

SEA TRAGEDIES REMEMBERED ON VP DAY



During the 2023 VP Day service we paid tributes to those who lost their lives in the sinking of the Australian hospital ship *Centaur* and the Japanese prisoner of war vessel *Montevideo Maru*.

The *Centaur* was sunk off the coast of Queensland on 14 May 1943, on her way to assist soldiers wounded or taken ill during the Kokoda campaign. Of the 332 personnel on board, only 64 survived, among them Sister Eileen Savage from Concord Hospital, the only nurse to be rescued.

The wreckage of the *Montevideo Maru* was discovered off the Philippines coast earlier this year. It had been torpedoed by a US submarine on 1 July 1942. Carrying no identification that it had Allied prisoners on board, the ship appeared to be a legitimate target. More than a thousand prisoners from 14 countries died, including 850 Australians who had been captured when the Japanese seized Rabaul. It remains Australia's largest loss of life at sea.

Among those to lay wreaths during the service were the NSW Minister for Veterans, David Harris, KTMW Chair Jennifer Collins, Canada Bay Mayor Angelo Tsirekas, guest speaker Lt Col Orry Kirkham, Air Commodore Nick Osborne, Commodore Nick Frost, diplomatic corps representatives from New Zealand, USA and Turkey, and Federal and State Members of Parliament.

Lt Col Orry Kirkham in his VP Day address acknowledged his grandfather Sergeant Raymond Richard Kirkham, who had fought on the Kokoda Track but rarely spoke of his WWII experiences (see accompanying report)..

Two veterans of the New Guinea conflict took part in the service; Bruce Robertson (103), ex-RAAF, and Reg Chard (99), 55/53 Battalion, laid a wreath in front of the stage, accompanied by Richard Jones and Malcolm Knight on behalf of the *Centaur* Association.





MEMORIES OF A GRANDFATHER WHO SERVED

Guest speaker Lt Col Orry Kirkham told the 400 assembled guests that as each year passes, events such as the VP Day commemoration are increasingly important, giving us time to stop, pause and reflect, particularly thinking of the Pacific war.

“My connection to the Pacific is through Sergeant Raymond Richard Kirkham. He enlisted on 8 August 1940 in the 36th Infantry Battalion Militia. He arrived in Port Moresby in May 1942 just in time for a Japanese air raid on the harbour. Shortly after he transferred to the Australian and New Guinea Administrative Unit and took part in missions up and down the Kokoda Track. He came home in 1946, met my Nan, and they started a family across the harbour at Greenwich. I was young when he was old. My memories of him are good. He taught me how to fish and would wake me up early during Christmas holidays to head down to the beach and put a line in. “He was a frugal bloke. Nothing ever went to waste but I guess you learn that when you’re fighting in 1942 in Papua New Guinea. He was quiet too, and sometimes didn’t sleep well. Dad said he rarely spoke about the war but Poppa told him he spent a month in 1943 working for the



LT COL ORRY KIRKHAM

Graves Commission to locate and recover the bodies of Australian soldiers on the Track, to be buried in proper graves. Knowing what we know about the fighting that took place in villages such as Isurava, Deniki, Imita Ridge and Templeton’s Crossing, that would have been some terrible job. “I’ve read lots of books about the Pacific War and Kokoda and when I go to the War Memorial because of Pop, I spend a little more time in the Pacific wing. It’s hard to comprehend the scale of the sacrifice and the true brutality of this campaign. What

the soldiers, sailors, airmen and women of Australia had to do in the early 1940s I don’t think has many equals.

“They were fighting for us as a nation, to protect their families and loved ones and to preserve the Australian way of life. Those men and women won us a victory at great cost. Those costs were borne not just in Papua New Guinea but in many other countries, on the seas and in the skies above the oceans.

“It is a victory we must never fail to remember or appreciate.”

THANK YOU TO THE BULLDOGS



At the close of the VP Day service the Canterbury Bulldogs NRL club presented us with a donation of \$10,000 for which we are very grateful. This was the proceeds from the raffling of an ANZAC Round jersey earlier in the season. Representing the club were Greg Pickering (CEO Canterbury League Club), Diane Langmack OAM (general manager stakeholder engagement) and Aaron Warburton (Bulldogs CEO), seen here with David Harris MP, KTMW Chair Jennifer Collins AM, and board member Cr Angelo Tsirekas.

BROTHERS KILLED ON THE SAME DAY

One of the plaques in our Memorial Rose Garden offers an especially poignant insight into the heartache, loss and pain one particular family must have experienced when told that two brothers had been killed on the Kokoda Track within minutes of each other. The plaque records Private J.M. Simmonds and Corporal E. Simmonds of the 2/31st Battalion died on 10 November 1942 at Gorari.

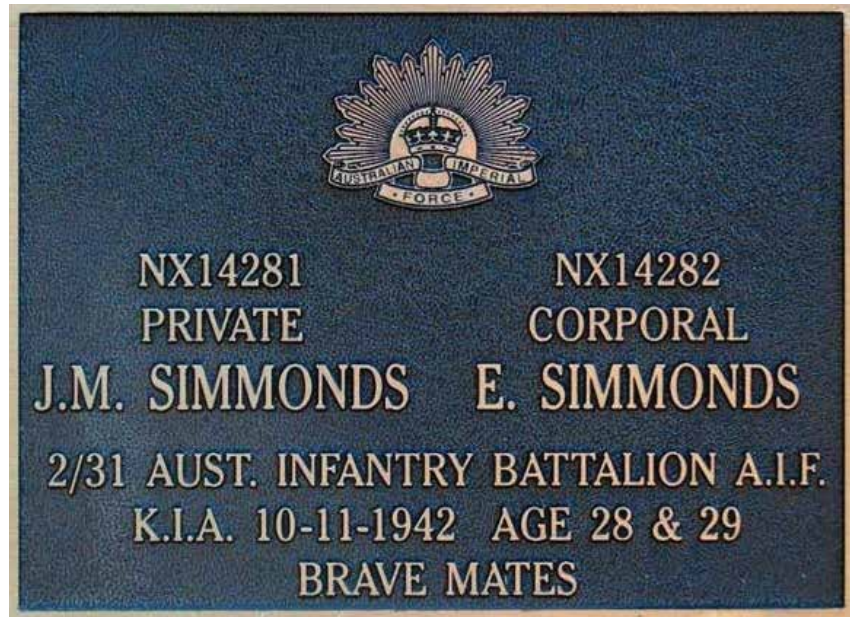
James Mountain ('Mount') and Edley ('Boy') Simmonds were part of a large farming family who lived at Pretoria in the small farming community of Warroo, some 33 kilometres west of Forbes, NSW. They were the fourth and fifth sons in a family of 13.

They enlisted at Forbes on 6 May 1940, and had the distinction of being allocated consecutive service numbers: James was NX14281 and Edley was NX14282.

The Forbes Advocate reported on 23 August 1940 details of the popular brothers and their farewell that had taken place a week before. A large crowd had assembled at their parents' property where they were honoured for their 'sterling and unselfish qualities' by family, friends and many ex-servicemen from the First AIF.

They served together throughout their time in the Army, first seeing action as part of the 7th Division's 25th Brigade, 2/31 Battalion D Company against Vichy French forces at Jezzine in Lebanon in June 1941.

Returning to Australia in early 1942, the boys were able to return home on leave, before the unit trained in Queensland and was then sent to New Guinea, disembarking at Port Moresby on 9 September



CORPORAL EDLEY SIMMONDS



PRIVATE JAMES SIMMONDS

1942 (around that time Edley was promoted to the rank of corporal).

A couple of months later the brothers were facing a determined and fierce rearguard fight by the retreating Japanese forces at Gorari, who had been ensnared in a pincer movement by the Australians. The fighting at Gorari was to be the last battle on the actual Track, before the Japanese were pushed back to the coastal beach heads.

On Tuesday 10 November, D Company of the 2/31st charged the entrenched enemy positions. Mount was hit by a sniper, and fell to his knees. A mate pushed him to the ground

(not knowing he was already killed), and Boy went to grab the Bren gun Mount had been holding. However, he too was hit by the same sniper and was killed instantly. In the brief but fierce battle, about a third of the company was killed or wounded. When official news was received by the family back in Australia, family descendants tell of the shock of receiving two telegrams on the same day bearing the fateful news.

The plaque in the Walkway's Rose Garden honouring the Simmonds brothers was provided by the 2/31 Association of NSW.





WATER FEATURE REPAIRED

Our water feature is running again! The pump which drives the water over the symbolic stone at the Memorial Centrepiece, and down the stream bed, had been out of action. Engineers declared it was beyond repair and we needed a new pump. This has been purchased and installed, with our thanks to Club Burwood which donated the funds required.



PETER WOODS OAM

Visitors to the Walkway will notice a smart new seat has been installed, adjacent to the flagpoles. This has been purchased as a permanent memorial to Peter Woods OAM, a driving force behind the creation of the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway, and a board member who contributed his wise counsel and energy. Peter, who died last year, was a long-serving mayor of Concord, which was later incorporated within Canada Bay Council.



THE WALKWAY IS NOW ILLUMINATED PROMINENTLY AT THE BRAYS BAY/CONCORD ROAD ENTRY BY LIGHTING INSTALLED BY THE CITY OF CANADA BAY. THANK YOU TO THE COUNCIL AND STAFF!

SCHOOL VISITS POPULAR

During the third school term we have welcomed more than 2000 school students to the Walkway, so they can experience the virtual reality program, meet our guides and discuss the Kokoda campaign at each of the memorial stations.

Senior students have come from Mount Druitt, Hurstville and Eastwood, while year 5 and 6 pupils have been in school groups from Randwick, Carlingford, Georges Hall, Birrong, Strathfield, Bass Hill, Maroubra and Bronte.

RSL sub-Branches have sponsored the visits by some schools, fulfilling their role in helping younger generations appreciate our military history.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

A simple wreath laying service will be held on Remembrance Day, Saturday 11 November, at 11.00 am. All are welcome to attend.

This will be preceded by one of our "Beyond the Battlefield" talks, at 9.45 am. Dr David W. Cameron will speak on "The other Isurava – the Battle for Abuari." This engagement, east of Isurava, initially involved the 53rd Battalion, with one Australian nominated for the Victoria Cross after the horrific fighting that occurred on 30 August 1942.