



A story from the history of Australian Artillery:
Commemorating 150 years – 1871-2021
N270852/NX134492 LBDR Frederick Ronald Wombey MM
14th Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, RAA
‘Standing his Ground’



19-year-old orchardist Fred Wombey was a keen young Digger, eager to do his bit. Enlisting in the Militia in April 1941, he was allocated to the Royal Australian Artillery as an anti-aircraft gun number.

Craving action, he volunteered for service in Darwin where he arrived in August, to join the ranks of the 14th Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. In lieu of action, Fred had to initially settle for drill, flies, humidity, hard work and boredom. But this was about to change...

With the bombing of Pearl Harbour and Japan’s entry into the war, Darwin became part of Australia’s front line. Showing his worth as a good, steady soldier, Fred was promoted to Lance Bombardier in mid-December.

During the enemy air raids on Darwin, a prime target for the attacking force was the Navy’s vital oil storage tanks. Amongst the elements charged with the oil tanks’ inner defences was Wombey and his anti-aircraft detachment. As the air raid sirens wailed, Fred took post on his light machine gun, and could see the formation of enemy dive-bombers and escorting fighters peel off and head straight for his position and the adjacent tanks.

The fighters screamed in and peppered the area around Wombey’s position. As the next wave came in, the fire from the air was so intense that Wombey ordered his men to take cover. Standing his ground, Wombey returned a continuous stream of fire, forcing the planes to break off from the attack.

Reloading, he readied himself for the next attack. The Zeros tore in, intent on silencing the inner air defences before unleashing the dive-bombers. This time, Wombey waited until the attacking plane was close enough to be an ideal target, then he opened up with everything he had, again forcing the Japanese planes to abort.

For his actions that day, Lance Bombardier Frederick Wombey was awarded one of only two Military Medals to be awarded for action on Australian soil. Fred later transferred to the AIF and went on to survive the war.

Sources:

Australian War Memorial, [Collection](#), accessed 18 Aug 2021

Australian War Memorial, [Collection](#), accessed 18 Aug 2021

Australian War Memorial, [Collection](#), accessed 18 Aug 2021

Australia-Japan Research Project, [Collection](#), accessed 18 Aug 2021

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