



Pittwater RSL Sub-Branch Newsletter



July 2023 - Number 38

50th ANNIVERSARY
AUSTRALIA VIETNAM

Pittwater RSL Sub-Branch

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The next Newsletter will be
published in October 2023.

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President's Report

Vale Chris Christensen and John Ward OAM. John was a past Treasurer of our Sub-Branch.

Congratulations to Sub-Branch Member, **Julie Emerson OAM**. This was announced on Monday 12 June in King Charles III 2023 Birthday Honours. Well done, Julie!

Centaur. On 14 May Northern Beaches District Council hosted the 80th Anniversary Commemorative Service of the Sinking of the Hospital Ship, Centaur. Please see pages 2 and 3 in this Newsletter. The service was held at the Lost At Sea Memorial, Robert Dunn Reserve, Mona Vale.

At the NBDC on 16 May, I was elected Vice President of the NBDC.

On Wednesday 31 May, I was fortunate to attend Rory Amon's induction at NSW Parliament House. I was acting carer for David and Jean Hay OAM. We sat on the floor of Parliament House. Please see page 4 for further details and a photograph.

On 02 June, along with Sandra May, Darren Crabb, John Chambers, Terry Jones, Bob Wood and Jean Hay OAM we attended the 81st commemorative service for the **Defence of Sydney** at North Head, Manly. It was a spectacular day, the sun shone brightly and John Platt CSC was the MC for the service. James Griffin MP and his PA, Adele Heasman, were outstanding in their organisation. Paul Fenn, student from Mosman Performing Arts School, presented a superb rendition of a sailor killed on the HMAS Kuttabul. Please refer to page 4 for photos.

NBDC is hosting two events for the **50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War**. On Friday 18 August (Long Tan day) a chapel service will be held at the War Veterans Chapel at 2pm, everyone is welcome.

On Sunday 20 August, Vietnam Veterans Northern Group will host a parade, service and lunch at Palm Beach RSL Club. Form up at Iluka Street at 10:30am and march off at

10:45am. There will be a road closure. Two pipers will lead the march followed by Vietnam Veterans and other Sub-Branch members.

The Service will be at 11:00am. Anyone wishing to lay a wreath should contact the organising committee, Mark Ferguson OAM at Palm Beach RSL Club. The committee comprises Mark Ferguson OAM, Chair, Tamara Sloper-Harding OAM, and Deborah Carter. Vietnam Veterans will be given first priority to attend lunch. Please contact the Sub-Branch office for further details.

Commemorative Medallion and Certificate to honour Vietnam War Veterans.

Vietnam War veterans, or their widows or family members (with immediate family members taking precedence) are entitled to the medallion and certificate. Please note, only one medallion is available per Vietnam War veteran.

For more information about the medallion and certificate, please visit the Department of Veterans Affairs website at www.dva.gov.au/vietnam50.

Sandra is producing a Vietnam 50th Anniversary Special Edition Newsletter which will be available after the various services.

After 146 days in Royal North Shore Hospital intensive care, Sub-Branch member Brett Mace has now been transferred to Arcadia Hospital Warriewood for rehabilitation. Best wishes, Brett, for your recovery journey.

A big thank you to Sandra for this Newsletter, and I wish Sandra and Darren a happy and safe holiday.



Lest We Forget
Regards,

Deborah Carter

Deborah Carter
President

80th Anniversary of the sinking of Australian Hospital ship, “*Centaur*” Commander Dr Douglas Falconer, RAN

It is with great honour that I deliver the Commemorative address to mark the 80th Anniversary of the sinking of the *Centaur*.

I am Commander Douglas Falconer, a Doctor in the Royal Australian Navy, and I have been honoured to deliver the Commemorative address to mark the 80th Anniversary of the sinking of the *Centaur*. and I have been fortunate on a number of occasions to march on ANZAC day under the banner of the *Centaur*. A banner that honoured the past and present serving members of the Navy Health Services.

AHS (or Australian Hospital Ship) *Centaur*, was a motor passenger ship originally built in Scotland in 1923 that was converted for use as a hospital ship.

But interestingly in 1941 prior to its commission as a hospital ship it had rescued survivors of the German auxiliary cruiser *Kormoran* after its battle with HMAS *Sydney*.

Although initially under British Admiralty control in January 1943, *Centaur* was handed over to the Australian military for conversion to a hospital ship, as her small size made her suitable for operating in Maritime Southeast Asia.

The refit included the installation of medical facilities and repainting with Red Cross markings. She was equipped with an operating theatre, dispensary, two wards (located on the former cattle decks), and a dental surgery, along with quarters for 75 crew and 65 permanent medical staff.

On Wednesday 12 May 1943, On only her second voyage as a new hospital ship the *Centaur* left Sydney bound for Port Moresby to embark casualties from the Buna and Gona battles.

On board were - 75 crew of the Merchant Navy including the ships pilot; 64 medical staff which included 12 nurses of the Australian Army Nursing Service; 18 doctors; 149 men of the 2/12th Field Ambulance; 44 attached personnel heading for a tour in Papua New Guinea.

There was no doubt the *Centaur* was a hospital ship. As it steamed through the night with all the lights on, fully illuminated. Running down the sides of the vessel were thick green stripes broken by three large red crosses. Painted on the bow was the number 47. This was the *Centaur's* registration number with the international Red Cross and indicated her status as a hospital ship.

At 4.10 am on Friday, 14 May, the *Centaur* was east of the Cape Moreton Light House off the coast of Queensland when she was torpedoed by an unsighted submarine. The torpedo struck the portside oil fuel tank creating a hole 8 to 10 metres wide, igniting the fuel, and setting the ship on fire.

Many of those on board were immediately killed by concussion or perished in the inferno. *Centaur* quickly took on water, rolled to port, then sank bow-first,

submerging completely in less than three minutes. The rapid sinking prevented the deployment of lifeboats or the chance to issue an SOS.

Of the 332 people on board only 64 were rescued. Most of the crew and passengers were asleep at the time of attack and had little chance to escape. **268 souls were lost.**

Those that survived spent 36 hours in the water, using barrels, wreckage, and two damaged lifeboats for flotation.

Sister Ellen Savage, was the only one of the nursing sisters on board to survive.

The suction of the sinking *Centaur* dragged Sister Savage down into a whirlpool of moving metal and wood. Her ribs, nose and palate were broken, her ear drums perforated, and she sustained soft tissue injuries. She was then she was propelled to the surface in the middle of an oil slick.



So, huddled together, the survivors spent the daylight hours of Friday 14 May on their makeshift rafts. In this crisis however, there was optimism and hope. A Seaman named Morris led them in vigorous singing of 'Roll Out The Barrel' and 'Waltzing Matilda'. Captain Salt, a Torres Strait pilot, despite his severe burns, kept assuring everyone that rescue must be on the way.

The only surviving doctor Lieutenant Colonel Outridge and Sister Savage did what they could for the wounded. Sharks circled them and occasionally nosed the rafts.

Though injured herself, Sister Savage through her motivation and great help and caring of the wounded was awarded the George Medal for her actions.

On the afternoon of Saturday 15 May, 36 hours after the *Centaur* had slipped to the bottom, the American destroyer USS Mugford picked up the survivors 40 miles east of Cape Moreton.



Centaur continued

Clearly a Hospital Ship, the sinking of the *Centaur* was regarded as an atrocity. The Australian Government delivered an official protest to Japan over the incident.

For many years there was no acknowledgement of responsibility for the incident, and the War Crimes Tribunal could not identify the responsible submarine. However, the Japanese official war history makes clear that it was submarine 1-177.

Since the end of the war, many people have pushed to locate *Centaur* as a way of providing some solace to those family and friends who had lost loved ones, and to possibly answer some the unresolved questions surrounding its sinking.

A search led by David Mearns, who had previously lead the team that found the wrecks of HMAS *Sydney* and HSK *Kormoran*, discovered *Centaur's* wreck on 20 December 2009.

Centaur's resting place was located 30 nautical miles off the southern tip of Moreton Island, at a depth of

approximately 2000 meters, off Queensland's south-east coast.

Few disasters during the Second World War touched Australians as deeply as the loss of the *Centaur*. In 1943 the *Centaur* quickly became a symbol of Australian determination to win the war.

At Caloundra, Queensland, a memorial on a cliff points out towards the *Centaur's* final resting place. Another memorial was unveiled at Point Danger, Coolangatta, in 1993 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the sinking.

Today we mark the 80th Anniversary of the sinking. And although many years have past we cannot forget the sacrifice that many Australian men and women have made to defend their country.

The *Centaur*, this ship symbolises the courage of Australians in war and peace and reminds us of all who served and have no graves but the sea.

Lest we forget



This service was a Northern Beaches District Council initiative - Bob Lunnon, President and Vince Williams CSC, Secretary. Approximately 60 people from the northern beaches Sub-Branches attended, including Ray James OAM, RSL NSW President; Pauline James OAM, RSL NSW Auxiliaries State Co-ordinator; Rory Amon MP; Dr Sophie Scamps MP; Shaun Parren and Chaplain Bob Durbin. The service took place at the Robert Dunn Reserve, Narrabeen Park Parade, Mona Vale on Sunday 14 May 2023 at 3pm.



*Pittwater RSL Sub-Branch assisted with the arrangements.
We thank Jason Manning CEO, Pittwater RSL Club Ltd, for providing the marquee, chairs and lectern.
Thank you to our photographers: Michael Mannington OAM Community Photography,
Dale Cohen, Northern Beaches Advocate, and Sandra May*

Rory Amon MP - Inaugural Speech at NSW Parliament House - 31 May 2023

Sandra

On Wednesday 31 May, we were fortunate to witness a special day for Rory - his inaugural speech at NSW Parliament House, Sydney.

Approximately 150 family, friends and supporters were in attendance. Rory's 30 minute speech was measured, eloquent and, in parts, amusing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzCw80WylIU>

Afternoon tea was served in the Stranger's Dining Room.

Sandra, Rory, Deborah, Darren, Scott
Photo courtesy of Dale Cohen,
Publisher & CEO Northern Beaches Advocate



Defence of Sydney Commemorative Service - Friday 02 June 2023

Sandra



Jon Black CEO RSL NSW (on behalf of Ray James OAM), NBDC representatives:
Deborah Carter Vice President, Shaun Parren Vice President, Bob Lunnun President



Darren and Sandra with John Platt CSC

On Friday 02 June, Deborah Carter, Terry Jones, Bob Wood, Darren Crabb and I attended the 81st Anniversary of Defence of Sydney Commemorative Service. The night of 31 May and morning of 01 June 1942, war came to Sydney Harbour with the Japanese sinking of HMAS Kuttabul, killing 21 RAN service members. Sub-Branch member, John Chambers also attended representing the Sub Mariners Association. Another member, Gwen Sneesby, aged 99 years, was commemorated in the organiser's speech. Gwen was extremely fortunate, as 31 May 1942 was her rostered night off from the Degaussing Station at Bradleys Head.

WELCOME TO RECENT NEW MEMBERS

Affiliates - Margarete Douglas, Marta Onslow, Kate O'Neill, Janelle Strawbridge and Marcia Gravenor.

Service - Philip Jamieson



Gwen Sneesby on her 99th birthday - 17 June.

Sandra May with the very bright and chatty Gwen on the day! Gwen is a Living Treasure!



July

13, 1953

HMAS Tobruk begins a two-week patrol of the northern part of Korea's east coast. This was the Tobruk's last patrol before the war in Korea ended in late July 1953.

07, 1942

Horn Island Bombed. Horn Island was bombed by Japanese aircraft nine times during the Second World War.

17–18, 1918

Lieutenant A.C. Borella VC. Lieutenant A.C. Borella, 26th Battalion, originally from Borung, Victoria, wins the Victoria Cross at Villers-Bretonneux, France. At 36 Borella was the oldest member of the first AIF to receive this award.

August

03, 1916

Battle of Romani. The Australian Light Horse was involved in the battle of Romani, Egypt. The battle signalled the end of the defence of the Suez Canal and the beginning of a bolder offensive strategy against the Turks in the Middle East.

09, 1915

Corporal W. Dunstan, VC. Corporal W. Dunstan, 7th Battalion, originally from Ballarat, Victoria, wins the Victoria Cross at Lone Pine, Gallipoli.

09, 1945

Nagasaki bombed. Nagasaki was the second Japanese city to suffer an atomic attack. Japan surrendered shortly afterwards.

September

01, 1939

Germany invades Poland. The German invasion of Poland led to the declaration of war against Germany by the United Kingdom and France and began the Second World War.

10, 1943

Italy signs armistice with the Allies. Prior to this the Italians had been fighting with the Germans. Despite the Italian surrender the Allies faced more than a year of difficult fighting against the Germans in Italy.

19, 1943

2/6th Independent Company capture Kaiapit, New Guinea. Kaiapit was needed for the airstrip that was to be constructed there once the Japanese had been driven from the area. Kaiapit became a base for the 7th Division's advance up the Markham Valley.



CPL William Dunstan VC. Photo AWM.

Full biography:

<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dunstan-william-6059>



LT Albert Chalmers Borella VC. Photo AWM.

Full biography:

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P10676220>



July August September

Sandra May



JULY

Christopher Bedwell	07
Shane Fender	07
Don Tierney	08
Andrew Thomson-Ko	09
Mitch Harmer	13
Dorothy Clark	20
Jim Colbeck	21
Deborah Carter	23
John Kaye	25
Rory Amon	25

AUGUST

Sam Steel	05
Walter Nicholls	14
Brett Mace	15
Brian Heal	16
Geoffrey Jones	16
Kim Brownlie	26
Bernard O'Neill	27

SEPTEMBER

Cliff Gravenor	02
Michael Mannington OAM	16
Darren Crabb	17
Robert Crowe	18
Roberta Conroy	22
Brian Strawbridge	25

Military Vehicles Experience - The Mill Courtyard, 6 Bundaroo Street, Bowral, New South Wales 2576.

This unique experience will assist the forgotten people of Vietnam, the orphaned children, the returned Soldiers suffering PTS. Your donation for the cost of the drive will also include a visit to the Nui Dat Base at the Mill. This is the home where they preserve historic vehicles which were built for WARS but now are used for LOVE and COMPASSION.

Military Vehicle is about hope and grew from the dream of hope. Hope for the forgotten people of Vietnam. The Vietnam War 1962-75 was very costly in the human toll it took on the Vietnamese people. After US withdrawal, millions of Vietnamese refugees attempted to flee by boat. Vinh Tran's sister was one of those refugees. Fast forward to the present, Vinh found a unique way to use the relics of war for a greater good. He would bring army jeeps to Australia to raise awareness and charity that helps war affected orphaned children in Vietnam, with food, medical supplies and support.

For further information, call Vinh or John, mobile: 0405 397 345 or email: info@military-vehicle.org

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-04-21/vietnam-war-vehicles-bowral-restored-for-fundraising-and-healing/100066190>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0H_vKBJ4lrkRESERVED

I spoke with Vinh Tran in April and he assured me they have planned a few special events for the 50th Anniversary in August. Darren and I visited in February this year, and thought it was worth a visit - they also organise special tours. *Sandra*



Vinh Tran with one of his imported military vehicles at his display in Bowral. (ABC Illawarra: Justin Huntsdale)

VALE

With great sadness, we report the passing of our former Sub-Branch Members

Chris Christensen

17 December 1939 - 04 May 2023

John Ward OAM

14 February 1939 - 22 May 2023

LEST WE FORGET

ON THE HORIZON

July - December 2023 (Subject to change)

All monthly General Meetings will be held in The Meeting Place



Sunday 02 July	10:30am	General Meeting
Sunday 06 August	10:30am	General Meeting
Friday 18 August	2:00pm	Vietnam Veteran's Day 50th Anniversary War Vet's Chapel
Sunday 20 August	10:30am	Vietnam Veteran's Day (Northern) Form up at Iluka Road, Palm Beach
Sunday 20 August	10:45am	Veterans to lead the parade to Palm Beach RSL Club
Sunday 20 August	11:00am	Vietnam Veteran's Service. Lunch will follow.
Sunday 03 September	10:30am	General Meeting. 2024 Diaries - orders will be taken
Sunday 01 October	10:30am	General Meeting
Sunday 05 November	10:30am	General Meeting
Saturday 11 November	10:15am	Remembrance Day Service. Form up lower car park.
Saturday 11 November	12:00pm	Refreshments in the Distillery
Sunday 03 December	10:30am	General Meeting
Sunday 03 December	12:00pm	Christmas Lunch in the Auditorium

Executive Committee and Sub-Branch Office

Deborah Carter	President, Welfare Officer	0414 470 913
Terry Jones	Vice President	0466 892 771
Sandra May	Secretary, Newsletter Editor	0417 944 244
Bob Wood	Treasurer	0409 712 349

Support Team

Inese Carrodus	Office Assistant	0449 525 316
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If urgent, please call any member of the Executive.