

MILITARY HISTORY

THE BIRTH, LIFE AND DEATH OF THE 1ST AUSTRALIAN ARMOURED DIVISION

LIEUTENANT ZACH LAMBERT

ABSTRACT

This article examines the history of the formation of the Australian 1st Armoured Division for use in both the Middle East and the defence of the Australian mainland during the Second World War, from the intellectual and policy developments leading to approval by the War Cabinet to the equipment, manning and training issues experienced in trying to raise a formation in a short period. It also addresses the purpose of the formation given the circumstance of the time, and the creation and continuation of the armoured tradition in the Australian Army. It finally looks at the way the unit was disbanded and the follow-on effects to Australian armour, briefly addressing the impact of the armoured vehicle in Australia's primary operating environment.

The 1st Australian Armoured Division, formed in 1941, was a 2nd Australian Imperial Force (AIF) formation and the first substantial armoured formation in the Australia military. Although Australia had previously possessed two small tank companies, at the onset the Second World War there were only eleven mobile tanks in the country. Under these circumstances, the fact that Australia raised an armoured division and prepared it for deployment only

eight months after receiving its first tanks is a remarkable achievement. The 1st Armoured was designed to be used primarily in the Middle East, although this role changed with the entrance of the Japanese into the war, when the division became a key element to the defence of continental Australia against Japanese aggression. It was eventually disbanded without seeing combat.

There are three aspects to consider when discussing the 1st Armoured. First, why such a powerful formation was thought necessary for Australian success in war, and the influences that acted to encourage its formation; second, the specific issues encountered while raising the 1st Armoured Division and their effects; and finally, why the division was disbanded without seeing action, even though at its height in November 1942, it was the most powerful fighting formation in terms of firepower and manoeuvrability that Australia had ever possessed.

The value of the Armoured Fighting Vehicle (AFV) was demonstrated amply during the First World War, and the effectiveness of armoured support to infantry forces had been proven successful time and time again. However, at the outset of the Second World War, Australia was woefully unprepared for the realities of armoured combat. There had been an undercurrent dragging the Australian land forces towards mechanisation over the decade preceding the Second World War, but the voices calling for the creation of armoured forces, although present, were greatly stifled in the Australian military. After June 1940, with the firepower and manoeuvrability of the armoured division demonstrated by the Germans in the fall of France, possession of an armoured capability in the Australian military seemed highly desirable.

At the onset of the Second World War, the *Defence Act 1903* still restricted the small full-time Permanent Military Force from forming field units, primarily relegating them to training or staff roles. It also restricted the much larger

part-time militia forces from serving outside Australia at all.¹ As a result, the 2nd AIF—the direct successor of the 1st AIF of the First World War—was raised in September 1939, with one infantry division raised and sent to Palestine to complete training before heading to France. However, following the fall of Britain's major ally, France, and the entry of Italy into the war, the AIF was tasked instead to fight in the Middle East, and would later serve in the Far East. As a result of the events in Europe, enlistment in the AIF surged in Australia. At the same time, in July 1940, the War Cabinet directed that a supply of AFVs necessary for the equipment of an entire AIF Armoured Division be acquired.² Provisions were also made for establishing

After the ruthless efficiency of German armour in France, it was believed that armoured divisional formations would be essential to victory in the war ...

a training school for AFVs as well as the development of a permanent Australian armoured corps. After the ruthless efficiency of German armour in France, it was believed that armoured divisional formations would be essential to victory in the war, and that Australian AIF soldiers in the Middle East would require an armoured division to support them. Recommendations were made that a division be created, and plans for its formation discussed. On 10 July 1940 final approval was given for the ‘initial portion of the 1st Armoured Division A.I.F. to be raised in the period July–September 1941’.³ This event was only possible due to the substantial development of Australian defence policy over the previous ten years, and several factors contributed to the final decision to create an Armoured Division for the AIF.

The first factor contributing to the creation of the 1st Armoured Division was the intellectual contributions of Lieutenant-Colonel Lavarack in 1930 and Lieutenant-General Squires in 1938. In 1930, as Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, Lavarack argued that Japan was a serious threat to Australia, and that relying on the Royal Navy for defence was not sufficient to defend the country.⁴ He argued that a policy of mechanisation would give Australian land forces the ability to protect the country from invasion. These views were later supported by Squires in the role of Inspector General of the Australian Military Forces, when he advocated light cruiser tanks to defend the Australian coastline against invasion, believing that only light enemy AFVs such as the Japanese Type 95 light tank could be landed without port facilities.⁵ The importance of defending the Australian mainland with armoured forces was recognised by the Minister for Defence as early as 1938, when Harold Thorby supported the concept of a mechanised force to protect the coast of Australia.⁶

The growing concern that the Australian mainland could be under threat was one that had been developing in strategic planning circles for the majority of the inter-war years⁷, leading to a cautious policy directive from the Military Board in 1938 that Australia’s land forces should focus on the possibility of defending against an invasion. Following the 1938 crisis in Czechoslovakia and the subsequent Munich Agreement, the Board stated that ‘it is evident that the threat of a more serious scale of attack or even invasion of some important area [of Australia] is a possibility which can no longer be disregarded’.⁸ These recommendations would eventually be translated into practice with the provision of both light and medium American M3 tanks to the 1st Armoured Division to allow it to function in a dual role—first, as a home defence division, utilising light cruisers as a first response force to possible invasion, and second, as a deployable AIF formation for potential use in the Middle East.

Another factor that strongly contributed to the creation of the 1st Armoured Division was the success of mass armour tactics by the Germans in Belgium and France, as well as British successes in the Middle East, and the resulting effect on

doctrine within Australia. By July 1940 a belief had developed in senior Australian military and political leadership that ‘ever since the formation of the 6th Australian Division A.I.F. it has been considered vital that the A.I.F. in the Middle East should possess its own tank units.’⁹ This belief was soon apparently validated by British successes in North Africa utilising divisional level armoured action in Operation Compass, from December 1940 to February 1941. It was seen as increasingly vital that tanks were not only utilised in large formations, but the types of tanks to be used were to be of the cruiser variety as opposed to infantry tanks, in order for them to operate independently of infantry formations. As a result, it was believed an AIF armoured division would be best suited to Australia’s needs in the Middle East.

It is important to outline here the difference between infantry and cruiser tanks, and the significance of the formations in which they operate. In a study ‘The Provision of Tank Equipment and Personnel’, released to the War Cabinet on the 10 July 1940, the key differences between infantry and cruiser tanks are defined as follows:

It was seen as increasingly vital that ... the types of tanks to be used were to be of the cruiser variety

Infantry tanks are heavily armoured and comparatively slow moving. They are organized in army tank battalions and brigades mainly for the close support of infantry. Cruiser tanks are less heavily armoured than infantry tanks and possess a greater speed. They are organized in Armoured Regiments and Brigades within the Armoured Division.¹⁰

This is a fundamentally important detail with regards to the formation of the 1st Armoured, and several points must be noted. Firstly, the 1st Armoured was formed as a division rather than a series of brigades. This was based on the British model of an armoured division, with two brigades of three regiments each, as well as headquarters and supporting elements including three motor regiments, an armoured car regiment, a field artillery regiment and an anti-tank regiment. This formation demonstrates that the division was purposefully designed to operate distinctly separate from infantry formations, a departure from Australian formations until that point.¹¹ Secondly, the 1st Armoured Division was originally intended to be equipped with American M3 Stuart light and Grant medium tanks obtained through the British Purchasing Commission from the United States even though they were considered to be ‘not suitable for use against modern German and Italian tanks owing to their light armour.’¹² They were to be used as training aids and more specifically for home defence, and although it was believed that cruiser tanks were essential to the success of the Australian war effort both in a defensive role and abroad in the Middle East, the War Cabinet stated that ‘it is considered that M3 light

tanks should not be employed outside Australia.¹³ Due to the relative weaknesses in both armour and armament when compared to similar tanks in use by other nations, the M3 variants were ‘recommended by the [British] War Office as reasonably suitable for local defence [in Australia] and is expected to be equal to any tanks which could be landed on our coast in the early stages of an attack.’¹⁴ This recommendation was consistent with the advice given by Lieutenant-General Squires in 1938.

However, this proposal was made on the basis that the 1st Armoured would be re-equipped with British tanks upon deployment to the Middle East. Sadly, this policy never came to fruition; although enquiries were made with the British War Office on several occasions, the British did not believe they could provide enough tanks to equip any more than one armoured brigade, and this only with Valentine Mark III infantry tanks. A cable from SM Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London, received on 19 May 1941 explained that:

Enquiries have been made with the War Office on several occasions to [ascertain] the possibility of obtaining British infantry tank equipment that would be manned by A.I.F. Armoured Corps personnel. In January and February 1941 the prospects became brighter and recently the High Commissioner, London, has confirmed War Office ability to provide infantry tank equipment for one Army Tank Brigade A.I.F. in the Middle East in the first quarter of 1942... High Commissioner, London (cable No. 2510) states that although delivery of sufficient cruiser tanks is not assured the War Office may be able to provide sufficient infantry tanks Mark III for use as cruiser tanks by one Armoured Brigade A.I.F.¹⁵

The fact that insufficient cruiser tanks of adequate specifications could be obtained, combined with the entrance of the Japanese into the Second World War on 8 December 1941, meant that the chances of the 1st Armoured Division going overseas were all but finished. It was no longer able to fulfil its function of contributing to the Australian war effort in the Middle East, but it now had a new role as the most capable defensive unit in Australia to deal with an invasion of the mainland. As a result, it became all the more essential to prepare the division for a possible invasion by the Japanese even though on 6 December 1941 only ten M3 light cruisers were available to the division in Australia.¹⁶ Up to 400 other American light and medium tanks had been ordered, but they would not arrive in Australia before April. The story of how the 1st Armoured Division—a force

... the division was purposefully designed to operate distinctly separate from infantry formations, a departure from Australian formations until that point.

that would become, with its firepower and manoeuvrability, the most powerful formation Australia had ever created—went from an organisation on paper to an effective fighting force begins here.

When the initial components of the 1st Armoured Division were raised from July to September 1941, Major General John Northcott was placed in charge of the formation with the expectation he would supervise the raising and training of the unit, and then lead it overseas in the Middle East.¹⁷

He spent the first two months of his posting attached to the British 7th Armoured Division in the Middle East before returning. Northcott faced several serious issues in attempting to prepare the division for battle, most notably in manning and equipment. In a letter to the Headquarters of Home Forces Office on the 27 January 1942, Northcott wrote that one of the major factors retarding progress in training and organisation was the fact that:

... a force that would become, with its firepower and manoeuvrability, the most powerful formation Australia had ever created.

...the two most recently formed Regiments in each Brigade were required to select the best-trained officers, N.C.O.s and other ranks to make up the two Independent Squadrons for immediate service overseas.¹⁸

The devastating impact of this transfer was felt in two ways. First, according to a report completed just prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War on the operational value of the 1st Australian Armoured Division, only officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) had completed AFV courses, and were therefore the only men capable of effectively training the soldiers in what was essentially a highly technical skill.¹⁹ Secondly, Northcott wrote that:

The Psychological effect upon A.I.F. Troops who were expecting to embark for overseas service early in the new year, of the loss of many of their most experienced officers, the shortage of training equipment, absence of tanks, and having to accept a lower priority than militia formations, has made it very difficult to maintain the interest and progress in training which is essential.²⁰

Also, to add insult to injury, the officers and NCOs chosen for the Independent Squadrons were informed on the eve of their departure to Malaya that they would not be deploying.²¹ They were then returned to the 1st Armoured to take up positions that had been temporarily filled by other men. This had a long-term negative effect on the morale of the division that would continue to get worse over the life of the formation. This psychological effect was extremely important during wartime as members of the division were AIF and therefore entirely voluntary unlike the conscripts of the

militia. At the time, there were severe shortages of trained personnel and, as noted, the division was given a lower priority in this regard to even the militia units in Australia, Papua and New Guinea. For example, the Brigades did not have any armoured vehicles of note before April of 1942. In December 1941, it was reported that:

8 Light and 10 Light Cruiser Tanks only available. The Light Tanks are obsolescent and spare parts are short. The U.S. Light Cruisers are new but NO SPARES are available.²²

Instead of tanks, the division was equipped with less than thirty machine gun carriers per regiment for the purpose of training. Due to these factors, it became extremely difficult to maintain training standards.

On 5 April 1942, Major General Horace Robertson arrived at the 1st Armoured to take command of the formation and prepare it for war. However, due to Japanese action in December 1941, the purpose of the division had crucially changed, and this was reflected in its commander. Robertson was a permanent officer, and for the majority of the year previous to his appointment at the 1st Armoured he had been in command of the AIF Reinforcement Depot (Middle East).²³ This left him supremely qualified in bringing the division to standard in the quickest time possible. However, although Robertson had advocated for an armoured division throughout his career, he was not held in highest regard by his superiors due to his independent nature, and was not initially considered for the position.²⁴ However, with the outbreak of war with Japan, he along with several other younger officers were returned to Australia to take command of forming units for use in the defence against the Japanese.

Robertson arrived at the 1st Armoured Division just in time for the first tanks to arrive and be issued to the division. From the start though there were issues with the equipment. The 2/9th Armoured Regiment received the first batch in mid-April 1942, but it was discovered they had radial aircraft engines that ran on petrol, and required specialised and unavailable equipment to get started.²⁵ This presented an extremely large logistical problem due to the high maintenance requirement of petrol engines. On 31 August the Armoured Division Headquarters and the 1st Armoured Brigade were finally fully equipped with 170 petrol tanks. However, there was a large maintenance liability at that point as twenty-six tanks were in need of an essential 100 operating hour service while a further 105 tanks would require their service within the next fortnight. As the combined brigade workshops could only carry out ten overhauls per week, it would take almost three months to bring the brigade back to full effectiveness.²⁶

... it was discovered they had radial aircraft engines that ran on petrol, and required specialised and unavailable equipment to get started.

As well as the issue of maintenance, Robertson expressed his concern with the severe lack of trained personnel available to the Brigade. In fact, he noted that ‘there is no trained personnel available to replace even normal wastage under training conditions.’²⁷ This was an issue that went further than simply the mechanics who kept the vehicles in working condition; there were severe shortages of trained NCOs and officers due to the fighting against the Japanese in Papua, especially during the crucial months following the Battle of Milne Bay in August 1942. This meant that the 1st Armoured had suffered even further as a result of priority given to militia units in the Australian territories. In order to counteract the obvious lack of preparedness for war created by this situation, the 2nd Armoured Brigade was re-equipped with more easily maintained M3 diesel tanks, and had approximately ninety functioning tanks by the beginning of September.²⁸ Although the greatly reduced maintenance requirement allowed 2nd Armoured Brigade to function effectively and continue training as required, it forced the Brigades to train and operate separately and as a result, the division could not be considered a single functional unit. This greatly hampered Robertson’s ability to prepare the 1st Armoured to present a coherent defence against possible invasion, and as a result he drew up plans for a series of intensive divisional level exercises in the Narrabri training area in New South Wales.²⁹

These exercises were to be conducted over the course of several weeks from the end of September to the end of October with the purpose of ‘reaching operational readiness by 1 November.’³⁰ Although the exercises were not perfect, they did achieve the purpose of preparing the 1st Armoured to operate at a divisional level—by 1 November 1942, for the first time since its formation, the 1st Armoured Division was prepared to go to war. It was noted that the training had been extremely valuable and would ‘result in a considerable reduction in the number of valuable trained lives likely to be lost in the first and subsequent actions.’³¹ However, Brigadier Macarthur-Onslow, Commanding Officer 1st Armoured Brigade, drew several severe criticisms of the conduct of the brigades as umpire. He highlighted a lack of tactical understanding of armoured warfare and a lack of professionalism when it came to maintaining equipment, both of which would cause major issues should the division go to war.³² However, it cannot be ignored that the division was as fully trained and prepared as it could have been without facing action. Sadly, this was not to last. On 18 October, near the end of the exercises, Robertson informed his commanders down to regimental level that ‘the division as they knew it was to be broken up.’³³ The reorganised 1st Armoured Division was to be sent to Western Australia as part of

... by 1 November 1942, for the first time since its formation, the 1st Armoured Division was prepared to go to war

Lieutenant-General Bennett's III Corps, and within the next month it was reorganised and deployed to a location near Geraldton, Western Australia.

By the time the decision was made to send the 1st Armoured Division to Western Australia substantial thought had gone into the reorganisation of land forces in Australia. The guiding concept was that instead of one single armoured division that could defend only one location, it was in the best interests of Australia to redesignate the 1st and 2nd Motor Divisions as armoured divisions and equip one brigade per division with M3 tanks. This was due to the Australian Government's failure to develop strategic transport infrastructure in the form of roads or railway networks, meaning that units could not be moved to the site of an invasion if in fact it did take place.³⁴ In order to address this fault, the 1st Armoured would lose 2nd Armoured Brigade, and gain a motorised brigade in return.³⁵ The creation of the three new divisions would allow an effective defence of both the eastern and western coasts with armoured units, and allow for one division to be kept in reserve in the vital south-eastern areas of Australia. The reorganisation did occur, with the 3rd Armoured Division created in November 1942 after absorbing 2nd Armoured Brigade, and the 2nd Armoured Division created in Queensland in February 1943. The reorganised 1st Armoured Division was to take responsibility for defending the west coast under

The new strategic focus on the South-West Pacific Area ... was the beginning of the end for the 1st Armoured

Lieutenant-General Bennett and III Corps. At the beginning of 1943, due to the rapid Japanese advance and the increasing threat in Papua, it became increasingly apparent that the 1st Armoured Division would not have the opportunity to fight as a formation. The new strategic focus on the South-West Pacific Area and the limitations of terrain there meant that the 1st Armoured was quickly losing relevance as a massed armour formation.³⁶ This was the beginning of the end for the 1st Armoured, as well as for the other Armoured Divisions created by the reorganisation.

Major-General Robertson had been aware of the doctrinal thought behind the reorganisation and had several times attempted to point out the problems with modifying or disbanding the division—problems such as the £20,000,000 cost of equipping it, or the fact that it would be practically impossible to supply the number of trained personnel required to fully man all three divisions.³⁷ However, his relationship to his superiors meant that his opinion went unheeded and he was dispatched to Western Australia. As the war against the Japanese progressed, it became increasingly apparent that an invasion would not occur; Robertson attempted to occupy his troops although recognising that his division was becoming less relevant. In early 1943 he was reported to have told the Minister for the Army

that ‘they have sent me to the end of Australia to get me out of the road’.³⁸ However, the division still participated in exercises aimed at preparing for defending the coast until as late as July 1943.³⁹

Eventually the soldiers of the 1st Armoured Division realised that they would not be defending Australia against an invasion by the Japanese. It became almost a running joke to the soldiers, with one recalling a conversation held in the mess late in 1943, where it was remarked that:

There is a strong possibility that we will be awarded a campaign medal...I heard the CO and Colonel discussing it and both agreed that we won our battle without fighting. The Japs were too scared of us to make a landing and decided to bugger off.⁴⁰

Finally, in September 1943, the 1st Armoured Division was disbanded. This was in line with similar action to the 2nd and 3rd Armoured Divisions, which were disbanded in February and October respectively. The 1st Armoured Brigade of the 1st Armoured Division was retained as an independent brigade, and other new units such as the 4th Armoured Brigade were formed with the purpose of providing units to attach to infantry formations in jungle warfare. This represented a reversion to the tactics of providing infantry support tanks in squadrons and battalions to individual units. The new brigades were deployed in elements into the South–West Pacific theatre, and almost all were re-equipped with Matilda infantry support tanks before deployment due to the greater effectiveness of the Matilda in the jungle. For the remainder of the war the concept of an armoured division was abandoned as irrelevant for the war Australia was fighting.

A divisional formation for armour has not been attempted in the Australian Army since the disbandment of the 1st Armoured Division in September 1943.

The Australian Government’s decision in 1940 to approve the formation of the 1st Australian Armoured Division was extremely ambitious, but given the evidence they had at their disposal, the decision seems to have been justified.

The shock caused by German victory in France caused ripples that spread across the world, and the risks associated with the decision to create a large armoured formation in Australia were mitigated by the way in which it was implemented. Instead of simply creating a formation for overseas service, the Government considered advice from several sources and created a formation that would also be able to effectively fulfil the role of home defence. The raising of the division, although fraught with technical and manning issues, was still accomplished in less than

The raising of the division ...
was still accomplished in less
than eighteen months, a minor
miracle given Australia’s almost
total lack of expertise ...

eighteen months, a minor miracle given Australia's almost total lack of expertise and tank construction capabilities. Also, as Australia's military modified itself for war in the jungle, the disbandment of the division in 1943 is understandable, as it was a huge resource drain on the war effort, and the perceived threat of Japanese invasion was reduced for every soldier deployed to the Australian territories in Papua. Combined with Japanese naval losses at Midway and Guadalcanal, the threat of invasion was greatly reduced. Overall, there are several important points to make with regard to the 1st Armoured Division and its influence on the Australian Army tank forces that followed it.

The 1st Armoured Division was created in response to a very real need to possess a powerful, deployable armoured force. Although it never functioned in its intended role, it fulfilled two key purposes. First, it trained men in the tactics and skills required of armoured units. This allowed them to function at a much higher and more capable level when they were deployed in smaller formations. The value of the experience gained during the formation of the 1st Armoured should not be ignored; the men of the formation did not simply forget their skills when it disbanded. Also, it provided Australia the ability to react to any possible Japanese invasion with a precise, powerful force that could decisively engage and defeat any possible landing force. Although it was not used, at the time it was seen to be Australia's best hope against a determined landing.

Although it was not used,
at the time it was seen to be
Australia's best hope against
a determined landing.

Although the 1st Armoured was formed to exploit a demonstrated development in armoured tactics at the time, its use as a defensive formation was justified. The doctrinal thought behind using a fast, heavily armoured and manoeuvrable formation to defend mainland Australia in the event of an armed landing is not without merit—the terrain generally suits a mobile armoured defensive strategy. It is also significant to note that although Australia has never utilised an armoured formation in this role, it is one that has been maintained in the Army from the time of the 1st Armoured Division until today, with the M1A1 Abrams main battle tank fulfilling the same role as the light and medium M3 cruisers of 1942. It is also curious to note that in the only two theatres in which the Army has deployed tanks, the South–West Pacific Area during the Second World War and Vietnam, they have been used in an infantry support capability, and yet no AFV-equipped unit has been dedicated to functioning in this role since the Second World War.

In the present, this shortfall has been addressed partially by the provision of the cavalry regiments and the Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV), but their primary role has always been medium reconnaissance and independent operations separate

to the infantry battalions. Although they have recently gone beyond their core functions and been attached at the combat team level to infantry sub-units, a capability gap still exists between a dedicated infantry support AFV, and the current in service LAV and the Protected Mobility Vehicle (PMV). The M113A4 Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) partially fills this role, but lacks in both the survivability and firepower required for close combat high-end warfighting in support of infantry in complex terrain. The M1A1 Abrams main battle tank also provides some infantry support capability, but has not been utilised in the Australian context, and there is no indication that this will change. Overall, there is an identified capability gap between in service equipment and an infantry support AFV.

The primary operating environment for armoured vehicles in the Australian Army today remains similar to that of the Second World War—operations within Australia, the South Pacific islands and littoral operations in South–East Asia. This environment calls for the provision of an AFV with the ability to support infantry operations, and whilst the M1A1 Abrams main battle tank may be suited to the original role of the AFV in defence of northern Australia, its 62-tonne weight is largely unsuited to littoral operations throughout Asia.

The primary initiative towards providing the infantry support AFV capability to the Australian Army is the Land 400 project, and there are several lessons that can be drawn from the experience of raising the 1st Armoured and applied to the acquisition of a Land Combat Vehicle System (LCVS) in the infantry support AFV role.⁴¹ The Land 400 concept of operations requires the LCVS to provide close combat reconnaissance, intimate/direct fire support and high survivability for both the vehicle and its occupants⁴² This will require the substantial developments in force structure that are currently underway, as effective training can only be conducted in formations where the units are able to operate and train collectively. One lesson from the development of the 1st Armoured Division is that when units are equipped differently and trained separately, they cannot operate effectively together, even in controlled exercise situations. As such, frequent intimate collective training between the LCVS and infantry battalions or embedding of the vehicles will be essential to the effective use of the system. This will result in a higher required manning and maintenance liability due to the diffused force structure, but is essential to force effectiveness on operations.

There is also a lesson for the Land 400 project in the logistical problems presented to the 1st Armoured Division on the initial acquisition of its petrol radial M3 tanks.

... when units are equipped differently and trained separately, they cannot operate effectively together, even in controlled exercise situations.

Both tooling and maintenance were a major issue—it is not good enough to simply provide the new vehicle without correct support at the field workshop level, as having to send a vehicle to the manufacturer to repair each time it is damaged causes unacceptable delays. In a wartime situation this can be a critical failure and lead to massive equipment shortages. Supply was also a major issue, with the majority of the facilities set up for the division catering to diesel vehicles, causing extreme difficulty when resupplying the petrol vehicle, both in barracks and in the field. Interoperability then becomes paramount, as the rest of the vehicle fleet should be able to be maintained and supplied with the same supply chain and with the same petrols, oils and lubricants.

Until the introduction of the Land 400 LCVS, it appears that for the foreseeable future, the 1st Armoured Regiment will continue the tradition of the 1st Armoured Division in ensuring both the defence of northern Australia and the provision of high-end combat power in direct support of infantry, and will continue to train for these eventualities. It remains to be seen if this capability will be utilised, given that it has never been used for this purpose. The Land 400 project should provide a capacity to fill the infantry support AFV capability gap that has existed since the deployment of Matilda tanks in the Second World War. The Land 400 vehicle must keep in mind the primary operating environment, and the requirement to operate in this terrain and conditions in close proximity with infantry, as well as the requirement to operate in both littoral and jungle environments. If these considerations are achieved, it will continue the Australian tradition of utilising AFV to ensure infantry forces are more effective in close combat and receive fewer casualties.

The Australian 1st Armoured Division was the opening chapter to the use of armour in Australia. Although it never served overseas, it achieved a great deal in the defence of the nation and as such should not be relegated to the vaults of history. The men who served in the 1st Armoured went on to serve throughout the South–West Pacific Area, and their performance was in part due to the training and preparations they received during their time with the division. The 1st Armoured should not be known as the division that never saw battle, but instead as the division that built Australia's current armoured tradition from nothing. The continuation of this tradition will show in the increased capabilities provided by Australian armour into the future.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Peter Dennis et al (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 208.
- 2 War Cabinet Minute, Agendum No. 150/1940 – Supplement No. 3 – Provision and Training of Personnel, 10 Jul 1940, AWM54 721/2/25.

- 3 War Cabinet Minute, Agendum No. 150/1940 – Supplement No. 4 – Provision of Tank Equipment and Personnel, 10 Jul 1941, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 4 Ronald Austin, ‘The Appointment of Lieutenant-General Squires: The Role of Major-General Sir Carl Jess in the Conflict Between the Military Board and the Government’, *Sabretache*, Vol. 44, No. 1, March 2003, pp. 27–32.
- 5 Chris Chant, *Tanks*, Silverdale Books, Melbourne, 2004, p. 96.
- 6 James Morrison, ‘Mechanising an Army: Mechanisation Policy and Conversion of Light Horse 1923–1940’, Land Warfare Studies Centre Study Paper No. 307, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra June 2006, p. 43.
- 7 Jeffery Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, 3rd Edition, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008, p. 137.
- 8 Morrison, ‘Mechanising an Army’, p. 45.
- 9 War Cabinet Minute, Agendum No. 150/1940 – Supplement No. 4 – Provision of Tank Equipment and Personnel, 10 Jul 1941, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 10 Director of Staff Duties, 1 Armd. Div. War Establishments – Army Tank Brigades and Battalions, 03 Sep 1941, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 11 War Cabinet Minute, Agendum No. 150/1940 – Supplement No. 4 – Provision of Tank Equipment and Personnel, 10 Jul 1941, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 12 Ibid..
- 13 War Cabinet Minute, Agendum No. 150/1940 – Supplement No. 4 – Provision of Tank Equipment and Personnel, 10 Jul 1941, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Director of Armoured Fighting Vehicles, Operational Value – 1 Aust. Armd. Div., 06 Dec 1941, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 17 John Coates, ‘Northcott, Sir John’, Ed. John Richie, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 15, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2000, pg. 493–4.
- 18 Peter Donovan. *Waltzing Matildas: The Men and Machines of the 9th Australian Armoured Regimental Group – 1941–1946*, Australian War Memorial, 1988, MSS1182, p. 46.
- 19 Director of Armoured Fighting Vehicles, Operational Value – 1 Aust. Armd. Div., 06 Dec 1941, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 20 Donovan, *Waltzing Matildas*, pg. 46–7.
- 21 Ibid., p. 47.
- 22 Director of Armoured Fighting Vehicles, Operational Value – 1 Aust. Armd. Div., 06 Dec 1941, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 23 Jeffery Grey, *Australian Brass: The Career of Lieutenant General Sir Horace Robertson*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992, pg. 95–6.
- 24 Ibid., p. 100.
- 25 Donovan, *Waltzing Matildas*, pg. 54–5.

- 26 Ibid., p. 62.
- 27 Ibid., p. 63.
- 28 1 Aust Armd Div HQ, Annex to Tank Situation – 31 Jul 1942, 26 Aug 1942, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 29 Crouch, Australian Fighting Vehicle Directorate, 1 Aust Armd Div Letter of Information, 14 Aug 1942, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 30 Grey, *Australian Brass*, p. 108.
- 31 Donovan, *Waltzing Matildas*, p. 65.
- 32 Macarthur-Onslow, Points of Interest Noted by Umpires – 1 Aust Armd Div Exercise – 06 Oct 1942 to 10 Oct 1942, HQ 1. Aust Armd Bde, 14 Oct 1942, AWM54 721/2/3.
- 33 Grey, *Australian Brass*, p. 110.
- 34 Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p. 175.
- 35 Crouch, Australian Fighting Vehicle Directorate, 1 Aust Armd Div Letter of Information, 14 Aug 1942, AWM54 721/2/25.
- 36 Dennis et al (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, p. 50.
- 37 Grey, *Australian Brass*, p. 110.
- 38 Grey, *Australian Brass*, p. 111.
- 39 Adv Headquarters, 1 Aust Armd Div. Trg Instn No. 32., 11 May 1943 to 31 Jul 1943, AWM54 952/1/7.
- 40 Will Hungerford, 'Battle Honours', in *Live Cowards and Dead Heroes*, 1988,, MSS1245.
- 41 Gillespie, Army User Requirement—Land 400 Land Combat Vehicle System, 30 Mar 2011. Army internal document, unclassified material.
- 42 Caligari, Land 400 Land Combat Vehicle System—Concept of Operations, Plan Destrier, 01 Dec 11. Army internal document, unclassified material.

THE AUTHOR

Lieutenant Zach Lambert joined the Australian Regular Army in 2007, attending the Australian Defence Force Academy and completing a Bachelor of Arts in history and politics. He completed a Graduate Certificate in Defence Studies and graduated ADFA in 2009. On completion of Royal Military College - Duntroon in 2011, he was allocated to the Corps of Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. He is currently serving in the Operational Support Squadron Workshop at 3 CER as Acting TST Comd.
