

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Brigadier Bruce Edmunds KLEIN

(1900-1963)

Bruce Klein was born in Perth on 31 January 1900 to James A. and May Edmunds Klein. Both parents had migrated to Perth from NSW in search of better opportunities. His father was inspector of schools in Perth and his mother a school teacher. Bruce was educated at Perth Modern School.

Klein entered RMC, Duntroon, in March 1917 and as a redhead was nicknamed 'Brickie'. He was a good student and completed his course in 1920, being allotted to the Royal Australian Artillery. After a secondment to the Royal Artillery in the UK and Germany, his early career followed the usual postings for junior gunner officers, his first being in the Fremantle coast artillery defences, 3rd Australian Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) at Guildford, 3rd Battery, RAGA at Fort Scratchley, Newcastle, and later as a captain Adjutant/Quartermaster of 18th FAB in Sydney. Here, with other Staff Corps officers of like mind, he was a key member of the 'Ubique' Polo Team that played three-a-side chukkas on Marrickville Depot parade ground against three other teams – Rovers, Musketeers and Optimists. They were horsed on remounts, and their trophy was a replica of the prestigious Ashton Cup.

Promoted major and BMRA 1st Division, he undertook training in Army/RAAF cooperation exercises in 1937, and was selected for the Long Gunnery Staff Course in 1939. His ship was steaming up the English Channel when war was declared and, after a short interval, he returned to Australia in the first convoy of the war. He was seconded to the AIF and appointed BMRA 6th Division based in Melbourne. Here he was also involved in raising the 7th Division Artillery before he was posted to Tasmania as Second in Command of 2/8th Field Regiment, training at Brighton camp. The remainder of the regiment trained at Puckapunyal, Victoria, and it eventually became a unit of the 9th Division.

Klein was then appointed GSO 2 HQRAA I Australian Corps, and in this capacity went to the Middle East in 1941, but on arrival was promoted lieutenant colonel and GSO I Australian Corps Artillery and Corps Counter Bombardment Officer. He was appointed CBO of Lustreforce, the combined British, Australian and New Zealand force under the command of Lieutenant General T. A. Blamey formed for the defence of Greece, and later Crete. He survived both withdrawals and evacuations (by ballot) and soon after his return to Cairo was appointed CBO 9th Division at Tobruk. Here he spent six weeks, where the suppression of German and Italian artillery was crucial to the survival of Major General Morshead's division. He returned to Australia in early 1942.

Klein's last big command was as CCRA III Australian Corps. This formation had the role of defending Western Australia – its coastline, ports, airfield and centres of population. He set about his command with infectious enthusiasm, for here was a formation not beholden to

Tropical Establishments. All arms and Services were represented in the corps, and as its personnel came from other states, there arose an organization, the Citizen's Reception Council. Its function was to provide 'home life' to servicemen by having men on leave stay in homes, which it did enormously well.

As Fremantle became the second most important port in Australia by virtue of the arrival of the United States, Royal and Netherlands Navies surface vessels and submarines, its defence was paramount. An enterprising US Rear Admiral Charles Lockwood wanted to increase the patrol time of his large submarine fleet and chose Exmouth Gulf for an advanced base. Bennett, Commander III Australian Corps, deputed Klein for army liaison for anti-aircraft defence, and together they reconnoitred an area in April 1942 later known as Potshot, at the southern end of the gulf. Its life was relatively short as such, but Klein played an important part in its development.

To get around his command, an area as big as India, Klein travelled 120,000 miles by road and 37,000 miles by air, the latter being in a RAAF No.19 Communications Flight Dragon Rapide. He had under his command 580 officers and 9,000 men; 15 different calibre ordnance; eight field regiments, one medium regiment, three LAA and one Composite AA regiments, three anti-tank regiments, two survey batteries and one sound ranging cadre, in all 450 guns in 13 locations. He was very proud of his achievements with these troops.

He was appointed CRA 3rd Division in Bougainville in June 1944. In January 1945, he was admitted to hospital with cardiovascular degeneration, neurasthena and pyoderma. After treatment he was Commander Hay Prisoner of War Group for four months and Deputy Assistant Quarter Master General 7 Military District, Darwin, for a short time. An administrative indiscretion brought his career to an end and he was placed on the Regimental Supplementary List in January 1946 and pensioned off.

Klein was an extrovert, capable and persuasive, an impressive speaker, a man of convictions who got things done. He had the confidence of Admiral Lockwood, who described him as 'a fine shipmate, mess mate and soldier. As a representative of a fine people and of a superb army – he won our admiration and respect'.

Post-war he returned to his family in Sydney (Edgecliff) and took a high profile position in RSL affairs, Rotary and local government (Woolhara Council). He passed the Real Estate Institute examinations and formed an agency with an ex-RAAF officer. Klein was known locally as 'Guns'. He suffered his first stroke in early 1954 and moved to and raised poultry on his land at Mona Vale, near Pittwater. He suffered his second and fatal stroke on 28 November 1963, and was cremated at Northern Suburbs Crematorium.

Bruce Klein married Elsa Maud Rooney of Perth at Claremont in April 1927. They had one daughter, Susan, who survived him. His daughter donated six of her father's wartime photograph albums to the National Artillery Museum. His younger brother Garth (a pilot) pre-deceased him in 1940 in an aircraft accident.

Sources: Alan H. Smith, *Bruce Edmunds Klein, A Brief Biography*, (Monograph), December 2001; C. Lockwood, *Sink 'em All*, p. 45, 54; War Diary HQRAA III Australian Corps, AWM 52 4/1/7 of 25 June 1944, Appx.7; Mrs S. Davies, personal papers.