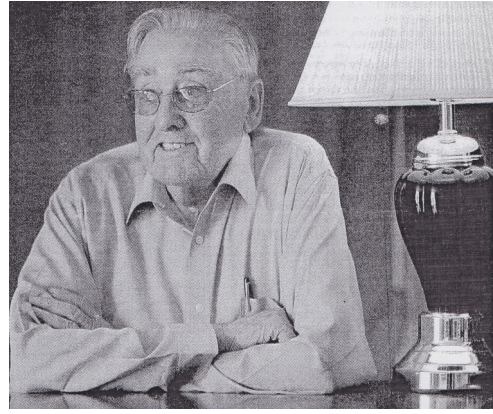


Good Blokes did their bit: Alex West

By Julie McNamara

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Alex West goes to great lengths to point out he was no hero in the war, just an average bloke keen to do his bit for his country.

With Anzac Day approaching tomorrow the World War II veteran took the time out to share his thoughts about the importance of remembering those who had fallen both during and since the war.

The 82 year old Warrnambool man said he believed the poem Just A Common Soldier was a fitting tribute to “the boys” who had died.

“It’s so true, so true. A politician, when he leaves, look what happens, but when a digger gets crook and dies what happens to them?” Mr West said.

The grandfather served four-and-a-half years in the Australian army including 20 months in Darwin and 10 in New Guinea.

“I saw every air raid in Darwin except for the first and last” he reflected. “It was 20 months of wasted time. You could stand and watch them and you knew where they were going to bomb.”

His 21st birthday came and went in Darwin with yet another air raid the only event which marked the milestone. One of his most harrowing experiences unfolded early into his stint in New Guinea. “We went into a camp the Americans had been in” he said.

“The Yanks were notorious for putting booby traps in , but they told us they were all gone. A real good mate, a sergeant, was making a bed and a spade he was digging with hit the booby trap and he was gone.”

Although he wouldn’t have missed the war “for quids” the former Fletcher Jones worker said he didn’t like to think about his experiences too much. He believed, however, Anzac Day served an important role in educating the next generation about the war.

“I think it’s good for young ones to let them know what sort of people their ancestors were”, he said.

“There were a lot of good blokes killed in that war”.

Just A Common Soldier

He was getting old and paunchy and his hair was falling fast;
And he sat around the legion telling stories of the past.
Of war that he had fought in, the deeds that he had done,
In his exploits with his buddies, there were heroes every one.

And tho' sometimes to his neighbours, his tales became a joke,
All his legion buddies listened, for they knew of what he spoke.
But we'll his tales no longer for old Bill has passed away;
And the world's a little poorer, for a Soldier died today.

He'll not be mourned by many, just his children and his wife,
For he lived an ordinary, quiet and uneventful life.
Held a job and raised a family, quietly going his own way,
And the world won't note his passing, though a Soldier died today.

When politicians leave this earth, their bodies lie in state,
And thousands note their passing and proclaim that they were great.
Newspapers fell their life stories, from the time that they were young,
But the passing of a simple Soldier goes unnoticed and unsung.

Is the greatest contribution to the welfare of our land,
A person who breaks promises and cons his fellow man;
Or the ordinary fellow, who in times of war and strife,
Goes off to serve his country and offers up his life?

It's so easy to forget them, for it was so long ago,
That the old "Bills" of our country went to battle, but we know,
It was not the politicians, with their compromises and ploys,
Who won for the freedom that our country now enjoys.

He was must a common Soldier and his ranks are growing thin,
But his presence should remind us that we may not see his like again.
For when the countries are in conflict, then we find the Soldier's part,
Is to clean up all the troubles that others always start.

If we can give him honour, while he's here to hear the praise,
Then at least let's give him homage, at the ending of his days.
Perhaps a simple notice in a paper that would say,
Our Country is in mourning "cause a Soldier passed away"

Anon

