

THE FURPHY

ARMADALE SUB-BRANCH OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

March 2022 Edition



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General Meetings:

Second Sunday of the month at 1030hrs

Annual General Meeting:

Second Sunday of September

Committee Positions

Armadale Sub-Branch Committee	
President	Mr Ken Hepburn
Vice President	Mr Hans van de Velde
Secretary – Inc.	Mr Mike Fairweather
Secretary – Sub	Ms Carol King
Treasurer – Inc.	Mr Bob Gildare
Treasurer – Sub	Mrs Cheryl Cowie
Warden	Mr Bob Giles
Warden	Mr Graeme Cowie
Membership Officer	Mr Tom Rynn
Committee	Mr John Hennah
Committee	Mr Rod Jonsson
Committee	Mr Paul Newman
Committee	Mr Laurie Sargeson
Advocate / Welfare	Mr Brent Errington
Bar Manager	Mr Mike Fairweather



Sunday saw the Gulf War I remember the end of the conflict. This is now planned as an annual event. You will also be able to march behind this banner in Perth's ANZAC Day March.
Cowboy.

Presidents Report

Hi Folks,

The Election for the RSLWA State President was held on Thursday, 17th February 2022 and the new President is Duncan Anderson and there will be a Declaration of the WAEC poll, for the position, held on Saturday, 26th February 2022, at Anzac House. Myself and three other committee members will be attending.

On Monday the 21st of February 2022, I spoke directly to Siobhan Wilks, Communications and Engagement Officer for the Byford Rail Extension.

The Minister had announced that the Armadale line is set to be transformed through three significant METRONET Projects – Byford Rail Extension, Victoria Park – Canning Level Crossing Removal and Thornlie -Cockburn Link.

Work on these three projects will commence in early 2023 and last up to 18 months.

METRONET will keep me informed of the impact that this project will have and I will keep you informed and place notices on the club notice board, but at this stage the RSL will remain open and operating as normal and I can see no changes to this until 2023.

ANZAC Day planning is going ahead, but will be reviewed, depending on what the COVID Restrictions are in place for that time.

Regards

Ken Hepburn

President

Returned Services League Armadale Sub-Branch

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Secretary's Notes

Hi Everyone,

Again, Covid has impacted on the way we do our business and I'd like to thank everyone for their patience and understanding during the period we have been required to check Vaccination Certificates upon entry to the Sub Branch.

As rules change, we would ask that you all adhere to the guidelines which have recently been updated will likely continue for some time.

This has impacted on our pre-planning for Anzac Day and while final decisions are yet to be made, the Executive and Committee will continue to take advice from the Health Department, State Government, the City of Armadale and RSLWA as to what form the day will take. We will advise members as soon as we have more clarity.

We will again be holding an Anzac Day Appeal scheduled for 21st, 22nd and 23rd April and merchandise has already been ordered. A form for volunteers to write their names up will be placed on the Notice Board once venues have been confirmed.

Thanks to all who attended the February General Meeting which resulted in the updated Club Inc. Constitution being passed unanimously. This will now be lodged with the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety.

I would again extend my appreciation to all members who continue to support the Executive and Committee in our efforts to keep our RSL sustainable.

Best Regards to all,

Carol King

Secretary

Important dates for your diary

March			
8 th	Tuesday	Committee Meeting	1830
11 th	Friday	MBMMC	1930
13 th	Sunday	GM	1030

Editors Notes

Hi All

March reminds us that one of our biggest tasks is looming.

ANZAC Day.

Let's pray that we can observe this important day this year in the manner it should be observed.

This being the first for three years we need to make it a good one, so I urge you all to jump in and help where you can. Volunteers are always appreciated to man the merchandise locations and to scrub the old RSL from head to toe.

The 2022 Constitution has now passed and I hope that this will assist in our retention of Inc.

There have been some extraordinary feat's performed in the February and March months. I have tried to include some of interest. As usual if you have any that you think would be of interest. Please wack them in the suggestion box or pass them to me. I have started a file of interesting articles for next Year but it's not too late for the following months, as it's always nice to read things that have a local relevance.

Sunday saw the Remembrance of the end of the Golf War I conflict.
This is now planed as an annual event.

Cowboy

Membership Update

Tom Rynn

Just when things seemed to be looking brighter along comes another setback with the Omicron strain of Covid 19 starting to hit us in WA. Even though infections will spread like wildfire we need to be positive.

Positive that the Sub Branch will move forward and positive that social activities will one day return along with a membership increase.

Currently, we are well down on Social Members and we will soon find out if the Affiliate numbers will decrease. Our Service Member numbers are static and have been so for a considerable time.

Most of our Service Members are already financial for 2022 having paid online to RSLWA .

A few members have raised the issue of not receiving their 2022 cards and that has been taken up with RSLWA so I expect that by the March GM that issue should be resolved. If anyone has not received their card and they paid before the end of January then please let me know at the meeting and I will follow up.

In any event, those members who paid via me are advised to retain their receipt until their card arrives via RSLWA.

Tom Rynn

Membership Officer

Mob: 0439 934 285

Email: tomrynn@bigpond.com or tomrynn42@gmail.com

Birthday List

Christian	Surname	DoB
Thomas	Akacznek	8/3/22
A	Billi	25/3/22
Anne	Corrigan	3/3/22
Roger	Cripps	19/3/22
Geoffrey	Dell	21/3/22
Judith	Emmanuel	4/3/22
Robert	Esslemont	12/3/22
Sean	Grogan	14/3/22
Patrice	Hymus	8/3/22
Robin	Johnson	7/3/22
Allan	Jones	29/3/22
Gordon	Leask	20/3/22
Joy	Manning	5/3/22
Glenn	Mitton	8/3/22
Graham	Newey	23/3/22

Christian	Surname	DoB
Paul	Newman	4/3/22
Merette	Passmore	12/3/22
Martinus	Popelier	20/3/22
Robert	Powell	7/3/22
Steven	Ritson	27/3/22
Drew	Sanders	25/3/22
Lyn	Shortcliffe	7/3/22
Rachel	Stead	5/3/22
Peter	Stevens	21/3/22
Ngaire	Stewart	14/3/22
Daniel	Sullivan	27/3/22
Murray	Tozer	17/3/22
Lloyd	Venus	12/3/22
Jason	Wood	23/3/22

The members above can pick up a free drink of their choice in February.

Have a very special Day

Please get your membership up to date so you can join us at the bar.
And get your loyalty card.

Bar Manager's Report

G'Day to all Members,

A reminder that all financial members are entitled to apply for a Loyalty Card.

Application forms are on the Notice Board.

When purchasing over the Bar and having your personal card swiped, you will receive points to the value of 10% of the value. Effectively, this means after buying 10 drinks, you will be entitled to one free by using the points.

For those who have already applied and not yet received your card, please let either me or the Secretary know, and we will arrange for them to be handed to you.

Some of you members should make a bigger effort to patronise the Club more frequently to enable us to keep the bar functioning with paid staff.

RSL wines (Cab Sav and Brut Cuvee) are still on special at \$7 per bottle or \$75 for a case of 12.

Hope to see you all in the Club again soon.

Kindest regards,

Stormy

What's on at the bar?

Special Deals for you:

Cav Sav.	Out at \$7.00 a Bottle.	\$75.00 a Case of 12.
Brut Cuvee.	Out at \$7.00 a Bottle.	\$75.00 a Case of 12.

Until Sold Out

Happy Hour

Fridays – Happy Hour – 1300 to 1400

Sundays – Happy Hour – 1300 to 1400

Call the Defence and Veterans Legal Service on 1800 33 1800

or visit our website
defenceveteranslegalservice.org.au



If you need an interpreter, we can
arrange one for you for free. Tell us your
language and we will arrange it for you.



If you are hearing or speech impaired
you can contact us by calling the
national relay service (NRS) on 133 677
or TTY 08 9219 5126.



Independent legal support to participate in the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

Call 1800 33 1800 (FREE CALL)
www.defenceveteranslegalservice.org.au



DEFENCE & VETERANS
LEGAL SERVICE

This service is an initiative of



National Legal Aid



DEFENCE & VETERANS
LEGAL SERVICE



Who are we?

We provide free, independent legal advice
and support to anybody considering sharing
their experiences with the Royal Commission
into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

We have staff across Australia who deliver
a trauma-informed service. We are
independent of the Royal Commission.

What do we do?

We provide free and confidential legal
advice to members of the public, including
Australian Defence Force personnel
and veterans, their families, carers, and
supporters, about:

- taking part in the Royal Commission
- your legal rights when sharing
information with the Royal Commission
- available legal protections when sharing
information with the Royal Commission.

We can talk to you about how you can:

- share your experiences in a safe way
- keep your experiences and participation
in the Royal Commission confidential
- overcome barriers you might face in
sharing your experiences.

We can also:

- support you to make your submission
- support you in a private session
- connect you with other services,
like counselling, advocacy, and other
legal support not related to the
Royal Commission.



The Military Brotherhood Military Motorcycle Club

Another month has flown by. We have been fairly quiet this month. This month we have thrown our support behind two very worthwhile causes.

First was the Heart Kids Ride on the 5th. This is a ride that is close to the heart for a few of our members.

On the 17th, a few of our members attended the funeral of one of WAs Sub Branch Presidents. Top Cat was ex RAN. His funeral was held at Karrakatta. Thank you to those who could attend and gave the send-off he deserved.

Last weekend 26th, we attended a ride in conjunction with The Patriots and Western Grunts. We rode together to Waroona Tavern to show our support to a young family who is doing it very tough. Their 4-year daughter Abby has been diagnosed with not 1 but 2 terminal illnesses. The chance of this happening is 1 in 750 million. Money raised on the day will help the family with the financial burden of having to deal with these terrible illnesses.

MBMMC as a group decided to bid on a giant Teddy Bear, which we did eventually win, and presented it to Abby. Before we did, we dressed him in a Brotherhood shirt and hat. Thanks, Dazza for losing your shirt and Dingo for your hat. The smile on little Abby's face was worth it.

Till next month, stay safe.



Tracey “Frosty” Newman
Assistant Secretary
MBMMC
Perth South

Our motto is
“The Task is Ours”
Military Brotherhood MMC Perth South

March History

Information via AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

[March | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](http://march.awm.gov.au)

Date

1 March 1901.

Title

Naval and military forces of the States transferred to Commonwealth control.

Event

With Federation state and federal authorities began planning for the establishment of federal military forces.

Date

1 March 1942.

Title

HMAS Perth sunk in Sunda Strait.

Event

Having survived the battle of the Java Sea HMAS Perth and the United States Cruiser Houston were sunk in a battle against overwhelming Japanese forces off the western tip of Java. 353 of Perth's 680 crew were killed in the battle.

Date

1 March 1943.

Title

Battle of Bismarck Sea begins.

Event

A Japanese convoy of eight transport ships and eight escorting destroyers was almost annihilated by Allied air attacks as they attempted to reinforce the garrison at Lae. Of the 6,000 Japanese troops bound for Lae only 2,890 survived.

Date

3 March 1885.

Title

Sudan contingent departed Sydney.

Event

New South Wales' offer to send a contingent to the Sudan was a demonstration of the depth of imperial sentiment in colonial Australia.

Date

3 March 1942.

Title

Broome and Wyndham bombed.

Event

The Japanese air raid on Broome came when the port was crowded with refugees fleeing the Japanese invasion of the Netherlands East Indies. About 70 people, including many civilians are thought to have been killed in the raid. Japanese Attacks on Wyndham focused on the town's aerodrome.

Date

4 March 1942.

Title

HMAS Yarra sunk south of Java.

Event

Yarra was escorting a convoy of three ships from the fighting in the Netherlands East Indies to Java to Fremantle when they were attacked by three Japanese heavy cruisers and two destroyers. All four ships were sunk and only 13 of Yarra's 151 crew survived.

Date

5 March 1970.

Title

HMAS Sydney arrives at Fremantle, en route to Sydney.

Event

On board was 5th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, which had completed a tour in Vietnam. HMAS Sydney made 21 voyages to Vietnam during the war. ([side Note. I was aboard on that trip](#))

Date

7 March 1942.

Title

Japanese occupation of Java complete.

Event

Allied forces offered little resistance to the Japanese invasion of Java, the former Dutch colony fell to the Japanese 16th Army on 12 March.

Date

8 March 1942.

Title

Japanese land at Lae and Salamua.

Event

Lae and Salamua were occupied by the Japanese to provide defensive depth for their important air and sea base at Rabaul.

Date

9 March 1942.

Title

7th Division AIF arrives in Adelaide.

Event

Leading brigade of the 7th Division AIF arrives in Adelaide from the Middle East. Elements of the Division had been sent to Java where they soon became prisoners of the Japanese.

Date

10 March 1942.

Title

Japanese land at Finschhafen.

Event

The Japanese needed to capture towns such as Finschhafen and Salamua to protect their forward air base at Lae.

Date

11 March 1845.

Title

First Maori War.

Event

British troops based in Australia were sent to suppress an uprising by Maoris who were unhappy at the continuing expansion of European settlement in New Zealand's North Island.

Date

11 March 1917.

Title

Baghdad occupied.

Event

Members of the 1st ANZAC Wireless Signal Squadron attached to Lieutenant General Stanley Maude's force of two British Army Corps and one Indian Cavalry Division occupy Baghdad.

Date

12 March 1900.

Title

Australians arrive at Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Event

Members of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, under Lord Roberts, reached Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, under Roberts' strategy of taking the war into the Boer Republics.

Date

13 March 1943.

Title

Japanese reconnaissance flight over Darwin.

Event

In addition to the 64 air raids on Darwin the Japanese made numerous reconnaissance flights over northern Australia.

Date

14 March 1942.

Title

Horn Island bombed.

Event

Japanese bomb Horn Island, Torres Strait. Horn Island, in the Torres Strait, was the main tactical base for Allied air operations in the Torres Strait. The island was subject to nine Japanese air raids during the Second World War.

Date

15 March 1940.

Title

First two women from the Voluntary Aid Detachments organisation enlist in the AIF.

Event

Most Voluntary Aids transferred after August 1942 into the new Australian Army Women's Medical Service. Over 200 Voluntary Aids served in the Middle East and Ceylon during the Second World War.

Date

16 March 1942.

Title

Darwin bombed.

Event

Darwin was subject to 64 Japanese air raids during the Second World War.

Date

17 March 1917.

Title

Australians occupy Bapaume, Western Front.

Event

Originally the objective for the first day of the Somme campaign, Bapaume was occupied by the 5th Division after fighting rearguards from the German retreat of early 1917.

Date

17 March 1942.

Title

General MacArthur flies to Darwin.

Event

Having left the Philippines after the Japanese invasion, General MacArthur was appointed to command the newly created South West Pacific Area. Australia became the base from which he would launch offensive action against the Japanese in the Pacific.

Date

18 March 1915.

Title

Allied fleet attempts to force the Dardanelles.

Event

This was the second allied attempt to force a naval breakthrough of the Turkish defences in the Dardanelles.

Date

19 March 1916.

Title

Sir John Maxwell withdrawn from Egypt, leaving Sir Archibald Murray in command.

Event

Murray ultimately led Allied forces, including the Australian Light Horse, in the war against Turkey in the Sinai and Palestine.

Date

20 March 1916.

Title

ANZAC Corps land in France.

Event

With Gallipoli behind them the bulk of Australia's forces were now sent to France where the terrible fighting on the Western Front awaited.

Date

20 March 2003.

Title

Iraq War.

Event

Australian military forces, as part of the US-led coalition, commence operations as part of the invasion of Iraq.

Date

21 March 1918.

Title

Final German offensive of the First World War begins.

Event

The Germans hoped to split the Allied forces around Amiens and drive towards the English channel. After initial success their advance slowed and was turned into the retreat that eventually led to the end of the First World War.

Date

21 March 1942.

Title

Air battle for Port Moresby begins.

Event

The Japanese had hoped to occupy Port Moresby as a base from which to cut off shipping to Eastern Australia. Their defeat in the Battle of the Coral Sea thwarted the planned naval attack and invasion against Port Moresby.

Date

22 March 1942.

Title

Japanese aircraft bomb Katherine.

Event

This was the only air raid against Katherine in the Second World War, one man was killed. (Source Wikipedia: [During World War II, the Australian Army set up two hospitals around Katherine, the 101st Australian General Hospital and 121st Australian General Hospital. The army also set up a Katherine Area Headquarters. On 22 March 1942, Katherine sustained its only air raid during World War II. One man was killed](#)

Date

23 March 1945.

Title

Waitavolo and Tol plantations captured by Australians, New Britain.

Event

In 1942 the Tol plantation was the scene of the massacre of some 150 Australians as they attempted to flee Rabaul. The capture of the plantations in 1945 enabled the Australian 5th Division to establish a line across the Gazelle Peninsula from which they were able to conduct patrols against Japanese positions in the North of New Britain.

Date

24 March 1901.

Title

Veldfontein.

Event

Australians capture Boer convoy and guns at Veldfontein.

Date

24 March 1942.

Title

Port Moresby bombed by Japanese.

Event

The Japanese had hoped to occupy Port Moresby as a base from which to cut off shipping to Eastern Australia. Their defeat in the Battle of the Coral Sea thwarted the planned naval attack and invasion against Port Moresby.

Date

26 March 1917.

Title

First Battle of Gaza begins.

Event

This was the first Allied attempt to capture this major Turkish centre lying 32 kilometres inside the border of Palestine. The Allied strength included two Australian Light Horse Brigades and the ANZAC Mounted Division under Major General Harry Chauvel.

Date

27 March 1944.

Title

First Victory Loan.

Event

Australian Government launches first Victory Loan aimed at raising £150 million for the war effort. Twelve major Government war loans were offered to the Australian public during the Second World War.

Date

27 March 1953.

Title

Last engagement between Meteors and MIGS in the Korean War.

Event

Meteors had been found to be inferior to MIGS in air to air combat in Korea and were transferred to ground attack duties.

Date

29 March 1885.

Title

New South Wales contingent arrive in Sudan.

Event

New South Wales' offer to send a contingent to the Sudan was a demonstration of the depth of imperial sentiment in colonial Australia.

Date

29 March 1941.

Title

Battle of Matapan, Greece.

Event

HMA ships Perth, Vendetta and Stuart were among 13 Allied ships involved in the battle which saw the loss of five Italian ships and 1,230 men. Victory at Matapan gave the Allies sea control of the Eastern Mediterranean until the end of the campaigns in Greece and Crete.

Date

31 March 1921.

Title

Formation of the Australian Air Force.

Event

In Australia negotiations between Army, Navy and Defence officials from 1917 to 1921 resulted in the Australian Air Force being formed on 31 March 1921, with approval to use the 'Royal' prefix granted on 13 August 1921.

[Re 23 March 1945 entry.](#)

Written 5 February 2017.

75 years on, shocking Tol Massacre forgotten

MAX UECHTRITZ

IT WAS one of the most callous atrocities of the Pacific war.

Seventy-five years yesterday, 160 Australian prisoners were bayoneted, beheaded, shot or burned alive by Japanese troops – on what was then Australian territory.

So horrific was the Tol Massacre on the island of New Britain that the Australian government suppressed details for 47 years.

That this tragedy is barely remembered and rarely commemorated blights Australia's national conscience and to this day rankles the distressed families of the victims.

Few Australians know of the carnage at neighbouring Tol and Waitavalo plantations - nor that it came soon after one of the most shameful episodes of our war when 1,400 diggers and civilians were abandoned as 'hostages to fortune' ahead of the Japanese invasion of Rabaul on 23 January 1942.

Rabaul was the capital of Australian-mandated New Guinea and was protected by a tiny garrison consisting mainly of the 2/22nd Battalion Lark Force.

The town was quickly routed by a massive Japanese fleet of carriers, destroyers, submarines and fighter and bomber aircraft.

When the order "every man for himself" was given, soldiers and civilians fanned out over New Britain looking for escape routes through the most rugged terrain imaginable.

Some endured an epic trek through dense jungle – battling malaria, dysentery, tropical ulcers, leeches, exhaustion, malnutrition and crocodile-infested rivers – to eventually reach points where they were able to escape on small boats.

But this was not the majority, including those who reached Tol Plantation hoping to be rescued.

To their horror, five barge-loads of Japanese troops were on the beach to meet them.

There was no option for the starving, exhausted, virtually unarmed Australians but to surrender. At first it seemed they would be treated as normal prisoners of war. Then an order to execute the prisoners was given.

Red Cross brassards were ripped off medics. Men were trussed together in small groups with fishing line or ropes and taken into the jungle and slaughtered.

They stood or sat listening to their mates' death cries – awaiting their own fate by blade or bullet.

The few survivors told of grinning Japanese soldiers emerging from the bush wiping blood from their bayonets and beckoning their next targets.

Some victims - asked if they wanted to be shot or bayoneted - chose the gun only to be stabbed. Two wounded men found alive in Waitavalo Plantation homestead had been smeared in pig grease to be burned alive in the house.

Requests for final cigarettes were refused. Some men prayed, some begged for their lives, others said cheerio to their mates.

They were covered in palm leaves and left to die. Incredibly, several men feigned death and survived to tell the story.

Private Billy Cook of the 2/12 Field Ambulance survived 11 bayonet wounds. He wrote:

"The first stab knocked us down. The Japs stood over us stabbing madly. I received six wounds in the back, two just missing the spine, two more breaking ribs...

"As the Japanese were moving off, the man next to me groaned. One of the Japanese soldiers came running back and stabbed him once more. By this time I could hold my breath no longer. When I drew a deep breath the soldier heard me and inflicted four more bayonet wounds.

"The last thrust went through my ear into my mouth, severing an artery on the way. Seeing the blood gushing out of my mouth, he assumed that I was at last dead, he covered the three of us with coconut fronds and vine leaves and left."

Cook somehow crawled off into the jungle – as did five other survivors – and eventually was evacuated from New Britain to Port Moresby with 156 soldiers, sailors and civilians aboard the overcrowded government yacht, the *Laurabada*.

An estimated 1,053 of the troops and Rabaul residents who remained in the town or who were captured would eventually perish as prisoners when their prison ship, the *Montevideo Maru*, taking them to Hainan then occupied by Japan, was sunk by mistake by an American submarine off the Philippines.



The details of that episode and the miserable way victims' families were treated for decades - plus the disgraceful abandonment of Rabaul itself - are stories for elsewhere.

So, too, is the shameful way in which the Chinese population under Australia's protection was left behind along with indigenous workers employed by the colonial administration.

But this weekend we remember the 160 poor souls who died such unspeakable deaths at Tol and Waitavalo 75 years ago.

Many were just boys – the average age of Lark Force soldiers was 18 and a half – while some of the civilian volunteer rifle men were granddads in their fifties and sixties.

Some remains were retrieved post-war and buried at Rabaul's beautiful Bitu Paka war cemetery - but the bones of others rot still in the jungle soil of a place whose name most Australian have never heard.

They deserve better.

Lest We Forget.

Posted in [Past times: Montevideo Maru](#), [Past times: World War II & Kokoda](#)

The RAAFAAD have kindly allowed us to reproduce the material.

Air Force Association - SA Division

14 February 1989: RAAF Blackhawks transferred to Army

Did you know that in 1989, the RAAF's Blackhawk Helicopters were transferred to the Army?

From the late 1940's to the 1980's the RAAF operated rotary wing aircraft seeing distinguished service in conflicts in Malaya and Vietnam, peacekeeping duties, regional engagement, Army support, search and rescue and disaster relief.

During the 1980's the Australian Defence Force began its search for a replacement for the aging UH-1 Iroquois helicopter which had seen such distinguished service in Vietnam. A request for tender was issued in 1984 and responses were received from Aerospatiale (Super Puma), Westland (Lynx variant), Bell (JVX tilt-rotor), Sikorsky (S-70A or UH-60 Blackhawk) and Augusta (Mongoose development).

The Blackhawk was selected noting its similarity to the S-70A Seahawk already selected for the Navy and its use by the US Army and in May 1986, an initial order for 14 helicopters was submitted.

However, also during the 1980's there was considerable debate about whether the ADF's battlefield helicopters should remain with the RAAF or be transferred to the Army.

In November 1986, the Defence Minister, Kim Beazely, decided that the Blackhawk helicopters be transferred to the Army - the RAAF was to see the Blackhawk enter into service and the aircraft would then transfer to the Army.

Between December 1987 and January 1989, eight S-70A / UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters were delivered to and served with No 9 Squadron based at RAAF Amberley. In late December 1988, the unit relocated to RAAF Townsville in preparation for the handover of the helicopters to the Army.

Shortly after, on the 14th February 1989, the RAAF Blackhawk helicopters were formally transferred to the Army and No 9 Squadron was disbanded with its 120 members integrated into A Squadron, 5th Aviation Regiment. No 9 Squadron's last commanding officer, Wing Commander (later Air Chief Marshal) Angus Houston, oversaw the transfer. Meanwhile, RAAF members remained at 5 Aviation Regiment until they were progressively replaced by trained Army personnel that became available over the next several years.

The transfer of the Blackhawk helicopters and the subsequent disbanding of No 9 Squadron and then No 5 Squadron was a contentious initiative that caused angst amongst serving and ex-serving RAAF members given the distinguished service of RAAF helicopters particularly during the Vietnam War and in operations thereafter.

Many questioned the reasoning suggesting it was not resource effective, was overly motivated by memories of some initial issues in Vietnam with battlefield support and reflected realpolitik at the highest levels of Defence.

Notwithstanding, the RAAF completed the transfer, a particularly significant and complex undertaking, honourably, smoothly and successfully as directed. Destined to be a successful leader at the highest levels of Defence, WGCDR Houston was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 1990 for his leadership and management as CO 9SQN of the transfer of the Blackhawk fleet.

Imagery of Blackhawk helicopters in RAAF livery at RAAF Edinburgh in 1988 courtesy of Nigel Daw.





The story of Gunner a very courage's dog.

LEST WE FORGET

Meet 'Gunner' the stray kelpie who was found 80 years ago [#OnThisDay](#) 19 February, 1942, under a destroyed mess hut in a Darwin air after an airraid and became adept at warning of Japanese planes up to 20 minutes before they arrived!!!!

He could tell the difference between enemy and friendly aircraft and saved a great many of lives.

AN AMAZING STORY.... The six-month-old black and white male kelpie was found whimpering, having suffered a broken front leg, under a destroyed mess hut at Darwin Air Force base [#OnThisDay](#) in 1942, following the first wave of Japanese attacks on Darwin.

Air Force personnel took him to a field hospital, but the doctor insisted he couldn't fix a "man" with a broken leg without knowing his name and serial number. The doctor repaired and plastered his leg after the air force personnel replied that his name was "Gunner" and his number was "0000". Gunner entered the airforce on that day.

Leading Aircraftman Percy Westcott, one of the two airmen who found Gunner, took ownership of him and became his master and handler. At first, the dog was badly shaken after the bombing, but being only six months old he quickly responded to the men's attention. About a week after, Gunner first demonstrated his remarkable hearing skills. While the men were working on the airfield, Gunner became agitated and started to whine and jump. Not long afterwards, the sound of approaching aeroplane engines was heard by the airmen. A few minutes later a wave of Japanese raiders appeared in the skies above Darwin and began bombing and strafing the town.

Two days later, Gunner began whimpering and jumping again and not long afterwards came another air attack. This set the pattern for the months that followed. Long before the sirens sounded, Gunner would get agitated and head for shelter. Gunner's hearing was so acute he was able to warn air force personnel of approaching Japanese aircraft up to 20 minutes before they arrived and before they showed up on the radar. Gunner never performed when he heard the allied planes taking off or landing; only when he heard enemy aircraft as he could differentiate the sounds of allied from enemy aircraft.

Gunner was so reliable that Wing Commander McFarlane gave approval for Westcott to sound a portable air raid siren whenever Gunner's whining or jumping alerted him.

Before long, there were a number of stray dogs roaming the base. McFarlane gave the order that all dogs be shot, with the exception of Gunner.

Gunner became such a part of the air force that he slept under Westcott's bunk, showered with the men in the shower block, sat with the men at the outdoor movie pictures, and went up with the pilots during practice take-off and landings.

When Westcott was posted to Melbourne 18 months later, Gunner stayed in Darwin, looked after by the RAAF butcher....

Gunner's fate is undocumented.



RETURNED SERVICES LEAGUE ARMADALE SUB-BRANCH.

Your RSL.