



# DISPATCHES

War Veterans Village (Narrabeen) RSL sub-Branch Newsletter

December 2025

## Wartime Christmases



In this issue:

- ◆ Tributes to recently-passed members
- ◆ Christmas in time of War
- ◆ Reports



Address label

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# DISPATCHES

War Veterans Village  
(Narrabeen) RSL sub-  
Branch Newsletter

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*Dispatches* is published monthly by the War Veterans Village RSL sub-Branch.

Opinions expressed are those of the individual authors and not necessarily those of the sub-Branch.

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

Cover: The statue 'All Together Now', located outside the bombed-out St Luke's Church in Liverpool, UK, was designed by artist Andy Edwards as a way to pay respects to the soldiers of WWI (1914-1918), honouring the famous 'Christmas Truce'. (See story page 6).

Outside of London, Liverpool was the most-bombed city in England, suffering particularly in the 'May Blitz' of 1941.

## Dates for the diary:

Thursday December 11: Monthly meeting and Christmas lunch in the Lone Pine Lounge; 11.30am for 12noon lunch.

Thursday December 25: Happy Christmas!

The first meeting for 2026 will be on February 12: 9.30am in the Lone Pine Lounge, with an interesting guest speaker.

## President's message

Remembrance Day was a great success by all. It was good to see a lot of older veterans and the young diggers taking part.

We are getting a small number of new members joining our sub-Branch.

One thing I need is all members to think about is that some of our current committee members are not seeking re-election. That means we will have vacancies for Vice-president, Secretary and Fundraising co-ordinator.

I have been working with some veterans on claims. On morning teas and a men's day out with Chaplain Keith.

Our market day on December 4 was a great success, as mentioned elsewhere in this edition of *Dispatches*.

News from the NBDC meeting which I attended on November 18: Vince Williams attended the meeting and spoke of his first weeks as NSW State President, getting protocols in place and getting to know everyone in the HQ Organisation.

New shirts can be ordered, with the price depending on quantity. More on this later.

All reports have been finalised for the State congress meeting.

*Geoff Seis, President*



## Chaplain's message

Christmas reminds us that God steps into the world not with fanfare or force, but with the quiet strength of humility. In Bethlehem, the eternal Son of God arrives as a newborn—fragile, dependent, wrapped in cloth, and placed in a manger. The story is simple, yet its meaning shakes the world: God comes near.



The shepherds, overlooked by society, become the first to hear the angel's announcement—"Good news of great joy." Their inclusion reminds us that the Savior comes for the lowly, the weary, and the ordinary. Mary, Jesus' mother, treasures very moment, teaching us to slow down and ponder the work of God in our own lives.

In Jesus, God has come to redeem, restore, and renew. Christmas calls us to receive this gift with wonder at "Immanuel" - God is with us. And because He has come, light shines in every dark place, offering hope that nothing can overcome.

Blessings,

*Keith Walker, Chaplain*

## Dec 5 was International Volunteers Day.

It is not too late for us to give a thought to just what a difference volunteers make. Here in the Village there will be a lunch on the fifteenth to thank the many people who help make the place tick. And those who keep our sub-Branch going - on the committee, selling raffle tickets, serving morning tea, and so much more.

## Secretary's Report

Our November meeting was reasonably short, attended by 40 members and all enjoyed a Committee-provided morning tea. Some were still enjoying the social get-together well after 11 o'clock.



New Service member Scott Tate was unable to attend to receive his membership badge and card which have subsequently been presented to Scott by President Geoff.

Looking forward, as this is written, we have the Village Market Day on Thursday 4th December when hopefully we will have had many home-made cakes, biscuits and slices for sale as our end of year fundraiser – it's also always an opportunity to promote the RSL sub-Branch to the rest of the Village residents and those visiting for the occasion.

2026 beckons as an exciting and challenging year. Your committee has arranged guest speakers for February and April; the AGM and elections are in March which it is planned to have over Breakfast.

We hope this will encourage members to come along and hear how your sub-Branch is going and answer the call to be involved in some small way to ensure the continuation of this organisation.

Small roles like membership, welfare, visitations, minute-taking and minutes-keeping, guest speakers, tours/trips and commemoration occasions each need someone to look after that particular small but important aspect.

Remembrance Day fundraising was again successful, mainly due to some members volunteering to support Leigh Haines as Fundraising coordinator to spend time meeting the public at external and internal pop-up sales tables. Leigh will have a report separately on this event.

Members have been slow to book for our Christmas Lunch which has been organized with a great menu and priced "to die for." Membership renewal subscriptions have been rolling in and we look forward to confirming our financial membership prior to the March 2026 AGM.

A small number of RSL 2026 Diaries have been received – members wanting one should see Secretary John with \$6 – we will have one available for each new member registered in 2026.

A notice will be on the office door indicating it will be closed from Monday 21st December till Monday 19th January – if you need to talk with someone urgently during these four weeks, please contact the Secretary whose details are on page 2 of Dispatches. *Ctd col 2:*

Your committee hopes to see you at the Christmas Lunch and wishes all members a very happy, safe and blessed Christmas period and we all look forward to another enjoyable year in 2026.

*John Sowden,*  
Secretary

## Remembrance Day Fundraising Report

The 2025 Remembrance Day fundraising campaign was generally successful and was marginally better financially than the previous year.

Transactions on the Square terminals and donations were up; cash sales were down.

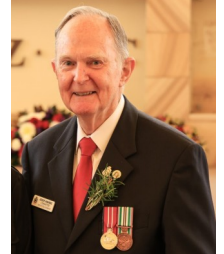
To the volunteers who gave up their time to staff the pop-up tables at Warriewood Square, Augusta Shops, Gallipoli Building, Vivian Bullwinkel Lounge and RSLLC Head Office at St Leonards, my sincere thanks for a great effort.

The numbers:

Sales and donations \$3,908.75

Gross profit \$2,504.44

*Leigh Haines,*  
Fundraising Coordinator.



## FROM THE TREASURER'S DESK

In contrast to recent months November was very busy, with payments coming in for Remembrance Day fundraising, the Xmas function and Member Administration fees for 2026.

Our result to November shows a surplus of \$59,055 but this will be affected negatively in December when our Endeavour sponsorship payment is included and the Xmas function net costs will be included.

Our table at the Village Market on December 4 produced an outstanding result; our takings amounted to \$800.

*Peter Cole,*  
Treasurer



The next edition of *Dispatches* will concentrate on the role of nurses in the Services, coinciding with the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the RAANS in February 1951.

## Lindsay (Lin) Allan DUFTY

8 May 1923 – 21 November 2025



Lindsay was born in Casino.

At the age of 19, now a woolclasser and living in Sydney, Lin volunteered in the Australian Army, enlisting at Willoughby on 5 October 1941.

He commenced training while awaiting a deployment, which turned out to be using equipment the Army was newly developing.

He was discharged on 24th June 1946 from 22 Anti Aircraft Battery.

Lindsay served in the Darwin area from 2nd February 1942 to 4th February 1943 and experienced the full Japanese attack on Darwin on 19th February 1942.

Lindsay, and school friend Stan Burrows, had been recruited into the secretive Radio Detection Finder (RDF) Unit and after two days of basic training were transferred to Darwin – the trip took ten days on troop trains, troop trucks and in cattle trucks with open slat floors and tarpaulins for the rain - and arrived in a violent storm on 1st February.

Lindsay was on the parade ground at 0955 hours on 19th February 1942 when “all hell broke loose”. There was no defence to the wave after wave of bombers and fighters attacking the city. His unit was split up and Lindsay was deployed to the 14th HAA Battery No.1 detachment of 4 X 3.7inch anti-aircraft guns on the cliffs overlooking Darwin Harbour.

The scene on the harbour was one of ships burning and sinking, with the water thick with black oil and littered with small boats, bodies and debris.

On 19th February each year Australia commemorates the Anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin. In 2011, Bombing of Darwin Day joined ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day as a National Day of Observance.

Lindsay joined the RSL in 1948, attended Chatswood sub-Branch and transferred to War Vets just prior to COVID in 2020 when he was not able to travel to Chatswood any longer for meetings. Lindsay kept himself fit through his commitment to the daily Canadian Airforce 5BX 11-minute daily exercise programme which he was proud to tell you he followed.

In 2023, Lindsay was presented with a 75-Year RSL Membership Certificate by State President Ray James and it was about that time that we as sub-Branch members enjoyed the company at a sub-Branch meeting of our three centenarian members together - Max Marvin, Arthur Johnson and Lindsay.

Lindsay has died at the great age of 102.

VALE Lindsay Dufty.

## Peter Douglas (Doug) SMYTH

21 May 1944 – 29 September 2025



We all knew the man as Doug.

Doug joined the New Zealand Army as a National Serviceman in September 1964 and soon after was recommended for officer training.

He served in the New Zealand Army Medical

Corps until 31st December 1970 and the next day was transferred to the Territorial Force where he remained, achieving the rank of Major before resigning in 1979 when he joined the Army Reserve, from which he withdrew in 1986.

Doug's involvement and unique role in the War Vets RSL sub-Branch commenced when he joined the RSL in July 2004 as a Service Member at Forestville RSL sub-Branch, while he and Carolyn were living at Beacon Hill. He took the role of Membership officer in 2008.

In 2010, The War Vets RSL sub-Branch President, George Main, advised Forestville that it was not able to elect an executive and as a result Doug transferred his membership to War Vets and took on the roles of Vice-President and Secretary.

The option for War Vets if this did not occur would have been to wind up or become a Chapter of another sub-Branch. Management of ANZAC Village considered that this was not a viable option for such a Village. We can thank Doug for the strong position in which our sub-Branch stands today.

Doug has been an integral part of our sub-Branch ever since. He initiated the Newsletter which was an important communications link with members, many of whom found it difficult to regularly attend meetings.

He later became publicity officer which expanded our activities into the wider community especially for ANZAC and Remembrance Days. He then researched and developed the sub-Branch website.

Doug was a positive person, always giving of himself. For his commitment to pursuing the aims and objectives of the RSL he was awarded Life Membership in 2021 and he was presented with an RSL Auxiliary Quilt in 2024.

VALE Doug Smyth.

## Maxwell Frank (Max) MARVIN

6 February 1924 – 2025

Max was a resident here in our Village, living in the Dardanelles, next to the Vivian Bullwinkel Lounge, a facility he visited frequently no matter what entertainment or meeting was on!



He was a much-loved member of the Dardanelles community within the larger ANZAC Village.

Max was born in Murrurundi and moved to Temora when he was 11; he was still at school when the Second World War broke out.

He had older brothers, with one in the Army and one in the Air Force so Max chose on his 17th birthday to enlist in the Navy, where he served until his discharge on 29th January 1946 from HMAS *Penguin*.

Max served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Australian Navy aboard Corvettes from 1941 till 1946.

During his five years of honourable service for his country, Max spent time based in Singapore and was involved in patrols and the evacuation of Allied personnel from Malaya, Java and Sumatra.

He was on the last Australian Naval ship, HMAS *Wollongong*, to leave Singapore before its surrender to the Japanese Imperial Army.

HMAS *Wollongong* was involved in picking up survivors from the passenger ship "Empress of Asia" after it was bombed in Singapore Harbour.

His ship was then involved in patrolling around the Australian coast. Max spent time in New Guinea and was there when Milne Bay was attacked.

He met his wife Yvonne while on leave in Sydney in 1943.

Max had achieved the grand age of 101 when he died and was active right up to the time he was admitted to Northern Beaches Hospital.

He will be missed by his many friends in the Village, particularly in the Dardanelles.

VALE Max Marvin

## Welfare Report

I've recently found that delivering *Dispatches* to our members in the Care Homes is a good way to both socialize with them and also find out how they are "travelling".

Thank you Pam Ward for taking on the role of ensuring our members in Peter Cosgrove House get their copy each month. Pam Boyle and Pam Ward came to our November meeting and took our best wishes back to Tom Hart, Ray Green and Helen Clark.

I found members in Phyllis Stewart House a little surprised to receive *Dispatches* personally delivered and able to stop for a short catch-up. I found John Connell enjoying the post-evening-meal time in the lounge. I, and I'm sure many members, are not aware of John's service record – Group Captain John Thomas Connell, MBE (awarded for service flying with "Wallaby Airlines" in Vietnam) enlisted 25th January 1950 and discharged 24th January 1987 – 37 years in the Royal Australian Air Force.

This included service in Vietnam and Malaya, while his last assignment was as Commanding Officer of 481 Squadron at Williamstown.

Andrew Jackson was as talkative as ever and always welcomes visitors. Irene Axton is still active and gets out to various events in the wider Village when she can find someone to push her wheelchair.

Harry Stenhouse is often seen in the Dugout enjoying an early morning coffee and was pleased to have a brief catch up.

Kokoda is now home to Malcolm Brodie, who misses his Birdwood/Monash home but is comfortable with being well looked after here.

David Picknell is in a room which overlooks the Gallipoli building so he was able to watch parts of the Remembrance Day service. He tells me he is planning a long cruise soon with his wife Maureen – I hope his medication enables him to imagine having a great time away from the Village!

My visit to Connie Fall was to see Lindsay Dufty who was finishing dessert for the evening meal. He said to me he would rather not be there. Sadly, but a blessing for Lindsay, he passed away on Friday 21st November at the wonderful age of 102.

*John Sowden, Secretary*

*Welfare and Visitations is currently part of the Secretary's job in our sub-Branch but is a small but most rewarding part of the bigger role. It would be encouraging if someone would take this small activity under their wing. It would also ease the load of the Secretary. President Geoff would appreciate being advised of members who are going through rough times, unwell, in hospital or rehab locations so they can be followed up each month. JS*

## **Christmas in time of War**

*We are surely all familiar with the story that gunfire from the trenches in the first World War ceased for a while at Christmas-time in 1914 and a short-lived unofficial truce. ensued.*

When WW1 broke out in the northern summer of 1914 many thought it would all be over by Christmas. Never have people been so wrong.

By Christmas hundreds of thousands had been killed in heavy fighting. The German invasion had been halted by the first Battle of the Marne in September and the 'Race to the Sea' had culminated at Ypres. A bloody stalemate ensued.

By December 1914 weeks of heavy rain had turned both the trenches and the narrow - in places less than fifty metres across - No Man's Land separating them into a cold, muddy morass. It was mid-Winter.

Details of the unofficial truce - more an impromptu and unofficial cease-fire - are still disputed. It is a matter of debate whether the opposing troops actually competed in a soccer match, despite the picture on the cover of *Dispatches*, although the story adds a nice touch and was mentioned in some letters home - strict censorship had not yet been imposed.

What is certain, however, is that along much of the thirty-mile front occupied by the British Expeditionary Force the guns fell silent. The pause was not universally observed and was certainly not authorised by the higher authorities.

In early December an attempt had been made to secure an official truce for the holidays. Pope Benedict XV had ascended to the papacy shortly after the outbreak of war; on December 7 he appealed to the leaders of Europe "that the guns may fall silent at least upon the night the angels sang." His hope was that a truce may allow the warring powers to negotiate a fair and lasting peace, but there was little interest from leaders on either side.



Soldiers at the front, however, had other ideas.

As Christmas drew nearer the rain turned to frost and a light fall of snow blanketed the ground. The German emperor William II had sent Christmas trees to his troops as a morale-booster. Two days before Christmas they were erected outside their trenches.

They sang Christmas hymns such as 'Silent Night' ('Stille Nacht'), to which the British responded with carols of their own.

Without any authorization from above, by Christmas Eve some lower-ranking British officers had begun ordering their men not to fire unless fired upon - "live and let live".

On the morning of Christmas Day, German soldiers emerged from their trenches, waving their arms to show that they had no ill intent. As it became clear that they were not carrying weapons, British soldiers soon joined them, meeting in No Man's Land to socialize and exchange gifts.

Very few Tommies spoke German, but quite a few Germans had worked in England pre-war and were fluent in English, making communication easier.



*Photo from the scrapbook of CSM Herbert Styles, 2nd Battalion The Gordon Highlanders.*

Letters sent home tell that even the men involved could hardly believe what they were experiencing - something never to be repeated as the War became ever more brutal and deadly and personal enmity towards the enemy increased.



*An artist's impression from The Illustrated London News of 9 January 1915: "British and German Soldiers Arm-in-Arm Exchanging Headgear: A Christmas Truce between Opposing Trenches".*

The following two sources are highly recommended:

- ◆ A short YouTube video from the Imperial Museum website. The address looks incorrect but will work if copied and pasted in your browser, and
- ◆ And a series of reminiscences of British soldiers who experienced the truce, from the same site. It can be viewed as a video or read as a transcript.

<https://youtu.be/NaBJhmDKmc>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/voices-of-the-first-world-war-christmas-at-war>

## Christmas in time of War

*But what about earlier Christmases? And later ones - Christmases of 1915 and those following? During the 1939-45 War? Korea? Vietnam? Afghanistan? And what was Christmas like for those at home, 'celebrating' without loved-ones?*

Christmas has long had special significance, even during wars.

1,225 years ago Charlemagne chose Christmas Eve on which to be crowned the Western Emperor of Rome. Both the second and third kings of Jerusalem while the city was in Christian hands during the Crusades were crowned on Christmas Day - Baldwin I in 1109 and Baldwin II ten years later.

Gen George Washington famously took advantage of the season at what became a turning-point in the American War of Independence in 1776 - 250 years ago next year.

He rightly reasoned that the Hessians - German troops hired by the British and stationed in Trenton, New Jersey - would be unprepared for a battle after their Christmas celebrations.

So, late on Christmas night, Washington and his troops - in boats and wading - crossed the icy Delaware River.



*The Battle of Trenton inspired this famous painting by Emanuel Leutze of Gen. George Washington crossing the Delaware River. (US Nat. Archives)*

He was right. At dawn on December 26 2,400 Continentals pushed into Trenton and did indeed surprise the enemy, who surrendered within an hour and a half.

The 1914 Christmas truce described on the opposite page was not repeated and possibly may never be.

The period between the two World Wars was far from a time of peace, seeing the Civil War in Russia (1917-22), the Irish War of Independence (1919-23), the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the Sino-Japanese War, which began in 1937, as well as various colonial conflicts.

The Second World War saw a few limited truces, such as the brief ceasefire during the Battle of the Bulge (1944), but they were very rare.

How Christmas was celebrated depended on location.



*At an airfield on the Egyptian coast, a member of No 451 Squadron RAAF puts the finishing touches to a menu board he has painted for the squadron's 1943 Christmas dinner.*

*Anzac Portal images here and in column two.*

Some Australians were in New Guinea, enduring stifling heat and humidity.

*Australian naval personnel receiving their Christmas parcels at the Australian Comforts Fund tent at the 5th Base Sub Area, eastern New Britain, 25 December 1944. AWM 078018*



Australian war correspondent Frank Hurley captured film footage while in Palestine in November 1941. He intended it to be a light-hearted Christmas story for friends and family back home. For reasons unknown, the final film edit was never finished. The short video includes narration of a letter from a father to his family; snippets of soldiers enjoying card games together; and funny footage of soldiers making pudding while singing 'Merry Christmas' to Australia.

Here is the link: <https://youtu.be/mVOT520zI3A>

Bombardier [Herbert Huie Armstrong](#) was a prisoner of war (POW) between October 1942 to May 1945. He spent 2 Christmases in captivity in Germany.

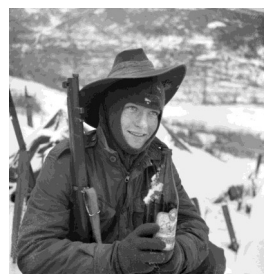
Like many serving abroad, Armstrong wrote home when he could. His letters and postcards between 1944 and 1945 share a glimpse into his time at Stalag 344 and Stalag 357 POW camps.

On 25 December 1944, Armstrong wrote a letter to his recently widowed mother, sharing his experience of Christmas that day:

*Dear Mother I hope you have had a fairly good Christmas, and that the coming year will be a happy one for you and I have great hopes that it will be for all of us ... Today has been a very nice day, the ground was frozen hard so we had a rest from walking around in a mud puddle, and the sun was shining all day so although cold it was quite nice.*

*Our Christmas parcels did not get here, although we received word that they have been sent. However we had other parcels, and quite good feeds, including a pudding made out of biscuits and fruit and stuff. The spirit in camp was very good, and it has been a good Christmas.*

In the Korean War, Australian forces were part of the United Nations forces fighting against the forces of the North.



Australian servicemen and women had to deal with the freezing temperatures of the Korean Peninsula while they celebrated the Christmas season, here with a half-frozen beer.



*A member of the 110th Signal Squadron and a local worker distribute gifts to orphans in Saigon 25 December 1969 AWM LES/69/0845/VN*

*Members of the 5th Battalion RAR share Christmas treats sent to Vietnam from Australia, December 1966. AWM COL/66/1010/VN*



*Australian soldiers from Mentoring Task Force Three (MTF3) enjoy time out for Christmas lunch at Tarin Kot, Afghanistan, 2011.*

*Picture: Corporal Raymond Vance / Defence Dept published by news.com.au 28 October 2012.*

And Wars will still be raging elsewhere in the world as we sit down to Christmas dinner.

Russia's brutal invasion of its neighbour; in strife-torn Africa. And who knows what will happen in the Middle East and elsewhere?



*A Ukrainian servicemen decorates a tree in Bakhmut.*

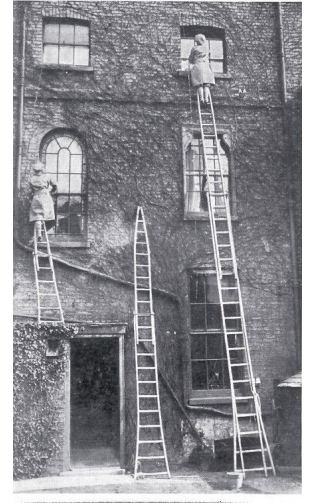
The city subsequently fell to Russian forces in what was described as the bloodiest battle since WW2.

## On the home front

No conflict has affected Australia like the First World War. It is hard to imagine a country with a population of just under five million sending over 324,000 of its best to fight overseas. And of these, nearly 60,000 died, 152,000 were wounded and 4,000 were taken prisoner.

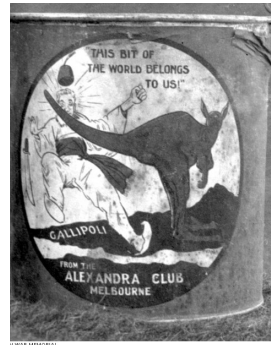
These men and women left their jobs, in manufacturing, on farms and in hospitals. Women assumed roles to which they were unaccustomed to fill the gaps. Many would value the new lifestyle; some were reluctant to relinquish it when the men came home.

*This image is from a 1914 UK magazine, The Illustrated War News and shows women cleaning windows in Cambridge. Unfortunately not a picture of Australian women, but took my fancy. Ed.*



Home life was not easy - strict rationing was in place, although nowhere near as strict as in Britain. Sugar, butter and meat were rationed using coupons and people were encouraged to grow vegetables, keep hens, and conserve food.

Shortages of wheat and meat, rising prices, and hoarding caused public anger, leading to strikes and social tension, especially in 1917.



Particularly before Christmas, many volunteers were involved in packing parcels for the troops overseas.

Prominent among these was the Alexandra Club in Melbourne, which began a project providing tin billies for citizens to fill with small gifts for troops at Gallipoli.

They held an assortment of items which the Anzacs considered luxuries: tobacco, cigarettes, matches, razor blades, knitted socks, writing paper and pencil, cake, cocoa, tea and coffee and, of course, Anzac biscuits.

Organisations such as the Australian Red Cross Society, the YMCA, the Australian Comforts Fund - even a Tanned Sheepskin Clothing Committee all played a vital part.

*The committee and members of the War Veterans Village (Narrabeen) RSL sub-Branch wish all readers a Happy Christmas and a great 2026*

