

THE BOSUN'S CALL

NEWSLETTER OF THE NAVAL ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



ACT EDITION MAR 2026

VOL: 31 NO: 02

ONCE NAVY, ALWAYS NAVY



2026 marks 125 years since the formation of the Commonwealth Naval Forces that later become the Royal Australian Navy.

In this issue

- Page 3 Book Presentation: Operation Cleaves
- Page 4 February Committee Meeting Minutes
- Page 4 February General Meeting Minutes
- Page 6 Veteran Healthcare in Canberra
- Page 8 DVA Contact Information

Throughout 2026, events and activities will be conducted around Australia to mark Navy's 125th anniversary. The celebration of this historic milestone throughout the entire year is an opportunity to reflect on Navy's past, honour the contributions of Navy people and look ahead towards the future.



Naval Association of Australia (ACT Section)

Founded 1 July 1944
Patron The Hon Sir William Deane AC KBE

Office Bearers 2025 - 2026

Executive Committee Members

President David Manolas
0427 504 564
stbdstayportgiveway@gmail.com

Vice President Alex McGown
02 6258 6167

Secretary Darren Rush
0435 911 607
darren.rush@navalassoc.org.au

Treasurer Alaric O'Neill

Committee Members

Tiger Lyons 02 6254 3453

Welfare Alex McGown
02 6258 6167

Membership Peter Cooke-Russell
0412 757 505
peter.cookerussell@gmail.com

Social Sec Bev Joce

Bosun's Call Darren Rush
wem@navalassoc.org.au

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

March Birthday List

Kathleen Reid-Smith

Heather Milward

John Small

Jack Aaron

Upcoming Events

- 4 Dec** Christmas lunch –Gungahlin Eastlakes Football Club 1200
- 26 Dec** Last Post Ceremony AB Stafford Dowsett HMAS Parramatta, Mediterranean Sea
- 2 Jul** Christmas in July –Gungahlin Eastlakes Football Club 1200
- 28 Feb** Last Post Ceremony Loss of HMAS Perth and ERA4 Vincent McGovern Sunda Strail

Meeting Dates & Locations

Tables are normally booked for drinks and lunch in the host club from 1200 prior to the meeting.

- 2 Apr** Eastlakes Club Gungahlin
Committee Meeting 1100
General Meeting 1330
- 7 May** Eastlakes Club Gungahlin
Committee Meeting 1100
General Meeting 1330
- 4 Jun** Eastlakes Club Gungahlin
Committee Meeting 1100
General Meeting 1330
- 6 Aug** Eastlakes Club Gungahlin
Committee Meeting 1100
General Meeting 1330
- 3 Sep** Eastlakes Club Gungahlin
Committee Meeting 1100
General Meeting 1330
- 1 Oct** Eastlakes Club Gungahlin
Committee Meeting 1100
General Meeting 1330

Social Program

Fish & Chips - held at Snapper & Co.
(Canberra Yacht Club)
Mariner Pl, Yarralumla ACT 2600



- 19 Mar** Fish 'n Chips 1200
Canberra Yacht Club (Snapper & Co)
- 16 Apr** Fish 'n Chips 1200
Canberra Yacht Club (Snapper & Co)
- 21 May** Fish 'n Chips 1200
Canberra Yacht Club (Snapper & Co)
- 18 Jun** Fish 'n Chips 1200
Canberra Yacht Club (Snapper & Co)
- 2 Jul** Christmas in July 1200
Eastlakes Footy Club Gungahlin

Bev Joce
Social Secretary

Book Presentation

OPERATION CLEEVEES: SOE'S FORGOTTEN WARTIME TRAGEDY IN THAILAND

Kate Reid-Smith | |ACT General Meeting | 5 February 2026

Book highlights:

Covert logistics, local alliances, family impacts, above and beyond traditional military records.

Narrative non-fiction approach focused on personal stories.

Intention to pursue further recognition for the war dead with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

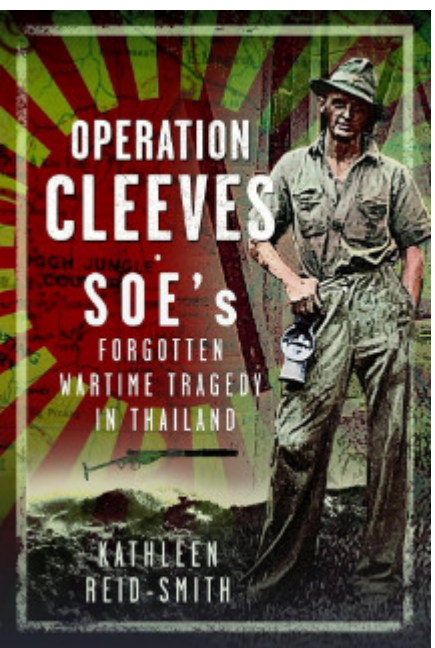
Ongoing and future projects: Upcoming book centered on family perspectives and documentation.

Discussion:

Clarified that operatives were mainly recruited locally (not Second AIF), often civilians with vital skills or knowledge.

Further discussion of covert operations history in WWII, parallels in New Guinea and Southeast Asia, and code-naming traditions for British operations.

Closing acknowledgement: Kate drew on books from a recently deceased member for her research.



Operation Cleeve, was a covert operation in December 1941 (Thai/Malay border, WWII) involving 29 covert operatives (mainly Australians) many executed or buried in mass graves by the Japanese in Southern Thailand.

Origin of research: Traced through interviews and local legends of "hungry ghosts" (unburied, restless dead) along the border which lead to discovery of untold war stories.

Research process included international archival work, document contributions from affected families (including Steven Wright's family, whose grandfather was involved).

Operation Cleeve (British code name) was run under SOE (Special Operations Executive) in the Far East, involving clandestine/pre-invasion commando training and local civilian recruitment.

Published by Pen & Sword. The book is also available at the Australian War Memorial (limited copies) and a book signing is planned for June upon her next return to Australia.

Committee Meeting Minutes ACT Section - 5 February 2026		General Meeting Minutes ACT Section - 5 February 2026		ACT Section - General Meeting Minutes - 6 November 2025	
Attendees: Alex McGown, Darren Rush, Alaric O'Neill, Peter Cooke-Russell & Dennis Lyons.		Attendees: Committee, Glen McNamara, Raymond Horne, Heather Milward, Sue Wheeler, Veronica Heard, Tony (Irish) Vickers, Alan Masters, Harry Beardsley & Bev Joce.		Claims Processing Update: DVA update: from July 1, claims process will be easier (notice available on request).	
Apologies: David Manolas.		Apologies: David Manolas, John Small, Mike Hardwick, Pauline Gribble, Peter Gillin, Graeme Quinn, Joe Slaats & Jeffrey Wolford.		Historical Society Cruises: Naval Historical Society offering Sydney Harbour cruises for the 125th anniversary (information available upon request).	
Meeting opened at 11:10		Meeting opened at 13:30		ANZAC March Registration: Registration completed for NAA ACT Section at this year's ANZAC march, ending at the War Memorial.	
1. Vice President's Report		1. Recital of the Odes Naval Ode, Ode to the Naval Veteran, and the Ode of Remembrance.		7. Treasurer's Report Current finances are stable ("solvent"). Annual financial report to be presented at AGM (March). Year-on-year financial position is stable (approx. \$23,000 in account; income and expenditures balanced over past year).	
Last Post ceremonies scheduled in March, April, May, & June.		Remembrance for Sylvia Sinfield (former member), who passed away in late January - her funeral was held on January 29. Also to John Small's wife, Wendy, who passed away late last year.		Full detailed report pending.	
75 Years On - National Servicemen Commemoration.		2. Welcome Kate Reed Smith welcomed back from her Book Tour. Sue Wheeler welcomed as a new member.		8. Membership Report 40 members have paid dues for 2026; 8 remain unfinancial.	
RAN's 125th formation anniversary.		3. Birthday Congratulations <i>January Birthdays</i> Merle Hare (turned 106), Brian Eagles, James Sanderson & David Manolas.		Membership Breakdown: 48 full members 8 honorary members (pending AGM approval for continued status) 1 club member 3 honorary life members No associate members	
Reminder that March meeting will be the AGM (all positions open to nominations).		<i>February Birthdays:</i> Peter Cook-Russell John Crawley, Michael Doyle, & Francis Shrug.		Registrar to provide listing to Treasurer.	
Preparations for Anzac Day march.		4. Minutes of previous meeting Reference to minutes of November 2025 (published in December "Bosun's Call" Newsletter). No questions or issues raised; motion to accept: Mover: Albert Seconder: Irish Passed by all in favour.		9. Social Events After lunch meetings occur on first Thursday of each month.	
2. Secretary's Report		5. Vice President's Report Upcoming Events: Multiple Last Post ceremonies in March, April, May, and June (volunteers invited—speak to the Vice President if interested).		Informal fish and chips gathering ("Snappers") at Yacht Club on third Thursday monthly (attendance typically low; all encouraged to join).	
Upcoming National AGM: Officer positions open: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer		Representation at "75 Years On" National Servicemen commemorative event on February 14.		Invitation for members to propose and organize additional social events (open to AGM/committee nomination).	
125th Navy Anniversary clarification of "Fleet Review"		RAN's 125th formation anniversary on March 1.		Parking at Yacht Club is no longer an issue; system clarified.	
Received inquiry regarding Gala Ball for 125th RAN Anniversary - redirected to Victoria Section		Reminder that March meeting will be the AGM (all positions open to nominations; only financial members may vote).		General encouragement to increase participation.	
DVA update: Claims Processing Update: from July 1, claims process will be easier		Anzac Day march: Vice President unable to attend—needs someone to collect banner. (Darren Rush volunteered).		10. General Meeting Reports Motion to accept reports: Mover: Glenn Carried.	
Historical Society Cruises: Naval Historical Society offering Sydney Harbour cruises for the 125th anniversary.		5. Secretary's Report National Executive Nominations: Officer positions open: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer (details available for those interested).		11. Defence and Veteran Affairs Policy & Royal Commission Royal Commission into Defence and Suicide: recommendation for establishing a new peak body of Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs) to advise government.	
ANZAC March Registration: Registration completed for NAA ACT Section at 2026 ANZAC March.		125th Navy Anniversary:		Confusion regarding selection/formation of the peak body and working party (no contact with known ESOs so far, no clear terms of reference).	
3. Treasurer's Report		An inquiry from a leading seaman regarding Gala Ball for 125th RAN anniversary - redirected to Victoria Section.		Historical context: previous peak body (Australian Veterans and Defence Service Council—AVADS) dissolved after DVA withdrew funding in 2008.	
Current finances are stable ("solvent"). Annual financial report to be presented at AGM (March). Year-on-year financial position is stable.					
4. Membership Report					
40 members have paid dues for 2026; 8 remain unfinancial. 8 honorary members require AGM approval					
Meeting closed at 11:50					
4				Current efforts to establish new body lack transparency, reminisce of past government initiatives with short institutional memory. Extended discussion shared by Peter, referencing prior DVA initiatives and the history/decline of service organizations' peak advisory groups.	
				12. Website Updates HMAS Sydney II Memorial Website: Nearing completion of major rebuild; relaunch expected soon. Members encouraged to refresh browser to experience new site after launch. Notice to be posted on website regarding launch date.	
				RAN Website: Noted major revamp; usability issues highlighted (navigation/search difficulties).	
				13. Sydney 125th Anniversary International Fleet Review Report by Irish (received Jan 3): Fleet review on Saturday, March 21, 2026. Naval Historical Society organizing morning cruise (8:00–11:00) with breakfast, and afternoon cruise (13:00–17:00) coinciding with ceremonial events and afternoon tea.	
				Tickets: Limit of three per member, members of Naval Historical Society to have priority; some general public availability expected.	
				Accessibility: Limited facilities aboard; not suitable for wheelchairs or those with significant mobility needs.	
				Pricing: \$45 (morning), \$85 (afternoon).	
				Clarification: Not an "international" fleet review as in prior years - no ship boardings offered, limited to watching ships move through harbour (ships to assemble near Jervis Bay before moving into Sydney Harbour).	
				Ancillary events: Possible reception with Chief of Navy, but no open events confirmed.	
				War Memorial Event: Navy birthday event on March 1 will be at War Memorial; no additional Last Post ceremony or other events currently confirmed.	
				No further knowledge regarding further commemorative events or changes to the annual schedule.	
				14. Book Presentation: "Operation Cleese" - Kate Reid Smith	
				See separate article (page 6) for full presentation	
				Raffle held with copy of Kate's book featured as one of the prizes.	
				15. Insurance Query Raised concern about public liability insurance certificates for the year. National certificate is not yet available on the website: ACT-specific certificate not yet received.	
				Meeting closed at: 15:14 Next Meeting: 5 March 2026 to include AGM.	
				5	

VETERAN HEALTHCARE CARDS PROMISE FREE MEDICAL TREATMENT BUT PATIENTS SAY MANY GPs WON'T ACCEPT THEM

VETERANS IN CANBERRA HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING TO FIND GPs WHO ACCEPT THE VETERAN HEALTHCARE CARD, WHICH ENTITLES VETERANS TO FREE MEDICAL TREATMENT.

By Rosie King
Published on ABC News
1 September 2025

Pat McCabe was always destined for a life of service.

"My father was in the navy — he served in Korea," Ms McCabe said.

"And my grandfather was in the army. He wasn't fit enough to go overseas but he was chief cook at home.

"We got to HMAS Harman when I was about two, so I grew up in that atmosphere."

Ms McCabe joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1973 and worked as a communicator.

"I served within Australia because girls didn't go overseas in those days," she said.



Pat McCabe's family has a long heritage of service for Australia. (Supplied: Pat McCabe)

Pat McCabe's family has a long heritage of service for Australia. (Supplied: Pat McCabe)

"It was the early era of computers, so I got into that sphere and learnt a hell of a lot — it was very exciting, it was new and innovative.

"And the camaraderie is just brilliant, and it remains with you for life.

"I'd still be there today if I hadn't been medically discharged."

Ms McCabe was involved in a serious car accident in 1978 and was medically discharged from the Navy the following year.

She was left with skeletal damage and has lived in constant pain ever since, relying on daily medication.

"There's no recovery really so it's just something you live with," she said.



Pat McCabe (left) joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1973. (Supplied: Pat McCabe)

Living with the condition became a lot harder during the pandemic, when Ms McCabe began the hunt for a new general practitioner (GP).

For more than two years, she struggled to find a GP in Canberra who was taking on new patients, and accepted her Department of Veterans' Affairs-issued healthcare card.

It took a toll on her physical and mental health and as her pain got worse, she upped her dose of opioids to cope.

"Not having anybody there to help you was the biggest frustration," Ms McCabe said.

We're the capital of the nation and we're the only capital city considered to be a GP desert. For a capital city, it is a disgrace."



A cabinet in Pat McCabe's house of her family's military history. (ABC News: Ian Cutmore)

Challenges with open books, specialists

A spokesperson for the Department of Veterans' Affairs said that there had not been a decline in the number of health professionals willing to see veteran patients.

"There are many Canberra GPs and specialists who accept the veteran card as full payment for services," the spokesperson said.

"The Department has not seen a decline in the number of health professionals in Canberra that provide treatment to veteran card holders.

"There has been an increase of approximately 8 per cent in the number of ACT-based GPs providing services to Veteran Card holders for the period 2020-21 to 2024-25."

The spokesperson also pointed to the availability of services that can help veterans connect with health professionals, including the Health Direct website and hotline.

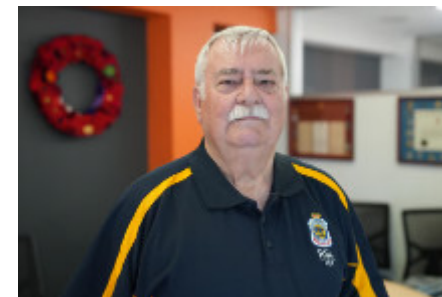
Additionally, in the 2023-24 Budget, \$33.3 million dollars was allocated to triple the Veterans' Access Payment for certain GP consultations over four years.

But John King from the Returned Services League's ACT Branch says that, according to his members, finding a GP with open books who

accepts the white and gold cards is increasingly difficult.

"It's been like that for a heck of a long time, and it hasn't changed," Mr King.

"Apart from the illnesses and problems veterans have, it creates an anxiety and a stress they don't need. And it's not just for them but for their families as well."



John King, former president of the RSL ACT Branch, says veterans struggling to access GPs is not a new problem. (ABC News: David Sciasci)

Mr King said veterans were also finding it increasingly challenging to find specialists in Canberra who were willing to accept their gold and white cards for payment.

"I know of people who have been given a list of psychiatrists in the ACT and told to contact each one to book yourself an appointment," Mr King said.

"And after 15 phone calls, the books are closed — so, what do we do? We go to Sydney or Melbourne.

"I've experienced it myself with my white card. After 39 years of service, I basically rely on my private health."

A white card entitles the veteran cardholder to free medical treatment for specific health issues, whereas the gold card covers all medical conditions.

GPs in Canberra who accept the cards are paid a rebate of \$50.50 by the Department directly, plus the Veterans' Access Payment, which is \$25.70.

Doctors cannot ask veterans to pay a gap fee.

Relying on the goodwill of doctors



Australian Medical Association's ACT Branch president and Canberra GP Dr Kerri Aust says the system relies on the goodwill of doctors. (ABC News: Ian Cutmore)

Canberra GP Kerrie Aust, who sees a veteran patient at least once a day, said the system had relied on the goodwill of doctors for too long.

"The DVA rebates have not been keeping pace with the cost of providing the services to the patients — the costs of running a practice just keep going up and up and up," Dr Aust said.

"Essentially, we're making those decisions between paying our own mortgages and continuing to service the veteran community.

"We are seeing, as a result, fewer GPs are taking gold and white cards for payment, and more people are closing their books and withdrawing from servicing veterans."

Dr Aust said the out-of-pocket cost for doctors to see veteran patients would depend on their individual fee structure but in some cases "it will be more than \$50 or \$60".

She also said finding specialists to refer veterans to was becoming harder, echoing Mr King's experience.

"And once again ... the cost of providing the services is getting too far away from the reimbursement that's provided by the Federal Government," she said.



Ms McCabe said the camaraderie she found in the Navy was "just brilliant, and it remains with you for life". (ABC News: Ian Cutmore)

Dr Aust believes an easy solution is for the Department of Veterans' Affairs to increase the rebates for general practitioners so they adequately cover their costs.

She said not doing so would risk more doctors turning their backs on veterans for the sake of their own financial viability, and feared the impact that would have on Canberra's veteran community.

"The impact on mental health is significant," Dr Aust said.

"Many of our veterans are living with conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder.

"And for some, it's hard enough to reach out, so when they reach out and the doors are closed, it's very, very challenging."

Posted Mon 1 Sep 2025



Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs

DVA Contact Numbers

Provider invoicing & billing enquiries: 1300 550 017

Provider enquiries: 1800 550 457

Transport bookings: 1800 550 455

Veterans' Affairs Pharmaceutical Advisory Centre (VAPAC): 1800 552 580

Hearing or speech impairment assistance

If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service (NRS):

Talk To You (TTY) users phone 1800 555 677 then ask for 1800 838 372

Speak and Listen users phone 1800 555 727 then ask for 1800 838 372

Internet relay users connect to the NRS then ask for 1800 838 372

Information on health services may be obtained from DVA. The contact numbers for health care pro-viders requiring further information or prior financial authorisation for all States and Territories are listed below:

TELEPHONE: 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372)

INTERNATIONAL CALLERS: +61 2 6289 1133

POSTAL ADDRESS FOR ALL STATES AND TERRITORIES:

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Health Approvals & Home Care Section

GPO Box 9998

BRISBANE QLD 4001

DVA WEBSITE: <http://www.dva.gov.au/providers/allied-healthprofessionals>

DVA EMAIL: For prior financial authorisation: health.approval@dva.gov.au

The appropriate prior approval request form can be found at: <https://www.dva.gov.au/providers/servicesrequiring-prior-approval>

CLAIMS FOR PAYMENT

For information about claims for payment visit: www.dva.gov.au/providers/how-claim

CLAIM ENQUIRIES: 1300 550 017 (Option 2 Allied Health)

Claims will take a variety of times to complete based on whether or not the claim is prioritised for allocation to a decision maker and the complexity of the claim itself. For example, if the service of the individual crosses two or more Acts or contains a lot of health conditions and injuries or both. This results in some claims being decided faster than the average time, while some claims take longer.

For any condition, to make the claiming process smoother, follow these 3 steps:

- Step 1: Get your medical practitioner to con-firm your diagnosis.
- Step 2: Supply the documents you need to;
- Step 3: Check if you are already eligible for free health care and treatment.

CLAIMS PROGRESS

As at 31 October 2025, DVA had 89,597 claims on hand, comprised of 22,820 unallocated claims and 66,777 claims being processed.

In the financial year to date (FYTD) (1 July 2025 to 31 October 2025):

DVA received 39,032 claims

DVA made 36,099 determinations

For all claims on hand including older claims being processed the average TTTP for MRCA IL was 333 days, up from 304 days in the previous FYTD. The median TTTP was 271 days.

There have already been some significant improvements in processing timeframes for new IL claims received and determined within the last 12 months.

For claims received within the last 12 months, the average TTTP for MRCA IL was 110 days. The median TTTP was 96 days.

OPEN ARMS

Veterans & Families Counselling

Open Arms provides mental health and wellbeing support to anyone who has served at least one day of continuous fulltime service in the ADF and their immediate families.

1800 011 046

SAFE ZONE SUPPORT

Free and anonymous counselling line for all current and ex-serving ADF personnel, veterans and their families. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

1800 142 072

DEFENCE FAMILY HELPLINE

Available 24/7 or online at www.defence.gov.au/members-families/defence-helpline.asp. Staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

1800 628 036

DEFENCE ALL HOURS SUPPORT LINE

24/7 confidential telephone service for Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families to facilitate access to ADF or civilian mental health services.

1800 628 036