

THE FURPHY

ARMADALE SUB-BRANCH OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

February 2026 Edition



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Ph: (08) 9497 1972

email: secretary@armadalersl.com.au

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General Meetings:

Second Sunday of the month at 1100hrs

Annual General Meeting:

Second Sunday of September

Committee Positions

Armada Sub-Branch Committee	
President	Mr Mike Fairweather
Vice President	Mr Bob Giles
Secretary	Ms Carol King
Treasurer	Mrs Cheryl Cowie
Warden	Mr Graeme Cowie
Warden	Mr Keith Northcott
Membership Officer	Secretary
Committee	Mr Geoff Scott
Committee	Ms Fiona Boyle
Advocate / Welfare Officer	Mr Brent Errington
Bar Manager	Mr Mike Fairweather

ADVOCATE / WELFARE

Brent Errington “Erro” is available as follows:

At the Armadale RSL Sub-Branch:

Monday: by appointment only
Thursday: between 0900 - 1400hrs

Weekday Contact Details:

Mobile: 0407 449 150
e-mail: welfare2@armadalersl.com.au

Diary Dates for February

<i>Day</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Time</i>
Sunday	1 st	Social Committee Meeting	1100
Tuesday	3 rd	Management Committee Meeting	1100
Sunday	8 th	General Meeting	1100
Sunday	22 nd	Heartbeats Band	1230

Did You Know... In Las Vegas there are more Catholic Churches than casinos. Not surprisingly some worshipers at Sunday services will give casino chips rather than cash when the basket is passed.

Since they get chips from many different casinos, the churches have devised a method to collect the offerings.

The churches send all their collected chips to a nearby Franciscan monastery for sorting and then the chips are taken to the casinos of origin and cashed in. This is done by the chip monks.



Secretary's Notes

Hi Everyone,

I hope you all had a great Christmas and New Year.

We have a few things planned for the year and will let you know as they are getting closer.

Roast Lunches have commenced and will be held on the second Sunday of each month (General Meeting Day) at a cost of \$20. Dessert is also available for \$5.

Errol and the Heartbeats Band are returning on 22nd February. Burger and Chip lunches will be on sale between 12 noon and 2:00pm.

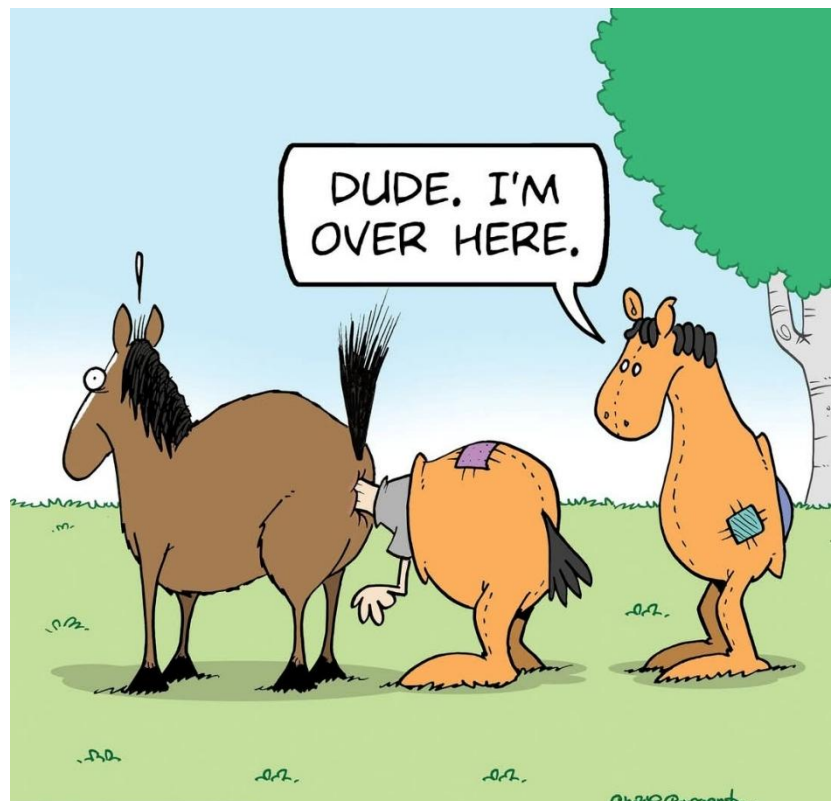
We are in the middle of planning the ANZAC events and volunteers are always required to assist with various activities including manning the Fundraising Stalls in April. Once the dates are confirmed I will place a roster sheet on the notice board.

Best regards as always,

Carol King

Sub-Branch Secretary

e-mail: secretary@armadalersl.com.au



KILTS

Balls like these don't fit in trousers.



January 1918 - An RAMC officer, attached to the 12th Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment (92nd Brigade, 31st Division), bandaging a face wound and conducting a foot inspection in a support trench in the Arleux sector, near Roclincourt.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Hi Members,

We are still awaiting advice as to when our new carpet will be arriving but will let you know when we need a hand to move everything off the carpeted area so everyone gets a chance to help out !!!

We haven't heard anything back about the Veterans Facilities Fund Grant, but it normally takes a couple of months to be assessed.

If we get this, it's possible we may have to close while some of this work is happening, but we'll do our best to have as little disruption as possible to members.

That's all from me for now,

Mike Fairweather

President

Returned Services League Armadale Sub-Branch

Ph: (08) 9497 1972. M: 0403 980 290

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e-mail: president@armadalersl.com.au

**2 men walking
down the road see
a blind dog
shagging a
cabbage, one
says...**

**Poor bugger, must
have thought it was
a collie**

ROAST PORK LUNCH

Sunday 8th February 2026

(1230 hours)

Only \$20

Pay on the day – No Bookings



Men of D Company, 2/9th Infantry Battalion, awaiting to move into action at Finisterre Ranges New Guinea during the Battle for Shaggy Ridge

Pictured left to right back row: Private H.F. Hedges; Lance Corporal E. Booth; Private W. Robertson

Front row: Corporal C. Bush and Private B. Vowles

Membership Update

As at 31st January, 2026:

Service Members:	141
Affiliate Members:	43
Social Members:	<u>96</u>
Total:	<u>280</u>

Renewals were due on 31st December, and forms are on the Notice Board.

Affiliate and Service Members are unfinancial from 31st January and may not take part in any activities which are pertinent to the running of the Sub-Branch (meetings etc.) A Renewal Form and payment must be received prior to 30th April. At that time RSL Membership will lapse, and a new Application for Membership must be submitted.

Social Members not renewed by 31st January, 2026 are deemed to be lapsed and will be removed from our records.

All Members not renewed by 31st January, 2026 will have their Loyalty Cards disabled.

RSLWA may not have advised me of Service members who have renewed on line directly through them. On that basis I strongly suggest that you keep receipts as proof that you've paid. It's unfortunate, but I may need to see that proof of payment to re-activate your Loyalty Card.

Carol King

Tel: 9497 1972

e-mail: secretary@armadalersl.com.au



February Service Members:

Caldwell	Mr	Wayne	25/02	Clark	Mr	Gregory	01/02
Finlayson	Mr	Jeffrey	24/02	Halliwell	Mr	Graham	14/02
Hepburn	Mr	Kenneth	17/02	Kang	Mr	Damon	09/02
Kostin	Mr	John	25/02	Mahoney	Mrs	Wendy	14/02
Weekes	Mr	Garry	08/02	Wood	Mr	Derek	21/02

February Affiliate Members:

Boyle	Ms	Fiona	06/02	Higham	Mr	Dale	23/02
Welch	Mrs	Margaret	20/02				

February Social Members:

Beard	Mr	Trevor	21/02	Bowe	Ms	Debbie	16/02
Bridle	Ms	Heather	11/02	Chatelain	Mr	Ken	14/02
Crocker	Mrs	Richelle	08/02	Darlington	Mr	Jim	17/02
Fowler	Mrs	Marion	22/02	Fowler	Mr	Glen	01/02
Kaur	Mrs	Amrit	24/02	Mathieson	Mr	David	27/02
McIlrath	Ms	Fiona	07/02	Rynn	Mrs	Glynes	15/02
Spencer	Miss	Victoria	14/02				

If there are any errors or anyone has been missed off the list, please advise

The Secretary (Interim Membership Officer)

These members may collect a free drink of their choice during the month

We hope you have a very special Birthday



A grave marked with a cross and a German helmet and rifle marking the final resting place of a German soldier KIA near Bastogne, 3 January 1945



An RAAF Vultee Vengeance of 24 Squadron warms up at Tsili Tsili, New Guinea, November 1943.

HEARTBEATS BAND

live at the
Armadale RSL



Sunday 22nd February – 12:30pm

Burger Lunch on Sale

From 12 noon – 2:00pm

***Get a group of friends together and join us for a great
afternoon of musical entertainment***

Free Entry



WAS THE 1ST LIGHT HORSE EVER MOUNTED ON DONKEYS?

And to prove it, take a look at the photo above, part of the Museum's collection. During General Allenby's great campaign through Palestine and the Hejaz in World War 1, horses became in very short supply because of poor feed, over work and battlefield casualties. So much so that the 1st Light Horse, part of Harry Chauvel's famous Desert Mounted Corps, formed an experimental donkey mounted Troop. Mounted on white Sudanese donkeys, they were nicknamed Allenby's white mice

Sadly, the experiment was not a success. Not because the Sudanese donkeys turned on displays of donkey stubbornness and would not co-operate. The problem was that the poor little beasts simply could not keep pace with the Troops that remained mounted on horses, and fell far behind over the long rides that were typical of the Light Horse campaign.



A tunnel rat begins his descent into a Viet Cong tunnel. Date: 1967



Morning of January 1, 1945. Gefreiter Alfred Michel's short participation in WW2 had just come to an abrupt end.

The 23 year old fighter pilot of 16./JG53 had taken to the skies that morning, in what was his first and last combat mission as part of "Operation Bodenplatte", the Luftwaffe's last offensive operation of the war.

The primary objective was to hit 16 Allied airfields and destroy as many aircraft as possible on the ground. But to reach their targets the German pilots had first to survive Allied air coverage and ground AA batteries.

When his unit (IV./JG53) engaged some US artillery and AA positions near Waldweistroff, in the Franco-German border, Gefreiter Michel's Me 109G-14 'Blue 2' was hit by .50 caliber rounds which damaged the engine, forcing him to belly-land in a nearby field.

Michel came out unhurt of the ordeal, save for a nasty bump on the head, and immediately tried to run across the field to some nearby woods. A section of "D" Battery, 455th AAA, overlooking the crash scene fired two 40 mm rounds ahead at him. At the sight of the tracers, Michel promptly stopped and sat down to await the men of the US 90th Infantry Division rushing to the scene. Upon inspection it was found that his aircraft guns had not been fired.

Others were not so lucky as Gefreiter Michel. In the same area, three other IV./JG53 pilots are thought to have been shot down by the 455th AAA. Two of them, Fähnrich Siegfried Leese and Fähnrich Wolfgang Rosenberg, born one month apart, were only 19 years old. All 3 are MIA to this day.

Bar Manager's Report

G'day All,

The Bar has been a bit quiet lately, but we're hoping that with the roasts happening once a month and a Band later in February this will help.

All the Loyalty Cards for members who did not renew by 31st January are being de-activated. If you have paid in the meantime, please let me know and I will reinstate it for you. No accumulated points will be lost as a result.

I'm still trying to hold the prices down at the moment but can't guarantee how long that will be for.

Cheers for now,

Stormy

When your friend ask if you want to
day drink and talk shit about people



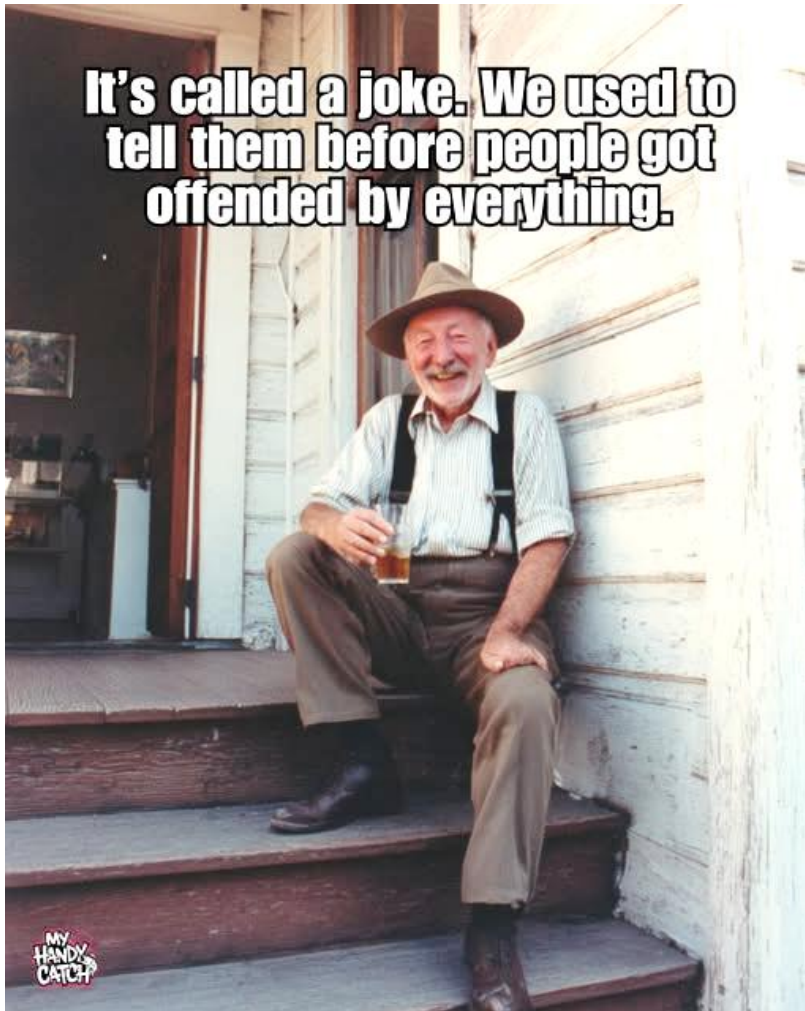


*A tank crew of the 9th Australian Divisional Cavalry Regiment.
Aleppo, Syria - November, 1941*



A member of the New South Wales Lancers - circa 1893

**It's called a joke. We used to
tell them before people got
offended by everything.**



**I'm heavily invested in stocks.
Chicken, vegetable, beef...**



The Cost of War

Submitted by Greg O'Reilly – has written this article about his grandfather Lt B O'Reilly of Sixth Rd Armadale. He lived about 200 yards from the club next to the railway line and was a long time member.

The Cost of War

There is an absence in the Official Histories about the role played by machine guns in the successes of 1918. The one brief and unexplained acknowledgement was the success at Amiens 8 August 1918, where it was observed 'actually the infantry with machine guns was the instrument of success; but its vital assistant was the artillery'. Generals, most notably Haig and Rawlinson who had been screaming for more high explosives in 1915 and 1916 were completely silent after the war about how machine guns had replaced artillery as the primary form of enemy fire suppression by the start of the 100 Days. This was on purpose for two reasons, to keep the enemy from copying the tactics and to prevent the Commonwealth public from finding out they had done much to stifle their development. Key documents, such as Machine Gun Notes No.2, were not declassified until 1948 while Pte Wilfred Jones was denied access to the 'confidential' unit diaries of the 110 Company MGC as late as 1962.

However, the biggest self-censorship came from the machine gunners themselves. It took Edward Rowbotham (71 MGC) 50 years to find the courage to write 'I felt a murderer' after firing indirectly on some Germans attempting to repair the wire:

All day I could not stop thinking about those seven men; men I had killed in revenge for my brother. Those men probably had brothers too, who would be mourning them, just as I was mourning Tom, and I had created another seven sad families. From 50 years away I can still call to mind the intensity of my feelings that morning.

For almost 60 years, Lt Tom Lydster MM and Bar (4th Aust MGC) 'prayed every night for all the men he had killed', which had been many. Both his decorations were for inflicting heavy losses on the enemy,

including a good number of reinforcements in motor buses being brought forward from long range.

The author's grandfather, Lt Bernard (Barney) O'Reilly, too had been a prolific killer of men on the battlefield. In 1916 he was sent to defend the highest point on the Somme battlefield just south of the Windmill at Pozières, a place known to the Germans as *Höhe 161*, his citation read:

Corporal O'Reilly kept his gun in action during the night 5th to 7th August and also during the heavy bombardment of 7th August. This gun position was repeatedly blown in, the gun and crew being buried. On two occasions while actually firing, Corpl. O'Reilly's gun was blown up but he retained his grip and recovered it; the infantry in the vicinity were all disabled. In order to keep his gun in working order, Corporal O'Reilly fired throughout the night and when the enemy counter attacked in the morning, he was able to destroy a large number of them.

For this action he was awarded a Russian Cross of St George 4th Class. The men themselves were told it was 'the equivalent of our VC', but was officially awarded for acts of gallantry 'better than a DCM'. Though he had been 'carried on shoulders from the parade ground' by his grateful comrades, it's importance was soon forgotten and few, including his own family, even knew he had anything more than service medals. This 48 hours appears to have had two very important effects on his later life, the guilt that came with killing and the long term impacts of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy.

Machine gunners were invariably the main targets of any artillery fire, whether high explosives, shrapnel or gas. While firing indirectly in support of the neighbouring brigade operations on 14 February 1917, Barney had perhaps a second or two notice, sufficient time only to roll over, before being hit on the back of the thigh by fragments of a high explosive shell, killing one and wounding two others. A series of operations at Reading led him to fortuitously miss almost all of 1917. He was struck by shrapnel in his unit's last battle on 19 September 1918 and had also been shot in the chest by a machine gun at Gallipoli, the bullet passing under the skin but deflected by his rib. In addition, he suffered near liver failure from hepatitis in the atrocious conditions on the Peninsular and the lifelong haemorrhoid problems that plagued all that had been there. However, it was the cumulative damage to his frontal lobe would have the most long term impact, exaggerating his personality, and drawing his thoughts ever inward.

The 4 Aust Division relieved the 2 Aust Division after they had captured the highest part of the Pozières Ridge. This became the *Schwerpunkt* (point of main effort) of German counterattacks on the Somme and their inability to recapture it caused significant friction in the highest levels of the German Army. The fighting that went on here 4-15 August 1916 was as brutal as any throughout history.

Reserve Army Commander Sir Hubert Gough, who regularly imposed poor tactics on his subordinates, demanded one Vickers Gun per brigade be thrust well forward into no-man's-land. The one near Höhe 161 would cover the Roman Road, a reliable night navigation marker, and could fire along the *Hohlweg* (sunken road) leading to Courcellette.

Cpl O'Reilly and his gun crew were ordered into No-Man's-Land near Höhe 161 with the XII platoon of the 45 Aust Battalion. The heavily laden crews picked their way forward and were greeted by men coming out of the line saying 'you'll be sorry you came', finding:

OG1 bore some resemblance to a continuous line, but OG2 had been shelled so much, first by our own artillery and then by the enemy, that practically all signs of a trench system had been obliterated.

XII platoon Sgt Harry Gadsby described how he and Pvt Archie Miller were some of the 'few to reach there' and how Miller's head was blown off six minutes after arriving. Work began immediately on digging in and connecting up craters, despite all the din, did so quietly. They were only a few hundred yards from both the notorious Munster Alley, where 15,000 grenades had been thrown at the Germans a week before, and the half dug Pozières Riegel, still notionally held by the I/163IR and 84RIR. A shell landed in an occupied crater that killed four and wounded two of the infantry. Gadsby was struck by shrapnel in the back the next morning and evacuated. Both sides pounded the positions, one historian claiming as many of their own shells fell on the Windmill as German ones during the period 13/14th August.



Drawing 1 – Lt Carl Zinnemann at the Pozières Riegel.

'Forward! Go! Go! Piercingly shrill 'Hurrahs', shouts and roars fill the air - then comes a shower of enemy hand grenades - they burst and men fall - the battle is joined! We are on top of the enemy, it is truly terrifying. Figures flit before us, right and left of us came huge bursts of fire - bullets fly everywhere - a British machine gun rattles away. In the harsh light of the numerous flares, Germans can be seen going down. Cursing, moaning, the last of the grenades are thrown in the direction of the machine gun. The man of my right pulls one out, Raises himself and prepares to throw. Then there is a crack, a thud, a shriek and he collapses, shot through the arm. My batman tears the grenade out of his cramped hand and throws it

away from us. We duck and it explodes - it could have killed us all! The attack has only progressed twenty metres. We are caught in the open and take cover in shell holes, whilst machine gun fire scythes through the air just above our heads. Artillery is bringing down heavy shells behind us. It does not get us here. We are at grenade range from the enemy. The arm is bound up. August has sacrificed the belt of his trousers. The man is quite chirpy and wants to head back. No chance of that. We are completely pinned down and cannot lift our heads one single centimetre. Spades out! We scabbled at the ground sweating. Tonight will bring death and tomorrow? What then? We shall be wiped out here. OK, spades to the rescue. Soon we have dug a shallow channel and we lie along it one behind the other.

To our front we make progress and soon our bodies are in cover, but our legs are still damn well out in the open. The men in rear dig around the legs of the man in front and carefully we make our trench deeper and deeper. Bullets crack through the air above us, shells crashed down and splinters fly. They can't get us that way, but they could be through us suddenly with a bayonet charge. There are very few of us here forward. The majority are dead or wounded; we can hear them. We can't help hearing them and it grates on us. Towards dawn we're sufficiently deep down that we can crawl around, so branch out and begin to link up. I crawl in the direction of the road, pushing past the men. Everywhere it's the same. Grey face soldiers digging in and bloodied men groaning. I give out orders that the wounded are to be got back to Martinpuich before it gets light. Whoever can crawl has set off along the trench. There is nothing else for it, even if they're in great pain. Once the day breaks, there will be no possibility of evacuation.

Everyone realises this and they pull the groaning men along the trench, lifting them over themselves while lying in the trench. It is incredibly strenuous, but anxiety about the coming day acts as a spur.



Drawing 2 – Lt Carl Zinnemann, attempt on Höhe 161.

While Zinnemann was able to get most of the wounded away, he himself was hit soon after, collapsing under the stress of the experience and the injury. The screams of the men that morning would haunt all that were present, including Cpl O'Reilly.



Drawing 3 - MG08 of the 84RIR in *der Schlacht an der Somme*, probably not too dissimilar to that of Cpl O'Reilly on Höhe 161.

HOW A CROSS WAS WON

Word has just been received as to how Sergeant Bernard O'Reilly (12th Machine Gun Company) won the Russian Cross of St. George, which is equivalent to our V.C. On one night all the infantry had been either wounded or killed by a German counter-attack, and all his men except one had to be taken off the gun owing to shell shock. He kept up a fierce fire, and thus kept the Germans at bay, and by so doing saved the position. His Brigadier-General, wishing his division to get the decoration (which is a very rare one) selected Sergeant O'Reilly, and he was chosen as the recipient. It was expected that he would have been further decorated, but his Brigadier-General has since been killed. The Russian Cross hero was seriously wounded in the attack on Goudecourt, the first shell killing No. 1 and No. 2 man on the gun, while he was seriously wounded. He left Australia nearly two and a half years ago, and expects to go to France again in a few months' time. He is at present in No. 1 War Hospital, Reading, and although he has undergone two operations, the doctors have failed to get the shrapnel out of his wound (which is just above the left knee). He left Western Australia with the — Battalion, and thus adds more to the glory of the "Good Old — Regiment."

Photo 1 - Newspaper article The Daily News (Western Australia) 11 Jun 1917. p6.

The 12 Aust MGC OC, Lt (later Brig Gen) Fred Hinton MC, inspected the positions and the carnage around Höhe 161, writing home on 13 August from his dugout:

It is only the fortunate who reach here, and, believe me, it's only the most fortunate who get away again. I've now seen fighting on three fronts, but this beats the lot...

One soon gets accustomed to the feel of treading on dead bodies in the bottom of a trench and also to seeing detached arms and legs lying about. Bodies after a decent scrap are so numerous that burying parties have more than they can very well deal with, and so sentiment flies to the four winds, and bodies are put anywhere out of the road.

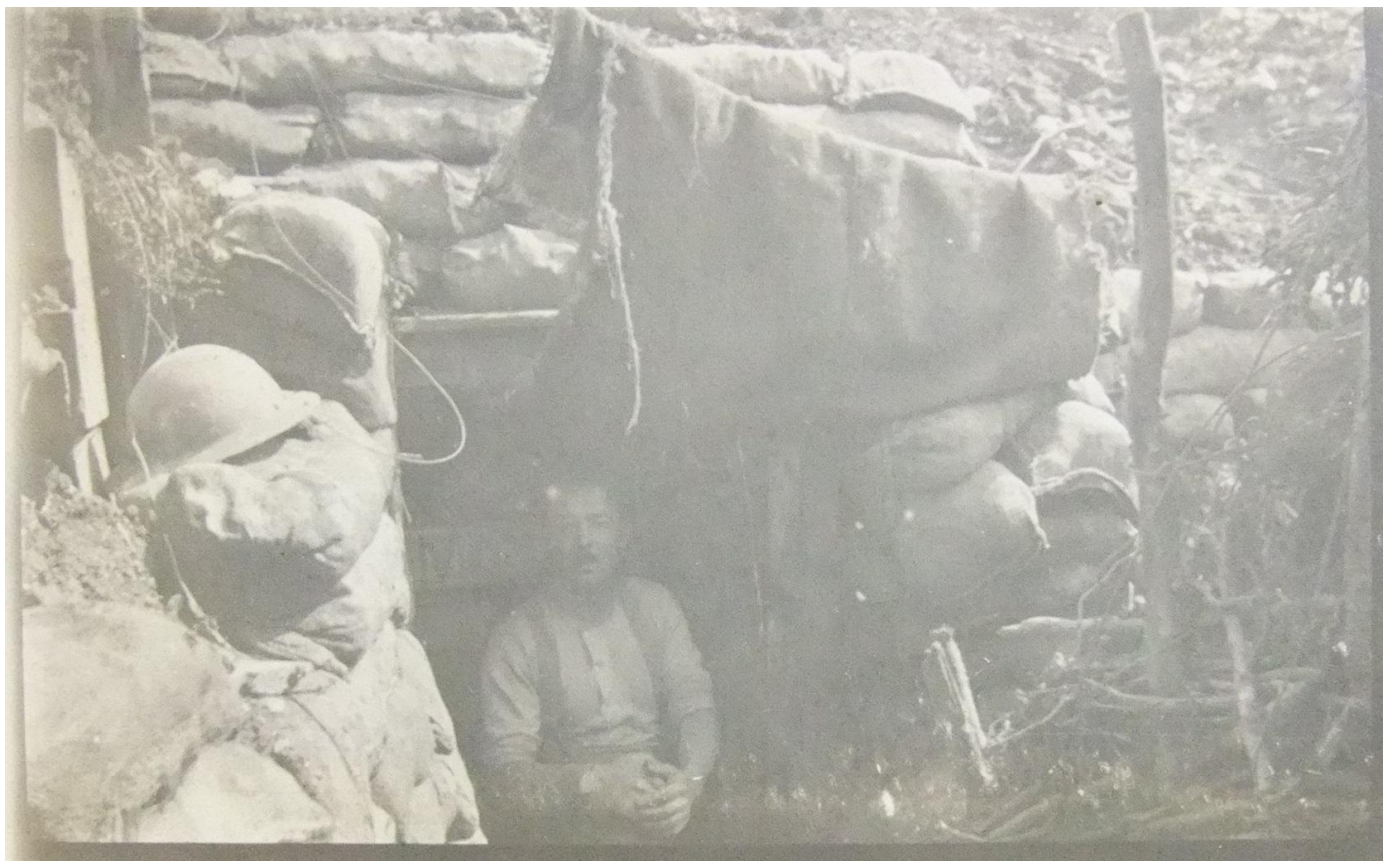


Photo 2 - Lt Fred Hinton MC in his dugout 'right in the centre of over four hundred guns of all sizes' in Sausage Gully which made 'an awful din when lit'. 10 August 1916. Courtesy Capt DSA Martin MC Collection.

On the night 9 August, the 139IR relieved the 63IR in the Pozières Riegel:

Based on the distance travelled and provided the map is still right, a man should be waiting for the company here to guide them into the position. A man from the regiment to be relieved. Nothing to see apart from crashing shells. There, something that does not look like soil, on the edge of the crater. A dead body. The regimental number is that of the regiment to be relieved. So this is indeed the expected guide. Even in death he indicates that they are on the right path. They are looking for footprints. There, suddenly a couple of officers - of their own battalion staff - they are also looking for their guide, who is supposed to show them the way to the command post of the battalion. The brave fellow will probably not be able to come. A short consultation - the company feels, jumps, stumbles, and creeps onwards. Yes, where is the position?

Judging by the number of steps we should have reached them. We stumble across corpses, the helmets are facing towards the enemy. Traces of a former line run from one corpse to the other through the muddy, splinter-scarred boards, a few cartridge cases, something that appears like the remains of a dugout - all of which gives the impression that the "position" is actually to be found here! It is completely unoccupied, no defensive equipment [i.e. wire etc.], armoured shields, etc. to hand, not a sandbag to be seen. The men are quickly distributed in the direction of the corpses, which despite the tremendous weight of fire are all gathered together behind the "position" in a shell crater. Now the spade has to create the first faint hint of a line, a connection between the individual men and the first light head cover. Not to cover against shots, heaven forbid, only against being spotted too soon!

Though several more attempts would be made, Höhe 161 was held and moved forward again in the battle of Flers-Courcellette. In the aftermath, the survivors from the 12 Aust MGC gathered for photographs.



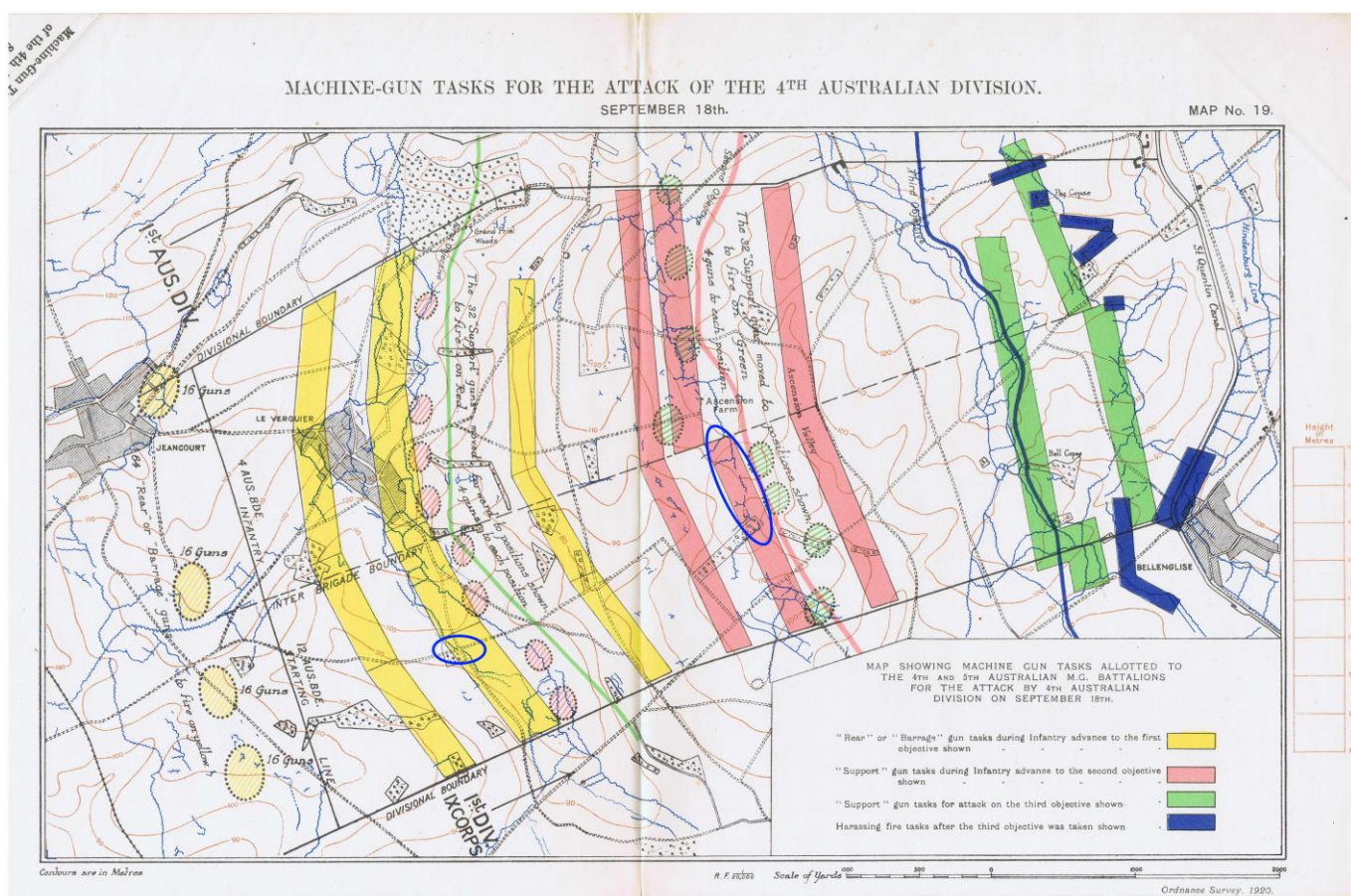
Photo 3 - D Section of the 12th Aust MGC. Officer in middle is Lt (later Capt) Harry Crouch MC, on his left holding a rifle is Sgt Bernard O'Reilly, on his right is 2Lt (later Lt) Tom Jack MC. Back row second from right Pte Dave Duncan.

Whatever internal turmoil Barney had from this experience, it manifested in an exterior calmness, even under the most extreme pressure. On 18 September 1918 he was the officer in charge of three Vickers assigned to support a leapfrog attack by the 45 Aust Battalion on the second objective at Ascension Farm. In the mist and smoke he got his guns into the pre-chosen position next to a sunken crossroad ahead of the infantry. While setting up to fire a barrage of about 2,500 yards range, a German Officer came out and shouted to him 'Mercy kamerad. I can't get my men to fight and I want to surrender' to which he replied 'All right, I won't hurt you' and got on with what he was doing. The arriving infantry accepted the surrender of 281 prisoners. By the time they packed up and gone forward again, the fire of three guns on Ascension Farm had been replaced by that of 32. Several hundred more surrendered there with the regimental commander declaring 'the small arms fire was absolutely too terrible for words. There was nothing to be done but to crouch down in

our trenches and wait for you to come and take us'. In addition, 'enemy machine guns were found in their trenches with their barrel casings pierced and their crews killed by machine gun fire'. Behind the objective '50 dead hunns' were found 'killed while trying to run away' by machine gun fire. Three understrength battalions of the 12 Aust Brigade, each with only about 350-400 men, made a 7,000yd advance on a 2,000yd front with their right flank in the air to the outskirts of the Hindenburg Line at Bellenglise, capturing almost 1,500 prisoners with only a few hundred casualties of their own. It was probably the best planned and executed machine gun tactics of any attack throughout the entire war and formed the right half of the example of how the Fourth Army used their machine guns during the 100 Days. At the time however, the Fourth Army described it as the Germans 'surrendering freely' to the Australians but 'fought with determination' elsewhere, as explanation why the 10 BEF divisions also engaged did not achieve the same success.



Photo 4 - AWM E03274. Germans who have discarded their helmets and weapons surrendering at Ascension Farm, 18 Sep 1918. Note one on extreme left appears recently shot through the jaw.



Map 2 – Map 19 from AA Montgomery ‘Story of the Fourth Army in the 100 Days’ showing site of crossroads and Ascension Farm circled in blue.

Wounded the next day, Barney's war was over. He had been phenomenally lucky, having landing around 5.30am at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915. His recuperation after the Armistice was greatly assisted by the introduction to his sister Julia's friend Bea Howe, both from Cork nursing for the British Army in London. They were married in 7 January 1919 and it was decided she would return to say goodbye to her family, while he would not, or could not, go back to his native Ireland and instead returned to Australia a week later. He was discharged from the army on 26 April 1919 as '25% disabled' from his elbow wound.

When Bea eventually embarked to Australia, she did so as the wife of an officer, looking forward to a new life with prospects of improved social standing. This was not to be and when she arrived in Fremantle in December 1919 she was met by his cousin and told he had gone bush working near Kalgoorlie, 600km east of Perth. She was still crying when put on a train the next day and undoubtedly cried a bit more when she was met by him in a black workman's singlet at a railway siding in the

middle of nowhere, all hopes of a more genteel life crushed in the heat and flies.

It wasn't just that he had chosen to be a labourer, but that he would refuse all self-advancement, declining to take responsibility for others and, at times, even his own family. He drove himself to exhaustion, mostly to help with sleep, but also as punishment in the Catholic tradition for the evil he thought he had done. Whilst it was certainly not what she was expecting, they had both been born in West Cork, one of the poorest parts of 19th Century Europe and built a partnership on mutual support and respect rather than outright love.

They were, after all, some considerable benefits for Bea. Unlike many other veterans, Barney rarely drank and brought each pay packet home for her unopened. He would dote on her and she could give him orders, which would be dutifully followed. He did not earn much, but having experienced a local famine in 1892, he would always be first to go short, as his parents had done. His mother's growth had been stunted as a child in the Great Famine. While food in Australia was relatively plentiful, water was not and Tuberculosis was as common as it was back in Ireland. They had two sons born in this period, the second Desmond, surviving only two days. Bea too had bouts of infections, and they left the Goldfields for Perth and more menial hard-working jobs.

By 1924, his infected left elbow still gave him trouble in the form of numbness of his ring and little fingers, which weakened his grip and gave some considerable pain. Wasting of his forearm was already observable and was often short of breath. He was consequently re-assessed as 60% disabled. A daughter was born in 1925 and twin boys in 1927, the Depression saw more hard times away from the family building rural roads before landing his ideal job, caretaker at the Canning Park Racecourse in 1931. Here the majority of the work was cutting the race track and the cricket field inside, which he did every week by hand using a scythe. The first memories of the twins was their father endlessly labouring away in the distance or sitting smoking and sharpening his weapon.

Barney's father had been school master at the National School in Rosscarbery, and he himself had been a trainee teacher as an 18 year old in a class that included a young Tom Barry, before coming to Australia in 1905. In 1918, he had been urgently despatched by Lt Col Harry Murray VC CMG DSO and Bar DCM to teach the machine gun

tactics used by the Australians at Hamel five days before Amiens, but this sort of career was not an option for him, despite the AIF's commitment to retrain returning soldiers.

By 1935 the racing track had closed, and a late mistake was born when he was 50 and she was 44. The remnant shell pieces in his leg began to give him some considerable trouble and the physically demanding punishment he put himself through became too much. The wound, at times, increased in swelling and caused a pain like 'a dull toothache. The X-ray report noted 'a large shell fragment lying superficially in the adductor muscle. Three to five minor fragments scattered throughout the soft tissues, two of which may be in close relation to the sciatic nerve'.

In early 1936 he had a 'grey piece of metal with sharp edge removed from inner side of r. thigh in upper 1/3, metal surrounded by chronic abscess with very thick wall'. The other pieces would be left behind. A month later he was 'not too bad' but that his knee hurt after the operation. The doctor's recommendation was 'do not consider that he is fit to go into the country to work for 14 days'. Despite this, he started a job as a line repairer on the railways two days later.

In the home, he dispensed discipline as coldly and understatedly as he had on the battlefield, an aversion of his eyes towards the instrument of punishment invariably worked on unruly children. Though never known to carry it out, none doubted his threats. He philosophised with statements like 'if you do something, do it to the best of your ability'. At the time they thought it meant shining shoes, but undoubtedly was a reference to his time as a soldier, the thing he was best at.

In around 1939, Bea managed to cobble together sufficient funds for a deposit on a house on Sixth Road in the rural community of Armadale on the outskirts of Perth, next to the rail line he maintained. Barney, now well into his 50's, volunteered for the home guard serving in the 2nd (Fremantle) VDC Battalion. His son would not be permitted to enlist until he was 21, firm in his view the battlefield was 'no place for children' and that they 'just got everyone around them killed'.

He worked repairing the line around Armadale for years and could often be seen cranking the hand trolley along the line heading in and out of town. Pain forced his retirement in 1952, just before his 65th birthday.

From this point on, he would rarely leave the house, and his energies went towards work outside in the garden, including killing all the snakes that terrified Bea on washing day.



Photo 5 – As his family remembered him, hunched over working in the backyard.

His relentless energy always took him outside and as his physical capacity diminished, this transferred to lighter tasks such as endlessly raking the chook shed, sometimes in the company of grandchildren.

He preferred to be on his own and the few friends he had were those who had not been in the army. Those that had, such as Lt Bill Gregson, were mostly welcomed but also sometimes hidden from, with frustrated visitors having to make the long journey back to Perth much to the embarrassment of Bea. There were simply times he did not want to be reminded about the war. Gregson, from Blackburn in Lancashire, was different. He had been empowered by the war, establishing a major auctioneering house on the basis that such things are easy compared to what they had done in France. They shared a sense of humour dating back to Gallipoli where Pte Gregson introduced himself as 'a tall dark handsome soldier reported for duty' (Gregson's hair was 'fair' and was 5'7"), to which Barney replied he 'preferred his men for fighting, not for kissing'. Promoted corporals together on joining the 12 Aust MGC, they were also 'honoured' with 'King's Commissions' in the field together, missing out on Oxford or Cambridge and several months in England.

Barney's younger brother Joe had emigrated in 1912 and served in the 32 Aust Battalion and was also 60% disabled from an elbow wound near Proyart in August 1918 and a perpetually painful chronic infection that greatly withered his forearm. They could often be seen in quiet conversation away from the rest of their families, both who had children of similar age.

In 1964, after a hernia operation, Barney 'was found hanging by foot from iron bracket outside balcony'. He had been 'somewhat confused. Stated he heard a noise & thought there was a fight. Tried to get over the balcony but was caught by his right foot'. Whatever sort of fight he thought was going on, this 77 year old man was heading towards it rather than away.

He retained his sense of humour. When one of his sons, a catholic priest, was appointed chaplain to the military district of Western Australia, it came with the honorary rank of major. Coming home one day naively declaring 'look Dad, now I outrank you', for which he got a hearty chuckle. His mother, however, pulled him aside and was visibly cross with her favourite son dressing him down with 'never compare yourself to your father'.

The couple spent more than 50 years praying together. They prayed for enemy, the screaming Silesians shot to pieces on Höhe 161, those caught in the barrage at Ascension Farm and for all the other unknown

and unseen dead and disfigured he had caused during his service. They prayed for his own men who had been sent to their deaths under his orders, but most of all they prayed for Barney's soul to be saved. In the face of the debilitating and crushing guilt, this became their primary mechanism for dealing with it.

Though the stipend of a DCM would have allowed for the education of his children, they inherited enough of his intelligence and integrity that one was the recipient of an Order of Australia while three others appeared in Who's Who of Western Australians in 1979. All five of their surviving children gave more to their communities than they took out.

The one day of the year that was different was ANZAC Day. He marched when he could and usually returned home somewhat tipsy, the only times he would mention the war. When older and no longer able, he would watch the parade on TV with some of his family. On one occasion, the announcer mentioned the large number of Germans that surrendered to the 48th Aust Battalion on 18 September 1918, he simply smiled and said 'they just kept coming out with their hands up', followed by a long and awkward silence.

As years went by his isolation only increased with the most common of all WW1 injuries, profound deafness. When Bea died of cancer in 1969, he became lost without the structure she gave his life, seeing out his final years with his widowed daughter then finally endlessly pacing up and down the halls of the care facility where she nursed, dying in 1975 at the age of 87.

In the final few months, when his previously sharp mind began to go, he was left with only his strongest memories. Uncharacteristic outbursts of violence and profane 'army language' were unleashed on staff, to the acute embarrassment of his shocked family members.

Gregson, who knew him best, wrote to the family from England after reading about his death in the paper at Australia House in London. The family had long assumed his army service had been much like the rest of his life, nondescript and uneventful. None had even the slightest idea that this much adored quiet and gentle man, never once known to lose his temper or use violence in his civilian life, had once been one of the most dangerous and lethal men on the entire Western Front.

Most importantly Gregson wanted the family to know 'what a great soldier he was, not only a soldier, but a GOOD MAN'. Tragically Gregson knew too well that Barney did not think he could be both.



Photo 6 - Bernard and Bea O'Reilly with the author and his sister, circa late 1968.

The author would like to thank his friend 2/Lt John P O'Halloran MG, who led his country's most decorated platoon in Vietnam and the last bayonet charge by Australian soldiers, for his invaluable insights into the burdens of command and being the best soldier you can be.



RETURNED SERVICES LEAGUE ARMADALE SUB-BRANCH

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