

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Brigadier Shirley Thomas William GOODWIN, DSO

(1894-1943)

Bill Goodwin was born in Ballarat on 6 February 1894, the son of Mr and Mrs J. T. H. Goodwin of Camberwell, Victoria. His father was a property officer in the Department of Home Affairs. Bill was educated at the Bridgeway Preparatory School and Camberwell Grammar School completing the Melbourne Junior Public Examinations in 1910.

He entered Royal Military College on 22 June 1911 but due to unsatisfactory progress in his studies he was discharged on 13 December 1913. Nevertheless, he joined the Militia and was appointed a second lieutenant in the Australian Field Artillery in February 1914. He enlisted in the AIF on 18 August 1914 and was appointed to the Royal Australian Field Artillery on 2 October.

In October 1914, Goodwin, sailed in the troopship, *ss Shropshire*, for the Egypt with the 2nd Australian Field Artillery Brigade (FAB), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel G. J. Johnston (qv). After service with his battery on Gallipoli in support of the 1st Division, Goodwin volunteered to become an aerial observer and spotter in the Royal Naval Air Service. After elementary training in air observation of artillery fire and protection of his aircraft, he was observing for Lieutenant Frank Beason, RNAS, on the eve of the evacuation of Gallipoli (20 December 1915). Their mission was to observe troop movements over Suvla and Anzac during a cloudy and misty morning.

About a mile from the shore the engine of their machine failed and the pilot immediately turned towards the shore but ditched in the sea and slowly sank. Goodwin's pilot drowned but he was rescued suffering from immersion by a Bavarian officer who treated him 'as if I had been one of his comrades', and warned him how to behave during interrogation by General Liman von Sanders, the German military advisor to the Turks. Goodwin was later imprisoned in Constantinople where he recorded that: 'they were the most miserable (days) of my existence'. After experiencing varied levels of good treatment, he was sent to a POW camp at Afion Kara Hissar where an escape attempt by the commander of the Australian submarine AEII led to all the prisoners being locked up for two months. Typhus broke out but only two officers succumbed.

On repatriation to Australia, Goodwin resumed his career, as a member of the Staff Corps, and as adjutant of 1st FAB until 1921. Similar postings followed, often combining adjutant/quartermaster functions, as did a short period of regimental service with 1st Field Cadre, RAA. In 1925, he was posted as Brigade Major 2nd Division for five years. During the stringent years of the 1930s, Goodwin was an instructor in signalling and military law at RMC where he was promoted major. For a short while he was back in his old role in 2nd

Division until 1938. He finally moved to coast artillery, serving with 1st and 2nd Heavy Brigades and prior to the outbreak of war in 1939 he was Commander, Coast Artillery, Southern Command as a lieutenant colonel.

Goodwin raised the 2/2nd Medium Regiment in Victoria, but due to a shortage of suitable ordnance, it was re-designated 2/12th Field Regiment. He took it to the Middle East on 21 October 1940, where it was one of the three regiments under the CRA, 9th Division. His regiment was brought piecemeal into Tobruk for the siege minus their guns. The only British guns available were 60 pounders which meant that other troops would be using captured Italian weapons to bolster the artillery strength of the regiment and, more importantly, the fortress. Goodwin brought his professionalism with him, and compiled range tables and other data for the successful employment of the unfamiliar weapons.

He also doubled as Counter Bombardment Officer after Bruce Klein's term ended, and at his peak he commanded two 60 pounders, 10 75 mm, four 105 mm, three 100 mm howitzers and one 149 mm gun. His most impressive opponent was Bardia Bill, the 155 mm nuisance gun (range 18 kms), against which he could only pit his puny 60 pounders (14 km) using guile and sniping positions. Nonetheless, the arrival of Goodwin's regiment was seen by the RA artillery staff as the turning point of the siege. Goodwin saw his regiment withdrawn on 19 September after an arduous campaign.

When 9th Division garrisoned Syria, he handed over command to his second-in command, Major Geoff Houston, to command the Artillery Training Regiment at El Maza, and in so doing missed out on commanding 2/12th for Second El Alamein in October. Nevertheless he was awarded the DSO for his Middle East service. On return to Australia, he succeeded Brigadier Alan Ramsay as CRA, 9th Division. As is well known, the 9th Division landing at Lae on 4 September 1943 presaged the use for the first time of its field artillery operating on jungle establishments. During a chance and unexpected Japanese bombing raid on Lae on 25 October 1943 Goodwin was killed at HQRAA in the divisional area.

Sources: R. Lee, *The History of the Royal Military College*, appendix; Dispatch from AIF HQ London, made available by the Acting Minister of Defence Senator Russell (undated); Lt S. T. W. Goodwin, *Reminiscences "Three Years in Turkey"*; M. Parsons, *The History of the 2nd/12th Field Regiment*, RAA, pp.43-45; B. Maughan, *Tobruk and El Alamein*, pp. 133-4, 269; D. Dexter, *The New Guinea Offensives*, p.557; Alan H. Smith.