Darwin Defenders Fight for Veterans

For World War II Veterans Ray Buttery and Henry Blythe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was an unrecognised condition when they returned from war.

Now supporters of The Repat Foundation – The Road Home, both Ray and Henry are strong advocates for research into the health and wellbeing of those who put themselves in harm’s way and sacrificed so much to protect our community.

“Back during World War II they didn’t recognise PTSD, they didn’t do much about it,” Henry said.

“A number of ex-service men of World War II who worked with me post war in the same industry required treatment for war trauma and ended up at the Repatriation General Hospital (RGH).”

Both Henry and Ray were proudly part of Australia’s defence during World War II when the Japanese planes raided Darwin on February 19, 1942.

At 19 years old Henry was working in clerical work and studying cost accountancy when he, along with 16 other men of the same age, were advised they would form the nucleus of the Seventh Military District Army Field Postal Unit in Darwin.

“We enlisted in September 1941 and in early December arrived in Darwin,” Henry said.

“There must be a strong focus on the men and women now civil fighting overseas, there are going to be hundreds more who return with PTSD.”

SAVE THE DATE!
Remembrance Business Breakfast
November 2016
To register your interest for this event, please email events@theroadhome.com.au or phone (08) 7002 0808

LEAVING A LEGACY

Through the generosity of people like you, health and medical research will help reward the men and women that serve to protect us with hope and healing.

For many people, leaving a lasting legacy in their will is an opportunity to give a significant contribution to an organisation they care about and respect.

For more information or to request an information pack, please contact Irene Jones on (08) 7002 0880 or ijones@theroadhome.com.au.
Darwin Defenders Fight for Veterans cont’d

“It was a traumatic experience for us all, who were just young men, like many of the other defenders of Darwin at that time.

“Of the 16 young men I joined up with there is only two of us left. We are both 94 this year.”

In August of 1942 Henry transferred to the Ninth Australian Army Troop Engineers at Adelaide River and defended Australia overseas in the South West Pacific and Japan, before being discharged in May 1947.

In Darwin, Acting Captain and President of his 48th Battalion/108 LAA Regiment (AIF) Ray was solely in charge of looking after his men, a task that left him with long lasting injuries which impacted him for the rest of his life.

“My unit arrived in Darwin after the first raid, we had about 19 raids during the time we were there,” Ray said.

“We suffered considerable casualties, my original command B Company was reduced to only 10 men,” Ray said.

“My unit arrived in Darwin after the first raid, we had about 19 raids during the time we were there,” Ray said.

“The transition back to normal life is very hard for a lot of people,” Henry added.

“On top of this partners and children of service people have months and months of being on their own. When their partner does finally return from war they’re not the same person as when they went away,” Ray said.

“I don’t think any of us who have been to war are the same.”

Uncovering the Health and Wellbeing of Our Ambulance Workforce

“This means although it is conducted in South Australia, the research will be able to comment on the overall health and wellbeing of the entire ambulance workforce, which is very important.”

Dr Van Hooff explained findings from the project will contribute to the development of policies and procedures within the ambulance services in a number of areas.

“Our findings will help inform policies around recruitment, allowing the identification of individual factors that may predict mental health and wellbeing over time,” she said.

“It will also assist in the area of Occupational Health and Safety, allowing the employer to examine environmental and occupational factors such as promotion, sick leave, workers compensation and flexibility in working arrangements as contributory factors to psychological and physical health.”

The project team will be surveying all SA Ambulance and St John Ambulance workers within South Australia for this project and Dr Van Hooff says these partnerships have been critical.

“Research of this type, where results are representative of an entire workforce, are critically dependant on the input, engagement and support from the organisation of interest,” Dr Van Hooff said.

“This type of research partnership ensures that we as the researchers have the best understanding of the issues which are relevant to the organisation, and the organisation has the best understanding and confidence in the findings that emerge.”

Extremely grateful for the support of The Repat Foundation – The Road Home, Dr Van Hooff says the project would not be possible without the recent grant, announced formally at the ANZAC Commemorative Cocktail party.

“This funding will enable the development of the collaborative partnerships that underpin this ambitious program of work and will serve as a springboard for us to apply for more extensive funding to support an expanded program of work into the future.”

We look forward to providing an update of Dr Van Hooff and her team’s research in the future. If you would like to find out more information, please contact us on (08) 7002 0880 or via email: contactus@theroadhome.com.au.

The Repat Foundation – The Road Home

The Repat Foundation – The Road Home is proud to announce the successful recipients of the 2016 Research Grant Round for projects into the health and wellbeing of veterans, emergency first responders and their families.

- Dr Miranda Van Hooff, Centre for Traumatic Stress Studies, University of Adelaide – Understanding the health and wellbeing of Australia’s first responders ($50,000 for one year)
- Dr Ganessan Kichenadasse – Novel neoadjuvant therapy for high risk localised prostate cancer (Prabhia Seshadri Grant – $50,000 for one year, undertaken at the Repatriation General Hospital)

The Repat Foundation – The Road Home wishes to acknowledge the support of SA Health which has helped enable the provision of this important research grant round.

Find out more about Dr Van Hooff’s project in this edition of The Despatch and stay tuned for further details on Dr Kichenadasse’s exciting project in our next newsletters. For more information, please contact us on (08) 7002 0880 or contactus@theroadhome.com.au.

“An Australian first research project describing the mental health and wellbeing of our nation’s ambulance workforce has been enabled thanks to support from The Repat Foundation – The Road Home.

Successfully securing funding in The Road Home’s 2016 grant round, Dr Miranda Van Hooff from the Centre of Traumatic Stress Studies (CTSS) at the University of Adelaide will lead the project, aimed at informing policies and procedures within the ambulance services with the opportunity to extend to other emergency responder organisations.

“Our plan is to establish a footprint of the mental, physical and social health of all South Australian first responders, beginning with SA Ambulance Service and St John Ambulance and later extending this research to include the South Australian Police,” Dr Van Hooff said.

“We know from our previous research with both Australian Defence Force personnel and the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service that it is the repeated exposure to traumatic events that places the greatest risk on mental health.”

“Ambulance personnel, by the nature of their work are exposed to traumatic events, such as witnessing human trauma on almost a daily basis. These exposures, combined with occupational specific stressors such as night shifts and irregular work hours potentially place these workers at a greater risk of mental health concerns,” she said.

According to Dr Van Hooff, there has been a recent “explosion of interest” both within the workforce and the general community regarding the health and wellbeing of Australia’s first responders.

“We have seen a real increase in demand for support for all emergency services workers across the state, and many are currently seeking support from their employer and the health service,” Dr Van Hooff said.

“While there are currently a number of studies underway that are examining the occupational experiences and health and wellbeing of Australian ambulance personnel in other states, our project will use population level data,” she said.
Having lived with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for over five years Vietnam veteran Bob Walter and his wife Sharyn are passionate advocates for The Repat Foundation – The Road Home’s new direction to fund research in support of not only veterans but also their families. Forty years after serving in the Vietnam War, Bob was diagnosed with chronic late-onset PTSD, but for months before that he was sure he was “going mad.”

“We battled with my PTSD for a long time before I was diagnosed, I ended up buying a lot of books on mental health issues in an attempt to make sense of what was happening to me,” Bob said.

“After six months I was prompted by a group of veteran friends in Canberra to seek help. This led to a psychiatrist who diagnosed my condition. As a result I became involved in the Day Patient Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Program at the Repat Hospital.”

It was during this eight week course that Bob, along with fellow veterans, began to understand how PTSD was affecting him and his loved ones.

“When you go into a war zone your training gears you up to be on full alert, and we don’t get properly switched off when we come out of the war zone,” Bob said.

“Having PTSD is very emotionally numbing, I could see that I was affecting Sharyn but that didn’t mean I could necessarily find the control to change it.”

The symptoms of PTSD not only took its toll on Bob, it also had a significant impact on Sharyn’s health as she uprooted her own life and quit her job to support him.

“I was completely reliant on Sharyn, I couldn’t be left alone.”

This is why both Bob and Sharyn are thrilled The Repat Foundation – The Road Home will not only be supporting vital research for veterans but will also have an added focus on the health of their families and loved ones.

“I am delighted there will be a bigger focus on families of veterans. It is very important to also explain to the partners that what is happening to their loved one is not their fault,” said Sharyn.

“For a lot of contemporary veterans their PTSD is hitting them younger, and often they have a young family to support,” said Bob.

Finding a release from PTSD through poetry Bob is the proud author of ‘There’s Nothing Wrong with Me’ with all proceeds from this directed to vital research into veteran health and wellbeing through The Repat Foundation – The Road Home.

“With PTSD we are living with unresolved memories, and writing these down helped me resolve them,” Bob said.

“I want to support continued research into veteran’s health, the question is what we can do at the front end to reduce the effect on young veterans when they return from war.”

“For change comes opportunity.”

Forty years after serving in the Vietnam War, Bob was diagnosed with PTSD at the Repatriation General Hospital (RGH). Following the transition of the foundation to The Repat Foundation – The Road Home, Darren remains an advocate for supporting research that protects the men and women who put themselves in harm’s way to protect us – our nation’s heroes.

Darren has spent his entire career at the RGH, starting in 1983 as the forerunner of Orthotics and Prosthetics South Australia. Performing this role for two years he then decided a change was in order and it wasn’t long before he found where he was meant to be, working alongside the veteran community.

“In my role I specifically look after the interests and needs of the veteran community, in particular veterans themselves, war widows and veteran organisations,” Darren said.

Darren’s support for veterans and their families doesn’t end there; he is also involved in the management of The Friends of The Repat Hospital volunteer group that raises money in support of veteran’s health.

“It gives me great joy to be able to see positive outcomes and knowing we’ve been able to do something to improve a person’s life,” he said.

“Veterans are not coming to me to look after themselves. They are coming for their wife and children to make sure they are looked after in the future.”

“I am proudly serving those who have served us. I’ve met some truly remarkable people and have developed some really close friendships.”

Having witnessed first-hand the positive effects that research into veterans’ health and wellbeing has on people’s lives, Darren is determined to see research in this area continue long into the future.

“The Repat Foundation – The Road Home plays a pivotal role through the funding of vital medical research into conditions that affect so many veterans,” he said.

“Veterans’ health and wellbeing is a cause very close to my heart and I find it very reassuring these people will continue to be looked after in the future.”
Art Trolley to The Rescue – Koula’s Journey

A patient at the Repatriation General Hospital (RGH) for six months Koula Katsambis likens the art trolley to a ‘treasure trove’, supporting her through six months of rehabilitation after a leg amputation.

Suffering from diabetes, Koula developed an infection in her leg that left her with no other option than a leg amputation.

Having the operation at Flinders Medical Centre she was transferred to the RGH to help her adjust and learn to walk with a prosthetic leg.

Soon introduced to the Art Trolley, founded by The Repat Foundation – The Road Home, Koula found herself connecting with a love of art she didn’t know she had.

“I am a total novice, apart from observing my children playing with paint at school. For me it was a wonderful beginning, an opportunity to try new things as well as very good medicine for my condition,” Koula explained.

“I was indebted to the emotional support of the Art tutor in this difficult six month period.”

For Koula and so many patients like her, art proved a powerful therapy providing her with a physical and emotional outlet from the challenges she faced adjusting to a prosthetic leg.

“It is very poignant to me that in the midst of the disaster that was losing a leg, I discovered a wonderful window of experiences I had never had before through the Art Trolley.”

Thanks to the Art Trolley Koula has embraced a newly found appreciation for art as an adjunct to other therapeutic activities at the Repatriation General Hospital (RGH).

Art: A Powerful Medicine for Occupational Therapists

Occupational Therapist Megan Frecelton has a strong appreciation for art as an adjunct to other therapeutic activities at the Repatriation General Hospital (RGH).

The Veterans Art Health and Wellbeing program, funded by The Repat Foundation – The Road Home brings art to the Rehab Wards at the RGH as a way of bringing joy to patients and providing obvious therapeutic benefits.

For Megan, working as an Occupational Therapist where her role is to help patients participate in their daily activities, she has witnessed first-hand the benefits the art program can deliver.

“Sitting in a hospital bed can be lonely for some patients so these classes give them the motivation to start doing things and reignite some of their interest to get back to the activities they enjoy.

“It’s a positive feedback loop and helps break that cycle of hopelessness or loneliness. I hope all patients can find some sort of relevance to their lives.”

Thanks to the Art Trolley Megan now runs both one-on-one sessions with her patients along with group activities including art classes, to promote both their functional, emotional and social skills.

“I can only rehabilitate someone to a point, so by having access to the art group we try to encourage our patients to use their body in ways they may be doing at home,” she said.

“For some patients who may have some visual deficits such as inattention perhaps on one side, having a pen and paper encourages them to scan and take in the whole page.

“The Spirit of ANZAC Centenary Experience came to Adelaide earlier in the year and the incredible exhibition, open to the public, allowed people to discover Australia’s history of courage, service and sacrifice from the First World War to the present day.

Thanks to Brigadier Alison Creagh CSC (ret’d) who is Deputy Chair on the Board of Governors for The Repat Foundation – The Road Home, we were able to invite our supporters to attend an exclusive VIP ‘behind the scenes’ tour.

The Spirit of Anzac Centenary Experience told the story of Australia’s involvement in the First World War and the ensuing Century of Service of our armed forces, bringing the Anzac legacy to life. This was a very moving experience and one that will not be forgotten.

If you are interested, you still have the opportunity to experience this tour online, by visiting www.spiritofanzac.gov.au.

Targeted Therapy for Chronic Shoulder Pain

Musculoskeletal Physiotherapist Matthew Sutton from Flinders University and based at the Repatriation General Hospital is pursuing research into chronic shoulder pain, a debilitating condition affecting the day to day life of many of our community.

“It is concerning that when people have shoulder pain affecting the use of their arm it has a significant effect on their quality of life. In fact the reduction in quality of life from chronic shoulder pain has been shown to be equivalent of that for people with conditions such as heart disease and diabetes,” Matthew said.

“What we are trying to do through this research is to identify some factors that could influence the outcomes of the most common types of intervention for shoulder pain. These factors include an increased sensitivity to warm or cold sensations, or in simpler terms, having a lower pain threshold than what is normally expected.”

With support from The Repat Foundation – The Road Home to purchase vital research equipment, Matthew is hopeful his project will allow future clinicians to target the treatment best suited to a particular patient, based on their individual needs and characteristics.

“All of the feedback from experienced clinicians has stated there is a real variability in how people with chronic shoulder pain respond to treatment, whether they are treated with surgery, physiotherapy or injections,” he said.

“We intend on using the research to target our intervention better, identify the people that respond well to surgery for example as opposed to those that will have better outcomes with a non-surgical approach, such as physiotherapy.”

Thrilled to have the opportunity to pursue this project Matthew is eager to translate his research to the clinical setting as soon as possible.

“These findings will have a strong clinical application so we can immediately give back to the community.”
The 2016 ANZAC Commemorative Cocktail Evening was held on the evening of Friday, 29 April 2016 with over 115 guests attending to commemorate our national day of remembrance and recognise those who fought for our freedom.

The Repat Foundation – The Road Home would like to thank everyone for attending and making the evening such a success. A very special thank you must go to our patron, His Excellency the Honourable Hieu Van Le AO, Governor of South Australia for his attendance.

The Cocktail Evening was a night of ceremony and reflection, while importantly raising $10,000 in funds for research into the health and wellbeing of our nation’s heroes.

The evening was also full of wonderful entertainment, a dance and superb food and wine. Guests were treated to music from the Australian Army Band Jazz Coupe and later on, local band Nikko and Snooks Trio. Thank you once again for your attendance and we look forward to seeing you at future events!

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The Repat Foundation gratefully acknowledges donations in memory of:
• Raymond George
• Williams Annis
• Tracey Fraser
• Sandra Crabbe
• Eric Green

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