



HISTORY OF 103rd BATTERY, ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY

Introduction

The parent unit of the 103rd Battery was the 3rd (Army) field Brigade of the Australian Imperial Forces in World War 1. Historically, the immediate predecessor of the first Australian Battery to be numbered "103" - the 103rd (Howitzer) Battery AIF - was the 26th Mountain Battery (Jacobs) of the Indian Mountain Artillery. It was this unit that performed the tasks at ANZAC, which would have been those of the 103rd Battery if Australian Artillery Brigades had then included Batteries.

The successors to the 103rd (Howitzer) Battery were, in sequence, the 103rd Field Battery (Howitzer) of the Citizen Military Forces from 1920 to 1941, 103rd Anti-Aircraft Battery from 1954 to 1957, 103rd Field Battery from 1960 to 1967, 103rd Medium Battery of the Australian Regular Army from 1967 to 2011 and 103rd Battery from 2012 to today.

Egypt 1916

In December 1915 the ANZAC troops were successfully evacuated from the Gallipoli peninsula, and returned to Egypt for re-grouping and training in preparation for movement to the Western Front in France. The AIF was reorganised to conform to the revised British order of battle. For the Australian Artillery, this meant that in addition to the three 18 pounder Field Brigades there was a requirement to raise in each division a Howitzer Brigade comprising three 4.5 inch Howitzer Batteries each of four guns.

Batteries in these Howitzer brigades were to be numbered consecutively commencing at 101. Accordingly, at Tel-el-Kebir, on 6 March 1916, 103 Howitzer Battery was raised as part of 12 Howitzer Brigade AIF. The first commander of the "Sphinx" Battery was Major A.H.K. Jopp, DSO.

France 1916 - 1919

The new Howitzer Brigades were short lived, for when the AIF arrived in France, they were disbanded and the batteries were amalgamated with the Field Brigades. On 29 April 1916 103 Battery joined 3 Field Brigade in the line at Fleurbaix, a small village four miles southwest of Armentieres on the Belgian border.

The Battery became an integral part, and remained with 3 Field Brigade until the end of the war. The 7th and 8th Field Batteries were the other sub-units of the Brigade. In the space available it is impossible to detail each move the Battery made into and out of the line. The very regularity of the pattern did nothing to make each tour less of a trial of endurance and courage than the preceding one. Each time the Battery came out of action, it left a little of itself behind - some beloved horses, some damaged equipment, but the war diary shows the one thing it always maintained, its spirit.

After the Armistice, the Battery moved to Dinant in Belgium, from where all the guns and equipment were dispatched to Australia. On 24 February 1919, the Battery (by now only a handful of men because of the constant repatriation to Australia) was absorbed into 101 Howitzer Battery for the voyage home.

Western Australia 1920 - 1941

The Battery was raised again in 1920 as 103 Field Battery (Howitzer) to form part of the CMF and was stationed at Victoria Barracks, Sydney. With the reorganisation of the Army into a divisional structure, units were redesignated and allotted to areas in 1921. Military Order 95 of 1921 gave instructions that the Battery was to be transferred to its former parent unit, 3 Field Brigade at Guilford, Western Australia.

The Battery was formed by troops from the 38th and 39th Field Batteries in 1922. As part of 3 Field Brigade the Battery developed strong local ties and support, and was raised to war establishment on October 1939. The Battery was disbanded on the reorganisation of 3 Field Brigade into a regimental establishment in 1941. All Brigades had received orders to reorganise into a Regiment of two Batteries, with the Howitzer Batteries to be absorbed as the third troop in each of the 18 Pounder Field Batteries. The 3rd Field Regiment therefore consisted of the 7th and 8th Field Batteries, each having a troop of 4.5inch Howitzers from the 103rd Field Battery (Howitzer).

The Battery consequently faded out of existence in 1941 and did not by title participate any further in the Second World War, although a majority of its members would have seen service with the 3rd Field Regiment.

Reorganisation of the RAA 1954 - 1957

In 1954 it was decided that Regular Batteries of the RAA would be numbered according to a standard system. DRA Minute of August 1954 directed that Batteries would bear their number irrespective of the role they might fulfil from time to time. Consequently in 1954, 103 Anti-Aircraft Battery was raised by transferring the officers, soldiers and guns of 3 Anti-Aircraft

Battery, and was stationed at Middle Head Barracks, Sydney, as part of 1 Field Regiment, RAA. The Battery was disbanded on 3 May 1957 as part of the regrouping of the RAA to meet the contingency plans for the 1st Infantry Brigade Group. The Battery personnel were transferred largely to 111 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery RAA.

4 Field Regiment RAA 1960 - 1961

The Australian Army reorganised to a pentropic division organisation in 1960, which necessitated a second Regular Field Regiment to be raised. In June 1960, 103 Field Battery was reborn to form part of the new 4 Field Regiment RAA stationed at Wacol, Brisbane. Major J.A. Loveday was the Battery Commander, however little is recorded in the Battery history of the activities on the rebirth of the battery.

Malaya 1961 - 1963

Major J.R. Salmon became Battery Commander in February 1961 and shortly afterwards the Battery prepared to relieve 101 Field Battery in Malaysia with the 105mm L5. In October 1961 the Battery joined 26th Field Regiment, RA as part of the Far Eastern Strategic Reserve stationed at Camp Terendak, Malacca. The tour is well documented in Battery records, indicating a full programme of exercise, sporting and social activities. In addition Battery Officers obtained brief visits to South Vietnam and Thailand.

Holsworthy 1963 - 1966

On return from Malaya in October 1963, the Battery joined 1st Field Regiment, RAA at Kokoda Barracks, Holsworthy. From this time until late 1965 when warned for service in South Vietnam little is recorded of battery activities.

South Vietnam 1966 - 1967

After intensive training and field exercises Caesar Augustus and Iron Lady, the Battery moved to South Vietnam with the 105mm L5 as part of 1st Field Regiment RAA in May 1966. The 105th Field Battery had already been in Vietnam since September 1965. Some time was initially spent at Vung Tau, until on 6 June 1966 the Battery moved by air to the new Task Force base at Nui Dat, to join 105 Field Battery, RAA and 161 Field Battery, RNZA in the Regimental Gun area.

The now well-known and documented Battle of Long Tan was the first major contact by Australian troops in the Vietnam conflict. 103 Field Battery took a significant part in the conduct of the battle. However prior to the actual battle was the mortaring of the Task Force base area on the night of the 16/17 August 1966. The attack lasted approximately 15 - 20 minutes, in which time an estimated 30 rounds fell in the Regimental area. After the attack had been in progress some 10 minutes, the Battery was ordered to engage a previously prepared CB task. The Battery took post under fire, and the Battery historian relates that "a creditable performance was put up A Sub, having six rounds in the air before any other gun had fired." As a result of the attack the Battery suffered two casualties, one of whom was eventually evacuated back to Australia.

In support of the Battle of Long Tan on 18 August 1966, the Battery fired for five hours under extremely difficult climatic conditions. The Forward Observer for the relief force was a member of 103 Battery, Captain P. E. Aspinall, so although the

Battery was in general support for the battle, one of the Observers was a member of the Battery. 103rd Battery fired 1078 rounds during this battle; the highest number of rounds fired by any Battery of the Regiment during the Battle of Long Tan.

On 18 August 1966, 103 Field Battery became the direct support Battery to the 5th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, relieving 105 Field Battery of their task. On 1 May 1967 the Battery came out of action to hand over to 106 Field Battery, completing almost 12 months continuous service in action in support of 1 ATF. During this period the Battery fired a total of 28468 rounds.

Holsworthy 1967 - 2000

On return from Vietnam, the Battery was stationed at Gallipoli Barracks, Holsworthy, and on 19 June 1967 become the Independent 103 Medium Battery. The 5.5-inch guns and equipment were handed over from 104 Medium Battery, which then converted to the field mode. The role of 103 Battery was primarily to support the School of Artillery, provide gun salutes, and conduct some limited trials.

On April 16th 1968, the Battery lost its independence and joined 19th Composite Regiment, RAA which was located at Kokoda Barracks. On 4 August 1969, 19th Composite Regiment RAA formed 8 Medium Regiment, RAA; therefore the Battery once again had a new parent unit. This situation was to stay until 16 November 1973, when the two Sydney based Regiments, 8th and 12th Regiments were to combine to form 8/12 Medium Regiment RAA.

The new Regiment had the roles of depot support regiment for the School of Artillery and direct support regiment for the 1st Task Force. Fulfilling both these roles has kept the Battery busy since the formation of 8/12 Regiment, RAA in November 1973. To assist the Battery in carrying out its dual function, in September 1975 the Battery was issued with six M2A2 105mm guns. Therefore the Battery was equipped with six 5.5-inch guns and six 105mm guns. Towards the end of July 1983 the Battery saw its first glimpse of the American M198 155mm Towed Howitzer, which was to replace the ageing 5.5-inch guns as the general support artillery piece for the Corps.

By July 1984 the 5.5 inch gun was retired from service in the RAA after some 40 years of diligent service and replaced with the M198, however, the Battery remained dual equipped with the M2A2 for some time to support the School of Artillery. This function came to an end with the School of Artillery moving from North Head to Puckapunyal in 1998.

East Timor 1999 - 2000

On October 7th, 1999 elements of 103rd Medium Battery deployed to East Timor with the 5th/7th Battalion Group as part of the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) Operation WARDEN, commanded by Major G.W. Finney. On February 21st, 2000 Operation WARDEN transitioned to the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) controlled Operation TANAGER, under the command of Major C.D. Furini (this transition meant that 103rd Medium Battery was the first RAA unit to serve on a UN operation under UN command). 103 Battery provided the entire Civil Military Liaison element as well as other critical roles within the Battalion.

Darwin 2000 - 2004

With the reorganisation of moving 1 Brigade from Holsworthy to Darwin, 8/12 Medium Regiment was to be one of the last units to relocate in 1999. 103 Battery returned from East Timor in mid-2000 to occupy their new home in Darwin. From there, the Battery had the task of moving into new facilities, and with the re-forming of 101 Battery, rebuild a new Regiment. In late 2002, Major Andy Haebich deployed with the 103 Battery CLOG to East Timor as a part of Operation CITADEL.

Iraq 2005 - 2006

On 22 February 2005, the Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard MP, announced that an Australian Army task group would deploy to Al Muthanna province in Southern Iraq. The Al Muthanna Task Group's (AMTG) mission was twofold: firstly, to provide a stable and secure environment for the Japanese Reconstruction and Support Group as they undertook essential humanitarian, engineering and rebuilding tasks and secondly, to assist in the training of local Iraqi Army units so that they are able to take over the internal and external defence of their country.

The AMTG was established in April 2005, based on 2 Cavalry Regiment HQ supported by 101 Medium Battery. In November 2005, 103 Medium Battery (commanded by Major S. Jenkins) deployed its Joint Offensive Support Coordination Center (JOSCC) and Forward Observer parties to support the 5/7 Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, rotation through to June 2006. During its rotation the JOSCC additionally commanded a radar and UAV detachment from 131 Surveillance Battery (which became a part of 20 Surveillance and Target Acquisition Regiment, which formed on 01 January, 2006).

Solomon Islands 2006

In April of 2006, riots in Guadalcanal prompted a Company sized Infantry group to be re-deployed to provide security as a part of Op ANODE. 101 Medium Battery departed in May 2006 to replace the Infantry group for 4 months, with 103 Medium Battery (commanded by Major J.F. Kerr) deploying to the Solomons from September to December, taking over from 101 Battery.

Prior to deploying, the Battery trained extensively in Infantry Minor Tactics, Population Control and conducted a Mission Rehearsal Exercise at RAAF Base Tindal. Once deployed, they conducted a platoon rotation with a RRF maintained at the Guadalcanal Beach Resort (with Op ANODE HQ) and the remainder of the company at the Solomons Telecom

grounds, nearer to the centre of the city. This force conducted joint training and security patrols with the AFP and Solomon Islands Police Forces. Each platoon also conducted an independent remote island patrol (supported by AFP Rotary Wing assets) and assisted local police with security, medical support and transport tasks. After a successful deployment, and a handover to a Reserve Infantry Company from 25/49 Royal Queensland Regiment, the Battery returned home in early January 2007.

Iraq 2007

In February 2007, the 103 Battery deployed to Cultana training area for a Battery and Regimental training exercise. For the BC (Major J.F. Kerr) and his party, and several of the JFT members, this became a Mission Rehearsal Exercise into March and April with 5/7 Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, to prepare for deployment as a part of Overwatch Battle Group West Three (OBGW-3) to Tallil, Iraq. In June 2007, OBGW-3 deployed two Combat Teams to Al Muthanah and Nasariyah respectively, where they completed security and training tasks with the Iraqi Army and Police until December 2007. The 103 Battery Joint Offensive Support Coordination Centre (JOSCC) were employed in the 5/7 RAR Battle Group HQ, with the Battery providing Joint Fires Teams (JFT – or FO parties) to the Combat Teams and gunners as Bushmaster drivers and signallers. At the conclusion of their tour, they handed over to OWBG-4, who were the last Australian Battle Group deployed to Iraq.

Op HERRICK - RAA Troop Afghanistan - 1 / OP HERRICK VIII – 2007-2008

In October 2007, 15 Gunners of 8/12 Regt were selected for secondment to the British Army for a year. Eight were from 103 Battery (the others 101 Battery), and with two weeks notice, departed for 7 Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery (7 RHA) based in Colchester, Essex. For six months the RAA Troop integrated with the British gunners and conducted a series of exercises, building familiarity with the L118 Light Gun across England, Scotland and Wales in freezing conditions.

In March 2008, the Troop embedded with 'I' Parachute Battery (Bulls Troop RHA), deployed to FOB Armadillo, Helmand Province Afghanistan as the Direct Support Battery to Battlegroup Centre. Conditions were austere, with no accommodation besides Hesco shelters, kitchen or toilets outside of plastic bags, average daily temperature was between 39 - 55 degrees C. For three months the only support required was illumination however this changed once the traditional fighting season commenced in June. Danger Close and Counter Battery Fire were to become the norm for the final three months. The Troop fired 2911 rounds in 153 Fire Missions in support of British Parachute, Danish Mechanised and American Light Infantry. Highlights included establishment of an ad hoc Troop at Kajaki which required an airmobile insertion supporting the movement of a turbine to the Kajaki Dam to generate power for Kandahar and the successful destruction of four mortar teams in conjunction with Danish ARTHUR Radar. Support to Patrol Base Attal, held by Royal Irish Operational Mentoring Liaison Team with a company of Afghan National Army included firing as close as 60m from unprotected troops and firing of Final Protective Fire on multiple occasions.

The Troop returned to Australia via the UK in October 2008 and were proud to return to the Regiment having done their job on time, on target and safe throughout.

2008 - 2009

In January 2008, an FO party deployed to RCB rotation 81 as part of Support Company, 5th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. The party, commanded by CAPT W.G. Cooper, were responsible for the training of the 5th Battalion mortar platoon in lead-up to their first deployment to Afghanistan as part of the 7th Battalion led Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Group (MRTF-1) in October 2008.

The field exercises in 2008 focussed on the introduction of the Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS) which was procured under Land 17 Phase 1A (Land 17 is the land project designed to enhance the Australian Army's indirect fire system through the replacement of the L119 and M198, and the introduction of enhanced battle management and targeting systems and precision/near precision munitions). Introducing this system, replacing the indirect-fire control computer, was the first step in the RAA entering the digital-age, of which 103 Battery lead the way.

Concurrently to MRTF-1, a number of 103 Battery personnel deployed to East Timor in September 2008 as part of the 5th Battalion led rotation five of the Timor-Leste Battle Group (TLBG-V). These personnel were employed in a range of functions, from operations staff through to interagency liaison and signallers. The remainder of the Battery remained in Australia under the command of Major D. Patterson; the highlight of the year being the 'Long Guns' exercise in which the entire-RAA conducted an artillery concentration in Shoalwater Bay. The TLBG-V personnel returned to the Regiment in June 2010.

Op HERRICK – RAA Troop Afghanistan – 4 / Op HERRICK 11 – 2009-2010

On the 12th March 2009, 15 members from 8th/12th Medium Regiment (predominately 103 Battery, with several from 101 Battery) deployed to the United Kingdom as part of the fourth iteration of the RAA Troop, Afghanistan. The Troop was known as Brumby Troop and was embedded into the 1st Royal Horse Artillery - 1 RHA, located at Tidworth Barracks, Wiltshire; just a stones throw from the Royal School of Artillery (RSA) Larkhill. In mid August 2009, forward elements of 1 RHA, as part of the 11th Light Brigade commenced the relief-in-place into Helmand Province, Afghanistan, with Brumby Troop occupying their Forward Operating Base (FOB) by mid-September 2009.

Brumby Troop was based at FOB Armadillo (located in the Upper Gereshk Valley, Helmand), as part of Battle Group Centre a south. Half way through the tour the FOB was renamed to Budwan. Brumby Troop was attached to B Battery, 1 RHA and formed the nucleus of the Gun Troop with an equal amount of Brit Gunners also represented. The banter between the Brits and Aussies was intense at times, however, when it came to doing the job required (shooting in support); the troop excelled as one. Brumby Troop operated the callsign SALVO 30, along with their British Counterparts.

Throughout the tour Brumby Troop provided indirect fire support to the Danish Task Force - Helmand, Battle Group (Centre) which was principally based on Danish and Afghan National Army soldiers as well as British Observer Mentor Liaison Teams (OMLT) call signs located within the AO. Throughout the tour, Brumby Troop fired constantly in support of numerous planned operations as well as contacts across the 'Green Zone', specifically within the Adin Zai AO. Brumby Troop gained a significant reputation for accurate, aggressive, and responsive fires in support of all those that called utilising both main armaments and smaller direct fire support weapon systems. The troop fired HE, Smoke and Illumination missions from their 105mm L118 guns, with 1027 rounds expended during their six month tour.

This was best demonstrated by the troops continued provision of outstanding support to the Patrol Base Line, specifically PB Keenan, PB Sandford, and PB Zumbalay and through the determined actions of the Gun Troop; both line and Command Post.

In mid March 2010, after steady state operations, Brumby Troop commenced HOTO and RIP with fellow gunners from 4th Regt, RA. The troop farewelled Helmand and arrived back at Tidworth Barracks in the first week of April 2010, via a well deserved decompression in Cyprus.

The troop was presented with their British Operational Service Medals with Afghanistan clasp and formally farewelled by 1 RHA en-masse during a very moving parade and church service. It was OP Herrick XI that experienced some of the worst losses of British and Danish forces within Helmand Province since operations commenced there some seven years prior. Brumby Troop arrived back in Darwin on 23 April 2010.

Afghanistan 2010 – 2011

In March 2010, the 103 Battery JFECC and CLOG (commanded by Major S.J. Hunter) force concentrated with the 5th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, to conduct its lead-up training as the second rotation of the Mentoring Task Force (MTF-2) before deploying to Afghanistan in October 2010. In April of 2010, 101 Battery lead the first rotation of the Artillery Training Team – Kabul, who had the mission of establishing the Afghan School of Artillery. For this rotation, 101 Battery was reinforced with the officers, warrant officers and SNCOs from 103 Battery. The second Artillery Training Team, based predominately on members of 103 Battery, rotated into theatre in November 2010.

In January 2011, as part of the change in the RAA-wide regimental structure (increase in Battery's to accommodate a single 'gun' Battery and three 'observer' Battery's), the deployed 103 Battery members as part of MTF-2 formed 115 Battery. This tour was extremely busy for all gunners involved, in which over 300 rounds of US M777 155mm, over 200 rounds of Afghan D-30 122mm and over 200 rounds of Australian 81mm mortars were fired. Of note was the operational introduction-into-service of the Digital Terminal Control Suite, as well as one FO Ack who received severe wounds in the line of duty and another FO Ack (BDR D. Robertson) who was awarded the Medal of Gallantry for his actions. All 8/12 Regiment members returned to Australian in June-July 2011 and took some well earned leave.

Back within the Regiment, the M198 fleet was replaced with the M777A2 155mm as part of Land 17 Phase 1A. This signified the end of an era for the M198, 103 Battery and the Regiment.

2013

In 2013, the 5th Battalion (as part of the 1st Brigade) assumed the responsibility of the Ready Battle Group (RBG); the first time this has occurred outside of the 3rd Brigade. As part of this responsibility 103rd Battery led the Regt contribution of a full Gun Battery and CLOG to the 5 RAR Battle Group. Additionally, the Battery took part in the full range of Regt live-fire exercises, as well as Adventure Training, Bde Sports and the COs Challenge and the Bde Military Skills competition. The year culminated with the Battery being awarded both the Sudan Shield (Best Sporting Battery) and the Coral Trophy (Best Battery). 2013 also saw a vast majority of 103 Battery members deploy and return as part of Combined Team – Uruzgan Rotation 5.

2014

2014 has seen the 103rd Battery (as part of the 1st Brigade) operate within the reset phase of the force generation cycle for 2014 (through to mid-2015), meaning individual courses and small-team development have been the priority. Three major exercises were conducted, Ex THUNDER RUN 1 and 2 at Mt Bundey, and Ex HAMEL in Far-North Queensland. The 103rd Battery deployed a Joint Fires Team (and GPO) to the Rim of the Pacific Exercise for 4 months in Hawaii, as well as providing the first Joint Fires and Effects Coordination Cell (JFECC) to an Aviation Battle Group. Additionally, the Battery provided personnel for an exchange with the Indonesian Army.

The exercises conducted through the year focussed on developing junior level leadership, with key activities conducted being air-mobile and M777 underslung operations, exposing

the gunline and CP to the danger close observation post, combined arms live-fire gunline defence serials, food and sleep deprivation, adventure training, urban operations, operational flights on P-3 Orion, and off-base gunline and physical training just to name a few. The Officers and Men of the 103rd have conducted several courses and provided excellent support to the School of Artillery, Royal Military College and the Army Recruit Training Centre. The Battery has worked hard to forge a strong relationship with the United States Marine Corps Darwin rotation, and has created the Langley, MC Club as the 103rd Battery Boozer.

Conclusion

The record of service of all "103" Batteries since the first Battery raised in 1916 more than justifies every member of the present Battery having immense pride in the tradition and history that has been formed. The 103rd Battery is part of the mosaic that is the proud history and tradition of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery.