

# VicRoads Association

## Newsletter No. 241



*Troops de-bugging their beds, Changi, by Murray Griffin*

Membership of the Association is available to all who have been members of VicRoads or forerunner organisations or the spouse of deceased members, and bestows on them all the rights of the Rules of Association. Cost of membership is a once only fee of \$50. Enquiries about membership or receipt of the Newsletter by e-mail should be directed to the Secretary, VicRoads Association, PO Box 80, Kew 3101 or by phone or e-mail as shown in the footer below. Visit our website at [vicroadsassociation.org](http://vicroadsassociation.org)

### Dear Members,

Over 70 people attended the Christmas lunch at the Glen Waverley RSL on 12 December. It was a great day. The three most handsome men in attendance also happened to be the three oldest there. Here they are – all of them over 90.



Jim Winnett, Stan Hodgson and John Clark



And these are the people who worked in the rural regions – and most of them still living there



Traffic Section



Those who worked in the metropolitan regions



Hume Freeway veterans



Administration heroes



And here are some random shots.



## What else has been happening

### Visit to Benalla and Shepparton

17th and 18th November 2022

Two or three weeks before this trip, both Benalla and Shepparton were in severe flood, so we were very pleased that this trip could proceed with such success. We met at the Benalla Gallery for lunch on the 17th and we were told that the flood water had inundated the basement and reached nearly to the floor of the gallery itself. All the garden surrounding the gallery was flooded and yet there was not the slightest sign that it had recently flooded.

We saw the Ledger Collection – an extensive and remarkable collection of Australian art from the 1840s through to the 1980s. What was on display was only about half the collection. It contains early colonial art, the Heidelberg School of impressionism, French impressionism and modernism. It alone, made the trip worthwhile!

After lunch, we visited the L.S. Precast factory just outside Benalla where all the precast concrete units (of all description) were being manufactured for the Metro Rial Project and the West Gate Tunnel Project. As you can see from the photograph, we all had our hard hats, our steel tipped footwear and our high viz jackets on.

That night we dined at the Northo Hotel. The meal was excellent and I was very impressed because they only provided locally grown wine – and they were very high quality. We had over 40 people for dinner and it was a great night of fun and comradeship.

The following day we drove across to Shepparton to visit the Shepparton Art Museum (SAM). We had a guided tour

through the museum and the two aspects that impressed me most were the burgeoning collections of indigenous art and ceramics. After lunch there, we dispersed for home.



The visitors at SAM.

We are indebted to Gary Edwards and Lester Watt for all the assistance they provided in organising our visit. Without their help, we could never have made the trip as interesting and enjoyable. And after about 45 years, I never tire of hearing Lester's story about entering some chickens at the local show. There were only two entries and Lester's came third. The judge explained that all entries weren't up to the required standard. When he asked the judge how he could win a prize in future, the judge suggested that he slaughter the birds, cook them and enter them in the chicken pie category.

Thank you very much Gary and Lester.



## Help wanted

I have found the names of the people in the photograph of the CRB staff members taken at the Titles Office in 1921. This has been a major breakthrough for me in identifying soldiers who served in the First World War. Nine of them are wearing RSL badges – a sure indication that they served – but there are other ex-soldiers in the group whose names are in the National Australian Archives – but they are not wearing RSL badges.

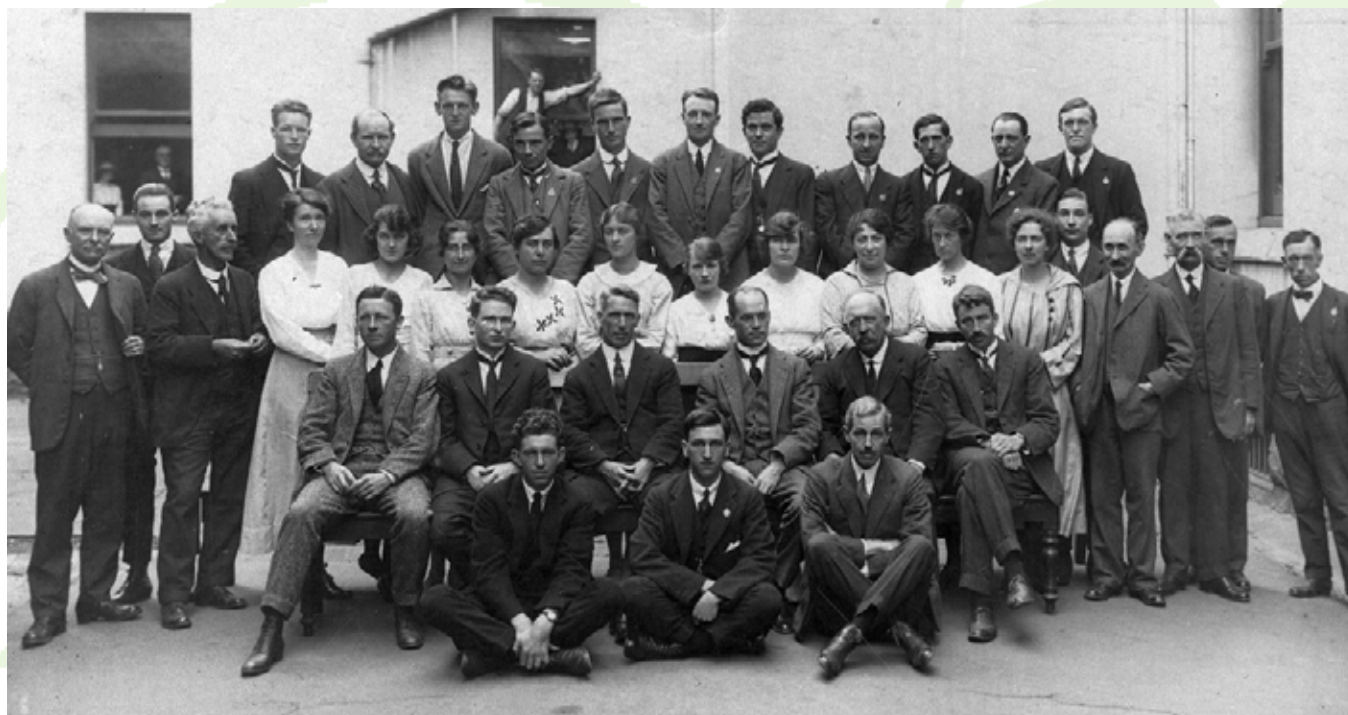
I am trying to find more information about Norman E. Vaughan, Frederick Hine and Mr Hart. I know that Freddy Hine worked in the Accounts Branch as a Pay Officer and retired in 1962. I think Vaughan may have been an engineer. He is mentioned on the very first page of *Reminiscences*

of *Life in the Country Roads Board* by Frank Docking who noted that Norm Vaughan – like Frank, went to University High School – and was already working for the CRB. I don't know anything about 'Mr Hart'.

If any of you can provide any information about them – or any others in the photo please contact me.

There are a few others I am trying to find. They are:

Kevin John O'Keefe, David Alexander Bryan, David Mitchell Patterson, Brian Terrence Scantlebury, Douglas Brian Welshe and Bob Adams – who all served in the Vietnam War.



After the First World War - Staff of the Country Roads Board at the Land Titles Office - 1921.

Back row left to right: W. Birrell\*, I. Coffey, D. Ebbs, A. Kerry\*, D.V. Darwin\*, H. Wood\*, E.J. Hicks, R.F. Jansen\*, L. White\*, R. Foster\*, Mr Hart.

Middle row standing left to right: Mr Hargraves, F.W. Hine\*, Mr Aspinall, Miss Oliver, Miss H. Watts, Miss M. Wood, Miss E. Couve, Miss E. Young, Miss Palmer, Miss Long, Miss A. Phillips, Miss Weller, Miss E. Young, Mr Rankin, Mr Phillips, Mr Campbell, Mr A. King, Mr J.V. Whitehead\*.

Centre seated left to right: F.R. Oldfield, W.T. Williams\*, W.L. Dale, T.G. Bowden, A.E. Callaway, T.H. Upton\*.

On ground left to right: Mr Tonks, N.E. Vaughan, A. Phillips.

\*Indicates returned servicemen whose stories are included in *Roads to War*.

Messrs Hart (extreme right in the back row) and Vaughan (sitting in the middle on the ground) are wearing RSL badges but I have been unable to retrieve any records of them.

## Vale

### Robert Wiseman

Kevin Tehan contacted me to say that Robert died on 20 December 2022. Although Robert wasn't a member of the Association, I am sure that many members would have memories of working with him. He worked for VicRoads and its predecessors in Major Projects, the Geelong Bypass, the Hume Freeway and the Metropolitan Ring Road as a Surveillance Manager.

His wife, Jeanette, also worked with VicRoads in the early days of the Hume Freeway Project and more recently, with VicRoads Design Corporate Plan Filing.

We extend our sincere sympathy to Jeanette and family.

## What's coming up

### Occasional lunches and Annual General Meeting

We are still working on the program for this year and will provide details as arrangements are finalised. However we have finalised the dates for our lunches at Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel. They are 3 April, 19 June, 7 August, 9 October and 6 November 2023.

I also want to give notice of our Annual General Meeting which will be held at Glen Waverley RSL at 6.00pm on Thursday 16 March. Following the AGM we will have dinner commencing at 6.30pm. Ken Vickery is our contact for this function. If you would like to come, please contact Ken on [kenvickery@tpg.com](mailto:kenvickery@tpg.com) or 0409 561 168. Family and friends are welcome. We will put out a reminder closer to the date.

## Membership

We published the list of members in the last newsletter and we apologise to Rob McQuillen and Bill Wilson omitting mention of their Public Service Medals (PSMs) in their entries. Amongst our membership we have two members with an AM (Max Lay and Tom Glazebrook) and five with a PSM (Ted Barton, Norm Butler, Graham Gilpin, Rob McQuillen and Bill Wilson).

We also omitted Stan Hodgson and Thuan Nguyen because of some glitch. Apologies to them also.



# LEST WE FORGET



## The Second World War

There was no single cause of the Second World War. It was a series of events and developments around the world that came together inexorably, until disaster eventually erupted. The myth of the First World War being the 'War to end all wars' was exploded – but there can be no doubt that the Treaty of Versailles - motivated more by revenge on Germany rather than sympathy toward it following defeat – was a major cause.

The Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919. It codified the peace terms between the victorious Allies and Germany. It required Germany (and its allies) to accept full responsibility for all the loss and damage caused by the First World War. It required the disarmament of Germany, as well as harsh territorial concessions and the payment of massive reparations. The treaty humiliated Germany while failing to resolve the underlying issues that had led to the war in the first place. The economist, John Maynard Keynes - a British delegate to the Paris Peace Conference - predicted that the treaty was too harsh and the reparation figures too excessive and counter-productive. On the other hand, prominent figures on the Allied side, criticized the treaty for being too lenient on Germany.

Germany's resentment of the treaty was exploited by Adolf Hitler during the rise of the Nazi Party in the 1930s. He asserted that Germany had not lost the war but, rather, it had been betrayed by the Weimar Republic who negotiated an unnecessary surrender. Germans viewed the treaty as a humiliation and, with nationalistic fervour, they eagerly listened to Hitler's oratory which blamed the treaty for all of Germany's ills. Hitler's promises to reverse the depredations of the Allied powers and recover Germany's lost territory and pride, was a significant factor in the onset of the Second World War.

Another major contributor to the Second World War was the Great Depression. It worsened the collapse of the German economy. Though the Treaty of Versailles may not have caused the crash, it became a convenient scapegoat for the Nazis. The depression was world-wide, causing economies to shrink and limiting trade between nations. Unemployment was high, banks failed, prices fell and businesses closed. The people of Germany turned to the messianic political message of Hitler, placing their hopes on his promises to make Germany great again.

This was an era of totalitarianism. European and other democratic nations were transfixed by a fear of Communism which had arisen out of the Russian Revolution. In Germany and Italy the future appeared to be a form of militaristic totalitarianism known by its Italian name, Fascism. It promised to provide for the needs of the

people more effectively than democracy, and presented itself as a certain defence against Communism. Benito Mussolini established the first Fascist dictatorship during the inter-war period in Italy in 1922. It is a myth that he got the trains to run on time. Mussolini's rise to power had been founded on publicity. He might have had bizarre policies and looked like a comedic figure to later generations, but he knew what worked when it came to getting attention, and his propaganda was strong. Mussolini picked on the rail industry as something to show how his supposedly dynamic rule had improved Italian life. But in truth, there was only minimal improvement in Italian railways but a huge suppression of liberalism and individual civil rights.

Hitler's ruthless rise to power was fuelled by Germany's nationalistic ambitions. He made military pacts with Italy and Japan (known as the Axis) and stealthily built up Germany's military forces and war arsenal. In 1936, Hitler moved troops into the German speaking areas of the Rhineland (in France), Austria and Czechoslovakia without any resistance, because neither Britain nor France had the military resources to resist. This move heartened the huge following of the Nazis in Germany and strengthened its resolve for war.

Great Britain and France had been pursuing a policy of appeasement with Hitler. The sight of the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, brandishing a piece of paper – the Munich Peace Agreement of 1938 – is an iconic image of history. History proved that it was worthless. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain cuts a sad figure in history. He fought doggedly to prevent war and in doing so, delayed its outbreak for a couple of years. Some historians have taken a more favourable perspective of Chamberlain and his policies by arguing that going to war with Germany in 1938 would have been even more disastrous as the UK was totally unprepared

His conduct of the war was heavily criticised by members of all parties in the British Parliament and, in a vote of confidence, his government's majority was greatly reduced. Accepting that a national government supported by all the main parties was essential, Chamberlain resigned the premiership because the Labour and Liberal parties would not serve under his leadership. Although he still led the Conservative Party, he was succeeded as prime minister by his colleague, Winston Churchill.

Chamberlain's reputation remains controversial among historians, the initial high regard for him being eroded for failing to prepare Britain for war. Most historians in the generation following Chamberlain's death held similar views, led by Churchill in *The Gathering Storm*. Nonetheless, Chamberlain is still unfavourably ranked amongst British prime ministers.



Neville Chamberlain declaring peace in our time through the Munich Peace Agreement.

In August 1939, Hitler and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin signed a non-aggression pact which further alarmed Great Britain and France. Hitler had long planned an invasion of Poland, a nation to which Great Britain and France had guaranteed military support if it were attacked by Germany. The pact meant that Germany could invade Poland unopposed without facing a war on two fronts. On the other hand, Stalin was buying time so that Russia could build up its war machinery without waging war against Germany. They also made an agreement on how they would later divide up Eastern Europe. The pact fell apart in June 1941 when Nazi forces invaded the Soviet Union.

Britain and France's attempts to appease Germany by agreeing to Germany entering some parts of Czechoslovakia as agreed in the peace agreement of 1938 was flaunted when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. Hitler was under the misapprehension that he could march into Poland with impunity. He had been playing brinksmanship with Britain and France and he believed that they would bow to his bluff but it was this act that caused Britain and France to declare war on Germany. Hitler was shocked. As was the case in the First World War, Australia automatically became involved as a member of the British Commonwealth.

On the other side of the world, Japan too was hit badly by the economic depression. Like Germany, Japan had a strong, militaristic tradition of warrior culture. The Japanese people had lost faith in the government and they looked to the army to find a solution to their problems. Japan was hungry for mineral and oil resources and their military class had ambitions of ousting the US as the major power in the Pacific.

The Japanese had already begun imperial expansion in Manchuria (1931), Inner Mongolia (1936), and China (1937). China was rich in oil and minerals and Japan needed these resources to build up its war machinery. China sought

international help from the League of Nations in resisting the Japanese invasion but they were ignored.

The Empire of Japan entered the Second World War on 27 September 1940, by signing the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. It further expanded its territory by the invasion of French Indo-China (Vietnam) in September 1940. The US was concerned about the security of its Pacific territories and strengthened its naval fleet which was stationed at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. Japan, realising that its expansion in the Pacific could be threatened by this move by the US, attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 aiming to destroy the US fleet at one fell swoop. For seven hours on that same day, there were coordinated Japanese attacks on the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island, the Dutch East Indies<sup>1</sup>, Thailand, Borneo, Malaya and Hong Kong. The strategic goals of the Japanese offensive were to cripple the US Pacific fleet, capture the oil fields in the Dutch East Indies, and maintain their sphere of influence over China, East Asia, and Korea. It was also to expand the outer reaches of the Japanese Empire to create a formidable defensive perimeter around the newly acquired territory.

The bombing of Pearl Harbour was a critical turning point in the war. America declared war on Japan immediately but not on Germany. In fact it was Hitler who declared war on America on 11 December 1941. He thought that Japan would support Germany by attacking Russia but this did not eventuate. This was a catastrophic blunder on Hitler's part as it created a grand alliance of nations – America, Britain and Russia – which was eventually to bring powerful offensives from both the east and west to defeat the Nazi forces in Europe.



USS Arizona sinking during the attack on Pearl Harbour.

<sup>1</sup> The Dutch East Indies was often referred to as NEI (Netherlands East Indies) and is now Indonesia. Likewise, New Guinea was the entire island which has now been split into Irian Jaya (part of Indonesia) and Papua New Guinea. Malaya included Singapore – which is now a separate country – and the remaining part is now Malaysia.

## LEST WE FORGET



Australia entered the war after Britain's declaration of war on 3 September 1939. By the end of the war, almost a million Australians had served in the armed forces in the European theatre, the North African campaign and the South West Pacific theatre. Australia also came under direct attack for the first time in its post-colonial history. Its casualties from enemy action during the war were 27,000 killed and 24,000 wounded. Many more suffered from tropical disease, hunger, and harsh conditions in captivity. Of the 21,467 Australian prisoners taken by the Japanese only 14,000 survived.

Australia's initial involvement in the Second World War was in Europe and North Africa. The Royal Australian Navy participated in operations against Italy in June 1940 and some Australian airmen flew in the Battle of Britain the following August and September. The Australian army was not engaged in combat until 1941, when the 6th, 7th, and 9th Divisions joined Allied operations in the Mediterranean and North Africa.

Following early successes against Italian forces, the Australians suffered defeat with the Allies at the hands of the Germans in Greece, Crete, and North Africa. In June and July 1941 Australians participated in the successful Allied invasion of Syria, a mandate of France and the Vichy government. Up to 14,000 Australians held out against repeated German attacks in the Libyan port of Tobruk, where they were besieged between April and August 1941. After being relieved at Tobruk, the 6th and 7th Divisions departed from the Mediterranean theatre for the war against Japan. The 9th Division remained to play an important role in the Allied victory at El Alamein in October 1942 before it also left for the Pacific. By the end of 1942 the only Australians remaining in the Mediterranean theatre were airmen serving either with 3 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) or in the Royal Air Force (RAF).

Following the outbreak of war with Japan, Australian units were gradually withdrawn back to home base. However, units and personnel of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) continued to take part in the war against Germany and Italy. From 1942 until early 1944, Australian forces played a key role in the Pacific War, making up the majority of Allied strength throughout much of the fighting in the South West Pacific theatre. While the military was largely relegated to subsidiary fronts from mid-1944, it continued offensive operations against the Japanese until the war ended.

The Second World War contributed to major changes in Australia's economy and its military and foreign policy. The war accelerated the process of industrialisation, led to the development of a larger peacetime military and began the process of Australia shifting the focus of its foreign policy from Britain to the United States. The final effects of the war also contributed to the development of a more diverse and cosmopolitan Australian society through the migration of European refugees.

The war also saw the emergence of women playing vital roles in the war effort. Although nurses accompanied the AIF in 1940, during the early years of the war women were generally unable to make any significant contribution. Labour shortages forced the government's hand and, in February 1941, the RAAF established the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF). The RAN also began employing female telegraphists, leading to the establishment of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) in 1942. The Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) was also established in October 1941 and outside the armed services, the Women's Land Army (WLA) was established to encourage women to work in rural industries. Other women in urban areas took up employment in industries, such as munitions production.

The Second World War brought new horrors to history. In terms of total dead, about three per cent of the world's population was obliterated – 75 million people. Many people died because of deliberate genocide, mass bombings, massacres, disease and starvation. The concentration camps of the Germans, the prisoner of war camps of the Japanese and the gulags of the Russians saw unimaginable atrocities committed in the name of nations.

Nazi Germany killed over 11 million people because of their ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, physical/mental condition or religion. This included six million Jews. Up to 10 million Chinese people were enslaved by the Japanese to work in the mines to provide the war materiel for the Japanese. Of the 5.7 million Russian prisoners of war held in Germany, fifty seven percent died or were killed.

These awful acts of cruelty driven by insane prejudice, in a perverse way, legitimised the Second World War when compared to others. It would be intolerable to think of what the world may have been like had Hitler succeeded. The disdain for liberal democracy and the parliamentary system by Fascism and Nazism is now widely recognised as immoral and evil. The horror of the Holocaust could never be conceived on any rational basis and the fact that it occurred should never be forgotten. The period of the Second World War must go down in history as one of the World's darkest periods – in terms of numbers, the darkest of all time.

Although Germany and Japan stole the march on their enemies by preparing early for the war, the mobilization of people, resources and war materiel by the Allies was a critical component of the war effort. After the commencement of the war, the Allies were able to eventually outpace the Axis' war production. America's involvement was key. By the end of the war US factories had produced 300,000 planes, and by 1944 had produced two-thirds of the Allied military equipment used in the war. Eighteen American shipyards built 2,710 Liberty ships between 1941 and 1945 – an average of three ships every two days.





S.S. *John W. Brown* – one of four surviving Liberty ships photographed in 2000.

On 8 May 1945, Germany signed an unconditional surrender to the Allies. Hitler had committed suicide on 30 April during the Battle of Berlin and Germany's surrender was authorised by Hitler's successor, Admiral Karl Dönitz. The war in Europe was over but it still raged in the Pacific.

The war ended finally with the detonation of two atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (on 6 and 9 August 1945). They unleashed a power never seen before – not only in the devastation of the explosions themselves but also the long-lasting effects of radiation. The two bombings killed somewhere between 130,000 and 230,000 people, most of whom were civilians. Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945, six days after the Soviet Union's declaration of war on Japan. There is still much debate concerning the ethical and legal justification for the bombings. Supporters believe that the atomic bombings were necessary to bring a swift end to the war with minimal casualties, while critics argue that the Japanese government could have been brought to surrender through other means, while highlighting the moral and ethical implications of nuclear weapons and the deaths caused to civilians.

Now, nine nations have nuclear weapons and the horrendous threat of nuclear war still pervades the world today.

I include below the stories of three of our colleagues who served in the Second World War – two in the Army and one in the Royal Australian navy.



## Sapper William (Bill) Simpson Brake

VX96311 (V158054)

Bill was born in Camberwell in 1923 and enlisted in the Australian Army in February 1945. Bill attended Mont Albert Central School until 1936 after which he attended Scotch College until the end of 1941. He commenced studying civil engineering at the University of Melbourne in 1942 but at the end of that year he decided to join the Royal Australian Navy. He enlisted in December 1942, completed his medical and was awaiting call up when, on Boxing Day 1942, someone from the Manpower Directorate rang him to say that his enlistment was voided and that he had to continue his engineering studies.

Labour controls were introduced in 1942 to deal with the needs of the armed services and industry. Manpower regulations affected individual liberties and touched the day to day activities of Australians perhaps more than any other executive operations of government throughout this period. The first significant regulation introduced during the first two years of the war was to reserve occupations from military service. Occupations reserved were those which were essential for the production of equipment and supplies for the war effort. From the first of April 1942 engagement of all male labour was controlled and a national registration of both male and female labour was completed. The government had the power to say what every man should do whether in the armed services, war industry or civilian industry. The powers under the Manpower Regulations included:

- power to exempt a person from service or prohibit their enlistment
- prevent employers from engaging labour not authorised by the directorate
- restrict the right of employees to engage in the employment of their choice
- prevent employees from leaving their employment
- restrict the right of the employer to dismiss his employees
- power to direct any person to leave one employment and engage in another
- and compel individuals to register and provide information about themselves.

Such is the necessity of war, and young Bill Brake's destiny was set in history by these regulations. Likewise, at the end of 1944, Bill's studies were interrupted by the Directorate when he was ordered to enlist in the Army – which he did in February 1945.

He joined the Royal Australian Engineers and trained in Cowra for three months and then



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Thousands of people lined the streets of Wagga Wagga to watch the funeral procession for the victims of the Kapooka Tragedy.

he went to Kapooka, near Wagga Wagga, in NSW to do a training course in bridging. He was there in May 1945 at the time of what has now become known as the Kapooka Tragedy. It is etched deep in his memory. Twenty six recruits lost their lives in a bunker where they were being trained in the use of explosives. The cause of the explosion is not known. The gravity of the loss is compounded by the fact that the war was drawing to a close – the Germans had surrendered and momentum was with the Allies in the Pacific.

At the war's end, Bill had nearly completed his training while working on the construction of a bridge over the Murrumbidgee River in Wagga Wagga. It was a Bailey Bridge supported on pontoons. He lived in a tent by the river. He recalled that in the winter, the still water in the river used to freeze over.

After his discharge in January 1946, Bill went back to university to complete his degree. In his cohort were other CRB stalwarts such as Tom Russell, Keith Moody, Laurie Jones and Max McPherson. He completed his studies at the end of 1948 and in 1949, he married Mona (Noni) Lesley McDonald.

Bill had a stellar career at the CRB. In 1949, the newlyweds went to Bairnsdale Division where Bill Dolamore was the Divisional Engineer. Bill was given responsibility for all the roads west of Nowa Nowa while Les Starling looked after those to the east. At that time, most of the roads were unsealed and they passed through some of the remotest parts in the State of Victoria. Bill had to travel up into mountains and often had to stay out of the office for days on end. He recalled once, staying at a remote hotel in the high country where the hotelkeeper opened a tin of Irish Stew for his dinner. He didn't return.

In the story of Frank Jackson in a previous newsletter, I mentioned how Frank and Les Starling carried the cash wages – and a pistol – to the remote camps in their area of responsibility. Bill also did this for his area. He said he often carried up to £2,000 in a dilly bag on the seat of

the car with the pistol in it. He would often have a line of detonators in the car to give to the road gangs he was visiting. At the hotel where he was staying, he would place the bag in the bottom of the wardrobe and go down for dinner with never a worry about it. In winter, he drained the radiator of his car as there was no anti-freeze available in those days.

After Bairnsdale Division Bill spent five years at Benalla Division looking after the Hume Highway, the Murray Valley Highway, and the Midland Highway. His last Divisional appointment was to Dandenong Division as Assistant Divisional Engineer to Frank Docking.

When Bill finished his career working in the Divisions, he was transferred back to Head Office as Deputy Chief Engineer Road Design. He served as Chief Engineer



Bill Brake – circa 1960s

between 1972 and 1974 after which he was appointed as a member of the Board under the Chairmanship of Tom Russell.

Much of this information was gleaned from an interview with Bill in October 2022 when Bill was 99 years old. Although he has become very deaf, his memory and general health are amazing.

## Lance Corporal Ivor John Coventry

VX2975



Ivor Coventry's paybook photograph.

Ivor was born in September 1913 in Zeehan, Tasmania. He enlisted in November 1939 and joined the 2/32nd Battalion. He was married (to Joyce) and 26 years old at enlistment. He gave his occupation as 'motor driver'. He was, in fact, a chauffeur at Larra Station at Derrinallum in the Western District of Victoria. Larra Homestead was established by emigrant Scottish farmer J L Currie following acquisition of the Mt Elephant pastoral run in 1884. The single storey basalt homestead was erected in 1875.

There are no major towns in the vicinity of Larra leading me to speculate Ivor's family were in service to the station owners.

The 2/32nd Battalion was formed in June 1940 from surplus Australian troops who had been sent to the United Kingdom shortly after the fall of France. After completing training in the United Kingdom, the 2/32nd served in North Africa in 1941–1942. In early 1943, the battalion returned to Australia and later took part in campaigns against the Japanese in New Guinea and Borneo.



Larra Homestead by Eugene Von Guerard.  
Mount Elephant is in the background.

After joining up, Ivor was initially billeted at the Melbourne Showgrounds and was posted to the 2/1st Field Workshop. In early May 1940, he embarked on HMT X5 from Melbourne. HMT stands for Hired Military Transport. He disembarked six weeks later at Greenock in Scotland where he transferred to the 71st Battalion. The archive mentions him being in Tidworth and Colchester. He was promoted to Lance Corporal but reverted to Private as a result of some offences – one of which was for being in Ipswich without a leave pass or written authority.

In January 1941, he embarked on HMT J19 for the Middle East. He was treated in the ship's hospital for adenoids. He attended the Australian Corps School of Signals and became a Group II Signaller. He had a few stints in hospital – pyelitis (urinary tract infection) and heat distress. The file does not mention where he was in the Middle East but the history of the 2/32nd shows that they joined the fighting in the Western Desert. After the Allies were pushed back to Tobruk, the 2/32nd was moved forward by train to Mersa Matruh and then by ship to the encircled port of Tobruk. They remained there until September 1941 when most of the Australians were withdrawn to Palestine and Lebanon. In July 1942, the battalion joined the two major battles at El Alamein to stem the flow of the German and Italian advances. Ivor was somewhere in all of this but it is definite that he was back in Australia in February 1943.

In July 1943, Ivor embarked from Brisbane on a ship called *Anhui* for New Guinea. They disembarked at Puna. Within a month, Ivor had developed an upper respiratory tract infection which hospitalised him. He was restricted to light duties that required only restricted physical effort. He was flown from Port Moresby to Townsville and eventually down to Caulfield Hospital in Melbourne for further investigation.

He was discharged from the army at Caulfield Hospital in November 1943 as unfit for service.

He joined the Country Roads Board in 1947 and worked on road construction in Dandenong Division and, in 1963, he commenced patrol work.

He retired from the CRB in September 1978 and died in 1987.

## Leading Seaman Charles (Charlie) Ferrer Butler 18031



Charlie Butler – 1966.

Charlie worked at the CRB's Mechanical Depot at Syndal.

In the Australian National Archives, there are 65 men and women named Butler listed as serving in the RAN during and since the Second World War, but only one of them has the name 'Charles' in their forenames. The following entry is included in a Roadlines magazine dated 1966.

*"Tokyo Rose", in a smug radio broadcast after the Battle of the Coral Sea, reported the Hobart as having gone down with all hands, but Charlie Butler knows how wrong she was. Charlie, a surviving crew member of the Hobart, was feted at this year's celebration during Coral Sea Week."*

Charlie's file is extremely difficult to interpret. There are only two pages and many of the entries have been written in fading pencil. Charlie was born in Richmond in November 1909 and enlisted in the Navy in December 1926. He earned Good Conduct Badges in 1932, 1937 and 1942. It is clear, however, that Charlie served on HMAS *Hobart* as a Leading Seaman from August 1942 to March 1943.

HMAS *Hobart* was a light cruiser which originally served in the Royal Navy as HMS *Apollo*. She was sold to Australia in 1938. During the war, *Hobart* was involved in the evacuation of British Somalia (1940) and later fought at the Battle of the Coral Sea and the amphibious landings at Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands (1942). She was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine in 1943, but returned to service in 1945 and supported the landings at Tarakan, Brunei and Balikpapan (Borneo) and Wewak (New Guinea).

The Battle of the Coral Sea was fought between 4th and 8th May 1942 between the Imperial Japanese Navy and the naval and air forces of the United States and Australia. Both sides publicly claimed victory after the battle. In terms of ships lost, the Japanese won a tactical victory by sinking about 42,500 tonnes versus 19,000 tonnes sunk by the Allies. The Japanese public was informed of the victory with overstatement of the Allied losses and understatement of their own.

From a strategic perspective, however, the battle was an Allied victory as it averted the seaborne invasion of Port Moresby, lessening the threat to the supply lines between the United States and Australia. The Japanese were forced to abandon the operation that had initiated the Battle of the



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HMAS Hobart.

Coral Sea in the first place. The battle marked the first time that a Japanese invasion force was turned back without achieving its objective, which greatly lifted the morale of the Allies after a series of defeats during the initial six months in the Pacific Theatre. Port Moresby was vital to Allied strategy and its garrison could well have been overwhelmed by the more experienced Japanese invasion troops. The United States Navy also exaggerated the damage it inflicted, which later caused the press to treat its reports of Midway with more caution.

One of Charlie's shipmates on *Hobart*, Stoker Doug Watts, was also destined to work with the CRB after the war.

In December 1943, Charlie joined HMAS *Shropshire* on which he served until December 1945. In December 1943, *Shropshire* took part in the New Britain operations covering the landings at Arawe and Cape Gloucester. In March 1944, with other ships of Task Force 74, she took part in the operations leading to the seizure of the Admiralty Islands and the following month was again in action at the Hollandia/Humboldt Bay operations.

On 12 July 1944 *Shropshire* proceeded to the New Guinea area operating in support of the 6th Army. On 14 July Japanese forces were bombarded in positions east of Aitape after mounting a major attack against the American garrison on the Driniumor River line. On completion of that operation *Shropshire* joined the bombardment group covering the last landing in New Guinea at Cape Sansapor on the Vogelkop Peninsula.

Charlie was discharged from the Navy in November 1946. I don't know when he joined the Board nor the length of his service.

His wife's name was Alma and he died in May 1977 at Coff's Harbour, NSW.

## And now for something beautiful

In the 1990s, when I was working with the Overseas Projects Corporation of Victoria, I was a fairly frequent visitor to the Middle East – in particular, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Oman, United Arab Emirates and Lebanon. At that time it was relatively quiet, but trouble always seemed to be brewing. Doing business there was pretty hard work.

The civil war in Lebanon had finished but the country has still not recovered, the hostility between Israel and Palestine festered along (as it is now), and I was in Egypt at the time the Second Gulf War erupted. Saudi Arabia and Iran were at loggerheads – the one a mainly Sunni kingdom and the other, a Shi'ite theocracy. On one of my trips to Saudi Arabia, I was invited by an American colleague to visit the USAF compound about 20 km from Riyadh – where about 10,000 Americans lived, complete with Starbucks and MacDonalDs - and maple syrup pancakes for breakfast in the desert. The American presence was to support Saudi Arabia as well as safe-guard America's oil interests in the Gulf.

Because of these events, much of the work I was involved in did not come to fruition and I found my visits frustrating

and fascinating at the same time. The frisson in the region added a sort of edge to my travel which I rarely experienced in other places and the traditional, rigid cultures were fascinating in their contrast to ours in Australia. Islamic culture prevails – except in Israel. This should not be confused with Arab culture – as there are others such as Israeli, Coptic (Egypt), Turkish and Persian (in Iran) that have their own traditions.

It is a shame that this unrest continues today because otherwise it could become one of the world's greatest tourist havens. It abounds in history and was the birth place of modern civilisation. Sumeria (Iraq), Egypt and Assyria (Kurdistan) were where towns were first built, crops were planted, animals domesticated, systems of government formed, writing and arts developed and religious beliefs formulated. It is the home of two of the world's greatest religions - Christianity and Islam as well as Judaism.

But it is also a place of surprising beauty, both natural and man-made. In this newsletter I will show you some of the natural beauty of the landforms – the deserts - which have a beauty of their own.



## The Dead Sea

The Dead Sea is bordered by Jordan on the east and Israel and the West Bank of Palestine on the west. It is the lowest place on earth. The lake's surface is 430m below sea level and it is over 300 m deep.

It is impossible to drown in the Dead Sea. It is ten times saltier than the ocean so that one floats rather than swims in it. Nothing lives in it – hence its name. The lake is declining in area and the Jordanian and Israeli Governments are planning a project to convey seawater from the Red Sea near Aqaba at the top of the Gulf up to the Dead Sea. Water would be desalinated along the route to provide fresh water to Jordan, with the brine discharge sent to the Dead Sea for replenishment. Israel will likely benefit from some of the water delivery to its Negev region.



The Dead Sea from Jordan.



The Dead Sea from Palestine.

## The Empty Quarter – Saudi Arabia

The Rub' al Kal, (the 'Empty Quarter') is the sand desert encompassing most of the southern third of the Arabian Peninsula. It covers some 650,000km<sup>2</sup> including parts of Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

The region is classified as hyper-arid with annual precipitation generally less than 50 millimetres, and daily mean relative humidity of about 52% in January and 15% in June-July. Daily maximum temperatures average 47°C in July and August, reaching peaks of 51°C. The daily minimum average is 12°C in January and February, although frosts have been recorded. Daily extremes of temperature are considerable.

The border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen is undefined. It has never been surveyed. It is a stunning sight – totally treeless.



The Empty Quarter – Saudi Arabia.

## The Red Sea - Yemen, Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia.

The Red Sea has more than 1,200 fish species including 44 sharks, making it one of the world's most popular marine life destinations. I remember standing on the deck of the P&O ship, Oriana, in 1964 watching the schools of sharks trailing the ship, presumably hoping for garbage to be ejected.

I heard of a report that Moses guided the Israelites out of Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. Pharaoh and his army pursued them. When the Israelites reached the Red Sea, Moses stretched out his hand and the waters divided, allowing his followers safe passage. The Middle East is

*And now for something beautiful continued*



riddled with wondrous stories like this. How I wish that Essendon could recruit Moses.

The Red Sea also has its own curious characteristics that are not seen in other oceans. It is extremely warm – temperatures in its surface waters reach more than 30° Celsius—and water evaporates from it at a prodigious rate, making it extremely salty.

With its connection to the Suez Canal, is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, offering an alternative to the route around the Cape of Good Hope. It's an essential channel, crucial to maintaining many countries' political and economic stability.

## **Cappadocia - Turkey**

Cappadocia, ancient district in east-central Anatolia, is situated on the rugged plateau in the centre of present-day Turkey. Cappadocia's landscape includes dramatic expanses of soft volcanic rock, shaped by erosion into towers, cones, valleys, and caves. Rock-cut churches and underground tunnel complexes from the Byzantine and Islamic eras are scattered throughout the countryside.

There are a number of underground cities in Cappadocia, some connected by a network of tunnels. These subterranean settlements were made possible thanks to the pliability of the soft rock. Many are open to visitors, however, a lot of the land in the area is private property. There are as many as 600 churches carved from the soft Cappadocian rock and possibly many more that have not yet been discovered. These churches date back to Medieval times and display beautifully painted frescoes, which have retained an amazing amount of colour and detail over the centuries. Some painted figures have had their eyes scratched out by superstitious locals afraid of the Evil Eye.



The landscape of Cappadocia.



Ballooning over Cappadocia.

The most popular way of viewing this area is by hot air balloon – a feast for the eyes in its own right.

## **The White Desert – Egypt**

The White Desert National Park is located just slightly northwest of the central point of Egypt. It covers an area of 300km<sup>2</sup> and is part of the Farafra depression in the Sahara Desert. The desert is renowned for the white sands, white sand rock formations, and the introduction to the Great Sand Sea. It is the most sparsely populated areas in Egypt.

The white sands manifest as piles and rows of white piles scattered across orange sandy base landscapes, as rock spires, and as other unusual white rock formations. The

white sand and white rocks are composed of either white calcium, quartz crystals, or limestone.

In many places, the collection of white sand appears like snow that has frosted the desert. These white quartz crystals have created several unique picturesque rock shapes. The pinnacle white rock formation is known as Crystal Mountain. It is completely made out of crystal and features a hole through the middle of it.

Along with protecting the unique white sands and rock formations of the Sahara Desert, the park also protects an array of wildlife. Some of the more popular species include barbary sheep, foxes, gazelles, jackals, and sand cats.

### Wadi Rujib - Jordan.

The Mujib Biosphere Reserve is the lowest nature reserve in the world, with a spectacular array of scenery near the east coast of the Dead Sea. The Reserve is located within the deep Wadi Mujib gorge, which enters the Dead Sea at 410m below sea level. The Reserve extends to the Karak and Madaba mountains to the north and south, reaching 900 metres above sea level in some places. This 1,300m variation in elevation, combined with the valley's year-round water flow from seven tributaries, means that Wadi Mujib enjoys a magnificent bio-diversity that is still being explored and documented today.

Over 300 species of plants, 10 species of carnivores and numerous species of permanent and migratory birds have been recorded. Some of the remote mountain and valley areas are difficult to reach, and thus offer safe havens for rare species of cats, goats and other mountain animals. Mujib's sandstone cliffs are an ideal habitat for one of the most beautiful mountain goats in the world, the horned Ibex.

What a welcome relief to desert travellers it must have been – trudging through endless desert to the lovely clear water of the wadi.

### Wadi Rum - Jordan

Wadi Rum Desert is famed for its link to T. E. Lawrence – Lawrence of Arabia. Along with Prince Feisal bin Al-Hussein, he made his base here during the Arab Revolt of 1917-1918. But it is also a stunningly beautiful place.

Wadi Rum is a protected desert wilderness in southern Jordan. It features dramatic sandstone mountains like the many-domed Jebel Um Ishrin, and natural arches such as Burdah Rock Bridge. Many prehistoric inscriptions and carvings line rocky caverns and steep chasms, such as Khazali Canyon. The natural watering hole of Lawrence's Spring is named after Lawrence of Arabia who allegedly washed there.



The White Desert – Egypt



Wadi Ruhib



Wadi Rum

# Trivia and didactic whimsies

## From the Christmas crackers

Bing Crosby, Don Partridge, Mary Hopkins, and Lee Hazelwood, have asked me to join their group to sing carols this year. This is very exclusive, just Bing Don Mary Lee and I.

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Q: What did Adam say the day before Christmas?

A: It's Christmas Eve

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For Christmas I was given a jar of cherries in brandy. I was grateful not just for the cherries but for the spirit in which it was given!

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Q: Why did no one bid for Rudolph and Blitzen on E-bay?

A: Because they were too Deer

## One good turn deserves another

A husband and wife were upstairs in bed one cold, wet and windy night when the doorbell rang.

The husband went downstairs to see who it was and returned to the bedroom a couple of minutes later. His wife asked who had rung the doorbell. He replied, *"Some guy wanting a push, but I said I can't help him, it's too wet and muddy"*.

His wife reminded him of a time when their car had broken down and a stranger stopped to help. Her husband reluctantly conceded that he should indeed help and went back downstairs.

He opened the front door and called out, *"Are you still there?"* and a voice came back, *"Yes"*. *"Do you still need a push"* asked the husband, and the voice replied *"Yes"*. *"Where are you?"* asked the husband.

The voice came back *"Over here on the swing"*.

## Spoilt Dinner

A man and a woman were having dinner in a fine restaurant. Their waitress, taking another order at a table a few paces away noticed that the man was slowly sliding down his chair and under the table, with the woman acting unconcerned.

The waitress watched as the man slid all the way down his chair and out of sight under the table. Still, the woman dining across from him appeared calm and unruffled, apparently unaware that her dining companion had disappeared.

After the waitress finished taking the order, she came over to the table and said to the woman, *'Pardon me, ma'am, but I think your husband just slid under the table.'* The woman calmly looked up at her and replied firmly, *'No he didn't. He just walked in the door.'*

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