

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Major General Donald Ross Kerr, CBE, ED (Retd)

1910 – 1984

By Colonel A R Burke, OAM, (Retd)

Major General (MAJGEN) Kerr enlisted in the Militia in 1926 at the age of 16 and gained his commission in 1931 in 105 Battery, Field Artillery. He reached the rank of Major in the Field Artillery in 1939 and served as Second in Command (2IC) of the 2nd/10th Field Regiment during the bitter fighting in Malaya prior to being taken Prisoner of War by the Japanese at the Fall of Singapore in 1942.

The 2nd/10th Field Regiment was a Queensland based unit which fired the new 25 Pounder Gun. He served with distinction during the Malaya campaign, being twice Mentioned in Despatches, and actually commanded the regiment in battle due to the illness of the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Walsh. Major Kerr had an integral role in the planning of the highly successful Nithsdale Estate Action on 26 – 27 January 1942, where the Australian Brigade, under the command of Brigadier Harold Taylor, repelled the advancing Japanese at the Nithsdale and Joo Lye Rubber Estates, south of Mersing. The 2nd/18th Infantry Battalion also played a major role in this successful action, which turned the main Japanese Army Column south to meet the rest of the 8th Division at Muar. This highly successful action has received little recognition.

During captivity Major Kerr served as 2IC to Colonel Charles Anderson, VC of 2nd Battalion, A Force on the infamous Burma Railway, where his courage and loyalty were a great inspiration to his men. 2nd Battalion consisted of 1000 Australians, who began laying the line at Thanbyuzayat in Burma, and then walked the full 44 km of the railway to finish the war at Tamarkan in Thailand. 160 men of 2nd Battalion perished during this fateful task.

After World War Two, he commanded the 30th Medium Regiment RAA, Citizens Military Force (CMF), and in 1956 he was promoted to Brigadier to command the CMF 5th Army Group, Royal Artillery (5AGRA). During this period, he played an integral role in the formation of the present Wide Bay Training Area, which is located near Tin Can Bay, east of Gympie. This training area provides ideal terrain for an artillery training range, and still forms a vital part of the Army's training facilities. The main base at Wide Bay Training Area is called Camp Kerr in his honour.

MAJGEN Kerr was appointed to the position of CMF Member of the Military Board in 1962 on his promotion to Major General, being the first Queenslander to achieve this rank in the CMF. MAJGEN Kerr was honoured by the Queen with a Commander of the British Empire, which was awarded in 1964.

MAJGEN Kerr died on 22 October 1984 and was buried at Dayboro Cemetery.