

THE EXHIBITOR

NEWSLETTER OF THE ARMY MUSEUM OF SOUTH Australia



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AMOSA Bandiana Trip Nov 2025.....

What started as a request to see the AAHU Repository which is located in the Army Barracks at Bandiana (near Wodonga Victoria), resulted in an adventurous trip visiting the Repository plus four other museums in Bandiana and Puckapunyal. Our Museum Manager (JB), using his knowledge and experience in the military system, requested and obtained approval for a group of up to 50 ARes staff and museum volunteers to participate in an interstate trip visiting the Army Heritage Repository, Army Museum Bandiana and Army Museum Puckapunyal. We also managed to visit the Bonegilla Migrant Museum and the Bendigo Military Museum as we passed near or through the towns. The 2025 Museum Training Program for staff and volunteers was expanded by the inclusion, during the period 17-21 Nov 25, to include a visit to the Bandiana and Puckapunyal Military Areas in Victoria. All ARes staff and museum Volunteers were offered the chance to be involved in the training. Some were automatically unavailable due to other commitments, but we had 50 (+) people who said they could be available which made the trip viable and worthwhile. By the Final Planning Conference, we were down to 41 attendees and then in the final week a few others had to pull out for medical or family reasons, so we departed on our trip with 36 staff and volunteers. The good thing was that this meant we had a few empty seats in the bus so people could spread out a bit. The first day we had to be at Keswick early for a 5am departure. This was done so we would arrive in Bandiana in time for our evening meal and to move into our Barracks accommodation. Bandiana is a Logistics Corps Training area so there is plenty of accommodation and large OR's Mess facilities. There were also lots of



The trip participants outside the Bendigo Military Museum

other trainees in and around the area. One of our volunteers (Don Harvy) proudly told us all that he had spent 2 years during his training in the Regular Army living in the exact same building and on the same floor as the one he was allocated on this trip (a real déjà vu moment). **Day 2** This was our chance to see the Army Heritage Repository. The new manager (Joe) and most of his staff were on hand to talk to us and show us around the facility. There were lots of questions which were all answered to everyone's satisfaction and then we were allowed to wander and talk to the staff in their relevant areas. We didn't get into the Live Weapons Armoury as there weren't enough staff on hand to adequately secure it, but we were promised that those who wanted, could see it the following morning. After lunch we visited the Bonegilla Migrant Museum where AMOSA staff and volunteers visited the old huts used by the migrants, searched the museum's database looking for family members or trying to find people they knew. Three of our group found family members listed and Alex Mericka found details of his father whom he did not really know. The museum staff were also able to show Alex the room his father had lived-in and they gave him a copy of their

Inside this issue

<i>Bandiana Trip</i>	<i>P1</i>
<i>Willo</i>	<i>P2</i>
<i>43 Cadet Unit</i>	<i>P3</i>
<i>Formal dinner</i>	
<i>Aloha AMOSA</i>	<i>P4</i>
<i>Christmas Party</i>	
<i>Restoration of</i>	<i>P5</i>
<i>the Blitz Truck</i>	
<i>Remembrance</i>	<i>P5</i>
<i>Day 2025</i>	
<i>Vietnam War</i>	<i>P6</i>
<i>Memorial Walk</i>	
<i>MAJGEN Eric Lacy</i>	<i>P7</i>
<i>Vowles MC</i>	
<i>Collection</i>	
<i>Thank you</i>	<i>P8</i>
<i>Volunteers</i>	

2026 ACTIVITIES

Wednesday 14th January—
AMOSA re-opens

Sunday 18th January—
Compliance Training
(Guides)

Saturday 14th February —
National Serviceman Day

Wednesday 18th
February—Compliance
Training

Sunday March 1st—Army
Birthday—125 years

Saturday 25th April— Anzac
Day

Wednesday 13th May -
History Lunch

Tuesday 18th August—
Vietnam Veterans Day

AMOSA Bandiana Trip Nov 2025.....

archival information which included a photograph of his father. A very moving time for Alex. **Day 3** We visited the Army Museum Bandiana which is a huge old warehouse building literally full of equipment and exhibits relating to all the Logistics Corps. There was also almost as much heritage equipment (vehicles and guns) displayed outside the museum as there was inside. Those who wished, had the opportunity to visit the Live Weapons Armoury with people being ferried from one area to the other in small groups. The Bandiana Museum also had a large range of souvenirs and mementos which were snapped up by us all.



The Bandiana Museum



A great museum if you are visiting the area.

Day 4 After a leisurely breakfast we were all back into the bus for our move to Puckapunyal where we visited the new combined Armour (RAAC) and Artillery (RAA) facility. The recently installed Artillery collection was from the RAA Museum at North Head in Sydney and has been in



storage for 12 years. This is now a very interesting, combined museum and is well worth a visit. They even have a full Leopard tank cut in half, and you can stand between the two halves and see how everything works.

In the afternoon we moved to Bendigo to see the Bendigo Military Museum which is located in the centre of Bendigo in a recently refurbished heritage building. Another museum well worth visiting if you are passing through the district. **Day 5** This was the last day of the course and for us it meant the long bus trip home. In summary, it was an opportunity for us all to expand our knowledge of museum techniques and see alternate ways of displaying items and getting plenty of new ideas. We all agree our museum (AMOSA) holds up very, very well in comparison to the others and they were all very envious when we talked about our interactive exhibits and they are now all keen to visit our museum. I think we have started a new trend for museum staff and volunteers visits. On the bus home someone was offering lollies around the bus and the comment was heard "I don't need any more food as I am sure I have already put on a few extra kilos". Everyone agreed, we had all enjoyed the quantity and quality of the meals, so we were not surprised at the comment. Thanks to JB and his staff for organising such a great trip and getting us there and back safely.

By Greg Rosser

Willo.....



43rd Army Cadet Unit Formal Dinner.....

Recently AMOSA was asked by the 43rd Army Cadet Unit to provide a speaker on the subject of the Australian Women's Army Service for their annual formal dinner and I was nominated. At the start of my talk I did make it clear that I am not quite old enough to be able to speak from personal experience and so had to undertake research on the subject. I would like to thank Sue Urban and Lynne Smith for providing me with books and articles which proved most helpful. I found several amusing anecdotes from the ex-servicewomen which I hope lightened things a little. In my research I was astounded by the fact that the Australian Government was initially very much against involving women in the Army as they felt there were sufficient men available to serve both in Australia and overseas. From the very beginning women were keen to do their bit to help and even in the face of an obstinate government trained themselves in useful skills. This came to a head when Japan declared war and the government finally decided they did need women. In 1941 Colonel Sybill Irving was appointed to organise the formation of the AWAS and enlistment finally commenced in 1942. From the outset Colonel Irving wished to stress that while she knew women had to be capable they should also be seen as feminine and nurturing and would not be involved in the taking of lives and as a symbol of this she wanted the AWAS uniform to have a soft felt hat rather than a peaked cap.



In South Australia the AWAS were formed as the 58th Searchlight Battery with their headquarters on the northern side of Bartels Road in the city. The men were on the other side of the road to the south. The women were responsible for guarding the searchlight installations and their own area and as such were issued with .303 rifles which had to be carried at all times. I'm not sure how this tied in with the policy of not being involved with the taking of lives.

Perhaps if called on to fire on someone they could only aim to wound! It should be noted that when I served in the

Army Reserves in the 1960s women were not permitted to handle firearms at all and it was not until the 1980s with the disbandment of the WRAAC and women fully integrated with the male corps that this policy changed. An AWAS drum and pipe band was also formed and it is believed that this was the only all-service, all-women pipe band in the Commonwealth at the time.

Although the AWAS were meant to only serve within Australia a small contingent was sent to New Guinea to be attached to the Pacific Islands Regiment. As you can imagine their arrival there proved most popular. Apparently the Fuzzy Wuzzies were very taken with the blonde women and often visited with gifts of fruit for them. Although not recognised formally by the Government of the day women also joined what was known as the Women's Land Army to cover the shortage of labour when men from farms left to enlist. It was not an enlisted group but a voluntary group and the women were paid by the farmers and not the government. I felt that it should be stressed to the cadets, especially the females, that this era in our history was very important in that it was the beginning of opening up a life for women outside of the home.

They learned what they were capable of achieving during their service and although they did find that on the return of men from the war they were again relegated to the role of homemaker, it was a start. We now have a policy of equal opportunity for both men and women in the work force, and supposedly equal pay for equal work. I found the whole evening to be well organised and a most enjoyable experience. The cadets were smartly dressed in after-five outfits and took the formalities very seriously.

I was hosted by a cadet who looked after me prior to the dinner and formally introduced me to the group assembled in the anteroom. The adults in charge had an obvious interest in nurturing the development of these young adults and were aware of them as individuals. It is anticipated that some will go on to have a service career, if not in the regular Army, then the Reserves. I would also like to thank LCPL McGarry for his support on the evening in setting up the display of the AWAS mannequin and information boards. (I believe he whiled away the hours while we were at dinner at the Marion cinema.) Thank you too Malcolm for coming along for moral support.

By Heather Simms
Curator, Uniforms and Textiles

ALOHA AMOSA Christmas Party.....

Volunteers, partners and the staff of the Museum assembled in the Annex of the Officers Mess to celebrate Christmas and to thank our volunteers and staff for their support and effort throughout the year. There were 80 plus members attending in a decorated Annex with Hawaii being the theme for the tables and outfits worn by our volunteers.



Attendees received a complimentary drink when they arrived and sat down to a tasty assortment of meats, cheeses and nibbles. The 10/27 Battalion Band Ensemble played music throughout the afternoon. After everyone had 'settled in' the Chair of the Foundation, Pat Trainor and the Manager JB gave us a summary of the years activities and achievements including the trips to the Maritime Museum and Bandiana.



A delicious meal followed the speeches with some Hawaiian ham steaks and chicken meal with a generous range of salads for members to self serve.



Our thanks go to Trudy and her helpers in preparing and presenting a 'theme' based tasty meal which was appreciated by all our members.



A thoroughly enjoyable lunch and afternoon which was enjoyed by all our volunteers. Well done to all the organising committee and staff who supported the party. Presentations were made to volunteers who provided significant support to the museum during the year.

By Nick Williams



Restoration of the 'Blitz' Truck

Since writing the article in the last AMOSA newsletter good progress has been made by the 'A Team' on restoring AMOSA's Blitz truck. We arranged for the tray to be lifted off the truck and turned over to enable team members to clean the corrosion from the underneath side. This has been completed and the surface treated with a product referred to as 'rust eater', and a primer coat has also been applied. At the same time other team members have applied the same skills to cleaning the top, sides and underneath of the chassis, and applying the same 'rust eater'. By Monday 8th December the primer coat will also have been applied. On return to work in January 2026 the paint brushes will again be busy applying the topcoats to both the underneath of the tray and to the chassis. I would hope that both areas will have two topcoats completed by the end of January.



Meanwhile, we have also finished cleaning and painting the inside of the cabin wall, door and roof surfaces, and

work has commenced on cleaning and painting the engine (yes, the engine is mainly accessible from inside



the cabin!); this will also be completed by the end of January. Work is also being done on cleaning and painting the bench seats and spare wheel carrier (a large and very heavy component). The vehicle 'tac signs' have just been taken to the signwriters for installing the symbol of the Australian 9th Division (during World War 2) which, among most other allied formations used the Blitz trucks extensively. Also planned for early 2026 will be work on the rear axle assembly and wheels, and the underneath of the engine and transmission. At this time, I hope that the Blitz project will be completed by Easter, and the vehicle returned to display.

By Geoff Laurie

Remembrance Day 2025

For many years, Adelaide Cemeteries have been conducting their annual Remembrance Day Services on 11th November at West Terrace Cemetery and because of the link between the Keswick Repatriation Hospital and the Cemetery some AMOSA members have made a commitment to attending the service. I, for one, have been attending the service for a number of years and have presented a wreath/book on behalf of AMOSA each



time. The service is held in the Australian Imperial Forces section of the Cemetery which holds great significance as the first dedicated military burial ground in Australia and the final resting place of more than 4,000 returned service personnel who served during the First and Second World Wars. Among those who lay at rest are four Victoria Cross recipients. (Blackburn, Davey, Inwood and Jensen.) The Military Hospital at Keswick, which opened in 1915, accepted wounded soldiers returned from Egypt, Lemnos and England following the withdrawal from the Dardanelles campaign. It was originally designated 7th Australian General Hospital, but this was later changed to Keswick Repatriation Hospital. During both wars it was common to see soldiers who had succumbed to their injuries be moved ceremonially from the hospital up ANZAC Highway to be interred in the West Terrace Cemetery. West Terrace Cemetery is Adelaide's oldest operating

Remembrance Day 2025 (cont).....

cemetery and in 1920, shortly after the Imperial Forces section of the Cemetery was established, a monument, funded by public subscription, was erected in the Imperial Forces section.



This monument is the centre piece of the service each year, with the catafalque party taking post at its corners. Each year students from local schools are invited to participate in the activity in a variety of ways including placing a poppy in front of every headstone in the Imperial Forces section, playing the music and singing, laying wreaths, and reading "In Flanders Field".



This year we, along with other organisations, presented a book in lieu of a



wreath, and all books presented were shared amongst the schools to be added to their library collections. Again, this year the Museum team also set up a display at Centennial Park Cemetery for their Memorial Service. The display of service memorabilia was greatly appreciated and became a major focal point for those who attended the service. **By Greg Rosser**

Vietnam War Memorial Walk

In October 2024 Greg Rosser and I, together with our wives travelled to Stansbury at the request of their RSL Club to provide advice on the restoration of their memorial 25 pdr Gun, located on the seafront and therefore badly affected by rust. Having done so, the Museum was contacted in early 2025 to provide similar advice to the Edithburgh RSL Club. We were able to do so by email, having looked at their 25 pdr Gun (and those at Yorketown and Maitland) whilst on the trip last year. The timing of the request became clear when it was announced that the Edithburgh RSL had invested considerable planning and preparations to officially unveil a Vietnam War Memorial Walk to recognise and pay respect to the thousands of Australians who had served in Vietnam in the 1960's and 70's – this was planned for Monday 18th August, Vietnam Veterans' Day 2025. Greg and I, together with our wives were invited to attend the Official Unveiling Ceremony, followed by Lunch, followed by a Concert by the well-known John Schumann from Red Gum, who made famous the Vietnam-era song titled "I was Only Nineteen". The Ceremony was preceded by the arrival of a 'Huey', which had flown over 3-days from a private collection in New South Wales – of particular note was that this Huey was, itself a Vietnam Veteran, as were the pilots who were at the controls. The approach and landing, and the later take-off stirred many feelings among the veterans in the crowd of about 2000 people. The Huey then flew a short distance to a nearby oval and was then available for many locals and official guests to view at arm's length the aircraft for the next couple of hours.

General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK AC (Mil) CVO MC (Retd) officially opened the Memorial Walk, and his speech culminated in him 'declaring the Walking Trail "Open"'.

The sealed trail is just over 5 kms in length and follows the wooded seafront from the northern edge of Edithburgh to the nearby hamlet of Coobowie. Along the Trail are a number of signs providing information on, and respect to the many units of the Australian Defence Force which served in South Vietnam during that period. Members of the Edithburgh RSL, and others involved in planning and implementing this Memorial Walk and Service should be justly proud of their efforts, which resulted in a very successful Vietnam Veterans' Day.

Greg and I are planning to walk the Trail in the new year.

By Geoff Laurie



The MAJGEN Eric Lacy Vowles MC Collection

Some time ago the Uniforms and Textiles Department was presented with a box of uniforms which had been stored in our Bay 5 Repository for some time. The contents were duly placed in the freezer and set aside for processing. We found several officer's service and mess dress uniforms together with a metal box containing a peaked cap and Sam Browne belt, together with a pair of long boots all belonging to a MAJGEN (Major General) Eric Lacy Vowles, MC. On investigation, we found that MAJGEN Vowles had an extensive service record during WW1 and WW2 but unfortunately, apart from the fact that he died in South Australia, there was no connection to meet the criteria required to retain the artifacts as part of the AMOSA collection. Rather than simply send the uniforms to the Repository, we decided to investigate his connection to the RMC (Royal Military College) - Duntroon. RMC was delighted to hear we had the uniforms as he was well known to them, having been in the first class to attend the College, graduating in 1914. As a Staff Cadet, he also designed the RMC badge, still used to this day. On graduation, he enlisted in the AIF and shortly after embarked from Fremantle to join the Mediterranean Expeditionary Forces, Dardanelles with the 9th Battery of the 1st Division. He was one of three RMC graduates chosen for the task of directing support fire of the naval guns during the landing at Anzac Cove, Gallipoli. Following the evacuation from Gallipoli to Egypt he served in France, and among other things, attended a Staff course in Cambridge. He was wounded and gassed in Passchendaele and returned to London for treatment but after recovering returned to France, later to Egypt. He posted for duty with Hants Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, later serving with them in Palestine. At the conclusion of WW1 he returned to Melbourne, and was later stationed in Perth. He continued to occupy a series of staff postings, mainly artillery related throughout Australia. In the following years, he held further positions at the RMC and in 1939, at the outbreak of WW2 posted as Director of Military Training to Australian Headquarters. In 1944–45, he also saw service in New Guinea. The end of the war saw him as Commandant at RMC. In June 1949, MAJGEN Vowles retired from service with RMC and the Australian Army and moved to South Australia. He passed away in 1977 and over the years, his family stored his uniforms which were eventually moved onto our museum where they sat undisturbed until recently. Although we do not have his medals, his service ribbons show that he was awarded the following: World War One: British 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, 1914-18 Victory medal w/ Mentioned-in-Dispatches (MID). World War Two: 1939-45 Star; 1939-45 Defence Medal; Pacific Star; 1939-45 War Medal w/ MID; 1939-45 Australian Service Medal.

Other: Military Cross, King George VI Coronation Medal; Italian Silver Medal for Military Valour (Ernest Hemingway and Erwin Rommel amongst its other recipients!). So while we cannot claim MAJGEN Vowles as our own, we must thank him for his distinguished service to our country. His memorabilia has now been passed onto the grateful curatorial staff at the Australian Army Museum – RMC Duntroon and will be put on display in due course.

By Heather Simms
Curator, Uniforms and textiles



Thank you Volunteers

A morning tea provided by Australian Army History Unit to say a big thank you for all the work undertaken by the volunteers and staff at the Army Museum of South Australia. Our thanks to Tim Gellel and his staff for their guidance and support throughout 2025.



Merry Christmas