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The West Australian

ELECTION 2025

GREENS LEADER IS TURFED OUT

KATINA CURTIS & ELLEN RANSLEY

Adam Bandt's pre-election cockiness has come back to haunt him after he lost his seat of Melbourne. But despite the defeat, the Greens leader refused to concede yesterday. Mr Bandt was vocal

during the campaign about the demands his minor party would place on the Albanese Government, predicting a minority win. Instead, Labor won in a landslide, and the Greens have been left leaderless and retained just one seat in the Lower House.

FULL REPORT PAGE 7



GRAVE SHAME

War heroes forgotten and under a footpath

BEN HARVEY

Australian soldiers who served in the Great War lie anonymously under footpaths or rest in garden beds at Karrakatta Cemetery as State and Federal bureaucrats shift the blame over responsibility for giving them proper recognition. RSL WA board member David Thomas said the impending com-

memoration of the life of Arthur Leggett, WA's last World War II prisoner of war, should bring into focus the plight of the Diggers, many of whom served at Gallipoli, trapped in a bureaucratic no-man's-land. "We have soldiers from the first war under footpaths and in garden beds," Mr Thomas said.

FULL REPORT P18-19



THE BAD NEWS BEARS

Rugby-mad Roger Cook forces WA taxpayers to pay Sydney's NRL rejects \$65m to play in Perth

DYLAN CAPORN

Premier Roger Cook, a self-confessed rugby league tragic, is making WA taxpayers pay \$65 million to relocate a dud second division team to play in Perth, finally revealing the huge price tag after months of secrecy and deception.

Despite promising not to give money to Sydney rugby league bosses, the massive cheque will go to the North Sydney Bears, which will be owned by the game's administrators, the National Rugby League. The Cook indulgence delivers questionable economic benefit to

the AFL-mad State for a game with negligible local fanbase and no elite players, but will further pump up the NRL's coffers by allowing it now to chase an even bigger payment from rights holders in its next broadcast deal.

FULL REPORT PAGES 4-5

PERTH 15-30 Sunny. Tomorrow: Sunny, 16-31. Yesterday: 9-25.4

Weather details P48

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GRAVE SHAME FOR

As we rightly prepare to honour our last WWII prisoner of war, the

BEN HARVEY

Some lie anonymously under footpaths. Others rest in garden beds, the only clue being a small plaque hidden between plants.

Countless more have had fresh caskets laid over them, generations of dead piled on top of their bodies.

As Australia prepares for the state funeral of Arthur Leggett, WA's last World War II prisoner of war, dozens of soldiers who served in the Great War lay with little or no recognition at Karrakatta Cemetery in often disrespectful states.

They are the victims of penny pinching, red tape and buck-passing between the State-run Metropolitan Cemeteries Board and the Federally managed Office of Australian War Graves.

RSL WA board member David Thomas said the impending commemoration of Mr Leggett's life should bring into sharp focus the plight of the World War I Diggers, many of whom served at Gallipoli, trapped in a bureaucratic no-man's-land.

"The entire country is rightly paying homage to Arthur Leggett's service in the Second World War but as that happens we have soldiers from the first war under footpaths and in garden beds," Mr Thomas said.

"The RSL has been agitating on this issue for years now and still nothing has been done to properly recognise these men. It's become a complete joke."

Soldiers who returned from the Great War, and died as a consequence of their service, were buried in civil cemeteries such as Karrakatta because there was no war cemetery.

Karrakatta is home to more than 3500 World War I and II veterans, many of whom have well-defined graves and granite Australian Imperial Force headstones.

However, the ravages of time and so-called burial plot renewal programs — which have graves demolished every few decades unless the deceased's family is aware and pays more money — means others have been squeezed into obscurity.

Modest plaques are haphazardly wedged near their burial site after their original granite headstones were unceremoniously smashed during cemetery renovations.

At least 100 suffer the ultimate

VE Day was a milestone for the war in Europe, but Down

MALCOLM QUEKETT

When World War II veteran Bill Fielding looks back 80 years, his assessment of how the end of the fighting in Europe was greeted is measured.

And there is good reason for that. Mr Fielding, now 100, was still at war against Japan.

For the Diggers, May 8, 1945, may have been Victory in Europe or VE Day but the date of their own victory in the Pacific war was still unknown.

And so at the time VE Day "in

itself was not a major thing", Mr Fielding told The West Australian. But, he said, later it would become clear it was.

In London, crowds had sang, danced and cheered news of Germany's surrender.

But families in Australia still had men in action ... And in Japanese prisoner of war camps. Husbands. Sons. Brothers.

The news of VE Day was reported in Perth in sombre fashion. In a special "extraordinary edition" of The West Australian produced through the night

of May 7, the paper broke the news under the headline "End of Hostilities in Europe", and "Germany defeated".

"The first stage of the world's greatest war ... has ended with the unconditional capitulation of all the German armed forces in Europe," the paper reported.

But in its editorial it reflected on what was still ahead.

"The war which began on December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and Singapore, has yet to be won ... and it may be long," it said. "In this

told the Coroner her husband "would crawl under his bed ... afraid of himself".

Pte Nightingale's final resting place has no headstone or plaque. People stand on his grave as they inspect contemporaneous tombstones around him.

A short walk from Nightingale is Pte Thomas Brady, who was wounded in France.

His headstone was smashed during one of cemetery's many renewal programs.

Today, his coffin lies anonymously amid hulking monuments to civilians who died of natural causes far more recently.

Pte John Cotter served in both the Boer War and World War I. He

was wounded and captured in France in 1916, spending the next two years in a German POW camp.

He was buried in 1935 but decades later his grave was abandoned and headstone destroyed during ground works at Karrakatta. His body is now under a footpath and there is no plaque to acknowledge his presence.

Pte George Butcher was one of six brothers from Bridgetown who all survived the war.

The then 34-year-old timber worker signed up in 1915, serving in the 28th Battalion. He returned to WA suffering from trench fever and died in 1923.

A tree now stands where he was buried.

Nearby, Pte William Ure's grave was paved over and a seat installed for people to relax on.

"The fact there is a seat on a Digger's grave is bad enough, but up until a few months ago

there was also a rubbish bin on top of him," Mr Thomas said. "It was only when we kicked up a stink about that they moved the bin."

Mr Thomas believes that every World War I soldier buried at Karrakatta should have a granite headstone like the one originally placed on their graves. He is also pushing for soldiers in unmarked graves to be reinterred in the manicured grounds of the neighbouring Perth War Cemetery.

"It has capacity for hundreds more graves," Mr Thomas said. "The headstones there are displayed in a way that commemorates soldiers at attention and facing east, towards the enemy."

The timing of a veteran's death is one of the reasons authorities cannot agree on what to do with the lost World War I Diggers.

In a bid to limit costs after the



Bill Fielding now and in his WWII service days with the RAAF. Right: The West's front page.

hour of achievement it is necessary to rededicate ourselves to the task ahead."

Mr Fielding was part of the Royal Australian Air Force still dedicated to that task.

An article compiled by Brian Jennings of the North Beach RSL tells how Mr Fielding was living in Queensland when war broke out. He wanted to be a pilot, but told that air crew were not being recruited quickly, he enlisted on October 28, 1942, as a trainee radio location mechanic — which led to his deployment as a radar mechanic.

By August 1944, Mr Fielding was part of a small team operat-

FALLEN VETS

resting places of other Diggers lie in a state of disregard



Pte Thomas Brady's headstone was smashed during a renewal programs, while other graves rest in garden beds or behind bushes.



Pte John Nightingale's grave is an unmarked patch of dirt that people unsuspectingly walk on.



Pte John Nightingale was wounded at Gallipoli but went on to fight on the Western Front, where he was taken as a prisoner of war in 1917. He took his own life in 1926 suffering shell shock and his grave is now a patch of dirt that members of the public unsuspectingly walk over. Far left: Arthur Leggett, WA's last World War II prisoner of war will receive a state funeral.

Great War, the British Government ruled that only veterans who died before August 31, 1921, were eligible for a Commonwealth war grave.

The Australian Government believed this was unfair and agreed to pay for the maintenance of graves of all people who served and Karrakatta Cemetery, which has since morphed into the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board, was happy to carry out the upkeep, establishing a financial fund to that end.

However, the undertaking by Karrakatta was made when it was envisaged the cemetery would take no new bodies after the 1950s.

Decades and thousands of funerals later, the promise became difficult to keep.

Federal Veterans' Affairs Minister Matt Keogh said the controversy "arose from bureaucratic decisions in mid-last century".

"This is an important, complex, difficult and emotional set of issues that takes time to work through in a coherent, systemic way," he said.

"As part of this I have been working through understanding the full extent and complexity of proper burial entitlements with the Office of Australian War Graves and how these interact with municipal and State Government cemetery authorities around the country and their various implementations of plot renewal programs."

The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board said that in 2008 a decision was made that all "official commemorations (plaques or headstones) should be retained at the original burial site, where possible".

"Any decision relating to the interments within the Perth War Cemetery would be the decision of the Office of Australian War

Graves in consultation with the families," a spokesperson said.

The Office of Australian War Graves said service-people who died "after the relevant designated period of a war, as defined by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission ... are classified as post-war dead".

"They are not eligible to be commemorated as war dead, or to be commemorated in a war cemetery," an OAWG spokesperson said. "Granite headstones are the standard commemorative marker for war dead. Other commonly used grave markers include pedestal markers surmounted by a bronze plaque or stone tablets." WA Local Government Minister Hannah Beazley, who has responsibility for the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board, said the OAWG "leads the MCB on matters related to war graves within the MCB cemeteries".

Under, there was three more months of battle

Mr Fielding joined 332 Radar Unit on Krantek Island, near Madang on New Guinea's north-east coast.

There they prepared for advancing towards the Philippines by training for beach landings, setting up, operating and dismantling radar stations.

But there were dangers in undertaking operations with the US troops.

"The Australian forces insisted that we wear our uniforms as we go in with the Americans," Mr Fielding told The West. "And

the Americans were known for killing each other with friendly fire."

Mr Fielding recalled that within weeks of VE Day the significance became clear.

"We knew that Japan was not an easy job," Mr Fielding said.

"But it would seem most likely that the war would finish much earlier than expected."

Japan's surrender (Victory in the Pacific Day) or Victory over Japan (VJ Day) was celebrated on August 15, 1945.

The war was finally over.

