

King Island Anzac Day Main Service 2024 Remembering Private Reg Groom

Sub branch President Gary Barker

King Island's record in volunteering for war is second to none, as is the support that islanders provided to those serving regardless of where they came from. We are most fortunate that a collection of over 530 letters from 139 writers during World War 2 to the Island's War Service Fund has survived. With the support of the Marshall family, Ann Ghazarian and her team transcribed them all, and now they are all on each veteran's page on the The Virtual War Memorial of Australia.

Slowly but surely, we are making contact with descendants of these veterans who are unaware of this piece of history. I welcome Janet Hamilton, one such descendant.

Guest Speaker – Janet Hamilton

I would like to read a letter written by a young King Island soldier who on the Tenth of June 1941 was stationed at Adelaide River with the Second Fortieth Infantry Battalion. He was writing to Mr Jack Marshall.

Dear Mr Marshall.

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

I had heard of them being sent and as quite a few parcels forwarded to this unit seem to have gone astray, had nearly given them up for lost. But were very pleased and very grateful for your War Service Fund on Saturday when they were forwarded to us. So, on behalf of myself and I think all the other KI boys here, I wish to thank you very much for them.

As you see we are still in Australia up here near Darwin and 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 and after nearly twelve months we are beginning to wonder if we are ever going to get away.

And personally, I think it's about time we were doing something to help the other boys overseas. We do not hear much news up here and I have often wondered how John has been getting along and sincerely hope he is as fit & well as ever.

Please give my regards to all your family. I am yours Sincerely.
Private Reg Groom

Some may remember that Reg was my father. Dad was nearly 21 when he volunteered to serve overseas on 9 July 1940. It was emotional for me when I read about them wanting to help their mates overseas. He did not have to wait long to face the Japanese, but on 22 February 1942, like the majority of the Second Fortieth, he was captured on Timor and spent the remainder of the war as a POW. He was repatriated from Japan on 19 September 1945 and discharged from the Army on 7 December that year.

Dad, being a man of few words, was never willing to talk about his experiences as a soldier and while a POW. But I do remember him attending RSL meetings and religiously attending every POW reunion, regardless of where it was held in Australia.

As a father, he was always there for our mother Iris Hays and their children: Peter, Elaine, Ross, Kaye, myself, Colin, and Helen. We grew up in a loving close family on Main Road Currie. My parents lived until their early eighties and now rest in our cemetery.

Dad, having read your Army File, letter and other documents, I now have a greater understanding of you, what you went through, and sacrificed for your country and our family. I stand before you a very proud daughter and King Islander.