

55/53 Australian Infantry Battalion Association—
Support Group
ORDERLY ROOM REPORT
October 2020 (2-2020)
Website: 5553battalion.com

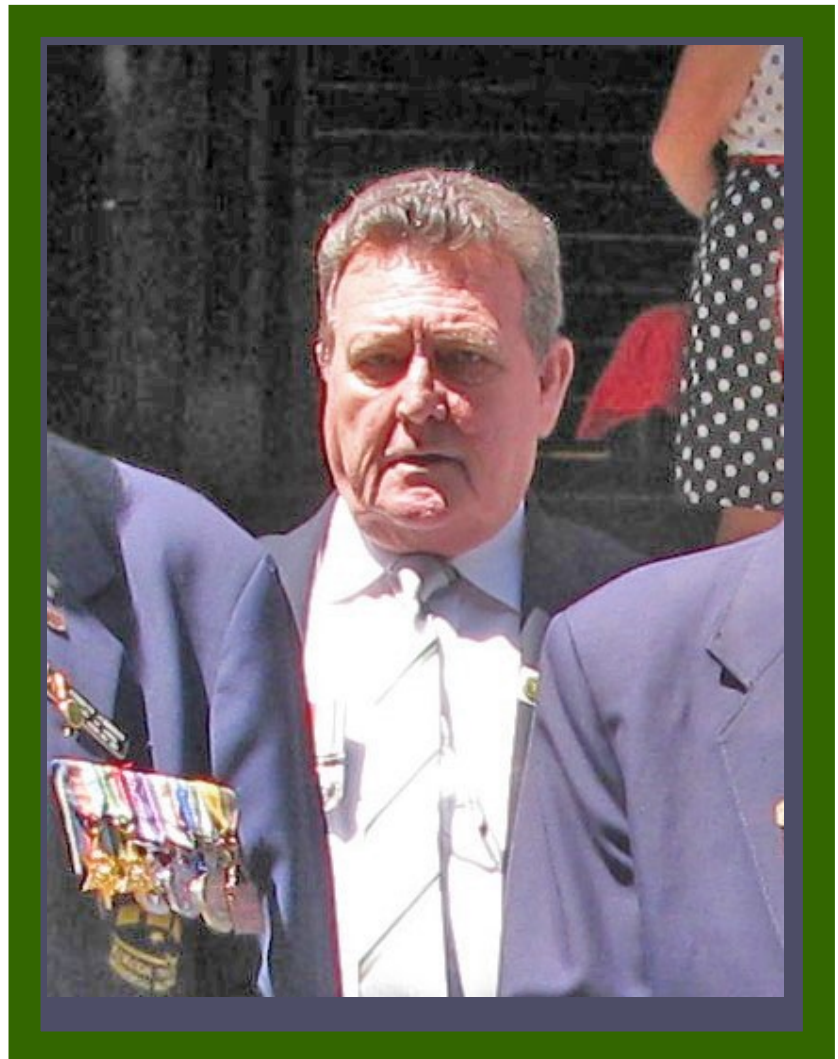


55/53 Aust. Inf. Bn. Association
("The Mice of Moresby")

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(Clyde Parsons 2015)

Vale: Charlie Harris, Leo Ingles, Ray Gentles, Lou Collett & Clyde Parsons



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Presidents Report



Dear Descendants Families and Friends,

Well what a world we have been living in this year 2020 has seen both the Highs and lows of our Battalion. Firstly with the cancellation of Anzac Day, then the passing of our good friends Ray Gentles and Lou Collett. We thank our fallen comrades for their service and long may they be remembered amongst Mice Folklore.

Congratulations to David McDonald who celebrated his 100th birthday a few months back at Toronto in Lake Macquarie NSW.

We've had to adapt the way we are remembering our fallen on Sanananda day this year. Our venue at the Great Southern Hotel will only permit 10 persons so we've switched over to Granville Diggers this year on Saturday December 5 with room for 50 x guests from 10am onwards. Both Fred Denny and Reg Chard will be present.

For the first time in 74 years we won't be able to hold our ceremony at the Cenotaph in Martin place but will be back for 2021.

We also had a day planned with David Howell and Kokoda Historical and our Battle of the beach heads World War II conference which we have had to postpone. This was to entail full details on; What was the Japanese plan?; Who controlled the sea and the sky? How did the Allies mass forces onto the northern coast of Papua? Was the order to destroy the Japanese positions necessary?; How well did the Australian and American forces cooperate in fighting the battle?; Were Allied forces pushed beyond their capability?; How much did tanks help to break the stalemate?; What are the legacies of this little-known chapter of military history? We will reschedule this for 2021 with David and let all of those interested know a new date. Peter has included an article on this subject at the end of this newsletter.

I'd like to acknowledge our hardworking Committee for a difficult year and despite the knock downs we will continue to strive for excellence and what the mice badge stands for. To Peter, Arthur and Margaret along with Carole Mathew for her work on our website.

Lastly, can I please urge all our members to renew their memberships and for those reading that aren't members please consider helping out. This year has seen us have some incredible expense and without our members and descendants subscriptions we cant continue the work we are doing. Peter apologies for the "lack of Jokes" in this bulletin.

Rob Denny
National President
Mice of Moresby
55/53 Battalion Association & National Support Group Inc.

SECRETARIES REPORT

VALE- FAREWELL OUR GOOD AND FAITHFUL FRIENDS

In the year to date we have had to say goodbye to Leo Inglis, Clyde Parsons, Ray Gentles and Lou Collett. Clyde Parsons was the first non-55/53rd Bn soldier who was president of the association. He took over following Paul 'Peter' Wrights death in 2010, until a few years ago when his health deteriorated. Without Clyde's determination to keep the memory of the diggers in our minds, the association would have disappeared long ago as dozens of other associations of returned service personnel.

We remember Leo Inglis as being one of the last remaining members of the 53rd Battalion who marched to Isurava in August 1942 and served their country with honour. He would have been 100 in November next year.

Ray Gentles is remembered here because of the Man was! Ray was a man of great passion for his country and love his fellow soldiers. His work in his local RSL sub-branch and particularly bringing the story of the Kokoda Track and Sanananda to countless thousands of children who visited the Kokoda Track walkway at Concord over the past 23 years. Without Ray's contribution to the association it would not have survived as long as it has.

We also remember Lou Collett who has also died. Lou attended almost every reunion and parade over the past 65 years. His ability to attend was often restricted by health issues. In recent years he attended regularly, because of the wonderful support of his family. A man of great compassion and principles. Early in his army career, Lou showed what the sort of person he was when he stood up for a little bloke who was being bullied. See his story in the below article about the undefeated Rugby League team of which he was a member.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & GENERAL MEETING:

The meeting was held 24.2.2020. The new constitution was approved. and registered with NSW Fair Trading.

Due to Covid 19 all other activities of the association including Anzac Day and Sanananda Day Parade/ reunion have been cancelled.

ARCHIVE CABINET

The Archive Cabinet has now been relocated to the Thirlmere RSL Sub-Branch Museum. Anyone who would like to see it should phone Rob Denny. The 1927 55 Bn Flag and Kings Flag remain with Mark Edwell. The 55th Bn flag is in poor condition and requires restoration. To repair the flag the costs will be about \$4,000.00. We will be looking at getting a Dept. Veterans Affairs grant to pay the cost of restoration.

SANANANDA DAY ARRANGEMENTS.

This year at Granville Diggers we will be holding a meeting and a remembrance service for Sanananda Day. We will be gathering at the Granville Diggers Club on Saturday 5th December at 1000 hours. With the meeting to commence at 1030hrs followed by a remembrance service. The Granville RSL has kindly allowed us to use a room that will hold 50 people under Covid19 rules. There will not be a formal lunch this year. Catering facilities available at the club bistro. Veterans/ Wives/Widows will take first preference. We will be accepting names from 1st November. If you are able to attend, please contact our treasurer Arthur Perry by phone 02 9809 3839 or email: perry80@optusnet.com.au.

ORDERLY ROOM GOSSIP:

Last year a FaceBook post from Marilyn Cox, a daughter of Lou Collett posted several photos of the 55/53rd Battalion Rugby League team which was reported to have been undefeated in 23 matches between 1943 and September 1945. This prompted some research. In the Orderly Room Report below you will be able to read the personal retails about each of the known players. The full report (25 pages in length), is found under 'Soldiers Stories' on the website. To correct the record the Battalion team lost the last two games. The first was as a preliminary match to a Queensland v. NSW on 15.9.1945. Three of the battalion team key players were absent being members of the origin teams; Qld. Lisha Kayrooz, N.S.W. Bill Bray and Tom Briggs. With the loss of the three key rep. players, the 55/53bn went down to 26 Bn. 0-3.

The last game the battalion played was on 22.12.1945 at Rabaul also v. 26 Battalion. By then most of the team were back at home with their families, the result 26 Bn. 6 defeated 53/53rd Bn. 3.

The credit to the next article is a reprinting of an article from the 3-1995 Orderly Room Report; Trevor Harper included this objective account of the beach-head battles. It is well worth reading.

Peter Dowling,
Hon. Secretary



55/53rd Battalion WWII League Team

This photo is courtesy of the late Keith Shepherd. 17 players are in this photo. Their positions in the photo are unclear. Keith names Beasley, Tutleby, [Tuttlebee] Bray, Chas Smith (Mid Row 2nd right), Briggs and Donovan.

We have found a number of newspaper reports here is one from the Townsville Bulletin 20.6.1944:

ARMY No. 6 DEFEATS RAILWAYS.

"Football fans who have followed the first round of football selected a meeting between the Railway team and Army No. 6 as a hard, fast game. The game on Sunday afternoon (18.6.1944), between them even exceeded anticipations. The gate receipts totalled £112/3/6.

The teams were:

Army No. 6: K, Beazley, Howard, Briggs, Kayrooz, Watt, Nevin, Ball, Sheehan, Smith, Tuttlebee. Deacon, Barnes and Hobson.

Railway: Seymour, Askew, Kehoe, Gaylor, Bailey, Venn, Robertson. Curtis, Cruickshank, Vincent, Jones, Baker, and Bathe.

Referee: R. Draney.

Railways kicked off but the Army attacks and kept the ball in their opponents' territory. The first opportunity to score was a penalty to the Army after ten minutes of play. It was not a difficult kick but Ball's effort went just outside the posts. Another penalty well out, a few minutes later, was entrusted to Briggs who raised the flags. From the kick off Railways carried the ball down to Army territory, but a breach gave Railways a penalty and Seymour raised the flags. A few minutes later another breach gave Seymour a kick from the side line, and near midfield. Seymour was loudly cheered as the ball went over between the uprights, and gave the Railways a lead of two points, after 16 minutes' play.

Army again attacked, but Deacon was penalised for being offside and Seymour's kick placed the Army on the defensive. At this stage Ball, who had been playing well was injured and was replaced by Russell. Ten minutes later Baker, a heavy forward, came into collision with Russell and the lad was conveyed to an Army hospital for attention, J. Moores [J. MOORE], replaced him just before half time.

Hard interesting play ranged in midfield for some minutes, then Briggs was given a penalty kick, and made the score 4 all. Excitement was high when the Army breached and Seymour again kicked. The ball went close, one linesman putting up his flag, but Referee Draney ruled it outside.

Almost on half time Briggs kicked another penalty to take the half time score 6-4, the ten points being secured from penalty kicks.

On resumption, the Army winger Watt limped with a heavily bandaged ankle. Army again attacked, and a breach in the first two minutes resulted in Briggs adding another two points. A good line kick by Seymour found the side line and the Railway forwards tried hard to break through the defence. Askew came off the field with an Injury, at this stage of the game Army then attacked and when the ball went back to Seymour, he kicked infield Beazley who had won many kicking duels during the match, fielded the ball and kicked a fine field goal, 10-4.

It was only after 29 minutes play in this half that Army broke through the defence. Briggs followed a kick down in the corner, and beat two opponents for the ball, and scored. The kick from near the side line failed.

Railways made a final effort to even the points and kept the Army defending their line in the last stages of the game. Seymour failed in an attempt to kick a field goal, but a ten minutes later Curtis fell over in the corner to make the final score 13-7.

The result was cheered by some 500 followers who had made a special trip to lend 'moral' support to their companions. The game which at times very heated and was kept well in hand by Referee Draney”.

The 55/53rd Battalion Rugby League A Grade team was legendary around Townsville in the 1943's and Strathpine in the 1944's and Torokina, Bougainville and Rabaul, 1945 and 1946. They were undefeated against all comers for three years. A 25 page report can be found under 'Soldiers Stories' on the battalion website 5553battalion.com. Below are short biographies of the soldiers/ Players. One exception is Patrick Bugden Half-Back for Newtown and Western Suburbs, Sydney 1942-1947, of Alstonville may have been included if proof of his army service was found. Patrick Bugden was a dental mechanic.

BALL, AUBREY DONALD (Mousey) (27.1.1920-1989)

Rank: Lance Corporal

Position: Half Back

Fred Denny remembers Mousey Ball, “a pocket dynamo”. Born in Newcastle 27.1.1920, the youngest son of Margaret and Frederick Ball. (NSW BDM 7448/1920) of Mereweather, Newcastle NSW.

Aubrey enlisted in the Militia and allotted to the 53rd Battalion. He served on the Kokoda Track at the battle of Isurava. On the dissolution of the 53rd Battalion in October 1942 he was transferred to the 39th Battalion and suffered the horrors of the battles at Buna and Sanananda in December 1942. Following the dissolution of the 39th Battalion in 1943, he was transferred back with the remaining members of the amalgamated 55/53rd Battalion. He would have been one of the very few that survived Isurava and Buna. A very brave man.

Aubrey Ball kicked 2 goals in the 26-5 win on 28.5.1944 against Railways (Townsville Daily Bulletin 30.5.1944). On 18.6.1944 Aubrey played Half-Back for the 55/53rd Battalion team also against the Railways team at Townsville. He was injured and had to leave the field. In 1949, Aubrey married Frances Dudley Connors at Hamilton (Newcastle) N.S.W., (NSWBDM: 4199/1949). He died in 1989 (NSW BDM: 104346/1989).

BARNES, CHARLES HENRY (24.12.1920-9.6.2009)

Rank: Private

Position: Probably Front Row - Hooker

Charles Barnes was born at Canterbury, Sydney on 24.12.1920. He was the son of Charles and Gladys Barnes. Brother of Margaret, George, Gladys and Thelma.

Charles Barnes was discharged 21.3.1946. In 1951 Charles married Gwendoline Winifred Barnes.

He was a member of the Battalion Association in the 1990's and lived at 69 Salisbury St., Canley Vale NSW. Charles Barnes died in 1985 (NSWBDM: 20525/1985), his widow Gwendoline Winifred of Canley Heights, died 9.6.2009 (Daily Telegraph, Sydney 11.6.2009).

BEASLEY, Kevin Thomas (26.6.1919-1985)

Rank: Staff Sergeant

Position: Wing

Kevin Beasley was the son of Thomas Arthur and Eilly Beasley. Born at Albury on 26.6.1919. His father was a horse dealer. He enlisted into the Militia at Wagga Wagga on 10.7.1942. and allocated to the 21st Australian Cavalry Regiment.

He was part of the 1943 draft of reinforcements to the 55/53rd Bn. His name first appears in the battalion War Diary, promotion to Sergeant Routine Orders 7.9.1943. His served in the unit up until being demobbed 12.7.1946. As a footballer he excelled at both Rugby League and Australian Rules Football.

Kevin Beasley was selected early in the 55/53 Bn Rugby League Team. Keith Shepherd names him in a team photo. He was listed as Winger in the Army No 6, team that defeated Railways 13-7, on 19.6.1944. (Townsville Daily Bulletin Qld. 20.6.1944)

Following his discharge from the Army on 12.7.1946 Kevin Beasley resumed playing for the Wagga Waratahs his first game back of the Waratahs was on 11.8.1946. He was part of their Group 13 team being selected in the team to play Batlow at Batlow on 18.8.1946. (Daily Advertiser (Wagga Wagga, NSW 9.8.1946). He died in 1985.

BRAY, JACK (31.10.1922- died after 1989)

Rank: Private

Position: Five-eight, Full-Back

Jack Bray was a younger brother of William Joseph Bray (Bill) below who also served in the 55/53rd Battalion. He had another brother Mick who played football for West Wyalong. Jack Bray was born at Wyalong on 31.10.1922, son of William and Mary Frances Bray.

He commenced his rugby league career at an early age, when he was named in a junior team. The team schedule suggests he was lock forward. (West Wyalong Advocate 18.6.1937). Four years later in 1941, Jack was selected as a 19-year-old in first-grade and scored his first try on 25.6.1941 against Cowra. (West Wyalong Advocate 26.6.1940). He enlisted in the Army on 4.8.1942 at Nowra.

Jack Bray returned to West Wyalong on 11.8.1945 and with another returned servicemen, was given an enthusiastic welcome home.

BRAY, WILLIAM JOSEPH (BILL) (10.6.1918-17.6.1988)

Rank: Private

Position: Front Row

Bill Bray was born at West Wyalong on 10.6.1918. The eldest son of William and Mary Florence Bray. He had two brothers Jack and Mick who were members of the West Wyalong Football team. He commenced his first-grade football as a rising star for West Wyalong at the commencement of the 1939 season. In a match against Barmedman, on 30.4.1939 he scored a try and played an outstanding game in the forwards (West Wyalong Advocate 2 May 1939.) in 1939-40 Bill Bray made a name for himself as a dynamic attacking forward and powerful defender. He had the speed of a wing-three-quarter and a very handy Goal Kicker. Bill was part of the West Wyalong team that defeated Young on 2.4.1940. In the opposing team were Jack Hobson and Tom Briggs, who would later be team-mates in the 55/53rd Bn team 1943-1946. (West Wyalong Advocate, NSW, 20.5. 1940.)

In July 1942, Bill Bray enlisted in the Militia and posted to the 55/53rd Bn. members of the Battalion Association and attend many reunions and parades over the years. He lived at Sutherland, NSW.

Bill Bray died on 17.6.1988 aged 70. His ashes are interred at Woronora Cemetery.

BRIGGS, THOMAS HENRY (Tom) (29.7.1919- died after 1990)

Rank: Sergeant

Position: Centre/Five-Eight

Thomas Henry Briggs was born at Young, NSW on 29.7.1919. Son of Sidney W and Rosa M Briggs (NSWBDM: 30551/1919).

According to newspaper reports Tom Briggs played Rugby League with Sydney Eastern Suburbs up to his enlistment. He was included in the playing list as "five-eight" for Eastern Suburbs Reserve Grade against Newtown to be played at Henson Park on Sat. 24 May 1941. (*The Rugby League news*. Vol. 22 No. 7 (May 24, 1941 p. 17). Also 28.6.1941 against Wests at Pratten Park.

Western Suburbs 1946 & 1947 St George teams between 1946 and 1949. The St George Call (19.3.1948 p8,) said that "In the Centre Lew Evans and Briggs worked up an effective combination each showing out to advantage". ...

Thomas Briggs, enlisted at Young NSW on 5.11.1940. Between 1943-1946 Tom Briggs was a member and possibly captain of the undefeated Battalion Rugby League Team. He was the Captain of the 11th Division team that defeated 29th Brigade in Brisbane on 19.10.1944. The 11th division team won 26-3.

Following discharge, he played 21 matches for Sydney teams: Western Suburbs (No. 442) 1946 & 1947 St George teams between 1946 and 1949. He married at Hurstville, Betty Valerie Scott in 1946 (NSWBDM: Marriage 26476/1946). Thomas died after 1990

COLLETT, LOUIS (Joe) (19.6.1923-17-8.2020)

Rank: Private

Position: not known

Louis Collett was born at Lakemba on 19th June 1923, son of Lawrence Collett. Prior to enlisting Lou was employed as an Electro-plater. On enlistment he was allocated to the 2nd Artillery Regiment. He was transferred to the 55/53rd Battalion on 9.11.43 and subsequently served at Jacky Jacky (Thursday Island), Strathpine, Brisbane, Bougainville and Rabaul. He returned to Sydney on 15.5.1946 and was assigned to 21 Aust. Works Company until his discharge in Sydney on 26.9.1946.

Louis Collett married Mary Darby at Canterbury N.S.W., in 1947.

Louis was a member of the battalion association for many years up to his death and regularly attended the annual parades and reunions. He died peacefully at his nursing home on 17.8.2020. His funeral was conducted at Mittagong on 31.8.2020.

DEACON, ROBERT CHARLES (19.11.1920-23.9.1984)

Rank: Lieutenant

Position: Front Row - Prop Forward

Born at Warren, NSW on 19.11.1920, son of Isaac and Sarah Deacon. Enlisted in the Militia at Warren NSW and later transferred to the A.I.F. on 19.11.1942 at Foster, Victoria.

Transferred to 55/53rd Bn on 5.11.1942, weeks before the unit was sent to Sanananda. In May 1943 as Assistant Works officer, he was in charge of preparing football/parade grounds. In August 1943 was recorded as being Platoon Commander R/O 21.8.1943. which platoon not stated.

He was transferred to the 2/11 AUST COMMANDO SQDN in late 1944, This unit sailed for Morotai in April 1945 in preparation to liberate areas of Netherland East Indies and British Borneo and landed on Labuan Island 10.6.1945: On 19.6.1943 the unit moved to Mempakul clearing the Klias Peninsular and remained there until the end of the war and some time afterwards. The 1/11 Commando Squadron returned to Australia in January 1946 and was disbanded. (<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U54328/>)

Robert was discharged 11.2.1946.; married Patricia May Witherby at in 1943. They had no children.

Robert died at Wyoming, NSW on 23.9.1984 (SMH 25.9.1984).

DONOVAN, FRANCIS PATRICK (Pat) (1.2.1921-24.2.2012)

Rank: Lieutenant

Position: unknown

Pat Donovan was born at Ingham, on 1.2.1921 son of John Francis Donovan, educated at St Joseph's College, Nudgee, Brisbane. He was dux of the college at age 15, a member of the First XV Rugby Union team and First XI Cricket Team. He commenced a law degree at the University of Queensland in 1939. In the same year he enlisted in the Army as a private soldier. He served initially in the 9/49 Infantry Battalion (30.3.1939), and transferred to the 9th Bn 18.11.1940. He was attached to the 15 Battalion for training 28.4.1942: promoted Corporal 18.12.1942: Served at Milne Bay 14.1.1943-22.2.1943; Attended junior officers' course and appointed Acting Lieutenant on 22.5.1943:

Transferred to 55/53rd Battalion as a reinforcement rank of Lieutenant on 18.11.1943: Appointed 55/53rd Battalion Adjutant (1.8.1945-1.12.45): Commission appointment terminated 15.1.1946.

The following are extracts from his obituary: Pat Donovan was awarded the Rhodes Scholarship and gained a bachelor of Civil Law at Magdalen College, Oxford in 1946. He returned to Australia in 1952 as Chair of the Melbourne Law School. In 1961 he entered the diplomatic service in Rome, Geneva and London. In 1977, he became ambassador and permanent representative to the OECD, based in Paris. Became a member of the International Court of Arbitration, rising to the position of vice-president. In 1980, he was made a Knight of Magistral Grace in the Australian Association of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. Donovan was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 1976 and in 1998 he was honoured by the French government with the award of Chevalier Legion d'honneur. He died in Paris 3.2.2012. (Sydney Morning Herald February 25, 2012).

HOBSON, Jack M.I.D. (21.12.1918-14.5.1976)

Rank: Private

Position: Forward: Front Row

Jack Hobson was born at Young, NSW on 21.12.1918, son of Frederick James and Amy Matilda Hobson. Official records say he enlisted at Young on 5 August 1940; in reality he enlisted in April 1940 as a farewell function for Militia volunteers was held at Young Town Hall and reported in the local newspaper. 400 people attended; The paper reported "Soldiers given a rousing Send-Off". The volunteers were to commence a three-month camp in May 10 1940. (The Young Chronicle 19.4.1940).

Following his return from the 3-month camp Jack represented Young in First Grade in a Rugby League match for the 'Maher Cup' on 24.7.1940 against Harden-Murrumburrah at Young. It was a dour struggle in wet and muddy conditions.

Following his discharge on 29.1.1946 Jack returned to Young and continued to play league for the Young Team. The Cootamundra Herald 14.8.1947 published the following: "Mr Jack Hobson of Temora road who served in the A.I.F. in the last war had been mentioned in despatches. The honour entitles him to wear two oak leaf emblems on the ribbon of the British War Medal. Mr Hobson is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Hobson of Lower Boorowa street. He is married with one child, and is a prominent member of Young's Maher Cup team". The award was for exceptional service in the South Pacific Area. The date and place of award not provided. Citation Ref A.M.F. O/A 41(2). Died at Young NSW 14.5.1976 age 57 and buried in Young Cemetery.

HOWARD, ROLAND CREIGHTON (Ron): (31.3.1921-4.3.2013)

Rank: Corporal

Position: Probably Wing three-quarters

From West Wyalong NSW Roland or Ron Howard was a professional athlete - sprinter prior to WWII. There is no proof he was a rugby league player. Having read most of the West Wyalong Advocate's Football reports from 1937 to 1946. He enlisted about the same time as other 55/53th Bn footballers from Young and West Wyalong, Jack Hobson, Tom Briggs (Young) Bill Bray and Jack McDonald West Wyalong. He was serving in the 55/53 Battalion during 1943-1946. Not all fast runners make good footballers.

Ron was born in Bundaberg Queensland on 31.3.1921, son of a T. Howard. Enlisted on 9.7.1942 at Berrima, then residing at West Wyalong.

The West Wyalong Advocate published his death notice on 5.3.2013. He died 4.3.2013.