

YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 33

TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia now open three days per week, Wednesday through Friday. A COVID-19 plan is in place with social distancing and limits on numbers in individual galleries. Sanitiser stations are available throughout the Museum together with an enhanced cleaning regime. For those unable to visit at present, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing present interesting features of the collection and their background stories

1st Aust Naval Bombardment Group



Whilst engaged in operations in the Middle East involving cooperation with naval ships providing gunfire support, AIF artillery officers recognised the advantage that could be gained from its use. They also realised the need for liaison teams who could advise the naval gunnery officers so they could meet the needs of the gunners on the ground. When these officers returned to Australia and identified that there would be numerous amphibious landings required to recover the ground lost to the Japanese, they identified a need to develop and train personnel as members of such teams. Proposals were submitted to senior army and navy personnel recommending the formation of a specialised unit to cover such activities. This led to the formation of the 1st Aust Naval Bombardment Group. The unit colour patch, retained the traditional red and blue artillery colours, but instead of a variation of lightning bolt designs associated with the legend of St Barbara used stylised ocean waves.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The operational role of the Naval Bombardment Group was to liaise with the two services planning naval bombardments prior to a landing and to support the assault troops with fire pending the landing of the field guns and their coming into action. Even after this the naval guns had a role to play in engaging targets, which could withstand the shelling of the army guns or were perhaps out of range of the field guns.

The nucleus of the unit comprised two officers of either the rank of Major or Captain and two NCO's from each of the AIF Field artillery regiments. It was commanded by an officer with the rank of Lt Colonel and he was known as Chief Bombardment Liaison Officer (CBLO). He was assisted by two Senior Bombardment Liaison Officers SBLO with the rank of Major and ten Bombardment Liaison Officers each of whom was to assist the Gunnery Officer on the ship carrying out the bombardment task. The BLOs' had a technical assistant and two signallers.

The unit was raised initially raised early in 1943. Two-week courses were undertaken at Flinders Naval Depot, not as it might seem to ensure close liaison with the navy but purely because the depot was the most suitable facility at which to bring all the personnel together to form the unit. A party known as a Shore Fire Control Party (SFCP) landed with the assault troops to handle any support fire requested by them. There were ten such parties in the unit. A party of five made up a Troop commanded by a Major so the parent unit comprised two Troops. Each SFCP comprised an officer holding the rank of Captain, a Signals Sergeant, a Signals Bombardier, a Bombardier Technical Assistant and six Other Ranks comprising four Signalers and two Drivers.

The party was issued with two jeeps and a United States TBX2 wireless set as used by their Marine Corps. They were a superior wireless unit to the normal Australian sets. The organisation of 1st Aust Naval Bombardment Group provided for the support of a two-division assault. The CBLO's party was posted to the HQ Command ship prior to and subsequently to the landing whilst the SBLO's parties were deployed on whatever ship they could be used to the best advantage. The Group took part in the landings of the 7th and 9th Divisions at Balikpapan and Tarakan respectively.

As an example of firepower available, the American cruiser USS "Phoenix" with fifteen 6-in guns in triple turrets was equivalent to two Australian field regiments or forty-eight 25-pr field guns. This Virtual Visit is based on an article by RK Glyde which appeared in *The Aiming Post* magazine of the RAA Historical Society. Bob's source was a précis by an officer of the 2/5th Aust Field Regiment, AIF.



HMAS Shropshire executing a shore bombardment task

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHFLytbWnt0>

<https://www.facebook.com/navalhsa/videos/1185774804927668/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6wDdlWAX6Y>



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Morotai. 1945-05-17. Major DA Calder, 1 Naval Bombardment Group, (1), in charge of shore fire control. All branches of the services were present for the briefing of 24 Infantry Brigade for their part in the Combined Operation Oboe 6. Identified personnel are:- Lieutenant Colonel GD Houston, commanding officer 2/12 Field Regiment, (2); Lieutenant Colonel Mervyn Jeanes, commanding officer 2/43 Infantry Battalion, (4); Lieutenant Colonel TH Scott, commander 2/32 Infantry Battalion, (5); Lieutenant Colonel HBC Norman, commanding officer 2/28 Infantry Battalion, (6); Brigadier SHWC Porter, commander 24 Infantry Brigade, (7).

References :

The Artillery Units volume of the reference series *The Unit Guide* by Graham Mackenzie-Smith has a comprehensive summary of the formation and operations of the 1st Aust Naval Bombardment Group

<https://www.bigskypublishing.com.au/graham-r-mckenzie-smith/>

The Unit Guide, in a six volume boxed set, sets out to fill this gap with more than 5,500 profiles of units in the Australian Army during the war (which between them had over 13,700 unit names). Each profile covers what is known of the unit's formation, role, organisation, movements, operations and place in the Army's hierarchy, including references to the unit's War Diary at the Australian War Memorial and an extensive Bibliography.