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The official newsletter of the Highgate (WA) Sub-Branch of the Returned & Services League of Australia

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Monthly Luncheon

17 September 2001

Venue: Gallipoli Room, Anzac House
Time: 1150 hrs Fellowship 1230hrs Luncheon
Speaker: Dr Wojciech Gorski
Topic: Honours and Awards System

Presidents Report

The Highgate Ladies Lunch was held at Carine TAFE on 29 August and once again proved to be a very popular function with 60 members and guests in attendance. This was a relaxed informal occasion and we were also fortunate to be able to share the day with Mrs Mary Stewart, who celebrated her birthday the same day.

Spring has arrived again on schedule and another year is slipping away most rapidly. I ask that you give some thought to Poppy Day (Friday 9 November). We require people to sell poppies and at the luncheon meeting this month I would appreciate an indication by those members who are prepared to give a couple of hours for this worth cause and act as collectors.

Whilst on the subject of reminders, in November the Highgate Ladies Dining Night will be held once again at the WA Club. His Excellency the Governor Lt Gen John Sanderson AC and Mrs Sanderson will be in attendance. As in the past I expect this annual event to be popular with members and ask that you indicate as early as possible of your intention to attend, early numbers are needed for planning purposes. A return for the Ladies Dining Night is included in this Newsletter.

At the August meeting Max Grace requested to address the meeting in regard to the birthday meeting held on 16 July, for those whom were unable to attend the following is transcript of his address.

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FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Committee: 1000 hrs Monday
8 October 2001

Luncheon: 1150 hrs for 1230 hrs,
15 October 2001

Assistant Cashier for September – Bob Mercer

Please bring correct money - **\$20.00**

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I am taking the liberty of speaking on behalf of the seniors of the club who were so honoured at our last meeting; it was a marvelous occasion and very touching one at that. Our top table looked a treat even down to the elegant personal place cards inscribed with exquisite calligraphy. The spelling out of profiles added that personal touch again and was reinforced by a panorama photo, which hopefully will find a permanent home in the family album. The ever-popular Birthday cake, which brought proceedings to a close made the point that Highgate members don't really get old, they just get older. We oldies thank you all for a lunch to remember.

On behalf of the Committee and Members Max, we thank you

Take care John

Luncheon Format

The most successful format for the luncheon over the last two months has been adopted and will be the format for all future luncheons. You need to collect your name badge as you pay you may proceed upstairs to reserve your place and return downstairs for fellowship.

Hospital Visits

The following members of Highgate were visited during August:

Colin Avery Bill Booth Robert Jones - all in Hollywood
Ray Hepworth -St John Subiaco

Don Meredith – HVO

Sub Wardens Duties

Wreath laying ceremonies currently scheduled at the State War Memorial, Kings Park:

Sunday 9 Sep	11:45 hrs for 12 Noon	Maltese Assn of WA
Sunday 16 Sep	14:45 hrs for 15:00 hrs	Royal Airforces Assn WA
Thursday 4 Oct	15:45 hrs for 18:00 hrs	RAN Association (WA Section)
Monday 10 Sep	15:45 hrs for 16:00 hrs	Japanese Ambassador

Please support our sponsor:

Kingsize Menswear, City, Inglewood and Cannington

Last Month's Speaker

Lynne McHale from Veterans' Affairs, our Guest Speaker for August, "Veterans Carer Support Adviser" From the number of question and the interest shown by our members relating to Lynne's subject it was evident that the topic was very relevant to many. Her presentation was professional and wholeheartedly received by the luncheon meeting.

"Honours and Awards Systems"

Our Guest Speaker for September is our own Dr Wojciech Gorski OAM; his presentation will cover an overview of the honours systems of various countries, especially in Australia, UK, Poland and France with particular emphasis on the range of oddities and peculiarities. Wojciech has been a very active member of the Polish community in WA over many years as a long standing President of the Polish Ex Servicemen's Association Sub- Branch and also the Coordinating Council of Polish Organizations in WA

Ladies Dining Night - Friday 23 November 2001

Once again this popular night is at the WA Club the timings are 7:15pm for 7:45pm at \$55 per head.

As mentioned the Governor and his wife will be attending ensure you are punctual.

Car Parking is available at the New Esplanade Hotel, 18 The Esplanade PERTH. After parking take the elevator to the Floor E&F walk up ramp to F to exit through Allendale Square onto St Georges Terrace, a short walk to the WA Club. The security door closes at 9pm to re-enter car park after the function you need to walk via Howard Street and the Esplanade. On leaving with your car at the end of the night if you mention the WA Club to the attendant the car park charge will be \$4 cash.

Please complete the Yellow Return and forward to the Treasurer with your cheque there is limit of 80. Bookings via the return are essential there are no "door" sales.

Highgate Programme Diary Notes 2001

November 9 th	Poppy Day
November 23 rd	Ladies Dinner
December 17 th	Annual General Meeting

Don Blair SVP

A Sea Story

The little Byoki Maru began life proudly as the cargo ship Canadian Princess. Then she became the Potomac and finally, battered and unlovely, the Rushin Maru. But to the POWs who sailed in her on her last eventful voyage from Singapore to Moji in Japan, she will always be the Byoki Maru "the sick ship". She was one of us. Displacing between 3,000 and 4,000 tons she had been bombed and burnt out in Singapore. Refloated, she had been patched up to carry cargo to Japan, mostly in the form of 1200 POWs who had worked on the Burma-Thailand railway and were now to be slave labour in Japan.

The Byoki was not a comforting sight. There was only a gaping hole where the bridge had been and the deck had dropped about 15 inches. The Japanese skipper was to direct her course from a small box-like cabin built over the stern. Two great steel girders welded to the deck were all that was to keep her from breaking in two. There were no hatch covers for the forward two holds, with 400 POWs in each exposed alternatively to rain and the tropical sun. The toilets were wooden boxes lashed to the ship's side with a gap in the centre of the floor to allow us to squat high above the ocean. Definitely "Not Wanted on Voyage" were the lice and bugs that came aboard with us in Singapore. We didn't like the heat and sweat in the holds. They did. They bred as only lice and bugs can.

Our convoy crossed to Borneo and followed the coast north hugging a chain of islands until we reached Manila. There we waited for three weeks with only an occasional break on deck from the stinking holds. On 9 August we left and it seemed only a few hours before the waiting American subs struck. A large freighter ahead of us was blown clean out of the water. A tanker suffered the same fate. The last ship in the convoy also went down.

It wasn't until an international POW reunion in 1986 that we heard why the Byoki might

have been spared. A former US submarine commander told us about an attack on a convoy near Manila in August 1944. After a look at a 'cruise' ship that may have been ours, he had told his men not to waste a torpedo on "that wreck" and to hit the next ship. It was surely our convoy and "that wreck" was surely the Byoki Maru. Some would say it was just luck. Believers say it was a miracle.

Some days later we were hit by the typhoon. In the early morning when I was allowed on deck to go to the toilet the sea was dead calm but the crew were lashing down everything in sight. I was told there was "big wind coming". Within a few hours what had been a millpond was a violent, turbulent ocean raging against everything on it.

The Japanese skipper, generally conceded to be a great seaman, ran before the storm to reach the lee of some small islands. There were no longer guards and prisoners; everybody was working for survival, feeding the boilers with all the coal they could take. At one stage a series of giant waves, 50 to 60 feet high, kept the Byoki on her side. But the battling ship righted herself and pushed on to sail into calm seas once again.

There the Byoki sprang a kindly leak in her thin plates. It was a heaven sent opportunity for men stinking to high heaven to bathe in a stream of sea water jetting high into the forward hold before the leak was reluctantly reported. The ship's carpenter arrived with a piece of 4"x4" timber which he whittled down to a point and hammered in.

We made our landfall in Japan at Kagoshima on the southern end of Kyushu on 3 September, five years to the day since war was declared. Five days later we reached our destination, the port of Moji. It was 8 September 1944, less than a year before the Japanese surrender.

So ended the death defying voyage of the Byoki Maru. And May God Bless all who sailed in her. [Banjo Binstead].