

ROADS TO WAR

David Jellie

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Perhaps

*Perhaps someday the sun will shine again,
And I shall see that still the skies are blue,
And feel once more I do not live in vain,
Although bereft of You.*

*Perhaps the golden meadows at my feet
Will make the sunny hours of spring seem gay,
And I shall find the white May-blossoms sweet,
Though You have passed away.*

*Perhaps the summer woods will shimmer bright,
And crimson roses once again be fair,
And autumn harvest fields a rich delight,
Although You are not there.*

*Perhaps someday I shall not shrink in pain
To see the passing of the dying year,
And listen to Christmas songs again,
Although You cannot hear.*

*But though kind Time may many joys renew,
There is one greatest joy I shall not know
Again, because my heart for loss of You
Was broken, long ago.*

Vera Brittain

Dedicated to her fiancé, Roland Aubrey Leighton, who was killed at the age of 20 by a sniper in 1915, four months after she had accepted his marriage proposal.

Preface

In the foyer of the Head Office of the Country Roads Board (CRB) at 60 Denmark Street, Kew, Victoria, were two Rolls of Honour commemorating staff members who served in both World Wars. When I started working there in 1961, I often glanced at them as I entered the building but the names meant little to me.

The Roll of Honour for the First World War contained the names of all the men of the CRB who served, while the one for the Second World War was for those who died on active service. There are 35 names on the one for the First World War and 16 on the roll for the Second World War.

The Roll of Honour for the Second World War was unveiled by the Chairman of the CRB, Donald Darwin MM ISO, on 5 November 1952 in the presence of the members of staff and relatives of the deceased officers whose names are on the plaque.



Donald Victor Darwin unveiling the CRB Honour Roll for the Second World War at the Exhibition Building, 1952.

Most people entered the building with scarcely a glance at the names of these men and yet each name had a story to tell – some more terrifying than anything we can imagine. Their names meant nothing to us – twenty of them never returned to tell their stories and they are now forgotten. Since the closing of this building in 2024, they are now displayed in the Victorian Government’s Department of Transport and Planning office in Ringwood.

With this record, *Roads to War*, our memory of these men will last a little longer. Their stories are recalled in a spirit of pride, gratitude and comradeship. Even though we didn’t know most of them, it is important that they are remembered in the tradition of Anzac and because they were workmates. We should remember them.

The CRB officers and employees who enlisted for the First World War – as recorded in the Board’s Fifth Annual Report – are shown in Chapter 2. To this list should be added Major W.T.B. McCormack who was a Board Member in the first CRB. He became the second Chairman of the Board in 1928. Another one missing is Bob Humphreys – probably because he was not working for the CRB at the time. When he enlisted at the age of 20, he gave his occupation as fireman.

The Roll of Honour for the Second World War records the names of 16 men who died on active service but there is one other name which should be on it, Ernest Lingenberg, who died on the Kokoda Track in 1942.

Appendix 1 – from the 41st Annual Report of the CRB – shows all the CRB staff and employees who enlisted in the Second World War. There are 60 members of staff and 536 employees on it. A lone woman, Miss T. Storey, is included in the list. I could not find a woman of that initial and name in the National Australian Archives but I found Miss Valerie June Storey who, in many ways, fits the bill, but I can’t be sure.

In addition to the men named on these rolls, there were many others who joined the CRB after the wars. They too, had stories to tell – but few did so. I worked alongside many of these men without knowing their stories. Indeed, I had no inkling that many of them had even served during the wars.

There was at least one Boer War veteran in our midst – Evan Davies. Evan was assistant to the Chief Draughtsman of the Title Survey and Records Section which was housed in one of the tin sheds at the rear of the Exhibition Building after the Second World War. Unfortunately, the Victorian rolls for the Boer War had not been digitised at the time of writing so I have no other information about him.

I started work as a design engineer in the Bridge Branch of the CRB in 1961. This was only 16 years after the end of the Second World War and I soon became aware of the legacy of that war. Many of the people working there were Europeans. In those days they were referred to as ‘displaced persons’, but, in reality, they were refugees who could not return to their war-ravaged home countries for fear of persecution, or people who wanted to forget the fracture of civilization in Europe and so got as far away as possible.

My first boss, Erwin Matzner, was a Croatian Jew who was a captive of the Nazis (or so I thought); Greg Cikalov was born in Russia but shifted to Serbia to escape his Menshevik-leaning family’s persecution; Branko Tavcar and Vladimir Doric were Yugoslavians with a morbid dread of communism; Rico Dapretto was an Italian policeman; Leah Lengyel (a tracer) was an elegant woman from Eastern Europe who wore a fur coat like a princess; Mr and Mrs Halafoff were Russians who were incarcerated in a displaced persons camp in Germany where their son, Sergei, was born; brothers Frank and Gus Kroyherr were Hungarians as was Sam Ujvari – and there were others I can’t remember.

Peter Kozeill from Poland had war-time experiences that could only be concocted by Hollywood scriptwriters. I knew him as a humble clerk in Bridge Branch and I eventually learnt about his service when I saw him marching one Anzac Day. Ernie Renz, a German, also had an extraordinary story. He was one of the ‘*Dunera Boys*’ and served in 8 Employment Company of the Australian Army.

I knew all these people who worked with me in Bridge Division, and there were many more working in other branches and divisions of the CRB.

I soon became aware that there were many men that I worked with who were prisoners of war of the Japanese, including the Chairman, Ian (Paddy) O’Donnell OBE. I was puzzled early in my career as to why Paddy came down from his office in the rarefied air of the executive suite on the

fifth floor to sit and chat with our pipe-testing officer, Frank Jackson – until someone told me that they were prisoners of war together and that Paddy was ever-vigilant in providing support to Frank.

There were also prisoners of war of the Germans amongst us but I knew nothing of them.

Veterans of the First World War were still working then, including the first two Chairmen I worked under – Donald Darwin MM ISO and Caleb Roberts MC. Caleb's successor, Ian O'Donnell, as I mentioned above, was a prisoner of war and his successor, Ted Donaldson, fought in the South West Pacific area with the 8th Divisional Field Artillery.

The servicemen of the CRB – there are no women's names on the honour rolls – came from all ranks and disciplines of the organisation – accountants, clerks, surveyors, labourers, engineers, drivers, draughtsmen, plant operators, and chainmen. Apart from Miss T. Storey previously mentioned, I have found two other women, Flying Officer Patricia Marr of the Royal Air Force, who joined the CRB after the Second World War, and Lillian Moon who served in the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force.

It is impossible for we who have never experienced war to understand the horror and terror of battle. We can proselytise all we like about the evil of war but, nonetheless, we must admire all these men and women who went off to war believing they were doing their duty. For those who returned, hardly a day would pass when they didn't think about the terror of their experience and of the people they served with who didn't make it back. Every serviceman and woman suffered. Those who were not hit by bullet or shrapnel or who never experienced gassing were, nevertheless, casualties of war. They carried these scars for life and this is why their bonds are unusually close – bonds that exist only from shared experiences in combat or suffering. Some may have been heroes and some were not but all of them served with heroes. For those that survived, they deserved peace.

I have written elsewhere about the randomness of war – how warfare does not discriminate between who lives and who dies. All wars are alike. They comprise chaos, boredom, bravado, folly, terror and trauma. But war is unique for every individual. Despite the differences between people in intellect, education, stature, athleticism – the fate of war does not discriminate amongst them. In war, there is a true brotherhood and sisterhood, galvanised by dependence on each other - and

the support and desperation of mates. Many of the bravest survived and many of the bravest died. Many pushed themselves beyond limits that they never imagined possible.

I am somewhat abashed that I did not know the stories about most of these people. They were my mentors and colleagues and, with one exception, they never talked about their experiences in war. They were men of peace and I still cannot imagine them undergoing the travails and terror of battle. Some did not see battle at all but they deserve inclusion. They volunteered for service but their health, age or specialist skills – or the timing of their enlistment – precluded them from active service. Their tasks were to support the servicemen on land, sea and in the air, and their contributions were vital to the war effort.

When troops returned from the First World War and disembarked at docks across Australia, they carried, alone, the effects of their experiences in this terrible and destructive war. They entered a nation that had few social safety nets and even less opportunity. They stepped straight into the Spanish Flu pandemic and the Australian economy was suffering from the toll of the war effort. The Great Depression was just around the corner and the CRB still suffered under restrictions imposed by wartime controls. Peace had returned but the plentiful labour supply and cheaper materials of an earlier era did not return. Continuation of the wartime policy of concentrating on road maintenance, rather than construction, stifled the development of the road network for which future generations would pay.

The Australian Government established a war pension scheme in late 1914 to help wounded veterans and the families of those who were killed. However, the growing number of casualties prompted the need for a new, comprehensive and centralised repatriation scheme. In 1918, the Australian Government created the Repatriation Department to help returned veterans resettle in the Australian community. The department introduced programs assisting veterans to develop their vocational skills and find jobs, and supported their independence through pensions and loans. Soldier settlement schemes were also established and administered by the states.

The Department also provided medical services to meet the extensive and varied needs of veterans and financial assistance for their dependents. It was an enormous undertaking which had no model to work from. The long-term costs of ongoing medical care and welfare benefits following the war were on a scale never before encountered.

In 1922 the Federal Government established an unemployment relief plan to provide work for the poor – including many returned servicemen. By 1932 at the height of the Great Depression, unemployment in Australia reached 32 per cent. The CRB provided work for many of these men who had to live in tents in the distant, mountain regions of East Gippsland to earn a pittance at roadmaking. They had no idea of how their families were faring and they had little social contact with the outside world. The works were chosen to maximise the advantage of excess unskilled labour and usually involved timber clearing and earthworks. Efficiency on these projects was only 65 to 75 per cent when compared with contract-labour jobs, as road-making machinery was sparingly used. It is little wonder that many of them gave up after a few weeks.

Certainly, soldiers returning from the Second World War were better off than their First World War counterparts. Australia had the experience of the demobilisation from the First World War and organisations such as the Repatriation Department and the Soldier Settlement Scheme had matured. The Department of Post-War Reconstruction was actually formed during the war - in 1942. It was involved in developing veterans' entitlements to help them settle into civilian life. An important consideration was to ensure that civilian employment opportunities were created at an appropriate rate as the size of the military was reduced. The Department implemented the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme offering vocational or academic training to men and women who had served. Its purpose was to aid in the return of ex-service personnel to civilian employment. It operated from 1942 until last acceptances were taken in 1950.

Some of the people you will read about participated in this scheme – including engineers, surveyors, accountants and scientists. Their education was a benefit earned from their contribution of years of their life spent away from their homes and, perhaps, their compromised health and rehabilitation.



The cover of the first issue of the magazine Repatriation, published in 1919.

The wars left an indelible legacy on the Country Roads Board. Six of its ten Chairmen were veterans and others held very senior positions, and all of them understood the hierarchal management structures of the armed services, as indeed did all the others who served. There was an ethic of discipline, stability, efficiency and goal-oriented behaviour in the organisation and promotion was based on merit. Above all, they engendered loyalty to the organisation and to their colleagues. Their military experience shaped the character of these veterans and was a positive influence on their management styles and professional decision-making.

I have a one-generation family connection to both World Wars – I had uncles in both - so that I still have an awareness of war, but my children and grandchildren have little concept of the darkness of those times. They never met my uncles so their stories were never recalled.

So, the names recorded on the Honour Rolls and War Memorials around the country are now largely forgotten except for the distant and ever-diminishing memories of family members. This is why I have written the stories of these people to ensure that their names live on for a little longer. We owe it to them.

David Jellie
Melbourne, May 2021

Background

Men of ripe colour reared in Liberty!

Soldiers and kinsmen – road-men that we knew,

Over all ills of land or sky or sea

Snow-fall or red wind, goes our love to you.

Salt of your courage shines in everything.

Here in the flags – in all the bells that chime;

In the endowed bewilderment of Spring

While the slow moons walk to the Summertime.

TO THE MEN OF THE ROADS

This poem by John Shaw Nielson is dedicated to his friends at the Country Roads Board.

Before the First World War, the roads of Victoria were in an appalling condition. This was not unusual as all roads in the country were in a similar plight. During the winter, many roads were impassable due to wet weather so that regional communities became isolated and disadvantaged due the condition of the roads. It was also the era of the rise of the motor car. The number of motor cars and trucks was rapidly increasing bringing a new emphasis on speed, mobility and all-weather travel. In 1910 there were 12,000 motorized vehicles in Victoria, by 1915 there were 38,000 and by 1930 there were 180,000.

The Country Roads Board (CRB) of Victoria was appointed under the *Country Roads Act 1912* and instituted on 26 March 1913. Its purpose was to investigate the condition of the roads in the State and, in consultation with all the municipalities, determine which roads were to be declared as main roads. These roads were then gazetted and became the responsibility of the CRB for their construction and maintenance. In undertaking this mission, the CRB became the first State Road Authority in Australia.

But the optimism and energy of this new organisation was soon thwarted by the outbreak of war the following year. Much of the money that the Government had allocated for roads was diverted to Australia's war effort and 35 members of its staff enlisted to "*serve our Sovereign Lord the King*" to "*resist His Majesty's enemies and cause His Majesty's peace to be kept and maintained.*" This was a serious drain on the resources of the CRB.

Since then, the CRB has undergone much change. In 1974 it absorbed the Highways Branch of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and, in 1982, the West Gate Bridge Authority. In 1983 it was retitled the Road Construction Authority (RCA). At the same time, in 1983, the Road Traffic Authority (RTA) was created by the amalgamation of the Transport Regulation Board, the Motor Registration Branch and the Road Safety and Traffic Authority. Then the RCA and the RTA merged in 1988 to form VicRoads. In July 2019, after 106 years of service, VicRoads was closed down altogether and now road management responsibility in Victoria is vested in a division of Victorian Government's Department of Transport and Planning.

Staff members of all these organisations volunteered for active service in both World Wars and the Korean War and some were conscripted into the Vietnam War. Their stories are the basis of this book as well as those who joined the organisation after their return from war.

Some of these stories are remarkable and, taken as a group, they display the full gamut of warfare – death, injury, sickness, suffering, tragedy and luck. A few reflect the feeling of despair of loved ones at home and of the unfulfillment of dreams. Some of them were still teenagers. Surely, those who enlisted had no concept of what they were about to enter – especially in the First World War. This war was fought on the other side of the world at a time when few Australians would have ventured so far, and for those who perished, there was little hope of loved ones ever being able to visit the graves or memorials of the fallen.

Unfortunately, there will be some who are not mentioned here because the passage of time has erased them from the memory of those still living. I have not purposely excluded anyone – I have only included those that I could find.

The wars had a great effect on the CRB and its operations as demonstrated by the following extracts from its annual reports.

With regard to the First World War, the first mention was in the second annual report of 1915. It reflects the general patriotic duty supporting Australia's involvement in the war at the time – but is the harbinger for the mounting death toll to come.

It is the Board's pleasing duty to place on record the fact that eighteen of its officers and employees have enlisted for active service, the majority of whom are already at the front.

It is deeply regretted that Lieutenant Couve, who was the first of the staff to offer his services to the Empire, lost his life at Gallipoli. Lieutenant Couve was previously on the staff of the Public Works Department, and joined the staff of the Board at its inception.

The third annual report (1916) maintains the patriotic theme.

It is with pride and pleasure that the Board desires to record the fact that one of its members, Major McCormack, has placed his services at the disposal of the Empire.

Major McCormack left for the front on the 21st June last, in command of the 10th Field Company Engineers, accompanied by three additional members of the Board's staff, viz. :-Lieutenant Moore, Lance-Corporal Graham, and Sapper Kerry.

The fourth annual report (1917) stated:

During the year four additional members of the Board's staff enlisted for active service, viz., L. J. Herd, H. P. Wood, C. E. Tuxen, and W. T. Williams, bringing the total up to 31 officers.

In this connexion the Board desires to record its appreciation of the willing services and loyalty of the remainder of the staff in carrying out the work of the Board in the absence of their colleagues, under extremely trying circumstances, without serious inconvenience to or complaint from the public.

The 5th annual report saw the war coming to a conclusion and included the Roll of Honour shown in Chapter 2. It stated:

Since the beginning of the war, 34 officers and employees of the Board's staff have enlisted for active service with the A.I.F. Of these three have laid down their lives in the cause of the Empire. Three have returned to Australia, one has been discharged and returned to duty, while the others are still abroad.

It is with deep regret that we have to record the deaths of Captain E. K. Dilworth, M.M., who died of wounds received in France in May of this year, and Private V. G. Taylor, who was killed in action in July last. The loss of Captain Dilworth has removed from the Board's Engineering Staff a valued and efficient officer, and cut short a promising career. With Lieutenant Couve, who fell at Gallipoli, he enlisted and left Australia with the first expeditionary force in 1914. Private Taylor was formerly employed as a chainman on the Board's Survey Staff, and was a capable and popular employee.

We mourn the loss of these heroic young men, but at the same time have reason for thankfulness in the prospect of the early return of their comrades to their native land.

Major McCormack, a member of the Board, who has been on service with his unit (10th Field Company Engineers since May 1916, has been awarded the Croix de Guerre. Captain Dilworth gained the Military Medal and Lieutenant Moore the Military Cross, and other members of the staff have received recognition of their services from the military authorities.

It is due to the remainder of the staff to acknowledge their loyal and willing service in carrying out the Board's work under particularly trying and arduous conditions.

The depletion and disorganization of the limited staff, owing to the large percentage of enlistments, has thrown upon them additional work and increased responsibility, which could only be overtaken by considerable self-sacrifice and working overtime. This has been undertaken without complaint, but it is hoped that the ending of the war will

speedily bring a return to normal conditions, and enable the members of the staff to enjoy their rightful and necessary recreation leave.

No further mention of the First World War was included in later annual reports.

In regard to the Second World War the following extracts were included in the annual reports of the time.

The 27th Annual Report in 1940 stated:

“Up to 30th June 1940, 133 officers and employees of the Board had enlisted for service abroad with the 2nd AIF or the RAAF and three had enlisted for the Naval forces. For home services six officers and employees were called up for limited periods or for the duration of the war, and 12 members of staff were loaned to the Commonwealth Government to assist in carrying out urgent tasks.”

In the 32nd Annual Report of 1945 it was recorded:

“It is with deep regret that the Board records that nine members of its staff paid the supreme sacrifice during the war. Each of the officers was a young man of more than ordinary ability and great promise, to whom the Board looked to fulfill important positions in the future ... During the war 48 members of the staff and 590 employees joined the fighting services.”

In both these reports, there is a distinction made between members of staff and employees. The staff refers to those people who were on the permanent staff of the CRB including engineers, surveyors, draftsmen, accountants, and clerical officers. Employees were usually people who worked in the field such as overseers, clerks of works, tally clerks, labourers, chain men (in survey gangs), plant operators, drivers and road workers.

Given the huge number who enlisted in the Second World War, the people mentioned in this history are only a small fraction of all those who served.

The 32nd Annual Report of the Country Roads Board also stated:

“With the cessation of hostilities, the Board is now awaiting the release of officers and employees still in the services with a view to their returning to their normal duties.

For several years a great deal of apprehension was felt for the welfare of certain members of the Board's staff who were prisoners of war. It is with a feeling of great joy that reference can now be made to the fact that all of these officers have been released. Heartiest congratulations are offered to them and to their families on their safety, and the hope is expressed that they will not suffer any permanent disability as a result of their unenviable experiences."

Elsewhere in this report, the CRB's sensitivity to the needs of its staff members who may have required assistance due to their war service, was expressed.

"Shortly after the outbreak of the war, a fund was inaugurated by the Board's staff for the purpose of assisting any cases of hardship suffered by members of the staff as a result of war service, for providing comforts for service personnel and to enable contributions to be made to charitable objects without the necessity for making constant appeals. The fund is built up by regular contributions by the staff supplemented by the proceeds from functions held from time to time. An amount of £2,800 has been collected from the commencement and valuable assistance has been rendered to such organizations as the Red Cross, Australian Comforts Fund, Lord Mayor's Hospital Appeal, &c.

A large number of parcels of food and comforts were forwarded to officers and employees of the Board in the fighting forces during the war period. The organization has also been utilised for assisting several appeals such as food for Britain, clothing for inhabitants of devastated areas, &c.

The 33rd Annual Report for year ended 30 June 1946 described in more detail the new challenges it faced not only in attaining appropriate staffing levels but also the need to train staff to the required levels of qualification required for the new technologies. It stated:

"Since the termination of hostilities the officers who have been absent on service and to whom reference was made in the last annual report have now returned to duty. Some of these servicemen, however, have been granted leave of absence to continue or commence studies at the University under the Commonwealth rehabilitation scheme; it is recognized that these officers will be much more valuable to the Board on the completion of their academic courses.

The Board views with concern the loss of a number of very valuable officers holding key positions in its service, through their accepting positions at higher salaries in Commonwealth Departments and industrial organizations. Apart from the inconvenience caused the position becomes serious at this period when the Board is faced with the necessity of putting in hand a large number of works which had to be deferred during the war years, many of which are now extremely urgent. The increasing reliance on research and engineering investigation also calls for additional professional staff, and for a high standard of qualification of technical officers.

In a properly organized Department the positions of officers are graded according to the importance of their duties and the salaries paid are fixed accordingly. Under these conditions grave anomalies are likely to be created should action be taken to increase the salary of an individual officer if inducements are held out to him by another body. The Board feels that the only satisfactory method of dealing with such a situation is to revise the salary scale of all officers, having regard to the ruling conditions in the profession at the time. It appears essential in the national interest when important public works require to be put in hand that the organizations responsible for these works should be able to retain the services of men who have been specially trained over a long period of years. Whilst in some cases replacements of officers have been obtained, it is necessary for some time to lapse before the newly appointed officers become familiar with the special problems they are required to handle.”

The soldiers, sailors and airmen (and one woman) mentioned in this narrative all contributed, not only to the safety of our nation, but also to the standard of living we enjoy today through the construction and management of Victoria’s state road network. Roads are a critical component of our state’s social and economic development. Roads link communities together and provide opportunities and services beyond the borders of municipalities, enabling better education for schoolchildren, opening up markets for farmers, commerce and tradesmen, and improving recreational activities. The road network of Victoria, probably, has the highest replacement value of public infrastructure in the state.

Since before the First World War, roads and bridges have been built to connect isolated settlements. Roads are a necessary and constant part of our lives. They allow for the transport and exchange of merchandise, food, medicines, equipment and ideas. Over the years, surfaces have been sealed improving travelling conditions, road rules and improved vehicle standards have been established to improve road safety, and through the driver licensing system, people have been given the freedom to commute and roam for business and pleasure.

All of the people whose stories appear in this history contributed to this infrastructure and many of them were pioneers in creating the roads which we are still using today.



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 this narrative.

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.



Board members of the Country Roads Board – all veterans of the First World War.

From left: Caleb Roberts, Bill Neville and Donald Darwin.

Taken at Darwin's retirement presentation -June 1962.