

Colonel William Ford OBE, G psc RAA (RL) 1913-2011



In June the Royal Military College Duntroon celebrates its Centenary, and at his death on 24th May Bill Ford was the oldest surviving graduate of the College, graduating in 1939. Born in Seymour on 6th September 1913 and raised in Ballarat and while working as a school teacher, he joined the Citizen Military Forces 8th Battalion (City of Ballarat Regiment), the same battalion that his uncle, Brigadier and Senator William Kingsley Bolton, had raised and then commanded at Gallipoli in 1915. When the opportunity arose he chose the Duntroon path to become a regular Army Lieutenant in the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery.

During the Second World War, Bill saw action in Palestine, Greece, Cyprus and Crete both as a gun line officer and forward observer. He was seriously wounded in Greece but managed to rejoin his Regiment and help a party of wounded to escape on the last boat out of Crete. Perhaps it was his lucky AIF number VX 11411 that was looking after him. In March 1942 he returned to Australia to take part in forming the Armoured Division in West Australia. He also grabbed the opportunity to marry Florence Josephine Margaret Cornish

on 10 April 1942 who was his treasured life long companion. Subsequently he deployed to Borneo where he was mentioned in dispatches (MID) for action behind Japanese lines.

Bill remained in the Australian Regular Army until his retirement in 1963. He filled a wide range of command, staff and training appointments throughout Australia. He was the Commanding Officer and Chief Instructor at the School of Artillery at Sydney's North Head from 1956-1960, and during that period he encouraged the School's close relationship with Manly, and in particular with the Manly Rugby Union Club who used to conduct their trial season matches on the School's oval. This association, with Bill being a Vice President of the Manly Rugby Union Club, came in handy when the Biloela Bell, presented to the Garrison Artillery in 1930, and then located at North Head where it was used to announce muster parades at the School, suddenly went missing. The perpetrators of the "theft", the RAAF base Williamstown, were quick to return the Bell when offered the alternative of a rugby match against an "enhanced" School of Artillery team which included a number of Australia's Wallabies from the Manly Club, including such notables as Tony Miller and Rob Heming.

In 1967 Bill became the General Secretary of the NSW Country Party and Secretary of the Federal Council and Executive, positions that he held for the next 9 years. This was an interesting time to be in the Country Party, which then played an important role in both the NSW and Federal Coalition Governments. Bill felt strongly that the focus of the Party should primarily be on the country communities the Party represented. He did not support the move to develop a national perspective, the "Joh for Canberra" push. This issue of

the best way to represent regional concerns continues to be topical in today's politics.

Bill and Florence moved to the Queensland Sunshine Coast in 1976 where they both led an active life in their local community. Following Florence's death not long after their Golden Anniversary in 1993, Bill settled in Gympie to be close to his daughter and family and there he became immersed in the community. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Gympie netball and was still driving and delivering Meals on Wheels to others at 95.

Bill Ford was proud of being a Mason throughout his life. He joined his first Lodge in Ballarat in 1937. He was appointed to the 32nd degree in 2007 and received his 70 year jewel in 2008. He even volunteered once again to become Master of his local Lodge in Gympie at the age of 96.

Bill was appointed as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for his service to the Nation and made a Life Member of the NSW Country Party.

Bill's military awards include the 1939-45 Star, the Africa Star, the Pacific Star (Mentioned in Dispatches), the Defence Medal, the War Medal 1939-45, the Australian Service Medal 1939-45, the Greek Commemorative Campaign Medal 1940-4 the recent Australian Defence Medal and the Returned from Active Service Badge.

Bill is survived by his children, John, Tim and Sally, three granddaughters and two great grandsons.

*Tim Ford
2 June 2011*