

RSL Hellenic Sub-Branch
RETURNED SOLDIER –
“APOSTRATOS”

Memorial Hall, 14A Ferrars Place South Melbourne Vic 3205 Phone 9699 9844

November 2014

Dear Members and Friends of the RSL Hellenic Sub-Branch

We congratulate member Mrs Sofia Borobokas for receiving the award – Medal of Meritorious Services to the Community for her work with the Greek Community.

The festive season is upon us, on behalf of our committee, I would like to take this opportunity to extend our sincere thanks to all for your support in 2014. We wish all our Veterans, members and their families a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2015. Looking forward to seeing you at our final 2014 event, the Hellenic Sub branch **Christmas function** on Saturday 13th December. Details elsewhere in this newsletter.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Returned Soldier “Apostratos” Newsletter

Steve Kyritsis, President



Consul General of Greece **Christina Simantiraki** lays a wreath at the Sanctuary inside the Shrine of Remembrance
OHI Day story continued on page 2

Date	Milestones and Past Events
28 th October 2014	Ohi Day at the Australian Hellenic Memorial & Shrine.
Sunday 12 th October 2014	Hellenic Sub-Branch participates in the Australian Hellenic Memorial School Competition
11 th November 2014	Remembrance day

OHI Day 28th October 2014 - Continued from page 1

As with other years, our Sub-Branch with pride and emotion commemorated OHI Day by attending a Church service at the Greek Orthodox Church South Melbourne. A large crowd was present to watch the two wreath laying ceremonies. Hosted by Senior Vice President Emmanuel Karvelas, one ceremony was held at the Australian Hellenic Memorial and another within the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance. Back at our clubrooms all enjoyed a light complimentary lunch. Photos were taken by Dennis Katsamas from the Ithacan Philanthropic Society.



Father Ioannis reads a prayer for the fallen



Mr Murray Thompson MLA lays a wreath

The following dignitaries laid wreaths on behalf of their organisations:-

Mrs. **Christina Simantiraki**, Consul General of Greece

Brigadier Keith Rossi, represented MAJ GEN David McLachlan, President of The Returned & Services League, Victorian State Branch.

Mr **Steve Kyritsis**, President Returned & Services League Hellenic Sub-Branch Melbourne.

Mr **John Geary**, Deputy Commissioner Department of Veteran Affairs

Murray Thompson MLA, represented the Premier of Victoria **THE HON Dr Dennis Napthine**

Ms **Jenny Mikakos MLC**, represented the State opposition leader **THE HON Mr Daniel Andrews**

Mr **Martin Foley MLA**, State Member for Albert Park and convenor of the Victorian Parliamentary Friends of Greece

Mr **Lee Tarlamis MP**, Member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Mr **Kiriakos Papadimitropoulos**, Vice President Greek Ex-Servicemens Association

Mr **Terry Cole**, Representing 2/2 Field Regiment Association.

Mr **Nick Parthimos**, represented Mr **Bill Papastergiadis** President, Greek Orthodox Community Melbourne Victoria

Mr Peter Andrinopoulos represented The Australian Hellenic Memorial Foundation

Mr **Jim Claven** Secretary, Lemnos Gallipoli Commemorative Committee.

Mr **Con Procopiou**, President of Panseka

Mr **Spiros Robotis**, President and Ms Olga Black AHEPA Victoria

Mrs **Yvonne Panagakos**, President Kastelorizon Association Victoria

Mr **Bill Georgantis**, represented The Lemnian Community Melbourne Victoria.
 Mr **George Verginis**, represented the Federation of the Dodecanese Islands
 Mr. **Constantine Dimaras**, President of modern Greek Teachers Association Victoria
 Ms **Dimitra Petropoulos** represented Maniatiko Association
 Mr **Peter Diakrousis President** and Mr **Spiros Laskaratos** from Cephalonian Society Melbourne.
 Mr **Con Procopiou**, represented Pan Epirotic Omospondia
 Councilor **Kris Pavlidis**, City of Whittlesea
 Ms **Sofia Mastori**, President Womens Federation Victoria
 Students from **Oakleigh Grammar** Victoria
 Students from **St John's College** Preston Victoria
 Students from **Alphington Grammar** Victoria



Ms Jenny Mikakos MLC lays a wreath



Brigadier Keith Rossi, recites the ode

Back at the sub-branch, Jim Anagnostou displayed some of his collection of World War II Greek Military items.



Gilford George Ettridge

The following article was submitted by Geoffrey Ettridge, son of the late WWII veteran Gilford Ettridge. Sadly, Gilford passed away on 28th September 2014 aged 96. The RSL Hellenic Sub-Branch would like to pass on our condolences to his sons Trevor, Geoffrey, his daughter Elizabeth and the extended Ettridge family.



As a kid, I used to quiz Dad about his wartime service particularly in Greece. He would tell me about the Acropolis, Kalamata, Larissa, Brallos Pass and Nafplion. But not the “nitty gritty” detail of the action, until he felt I was old enough to understand! His Greece/Crete experience shaped his life. He loved olives and Greek people!!

Gilford George Ettridge was born in Port Lincoln South Australia on the 18th November 1918, one week after the signing of the WWI Armistice to James and Louisa Ettridge. As a youngster, Dad had a fascination with motor bikes. In 1938, aged 19, he entered in the Annual 6 Hour Trial, a keenly contested endurance event on the national circuit where he achieved overall 4th position and was awarded the Thomas Barr-Smith Cup.

On 5th June 1940, Dad enlisted in the Australian Army, acquiring his cherished number of SX4249. He undertook a couple of weeks training at Woodside then shipped off to Seymour for signals training. Dad had been strongly advised by his brother "Don't think about becoming a dispatch rider ... you will be a sitting target". On parade one day, an officer called for "Anybody who knows anything about motor cycles step forward one pace". Naturally Dad, along with several others, stepped forward, ignoring the family advice and so commenced comradeship with mates which endured to his last day. Nig Ward, Frank Cox, Frank Gardener and others remained mates forever. Dad was posted to 1 Australian Corps of Signals and on 1st October 1940, he sailed to the Middle East as part of the 6th Division AIF.

Training and acclimatisation commenced immediately in Egypt, across the Suez and into the infamous Sinai Desert. Then the metal was really tested! Despatch duties, transport and troop escort duties 24 hours a day, catching a nap or a feed whenever he could. It was vital that the message got through and troop movements were guided and directed on the right path. Then it was over to Egypt, Libya, including Benghazi, Tobruk with 2 - 3 day operations taking him right up to the front line, guided mostly by scant handwritten maps with estimations where his destination might be. Deliver the message, pick up the reply then set off back to HQ.

The job proved extremely hazardous. The harsh climate and terrain along with the formidable enemy aircraft activity ensured that most travel occurred at night under cover of darkness and shelter from the heat. Dad's only defence was a 45 calibre revolver, 6 bullets and a stout heart. Some long operations took up to five days.

In early 1941, the 6th Division was sent to Greece as part of "Lustre Force", a combined Allied Force of 23 000, which was instructed to create a diversionary east front to attack Germany. Lustre Force was designated an ANZAC Force, the only one of World War 2. The only other designated ANZAC designated Force was the Gallipoli Campaign of World War 1 in 1915. This makes Dad a true ANZAC in every sense of the word. The campaign proved disastrous with much loss of life, prisoners of war and the destruction of most of the equipment. They faced a force of 35 German Divisions. In April 1941, orders were given to retreat. Dad's unit duty was to spread this message, which took him through Greece and into the then Yugoslavia. Dispatch riders were a vital source of information and a good target for the Nazi sympathisers and collaborators. No-one really knew for sure who was friend or foe.

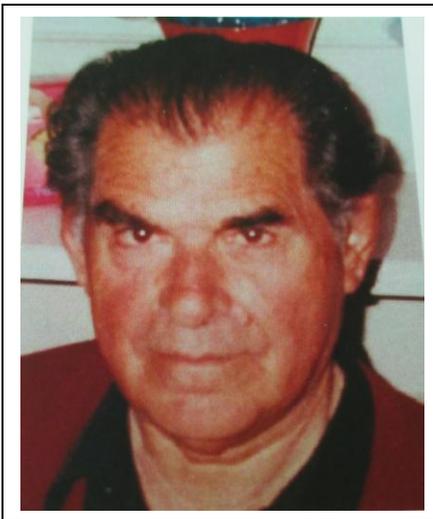
Dad's duty required him to look for stragglers and provide help where needed and thus he was extremely lucky to escape. Dad had the melancholy duty of destroying his trusty motorbike, something that served him so well. Dad sailed from Greece on the SS "Costa Rica" which was subsequently bombed and sunk en-route to Crete. Miraculously, all aboard survived and the 6th Division returned to Egypt via Crete and reformed.

Operations re-commenced in North Africa, followed by deployment in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine fighting against the Vichy French. In early 1942, orders were received for a withdrawal and back to Australia via the Far East. During the voyage, Singapore fell to the Japanese so they were diverted back to Colombo Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), then the long way back to Fremantle, then to Outer Harbour and home. After 18 months away, the troops were billeted at Hampstead in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. It would be another 2 weeks before leave was granted enabling Dad to go home to Deveraux Road, in the Eastern suburbs of Adelaide to be re-united with his dear parents. Every day for the 2 weeks they waited at home, often spending the entire morning at their front gate waiting for Little Gilfy. What a reception he got !! A moment that will live forever in Dad's heart.

After a brief leave, it was off again. This time, for training and operations in the Atherton Tableland and jungles of Queensland, preparing for battle in New Guinea. After a year of operations in New Guinea and with the threat of invasion of Australia over, it was back to Australia. The war ended in August 1945 and Gilford was discharged in September 1945. He deeply missed his mates, most he would never see again. Dad went on to have a busy and very happy life. On the 18th October 1947, he married Eileen Doward. They had three children, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. My dad was a great Australian, a true son of Port Lincoln and a true ANZAC.



On 28th October, our Sub-Branch honored three of the original and remaining 1980 sub-branch Committee members with plaques for their contribution and support over many years. Following a number of meetings and conversations between the original committee and with Victoria's longest serving RSL president Mr Bruce Ruxton MBE OBE AM +, the Hellenic Sub Branch of the RSL was formed in 1980. Pictured left to right - Mr John Skitzis, Mr Themis Borobokas and Mr George Fifis



The President and Committee wish to pass on our condolences to the extended Katsambanis family for the loss of

Polykratis (Paul) Katsambanis
aged 85

For many years, Polykratis was a member and great supporter of our Sub-Branch.

I Had That Type of Soul

The following is a small extract of an article submitted by year 10 student Dion Kouskouris who won first prize in the Australian Hellenic Memorial School competition (Years 10-12 category). The Kouskouris family has been invited to attend Mother's Day 2015 at the Sub-Branch where Dion will read out her article to her grandmother and the audience.



Dion Kouskouris with her award at the Australian Hellenic Memorial on Sunday 12Oct2014

A few weeks ago, I visited my great grandmother who began recounting her life story to me. My grandmother was born in 1923 in Chania, Crete. There she lived her young years with her family. The Second World War is a huge part of her life even today. Every time I see her, she always seizes the opportunity to retell her involvement in the war. Her experience is unique and I feel the need to tell you her story to explain what else occurred during the war apart from what was going on in the front line. She began her story and I was listening attentively.

What were the conditions of the war?

We were living in starvation! Everyone was hungry! I remember a time when a truck drove by full of bread loaves. We could not believe it! We could see it from afar and we were drooling. A group of friends and I ran closer. The truck had now stopped and out hopped two German soldiers. When they weren't watching, we began to unload the vehicle. Firstly we counted the bread loaves and then distributed them. We fed the children first which had come from everywhere. How the Germans didn't catch us then was an absolute a miracle.

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Reminder:- The 2015 RSL Membership fee (Service or Affiliate) of \$35 will need to be paid between January and February 2015

How else did you take part in the war?

I was feeding Englishmen! As they passed through our village I would give them a little food and they would then depart for battle. They were just asking for a little bit of bread. Do you understand? I had that type of soul.

Prison! How long where you in prison for and why?

I was jailed for eight months. They came at midnight while we were sleeping. "We want Miss Katerina! We want Miss Katerina now! Get up! We know about the Englishmen!" "I don't know about any Englishmen!" I told them. They were banging on our door. My father did not open the door for them. "Don't ask me! I don't know! Don't ask me again!" They tried to make me talk. "We will call the Englishman, because he recognises you" they called out. "You have made a mistake! It is another Katerina!" Finally I could not take it anymore.

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Hellenic Sub-Branch - Final Event for the 2014 season



The flyer features a festive background with a blue sky, white snowflakes, and colorful balloons (blue, pink, green, red, yellow). On the left, there is a crest of the Returned & Services League of Australia. The text is centered and reads: "RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA HELLENIC RSL SUB-BRANCH", "Memorial Hall 14A Ferrars Place, South Melbourne, VIC 3205", "CHRISTMAS DANCE", "Saturday 13th December 2014", "7.00pm til Late", "Great Music - Great Taverna Food", "With all drinks included. \$50.00 pp", and "Please book early and support our sub-branch". At the bottom, it lists "President: 0418 571 800" and "Secretary: 0414 209 674". There are also small "001" markings in the bottom corners.

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Did they torture you? What'd they do to you?

They did not torture me. They did not touch me at all. Others in prison would get beaten. The Germans took a liking to me. However, they would not allow me to speak to anyone. They would take me out to get fresh air once a day.

Tell me, where there other women with you?

Everyone had their own room. No one had company. There were women in prison, however not in the same room. There were also men, young boys and girls. One time there was one woman who screamed to the Germans: "Burn her! Burn Katerina! Don't worry, I sorted her out.

Did you have a good friend in or out of prison?

No my child, isolation. Do you know what isolation means? In prison my room was two times this length, like this table (*approximately one metre by two metres*) and the door, which lead out of the cell. We were locked inside. Four dogs guarded us from one side and four on the other along with two armed German soldiers.

Did they allow you to speak with your family while you were in prison?

They would send news to my family from their office. They were strict but they were kind towards me. They would read us all the letters we received. The communication between my family and I was limited. I was hoping I would be released very soon from prison. However unfortunately, the days were not passing fast enough (*my grandmother's eyes begin to fill with tears*).

By Dion Kouskouris

*To hear the complete story and meet Dion in person,
come along to the May 2015 Sub-Branch Mother's day function.*



The Hellenic Sub-Branch
would like to congratulate

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for receiving her award

Medal of Meritorious
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Next Edition Returned Soldier "Apostratos" – Due out March 2015