

Rifle clubs: Origins Tweed man was a straight shooter



Looking
Back with
Di Millar

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RIFLE clubs have been part of the Australian landscape for a long time and Australian shooters have enjoyed international success at a wide range of events including Olympic and Commonwealth Games and National Rifle Association competitions.

The NSW Rifle Association was formed in 1860 and the first prize meeting was held at Randwick race course in September 1861 between members of the military. Civilians were allowed to compete in 1866.

Here on the Tweed the first attempt to form a rifle club took place at Higgins' Imperial Hotel, Murwillumbah on Wednesday night, June 22, 1898 when 20 men turned up to a meeting chaired by local storekeeper Augustus Henry Linabury.

Mr Cleeve who was the town's acting Clerk of Petty sessions shared his experience and information on the working of rifle clubs in NSW.

He explained the objects of the club and the rules in force in NSW, including that the minimum requirement of membership to form a club was 20.

The members would be sworn in and in six months a staff sergeant would visit and put members through training after which each member would receive 200 rounds of ammunition and, for a club of 20, about a dozen rifles would be supplied. Mr A E A Smith proposed and Murwillumbah postmaster William Grime seconded that a rifle club be formed in Murwillumbah. Mr Grime was elected president, Mr Linabury elected secretary and Mr A E A Smith was elected treasurer with the committee made up of Edward Fackerell, E J Smith, John Withford, George Skinner and Thomas Higgins. Everyone at the meeting expressed their willingness to become members.

One speaker thought it was a primitive step on the part of the townspeople to form such a club and that a militia should be formed.

Mr Cleeve stated that when he returned to Sydney he would do all he could towards the formation of the club by seeing the proper authorities.

Whatever the outcome was back then, the club did not get up and running until later. In March 1902 the range situated on Mr G E Love's property at Kynnumboon was almost complete. Murwillumbah music teacher Henry Burge, who was club secretary, organised the first practice of the Murwillumbah Rifle Club (comprising 22 members) on Saturday, March 29. Martini Henry rifles were first used but were replaced in time by the Lee Enfield rifle.

Born on the Tweed in 1883 to Thomas and Susannah Boyd, Oswald Edward (Edward) Boyd had learnt to shoot in his teens and he became an early rifle club member, competing in his first shoot around 1904.

In October 1906 at the Mullumbimby range he won the badge for best shot in



ABOVE: Four-time winner of the Queen's Prize, Murwillumbah's Leo Dove is pictured competing at Bisley in 1948.



A Bisley shooting contest pictured in 1923 with the judges under umbrellas and the contestants exposed to the elements.



BELOW: Some Tweed shooters pictured around 1970 are, standing left to right, Fred Thompson, Doug Hawkins, Don Cobb, Harry Partridge, Winston Shoolbridge, Bill Roberts and Keith Thompson. Sitting left to right are Jim Simcox, Wally Rollman and John Jeffries.

the district by shooting 174 out of a possible 190. OE Boyd's reputation for being a crack rifle shot soon grew.

At the annual meeting of the Queensland Rifle Association held in August 1908 he won prizes in the 300 yards and 500 yards events.

In 1909 O E Boyd won the King's Badge in Sydney where he was noticed by state selectors for the Australian rifle team to compete at Bisley, the premier shooting ground and headquarters for the National Rifle Association in Surrey, England.

In January 1910 he was invited to Sydney to shoot in the Bisley elimination tests and led in the aggregate throughout the rounds. In May 1910 Edward Boyd sailed for

England on the RMS Omrah, one of three NSW representatives in the 12 man team. The wet conditions during the competition did not suit the Australian shooters and particularly when rainstorms swept the range. Although the Australians did not win any of the big team matches they won prize money of more than 400 pounds as individual competitors.

Edward Boyd won 40 pounds in prize money and he made it into the final 100 competitors of the King's and St George's competitions for which he received badges. Of the 1500 shooters competing in the King's Prize he finished in 40th place with a score of 321 and won eight pounds.

Fittinly Mayor Augustus Linabury was

at the send-off and welcome home functions put on by the Murwillumbah townspeople for their shooting celebrity.

In September 1935 Edward Boyd won the King's Prize in Brisbane under trying conditions in a shoot-off, proving that old shooters (at 52) could hold their nerve. During his life Oswald Edward Boyd served as a director of the NSW Banana Growers Federation, Murwillumbah Municipal Council alderman, Tweed Shire councillor, chairman of directors of Tweed Co-operative Butchering Co Ltd, president of the Murwillumbah branch of the Primary Producers Union, Chairman of the Cudgen Drainage Trust and trustee of the Tweed River Agricultural Society. He died on January 23, 1943.