

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Sergeant Hubert Thomas WARHURST

(1917-2006)

Tom Warhurst was born in Adelaide on 10 February 1917, the second child and son of Frederick, bank manager, and Louisa Frederico. He was educated at Quorn and Kadina, where his father was bank manager, and later at Xavier College in Melbourne.

He was an outstanding athlete representing Victorian Schools in international competition in hurdles and high jump, as well as being an impressive sprinter. Team sports of football and cricket were mastered with equal flair. From 1935 Warhurst played Australian Rules Football (AFL) for Norwood, was a prolific goal kicker, won the club 'Best and Fairest' award in 1939, and shared team captaincy in 1939 and 1940.

His summer sport of tennis led to his attendance at national tennis camps under Pat O'Hara-Wood and then membership of the Junior Davis Cup squad. In athletics in 1934 he represented Victorian schools against Canada and New Zealand in the Intra-Empire Schools Championship at the MCG. His school high jump record of 1.82 m stood for 20 years.

Warhurst enlisted in the 2nd AIF in 29 June 1940 with six other well-known local sporting personalities who survived the war. Tom was allotted to artillery as a gunner in C Troop, 13th Battery, 2/7th Field Regiment. He advanced to gunlayer on 19 July 1942, and was slightly wounded by shrapnel in the First Battle of Alamein in July and during Second Alamein in October, a more serious wound saw him away from his unit for six days. During this period in Egypt he starred in sporting competitions that were arranged between periods of duty. Given the opportunity, he partnered Ross Lock, one of his sporting mates and a gunner, to win the Egyptian doubles tennis title in 1941. At a divisional athletics meeting Warhurst won the 100 yard sprint and high and long jumps, all on the one day.

He returned to Australia on 25 February 1943. He was promoted lance bombardier in December 1943 in Queensland and bombardier, then sergeant in August 1945 as gun sergeant with E Troop, 57th Battery, during operations on Tarakan. He forsook further promotion in spite of his marked abilities so he could remain with his gun detachment. Prior to Tarakan he was awarded the Blue Ribbon as the division's best athlete. He was demobilised on 14 November 1945.

He resumed his sporting career. He was fullback in Norwood's premiership (SANFL) team of 1946 and then after 94 games graduated to commentating on 5KA in the early 'fifties'. He toured South Africa in 1949 with an Australian Tennis team where he and Wimbledon finalist Geoff Brown won the doubles title. Between times, he had a five set victory over legendary Jack Crawford in 1948. He was SA's highest ranked player for several years, being competitive until well into his forties at state level. Fifty years later, Warhurst returned to the

scene of his victory in Cairo at the Gezira Sporting Club on a 'nostalgia trip' to that city with his gunner and tennis playing mate, Jack Parham. He played tennis into his eighties.

Warhurst's business life was in trade, and he became a partner in Oldham and Company before branching out as H. T. Warhurst and Company, an agency built around Spalding sporting goods for tennis, golf and basketball. A great mixer, with a good sense of humour and a quick wit he had a wide circle of friends and found time for recreation with dominos and poker, often at his beach house at Victor Harbour. He was a dedicated member of Legacy, devoting many hours to the welfare of his charges. He complemented this by being a committeeman for many years of his regimental social and welfare club. If one phrase can capture Tom Warhurst, it would be that he was a 'gentleman's gentleman'.

Warhurst had four loves – his family, his friends, his church and his sport. He wed Patricia Lewis on 23 April 1947 at St. Patrick Xavier's Cathedral, Adelaide, and there were four children of the marriage, all of whom survived him; John, Anne, Christopher and Thomas. His wife predeceased him in 1989. Tom Warhurst died at his home at Victoria Grove of natural causes on 23 January 2004. His funeral service was held at St. Ignatius Church, Norwood, and he was interred with his wife at Centennial Park Cemetery

Sources: Professor John Warhurst obituary; Gordon Schwartz, *The Advertiser*, Obituary, 28 February 2004; Jack Parham: AWM records.