



Colac & District
Family History Group Inc.

Coladjins

Inc. No. A0022664A ABN 29618437272

Winter 2020 Issue 112

SPECIAL EDITION

This edition of Coladjins is dedicated to the thousands of local men and women who served at home and abroad during the Second World War. These are some of their stories.

Commemorating

75

Years

Since the end of World War II

A WORD FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Diana McGarvie

Dear Members,

Little did I know when I wrote the letter in our Autumn Newsletter that we would, almost six months later, still be in this situation, with the pandemic continuing to be part of our lives. We have all been affected in different ways, and all managed in different ways I expect. What I do know is that there has been a power of work done by our enthusiastic volunteers during this time.

Firstly our diligent I.T.volunteers in Warrnambool, Bernie and Phil, have cleverly set up the group's computers so that some members can access the information from home, which of course has enabled our work to continue through this period. The "Duty Called" project has blossomed with the 75th Anniversary of the end of WW2, thanks to the capable team members who have now set up a special page and links on our website. This enables members of the public to access the list of returned service men and women from the district, read stories of those completed,

and download a template to include their family member in this project. So far there are more than three and a half thousand names published, and you may have read some of their stories recently in the Colac Herald.

The "Almost Forgotten" project continues, and has had an innovation in that it has become a team research project, ie several members researching the same person, with some excellent results. The implementation of the new group Facebook site has facilitated easier communication, as well as keeping us connected.

Hundreds of birth and death certificates from our collection have been transcribed, and proofread, adding valuable information for our research and rate books are being transcribed, photos and maps catalogued, the WW1 personnel collated, as well as some members working on their personal projects and stories.

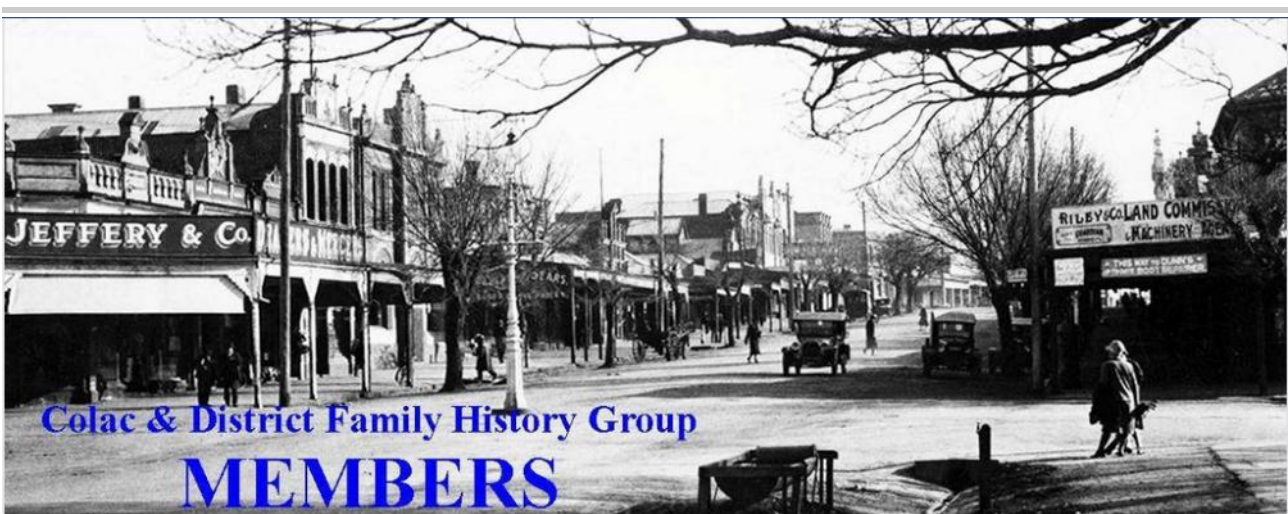
The secretary has been keeping up with the correspondence, and the treasurer has continued to pay the bills and balance the books. Our research officer has continued to respond to queries through the website and we have sold quite a lot of books during the closure which she has wrapped and posted.

We have not been able to hold our usual fundraisers, so our treasurer is working on responses to the local, state and federal government grants on offer. I thank each and every one of you for this grand effort, and I look forward to meeting up with you all when we can again open our doors, (let's hope it won't be too far away). I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome and thank the new volunteers who are contributing to our work and hope you are finding it worthwhile.

Lastly, but by no means least, I thank our remote and interstate members, who also contribute, where possible, to our ongoing work. I appreciate your continued interest, support and membership, especially at this time. As many of you are connected to local families, your contributions add valuable information to our collection and the database.

Diana McGarvie, President

STAYING CONNECTED DURING COVID19



Colac & District Family History Group
MEMBERS

Have you joined our Members' only facebook page yet? It is easy, just click on the link below and ask to join. One of the administrators will check your membership and respond, usually within hours. This page was started to help members stay connected during the pandemic. It is a place where you can ask for or offer advice and assistance, share interesting stories and resources with other members and be the first to learn about what is happening with your group. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/colacfamilyhistorygroupmembers/>

WORLD WAR II HONOUR ROLL

One of our regular volunteers, Raye, who previously used to spend around twelve hours a week working at the History Centre, decided to use this time in isolation to develop a comprehensive record of local men and women who volunteered for service in World War II.

Raye's project fitted perfectly with the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the end of World War II. As a tribute to these men and women, our website team added to the work Raye was doing, by creating space on our website for a World War II Honour Roll where all of these names will eventually be displayed.

It is still a work in progress and after hundreds of hours trawling through our collection and other physical and digital records, Raye has now the names of more than 4000 local men and women who served.

Thanks also to Robyn, Lexie and Lynette for the many hours that have been contributed to this project and to all of our members and relatives and friends of ex-service personnel who have shared their stories.

You can see all of the names, and read some of their stories by visiting our website. This is what the project page looks like and a sample of what you will be able to find if click on any of the names that are blue.

www.colacfamilyhistory.org.au/projects/duty-called-2/



WORLD WAR II HONOUR ROLL

These are names of servicemen and servicewomen, nurses and civilians who contributed to the war effort. This roll is a work in progress and we appreciate your contributions or corrections. Select the first letter of a surname below, then select any of the names that are blue to learn more about the person and their service history. Or go to the [Department of Veterans Affairs Nominal Roll website](#) to gather more information.

If you have information about one of the people on this list, please download this [form](#), complete what you know and email to media@colacfamilyhistory.org.au

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

ADAMS June Lorraine

ADAMS Stanley James

ADAMSON Bruce

AHYEE Gordon Vernon

AMEZDROZ Clarence George

[AMEZDROZ Donald Ray](#)

AMEZDROZ William Reginald

AMOR Herbert Roy

ARMSTRONG John Clement

ARMSTRONG Leslie Nicholas

ARMSTRONG Ronald William

ARNALL Harold Victor

AMEZDROZ, Donald Ray

Service: Australian Army – 2/4 Armoured Regiment

Service number: VX125291

Locality on Enlistment: North Melbourne

Duration of Service: 9 Mar 1943 – 31 Dec 1946

Prisoner of War: No

Honours: None for display

Date and Place of Birth: 20 Jul 1925 Colac Victoria

Parents: George Hamilton AMEZDROZ and Alice May COLLINS

Spouse: Patricia Ruth MILLER

School/s:

Occupation: Cellar man

Date and Place of Death: 18 Jul 1995 Melbourne

Place of Burial: Fawkner Cemetery



Notes: Donald altered his date of birth by 6 months so that he could enlist. He was only 17 years and 6 months. He participated in standard training in Bendigo and Puckapunyal and was then transferred to Queensland, being a tank mechanic in the 2/4 Armoured Regiment. In September 1944 Donald embarked from Brisbane per "Duntroon", disembarked Madang, Papua New Guinea. In June 1945 he arrived at Torokina, Bougainville where the 2/4 Armoured Regiment continued to provide support to the Australian Infantry until the Japanese surrender, taking part in a number of battles during the advance toward Buin. Following the end of the war, a detachment from the regiment was deployed to Rabaul to assist with guarding 100,000 Japanese troops in the region.

YVONNE ELSIE HILLIER NEE DOWSE STORY BY LYNETTE GENUA

Yvonne Elsie Dowse, the daughter of Albert and Winifred Dowse of Timboon, was born on the 6th January 1922, in Prahran. She married Private Ronald Harold Gordon on Boxing Day, 1940. Ronald, a herd-tester, had enlisted in the Australian Military Forces six months earlier. Sadly they were only together for a few months before he embarked for Singapore. Soon after Yvonne trained and began to work as a herd tester, an opportunity that had only recently become available for women because of the shortage of men.



Corporal Ronald Harold Gordon

The year 1942, was a terrible one for Yvonne. Ronald was listed as missing, presumed dead in Malaya in February and her brother, Private Albert Dowse, died of encephalitis in Bonegilla Military Hospital in April in after escaping from Rabaul. Yvonne decided she was next in line, so she resigned her position as a herd tester and enlisted in the Army. After a three week rookie school she was sent to a motor and driving school, as she desperately wanted to be an ambulance driver. Her first posting was to 3rd Ambulance Company working out of a depot in South Melbourne. Shortly afterwards she was transferred to Puckapunyal, where she mainly undertook daily trips to Heidelberg and convalescent homes.

She described the ambulances as Spartan. There were four stretchers, two top and two bottom, each with a pillow and two blankets. Up front there was a box containing the necessary enamel ware. It was quite difficult work for young women to lift men into the back of these vehicles.

After twelve months Yvonne was posted back to the Transport Depot in South Melbourne to sort out the records which were in a shambles but she soon yearned to go back to being a regular driver and was posted to a unit at Royal Park, which was very busy with troops filing through for discharge.

Later Yvonne would recount the heartbreaking memories of those disabled, emaciated men returning, having been Japanese prisoners of war.

Yvonne was discharged from the army on the 29th October 1945 and in 1947, she married Albert Arthur "Dan" Hillier in Cobden, an ex-prisoner of war,

Dan, as he liked to be called, was born on 10th January 1912 at Hartford, Latrobe in Tasmania, the youngest of ten children of Robert and Jane Hillier (nee Grice).

In the late 1930s Dan had moved to Victoria and worked around the Port Campbell area as a labourer. He enlisted in the Army on the 24th October 1939 at Geelong. He joined the 2/6th Battalion and embarked for the middle east in April 1940. Private Hillier was reported missing in May 1941 and had been taken prisoner of war on Crete and interned in Germany. Dan was recovered in early 1945 and discharged from the army on the 8th of August.

After their marriage Dan and Yvonne had a farm at Jancourt and later at Irrewillipe. Dan died on 16th June 1984 at Elliminyt and was buried at Colac Cemetery.



Yvonne Elsie "Von" Hillier nee Dowse



Albert Arthur "Dan" Hillier

SISTER HARRIET ROACHE

After undertaking training in Sydney and working in various Melbourne hospitals, Harriet "Ettie" Roache sailed to England, in March 1938 to gain overseas nursing experience. Unable to return when war broke out, Ettie enlisted with the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. During her time in the service Ettie was posted to British Government Hospitals in Alexandria, Jerusalem, Beirut and Syria before being transferred to Palestine. After returning to the UK for leave, Ettie was posted to a unit as part of D Day, working at the 20th General Hospital in Bayeux, Normandy. Ettie also served for three months on the Hospital Ship Dorsetshire and finished her service at Chester Military Hospital before being released from service.



She returned to Australia on HMT Rangitata, a war bride ship, in April 1946, possibly signed on as a nurse for the voyage. It is believed that she wasn't eligible to be repatriated to Australia as she had enlisted with the British Nursing Service and her home was considered to be Britain.

After returning to Australia, Ettie nursed at Colac hospital and was made a Justice of the Peace in 1948. Ettie had been named in the New Year King's Honours list in Britain, in 1946, but the actual award was presented in 1950 by Sir Dallas Brooks, Victorian Governor, at a ceremony at government house.

For leisure, Ettie enjoyed spending time with her nieces and nephews and playing golf was another favourite pastime.

After her retirement, Ettie did private nursing for some of her elderly patients. Ettie died in 1985, aged 85, after having lived a full and adventurous life and a life of service to the community. She is buried next to her parents at the Colac Cemetery.

Story and photograph provided by Veronica Roache

RONALD EDWARD COWAN

Ronald Edward Cowan was born in Colac on 5th July 1916. He was the son of Thomas and Ivy Cowan (nee McIntyre). Ron enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy on 1st July 1940 at the age of 21. He served on the light cruiser HMAS Adelaide as a stoker, working in the boiler room, helping to create the steam to power the ship. This vessel performed transport work around Africa and India, picking up convoys of troops and transporting to another destination. Ronald said his time in the Coral Sea was "the most



harrowing". They visited different ships picking up the unfortunate ones that had been killed. "The boats were shot up pretty bad, lots of dead people on board". The Captain would say a few words, before conducting a burial at sea.

Each year Ronald tried to make himself a bit better; if you passed exams you were paid better, had a bit more money for beer. He served four years as a stoker before becoming a Petty Officer on Corvette HMAS Cairns. Ron was discharged on 23rd November 1945. After leaving the Navy, Ron worked as a boiler attendant in Colac at the Colac Abattoirs and Regal Cream Products. In later life he said that he was "most proud of being able to go to the ANZAC dawn service each year". Ron Cowan died on 22nd February 2017 in his one hundredth year of life.

Story by Lynette Genna

MAX KEIRAN CUMMINGS

Max Keiran Cummings was born in Goulburn, New South Wales on 4th April 1913, the son of Joseph and Lizzie Cummings (nee Salmon). He grew up in Melbourne with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and a consuming passion for aeroplanes. After Max's father died, his mother remarried John Stafford and the family moved to John's farm at Johanna. Max enlisted for the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) on 20th June 1941 and trained in South Australia. He married Kathleen Harrold of Victor Harbour, South Australia and left to serve in England on 2nd July 1942. Max undertook further training in England and was engaged in a number of bombing missions over Europe in Lancasters. The squadron was in training for the "Dambusters" operation.



On the 18th June 1943, Max was piloting an aircraft on a practice bombing mission with a crew of seven plus two passengers, believed to be wireless technicians. In bad weather, the plane appeared out of the cloud, on fire, attempting a forced landing at Scredington Village in Lincolnshire.

It hit buildings, bounced over a road and ditch, before crossing a field and landing in a stand of trees.

The plane burnt on impact with all on-board being incinerated. In June 2013, around the 70th anniversary of the incident, a marble plaque was unveiled at the Scredington village church to commemorate the men who died in the crash.

Story by Lynette Genna

COLAC WOMEN DURING WORLD WAR II BY LIZ SPENCE

During WW2 Colac and District women contributed in many ways to the war effort. Some took over the daily running of the district's farms, others joined the home army as drivers and cooks and some worked in industries previously run solely by men. One of these industries was the Rossmoyne dehydration factory.

"The Rossmoyne dehydration factory was erected by the Commonwealth government during WW2 in 1943." "Opening day was March 1st 1944." "Wage rates per week were – Adult males 5 pounds four shillings and Adult females 2 pounds eighteen shillings and nine pence." "By July 1944, the factory employed 105 with more workers needed. Two thousand and six hundred cases of dried onions were sent away. In May 1945 there were three shifts a day employing seventy females and thirty eight ales." (Onion People – The History of Onions in Victoria by Shirley Burns)

Women were taken by bus to work there. They had no choice and were ordered to work there. My aunt was one of these women and complained to her mother about her dirty broken nails and the onion smell. She had previously worked at Bilsons store.



Dehydration workers. Ila King is on the left. We would be grateful for any information about the identity of the other two women in the photograph

Colac Dairying Company - Dehydration Factory

Cafeteria Service.

Details of the Service available, including Hot Meals and Light Luncheon, are given here, together with full information of the Service, methods, and prices.

THE MENU (Opening Day)	
Soup:	Vegetable.
Entree:	Braised Steak, creamed potato, cabbage.
Salad:	Corned Silverside and potato salad.
Sweets:	Apple Pie and custard. Jellied Fruits and custard.

Hot Meal Service

The Hot Meal will consist of Soup, Entree or Salad, Sweets, and Mug of Tea.

PRICES for individual courses are:—

Soup	- - - - -	3d.
Entree or Salad	- - - - -	9d.
Sweets	- - - - -	3d.
Tea	- - - - -	1d.
Bread—3 half-slices	-	1d.

Payment for Hot Meals

Payment will be by Tickets, tendered to the cashier as you leave the race. Assist the service by tendering the correct ticket, based on the above prices.

Light Luncheon

The following items of Light Luncheon will be on sale:—

Cakes, 2d. each.	Scones, 2d. each.
Soft Drinks.	Fruit in Season.

Cafeteria Service

This is a "SELF-HELP" service, and consists, as far as each patron is concerned, of—

1. Placing your tray on the Cafeteria tray-rail, and selecting the cutlery you require.
2. Choosing your sweet, and placing it on the tray.
3. Placing three half-slices of Bread (if required) on the tray.
4. Obtaining from the Attendants a Mug of Soup and your Entree.
5. Collecting your Mug of Tea.
6. Payment is made by handing your Ticket to the Cashier as you leave the race.

PLEASE HAVE YOUR CORRECT TICKET READY.

After having completed your meal, please assist the staff by returning your tray and used dishes to the table provided for this purpose.

Times of Service

MORNING TEA	10.00 a.m.
MEAL BREAKS	12.00 Noon to 12.40 p.m.
	12.40 p.m. to 1.20 p.m.
AFTERNOON TEA	3.00 p.m.

WE WANT YOUR SUPPORT AND PATRONAGE TO MAKE THIS CAFETERIA SERVICE A SUCCESS.

Much to her relief she was later employed in the workers' cafeteria.

Another industry was the Flax mill which was situated in Colac East on what is now called Flaxmill Road.

"The establishment of a flaxmill took place not only in the same era as the abattoir but in the same area." "Some flax was also grown in the Colac district." "Retting and other processing was carried out, and during the 1939-45 War, women process workers numbered over ninety, having been 'called up' to work in what was regarded as an essential service." (Extract from – Forest Lake and Plain, The History of Colac 1888-1988 by Ida McIntosh.)

"—a flax mill was established at Colac East in 1942 to process raw materials into belts, harnesses and webbing for the department of Defence. The factory employed a workforce of over 90 women who had been 'called up to work in what was then regarded as an essential service.'" (From Colac Heritage Study, Volume 1, Mary Sheehan & Assoc.)



This photograph of World War II farm workers taking a break at Colac was published in the Herald Sun 16 August 2020.

PHILLIP & ELIZABETH GAVENS - SIBLINGS ENLIST



Phillip Richard Gavens, and his sister Elizabeth May Gavens were born in Colac, children of Frederick and Mabel May Gavens nee Kilsby. Phil, as he was known, was born on 16th November, 1918, just days after the end of the First World War.

At fourteen, during the depression, Phil started his carpentry

apprenticeship in Colac. When he was 22, spurred by the memory of a joy-flight with Kingsford Smith, he enlisted for aircrew. Phil trained initially in Southern Rhodesia, and was commissioned in England, becoming a flight instructor and pilot in Bomber Command. At the time of discharge, he held the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

Phil met Deborah Lee, a serving WREN, daughter of Major and Mrs R T Lee of Lyme Regis, Dorset.

Deborah shared Phil's dreams of a family life and building a business in Colac in peacetime.

The couple were married on 30th October, 1945 at Queen's Gate, London.

Phil was described as steadfast, reliable, patient, unflappable, practical, loyal and of great integrity by his family, friends and especially his flight crew.

Phil quietly and consistently contributed to family and community throughout his life.

Phil died on the 8th August 1996, aged 77 years and Deborah died on 16th June 2008. Their remains are together in the Lilydale Memorial Park.

With assistance from daughters:

Thalia, Fiona, Clare, Juliet and Vanessa

Elizabeth (Betty) Gavens was two and a half years younger than her brother Phil. She was born on 20th April 1921 in Colac. The siblings attended the

same schools, Colac West State School and Colac High School. Later Betty, as she was known, would follow Phil and join the Royal Australian Air Force.

Betty was working as a typist in Colac and trained as a teleprinter operator in the Air Force. While posted at Laverton she met a young radio operator, Ronald Spencer Forbes, but he was posted to Darwin so their

courtship was conducted by mail. Fortunately Ronald survived the bombing of Darwin and they were married in 1946 before settling in Melbourne.

The marriage took place at Colac's Wesley Church and the reception was held at her parents' home in Lygar St. Colac. It is reported that Ronald got in to trouble for eating too many cakes as it was so long since he had seen real cream. They were married for more than 60 years. Ronald died in 2011 and Betty died at Ocean Grove two years later.

With assistance from Elizabeth's daughter Janine Madden



JAMES NIBLETT



James Niblett, known as Jim, was born on 10th February 1919 at Colac, the son of Silas Niblett and Mary Lynch. He was raised on a dairy farm at Irrewarra and attended Irrewarra State School. On the 11th March 1941, Jim enlisted in the Army and joined the 2/6 AIF. He served a total of 1195 days in the Army, of which 956 days

were abroad. He served in the Middle East between June 1941 and August 1942. He was then posted to New Guinea twice, from October 1941 to September 1943 and then from December 1944 to June 1945. During the second posting he was recommended for the Military Medal for "outstanding courage and

initiative" on 29th and 30th March 1945 at Kilkuil and Gwanginin. Shortly after these heroic acts, he was seriously wounded in action on 16th April. He suffered a fractured left femur with sciatic nerve lesion. Jim was evacuated on the 30th of April to begin the long journey home, with many stops along the way. He arrived in Melbourne by ambulance train on 20th June 1945 but subsequently lost his left leg.

He was discharged for the Army on 17th July 1946 and on discharge was deemed 100% disabled.

In 1947 he married Gwenneth (Gwen) McEwan and despite his disability ran a dairy farm at South Purrrumbete. Jim and Gwen raised four children.

However the tragedy of war was to strike the Niblett family again. Private Ralph James Niblett their eldest son, was called up for National Service and killed in action, 21st September 1971 while serving in Vietnam.

Jim died on 8th January 1995 and is buried in the Cobden Cemetery with Gwen who died in 2015.

Story by Lynette Genua

ALBERT “WAGS” WEGNER –POW

Albert ‘Wags’ Wegner, was born in Roseberry and lived for some time at Terang before moving to Colac in the late 1930s. He was a labourer living at Elliminyt with his wife Ada “Sylvia” nee Goodwin in 1940, at the time of his enlistment. He became a member of C. Company Machine Gun Platoon which was among the Australian battalion group of about eleven hundred men known as ‘Gull Force’. They arrived in Ambon on 17 December 1941 after a three-day trip from Darwin. The group comprised the 2/21st Battalion, which was part of the 23rd Brigade, 8th Australian Division, together with anti-tank, engineer, medical and other detachments. The first Japanese air attack on Ambon was on 6 January 1942 and by 24 January the Japanese were less than 1000 kilometres from the island. The last of the Allied aircraft were withdrawn on 30 January. The Japanese landed three battalions on Ambon during the night of 30-31 January. The Australians lost contact with the Dutch who capitulated the next day on 1 February. Scott, the Australian commander, surrendered two days later on 3 February. Some small groups of men escaped and made their way back to Australia but almost eight hundred surviving Australians became prisoners of war. The Australians together with about three hundred Dutch prisoners of war were put back into their barracks at Tan Tui, north of Ambon town.

On 25 October 1942, about 500 of the Australian and Dutch prisoners were sent to Hainan, an island in the South China Sea off the coast of mainland China. Led by Lieutenant-Colonel Scott, they left Ambon in the *Taiko Maru* and arrived in the Bay of Sama on Hainan Island on 4 November. The next day they sailed up the coast to a camp at Bakli Bay. The Japanese government had recognised Hainan Island's potential and planned to use the POWs to build roads and viaducts in order to develop agriculture and industry on the island. The prisoners were forced to do hard manual labour under difficult and brutal conditions with a completely inadequate diet. By 1945 the survivors were all starving. The prisoners on Ambon and Hainan were subjected to some of the most brutal treatment experienced by POWs anywhere during World War II. More than three-quarters of the Australian prisoners there died in captivity. Albert Wegner was one of them.

WEGNER, Pte. ALBERT CHARLES, VX.27317. A.I.F. 2/21 Bn. Australian Infantry. 23rd June, 1945. Age 39. Husband of A. S. Wegner, of Colac, Victoria, Australia. Aust. Sec. D. B. 6.

After Albert's death, Sylvia moved to New South Wales where she spent the remainder of her life. She never remarried.

With assistance from Raye Kayler-Thomson

HECTOR CHARLES STEPHENS BY LYNETTE GENUA

Hector (Hec) Charles Stephens was born on 25th July 1912 at Beec. He was the third son of Thomas George Stephens and Elizabeth Lavinia Opie. As a result of the depression, he left Colac High School and worked in his father's shop. He made several unsuccessful applications for teaching jobs, so returned to school at the age of 21 to study. In 1934, Hec was eventually employed as a probationary student teacher and in 1936 he undertook a further year's training at Melbourne Teachers College and became a Head Teacher Class V. In February 1937 he was posted to Welshman's Plains and for the next four years taught at rural schools terminating in Mount Eccles South. Hector enlisted in the 2nd AIF on the 26th April 1941 at Leongatha. He joined the 2/29th Battalion of the Australian Infantry and was posted to Malaya. At the Battle of Muar River in January 1942, the badly outnumbered Allied Forces held up the elite Japanese Guards for six days. During this time more than 500 allied troops were killed in action. After the battle a small group of English and Australian soldiers, including Hector, began groping their way along devious back-tracks across Southern Malaya, avoiding enemy patrols and searching for some kind of rallying point. Several died along the way and it was not until 1943 that the remaining five made contact with Chinese guerrillas sent from the 4th Guerilla Headquarters at Tenhkil.

Private Stephens was one of the casualties of the trek. He is buried some where along the track leading to the Guerilla camp at Tengkil in Malaya. Private Stephens is commemorated at the Singapore Memorial, Column 132 at Singapore. In 1993 his good friend, Private Jim Wright of the Royal Norfolk Regiment, wrote: “He was a good man, a brave man, and showed great courage and fortitude in awful conditions. All his family can be proud of him.”



RONALD DARE BY WINSOME DE JONG

My father Ronald Dare served in Darwin and Morotai near Borneo in the Second World War. He found it too painful to speak of his experiences but in later years opened up a little. I was aware that he had kept a diary of his experiences in Darwin but it was locked away and I never knew of its contents until he passed away. Having the opportunity to read the entries opened up his world at this time to myself and my siblings. Following are some entries.

23rd April 1943

"We arrived yesterday at a camp out of Darwin a bit. We have seen the town and some of the damage done by the Japs. Our camp is in the bush and yesterday afternoon we were erecting tents and did slit trenches



as we are expecting a raid any time now... It is very steamy here and there are plenty of mosquitoes and sand flies."

2nd May, 1943

"We had our first raid today. They came over at about 10.a.m. There were 18 bombers and three Zeroes. They bombed the RAAF and the water pipe line and started a few fires in the bush. Six of our planes were down but we are not sure of the Japs yet. We heard that 12 came down."

And then there were the personal experiences.

11th Oct 1943

"I received word yesterday that I am the father of a baby son. The time will not pass fast enough now until I can get home to see him and my darling wife." Dad finally got leave on the 2nd May 1944 to see his son.

Though not able to talk about his war experiences to his family he looked forward to the Anzac Day march which gave him the opportunity to catch up with mates who shared the same experiences.

SGT JOSEPH HENRY "HAL" ROGERSON



Sgt Joseph Henry (Hal) Rogerson, of Colac (2nd from right, front row)
RAAF No 1 Initial Training School, No 4 Pilot Course 1940 held at Somers, Victoria.

Four of the eight airmen seated in the front row of this photograph did not return from the war. Sgt Joseph Henry "Hal" Rogerson, was born on the 28th February 1914 at Dr Gibb's Private Hospital in Connor Street, Colac. His parents, Joseph Rogerson an accountant and Elizabeth MacMeikan had been married in Colac in January the previous year and his uncle, Samuel James Hill, timber merchant, had registered his birth. The family moved to Melbourne when Joseph was quite young, but he would always have a connection to the town where he was born.

Joseph enlisted in the RAAF in 1940 and after initial training, was sent to England. In January 1942, he was an observer on a night bombing practice flight when the weather deteriorated and the Sperry compass failed. The plane crashed into a wood five miles from Lichfield and the full crew of seven were killed. Joseph and the three other RAAF members on board are buried in the Fradley (St Stephens) Churchyard which contains 34 CWGC burials of which 24 are Australian (RAAF) from WW2. Most of the casualties were as a consequence of training accidents.

BARTOLO "BOB" LO RICCO STORY BY LYNETTE GENUA

Bartolo Lo Ricco (V500501) was born on 14th October 1913 on the small island of Lipari, off the coast of Sicily. In 1928, at the age of 15, he migrated to Australia from Italy and became an Australian citizen in 1935. By that time he was living at 70 Hesse Street Colac and had owned his own fruiterer business for more than a year. In 1941 he was conscripted into the Australian Army. Bob, as he was known in Australia, served as a cook at several locations throughout Australia. He was then posted to New Guinea, serving at Lae, Madang and Port Morsby. In these remote locations finding enough food to feed the troops was often a real challenge. After the War, he returned to Italy and married Goiovanna Maria Zaia in 1948. Later that year, he brought his young bride to Australia. Bob owned a fruit shop and milk bar in Murray Street, Colac for many years. He not only employed several locals but supported and employed a number of relations who migrated to Australia. He and Gina raised eight children. Bob's role in life was to give back to others as payment for the opportunities he had received.



RONALD MILES LAIDLER STORY BY LYNETTE GENUA



Ronald Miles Laidler was born on 28th August 1923 in Colac. He was the son of Percival and Margaret Laidler (nee Turner) and his middle name, Miles, was possibly a tribute to his uncle, Miles Nuel Turner, who served and died in the First World War. Ron's occupation was electro plater when he enlisted in the Army on the 29th September 1941 at Preston, just one month after his eighteenth birthday. He served in the Second Machine Gun Battalion in the Middle East and New Guinea, generally engaging the enemy in a team of five. In an interview with the Colac Herald in November 2011, Ron, then 88, said: "I carried machinery, someone carried ammo, someone carried water, someone carried the tripod, each had his job to do... I can tell you it wasn't easy trying to carry heavy weights." "We were like brothers, really, we all had the

same thing to do. We were in it together." he said that his army mates were the best friends he ever had.

After his discharge, Ron worked as a grocer in Colac for a short time before he married local girl Betsy Isabel Williamson in 1948. The couple first settled in Alvie and Ron employed as a Shire Herdsman, before they moved to a farm in Penshurst where they lived for more than twenty years before returning to Colac to live. In his later years Ron preferred to reminisce about premierships he won playing cricket and football with Alvie as captain and coach than his war service.

After being together for sixty years, Ron's beloved wife Betsy died on 13th December 2008 and Ron died six years later on 19th November 2014. They are buried together in the Colac Cemetery.

PEARL HELEN "NELL" TAYLOR STORY BY LYNETTE GENUA

Pearl Helen "Nell" Taylor was born on 30th April 1923 at Birregurra, the daughter of Ivo and Catherine Chapman. Nell grew up on her parents' dairy farm at Barramunga and was educated at Barramunga State School and Colac High School. Nell enlisted in the Women's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF) on 10th June, 1942 and was one of the first fifteen WRAAF instrument repairers employed in RAAF workshops. It was an experiment to try out women for technical and mechanical work on aeroplanes, with the idea to release men to work at advanced bases as the battle lines moved northward. After three months basic training in Adelaide, the trainee technicians did a further six months strenuous training in Sydney. Every plane that came into the



base where they were stationed required a complete overhaul at regular intervals. The RAAF instrument repairers assisted by taking out the cockpit panel, stripping the instruments, checking and repairing boost gauges, air-speed indicators, generators, flexible drives, artificial horizons and the numerous other gadgets that guide the pilot in manoeuvring the plane. Nell served in several locations round Australia – Melbourne, Somers, Adelaide, Sydney, Point Cook, Deniliquin, East Sale and Ransford. Corporal Taylor was discharged on 14th March, 1946 and married Arthur Laurence Westwood in 1948.

Arthur had enlisted to serve in the army, putting his age up by two years. After their marriage he worked as a forester at Barramunga. Around 1970 the family moved to Campbell Street in Colac and Arthur was employed as a driver. He died on 14th June 1988 aged just 65 and Pearl died 9th February, 1999. They are buried together in the Colac Cemetery.

THE BEEAC BOYS



*Left to Right: Oliver Ronald Hunt, Thomas Leonard KingGeorge Phipps, (centre), Alan Hunt
(please let us know if you recognise any of the other three soldiers, any assistance would be appreciated)*

This is a photo of “The Beeac boys” who enlisted together at Beeac. Oliver Ronald “Ron” Hunt and Alan Hunt were my dad’s brothers and Thomas Leonard “Len” King was Mum’s brother. They, along with my dad, Les Hunt, worked for Jack Simpkin who had built a threshing machine and worked it around the Cressy and Beeac area.

On Friday nights the boys would come to my grandmother’s house in Queen Street Colac. That is how my mum met dad. Mum and dad married during the war. Dad was stationed in Darwin and was home in Victoria when they married.

Len King and Ron Hunt were drowned while on

board the “Heward” which was sunk off the coast of Crete. A letter from George Phipps, also in the photo, told grandma what had happened to them.

The letter said they had no chance as they were ill on Crete. Mum described it as “shell shock”.

Grandma had received telegrams, which I still have, saying they were missing but she was not officially informed of their deaths for well over 12 months. .

Alan Hunt also served in Australia. He lived in Perth where he met his wife.

So after all that Len and Ron would have been brother-in-laws if they had survived.

From Liz Spence

THE KING FAMILY STORY BY LYNETTE GENUA

World War II was to have tragic consequences for John and Mary Jane King (nee Inglis). Three sons enlisted in the Armed Forces, one was killed in action and another taken as a prisoner of war. Thomas Leonard (Len) was born on the 19th October 1912 at Coragulac. After enlisting in the Army on the 20th June 1940, he joined the 3rd Light Anti Aircraft Regiment and served in Palestine. He was then transferred to Crete and on evacuation from there, the vessel carrying the regiment was hit by enemy fire on 29th May 1941. Gunner King lost his life at sea. He is commemorated at the Athens Memorial at the Phaleron War Cemetery, Athens, Greece. His younger brother, Ian Inglis King was born 23rd of February 1916 at Berwick. He also enlisted in the Army on the 20th June 1940. Ian was posted to the South West Pacific and was taken prisoner by the Japanese on the 15th February, 1942 at the fall of Singapore. He was interned in Changi Prison Camp, a POW camp in Malaysia, for three years. He was finally discharged from the 2/9 Field Ambulance Brigade on 28th November 1945. Ian married Amy Hagley in 1949 but, like so many who were Prisoners of War under the Japanese, died at an early age in 1954.

Their older brother, James George King was born on the 17th July 1911 at Colac and was the last to enlist in the Armed Forces. He joined the Royal Australian Airforce (RAAF) on the 30th March 1944 and served in the 2nd Airfield Construction Squadron. Leading Aircraftman King was discharged on the 3rd January 1946.

75TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION STORIES IN THE COLAC HERALD



The Colac Herald recently ran a series of articles that were prepared with the assistance of some of our members. The stories were in honour of local men and women who served our country in the Second World War and featured George Rhodes, Helen McDonald, Darcy McMinn, Grace Swanson and George Chester, Les Trigg, Dulcie Brooks, Jim Niblett, Eric Lewis and Leslie Stokie. If you would like copies of these items, contact media@colacfamilyhistory.org.au

This is a unique period in our history. Think about recording what you are doing, how you are feeling and how this is affecting you or your family. Did you take an "isolation photograph"

We would love to have any stories or photographs that you are willing to share.

Email: secretary@colacfamilyhistory.org.au

USUAL OPENING TIMES
Mon & Tues 10pm to 2pm
Thur & Fri 1:30pm to 4:30pm
Sun 2pm to 4pm

Closed

Until Further Notice

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KEEP UP TO DATE THROUGH OUR WEBSITE OR FACBOOK PAGES

Website: www.colacfamilyhistory.org.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/colacdistrictfamilyhistory

Cemetery Project Facebook: www.facebook.com/almostforgotten1900/

New Facebook Page for C&DFHG Group Members

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/colacfamilyhistorygroupmembers/>

We thank these organisations for their ongoing support:

COPACC, Colac Otway Shire, The Colac Herald, Office of Richard Riordan MP.

DISCLAIMER: Contributions to this newsletter are accepted in good faith and the committee does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of information of submitted articles nor opinions expressed