



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

**VX39725 Lieutenant John N. Pearson MC**

**2/4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RAA**

**'Leading the way'**



It was to be an undoubted 'first' for the RAA – executing a combat parachute insertion of guns, 192 rounds of ammunition and detachments into battle. The action was to centre on Nadzab airfield in New Guinea, in an effort to take the enemy pressure off the Allied amphibious landing at Lae.

2/4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment volunteered two of its eight new, just-delivered 25-Pounder Short guns, to be broken down and parachuted in, accompanied by a contingent of four officers and 30 other ranks, under the command of Lieutenant Johnny Pearson. A number of the contingent had undertaken some rudimentary parachute training, but for some, their first jump would be the operational sortie.

Inspections on the guns found serious flaws and the six were cannibalised to build two complete guns, fit for the task. These guns were proofed by firing 20 rounds, of which one of the guns failed and required significant work overnight, to make it serviceable for the coming task.

A thousand things would have been going through Pearson's mind in the preparation phase, leading the readying of a task never performed before. Once in the air though, his mind would need to be clearly focused on the mission, his men, the precious guns and the follow-up drop of ammunition. All too quickly came the orders that had him standing in the doorway of the aircraft - and then the trepidation of the tap on the shoulder, and that first step into history.

Once on the ground, Pearson assembled his men running in from all points. Miraculously only one man was injured with a broken collarbone. Together, the Gunners searched for the parts of the guns in the high kunai grass, and laboured until they had found one complete set of components. The gun was quickly assembled and made ready to fire - but never called upon to defend the new airhead.

Pearson later served with distinction at Shaggy Ridge, earning a Military Cross, when he and his party managed the most complex fire plan yet experienced yet in New Guinea. The party moved with the lead infantry element, through enemy rifle and mountain gun fire and maintained continuous and 'dangerously close' fire on the enemy.

A month before war's end, Pearson was killed in action at Balikpapan, Borneo, again operating with the leading infantry teams.

**Sources:**

National Archives of Australia: B833, WW2 Service Records VX39725 J.N. Pearson MC

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