WARRAGUL RSL SUB-BRANCH NEWSLETTER

September 2019

No. 52

Warragul RSL Sub-Branch Committee 2019

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Duty Officer

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Important Dates:

General Meeting on September 2nd @ 7.00pm

A word from the President…

Dear Warragul RSL Members,

We have had a very busy time at the RSL in the past few weeks.

The Voyage Saturday morning activity continues to thrive with twenty plus people getting out of bed on these cold and wet winter mornings to punish their bodies. The Voyage boys have conspired to ensure we sweat and be competitive. Injuries occasionally occur and we must remember our limitations. In the next few weeks we need to do another testing day and hopefully by the time we have our September General Meeting (GM) we will have more details to give on this activity.

RSL Victoria is in the process of electing a new CEO. This is a vital appointment and on your behalf I made several suggestions regarding the appointment to Dr Rob Webster the State President. Some of the selection criteria suggested were:

From the members perspective a person with a regular military background is an essential attribute however the recent crop of senior officers from all services have been cast in the political rather than the operational mould. An appointment that genuflects to the "politically correct and culturally sensitive" would not be supported by the membership either at my Sub-Branch or I believe the wider RSL.

In order to attract the young Veterans, the appointment of a young aspirant with great potential rather than the imprimatur of Star rank military would also signal to the Young Veterans, the RSL's future, that their cause(s) are acknowledged.

Apart from the necessary administrative skills we need a person with a strategic outlook with the ability to plan to take the RSL and its members to the mid-century.

The successful applicant should not be an active member of the various ADF reserves. Only an independent person free to comment critically on military matters should be appointed.

Veteran welfare continues to be the priority for the RSL. The centres of gravity for Veteran welfare remains the ADF and DVA and therefore the Government of the day. The successful applicant should be frank and fearlessly articulate opinion to the RSL Victoria Executive, the members, the ADF, DVA and the Government. I know that you and your Executive will encourage and support that characteristic.

Whilst the successful applicant should be apolitical, he should have the persona that both major political parties are aware of the electoral power and influence that the RSL has the potential to wield.

From this distance the RSL Vic Executive needs the support of a CEO who is administratively accomplished, can heal the division between the respective veteran cohorts, restore the faith of all the members and aggressively articulate Veteran issues to vested interests and not be a military apparatchik from the Star ranks.

This appointment is critical for the RSL's future and a fierce but administratively competent advocate is my preference.

Please note the following letter to the Editor in the Warragul Gazette earlier in August.

Vietnam Veterans Day: Lessons not learned!

It is appropriate that on the 18th of August, the Anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, each year we reflect on the Vietnam Veteran experience and reflect on lessons learnt and ignored. Vietnam Veterans achieved prominence as young soldiers and then as a tight group with their families. Whether a Nasho or a Regular they have been and remain an inspiration to the emerging Veteran community.

Whilst the Warragul Gazette is not the forum for the strategic lesson; the Vietnam Veteran legacy is that their War is of two battlefields as part of one conflict. Sent to Vietnam to fight in an unpopular war by a divided society they did their duty in an exemplary manner. The war was not lost on the battlefield; it was lost in the lounge rooms, the streets, the universities and the schools of the USA and Australia.

For the truth is; be it Long Tan, Battle of Coral/Balmoral, Op Broken Hill or Bhin Bar, our country's soldiers were never bested in Battle! Urban myths pervade and obscure the fact that in Vietnam we fought with distinction and effectiveness.

A word from the President continued over on page 2

Activities

Monthly General Meeting
1st Monday of the Month
7.00pm

Monthly Social Info Meeting
1st Monday of the Month
1.30pm

Young Veterans Exercise Group
Every Saturday Morning
Voyage Fitness
10.00am

Heart Health Exercises Group
Every Wednesday
9.45am

Members Carpet Bowls
Every Wednesday
1.30pm

Legacy Widows Social Club
Second Thursday of the Month

Library Open
Every Friday
9.30am

Drop in for a Cuppa
Every Friday
9.30am

David's Light Exercises
Every Friday
9.45am

Above:

John & Kylie Sage

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From 1962 to December 1973 Vietnam Veterans upheld and reinforced the Australian reputation for producing outstanding fighting soldiers. As the best forces aspire – the enemy feared and dreaded contact with them and our allies prized their fighting skills. They still do!. Their military duty done, on return to Australia – we the community - let them down by our lack of appreciation, concern for their welfare and lack of gratitude for their effort. Their War continued and they had to fight on! Our treatment of you for over sixty (60) years stands as a national disgrace. For sixty (60) years you – and your families - stoicism, endurance and guts in the face of administrative and legal adversity continues as an outstanding example of courage in another form.

Forced to self-manage, your cohort, via the Vietnam Veterans Association, forced the community and government to act. For over half a century, you have fought in the home theatre of operations on our behalf cutting the trail for better treatment for the subsequent generation of service personnel. Yet successive Governments fail to heed the lessons. Sending Soldiers, Sailors and Airman on operations confers a contract of unlimited liability due to the nature of the employment. Service personnel consciously forgo community rights and freedoms, they are subject to a disciplinary code not found in the "normal" employment sectors and they routinely place themselves at risk of injury, both physical and mental - and death. The community's contractual obligation is to provide effective and appropriate medical and welfare support in the event of injury. Successive Governments have abrogated that responsibility. More military personnel have suicided in the past three years than we have lost on twenty years of intense operations. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is crippling the emerging cohort and their health conditions are exacerbated by the Government's adversarial approach.

Like their Vietnam counterpart, bureaucratic ineptitude and lethargy have been more dangerous than the enemy! The Vietnam Veteran cohort has a life span ten (10) years less than their civilian counterpart. The emerging Veteran cohort is beginning to emulate the post-Vietnam experience. This is an ongoing tragedy and shows that in nearly sixty (60) years of Veteran management Government (s) have learned nothing. For instance, there is only one authorised DVA psychologist in Warragul/Drouin area. Recently we sought advice from "Open Arms", the DVA provider, over what service we could access in the event of an emergency. Answer: call the Police. That is not Veteran Management that is intervention – years late! Add in the complication that Medical practioners shun Veterans because DVA don't pay enough! Daily, these issues are placed before Government representatives across Australia yet the pace of change is not quick enough to save the lives of the one hundred and forty-five veterans who suicided last year.

I know that the politicians are aware of the problems of Veteran health. Eight (8) recent enquiries have all directed them to the impediments; an unsympathetic unrepresentative bureaucracy, a lack of leadership from the ADF regarding the welfare of its personnel, adversarial processes and a lack of political will! Despite all these warnings the machine continues to operate at snail pace – and Veterans die! The Vietnam Veteran justifiably sits in a more than an equal place with any generation of Australian soldiers, sailors and airman. Acumen on the battlefield, guts and mateship. You have shown the virtues of the Australian ethos – you stuck by and supported your mates in adversity. Your mutual bond serves as an exceptional example of strength through unity. Governments; heed the lesson of the Vietnam Veteran cohort and get your Veteran house in order and help, not hinder us to prevent any more of us dying by their own hand because of Government ineptitude.

The wider RSL members positively acknowleldged the sentiments in the letter. I intend to gain an appointment with Russell Broadbent in the near term to discuss the issues I have canvassed with him directly and those in the letter. My view is that Veteran Welfare is the most significant issue the wider membership faces.

I also attended a meeting at the Ringwood RSL convened by the RSL Reform group. I was there as an observer and made a statement on your behalf – espousing the view that we are not Vietnam or Young Veterans but Australian veterans, we must stick together and concentrate on efficacious Corporate Governance and Veteran welfare. More to follow!

You'll note several changes to the premises at Albert St. As special thanks to Kylie and John Sage (pictured left) and Mark Buttner for their efforts in dismantle the old and installing the new AV system. Their efforts saved the Warragul RSL several thousand dollars. John worked from early Saturday till dusk to get the cables run and ensure the projector was aligned correctly. You'll note the change of orientation to the room and we believe that the result will be worth the effort. John went back in on Wednesday to direct the mounting of the new signage. We value his role as the Technical Director, Communications expert (LPT1) and resident humourist! Mark and Kylie continue to keep us up to the mark with Corporate Governance, attending courses and coping with the emails.

On Monday night I was the guest of the Warragul Freemasons. You'll be aware that they have been exceptionally generous donating money to our organisation – and special thanks to Brett Kersten for his efforts. The outcome on the meeting is that I will be briefing the Freemason State Executive on Veterans welfare problems, how we got there and what assistance the Freemason's may be able to offer. Look forward to seeing you on the first Monday in September and getting your direction of our Business Plan concept.

Regards,
Bill Westhead | President

Vice President - Governance

The corporate governance team continues to work towards ensuring the sub branch is meeting its regulatory and governance obligations.

Liquor License

We continue to work towards updating our liquor license to reflect the needs of the sub branch and its membership, these updates include:

- Nomination of a new Licensee, Bob Green has kindly accepted this position of responsibility, thanks Bob.
- Updating our hours of operation (when we can serve alcohol) to cater for changes in the way we operate.
- Amending our "Red Line Plan" which defines where we can serve and consume alcohol on the premises (currently within the confines of the building and the back paved outdoor area). We will be seeking to extend the area to include the paved area at the front of the building where the doors into the room where the exercise equipment and other miscellaneous items are kept at the moment. Future plans include making this room suitable to be used as a social room where the sub branch can have activities such as Friday night drinks etc. for members and their guests. Extending the red line plan will allow users to have a drink outside when the weather is fine.
- Four of the executive have attended Responsible Service of Alcohol training, with further members to attend at the next course in September.

Office and Storage Areas

A clean out of the office has been conducted to reduce congestion and improve the working environment for users. Work has commenced on updating our storage capacity in the store room to allow us to move items from the front room to the store room as part of the development of the front room as a members social area. Further work is to be done at another working bee to finalise these enhancements.

Audio Visual Equipment Updates

As our president has mentioned, work has commenced on updating and reposition our audio visual equipment, part of this has included the purchase of:

- A new projector
- 150 inch screen (electric), and
- Amplifier.

We apologise for any inconvenience caused to members as a result of these updates but are confident that the longer term benefits of these enhancements will be welcomed.

Duty Officer

The duty officer roster for the next few months is:
Aug 19: Mark Buttner (0434 280 231)
Sep 19: Kylie Sage (0418 512 130)
Oct 19: Bill Westhead (0408 240 215)

Insurance

We are currently reviewing the sub branches insurance requirements, particularly in relation to ensuring our committee members can function in their roles without risking personal loss as a result of fulfilling their responsibilities.

General

A letter box has been installed at the gate of the RSL building; the sub branch will progressively direct all of its mail from the current post office box to the street address mailbox. We do not receive a lot of mail and this change will remove the need to pay an annual rental fee for the Post Office Box.

A mail box has also been installed outside the office door so that items e.g. venue hire payments, membership applications, can be deposited into the mail box. This mail box is cleared by the secretary/Treasurer on a regular basis.

Regards,
Mark Buttner | Vice President - Governance

Vice President - Operations Report

A last minute night at the movies was held on the 19th of August with approximately 24 members, families and affiliates attending to watch 'Danger Close', it was a great night.

AFL Grand Final Day Event

On the RSL Big Screen, will be held for all of those unlucky not to go to the game.

When: Saturday 28th September, 2009
Time: From Midday to late
Venue: RSL
BBQ: or a roast meat roll will be provided for lunch, approximate cost $5 per head
Drinks: BYO or can be purchased at the RSL
Cost: $15 per person
RSVP by emailing: rslwgl@dcsi.net.au (please include numbers attending) or by calling the RSL on 5623 6003.
RSVP: by the 14th September 2019

Bus Trip:

We hope to go ahead with the bus trip to the VV Museum at Phillip Island followed by lunch at the Phillip Island RSL.

Date: 16th October, 2019 (date to be confirmed)
Time: TBC
Drinks: At own expense
Cost: Approximately $30 (Including bus trip, entry to museum and lunch)
Book by emailing: rslwgl@dcsi.net.au (please include numbers attending) or by calling the RSL on 5623 6003.
RSVP: by the 4th of October, 2019

Mateship & Fitness Group:

The Mateship and fitness group at Voyage gym has been seeing consistent patronage. Thanks to RSL Active for their ongoing support. Please, if you know anyone interested, get them to contact:

- Ben Vahland on 0402 221 979 or email ben.vahland@gmail.com
- Bob Green on 0408 002 760 or email bob.jackie@bigpond.com
- Dave Whelan email david.whelan@vline.com.au or at the RSL for further details.

RSL Active has continued to financially support the program. DVA have also been briefed by RSL Active and a meeting to be advised regarding DVA potentially supporting as well with a view to State-wide interest in the program.

Wellbeing Group:

The Gippsland Wellbeing Support group for military and first responders met at the RSL on Thursday the 22nd of August , which was very well attended. Members heard a talk from Paul Turner on his journey. The next Wellbeing meeting will be the 19th of September 2019. Still seeing a constant attendance, in the 20's with numerous new attendee's over the past few months. Great work!

Vice President Operations report continued over on page 5.

Vice President - Operations Report *continued….*

Stakeholder Relationships:

Voyage Fitness Club, the working relationship continues to be a great success and we will work with Anthony regarding future programs and possibly hiring of 'Myzone' fitness bands for regular attendees. Dave Whelan will be briefed soon and will take on management of the fitness programs and engagement with RSL Active and other stakeholders. Operations have secured a volunteer for the Assistance Security position, David Baker, thanks Dave. Still seeking an Event Manager committee member to assist with planning and operationalising a number of upcoming events into the future. As above, and the inclusion of other assistants to assist in the development of the events to occur. Further programs (possibly martial arts / mid-week gym session) to be considered by the Executive committee.

Future Initiatives

A subcommittee has been formed to commence works regarding a partners Wellbeing Group in a similar vein to that of the current Wellbeing Group. Please let me know if you are interested in being involved in the setting up of this initiative which will be a group aimed at supporting those who have and continue to support veterans.

Regards, Ben Vahland | Vice President - Operations

Left: New signage at the front of the RSL, pictured: John Sage.

Communication & Editor's Comments…..

Your **EMAIL** details are needed. To assist us to improve our communications with Members, we need your EMAIL address.

This will enable us to send the Newsletter in a easy to read format, it will also enable us to communicate in a more timely manner should the need arise. If you do have an EMAIL address but have not been receiving Newsletters or other communications from Warragul RSL Sub Branch' then we do not have your email details or they are incorrect. Please assist us to get it right and send an email to rslwgl@dcsi.net.au as soon as possible confirming your email details.

NEWSLETTERS

We will continue to forward hard copies of newsletters by mail to members that do not have Email facility. Where possible and to minimise mailing costs, we will issue newsletters at Monthly meetings. We also post a copy of Newsletters on our Warragul RSL Facebook page, unfortunately Facebook does not enable us to attach the Newsletter in an easy to read document format, we continue to seek better solutions.

Regards , Bob Green | Communications & Editor | Warragul RSL Sub-Branch

How a fledgling democracy won a war at home

By Ross McMullin

Pictured above: A Great War victory march in Melbourne on July 19, 1919.

A century ago, with the Great War over at last, Australia's surviving soldiers returned home to resume civilian life. This transition, for thousands of them, was anything but straightforward after years of battlefield brutalities had scarred them irretrievably.

They were returning with their physical and psychological legacies to a society transformed by the conflict. The bitterly contested conscription plebiscites had divided Australia profoundly. Furthermore, the economy was not in good shape: the cost of living had risen, the national debt had soared, industrial unrest was widespread and there were not enough jobs.

Whether the returned soldiers would be able to adjust to a post-war existence was uncertain. In fact, the prospect of unsettled warriors out of control generated considerable apprehension and, in some high-placed quarters, pronounced anxiety.

It was widely accepted that the returned soldiers would be a force to be reckoned with in postwar Australia. As a shrewd observer (and former mayor of Essendon) put it in 1919 to his famous friend General Pompey Elliott, the "soldiers will of course be in a position to rule this country for some years to come if their energies are consolidated".

But would their energies be appropriately directed? What happened in Melbourne 100 years ago this month was alarming evidence that this was far from guaranteed.

It all started with the signing of the Versailles peace treaty in June 1919, commemorated around Australia and beyond on Saturday, July 19. Celebrating the formal conclusion of such a terrible war was understandable, even though the Versailles document was a tainted treaty that was to pave the way for a second world war as the unfinished business of the first.

Moreover, the date was incongruous for Australians. As well as the lack of awareness of the treaty's shortcomings, few of those revelling in the celebrations realised the date of the victory march was the third anniversary of the disaster of Fromelles, which remains the worst 24 hours in Australian history since European settlement.

Wartime censorship had ensured that hardly anyone was aware of the magnitude of the catastrophe apart from the survivors of Fromelles and their families.

So it was a peculiar day for Australians to celebrate victory, but in Melbourne — then the nation's capital — the crowd was large and the mood was joyful as 7000 sailors and soldiers marched through the city. Afterwards, though, high spirits led to boisterousness, rebelliousness and arrests.

Some returned soldiers resented what they regarded as excessive police heavy-handedness. They decided to raid Victoria Barracks to release some of the prisoners. In the ensuing skirmish one of the raiders was killed.

The Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (which was to become the RSL) convened an urgent meeting to discuss these events on July 21. The upshot was the dispatch of a deputation forthwith to the police commissioner, Sir George Steward. The delegation outlined its grievances about police conduct and Steward agreed to investigate.

When the deputation returned to report to the RSSILA, however, the meeting was in no mood to be fobbed off by the prospect of some inquiry. Majority sentiment demanded immediate redress. Three thousand demonstrators proceeded to police headquarters. They found Steward in no mood to back down. He had agreed to look into their grievances, and he was not going to kowt ow to an unruly mob. If the soldiers could not obtain satisfaction from the police chief, they decided they should go higher still. They resolved to take their demands directly to the government of Victoria. So they made their way without delay to the state parliamentary offices.

How a fledgling democracy won a war at home

By Ross McMullin continued……..

The premier of Victoria in 1919 was Harry Lawson, a Castlemaine lawyer in charge of a conservative government. He was presiding over a cabinet meeting when the soldiers arrived, but they did not let that deter them and burst in to deliver their demands. They insisted on the dismissal of an especially loathed senior constable, an end to the wielding of police batons against returned servicemen, and the release of soldiers arrested during the weekend together with remission of their fines.

Lawson urged the intruders to listen to reason and to uphold law and order. The leading dissidents refused to be mollified unless he acceded to their demands straight away. His unwillingness to do so was in the circumstances tantamount to flourishing a red towel at these militant bulls. Amid extraordinary scenes of escalating disorder, offices were invaded, documents were ransacked, furniture was damaged and an inkstand was hurled at Lawson, striking him heavily on the head. Shocked and dazed, he was guided away, trying to staunch with his handkerchief the blood already "saturating his collar".

Police were urgently summoned. A contingent arrived to disperse the insurgents. This proved no easy task. The police managed to quell the invaders only after resorting to a baton charge. Afterwards a violent melee erupted outside police headquarters. Various participants, both protesters and policemen, ended up in hospital. There were further clashes the following day.

The wave of violence was profoundly disturbing. Officialdom's nightmares about rampaging warriors had become real. A conservative premier was nursing a sore head and an acute grievance against the RSSILA after a demonstration under its auspices had resulted in intruders assaulting him in his government's offices.

Corrective intervention was clearly necessary. Renowned military commanders provided it. A mass meeting of returned soldiers was convened. It was held at the Melbourne Domain on July 23. Thousands attended.

They heard a series of pep talks on the need to curb disorderliness from some of the best-known Melbourne-based leaders. Elliott, Australia's most famous fighting general, was among the speakers, together with five other generals and three colonels.

Chairing the meeting was a captain, Gil Dyett, who had just been elected the RSSILA's national president. He had served under Elliott at Gallipoli. Dyett had been wounded at Lone Pine so severely that his lifelessness had resulted in a blanket being reverently placed over him before burial. Then someone noticed him move.

Dyett and Elliott had not seen each other for four years until July 1919. Now here they were together at this significant gathering, stepping up on to an improvised platform to proclaim their abhorrence of unruliness.

Elliott's speech was influential. When Dyett introduced him he was given a rapturous reception. "I want to say a few words about our conduct," he began, associating himself with his audience right from the outset. They had enlisted voluntarily to overcome a brand of tyranny that aspired to world domination, he pointed out, yet some returned men were now misguidedly associating themselves with forces of disorder tainted by similar tyranny. Attempting to coerce an elected government with threats and violence was unjustifiable, Elliott continued.

Australia was a proud and free democracy, where rich and poor were equal before the law. Its soldiers should appreciate and uphold its system of government. If they did not approve of what a government was doing or not doing, their remedy was to vote against it on election day.

Elliott urged soldiers to show restraint, while empathising with their frustration that some returned men, "through no fault of their own", were "out of employment and suffering hardship". It was "essential that we should not mix ourselves up in disturbances in the city", he declared.

He added an astute analogy. In the "battles we fought in together it was possible that there were many Germans who were opposed utterly to German militarism and despotism, but it was impossible for us to discriminate in a bayonet charge".

Similarly, even if mere curiosity prompted some returned men to join the crowds in Melbourne, it was "equally impossible for those guarding the city to discriminate in carrying out their duty".

The other speeches were in similar vein. After all had been delivered, Dyett called on everyone present to raise an arm if they supported the maintenance of law and order. The response was unanimous, and highlighted by the newspapers. The Argus proclaimed it under multiple headlines — "UPHOLDING THE LAW: SOLDIERS WILL AID: EMPHATIC DECLARATION" — and The Age trumpeted it as a "TRIUMPH FOR LAW AND ORDER". The ensuing decline in disorderliness in Melbourne indicates that meeting (and press coverage of it) was influential. The returned soldiers generally accepted violence was an undesirable avenue to remedy grievances in a democratic society. The animosity and tension subsided. The streets became quiet. The sense of relief was fervent and widespread. At the Federal election five months later Elliott topped the Senate poll in Victoria. Lawson was premier until 1924. Dyett remained RSSILA president for 27 years.