

= 2 / 1st Machine Gun Battalion (Australia) =

The 2 / 1st Machine Gun Battalion was a battalion of the Australian Army that was raised for service during World War II as part of the 6th Division . When it was formed on 14 December 1939 , its component companies were spread across several Australian states , but it was later concentrated at Ingleburn , New South Wales , where it completed basic training in the early months of the war . In mid @-@ 1940 , the battalion embarked for overseas , bound initially for the Middle East , but following the Fall of France it was diverted to the United Kingdom . Along with a larger contingent of Australians , it helped to bolster the island 's garrison , undertaking defensive duties during a period when it was expected that the Germans might launch a cross @-@ Channel invasion .

The battalion was transferred to the Middle East in late 1940 , after the threat of invasion had passed . It underwent further training in Egypt , before taking part in fighting against the Germans in Greece and on Crete in mid @-@ 1941 . Having lost most of its equipment and suffering heavy casualties , the 2 / 1st was rebuilt in Palestine before undertaking garrison duties in Syria in 1941 ? 42 . The battalion was withdrawn to Australia as a result of Japan 's entry into the war in December 1941 . During 1943 , the 2 / 1st fought a defensive role in the New Guinea campaign . Following its withdrawal to Australia in early 1944 , the battalion was re @-@ organised on the Atherton Tablelands and reassigned to the 7th Division . It was committed to its final campaign in mid @-@ 1945 , during the Borneo campaign . After the war , the battalion was disbanded in early 1946 . One of its mascots , Horrie the Wog Dog , became the subject of a book by Ion Idriess .

= = History = =

= = = Formation = = =

The 2 / 1st Machine Gun Battalion was formed on 14 December 1939 , as part of the Second Australian Imperial Force (2nd AIF) . It was raised following a reorganisation of the 6th Division 's infantry battalions , which saw the removal of the machine gun platoons that had previously existed within each battalion and their centralisation in a single unit . Three other machine gun battalions were subsequently raised as part of the 2nd AIF during the war to support its four infantry divisions . Developed by the British Army , the concept within the Australian Army had its genesis during the Gallipoli Campaign in 1915 , when the machine guns assigned to the infantry battalions ? initially two and then , later , four ? had been grouped together and co @-@ ordinated at brigade level to help compensate for the lack of artillery support . Over the course of the war on the Western Front , the concept had evolved through the establishment of machine gun companies in 1916 to the establishment of machine gun battalions in 1918 . Similar formations had also been established amongst the Australian Light Horse units serving in the Sinai and Palestine Campaign . During the inter @-@ war years , the machine gun battalions had been deemed unnecessary . When the Army was reorganised in 1921 , they were not re @-@ raised , but in 1937 , when the Army looked to expand as fears of war in Europe loomed , four such units were raised within the part @-@ time Militia by converting light horse units and motorising them . When the Second World War broke out , the decision was made to raise several machine gun battalions within the 2nd AIF , one allocated to each division .

Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Claude Prior , the 2 / 1st Machine Gun Battalion was formed with four machine gun companies , a headquarters company ? consisting of an anti @-@ aircraft platoon , a signals platoon and a transport platoon ? and a battalion headquarters . Australian machine gun battalions were established with an authorised strength of around 800 to 900 personnel , and like the others , the 2 / 1st was a motorised infantry unit with both wheeled motor vehicles and tracked carriers . Equipped with 48 Vickers medium machine guns , the battalion 's four machine gun companies ? designated ' A ' to ' D ' and each consisting of three four @-@ gun platoons ? were initially formed separately , with ' A ' Company forming at Ingleburn , in New South Wales , ' B ' Company forming at Puckapunyal , in Victoria , ' C ' in South Australia , and ' D ' at

Rutherford , in New South Wales . At the end of the month , ' B ' and ' C ' Companies concentrated at Rutherford , before moving to Ingleburn with ' D ' Company in January 1940 . An intense period of training followed , with range shoots at Liverpool , and field exercises in the Green Hills and Wallacia areas , the latter being conducted in conjunction with the infantry battalions of the 18th Brigade . This period concluded in early May 1940 , when the battalion was moved by train to Darling Harbour and embarked upon the Queen Mary .

= = = Defence of Britain = = =

The men aboard Queen Mary were originally destined for the Middle East but a decision was made mid @-@ voyage to divert them to the United Kingdom , as part of a larger contingent of Australians that were sent to help bolster the garrison there . After making the long passage via Fremantle , Cape Town , and Freetown , the battalion landed in Gourock , Scotland , in mid @-@ June . France had just fallen , and Britain was preparing for a potential cross @-@ Channel invasion . The Australian troops from the 18th Brigade and , eventually , the 25th Brigade , along with various supporting arms , had been despatched to help bolster the island 's defences . From Gourock , they entrained and moved south to Tidworth Camp on Salisbury Plain . They remained in Britain throughout the rest of the year , undertaking training , mounting guard , conducting patrols and exercises . A move to Colchester took place in October to afford the Australians a more permanent barracks for the coming winter , as they were mainly under canvas at Tidworth . The following month , as the threat of invasion seemingly passed , they received orders to move to Glasgow to embark on the transport Otrango , bound for the Middle East where they were to rejoin the rest of the 6th Division .

= = = Middle East , Greece , and Crete = = =

Sailing around the west coast of Africa to avoid the threat of air attack in the Mediterranean , the Otrango carried the battalion to Egypt , which was reached at the end of December , following stops at Freetown and Durban . After docking at Kantara , the battalion moved by rail over 225 miles (362 km) to Ikingi Maryut , west of Alexandria in the Western Desert . There they received a new commanding officer , Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gooch , after Prior was promoted and transferred to divisional headquarters , and they began training to acclimatise to the new conditions . The rest of the 6th Division had gone into action in the Western Desert but the 2 / 1st , still waiting on the majority of its equipment to arrive , was not committed , its place being taken by a British machine gun battalion from the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers . The Australian battalion remained at Ikingi Maryut until late March and early April , when it was despatched , along with the rest of the 6th Division , to Greece , where a German invasion was expected .

Spread across several different transport vessels , after completing the crossing ? during which the battalion ? s machine guns were employed for anti @-@ aircraft defence ? the 2 / 1st 's companies were split up : ' A ' Company , supported the Australian 2 / 4th Battalion , while two companies ? ' B ' and ' C ' ? supported the New Zealand 4th Brigade , and another ? ' D ' Company ? was assigned to the Australian 17th Brigade . The campaign proved to be short @-@ lived , as the Allies were quickly pushed back by the advancing Germans , and the battalion was subsequently withdrawn around the end of April and early May , having fought major actions around the Aliakmon River , Servia Pass , Lamia and Mount Olympus . During the evacuation , elements of three companies were taken aboard the transport Costa Rica , which was later attacked by German aircraft . As the vessel was sinking , the troops on board were evacuated by Royal Navy destroyers and landed on Crete , minus the majority of their equipment which was lost at sea .

On Crete , the battalion 's companies were once again separated ; ' D ' Company , the only company in possession of all of its equipment , was assigned to support the Australian 19th Brigade around Georgiopolis , while the other three companies went into camp around Suda . A single platoon from ' B ' Company was later sent to reinforce ' D ' Company ; however , on 14 May , the remainder of the battalion ? a total of 432 personnel ? was evacuated from the island on the

transport Lossiebank , sailing back to Egypt and subsequently missing the German invasion of Crete , which was launched a week later . A short but sharp campaign followed , which saw the machine gunners that remained ? 170 personnel , including six officers ? take part in fighting around Canea and Retimo before the island 's garrison was finally defeated at the end of May . By the end of the fighting , the 2 / 1st had lost 104 men killed , wounded or captured in either Greece or on Crete ; of these , two later escaped , while one died in captivity .

After arriving in Egypt , the remainder of the battalion was transported to Palestine , where it was subsequently rebuilt . The 2 / 1st Machine Gun Battalion remained stationed around Gaza until October , when it was sent to Syria to bolster the garrison that had been established there following the defeat of Vichy French forces . At this time , the 2 / 1st effectively became assigned to the 7th Division , and received a new commanding officer , as Lieutenant Colonel Cyril Fidock , a World War I veteran , replaced Gooch . The battalion was subsequently stationed in Damascus and at Zaboud , remaining there until early 1942 , when it was moved back to Gaza as part of the draw @-@ down of Australian forces in the Middle East and their return to Australia in response to Japan 's entry into the war . The battalion embarked upon an American troop transport , USS West Point , in mid @-@ March 1942 , completing the voyage to Port Adelaide , via Fremantle , in just 19 days .

= = = New Guinea and Borneo = = =

Following the battalion 's arrival in Adelaide , the men were billeted by locals in the city 's suburbs while leave drafts were despatched throughout April . In early May , the 2 / 1st was reconstituted at Ingleburn , where it remained until June 1942 , when the order came to move to Queensland . Moving up the coast via train , the battalion established a camp near Peachester , in the Sunshine Coast hinterland . Jungle training was undertaken there until September , when the 2 / 1st moved to another camp closer to the coast at Deception Bay . At the end of October , ' A ' and ' B ' Companies embarked in Brisbane , bound for New Guinea , to reinforce the troops fighting around Buna ; en route they were diverted to Townsville , where they were unloaded . ' B ' Company later re @-@ embarked and arrived in Port Moresby in late November on the transport Both , before moving to Oro Bay , where it was deployed defensively around the US base and the mission at Eroro . ' A ' Company also deployed in December , and the following month also moved to Oro Bay . The rest of the battalion remained at Deception Bay in Queensland and did not link up with the other companies until May 1943 , landing in Port Moresby from the Duntroon . In the intervening period , the two deployed companies were temporarily detached to the Militia 7th Machine Gun Battalion , and ' A ' Company went into action in the Pacific for the first time , fighting around Wau , before marching to Nassau Bay to support the 3rd Division during the Salamaua ? Lae campaign .

The battalion was withdrawn back to Australia in early 1944 for rest and reorganisation . During this period it was stationed at Tenterfield , where the soldiers experienced a bitterly cold winter , before moving to Petrie and then Kiari on the Atherton Tablelands . The battalion was reorganised to conform with the requirements of the jungle divisional establishment , and as a result its vehicles were changed to include jeeps and trailers , instead of trucks , which were considered impractical in the jungle . A change of commanding officer also took place in this time , with Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Haupt ? who had previously served as battalion second @-@ in @-@ command before leaving to take over command of the 62nd Battalion in January 1943 ? returning to take over from Fidock . A long period of training , which included courses in amphibious warfare and various jungle exercises followed , as the focus of the fighting in the Pacific shifted away from Australian forces towards the US military . Consequently , it was not until close to the end of the war that the battalion went into action again . Before this , the battalion contributed to an Australian contingent that was sent to India to lecture British Army officers on the lessons of jungle warfare .

In May 1945 , the battalion was transported to Morotai Island in preparation for Operation Oboe , the recapture of Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies . The 2 / 1st was assigned to support the 7th Division 's landing on Balikpapan in July . Now largely being used as a divisional asset , the battalion provided a company to each of the division 's component brigades ? the 18th , 21st and 25th ? while one company remained in reserve with the headquarters . Coming ashore aboard

several landing craft , the two companies taking part in the initial assault ? ' B ' and ' D ' ? helped to secure the high ground overlooking the beachhead , while ' C ' Company remained a floating reserve along with the 25th Brigade . The battalion 's reserve company , ' A ' Company , and headquarters element came ashore in a later wave to set up a secure base . During the subsequent advance inland , the battalion 's main focus was progressing through what the Australians dubbed the " Vasey Highway " , which ran east ? west along the island 's southern shore , as the Australians fought to take the oil pipeline and the airfield at Manggar , and the " Milford Highway " , which ran north ? south through the centre into the more mountainous hinterland . During the fighting on Borneo , the 2 / 1st lost 17 men killed or wounded .

Following the conclusion of hostilities , the battalion 's personnel were returned to Australia in small drafts , as the 2 / 1st undertook garrison duties in the Balikpapan area . The longer @-@ serving men were repatriated and discharged early , while volunteers were transferred to other units that were being raised as part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force that would be deployed to Japan . In November , a batch of men were transferred to the 21st Brigade for occupation duties in the Celebes as the Australian forces began preparing to hand over the territories to Dutch authorities . By December , the battalion consisted of less than fifty personnel , and at the end of the month this cadre embarked upon the transport Kings Point Victory to make the journey back to Australia . The battalion was subsequently disbanded on 26 January 1946 .

When they had been formed , it was intended that the machine gun battalions would provide highly mobile fire support ; however , Phillip Hocking , author of *The Long Carry* , highlights that throughout the war the utility of the machine gun battalions was largely misunderstood by commanders , particularly after the focus of the Australian Army 's operations shifted to the Pacific . Some commanders used the machine guns largely in a static defensive capacity against short and medium range targets , rather than as offensive fire support weapons that could be employed to provide long range fire support . The medium machine guns were also largely utilised in the same manner as light machine guns , such as the Bren . Other reasons identified for the concept 's limited use include distrust of overhead fire by some commanders , a preference for organic fire support over attached sub @-@ units , over @-@ estimating the difficulty of transporting Vickers guns in the jungle , and a tendency to ignore targets that could not be seen . After their disbandment , the machine gun battalion concept was not used in the post @-@ war Australian Army , as the function became nested within the structure of a standard infantry battalion .

One of the 2 / 1st Machine Gun Battalion 's mascots , Horrie the Wog Dog , was the subject of a book by Ion Idriess ; the book was based on stories recounted by the dog 's owner , Jim Moody , who served as a machine gunner in the 2 / 1st . Over 2 @, @ 000 personnel served in the 2 / 1st throughout the war , and 34 members of the battalion were killed in action , died of wounds or died from accident . Decorations awarded included two Military Crosses , four Military Medals , one British Empire Medal and 16 Mentions in Despatches .

= = Commanders = =

The following officers served as commanding officer of the 2 / 1st Machine Gun Battalion :

Lieutenant Colonel Claude Esdaile Prior (1939 ? 40) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Neil Gooch (1941) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Cyril Henwood Fidock (1941 ? 44) ;

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Graham Keith Haupt (1944 ? 45) .

= = Battle honours = =

The 2 / 1st received the following battle honours for their involvement in the war :

Greece 1941 , Mount Olympus , Servia Pass , Middle East 1941 , Crete , South West Pacific 1945 , Borneo , Balikpapan , and Milford Highway .