

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Lieutenant General Sir Edmund Francis HERRING, KCMG, KBE, DSO, MC

(1892-1982)

In 1912, Ted Herring was selected as Victoria's Rhodes Scholar and attended New College, Oxford.

In 1913, he enlisted in King Edward's Horse (Cavalry) and on the outbreak of WWI he deferred his studies and transferred to the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) where he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He was posted to the 99th Brigade RFA, serving in France and then in Macedonia, where he commanded a battery and won the Military Cross for gallantry on the Dorian front. Energetic, eager and capable, by the end of the war he was commanding officer of the brigade as a temporary major. He was awarded the DSO in 1919 and mentioned in dispatches.

Intending to study law, Herring returned to Oxford (BA, 1919; MA, BCL, 1920) and was called to the bar at the Inner Temple. He returned to Melbourne in November 1920 to practice as a barrister and solicitor. In 1922, he accepted a commission as a legal staff officer with 2nd Cavalry Division. Within a year he was offered command of the 44th Battery, 22nd Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) and from 1929 he commanded a succession of field brigades as a lieutenant colonel. His superiors regarded him as 'the best type of officer and one that should be employed to the utmost.'

The police strike of 1923, during which Herring worked as a special constable, saw the formation of the White Guard in which he served as a regional commander with responsibility for the Mornington Peninsula. Sir Thomas Blamey was a central figure in the organization and, despite their very different temperaments, he and Herring maintained a strong mutual regard.

From about 1937 Herring joined a number of senior Victorian WWI officers who came together at weekends to attend TEWTS (Tactical Exercises Without Troops), then a new concept, that were held at the Naval and Military Club. These affairs were known as 'meetings', the Club being unaware of the subject matter.

At the outbreak of WWII, Herring accepted Blamey's invitation to join the 2nd AIF as a temporary brigadier and CRA 6th Division. In North Africa in January 1941 Herring's gunners played a significant part in decisive victories over the Italians at Bardia and Tobruk; for his leadership he was appointed CBE.

Three months later, during the ill-fated Greek campaign, his highly effective use of artillery was vital in delaying advancing German forces and enabling orderly retreats. In August 1941,

as a temporary major general (substantive February 1944) he assumed command of 6th Division, reforming in Palestine, after its heavy casualties in Greece and Crete. From October the 6th became part of the occupying force in Syria until ordered to return to Australia to face the impending Japanese threat. Herring anticipated that his troops would have to fight 'a damn sight harder than we have been asked to fight yet'.

Appointed commander of forces in the Northern Territory in March 1942, one month after the devastating air raid, Herring was ruthless in dismissing officers of the former command and replacing them with experienced AIF officers. During the next five months he worked ceaselessly to improve and reorganise the Territory's defences. After briefly commanding II Australian Corps at Esk, Queensland, he succeeded Lieutenant General Sydney Rowell in command of New Guinea Force and I Australian Corps in October 1942, with the rank of temporary lieutenant general. Blamey wanted a commander 'of cheerful temperament' and who was 'prepared to cooperate to the limit'. He held the New Guinea command until August 1943, continuing as I Australian Corps commander until February 1944.

Herring regarded his principal task as ensuring good working relations between the Australians and their American allies in the battle for the Papuan beachheads of Buna, Gona and Sanananda between September 1942 and January 1943. At the higher command level, the nature of the campaign in difficult terrain did not allow for sweeping military initiatives but was a severe test of administrative capacity. In January 1943, Herring was awarded the American Distinguished Service Cross and in May appointed KBE for his services in Papua. Over the next six months the Allied forces conducted several successful assaults in New Guinea at Lae, Salamaua and Finschhafen.

Sir Edmund's active service ended with his swearing as Chief Justice of Victoria on 14 February 1944. From 1945 to 1972, Herring also held the post of lieutenant governor. In 1950-51, during the Korean War, his fears over the inadequacy of Australia's defences led him to step aside from the chief justiceship and serve as director of recruiting.

Predeceased by his wife and survived by his three daughters, Sir Edmund Herring died at Camberwell, Melbourne, on 5 January 1982. He was cremated after a state funeral at St. Paul's Cathedral. Portraits by Sir William Dargie are held by the Australian War Memorial and the Supreme Court of Victoria Library; the Australian War Memorial also holds a portrait by Sir Ivor Hele. Herring Island in the River Yarra, is named after him.

Source: G Browne, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.17, 1981-1990. pp. 520-523. MUP and S. Sayers, *Ned Herring*, Hyland House. 1980.

For more information follow this link: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/herring-sir-edmund-francis-ned-12626>