

The King Island World War 2 War Service Fund

During World War 2, Reginald Groom 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.

Reg wrote one letter to the Fund on 10 June 1941, while stationed at Adelaide River in the Northern Territory. His letter shows how every possible space was used and how keen they are to see action. For Reg this was not to be a good outcome and like the majority of the members of the 2/40th Battalion he was captured on Timor in February 1942 and remained a prisoner of war until September 1945.

Adelaide River.
10-6-41.

Dear Mr. Marshall.

I am just writing a few lines to acknowledge the receipt of your comfort parcels, which the K. I. boys received on Saturday last.

I had heard of them being sent & as quite a few parcels forwarded to this unit seemed to have gone astray, had nearly given them up for lost.

But were very pleased & very grateful to your War Service Fund on Saturday when they were forwarded to us. So on behalf of myself & I think all the other K. I. boys here, I wish to thank you very much for them.

As you see we are still in Australia up here near Darwin & have been for some time, although supposed to be the best trained unit in Australia, we are still being kept at home, this is very hard to understand & after nearly twelve months we are beginning to wonder if we are ever going to get away.

And personally I think its about time we were doing something to help the other boys overseas. We do not hear

much news up here & I have often wondered how John has been getting along & sincerely hope he is so fit & well as ever. Please give my regards to all your family. I am yours sincerely
Pte. Reg Brown.

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Please give my regards to all your family.

I am yours Sincerely.

Pte. Reg Groom