



DISPATCHES

MARCH 2025 EDITION

War Veterans Village (Narrabeen) RSL Sub-Branch

Through an active membership we keep the ANZAC spirit alive and growing

Sub-Branch email: War-Veterans-VillageSB@rslnsw.org.au Phone: 8978 4266

Office hours: Monday to Friday 9.30am - 12noon

Editor: Ralph Clark Email: rlc2578@gmail.com Phone: 0418 265 529

From the President:

The major event during February was the Purple Poppy Day commemoration and our sub-Branch scored many points in terms of its efforts to participate in this event.



Initially Leigh Haines was involved in a complicated journey through the avenues of publishing in seeking permission from the various legal owners of the copyright in the children's book that it had been decided to use as the background material for our theme and this resulted in a full undertaking from the owners of the rights to permit us to use the material exactly as we had requested. Great job Leigh!

The major input to the planning came from John Sowden who put in a long and arduous number of hours to find a speaker for our gathering from the Turkish Consulate (due to the Turkish flag being permanently resident at the Simpson Memorial in company with our own Union Jack).

A part of the proceedings involved the replacement of the (well worn) Turkish flag that had been resident for two years and was looking a little shabby.

The school holidays became a barrier to inviting school children to the ceremony due to the schools being closed (for holidays) for a major part of the planning period.

In the event two schools attended and contributed much to the proceedings.

The invited speakers chose their topics carefully and expanded the scope of the basic theme "animals participating in War" into interesting and informative discourses.

Senior management of RSL Lifecare attended the gathering and this was a contributing factor that added to the tone of the proceedings.

Village Management provided all assistance requested and the arrangements finally put in place served the intended purpose well.

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The gathering ended in an afternoon tea for the official party that was well catered by the Village - the sub-Branch holds the view that the ceremony was performed at the level of dignity expected and was appreciated by those in attendance.

Subsequent to Purple Poppy Day, the *Northern Beaches Advocate* included in its reporting a full description of the proceedings that had taken place at the Village. *(This is reproduced on page 3, Ed).*

Roy Parkinson,
President



John Hill and Yoda

Dates for the diary:

Thursday March 13: Monthly meeting in the Lone Pine lounge, 9.30am.

Tuesday March 25: RSL Lifecare Veteran and Senior Expo.

Thursday April 10: Monthly meeting in the Lone Pine lounge, 9.30am.

Friday April 25: ANZAC Day.

I have been asked to remind members that our monthly meetings *commence* at 9.30am, so please try to arrive and be seated prior to that time.

Did you know?

Our monthly meeting on March 13 falls on the same day of the year on which Daisy Bates (nee Dwyer) married Edwin Harold (Breaker) Murrant in Charters Towers, QLD.

They separated after a month and never saw each other again.

Secretary's report:

The March meeting on 13th March is our Annual General Meeting, which will be followed by a normal monthly meeting – however, there are no elections this year so the AGM will be very short with the financials being presented for approval prior to forwarding to RSL NSW.



We are looking forward to Service member David Farthing speaking to us at the general meeting – he has had a most distinguished military career and has been recognized accordingly.

The quarterly Northern Beaches District Council of sub-Branches (NBDC) met in late February with our two delegates President Roy Parkinson and Vice-President Peter Cole in attendance.

It provides an opportunity to network with other sub-Branches and keeps others informed of what may be happening here at the Village.

Our sub-Branch organised a special commemoration service for “Animals in War” Day on 24 th February at the Simpson of Gallipoli Memorial.

Vice Consul Dr. Cem Gencoglu, the Education Attache at the Consulate of the Republic of Turkey and Denis Moore, representing The Friends of Gallipoli, were the guest speakers and they presented a special children’s book titled “Wear a Purple Poppy” to the students from Wheeler Heights and Narrabeen Lakes Public Schools. Senior management attended together with many residents and sub-Branch members.

The sale of pins and badges in the Gallipoli building the day before raised \$450 – thank you Fundraising Coordinator Leigh Haines, Shirley Beggs and John Hill with his service dog Yoda for this result.

You are all aware that we have a new *Dispatches* Editor, Ralph Clark. I think Ralph has done a great job with his first edition (January/February) and is keen to maintain a monthly edition – please provide copy, articles, ideas, suggestions, etc. and please pass on your comments to Ralph if you enjoyed the reading. A “pat on the back – well done” goes a long way.

Ralph has highlighted a couple of items which we have missed in recent *Dispatches* – a note from the Chaplain, Treasurer and perhaps another one or two. We’re hoping to correct this soon.

For those not at the February meeting, it was decided, after a presentation from Pamela Dodd on behalf of a sub-committee of eight affiliate members, that an Auxiliary was not something with which we would like to proceed.

We will continue with our current structure with emphasis on encouraging members to volunteer for various roles within the sub-Branch and looking in the long term to take on board some committee and executive positions. Some of the areas where help is needed are membership, outings/tours, catering (organising not doing), commemoration services, visitation/welfare, etc. Please come and talk to me if you are interested.

I look forward to receiving many offers of help!!!! – stay well and keep in touch with friends and neighbours.

John Sowden, Secretary

FROM THE TREASURER'S DESK

At the end of February our total bank deposits amounted to \$56,073, a small increase on the balances at 1st January.

One notable change is that following contact at the Annual State Congress we began discussions with the Australian Military Bank, formerly Defence Credit Union, and have now placed with them \$40,000 on Term Deposit for six months at 5.1% p.a. This should generate over \$1,000 interest when it matures in August.

Other facilities are being considered. We will continue to use the CBA to enable deposits of cash and coin.

Our 2024 Annual Accounts have been signed off by our Reviewer without qualification (a good thing). This will enable us to complete our RSL NSW obligations.

Peter Cole, Honorary Treasurer

From the Editor:

Thanks to all who have contributed to this edition. You will notice that I have brought back some previous inclusions:

A message from our now-retired Chaplain Tony appears on page 4 and a Treasurer’s report on page 2. We will soon welcome the new Village Chaplain To our sub-Branch, who I hope will contribute to coming *Dispatches*. Reports on the Animals in War commemoration follow; we may have more on this theme in the next issue.

Ralph Clark, Editor

Dates from History:

Sixteen hundred years ago, around 385AD, a boy was born in Roman England. Captured as a teenager, he was taken to Ireland as a slave, but escaped and returned to his parents after six years.

Called by God, he studied and was ordained, before returning to evangelise the Irish. While there naturally are few accurate records from the time, one version gives date of his death as March 17, 461AD.

So on Monday we will celebrate St Patrick’s Day!



Bill the Bastard

Australia's greatest war horse was Bill the Bastard.

Bill the Bastard was a 'Waler' a hardy type of horse bred under the extreme climate and challenging working conditions of Australia. Bill was a massive 17.1 hands high, weighed approximately 730 kg and had strength and intelligence unmatched by any others of his breed. Bill showed courage, endurance and strength that became legendary. He had only one problem – he was the most cantankerous horse that had ever been encountered by the Lighthorsemen.

Bill's story starts in Sydney's Liverpool Army Camp. He was one of over 130,000 Australian horses that served in the First World War, who were never to return home.

The first contingent of the AIF left Albany, WA, on 1 November 1914 and consisted of approximately 20,000 men, including 19 veterinary officers and nearly 8,000 horses.

Bill caused trouble even before the convoy set sail and he was almost left behind. Lieutenant Michael Shanahan was also on board the ship and Bill's later relationship with Shanahan gave the horse the chance to become the hero he was meant to be.

Bill travelled to the Middle East under the watchful eye of his minder, Australian writer, poet and journalist Lieutenant A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson. The health of the horses was very good, with the loss at sea being only 3 per cent.

The first stop for the convoy was Egypt under the command of General Harry Chauvel. In February 1915, Bill was amongst thousands of horses being broken out for one of the most vital roles of the war in the Middle East.

In mid-April 1915, Chauvel informed his men that they would be sent as back-up infantry for close combat trench warfare at Gallipoli. Everyone noticed Bill along with a gritty yet always cheery Englishman John Simpson and his donkey. Later, Bill would carry the limp body of Simpson down the valley on the day Simpson was killed by a spray of shrapnel.

During October, Captain Anthony Bickworth, an exceptional English cavalryman, was ordered to mount this most difficult horse in an attempt to get a despatch through. The result was Captain Bickworth, after two kilometres, lying unconscious on the ground and Bill completing the gallop safely and delivering the mail riderless but with a bullet lodged in his flank.

During his stay in the veterinary sick bay Bill received treatment for his wounds and Major Michael Shanahan claimed a bond with Bill through sweet talk, daily walks and liquorice treats. Bill met his match when he met Shanahan from Roma in Queensland and Shanahan became the first person to ride Bill without being thrown.



Photo from the excellent Virtual War Memorial Australia website.

In August 1916, Shanahan persuaded Paterson to let him take Bill into the pivotal Battle of Romani. The Australians were severely outnumbered with a force of 1,700 troopers pitched against 26,000 Turks in the turning point of the war in the Middle East. Late on the night of 3rd and 4th August, Shanahan and Bill rescued four Tasmanian troopers, who faced certain death, returning them to

safety and earning Shanahan the Distinguished Service Order. Bill had monumental stamina and powered on for six hours that night.

Later in the battle of Romani, Shanahan was shot in the leg but kept fighting until he passed out. Bill, sensing that his rider was unconscious on his back, carried Shanahan three kilometres to the vet, who then passed him on to a medic where his leg was eventually amputated.

Shanahan was now out of the war and Bill continued to serve as a packhorse, including an impressive effort at the Battle of Beersheba where he carried machine guns.

After Beersheba, as no horses were to be returned to Australia, Paterson turned a blind eye as many troopers took their mounts into the desert and shot them. Bill on the other hand, had the best possible ending. He was smuggled back to Gallipoli as part of the group of packhorses used on an artefact-gathering trip. It was made clear that Bill was only to be used as a packhorse and stud, never to be ridden.

Shanahan's association with Bill the Bastard caused him to become a permanent part of the Anzac legend. Bill the Bastard has been immortalised in Harden-Murrumburrah by a life size model depicting the epic feat of Bill the Bastard and Major Michael Shanahan saving four Tasmanian troopers during the Battle of Romani.



Edited by Leigh Haines.

My thanks to Leigh for this interesting article and for the work he did for Purple Poppy Day. His very professional media releases gained us valuable PR in the Village and community at large - Ed.

Purple Poppy Day, 24th February 2025 *(From the Northern Beaches Advocate 25.2.2025)*

A commemoration was also hosted ... by the War Veterans' Village (Narrabeen) RSL sub-Branch at the Simpson Memorial at RSL Anzac Village, Colooli Road, Narrabeen. The service was attended by Vice-Consul (Education) Dr Cem Gencoglu, Consulate -General of the Republic of Türkiye, and Lieutenant Colonel Denis Moore (retired) of Friends of Gallipoli. *(Centre L-R below with school pupils).*



During the ceremony, the flag of the Republic of Türkiye was presented to the War Veterans Village by Dr Gencoglu and raised alongside the Australian National flag at the Simpson Memorial to demonstrate the friendship between Türkiye and Australia.

The War Vets RSL sub-Branch made a presentation of books titled 'Wear a Purple Poppy' to student representatives of each of Wheeler Heights Public and Narrabeen Lakes Public Schools.

National Day for War Animals, affectionately known as Purple Poppy Day, is held on 24 February each year. For more information, visit the [Australian War Memorial website](#).

To all animals in war, who had no choice.

Lest we forget.

Images: Northern Beaches Advocate, RSL LifeCare



Chaplain's message - The War Vets Chapel

The War Vets Chapel is at its heart a military and memorial chapel. Courage, Endurance, Mateship and Sacrifice.

At the Entrance at the front of our Chapel in granite tiles are the words 'War Vets Chapel' which is surrounded in cobbles. This is reminiscent of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Westminster Cathedral in London. The cobblestones here represent more than 100, 000 Australians who have given their lives in service to their country. Lest we Forget

The Bell Tower is reminiscent of the French town of St Mere Eglise where a wounded paratrooper John Steele hung on D Day on the church tower limply for 2 hours pretending to be dead before the Germans took him prisoner and later, he escaped, surviving the war.

The bell tower at the War Vets Chapel chimes, in remembrance of those who have served, daily at 11am.

The Sword of Sacrifice which is fixed onto the Belltower was first designed in 1918 and is present in all Commonwealth War Cemeteries, a bronze longsword affixed to a cross. The Cross of Sacrifice is a symbol of the Christian faith and the self-sacrifice of the men and women who have given their lives in service to their country.

The Stained-Glass Windows represent various theatres of War and have many precious symbols, delightedly lifted and preserved from the original Chapel which was opened in 1976.

The Plaques are from various battalions, and platoons of army, navy and air force, including a plaque that has on it a crucifix found in the ruins of the church at Le Hamel in France.

The Crosses: With the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan in 2014 the military bases were dismantled and included in the dismantling was The Ghan Chapel at Tarin Kowt. With the assistance of Major Micheal Koen, the War Vets Chapel was given the external cross of the Ghan Chapel. It is now displayed proudly at the altar of the War Vets Chapel and was placed there at the official opening of the Chapel in 2015.

The Memorial Wall Stone: A slither of the Memorial Wall in Camp Holland, Multi-National Base- Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan, Afghanistan. The Memorial Wall honours 114 ISAF military personnel killed between 2002 and 2013 from Australia, France, The Netherlands and United States of America, and stood until just before Camp Holland closed in December 2013. The wall bore the inscription:

"To our Brothers and Sisters in arms,
Thanks for all the Memories,
Laughs, blood, tears and sweat.
You will always be in our thoughts and remain in our hearts."

It has been a pleasure serving with you all, a short time in the sub-Branch but 16 years in the Village. In that time my love and respect for veterans has deepened, you are part of my heart now. I will continue to serve our veteran community in voluntary ways in some capacity. *Chaplain Tony*

Lest We Forget.

(Note: Most of this information is from a leaflet titled War Vets Chapel, available in our Chapel)