

# RSL ACT Branch President's Report

## Busy round of events in the ACT

Branch presidents take on a wide range of duties in the execution of their office.

Here is the diary of the ACT Branch President, LtCol John J Merrick (Retd), for August and July.

**1-2 July:** I attended the Victorian Branch State Congress in the Function Centre of the Caulfield Racecourse, a most delightful setting. The welcome address was delivered by the State President, Major General David McLachlan AO (Retd) and the Congress was opened by the Premier of Victoria, John Brumby. Other presentations were made by the National President, Major General Bill Crews AO (Retd), the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, the Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Mrs Bronwyn Bishop and the former Secretary of the Department of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Mark Sullivan.

**3 July:** Chaired the RSL ACT Branch Executive meeting, which was held at State Branch offices.

**8 July 2008:** Together with the State Secretary and Vice President Jan Paulga, I attended Member for Canberra Senator Bob McMullan's medal presentation, at which past and present members of the Defence Force received the Australian Service Medal.

In the evening I cohosted, with the National President and Victorian State Branch President, a dinner at the Commonwealth Club, Canberra, to entertain those embassies that have given the League assistance over the past year.

**9 July:** I attended a meeting of the League's National Trustees.

**11 July:** I attended a wreath-laying at the Australian War Memorial on the occasion of the Australian Defence Force Military Diocese of Australia's World Youth Day 2008. This was a most impressive ceremony, attended by about 300 military personnel including many military cadets from France, Columbia, Canada, USA, UK, New Zealand, Germany, PNG and Australian Navy, Army and Airforce representatives of ADFA and RMC.

After the wreath-laying, the party walked down ANZAC Parade, stopping at various monuments to say some prayers and the morning finished with a Mass in the Duntroon Chapel. RSL National Past President Major General Peter Phillips AO MC (Retd) and ACT Branch Past President Brigadier Peter Evans, Brigadier Tan Roberts and Mr Richard Hall were also in attendance.

**14 July:** I chaired RSL ACT Branch Council meeting.

**15 July:** I attended a briefing, with RSL Branch Treasurer Mickey Michaelis and Vice President Mrs June Healy OAM, given by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, on the establishment of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

**16 July:** I attended, as a guest, a luncheon at Duntroon House given

### Farewell to the RSL



His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC (Retd)  
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

A Message  
from

His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery, AC CVO MC (Retd)  
to  
The Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL)

As my term as Governor-General comes to an end, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to RSL members, past and present, for the magnificent service they have rendered our nation since the League's inception in 1916.

The RSL was established to advocate with government to improve the benefits, treatment and welfare of veterans, ex-service and serving members of the Defence Force whilst also advising on security issues affecting Australia.

In addition to the original charter, the League's programs now include advocacy, hospital visits, support for veterans' entitlements, development of the finest aged-care facilities and the promotion of commemorative events of national significance.

To mark its 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and as a gift to the nation, the RSL launched its 'Serving the Nation Youth Program', which encourages young Australians to understand why the RSL was established and what it has achieved over the years. The program emphasises the importance and benefits of community service and personal development through citizenship. Through strong branch and sub-branch commitment, members have risen to meet the demands of the expanded charter with skill, dedication and compassion.

For me personally, it has been a singular honour to participate in many moving commemorative services in towns and cities all over Australia and overseas at Cape Wom, Kokoda, Gallipoli, Menin Gate, Polygon Wood, El Alamein, Terin Kowt and Beersheba. It has been a special privilege to meet thousands of our ex-servicemen and women who have served our nation in the past, who are serving it now, and will do so in future.

The future success of the RSL will depend on its capacity to remain a strong and relevant voice for our service and ex-service communities. Veterans from other service associations should be encouraged to become members to carry on its important work and ensure the long-term relevance of the League.

Mariena joins me in extending our very best wishes to the Returned and Services League of Australia. I thank its members for their outstanding service to the Australian community over many years in support of our servicemen and women.

*Michael Jeffery*

(Michael Jeffery)

11 August 2008

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on behalf of the entrants of the RSL Queensland's Golden Girl Quest, who were in Canberra on an official visit, raising funds for their RSL (Queensland) appeal.

**24 July:** I attended the rededication of the 10th Battalion Memorial, relocated from along the Federal Highway to a permanent position in Eddison Park, Woden. Vice Presidents Healy, Millar and Paulga also attended. Mr Jan Paulga was the motivator of the relocation and rededication of the memorial. I recited the *Ode*.

**27 July:** I attended a wreath-laying and memorial ceremony at the Australian National Korean War Memorial, commemorating Korean Veterans' Day.

**4 August:** Meeting and discussions with the National President at NHQ.

Discussions reviewed strategies and plans to promote and accommodate all aspects of publicity the League receives in the national capital and surrounding States

**5 August:** Attended the Barton-Capital annual general meeting and lunch and delivered an address covering the team and changes at Branch HQ.

**6 August:** Chaired the Branch executive meeting.

**11 August:** Chaired the Branch Council meeting at which welfare was one of the main topics discussed.

**18 August:** Discussion with National President at NHQ covering recent queries submitted by sub-branches relating to issues raised by Government.

I then attended the Vietnam Veterans' Remembrance Day ceremony at the

Vietnam Memorial, commemorating Vietnam Day and the Battle of Long Tan.

Instead of laying a wreath I presented a book relating to the conflict in that country.

This book was subsequently presented to the Chapman School library on our behalf.

At the ceremony the Prime Minister, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the family of LCpl John Gillespie, 8 Field Ambulance, whose remains had been found and returned to Australia earlier in the year, unveiled a plaque on the memorial seat in his memory. I recited the *Ode* on behalf of those present

**25 August:** I attended the funeral of our member and Branch Welfare Officer, Peter Kelly OAM. During the service I delivered the RSL Remembrance Service and presented the Kelly family with an Australian flag, a part of the RSL Service. It was very pleasing to see such an attendance, including many past ACT Branch presidents.

**28 August:** I attended National Headquarters and, with the National President, National Secretary, met Major General Raymond F Rees, Adjutant General, Oregon National Guard, who was on a visit to Australia, especially to give his and the US Administration's thanks to Australia for its efforts and assistance in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**LtCol John J Merrick (Retd)**

## National Congress in Townsville

The president of the ACT State Branch of the RSL and other officers attended the National Congress of the Returned and Services League of Australia, meeting in Townsville, Queensland on 8 to 11 September.

## Kokoda Track report discounted

Australian Defence Force staff of the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby reached an isolated site on the Kokoda Track on September 4 to check media reports that the body of an airman had been located in the jungle canopy.

No remains were located.

Although the location, near Kagi, is below a flight path that was commonly used by allied aircraft during World War II sorties, the find has been confirmed by ADF staff as a moss-covered branch.

It seems that the branch has broken off the main tree and fallen across some vines which, from the ground, could have been mistaken for the body of an airman.

**News items and letters to the editor for publication should be sent to ACT RSL POBox708 Canberra ACT 2601 or emailed to [actrsl@netspeed.com.au](mailto:actrsl@netspeed.com.au)**