



# 101 Field Battery RAA

Malaya 1959-1961

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## November 2014 Newsletter.

Anzac Day in Canberra was a great success and I would like to thank Bruce Stark for all the work he put in to make this visit a memorable one for all that attended.

I had the privilege of laying a wreath by the Pool of Reflection at the Closing Ceremony at the Australian War Memorial on Anzac Eve.



It was pleasing to see that Lionel Tucker and Barry Alger are now on the Honour Roll at the AWM.



There were 31 at the Anzac Eve Dinner and a good time was had by all.

Some of us attended the Dawn Service which was a very moving one for those of us that had not been there before.

After breakfast we drove up to Mount Pleasant to the Royal Australian Artillery Memorial for the Memorial Service. Ken Murphy read a prayer and Bill Dunstan laid a Wreath on behalf of 101 Battery Malaya members.





We then marched under the Royal Australian Artillery Association Banner and were able to sit in the stands reserved for the marchers and view the rest of the parade.



It was a long walk down to King O'Malley's for the RAA Association function when the Anzac Day Ceremony finished. However when we arrived the Association members were leaving as they did not stay after the march as they had seen it all before. Nevertheless we had lunch and a few drinks before returning to the hotel for a few more drinks and an early night.

Sadly Alan Jones passed away on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013 after a very short battle with leukemia.

29397 JONES Alan Gaudern (Buck) Born 7<sup>th</sup> September 1939. Enlisted 1<sup>st</sup> October 1956. 1 Fd. Regt. 102 Bty. 1957. 101 Bty 1958. Malaya: Gnr 101 Bty 4<sup>th</sup> October 1959. 26 Fd Regt. RA 17<sup>th</sup> October 1960 – 29<sup>th</sup> October 1961. 4 Fd Regt 13<sup>th</sup> November 1961. Discharged 1<sup>st</sup> October 1962.

On discharge Alan went to South Australia where he married. He served with the South Australian Police Force until retirement.

Fred Plummer passed away on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

41514 Plummer Bryan Fredrick (Fred) Born 18<sup>th</sup> September 1933. Enlisted 29<sup>th</sup> October 1952. Korea: Pte (AACC) 3 RAR 12<sup>th</sup> June 1954-7<sup>th</sup> October 1954 & 1 RAR 8<sup>th</sup> October 1954- 28<sup>th</sup> April 1955 & 8<sup>th</sup> June 1955- 24<sup>th</sup> June 1955. Malaya: Pte (AACC) 101 Bty 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1960. 26 Fd Regt RA 17<sup>th</sup> October 1960. (Acting Cpl 30<sup>th</sup> August 1961) – 25<sup>th</sup> October 1961 & 103 Bty 26<sup>th</sup> October 1961- 16<sup>th</sup> August 1962. SVN: WO2 (AACC) 3 RAR 12<sup>th</sup> February 1971- 9<sup>th</sup> October 1971. WO1 Discharged 1<sup>st</sup> February 1987. Jubilee Medal.

There are now 100 members on the Honour Roll with 27 members that we have lost touch with.

There were six 101 Battery members at the National Gunner Dinner at Caloundra and we had a great time.

The Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company launched their 18 Pounder Project at the dinner.



*Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company*



**THE  
ANZAC CENTENARY  
18 POUNDER GUN PROJECT**

**A Commemoration of the Centenary of ANZAC**

**PLEASE DONATE  
TO THIS WORTHY CAUSE**



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

[www.artilleryhistory.org](http://www.artilleryhistory.org)

The vision is to provide a living memorial to Australian Artillery by deploying the gun and team for commemorative events starting in 1915 for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gallipoli.

The RAAHC has assembled a team to deliver a World War 1 Quick Firing 18 Pounder gun and ammunition limber complete with horse team and gun detachment.

We have donated \$250 from our funds towards the project and would like to see our members fully support the project also.

**Cheques to:**

RAAHC  
PO Box 171  
Cremorne Junction NSW 2090

**Electronic Funds Transfer to:**

Account Name: RAAHC Gift Account  
BSB Number: 032096  
Account Number: 179231

Include description: '(Surname – Initials) Donation'

To allow a tax receipt to be issued please provide address details either by post to RAAHC P.O.Box above or email [18pounder@artilleryhistory.org](mailto:18pounder@artilleryhistory.org)

Syd Farrow and the Committee of the Laurieton United Services Club have extended an invitation for 101 Battery, Malaya members to join them in commemorating ANZAC Day 2015.

A broad program will be Friday evening, 24<sup>th</sup> April meet and greet at Syd Farrow's place or at the Laurieton United Services Club. Dawn Service at 0530hrs in the Memorial Park followed by breakfast (no charge) at the LUSC.

The march commences (approx. 700 m) at 1030hrs outside the LUSC. Transport available for non-marchers. Ex Service members will march directly behind Laurieton Sub-Branch and banners may be carried. Trevor Madeley, President of the 101 Battery Association will lend us a 101 Battery Banner that we can march behind.

The Reviewing Officer to take the salute will be Brigadier Bill Silverstone RAA (Rtd)

Lunch and refreshments will be served in the Tarcoola Room of the LUSC at a cost of \$10 per head for each ex-service member and partner/carer/friend. A bistro is available for non-service members at discounted rates.

Laurieton is around 40km south of Port Macquarie airport, 15 km east of Kendall railway station or 4 hours' drive from Sydney and 7 hours' drive from Brisbane.

Accommodation is available in two motels-

Woogarra North Haven (02) 6559 9088 and Haven Waters North Haven (02) 6559 9303.

Around 30 rooms ranging from doubles to two that sleep five. Total price for three nights (Friday to Sunday) are from \$255 to \$400. The NSW school holidays finish on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April so would suggest that you make your bookings as early as possible.

You can contact Syd on (02) 6559 6723 for any assistance if required.

Can you please let Syd know if you will be attending.

I would like to share with you an article written By Chelsea Mannix who was a 2010 Australian War Memorial Summer Scholar. Published in WARTIME, The Official Magazine of the Australian War Memorial, Issue 53, April 2011.

# Rose Force Unearthed

One man's search for battlefield relics helped recall the story of Australian Forces in action in Malaya.

In February 1961, Warrant Officer Jack Balsillie, of the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers stationed in Malaya, was preparing for a truck trip from Malacca to Singapore. The latest edition of *Reville*, the New South Wales RSL journal, was being delivered to his workshop so he grabbed a copy for his journey south. Somewhere along the route, while reading a feature article on the 2/30<sup>th</sup> Battalion's 14 January 1942 ambush at Gemencheh bridge, Balsillie realized he was travelling down the same Gemas-Tampin road on which the Imperial Japanese Army had cycled into the ambush 19 years earlier.

The Japanese had invaded Malaya on 8 December 1941 and their advance down the peninsula had been swift. The ambush was the first major battalion action by the Australians against the Japanese. From a photograph in *Reville*, Balsillie recognized the Gemencheh Bridge and stopped. Here on the side of the road, he discovered three expended cartridge cases with markings that showed they had been produced in the munitions factory in his home town of Maribyrnong, Victoria, in 1939. He was holding history in his hand.

The discovery of his first battlefield relics sparked an interest that sent Balsillie digging holes on former battlefields across southern Malaya, Changi, the Burma – Thailand Railway and Sandakan death marches: these are what the men of the Australian 8<sup>th</sup> Division, taken prisoner at the surrender of Singapore on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1942, were remembered for. Their role as fighting soldiers had been forgotten, and Balsillie sought to rectify this by searching the old battlefields and unearth their stories. Many of the objects he found would become the basis of exhibitions in the Australian War Memorial. Burnt and twisted pieces of tank from Bakri, corroded helmets from Gemas, rusted and broken bayonets from Mersing, and vehicle parts from the roadside at Parit Sukong are now part of the Memorial's collection. They are evidence of hard fighting. Balsillie later also instigated the donation from Ford Malaya's boardroom of the table on which the surrender of Singapore had been signed; it is now an important feature of the Memorial's Second War gallery.

In his quest, Jack Balsillie not only uncovered objects but also rediscovered some lost stories. One of them was about Rose Force. Before the 2/30<sup>th</sup> Battalion's Gemencheh bridge ambush, this small Australian unit had already seen combat. Mentioned only briefly in official history, the exploits of these men caught Balsillie's attention.

Major General Gordon Bennett was General Officer Commanding the AIF troops in Malaya. On 22 December 1941, he called for volunteers for a small commando-style unit to be called Rose Force, named following the line of a similar body already established as Tulip Force. The volunteers were to be single, ready to fight behind enemy lines and prepared to be left behind should they become a burden to their party. Since the Japanese invasion, the 8<sup>th</sup> Division had been largely confined to evacuating villages and digging trenches in the southern provinces. As the Japanese steadily advanced down the peninsula, they came into contact with Indian and British units. Bennett's men were itching for their chance.

Rose Force was the brainchild of a British officer, Major Angus Rose of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Rose's initial idea was to send a battalion behind enemy lines on a series of raids against the Japanese lines of communication. His grand plan was eventually watered down to two platoons, to be drawn from the AIF battalions. While Rose had wanted British troops, he was impressed by the Australians and happy to accept them.

The volunteers were drawn from the six Australian battalions in Malaya- each supplying seven men, including the Commanding Officer, Captain David Lloyd from 2/30<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Guerrilla warfare was a new concept in Malaya in 1941 and Lloyd, a clerk in Sydney before the war, had no commando experience. The troops, too, had received no special training but they were keen to see action.

To add to the two platoons, Rose obtained six local Europeans. Supplies included Bata hockey boots, special rations and, for each platoon, an allocation of 13 Thompson sub-

machine guns, two Bren guns, 12 rifles, eight Gurkha kukris, four .38 pistols and 26 Bakelite grenades.

For its mission, the little force was shifted by boat from Port Sweetenham (today's Pelabohan Kelang), south-east of Kuala Lumpur, 300 kilometres north to the mouth of the Trong River, far behind enemy lines. The first platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Maxwell PERRIN AND TO WHICH Lloyd was attached, had engine trouble and was unable to continue. This left the second platoon, under Lieutenant Ralph Sanderson, to which Rose was attached as liaison officer, to carry on.

The platoon made its way inland. Just before 8 am on 28 December, Sanderson's platoon, comprising three sections, took up its position in the jungle. The men were to wait for Sanderson to fire the first shot from the centre section. Half an hour later a Japanese convoy appeared, headed by a staff car carrying a pennant and followed by a utility vehicle and three lorries. Sanderson took his shot and the platoon opened fire on the group, running the staff car off the road. Sanderson fired a full magazine from his Thompson gun into the car's six occupants. Following this short but effective action, the platoon lay hidden in the jungle for an hour and a half while Japanese planes flew low overhead, trying to spot them. The entire group returned safely to Port Sweetenham that night.

The account of this ambush in the Rose Force unit diary suggests the platoon killed a Japanese major general, but no Japanese source confirms this. However, news spread quickly and the reported success of the ambush served as an important morale booster for the troops still waiting to meet the Japanese. It fed their anticipation that they would be able to handle the enemy when they met. Such an attitude would soon prove to be an illusion.

Rose Force was disbanded, as fighting was getting too close to Singapore and Bennett needed every man. The troops returned to their units on 27<sup>th</sup> January, crossing over to the island in time for the final battle of Singapore. After the surrender, they became prisoners of war.

Jack Balsillie had known few of the details of Rose Force during his time in Malaya, but with a copy of the unit's diary and Rose's own published account, *Who dies fighting*, he began his records. He was able to visit Lloyd and Sanderson, hoping they could help to establish the ambush's exact location. He learnt that Angus Rose was considered an eccentric and antagonistic officer, and Balsillie says that when he attempted to contact him he was told that Rose had spent the last years of his life in a psychiatric facility.

Balsillie's enthusiasm for finding some relics from Rose Force sustained him through five years of enquiry. He applied to the Australian War Memorial and the army, seeking their support and funding to go back to Malaysia to locate the ambush site and retrieve some objects. Money was not forthcoming. In March 1967, he set off on a self-funded mission.

Balsillie had five weeks' annual leave owing to him. As he was still in the army, some practical help was available: he was able to join an RAAF flight to Singapore and stay at army bases. The army also provided a driver and put Balsillie in touch with a local Malay who had lived in a kampong near the ambush site in 1941. For a small fee, he was led to a place on the Trong-Temerloh road. Balsillie was skeptical at first, but he had learnt to trust the locals' knowledge. The site was 550 metres from where he expected it to be. However, there, in the middle of seemingly untouched jungle, Balsillie discovered a relic which confirmed that this was the ambush site. While Thompson sub-machine guns were becoming standard issue, by late 1941 they were not yet widely issued in Malaya and most men of the AIF had not fired one. Rose Force was unique in that every second man carried a Thompson, and it was a Thompson magazine that Balsillie had stumbled upon. This key piece of evidence validated years of effort; Balsillie considers it his most important find from his return visit to Malaysia. He went on to find a grenade, a Japanese wheel wrench and several other badly corroded battle remnants at the site. He was excited to be able to deliver some Rose Force relics to the Memorial, although their quarter of a century in dense jungle had made them hardly suitable for exhibition.

Balsillie's passion for collecting did not end with the discovery of the Rose Force ambush site. In 1967, he was posted to Vietnam and during his year-long tour he collected some of the Memorial's key pieces from the conflict.

When Jack Balsillie eventually retired from the army in 1985, he was the longest continuously serving soldier from the Second World War, having joined as a 16-year-old apprentice in 1945. He has risen through the ranks, from apprentice to major over his 40 years, service. He was awarded an MBE (civil) in 1970 for his valuable contribution to the Australian War Memorial. A visit to the Memorial's galleries is a reminder of the importance of Balsillie's legacy and the stories he endeavoured to tell.

### **Sick Parade:**

Jack Balsillie turned 86 on the 21<sup>st</sup> November and has not been in the best of health and has been in hospital but is now home after successful surgery for skin cancer.

Ray Chadburn has been in Greenslopes Hospital but is now at home and feeling a lot better. He wishes to send his regards to all from 101 Battery.

Jan McMillan is recovering well from her cancer operation and would like to thank all the wonderful people who sent cards and rang for their thoughtfulness and she looks forward to seeing them all in the future.

I have been advised by the 101 Battery Association that they have re-launched their website  
The address is: <http://www.101batteryassociation.com>  
The 101 Battery Association website is being hosted by the Australian Artillery Association website.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

