



A story from the history of Australian Artillery:  
Commemorating 150 years – 1871-2021

**VX24598 Bombardier Edward James Courtney MM**

**2/3<sup>rd</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RAA**

**'One of the Rats'**



Australian soldiers have always been renowned for their ingenuity; and for those who served in the Western Desert in the Second World War, it was no different. As the Italian Army garrisons fell to the Commonwealth forces in the early stages of the Desert campaign, so did large quantities of arms, ammunition and equipment. While some equipment was of dubious quality, it was still functional and in the right hands - lethal.

Edward Courtney was one of the famous 'Rats of Tobruk' and, as a Gunner, was assigned to a captured 20mm Breda anti-aircraft gun, located to defend the vital port facilities. It was ANZAC Day 1941, when forty enemy aircraft attacked. As the Australian gunners were returning fire, the Breda gun manned by Courtney and his detachment had a severe stoppage. The detachment was ordered to take cover, but Courtney remained at his post; despite heavy machine gun fire and nearby bomb blasts impacting in close proximity to the gun pit, he was able to clear the stoppage and effectively re-engage the enemy aircraft.

On 7<sup>th</sup> May, the Australian Gunners were tasked to provide anti-aircraft protection to a troop of 60-pounder guns. While being attacked by enemy dive bombers and escorting fighters, the Breda gun manned by Courtney jammed once again. Even though enemy aircraft were strafing the position and rounds were peppering Courtney's gun pit, he continued to work on clearing the stoppage and bring the gun back into action and recommence firing.

For his actions Edward James Courtney, now a Bombardier, was awarded the Military Medal for '*Bravery and devotion to duty in an anti-aircraft detachment whilst under heavy dive bombing and machine gun fire*'.

Courtney went on to fight at El Alamein, and in New Guinea, and at war's end, he returned home to his family.

**Sources:**

Australian War Memorial, [Collection](#), accessed 16 August 2021

Australian War Memorial, [Collection](#), accessed 16 August 2021

Australian War Memorial, [Collection](#), accessed 16 August 2021

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National Archives of Australia, [Collection](#), accessed 18 August 2021

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