

THE APPRENTICE ABOUT

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NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY APPRENTICES ASSOCIATION INC.

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PATRON: MAJOR GENERAL ANDREW FREEMAN AM (RETD)

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From the President

By Keith LOWE, 22nd Intake Fitter and Turner, President AAAA, president@austarmyapprentice.org, August 2026

I hope all members receiving this Newsletter are keeping best health possible during these cold months. Currently 5 degrees and raining as I write this.

Members if you know of any Apprentices who are not travelling well, particularly if they are living on their own, can you please reach out to our Welfare Officer who may be able to provide some guidance for additional assistance to those in need.

Again, during this last period since our May Newsletter we have lost too many from our ranks. In earlier years too many were the result of motor vehicle incidents but as we all age, it's down to natural causes with cancer and related conditions at the head of the list.

A list of all recent death notifications is also included in this Newsletter and I extend our sincere condolences to all affected by these losses.

~ Lest We Forget ~

End of Life Instructions

I appreciate I have touched on this subject in one form or another previously however I feel a need to do so again. Recent experience indicates as Veterans we need to leave clear instructions for loved ones to follow concerning how we wish to be farewelled when the time comes. Much easier to have it clearly documented in advance than to leave bereaving family members to try and second guess what we may want.

If you don't want a funeral per se it's simple, put it in your will and tell your family.

On the other hand, if you wish to have a formal service, document your instructions, particularly if you want a Veterans' send-off included. If this is the case, what inclusions do you require e.g. flag and hat on the coffin, summary of service read, laying of poppies, Last Post, Minute's Silence, Ode, Rouse and presentation of an Australian flag to the NOK.

If cremated, do you want your ashes committed for interment at our Memorial and a plaque? Please spell it out.

Committal of Ashes Apprentices Memorial

Following protracted negotiations over the last few years we now have confirmation from Director General Defence Member and Family Support (DMFS) of the approval process to gain permission for the committal of deceased Veterans' ashes to Defence land.

Anyone interested in having ashes committed to our Memorial should contact our Secretary in the first instance for guidance and provision of the required forms.



Eightieth Anniversary of the Army Apprentice Scheme

As mentioned in our last Newsletter, your committee has commenced planning for a reunion to commemorate/celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Army Apprentice Scheme. In my message I asked for suggestions from members as to what we should include in the event and I am disappointed to report we have not had any response. So, I again ask for your ideas and suggestions please. Emails to event2028@austarmyapprentice.org reference EVENT SUGGESTIONS will be appreciated.

Let's have your ideas please.

Until next time stay well and look out for your mates.

All the best, Keith

Membership matters

By Graeme SMAIL, 35th Intake Electronics Tradesman – Membership Secretary, membership@austarmyapprentice.org

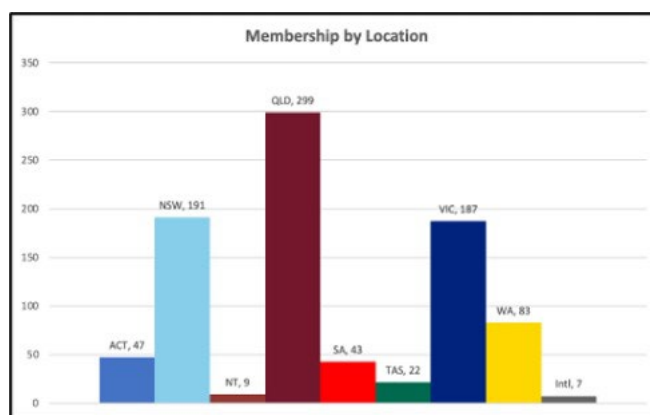
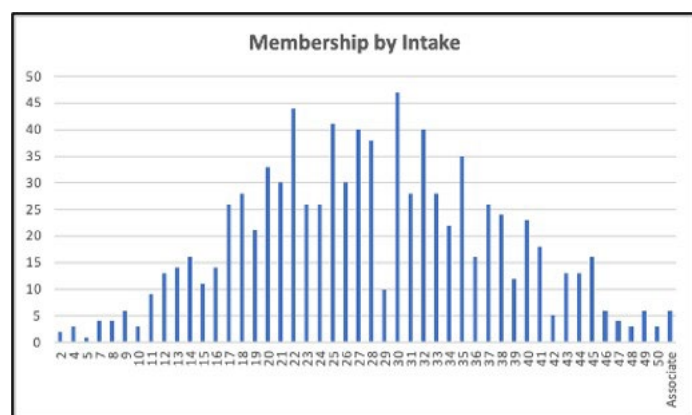
Membership Status

The current state of the membership (as at 14 Jul 2026) is 888 financial members (see right). These figures show a slight decrease in membership YTY. Perpetual membership is on the rise.

I have a backlog of new member packs to send out which I plan to clear by the end of July so those new members who have not received anything in the post from me can expect to soon. If your mailing address is wrong, please get it sorted asap.

Type	14 Jul 26	27 Jun 25
Life	4	3
Perpetual	9	-
Ordinary	567	572
Retired	302	312
Associate	6	7
TOTAL	888	894

Membership Analysis



Time for some New Members

A call out to all members to ask their appy mates if they are members. If they are not, then convince them to join. It would be good to see membership numbers jump before the 80th anniversary. If they are unsure about how to join, then give them a hand or send them my way.

Perpetual Membership

Are you eligible for Perpetual Membership? Most likely the answer is yes. We have tiered Perpetual Membership fees accordingly based on the number of years you have been financial. You can even join the Association as a Perpetual Member. Many current members are eligible to renew as a Perpetual Member at the highest discount as they have been financial for more than 10 years. This is just \$25 and that's it, no more renewals!

So next time you renew, consider transferring over to Perpetual. If you have any questions or need assistance then reach out – 0438 212964 or email at membership@austarmyapprentice.org.



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King's Birthday awards 2026

Wayne DAVIS OAM, 50th Intake Electrical Fitter, AAAA Committee Member

Medal of the Order of Australia: Warrant Officer Class One Wayne Robert DAVIS, For meritorious performance of duty as an Artificer Sergeant Major and as the Master Artificer Technician Electrical for the Australian Army.

"Warrant Officer Class One Davis made a significant contribution to the Army's operational effectiveness through remarkable initiative, superior leadership and technical knowledge, and performance of duty over a number of postings. His innovation and reform of Army's electrical trade training has safeguarded future capability, while his strategic influence as Master Artificer Technician Electrical shaped the modernisation of land materiel systems. His service reflects great credit upon himself and upholds the highest traditions of the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force."



Image from TAA February 2026

Craig FAIRWEATHER OAM, 50th Intake Carpenter and Joiner

Medal of the Order of Australia: Major Craig FAIRWEATHER, For meritorious service in military engineering for the Australian Army.

"Major Fairweather's engineering expertise and leadership has contributed to Australia's defence objectives across the Indo-Pacific region. His remarkable project management skills and dedication to mentoring have enhanced Army's engineering capability, while his technical excellence has advanced Australia's strategic partnerships. His achievements have created enduring benefits for Defence and partner nations, as well as the Aboriginal community, and exemplify the finest traditions of the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force."

Patrick PICKETT OAM CSM, 27th Intake Musician

Medal of the Order of Australia: Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Anthony PICKETT, For service to the performing arts, particularly through music.

"Music: Part-time Director of Music, Riverina Conservatorium of Music, c1994; Founding Chair, Independent Conservatorium of Music Council, New South Wales; Fellow of Conducting, Trinity College of Music, London; and Former Member, Panel of Examiners and Advisors, Australian Music Examinations Board, Queensland."

The University of Queensland: Former Adjunct Professor in Music; and Founding Director and Conductor, Wind Symphony."

Australian Defence Force: Director of Army Music, 2004-2009; Former Head of Corps, Australian Army Band Corps; Commandant, Defence Force School of Music, 2004-2009; Artistic Director and Concept Designer, Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference, 2007; Commander, Tri-Service Band element, Commonwealth Games Melbourne, 2006; Senior Music Director, Brunei International Military Tattoo, 2006; and Music Director, 90th Anniversary Celebrations at Anzac Cove, Gallipoli, 2005."



Association members in the news

Reid OSSINGTON, 49th Intake Vehicle Mechanic, AAAA Member #606, retirement

From: Facebook RAQ dated 29 May 2026

"From Appy to Major – Reid retires after 32 years of service

After more than three decades of service to the Australian Army, including 15 years in the ARA followed by 17 years as a Reservist, MAJ Reid Ossington officially retired from service at the start of May 2026, closing an important chapter in a long and distinguished RAEME career.

Reflecting on his time in uniform, Reid acknowledged that it was the soldiers and junior officers he served alongside who kept him motivated to continue serving for so many years.

Throughout his career, Reid expressed deep gratitude for the experiences Army provided and for the many outstanding men and women who helped shape him along the way. He credited the Army with providing the foundations for a successful civilian career and spoke proudly of his journey from Army Apprentice to senior officer.

Of greatest importance, however, was the support of his family. He paid special tribute to his wife Simone, acknowledging the sacrifices she made throughout his service, particularly during long absences, weekends away, and late nights. He also recognised his two sons, who often missed valuable time with their father while he balanced the demands of military service and family life.

Proudly describing himself as both an "appy" and a "bluebell", Reid reflected fondly on the unique bond shared by Army Apprentices and the lifelong connection to the Corps.

The RAEME family congratulates MAJ Reid Ossington, 49th Intake Apprentice VM, on his outstanding service and wishes him and his family all the very best for the future.



Picture: L-R CO 11 CSSB LTCOL Will Morrison farewells MAJ Reid Ossington from Army after 32 years' service

Image and article adapted courtesy of Defence"



Steve HOWELLS, 28th Intake Electronics Tradesman, AAAA Member #471, RAQ Anzac Day Committee Chair

From RAQ Spanner News Weekly, Friday 8 May 2026

Congratulations to Steve Howells on his appointment as RAQ Anzac Day Committee Chair. This important role represents the RAQ on the Brisbane Anzac Day Parade Committee.

Quilts of Valour to Army Apprentices – Macleay Island

From: Spanner News Weekly, 10 July 2026

“Michelle Lafferty from Quilts of Valour had organised for a quilt to be presented to Maxwell Brown, who was a 1st Intake Army Apprentice. This was to be done at the Army Apprentices Reunion on June 6th at Bulimba Bowls Club. Sadly, Max passed away a few days before the reunion. Max’s family have been contacted, and arrangements have been made to present Max’s quilt to the family on 14 August, at the 101 Reunion at the Gold Coast by Michelle.

On Tuesday the 30 June, Michelle Lafferty and Brian Daley travelled to Macleay Island where we were picked up from the ferry by Cam Willett, a 41st Intake Army Apprentice, and also an RAQ Member, and taken to the Macleay Island Sailing Club where four veterans were among people enjoying morning tea. Macleay Island RSL had organised a morning tea with no mention of the surprise to come!!

Michelle presented beautiful Quilts of Valour to four veterans, including: Keith Fox a 2nd Intake Army Apprentice, a vehicle mechanic by trade, Army No. 1/8504.

Keith was proudly wearing his Apprentice cap and spoke about his service at the British Atomic Tests at Emu Claypan (Woomera) in South Australia.

Quilts were also presented to three other veterans, two who served in Vietnam and the other was a Survey veteran who served at Balcombe at the same time as Keith.

Brian Daley 14MV”

Above: Clockwise from top left. Cam Willett, 41st Intake Motor Mechanic, Michaelle Lafferty, Brian Daley OAM, 14th Intake Vehicle Mechanic, AAAA Life Member (Member #14), and Keith (Slim) Fox 2nd Intake Army Apprentice Vehicle Mechanic [AAAA Member #173] presented with his Quilt of Valour.



Non-Association members in the news

Andrew McADIE, 34th Intake Motor Mechanic, 40th Anniversary RAEME Corps Banner Parade

From Facebook, RAEME Association QLD (RAQ), 25 May 2026

For detailed reports on the parade, see the various Defence and RAEME Websites and Facebook groups. This extract and image below are courtesy of Defence and RAQ.

“As the final rehearsal concluded the day before, WO1 Andrew McAdie reflected on returning to the same parade ground four decades after first marching there as a young Craftsman.

‘It’s amazing to think I was a 22-year-old Craftsman, 40 years ago, standing on this parade ground. And now here I am, 40 years later, with that opportunity again,’ WO1 McAdie said.

During the parade, WO1 McAdie undertook the ceremonial role of Artificer and recalled the extensive preparation undertaken by those on parade.



'We were well trained,' he said. 'We practised an awful lot for the parade. We spent a lot of time on the parade ground and we were all fairly confident.'

Reflecting on the current generation of soldiers, he added, *'From what I see, with the young troops, they are just as keen as I was, and am.'*

Right: WO1 Andrew McAdie at the final rehearsal (note the heavily overcast weather – "In the lead up to the parade, the weather across Bandiana had been bleak and rain threatened the day's proceedings. However, just as occurred in 1986, the skies cleared in time for a perfect autumn day on parade.")



Sailing On WA, Guy MEWBURN, 29th Intake Electronics Tradesman

Source: [YouTube Sailing On / Parliamentary Mention, by Jonathan Huston MLA - WA This Week](#)

We featured [Sailing on](#) with Founder Guy Mewburn, 29th Intake Electronics Tradesman in TAA February 2022 and May 2023. In May this year, Sailing On WA was mentioned in WA Parliament by Mr Jonathan Huston MLA who spoke of the amazing work that Sailing On was doing for Veterans in the mental health and wellbeing space. He said that Sailing On was "... bringing Veterans together to learn new skills, rebuild camaraderie and once again operate as a team." And "Veterans return to an environment of discipline, teamwork and shared responsibility."



Sailing On members, WA Parliament, 7 May 2026, Guy Mewburn front row with the red tie and his wife Leonie on his right

John HALEY, 35th Intake Motor Mechanic, 2nd Federation Star

From Facebook, Army Logistic Training Centre, CAPT Krysten Clifton, 17 June 2026

"Today, at the Army Logistic Soldiers Mess, Bandiana, Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Simon Stuart AO DSC presented Major John Haley with his sixth clasp, the second Federation Star, to the Defence Long Service Medal representing 45 years of dedicated service.

After speaking some quiet words to MAJ Haley, he addressed the room and spoke to the importance of stopping to recognise service.

"It is one of our values and it has a specific meaning – it means putting purpose and people, mission and mates before oneself and





to do that, effectively for a lifetime, is absolutely worth us coming together to recognise and reflect on," *LTGEN Stuart said.*

"The range of deployments, the range of teams, the range of jobs [listed in his service history] says a lot about our Army, but it also says a lot about John and his commitment to service, his agility, his flexibility and his dedication."

Please join us in congratulating MAJ Haley and his family on this mammoth achievement and milestone."

Andreas PRETTERHOFER, 33rd Intake Musician, retirement

From Facebook, Australian Army Band, 26 June 2026

"Today we farewell Warrant Officer Class Two Andreas Pretterhofer. Warrant Officer Class 2 Andreas Pretterhofer joined the Australian Regular Army as an apprentice musician in January 1978, beginning a remarkable career with the Australian Army Band Corps. Across nearly five decades, 'Pretzy' has served with Army bands in Perth, Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Kapooka and Adelaide, consistently leading by example with professionalism, dedication and selfless commitment.

WO2 Pretterhofer's service includes operational deployments on Operation Warden and Operation Acolyte, as well as countless ceremonial performances across Australia.

Appointed Bandmaster at the Australian Defence Force Academy and later serving as Drum Major of Australian Army Band Adelaide, he has made significant contributions in the training space and preservation of sub-unit history. On behalf of the Commanding Officer and members of the AABC, we thank Andreas for his 48 years of service and wish him every success in his next chapter."



Welfare and Vale notices

Contact: Association Welfare Officer Grant COTTERILL, 38th Intake Plumber and Gasfitter, welfare@austarmyapprentice.org

The Welfare Officer:

- supports members in determining welfare and other Commonwealth and State Government entitlements by helping them locate the organisations who may assist
- liaises with similar service bodies (e.g. Returned and Services League, Vietnam Veterans Federation, Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Association) on welfare matters
- on the advice of the death of a member, verifies that the Vale notice is not already on the Association Website, ensures that information received is complete and correct (e.g. spelling, missing regimental number), ensures that the NOK is being cared for and sends condolences, advises the President, Secretary, Membership Secretary, and Newsletter Editor of updates required
- on the advice of a member in hospital, sick or otherwise indisposed, arranges a visit from a member to ensure his/her welfare (through a Regional Representative if applicable).

2026 Veteran Card reissue

From: [DVA Veteran Card](#)

From July 2026, DVA Veteran Cards will be re-issued. The new cards will function the same way but have a new look. If you're a Veteran Card holder, please update your postal address details on [MyService](#) to avoid delivery delays. Current cards remain valid until the new ones arrive, even if they read expired. Some Veteran Card holders may not receive their new card until October.



Vale notices

The untimely passing of a former Army Apprentice is always a sad occasion. It is important when notifying of the passing that we are clear about the details of the notice. Whilst social media posts draw attention to the passing of Apprentices, occasionally there is insufficient information to assist in maintaining the Apprentices nominal roll.

The AAAA Website [Vale Notification Form](#) prompts for the necessary information. If you don't have all requested information, send what you have, and we can follow up. Thank you to all those who have provided details.

This edition's Vale summary below includes three historic entries.

Intake	Reg No	Name (AAAA Membership no)	Trade	Passed away
10	242946	Bruce McILWRAITH	Clerk (AATTV)	4 Jul 2023
33	226560	Jeffrey Wayne KERR	Electronics Tradesman	13 Dec 2025
38	453546	Steven Myles PERCY	Electronics Tradesman	14 Feb 2026
14	243182	Patrick Spencer Ainsworth STEER	Musician	30 Apr 2026
18	18816	Christopher Paul MANKTELOW	Radio Mechanic DNG	9 May 2026
12	243042	Kevin John CRANDELL (#1361)	Bricklayer	14 May 2026
28	316073	Stevan VUJOVIC	Electronics Tradesman	22 May 2026
7	242724	Henry Clifford (Harry) COLE (#97)	Vehicle Mechanic	1 Jun 2026
26	220860	Raymond James DOUGLAS (#1104)	Electrical Mechanic	3 Jun 2026
1	31590	Maxwell BROWN	Carpenter and Joiner	3 Jun 2026
6	242636	Lawrence DOHNT	Carpenter and Joiner	Jun 2026
43	2306765	Daniel Kenneth ARMFIELD	Electronics Tradesman	9 Jun 2026
22	217281	Dallas Noel SCHOFIELD (#1024)	Fitter and Turner	10 Jun 2026
13	18620	Robert (Beau) Menzies ROBERTSON	Plumber	10 Jul 2026
31	58989	Stefan Gunter Herwarth SCHMIDT (#776)	Fitter and Turner	11 Jul 2026
13	18615	Lawrence Bensley DAWSON (#19)	Radio Mechanic	21 Jul 2026

Vale – Chris MANKTELOW, 18th Intake Radio Mechanic, 12 November 1945 – 9 May 2026

By Herb Ellerbock, 18th Intake Radio Mechanic, AAAA Member #152

"In January 1963, Chris Manktelow enlisted in the Army Apprentices School with 186 other adventurous and hopeful teenagers who became known as the 18th Intake.

At a place called Balcombe, we were turned into tradesmen and soldiers, before we reached adulthood. We were brothers – different mothers – but bound together in a way that only service, hardship, and loyalty can forge. It's a bond that can only be broken by death.

And Chris nearly broke that bond when he stepped on that land mine in Vietnam. But he found the resolve, not just to rebuild his life, but to make it count.

Chris was respected, admired, and known for his courage. He lived it every day, quietly and without fuss in the way that truly brave men do.

Rest in peace, Brother.

We, who are still scattered around Australia and places beyond, salute you.

On behalf of the Army Apprentices School 18th Intake, 22 May 2026"



Vale – Stevan VUJOVIC, 28th Intake Electronics Tradesman, 5 Feb 1957 – 22 May 2026

Source: Wally Rotow, 18th Intake Radio Mechanic, AAAA Member #182

"Steve was taken to the Alfred Hospital after suffering a serious stroke. He passed away shortly after 5.00pm in the evening, Friday 22 May 2026.



Steve was a member of the Army Apprentices School, graduating in December 1975. He served as a RAEME Craftsman, before graduating from OCS in the Class of June 1980 to RAEME. During his full-time service to 1986, he served as a Troop Commander in the SASR. On discharge in August 1986, at the substantive rank of Captain, he served in the Reserve until 1994.

Steve will be sadly missed by many, including his Portsea classmates. RIP.”

Vale – Harry COLE, 7th Intake Vehicle Mechanic, AAAA Member #97, Past-AAAA Heritage Officer

From Judy, Anthony, Paul and Peter Cole



It is with deep sadness that we share the news that Harry Cole passed away peacefully today, Monday 1st June 2026, aged 90.

He was a caring husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend to many. He will be sadly missed. We will provide further details of his funeral service to be held on Tuesday the 9th of June

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Salvation Army

From Kerry Tunbridge, 14th Intake Vehicle Mechanic, AAAA Member #804

“With regret and sorrow, I advise the death of our RAEME friend and colleague 242724/256962 Major Harry Cole at Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick at 1000 hrs today 1st June, 2026. Harry was a 7th intake Army Apprentice Vehicle Mechanic and rose to the rank of Major. Harry is survived by his wife Judy, sons Anthony, Paul and Peter with their families including 8 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren. His funeral will be conducted on Tuesday 9th June – venue and timing to be confirmed.

In lieu of flowers please consider a donation to the Salvation Army.

Arte et Marte, Lest We Forget”



Above: Past-AAAA President Frank Poole (dec) presenting Harry Cole with a Certificate of Appreciation in 2017, recognising his service as the Association Heritage Officer after more than a year in the position. He created many excellent stories to add to the Association's heritage collection. In presenting the Certificate, Frank said that Harry had been a keen and active supporter of the Association since its early formation and that he considered him a close friend and looked forward each quarter to meeting up at the Canberra Region lunches where he assisted in the role of registrar and treasurer. Frank said, “His work as the Heritage Officer will be missed, particularly his corporate knowledge flowing from his early intake.”

Sadly, Harry's wife of 65 years, Judy, passed away shortly after his funeral on 11 June 2026 at the Uniting War Memorial Hospital in Waverley, NSW. Harry and Judy were married at the old All Saints Catholic Church in George St, Liverpool on 25 February 1961, by Fr Davies the Parish Priest.





From Greg Haqgett, 40th Intake Plumber and Gasfitter, AAAA Committee Vice-president

I'd like to formally recognise the passing of Harry Cole, 7th Intake VM. I was lucky enough to have developed a connection with Harry and I cherished our conversations. Much the same as the late Jack Gamble 4th Intake C&J. Both men gave me a sense of our history and were instrumental in developing my interest and desire to recognise our involvement [with] the Australian Army Apprentice alumni. These men set the standard and we have followed as a unique, determined and successful group. Unfortunately, I was too late in calling Harry for one final chat. The legacy of these men lives on in us all and I hope we can honour their memory. May they both Rest in Peace. UBIQUE

Vale – Max BROWN, 1st Intake Carpenter and Joiner

From a Facebook post by Treina Davis, Max's daughter

"Sadly we lost our dearest Dad this week, Max Brown aged 94 years young. We are so very proud of him and he was so extremely proud to be in the 1st Army Apprentice Intake in 1951 [enlisted in 1948] after he ran away to join the army. I do believe dad was the last man standing from this group of 43 men. Dad had a wonderful life."

[Unfortunately, the Association's records don't include death details for 20 members of the 1st Intake (and for many others in most other intakes for that matter). We are always keen to receive details of any Apprentice who has passed away and is not listed in the official list on the Website – accessible to members only at https://austarmyapprentice.org/vale_list/.]

Max is pictured (below) on the Association's Official Group on Facebook, along with three other 1st Intake members and four 49th Intake members at the 2018 70th Reunion in Canberra.



(L-R): 49th: Paul Burton, Plumber and Gasfitter; Todd Williams, Plumber and Gasfitter; Jason Roberts, Electronics Tradesman; and Terry Hill, Electronics Tradesman; and 1st: Geoff Hawker, Fitter and Turner; Douglas McCarthy, Carpenter and Joiner; Max Brown, Carpenter and Joiner; and Keith Thomas, Fitter and Turner.

Pictured below: 39 of the 43 graduates of the 1st Intake (20 didn't graduate): **L-R – front:** Cameron, Nichols, Hocking, Edebone, Frazer, Bird, Weetman, Collins, Barrow, **Max Brown**, Henson, and Mashado; **Centre:** Garside, **Scott (first BSM)**, Corliss, Nixon, Hawker, Johnstone, Jackson, Sukroo, L Brown, Anderson, Christopher, Stapleton, Byron, and Fisher; **Rear:** Jennings, Brooks, Thompson, Ganino, McCarthy, Punch, Evans, Waddell, Thomas, Pini, Valentine, Sproule, and Tynan; and **Absent:** Crombie, Holbrook, Scholes, and Shepherdson.



Vale – Dennis CROWE, RAEME

By Jeff Heron, 21st Intake Radio Mechanic, AAAA Public Officer and Newsletter Editor

Whilst not an Apprentice, many RAEME Apprentices will know or have served with Dennis Crowe who passed away on 15 June 2026 from a heart attack. Dennis was a 5/80 ATET student at RAEME Training Centre (RTC). He served in Puckapunyal Wksp, 17 Construction Sqn, 1st Armoured Regt Tech Support, 1AR 'C' Sqn, RTC, MEA, DCPM, ALTC, the ASLAV Introduction into Service, and finally DMO/CASG.

Vale –Victor Edwards (Snow) READING, RAEME – 10 October 1942 –4 July 2026

By Jeff Heron, 21st Intake Radio Mechanic, AAAA Public Officer and Newsletter Editor

Vic served in the Army for 22 years, serving in Vietnam as the Regimental Duty NCO with 102 Field Workshop from 26 November 1968 to 28 November 1969. Starting his career in Infantry at 2RAR, he transferred to RAEME. Snow was a stalwart of RAEME and the RSL, and a well-remembered instructor at RAEME Training Centre Field Training Wing (ex-106 Field Workshop). Postings included Northern Command Workshops Bulimba, 301 Field Workshops Bulimba, 102 Field Workshop, 1 Base Workshop Bulimba, CSM HQ RTC (amongst others), RSM 2 Base Workshop, RSM 3 Base Workshop, discharging in 1986. He moved to Bribie Island with his wife Helen, where he joined the Bribie Island RSL. In 2005, he became District President and Board Member of RSL QLD. Redcliffe RSL Sub Branch named their Pension and Welfare Centre in his honour to support Veterans. In keeping with his wishes, a private cremation was held at Moreton Bay Crematorium & Memorial Park on Tuesday 14 July 2026.

Events reports

Balcombe Grammar School ANZAC Service, 21 April 2026

From Cindy Waters, Chaplain Balcombe Grammar School, 28 April 2026

“Good morning Keith,

I hope you are well this fine sunny (in Victoria) morning,

I just wanted to pass on to you that our School ANZAC Service went very well last week. We had quite a good turnout from the former Balcombe Army Apprentices Association (although I do not know all their names). We ended up getting one of our staff to speak who had served as a Lieutenant in the Royal Australian Navy for many years. It was a wonderful point of connection with our students to hear from one of the “English teachers” about her life prior to teaching.

Please find attached some photos of the day, including of the Apprentices at morning tea with Ms Stacie Oakford, keynote speaker. Here’s to hoping you may be available next year. I’ll be in contact next January as I begin the plans for the School’s 2027 ANZAC Service.

Blessings, Cindy”



L-R: Geoff Roberts-Thomson, Principal (former RAAF FLTLT); Bruce Keevers, 16th RM (#275); George Stockwell, 19th RM (#874); Phil Board, 16th F&T; Dennis Wilson, 22nd F&T (#977); David Isted, 20th RM (#248); John Maher, 21st VM (#386); Desmond Poulton, 6th F&T; Michael Botten, 33rd VM (#965); and Cindy Waters, Chaplain



L-R: Bruce Keevers, Phil Board, Stacie Oakford & George Stockwell



Desmond Poulton

RAEME Prince Phillip Banner Ruby celebration, North Bandiana, Wednesday 20 May 2026

For detailed reports on this important event, see [Maintenance Matters Edition 5 here](#).

ACT Region Quarterly Lunch, Ainslie FC, Wednesday, 10 June 2026

By Jeff HERON, 21st Intake Radio Mechanic, ACT Regional Rep

A small crowd ventured out for a pleasant lunch. Intakes 2 to 35 were represented with 5 x Elec Trades, 2 x Building Trades, 1 x VM & 1 x F&T. We welcomed John and Robyn Culbert (18th Intake Carpenter and Joiner) visiting from Wagga, and Andrew Adams (35th Intake Electronics Tradesman and ACT/NSW RAEME Colonel Commandant) for the first time.



31st Intake Apprentice 50th Reunion, Maroochydore, 23-25 April 2026

From Steve Murphy, 31st Intake Fitter and Turner, AAAA Member #950

The 31st Intake's 50th Reunion was held recently in the Maroochydore area over the Anzac Day long weekend. Just under 50 of the Intake's original 214 members (not including DNG) attended, including two who travelled from overseas: Brad Strong MF *[Fitter and Turner]* from Canada and David Moran EM *[Electrical Mechanic]* from California.

A Meet & Greet was held at the Duporth Tavern on the Wednesday the 23rd night with roughly 80 Appies & wives/partners in attendance.

Followed the next night Thursday Apr 24th at the Maroochy RSL with a formal dinner for 85 persons. This included a lucky door prize draw of a 50th Reunion Flag signed by everyone who attended the events. Bud Bowman *[31st Intake Electrical Mechanic, AAAA Member #1231]* was the proud winner who also got to fly the flag along with Stephen Ward *[31st Intake Electronics Tradesman, AAAA Member #1642]* (one of the organisers of the reunion) on the Anzac Day Parade.

Fifty members walked the short route on Anzac Day from the RSL to the Cenotaph joined by a few other Intakes at the rear.

This was followed by a private event upstairs in the RSL for past and currently serving Defence members, where more lies were again told and no problems of the world were solved.

During the spare days, some went for river cruises, and some went for more places to have a beer and a feed. Ricks Garage Palmwoods was popular.

They're all looking forward to the next reunion, somewhere.

Cheers, Murf, Event Coordinator





Army Apprentices Reunion SE Qld 2026 – Bulimba

Adapted from RAQ Spanner News Weekly, 12 June 2026





Above: The 14th Intake, from left: Brian Daley OAM, Phil Livingstone, John Nickols, Bill Proudfoot, Alf Richardson, Graham Poole, Rendell Brown and David Grant.

The 2026 SE Qld Army Apprentices Reunion was held on a mild Brisbane winter's day at the Bulimba Bowls Club, Balmoral, with approximately 130 Army Apprentices, wives and partners attending.

This year's reunion was tinged with sadness following the passing of Maxwell Brown, a 1st Intake Apprentice, who had hoped to attend with his family. Max sadly passed away on Wednesday 3 June, after suffering a fall and sustaining serious injuries. The Apprentices observed a minute's silence and raised a toast to Max, and to all Army Apprentices unable to attend, including Keith Fox, a 2nd Intake apprentice who joined the reunion last year.

Barb Daley and Mary-Anne Bowyer once again provided wonderful support with the raffle and name tags.



(L) Brian Daley with the ladies who make it happen: Barb Daley, and Mary-Anne Bowyer.



(R) The 27th Anniversary cake made by Trisha Richardson.

The 30th Intake was the most represented this year, closely followed by the 21st. The oldest intake represented was the 14th, with David Grant, Rendell Brown, Graham Poole, Alf Richardson, Bill Proudfoot, John Nickols, Phil Livingstone and Brian Daley in attendance.



Above: Gathering of the 30th Intake

Lunch was well received, the stories flowed, friendships were renewed, and several first-time attendees said they wished they had come along sooner. All agreed it was another excellent day celebrating the mateship and shared history of the Army Apprentice community.



Upcoming events

AAAA and Apprentices functions

- * **ACT Region Quarterly Lunch, Ainslie FC, Wednesday, 9 Sep 2026, 1200.** Please let me know if you will be there.
- * **AAAA AGM 2026, Fawkner RSL, Vic, and via Zoom, Saturday, 24 October 2026, 1000.** Details will be forwarded over the coming months to Members via email. Non-members should keep an eye out for information on Facebook and the [Association Website](#).
- * **AAAA Committee Meeting, Fawkner RSL, Vic, and via Zoom, Saturday, 24 October 2026, after the AGM.**
- * **SE Qld Army Apprentices Reunion, Saturday, 5 June 2027, put it in your diaries.**
- * **80th Anniversary of the Commencement of the Army Apprentice Scheme and the Army Apprentices School.** Watch for information on Facebook and upcoming Newsletters.
From Peninsula Essence September 2024: *"Following a competitive selection process, on 2 August 1948 the first intake of 63 army apprentices started their training in eleven various trades while residing in the camp's old unheated huts."* (The Army College of TAFE stated seven trades, but in fact, there were nine trades as listed in the official roll maintained by the AAAA.)

Other associations, etc

- * **25th anniversary of Australian service in Afghanistan 2001-2021, Sunday, 11 October 2026, 1000, AWM** Canberra, for Veterans, families of veterans and the wider community, free, but register on the DVA website – www.dva.gov.au/Afghanistan-anniversary
- * **RAE Association Victoria Inc., contact [RAE Future Events](#)**
- * **RAE Association WA Inc., contact <https://wasappers.com.au/events/>**
- * **RASigs Association, contact <https://rasigs.org/events/category/rasigs-association-events/>**
- * **RAEME National Network, contact <https://raeme.org.au>**
- * **101 Fd Wksp & Friends Reunion, Friday 14–Sunday 16 August 2026, Currumbin RSL and Vikings Surf Club** Currumbin, *contact Michelle Lafferty on 0404 004775 for details.*
- * **78th WRAAC and Australian Women's Veterans Reunion, 12–16 February 2029, Sunshine Coast, contact wraac78threunion@outlook.com.**

Letters to the Editor

Update to Army Rank Insignia

From Dr Geoff Grey CSM, 36th Intake Musician (AAAA Member #618)

"Hi Jeff,

It's great to read another sterling issue of 'The Apprentice About'. Thanks for the efforts of all contributors and, of course, yourself as editor.

Of particular interest was the new ranks chart on p.15, especially the descriptor "... and the removal of obsolete ranks no longer in use."

As a proud former member of the (unofficial) 'Royal Corps of SSGTs', I was bemused that the rank slide for SSGT has been removed. Not so much that the rank is no longer attainable – and hasn't been for many years – but more so for the situation this may place my fellow 36th muso, also still serving, SSGT Stuart Colhoun! It's a pretty big hint to leave when your rank is no longer in print!

Cheers, Dr Geoff Grey CSM, LTCOL"

[Thanks Geoff. We'll see what transpires! Ed]



Electronics Trades

From Peter "Lobes" Lobegeier, 29th Intake Electronics Tradesman (or Radio Mechanic?) (AAAA Member #299)

"Hi Jeff,

In the latest newsletter in the article about Electronic Trades I believe the designation Radio Mechanic continued up to the 29th Intake not the 27th.

We were the last Intake into Radio Wing to be trained under the "Grade" System of learning our Electronics Trade. From the 30th Intake the module system was used. Also toward the end of our third year we also studied a couple of modules on "Electronic Logic". A pass in these modules entitled us to receive the Victorian Education Department "Electronics Certificate" and along with our Industrial Training Commission "Radio Tradesman" papers.

I have quite an interest in the training conducted in Radio Wing as apart from my apprenticeship at Balcombe I was also posted to AAS Bonegilla as a Sergeant Instructor 1984/85 and again as WSM Radio Wing 1989/90 AAS Bonegilla. AAS became Army College of TAFE in that time.

Your Newsletters and the effort you put into their production is greatly appreciated. Best Regards, Peter "Lobes" Lobegeier"

[Thanks Lobes. It will be interesting to hear from others from the 27th, 28th and 29th Intakes.

These extracts below, using "ETs" rather than Radio Mechs, are from the AAS Journal '74.

SPAASSM Phil, Binder 10, Item 24 – secret answer.]



The 28 ETs working on this Journal. App Christie in the foreground.



The 28ETs again, this time with the Editor, Lt Pat Harvey doing a little checking.

27th CLASS ELECTRONIC TRADESMEN

315124	ALLCHIN	JOHN	RAEME
46284	BOCK	JOHN PHILLIP	RAEME
56885	BRENNAN	MICHAEL JOHN	RA Sigs
56877	BURGES	STEPHEN RHYS	RA Sigs
1204084	CHAPMAN	KIMSLEY WARREN	RA Sigs
62413	CHUGG	NEVILLE LAWRENCE	RA Sigs
56894	CLEGHORN	DAVID JOHN	RA Sigs
56558	CLUTTERBUCK	DAVID CHARLES	RAEME
221669	COOK	GEOFFREY BRIAN	RA Sigs
56897	DARCY	WILLIAM ROSS	RAEME
1204061	DIHM	JACK	RAEME
221679	EDWARDS	PHILLIP JOHN	RAEME
62416	ELLARD	JAMES JOSEPH	RA Sigs
1204083	FERRIS	PETER WAYNE	RAEME
46282	GOODYER	HUGH	RA Sigs



221688	KLADOUHOS	NICHOLAS	RAEME
46279	KNOWLES	MALCOLM JOHN	RAEME
1204091	KORZENIEWSKI	FRANCISZEK ROMAN	RA Sigs
221702	McILROY	WARREN JOHN	RAEME
1204090	MARK	HANS BRYSON	RA Sigs
46283	MOODY	GEOFFREY PHILLIP	RA Sigs
221698	MOULDS	HENRY CHARLES	RAEME
315160	PRESUCHE	FRANK FRITZ	RA Sigs
315122	PREUSCHE	LUTZ KARL WILHELM	RA Sigs
315188	RAYSON	STEPHEN JAMES	RA Sigs
1204089	ROBERTS	BRUCE JAMES	RA Sigs
1204102	ROLES	CHRISTOPHER LEONARD	RA Sigs
46281	SHARMAN	TREVOR COLWYN	RA Sigs
1204117	TATE	GEOFFREY BRUCE	RAEME
315121	WAYE	DAVID GEOFFREY	RA Sigs
1204062	WHITE	PETER WILLIAM	RA Sigs
1204119	ZILLMAN	RALPH PERCIVAL	RAEME

SPAASSM Collection

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/tcmowfh3ulz8rr7/SPAASSM%20Index%20and%20Cover.pdf?dl=0>

May 2026 solution

Q: What are these guys standing/squatting on?

A: A Leopard tank. (*SPAASSM Ph I Image 02844*)

Again, there were no correct answers!

SPAASSM competition end

It appears that interest in the current SPAASSM competitions has run its course. There were no responses to the last three questions, so it's time to think of something else. From February 2014 to May 2026, we have featured 45 images, for which we awarded a SPAASSM DVD or USB wafer to 27 correct responses. These last few images are for your enjoyment. Keep an eye out for something new in this issue!



SPAASSM Ph II Binder 27 Item 01 Image 00001
4th Class Graduation, December 1952



SPAASSM Ph II Binder 31 Item 01 Image 00002
AAS Band entering the Memorial Gates, c. 1960-62



SPAASSM Ph I Image 01608 – AAS Staff, including CO/CI LTCOL Cecil Ives OBE, Balcombe, 1955



SPAASSM Ph I Image 03963
Catafalque Party c. 1982, Balcombe



SPAASSM Ph I Image 03080
Governor-General's Banner, Bonegilla, date unknown



SPAASSM Ph II Negatives (Kodak Box) Item 01 Image 00175
Freedom of the City of Albury, 1986



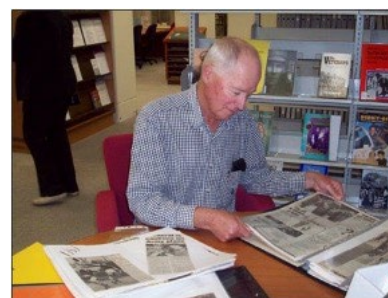
SPAASSM Ph I Image 02616
Last Apprentices Parade, Bonegilla, 1995



New SPAASSM competition

As we reach 20 years since the beginning of the SPAASSM Project in August 2006, this edition of TAA celebrates the anniversary in a couple of ways. Firstly, there is the selection of images of above. Secondly, there is still an opportunity to obtain a free copy of the SPAASSM Collection. All you have to do is find the secretly hidden SPAASSM item details in this edition. Once you find it, send your answer by email to news@austarmyapprentice.org. The first correct answer will receive the free copy.

[R: Ian Morris, 12th Intake Wireless Mechanic,
AAAA Member #12, SPAASSM Project Member]



Merchandise

AAAA SHOP: <https://austarmyapprentice.org/shop/>

For enquiries, contact the Treasurer: treasurer@austarmyapprentice.org

Notes:

1. Postage is calculated on ordering. **Shipping is free for Promotion items.**
2. When ordering a Name Badge, include your preferred first name, and Intake/Class.
3. When ordering a Key Ring, ask if a number (between 1 and 1000) you would like is still available.

From Defence

Timor-Leste Solidarity Medal

[From Defence](#)

The Australian Government has accepted a generous offer from the President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, His Excellency José Ramos-Horta, to **expand the eligibility criteria of the Timor-Leste Solidarity Medal**. The medal recognises a broader cohort of Australians who served on mandated missions in Timor-Leste since 1999.

For details, see <https://www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/honours-awards/foreign-awards/timor-leste-solidarity-medal>.



The Soldier – Essentials of Land Warfare

From ARMY, Edition 1606, June 25, 2026

Volume 1: The Soldier – sets out the enduring purpose of the Australian Army and the professional obligations of the Australian soldier.

Volume 2: The Sword and Baton – sets out the professional code of honour and conduct expected of Australian Army Generals, articulating the unique authority, responsibility, and accountability inherent in Generalship.

Review by Sgt Matt Bickerton

“ARMY is an organisation of war, with a “duty to kill” the enemy and be as “good at it as you can be”.

The Soldier – Volume 1, produced by Army, articulates this honestly, saying the quiet parts out loud in a way I’ve not seen before – and it’s refreshing.

It outlines what’s expected of a soldier, what to expect from war, how to conduct yourself, and states in no uncertain terms a soldier’s role: ...

Hard copies of The Soldier have been distributed to units across Australia, with a digital version also available on the Australian Army website: <https://www.army.gov.au/our-work/strategy/essentials-land-warfare>”



History

RAE history enters a new chapter

From LinkedIn, Defence Australia's Post on 12 Jun 2026, by CPL Johnny Huang

"The latest instalment of the official history of the Corps of Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) will be written over the next two years, following a contract signing at the Australian Army Museum of Military Engineering.

Volume 5 of the corps' history will cover the period 1973 to 2002, a time that RAE Head of Corps Brigadier Mick Scott said was marked by significant change.

"Accurately capturing the history of the Royal Australian Engineers, like other histories of the Australian Army, is essential to the corps' identity, culture and commitment to learning," Brigadier Scott said."

<http://spr.ly/6045B84TKv>

Apprentices posted as Corps' Senior WO1s/RSMs

From Facebook post on 13 May 2026, by Michael Kusternig, 17th Intake Clerk (AAAA Member #660)

Michael Kusternig listed the RAEME Corps' Senior WO1s/RSMs from Jun 1953 to the current day. In the list of 27 (including two who had two roles each), there are nine Apprentices who held the roles, see the table below.

Maybe the other Corps can provide similar lists for us?

Dates	Name/ AAAA Member no	Intake	Trade	Position	
Jun 1979 – Feb 1982	Michael KUSTERNIG/ #660	17	Clerk	RSM RAEME Training Centre	
Jan 1996 – Dec 1998	Craig JONES/ #902	28/29	Electrical Fitter	RSM Corps Directorate/Army Logistic Training Centre (ALTC), and was also BSM AAS in 1975	
Jan 2004 – Jun 2004	Tibor FEKETE	39	Electrical Fitter	RSM Material Support Division, ALTC	
Jun 2004 – Jan 2006	Tibor FEKETE	39	Electrical Fitter	RSM ASEME	
Apr 2007 – Oct 2007	Mark McLEAN CSM	40	Fitter & Turner	Corps WO1	
Oct 2007 – Jan 2010	Martin BURGESS OAM	40	Vehicle Mechanic	RSM ASEME	
Jan 2010 – Dec 2012	Jason BALLARD	42	Vehicle Mechanic	RSM ASEME	
Jan 2013 – Dec 2014	Craig WEBB OAM	45	Electrical Fitter	RSM ASEME	
Jan 2015 – Dec 2016	Robert TURNBULL	44	Vehicle Mechanic	RSM ASEME	
Jan 2021 – Dec 2022	Scott COLLARD	49	Electrical Fitter	RSM ASEME	

Forged at Balcombe, Concluded at Bonegilla

By Lutz Preusche, 27th Intake Electronics Tradesman, and AAAA Heritage Officer from November 2020 to November 2022, (AAAA Member #920)

"Tradition, trades, and the quiet confidence of certain intakes"



There was a time when the Australian Army looked at a group of teenage boys and decided they could be shaped into disciplined tradesmen. It sounds ambitious, bordering on optimistic. It also turned out to be remarkably effective.

Established in 1948 at Balcombe, Victoria, the Australian Army Apprentices School (AAS) was a practical response to a changing military. Post-war armies needed more than soldiers who could march and shoot. They needed mechanics, fitters, clerks, and technicians capable of keeping increasingly complex equipment operational. The solution was straightforward: recruit young, train thoroughly, and instil both trade skills and military discipline from the outset.

The first intake was modest, just a few dozen boys aged between 15 and 17. Over the following decades, the school grew into a highly efficient training system. Between 1951 and 1982, more than 5,000 apprentices graduated through Balcombe's gates, leaving with recognised qualifications and a grounding that would serve them for life.

Daily life at the school was structured and demanding. Academic study, trade training, and military routine were tightly interwoven. One moment might involve classroom instruction, the next a workshop task, followed closely by inspection standards that left very little room for interpretation. It was a system that expected a great deal, and generally got it.

Alongside the formal training, a strong internal culture developed. Each intake formed its own identity, shaped by shared experience and a healthy dose of rivalry. Lines were drawn early and rarely erased. Debates over intake numbers became part of the background noise of apprentice life, with odd and even intakes developing a long-standing and entirely unofficial competition that could be as good-natured or as stubborn as the personalities involved.

Respect for the earlier intakes has always been a constant. They set the standards, established the reputation, and endured the early years when systems were still being refined. That respect has remained intact across generations. Beyond that, views tend to become... more confidently held, depending on who is speaking.

Rivalries were not limited to intake numbers. Trade distinctions added another layer. Fitters, vehicle mechanics, clerks and others all carried their own sense of pride, occasionally expressed in ways that suggested their particular skillset was the backbone of the entire Army. Then there were the musicians—the “mussos”—who managed to sit slightly apart while still being very much part of the same system. Their presence added colour, ceremony, and just enough contrast to ensure they were never entirely spared from commentary.

Another enduring element of apprentice culture is the term “Crabs.” Its origin is debated and, in truth, probably less important than its meaning. To be known as a Crab is to belong. It reflects a shared background, a common experience, and an understanding that doesn't require much explanation. Like most long-standing traditions, it is recognised instantly by those within it and rarely explained fully to those outside.

By the 1970s, the Apprentices School had reached its stride. It was producing highly capable tradesmen within a disciplined military framework, and its graduates were widely regarded for both their technical ability and their professionalism. The model worked, and it worked well.

In 1982, the school relocated from Balcombe to Latchford Barracks at Bonegilla. The move was intended to modernise and consolidate training, but it also marked a shift. Balcombe had accumulated decades of history, and while the program continued effectively at its new location, many felt that something of the original character remained tied to its former home.

At Bonegilla, the school also reflected a broader change within the Army itself. In 1984, commencing with the 39th Intake, female apprentices were formally introduced into the AAS. They trained within the same structure, meeting the same standards and becoming part of the same intake-based culture that had long defined the school.

The school continued at Bonegilla until 1995, when the final intake graduated and the Australian Army Apprentices School closed. Changing training systems and evolving military needs had made the model less necessary, bringing an end to nearly half a century of operation.



What remains is a legacy that extends well beyond the years of service. Thousands of apprentices carried their skills into the Army and civilian life, contributing across industries and communities. Just as importantly, they carried with them a shared identity.

Today, former apprentices still gather, still exchange stories, and still maintain the traditions that defined their time. The rivalries persist, usually with a smile but occasionally with surprising conviction. The earlier intakes are spoken of with respect. Others are spoken of with a certain quiet assurance that needs no elaboration.

And among the stories and the laughter, there is always a quieter moment. Time has taken some of those apprentices, as it inevitably does. They are remembered not in formal terms, but in shared recollections, familiar names, and the understanding that they were part of something that mattered. They remain part of the intake and the Apprentice brotherhood.

No one seems particularly inclined to change that.

Lutz Preusche 27th ET — at C Coy AAS Balcombe.

Antarctica Exhibition – National Museum of Australia – 1 July to 11 October 2026

In the February 2017 edition of TAA, we included an article by Peter Thompson, 21st Intake Vehicle Mechanic (then AAAA Heritage Officer) on Desmond "Pancho" Evans, 1st Intake Vehicle Mechanic who, along with senior mechanic Neville "Gringo" Collins, took part in the 3,000 km, four-month Vostok traverse, the most ambitious over ice journey then attempted by Australian Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE) in September 1962.

The article told the story of their efforts in keeping two D4 Caterpillar dozers (towing a train of sledges and caravans) and two vintage 1944 Weasel over-snow vehicles operational in temperatures which, at one point, fell to -63°C.



Desmond was awarded the Polar Medal, presented by the British Sovereign to those who made outstanding contributions to polar research and endured extreme hardships in Arctic or Antarctic climates.

One of the large objects on display with the [National Museum of Australia's Antarctica Exhibition](#) is one of the dozers driven and supported by Pancho and Gringo.

To view a 24-minute film of this adventure, visit [Steak and onions Vostok style](#).

Over Open Sights – An Apprentice fighting on the frontline at Fire Support Base Coral, Việt Nam

An account of the Battle of Coral and Balmoral (12 May – 6 June 1968), as told by 13th Intake Fitter and Turner Kelvin Ferris (AAAA Member #1205) to 14th Intake Vehicle Mechanic Norm Wells (AAAA Member #536). Interview subsequently submitted to the Australian War Memorial on the 40th anniversary of the Battle. With additional reporting drawn from an interview with Simon Brooks, 40th Intake Motor Mechanic, AAAA Committee Secretary

With enemy mortars raining in on his position and bleeding from a shrapnel wound to his chest, Kelvin Ferris was a world away from the Army Apprentices School on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, but he instinctively knew the training he received there would be his saviour.

It was the early hours of 13 May 1968. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) had taken out the Number 2 gun at *Fire Support Base (FSB) Coral* and Kelvin was receiving the damage report from his Craftsman Fitter, who had just inched his way back to him under fire.

"It needed my assessment", the (then) Artificer 'Tiffy' Fitter Sergeant says, adding, "I waited for a lull in the barrage and crawled over to check the gun."



A hasty inspection established damage to the upper recoil system, a destroyed tyre and shrapnel damage to the gun trails.

"I suggested it could still be used but only on low charge in direct defensive fire straight in front of us. I believed an enemy ground assault would soon follow the barrage we were enduring, and I thought we would soon be fighting for our existence, firing the Howitzers over open sights to deter the attackers. As it turned out, my forecast of developments sadly was how it turned out to be."

Balcombe beckons

Kelvin came from Collie, a small country coal mining community in WA and, after learning he'd been accepted into the Army's apprentice training scheme at Balcombe, he was straight off to Perth ... by steam train!

"That's how long ago it was, 1958! But for a 15-year-old to travel all the way to Melbourne was very exciting," Kelvin recalls.

While he found some of the instructors at the School to be "hard but fair", and the living quarters to be cold and draughty, Kelvin says he and the others in his Apprentice intake didn't know any better.

"It was not easy ... but by and large, you got through," he says. "I've formed a lot of long-term friendships, which I still have. And really, it was all very positive. In my year, I was in the top 10 of my class of 20, so I did okay. And I went to RAEME after graduation," he explains, adding that his parents drove across from WA for the ceremony. "Which was quite big time in those days because the Nullarbor crossing was gravel."

After Balcombe, Kelvin was posted to 2 Base Workshops, Sydney, to finish his apprenticeship, then to Holsworthy, Darwin and Perth for just a few months when notice came through that he was being sent to the Jungle Training Centre, Canungra. Next stop, Việt Nam.



Operation Toàn Thắng

The failure of the massive widespread enemy actions of the Tết (Lunar New Year) Offensive, in February 1968, to overthrow the Government of South Vietnam had resulted in the depletion of the regional Việt Cộng structure, which had suffered some 45,000 casualties, and their ability to launch major offensives had been disrupted.

However, in April 1968, US Intelligence became aware of an intended assault on Sài Gòn using 10,000 NVA reinforcements, who had been pouring down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to assault Sài Gòn from the north-west.

The Americans subsequently made a request to use Australian Forces in Biên Hòa Province outside their normal Phước Tuy operational area to interdict the NVA line of march in and out of Sài Gòn. Operation Toàn Thắng was approved.

Early on 5 May, the enemy attacks on Sài Gòn and nearby US installations commenced.

In response, the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) deployed into AO (Area of Operation) Columbus to assist in the protection of the extensive US facilities at Biên Hòa and Long Biên.

On 6 May, 102 Field Battery, 12 Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, commenced a continuous operational deployment of some 30 days, firstly to *FSB Harrison* and then to *FSB Coral*. It was a pivotal moment for Kelvin, who accompanied the Battery as its 'Tiffy' Sergeant.

FSB Coral established

The Artificer 'Tiffy' Fitter Sergeant was a RAEME appointment with responsibility for technical maintenance management of the Battery's equipment. With a small team of tradesmen, he cared for its six M2A2 105mm Howitzers, all personal weapons, machine guns, vehicles, plant equipment, generating sets, illuminating equipment, field cookers – and the odd personal transistor radio.



On Mother's Day, 12 May 1968, Australian forces were directed to establish *FSB Coral*.

The Chinook uplift had been delayed and, amid scorching humid 37-degree heat, "We flew in unusually late, approaching 1500hrs, with little water and the heavy work of establishing the gun position ahead of us," Kelvin says. "Setting out the Howitzers for action, preparing ammunition, digging in the command post, and preparing sentry weapon pits. A lot of exhausting sweaty work was yet to be done without delay."

The small Case 'size 0' bulldozer was working hard pushing up clay soil walls to protect each gun position but the hard ground and late fly-in delayed most of the usual defensive gun bund construction, and these were only partly erected by nightfall.

"By sundown stand-to our defence works were far from complete, with most still working hard to establish personal fighting pits well into the night," Kelvin recalls. "Time had just not been available to erect perimeter barbed wire. Never before had our gun position defences been so unprepared and vulnerable to an enemy assault. I positioned my shell scrape, along with my Craftsman and the Medic, between Number 1 gun and the stores area near the track. The dry rock-hard grey clay made digging very difficult, hence the pits were rather shallow."

But as night closed, the wider *FSB Coral* defences were incomplete. Yet they would have to be enough. Around 110 personnel, from 102 Field Battery, 1RAR Mortars, a few from HQ Battery, and 161 Div Locating Battery, were depending on it.

Contact!

After daylight sightings of NVA observers watching from a distant tree line, who were thought to be US troops, 1RAR reported a contact sighting of 10 enemy at 1925hrs followed shortly afterwards by two red signal flares to the north.

D Company 1RAR then ambushed a large enemy party passing through its position at 0200hrs on 13 May. The enemy returned fire and 102 Battery 4, 5 and 6 guns turned north to fire in support of the D Company ambush action. This decision was to prove critical in the battle to come.

Soon after, the enemy commenced a heavy mortar and Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) barrage on 102 Battery and the 1RAR Mortar positions.

"All hell broke loose, with RPGs whizzing closely overhead followed by an ear-splitting explosion," Kelvin says. "Mortars rained in with no flight sound, just a sudden deadly impact explosion heard," with most fortunately overshooting their position.

"I was lying on my back in my far too shallow shell scrape trying to protect myself with my steel helmet covering my face," he continues. "The ground was shaking from the incoming exploding mortars. I felt a blast close by and copped minor shrapnel wounds to the chest.

"Next thing I knew, Corporal 'Doc' McKenzie, whose shell scrape was a couple of metres from mine was on top of me groping about in the dark! After an unrepeatable comment from me he replied, 'Thank Christ you're OK, I thought you got a direct hit'. There appeared damage everywhere and many shouts for 'Medic'. The poor fellow was about to be run off his feet.

"The terrifying RPG salvos continued for some time keeping us pinned down praying for an end to it."

Close by, the canvas tarpaulin covering Number 1 gun's ammunition had caught fire and was burning fiercely. Believing the shells would not ignite without the fuse fitted, Kelvin went to help extinguish the fire. Meanwhile, the Number 2 gun had received a direct hit on its recoil system and, with Kelvin busy tackling the ammo cover fire, his Craftsman Fitter hurried over to check on the damage.

To Hell and back

Amid all the chaos, the enemy had crawled up to within a couple of metres of their position and surprised the Australians with a fierce ground attack. Firing flares and rockets, an estimated 480 North Vietnamese well-trained



soldiers rushed forward. The initial enemy assault was well planned and quickly overpowered the Australian defences, attacking from the north-east, swarming onto the 1RAR Mortar position and then the 102 Field Battery gun position.

“The enemy penetrated the gun position and terrifying close quarter hand to hand fighting took place in some areas,” Kelvin recalls ruefully.

By this time the forward guns were firing over open sights in self-defence using the formidable Splintex anti-personnel shells, which fire a wall of some 5,000 20mm steel darts. This was the first firing of Splintex rounds by the battery.

“With people everywhere in the confusion, we were mindful using our personal weapons in the gun position confines,” Kelvin says. “The constant noise of the battle was deafening.”

But mercifully, word of the battle had by then got back to President Johnson in Washington and, fearing the Australians could be wiped out, massive close air support was immediately ordered.

In for the fight

Over at the 1RAR Mortars, the surviving infantrymen were ordered to take cover in their pits while defensive fire support was called onto their position. Splintex was then fired over open sights by the Number 5 gun across their position, to devastating effect. The decision to leave the three 102 guns facing north had proven fortuitous. They had been ready to fire against the axis of the enemy assault onto their position.

“We could hear the enemy talking to each other and shouting orders as they came in close contact fighting on through the 102 gun position,” Kelvin adds.

As each gun crew took responsibility for their own fighting defence, it appeared they were close to being totally overrun. Sergeant Max Franklin’s Number 6 gun was closest to the enemy advance and became the subject of the enemy assault. Overpowered by numbers, the gun crew fought a strategic withdrawal leaving their gun unusable as Max had put the firing mechanism in his pocket. They withdrew to the Number 5 gun position.

“Earlier I was told Number 6 gun was not firing so, when I could, I started to crawl across to its position,” Kelvin says. “As I crawled by Number 5 gun, I noticed Max and his team on that gun position. When I said I was going to their gun they replied I better not as the enemy had possession.”

Fearing the worst in this darkest of hours, the Australians steeled themselves for an onslaught. And in that moment, the battlefield abruptly lit up like a Christmas tree. The USAF DC3 Dakota Gunship, affectionately known as ‘Puff the Magic Dragon’ or ‘Spooky’ by the Allied troops, had appeared in the sky above dropping parachute flares that turned night into day. The plane’s devastating mini guns began strafing the enemy with withering fire.

Screaming sirens of red tracer streamed across the night sky from its four-gun broadsides, each capable of firing around one hundred rounds a second. Help was finally here!

The tide turns

Spooky was quickly backed up by Huey Cobra gunship teams, which swept in lancing the enemy with further mini gun and rocket fire, giving them something to refocus their minds on. Enemy attempts to shoot down the aircraft with their green tracer ammunition resulted in a rapid deadly response of red tracer from the aircraft.

The gunship action quickly brought about a change in the situation, slowing down the advancing hordes and annihilating enemy parties outside the perimeter, who until now had held the battlefield initiative. Despite the onslaught from above, tenacious enemy inside the Australian perimeter fought on to secure their objective. A flanking assault proved futile, frustrated by the turning of the guns earlier in the evening.

By first light, the enemy’s determination had begun to abate, and they had been driven off Number 6 gun by its crew’s aggressive counterattack. Kelvin was instructed to take a clearing patrol out and sweep the area for any stray or wounded enemy that may remain.



"I took the patrol out and we were aghast at what we saw in the mortar location alongside our position," Kelvin recalls. "They had borne the brunt of the attack. From their 1RAR Mortar Platoon strength of 18, they had lost four KIA and eight WIA, a very upsetting outcome."

Total Australian battle casualties over the preceding 24 hours were nine KIA and 28 wounded, with one 105mm Howitzer (No. 2 Gun) and two 81mm Mortars damaged.

Enemy casualties were estimated to be 60 KIA and an unknown number wounded (the enemy were known to drag casualties from the field), one NVA prisoner was taken, with 23 small arms and seven crew-served weapons captured.

Aftermath

The *Battle of Coral and Balmoral* would rage until 6 June 1968. *FSB Coral* would withstand another major perimeter assault and 57 separate contact fire fights. *FSB Balmoral*, located 4,500m north of *FSB Coral*, came under attack on 26 May. Defended by Centurion tanks, the enemy didn't stand a chance.

Those tanks had earlier helped to defend *FSB Coral*, arriving on 23 May with their RAEME support Forward Repair Teams from 1 Armoured Squadron Workshop, after a two-day road run of some 120 kilometres from Núi Đất.

In total, 27 Australians would be killed in action and over 100 wounded over the 26-day battle and many more had their lives permanently disrupted from their experiences.

For his part, Kelvin picked up where he had left off on 13 May.

"I continued my armourer work inspecting and test firing machine guns and the M16 ArmaLites that had misfired in the battle," he says. "The problem appeared to be a bad batch of Australian manufactured ammunition blocking the recoil gas feed. US ammunition solved the problem."

The Number 5 gun Sergeant, his good mate 'Robbie' Robertson, was seriously wounded and blinded by an incoming mortar blast during a battalion strength assault on *Coral* in the early hours of 16 May.

"Bombardier John Burns took charge as Acting Sergeant and managed the ongoing battle trying to hold his gun crew together in the exhausting and frightening circumstances they found themselves in. To ease their situation, I assisted the crew where possible with ammo, laying claymore mines out front when I was not required elsewhere," Kelvin explains.

Life after Coral

As the Paris Peace Talks got underway on 25 May 1968, the enemy's attempt to improve its negotiating position on the battlefield had been thwarted. 102 Field Battery, now renamed the 102nd (Coral) Battery in honour of its battlefield victory, returned home in February 1969.

"And I wept once in Việt Nam when 102 Battery came home and I was left. They couldn't get a replacement for me," Kelvin says sheepishly, "but no one saw me in the Land Rover coming back from the airfield."

Kelvin was recommended for a commission when he returned to Australia, however he decided to become a civilian. In the years since, the camaraderie formed in Việt Nam has helped him enormously.

"Well, it's been very good, and I think mentally helpful for all of us ... there's around eight of us from 102 Field Battery in Perth," Kelvin says. Every year, Kelvin arranges a luncheon on 13 May for his 102 mates and, at their request, he leads the unit in Perth's Anzac Day march.

"But predominantly the guys here, two of the guys in 102 Battery, I go to gym with twice a week, we have coffee afterwards, tell fibs and jokes but it's great."





In those moments, Kelvin likely rolls out a favourite tale of his about the time he met Prime Minister John Gorton, shortly after the battle, when 102 had returned to the 1ATF Base at Núi Đất.

“Dressed in my ‘Sunday best’ freshly laundered and pressed uniform ... Mr Gorton shook my hand and thanked me for my ‘tireless effort and bravery at *Fire Support Base Coral*’. But he never saw my underwear after that horrific morning of 13 May 1968.”

Note:

Kelvin wasn't the only Apprentice who was serving in Việt Nam at the time of the *Battle of Coral and Balmoral*. Ronald Engstrom, 18th Intake Carpenter and Joiner was also involved in the *Battle*. On his second tour, he was killed by an enemy mine in Phước Tuy on 30 January 1970. ♪ **LEST WE FORGET** ♪

Army Museum reopened



Photo: From WIN News, Facebook page

The Army Museum Bandiana reopened to the public on 3 July 2026, with new times, new displays, and a refurbished building. The Museum is celebrating its 50th year, having commenced in 1976 as the Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps (RAAOC) General Museum in its present location. We included an article on the Museum in [TAA Volume 6 Issue 10 February 2026](#). It is open from 0900 to 1500, Wednesday to Sunday.

The Museum's Manager, Wendi McAdie (who we included in TAA February 2025 receiving her Federation Star in November 2024 with her husband Andrew, 34th Intake Motor Mechanic) said at the opening that “*We have veterans [volunteers] who continue to serve Defence 25 years after they've taken their boots off.*”

For entry, park to the left of the entrance road before the gate. The driver, with photo identification, walks to the security gate house, informs the guard that they wish to visit the Museum, and then follows their instructions.

AWM – Memorial Galleries nearly all open

As the AWM's major expansion programme nears its completion, the following existing Galleries are all open: First World War; Second World War; Cold War, including Vietnam War and Korean War; Hall of Valour; and the Commemorative Area.

The following new Galleries are also open: Anzac Atrium; Anzac Hall, including G for George; Aircraft Hall; and the War in Afghanistan, which opened in June in Anzac Hall. The images below are from the newly opened "Peacekeeping: 1947 to Today" gallery.

The Autumn 2026 edition, Issue 3 of the War Memorial Magazine (WM) introduced the newly opened spaces of Anzac Hall, the Anzac Atrium and the Aircraft Hall. Major objects featured include: T-walls, signed by thousands of MEAO veterans; a Rigid-hull Inflatable Boat; G-for George of course and the V2 rocket and *Meillerwagen*; C-130H



A97-010 cockpit; CH-47D Chinook A15-202 – Kandahar Workhorse; P-40 Kittyhawk; the Sydney Harbour midget submarine; a reimagined Sydney-Emden battle display; and in Aircraft Hall, the return of WWI aircraft and the restored Mural of Australian Military Aircraft.

For those who are not Friends of the War Memorial or WM subscribers, and didn't receive a copy of the Magazine, it is available [for sale here](#), and will become available on the Web after Issue 4 is released.

The last Galleries, currently in development and due for completion in 2028, are the Pre-1914 Galleries.



HMAS Tobruk's (L 50) role in Somalia supporting the Australian contingent during Operation Solace from December 1992 to May 1993 is shown in this display.



This excellent new diorama depicts the 20 September 1999 Australian-led INTERFET amphibious landing in Dili as part of the "Peacekeeping: 1947 to Today" gallery.



In May 2006 'One Fitty' was the lead vehicle during an Australian Army Special Forces unit patrol in Afghanistan. It struck an IED causing significant damage.



This Bushmaster vehicle (Debbie, formally Echo 21 Alpha) was damaged in an IED attack on the vehicle on 10 July 2012 in Afghanistan's Deh Rawud district.

From: <https://www.awm.gov.au/ourcontinuingstory/heritage-main-building>

"The Pre-1914 Galleries will include deeper depictions of all pre-1914 conflicts and be developed post 2025 as part of the main building works. They include conflicts from contact in 1788, First Nations resistance to colonial forces, the New Zealand Wars, Sudan, the Boer (South African) War and the Boxer Rebellion.

The Memorial is committed to the recognition of the experiences of First Nations peoples. The development process for this gallery will include audience evaluation and a community engagement program."



Our committee

<http://austarmyapprentice.org/about/committee/>

Vacant Position – Assistant Treasurer

We are looking for someone to take on the role of Assistant Treasurer. You could be an existing Ordinary Committee Member, or anyone from the Membership could volunteer.

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Contributions to The Apprentice About

The Apprentice About (TAA) is published quarterly (in February, May, August and November). Contributions are greatly appreciated – please email them to the Editor at news@austarmyapprentice.org or mail them to the address on the first page. Submissions close on the 15th of the month preceding each edition.

Disclaimer

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