



## Blokes Playgroup.

While "Men's Sheds" are commonplace in Australia's Veteran's society, few, if any, can lay claim to a history going back close to the start of the millennium. One, operated by the RAAF Vietnam Veterans' Association of WA Inc, can make that claim with the group marking their fifteenth year since coming into being as the "brainchild" of Vietnam Veteran Peter Robinson (right). Peter was with 9 SQN in Vung Tau from April 1969 to Feb 1970.

Peter takes up the story: " in early 2001, our old washing machine spat the dummy. I went through the exercise and spent a bucket of money on a new one and almost threw the old one out, thinking, one day I'll get around to fixing that."

Peter did fix the machine for the grand sum of \$60.00. The next week he picked up three "dead" washing machines from the "council pick up" on the side of the road. He now had another problem: what to do with three washing machines that needed fixing. In no time at all, he had rounded up mates he served with to get together in his garage to fix washing machines. Many of the mates were ex RAAF; tradesmen so they "knew tools". Some of the Vets who heard about the operation on the grapevine and dropped in didn't. This is where Peter's motivation motto kicked in. 'Give a Vet a purpose in life and through that will grow the key elements: friendship, camaraderie and satisfaction.' Peter continues, "a tradie and non tradie would team up in 'an on the job training exercise', and when one of the non tradies completed a task and the machine worked, the look on his face was priceless. Here was the satisfaction.



And the other two elements were ever present. We had struck gold in finding that purpose in life for the Vets," said Peter. "We donated the washing machines to the relief effort in East Timor with the Lions Club of Rockingham arranging shipping. Many of the washing machines also found good homes in various women's refuges in suburban Perth and nearby regional centres and as the word spread so did the numbers of Vets turning up. Soon we had 8 to 10 every opening day and some just dropped in for a brew and a chat. No worries, that's where the camaraderie came in, soon we were fixing



bikes and all sorts of other stuff. We had to move away from washing machines for the obvious reason, but there was never a shortage of items in the shed that needed work.

While the shed is open on Tuesdays and Fridays throughout the year, except for school holidays, members are often on the telephone to each other, catching up for a chat. Apparently one wife has christened the shed, "The Bloke's Playgroup." For reasons beyond the control of the group, shipments to Dili had to cease. No matter there was always another challenge for Peter and the team.



"Next came lawn mowers, said Peter. "These, along with bikes are donated to various groups again around Perth metro and nearby regional centres." The group raises some funds by selling good quality reel mowers that are always in demand. Peter also commented that Bunnings Balcatta had made a very welcome donation from their welfare funds and the group were able to source two grants from Department of Veterans' Affairs. Obviously more grants will assist this men's shed to continue the good work. In order to source Government grants, the group was required to incorporate. This adds a layer of regulation that has to be lived with.

The influence of the Kingsley Men's Shed has spread beyond Perth's northern beaches. The Kingsley operation is used as a model for other sheds across metropolitan Perth and into the hinterland. Peter is most proud of a crowning achievement when his Kingsley operation was a key element of the inaugural WA Men's Shed conference in the central wheat belt town of Mukinbudin. Men's Sheds in WA extend beyond Veterans. Peter stated that retired police are starting sheds and modelling their operation on Kingsley.

One area where sheds are fulfilling a serious need is in the farming community, Sheds are helping ward off an increasing suicide rate among farmers who are really doing it tough on the land and among those who have lost their properties'. While most of these sheds concentrate on wood- work, many cater for welding projects and mechanical repairs. So what started out almost by accident nearly fifteen years ago has extended its influence far beyond Kingsley in suburban Perth and demonstrates just what can be achieved when a group of Vietnam Vet- erans put their minds to a task.

Pete Robinson, who also headed up the blokes who put [Iroquois A2-296](#) back together then into the Museum at Bull Creek in Perth, was a sumpie brat on the 14th intake at Wagga back in 1960/62.



Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving.





## Grey Nomads.

If you're into Grey Nomading, and you're thinking of doing the big round trip, and you're interested in saving a few dollars and would like to meet up with similar people, you perhaps could do yourself a favour by checking out the web site below.



This site gives you an Australia wide list of Vietnam Vet retreats that would welcome you with open arms. If you do check these out, please let us know your experiences and also send us some photos.

<http://www.vvaa.org.au/Vietnam%20vets%20retreats1%208.5.2013%20.pdf>

## Brisbane War Graves.

Over 12,000 Australian lives ended in their home country during the Second World War or as a result of their service during the First World War. Australian, Commonwealth and Allied war dead, civilian casualties and even two enemy military dead are buried in 72 Commonwealth war cemeteries and plots and over 1,900 civil cemeteries in Australia. The Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG) also maintains [Cowra Japanese War Cemetery](#) and [Tatura German War Cemetery](#) for their respective Governments.

Many Australian war cemeteries and graves are close to the sites of Second World War military bases and facilities and each plays a unique part in telling the story of Australia at war.



There are several in Queensland,

- **Atherton War Cemetery**, cnr Kennedy Hwy and Rockley Rd, Atherton. 164 Grave sites.
- **Bundaberg War Cemetery**, cnr Isis Hwy and Bolewski St, Bundaberg West. 46 Grave sites.
- **Cairns War Cemetery**, cnr Anderson and Martyn Sts, Cairns North. 117 Grave sites.
- **Charters Towers War Cemetery**, cnr Gregory Development Rd and Chapman Lane, Charters Towers. 33 Grave sites.
- **Ipswich General Cemetery** cnr Warwick Rd and Carr St, Ipswich. 101 Grave sites.
- **Lutwyche War Cemetery**, cnr Gympie and Kitchener Rds, Kedron, Brisbane. 397 Grave sites.
- **Rockhampton War Cemetery**. Cnr Bruce Hwy and Moores Creek Rd, Rockhampton. 35 Grave sites.



- **Toowoomba War Cemetery.** Cnr Hampton and South Sts, Toowoomba. 65 Grave sites.
- **Townsville War Cemetery.** Evans St, Belgian Gardens, Townsville. 222 Grave sites.

The Lutwyche War Cemetery in Brisbane contains 397 graves of service men and women (Click [HERE](#) for the list). These graves contain 389 Second World War burials, 1 being an unidentified Australian Airman, 9 burials from the First World War and 3 burials of other nationalities. The graves also contain the Queensland Cremation Memorial which commemorates 36 members of the Australian Forces who died in Queensland during the Second World War and whose remains were cremated.



With graving docks capable of accommodating destroyers and fuelling facilities, Brisbane became a naval base during the Second World War due to its ideal location on the Brisbane River. This location was navigable by large vessels from Moreton Bay to the city and had graving docks capable of accommodating destroyers and also fuelling facilities.

Upon the entry of Japan into the war, fixed defences were provided and manned in Brisbane and American detachments arrived and established themselves there. Allied Air Forces headquarters, a general intelligence unit and the headquarters of the General Office Commanding in Chief Australian Military Forces were in Brisbane and in July 1942 the American Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, South-West Pacific Area moved his Headquarters from Melbourne to Brisbane to be nearer the scene of the operations in Papua and New Guinea.

Lutwyche Cemetery was established in 1878 and in 1925, Brisbane's tram network was extended to reach the cemetery. This allowed easier public access for grieving families. After the outbreak of the Pacific War, the







Brisbane City Council allotted a portion of the cemetery to military burials. This War Graves Section became the post-war responsibility of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. After the arrival of American forces in Brisbane, the US was also granted its own War Graves Section but it was later moved to the Ipswich Cemetery. In 1947, the US service personnel were exhumed and shipped back to the US for interment in domestic cemeteries.



By the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, with Brisbane's older cemeteries at Toowong and Dutton Park having limited burial space, wartime burials had to be directed towards the Lutwyche or Mt Gravatt Cemeteries. Unlike Mt Gravatt Cemetery, Lutwyche Cemetery was easily accessible via public transport and so it was chosen to be the location of those service personnel who died around Brisbane after 1942.

On 28 November 1942, the Brisbane City Council announced that the soldier's section at Toowong Cemetery was nearly full and that subsequently any future military deaths would be buried at Lutwyche. Council set aside a special section that was to resemble the post-World War I Gallipoli and French war cemeteries. The war graves section had no walls. There was no tiling around the graves that were to be placed around a central memorial. Initially it was planned that plaques instead of headstones would be the grave markers but this changed. The headstones were rectangular with rounded tops and were differentiated only by the inscriptions that record the national emblem or regimental rank, the name, unit, date of death, age and religious symbol if applicable.



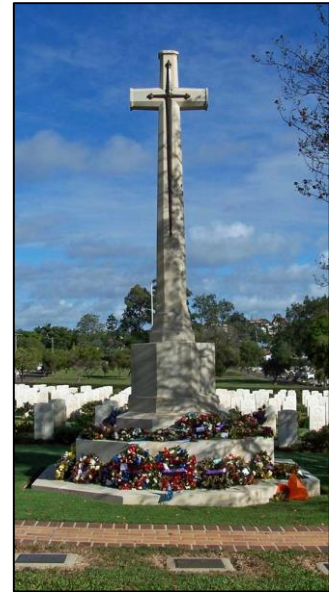
Post-war, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission assumed maintenance of the Lutwyche Cemetery's War Grave's Section. The Commission had been established during World War I in an effort to mark, record and maintain the graves of British Commonwealth war casualties. With



the onset of World War II, the Commission continued its work, establishing new cemeteries throughout the World in honour of the fallen.

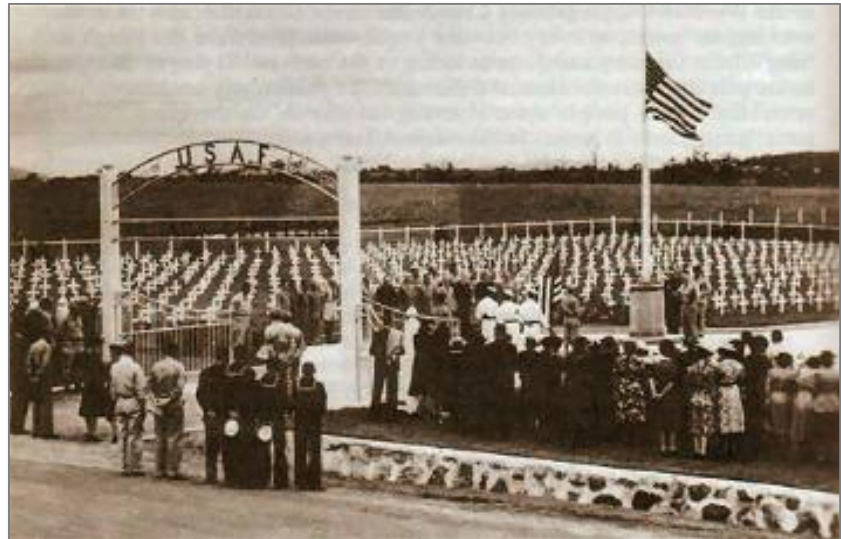
Lutwyche Cemetery's War Graves Section consists of ten rows of white marble gravestones, including one of an unidentified Australian airman (RAAF). In cemeteries of more than 40 burials, a Cross of Sacrifice was erected as the central memorial. Reginald Blomfield's design consisted of a simple cross-mounted on an octagonal base as was placed in Lutwyche Cemetery. The Section has well maintained gardens with low-growing plants and manicured lawn. The Lutwyche Cemetery has several lawns with the graves of other ex-service men and women and their spouses.

In 1942, the United States armed forces established a separate War Graves Section at Lutwyche Cemetery. This was located in the southeast corner facing Gympie Road. The US Section held 11 graves. All were exhumed in June 1942 and transferred to the US War Graves Section at Ipswich Cemetery, where all the American dead were to be concentrated.



After the war, the US Government requested that its service personnel be disinterred for removal for permanent burial in US cemeteries. The US merchantmen *Gauchec Victory* berthed in Brisbane in November 1947 to carry the exhumed bodies back to the USA.

The clearing of the US War Graves Section at the Ipswich was completed by 20 December 1947. As a sign of respect for the US contribution to the defence of Queensland, a coffin holding the body of an unknown US soldier was ceremoniously placed in Brisbane City Hall on 22 December for the public to pay homage. A solemn funeral parade



carried this coffin through Brisbane streets to the Newstead Wharf where it was placed aboard *Gauchec Victory*. Approximately 30,000 Brisbane residents lined the streets for this funeral procession. The last 1,800 American coffins had been transported to Brisbane and sent by ship to the USA by the end of December 1947.





## Computer Addiction.



## Billy Sing

The Cemetery is also the final resting place of trooper Billy Sing.

William "Billy" Sing was born in 1886 to an English mother and Chinese father. He and his two sisters were brought up in Clermont and Proserpine, in rural Queensland. Life on the land was tough and from a young age Billy had to help his parents with their market garden and milk deliveries. He was also a talented horse rider and skilled at shooting.

When war broke out in 1914, Billy rushed to sign up. As one of the first to enlist, Billy was not subjected to the degree of later resistance against recruiting non-white





Australians into the AIF and he was accepted into the 5th Light Horse Regiment. He was sent to Egypt in December 1914 and onto Gallipoli in May 1915.

At Gallipoli, Billy was given the nickname “the Murderer” or “the Assassin” for his skill as a sniper. A fellow soldier described him as, “a little chap, very dark, with a jet black moustache and a goatee beard. A picturesque looking man-killer. He is the crack sniper of the Anzacs.” Every morning in the darkness before dawn Billy would find a place to hide and watch over the Turkish soldiers in their trenches. Waiting patiently with a “spotter” he would wait for an enemy soldier to come into view. To avoid becoming a target of the Turkish snipers themselves, the Australians would stay in their position until nightfall.

The ANZAC war diary for 23 October 1915 states:

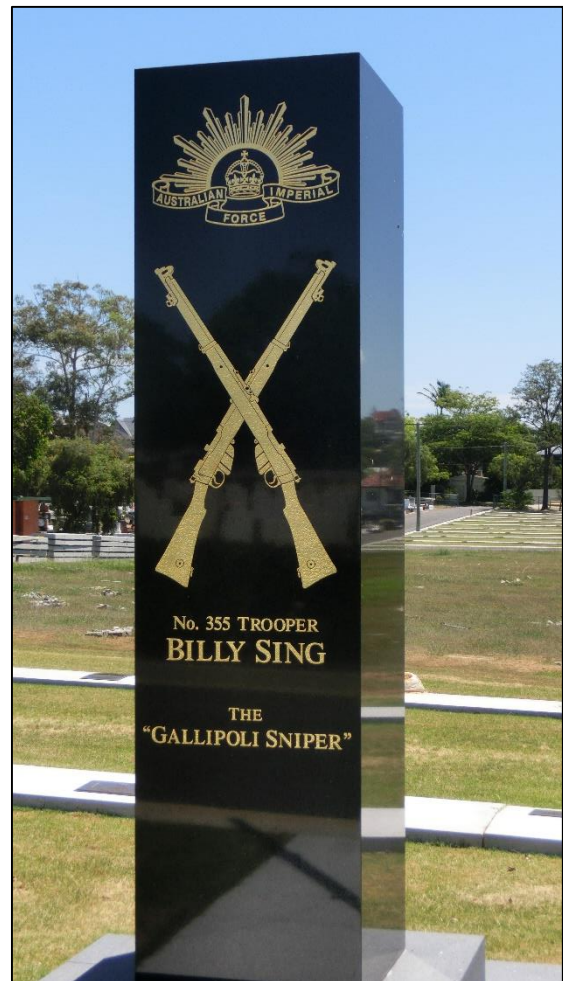
“Our premier sniper, Trooper Sing, 2nd L.H., yesterday accounted for his 199th Turk. Every one of this record is vouched for by an independent observer, frequently an officer who observes through a telescope.”

Billy’s fame spread beyond the soldiers at Gallipoli, and his tally was written about in the Australian, British and American press.

The Turkish Army was also aware of Billy’s reputation. In an effort to eliminate him, they brought in their own crack shot, a man known to the Australians as “Abdul the Terrible”. It is thought Abdul came very close to fulfilling his mission. In August 1915, a single bullet, fired from the Turkish side, passed through Sheehan’s telescope and through his hands, mouth, and cheek before hitting Billy in the shoulder.

In the end, it was Billy who shot and killed Abdul. The Turkish army immediately retaliated, aiming its heavy artillery at Billy’s hiding position and completely destroying it. Fortunately for the Australian sniper and his spotter, they had already evacuated to their unit trenches.

For his efforts on Gallipoli, Billy was Mentioned in Despatches by General Sir Ian Hamilton, and awarded the British Distinguished Conduct Medal in 1916 for “Conspicuous Gallantry from May to September 1915 at Anzac as a sniper. His courage and skill were most marked and he was



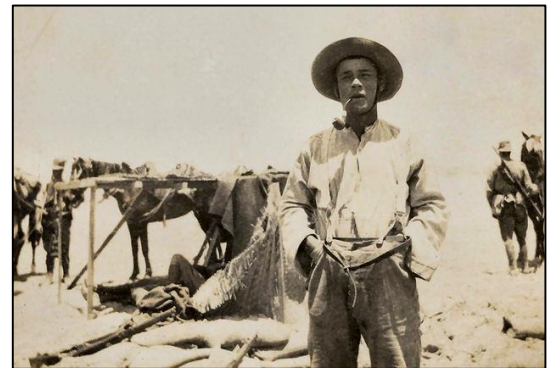




responsible for a very large number of casualties among the enemy, no risk being too great for him to take”.

The Australian soldiers were evacuated from Gallipoli in December 1915 and Billy was sent first for training in England and then to fight in France as part of the 31st Battalion. The type of warfare on the Western Front, was different to that on Gallipoli. It is unlikely that, as a sniper, Billy spent much of his time on the battlefield, nevertheless, his skills were put to good use. In 1917, he was recommended for, though not awarded, the Military Medal for his actions leading an anti-sniper fighting patrol at Polygon Wood, in Belgium. He was again Mentioned in Dispatches for gallantry, this time by the Commander of I ANZAC Corps, General Birdwood, and in 1918, awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre.

Billy's health suffered during his service, and he was frequently hospitalised to treat ailments ranging from serious infections to influenza. He was wounded on a number of occasions and one gunshot wound to the leg caused him problems for years. In 1917, while recuperating from illness in Britain, Billy married Elizabeth Stewart, a 21-year-old waitress from Scotland. Little is known about her or her marriage, and it is not even certain that she accompanied him back to Australia.



Billy returned to Australia in July 1918 as a submarine guard on board the troopship SS Boonah. Shortly afterwards he was permanently discharged as a result of being unfit for duty due to ongoing chest problems. He returned to Proserpine, Queensland, to a hero's welcome, which included the presentation of a purse of sovereigns from well-wishers. Whether or not Elizabeth had accompanied Billy back to Australia, they were permanently separated by the time he took up a Soldier Settlement farm a few years after his return. This venture failed, as did an attempt to strike it lucky in the Miclere gold fields near his property in Clermont.

In 1942 Billy moved to Brisbane to be near his surviving sister, Beatrice.

A year later Billy Sing died of heart failure at the age of 57. All that remained of this one-time famous sniper was a miner's hut (worth around £20), and 5 shillings found in his room in a boarding house. There was no sign of his medals or awards from the war. Billy was buried at Lutwyche Cemetery in Brisbane. His headstone highlights his skills as a sniper, and reads:

“His incredible accuracy contributed greatly to the preservation of the lives of those with whom he served during a war always remembered for countless acts of valour and tragic carnage.”



## Computer Addiction.



## Aircraft Cemetery.

Victorville in California is perhaps most famous for its airliner storage and recycling businesses. Photographically, the airfield is a fairly tough nut to crack from the outside, so the best way to see it is from the air,

The airport at Victorville is now known as Southern California Logistics Airport (SCLA), having once been George AFB, latterly a base for F-4G Phantoms of the 35th FW. The military left in 1992 and since then the airfield has been in civilian hands. A good deal of money has been invested in facilities to encourage air transport carriers to take advantage of its good road and rail links to the San Bernardino and Los Angeles area, but the airport is most famous as a site of airliner storage and reclamation.





The main company involved in that line of work is Southern California Aviation, which look after the majority of the stored aircraft. Some of the aircraft are in temporary storage, often at the end of a lease period, and will eventually pass to other operators for further use. Some have reached the end of their careers and will eventually be 'parted out'; picked clean of reusable spare parts and the remains sold for scrap.



Most of the stored machines retain the colours of their last operator and some airlines can be sensitive about "their" aircraft being photographed in a state of some disrepair, so photography is not encouraged on the airfield and in any case, most of the storage area is somewhat distant from the road. This means the best way of viewing the stored aircraft begins at nearby Apple Valley Airport.

Apple Valley is the home of Midfield Aviation, a typically friendly FBO (Fixed Base Operator) who offer a variety of aviation services including flying instruction. With Victorville lying approximately 10 minutes' flight time away, it is easy to take a trial lesson and head over for a few circuits and take some photos in the process!





The aircraft in storage are primarily former airline machines, but come from a huge variety of backgrounds. The majority are actually freighters, with most being ex-FedEx A310s, 727s and DC-10s. Each of these fleets is being run down to a varying degree, as more modern types are delivered.

Passenger 747-400s in storage included a single United Airlines example and three from British Airways; during the height of the financial crisis in 2008-9, there were more BA jets present, but these have now returned to service. With the airline anticipated to begin retirement of its large 747 fleet shortly, the aircraft at Victorville would seem unlikely to fly for BA again.

The remainder of the stored aircraft are made up of a mix of single aisle and wide body types, primary of American origin, such as 737s, 757s, MD-80s and MD-11s. There are a significant number of former Delta Airlines Tristars still in storage; the airline was the last major US carrier to operate Lockheed's sole wide body airliner, retiring its last example in 2001. Scrapping of the remaining examples has started, although one is believed to be earmarked for preservation at the Joe Davis Heritage Airpark in Palmdale.

All in all it was sad so many forlorn looking aircraft living out their final days under the desert sun. In particular, with the 747 disappearing from service at an alarming rate, it would appear that Boeing's Queen of the Skies is in terminal decline! As modern, purpose built and fuel efficient cargo aircraft such as the 777F find favour with operators, it would appear that there is little appetite for converting retired airliners into freighters; better for the planet perhaps, but certainly not as photogenic!



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