

🌟 **Tracks of the Dragon – A History of Australian Locating Artillery** 🌟

How I came to write the history of Locating Artillery

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After much thought, I considered that instead of telling you what the book is about, as I know many would want to buy the book, but how I came to be involved with another colleague and wrote *Tracks of the Dragon – A History of Australian Locating Artillery*.

Many here have served. I was too young. On 5 December 1972 there was a change of Government and conscription was abolished. I was due for the next call-up in February 1973. My mother believed I need discipline and encourage me to join the CMF, later the Army Reserve (ARes). After my service of 17½ years, my mother still believed that I lacked discipline. Today I am a Tour Guide at the Royal Australian Artillery National Museum at North Fort, North Head (Artillery Museum) . I participate in maintaining and expanding the Locating Display at the Artillery Museum with the **Locating Artillery Association**, the Association I formed.

WHAT IS LOCATING ARTILLERY:

Locating Artillery is about finding enemy artillery and, had it's **beginnings** during World War I with its initial responsibility that it **locate** enemy artillery, so that our Allied forces could *silence the guns* .

Prior to World War 1, artillery brought into action on the battlefield (such as the Napoleon Wars), were in *full view* of the enemy infantry, often only 450 metres away. The “**Industrial Revolution**” period of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, saw many major changes, changes that affected how artillery was used during the Great War, as it now could fire greater distances, *went into hiding*, regularly firing from behind hills and woods.

The book ‘*Tracks of the Dragon - A History of Australian Locating Artillery*’ is the story of the methods used and, the people who contributed their talents.

Even a brief explanation of my involvement in writing the history of Locating Artillery would be incomplete without some explanation of the types of methods and equipment used.

Flash Spotting: - observing the gun flash and taking a bearing on the direction of the flash. Observations from several positions could be used to calculate the position of the gun.

Sound Ranging : - Placing microphones at regular surveyed locations to detect the sound of gunfire and, using the time difference of the sound as it reaches each microphone.

Survey - Artillery Survey: - The location of hostile enemy is very much determined on the exact position of the detection equipment and/or the observer.

Radar: - Projects an electronic beam at an object, this object may be anything from an aircraft to a mortar bomb.

Meteorology: - Atmospheric weather conditions at that moment and, assumes that these conditions will remain steady for a short time, normally between two to four hours.

Calibration - Electronic Velocity Analyser (EVA): - Calibration of the guns is essential to ensure the Muzzle Velocities are accurately known, as, at times, the gun barrel wears, due to continued firing.

Crater Analysis: - The method used to determine the type of weapon used to create the crater. The position of tail fins and the fuse left in the crater, will give the direction and angle of descent.

Artillery Intelligence: - The collection, collation and distribution of data on hostile batteries.

Sensors: - Variety of equipment, such as Infra-Red, Thermal Imagery, Acoustic and Seismic, used to mount surveillance of tracks or paths that may be used by the enemy to provide early warning of their approach.

Surveillance: - On most occasions from an elevated position. Includes photographing villages/villagers, local market areas and any suspicious activity.

Drones - Unmanned Aerial Vehicle: have 20+ hours of endurance both day and night; no need for a runway, reliable during many adverse weather conditions.

How did I become involved in 'Writing':

On 1 July 1998, a Thursday, the first inaugural Reserve Forces Day had their march from the Rocks up George Street to Liverpool Street, then dispersed to watering holes located in various places throughout the City. Prior to the march, I made contact with many former Locating members and some in turn contacted others. On that day 12 from 133 Div Loc Bty, 10 from 130 Gun Loc Bty, 2 from 20 Locating Regiment and, one other who served with 131 Loc Bty marched together on the day.

Over a few drinks, where all great decisions are made, I had the support of others for a reunion, but I did all the hard work of organising and contacting people. I set a date of 14 November 1998 and on that day 110 people attended.

During that reunion, I formed the "*Locating Artillery Association*" and was the inaugural President for 3 years.

In contacting long lost colleagues from former units for the re-union, I looked in particular for Keith, the other co-author of this book who had been with the Regular Army and attached to 133 Div Loc Bty (Cadre staff) during my time with the ARes. Many phone calls were made using both the Internet white pages, and physically raked through white pages phone books and, whilst given a maze of clues that at first lead to dead-ends, eventually spoke to his sister here in Sydney.

Although Keith had put those years with the Army behind him, his sister phoned him and passed on my number. Some 5 minutes later he had returned my call. I had gone out of my office at the time he called and then phoned him back.

Keith lived in Maroochydore and after a long conversation wished success for the reunion, asked that I continue to keep in contact and not to make it as long as the last 20 odd years. 1 month later Keith phoned and had said that after much thought he wished to attend this reunion and had organised flights.

He asked if I could have a look for him at cheap accommodation within the Manly area and gave me a price guide. I suggested and he accepted accommodation at my place, however, it was to cost him a few beers. The night before the reunion, Keith arrived and over a few quite drinks, we reminisced on the bygone years to the early hours of the morning.

Keith's Short History, and others

Keith had written an unpublished document on "*Locating Artillery in Australia – A Short History (emphasis on 133 Divisional Locating Battery)*". This consisted of 14-pages and it was during the reunion that I discussed with him the possibility of concluding the history as the Unit had closed 5 years after his short history ended. Whilst Keith had at first said no, he then asked for me to assist as I had access to the Artillery Museum Library. We both expected that the research and task would be completed within a very short time.

April 1999 just 5 months after the reunion Keith and I had become aware that there was **no** information about **Locating Artillery** just "Pams" (training manuals). I had the only known copy of Keith's unpublished short history, Keith did not have a copy and yet he was awarded BEM for that work. I would have had the work framed had I been awarded a BEM. We decided to interview those who served at 133 Div Loc Bty, Regular Army and ARes alike to at least see if it was possible to record those remaining 5 years. The Vice President of the Locating Artillery Association at the time was the last BC of 133 Div Loc Bty and, the last BK and was the Librarian and Accessions Officer at Artillery Museum. There were many other Regular Army and ARes personnel who were still around and could help to conclude a task that seemed simple enough. Surprisingly, these same people and others were instead suggesting we turn our hand to writing the Locating history, not just 133 Div Loc Bty.

Another pointed me to Major Peter Sattler who had tried to write the history. It appears that Peter's attempt had some political tones and he did not get the support required. I contacted Peter and later visited him at his home in Canberra and he gave me all his material. Another, Graham, lived in Newcastle and had a 9-page history on 131 Div Loc Bty used only as an induction package to new personnel into that unit. Graham had the only copy and fully supported our intended work and following my initial phone call, had a copy made and sent to me.

From the sources and material provided, it became apparent that we should try our hand at writing the book. I had a basic understanding of drafting as my civilian occupation requires formatting Decisions, Orders, Recommendations, etc to be published into various Law Reports.

There were many interviews I conducted, armed with a Dictaphone and a draft. On two separate occasions I visited Bill Cameron who lived in Stockton (Newcastle) as he had some vital information regarding Artillery Survey and Flash Spotting between the wars. Both Peter Sattler and Bill Cameron I sadly learned were both dying from cancer.

Lt Colonel Eric Nowill and Major-General John Stevenson both provided valuable information relating to their time and the role the Locating Batteries played during the Korean War.

Peter, Bill, Eric and John have all since passed away. Their valuable time they gave to me for the interviews, their information and records has made the writing of this history easier.

Communication era

Both Keith and I were fortunate, we were living in a time where the electronic age made life simpler. I lived at Dee Why, Keith at Maroochydore. We each travelled to each other's home twice. From time to time my work took me interstate and, whilst in Brisbane on one occasion, Keith came down and during the lunch break we went over notes. At the conclusion of that day we had a quiet beer together. On one other occasion I travelled to South Australia and at the same time Keith was representing Queensland in the 10-pin bowling tournament held there in South Australia.

Most of the work was carried out by phone and by email. Often 'floppy-discs' were dispatched.

Principle Reporter

With both of us writing and swapping notes, proof reading and collation, I came to the conclusion that **one** should be the principal writer, and I suggested that it should be Keith. I felt that rather than have a disagreement between each other over the inclusion of something or other, that there should **be a final decision maker**. I believe strongly this played an important part in strengthening the friendship between us both and allowed the work to be completed. I am pleased to say that whilst Keith and I would consider all the information provided by either one of us or by someone else, on only a very few occasions was there a need for a casting vote from Keith. This concept worked well for us both.

The task of finding a publisher was difficult. I had manuscripts made and posted out to various publishers as they appeared in the phone book. One sent to Allen & Unwin was returned the very next day, much to my surprise. Faster than you can throw a boomerang round a lamp post. I wondered whether it may have been incorrectly addressed by me. 1 week later Allen & Unwin phoned and suggested I write to the Army History Unit (AHU) as the book was military. I did so.

Three months passed and finally the AHU phoned and said that they considered that it would be a significant military history as the work had never been told and offered to fully sponsor the book. Not long after, the Australian Military History Publications (AHMP) was awarded the contract to publish the book.

With the book now in the hands of the AHMP, there was a reunion at Coffs Harbour and many of the Locating Artillery Association members were 'chomping at the bit' as to when the book would be released. This was relayed by me to AHMP and was advised it was not ready for publication. Instead, AHMP offered and provided me with a draft of the proposed book. I was staying at my Sisters home at Bellingen on that Friday, the day the reunion started. I travelled early that morning in to Coffs Harbour with my Sister and left that copy for Keith with another member of the Association who was staying in the same motel as Keith with strict instructions not to open. That request was obeyed. Keith saw that draft on Friday after he arrived and before the socialising began. I had been pleasantly surprised with this draft, however, I waited until I saw Keith on the Saturday. He too was pleasantly surprised. The draft was opened to the members to view and for their comment and to ensure the accuracy. The response in viewing the draft was very, very positive, and a relief for us both.

TRACKS OF THE DRAGON

The book '**Tracks of the Dragon - A History of Australian Locating Artillery**' represents the **tracks** leading from the earliest days of its **beginnings**, to **current day**, and what may lie beyond

During the Vietnam War, a Detachment from **131 Div Loc Bty** was stationed in Vietnam, but they had no plaque. They wanted something to signify that, whilst artillery, they had no guns, but relate to being

in the **Orient**, not gaudy, but with a meaning. An American envelope they had, portrayed a **Dragon** in flight, not dissimilar to a map of Vietnam. Something else was needed, and the atom symbol round the artillery logo eventually was added, then the words the *Eyes and Ears of the Taskforce*, established the element of a *Locators* responsibility.

Name Changes

On 10 June 2002, **131 Loc Bty**, a Regular Army Bty, having had many name changes previously, celebrated its 50th anniversary. On that day, they changed their name again from 131 Loc Bty to **131 STA Bty**. In so doing, they kept the name “**131**”; they kept the **atoms** around the artillery logo, and also the symbolic **Dragon**. A ‘relief’ of the **Dragon** was presented to **131 STA Bty** from the *Association* on that day.

The new locating unit of **today** has moved forward with its prime responsibility of ‘*Surveillance*’ and to provide ‘*Target Acquisition*’.

In November 2007, 131 STA Bty became a Regiment, **20 STA Regt**, with “**20**” reflecting 131’s earliest ancestry **20 Loc Bty**. The Unit’s within the regiment also reflect other locating units:

THE FUTURE OF LOCATING ARTILLERY

I mentioned earlier that **Locating Artillery** had its **primary responsibility** to “**locate**” enemy artillery.

The new locating unit of this millennium has moved further into the Electronic Era and surveillance. The old Mortar Locating Radar (ANKPQ-1) and Sound Ranging equipment have now been replaced by Weapon Locating Systems. High powered Camera’s, Range Finders and Radars provide Intelligence Gathering information vital on any battlefield and, UAV’s are currently flying over Afghanistan.

Today, we learn of the unrest in Pakistan. It should be remembered that 11 to 13 May 1998, India, exploded 5 nuclear weapons underground. Tests include both categories: Atomic and Hydrogen. Approximately 100,000 kilotons. On 28 May 1998, 15 days later, Pakistan in retaliation goes one up and exploded 6 nuclear weapons, 20 kilotons.

It may well be that the **Drones - Unmanned Aerial Vehicle**; may be needed in the region to end the threat of terrorism.

Today Keith and I talk frequently by phone and often meet up whether at reunions or again in travel. My wife and I just last December stayed with Keith and Pam on our motoring trip around Queensland. The *Locating Artillery Association* made Keith the “Historian” for the Association and he is often a listening ear to those veterans’s who phone him needing advice.

PUBLISHED IN AUGUST 2004:

It commenced as an opportunity to finalise a 14 page unpublished short history by adding the missing 5 years, and ended with a **340** page book of the *History of Locating Artillery* published in August 2004 5-years later.

The AHU identified that this history had not been told, and the CEO said: “**Tracks of the Dragon- A History of Australian Locating Artillery**” will be a significant addition to the military history of this country”.

Until mankind learns to live in peace, the history of Artillery will continue.

I am not here to glorify war, but here today to inform you about how I became involved in writing the *History of Locating Artillery*.

'The only war you really win, is the war that never starts'.