

# Things Past

Newsletter 87

May 2015

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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## Dates for your diary

Mark Grealy, who runs the research business Archival Access, will speak about the records available at the Public Record Office, with particular reference to Mt Evelyn. Saturday 16 May, 1.30pm at Hardy House, 49 Birmingham Road Mt Evelyn. All welcome.

## Netherlands Memorial Day 4<sup>th</sup> May

**Richard and Bev Doig pay respects to Bev's uncle, shot down in WWII**

We travelled to Eindhoven, where we were collected by Adrian van Zantvoort and his wife, who had kindly offered to take us to the crash site and to the cemetery where Bev's uncle was buried, but the event turned out to be much more than that.

The background to this story is that Bev's uncle Cyril Keith Deed had been the Rear Gunner on the Lancaster Bomber PB225 that departed Lincolnshire with 96 other bombers on a mission to bomb the railway in Cologne, Germany. The plane was hit and crippled by anti-aircraft fire over the Dutch Province of Limburg. The pilot tried to return to England but the aircraft exploded over Middlebeers, Holland, on Christmas Eve 1944.

Cyril was born on 26 December 1918 in the country town of Maryborough, Victoria. After leaving school he found it hard to get work because he had no qualification or trade. He did general farming work, worked in a furniture factory and he did a bit of house painting. His father died in 1938. When Cyril saw that many of the young men in the district were enlisting for the Army he applied. He was accepted in November 1939 and attached to a machine gun regiment.



**Wreath laying ceremony at the cemetery in Oostelbeers. Left to right, Reik Verbeek, who tends the graves of the crew, the Mayor of Oirschot, Adrian van Zantvoort and Bev Doig. Below left, Richard and Bev at the crash site.**

Standing 169cm and 58kg, he was unsuited to the Army and applied to join the Air Force in 1940, but was not accepted. He persisted and sent in four character references with his next application in January 1941. They all said that he was hard working, industrious, trustworthy, a teetotaler and a non smoker. He was accepted. He failed his tests to be a carpenter rigger, but was later accepted into Air Crew.

He wanted to work his way up the ranks to be a pilot. He tried and tried again but just couldn't master Morse Code. Because he had a good service record and attitude he was posted to England, became an Air Gunner and was with 460 Squadron in November 1944. The aircraft crashed in a forest near Oostelbeers. The townsfolk heard the explosion just as they were

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coming out of the church after the evening service. A few days later the remains of the six Australian crew and the English pilot were recovered and buried in a common grave. Cyril was just two days short of his 26<sup>th</sup> birthday.

After the drive to the forest we were met by Group Captain Paul Nicholas (RAAF) and his wife Sarah from the Australian Embassy in London as the representative of the Australian ambassador in The Netherlands, Captain Amphlett from the British Embassy in The Hague, Colonel Doense of the Royal Dutch Army, Major Asniel van As of the Royal Dutch Air Force, the Mayor of the district Ruud Severijns, and about 20 other ex-servicemen. We were all taken in Army trucks provided by the 13<sup>th</sup> Mechanised Brigade of the 30<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the National Army Reserve.

We were driven into the forest to where the crater formed by the crash is still evident. A short but very moving ceremony was held, with a few words spoken about what was known of the details of the last flight of the Lancaster. The researchers were able to be confident that this was the spot at which Bev's uncle died, as a wedding ring was found with an inscription that belonged to one of the crew.

We were then taken by private cars to Cafe Dorpsplein in Oostelbeers for light refreshments and to meet the distinguished guests. The cafe was a little like an RSL hall and a display had been set up by the local History Group and others with photos and articles of a number of aircraft that were known to have crashed in the forest where Cyril was killed. It included some of the aircraft pieces that had been recovered from the crash site.

A Scottish piper in full regalia then piped the group across the road to the Roman Catholic churchyard to the graves of the crew of the Lancaster. A very formal service was held there, with the playing of the National Anthem, flag ceremonies, speeches from each of the military officers, the Burgomaster of Oirschot, and Adrian van Zantvoort who, together with Rene, had organised the special ceremony. Remembrance wreaths were laid in full military fashion by each of the dignitaries, including Bev, while the piper played 'Amazing Grace'. Each of the officers and the Mayor gave heartfelt messages paying their respects to everyone that served in the military during conflicts and in particular to the six Australians

## The crew of PB255

**Flight Sergeant G.E. Day, 20, RAAF**  
**Flight Sergeant C.K. Deed, 25, RAAF**  
**Flight Sergeant R.J. Dickie, 20, RAAF**  
**Sergeant T.C. Newman, Flight Engineer RAF**  
**Flying Officer M.C. Skarratt, 22, RAAF**  
**Flight Sergeant R.I. Stewart, 21, RAAF**  
**Flying Officer J.M. Ward, 21, RAAF**



**Above, Richard and Bev at the airmen's grave.**

and the English pilot buried in this cemetery. Richard gave a fitting tribute outlining how Cyril enlisted, firstly in the Army and then his trials and tribulations in being accepted into the Airforce, joining 460 Squadron and his last fatal flight. A special vote of thanks was given to Mrs Reik Verbeek, a local lady who has been tending the graves for more than 17 years. She called them 'her boys'.

From there we were taken to a restaurant in the centre of Oirschot for a fabulous four-course dinner with the invited dignitaries. The restaurant owner, on hearing why his restaurant had such important visitors, said he was honoured to have 'the Australian visitors with their military escort' and waived any charges. The hospitality of the people is truly amazing. The service at the crash site and at the cemetery in Oirschot were very special events and had not been organised to this extent on any previous occasion.

In the evening the Remembrance Day service was held at 8.00pm near the Chapel of the Holy Oak. The townspeople from East, West and Middlebeers assembled at appointed places and then 'walked in silence' to the Chapel, all converging at the same time.

This service was very much like our own Anzac Day services, with the laying of wreaths by the dignitaries and speeches by the town Mayor. Although it was all in Dutch we were able to recognise that they mentioned Bev as coming from Australia to honour her uncle Cyril. An

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## MY LIFE WITH ST JOHN AMBULANCE 2: Australia Corps Staff Officer Jim Humphrey

We emigrated to Australia in 1970. It took three years before we rejoined St John Ambulance, after attending a first aid course run by Dr Hardy at Lilydale. We joined the Mt Evelyn Division and they soon learned of our experiences in England. I was appointed Divisional Officer, under Mrs Gene Stroud, on 11 April 1976, and promoted to Superintendent almost a year later on the retirement of Gene.

The Division always remained fairly small but we did grow in experiences and activities and our public duties brought even more experiences. We moved from one second-hand Holden Panel Van as our ambulance to two, a big ex-Myers Removal Van and a F100 4wd ex-ambulance. We also purchased a camper trailer that proved excellent as a mobile first aid post and later were donated a large caravan after the Ash Wednesday bush fires.

We covered the snow at Mt Baw Baw, the farm exhibitions, cattle droving and mustering, bushfires, little athletics, local shows and exhibitions, as well as many Metropolitan duties. Our experiences grew, as we attended duties every weekend. But our favourite duty was the summer one at Fraser National Park.

We used to tow the caravan up there just before Christmas and set it up as a combined home/First Aid post. It stayed up there for the eight weeks of the summer holidays, every member of the Division having an opportunity for a week's holiday as well as providing first aid cover to the many campers in the Park.



Above, Doreen and Jim in St John uniform.

We made great friends with the Park Rangers and became part of the family. On one occasion we even wombat-sat an orphaned wombat whilst the rangers went into town.

I was on duty the day before Ash Wednesday in the Mount Evelyn fires in 1983, when fire destroyed two houses in Kookaburra Lane, and again at Warburton and Reefton when fire devoured many homes in Victoria a few days later. This was a three day duty, where we went without sleep for the whole of those three days. We were eventually relieved, to return home and sleep for a full 17 hours.

During the Ash Wednesday fires I was asked to help with the evacuation of people from the Upper Yarra Dam area, as the fire had forced them to shelter in a culvert, and went up empty so that we could provide extra seating space. After travelling through narrow country roads with fires in the trees on both sides, often cutting across the road, we were forced to abandon the rescue at the Marysville turnoff, some five miles short of our destination.

We sheltered on a small triangle of grass with a fire tanker, a Salvation Army food trailer and a petrol tanker. Fire was all around us, with trees exploding and disappearing through the rapid expansion of the eucalyptus oil. It was quite frightening, We stayed there for about an hour, until the fire died down and passed by, enough to allow us to return to Warburton.

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Above, St John vehicles Mt Evelyn 1 and Mt Evelyn 8 at Fraser National Park. Photo Jim Humphrey.

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The 40-odd people at the dam were also able to return to their homes.

It was after this I was promoted to Corps, No. 4 Corps as it was then, an appointment I held for over 12 years. I became the Displan Liaison Officer for the Eastern suburbs, and participated in many bush fire events after this, including Mt Evelyn, Steels Creek, Mt Dandenong, Upwey, Seymour and Flowerdale, but none as scary as Ash Wednesday.

As a Corps Officer, I was in charge of a Corps response to the Air Show at Lilydale Airfield. This was a massive event, and we arranged for a field hospital with ten beds and a St John Doctor, using a tent borrowed and erected by the Army at Healesville. We had most of the Corps vehicles at intervals along the runway, as we had a huge crowd of spectators. Fortunately we had very little work to do, First Aid-wise. The same event was held the following year, when an aircraft crashed with fatal results. The show was never repeated again at Lilydale.

I was also responsible for all the cadets in the Eastern suburbs and successfully opened new Divisions at Rowville, Bayswater, Narmara, and Healesville Cadets, all of whom have since closed. I also organised and ran many cadet proficiency courses, as well as adult training exercises based on the exercises of England, These we named, Armadillo, Buffalo, Cicada, Dolphin and Echidna. Members from all over Victoria attended these weekend activities, which proved a valuable tool in inter-Divisional relations and learning.

Another major event was the Annual Corps Cadet Camp that was run in various places around Victoria. The very first had 12 members from Upwey and Healesville Divisions attending and was held at Fraser National Park. The next one, also held at Fraser National Park, was much larger, being able to field two cricket teams of 15 each side, and still have half a dozen in the canoes. The last but one

camp entertained over 120 cadets. I had handed over the running of this to another Corps Officer as I had moved to run a Division at Warburton after their officer died suddenly from a heart attack. But my replacement was unable to complete the task and I had to step in at the very last moment and rescue the activity. Even so, we managed to provide an exciting camp for the cadets. Activities were canoeing, horseriding, swimming, fishing trips, trips to places of interest, as well as competitions at the camp itself. Apart from the ones run at Fraser National Park, we held camps at Raymond Island, Phillip Island, Rochester, Creswick and Portland.

At Warburton I revitalised the ailing Division and again started to see growth. I moved the Division to East Seville, where I bought for St John Ambulance use a large public hall for \$1.00, plus being given their bank account of over \$1000. Our membership was growing all the time. Then it was merged with the Lilydale Division, the ex-Mt Evelyn Division, and I resigned from first aid services.

I had been made a Serving Brother in 1985, an Officer in 1998, and a Commander in 2003, with an average of over 1000 duty hours per year. All in all I had contributed almost 50 years of involvement with both the non-uniformed and uniformed branches of St John Ambulance.

My last time of wearing the uniform was on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our wedding when we renewed our wedding vows. I had worn my uniform at our first wedding, and I felt that it was fitting to wear it once more. I had joined in 1957, and in 2001 (44 years later), hung up the peaked cap and black tunic for the last time. I never ever felt that those years in St John were wasted. They brought me joy, experiences and camaraderie that perhaps I would never have had the opportunity to enjoy, and a wife I would not have met, had I not joined as a lad of 17 years. *Jim Humphrey*

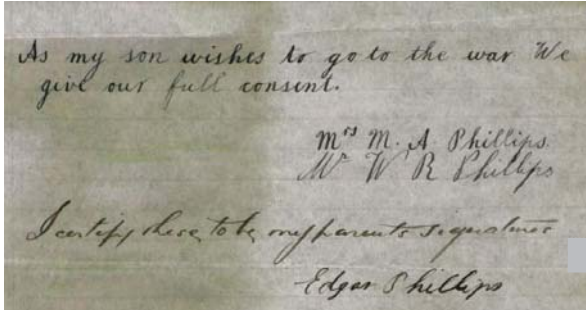


**Above, Jim wears the black uniform for the last time.**

## One man's war service: relics tell the story

Kevin Phillips recently came upon his grandfather's World War I memorabilia.

Edgar Phillips of Williamstown enlisted 22 June 1915, a month after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. He had served four years in the Militia. A note giving his parents' consent looks suspiciously like his own hand.



He joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements.



The one blot on Edgar's record occurred during his voyage on *HMATS Makarini*: 'that he did absent himself from his post whilst on guard after being cautioned' [sic]. He was fined 2/6.

An embroidered silk banner that he sent home, 'Souvenir of Egypt 1915 From Edgar To Mother', showed that he was in Egypt that year.



He was at Anzac Cove in December 1915. In Egypt again early in 1916 after the Gallipoli campaign ended, his section of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion was incorporated into the 60<sup>th</sup>. He was transferred to the 58<sup>th</sup>, 59<sup>th</sup> and later back to the 60<sup>th</sup>. All three battalions were part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade, attached to the 5<sup>th</sup> Division.

While serving in France, Edgar was wounded on 19 July 1916. His brother William, serving with the 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion, was wounded the same day. That date, regarded as the worst single day in Australian military history, was the date of the Battle of Fromelles. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division suffered 5,533 casualties (killed, wounded, missing or taken prisoner). Only in recent years have the remains of the missing diggers of Fromelles been recovered from a mass grave.

Edgar sustained another wound on 11 May 1917 that saw him sent back to Australia. He was discharged as medically unfit on 21 December 1917.



He was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the Victory Medal and the British War Medal.



Photos from top left. This note giving parental consent to enlist may have been forged (National Archives file). Uniform badges; the pleated hatband, thought to be from Edgar's time in the Militia, was later worn by his son with a collection of badges. Silk banner from Egypt 1915. Edgar's discharge certificate: 'Served with honour and was disabled in the Great War', with the King's signature, 'George R.I.' Medals and bullet casing.

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During World War II Edgar's son enlisted in the RAAF at 18 and his daughter became an Army nurse.

Edgar died in 1963, aged 66.

**Karen Phillips**



Edgar's slouch hat, above, was adapted for civilian wear and was still in use in the 1950s. The original leather strap has been replaced by a string fastened with a 1951 ha'penny. Photos Kevin Phillips and Kathrine Collison.

**Sources:** National Archives; Australian War Memorial; items from Eleanor Phillips' collection.

### Congratulations to our President

History Group President Paula Herlihy has received a National Day of Thanksgiving (NDT) award, to be presented at the Mayoral Breakfast on 30 May. The NDT Mayoral Breakfast honours those in our community who have given selflessly of their time and effort to make life better for others.

The Mayor would like to recognise Paula's work with community groups, in particular the Mt Evelyn History Group and the Mt Evelyn Township Improvement Committee (METIC).

Congratulations on a well deserved award, Paula, and thank you for all you do for us. We're so lucky to have you.

### From p.2

honour board in the Chapel listed the names of all the local men that paid the ultimate sacrifice and included Cyril and his fellow crew members. This was another memorable and poignant service. The evening concluded with coffee and refreshments in Café de Nachtegaal, Proosbroekweg.

We returned to our hotel in the late evening completely blown away by the extent to which the people of Oostelbeers and Oirschot had organised such a fitting and memorable afternoon for us.

**Richard Doig**

### Soldier settlers after WWI

The PROV recently placed files from the post-WWI soldier settlement scheme online: 'Battle to Farm' <http://soldiersettlement.prov.vic.gov.au/>

You can browse the interactive map or search by name. Searching by the parish name (if known) will also work but town names give no result. A number of settlement blocks show up for both of 'our' parishes, Mooroolbark and Wandin Yallock.

Tom Forge, for whom Forge Road was named, was described as a soldier settler in *Street Names of Mt Evelyn*. There is a Thomas William Forge listed in the database but his block was in Tongala. We could not trace any soldier settlement blocks in Mt Evelyn.

### Charles Bean's history online

The Australian War Memorial has digitised Charles Bean's war diaries and his monumental 12-volume *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*.

Both can be accessed at:

[https://www.awm.gov.au/histories/first\\_world\\_war/](https://www.awm.gov.au/histories/first_world_war/)

### From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for April 2015 for Mt Evelyn, McKillop, Melbourne and Melbourne average.

Mt Ev	McK	Melb	Melb Av
69.9mm	77.5mm	36.8mm	57.3mm

McKillop readings courtesy Jean Edwards. Melbourne figures Bureau of Meteorology: <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/data/>

**Kevin Phillips**

### Contact us

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