

Leongatha and District Historical Society

P O Box 431 Leongatha 3953



Newsletter

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President : Geoff Michael

Secretary : Lyn Skillern Tel 56686304

The latest news

- Kath Murphy. We were very sad to hear that our Kath has had a stroke and has been in the Latrobe Valley Hospital Rehabilitation Centre. It was pleasing to hear that she has made some improvement and is back in Leongatha. We wish you all the best Kath.
- The launch of John Murphy's latest book on the history of the Leongatha Butter Factory will be held in the Memorial Hall Leongatha on February 22nd at 2 pm. All members are welcome to attend. The book will be available from the Society for \$15.
- A Town Walk brochure is now available at the rooms. This is a guide for those who wish to go on a short walk around the Leongatha CBD and find out about our historic buildings. A small group braved the heat on Australia Day and followed the walk brochure around the town centre.
- Our Multi Cultural Project : Johanna Haasjes and Lyn Skillern are organising a number of afternoon teas to help us record the stories of those who have come to South Gippsland from overseas. The first afternoon tea will be on April 4th from 1.30 pm until 3.30pm. Members and friends are welcome. For more information contact Lyn on 56686304
- The feature articles by Ian Lester on tools of the pioneers will return in the next edition of the newsletter

2006 the Year of the Onion

Did you know that the growing of onions was a significant agricultural pursuit in the Leongatha district for many years. At the November meeting Les Hutchinson spoke about his family's collection of aboriginal artefacts from the area near the Tarwin on their property not far from Leongatha. Later in the evening the subject changed to onion growing and there were so many good stories told that we felt onion growing was a topic worth research and display. What do you know about onion growing? We welcome your stories and photographs. A special file will be set up to start collecting information.

Guest Speaker for March. Our guest speaker at the meeting on March 21st will be a representative of the South Gippsland Bird Observers Group

The People behind our Street names

George Francis Roughead Roughead Street Leongatha

Young Hawthorn footballer Jarryd Roughead (son of Michael and Sherill) is a fifth generation Leongatha Roughead . George Roughead after whom Roughead Street and Roughead Road are named was Jarryd's great great grandfather. He ran a General Store in the town from the 1890's in the town's pioneering days. This store was situated near the railway line on the main road running between Inverloch in the south and Morwell in the north. The town section of this road was to become Roughead Street. When Gippsland was opening up in the 1870's George and his father came to the region via Port Albert by steamer and worked on the railway between Sale and Rosedale. George came to Leongatha in the late 1880's and started the store. In 1908 the family moved to a farm just south of Leongatha, hence the naming of Roughead Road. George Roughead was instrumental in the founding of the Leongatha Recreation Reserve in 1892. This reserve was bush and had to be cleared before any sports grounds could be established. A small oval for football and cricket was established in these early years. It is significant that 3 generations of Rougheads have played football on that oval at the recreation reserve which is located in, yes, Roughead Street.

This early photo of Roughead Street was taken in 1890. The Roughead store is on the right of the photo. Note the thick bush that needed to be cleared further down the road to make a football ground. .





**George Francis Roughead
with his wife Eliza (nee
Johnson) and children Grace
Lillian, George Charles, Alice
Isabel and William Ernest**

Guest Speaker for the 60th Anniversary of the end of World War Two in the Pacific

Herb Toohill

Herb Toohill spoke about his adventures 60 years ago. He has vivid memories of the 3rd of September 1939. He had grown up in a Congregational Church community and was part of a Christian Endeavour Society, a youth group and in his studies he had produced material for sermon making. Members of his group were asked to go to small congregations around Brisbane and speak. He was 19 and on that day rode his bicycle to Salisbury 5 miles away and took a service for 5 people. He rode his bicycle home and heard Mr Menzies on the radio saying war had been declared. His father had been badly wounded in France in World War One and they knew they were in for a bad time. His thoughts turned to the air force. Great airmen had landed in Brisbane in the 30's and this appealed to Herb. There was an air race in the 30's and the Dutch competitor got lost near Albury. He tried to join the air force in February 1941 and was rejected as being too small and was told to muscle up. He was also given a free course at a gym for the purpose. Herb went back in 3 months and failed again. He then joined the army where he became very fit and was then called to the air force in November. Herb came to Melbourne Tech and

learned about radio operation and Morse code. By December 1941 he was an AC 1 wireless operator and proud of himself. Herb was posted to Cootamundra which was a training area for navigators and he became part of a crew. They went flying around NSW and the pilot would fly low to see the railway station names and check whether they were on the right flight path. The war seemed along way away with Australia being used as a training ground for air crew. This was very important as we had new crews coming on all the time. There was a notice on the board requesting applications for wireless operators to do a direction finding course because Australia had to become an operational area. There was some operational structure previous to this which had air crew stationed along the coast and in the Middle East. Pilots and navigators needed a checkpoint to find their way. So the government started up direction finding courses. Herb went to Laverton where he did a course for 4 to 5 weeks and was transferred to the North Eastern area headquarters, the operational hub of RAAF activity in the South West Pacific at the time. This was March 1942, before the Battle of the Coral Sea. At Townsville he was receiving messages from the seaplane base in the Solomon Islands. One of the signals was not coded and indicated that aircraft had been seen at the base. The last signal said that Tulagi was being taken over and it became a Japanese base. A few weeks later he was ready to go to Groote Island. This was a base in the Gulf of Carpentaria en route from Rosebay to Singapore - the route flown by Qantas Empire Flying boats. They were very large aircraft and took 2 weeks to get from Rosebay to London. Herb flew to the base in an empire flying boat. To convert the plane a hole had been cut in the roof and a Vickers machine gun put on the roof. An operator had to put his head through the hole and fire the gun at the enemy if necessary. They landed at Karumba and then into the lagoon at the base. It was a well made base and the next day they were taken in a pearling lugger crewed by aborigines. It was like a novel by Somerset Maughan. The mission lugger then came out to transport the men and materials to the strip. When they got up to the strip they got to a building near the crossway of the strips. The building was like a one teacher school. It was made out of hardwood and was about 4 feet off the ground with an iron roof. In it were two quite large rooms and a little veranda. Inside one room were six double bunks around the walls and the other room had a pyramid in the middle of the floor which was the food for 12 months. They had to cook outside on an open fire. They were preparing their food for breakfast the next day when an aboriginal family came along the strip. There were about 8 or 9. "They must have thought we were from Mars" said Herb.

Their cipher officer was an older man who had lived on Malaysia on a plantation and spoke with a plum in his mouth. Every message had to be coded by this cipher officer. Each afternoon after lunch he had a habit of having a siesta and he would lay on his bunk naked and smoke a cigarette. He had covered his tent with tree branches to try and make it cool and one day he fell asleep and the cigarette set the whole thing alight and it went up in smoke. The rest of them ran to the creek to fill buckets with water to put out the fire with little success. The problem was his table had been covered with the RAAF code books for the entire South West Pacific area and they were lost.





Air force personal in the Northern Territory.

They had to find the man some clothes and the send an emergency message to Townsville, not in code stating that a fire had destroyed the code books. Headquarters thought that the Japanese had landed which was not unreasonable given that they were expected. Only days before the Patricia Cam, an Australian Navy shore vessel had been sunk by a Japanese flying boat and a missionary was taken hostage and eventually shot. He was Rev English of the Methodist Church. All hell broke out at Townsville. They received many messages and finally an aircraft arrived to find out what was going on. All the codes for the South West Pacific had to be changed because they had lost theirs. Herb left there soon after and went to the other end of the island to take charge of the DF station from the Dept of Civil Aviation and there they had to learn how to use the equipment and do the maintenance and the statistical work. So they had a lot of spare time. They were able to tune in and listen to the Japanese. Tokyo main base was transmitting to all the area north of Australia and the Australians were able to listen to the transmissions Gradually the Australians were able to understand the Japanese kana code. Morse code uses symbols for 26 letters of the alphabet plus 10 figures, the kana code has to cover 71 letters plus 10 figures. They had to have 7 dots and dashes not 5 so it was with Morse code. Towards December 1942 Herb was transferred to Darwin and joined the DF station on the RAAF drome. There were 5 operators on a 24 hour watch. They had 7th and 13th Squadron both operating America Lockheed Hudson aircraft. These were recognisance aircraft but used for everything. Also there was 12th squadron with dive bomber aircraft called the flying brick. Once the engine cut out, you went straight in. It was a bit useless as an aircraft. Then there was the Dutch squadron, a composite squadron with pilots and navigators from the NEI (Netherlands East Indies) now Indonesia with gunners etc from Australia. The Dutch Government had great credits with the USA and

were fitted with B 25 Mitchells the most modern bomber available. The 7th and 13th squadron did good work with the 2nd independent company on East Timor. The 2nd Independent company were the only people in the South West Pacific to stop the Japanese. The Japanese had to put a division on Timor and therefore it was available to go elsewhere. The 2nd Independent Company trained at Wilson's Prom. and went into Timor to remove the Japanese. This group was eventually replaced by the 4th Independent Company. In Darwin at that time the 7th Div was recalled and were training in the Atherton Tableland and they sent number 51 wireless group to Darwin under the command of Geoffrey Ballard. They were experienced signals intelligence people. They could read the kana code but also analysts who could decode the kana into plain Japanese. This group gave Herb's party instruction on how to read the kana code. Over the next 6 months they did good work with the 51 wireless group. The 51 wireless were feeding information into central bureau, General McArthur's signals intelligence centre. Central bureau got the idea that those at the DF station in Darwin were doing a good job. The signals had to be right the first time. The signals intelligence network was throughout the Pacific and as far away as Washington and Ceylon. Some Poles working in a factory in Germany discovered that a coding machine was being made and they got copies of this machine. The wireless units were all over Australia and the Pacific. More units were formed and some went to Darwin - an ideal place to receive communications from the Japanese. The Australian wireless units were invaluable to the Americans. General Willoughby the intelligence chief for McArthur said that the value of signals intelligence in general reduced the war by 2 years. The commanders of the allies often knew the Japanese movements before their own commanders did. The Japanese were on the run and large bases such as Rabaul and Wewak were side stepped. The Japanese never really accepted that we had broken their code.



Radio Operators World War two

Herb went to Amberley and Central Bureau and was in signals intelligence from the end of 1943 until 1945. He went to New Guinea and to Dobodura where the Japanese had first come in to go over the Kokoda Track. The Americans had built 26 strips in the flat area between Milne Bay and Buna. These were made of interlocking steel and could be pulled up and removed. The Americans had a squadron of cobra aircraft. They would fly out of Dobodura and try and bomb the Japanese supply barges. The Americans built a church like it would be in Oklahoma or somewhere. When the squadron left the church was packed up and taken to the Philippines. Herb and his colleagues used to go to watch films

being shown by the Americans and on one occasion they parked their jeep and when they got back it was gone. This jeep was a vital piece of transport for the unit so they were in trouble. The next night they took a new American jeep and made it look dirty and Australian!

Hilda Tilson of Leongatha

Hilda was in the nursing service in Northern Territory for 8 months and there she developed terrible arthritis. The sandflies affected the arthritis and Hilda had to go back to the South. She was very proud of her time nursing people in the Territory

Ron Salmon of Korumburra

In four months he will be 90. His unit, the Number 4 Repair and Salvage unit arrived in Darwin in October 1942 and was located at an air strip 12 miles north of Adelaide River. The Bell strip was named after an American who was shot down in the first raid on Darwin. Their task was to salvage allied and enemy aircraft from Broome to Mt Isa. They had to maintain a series of aircraft types such as Beaufighters and Hudsons and motor vehicles. He had trips to many places to retrieve and shift whole planes that had come down. The base was only bombed once because the lid was left off the incinerator. Japanese aircraft were sent south for examination. His unit served aircraft flown by people like Bluey Truscott. The food was poor until refrigeration trucks arrived and then things were better. There were also pictures at Adelaide River. Ron was there 13 months including two Christmases. Ron belongs to the Darwin defenders Inc and they have published a book called *Darwin Battle For Australia*. The stories in the book have been written by service personel of all types who served in Darwin. There were 64 raids on Darwin. He was there for 37 and one night he was in the trenches for 3 hours. The people of Australia had never been told the truth about Darwin.

If you know anyone who would like to be a member of the Society please have he or she fill out and return the form below.

Membership type : Single membership : \$20 Couple/Family : \$25

Name :

Address :
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Telephone :

Email :

Membership subscription :

Your much appreciated donation :

TOTAL : \$ _____

Thank you