**NEWSLETTER OF THE GREAT LAKES SUB-BRANCH**

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**THURSDAY 14 MARCH 2019**

**MANNING RIVER CRUISE**

4 hr cruise to FARQUAR INLET

Cruise departs at 10.30am from Endeavour Wharf, Stevenson Street, Taree.

Cruise includes Devonshire Tea morning tea, and scrumptious piping hot roast lunch with a yummy dessert.

Members - $38 per person, Non-members $49 per person, Maximum of 45 people, so please book early to avoid disappointment.

We will car-pool from the front of Forster Bowling Club, leaving at 9.30 sharp.

If you would prefer to self-drive, then please be at the wharf, Stevenson Street, Taree, at 10am sharp.

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**WELCOME TO “51-72”**

Hello everyone, I hope everyone enjoyed a lovely Christmas and New Year. I sent out an email a few weeks ago, detailing some of the things we will be dealing with this year and we did speak about it at the January meeting. "But just in case there are still some members who are unaware of what is happening I will explain here.

Forster Bowling Club is undergoing major interior building alterations which will impact on our meetings, etc., for probably the first half of this year. Our meetings will now be held in what was Danny’s restaurant, which will become the new auditorium when a new restaurant is built in was now the auditorium. For the foreseeable future, we won’t be able to have our BBQ lunches, so there will be morning tea at every meeting. March meeting is cancelled, but things back to normal soon. Cheers, Kim Dwyer

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**REPORTS**

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**PRESIDENT** - This new year has brought about a few changes to the way we will have our monthly meetings. In the past we have, at every second meeting held our BBQ and this has been a major revenue raiser, but due to remodelling of the Forster Bowling Club we may have to hold off future BBQ’s until we see what the Bowling Club can provide. Perhaps an area where we can cook and serve food may be possible outside the part of the building near the Ten pin bowling building.

Well, there’s not too long to wait for our trip to Moree for the Nasho reunion (March 8th, 9th and 10th 2019). So far we have a good representation from our Sub-Branch who have booked accommodation, so I hope that the weather is kind to us as Moree can get very hot this time of the year. Please remember that we are not holding a meeting in March, as many of our members will be in Moree.

I have managed to secure a commitment from the Military Re-Enactment Group to once again join us for National Servicemen’s Day on February 14th, to form up for the catafalque party. We look like having some guests from Toukley Nashos join us as well.

We will have an application for the financial assistance grant is still in the pipeline and as soon as your committee is advised of the outcome I will let you all know what the result is. Keep your fingers crossed.

**SECRETARY** - It is now time to renew your membership. After February 28th 2019, if you have not renewed, you will be removed from the State Branch membership list.

Please do your best to attend National Servicemen’s Day on February 14th. I have been busy with arranging invitations to important guests that I hope may attend our National Servicemen’s Day 2019, so I do hope that we will be blessed with good weather once again on this most important day.

Seems that all is quiet at Head Office in Sydney at the moment. I am aware that the Christmas period is always this way as most of the volunteer workers at Nasho Headquarters were on holidays.

Cheers, Gloria McNeil
COACH TRIP TO STROUD - TUESDAY 13th NOVEMBER 2018
It was a glorious day on which 35 members and friends embarked on our 1-day trip to Stroud and surrounds. We had morning tea on the way, at Gloucester and after arriving at Stroud we visited and were given tours of the local attractions of Stroud Common and Silo Hill, Quambie House and the Court House. Lunch was a delicious selection of sandwiches and cakes at a local café, Crepe Myrtle Kitchen. After a scenic drive through the town we returned home via Booral and Bulahdelah. It was a great day, enjoyed by all who joined us.

CHRISTMAS PARTY - SUNDAY 9 DECEMBER 2018
What a wonderful day we had today, at our Sub-Branch’s 20th Anniversary Christmas Party, with a full house of 110 people attending. It was a fantastic turnout. Our usual bumper Christmas raffle was again a huge success, with 3 fabulous hamper baskets plus over 50 prizes, including over 30 homemade Christmas cakes and puddings, including specially gluten-free and diabetic cakes. Thanks so very much to those who helped out with the cooking and organisation for the party.

Once again, we presented a number of award certificates to members, whose contributions to our Sub-Branch deserve recognition. Usually these are Certificates of Appreciation, Merit or Thanks, according to how long the recipient has been a member and what their contribution has been. The awards presented at today’s party were: Certificate of Thanks - Sharon and John McNeil; Certificate of Appreciation - Pat and Eric Janes, Les McKenzie and Ron Wallingford. On behalf of the President, Committee and members of Great Lakes Sub-Branch I would like to congratulate these members on their awards, without people such as these our Sub-Branch would not be the strong and successful one that it is.

THE OWEN SUB-MACHINE GUN
AN AUSTRALIAN INVENTION SAVED THE LIVES OF MANY AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS FIGHTING THE JAPANESE IN WWII

The inventor was Evelyn Ernest Owen, born on 15 May 1915 in Wollongong. He was fascinated by mechanical things from babyhood and, at eight, having mastered the workings of the internal combustion engine, he turned his attention to firearms and explosives.

Evelyn, or “Evo” as he was affectionately called, collected old discarded shotguns and rifles and, by building missing or broken parts, got them back into firing order. When Evelyn was 12 he got an ancient, hammerless shotgun. He filed a single piece of steel into the shape of a rifle hammer, cleaned dust from the barrel and loaded the gun. Pointing the muzzle at the ground, he squeezed the trigger. The gun went off alright but left Evelyn with deep lacerations on his chest and stomach. There were numerous occasions when Evelyn rushed from the workshop into his mother’s kitchen so she could clean up the blood and wounds and apply bandages, and this was just one of them.

Apart from firearms, Evelyn had another interest - bombs! He experimented with sparklet bulbs - all he had to do was remove the original caps, put explosives inside and fit new caps. On one occasion he threw a sparklet bomb into the embers of a fire. As nothing happened, he bent down to retrieve it and - bang! - it detonated. More scars to add to his body.

As Evelyn grew older and mastered the practical side of firearms knowledge, he concentrated on the theory and began buying many books on weapons and numerous machine guns, but could not achieve the perfect weapon. There were problems with jamming, slow rate of fire and accuracy. When one weapon showed faults he put it aside and started on another, never giving up.

In 1938 the ultimate Owen sub-machine gun was built and every piece of steel was cut and turned by Evelyn. It was accurate, fired a steady rate and did not jam. Even when subjected to all tests, it continued to fire. It was a simple weapon consisting of little more than a barrel, bolt, spring, pistol grip and piece of steel bent to form a stock. It was operated by the recoil action of each shot.

In July 1939 Evelyn approached an officer in Sydney’s Victoria Barracks. When asked by the officer what was in the parcel, Evelyn
replied, “It’s a Tommy-gun”. A “tommy-gun” was a dirty expression at Victoria Barracks. The officer replied, “That’s an American gangster gun. The Army has no use for it”. Despite that rebuff, and others, he continued looking for someone of influence, but had no joy from any manufacturer or government department. Then World War II began.

In May 1940 Evelyn Owen followed his three brothers, David, Julian and Peter, and enlisted in the AIF. Before leaving for an army camp near Sydney, he covered his sub-machine gun in grease and put it in a sugarbag, leaving it in the garage of a tenant who rented a flat owned by his father. The tenant happened to be the general manager of Lysaght’s Port Kembla sheet metal plant, Vincent A. Wardell.

Sometime after Evelyn had left for Sydney, Wardell noticed the sugarbag, inspected the contents and examined it thoroughly. He cocked the weapon, operated the trigger and saw the bolt shoot smoothly forward. He knew a fine piece of machinery when he saw it. It had a simple operation. The bolt seemed to be the only working part.

Wardell saw Evelyn’s father and the same day sent a telegram to the Director-General of Munitions, Essington Lewis, saying that he had discovered a marvellous firearms invention. Lewis contacted the Minister for the Army, P.C. Spender, advising that a young Wollongong man had built a sub-machine gun that was light, with a simple operation and, from what he was told, it was also faultless.

Things happened quickly after that. Evelyn was told that the Army no longer needed him and that he was to present himself before a meeting of the War Cabinet. In June 1941 he was discharged from the AIF and began work at Lysaght’s. Wardell was given a contract to make 100 Owen guns and on 30 September the Owen gun was tested at Long Bay Rifle Range against similar weapons - the Thompson, Sten and a German Burgmann.

In the first test, the Owen was more accurate and grouped it’s shots better. All the weapons were then put in mud, water and sand. The audience stood spellbound as the Owen gun outperformed the Thompson, Sten and Burgmann guns, which all failed the sand, water and mud tests, while the Owen gun was unaffected.

These tests proved that the young man from Wollongong had designed the world’s finest submachine gun. Under Wardell’s watchful eye, Evelyn Owen supervised the production of 45,477 guns that were supplied to the Australian Army. The support of some army officers, notably Colonel E.W. Latchford, helped to get the approval to manufacture the gun.

The Owen gun was a shoot-from-the-hip, short range specialist jungle warfare weapon, but it had limited capability in open country.

It was sent to New Guinea and played a vital role in saving Australia from the Japanese invasion during the Kokoda campaign. The soldiers there preferred it to the Thompson or Sten gun. It was later used by Australians in the Korean War and during the Malayan Emergency and the early stages of the Vietnam War.

Evelyn Owen did not worry about patents in 1942 and it was not until after World War II that he received about £10,000 in royalties and proceeds from the sale of his patent rights. He used most of the money to buy a small sawmill at Tongarra, near Wollongong.

He did not marry but still enjoyed experimenting with sporting rifles. Evelyn was not a good businessman and the mill swallowed his capital and returned very little profit. In addition, being a fairly heavy drinker, he was admitted to Wollongong Hospital where he died from a ruptured gastric ulcer on 1 April 1949, aged 34. He was buried in the local cemetery.

Evelyn Owen did not receive anywhere near the recognition he deserved from the government or the army for his financial and personal sacrifices as well as his loyalty to his country.

However, on Tuesday 19 June 1990, a special 50th anniversary unveiling of a bronze statuette, modelled from a clay likeness of the famous inventor’s face, was held at the Wollongong City Council Building.

The bronze portrait was the work of Evelyn’s sister, Elanor Owen O’Donnell. The project was the collective plan of the Owen family and men and women who worked on the assembly of the Owen gun from 1940 to 1945. The project was supported by BHP Sheet & Coil Products, formerly John Lysaght (Australia) Limited. Attending the ceremony were members of the Owen family and Lysaght’s representatives, as well as some of the women who worked on the Port Kembla gun production line in the 1940s.

Specifications of the Owen Sub-Machine-Gun:
- Calibre: 9mm
- Length: 813mm
- Length of barrel: 9.84” (250mm)
- Weight loaded: 10.61lb (4.815kg)
- Magazine: 33 round vertical box
- Rate of Fire: 700 rpm
- Muzzle Velocity: 1,380ft (420m) per second
- Cost: £12 per gun (£24)

This story was originally written by Owen Thomas; 12th National Service Battalion; 12/16 Hunter River Lances; No. 2745993, who says: I have always been very proud of Evo. He was my second cousin.

A REMINDER TO MEMBERS - If you have not already done so, PLEASE pay your $25 membership renewal at February meeting. If you’re not attending, please arrange to pay by cheque (made out to “National Servicemen’s Assoc. Great Lakes Sub-Bran$h”) & send to The Treasurer, PO Box 4141 Forster NSW 2428, OR bank internet deposit - BSB: 650 300, ACCT no.: 513573808, ACCT NAME: National Servicemen’s Association Great Lakes Sub-Branch (PLEASE leave your name as reference). If not paid by the end of February, State Branch will remove your name from their membership list!!
OUR YEAR’S PROGRAM OF EVENTS:
From time to time, EXTRA dates for special events, or outings such as bus trips, will be included in this program, marked with a **, so watch for any changes. Unless otherwise advertised, our meetings are held on the second Friday of the month (not Dec.), in DANNY’S REST., FORSTER BOWLING CLUB, STRAND ST, FORSTER, commencing 10.00 am. Street parking at front of Club, and a carpark at rear of Club, accessed from Cross Street.

FEBRUARY 8 - Meeting and morning tea. Lunch at Forster Bowling Club’s Rinkside Café, if you wish, at own expense.
If you are going on the Manning River Cruise on 14 March, please pay for this at the February meeting, thank you.

**FEBRUARY 14 - National Servicemen’s Day - service at the memorial in Little Street, Forster, 11am. Please assemble at 10.30am, full uniform and medals to be worn. Followed by light lunch at Forster Bowling Club.

MARCH 8 - NO MEETING. This meeting has been cancelled due to no suitable meeting place because of alterations a Forster Bowling Club. We will see you in April.

**THURSDAY 14 MARCH - MANNING RIVER CRUISE
4 hr cruise to FARQUAR INLET - Cruise departs 10.30am from Endeavour Wharf, Stevenson Street, Taree. Cruise includes Devonshire Tea morning tea, and scrumptious piping hot roast lunch with a yummy dessert.
Members - $38 per person Non-members $48 per person. Maximum of 45 people, so please book early to avoid disappointment.
We will car-pool from the front of Forster Bowling Club, leaving at 9.30 sharp. If you would prefer to self-drive, then please be at the wharf, Stevenson Street, Taree, at 10am.

APRIL 12 - Meeting and morning tea. Lunch at Forster Bowling Club’s Rinkside Café, if you wish, at your own expense.

OUR SPONSORS
These businesses have made a commitment to support our Sub-Branch through their sponsorship of our newsletter. In return, please give them your patronage whenever possible.