



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



# The **SERVICEMAN**

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**AUGUST 2023**



*100-year-old WWII veteran & Sub-Branch member, Les Cook with the Prime Minister, The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, after the Dawn Service at the Australian War Memorial.*



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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 2023-2024

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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 Street, Phillip at 7.00PM. Membership Subscription is due on January 1<sup>st</sup> annually and should be posted to the above Sub-Branch address.

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

*Bob Cremer*



Although the number of schools participating in this year's essay competition was less due to Covid and school holidays, the overall quality is still outstanding considering the essays are from Year 5 and 6 students. A job well done by all those who participated.

A very sad loss to our members, especially those of the Day Club with the recent passing of Merna Gillard. Merna was also one of the founding members of the Day Club and has been a keen participant in events held there since its inception. Deepest sympathy to Reg and family.

A lot of information in this issue so hopefully it will provide some good reading for our members and friends. My usual appeal for stories of your service and/or other stories that might be of interest to our membership. We cannot rely on Les Cook forever and I am fast running out of his stories, so think about it!

Something that I feel strongly about. While I feel sorry for those killed in the unfortunate Titan submersible accident, people seem to forget that this site, the Titanic wreck is a grave site, and, as such should be treated as such and, as a memorial to those unfortunate 1,500 people killed in its tragic sinking. We have been made aware of the circumstances that led up to the Titanic's sinking. This, I think also applies to currently sunken warships scattered throughout the globe that are grave sites and should be respected as such and not used for personal entertainment. Finding their final location is important and provides closure for those families involved, but then they should be left as a memorial.

Certainly, continue with the exploration of the sea and outer space, areas that we still have a lot to learn about, but leave these sad grave sites as a memorial to those unfortunates who perished.

Finally, stay safe and be kind to each other.



## ***FROM THE PRESIDENT***

*Jim Gilchrist*



While I leave it to readers to consider Ian's comments, I suggest that over the past 100 (+) years, we might have lost some of the focus that the founding members of this wonderful organisation foresaw. Although society has changed, perhaps we are now more interested in external influences and perceptions than on what we should be doing. To that end, I recently submitted a report that suggested decisions and policies are being made, or formed by people who are less well informed of critical grassroots issues than perhaps they should be.

In that and similar reports, I referred to activities our Sub-Branch conducted and the nature and levels of support we have provided to our members and others in the Veteran Community in recent years. Although our resources limit our ability to accurately collect, collate and analyse quantitative data relating to this work, the details we can provide are instructive in themselves. To that end, I again thank all of the volunteers and staff who continue to contribute to these efforts.

In making these comments and referring to the desire to develop a succession plan for the Sub-Branch, I hasten to add that all Board members are willing to continue to serve on the Board while we progress these plans and attract new people and financial support. I also note that, in keeping with our strategy to use our assets wisely while we achieve our goals, our financial resources can sustain our present and forecast workloads.

However, we still need to attract more volunteers if we are to continue as we believe we need to. We are certainly not at risk of leaving the Sub-Branch penniless. If necessary, we will reduce our discretionary spending only as, when, and if we need to. In the meantime, we will continue to optimise our business practices as we seek efficiencies without the loss of effectiveness.

On other positive notes, we continue to achieve some good outcomes in the compensation area. However, these wins continue to be offset by what we consider to be some *odd* decisions. Similarly, our Welfare Team continues to advise and support many of our members who are struggling with ageing and other health issues that are affecting them or their partners. We recently applied for a grant to fund several bus trips later in the year as these were very popular last year. Again, I thank those of you who assist where you can to organise various events and to operate the telephone welfare network.

The Coffee Catch Ups continue to attract at least 15 members on most Fridays. And a small but steady group continues to attend the Edison Day Club lunches. Details of these activities and some highlights from them are reported in our weekly newsletters or Items of Interest.

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At the Branch AGM in May, I again stood for the position of Branch President but fell well short of the target as John King was returned for another year. Several Branch members were elected unopposed to the Branch Executive leaving several vacancies that hopefully will be filled soon. In wishing John and his team all the best for the coming year, I iterate our offer to use our VSC to foster and train advocates from other sub-branches.

From a National perspective, we distributed media releases in our weekly *Items of Interest* and monthly newsletters, generally without comment. As some of these items seek feedback from the Veteran Community, I leave it up to individuals to engage as they wish.

As some of you will have noted from our meetings, newsletters and other sources, other matters are changing in the 'veteran space' in the ACT. These include changes to the Veteran Liaison positions at the Canberra Hospital and, presumably, Calvary Belconnen, that are both part of ACT Health. We expect some changes to Clare Holland House as that also has been taken over by ACT Health.

Despite a flurry of activities a few months ago, we have heard little about the Veterans' Hub in Queanbeyan. In fact, I am unsure as to whether this Hub is still on the list to be developed under current Federal Government budgetary arrangements. However, as we believe the Queanbeyan Hub to be an important facility for the Veteran Community in the ACT and region, we will follow its progress closely and will keep you informed as the situation evolves.

In closing, I encourage all of you who are able and available, to consider ways in which you can become or remain involved in our Sub-Branch activities to do so; whether it be as a volunteer or by merely attending functions and staying engaged in any way you can.

For those of you who are struggling with your health or wellbeing, please call us for advice, assistance or just a chat. Please also stay alert to notices about the Day Club, the Coffee Catch Ups and other social gatherings and events in the newsletters.

### ***2023 KING'S BIRTHDAY HONOURS AWARD***

Sub-Branch member Barry Campton was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in the 2023 King's Birthday Honours list for services to veterans and their families with Legacy Canberra.

Congratulations Barry for this special honour.

## *Vale Merna Gillard 24 July 1931 - 17 March 2023*

Popular Sub-Branch member Merna Gillard was recently farewelled at a service at the Pines Aged Care Facility in Farrer. Merna, for 62 years the loving wife of Reg, a former Air Commodore and Defence attaché.

They had known each other since kindergarden days in Melbourne and married on 31 March 1956 in Adelaide. The service was well attended by their family, Bruce, Ian (in Tasmania), Brian and Peter and the extended family who watched via on-line streaming, and attended by many Sub-Branch members.

Merna had a fascinating life including time as an air hostess with TAA, and partly because of Reg's official duties in different parts of the world as well as being an excellent cook and function arranger. A keen gardener, she liked dogs, loved nature and volunteered with Red Cross, All Saint's Church in Ainslie. She and Reg were popular supporters of the Eddison Day Club lunches held regularly at the Canberra Irish Club.



Merna with Sub-Branch President Jim Gilchrist at the Day Club's 15<sup>th</sup> Birthday party and with Reg and guests at the 2018 Sub-Branch Christmas party.



### *FALL IN*

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

Frederick Rubly, Barry Hockney,  
Lachlan Lewis, Paul Schwerdt

**Woden Valley RSL Sub-Branch  
Annual Report  
January - December 2022  
2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Following two years under the COVID-19 restrictions that applied to the ACT and elsewhere, 2022 provided some relief to all of us. While we remained aware of the threats associated with this disease, we carefully moved towards the *new normal*, whatever that might mean or be. One of the effects of the past few years is our struggle to maintain contact with some members, especially those who faced issues related to the ageing process or who suffered from other illnesses, or who were in Nursing Homes. We did, however, gather for meetings and social occasions, and we continued to provide a range of advocacy services to our members and others in the Veteran Community in the ACT and region.

Thus, I start this report by thanking all of the volunteers and staff who supported our members and others so professionally during 2022. I also applaud those who attended meetings and other gatherings as it is through these contacts that we maintain the strength to keep going forward. The discussion that occurs during these occasions contributes greatly to our overall success as a sub-branch.

During 2022, we continued to apply lessons we learned from the previous two years to our sub-branch operations and its integral Veteran Support Centre (VSC). As communications is fundamental to all member-based organisations, we issued weekly eNewsletters, and sent other notices by email when necessary. By these means, we forwarded media releases from RSLA, DVA, the Federal and ACT Governments, and other sources that we deemed relevant. We continued to use telephone networks to maintain contact with as many members as possible and, where possible, we visited members in their homes or in Aged Care facilities. Given the success and popularity of these measures, we are keen to find more volunteers to build what we believe must be a growth area in coming years.

*The Corey Room* at the Grant Cameron Community Centre proved a popular place for OGMs, the 2022 AGM, the Friday morning Coffee Catch-ups and other smaller gatherings. The Board held its monthly meetings there also. I encourage all members to avail themselves of this excellent facility and the books that are in the library. I thank those who contribute to the evolution of this facility, especially Bill Kelly for his oversight and librarian skills, and Ross Smith who presented some excellent displays of memorabilia that others had donated.

Although we again cancelled the ANZAC and Peace Ceremony due to the COVID restrictions, we held the Essay Competition that attracted a small but good field of entrants. Year nine students from Marist College toured parts of the Woden Cemetery where, under the guidance of some of our members, they reflected on the service and sacrifice of the servicemen and women who are buried or otherwise remembered there. I thank Greg Kennett and his teams for their contribution to these two activities that reflected well on some younger members of our community, their teachers and schools, and their parents.

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The National President, Major General (Retd) Greg Melick, addressed our ANZAC Eve Dinner that attracted about 80 members and guests, including our Patron, the Honourable Dame Annette King, NZ High Commissioner to Australia, and her husband Ray Lind. Chris Latham, the Artist in Residence at the AWM, played the Last Post and Rouse on his violin during the commemorative and rededication ceremony.

Some 70 people attended a service at Eddison Park on ANZAC Day. The Salvation Army Band (Tuggeranong), vocalist Drew Ashley, the 241 Army Cadet Unit, the Weston Scout Group, Piper Jen Hamer and LTCOL (Retd) Brian Hewitt added to this simple but moving occasion. At the end of the service, a member of the Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Association, Ms Vicki Munday helped dedicate a plaque to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of the siege. I thank organisers Matt Griggs and Anthony John for their contribution, and offer a special thanks to our Honorary Chaplain, the Rev Mick O'Donnell for his blessings during the service and the dedication that followed.

Another commemorative activity in which we were involved was the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of the Australian Army Training Team in South Vietnam on 3 August 1962. Sub-Branch members, Ian Gollings and Simon Hearder organised a Last Post Ceremony at the AWM to honour Warrant Officer Kevin Conway, who was the first member of The Team to be killed in action. This ceremony was complemented by a lunch at the Commonwealth Club, at which Major General Jason Blain addressed former Team members and their families and guests. It was a pleasure and privilege to represent the Sub-Branch at these events.

Sub-Branch members attended many other commemorative services and events during the year, including the Vietnam Veterans' Service held on 18 August on ANZAC Parade. These events were all reported in *The Serviceman* and/or various newsletters during the year.

Although it remained difficult to quantify how many members or other clients sought advice or support through the VSC, we estimate more than 300 veterans contacted the Compensation Team. Similarly, a steady flow of members or their families sought advice and support from the Welfare Team that, itself, is supported by several reliable external advisors with experience and knowledge of the various systems our members need as they face issues relating to ageing. The Welfare Team also handled some complex cases that had been referred to by DVA, local hospitals and other sources. By the end of the year, the Board had agreed that we would have to review how best we could responsibly manage these cases as many stretched our capabilities.

The Welfare Team re-introduced meetings for the Carers' Friendship Group, and held several information sessions, three of which were part of Veterans' Health Week. Jacqui Thorpe continued to make birthday calls to our Over 80 year-olds and we delivered about 250 Christmas presents to our elderly members. I offer my sincere thanks to those who contributed to these activities that remain fundamental to our culture and are valued by those who benefit from them, especially the phone calls and birthday cards.

For another year, the Eddison Day Club was prevented from holding its Friday meetings and lunches.

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While small groups met informally at the Canberra Irish Club, the Day Club Committee continued to plan how to regenerate this worthy and much needed resource. As we hope to make good progress in 2023, I am sure the Committee would welcome any suggestions as to how we can continue this program and how we might attract new volunteers.

A major highlight of the year was our involvement in *The Flowers of Peace, POW Requiem*, that premiered at Llewellyn Hall on 29 October. While planning this production, Director, Chris Latham, discussed key aspects of this Requiem with our members Major General (Retd) Peter Phillips and Terry Colhoun, both of whom had worked for many years to promote harmony between the Australian and Japanese veteran communities and the respective governments and people.

We provided 14 Funeral Tributes, 5 of which were for non-members of the Sub-Branch, and advised 15 other families for which a tribute was not required.

With changed guidance applying to DVA's BEST Grant process and some other issues, we did not attract any funds from this source. However, we did garner funds for specific purposes such as Veterans Health Week and several bus trips, all of which were reported during the year. As the issues relating to the BEST Grant are based on the recently revised training system for advocates, we are no longer eligible to apply for these funds, unless, of course, the conditions are eased in future. As the current training process also adversely affects our ability to attract and train new advocates, we will continue to seek changes to the new system in 2023. While various factors also limited our ability to attract funds through the ANZAC and Poppy appeals, a small group of dedicated members supported both appeals that promoted our Sub-Branch activities while attracting some \$28,000 to our coffers.

Despite these limitations on our revenue, we are in a sound financial position and are well placed to start 2023 from a sound base. In making this observation I thank Sub-Branch Secretary, Greg Kennett, Treasurer, Jan Properjohn and all members of the Board for the work they do throughout the year.

The ACT Branch was also limited by the COVID situation, with the effect it held a small AGM in May rather than a full Congress, three Council meetings and an EGM in December. The EGM amended the Branch Constitution to align the quorums required for general and council meetings to reflect the reduction in the number of ACT-based Sub-Branches during the past few years.

In what was a fine end to the year, the Sub-Branch Christmas lunch provided an opportunity to thank our staff and volunteers. While we had intended to initiate two members into *The-Order-Of-Whatever-It-Is*, neither were available on the day. We will catch up with them in 2023. On behalf of the Board and our members, I thank all of you who contributed to our success during 2022. On a personal note, I thank everyone who assisted and advised me in my various roles last year. I cannot express how proud I am to have these opportunities in such a wonderful environment and how proud I am of our Sub-Branch and its members.

***J.A.F. Gilchrist - President***

***Even during the darkest days of Tobruk, Cricket was played.***

*From 'Cricketers at War' by Greg Rowden*

One semi-serious inter-service match in July 1941 between the **20<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade** and **107<sup>th</sup> Royal Horse Artillery** at the Tobruk (Tobruk) Cricket Ground including the stipulations that 'Play will **NOT** cease during shell fire.'

'All players will supply their own Beer. Rum issue before and after the match is being arranged by the Manager.'

'Umpires will wear coats (if available) and will carry loaded rifle with fixed bayonet. Tin hat to be used (on head only) by wicket-keeper, if desired.'

'Remarks to umpire on receipt of adverse decisions to be confined to those words used during dive-bombing attacks. All players will be searched for concealed weapons before the start of play. All weapons found, other than ST grenades, Mills bombs and revolvers will be confiscated (this does not apply to umpires).

'Other rules may be added or deleted as a majority of players, umpires or onlookers think fit.'

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**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.”*



Wilfred Hedley, Colin Brown, Merna Gillard,  
Marcel Le Nevez, Walter Beckhouse



## *Eddison Day Club*

*Peter Sutton  
Coordinator*



Our volunteers are continuing to stay in contact with other members and our volunteers. This is vital to check on the current well-being of our elderly.

I have not long returned from an overseas holiday. Whilst I was away the death of Mrs Mirna Gillard occurred. Merna was a founding member of and volunteer of the Eddison Day Club since February 2004. She was one of the driving forces in the Day Club. She was still attending the lunches each Friday up until the end, and I spoke to her on my last Friday in early May before going away the next Thursday. Her husband Reg joined the Day Club in 2005.

Both Merna and Reg did so much over the last 19 years to keep the Day Club viable. Unfortunately, Reg has not attended for some time as he is now a resident of an Aged Care Facility with failing health. Reg and Merna had been married for over 67 years. Their four sons are assisting their Dad at this time.

On Friday 23 June, we had 15 people attend the luncheon, and on Friday 30 June, we had 18 patrons attend for lunch. Some were regulars and others have started to return following a long absence. We have again started either quizzes or card games arranged by Mrs Thelma Maurice. These activities are welcomed by those who attend. We are slowly building numbers and we would ask that more people come and enjoy a cheerful get together. Once we can attract a reasonable number, we can then arrange to have guest speakers or artists to return to entertain and educate those who attend.

We were recently advised of the death of Claire, the wife of Mr Barrie Virtue, one of our regular guest speakers over the last 19 years. Claire had died after many years of ill health. A condolence card was posted to Barrie at this sad stage of his life.

Approaches are proceeding well to have a local Aged Care Facility arrange to drive some residents to and from the Canberra Irish Club each Friday. All those that attend do not have to be veterans or have any connection either with the armed services or with our Sub-Branch. Any member of the community is welcome, especially if they are lonely and isolated.

The Eddison Day Club membership and volunteers would like to thank the continuing support of the Board of Management, and members of the Woden Valley Sub-Branch, an arrangement that has continued since 2004.

## *ANZAC Eve Dinner Monday 24 Apr 2023*

The traditional ANZAC Eve dinner was well attended with 70 members and guests under the control of MC Jack Aaron. Special guests were our Patron, Dame Annette King, the New Zealand High Commissioner to Australia with her husband, and Chris Latham, musician and Director of the Flowers of War Company, the recently produced 'Vietnam Requiem.' President Jim Gilchrist introduced the Guest Speaker Major General Roger Noble, AO DSC CSC, former Commanding Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Regiment; Commander 3 Brigade; Deputy Coalition Land Force Commander Iraq; Deputy Commanding General (North) United States Army Pacific; and Australian Ambassador for Counter-Terrorism who gave a moving speech on what ANZAC Day means to him.





A very pleasant evening with members and guests and directions to the appropriate event function room provided by the bagpipes of Piper Jen Hamer from Canberra Pipes and Drums.

Member Dorothy Seedsman attended on the evening along with her twin sister Mary and husband Bert visiting from Melbourne.





***ANZAC Day - Eddison Park Ceremony***  
***Tuesday 25 April 2023***

An excellent attendance on a picture perfect day welcomed attendees at this year's Eddison Park Ceremony. MC Matt Griggs officiated with the Welcome to Country address and President Jim Gilchrist delivering the ANZAC Requiem and prayers by Chaplain Mick O'Donnell. Army cadets provided the Catafalque party, flag marshals from the Weston Scout Group, hymns by the Salvation Army Band and Jen Hamer on the bagpipes.



## *Special Birthday Event*

On Wednesday 17 May members and invited guests gathered in *The Corey Room* to celebrate the 99<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Sub-Branch member Norma Eggleston.

Visitors assembled for the official cutting of the cake.



Also in attendance at Norma's special birthday were Col Kimberlea Juchnewicz, Major Anne-Maree Hunt, Cpl Daniel Hodgson, LtCol David Hankin and WO1 Virginia Morris

## *The 2023 Primary Schools ANZAC Essay Competition*

*This year's topic:*

*“Australia's participation in the Vietnam War 1963-73 - What were the attitudes and perceptions of the Australian community towards that participation?”*

*Winning Essay by Tharuli Walakuluarchchi  
Year 6 Mawson Primary School*

The 1960s is known for its signature events, such as the civil rights movements and women's workplace equality. However, in Australia the decade's most painful chapter was the Vietnam War.

Vietnam was split into two; North Vietnam, led by people who believed in communism and South Vietnam which was not impressed by communism and fought against it.

America was worried that if the communists won in Vietnam, there'd be a domino effect and all South-East Asia would become communist. America entered and requested further support from allies, including Australia. Australia supported America in strengthening relationships and preventing the spread of communism in South-East Asia.

The Australian public didn't like being dragged into the war. The Army was low on soldiers and conscription was introduced whereby soldiers were picked up by a giant nationwide lottery for those that had turned 20 years of age. There had also been exceedingly disturbing footage and horrific images about the war, further weakening public support and creating anti-war protests. The anti-war protests continued throughout the war. "Save our Sons" was one slogan that changed the government's perspective, as many politicians had also sent their sons to fight, which affected them emotionally. Australia withdrew from the war in the early 70s as a result of public opinion.

Australian troops came home after the long battle, losing 523 Australians, 2,400 being wounded. Our soldiers did not receive the homecoming they deserved. They were given the cold shoulder, unlike the soldiers who fought in other wars. The Vietnam War was a shameful event in the eyes of the Australian public.

The public insulted the Vietnam soldiers and portrayed them as baby killers, psychos, drug addicts and warmongers. The veterans who were battling PTSD, anxiety and depression deteriorated by this lack of understanding and it left a long standing impression on them. Vietnam Veterans were rejected by most of the WWII veterans who conveyed the impression of this not being "a real war" compared to what they had been through.

By 1987 Australia's perspective of the returning soldiers changed. Their cold shoulders turned warm. About 25,000 veterans marched through the streets. Tears which had been held back for 15 years slid down their cheeks while thousands of Australians cheered them. This time the veterans felt it was a real march of home welcoming. Finally, they were acknowledged as true war heroes. "Lest we Forget" our war heroes!



## *The 2023 Primary Schools ANZAC Essay Competition*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Prize Winner - 2023  
Lorna Bassingthwaight  
Canberra Girls Grammar School*

Australia's participation in the Vietnam War from 1963-74 was a controversial and divisive period in the country's history. The attitudes and perceptions of the Australian community towards that participation were varied and complex, with strong opinions on both sides of the debate.

At the start of the war in 1963, the Australian government under Prime Minister Robert Menzies was quick to offer military assistance to the United States. The government justified its involvement in the war as part of its commitment to the ANZUS alliance and the containment of communism in the region. This stance was initially supported by many Australians, who saw it as a way to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States and protect their country from the perceived threat of communism. However, as the war dragged on and the casualty count rose, public opinion began to shift. The anti-war movement gained momentum, with protests and demonstrations held across the country.

Over the decade-long involvement in the Vietnam War, the Australian public's perception and attitude towards the conflict underwent several changes. Initially, the public paid little attention to the war as it involved very few Australian soldiers, who were primarily engaged in a training role. However, due to the growing fear of communism's spread through Asia, most Australians were cautious about the situation. When Australia's regular Army battalion was deployed to Vietnam in 1965, there was a negative reaction.

The media played a significant role in shaping public opinion on the war. Television coverage of the conflict brought the reality of the war into people's homes, with graphic images of wounded and dead soldiers and civilians. This led to a growing sense of disillusionment and outrage among many Australians, who felt that the government had misled them about the nature and purpose of the war. There were also concerns about the impact of the war on Australian society. The conscription of young men to fight in Vietnam was a highly controversial issue, with many Australians opposed to the idea of compulsory military service. The use of conscription by the government to boost the number of Australian men sent to fight in Vietnam was met with widespread anger and disapproval among citizens who believed it to be an unfair practice. The war also led to a breakdown in social cohesion, with divisions between pro and anti-war groups becoming increasingly entrenched.

Despite these concerns, there were still many Australians who supported the government's involvement in the war. The Returned and Services League (RSL) was a strong advocate for the war effort, and many veterans and their families felt a deep sense of pride and loyalty towards their country and its military traditions.

In the end, the Australia government's decision to withdraw its troops from Vietnam in 1972 reflected the changing attitudes and perceptions of the Australian community towards the war.

>>>



The conflict had caused significant divisions and had challenged the country's sense of identity and values. The legacy of the Vietnam War is still felt in Australia today, with ongoing debates about its impact on society, politics and culture.

## ***The 2023 Primary Schools ANZAC Essay Competition***

***3<sup>rd</sup> Prize Winner - 2023***

***Katherine Doherty***

***Year 5/6 St. Benedict's Primary, Narrabundah***

There were mixed opinions within the Australian population towards Australia's participation in the Vietnam War. As part of my research, I interviewed my grandparents to see what their experiences were. I found that attitudes towards the war changed over time, from initially being mostly supportive, to becoming uncertain and eventually unsupportive of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.

My grandparents remember that early attitudes towards the Vietnam War were positive and supportive.

My Nanna remembers watching news of the Vietnam War and discussions about Australia's participation on television shows such as Four Corners. In previous wars, the Australian public read about conflicts through newspapers and letters from loved ones. As the press had more access in Vietnam, images came into the living rooms of Australians for the first time. This brought home the reality and brutality of war in a way that had never been experienced before.

My Poppi, a policeman during the Vietnam War, spent time policing the protests and momatoriums in Melbourne. He remembers that initially they were mostly peaceful, however, as the years went by and support for the war declined, these protests and marches became larger and more violent as attitudes began to change. He and my Grandad remember the six-monthly ballots that would determine who would be called up for National Service. They remember that some people who were called up went along willingly because they thought it was the right thing to do, whilst others objected and didn't want to be in a war that they believed Australia shouldn't be in.

During the Tet Offensive in early 1968 when the Viet Cong attacked major cities, the media's coverage influenced people's perception of whether Australia could ever win this war. Support began to decline rapidly.

When troops were withdrawn in late 1972, there were mixed emotions. People who were supportive of the war thought that it was too soon; veterans who fought felt let down and those who opposed the war were relieved. The soldiers that went to Vietnam to fight were met with a 'hostile' return home. A lot people did not like the war and that reflected on their attitudes towards the soldiers.

It has taken a lot of time for the Australian public to recognize the service of the Vietnam veterans and I personally think it's a disgrace because they risked their lives to fight for others and we didn't even acknowledge them when they returned home.

***The transcript of an address by the Director of the Australian War Memorial  
Matt Anderson, at the War Widows' Field of Remembrance Ceremony  
at RSL Lifecare's Sir Leslie Morshead Manor and El Alamein Village,  
Lyneham ACT on Friday 21 April 2023.***

*Matt's address is reproduced with his kind permission.*

Every night, at the Australian War Memorial we conduct a Last Post Ceremony, where we acknowledge those who have served, those still serving and the families that love and support them. On Monday, we commemorated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Last Post Ceremony. 10 years ago, at the first ceremony in its current format, we commemorated the life of a young Canberran killed in Afghanistan, Private Robbie Poate. His mother, Jannie and father Hugh, were present 10 years ago, and they were there again on Monday to lay a wreath.

We have honoured 3,300 of our fallen this way. It will take 280 years to honour each of them individually. To remember them not only for how and where they died, but who they were when they lived. 103,000 lives and, as Prime Minister Keating said, at the entombment of the Unknown Australian Soldier in 1993, "with them we have lost their love of this country, and all of their hope, and all of their energy." But we have lost so much more.

Last weekend I was overcome when standing at the rear of the Commemorative Area with the Chief of Navy, Mark Hammond, at another LPC, this time honouring two brothers. Private John Thomas McCague and Corporal James Joseph McCague, both killed in action on the Western Front. The sizeable family in attendance, covering three generations, were all descendants of the third brother, Hugh McCague, who survived the war. I was struck with an image of those who weren't there. The ghosts of families that never were. How much poorer are we as a nation for the loss of all of *their* love for this country, *their* hopes and their energy?

Historian Geoffrey Blainey asked the rhetorical: How can we measure the true cost of war? The loss of all those talented people who would have become prime ministers and premiers, judges, divines, engineers, teachers, doctors, poets, inventors and farmers, the mayors of towns and leaders of trade unions and the fathers (and mothers) of another generation of Australians. During the First World War, nearly 417,000 enlisted and 325,000 served overseas. More than 60,000 were killed and 160,000 wounded. This devil's arithmetic meant that only one out of every three Australians who went to the war got through it unscathed. At least physically.

There were those whose central nervous systems collapsed under the pressure of a sustained barrage, or simply the inability to comprehend the nightmare in which they had been forced to live, and to somehow survive against impossible odds. And what we now call the moral injury. Only to have someone scratch an obscenely insensitive LMF - Lacks Moral Fibre - on their medical file for return to Australia. When they came home, of course many were broken and in need of recovery. How could they not be with all they had endured? It has been calculated we lost almost as many men in the short decades after the war as we lost during it. Too many, too young. >>>

All of their hope. All of their energy. Lest we forget was not the problem. Trying to forget was the real challenge.

Those who brought the war home with them also brought with them a long shadow; an extra place at many a dinner table; an unwelcome and often violent guest in the middle of the night. Families are most often conscripted into a service.

The families of those who returned in 1919 were simply unprepared to nurse the traumatised, lung-damaged and disabled. This task fell not only to wives and sisters, many were unmarried when they enlisted, and unrecognisable when they returned. So parents too were co-opted to look after their prematurely aged children.

Historian Joan Beaumont said: 'They tended to their wounds, spoon-fed them, if necessary, endured their erratic and violent behaviour and bore the brunt of the alcoholism to which some succumbed.'

The Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier rests in the Hall of Memory, the sacred heart of commemoration at the Memorial. Conceived by Mervyn Napier Waller, who was an artist before the First World War, and who would have his right arm amputated after Bullencourt - taught himself to write and to paint with his left hand because, as he said, 'an artist paints with his head, not with his hands' - imagined both the 15 stained glass windows and a mosaic, the size of five tennis courts, to honour our servicemen and women. It would comprise more than 6 million tesserae glass tiles to cover the walls and the ceiling of the Byzantine dome.

This mosaic was assembled offsite in one foot square panels by art students and war widows.

The widows and the young would adorn the most sacred place where our nation gathers to remember. Napier Waller understood we cannot honour those who have served without including the families that love and support them. The young and the bereaved.

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a family to serve a nation. My wife, Lou, was only 21 when we met. I was already in the Army. We've been married now for 31 years, and we have moved house 21 times. My children have had 10 schools in 5 countries.

Every family guards the record of their loved one. The ones who were lost, the ones who returned home, the ones who brought the war home with them.

It is my profound honour to be here today, at the Sir Leslie Morshead Manor and El Alamein Village at this field of remembrance.

As the then Governor General, Lord Gowrie said, at the opening of the Australian War Memorial in 1941, Australia gave unsparingly, ungrudgingly the best and the bravest ...and, it is in their honour that this Memorial has been created. But today we honour too, the families who have always loved and supported them.

*Lest We Forget*

## *The Tradition of Burial at Sea*

*Mike Taylor*

As this essay is read, the Flagship of the Australian Amphibious Force (AAF), HMAS Canberra, is at sea with the Commander of the AAF and her Staff embarked. The Commander of the AAF, Captain Phillipa Hay CSC and Bar RAN, has in her custody the Ashes of the late Commodore Michael (Mike) Rayment AM RAN for Burial at Sea.

Mike's funeral took place on 21st April at Duntroon's Memorial Chapel. This was conducted by our Rev Mick O'Donnell, also a former RAN Warrant Officer Comms. The Navy had posted Mike Rayment to command four ships, HMAS EMU, SNIPE, SWAN and TORRENS, including as Flotilla Commander. Later he was posted as the Commanding Officer of the RAN's largest training establishment HMAS CERBERUS. The Gloucester Cup, awarded yearly to the Navy's most efficient ship, was awarded to two ships in which Mike served.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1944, Michael's father, Commander John Rayment DSC RAN, was killed during the Battle of Leyte-Surigao Strait when onboard HMAS Australia as the Squadron Navigation Officer; as were 29 others and with 64 wounded when the vessel was struck by a suicide Japanese dive bomber. These three battles in that area were the biggest at-sea battles in history: (<https://www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/battle-leyte-gulf-1944>).

At the families' request, in mid-June and at a short Service on the ship's quarterdeck, Mike's Ashes were presented to CANBERRA's Commanding Officer for custody and Burial at Sea. Mike's request was that his Ashes might be scattered near his father's sea grave near Leyte Gulf.

However, CANBERRA will not be operating east of the Philippines, but to the western sides so, where to scatter the Ashes? His family said. "Off Subic Bay?" A brilliant choice.

During HMAS Hobart II's second and third Vietnam deployments in 1968-70, when Mike was Navigator then Executive Officer, passage was made on innumerable occasions to the dangerous warlike readiness and operational gunline missions off North and South Vietnam from Subic Bay. Not dissimilar to his Father's operations, before him, in WWII.

If there is not a Chaplain onboard, the Commanding Officer will conduct the formal Service, the ship's ensign will be flown at half mast, the Final Post will be played and from amongst the attending ship's company, the youngest sailor onboard will scatter the Ashes overboard.

HMAS Canberra and sister ship Adelaide are the largest vessels built for the Navy. They have a displacement of 27,000 tonnes deadweight and when the Amphibious Group is embarked, that reaches 30,000 tonnes. The height of the Ships' side is equivalent to a seven story apartment.

## *A Special Coffee catch-up on Friday 9 June 2023*

A good roll-up attended this morning for the 'special' birthday celebration for our office manager Alex who celebrated her #@\* birthday today. Happy Birthday Alex.



All those attending enjoyed the celebration, the company and the special obligatory birthday cake and other goodies provided.



## *2023 - The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.*

The Australian Government will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War with:

- a televised Commemorative Service at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial on Anzac Parade, Canberra on Friday 18 August 2023; and
- production and distribution of a Commemorative Medallion and Certificate of Commemoration.

### *Commemoration Service on 18 August 2023*

**Location:** Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial  
Anzac Parade, Campbell, Canberra

**Date/Time:** Friday 18 August 2023  
Pre-Service commences at 10:00AM  
Commemorative service commences at 10:30AM

**Broadcast:** The service will be broadcast live across Australia by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and streamed online. The ABC will also make the broadcast available to other networks to provide all members of the community the opportunity to acknowledge the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

### *Ticketing for in-person attendance:*

All attendees must register in advance. An attendance pass is essential for entry to the service. Further information regarding attendance passes will be announced by DVA shortly and made available on the DVA webpage.

(r) A hand made tapestry currently on display at the RSL Club in Mittagong



## **THE OBJECTS FOR WHICH THE LEAGUE WAS FOUNDED**

*Ian Gollings*

Meeting in Melbourne in June 1916, returned men, most of them having been wounded during the Gallipoli campaign, formed The Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia. In the 1920s “Airmen” were added so it became the RSSAILA. Widely known ever since as the RSL, it has become probably Australia’s most iconic organisation. Central to this organisation and enshrined in its constitution at the time it was founded, were these five objects to define and direct the work of the League:

1. *To perpetuate the close ties of friendship created by mutual service in the Australian Defence Force or allied forces, to maintain a proper standard of dignity and honour among all past and present members of the Defence Force and to set an example of public spirit and noble hearted endeavour.*
2. *To preserve the memory and records of those who suffered and died for Australia.*
3. *To provide for the sick and wounded and needy among those who have served and their dependants including pensions, medical attention, homes and suitable employment.*
4. *To inculcate loyalty to the Nation, to guard the good name and preserve the interests and standing of members of the Defence Force.*
5. *To promote our policy on national questions, particularly:*
  - *the unity of the Commonwealth of Nations*
  - *the Defence of Australia*
  - *the maintenance of a sustained and selective immigration policy*
  - *the development of a national defence infrastructure and defence industry, and*
  - *the promotion and proper employment of the nation’s natural resources.*

Fine words from 117 years ago you might say but are they still relevant? Although the original Objects were re-endorsed in 1991 on its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the League found it necessary to bring them up-to-date in June 2016 to better demonstrate the roles of this large national organisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (with some amendments in September 2019). Let us now examine if and how these founding Objects have been reflected in today’s RSL Constitution. It is not known whether the current Objects, shown as follows, were meant to be in order of priority:

*The RSL is established for the principal purpose of promoting the interests and welfare of serving and ex-serving men and women of the Australian Defence Force and their dependants and for this purpose has the following objects:*

*(a) To assist and care of the sick, elderly and needy by providing, or assisting to provide pensions, benefits, accommodation, medical treatment, rehabilitation and other forms of welfare;*

*(b) To establish and accept trusts having for their object the welfare and benefit of any member of the League, or of any serving, or ex-service member, of the Australian Defence Force, or their dependants;*

*(c) In furtherance of any of the objects of the RSL, to make grants to and give assistance to such persons, trusts, groups, associations, societies, institutions or other organisations and authorities and to establish such scholarships as the RSL may, from time to time determine;*

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- (d) *To perpetuate the close and kindly ties of friendship created by mutual service in the Australian Defence Force or in the forces of nations traditionally allied with Australia and the recollections associated with that experience, to maintain a proper standard of dignity and honour among all serving and ex-service men and women of the Australian Defence Force, and to set an example of public spirit and noble hearted endeavour;*
- (e) *To ensure the preservation of the memory and the records of those who suffered and died for the nation, to ensure the erection of memorials to their valour and that they have suitable burial places; to establish and preserve in their honour, ANZAC Day, Remembrance Day and other commemorative occasions.*
- (f) *To promote the defence of the Nation, and guard the good name, interests and standing of serving members of the Australian Defence Force;*
- (g) *To support serving Australian Defence Force members at home and abroad and actively assist them in their transition to civilian life, especially if they are detrimentally affected by their Defence service;*
- (h) *To support Australian Federal Police overseas veterans with appropriate assistance and encouragement to join the League;*
- (i) *To encourage members of the League and citizens to serve the Nation with a spirit of self-sacrifice and loyalty, supporting constitutional arrangements that promote a stable and progressive society;*
- (j) *To maintain a national association, which is non-sectarian, and in relation to party politics, non-partisan;*
- (k) *To enunciate, from time to time, its policy on national questions and to encourage members of the League to abide by, support and actively carry out such policy so far as is permitted by law;*
- (l) *To establish, maintain, furnish and equip premises, information bureau, libraries, literary, social, educational and benevolent institutions for the benefit and advancement of members of the League and to print, circulate and publish such papers, books, magazines and circulars, carry on such other literary and journalistic undertakings, and publish material that may be conducive to the objects of the RSL;*
- (m) *To subscribe or donate to, become a member of and co-operate with any other body of persons corporate or unincorporated whose objects are similar to those of the RSL and which prohibits the distribution of its or their income and property, amongst its or their members, to an extent at least as great as is imposed on the RSL under or by virtue of clause 6;*
- (n) *To conduct commercial, marketing and sponsorship activities consistent with relevant legislation and the RSL's reputation for the purpose of delivering the Objects and other outcomes as directed by the Board; and*
- (o) *To do any act matter or thing which is conducive to carrying out the Objects.*

There was some discussion relating to the original Objects at the Woden Valley RSL Sub-Branch monthly meeting on 30 May, but it might be instructive to look at them in more detail. In short, is the League observing these Objects, at what levels of the League are they being observed and is our Woden Valley RSL Sub-Branch playing its part in their observance? To do so, let's give them some abbreviated titles.

**Dignity, Honour and Public Spirit.** (The first object in 1916 is now down the list as (d). Sub-Branches clearly have a role here and it would be fair to say that our sub-branch is doing it well. >>>

But do we all, as individual members of the RSL, have a role to play in this? Should we all examine our own consciences in this regard? Could we all as individuals contribute more of our time and energy to the important work of the sub-branch? Do we consider eligibility for membership of the RSL to be a privilege and an honour that each of us has earned?

**Commemoration.** (The number 2 priority in 1916 is, at (e), also down in the latest list.) Is establishing and accepting trusts (number (b) on the latest list) more important than commemorating those who have given their lives? Or would a Sub-Branch Trust Fund enhance our ability to conduct commemorative activities? The ceremonies conducted annually at Eddison Park - the Anzac Day service and the Anzac and Peace Ceremony for school children are both well regarded and attended.

**Caring,** (The League's number 3 Object in 1916 is at sub-paragraphs (a) and (g) now.) I'm sure we all look upon ourselves as 'caring' people but, some years ago, our sub-branch had to reduce our hospital visiting program because not enough of us volunteered to participate, and then the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic limited all hospital visitors for about three years. What about it? If our sub-branch resumed this program would you put your hand up to volunteer, say once each month to visit patients in hospitals and residents in nursing homes or lonely fellow members in their own homes?

However, it is in caring that the Woden Valley Sub-Branch excels. Its Veterans' Support Centre (VSC) helps hundreds of veterans each year with their compensation claims and appeals, their health needs and their well-being generally. About 12 volunteer advocates from within the sub-branch and from other ex-service organisations have been especially trained to assist veterans wounded in body or mind, to receive their entitled compensatory benefits from the Department of Veterans' Affairs with as little fuss or delay as possible. At least two of these advocates have been doing this work for more than 20 years - congratulations and thanks to Ross and Ken! If this voluntary work interests you, contact the sub-branch secretary now.

However, the quantity and quality of our sub-branch caring services can be directly related to our financial circumstances. To provide the current services these days requires the sub-branch to draw down from our reserve funds. One way we could all assist in improving our financial situation is by volunteering a couple of hours twice a year to sell Anzac Day pins and Remembrance Day poppies. Last Anzac Day only 20 members from our total sub-branch membership of more than 500 volunteered. Surely, we can do better than this! In addition, would a Trust Fund as shown at number (b) on the latest list of Objects, enable us to improve or expand our caring role?

On the subject of volunteering - President Jim, Secretary Greg and Treasurer Jan have each served voluntarily with high distinction for upwards of a decade. They deserve a break, preferably from younger sub-branch members. And we haven't had an assistant secretary or an assistant treasurer for years. *The Serviceman* editor, Bob, has produced this splendid sub-branch publication for very many years - he needs an assistant. Is it time for us members who have served our country well, to now serve the RSL and our comrades by offering to do a year or two in a sub-branch leadership or managerial position?

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**Loyalty.** (Number 4 originally but now well down the list in the (i) sub-Paragraph.) As individuals, having served in the ADF and now by being members of the RSL, we have already demonstrated our personal loyalty to our nation. How we could “encourage ... citizens to serve the Nation with a spirit of self-sacrifice and loyalty” might be an interesting topic for discussion within the sub-branch on an appropriate occasion. However we must take care to not invite accusations of jingoism, as the RSL has been accused of in the past.

**National Questions.** (The fifth Object of the RSL in 1916 now at (f) and (k) in the 2016 update.) This one created controversy among returned Vietnam veterans. The men who founded the RSL were firmly of the view that because they had suffered from serving their country and they had promised their mates who had not returned that they would look after their widows and children, they deserved the right and had the responsibility to speak out on national affairs. This belief was carried forward by the returned men and women of the World War 2 generation but, decades later, many service men and women returning from the Vietnam War thought the RSL should concentrate its efforts purely and simply on its caring and commemorating roles.

I am of the view that the League can both care for ex-service men and women and speak out on national affairs. Being frequently in the public eye encourages media representatives to seek the RSL’s views on a variety of topics and thus helps the visibility of the League and so, its ability to constantly promote the direct needs of the ex-service community. But speaking out on national matters is not a sub-branch responsibility - the National President makes the League’s views known on appropriate matters and state presidents can do so too. However, RSL sub-branches could encourage discussion of national affairs with a view to making submissions to their state branch which, after consideration at state congresses, would remit the subjects to national headquarters for debate at the next national congress. After this, somewhat tedious, process the collective views on the subject are then able to be submitted to the government and opposition of the day as the considered opinion of the entire membership of the RSL. This process has been followed successfully by the RSL right from the formation of the League. But what about the other Objects laid down in the League’s 2016 Constitution. (b) is worth investigating by our sub-branch but is there a member who knows about establishing and managing trust funds? If there is, I’m sure the Board would like to hear from you. (c) is already an activity of the sub-branch with our Anzac Essay competition for school students. (h) I’m sure AFP overseas veterans would be welcome to join our sub-branch but they have already formed their own. Both (j) and (l) are already part of the Woden Valley Sub-Branch’s work as are (m) and (n) - members are always welcome to visit our library and borrow books for reading at home.

**Volunteers.** It was a simple matter of fact in 1916, in the days of smaller governments, that the Objects for which the League was founded would be implemented at all levels by volunteers who were veterans. There was no shortage of them then and for the many decades until after World War 2, but this is not the case today. National headquarters, all state branch headquarters and many sub-branches have to employ staff to do what volunteers used to do to look after the welfare of their members, to provide compensation and advocacy support for those who have been affected by their service in body or mind and to properly manage the general and financial administration of their entities. >>>

This work requires our sub-branch to draw on the funds raised from membership subscriptions and the sale of Remembrance Day poppies and Anzac pins, that could be better put towards implementing the Objects of the League in our own local level. We also have to withdraw considerable funds from our accumulated reserves to meet our caring obligations.

I know that many younger or recently joined sub-branch members look upon the present office bearers, all volunteers, as competently performing their duties and so are reluctant to offer themselves as volunteers. However, with great respect for the incumbents, mostly aged in their late 70s or 80s, we need some younger people on the Board of Management. Younger members are also needed in welfare, advocacy and management positions to ensure the future effective performance of our sub-branch.

Volunteering is an honourable profession. Pass the word around - there can be much satisfaction gained from doing voluntary work in the service of others.

**Conclusion.** Carrying out the objects of the League as an RSL sub-branch we are doing very well but solely through the efforts of the few of our comrades who have been valiantly occupying key leadership, management, advocacy and welfare positions for many years. There is so much talent within our large membership that we should be able to fill the assistant secretary and assistant treasurer positions now and then look forward to an effective succession plan for all office bearers.

### **Your Woden Valley RSL Sub-Branch needs you! Now!**

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#### *Sandakan Memorial*

This ceremony conducted on Friday 26 May 2023 marks the 78<sup>th</sup> anniversary to honour those who died during the Sandakan Death march on 29 May 1945.

Hosted by the Director of the Australian War Memorial, Matt Anderson, the commemorative address was given by Professor Christine Helliwell, Emeritus Professor from the Australian National University.

The ode was read by Rear Admiral Rachel Durbin CSC RAN, representing the Chief of Navy, with wreaths laid by diplomatic, political and military representatives that included His Excellency Mr Kazuhiro Suzuki, the Ambassador for Japan. Also attending was Sub-Branch member, Sister Betty Mills shown with her friend and Sub-Branch Chaplain, Mick O'Donnell, who delivered the prayer and blessing.





## *The Human Side of Service and Sacrifice*

*A keynote address by author Dr. Kathryn Spurling made at Junee on Remembrance Day 2022 and reprinted in this edition of The Serviceman for the interest of our members.*

We gather here today to recognise the service and sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of Australian Defence Force men and women, and the families left behind.

Australian military history is rich and for this we are indebted. Teenagers went to war, exploits that were heroic, tragic and which defined our culture. Each is a story, so many stories, stories which make us cry, make us laugh but most of all inspire us.

Our military history is very human, it is about the fear of a 17-year-old under fire, about the triumph over adversity when a Prisoner of War; of a young woman whose fiancé never returns, and she never marries; of a mother who insisted that rather than her son's gravestone in a cemetery a world away be engraved "For the glory of King and Country", it be engraved simply with two words - "My Son." It is about an 80-year-old man who laments that no-one ever asked him how much he had missed his big brother.

Heroes come in numerous forms. It is about a teenager who kept diving into his sinking ship to save his mates. It is about nuns in Rabaul, New Guinea, who refused to be intimidated by an occupying enemy and fought to save the indigenous population and wounded Australians. It is about the families who refused to accept their sons, brothers and husbands were lost in Australia's first submarine, AE1, until it was found, more than 100 years later. It is about Ruby Boye-Jones who remained in the Solomon Islands and became a Coastwatcher to relay valuable information on enemy movements, regardless of the inherent danger.

Incarcerated POW Sister Jessie Simons found her broken spectacles no longer stayed together. She found spectacles whose POW owner had died. Her heart rose, she would fit her own lenses. Her lenses were too small for the frames.

She wrote:

"I tapped a rubber tree and, using the latex and some strips of cloth I wedged the lenses into place. I was fitted out in such comfort again that when a doctor in Singapore asked me during my liberation medical overhaul: "I suppose you will be wanting some new glasses?" I was surprised and answered: "Do you think so?"

Australian Army Nurses demonstrated the term that the weaker sex was a fallacy.

They were brothers and not just brothers-in-arms: Private Frederick Beale and his brother Pte George Beale were with the 2/20<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The Beale brothers were Indigenous Australians. War does not discriminate. When caught up in the Singapore surrender, they were sent to Japan with 'C' Force and made to work as steel mill labourers. Pte George Beale died on the operating table, from injuries sustained in an accident after working a 24-hour shift. His brother Frederick was released just four months later.

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There are countless heroes, like Junee's own, Fireman Sergeant Leslie Malcolm Black of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion, who was killed by a sniper's bullet on the Western Front on 1 January 1917; Pte Thomas Alfred Bertram Hamilton, a farm labourer, was killed in action in France on 3 May 1917. Pte Edric Newman, a blacksmith striker, enlisted in the 55<sup>th</sup> Battalion from Junee in December 1915, was killed in action in April 1917 and buried in a French grave too far away. Able Seaman (AB) William Leonard Edward Danswan was 23 when he was killed by a mine explosion on 14 July 1941 and Pte George Anderson Roots was killed in action on 30 June 1953, in yet another war, the Korean War. Your own Long Tan Memorial standing on Broadway Street is dedicated to all those who served in the war in South Vietnam.

The strength to endure is highlighted in the letter scribbled by an Australian soldier on the Owen Stanley Range:

“Some of the old unit are so thin now you would be shocked to see them. This is a physical nightmare. We have been overloaded all the way, climbing 2,000 feet, climbing day after day. You keep going because you have to, somewhere over these ridges is Kokoda and the enemy. Men dying in this jungle and Fuzzy Wuzzies scaling greasy precipices bearing haggard, wounded Aussies.

The human spirit is wonderfully exemplified in men like AB Ernie Toovey. A promising cricketer, he survived the sinking of his ship *HMAS Perth* only to become a POW on the Burma-Thai Railway. He developed a leg ulcer and the camp surgeons declared the leg must go. Ernie refused, saying he needed two good legs to play cricket. He painfully cleaned out the ulcer himself and kept the leg. On his return home, he did indeed play cricket for his State and was also selected in the Australian baseball team. Each time the team left Australia on tour he withdrew. He explained with conviction:

“I went overseas once and it took me three-and-a-half bloody years to get home, I will not risk it again.”

Our military history celebrates precious love stories such as that of Albert and Noelle Stobart. They were engaged before he entered WWII. Bert Stobart was sent into the dangerous European night skies in a Lancaster Bomber in the most perilous position, that of rear gunner. His crew were shot out of the sky. He and the middle upper gunner the only two to survive. Fate is fickle. Bert needed to survive years in a POW camp. He found an artist in the camp and asked if he could paint a portrait of his fiancée Noelle, from a small, grainy, black and white photo he carried. The rolled-up canvas was all that he returned to Australia with and took pride of place in their home during their long and happy marriage and, both aged 94, Bert and Noelle died within months of each other.

The service and sacrifice continues. On 5 May 1998 *HMAS Westralia*, carrying a crew of 98, departed for overseas exercises. Approximately 20 kilometres off the West Australian coast the engines were brought to full power. A fire broke out. The crew fought bravely to save their ship, but Midshipman Megan Pelly aged 22, Petty Officer Shaun Smith 29, Leading Seaman Bradley Meek 25, and AB Phillip Carroll 23, were killed in that engine room.

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It was found that the incorrect hoses recently fitted to the engines by unqualified civilian contractors had burst. Four young Australians with bright futures lost their lives. No-one was held criminally responsible ... someone should have.

The stories are endless, human and inspiring. These men and women have left a powerful legacy, one that shows us, brotherhood, purpose, loyalty, the sense of never giving up even against great adversity, and the power of love. We should never forget their names, their service and sacrifice and the richness they have added to our lives.

Thank you.

***New Googong Memorial***  
*Bob Cremer*

I picked an extremely cold and unpleasant day to check the new Memorial in Googong's Bunyip Park, so Jan and our friend Joan Revill had to shiver for a moment or two while the necessary photos were taken for this latest edition. The park is looking good and will be much improved when the adjacent landscaping work is completed.







## Some things in life are better together.

Nominate **Woden Valley RSL** as your Community Rewards group and **7.5% of your spend** on food and beverages will be donated to them when you dine at selected Canberra Southern Cross Club venues.

Find out more visit  
[csc.com.au/rewards](http://csc.com.au/rewards)



## *My First Flight*

*Les Cook*

Very few Australians had been in an aircraft when the war started in 1939. Most of us had not even seen one on the ground, and, except for the inter-capital city routes, one didn't see many in the air either. Indeed, as a child attending primary school in the country, it was such an unusual event that I can recall us being let out of school to see one flying over. It was a single-engined biplane built of wood and cloth carrying two people in open cockpits who waved to us as it flew over close to the ground. It had the red, white and blue rondels on the wings and fuselage so I assume that it was a military aircraft. This state of affairs was to change very rapidly during the war and in the following years.

After toiling through the steamy jungle of the Owen Stanley Range and the coastal swamps in New Guinea for about six months in 1942-43, the few of us that were left were finally being relieved. We had marched back along the muddy track from Gona to the airstrip at Popondetta to be flown to Port Moresby. The airstrip was nearly as muddy as the track, and was unuseable until it had dried out after the heavy rain that fell on most days while we were there. Fortunately the drying-out process was quite fast due to the intense heat of the midday sun, but often there were days when it could not be used at all.

The incoming aircraft brought supplies or more men from Port Moresby and took back the sick and wounded and those, like us, who were being relieved. They were twin engined Dakotas (or C47s as they were officially designated by the U.S. Airforce) each carrying twenty men. They were not pressurised aircraft, and even at the relatively low altitude of three thousand metres, necessary to cross the Owen Stanley Range, they were noisy, and very uncomfortable.

The men sat on long seats that ran down each side of the body of the aircraft, their equipment and weapons dumped on the floor at their feet. There were perspex windows along both sides of the aircraft, each window having a hole about 50mm diameter with a rubber grommet around it. On asking what the holes were for, we were told they were to enable to occupants to fire at attacking enemy fighters with their personal weapons. Logic told us that this would be singularly ineffective, but, just for psychological reasons alone, I suppose that it would have been better than just sitting there doing nothing. It is devastating to be under attack and completely unable to retaliate, however ineffective the retaliation might be.

We had camped at the side of the strip for several days waiting for the weather to clear. Apparently it was safer to land on a muddy airstrip that it was to take off from one because the incoming aircraft landed while the strip was still soft and muddy.

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As the aircraft landed and ran along the strip the wheels threw up a shower of mud over the body and tail area. When the aircraft had been unloaded, we had to wait for a few hours for the strip to dry out enough for it to take off again. The Dakota had the old style landing wheel configuration of two wheels at the front and a smaller tail-wheel at the back.

When the aircraft was on the ground the tail-plane assembly was less than a metre above the ground. As we walked out to the aircraft one of the crew was inspecting the mud splattered tail-plane assembly while the other crew member worked the controls to ensure that they moved freely. By this time the mud on the aircraft had dried and become hard in the heat of the midday sun. It didn't do much for our confidence to see the man on the ground kicking the tail-plane assembly with great clods of dried mud falling from it before the ailerons could be moved.

When the crew was satisfied that it would fly we boarded the aircraft. It was a novel experience for all of us and it would not be an exaggeration to say that we were somewhat apprehensive. The door was shut, the engines started and the aircraft taxied slowly to the end of the strip where it turned around and increased speed preparatory to take-off. It soon became apparent even to our inexperienced eyes that something was wrong.

The aircraft was pointing forward but appeared to be sliding sideways to the right towards the trees at the edge of the strip, which seemed to be getting dangerously close. The pilot backed off the throttle, turned the aircraft around and taxied slowly back to the place we had just left.

One of the crew came out of the cabin, walked down the length of the aircraft without saying anything, opened the loading door, and jumped to the ground. Again there was an inspection of the tail-plane assembly accompanied by what apparently was the ritualistic kicking. This man then boarded the aircraft, shut the door, and returned to the cabin again without saying anything to us. Apparently it was a routine daily procedure for them and not worthy of comment, but by this time we could easily have been talked into leaving the aircraft and walking back over the mountains to Port Moresby.

The engines were started again and we began to move. The aircraft skidded and fishtailed as it gathered speed, but this time, at least, it did get off the ground. We had hoped to see some sign of the track as we flew over it, but the mountains were covered in cloud until we arrived over the seven-mile strip at Port Moresby. It had taken less than an hour to cover the ground that we had toiled over for so many weeks.

## *Henri 'Digger' Heremene*

*Kathryn Spurling*



He simply arrived at the airfield, a little shy to begin with but then hunger drove him to bravely enter the accommodation of Australian Flying Cops, 4 Squadron. He was small, his clothes had too many holes to keep out the winter chill and he didn't speak a word of English. It was Christmas Day 1918 and although their Christmas lunch may have not been as fulfilling as if they had been at home with their own families, it was still a pretty good feast. It was Christmas and they could not turn this waif away. He ate hungrily and showed no desire to leave the warmth of the camp space or the company of these strange men in khaka with slouched hats. Fortunately, some Australian aircrew had enough high school French to gradually encourage the boy to tell his story.

His name was Henri Heremene or Maememe. His father had been killed in action with the French Army and his mother killed in a German bombardment. He wasn't sure how old he was or when his birthday could be or if he had any relatives because his village had been destroyed and survivors had evacuated without him. He had just wandered ever since, attaching himself to a couple of British Army units and had even been wounded in the knee near Ypres.

What to do with this orphan? The men could not send him back out into the snow to survive as best he could. It was decided to let Henri stay until further thought could be given to his welfare. He was given a medical examination and it was calculated that he could be as old as eleven and they decided his birthday should be set as 25 December 1918. Henri was an engaging boy, who responded enthusiastically to any attention or encouragement. He helped whenever he could and showed a great interest in the work of the AFC maintainers and mechanics. Henri's attempts to teach the Australians how to skate were not always successful but he was even happy to clear away dead rats in the cart they made especially for him.



He was fascinated by the Australian aircraft and watched as they thundered down the airfield and lifted into the air. AFC 4 Squadron suffered the highest casualty rate of all WWI Australian squadrons but the presence of a small orphan boy lifted their spirits. Squadron hierarchy decided Henri's presence was good for morale. A special 'Aussie' uniform was made for him, and he was named the 'Mascot' of AFC 4 Squadron.

Under the care of the men, he grew stronger and more confident. >>>>

Unfortunately, the English he picked up was not exactly the most appropriate, thanks to the constant Australian expletives he heard watching the men work. With the German surrender the Australian Flying Corps was slowly withdrawn first to England so airmen could be transported home onboard the *Kaiser-I-Hind* in May 1919. The boy called Henri Heremene now known as ‘Digger’ was again facing a dilemma. They argued that he could not simply be deserted. Two of the 4 Squadron air mechanics were brothers, Private (Pte) Edward John ‘Ted’ Tovell and Pte Timothy William ‘Tim’ Tovell. It was decided Tim would ‘adopt’ Henri.

The same subterfuge saw ‘Digger’ smuggled onboard the ship in a sack made to smuggle Henri onto transports back to England, with the Tovell brothers, Henri’s presence only revealed when the ship was three days on the high seas. The captain had little choice but to allow the stowaway to remain, particularly as there was a large number of war seasoned AFC airmen who would allow no other decision. Special permission was granted for Henri to land in Sydney. The Tovell brothers were Queenslanders and it so happened that also travelling in the *Kaiser I Hind* was the Queensland Premier. It took little convincing for him to circumvent the authorities and arrange for Henri to travel home with the Tovell brothers. He told a reporter that, “the Aussies have been very kind to me all through, and I never want to leave their country.”



*Henri Tovell with his brother and sisters*

Tim Tovell and his wife adopted Henri raising him as their own along with their other children in Brisbane. He attended St Mary’s Church of England School at Kangaroo Point and then apprenticed as a fitter and turner.

On reaching the age of 18, Henri moved to Melbourne in 1928 to join the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) as a mechanic as his adopted father had served with the AFC.

On 23 May 1928 tragedy struck when the motorcycle Henri was riding collided with a taxi. Henri Heremene ‘Digger’ Tovell died the following day and was buried in Fawkner Cemetery.

The boy and his story had attracted much attention from an Australian public struggling with the WWI legacy of grief. Donation paid for an elaborate tombstone to mark the grave of the little ‘Digger.’



## ***Major-General the Honourable James Alexander Kenneth Mackay C.B., O.B.E., V.D., F.R.G.S. (1859-1935)***

Wallendbeen born Major-General Mackay is remembered for his actions in creating the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Horse.

This special regiment of cavalry volunteers was raised on 30 August 1897, with the initial call-up muster and enrolments taking place at Harden-Murrumburrah NSW. Wallendbeen is a small regional town in southern NSW administered by the Cootamundra-Gundagai Council.



The troop was the precursor to the Australian Light Horse and was recruited entirely from country districts in the NSW colony. Mackay was appointed to command the regiment in 1898 and promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.

When the Boer War broke out in 1899, the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Horse sent two contingents to South Africa where they served as a cavalry squadron. Mackay was too senior in rank to accompany them. Resigning his portfolio, he was given command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Imperial Bushman's contingent of NSW, who were sent to Rhodesia where he was mentioned in despatches.

*Statue of Major-General Mackay in the main street at Murrumburrah NSW.*



## ***ANZAC Appeal 20-24 April 2023***

Norm Russell and Brian Fish attending to the collection at Cooleman Court on Monday 24 April who joined with other volunteers during our ANZAC appeal this year.





## Notes for the Diary in 2023

The venues of upcoming OGMs will be advertised in e-News

Poppy Appeal - 7 - 11 Nov - Remembrance Day Appeal - Volunteers required

Closing date for Christmas edition of 'The Serviceman' - Fri 28 Oct



# e-news

Australian Government  
Department of Veterans' Affairs

### ***Beware of bank impersonation scams***

As advertised in the current edition of e-news, members should be aware of bank impersonation scams.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's Scamwatch has reported an increase in the number of 'bank impersonation' scams this year - with many people losing their life savings. According to Scamwatch, there were more than 14,500 instances of bank impersonation scams in 2022 alone, with people losing more than \$20 million.

Bank impersonation scams are becoming highly sophisticated and increasingly harder to detect. For instance, scammers can disguise their caller ID as legitimate numbers, making it hard to spot whether a text message or phone call is a scam.

*Read the full story on the DVA website*

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# 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, 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 in regards to 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. Contact the Sub-Branch office on 6285 1931 for details.

**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.** The arrangements in place between the Southern Cross Health Club and the Sub-Branch 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 per 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 held 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.**