



SITREP



RSL Hornsby (Sub-Branch)

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



Email: info@hornsbyrslsubbranch.com

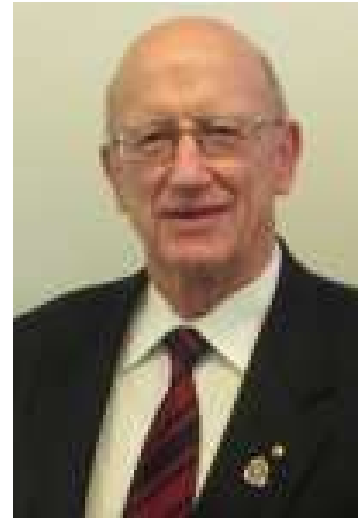
Website: www.hornsbyrslsubbranch.com.au

President's Message

Hi Everyone,

We have just had our second most important community commemoration for the year, with Remembrance Day on 11 November 2025. Attendance was probably more than 300; with good representation from secondary schools, in particular.

The Remembrance Day address was delivered by Ms Elizabeth Amvrazis, Principal of Asquith Girls High; in keeping with inviting different community leaders to address us at Remembrance Day. Her address was inspiring, especially coming from a migrant background from an allied nation. She provided cause for reflection on being Australian and remembering those who have served us as a nation and those who continue to do so.



We are also most thankful to the Hornsby RSL Club for their support in providing refreshments, both food and drinks, after the commemoration service.

As you pass by the Flame Room at the front of the War Memorial Hall, have a look at the new plaque remembering and naming the various conflicts in which Australian service men and women have served in more recent times. The plaque was funded by a grant from the NSW Office for Veterans Affairs; thank you to George Main and all those who worked hard to secure that grant. The new plaque was in place just in time for Remembrance Day.

Before we leave Remembrance Day, we give hearty thanks for all those who assisted in Remembrance Day fund-raising; the Auxiliary in the Club foyer, collectors at railway stations and shopping centres, Hornsby Heights Pharmacy and our Australia India Cenotaph Committee friends. Special thanks to John and Dulcie Zeller for their excellent work in preparing for and organising the very successful fund-raising effort; many empty trays and a much fuller Fund-raising account.

The State Member for Wahroonga, whose electorate covers much of Ku-ring-gai and some of Hornsby, has set up an ANZAC Day Advisory Committee, aimed at providing better co-ordination, support and visibility of ANZAC Day commemorations across the electorate. I am representing RSL Hornsby in that forum. There will be more information closer to ANZAC Day.

Unseen to most of our members, we have a steady stream of requests for support and contacts from veterans and their families. Thank you to Vice President George Main and Phil (#3) Loomes for the time and effort helping to care for veterans and their families.

As the year draws to a close, we are looking forward to our last General Meeting and our Veterans' Christmas Lunch on Sunday 7 December 2025. We want to see as many of our members as can possibly attend on that occasion. The Christmas lunch is open to all veterans, not just RSL members. Please invite your veteran mates to join us; they can each bring a partner/friend (as can members). This is a great opportunity to introduce veterans in our area to our local veteran community.

Our March AGM (2026) is the election AGM for the Sub-Branch Executive and Committee for the next three years. We already have vacancies in the Committee and Executive, and a number of the existing team will be retiring in March. We welcome early interest from those who can contribute to the leadership and administration of our veteran community. If you want to discuss how you might become involved, please call me (0418 307 219) or other members of the Sub-Branch Executive.

I wish you all a happy and blessed Christmas and a great New Year.

Best Regards,
Neil Turner

Welcome

Since the last edition of SITREP, the sub-Branch has welcomed two new members:

- Darren Gibbs. Darren served for six years in the Royal Australian Navy.
- Christine Matejka. Christine served for over 30 years in the Australian Army.

Vale

It is with sincere regret that we must acknowledge the passing of Alan Vale, Harold Taplin, Marsden Hordern, Graeme Swalwell and Jeffrey Botton-James.

Alan was born on 25 August 1937. He completed his National Service in the late 1950s serving with 16 Inf Bn and 1 RWAR. Regrettably, the sub-Branch has only recently learnt that Alan passed away on 8 January 2025.

Harold was born on 27 May 1930. He served in 5 Fd Regt in the 1950s. Harold passed away on 27 August 2025.

Marsden was born on 26 March 1922. He served in both the Army and Navy during World War 2 and had also attempted to join the RAAF at the age of 17 but his mother refused to sign his enlistment papers. Until his passing on 17 October 2025, he was the oldest of our centenarians.

Graeme was born on 23 July 1935. He completed his National Service in the 1950s serving with 2 Div Signals. Graeme passed away on 18 October 2025

Jeffrey was born on 27 November 1946. He served in the Australian Army Aviation Corps for 25 years including service in Vietnam. Jeffery passed away on 26 October 2025.



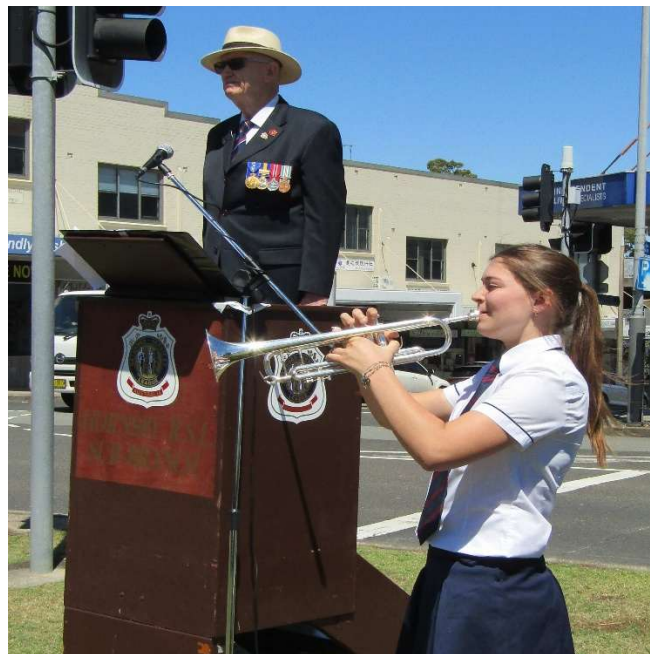
News and Activities

Issues and Activities.

Remembrance Day

The sub-Branch held its regular Remembrance Day commemoration at the Hornsby Cenotaph. As previously noted, the address was given by the Principal of Asquith Girls' High School, Elizabeth Amvrazis, and Barker College provided the Catafalque Party. Many thanks to those who helped bring this event to fruition.

The following are a few photos taken on the day by Phil Loomes. Many thanks.





Poppy appeal results

Fundraising in the lead-up to Remembrance Day, the Auxiliary raffles and the Poppy Appeal has added almost \$8,000, after deductions for costs, to the funds raised in 2025. This is in addition to \$6,700 raised in the leadup to ANZAC Day.

In the year to date the sub-Branch has donated \$5,000 to RSL Life Care Veteran Services and a further donation in support of veterans will be made following the December Committee meeting.

As Neil has stated in his message, thank you very much to all who have assisted in this impressive fund-raising effort in 2025.

RSL NSW State Congress and AGM

The RSL NSW Congress and Annual General Meeting took place at the Tamworth Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre from 24–26 October 2025, with Phil White attending as the Hornsby sub-Branch delegate. Attendance appeared lower than in 2024, with a very limited representation from the NMDC.

Unlike previous years, recordings of each day's proceedings are not available, but copies of the presentation slides can be found at <https://rslnsw.powerappsportals.com/resource-centre-list/?mf=10%3D2>

The opening day included ceremonial proceedings, addresses from key officials, and the introduction of Vince Williams as Acting President following Mick Bainbridge's resignation. Day Two featured presentations from senior representatives of DVA, the Defence and Veteran Services Commission, ANZAC House staff, and RSL LifeCare. The content of these presentations was reasonably predictable but the DVA presentation was more positive than previous years. The day concluded with strategic planning sessions supported by AI, helping to shape the 2026–2031 strategic plan.

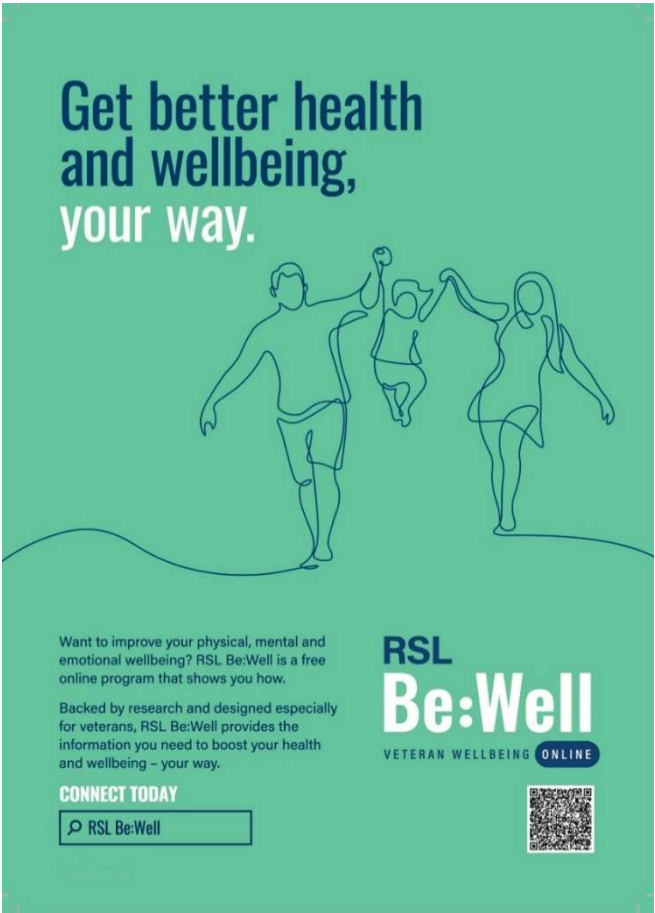
The third day consisted of a Q&A session with Board members followed by the formal AGM. 23 motions were tabled. Of these, three were withdrawn, seven ordinary motions were successful and three were not carried; six constitutional amendments, requiring a two thirds majority, were passed and four were unsuccessful. The delegate adjusted Hornsby's votes on two motions to reflect concerns about conflicts of interest and to support stronger behavioural standards, aligning with the Congress's emphasis on rebuilding integrity after recent challenges. The next RSL NSW Congress and AGM is scheduled to be held again in Tamworth in 2026.

Welfare Notes

George Main suggests that this new RSL program may be of assistance to some members.

This is an online program designed specifically for veterans. It covers the latest health information for veterans' physical, mental and emotional health.

It can be found at <https://rslnsw.org.au/find-help/online-learning/rsl-bewell/>

A green poster for the RSL Be:Well program. At the top, the text 'Get better health and wellbeing, your way.' is written in white. Below this is a line drawing of a man, a woman, and a child holding hands. In the bottom left, there is a block of text: 'Want to improve your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing? RSL Be:Well is a free online program that shows you how. Backed by research and designed especially for veterans, RSL Be:Well provides the information you need to boost your health and wellbeing – your way.' Below this text is a button that says 'CONNECT TODAY' and a search bar with 'RSL Be:Well' inside. In the bottom right, the text 'RSL Be:Well' is prominently displayed, with 'VETERAN WELLBEING ONLINE' underneath it, and a QR code to the right.

Upcoming Dates

The 2026 calendar is currently being prepared and will be distributed to members shortly. However, readers should note that January is a stand down month and normal sub-Branch activities will resume in February 2026

Snippets from the Past - Australian Military Operations in Borneo, 1945

This edition concludes our focus on the campaigns of 1945 to mark the 80th anniversary since the end of World War Two.

Unlike the other three campaigns, this operation went beyond clearing Japanese forces from Australia territory. The campaign sought to recapture British territory lost to the Japanese in 1942. In common with the other 1945 campaigns, Borneo was also criticised as unnecessary, but in the context of a war that was expected to last well into 1946, Borneo held significant strategic importance due to its rich oil resources and its position along key maritime routes. Therefore, operations in Borneo had merit, securing resources and territory that could support future operations against Japan.

From May until July, Australian forces undertook a series of major amphibious operations in Borneo as part of the Allied effort to liberate the island from Japanese occupation. These campaigns, collectively known as the Operation Oboe, were among the last large-scale operations of the war in the Pacific and represented Australia's most extensive and complex amphibious assaults of the conflict.

The Japanese had occupied the island since 1942, exploiting its resources and establishing strong defensive positions. By early 1945, the Japanese garrison on Borneo numbered about 35,000 to 40,000 troops, including elements of the 37th Army and various naval, air, and support units. Many of these forces were dispersed across the island in isolated areas with limited supply and communication lines.

The Oboe campaign, was conducted by the Australian I Corps, supported by Australian and American naval and air forces. The original plan was divided into six phases but three of these were deleted or overtaken by events. As executed, Oboe was divided into three phases:

- **Oboe One – Tarakan (1 May 1945).** The 26th Brigade of the 9th Australian Division landed on Tarakan Island off the north-east coast. Despite heavy Japanese resistance and swampy terrain, the Australians captured the island after six weeks of fierce fighting. However, extensive damage limited the immediate use of its airfield. Among those killed was Lieutenant Tom Derrick VC, DCM, one of Australia's most decorated soldiers, who was mortally wounded on 23 May 1945.



- **Oboe Six – Brunei Bay (10 June 1945).** The 9th Division launched another amphibious landing at Brunei Bay, capturing the area with relatively light casualties. The operation secured important oilfields at Seria and Miri, while

subsequent advances into North Borneo (Sabah) eliminated remaining Japanese pockets of resistance.

- **Oboe Two – Balikpapan (1 July 1945).** The largest and final operation involved the 7th Australian Division landing on Borneo's east coast. Supported by intense naval and air bombardment, the Australians overcame strong resistance to seize Balikpapan and its oil facilities after nearly three weeks of fighting.



Landing troops of the 7th Australian Division, AIF, at Balikpapan, July 1945. Picture: Australian War Memorial. Source: News Limited

By the war's end in August 1945, Australian forces had liberated much of Borneo, restored vital infrastructure and assisted in repatriating prisoners of war and internees. Across all three operations, Australian casualties totalled around 600 killed and 1,600 wounded, while Japanese losses were far higher. For acts of outstanding bravery during the campaign, two Victoria Crosses were awarded — Corporal John Bernard Mackey (posthumously) for his actions at Tarakan, and Private Leslie Thomas Starcevich for his courage at Beaufort in North Borneo.

The operations demonstrated Australia's growing military capability. The Borneo campaign remains a significant, if perhaps little known, chapter in Australian military history — marking both the culmination of its Pacific war effort and the valour of its troops in one of the final battles of the Second World War.

Editor's Note

After seeing AI being used at the State Congress, I decided to conduct an experiment and asked Chat GPT to write a short article on the Borneo Campaign. The results were mixed. It managed to produce a reasonable summary but had to be interrogated further to include details of the Japanese forces, casualties and bravery awards. With some encouragement, it noted that two Victoria Crosses were won, surprisingly by two brothers, Thomas Starcevich and Leslie Starcevich. John Mackey missed out. Lesson learnt - use with extreme caution!

That said, subsequent tests using other AI tools did yield some better results, but still be cautious.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your 'near and dear' ones.

Phil