

# RSL WODEN VALLEY SUB-BRANCH ENEWS



Special ANZAC Edition

April 2022



## Annual Anzac Eve Dinner 2022

Nearly 80 Sub-Branch members and guests gathered at the Canberra Southern Cross Club for our Annual ANZAC Eve Commemoration and Rededication Dinner. This year our guest speaker was RSL National President Greg Melick AO RFD FANZCN SC.



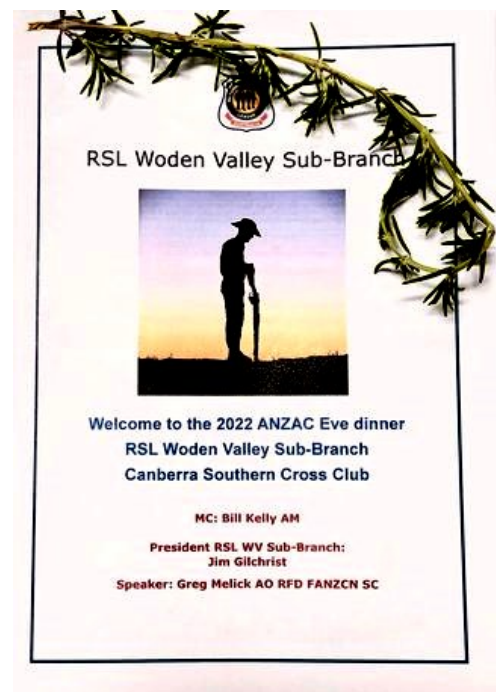
Photo above: Her Excellency the Hon Dame Annette King, Greg Melick and Jim Gilchrist.



Photo above: The speaker Greg Melick



Photo above: Her Excellency the Hon Dame Annette King with Terry Colhoun.



# ANZAC DAY

## Anzac Eve Dinner 2022 photos







# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**April 29**

**Dear Members,**

**We have reached the end of April and ANZAC Day has been and gone for another year.**

**However, as we have all said and/or heard many times in the past few days, and through the year, 'We will remember them' and 'Lest we forget'. These two terms are synonymous with much of the work we do at the Woden Valley Sub-Branch, whether it be at functions, events, or commemorative services; while assisting and advocating for our members and others in the veteran community in the ACT and region; or generally in the way we conduct ourselves and our Sub-Branch.**

**Over the past few weeks, our members have participated in many community events as organisations recognised ANZAC Day and the service and sacrifice of military personnel who have served our country in peace and war, and those who continue to serve. Where appropriate, the support and sacrifices that families made and continue to make in this context have also been recognised.**

**The photographs provided in this Special ANZAC Edition of our newsletter are from the two events we hosted with purpose: our ANZAC Eve Dinner, during which we held a brief Commemoration and Rededication Ceremony; and the ANZAC Day morning service at Eddison Park. Our support of the local Rugby League derby is an example of the many ceremonies we attended or contributed to throughout the community. We engaged with a large group of Marist school students at the Woden Cemetery and conducted the ANZAC Schools Essay competition.**

**Thank you to everyone who was involved in organising and supporting our commemoration of ANZAC Day.**

**Sadly, however, the effects of COVID and the building work at the Australian War Memorial, severely restricted the normal ANZAC Day March and service. While the building works will have similar adverse effects for the next two years, I trust that the COVID situation will ease before next April.**

**Thank you to the small group of dedicated members who assisted with our ANZAC Appeal as that also helps us engage with the local community, while helping with some welcome funds. I offer my particular thanks to our Treasurer, Jan Properjohn, who coordinated the appeal.**

**I also take this opportunity to thank Joyce O'Brien, who has left us after six years supporting our members, staff and clients in her role as Office Manager. On behalf of all of us, I wish Joyce all the best as she starts a new job with the High Court.**

**In closing, I note the passing of Colonel Bernard Skarbek. In addition to what is noted in the article in this newsletter, Bernard had been a member of our Sub-Branch for many years and was the last of the fine group of Polish World War II veterans who have been part of our community for a long time.**

**I offer my condolences to his family and thank him for his service.**

**Please stay well and stay in touch,**

**Jim Gilchrist**

**President**

# **MEETING NEWS**

## **AGM/OGM**

**An AGM/OGM will be held at 1400 hours on Tuesday 31 May 2022 in the Sub-Branch Office. Light refreshments will be provided following the OGM.**



## **Carers Friendship Group**

**Held Every First Tuesday of the Month**

**Corey Room**

**RSL Woden Valley Sub-Branch**

**Second Floor, Grant Cameron Community Centre**

**27 Mulley Street, HOLDER ACT**

**Contact us on 62 887 470 to book a place.**

**10:00am to 11:30**



**Come and join us for a fun morning offering support, friendship and a laugh.**

# Woden Valley Sub-Branch ANZAC Morning Remembrance Ceremony at Eddison Park, Phillip on Monday

25 April 2022





**Jim Gilchrist conducted the ANZAC service at Woden Valley Rams Rugby League game on Sat 23 Apr. The Rams were playing Tuggeranong Bushrangers in round 3 of the local League competition. The service which included recital of the Ode and Last Post was held in front of a fair size crowd gathered to view the match. Jim also executed the coin toss before game start.**



## **WV RSL Sub-Branch Member Colonel Bernard Zdzislaw Skarbek OAM has passed away on 24 April 2022, aged 100.**

**Bernard served with the Polish Armed Forces during the Second World War and was due to take part in Anzac's Veterans' March at the Australian War Memorial and RSL Annual Anzac Eve Dinner.**

**Bernard was the highest ranking Polish army veteran in Australia. He received numerous British and Polish Honours, including the Polish Cross of Valour, the Cross of Monte Cassino and the Cross of Merit with Swords, during his lifetime and was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in January 1990.**

**Vale Bernard Zdzisław Skarbek.**

**Read more about the life of Colonel Bernard Zdzisław Skarbek, OAM:**

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articl.../blog/bernard-zdzislaw-skarbek>

### **#Lest We Forget**





The Battle of Monte Cassino was one of the most bitter and bloody battles of World War 2, causing tens of thousands of casualties over five months in 1944.

Monte Cassino was a mountain redoubt in the German defensive line, stretching across Italy and blocking the Allied advance to Rome. During the harshest Italian winter on record and difficult terrain, the battle centred on the world-famous vast sixth-century abbey, an ideal defence for the Germans.



Skarbek aged 20



Skarbek leading Polish veterans – Australian War Memorial

The Allied victory came at a high price. The Allies made repeated attacks on the abbey and some 200,000 soldiers on both sides – including American, British and Commonwealth - were killed or wounded. Many of those who survived were forever scarred.

The Germans, however, rescued the abbey's treasures, and at first the Allies refrained from bombing the building, though they eventually were forced to destroy it. The redoubt was finally captured by Polish troops.

The veterans of Monte Cassino lacked proper equipment to dig-in throughout the mountainous terrain and the rocks shattered like glass when hit by any projectile, which "sent splinters of rock in all directions, and causing a horrifically high number of head, face and eye injuries". Men also died from extreme weather exposure.

Bernard Skarbek aged only 18 entered the war on the very first day when Germany invaded his homeland of Poland from the west and only weeks later Russia invaded from the East. His parents and sister were all arrested and placed in war camps in Russia and his father was later murdered in Kalinin, now called Tver, and buried in one of the mass graves in Miednoje - referred to collectively as the mass graves of Katyn. Bernard was left to fend for himself and for months he helped save the lives of numerous soldiers, women, and children by leading them through enemy lines and across frozen rivers in the middle of the night to the south and to safety.

He was eventually captured, then escaped only to be recaptured when he was betrayed by another civilian trying to buy his own freedom. Bernard was sentenced without a hearing to ten years imprisonment with hard labour in a gulag in the frozen forests of Siberia. Many weeks were spent crammed in a putrid railway cattle car with little food or water and no sanitation until they arrived at the camp. The only warmth was each other's body heat.

After three winters cutting trees, building a hospital and other buildings, and burying the hundreds that perished in the horrific conditions he was set free, due to Germany invading Russia in Operation Barbarossa, despite a non-aggression pact signed between the two nations in August 1939. Mostly skin and bone they caught trains, caught rides on horse and wagons travelling south or they walked. The Polish prisoners were asked if they would fight for the Soviet Army or the Polish Army. Those who chose the Polish Army were subsequently forced out of Russia towards Persia via the Caspian Sea. Hundreds died, but those that made it across the Caspian Sea to Persia were immediately recruited into Polish Army regiments under British command and were given food and medical treatment.

Bernard Skarbek was then transported to Palestine where he was trained in all forms of soldiering; however, as he was highly educated he was recruited into communications in the 3rd Carpathian Division where he became a skilled telephone technician. Prior to the invasion of Italy, he was sent in an advanced covert team to establish communication lines for the invading forces. Before every battle from Castel di Sangro to Ancona and Bologna, his unit would set up communication cables under the cover of night for the frontline commanders and troops. Many were picked off by German and Italian snipers or heavy artillery.

After surviving the main battle of Monte Cassino he was wounded in the bombardment of Loreto and was transported to hospitals in Loreto, Ancona and Casamassima in Italy before being transported to recover in a hospital in Scotland.

After the war, Bernard Skarbek married, lived and worked in London. On hearing that some of his wife's family had also survived the war and were living in Australia, Bernard Skarbek, his wife and young daughter moved to Canberra in 1956. For many years he worked at the Canberra Brickworks, but he was recognized for his educational abilities and recruited into the Australian Public Service and worked in the Department of Trade. During that time, he was President of the Polish Ex-servicemen's Association in the ACT and was a substantial fundraiser for the Polish school, scouts and historical society. In 1990, he was awarded the Order of Australia for his services to the Polish community in Australia

From : Veteran Responders Community Shed, Robert Longbottom



Coffee Catch Up



## COFFEE CATCH UP ACTIVE AGAIN

Our Coffee Catch Up is open again from 10-12 every Friday in The Corey Room, Level 2A, of the Grant Cameron Community Centre, 27 Mulley Street, Holder.

**Please note that the Eddison Day Club is currently meeting on only a very casual basis for lunch at midday Fridays.**



### Contact Us

Give us a call for more information or access to our services

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Office hours are  
9am-3pm Mon-Fri

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