
ANZAC DAY

25 APRIL 2026



*REMEMBERING AND COMMEMORATING
LOCAL SERVICE PERSONNEL WHO
HAVE SERVED OUR COUNTRY*



A BRIEF MESSAGE FROM CLAYTON

Welcome to this year's edition of my Anzac Day brochure. The local stories about our servicemen and women is always linked to the idea that a little more than 100 years ago, and every day since, the person going off to war to fight for this country could have been you, or a family member, or your neighbour, or your friend.

It is my hope that as you read through this brochure you get a good sense of the people that answered the call to serve our nation. They came from all walks of life and had various experiences of war with no two journeys being the same.

In this year's edition we do take time to recognise the "Nasho's" on the 75th anniversary of their origins.

Thank you to our local RSL sub-branches, Anzac Committees and historical societies for their ongoing work for remembrance and support of those who have served.

I do sincerely hope that you take the time on Anzac Day this year to remember all those that have served, or are currently serving, this wonderful country of ours.

Clayton Barr, MP
State Member for the Electorate of Cessnock



TWICE WOUNDED, ONCE DECORATED: KURRI'S HERO

Peter Turnbull was born in the coal mining town of Amble, in the north of England and was the third son of William and Mary Jane Turnbull. The family had settled in Kurri Kurri to work in the mines not long before the beginning of World War I.

A coal miner by trade, 25 year old Private Turnbull enlisted on 18 July, 1915. With a sense of patriotism high after the recent battle at Gallipoli, volunteers were encouraged and so restrictions on height were relaxed. Peter, standing at just over 5 feet found that his time had come.

For his service Private Turnbull was recommended for the Military Medal twice and awarded it once. He received the Military Medal for his heroic deeds on 4 July, 1918 during an operation in Varie Wood, France, where during heavy enemy bombardment, he worked for hours repairing lines despite personal risks to make sure communication lines would remain open.

Private Turnbull was wounded twice during his service. On 11 April, 1917, he was treated for a wound to his left knee caused by a grenade. After recovering he rejoined his unit. In August 1918 he suffered a gunshot wound to his left arm. While recovering in England, Private Turnbull met Annie Harvey who he would later marry by special licence.

Due to his injuries Private Turnbull was discharged in October 1919. He returned to mining and raised his family in Kurri Kurri. The Returned Services League was a large part of his life and he was also active in the Freemasons. He died after a short illness in Kurri Kurri Hospital at the age of 47.

A FATHER'S SACRIFICE ACROSS WARS



Above: Private Charles Johnston.

Charles Henry Johnston had already served as a private in World War I when, desperate to save his two sons from the horrors of World War II, he volunteered to serve again so they would not. However, his sons Charles Junior and Norman would follow him by enlisting the following year. Luckily for the Johnston family all three would return home.

Born on 3 March, 1896, Charles moved to Quorrobolong as a 3 year old when his mother Alice married Edmund Baker.

In November 1915, at the age of 19 he enlisted in WWI as part of the 5th Pioneers Battalion and served in the Middle East and on the Western Front.

During his service he met and married Alice Reid, in her home town of Aberdeen, Scotland, on 13 December, 1918 prior to returning home to Australia onboard the HMAT "City of Exeter" in March 1919. Settling in Cessnock, they had their first of 7 children (Charles, Norman, Catherine, Stuart, Robert, Bruce and Lenard) before moving to Sydney in 1922.

At the outbreak of WWII, Charles, not wanting his two eldest sons to serve, re-enlisted as part of the 2/6 Australian Armoured Regiment. He served both in Australia and overseas in New Guinea until his discharge in July 1943.

WEST WALLSEND'S VIDA DRYSDALE



Above: Lieutenant Vida Drysdale helping a young boy known as "Bill" to fit clothing made by nurses.

Approximately 5,000 Australian nurses served in World War II across the Middle East, Pacific and Europe providing vital care in dangerous conditions. Primarily with the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS), they faced many risks and by the end of the war, these women provided a lasting legacy of bravery and honour.

West Wallsend's Lieutenant Vida Drysdale was one such nurse. Born on 7 October, 1912 to David and Edith Drysdale, Vida, was already working as a trained nurse when she enlisted on 19 May, 1941 in Sydney. She was promoted to Lieutenant in March 1943.

During her service Lieutenant Drysdale would serve in Australia and overseas in the Middle East, New Guinea and Morotai.

Lieutenant Drysdale was discharged on 18 May, 1946. She married Jack Stewart three months later on 3 August in her home town of West Wallsend. She died on 22 January, 2006 at the age of 94 in Queensland.

There are many devastating events in war but there are also compassionate stories. A half-naked and ravenously hungry young boy aged 13 wandered into Australian lines near Wau. They took him to an Australian Hospital for help. The nurses made him a shirt and pants, while a wounded soldier gave him a belt. There were no shoes small enough so a nurse gave him a pair of her own service boots. Lieutenant Drysdale was one of the nurses who helped the young boy.

REMEMBERING AND HONORING

PRIVATE MATTHEW PETER McDONALD



Born at Cockfighter Creek, Wollombi, Private Matthew Peter McDonald returned home from his service in WWI, however the horrors of war and his injuries would lead to his death in 1930 at the age of just 46.

Private McDonald was 32 when he enlisted in January 1916. While serving on the Western Front he was injured multiple times including being gassed in 1917 and suffering a gunshot wound and shrapnel to the right leg in August 1918. While on the hospital transport returning to Australia he was confused and suffered from mental illness. He was discharged as medically unfit in August 1919. He died at Callen Park Mental Institution, having suffered severe mental illness as a result of his service.

PRIVATE CLIFFORD REGINALD DAVIES

The son of Arthur and Rachel Davies of Cessnock, Private Clifford Davies enlisted as part of the 34th Battalion on 10 January, 1916.

Like many Australian soldiers Private Davies left Australian shores filled with a spirit of adventure, onboard the HMAT *Hororata* in May 1916. After arriving in England he was sent to the Western Front where 7 months later he suffered a gun shot wound to the chest.

He was treated at the Australian Casualty Clearing Station where he eventually died from his wounds on 12 December, 1916. He was 19 years old. Private Davies is buried in the Trois Arbres Cemetery, France. The inscription on his grave reads "He died as he lived noble and brave a true Australian son."



PRIVATE ROBERT EDMUND GARTH

A grocer from Cessnock, at just 18 years old Private Robert Garth enlisted in February 1916 as part of the 34th Battalion.

Private Garth left Australia on board HMAT *Hororata* in May 1916, before heading to France where he would be wounded twice. He was wounded in action in May 1917 and after a short stay in hospital rejoined his unit where 2 months later in July he suffered multiple gunshot wounds to his wrists, legs and arms. Private Garth was transferred to hospital in England for treatment.

Private Garth was invalided home in January 1918 and discharged as permanently unfit in July 1918. He died in April 1966 at the age of 67 in Hamilton.

PRIVATE PERCY JAMES WALKER

Greta's Private Percy James Walker, the son of Major Edward and Katherine Walker was working as a labourer prior to his enlistment.

Private Walker left Australia on the SS *Napier* in November 1916 with the 5th Reinforcements of the 34th Battalion. These men were known as the "Wallabies". While on the troopship Private Walker became ill and went to ship's hospital. On 18 January, 1917 he died from myocarditis while at sea, without ever seeing action. He was only 24.



URING OUR LOCAL HEROES

PRIVATE JAMES WILLIAM CHARLES SMITH

Coal miner Private James William Charles Smith answered the call of duty like many others from the mining town of Weston enlisting on 25 March, 1916 in West Maitland.

The young father was almost 36 years old when he joined as part of the 1st Pioneer Battalion.

After arriving in England, the battalion was then marched out to Etaples (France). The 1st Pioneer Battalion were involved in the Passchendaele campaign, where they were working under heavy artillery fire to clear roads and maintain supply lines when it was reported Private Smith was killed in action on 19 September, 1917. He left behind five children. He was buried in Hooge Crater Cemetery, near Ypres in Belgium.



PRIVATE AVERY HOWARD

Mulbring school teacher Private Avery Howard enlisted in July 1918, at 31 years of age, making him one of the older recruits at the time.

Private Avery arrived in England on 14 November, 1918, 3 days after the Armistice agreement had been signed however this did not mean the war was over. While the fighting had stopped on the Western Front, fighting was still continuing in several other areas. Private Howard's unit was used in France and Belgium. After serving a year he returned home to Australia on 22 September, 1919.



PRIVATE WILLIAM RIDLEY

Private William Ridley of Young Wallsend (now known as Edgeworth) was a 21 year old labourer when he enlisted with the 35th Battalion on 11 January, 1916.

The sixth son of John and Jane Ridley, his older brother Edward was also at the front. On 2 December, 1916 the battalion were holding the line when Private Ridley was shot and killed. One of his fellow soldier's wrote to Private Ridley's family of his friendship "A better mate I could not wish to find. He was always cheerful, and looked on the bright side. A favourite with every man in his section and thought a lot of by his platoon officer for his cheerfulness under all circumstances."

He is buried at Bancourt British Cemetery. Private Ridley was 22 when he died.

PRIVATE JAMES ALLAN



A miner from Abermain, Private James Allan was born in Sachie, Scotland in 1891. Having arrived in Australia at just 19 to work in the mining industry, he demonstrated a strong commitment to hard work.

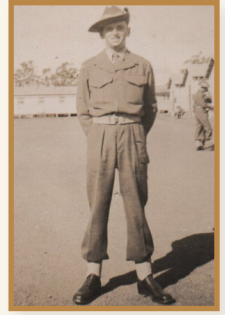
He had previously served as part of the 7th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Enlisting in December 1915 with the 36th Battalion, he left Australia in May 1916 bound for France and the Western Front.

The Battalion was involved in the Battle of Messines where Private Allan was killed in action on 7 June, 1917 in Belgium. He was 26 years old.

75 YEARS OF NATIONAL SERVICE

This year marks 75 years since the introduction of National Service in Australia, a policy that saw more than 280,000 young men called up between 1951 and 1972. Known affectionately as “Nashos, these men came from cities, towns and villages across the nation.

One of those to be conscripted was Private Eric Wells, a well-known and adored member of the Kearsley community, who was called up to the Australian Army under the National Service Scheme. While many of his fellow Nashos were sent overseas, Private Wells remained on the home front, undertaking continuous basic training and preparing for arm-to-arm conflict should he be called upon by the government. His service formed part of Australia’s broader efforts to protect hard-won freedoms during a period of regional uncertainty.



Above: Private Eric Wells
Below left: Lance-Corporal Lew Conserdyne



Following his return to civilian life, Private Wells made a positive and lasting contribution to the Kearsley community.

In his twilight years, he was known for forming a well-trodden path from his home on Allandale Street to the old Auto Port in search of a treat and the latest village gossip. Private Wells passed away in 2017 at the age of 80.

Between 1964 and 1972 Australia’s National Service Scheme used the birthday ballot system to select individuals for national service.

The birthday ballot was like a lottery where numbered marbles or wooden ballot balls were placed in a hand-spun barrel.

A predetermined number of balls were drawn and the men whose birthdates matched the drawn numbers were called up for national service.

Lance-Corporal Llewellyn (Lew) Conserdyne, born in 1945 and raised in Kearsley was another local Nasho.

His National Service ballot was drawn in 1965, sending him to Vietnam with 581 Signal Troop, Royal Australian Corps of Signals. Arriving in Vietnam in mid 1966, Lance-Corporal Conserdyne quickly saw how underprepared the Army had been, spending his first week sleeping in a gutter with only a poncho for cover. Despite the harsh conditions, he worked long days laying communication lines.

Just months into his service, Lance-Corporal Conserdyne supported a top-secret operation later known as the Battle of Long Tan, coming under mortar fire. He returned to Australia in 1967, never forgetting his service in Vietnam. Lance-Corporal Conserdyne passed away in 2022 at the age of 77.

To ensure their service is never forgotten, commemorative plaques have been unveiled at the Kearsley Remembrance Garden. Private Wells and Lance-Corporal Conserdyne are just two of the many local men who answered the call to duty through National Service.

PELAW MAIN'S RICHARD LLOYD

A gifted sportsman, Private Richard Lloyd excelled at rugby league and cricket prior to being called up for service. He had played for the Kurri Kurri Bulldogs and was part of the A-Grade premiership team of 1966, the same year he was posted to Vietnam.

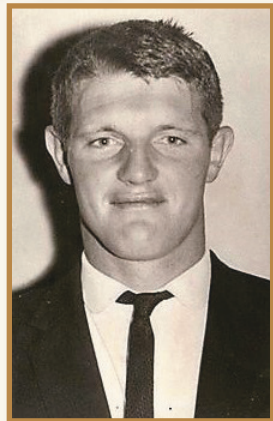
Private Lloyd had been called up to serve after his birth date was selected in the National Service Scheme in 1965. However, the army had agreed to allow him to defer for a year until he completed his boiler making apprenticeship.

He left for Saigon in December 1966 serving as a rifleman with the 1st Australian Reinforcement Unit then the 5th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (5RAR).

He was killed by a landmine less than 6 months later on Easter Sunday morning 6 April, 1967 in the village of Dat Do, in South Vietnam. He was just 21 years old.

Over 4,500 people lined the streets of Kurri Kurri to attend his funeral, held at St Paul's Anglican Church.

Private Lloyd is listed on the Vietnam Memorial at Col Brown Rotary Park. He is also listed on the Weston Cenotaph. Lloyd Park in Pelaw Main is named in his honour.



Above: Private Richard Lloyd of Pelaw Main.

FROM MACHINE GUNS TO SUPPLY LINES

Private Stan Dunker not only served with the 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion during World War II, he also saw service in Vietnam between 1966 and 1967.

Private Dunker first answered the call to duty at the age of 20 when he enlisted in July 1940 with the 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion which served with distinction in the Middle East and Pacific during World War II. Their tenacity and commitment to service in Africa saw them referred to as the "Rats of Tobruk."

After completing training Private Dunker and the Battalion were deployed to the Middle East where they participated in key battles including the 1st and 2nd Battles of El Alamein. In 1943 the unit returned home to defend Australia. They served in New Guinea and Borneo.

After the war he and his family moved to Kurri Kurri in 1950 where he worked as a truck driver and coal miner at Stanford Merthyr Colliery and Hebburn No 2 Colliery. A downturn in the coal industry saw him rejoin the army in the late 1950s where he stayed until 1974.

In 1966-67 he served a tour of duty in Vietnam with the 21 Supply Platoon Royal Australian Army Service Corps. He and his wife Edith (Ginger) were also posted to Lae, in Papua New Guinea from 1971-73 with the Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps. Corporal Stan Dunker died on 13 July, 1976 in Kurri Kurri aged 56.



Above: Corporal Stan Dunker

LOCAL ANZAC DAY SERVICES 2026

ABERMAIN

8:30am - March from the corner of Bathurst Street and Cessnock Road to the Jeffries Park Cenotaph for the service.

BRANXTON

5:30am - Dawn Service at the Branxton Rotunda, John Rose Avenue, Branxton.

11:15am - Form-up in front of former Commercial Hotel for **11:30am** Town March

11:45am - Main Service Branxton Rotunda for day Memorial Service.

BROKE

5:45am - Dawn Service at Broke War Memorial, Broke Street, Broke.

10:00am - Service at Broke War Memorial.

BRUNKERVILLE

3:00pm - Service at Uniting Church in Memorial Garden.

CESSNOCK

5:45am - Dawn Service at the Cessnock Cenotaph which is located in the grounds of Cessnock TAFE, North Avenue, Cessnock.

9:00am - Morning Service at Veterans Park, Aberdare Road, Aberdare.

11:00am - March from the former Vincent St Kitchen + Bar, along Vincent Street to the Cenotaph for the service at

11:40am in the TAFE grounds.

GRETA

5:30am - Dawn Service at Greta War Memorial Cenotaph, New England Highway, Greta.

6:00am - Gunfire breakfast in the Old Greta Courthouse. Free to the public, although a gold coin donation would be appreciated.

9:30am - March from the corner of Nelson Street and New England Highway to the Cenotaph for the service at **10:00am**.

KEARSLEY

5:20am - March from Kearsley Tennis Court to the Cenotaph at Kearsley Community Hall, Allandale Street, Kearsley.

5:30am - Service at the Cenotaph. BBQ breakfast will follow within the grounds of the Area of Remembrance.

Front Cover: War Memorial Gates standing at the bottom of the driveway of the former Pokolbin Public School, with honour rolls for WWI and WWII and brass plaques for later conflicts.

KURRI KURRI

5:00am - Dawn Service at the Cenotaph in Rotary Park, corner of Lang and Hampden Streets, Kurri Kurri.

9:40am - Form-up for a **9:45am** March from 139 Lang Street Kurri Kurri (former Mitre 10) to the Cenotaph.

10:00am - Service at the Cenotaph.

Lost Diggers tribute at Col Brown Rotary Park, Kurri Kurri.

7:00am to 4:30pm - Field of Honour at Kurri Kurri Cemetery.

NEATH

From 11:30am - Lighting of the Miner's Lamp at Neath Hotel, Cessnock Road, Neath.

MILLFIELD

5:15am - Gather at St Luke's Anglican Church, Wollombi Road, Millfield and march to Millfield Public School for the service at **5:30am**.

PAXTON

5:25am - Gather at the corner of McDonald and Anderson Avenues, Paxton and march to Paxton Public School for the service.

POKOLBIN

7:00am - Service at Memorial Gates, 126 McDonalds Road, Pokolbin.

PUTTY

10:00am - Service at Putty Community Hall, Putty Valley Road, Putty.

WESTON

5:30am - Dawn Service at Cenotaph 56 Cessnock Road, Weston.

WEST WALLSEND

9:40am - March commences from corner of Withers and Carrington Streets, West Wallsend.

10:00am - Service at West Wallsend Soldiers Memorial Park, corner of Carrington and Hyndes Streets, West Wallsend.

WOLLOMBI

5:45am - Service at Wollombi Anzac Reserve, corner of Wollombi and Narone Creek Roads, Wollombi.

****Please note times may be subject to change****