

History of RAE Association of WA (Inc)

ENGINEERING WAR UNITS. A well attended meeting was held at the Soldiers' Institute on July 23rd, for the purpose of inaugurating an association of all the engineering units that served in the Great War of 1914-19. A Provisional committee was formed to draft a constitution, draw up the necessary rules, and generally lay the foundation of what is hoped will become one of the great associations of Old war comrades, worthy to rank with the South African Veterans, 28th Battalion, and other kindred associations. It was decided that under the tentative name of the "Ex-Service Association of Engineers and Signallers" the following units should provide the membership, viz, the Engineers, Tunnellers, Pioneers, Signallers, Railway Boring and Mechanical, and the Royal Engineers, the last being the ex-Imperial men. The object of the association will be to foster the friendship formed whilst on active service, to assist those in distress and to look after the welfare of the widows and dependents of the men of the various units. This will be achieved by socials, re-unions, and other forms of gatherings. The subscription has been fixed at 2/6 annually. The chairman Mr. G. D. Shaw c/o Soldiers' Institute, Perth or the Hon. Secretary Mr. Robert Tyler of Barton Street, Rivervale, Perth will receive subscriptions or reply to inquiries.

It was further decided that the next general meeting be held on Monday August 16th in the R.S.L. Board Room, and that arrangements would then be made for the Annual Re-Union to be held during Show week, in Perth.

The date July 23rd, 1926 is a memorable day in the history of the Royal Australian Engineers Association of WA. It is the date when a group of engineers from World War 1 Engineer Units held a meeting with the idea of starting an Association for sappers who served in the Great War of 1914-19.

The name proposed for this new Association was the Ex Services Association of Engineers and Signallers and would encompass Engineers, Tunnellers, Pioneers, Signallers, Railways, Boring and Mechanical, and the ex-Imperial men of the above units.

At this meeting, Major George Shaw, CO 13 Fd Coy, was elected President and Robert Tyler was elected Honorary Secretary. Colonel J Nicholson, Commander Royal Engineers, agreed to be the Patron.

The first general meeting was held on 16th August and the second general meeting on 31st August, at which a total of 21 people attended. Then on Monday 4th October, the first Annual Reunion Smoke Social was held in the Soldiers Institute, St. George's Terrace, Perth.

By the end of 1926, the Association of Ex-Service Engineers and Signallers had a total of 116 members.

In early 1927, the Association changed its name to Ex-Services Association of Engineers and Allied Units.

In 1929, Angus McLennan took over as the Secretary and H Oldham took over as President in 1931. Both men served until 1941.

The following is an extract from a letter sent by the Hon. Secretary A D McLennan to the "Listening Post" for August 1930: -

'On the Anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo 18th June 1930 Waterloo Night was held by the Association of Engineers and Allied Units after their fifth Annual General Meeting in the Soldier's Institute, Perth.

The night was dark and stormy, but it did not prevent about 50 old soldiers assembling once again in order to renew that comradeship and "esprit-de-corp" so well cemented around them in the old A.I.F. days'.

After the General Meeting closed, short speeches and long drinks and plenty of harmony was the order of the night'.

This is the first mention of the Battle of Waterloo, but it is not known when the first Waterloo Dinner was held but a Dinner held in 1934 was heavily reported.

With the outbreak of World War II, many of the members re-enlisting or were called up for service.

In 1941 the Association went into recession.

In 1948 the Royal Australian Engineers Ex-Services Association was reformed by LTCOL Victor (Vic) Steffanoni who was elected President and William (Bill) Robinson was elected Secretary.

When Roy Abbott was appointed the grounds curator at the West Australian Cricket Association, it was decided that all meetings would be held at the WACA where members would have access to the WACA facilities.

For many years, the only meetings held on a regular basis were committee meetings with only one general meeting held after the ANZAC Day march. This meeting was in fact the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

At the 1955 AGM, a motion was passed that the President would lead the Association on the ANZAC Day parades from then on.

A letter was written to all other RAE Associations in 1956, inviting them to form up as one group and march behind the RAE flag with banners representing each of the Associations being carried immediately behind the RAE flag.

It is not known if there were any member subscriptions paid but there is record that if a function were to be held, an organising group was formed who investigated venue and catering charges. A cost per head was agreed at the next committee meeting and this was charged to the members attending the AGM to offset the cost of catering.

It was in 1958 that membership subscriptions were introduced, and the subs were set at £1/0/0.

The first Constitution was accepted at the AGM in 1961 with a name change to Royal Australian Engineers Ex-Servicemen's Association.

In 1961, the Perth branch of the Commonwealth Bank wrote to the Secretary of the Ex-Services Association of Engineers and Allied Units advising him the bank account had not been operated on since 1940 and that any funds in the account would be transferred to a Depositor's Unclaimed Fund.

The Secretary informed the bank that the Association was no longer operating and requested that any monies in the account be transferred to the new Association which had opened an account at the Commonwealth Bank branch in Mt Hawthorn. The amount of £16/1/9 was transferred into that account on 11 July 1961.

On ANZAC Day in 1965, marchers wore a purple ribbon to signify the marcher as belonging to the RAE.

There was an attempt to unite all the RAE Unit Associations and eligible RE sappers to join the Association in 1969. This was the year that membership nomination forms were introduced.

At the AGM in 1975, Hugh O'Doherty and Roy Abbott were made the first Life Members of the Association for services rendered.

The annual subscriptions were increased to \$3.00 at the 1978 AGM.

When Roy Abbott retired as curator of the WACA in 1980, meetings were no longer able to be held there without paying a hire fee. For the next two years, meetings were held at the RSL ANZAC Club in Perth. Then in 1984, all meetings were held at 13 Fd Sqn in Hobbs Artillery Barracks at Irwin Barracks, Karrakatta.

At the 1985 AGM, annual subscriptions were raised to \$4.00.

13 Fd Sqn invited the Association and other RAE Associations to attend the Holdfast Reunion to be held in November 1985.

When 13 Fd Sqn went to Bindoon for their annual range practice in 1986, members of the Association were invited. Five members took up the invitation and participated in the shoot along with members of 13 Fd Sqn.

A new Constitution was rewritten and adopted by the Association in 1988 and the Association name was changed to Royal Australian Engineers Association of WA, our current title. A copy which has been fastened to the first page of the minute book for that year.

When 13 Fd Sqn relocated to barracks in Washington Street, Victoria Park in 1988, Association meetings were held at Washington Street. Because the depot was solely under RAE control with no restrictions on access, meetings were held bi-monthly.

At the June 1989 AGM, it was moved that annual subscriptions be raised from \$4.00 to \$10.00 commencing from 1 June 1990.

At the July 1989 committee meeting, Brian O'Toole, who was an active member of the NSW Sappers Association at the time, reported that in 1987 the NSW Sappers Association had approached the National Corps Committee of their proposal to bring all Engineer Associations together in a National body.

As no reply was received from the National Corps Committee, the Sappers Association of NSW along with the Old Sappers Association of Victoria proposed to form the nucleus of a National Association and invite other Engineer Associations to join them. A Constitution had even been drawn up for the new National Association.

The committee decided to hold the matter of registration over until more information was available.

In the 1989 Edition of the "Sapper" magazine, the National Corps Committee decided to proceed to establish a National RAE Association however in February 1990 it was decided not to proceed, and the matter was dropped.

Meetings continued at Washington Street until 1992 when 13 Field Squadron moved back into Irwin Barracks and into the old 22 Construction Squadron buildings and meeting were held in the Devil's Inn. Meeting were then held on a monthly basis.

In 1994, the Association applied to the Department of Commerce and Consumer Protection to become an Incorporated Association. This was approved on the 8th December 1994 and the Association became known as the "Royal Australian Engineers Association of Western Australia (Incorporated)".

At the AGM held on 9th June 1996, the membership fees were raised to \$15.00 and remained at that until the AGM in 2003 when they were raised to \$20.00. Fees have not changed since then.

At the February 1999 General Meeting and after many years of painstaking work, Harry Hickson announced that the new "Banner" was completed and on display. In October 2003, a timber frame was installed and fixed to the wall of the Ryan Club to house the "Banner". The original Banner was donated to the Tasmanian RAE Association in 2005.

At the 1999 AGM a vote was taken to change the name of the "The Devil's Inn". With all members present agreeing, the boozery became known as the "Ryan Club".

The Association for some time published a newsletter but in February 2000, Mick Ryan, who was then President, published the first "Purple Circle".

Back in 1998, Warwick Broomfield was given the task of designing an Engineer Memorial and his design was presented to the Association and approved. Work started almost immediately and was completed at the beginning of 2000. On ANZAC Day 2000 the Memorial was officially opened and consecrated by Chaplin Howard Eaton.

Since that day, the Memorial Precinct has been the place the Association and 13 Fd Sqn have held ANZAC Day services to honour past sappers who have paid the ultimate price in war.

The only upgrade to the Memorial was in 2006 when the old limestone plinth was replaced with a new granite plinth and bronze slouch hat.

Prior to 2001, the Waterloo Dinner was celebrated by serving and retired Officers and by serving and retired senior NCO's, each in their respective Mess dining room. As numbers of each group started to dwindle the event was combined to be an Officers and senior NCO's dining in night.

With the closure of 22 Const Sqn and the further decline in retired numbers, it was decided that the Waterloo Dinner held in June 2001 would be an "All Ranks" event and has continued as such ever since.

At the June 2003 AGM the Association received a donation for the sole purpose of setting up a Welfare Fund to help sapper's and their families in a time of need. With the support of a benefactor and fundraising by the Association, the Welfare Fund is still operating.

After many hours of sketching and drawing, Spr Ian Coate presented to the Association/13 Fd Sqn at the 2004 AGM, the painting "100 Years of Engineering" which is displayed on the back wall of the Ryan Club.

Over the period from 1926 to 2018, a period of 92 years, the Association has had 3 titles (1 title pre-WW2), 15 Presidents (2 pre-WW2), 7 Secretaries (2 pre-WW2) and 11 Life Members.

The longest serving President was Michael Ryan who held the position for 23 years and the longest serving Secretary were Hugh O'Doherty and Neville Clark, both holding the position for 22 years.

Acknowledgement:

The Editor would like to acknowledge that some of the information used to compile the history of how the Association began, came from the book "Sappers in the West" written by Graham McKenzie-Smith.
