

## Somewhere Between Lamia and Larissa Roads

Researched and compiled by Frank Giggins (nephew of Corporal Jack Giggins) of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF.

The information appearing in this compilation is dedicated to the memory of the brave members of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion and has been derived from the collections of the Australian War Memorial, family memorabilia, and other sources as referred.

*'Your fancies and fortunes I've borrowed. Your songs of the land or air.  
Men say not 'He joyed' or 'He sorrowed', But say, 'My battalion was there.'*<sup>i</sup>



**Corporal (CPL) John (Jack) Giggins** Service No: VX10149, 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion, Australian Army, 2<sup>nd</sup> A.I.F.



Figure 1: Corporal Jack Giggins 1940

Jack was one of eight children born to John and Emma Giggins. Jack was born on 12 Sep 1910 in Gravesend, Kent in England and immigrated to Australia in 1914 with his mother and four other siblings. The family settled in Malvern, an inner suburb of Melbourne, Victoria.

Jack married Ethel Cairns Jenkins on 24 November 1934 in St Georges Church of England, Malvern, and together they had a daughter (Margaret) born in 1935.

Jack voluntarily enlisted in the Australian Army (Second Australian Imperial Forces, 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF) in South Melbourne, on 1 Feb 1940, at age 30 years; - one of three Giggins brothers to enlist in the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF during World War 2.

Prior to his recruitment in the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion, Jack had been enlisted in the 37<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Australian Citizen's Forces (1925-28), and the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Voluntary Militia Forces, from which he was discharged in 1940 to join the AIF.

After enlisting and being transferred to Puckapunyal he was posted to the newly formed 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion. Having completed basic training, Corporal (CPL) Jack Giggins and the rest of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion embarked from Melbourne on 14 April 1940, aboard the vessel HMTY1 (Ettrick) for overseas service.

Arriving in the Middle East at El Kautara (a city on the western side of the Suez Canal in Egypt) on 18 May 1940, the battalion continued training in Palestine and Egypt.

The men of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion took part in their first campaign in January and February 1941, advancing against the Italians in eastern Libya, where they took part in successful attacks at Bardia and Tobruk. The battalion's time in Libya cost it 32 killed, and 60 wounded.<sup>ii</sup>

On 9 April 1941, the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion and most of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division, including Corporal (CPL) Jack Giggins were deployed to Greece, in order to resist the anticipated German invasion; embarking on the troopship MV Cameronia at Alexandria (Egypt), and disembarking in Piraeus, Greece on 12 April 1941, from where they moved on to Daphne..



Figure 2: Corporal Jack Giggins at Puckapunyal, Victoria, 1940

The 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion began their campaign on 14 April 1941 moving forward and taking up positions at the junction of Graunia and Corfu Road in central Greece, to cover the withdrawal of other units.

On the 15 April the Germans were reported to be within 30 miles, so subsequently the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> battalion moved to reserve positions at Kalambaka (a small town located in the heart of Greece, in the northwestern part of the Thessalian plain. The town of Kalambaka would be eventually burned to the ground and destroyed by the Nazis forces before the war finally ended).

By the 17 April the battalion is recorded as withdrawing a further 6 miles from their previous positions and prepares to fight rearguard action. Further withdrawal of the battalion is recorded on the 18-19 April through Simtom to Lamia Pass.

Official records indicate Corporal Jack Giggins was killed in action on 19 April 1941, just seven days after arriving in Greece. He was reportedly amongst 13 Australian soldiers from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion killed that day in an air strike against the Australian troops as they were retreating around the region of Lamia in central Greece. His remains were never recovered, and records indicate that he is buried 'somewhere between Lamia and Larissa Roads', in central Greece.



Figure 3: Corporal Jack Giggins (left) and Lance Corporal Leo White, Palestine 1940-41

Family folklore recounts that Lance Corporal Leo White (who would later in 1943 marry Jack's youngest sister Jessie) was with his mate Corporal Jack Giggins at the time Jack was killed, however there is nothing to confirm or otherwise refute this claim, which at the time provided some comfort for Jack's family.

In the book 'Those Who Served', the author of one of the chapters, Gavin Long from the Australian War Memorial describes the chaos and

the casualties associated with the day Corporal Jack Giggins perished:

*"Many vehicles were hit but few disabled. One officer who was towards the rear of the column remembers having seen only six abandoned vehicles between Larisa and Lamia. It seems certain that more vehicles were lost as a result of being bogged, breaking down, or running over the edges of the narrow roads than as a result of direct damage by air attack.*

*In men, to take two instances, the 2/5th Battalion lost thirteen killed and twenty-four wounded during the day, and the 2/11th Battalion four killed and eleven wounded; these appear to have been the heaviest casualties inflicted on Australian battalions by air attack in any day in this campaign."<sup>iii</sup>*

On the day that Corporal Jack Giggins was killed, Larissa fell to the advancing German army. The 2nd/5th Australian Infantry Battalion had withdrawn through Simtom to Lamia Pass, and eventually all the way to the port of Kalamata, where on 27 April 1941 the remainder of the battalion boarded the transport vessel 'City of London', for evacuation to Alexandria. Following this the remaining battalion moved on to Palestine, where it arrives on 30 April 1941. The battalion lost 21 men killed, 26 wounded and 47 as prisoners of war during the brief campaign in Greece.<sup>iv</sup>

The following is an extract from the official War Diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion on the day (19<sup>th</sup> April 1941) that Corporal Jack Giggins and a number of his comrades from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion were killed or injured.<sup>v</sup>

A.I.F. FORM C 2118A **WAR DIARY** (RENDER UNDER SECRET COVER) UNIT *2/5 Bn*

For material required, see F.S.B. Vol. I, Sec. 171

PLACE	DATE	SUMMARY OF EVENTS <small>Routine training details and information given in Casualty Returns are NOT required</small>	REFERENCES TO APPENDICES	C.O.'s REPORT AND COMMENTS ON MONTH <small>(On Operations, Equipment, Movement, Health, Administration, etc.)</small>
<i>TRIKHAI</i> <i>1: 100,000</i>	<i>19.</i>	<i>Continued journey as far as LAMIA where Mr. Giggings was on the pass overlooking the plain &amp; SPERCHONIA. Mr. Giggings was shot of LAMIA (225-338) company was heavily bombed in transit on several occasions. First attack was at 0700 hrs &amp; attacks continued throughout the day until 1700 hrs. The bombing &amp; M. Giggings was most effective from enemy point of view causing company to be halted. Most of the day. Considerable amount of transport was damaged &amp; Casualties numbered 13 killed &amp; 24 injured. Capt. Bostler &amp; Lt. G. G. in killed. 2300 hrs. Day resumed. Mr. Giggings was on high ground overlooking region of Bull road to ATHENS on the first attack of the LAMIA Pass where he was coming up from the plain made a hairpin bend to go up the face of the mountain. Mr. Giggings' flank was protected by precipitous slope &amp; on the left was 2/1 Bn.</i>		
	<i>20.</i>	<i>In position. Pass bombed on several occasions &amp; there was a heavy attack on area. A NZ Major arrived at P.H.Q. &amp; informed as above. Mr. Giggings was in the area. It transpired that they were in a</i>		

*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_

A10 Mob Print Ser AIF-21M-141-G

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

RCDIG1027013

Figure 3: War Diary entry of Commanding Officer on the day Jack Giggings and other Australians were killed in Greece. Courtesy AWM <sup>vi</sup>

At least fifteen names are recorded of soldiers from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion who fell in Greece on the same day that Corporal Jack Giggings was killed in action - 19 April 1941 (Note: this list may not fully represent all members of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion who were killed on 19 April 1941 in Greece).

It is assumed that some of these soldiers are those that are referred within the Official War Diary entry referenced above, however some may also have possibly died in action elsewhere in Greece on the same day:

Figure 4: Compiled from records held and published online by the Australian War Memorial

Service Number	Rank	Surname	First Name	Second Name	Age at Death
VX610	Private	Allen	Thomas		22
VX11568	Private	Balmas	John		23
VX35401	Private	Burnett	Fred		30
VX14342	Private	Dubberke	Harry	Walter	22
VX27697	Private	Finlay	Ronald		28
VX10149	Corporal	Giggings	Jack		31
VX12934	Private	Metcalf	William	John	31
VX7419	Private	Morcom	Ralph	Eric	29
VX4002	Private	Nash	Harold	Keith	27
VX3239	Private	O'Bryan	Francis	Joseph	23
VX5294	Private	Parker	James		37
VX5231	Private	Phillips	Albert	Edward	33
VX12860	Private	Quinlivan	Henry	Allen	25
VX3284	Private	Sutherland	George	King	35
VX12315	Private	Toleman	Charles	William	30



Of the approximately 17,000 Australian military personnel deployed to defend Greece and Crete against the German invasion, some 39 per cent were killed, injured, or captured.<sup>vii</sup> There are over 2,000 Australian servicemen who remain unaccounted for from World War Two.

Corporal Jack Giggins left behind his wife Ethel and five-year-old daughter Margaret, who were living at the time in the Melbourne suburb of Carnegie. The following are the official military records indicating the death of Corporal Jack Giggins and his place of burial – ‘between Lamia and Larissa Road, Greece’.

Official Number: VK10149  
 Rank: Cpl  
 Name: GIGGINS, Jack  
 Honors:  
 Age: 30  
 Ship or Unit: 2/5 Aust Inf Bn  
 Service: ARMY  
 Date and Place of Death: 19.4.41, Middle East  
 Place of Burial: Between Lamia & Larissa Road, GREECE.  
 Usual Place of Residence: Malvern Road, MALVERN, VIC.  
 Occupation: Treasury Employee  
 Birthplace: GRAVESEND, ENGLAND.  
 Parents - Father: GIGGINS, John  
 Mother: GIGGINS, Emma  
 Wife (Name): GIGGINS, Ethel Kaiama  
 Connection:  
 Roll of Honor: MALVERN, VIC.  
 Signature (N.O.K.): E.K. Giggins, (Widow)  
 Address: 58 Trararnore Ave, CARNEGIE, VIC.  
 REMARKS

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES  
 Record of Death  
 THIS IS TO CERTIFY that, according to records:-  
 Personal Army No. VK10149 RANK Corporal  
 NAME GIGGINS, Jack  
 UNIT 2nd/5th Battalion (Australian Imperial Force)  
 was Killed in Action  
 on 19th April, 1941.  
 The official notification of the above is contained in Army Form B2090A dated 14th May, 1941 - Dima.  
 Name and address of person nominated by the member as his next of kin (to be treated as confidential)  
 Mrs. E. K. Giggins, (wife)  
 58 Trararnore Av.,  
 CARNEGIE, S.E.S.  
 A. J. Dickinson  
 Lieut. Col.  
 Officer in Charge, Records,  
 District Records Office,  
 Southern Command 3rd M.D.  
 DATE of issue 17th November, 1941.  
 Issued Free.  
 Receipt No. Mrs. E.K. Giggins,  
 58 Trararnore Ave.,  
 CARNEGIE  
 Issued to  
 3M - 7/41 - 0138

*“They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them. Lest we forget.”*

Corporal Jack Giggins name appears, at panel 31 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. He is also commemorated at the Athens Memorial (Face 11), Phaleron War Cemetery, in Greece. There are now 2,029 Commonwealth servicemen of the Second World War buried or commemorated in the Phaleron War Cemetery, 596 of the burials are unidentified.

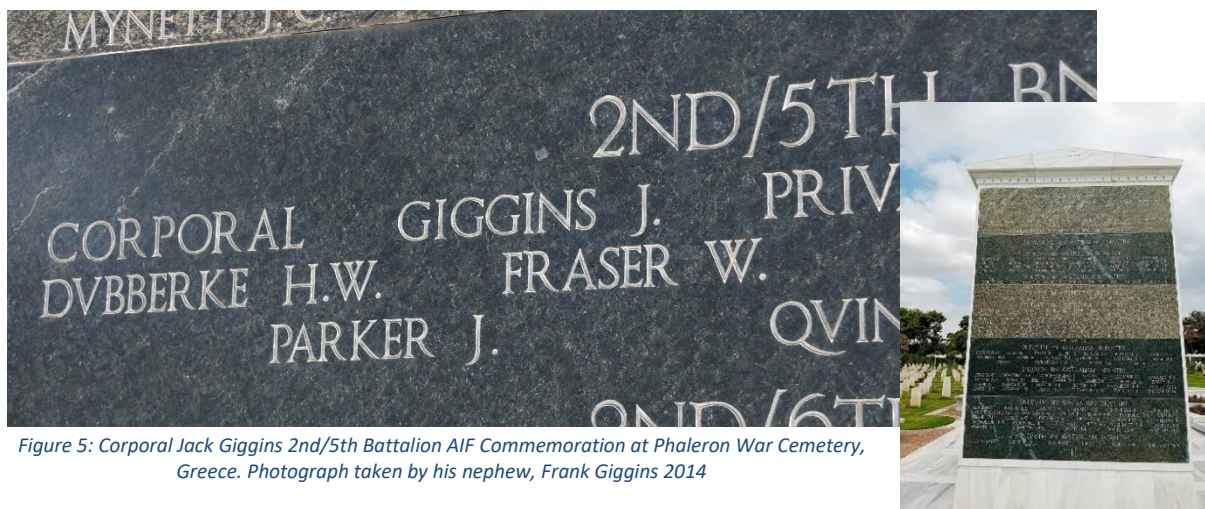


Figure 5: Corporal Jack Giggins 2nd/5th Battalion AIF Commemoration at Phaleron War Cemetery, Greece. Photograph taken by his nephew, Frank Giggins 2014

**CPL. JACK GIGGINS, Inf.** (killed in action), was one of the first Malvern men to enlist. He was the third son of Mr. and Mrs. John Giggins, of Elizabeth st., Malvern, and was employed by the M.M.T.B. Another son is with the AIF abroad. Cpl. Giggins saw service at Tobruk, Bardia, and Benghazi, and it is presumed he was killed in Greece. He wrote his last letter home on April 9 and was killed on April 19.

On 17 May 1941 the following death notice was published in the Argus Newspaper (Melbourne, Vic.) 1941, page 5, announcing that Corporal Jack Giggins had been killed in Greece. It reads:

*"CPL. JACK GIGGINS Inf. (killed in action) was one of the first Malvern men to enlist. He was the third son of Mr. and Mrs. John Giggins of Elizabeth Street, Malvern and was employed by the MMTB. Another son is with the AIF abroad. Cpl. Giggins saw service at Tobruk, Bardia, and Benghazi, and it is presumed he was killed in Greece. He wrote his last letter home on April 9 and was killed on April 19."*



On 16 June 1946, five years after Corporal Jack Giggins' death, nearly 300 mourners attended a memorial service at the Malvern Tramways Depot in honour of two former members of the Tramways Union who lost their lives in the war.

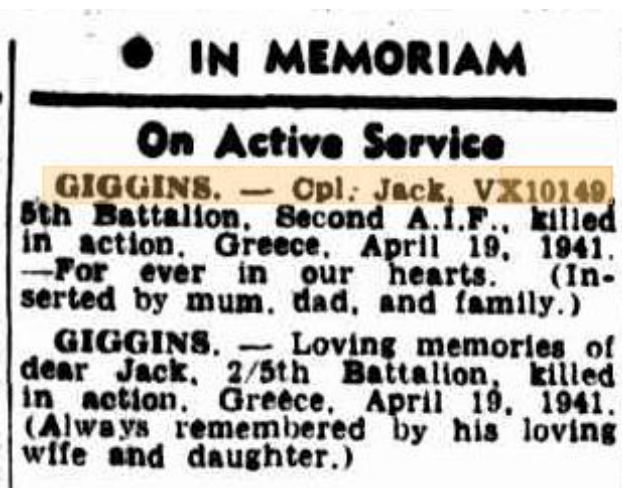
The two employees honoured included Corporal Jack Giggins. The service was conducted by Padre Reverend Alec Fraser of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion, with the address being given by Captain C.B. Swyers also of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion.

### MEMORIAL SERVICE AT TRAM DEPOT

Nearly 300 attended a memorial service at Malvern tramway depot yesterday in honour of two members of the Tramway Union who lost their lives in the war. They were Mr J. Giggins, who was killed in 1941, and Mr W. E. Armstrong, who died in 1943 while a POW. The service was conducted by Padre Rev Alec Fraser, 2/5th Batt, and an address was given by Captain C. B. Swyers, of the same battallon. Among those who attended the service were Cr S. Stevens, Mayor of Malvern; Cr Burnett Gray, representing the Tramways Board; Mr J. Abfalter, secretary of the Tramways Union; and Mr J. Dye, depot delegate on the union executive.

Corporal Jack Giggins' name appears on the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board Honour Roll (Malvern), Second World War 1939-45 (position 23).

Jack's two brothers - Stanley (Service No: VX24807) and Frank (Service No: VX281030), and his brother-in-law Leo White (Service No: VX3302, Leo served alongside Corporal Jack Giggins in the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion) all survived WW2.



Fifteen years after Corporal Jack Giggins was killed in Greece he continued to be remembered by his wife and family with a Memoriam Notice published in the Argus Newspaper (Melbourne, VIC), 19 April 1956, page 13, on the anniversary of his death in Greece.

Corporal Jack Giggins wife Ethel never remarried after losing her husband and died in 1994. His daughter Margaret died in 2018.



On 29 July 1946, a 2,500-year-old Greek Corinthian urn was donated to the Australian Government. It was presented by the Vice-President of Australian-Greek League (Athens) Mr Anargyros Stratigos to Prime Minister Chifley. The urn contained soil from the graves of Australians buried in the cemetery at Phaleron outside Athens.



Figure 6: The 2,500-year-old Greek Corinthian urn containing soil from the Graves of Anzacs donated to the Aust Government (AWM Art 30402)

Mr. A. Stratigos, who came from Greece specifically to make the presentation, told Mr. Chifley that this was the first time in history that Greece had presented Greek soil to a foreign country.

When he made the presentation, Mr Stratigos said: *“This is a piece from the holy body of Greece, which the Greeks have ever denied to other races. But they now offer it to a brother people, Australia, as an official token of the most sacred and unbroken ties of unity. The contents are historically significant as they are a symbol of friendship and recognition of the valiant efforts of Australian soldiers who fought and died in Greece.”*

In a letter to the Prime Minister of Australia (dated 23 August 1947, Athens), the Prime Minister of Greece stated: *“The Greek people will always remember with deep emotion the unparalleled heroism of the Australian soldiers, who, in the dark hours of our recent history, fought against the common enemy in Greece and Crete in comradeship with our soldiers.*

*The Australian soldiers who are buried in Greece are the everlasting symbol of the friendship between our two countries and of the heroic contribution of Australia in the struggle for liberty and justice.”<sup>x</sup>*

<sup>i</sup> Unidentified frontispiece in Pryce, H.W., *Your Old Battalion: War and Peace Verses*, Cornstalk Publishing Company, Sydney, 1926

<sup>ii</sup> Johnston, Mark (2008). *The Proud 6th: An Illustrated History of the 6th Australian Division 1939–46*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-51411-8.

<sup>iii</sup> Greece, Crete and Syria, Chapter 6: The Thermopylae Line by Gavin Long Australian War Memorial Canberra 1953

<http://tothosewhoserved.org/aus/army/ausarm02/chapter06.html>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://lemnosgallipolic.blogspot.com/2016/04/19-april-1941-larissa-falls.html>

<sup>v</sup> AWM52 8/3/5/6 - April - June 1941. RCDIG1027013 <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1367895>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/RCDIG1027013/bundled/RCDIG1027013.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.naa.gov.au/blog/battles-greece-and-crete-personal-tragedy>

<sup>viii</sup> Source: TROVE Digitized Newspapers. Deaths, On Active Service. Age (Melbourne, Vic.: 1854 - 1954), Saturday 7 June 1941, page 13

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/205149301>

<sup>ix</sup> Source: TROVE Digitized Newspapers. Memorial Service at Tram Depot. Argus (Melbourne, Vic.: 1848 - 1957), Monday 17 June 1946,

page 3 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/22249115>

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ART30402> Greek Australian Alliance, 1899-2016. 100th Anniversary Macedonian Front, 75th Anniversary Battles of Greece and Crete. Edition Dec 2015.

<https://www.kytherianassociation.com.au/articles/75th%20Annual%20115%20Year%20Booklet.pdf>