

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

David Frey (Pete) Spark, MC

(20 April 1916 – August 2000)

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David Spark, affectionately known to his Army mates as "Pete". This generous man, generous in his friendship, generous in his contribution in time and effort to the community and organisations to which he belonged. He will be remembered by his Unit Association not only for his leadership qualities and his Military Cross, but for the generosity to the welfare of his former comrades by his regular substantial donations to the funds of the 4th Field Regiment Unit Association. Lieutenant Colonel Bill Cremor, his CO in 2/2 Field Regiment said of him in 1946, "He was a man of high courage, determined character and absolute loyalty".

This Citation sums up the qualities of the man we honour today and for whose life we can be thankful.

Citation: Serving with 4th Australian Field Regiment – "On 9 June 1945 during the evacuation by sea of a position in Porton Plantation Bougainville in close contact with the enemy Lt Spark was Forward Observation Officer (FOO) with the company involved. After arranging covering fire Lt Spark adjusted and controlled it until his wireless communications failed. Under heavy fire he arranged alternate communication until that also failed. Refusing to withdraw in a barge he swam to an LCA (Landing Craft) and again established communications. Due mainly to Lt Spark's devotion to duty and disregard of personal safety the artillery was able to maintain accurate and sustained fire which assisted materially in the successful evacuation of the force in the face of constant enemy suicide attacks.

During the period which covered some five hours, Lt Spark was struck repeatedly by fragments of bullets and spent splinters nevertheless he remained at his post until nightfall when darkness rendered this further pressure useless. In addition, Lt Spark assisted wounded soldiers to reach safety on at least one occasion he swam a half a mile to do so, again under fire. At the conclusion of his action ammunition was almost exhausted and it is due to Lt Spark's sound judgement and exceptional technical ability throughout the whole action that the utmost value was obtained from that available and that fire was maintained throughout. Lt Spark's coolness and demeanour were outstanding and an inspiring example to all around him".

Several years ago whilst visiting Melbourne, David came to our home for dinner. That night, he met up again with Alwyn Shilton, the infantry officer whom he was supporting in the Porton Plantation action. They had both been in action together in similar circumstances in the Middle East. There was much to talk about and both gained much from that and the respect they had for one another. Another awesome Pete Spark experience was in 1941 on Crete. 2/2 Field Regiment, in which he was a Bombardier, had been fighting in Greece to stem the German advance withdrawing to Crete. They fought there as infantry and were slowly forced south.

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Evacuation took place through Sfakai. David was left as the last boat withdrew and he was captured by the advancing Germans. His diary of 1 June 1941 quotes – “We had to walk back to Canea under German direction”and describes the difficulties of his health, lack of food and general bad conditions. Established in a poor POW camp, plans between he and a few friends were made to escape. 27 June 1941 saw them escape through the wire and seek the help of local Cretans. This help continued for months as they moved from place to place on the island always at risk. Their protectors were equally at risk, but Cretan help resulted in evacuation to Alexandria on the night of 25 November 1941 nearly six months after capture.

These are but two incidents in the life of David Spark. Major General John Whitelaw, MGRA, wrote in the foreword to the 2/2 Australian Field Regiment Unit History in writing of the members of that Regiment – “It is differed not at all from others in the pure gold of its personnel”

David Spark was one of those “Pure Gold Personnel”.