

RSL WODEN VALLEY SUB-BRANCH ENEWS



August 2021

From The Serviceman Winter 2021 edition



At the Branch AGM in May, Meritorious Service Medals were awarded to members Jack Aaron and Ross Thomas. Bill Smith and Ian Gollings were previously awarded MSMs in 2019. The MSM, the League's highest honour over and above Life Membership, is awarded on a restricted basis to preserve its prestige to members who have given exceptional service over a sustained period and who are deserving of special acknowledgement.



MEDIA RELEASE

8 July 2021
For immediate release

RSL Welcomes Appointment of Royal Commissioners

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) has welcomed the appointment of the Royal Commissioners to investigate the incidence of veteran and defence personnel suicide.

RSL National President Greg Melick said the appropriate combination of investigative, legal and mental health skills, as well as the uniformed service experience of the retired senior police officer Nick Kaldas to head the Royal Commission was a very good outcome.

“The Commissioners are taking on a vitally important and challenging role and the RSL and its members will support them in whatever way we can,” he said.

The RSL provided input to the development of the Royal Commission's Terms of Reference and the organisation and its members will continue to provide support to find solutions that deal with the scourge of veterans' suicide which impacts severely on the entire veteran community. Our members also stand ready to assist anyone affected by the Royal Commission and matters arising from it.

Greg Melick said the issue of veterans' mental health and veteran suicide is supremely important and the time for action is long past.

“As I have said on behalf of the RSL previously, less than one in four of the recommendations of the many previous inquiries into veterans' mental health issues have been implemented.

“The Royal Commission now provides the opportunity to redress this, to determine all the factors contributing to the poor mental health experience by veterans and the alarming incidence of suicide and attempted suicide, and provide a clear pathway for better outcomes for the veteran community in the future.”

ENDS

National Media contact: Tony Harrison – 0417 318 178; tony@wearebright.com.au

Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

<https://defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/about/terms-reference>

The Commissioners are appointed to be a Commission of inquiry, and required and authorised to inquire into the following matters:

- a. systemic issues and any common themes among defence and veteran deaths by suicide, or defence members and veterans who have other lived experience of suicide behaviour or risk factors (including attempted or contemplated suicide, feelings of suicide or poor mental health outcomes);
- b. a systemic analysis of the contributing risk factors relevant to defence and veteran death by suicide, including the possible contribution of pre-service, service (including training and deployments), transition, separation and post-service issues, such as the following:
 - i. the manner or time in which the defence member or veteran was recruited to the [the Australian Defence Force (the ADF)];
 - ii. the relevance, if any, of the particular branch, service or posting history, or the rank of the defence member or veteran;
 - iii. the manner or time in which the defence member or veteran transitioned from the ADF or transitioned between service categories;
 - iv. the availability, accessibility, timeliness and quality of health, wellbeing and support services (including mental health support services) to the defence member or veteran, and the effectiveness of such services;
 - v. the manner and extent to which information about the defence member or veteran is held by and shared within and between different government entities;
 - vi. the reporting and recording of information, relevant to the mental and physical health of defence members and veterans, at enlistment and during and after service;
- c. the impact of culture within the ADF, the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs on defence members' and veterans' physical and mental wellbeing;
- d. the role of non-government organisations, including ex-service organisations, in providing relevant services and support for defence members, veterans, their families and others;
- e. protective and rehabilitative factors for defence members and veterans who have lived experience of suicide behaviour or risk factors;
- f. any systemic issues in the current availability and effectiveness of support services for, and in the engagement with, families and others:
 - i. affected by a defence and veteran death by suicide; or
 - ii. who have supported a defence member or veteran with lived experience of suicide behaviour or risk factors;
- g. any systemic issues in the nature of defence members' and veterans' engagement with the Department of Defence, the Department of Veterans' Affairs or other Commonwealth, State or Territory government entities (including those acting on behalf of those entities) about support services, claims or entitlements relevant to defence and veteran deaths by suicide or relevant to defence members and veterans who have other lived experience of suicide behaviour or risk factors, including any systemic issues in engaging with multiple government entities;
- h. the legislative and policy frameworks, administered by the Department of Defence, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and other Commonwealth, State or Territory government entities, relating to the support services, claims and entitlements referred to in paragraph (g);
- i. any systemic risk factors contributing to defence and veteran death by suicide, including the following:
 - i. defence members' and veterans' social or family contexts;
 - ii. housing or employment issues for defence members and veterans;
 - iii. defence members' and veterans' economic and financial circumstances;
- j. any matter reasonably incidental to a matter referred to in paragraphs (a) to (i) or that [the Commissioners] believe is reasonably relevant to [their] inquiry.



MEDIA RELEASE

July 8 2021
For immediate release

RSL welcomes consideration of further recognition for Somalia veterans

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) has welcomed the review by the independent Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal of unit recognition for Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel who served in the Somalia conflict.

The Federal Government has asked the Tribunal to reassess the matter following representations from the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment Association.

RSL National President Greg Melick said the Tribunal would consider the service of all ADF units that served in Somalia through 1992-95, having regard to the eligibility criteria for the Meritorious Unit Citation.

"The operation was previously deemed to be war service and ADF personnel involved were awarded the Australian Active Service Medal," he said.

"But for some time, there have been numerous suggestions to add a 'Meritorious Unit Citation' for all ranks who served in the Australian contingent.

"This unit recognition is appropriate given the outstanding work of the 1st Battalion Group on this difficult task for which the Battalion Group received accolades for professionalism and dedication to duty. "

The RSL is fully supportive of the awarding of the citation, as suggested by many RSL members across Australia.

"It is important that the service of the ADF Somalia veterans is fairly and comprehensively assessed and the review by the independent Tribunal will provide this.

"The Tribunal is now receiving submissions as part of the review, with a closing date of 31 August 2021 and the RSL urges anyone with an interest to ensure their views are heard," Greg Melick said.

ENDS

National Media contact: Tony Harrison – 0417 318 178; tony@wearebright.com.au



MEDIA RELEASE

26 July 2021

For immediate release

RSL Supports New Census Question on Defence Service

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) has welcomed the first-time inclusion of a question regarding service in the Australian Defence Forces in the forthcoming National Census.

RSL National President Greg Melick said the question, "Has the person ever served in the Australian Defence Force?" will provide valuable new information for Governments and veteran support and service organisations.

"The RSL has lobbied over two decades to have a question in the National Census on veteran statistics and service, and it is pleasing to see this now included in the 2021 Census," Greg Melick said.

"While plenty of information exists about those currently serving in the Australian Defence Forces, there is not a lot of detail about former service personnel and the data will particularly provide the Department of Veterans' Affairs with accurate information on veteran numbers and where they live," he said.

The Census will also seek information on veterans' ages and employment status.

"This will enable the Department to better focus its support for veterans and their families and also assist the RSL in planning its service and support delivery," he said.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs supports around 210,000 veterans and their 100,000 dependents. The Census will confirm the total number of veterans living in Australia and likely determine that there are more not currently on the Department's records.

"Estimates indicate the real number of veterans may be as high as 630,000 people," Greg Melick said.

"It is important Australia is aware of the full picture and that the support provided for veterans and their families can be strategically developed and directed to best effect.

"The RSL will be promoting participation in the Census to its members to ensure the outcome is comprehensive and accurate and that all veterans receive the support and services to which they are entitled."

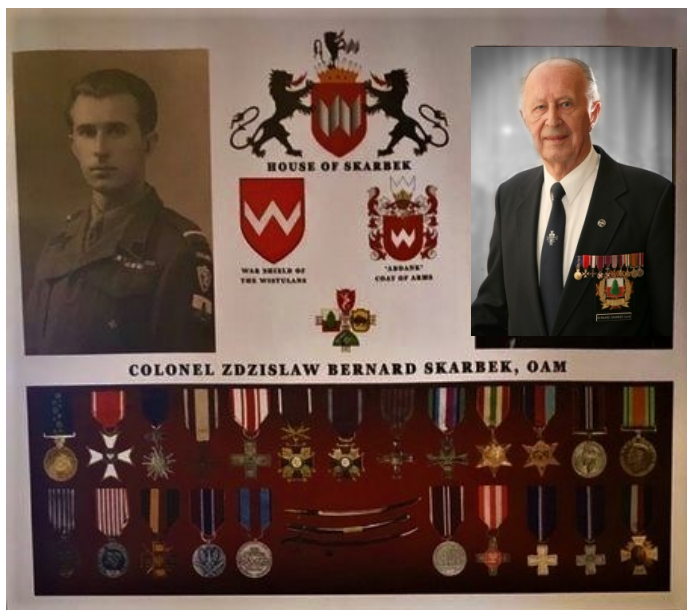
ENDS

National Media contact: Tony Harrison – 0417 318 178; tony@wearebright.com.au

The 100th birthday of RSL Woden Valley Sub-Branch Member Col. Bernard Skarbek, OAM

At The Polish Club White Eagle veteran Bernard Skarbek OAM celebrated his 100th birthday with friends and family. Bernard is a member of the RSL WV Sub-Branch, veteran of the Monte Cassino fight and a distinguished Polish community activist in Canberra from 1956.

Colonel Bernard Skarbek was born on July 1, 1921. After the outbreak of World War II, he and his family were deported to Siberia in February 1940 and sentenced to 10 years in a labor camp. In 1942 he joined the Polish Army in the East created in the USSR. He took part in the Italian campaign as a senior rifleman in the 3rd Carpathian Communications Battalion of the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division of the 2nd Polish Corps. He participated in the battles of Monte Cassino, Ancona, Loreto and Bologna, among others. After the war, he settled in Great Britain, and then in Australia. From 1956 he was active in the Association of Polish Combatants in Australia, being a member of the Board of the SPK in Australia and a long-term president of the circle No. 5 in Canberra. He is the highest officer in rank Polish veteran living in Australia, he was awarded 23 Polish and Australian medals.





Skarbek aged 20



Skarbek leading Polish veterans – Australian War Memorial

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.

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

95 years ago, the first major battle fought by Australian troops on the Western Front took place at Fromelles in France. This moving documentary by students of St Clare's College Waverley aims to restore the dignity of the diggers who were buried in the mass grave at Pheasant Wood following the Battle of Fromelles. Lest we forget.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rzslmwgRIM>



The battle of Fromelles on 19 July 1916 was a bloody initiation for Australian soldiers to warfare on the Western Front. Soldiers of the newly arrived 5th Australian Division, together with the British 61st Division, were ordered to attack strongly fortified German front line positions near the Aubers Ridge in French Flanders. The attack was intended as a feint to hold German reserves from moving south to the Somme where a large Allied offensive had begun on 1 July. The feint was a disastrous failure. Australian and British soldiers assaulted over open ground in broad daylight and under direct observation and heavy fire from the

German lines. Over 5,500 Australians became casualties. Almost 2,000 of them were killed in action or died of wounds and some 400 were captured. This is believed to be the greatest loss by a single division in 24 hours during the entire First World War. Some consider Fromelles the most tragic event in Australia's history.

Over two years after the battle, on the day of the Armistice of 11 November 1918 when the guns of the Western Front finally ceased firing, Australian official war correspondent, Charles Bean, wandered over the battlefield of Fromelles and observed the grisly aftermath of the battle: "We found the old No-Man's-Land simply full of our dead", he recorded, "the skulls and bones and torn uniforms were lying about everywhere". Soon after the war these remains were gathered to construct VC Corner Cemetery, the only solely Australian war cemetery in France. It is also the only cemetery without headstones. There are no epitaphs to individual soldiers, simply a stone wall inscribed with the names of 1,299 Australians who died in battle nearby and who have no known graves. The unidentified remains of 410 are buried in mass graves under two grass plots in the cemetery.

For nearly 80 years this sombre monument remained the only conspicuous reminder of the tragic events of Fromelles until, in July 1998, a new Australian Memorial Park was dedicated there. Situated close to VC Corner Cemetery on a part of the old German front line which was briefly captured and held overnight by the 14th Australian Brigade on 19/20 July, the park includes the stark remains of four German block-houses. A bronze statue, titled 'Cobbers', by Australian sculptor Peter Corlett, depicts Sergeant Simon Fraser of the 57th Battalion in an enduring image of the aftermath of the battle, the rescue of the wounded.

Until recent years, 1,335 Australian soldiers remained 'missing' from the Fromelles battle, having no known grave. Then in 2007, following persistent research by retired Melbourne teacher, Lambis Englezos, archaeological investigations began to uncover the remains of some 200 Australian and 50 British soldiers who were buried in a mass grave at Pheasant Wood by German troops in 1916. Between 30 January and 19 February 2010, the remains of 249 soldiers were reinterred with full military honours in Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery, newly constructed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Over 90 Australian soldiers were identified by name and more may still be identified.

On 19 July 2010, the 94th anniversary of the Battle of Fromelles, the last of 203 Australian soldiers recovered from the excavation were buried in a solemn ceremony with full military honours. Later that day, a private ceremony was held for families of identified soldiers to dedicate the named headstones within the cemetery.

Changes to major public roads around the Australian War Memorial

As the Australian War Memorial begins major construction activity for its Development Project, we wish to advise of upcoming changes to roads around our site. These changes have been approved by Transport Canberra and City Services, to ensure the safety of pedestrians and vehicles with increased movements of construction vehicles in the area.

Reduced Speed Limits:

From mid-July, speed limits will be reduced to 40 km/h on the sections of Limestone and Fairbairn Avenues that lead to and go around the Australian War Memorial.

New Coach Drop-Off and Pick-Up Point:

A new coach drop-off and pick-up point will be added to Fairbairn Ave, on the Memorial side of the road, after the Anzac Parade roundabout. This point will be used for the arrival and departure of tour companies and school coaches, on the occasions when the usual drop-off points on site are inaccessible. Please be mindful of increased activity in the area when this stop is being used.

Public Transport and Bike Paths:

There will be no changes to the Transport Canberra bus stops along Fairbairn and Limestone Avenues. Bike paths will also remain accessible.

We hope that you will share this update among your staff and community networks. Please see attached map referencing these changes.

For more information please visit <https://www.awm.gov.au/ourcontinuingstory> or contact development@awm.gov.au.

Kind regards,

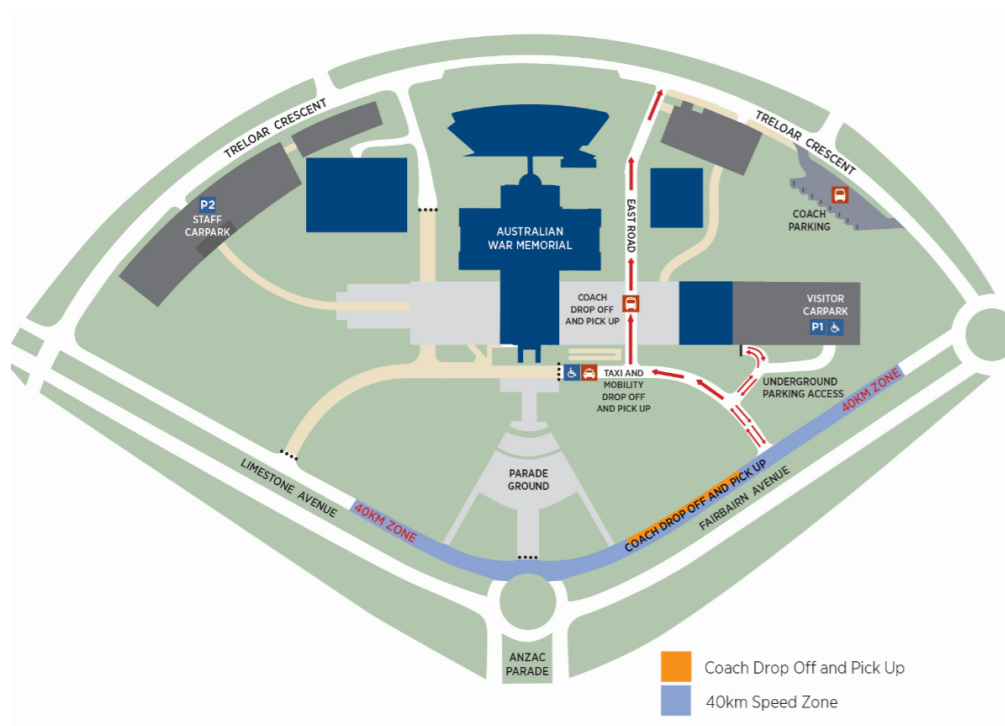
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Australian War Memorial | GPO Box 345 Canberra ACT 2601 | www.awm.gov.au

If you require sharing attachments over 5MB please use the AWM file transfer utility -
<https://filetransfer.awm.gov.au/filedrop/marissa.ayala@awm.gov.au>



Support for ADF firefighters due to start in September

16 June 2021

As a part of the 2021–22 Budget, the Government allocated \$6 million in support of Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel who participated in fire training at Royal Australian Air Force Base Point Cook Fire Training School between 1 January 1957 and 31 December 1986.

These personnel were potentially exposed to a range of toxic chemicals at a time when personal protective equipment standards were lower than today.

The Scheme will provide eligible personnel with:

- simplified access to compensation and treatment for a list of 31 specified conditions, under the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Defence-related Claims) Act 1988*;
- screening for colorectal cancer and melanoma, for early detection and prevention; and
- individually tailored lifestyle advice under the 12-month [Heart Health Program](#).

The ADF Firefighter Scheme is scheduled to begin on 20 September 2021.

Serving and former ADF firefighters who participated in fire training at Royal Australian Air Force Base Point Cook Fire Training School between 1 January 1957 and 31 December 1986 can register their interest in the Scheme by emailing ADF.Firefighter.Scheme@dva.gov.au

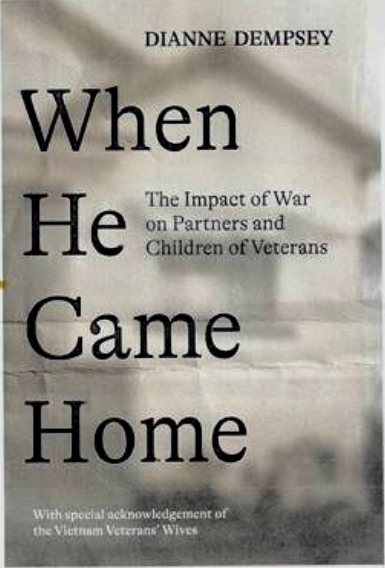
For more information, please visit the [ADF Firefighters Scheme page of the DVA website](#).

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide will conduct its inquiries in a trauma-informed way and hold private sessions for those who don't wish to give their evidence in public. The website for the Commission is up and running at:

[Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide](#)

The Commission invites interested members of the public and institutions to make submissions to the Royal Commission using an online form. If you prefer to use a paper form, the Royal Commission would still like to hear from you. You can download a printable version [PDF], print it out, fill it in, and mail it to: GPO Box 3273, Sydney NSW 2001.

If you are unable to print the form, you can ring the Royal Commission on 1800 329 095 (9:00 am to 7:00 pm AEST Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays) and they will post a form to you. The Commission will continue to accept submissions until at least the end of March 2022. A date for the closing of submissions will be announced before the end of 2021.



Format: Paperback
Released: July 2021
Price: £29.95
ISBN: 978-1-922454-66-9

WHEN HE CAME HOME
The Impact of War on Partners and Children of Veterans
Dianne Dempsey

When the Vietnam War veterans returned home to Australia, neither the veterans nor their partners were aware of the atrocious psychological harm with which they had been afflicted. Post-traumatic stress disorder had not yet been recognised and as the men fell victim to terrible moods and illnesses, they capitulated to their pain and isolated themselves and their families.

With great courage and without recognition, veterans' wives held their families together in the face of government and community indifference and did so for decades.

When He Came Home is a belated recognition of these women, and it also focuses on how the issues of PTSD and suicide affect veterans who participate in contemporary conflicts. Told within an informed historical context and employing intimate narrative interviews, this important book examines the unexamined: how so many families have been brought to their knees and how such suffering can be prevented.

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Hi there,

I'm reaching out to let you know about a special commemorative coin released by the Royal Australian Mint to mark the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Long Khanh, which I thought would be of interest to you.

The coin, which was released last month, features an artistic depiction of Australian soldiers during the Battle. In developing this coin, we worked closely with veterans of the 3RAR who fought in the Battle of Long Khanh. We especially worked with Peter Scott, who advised us on the design of the coin to ensure it was an accurate representation of the events of the Battle.

I have attached an image of the coin for your reference. They can be purchased from the Mint's online shop [COIN PACK 50CENT UNC 2021 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF LONG KHANH | RAM eShop \(ramint.gov.au\)](https://www.ramint.gov.au/COIN_PACK_50CENT_UNC_2021_50TH_ANNIVERSARY_OF_THE_BATTLE_OF_LONG_KHANH)

If you would like any further information on the coin, let me know.

Kind regards,
Annika

Royal Australian Mint
Denison Street, Deakin ACT 2600
P. 02 6202 3466
E. info@ramint.gov.au
[ramint.gov.au](https://www.ramint.gov.au)





RSL
Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

30 July 2021
For immediate release

RSL Congratulates The Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) has congratulated the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery on the occasion of its 150th Anniversary.

National President Greg Melick has extended his warmest congratulations on behalf of the members of RSL Australia, to the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery that commemorates 150 years of continuous service on Sunday 1 August 2021.

"The Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery is in integral component of the Australian Defence force and has played a vital role in conflicts over many years," Greg Melick said.

"One and a half centuries of continuous service is an outstanding achievement and all Gunners who have served in the Royal Regiment deserve our thanks and best wishes on this great occasion."

Following a Commemorative Service, a National Salute will commence in Canberra at 12:40 EST, with Salutes also to be fired by Gunner units around the country.

"Good shooting and Ubique from the RSL to all Gunners," Greg Melick said.

ENDS

National Media contact: Tony Harrison – 0417 318 178; tony@wearebright.com.au



Some great photos from the Gun Salute fired yesterday to commemorate 150 years of The Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery (From Defence Australia facebook page)

There's never been a better time to get online.



As a Be Connected Network Partner, we can help you discover how being online can add new skills and experiences to your life - for free.

RSL Woden Valley Sub-Branch can assist with your IT needs. Call the office 6285 1931 to make a booking



Australian Government

Be Connected
Every Australian online.

Network Partners

RSL Woden Valley Sub-Branch has joined the national network of community organisations helping older Australians thrive in a digital world. We know it's not easy keeping up with new devices, new services, and new applications.

As a Be Connected Network Partner, we are able to access resources, grants and collaborative opportunities to help improve your digital skills.



So far, around 30 Sub-Branch members have benefitted from attending classes led by member and tutor Scott Powers, assisted by Marion Kossatz.

You are invited to attend these classes, held fortnightly from noon to 2pm in our new training room at the Sub-Branch. Bring your own device if you have one, or borrow one of ours. Call the office on 62851931 to enrol.



**Be Connected -
IT sessions with
knowledgeable
volunteer tutor,
Scott Powers.**

Don't forget 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.



Members and guests are welcome to join us for a chat and enjoy freshly brewed coffee with former service mates.

**◆ Eddison Day Club meetings
with Peter Sutton**

Active again

**Carers Friendship Groups are
back in business**

**For details call
Rania Kalimeris 6285 1931**

Did you know?

E-News and *The Serviceman* are also readily available to read on our website www.rslwoden.org.au



Contact Us

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

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Visit us on the web at
www.rslwoden.org.au

Or drop in for a coffee Fridays
from 10.00am

Our office hours are
9am-3pm Mon-Fri