

Lieutenant Colonel Allan James Stead

9/12/1917 - 18/9/2013

By Peter Bruce, OAM



Allan joined the Australian Army in November 1938 when the Army was about 5000 strong and the only soldiers other than Light Horse Militia Cadre were shore batteries. He was initially recruited for the proposed Darwin Mobile Force, but apparently he never went to Darwin. He was probably the last of this cohort. He began in the Permanent Military Force as a Gunner with initial training at Fort Largs in South Australia.

When war was declared in 1939 he volunteered for the AIF and sailed to England on the Queen Mary. In one instance while stationed in southern England in 1940 whilst on leave and at a dance he was showing off to a young lady that his revolver was perfectly safe as he always left the first chamber empty. To prove the point he pulled the trigger on the revolver and promptly shot a hole in the dance floor! He immediately left the premises. He had recently been issued with a different make of revolver and failed to realise the chambers revolved the opposite way.

Another incident involved the firing of a gun at midnight outside the Officers' Mess on the order of the CO and putting the whole of Southern England on alert. Apparently the CO was replaced shortly afterwards.

Allan was then moved to the Middle East and Africa, where he saw action in Libya. He was subsequently involved in the ill-fated Greek campaign. During this campaign he was cut off from his unit (the 2/3 Field Regiment) and spent the next three weeks (along with several others) escaping across the mountains, eventually arriving at the coast where they procured a fishing boat that made it to Crete. Because of the retreat, he had been given cash by the unit paymaster, which helped fund the escape.

He was one of the last to be evacuated from Crete from where they sailed to Colombo, heading for Java. However, luckily, they were recalled to Australia where Allan arrived back in Adelaide on 17 March 1942. On 21 March 1942, he married his fiancé, Ellice Dickinson. They shared their lives for 71 years.

A few months later, Allan was recalled from the AIF to the PMF and was posted to the Proof and Experimental Range at Port Wakefield, South Australia. By this time he was a Warrant Officer. There he remained until about 1953/54 until he was posted to 13 Field Regiment (CMF) at Keswick Barracks. It was also during his time at Port Wakefield that his 2 daughters and 1 son were born.

During the mid fifties he went on a six month course at the School of Infantry or "Insanity" as he called it. At one stage all the participants were on the rifle range and the instructor picked on Allan, being the only Artilleryman, to fire a grouping in the target so that it could be compared with his infantry marksman's results. Unknown to

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the instructor Allan was a former Kings Medal rifle shooting competitor and he took great delight in outshooting the expert. Although it didn't make him popular, he always thought the satisfaction was well worth it.

In 1960 Allan was posted to Wacol, Queensland as the founding RSM of 4 Field Regiment and it was only about 18 months later that he was commissioned as a Lieutenant, Assistant Quartermaster. In 1963 he was posted back to Keswick Barracks. He was promoted to Captain and in 1968/69 served in Vietnam with HQ Australian Force Vietnam (Army Component). Following his service in Vietnam he was promoted to Major and retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in November 1973.

During the early years of retirement Allan and Ellie travelled widely within Australia by caravan. In 1981 they travelled to Greece and Crete with a group commemorating the 40th anniversary of the WW2 campaign. In 1991 they packed up their home in Adelaide and moved the Canberra to be close to their two daughters for the latter years of their lives. For some years they were involved with croquet, Allan as an instructor and referee. Allan was at the Dedication Ceremony of the 4th Field Regiment Commemorative Plaque, at the Australian War Memorial, in 2000. He also attended the Regiment's 40th Birthday Reunion, up in Townsville, in the same year.

In 2006 Allan donated his final uniform (except his cap) to the Australian War Memorial. The ribbons on his uniform denoted service from 1939 to Vietnam. The cap was placed on his coffin and has now completed his uniform at the AWM.

"AWM ref REL33434.001; .002; .003; .004; .005

Associated with the service of Lieutenant Colonel Allan James Stead, Royal Australian Artillery. Stead, born at Murraytown, South Australia (SA) on 9 December 1917, joined the Militia (artillery, service number SP4531) in 1938 and enlisted on 4 November 1939 at Keswick, SA. He was posted, with the service number SX1217, to 2/3 Field Regiment, seeing overseas service in Egypt, Libya, Greece and Crete before returning to Australia in 1943 with the rank of Warrant Officer Class 2 to take up a posting at the Artillery Proof Range at Port Wakefield, SA, where he stayed until 1953. Stead was commissioned after the war and assigned the service number 498. He later saw service with the 13th and 4th Field Regiments, and served as an administrative officer at Headquarters, Australia Force Vietnam from 15 July 1968 to 30 July 1969. He retired from army service in 1973."

Allan James Stead died on 18 September 2013, leaving his beloved wife Ellie and three children - Gillian, Jennifer and Peter and their partners, seven grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Acknowledgements:

Sincere thanks to Allan's children in particular to Gillian Stead for compiling the above information and passing it on to us. Thanks also to Arthur Burke, Kevin Salter, Chris Jobson and George Salmon for their input. Chris Jobson attended Allan's funeral as the RAA representative and made initial contact with the family.