



25-year-old SGT Kelvin Palmer enlisted in the Second AIF on 23 May 1940 as part of the 2/5th Field Regiment. A veteran of Syria and New Guinea, he acquitted himself well both in and out of action for the next five years of war.

In July 1945, the 7th Australian Division, which included the 2/5th Field Regiment, was tasked with the amphibious assault on the oil rich area of Balikpapan in Borneo.

The Allied amphibious landings at Balikpapan proved to be the last littoral assault conducted in World War Two. A contentious manoeuvre, historians to this day still argue if in fact they were at all necessary.

On the 5th of July 1945, Palmer and his detachment were specially chosen for a key mission. The Gunners deployed forward to just short of a selected position near the vital Manggar Airfield. Their task was to neutralise two enemy 155mm gun emplacements dominating the higher ground, which over the previous two days of concentrated fire, were preventing the Australian troops from assaulting and capturing the airfield. An Australian 6-pounder anti-tank gun had tried previously, prior to dusk, but lacked the weight of fire to silence the 155s. Laying up just short of the 6-pounder gun platform, Palmer's detachment settled in for the night. Just prior to dawn, Palmer ensured every available man was on hand to manhandle the gun quickly into its firing position.

In the emerging light, Palmer laid on the first enemy gun over open sights, then came his order – 'Fire!' and the first of a number of rounds was on its way. With great coolness, SGT Palmer switched his fire between the two targets and even when enemy fire was incoming onto his position from other batteries wounding several members of the detachment, the Australians stuck to grimly to the task at hand. They continued to fire until both of the enemy guns were neutralised. It was then that the infantry pressed forward an attack and successfully occupied the airfield.

For his actions, leadership and complete disregard for his personal safety, Palmer was awarded the Military Medal.

Sources:

O'Brien, John W., *Guns and Gunners: the story of the 2/5th Australian Field Regiment in World War II*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1950

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

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