

JOSEPH FORDE IRWIN

GUNNER

N168213/ NX132283

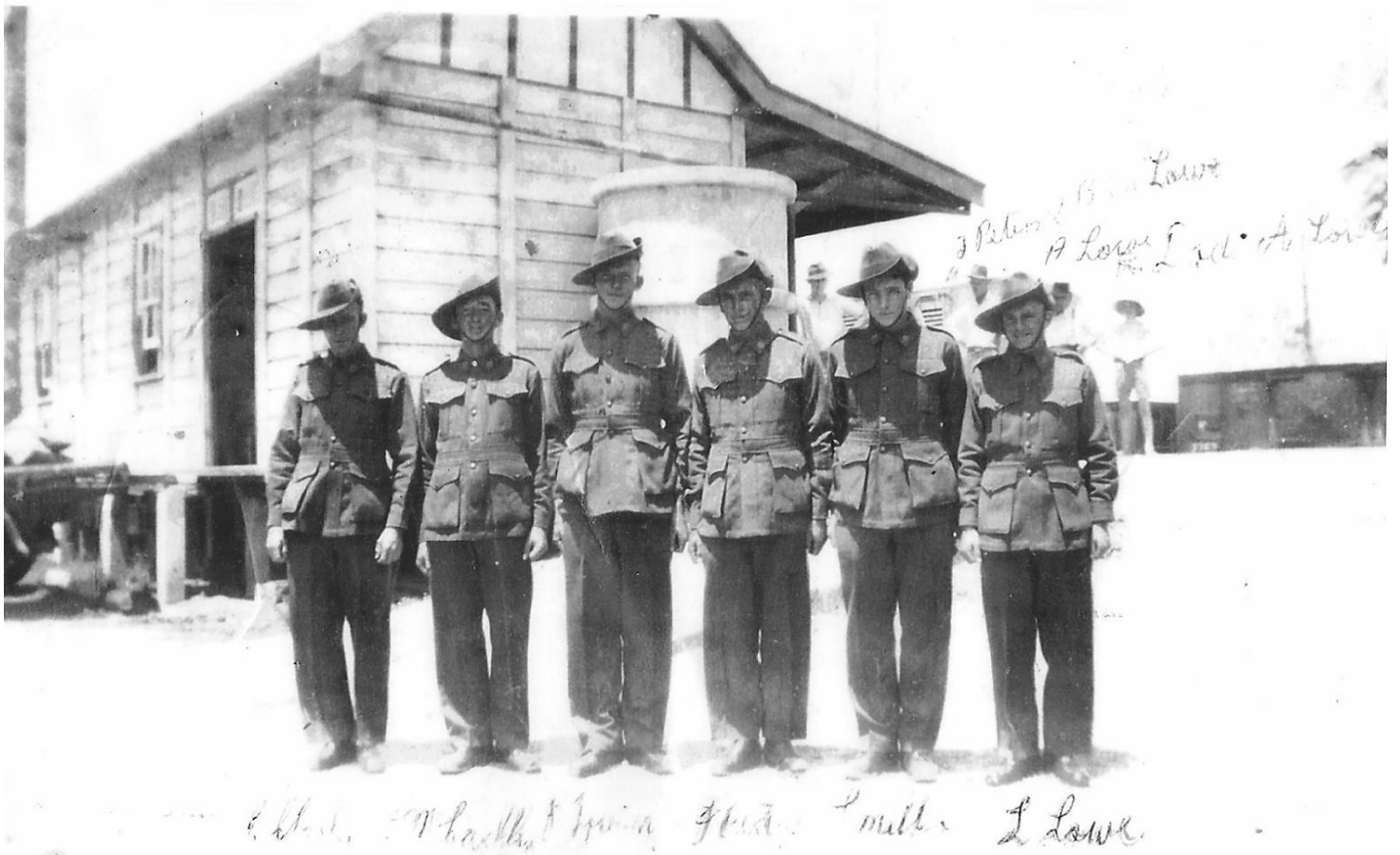
Joseph Forde Irwin, son of John and Catherine Anne Irwin of "Kerry" Bonshaw, was born on 18 November 1920 at Mandowie, NSW. He enlisted for service aged 20 on 6 October 1941 at Boggabilla, NSW. He joined the 1st Australian Field Regiment (Artillery) at Largs, NSW, as a Gunner. He spent a week or so in hospital with measles in late July 1942. Most of 1942 was spent in various training depots in NSW. Joe then got transferred to Darwin in June 1943, Darwin was classed as an Operational Area at that time. On 11 May 1944, Joe was a passenger on a troop train back to Darwin, when it was involved in a train crash that killed 4 people at Copley in South Australia. The troop train's locomotive had mechanical difficulties after a long uphill pull and required water. While the locomotive was away getting water, a freight train ran into the back of the troop carriages halted on the tracks on a cold, dark night^{1,3,4}. Joe was uninjured due to the fact that he was lying down on the floor as he was cramped up and uncomfortable sitting in the seat. His mate that was sitting beside him in the seat was killed with the impact of the train crash. Joe was transferred to 2/11 Australian Field Regiment on 5 August 1944, and was in "F" Troop of the 61st Battery⁵. He embarked at Darwin, NT, on 15 September 1944 aboard *HMAS Katoomba* and disembarked on 29 September 1944 at Lae (New Guinea). Joe reckoned that the boat trip was the worst part of the war. He said the facilities were a bit rough, they had guttering along the side of boat for urinals, draining into sea! While the 2/11 Aust Fd Regt were in Lae they trained in the jungle conditions and also helped with improvements at the Nadzab air base set up by the US Air Force². After some months in Lae, he embarked per *SS Maiwara* on 12 April 1945 and disembarked in Torokina, the main Australian base on the island of Bougainville on 17 April 1945. Joe's role in the gun crew was to aim the gun (25 pounder), and said that they would dig the guns down into a pit. He said that as the ground was so wet from the tropical conditions, the guns would sink down into the ground when fired and they would have to keep putting logs under the guns to reposition the guns and stop them sinking into the wet ground. Joe served with his unit fighting against the Japanese in Bougainville until the Japanese surrender in August 1945. After 8 months in Bougainville, Joe embarked for home at Torokina per *HMAS Canberra* on 14 December 1945. He disembarked in Townsville, Qld, on 18 December 1945, and was discharged on 26 April 1946 on account of demobilization, aged 25. His mother, Catherine, said that he spent 3 weeks in bed after he got home jaundiced and sick with Malaria. He was awarded the 1939/45 Star, the Pacific, the Defence Medal, the War Medal 1939/45, and the Australia Service Medal.

Compiled by Jennifer Irwin. Information used to put together this story was gathered from recollections by Joe's family, Joe's service record and online records. References:

1. Wikipedia: Railway accidents in South Australia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Railway_accidents_in_South_Australia
2. Australian War Memorial: 2/11th Field Regiment <https://www.awm.gov.au/unit/U54401/>
3. The Argus (Melbourne), Saturday May 13, 1944 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/11812275>
4. The Courier Mail, Saturday May 13, 1944 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42043210>
5. Australian War Memorial Photograph 068704 <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/068704/>
6. Wikipedia: 2/11th Field Regiment (Australia) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2/11th_Field_Regiment_\(Australia\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2/11th_Field_Regiment_(Australia))
7. Northern Territory Library: Military Units in the Northern Territory, 1939-1945, 2/11 Field Regiment <http://www.ntlexhibit.nt.gov.au/exhibits/show/unit/unit/item/1142;>
<http://www.ntlexhibit.nt.gov.au/archive/files/747752335fdcf82b105f8610b1acb5c1.jpg>
8. Australian War Memorial Photograph 094224 <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/094224/>
9. State Library of South Australia: Train wreckage, Copley [B 50513] Photograph <http://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/B+50513>



Irwin Family Photo. Joe Irwin pictured with his brother Francis "Dude" at "Kerry" Bonshaw. Dude is pictured wearing Joe's gas mask!



Irwin Family Photo. Boggabilla Railway Station. L-R: Lionel Clark, Les McLachlan, **Joe Irwin**, Jack Pictin, Les Miller, Leo Lowe.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

068704

Australian War Memorial Photograph 068704⁵: 51 Mile Point, Stuart Highway, Northern Territory, Australia, 1994-08-22. Members of "F" Troop, 61st Battery, 2/11th Field Regiment, moving along the highway after marching past the saluting base where the Commander-In-Chief, Allied Land Forces, South West Pacific Area took the salute. Identified personnel are: VX46205 Captain P. W. Dietrich (1), VX43027 Lieutenant (LT) W. Lewis (2), Vx45386 Lt G. W. Barrel (3), VX45395 Lt R. Glass (4), NX84692 Gunner A. K. Richardson (5), QX24429 Gunner L. G. Mathers (6), VX41415 Sergeant R. A. Christiansen (7), VX24755 Gunner A. E. Jago (8), **NX132283 Gunner J. F. Irwin (9).**



Wikipedia: 2/11th Field Regiment (Australia)⁶ 25-pounder guns from the Australian 2/11th Field Regiment at practice in the Darwin area, 28 June 1943.



(c) Northern Territory Library

hdl:10070/34255

Northern Territory Library: Military Units in the Northern Territory, 1939-1945, 2/11 Field Regiment ⁷



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

094224

Australian War Memorial Photograph 094224⁸: South Bougainville, 1945-07-20. A Jeep and trailer of 2/11 Field Regiment, carrying supplies to 22 Field Battery site west of the Mobiai River along the Buin Road. The picture shows heavy rain and almost impassable condition of the road.

4 SOLDIERS KILLED IN S A RAIL CRASH

Troop Train In Accident

ADELAIDE, Fri: Four soldiers were killed and 27 injured, seven of them seriously, when a goods train crashed into a stationary troop train carrying 500 men near Copley, 375 miles north of Adelaide, about midnight on Thursday.

Names of the casualties have not yet been released, but it is stated that this is because efforts are still being made to notify next of kin.

There were terrible scenes in the bitterly cold darkness immediately after the crash. Guided by cries from the wreckage, soldiers worked feverishly to rescue dazed and injured comrades. Several of the carriages were telescoped. One man was pinned for more than two hours beneath wreckage. He was conscious throughout, but died later.

The accident occurred on the Commonwealth section of the railway. It is the worst smash in the history of the single-track north-south line. An ambulance train, with doctors and medical equipment, was despatched as soon as possible, but an Army doctor and two nurses had preceded it from Adelaide by plane.

The most serious cases were removed temporarily to the Great Northern War Memorial Hospital at Hawker. They were placed aboard the hospital train today, and are expected in Adelaide tomorrow night.

The troop train had left Terowie for a northern destination on Wednesday. On a gradient in the Copley Hills the engine ran out of water and broke down. While members of the train crew were uncoupling it to take it to a water tank near by the freight train came out of the darkness behind and crashed into the rear of the stationary train. The old-type carriages smashed like matchwood, but an emergency train crew in the guard's van at the rear of the stationary train had an amazing escape from death. Their stoutly built car withstood the force of the impact, which telescoped the carriages behind them.

The darkness, the cold, the suddenness of the crash, and the cries of the injured contributed to a scene of indescribable confusion. Huge fires were lighted alongside the track, and the injured were wrapped in blankets as they were rescued. They were made as comfortable as possible near the warmth of the fires. Most of the men had been sleeping without boots when the tragedy occurred. In the light of the fires they searched among the wreckage for hours looking for personal belongings.

Women came out from Copley to help the injured, and later a doctor and nurses arrived from Quorn. Soldiers said they all did wonderful work.

The Argus (Melbourne), Saturday May 13, 1944³

4 SOLDIERS KILLED IN TRAIN CRASH

ADELAIDE, Friday.—Four soldiers were killed and 27 injured when a goods train crashed into a stationary troop train in South Australia soon after midnight on Thursday.

According to an official army statement the crash occurred near Copley, 373 miles north of Adelaide.

The train carrying 300 troops had broken down in the Copley hills, and the freight train, overtaking it, crashed into the rear.

Carriages were telescoped and loaded trucks were wrecked. Soldiers were pinned beneath wreckage.

A special train with doctors and medical equipment was sent from Quorn, and nurses arrived by road. First aid was given to the wounded. The special medical train did not arrive until eight hours after the crash.

Two of the injured are badly hurt, but their lives are not in danger. With 11 others slightly injured they are in Hawker Hospital.

The train had 10 cars, three of which were fully-loaded trucks, and a brake van.

The engine faltered on a steep incline in the Copley hills, and finally broke down in Puttapa Gap.

"It was plain hell," said one soldier. "Some of the boys showed amazing fortitude, and a civilian doctor and women helpers did wonderful work."

"Most of us were asleep at the time. I was in the second last carriage. It was badly smashed and the roof of the last carriage shot right through our carriage."

"Had we been awakened before the smash and on our feet trying to jump out we probably would have been cut in halves as the carriages telescoped."

"Some of the men from the second last car were thrown into the carriage ahead and some jammed between the carriage platform and the wheels."

One Killed Instantly

The soldier said that one man was killed outright and others so badly jammed in the wreckage that they could not be shifted.

"One man was conscious for two and a half hours," he said. "He was jammed in the wreckage, which had to be jacked off him. He died later."

"Rescuers had a difficult job in the dark. It was bitterly cold, and huge fires were lighted alongside the track, where the injured were wrapped in blankets and made as comfortable as possible."

"Most of us were without boots as we had them off when we were sleeping."

"Our boys worked untiringly helping to rescue the injured and then to make them more comfortable while they were waiting for medical help," he said.

BIG DROP IN BUTTER

Queensland's butter production this month is expected to be the lowest on record for May.

The Queensland Butter Board expects a production of 85,000 boxes, compared with 108,221 in the corresponding period of the previous year. Main reasons for the drop are dry weather and manpower shortage.

Production for the 11 months, including an estimated 85,000 boxes this month, will be 1,756,604 boxes, against 1,902,059 for the corresponding months of last year. April output, 118,171 boxes, was more than 18,000 boxes below the figure for April last year.

Trend of production in 56lb. boxes is:—

	1942-43	1943-44
July	150,475	81,489
August	141,849	74,287
September	129,163	93,651
October	130,039	139,944
November	168,498	211,345
December	196,286	244,003
January	281,077	269,805
February	245,932	235,667
March	213,976	203,242
April	136,543	118,171
May	108,221	85,000

Totals 1,902,059 1,756,604

April cheese production totalled approximately 576 tons, a drop of 366 on March.

Doesn't Like Our Gallery

Mr. Will Ashton, one of Australia's foremost artists, who, until recently was director of Sydney Art Gallery, does not like either the building or the location of the Queensland National Art Gallery.

He thinks the building is unsuitable for a modern gallery and that it is too far from the centre of the city. Anything more than that will be revealed in his special report to the trustees.

Mr. Ashton, who has come to Brisbane at the request of the trustees to advise them about future developments, arrived yesterday by plane.

The chairman, Sir James Blair, and other trustees, the president of the Queensland Royal Art Society (Professor J. V. Duhig), and Mr. Frank Sherrin, representing the chairman of the Half Dozen



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State Library of South Australia: Train wreckage, Copley [B 50513] Photograph⁹
<http://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/B+50513>