

# AUGUST NEWSLETTER

**DON ROWE**

## **NSW State President Returned and Services League of Australia**

Hello, and welcome to this, the first in a series of monthly newsletters for RSL members, the news media and for the general public.

August 2014 marks the start of four years of very significant anniversaries and commemorations. It is now 100 years since Australia went to the support of Great Britain in WWI and next year we will pay our respects to those gallant volunteers from Australia and New Zealand who landed at Gallipoli on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1915. Next year is also the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII.

As the RSL State President, I thought it appropriate to keep everyone reminded on a regular basis of forthcoming anniversaries and informed as to the commemorative activities which are planned.

- **Today, August 4<sup>th</sup>**, is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of WWI – the “Great War”, as it became known. In Sydney, a ceremony will be held at the ANZAC Memorial in Hyde Park, commencing at 11.00 am. The Premier of NSW, the Hon. Mike Baird MP, and Opposition Leader John Robertson MP, will both speak and lay wreaths. Northern Country Vice President Peter Stephenson will represent the RSL and recite the Ode.
- I will be in **Cowra** this week, attending a series of commemorative events to acknowledge the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cowra breakout, on **August 5<sup>th</sup> 1944**. On this day, more than 1100 Japanese prisoners of war tried to escape from the camp where they were held near Cowra. In the aftermath, four Australian soldiers were killed and 231 Japanese prisoners were either killed or committed ritual suicide. The remainder were recaptured.
- The 69<sup>th</sup> anniversary of **VP Day – Victory in the Pacific** – falls on August 15<sup>th</sup>. As is traditional, a wreath laying ceremony will be held at the Cenotaph in Martin Place, Sydney, and the main commemorative service will take place at the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway, adjacent to Concord Repatriation General Hospital. This year the guest speaker will be Dr Brendan Nelson, Director of the Australian War Memorial, a former ambassador to the European Union and NATO, and a former Minister for Defence. This VP Day service is always well attended by WWII veterans, especially by those who served in the New Guinea campaign.
- The **Battle of Long Tan** during the Vietnam War took place on **August 18<sup>th</sup>** 1966 and commemorative services will be held in several locations throughout NSW to mark the 48<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This day is also regarded as Vietnam Veterans’ Day.

- A little known anniversary falls on **August 19<sup>th</sup>**. On this day in 1914, the 1<sup>st</sup> Naval and Military Expeditionary Force, consisting of 1000 soldiers and 500 seamen and naval reservists, marched through the streets of Sydney to Circular Quay, to board troopships. These were the first Australians to be sent overseas in WWI. Their mission was to seize German wireless stations in the South Pacific, and they saw action at Bitapaka, Rabaul, Bougainville and New Ireland. Captain Brian Pockley was killed after he had taken off his Red Cross brassard and placed it on the arm of a stoker, whom he left in charge of a mortally wounded seaman, W.G. Williams, the first man to be hit. He died later in the day. Lieut.-Commander Elwell fell leading a party of 50 reservists on another trench. These are recorded as the first Australian casualties of WWI.
- **Did you know?** The first Australian soldier to be killed in WWI is thought to have been Lieutenant William Malcolm Chisholm, who had enlisted in the British Army. He died in the Battle of Le Cateau in northern France on **August 26<sup>th</sup> 1914**. More than 40,000 British troops engaged the German army; Lieutenant Chisholm was one of more than 5000 casualties. He had been educated at Sydney Grammar where he was an army cadet and also an officer in the NSW Scottish Rifles. His father, respected Macquarie Street doctor William Chisholm, had taken the family to England when he was appointed to a London hospital. His son had joined Sandhurst military college in 1911 and was among the first British troops sent to France at the start of WWI.

Closer to home, State Branch CEO Chris Perrin and I have been honoured by a personal invitation from the Prime Minister of Timor Leste, Xanana Gusmao, to represent Australia later this month at ceremonies marking National Veterans' Day. We will lay wreaths on behalf of the RSL and also share our experiences and knowledge with the leaders of the Timorese veterans' organisation. We were pleased to welcome a delegation from Timor Leste in Sydney in April, and to have them join us in the ANZAC Day March through the Sydney CBD. We look forward to cementing strong bonds between the RSL and our Timorese counterparts.

I trust you have enjoyed reading this newsletter and found it informative.

Until next month

Don Rowe