

2022 Premier's Anzac Spirit School Prize
By Ned Uren
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The Service Story of Raymond Arthur Truman
SX 1260

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Part A

Pre-War:

Raymond (Ray) Arthur Truman was born in Kalgoorlie, Boulder in Western Australia on June 4th, 1919, Born to Leslie Truman Snr and Mary Matilda May O'Neil. Ray had two brothers Dudley and Leslie who joined the forces also. In his early teenage years, Ray decided to move to Adelaide with his brother Dudley. Kalgoorlie during the early 20th century was a town that ran off its mining industry and there is no doubt Ray and Dudley envisioned themselves striving for something beyond a career in mining. Ray attended Adelaide technical High school while living at 225 Carrington Street in the Adelaide Technical boarding house with his brother Dudley. In 1935 at the age of 16, Ray left school and worked as a labourer. A significant step in his Pre-War journey was him joining the 27th Battalion which was a militia reserve unit. With Ray taking his first steps towards life in the military these first steps would have been no doubt extremely beneficial for his war service in the years to come.



Fig.1 A young R.A Truman in 27th Battalion Uniform *Image from Verity Truman*

During The War:

On the 3rd of November 1939, Ray Truman enlisted to join the 2nd Australian Imperial Force. Ray would have jumped at this opportunity as his pre-war training with the 27th Battalion would have given him a glimpse of life in the military. Given the number SX1260, these two letters and four digits would stick with Ray throughout his time in the army. He enlisted in the 2/10th Battalion which was the first South Australian battalion formed for the Second AIF. The Battalion Adapted the Colours Blue and Purple. The 2/10th Started training at Woodside in the Adelaide Hills where Ray would participate in many training procedures such as; marching, rifle drills and compass reading. After moving out of the Woodside Barracks the Battalion moved to Ingleburn in New South Wales. While training at Ingleburn a 20-year-old Ray Truman was promoted to L/Sgt (Corporal) in January 1940. The battalion then moved to England on the 18th of June 1940 to train.



Fig.2 Ray In his army uniform c. 1940. On his shoulder you can see the 2/10th Battalion patch. *Image from family collection*

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Fig.3 shows Ray operating a mounted anti-aircraft gun. Whilst in England the battalion was based on Salisbury Plain and was responsible for the defence of the nearby RAF base Middle Wallop.

After training Ray and the 2/10th arrived in the ports of Glasgow ready to embark to Egypt. These men leaving from Glasgow were about to enter a foreign environment

The 2/10th were stationed in Ikingi Maryut which was an Allied camp area in the Egyptian desert. For the early months of 1941, Ray spent most of his time maintaining the A.A (anti-aircraft) support on the different vessels in the Alexandria docks. Throughout this report, Ray Truman states the condition of the Vessel and records the A.A fire around the Alexandria Dock. The vessel being guarded was the S.S Hanne (See Fig.4). On the 22nd of March 1941 the Escort of the "S.S Hanne" Bren Gun/A.A s support to Tobruk, whilst leaving Tobruk the escort vessel hit an underwater mine and sunk Ray's boat. It was saved by the "S.S Hanne" helmsman. As confirmed by the report this vessel was heavily secured by Mounted Bren Guns. Throughout the night German A.A fire is recorded as being extremely heavy. An interesting piece taken from the AWM unit dairies is the report L/Sgt Ray Truman wrote (Fig.5), Ray Mentions the Semi-Obsolete classes of the German equipment in respect to the aircraft they were using.



Fig.3 1940, England, Lopcombe Salisbury. Ray Truman Operating a mounted Anti-Aircraft gun *Image from family collection*



Fig.4 The S.S Hanne in the Earle's Shipbuilding yard in Hull, England, Date of image is unknown. *Photo used from www.wrecksite.eu*

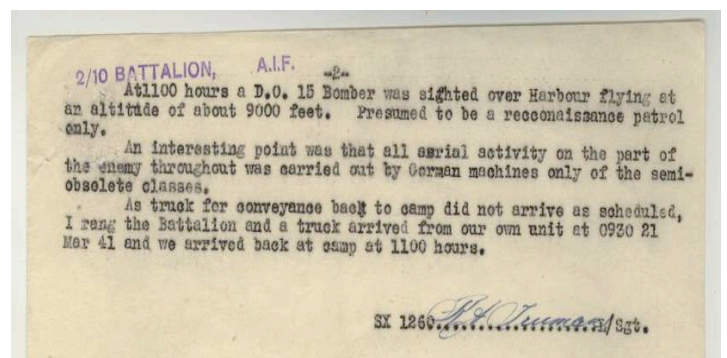


Fig.5 An extract from the 2/10th Battalion AWM unit dairies, this is the last part of the report where L/Sgt Truman mentions the aerial activity of the Germans *Image from AWM Unit War dairies*

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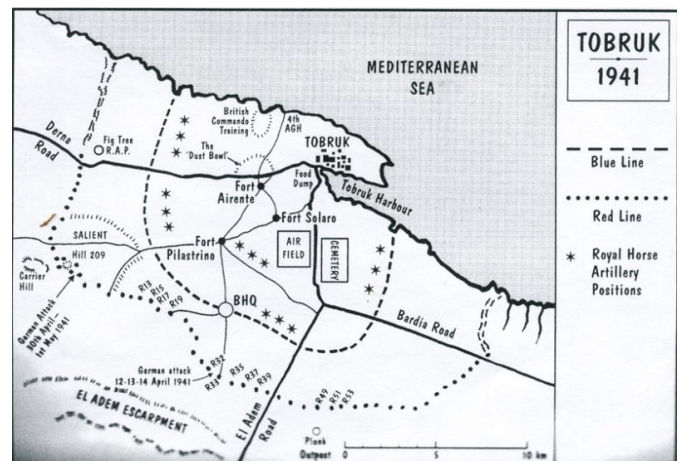
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The Siege of Tobruk (10 April 1941 – 27 November 1941)

For eight long months the Australian soldiers in Tobruk including Ray Truman surrounded by German and Italian forces. The men of the Tobruk siege withstood many of the harsh conditions such as sandstorms, heatwaves, extremely cold nights, tank attacks, artillery barrages and daily bombings. As these attacks went on, Ray Truman was amongst his fellow "Rats of Tobruk" as the men saw out endless days and nights holding back the Germans and Italians. Fig.6 Shows the Tobruk area including the harbour where Ray was based on shipping duties.

Fig.6 Image of the Tobruk harbour and surrounding areas. *Image from*



In a letter that Ray wrote to his sister-in-law Audrey, although not being able to give away his location in case the Germans intercepted their letters, He writes about the conditions in the desert commenting on frequent sandstorms. Ray describes what it is like to see a sandstorm roll through the desert as you can only see a yard or two in front of you. "In dust storms everything just seems to stop", This letter gives an insight of the conditions the men in Tobruk faced

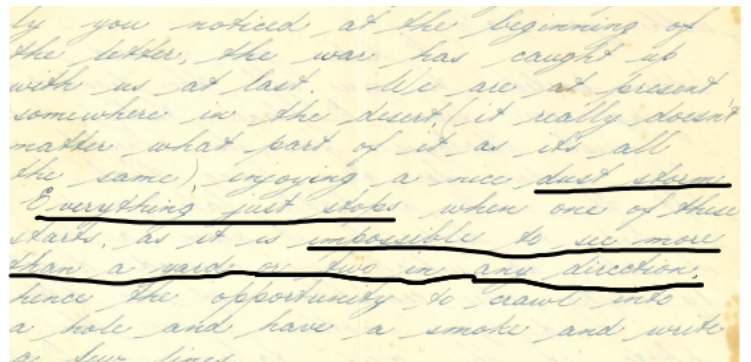


Fig.7 Is an extract from ray's letter. The underlined parts are his quotes of "everything seeming to stop" and how far you can see in a sandstorm, *Image from family collection*

Fig.8 Shows Ray (On the right) pictured with an unknown soldier, in classic Ray fashion even during the war he still found time to have a drink with a mate. Showing that time with others is invaluable in such a dark time as war and conflict. This photo was most likely taken in Aleppo around early 1942



Fig.8 Ray Truman (Right) Having a drink with a friend while in the middle east *Image from family collection*

After his time in the Middle East Ray is identified as a potential officer and is then moved to Bonegilla, Australia to participate in an officers' training course. During this time, he sits many exams and practical tests to see how suitable he could be as an officer in the future.

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With the 2/10th In the pacific (Buna and Gona) (16 November 1942 – 22 January)

After returning from officers' training course in Australia, Ray is then moved to Buna around early December 1942 where the 2/10th began an attack on an airfield that was under Japanese control. Throughout December the Battalion progressed slowly as the Japanese were well entrenched in their bunkers. By December 23 the battalion had successfully cleared out the airfield. Ray and his fellow Battalion members would have felt a sense of relief after the long days and nights in the sapping tropical conditions. The time for rest was slight as on the 24th of December the Battalion then moved to a contested area between the airfield and the coast. The 2/10th made a series of attacks. The persistence of the 2/10th Battalion during this time is shown in this passage from the History of the 2/10th Battalion book "Whilst feeling the loss of so many of their pals, they knew that the efforts of all the previous day were something to be proud of" (Allchin 2008), There is no doubt Ray especially would have been feeling loss as much as many of his good friends were killed or severely wounded. The men were ready for their next push on Christmas Day. "Few Had time, or thought, to know that it was Christmas Day. In a world of war that, during the last few weeks, had again increased in tempo." (Allchin 2008). This day would be one that Ray would never forget as he was wounded in action by a gunshot that hit him on his right elbow and lower back. After spending many months in hospital, He then re-joins the 2/10th Battalion on March 7, 1943. Upon Ray's return to the Battalion, they were now leading the Sanananda track alongside troops from the United States. The time spent on the track was a time of patience. In a discussion with Verity Truman, she recalls her father training the American troops in jungle warfare as they were not sufficiently experienced in jungle warfare. This action shown by Ray to train these troops displayed his character as something very similar to what was noted in his Potential officer course report. This report noted Ray to be "Quiet, Steady Personality, Reliable type, Soldier Bearing, Shows Enthusiasm" (NAA Service record RA Truman 2022).

Transferring to the 2/33rd, The Jacksonsfield liberator Crash

On September 7, 1943, just 6 days after Lt. Ray Truman was transferred to the 2/33rd Battalion one of the worst Australian wartime aviation disasters took place. In the early hours of the morning a B-10 Liberator was heard and seen spitting flames from its exhausts. As the Liberator Bomber declined it clipped a tree and collided with the trucks on the edge of the airstrip. These trucks contained ammunition and bombs. As the plane collided it exploded destroying many of the trucks belonging to the Battalion. This tragic incident was consequential for the deaths of 11 USAAF flight crew members and the 62 Australian soldiers



Fig.9 Photo taken September 9, 1943. This truck had been severely damaged in the crash.
Image from
<https://www.liberatorcrash.com/photos.html>

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(Crooks 1971). This Liberator crash resulted as the most casualties the 2/33rd saw throughout the war in a single action. Due to the chaos and trauma connected to this crash it's apparent why Ray never spoke about this event.

After the events of the Jacksonsfield air crash the battalion then made it to Nadzab where they made the final insurgence towards Japanese military forts based in Lae. The battalion encountered the Japanese in the Markham and Ramu Valley throughout 1943 (AWM, 2022). American parachute regiments played a key role in providing cover for Australian troops especially the machine gunners Ray was a part of.

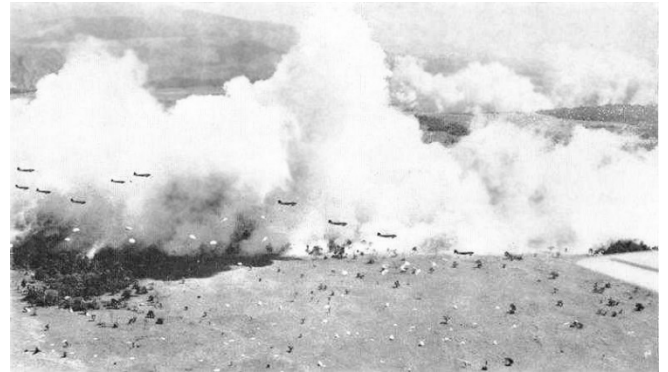


Fig.10 American Parachute regiments assisting Australian troops in Nadzab. *Photographer unknown Public Domain*

Borneo And Balikpapan 1945

After his leave in 1944, Ray was sent into action in June 1945 as the 2/33rd were sent to the south coast of Borneo. Balikpapan served as the last major ground operation served by Australian Troops in WW2. The landing on Balikpapan was meant to secure oil processing facilities. The landing on Morotai island of Borneo was considered by many to be the biggest single landing operation any Australian division had ever taken part in, this landing surpassing Gallipoli. Apart of H.Q. Company, Ray oversaw MMG's (Medium Machine Guns) (AWM 2022).

Oboe 2 and other missions on Balikpapan are often described as the most controversial Australian operations of the Second World War. As it was clear to some that the Australian operations in Borneo were not serving much purpose to the final defeat of Japan. Australian Commander-in-chief General Sir Thomas Blamey advised the government to withdraw its support for Oboe 2, but the Army continued and the loss of life in Borneo was high, 229 Australian troops died (AWM 2022).



Fig.11 (1945) Lt Col. Truman, Left, with the Machine gun platoon during the advance to the MacDonald's Track line. *Image from the 2/33rd Footsoldiers book, Crooks 1971.*

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After the war (1945-Onwards)

After the war Ray stayed on with army and he was awarded an MBE for his military actions. He then organised CMF forces after 1945. CMF post war merge battalions were put in place to form the new Army after WWII. When awarded his MBE Ray was the rank of Major and C.O. of the 43/48th Battalion. In 1961 Ray left the army with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and moved to Mobil to become an accountant. Ray and his wife Winifred had 3 children Stephen, Elizabeth, and Verity.



Fig.12 Ray's Medal set, (MBE,1939/45-star, Africa Star, Pacific Star, Defence Medal, War Medal, AEM, Tobruk siege medal) ***Medals from Verity Truman***

Reflection on the ANZAC Spirit

Raymond Arthur Truman Was a man of many different values and he held all his values very close to his heart. Enlisting In 1939 and his involvement pre 1939 with the 27th Battalion showed how ready and prepared Ray was to serve. Verity Truman recalls Ray never being a big on marching with his medals in parades as Ray often supported the team effort shown in the war not focusing on the individuals.

The Tobruk Siege was an event where mateship and resilience were key. Ray showed the ANZAC spirit when in the face of adversity, he continued to follow orders and serve his unit and men. The army took in people from all walks of life and Ray was understanding of this and believed that is what made the army great as all the people who fought alongside each other all had very different backgrounds, but they all came to unite for the greater good. The defenders of Tobruk did not surrender or retreat as their determination, bravery, courage, and the ANZAC spirit inspired them in the war's darkest days as the men earned themselves the nickname as the "Rats of Tobruk" a name given to them by enemy. Ray was a strong advocate for the work of Legacy Australia as he believed that this work for the families was important for those who lost a loved ones during the war.



Fig.13 Maj. Raymond Arthur Truman with his MBE (Military Order). Also shown in the image are his wife Winifred and children Stephen and Elizabeth. *Image from personal collection of Verity Truman*

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Part B:

To tell the Story of My great great uncle Raymond Arthur Truman, I needed to undertake an interview with His daughter Verity, she spoke about Ray and what he was like as a Person and she spoke about any stories crucial in Rays lifetime. I looked through his Service records and many forms as well as the official unit dairies to assist in finding this information about Ray. I also spoke to My Dad who remembers Ray and hearing his stories about his time in the war, although nothing too sensitive was brought up Ray was often described as very gentle and easy going by his loved ones and was open to talk to family about his experiences. When I was with Verity, she showed me photos of Ray during, before and after the war. She also let me borrow his medal set to examine. Verbal stories were undertaken with Verity as she spoke very deeply about her father's care for other soldiers as Ray would often meet at reunions with descendants and those who we fought with and against. Being able to talk with Verity was a moment that will cherish for a long time as I never got to meet Ray as he passed away 7 years before I was born but being able to hear stories about Ray helped me gain a deeper understanding about him.

As my dad is a keen historian as he is in possession of Ray's Records that would be kept on the National Archives of Australia. These Records gave me a framework and timeline to follow to track and see the important movements during the war for Ray. The photos I have been given to by my dad are all displayed above as they are labelled as being from a "Personal Collection". These photos gave me a very good visual of knowing what Ray looked like during the War.

The two books that my Family owns regarding the Battalion History of the 2/10th and the 2/33rd. Purple and Blue and book by Lt.-Col Frank Allchin gave a great insight of the 2/10ths journey in the War as Ray spent his starting years with this Battalion. The Footsoldiers, the story of the 2/33rd Infantry Battalion A.I.F by William Crooks also gave me great insight towards the Story of the 2/33rd Battalion as this was a Battalion Ray was a part of in his later years of WWII.

After investigating the task sheet and piecing together all my information I created a folio which included annotations and timelines of Ray's actions during the war. This folio was important as it made it easy to put all my information on this final good copy.

Word Count: 449

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