



CENTURY OF SERVICE

AUSTRALIAN
CONCERT PARTY

Comradeship

Stories of friendship and recreation in wartime





AWM ART90410.002

In the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra there are 15 stained-glass windows. Each shows a figure dressed in military uniform, and under each figure is a word which describes a quality displayed by Australians during wartime. One window features a Lewis gunner with a set of panpipes overhead. He represents all the men and women who shared good cheer and fellowship through simple pleasures like sport, music, games, and conversation in times of war.

This window bears the word *Comradeship*.

Comradeship

Stories of friendship and recreation in wartime

Written by Kathleen Cusack

Comradeship – Stories of friendship and recreation in wartime

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Napier Waller, *Hall of Memory: west window* (1950, stained glass, AWM ART90410.002 [detail]).

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Comradeship

Ancestry

Patriotism

Chivalry

Loyalty

Resource

Candour

Curiosity

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Note to the reader:

Most of the events described take place during wartime. You may feel sad after reading some of them. Teachers may wish to be sensitive to those students who have parents serving overseas in war zones.

Readers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent should be aware that this book contains images of deceased Indigenous ex-servicemen.

Introduction

Millions of Australians have been affected by war. Many servicemen and servicewomen have faced extraordinary dangers, while their loved ones waiting at home suffered months and even years of uncertainty. Yet, despite the difficulties, a strong sense of shared experience, friendship, and camaraderie often developed.

The stories in this book are about comradeship. Corporal Leslie “Peter” Chitty BEM provided a welcome distraction on the sporting field for those longing for home; Lorrae Desmond MBE took the stage, drawing smiles from a grateful crowd; and Trooper David “Poppy” Pearce provided comforting words and a listening ear.

Some friendships lasted well beyond the war years. Many of these men and women travelled across the world for reunions, while others held onto mementoes, a lasting reminder of the bond they had once shared.

The individuals in these stories share many qualities: an unshakeable optimism, a sense of humour, and a determination to help others. Even in the darkest days, these men and women found joy and laughter through simple pleasures like sport, music, games, and conversation. This sense of comradeship brought comfort, strength, and hope for a brighter future.

A group of Royal Australian Air Force nursing sisters serving in New Guinea take the opportunity to relax by the ocean, c. October 1944.

AWM OG1948



AWMOG1948-1

On the field:

Lance Corporal Richard Overy

A tense silence descended over the snow-covered ground of northern France. Lance Corporal Richard Overy took a sharp breath in anticipation, and looked across at his teammates, their jerseys proudly emblazoned with a symbol from their distant home. Suddenly, a whistle sounded and a roaring cheer broke out on the sidelines. Richard saw the football sailing towards him, and sprang into action; the game had begun.

Richard was working as a plumber in Sydney in August 1914 when he heard the news that Britain had declared war on Germany. Opposition Leader Andrew Fisher had already vowed that Australia would support Britain “to our last man and our last **shilling**”¹ should war eventuate, and within days excited crowds began to gather at Victoria Barracks in Sydney, eager to volunteer for the **Australian Imperial Force** (AIF). Twenty-four-year-old Richard rushed to join the queue, and became a driver in the 13th Battalion.

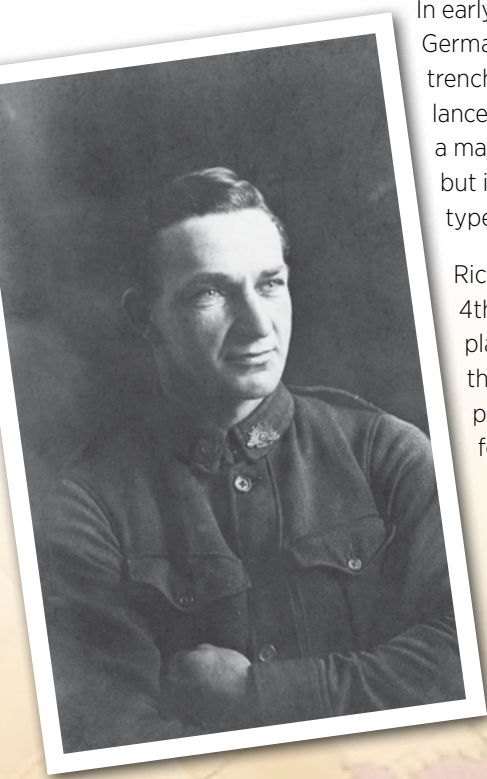
The following year Richard was on Gallipoli, where Australian and New Zealand forces had established a **precarious** position on the steep and rugged slopes above Ari Burnu. Hopes of a swift victory had been dashed early on, and the allies struggled to make any ground as the months wore on. In October 1915 Richard returned to Egypt, where he served in the transport section, and two months later the remainder of his battalion was also withdrawn from the **peninsula**.

In early 1916 the AIF prepared to enter the **Western Front**. There, the French, British, and German armies had been locked in a **stalemate** for nearly two years, resulting in a line of trenches that stretched from the Belgian coast down to the Swiss border. Richard, now a lance corporal in the 4th Machine Gun Company, arrived in France that June in the midst of a major British **offensive** on the Somme. Richard’s unit was soon in the thick of the action, but it wasn’t long before it rotated out of the front line and he found himself on another type of field.

Richard was a dedicated Rugby League fan, so when a group of soldiers from the 4th Machine Gun Company decided to form their own team, he leapt at the chance to play. Rugby League was popular among the troops, and the Mudlarks, as they called themselves, were soon competing against teams raised throughout the AIF. Richard proved to be a valuable player, and he was presented with a nine-**carat** gold watch chain for his contribution to the team.

However, the Mudlarks’ time together was short-lived. On 11 April 1917 the 4th Machine Gun Company took part in a disastrous attack at Bullecourt. More than 3,300 Australian troops were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner in this ill-fated attempt to break through the **Hindenburg Line**, including some of the Mudlarks. With so few players remaining, the team was forced to disband.

Four months later Richard was wounded near Messines in Belgium. He was taken to hospital, and spent the remainder of the year recovering. In January 1918 he was **repatriated** to Australia; his wounds were too severe for him to return to the battlefield. Just before he set out on the long voyage home, he carefully packed his belongings into his kit bag; among them was his blue cotton Mudlarks jersey, still encrusted with the mud of the team’s final game.



Richard in 1914.

AWM P04147.002

Korean War
1950–1953

Indonesian Confrontation
1962–1966

Vietnam War
1962–1975

Recent conflicts and peacekeeping
1990–today

AUSTRALIAN
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Richard's team jersey embroidered with the silhouette of the Australian mudlark, also known as a magpie lark or a peewee.

AWM REL32907

Do you have any special mementoes you have kept over the years? What story do they tell?

Richard's watch chain, with a British coin on one side and a sporting medallion engraved with a football on the other.

AWM REL32910



FAST FACTS Sport in wartime

Many Australian troops loved to play sport, and their commanding officers encouraged them to take part in activities whenever they were stationed away from the front. Competitions in cricket, Australian Rules football, Rugby League, swimming, and athletics were commonplace, and most units formed teams to participate in championships. Other events included acrobatics, pole-jousting, and even egg-and-spoon races on camelback. These sports were timely reminders of home – a brief **respite** from a long and brutal war.

AWM REL/00651



The Mudlarks in 1916. Richard is standing in the middle row, second from the right. At least four team members were recommended for the Military Medal and another was awarded the Military Cross for bravery in the field.

AWM P04147.001



Musical notes:

Sergeant Herbert Chudleigh

Swarms of flies buzzed hungrily near the dug-out, searching in vain for an open tin of sticky jam. Private Herbert Chudleigh swatted the persistent pests away, and sat down in the dust. He looked at the weary crowd that had gathered. No one knew what lay ahead, but tomorrow they would leave the peninsula, and Gallipoli would soon be a distant memory. Herbert picked up his concertina, and began to play.

Herbert was 22 years old when he volunteered to serve in the newly formed AIF on 24 August 1914. For many young Australians, joining the AIF was an exciting opportunity to see the world and earn a decent wage. Herbert trained as a medical orderly and was assigned to the 1st Australian Field Ambulance (1st Fld Amb). Two months later he boarded HMAT *Euripides*, clutching a kitbag that held his most precious possession: a mahogany-framed concertina.

Herbert was a talented musician, and he soon found his skills in high demand. While the Australian troops were training in Egypt he played in concerts and parades, and kept his fellow soldiers entertained on long walks around the camp. The concertina remained Herbert's constant companion; even when he was sent to Gallipoli, he carefully carried the instrument ashore. There, he led his unit in impromptu singalongs, providing a welcome distraction from the blistering heat, nearly inedible **rations**, and constant shelling.

In June 1915 some of the 1st Fld Amb were moved to Cape Helles, where they were urgently required to treat wounded allied troops. Shortly after the men's arrival, a **shell** landed in their dug-out. No one was injured but the explosion buried Herbert's concertina. He quickly started digging through the dirt, and eventually pulled his beloved instrument free. Herbert later returned to Anzac Cove, and in September 1915 he helped prepare his unit to leave the peninsula, leading them in a farewell concert on their final day.

Herbert carried his concertina with him even as the 1st Fld Amb made its way to the Western Front, but in August 1916 he decided to send the instrument home. Just before he parted with it, Herbert asked the men in his unit to sign their names on the **bellows**, and added the places he had served. Things weren't the same without his music, and the 1st Fld Amb soon started a collection so that Herbert could purchase a new concertina. He ordered a second instrument from London, and put it to good use until he returned to Australia in December 1918.

The first concertina played by Herbert Chudleigh while serving in the 1st Australian Field Ambulance.

AWM RELAWM07996.001

Why would Herbert have asked his unit to autograph his concertina?

Sergeant Herbert Chudleigh in uniform.

AWM PR01334



A soothing song



Frank Crozier, *The sinking of the troopship Ballarat* (1936, oil on canvas, 91.6 x 152.8 cm, AWM ART13329)

Why do you think William started playing? How do you think his fellow survivors would have reacted?

Music was heard in some unlikely places during the First World War, none more so than from a lifeboat as the troopship HMAS *Ballarat* slowly sank at the entrance to the English Channel. It was 25 April 1917, and the troops were assembling for an Anzac Day service when a torpedo from a German **U-boat** struck one of the ship's propellers. As the 1,700 men on board made their way into the lifeboats, bandmaster Sapper William Headen lifted a **cornet** to his lips and began to play.

For four long hours, as the *Ballarat* was sinking, the sound of William's cornet led the survivors in a medley of popular songs, including the title track from a much-loved musical, *So long, Letty*. His playing created such a memorable impression that the Ballarat Survivor's Association requested an encore at every Anzac Day reunion throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Field ambulances helped to administer first-aid and transport wounded men from the battlefield to nearby casualty clearing stations by means of stretchers, horse-drawn carts, and motor vehicles. It was dangerous and exhausting work, battling against difficult conditions and weapons that caused devastating wounds.

AWM EZ0103



The members of the 1st Fld Amb remained close, and continued to hold reunions long after the war ended. Herbert is in the back row, fourth from the left, and his younger brother, Edward, who transferred to the 1st Fld Amb in mid-1916, is also in the crowd.

AWM PR01334.001



FAST FACTS Music on the front

Music was an important part of life for soldiers who fought in the First World War. Bands were formed within brigades, battalions, and even on board troopships, but many soldiers also brought along their own harmonicas, accordions, and **mandolins** to provide entertainment, distract during the long hours of boredom, and keep morale high. Others fashioned new instruments from debris collected on the battlefield.

Sentimental ballads and **patriotic** songs such as "Australia will be there" were popular tunes among the troops at the time. They also loved to sing along to music from familiar stage shows, and devised humorous lyrics that poked fun at generals, officers, the enemy, and life in the trenches.

Tea and sympathy: Minnie Rattigan

Morning sunshine fell across the streets of London, stirring the city awake. Minnie Rattigan heard the drum of boots on the footpath outside, and hurriedly placed the vase she was holding on the table. She glanced around the room, and nodded in satisfaction as a group of women in green pinafores appeared with freshly brewed tea and hot buttered toast. The clock chimed; Minnie raced to the hallway, and swung open the door in welcome.

The bustling English capital was nothing like the tranquil southern **Riverina** town Minnie had once called home. She was born in 1870 to Patrick and Eliza McFarland, who owned a property on the banks of the Murray River near Tocumwal in New South Wales. There, Minnie grew up alongside her six brothers and sisters, playing among the gum trees and helping on the farm.

In 1912 Minnie married her second husband, Alan Rattigan, and said farewell to the familiar Australian landscape. The couple settled in London, where Alan gained an important position with the **Household Cavalry**, but the outbreak of the First World War just two years later shattered their peaceful existence. Alan, now a captain in the British Army, bid his beloved wife goodbye and sailed across the English Channel to take his place on the Western Front.

Minnie suddenly faced an uncertain future, but she was determined to play her part to help the war effort. Together with her friends in the Australian Natives' Association, an **expat** organisation for Australians living in London, she set about establishing a club for Australian soldiers on leave in the city. Known as the Anzac Buffet, the club opened in late 1915 and was soon providing free meals and entertainment to some 30,000 troops per month.

Minnie Rattigan with Private Frederick Trice, c. 1918–19.

AWM P01441.001

Examples of some of the colour patches attached to Minnie's skirt in the photograph.

AWM RELAWM13307.193, AWM RELAWM13307.078, and AWM RELAWM13307.181.





The Anzac Buffet remained open long after the end of the war, providing activities for troops as they waited to return home. Here Australian and New Zealand soldiers make their way to Hampton Court Palace for a picnic in May 1919.

AWM D00636

Minnie sent this postcard (below) home to her family in Australia in 1915. She has marked her position in the photograph, which shows troops tucking into refreshments at the Anzac Buffet.

AWM RC06143

Aside from the hot meals, why else might off-duty soldiers have enjoyed visiting the Anzac Buffet?

This “trench art” watch stand was made for Minnie by Driver Francis Caple as a token of his gratitude. Such craft became popular during the First World War. Most pieces were made from spent bullets and shell-casings collected from the battlefield, and these were highly sought after as souvenirs.

AWM RELAWM06182



Minnie worked tirelessly to ensure that visitors to the buffet received a warm welcome. As superintendent, she led a team of dedicated volunteers, who prepared generous quantities of sandwiches and scones and decorated the dining tables with fresh flowers every morning. Minnie also organised special events for the troops, and encouraged them to play **billiards**, write letters, or join in a singalong around the piano.

In late 1916 the Anzac Buffet expanded, and a second branch was opened at No. 2 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Southall in London. There Minnie saw the devastating effects of the war; most men at the hospital had sustained life-altering wounds on the battlefield, or undergone operations to have one or more of their limbs **amputated**. Many spent months in **rehabilitation**, but they enjoyed visiting the Anzac Buffet, where Minnie was always ready with a cup of tea and a listening ear. Minnie remained devoted to her work throughout the war, and she received gifts in return for her care and compassion. For many Australian servicemen far from their loved ones, the Anzac Buffet was a home away from home.

When the guns finally fell silent on 11 November 1918 the people of London burst into joyous celebrations. Minnie was eventually reunited with her husband, Alan, who had survived his years on the Western Front, and some years later the couple moved to Cagnes-sur-Mer in the south of France. Minnie died in 1943, aged 72.

A mother greets her son with outstretched arms at the Anzac Buffet in Sydney.

AWM H11575

FAST FACTS Clubs and societies

The Anzac Buffet in London was one of several clubs that catered for Australian troops during the war. There were similar centres established across Australia, and some of these were also known as the Anzac Buffet. Most were run by volunteers, and relied on donations from the public.

In Australia, the clubs provided comfort for troops about to embark for service overseas. Some volunteers, like those in the South Australian Cheer-Up Society, even visited training camps to share tea and conversation.

As the war dragged on and the seriously wounded started to return home, however, new clubs opened at hospitals to care for soldiers as they recovered from their wounds. From 1918 the Anzac Buffet in Sydney also became known as a place where returned servicemen were reunited with loved ones.

A stitch in time

During the First World War, wounded servicemen were encouraged to take up needlework and embroidery as part of their rehabilitation. This fancy-dress costume was made for Minnie by Private Malcom Brown, Private Joseph Baillie, and Private Frederick Trice while they recovered at No. 2 Australian Auxiliary Hospital. All three men had been severely wounded in action, and all had undergone operations to remove both legs.

The soldiers worked on their project towards the end of the war. The **tabard** was made from black satin edged with red, green, yellow, and purple silk crepe. A Rising Sun badge was added to the front, and the skirt decorated with different colour patches, usually worn on sleeves to indicate each man's division, brigade, and battalion.

Why would needlework and embroidery have been important activities for soldiers recovering from wounds?



AWM REL/01748.001



AWM REL/01748.002

AWM H18652

A program from a performance in support of the Anzac Buffet in London.

AWM PUBS002/006/001/003/001



*We leave our kit and pack in the cloakrooms ...
We wander out thro a slum, into the foggy dimness
of Victoria Street, still cogitating how to put in these
most precious hours of freedom ... This question is
answered, for there upon a door is a mystic sign
Anzac Buffet, we push open the door and look in,
and lo! London is forgotten for there around us are
Australian faces.¹*

Letter from Australian soldier Ellis Silas, 19 December 1921

On with the show: Private Ernest “Nick” Nicholls

Private Ernest Nicholls peered through the makeshift curtain, where a sea of khaki-clad soldiers sat waiting. Their faces were tired and drawn, exhausted from months of fighting on the Western Front. Ernest straightened his ruffled collar, and tipped his hat; he was determined to make them smile.

Even as a child, Ernest had loved to make people laugh. Born and raised in London, “Nick”, as he was later known, first took to the stage as part of “Carrie Laurie’s Juveniles”, a popular entertainment **troupe** that performed on the city’s piers. As a young man with an adventurous and independent spirit, he farewelled his family in England and set sail for a new life in Australia. He settled in Melbourne and took up work in a picture theatre as a film operator.

In August 1914, however, the world changed: the First World War began, and the call to defend King and country rang out across the British Empire. Many believed that the war would be over by Christmas, but months soon turned into years, and there was still no end in sight. By June 1916 Nick felt he could no longer remain at home, and presented himself at the nearest recruiting office. He was assigned to the 20th reinforcements for the 8th Battalion, and within a few short months he was on board HMAT *Euripides*, bound for the Western Front.

After some weeks in England, where he trained as a **Lewis gunner**, Nick joined his battalion in France, just as Europe’s coldest winter in 36 years set in. His service was short-lived; in early 1917 he was struck down with severe tonsillitis and returned to England for treatment. Despite months spent recuperating in London, he was still not fit for battle. Like others recovering from illness or wounds, Nick was ordered to report to No. 1 Command Depot at Perham Downs. There, depending on the severity of their condition, soldiers underwent training, exercises, and courses to improve their level of fitness in preparation for an eventual return to the front. Nick soon found another way to make a contribution, joining the cast of an Australian concert party known as the “Perham Stars”.

Private Ernest Nicholls (far right), c. 1917–19.

AWM P11238.003



Korean War
1950–1953

Indonesian Confrontation
1962–1966

Vietnam War
1962–1975

Recent conflicts and peacekeeping
1990–today

AUSTRALIAN
CONCERT PARTY



Wallace Anderson and Louis McCubbin, *Somme winter* (1923–26, diorama, 400 x 730 x 215 cm, AWM ART41020 [detail])

This diorama shows the conditions Australian troops experienced on the Western Front. What words would you use to describe the environment?

A poster advertising a performance by “The Aussies”, May 1918.

AWM4 33/16/15

What does this poster tell you about “The Aussies”?

This talented troupe brought joy and laughter to their fellow soldiers through their comedy routine, and their fame soon spread. In late 1917 the “Perham Stars” performed at the renowned Aldwych Theatre in London, and held concerts to raise much needed funds for the **Red Cross** as well as a newly established foundation for war widows and their children. Later renamed “The Aussies”, the concert party frequently welcomed new cast members as soldiers moved to and from the front, but Nick remained at the depot. An accomplished **baritone**, he wrote musical numbers like “The laughing song” and co-wrote “The kit-inspection hymn”, and also had a prominent role in the troupe’s management. “The Aussies” continued to tour hospitals, training camps, and nearby villages until the war ended.



In 1919 Nick returned to London and the family he had farewelled so many years earlier, but before long he set sail once again on the long journey to Australia. A performer at heart, Nick continued to pursue his passion for acting with the **Gilbert and Sullivan** Society, the Sydney Musical Society, the Mosman Musical Society, and the dramatic group “The Thespians”. During the Second World War Nick again performed for troops, this time as part of the **YWCA's** Open House Community Singing. He later moved to Milton on the New South Wales south coast with his wife, Elizabeth, and worked as the hospital director and district coroner. Nick remained an active member of the Returned and Services League all his life, and was fondly remembered for playing song after song at reunions, still drawing smiles of enjoyment from the crowd.

Two members of a theatre troupe perform in the village of Vignacourt, France, where troops arrived from the battlefield to recover.

AWM P10550.860



Did you know?

Most concert parties had an all-male cast, so men usually performed both male and female roles. Female impersonators often wore jewellery fashioned from recycled materials. This bracelet was created from small coils of fine brass wire, while the brooch was made from a tin lid, cut down to size and covered in **diamantés**.



AWM RELAWM17084.005



AWM RELAWM17084.006



Nick (far right) performs with “The Aussies” as the popular **pantomime** character Pierrot.

AWM P11238.001

Why do you think concert parties were such a popular form of entertainment?

FAST FACTS Concert parties

Concert parties were a way for soldiers to entertain themselves and others during the First World War. They performed on board troopships, within units, and even in prisoner-of-war camps, and usually featured a variety of comedy sketches, songs, and dances.

Some performers were amateurs, but others, like Lieutenant Arthur Boorman, were seasoned professionals. Described as the “irresistible comedian”,¹ Arthur starred alongside Nick in the “Perham Stars” and “The Aussies”.

Many soldiers developed a passion for the stage during the war, and later went on to have successful careers in show business. Some concert parties, such as the New Zealand troupe “The Famous Diggers”, remained together even once the war ended, and continued to perform for enthusiastic audiences across the globe.

Why might some concert parties have chosen to continue performing long after the war was over?

Lieutenant Arthur Boorman (seated, centre), c. 1918.

AWM P11238.004



Friendship through adversity: Warrant Officer Charles “Ken” Gilkes

Flight Sergeant Ken Gilkes slowly opened his eyes. A nurse was moving quietly around his bed, carefully adjusting the pillows where his hands lay wrapped in thick bandages. His arms were etched with scars, and his face ached, the new skin straining tight across his forehead. Ken stared blankly into space; home seemed a world away. As he turned towards the window, Ken heard a burst of raucous laughter, and a merry group of airmen appeared in his doorway.

In February 1923 First World War veteran Charles Gilkes and his wife, Ray, welcomed the birth of their first child. It was a happy occasion for the Sydney couple, who proudly named their newborn son Charles, just like his father and grandfather. Known affectionately as “Ken”, he grew to be a talented athlete, and loved nothing more than willing away the hours on the Lane Cove River, racing with the 12 Foot Sailing **Skiff** Club. After finishing school Ken joined a financial company as a junior clerk, before life took an unexpected turn.

In 1939 Europe descended once again into war, and Australia, as part of the British Empire, was immediately drawn into the conflict. It soon became apparent that the war would be fought in the skies as well as on the land and sea, so Britain needed more trained aircrew to maintain the Royal Air Force (RAF) against the powerful German **Luftwaffe**. Australia and Canada, along with other **dominions** of the British Empire, agreed to recruit and train 50,000 men annually through the Empire Air Training Scheme.

Among the thousands of young Australians who leapt at the opportunity to join the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) was 18-year-old Ken. Eager for adventure, he enlisted in November 1941 and started training as a pilot at Bradfield Park in North Sydney. The following year Ken bid farewell to his sweetheart, Roma Bessell-Browne, and set sail for Canada. There he earned his **wings**, and within months he was in England, learning to fly heavy bombers for operations in the extraordinarily dangerous skies over Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe.

Ken’s identification card.

AWM2016.231.4



Ken's flying goggles.

AWM2016.231.2



Ken carried this kit bag throughout his service in the Second World War.

AWM2016.278.1

RAAF recruits leave Sydney for further training in Canada, November 1940.

AWM 004147



LICENSED TO CARRY
74 PASSENGERS
56 SEATED, STANDING
DEPT OF ROAD TRANSPORT

On the evening of 7 September 1943, as darkness fell, Ken prepared to take flight. The seven-man crew took their positions, and Ken coaxed the lumbering four-engine Stirling into the sky. The operation was successful, but as the crew guided the aircraft back across the English Channel they were followed by a German fighter. Ken knew the airfield was nearby, and steadied the bomber for landing, but right at that moment the fighter attacked. With neither enough time nor the **altitude** for an emergency escape, Ken was forced to make a crash landing. As soon as he struck the tarmac, the aircraft burst into flames. Two of the crew died in the crash.

Ken suffered horrific burns to his face, hands, and legs. He was transferred to a specialised unit at the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead. There he came under the care of Sir Archibald McIndoe, a New Zealand-born plastic surgeon who was trialling new ways to treat burns victims. Over the next few months, Ken underwent countless operations as the doctor slowly rebuilt his face and hands, layer by layer.

Dr McIndoe operated on hundreds of airmen during the Second World War, and soon became known as the “Maestro”¹ or the “Boss”.² Bonded by their shared experience, his patients formed an organisation known playfully as the Guinea Pig Club. Ken was an enthusiastic member, and became close friends with many other Guinea Pigs, including fellow Australian Freeman Strickland. The pair loved to plan elaborate pranks; Ken joked that he was able to escape detection as he no longer had any fingerprints. Many Guinea Pigs considered laughter and friendship to be the best medicine.

Members of the Guinea Pig Club received this badge. Admission was granted only to those members of the RAF or an Allied air force who had undergone plastic or maxillofacial surgery for their wounds at the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead.

AWM REL/15085

A “guinea pig” describes someone who is used as a subject for an experiment or research. Why might Dr McIndoe’s patients have adopted the name “Guinea Pig Club”?

A Stirling bomber like the one Ken flew, November 1945.

AWM UK2692





Dennis Adams, *Night prang* (1945, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 92.4 cm, AWM ART26046)

The German army's aggressive and effective defences were not the only risk to Allied bombing operations. Collisions were common, as were the dangers of mechanical malfunction and bad weather.

What words would you use to describe the mood in this painting?

FAST FACTS (Un)lucky clubs

Thousands of Australian airmen took to the skies in the Second World War. Operations were perilous; many were killed and others barely escaped with their lives. Men who experienced near-misses often developed a close bond, and some unusual clubs were established to commemorate their death-defying feats.

The Late Arrivals Club or Winged Boot Club, for example, honoured those who had survived a crash behind enemy lines and walked back to safety. Members received a certificate with the words, "It is never too late to come back",³ as well as a badge (top), worn on the left breast of their flying suits.

Membership to the exclusive Goldfish Club, on the other hand, was granted only to those who had been forced to ditch their aircraft into the sea. There were also several organisations, such as the Caterpillar Club and the Roo Club, for airmen who had used a parachute to make an emergency escape.



AWM REL22339

AWM REL35318.001



The support that the Guinea Pig Club provided to its members was matched only by the kindness shown by the villagers living in East Grinstead. The terrible wounds the Guinea Pigs had endured had, in some cases, caused severe disfigurements, and Dr McIndoe feared they would be treated differently. Urged on by the surgeon, the town threw open its doors to the airmen, welcoming them into their homes for dinner, reserving them seats at the local cinema, and inviting them to weekly dances. In later years, East Grinstead was fondly remembered as “the town that didn’t stare”.

In 1945 Ken returned home to Australia, and Roma greeted him, saying: “You haven’t changed. You might look a bit different, but you are the same person”.⁴ Some years later they were married, with fellow Guinea Pig Club member Freeman Strickland standing as the best man. Ken soon returned to work at the financial company, and took up competitive sailing again, representing Australia at the 1981 Dragon Class World Championships with his son, Ian, and brother, Bill, as his crew. He remained a loyal member of the Guinea Pig Club, and over the years he travelled across the world to reunite with the others. Ken attended a reunion at East Grinstead for the last time in 2007. He died in 2014, aged 91.

Wounded servicemen learn to assemble delicate aircraft instruments in the industrial therapy ward at Queen Victoria Hospital.

AWM UK3001

Why might Dr McIndoe have considered spending time in the town of East Grinstead as equally important for his patients’ recovery as taking part in the types of activities pictured here?



Ken Gilkes (far right) with Sir Archibald McIndoe (centre) and Freeman Strickland (seated, left) at a reunion of the Guinea Pig Club in 1956.

Image courtesy *The Australian Women’s Weekly*/Bauer Media Pty Ltd.

Why do you think the Guinea Pigs continued to hold reunions years after the war?



A close escape

Born in 1920, David Paul was a descendent of the Kamilaroi people, the second largest Aboriginal nation on Australia's east coast. When war broke out in 1939 David pinned his hopes on joining the RAAF and enrolled at the local college, determined to obtain the necessary qualifications. He successfully enlisted in 1941, and began training in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

David was a keen and dedicated pupil, and soon he was flying on **reconnaissance** operations, monitoring submarine movements, and photographing enemy shipping. He was an outstanding pilot and well-liked by his peers; his commanding officer later wrote that he knew no one else who "was so universally popular throughout the Squadron".⁵

On 4 December 1943 David was flying over the Aegean Sea when his **Baltimore bomber** was shot down and the fuel tank burst into flames. Somehow, David managed to ditch the aircraft into the sea, and even though his hands were severely burnt he swam through the flames to rescue a drowning crew member. The floundering airmen were rescued from the water by German sea planes, and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp. There, David's leadership, cheerfulness, and compassion earned him the respect and admiration of his fellow prisoners.

A membership card for the Goldfish Club.

AWM REL35318.002



Flight Lieutenant David Paul DFC, c. 1945.

AWM P10129.001

On 28 March 1944, while still in captivity, David was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He was also invited to join the prestigious Goldfish Club. After the war David forged a distinguished career in the New South Wales Police Force, and also served as a **squadron leader** in the RAAF Reserve.



A team player: Corporal Leslie “Peter” Chitty

Corporal Peter Chitty felt beads of sweat roll slowly down his face; the air was thick with humidity, and the breeze just barely ruffled the leaves on the surrounding rubber trees. More than 10,000 Allied prisoners of war had gathered in excitement, their gaze fixed on the silver medallion around Peter’s neck. There was a hush; Peter looked out across the crowd, and just for a moment he was carried back to Melbourne, where he had played his beloved game so long ago.

As a young boy, there were few things more important to Peter than family, farming, and football. Born in 1912 to Allan and Hannah Chitty, he grew up on a dairy property nestled in the foothills of the Australian Alps in Corryong, Victoria. Work never stopped on the Chitty farm; every day Peter and his 11 siblings helped milk the cows, tend the crops, and set traps for unsuspecting rabbits. But when time permitted they loved to play tennis, practice boxing, and kick around a football.

As he grew older Peter started playing Australian Rules football, and quickly earned a reputation for his remarkable speed and endurance. In 1935 he caught the eye of a Melbourne scout seeking out fresh talent for the Victorian Football League (VFL), and was invited to join the St Kilda Football Club. Only weeks after making his debut, however, a devastating workplace accident damaged his knee, ending his **fledgling** VFL career.

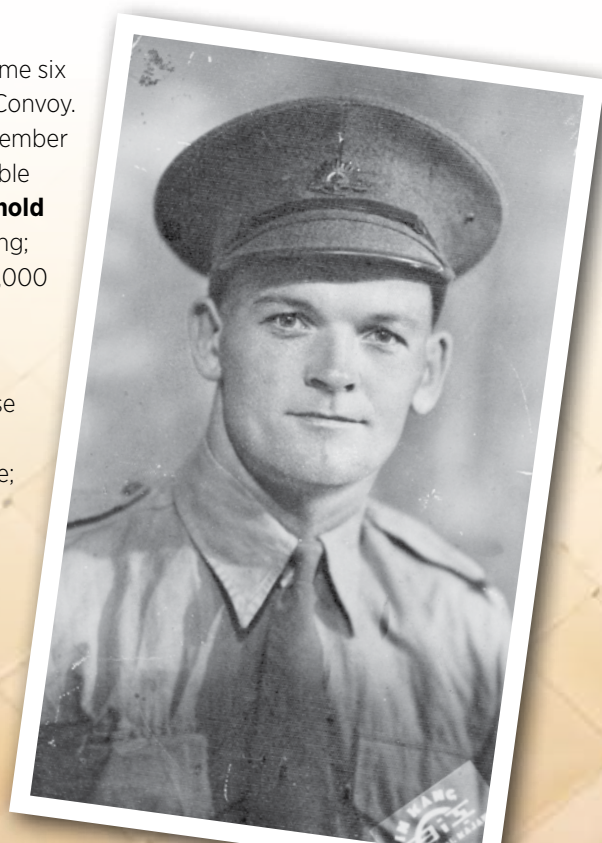
Peter returned home to Corryong, but not alone: while in Melbourne he had met and fallen in love with 19-year-old Lilian Prowse, and the pair had soon married. The newlyweds settled into life in the bush, and Peter, now fully recovered from his injury, took to the football field once more, captaining his team to two **premierships** in the local league. In February 1939 Lilian gave birth to a daughter, Dawn, but the outbreak of the Second World War later that year tore the young family apart.

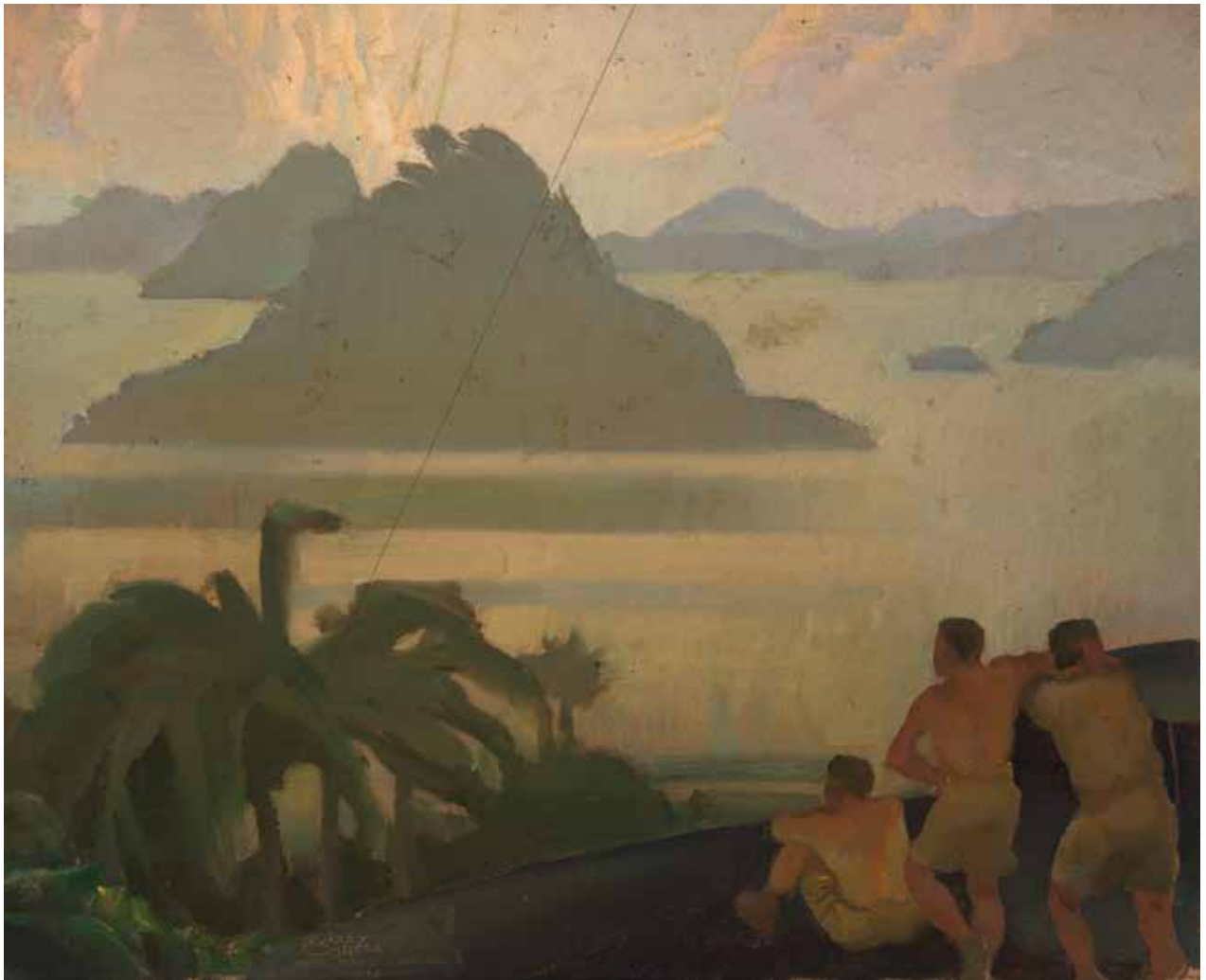
Peter enlisted in the Second Australian Imperial Force in July 1940, and some six months later sailed for south-east Asia with the 2/2nd Motor Ambulance Convoy. Tensions were rising over access to raw materials in the region, and in December 1941 Japanese forces attacked the Malay Peninsula. Allied forces were unable to stop them and withdrew to Singapore which was regarded as a **stronghold** of the British Empire. However, the Japanese advance proved overwhelming; the island was bombed, then invaded. On 15 February 1942 more than 130,000 Allied troops surrendered.

Peter Chitty was among the 15,000 Australians made prisoners of war. He was sent to Changi, where in the early months of captivity the Japanese imposed few restrictions. Left somewhat to their own devices, prisoners organised sporting contests, concert parties, and even an education centre; anything to improve morale, create some normality, and provide a distraction from camp life.

Corporal Leslie “Peter” Chitty on 2 June 1941. He was christened Leslie Allan Chitty, but always known as “Peter”.

AWM P04441.001



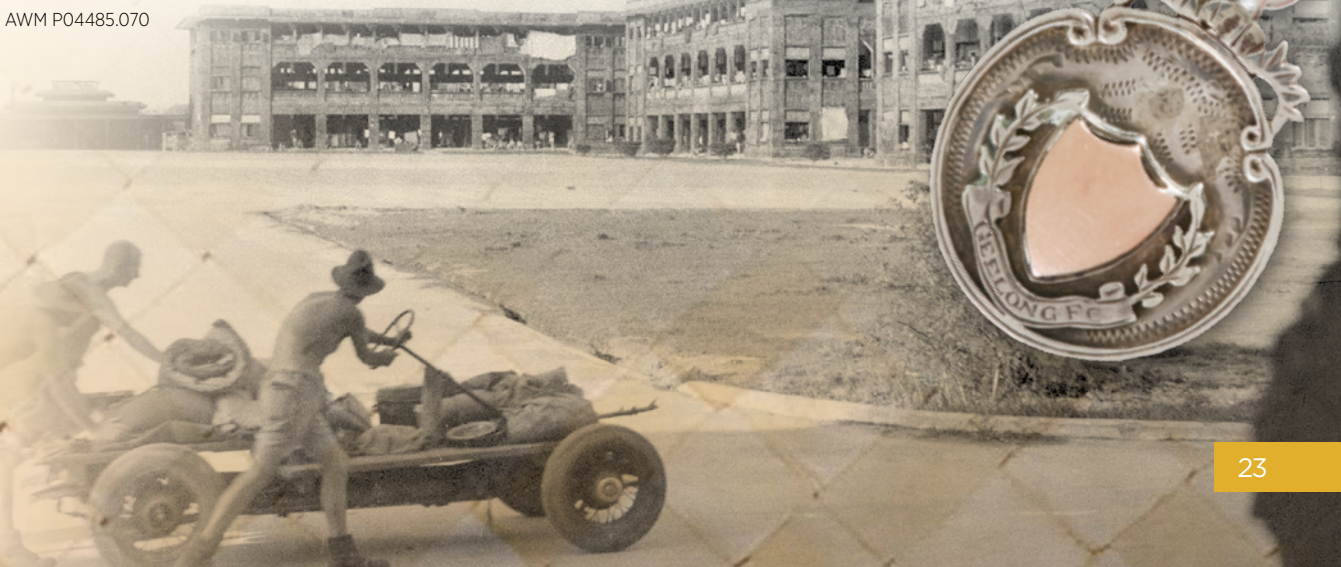


Murray Griffin, *Looking towards home* (1942, oil on plywood, 35.9 x 42.3 cm, AWM ART24470)

Official war artist Murray Griffin was taken prisoner when Singapore fell to the Japanese. Over the next few years he created nearly 200 drawings and paintings about life in Changi. What might Murray have been thinking about as he painted this work?

This photograph of the Changi prisoner-of-war camp was taken in secret and its negative hidden from the Japanese guards, c. 1942–45.

AWM P04485.070



The Changi Brownlow Medal was made from a soccer medal found in the camp. Engraved on the reverse side were the words, “1943 Changi POW Brownlow Medal won by Sgt L.A. Chitty ‘Best and Fairest!’”.

AWM REL32808

How do you think Peter felt about receiving this medal?

In mid-1942 a group of Australian Rules enthusiasts, including 1933 Brownlow Medallist Corporal Wilfred “Chicken” Smallhorn, established the Changi Australian Football League. The teams were named after clubs in the VFL, and Peter, keen to take part, was selected as captain of the Geelong team. With limited resources, the players were forced to be inventive, using trees as goal posts and making footballs from boot leather and wild boar skin. Nevertheless, the games were fiercely contested, and the crowds were just as ferocious in their support.

Peter showed great leadership as captain, instilling in his players a sense of discipline and teamwork. Soon Geelong was on top of the ladder, but in early 1943 all football was banned by the Australian medical officers. There were too many injuries, and medicine was too precious to spare, so on 24 January Peter ran onto the Changi field for the last time. He had been chosen to **skipper** the Victorian side in a special match against “The Rest”, and some 10,000 onlookers had turned out for the spectacle. Prior to the game, Peter received an award for “best and fairest”, the Changi Brownlow Medal. The proud Victorian marched out onto the field and led his team to victory.

Peter showed the same devotion to his fellow captives away from the field as he had to his teammates. In April 1943 he was sent to the Burma–Thailand Railway, where the prisoners were forced into hard labour for hours on end. After days travelling in a cramped steel wagon, some 1,000 men, including Peter, were ordered to march almost 300 kilometres through the rugged jungle. Many, like Private Jim Downie, were seriously ill and barely able to walk. Without thinking, Peter slung his arm around Jim’s waist and started down the path. As the days wore on, Jim’s condition worsened, but Peter was determined to get him to hospital. He hoisted Jim and both their packs across his shoulders, and carried on. Though Jim later died of his wounds, Peter was awarded the British Empire Medal for his outstanding conduct.

Eventually, Peter returned to Changi, where he and the others waited for the end of the war and liberation, both of which came in 1945. Peter travelled home some months later, ecstatic to hear that his younger brother Bob, a talented football player in his own right, had won his second VFL premiership. It took time for Peter to adjust to life at home; like many prisoners of war, he seldom spoke about his experience, but he always treasured his Changi Brownlow Medal.

Prisoners of war carry sleepers for the Burma–Thailand Railway, c. 1943.

AWM P00406.026

How might comradeship have helped prisoners of war survive these conditions?

Did you know?

On the first Tuesday of November in 1942 a group of Australian prisoners of war held their own Melbourne Cup race. With no horses available, the soldiers used frogs, marking them with coloured rags and paper and releasing them from a box in the centre of a circle. The first to hop over the line was “Triggerman”, and his owner, Captain William Dixon, was awarded this improvised trophy made from coconut shells.



AWM RELAWM31985



FAST FACTS Life in Changi

Prior to the Second World War, Changi was the British Army's principal base on Singapore, and it was here in the former barracks and military camps that Allied prisoners of war were housed following the fall of the island to the Japanese. From the outset, the prisoners were extremely resourceful, making everything from brooms and cooking utensils to soap and artificial limbs. They also grew spinach, tapioca, sweet potatoes, lettuce, and papayas. These were, in some cases, their only source of vitamins.

The prisoners not only relied on each other for physical survival but also turned to one another for emotional strength. As the years rolled by, they found joy in sport and games, and even in the darkest days of captivity the famous Changi Concert Party kept the camp distracted and in good humour. Despite the effects of constant hunger, illness, and hard labour, the laughter the men shared gave many prisoners hope for a brighter future.



The citation for Peter's British Empire Medal (far left) read:

During various long marches through the jungle under extremely difficult conditions, L/Sgt Chitty set an outstanding example of unselfish conduct and courage continuously helping the sick by carrying their kits as well as his own and helping them along and constructing shelter for them when halted. By these means he undoubtedly saved lives.¹

AWM REL41922.001-006

Three of Peter's siblings, Phil, Ron, and Arthur, served in the North African campaign. Phil and Ron were taken prisoner, while Arthur was killed in action. This photograph shows Phil and Ron visiting their brother's grave in El Alamein War Cemetery on 11 November 1943.

AWM MEA0959



Finding comfort in craft: Dr Margaret Smallwood

Dr Margaret Smallwood ran her fingers over the faded material, tracing the pattern of her stitches. There, carefully embroidered on the scrap of white fabric was a room containing a tiny bed, a table with a single cup, and a barred window. It was her prison cell, her home for the uncertain months that lay ahead. But she was not alone; her patch was one of many that would soon be sewn together to make a beautiful quilt.

Margaret had been working as a doctor for the Malayan Medical Service in Johore, caring for sick children, when Japan launched its attack in late 1941. Like other civilians in the region at the time, Margaret was evacuated to Singapore, where she took up work at a hospital. As the Japanese drew closer to the island the sound of exploding bombs and shells echoed around the hospital building, and Margaret was treating more and more Allied servicemen wounded in battle.

On 15 February 1942 Singapore fell to the Japanese, and Margaret was among the 2,400 civilians, including more than 450 women and children, taken prisoner. Some had not been able to leave Singapore in time; others had chosen to remain behind. The **internees** were marched into Changi Gaol; a building designed to hold only 600. The men were crammed into one section, while the women and children took up residence in another. They were forbidden to speak to their husbands, fathers, and brothers living just behind the wire.

Life in the prison was hard: cells were overcrowded, sickness was widespread and food was scarce. From the outset, however, the women took matters into their own hands, electing a leader and even drafting a **constitution** to ensure the camp ran efficiently. They also set up a school and hospital, where Margaret took a leading role checking on the children each morning and petitioning the Japanese guards for extra food.

Margaret (right) writes home from Singapore in 1945, more than three and a half years after she first entered Changi Gaol. Her husband, Ian, was also taken prisoner when the island was captured by the Japanese.

AWM 019346

Why do you think the women in Changi felt it was important to draft a constitution? What impact do you think it may have had upon their experience?



A patch from the Australian quilt made by civilian internees at Changi.

AWM REL/14235 [detail]



FAST FACTS Creativity in captivity

Many prisoners turned to arts and crafts as a way to keep their spirits up. Embroidery, knitting, and crochet were some of the most popular activities, but there were few materials available. Some prisoners made needles and crochet hooks from fencing wire, reading glasses, and even ground-down toothbrushes. Many held onto their creations long after the war was over.

This notebook cover was made from the remains of a sleeping mat, and was given as a 21st birthday gift to an internee held captive in Sumatra.

AWM REL25331

What might these items have meant to the prisoners after their time in captivity?



The months passed slowly, but the women kept themselves entertained in a variety of ways. Ethel Mulvaney, a Canadian internee, loved to sew and suggested they work together to make some quilts. Each woman involved was given some white fabric, torn from old sheets and flour bags, and asked to stitch her signature and an image that said “something of herself”! On her square, Margaret stitched an image of her prison cell, accompanied by the words “a room with a view”.

The internees made three quilts, one each for the Japanese, Australian, and British Red Cross, and convinced the camp guards to donate them to the hospitals in Changi. Some hoped their relatives may eventually come across the quilts and draw comfort in the realisation that their loved ones were still alive. For others the project was a distraction from their bleak reality, and a way to record their hope for a better future. It would be years, however, before their release.

When the war finally ended in 1945, Margaret returned home to Melbourne. The care she had provided the internees over the years had not gone unnoticed, and in 1947 she was presented with the Order of the British Empire. She devoted the rest of her life to promoting the health of women and children both in Australia and overseas.

At the end of the war the quilts were given to Australian doctor Lieutenant Colonel Robert Webster. He took the Australian (right) and Japanese quilts home to Tasmania. He presented the Australian quilt to the Red Cross, and gave the Japanese quilt to his wife. Both are now on display at the Australian War Memorial.

AWM REL/14235



An Olympic dream: Major Claude Smeal

Captain Claude Smeal heard the crowd roar as he sprinted into view. He saw his teammate waiting anxiously at the changeover and raced towards him, gasping for breath. His heart was pounding and his lungs were almost bursting, but Claude was determined to lead his side to victory.

It was 19 November 1952 and the signals unit was dashing towards the finish line in the 18-mile relay. It was a popular event among British Commonwealth troops stationed in Japan, and many units entered teams hoping for success. On this occasion, however, the signals unit had a secret weapon: their captain and coach, Claude Smeal.

Claude was an experienced soldier; he had joined the army in February 1939 as a 20-year-old recruit and saw action in the Pacific during the Second World War. He had chosen to remain in uniform once the war ended, and had been posted to Victoria Barracks in Sydney.

Claude also loved to race in marathons, and ran kilometre after kilometre to prepare for each gruelling event. He finished fourth in the 1951 national championships and hoped to be selected for the Olympic Games, but later that year he was **deployed** to Korea with the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR).

War had erupted between North and South Korea in late June 1950, and Australia had joined a United Nations-led force to defend South Korea against the **communist** North. Claude arrived in Korea in late 1951 just as Chinese forces successfully recaptured Hill 317. Also known as Maryang San, the steep hill was a tactically important position overlooking the Imjin River.

Korea was a dangerous place; **landmines** were scattered across the countryside, and **snipers** were a constant threat. But nothing deterred Claude from his rigorous training schedule; every morning he set out in his St. George Athletics Club singlet, tracing a path through the surrounding rice paddies.

Tales of the dedicated captain soon reached journalists Noel Monks and Norman MacSwan, both of whom were in Korea to report on the conflict. The pair volunteered to time Claude in a trial marathon, and were impressed when he crossed the finish line just 20 minutes outside the world record.

Claude (right) accepts a trophy on behalf of his team for winning the 18-mile relay in Japan, 19 November 1952.

AWM 148220

Why would participation in team sports and recreation be important during wartime?





Claude's medals, including the United Nations Service Medal for Korea (third from right).

AWM REL45962.001-010

The Korean Ashes

In October 1954 the English cricket team strode onto the **WACA's** hallowed ground in Perth to take on Western Australia. An excited buzz filled the air; it was one of the first matches in the lead up to the fiercely contested 1954–55 Ashes series, and fans on both sides were keen for their players to put on a good show.

Meanwhile, in Korea, a group of Australian and English troops were preparing for their own showdown on the sporting field. It was the annual Korean Ashes: a cricket match played on a desolate oval only a few kilometres behind the **Demilitarised Zone**. England had seized victory in the 1953 game, and Australia was determined to turn the tide.

As the game approached, renowned test player Keith Miller sent a note of support to the Australians, urging them to “twist the lion’s tail”.¹ The team won the match with three wickets in hand, and later returned the favour to the team back home in Australia, sending the following words of encouragement: “We have given the lion’s tail a preliminary twist. The rest is up to you”.²



AWM RELAWM34559



AWM HOB5413

The start of the 1952 Olympic Games was only weeks away and the Australian team had already been announced. Claude, still on active service, had not been considered so Noel contacted the owner of *The Daily Telegraph*, Sir Frank Packer, hoping he may be able to convince the selectors to include him as a late entry. Just days later Claude, now a proud Olympian, slung his kitbag over his shoulder and set off for the host city, Helsinki.

Claude arrived in Europe soon afterwards, and prepared for the run of his life. In the end Czechoslovakian athlete Emil Zatopek, playfully known as the “human locomotive”,³ claimed victory in the 42-kilometre race, but Claude made a determined effort, finishing 45th in two hours, 52 minutes and 23 seconds.

When the Olympics ended, Claude put on his slouch hat and set out on the long journey back to the front. He was posted to a **non-combat** role in Japan, where the British and Commonwealth forces were based, but he was eager to return to the action. In the meantime he took part in the annual British Commonwealth relay race, running one leg of the 18 miles between the cities of Hiroshima and Kure. He was appointed captain and coach for the signals unit, and the team won the competition in record time.

Claude eventually returned to Australia and continued his career in the army, rising to the rank of major. He kept running, and in 1989, aged 70, he was granted the honour of firing the starting gun for the Anzac Day marathon in Sydney.

Korea could be bitterly cold; troops even slept with their weapons to prevent the metal parts from freezing. Frostbite was common, so warm clothing like these mittens was essential.

AWM REL31360

What impact might weather have had upon morale?



FAST FACTS Rest and recreation

Leave came as a welcome respite for Australian troops serving in Korea. Most took their leave in Japan, where they explored local attractions, and relaxed at purpose-built rest and recreation centres. There the men were also able to enjoy a hot meal, take a warm bath and wash their clothes.

Japan was home to the United Nations Command support bases, and Australian service personnel were stationed there to assist operations in Korea. While in Japan, many competed in the annual British Commonwealth swimming and athletics carnivals, as well as other organised sporting events.

Australian troops on deployment to Korea also made their own fun. When stationed away from the front they played games, listened to records, and even built yachts from scrap material.

A member of the engineers' team dives into the pool during the annual British Commonwealth swimming carnival in Kure, Japan, c. 1955.

AWM SWEJ0048





Ivor Hele, *Hill 317* (1952, oil on canvas, 104.7 x 119.9 cm, AWM ART40314)

What does this painting tell you about the conditions Australian troops encountered in Korea?

Claude's team blazer for the 1952 Olympic Games. He was watching a boxing match with his fellow troops when his selection was announced.

AWM REL45961

How would Claude's fellow troops have reacted to this news?

A teammate takes over from Claude during the relay race in Japan, c. 1952.

AWM 148219

What might it have meant to Claude to fire the starting gun for the Anzac Day marathon in Australia in 1989?

Claude received this medallion for participating in the 1952 Olympic Games.

AWM REL45960



“Mother of all Vietnam vets”: Lorrae Desmond

The rain was ceaseless, pouring down upon the soldiers in torrential waves. Standing centre stage, Lorrae Desmond saw their cotton hats dripping with water, their green shirts clinging to their skin, but nothing seemed to dampen their enthusiasm. Lorrae took a bow, her ears ringing with applause, and then burst into another song.

Lorrae was a born entertainer. As a child, she loved to sing, and hoped to travel the world one day as a performer. She took up work at a local hairdressing salon to pay for **elocution** lessons, and later became a **singing cigarette girl**, saving every penny she earned to buy a ticket to England. Before long, she set sail for the other side of the world, leaving her hometown of Mittagong, New South Wales, behind her.

After making a list of the goals she wanted to achieve, Lorrae started searching for her big break. She was persistent, and was soon appearing in **cabaret**, pantomime, and even radio shows. She was also making records, working alongside Sir George Martin, who later produced music for the Beatles. Her fame grew. Eventually she was offered the opportunity to star in her own television program, and perform for British troops stationed in the Middle East. She found the experience addictive; she loved to see a smiling audience, knowing she could brighten their lives, even if it was only for a moment. She returned to the Middle East for a second tour, and later travelled to Kenya as an entertainer in the midst of a military **uprising**.

In the early 1960s Lorrae started work on a variety program for the ABC, *The Lorrae Desmond Show*. Still based in England, she flew back and forth to Australia, writing her routines on the back of airline sick bags. In 1962 she became the first woman to win the prestigious Gold Logie as the most popular personality on Australian television.

In that same year Australian troops arrived in Vietnam. The first was a team of military advisors to provide training and support to South Vietnamese forces fighting against communist North Vietnamese and local insurgent forces. However, the conflict soon escalated, and more and more troops were deployed. Almost 60,000 Australians served in Vietnam over the next decade.

In 1965 popular singer Lucky Starr travelled to Vietnam to put on a concert for Australian troops. The tour was so successful that the government decided to sponsor other entertainers to make the same journey. Over the next six years the Forces Advisory Committee on Entertainment organised 46 concert parties, involving some 365 entertainers.



Lorrae on stage in Nui Dat, c. 1967.

AWM COL/67/0174/VN



This jacket was adapted from a full-length sequined dress Lorrae wore on her first tour of Vietnam in March 1967.

AWM REL33301.001

Lorrae shares a joke with a soldier in the audience, c. 1970.

AWM CUN/70/0859/VN

Those of us from the Task Force who were privileged to see your great show at Luscombe Bowl were overwhelmed by the sincerity and enthusiasm of all of your team. Any artist that can hold an audience in a monsoonal downpour as you did in your first show here is really great. You need no further proof that your team's efforts were greatly appreciated. Morale is very high indeed but it's wonderful people like you that keep it that way.

Letter from Brigadier Stuart Paul "Bill" Weir, Commander, 1st Australian Task Force, to Lorrae, 28 September 1969.

AWM PR05428



Entertainers often performed in dangerous areas, and helicopters were occasionally required to fly them to safety.

AWM P06295.032

How do you think entertainers like Lorrae may have felt about venturing into a war zone?

Lorrae was among the performers invited to take part, and in March 1967 she took the stage in Nui Dat. There, at the Australian Task Force base, Lorrae sang with the ABC Dance Band in front of more than 1,000 troops. That December she volunteered to return to Vietnam for a Christmas concert, and over the next few years she made several trips there to perform for the troops.

The weather was often hot and humid, but Lorrae was not fazed; on one occasion she remained on stage throughout a **monsoonal** downpour. The grateful audience stayed until the end, cheering her for encore after encore. Lorrae formed a close bond with the troops – or “her boys”, as she fondly called them – making time to visit the wounded in hospital, deliver letters from home, and share in a meal. In 1970 Lorrae was appointed a Member of the British Empire for services to entertainment and the welfare of Australian forces in Vietnam.

In the years after the war Lorrae continued her successful career at home in Australia, most notably appearing as Shirley Gilroy in *A Country Practice*, but the genuine care and compassion she developed for “her boys” in Vietnam never ended. In 1987 Lorrae proudly marched alongside the veterans during their welcome home parade, and later sang for them one more time.



Entertainers performed on all kinds of stages; on one occasion Lorrae even sang from a **pontoon** in the middle of the Mekong River. Here a United States Army band stages a concert for the 1st Australian Task Force on the back of two trucks.

AWM P02384.008

Why would so many entertainers have volunteered to perform during the war?



This plaque was given to Lorrae some years after the war by a group of Vietnam veterans in appreciation of her services.

Courtesy Lorrae Desmond.

How do you think Lorrae may have felt about the title, “Mother of all Vietnam Vets”?

Did you know?

Dozens of famous entertainers have performed for Australian troops over the years. In 1999 Kylie Minogue, John Farnham, and The Living End travelled to East Timor as part of the Tour of Duty concert, and more recently Hamish Blake and Andy Lee broadcast live from the Australian base at Tarin Kot in Afghanistan.

FAST FACTS Entertainers in Vietnam

More than 700 Australian entertainers performed in Vietnam during the war. Most were sponsored by the government, which provided transport, accommodation, and security. The performers were often exposed to enemy and friendly fire, and their safety remained a concern at all times.

Many entertainers also made their own way to Vietnam as part of a private concert tour. They often spent more than three months in the country, while government-sponsored concert parties typically lasted between one and two weeks.

Some entertainers, like Little Pattie or Col Joye and the Joy Boys, were household names back in Australia. Others were less well known, but every performer helped in some way to lift the morale of troops far from home.



AWM REL38871

Troops crowd into the Luscombe Bowl in Nui Dat to listen to a concert, c. 1970.

AWM EKN/70/0003A/VN

Why would these concerts have been important to soldiers serving in Vietnam?



“Dear soldier”: Warrant Officer Class 2 Rodney Kenane

Sergeant Rodney Kenane heard a truck rumble to a stop, and scrambled to his feet. He gave a shout as the driver emerged, a thick stack of envelopes in his hand; the mail had arrived. His fellow troops raced to the truck in excitement, and Rod ran over the rain-sodden ground to join them.

In 1966, just weeks after arriving in Vietnam, Rod and his **platoon** received some surprising mail. Expecting to read news from their loved ones, the men peeled open the envelopes to letters written by year 5 students from Gowrie Park Primary School near Latrobe in Tasmania.

At that time Gowrie Park was home to the families of men working on the nearby **hydro-electric scheme**. Many had moved to Australia from places such as Germany, Poland, Yugoslavia, Russia, and Italy in the wake of the Second World War, and their children had become students at the local school.

As Anzac Day approached, the year 5 teacher, Marie McCulloch, encouraged her class to turn their attention to the war in Vietnam. The students were already aware of the conflict; many had watched a televised concert for allied forces stationed over there, and had been struck by the sight of hundreds of troops in uniform. Determined to make a contribution, the class decided to write to Australian soldiers serving there to let them know they had not been forgotten. Marie sought approval from the Department of Defence, and soon some 50 letters – each addressed to “Dear soldier” and decorated with paintings, cartoons, and pressed gum leaves – were on their way.

Rod and his platoon were touched by the students’ thoughtfulness, and almost immediately penned some replies:

Dear Joana,

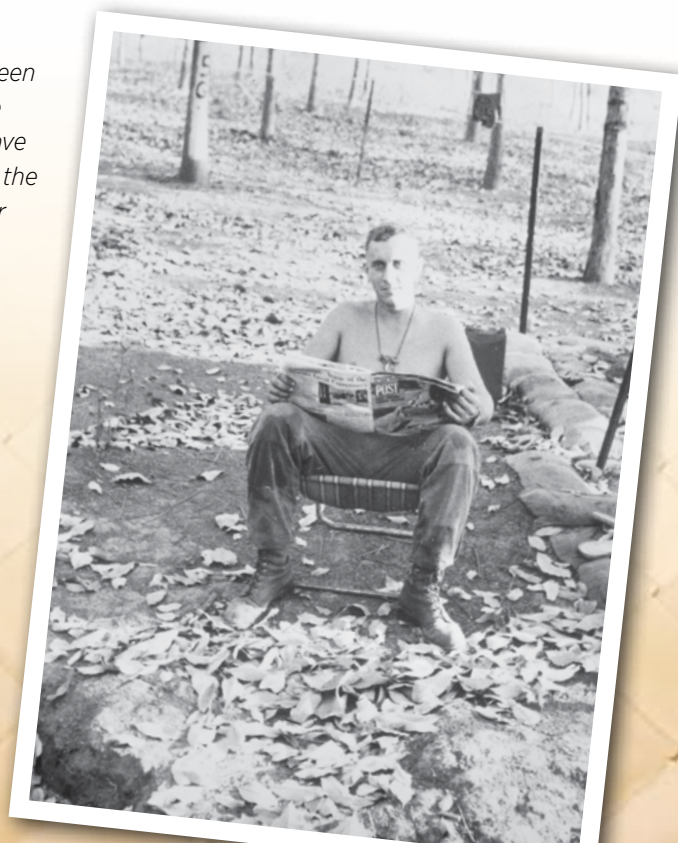
First, thank you for your letter, also thank all your friends for the letters they wrote, which my mates will answer soon ... We have been in Vietnam for nearly two months now, and at the moment we are working from a base area on the coast at Vung Tau ... You must have a great teacher for helping all you children write to us. We read in the paper, how you all saw the Bob Hope show, and you all asked your teacher could you write ... So goodnight my friend, I hope I have another letter from you soon.

Lots of luck, Rod Kenane

AWM PR01797

Rod was section commander and sergeant of 1 Platoon, A Company, 5th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (5RAR), during the Vietnam War from May 1966 until May 1967. He later returned to Vietnam for further service.

AWM P05247.001



Over the next few months the students and the soldiers continued to exchange letters, sharing tales about life in Gowrie Park and Vietnam. The class also sent a recording on which they had taped themselves reciting poems, performing songs, and reading personal messages. Rod's platoon soon responded in kind, posting a **reel-to-reel tape** to the school.

The students and soldiers lost touch in the years after the war, but Rod fondly remembered the correspondence they had once shared, and in 2004, nearly 40 years on, he finally met Marie McCulloch for the first time.

Mates

*I've travelled down some lonely roads,
Some crooked tracks and straight;
And I've learned life's noblest creed,
Summed up in one word ... "Mate".*

*I've been thinking back across the years,
A thing I do of late;
And this word sticks between my ears,
You have got to have a mate.*

*My mind goes back to the '60s,
The good times and the hate;
When man's one chance to stay alive,
Depended on his mate.*

*With a pannikin for a billy can,
And dixies for a plate;
A bamboo thicket full of bugs,
Was bed for me and my mate.*

*You would slip and slither through the mud,
And curse your rotten fate;
But then you'd hear a quiet word,
"Don't drop your bundle mate."*

*And though it's all so long ago,
The truth I have to state;
A man don't know what "lonely" means,
Until he's lost a mate.*

*If there's a life that follows this,
If there's a "Golden Gate";
The welcome that I want to hear,
Is just, "Good on ya, mate."*

*And so all who ask us why,
We keep these special dates;
Like Long Tan and Anzac Day,
I answer ... why, we're thinking of our mates.*

*And when I leave the driver's seat,
And hand in my plates;
I'll tell old St Peter at the door,
I've come to join me Mates.¹*

Courtesy Rodney Kenane.

Rod wrote this poem while reflecting on his time in Vietnam. Write your own poem on the theme of comradeship using one of the stories in this book as inspiration.

Soldiers read letters from their loved ones while on patrol, c. 1967.

AWM P05528.007

How might servicemen and servicewomen keep in touch with their loved ones today? What are the advantages of today's technology compared to letter writing? Are there any disadvantages?



FAST FACTS Letters from home

Mail delivery was always a welcome occasion for Australians serving far from their loved ones. The battalion "postie" sorted some 2,000 letters each day, and these were eagerly received by the troops. Some service personnel were fortunate to receive recorded messages from their friends and family, and many carried portable recorders to tape their own messages to send back home. Parcels were welcome as well; the Australian Forces Overseas Fund distributed thousands of care packages at Christmas time, filled with comforts such as socks, handkerchiefs, books, and canned fruit.



AWM P05040.009

On top of his game: Lieutenant Duncan “John” Perryman

The ship rocked slowly from side to side as Petty Officer Signals Yeoman John Perryman peered through his binoculars one last time. The sea was still calm; he had hardly seen a ripple on the surface over the last few hours. His working day over, John made his way below deck. As he pushed open the door to the mess, John heard a gleeful shout of victory, and chuckled to himself. He was ready to join in the game.

John was born and raised in the nation’s capital, Canberra. His British-born parents had been posted to the British **High Commission** there in 1963, and some years later they made the move permanent. John and his siblings loved to ride bikes, catch tadpoles, and climb the nearby mountains, returning home only when the sun had slipped below the horizon.

From a young age John hoped to follow in his parents’ footsteps by becoming a sailor. Both his father and mother had served in the Royal Navy, and he had listened to their adventures with wide-eyed interest. In 1974 his family visited HMAS *Anzac* (II) in Sydney Harbour; it was the first time John had set foot on a war ship, and he resolved that it would not be the last.

Six years later John realised his dream, joining the Royal Australian Navy at just 16. There he learned to be a signalman, using **Morse code** and flags to send and receive messages. It was a difficult job; watch-keepers, as they were known, often worked long hours and remained on lookout even through rough winds and angry seas.

Over time John rose through the ranks and travelled around the world. He served in peacekeeping missions to Somalia in 1993, Bougainville in 1997, and East Timor between 1999 and 2000. As a chief yeoman of signals in Somalia and Bougainville, he advised the captain on signal matters and tactical manoeuvring, while in East Timor he worked as a warrant officer yeoman in headquarters, helping restore peace and security to the war-torn nation.

John had married his childhood sweetheart, Meredith, in 1989, and they started a family soon afterwards. He wrote home constantly while he was away, but he also became close to his “naval family”, bonding with his fellow crew members over games including cards, darts, dominoes, **mah-jong**, and Uckers.

John came across Uckers on board his first ship, HMAS *Stalwart*, and soon became hooked. It was not only fun to play but also a great spectacle for onlookers. Some players were very competitive, and at times boards were flung across the room in frustration. Games like this provided some sense of normality, as well as a welcome distraction from regular duties.

Petty Officer Signals Yeoman John Perryman on board HMAS *Tobruk* in 1992. The cloth badge on his sleeve features two crossed flags, indicating his role as a signaller.

Image courtesy John Perryman.





John's mother, Jean (left), at HMS *Heron*, Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton in Somerset, England, 1958. She was the first female **drum major** of the Yeovilton naval band.

Image courtesy John Perryman.

John's father, Terry, in Malta, c. 1955. John's younger brother Lindsay also joined the Royal Australian Navy, and he too received a Conspicuous Service Medal.

Image courtesy John Perryman.



HMAS *Tobruk* docked in the harbour at Mogadishu, Somalia, c. 1993.

AWM P01735.139





John's experience taught him that morale was integral to life on a ship, and he went to great lengths to keep spirits high among the crew. He not only played games but, while in Somalia, he also helped record a news program that was broadcast throughout the internal television system aboard HMAS *Tobruk*. Using an ironing board as a desk, John and his **co-anchor** read the daily bulletin and conducted interviews for a "special features" segment. The light-hearted program always drew smiles from their fellow troops.

In 2004 John, then a lieutenant, transferred to the naval reserve and took up work as the senior naval historical officer at the Sea Power Centre of Australia. He later received the Conspicuous Service Medal for his contribution to the discovery of the wreck of HMAS *Sydney* (II), which disappeared without a trace after a devastating sea battle during the Second World War.

Today John remembers the times his skills, strength, and determination were tested, as well as the fun and laughter he shared with his fellow servicemen and servicewomen. He still loves a fiercely contested game of Uckers, and even made his own board to pass the tradition on to his family.

Peter Churcher, *Alert 15, two-deck cafe, HMAS Kanimbla* (2002, oil on hardboard, 46 x 56 cm, AWM ART91754)

The men in this painting are waiting to be called to action. What are they doing? How might they be feeling?

Did you know?

On 5 May 1945 the German U-boat *U-534* came under attack near the Danish island of Anholt. Most of the crew survived, but the submarine sank to the bottom of the ocean. Nearly 50 years later *U-534* was raised to the surface, and there among the crockery, cutlery, and other objects salvaged from the wreck was a homemade Uckers board.



FAST FACTS The game of Uckers

Uckers is a popular board game played by naval personnel across the world. The rules are similar to Ludo, which in turn was adapted from Pachisi, a traditional Indian game played on a board shaped like a cross.

Uckers can be played by two or four people, or even as a team game. Each player receives four pieces and takes a turn to roll the die, moving their pieces in a clockwise direction around the board.

As in Ludo, a player must return to “base” if an opponent lands on the same square. If a player lands on the same square as his own piece, the two pieces form a barrier known as a “blob”, and opponents must challenge the player to pass.

There are some variations to the game, but usually a player is required to roll a six to first move a piece from “base”, and the first player to have all four pieces “home” is the winner.



The playing pieces in Uckers were traditionally made from spent .50 calibre cases, weighted to counter the movement of the ship.

Image courtesy Department of Defence
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**Have you ever created your own game?
What were the rules?**

John’s homemade Uckers board features emblems from ships he served on throughout his naval career.

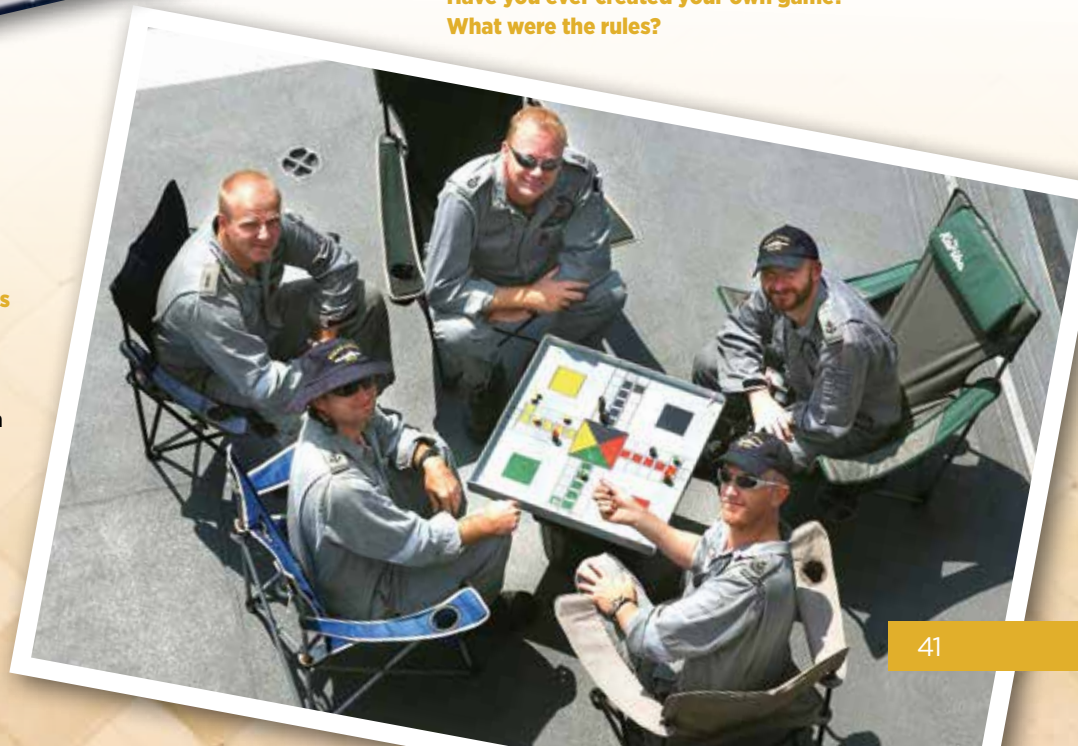
Image courtesy John Perryman.

Why do you think John made his own Uckers board?

The crew of HMAS Anzac enjoy a game of Uckers, c. 2005.

Image courtesy Department of Defence
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Why might comradeship be important for a ship’s crew?



A loyal friend: Trooper David “Poppy” Pearce

The dust swirled in chaotic clouds around the faded yellow hut. It was almost dusk, and a group of camouflage-clad soldiers were laughing as they made their way towards the entrance. A weathered wooden sign adorned the doorway, inscribed with just one word: “Poppy’s”.

In 2001 Australian troops arrived in Afghanistan as part of a **coalition** force. Over the next 13 years, more than 26,000 soldiers served in the region, helping to disrupt terrorist activities, mentor the Afghan National Army, and re-build the war-torn nation. The war in Afghanistan was Australia’s longest war, and not without cost: more than 260 troops were wounded, with 41 killed in action.

At 40, Trooper David Pearce was much older than most in his regiment. He first joined the army as a **reservist** in 2002, and was posted to the 9th Battalion, Royal Queensland Regiment, in Brisbane. Three years later David was in the Solomon Islands helping to restore law and order amid mounting local violence. It was a life-changing experience; he was proud to wear his nation’s uniform, and loved the camaraderie that came from working in a close-knit unit.

Encouraged by his family, David enlisted in the army full time, and was posted to the 2/14th Light Horse Regiment, an **armoured reconnaissance unit** based in Brisbane. There he earned a reputation as a hardworking, talented, and dependable soldier. He also earned himself a nickname: “Poppy”. Many of his comrades saw David as a father-figure, a steadying influence, and they often turned to him for advice and leadership. He was a loyal and supportive friend, and even in the most difficult circumstances he was always able to make his fellow troops laugh.

This patch was worn by Australian soldiers like David who deployed to the Solomon Islands as part of Operation Anode. The mission was known to locals as Operation Helpem Fren, or “helping friend” in Pidgin English.

AWM REL41245

What qualities do you value in a friend? Why?



Trooper David “Poppy” Pearce, c. 2006–07.

AWM P11635.002

FAST FACTS In memory of mates

Since 2001, 41 soldiers have died while serving with the Australian Army in Afghanistan. On each occasion their fellow troops would gather around the stone memorials at **Camp Holland** and **Camp Russell** to farewell their friends in a solemn ceremony. Both memorials have since been moved to the Australian War Memorial, and remain on display in the sculpture garden, a permanent tribute to those who did not return home.

The troops in Afghanistan also wrote the names of the fallen on walls at patrol bases, and, as with “Poppy” Pearce, occasionally named places in their memory. Camp Russell, for example, is named in honour of the first Australian killed in Afghanistan, Sergeant Andrew Russell. Today some returned servicemen and servicewomen wear a simple metal bracelet in remembrance, engraved with the name of their friend.

What are some other ways to remember friends and loved ones?

The Camp Russell memorial at the Australian War Memorial.

Image courtesy Department of Defence 20150318adf8588365_031.

An Australian Light Armoured Vehicle (ASLAV) on patrol in Afghanistan.

AWM P09971.027



In 2007 David started training for deployment to Afghanistan. He arrived there in September as part of Reconstruction Task Force 3 and soon set out on his first patrol alongside a team scouting for a new **Forward Operating Base**. As he prepared to leave, David wrote in his diary:

I have confidence in my mates and myself. This is what I train to do ... serve my country, army, and uphold the Anzac spirit. I'm ready.¹

It was his last diary entry. Early on 8 October, as the patrol returned to the Tarin Kot multinational base, the ASLAV he was driving triggered an **improvised explosive device** on top of an anti-tank mine. He died instantly.

David's family and friends were devastated, and tributes soon poured in to honour the kind-hearted man who always put others first. Lieutenant Colonel Chris Websdane, the commanding officer of the 2/14th Light Horse Regiment of the Queensland Mounted Infantry, said:

[David] was highly regarded by those mates closest to him, who knew that when it counted most, they could depend on "Poppy" to be there for them. David defined mateship and exemplified what it meant to be a "digger".²

As a further tribute, the Australians stationed in Afghanistan decided to name their recreation hut "Poppy's". It was there that troops gathered to share stories, play games, and think about their loved ones back home, just like they had once done with their friend, "Poppy" Pearce.



Poppy's recreation hut in Tarin Kot, Afghanistan. The bounding red kangaroo over a black boomerang was the emblem for the Australian Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force.

AWM P08204.040

How do you think David may have felt about the nickname "Poppy"?

David's name appears on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial, which commemorates those Australians who have died in war or peacekeeping operations while serving in the Australian armed forces.

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Poppies are placed next to names on the Roll of Honour. Why is the poppy used as a symbol of remembrance?

AFGHANISTAN 2001 -

AUSTRALIAN ARMY
2/14 LIGHT HORSE REGIMENT
MILOSEVIC S. PEARCE D. R.
4 FIELD REGIMENT

Poppy's café

In July 2014 the Australian War Memorial re-named one of its cafés “Poppy’s” in memory of the trooper. David’s wife, Nicole, and his two daughters, Stephanie and Hannah, attended the opening alongside several of his friends from the 2/14th Light Horse Regiment. At that time, his family unveiled a plaque:

In honour of Trooper David “Poppy” Pearce and all those Australians who have served the nation in its defence forces.

The wooden “Poppy’s” sign that had once adorned the entrance to the Tarin Kot recreation hut now has a new home in the café, as does the emblem for the Australian Mentoring and Reconstruction Force.

What might this have meant to David’s family?



AMM REL47304

AMM REL48027



AMM PAU02015/20703

Where did these stories take place?

- 1 Richard Overy**
Egypt
Turkey
France
Belgium
England
- 2 Herbert Chudleigh**
Egypt
Turkey
France
- 3 Minnie Rattigan**
England
France
- 4 Ernest Nicholls**
England
France
- 5 Ken Gilkes**
England
- 6 Peter Chitty**
Malaya (Malaysia)
Singapore
Thailand
Burma (Myanmar)
- 7 Margaret Smallwood**
Malaya (Malaysia)
Singapore
- 8 Claude Smeal**
Korea
Finland
Japan
- 9 Lorrae Desmond**
England
Vietnam
- 10 Rodney Kenane**
Vietnam
- 11 John Perryman**
Somalia
Bougainville
East Timor
- 12 David Pearce**
Solomon Islands
Afghanistan



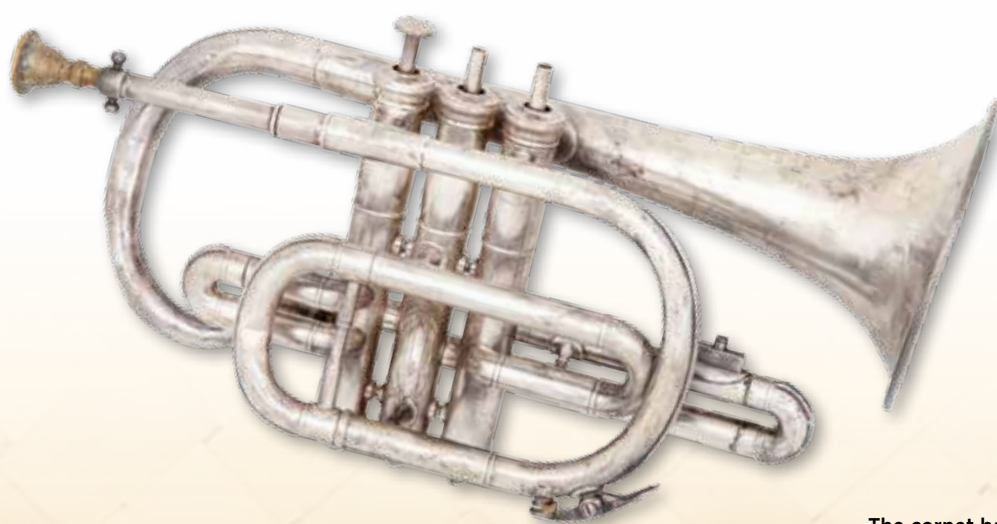
AWM E03355

Glossary

altitude	The height of an object above sea level.
amputated	To have had a body part surgically removed.
armoured reconnaissance unit	An army unit that uses vehicles such as tanks to participate in military operations, including exploratory missions.
Australian Imperial Force	A volunteer force raised for overseas service during the First World War. A Second AIF was raised for the Second World War.
Baltimore bomber	A twin-engine aircraft manned by four crew members.
baritone	A male singing voice.
bellows	The part on a concertina that the musician stretches between their hands.
billiards	A game similar to pool in which a long stick, known as a cue, is used to hit balls into pockets around a table.
cabaret	A type of entertainment featuring music, song, dance, or drama.
carat	A unit measuring the purity of gold.
Camp Holland	A military base in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, once manned by Dutch and Australian personnel.
Camp Russell	A military base in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, for units on special operations.
calibre	A unit measuring size in weapons.
co-anchor	A news commentator who delivers the broadcast with another person.
coalition	A group of people, states, or countries that have joined together to work towards a common goal.
cogitating	Thinking carefully.
communist	A belief in communism, a system of government based on the theory that all property belongs to the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.
constitution	A set of rules by which a country, state, or organisation is run.
cornet	A brass instrument similar to a trumpet.
Demilitarised Zone	A section of land between the border of North and South Korea.
deployed	To be sent into an operational area.
diamantés	Artificial jewels that sparkle.
dominions	Countries which are part of an empire.
drum major	The leader of a marching band.
dug-out	A shelter situated close to the front line and occasionally in rear areas.
elocution	The art of clear pronunciation and expressive speech.
expat	A person living away from their home country.
Forward Operating Base	A secure military base used to support operations in the field.
fledgling	Just beginning.
Gilbert and Sullivan	A pair of English playwrights known for the comic operas they composed in the 1800s.
Hindenburg Line	A complex system of defences constructed by the German army during the First World War.
High Commission	An embassy of a British Commonwealth nation.

Household Cavalry	An elite group of soldiers in the British Army.
hydro-electric scheme	A system designed to generate electricity from water.
internees	A group of people imprisoned for political or military reasons.
improvised explosive device	A weapon made from materials such as ammunition and explosives, or from chemicals and compounds. Such weapons are designed to destroy vehicles and kill, wound, or distract personnel, and are often hidden under or alongside roads, tracks, or paths.
landmines	Explosive devices laid on or in the ground.
Lewis gunner	A soldier armed with a Lewis gun, a light air-cooled machine-gun used mainly in the First World War.
Luftwaffe	The German air force during the Second World War.
mah-jong	A popular board game that originated in China.
mandolins	Pear-shaped musical instruments with several metal strings.
maxillofacial	The jaw and face.
monsoonal	Heavy rain caused by a change in wind direction.
Morse code	A way of sending messages via a series of “dots” and “dashes”, either written or signalled in the form of sound or light flashes.
non-combat	Not involved in fighting.
offensive	An attack.
patriotic	Showing support for one’s country.
patrol	An expedition to monitor an area.
pantomime	A form of entertainment in which performers use elaborate gestures to express themselves.
peninsula	A piece of land bordered by water.
platoon	A group of soldiers that work alongside each other as a military unit.
pontoon	A boat or a similar floating device that may serve as a temporary dock or bridge.
premierships	Competitions held between sporting clubs, where the winning team is given the title of “premiers”.
precarious	Dangerous.
rations	A certain amount of food or supplies distributed among a group.
reconnaissance	An exploratory mission to gain information for military purposes.
Red Cross	An international humanitarian organisation, founded in 1863, which provides relief to victims of war or natural disasters.
reel-to-reel tape	A piece of equipment used to record sound.
rehabilitation	A process of restoring someone to good health following injury or illness.
repatriated	Returned to one’s home country.
reservist	A person who is involved in the military part-time.
Riverina	A region in south-western New South Wales known for farming.
respite	A short period of rest.
shell	An artillery projectile or bomb containing high-explosives or shrapnel.
shilling	A coin that was used in Australia until decimal currency was introduced in 1966.
singing cigarette girl	A person that carries a tray of cigars and cigarettes for sale, and sings to customers in a restaurant or club.
skiff	A small boat used for rowing or sailing.

- skipper** The captain of a team.
- snipers** Skilled marksmen trained to fire weapons from hidden places.
- squadron leader** A senior officer in the Royal Australian Air Force.
- stalemate** A situation in which neither side can win.
- stronghold** A place that has been secured against attacks.
- tabard** A kind of coat traditionally worn by knights over their armour.
- troupe** A group of performers.
- U-boat** A German submarine.
- uprising** An act of rebellion against a governing or military body.
- WACA** The Western Australian Cricket Association, also the name of a stadium in Perth.
- Western Front** The main area of operations for allied forces in Western Europe during the First World War.
- wings** A badge worn by a pilot showing that they are qualified to fly an aircraft. Members of the Royal Australian Air Force who have other jobs, such as observers and navigators, wear a badge with only one wing.
- YWCA** The Young Women's Christian Association formed in Great Britain during the industrial revolution. It was created to provide protection, education, and assistance to working women.



The cornet bandmaster Sapper William Headen played during the sinking of HMAT *Ballarat* on 25 April 1917.

AWM RELAWM12686.001

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A group of 3RAR troops play an impromptu game of cricket in the Korean countryside, c. October 1950.

AWM P01813.832

Australian Army Nursing Service members play quoits on board a ship, 26 March 1942.

AWM 011863/30



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Members of No. 451 Squadron from the Royal Australian Air Force enjoy a swim in the Mediterranean Sea in July 1944. It was a brief moment of joy; before long these men would be back in combat, flying Spitfires over Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe.

AWM MEC1615





It is certain that the game had given them fresh heart. It had carried their thoughts vividly back to those happy days when football was played in certain Melbourne suburbs called "home". And it is in such happy thoughts and memories that we soldiers live.

The Argus, 10 May 1917



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