

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Sergeant Maxwell Charles PARSONS, OAM

(1920-2006)

Max Parsons was born at Caulfield, Victoria, the son of Herbert Parsons, builder and Clara Mary Jean (nee Wills) on 10 March 1920. He completed his early education at Caulfield State School and worked as a grocer learning the trade until he joined the 2nd AIF.

A former member of 2nd Medium Brigade as a Senior Cadet, he enlisted in the AIF in June 1940 and transferred to 2/2nd Medium Regiment at Puckapunyal. He qualified as a gun-layer and sailed to the Middle East with 2/12th Field Regiment and on to Palestine where he trained for three months and qualified as a Gun Position Officer Assistant (GPOA) thanks to a colleague, Wally Cass, coaching him in trigonometry. Max's technical proficiency as a Group 3 specialist conveyed him to a more exciting post or, to be more precise, posts. In the Tobruk Fortress of Major General Leslie Morshead, which he reached in May 1941, he saw the dusty, bleak desert landscape from posts R8 as Observation Post Assistant and C Troop gun position as GPOA in 24th Battery with Captain Maurice Feitel (May to September 1941). Next, Parsons was Battery Commander's Assistant to now Major Feitel at the Battles of El Alamein (July to November 1942).

Promoted to sergeant and gun detachment commander in his old troop, Max had the unique opportunity to see and hear the artillery war as a senior NCO in all the vital employments in a field battery. His active service in this role continued with the Finschhafen campaign, followed by endless training and boredom in Queensland from May 1944 to April 1945, thence with the 9th Division for the Labuan landing. He brought to it a wealth of experience in a field regiment in the Middle East and the jungles of the SWPA.

Back on 'Civvy Street' in 1945, Max returned to retail grocers, Crittendens, in Malvern, a well-established and affluent suburb of Melbourne. He was made manager of the Toorak branch which had a liquor licence. As a result of several commercial developments, by 1962, Max was a director of six separate licensed companies (liquor stores) with responsibility for accounts, advertising and marketing. Twenty years on, the Crittenden Group became part of Myer Ltd. and Max soon found he spent less hours per week at work and more at the Victoria Golf Club. He retired from work in 1983.

Max had edited 2/12th Field Regiment's newsletter for many years and he wrote and edited 'Gunfire', a history of 2/12th for publication in 1991. He followed with a pictorial record which he published in 1993. There was a certain irony in Max's achievements in the post-war world. He had been twice recommended for officer training by Feitel, but his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Shirley Goodwin (qv), turned down the application because he had not matriculated! This was an advantage and it shows admirably in 'Gunfire' where the Other Ranks' experiences dominate the text, unlike other histories of the genre written by officers.

In semi-retirement, Max also proved the axiom that: 'If you want something done, give it to a busy man'. With the advent of computers Max and his wife prepared manuscripts, edited, created indexes and print-ready artwork complete with photos, maps and diagrams. As he enjoyed writing and editing, he attracted a steady stream of military history projects. Others on which he has worked in whole or part are the histories of 2/9th and 2/25th Infantry Battalions, 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion, 1st Australian Parachute Battalion and 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Regiment.

He edited two campaign histories, "*Largely a Gamble*" and "*Kokoda to the Sea*", and in collaboration with Syd Tregellis-Smith, a bibliography of unit histories. He helped edit "*Flying Backwards*" – a great title for a memoir of a WWII RAAF rear gunner. Max was also involved in producing the RSL's "*War Memorials of Victoria*" coffee table book. Max 'relaxed' producing newsletters for two regiments and the local Probus group, as well as researching genealogy. Such prolific involvement in preserving our Regiment and other armed forces' heritage did not go unnoticed. In 1996 he was awarded the OAM for service to military history and the community.

Max Parsons married Linda May Jean Edwards at Moreland Methodist Church on 14 April 1951. He died on 7 January 2006 from Non Hodgkins Lymphoma, and donated his body to the University of Melbourne, Department of Anatomy. There were four children of the marriage, all of whom survived him. Max was a quiet achiever whose opinions and decisions were widely respected by family and friends.

Sources: Mrs Linda Parsons, private documents; Alan H. Smith, Max Parsons, Gunner Historian. *Cannonball, Journal of the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company*, No. 42, 2002, p.18.