

SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

DON ROWE

NSW State President Returned and Services League of Australia

Hello, and welcome to this, the September 2014 monthly newsletter for RSL members, the news media and for the general public. Thank you for your response to last month's newsletter, the first of a series of regular bulletins to keep everyone informed on what's happening, particularly in regard to the very significant anniversaries and commemorations.

- On **Wednesday, 3 September**, we will farewell our team for the Invictus Games in London. Together with the Australian Defence Force, the RSL is supporting a team of 36 serving and former ADF personnel, who have been wounded, injured or seriously ill during the time of their service. Some of these have lost limbs or suffered other terrible wounds, others have battled illness such as breast cancer. More than 400 athletes from 14 countries have been invited to the Games, which are being promoted by Prince Harry. The RSL is proud to support the Invictus Games, and on Wednesday the Governor-General, Sir Peter Cosgrove, will join us to farewell our athletes.
- On **Tuesday 9 September** our retiring State Governor and RSL Honorary Life Member, Professor Marie Bashir, will officiate at the launch of "Beyond 1914 – the University of Sydney and the Great War." This is an extensive database of biographies and archival information of members of the University community involved in WWI. It is built on information provided to the University by more than 2000 former staff, students, graduates and their families, and offers an insight into the lives of University men and women before, during and after the war.
- A special memorial service will be held at Bradley's Head on **Thursday 11 September** at 10.30 a.m. to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of Able Seaman Billy Williams, the first Australian serviceman serving in the Australian armed forces, to be killed in WWI. AB Williams was serving in HMAS Sydney during the operation to capture German wireless and military installations in and around Rabaul. He was a member of the landing party when he was shot, dying of his wounds later that day.
- **Sunday 14 September** will be the 100th anniversary of the loss of the RAN's first submarine, AE1. She left Blanche Bay, Rabaul, on the morning of 14 September 1914 to patrol with HMAS Parramatta, but was never heard from again. AE1 is thought to have sunk with all her crew – 35 officers and enlisted men – after striking a reef.

I have been in touch with the Powerhouse Museum concerning the priceless tapestry which the State Branch presented as a bicentennial gift to the people of NSW in 1988. This tapestry is massive, almost 3 1/2 metres high and 7 metres wide, and was commissioned in 1959 as a memorial to the men and women of NSW who served in WWII. It was designed by Frenchman Jean Lurcat, a master of 20th century tapestry design and technique, and is acclaimed as one of his most outstanding works.

Bursting with colour, it symbolises the Australian Imperial Forces and the part played by them in all wars. Fish and marine life represent the navy; flora and fauna represent the army; and birds and sky represent the air force. At the centre is a large sun, within which appears the Southern Cross constellation, a branch of wattle, and symbolically, the faces of Australian youth who lost their lives on battlefields.

The RSL received the tapestry in 1961 and it was hung in the Hall of Remembrance when ANZAC House was in College Street, with an eternal flame burning in front of it. Early in 1987 the ANZAC House Trust sold the College Street building and moved to Kent Street, where there was no suitable place to hang the tapestry. The Trustees wanted to make sure the public could still view this remarkable and valuable work of art, so in 1988 the RSL presented it to the Powerhouse Museum.

It is no longer on display and the museum tells me it has been placed in storage, partly for conservation reasons, so it can be “rested” and kept out of the light. There are plans to redevelop the museum’s permanent galleries but at present, no specific plans to put the tapestry back on display.

I do think it would be appropriate if this magnificent work of art and tribute to our serving men and women could be displayed, at least for a short period, either during WWI and WWII anniversary commemorations next year, or during our celebrations of the RSL centenary in 2016. The museum does have a “loans” policy and would be happy to consider such a request. We would need to find a safe, secure location, but one which is still accessible to the public. I am open to suggestions.

Did you know? Australia’s first Victoria Cross recipient of World War I, Albert Jacka, enlisted in the AIF 100 years ago, on 18 September 1914. He was in action at Gallipoli from 26 April 1915, winning the VC for his bravery at Courtney’s Post the following month. The full citation read:

War Office, 24th July, 1915

*His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to award the Victoria Cross to:-
No. 465 Lance-Corporal Albert Jacka, 14th Battalion, Australian Imperial Forces.*

*For most conspicuous bravery on the night of the 19th–20th May, 1915 at
"Courtney's Post", Gallipoli Peninsula.*

Lance-Corporal Jacka, while holding a portion of our trench with four other men, was heavily attacked. When all except himself were killed or wounded, the trench was rushed and occupied by seven Turks. Lance-Corporal Jacka at once most gallantly

attacked them single-handed, and killed the whole party, five by rifle fire and two with the bayonet.

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

Until next month

Don Rowe