

DONALD ROBERT McKELVIE



Donald and Ellen (nee Chester) on their wedding day

Donald McKelvie was born at Wellington Mills on the 17th of August 1913.

At the time of his enlistment at Claremont, he gave his occupation as that of a Share Farmer and named Mrs Isobel Margaret Guthridge (sister) as his next of kin. Donald was later to marry and therefore change his Next of Kin to that of his wife Ellen Alice. They married on the 24th of December 1941.

Donald McKelvie enlisted on the 7th of January 1942, his service record shows two dates, the first being 15th of December 1941, this date is then ruled through, and the 7th of January 1942 inserted. This would explain the difference in naming his next of kin. Donald's wife Ellen was also a member of the services. (W90866 Pte. E A McKelvie VAD 3rd AGTS)

The 16th of January 1942 saw Donald transferred to the Recruit training Battalion at Northam. After spending some time at Northam during which time Donald sustained a severe cut to thumb, he was to join the 2/32nd Battalion and embarked Fremantle bound for the Middle East with US Convoy 16 P2. (Ship unknown), on the 6th of September 1942. During the voyage, Donald was admitted to the ship's hospital with suspected meningitis. Disembarked at Suez 8th of October 1942. Marched into AIF staging camp in November 1942.

From the 22nd of November to 27th of December 1942, Donald was hospitalised with diarrhoea / dysentery.

On the 24th of January 1943, Donald embarked Suez bound for Fremantle, disembarking at that port on the 18th of February. Like many of his fellow soldiers, Donald was charged with being A.W.O.L. for a period of three days and was fined £2. He was encamped at Melville for a period of 2 months before boarding a train bound for South Australia, for onward movement. On the 7th of August 1943, embarked United States Transport Ship "Steinmetz" bound for New Guinea.

Donald McKelvie's service record shows that on the 25th of October he was wounded in action against the Imperial Japanese Army. One week later, Pte. Donald Robert McKelvie succumbed to his wounds and died on the 1st of November 1943.

Donald was initially buried at Langemak Bay, north of Finschafen. His body was later exhumed and reinterred at Finschafen War cemetery, finally in 1946, Donald was laid to rest at the War Cemetery in Lae, Papua New Guinea. Plot U.A.6 Memorial ID 23715417.

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The 2/32 Battalion

The 2/32nd Battalion was unique in being one of only three Australian Infantry Battalions formed in the United Kingdom, later, the 2/32nd formed part of the 25th Brigade and carried out its training at Tidworth and Colchester in January 1941, it left Britain and sailed to the Middle East. The 2/32nd left Scotland on the 4th of January 1941 and disembarked in Egypt on the 9th of March, travelled by train to Palestine and encamped at Kilo 89 where it absorbed its fourth rifle company, D Company that had formed and trained in Palestine.

By April the war in the Western Desert had turned against the Allies. The German Afrika Korps led the Axis counterattack, pushing the British back from El Agheila and Benghazi. The 9th Division was subsequently forced to withdraw to Tobruk. One of the division's brigade's, the 24th Brigade, had only two battalions in the "fortress" and it was decided the 2/32nd would transfer to Tobruk. The 2/32nd remained with the 24th Brigade for the rest of the war.

Reorganised for jungle operations, on the 2/32nd participated in the 9th Division's amphibious landing at Red Beach, north-west of Lae. While the division's other brigades had landed on 4 September, the 24th Brigade came ashore during the night of 5 September. The 2/28th and 2/43rd went into the fighting around Lae but the 2/32nd, which had been the divisional reserve, did not take part in the fighting until 14th of September .

Following the fall of Lae, the 20th Brigade landed at Scarlet Beach, north of Finschafen, on 22 September. On 11 October the 24th Brigade moved to Scarlet Beach and successfully defended the area when the Japanese counter-attacked later that month. By the end of the month the main Japanese offensive had withdrawn to Sattelberg, but large numbers of troops were still north of Scarlet Beach on Pino Hill and at Nongora. Advancing along the coast the 2/28th captured Guiska and the 2/32nd, further inland, captured Pino and then Pabu on 20 November. Between 22 to 25 November the Japanese launched a series of unsuccessful attacks against Pabu. The 2/32nd held on - "an Australian island in a Japanese sea" - and suffered 25 men killed and 51 wounded. It counted 195 dead Japanese. Ten days later the 2/43rd joined the 2/32nd and both moved further inland, despite being seriously depleted by illness. They advanced to Christmas Hill on 10 December and the 2/32nd was relieved two days later. It returned to Australia in February 1944.