



Terrigal Wamberal RSL sub Branch

# NEWSLETTER



## President's Message

The planning of this year's ANZAC Day Dawn Service was a challenge because of COVID crowd control regulations and restrictions. The sub-Branch is proud of what we achieved, and I thank everyone involved in the planning and implementation, including Council and the Brisbane Water Area Police. Many veterans marched, and relatives and friends enthusiastically greeted them as they entered the restricted area. It is difficult to determine crowd numbers, but our best estimate is around 5000. We are incredibly grateful for this support and for the number of individuals and organisations who laid a wreath.

The ANZAC breakfast at Breakers and the 11 am Service were also well supported.

The sub-Branch will continue to engage with the community and all levels of government to promote the interests of former and current servicemen and women. We are currently communicating with the Central Coast Council regarding the restoration of displaced memorial stones at the Wamberal Memorial Hall. The Hall was built on donated land and was officially opened in 1920. While this property is not included on the list of assets to be sold by Council, it is a designated war memorial, and we need to remain vigilant.

I am pleased to advise that we have entered into a further sponsorship agreement with Creightons, and this will allow us to plan and finance commemorative events with confidence. We have invited a Creightons representative to attend our sub-branch meeting on 10 July to promote their services. Wives and partners are encouraged to join us at this meeting.

Our next social event is a BBQ at The Haven on 17 June. Refer to details on page 5.

I thank members who have renewed their membership, and on behalf of the sub-Branch, I welcome our new members. The RSL State Congress in October will determine future membership fees.

Kind regards

Terry Saxby



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### Upcoming Events

- Sub-Branch meeting 12 June
- BBQ 17 June

# Meet the Members

## Bill Forsbey



Bill joined the RAAF on 14 June 1977 as a CAT 1A trainee, and after graduation, he commenced training as a Radio Technician (Ground) at the School of Radio, RAAF Base Laverton. When qualified, he joined the Air Transportable Telecommunications Unit (ATTU).

He was deployed to various locations during his six years' Service and remained with ATTU until he was discharged on 14 June 1983.

After leaving the RAAF, he was employed by the Navy as a civilian attached to the Maintenance and Repair Unit in Sydney and later with Naval Communications Engineering in Canberra. He commenced employment with the South Eastern Sydney Area Health Service in 1997 as a telecommunications manager until he retired in 2008.

Bill began pension advocacy training in 2013 and completed numerous TIP courses. He continued his training when the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) was introduced, and he is now qualified as a Compensations Officer Level 4.

He is authorised to provide advice and assistance to serving and ex-serving military clients and their dependants with rehabilitation and compensation claims and represent serving and ex-serving military clients and their dependants before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) or Veterans' Review Board in relation to compensation and entitlement decisions. This includes;

- Prepare and/or lodge liability, compensation and income support claims
  - Prepare requests for review of DVA decisions
  - Prepare appeals for review by the Veterans' Review Board or the Administrative Appeals Tribunal
- Provide representation at hearings by the Veterans' Review Board and Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Bill delivers a valuable service to the sub-Branch and Central Coast ex-services community.

*Appointment contact details: (m) 0411 266 932 (email) [pensions@twrsrlsb.org.au](mailto:pensions@twrsrlsb.org.au)*

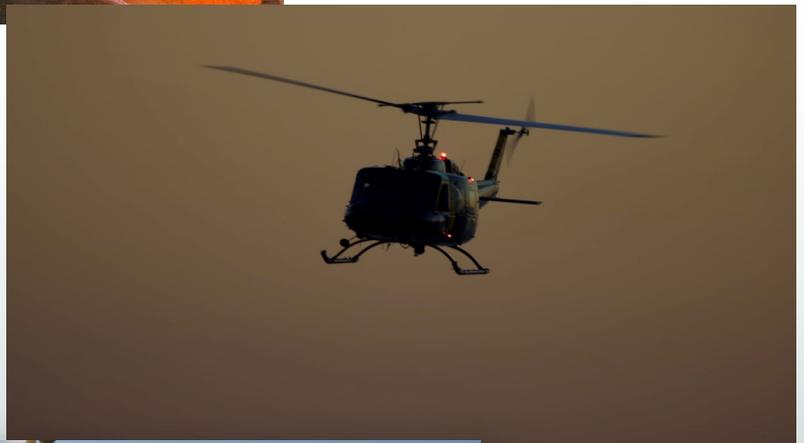
# ANZAC DAY IMAGES



Simon's shout



Aerial View of Dawn Service



The Huey flyover



The Last Post



24 May 2021

## **RSL Australia submission to Consultation on Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide**

Dear Members

I am pleased to advise that following the request for feedback from sub-Branches through District Councils, RSL NSW has contributed to the RSL Australia submission on the Themes for Consultation to inform the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide which was lodged on 21 May. You can [read the submission here](#).

RSL State Branches across the country (except Queensland) provided member feedback which contributed to the RSL Australia submission.

The feedback received was consistent across the Branches, and predominantly in these areas:

- Barriers to implementing previous inquiries re this topic, and for the Royal Commission going forward
- External factors (outside of ADF service) including suicidality
- Review of existing national data on all suicides, and evidence-based information for further reviews
- Mental health research and processes for veterans
- Support for serving personnel/veterans within the Service, and from NGOs and ESOs
- Post Defence service employment opportunities
- Transition processes
- DVA Claims processes
- Social media influence and disinformation

The submission also communicated RSL members' views on the scope of the Royal Commission, the need for clarity between the function of the Royal Commissioner/s and the role of the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention and the importance of reviewing the previous work in this area.

We will continue to listen to and advocate for all veterans throughout the Royal Commission. The [RSL NSW Strategic Plan](#), which was formulated following consultation with members, has set us up well to be the leading agents of change to improve the lives of veterans.

Yours faithfully

**Ray James**  
RSL NSW President



# BBQ @ The Haven

We  are having a sub Branch BBQ at The Haven.

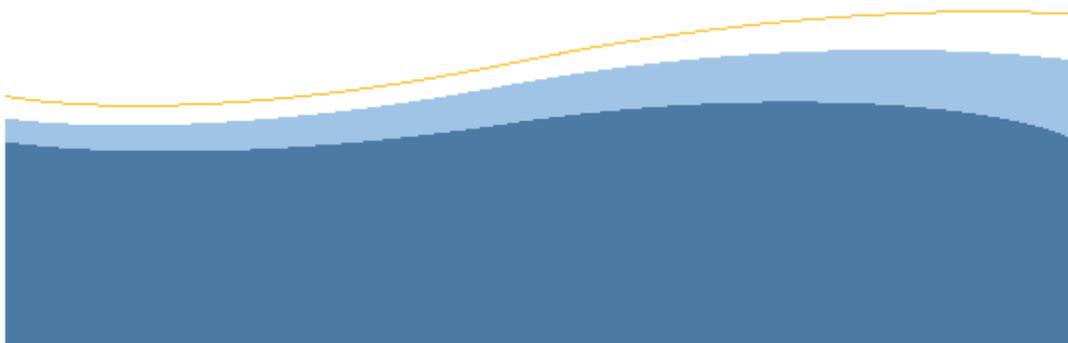
Food and beverage supplied

**Thursday June 17th, 2021, 11am to 2 pm.**

**The Haven, Terrigal NSW**

RSVP to the Secretary

Bring a hat, chair and sunscreen.



# Remembering the Battle of Coral-Balmoral, Vietnam War

*The following speech was delivered by RSL NSW Chief Executive Officer, Jon Black, at the Coral Balmoral Remembrance Service which was hosted by the Ingleburn RSL sub-Branch on 16 May 2021*



*Image courtesy Australian War Memorial*

**The Battle of Coral-Balmoral took place from 12 May to 6 June 1968**

Today we remember the service and sacrifice of Australians who served in the Battle of Coral-Balmoral that took place in May and June of the fateful year that was 1968.

I would like to especially acknowledge those people here today who served and committed themselves to their profession and support to one another at the time of the battle, and for all those who served our nation during the Vietnam War.

I joined the Army at a time when all those who taught me had experienced the war in Vietnam. I will never forget what they taught me. It was not just how to use weapons and the tactics to employ them, but about the importance of character. People like Ian Ahern, Don Tait, Mick Grimes, Ray Curtis, and Neil Weekes.

They taught me the importance of values that form character such as teamwork, loyalty, hard work and respect. I was a proud artilleryman and served in the same Unit as the 'Coral' battery.

May the acts of bravery and mateship never be forgotten.

I would also like to acknowledge, that after acts of extra-ordinary gallantry on 13 May 1968, the Governor General of Australia, General David Hurley awarded the Medal of Gallantry to Tony Jensen this week – exactly 53 years after the events at FSB Coral. As the mortar platoon commander – he displayed outstanding leadership while the FSB was violently attacked.

Today, rather than speak explicitly about the battle itself – I will speak about the strategic context of the battles of Coral and Balmoral – In doing so, I solemnly acknowledge the extraordinary bravery of the Australians who fought for each other in the battle, and the 14 who lost their lives, the 47 wounded in action around the FSBs (not counting the other losses in the wider battles that ensued) and of course the many who were there who still carry physical and mental scars today. Another reason I will not dwell too long on the actual physical battle, I am a bit nervous that there are people in the audience – my artillery teachers and mentors – who are still technically brilliant at what they did, and I do not want to give them a chance to correct my skills and knowledge!

1968 is considered by many historians as one of the most tumultuous single years in world history, and the Vietnam War was smack bang in the centre of it.

For those of us who were not in Vietnam at that time, imagine for a moment what it must have been like.

In late January, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launched the Tet Offensive which was a coordinated series of attacks against Saigon and other key targets in South Vietnam. On 18 February, the U.S. State Department announced the highest U.S. weekly casualty toll to date of the Vietnam War, with 543 Americans killed in action and 2,547 wounded during the previous week.

As this type of news played out on TV screens, the war was becoming increasingly unpopular not only in the U.S. but also in Australia.

On 31 March, US President Lyndon Johnson announces that he "shall not seek and will not accept" the nomination of the Democratic Party to run for re-election, basically because of the

Vietnam War – he said he did not have time to run because he was so committed to looking after the troops in Vietnam. Just five days later the renowned civil rights leader, Dr Martin King Junior was assassinated while he was standing on the balcony outside his room at a Memphis motel. Bobby Kennedy, younger brother of John F Kennedy and presidential candidate, was assassinated while the Battle of Coral-Balmoral was still taking place. While these assassinations were not connected to the war, they must have significantly added to the atmosphere of gloom when you consider how important "news from the home front" is to morale.

Elsewhere on the world stage there was the Paris Spring – civil unrest in France, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the list of unrest and controversy happening in the world in 1968 goes on and on. Many remember the protests at the Mexico City Olympics – the Australian silver medallist Peter Norman between the black glove protesters – First humans to orbit the moon – Apollo 8.

And here you have, in this context, troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Task Force in Vietnam, complete with their lives – their hopes, their dreams, their convictions, their fears – deployed outside of their main area of operations in Phuc Tuy province, to an area north of Bien Hoa city to intercept and disrupt enemy forces withdrawing from the capital, Saigon.

Several fire support bases were established – to provide defended positions for supporting artillery and mortars which would cover the infantry patrols to be sent out by the two battalions (1RAR and 3RAR) to intercept the retreating enemy. One of these FSBs was nick-named "Coral" and the other "Balmoral."

Only two years before, the Australian infantry learned the importance of close artillery support at the battle of Long Tan. The infantry would not want to operate without artillery support.

The enemy forces reacted violently to the establishment of these bases and on the night of 12 May, with the Australians having only just arrived and working furiously to set up the base, the enemy launched an attack on Coral. Many Australians at the time commented on the 'cluster xxxx' of the deployment into the FSBs' so the enemy, never to be underestimated would have seen this, and attacked with vigour while they saw disorganisation.

Australian historian Ashley Ekins describes the situation like this: "Every indication was that the Australians would be overrun that first night. I believe it was an attempt by the [North Vietnamese Army] at an annihilation ambush. Their own losses did not matter to them. They wanted to overrun and destroy the base at any cost."

“It was only the Australian soldiers’ training, their bravery – the men did not buckle under the most extreme circumstances, some very determined leadership and a degree of luck that saved Coral and the Australians on May 12 and 13.”

Ekins uses the term “saved” advisedly – The Australians suffered heavy casualties with 9 killed and 28 wounded in the first enemy assault on 13 May and 5 killed and 19 wounded in the second assault on 16 May.

Lex McAulay who wrote a book about the battle says it was “an overnight switch in war tactics, from patrolling and ambushing to close combat action, where, for the first time in a long while, tanks and artillery support came into their own.” David Ellery from the Canberra Times wrote this about the battle on its fiftieth anniversary in 2018: “While that first night was, as Wellington said of Waterloo, ‘the nearest run thing you ever saw’, once the Australians were established in the ‘catcher’s mitt’ the end was inevitable given their superior training, equipment and sheer firepower.”

“While Coral-Balmoral was a complete success for the Australians who had been sent into harm’s way to draw out NVA troops returning from Saigon and reinforcements heading south, winning the battle was a far cry from winning the war.”

Ultimately, counting the wider battles around the FSBs, 26 Australians would give their lives during the battle. Scores more were wounded. Today we remember their sacrifice. [Pause]

To add insult to serious injury for those who survived and returned home from Vietnam, the gratitude and respect they deserved as returned servicemen and women was a long time coming.

I am sorry to say that not only did they often face ridicule by members of the public, but by and large Vietnam Veterans were not even made welcome by their local RSL sub-Branches, who it seems were stuck in a mentality that could not appreciate that for all its differences, those serving in Vietnam faced the same horrors of war and that they deserved the same dignity and respect that returned servicemen and women from previous wars had received. I for one, owe such a debt of gratitude to all the NCOs, Warrant Officers and officers who taught me – I will never forget them.

Now I would like to draw what I see as some parallels from then to the present day – both from the situation in the battle from May and June of 1968 and from the reception the returned servicemen and women received when returning from Vietnam.

The Vietnam Veterans Association was created to fill the breach that the RSL left wide open when it failed to adapt and welcome Vietnam Veterans into the fold. In recent years we have seen a similar breach being filled by literally thousands of other so called Ex-Service Organisations due to younger veterans showing a lack of interest in the RSL and instead turning to other organisations to provide the support they are seeking.

The statistics are telling. Membership has declined and declined from over 200,000 in NSW to fewer than 26,000. Less than 10% of these are under the age of 55, and less than 1,000 are under 39 years of age. With 89% of current RSL NSW members 55 years or older, including 32% who are over the Australian male average life expectancy age, without intervention, RSL in NSW will no longer be a viable member-based organisation from between 10 to 18 years from now.

While the circumstances in 2021 may be different in some ways to the late 60s and early 70s, the common theme is the need for the RSL to change and adapt to meet the needs of younger veterans.

This brings me to the other parallel – that of the circumstances of the Battle of Coral-Balmoral itself. That night of 12 May when the enemy launched the attack while the Australian soldiers were still preparing the fire support base, you can imagine the frustration of them not feeling ready to engage with the enemy, but there they were – they were instinctive – well trained.

Isn't that how we can feel when we are confronted by circumstances that we wish were different. "I'm just not ready" is a feeling every person can relate to.

The troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Task Force rose to the occasion – 102 Field Battery and 1 RAR's mortar platoon in particular. They depended on each other, they showed grit and determination, and they worked as one. They were true ANZACs as we know.

There is so much I feel we can learn from their example today.

For the RSL, the danger for us is to persist with local self-interest and introspection when we really need to work as one and be recognised as the leader, and the organisation veterans wish to join and become involved with.

The League was established to look after all people who returned from war, and in today's world war can be and will look different and continue to evolve, and we need to be able to adapt and change to meet the needs of the moment. Do you consider a drone pilot, miles away from the point of contact a veteran? I think they are; they see the horrors of the power of their weapons – they live with those images.

Like those committed Australians at Coral and Balmoral, we need to adapt, and adapt quickly. It does involve change and change is typically a bit uncomfortable. But when I think of the nature and need of today's veterans, and the tragedy of veteran suicide I see so much potential for us to be serving them better. We (RSL members) need to reflect on those who have gone before and unleash our collective potential we have today – just like the teamwork and bravery that was displayed at FSB Coral and Balmoral, and the surrounding areas.

I thank you for the honour of being able to speak with you today as we commemorate the service and sacrifice of those who fought during the Battles of Coral-Balmoral.

Lest we forget.

  
**GREENWAY**  
CHAPEL & MEMORIAL GARDENS

  
**CREIGHTONS**  
FUNERAL SERVICE

  
**PALMDALE**  
LAWN CEMETERY & MEMORIAL PARK



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