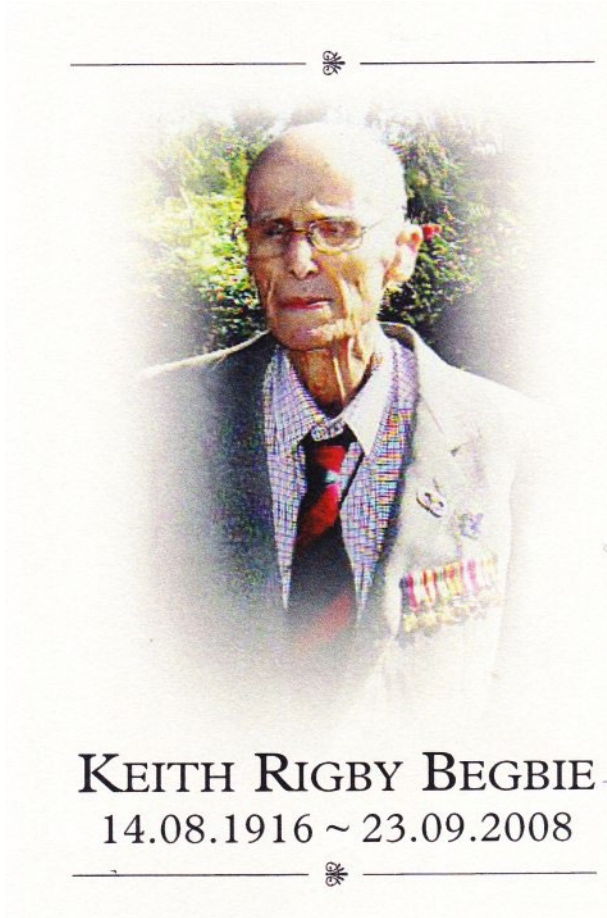


AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

QX 5705 Gunner Keith Rigby Begbie

14.08.1916 – 23.09.2008

By Peter Bruce



KEITH RIGBY BEGBIE
14.08.1916 ~ 23.09.2008

Keith was a Charters Towers boy born in 1916. Not much is known of his early life however he did enlist in the 11th Light Horse Regiment in 1939 and at the age of 24 he travelled to Toowoomba and enlisted in the AIF on 28th May 1940. For reasons known only to him, he put his age down by 12 months, telling the enlistment officer he was born in 1917. Perhaps he did not want to appear too old to enlist.

His first posting was to 'A' Squadron, 7th Division Cavalry Regiment and by December 26th, 1940, Keith was in the Middle East, initially training with Australian made Machine Gun Carriers but later his unit were back to using guns mounted in trucks. His unit returned to Australia in March 1942 and he was allocated to 2nd/4th Australian Field Regiment. After training at Atherton in North Queensland, he and his unit deployed to New Guinea on 28th September 1942. By this time,

Singapore had fallen, and some 130,000 allied personnel were prisoners of war. Of these, 15,000 were Australians and the situation in the Pacific looked very grim.

Keith had vivid and disturbing memories of the Huggins Perimeter and the Battle of Sanananda where he came close to death on several occasions. A while later, in 1943, he was in one, of two, gun detachments attached to the American 503 Parachute Regiment when they launched their memorable airborne assault on the air strip at Nadzab in the Markham Valley of New Guinea. This was a precursor to the advance on Lae by the 25th Infantry Brigade. Keith was the only Queenslander who made the jump. One can only imagine how it must have felt to respond to the order: "Stand to the door!" Keith said of that jump: "I seem to recall that on landing I felt rather like a punch-drunk boxer answering the bell for the 12th!" In all, 302 planes took part in securing the Nadzab airstrip. These 'volunteers' pushed their short barrel 25 Pounders out of the Dakota aircraft and then followed them out. Keith was a regular attendee at 2/4th Field Regiment Association functions and very proudly received his parachute jump wings with combat star at the units 50th anniversary.

Keith was wounded in action on 19 December 1942 and eventually returned Australia in February 1944. He was discharged from the AIF on 14 November 1944. Keith was always happy to share his military story with colleagues, but he was adamant that the

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focus of his experiences be on the importance of medical research and not his life experiences. He commented once that; "Medical research is of vital importance. There have been so many advances since I was a boy and we must continue researching to improve outcomes for generations to come". Keith had an avid interest in advances in technology and research, particularly in the areas of cancer and heart and was renown for offering great encouragement to researchers.



Keith's medals included:

- 1939-45 Star
- Africa Star
- Pacific Star
- Defence Medal
- War Medal 1939 – 45
- Australia Service Medal 1939 – 45.

Keith was awarded a Commander-In-Chiefs Card for distinguished service in Nadzab which was promulgated in General Order 1 of 1945.

Keith having a beer in Beirut circa 1941

Keith was laid to rest at Mt Thompson Crematorium West Chapel on 29th September 2008.

Acknowledgements:

- The late Arthur Burke who gathered notes on Keith's military service and life. Arthur also treasured Keith's friendship as Secretary to the 2/4th Field Regiment Association. This obituary has been compiled from Arthur's notes and Service records.