

SUB-BRANCH REPORT

Since the last "Insight" the RSL sub-Branch has been very active with the ANZAC Commemoration activities, NSW RSL State Congress and State RSL matters, important support to the forthcoming Invictus Games and various other sub-Branch events.

As I mentioned in the last Insight, the Invictus Games is an international multi-sporting event for wounded and injured service personnel and veterans. Invictus is Latin for "unconquered" or "undefeated", and participation greatly assists these veterans on their road to recovery. The Games were created by Prince Harry and, as you are aware, this year will be held in Sydney from 20th to 27th October at various venues. The sub-Branch is and has been a strong supporter of this inspirational event. After many months working through the detail with Defence and the RSL State Branch, the sub-Branch was finally able to make our long-awaited donation of \$25,000 in support of the Australian veteran competitors to be used, as required, in their selection, training and competing in the Games and to assist their families to attend to support them. Additionally, under the guiding hand of Cheryl Hill, our hard-working Welfare Manager, the ladies of the sub-Branch, wives and family of sub-Branch members have made over 50 Australian themed laundry / tote bags to help the RSL Auxiliary who are presenting some 550 bags to athletes of the visiting Invictus Games teams. The sub-Branch formally handed over these items to Pauline James, President of the RSL Auxiliary on Monday 9th July, at our General Meeting, in the presence the NSW Minister of Veterans Affairs, David Elliott MP.

The sub-Branch also filled a table of ten, with associated donation, and attended the Invictus Games "Make Your Mark" breakfast held at the RSL Club on Friday 15th June. An excellent function run by the Club for a good cause. Many highlights including a moving speech by Curtis McGrath,

OAM Paralympic Gold Medallist and 2018 Invictus Games Sydney Ambassador, who was a combat engineer who lost both his legs in Afghanistan in 2012. There was also an interesting panel discussion with Ed Jenkins (a Rugby Sevens champion), Adrian Talbot (Executive Manager, Homes for Heroes) and Brigadier Pat Kidd, CBE (Chief Executive Officer Invictus Games Sydney 2018) and confident speeches by some of our local youth, including Olivia Christie, daughter of Annemarie and Ben (a sub-Branch member). I was able to formally announce that the sub-Branch was donating a further \$20,000 to the Australian International Military Games Limited (AIMG), who organise and run the Invictus Games. Thus, with this donation and previous ones, the sub-Branch's total financial donations to the Invictus Games is \$55,500.

On that same Friday, the Australian Invictus Games Team of 72 was announced on the steps of the Opera House. And that evening, my wife, Dee, and I had the privilege of attending the Australian Invictus Games Team Announcement Dinner at the RSL LifeCare's "Home for Veterans" in Narrabeen. I had the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of our sub-Branch and introduce the Sitting Volleyball and Swimming teams, and can advise that our sub-Branch support was mentioned a few times and is much appreciated. We had an opportunity to talk to team members and support staff – most inspirational.

Recently, on Wednesday 15th August, members of the sub-Branch conducted a day visit to the Australian Invictus Games Team in training at the Narrabeen Sports Centre combined with a visit to the excellent museum at the "Home for Veterans" Narrabeen RSL LifeCare Retirement village. Our members watched the Sitting Volleyball Team in training, and had an opportunity to mix and have lunch with the athletes. They met with some team



members who had benefited directly from the largess of our donations including being provided with specialised equipment for them to compete in their chosen events – the athletes were all most appreciative of our support.

On Thursday 2nd August, Colonel Don Tait, OAM and myself represented the sub-Branch at the launch by Minister Elliott, of the Invictus Games online education package at Baulkham Hills High School. It was a well-orchestrated event and the School must be congratulated by the way they have totally got behind the Invictus Games. Just google “Baulkham Hills High School Invictus Games” and see how a local school can make such a significant contribution to spreading the Invictus spirit – well done!

The sub-Branch will have a large contingent at the Invictus Games Closing Ceremony on Saturday 27th October as well as many members attending the various sporting events during the week. We strongly encourage all the members of our community to get behind this inspirational event by attending and supporting each and every competitor from all the various countries attending. Their competing alone is victory against the odds. You can find out more information by visiting www.invictusgames2018.org.

Our ANZAC Commemoration activities in April this year were blessed by three magnificent speakers; Dr Brendan Nelson, AO Director of the Australian War Memorial at the Sunday Service, Colonel Robert Lording, Deputy Commander 8 Brigade, at the ANZAC Sunday Lunch and Brigadier Susan Coyle, CSC, DSM Commander of 6 Brigade for the ANZAC Dawn Service. Each provided very different approaches to the subject of ANZAC and commemoration but all were very moving and much appreciated by their respective audiences. I have had many people comment on the quality of their orations and each of their speeches are presented in the June 2018 edition of the

Veteran (you can find them here at <https://www.chrslsubbranch.org.au/the-veteran-magazine>). The ANZAC Sunday Service on 22nd April included a vehicle display with the Vietnam Bus (NAMBUS), jeeps from The Military Vehicles Association and the World War 2 heritage Matilda tank, ACE, from the Lancers Association. Many of our audience took the opportunities to look over the displays and they added another interesting dimension to our Sunday service activity. In the year of the Australian Invictus Games, we added the poignant “Invictus Poem” which was wonderfully read by Cadet Sergeant Clarissa Lu. A short notice addition was the “Soul of Australia” poem delivered in the heartrending deep tones of Kamahl.

Once again, our Senior School ANZAC Ambassadors did themselves, their families and schools, and our community proud through their assured presentations of aspects of the Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux. Well done to our Ambassadors; Anna Antonito, from Kellyville High, Michael Dell’Aquila, from Marian College, Cali Doyle, from Hills Grammar and Jesse Krauksts-Garofano, from Oakhill College. Our thanks to the team that selected, prepared and supported them through the process including Mayor Dr Michelle Byrne, stalwart supporters Bev Jordan and Bryan Mullan (who coordinated it all), Don Tait, Phill Evenden and Gareth McCray, who ran his usual valuable session at 2CH to develop their presentation skills and presence. Of interest, Gareth had two of our 2017 ANZAC Ambassadors, Caitlin McDonald and Hannah Barratt, join him in his radio commentary of the ANZAC Day events at 2CH.

This year our Dawn Service was live streamed with many hundred views to date including one from Italy (a relation of one of our ANZAC Ambassadors). This enabled those who couldn’t attend to watch the Service as it happened or to view it later. Our Welfare Team provided all the relevant access details to the many Retirement Villages and

Nursing Homes and other organisations that the team supports and visits. This is an important addition to our commemoration activities and substantially increases its accessibility to our Community. You can watch a replay of our Dawn Services here: <https://www.chrslsubbranch.org.au/>.

Many thanks, as always, to the myriad organisations and people involved in supporting and coordinating our various ANZAC activities including the numerous sub-Branch members who willingly gave of their time. We were pleased to have contingents from HMAS Adelaide, under the command of Captain Jon Early, CSC, and RAAF Base Richmond in attendance on ANZAC Sunday. A special thanks to the State Emergency Service (SES), our local Police, St John Ambulance, 1st / 15th Royal NSW Lancers under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Scott Francis, 322 (City of Ryde) Squadron Australian Air Force Cadets, the dedicated staff of the Castle Hill RSL Club, the Castle Hill RSL Pipe Band, the Castle Hill Baptist Singers, David Sanders (for the National anthems), the various representatives from our local community. I also thank those numerous sub-Branch members who provided invaluable service by representing veterans and speaking at the many and various ANZAC activities at the many schools and local organisation we support throughout the District.

Brian Walters and I attended the RSL State Congress at Albury from Sunday 20th to Wednesday 23rd May. This Congress was of critical importance in plotting our way through the significant challenges that face the NSW RSL. Some excellent presentations were provided throughout including from our Patron, the State Governor (His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley), the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) (Air Chief Marshall Mark Binskin, a few days before his retirement and with the challenge of speaking immediately prior to Dr Nelson), Dr Brendan Nelson (in an especially stirring speech), John Hutcheson from Legacy, Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC) Assistant Commissioner – Charity Services (David Locke), NSW Minister for Veteran Affairs (David Elliott, who flagged, amongst

other things, positive changes to the State RSL Act), and State Opposition representative (Member for Campbelltown, Mr Greg Warren). There was a particularly poignant address by War Widow, Gwen Cherne, on Wednesday morning. The consistent theme from all of those speaking was the importance of the League to our Nation and our responsibility to veterans and to broader Australia. As such, we must reset our values and regain the trust we once held.

State RSL President, James Brown, and Treasurer, Phillip Chin, presented good reports, and provided plenty of opportunity for questions from the floor (and there were many). James emphasised a figure that we must strive to address and that being 85, the number of veterans who took their life in 2017 – this is a “wake up call” for the League and we must do all in our power to drive this figure down for humanities sake and to honour their service.

On Wednesday 28th March 2018 the Honourable David Elliott MP, Member for Baulkham Hills, Minister for Counter Terrorism, Corrections and Veterans Affairs, and one of our sub-Branch members, hosted a “Gold Class” experience of the film “Twelve Strong” at Castle Towers. The film was based on the book “Horse Soldiers” by Doug Stanton, which tells the story of the first US Special Forces and CIA operatives into Afghanistan in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks. A total of 30 of our members and partners enjoyed a wonderful night’s entertainment with plentiful food, good company and an excellent, and deafening, film. Many thanks to David and his trusty assistant, Alice, for making it all happen.

Our mid-year lunch was conducted on Sunday 17th June at the Club. We had a chance to acknowledge the great support we get from St John Ambulance with the attendance of Superintendent Jennie Page and husband Stephen. Colonel Don Tait, OAM was the key note speaker who provided an eye witness perspective and heart felt presentation on the Battles of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral in the year of the 50th Anniversary. We also had the opportunity to acknowledge Don being awarded the Unit Citation for Gallantry for

his contribution to the battle and Noreen for her long-standing support of Don. We were honoured by the attendance of our older veterans Lance Futcher, World War 2 Navy (who sadly just recently passed away aged almost 92) and Eric Callow and Ray Willis, Korean War. A most convivial event with wonderful food and even finer company. Many thanks again to Barry Pareezer for his sterling organisational efforts and the staff of the Castle Hill RSL Club for their terrific service.

Recently the Premier conducted separate receptions at Government House for Korean War veterans on Saturday 7th July and Vietnam Veterans on Saturday 11th August. Both events were exceptional with good representation from the sub-Branch. Excellent, appropriate and short speeches by the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Premier and members of the respective veterans' communities. The vista over the harbour and venue were sublime, food and beverages delectable, and the music from the musicians of the Corrective Services Band perfect. A wonderful time had by all and many thanks go to the Premier for hosting it, the Minister for putting it all together and the NSW Governor and his wife for providing their humble abode and support to the event.

On Sunday 11th November 2018 we commemorate the centenary of the end of the War to end all Wars, World War 1 – essentially the end to our Centenary of ANZAC commemorations which we have conducted since April 2015. There are two events you should put in your diaries. Our commemoration at the Castle Hill RSL Club at 11am. This year it will be held inside the Club and we expect a large crowd. In the evening the Centenary of the Armistice Finale will be conducted at the Bella Vista Farm Park from 6:30pm to 8:30pm. Tickets will be required for entry – they will be free and available online prior. The feature activity will be the 1812 Overture played by the Castle Hill RSL Youth Orchestra accompanied by artillery guns firing blanks manned by members of 9 Regiment,

Royal Australia Artillery. More information will be available closer to these events.

Of course, throughout this period our army of marvellous sub-Branch volunteers have continued their sterling work in supporting our veterans and families of departed veterans through welfare, pensions and funeral services and support and commemorative activities. These services are the bedrock of our organisation and I thank all for their continued work.

As always, I would like to thank the Castle Hill RSL Club for their ongoing support, evidenced in abundance during the ANZAC period and in supporting the Invictus Games, and our close relationship. I would encourage all the many thousands of members of the Castle Hill RSL Club to vote at the forthcoming election for Board members. As veterans, we have served to protect the freedoms we enjoy as Australians – democracy is one of those freedoms and you should exercise it in having your say in who should be the directors of your local Club.

All the best,

Brigadier Phillip K.H. Bridie, AM

President, Castle Hill & Districts RSL sub-Branch

“Lest We Forget”