



RETURNED and SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA
EPPING RSL SUB-BRANCH
ROUTINE ORDERS



Vol 26 No 5

October-December 2023

President: Brian Swan AM
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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



As we commemorate the end of World War 2 on August 15, we think of many things that have gone by. But as we dwell on the past we should also think of our present time.

My thoughts are for the recent Taipan helicopter crash off Hamilton Island and the loss of four ADF members: Captain Daniel Lyon, Lieutenant Maxwell Nugent, Corporal Alexander Naggs, and Warrant Officer Laycock. As their families grieve for them, we too should have them in our thoughts. They were ADF members participating in Exercise Talisman Sabre, which was a multi nation exercise.

The helicopter crash and their deaths show us that Defence exercises can be as real as war itself and can have serious

consequences. The service of these four ADF members should not be forgotten.

I have been advised that Lieutenant Maxwell Nugent was educated at Barker College where he did very well in his scholastic subjects and was also a member of the Cadet Corps where he thrived. He rose to the rank of Cadet Under Officer and was the Commander of Echo Platoon.

So, as we quite rightly grieve for the families of World War 2 personnel at our Victory in the Pacific commemoration, spare a thought for our four comrades who gave as much as any of our past diggers- they gave their lives.

Lest We Forget.

Brian Swan AM

Epping RSL sub-Branch President

REMEMBRANCE DAY

SATURDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2023

Wreath-laying service at Boronia Park Cenotaph

Assemble at 1030h for service commencing at 1045h

Medals will be worn

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

VALE

“WE WILL REMEMBER THEM”

During the months of July - September 2023, no advice has been received of the passing of service members.

SENIOR MEMBERS ASSOCIATION

President: Merrill Prestidge

Vice President: Les Rowe

Secretary: Margaret Cummins

Treasurer: Deirdre Curdie

Committee Members: Don Greentree, Brenda Greentree, Gerard Landon, Gavin Nell

The Senior Members Association Luncheon advertised for Tuesday 12 September was cancelled with approval of the August General Meeting. It was considered to be too expensive with our Christmas Luncheon coming on Tuesday 21 November.

Merrill Prestidge, President

AUSTRALIAN WAR WIDOWS N.S.W. LTD

Coordinator: Heather Gillam 9876 3588

Treasurer: Heather Gillam

Meetings: First Monday in month at 10.30 a.m.

October 9 2023 (October 2 Labour Day Public Holiday)

November 6 2023

December 4 2023

STAND EASY

The meetings are between 1300 and 1500 hours on the third Wednesday of the month in 45 on Rawson at the Epping Club.

It is a warm and relaxed camaraderie meeting. Drinks and snacks are provided. These monthly casual meetings are designed for all Members of the sub-Branch to join and enjoy a friendly atmosphere to laugh and share their experiences with each other. They will also be informed about the current and future events and activities of the sub-Branch. All Members are welcome and warmly encouraged to attend.

The next meetings will be on:

Wednesday 18 October 2023

Wednesday 15 November 2023

Wednesday 20 December 2023

Wednesday 17 January 2024

Allan Lotfizadeh, Secretary

EPPING RSL SUB-BRANCH

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY: OCTOBER 2023 – JANUARY 2024

OCTOBER 2023

Monday 02 LABOUR DAY PUBLIC HOLIDAY

Tuesday 03	RSL Senior Members Association Meeting	1400
Monday 9	Australian War Widows NSW Ltd	1030
Monday 9	Epping RSL sub-Branch Committee Meeting	1800
Wednesday18	Stand Easy	1300
Monday 30	Epping RSL sub-Branch Monthly General Meeting	1930
Tuesday 31	RSL Senior Members Association Committee Meeting	1030

NOVEMBER 2023

Monday 06	Australian War Widows NSW Ltd	1030
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Monday 06 RSL Senior Members Association Meeting 1400

Tuesday 07 MELBOURNE CUP

Monday 13	Epping RSL sub-Branch Committee Meeting	1800
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Wednesday15 Stand Easy 1300

Tuesday 21	RSL Senior Members Association Christmas Luncheon	1230
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Monday 27	Epping RSL sub-Branch Monthly General Meeting	1930
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Tuesday 28	RSL Senior Members Association Committee Meeting	1030
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DECEMBER 2023

Monday 04	Australian War Widows NSW Ltd	1030
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Tuesday 05	RSL Senior Members Association Meeting	1400
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Sunday 10	Epping RSL sub-Branch Christmas Luncheon	1200
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Monday 11	Epping RSL sub-Branch Committee Meeting	1800
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Wednesday20 Stand Easy 1300

JANUARY 2024

Monday 08	Epping RSL sub-Branch Committee Meeting	1800
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Wednesday17 Stand Easy 1300

Monday 29	Epping RSL sub-Branch Monthly General Meeting	1930
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Tuesday 30	RSL Senior Members Association Committee Meeting	1030
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EPPING RSL SUB-BRANCH HOSPITAL/ AGED CARE VISITATIONS

Members of our hospital/aged care visiting team have performed a great service for the sub-Branch for many years by maintaining close liaison with members when they are not well, and when they have to go to hospital. Mainly though they keep up regular contact with those with more extended problems who spend time in Care Facilities etc.

SUSPENSION OF VISITING DUE TO CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Sadly, in mid-March 2020, over three years ago, it became necessary to suspend our visiting programme due to the impact of the Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic on our country. Care facilities and hospitals went into lockdown. Also, importantly, we did not want to put our visiting team at any personal risk. The situation started to look much more promising late in 2021 resulting from the significant growth in double vaccinations and then in booster vaccinations, but Omicron arrived and spread so rapidly that once more we do not know when we shall be able to resume visiting. Facilities are constantly going into lockdown and when visiting is allowed it is highly restricted and by appointment only.

We are, however, constantly monitoring the situation so that we can resume our visiting program when this becomes feasible.

Robin Cummins, Welfare Officer - 9680 4865

THE HOME FRONT: The Never-Ending War Within Our Veterans

Patrick Lindsay, affirm press, Victoria, 2023

Forty-one Australian soldiers died on active duty in over 20 years of fighting in Afghanistan; in that time more than 1400 veterans have taken their own lives. Veterans today are chronically over-represented when it comes to PTSD, depression, homelessness and suicide.

Australians rightfully pause on Anzac Day each year to solemnly remember fallen soldiers, but are we forgetting our returned veterans whose personal battles continue every single day, and how did we get to this point?

In this authoritative, compelling and urgent book, bestselling author Patrick Lindsay (*The Spirit of the Digger* and *Fromelles*, among many) looks at the wide-ranging damage caused by training Australians to be fighting machines and then inadequately supporting them as they re-enter their communities. Featuring moving interviews with veterans and their families as well as a broader analysis of Australian military culture and government responses, Lindsay illustrates both the personal and societal costs of this dereliction of duty.

The Home Front is a fascinating and rousing indictment of the culture of war, the thinking of those who wage it, and the cost to those who experience it.

Editors Note: This book was recommended by Bob Kenyon. In particular, Chapter 7 A Shadow Over Their Service, provides a very interesting discussion of service in Afghanistan.

The officer of the day was going his rounds when he saw that one of the sentries was a very raw recruit who was having his first spell of guard duties. Determined to find out whether the the young fellow understood his duties, he began to question him.

“If you saw a General approaching, what would you do?”

“Call out the guard,” the recruit answered.

“Very good! And if you saw a battle-cruiser coming across the the parade ground, what would you do then?”

“Report to the hospital for mental inspection,” came the prompt reply.

A SOLDIER'S PLEA OF NOT GUILTY TO CHARGE OF PLAYING CARDS IN CHURCH

I have been about six weeks on the march. I have neither Prayer Book nor Bible - nothing but a pack of cards. I will satisfy your Worship on the purity of my intentions. Beginning with the ace: When I see the ace it reminds me that there is but one God. When I see the deuce, it reminds me of the Father and Son. When I see the three spots it reminds me of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

When I see the four spots it reminds me of the four evangelists - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. When I see the five it reminds me of the five wise Virgins that trimmed their lamps; they were ten, but five were wise and five were foolish and were shut out. When I see six it reminds me that in six days the Lord made Heaven and Earth. When I see seven it reminds me that on the seventh day He rested from the great work He had created and hallowed it. When I see eight it reminds me the eight righteous persons that were saved when God destroyed the world, namely, Noah and his wife; there were three sons and their wives. When I see nine it reminds me of the nine lepers that were cleansed by Our Saviour - nine out of ten never returned thanks. When I see ten it reminds me of the Ten Commandments which God handed to Moses on the mountain.

When I see the King it reminds me of the King of Heaven, Who is God Almighty. When I see the Queen it reminds me of the Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon, for she was as wise a woman as he a man. She brought with her fifty boys and fifty girls, all dressed in boy's apparel, for King Solomon to tell which were the boys and which were the girls. King Solomon sent for them to wash; the girls washed to the elbows and the boys washed to the waist. King Solomon told by that.

When I count how many spots in a pack of cards I find 365 - as many days in a year. When I count the number of cards in a pack I find 52 - the number of weeks in a year. I find four suits, the number of weeks in a month. I find twelve picture cards in a pack, the number of months in a year, and on counting the tricks I find thirteen, the number of weeks in a quarter. So, you see, sir, a pack of cards serves me for a Bible, Almanac, and Common Prayer Book.

NEWS FROM THE GOLDEN KANGAROOS

The Golden Kangaroos Concert and Marching bands are always busy as the weather warms up and this year is no exception. The Concert band played in the NSW State Band Championships at the end of August and won the Open C grade concert band section. The performance of the test piece, "Kurrajong", depicting the life and times of the village in the foot hills of the Blue Mountains, greatly appealed to the composer and it is now featured on the publisher's website (Thorp) in case you missed hearing it at the August concert.

The Marching Band has recently performed in the Orange Blossom parades at Rouse Hill and Kenthurst and coming up, it will be on display at the Eastwood Granny Smith parade on 21st October.

Participating in community events is important to the Golden Kangaroos and on 4th November, the marching band and explorer band will play at Rofe Park, Hornsby Heights the opening of the Hornsby Relay for Life, which helps to raise money for Cancer Council research, prevention and support services.

This year will be the tenth for the band to travel to Leeton in southern NSW in mid-November to participate in the Outback Band Spectacular. The weekend features numerous musical performances on street corners and in parks around town with a truly spectacular massed band concert on Saturday night.

Everyone is welcome to come along to our free end of year concert at 2pm 26th November at the Hornsby War Memorial Hall, High St Hornsby. As always, you will be treated to a very diverse programme of music, including an entertaining piece about that nightmare

Marnie Holmes, Programme Director, Golden Kangaroos Hornsby Concert Band





The Ambush at Thua Tich

A battle Australia refused to recognise

By Participant Don Greentree

My story begins on 29h May 1969 when back at the Fire Support Base (FSB).

The mortar crew consisting of four men including myself was hastily packed onto a mortar carrier and we found ourselves detached to 2 Troop, B Squadron, 3 Cavalry Regiment as part of OPERATION GARY OWEN in Area of Operations (AO) FROG led by Captain Tom Arrowsmith. We set off at a great rate of speed heading to a destination unknown to us. Nor did we have an inkling of the trouble we were heading into.

Including our mortar track, we had a total of 13 vehicles. I suppose if you were worrying about what may lie ahead, this was not a good sign.

Somewhere along the way we had acquired a number of infantry men from the 2nd D & E Platoon, 7 of whom were to stay with us.

On arrival at what we then knew to be the Viet Cong (VC)-friendly village of Thua Tich, or rather the stone or cement pillars gateway that was all that remained, Captain Arrowsmith split the group up sending nine of the 13 carriers further north along the track in case of an attack from that direction.

This led the remaining four carriers, including the mortar track, to hide our vehicles behind some very sparse scrub. The mortar track having the heaviest fire power and needing clear air around us to be able to fire, was given the prime position. As the photographs (see later) will clearly show, my carrier was almost completely in the open facing south along the track.

As we were setting up our arcs of fire, the seven men from the 2nd D & E platoon passed through us to set up an early warning post some 500 metres south along the track. This meant that our arcs of fire had to be easily recognised in the dark so that we would not be lobbing mortar bombs on to them (and they did not look the type that would be happy with that happening).

Alongside us, separated by a few metres, was Captain Arrowsmith's command vehicle. Beside him on a bit of an angle was another fighting track, then to the rear was an engineer's track.

(I note here that the battle report shows my

mortar track took very little part in the battle. As my story and photographs will show, this was wrong.)

Our little group set up its defences as best we could given the sparse amount of cover we had with a bank of 12 claymores directly in front of Captain Arrowsmith. The signal for 'all hell to break loose' was when, and if, he pressed the tit.

We then sat down to eat a cold meal of whatever rations we had brought with us and with night starting to fall, we, the mortar crew, planned with the crew of our carrier exactly what we were to do if the claymores were fired.

As the mortar crew cannot see over the sides of the carrier it was decided that I would stand and give fire directions as needed.

Let me first say here that the road was only about 20 feet in front of us. A moonless night descended rather quickly as we stood-to in our various positions. All was still as though the whole countryside had stopped breathing. I was looking South along the track that was a possible enemy approach. From my position I had a perfect uninterrupted view of not only the road but the entire grass area to our front where every tree and shrub had been removed for about 200 metres before the jungle commenced.

2000hrs came. Nothing. We thought we were in for a quiet night when, at 2030hrs, we heard the click of the radio and then the whispered message that a large group of heavily armed North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) were heading towards us. Their assessment was a group of between 200 and 800.

Peering through the darkness with only the light of the stars, I saw three scouts coming along the road. They seemed to be doing a good job which worried me greatly. Behind them I could see the main body come four abreast and I quickly counted 125. I turned to look at Arrowsmith's vehicle and there were about 50 enemy now in the killing field. The tit was pressed and all hell broke loose. Luckily for us most of the enemy turned and ran for the safety of the jungle two hundred metres away— if they had turned in at us we would have been in big strife.

We heard the boss calling for illumination so within seconds the whole area was lit up bright as day.

From there the mortar went into virtual self-control and we were firing rounds no charge,

straight up and down as well as ranging out over what was now a very large battle field. Every so often we would throw up a star shell to keep the area illuminated.

(I note here that the battle report claimed handheld flares were responsible for illuminating the battle area. Some illumination was undoubtedly provided in this way, but it would simply not have made sense not to use mortar star shell that provided illumination 500 times greater than handheld flares.)

I saw sights that I will never forget as I looked out over the battlefield. I saw one person crawling away dragging their intestines behind them until another round of fire ended their misery. I saw a figure stand and aim his weapon before he disappeared in a blaze of explosive light, hit directly by a mortar bomb. I saw bodies doing strange movements as 50cal rounds tore into them.

After some very hectic nerve shattering hours, well, only a bit more than 10 minutes really, the call came through to cease fire.

The sound of silence was deafening after the storm of noise from the last ten minutes. A quick round up of any injured was done and it turned out we had only one injury which, I understand, was a wound to the heel of a driver.

In the quiet of the aftermath we could hear the calling out of the enemy wounded and then, shortly after, the calling would stop.

We were so far out that we were beyond the range of artillery assistance so I believe that Captain Arrowsmith, at 2130hrs, was informed by Task Force HQ that a Spooky gunship aircraft was coming to our aid. We had four men mark our perimeter by laying on their backs with a red filter on the torch pointing upwards. Next minute there was a noise like ripping cloth as bullets from Spooky literally tore the jungle to shreds no more than a few feet out from us. Added to this was our mortar tube continuing sporadic fire which helped prevent, I believe, an enemy counterattack.

(Here again, I take exception to the battle report that stated twenty 81mm rounds were fired at the onset of the battle and a further ten 81mm High Explosive (HE) rounds fired as interdiction rounds throughout the rest of the night. In fact, we fired the first and last shot of the battle and fired over 60 rounds. Also, as far as I am aware, an 81mm mortar has never before been used in a killing group of an ambush. Yet not once does the battle report give any recognition to the mortar tube and crew.)

An official photograph taken as the resupply

chopper came in revealed that the mortar track was in prime position facing the oncoming enemy.

We were on full stand-to all night as we knew that only a short distance away was the remainder of the enemy force far outnumbering us. I honestly believe that if it had not been for Spooky and our mortar tube the enemy would have retaliated, and we would not have stood a chance.

Come first light we could hear the roar of the other APCs swooping down from the north and watched as they made a sweep out through the grass lands. At the same time, the early warning team came in through the mortar position looking absolutely exhausted, but you could see that if needed these seven men would be more than ready to fight to the end.

Conferences were called but being a lowly private I was not included in any part of these. During this time a chopper landed with top brass, intelligence officers etc and the army photographer for the photo op.

An official photograph shows myself sitting behind the 50cal of the mortar track cleaning my SLR at the same time. Pictured in the background is the chopper that brought in resups, the grass area all around is the battle ground and further off you can see the jungle starting again. I will say here that the mortar track had not moved since being positioned the evening prior to the battle, so it can again clearly be seen that we were in the prime position and definitely not in the rear position.

After one of these conferences with the team leaders etc, I saw Jimmy Riddle, who was in charge of the seven-man 2nd D & E platoon, go up to his men, have a bit of a talk and then went back to Captain Arrowsmith where a slightly heated discussion took place, I have no firsthand knowledge of what that was about.

Just after that the order was given that all the bodies of the enemy dead were to be buried near the village gate pillars.

It was understandably decided not to stick around this enemy infested area. So a mad dash for the village of Xuyen Moc began with the mortar track being positioned towards the rear of the column. One of the tracks got tangled in barbed wire and had to stop to clear it. We stayed with that vehicle due to the fact that we had the heaviest fire power of all, and as soon as the wire was cleared we took off faster than the flying nun to meet up with the rest of the troop. During that wild ride we had been hit twice with another five bodies being counted.

After returning home, I had nothing more to do with Thua Tich for a number of years until I happened to see a book in a department store with my photograph on the cover. Naturally I purchased the book, read it, noted all the discrepancies and attempted to set things right.

This is when the s..t fight started.

I attempted to get in touch with the other members of the mortar team that were with me at Thua Tich but instead of them replying I received emails from DVA, from my old battalion and from Department of Defence telling me not to try and contact them as they wanted nothing to do with me.

This was like a red rag to a bull. So I spent a number of years writing to every member of parliament that I thought could help, even to my battalion mortar platoon pointing out that this should be on our battle honours as a mortar had never before been used in an ambush killing ground as well as the fact that it had played such a central role.

I received a reply saying that as we were detached to 2 cav it had nothing to do with the battalion. They had even sent my letter to the battalion association and I received a rather curt message from them that it was obvious that I was trying to drum up some sort of glory for myself and to drop it.

I then contacted another person who had also been at the battle for advice. He was also trying to get recognition for his group.

Most disappointing was having to fight against the contention that the battle never happened. But between the two of us, over a 12-month period, we discovered that that a couple of awards had been handed out for the action (so some authority must have accepted that it did happen—it was a confusing situation).

Eventually after many letters back and forth with undeniable proof of our claim, we were able to communicate with the head of the Australian War Memorial (AWM) Dr Brendon Nelson. Letters of fact that we had been sending had, Dr Nelson confirmed, not been passed on to him.

In short, he then initiated an investigation into the battle at Thua Tich, found that what we were presenting to him was factual and instigated the insertion of a diorama of the Battle of Thua Tich into the war memorial's Vietnam war section. This no doubt forced the military to reluctantly

admit that such an action had taken place.

I put forward this contention: That 19 Australian soldiers taking on in excess of 200 enemy, with no artillery support, and beating them, should be a battle remembered, not denied just to suit the military higher ups.

Actions that took place were not decisions made by the rank and file, yet it is the rank and file yet again being shafted.

I have given here in this story my memories, which are as clear to me today as they were all those years ago. Many of the people I contacted—parliamentarians, journalists, shock jocks—all said the same. 'No one cares any more, it was so long ago'.

Well I remember and I care.

This was one of the biggest battles that Australians had in Vietnam when taking into account our numbers and the vastly superior numbers of the enemy. Because of the incorrect official report, those of us who fought the battle were denied our rightful recognition. The mortar crew, I truly believe, played a major part of stopping the enemy from regrouping and overrunning us. Yet we were shafted badly in the battle report which wrongly stated that we were placed in the rear and took no important part in the battle. This wrong statement was made, even when photographic evidence showed that we were in the prime position directly facing the enemy and that our ranging across the battlefield would have made it look as if there were two mortar tubes in action. Add to this us having fired in excess of 60 rounds during the battle and sporadic fire all night and the injustice of the official claim becomes clear.

Recognition, denied elsewhere, was eventually given by Dr Brendon Nelson of the Australian War Museum who confirmed that the battle at Thua Tich was one of the most significant battles that Australian troops fought in Vietnam due to the number of Australian troops facing the vastly superior NVA and VC forces.

Yet, even to this day, there have been no commendations, no word of well done, just a very reluctant acceptance that a battle took place at Thua Tich.

Contributed by Don Greentree, Epping RSL sub-Branch member.

Originally published in the Official Journal of the Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

BEL/69/0368/VN

3177505 Private (Pte) Donald Stanley (Don) Greentree, Mortar Platoon, 5th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (5RAR). checks the magazine of his L1A1 self-loading rifle (SLR) while sitting in the crew commander's position of an M113A1 armoured personnel carrier (APC), 30 May 1969. The weapon to his front is an M2HB Browning .50 calibre heavy machine-gun. Behind Pte Greentree in the photograph, members of 2 Troop unload a resupply of ammunition and rations from a RMF Iroquois helicopter. Private Greentree, of Dandenong, Victoria, was part of a four-man mortar section from 5RAR attached to 2 Troop, B Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment on Operation Garry Owen in Xuyen Moc District, in eastern Phuoc Tuy province in late May 1969. The combined-arms force also included a section of infantrymen from the Defence and Employment Platoon (D&E Pl) and combat engineers. During the previous night, 29-30 May, the Australians had ambushed a party of 50 Viet Cong (VC), killing eleven and capturing seven AK-47 assault rifles plus an RPG 2 rocket launcher and large quantities of ammunition, medical supplies and equipment. On the afternoon of 30 May enemy forces attempted to ambush the Australians as they travelled to Xuyen Moc village. Five VC were killed, and two RPG2 (rocket propelled grenade) rocket launchers were captured. There were no Australian casualties.

Australian War Memorial

When I get a headache, I take two aspirins and keep away from children, just like the bottle says.

If you see me talking to myself, just move along. I'm self-employed. We're having a meeting.

I hate it when I can't figure out how to operate the iPad and my tech support guy is asleep. He's 5 and it's past his bedtime.

The ability to speak several languages is an asset, but the ability to keep your mouth shut in any language is priceless.

Be decisive. Right or wrong, make a decision. The road is paved with flat squirrels who couldn't make a decision.

Contributed by David Taylor

EPPING RSL SUB-BRANCH DIRECTORY 2023

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ROUTINE ORDERS is issued 5 times per year, in January, April, June, August and October.

Contributions for inclusion in ROUTINE ORDERS, such as forward activities, interesting personal notes etc. are always welcome. Items for the next issue on Monday 29 January 2024 are required before Wednesday 17 January 2024.

Earlier would be appreciated. Electronic copy preferred if possible. *Routine Orders* editor Barry Hoschke bhoschke@tpg.com.au.