



## WAGGA'S WAR EFFORTS

Editorial and images by Monica McInnes

FOR GOD, KING AND COUNTRY - HONOURING WAGGA  
WAGGA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

You only have to look at the local cenotaph of any Australian country town to realise the impact the Great War had on these communities. Wagga Wagga is no different.

Two hundred and seven names are etched into the walls at Wagga Wagga's war memorial, Victory Memorial Park. Each name represents a son, father, uncle, brother, cousin who signed-up and paid the ultimate sacrifice. Most would have been from Wagga Wagga and surrounding areas. All are remembered on Anzac Day.

Aside from the loss of life, Wagga Wagga was the starting point for the recruiting drive known as the Kangaroo March. It left Wagga on 1 December 1915 with 88 eager enlistees from Wagga, Narrandera, Tumut, Young and localities in between. The 350-mile march to Sydney, recruiting along the way, was the longest of its kind. Mindful of its 'country' origins it did not recruit after Campbelltown. Twenty-five of them lost their lives serving their nation.

One of the Kangaroos from Tumut, John Ryan, was awarded the Victoria Cross. His act of valour was during the Hindenburg attack in 1918, when, under heavy fire, he took a German Trench and led an attack with bombs and bayonets, to neutralise three Germans. John Ryan, despite his shoulder being badly wounded, 'single-handedly rushed the remainder and drove them back' retaking the trench. John Ryan VC returned from the war and died from pneumonia in 1941.

Not so lucky, were two decorated soldiers whose names are remembered on the Wagga Wagga memorial. Sergeant William Herbert Birrell was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), and Lance Corporal Harlequin Gladstone Huxtable was awarded the Military Medal (MM) for their selfless acts during the war.

William Birrell joined the war efforts in 1914 and was awarded the DCM for his distinguished conduct on 8 May 1915 at Gallipoli. William Birrell received the award for 'collecting and organising men who had become detached and leading them to a

### This Anzac Day in Wagga

6am: Dawn Service at the Cenotaph in the Victory Memorial Park.

6:45am: Pilgrimage to the War Cemetery on Koorungal Road. Service will be held on the lawn outside gate to respect the graves.

7am: Doors open at the RSL Club for a Gunfire breakfast – buffet style including rum and milk. Cost \$10 per person.

10:30am: Anzac March along Baylis Street from Morgan Street towards the Cenotaph. Those marching should arrive to the start point on Morgan Street by 10am. The order of the March will be Navy/Army/Air Force in order of conflict, followed by descendants of Australian Veterans and Wagga Wagga schools.

11:15am: Wreath laying and Commemorative Service at the Cenotaph. Veterans are invited to use the seating provided at the Cenotaph, and a Marquee and some seating will be available to all other service attendees in the centre of Victory Memorial Park.

1pm: Anzac Day Commemorative Games at Robertson Oval. Entry is a gold coin donation. A short commemorative service will be held here at 3.15pm.

5pm: Anzac Day Sunset Service at the RSL Club Memorial located at the entrance of the club.

For more information please contact the Wagga RSL Sub Branch on 6921 3528 or email [rlswagga@bigpond.net.au](mailto:rlswagga@bigpond.net.au), or visit [www.waggarlsclubbranch.com.au](http://www.waggarlsclubbranch.com.au)

weak flank in the firing line.' He was shot and wounded within days and returned to his unit two months later. He served on the Western Front where he met his fate in Belgium on 4 October 1917. Unofficial accounts from men in his unit refer to William Birrell DCM as 'a very fine fellow, one of the best'.

Equally impressive is Harlequin Huxtable MM, whose actions at Hamel in France on 4 July 1918 earned his Award. After his Corporal was killed and machine gun destroyed, Lance Corporal Huxtable took charge and engaged with a German Machine Gun until a replacement Vickers Gun was bought forward from Headquarters. During this time the team held the line preparing for the counter attack. Harlequin Huxtable MM was shot in the right shoulder on 8 August 1918, but despite the best efforts of medical personnel, died of his wounds two days later.

Bravery and sacrifice was commonplace on the battlefields of the Great War and is what Wagga Wagga RSL President, Kevin Kerr will remember this Anzac Day. "ANZAC Day represents the birth of the ANZAC spirit - the day Australians commenced the fight against the enemy so that we could retain our freedom," he explains.

And the cost was high. Not only did Australia, with a population under five million, commit nearly 417,000 troops to the allied cause, more than 60,000 paid the supreme sacrifice. Another 156,000 were wounded, gassed or taken prisoner. Mr Kerr agrees, saying, "we lost the cream of Australian manhood."

In recent years the popularity of Anzac Day services and ceremonies has surged as younger generations appreciate and

pay respect to those young Australians who sacrificed so much. Mr Kerr believes this is because people are "more aware of the sacrifices of our Defence personnel in the theatre of operations and of the current hostilities overseas."

Whatever the reason, the crowds will be deeper than ever this Anzac Day, remembering the fallen, the sacrifices, the families and the freedoms we now enjoy in this great country of ours.