

# THE EXHIBITOR

## NEWSLETTER OF THE ARMY MUSEUM OF SOUTH Australia



**AMOSA**



**December 2024**

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## Our Year 2024 .....

**School visits** this year most were only classes of 25 so numbers were not as high as previous years. Two years ago we had about 2000 students probably 1500 last year and 1000 this year. You could say over the last 3 years we average approximately 1500 students. (These are structured formal visits using the Museums history program with up to 6 stands for students to undertake work on projects. The teachers decide if they want to continue a project back in school using online resources.

Interaction with other museums eg visit to migration museum, loan items to National Military Motor Museum and the Unley City Council Museum.

Strong online presence (website, Facebook.

Introduction of the MYOB Account system and the SQUARE EFTPOS system. updated our forms and documents to comply with ISO 9001 Document Handling requirements.

We conducted a number of **external displays** at military supported events eg Remembrance Day and provided guest speakers for external organisations eg Lions, Rotary and Probus.

-A major **display** for 16 Regiment Open Day at Woodside.

We produced and distributed a **booklet** to help members of the public research members and friends military history.

Members attended **curatorial courses** to upgrade skills and knowledge of storage and handling of historical items.

A successful **history lunch** during the SA Government History Festival in May with over 100 attending with 3 guest speakers on the history of Keswick Barracks.

A highly successful year for our Gres staff and volunteers. On the last Wednesday of each month we have a **morning tea** for our volunteers. A guest speaker and recognition of birthdays are a feature of the morning tea. Thanks to our volunteers for the cakes and savouries.

A date for our **Annual History Lunch** is 14 May 2025.

*By Greg Rosser, Chair, AMOSA Foundation*

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## Happenings around the Museum.....



Our next project for 2025 may well be this Blitz truck. Originally made in Canada with parts produced in Australia.



Dave Edgar seen here with brush in hand giving the Grant Tank a fresh look prior to development of an audio visual display.



David Williams with brush in hand giving the front door a fresh coat of varnish after sanding down the door. The foyer and door of the Museum are important features of our displays and access to our visitors and patrons. Constant upgrading is our aim!

## 2025 ACTIVITIES

### Vietnam Veterans

**Walk** between Edithburgh and Coobowie. Official opening 18th August 2025.

### AMOSA Youtube Videos

There are 6 there at present and more to follow.

<https://www.youtube.com/@armymuseumofsouthaustralia11>

## Interesting facts about the 19 Sixers.....

- \* A staggering 99% of people born between 1930 and 1946 (globally) are now dead
- \* If you were born in this time span, your ages range between 77 and 93 years old (a 16-year age span) and you are one of the rare surviving one-percenters
- \* You are the smallest group of children born since the early 1900's
- \* You are the last generation, climbing out of the depression, who can remember the winds of war and the impact of a world at war that rattled the structure of our daily lives for years
- \* You are the last to remember ration books for everything from tea to sugar to shoes
- \* You can remember milk being delivered to your house early in the morning and placed in the "milk box" at the front door
- \* Discipline was strictly enforced by parents and teachers
- \* You are the last generation who spent childhood without television and instead, you "imagined" what you heard on the radio
- \* With no TV, you spent your childhood "playing outside". There was no city playground for kids
- \* The lack of television in your early years meant that you had little real understanding of what the world was like
- \* We got "black-and-white" TV in the late 50s that had 3 stations and no remote
- \* Telephones (if you had one) were one to a house and hung on the wall in the kitchen (who cares about privacy)
- \* Computers were called calculators; they were hand-cranked
- \* Typewriters were driven by pounding fingers, throwing the carriage, and changing the ribbon. INTERNET and GOOGLE were words that did not exist
- \* Newspapers and magazines were written for adults and your dad would give you the comic pages after he read the news
- \* The news was broadcast on your radio in the evening

The radio network gradually expanded from 3 stations to thousands

- \* New highways would bring jobs and mobility. Most highways were 2 lanes and there were no Motorways
- \* You went to the city to shop
- \* You walked to school and back
- \* Your parents were suddenly free from the confines of the depression and the war, and they threw themselves into working hard to make a living for their families
- \* You weren't neglected, but you weren't today's all-consuming family focus
- \* You entered a world of overflowing plenty and opportunity; a world where you were welcomed, enjoyed yourselves
- \* You felt secure in your future, although the depression and poverty were deeply remembered
- \* Polio was still acrippler. Everyone knew someone who had it
- \* You are the last generation to experience an interlude when there were no threats to our country. World War 2 was over and the cold war, terrorism, global warming, and perpetual economic insecurity had yet to haunt life
- \* Only your generation can remember a time after WW2 when our world was secure and full of bright promise and plenty
- \* You grew up at the best possible time, a time when the world was getting better

*Submitted unsubstantiated information by John Claxton*



## Dikko.....





# 16 Regiment Open Day .....

AMOSA was invited to set up a display for the Woodside Barracks Open Day to be held by 16 Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery on Saturday, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2024. This occasion was to be especially auspicious as it would be the last occasion the unit would hold a Family Day at this location after being based there since 1969.



The theme of the display was to focus on the historical Air Defence role of the Unit to complement the modern Air Defence capability on show by 16 Regiment. In 2022, we had participated in this event and the experience from that occasion influenced the choice of display material. As per previous displays, the Land Rover with 106 mm recoilless rifle; the Rapier Missile Launcher and Tracker Unit were taken. To maintain the anti-aircraft theme, the Tobruk Bren gunner and Vietnam rifleman mannequins were moved from the display in the Museum. The Vietnam greens figure was updated with a 1970-80s era Redeye Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) Launcher. Another mannequin outfitted in 1980-90s era Auscam camouflage uniform and webbing was placed next to the Rapier Tracker to represent that time period.



Inside the tent, we placed a couple of 16 Air Defence photobooks on covered tables for past and present members



of the unit to peruse and annotate if desired.

This was backed by a standing partition board with Unit symbols, a short history, and a roll each of past Commanding Officers (CO) and Regimental Sergeant Majors (RSM). Also featured was an especially printed banner of Australian air defence equipment throughout the unit's history. Finally, to inject a bit of a historical touch, the trusty WWI mannequin with Brodie helmet stood guard, flanked by banners on the WWI Australian soldier and WWI artillery.



The weather on the day could not have been better – and it was borne out by the multitude of visitors and volunteers that came out to visit the stand and event in general. The Open Day not only offered an insight into 16 Regiment's current and past activities but was enhanced by the Army Band and 10/27 Bn RSAR enacting a mock section assault at regular intervals. ADF Welfare organisations were also on hand as well as a contingent from the National Military Vehicle Museum whose vehicles complemented our display.

Thanks go out to John and Lisette McInnes and the entirety of the AMOSA military team for their assistance in set-up/take-down and manning of the stand for the day. Also, thanks to the volunteers who turned up to support AMOSA on the day.

**By Adrian Li, Curator**

## Book Launch .....

AMOSA staff attended the Book Launch – Her Great Adventure, Dorothy ‘Puss’ Campbell WW2 Army Nursing Sister by Janet Scarfe on Thursday 7 November 2024, at the Torrens Parade Ground Drill Hall.

The book launch commenced at 1700 and concluded at 1810 followed by some light refreshments, book purchasing and signing of books.

It was a sold out event with some really good stories shared about Puss’s life. A great event. Janet and Suzanne were very happy that AMOSA was in attendance and the finding of Puss’s diaries.



Book launch signing with Janet Scarfe

## Books for Purchase at the Museum .....

New Release South Australian military books at the Museum

oooOOOooo

**Not One of the Good Men**  
(Jayne Bates) \$40

**REVIEW:**

“‘Not One of the Good Men’, by One of the Very Good Writers. I finished this book a couple of days ago, having read it a Chapter at a time. I couldn’t read it quickly. This is a story of a War I knew a bit about, but soon realised I knew very little indeed. Little of the numbers, the colonial superiority and ineptitude and the range of battles endured by many strong men. I was appalled at the deaths, the uncaringness of leaders and the squalor of the battlefields. Then there was the sadness of Glen’s family story - thank goodness for that lovely women in England! This is a book that lived with me for the days I read it. It is still moving around my mind as I ponder that incessant question: ‘When is war ever an answer?’ The research is phenomenal. How incredible is it that Glen’s letters survived in a family that seemingly cared so little about him and, at times, he them? What a treasure for all members of the diverse Bates families to think one of their less revered members could, through another member, have such an impact on all who read about him and his wars. I love this work. The construction of the story so effortlessly weaves a life and a major time in world history, into an unforgettable piece of literature.

With much gratitude. And admiration!” (John Holmes, May 2024) Penneshaw Progress Facebook



**Her Great Adventure**  
(Janet Scarfe)  
\$45

Dorothy ‘Puss’ Campbell  
WW2 Army Nursing Sister

**REVIEW:**

Her Great Adventure is a fresh, factual and engaging account of Australian army nursing in WW2. One of 3600 members of the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS), Dorothy ‘Puss’ Campbell served in England, Egypt, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Queensland and Adelaide . Puss and her colleagues are shown nursing in many challenging circumstances. For the first time the sisters’ lives away from the wards come to light – their travels, sightseeing, friendships and romances.

Professional historian Dr Janet Scarfe has woven together Puss’s personal diaries and photographs, and the official records of the hospitals where she served.

The result is this ground-breaking book.

**From Sue Urban—AMOSA Shop**





## Morris Car Club Visit....

The Morris Minor Club of South Australia had a day out at the Army Museum of South Australia on Sunday 24 November. On a bright and warm Sunday morning the convoy of immaculately restored 'giants' of the motoring past descended on Keswick Barracks for a visit to the Army Museum.

After parking and 'right dressing' the vehicles in perfect alignment the 26 members were given a brief and history



*Right dressing the vehicles*



presentation by our guide, John Claxton and then taken for a Heritage Walk around the Barracks while being entertained by Parade rehearsals by the Cadets, preparing for their afternoon parade.



*Picnic lunch under the trees*

Following a picnic lunch, which they provided for themselves, the club members visited the Museum galleries and were full of praise for the quality and work done on the displays by the volunteers. An enjoyable day out.'

*By John Claxton—Museum Guide*

## Unmarked Graves No More .....



As you wander through the Boer War display you may notice the above studio photograph of South Australian nurses titled 'Patriotic nurses for South Africa'. Those of you, like me, may even remember the painting we had of the same photograph. The photograph has Nurse Agnes Cocks second in the back row. Agnes and her sister Edith were buried in a grave at West Terrace Cemetery with only their first names as any form of identification.

On Monday 4th November, the Headstone Project South Australia (in which both Peter Collins and I are volunteers) dedicated the headstones of both Agnes and Edith as they were both World War 1 nursing sisters:

Agnes Maude Cocks was born on 14 August 1871, the daughter of John and Sarah Cocks (nee Jones).



Agnes was the fourth child born into this family of 8 children, 3 boys and 5 girls. On leaving school, Agnes Cocks trained as a nursing sister at the Adelaide Hospital. In January 1900, Agnes volunteered for the newly created South Australian Nursing

Contingent for service in the Boer War in South Africa. In February 1900, she departed Australia with 8 other nurses with the 4th detachment of the NSW Lancers en route to Natal, South Africa where she served with the British Army Medical Corps. At the end of the Boer War, Sister Cocks returned briefly to Australia then returned to South Africa and worked in Johannesburg. After some considerable time in South Africa, there she sailed to England, to practise her profession. Agnes returned to Australia several times but because she was in London when war was declared in 1914, she Corps and served with a medical unit in France. Returning to England, she then served at the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps at the Queen Alexandra's Military

# Unmarked Graves No More (Cont).....

Hospital near London. Apart from military personnel wounded by munitions, this hospital attended to cases of trench fever, frost bite, shell shock and gas gangrene. It was recorded that the strain of war work had told considerably on her once robust condition. Sister Cocks was awarded both the Queen’s and King’s South Africa Medals, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. The South Australian Government also awarded her a Devoted Service Cross. Sister Cocks returned to Australia in April 1918 and lived with her widowed mother on South Terrace. On return to Australia, she tried to enlist in the Australian Army Nursing Service but was found to be medically unfit. Sadly, on 28 June 1925 following severe burns she suffered in a domestic accident, Sister Agnes Cocks, died from double pneumonia aged 53 years.

Edith Cocks was also the daughter of John and Sarah Cocks (nee Jones) and was born on the 14 September 1874, Mount Gambier, SA. Edith was the fifth child born



into this family of 8 children, 3 boys and 5 girls. On leaving school Edith became a trainee masseuse in the Adelaide Hospital. On 1 April 1908 Edith was appointed Honorary Masseuse at the Adelaide Hospital but resigned from the position on the 23

November 1909.

In 1915 at the age of 41, Edith enlisted into the Australian Army Nursing Service and was attached to the 2nd Australian General Hospital. She embarked from Melbourne aboard HMAT A67 Orsova on 12 November 1915, disembarking in Egypt and was first posted to the Al Hayat Convalescent Depot in Helwan (Cairo). She remained with the AIF both in the Middle East and England for the rest of the war. Edith embarked from Suez for Australia on 18 July 1919 aboard the HT Dunluce Castle with returning soldiers and three nursing sisters; E.H Chapman, L.L Bentley, and N.K Whitehead arriving on 23 August 1919. She was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. She reported to the 7th Australian General Hospital at Keswick and was discharged from the AANS on the 17 October 1919. She returned home to live with her mother and two sisters. After discharge, she was appointed to the Repatriation Hospital Keswick and remained there until 1933. Edith Cocks died in Adelaide on 31 August 1937 aged 63 years.

*By Sue Urban , Web Manager*



*Headstones of both Agnes and Edith*

# Working with the Community .....



From time to time the Museum is asked to assist community groups such as the Free Agents Youth Theatre which presented LAMBS in June, at the Goodwood Theatre

& Studios, and was a hugely popular and critical success. Exploring the fictional lives of underage boys who enlisted in WWI, the play relies on period-specific clothing, which lead the Designer to source military outfits from the Army Museum of South Australia, Keswick Army Barracks.



The organisers said: “They have always been incredibly helpful – their domain

is an extraordinary resource that should be cherished and preserved for future generations.”

Let’s hope that we are able to continue to work with the community in this manner.

*-By Heather Simms Curator, Uniforms & Textiles*



# Volunteer Profiles.....

Trudy is an experienced capable volunteer having been involved in a variety of museum functions. She is also a member of the Museum Board and quietly works behind the scenes researching and recording museum data and assisting with museum catering as required.



<b>Name</b>	<b>Trudy Babinskas</b>
Nick Name	Trudles
Where were you born	Adelaide-Same year as Grange Hermitage
Other places lived	Radium Hill (No need to turn the lights on at home)
School attended	Terowie Convent School, St Aloysius
What did you want to be when growing up	Test Pilot or crop duster
What was your first job	Legal Secretary
Have you served in the ADF	Army Reserve (1981 - 1998)
Rank achieved	Corporal - Catering Corps
Any overseas service	No
What was your main civilian employment(s)	Police Officer (Crime Scene Investigator)
	Social worker (Criminal Justice System)
When did you start at the museum	2014
What brought you to the Museum	A request to supplement the Museum Catering Group - to provide a womans touch!!
What is your primary role at the Museum	Entering object data onto the Mosaic data entry system/research assistant
Most memorable event at the Museum	Cooking scones on the *KFM for the WRAAC Association Book launch.
Do you have a war hero	Matron Vivian Bullwinkel Sir Cedric Stanton Hicks - inventor of *KFM
Do you have any hobbies	Cooking, Mosaicing (making kitsch things with little tiles). Studying 'Another language course' at TAFE to assist future refugees arrivals to South Australia
Favourite food	Ratatouille
Favourite drink	Red wine (all good but some better than others) however happy to accept Single Malt Whisky as a present if anyone is interested
Favourite sport	Watching cooking shows, Gliding (soaring the skies)
Favourite sports team	None
Favourite holiday spot.	The Kimberlies
Favourite song/band	Hugh Laurie
Favourite saying	She'll be right'
Favourite car make	Morgan
What's at the top of your bucket list.	Was 'flying in a Tiger Moth' but having achieved that - Travel anywhere!!
	* KFM -Kitchen Field Mobile
Any comments	May the museum survive and prosper in the future .

Kim is a quiet achiever, producing a plethora of electronic 'stuff' in support of a variety of Museum activities.



<b>Real name</b>	<b>Donald Kimball Hutton</b>
Preferred first name	Kim
Nick Name	Kimbo
Where were you born	Adelaide
Other places lived	Melbourne, Darwin, Newcastle
Where did you go to school	Urrbrae
What did you want to be when growing up	Electronic Technician
What was your first job	Barman (Dad's Pub - Strathalbyn)
Have you served in the ADF	RAAF
Rank achieved	Corporal
Did you serve overseas	No
What was your civilian employment	Marine Electronics Broadcast TV (Channel 10)
When did you start at the museum	2011
What brought you to the Museum	Former 2IC asked him to digitise some films that were found in the archives - as they say 'the rest is history.
What is your role at the Museum	IT / AV Tech and video / audio archivist
Most memorable event at the Museum	Jeff Ayles Memorial Service - Kim played an integral role in the audio-visual and musical presentations
Do you have any war heroes	Father and two Grandfathers (ADF)
Do you have any hobbies	Ham radio and video production
Favourite food	Smashed avocado
Favourite drink	Cabernet Sauvignon
Favourite sport	Scuba Diving
Favourite sports team	Socceroos
Favourite holiday spot.	Port Elliot (Caravanning)
Favourite song/band	Quincey Jones
Favourite saying	"She'll be right"
Favourite car make	BMW
What's at the top of your bucket list.	More overseas travel (cruising)
Any comments	Museum volunteers and the Army staff are a great mob to work with.



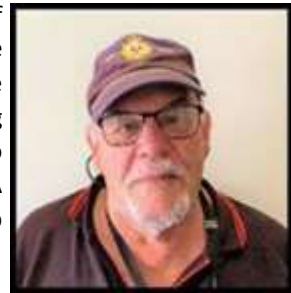
# Volunteer Profiles (Cont).....

Goldy is an iconic character that is always cheerful and happy to have a chat and he has a lot to chat about with over 200 friends on Facebook



<b>Name</b>	<b>Barry *Orlando Goldsworthy</b>
Nick Name	Goldy
Where were you born	Born 2 Nov 1944 at home in Halifax Street
Other places lived	Near Morphett Racecourse (Brother was a jockey)
School attended	One of the first kids to attend Forbes Primary School
What did you want to be when growing up	Join army, jockey
What was your first job	Apprentice steel moulder
Have you served in the ADF	CMF 1961-1964 -3/9 SAMR
Rank achieved	Trooper
Did you serve overseas	No
What was your civilian employment	Truck driver - Brambles, Perry's Engineering, Bar Manager AAFCANS Warradale Barracks
When did you start at the museum	2000
What brought you to the Museum	Interest in history
What is your role at the Museum	Working for Jeff Ayles - 16 years painting all the guns, now graduated to cobweb remover and Ground Control OIC blower
Most memorable event at the Museum	Procuring acquisitions from RSL rebuilding projects for museum displays
Do you have a war hero	A cousin - he was a highly decorated bomb disposal expert
Do you have any hobbies	Bodgies and Widgies Motor cycle club
Favourite food	Pub food
Favourite drink	Beer
Favourite sport	AFL
Favourite sports team	Bays and Crows
Favourite holiday spot.	Iron Knob
Favourite song/band	All rock and roll, John Schumann
Favourite saying	Ooroo kangaroo'
Favourite car make	HK Premier Holden
Any comments	*Orlando - named after a ship that landed the first settlers his family) to SA at Glenelg
	Dad died when I was 14 - had to get a job to support mother
	Cheer up hut piano has his mothers name written on it
	Married twice, divorced twice currently full time carer for son.
	Loves being part of the museum family

Ron has gathered a wealth of information and experience during his association with the military. An interesting character, always prepared to offer an opinion - just ask him. A loyal member who likes to keep the 'B's honest.



<b>Name</b>	<b>Ronald Fleet - only child</b>
Nick Name	Fleety
Where were you born	McBride Hospital North Adelaide on 6 June 1941 - an only child
Other places lived	Too many to remember
School attended	GillesStreet Primary then Goodwod Boys Technical High
What did you want to be when growing up	Join permanent Navy as apprentice but father would not sign enlistment form
What was your first job	Apprentice plumber with Government
Have you served in the ADF	National Service at Woodside 1957 and then 5 yrs CMF with 3/9 SAMR
Rank achieved	CPL
Did you serve overseas	No
What was your civilian employment	Stayed in Commonwealth Government - worked at Katherine NT as a plumber
When did you start at the museum	2000 - under the guidance of Ron Oxley, a former SAMRA volunteer, restoring armoured vehicles
What brought you to the Museum	Call for volunteers at a SAMRA meeting
What have you been involved with at the Museum	Historic restoration of 3/9 vehicle
What is your current role at the Museum	Outside maintenance , OIC event parking control
Most memorable event at the Museum	Xmas functions, Museum open day, recovery of Saracen from Murray Bridge Trip to Point Cook Airforce Museum organised by former Manager , Major Barry Willoughby
Do you have a war hero	My Uncle Len - served with Diver Derrick at Lae, Weary Dunlop
Do you have any hobbies	Militaria collector, militaria research, part-time volunteer assistant at a antique shop
Favourite food	Well known for love of food - particularly asian
Favourite drink	Beer with a rum chaser
Favourite sport	AFL , Cricket. Premier League Soccer
Favourite sports team	Crows
Favourite holiday spot.	South America- Buenos Aires
Favourite song/band	Buddy Holly, enjoys classical music
Favourite saying	Whatever'
Favourite car make	Renault and Peugeot
What's at the top of your bucket list.	Visit to antarctica
Any comments	Museum has changed over the years and future is not looking promising. It will be a pity to see it move.
Career highlight	Drove Brigadier Oscar Wayland's Saracen command vehicle on Exercise.



## The AUSTEN Sub-machine Gun .....



Old Diggers are familiar with the venerable Owen Machine Carbine, (bottom of picture), which served the Australian Army so well from 1942 until replaced by the F1 sub machine gun in the 1960s. But less well

known is the AUSTEN submachine gun, (top of picture), which served alongside the Owen, albeit for a shorter period. The name derives from AUSTRALIAN STEN, and was an attempt to improve the British Sten gun by incorporating the best features of that weapon and the German MP38/40. The weapon combined the barrel, trigger assembly and magazine of the Sten, (these were interchangeable with the Sten), and the telescoping return spring cover, pistol grips and folding stock of the MP38/40.



*AUSTEN Sub-machine Gun Mark 1 (Author's collection)*

The gun also included the following features: a front pistol grip, which eliminated the danger of the firer's little finger being caught by the bolt, if inadvertently placed over the ejection port, as was the case with early marks of the Sten. The front pistol grip also housed a small oiled bag of spare parts.

The stock could be folded forward over the front pistol grip and this feature was popular with Z Force commandos and parachute troops as it enabled the weapon to be tucked under the straps of a parachute harness. The weapon has been severely criticised by the YouTube channel "Forgotten Weapons", as being over engineered, and not much of an improvement on the Sten. (Although the presenter was less critical of its performance on the range.) Approximately 20,000 AUSTEN Mk1s were produced from

1942 onwards, followed by 200 Mk2s which were never issued. There was also a suppressed version which was used by Z Force commandos.



*Supressed AUSTEN sub machine gun. Almost all AUSTENS were spray painted in camouflage*

The main problem with the weapon was that it incorporated the double stack, single feed magazine of the Sten. This led to stoppages if the lips of the magazine were damaged and required a special loading tool to compress the magazine spring.

(The Owen, by contrast, used a double stack, double feed magazine which eliminated this problem. The Owen's magazine could also be loaded by hand) There were other criticisms from front line troops, namely:

The folding stock was too long for some soldiers, as it had to

clear the front pistol grip when folded forward.

When fired from the shoulder it was difficult for some soldiers to cock the weapon for the same reason. Magazine issues as described above

The side mounted magazine was easily caught in soldiers' webbing. The ejection port on the right side of the receiver was prone to the ingress of mud and other debris, whereas the Owen's ejection port was on the bottom of the receiver and was aided by gravity and ejecting cases to clear debris.

The cocking handle slot ran the whole length of the receiver and allowed dirt and other debris to easily enter the working parts.



*AUSTEN Mk 1 aimed from the shoulder. Note the long reach necessary to cock the weapon. (Author's collection)*

Whereas the Owen had a protracted development, (and some authors maintain that this was deliberate obstruction by the Army bureaucracy), the Austen was rushed into service at a time when Australia faced the real possibility of a Japanese invasion. Some sources quote as many as 30,000 Lee Enfield rifles were sent to Great Britain in 1940 to help make up for the losses at Dunkirk, and although the Government Small Arms Factory at Lithgow was tooled to produce Bren and Vickers guns as well as Lee Enfields, these were complex weapons which required many skilled man hours to produce. The Australian Army had shown a belated interest in sub machine guns, (often describing them as "gangster's weapons"), and Australia had purchased almost 19,000 Thompson M1928s at the beginning of the war.

Unfortunately, the Thompson was also a complex weapon which required a skilled production



*Australian para-trooper with AUSTEN gun. Note side ejection port and stock folded over the front pistol grip. (AWM photo in public domain)*

## The AUSTEN Sub-machine Gun (Cont).....

workforce, was heavy, and expensive, and as there was no production facilities in Australia had to be purchased from the United States at a time when the US Army needed every sub machine gun available for its own needs. (A Thompson M1928 cost the Australian tax payer 56 pounds, or about 5,000 AUD in today's money.)

What was needed was a cheap and easily produced sub machine gun which could be made by companies not used to producing complex weapons.

In 1941 technical information and an example of the Sten Mk1 and Mk2 were received from the UK. The Army had been under the impression that the Sten was a high- quality weapon which had undergone protracted development, and was shocked at the gun's cheap and shoddy appearance. (More printable sobriquets bestowed upon the gun by British soldiers were, "the plumbers' nightmare" and the "stench gun")

The Ordnance Board approached Die Casters of Melbourne to review the weapon and improve its design. Carmichael and Sons of Sydney, (a stove manufacturer) also undertook to produce the Austen

Parts of the Austen, (the magazine housing and front pistol grip assembly), were produced by the die casting process by which molten metal is forcibly injected into a mould. The rest of the weapon was constructed of pressed and welded steel. As an improvement on the Sten gun, the Austen was a failure. As well as the failings described above, it suffered production delays with both companies, and was more expensive in both cost and man hours.



*The magazine housing and front pistol grip assembly of the Austen, produced by the die casting process.*

A Mk2 Sten gun could be produced in ten hours at a cost of 2 pounds sterling, (about 80 GBP in today's money), whereas an Austen took an average of 18 hours at an average cost of 10 pounds. By contrast, although the Owen cost about 14 pounds, and took 21-man hours to produce, the weapon was robust and reliable, and is

widely regarded as one of the best sub machine guns ever produced. (Figures quoted by Kevin Smith in "The Owen Gun Files") In 1944 the Chief of the General Staff, General Northcote, directed that Australian troops fighting in the Pacific should only be issued Owen guns, and all Austen guns were to be returned to Australia. The Austen was passed to the Volunteer Defence Corps, (Australia's equivalent of the British Home Guard) and other troops based in Australia, such as POW camp guards. Most sources state that the Austen was declared obsolete and withdrawn from service in 1946. However, in 1949 the Australian Army deployed troops to break a strike by NSW coal miners, and there are a number of pictures on the Internet which show these soldiers armed with Austen guns.

### SPECIFICATIONS

- \* Calibre: 9mm. (Cartridge 9mmx19mm Parabellum)
- \* Magazine capacity: 28 Austen or 32 Sten
- \* Rate of fire: 500 rpm
- \* Weight: 3.9kg loaded
- \* Length: 845 mm stock open, 552mm stock closed
- \* Action: Blowback
- \* Effective range: 70 metres
- \* Muzzle velocity: 396 metres per second

\*These weapons were referred to as machine carbines when originally produced, but the Infantry Small Arms Training Manual of 1943 refers to them as submachine guns.



*Over engineered? The Austen incorporated a screw driver and cleaning rod in the struts of the folding stock. (Author's collection.)*

\*\*I would like to thank Garry Schutt of the Military Arms Preservation Society and Cpl Adrian Li of AMOSA for their assistance with this article.

*By Pete Tulloch, South Australian Mounted Rifles Association*



*An Austen Mark 1 submachine gun*

