

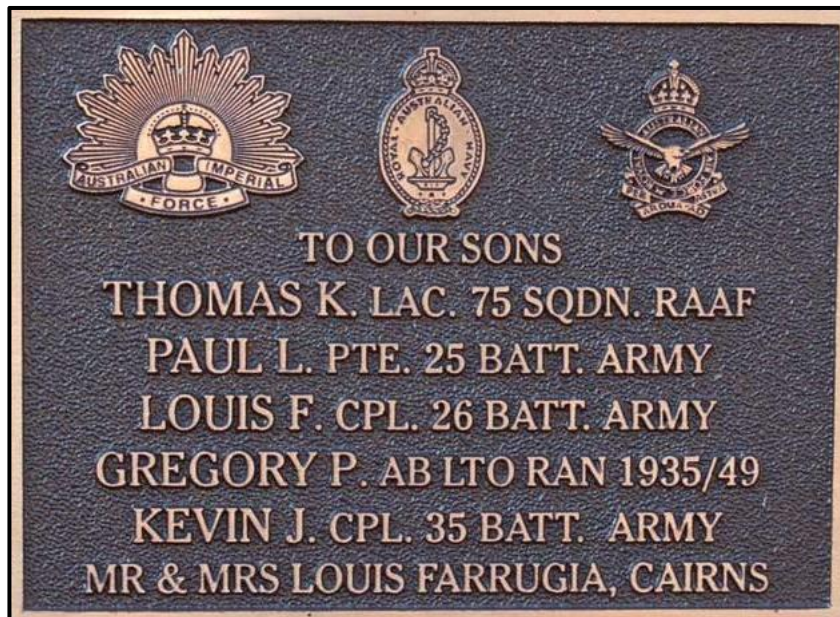


## Stories from the Plaques

### No. 9: The Five Farrugia brothers

During the Second World War, it was commonplace for families to have multiple siblings enlist. For some families, war brought mixed fortunes upon those in uniform. The pride exhibited by parents when their (mostly) young men donned their uniforms and marched off was often tempered by grief and loss when one or more never returned home.

However, there were 'lucky' families who welcomed home all of their loved ones. One such family was the Farrugias from northern Queensland, and visitors to our Memorial Rose Garden can see a plaque that commemorates the service across all three service arms of the five Farrugia sons - Thomas, Paul, Louis, Gregory and Kevin - which was dedicated by their proud parents. While their stories differed, and included a war bride, peacetime enlistment to escape the Great Depression and participation in 'mopping up' Japanese forces towards the end of the war in the Pacific, each reflected a desire to 'do their bit' in the Second World War.



The plaque in the Walkway's Memorial Rose Garden dedicated to the five Farrugia brothers (position 121 on the north wall, second row).

The boy's parents were Louis and Concetta. Louis Farrugia married Concetta Rizzio in May 1912 in Brisbane. Louis was from Brunswick Heads in northern NSW, while his bride was from Melbourne. They initially lived in the Northern Rivers region in NSW, and acquired a large family, eventually consisting of six brothers: Tom, Paul, Lou, Greg, Kevin and Joseph (Joe was born in 1931, and was too young to enlist during the war - he died in 2013), and two sisters.

The family first moved to Cairns in about 1927, but then returned to Brunswick Heads a few years later (minus the eldest, Tom, who remained in Cairns working). As the boys grew up (with some marrying), the family again relocated back to Cairns in about 1938. At this time, only the parents plus four of the children (including the two sisters) were in back living in Cairns, while some of the brothers were living in Sydney and Brunswick Heads. Whether in Cairns or Brunswick Heads, the family were involved in many water activities, from sailing, rowing, surf life saving and swimming (sadly, the father Louis drowned in June 1950 when his fishing launch foundered during a storm off Southport - he was described as a 'first class seaman and master of small boats during the war').

Families with a number of young sons must have dreaded reading of the growing threat of war in the late 1930s, and most likely this was the case with the Farrugias. When war was declared in September 1939, Tom was 25, Paul was 23, Lou was 22, Greg was 20 and Kevin was 18. However, Greg had already been in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) since March 1936, having enlisted as a 17 year old.

From 1940 onwards until 1943, the remainder of the boys enlisted and their varied times in the Australian Infantry Force (AIF), Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and RAN highlights the breadth of military service experienced by those who enlisted during the war. Each was to experience their share of danger, but remarkably, all survived the war without injury and returned to civilian life to live long lives.



**Future servicemen: four of the five Farrugia brothers photographed in 1920, at play near their fathers boat shed in Brunswick Heads. From left is Lou, Tom the eldest, Paul, and Greg. Kevin was yet to be born. (source: Facebook - Brunswick Heads Community Page)**

Here are the brief stories of the five Farrugia brothers (from oldest to youngest):

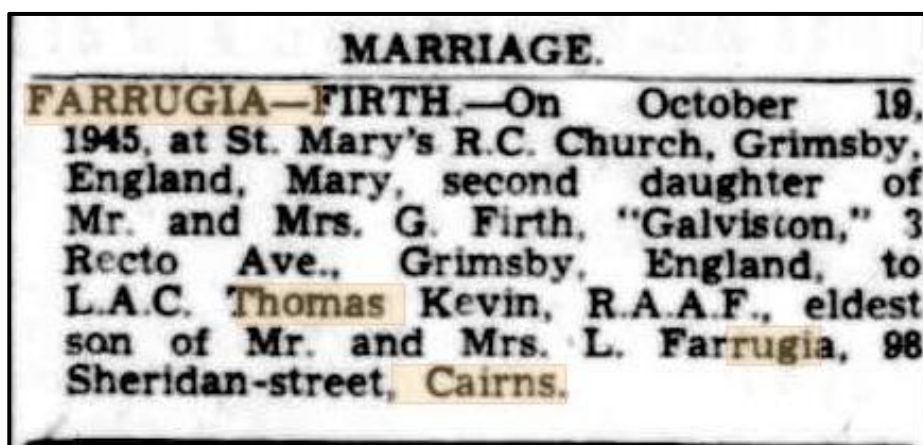
### 1. Thomas Kevin Farrugia (RAAF, 24226) 30.09.1914 - 07.03.2009

Thomas Farrugia was born in Lismore, 30 September 1914, and grew up in the Brunswick Heads area. He enlisted in the RAAF on 20 June 1940 (aged 26), in Cairns, listing his employment as a 'general carrier' (he was previously doing labouring for two years, and eight years truck driving). He enlisted for the duration of the war plus a period of 12 months thereafter. Upon enlistment, and after initial testing, he was a trainee flight rigger.

His RAAF service file contains interesting details usually not listed in the files of other service branches. His police check states he was a 'sober, honest and respectable man', with no convictions. His initial RAAF report lists various attributes: under 'Keen?' a simple 'Yes' was written; the answer to 'Because' was he wanted 'To do his bit'; he was willing to serve anywhere; his sport was noted as 'Swimming' (as evidenced by numerous mentions of him in local newspapers when he competed in swimming events); under 'Can rough it?' was 'Yes'; and he was described as a 'quiet, soft spoken, polite, steady and good type'.

Tom was originally posted to Richmond and by June 1941 (he was now a Leading Aircraftman [LAC]) he was posted to 24 Squadron in Townsville. December 1941 saw him posted to Rabaul in 75 Squadron 'on special duty', and following this he returned to Townsville. In late March 1942, he was posted to Port Moresby, and returned to Australia in May that year. He saw service overseas again in July 1942 in Milne Bay, Horn Island (in the Torres Strait, in October) and back in Port Moresby in February 1943. His longest posting back in Australia was at Amberley from March 1943 to February 1945.

However, more overseas service was yet to come, this time in the United Kingdom (UK). Despite the European war was coming to an end in May 1945, Tom was posted to the Royal Air Force (RAF) in the United Kingdom (UK) that month. He served at a few bases, including RAF Binbrook in Lincolnshire (which was home to the RAAF's 460 Squadron). The hidden charms of his UK posting must have been strong, for he met his future partner there, and married his wife Mary on 19 October 1945, at Grimsby (also in Lincolnshire).



The belated notice of Tom's wedding to Mary, 'Cairns Post' 9 November 1945, p.5. (source: Trove)

Although the war had ended, in early October 1945 he requested his repatriation back to Australia to be delayed due to his impending marriage. A curt reply to his request stated that his repatriation may not be deferred, and he was advised to get married 'as soon as possible'. Tom and his wife returned to Australia in February 1946, and he was eventually discharged in Brisbane in early April 1946, with the rank of Leading Aircraftman.

Little is known of Tom's life after the war, but it seems he returned to his home town of Cairns when he returned to civilian life, and resumed his job as a carrier, eventually owning his own carrier business. Tom was also involved in the Cairns surf life saving club for many years, not surprising as he was known as a swimmer growing up. He and Mary did have one child (a daughter). Tom died in Cairns on 7 March 2009, aged 94. His wife Mary died in Cairns in 2013, aged 102 years old.

His service in the RAAF was short of five years in length, and had taken him throughout Australia, to the south-west Pacific and to the UK. He returned to Australia with a war bride, and then lived a long life back in his home town of Cairns.



Thomas's plot in Cairns cemetery. (source: Find a Grave)

## 2. Paul Louis Joseph Farrugia (Army, N299354) 02.02.1916 - 09.06.2006

Paul Farrugia was born in Brunswick Heads, 2 February 1916. As noted, when younger he lived in Cairns, he was involved with swimming competitions, often alongside his brothers Tom, Greg and Lou. When he enlisted at Mullumbimby on 21 January 1942, just shy of his 26<sup>th</sup> birthday, Paul was living in Brunswick Heads, married (in 1940) to Thelma with three children. He listed his occupation as a lorry driver and storeman. On his form, Paul noted he had 18 months prior militia service in Queensland.

Army life for Paul consisted of various postings within the NSW Line of Communication (LOC) structure. LOCs existed in most States, and provided support services attached to Military District Headquarters units that looked after personnel, equipment, stores, recruitment, signals/communications, workshops and the like. Often these were located at drill halls and the like that existed before the war and had been used by local militia units. He served in depots and with various anti-aircraft batteries during his service in NSW.

His record notes he had a daughter born May 1943, which must have provided some positive news since he was frequently in and out of Army hospitals (including 113 Australian General

Hospital [AGH] at Concord) with a variety of illnesses that required hospitalisation on a regular basis.



**Images of men from the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion in Bouganville. (sources: AWM)**

His service eventually lead him to being assigned to the 25<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion in July 1945, in time for that Battalion's participation in the Bouganville campaign in the Solomons. However, illness struck him again, requiring admittance to yet another hospital (2/1 AGH) while in Bouganville. His overseas service ended on 20 October 1945 when he embarked for Brisbane. Paul was eventually discharged there on 23 January 1946, still attached to the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion as a Private. His service totaled 1,241 days, the vast majority of it (1,126 days) within Australia, while his service overseas was less than four months. His records state that on discharge, he had five children, four under the age of 16.

Despite that, Paul's service would not have been without danger, especially his time in Bouganville, where resistance by Japanese forces was still a threat, despite the war coming to an end at that time. Paul, like brothers Lou and Kevin, participated in what many critics have labeled as 'unnecessary' campaigns, which are viewed as wasting Australian lives for little strategic or operational benefit, while American forces lead the way in more dramatic (read: higher profile) campaigns. Yet while this may be the case, the likes of Paul and so many other Australians continued to serve where sent, and until needed.

As with any service in the south-west Pacific, disease and illness was prevalent (the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost 62 men killed in action or died on active service with a further 174 wounded in the war).

Little is known of his life post-war, although he was initially living in Brunswick Heads after the war. In April 1951, a newspaper article described his wife winning second prize in the State Lottery (£1000 pounds - a large sum at the time), where she stated that her husband had taken over a fish shop in Brunswick Heads a few months earlier and the funds would go towards renovations of the shop (the article also states the couple had five children at the time, from ages 3 to 19 years). Meantime, records indicate he was living in Wollongong in 1998. He died on 9 June 2006 aged 90 (his wife Thelma wife died 1985), and both are buried at Mullumbimby



Paul Farrugia's headstone in Mullumbimby (source: Find a Grave)

### 3. Louis Francis Farrugia (Army, NX155100/N216997) 08.08.1917 - 07.06.1993

Louis Farrugia was born in Mullumbimby, 8 August 1917. He lived his life in coastal locations, and in 1936 a newspaper article reported he was chosen to skipper a launch from Cairns with Customs Office staff to investigate incursions from foreign fisherman because of 'his knowledge of the northern waters'. When he enlisted on 14 February 1942, he was 24 and living in Darlinghurst, having married in Lismore in April 1939 to wife Mavis. Lou enlisted in the Citizen Military Force (CMF) and was assigned the service number N216997. His papers state he had been labouring as a textile worker before he enlisted.

In August 1943, having served in various locations undertaking general duties associated with the NSW and QLD LOC structure, he joined the AIF on 12 August 1943, and was attached to the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion with a new service number NX155100. Following this, Lou served outside mainland Australia on various occasions.

He was stationed on Horn Island (in the Torres Strait) for two periods in 1943 and 1944, where the Battalion undertook defensive duties. Later, he saw service in Bouganville from early December 1944, where the Battalion relieved American forces, and still faced strong opposition from Japanese troops. Lou was then in Rabaul after August 1945 for garrison duties, and returned to Australia mid-January 1946 leading up to his discharge.



Men from the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion in Bouganville in 1945 (left) on patrol to clear Japanese troops and (right) coming ashore to relieve other Australia troops (sources: AWM)

During his brother's (Kevin) interview in 2003, it was revealed that the day he embarked to return to Australia was the same day Kevin was disembarking from the same ship for his duties in Rabaul.

At war's end, Lou's rank was Corporal (he was confirmed in this rank while in Bouganville in September 1945), and on demobilisation in February 1946, his record shows that he had two children, and had served a total of 1,359 days - 951 days in Australia, and 408 days overseas.

Like other units that served in Bouganville, his service would not have been without danger from skirmishing with entrenched (dwindling in numbers, albeit still formidable) Japanese forces at the time, as well as from tropical diseases and illnesses which plagued all combatants, friend and foe. In total, the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost 40 men killed in action or died on active service and 110 wounded.

Lou died on 7 June 1993, aged 75, and was listed as living in Karuah at the time, but was buried in Mullumbimby. His wife Mavis died in 1978, and is also buried at Mullumbimby.

#### **4. Gregory P. Farrugia (RAN, 21034) 11.03.1919 - 26.09.1997**

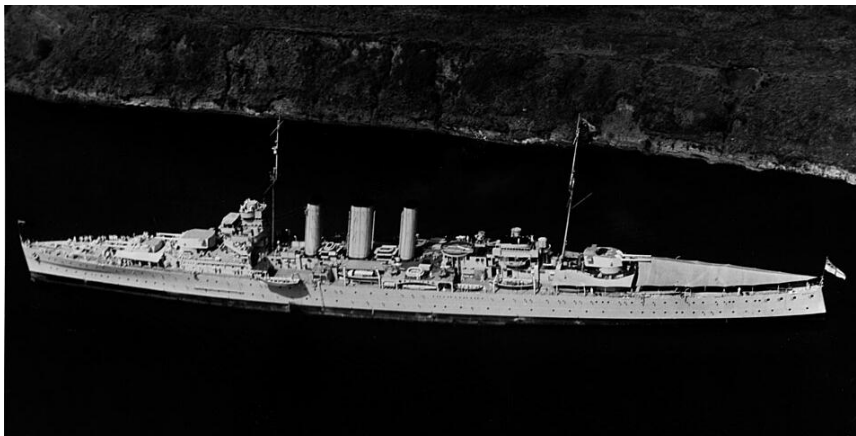
Gregory Farrugia was born in Lismore on 11 March 1919 (while the plaque has 'P' as an initial for his second name, no confirmation of this name has been found). Growing up in Cairns with his brothers saw them all participate in swimming (a 1932 newspaper report on the Cairns swimming club described Greg and Lou as 'brilliant youngsters'). However, a few years later saw Greg move to Sydney. He was the first to enlist in the services, but unlike his brothers he did so as a teenager and in peacetime before 1939.

He enlisted in the RAN in Redfern on 30 March 1936 (the plaque states he enlisted in 1935), a couple of weeks after his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. His rank was Ordinary Seaman II, the standard rank for young men (boys) in the RAN at that time.

His reasons for enlisting in the peacetime Navy are not known, but probably it was a chance to receive a regular wage during the Great Depression, even though Naval pay rates had been cut during the Depression. The prospect of regular employment and job security in the RAN was probably a better bet than chancing his luck in civilian life, especially when many men were unemployed across the nation. Not being an adult, his prospects for regular employment would have been slim to none and, if he had have worked at all (highly unlikely when the unemployment rate had been a staggering 32% in 1932), it would have only been manual labouring. In any case, when he signed on with the RAN, it was for a period of 12 years, a common occurrence for young men at the time. It was a huge commitment for one so young, but it seems Greg was determined to fulfil that promise.

The RAN in the decade before the Second World War was a shadow of its wartime capabilities. In the beginning of 1930, it had only five vessels, and 3,500 personnel, yet in 1932, the service now only had three ships in full commission. Lack of finances for defence spending, coupled with general disinterest by governments to increase naval (and other defence force) capabilities meant the RAN was in a poor state. However, as the 1930s progressed, so did the threat of hostilities in Europe, then Asia. Gregory's enlistment in 1936 would have been just prior to the expansion and modernisation of the Australian fleet which occurred rapidly from 1938 onwards.

Unfortunately, much of Greg's long service with the RAN is not known. The usual source when researching members of the armed forces during the Second World War (his RAN service file in the NAA) is only two pages, not unusual since the Navy only kept very basic records during a member's service, and much of that is illegible due to the age of the file.



**HMAS Australia in 1935 (source: Wikipedia)**

He appears to have initially been posted to HMAS *Australia*, and in the years leading up to the outbreak of war was posted to HMAS *Penguin* (the RAN base at Balmoral) and HMAS *Moresby* (a minesweeper and survey vessel). With the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, Greg was again posted to HMAS *Australia* until April 1941. He married his wife Thelma in 1939 (they eventually had two children).

During 1941, Greg's ship would have been undertaking escort duties in the Indian Ocean, then around southern and western Africa, Gibraltar to the UK, and eventually back to Australian waters.

His file indicates he then served at HMAS *Cerebus* (near Melbourne) and HMAS *Leeuwin* (another shore base, in Fremantle) and back again at HMAS *Penguin*. When he was discharged on 21 March 1949 he was stationed at HMAS *Watson*, the training base at South Head in Sydney.

Little is known of his life post-discharge, although it seems he continued to live in Sydney until his death. His brother Kevin stated in his 2003 interview (see below) that he (Kevin) did temporarily work in Sydney with Greg, who was working as an electrician in the late 1960s.

Greg died on 26 September 1997 (aged 78), and is buried at Rookwood in Sydney. Thelma died in July 1972 and was buried at Liverpool.

## **5. Kevin John Farrugia (Army, Q268663) 11.06.1921 - 22.08.2012**

In 2003, Kevin Farrugia was interviewed for the Australians at War Film Archive, and much of the details included here were taken from that extensive interview. In this [interview](#) Kevin provided recollections of his entire life, from the pre-war years, during his service and the years that followed his discharge. His interview provides an intimate portrait of an enthusiastic boy then adult, who lived a carefree life on the coast with a large family in both NSW and QLD, then joined up in a war that saw him enjoy time with his mates, albeit being participating in dangerous campaigns towards the war's end.

Kevin was born in Mullumbimby on 11 June 1921, and initially grew up in Brunswick Heads, but being one of the youngest in the large family he found himself with his two younger sisters and brother still living with his parents when the Farrugia family returned to Cairns in the late 1930s. He was a mill hand at a sawmill before joining up at Cairns on 6 May 1941.



**Kevin Farrugia's service pay book photo taken on enlistment (source: NAA)**

After enlistment, he was sent to do basic training first at Warwick, then onto Canungra. Kevin was first assigned to the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion, but then to the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion later in the war in Rabaul.



**A colourised studio portrait of Kevin in his uniform (left), and with his mother Concetta (right)  
(source: Australians at War Film Archive)**

He saw service in Milne Bay then Finschhafen, where he recounted he saw plenty of dead and dying Japanese but wasn't in any combat against them. Following this stint, he went onto Madang, where he was involved in patrolling and garrison duties.

During his time in the AIF, Kevin was in New Guinea twice, the first time from 18 January 1944 to 9 September 44, and then from 13 November 1944 to 21 May 1946. While in New Guinea after the war ended, he was involved in general salvage and clean up duties. Kevin eventually served a total

of 1,389 days - 598 days in Australia, and 791 overseas. When he was discharged November 1946, his rank was Corporal.



**Kevin Farrugia (middle row, fourth from left) in the Wewak Madang area in July 1944. (source AWM)**

As was previously mentioned with the service of his brother Lou, as Kevin was landing in Rabaul, Lou was boarding the same ship to go home. Neither brother knew they had just missed each other. In his interview, Kevin counted himself as lucky with his service overseas. While he saw many dead and dying Japanese (leading up to and by the war's end, many Japanese were starving or ill with disease in various south-west Pacific locations having been cut off from re-supply options for months), he was never in a pitched battle with Japanese troops, although others in his battalion did encounter Japanese forces.

After being discharged in Brisbane he went back to Brunswick Heads then up to his parents in Cairns. He then went to Sydney, where he had various jobs, including a long stint as a storeman and packer job. He left this job and went back to Cairns, but could not find work and was living on the meagre unemployment benefits of the time. Finding this was not providing him with enough money, he once again returned to Sydney and lived for a while with his older brother Greg (ex-RAN) and his wife.

Greg was working as an electrician, and got Kevin a job as his 'offsider', but Kevin said that this arrangement didn't work out, but he continued with the firm in other roles. In his 50s now, Kevin said that as he got older, the manual work was harder to endure, and younger men were offered jobs he applied for. He eventually found work with Commonwealth Bank as driver/storeman, and retired from that job when he was 60 in the early 1980s. It seems he was living in North Ryde for much of his retirement (as an aside, for much of his life and with his time in the AIF, he was known as 'Frick', a nickname he gained when he was at school because he had freckles, which was then shortened to 'Frick').

Kevin remained single his entire life ('just an old bachelor' he said in his interview, although he did admit to having 'a lady friend' whom he shared social events with in his later years). He died on 22 August 2012, aged 91, and his was cremated at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium in North Ryde.



**Kevin Farrugia in 2003 when he was interviewed for the Australians at War Film Archive project.**  
(source: Australians at War Film Archive)

Louis and Concetta Farrugia must have welcomed the end of hostilities in August 1945. Their five sons were alive and unharmed, but for some discharge (especially for Greg, who still had four years remaining in the RAN) was still some time off. Yet the immediate threat of harm from enemy action had passed. Eventually all lived long lives with growing families, whose descendants are no doubt proud of their service. They 'got on' with their lives, and contributed to the communities they chose to return to. Family and friends would have been thankful all returned unharmed while so many others were not as lucky.

Their postings within and outside Australia illustrate the broader experience of those who saw service during the Second World War. All five faced potential dangers from the unglamorous (but essential) work in depots, land bases and the like providing logistical support and training, to overseas postings which included enemy action as well as the humdrum of immediate post-war duties. The rush and immediacy of training and preparation in Australia often saw accidents occur, while an overseas posting could involve enemy action or the risk of illness or injury. But each of the Farrugia brothers, like so many of their contemporaries, did not hesitate and accepted the challenge.

Their experiences mirrored many of their generation - a working class background, large and loving families, accepting the need to 'do their bit', whether it was with duties in Australia or facing enemies in the air, sea and land in foreign territories. Each of the Farrugia brothers deserve their individual story to be known, and it is hoped this article has achieved that to some degree. Tom, Paul, Lou, Greg and Kevin served their country in a time of need, and deserve our thanks and appreciation.

Lest we forget.

## Select Sources

[Australian War Memorial](#) (AWM) - image collection site

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[Department of Veterans' Affairs Nominal Roll](#).

Facebook: [Brunswick Heads Community Page](#)

[Find a Grave](#) website.

Naval Encyclopedia: [entry for RAN](#).

[National Archives of Australia \(NAA\)](#): service files for Thomas, Paul, Louis, Gregory and Kevin Farrugia.

[Trove](#) website.

Wikipedia pages for the [25<sup>th</sup> Battalion](#), [26<sup>th</sup> Battalion](#) and [35<sup>th</sup> Battalion](#).