



"Sitrep, Over!"

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL SOUTH AUSTRALIA REGIMENT ASSOCIATION INC.

PATRON: MAJGEN NEIL WILSON AM RFD

EDITOR: DAVID LAING

JULY 2025

2nd July 1993 Death of Weary Dunlop

Colonel **Sir Ernest Edward "Weary" Dunlop**, AC, CMG, OBE (12 July 1907 – 2 July 1993) was an Australian surgeon who was renowned for his leadership while being held prisoner by the Japanese during the Second World War. In November 1939 Dunlop enlisted in the AIF for service overseas. By May 1940 he had been promoted to major, having served in Jerusalem and was appointed Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services on the staff of the Australian Corps Headquarters and AIF Headquarters in Gaza and Alexandria.

Dunlop served in the Greek and Crete Campaigns with the 2/2nd Casualty Clearing Station, and was later senior surgeon in Tobruk. When the war in the Pacific began Dunlop's unit was transferred to Java. He was promoted to temporary lieutenant

colonel in February 1942 and given command of No. 1 Allied General Hospital at Bandung. When the island fell to the Japanese Dunlop became a prisoner of war. After being imprisoned on Singapore, Dunlop left for Thailand on 20 January 1943. For the rest of the war he worked as a medical officer on the Burma Thailand railway. The men under his charge suffered under primitive conditions and Dunlop became famous for his care of the ill and his willingness to place himself at risk, despite being unwell himself. Dunlop survived captivity, had his temporary promotion confirmed, and was demobilised in February 1946 after which he transferred to the reserve with rank of honorary colonel. He died on July 2nd 1993 in Melbourne.



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Editorial

Thank you to all those who purchased tickets in our fund raiser raffle for 2 nights accommodation at the Welcome Swallow Boat House at White Sands on the Murray River. The winning tickets will be drawn at midday during our 2025 AGM at the Avoca Hotel. All winners will be notified by phone. If you have any raffle book stubs or any unsold tickets can you please return them, before the end of July, to the PO Box 5218 address located in the right hand column? Thanks again for your support and good luck!

And speaking of the AGM, it is imperative that you reserve your seats for the AGM by contacting the Acting President prior to the event. The Avoca Hotel kindly provide us with a free room and set up the tables and chairs to our requests, therefore we need to know exactly how many members and partners are coming, to avoid confusion and embarrassment. Please arrive by 1100 hrs and order your meal prior to the meeting and register your interest NOW!

Annual Fees are due at the AGM of shortly after, so for all those who haven't caught up with their finances this year, please honour your commitment and bring our records up to date. Your annual subs help us carry out the work we do for our soldiers still serving, and we can't do it without you. For those who have already paid, your support is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

A large number of our "mature" members have at one time served within our Battalions at the old Alberton Drill Hall, located on Sussex Street at Alberton. 1st Bn RSAR, the 10th, 27th, 43rd, 10th/27th and the Band have all at one time graced it's hallowed walls. Next year will mark the 110th year since it was built, and the 30th anniversary since it was demolished, so I thought I'd add a bit of information for those who have never heard of that hallowed place, the "Home of the Spartans!" Check out Page 18 & 19.

Our Vice President and Historical Officer Des Hawkins has been doing some research into the origins of the original RSAR Association, and he has uncovered some copies of the original hand-typed letter sent out to prospective members, and a number of old newsletters. If any readers have any further info on the original Association, and why it ceased to continue, please contact the undersigned.

That's it for this month. Stay well and stay safe.

David



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Visit us on the web at:

www.rsara.asn.au

Or our Facebook page

www.facebook.com/1027RSARA/



Find us on
Facebook

All Merchandise Orders to:

**CPL Selina Laing on
lebanonsel@live.com**

**Fees and Merchandise can
be paid by EFT through
the following Bendigo Bank
account**

RSAR Association Inc

BSB 633 000

Acc. 1616 585 88

Cheques etc. can be mailed to

The Treasurer

**Christian Bennett
RSAR Association Inc
PO Box 1133
Kensington Gardens
SA 5068**

christianbennett95@gmail.com

A day Harry Dale will never forget

The day the Japanese bombed Darwin is one that Harry Dale will never forget. He was on a ship in the harbour when the planes began their raid on Thursday, 19 February 1942, and was lucky to survive.

Harry Dale had joined HMAS *Karangi* while she was still being fitted out at Cockatoo Dock in Sydney. The ship had two strange looking steel horns protruding from the bow and he learned that she would become a boom defence vessel in Darwin Harbour.

HMAS *Karangi* left Sydney on 26 December 1941 and headed up the east coast, stopping briefly in Townsville and arriving in Darwin early in January 1942. The next few weeks were spent settling in to the work of working on the 'trotts' of the boom gates [a trott is a panel between each flotation barrel made up of stretcher weights and the mesh] which were only open in daylight hours so Japanese submarines couldn't slip into the harbour undetected.

Word came through that a convoy had been attacked by Japanese planes and on 18 February, between 20 and 30 ships steamed into Darwin Harbour including the battleship, USS *Houston* and HMAS *Swan*, HMAS *Warrego* and USS *Peary*. As dusk was closing in, USS *Houston* sailed back out through the boom gates heading west towards Fremantle.

Harry Dale decided he would keep a record of his time in Darwin. Because it was strictly forbidden to keep a diary or to tell anyone in the family anything about the war, Harry hit on the idea of writing letters to his mother - but not posting them. Thus he kept a record of events that included a vivid description of the bombing of Darwin.



Thursday 19 February 1942

The time is near 2400 hours (midnight). What a day; boy, I'll never forget today, a lot has happened in a short time. I'll try and keep this up to date, just in case any thing happens. The ship has now stopped, we are now laying a fair way up the East arm at anchor, I don't know how far we have come, but here we are, I'll try and fill in the details as they happened, here goes.

Cecil Dobell and I were on duty this morning, just before 1000. We were up on the gun deck together, just skulking around, and having a smoke. Cec was oiling the breach of the gun. The *Karangi* has a 12 pounder Ack Ack gun and two Hispano machine guns. The Hispanos are located on the wings of the bridge. I think they were left over from the last war, still they work ok. Anyway, we heard this low droning sound. It was a plane but sounded pretty high up. Then it came into view, it wasn't one, but many. They all glistened silver in the sun, like they were painted with silver frost. It was the sun shining on them. It looked like nine, then another nine, then another nine. They could have been altogether, they were flying in arrow head formation, with one leader. I said to Cec 'they're not ours'. Cec said 'they're Japs, we don't own that many.

By now they were well into view coming across the harbour in a line, which to me was taking them straight up the town. We reckon they were 30,000 feet high. I raced into the wheel house and pressed the alarm button, then I stood in the doorway. As they got closer I could see their bombs starting to fall. All the planes let them go together. They looked like golf balls.

A day Harry Dale will never forget

I watched them right down to the ground. The first bomb to hit looked as if it hit between the signal station and the ships tied up alongside the wharf. I looked at the ship's clock - it was showing 0958 hours (two minutes to 10 am.) That's one time I shouldn't forget. About the same time as it hit the wharf, I know there is a ship there unloading depth charges (*Neptuna*). I'd say it copped a hit. By now our gun crews have closed up and the crew are all at action stations. We were a little lucky - our anchor was not on the anchor cable but on a 'brake slip stopper', which meant we didn't have to use up any steam to raise it. We were able to slip the lot into the harbour. That's where it is now. You can see all the ships belching out smoke as the stokers are really stoking the boilers right up, trying to get up a head of



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P05692.001

The Crew of the HMAS Karangi, an RAN Boom Defence Vessel

steam quickly so they can get under way. The old HMAS *Platypus* is at anchor between us and the wharf. I don't think she will be able to get under way - she is used as a supply ship, has never been moved since we have been here. If those depth charges blow the old *Platypus* will be very lucky to stay afloat. She is not that far away from the wharf.

The dive bombers are now in action. The USS *Peary*, who is only a few hundred yards away from us on our port quarter, is putting up plenty of flack and machine gun fire. There is a small cloud just above her. There are five dive bombers. They seem to be hidden in the cloud. They are dropping every thing at her. Our little 12 pounder is going great, haven't hit any thing yet. We made the tail of one of the dive bombers wobble, it must be out of bombs and ammo as it has flown right at and over us and kept going.

My job on the gun is to set the fuses and keep the ammo up. The magazine is under the mess deck. Ken Trayhurn is down there loading them into a canvas bag. Spud Murphy hauls them up, then runs along the deck, hands them up to me on the gun deck. The USS *Peary*

A day Harry Dale will never forget

has just been hit again. She is on fire. She never managed to get up any speed before she got hit again. The ships along side the wharf have just blown up, can't see the old *Platypus*. I think she must be gone.

We have all ducked for cover, shrapnel is falling everywhere. The *Manunda*, the hospital ship, is only a few hundred yards off our port bow. Here comes a Kittyhawk, its belly light is flashing 'dot dash' all the time. There's a bloody Zero after the Kitty. The Nip is firing all guns. They have just hopped over the *Manunda* (looks like the *Manunda* was strafed by the Nip as he flew past). The Kitty is headed straight along our port side. I can see the Hispano on the port side working, bullets are flying every where. The Japs' bullets are raking along the Karangi's side. I'm hiding behind a stanchion. The Jap planes have disappeared. The bridge calls down to see if anyone is injured. All on the gun deck are present, some one yells, 'where's Murphy'. He bobs up out of the winch house. Don't hold out much hope for the Kitty pilot.

We are under way. The *Zealander* is astern of the *Manunda* and has been hit. She is ablaze down the stern, big fire. They are taking to the life boat. We are heading toward them. They are rowing toward the *Manunda*. Looks like a direct hit on the *Peary's* magazine, OH!! She has blown sky high. What an explosion. We have copped the full force of the blast. I've got bells in my ears. She's sinking stern first. Nearly under now. The forward turret is still firing. We are pumping shells out as fast as we can. I can see the form of a sailor right on top of the blast. The *Peary* is nearly under. Can see another life boat being rowed away from the wharf. Don't know how they have survived. The old *Platypus* is still afloat. We are still firing at anything our gun can reach. The boys yell out the setting they want and I set to that. We can't get over 12,000 to 15,000 feet in height. It's useless wasting ammo trying to reach the high level bombers. We are just fending off any low level fighters or dive bombers that are around 1000 feet or less.

The Catalinas went with one run of bombs. They have sunk the lot. There's a torpedo bomber carrying a great big torpedo under its belly. It's keeping out of the way. Reckon they expected to find the USS *Houston*. Bloody glad she got away yesterday, Where ever you look there are burning or sinking ships, the air is filled with the smell of cordite, gun fire, and exploding bombs. There are still explosions going on. The bombers haven't let up. We are making way towards the boom gate, probably only four or five knots. The town looks to have some big fires. The shore ack ack are still trying to reach the high level planes. Don't reckon they have any hope. The worst seems to have passed. Hope they don't come back. No one on our ship has been hit, we certainly have been lucky, especially when that Zero chased the kitty along our port side. I reckon by the time they had sunk the *Peary* the dive bombers were out of bombs. Can't imagine why they would have left us without letting at least one or two sticks go, as we were certainly firing at them.

Can't see or hear any more planes. We are heading toward the boom gate, just passed two ships - all that is showing is their super structure above the water. No crew to be seen, plenty of wreckage. We are now out at the boom gate. Seems a fighter was going past the gate ship when it turned about and started strafing it. One seaman badly injured, a chap named Pony Moore. They have managed to get him headed for the *Manunda*.

The time is 1215 hours. We can hear planes, we are under way again as evidently there is nothing we can do here. The Japs are now bombing what looks like the RAAF base. They are in a wave of 27, flying in arrow head formation. Looks like it's the same pattern as this morning. We have a good view from here, as we watch the bombs explode. Here comes another wave of 27. The first wave has flown out over the harbour, turned before they reached us and are now heading north. Lucky for us there doesn't seem to be any fighters with them. The other wave has just unloaded their bombs, and headed north. Can't see any more, there mustn't be any thing left of the RAAF base.

We are now heading back to where we were this morning. As we get nearer to the boom wharf, it's been about four hours since the Japs made their first raid, we have been going

A day Harry Dale will never forget

over to each ship that's sunk looking for survivors. They have either got away in the life boats, been trapped in their hulls, or are floating about with the wreckage. The harbour is littered with debris of all sorts. Can see a few ships in the distance. Like us, they are still afloat. All the crew are still closed up at action stations. The magazines are full of shells, so I gather its wait and see what happens. Still a few hours till dusk. Can't come soon enough for me. None of us on the gun deck have any idea where we are headed. Seems we are about to enter the East arm. No idea where that goes. We are now proceeding at a very reduced rate of knots. At the moment I'm not needed on the gun crew. They have plenty of ammo. Roy Stone, he's the Bosun, has got me to heave the lead, that means I heave a line which has a seven pound lead weight on the end. I call out how deep the water is using the different markings on the line - so many fathoms deep, so the skipper knows how much water is under the ship so we don't run aground.

I have been relieved a couple of times, Cecil Dobell is doing it now. I have come down to the mess for a cup of Kai (hot chocolate). The engines seem to have stopped. On deck I see Nobby Clarke. He is a PO/Stoker - seems we are stopping here for the night. Well, that takes care of Thursday 19 February 1942 as it is nearly 2400 hours. I hope I never have to live through another day like today.

The material for this article was supplied by Harry Dale from Victoria
8/01/2002 10:48:18 AM



Ex-HMAS KARANGI's hulk in the 'wreck islands' of Homebush Bay

As the mangroves creep aboard, ex-HMAS KARANGI'S hulk is destined to become another attractive 'wreck island' and home for waterbirds in Sydney's Homebush Bay, site of the 2000 Olympics Park on the side from which this photo is taken.

SOURCE: DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2022), *A day Harry Dale will never forget*, DVA Anzac Portal, accessed 16 April 2025, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/stories/australians-wartime/day-harry-dale-will-never-forget>



RSAR Association Inc



2025 Annual General Meeting

All Members, wives
& partners are
invited to attend the
AGM where all
Committee positions
will be decided
vacant.

YOUR VOTE
COUNTS.

Please arrive by NLT
1100 hrs to order
and pay for your
meals, to be served
at the conclusion of
the AGM at 12 noon.

A CALL FROM YOUR ASSOCIATION



SUNDAY 3rd Aug
1100 hrs Avoca Hotel,
South Rd
Clarence Gardens

This is the MAIN event
for the year so it is
imperative for all
members to attend
and vote.

Dress Neat, Casual.

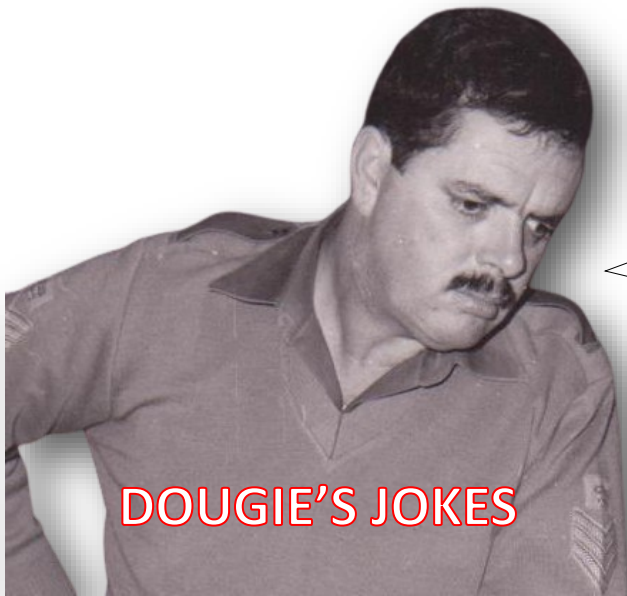
Guest Speaker will be
Mr Nathan Klinge, CEO
of RSL Care (SA)

Please join us after the
AGM for a couple of
drinks and a chat. Get
to know the other
members.

The winning tickets
in the
We for Swallow Boat
House Raffle will be
drawn at midday

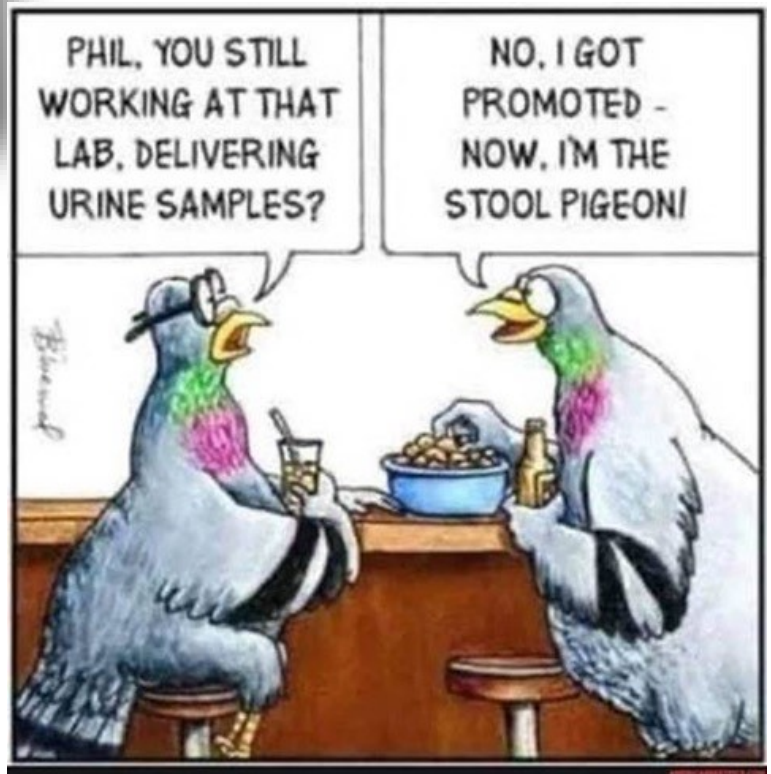
Reservations Required
for Seating & Catering Purposes NLT 30 July to
davidlaing49@bigpond.com or 0407 791 822

See you there!



DOUGIE'S JOKES

I went to a seafood
disco last week and
pulled a muscle!

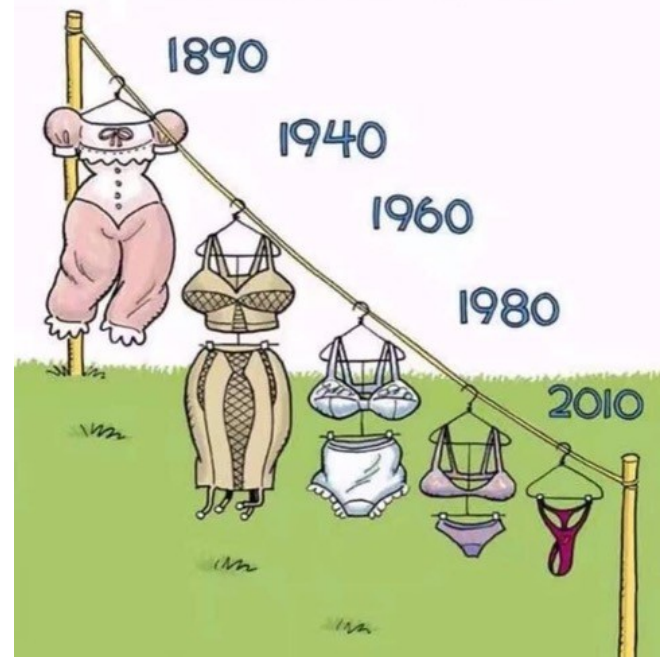


THE RECIPE SAID...DRESS THE CHICKEN!





DEFINITIVE PROOF OF GLOBAL WARMING



An elderly man was having hearing problems and went to see a specialist. The doctor fitted him with some hearing aids that brought his hearing back to full strength.

After a few weeks the man came back to make sure the new equipment was working properly, which it was.

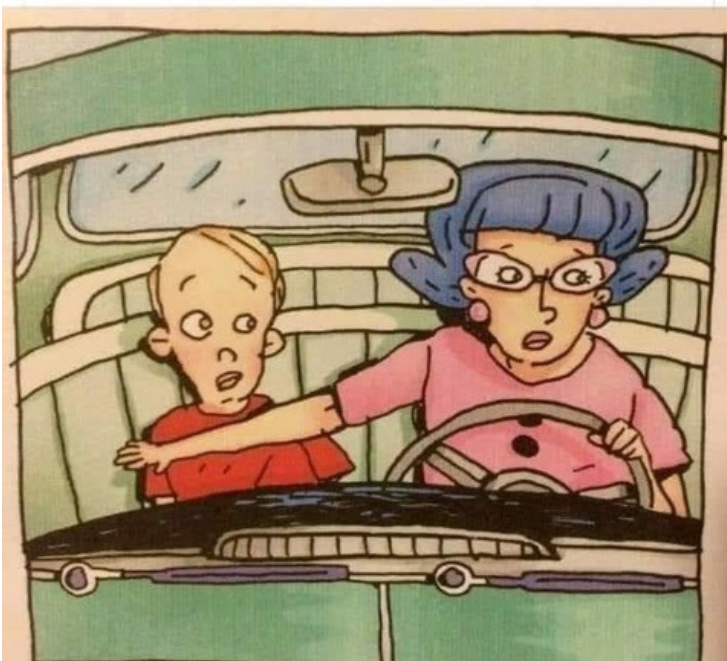
The hearing specialist said, "It all seems perfect. Your family should be delighted you can hear everything now."

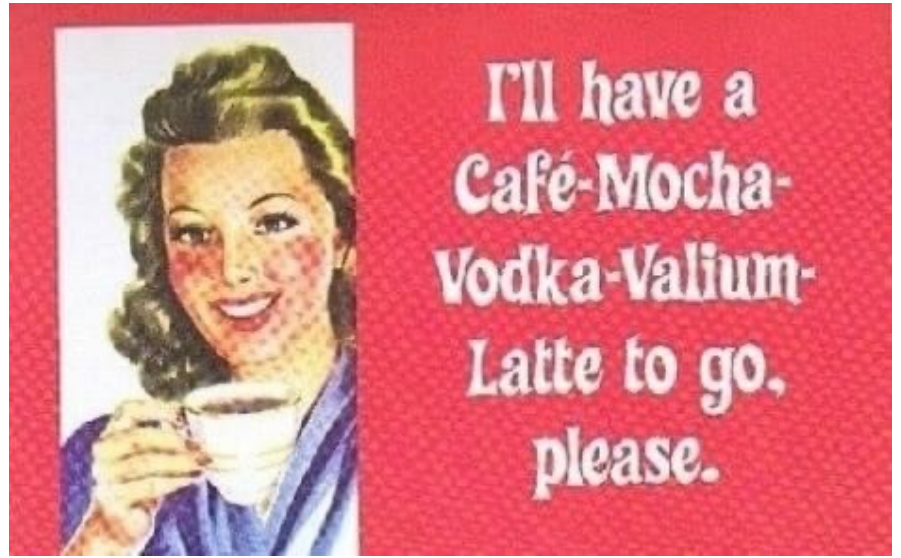
"Oh no," the man responded. "I haven't told any of them. I just sit quietly, listening carefully. I've changed my will four times." 😂😂😂

THIS IS MY STEP LADDER

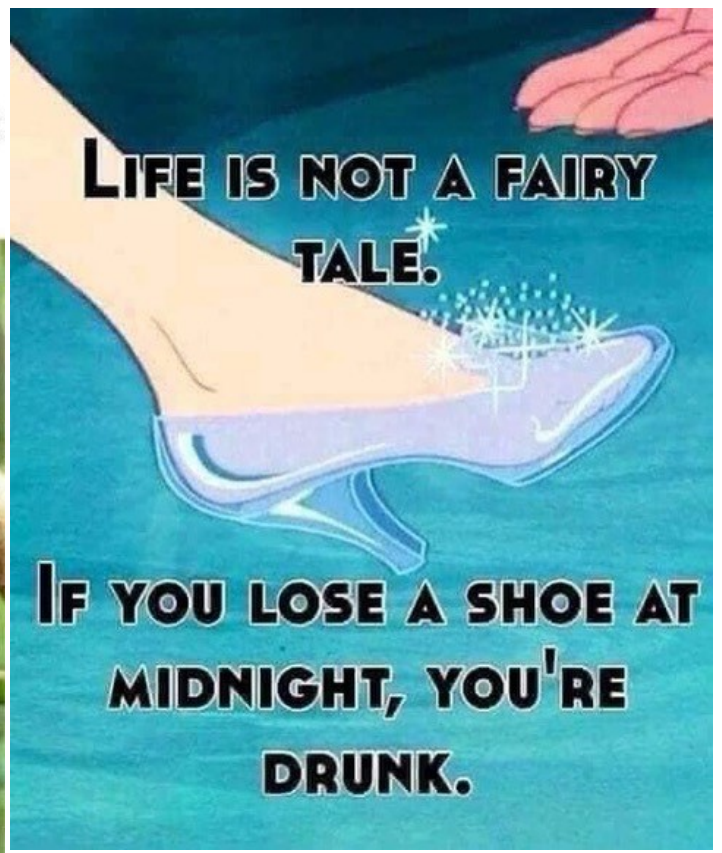
I NEVER KNEW MY REAL LADDER

If you remember your mom doing this, you are pre-seat belt and really old, like me.





Ok.. I'm not a bird specialist, but I'm pretty sure that this couple just had a fight.





Royal South Australia Regiment Association Inc

FUND RAISER RAFFLE

The Royal South Australia Regiment Association Inc is conducting a raffle, with the winning prize being 2 nights accommodation in the newly opened

Welcome Swallow Boat House

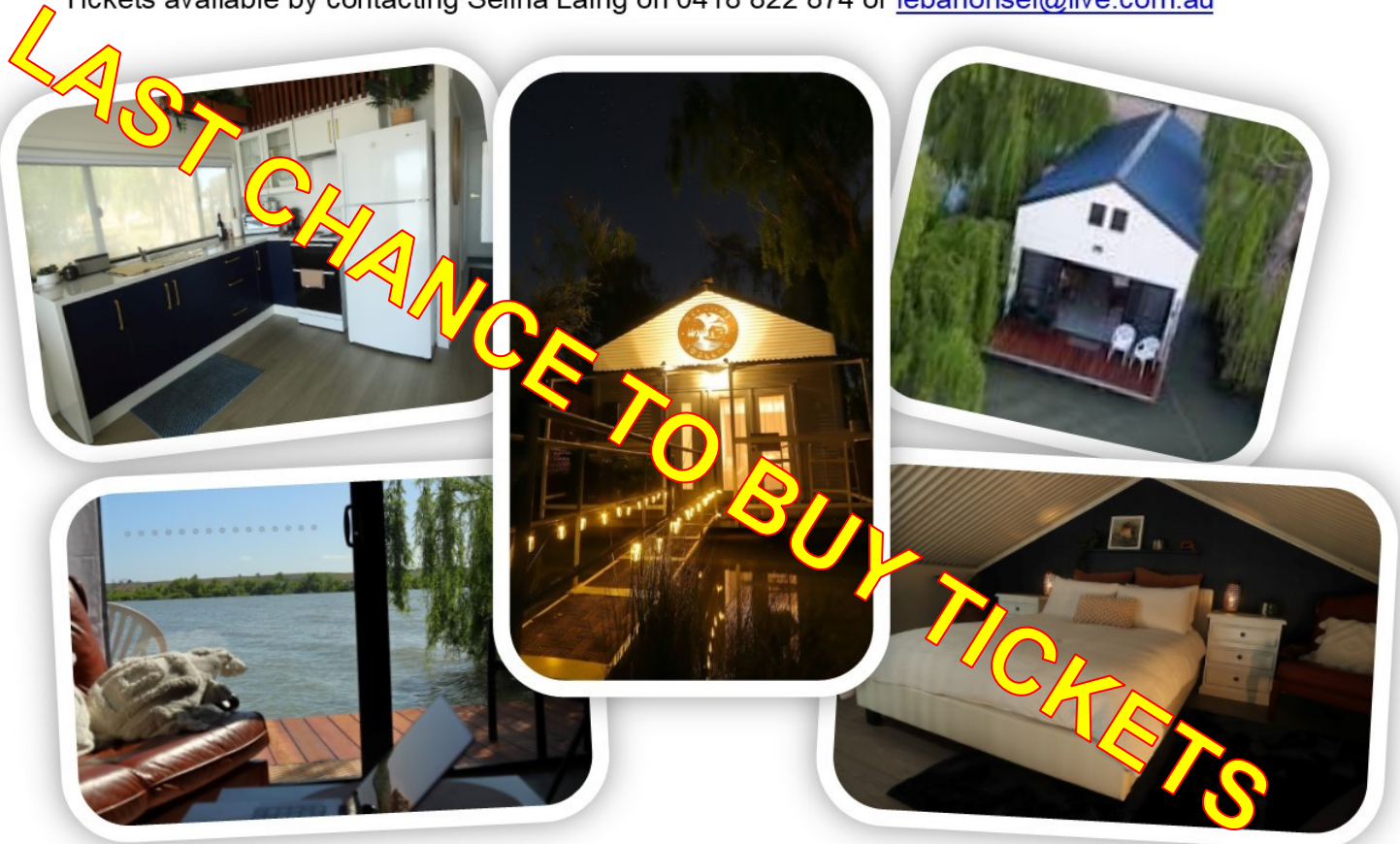
Located at White Sands on the River Murray.

Normally valued at over \$700, you can win this prize for only **\$5** per ticket.

The winning ticket will be drawn at the RSAR Association Annual General Meeting held at the Avoca Hotel, Clarence Gardens on 3rd August 2025 at Midday

The Winner will be contacted by mobile phone and announced in the monthly RSARA newsletter.

Tickets available by contacting Selina Laing on 0418 822 874 or lebanonsel@live.com.au



2nd Prize: Wallis Cinemas E Gift Card valued at \$120

3rd Prize: BCF Gift Card valued at \$50
and a Bunnings Gift Card valued at \$50. Total \$100.

Tickets go on sale from 1st & 2nd February 2025

For more pics check out the website. <https://www.thewelcomeswallow.com/>

To transfer money for tickets, please deposit to: BSB 633 000 Acc: 1616 585 88
Include your Surname and "Raffle Tickets" as an identifier.

padre's Ponderings

By Padre Stephen Albrecht—Chaplain 10/27 Bn RSAR

When I think about the 10th/27th RSAR it's not just a reserve unit, I see it as a living piece of Australian military heritage and I'm proud to be a part of it. Formed from the amalgamation of two historic battalions, the 10th and the 27th infantry battalions, 10th/27th RSAR represents more than operational capacity; it embodies a legacy of courage, commitment, and community.

The 10th Battalion was among the first infantry units to land at Gallipoli in 1915 and the Western Front, earning distinction for bravery and sacrifice. The 27th Battalion was raised from the suburbs of Adelaide and they also landed at Gallipoli, fought in the battle at Pozieres and the Somme Valley. It's understandable why the combination of these two battalions ensures that 10/27 RSAR carries forward a legacy of service that shapes its culture and values.

In recent years 10/27 RSAR has evolved into a modern, adaptable reserve unit that provides highly trained soldiers ready to deploy in support of domestic and international operations. Members of the battalion regularly support joint exercises, humanitarian efforts, and security tasks both near and afar. This operational versatility showcases how the regiment contributes to the broader objectives of the Australian Defence Force.

Based in South Australia, 10/27 RSAR is deeply woven into the fabric of metropolitan and rural communities. From disaster relief during bushfires and floods to ceremonial duties and community events, the battalion exemplifies the dual role of the modern reservist as both defender and community support.

Unlike regular units, reservists often live and work in the same communities they serve. Our members are teachers, tradies, students, paramedics, and professionals. This unique dual role creates a powerful bridge between the ADF and these communities, making defence visible, accessible, and trusted.

Reserve units like 10/27 RSAR are more than just a support arm of the military, they are a strategic asset, a historical symbol, and a community pillar. The unit's legacy, combined with its modern relevance and connection to South Australian communities, makes it not only special but essential.

In recognizing and investing in units like 10/27 RSAR, Australia ensures its defence remains resilient, representative, and rooted in both tradition and the future.

Padre Stephen Albrecht

Chaplain 10/27 Bn RSAR



Letters to the Editor

1959 Camp Recollection / 10th Battalion RSAR by Life Member Chris Acton

Back in 1959 I was a member of the 10th Battalion. At the annual 2-week camp which was held at Cultana the battalion was put through a series of exercises.

Back in that time there was National Service and there was plenty of manpower and once you finished your 3 months training you had to do time in the CMF in one of the Infantry battalions in South Australia.

From memory we left Adelaide by train to Port Augusta then trucked to the camp site. First order of the day was the "short arm" parade. There seemed to be an enthusiastic group who carried out the inspection of around 700 diggers from the battalion. It was standard procedure in those days so no big deal. Anyhow at 2100 hours there were people still lined up on parade which was being done by torch light.

From memory everybody passed inspection.

So here I was Private Acton, Signaller in Support company. This was a bugger of a job as you got to carry a very heavy piece of kit namely a 510 Radio. It comprised of two huge pouches attached to the front of your webbing with radio components in each pouch. And a "whip" Aerial. To use the radio, you had to tune it into the correct frequency, and you did this by twiddling some dials and achieved what was called a "zero beat".

That meant you were on the designated channel. Of course, depending on conditions, you had to continually "zero beat" to maintain a connection.

Now it so happened on this camp that we were trucked out to a place named Alligator Gorge. I was with a rifle platoon and supposed to keep up with the Platoon Commander. Plus keep in radio contact plus carry all of the usual stuff like a 303 rifle plus your kit.

On the march into wherever we were camping that night we had to traverse some pretty rugged country. Talk about hard going and this is where I saw an old Sergeant who was with us, he was probably WW2 vintage keeping an eye on us. The Bren Gun was a heavy piece of gear so it was shared among the platoon as we moved. Everybody except me took a turn at carrying the gun.

We reached a spot where we had a very steep hill that we had to climb down. The Platoon Commander was consulting a map when this Sergeant came up and he was carrying the Bren Gun. He then tossed it straight off the top of the hill and we watched it roll down to the bottom. Next he said the last one down gets the gun so without waiting there was a surge of blokes making their way down the hill.

The Platoon Commander was stunned but he sure as hell wasn't going to reprimand this old soldier.

The vision of that Sergeant tossing the Bren Gun down that hill has stayed with me and sort of showed just how innovative an "old digger" can be.

Chris Acton

Hullo David,

You know there is no doubt your presidency will be confirmed at the AGM BUT what concerns me is the amount of responsibility on your shoulders. The secretary's job is immense (including editor). You are doing an unbelievably good job of all of this currently but it worries me on your behalf.

No doubt you have your eyes open to find someone to take on the secretary role and even though I think you enjoy the editor job, I hope we can find someone (with help) to relieve you of this additional load.

It is your leadership (as it was with Rod) that keeps me involved to help where I can.

Have you a plan my friend?

Cheers,

Howard Parslow

Editors note: I have replied to Howard and thanked him for his concern and support. I do this job because 1.) I love doing it, and 2.) I feel like I'm making a difference in keeping our traditions and heritage alive by supporting the Regiment. When I no longer enjoy it, I'll let you all know! Cheers & thanks. David

Mid Year Report from your Committee

The Royal South Australia Regiment Association Committee of Management meet four times a year at Keswick Barracks to discuss current operations, and ways in which we can better support the soldiers of the Battalion.

There are 12 members on the Committee, made up of 7 Serving Members and 5 former Serving Members of the Regiment.

They are Des Hawkins, WO1 David Portakiewicz, WO2 Mark Blondell, SGT Michael Abraham, CPL Selina Laing, LCPL Corey Skapin, Musician Christian Bennett, Paul Tucker, Mick Hudson, Jesse Humphrys, Padre Stephen Albrecht and David Laing.

So far this year we have:

1. Prepared and served lunch to 120 soldiers at the RAAF Base Edinburgh Force Preservation Exercise in February.
2. Purchased, packed and posted 21 Care Packages to our soldiers deployed on Border Protection duties out of Darwin.
3. Purchased and provided 60 soldiers at Warradale Barracks with Soft Drinks, Potato Chips and Chocolate Bars FREE of Charge when they returned from a "vigorous" training exercise at Murray Bridge,
4. Funded the manufacture of 50 Unit PT Shirts for the Battalion to on-sell to the troops.
5. Continued to provide Association merchandise to members on request.

Later this year we will:

1. Conduct our 2025 Annual General Meeting at the Avoca Hotel on August 3rd
2. Prepare and serve a BBQ lunch and Hot Soup for up to 100 soldiers at the Simpson Trophy Competition to be conducted at the Murray Bridge Range, hosted by 10/27 Battalion RSAR.
3. Provide trophies, shields and awards at the Battalion End Of year Presentations
4. Prepare and serve a FREE lunch for all members and their partners at the Warradale Barracks Sergeants Mess on Sunday 14th December

All Committee positions will be declared vacant at the Annual General Meeting in August, and if they all put up their hands for re-election, the AGM will be conducted very quickly.

We welcome comments and ideas from members on how we can better support the Battalion and provide support and/or assistance to its soldiers.

As most of the Committee are serving members of the Battalion they are unable to assist us with the preparation and serving of meals, therefore we will be asking other non-serving members to assist us. This usually involves about 4 hours of set-up and serving of the meals, either at Warradale Barracks, RAAF Base Edinburgh, Murray Bridge Range or Keswick Barracks. We can't provide this level of support to our soldiers without your help, so please consider giving a few hours of your time once or twice a year. The gratitude we get back from the troops is well worth it and will help us continue our goal to Perpetuate The Regiment.

Cheers

David Laing on behalf of the RSAR Association Inc. Committee of Management

The Emu War

The bizarre story of when Australia went to war with emus—and lost

In the 1930s, a battle unlike any other unfolded in the Australian outback. After World War I, thousands of “soldier settlers” moved to Western Australia, attracted by government incentives to develop the land. As a result, thousands of emus—tall, flightless birds—in search of food, migrated into these newly established farms and trampled crops along the way.

The government’s response was swift and unusual: dispatched soldiers armed with machine guns to eliminate more than 20,000 emus. What they expected to be a quick and decisive victory turned into a humbling and absurd episode known as the “Emu War.”

But this bizarre chapter in history wasn’t just a military misstep—it revealed the emus’ critical role in Australia’s ecosystems and solidified their status as one of the country’s most iconic species.



The Emu War: A surreal showdown

Following World War I, the Australian government sought to settle more than 5,000 soldiers turned farmers in the westernmost state of Australia. However, the region’s harsh conditions proved difficult with poor soil and inconsistent rainfall. When a severe drought in 1932 drove nearly 20,000 emus into the farming areas, the birds—breaking fences that allowed smaller pests in—became the final straw.

Farmers called in reinforcements, and on November 2, 1932, three soldiers from the Royal Australian Artillery arrived with two Lewis light machine guns. The mission seemed simple: eliminate the emus and protect the crops.

Yet the campaign quickly descended into chaos. “I think back in the day they underestimated the species,” says Sarah Comacchio, a zookeeper at Taronga Zoo, Sydney. “They were quite unsuccessful because [emus] are such fast, agile birds.”

In the first three days, the men killed only 30 emus. Instead of staying in large herds, the emus scattered, making them challenging targets. Two days later, a machine gun jammed during an ambush at a watering hole, with thousands of loitering emus in sight.

As reports of the “war” spread, public fascination grew. People were intrigued by the plucky survivors, who even formed “units” with lookouts to evade capture. Truck drivers who failed to herd emus towards gunners reported the birds sprinting over uneven ground at 55 miles an hour, with one truck even crashing in pursuit.

Other witnesses were astonished at the emus’ alleged ability to survive glancing shots. The lead officer, Gwynydd Purves Wynne-Aubrey Meredith, famously said, “[Emus] could face machine guns with the invulnerability of tanks.”

Forty-five days after the start of the campaign, the soldiers had killed only about 2,500 emus—a fraction of the population—leaving the farmers no better off. Soon after, calls for humane treatment sounded for the

The Emu War

animals, and the government called off the operation. The emus emerged victorious.

Survivors of the Outback

The Emu War wasn't just a testament to military folly; it underscored the birds' incredible resilience. Standing nearly six feet tall, with strides over three feet long, emus are part of the ratites, a flightless group of birds descended from dinosaurs. They are the only bird with a calf muscle, which helps propel them forward. Their powerful leg muscles give them exceptional speed and endurance, enabling them to sprint up to 55 miles per hour and follow rainfall patterns to walk up to fifteen miles a day in search of food.

"I would call emus dispersive rather than migratory. Their movements are somewhat unpredictable and can occur in any direction," says Rowan Mott, an ecologist with the Bush Heritage Foundation. While emus often forage alone or in small family groups, droughts can unite them in large flocks, transforming their usually solitary wanderings into mass movements across the countryside. This convergence of natural behavior set the stage for the so-called "Emu War" in the early 1930s. (These animals have some of the most surprising mating and parenting habits.)



A farmer holding an Emu killed by Australian soldiers

But emus are more than just survivors. As opportunistic feeders, they play a vital ecological role by dispersing seeds over vast distances, thus helping to regenerate vegetation across Australia. While studies have found dozens of plant species in emu dung, Comacchio says emus are pivotal in spreading the quandong, a hardy, native peach. "A lot of other animals feed on that plant too. You'll see it growing in deserts where others might not grow," she says. "Emus dispersal of those seeds is a big benefit to the ecosystem, benefiting everyone in turn."

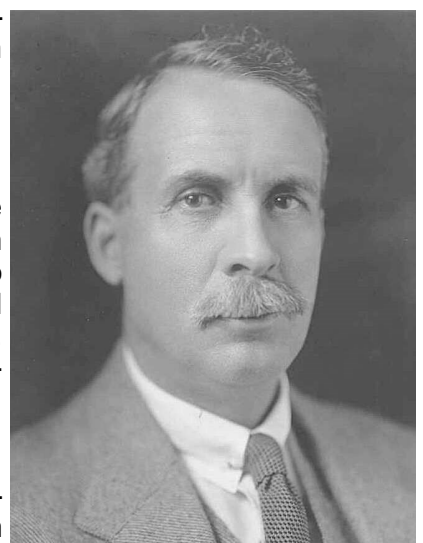
An Australian symbol

Beyond their ecological role, emus hold deep cultural significance. The emu holds significant symbolism in some First Nations Aboriginal creation stories, often representing resilience, strength, and a deep connection to the land. In some stories, the emu is a creator spirit guiding the natural world, and in others, it appears as a celestial figure in the Milky Way. Emus connection to Australia runs so deep that they appear on the nation's coat of arms, the 50-cent coin, and even sports team logos.

(Australia hands control of its newest national parks to Indigenous people.) "They're pretty iconic: very curious, not scared, quite confident," says Comacchio noting the birds' quirky behaviors, such as hopping excitedly from one leg to the other. "People love them."

The Emu War may have ended in military failure, but it cemented these birds as symbols of survival and adaptability. Protected under Australian environmental law since 1999, their population remains strong, with more than 600,000 wild emus traversing the continent.

[Sourced from Wikipedia](#)



Defence minister Sir George Pearce ordered the army to cull the emu population. He was later called the "Minister of the Emu War" in parliament by Senator James Dunn.



About ARVL

RSL Care SA's Andrew Russell Veteran Living (ARVL) is a veteran's housing program which aims to ensure that ex-service personnel in South Australia have the opportunity to access appropriate and affordable housing solutions.

ARVL provides housing options for veterans in two ways:

1. Through an emergency accommodation program designed for those that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This emergency housing has so far provided over 27,800 nights of emergency accommodation for 239 veterans, since January 2016.
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Our residential aged care facilities are the War Veterans Home in Myrtle Bank, Morlancourt in Angle Park, and our newly built facility, Romani located in Murray Bridge.

RSL Care SA also has four retirement living villages. Sturt Village is located in Marion and our Hamilton Retirement Village is located in Glengowrie. The War Veterans Retirement Village is co-located with the War Veterans Home in Myrtle Bank, and Waterford Estate in Murray Bridge is co-located with our Romani aged care facility, allowing us to provide a range of services to those living independently in the villages.



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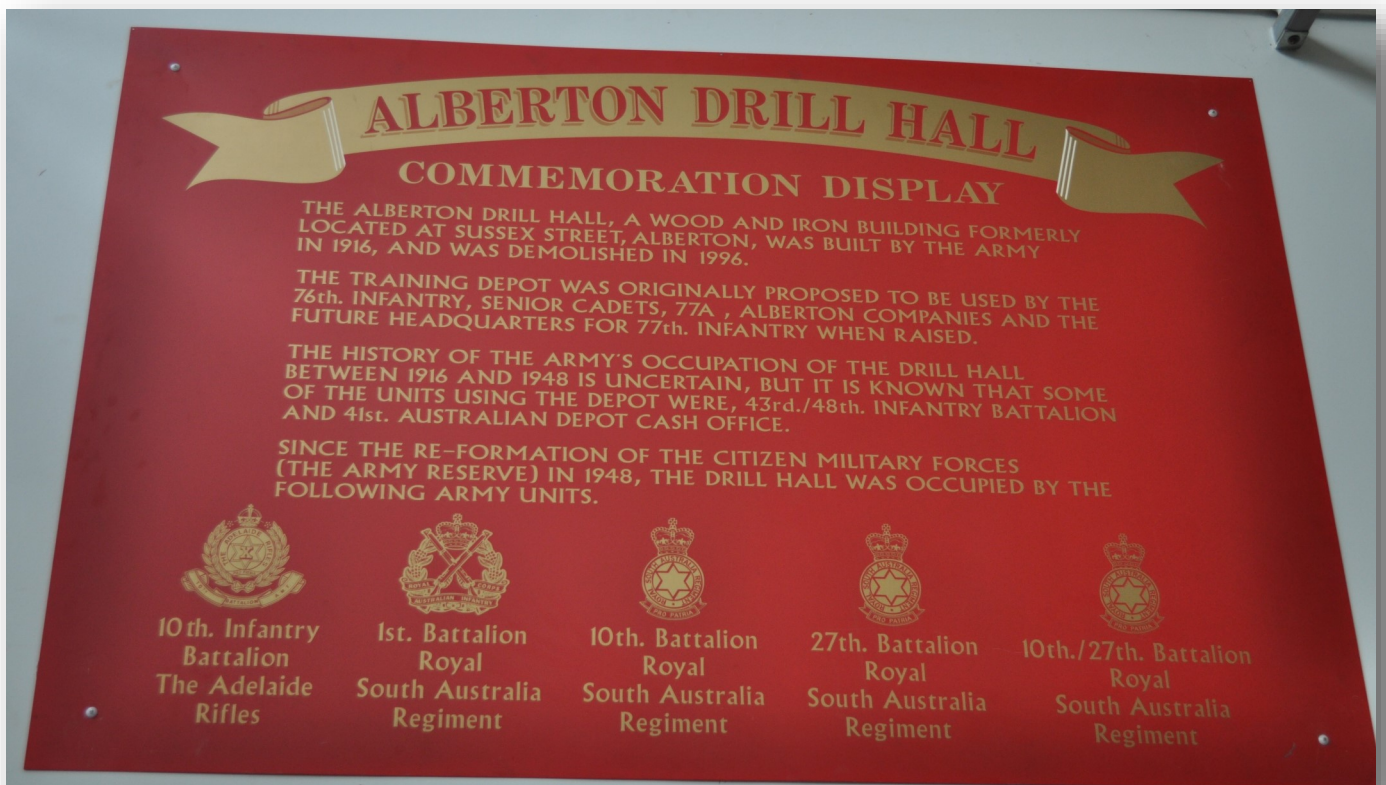
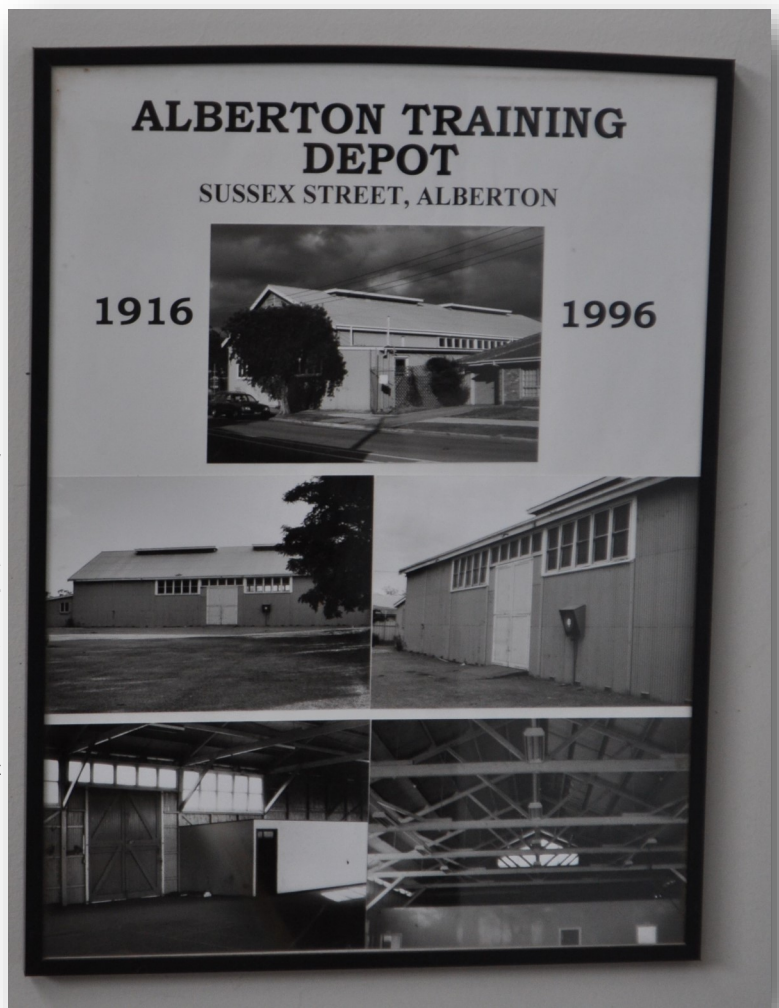
The Alberton Drill Hall

Home of the Spartans

When the Alberton Drill Hall in Sussex Street Alberton was being demolished around the year 1996, a member of the South Australian Military Vehicles Collectors Society saved the large red sign, pictured below.

The sign was displayed at the National Military Vehicle Museum when the Museum was located at Port Adelaide.

The training depot, built in 1916, was originally proposed to be used by the Alberton Companies of the 76th Infantry Battalion and the 77th Senior Cadets Battalion, and becoming the future headquarters of the 77th Infantry Battalion, once raised. The actual Army's occupation between 1916 and 1948 is uncertain, but some units stationed at the depot were elements of the 43rd/48th Infantry Battalion and the 41st Australian Depot Cash Office. Since the reformation of the Citizens Military Forces (CMF) now known as the Army Reserve, in 1948, the depot has been occupied by A Company of the 10th Infantry Battalion The Adelaide Rifles, E Company of the 1st Battalion Royal South Australia Regiment, and the A Company of the following battalions: 10th Battalion Royal South Australia Regiment, 27th Battalion Royal South Australia Regiment, 10th/27th Battalion Royal South Australia Regiment and the Band of the 10th/27th Battalion Royal South Australia Regiment.



The Alberton Drill Hall

Home of the Spartans

Former members of the units occupying the Alberton Drill Hall, the “Alberton Boys” successfully sought permission from the Museum Committee to establish a display in remembrance of the Drill Hall and the service personnel who passed through it, utilising the saved sign. The “Boys” formed a committee of ten, and the planning started, usually at the Alberton Hotel, which had been the “refreshment supplier” probably since the Hall was built.

The publishers of the *Portside Messenger*, the local newspaper, were approached and an article was published calling all “ex Alberton Boys” and the public for support and memorabilia. A fund raising cabaret was held at the Largs Bay RSL and all raffle prizes were donated by local persons and businesses. The night was socially and financially successful, with many old mates able to reminisce, as some had not seen each other for many years. A large photo board also bought back many memories.

The cabaret proceeds financed two display cases and a large information board. Two more fundraising functions were held at one of the “Boys” houses: they both turned out to be typical “Alberton” parties and enough finance was procured to complete the project. A large glass frame was donated to house the Alberton Flag, the “Old Red Rooster”, which is now housed safely within the Army Museum of SA at Keswick Barracks..

The committee approached the Port Adelaide Enfield City Council, which resulted in a plaque being donated and laid in the footpath on Sussex Street adjacent to the site of the Drill Hall. When the National Military Vehicles Museum was relocated to Edinburgh Park, most of the Alberton display was moved there also.

Editors Note: The Bronze Plaque dedicating the former site of the Alberton Drill Hall is laid into the pavement outside the site on Sussex Street Alberton. Check it out!.



Presenting the Flag to the Army Museum of SA for safekeeping in 2016. L - R. SSGT Barry Johnson, MAJGEN Neil Wilson, WO2 Ian Carnachan, MAJ Don Field, WO2 Jim Thomson, MAJ Trevor Phillips.

PS The Old Red Rooster was designed and produced by the Alberton Members in 1964 and in 1965 was raised in public for the first time when it was marched on to a Battalion Parade at Cultana, to the secret delight of the Battalion CO and the unconcealed horror of the RSM.

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