the 1940s have been quoted as they were then used and an explanation can be found in the glossary.

A lot of the book is written from memory and the knowledge of the affairs of the day as seen by an A/A gunner. Some of my comments have been flavoured by hindsight and after some study a few dissertations added to heat the pot. The structure of the book is during an early part of Darwin's existence and near extinction. But it is in no way a reflection of the Darwin of today. My life there in the 40s is history and was an experience. The book tends to dwell on my participation at the Oval gun site. There is no doubt that the battery's other sections Fannie Bay, McMillans, Elliott Point and the Oil Tanks would have proceeded along similar lines.

## Foreword by the Hon. Austin Asche

Congratulations Jack Mulholland. You have done a great and necessary service for Australia. You have cleared up some unhappy misconceptions which still prevail in some quarters and put it into context, a statement by a prominent Australian that was either unfortunately phrased or at least misinterpreted by many.

I yield to no one in my admiration for Sir Paul Hasluck. He was a great Australian and although he did not live here, we can truly claim him as a Great Territorian. As the longest serving Minister for Territories (1951-1963) he made frequent visits, communicated extensively with the Aborigines and, as the Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography puts it:

*It was at least partly as a consequence of his efforts that the Territory's economy developed quite markedly and its population grew. He was a splendid historian, a far seeing statesman and a deservedly popular Governor General.*

In 1955, in addressing the NT Legislative Council he referred to the 19th February 1942, as "A day of National Shame", and spoke of a "panic evacuation". No doubt, as he suggests in his letter to Stan



Burrows 16/5/1990 (the full text of which is in the book), the press took those remarks out of context; but with great respect to him, he should have known that this was just the sort of sensation which would be irresistible to many journalists. The result has often been a sort of blanket condemnation of all who served in the area either as a civilian or in the armed forces. This was unfair and unjust and I am certain it was not what Sir Paul meant. The latter makes this clear and it is to be hoped that its publication in this book will change some attitudes. Let me remind you of this paragraph:

*My passing reference to a "Day of Shame" in my speech at Darwin was clearly no slight on those who were active in the defence. It was a reminder to Australians that before, during and after the raids some Australians had not behaved well. We should not boast about the wrong things and fail to correct our faults.*

So be it. Some Australians had not behaved well. Let us remember however, as any reading of Douglas Lockwood's book *Australia's Pearl Harbour* or Professor Powell's excellent history *The Shadow's Edge* or of the events that the Author accounts here, many Australians behaved with immense courage and gallantry. Even of those who did not behave well, can it be said that others would not do the same in a situation for which they were unprepared, unorganised and under trained and faced for the first time in their lives, with the horrors of a full scale bombing raid by a determined and ruthless enemy?

As Jack Mulholland points out and it is surely a lesson we must remember, those well trained to their task stood firm and did their duty even with the inadequate equipment given to them. If there was any "shame" on that day surely it must fall on higher heads than confused civilians who were told to leave or some less well trained service personnel given conflicting orders. Where were the great leaders who sent inferior equipment, failed to plan adequately and missed the warning signs? What ponderous "brass hat", safely ensconced in the southern army barracks sent that magnificent order: "Use the 1916 ammo first"? But "tout compronde c'est tout pardonner". The fact is we were almost totally unprepared and the unexpected will usually cause chaos at first. The first use of gas in Great War caused panic. The first experience of Blitzkrieg in the Second War caused the same among both armed forces and civilians.

It is the next reaction that counts. We were unprepared and shocked on 19 February 1942. Let us take pride in our reaction. Within a few months our radar screens were up, our aircraft and Ack Ack were shooting down the interlopers, and, soon after our radar operators found themselves tracing our bombers going out more often than enemy bombers coming in. Undoubtedly, much of this was due to the great victory of the American fleet at Midway: but we had found leaders who could lead, and equipment that could do the job. And even in the darkest days, I do not believe that any Australians, no matter how pessimistic as to immediate setbacks, contemplated the possibility of ultimate defeat.



*The Hon. Austin Asche and Author*

In this respect I believe, and I think the author believes also, that we were ill served by the censorship clamped on the Darwin raids. A censorship which, even now, leaves many quite ignorant of their extent and the devastation caused. There were, presumably, only two reasons for censorship. The first, that it would give information and encouragement to the enemy, the second, that it would be bad for civilian morale. As to the first, it would have been a very obtuse enemy who could not see perfectly well from the air the extent of damage caused and the Japanese were not obtuse. The second was really an insult to the average Australian. Knowing my countrymen, as I hope I do, I have no doubt that the real picture would have infuriated rather than depressed them.

It must, however, be hard for the present generation to realise how remote Darwin was in those days. Although some brave pioneers took the journey by land, the usual way was by ship, taking two weeks from Melbourne. I had been brought up in Darwin in my early boyhood, although I was in Melbourne when the war began. It is not too much to say that to my schoolfellows I might just as well have come from Mars for all they knew of the place. The war changed all that and put Darwin on the map. But Jack Mulholland and his fellow diggers must have thought of it as equivalent to going over seas; and understandably enough, considering the conditions in which he was "housed" (if that is the right word), he found no great liking for the place. I mention that because it gives emphasis to the Author's convincing argument that proper recognition had never been given to those who endured the raids and heat and "dermo". They served their country in harsh and more dangerous and more isolated parts than many overseas postings and their country should recognise that. I hasten to say of course that Darwin is now one of the most beautiful and livable cities in Australia.

The other canard foisted upon our troops in the North is that of looting after the raids. Well, there is looting, and looting. No doubt some unforgivable things were done, but most of the so called pilfering or looting was, as Mulholland explains, no more than sensible use of available resources in an undoubted emergency.

But I have omitted to mention a great virtue of the book, apart from its value as a war time history told by one of the (Other Ranks). This is, its typically Aussie humour, matched with typical cheekiness or ironical tolerance with which the average Aussie serviceman regards the ravages of fate or the pretensions of his superiors. The best of officers can turn this to his advantage. The others had better find a cushy job somewhere in headquarters. We are not a Subject people and can only be governed by those who know the language.

Every ex-serviceman will understand the sort of blind authority that lives by the rules. Every ex-serviceman will understand the Author's predicament when he lost his pay-book. The result was three separate inoculations because he had no "record" of the earlier ones. His word, of course, meant nothing. Obviously the authorities had the same philosophy as Samuel Goldwyn that a verbal contract was not worth the paper it was printed on.

There are many hilarious anecdotes in this book, enlivening some of the boredom of a life punctuated by Guard Room duties and training.

Finally, the Author tells us of the day when all the training came into its own when some 188 Japanese bombers and fighters bombed and strafed Darwin furiously and effectively with a second raid following soon after. His description of this must be one of the most vivid eyewitness accounts ever given and the book is worth reading for this alone. Our Gunners did what they were trained to do, they did it splendidly with seriously limited equipment and they upheld the traditions of the Australian fighting forces. This was no Day of Shame for Jack Mulholland and his mates and this book allows us to pay the honour due to them.

Congratulations, Jack.

*Austin Asche*

Former Chief Justice of the NT and Administrator



## The Author

Jack Mulholland was born in 1921 at Hay, the family being stationed at Booligal where his father was teaching at a (one man) school. Jack was educated at the Masonic Schools and Parramatta High School.

He joined the Commonwealth Bank in 1938 and on turning 18 years of age enlisted in the First Light Horse Regiment. In 1940 he transferred to the 14th Heavy Anti Aircraft Battery and was posted to Darwin where he served until late 1942.

On his return to Sydney he completed the heavy A/A schools. At a later date he spent two months in South Australia undergoing infantry training and then gained his commission on Bofors (light A/A).

After further service with heavy A/A, in 1945 he completed a three months conversion to infantry course in Victoria. He then spent a couple of months at the Jungle Warfare training course at Canungra Q. where he was transferred to Sydney as medically unfit.

He was discharged at the end of 1945 and rejoined the Commonwealth Bank at the beginning of 1946.



## Army enlistment

It was October 1940, Sydney.

I had turned nineteen years of age the previous month and had decided to join the army in a full time capacity. Execution of such a decision was not as simple as my young mind considered.

The war in Europe had been in progress for twelve months, and I was sitting in front of one of the bank's personnel officers, who was trying to convince me that I should remain with the bank instead of joining the army. Personnel, or Staff Department as it was then known, was situated in the Head Office building, Martin Place, Sydney. For a young bloke of my very limited (practically nil) banking experience, Head Office was about as daunting to me as the Gobi Desert would be to a mermaid. Staff Department was the most holy of the holies deciding, where, when and anything else that affected a young officer. I sat very quietly in front of that, to me, rather important executive type in his swivel chair behind his highly French polished desk. To be sitting in a chair was some form of seniority because I had not reached a stage (optimistically) that warranted a seated position at work.

When it seemed that I was not responding positively to his cajolery – probably because I was overpowered by the occasion – he played

his trump card. In a voice of finality, and expecting a positive result, he told me that should I join the Citizen Military Force (CMF), the Bank would refuse to make up my pay. Further to that I would also be required to have sufficient funds in my staff account to meet my superannuation and insurance payments as they fell due.



*The interior of the Commonwealth Savings Bank, Sydney, 1940.*

It was the bank's policy to make up the difference between the serviceman's pay and the salary the bank would have paid that person. Such policy however only applied if the person served with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) or the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). Where the person was stationed had no effect.

The bank did not consider that an employee who joined a CMF



unit rated any assistance. Not because it objected to such a person being financially rewarded but, possibly, regarding his worth to his country compared to being an industrious bank clerk. In all fairness it is to be remembered that in 1940 the war had reached a stalemate. Some time later I was to find that a CMF member would have his pay made up to the civilian level, from the time he was shot at. Certainly not the safest or easiest way to earn a rise.

The personnel officer's intimidating advice had been part of an overall effort to slow down the loss of staff to the armed services. In 1940 the number of male staff in the bank may have been as high as ninety percent and recruiting by the armed forces was putting a considerable strain on the work force. The bank reluctantly gave permission to suspend my employment and I was free to join up.

Looking back now somebody was more concerned about the value of Darwin, and its safety, than the bank.

The Second World War, like the first, was intended to end all wars. That may have been a good recruitment cry or there were definitely some optimists among us. By 1940 the war had come to a standstill. Germany had over run France and the Low Countries and was poised facing England across the Channel. No army movements of importance were taking place and the war had reached a point of stagnation. The main activity was the pounding of England by the Luftwaffe, in what was to be known as the Battle of Britain, and the strengthening of the Channel coast defences by the Germans.

Why Hitler and his advisers stopped at the Channel is not for me to speculate but because they did, it limited my choice of enlistment. On second thoughts, Hitler was surely an ego maniac and with his fast rise to power, probably considered he had God-like qualities and expected the waters of the English Channel to part as the Red Sea did for Moses.

It was proudly said, "the sun never sets" on what had once been Britain's empire of occupied lands surrounding the earth. It seemed to be an accepted fact that if England declared war then the rest of the British Commonwealth automatically joined her. Australia's loyalty to Britain was borne out by the then Prime Minister, the Hon Mr. R.G. Menzies, in his announcement to the nation on 3rd September 1939. He said something to this effect:

*"Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially, that in consequence of a persistence by Germany in*

*the invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her and that as a result Australia is also at war."*

That statement and the times brought on an urgent desire to enlist.

At the start of World War 2 Australia was a relatively new addition to the Empire, being settled as an English colony only one hundred and fifty one years earlier. The population was predominantly of Anglo Saxon stock and as a result it remained closely tied to the "Mother Country". Our language and lifestyle was akin to that of England. Australians when travelling to England spoke of "going home" or "going home for a visit". We in Australia lived an English existence in an un-English country and an un-English climate.

The difference in climate was ignored and the day to day life was a continuance of the old country's ways. The traditional baked dinner, backed up by hot plum pudding, was still the Christmas meal regardless of the temperature. The ladies in the kitchens stoically prepared the festive repast. Christmas cards were decorated with snow scenes and a sprig of holly, all reminiscent of England. Clothing, architecture etc., were all very English and to this day, there is still much evidence of the British and Irish origins in our lifestyle.

More suited to the English climate three piece suits were considered to be the accepted and expected men's clothing.

Our office staff wore starched collars attached to shirts with studs, armbands to adjust the length of shirt sleeves, and of course suspenders on the legs to hold up the socks. Male officers wore coats and ties regardless of the day's temperature. The gentry of the day carried furled umbrellas, wore bowler or homburg hats with the final touch, a flower in the lapel buttonhole. We bank officers, with an eye to advancement, would not think of leaving the office without a hat. It is only in recent years that there has been a relaxation in men's wear.

Probably one of the first changes resulting from the climate was the chilling of beer – an excellent idea.

Australian school children were versed in English literature, English history and English patriotism. The day's schooling commenced with the saluting of the flag. Loyalty to the Monarch and Empire was cardinal.

One of the main celebration days on the calendar was Empire Day; a day, which in many cases brought for the children a mixture of boredom and excitement. Boredom came first in the school assembly

halls where some person of note would extol the virtues of the Empire and the deeds of our forefathers, followed by the headmaster who would be more eloquent and long winded. The children were inclined to become restive and impatient, and possibly end up in trouble for talking instead of paying attention. After school, and particularly after dark, the excitement came with the lighting of the bonfires. All over the country pyramids of paper, grass, branches and the odd car tyre were gathered and guarded for cracker night. When the piles of rubbish were lit, it was time for the children to let off their crackers.

The evening was referred to as Empire night and it provided great fun for adults and children, as well as good business for those who traded in fireworks. In those days there were few restrictions and the crackers ranged from penny dreadfuls, or packets of "Tom Thumbs" to large crackers and basket bombs.

The following morning bright and early, with probably a frost on the ground, we would search for unexploded crackers to set off, or to break in half to make "fizzers". The demise of the cracker celebrations, no doubt, is the result of injuries sustained and irresponsible practices.

Although the country was young, Australians had already fought in five conflicts at a distance from our shores including the Sudan, Boer War and the First World War. Now the Empire was at war again in distant places but that did not seem to matter. Despite the massive loss of Australian lives in the Great War, as the consequence of poor British leaders, in the 1930s and 1940s patriotism to the Empire was still strong.

Australia's approach to that new war was a continuation of the conditions applying in the previous conflict. Our armaments, uniforms and pay, of five shillings a day, continued unaltered-as if there had been no break in hostilities. The same applied in the planning and strategies of the Government and Defence. Many of the problems our country was to experience were caused by hangovers from WW1.

The question may well be put – how did Australia raise its defence forces on a voluntary enlistment programme? Personally my own motivations for enlisting did not stem from any wish to leave home, nor was I unhappy with my career. One was probably fortunate at that time to be employed. It was a time when voluntary enlistment was a normal path and the country expected such a response. My

friends and peers were enlisting. I could not have laid claim to a swashbuckling, devil-may-care spirit but I was young, naïve and maybe looking for a change and a small amount of excitement. Perhaps, and I hope it was true, I also felt that I had a duty to be of some service for my country. These incentives and feelings were greatly enmeshed with the historical background explained above and had a bearing on my decision.

Looking back after sixty odd years, that movement in my peaceful existence must have been a time of excitement and trepidation wondering about the magnitude of my solution and the unknown future. It was necessary for me to give up my job, leave my family, mother, younger brother and sister, my friends and associates. In accordance with that there did not appear to be any benefits. In the opposite direction I was about to join a lot of male strangers and enter a strange and uncertain occupation. It also involved a decrease in my financial position, which was not strong at the best of times. At my early age it was of concern as to the number of connections that were to be broken when transferring from one life to another. That life did not evince any benefits either.



*Photo of Sydney from top of Commonwealth Bank.*

The change to be made to my income put a small dent in my loyalty to King and Country. Five shillings could not be classified as a great incentive to rally to the flag. A deal of thought was given to the problem but my mind was made up after some positive fatherly advice given by a retired colonel who worked in the bank.

The need for a decision in my young and simple life was the result of an application I had made for service in the artillery. The army appealed to me rather than the Navy or Air Force, and I was already a member of a part time army unit. As mentioned the army had stopped recruiting for the AIF and so, unaware of my employer's pay policy, I looked elsewhere. As it happened I nearly missed the enlistment and was required to accept unusual conditions to offer my services.



*Photo of Sydney from top of Commonwealth Bank.*

The Australian army had eventually seen some reason to consider my application and forwarded an enlistment form for completion. Included in the form was the standard of fitness required and necessary minimum body measurements. However, I did not know that the requirements set down were those for the permanent peace time recruits, or that wartime standards were more relaxed. A set of good teeth was one of the standards in the application and so several visits to the dentist saw my teeth in good army order. Some time later I was pleased I had spent the money on my molars when I saw an army dentist in action. He was operating with a pedal drill and I can still see the drill going up and down in the tooth keeping time with the rhythm of his foot. It seemed something akin to patting your head with one hand while rubbing your stomach with the other hand. Maybe that scene has left a nasty impression on my mind because I think of it on my visits to the dentist.

Recruitment was all voluntary. There was no direct threat to Australia and yet the three services' needs were more than met.

It is reasonable to wonder whether the same proportion of people would volunteer today if England went to war in Europe. Fifty odd years have seen many changes in national attitudes; the composition of the Australian population has changed, and other factors have emerged. One could wonder that with a reduction of men to fill the services would we have sufficient people to fill the work force. In WW11 women moved from house management to fill gaps created by the loss of men in industry. Today a large percentage of women are already employed. Such thoughts have brought to mind the matter of our much discussed present unemployment position. If our work force reverted to say 1940, which would remove many females, we would not have sufficient manpower to meet our needs.

The world war, that is number Two, started as the Great Depression was coming to a close. A depression that had caused much hardship and many people were unemployed. There was no unemployment and social security benefits made available, as we know of them today. There was a dole of sorts, but to earn it one had to work several days a week on government projects. There was no safety or security net for those unfortunate enough to be placed in poverty and little opportunities for rorts. To day some young and older people are seduced into a life of not looking for work. In the 40s people were eager to work and sought jobs wherever they were – regardless of location. One wonders whether we have not become over civilised to a fault. Restraints and greed in our way of life are balancing many of the freedoms and care gained by people with good intent. It would seem that some of our traditions, courtesies and culture are being forfeited in favour of the excuses of exigencies.

The lucky children with fathers who had proper jobs were able to enjoy the benefits of a balanced upbringing. It was a degrading spectacle to see work-capable men lining up in soup queues to collect meals and it would have done little to raise the pride in the men or their families.

It has been said that the men who enlisted early were mainly unemployed and there is no doubt that many enlisted to find a job and so assist their families. But there were many more who enlisted from all walks of life in answer to the Mother Country's needs, or with the desire to travel, to find excitement, or to follow in the footsteps of their World War 1 relatives.

In answer to my formal application the army requested my attendance at the North Head military barracks at 0900 hours on 27th October 1940. With about sixty or seventy other young chaps I duly reported. We stood around, none of us knowing what to expect, our destination and reason for enlistment being a complete fog. Eventually a sergeant in a voice used for frightening civilians, and definitely recruits, managed to form us into what appeared to be three ranks. There we waited until a major with his swagger stick appeared from a building to our front. I was to learn later that a swagger stick or cane was carried by senior non-commissioned officers and officers. The stick or cane was about thirty inches in length and was used for slapping the calf of one's leg, deterring sniffy dogs, and pointing at objects. Of course there were recognised drill movements for the cane. I did not know then that there were very few objects or movements for which the army did not have drill.

The major did not appear over impressed with what he saw before him. I had the impression that permanent army or career soldiers, and he was one, did not consider civilians as a very high form of life.

The sergeant handed the parade over to the major with a good show of cane drill, foot pounding and saluting. The major then proceeded to explain that the army was forming a tropical force and was calling for volunteers to serve in Darwin. Those of us that were interested were ordered "Two paces back march". About half of the "bods" back marched but, not being too enthusiastic about service in Darwin, I remained still. My knowledge of the exact location of the army in Darwin and its purpose in the nation's existence was very vague. It was of wonder as to what a person was required to do in Darwin, how long was the term and what facilities were available. The project appeared to have a lack of purpose. Unbeknown to many others and me a purpose of some import would eventuate. There may have been second thoughts if I had known that part of the unknown was to be army pioneer work. There was no indication at that time as to the army's intentions and our role.

The major, taking his time, turned to the sergeant and told him to "Take those who had remained still around the corner and piss them off home".

It was then that I smartly "back marched" the two paces. After all my teeth were in first class condition ready for service in Darwin and that appeared to be the only answer to my wish to join the army.

Having disposed of those not wishing to join the tropical force, the

major with a knowing expression, hit the panic button. He told us that we were allowed three days to make the necessary arrangements to those things that would complete our present existence or, as he said, "other life". The major stressed the need to set our affairs in order. We were instructed to report back to North Head at 0900 hours on the 30th of October. His parting announcement, which gave him the look of a cat coming out of the dairy, was that we were scheduled to sail for Darwin seven days later. There was no reason given for such haste. Possibly it may have been to meet a contract with the shipping company.

The parade was handed back to the sergeant, who also had a satisfactory look on his face, as he dismissed us. That was my official introduction to the permanent army system – a system that allowed me to know only those things that others considered essential for me to know.

My affairs were not of such magnitude that I could not complete them in the three days allowed. There were no matters of finance to be settled nor were there any vehicles to be sold or stored. Being single, and not attached in any way, the only person to satisfy was my mother. To disentangle my other life brought up the problem of completing the commitment I had made in my part time army enlistment.

After turning eighteen years of age I joined the 1st Royal New South Wales Lancers or, as it later came to be known, the 1st Mechanised Machine Gun Regiment. Horses had become a thing of the past. The regiment was a part time Citizens Military Force unit. Its armaments consisted of .303 Lee Enfield rifles and .303 Vickers machine guns. Transport was by three ton trucks if one was available. Training was carried out at weekends and at an annual two weeks camp. One thing I learnt about the Vickers gun was to be careful placing the tripod on which the gun sat. Speed of course was essential and if not careful in placing the tripod the centre leg could unfortunately swing up between the trooper's legs causing much pain.

Being a member of the Lancers was of concern to me mainly to say farewell and to return my equipment. I was not concerned and there seemed no problem in moving from the Lancers to the tropical force. After all I was still in the same army. With those thoughts in mind I gathered together the uniform, kit bag, rifle and other gear and took myself off to the regiment's drill hall. When I explained to the troop sergeant that I wished to return my equipment he was



speechless. I then further unfolded, nicely of course, my intention to leave the unit. I thought he was about to have a fit. In a fearsome and menacing voice, coloured by some rude expletives, he told me that I could not “Just bloody well leave the so and so unit” and that it was my duty to lodge a requisition for transfer through the proper channels. I was not too sure what the proper channels were or how long such a procedure would take. It seemed fairly certain that an answer would not be made in the two days left, or in my favour.

There did not seem to be any use continuing my approach to the sergeant. He was ignoring me in any case, as it would appear he felt he had dealt with me. As a result the kit bag, rifle, uniforms etc., returned home with me. My hopes of terminating my time with the Lancers in a formal manner were lost. No transfer was obtained and apparently there is or was a dirty mark against my name in the annals of the Light Horse.

During the time of suspense when the army did not appear to need me I had ordered a new tailored three piece suit costing the princely sum of eight pounds eight shillings or, as known then, eight guineas. The army forwarded my call up notice about two or three days after I collected the suit. My mother was cranky because I had spent so much money for the suit, and then was further incensed because I had enlisted and what would happen to the suit. At the same time my employer, the bank, was not pleased, the sergeant in the Light Horse was going to be mad. So my overall enthusiasm to rally to the Colours was slightly diminished once again. My enlistment did not appear to have pleased anyone: maybe I should have transferred to the Foreign Legion.