



RETURNED and SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA

EPPING RSL SUB-BRANCH ROUTINE ORDERS



Vol 29 No2

April - May 2026

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



This will be my final input to Routine Orders

I will be stepping down as President after a busy three years, to make way for younger members. During my time as President, our subBranch has continued to attract new members. We have commemorated a variety of events and, together with other members, I have visited many of them.

Our ANZAC preparations are well advanced and Andy Brayshaw has arranged an ANZAC dinner on 2 May 2026. Local schools and 322 City of Ryde Air Cadet Squadron will assist Anzac Sunday and the Dawn service.

In closing I would like to record my heartfelt thanks to all members but especially our Committee whose support and work stands at the front of our subBranch.

Brian Swan AM

President, Epping RSL sub-Branch

Changes to sub-Branch Management

The sub-Branch Annual General Meeting is usually held in February. However, due to renovations at The Epping Club, it is being held in March this year.

At the Annual General Meeting this year all positions on the Executive and Committee are declared vacant and elections held for a three-year term. Several members of the Executive have indicated that they will be retiring this year.

As this issue of Routine Orders is distributed at the March General Meeting, prior to the Annual General Meeting, it is not possible to list the new executive on the masthead.

Email addresses remain as:

subbranch@eppingsubbranch.com
president@eppingsubbranch.com
vicepresident@eppingsubbranch.com
secretary@eppingsubbranch.com
treasurer@eppingsubbranch.com
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ANZAC COMMEMORATIONS

Anzac Sunday Service

**19 April 2026 2.00 pm Grand Ballroom, The Epping Club,
followed by a march to Boronia Park Cenotaph for Wreath Laying**

ANZAC DAY DAWN SERVICE

25 April 2026 6.00 am Forest Park, Epping.

Assemble at 0545

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

VALE

“WE WILL REMEMBER THEM”

During the months of January-March 2026, advice has been received of the passing of the following Service Members:

NAME	RANK	SERVICE	UNIT	SERVICE NUMBER	DATE JOINED	DATE DECEASED
Ilic Vojislav	LT	ARMY	1 BAD	2207422	16/10/1991	19/01/2026
Cunneen Michael	LT	ARMY	12 Transport Coy	2135138	1/12/1990	14/12/2025

WELLBEING SUPPORT OFFICER

Andrew (Andy) Brayshaw

Mobile: 0435 879 258

Email: wellbeing@eppingsubbranch.com

Visit Andy in the sub-Branch office on Wednesday mornings between 9 a.m. and noon.

WSOs can offer:

referrals for training and employment pathways, housing providers, counselling and health services, and claims and compensation advocacy

support to claims Advocates,

visits to veterans at home, and in hospital and aged-care facilities

support services, such as driving and shopping trips

support at funerals

assistance organising domestic assistance or home maintenance services

assistance with administrative duties in a volunteer capacity

support organising and conducting social, family and Sport & Recreation Program activities

non-clinical and non-advocacy support to a veteran's family during time of grief, loss, and bereavement

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 25 May 2026 are required before Wednesday 13 May 2026 .

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

EPPING RSL SUB-BRANCH

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY APRIL-JUNE 2026

APRIL 2026

Friday 3	GOOD FRIDAY	
Sunday 5	EASTER	
	Daylight Saving Time Ends	
Monday 6	EASTER MONDAY	
Monday 13	War Widows NSW	1030
	Epping RSL sub-Branch Committee Meeting	1800
Wednesday 15	Stand Easy	1300
Sunday 19	Anzac Sunday Service; Epping Club Ballroom	1400
Saturday 25	Anzac Day: Forest Park Dawn Service	0600
Monday 27	Anzac Day Public Holiday	

MAY 2026

Saturday 2	Sub-Branch Anzac Dinner	1900
Monday 4	War Widows NSW	1030
Monday 4	Epping RSL sub-Branch April General Meeting	1930
Monday 11	Epping RSL sub-Branch Committee Meeting	1800
Wednesday 20	Stand Easy	1300
Monday 25	Epping RSL sub-Branch Monthly General Meeting and AGM	1930

JUNE 2026

Monday 1	War Widows NSW	1030
Monday 8	Epping RSL sub-Branch Committee Meeting	1800
Wednesday 17	Stand Easy	1300
Monday 29	Epping RSL sub-Branch Monthly General Meeting	1930

STAND EASY

Stand Easy is an informal daytime gathering on the third Wednesday of the month between 1300 and 1500 hours. It is held in 45 on Rawson at The Epping Club.

This provides an opportunity for all members of the sub-Branch to relax with a drink and nibbles and solve the problems of the world. Those who are unable to attend the evening monthly meetings catch up on sub-Branch activities and enjoy companionship.

Upcoming Stand Easy meetings will be held on:

15 April 2026

20 May

17 June

Heather Gillam - a life of service

by Jo Burgess

This is the briefing note I wrote for Monica Tudehope MP as requested for the Community Recognition Statement she read in the NSW Legislative Assembly on 18 March 2026.

Heather Gillam will be 99 years old on the 8th of November this year. She has been the Coordinator and Treasurer of the Epping Branch of the War Widows Inc. of NSW for more than 20 years.

It was only because of her failing health that Heather has had to relinquish this year, her role as coordinator of the Epping branch of War Widows.

Up until last year, she would walk the 2 kilometres from her home in West Epping to the Epping Club for the monthly War Widow meetings. Heather has been the main driving force in keeping the ladies together over the last 20 years. The average age of the Epping War Widow group is 90 years.

This is the War Widow's Motto that Heather would lead at every meeting. Heather lived this motto, not just for herself, but for her service to the other ladies in our group.

“We all belong to each other.

We all need each other.

It is in serving each other

And in sacrificing for our common good

That we are finding our true life.”

Heather was married for 57 years to a World War 2 veteran. His name was Private John Gillam 2nd AIF. He and his brother, Captain Walter Gillam's names are embedded on the worn path at the Epping Boronia Park Cenotaph. Heather always stops to remember them after each wreath laying ceremony.

War Widows are the 'Chief Mourners' at every Commemorative RSL Service. Heather has never missed a Dawn service on ANZAC Day, or a Victory in the Pacific Day, or indeed a Remembrance Day.

I think she felt it was her duty to lay a wreath on behalf of the 'older' war widows who could no longer make the journey.

Heather has been a long-time supporter of War Widows Inc. NSW and the recent spinoff group - Families of Veterans Guild. Heather has been a long-term advocate for all War Widows; but especially her local ladies. Because as we age and need more services, Heather has kept abreast of changes in legislation and new services that might impact on her War Widows.

Heather is a gentle and caring lady, who has not let her age stop her from supporting her War Widows. Heather has also been a big supporter of our local Epping RSL. At her recent retirement lunch as coordinator, many of the RSL executive fondly spoke to her participation in many of their activities over the past 20 years.

When a War Widow or a member of the Epping RSL Sub - branch found it necessary to go into an assisted care facility, Heather would go and visit them ... wherever they were ...by public transport.

For many years she would make the trip from Epping to Toongabbie or the RSL Veterans Retirement Village at Collaroy.

In 2021 because of her service to War Widows and Australian Veterans, Heather was awarded 'Senior Citizen of the Year' by the Parramatta City Council.

To finish, Heather is the embodiment of service.

If we could all strive to follow her example the world would be a better place. "Thank you" does not seem a strong enough word, to cover the sacrifice and hard work this lady has done over the years to support the aging wives and families of our returned Veterans.

WAR WIDOWS NSW

Coordinator: Jo Burgess 0404 107 794

Treasurer: Jo Burgess

Meetings: First Monday of the month at 10.30 am except for public holidays

Monday 13 April due to Easter Monday on 4 April

Monday 4 May

Monday 1 June

Monday 6 July

Monday 3 August

Monday 7 September

Monday 12 October due to Labour Day Holiday 5 October

Monday 2 November

Monday 7 December





LEST WE FORGET ANZAC DINNER

Saturday 2nd May 2026
Epping RSL sub-Branch
Epping Club
Rawson Street, Epping

7:00pm – 11:00pm

Dress Code:

Mess Dress/Lounge Suit,
Ladies: Appropriate Dress
Medals: Miniatures to be worn

TICKETS

\$45.00

LIMITED TICKETS AVAILABLE

Featuring the



**GOLDEN
KANGAROOS**

HORNSBY CONCERT BAND



Purchase Tickets

2026 ANZAC Day RSL sub-Branch Information Stalls at Epping Station

This year the Epping RSL sub-Branch will run an information stall in the Oxford Street/Langston Place entrance of Epping Station to increase local community awareness of local 2026 ANZAC commemorative events in Epping. Our objective is to inform our local community about sub-Branch ANZAC Day activities and increase:

- attendance at the 19 April 2 pm Sunday afternoon ANZAC commemoration at the Epping Club
- ANZAC Day Dawn Service attendance at Forest Park, Epping
- our local profile and RSL membership enquiries

As well as engaging with commuters and others travelling through Epping Station during weekday peak afternoon periods and the morning before our Sunday commemoration, we will provide information leaflets and sell commemorative ANZAC trinkets to the public. Public engagement is our priority, but donations towards RSL activities will also be accepted.

Dates and times for the stall are:

Friday afternoon 17 April 2026; 16:15-18:00

Saturday morning 18 April 2026; 10:15-12:00

Wednesday afternoon 22 April 2026; 16:15-18:00

Thursday afternoon 23 April 2026; 16:15-18:00

Friday afternoon 24 April 2026; 16:15-18:00

New tear-drop and pull-out banners to promote our sub-Branch are also being produced. We will also use the banners for our sub-Branch activities.

If you would like to volunteer to assist with the stall, please let Mark Hoare know on 0424 952255 or email him via hoare.mark@gmail.com



CHANGES TO COMPENSATION CLAIMS

Veterans' service is covered by 3 Acts, known as the MRCA, VEA and DRCA. Which Act you are covered by will depend on the service that relates to your injury or disease. Generally, if your condition relates to:

- service after 1 July 2004, then the MRCA will apply
- service before 1 July 2004, then either the VEA, the DRCA or both will apply
- service that spans 1 July 2004, then one or more of the VEA, DRCA and MRCA will apply.

The **Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025 (VETS Act 2025)** simplifies and harmonises veterans' compensation, rehabilitation, and support by consolidating multiple Acts into a single framework under the improved Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA).

Purpose of the Act

The VETS Act 2025 was passed by the Australian Parliament on 13 February 2025 to address the complexity of the veterans' entitlement system, which the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide found could negatively affect veterans' mental health. Its primary goal is to simplify and harmonise the legislative framework governing veterans' compensation, rehabilitation, and support, consolidating the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA), the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988 (DRCA), and the MRCA into a single, streamlined Act.

Key Provisions

Single Act Framework: From **1 July 2026**, all new claims for veterans' compensation will be determined under the improved MRCA. The VEA and DRCA will no longer accept new claims, though existing payments continue uninterrupted, except for DRCA incapacity payments, which will transition automatically to the MRCA's more generous arrangements.

Incapacity Payments: Veterans currently receiving DRCA incapacity payments will automatically move to MRCA arrangements. Other veterans can apply for MRCA incapacity payments from 1 July 2026, regardless of the Act under which their conditions were previously accepted.

Support and Assistance: The Act provides rehabilitation, compensation, and other entitlements for all current and former Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families, including child care, counselling, and household services.

Dependants' Entitlements: Dependants of deceased veterans whose death was related to pre-July 2004 service can claim compensation under the MRCA, with some remaining eligible under the VEA.

Administrative and Governance Changes: The Act establishes the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission (DVSC) to provide independent oversight, evidence-based advice, and drive system reform to improve wellbeing outcomes for veterans.

Commencement Dates

1 July 2026: Full commencement of the MRCA for new claims, closure of VEA and DRCA to new claims, and transition of DRCA incapacity payments.

29 September 2025: Certain provisions related to oversight and review pathways commence.

Implications for Veterans

Simplified Claims Process: Veterans will have a single legislative framework for all new claims, reducing confusion and administrative burden.

Grandparenting of Existing Payments: Most existing compensation payments under the VEA and DRCA will continue, ensuring continuity of support.

Enhanced Oversight: The DVSC will monitor the veteran ecosystem, providing independent advice and ensuring reforms are evidence-based.

Access to Benefits: All members and former members, regardless of service period or type, will be covered under the MRCA for new claims, making it the sole Act for future entitlements.

BOY SOLDIERS

During the First World War, the Australian Army's enlistment age was 21 years or 18 years with the permission of a parent or guardian. Although boys aged 14-17 could enlist as buglers, trumpeters and musicians, many gave false ages in order to join as soldiers. Their numbers are impossible to determine.

Enlistment of boys was normal practice for the Navy and several died on service during the First World War. Five of those who qualify for the Memorial's Roll of Honour were serving on the Sydney-based training ship HMAS *Tingira*.

Private **James Charles ('Jim') Martin** is the best-known boy soldier. He is believed to be the youngest soldier on the Roll of Honour. Jim was 14 years 9 months old when he died at Gallipoli.

James Charles Martin, born on January 3rd 1901, in Tocumwal, New South Wales attended Manningtree Road State School. A year after leaving school, James started work as a farm labourer. Later, in 1915 James forced his mother to enlist himself in the Australian Imperial Force. He was known to be the youngest male to die at war. James' motivation began after his father was previously rejected from service. James was also the only male child in his family and was keen to serve in place of his father. With that, James needed a written parental permission to enlist because he was younger than the minimum age, which was 21 years old.

Martin succeeded to recruit at the age of 14 and three months, which was four years under the minimum age. After training for several months at Broadmeadows Camp, James departed from Melbourne, with the 21st Infantry Battalion, aboard HMAS Berrima on the 28th of June 1915.

Martin and the other reinforcements of the 21st Battalion were deployed to Gallipoli from Egypt. Their transport ship was destroyed by a German submarine. Martin and several others in the water for hours before being rescued. On the 7th of September James landed in Gallipoli and was positioned near Wire Gully. In the following month's short rations of food, sickness, flies, lice, and mosquitoes took their toll on the unit, while enemy casualties were slim. Several letters were sent from James to his parents from Gallipoli. On the 25th of October 1915 James was diagnosed

with typhoid fever and was evacuated to hospital ship HMHS Glenart Castle. At this point he had lost a great deal of weight was in a bad state. Doctors and other medical staff tried all they could but unfortunately could not save him.

James Charles Martin died of heart failure on the 25th of October 1915, three months before his 15th birthday. He was buried at sea and is now commemorated at the Lone Pine Memorial in Gallipoli. A day after his death, Matron Reddoch, the medic who tried to save James, wrote a letter to Martin's mother in Australia about her only son.

James Charles Martin is considered the youngest to have died on active service during the First World War.

His epitaph written by his parents reads.

HE FELL! A HERO IN THE DEADLY
STRIFE,
FOR KING AND COUNTRY HE LAID
DOWN HIS LIFE,
FAME WAS ACHIEVED AND HE HAD
DONE HIS SHARE,
TO WIN THOSE LAURELS RICH AND
RARE,
WHICH NOW ADORN AUSTRALIA'S
LOYAL RACE,
NOT EVEN TIME IT'S GLORY CAN
EFFACE.



New Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre website shares stories once hidden deep in the Thai jungle

DVA News 23 March 2026

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Matt Keogh MP, has announced the launch of a new Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre website to help share the stories of the prisoners of war and rōmusha (forced Asian labourers) who worked on the Burma–Thailand Railway during the Second World War.

Through a curated collection of personal stories, the new website preserves the memory of the more than 60,000 Allied Prisoners of War (POW), including around 13,000 Australians, who were forced to carve out Hellfire Pass in Thailand to support Japanese military operations in Burma.

Valentine William Lowrie was one of these Australian POWs.

First captured at the fall of Singapore, Valentine was sent to work on the Burma–Thailand Railway between 1943–45.

‘On the railway his job was a “cane cutter” which involved men at the very front of the gang that cut cane for the pathway of the rail line,’ Callan Date explained, reflecting on his grandfather Valentine’s role.

The scale of suffering at Hellfire Pass is hard to imagine. Workers laboured day and night, cutting through solid rock and thick jungle, often with just basic tools or even their bare hands.

‘Pa turned 21 whilst a POW in Changi prison, which I reflect on knowing how different my 21st birthday celebrations were, to the pain and suffering he was going through being held captive while away from family in a foreign country.

‘There is a deep sense of pride within our family that Pa was a POW and that he was able to survive the extreme hardship and return home,’ said Callan.

Stories of POWs like Valentine are shared at the Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre to honour their memory and spirit in the face of terrible

hardship.

‘I believe it’s vital that stories like my grandfather’s are shared and preserved because they help future generations understand the human reality behind the history we commemorate. When these stories are accessible, they ensure that the sacrifices, resilience and courage of people like Pa aren’t reduced to just historical facts,’ said Callan.

The new website explores the historical context, oral histories, and artefacts associated with Hellfire Pass and the wider Burma–Thailand Railway. It also provides guidance for visitors to plan their trip to the Hellfire Pass Interpretive Centre. Visit the website to find out more, <https://hellfirepass.dva.gov.au/>

Army accelerates drone training

Defence News 27 March 2026

Perched atop the rugged hillside and camouflaged in hides, teams operate their drones, sweeping for targets among the close terrain, ready to kill enemy personnel with their lethal payloads.

Training at the Puckapunyal Military Area field range in Victoria, they peer through first-person-view (FPV) goggles, giving them a bird’s-eye view of the battlespace and their quarry.

The drones’ lethal payload is simulated, but the intent and relevancy of the training is deadly serious.

Captain Andrew Dunn-Lobban, of Army’s Land Combat College, and senior instructor for the course, said it was part of a comprehensive training continuum designed to get soldiers ready to take the capability to their home units and wider Army.

“This training today is part of a suite of training on small uncrewed air systems (SUAS) or drones. The first course we conducted was ‘Employ Multi-Role Drones’ where trainees are taught to employ stabilised drones predominantly as a reconnaissance platform, but also as a platform to drop munitions or for carrying other payloads,” Captain Dunn-Lobban said.

“The next course we conducted is ‘Modify and Operate Attack Drones (FPV)’ where trainees produce, modify and fly attack drones, getting them to the point where they can employ these in the field at range to strike targets.

“The instructors are almost all from 2RAR [2nd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment], which reflects that they have made some great strides with their drone capability. They recently came off Operation Kudu where they were directly mentored by Armed Forces of Ukraine drone specialists and we are leveraging that battlefield experience to give the best possible instruction to trainees.

“We will refine what works and does not work and rapidly scale these courses across Army. For example, the trainees from 5/7RAR [5th/7th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment] will take this capability back to their unit, and within weeks, test this on a combined arms exercise.”

Claims processing data – February 2026

DVA News 17 March 2026

The Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA) continues to process outstanding claims as quickly as possible, to deliver much needed help to veterans and families sooner.

As part of our commitment to routinely, publicly, and meaningfully reporting on claims processing progress, each month DVA releases updated data via the claims processing.

A snapshot of February 2026:

DVA received 8,967 claims in February bringing the total for the financial year to date (FYTD) to 71,278 claims – 9.0 per cent higher than the same period last year.

DVA made 7,009 determinations and has finalised 63,670 claims in the FYTD, 2.4 per cent less than the equivalent period last year.

65,661 claims were with an officer for processing, and 29,989 claims were yet to be allocated for processing.

The average time taken to process a MRCA IL claim was 349 days in the 2025-26 FYTD (1 July 2025 to 28 February 2026), compared to 298 days in the corresponding 2024-25 FYTD.

Veteran pension update, March 2026

DVA News 19 March 2026

From 20 March, some veterans and veteran family members will receive an increase in their DVA pension and compensation payments.

The first full payment at the new rate will be the payday 16 April 2026. You don’t need to do anything to receive the increase; it will be applied automatically.

Payments made on payday 2 April will cover the period 17 March to 30 March 2026, and will include entitlements calculated at both the old and new rates.

This increase helps make sure your payments keep up with the cost of living.

The majority of pension and compensation payments are indexed in March and September each year. Indexation is determined by either the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI) or Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE). For 20 March 2026, the indexation is driven by CPI.

From 20 March 2026, deeming rates will also change in line with arrangements applying to payments made by other Commonwealth Departments. Deeming rates are used to calculate deemed income from your financial investments (e.g. shares, bank accounts), regardless of actual returns.

This deemed income counts toward the income test while the actual returns are not counted. The income test, along with the assets test, determines your entitlement to Service Pension, Income Support Supplement and Veteran Payment.

A new deeming rate of 1.25% (currently 0.75%) will apply to financial assets under \$64,200 for singles and \$106,200 combined, for couples. Any remaining balance over these amounts will be deemed at a rate of 3.25% (currently 2.75%). To know more about deeming rates please visit [Operation of Deeming](#) |

FREE ONLINE MINDFULNESS PROGRAM FOR VETERANS AND FAMILIES

DVA News 18 March 2026

When Royal Australian Air Force veteran EJ was medically discharged from Defence and going through a marriage breakdown, the impact on her mental and physical health was, at times, overwhelming.

During this very difficult period, EJ reached out to Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling which invited her to join an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program.

The experience proved life-changing.

“It started me on the road to re-programming my brain, showing myself compassion, changing my mindset towards stress, taking off that protective layer you develop in the military and being vulnerable,” she said.

“It changed my life.”

Since completing the program, EJ has built mindfulness into her daily routine. She says the practice has brought a sense of calm and clarity she had been searching for over many years and continues to help her to navigate challenging periods.

Now a lawyer in Melbourne, EJ says the skills she gained through mindfulness also support her to be the best version of herself — at work and at home.

New free Mindfulness program available to veterans

EJ is now encouraging other veterans, family members and carers to take part in a new free, online Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, funded by Open Arms and delivered by mental health charity OpenGround.

The program builds on the success of a pilot delivered in 2024, which helped participants to improve their self-awareness and relationships, develop stronger coping skills and better manage their mental and physical health.

The new eight-week course is delivered entirely online, making it accessible to people anywhere in Australia. You do not need to be an Open Arms client to take part.

What the program offers

Each course includes:

an online information session before the course begins

weekly 2.5-hour online classes over eight weeks, offered at a range of times including evenings and weekends

individual check-in calls with the teacher before, during and after the course

a half-day guided practice session

facilitated referrals to additional clinical or counselling support if needed.

Register today

Veterans, families of veterans, and their carers can register their interest to join the program at <https://www.openground.com.au/private-events/mbsr-program-for-veterans-family-members-and-carers>

“Every morning is a fresh beginning. Every day is the world made new.” “The beginning is the most important part of the work.” “The sun himself is weak when he first rises; and gathers strength and courage as the day goes on.”

Did you hear about the guy who drank invisible ink? He’s at the hospital waiting to be seen.

Did you hear about the guy who was addicted to the hokey pokey? He turned himself around.

Did you hear about the guy who’s afraid of escalators? He takes steps to avoid them.

Did you hear about the stolen dog collar? Police are looking for leads.

What sort of dad tells jokes even though he doesn’t have kids? A faux pas.

When does a joke become a dad joke? When the punchline becomes apparent.