

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: SX10050
Name: Arnold Hjalmar BERG
Nickname: Arn



Medals and Decorations

1939 - 45 Star

Pacific Star

Defence Medal

War Medal 1939 - 45

Australian Service Medal 1939 - 45

Rank: Driver
Service: Army
Enlisted: 7 Aug 1940
Discharged: 10 Dec 1945

Arnold's family migrated to Australia in 1920 and he was born on reaching Australian shores, on 16 Feb 1920 at Fulham (SA) to Arnold Berg and Carrie Ethel Berg (nee Robinson). The family then moved to Greenock and established a vineyard. He attended school at Marranga (near Seppeltsfield, SA).

In 1929 the family moved to Kielpa (SA) and bought a 1600 acre (640 Ha) scrub block. Arnold worked on the farm and completed his schooling at Kilroo (near Kielpa). After completing his schooling at grade 7, as was the norm at that time, he continued to work on his father's farm. It was harsh pioneering times at Kielpa as the depression years dragged on and the remoteness of the area produced many difficulties.

On 7 Aug 1940 he and his brother enlisted in the Army. On completing his basic training at Hampstead (SA) he was allocated to 8th Division Ammunition Sub Park as a driver. Initially he was sent to Alice Springs, but after a short time was recalled to Adelaide for embarkation to Singapore; he arrived in Malacca (Malaya) in mid 1941. His task here was to transport munitions forward to the troops in Malaya.

On 8 Dec 1942 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour: a few hours later they bombed Singapore. The Japanese overpowered the Allied forces in Malaya and Singapore, resulting in their surrender. Arn was captured on 15 Feb 1943 – his birthday! He was interned as a Prisoner of War (POW) in Changi Gaol with approximately 20,000 other allied soldiers; the gaol had been built to house 600 prisoners!

The Japanese decided to use many of the prisoners to build the infamous Burma – Thai railway. Arn was sent to work on the rail line; he and the other workers were given one cup of rice three times a day as sustenance. This diet was totally inadequate and

thousands of men died working on the line, the main killers being dysentery, typhoid fever and ill treatment by their captors. Although there were doctors in the camps there were no medical supplies. This “hell” lasted until surrender of the Japanese in Aug '45.

He was repatriated to Australia by Catalina flying boat after the surrender. After medical checks he returned to Adelaide on 10 Dec 45 and took his discharge. Like many returned servicemen, he experienced difficulty in settling back into civilian life and after a succession of short term jobs in Adelaide, he returned to Eyre Peninsula: he continued short term employ in the local area driving trucks and lumping wheat. He then purchased a school bus run in the area: by day he drove the bus, by night he drove tractors on the local farms to supplement his income.

In May 1946 a dance was organised at the Cleve Hall to honour the local returned servicemen. It was here that he met his future wife, Constance (Connie) Maxine Hutchinson. They were married on the 10 Sep 1947 and lived with Connie’s parents on their farm at Rudall. Their only child, a daughter, Gaynor Roxanne, was born a year later.

In Oct 1947 he applied for a “soldier settlers” block at Tumby Bay. 3 years later he was allocated 2 Sections of land. This was part of the Mortlock estate; it was a partly cleared scrub block with a house and old shed and home to “millions” of rabbits. It became the family home, known as “*Waverley*”.

After 54 years of farming, he decided to retire. With a great heart wrench, “*Waverley*” was sold and the family moved to the Adelaide Hills where a much smaller property was purchased at Cherry Gardens . Like most farmers he really could not retire and this property became a real showpiece , with the gardens gaining wide acclamation . He remained on this property until his death on 22 May 2008.

Arn was an accomplished sportsman, competing locally in tennis, cricket and football; he won the Rudall Association Medal for best and fairest in 1947. However, his main sporting interest involved horses – he was a keen horseman and judge, competing and judging at all levels throughout SA. He passed this love of horses onto his daughter and grandchildren, who have all competed at equestrian events at local and state level. He was an inaugural member and President for 10 years of the Southern Eyre Hunt Club; apart from being a co-founder he also provided a venue for the hunt at his property, “*Waverley*”.

