



Highgate Highlights

Official Newsletter of Highgate RSL Sub-Branch
Returned & Services League of Australia (WA)
www.highgate-rsl.org.au

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ANZAC Day at your home

Australians can mark ANZAC Day at home, by lighting a candle on their porch, balcony or driveway at 0600 (6am) on 25 April, and observing a one-minute silence for contemplation and gratitude to the fallen.

And if you don't have a candle or it's too windy or wet, consider shining a torch or your mobile phone light skywards. Or stand quietly in the dark – just like at the dawn services.

Veterans, those still serving, and relatives with medals they would wear in ANZAC Day marches in remembrance of family members, may want to don these for their private commemoration. Australian Air Force Cadets have been officially asked to wear their Service dress uniforms for the dawn driveway vigil.

With neighbours possibly coming out and doing the same (ring them up and encourage), and afterwards waving to others around you, front-of-house commemorations will honour the sacrifice of the fallen, while maintaining social distancing and building community spirit.

This time of reflection and thanks could then be followed indoors by a private family Gunfire Breakfast – a military tradition evolved from a cup of tea or breakfast before first parade of the day, and which is now an opportunity to further remember comrades and family, past and present – and to talk about your mates or those family members who served. And maybe bring out their medals and photographs.

You could even consider having a video meeting with family and friends of similar persuasion (get the kids to organise as they know about all this stuff). And for those so inclined and old enough, let's not forget the importance of an appropriate libation...

These alternative ways to commemorate ANZAC Day come after the Australian Government, State leaders and the RSL nationwide, have regrettably cancelled

attendance at all services and marches, both here and abroad, due to the risk of spreading corona virus infection, especially among our elderly.



Lest we forget on ANZAC Day

With medals awarded to both her mother and father who served during WWII, and to son, Keith, who served in East Timor, Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan, Annette Buddrige with candles of remembrance in front of her home, in preparation for a personal Dawn Vigil Commemoration on ANZAC Day 2020.

Australian War Memorial to broadcast ANZAC Day service from 0530

The Australian War Memorial will televise a private ANZAC Day commemorative service from 0530 on 25 April 2020. The revised ceremony will be held in the Commemorative Area and Hall of Memory of the Memorial. While not open to the public, it will be broadcast live across Australia by ABC television and streamed online.

Wreaths will be laid by dignitaries representing the Commonwealth of Nations, people of Australia and New Zealand, as well as by senior representatives of current and former Veterans.

The traditional Dawn Service, National Ceremony and Veterans' March will not take place.

Details are still being finalised, but the televised ceremony will retain traditional elements and provide an opportunity for Australians to safely pause in their homes, in honour of Veterans and the Australian spirit.

The last time smaller or limited capacity ANZAC Day services were held was in 1942, due to the threats Australia faced during the Second World War.

As a nation, we recognise the importance of ANZAC Day and on 25 April this year, all Australians are encouraged to pause and reflect on the service and sacrifice of the more than 102,000 Australians who have died in wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations.

ANZAC Day Commemoration 2020 | 10am ANZAC Day 25 April Perth's Capital Radio 101.7 FM and Capital Digital online

Presented by Tony Howes, and introduced by WA Governor, the Honourable Kim Beazley AC, Capital Radio's program (101.7FM) for one hour from 10am on ANZAC Day will let listeners pay tribute to all those who embody ANZAC Spirit.

You'll hear the voices of some of the original ANZACs, and the stories of those who followed, including from the Second World War, Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam, Afghanistan and other areas of conflict and peace-keeping. You'll listen to a King giving hope to the nation; and hear other historic sounds.

Music of the times, plus the artistry of West Australian performers giving of their talents in telling these stories have been assembled to bring all this to you afresh. You will enjoy hearing Perth's leading theatrical family, Jenny Davis OAM, Bernie Davis, Rebecca Davis, her husband Stuart Halusz, and their two children, Saskia and Oliver, along with veteran actor, Rick Hearder. WA singers, Kelly Newton-Wordsworth and Robert Hoffman, will be joined by musicians of the Royal Australian Navy and the Australian Army.

Technical production is by Edo Brands, with compilation and production by Jenny Davis and Tony Howes.

So, settle back with a cup of your favourite brew and nibble on a couple of ANZAC biscuits, while thanking those who gave us our ongoing freedom.

No Highgate Luncheons or Committee Meetings during operational pause Important ANZAC Day events | Saturday 25 April

- 0530 | Dawn Service ABC broadcast from Australian War Memorial
- 0600 | Personal Dawn Vigil on your driveway, patio or balcony
- 1000 | ANZAC Day commemoration on Capital Radio

Last Post | Lest We Forget

We remember with deep sadness and affection

Bill Adamson | Merdeka Day Organiser and Friend of Highgate RSL
and convey sincere condolences and sympathy to Elizabeth, family and friends





From our President



Bill Munro

As we struggle through the impact of the COVID-19 virus, we are seeing positive examples which show the Aussie spirit is still alive and well in times of stress.

The Australian distilling industry, which is slowly gaining a reputation for producing quality gins and whiskies, has been marshalled into converting their distillation process into the manufacture of hand sanitiser. This has been organised by Albany-based Cameron Syme, producer of Limeburner's Whisky. Cameron is not a Veteran but has been a strong supporter of the SAS Resources Trust for many years.

You will be aware that all ANZAC Day services and marches have been cancelled for 2020, to be replaced by a suggestion that we commemorate this year with a driveway acknowledgement at dawn.

101.70 FM Capital Community Radio, sponsored by Highgate Sub-Branch, will be broadcasting an ANZAC Day special for one hour from 10am, to be introduced by WA Governor Kim Beazley AC, and produced by Highgate member, Tony Howes, who hosts the weekly Monday night program, *The Listening Post* (currently in operational pause).

The ANZAC Day program is still in production but will include interviews, speeches and music to create the impression of a live ANZAC Day service. Full details are on the front page of this issue.

ANZAC Day brought to mind the ANZAC Bell which is housed in the Bell Tower at Elizabeth Quay. Some members may be familiar with the bell, but it was news to me. I was going to suggest a visit, but perhaps next year when the turmoil is past.



The following is an extract from the Swan Bells website:

Located on Level 5 of the building, the ANZAC Centenary Bell is rung every day at noon (1pm on ANZAC Day). The ANZAC Bell is the largest swinging bell in Australia and a lasting memorial to Australian and New Zealand Service men and women involved in wars, conflicts and peace-keeping operations around the world. The ANZAC Bell is one of the first bells to use 3D printing in its design.

Gold was added to the copper and tin during casting, reflecting a tradition dating back hundreds of years. The ANZAC Bell was installed in October 2018 and the first official ring was the 100th Anniversary of Armistice Day on 11 November 2018, shortly after 11am. It is the largest bell of its kind ever made in Australia and was cast in Perth. The ANZAC Bell weighs 6.5 tonnes and is expected to last over 500 years.

And please, let me ask you a very personal question: Are you OK? Are you managing your way through this situation? Most of us with military experience have been through tough times before and have come out the other side without too many long-term effects. But that was a long time ago for the majority, and times change. Please keep in touch with your Highgate mates. They probably want to hear from you as much as you want to talk to them.

Regards - **Bill Munro**

A lighter? We're going to need a flame-thrower to light up all your candles!



Members celebrating their birthday in March include Geoff Simpson, Tony Wills, Rodney Halcombe, Robert Mitchell, Frederick Brown, Robert Arnold, Harry Lodge, Geoff Stooke, John Pope, William Ritchie, Michael Bradford, Richard Adams, Tony McKay, Ian McGuckin, Doug Webb, Shane Edmonds, R E Mees, Norman Coleman, Sarah Freeman, Ronnie Leigh, John Farrell and John Maltas

Editors note: With 18 bells, our Swan Bells is the second-largest musical instrument on the planet (after Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin which has 19 bells), and is a gift from the City of Westminster (London), following permission from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, as an Australian bicentennial gift to the people of Western Australia.

The original 12 bells were from the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields (Trafalgar Square, London) and also known as the Admiralty Bells, and can be traced back to the 14th century.

As royal bells, they are extremely rare and are the only set ever to leave England.

The Admiralty Bells have special significance for Veterans, as these were the first to be rung as the start of a nationwide alert (before telegraph, telephone and digital communications) that was then relayed by other bells in churches across the British Isles to signal danger, a major celebration, or to herald the coronation of many British monarchs.

Our former Admiralty Bells celebrated many historic events, including England's victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588, the World War II victory at El Alamein in 1942, ringing in the New Year at Trafalgar Square for more than 275 years, celebrating the coronation of every British monarch since King George II in 1727 - and adding a distinctly Australian theme - welcoming the homecoming of Captain James Cook after his voyage of discovery in 1771, which included exploring our east coast.

And in remembrance of the second anniversary of the Bali tragedy on 12 October 2004, the bells were tolled at dawn (0540), 16 times each hour on the hour from 0700-2200, and then for the last time at 2308, the actual time the tragedy occurred.

The tragedy of 11 September 2001 in New York is also remembered with a special anniversary ringing. The bells are rung regularly, every Monday, Thursday and Sunday, 1200-1300.

The ANZAC Bell rings every day at midday for one minute. On special occasions, such as Remembrance Day and ANZAC Day, it may ring at different times.

Patron of the Bell Tower, Laith Reynolds, (whose daughter is Defence Minister, Senator Hon Linda Reynolds CSC) was the person who saved the St Martin-in-the-Fields Bells from being melted down to form new ones, as they had become too heavy for the ancient foundations of the church in Trafalgar Square, London. Western Australia gave St Martin-in-the-Fields copper and tin to the same weight as the old bells so they could use that metal to cast their new bells.

Mr Reynolds then successfully campaigned to have a specially-built tower in Perth to bring them to life for all West Australians. The Bell Tower receives about 100,000 visitors each year.



Saving the Sub-Branches

By Geoff Hourn AM | Highgate RSL Warden & Immediate Past President

In recent years, there has been much anguished debate within the RSL about the future of some of our smaller Sub-Branches. The closure of any Sub-Branch is not just a loss for the RSL, but a loss for a local community.

Sub-Branches are the lifeblood of the RSL and part of the lifeblood of many local communities. RSL Sub-Branches have now been part of the history of local communities for over a century. They are relied upon to care for local Veterans, widows and families, lead commemorative services, provide speakers at schools, retirement homes, clubs and various gatherings, and they also provide an ongoing social focus in many communities.

In other States, the RSL owns large licensed clubs with gaming, along with bowling and sporting clubs and other attractive recreational facilities. These attract large numbers of affiliate members.

Although the closure of several Sub-Branches is occurring across the nation, the death of Sub-Branches currently seems to be more prevalent in Western Australia.

Despite the eagerly awaited opening of a new ANZAC House, along with the vaunted Veteran Central, the fact remains that the Sub-Branches are where the Veterans are.

Veterans are mostly distant from St Georges Terrace, an important aspect that should always be deliberated. Veterans live where the Sub-Branches are.

The recent Sub-Branch Briefings conducted by RSLWA in the Perth CBD are a case in point. Those briefings could have been held in Rockingham, Bunbury or Joondalup! Or Mandurah, Albany or Geraldton!

The fact that RSLWA exists to support the Sub-Branches (and not the other way around) should continually be in the minds of those working from ANZAC House. It is not always the case.

Several years ago, a former RSLWA CEO cheerfully referred to Sub-Branches as *the enemy*. It was an appalling attitude, even if it was taken jocularly, but unfortunately, that attitude at times still persists.



Geoff Hourn

An example comes by way of the Osborne Park Sub-Branch. For those who haven't visited, it occupies a beautiful and unique heritage building on Main Street.

The President of Osborne Park Sub-Branch phoned ANZAC House a few months ago to enquire if funding was available to fix a toilet door hanging from its hinges. The initial response was *'if you can't look after your own maintenance we will close you down'*. Having apparently realised it was an inappropriate statement the response then became more conciliatory but by then the old attitude had been revealed.

There are 36 RSLWA properties occupied by Sub-Branches being considered for closure around the

'Veterans live where the Sub-Branches are.'

State, because of the cost required to maintain premises. One is the Beverley Sub-Branch, which occupies an RSL Memorial Hall that was bequeathed to the Sub-Branch. However, the building is now owned by RSLWA. Beverley RSL Memorial Hall has a commercial-standard kitchen and bar facility but is not licensed. The Sub-Branch hopes to celebrate its centenary next year.

There is a proposal to close Beverley and some other Sub-Branches in that area and establish a regional RSL hub in Northam. However, the President of Beverley Sub-Branch rightly points out that no one from Beverley is going to drive the nearly two hours, 130km return journey to Northam, just to attend a monthly RSL meeting. His view is that once the RSL is gone from Beverley and other towns in the region, it will be gone forever.

In recent years, RSLWA sold the historic premises of the Coolgardie Sub-Branch. The President at the time, Bill Chambers, purchased the building and went about recruiting 40 new members to ensure continuation of the Sub-Branch. It was a heroic effort.

Whenever the doors of the historic building are open, the current Coolgardie Sub-Branch President says passing tourists ask to see inside the building.



Coolgardie RSL
Photo by Mary W Shields

And in Esperance, where there was a threat to close the Sub-Branch premises, the RSL continues to have its own home. The premises are

located prominently in a beautiful street and park in the CBD.

The closure of RSL premises is often the precursor to the eventual closure of the Sub-Branches affected. One proposed solution, to lease premises in industrial estates, is largely unpalatable. Given our RSL forefathers fought for decades to establish the RSL on the main streets of our towns and cities, it is a retrograde step to hide the RSL in industrial estates.

The problem of Sub-Branch closure is not confined to regional Western Australia or to maintaining premises. In the metropolitan area, there are Sub-Branches with and without premises, with similar uncertain futures.

Many are taking positive steps. Nedlands and Claremont Sub-Branches are working hard to increase membership. Subiaco and Shenton Park Sub-Branches have recently amalgamated. Victoria Park and City of South Perth Sub-Branches are currently discussing amalgamation.

It is reported that most members of the Cambridge Sub-Branch are in nursing homes but the President and Secretary are fighting hard to maintain an RSL presence in the neighbourhood. The Cambridge Council, which understands the important part the RSL plays in the local community, supports them.

Vincent Council is providing support to the Mount Hawthorn Sub-Branch which is being reinvigorated by President Trevor Stiles. For ANZAC Day 2020, the Mount Hawthorn Sub-Branch and Vincent



Saving the Sub-Branches *(from page 3)*

Mayor are producing an on-line commemorative service for viewing in nursing homes, hospitals and other institutions.

And in the small but energetic Cottesloe Sub-Branch, which received its Charter in 1931, the annual Frederick Bell VC Memorial Lecture always attracts a full house at the Cottesloe War Memorial Town Hall.

Outstanding lecturers have included Brendan Nelson, Mark Donaldson VC and last November, former Governor-General, Sir Peter Cosgrove.

The annual Frederick Bell VC Memorial Lecture epitomises how small Sub-Branches make enormous contributions to local communities and the whole RSL.

It is hoped the attitude from ANZAC House about proposed closures of premises is ambivalent. There is no doubt there is currently more of a commercial outlook than a community outlook at ANZAC House when it comes to proposed closures.

It is an outlook cloaked in incongruity. The RSLWA Finance Committee has just magnificently raised the estimated \$40 million needed to rebuild ANZAC House, but there is no money available to fix a toilet door in Osborne Park.

And RSLWA continues to increase annual State Branch running costs while most Sub-Branches languish.

When Graham Edwards was State President, with Phil Orchard as CEO, there were 12 paid RSLWA employees. Now, with fewer Sub-Branches, there are 25 paid staff working at ANZAC House, with an additional position currently being filled.

It is apparent the new edifice of ANZAC House is being complemented in size by a much increased RSLWA staff organisation.

There is now a Communications and Engagement Officer, a Director - Marketing & Strategic Partnership, a Veteran Liaison Officer, a Veteran Services Manager and many more.

All of this leads to greatly increased overheads to run RSLWA; and increased workloads for voluntary Sub-Branch Committees required to respond to the many new RSLWA deadlines.

Many Sub-Branches regret the days are gone when the State President would liaise with Sub-Branch Presidents, the CEO would liaise with Sub-Branch Secretaries and the Chief Financial Officer would liaise with Sub-Branch Treasurers.

Once the new ANZAC House is opened, a re-aligned RSLWA focus should be to support Sub-Branches. Without Sub-Branches, RSLWA simply becomes superfluous!

When ANZAC House is re-opened, RSLWA should define 2021 as *The Year of the Sub-Branch*.

A year focused on saving every small Sub-Branch in Western Australia, on increasing membership in all Sub-Branches, on working out business models to restore, maintain and develop existing RSLWA properties, and make them viable entities with a suitable return on investment.

It will require a further close examination of the property portfolio audit report and close liaison with local governments, corporations and institutions throughout the State. It will also require renewed efforts by the very talented Finance Committee for the next phase in the life of RSLWA.

It is so important to keep our small Sub-Branches alive and to grow all of our Sub-Branches – because that is where the Veterans are!

Accessing RSLWA

RSLWA continues to operate but all employees will now be working from home rather than in the office while still conducting frontline services to members and other Veterans. Please use the following email addresses:

General (regularly monitored) admin@rslwa.org.au

Advocacy - advocacy@rslwa.org.au

Events - events@rslwa.org.au

News & Communications - comms@rslwa.org.au

Marketing & Fundraising - marketing@rslwa.org.au

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY Celebrating those who served

International Women's Day on 08 March celebrated the achievements of women across society and gave special thanks to those who have supported and served our country in military conflicts and peacekeeping operations.



Women have always played an important part in Australia's rich military history and were acknowledged and remembered for their service and sacrifice.

The role of women in the Australian military in peace time and during war has evolved significantly over the last century and today there is no role in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) that women can't take on.

In the First World War, women worked as nurses in the Australian Army Nursing Service, and others played a crucial role fundraising and producing packages to be sent to deployed soldiers.

The role of women changed significantly during the Second World War, with the formation of the women's auxiliary services, with 50,000 women serving by 1944 and many more supporting the war effort in a civilian capacity through organisations such as the Australian Women's Land Army.

Following the Second World War, women gradually became a part of Australia's mainstream Defence forces as gender barriers in society were dismantled. However, it wasn't until the early 1980s that the female equivalents of Australia's Defence services were fully integrated. Today, almost 20% of ADF personnel are women, with almost 11,000 serving in the permanent forces. This includes more than 3,000 women in the Navy, more than 4,000 in the Army, and over 3,000 in the Air Force. An additional 4,500 women serve as part of the ADF Reserve.

Women are vital to our country's military efforts, and this should be recognised by everyone every day, but importantly so on International Women's Day.

Further information about the role of women in Australia's military history can be found on the **ANZAC Portal**.

Sub Warden Duties | 2020

Wreath Laying Services | State War Memorial Kings Park

POC: Geoff Simpson OAM RFD
Deputy Warden State War Memorial



Operational pause in place until further notice

Deputy Warden Geoff Simpson awarded Australia Day Medallion

Congratulations are extended to Highgate RSL member, Geoff Simpson OAM, who has been awarded a 2020 Australia Day Medallion for his exceptional service to Veterans, families and the multicultural communities of Western Australia.

Geoff Simpson was appointed Deputy Warden of the State War Memorial in Kings Park on 11 November 2011, and since then has led the Sub Wardens Team in carrying out more than 380 commemorative events at the SWM for more than 100 community organisations.

Geoff has supported three WA Governors, nine State War Memorial Wardens, three RSLWA State Presidents and CEOs; and hosted numerous Federal and State Ministers, as well as members of the Royal Family.

Geoff's role has been crucial to RSLWA's custody of the State War Memorial and his liaison with the Botanic Gardens Park Authority has been exemplary.

He has ensured a high standard of ceremonial practice among members of the Honour Guard and has drawn praise from attendees at Kings Park for ANZAC Day Dawn Services, Remembrance Day and special commemorations by local, national and international associations, ambassadors, consuls, generals and other dignitaries.

In 2015, Geoff was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for service to Veterans, their families and to Service groups.

Geoff retired from the Water Corporation in 2008 after 34 years service, including as Commissioning Coordinator for the Perth Sea Water Desalination Plant.

He became Rotary International District Governor for District 9450 for 2009-10 – which stretches from Fremantle to Kununurra. In his formative years, he was an Army Cadet at Christ Church Grammar School, before joining the Citizen Military Forces in 1967, and receiving his officer's commission in 1971 in the University Regiment.

He was Officer Commanding 13 Field Squadron Royal Australian Engineers 1983-85. Commanding Officer WA University Regiment 1988-91, and promoted Colonel in 1994. Geoff was Commander No.5 Training Group 1994-96 and Director Army Personnel Agency from 1996 until retirement in 1998.

Geoff Simpson was appointed Colonel Commandant - Royal Australian Engineers Western Region in 2003.



Geoff Simpson OAM

Congratulations, Mick Coyle

We applaud and congratulate Highgate RSL stalwart, Mick Coyle OAM JP, who was recently elected President of the Airborne Forces Association of WA.



Mick served with the Irish Guards in the Middle East from 1953 and later in Suez. He was a member of the Parachute Regiment Airborne Forces 1st and 2nd Battalions, the Cameron Highlanders, and with NORFORCE Pilbara Regiment.

Mick was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 1989 in recognition of his service to the Australian Army as Company Sergeant Major 16 Battalion, Royal Western Australian Regiment.

He retired in 1996 with the rank of Warrant Officer, but continues to serve as a State War Memorial Sub Warden, and as a member of the Cockburn Pipe Band.

ANZAC Street Appeal cancelled – but online appeal still on

RSLWA has cancelled the ANZAC Street Appeal due to health considerations for staff, members, volunteers and public. This means that on Friday 24 April 2020, RSLWA and Sub-Branches will not be collecting on the streets.

The ANZ blades will no longer be available for hire for this appeal. If your Sub-Branch has ordered appeal merchandise that has been paid for and is to be collected from our State Branch within the next two weeks, you will need to revise a time to collect or advise us you would like it posted out.

However, RSLWA is **not** cancelling the ANZAC Appeal. Instead, it will become an online appeal where the public can donate to your Sub-Branch through our website. The public can also make EFT and cheque payments as donations to your Sub-Branch. **RSLWA point of contact for questions or concerns is Hayley Barclay, Financial Services Officer at fso@rslwa.org.au**

Highgate welcomes two new members

Mike Wadsworth served more than 14 years as a Regular and Reservist in New Zealand's Canterbury and Nelson-Marlborough and West Coast Regiment, retiring with the rank of Major. Mike has transferred to Highgate from Mandurah RSL Sub-Branch.

And new affiliate member, **Robert Dickson**, also joins Highgate. Robert's deceased father, Alfred James Dickson, served with the Australian Imperial Forces in New Guinea 1942-45 and was a member of Gosford RSL in NSW.

Increases in Veteran pensions

Veteran pension payments increased in March, in line with the biannual indexation process. Pension recipients, including Veterans, their partners, war widows and widowers, will see the increase from 20 March 2020. Due to the calculation of pension rates on a daily basis, the first pension indexed on payday 26 March will comprise both old and new rates. The new pension rates will be fully effective from pension payday 09 April. A full list of pension rates at www.dva.gov.au or call 133 254 or 1800 555 254 from regional Australia.



Pensions Report By David MacLean | Highgate Pensions Officer

Members have enjoyed some success with claims under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA), Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (RCA) Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA) and Defence-Related Claims Act 1988 (DRCA).

One member successfully overturned a DRCA decision which had gone against him. This matter is quite complex and proceeding slowly. The writer, accompanied by Graeme Bland, RAAFA WA, took part in a well-attended Veterans Review Board (VRB) Forum at the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) on 10 March.

The meeting was addressed by Jane Horton, VRB principal legal officer, with other central office staff and two WA representatives. Jane reported that Alternative Dispute Resolutions (ADR) were now accounting for 70-80% of VRB decisions, with resolution being reached in most cases within six months, a vast improvement on the previous full Board system.

The Ex-Services Organisation (ESO) community has welcomed moves to bring DRCA under the VRB. Mention was made of a new VRB Justice Portal which would allow easier and speedier direct access to the Board. Recent Federal Court decisions which have impacted on the Board were discussed.

With the new Commission for Defence and Veteran Suicide, much emphasis is being put into suicide prevention in a genuine effort to reduce the startling numbers.

A Families representative is to be appointed to the Commission which will be an independent and permanent publicly accountability body with the same powers of a Royal Commission.

Long delays are being experienced in receiving s.137 reports from DVA, exacerbated by the mandated 42 day delay, followed by the 28 day comment period.

Generally, Board members and staff are positive and happy with the changes and increased productivity.

The Productivity Commission Report recommendations were, on the other hand, wide sweeping and radical, postulating that the VRB was *not fit for purpose* and should be replaced in stages by the Veterans Service Commission by 2025.

Stage one would replace the three-person board with one member by 2022 and then replaced entirely by 2025. ADRs would disappear. Decisions on appeals would then be made internally by the new body from that date.

This proposal was not greeted warmly by the floor.

I have no problem with bureaucrats holding ministerial delegations, however, an independent body reviewing contentious or contested decisions is a much more open and fairer system than any internal review, no matter how qualified the decision-maker. The most earnest delegate knows who holds the purse strings.

Veterans' Wellbeing Centre on track

Veterans and their families in Western Australia are a step closer to easier access to services and support with the Veterans' Wellbeing Centre to be based at ANZAC House Veteran Central in Perth receiving a Federal Government's \$5 million commitment to finish the project.

The Veterans' Wellbeing Centre, which is being led by RSLWA, will provide a one-stop shop for Veterans and their families to access assistance from government, health services, Ex-Service Organisations, other Veteran services providers and community groups in a friendly, welcoming environment where their unique experiences are understood and supported, and their military service is respected.

Services include medical and allied health services, mental health support, employment guidance and placement. The Wellbeing Centre should be open before Christmas this year.

The Government has committed \$30 million to develop a network of six Veteran Wellbeing Centres across Australia in partnership with ESOs and State and Territory governments.

The Veteran Wellbeing Centres are part of the Government's commitment to putting Veterans and their families first and complements the more than \$4.3 billion a year dedicated to support Veteran health. More information at www.dva.gov.au/wellbeing-centres

Health and stimulus packages support Veteran community

Veterans and their families will benefit from the Federal Government's commitment of \$2.4 billion to bolster the nation's health system, in response to COVID-19.

The health package gives older and at-risk Veterans access to some health consultations and assessments remotely by video, or phone if video is not available.

If Veterans are in home isolation or from a vulnerable patient group, they will also be able to have their Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS) prescriptions filled online or remotely and have their medication delivered directly to their home.

This ensures vulnerable Veterans can access the health care they need while limiting risk of exposure.

Veterans in residential or home care will be supported by the Government's commitment of over \$100 million to upskill and increase the numbers of aged care staff and nurses.

In addition, more than 225,000 Veterans and their dependants will benefit from the \$17.6 billion stimulus package announced by the Government recently.

Veterans or dependants receiving income support or compensation benefits through DVA, and who are currently residing in Australia, will receive a once-only payment of \$750.

The payment will be automatically paid into bank accounts and will come from DVA or Services Australia.



52 years ago | Remembering Operation Pinnaroo

Operation Pinnaroo (27 February -15 April 1968) was probably the most dangerous operation conducted during the Vietnam War by 2nd and 3rd Battalions, Royal Australian Regiments (2RAR and 3RAR).

It was the Australians first successful foray into the traditional People's Liberation Armed Forces stronghold of the Minh Dam Secret Zone in Phuoc Tuy Province, with their objective to capture and destroy the Viet Cong bases.

Their task included cordoning off the entire Long Hai hills area to stop Viet Cong groups trying to escape, and to locate and neutralise enemy mines and booby traps.

The region's natural caves and subterranean streams provided a haven from which the Viet Cong had launched raids and propaganda missions into the surrounding countryside. Operation Pinnaroo was carried out with 2RAR and 3RAR cordoning off the complex, with the rifle companies patrolling and

ambushing at night in order to prevent the Viet Cong from escaping.

On 08 March, the Australians conducted an encircling movement to tighten the cordon, while a sustained bombardment by US B52 heavy bombers and artillery targeted the hill the next day.

A combined force of infantry from 3RAR, supported by armour, then advanced on the foothills, before clearing the minefields and destroying an extensive base area which included a deep cave system that had first been used by the Viet Minh against the French in the 1950s.

Each Australian rifle company then methodically searched its area of operations, while engineers destroyed the underground facilities; a task which required the use of tonnes of explosives.

Exploding mines claimed a significant toll, with 10 Australians killed and another 36 wounded.

Known Viet Cong casualties included 21 killed, 14 wounded and 40 captured.

Fifty-seven camps and bunker systems were destroyed, as were large quantities of weapons, munitions and supplies.

Judged a success by the Australians, despite their heavy losses, the operation resulted in significant disruption to the Viet Cong and hindered their operations for some time.



This flag (now in the AWM) was raised by Signallers of C Company, 3RAR, on top of Hill 323 in the Long Hai Hills on 19 March 1968. and bears the names of members taking part. Shortly after the flag raising, Battalion HQ received a request for ground clearance from a US warship lying offshore to enable them to 'shoot at a VC flag 'which has just been raised'.

- I talked with a 90 year old man today -

I asked him if there was anything I could get him while the corona virus scare was gripping Australia. He simply smiled, looked away and said: "Let me tell you what I need: I need to believe in this country my generation fought for. I need to believe we handed this nation safely to our children and their children. I need to know this generation will quit being a bunch of sissies. I need to know they respect what they've been given. I need to know they've earned what others sacrificed for."

I wasn't sure where the conversation was going or if it was going anywhere at all. So, I sat there, quietly listening.

"You know, I was a little boy during WWII. Those were scary days. We didn't know if we would end up speaking English, German or Japanese. There was no certainty, no guarantees like Australians enjoy today. And no home went without sacrifice or loss. Every house, up and down every street, had someone in harm's way. Maybe their Dad was a soldier. Maybe their son was a sailor. Maybe it was an uncle. Sometimes, it was everyone - fathers, sons, uncles.

"Having someone you love sent off to war wasn't less frightening than it is today. If anything, it was more frightening. We didn't have battlefield news. We didn't have email or mobile phones. We sent them away and we hoped, we prayed. We might not hear from them for months, if ever. Sometimes a mother got her son's letters the same day her husband was comforting her over his death.

"And we sacrificed. You couldn't buy things. Everything was rationed. You were only allowed so much milk per month, only so much bread, toilet paper. EVERYTHING was restricted for the war effort. And what you weren't using, didn't need, was saved and sorted for the war effort. My generation was the original recycling movement in Australia. And we had viruses back then. Serious viruses. Things like polio and measles. It was nothing to walk to school and pass a house or two that was quarantined. We didn't shut down our schools. We didn't shut

down our cities. We carried on, without masks, without hand sanitiser. We persevered. We overcame. We didn't attack our Prime Minister or Premier - or each other. Instead, we came together.

"We rallied around for the war. Thick or thin, we were in it to win. And we would lose more troops in an hour of combat than we lose in entire wars today."

He slowly looked away again. Maybe I saw a small tear in the corner of his eye. Then he continued:

"Today's kids don't know sacrifice. They think a sacrifice is not having coverage on their mobile phone while they freely drive across the country. Today's kids are selfish and spoiled.

"In my generation, we looked out for our elders. We helped out with single mums whose husbands were either at war or dead from war. Today's kids rush the store, buying everything they can, with no concern for anyone but themselves. It's shameful the way some Australians behave today. None of them deserve the sacrifices their grandads made.

"So, no, I don't need anything, but I appreciate your offer. I know I've been through far worse things than this virus. But maybe I should be asking you, what can I do to help you? Do you have enough beer to get through this, enough steak? Will you be able to survive with just Netflix, Stan, SBS and ABC on demand and umpteen channels on your TV?"

I smiled, fighting back a tear of my own...now humbled by a man in his 90s. All I could do was thank him for the history lesson. Leave him my number for any emergency and leave with my ego firmly behind me.

I talked to a man today. A real man. An Australian man from an era long gone and forgotten. We will never understand the sacrifices. We will never fully earn their sacrifices. But we should work harder to learn about them. Learn from them. Respect them.



R&R Veterans Transition Centre

By Tony Wills and Geoff Baldwin

After Service life, which often includes multiple deployments to war zones, and experiences most of us cannot comprehend, Defence personnel are faced with re-packaging themselves and preparing for civilian life and a career. This is a massive challenge and without effective, ongoing assistance and support it can go very wrong.

The R&R Veterans Transition Centre assists Service people transition from military and active service into civilian life, and helps them avoid the growing challenges of mental health and the results of exposure to trauma associated with long and/or active service.

Our main point of difference is that the R&R Centre focuses on prevention rather than cure, the latter being well serviced by other worthy charities and bodies.

Military people bond over love of country, mateship and community service. We focus on strengthening this bond to help ensure it endures long after Service life to the benefit of the individual, their peers, families and communities.

Here's what we're doing

Ex-Service people have an enormous amount to offer. However, adjusting from a long military career to living and working in civilian life can be extremely challenging for individuals and families.

So, in 2018, a group of ex-Serving members and like-minded supporters/directors teamed up to establish the R&R Transition Centre at Jarrahdale to assist ex-ADF personnel with a support and transition program.

Services The R&R Transition Centre provides a full suite of services, including counselling, training, development and vocational guidance; as well as providing a temporary safe house for any ex-Service person in need of support.

Achievements We've conducted various courses with Young Heroes, and career transition seminars linked with Working Spirit Ltd, getting more than 60 jobs for Veterans in the past year. We've accommodated and counselled nearly 100 Veterans.

We also have great working relationships with the RSL, Austal Ships, Alcoa, Incite Solutions, Open Arms, Younger Heroes, Working Spirit, Jarrahdale Serpentine RSL (they've sponsored us and will utilise our community hall for some of their activities), Timor Awakening and other organisations.

And we have now established a war footing with the Centre being used for Veteran crisis accommodation associated with the current pandemic.

All of this has been achieved without a single cent of funding from the Federal Government, State Government or the Peel Development Commission in whose area our Centre resides. However, Federal Member for Stirling, Vince Connelly MP and Hon Peter Tinley, WA Minister for Veterans Issues, have both provided outstanding assistance.

Where and what Only 45 minutes from Perth CBD, the R&R Centre in Jarrahdale is a private 40 hectare retreat surrounded by native bush, and incorporates more than 30 accommodation units, a community hall and supporting infrastructure. Volunteers, mainly ex-Service people, have carried out considerable restoration work on the buildings.

The R&R Veterans Transition Centre comprises 10 log cabins providing 20 A-frame one bedroom chalets, 10 two bedroom cottages, two dormitories, three halls, a commercial kitchen and cool room plus another kitchen for the barbecue area, laundry, office, toilet block and several separate dwellings and workshops. Recreational areas include two tennis courts, cricket nets, and a pool.

Self-sufficiency the goal Using highly qualified ex-Service people to direct and conduct onsite courses in resilience, leadership and life skills for students, corporates, sporting clubs and individuals, will help us achieve financial self-sufficiency, and further program development.

Who can come We work with ex-Service people, ideally immediately after they leave their last posting, so we can best assist them in their transition, while they in turn can use their skills and experience to help others in a pleasant location. However, we naturally welcome any ex-Service person, regardless of how long since their discharge.

We welcome sponsors and for more information about us, see www.rnrcentre.org





Just for laughs

From the Margot and Roger Collection



Horrified young Veteran, having just been told by his doctor he has corona virus, says, *"But, Doc. That's just not possible! I have 300 rolls of toilet paper!"*

A lot of people are wondering why Veterans aren't panicking about COVID-19. It's because current events have made us realise our present and our previous lives in the military, have a lot of similarities:

- Never any toilet paper
- Lots of tinned food
- Being told what to do all the time
- Ordered into groups or defined size of groups
- Watching others panic
- Constant instructions which are always changing
- Information which is out of date by the time you receive it
- Being told what to do in your free time
- Standing in long queues to get food or anything else
- Carrying a mask around all the time
- Weekend plans all stuffed up
- Living under a permanent curfew
- Constant travel restrictions
- Your favourite pubs are off limits.

As a Veteran was driving down the freeway, his car phone rang. Answering, he heard his wife's voice urgently warning him, *"Reg, I just heard on the news there's a car going the wrong way on the Kwinana Freeway. Please be careful!"* "Heck," said Reg, *"It's not just one car. There are hundreds of them!"*

Two old Veterans had been friends for many decades, sharing all kinds of activities and adventures. Lately, they'd been limited to meeting a couple of times a week to play cards. One day, they are playing cards when one looks at the other and said, *"Now don't get mad at me I know we've been friends for a long time, but I just can't remember your name! I've thought and thought, but I can't remember it. Please tell me your name?"* His friend stared at him for at least two minutes. Finally, he said, *"How soon do you need to know?"*

Three elderly Veterans, each with a hearing loss, were playing golf. One remarked, *"Windy, isn't it?"* "No," his friend replied, *"It's Thursday."* And the third man chimed in, *"Yeah, I am, too. Let's get some beers."*

An elderly Veteran calls 000 on his mobile phone to report his car has been broken into. He's hysterical as he explains his situation to the police. *"They've stolen the stereo, the steering wheel, the brake pedal and even the accelerator!"* he yells. The officer says, *"Stay calm, Sir. A police officer is on the way."* A few minutes later, the officer radios in. *"Disregard."* he says. *"He got in the back-seat by mistake."*

My elderly cousin said she was in a long line at 0745 today at the grocery store, which opens at 0800 for seniors only.

A young man came from the car park and tried to cut in at the front of the line, but an old lady beat him back with her walking stick.

He returned and tried to cut in again, but an old Veteran (with sergeant stripes tattooed on his arm) punched him and then kicked him to the ground.

As the young man approached the line for the third time, he said, *"If you don't let me unlock the door, none of you will ever get in there."*

I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. I just can't put it down.

Three ex-Army sisters, aged 92, 94 and 96, live in a house together. One night the 96-year-old draws a bath. She puts her foot in and pauses and yells to the other sisters, *"Was I getting in or out of the bath?"*

The 94-year-old yells back, *"I don't know. I'll come up and see."* She starts up the stairs and pauses. *"Was I going up the stairs or down?"*

The 92-year-old is sitting at the kitchen table drinking tea and listening to her sisters. She shakes her head and says, *"I hope I never get that forgetful, knock on wood..."* She then yells, *"I'll come up and help both of you as soon as I see who's at the door."*

Why is bra singular and panties plural?

Why do you press harder on the buttons of a remote control when you know the batteries are dead?

How come abbreviated is such a long word?

Why do we wash bath towels? Aren't we clean when we use them?

Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle?

Why do they call it a TV set when you only have one?

I know a guy who's addicted to brake fluid, but he says he can stop any time.

I did a theatrical performance about puns. It was a play on words.

Jokes about German sausage are the wurst.

Did you hear about the cross-eyed teacher who lost her job because she couldn't control her pupils?

They told me I had Type-A blood, but it was a typo.

When you get a bladder infection, urine trouble.

Velcro - what a rip off!

Broken pencils are pointless.

I dropped out of communism class because of lousy Marx.

Don't worry about old age. It doesn't last.



**Highgate RSL's March Luncheon
With guest speaker Hon Graham Edwards AM**

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Newsletter contributions are always welcome.

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