

# ANZAC DAY

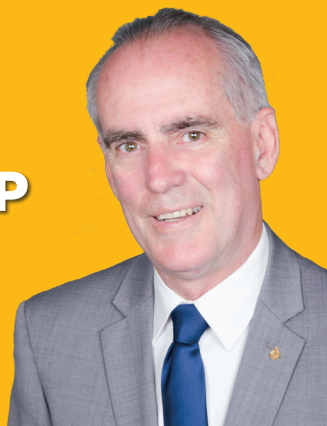
SUNDAY 25 APRIL 2021



Compliments of

**GREG PIPER MP**

**INDEPENDENT MEMBER  
FOR LAKE MACQUARIE**





## A message from Greg

The tales of survival and the will of many Prisoners of War to out-wit their enemy captors and literally push the boundaries should be an inspiration to us all. When times are tough and we're challenged under the most difficult circumstances, we could do well to consider the plight of all those men and women who served as POWs – many who never returned home. Local Rathmines man Richard Baines has a great story to tell about his father Ronald, who was a fighter pilot in the Second World War and was captured after his plane made a forced landing after being shot down.

Not only did he survive a walk (unknown to him at the time) through a mine field to the commands of waiting German soldiers, but he lived the next three years in the POW camp Stalag Luft III which became famous for The Great Escape. Ronald was, in fact, involved in helping with operations to plan and execute the escape, which was years later given Hollywood status in a movie account of the daring event. This year's Spirit of ANZAC publication tells Ronald Baines' story, in the words of his son Richard, who contributed some well-researched information and pictures of his dad. I hope you enjoy this story, along with other tribute pieces to our veterans. The booklet also highlights some significant battles, such as Kapyong (Korea) and Long Tan (Vietnam), which have milestone anniversaries this year. In recent times our communities have faced their own challenges in these testing times. They have shown strength and resilience amid the upheaval on our lives as we changed the way we live, work and play. In many ways we have shown the same characteristics which reflect the true Spirit of ANZAC – courage, mateship, endurance and sacrifice. I encourage those communities within the Lake Macquarie Electorate to embrace the Spirit of ANZAC at this special time. ANZAC Day is a time-honoured tradition and a significant part of our history and culture. Please take the time on this special day, wherever you may be this year, to stop and remember them.

Greg Piper MP  
Member for Lake Macquarie



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## The Billy Boy inspired artist at Rathmines

This unique portrait is of Irishman Joe Westcott.

Joe was no war hero but to many he was a local legend working at the Royal Australian Air Force Base Rathmines during World War Two. His contribution to the war effort was significant to the Air Force personnel based at Rathmines. The portrait was produced by artist William Dobell whose talents were being used at Rathmines to help paint camouflage on the sea planes. Dobell wrote the following about his model, Joe Westcott, and the work of art which features as part of the Australian War Memorial collection.

The name of the portrait is aptly named The Billy Boy



*"He was a Glasgow Irishman and his name was Joe Westcott. He was more interested in political argument than boiling the billy - which was his only job. Whenever we were waiting for our tea at morning or afternoon smoko, Joe, a dinkum bush lawyer, was trying to shout someone else down in an earbashing contest, and we often had to boil our own billy. I painted him at Rathmines Air Base, where I worked on camouflage with Joshua Smith and a lot of other artists."*

Sir William Dobell OBE was a renowned Australian portrait and landscape artist of the 20th century. He won the Archibald Prize, Australia's premier award for portrait artists on three occasions. The Dobell Prize is named in his honour. He died at Wangi Wangi on May 13, 1970.

## ADF celebrates milestone birthdays

The Australian Defence Force this year recognises three milestone anniversaries for the Army, Navy and Air Force.

The Australian Army and Royal Australian Navy both formed on 1 March 1901 and this year celebrate 120 years of service to the nation.

This year also marks the centenary of the Royal Australian Air Force. The RAAF celebrated its 100th birthday on 31 March 2021.





## Ronald Baines: Fighter pilot



***Flight Lieutenant Ronald Baines was a fighter pilot in the RAAF, was shot down, walked through a mine field and became a Prisoner of War in 1942. His war story is a remarkable one, highlighted by Ron's role in The Great Escape which later became a Hollywood blockbuster movie.***

***Ron's son Richard Baines, who lives locally in the Lake Macquarie area, contributed these words in a telling account of his father's World War Two experience.***

As war broke out my father Ron Baines, initially joined the militia in Melbourne, his role then being a truck driver.

Finding it all too boring and far from the war front, he joined the RAAF. During the RAAF interview, Ron stated he wanted to fly, go to Britain and look after the 'Mother Country'. He soon got his wish!

Under the Empire Air Training scheme he learned to fly in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and was then sent to Britain to be endorsed on Spitfires. This took place initially in north Wales and he later joined a Spitfire Squadron near London.

When German general Erwin Rommel was becoming a concern in North Africa, select Air Force personnel were summoned to form the so called 'Desert Air Force', Ron being one of them.

My father soon adapted quickly to rough living in Libya, joining a mixed British Squadron of Hurricanes in support of allied armies.

Not long after arriving in Libya, Ron, and 11 others were on a ground strafing mission, encountering intense enemy ground fire as they rose over a large sand hill and fort-like structure. The Germans shot down three Hurricanes in the process, one of which plunged into the ground, the other two performing 'wheels up' landings some distance away and becoming POW's in the process.

My father was often said he was shooting at the Germans and was peeved that they were actually shooting back!

Ron landed (unbeknown to him at the time) in a mine field and walked away from his burning aircraft at the behest of some very angry Germans. He wondered why they weren't coming to get him, then realised the situation on seeing a sign. On a single strand of barbed wire, which said 'achtung minen'

My father, after initial interrogation by the senior 'Africa Corps' officer, was dispatched to Germany on 18 November 1942. The aircraft transporting him ran out of fuel within site of the Italian coast.



*Fighter pilot Ronald Baines ready for action*

## lot, prisoner and survivor

The aircraft made an ungainly crash landing, just making landfall and thus avoiding a water landing. This ended a period of two crash landings in one day for Ron.

The journey as a POW through Italy to Germany started then onto Sagan (technically Southern Poland) to his 'home' for the next three years, Stalag Luft III. This camp features in Paul Brickhill's book and the movie *'The Great Escape'*.

Ron adjusted as best he could to life as a POW, involving himself in the camp orchestra, theatres and plays, reading books and playing sport - anything to fill in time, including his part in the tunnelling systems evolving at the time. Life was mostly a misery, highlighted only by news from the Front from incoming POWs, the occasional letters from home and if you were lucky the receipt of Red Cross parcels was a great morale booster.



*Flight Lieutenant Ronald Baines.*

The people involved in tunnelling were known as the 'Tally Ho' boys of which my father was involved to an extent, keeping watch for German guards (ferrets) who may interrupt escape activities.

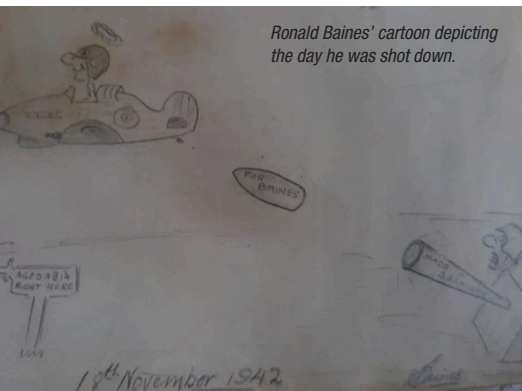
There were many tunnels, and attempted escapes of all descriptions but the foremost was the tunnel named 'Harry' (Tom, Dick and George were the names) which was the most spectacular with an anticipated 250 people selected, given false papers and wearing civilian clothes were to escape on this particular night.

As fate would have it, a guard outside the compound noticed steam emanating from the crowded tunnel thus ending the attempt. The day after, Ron somehow upset the already infuriated Germans and with other POWs was sent to the cooler (solitary confinement) for his effort.

Ron's POW diary is a fascinating record of life in the camp - the lack of food, deep depression of not being part of the war effort, a feeling of guilt, not knowing when the war will end, missing loved ones, the list goes on. Humour however was displayed frequently in his and many others' log books and diaries, making light of their plight behind the wire. As the war was close to an end, Hitler demanded all allied prisoners be marched to more western parts of Europe away from potential Russian hands.

They trudged wearily on for weeks, ending only when the war finally came to its end in 1945.

Ron met my mum in Britain during his time there, mum being a WREN. They had married in Alexandra in Egypt and three weeks later Ron was a POW. Ron returned to Rhodesia after the war with his new bride, raising three children there, and returned to Australia in 1952. Ron lived for 84 years.



*Ronald Baines' cartoon depicting the day he was shot down.*



## Battle of Kapyong: A new ANZAC chapter

**It took place 70 years ago this year and is defined as an epic battle in Australia's military history. The days leading up to ANZAC Day is the anniversary of the Battle of Kapyong – a legendary fight involving Australian soldiers in the Korean War.**

**The significance of the Battle of Kapyong has contributed greatly to another chapter in the legend of ANZAC.**

On the night of April 22, 1951, Chinese forces launched a major offensive against United Nations forces defending the South Korean capital, Seoul.

The next morning the 27th British Commonwealth Brigade (including the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment) was ordered to the valley of the Kapyong River about 60 kilometres north-east of Seoul, where South Korean forces were being forced back.

During a night of fierce fighting and throughout the day on April 24, the Australians and a Canadian battalion, supported by a New Zealand artillery regiment, stalled the Chinese advance before it eventually withdrew after dark.

By the afternoon of April 25 the Chinese at Kapyong were exhausted and made no further attacks.

The battle came at a cost with 32 men killed, 59 wounded and three missing (taken prisoner).



*Penning letters to loved ones back home was an important part of a soldier's life in Korea. Despite being ankle deep in water on the Kansas line, Pte Syd Webster, from Mandalong, takes time to write a letter having spent nine months in Korea. He left his family timber cutting business four years earlier to join the Army. Pte Webster is a member of the Signals Platoon 3RAR. Here he is in a forward wireless control post during a period of heavy rain*

## Battle of Long Tan claimed 18 Aussie lives

One of the best-known Australian battles of the Vietnam War was at Long Tan on August 18, 1966 – 55 years ago this year.

The battle saw the action of 105 Australians and a three-man New Zealand artillery team against a Viet Cong (North Vietnamese) force estimated between 1500 and 2500. The Battle of Long Tan was one of the heaviest engagements of the war and remains one of the few battles in military history to be won against such odds.

D Company, 6 RAR Battalion, was sent into the Long Tan rubber plantation and came under heavy machine-gun fire and mortar attacks.

After almost 3 hours of fighting, reinforcements from A Company arrived in armoured personnel carriers (APC), then B Company also arrived and engaged. Seven APCs arrived and the extra firepower finally stopped the enemy.

There were 18 Australians killed – 17 from D Company and one from the 1st APC Squadron – and 21 wounded.

The Viet Cong insurgents left 245 dead and many more wounded.



*General J. van Fleet, General Officer, 8th US Army inspects members of the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), when bestowing the Presidential Citation in recognition of the unit's action at Kapyong.*

For their contribution to this action, 3 RAR was awarded a US Presidential Citation.

Fighting in the Korean War ended with the signing of an armistice on July 27, 1953. Australian forces remained in Korea in a peace-keeping role until 1957.

The Korean War started on 25 June 1950 when communist North Korea launched an invasion of South Korea.

More than 18,000 Australian sailors, soldiers and air force personnel served during the Korean War, including 50 nurses.

Of those more than 1500 were injured, 340 killed, 30 taken prisoner and 43 are still listed as missing in action.

The United States lost more than 36,000 service personnel. Millions of Korean and Chinese soldiers and civilians were also killed.



*Here's cheers to freedom!*

Private T. Hollis, A Company, 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), of Enmore, NSW (right), and Pte Keith R. Gwyther, D Company, 3RAR, of Leongatha, Victoria, celebrate their return to freedom, with a drink outside the hospital ward at the Britannia Camp in South Korea.

Both had been Prisoners of War (POWs) and were released on August 9, 1953.

Pte Hollis was captured at Inchon sector on January 21, 1951 and Pte Gwyther was captured at Kapyong April 24, 1951.



*Original soldiers of D Company, 6th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR), together again to mark the 3rd anniversary of the company's epic battle at Long Tan. The Diggers were at the landing zone before marching back into the Long Tan rubber plantation for a commemorative service at the memorial cross.*



# THE SPIRIT OF ANZAC

## Rats under siege but still smiling

It is 80 years ago since Australians fought their first major land battle in World War Two and earned a nickname which would remain part of the ANZAC legend forever more.

Australians fighting in the Siege of Tobruk in 1941 were told “no surrender, no retreat” and bravely held out against German General Erwin Rommel’s powerful assault.

These soldiers became known as the Rats of Tobruk, a nickname given to them because German radio propaganda broadcaster “Lord Haw Haw” described them as rats living in the ground.



*The smiling faces of Diggers, Cpl Alex McHutchison (left) and Pte Patrick McKenna, are members of the famous Rats of Tobruk who dug in and never gave up against fierce German forces in the Siege of Tobruk.*

## 2021 ANZAC Day activities

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and Public Health Orders have sadly had an impact on some of the local ANZAC Day services again this year. While many people won’t be able to attend a service this year, I hope we’ll all acknowledge the day in our own unique way, just as we did last year when so many of us silently greeted the dawn from our front yards and driveways. The services below are correct as at April 2, but please be aware that things may have changed between then and now and times should be checked with your local RSL sub-branch.

### “LEST WE FORGET”

#### **BOOLAROO-SPEERS POINT**

No service or march.

#### **CARDIFF**

Invited guests only.

5am Dawn Service at Cardiff RSL.

4.45am march, restricted to Cardiff RSL sub-branch veterans. Form up at corner of Main and Macquarie roads, proceed to memorial at Cardiff RSL.

#### **DOYALSON-WYEE**

5am Dawn Service at the cenotaph outside the club.

March starting at 8.30am in Wentworth Ave, followed by main service at the cenotaph about 9am.

#### **MORISSET**

6am Dawn Service outside Dora Creek Workers Club.

Main Service at 9.30am. No march this year.

#### **RATHMINES**

12.45pm march to memorial followed by service at 1pm.

#### **RYHOPE**

No service this year.

#### **TERALBA**

No service or march.

#### **TORONTO**

No march to Goffet Park this year.

Sub-branch members holding their own private memorial service by invitation only.

#### **WANGI WANGI**

5.30am Dawn Service at the War Memorial at Wangi RSL Club.

10.00am March from corner of Puna Rd and Dobell Drive to the war memorial (march participation by invitation only).

Main service will follow the march at about 10.30am. Historic vehicle display on the RSL foreshore all day.

PLEASE NOTE: All times and venues have been supplied by various RSL Sub-branch officials. Care has been taken to ensure as many services as possible have been included and were correct at the time of publication. For verification of other services please contact your local RSL Sub-branch.