



THE LAST OF OUR WWII VETERAN GUIDES

Reg Chard OAM

31 October 1923 – 24 July 2026

The death of Reg Chard, aged 102, marked the end of a significant chapter in Australia's military history.

He was the last survivor of the troops who fought on the Kokoda Track, at Milne Bay and at Sanananda. He was also the last of the WWII veterans who for 30 years have been guides at the Memorial Walkway.

Tributes for Reg flowed from across the country. His story has been told many times in print, on television, and on radio. A vast number of Australians, many of them school students, have listened to Reg himself.

As KTMW director Alice Kang said in her eulogy at the memorial service on 3 September:

"Reg thrived in his role as a guide. He was a natural storyteller and loved sharing his experiences with the thousands of school students, community groups and sporting organisations who visited the Memorial.

He never seemed short of something to say."

Reg had made no secret of how he had been lost without any purpose in life when his wife Betty had died, and how he had overcome that depression by volunteering at the Walkway.

Brigadier Vince Williams, NSW State President of the RSL, touched on Reg's war service and the bouts of malaria that were to afflict him for the rest of his life.

"The conditions took an extraordinary physical toll. By the time Reg returned to Sydney in 1943, he had lost almost 30 kilograms. Yet perhaps the most remarkable part of Reg Chard's story is not simply that he endured those experiences. It is what he chose to do with them.

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"Reg carried the memory of the men with whom he served. He understood that he had been given something many of his mates had been denied – the opportunity to come home, to grow old, to build a family and to live a long life."

The memorial service included a video presentation of television interviews Reg had given, in which he argued publicly for government funding and recognition of the Walkway.

As Alice Kang explained:

"Reg was a straight shooter and was never backward in coming forward. He was also an avid advocate for the Memorial and was quite capable of

putting visiting politicians on the spot if he thought they were not doing enough to support it. That was Reg!

"Perhaps the greatest measure of Reg's life at the Memorial was not the number of tours he gave, or the number of people who heard his stories. It was the people he touched."

"Reg had a wonderful ability to connect with young people. He could stand in front of a group of school students and take them back in time — not through a textbook, but through the experiences of someone who had actually been there."

The service included the reading of the poem "Brothers in the

Mud" by students from Bethany College, and a performance of "The Call" by the choir from Strathfield North Public School. At the conclusion of the service the Chard family led guests in placing candles and poppies in front of a portrait of Reg as a gesture of gratitude, remembrance and farewell.

Brigadier Williams had expressed the feeling of everyone present when he paid this tribute:

"Reg belonged to a generation of Australians who rarely described themselves as heroes. But today, it falls to us to say what Reg himself may never have said."

"He was an extraordinary Australian."

KOKODA MOVIE NIGHT



Join us to celebrate our 30th Anniversary with this special Kokoda movie screening+talks event!

When: Saturday 31 October • 4.00–10.00pm

Where: Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway, Killoola St, Concord West

Cost: Free, but bookings for movie & talks through Eventbrite

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LOCAL ARTISTS FEATURED

School students responded enthusiastically when they were asked to contribute to the Commemorative Art Show over the weekend of 12-13 September.

The Drummoyne Art Society collated the exhibition, with its members supplying many of the artworks on display. The Five Dock Rotary Club provided refreshments on both days.



First prize went to Genessa Mieli From Rosebank College. Canada Bay mayor Michael Megna and KTMW chair Jennifer Collins AM, pictured with other prize winners, Georgia Saab from Enfield Public School and Stella Mullins from Bronte Public School.





LESSONS OF HISTORY ON VP DAY



The theme for the VP Day service this year was a tribute to those who cared for the troops, with a focus on the nurses who were killed or injured during WWII and the initial role of Concord Hospital as the 113th Australian General Hospital.

As Anthony Dombkins, the hospital's general manager, noted in his prologue, many of those treated in the wards had fought along the Kokoda Track, at Milne Bay and in other campaigns across New Guinea.



Guest speaker, Jason Yet-sen Li, the Member for Strathfield, representing Veterans Minister David Harris, threw

down a challenge to those present, asking whether we understand that love of country is not found in flag-waving or slogans, but in how we protect, value and honour the freedom secured in WWII.

"These moments remind us that history does not sleep," he said.

"It waits, watching what we choose to learn. The legacy of war is not just a lesson in loss, but a summons to conscience: to turn away from cruelty, resist the drift toward hatred, and keep lit the fragile, flickering flame of peace. Not peace as rhetoric. But peace as the daily, difficult work of empathy and restraint."



Mr Li related a personal story, describing how his grandfather had faced up to the Japanese when they invaded China.

"My parents were born in 1940s China, during the brutal Japanese occupation. Before the war, my grandfather had studied in Tokyo and lived with a Japanese family who he adored — and who adored him."

"In 1942, as a Japanese army unit advanced towards his village, he took my two-year-old mother by the hand and walked straight to the commander. A bayonet was held to his throat. Speaking in fluent Japanese, he told the officer about his studies, and about the people who had once welcomed him into their home. The commander listened. And then he gave the order: the village was not to be harmed."

"That story has stayed with my family for generations. And here in our community, in every language spoken on our streets, there are stories like these. Stories of suffering, yes — but also of grace, of courage and of hope."

"That is why VP Day still speaks to us. Not because war is glorious. Not because victory was easy. But because this day asks us to remember with open hearts and a shared purpose. And let me say this, especially to the young people here today: This is your history too. It is not something dusty and distant. It is the reason we live in peace. It is the reason you walk free."

CENTREPIECE TO BE CONSECRATED ON KOKODA DAY



This year's Kokoda Day commemoration service on Tuesday 3 November will have special significance as our guest of honour, Cardinal Sir John Ribat, Archbishop of Port Moresby, will consecrate the Memorial Centrepiece.

Cardinal Ribat was born in East New Britain, in 1957 and was ordained a priest in 1985, going on to serve parishes in Manila and Suva. He was appointed Archbishop of Port Moresby in 2008, assuming a pivotal role in the Catholic community of Papua New Guinea.

The pinnacle of Ribat's ecclesiastical career came in November 2016, when Pope Francis elevated him to the rank of cardinal. This historic event made Ribat the first cardinal from PNG, a significant achievement not only for him but for his nation.

Cardinal Ribat's achievements extend beyond his religious appointments. Queen Elizabeth II conferred a knighthood on Cardinal Ribat in her Birthday Honors list of 2016, recognizing his contributions to both the Church and society. He was awarded both the Order of the British Empire as well as the rank of Knight of the British Empire.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Graham Ware began volunteering at the Walkway 27 years ago

My uncle Norm Ensor, who fought on the Track in 1942 in the 7th Div and was part of the team that took school children over, took me aside one day after such an excursion, and said, "Graham, you are a school teacher so you should be able to do these excursions. We are short of guides and need some extras. What about it?"

Do you have a connection to the Kokoda Campaign or World War II?

In 1942 I was appointed bell ringer for air raid practice – ringing the bell started and terminated it. The air raid trenches were dug and built by local Dads from the P&C, my Dad being one of them, so I was always in attendance.

My uncle Harry worked on the submarine cables in Sydney Harbour. When the Japanese sailors blew up their mini-sub that been caught in the nets, I was given a piece of the sub which now is in the National War Museum.

Uncle Jack, a Sergeant in the Air Force, had a task of signing aviation fuel chits to fuel planes flying from Darwin to Alice Springs to Broken Hill (my birthplace) to Dubbo workshops and back to Darwin. He used to take me with him - I even drove a Kittyhawk across the tarmac.

What is your favourite part about volunteering here?

Meeting the old soldiers and listening to their stories of experiences on the Track and being enlightened on the events of 1942.



Receiving letters of thanks from children and knowing how much they had absorbed. One teacher once commented to me that "You had them enthralled by your stories and the participation that you involved them in."

Why should someone consider volunteering at the Walkway?

If you like telling a story, outlining events and have some rapport with children, try a Walk with the guides, become familiar with the concept and give it a go.

NEW VIDEO WALL IN EDUCATION CENTRE



After many years of supporting our audio-visual presentations, the six television screens in the Ralph Honner Education Centre had reached the end of their useful lives. They have been replaced by a new, state of the art video wall, which provides a more professional presentation environment with sharper and clearer images.

Year 6 pupils from the Westport Public School at Port Macquarie were among the first visitors to enjoy the benefits of the new screen.

The video wall was installed with the backing of the RSL's Veteran Support Fund and assistance from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. It offers school groups and other visitors a much more engaging audio-visual experience, helping us to continue to bring the stories of the New Guinea campaign to life for future generations.

ORCHIDS IN BLOOM

Visitors to the Walkway on Saturday 1 August were dazzled by the colourful beauty of orchids, as the Five Dock RSL Orchid Society and the Royal Horticultural Society produced a terrific display.

This was the first of a series of community events marking the Walkway's 30th anniversary. Information sessions throughout the day allowed gardening enthusiasts to ask questions and obtain advice on propagating and growing orchids.

The complimentary morning and afternoon tea services were also a hit with visitors.

