BOOK REVIEW

Battle Winners
Australian Artillery in the Western Desert 1940-1942

Alan H Smith
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Reviewer: Ian George, March 2017

Battle Winners explores the rise of artillery to become arguably a decisive combat arm in the battles waged by the allies against the Italian Army and the Afrika Korps in the deserts of North Africa from 1940 to 1942.

More than that however, Alan Smith adds considerably to the body of military history with a detailed description of the allied development of artillery organisations, equipment and tactics leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War.

The main focus of the book is the experiences of the six artillery field regiments of the 6th and 9th Australian Divisions during operations in the harsh terrain of the Western Desert and describes the heroism of the participants in the siege of Tobruk and the extreme hardships endured during the battles at Benghazi and El Alamein.

If the words ‘Stonk’, ‘Check Window’, ‘Bombard’, ‘Meteor Telegram’, ‘Zero Lines’, and ‘Counter Bombardment’ warm the cockles of your heart, then this is the book for you. The little known (or acknowledged) part played by counter battery fire in the battle plans of senior commanders is explored and the application of the technology employed in sound ranging bases and flash spotting and the organisations within which the intelligence thus gained is processed, integrated and applied is detailed.

The ‘black arts’ of artillery intelligence and the importance of and advantages gained in resolving the vast survey problems are also examined and placed into the context of battle planning and the logistic difficulties of handling vast quantities of artillery ammunition to support operations is brought into sharp relief.

Familiar names such as Herring, Vickery, and Ramsay together with many others appear throughout the text and gunners, layers, signallers, command post operators and drivers are not forgotten in the many stories also included of outstanding deeds by men in these trades.

Alan Smith joined the Royal Australian Artillery in 1951 and has written extensively on the history of Australian Artillery and in Battle Winners he includes details of unit organisations, photographs, maps and a Roll of Honour.

The book is introduced by a foreword by Major General Steve Gower, AO, AO (Mil).

The Royal United Services Institute of Victoria Library wishes to thank the publisher for providing a copy for review.