



Official Magazine of  
**WODEN VALLEY  
SUB-BRANCH R.S.L.**



# The SERVICEMAN

First Published in January 1962

CHRISTMAS EDITION

NOVEMBER 2023



Local Canberra artist, Sylvie Carter, a finalist in the 2023 Gallipoli Art competition with her painting of Stretcher Bearer, *'Corporal Earnest Albert Corey on the Hindenberg Line 1918'* presenting the painting to Sub-Branch President, Jim Gilchrist to be displayed in the Corey Room.

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### *Notice*

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# The SERVICEMAN

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE WODEN VALLEY RSL SUB-BRANCH (INC)  
RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA

**Editor:**  
**Bob Cremer**  
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## OFFICE BEARERS 2023-24

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The Sub-Branch meets on the last Tuesday of each month except April and December at the Canberra Southern Cross Club, Corinna St, Phillip at 7.00PM. Subscription is due on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan annually and should be posted to GCCC, 14/27 Mulley St, Holder ACT 2611, by Phone or direct to BSB 062908 Acct 10841897.

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**FROM  
THE EDITOR'S DESK**

*Bob Cremer*



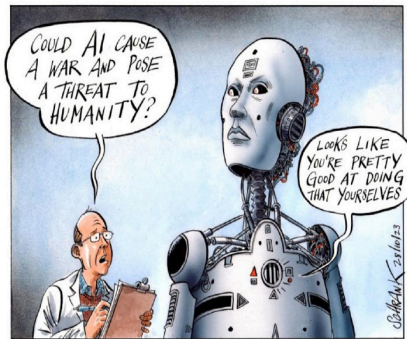
With the end of 2023 approaching rapidly, I thought that it was time to get this Christmas edition together although I feel like we have only just distributed the winter edition - it's difficult to keep up.

Things will be a bit hectic for a while at our place as Jan has just had a knee replacement on Friday 4 Nov, and as a result is obviously suffering considerable pain. After putting up with constant pain, and unable to participate in the walking group, of which we are long term members, a decision was finally to go ahead with the operation. Now we wait for the rehab process to hopefully provide a long term solution.

While we are being constantly reminded that COVID is still very prevalent in the community, let us hope we are able to carry on with our normal activities without suffering any future effects.

To all of our members and friends, have a very happy Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year as we progress into 2024.

Take care and be kind to each other.



**FALL IN**

*A warm welcome is extended to the following  
new members.*



Michael Banham, Steven Goodman,  
Peter Richards

## *President's Message*

*Jim Gilchrist*



Welcome to the Christmas Edition of *The Serviceman* for 2023 that marks the end of our financial year and heralds the onset of 2024. The past year brought some excitement and many happy memories and good times for our members, and continued to demonstrate the work that our advocates do to assist our members and others in the Veteran Community, and provided ample opportunities for the leadership teams to consolidate their respective work areas and plan for the future. Sadly, however, we also farewelled some longstanding members and assisted others who faced the inevitable effects of the ageing process.

Overall, 2023 was a good year during which we continued to develop a succession plan that aims at assuring our sustainable future. While we faced some frustrations, we dealt with them and the uncertainties that surrounded some of them. Many of us enjoyed some good times along the way and we maintained a commendable workload in all key areas. That said, we will need to ensure we optimise the use of our available resources, especially the availability of our volunteers and the funds we need to support our operations.

As I have noted in previous editions of *The Serviceman* and in our monthly newsletters, the Sub-Branch Board has continued to work on its succession plan and to review key aspects of governance and management. We recently applied for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status that, if successful, will provide opportunities for us to seek financial support from external sources, particularly veteran-centric or focussed organisations. We also continued to liaise with DVA to ensure the contribution that we, as a large member-based Ex-Service Organisation, and our advocacy work are recognised as a critical element of the overall support system for the Veteran Community.

In relation to the compensation and welfare work we do through our Veterans' Support Centre (VSC), I continually highlight the fact that the VSC is an integral part of our Sub Branch and that it is not a separate entity, nor do we have any plans for it to be separated from the Sub-Branch. I also note the fact that we fund the VSC from our own resources that we supplement through grants and appeals, and some small donations. In stressing that point, I remind all interested parties that if we do not receive substantial and sustainable financial support, we will need to continually reduce the services we offer to the broader Veteran Community, and will focus increasingly on our members. >>>

Another key development in our region is the *Queanbeyan Veterans and Families Hub* that will hopefully be operational by about mid-2024. We are supportive of the need for this Hub as it is intended to support the Veteran Community in the Region, including those who live in the ACT. The Hub will be operated by RSL LifeCare Veterans Services, that is an offshoot of RSL LifeCare with which many of you will be familiar. It will be supported by RSL NSW Branch. Having contributed to some of the open planning sessions and in subsequent meetings, I have stressed the extent, nature and needs of the whole Veteran Community such as that of our membership. In doing so, I also stressed the major role we now play in the overall system and that will be required in future. I am cautiously optimistic we might receive some essential back-office type support to sustain our operations, while also ensuring our operations are complementary and supplementary.

Two of the major success stories within the Sub-Branch, are the weekly Coffee Catch Ups, in *The Corey Room*, and the reinvigoration of *The Eddison Day Club*, at The Irish Club. While these activities both occur on Fridays, they are complementary rather than competitive, they provide camaraderie for our members and opportunities to introduce guests and prospective members to our Sub-Branch. If you are not already involved, please come along next year and see what suits you; bring a friend if you would like to. Please refer to our weekly Items of Interest and our monthly Newsletters to read about some of the highlights of these gatherings. Unfortunately, while our application for a grant for a bus trip this Spring was unsuccessful, we are awaiting another application that might provide an alternative for early next year.

Our small but enthusiastic and capable Compensation advocacy team had some excellent wins recently; but these were offset by some decisions that confuse the best of us. The Welfare team continued to focus on our members while doing its best to ensure that others who sought our assistance were referred to appropriate organisations who were able to help them. I note the support that Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) provided to our members recently and hope they will continue to do so into 2024.

While sustainable funding will support all our operations, the key to our continued success will remain the people on whom we rely to support all our activities. As I have noted frequently, if you or anyone you know might have an interest in spending time with us, we will find them at least one option that might suit them and their availability.

The Branch Executive has scheduled a Veterans Expo on 25 November that will be funded through the *Minister's Advisory Group for Veterans and Families* (MACVF). The Expo seeks to promote ESOs that operate in the ACT and Region to members of the Veteran Community, and encourage them to join in the activities each provide. Hopefully, some will volunteer with the respective ESOs.

>>>

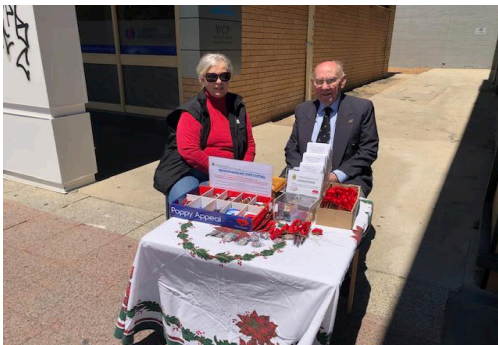
Further to comments you might have heard or read about concerning *The Canberra Hospital* (TCH) and the ACT Department of Health, the Director of Nursing at TCH, an assistant from TCH, and two senior members of the ACT Government’s Office of Seniors and Veterans, recently visited the Sub-Branch to discuss our work and some of our concerns. Our visitors confirmed they are aware of the needs and entitlements of members of the Veteran Community and that their new plans will try to cater for these. They will also continue to liaise with us and RSL LifeCare Veterans Services team regarding some of the cross border issues that limit the services available to all members of the community, including veterans.

In closing, I thank all our volunteers, our staff and anyone else who helped us during the year. I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year. Don’t forget that if any of you or any of your friends are struggling with your health or wellbeing, please call us for advice, assistance or just a chat.

### ***MOLOGA HAY BALES***

Located on the Bendigo Road, Mologa, Campaspe, Victoria the likenesses of 10 soldiers stand watch in the lead-up to ANZAC Day. Crafted from hay bales, they represent the 10 local men from this community who were killed in World War I. Each bale bears the individual name of one of the fallen men.

The art installation stands as a tribute to the late Allan Leed. The artworks also reflect details specific to each man, such as eye colour and the medals they were awarded, as recorded in a book collated by the local Landcare group.



Jan Properjohn and Chris Jobson out in the sun for this year’s Remembrance collection.

## *Vietnam Veterans' Day 18 August 2023*

On 18 August 2023, a National Commemorative Service was held at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial on Anzac Parade in Canberra. It was a day to commemorate the service of some 60,000 Australian men and women who served in the Vietnam War, and the sacrifice of their families.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. It was a day to commemorate the service of those who served in Vietnam. Tragically, 523 Australians lost their lives as a result of the war, and more than 3,000 were wounded.

General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK CVO MC (Retd) joined DVA to acknowledge and commemorate this significant anniversary. As a Vietnam veteran himself, Sir Peter saw firsthand the dedication and devotion of those who served and, reflects on their courage, commitment and bravery.

The service and other supporting activities were developed in conjunction with a national stakeholder consultative group, including Vietnam veterans and representatives of the wider veteran community.

The date of 18 August was selected as the date of the Service to coincide with Vietnam Veterans' Day, which is also the date of the Battle of Long Tan.

### *Commemorative Medallion and Certificate.*

To further acknowledge this significant anniversary, DVA is also distributing a commemorative medallion and certificate.

Further information can be found on the DVA website.





***MEDIA RELEASE - 15 September 2023***  
***THE HON MATT KEOGH MP***  
***MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS***  
***MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL***

***KAHLIL FEGAN DSC AM APPOINTED AS REPATRIATION COMMISSIONER***

Mr Kahil Fegan DSC AM has been appointed as Australia's new Repatriation Commissioner.

Son of a war widow and a Vietnam War veteran, Kahlil has served with distinction for over 30 years in the Australian Defence Force and will continue to serve the Defence and veteran community in the next chapter of his career.

Kahlil brings a lifetime of lived experience to the role, following decades in senior leadership roles in Defence, including as Commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Combat Brigade in Townsville. Kahlil has forged strong working relationships and collaboration across Government and with the veteran community and has demonstrated strong personal commitment to improving the lives of Defence personnel, veterans and families. He has dedicated his life to the service of our nation, and will now serve those who served alongside him.

The Repatriation Commissioner role is a member of both the Repatriation Commission and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission. This will see Kahlil play a critical role in engaging with and representing veterans to ensure services delivered through the Department of Veterans' Affairs are best targeted and most effective.

While the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide due to hand down its recommendations next year, Kahlil's deep understanding of the experience of veterans and their families has equipped him to help shape how we best support the veteran community moving forward.

Kahlil's appointment follows the retirement of Mr Don Spinks AM as the Repatriation Commissioner in July 2023. I would like to thank Don for his service to veterans and their families since 2019, particularly through his engagement with the young veteran community. It's this experience that's helped improve the Department of Veterans' Affairs understanding of the needs of veterans and families. I also thank Glen Ferrarotto for his work in filling this role in the intervening period.

***More: [The Repatriation Commission/Department of Veterans' Affairs \(dva.gov.au\)](https://www.dva.gov.au)***

## ***Welfare Report - October 2023***

*Peter Sutton - Vice-President Welfare*

The Welfare Section of the Sub-Branch has been very busy during the last few months with many complex and time-consuming cases for our veterans.

During September, we conducted two seminars concerning issues for veterans. One was the facilities and aids available through DVA for people who have hearing problems, the other, traps and solutions around decluttering and downsizing [or better put as right-sizing] for our veterans. These two were very helpful to those who attended. Please contact the Sub-Branch office if further contact is required.

We also had a visit earlier this month from Disaster Relief Australia [DRA]. Mr Stuart Keyton, DRA General Manager visiting from Brisbane, and Mr Gordon Pert, Manager for DRA ACT, who came to see what services they can offer our veterans.

We intend to arrange for a visit from them in early November to explain to the Friday 'Coffee Catch-Up' visitors what they can offer. One suggestion is to assist our veterans to have their houses fire-ready for the coming expected fire season. We had some volunteers from DRA attend some of our members earlier this year to assist with some yard tidying projects.

We attend each Thursday at Fred Ward Gardens Aged Care Facility to visit members who are resident there. We are attempting to attract those who are mobile to attend the Eddison Day Club lunch or the regular 'Friday Coffee Catch-Up' in the Corey Room held at the Sub-Branch office. Both are a chance to get out and meet old friends and others who attend.

The Friendship Group meets on the first Wednesday of the month in the ground floor office at the Sub-Branch. Those who attend are very supportive of each other.

We applied for a grant earlier this year to finance some more bus trips during this month and during November. We were notified late in September that we were unsuccessful.

However, we have since applied for a grant from another source. This grant closed last week, and if successful we intend to provide more bus trips as soon as possible. Tours conducted out of Canberra during late 2020 and 2022 were very popular and well attended with very positive feedback.

## *Eddison Day Club Report*

*Peter Sutton - Day Club Co-ordinator*



The Eddison Day Club is still meeting each Friday for a lunch at the Canberra Irish Club. We are slowly building up in the number of those attending. Over the last couple of years, numbers were depleted due to the ongoing effects of the COVID virus and the advancing age of our members. At present we are attracting between 18 and 25 persons each week and conduct a raffle or a quiz to help to entertain our members. The Irish Club has been very supportive of us over the last 19 years.

We intend to arrange a celebratory lunch to mark the important milestone of the Club's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary which will occur on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024. We had a similar event earlier this year to celebrate our 19<sup>th</sup> birthday which was very well attended by some original Day Club members, our volunteers as well as many members of the Sub-Branch.

We intend to keep meeting each week to provide an outlet for our members as well as older citizens of the Canberra community.

For those wishing to attend, just come along to the Canberra Irish Club in Parkinson Street, Weston at 12 noon for an enjoyable lunch and a change to meet others and enjoy getting together with friends.



Phillip Bennett, Margaret Gilddon, Ronald Henderson,  
Edward Page, Robert (Bob) Fletcher

## ***Peacekeeping Symphony Postponement to 2026 or 2027***

*Chris Latham - Artist in Residence  
Australian War Memorial*



I am writing to formally notify you all of the postponement of the ***Peacekeeping Symphony*** performance from 2023 to a date to be determined in 2026 or 2027, due to the inability to raise the funds to pay for the performance costs this year.

Our aim is to revisit the project and determine a date aligned with a major anniversary or ideally a peacekeeper's reunion in Canberra in either 2026 or 2027. This time frame is influenced by the fact we have to produce two other major concerts over the next two years; ***The Holocaust Memorial on Oct 31, 2024, in Melbourne*** and; ***The WW2 Requiem in September 2025 in Brisbane***.

It actually does make more sense to run all of these large commemorative projects in chronological order, given the Peacekeeping Symphony starts with the establishment of the UN following WW2.

Clearly if we wish to try again to raise the funds for the ***Peacekeeping Symphony***, then I am going to have to bring together a consortium of believers to establish a context for the work. I believe my failure this year to raise the money was at least partially due to the fact that I did not connect widely enough and early enough with the broader community of Peacekeepers, in the ADF, AFP and elsewhere.

I wish to restart the project by determining what kind of musical work Peacekeepers would value, adjusting the music we have written so far to match those wishes, and then building a stronger case for funding such a performance. Currently it seems that Peacekeeping does not enjoy universal support, and I believe we will need to strengthen the case for peacekeeping as a worthwhile and affordable activity which can strengthen Australia's reputation in the region and the world.

If any of you would be interested in engaging with a proposed future performance for the ***Peacekeeping Symphony***, please let me know. I'm sure I can construct a role that matches your availability and time.

Thank you also for providing supporting letters that accompanied the grant applications. While unsuccessful on this occasion, your support for my project was deeply appreciated. I am in debt to all of you, and deeply grateful that you saw value in this activity.

## Veterans to receive better access to a GP

The Albanese Government is committed to ensuring the veteran community is provided with the best possible services and supports. With increasing costs of living and rising costs for business, the veteran community has told us they are finding it harder to find GPs who will treat them without out of pocket costs.



**THE HON MATT KEOGH MP**  
 MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
 MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL

**MEDIA RELEASE**

From 1 November, it will be easier to access a GP for more than 276,000 Australian veterans.

In line with the tripling of the bill billing incentive, the Albanee Government is investing \$33.3 million to triple the Veteran Access payment (VAP) for certain GP services. The VAP is an incentive payment GPs receive, in addition to the Medicare rebate, when treating veterans who hold a DVA Gold or White Card. The tripling of this payment will help to ensure GPs continue to service veterans with no out of pocket costs.

These changes will see payment for a GP consultation of up to 20 minutes (Level B) increase by more than \$16 in metropolitan areas and more than \$31 in most remote areas of Australia. Payments apply to general face-to-face and telehealth GP consultations, including home visits for people who are homebound, and consultations in residential aged-care facilities. In an effort to further reduce the burden on medical practitioners, a review is currently underway to simplify and consolidate the Department of Veterans' Affairs forms that medical professionals are required to complete. The first package of the 19 most frequently used forms has been consolidated down to 7, while a process is underway to significantly reduce the remaining 54 forms by mid-2024.

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Stephanie Mathews - 0407 034 485

Who will benefit?

This measure will incentivise GPs to treat more than 276,000 veterans and eligible dependents who hold Veteran Gold or White Cards.

<b><i>From 1 Nov 2023, GPs who treat Veteran Card holders will receive increased VAP fees. Modified Monash</i></b>	<b><i>VAP as at 1 July 2023 (pre 1 Nov indexation)</i></b>	<b><i>VAP as at 1 Nov 2023</i></b>
1 - Metropolitan areas	\$8.05	\$24.25
2 - regional centres	\$12.20	\$36.90
3-4 large and medium rural towns	\$12.95	\$39.20
5 - small rural towns	\$13.80	\$41.65
6 - remote communities	\$14.55	\$43.95
7 - very remote communities	\$15.45	\$46.65

***Notes: Indexation of 0.5% applies on 1 November ahead of VAP increase.***



## *LEST WE FORGET*

**“The price of Liberty is Eternal Vigilance”**

*“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”.*



## *Pray Not In Vain*

*Sapper Bert Beros*

The silent men who lie below,  
In Flanders’ fields where poppies grow,  
Have heard again the bugles blow;  
The grind of war and martial tread,  
Among the cross at their head;  
And when they hear that sound again,  
They sob to know they died in vain.



Will we their sons who fight once more,  
On desert sands and jungle shore,  
Be wasted, like our sires before?  
Will sacrifice and blood and tears,  
Return again in thirty years?  
Have those who died on land or main,  
Or in the air - done so in vain?

Or will the bloody banner of Mars,  
Be buried deep and hide the scars?  
And peace last longer than the stars?  
Will the glorious dead who died in war,  
Then know it’s peace for evermore?  
And lust and might rise not again,  
That they who die, died not in vain?

*A group of men at the Medical Dressing Station at Myola were debating the subject of war; some for, some against. I later wrote this. The Medical Unit owned Iorabaiwa Joe, the famous parrot which was rescued from the natives. The fuzzies had plucked out his feathers. Iorabaiwa Joe travelled across the Owen Stanleys upon the shoulder of Corporal J.C. McNicol. He ate army biscuits.*

***Extract from ‘The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels and other verses.... Sapper Bert Beros***

## *Belated Presentations of the Order-of-Whatever-It-Is*

Normally, these awards are presented at the end of year Christmas lunch. However, due to the absence of the awardees at that event, the presentations were carried over until a suitable time could be found. The first occurred at the **Ordinary General Meeting** on Tuesday 25 July 2023 when **Ross Smith OAM** was placed on record on 7 December 2022 as the sole member of **The Perfection Award**.

As an RSL member, Ross draws on those skills to lift the general appearance, content and presentation of artefacts wherever displayed around the Sub-Branch. His expertise in the mounting and presentation of medals has lifted the quality of our exhibits to new levels.

The second award occurred on Friday 28 July 2023 at the **Coffee Catch-up** when **William (Bill) Kelly AM** was placed on record on 7 December 2022 as the sole member of the **Meritorious Member Medal**.

One of these activities, more visible than others, is selected and highlighted as an example of Bill's keen application of membership qualities of developing a scattered collection of over 1,200 books into a well-presented and catalogued library presenting easy access to members as well as improving many other aspects of the **Corey Room** to edge it closer to the desired objective.

Both awards were presented by President Jim Gilchrist.



## *‘Australia - A Nation at War 1939-45’*

An original letter from the then RSL National Secretary, Derek Robson, dated 5 Jun 1998 to then Woden Valley Sub-Branch President David Millar expressed appreciation to the Sub-Branch for their generous donation to the PNG Drought Relief Appeal.

For this donation the Sub-Branch was presented with an accompanying medal board, *‘Australia - A Nation at War 1939-45.’*



Ross Smith OAM, in association with the Cary Corporation Pty Ltd, kindly donated several of the medal boards, commemorating the anniversary of the end of World War II to assist the RSL in its fund raising appeal at that time.

For some years our medal board has been in storage for safekeeping but after revival and restoration by Ross Smith, it was presented to the current President, Jim Gilchrist at a ceremony on Tuesday 25 Jul 2023.

Along with other memorabilia, this medal board will be displayed in the Corey Room.



Sub-Branch Member Chris Jobson presented Jim Gilchrist with the *“Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery Ubique Quo Fas Et Gloria Ducunt”* plaque to be added to the plaques mounted on the front counter in the Sub-Branch office.





***Lieutenant Colonel Vivian Bullwinkel AO,  
MBE, ARRC, ED, FNM, FRCNA***

In 2023, a new statue has been dedicated at the Australian War Memorial, the first woman to be awarded such an honour.

Vivian Bullwinkel volunteered as a nurse during WWII, joining the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) in 1941. Assigned to the 2/13<sup>th</sup> Australian General Hospital, in September she sailed for Singapore. Japanese troops invaded Malaya in December and advanced southward, forcing Bullwinkel's unit to evacuate to Singapore. The short-lived defence of the island ended in defeat and on 12 February 1942 Bullwinkel and 65 other nurses boarded the *SS Vyner Brooke* to escape the island.

Two days later, the ship was sunk by Japanese aircraft.



Bullwinkel was among a group of nurses, men, women and children who made it ashore at Radji Beach on Banka Island and joined the next day by about 100 British soldiers. The group elected to surrender to the Japanese. While the civilian women and children left in search of someone to whom they might surrender, the nurses, soldiers and wounded waited.

Japanese soldiers came and killed the men, then motioned the nurses to wade into the sea. They then machine-gunned the nurses from behind. Bullwinkel was struck by a bullet and pretended to be dead until the Japanese left. She hid with a wounded British private for 12 days before deciding once again to surrender. They were taken into captivity, but the private died soon after. Bullwinkel was reunited with survivors of the *SS Vyner Brooke*. She told them of the massacre, but none spoke of it again until after the war lest it put Bullwinkel, as witness to the massacre, in danger. Bullwinkel spent three and a half years in captivity.

Retiring from the army in 1947, Bullwinkel became Director of Nursing at Melbourne's Fairfield Hospital.

>>>>

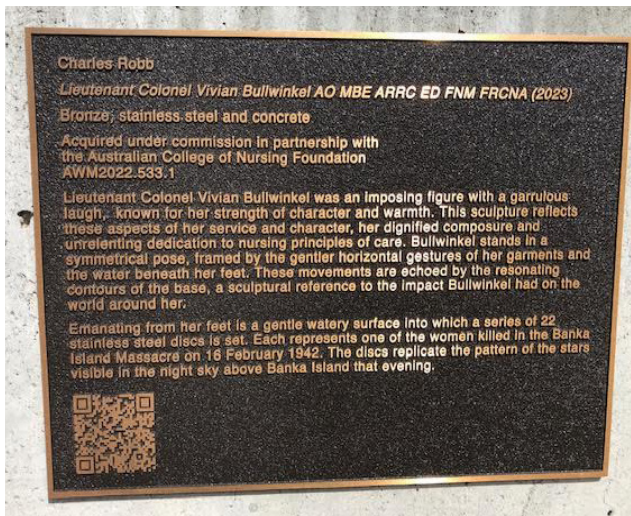
She devoted herself to nursing and honouring those killed on Banka Island, raising funds for a nurses' memorial and serving on numerous committees, including a period as a member of the Council of the Australian War Memorial, and later president of the Australian College of Nursing.

In the decades following the war, Bullwinkel received honours and awards including the Florence Nightingale Medal, an MBE and the AM. Through her service, she demonstrated qualities of care personified by nurses in the Australian Defence Force.

In 2019, the Australian College of Nursing initiated the development of a sculpture to commemorate Lieutenant Colonel Vivian Bullwinkel (1915-2000) as a great Australian, a great leader, a great woman, and a proud nurse. Her life is representative of bravery, dedication to nursing principles of care and the sacrifices of women in service.

The sculpture installed in the forecourt of Poppy's Café is the first sculpture of an individual nurse or women in the Memorial's grounds.

An advisory committee of external stakeholders, including representatives of Defence Force Nursing was formed to guide the project. Following a competition in 2020-2021 the advisory committee selected a design by Australian artist Charles Robb.



## *Portrait Presentation*

During the regular Coffee catch-up on Friday 4 Aug 2023, in the company of a small group of members and visitors, artist Sylvie Carter presented Sub-Branch President Jim Gilchrist with her painting of Corporal Earnest Corey on the Hindenberg Line 1918.



Thirty-eight finalists were announced for the 18<sup>th</sup> annual Gallipoli Art Prize, a privately funded prize auspiced by the Gallipoli Memorial Club in Sydney and invites artists to respond openly to the broad themes as expressed in the Gallipoli Club's creed:

*“We believe that within the community there exists an obligation for all to preserve the special qualities of loyalty, respect, love of country,*

*courage and comradeship which were personified by the heroes of the Gallipoli Campaign and bequeathed to all humanity as a foundation for perpetual peace and universal freedom”*

Also attending this special event was sub-branch member and ex-army nurse Betty Mills.



## *Fury To Hell*

*Kathryn Spurling*

Albert 'Bert' Adrian Stobart was born on 11 April 1921, in Sandringham, Victoria, to John and Beatrice. Initially hoteliers in the gentle green English countryside, his parents migrated across the world to the strong colours of Australia. The family moved to Melbourne. They were a devout Protestant family, and Bert was the youngest of seven children. They had only just returned from church when there was a radio announcement that Australia was at war.

The RAAF appeared to offer a more glamorous, cleaner, safer war. By 1940 cinema newsreels highlighted the heroics of Spitfire pilots while typically downplaying the brutal cost in lives. Bert was disappointed at not being streamed 'pilot' but intended making the most of his service as a Wireless Operator Gunner. Bert had little difficulty in the physical side of service life - the marching, parades, and physical exercises under the ever-watchful eyes and loud, colourful language of drill instructors. The theory component proved insurmountable having trouble with Morse Code, those dots and dashes seemed to blend into an unholy mess. Bert acquired the nickname 'Stoppy' due to the Australian preference of either shortening or lengthening names, whichever seemed easier and appropriate given his non-speed with Morse. He dropped the wireless part and was recategorized 'Gunner' His posting to Bomber Command in England came quickly and there seemed too little time, too much to say, but no way to say it to family standing wharfside, particularly Noel, the girl he had fallen in love with, the war delaying their plans to marry, but they were engaged.



*Bert and Noel*

Training in England was busy and dangerous. The world was moving fast and crewing up traumatic. Pilots got to choose their crew and Bert was hopeful he would find himself in a good crew, because a bomber crew was only as good as its weakest link. He hoped a particular pilot would choose him and was crestfallen when the man chose a different rear gunner. That crew was killed on its first operation. It was not the last time that fate would be kind to Bert Stobart. Robert Barr McPhan RAAF, from the NSW Central Coast town of Kanwal, introduced himself. The Bomb Aimer Sydneysider, John Andrew Spence, RAAF, Mid-Upper Gunner Ian 'Jock' Hilton RAF, Wireless Operator Robert Freeman RAF and Sgt Michael 'Simmo' Simpson RAF, Navigator.

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On their conversion to Lancaster Bombers Sgt Thomas McCulloch RAF became their Flight Engineer. They were an interesting mixture of accents, ages and personalities and need to bond quickly to survive. Their training had a new urgency as the air war extended further into Europe. They were posted to RAAF 460 Squadron. On the day of arrival they were told there was no aircrew accommodation available - quarters were full. The statement which followed was delivered with alarming calmness: *'Don't worry about it, ops are on tonight, you'll get accommodation tomorrow night.'* The following morning after a raid on Cologne, a Lancaster crew did not return. Belongings were cleared away, fresh sheets placed on beds and the Stobart crew moved in.

It took little time before any sense of 'glamour' disappeared and for the feeling of fear in the pit of the stomach to assert itself each moonlight night as they climbed into their Lancaster. Bert had the coldest and most precarious of positions. It was not for the faint hearted or weak stomached. The rear turret followed all the aircraft movements, pivoting rapidly on its centre of gravity horizontally and sideways to scan the skies for enemy fighters, who preferred to shoot the rear gunner first.



It was the night of 3-4 September 1943, the crew's 11<sup>th</sup> operation. With 30 operations needed to be completed for a tour to be over, they had a way to go. Unfortunately, the target that night was Berlin. A long flight from England and subject to heavy anti-aircraft fire and enemy fighters. Lancaster EE132 had just crossed the Dutch coast at 17,000ft [5182m] when their world disintegrated. Bert would say: *I didn't*

*see it, the mid upper gunner didn't see it, nobody saw it.'*

The starboard engines burst into flames which spread rapidly along the wing. The bomber began a downward spiral, they had been shot from below by an ME110 night fighter. McPhan's garbled voice over the intercom asked: *'Who's hit?'* before communications dropped out. A light with 'P' displayed above each crewmember, indicating the crew should abandon the aircraft. Bert centred his turret, crawled into the main fuselage and grabbed his parachute. Hilton, the middle upper gunner was injured and trying to extract himself. With difficulty Bert hauled himself up and freed 'Jock'. As they began to slide down the fuselage Bert assisted the other gunner to harness his parachute. *'We were downhill running at this stage with flames coming out'*.

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The Lancaster had lost a lot of altitude and was likely down to around 10,000ft. Bert kicked out the rear door and watched Hilton fall through the opening. Bert paused, and curiously felt no panic: *'Should I go up and see what the rest of them were doing, if everything was right up front?'* He climbed as far as the main spar and struggling to get over it. something clicked in his brain, *'I thought, Oh well, we'll probably see them on the ground... I gotta get out'*.

The drill practice was to kneel, carefully somersault out of the aircraft, count slowly to seven, or was it ten? to clear the bomber, and when on one's back, place an arm over the parachute enabling the elastic bands to pull the wrapping away, and the spring to eject and release the canopy. That was the drill. Bert released his grip from the main spar, fell down the fuselage and out of the Lancaster. He only just cleared the fin and pulled the ripcord. There was a tremendous jerk and a horrifying sound of stitches being torn on the heavy leather straps - *'Christ let them hold,'* shot through his brain. The ground came up too quickly. There was no time to complete those instructions that went something like, taking the initial landing on relaxed legs, pulling yourself into a ball, and roll to the left or right as preferred. Bert had released his parachute harness too soon, landing with a terrific thud and knocked himself out.

He wasn't sure how long he was unconscious. Struggling to his feet, parachute nowhere in sight, he realised he had suffered concussion and felt decidedly ill. There was no bomber, no other crew, and his confused brain could make no sense of what had happened - *Had he been told to bale out ... If so, where was everyone ... was he in Holland?* Bert had seen the Lancaster flying level but on fire. *'I thought I would see some of the crew, but I didn't.* On 3 September 1943 Lancaster EE132 exploded on impact, 24 miles [39km] south of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Only Bert and Hilton had survived.

Bert began to wander, *'I felt so sick'*. The uniforms were easily recognizable and the German soldiers were none too gentle as they bundled Bert into a car. He still felt squeamish and thought: *'This will be good, I'm bound to be sick, and I'll puke all over them. But I didn't, maybe just as well, I would have been belted.* The next days were *'not nice'* but the ensuing months and years decidedly worse.

The imagined career in the RAAF never included being a Prisoner of War, so adapting to life in Stalag IVB was never going to be easy. Members of the military taken prisoner arrived in camp with belongings. Australians shot out of the sky arrived with nothing but what they stood up in. Only due to the generosity of others who had been in camp for months was Bert able to secure a few belongings. German rations were shocking, something called soup, weak potato swill and a bit of horsemeat: *'You'd move the maggots aside because they used to go with your soups.'*

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A small loaf of bread was carefully divided into 24 slices by their group of four. Each group needed to ration their scarce resources in case things got worse - and they did. If they were fortunate their single meal of the day was four thin small slices of bread, 2ozs of bully beef, two potatoes and four spoons of barley. Red Cross parcels kept airmen alive, and they stopped coming as the Allies advanced. Aircrew of all nations were treated differently as POWs. They were secured in a special tight confine unto themselves.



*Main gate Stalag IVB*

They were not allowed to be included on work parties, which allowed POWs to bring back wood, barter, and collect additional food. The German Government believed that should the aviators escape, they could return to bomb again. His hut with 200 odd individuals 'felt crowded, almost overpowering,' His bunk, one of three there, offered a thin mattress and a palliasses, full of straw and a small wool covering, which offered little respite from the numbing cold of the northern hemisphere winter.

British authorities had told airmen: *'It is every POWs duty to try to escape,'* but there was no escape from confinement at Stalag IVB. Inspired escapes occurred from other POW camps but one from Luft III resulted in the murder of the recaptured.

The news of the Allied advance had heartened Bert but progress was slow and more and more POWs arrived crowding into spaces. The already scarce food supplies had to feed even more. New aircrew brought stories of their fellows landing by parachute from a burning aircraft only to be killed by angry civilians.

Disease became prevalent. As the Allies pushed further into Europe life became more dangerous. Guards became more invasive and violent, searches more frequent and POWs made to stand out in the snow for hours, and anyone seen approaching the barbed wire was shot. Any perceived indiscretion was punished. *'At the back of the mind of any sane POW is fear.'* The winter of 1943 was bad, the winter of 1944, the coldest in decades, with freezing conditions, scarce food, and one Australian aviator wrote in his diary: *Another lousy day ... couldn't be bothered getting out of bed ... bags of rumours ... all baloney in my opinion.* The advance meant more prisoners, POW camps so overcrowded with tents erected in the grounds offering little respite from freezing conditions.

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To keep himself going, Bert ventured as far as he could to meet other POWs. He had a book which he labelled 'My Trip Abroad' and he beseeched everyone to draw, write, and paint in the book. In doing this he met an artist who agreed for a trade, that he would paint a colour portrait of Noel from the small black and white photo Bert carried.

As Germany lost more and more ground, POWs were made to march through deep snow hundreds of kilometres away from the advancing Allies. These death marches took a horrendous toll on body and soul. Some marches only ended when friendly forces overtook them - thousands died from hunger, the weather, or shot where they fell. Bert realised how lucky he was that Stalag IVB was sufficiently deep in Europe not to require evacuation. They thought they were free when the Russians arrived but instead were used as pawns in the political battle for territory. British troop trucks were turned away by Russian machine guns. Under the night sky Bert and friends escaped and began the long walk to freedom. Authorities were shocked at how much these vibrant strong aviators had lost their weight and health and spent many months rehabilitating in England before returning home to Australia.

They left Australia, the finest of youth - many still teenagers - believing they were invincible. Imbued with patriotic fervour, they were determined to fight against evil, defend freedom and the British Empire. They believed there was glamour and safety in joining



the RAAF, the reality entirely different, becoming RAF Bomber Command fodder in the dangerous skies over Europe. Bomber Command suffered the highest of casualties. Of a total of 125,000 aircrew 57,205 or 46% were killed, a further 8,403 wounded and 9,838 shot out of the sky into the hell of German POW camps - a total of 60% of all operational airmen. Of the 10,000 Australians who served in Bomber Command, 3,486 were killed and 650 died in training accidents, the highest fatality rate of any unit in WWII.

Bert married Noel as soon as he could. He spent much of his life fighting for concessions for POWs of Germany and their families. He rose to be Vice President of RSL

Victoria. Pride of place in their home's foyer was given to that painting, of a young Noel painted in a POW camp in Germany.

They died within months of each other. Noel Margaret Georgina Stobart died on 28 January 2015 aged 94. Albert 'Bert' Adrian Stobart OAM died on 16 September 2015 aged 94.



## *Gun Laws*

*Les Cook*

Like most lads who lived in the bush, I grew up with a rifle in my hands. Despite our youth, or perhaps, because of it, our parents instilled in us a full understanding of the weapons, and they also required a rigid compliance with safety rules.

As an example of this discipline, Dad had a cardinal rule that there would not be any shooting in the home-paddock. Indeed, guns were not even to be carried loaded in the home paddock. Of course this rule could be broken by the rule-maker when warranted, such as a fox being in the vicinity of the fowl-house, but it was sacrosanct to his subjects.

Dad and I had been shooting. It was raining when we arrived at the creek that was the boundary of the home-paddock on our way home. I was 8 or 9 years old at the time and had a .410 gauge single-barrel Harrington & Richardson shotgun that had been made before the days of hammerless guns. Although one could carry the gun loaded, it was necessary to cock the hammer to fire it.

I had cocked the hammer to fire at a rabbit that had run out of range before I could shoot, but I had left it cocked in case another opportunity arose. To comply with the safety rules, I had to unload the gun when we reached the creek. To do this, it was necessary first to uncock the gun, which was achieved by pulling back on the hammer slightly with the thumb, releasing the trigger, and then lowering the hammer gently onto the firing-pin. The gun could then be opened and unloaded.

I was carrying the gun in the crook of my left elbow. Dad was a few metres away on my left. When I started to ease the hammer down it slipped from under my wet thumb and the gun fired. I don't think that the shot went close to Dad, but I was given a very severe lecture and deprived of the use of the gun for a month. When we children reached high school age, the family moved to the suburbs of Melbourne where firearms were no longer part of our lives. I can't remember what happened to the guns.

I started work at the end of 1938 when I was 15. A few months later I bought a rifle from a pawnshop for two shillings and sixpence [25 cents]. It was a British military .450-.577 Martini-Henry rifle made in 1884 but still in perfect condition. Ammunition for it, could still be bought from a gun-shop for one shilling and sixpence [15 cents] for a packet of 10 cartridges. I had bought this heavy rifle because I was planning with an older man from work to go to the Roper River in the Northern Territory shooting crocodiles on our annual leave in the following year.

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The sights on the rifle were calibrated to 1200 yards, and it had a kick like a mule. The ammunition was made in 1890, the cartridge cases hand-made from thin brass and the soft head bullet, which measured about 12mm dia. by 30mm long, being jammed into the case with waxed paper. It was a museum piece even then. On a still day it was necessary to wait a few seconds after firing before the smoke from the black powder cleared away enough to observe a result.

At that time in Victoria, the law required a person to be 18 years of age to use a rifle. This law had always been honoured more in the breach than in the observance in the country, but apparently there was a different attitude towards it in the suburbs.

We were sharing a house with a woman who, in a fit of pique, informed the Police that I had a rifle. Two plain clothes detectives came to the house and spoke with my father. They asked him several times if the rifle was his or mine. Each time Dad replied that it was mine, and that I had brought it with my own money. Looking back, I can see now that the detectives thought that the whole affair was a waste of their time and they were almost begging Dad to say that it was his so that they could go away with honour satisfied. Dad was too honest to see what they were on about.

They took the rifle away, and in due course I was fined ten shillings [\$1.00] for being in possession of a rifle while under the age of 18 years. Small as that amount may seem now, it was two thirds of my weekly pay.

I still wonder if I had broken the law. Certainly I owned the rifle, but I was not using it at the time it was taken away, nor did the authorities have any evidence that I had ever used it: the Police did not even enquire if I had any ammunition. I doubt if I was breaking the law just by owning the rifle. I suppose it depends on what the words "in possession" mean.

The war started in September 1939 and I enlisted in the AIF early in the following year so missed my change to go crocodile hunting then, and by the time I returned to civilian life almost seven years later I had lost the desire.

The irony of the whole affair was that, before I had reached the age of 18 years, the same system that had fined me for the offence had formally issued to me, and trained me, in the use of a .303 Lee-Enfield rifle, a Boyes anti-tank rifle, a Bren light machine-gun, hand grenades and other devices for inflicting death and injury.

In fairness to the "system", however, it was unaware of breaking its own rule because I had overstated my age by a few years when I enlisted. I suppose that this also was an offence, but nobody seemed concerned enough about it to fine me.

## ***IORIBAIWA: The Turning Point in New Guinea***

*An extract from Stories of World War II*

With their Port Moresby invasion fleet turned back by the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Japanese landed a force of 1,800 men in the Buna-Gona area on 21 July 1942, to reconnoitre the Kokoda Track and determine its value as a route to Port Moresby.

Major-General Tomitaro Horii's troops struck little opposition from the Australian Maroubra Force (some 400 men from the untried 39<sup>th</sup> Battalion and members of the Papuan Infantry) and within a week Kokoda Village was captured. In Rabaul, the commander of the Japanese XVII Army, Lieutenant-General Harukichi Hyakutake, amazed by the ease of his troops' advance, ordered Horii to make a positive attack on Port Moresby.

Regrouping at Kokoda, Horii's force was quickly built up to 10,000 front-line troops, despite constant Allied air attacks. Aware of this rapid gain in enemy strength, the Allies made certain changes in command. On 12 August, Lieutenant-General Sydney F. Rowell replaced Major-General B.M. Morris as commander of all Australian and U.S. land forces in New Guinea. Rowell was an experienced regular soldier who had been General Blamey's Chief of Staff in the Middle East, Deputy Chief of Staff on his return to Australia, then GOC1 Australian Corps since the previous April. Responsible for the defence of the Kokoda Track and Milne Bay, Rowell was ably supported by Brigadier S.H. Porter, in charge of Maroubra Force, and Major-General C.A. Clowes at Milne Bay - both Middle East veterans.

Maroubra Force had set up defensive positions at Isurava, where they were prepared to fight a delaying action in order to gain time for AIF reinforcements to be brought up the Track. The men of the 39<sup>th</sup> were in poor physical condition. Worn out by fighting in almost impassable terrain, engulfed in mud, drenched with tropical rain, wracked by malaria, dysentery and jungle rot, these were the men on whom the fate of Port Moresby - and Australia - rested.

On 26 August, the Japanese landed at Milne Bay and simultaneously renewed their offensive from Kokoda towards Isurava. However, two days later the 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade, moved up the Track from Moresby and relieved the exhausted 39<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Still numerically overwhelmed by the Japanese, the Australians fought a strategic withdrawal from Isurava, and by 7 September the enemy had taken Myola, Kagi and Efogi.

Brigadier Porter took command on 10 September from Potts, who returned to Port Moresby to report the situation.

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By now the Australians had withdrawn to Ioribaiwa, but with the arrival of Brigadier K.W. Eather's 25<sup>th</sup> Brigade on 14 September, the Japanese were held at Ioribaiwa Ridge. Unable to make a firm base for an offensive against the enemy, Eather and Porter requested permission to withdraw to the next range - Imita Ridge. General Rowell approved the move, but stressed that "any further withdrawal is out of the question and Eather must fight it out at all costs."

The Brigade moved back to Imita Ridge on 16 September, leaving a company of the 2/33<sup>rd</sup> Battalion in a carefully-arranged ambush for the Japanese. Next morning, when the enemy's advance troops appeared, the waiting Australians opened fire, then caught the Japanese with concentrated mortar fire. Some 50 Japanese were killed in this skirmish, the last enemy patrol to cross the Ioribaiwa Ridge.

Ioraiwa is a name that will long be noted in Australia's military annals. In this rainswept stretch of jungle a scant 30 air miles from Port Moresby, General Horii's drive to the south came to a halt. When two 25-pounder guns were brought into action by the Australians on 21 September, their first shots marked the turning point of the Japanese advance in New Guinea.



*Battle-weary survivors of the 39<sup>th</sup> Battalion on parade at Menari on 6 September 1942, where they were addressed by their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Honner.*



### *Sub-Branch Notices*

Christmas Party	Wed 6 <sup>th</sup> Dec 12:00 for 12:30PM	CSCC Orion Room
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Closing date for the 2023 ANZAC Edition of 'The Serviceman' - Fri 24<sup>th</sup> Feb.

### *Closure of Sub-Branch Office over the Christmas/New Year Period*

*The Sub-Branch Office will close at Midday on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023, reopening at 0900 on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2024.*



### *Christmas Party*

*Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023*

*Canberra Southern Cross Club*

*Venue — "Orion Room"*

*12.00 for 12.30PM - Dress Casual*

*Cost: \$45pp*

*For Members & Partners Take special note of the time OOWII 'Gongs' should be worn.*

Make a note in your diary for this year's Christmas event.



***Dedication of the Keith Payne VC Rest Area***  
***Mick Burgess, Brigadier***  
***Chair, The Remembrance Driveway Council***

I am writing as the Chair of the Remembrance Driveway Council to provide notification of the dedication of the Keith Payne VC Rest Area, to be held in November 2023 at Pheasants Nest, NSW. The date has not yet been selected.

The Remembrance Driveway, linking Sydney to Canberra, comprises groves, memorial plantings and rest areas, has been a living memorial to veterans for almost 70 years.

Since 1995, a project has been undertaken with the naming of roadside rest areas after recipients of the Victoria Cross. The project has been undertaken with the strong support of Transport for NSW in the years since it was started.

The Rest Area for the last surviving VC recipient from the Vietnam War, Keith Payne VC has been under development for several years. The Remembrance Driveway Council has been working with Transport for NSW and AMPOL, as the developer service centre and rest area at Pheasants Nest (northbound), NSW to provide a rest area dedicated to Keith Payne VC.

AMPOL has advised that the development is now nearing completion and we are in the process of finalising a date on which to hold the dedication, with Keith Payne VC in attendance. Keith has been kept informed throughout the planning and development. As this will be a Vice Regal event, we are liaising with Government House for the Governor General to be available.

AMPOL has also redeveloped the southbound site at Pheasants Nest, where the Kenna VC Rest Area was located. The Kenna VC site was deconsecrated prior to demolition mid last year and will be rededicated to Kenna VC in a small ceremony following the Payne VC Rest Area dedication. AMPOL has been very supportive and are to be commended for their deep interest and reverence for the status of the VC and veterans throughout the planning process. The Kenna family members have been kept apprised of developments and will be in attendance on the day also.

I will keep you informed as the plan develops and when the date has been selected. However, I thought it important that we provide this information to you so that you may inform your own members.

*Personal Recollections by Jack Dando  
from an interview with Hank Nelson*

John Edward Dando left school and joined the Commonwealth Public Service and it was from there that he retired at the end of his professional career. However, in 1941 he became Private Dando, VX61577, and as Private Dando he became a prisoner of war of the Japanese, five days after his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday. It was during those years, from age 23-26 that became the great physical and mental disruption to his life.

Born on 10 February 1919, the youngest in the family, Jack's early memories are of growing up on the family farm at Little River, southwest of Melbourne. His oldest sister Mary, died when he was an infant, so Jack only knew his older brothers, Rowland and Harry and sister Jean. His father, an accountant, had gone on the land in the hope that it might enable him to recover his poor health. It did not, and when Jack was about five the family moved to Port Melbourne where his grandmother was running a small hotel, '*The Foresters Arms*.' The hotel disappeared under one of the entrances to the West Gate Bridge, a road bridge across the Yarra River.

Jack started school at the local Catholic School, St Joseph's, completing his formal education at St Kevin's in Hawthorn where he attempted Leaving Honours, the then highest qualification in the secondary school system. The church was and remains important to him. In his final year, he says, he largely wasted his parents' money; 'I did not do a good job.' But he had his Leaving Certificate at the end of five years of high school. He left school aged 17 and that enabled him to get a position in the Commonwealth Public Service in the Department of Navy, then located in Melbourne. His older brothers, leaving school during the depression had trouble finding work and took whatever they could get. Before Jack completed his schooling, the family had moved to Essendon. He played Australian Rules football and competed in athletics. He was, he says, 'keen, but never any good.' He had cousing on farms, and whenever possible spent holidays in the bush. 'I absolutely lapped it up.' After joining the army he thought than when - or if - he returned to civilian life he would take up the land.

Jack's father did not serve in World War I and neither did his uncles, but *The Foresters Arms* had been a favourite meeting place of ex-servicemen, and Jack listened to many of the diggers' stories. Given the importance of Anzac Day and the casualties in World War I, few Australians went innocently to World War II. Asked why he volunteered, Jack gives a simple answer, because his brother, Rowly did. 'I did not want to be separated and made certain if he joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF and went overseas, I would too, and I did.'

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The closeness of their numbers (VX61482 and VX61577) shows how quick Jack was to follow his brother into the army. Rowly had served in the citizens forces but Jack had no previous experience in the army. In 1941 he went into training at Royal Park. Jack did not pass the physical fitness test and from then it was 'luck of the draw' that both Rowly and Jack ended up in the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Field Park. It was army policy to allow brothers to serve in the same unit - one could 'claim' the other. A small unit with just a handful of officers, the 2/10<sup>th</sup> was mostly concerned with vehicle maintenance, so apart from basic training which included use of weapons, Jack worked as a clerk. The unit did much of its training in Bendigo, central Victoria, and that suited Jack 'down to the ground.' Every chance he got, he went to his cousin's farm.

After final leave, the 110 men of the 2/10<sup>th</sup> went by train to Sydney. One man jumped from the speeding train after it left Albury, so it was 109 who boarded the transport, *Aquitania*, previously a British liner, and with 3,456 on board, left Sydney on 10 January 1942, calling at Fremantle where many defied the order that there was no shore leave, and sailed north under escort. In Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra, the *Aquitania* halted. Singapore was under daily bombing, and the risk of taking the large, heavily laden ship within range of Japanese aircraft was too great. The troops transferred to six Dutch ships and sailed into Singapore on 24 January.

Jack and the other troops on the *Aquitania* were the last group to reach Singapore. British and Australian forces had already retreated down the Malay Peninsula and within a week the last of the British troops crossed the causeway on to Singapore Island. Singapore city, crowded with refugees suffered frequent Japanese bombing. To Jack, the commanders seemed disorganised with no idea what to do with the newly arrived 2/10<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Field Park. After a four mile march from the railway station the men found no accommodation ready. On their first day, as they were sorting kit they suffered air raids. On 27 January they were bombed and Jack says that most of the men were given minor jobs to do; unit diaries referred to tasks as camp fatigues and general duties.

Japanese assault forces landed on Singapore Island on 8/9 February and moved rapidly towards Singapore city. On 11 February Jack's unit had reorganised as an infantry unit, and while frequently shelled and bombed it was not until 14 February that it was attacked by rifle and machine-gun fire. On 15 February they were told the cease-fire would be at 2030 hours. Jack, then serving as a rifleman, still had still not fired a shot. Jack says he is no tactician but it seemed obvious that a general surrender was inevitable. The ordinary soldiers were 'puzzled, angry' and unable to understand what happened. 'it was a shambles.' Jack became one of nearly 15,000 Australians captured on Singapore.

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Two days after the surrender, they began the march to imprisonment on the northeast of the island. The fifteen miles to Selarang Barracks at Changi was a 'bloody long way' for men who had been on board ship, then done little marching in the days before the surrender. They arrived tired and sore-footed and slept on the grass. Jack saw his first Japanese, some of the 'higher-ups' motoring past in cars. Groups of prisoners were taken to clean up war damage, working on the wharves and other labouring tasks. Within Changi, the prisoners began to organise themselves drawing on the talents of thousands of men and soon had music and drama groups operating at the 'University of Changi.'

In May 1942, Jack and Rowland were told they and others from the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Field Park were to be part of the 3,000 Australians in 'A' Force, the first work force to leave Changi for the railway. At the time, no prisoners knew where they were going or what they had to do. The Dando brothers were among those crowded on an old merchant ship, the *Tohohasi Maru*, a 'rust bucket', and sailed on 15 May. The holds filled with temporary floors, just over a metre apart so that men could not stand. After 12 days, they disembarked in a southern Burmese town, probably Tavoy. All Australians were gathered at Tavoy in August/September. Jack says that they were marched out in the morning to where they were making roads and an airfield, and marched back in the evening. Compared to what was to come, this was a 'bit of a picnic.' The Japanese there were first class troops and quite easy to get on with as long as we did as we were told.

In September, the Australians in 'A' Force were shifted to Thanbyuzayat, the town where the railway to Thailand was to begin. The prisoners had 420 kms (260 miles) of railway to build. Demands on the prisoners to work harder, faster and longer increased. Jack saw something of the Dutch prisoners in their green uniforms and the many Asian labourers who were tricked or forced to work on the railway and were worse off than the prisoners, with no supplies. The Koreans arrived to take over as guards and drove the prisoners relentlessly and would belt you at the drop of a hat. Nothing was organised. It was disorganised mayhem. The Koreans were among the lowest in the Japanese army, who belted them, and they in turn attacked prisoners. In the 'speedo' when Japanese engineers were desperately trying to meet target dates, the starving prisoners worked to exhaustion through the torrential monsoonal rains.

Jack moved through several camps until he was moved to the 55 Kilo Camp (55 kms from Thanbyuzayat). For Jack, the 55 Kilo was a 'hell hole.' After the construction teams moved on it was developed as a hospital camp, but there were no medicines, no equipment, little food, and the sick slept on bamboo platforms. Dysentery patients had no bedpans, no toilet facilities and orderlies had few means to clean patients. Rowland died of dysentery at the 55 Kilo on 3 September 1943. Jack was disabled with an ulcer on his lower left leg.

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The ulcers caused intense pain, ate into flesh, exposed bones and when arteries ruptured men died from loss of blood. Jack's ankle was exposed by the cavernous, spreading sore.

In June 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel Albert Coates arrived at the 55 Kilo. Coates had served as a medical orderly in World War I, returned home, qualified as a doctor and became one of Melbourne's leading surgeons. Coates had been at a tough work camp close to the Thai border and was recovering from scrub typhus and weighed just seven stone (44.5k). For the first fortnight at the 55 Kilo camp, he had to be carried on a stretcher as he did the rounds of the hundreds of sick. But, Coates brought order and hope. He had only a normal handsaw and enough anaesthetic to numb the limbs by injections, and within a few weeks Coates amputated 120 legs. Many of the men, weakened by malnutrition, malaria and dysentery did not recover, but Coates argued that they certainly would have died if he had not operated. Coates thought Jack would be better off if the amputation was above rather than below the knee, but Jack argued to keep his knee and Coates agreed. The crude anaesthetic was prepared by a Dutch chemist in the camp, (Captain van Boxtel), from cocaine tablets which Coates had brought with him. They could not always ensure that the anaesthetic was sufficient to last through an operation, but in Jack's case it worked and the operation took place on 13 September 1943. Jack says 'I owe everything to Bertie Coates.'

The railway extending from both the Thai and Burma ends joined in October 1943, and at the end of the year survivors from the 55 Kilo Camp hospital were loaded onto trains. There were about thirty men crowded into a goods wagon with Jack. The prisoners left 1,729 of their dead in Burma, 771 of them Australians. As the train crossed into Thailand, Jack passed Hellfire Pass and other places on the railway. In Thailand, the prisoners were off-loaded at Chungkai, and eventually Jack went to Nakompaton. Sir Edward (Weary) Dunlop who was there from June 1944 said that the hospital was on the 'flat land of the Bangkok Plains adjacent to the impressive bell-like temple.' Nakompaton was by its scale evidence of the disaster of the railway. It could hold 10,000 patients in its fifty huts. Food was still scarce, medical equipment and medicines in short supply, but in comparison with the 55 Kilo Camp, Nakompaton was a great improvement. Jack was fitted with an artificial leg, by prisoner craftsmen, with improvised tools, 'who did a marvellous job,' and Jack began a slow recovery.

On one moonlight night a flight of Allied bombers flew over the camp. Jack says he looked with wonder. In the Australia that he had left, and in Singapore there were no four-engined bombers - evidence of a world that had changed. But most of all, he realised that just in those few hundred feet above him were men who were free and he was hundreds of miles and perhaps years from freedom. The first letters did not arrive in Changi until March 1943, but in Burma and Thailand they were even less likely to get mail. >>>>

After the railway was completed and survivors recovered, the fittest were selected to go to Japan to work in factories, mines and shipyards. One of the men who left for Japan was a friend of Jack's, but he was on the *Rokyu Maru* which was sunk by American submarines off Hainan. A few days later the submarines came back and picked up 141 survivors from 1,200 prisoners who had been on board. Included in the 80 Australians was Jack's friend. When he got back to Melbourne the friend went out to the Dando's home and told them that Rowland had died and Jack had had his leg amputated. Jack heard about the end of the war on 16 August, when Coates went on stage and told the assembled prisoners that the war was over. There was, he said, 'cheering, shouting and tears.' It was some time before supplies were parachuted into Nakompaton, and several weeks before prisoners were moved into Bangkok. It was from there that Jack wrote to his mother.

Bangkok 'Drome  
17/9/45

*Dear Mum,*

*I don't know when this will reach you, whether before I get home or not. Anyway, I left Nakompaton, where we have been approx 18 months under the Japs, and went to Bangkok hospital, a truly wonderful place, set out in the most beautiful grounds. Incidentally the capital is the most picturesque city I have seen. We are at the emergency hospital at the aerodrome, 20kms out and waiting for a plane to Singapore. I am very well, but am very sorry to inform you that I lost the lower part of my left leg two years ago. However, I am about ten stone and walking everywhere on a jungle made wooden leg, so have no fears for my health.*

*Incidentally, I was one of about 500 amputations, rather less than half of whom survived, including approx 80 Aussies, so you can see that I haven't been altogether a spoiled child.*

*I hope you are all well and not too anxious. May God bless you, Mum, and grant me the grace to be two sons to you in atonement for not bringing home my big brother, the finest man I have ever met and the greatest pal in ups and downs. Perhaps I might tell you all that never had I been as close to him, nor him to me as in our joint misfortunes. I'm very, very proud of Rowly. If we go to Sngapore tomorrow as seems likely, I will endeavour to post this. I hope you received my other letter and the enclosure to Mary. If not, please tell her I am on the way home and looking forward to seeing her very much.*

*Give my love to all my relations and friends, and I'll be home very soon to join Dad, Jean and Harry. Just for the present I must close with love.*

*Your baby,  
Jack*

Jack flew on a RAAF DC3 from Bangkok, sitting on one of the metal seats set along each side. In Singapore they were housed in a seaside cottage where they swam every day. Like Jack, many of the newly liberated prisoners luxuriated in washing and swimming, cleaning away three years of accumulated dirt.

By the time Jack was allocated to a ship home, his health, by comparison with the other released men, was not too bad because he came home on a converted British freighter, not a 'hospital' ship.' Together with a few other survivors of the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Field Park he landed in Sydney and driven to a reception centre. There the men from various states were told of travel arrangements, but the Victorians 'did not get a guernsey.' Jack took the law into his own hands and caught a train to Melbourne. When he arrived at Royal Park, he found that his mother and sister had left after being told that no Victorians would be arriving. A Red Cross driver picked up his story and drove him home to Essendon but only his father was there. He had raced his mother and sister home.

Jack had been determined that he would walk off the ship when he reached Australia and he would walk off the train in Melbourne, and he did. As he had a job to go back to, Jack did not take up the opportunities for re-training, offered to ex-servicemen. He did, he says, 'bugger all' in his first month or so at home. The artificial limb centre in South Melbourne fitted him with a prosthesis, but because of the unhygienic conditions in which the amputation had taken place, the stump continued to weep. Staff at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital decided that they would have to attempt a skin graft which finally resulted in effective healing.

The 2/10<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Field Park did not have an active unit association and Jack was not much engaged in Anzac Day activities, continued to meet with ex-prisoners. A group of fifteen or so ex-prisoners, gave Coates (soon to be Sir Albert Coates) an annual dinner. The stocky Coates had a habit of poking people in the stomach as he made a point, and one evening he poked Jack and admitted, 'You were right about the knee.' Jack regrets that Coates' name is little known while Dunlop - who also did great work - is revered.

Jack went back to work in the Department of Navy, later becoming part of the Department of Defence and in 1959 transferred to Canberra. In the letter he wrote to his mother, Jack referred to Mary, the girl that he had courted before he sailed for Singapore. Jack and Mary were married and had six children. After Mary died Jack married Kath who also had six children from a previous marriage. As with others, Jack suffered lingering emotional trauma in the postwar. "I had difficulty sleeping and every other damn thing", he said, but he did all that he wanted except to go on the land, and also that in his 88<sup>th</sup> year, no longer has a driver's licence which restricted him driving out to Barellan where his son has a farm.

*A Case of “Getting Your Own Back”*  
*Paul Garrett*

I arrived at No 10 Squadron in Townsville in late 1963 as a brand new Pilot Officer having just graduated from No 25 Navigator’s Course.

As one of six new ‘boggy’ navigators we were given the more mundane flying tasks not regarded as being worthy of the more experienced back-enders. Each Neptune aircraft carried a crew of 10, of which there were three navigators. The third nav was the most junior.

In early 1965, the crew of which I was the third nav was programmed to fly a sortie out to sea to do rocket firing. The rockets which were attached to the outer wing were not ‘live’ in that they had a concrete head which was the same weight as the fully operational round.

On reaching the range the captain lined the aircraft up to fire at the target - a 44 gallon drum painted yellow - strategically placed in position by the RAAF marine launch.

The aircraft flew in low and fired the rocket off. As the junior nav I had an excellent view of the trajectory as I was standing up in the nav’s position with my head in the astrodome. The nav station was the only position in the tactical section of the aircraft where you could stand upright.

The rocket released and entered the water, somewhat near the drum (i.e. missed the target).

As the aircraft continued flying on the run-in course both pilots and myself, standing in the astrodome, were somewhat surprised when the rocket, deflected by the density of the water, erupted from the surface and rose up in front of the aircraft at about the same altitude.

Fortunately for us it missed.

A classic case of almost getting your own back!

**Footnote:** As to why Pilot Officer aircrew were called ‘Boggies’ I don’t know, except I believe it was a shortened version of ‘Bog Rat’.

*A Life Worth Living*  
*Marion O'Hara Kossatz*

Born in Swan Hill, on the mighty Murray River and amazed that I survived my childhood. In drought or in flood we children literally lived in that river; fishing, mussel-collecting, shrimping, jumping or diving off the top of the bridge, and being sent home by the local Policeman with threats to “Tell our Mother.”

Aged 5, I began school in Grade 1 at Wakool Public School, west of Deniliquin. My father, John Lindsay O’Hara, enlisted in WWII, so mother and four children moved to Barham for support from mother’s many relations; pioneer farmers in the Riverina from the early 1850s.

After WWII ended and Dad returned, we returned to Yinnar in Gippsland. At Yallourn High School, I was a House Captain, Prefect and Editor of the YHS School Magazine, an excellent grounding for adulthood. Then two years at Melbourne Teachers’ College set me on the way for a lifetime in education. Traralgon, Yinnar and Horsham, where I met my future husband, married and finally left teaching to care for our three children, Peter, Leanne and Jim for the next ten years. We lived in Horsham, Ballarat, Hazelwood, Mt Eliza, Gordon, Benalla and finally Canberra, teaching in Weston Primary School, Uriarra Primary School and Weston Creek High School as a Computer Consultant.

After my husband died suddenly in 1997, I became a volunteer for Isolated Student Education with moves to Cairns, Broome, Darwin and Alice and to many remote stations in those areas. At the request of parents of child performers with the Great Moscow Circus, I spent two years driving a 40-foot rig around Australia and taught four senior students enrolled with Brisbane School of Distant Education. When Moscow Circus performed in Hong Kong for seven months, I taught eight students, years 3 to 12.

Nine years with three different circuses, then with Moscow Circus in South Africa and Taiwan before going back to the bush. My last place as a Volunteer was at Vanderlin Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria with sharks, crocodiles in the water and, King Brown snakes and Death Adders, the islands normal resident hazards.

When VISE (Volunteers for Isolated Student Education) folded for want of volunteers, a life full of interest ended for me. Then three months as Assistant Manager of Wave Rock Hotel/Motel in Western Australia ended dramatically with COVID-19 and the cessation of 99% of tourists to this wonderful facility.

Now aged 88, What Next ... No idea!



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## *To the Moon and back with Air Force*

*Flt Lt Karyn Markwell*

As coordinator of volunteers at the RAAF Townsville Aviation Heritage Centre (RTAHC) since 2017, Flight Sergeant (Retd) Michael Hartley is an essential link between volunteers and uniformed management.

“The best parts about volunteering at the RTAHC are being able to keep u with Air Force friends, and meeting a wide range of interesting members of the public when they visit the centre,” Flt Sergeant Hartley said.



After completing his training in logistics, Flt Sgt Hartley was posted to Air Movements at RAAF Base Darwin in 1969. Darwin was the alternative splashdown site for the NASA Apollo program, if conditions proved too rough at the primary splashdown site in the Pacific Ocean. Along with three others, Flt Sgt Hartley’s role was operating the Telex network 24 hours a day, as the network linked all air movements sections with NASA at Cape Kennedy in Florida.

“As a 19-year-old, I found this fascinating, as we could read all of the messages from the astronauts taking about what might happen when they landed, and we all got a thank you letter from NASA for our efforts,” he said.

Flt Sgt Hartley was posted to RAAF Base Butterworth (now Royal Malaysian Air Force Base Butterworth) from 1972 to 1974. In 1973, with five hours notice, he was sent to Indonesia to assist the RAAF Sabre Advisory Unit sorting out a logistics problem which had grounded a fleet of Sabres. In those days, Air Force personnel travelled using their civilian passports. While entitled to semi diplomatic status for this task, unfortunately Flt Sgt Hartley’s passport was stamped with the wrong visa when he arrived in Jakarta.

“The first I knew about it was when civilian police arrived to arrest me and had a standoff with our Indonesian military police escorts, as guns were drawn and I had to do some fast talking to defuse the situation,” Flt Sgt Hartley said.

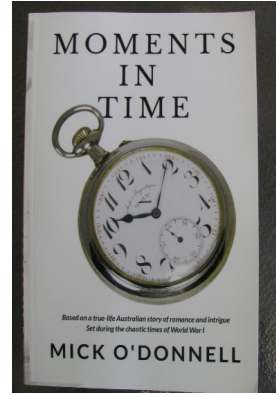
After a long and varied career - including being awarded a tri-service commendation, Flt Sgt Hartley transferred from the permanent Air Force to the Reserves in 2004. He said the most important thing he had learned during his time in the Air Force was “to treat people fairly ad listen to their points of view ... and be prepared to change your decisions and actions when required.”



## Book Launch

At our regular coffee catch-up on Friday 29 September 2023, an enthusiastic group attended a special event with the launch of our Chaplain and Author, Mick O'Donnell's release of his latest book, *'Moments in Time.'*

The key-note address was provided by Sub-Branch member, Mike Taylor followed by a short PowerPoint presentation by the author detailing the research undertaken and the development of the characters in this latest book.



After a short reading from the novel, Mick answered questions about the history of the people from the story.



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## ***Book Review - Moments In Time***

*Mike Taylor*

Prior to presenting the key-note address for Author Mike O'Donnell's latest book and his fifth publication, I had the privilege of reading this novel and providing a review.

To borrow another reviewer's comment, this is a panoramic Australian story based on fact and fiction. It is full of surprises as characters and events unfold over the eras. This really is history wrapped in a complex scenario, and that is all synthesised on the back cover of the book.

To me, two words encapsulate this story - Research and Characterization. the story commences just before Federation and concludes just after World War II. The basis is one family and their loving friendships - their Moments in that Time.

The depth of research is exceedingly impressive. All of the characterisations are vivid. Especially of the effects of the horrific personal devastation caused at Gallipoli on soldiers and medical staff. Then there are parts that become so touching and surprising. The author has written so many surprises as the innate nature of his characters are revealed. He gives clues to what become surprise outcomes.

For example, some questions and teases that he poses to the reader would be:  
Why did a full romance not eventuate between the Michiel and the Nursing Sister?  
Throughout, who was the one he loved to his core? Who was really double-crossed by dangerous military intelligence operations?

Then throughout the novel I was most fascinated by the threads concerning the Vatican, its historical intrigues, its European power and reach, and yet the opposite position in the thoughtful and kind manner of one compassionate Priest. Interesting for my part, at times the plot made me think of agnosticism, such were the dilemmas placed on Michiel, and to an extent the leading ladies, Maddie and Dienneke. Another example of the thought provoking stream of the story's flow.

Additionally, there are important moments that, through the author's exceptional wordsmanship, there are chapters of heart aching prignancy such as when the two women who so loved Michiel poured out their hearts together. Moving and gripping, and there was much more pathos in the book.

In summary, the story is alive, very vivid and very dramatic. A real 'thriller.' A reader will wonder 'what next?'

## SUB-BRANCH SERVICES

**Sub-Branch Office Hours.** The office is open from 9:00AM until 3:00PM Monday to Friday, except public holidays. The services of the Sub-Branch are available to all Sub-Branch members, and all serving and former members of the Australian Defence Force and overseas defence forces.

**Office Manager.** Alex Solecka administers the Sub-Branch office and is responsible to the Executive for the efficient day-to-day routine of the office. Alex will supervise all Sub-Branch matters including membership, correspondence, functions and access to Sub-Branch services.

**Veterans' Support Centre (VSC).** The office is open from 9:00AM until 3:00PM Monday to Friday, except public holidays, and at other times by appointment. The services of the VSC are available to all Sub-Branch members, and all serving and former members of the Australian Defence Force and overseas defence forces.

**Entitlement and Advocacy (E&A).** A team of trained advocates and entitlements/pension officers, both male and female, is available to provide assistance with claims under the Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986 (VEA), the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 (SRCA), and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA). We also provide support and advice to war widows and widowers regarding pensions. Andrew Properjohn, the E&A Administrator, will assist you with your enquiries.

**Community Support.** The provision of welfare to Sub-Branch members and their families can be arranged through Community Support. Advice is available on a case by case basis to access services through DVA, My Aged Care, Centrelink and the ACT Government. For details contact the Sub-Branch office on 6285 1931.

**Hospital Visiting:** We no longer visit the three Southside hospitals automatically but, working with the Veteran Liaison Officers (VLOs) in these hospitals, volunteers visit hospital patients on a case-by-case basis.

**Hospice Visiting:** Visits can be arranged for Sub-Branch members in Clare Holland House.

**Christmas Visits:** In December each year, all Sub-Branch members 80 years of age and over, and all Sub-Branch widows and widowers receive a home visit and a gift.

**Health and Fitness Program.** Arrangements between the Southern Cross Health Club (SCHC) and Sub-Branch members relating to gym use have changed. For details call the office on 6285 1931.

**Sub-Branch Publication.** The Sub-Branch Publication, *'The Serviceman'* is published three times each year and distributed free to all Sub-Branch members, widows and widowers. A special edition is also published for schoolchildren attending the annual ANZAC and Peace Ceremony at Eddison Park.

**Eddison Day Club.** Sponsored by the Sub-Branch, the Day Club caters for members, their spouses, widows, widowers and the general community. It meets every Friday from 10:00AM to 2:00PM (except Good Friday) from mid-January to mid-December at the Irish Club, Parkinson Street, Weston.

If you know of any member who would benefit from any of these services, but is reluctant to apply, please let our office know.