



SITREP

RSL Hornsby (Sub-Branch)

Supporting veterans in the Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai area



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President's Message

Hi Everyone,

I hope this Newsletter finds you all safe and well. Free from any significant COVID restrictions, Remembrance Day this year was strongly supported by the local community. Even though it was a work day, several hundred community members including representatives from our local schools, scouts and sporting organisations attended the commemoration. Great to see the ongoing support from our local community.



After the service, a quiet get together was hosted by the Hornsby RSL sub-Branch and the Hornsby RSL Club.

A special thank you to the sub-Branch Committee for their hard work in organising the Remembrance Day service and the great effort in raising just over \$8,600 through our fund-raising activities.

Our next Coffee & Chat meeting will be held in January 2023. The exact date has yet to be confirmed.

The Hornsby RSL sub-Branch in conjunction with the Veterans Well Being Centre-Hornsby will be conducting Youth Mental Health First Aid courses in the new year. The venue will be the Anzac War Memorial Hyde Park and Thomas Pulliene will be our instructor. Thomas has instructed on many of our previous Mental Health First Aid courses and is now qualified to instruct on Youth mental health courses.

The Veterans Well Being Centre-Hornsby is currently applying for two Department of Veterans Affairs grants. The first grant application is to fund a documentary on tank crews in Vietnam and the important role they played in the Vietnam War. The second application is to fund a documentary recording the mental and health effects on military personnel who served in conflicts from Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and peacekeeping missions.

Our transitioning videos have proven to be successful with hundreds of hits on our web site.

We have received a grant of \$10,000 from the Department of Veterans Affairs (NSW) to repair the Hornsby War Memorial. It is hoped that the repairs will be completed by 23 April 2023, the centenary of the War Memorial. A re-dedication of the memorial is planned to commemorate this anniversary.

I would close by taking this opportunity to wish you all a safe and merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Once again, all the best and keep safe.

Regards

George Main

Welcome

Since the September edition of SITREP, the sub-Branch has welcomed five new members:

- Alexander Burnett. Alexander commenced at the Royal Military College in July of this year.
- Paul Johnston. Paul is an affiliate member.
- Richard (Dick) Tucker. Dick has transferred from Castle Hill sub-Branch. He served in the Army until retiring in 1986.
- Jayath Gunawardena. Jayath is a RAAF student at the Australian Defence Force Academy.
- Graeme Holm. Graeme served with the RAAF for over 20 years, retiring in mid-1979.

Vale

We acknowledge the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Her Majesty served in the British Army during World War II and, as Colonel in Chief for a number of Australian Army Corps, had links to members of our sub-Branch and the wider veteran community across the Commonwealth. Her Majesty passed away on 8 September 2022.

Lest We Forget.

News and Activities

Issues and Activities.

Remembrance Day

As George has noted in his President's Message, Remembrance Day was strongly supported by the local community. The following are a few photos taken during the event courtesy of the Hornsby Shire Council Facebook page.



Remembrance Day Fund Raising

Also as George mentioned, fund raising activities in the leadup to Remembrance Day generated \$8,603.84 in total sales. A special thank you to all who contributed to this significant achievement.

50 Years of RSL Service

Congratulations to Michael Askey and Ian Wilson for their 50 years of service to the RSL. These milestones were recognised at our meeting in September when both members were presented with 50 Year Certificates. There are now 14 members of the sub-Branch with 50 or more years of service in the RSL.



Welfare Notes

Lifeline support to Veterans

The Gordon branch of Lifeline now provides a service especially designed to assist Veterans and their families in need. "Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service". The Lifeline office is located at 4 Park Avenue Gordon. Call 9498 8805 during business hours or if you are experiencing a personal crisis call 13 11 14.

Veteran Catalogue

At the recent RSL NSW State Congress, RSL National released a new webpage which provides a catalogue of support services available to veterans and their families. This a great new tool which can be found at <https://servulink.app/>. The link has also been added to our website home page. Using an interactive map, the tool enables the user to tailor his/her search to one or more of the following areas:

- Transition from the military;
- Family support;
- Physical health;
- Mental health;
- Social and Community support;
- Volunteering;
- Education and Training;
- Employment;
- Financial Support and Planning;
- Accommodation;

- Concessions and discounts; and
- Advocacy, claims and legal.

It is well worth a look!

Upcoming Dates

At time of printing, our calendar for 2023 has not been finalised. However, once available, it will be distributed to members as well as being uploaded to our webpage.

Readers are reminded that January is a standdown month.

Heritage

Snippets from the Past.



We conclude this series on the impact of events of 80 years ago in 1942, this time looking at how the Army responded to the changed circumstances of Australia at war in 1942. This section is a bit longer than normal but, in many respects, it is the story of two armies.

The Army's battles in Malaya, Papua at Kokoda, Milne Bay and later at Buna and Gona together with the battles in North Africa are well documented elsewhere. Rather, this short piece focuses on how the Army

responded to the changing strategic situation when Japan entered the war in December 1941.

At the end of 1941, the majority of the second AIF were still in the Middle East. The 6th Division was rebuilding after its losses in Greece and Crete, the 7th Division was undertaking garrison duties in Syria and the 9th Division was also rebuilding after the siege of Tobruk. The 8th Division was the only formation located in south east Asia, split between Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. A fifth AIF formation, 1st Armoured Division was in Australia being prepared for service in North Africa.

Japan's entry into the war caused a dramatic relocation of the AIF formations, made more urgent by the loss of the 8th Division when Singapore surrendered on 15 February. The 8th was never reconstituted in Australia after its loss in the early months of 1942.

The 6th Division was the first to return with one of its brigades arriving in Fremantle on 10 March. However, its other two brigades were diverted to defend Ceylon from the Japanese. They remained there from mid-March until July 1942. Several 6th Division brigades fought in New Guinea in 1942 and 1943 with other formations and as the division operated as a whole from late 1944.

The international machinations around the repatriation of the 7th Division are well known. Churchill sought to have the 7th diverted to Rangoon to help defend Burma and had arranged with the US to have two American Army divisions sent to Australia in lieu. However, Prime Minister Curtin insisted that the division be returned to Australia and the bulk of the formation arrived back in Australia in mid-March. A small detachment was diverted to Java and these were quickly overwhelmed during the Japanese advance through the Dutch East Indies. It was the brigades of the 7th Division together with the Militia battalions which turned the tide against the Japanese on the Kokoda Track and at Milne Bay.



November 1942. Australian troops of the 7th Division, AIF, cross a stream during their advance towards the Japanese occupying Buna.

It is also well known that the 9th Division remained in North Africa for most of 1942 culminating in its participation in the second Battle of El Alamein in October 1942. It was withdrawn from the North African battles in December but did not reach Australia until April 1943. The 9th deployed to New Guinea in mid-1943.

The planned overseas movement of 1st Armoured Division was cancelled in early 1942 and it spent most of 1942 in northern NSW before moving to Western Australia in early 1943. The division was disbanded in September 1943 while its brigades survived until 1944 when they too were disbanded. However, several of its units did serve in different areas of PNG.

The second part of the Army was the CMF or Militia. Over the course of 1942, this force grew, was reorganised, tweaked and reorganised again, reacting to the perception of the Japanese threat. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Divisions were infantry formations with a lineage back to the First AIF and had been retained in some form during the interwar years. They were mobilised following the outbreak of war in 1939 and employed on garrison duties across Australia. The 5th Division, also a former First AIF formation was re-established in early 1942. A reorganisation of the Army command saw the raising of the 10th Division in the Newcastle area and 11th Division was established at the end of 1942 by renaming the existing Milne Force. The 3rd and 5th Divisions would ultimately serve in New Guinea as complete formations.



Members of 3rd Tank Battalion training at Goulburn July 1942

The perception of threat to the Australian mainland also saw the rapid establishment of Armoured and mechanised formations. The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Divisions became Motorised Divisions and then the 3rd and 2nd Armoured Divisions by late 1942; the title of the 1st Armoured Division being previously given to the AIF formation raised in 1941. In addition, several independent tank brigades were raised to provide armoured support to infantry formations.

It is a further indication of the perceived threat that conscription was introduced without opposition. 25 years earlier and 25 years later, conscription was an incredibly divisive issue in the community but in mid-1942, it was accepted without any significant opposition. In reality, a conscription scheme had been introduced at the outbreak of war in 1939 when all unmarried men aged 21 were to be called up for three months' military training with the Militia. The Militia could only serve in Australia and its territories which, in 1942, included Papua and New Guinea. But in mid-1942, the Curtin government required all men aged 18–35 and single men aged 35–45 to join the Militia. In November 1942, Curtin overcame opposition within the Labor Party and extended the geographic boundaries to include most of the South West Pacific.

With such a rapid expansion, equipping the new formations was a challenge and the shortage of suitable tanks for the armoured formations was the most significant. The universal carrier (also known as the Bren Gun carrier) was the only armoured vehicle available in the early months of 1942. Australia attempted to develop its own tank, the Australian Cruiser Tank Mark 1 (AC1) "Sentinel", in 1941-43 but other tanks from the US and UK became available in 1942, so the 65 Sentinels produced by June 1943 went into storage. The tank's only regimental use was as mocked up German armour for the filming of the movie "The Rats of Tobruk". American Stuart and Grant tanks provided the bulk of armour for the Australian formations but by mid-1942, British Matilda II tanks also started to arrive. The experience of the Stuarts at Buna meant that the more heavily armoured Matildas were used against the Japanese in future operations.



Buna January 1943

During my service in the Army, there was a saying that the Navy and Air Force man the equipment whereas the Army equips the man. The genesis of this saying may well have been 1942 because ultimately, it was manpower shortages rather than equipment which led to further restructuring in 1943. By August 1942, the strength of the army was around 476,000. In addition, there were around 100,000 members of the Volunteer Defence Corps, a part-time force similar to the British Home Guard. This level of manpower in uniform was unsustainable given Australia's relatively small population. By the end of 1942, allied successes in PNG and Guadalcanal meant that the threat of a Japanese invasion subsided and throughout 1943, armoured formations were gradually disbanded to free up manpower for other tasks needed to support offensive operations in the jungles of PNG and further afield.

Embarrassing Memories

Don Huxtable's 31 mission

As a follow-on from September's SITREP, Tony Mills relates the story of one of our late members, Don Huxtable who served with the RAAF in Europe during World War 2. Don was a pilot of a heavy bomber who successfully completed a tour of 30 missions. Given the attrition of aircrew, this was no mean feat and Don, apparently in a fit of exuberance at the end of his 30th mission, chose to buzz the tower of his airstrip prior to landing. This was not appreciated by his squadron's senior officers who decreed that Don must fly one extra mission as a penalty. Fortunately for Don, he also survived that mission as well. What is not known is whether his crew who may have achieved the same milestone also had to undergo the same punishment. Hopefully not!

Guarding the Coast

This vignette speaks to Australia's general level of unpreparedness to counter a perceived Japanese incursion in 1942. My father served in the Army during World War 2 as a member of the Armoured Corps. From 1942 until it was disbanded in March 1944, he was a member of 3 Tank Battalion. The unit was initially equipped with Bren Carriers before being re-equipped with Matilda II tanks in the second half of 1942. Probably around early June 1942 in response to the midget submarine raid on Sydney, the Battalion was deployed to screen the south coast of NSW. At that time, the Battalion was still equipped with the Bren Gun carriers and Dad related that his carrier was sent to the Pambula/Merimbula area. The machine gun on his carrier did not work and he didn't say if his carrier was fitted with a radio. In the unlikely situation that the Japanese had made an appearance on the south coast, I don't anticipate Dad and his carrier would have provided much opposition but hopefully, he kept a few pennies to use a public phone!

Editor's Note

As always, any feedback is appreciated. Please take care and thanks for reading.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
Phil