



A story from the history of Australian Artillery:
Commemorating 150 years – 1871-2021

NX 3317 Gunner C.E. 'Kid' Barnes
2/1st Field Regiment, RAA
'Never Say Quit'



Gunner Crofton Edward Barnes enlisted in October 1939 and was allocated to 2/1st Field Regiment as a Gun Number. Known as 'Kid' by his mates, he was a typical knockabout soldier of the day and as his colourful record depicts, he was often 'on the mat', for a variety of disciplinary reasons throughout his six years of service.

He deployed with the Regiment to the battlefields of the western desert. Then in April 1941, he deployed with the Regiment to Greece, in an attempt to repel the expected German invasion. Against the German onslaught, the 2/1st and the other units fought their way down the Greek mainland, as part of a dogged withdrawal campaign along roads leading to the south coast port of Kalamata. With a staunch rearguard being provided by the New Zealanders and additional British units, it was hoped that some 58,000 Commonwealth troops would be successfully evacuated by the Allied navies.

With their equipment destroyed so as not to be of use to the enemy, the Allied troops waited for their turn to embark and escape. But on 30 April, the Germans broke through, capturing the port and 8,000 of the trapped soldiers, including 'Kid' Barnes.

Barnes was one of a draft of prisoners who were crammed into freight trains bound for POW Camps in Germany. He knew that the further north they went, the harder it would be to escape. The train was now about 80 miles north of Salonika: it was now or never. Jumping from the speeding train, and rolled across the ground and into cover.

For the next six months, he was aided by friendly Greek locals, and eluded the German patrols. Boldly, Barnes moved from village to village, making his way to the east coast of the Mt Athos peninsula. Here he was smuggled onto a Greek fishing vessel, successfully making his way to neutral Turkey.

Being handled back to Allied authorities through the diplomatic chain, 'Kid' Barnes, with other escapees, was able to re-join his unit in the September, and survived the war.

Sources:

Wartime Memories Project, [Battle of Kalamata in the Second World War 1939-1945](#), accessed 17 August 2021

Australia Remembers, [Barnes, Crofton Edward](#), accessed 18 August 2021

Australian War Memorial, [Collection](#), accessed 15 August 2021

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