

The King Island World War 2 War Service Fund

During World War 2, Mervyn Baker received a Comfort Package or a Money Order from the King Island (Tasmania) War Service Fund, and then corresponded with the Fund.

In August 1940, the Island Fund was formally approved to operate independently from the State of Tasmania. It was run by a group of volunteers, led by Mr John (Jack) Marshall. John was an ex WW1 soldier, also the President of the local Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA), founded on King Island in 1919. This is now known as the Returned and Services League (RSL) and the King Island RSL Sub branch is still in operation.

The fund distributed packages to locals who had enlisted and other people who had no connection with King Island. As a mark of respect 139 service personnel wrote letters of thanks, totaling approximately 530 letters – they form the basis of the collection. Further information on the Fund and its operation can be found on the Community Page.

The challenges for a service person during World War 2 to write a letter was to firstly find the inclination (often directly related to their mental condition due to combat), time, paper, a writing implement and a place under cover. Occasionally a letter was typed and the paper ranged from high quality to loose scraps, and as the war progressed supplies dwindled. With letterhead paper, naming a unit or organisation, do not assume that was where the person was when writing. Paper was borrowed and passed on to mates. Occasionally, a Telegram was sent where the emphasis was on brevity as each word added more to the cost.

The standard of writing is directly related to the standard of education and sometimes a friend or a Chaplain would write a letter on a person's behalf. Many of the letters were addressed to Mr Marshall (or just Jack), his wife, a member of the voluntary committee, or the RSSAILA. Some letters are very brief while others are detailed and mention other people, or events they have witnessed. The Marshall's also lost their son John while on Active Service, and some writers asked about John or acknowledged his death to the family.

For most of the war, letters were subject to censorship and this is often observed in a cutout section on a page – if the other side was written on it was also deleted. Many letters have the initials or the signature of the person who checked them prior to posting.

What follows is a scan of the original letter and a typed transcript, based on the original. Grammar or spelling has not been changed or corrected, and if more than one letter was written they follow in date order. Some of the original letters, although stored correctly, are very faint and fragile, but all have been included along with undated letters. They are perhaps the only surviving documents written by this person.

Mervyn wrote his first letter (undated) in 1940 while in Brighton Camp (Tasmania), and his last was on 24 July 1941 while in Darwin. He was posted to the 2/40th Infantry Battalion and like many of his comrades was taken as a POW on Timor on 22 April 1942. He was repatriated from Sumatra on 18 September 1945.

TX3445

Pte M. Baker

H.Q. Coy 2nd 40th Bn

AIF Brighton

To

The Secretary of King Is. War Service Fund

Dear Sir

I just want to thank
ever so much for the things sent to me
at Christmas and also other parcels which
you have sent to me on other occasions
I am very grateful indeed for everyone
which you have sent me and also
I would like to thank all others which
have helped in providing us all with gifts
I appreciate all and I sincerely no all others
that have come from the Island do too.
Thanking you one and all

M. Baker.

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Pte M. Baker

H & Coy 2/40th Bn.

No 4 Military P.O.

Dartmouth Nant.

July 24th 1941

To
The Secretary King Island War Services Fund

Mr Marshall Sen.

Sir.

I Mervyn Baker
wish to thank you very sincerely for our
gifts which you kindly send to all our
Boys that joined from you King Island
which one and all of us quite appreciate
at all times I can assure you, I also wish
you for me thank the C.W.F. there as well

Thanking You Sincerely

Mervyn Baker.

TX3445
Pte M. Baker
HQ Coy 2/40th Bn.
No 4 Military P.O.
Darwin Nth Aust
July 24th 1941

To
The Secretary King Island War Services Fund
Mr Marshall. Sen.
Sir.

I Mervyn Baker wish to thank you very sincerely for our gifts which you kindly send to all us Boys that joined from your King Island which one and all of us quite appreciate at all times I can assure you. I also wish you for me thank the C.W.A. there as well

Thanking You Sincerely
Mervyn. Baker.