

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Major Allan Hooper BROWN, OBE

(1914-1992)

Allan Brown was born in Albury on 3 April 1914 and joined the Commonwealth Bank after his secondary education, serving at Hay and Deniliquin.

Brown was commissioned in the Royal Australian Artillery (Militia) on 29 September 1939, volunteered for the AIF, and was allotted to the 2/1st Field Regiment and posted to 2nd Battery. He sailed for the Middle East with his colleagues of the 6th Division on 10 January 1940. After training in Palestine his regiment saw action at Bardia in January 1941.

Brown, however, was not with them as he had been seconded for special duties joining guerrilla forces operating against the Italian forces in Abyssinia from October 1940 until he was hospitalised in July 1941. He and four NCOs from the unit were detached to the British Army for guerrilla warfare training under Colonel Orde Wingate, later commander of the Chindits in Burma. They learnt enough of the tribal language to instruct and direct a band of about 200 Ethiopian tribesmen in guerrilla tactics.

As part of British efforts to keep pressure on the Italian forces, Brown led his irregular band of Australians and Ethiopians on a series of operations to ambush supply convoys and attack isolated forts. They ranged over wide areas at altitudes reaching 4,500 meters and would melt back into the mountains after their attacks.

Brown's most noteworthy success came when, with Sergeant Burke and 19 tribesmen, they attacked the fort at Mota, supported by mortars. After the bombardment he sent a runner under a flag of truce to demand the Italian commander's surrender. The Commandant courteously declined but cordially invited Brown to discuss the matter over a cup of tea on the following afternoon. Brown was well aware of the conventions of chivalrous conduct but, on this occasion, decided otherwise.

His answer was to attack at night with machine gun fire, mortars and grenades. Next day Brown took the surrender and then tea with the Commandant who presented him with his sword. After Mota, guerrilla activity declined as conventional British forces swept Abyssinia free of Italians. Brown and his NCOs were recalled and all the NCOs were commissioned into 6th Division infantry units soon thereafter.

Brown returned to the regiment and excelled himself yet again, this time in the jungles of New Guinea against the Japanese, initially at Buna-Sanananda. He was appointed BC of 51st Battery (2/1st Field Regiment) for the successful Wewak campaign. Enthusiastic as ever, he was responsible for artillery support, and his citation states 'the maximum effect being obtained through his detailed reconnaissance in forward areas and his ability and personal

courage.' Brown was also awarded the Order of the British Empire in 1945. He was a popular officer and inspired others through his strength of character. He was intelligent, adaptable, and decisive and was also a good sportsman.

Haile Selassie visited Australia in May 1968 and later invited Brown and other British Army officers to visit his country. They stayed in the best hotel with cars at their disposal and the Emperor presented them each with a large commemorative gold medal (nearly 50mm in diameter).

Brown married Audrey Brown of Kempsey in 1946. He resumed his career with the Bank but later resigned to run a news agency in Mosman and was later employed by the Taxation Department. He died of cardiac arrest in 1992.

Sources: G. Long, To Benghazi, p.282; The Sunday Telegraph, 25 Sep 1997; Citation, courtesy Mrs A. Brown; Edward J. Hewit, MC (ex 2/1st Field Regiment) monograph It Was Fun Sometime; and personal notes; E. Body, Guerrillas in Abyssinia, Cannonball, No.72, pp.2-3; Alan H. Smith.