



Empowering veterans with choice and support for making a claim

When it comes to lodging a claim with DVA, veterans and families have more options and support than ever before. More than half of claims are successfully lodged by veterans themselves, often using MyService, DVA's secure online portal accessed through myGov (my.gov.au).

But if you'd like more help, you're never alone. Whether you prefer to lodge your own claim or seek support, DVA is committed to empowering you with clear information and trusted assistance.

Free, professionally trained advocates are available through Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs). You can access support from ESO advocates who are independent from DVA, professionally trained, and covered by professional indemnity insurance.

Plus, many of these advocates are veterans themselves. They bring lived experience, compassion and a deep understanding of navigating the claims process. ESO advocates can help you prepare and lodge claims via MyService, request reviews, appeal decisions or act as a support person in hearings. They can also provide holistic support – including referrals to health, housing, employment, and family services.

You can find a qualified advocate near you via the Advocacy Register at www.advocateregister.org.au. This will shortly be replaced by the list of DVA Approved Advocates who are members in good standing of the Institute of Veterans' Advocacy.

For those seeking extra help, DVA has 2 dedicated programs offering personalised guidance every step of the way. The Claims Lodgment Assistance (CLA) and Veteran Support Office (VSO) programs connect veterans and families with specially trained DVA staff who provide one-on-one guidance throughout the claims process.

Both programs offer virtual or face-to-face consultations, help you prepare documentation, and walk you through lodging your claim online. After your appointment, you'll receive a summary of next steps and confirmation of submitted conditions.

The CLA program is designed for veterans who are no longer serving in the ADF and also supports ESO advocates with tailored training and troubleshooting, ensuring they are equipped to help veterans confidently use digital platforms like MyService. You can register your interest in meeting with a CLA by emailing CLA.WA@dva.gov.au. DVA VSOs are located on more than 50 Defence bases across Australia, providing personalised claims and transition support to all serving ADF members, including Reservists and their families. You can book a VSO appointment, or seek their support, by emailing VSO@dva.gov.au.

Advocacy should empower, not exploit

DVA is safeguarding the integrity of the veteran support system with reforms to promote informed

decision-making, ensure fair, consistent support for all, and warn veterans about misleading services.

A professional institute for advocacy is being established, independently from DVA. The Institute of Veterans' Advocacy will serve as the professional organisation to accredit professional veteran advocates. It will professionalise the sector by setting competency and training standards, accrediting and registering veteran advocates, and enforcing a code of conduct.

While commercial (fee-for-service) advocacy is a growing business, paying for advocacy doesn't guarantee faster processing, better outcomes, or greater compensation. All claims follow the same process, regardless of who lodges them.

You do not need to pay anyone to lodge a claim or get quality advocacy – trained advocates are available through ex-service organisations who provide comprehensive, free support to veterans and families. And you can always lodge your own claim online via MyService, by visiting a DVA location in person, or calling 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372).

For more information, including what to watch out for when considering fee-for-service advocacy services, see our *Making a Claim* guide on the DVA website at www.dva.gov.au/claimguide.

Remember: It's your service, your choice. You're never alone when making a claim.



DVA services during the holiday season

8



Prime Minister's National Veteran Employment Awards

16-17



New Veteran Family Commissioner Annabelle Wilson

19



Veteran drone racing takes off

26

Safeguarding the integrity of veteran support systems

Most health providers do the right thing and offer invaluable support to veterans and families.

However, there are some who look to take advantage of the system for their own personal gain. DVA is seeing increased reports of behaviour by providers that is self-serving and not in the best interests of the

veteran community – and some that could be fraudulent.

Some of the concerning behaviours which DVA has identified include:

- submitting invoices that do not match services provided to clients
- invoicing DVA at exorbitant rates (without clear clinical justification)
- delivering low value and clinically unnecessary care

- claiming for medical investigations or material that DVA has not requested or is not needed.

DVA is aware of some cases where, veterans have been deceived into undergoing unnecessary medical examinations, resulting in significant risks to their health, purely so the provider can charge the Department.

Continue reading on page 7.

CONTENTS

NEWS.....	2-8
HEALTH AND WELLBEING	9-12
DEFENCE NEWS.....	13
OPEN ARMS.....	14-15
TRANSITION.....	16-18
FAMILIES.....	19
WIDOWS' NEWS.....	20-21
ESO NEWS.....	22-23
BOOKSHELF	24-25
FEATURES	26
COMMEMORATIONS	27-29
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL.....	30
NOTICEBOARD.....	31-32



FROM THE DEPARTMENT

Alison Frame
Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs

DVA is continuing to take meaningful steps in strengthening how we support the veteran community while responding to the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

One year on from the Government's response to the Royal Commission's Final Report, the Minister recently outlined the significant progress that has been made not only within DVA and Defence but across government in implementing the recommendations.

By the end of December, 32 recommendations will have been implemented, with a further 89 recommendations in progress or under consideration.

One exciting initiative starting on 1 July 2026 will be the new agency focused on veteran and family wellbeing. The Government is providing \$78 million over 4 years to establish the agency, which will focus on the overall wellbeing of veterans and families, while providing wrap around support for at-risk veterans as they transition out of the ADF.

During the co-design work in which many from the veteran community participated, we heard that transition is not a single event where a person moves from military to civilian life, but an ongoing journey of change that unfolds over time. The agency will strengthen access to supports across the country – working with the Veteran Access Network, Open Arms and the Veterans' and Families' Hub network. It will also have a remit for complex case management, wellbeing service coordination, referral concierge and a hotline. (More about the new agency is on page 5 of this edition of *Vetaffairs*.)

From 1 July 2026, Government funding will be available for veteran specific mental health care plans to support GPs and psychiatrists providing proactive, continuous and connected care for veterans experiencing mental health conditions.

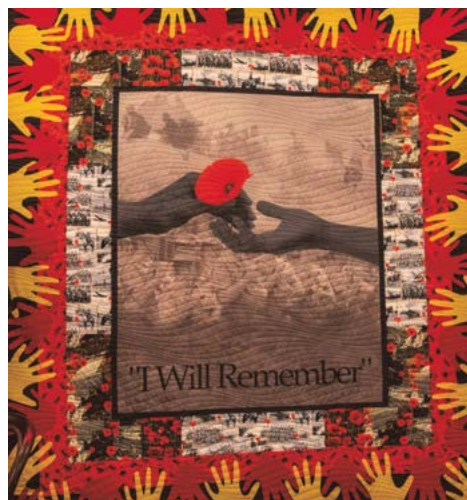
The emphasis on wellbeing and up-front prevention and treatment means that veterans can have conditions treated before they become chronic.

Overseeing this emerging ecosystem is the new Defence and Veterans' Services Commission – an independent, statutory entity dedicated to veteran welfare. DVA is already working with the new Commission to play our part in fulfilling the role intended for it by the Royal Commission. (See page 5 for more information.)

We recently released DVA's Suicide Prevention Framework. There is nothing more important than supporting the wellbeing of those in our community. I was powerfully reminded of this at a Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors workshop earlier this year, where DVA was presented with a quilt 'stitched with love and hope, by and for families who live with loss'.

The new Suicide Prevention Framework recognises that suicide is complex, with many contributing factors, and reflects the unique challenges faced by serving and ex-serving ADF members and those who support them. It acts as a collaborative roadmap for government, service providers, communities and individuals. (You can read more on page 5.) As the Director of the National Suicide Prevention Office pointed out, DVA is the first Commonwealth Government department or agency to develop a dedicated suicide prevention plan following the release of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Our work in the advocacy space also continues at pace to ensure that veterans and their families have access to free, professional advocacy services. The integrity of the veteran support system is paramount and we are determined to eliminate exploitative and irregular business practices, especially by commissions-based advocates and their associated entities.



Commemorative quilt from the Families and Friends of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

The Government has announced it will provide funding to the new Institute of Veterans' Advocacy to act as the professional association for veteran advocates to ensure more advocates are appropriately trained, qualified and required to comply with ethics and conduct rules. It is also more than doubling funding to the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) grants program to enable more advocates to deliver services that will be free for veterans and give organisations greater funding certainty.

As you're aware, new laws that govern the veteran support system come into effect on 1 July next year. The Department has been busy preparing for the start of the *Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025*, with a plethora of information and support being made available to all who intend to lodge a claim after this date. (You can read more on page 7.)

A new Claims Lodgement Assistant (CLA) program is already connecting veterans with specially trained DVA staff who sit alongside ESO advocates to provide personalised guidance throughout the claims process. This initiative will be further expanded in 2026.

Remembrance Day commemorations this year were made more memorable by a visit of Her Royal



Escorting Her Royal Highness Anne, the Princess Royal, through the Sydney War Cemetery in Rookwood.

Highness, Princess Anne. In the days prior, DVA's Office of Australian War Graves hosted a Service of Remembrance at the Sydney War Cemetery, where the Princess Royal laid a wreath and visited the graves of veterans. The Princess Royal is the Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals and was also in Australia to mark the Centenary of the Corps.

Earlier this year, the Princess Royal was also a guest at our Anzac Day services in Gallipoli. For the first time, veterans and family members of veterans travelled with our DVA delivery support teams in 2025 to assist with Anzac Day services in Türkiye, France, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea. This was a resounding success and we are increasing the number of volunteers participating next year, having received more than 850 applications from the veteran community expressing interest in joining our teams.

Finally, the festive season is a time of joy, but can bring mixed emotions for families, depending on your personal circumstances. Remember to reach out if you need to: The Open Arms phone line is available around the clock. There is military-aware mental health support available for veterans and their immediate families, day and night, 365 days a year, on 1800 011 046.

I wish everyone a merry and peaceful Christmas, and I look forward to the new year, as we work together to create a stronger and healthier veteran community.



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

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If you have an enquiry for DVA

Phone: freecall 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372)

Web: dva.gov.au





FROM THE MINISTER

The Hon Matt Keogh MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel

The wellbeing of our serving Defence personnel, veterans and families is my key priority.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide made clear significant change needed to be made in order to reduce the rates of deaths by suicide in our veteran community.

Twelve months on from the Royal Commission we have not deviated from our goal of implementing the recommendations of the Final Report as swiftly as possible.

As you're aware, the Government agreed or agreed in-principle to the overwhelming majority of the recommendations and an enormous amount of progress has already been made to implement these and progress many more that were noted for further work.

The Royal Commission said that its most important recommendation was the creation of a legislated, independent oversight body to oversee sustained reform to improve suicide prevention and wellbeing outcomes for serving and ex-serving ADF members. We have implemented this by creating the new Defence and Veterans' Services Commission, which began operating in September.

The Royal Commission had a particular focus on the wellbeing of Defence personnel, veterans and families – aimed at preventing harm and supporting early intervention.

That's meant improvements to how we support people in service and following – be that through enhanced suicide awareness



At DVA's annual Veteran Families Forum

training in the ADF, the development of a new agency for veteran and family wellbeing, or through a renewed focus on effective treatment and rehabilitation for veterans.

I'm proud that in my time as the Minister for Veterans' Affairs we've got on top of the backlog of initial liability claims and have been working to speed up overall claims processing, but that's not the end game.

I'm so excited to be seeing the shift within the Department of Veterans' Affairs – indeed across the whole veteran eco-system – to a more holistic, wellbeing approach, with funding now enabling social wellbeing activities, like arts and sporting activities, as part of a veteran's rehabilitation.

By engaging in creative or sporting activities with each other, veterans often find they're better able to express emotions and experiences that may be difficult to put into words, develop new coping and stress management techniques and, importantly, help them connect with others.

We are also continuing to roll out Veterans' and Families' Hubs and new veteran housing and homelessness support.

The focus is no longer just about paying compensation, as important as this remains, rather it's about taking a more holistic approach to supporting the wellbeing of a veteran or a veteran family.

We're moving to a treatment first approach. That means getting in early with prevention, treatment and rehabilitation to help a veteran improve their health and wellbeing, rather than waiting for a condition to become worse, with all the negative lifestyle impacts that entails.

Through our new agency for veteran and family wellbeing there will be a renewed focus on successful transition from military to civilian life, community connection and improving wellbeing outcomes.

It is also not enough to simply increase the Department's capability, we must also secure the integrity of the veteran support system, to ensure veterans and families receive the best possible care from those who have their wellbeing at heart.

Volunteer veteran advocates have been a core part of Australia's veteran support system for decades, with "mates supporting mates" being a founding principle. The increased

commercialisation of this vital support is a recent development and the actions of some operators are a growing concern. We're also seeing a concerning rise in inappropriate and sometimes illegal profiteering by providers at the detriment of veterans.

When choosing to use or recommend an advocate, veterans and families should know they do not need to pay for something they can and will get for free – and still receive the same outcome. I encourage you to find a qualified free-to-use advocate to support you on DVA's advocacy register at www.advocaterregister.org.au.

Remembrance Day last month was a powerful reminder of the enduring cost of war and the immense sacrifice made by those who have given their lives in the service of our nation. As we remember the fallen, we also remain steadfastly focused on the wellbeing of the living.

Finally, I wish all in the veteran community a safe, peaceful and merry Christmas. Enjoy the holiday season and remember support is always available if you need it.



At the Remembrance Day service at the Australian Memorial in London



New wellbeing changes support veterans and their families from their first day in the ADF to long after they hang up the uniform.

Artificial intelligence at DVA

As with many Australian organisations, DVA is looking at opportunities to leverage new technology to improve our processes, including artificial intelligence (AI).

DVA sees opportunities for our staff to use AI to deliver faster and more accessible services for veterans and their families. For example, a new AI-enabled assistant, CLIKChat, is now helping DVA staff more easily navigate publicly available policy and compensation information. It is used as an information support tool – not for decision making – and does not access client records or case management systems.

CLIKChat is improving the speed and accuracy of information for claims teams and forms part of DVA's broader work to

enhance staff capability and deliver more consistent, efficient services for veterans and families.

We have published an AI Transparency Statement on our website, which sets out DVA's approach to the safe, responsible and ethical adoption of AI technology.

DVA has also launched a new AI-enabled website search function to improve access to publicly available information harnessed from the websites of DVA, Open Arms, the Anzac Portal, and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs. You can try it for yourself at www.dva.gov.au.



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Current pensions and allowances

SERVICE PENSION	Old rate (fortnightly)	New rate (fortnightly)	Increase (fortnightly)
Single person	\$1,149	\$1,178.70	\$29.70
Couples (each)	\$866.10	\$888.50	\$22.40
Single person – transitional	\$944.80	\$959.70	\$14.90
Couples (each) – transitional	\$762.30	\$774.30	\$12.00
WAR WIDOWS (total amount)			
War widow(er)'s pension	\$1,170	\$1,200.80	\$30.80
Income support supplement (ceiling rate)	\$347.60	\$357	\$9.40
DISABILITY COMPENSATION PAYMENT (total amount)			
T&PI (Special rate)	\$1,812.50	\$1,860.90	\$48.40
Intermediate rate	\$1,201.60	\$1,233.70	\$32.10
EDA	\$978.10	\$1,004.20	\$26.10
100 per cent (inc ES)	\$629.20	\$646	\$16.80
10 per cent (inc ES)	\$69.85	\$71.53	\$1.68
Veteran Payment			
Single person	\$1,247.30	\$1,280.10	\$32.80
Couples (each)	\$972.80	\$998.40	\$25.60
MRCA			
Wholly dependent partner payment	\$1,170.00	\$1,200.80	\$30.80
Special Rate Disability pension (SRDP)	\$1,812.50	\$1,860.90	\$48.40

These are the maximum rates of payment that came into effect on 20 September 2025 and include any Energy Supplement payable.

Letter to the Editor

I am a Gold Card holder and live in the Adelaide Hills. Several retail outlets in my area offer discounts to pensioners, sometimes on a permanent basis and sometimes on a given day of the week. When I show my Veteran Card I have often been asked if it is a pension card, as the word "Pension" does not appear on it. In every case, with an explanation, I have been

given the discount, but it would be easier if the card was called a "Veteran Pensioner Card" – which is accurate as both White and Gold card holders receive some sort of payment. It would unquestionably make every veteran eligible for pensioner discounts.

Les Laub (Ex-RAN CPO)



Veteran wellbeing agency to open next year

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Matt Keogh has announced a new agency focused on veteran and family wellbeing will be established from 1 July 2026.

The functions to be delivered by the new agency were informed by a process of consultation and co-design with veterans, families and service providers between March and May this year. The new agency will provide information on wellbeing services, and support and connections to the community through the Veterans' and Families' Hubs network, so veterans and families are empowered to lead productive, meaningful lives after service in the ADF.

The agency will focus effort on supporting transitioning veterans who face a higher risk of suicide or other challenges. These veterans and their families will be supported to navigate and be connected to services and supports, including those available in the community through the Veterans' and Families' Hubs.

The agency will evolve to prepare and support veterans and families before, during and after transition by equipping them with

knowledge and skills to proactively manage their wellbeing. Once fully established, it will also play a role influencing system-wide changes to improve wellbeing service and support.

To support the ongoing delivery of services, the agency will scale operations over its initial phases of establishment. It will learn as it delivers support with a program of evaluation established to optimise the delivery of programs. This will include evolving processes and identifying quality local and national services, ultimately resulting in a better experience for veterans and families.

The agency's services will develop services to be available online, via a helpline, and through face-to-face contact in local and regional areas such as through Veterans' and Families' Hubs. It will become a service where members of the veteran community can find or be guided to the resources that can assist their wellbeing needs.

For updates on the wellbeing agency, as well as a peak body for ex-service organisations, please visit the DVA website and search for 'Taskforce on Wellbeing Agency and Peak Body'.

New framework to strengthen suicide prevention

DVA has a new Suicide Prevention Framework in place, designed to reduce suicide and suicidal distress among veterans and families. The framework delivers on a key objective of the joint Defence and DVA Suicide Prevention Action Plan and will underpin our dedicated response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The framework was shaped in collaboration with veterans, families, carers, health professionals and support organisations, and recognises that suicide is a highly complex issue, with a range of contributing factors at the individual and societal level. It reflects the unique challenges faced by the veteran community, serving ADF members and those who support them.

Responding to these challenges, the framework is designed to act as a collaborative roadmap for government, service providers, communities and individuals to coordinate efforts, build skills and establish more effective support systems.

The related Implementation Plan operationalises the framework, setting out a series of initiatives across the short, medium and long term.

These include:

- enhancing understanding of the needs of veterans and their support networks
- strengthening partnerships across government and the community sector, including service providers and subject matter experts
- supporting the implementation of recommendations 76 and 77 of the Royal Commission to develop a postvention framework and resources.

Importantly, the framework places families and carers at the centre of suicide prevention, recognising their crucial role in recovery and wellbeing, and aims to provide them with the tools and resources they need to navigate challenges such as suicidal distress, attempts, and bereavement.

To learn more or download the Suicide Prevention Framework, visit www.dva.gov.au.

Defence and Veterans' Services Commission up and running

The Defence and Veterans' Services Commission (DVSC) began operation on 29 September as a powerful force for change, overseeing sustained improvement in how we protect the lives of those who swore to protect us.

For the first time, veterans and their families have a government entity with a specific, singular focus on preventing suicide among current

and ex-serving ADF members. Operating independently of government, and backed by significant evidence-gathering powers, the DVSC will drive ongoing, systemic reform across the defence and veteran ecosystem.

The creation of the DVSC implements Recommendation 122 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide – to create a new, independent statutory entity – described by the Commission as its most important. A key element of its mandate is to hold government

to account by monitoring and reporting on progress to implement recommendations. Families of veterans who have died by suicide have made it clear they expect this body to be at arm's length from government.

That is why the Government will introduce standalone legislation for the Defence and Veterans' Services Commission, with a Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor-General to ensure their independence and enhance oversight of the implementation of Royal Commission

recommendations, and include defence and veteran families in the Commission's functions.

Penny McKay is serving as Acting Commissioner while a merit-based recruitment process for the inaugural permanent DVSC Commissioner is underway. Ms McKay comes to the role with a distinguished career that's included serving as Deputy Commonwealth and Defence Force Ombudsman.

You can find out more about the DVSC at www.DVSC.gov.au.

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The role of Australian civil society in enabling our military and veterans

For what they have done, this we will do.

Kahlil Fegan DSC AM
Repatriation Commissioner



Throughout our nation's history, the Australian military, as imperfect as it may be, has helped produce wonderful people and valuable citizens who have made an immeasurable contribution to civil society.

Following their service, some have gone onto become titans of industry – business owners and entrepreneurs, national leaders of not-for-profit, private and public sector organisations, and valuable local community contributors.

For well over 100 years, our society has been the beneficiary of the individual and collective achievements of veterans and indeed their families. Our society revels in the freedoms and largess their sacrifices have helped provide.

Our society owes our veterans much – for what they have done and what they continue to do.

Yet despite this, it appears some components of our society have become ambivalent towards the value of service and their role in

helping to enable a strong, empowered and proud veteran community.

Australian society has not faced the reality of war on our shores, or even close to home, since the Second World War. Hence, apart from a couple of nationally significant days, too many now naively and ignorantly consider all aspects of the provision of enabling support to our military, veterans and their families as government's problem.

This abdication of our society's responsibilities towards helping enable those we depend upon during times of conflict, leaves us vulnerable and exposed to wolves (see my article in *Vetaffairs* April 2025). Moreover, by under-investing in our veterans we fail to capitalise on the immense good they can do elsewhere in support of our nation.

Until mankind evolves to the point it can resolve conflict without violence, we need veterans and resilient families to support them. We need a strong and resilient society, and we can only achieve this when our civil society recognises the value of our veteran community, acts to enable it and demands of government that which only government can do.

Australian civil society can and must do so much more to be aware and proactive in supporting those that do or have served, and here are a few ideas:

- Accept society has a critical role to promote and support our military and veterans. This may include calling for necessary change or improvement. For example, why can't we recognise the 'value of service' by calling for *positive* discrimination for veterans and their families to help them find purposeful and meaningful employment post service, access to schools and medical support?
- Recognise that government has limitations as to what it can do. So how can others, such as Defence industry, meaningfully contribute to supporting and enabling the wellbeing of veterans and families? Hint: hire veterans and their family members and donate much more generously to ex-service organisations!
- Support ex-service organisations (ESOs). ESOs provide incalculable support to those in need – but they need *your* help – join, engage, donate and promote (have a morning tea, get a guest speaker, raise some money). Think about

what our national organisations like Legacy and the RSL have done for veteran and families in the past and what we may need them to do in the future!

- ESOs we need you. Don't let personality get in the way of agency. Seek opportunity to nest with and enable smaller organisations. Demonstrate collaboration and unity of cause.
- Be proud of our ADF. Although it's imperfect, it is world class in the quality and capability of its people and absolutely deserving of our respect, admiration and support. This could be as simple as thanking an ADF member for their service. Indeed, they deserve it.

We have a commendable civil society in Australia and it can and has achieved greatness when it desires to do so. This is in no small part due to the sacrifice of our veterans and their families. While it is admirable for this society to galvanise and commemorate the past, on certain days, it must do more to proactively set the conditions for our safe and prosperous future, through investment in our military, veterans and their families. We must lift our game!

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Safeguarding support systems

Continued from page 1.

DVA has an obligation to ensure taxpayers funds are used responsibly and will not tolerate those who look to take advantage of Australia's veteran support systems for personal gain.

We work cooperatively with more than 20 other government agencies – including the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, the Australian Federal Police, and the Australian Tax Office – in a Fraud Fusion Taskforce to find and stop acts of fraud across government payment programs.

DVA has identified non-compliant billing behaviour by some medical providers. Separately,

DVA has determined it will no longer pay for services from some providers due to serious non-compliance. We have also received information that a small number of advocates and/or providers have supplied compensation medical reports that appear to have been allegedly deliberately altered in an attempt to achieve a higher monetary payment, or are otherwise out of keeping with normal billing practices.

Clients affected by these investigations are being supported by the Department, including through direct contact and referral to alternative providers.

DVA has recently reviewed and updated official documents and guidelines that outline health provider responsibilities, including

how they should act and make decisions when treating our clients. This includes reminding providers of the requirement to disclose any relationships and/or commercial interests to veterans when they provide referrals to other providers.

Where a provider is found to have engaged in inappropriate practices, DVA can take a variety of actions, including corrective education about policies and procedures, referral to the regulator or other relevant professional bodies, declining to fund future services, debt recovery, or referral to the Australian Federal Police.

We've put these new systems in place to prevent health providers from exploiting the veteran support system by engaging in

illegal, inappropriate and unethical behaviour. We're calling out business practices and advocacy services that put profits ahead of veteran care.

DVA wants veterans to be aware of these risks and feel empowered to ask questions. If you are unsure about why a referral is being made or suspect that something "feels off", you have the right to speak up. By doing so, you can help make it easier for veterans and families to access fair, transparent and accountable care and compensation that supports their wellbeing.

We encourage anyone with concerns about the conduct of a provider in relation to DVA services to report it confidentially to fraud.tipoff@dva.gov.au.

From bases to backyards: DVA expands veteran support in South-East Queensland



L to R: Andy McCulloch, Aaron Davies, Rebecca Peall, Lu McCulloch and Troy Peall attending the Veteran Cooking Class at the RSL Queensland Veteran and Family Wellbeing Centre in Brisbane

A DVA Senior Veteran Support Officer (SVSO) has been embedded across several locations in the South-East Queensland region since October last year.

Lou West is offering personalised, face-to-face support to veterans, current ADF members and families, wherever they are in their journey.

'No 2 days are the same,' says SVSO Lou. 'We meet with veterans, serving members, widows, carers, partners and families.'

'Hubs are designed to feel safe and welcoming, not clinical or

intimidating. Appointments happen wherever people feel most comfortable: in an office, the kitchen, the common room, or even out on the deck. There's always a chance for a coffee and even pancakes on Fridays!'

Taking VSO services beyond military bases and into the heart of local communities provides relaxed access to services, helping break down barriers and build trust.

Veterans can get help with DVA claims, check progress, clarify documentation and connect with staff, all in a space that feels familiar and supportive.

One veteran, who recently finalised their claims after months of support, still drops by the Hub just to catch up. 'That in itself is a highlight,' Lou says. 'Knowing the connection doesn't end when the paperwork does.'

These Hubs have become vital touchpoints for those who've served, and for those who stand beside them. They're places of connection, care, and community. DVA is proud to support this model of outreach, which is currently being delivered at:

- Lives Lived Well Veterans' and Families' Wellbeing Hub, Caboolture
- RSL Queensland Veteran and Family Wellbeing Centre, Brisbane, and
- Legacy House, Brisbane.

Whether you're serving, transitioning, or no longer in uniform – VSOs are here for you.

Learn more about the work of Veteran Support Officers on the DVA website. (Search for 'Veteran Support Office')

Changes are coming on 1 July 2026

With the new *Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025* (VETS Act) set to commence on 1 July next year, DVA has a range of resources available to help you make the most of the improved system.

In just over 6 months, the veterans' compensation system will be easier to navigate. Changes to veterans' legislation will enable veterans and their families to better understand their entitlements

and receive the support they need, when they need it.

The current three-Act system will be simplified, so that all compensation and rehabilitation claims lodged after 1 July 2026 will be determined under a single ongoing Act – an improved version of the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA).

For the most part, there won't be too many changes for veterans with service commencing after 2004, but there will be enhancements to the MRCA – please visit the DVA website for more detail.

While the Department cannot provide personalised claims advice,

there are a range of resources on the website to help you understand how the new system will operate including:

- more than 20 fact sheets that provide information on specific topics and summaries of the impact for particular groups
- frequently asked questions
- scenarios that demonstrate how the improved MRCA may impact individual circumstances.

The new VETS Act responds to recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The Australian Government has established an independent oversight body, the Defence and Veterans' Services Commission, which commenced operation on

29 September 2025 (see article on page 5). A 'single review pathway' is also already in place providing access to all veterans to have claim decisions reviewed by the Veterans' Review Board.

There will be no changes to payments currently being received, including income support payments such as the service pension, income support supplement and Veteran Payment. Payments currently being received will continue to be indexed as normal. Advocates are being supported to ensure they can continue to support veterans with their claims.

For everything you need to know about the coming changes, go to: www.dva.gov.au/legislationreform.

DVA services during the holiday season



DVA will continue to provide support to veterans and families during the Christmas / New Year period. However, please be aware that some services will be impacted.

Counselling and mental health support

Open Arms offers military-aware mental health support for veterans and their immediate families, day and night, 365 days a year. Telephone 1800 011 046.

For free and anonymous counselling, Safe Zone offers 24/7 support, every single day of the year. Telephone 1800 142 072.

If you require urgent assistance, please call 000. If you are unwell, please contact your local doctor or go to your nearest hospital.

Open Arms centres will be closed for the Christmas / New Year period from Thursday 25 December 2025 to Thursday 1 January 2026 inclusive, and will re-open on Friday 2 January 2026. For further information visit the Open Arms website (www.openarms.gov.au).

Transport bookings for medical treatment

In a medical emergency, always dial 000. DVA staff will be available to process transport requests for approved or compensable medical treatment. Staff will not be available on weekends or the public holidays of 25 and 26 December 2025, and 1 January 2026.

If transport is required on these days and has not been pre-booked, you can pay for the travel and seek reimbursement. Please call 1800 550 455 for assistance during business hours. Or, if you are an existing MyService user with access to the Booked Car with Driver service, you can make new transport bookings and review existing ones online.

Pension payments

The last pension payment in 2025 will be moved forward to Wednesday 24 December to ensure payments are received prior to the Christmas Day public holiday. The first payment of the new year will be

Thursday 8 January 2026. See also 'Payment dates' section below.

Incapacity payments

The incapacity payment that would ordinarily be paid on Thursday 1 January 2026 will be moved forward to Wednesday 24 December 2025. The next payment after this will be made on Thursday 15 January 2026, as scheduled. See also 'Payment dates' section below.

Payment dates

As a result of differing arrangements by various banks during the holiday period, which are beyond DVA's control, the precise day of the week you receive your pension or incapacity payment may differ. You may wish to make arrangements to ensure you have enough funds to cover any direct debit payments.

VAN offices and general enquiries

DVA offices, shopfronts and general enquiry services do not operate over weekends or public holidays, including the Christmas / New Year period.

They will be closed from 25 December 2025 to 1 January 2026 inclusive. This includes DVA's General Enquiries phone line and our Veteran Access Network offices. These services will resume on 2 January 2026.

Defence Service Homes Insurance

DSH Insurance advisors will be available for support with any insurance needs 8 am to 5 pm from 29 December to 31 December 2025. Outside of business hours, and during weekends and public holidays, calls will be diverted to DSH Insurance's after-hours service partner, ensuring that support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

For enquiries, or help with a policy or claim, phone 1300 552 662.

Online insurance enquiries can be made via the DSH Insurance

website. They will be responded to after the public holidays. You can also lodge a non-urgent claim using the online claim form.

For DSH Insurance's automated payment service, phone 1300 304 989 for the cost of a local call. This service is also available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Client Support Program

The Client Support Program (CSP) provides case management services tailored to the individual needs of clients and families. This program will be closed from 25 December 2025 to 1 January 2026 inclusive. CSP case managers will contact their clients prior to this period to discuss support arrangements.

Rehabilitation Program

We encourage you to speak to your rehabilitation provider about any changes to your current arrangements over the Christmas / New Year period.

Claims and invoices submitted on or after 25 December 2025 will not be processed until after 1 January 2026.

Defence, Veterans' and Families' Acute Support Package

We encourage you to speak to your service providers about any changes to your current Acute Support Package arrangements over the Christmas / New Year period. Please refer to information available on DVA's website for external supports relating to crisis. (Search for 'Crisis contacts'.)

Claims and invoices submitted on or after 24 December 2025 will not be processed until after 1 January 2026.

Household Services and Attendant Care

We encourage you to speak to your service providers about any changes to your current household services and attendant care arrangements over the Christmas / New Year

period. Claims and invoices submitted on or after 25 December 2025 will not be processed until after 1 January 2026.

Veterans' Home Care Program

Access to Veterans' Home Care services is via the VHC Assessment Agency, which will confirm eligibility and conduct an assessment to determine the level of care needed. It can be contacted on 1300 550 450. The agency will not be available on the public holidays of 25 and 26 December 2025, and 1 January 2026.

Community Nursing Program

The DVA office will be closed from 25 December 2025 to 1 January 2026 inclusive. DVA-contracted Community Nursing providers can continue to accept new referrals and assess and deliver services to new and existing clients.

Veteran Support Officers

Veteran Support Officers (VSOs) provide personalised DVA services to ADF members on Defence bases. VSOs will not be available from 4 pm on 24 December 2025 until 9 am on 2 January 2026 inclusive.

ADF members can continue to book VSO appointments over the holiday period by emailing vso@dva.gov.au.

Scam and fraud tip-offs

The Scam and Fraud Tip-Off mailboxes will not be monitored between 25 December 2025 and 1 January 2026 inclusive.

If you believe you have been the victim of a scam, please review the options available at IDCARE, Australia and New Zealand's national identity & cyber support service (www.idcare.org).

For all serious matters, please contact the police.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Supporting veteran mental health over the holiday season

The summer holiday period is a time of joy, family and celebration. But for some veterans, the season can be one of the most difficult times of the year.

The holiday break can highlight mental health concerns such as low moods and anxiety. The end of the year can prompt reflection, and feelings of loneliness or sadness may be amplified for those who have experienced trauma, separation from family, or the challenges of transitioning from service to civilian life.

Families and close friends can provide valuable support during these times, offering stability, encouragement and a sense of belonging when it is needed most. But supporting someone living with mental health challenges without the right tools can be difficult.

That is why DVA fully funds mental health literacy and suicide prevention training for members of the veteran community.

Delivered by Mental Health First Aid Australia, the training program is open to families, friends, carers, employers and colleagues of veterans and serving ADF personnel.

The program helps build the skills and confidence to recognise the signs of mental health issues, start a supportive conversation, and connect loved ones to professional help.

By equipping families, friends and community members with these skills, the program strengthens the support network around veterans – especially when they may be feeling most vulnerable.

For more information or to sign up for a training session visit www.mhfa.com.au/mental-health-protect.

Funding connection, purpose and community with Veteran Wellbeing Grants

Almost \$3 million in funding has been awarded to 46 community-led initiatives through the 2024–25 Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program, supporting a holistic approach to veteran and family wellbeing that includes connection, purpose and community.

From metropolitan centres to regional towns, the funded projects reflect the diverse needs of the veteran community. Among them are the Resilience Shield Comedy Project in Western Australia, which blends humour and resilience training, and Trojan's Trek Foundation (Queensland), which is offering wilderness-based peer support. Meanwhile, Our Mate-Ship (NSW) is inviting veterans to hands-on boat restoration workshops and the Ringwood RSL (Victoria) is running eGaming sessions to build peer networks and mental wellbeing.

A powerful example of the program's impact is Eyes Front, a past recipient that used its 2022–23 grant to expand the Celebration of Service initiative. This project honours the lived experiences of veterans and first responders through storytelling, reflection, and peer connection.

Delivered through online and in-person events, a dedicated website and tailored course materials, Celebration of Service creates a safe space for veterans to explore and share their stories. Participants are guided through reflective

exercises that help them unpack significant moments from their service, identify personal growth, and express their experiences through journaling or storytelling.

The early sessions helped me explore the pivotal moments and lessons from my time in service. Putting these memories into words was cathartic. Sharing them with the group was nerve-wracking, but the supportive environment helped me realise I wasn't alone.

Celebration of Service participant

The initiative has helped veterans reconnect with their identity, build confidence and find healing through shared experiences. It also raises public awareness of the challenges faced by veterans, fostering greater understanding and compassion in the broader community.

Eyes Front has created a model of veteran care that combines compassion, peer support, and genuine celebration. DVA is proud to have supported this work, which continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of veterans and their families.

The Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program provides funding to eligible organisations for projects that enhance health and social wellbeing, build community capacity, and raise awareness of issues faced by veterans. Applications for the next round of Veteran Wellbeing Grants will open later this year. For information visit www.dva.gov.au/grants.



Veterans and first responders come together at an Eyes Front 'Celebration of Service' event to share stories and experiences.

Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The vision of the new *Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030* is to empower and support the Defence and veteran community for optimal mental health and wellbeing during service or employment, transition to civilian life and beyond. The strategy has 6 goals:

1. Promote and assist wellbeing.
2. Improve mental health and wellbeing through prevention and early intervention.
3. Facilitate timely access to quality care and support.
4. Grow a positive and connected Defence and veteran community.
5. Prioritise suicide prevention initiatives.
6. Use evidence and data to drive positive outcomes.

The strategy is underpinned by 2 action plans, one focused on mental health and wellbeing, and the other on suicide prevention. The strategy and action plans have been informed by extensive stakeholder consultation since 2023, including public consultation on an Exposure Draft of the strategy between January and March 2025.

The new strategy complements the *Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030*, and the Veteran Transition Strategy, with a shared focus of improving mental health and

wellbeing outcomes across the Defence and veteran community.

Defence and DVA gratefully acknowledge all the contributions which have informed the development of the strategy.

You can find the strategy, the action plans, and a summary of the feedback received through the 2025 public consultation on the DVA website: search for 'Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plans'.

Help is available right now

If you or someone you know is in danger and needs immediate assistance, call 000.

Veterans and their families can access support through **Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling Service.**

Free, confidential support is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year on 1800 011 046.

Summer is coming

Slip Slop Slap – Seek and Slide!



DR ANNA COLWELL

Deputy Chief Health Officer

Department of Veterans' Affairs

The sun is shining, the cicadas are singing, the roads are melting. What a great time to get the frisbee out, the hammock set up – and review our sun safe routines!

Australia is the unfortunate winner of the 'Most Skin Cancer in the World Award'. On peak UV days you can burn in less than 10 minutes – less for babies. You can also burn on days where it is overcast – wind burn is actually sunburn – always be aware of the day's UV forecast, which can be found on most weather apps.

Even without burning, the time that we spend in the sun also adds up to sun damaged skin, making us look older and develop more skin cancers.

There are 3 main types of skin cancer, named after the types of cell that start growing out of control. Basal Cell Carcinomas (BCCs) are most common. They generally grow slowly and stay local but can grow deep into bone and nerves. Squamous cell carcinomas (SCCs) are the next most common. They can rapidly spread to other parts of the body.

All of the different types are easiest to treat if they are picked up early. They can spread through the body or grow deep. Melanomas can start in an existing spot or be a new one.

Veterans have often spent a lot of time in the sun. But it is not too late to be sun smart!

Slip on clothing

There are all sorts of comfy, UV-rated, quick drying clothing items available now. Find something that suits your style and wear it!

The most common places to get a skin cancer are on faces, necks, and arms – because they get the most sun.

Seek some shade

Particularly during the highest UV times of the day, find or bring some shade. Trees, umbrellas, buildings. Remember to consider reflections from nearby concrete or water that reach your shady place.

Slop on sunscreen

Keep trying until you find a brand that feels nice on your skin – you will be more likely to use it. Applying 20 minutes before going outside is best.

You probably need a lot more than you think – a teaspoonful for each arm, leg, front, back and head/neck – 7 in total if you don't have a shirt on. If you think "my sunscreen doesn't work very well" you might not be using enough.

Remember to reapply, it won't last all day. Most need to be reapplied with time or after a swim or sweat.

Slide on some sunglasses

Protecting your eyes stops cataracts, where the clear lens in your eye goes cloudy. It also prevents skin cancers around the eye, which are a bit trickier to treat.

"Instant secret agent" or Elton John vibes, whatever you prefer, slide them on.

Slap on a hat

Generally, the bigger the better when it comes to hats and sun protection.

Shade your face and neck and stop skin cancers on your scalp – this doesn't just happen to bald people!

Get your skin checked

If you haven't had a full body skin check in a while (or ever) talk to your doctor. They can advise how often you need one after that – it depends on your family history, colouring, sun exposure and other medical conditions.

If you ever notice a spot or patch on your skin that looks weird, grows fast, bleeds easily, is scaly, new or changing, get it checked as soon as you can. Remember, early treatment is better.

DVA support

If you do develop a malignant skin cancer, some DVA clients are eligible for treatment under Non-Liability Health Care (NLHC) for cancer, subject to meeting eligibility criteria. Veterans can claim for NLHC cancer treatment via MyService or by completing form D9215.

Non-Liability Health Care covers things like getting the cancer cut out, medicine you may apply to your skin and, once you've had a cancer, those regular ongoing skin checks. Veterans without eligibility for NLHC cancer treatment may still lodge a liability claim to see if the condition relates to their service. Skin cancers are commonly accepted conditions and are usually subject to simplified assessment. You may also be able to claim some out-of-pocket expenses: Search for 'Medical Expenses Privately Incurred' on the DVA website for more information.

(Image courtesy of the Cancer Council)

Protect yourself in **five ways** from skin cancer



SLIP



SLOP



SLAP



SEEK



SLIDE

Bonsai brings veterans together

A creative wellbeing initiative at Inverloch RSL has helped local veterans and their families find healing, growth and connection, one bonsai tree at a time.

The Inverloch Sub-branch has hosted a series of bonsai workshops led by local expert Tim Rear-don, known as *The Bonsai Fella*. The project brought together 12 veterans and family members to learn the art of bonsai, culminating in a public exhibition.

The idea for the workshops grew from a personal interest and quickly blossomed into a popular RSL Active activity. 'Bonsai is a beautiful, L to R: Lindsay Guerin (Secretary) Kellie Gabb, and Ross Gabb (President) of the Inverloch RSL

reflective experience,' said Inverloch RSL Secretary Lindsay Guerin. 'It allows you to express your creativity in your own time. It brings peace and reflection over a long period.'

The workshops ran for several hours at a time, with follow-up sessions to help participants refine their skills and create new pieces. The program also included equipment to help participants continue their bonsai journey at home.

The impact on participants was profound. 'There's been a marked change in wellbeing and social connection,' Lindsay said. 'The friendships and mutual respect that developed, especially with Tim, have been amazing. There's a new sense of community that's grown through this program.'

A highlight for many was the exhibition at the Inverloch Community Hub, where participants proudly displayed their creations alongside an art show and natural products display. 'It was a feeling of great pleasure and honour to have our work on display,' one

participant said. 'To hear visitors say, "You did that?" - it was a real sense of achievement.'

The program has sparked interest in future workshops, with plans for beginner and advanced classes. One special project involved bonsai-ing a direct descendant of the Gallipoli Lone Pine, which will be installed as a permanent commemorative display in the community hub.

Lindsay praised a DVA Veteran Wellbeing Grant (VWG) for making the project possible: 'The program wouldn't have gotten off the ground without the support of the grant. It gave members a great sense of pride and belonging, and new shared experiences among veterans and their families.'

The Inverloch RSL's bonsai project is one of many community initiatives supported by DVA's VWG Program, which recently awarded almost \$3 million to 46 initiatives across the country. These grants help ex-service organisations and community groups deliver activities that support the mental health and wellbeing of veterans and their families.

For more information about the VWG Program and other grant programs, visit www.dva.gov.au/grants.



The new Aged Care Act – what you need to know

The new *Aged Care Act 2024* started on 1 November 2025 as part of the Australian Government's commitment to creating a simpler, fairer and more respectful aged care system. The new Act puts older people – including veterans and their families – at the heart of aged care. It strengthens rights, improves the quality and safety of care, and makes it easier to understand and access the support available.

DVA will continue to provide dedicated support and services to eligible veterans and war-widowed partners to help them live independently, safely and comfortably at home or in residential aged care. You will still be able to contact DVA for assistance and your existing Veteran Card and DVA entitlements remain in place.

From 1 November 2025:

- The new Act introduces a Statement of Rights for everyone receiving government-funded aged care services, ensuring dignity, choice and respect are built into every level of care.

- New residents entering aged care will see updates to the way costs and government contributions are assessed, to make the system more sustainable and transparent.
- DVA clients will mainly notice updated reporting requirements and adjusted rates under the new Act, rather than major changes to how they receive support.

If you receive a means-tested pension or payment you'll need to continue updating DVA when your circumstances change so we can ensure your payments and aged-care fees remain accurate and fair. You'll need to tell DVA within 14 days about changes to your circumstances, or 28 days if you live overseas or receive remote area allowance. This applies if you receive any of the following means-tested pensions and payments:

- Service Pension
- Social Security Age Pension
- Income Support Supplement
- Veteran Payment.

This includes changes to personal circumstances (relationships), residential circumstances or financial circumstances. You can tell us about changes to your circumstances by:

- ringing us on 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372)
- submitting changes via MyService, or
- writing to us at GPO Box 9998 Brisbane, QLD 4001



- visiting any of our offices – see the DVA location finder at www.dva.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/location-finder.

More information

You can learn more about your reporting obligations in the *You and Your Pension* booklet available on the DVA website.

For DVA-specific aged-care services, visit www.dva.gov.au/agedcaresupport.

For broader information on the new Act, visit the My Aged Care website (myagedcare.gov.au).

You can also contact My Aged Care by phone on 1800 200 422 if you:

- need aged care information
- need basic or complex support at home to live independently
- are thinking about entering residential aged care.

My Aged Care is the Australian Government's service that helps individuals access aged care services, providing information, support and guidance throughout the aged care system.

The high and lows of medicinal cannabis

“Natural, plant-based medicine”, or are there other concerns?



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JON LANE

Chief Psychiatrist

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Medicinal cannabis (MC), has been growing in popularity both in Australia and overseas over recent years. There are many reasons for this, but also a significant number of concerns. This can be seen in the large increase in media reports about the harms that have occurred when care isn't taken in prescribing these drugs.

The questions are: Should we be concerned? And what is DVA going to do about it?

MC refers to a cannabis product that is used to treat a medical condition. It is *regulated* by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), but not actually *approved* (more on this later), unlike most medicines prescribed by your doctor. MC products come from the cannabis plant used for a range of different health conditions. The best-known active ingredients are THC (Δ -9-tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (cannabidiol).

THC is psychoactive and causes the “high”. It is responsible for most of the problems with MC, including the side effect of psychotic disorders, which involve being disconnected with reality, such as seeing things that aren't there or hearing voices. It can also cause dependence in up to one in 4 people, when people need to keep taking it or get withdrawal symptoms if they stop. It is also very common to need to increase amounts to get the same effect as before, which is known as tolerance.

CBD doesn't give a high. It is the ingredient that may decrease pain, inflammation, and anxiety.

Products vary widely (oils, flower, gummies, sprays), and how much THC or CBD it contains can be very different too. This means the side effects can vary.

The evidence of benefits from MC is still very mixed: at best, they tend to be small rather than dramatic, including for chronic pain.

DVA primarily funds MC for chronic pain, however, we also cover it for chemotherapy-induced nausea, palliative care, anorexia and wasting associated with chronic health conditions.

DVA does not fund MC for mental health conditions because there is no good evidence of benefit, but there is significant risk of harm when MC is co-prescribed with other mental health medications, and significant risks of developing new conditions such as psychosis. Treatment of mental health conditions with MC therefore doesn't fit with our priority of supporting the wellbeing of veterans.

There have been many different media reports about the harms from MC, particularly because while these products are being prescribed in greater frequency and strengths, they are still not actually *approved*. This means they have not been checked for safety, quality and consistency of the product or usefulness in treating your symptoms by the TGA. This is different to other prescriptions from your doctor or over the counter medicines like paracetamol from the pharmacy.

A recent ABC news report (*TGA yet to investigate the safety of most medicinal cannabis products*) demonstrated these concerns and described ‘615 reports made to the TGA involving unregistered medicinal cannabis products between 1 July, 2022 and 1 June, 2025’.

A lot of people might think that MC is “natural” and therefore mostly harmless, and this is reinforced by MC marketing. Unfortunately, this isn't true because MC can have significant side effects and can negatively interact with other prescribed medicines.

Bad side effects reported include psychosis, suicide, and poisoning – including from children and pets finding “gummies” or lolly-like preparations and ending up in comas.

As a result of increasing concern about the harms of MC from medical bodies, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) has been investigating some MC prescribers and MC prescribing practices. It recently reported concerns with “single purpose dispensary” business models that could lead to unsafe prescribing. One concerning finding was that just 8 prescribers wrote more than 10,000 scripts in less than 6

months, reflecting both the demand for MC and the concentration of providers.

Marketing of MC is also problematic, with University of Queensland academics finding that ‘around 47% of the clinics were classified as being in ‘High Breach’ by breaching at least 2 TGA (advertising) guidelines’. It also reported that ‘most breaches occur under guideline 1, which often involved providers displaying images of cannabis plants or logos, referencing industry awards or using abbreviations for cannabinoids. A frequent breach involved unsubstantiated claims about the benefits of cannabis for health conditions.

These forms of marketing are concerning because they are designed to make the drug attractive and minimise the inherent risks.

If you have any interest in any medicine, the best thing you can do is talk to your trusted GP about it, rather than rely on advertising, whether it is MC, a weight loss drug, or any other kind of medicine.

MC is now big business. The Pennington Institute's *Cannabis in Australia, 2024* report stated that the total number of units sold in the first half of 2024 reached 2.87 million, up considerably from the 1.68 million units sold in the second half of 2023. It put the dollar value of this as being over \$400 million, so this equates to nearly a billion dollars last year and likely much more in 2025. There are serious dollars being spent on MC in Australia.

DVA funds MC for only 5% of veterans, but veterans are definitely a target market for these businesses. Veterans have reported inappropriate advertising on social media, as well as direct marketing through other means.

In my role as DVA's Chief Psychiatrist, my concerns about MC are about how DVA can protect veterans' mental health and functioning, while still providing access to something that has really helped some veterans.

As a part of the move to nationally recognised best-practice models, and supporting good medical practice with minimal restrictions, we are preparing guidelines for the safe use of MC – this includes when it's appropriate to start, how to monitor and when it's appropriate to stop. This move is in line with best-practice medicine and the practices of other countries such as Canada, and will be part of further work across the Department in the coming months to address the issues identified here.

Remote weapons technology tested

During Exercise Talisman Sabre, 1st Armoured Regiment tested the Modular Robotic Vehicle (MRV) with remote weapon stations, and first-person view drones (FPVD), for the first time in a combat field environment.

The MRV currently uses an M113 Armoured Personnel Carrier as a 'test bed', with 50-calibre machine guns or M23D minigun remote weapon stations attached. This technology allows soldiers to control the vehicle and weapon station using a remote control from up to 1000 metres away. Similarly, FPVD

are operated using a headset and hand controller.

Officer Commanding Major Tom Fisher said these drones could travel up to 20 kilometres from the operator, reaching speeds of up to 70km/h with the ability to provide a strike function when weaponised with a payload. 'It allows the war-fighter to strike targets at range without placing themselves at risk,' he said. 'The capability is quite early on, but looking to the future, this kind of capability can bring a heavy amount of firepower to bear without putting soldiers in harm's way, which is really promising.'



Honouring a Fremantle-class legend at Townsville

On a bright North Queensland morning, the former Royal Australian Navy patrol boat HMAS *Townsville* II made its final journey up Ross Creek, finding a new home at the Townsville Maritime Museum. For locals and Navy veterans, the occasion marked the celebrated return of one of only 2 surviving Fremantle-class patrol boats. Their service from 1981 to 2007 left an enduring legacy.

Commissioned in 1981, *Townsville* was among 15 Fremantle-class vessels built to patrol Australia's vast coastline. For 26 years, its hull patrolled Australia's waters, often working with other government agencies, mainly in Australia's

northern waters, but also deployed to countries in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Throughout her career, *Townsville*'s dedicated crews performed a wide range of missions: border protection, illegal fishing patrols, customs surveillance, and search and rescue. The vessel supported the Pacific region and participated in major operations, notably Operation Morriseance in the South-West Pacific in 1987.

Townsville gained fame beyond her duties by starring in the popular Australian TV series *Patrol Boat*. The show highlighted naval life and built a lasting connection between the ship, its crew and the wider community.



Resilient ADF children celebrated

More than 120 children of serving ADF members gathered to recognise the significant contribution that Defence families make to Defence capability at a ceremony at Sydney's Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park. Each child received a Child of the ADF Medallion, a symbol of recognition for the strength, resilience and sacrifices made by Defence families.

Defence spouse Caitlyn explained how her 3 young boys were already beaming with pride to show their "hard-earned" medallions to their father, a chief petty officer on board HMAS *Brisbane*: 'The boys have had to be quite

resilient over the past year, with their father being away on 2 deployments. I am so proud of our boys, they have done so well managing it. They are all so proud of their dad.'

Eldest son William said his father's example of service is one of the most important influences in his life, one he and his brothers, Lucas and George, aspire to live by: 'We all try to be good for mum and we help out as much as we can. We need someone big and strong in the family to look after us. As the biggest, I try to help out with the dishes and I mow the lawn when needed. We miss dad very much.'



Review recommends Cyber Reserve

The Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves identified 17 recommendations to modernise the ADF Reserve, supporting an integrated, focused force prepared to meet evolving strategic challenges. The review recommendations aim to strengthen Reserve contributions across the workforce, build capability and boost the specialist domains, including space and cyber.

A key recommendation is the Cyber Reserve Concept, developed to support the Defence Strategic Review's call for enhanced resilience, workforce agility and sovereign capability in the cyber domain. Cyber reserves will contribute specialised skills to safeguarding Australia's critical networks, be part of a pioneering force that strength-

ens national resilience, and make an operational impact on Defence cyber missions.

Colonel John Molnar, Director Cyber Reserve Concept Support, said expressions of interest and a refinement of entry processes would be issued in the coming months to support activation of the cyber reserve capability by early 2026. 'The Cyber Reserve Concept is developing a powerful new way for Australians to serve by bringing their skills to the frontline of national cyber defence,' he said.

The Concept incorporates organisational design, policy frameworks and pathways for on-boarding mid-career specialists, including reservist personnel. A flexible service model will underpin the Cyber Reserve workforce.



Cheree unwraps the holiday season for veterans



For Cheree, the spouse of a Navy veteran, the holiday season helped to create life-long friendships and great memories in Australia and overseas during more than 14 years of service.

'When my husband joined at the age of 31, we'd been married for 12 and a half years and had 2 kids,' Cheree said. 'He had waited nearly 2 years to join the RAAF, but when he was approached by the Navy, he was literally gone a month later to HMAS Cerberus in Melbourne. After 12 weeks, we moved down to be with him.'

'Over the next 14 and a half years, we were stationed in Perth, Cairns, Canberra, Hawaii and Sydney. He absolutely loved it. We loved it too - it's definitely a lifestyle.'

While she has many wonderful memories, Cheree had to be very self-sufficient and accept her husband would be away for significant events, including the holidays.

'We'd have one Christmas together and then he'd be shipped out for the next one,' she said. 'We had friends who would celebrate Christmas early so everyone would be together.'

'There was no rule book to living the Defence life. My husband wasn't with me for the birth of our last child. I had to drop the kids at school and drive myself to hospital to have the baby. We were also on our own in Cairns during Cyclone Yasi in 2011, sheltering in a cupboard.'

Cheree, who describes herself an 'introvert-extrovert' always included her Defence family in holiday celebrations.

'I would organise an orphan Christmas for those who didn't have family with them - a lot of the single Defence people would come. In

Hawaii, we once had 35 people over for Thanksgiving. I never wanted anyone to feel lonely or sad.'

Cheree now works with ADF Careers, where she gives potential recruits a first-hand account of the challenges and benefits of service, including travel, adventure and the wide variety of work opportunities available to them.

And she has some advice for veterans who may be separated from family and friends over Christmas and into the 2026 New Year celebrations.

'If you are invited to go somewhere, make yourself go,' she suggests. 'Keep it casual, so it's no big deal if you decide not to go at the last minute. We've all been to things where we didn't want to actually go and end up having the most fantastic time.'

'And reach out for help and support if you're feeling overwhelmed.'

Son's book honours VIETNAM VETERAN DAD

Veteran RAAF pilot and author Guy Hall clearly remembers the day when, as an 8-year-old boy, he saw his father go to war.

'It was the first time I ever remember seeing my mother cry,' Guy said.

Guy has re-released his 1999 book, *Our Vietnam*, to give a new generation of readers an insight into the impact the Vietnam War had both on families and the veterans who returned home.

In doing so, he also hopes to inspire a wider audience to reflect upon the consequences of war.

Guy enlisted his 2 daughters to illustrate the 70-page book, which recounts cherished family memories, highlights his own military service, and shares the post-war journey of his veteran dad, Richard.

'My advice to veterans, of any conflict, anywhere in the world, is this: talk to your children.'

Let them tell you what it was like when you went to war; what it was like when you were away; and what it was like when you eventually came home.'

To find out more about *Our Vietnam*, visit www.tinyfishpublishing.com/our-vietnam.

We would like to acknowledge the Vietnam veterans who returned to Australia and founded our service to help their fellow veterans overcome mental and physical challenges from the war.

Previously known as the Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service (VVCS), Opens Arms - Veterans and Families Counselling is a testament to their foresight, determination and ongoing legacy.



Guy Hall with daughters Meredith (left), who illustrated the book, and Miriam, who designed its cover.



Open Arms offers military-aware mental health support for veterans and their immediate families, day and night, 365 days a year. Telephone 1800 011 046.

For free and anonymous counselling, Safe Zone offers 24/7 support, every single day of the year. Telephone 1800 142 072.

Veterans find a sweet spot to help others

Army veteran Moose and his motorcycle crew are 'sweet as' making Country Women's Association donuts to support the mental health of their military mates.

Over the past 9 years, the Military Brotherhood Military Motorcycle Club's Cooloola-Sunshine Coast sub-branch has sold more than 50,000 cinnamon donuts to raise

awareness and funds to help local veterans. Not-for-profit organisations like the Brotherhood play a vital role in community service efforts to help improve the mental health of veterans and their families.

Moose, the Queensland and sub-branch president, says the Gympie-based club's annual fund-raising enterprise is changing lives for the better.

'It helps us to help veterans with mental health challenges and to get them out of the trenches they often find themselves stuck in,' says Moose.

'We often get into that hole with them, showing them the way out and following up with the correct support that they need through the club's large resource network. It is also an excellent avenue for our own club members who have PTSD. The work we do gives them a great outlet to deal with this.'

Moose says their ongoing recipe for success is part of the club's overall national plan to raise enough money to help struggling veterans and their families across Australia over the next 3 decades.

'At the end of the day we are all veterans wanting to help other veterans,' he says. 'In our sub-branch we work with ex-service organisations, charities, our community groups and emergency services to help make that difference.'

The Veterans Assistance Centre in Gympie is open every Wednesday for members and community walk-ins to connect with other veterans



Moose (right) President of Military Brotherhood Military Motorcycle Club (Queensland), with his wife Elvie and sub-branch Treasurer Homer

and the club. To find out more about the Military Brotherhood Military Motorcycle Club and its sub-branches across the country, visit www.mbmcc.org.au.

Stacey and Lillie join forces to help veterans

After serving together in the Army's Psychology Corps, Stacey and Lillie have again joined forces to help veterans struggling with their mental health.

Open Arms clinician Stacey and Lived Experience Professional (Peer) Lillie are part of a nationwide team helping veterans and their families make the successful transition from full-time service to civilian life.

'I find the most useful part about working with a Peer like Lillie is the wrap-around support to reinforce or support the client with the strategies we are on working on in sessions, such as building social networks or engaging in hobbies,' Stacey explains. 'Clients really value input from Peers as they have often walked a similar path.'

Lillie says Peers use their lived experience to help clients build social connection and hope:

'I've done a bit of work supporting clients to get out of the house. It can be hard for people to do. I have had feedback that if someone is there to meet you and walk beside you it makes it easier. Peers have also served, so we can share advice with clinicians who might not understand what service life is about and how the intricacies of rank, moving families and

the role of your job in the military affects people.'

Both Stacey and Lillie are proud of their service and to be working in the veteran space. Lillie helped support tri-service personnel for over a decade in 1 Psych Unit.

'My father was a Vietnam veteran whose life was changed for the better by Open Arms,' she said. 'I wanted to continue to serve in some way and help other veterans and their families.'

Stacey, now an active Reservist, says her background helps her to better understand the challenges of transitioning to civilian life. 'My transition from full-time service was positive overall, but there were still some tough parts,' she said. 'We know that's not the case for all serving members.'

Both can easily empathise with veterans who lose their sense of purpose after leaving Defence.

And they agree on some of the more common challenges during transition. These include finding employment outside Defence, integrating into new communities, navigating a different medical



Open Arms clinician Stacey (left) and Lived Experience Professional Lillie at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial in Canberra

system, finding housing, enrolling kids in a new school or even establishing a new family dynamic.

Stacey says it is very important for veterans to establish a routine, stay active and socially connected before, during and after transition: 'Attending an Open Arms Stepping Out Program can provide them with the information and skills to better manage their transition to civilian life.'

She also recommends veterans do something formal or informal to mark the end of their service:

'Whether it's attending a Last Post ceremony, gathering with loved ones or going on a holiday, do something meaningful to mark this important transition in your life. Defence marks the start of your service with a swearing in ceremony;

it's fitting to do the same at the end of your service.'

Lillie recommends veterans make a conscious choice to show respect, care and connect with their loved ones every single day. 'The military may have hardened some edges of your personality so consciously work to soften those edges,' she recommends.

'There are many support services available to you and your family as a veteran. Seek them out – the sooner the better. Life as a civilian can be just as rewarding and fulfilling as life in the services.'

'If you have a family, create a shared vision of your life after service and work towards it. If you are single, invest in your own financial prosperity while you are in [the ADF] to give you more options in the future.'

Prime Minister's National Veteran Employment Awards 2025

The Prime Minister's National Veteran Employment Awards celebrate the contributions of veterans and veteran partners in the civilian workforce and the organisations that support veteran employment. The winners of the 2025 awards were announced at a ceremony held in Canberra in November.

This year, the awards introduced 3 new categories to recognise individuals and organisations working to expand the veteran employment landscape: Champion of Veteran Employment; Best Regional Veteran Employment Initiative; and Best Veteran Employment Commitment Initiative. Their commitment inspires others to take action to enhance their own veteran employment initiatives.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel Matt Keogh

said that transitioning from uniform to civilian life can be challenging for many veterans and their families.

'A key to their wellbeing during the transition process is secure, meaningful work that respects their service and leverages their unique skills and attributes,' Minister Keogh said.

'We celebrate the best in veteran employment initiatives because the ADF's greatest capability is its people – and their long-term

wellbeing is a key focus of the Government.'

Now in their eighth year, the Awards showcase the innovative ways employers can help support veteran wellbeing while leveraging their unique skillset. In 2025, they received almost 50 per cent more nominations compared to last year, many from nominees who have not participated previously.

Congratulations to all winners, finalists and nominees.

VETERAN EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Taylor Cowell

Delivery Lead Defence Industry, Saab Australia



Taylor brings mission-focused leadership from his Army career to guide high-value projects through to delivery. He has made a positive and lasting impact on team and organisational culture at Saab through inclusive leadership, values-driven action, and advocacy for the veteran community. As Chair of Saab's Veteran Advisory Committee, Taylor has played a pivotal role in shaping Saab's veteran champion support culture, dedicating significant time outside of his full-time role to drive meaningful support for veterans, their families and Reservists.

CHAMPION OF VETERAN EMPLOYMENT

RSL Queensland



Proudly supported by Smart, Champion of Veteran Employment recognises individuals, organisations or collaborations that have demonstrated outstanding leadership and advocacy in veteran employment.

RSL Queensland is a leading force in championing veteran and veteran family employment. The team provides practical, tailored support that empowers veterans and their families to find meaningful, sustainable careers. Its holistic service model includes career coaching, resume support, interview preparation, job-matching services, training pathways and access to an extensive national employer network. The team have helped thousands of veterans and partners secure roles across a range of industries and work actively with businesses to improve veteran employment literacy, build tailored recruitment strategies and promote veteran talent pipelines.

PARTNER EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Savannah Wells

Hub Manager, Shoalhaven Veteran and Family Hub, RSL LifeCare

Savannah has developed a variety of skills during her career, combined with attributes informed by her experience as a partner of a veteran. Her roles and experience have focused on empathy and caring for people, which she draws on every day working with vulnerable veterans and family members, and in how she upskills her team. Through delivery of meaningful initiatives for the local veteran community, Savannah has embedded the Shoalhaven Veteran and Family Hub as a trusted and respected pillar of the community.



BEST REGIONAL VETERAN EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE

Ventia

Proudly supported by Dialysis Australia, this award recognises organisations that show leadership in delivering initiatives for veteran and partner employees across regional Australia, helping to build strong, connected communities. Ventia's Northern Territory Veteran Employment Initiative, in partnership with the Northern Territory Government, demonstrates regional leadership in recruiting and retaining veterans and Defence family members. Through its dedicated Veteran Liaison recruiter, Ventia directly matches veterans and partners to roles across regional sites where they complete a bespoke onboarding program, easing their transition from Defence into civilian roles.



TRANSITION



BEST VETERAN EMPLOYMENT COMMITMENT INITIATIVE NSW Government Veterans Employment Program

This award celebrates organisations that deliver initiatives to drive excellence in employment opportunities and outcomes for veterans and partners, as part of their Veteran Employment Commitment. The NSW Government Veterans Employment Program engages in extensive inter-agency collaboration to offer employment initiatives to support veterans. The program has created a transition pathway for veterans and partners to gain employment within local governments. It has also helped 32 NSW local governments to set up their own veteran employment programs.



VETERAN AND/OR PARTNER ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR Emily Pyke

Undatech

Emily Pyke's 13 years of service and extensive operational experience directly shaped the foundation of Undatech, one of the first companies globally to develop protective undergarments that integrate with personal protective equipment (PPE). After identifying critical gaps in PPE, particularly for women, Emily's lived experience provided the drive to be innovative in supporting the operational needs of women in high-risk roles through purpose-built, fire-safe and ergonomic base layers that align with protective uniform policies.



SMALL EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR Human Quotient Group

Human Quotient Group (HQG) provides professional services for Defence industry, government and community. As a veteran family business and certified social enterprise, HQG is on a mission to boost wellbeing, employment and education outcomes for the veteran community and women facing systemic barriers to workforce participation. HQG provides employment opportunities for veterans and partners through 2 programs that amplify the talent and opportunities for veterans and partners in the broader ecosystem: Cowork Coplay and Explore.



MEDIUM EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR

Military and Emergency Services Health Australia

Military and Emergency Services Health Australia (MESHHA) is a profit-for-purpose research, training and programs centre that supports the mental health and wellbeing of current and former ADF members, current and former emergency service personnel, and their families. MESHHA embeds lived experience in the design and delivery of its training, programs and services. Through delivery of its military identity and cultural competency programs, MESHHA supports employers to understand the skills and expertise military populations bring to the workplace.



LARGE EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR

Wilson Security

With veteran recruitment embedded into its core operations, Wilson provides a dedicated point of contact for veterans and tailored interviews to translate military skills into civilian equivalents. Its Veteran and ADF Family Employment programs offer fully funded Certificate II training and security licensing, with guaranteed employment upon successful completion. Other initiatives include a veteran mentorship program to assist with onboarding and workplace integration, veteran awareness sessions for non-military staff, a Veteran Champion and Executive Sponsor, paid Defence Reserves leave and publicly championing veteran employment.

Thank you to our sponsors:
Dialysis Australia, Smart Salary
Packaging, Westpac, Navantia,
Omni and WorkSec.

Read the full inspiring stories of
this year's winners and finalists
at www.veteranemployment.gov.au/awards

Reverend Andrew Nixon – Australia's inaugural Anglican Archdeacon to Veterans

Reverend Andrew Nixon has been appointed as the inaugural Archdeacon to Veterans by the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) in a resounding endorsement of the role of chaplains in providing spiritual and pastoral support to serving ADF personnel and their families, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Reverend Nixon served as a Navy officer from 1989 until 2001, where he specialised in warfare and leadership training. He left the ADF to pursue a career in the Anglican ministry before returning as a reserve Chaplain in 2011.

'This appointment is about bringing to the fore the importance of supporting veterans and recognising there are veterans right across the country in all our parishes, in our suburbs and in our neighbourhoods,' Andrew says. 'It's an incredible honour to support and represent Australia's veteran community as the inaugural Archdeacon to Veterans.'

Evidence brought before the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide highlighted the important role that ADF Chaplains play in suicide prevention and care and in supporting veterans with moral injury. Moral injury is a trauma-related syndrome caused by the physical, psychological,

social and spiritual impact of grievous moral violations of an individual's deeply held moral beliefs or ethical standards.

'Moral injury is about damage to the human spirit – that part inside us that makes us, us,' Andrew explains. Chaplaincy is about caring for our human spirit. It's not a religious thing – it's a human thing.

'Everybody has a deep part of them which determines their identity and purpose. We ask our ADF members to go and do really difficult things, which can both clarify and challenge this identity and purpose. We ask them to put their life on the line, to potentially take the life of another person, or even to lose a mate. There's a really deep dimension to that – a spiritual dimension.'



Archdeacon Andrew Nixon with Meg Green AM at the War Widows Day 2025 commemorative service in Sydney.



Former Governor-General David Hurley AC CVO DSC, Mrs Jenny Nixon, Mrs Linda Hurley and Archdeacon Andrew Nixon at his collation ceremony, St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, 28 July 2025.

His belief in the importance of chaplaincy has led Andrew to take up the role of Director of DVA's Veterans' Chaplaincy Pilot Program (VCPP), which offers chaplaincy services to transitioning ADF members, veterans and their families, ensuring continuity of spiritual and pastoral support when they leave the ADF.

The VCPP is currently being trialled in Perth, Brisbane and Townsville. All transitioning members of the ADF, as well as veterans and their families, can access these support services, regardless of their personal faith.

'The ADF is really clear about the provision of chaplaincy, because of the work we ask of our service personnel,' Andrew says. 'I feel very deeply that veterans are my people, so working in this role feels like I'm back home, which is an amazing privilege.'

To learn more about the program, search for 'Veterans' Chaplaincy Pilot Program' on the DVA website.

Australian Catholic University champions veteran employment and education

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) is preparing veterans for jobs and working with the Veteran Employment Program (VEP) to educate employers on how they can recruit and retain veterans.

The ACU is supporting veterans in their further studies to succeed in the civilian workplace. It has opened a Veteran and Family Lounge at its Brisbane campus, providing stronger community networks for veterans and their families to foster belonging, purpose and build new skills following their service.

'Higher education is not just about academic achievement – it's about providing an environment where those who have served, and their loved ones, can thrive during and after the transition from military to civilian life,' says ACU Student Veteran Services Manager Aaron Cornwall. 'Access to higher education, coupled with strong community networks, plays a vital role in building new skills, fostering purpose and creating a sense of belonging.'

Aaron was the Veteran Employee of the Year at the 2023 Prime Minister's National Veteran Employment Awards. Last year, his team

Employers at the Expanding your Veteran Employment Commitment workshop on the Sunshine Coast



launched 2 apps – Five2Study and Service2Campus. The lounge and apps were both assisted by DVA Veteran Wellbeing Grants.

'If you haven't studied in a while, university can present a few hurdles,' Aaron says. 'What these apps do is remove those jitters. They offer comprehensive support, right from the moment you ponder "Is uni for me?", to the day you graduate.'

The ACU is also using a DVA Recruitment Advisory Service for Employers of Veterans Grant to equip employers with the tools and knowledge to develop or update their employment policies and practices to support veterans. It has been working closely with employers via small, in-person workshops to help them develop or tweak their own employment strategies to incorporate a veteran focus. The groups have discussed practical ways veteran employment activities can be implemented by their organisations that can ultimately provide return on investment.

As a proud Veteran Employment Supporter via the Veteran Employment Commitment, the ACU



Employers at the workshop in Townsville

recognises the value that veterans bring from their ADF skills and experiences. It is working to implement new and improved activities with the aim of becoming recognised as a Veteran Friendly Employer.

Employers can now access a suite of resources on the VEP website, which provides practical advice and templates on how to implement veteran-friendly practices. From making simple changes to job advertisements to building veteran-specific employment pathways, these resources help employers to recruit and retain veterans in a way that works for them.

If you are an employer and would like to know more, visit www.veteranemployment.gov.au.

My story, and my plan

COMMISSIONER ANNABELLE WILSON

Veteran Family Commissioner

 Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner  Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner  vfaausgov



Mine is a family that slips through the cracks, so I'm passionate about creating systems that truly support our people.

I can still close my eyes and picture the first time I saw Flight Lieutenant Joshua Chalmers. It was at a party on the Airforce base in Williamstown, Newcastle.

He was loyal, trustworthy, magnetic and kind: the epitome of what the military aims to produce.

On Anzac Day in 2008, at the age of 22, Josh returned from an 8-month deployment to Afghanistan. Less than 2 months later, he was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumour and given 18 months to live – if he was lucky. Josh and I had 10 magnificent years together, and he passed away at 10.03 pm on Saturday the 25th of November 2017. Two and a half months later, on the 13th of February, our little baby girl Primrose was born. She shares a birthday with her Dad.

As is often the case with the family, once my veteran was gone, I felt like I was cut off, and forgotten. I was left to try and navigate the “claims machine” by myself, and I am an example of a family that, to this day, still slips through the cracks and receives no DVA support. I was 29, alone, and with a newborn baby. I couldn't understand why nobody would help me. I became lost and suicidal thoughts began to slip in. I stopped eating. I stopped sleeping. I was traumatised, and I was scared.

Then, two things happened. First, a friend brought me along to our local RSL sub-branch – a little single-fronted Victorian terrace in East Melbourne – and I had a quiet beer with the boys there, who welcomed me like a sister. And second, another friend, who also happened to be a Legatee, introduced me to Legacy.

Visiting the Western Australian guild of Australian War Widows

What has resulted is 8 years of me volunteering and working across the ex-service space, helping families just like mine, because there is so much to do. I have had a career built on advocacy, lobbying and policy influence at every level of government, for multiple causes – and I saw that these skills were needed in the veteran family space.

I have held positions on several boards and committees, including in my local RSL sub-branch and the Institute of Veterans' Advocacy. For the last 4 years, I have worked at Melbourne Legacy, most recently as the Chief Operating Officer. I'm very proud of the service delivery model I had a hand in building there, including securing the long-term funding needed for the ongoing stability for this service, which supported more than 4,000 families. This was funding that I had to find in the philanthropic space, as there was nothing within government and DVA to support this type of work.

During my time in this community, I have seen many other families around me who are slipping through the cracks too. Many have been through things that I will never experience. Many have been through things worse than what I have experienced. Their voices deserve to be heard and represented.

The Veteran Family Commissioner serves as the bridge between lived experience and government policy: And this is why I took the job. I'm passionate about creating systems that truly support our people – removing barriers, influencing systemic change, and hopefully, leaving this community a little better than I found it.

I came into this role with a very clear idea of what I wanted to address, and it was very validating for me to be able to verify that I was on the right track at the 2025 Veteran Families Forum, which was held in my first few weeks in the job. I've wrapped all these issues up into the following 4 key areas, which form the basis of my Strategic Plan, outlining what I wish to achieve for Australia's

veteran community in my tenure as the Veteran Family Commissioner.

- **Equity of Eligibility and Access:** which involves getting us all in the tent. Presumptive liability will support more families to access supports, and an understanding of ex-partners, carers and diverse family structures will make sure the Department is meaningfully recognising and reaching the community that we know exists.
- **Clarity and Improvement of DVA Services and Supports for Families:** which will mean that the programs and supports for families are fit-for-purpose and continuously improve.
- **Enhancement of ESO Partnerships and Supports:** which is about discovering how the Department can better support our ESO community to be sustainable and safe.
- **Build Life Foundations and Cultivate Belonging:** which includes postvention support, training and education for families, and support to rebuild and move forward with their lives.

I see this as a “living plan” – one that I will test and adjust as I go. I have a commitment to get out and about as much as I can. The engagement part of this job is incredibly important to me, because not only are the families in this community my peers, but I want to continue to be as informed as possible throughout my tenure. I want to hear the quiet voices. The ones we haven't heard yet.

And so, as we round out 2025, and move into 2026 (and beyond) I say to the fellow beautiful families who also live alongside me within this community: Please speak up. By speaking up about your experiences, you're showing the Department where the gaps are. We are a community of people who are constantly being told that we are the anomaly, but we are the majority. And use me and this role. I'm here to use this position to help support you to understand what the barriers are, and support you with advocating for change for you, and others just like you.

Here's to change. On we march.



War Widows Day 2025

A message from Australian War Widows (AWW) Inc.

War Widows Day (WWD) is observed on 19 October each year – the birthday of our founder Mrs Jessie Vasey OBE CBE. This year is also the 80th anniversary of the founding of the organisation. [See *Vetaffairs* August 2025.]

In the Northern Territory, an afternoon tea for war and defence widows was held at Parliament House with the continued support of the Minister for Veterans, Jinson Anto Charls. AWW National President Jenny Gregory attended to celebrate the occasion and the 80th anniversary with the war widow community.

'This day brings awareness to the widows themselves of the large network of resources and assistance that is available to them,' Mrs Gregory said. 'War and defence widows are the resilient legacy of their service member's sacrifice for the nation.'

This event was made possible by a small group of NT war and defence widows, the NT Government and

Mercy Celis, Stephanie Handcock and Carol Luke at the event in the ACT



NT-based ex-service organisations, which provide year-round support to widows in the region.

In Western Australia, Governor Chris Dawson AC APM and Mrs Darrilyn Dawson – Patrons of Australian War Widows WA Inc – hosted members to a high tea at Government House. The Governor spoke about the ongoing benefits provided by AWW, and acknowledged that widows and widowers of war are not just confined to the last century. State President Emily Cook spoke about the legacy of Mrs Jessie Vasey and her tenacity in establishing an influential national lobby group that continues to support widows and families who have borne the profound loss of a partner who served our nation.

With the support of the ACT Government, war widows and guests in the ACT celebrated the Day with a luncheon in Canberra at the Ainslie Football Club. They came together to enjoy one another's company and the music of Warren Derwent to recognise this special day.

In Queensland, War Widows Day was held in conjunction with the inaugural Field of Remembrance (see article on the next page). South Australian war widows commemorated the day with a luncheon in Daw Park, with members and families in attendance. The focus was on coming together to recognise Jessie's birthday and reflect on their past with fondness and gratitude.

In New South Wales, the commemoration brought together hundreds at the Sydney Cenotaph



Widows Guild member Sue Doolin lays a branch of wattle at the War Widows Day Service in Sydney.

to honour Australia's war widows and their families. In her address, NSW Governor Margaret Beazley AC KC acknowledged the sacrifice of war widows and their families, emphasising that their contributions to Australia's service history extend far beyond defence service. During the wattle floral tribute, led by Sir Peter Cosgrove AK AC (Mil) CVO MC and Lady Lynne Cosgrove, war widows paid tribute to one another, acknowledging their shared experiences, loss and resilience across generations.

In Victoria, a small group of war widows and veterans enjoyed a high tea at Vasey RSL Care – Brighton East to commemorate War Widows Day and Jessie's birthday. Jenny Gregory presented a copy of *No Mean Destiny – The Story of the War Widow's Guild of Australia 1945–85* to Kathleen Banks OAM, who is 98 years old, and who attended the first

meeting of the guild in Victoria with her mother and Jessie in 1945.

To learn more about support and services for war and defence widows, please contact the AWW Office on 0427 735 871 or at wwidowsnat@bigpond.com and we will direct you to one of the state branches.

AWW National President Jenny Gregory presents a history of the Guild to Kathleen Banks in Victoria.



WA Governor Chris Dawson AC APM and Mrs Darrilyn Dawson greet war widows in Perth.



NT Minister for Veterans Jinson Charls MLA, Bonnis Poulter, Jenny Gregory, Christine Nekrasov, and Clinton Howe MLA

WIDOWS' NEWS

Leading a green revolution in commemorative tributes

A message from Australian War Widows SA Inc. (AWWSA)

In a powerful step towards sustainability, AWWSA hosted an inspiring workshop that brought together diverse veteran and ex-service communities to rethink how tributes are made and laid at commemorative ceremonies.

The session was conducted by Shirley Lynott from The Little Flower Shop. Shirley's personal connection to the cause is deep: her mother was a war widow. Drawing on her floristry expertise, Shirley demonstrated how to source and create natural wreaths using sustainable materials such as

grapevine, jute, and native Australian flowers. Attendees learned how these organic alternatives not only honour our fallen heroes with dignity, but also protect our precious environment from harmful pollutants commonly found in traditional wreath-making materials.

Centennial Park Cemetery, renowned for its commitment to environmental stewardship, kindly provided a function space for the event. The workshop attracted participants from across the veteran community – including representatives from the War Widows, Partners of Veterans, Vietnam Veterans Federation, Veterans SA, Legacy, and the Malaya Borneo Association – highlighting broad support for this important cause. After a morning of hands-on learning and heartfelt

discussion, participants enjoyed a delicious morning tea, fostering a warm sense of community and shared purpose.

Driving this movement is Diane Carr, a passionate war widow and former AWWSA President. Diane is calling for a national policy among veteran organisations to commit to fully sustainable tributes at all commemorative services. She credits her inspiration to His Majesty King Charles III, who set a profound example by ensuring that only locally sourced flowers were used both at the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and his own coronation – symbolising respect for tradition coupled with environmental responsibility.

The event garnered formal recognition with a written endorsement

from AWWSA's patron, Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia, underscoring the importance of this environmental shift.

This initiative, funded by AWWSA and supported by a generous environmental grant from the Burnside Council, marked a milestone in promoting eco-friendly remembrance. A collaborative effort between veteran communities, environmental advocates, and local government, it sets a hopeful precedent and demonstrates that honouring those who served can be done in a way that respects not only their memory, but the world they fought to protect.

For more information or to join the sustainable tribute initiative, contact AWWSA (www.warwidowssa.org.au) or Centennial Park Cemetery.

Inaugural Queensland Field of Remembrance

A message from Australian War Widows Queensland (AWWQ)

AWWQ held its inaugural Field of Remembrance service at St John's Cathedral, Brisbane, on 20 October 2025. War widows, family members, dignitaries and the broader community gathered to honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to Australia.

AWWQ plans to hold the Field of Remembrance annually around War Widows Day, 19 October, the birthday of Australian War Widows' Guild founder Jessie Vasey. The tradition began in London in 1928 and inspired the ANZAC Field of Remembrance in Sydney in 1952.

Queensland's inaugural service continues this legacy, providing war widows and families a meaningful space for reflection and commemoration.

The ceremony included the laying of official and personal crosses for conflicts from the First World War to Afghanistan. Attendees placed small wooden crosses, each inscribed with the name of a loved one who served. Following the ceremony, guests gathered for morning tea.

The live-streamed service was a deeply moving occasion. The Ode of Remembrance, the Last Post, a minute's silence and the Reveille created a solemn atmosphere, filled with reflection and shared remembrance. Each cross placed that morning told a story of service, courage and enduring love, marking the start of a meaningful tradition for Queensland war widows and their families.

War widows from Redcliffe place crosses in memory of loved ones.

War Widows Honour Roll

A message from the Families of Veterans Guild

The peace, safety, and freedoms Australians enjoy did not come without sacrifice. Recognising war widows reminds us that service does not end with a uniform – it continues in the lives of those left behind.

By sharing their stories, we remember the human cost of service and the strength that carried this nation forward. Their voices help us live with gratitude – for our families, our security and the privilege of peace.

Honour a war widow who has touched your life by making a tribute to them on our War Widows Honour Roll, preserving their story and legacy for future generations.



Keith Payne VC Room honours friendship with Nepal

A message from the Keith Payne VC Veterans Benefit Group

More than 50 years ago 2 brave soldiers met in London – Keith Payne VC AM from Australia and Captain Rambahadur Limbu VC MVO from Nepal. Though they came from different countries, cultures and languages, they were united by courage, sacrifice, and friendship.

The loss of Captain Limbu, the last living Gurkha Victoria Cross recipient, in 2023 brought the end of an enduring friendship between the 2 Victoria Cross recipients.

This relationship fostered a strong bond between the people of Nepal and Australia. The Nepalese have always celebrated this great friendship and to commemorate it a meeting room named the 'Keith Payne VC Room' was established at the Rambahadur Limbu VC Memorial site in his hometown of Damak, Nepal, in October 2025.

The meeting room was officially opened by Mark Donaldson VC; Chairman of the Keith Payne VC Veterans Benefit Group (KPVCVBG) Rick Meehan OAM and Vice Chairman Fred Cambell OAM. Unfortunately, Keith Payne VC was unable to attend this auspicious occasion honouring his great friend and requested that Rick and Fred attend to represent him.

To honour Keith and his lifelong friendship with my father, we've named the room the Keith Payne VC Room. Foremost, we were extremely honoured to have Mark Donaldson VC, Rick Meehan OAM, and Fred Campbell OAM representing Keith and Australia as they unveil the plaque. May it inspire future generations to serve with pride, live with honour, and value the connections that bring us all together.

Bhanu Bhakta Limbu, son of
Rambahadur Limbu VC

Rambahadur Limbu VC was with the 2nd Battalion, 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles when he was awarded his VC during the Indonesian Confrontation in 1965. Keith Payne VC was with the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam when he received his VC in 1969. For the next 50 years, both men attended the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association reunions every



The Keith Payne VC Room is officially opened.

2 years in London, developing a bond worthy of this recognition.

The room was renovated at the private property and burial place of Limbu VC and a pergola was built outside over his resting place thanks to the kind support of the KPVCVBG. It's a symbol of friendship, respect, and shared history between these 2 great men and 2 great nations, enabling all veterans and members of the public to come together in the new space.



Captain Rambahadur Limbu VC MVO and Keith Payne VC AM

Greg Melick departs after more than six years of service as National President

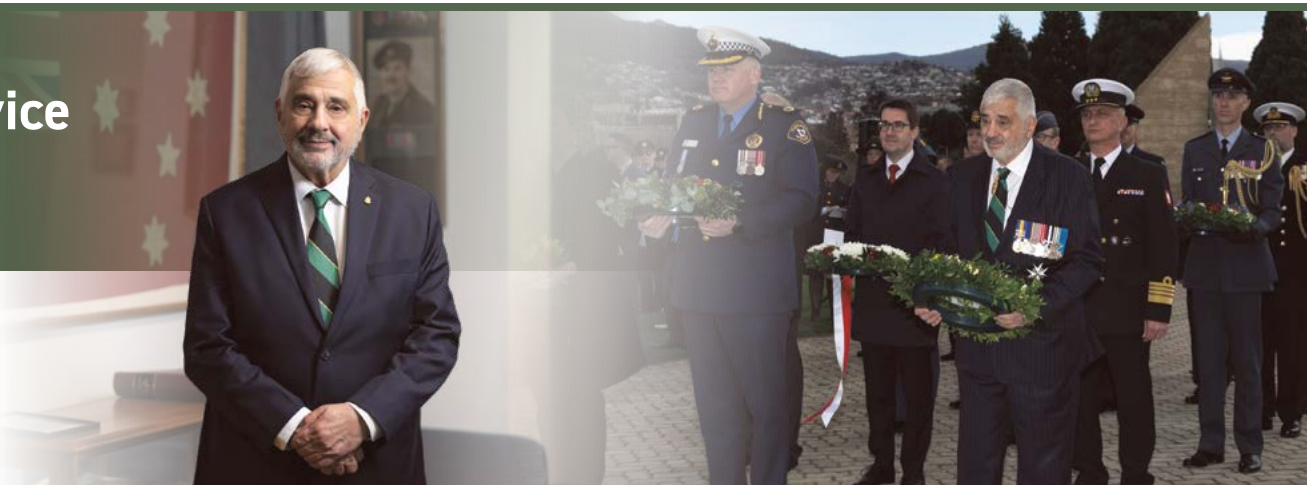
A message from RSL Australia

The Returned & Services League of Australia extends its sincere gratitude to outgoing National President Major General (Ret.) Greg Melick, who concluded his exceptional six-and-a-half-year tenure in October.

Greg Melick's tenure was defined by resolute leadership at a crucial time. Along with a dedicated National Board and management team, they restored organisational stability, significantly enhanced strategic advocacy, rebuilt essential partnerships, and established a clear strategic vision. His re-election in 2022 underscored the strong mandate from RSL state branches to continue his transformative work.

Reflecting on his time, Greg Melick said it was a great honour to serve the RSL. 'Throughout my tenure, I have endeavoured to promote the interests and welfare of veterans and their families, ensuring their needs remained uppermost in our advocacy priorities,' Greg said.

'I am proud that, together with our National Board, dedicated management team, state branches and committed members, we have rebuilt trust, modernised our operations, and strengthened our voice as advocates for those who have served our nation.'



Greg's presidency was defined by the RSL's proactive engagement with the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. In 2021, he committed the RSL to full support, providing input on the terms of reference, appearing at hearings, and driving a sustained advocacy campaign to demand the full implementation of all 122 recommendations.

In 2024, Greg launched the *Middle East Area of Operations Scoping Study*, a critical research project designed to better understand the long-term human impact of deployments to the area and improve support services for contemporary veterans and their families.

Greg significantly elevated the RSL's international standing. He represented Australian veterans at major global events, including Queen Elizabeth II's funeral. Greg fostered diplomatic engagement through the Seoul International Veterans Forum and visits to countries including Timor-Leste, New Zealand, the US and Canada, sharing Australian insights while learning from other nations. In 2025, his leadership in Anzac Centenary commemorations was recognised

Greg Melick at the commemorative service marking the 85th anniversary of the Battle of Britain in Hobart.

when he received an Officer of France's *Ordre national du Mérite*.

Under his leadership, RSL membership increased steadily over 4 years, surpassing 153,000, while internal cross-state cooperation and resource sharing improved significantly.

In addition, the RSL successfully advocated for the inclusion of ADF service in the Census, appointment of an Independent National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention, and the harmonisation of funeral and other benefits for veterans.

'As I conclude my presidency, I am confident that the RSL is well-positioned to continue its vital mission of supporting veterans and their families while contributing to Australia's national security discussions,' Greg said. The organisation's future is bright, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have played a part in this transformative chapter of the RSL's proud history.'

Honouring ADF innovation and impact

A message from the King's Trust Australia

An evolution of The Beyond Service Awards, the inaugural King's Trust Australia Awards 2025 continue to celebrate the entrepreneurial achievements of Australia's veteran and Defence family business community, while championing the successes of young people and those who support them through education, employment and enterprise.

Now in their fourth year of support, Commonwealth Bank and Saab Australia sponsor 2 of the most prestigious honours. The Commonwealth Bank Business of the Year Award is the peak award, recognising the outstanding efforts of veterans, ADF partners and spouses in business across Australia. The Saab Australia Rising Star Award celebrates the achievements of young veterans or ADF family business owner/operators.

This year's defence winners exemplify the spirit of service beyond uniform. From battlefield medicine to clean water innovation, their ventures are reshaping Australia's emergency response and sustainability landscapes. These stories are more than business success – they're about leadership, lived experience, and community impact.

Jeremy Holder – TacMed Australia

*Commonwealth Bank
Business of the Year Award*

Jeremy Holder's journey from Army special operations medic to founder of TacMed Australia is a testament to purpose-driven entrepreneurship. Shocked by the lack of battlefield-grade trauma gear in civilian emergency services, Jeremy launched TacMed from his spare bedroom to fill the gap. Today, TacMed equips Australia's frontline responders – from paramedics to police – with advanced trauma kits and tactical medical training rooted in military expertise.

Reflecting on his motivation, Jeremy said: 'I was shocked to find that the life-saving tools I relied on in combat – like tourniquets and trauma dressings – weren't available to Australia's first responders. I saw a gap, and I decided to fill it.'

TacMed's motto, "Depend on us when lives depend on you", reflects a deep commitment to saving lives and supporting those who serve. TacMed's impact extends beyond equipment – it offers veterans meaningful careers and fosters a culture of service. From spare humble beginnings to national reach, TacMed continues to serve those who serve others.

Shannon Lemanski – Aqua Ubique

*Saab Australia Rising Star Award
Veolia Sustainability Award*

Shannon Lemanski, an Army veteran and mechanical engineer, is revolutionising access to clean water through his social enterprise, Aqua Ubique. Inspired by a deployment to Papua New Guinea, Shannon developed technology that creates drinking water from air – Atmospheric Water Generation. Similar to an air conditioner, this remarkable technology condenses humidity from the air, purifies and mineralizes it, then dispenses safe, clean drinking water.

Shannon's mission: 300 million litres of water per day by 2032, ensuring every Australian can trust what flows from their tap.

Shannon credits The King's Trust Australia's Enterprise program for helping him take action: 'More than anything, the program reminded us we weren't alone. It gave us capability, credibility, and connections at a stage where those 3 things were hard to come by – and it continues to shape how we grow.'

Launched in 2024, Aqua Ubique's Drop-4Drop model funds machines for remote communities with every corporate installation. For every 5 water coolers they replace, they install and support one in a community. Shannon's work has earned accolades across the clean tech and social enterprise sectors, including the King's Trust Enterprise Accelerator Award and the Sunshine Coast Biosphere Business of the Year.

Shannon's story is one of ingenuity, impact, and unwavering dedication to sustainability and social equity.



L to R: Shannon Hennessy, Governor-General Sam Mostyn AC, Shannon Lemanski, Marc Bryant, King's Trust Australia Chair Julie Bishop, and Benjamin Campbell

The King's Trust Awards also feature 3 other categories: the Ministry of the Future Young Achiever Award; the Paul Cross Educator of the Year Award; and the Employer of the Year Award. The King's Trust congratulates all the winners and finalists recognised in our 2025 Awards. You can read their stories of determination and innovation at www.kingstrust.org.au/awards.

\$8000 SCHOLARSHIPS

FOR 1st YEAR UNIVERSITY & TAFE STUDENTS

The Gallipoli Scholarship has \$8000 scholarships available for first year University and TAFE students living in Australia. Open to direct descendants of an Australian or New Zealand serviceman or woman who has served in any conflict or peacekeeping operation from the First World War to the present day.

For information about the Gallipoli Scholarship Fund visit our website at www.gallipolischolarship.com.au
Email: applications@gallipolischolarship.com.au

Applications open
1st January 2026

Applications Close
28 February 2026.

Gallipoli
SCHOLARSHIP FUND INC.
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BOOKSHELF

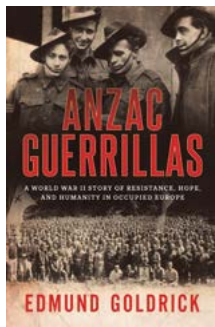
The following books, often self-published, have been written by, for and with veterans. The books and their descriptions are submitted by readers. DVA takes no responsibility for the accuracy of their content or the opinions expressed in them.

Anzac Guerrillas

By Edmund Goldrick

Anzac Guerrillas is an extraordinary story about a handful of Victorians who escaped from German prison trains just outside of Belgrade in 1941, after being captured in Greece. Assisted by the partisans, these Aussies were smuggled to a safehouse in German-occupied Serbia. Ross Sayers, a Castlemaine mineworker, witnessed the German Army lock the civilians of Kriva Reka into their local church before setting the building alight with dynamite. Half the village was killed instantly. The Australians just wanted to get home, but with no escape, they were forced to play very different roles. They learned Serbian and slowly became involved in the underground war.

- **Pages:** 352
- **Cost:** \$26.25
- **To Buy:** Amazon Australia

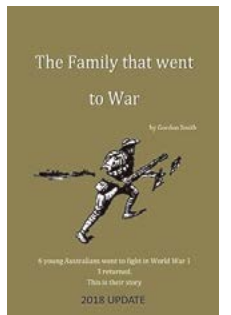


The Family that Went to War

By Gordon Smith

In the small NSW town of Cootamundra, 6 young Australians, all from the same family, joined up to fight in the First World War. This saga follows their journeys through Gallipoli and the Western Front, and also covers time in Egypt, England and France away from the fighting. This is a story of a family and how it was affected by events on the other side of the world. It tells of the battles, the wounding and sickness endured by these young men, as well as the lighter moments.

- **Pages:** 127
- **Cost:** \$14.84 (paperback), \$4.95 (e-book)
- **To Buy:** Amazon Australia

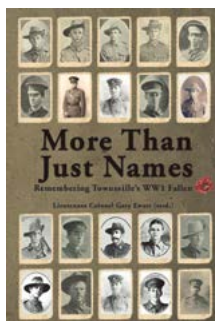


More Than Just Names

By Gary Ewart

This book is a tribute to 172 men from the greater North Queensland region who left their homes and families to serve in distant lands and never returned. In Townsville, the cenotaph stands as a silent guardian of their legacy. Each name etched in stone is a reminder that history is also woven from the personal stories of young men with dreams and futures who answered the call of duty. This book tells the story of each of these sons, brothers, fathers and friends who were once part of the community before joining the Australian Imperial Force and embarking for the battlefields of the First World War.

- **Pages:** 516
- **Cost:** \$39.49 or \$7.99 (Kindle)
- **To Buy:** Amazon Australia

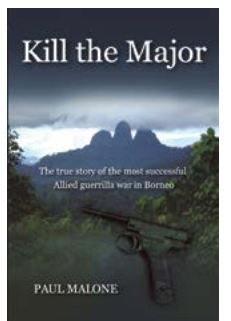


Kill the Major

By Paul Malone

This book tells the story of the most successful Australian, British and New Zealand special operation, behind Japanese lines, in Borneo in the Second World War. All 42 members of this operation – code-named Semut 1 – survived the war. But rather than revere their leader, British Major Tom Harrisson, many hated him and 3 of them aimed to kill him. In a matter of months, in 1945 the Allied “guerrillas” moved well beyond their initial intelligence gathering mission designed to support the major Australian landing on the West Coast of Borneo. They disrupted enemy supply lines and mounted many raids on Japanese-occupied towns and outposts.

- **Pages:** 200
- **Cost:** \$40
- **To Buy:** www.dromanabooks.com

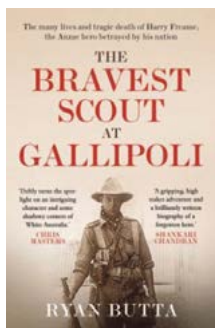


The Bravest Scout at Gallipoli

By Ryan Butta

C.E.W Bean stated that ‘but for the fact that this brave scout was half Japanese, he would have been awarded the first Victoria Cross at Gallipoli’. As it was, Sergeant Wykeham Henry (Harry) Freame was awarded the first Distinguished Conduct Medal. This book covers Harry’s early fascinating life in the Mexican Army, his exploits at Gallipoli where he was wounded 18 times, his life as a spy on a mission to Japan, and his suspicious death. His son, young Harry, graduated from Duntroon having won the King’s Medal, and was also killed in mysterious circumstances during the Second World War.

- **Pages:** 288
- **Cost:** \$26.95 plus postage
- **To Buy:** www.thenile.com.au

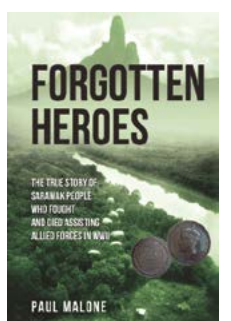


Forgotten Heroes: The True Story of Sarawak People who Fought and Died Assisting Allied Forces in WWII

By Paul Malone

In Borneo in 1945, local tribal people fought and died alongside Allied guerrillas, fighting behind Japanese lines in World War II. A sequel to *Kill the Major*, *Forgotten Heroes* is based on official UK records of the citations for The King’s Medal for Courage awarded to Borneo locals. This book recounts the courageous role played by Sarawak people who made the hazardous Semut special operation a huge success. The support native people gave the Allies in the Second World War is often overlooked in official war histories.

- **Pages:** 98
- **Cost:** \$20
- **To Buy:** www.dromanabooks.com

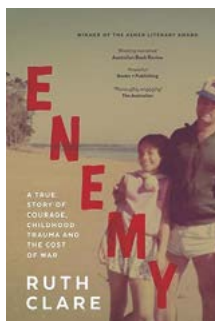


Enemy – A True Story of Courage, Childhood Trauma and the Cost of War

By Ruth Clare

As a child, Ruth Clare didn’t know her father was a Vietnam veteran. She didn’t know people went to war and came back changed. What she knew, was that no matter how hard she tried, she always seemed to set off her father’s anger. After becoming a parent herself, Ruth wanted to understand more about the generational impacts of war. Weaving her personal story with interviews with veterans and research into the nature and impact of military trauma, the author shines a much-needed light on the heartbreaking price children of veterans can pay when a parent returns home from war.

- **Pages:** 354
- **Cost:** \$29.99
- **To Buy:** Amazon Australia

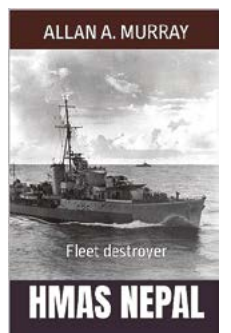


HMAS Nepal: Fleet Destroyer

By Allan A Murray

This is the only complete published history of Australia’s Second World War fleet destroyer, HMAS *Nepal*. The last of the N Sub-class destroyers commissioned into the RAN, she was initially famous for her role in the wartime classic movie, *In Which We Serve*. The infamous Arctic convoy PQ 17 introduced the ship to operations before she hunted U-boats, escorted convoys and provided naval gunfire support around Kenya, Madagascar, Burma and Java. The *Nepal* finished with the British Pacific Fleet in the 1945 Okinawa Campaign, by then respected as one of Australia’s more capable, trusted and best-led fleet destroyers.

- **Pages:** 152
- **Cost:** \$14.25 (paperback), \$4.25 (e-book)
- **To Buy:** Amazon Australia



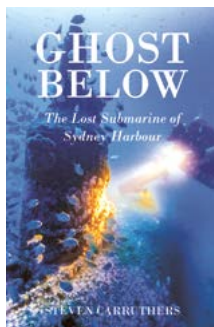
BOOKSHELF

Ghost Below: The Lost Submarine of Sydney Harbour

By Steven Carruthers

On the night of 31 May 1942, 3 Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour, sinking HMAS *Kuttabul* and killing 21 sailors. Two submarines were destroyed and recovered, but the third – M24 – escaped and vanished. For more than 60 years its fate was a mystery until a team of volunteer divers discovered the wreck off Sydney's coast in 2006. *Ghost Below* reveals how wartime history, modern archaeology and diving skill combined to solve one of Australia's last great wartime mysteries.

- **Pages:** 366
- **Cost:** \$32.95
- **To Buy:** Amazon (paperback edition)

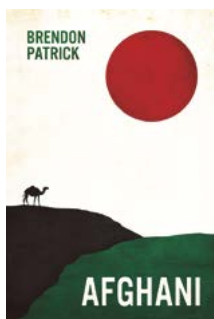


Afghani

By Brendon Patrick

Journey through a century of strife in this gripping dual-timeline novel with George Sher Gul, a Muslim cameleer and Patterson, an Australian soldier. George is fleeing early 20th century Afghanistan, seeking hope in Australia's unforgiving outback. He navigates harsh landscapes and the prejudices of the White Australia policy, with his dream of belonging hanging by a thread. Patterson is in post-9/11 Afghanistan, questioning the war's true motives amidst corruption and personal demons. Their intertwined stories challenge our beliefs on war, peace, and humanity.

- **Pages:** 434
- **Cost:** \$31.84
- **To Buy:** Amazon Australia



A Soldier's Tale

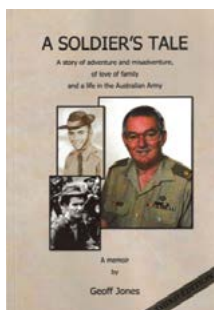
By Geoff Jones

Geoff Jones calls his memoir 'a story of adventure and misadventure, of love of family and a life in the Australian Army'. It chronicles the life of a boy becoming a man in the extremes of the Vietnam War. At the age of 13, Geoff Jones ordered his father, a damaged veteran of the Second World War, out of the home after striking his mother. Within days of his 17th birthday, Geoff enlisted in the Australian Regular Army, from which he retired aged 60, training as a medical assistant and serving with 6 Battalion RAR in the Vietnam War.

Pages: 174

Cost: \$30 plus postage

To Buy: Email jones.g@bigpond.net.au or phone 0437 437 099.

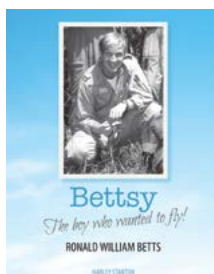


Betty – The Boy who Wanted to Fly!

By Harley Stanton

Ronald William Betts was the first RAAF helicopter pilot to be killed in combat in South Vietnam, on 20 March 1971. He was the co-pilot of a Huey gunship which attempted to drop a resupply of smoke grenades to an Army platoon that was under heavy enemy fire and sustaining casualties. The helicopter was hit, Ron was wounded, and died a few hours later. Some of the most poignant record of his life comes in his own words, snippets of his letters sent from Vietnam. *Betty* includes many comments from family and friends, numerous photographs and is filled with humour and told with compassion.

- **Pages:** 152
- **Cost:** \$65 including postage
- **To Buy:** email HarleyStanton7@gmail.com

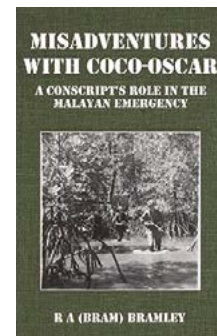


Misadventures with Coco-Oscar: A Conscript's Role in the Malayan Emergency

By R A (Bram) Bramley

This is the story of a National Serviceman's experiences serving in a dysfunctional army unit in an undeclared, and now largely forgotten, war known as the 'Malayan Emergency'. His battalion mostly found itself in the wrong places at the wrong times to demonstrate any combat capability and he found himself having to account for a succession of cock-ups and cover-ups. During its brief period on active operations, the only casualties it suffered were self-inflicted and the pinnacle of the battalion's achievements was winning the Far East Army Football Cup.

- **Pages:** 340
- **Cost:** \$29.99
- **To Buy:** Amazon Australia



Memoirs of a Test Pilot

By Milton Cottee

This captivating autobiography chronicles the author's extraordinary career, from flying P-51 Mustangs in the Korean War to testing all 3 V-bombers at Boscombe Down, UK, and serving as Chief Test Pilot at RAAF Laverton. As the final project manager for the F-111's introduction into the RAAF, Milton Cottee's skill and courage pushed aviation to new heights. Brought to life by veterans Richard (Dick) Wills and Owen Bartrop, this book is a tribute to Cottee's legacy. All profits support the Air Force Association NSW Ad Astra Foundation for veterans and their families.

- **Cost:** \$35 including postage
- **To Buy:** Contact Dick Wills at 2rcwills@gmail.com or on 0414 618 793



A Nice Day for Flying

By Garry J Gallagher

This book contains a unique blend of personal stories that reveal the real faces of those key figures involved in the lead-up to, and the actual moment, when a beautiful Darwin wet season morning was shattered by a rampant Japan in the Second World War. The author's ability to review, discern, and construct personal histories from both sides of the conflict, make this an important historical memoir for Australian, American and Japanese readers alike.

- **Pages:** 169
- **Cost:** \$29.50 (including postage within Australia)
- **To Buy:** www.bombingofdarwin.com.au or call 0432 041 132



Federal Ascent

By Jim Ayliffe

Meet Jordy Masters – former electrical tradesman, now Queensland's most explosive political figure. With razor-sharp instincts and the shadowy counsel of his enigmatic advisor, Sonja Peterson, Jordy has torn up the rulebook, confronting social decay with bold, controversial reform. But state power is only the beginning. As pressure builds to take his movement national, the Centre Right Group urges Jordy into the lion's den of Canberra. Ruthless rivals, internal betrayals and global pressure collide in a game where every decision reverberates far beyond Australia's borders. And for Jordy, the cost of leadership may be everything he's built – and everyone he trusts.

- **Cost:** \$16.99 plus postage
- **To Buy:** Contact cunnamullaexpress@gmail.com



If you have a book for a subsequent edition, please email vetaffairs@dva.gov.au. Please provide the following: title, name of author, blurb (short description that we reserve the right to edit), price, how to buy it, and image of the front cover. Submitting a book does not guarantee publication.

FROM SIGNALS TO SPEED

William “Bear” McCann and the rise of Veterans Drone Racing

Article courtesy of the Department of Defence



Bear McCann

When former Australian Army Signals Officer William “Bear” McCann first picked up a set of FPV (First-Person View) drone goggles, he wasn’t chasing podium wins – he was searching for connection.

After serving 13 years in the Australian Army, Bear medically discharged in 2019 and experienced a loss of identity and purpose during the transition. He then found the community of drone racing and is now the driving force behind the Veterans Drone Racing Team, an organisation dedicated to helping ex-servicemen and women find connection, purpose and excitement through one of the world’s fastest-growing sports.

For Bear, drone racing is more than an adrenaline rush.

‘When I left the Army, I missed the mateship and the shared sense of purpose,’ he says. ‘I have found that again in drone racing. It’s about teamwork, challenge, and rediscovering that spark of curiosity and drive.’

Drone racing combines technical skill with lightning-fast reflexes. Pilots wear goggles that stream live video from their drones, giving them a first-person view as they navigate obstacle courses at high speed. It’s a sport that rewards focus, precision, and creativity – qualities that many veterans naturally possess.

Bear’s journey into civilian life wasn’t an easy one. After being medically discharged from the Army, he found himself struggling to adjust. For a long time, he avoided people and crowded places, uncertain where he fit in outside of uniform. But as he spent more time building and flying

drones, he discovered not just a new hobby – but a new community.

‘Drone racing gave me a place where I felt accepted and valued again,’ he shares. ‘The biggest part of it isn’t the competition – it’s the people. The community is inclusive, accepting and safe for everyone. There are no egos; we just get around each other to support and encourage.’

And now Bear is determined to offer that same opportunity to other veterans. ‘Veterans are used to working in teams and solving complex challenges,’ he explains. ‘Drone racing taps into that mindset. You learn, you experiment, and you do it alongside mates who’ve shared similar experiences.’

The Veterans Drone Racing Team began as a small idea: to create a space where veterans could learn, compete, and reconnect. It has grown into a thriving community of drone enthusiasts who regularly compete at local and national events.

The team pilots support each other to improve their drone racing equipment, hold regular training sessions (virtual and in-person) and team racing events that offer friendship and belonging. ‘You don’t realise how much you miss the cohesiveness and shared goals until you discharge,’ Bear explains. ‘When we race, we’re back in that environment of teamwork and drive, but this time it’s also about creativity and fun.’

Drone racing sits at the intersection of technology and sport, demanding intense concentration, rapid reflexes and a deep understanding of electronics and flight dynamics.

For Bear it’s a perfect fit, combining technical skill with mental focus: ‘I have found that when I am in the goggles flying, I am completely in the

moment, and it is really a form of therapy that has been so beneficial for me.’

His passion for veteran support has also helped raise the profile of drone racing as an adaptive and inclusive sport. Bear is now working with the Invictus Games to include drone racing as a sport. Under his guidance, the team has partnered with other veteran groups, the ADF Force Drone Racing Team, and FPV racing clubs to share knowledge and create opportunities for veterans in drone racing.

Known for his calm demeanour and unwavering encouragement, Bear mentors new pilots, teaches science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workshops to school groups, and is President of the Australian FPV Association.

‘It’s adaptive, inclusive, and incredibly rewarding,’ Bear says. ‘There are many veterans who were struggling with isolation or injuries, and they have found a whole new community through drone racing. Our goal isn’t just to race drones. It’s to lift each other up and support veterans in their life after service to find a sport and hobby that is meaningful and exciting.’

Whether behind a microphone or in the goggles, Bear is continually looking for more ways to build the sport and the team. He contributes to the FPVBits YouTube channel, takes the lead as Race Director and commentator at premier drone racing events, and mentors students at a local Canberra school.

‘It’s not about winning or podium positions,’ Bear reflects. ‘It’s about finding your own success after service, be it on the race track, or stepping outside of your own comfort zone. We support each other to connect and achieve our own victories. That’s what Veterans Drone Racing is all about.’



COMMEMORATIONS

75 years since The Malayan Emergency

On 31 August – Malaya and Borneo Veterans' Day – veterans of the Malayan Emergency, families and descendants gathered for a moving National Commemorative Service in the nation's capital to mark the 75th anniversary of Australian service in the conflict.

The event was an occasion to honour and remember the service of all Australians who served in the Malayan Emergency and the families who supported them.

We remembered the more than 7,000 Australians who served in the Malayan Emergency between 1950 and 1960, and some 2,000 Australians who subsequently served in counter-insurgency operations on the Thai-Malay border between 1960 and 1966. The Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour names 39 Australians who died on active service in the Emergency and 2 Australians who died in the border area.

Sparked by increasing violence and the murders of British staff on 2 plantations, the Federation of Malaya declared a state of emergency on 16 June 1948. Australia committed to the conflict in June 1950, initially by deploying a training team and 2 RAAF

squadrons (transport and bomber), then naval, ground and further air forces from 1955 onwards.

At the national service, Navy veteran Ross Beadmen vividly recalled the extreme conditions of the war.

'The heat was an exceptional challenge,' Mr Beadmen said. 'Many of the ships were British built and designed more for the Arctic than the tropics.' A mechanical engineer, Mr Beadman remembered coming off watch in the machine room: 'It was nearly 48 degrees inside, and my boiler suit was completely soaked through. Life in those floating ovens was tough.'

He also paid homage to the 'good blokes' who served alongside him: '...through it all was the mateship. I had lots of really good friends, we'd work together, go to shore together, and stay at each other's houses on weekends.'

Australia increased its commitment in 1955 after co-forming (with Great Britain and New Zealand)

They were trustworthy, they were disciplined, they were good blokes. It was a culture and a way of life that I liked.

Ross Beadmen
Navy veteran of the Malayan Emergency

AWM HOB/56/0495/MC

the Far East Strategic Reserve to defend Malaya and Singapore from internal and external threats.

By this time, the threat was already declining, but Australian forces continued to contribute to the ultimate defeat of the insurgency. Several more Australian servicemen were killed in action and wounded, with others dying or injured from accidents, illnesses, or other causes.

The Malayan Emergency was perceived by Australians as a defence against communism, although it was also an anti-colonial conflict. Malaya, which achieved independence in August 1957, declared the Malayan Emergency over on 31 July 1960. There was, however, still some insurgent activity along isolated parts of the Thai-Malay border, with Australians continuing to see active service there until 1966.

Seventy-five years on, we remember their commitment to duty and their sacrifices on behalf of Australia.

Lest we forget.

The National Commemorative Service to mark the 75th anniversary of Australian service in the Malayan Emergency was broadcast nationally by the ABC and is available to view on DVA's YouTube channel.



COMMEMORATIONS

New podcast series amplifies contemporary veteran voices



Paul Singer (left) speaking with Soldier On co-founder and Army veteran John Bale.

A powerful new podcast series is giving voice to the lived experiences of Australia's contemporary veterans, offering listeners a rare and intimate insight into the challenges, triumphs, and transitions faced by those who have served in the ADF.

Saluting Their Service – Contemporary Voices of Bravery, produced by Soldier On, is a 10-part podcast that features compelling first-hand stories from veterans across Australia,

It explores themes such as leadership, identity, mental health, and life after Defence; topics chosen to reflect key areas of veteran experience. These themes aim to bring authenticity to the series by showcasing the struggles and successes veterans and their families face in their journey beyond service.

'We believe that every veteran story matters,' says Paul Singer, Soldier On CEO and co-host of the podcast. 'Behind every statistic is a person, a family, and a lived experience. We created *Contemporary Voices of Bravery* to give veterans and family members the space to share their journeys in their own words: raw, honest, and unfiltered.'

Jason Isaac, fellow host and veteran, says that veterans are often misunderstood or misrepresented. 'It's important the public sees the value, experience and passion veterans bring in serving others before self,' Jason says. 'This podcast promotes appreciation for the sacrifice of service and helps remove the isolation many feel after leaving the ADF.'

'Veterans today are as diverse as the communities they come from,' Paul adds. 'This podcast gives them a platform to share their stories in

their own words, stories that may be overlooked in traditional commemorative spaces.

The podcast is already receiving praise for its authenticity and emotional depth, with listeners describing it as 'moving', 'eye-opening', and 'essential listening'.

'Podcasts are powerful because they are personal, accessible and deeply human,' Paul explains. 'They allow people to connect emotionally with stories in a way that reports or campaigns can't always achieve. When the public understands the diversity of veteran experiences, they're more likely to engage, support, employ, and value those who have served.'

Jason agrees: 'Many veterans face an internal battle after service that can feel deeply isolating. I've been caught in that cycle myself, thinking "no one understands", especially when I wasn't connected to a veteran community. Hearing other veterans share their stories reminds you that you're not alone, and that your story matters. That sense of connection can be life changing.'

With significant anniversaries in Australia's military history marked in 2025, including the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, initiatives like *Contemporary Voices of Bravery* are helping to bridge the past and present, ensuring that all forms of service are recognised and remembered.

The podcast was made possible through funding from DVA's Saluting Their Service Commemorative Grants Program, which aims to help make veteran stories more visible and accessible to the broader public. You can find the podcast on Spotify, YouTube and Soldier On's website: www.soldieron.org.au.



Tickets for Anzac Day overseas services now available

For more than 110 years, on Anzac Day, Australians have recognised those who have served our country in wars, conflicts and peace operations.

Attending an international Anzac Day service is a unique opportunity to commemorate Australia's wartime history on the very lands the Anzac legend was forged.

The Anzac Day Dawn Service in Türkiye will take place at the Anzac Commemorative Site, Gallipoli, followed by a mid-morning Australian Memorial Service at Lone Pine Cemetery, one of the fiercest battlegrounds fought on by Australians on the peninsula.

In France, the Dawn Service will be held at the Australian National Memorial near Villers-Bretonneux. In 1918, Australian forces intensely battled for the small town of Villers-Bretonneux on the Western Front, taking it back after a major German offensive. An Australian Service will be held later in the afternoon at the 'Digger' Memorial, just outside the town of Bullecourt.

Those planning to attend the international Anzac Day Dawn Services in Türkiye or France will need to register for an attendance pass for entry. It's free and available online at commemorations.teg.com.au.

In addition to the services televised live on ABC television from the Gallipoli Peninsula in Türkiye and Villers-Bretonneux in France, DVA supports services in Sandakan (Malaysia), Hellfire Pass (Thailand) and Isurava on the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea.

We encourage Australians travelling overseas to become familiar with the entry requirements for each country and stay up to date with the latest travel advice via smartraveller.gov.au.

More information on all overseas services is available on the DVA website (search for "Overseas Commemorative Services").

Discover the Lemnos Remembrance Trail online

In April, DVA launched the new Lemnos Remembrance Trail website to mark the 110th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings. This interactive website offers a fresh and engaging way to explore an important, but often overlooked, chapter of Australia's First World War history.

The trail honours the brave Australian women and men who served on Lemnos, a small Greek island that played a critical role in the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign.

Lemnos was the final departure point for the Australian landings at Gallipoli. It served as an important rest camp for an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 Australian troops, and as a major hospital base. Between August and November 1915, close to 100,000 sick and wounded soldiers arrived on the island for treatment or evacuated to hospitals in Egypt, Malta and England.

Plans are also underway for the construction of a physical trail on the island. The trail will feature 16 commemorative sites and areas of reflection across the island, supported by interpretive signage at key places of significance.

Visit www.lemnosremembrancetrail.gov.au to learn more and explore this significant part of Australia's wartime history.

1 Australian Stationary Hospital; AWM H13986



COMMEMORATIONS

Commemorating 80 years since the Second World War

Historic military vehicles were on parade in Townsville. (Photo: Troy Rodgers)



Eighty years ago, Australians breathed a collective sigh of relief. Not only was the war in the Pacific at an end, but the Second World War was finally over. For six brutal, tragic years, war enveloped the world for a second time including in the Pacific region, on our country's very doorstep.

Its impact was felt by all Australians, but none more so than the almost one million who served in the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Merchant Navy, be it overseas or in key roles on our own soil. Some



Veterans of the Second World War at the Australian War Memorial service

40,000 Australians lost their lives serving in the war. Their graves and memorials to the missing span the globe and remain a tribute to their grit, fortitude and sacrifice.

Among the many commemorative events across the country, in the nation's capital a dozen Second World War veterans attended a moving national service at the Australian War Memorial to honour all Australians who served overseas or on the home front. Supported in their journey to Canberra by DVA, the veterans were presented with a commemorative medallion by Governor-General Sam Mostyn AC, and also had the opportunity to attend a special photographic exhibition and symposium at the Memorial.

In Townsville, DVA was proud to support the Victory in the Pacific Day commemorative service and wreath laying at the ANZAC Park Cenotaph. The city's proud military heritage also came to life with military parades, an aircraft fly-past, historic and vehicle displays.

In 1945, the celebrations remained bittersweet for many, with the global conflict taking a heavy toll. Eighty years on, we reflect on the enduring legacy of all who fought in the Second World War, the resilience of those who served and sacrificed, and lament the staggering cost to all who took up arms for peace.

Lest we forget.

Commemorative coin minted

The Royal Australian Mint has produced coins in honour of the courageous Australians who served in the Second World War. The coins feature a wreath of red poppies – an enduring symbol of remembrance in Australia and other Commonwealth nations. Surrounded by sculpted leaves, the 8 poppies in the wreath represent the 8 decades that have passed since the most devastating war in human history.



A gift of peace and friendship in Sandakan

Sandakan Memorial Day is observed in Sabah, Malaysia, on 15 August each year to commemorate the 2,700 Australian and British Prisoners of War (POWs) who suffered and endured immense hardship at the Sandakan POW Camp between 1942 and 1945. More than 2,400 of them died due to the harrowing treatment and captivity.

Approximately 1,000 POWs were forcibly marched a torturous 260 kilometres from Sandakan to Ranau. Only 6 Australians, who had escaped into the jungle, survived the horrors of the camps and the gruelling marches.

This year's 80th anniversary commemoration brought together Australian, British, New Zealander and Malaysian attendees and government representatives to remember the fallen, the atrocities that befell them and those interred. They gave heartfelt thanks to the local Sabahans for their sacrifices during the Japanese occupation, many risking their own lives to ensure the POWs' safety.

A small private Japanese contingent, including students from across Japan, honoured those attending with the gift of song and a moving symbol of healing. The students presented 1,000 hand-folded paper cranes representing peace

and a coming together of nations. In Japanese culture, 'senbazuru' is the tradition of folding 1,000 origami cranes, given to the recipient as a symbol of peace, longevity, happiness, and good fortune. At the handover ceremony, the group shared these sentiments:

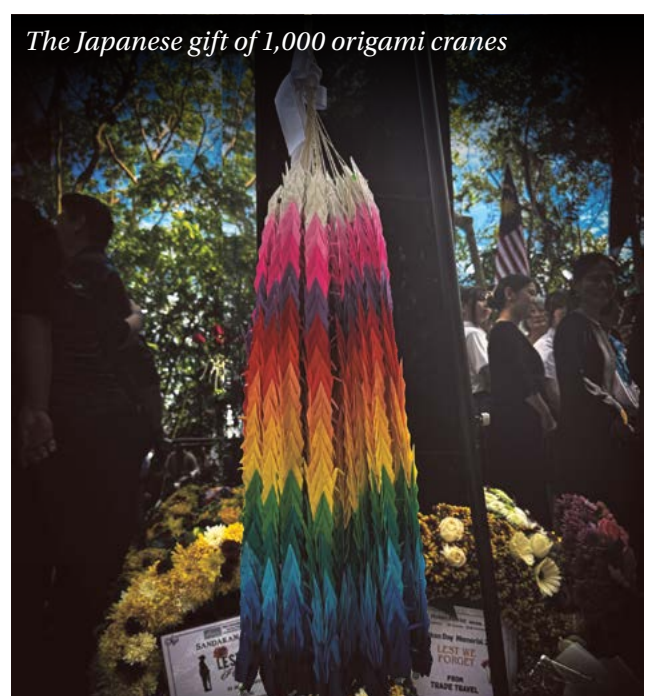
Though they come from different schools and different cities, tonight they stand before you united – ready to share 3 steadfast promises with all of you: Respect, Responsibility, and Representation. Respect for the past – for all those who lost their lives during this tragic chapter of history, and for the families who continue to carry their memory. Responsibility for the present – to learn what happened here in Sandakan, and to pass the story on with honesty and care. Representation for the future – these students are, in fact, our future itself.

They are ready to receive the invisible baton passed from each and every one of you, and they promise to carry it throughout their lives – until they, in turn, pass it on to the next generation.

The service was held at the DVA-managed Sandakan Memorial Park, situated on the site of the Prisoner of War Camp, which has become synonymous with remembrance and healing. The park is open to the public year-round and hosts an Anzac Day Dawn Service on 25 April annually.



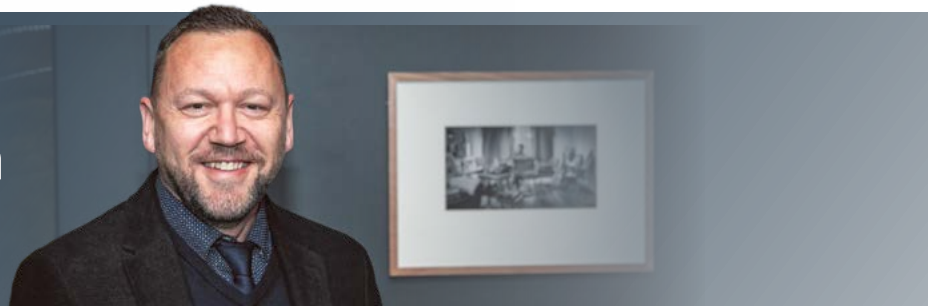
The Japanese contingent and DVA staff at Sandakan Memorial Park



The Japanese gift of 1,000 origami cranes

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

From battlefield to canvas: a son's tribute becomes part of the Australian War Memorial's National Collection



When Canberra artist and former Australian Army member Kris Kerehona entered the Australian War Memorial's 2019 Napier Waller Art Prize with a portrait of his father, veteran James Bruce Taawhi Kerehona, he never imagined the legacy it would create. The portrait, which was Highly Commended and accepted into the Australian War Memorial's National Collection, shows James in the final months of his life, surrounded by his cherished birds.

For Kris, it was more than an artwork – it was a way to honour his father's service, resilience, and influence on his family.

'Dad wasn't one to get his photograph taken – he was always frowning or refusing,' Kris said. 'But

one day when I was visiting him, he just let me take his photo.'

James was an Australian Vietnam veteran of Māori heritage. He was wounded in combat, surviving an explosion that drove a steel stake through his hand. Despite the hardship, Kris remembers his father speaking of his service with pride and respect, not only for his comrades but also for those he once fought against.

'Dad fully respected the North Vietnamese,' Kris said. 'He even went back to the battlegrounds years later with my younger brother to revisit the sites he needed to see again.'

James adopted Kris as a baby after marrying his mother, and Kris took his surname. Growing up in a bicultural family, Kris said his father instilled the values he still carries today.

'He raised me with incredible values and an open mind. My normal

life was a mix of brown and white, bicultural Anglo and Māori. I wholeheartedly believed that's what Australia could be: multicultural, inclusive, fair. And dad showed me how to live that way.'

For Kris, the Napier Waller Art Prize offered more than recognition. It was an opportunity to turn grief into legacy: 'After he passed away, the photo became a shared symbol for all the family when we came together. Knowing dad's story lives on at the Memorial means a lot.'

Australian War Memorial Director Matt Anderson PSM said stories like Kris' demonstrate the power of the prize to connect personal histories with the nation's shared memory.

'The Napier Waller Art Prize is not only about artistic achievement

but about honouring service and sacrifice in all its forms,' he said. 'Each work submitted tells a story, and together they create a rich tapestry of experience that helps all Australians understand the impact of military service.'

The Napier Waller Art Prize recognises artistic excellence among current and former ADF personnel. It provides a unique platform for veterans to reflect, heal, and share their experiences through art in any medium including painting, photography, sculpture, or digital.

Entries for the 2026 Napier Waller Art Prize are open until Sunday 1 February 2026. Visit www.awm.gov.au/napier-waller-art-prize-hub for more information.



Portrait of Vietnam veteran James Bruce Taawhi Kerehona

ITEMS FOR SALE AT THE MEMORIAL SHOP

Naked Army figurines

Commemorative and collectible, the Naked Army* figurine range captures the spirit of wartime service.

Each figurine is inspired by real-life Australian service personnel – from the Navy, Army and Air Force – and authentically depicts the distinctive uniforms and equipment used during conflicts, from the First World War to today.

From \$99.99



Explore our extensive range of Naked Army figurines.

* The phrase 'Naked Army' takes its name from the recollections of Signaller Thomas Skeyhill, who served on Gallipoli in the Australian Infantry Force.



Visit shop.awm.gov.au or call the Memorial Shop team on (02) 6243 4555 to place an order.



Designed by Platatac, expertly crafted and finely detailed, the figurines are modelled in cold-cast bronze.

NOTICEBOARD

REUNIONS

1975 WRAAC OCS Graduation Class

12 December 2025, Maroochydore RSL, QLD

A reunion lunch will be held at 12 pm for WRAAC who graduated on 12 December 1975.

Contact: Carolyn Paul and Jan Woods

☎ 0402 078 632

1966 MOBI REUNION

Early 2026

MOBIs of 1966 entry, we are planning a reunion in early 2026 for our 60th.

Please indicate your interest ASAP by text, email or phone.

Contact: Denis (Shady or Dick) Lane

☎ 0434 505 889

✉ seaview_38@bigpond.com

40-year Kapooka Reunion - 31 Pls 1986

17-18 January 2026, Wagga Wagga, NSW

Dinner will be held at the Wagga RSL on the 17th and a tour of DCoy 1 RTB on the morning of the 18th. This reunion is also for any females that attended Kapooka in 86 and were a part of 31 Pl.

Contact: Nicky Rothwell

☎ 0418 782 092

✉ nicky.rothwell4@bigpond.com

75th Anniversary of the Formation of Women's Royal Australian Army Corps

12-16 February 2026, Perth, WA

The WRAAC Association WA invites all WRAAC, RAANC, CMF, RESERVES and ADF (including current serving members) to the anniversary, with many events to choose from. Express your interest now: Visit the WRAAC 75th Facebook page for details or email.

Contact: Delma Lim

☎ 0437 489 638

✉ wraac_wa@hotmail.com

Navy HMAS Cerberus General entry 20/1985

21 February 2026, Perth, WA

40 years RAN basic training graduation.

Contact: Mark Shuttleworth

☎ 0418 906 489

✉ shuttm@outlook.com

35th Anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait

21 February 2026, WA State War Memorial, Perth

RSLWA will hold the anniversary at 17:00 at the Memorial in Kings Park. This will be followed by a reception at Anzac House. This will give all attendees the chance to catch up with those whom we haven't seen for many years.

Contact: Adrian Burns (Radar)

☎ 0406 359 477

✉ hmasydne.wa@gmail.com

National Gulf War Commemoration

28 February 2026, National Maritime Museum, Sydney, NSW

This event will honour the service and sacrifice of Australian Gulf War veterans who played a vital role in the liberation of Kuwait, on its 35th anniversary. The day will feature ceremonial activities, tributes to our veterans, and attendance from local and international dignitaries, concluding with live entertainment. Tickets are available via Humanitix and include entry, food and beverage package, and entertainment. Tickets are strictly limited, so don't miss out.

Contact: Australian Gulf War Veterans Association

🌐 www.agwva.org.au

HMAS Leeuwin 54th Marks Morrow Howden 50 Year Reunion

5-7 March 2026, Kawana Surf Club, QLD

A gathering to remember our time together at Leeuwin, shipmates who sadly have crossed the bar, along with the continuing mateship and camaraderie of all our 54th shipmates. Partners are most welcome.

Contact: Tony Yarnold

☎ 0417 228 276

✉ tyarnold1960@gmail.com

RP/CSO OPS Room Association

13-15 March 2026, Discovery Park/Adelaide Hills Convention Centre, Hahndorf, SA

Accommodation is a newly refurbished self-contained cabin, or bring your caravan. When booking accommodation, call the park (08 8388 7921) and quote OPS ROOM ASSOCIATION for a special deal. Do not book online. Book your accommodation ASAP and fill out relevant forms on the website.

Contact: Tania Beaumont

☎ 0427 131 716

✉ taniabeaumont@bigpond.com

🌐 https://opsroomassociation.org.au/

HMAS Leeuwin, Ramsay Stevenson Divisions, 55th Intake

17-22 April 2026, Adelaide, SA

This reunion will celebrate 50 years since we walked through the gates of HMAS Leeuwin. All recruits and their partners are welcome and encouraged to attend. There be a meet & greet night, reunion dinner and a farewell breakfast. Reunion program, including venues and cost, to be confirmed.

Contact: Ian Taylor

✉ 55threunion2026@gmail.com

HMAS Leeuwin 16th Intake (1966-1967)

19-22 June 2026, Port Macquarie, NSW

60th anniversary reunion.

Contact: Colin Hardie or Ken Griffin

☎ 0416 250 242

✉ hardiecolin4@gmail.com
harlandgriffin@hotmail.com

50 Years: Walton/Collins 56th Intake

17-19 July 2026, Perth and Fremantle, WA

The reunion is for all personnel who were part of the Walton and Collins intake joining HMAS Leeuwin in July 1976. Four functions are planned over the weekend.

Contact: Peter John Graham

☎ 0406 244 625

✉ pjgraham2@bigpond.com

📱 '56th Intake' group on Facebook

'A' Battery Association Inc. 155th Birthday & Reunion

31 July-1 August 2026, Brisbane, QLD

"Warning Order 2026!"

Celebrating the 155th Birthday of both the Royal Australian Artillery and 'A' Battery, culminating with a formal cocktail party at the Brisbane Tattersalls Club on 1 August. Register your interest by sending an email to the association. More information on this event can be found on the website under Upcoming Activities.

Contact: 'A' Battery Association Incorporated

☎ 0411 166 904

✉ abtyassn@abtyassn.org.au
or management@abtyassn.org.au

🌐 www.australianartilleryassociation.org

B. Company 2 RARNZ 70-71

16-21 August 2026, Maroochydore, QLD

Contact: Michael Gay

☎ 0439 031 285

✉ gaymick@bigpond.com.au

B SQN 3 Cav Townsville Members, 1972 to 1981

11-13 September 2026, Townsville, QLD

Reunion for members from the return from Vietnam in 1971 until the amalgamation in 1981.

Contact: Brian 'Casper' Chapman or Richard 'Dick' Pearce

☎ 0448 715 441

✉ rrjpearce@hotmail.com

60th Anniversary HQ1ATF Association Reunion

16-20 November 2026, Pacific Palms, NSW

To be held at the Tiona Holiday Park.

Contact: John Verhelst

✉ jeverhelst@gmail.com

🌐 www.hq1atf.org

MEDALS LOST & FOUND

LOST

Robert Barr Windlow, Service No. 1263

Seeking his 1914-1915 Star (no 22305) and his Victory Medal (no 24291). He served with the 14th Australian Field Artillery Brigade and was killed in action in France in 1917.

Contact: Neroli Ferguson (nee Windlow)

☎ 0427 140 451

✉ anferg@bigpond.net.au

Laurence Leonard Macpherson, RAAF F/LT. 401650

Several service medals, including Oak Leaf Meritorious Service insignia on ribbon. Also, a set of Medal Dress miniatures, Order of Australia Medal, and Order of Australia lapel miniature. We realised they were missing in November 2011 and reported to police. This loss is distressing and any information would be greatly appreciated.

Contact: Jenny (Jennifer) Macpherson

✉ jenny-macpherson@bigpond.com

Herman Edward Harvey and Albert Harvey

Trying to locate missing family medals for Pte Herman Edward Harvey, 9th Lighthorse, regimental number 1027: British War; 1914/15 Star; Victory Medal. And Sgt Albert Harvey 10 BN AIF, regimental number 1949: British War; 1914/15 Star.

Contact: David Coad

☎ 0417 868 325

Petty Officer Daryl Edward Budworth

Trying to locate medals belonging to Daryl (RAN; R63459). One is known to have been sold at auction in 2011 - attempts to recover have been unsuccessful. Medals are: General Service Medal 1962 with Clasp 'MALAY PENINSULA' (sold at auction), Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal and Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp 'FESR'.

Contact: Mary

☎ 0428 510 591

Joseph Edward Swann NX103975

Medals lost and believed to be in possession of a medal mounting establishment in Adelaide.

Contact: Joseph Swann

☎ 0429 064 472

FOUND

Vietnam Veteran Family Unit Medallion

Found in RACV car that was at Anzac Day in Melbourne. Green medallion featuring a helicopter.

Contact: Lisa Hogan, RACV

☎ 03 9790 2975

William Albert Saunders

Second World War medals - the Australian Service Medal and the Defence Medal issued to signaller William Saunders QX48450, from Brisbane (enlisted 13 March 1941). His next of kin was reported as B Saunders. I would be pleased to return these to his family.

Contact: Chris Reynolds

✉ chris.reynolds149@gmail.com

James Garrett Martin

First World War Medal and Victory Medal found in Hervey Bay belonging to Regimental Number 46 TRP James Garrett Martin. We would like to return these items to the next of kin.

Contact: Garth Rodgers

☎ 0412 668 685

Mark A Rose

Returned from Active Service Medal found in Canberra, service number 39532, belonging to Mark Rose, deceased in 2005. Last known location: Noosaville QLD.

Contact: Sharon

✉ generalenquiries@dva.gov.au

Sergeant John Gordon Smith, 9410

Three First World War medals - the 1914 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal. Hoping to find family to return them to.

Contact: Jim Finnemore

✉ themouse@internode.on.net

Peter T Tait

Dog tag inscribed with WX38699 TAIT P. Next of kin is Mona Tait. Looking to reunite it with family.

Contact: Brooke Volker

✉ lockietylerbella@hotmail.com

B J Chapman 8512944

Found medals belonging to 8512944 B J Chapman.

Contact: Ian Garthwaite

☎ 0438 081 452

These notices have been provided by readers of Vetaffairs. DVA takes no responsibility for the accuracy of the information they contain.

You may also wish to visit the Defence Department Honours and Awards page for information on applying for medals, replacements and relatives' medals (defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/honours-awards).

NOTICEBOARD

NAVY

HMAS Perth

Seeking any personnel who served on HMAS *Perth* in 1993, and in particular during 'Exercise Starfish'.

Contact: Bob Blak
(Veterans' Rep)

☎ 02 6943 4402 or 0428 434 400

Walter Frederick Sainty

Seeking relatives or friends of the late Leading Seaman Walter Frederick Sainty (RAN Second World War). Undertaking research concerning his wartime service – in particular his escape from Singapore in February 1942.

Contact: Greg Swinden

✉ greg.swinden@defence.gov.au

ARMY

Seeking families of Polish Second World War veterans

The Polish Ex-Servicemen's Association in Australia (Hobart Sub-branch) is undertaking stage one of the Carpathian Legacy Memorial Project. Our mission is to identify, restore, and maintain the graves of Polish veterans who settled in Tasmania after their service. We are seeking to make contact with living relatives of the following Polish Carpathian (3 D.S.K) veterans: Jan Zolobczuk, Rudolf Lucki, Jan Marszalek, Jerzy Treutler/Tadeusz/Treutler de Traubenber, Wacław Wojtaszek, Marian Aleksandrowicz, Edmund Zylski, Wojciech Grabek. We believe that most of these veterans passed away in Tasmania without family and are buried in unmarked or neglected graves.

Contact: Danyon Michalkowski

✉ spkhobart@gmail.com

🌐 www.facebook.com/groups/spkhobart

Seeking lost Locators

Seeking any information regarding the following who served with 131 Div Loc Bty RAA in SVN: Edward Bruce Cooper, born 1950; Frederick Brian Markwick, born 1948; Terry Leslie Welsh, born 1949; Robert Andrew Bruce, born 1945; Eric Raymond Thompson, born 1948; John Creighton Martin, born 1941.

Contact: Peter, Member, 131 Locators Association Inc.

☎ 0409 697 865

Calling all Gunners and Gunner families

The Royal Australian Artillery National Memorial is to be extended. This will enable the incorporation of the service and sacrifice of Gunners over the last 50 years. To achieve this, we need your help. For more information please visit: www.raanm2027.com or www.australianartilleryassociation.org.

Contact: Matt White

☎ 0452 623 038

✉ raanm@gmail.com

History book 2/27th (South Australian) Battalion

Seeking to buy an original hard copy of *The Brown and Blue Diamond at War* (the history of the 2nd/2/27th Infantry Battalion).

Contact: Blue

☎ 0427 242 996

✉ bluephillips287@bigpond.com

Seeking Paul Brandt

Trying to get in contact with ex-serviceman Paul 'pour habit' Brandt. We are due for a beer. Retired 2023. Last known whereabouts: 5th Engineer Support Regiment.

Contact: Wazza

☎ 0490 028 064

AIR FORCE

RAAF Maritime Squadrons Association (MSA)

Eligible current serving and former RAAF members are invited to join the MSA, a national association founded to foster the spirit of friendship formed in service, and promote the ideals founded in the maritime flying squadrons of the RAAF, RAN and other military forces. Currently, we have more than 200 members from Nos 10, 11, 292 and 492 Squadrons and No 92 Wing. Annual reunions are held in Brisbane, Canberra, Adelaide, and the Sydney/Wollongong area.

Contact: Maurice Ritchie, Secretary MSA

✉ maurice.ritchie@outlook.com

🌐 www.maritimesquadronsassociation.org

Seeking RAAF No 996 Course recruits

Searching for members of RAAF recruit training unit No 996 Course. Course CPL was Eriickon (?).

Contact: Ben Smith

☎ 0438 622 124

✉ bens4551@gmail.com

Seking P.V. Hewitt

Seeking family/friends of P.V. Hewitt, who was a member of RAAF No 19 Radio Apprentice Course at Laverton, graduating in 1967.

Contact: Al Chiesa

☎ 0410 540 238

✉ alchiesa@bigpond.net.au

Did you know Ned Spicer?

I'm the daughter of Neville (Ned/ Nev) who passed away in 2010 due to health reasons. We're hoping to contact his co-workers, specifically from RAAF Base Richmond during 1969–1972, where he was an Engine Fitter.

Contact: Jacquie Garrett

✉ jacstarr24@yahoo.com

MISCELLANEOUS

Greek Campaign medal 1940–41

Seeking families of veterans to apply for the Greek Campaign medal. Of the 17,000 Australians who served in Greece in 1940–41, only 90 families remain to apply. This could be the last search to apply and receive the medal.

Contact: Mr Steve Kyritsis
OAM, Hellenic RSL Sub-branch, Melbourne

☎ (03) 9589 3403 or 0418 571 800

✉ steve.kyritsis@hotmail.com

Women Veterans Network Australia, South Coast, NSW

This group is for women veterans who live in the Illawarra, Wollongong and South Coast areas. The group provides a chance for past and present women who have served in the ADF to come together. It's very informal and all services and ranks are welcome. We meet at the Albion Park RSL on the 3rd Sunday of each month at 2 pm. No RSVPs needed. Visit the website for more information or just drop in.

Contact: Michelle

✉ southcoastnsw@wvna.org.au

🌐 www.wvna.org.au

United Nations and Overseas Policing Association of Australia

The Queensland Branch is seeking members and support staff who have served on United Nations missions, capacity building and humanitarian operations, and investigations. Our members are serving or former police officers who have or are currently serving under the UN flag. We organise social events in south-east QLD and promote the welfare and care of its members. Let's meet friends and make new ones!

Contact: Neil Behm, 6th Contingent Cyprus, Queensland Police (Ret'd)

✉ neilbehm2@gmail.com

'Meet & Make' Hobby Club

Come and join like-minded veterans at a mid-week Model Making Group. I have run a similar group on Saturdays for countless years in Boronia, Victoria. It's all free and I also offer an Australian Partners of Defence (APOD) discount should you require anything.

Contact: Chris Hale

☎ (03) 9762 9266

✉ service@modelsandhobbies4u.com.au

🌐 www.modelsandhobbies4u.com.au

Somalia veterans

I have compiled a USB Somalia compilation with 2 books I have authored about the Australian Tri-Service Contingents, 1 RAR Bn Gp and the NZDF during 1992–1994, assisting the Somali population at a time of famine and dealing with local warlords. I am raising funds for the Toowoomba Hospital Foundation Inc. The price of the USB is \$50, including postage.

Contact: Gary Conquest JP (Qual)

☎ 0407 336 940

✉ somaliaveterans@outlook.com

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veterans from South Australia

We are seeking contact with these veterans or their families. The second edition of our 2022 book *For Love of Country* is being published in early 2026 and we would like to gather more names and stories for inclusion in the book, particularly, but not limited to, post-Vietnam War veterans.

Contact: Ian Smith (Co-chair of Aboriginal Veterans SA)

☎ 0413 909 080

✉ aboriginalveteranssa@gmail.com

1949 Coal Strike

In 1949, 3,000 troops were sent to the Hunter Valley to break a miners' strike. All services were involved in Operation Excavate. Seeking anyone with memories, material or information about this operation.

Contact: Bob Crawshaw

✉ bobcraw123@gmail.com

Did you serve in Saigon, Vung Tau or Nui Dat?

I am putting together my fourth book, *Proud to be a Pogo – Aussie Diggers Supporting the Combat Force* (rough title) and I would like to hear your stories.

Contact: Russ Morison

☎ 0408 947 935

✉ dabblers3@gmail.com

One million Australians for Anzac Day

The Australian Flag Society has set up a new Facebook community: "One Million Australians for Anzac Day". It's a space to share your local service details and photos; honour family members who served; connect with others who will be at dawn services and marches; keep alive the

spirit of remembrance for future generations. This Anzac Day, we're calling on Australians everywhere to stand together in remembrance. Together, let's make sure the one million voices of Anzac Day are heard, remembered, and carried forward. Anzac Day is A-OK!

Contact: Nigel Morris

☎ 0431 149 177

✉ nigelrmorris@hotmail.com

🌐 www.facebook.com/groups/remembertheglorious25th

FREE Mental Health First Aid Training for Defence carers and parents

Carer Gateway is an Australian Government-funded support service providing free, local services to unpaid carers of people with a disability, illness, mental health condition, or who are frail due to age. This 2-day, evidence-based course equips those who care in any capacity for a current or ex-serving Defence member to recognise the signs of common mental health problems, respond in a crisis, and guide someone towards professional help. It's just like physical first aid, but for the mind. You'll walk away with practical, ready-to-use skills and a nationally recognised certificate. Upcoming courses in QLD, South-West Sydney, Nepean and Blue Mountains, available in person and online. See website for more details.

Contact: Megan Humphreys

☎ 0421 257 000

✉ megan@kevinhumphreys.com.au

🌐 https://www.kevinhumphreys.com.au/wellways-carers-and-parents-of-defence

Glow in the dark bear kits for kids of veterans

I am ex-Army and now a science teacher and I make these kits as a volunteer. The kits contain everything you need to make a bear. The bears are non-toxic and 100% washable. If you're a veteran and would like your kids (or grandkids) or yourself to have one of these kits, get in touch. At most I'll ask for postage to be covered. The materials are excess from a prior grant. Limited amounts available.

Contact: Adam George Turley

☎ 0426 507 200

✉ agtdotscience@gmail.com

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