

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Brigadier Arthur George HANSON, DSO and Bar, ED

(1911-1999)

Tom Hanson was born in Sydney on 13 July 1911, the eldest of three sons of Arthur Cecil and Mildred Blanche Hanson (nee Faviell). He finished his education at Shore (SCEGS) in 1927. On leaving school he became a clerk with the Perpetual Trustee Company.

In 1928, he was called up under the Universal Military Training Scheme becoming a driver with the 7th Field Artillery Brigade located at North Sydney and later at Willoughby, having volunteered to service after the Scheme was suspended. The brigade was horse drawn and he learned his equitation at Victoria Barracks. By age 23 he had risen through the ranks and was commissioned on 23 March 1934 and promoted captain in November 1938.

He joined the 2nd AIF on 13 October 1939 and was allocated to the 2/1st Field Regiment as battery captain of the 2nd Battery. They sailed for the Middle East in January 1940 with the 6th Division which was deployed initially in Palestine. Before operations began to push the Italians out of Cyrenaica, Hanson was transferred to the 6th Division Ammunition Company, Australian Army Service Corps, to supply the Australian and British artillery regiments and retained that appointment for the calamitous campaign in Greece and Crete that saw his regiment all but crippled. He survived both evacuations and hostile bombing to emerge at Khassa, Palestine, promoted to major and battery commander of the newly formed 51st Battery. He was mentioned in dispatches for his diligent service between February and July 1941 during the Greek campaign.

Back in Australia in early 1942, after a brief stopover in Ceylon, following Japan's entry into the war, 2/1st Field Regiment, was put on a Tropical Establishment and shipped to Port Moresby in September. On 22 November 1942, Hanson commanded the eponymous BLACKFORCE that was air-lifted to Popondetta by Dakotas as part of 7th Division thrust to Gona-Sanananda on the north coast of Papua New Guinea. Hanson was known by the sobriquet 'Black Tom' because of his dark complexion, hence the origin of his force's designation. He handled his battery superbly during the campaign and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. His citation noted that: 'despite the large area to be covered . . . he had provided maximum support for attacks on Gona as well as along the Sanananda track ... being continually forward acting as artillery advisor'.

In January 1945, following a rest break and training on the Atherton Tablelands, the regiment was back in Papua and unloaded at Aitape. During the advance to Wewak in support of 6th Division he was appointed CO of the 2/1st in May. His citation for the award of a bar to his DSO of August stated that:

'in action in the Dagua area in support of the 16th and 19th Infantry Brigades his skilful planning and able handling of his regiment resulted in maximum support to forward battalions of 19th Infantry Brigade during the drive south to Mounts Tazaki and Shiborangu'.

In December 1949, Hanson returned to the Regimental Reserve List in 2nd Military District and in July 1952 he appointed CO of 7th Field Regiment (CMF), which he commanded until May 1956, after which he was promoted brigadier and CRA 2nd Division (CMF) for nearly three years. At that time he had three full strength gun regiments, a light and anti-aircraft regiment, and a locating battery, thanks to the National Service scheme.

He stressed meticulous planning, thorough preparation and attention to detail in all things. At annual camps he had the knack of arriving at a gun position when things were going wrong. He had a serious manner and a dry sense of humour, and a smile of encouragement for a job well done. Hanson was appointed an ADC to the Queen (1957-59) and was Colonel Commandant of the Royal Australian Artillery (NSW) 1970-71, during which the new Queen's Banner was presented by Governor General, Sir Paul Hasluck, representing Queen Elizabeth II, Captain General of the Royal Regiment, at Victoria Barracks on 1 August 1971.

Back in civilian life in 1946, Tom resumed his career with Perpetual and became a Trust Officer but in 1951 he became a member of the Sydney Stock Exchange and a partner in the firm of G. H. Partridge and Company. He was a partner in several amalgamations of the firm for 30 years until 1981 and then became a consultant with Bain and Co. until 1987 and retired from the 'Exchange' in December 1990.

He was an active member of the Avalon Surf Lifesaving Club for many years after its inception in 1925. He and his family were also active in the Avalon Sailing Club and a Perisher Valley ski lodge. In his later years he enjoyed the ambience of the Blue Mountains where he maintained a cottage for holidays at Leura. He was a member of the Australian Club and Royal Automobile/Imperial Service Club, Warrawee Bowling and Killara Golf Clubs. Hanson enjoyed travel both overseas and in Australia, returning to the Middle East in 1966 and he visited Gallipoli in 1990.

Hanson was always conspicuous at the head of his regiment in Sydney's Anzac Day parade. He was: 'A gallant, well-loved comrade who served his regiment with courage, dignity and utmost integrity'. He was active in Legacy for over 30 years and his core values of respect for people and for institutions was buttressed by an excellent sense of fair play. Tom was a committed member of St. Martins Anglican Church, Killara, where he wed Betty Ives on 20 November 1947. He died from pneumonia at his home at Killara on 6 July 1999, and was privately cremated at Northern Suburbs Crematorium after a service at St. Martins.

His wife, two sons and one daughter of the marriage and four grandchildren survived him.

Sources: Army Lists; *Kibble's Post*, October 1999; family and official records held by Mrs Betty Hanson; M. Haywood, *Six Years in Support*; G. Long, *The Final Campaigns*: Alan H. Smith.