

Pompey Elliott scholarship 2023

My name is Corporal Dale Vistarini and I joined the Army Reserves in 2007 as a Rifleman, posting to A Company 5/6 RVR (then at Sunshine). In my time I've been fortunate enough to deploy overseas (Solomon Islands in 2009; Timor Leste in 2012) and on other domestic operations (OP Bushfire Assist '09, OP Bushfire Assist 19/20 & OP COVID-19 Assist '20). My current posting is at 4 Brigade Headquarters as an instructor for the Combatives Cell, but my previous posting was at B Company (Sunshine) 8/7 RVR where I was privileged to be awarded the Elliott Pompey Scholarship in 2020.



(Post on website of the RVR Association) [NEWS | R.V.R. Association \(rvr.asn.au\)](https://www.rvr.asn.au/news)

Being that I was presented this award right in the middle of a global pandemic, my opportunities to undertake this award were for some time well... non-existent. The conversations only began to happen around 12 months ago where my CSM at the time suggested I look at 1 Mercian Regiment, England. He was also a previous awardee and had spent his time there, making friends he still communicates with to this day. After many emails and conversations, with a lot of careful consideration and planning I was finally able to set off on my travels this year during the English summer months of June/ July. Whilst I had made a very deliberate decision to be there during the warmer months, I was to later discover summer there is not as nice as it sounds.

It was only a couple days on their main base with A (Grenadier) Company before we moved to Castlemartin Ranges, located on the southwestern coast of Wales. Here, as part of their yearly training schedule, the unit conduct live fire training integrating as part of a mechanised battlegroup. It started with the basics of individual firing, then moving into pairs, bricks, sections and then platoons. All by day AND night. Like any team, the best way to work well together is connect and to get to know each other. So, slotting into sections as an extra body gave me the perfect opportunity to talk to other soldiers and learn how diverse this unit is. Throughout the whole company right up to the senior ranks there was a vast number of different backgrounds from Fiji, Caribbean and African countries, experienced Gurkha soldiers, even young mums and dads all alongside the keen baby-face teenagers. Although background was fairly diverse the experience of the teams I worked with were pretty fresh, with some only now taking part in their first real live fire attacks. It was here where I found I could contribute the most. The drills and SOPs of British Army are incredibly similar, and the fundamentals of a good Infantry soldier are even more the same, so the team was appreciative of

how well I could help with their skills. It was easy to relate to everyone's experiences as the whole army life, even in a different army on the other side of the world, felt strangely familiar.

The next stage of our Castlemartin stay once we had signed off all the dismounted manoeuvres was onto working in their Warrior Infantry fighting Vehicles. It was meant to be at least a solid week of mounted training with the crews however due various issues - including mechanical, crew competency and even weather delays our time jumping in and out of them was all too brief, limited to only a couple of days of live serials. From what practice I did dismounting from a loud, overly crammed human washing machine it was still fun to feel that battle buzz of being in the middle of a mechanised attack, flanked by heavy live fire from mounted machine guns AND a section's worth of rifle fire.

Once returned from the ranges the final level of training for the company was to put the fundamentals to the test with four weeks fully mounted out field on exercise. Due to my own scheduling I was not able to join the unit on exercise, which I later learnt was probably a good decision. I was able to see their convoys off as they departed for their AO, giving me a short break then onto my next destination before coming home.



(1). Standard British army rifle L85SA80A3. Does the job but not as ergonomic as our EF88.

(2). Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicles. Brought back a lot of memories of crammed bumpy rides in the back of our APCs.

The RVR Association informed me that part of this award was to conduct a study tour in a location of historical military significance. I thought nothing would be better than to visit the place where all our military's history started than the shores of Gallipoli, Turkiye.

We all know the stories of brutal fighting and the stalemate of trenches but there were two major things that I found could only be appreciated visiting these places in person. Firstly, is how difficult the terrain is. I was there at the height of summer where it's a dry 30°+ every day and although the area is now covered in pine trees, at the height of the campaign in 1915 there would have been absolutely no shade anywhere. If the unforgiving sun wasn't enough, it was just as harsh during winter with rain, seaside gale winds and even snow. There were the beautiful beaches next to the various memorials along the shore but looking up at the impossibly steep hills at it from my own perspective as an Infantry Corporal it's hard to imagine landing on the beach and being told to take that ground, only to get to the top and face a heavily dug in enemy. I shared the same sentiment looking down from these incredibly scenic peaks, thinking tactically that the high ground advantage the Turks had was huge. I still can't fathom why General Hamilton would have thought that this would have been an easy campaign!

The second thing to fully appreciate is how everything about Gallipoli was unbelievably close quarters. One of the stop-off points on our tour was in between two trench front lines, with no man's land separated only by the main two-lane road right through the middle. If you could imagine being in a trench on one side of the road, hear your enemy move and talk on the other side and have the dead bodies of your friends in the middle, all within less than 10 metres. With the constant stench of death above, the lack of supplies, the well documented unsanitary and disease-ridden living conditions combined with the previously mentioned harsh weather you can start to fully appreciate what our ancestors experienced, including one of mine.



Impression of No Man's land on the shoreline of Eceabat, showing how close each side was! (Distance measured here of No Man's land is only 8m)

I have laid a poppy at the name of my great, great uncle Private Hector Vistarini on the walls at Australian War Memorial in Canberra before, but to visit his known burial spot at Lone Pine memorial and walk the ground he fought and died on over a hundred years ago has always been a bucket list item of mine. The whole tour and experience of Gallipoli truly is moving and it's a pilgrimage I recommend to any defence member. In hindsight I wish I could have spent more time there.



Family relative known to be buried near Lone Pine - PTE Hector Vistarini 12th Battalion Australian Infantry Killed in Action 2nd May 1915.

When I returned home it wasn't until many weeks later that I heard back from one of my Mercian friends. The unit had just returned from their exercise and as he described, it was "horrible; pissed down nearly every day!" With my own many years of similar experience spent away on exercise in miserable conditions I couldn't help but feel a little happy that I wasn't out there with them. So much for the English summer!