



FAMILIES
OF VETERANS GUILD
Proudly owned & operated by Australian War Widows NSW Ltd

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THE GUILD DIGEST

SPECIAL EDITION WAR WIDOWS DAY 2024



AUSTRALIAN WAR WIDOWS NSW LIMITED

Trading as

FAMILIES OF VETERANS GUILD

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www.familiesofveterans.org.au

"We all belong to each other.

*We all need each other. It is in serving each other
and in sacrificing for our common good that we are
finding our true life."*

– King George VI, 1941

Under the patronage of

**The Honourable Margaret Beazley
AC KC, Governor of New South Wales**

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The Guild Digest has been checked thoroughly
and to the best knowledge is correct.
However, errors may occur which are
beyond our control. If this should happen, we
apologise most sincerely.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Events & Key Dates

**Online Christmas macrame
workshop**

5 December 2024

International Volunteer Day

5 December 2024

Canberra wellness walk

6 December 2024

The Entrance Christmas lunch

9 December 2024

Key Commemorative Dates

**Arrival of first Australian forces in
Afghanistan (2001)**

3 December 2024

**Last Australian Soldiers Evacuate
Gallipoli (1915)**

20 December 2024

**Conclusion of Operation SLIPPER,
Afghanistan (2014)**

31 December 2024

**Commonwealth of Australia
proclaimed (1901)**

1 January 2025

**Battle of Rafa, Sinai Peninsula
(1917)**

9 January 2025

**Cessation of hostilities in Vietnam
by Australian forces (1973)**

11 January 2025

Human Rights Day
10 December 2024

Batemans Bay regional visit
11 December 2024

Head office Christmas closure
23 December - 5 January

World War Orphans Day
6 January 2025

Australia Day
26 January 2025

**Ambush at Gemench Bridge,
Malaya (1942)**
14 January 2025

**International Holocaust
Remembrance Day**
27 January 2025

Tet offensive, Vietnam (1968)
30 January 2025

**HMAS Melbourne and HMAS
Voyager collision (1964)**
10 February 2025

**Radii Beach massacre, Dutch East
Indies (1942)**
16 February 2025

Bombing of Darwin (1942)
19 February 2025

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*Member and war
widow Michelle
Carr in front of the
Cenotaph with her
two children at the
War Widows Day
Service.*

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*Print out of the
poem 'What if?'
that was read
by member and
war widow Jenny
Ware, closing the
War Widows Day
Service.*



We are thrilled to welcome you to this special edition of *The Guild Digest*, dedicated to honouring our remarkable war widows. This edition is particularly close to our hearts as it coincides with War Widows Day—an important day of recognition and remembrance.

War Widows Day, observed on 19 October annually, is a significant occasion where we come together to acknowledge and appreciate the immense sacrifices made by the war widows and widowers of Australia. These brave individuals, who have lost their loved ones in service to our country, face the challenges of grief and isolation with unwavering strength. This day serves as an opportunity for us to break the silence and honour their stories.

This year, we held a unique and special service at the Cenotaph in Martin Place, Sydney. The ceremony began with a heartfelt welcome from Board Chair, Tricia Hobson, who emphasised the importance of recognising the sacrifices of war widows and their families. The service paid tribute to the legacy of Jessie Vasey, founder of the War Widows Guild, and acknowledged the contributions of past leaders, the late Audrey Blood OAM and Diana Bland.

We were honoured by the presence of our Patron, Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW, as well as many other distinguished guests. Their support and recognition of our war widows' sacrifices added profound significance to the event.

A particularly moving moment during the service was when war widows of all generations, along with their children and carers, laid a sprig of wattle in silent reflection. This act served as a poignant reminder of the reality of their sacrifices and the enduring impact on their lives.

Our new tradition of leaving the final word to a war widow continued with the reading of a touching poem titled '*What if,*' reflecting on the love and sacrifice of a widow whose husband served Australia with pride and honour. This heartfelt tribute resonated deeply with all in attendance.

Following the ceremony, we hosted a special lunch for our war widows at the Fullerton Hotel. During the lunch, we continued to honour their contributions with a special welcome from our President, Queen Dunbar and special messages from Jessie Vasey's granddaughter and the Governor General of Australia. These tributes highlighted the tenacity and strength of these incredible women who have built and sustained our organisation.

This edition of *The Guild Digest* is dedicated to all of you—our cherished war widows. We hope that this special edition brings you comfort, recognition and a sense of belonging. Your stories of love, sacrifice and resilience are the foundation of our organisation, and we are deeply honoured to share them with the world.

Thank you for your unwavering strength and dedication. We are privileged to have you as part of our community, and we look forward to continuing to support and honour you in every way possible.





Welcome to this special edition of *The Guild Digest*. I was honoured to be the Master of Ceremonies during our War Widows Day Lunch and it was my privilege to spend this special day in your company.

On War Widows Day, we pay tribute and express our gratitude to all those who have served in defence of Australia and their families. Most of all, we pay our respect to you, our war widows, and acknowledge the sacrifices you and your families have made in service to our country.

War Widows Day is your day, an opportunity to tell your story, a day when we honour you and your journeys of love and sacrifice.

War Widows Day is significant to our community. It is also significant to every single person who has a connection to defence service, as this day highlights the invisible service of our war widows and widowers, and their families. It highlights their existence, their duty, their sacrifice.

The day is significant for every single Australian because if it was not for you, we would not be living in a peaceful and safe country. On War Widows Day, every Australian can say “thank you” for your devotion, for your service and for the inspiration you are to us all.

When I look back on our day, I can only imagine how much Jessie Vasey would have been proud of a day like this. I can imagine she would have been proud to see us all out of the shadows of war and grief,

embracing each other and standing united as one.

On War Widows Day we are seen, heard and our sacrifices are honoured and acknowledged. This is valuable for me. And every year, as we gain momentum, our stories are told to many more Australians.

Australians need to hear the voices of war widows, of women, men and veteran families. We hear many stories of veterans who are impacted by their service, but we don't hear enough stories of those who carry the burden of service long after that service ends.

These are the stories we tell; for those are the stories that will bring about significant and meaningful change, and lasting bonds. Those are the stories that unite widows, widowers and veteran families.

Just like the war widows of 1946 and beyond, the women and families connected to the Australian Defence Force are no Cinderellas. We are not waiting for someone to come and save us; we don't want pity or charity. We want to be empowered with skills to help ourselves and our loved ones.

We need each other and we need a place to belong. We have been gifted that place and it is up to us to keep this legacy alive, to join, to be seen, to be heard and to help each other.

MS QUEEN DUNBAR State President



From left to right: Queen Dunbar, with Former State Presidents Wendy Thompson and Meg Green AM.



As Board Chair, it is my privilege to welcome you to this special edition of *The Guild Digest*, dedicated to our third annual War Widows Day.

On 19 October, it was an honour for me to be standing at the symbolic and meaningful location that is the Cenotaph with many of our members and war widows present.

We are always so pleased to deliver this service for war widows and widowers around Australia, their families and our broader community. It is a very special and unique service because it is the only service that honours the stories and the sacrifices of war widows, the families of our veterans.

The story of our organisation is one of women banding together to help other women. That story continues today and goes back almost 80 years.

In her book 'No Mean Destiny', author Mavis Thorpe Clark noted "*The story of the War Widows Guild is a powerful story of the energy released through grief of women fighting for their children and their mates. It tells of a great success and living proof that heaven helps those who help themselves.*"

These philosophies continue to guide us today as the organisation ensures that no widow or family member of a veteran is left behind or disadvantaged as a result of their loved one's service.

On War Widows Day, we honour war widows past and present and our founder - for what they have sacrificed and given so we benefit today.

War Widows Day serves as a reminder of Australia's history, of the cost of our peace and security and the foundations on which our country was built. It serves as a reminder that every day, when a veteran puts a uniform on, there is a family beside them, serving and sacrificing for our nation as well.

Australia's long history of war service dates back over 100 years and it has been the war service and indeed the widows and widowers of that service who have shaped the Australia we know today.

The loved ones left behind endured perpetual worry, the fear of illness, and the burden of single-handedly providing for their children. The confidence they had when bidding their partners goodbye was eroded by the harsh realities of war and separation.

A day like War Widows Day shines a light on the individuals who stand under the long shadow of war, who stood beside and behind our nation's veterans.

In honouring the women who paved the path we stand upon today, we acknowledge their strength and the indomitable spirit that continues to guide us.

On War Widows Day we paused, listened and learned from their stories of love and sacrifice.

To the widows and widowers reading this message today, thank you, for all you have given and sacrificed for the Australia we enjoy today. You continue to inspire, to teach us and we are so grateful to be in your lives and to be here for you.

MS TRICIA HOBSON
Board Chair





The Honourable Matt Keogh MP and Senator, the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC laying wreaths at the 25th anniversary of Australian service in East Timor, held in Canberra.

After three years and thousands of submissions, the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide has delivered their final report to Government.

The Report is an important body of work which marks the culmination of the most significant and comprehensive inquiry conducted into suicide and suicidality in the defence and veteran communities. The report comprised more than 3,000 pages of evidence, commentary and findings across 7 volumes, culminating in 122 recommendations.

As a Government, we're committed to taking action, and taking that action swiftly with a response to the Report be delivered before the end of the year.

Recommendation 122 of the Final Report was to "establish a new statutory entity to oversee system reform across the whole Defence ecosystem".

The Government agrees with the need for an independent oversight body and is working through the detail of this and the other recommendations through the usual Cabinet processes.

The Royal Commission has noted governments at all levels must work together to improve veterans' wellbeing and reduce the risk of suicide and suicidality, that work has already begun.

I hope you take this as a sign of action to come, but judge us not on what we say, but what we do.

In this regard it is worth noting that the Government has taken action on every recommendation made by the Royal Commission in its 2022 Interim Report, with 9 of its 13 recommendations already implemented in full.

This includes work to simplify and harmonise the framework for veteran rehabilitation, compensation and other entitlements.

As you're aware, the Government has introduced the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill 2024 to Parliament.

Following passage of this Bill, from 1 July 2026, all new claims received would be investigated and determined under an improved Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA).

I understand some in your community are concerned about some terminology in this Bill, namely "war widow/widower" and "wholly dependent partner". We are open to an alternative, consistent term should it be agreed to by the veteran family community. I thank all those who have been involved in consultations on determining such a term.

I want to sincerely thank everyone — many in your community — who contributed to the work of the Royal Commission. I commend them for their bravery in sharing often harrowing stories about their own experiences and those who have given a voice to loved ones unable to share their own story.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the 25th anniversary of Australian service in Timor-Leste. I had the great honour of participating in commemorative events in Timor-Leste and in Canberra to pay tribute to all those who served in these Peacekeeping operations, and their families.

I know many of your loved ones have played a role in Peacekeeping, I pay my respects to them, and to you, who bore the uncertainty and anxiety that comes with a loved one deployed.

This Remembrance Day we especially honoured the remarkable individuals who put their hands up to be keepers of the peace - their bravery, their dedication, and their professionalism.

And we paused to remember all those who have been lost, no matter the nature of the operation.

Lest we forget.

THE HON MATT KEOGH MP
Minister for Veterans Affairs
Minister for Defence Personnel



Minister Harris with President Queen Dunbar at the 2024 Remembrance Day Commemoration.

It's a pleasure to be able to share an update with you on a number of important activities that have taken place across our state.

In September, the Premier's Anzac Memorial Scholarship tour travelled to Japan. Twenty scholars and three teachers visited significant military and cultural sites in Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nara and Osaka. Student applications for the PAMS 2025 tour will open in early 2025 and students can register their interest by visiting this site: www.veterans.nsw.gov.au/pams

The War Widows Day service took place at the Cenotaph at Martin Place on Saturday 19 October. I am pleased that NSW has a designated annual War Widows Day. It's important the community has an opportunity to recognise the sacrifices made by the families of our veterans. While this year I was unfortunately unable to attend the ceremony, I appreciated that the Honourable Mark Buttigieg MLC was able to represent the NSW Government on my behalf and understand it was a wonderful occasion.

Also in October, I announced the successful applicants for Round 1 of the Community War Memorials Fund. This program provides funding to help conserve, repair and protect war memorials across NSW. We have opened applications for Round 2 and I encourage you all to liaise with your local community to see if your local war memorial would benefit from any funding.

Visit www.veterans.nsw.gov.au/grants.

Remembrance Day is a special date on the calendar. This year I had the privilege of hosting the Sunrise Service as well as attend the NSW Remembrance Day Service at the Cenotaph in Martin Place on the 11th of the 11th. Remembrance Day is an opportunity to pause and reflect, and to remember all who have served and are currently serving, and their families. As a state, we came together to pause for one minute, to commemorate the service and sacrifice of our veterans.

On 24 November we acknowledged the 90th anniversary of the opening of the Anzac Memorial. The day included special tours, talks, performances and an official commemorative service. It was wonderful to see the crowds of people participating in this occasion at our state's principal war memorial.

If you would like to support the Anzac Memorial in this 90th year, you can make a donation or buy a virtual star to commemorate a veteran. More information is available at: www.anzacmemorial.nsw.gov.au/support-memorial

In early 2025, the NSW Government will launch the NSW Veterans Strategy 2025-30. This is the next iteration of the Veterans Strategy originally launched in 2021, and it will see a new Action Plan that takes on board recommendations from the final report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. The NSW Office for Veterans Affairs will distribute the Strategy and Action Plan throughout the Defence community.

Yours sincerely,

THE HON DAVID HARRIS MP
 Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty
 Minister for Gaming and Racing
 Minister for Veterans
 Minister for Medical Research
 Minister for the Central Coast

Honouring War Widows: *a day of reflection and gratitude*

Every year, War Widows Day provides a vital opportunity to recognise and honour the immense sacrifices made by the spouses of Australia's military personnel. This day is not only a moment of solemn reflection on the past but also a celebration of the resilience and strength of the war widows community. Through heartfelt ceremonies and communal gatherings, we come together to listen, remember and express our deepest gratitude for their unwavering dedication and support.



War Widows Day is a significant occasion dedicated to recognising and connecting Australian war widows. It ensures they feel honoured and acknowledged and gives us the opportunity to say thank you for what they have sacrificed. Across New South Wales alone, there are more than 10,700 war widows, some of whom face the challenges of grief and isolation. On War Widows Day, we acknowledge them and remind them that they are not alone.

This year, we hosted our third annual War Widows Day Service at the Cenotaph in Martin Place, Sydney. The ceremony opened with the War Widows Motto, recited by President Queen Dunbar, which beautifully encapsulates the spirit of unity and mutual support: *"We all belong to each other. We all need each other. It is in serving each other and in sacrificing for our common good that we are finding our true life."*

A moving tribute followed, celebrating the legacy of Jessie Vasey CBE OBE. Former State President Wendy Thompson and former Director Lynne Boyd

delivered a touching war widows address, reflecting on the enduring legacy of their late friends Audrey Blood OAM and Diana Bland.

Once again, we turned the focus of the service to those we were gathered to honour, our war widows. As war widows of all generations, their children and carers made their way, one by one, to lay a sprig of wattle in silent reflection, it was difficult not to be moved. Seeing the widows rise together makes it all very real for those in attendance.

The ceremony also included the laying of wreaths by honoured guests, including Her Excellency, The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW, and representatives from various government and veteran organisations. This act of remembrance was a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made by the partners of those who served our country.

As has become a new tradition at our events, we left the final word to a war widow who shared a poem *"What if"*, reflecting on the love, story and sacrifice of a widow whose husband served Australia with pride and honour. This heartfelt reading brought the ceremony to a close, leaving everyone with a deep sense of gratitude.

Following the service, attendees gathered for lunch at the Fullerton Hotel that was both a continuation of the day's commemorations and a celebration of the community's strength and resilience. The lunch Master of Ceremonies was Queen Dunbar, our State President who warmly welcomed everyone and acknowledged the presence of former Presidents, Directors and Life Members.

The lunch began with Former State President, Rhondda Vanzella OAM, leading the War Widows Motto, followed by a call for a minute of silence

to honour all war widows who have passed. This moment of reflection was deeply moving, as it allowed everyone to pause and remember those who are no longer with us.

A special highlight of the lunch was the Table of Remembrance, a tradition at events where a meal is shared, to honour those who never came home and the war widows who have passed. Former State President Meg Green AM highlighted the significance of this table by reading a moving poem, reminding everyone of the sacrifices made by those who served and their families.

The lunch also featured a special video tribute, showcasing the stories of love and sacrifice from war widows past and present. This video was a heartfelt tribute to the resilience and strength of the war widows community, and it was met with great appreciation from all attendees. Scan the QR code on this page to view this video.

After the main course, Queen Dunbar read a special message from Jessie Vasey's granddaughter, reflecting on Jessie Vasey's legacy and the impact of her work in founding the War Widows Guild: *"Like all other war widows in Australia, my grandmother Jessie Vasey CBE OBE lost her husband, Major General George Alan Vasey, in the defence of Australia.*

"I have often wondered what it was in her that, after such a shock, allowed her to be as effective and successful as she was. One reason perhaps was her desire to build a place for widows and their children, and for herself too. For widows to have a home, for their humanity and losses to be recognised, and for an assurance that they could raise their children. Through founding the War Widows Guild, and through Vasey Housing Auxiliary, she worked to rebuild homes, livelihoods and women's self-confidence. I think from



the beginning, she knew what an emotional and intellectual challenge it would be; she said that it was 'No mean destiny to be called upon to go on for a man who had laid down his life.'"

But the biggest surprise for all in attendance was a very special message from the Governor General of Australia, dedicated to all war widows and families to honour their sacrifice this War Widows Day. You can read more about this special message on page 18.

The lunch concluded with closing remarks from Queen Dunbar, who reflected on the significance of the day and the importance of honouring the stories of war widows. She emphasised the need for the voices of war widows to be heard and for their sacrifices to be acknowledged and honoured.

As our Board Chair said in her reflection on War Widows Day, *"in honouring the women who paved the path we stand upon today, we acknowledge their strength and the indomitable spirit that continues to guide us. Today we pause, listen and honour their stories of love and sacrifice. To the widows and widowers here today, thank you, for all you have given and sacrificed for the Australia we enjoy today. You continue to inspire us, to teach us so much and we are so grateful to be in your lives and to be here for you."*

The day was a beautiful blend of solemn reflection and heartfelt gratitude, ensuring that the sacrifices of war widows are never forgotten. It was a day to break the silence, to honour the past and to look forward with hope and unity.

On the following pages, you can view images of the day.

Scan the QR code
to view our video tribute



A DAY TO REMEMBER YOUR STORIES



"It was a pleasure to celebrate War Widows Day with so many other war widows"
- War Widow



"It was very well presented and put together"
- War Widow





*"Thank you for a magical War Widows Day."
- War Widow*



*"The Service was extremely moving and humbling for us to be so honoured at our beautiful Cenotaph."
- War Widow*



A DAY TO REMEMBER YOUR STORIES



"Thank you for hosting an absolutely perfect War Widows Day ceremony and lunch"
- War Widow



"Thank you for a most memorable War Widows Day"
- War Widow





"I am deeply honoured, humbled and feel very privileged"
- War Widow



"The tribute provided by our ladies was indeed beautiful and fitting for War Widows Day"
- War Widow



A DAY TO REMEMBER YOUR STORIES



*"My heartfelt thanks to the team for a most memorable War Widows Day"
- War Widow*





"Thank you so very much for giving us this wonderful "gift" for Australian War Widows Day"
- War Widow



War Widows Day *club gatherings*

War widows from around New South Wales gathered to mark this War Widows Day. Thank you to all club coordinators and war widows who organised gatherings around the state and sharing some picture with us. Our organisation could not reach this many war widows without the tremendous help of our volunteers. Here is a summary of some of those War Widows Day events.

War Widows Day Commemoration in Penrith

On 18 October, the Nepean War Widows held a commemorative service at Memory Park, Penrith to honour our founder Jessie Vassey and War Widows Day. It was well attended by local dignitaries including Penrith RSL, Penrith RSL Sub-Branch and members.

Our State President, Queen Dunbar, also attended and provided a moving address to mark the occasion.

The commemoration was followed by lunch at Penrith RSL. Thanks from all of us to Penrith RSL Sub-Branch for funding this important event.



Wollongong War Widows Social Club

On 19 October, the Wollongong War Widows Social Club commemorated War Widows Day with a service at their local cenotaph, organised by Pam Bowmaker OAM. The event included invited guests from the local RSL and sub-Branch, along with the Reverend Gordon Bradbery AM, the Lord Mayor of Wollongong and a Minister of the Uniting Church, who led prayers. Special guest Bruce Roberts, a local WIN Television newsreader, shared and recited an original poem as a moving tribute.

Members had painted poppies on rocks, which were laid at the cenotaph as individual tributes. Following the service, the ladies gathered at the City of Wollongong RSL for a private lunch, continuing the day with reflection and connection.



Castle Hill Social Club



War widows from the new social club in Castle Hill enjoyed a War Widows Day morning tea at the Castle Hill RSL, hosted by the Castle Hill sub-Branch and organised by Cheryl Hill, sub-Branch President.

The group was also joined by the coordinator of the Parramatta Social Club. It was a wonderful day of reflection, recognition, support and connection for all in attendance.

Laurieton War Widows Social Club

On Thursday 24 October, the Laurieton War Widows Social Club gathered at North Haven Bowling Club for a lunch to mark War Widows Day.

In the spirit of War Widows Day and honouring the stories of our members, the ladies had the opportunity to honour their dear friend Lorna McCormick who passed in August, and to reflect on their shared bond and stories. This club offers a safe and welcoming environment where members can support one another, share memories, and find comfort in each other's company.



Macksville War Widows Social Club



The Macksville War Widows Social Club, led by coordinator Edna Stride OAM, hosted a high tea at the Macksville Services Club.

Members gathered to enjoy a morning together to mark this important day. A local legatee was also invited to join them, sharing insights into the history and significance of War Widows Day. The event was an opportunity to reflect, celebrate, and honour the legacy of war widows and their families.

War Widows Day Celebration in Narrabeen

On 17 October, the Northern Beaches Social Club gathered for a special War Widows Day celebratory lunch at the RSL ANZAC Village in Narrabeen, where the social club meets every month. Roast lunch was followed by a delicious cake to mark the occasion and a wattle tree plant, a symbol of the resilience of our war widows, was planted near the Remembrance Walk in the Village. A wonderful way to celebrate such a special day!



A very special message from the Governor General



To mark War Widows Day, Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, provided a special message to be played to our members during our War Widows Day Lunch. Her message, dedicated to you all, honours the sacrifices of our war widows and their families. We have transcribed Her Excellency's message for our readers. The video recording is also available to view by scanning the QR code on this page.

“The 19th of October is War Widows Day, a day for all Australians to pay tribute to widows and widowers whose lives have been utterly changed by the loss of a partner serving in the Australian Defence Force.

To those who have lost a veteran partner, we acknowledge your grief and honour your sacrifice.

The visionary and tenacious Jessie Vasey, founder of the War Widows Guild, was herself a war widow. She devoted her life to making sure that as we remember the fallen, we never forget the families left behind. She believed that support, compassion and friendship would give the families of veterans, in her words, the most precious of all human rights, a voice in their own destiny.

Almost 80 years later, the Families of Veterans Guild continues this work today, devoting time and

resources to the well-being of widows, widowers and families, offering the strength of connection and community and advocating for their recognition.

The Guild represents the qualities of care, kindness and respect that are the very best of our nation.

I'm especially delighted today to be able to wear this sprig of wattle, the War Widows Day pin. Not only is wattle our national floral emblem, it is a cherished element of the Governor General's crest. Instantly recognisable, the wattle is an enduring symbol of our nation, and a gift of hope and optimism, which we offer to our veteran families on this day and always.

And on this day, I'd like to encourage Australians to buy one of these important pins to show support for our war widows and take a moment to reflect on their sacrifices.”

Scan the QR code
to view the video message



Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC wearing her War Widows Day pin.

A tribute to our founder

Jessie Vasey CBE OBE



19 October is Jessie Vasey's birthday. Jessie was just 68 when she passed away in September 1966.

By 1966, the War Widows Guild had grown significantly from its humbled beginnings as a craft guild and advocacy group in 1946. It had become a group that no politician could afford to ignore.

Jessie's vision for the Guild was one she shared with her husband Major General George Alan Vasey CB, CBE, DSO & Bar. It was a vision well beyond its time and one that was fuelled by the idea that the era of the dependent female was passing quickly, and that Australia had a responsibility to the women the war left behind.

Jessie herself inspired her peers as she stood against gender and social bias and held government accountable for their promises of help and support.

She would regularly counsel other war widows, empowering them to stand for themselves in a system that was working against them, a system never built to support them as it promised. In rallying her peers in the 1940's she said *"THINK BIG! – Wear your prettiest hat – tell that man behind the desk he's there to help you!"*

World War Two ended with universal rejoicing, but there was no joy of the welcome home to many Australian women; most of them had been very young brides and had children many of their husbands did not live to see. As their husband died young, few women had financial security, and they discovered that living on a war widow's pension meant living on even less than the lowest army pay.

World War Two claimed the life of Jessie's husband, Major-General George Alan Vasey. After his passing, Jessie wrote *"My husband was truly the light of the morning before my eyes and when that light went out, I was drained of all hope of finding my way in darkness."* She also spoke of how her husband's death had left her weary.

Following her husband's death, Jessie turned her mind to creating what they envisaged: a better tomorrow for those the war was leaving behind.

Borne from a sense of responsibility George felt for those under his command and Jessie's resolve to stand for those that needed her, Jessie fought hard for all war widows.

She called on influential friends, fought for adequate pensions, worked on achieving housing stability, set up shops, jumble sales and fetes, and inspired generations of women. Empowering them to thrive through their pain and their families sacrifice. Giving them purpose, meaning and identity back.

Through her tireless dedication and unwavering spirit, Jessie not only restored hope to war widows but also left an indelible mark on history, reminding us all of the power of self-help and the enduring strength of the human spirit.

As one war widow once said, *"I had two husbands – but no one had more impact on my life than Mrs Vasey."*

Her legacy lives on through the countless lives she touched, setting their feet walking again and inspiring them to think big and strive for their best.

"THINK BIG! – Wear your prettiest hat – tell that man behind the desk he's there to help you!" – Jessie Vasey

War Widows Day *address*

This address was delivered during the War Widows Day service at the Cenotaph by Former State President Wendy Thompson and Former Board Director Lynne Boyd. The address included a heartfelt tribute to two remarkable women: the late Audrey Blood OAM and Diana Bland, who were Former Presidents of the War Widows Guild of NSW. Both Audrey and Diana dedicated their lives to serving others and left an enduring legacy within the community.



Lynne Boyd (left) and Wendy Thompson (right) delivering their joint War Widows Day Address.

“War Widows Day means so much to both of us, especially as we reflect on our years of caring and supporting our husbands who served Australia proudly.

Two men who but for their service to Australia, would be growing old with us but sadly were taken too soon because of the impacts of their service.”

Wendy’s husband Keith served during World War Two. He was just 16 when he enlisted and because he was quite tall, he had no trouble convincing the authorities of his age. Fighting for Australia is what was important to him above all else. Keith served in the Solomon Islands, Bougainville and New Guinea. He passed in 1999; Wendy was just 61.

Lynne’s husband, Chicka, served in Vietnam. He was one of the 15,300 Australian conscripts to that war. He always said that lottery was the only “*blood lottery I’ve ever won*”. A lottery that ultimately took him from us as he passed due to Agent Orange exposure.

“I was just 55 when he passed,” says Lynne. “He never got to see his daughter marry, he never got to meet his grandchildren. We feel his absence every moment of every day.”

Wendy and Lynne are two of the 10,700 war widows here in New South Wales. “Our stories are unique to us, but we are connected to these women through our shared experiences of service, sacrifice and love,” they described in their address.

“Following the passing of our husbands, we have found each other. We have also found many beautiful friends here today, and together, we get each other through.”

Lynne confesses “Being a war widow is the last thing that I ever wanted to be. I’d much rather have Chicka here today to walk beside me. Yet I am grateful for the incredible and inspiring women I have met since becoming a war widow.”

War Widows Day is more than just a day. Falling on the birthday of our tenacious founder Jessie Vasey, it reminds us of our history and the resilience upon which our country was built.

It is also a day where we remember where we have come from and the women who have built our organisation. The women on whose shoulders we stand.

“This year Lynne and I will pay tribute to two of our dear friends who have now passed. Women who selflessly served our organisation and who found their purpose following the passing of their husbands in service of other widows,” continued Wendy. “My fellow Former Presidents, Audrey Blood OAM and Diana Bland. Two women whose legacy continues to live through our Motto and the impact they had on the lives of other war widows.



Former State President Audrey Blood OAM.

“Audrey sadly never got to see War Widows Day,” continues Wendy, “she passed in 2022. She was an inspiration to so many, myself included. Joining the Guild in 1986, Audrey commenced volunteering in 1989 and continued her service for 30 years. Audrey supported war widows, bereaved parents and cancer patients and families.

“When I first met Audrey, I remember a lady of tremendous ‘presence’ who had style and was always impeccably groomed. A favourite saying of hers was ‘*The State President is the face of the Guild.*’ And she certainly was putting forward her best. Yet she also always had a softness to her which showed how much she cared about every war widow.

“She knew how to make people feel welcome and encouraged the best in us all. It was this care and compassion that set the tone for her leadership.

“She was awarded an OAM in 2002 for her service to her community and continued her service well after her formal terms as State and National President ended.” concluded Wendy.

Lynne shared “Diana was an incredible woman who, like Audrey, embodied the meaning of service and the War Widows’ Motto, particularly ‘*in serving each other and in sacrificing for our common good we are finding our true life.*’

“Diana joined our Guild in 1993 following the passing of her husband. Within a few years, like Audrey, Diana started to volunteer her time, leadership, compassion and expertise for the benefit of many of

us war widows gathered here today.

“Serving at both the State and National level of the organisation, Diana showed me that though I had lost Chicka, all was not lost. I could fill some of the void he left in my life through building friendships and bonds with others who had suffered like I had. Together, we built a bond that rivaled sisterhood, becoming the confidants to each other that allow us to just be.

“It was a powerful and deeply meaningful bond.

“Like Audrey, Diana didn’t stop serving her ladies when her official terms of office ended. She continued to make thousands of calls to war widows on their birthdays and hand wrote Christmas cards to them – even in the months before her passing in 2023.

“For me personally, it is difficult to put into words how much Audrey and Diane did for me.

“From the moment we met, they encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and try new things. In fact, the day I first walked into the City Saturday Social Club, Diana, who at the time was the President of the club, greeted me with a ‘*I’ve been waiting for you to arrive.*’

“A year later, I was the President of the club and continue to be today. Following in her footsteps as best I can, taking care of our ladies and reminding them we are here, and we care.” concluded Lynne.

Wendy shared “I had the difficult job of following in Audrey and Diane’s footsteps as State President



Former State President Diana Bland.

TRIBUTES TO OUR WAR WIDOWS



From left to right: Former Board Directors Di Vogt and Babara Jeanes, Former State President Diana Bland, Former Board Directors Lynne Boyd and Dawn Wellfare, and Former State President Meg Green AM.

from 2012 to 2015 and I will always remember how they encouraged me to get out there to represent all of our wonderful ladies here today and those who are sadly no longer with us.

“I remember attending a meeting shortly after taking on the role as President, I walked into a room, and it was filled door to door with men in suits, immediately, I felt what many of the women in our organisation have felt being a female leader in this sector. Probably not too dissimilar to what Jessie Vasey felt back in the 40’s.

“I took a deep breath, and I remember hearing Audrey’s voice in my head urging me on to ‘work the room’ for all of the ladies. So that is exactly what I did.

“Like Jessie, Audrey wasn’t scared, she saw herself as equal and in doing so, she would always make sure that no matter the circumstances, our women would be heard.

“Hearing her voice in that moment was everything I needed, and it guided me throughout my term of leadership.”

Wendy explained “I share this today in the hope that it inspires all of those who come after us and all of you here today, the way it inspired me. Because no

matter where we are or how old we are, our voices are important, and they matter deeply.”

Wendy also mentioned how Audrey and Diana also taught everyone the importance of connection and how much women and widows need each other. She explained “They set up tours to rural and regional towns, establishing clubs along the way. Expanding the regional network of war widows significantly, meeting widows where they were and connecting them to each other and their community. Work that I was proud to continue. Connecting with war widows, particularly those in regional areas, simply warms your heart and it always is an honour to be in their presence.

“This work continues today, it is important that no matter where we are in the state or the country, widows know they are not alone and that there are others out there who truly understand and want to learn from them.”

Lynne concluded “These are two stories of war widows; of women who inspired us and positively impacted our lives. Who helped us on our way into and through widowhood. They taught us how the gifts of care, compassion, understanding and support can inspire a new purpose and grow around our grief.

“We are so lucky to have found the Guild, to have known Audrey and Diana. To have learned from them and share that wisdom with you today.”

– Wendy and Lynne.

“It is important that no matter where we are in the state or the country, widows know they are not alone and that there are others out there who truly understand and want to learn from them.”

Thank you *war widows*

Your sacrifices and tireless efforts have paved the way for the freedoms we cherish today, and we are truly grateful. Your journey has not been an easy one. The perpetual worry and the burden of single-handedly providing for your families during times of immense hardship have tested your resolve in ways many of us can scarcely imagine. Yet, through it all, you have shown an indomitable spirit and unwavering commitment to the well-being of your families and our nation.

The stories of women like the late Audrey Blood OAM and Diana Bland, who have inspired and positively impacted many lives, serve as powerful reminders of the legacy you leave behind. These remarkable women, and so many others like them, have taught us the profound gifts of care, compassion, understanding and support. Through your guidance, we have learned to find new purpose and grow around our grief.

Many of our war widows say they are incredibly fortunate to have found the Guild, an organisation



that embodies the principles of women supporting, inspiring and empowering other women. Through the Guild, they have formed lifelong friendships, shared good times and found strength during the hard times. It is often the companionship war widows miss the most, but through your example, we have learned to find solace and support within our community.

Your contributions to the fight for entitlements and rights for your families will never be forgotten. The efforts you have made, the battles you have fought, and the victories you have achieved have laid the groundwork for future generations. Your dedication has ensured that no widow or family member of a veteran is left behind or disadvantaged as a result of their loved one's service.

War Widows Day serves as a powerful reminder of Australia's history, the cost of our peace and security, and the foundations upon which our country was built.

We are grateful for all the women who paved the path we stand upon today; we acknowledge your strength and the indomitable spirit that continues to guide us. Your stories of love and sacrifice inspire us daily.

"Congratulations and thank you for making us feel so special."

MEMBER NOTICES

VALE

Ada Rayner WOLLONGONG
Aggie McClutchey OAM TAREE
Alice Piper BONNY HILLS
Anita West OAM CAMPBELLTOWN
Ann Parks WOY WOY
Antilla Davidson YOUNG
Barbara Herbert CARINGBAH
Barbara Bowden NEW LAMBTON
Barbara Donovan ERINA
Beaty Hawkins INVERELL
Bernice Cooke CRONULLA
Beryl Dahlenburg BLACK MOUNTAIN
Beth Hammond ALLAMBIE HEIGHTS
Betty Baker SYLVANIA
Betty Starr CASTLE HILL
Betty Kennedy BELLEVUE HILL
Betty Cross WERRIS CREEK
Betty Walton GYMEA BAY
Betty Fraser EDGEWORTH
Clare Lidgard CONDELL PARK
Daphne Forrest TORONTO
Edna Boardman DAPTO
Eileen Elphick BURWOOD
Elaine Bryce GREENWELL POINT
Elizabeth Parish YAMBA
Elizabeth Wynn BUNDANOON
Emma Hanna WALLSEND
Enid Edwards GEURIE
Enid Emery BROULEE
Eugene Kent WINDALE
Fay Young LEEVILLE
Frances Farmer BELCONNEN

Freda Morgan RYDE
Gladys Williams WELLINGTON
Gladys Schilg LAVINGTON
Gwen Moore HORNSBY
Hazel Ahkin BEGA
Hazel Tyler WAHROONGA
Irene Slender KILLARNEY VALE
Iris Bourke BLAXLAND
Iris Collins GRAFTON
Ivy Bornefeldt S. WENTWORTHVILLE
Janice Dalton REVESBY HEIGHTS
Jean King BATEAU BAY
Jean Household MUSWELLBROOK
Jean Buxton BATEAU BAY
Jean Cleary SWANSEA
Jean Wales PORT MACQUARIE
Joan Jackson QUEANBEYAN
Joan Fox WESTCOURT
Joan Apperley GLENBROOK
Joy Brown HORNSBY
Joyce Pearse BRAY PARK
Joyce Phillips BAULKHAM HILLS
Joyce Phillips STRATHFIELD SOUTH
Joyce Grieves YASS
June Sim NOWRA
Kathleen Gibson HARDEN
Kathryn Skene DHARRUK
Lindsay Watts JESMOND
Lois McEvoy TURRAMURRA
Lorna McCormick LAURIE TON
Lorraine Emanuel QUAKERS HILL
Lyn Hyland PORT MACQUARIE

Margaret Lawler PANANIA
Margaret Doyle NORTH EPPING
Marlene McIntyre LANITZA
Mary Tagg BUNDEENA
Mavis Elliott SCONE
Mavis Brien CASTLEMAINE
Mavis Atherton PADSTOW
May Lambert ERINA
Moira Murnane LITHGOW
Monica Taffaha RANDWICK
Moya Midena PANANIA
Nita Johnson WINDSOR
Noelene Jackson COFFS HARBOUR
Norma Temens CARINGBAH SOUTH
Norma Allomes PORT MACQUARIE
Norma Stewart KANWAL
Patricia Finch RUTHERFORD
Pauline Taffa GILMORE
Peg Burns WILLOUGHBY
Peggy Dickinson MT WARRIGAL
Phyllis Bunn BAULKHAM HILLS
Rete Moore GLENWOOD
Ruth Burns BATEHAVEN
Shirley McKenzie FORROSTERS B.
Sybil Joel POINT PIPER
Thelma Cotter RANKIN PARK
Valerie Saunders HEATHCOTE
Violet Highett HEATHCOTE
Wilma Hickey CASTLE HILL
Yvonne Williamson CROYDON

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of these members 

What is grief and how to support grief?

Grief is a normal emotional response to the loss of someone or something important to us. Bereavement, grief and loss can cause many different behaviours and feelings, affecting people in various ways.

There is no 'one way' to grieve.

Grief is a common life experience for those connected to defence service and is not always due to bereavement. This free guide is designed to help you navigate the complex and confusing landscape of grief and loss.



Feel free to share this guide with family and friends.

You can download our Grief and Loss Guide by scanning this QR code or call us on 02 9267 6577 to receive it by post.



FAMILIES OF VETERANS GUILD

WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is a normal emotional response to the loss of someone or something important to us.

What does it feel like?
Intense sadness, shock, numbness, anger, loneliness, guilt, pain, relief, confusion, overwhelm - it can feel like a mixture of all of these feelings, sometimes independent of each other. Sometimes more than one at the same time. It can feel very draining; to the point where simple tasks feel very difficult. It's overwhelming, leaving your teeth on leaving the house.

How long does it last?
How long is a piece of string? The intensity of the grief related feelings may come and go over time depending on what is happening around you. Eventually the intensity will ease and the space and time between episodes of intense feelings will grow longer.

When should I seek help?
It is important that you connect with a health professional, your GP, counsellor or psychologist, particularly after a significant loss so they can monitor you and help you manage how you are feeling and the intensity of the waves. It is particularly important to speak to your health professional if the grief you are experiencing is affecting your appetite, your sleep or you are having thoughts of harming yourself.

What types of loss do the Families of Veterans experience?

- Loss of life
- Loss of health (physical and mental health)
- Loss of physical presence (deployment)
- Loss of career
- Loss of financial stability
- Loss of community
- Loss of social support
- Loss of relationships

Navigating Grief and Loss
Please scan the code below to view a recent webinar on navigating grief and loss.

Who can help me?
You, your friends, your GP or health professional and specialist services like Open Arms, Lifeline, Grief Line and Families of Veterans Guild. Importantly, you are never alone.

What do children experience?
Strong feelings. Feelings that are as strong and intense as what adults feel but without the skills to regulate or soothe. Feelings that can be confusing and can be expressed in challenging behaviour. The Kids Helpline has compiled some very good resources to help children through grief and they can be found at kidsline.com.au

Families of Veterans Guild govgild.org.au

Welcome to our new members!

- ☀ Ann Phillips NARRABEEN
- ☀ Annette Boyd BRADDON
- ☀ Betty Barrow PORT MACQUARIE
- ☀ Christine Frame MACQUARIE FIELDS
- ☀ Cinthia Bryson JERRABOMBERRA
- ☀ Dan Keneally SCOTLAND ISLAND
- ☀ Fran O'Donohoe CAMPBELLTOWN
- ☀ Jan Wilson THURGOONA
- ☀ Janette Williams NARRABEEN
- ☀ Janine Hill KILLARA
- ☀ Jennie Morris MAROUBRA
- ☀ Jenny Hammond ALLAMBIE HEIGHTS
- ☀ Jenny Kerslake ETTAMOGAH
- ☀ Joan Green JORDAN SPRINGS
- ☀ Judith Cole CAMPBELLTOWN
- ☀ Kelly Taylor WEST RYDE
- ☀ Laura Perry GRANVILLE
- ☀ Libby Miles MUSWELLBROOK
- ☀ Lisa Stephenson COFFS HARBOUR
- ☀ Marg Elias WODONGA
- ☀ Margaret Eder MIRANDA
- ☀ Sandy Louwrens NARRABEEN
- ☀ Sarah McGarth YASS
- ☀ Sue Lock AMBARVALE
- ☀ Sue Millar HARRINGTON PARK
- ☀ Tina Linnane EAST GEELONG
- ☀ Val Nihill NARRABEEN

We can't wait to get to know you!



War widows who recently turned 100

- Auriel Bartleman HORNSBY
- Brenda Dickinson PORT MACQUARIE
- Dorothy McQueen ASHFIELD
- Florence Webster EAST GRESFORD
- Glen Mitchelson GLENFIELD
- Joan Morgans DEE WHY
- Joy Barden MOSMAN
- Laura Mould COOMA
- Laurel Sharpe COOMBA BAY
- Lola Bachell ERMINGTON
- Maureen Dent SHOAL BAY
- Merle Gill LITHGOW
- Norma Smith EARLWOOD
- Rita Harrison LEETON
- Rosa Priest SOUTH GRANVILLE
- Sheila Bell LENNOX HEAD
- Shirley McAlister MENANGLE
- Velma Reibelt NARRAWEENA



Happy Birthday!

Celebrating some very special 100th birthdays!

Congratulations to all our members who recently celebrated their 100th birthday! They are incredible milestones and we are delighted to share some of the pictures we have received. Congratulation to you ladies!



Velma Reibelt celebrated her birthday at her local social club where she received her life membership certificate and flowers.



Rosa Priest celebrated her birthday surrounded by her family, opening presents from her family and letters from the King and the Governor General of Australia.



Jean Wales celebrating her 100th birthday in style, with presents, great company and Champagne!

Mental Health First Aid

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has recently partnered with Mental Health First Aid, launching free training to support veteran mental health.

The Standard Mental Health First Aid course for the veteran community aims to equip you with the tools and knowledge to support those experiencing mental health problems or crises.

For those undertaking the course, you will learn about common mental health signs and symptoms as well as how to recognise and respond to an emerging or worsening mental health problem. For more information please visit:
www.mhfa.com.au/mental-health-protect

Open Arms

Open Arms is a national counselling and support service for the veteran and defence communities.

If you are a war widow, Open Arms can help you with your challenges and grief. They offer free and confidential counselling by qualified clinicians, group programs and workshops with other war widows, support for your family, and referrals to other services and resources.

You can also access self-help tools and resources on their website, such as podcasts, webinars and factsheets.

Open Arms is here to help you cope and thrive.

You can contact Open Arms anytime on 1800 011 046 or visit:
www.openarms.gov.au.

Technology information

When was the last time you changed your email password?

Our email accounts have become crucial tools for communication. However, they also pose attractive targets for hackers. One of the simplest yet most effective ways to protect your email account from unauthorised access is by regularly changing your password.

Hackers can send malicious emails to your contacts, posing as you. This can lead to problems, including the spread of viruses, phishing scams, and even identity theft.

Remember, keeping your email account secure not only protects your information but also safeguards your contacts from potential threats. Taking a few minutes to update your password can save you and your loved ones a lot of trouble. Make it a habit – your digital security is worth the effort!

Do you have a copy of the Little Black Book of Scams?

In today's digital age, scams are becoming increasingly sophisticated and prevalent. It's crucial to stay informed and vigilant to protect yourself and your loved ones.

The Little Black Book of Scams is an essential guide that helps you recognise, avoid, and report scams. By understanding the tactics used by scammers, you can safeguard your personal information and financial security.

This book covers a wide range of scams, from online fraud to phone scams, and provides practical tips on how to spot and avoid them. It also includes real-life examples and advice on what to do if you fall victim to a scam. Don't wait until it's too late – call us to order your copy on (02) 9267 6577 or download the guide online below by **scanning the QR code**. Arm yourself with the knowledge to outsmart scammers!



Join Our Wellbeing Newsletter Today!

Are you looking to enhance your overall wellbeing? Join our Wellbeing Newsletter, an integral part of our Wellbeing Program designed specifically for war widows and veteran families.

Our newsletter offers valuable information aimed at helping you navigate the unique challenges you may face and resources dedicated to improving your mental, emotional and physical health.

Highlights of our newsletter include:

- Articles on mental health and resilience
- Tips on managing stress and fostering emotional wellbeing
- Updates on upcoming free events tailored for war widows and veteran families
- Inspiring stories from the veteran community to uplift and motivate you
- Access to mindfulness and self-care practices



By signing up, you'll be the first to know about our free events, offering opportunities to connect with others who understand your journey and to participate in activities designed to support your wellbeing. Whether it's a community meet-up, a wellness workshop, or a mindfulness session, our events are here to help you thrive.

Subscribe to our Wellbeing Newsletter today and take the first step towards a healthier, happier you. Sign up for our newsletter by scanning the QR code or call us at (02) 9267 6577.

Assistance with Community Transport

No longer driving and having trouble managing public transport? Contact My Aged Care:
<https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/> or phone: 1800 200 422

When you call, you will be asked a few questions, then you will be able to complete an assessment over the phone or in person at your home. My Aged Care is your portal to services to help you stay safely in your own home or call us for assistance on (02) 9267 6577 and ask for Jo or Pauline.

If you, or someone you know, is having a tough time and needs support, information, or guidance, please reach out to our office or one of these many phone services available.

- **1800 ELDERHelp** – 1800 353 374 (*national free call phone number that automatically redirects callers seeking information and advice on elder abuse with existing phone line service in their jurisdiction*)
- **Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling** – 1800 011 046
- **All-hours Support Line** – 1800 628 036 (*Australian Department of Defence*)
- **Lifeline Australia** – 13 11 14 (*24/7 crisis support line*)
- **Suicide Call Back Service** – 1300 659 467 (*24 hour counselling for suicide prevention and mental health support*)
- **1800RESPECT** - 1800 737 732 (*24 hour sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling service*)
- **Defence Member and Family Support Helpline** – 1800 624 608

'What if...'

Read by Jenny Ware on War Widows Day

If our paths had never crossed
If we'd never been
If our worlds had not diverged
When we were in our teens

If you'd not bumped into me
Way back in '64
If you'd not pursued me
And not knocked upon my door

If there'd been no heartbreak
Of the months you were away
There would have been no homecomings
With those magic heady days

If our paths had never crossed
Then we'd not have had our boys
And the memories you have given me
Have been ones of endless joys.

