

Where Our Association Started

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 Signalers and would encompass Engineers, Tunnellers, Pioneers, Signalers, 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 Signalers 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 and many of the members re-enlisting or being called up for service, in 1941 the Association went into recession.

From after World War 2 to June 1989, there is very little known about the happenings of the Association during that time as there are no minutes or other documents available.

What we do know is that in 1948 the Royal Australian Engineers Ex-Services Association was formed and Victor (Vic) Steffanoni was the President and William (Bill) Robinson was the 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 Association facilities.

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 that Association was no longer operating and 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 sixteen pound, one shilling and nine pence was transferred into that account on 11 July 1961.

A copy of the first Constitution was adopted by the Association in 1988. A copy which has been fastened to the first page of the minute book used to record the minutes of the first meeting in 1989. It is not known when the Royal Australian Engineers Ex-Services Association changed its name, but the Constitution has the heading 'Royal Australian Engineers Association of Western Australia', our current title.

The first recorded minutes were of the Annual General Meeting held on 11th June 1989. The meeting was held at the Washington Street depot in Victoria Park. T Davey and Ron Beard were elected President and Secretary respectively.

Meetings were held at Washington Street until 1992 when 13 Field Squadron moved back into Irwin Barracks and into the old 22 Construction Squadron buildings.

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.

In 1994, the Association applied to the Department of Commerce and Consumer Protection to become and Incorporated Association. This was approved and on

the 8th December 1994, the Association became 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.

At the February 1999 General Meeting and 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 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 boozer became 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 and present sappers who have paid the ultimate price in war.

The only upgrade to the Memorial has been the placing of the new granite plinth.

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 closing of 22 Const Sqn and the further decline in retired numbers, it was decided that the June 2001 Waterloo Dinner 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 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 today, a period of 91 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 was Neville Clark who held the position for 22 years.

Acknowledgement:

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