NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2013

70th ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIONS

BRISBANE

The Service in St John's Anglican Cathedral was conducted by His Grace the Anglican Primate, the Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall, Archbishop of Brisbane, in the presence of Her Excellency the Governor of Queensland, and many Centaur families. The congregation also included six members of the Centaur Memorial Fund for Nurses who had been members of the Younger Set in 1949, and who have raised much money over the years for the education of nurses in Queensland.

Regular participants were the choir of Brisbane Girls Grammar School, the pipe band from Brisbane Boys’ College, and the Naval Reserve Cadets from TS Centaur, seen here leading the Recessional.

Amongst the local families were Pam and Jim Gilbert, Debbie and Peter Butler, and our wreathlayers, Michael and Frank Forrest, with travellers, Neville Cavendish from Beenleigh, Ian Hudson from Airlie Beach and Mike and Mark Claydon from New Zealand.

Guest Speaker at the Commemorative Dinner at the United Service Club was Dr Madonna Grehan from Melbourne.

AWM CANBERRA

The 70th Anniversary Commemorations were held in the Western Courtyard with the Salvation Army Band, the Rugby Men’s Choir and students of Radford College in attendance. Radford College provided the speakers, with students Michael Spitskowsky and Nick Crawford laying a wreath. Capt. Stewart Holbrook stood in for US Ambassador Bleich representing the USS Mugford.

The Association’s official wreath-layer was Catherine McGrath, granddaughter of Pte George McGrath, FA, survivor, deceased.

A feature this year was the communal wreath on which people placed poppies. The wreath was laid by Ted Leask, n/o Ptes Alexander, Henry and Harold Leask, FA.

About 40 Centaur family members attended including Sydney visitors, President Richard Jones, Enid and Rod Blackman, with Lucy Walton and Isabel Fitzgerald from the Illawarra, and Doug Hoare from Wingham, plus representatives from Legacy, Red Cross, Nurses Association, Merchant Navy and the RSL.

L. Richard Jones recites the Ode.
R. Tiffany Knight gives the vote of thanks and invitation to refreshments at the end of the ceremony.

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CALOUNDRA CENTAUR SERVICE

The Caloundra Service was held under grey skies and occasional light rain. Numbers were well down on previous years but the weather did not dampen the spirits of those present.

The Caloundra school children numbers were also down due to their involvement in the NAPLAN Testing programme, however, students from three Caloundra schools did attend and they participated in the wreath laying and the placing of flowers beside the Centaur walkway plaques. Their presence and participation was very much appreciated.

Amongst the known Centaur families in attendance were Alice Thompson and her family, Col Cross, Max Chapman, and the Clegg family.

Erica & Bryan Costigan represented Caloundra at the Brisbane Centaur Commemorative Service, and their presence at Caloundra was missed, along with the passion and personal touch that they bring to our Service.

Mr Lex Gilvear MSM and S/B Committee Member Caloundra RSL gave the Address and spoke on the history of the 2/12 Field Ambulance. Pastor Arthur Fry, Church of Christ Caloundra, conducted the Prayers of Remembrance and spoke on the tragedy of Centaur and the affect on families.

I was proud to lay the wreath on behalf of the Centaur Association and for me this year’s service was made special with my cousin travelling from Dalby to attend, and laying a wreath made of lucerne symbolising my father’s life on the farm.

Channel 7 Local presented an excellent segment on Centaur in their 6.00pm News broadcast. I have received considerable positive feedback on the segment from many people, friends and acquaintances, leading me to believe that Centaur continues to be remembered.

Keith Clegg

ERICA COSTIGAN, OAM.

We join the Caloundra community in congratulating Mrs Erica Costigan on receiving the Order of Australia Medal in the 2013 Queen’s Birthday Honours, for services to the Centaur and Centaur families on the Sunshine Coast.

Erica’s story will appear in our next edition in May 2014.

THE LUCERNE WREATH

Flowers, like pictures, can be worth a thousand words—and they don’t need to be commercial or expensive to say a great deal.

Viola Hope, niece of Pte Percy Clegg, SMS, made a wreath of lucerne to pay tribute to her uncle by encapsulating her memories of him. Viola writes:

“My Dad and his only brother, my Uncle Percy, were partners trading as Clegg Bros on the farm at ‘Sunnyside’, Pratten, where I lived and grew up with their mother, Grandma Clegg, and where my brother is still living today. I remember reading letters that Uncle Percy had written to my Dad talking about the cutting of the lucerne, making hay and chaff and who they would be selling it to. Uncle Percy also broke in horses. My Dad and Uncle Percy also had a dairy and there are still cream/milk cans on the farm with ‘Clegg Bros’ on them.”

Viola Hope with the Lucerne wreath, Keith Clegg with the Association wreath, and Max Chapman and his wife with a wreath in memory of his father, Pte Earnest Chapman, FA.
The 70th Anniversary of the Centaur in Melbourne was held on the 19th May in the Centaur Memorial Chapel at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. The Service was organized as usual by Robert Winther, Veteran Liaison Officer, and conducted by the Anglican Chaplain Rev. Rosaleen Rudd.

The Heritage Bell in the adjoining Remembrance Garden was struck seven times for the seven decades that have passed since Centaur was sunk. Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital has had a long association with the hospital ship Centaur due to the loss of three staff: Sisters Alice O'Donnell, Eileen Rutherford and Wendy Walker. The first plaque dedicated to their memory was unveiled by Preston RSL (now Darebin RSL) in July 1944. An annual service has been held in the Hospital Chapel ever since, and remains the longest, continuous Centaur service. The Darebin RSL proudly supports the service every year, including hosting all attendees to a meal at the RSL rooms.

CENTAUR DAY MELBOURNE
from Pat O'Brien,
d/o L/Cpl Michael O'Brien FA

Firstly, Robert and Palliative Care Chaplain Luke Bowen, played a major part in supporting our last survivor Martin Pash back to Heidelberg for palliative care to be able to die amongst friends. His funeral was held in ANZAC Memorial Chapel on 2 August 2012 as reported in the 2/3 A.H.S. Centaur Association (inc.) Newsletter November 2012. An image of Martin Pash is to be placed in the Chapel stained glass window to be completed in 2014.

We thank Robert for all his Centaur work at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital that has allowed the Victorian Centaur community a special space to commemorate and remember those lost.

NURSES’ MEMORIAL CENTRE, MELBOURNE
COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE 2013

For the past five years the 2/3 Centaur Association has been invited to lay a wreath at the Commemorative Service at the Nurses Memorial Centre in Melbourne. This year the Association was represented by Judy Moore, Patricia O’Brien and Frans Odyk. As usual, Scotch College Army Cadet Unit provided the guard of honour, The Keytone Choir led the singing and the Reverend Ruth Redpath the prayers. Fifty one groups laid wreaths, the 2/3 A.H.S. Centaur Association as usual was complimented by being in the first group. In addition, there was a special eulogy to those who were on the 'Centaur'. Afternoon tea was served during which Group Captain Jenny Lumsden gave an address about Aero Medical Evacuation. Interestingly, outside the building is a replica mast from the 'Centaur' donated to the nurses in 1951 by Huddart Parker Limited “in memory of the nurses lost in the hospital ship 'Centaur' torpedoed 14th May 1943.” Huddart Parker owned the Wanganella which had also been converted to a hospital ship.

Due to the amazing work by Robert in developing and continuing the remembrance of Centaur, it is timely to say something about Robert’s achievements here in Melbourne working with the Association.

When Robert joined Heidelberg in 1996 he was captured by the story of Centaur. Robert was passionate about acknowledging its legacy and the service men and women on board. Robert’s achievements include:

Placing an image of Centaur in the Duckboard Stained Glass windows,

Hanging a framed painting of Centaur in the Main Foyer,

Relocating a Merchant Seaman plaque of Centaur to the Memorial Rose Garden,

Commissioning of two more plaques to complement those for the nurses and Merchant Navy Seaman. In 2005, the then Minister for Veteran’s Affairs De-Anne Kelly unveiled a plaque honouring all those lost on the Centaur.

In 2008 another plaque was commissioned for the survivors.

In 2010, Robert arranged for the replica plaque of the finding of the Centaur to be placed alongside the other three plaques, prominently displayed outside the entrance to the Centaur Wing of the hospital.

Finally, Robert and Palliative Care Chaplain Luke Bowen, played a major part in supporting our last survivor Martin Pash back to Heidelberg for palliative care to be able to die amongst friends. His funeral was held in ANZAC Memorial Chapel on 2 August 2012 as reported in the 2/3 A.H.S. Centaur Association (inc.) Newsletter November 2012. An image of Martin Pash is to be placed in the Chapel stained glass window to be completed in 2014.

We thank Robert for all his Centaur work at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital that has allowed the Victorian Centaur community a special space to commemorate and remember those lost.
Remembering

CAPTAIN B. F. HINDMARSH,
NX114295  A.A.M.C.
Ship’s Medical Staff

R. The last photo, taken by a street photographer at Circular Quay, in Sydney, on Saturday, 8th May 1943.

On the back is inscribed: “Bernie spent all his last leave breathing down the necks of the Navy for more life rafts.”

Extra life rafts were a precaution because of increased Japanese submarine activity on the eastern seaboard in early 1943. As Adjutant to Col. Manson, Captain Hindmarsh was charged with this responsibility.

Extended family member, Glenise Maher and her cousin, nephew Rob Morrison, laying a wreath on behalf of her late grandmother, Nurse Watts, who owned the maternity hospital at the time, and was a colleague of Dr Hindmarsh.

Family members at the Macksville Service, currently living in Macksville, included nieces and nephews who lost their Uncle Bernie.

Macksville, NSW

11 year old great-granddaughter, Abigail Knight lays a copy of the Myth of Immunity with a single red rose on the cenotaph in Macksville during the sunset Service. Captain Hindmarsh had been Macksville’s doctor for 18 years. The district lent its doctor to the war effort and expected to get him back. His loss devastated the whole community. The suitably inscribed Myth of Immunity was later presented to a captain of Macksville High School for the school library.

Caloundra, Qld

During the Service at Caloundra fresh flowers are placed by local school children at each plaque on the Memorial Walkway, on behalf of those families who can’t attend personally. There are more than 100 individual plaques, with room for more on the Walkway should anyone wish to have their Centaur person remembered in this way.
Point Danger, Qld

Captain Hindmarsh is remembered at the Centaur Memorial Service at Point Danger each year by the presentation of the Hindmarsh Medal for Courage and Endeavour to students of Centaur Primary School.

A very special recipient this year was 10 year old Sam who was in hospital in Brisbane recovering from open heart surgery. He received a surprise visit from the Principal, Mr Scott, Vice Principal, Mrs Foster and the six School Captains on their way back from the Cathedral Service. They presented his medal in his hospital room.

Bernard Francis Hindmarsh, the youngest of the four children of Kate and Walter Hindmarsh, was born in Sydney in 1898.

He was educated first at Christian Bros College Waverley and transferred to St Aloysius College Milson’s Point to study for an Exhibition to Sydney University to study medicine.

He did his internship at St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney, and in 1922 signed on as medical officer with a goldmining company on the Bulolo River in New Guinea.

His military career began with the school cadet corps and later with the 5th Light Horse when a troop was raised in Macksville.

He bought a practice in Macksville in 1925 and when he married Alma Morrison he became part of a large local family which gave him many nieces and nephews. Bernie and Alma had three children, Janice, Marlene and Ian.

A good townsmen, he was twice president of the Show Committee, and patron of the football club and both Surf Life Saving Clubs. He was one of the founders of the Golf Club.

His medical career in Macksville was typical of a country doctor of the times—on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, driving on unsealed roads to all parts of the far-flung district in an un-airconditioned car.

A Grace family member recalls that he was once called out in the early hours to the farmer’s wife, and having attended his patient, he took her place in the kitchen and had the bacon and eggs sizzling ready for the men’s breakfast when they came in from milking—no doubt his own breakfast, too!

When an overseas liner berthed in Sydney he would put on a locum in Macksville and sign on as ‘seaman doctor’ for a cruise while the ship’s medical officer had shore leave. It was not surprising that he later enlisted to serve his country on a hospital ship. He served at 113 AGH Concord, then on NMHS Oranje, and finally, 2/3 AHS Centaur.

R. Captain Hindmarsh leading morning Drill on the deck of the Oranje. He was known to be more comfortable on Sick Parade than Drill Parade, and said he felt they must have been desperate when they got him to take Drill.

Our own Joan Fisher OAM who was a young nurse on the Oranje tells the story of an Emergency Exercise Competition where she was on Captain Hindmarsh’s team. She was playing the part of a casualty who had collapsed in the Pan Room, and, taking her role seriously, she lay on the Pan Room floor. Casualties of other teams stood at the ward door and jumped on the stretcher as it raced past. Needless to say, Captain Hindmarsh’s team did not win the competition, and he said to her: “I could bloody well throttle you!”

When we first mooted the idea of a Centaur Association we approached the Oranje-Centaur Group. The immediate response of their president, the late Peggy Mason, who didn’t know the maiden name of the caller, was: “Our lovely Captain Hindmarsh was on that ship!”

A Permanent Memorial in Macksville

Hindmarsh Garden, an initiative of the Historical Society on land donated by the Council in 2002, is a small triangular ‘jungle’ and a welcome patch of greenery in the centre of the old part of town, a part that Dr Hindmarsh knew well. The accompanying storyboard reads:

Dr B. F. (Bernie) Hindmarsh son of North Coast pioneers, practised medicine in the Nambucca District for 18 years from 1925. For much of that time he was the only doctor in the Macksville area, a hardworking GP and an active participant in the life of the community.

In WW11 he enlisted in the AAMC and died when the Australian Hospital Ship ‘Centaur’ was torpedoed by enemy action in 1943.

Australia lost a patriotic citizen, the community lost a dedicated doctor, and a young family lost a father.
CENTAUR COMMEMORATIONS AT POINT DANGER

The inclement weather at Caloundra stretched all the way down to the Gold Coast, though at first it looked hopeful for a fine day. Preparations were made at the Memorial and five hundred children were bussed up from Banora Point, only to be loaded back in the buses again while the decision was made to go back to the school. The ceremony ran an hour late, but enthusiasm was high, and the students, despite their adventure, behaved in their usual exemplary manner. This was, after all, their special day. They are a living memorial for those we lost and the values they represented.

Though not as emotive as at the Memorial, the students managed to conduct a very meaningful ceremony in the Assembly Hall.

Then outside under clearing skies for the big surprise watched by awestruck students.

Phyll Butcher, s/o Pte Bill Lawson, FA, a school patron, Jan Thomas, d/o Captain Hindmarsh, SMS, with Srs Frances and Mary Moran, ss/o Pte Jack O’Neill Moran FA.

Then to the Library for refreshments and fellowship.

THE CLOSING CEREMONY AT THE AWM

Each evening at the AWM the Last Post is played and the flag lowered. Since the inception of Dr Brendan Nelson as Director, this daily ceremony has been extended to pay tribute to the service of someone whose name is on the Honour Roll.

On 14 May, the service person honoured was Centaur personnel, Sr Margaret Adams, SMS.

Rod and Enid Blackman attended the ceremony and sent in these photos. School children on excursion also attended the evening ceremony.

Front : Carol Egan, Virginia Chamberlin, Jan Thomas, Pam Gilbert, Margaret Henshaw, Phyll Butcher, Sr Mary Moran
Back: Doreen and Geoff Chegwyn, ?, ?, Mike Claydon, Darren Scott, Mark Claydon, Sr Frances Moran, Jack and Leone Bade. If you can identify the ?? Please let the editor know.

Mike and Mark Claydon travelled from NZ for the 70th anniversary at the Cathedral in Brisbane and as Point Danger was on 13th, attended at Point Danger as well. Margaret Henshaw travelled up from Kempsey, NSW.
More than 200 people attended the annual service in the chapel at Concord Hospital to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the sinking of the hospital ship Centaur, in the early hours of 14 May 1943. Seven white doves, one for each passing decade were later released from the chapel lawn to symbolize the terrible loss of life, and the peace for which they died.

A photograph of 30-year-old Nursing Sister Ellen Savage GM, the only woman to survive the sinking, was featured on the cover of the Order of Service.

The Service was conducted by the Rev Paul Weaver, hospital chaplain, and the Guest Speaker was our own Tony Stephens, son of Pte Britt Stephens, and former Walkley Award winning journalist. Tony chose not to retell the Centaur story, except in its barest outline, but to reflect on two subjects: how different this country might be if it weren’t defined so much by war, and the question of loss in war. Those who lose their lives in the service of their country, lose also their families, their careers and their unfulfilled potential. Tony cited the story of Alec Campbell, the last Australian survivor of the Gallipoli campaign who grew tired of pointing out that his six weeks at Gallipoli was a tiny part of his rich life of 103 years.

Contributing to the Service were the Corrective Services Band and the Meriden Singers. Miss Chastine Cidoro, RN, from Ward 2E of the Medical Assessment Unit, sang “How Great Thou Art”. The Association Wreath-layer was Bruce McSkimming, s/o Pte Sidney McSkimming 2/12th FA, and Mr Vic Totman from the Merchant Navy Association recited the Ode.

Coogee Bay Rovers are custodians of the 2/12th FA banner which was on display as usual. The Centaur Association is the custodian of the Oranje-Centaur banner which was set up outside as it is too large to fit in the chapel.

The Association wishes to thank Alice Kang for the special effort she puts in each year to arranging Centaur commemorations that are so meaningful and memorable.

QUEENSLAND NAVY HEALTH RESERVES CENTAUR EXERCISE

The Navy Health Reserves (QLD) Centaur Survival Exercise 1/13 on 4 May 2013 to mark the 70th anniversary of the sinking, gave Naval Reserve and Permanent Navy personnel an opportunity to experience something of the Centaur survivors’ ordeal, and to pay their respects.

Leaving from Water Police HQ at the Port of Brisbane, eight stalwarts were taken by police launch out into the bay where they climbed onto two rafts.

They spent the time playing cards, listening to the radio, and trying to put themselves into the position of the survivors, not knowing if they would be rescued. The Police launch kept a watchful eye on them.

Commodore Liz Rushbrook of the Permanent Navy came from Canberra, and our president, Richard Jones travelled from Sydney to represent the Association, along with local Association members, Pam and Jim Gilbert, and Debbie and Peter Butler. Richard presented the unit with a replica of the Centaur Plaque.

After the Exercise a short Memorial Service was conducted at Police HQ by Commander Nick Cusack and Commander Paul Luckin. Commodore Rushbrook read a short history of the sinking.

At the end of the Ceremony Richard was presented with $100, being the excess from their costs for the day, to which the participants had contributed.

In true Brisbane style, the sausage sizzle was accompanied by several thousand sandflies so they all hurriedly repaired inside.

The Exercise was an unusual but moving tribute to the Centaur.

Pam Gilbert

ANZAC BADGES

We have a supply of these badges for sale at $30 plus $5 postage. They are well-designed, oval-shaped, solid, grey metallic lapel badges with a white border, and are an initiative of the Victorian RSL, issued to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the sinking, and to raise funds for veterans.

We feel that those on board Centaur would approve of this use of the Centaur name, and we recommend these badges to you.

Buy direct from Treasurer, Tony Bracken, 2 Laughton Place, Altona Meadows, Vic. 3028. apb1@optusnet.com.au
Tel: 03 8307 9233

The Association AGM was held as advertised on 1 August at Altona Meadows in Melbourne. We accepted with regret the resignation of Peta Thompson from the committee. A replacement is yet to be found. Nominations are called to reach the secretary by 1 February 2014. The Executive and other committee members were returned unanimously.

The Myth of Immunity

This book by Christopher Milligan and John Foley is still the definitive book on 2/3 AHS Centaur. Painstakingly researched, it reads well and answers most of the questions.

Available to members of the Association for $35 posted anywhere in Australia from:

Nairana Publications,
6A Doncaster St
Hendra Qld. 4011.

Quote this Newsletter.