

Reg Chard Memorial Service

- Good Morning
- Today is a day of sadness but it is also a day of profound gratitude.
- We are grateful for a life that spanned more than a century, a life defined by service, devotion, resilience and kindness.
- I had the pleasure of meeting Reg on a number of occasions here at the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway, and I was honoured to attend his birthday in 2024.
- Those encounters gave me the privilege of knowing not only a remarkable veteran, but a remarkable man.
- Reg belonged to a generation that faced challenges few of us can truly imagine.
- Born in 1923, he came of age during the turmoil of the Second World War.
- At just 18 years of age, Reg left his apprenticeship as a baker and enlisted in the Australian Army.
- Like so many young Australians of his generation, he answered the call to serve without knowing what lay ahead.
- Reg was deployed to Papua New Guinea, where he would serve at Milne Bay, along the Kokoda Track and at Sanananda.
- He first helped build airstrips at Milne Bay, working in oppressive heat and incredibly difficult conditions.
- Then came the call to reinforce Australian troops fighting to halt the Japanese advance towards Port Moresby.
- Reg marched into the rugged mountains of Papua and onto ground that would become forever linked with the Australian spirit: the Kokoda Track.
- The conditions were brutal.

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- Soldiers battled steep jungle-covered mountains, torrential rain, mud, exhaustion, tropical disease and a determined enemy.
- Reg endured severe malaria on more than one occasion and later contracted scrub typhus — illnesses that nearly claimed his life.
- At one point, he was evacuated unconscious from the jungle.
- Yet, remarkably, after recovering, he returned to duty and continued serving alongside his comrades, including at Sanananda.
- But like so many veterans of his generation, Reg rarely spoke about himself as a hero.
- Instead, he spoke about his mates.
- He remembered those who did not come home, the sacrifices that were made, and the courage, loyalty and mateship that carried young men through circumstances most of us can't comprehend.
- He also never forgot the people of Papua New Guinea, particularly the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels, whose courage, care and support helped save the lives of so many Australian soldiers.
- When the war ended and Reg finally returned home, he did what so many of his generation did.
- He got on with life.
- He married the love of his life, Betty, and together they built a family and a future.
- But Reg's commitment to service did not end when he took off his uniform.
- His membership of the Bass Hill RSL Sub-branch and his decades of work here at the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway demonstrated his enduring commitment to honouring the service and sacrifice of his fellow diggers.
- Here, Reg became far more than a veteran.

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- He became a guide, a storyteller, an educator and a living link to history.
- Thousands of school students and visitors had the extraordinary privilege of hearing first-hand from someone who had walked the Kokoda Track and lived through the events they were learning about.
- In doing so, Reg gave a priceless gift to future generations.
- He reminded us that history is not simply dates, places and battles.
- History is people.
- Even at the remarkable age of 102, Reg remained committed to passing those lessons on.
- Today, we farewell one of Australia's last living links to the Kokoda campaign.
- But more importantly, we farewell a cherished husband, father, grandfather, friend and mentor.
- His legacy lives on through his family and friends, through the countless people whose lives he touched, and through the stories he worked so hard to preserve.
- My thoughts are with Reg's family and friends during this difficult time.
- His service will not be forgotten.
- His story will continue to be told.
- And his contribution will be honoured for generations to come.
- Lest we forget.

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References

<https://www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/nsw-stories/reg-chard>

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