

THE BLACKWALL BUGLE

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Tom Johnson's War

When Barry Johnson of Bagotville was told that the Wardell Red Cross Branch was this year celebrating its centenary, he said that he had a red cross personal bag that had been carried by his father Thomas George Johnson throughout the first world war. From beneath the verandah table at his farmhouse he produced a cardboard shoe-box. Inside the box was the blue cloth Red Cross bag and, as you can see on the right, a German army gas mask much prized by allied troops for their own protection.

Then Barry laid out upon the table a treasure of memorabilia from a battlefield on the other side of the globe where his father had fought a bloody war for the freedom of the world and almost gave his life. In the photo below, beneath Barry's right fingertips, is a sketch pad in which Tom drew first-hand



observations of the bleak landscape - bare earth, blasted trees, shell holes and ruins.

Beneath Barry's right wrist is a copy of the New Testament inscribed, "*From your sincere friend, N.E.P.*" The booklet saved Tom's life. Next to it is the gas mask and a fork - a man's got to eat to stay alive too! Beneath Barry's left thumb is a pair of German pilot goggles and behind it the web belt of a machine gun with the bullets long gone.

Arranged around the front of the Red Cross bag are some trophies of a bitter war - epaulettes ripped from the uniforms of the dead before they were buried - some German, some Prussian. Then, between Barry's hands is stretched a leather money belt given to Tom in Australia before he embarked. It wasn't used. He had no money. He had folded it tightly and placed it in his left breast pocket in front of his New Testament. A sniper bullet passed through all the folds of the belt except the last!

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Private Thomas George Johnson, service number: 5060, embarked at Brisbane on 4 May 1916 aboard HMAS Seang Choon A49. He joined the 26th Battalion which fought in its first major battle around Pozieres between 28 July and 7 August. After a short spell in Belgium, the battalion came south in October to attack again in the Somme Valley, then two attacks to the east of Flers, both of which floundered in mud and slush.

In early 1917, the 26th Battalion joined the follow-up of the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line and attacked at Warlencourt (1-2 March) and Lagincourt (26 March). On 14 July 1918 the 26th Battalion captured the first German tank to fall into Allied hands - No. 506 "Mephisto". Thomas Johnson was there!



The actual bullet stopped here!



Throughout this time, Tom was in the thick of it. He was wounded several times. He was shot in the buttocks and had part of his left hand blown away. After a short spell in an English hospital he decided to take time out to enjoy a few drinks before reporting back to his battalion. He was stopped three days pay!

Tom came back to the farm at Bagotville to milk his cows with only three fingers on his left hand. For months after his return from war he had festering sores which, when excised, revealed embedded shrapnel in his body. Tom volunteered and fought his war for us. He lived to marry and raise a family. He died in 1965 aged 75 years and is buried in Wardell Cemetery. Had he died on the battle field there would be no Barry Johnson to tell the tale. Tom's war diary showed that he had been gassed in the war but the pension tribunal denied that gas had been used that day. They refused his widow an increase in pension.

There are those who gave their lives in battle. Many of them lie in unmarked graves. They died for us.

Lest We Forget!



A crucifix, dog tags and a German Officer's whistle - artefacts of a world at war

The 2014 Annual General Meeting of the Wardell & District Progress Association Inc.

The meeting was well attended by members of the community. President Pat Carney welcomed everyone including Ballina Shire Mayor Cr David Wright and Councillors Keith Johnson, Ben Smith and Paul Worth. He extended a particular welcome to Lorraine and David Judge who have been stalwarts of the community for over forty years.

All positions on the committee were declared vacant and Cr Johnson took the chair for the election of the new committee. Those elected were President Pat Carney, Vice Presidents Rex Farrell and Lois Cook, Secretary Kerry Turpin, Treasurer Russell Krampe and Publicity Officer Margaret Kennedy. Mike Rushby is the Public Officer.

In his report, the President highlighted the improvements to the village footpaths and the park toilets; the new bus shelter in Carlisle Street and the new boat ramp at East Wardell. He also noted that the planned boardwalk linking the western side of town to the shopping centre had been approved. Mayor David Wright said that engineering work would be carried out to address the problem of road subsidence at the junction of Richmond Street and Sinclair Street near the Wardell Hotel. He said that for any other plans, the



Progress Association needs to submit a priority list with an outline plan of the main project. Pat then called for ideas to come in from the community.

The President said he much appreciated those who had gone the extra mile to support their community including past secretary Sharon Grant, Russell Krampe and John Ellis from LJ Signs for the 'Light up the Hall' Christmas event; John Stead, President of the Hall Committee, for his endeavours to improve the hall and Mat Sly for fundraising. Other notable supporters are The Wardell Pie Shop, the Wardell BP Servo and Sue Wardrobe.

The President then presented Lorraine and David Judge with a certificate of appreciation on behalf of the community. Refreshments were provided and prepared by Selina (maybe that's why we chose to reappoint Pat as President!)

ANZAC Day, Ballina 2014

You can't keep a good man down! You may recall the story of David Judge from Blackwall Bugle #27. A serious problem with his back following a spinal operation resulted in a loss of mobility. As a result he had to leave his large property at Carlisle Street and move into Ballina. He also had to stand down from operational duties with the Rural Fire Service. But he had been a founder member of the Wardell Brigade in 1974 and he has been appointed a Life Member of the Brigade.

On ANZAC Day this year, he marched with the parade for the last one hundred metres to join in the service held at the cenotaph in the RSL Memorial Park. David was with his wife Lorraine, his trusty chariot and accompanied by his mates. The photo, with the RSL Club in the background, shows David with Michael Heugh, Brigade President Rex Farrell, Group Captain Terry Buckley from Newrybar and Wardell Senior Deputy Captain Ron Rosolen.





Australian Red Cross

The Wardell Branch of the Australian Red Cross is to hold its annual Arts and Craft Show on Sunday 3 August from 10.00 am to 1.30 pm in the Wardell & District War Memorial Hall. There will be a variety of stall holders from whom to purchase homemade crafts.

Morning tea and light refreshments will be available. Everyone is welcome. Come along and support the Wardell Branch which this year celebrates 100 years of service to the community.

All enquires, telephone Monica on 6687 9620



Some of the many working model ships built by Ray Collyer. Story page 8

Pimlico News

Telephone 6683 4384

The Pimlico Ladies Charitable Organisation held its May meeting in the Pimlico hall in support of the Biala Special School in Ballina, which is an independent school providing services for students who are intellectually or physically challenged. The afternoon coincided with Mother's Day and each person at our meeting was presented with a buttonhole of white chrysanthemum, grown and made by PLCO member Olive Creighton and her granddaughter. Wendylea Playford, the CEO of Biala, was present and thanked the PLCO for their support over 54 years.

During the afternoon a prize was won by regular supporter Margaret Paul for being the proud great grandmother of 25 children! The raffle prize was won by Gladys Spindler of Ballina.

The June meeting will be held on the afternoon of the first Monday of the month at 1.30 pm to benefit Ballina Hospital.

Some much needed rain fell in Pimlico during April with 236 mm falling in storms. Lawns and paddocks turned green and household tanks were filled again.

On a personal note, I was pleased to see in the Blackwall Bugle the article about the opening of the Wardell bridge. I was there with my husband Eric and our daughter Leigh who was then three years old. I still have a piece of the ribbon which was cut for the opening ceremony. Later we assembled at the Wardell hall for a sumptuous tea. It was a memorable day.

Betty Fernance



Telephone 6683 4437

A highlight of the Wardell Sporting Recreation Club recently has been the celebration of Kevin & Shirley Geaghan's 55th wedding anniversary. To make the weekend even more of a celebration, it was Kevin's birthday 3 days later.

The next Seafood Night is to be held on Saturday 21 June. The prices remain \$30:00 for adults, \$18:00 for high school students, \$10:00 for primary school students and pre-schoolers dine free. At the end of September, we will be having an end of season party for all those in the footy tipping competition.

From 6.00 pm on Friday nights, meals are available from our expanded regular menu and we still have the specials board and dessert. We are open daily during the week from about 3 pm.

We are also available to be hired for functions.

Kerry Storton

Phil's Philosophy.

It is easier to go down a hill than up, but the view is from the top. Arnold Bennett.

Wardell Service Station
for all your fuel, newspapers, take-away foods and convenience store items.

Cooking until 7.00 pm

Phillip and Ann Read. Telephone 6683 4252





A group of Wardell friends that grew up together, worked together or played together, have stayed together. Their careers may have taken different paths but the bonds remain strong and they meet every first Wednesday morning of the month at the Federal Hotel Alstonville to share a yarn. Some of the tales may have improved over time!

Left to right - rear: Maurice Rudgley, Harry Law, Walter Wotherspoon, Ken Threlfo, Norm Parry, Gloria Craik, Trevor Monti, Keith Mullens, Barry Johnson.

Left to right front: Pam Rudgley, Narelle Law, Flora Wotherspoon, Lyn Lowe, Betty Attewell, Geoff Attewell.

The Blackwall Bugle is going digital!

From August 2014 The Blackwall Bugle will only be available as an electronic download from the Ballina Shire Council website. You will be able to view the Bugle on your smartphone, iPad or personal computer; or print it at home if you like to read your Bugle on paper.

To make sure that you never miss an edition, visit the Blackwall Bugle webpage and subscribe to our email notification system. Ballina Shire Council will then send you an email when the latest edition is available. If you prefer not to subscribe, you can still download the Bugle by visiting:

www.ballina.nsw.gov.au/blackwallbugle



The Biggest Morning Tea

The Biggest Morning Tea was hosted by the Wardell Knit 'n Knat. It was enjoyed by more than 60 people this year. Money donated and proceeds from the 6 raffles exceeded \$681. The sponsors and supporters surpassed those of last year, with the six available raffles having seven prizes each. A leaflet featuring each of the supporters was on every table.

The Wardell hall was beautifully decorated. After a very warm welcome by Chair Sue Steele, the numerous raffle draws were interspersed by the two guest speakers who gave candid, informative and sometimes quite humorously enlightened stories of their first-hand experiences with cancer.

Marie Taylor of Empire Vale provided a journey through her family history of cancer, with her key message for us to be aware of our family history, as it is possible for cancer to repeat itself through the generations and through siblings. She urged everyone to talk openly with family members.

Sharon Grant of Wardell shared her experiences with surviving two different cancers, two decades apart. Her key message was, "Have regular checks and screenings, as early detection increases the chances of survival." She urged everyone to ask if family and/or friends were maintaining regular checks and taking early action where necessary.

Both speakers praised the Australian Health Care system, and those wonderful people working within it to provide excellent support and care.



Above: Marie Taylor of Empire Vale, seated and Sharon Grant of Wardell.
Below: Part of the happy gathering.



An Aircraft Has Landed.

Pilot Don Matthews had nowhere to go when the engine of his two-seater light plane died shortly after taking off from a private airstrip at Bagotville. He tried to restart it twice to no avail, so he attempted to glide it down to the beach at Broadwater. But the tide was in with the water covering a hole in the sand into which the front wheel dropped. That caused the plane to flip over onto its roof. The pilot was trapped in his seat upside down but a young woman in a bikini rushed over and helped him out of his aircraft.

Aviation fuel was leaking from the damaged wing tanks but a crew of firefighters from the Wardell Brigade, led by Senior Deputy Captain Ron Rosolen, was soon on the scene. The Brigade provided the ropes and the manpower to turn the plane back over onto its wheels to assist with recovery before the tide came back in.

John Gardon, the owner of *Flight North* and Chief instructor for the Ballina Ultralight Flying Club, flew in from his Pimlico cane farm at Saltwater Creek. He landed his aircraft on the beach to give aid and advice on behalf of Recreational Aviation Australia (RAA) and supervise the recovery of the stricken aeroplane.

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"On my return home, I was met by Mum and Gayle at Sydney Airport and then shuffled through customs and out to a caravan where I was handed my pay, told to report to Enoggera on a particular day and more-or-less told to get lost. That was our welcome home from war. Even the RSL Clubs didn't want to know us. It wasn't until 1988 that the 'Welcome Home' was held for us. It was well overdue. That was very emotional for many people and got a lot of demons off blokes' backs.

"I used to come home from Sydney on leave with a couple of mates. They called us the 'Dubious Trio' because, although we never got into trouble, we were never far from it. The other two were Leif Hastard and George Keller. Lief was killed in action in Vietnam. I don't know what happened to George, who came from Nambour, but I think he had a pretty bad time of it. A little place like Wardell proudly produced six or seven Vietnam Veterans!

"Whilst on leave from the Army, I met Gayle Jung in Ballina. She was a country girl living in Lismore. I got out of the Army in March 1969 and on April 7th we were married! We lived in a caravan in Ballina for a while and then moved to our first married home in Carlisle Street, Wardell. I worked on the cane derrick at Owens Lane and when Armstrong walked on the moon everybody knocked off and I came up to the old house where Mum and Dad were sitting in front of the old black and white TV as Armstrong put his hoof on the moon. I will never forget that!

"Then I went to the weigh-bridge at the Sugar Mill. Bill Greeber had had the main contract before Ray Austin, but he now bought a new truck with a second-hand bigger tipper. He used to bring the chopped cane in and I would unload it onto the side carrier. On the first day, the first load of the new season, Bill brought his new truck in and began to tip it up. Three quarters of the way up, the bloody bolt on the back of the tipper broke and turned the truck over and tipped ten ton of cane all over the place. I ran for my life back into the mill and the cane followed me! Bill had had all his tools on the passenger seat and when the dust settled there was BIG Bill lying in the overturned truck with all his tools - including the jack - on his head with claret pouring out of him. He issued a few expletives and that was the end of that - except that the weigh-bridge and scales had to be fixed before we could take anymore cane.

"Ray Austin from Pimlico had a mechanical harvesting and transport business. He sublet the hauling part to five of us and Gayle and I bought a truck and hauled cane for a fair few seasons. The others carted the cane that had been harvested mechanically and I scored the one at West Ballina

and Cumbalum which was whole stalk cut by hand. Johnny Stibbard used to load it and we became the bane of the Broadwater Sugar Mill. Every time Collyer arrived they were all panicking. The equipment was new and I would come in there with fourteen ton of whole stalk cane and tip it up and inevitably choke the carrier. It was fun and games.

"Farming had become very labour intensive. Everything was single row although multi-row stuff was coming in. You had to get people to cut the cane for planting, people to put it on the trailer, to drive it there, to remove the trash and plant it down the tube. Every row was a single row hoed up and back.

"Gayle and I bought the farm from Dad in 1980 and built the house we live in now. Dad had built the house next door and Mum had passed away soon after they moved in. Then Dad was unfortunately killed in a tractor roll over when he was going fishing!

"In 1974 there was a big fire and a flood in the same year around Wardell. Foremost amongst the volunteers to help were the farmers Lewis Ford, Bill Attewell, Trevor Monti, Harry Law, Ray Walsh and Duncan Sutherland. Arthur Payne and Ian Gibson were grader drivers for Tintenbar Shire, and always turned out to help when needed. Andy Wilson was invariably there with a truck, and Jack Clark had a small truck with a water tank. When Jim Sawyer was appointed as the new policeman in Wardell he maintained an interest in firefighting for the length of his stay in the village.

"What little equipment was available was stored under the stage at the rear of the Community Hall. There were no funds, no bank accounts, and no formal meetings. If money was needed, a raffle was held to raise the cash. Tintenbar Council provided a trailer to carry the knapsacks and other equipment. There was no pump at first. This was fitted in 1974. The trailer was towed by the first farmer's vehicle to hook up to it. The original fire shed, which had been the Tintenbar grader shed, was moved to its location on the riverbank behind the community hall.

"On 11 November 1974, the first formal Annual Meeting of the Wardell Fire Brigade was held in the Wardell Memorial Hall. Present at the meeting were 20 people including founder member David Judge. The outgoing Captain was Harry Law. The new committee was: - Captain Noel Wilson, Vice Captain Bill Lock, and I was elected President. Area Captains were appointed. In December 1974 a meeting was held with Council when the area to be protected by the Wardell Fire Brigade was defined as: East of the Richmond River from South Ballina to Boundary Creek, from the Broadwater at Bagotville to Marom Creek, Rous Mill, Rous, Lynwood, Uralba, and Duck Creek.

"Nowadays the Wardell Brigade has two top class fire trucks with excellent off-road capability. I took over from Bob Smallcombe as honorary FCO or Fire

Control Officer in Ballina Shire and negotiated the new and present site for the Wardell fire station which was built by Bob Wilcox, Rex Kemp and Merve Lindsay.

"In 1994 I took up the position of Deputy FCO in Lismore and 18 months later became the FCO when John Moehead retired. I could not have done the job without the tireless voluntary support of Gayle who looked after all the administration whilst I handled all the operational matters.



Superintendent Ray Collyer AFSM as FCO Lismore and his 'adjutant' Gayle.

"We were lucky enough to go away and become involved in some of the bigger fires around Australia. Then in the year 2000, the Olympics were held in Australia and the RFS got involved as OVIPs or Olympic Volunteers In Policing - similar to Airport Security.

"It was an honour to be nominated for the Australian Fire Service Medal. I have a photo somewhere of the Governor General presenting me with the medal. People ask me, 'Why are you still in the RFS?' Well, it gets in your blood. It's a bit like the military which instils something into you: you're part of a team and that goes for the RFS too. You're part of a team that you depend on and they depend on you. That makes for great mateship and esprit de corps - to use that military term.

"Gayle is very involved in voluntary community matters. She is the Honorary Coordinator of the ADRA Op Shop in Ballina. I do the pick-ups and deliveries. In my spare time I play a little golf and I build large scale model warships which I take and sail with the Ballina Marine Modellers who are associated with Ballina RSL. We sail over in Kingsford Smith Lake.

"I have the fortune to have a lovely wife. We lost a little daughter at three weeks - probably due to Vietnam and agent orange - but we have two adult sons and two daughters who are all doing well in life and in business and we love this place.

Ray Collyer

On Active Service

Ray Collyer speaking with Mike Rushby

"In the 1840s the Collyers were well known around the Wollombi near Millfield in the Cessnock area. My great great grandfather Thomas William Collyer, along with other families including the Fernance and Ellem families, came by bullock wagon up to the headwaters of the Clarence around 1872 then up to the Richmond when cedar trees were king. A trek through that undeveloped country would have been an incredible undertaking. My great great grandfather John Thomas Collyer built the first house on this property at East Wardell and named it 'Millfield'. One of his sons, John Joseph, married Clara Sooley and they raised eight children including my father John Thomas 'Jack' Collyer. (There has always been a John or Thomas in the family.)

"Dad worked in Queensland before the outbreak of war. He enlisted and was assigned a QX number. He met and married Maria Pelleri, who was an Australian-born Italian from Ingham in North Queensland and brought her back to Wardell.

"They had four children with me being the eldest followed by John, Sandra and Julie. We lived in the house that still stands on the corner of Carlisle and Cedar Streets in Wardell. Dad worked for Tintenbar Council and at one time drove the ferry.

"Mum and Dad did it tough in those days. I think everyone did. There were no luxuries but we never wanted for anything. Mum was a great mother. She passed away unfortunately in the seventies.

"Sometime in the 1950s, Dad bought the farm off Pop who moved into town. It was a dairy farm until 1954 which was the year of the big flood. The old house was the second or third house on the property but was the one in which I was brought up. The floodwater was up to the windowsills. Dad was awake all night but Rodger Kidd, the local Police Officer, came around to help us. You wouldn't want to be doing dairy farming in those conditions chasing cows round in the flood. The 54 flood was a very dirty flood and needed heavy rain afterwards to wash the mud off the feed. I know dad got his cows away on agistment somewhere around Coolgardie. That was the end of dairy farming on this place. It has had cane on it ever since then. Dad worked the farm and hauled cane with horses at Owens Lane.

"We had a great childhood. You didn't have everything laid on like today – you made your own fun! We weren't in the town so, although we had our group of friends, we weren't in close proximity all the time. Graham Atherton was one of my friends who used to come up here. He passed away unfortunately quite a few years ago. Mum and Dad had their own friends too and they would come up here with their own kids. So we would make our own fun. Cowboys and Indians was the game!

"We didn't have a car in the early days. We had bicycles to knock around

with but if we wanted to go anywhere, Roy Clark had a taxi service driving a great big *de Soto*. Dad would ring him up and he would take us to Alstonville or wherever we wanted to go. Dad used to take us to the Wardell picture show on the back of the tractor. When we got the car, things changed a bit. But, basically we spent the time here on the farm and made our own fun.

"I went to school at the Wardell Catholic School until year 6 and then to Ballina High. I couldn't get out of there quick enough after third year. Then I started working. I worked as an off-sider hauling cane, a stalk boy and those sorts of job. The first vehicle I owned was a little motorbike. No helmets were required in those days but the winters were another story. Going to work at Floods Lane in winter in the early 60s on the motorbike was so bitterly cold. When you got there you would have to crack the icicles out of your eyes before you got off the bike. The steel rails were so cold you had to have a bag on your hands to carry them. We haven't had winters like that for many years. I worked with Billy Lovett and Johnny Watkins and Dudley Lovett when I was an offsider hauling cane.

"In the early sixties Don Gibson (Sparrow) and I ventured to North Queensland where Mum's relations lived. We went to Halifax up near Lucinda. Don and I got a job at the Victoria Mill fettling on the rail gang. We camped in barracks there. It was the year of one of their biggest floods. Don and I both had Minis (Morris Minors). I had a red one and Sparrow's was grey. The water was coming up and Sparrow and I drove our Minis through this water, which was miles too deep, to get back into Halifax. We had to be rescued by a farmer. That was an adventure! The cars were never the same after that. All the electronics were stuffed. It was terrible.

"One of the more harrowing experiences involved a little simplex,



Gayle & Ray on holiday at Gretna Green

which was a little train that pulled all the trailers with the rails on. We were coming back from work one day and we were crossing a crossing and a guy came hurtling around a corner in his Mk 11 Zephyr and hit the trailer that Sparrow and I were on. He was killed. The impact threw Sparrow and I off.

"Don then went home and I worked on at Macknade Mill mixing and pouring concrete which was a new experience. Soon after I returned to Wardell and drove a loader in the Floods Lane area. Then with Bill Thomas and my brother John I went to Brisbane to join the Army.

"In March 1966 I went to Kapooka for basic training followed by infantry training at Canungra. I was in Vietnam by December. I was just 19 years old. Vietnam was an experience I never regretted. During special training at Ingleburn, a Sergeant asked, "Who wants to go to Vietnam?" We all put our hands up. "Right o Collyer, you'll be in Vietnam in two days!" They jabbed my arms full of injections and threw gear at me. I contacted Mum and Dad who came to see me off in a US Airforce Starlifter. My service in Vietnam was never dull and I'm proud of the fact that I served my country.

"I went to B Company, 6 Battalion RAR first. We had a busy time including Operation Bribie which is well worth reading about at:

<http://vietnam-war.commemoration.gov.au/combat/bribie.php>

In that battle we got ambushed and pinned down and in serious trouble. Several men lost their lives in combat.

"When 6 Battalion returned to Australia, I stayed on with C Company 7 Battalion RAR until I came home in December 1967.

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