

The King Island World War 2 War Service Fund

During World War 2, John Wilshire 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.

John wrote one letter to the Fund in 1943 where he passes on his thanks for the items received.

Able/Seaman
J. H. Wilshire
HMAS "Meldura"
S. P. O.

Dear Mr Marshall

Many Thanks to
yourself and all members of the
King Island War Service Fund, for the
parcel received the other day

Receiving parcels in any
circumstances was always a source
of delight to me, so I will leave
you to imagine the pleasure they
now bring, not to mention the
effect they have of bringing home
so much nearer, no matter
how far one may be

Am still liking the life
although I hardly think that in
later years I will emulate Mr
Masfield in expressing any

great desire to "Go Down To The Sea Again"
I thank you again and feel
sure I speak for all King Island
chaps away when I assure you
of our deep appreciation of
the great job you are doing

Yours very sincerely

John Wilson

Able/Seaman
J.H Wilshire
HMAS "Mildura"
GPO

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I thank you again and feel sure I speak for all King Island chaps away when I assure you of our deep appreciation of the great job you are doing

Yours very sincerely

John Wilshire