



THE RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA HIGHGATE SUB BRANCH

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Highgate Happenings January 2023

Members all, a Happy and Prosperous New Year to you.



A feline Vice President John Cleary gets rattled at the December lunch.

After concluding 2022 with a relaxed, very enjoyable lunch, we can look forward to yet another great year of lunches with some top rating guest speakers organised by Vice President John Cleary, including State Leader of the Opposition Hon Mia Davies MLA in July.

This month, in a reversal of roles, our guest speaker is Allan Downs OAM. Allan will be interviewed by Tony Howes. Allan normally organises guest speakers to be interviewed by Tony on Listening Post Radio.

At eighteen Allan was part of the first National Service intake in 1951, joining 17 National Service Battalion. He was discharged in 1953.

In civilian life he worked on his father's farm, spent 20 years in the motor industry, followed by 52 years in the insurance industry. Having become an OBN in November, he is currently planning his early retirement.

Allan has been, or still is, a member of Jaycees, Rostrum, Freemasons, Rotary, Order of St John and a number of ex-service organisations. He is an active member of Highgate RSL Sub-Branch and a Sub-Warden of the State War Memorial. Allan was awarded the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to the community on 26 January 2018.

January Lunch Details – Anzac House **Monday 16 January 2023**, cost \$40 per person, raffle \$5 ticket. 1200h for 1230 h. Given the season, a tie free lunch. (Anzac House are opening specially for us). The link for the Booking Form is: <https://forms.gle/7qiByxuMdPsaoMgC6>

The link for the Response Sheet (VIEW only) is: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1P6igBA-LuX9d6ciKkj_Yy7ibTxhsYS6wQmTPcrHGG9c/edit?usp=sharing



Members celebrating in January include Chris Chapple, Barry Greville, Ken Ashman, Alan Shephard, Kevin Campbell, Leon Griffiths, Annette Newell, Phil Sumner, Frank LeFaucheur, John Stephens, Frank Taylor, Annette Buddrige, Tom Arnautovic, Stephen Sinclair, Barry Eather, Rod Willox, Jamie Holloway, Peter Bevilacqua, Don Blair, Trevor Boag.

What's Happening

Monday 16 January 23 – Tony Howes interviews Allan Downs

Although the Anzac Club is closed throughout January, they will cater functions and our lunch will still be at the Anzac Club.

Monday 20 February 23- Ian McMillan COO Austal Ships

Monday 20 March 23 - Professor Dr Alexandra Ludewig, Head of School of Humanities UWA

Tuesday 25 April – Anzac Day Gunfire Breakfast, Weld Club, speaker CDRE Brett Dowsing, Warden of the SWM.

Monday 15 May 23 - Dr Karen Filbee-Dexter; Marine Ecologist, School of Biological Sciences, UWA

Monday 19 June 23 - Consul-General of India

Monday 17 July 23 - Hon Mia Davies MLA, WA Leader of the Opposition.

Lunch booking links will be advised to members as soon as possible after the preceding month's lunch.

Welcome new Affiliate member Harvey Pearce, introduced to Highgate by Jeremy Buxton, and RSLWA Honorary Member Kerry Sanderson AC, former Governor of Western Australia, who has transferred to us from Central Branch.

ATTENTION NAVAL HISTORY BUFFS

Naval construction is a highly technical subject. Jeremy Buxton advises that his cousin Ian Buxton MBE has another book published on this subject.

<https://navalinstitute.com.au/diary-of-a-wartime-naval-constructor/>

This article by the Aust Naval Institute could be of interest to some members who are naval history buffs. Ian is a retired Reader in Naval Architecture at Newcastle-on-Tyne University. He has made several trips to Australia.

Kind regards,
Jeremy



Appointment of new DVA Secretary

The Prime Minister has announced the appointment of Ms Alison Frame as the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Ms Frame comes from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet where she has been in the role of Deputy Secretary, Social Policy. She has been a senior public servant for both the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments in a range of complex service delivery and policy roles. Ms Frame brings significant experience working with stakeholders and leading staff to deliver positive outcomes for the community.

Ms Frame's five-year appointment will commence on 23 January 2023.

'I congratulate Alison on the appointment and look forward to working with her in this new capacity,' Mr Albanese said.

'I also thank Ms Elizabeth Cosson AM CSC for her service as Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs since May 2018. She has been a passionate advocate for improving services for veterans and their families.'

A changeover to a new Secretary in January 2023 will provide for continuity in the department's leadership during the finalisation of the 2023–24 Budget process, 2023 Anzac Day commemorations and the ongoing response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Humble origins of an iconic Australian weapon

“Fight, work or perish” – that was the slogan you saw all over Australia during WW2. Australia did a lot more than just providing the Allied nations with fine fighting men; she equipped her own troops and those of Britain and the USA with a great variety of weapons, supplies, tanks, some planes, torpedo bombers, gun carriers, shells, range finders as well as ships and food and clothing.



The Owen Tommy Gun, known as the Owen machine carbine, was an Australian submachine gun invented and designed in 1938 by 27-year-old Evelyn Ernest (Evo) Owen, a mortar-mixer from Wollongong. The Owen was the only entirely Australian-designed and constructed service submachine gun of World War II – particularly effective under tough conditions – and was used by the Australian Army from 1942 until 1971.

Seemingly born with an innate understanding of all things mechanical, Evelyn or ‘Evo’ as his mates called him, had a complete grasp of the combustion engine by the age of eight. Apparently, despite considerable efforts of his worried parents to garner interest in less dangerous hobbies, a young Evelyn continued to be enthralled with all aspects of firearms and experimented with them recklessly; including making them and firing them.

From a young age, he would be found tinkering with old broken shotguns and rifles turning out new parts to replace the broken ones. When older, on one occasion he shot himself in the stomach while trying out a new kind of bolt in an old rifle.

It was in his teens that his interests turned to sub-machine guns and having taken time to learn metal and lathe work, he began making his own prototypes. The weapon that would eventually bear his name, the Owen sub-machine gun, came into being in 1931, but he did not perfect it until 1938. While he worked on the prototype for his famous Owen Gun at Brewster’s Garage at Albion Park, where he turned parts for the gun on the garage lathe, Evo Owen lived in a hut at the foot of Macquarie Pass.



The prototype combined the stock and barrel from a .22 calibre civilian rifle with a 44-round revolver-style magazine fashioned from car parts and gramophone bits with a crude trigger – a thumb press atop the stock.

Owen’s working .22” calibre model, adaptable to a larger bore for military use, was eventually brought to the attention of the Australian Army in early 1939 with a view to the Army developing his ideas of a new machine gun – it could be manufactured for £12 compared to £50 for the British Thompson Gun.

The gun evolved through a number of designs of differing calibres – .38”, .32”, .45”, each with its own problems, until comparative performance testing of the Owen in its 9mm calibre variant alongside its British Sten and US Thompson SMGs was conducted by the Australian Army. After harsh trials in multiple environments involving sand, mud and water and endurance testing, the Owen was the only weapon that remained serviceable as a purpose-built jungle fighting arm, perfect for close quarters combat in the tropical environment while its rate of fire and reliable 32-round magazine made it a formidable weapon.



Owen SMG production during the war rose to around 50,000, primarily for jungle use, at a price of \$30 per gun; Serving with distinction to the end of World War II, it was taken out of production in 1945.

Having received only about £10,000 in royalties and proceeds from the sale of his patent rights, Evo Owen got little recognition and a large portion of the money he made for his invention was taxed.

A heavy drinker, he started a small sawmill at Tongarra, near Wollongong, and lived there unmarried and alone until his death in 1949 just short of his 34th birthday.

The Owen continued to prove its worth and remained in Australian service for many years – soldiers in New Guinea preferred them to similar weapons, and Australians later used them in the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War – with the Australian infantry often referring to it as the “Digger’s Darling.”

Courtesy VeteranWeb

JANUARY IN MILITARY HISTORY (Courtesy of the AWM)

1 January 1969 Vietnam Australian military commitment to Vietnam reaches a peak of 8,300 service personnel.

2 January 1943 Buna Government Station captured. The Japanese withdrawal from the Kokoda trail enabled the allies to plan the encirclement of important Japanese positions in the Buna, Sanananda and Gona beachhead. Buna was the second of the three to fall to the allies after weeks of heavy fighting.

8 January 1958 Last Australian servicemen return from Korea. At the end of hostilities in Korea the peninsula remained divided between North and South. The war has yet to officially end.

11 January 1973 Cessation of hostilities in Vietnam by Australian forces. The proclamation by the Governor-General, Sir Paul Hasluck, ended 11 years of Australian involvement in Vietnam, the longest duration of any war in Australia's history.

12 January 1943 Beginning of allied attack on Sanananda. The Japanese withdrawal from the Kokoda Trail enabled the allies to plan the encirclement of important Japanese positions in the Buna, Sanananda and Gona beachhead. Sanananda was last of the three to fall to the allies after weeks of heavy fighting.

21 January 1941 6th Division begins its attack on Tobruk, Libya. The port city of Tobruk was a well-fortified Italian held strong point held by about 25,000 men. Tobruk surrendered the following day.

24 January 1967 First contact at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. Fighting at Bien Hoa involved a series of contacts between units of the 1st Australian Task Force and communist forces in the area of the Bien Hoa - Long Binh complex near Saigon. Australian and American units sought to dominate the area and prevent enemy rocket attacks on nearby military bases and installations.

28 January 1991 RAN Clearance Diving Team departs Perth for Kuwait. As part of Australia's commitment to the Gulf War a Royal Australian Navy Clearance Diving Team was dispatched to the Gulf for explosive ordnance demolition tasks.



JUST JOKING

I had two fingers cut off my right hand after an accident at work. I asked my doctor if I would still be able to write with the hand despite the injury and she said: “maybe, but I wouldn’t count on it.”

My mother was cleaning out the liquor cabinet and offered me a bottle of vodka she’d had for ages. I declined knowing that it was 70% water from me stealing it when I was 16.