



ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE FOR GIRLS

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MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

Girls connect with local veterans, win national award

St Patrick's College students have been awarded first prize in the National Anzac Day Schools' Awards for a passion project through which they recorded the stories of local servicemen and women, then built a website to publish their research.

In addition to taking out the top spot in the competition run by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, these students were awarded the Brigadier Bill Rolfe AO Award for Veteran Involvement.

The student-led project titled, "Our local veterans: Discovering, recording and reflecting on stories of service", was completed outside school hours by members of the History Club and aimed to preserve the first- and second-hand stories of service personnel.

The girls conducted 14 interviews with veterans and their families. Interviewees were invited to bring an object from their military service to discuss and were asked a range of questions, including about the challenges they faced during and after their service. Each participant sat for a portrait taken by Year 10 student, Hannah Buckpitt. When the content was complete, the website build was led by Year 12 student, Isabelle Slade.

Many of the military personnel were parents or relatives of the students and the girls reflected on how the project helped them view their family members in a new light.

Particularly poignant is the interview Year 8 student, Hope Schwarze, conducted with her grandfather, John Matthew Purkis, who served in the military for 19 years, including in the Vietnam War. Mr Purkis passed away just a few weeks after the interview.

"Every year, I have marched with my pop on Anzac Day," Hope said.

"This year was my first time marching without him. He taught me what Anzac Day is about and now, in his absence, I will wear his medals, and my great-grandfather's medals, with pride and carry on their legacy."



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"My grandfather and his inspiring stories have taught me how to be courageous and to believe in myself. He followed through with his childhood dream to serve in the army. When he returned, he lived with no regrets. He saw the best in everyone and everything, even though he had experienced the worst," she said.

Year 12 student, Caitlin Reynolds, documented the story of her great-grandfather, Harley James Daley, who was 34 years old when he enlisted in WWII in 1940. While serving, Daley was captured by Japanese soldiers in Malaysia. He spent four years in brutal POW camps, including Changi. As a Warrant Officer, Daley was responsible for 200 Allied soldiers in Changi prison and risked his life documenting his experiences in a diary which he buried each day. Upon returning home, Daley resumed his former position with Ingleburn Municipal Council, which was later amalgamated with Campbelltown Municipal Council. He made a significant contribution to the local area, helping to facilitate Campbelltown's transformation from a small country town to a burgeoning city.

"Learning about my great-grandfather has allowed me to reflect upon the experiences of those who have served — they hold our national stories, our local stories and our family stories," Caitlin said.

"It is these experiences that help us understand the sacrifices of those who came before us."

Other stories are closer to home, like those of Pippa Rindermann, Year 7; Coralyn Garcia, Year 8; and Willow and Chaiyya Robertson, Years 8 and 10; whose fathers served in conflicts including Afghanistan and Iraq.

"There is a long history of military personnel in our family, including our father, who was a member of the 2nd Commando Regiment, which served on the front line in Afghanistan," Chaiyya said.

"He also served in Iraq and East Timor, alongside his close friends. My father, like so many others, selflessly gave of himself to protect the liberties we hold dear. Their sacrifices are etched into the fabric of our nation's history, reminding us that freedom is never free."

St Patrick's College's History Club students are well-known in the Macarthur region for raising awareness about women's contributions to war and regularly attend Anzac Day parades and memorials wearing replica uniforms worn by servicewomen throughout history.

Through the website project, Laura Zapirain, Year 12, helped ensure the work of servicewomen from South West Sydney, such as nurse Elizabeth McRae, is remembered.

"The life of Elizabeth McRae serves as a moving example of the difference that one person's commitment and service can make," Laura said.



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“Her passion was nursing, and she served courageously in WWI. Her experiences in Egypt, France, England and Gallipoli demonstrate the need for endurance in the face of difficulty. Her community's deep appreciation is shown by the warm welcome she received upon her return. In renaming Elizabeth McRae Avenue in her honour, her legacy lives on.”

These young women are passionate about making historical sources widely available and, to that end, collaborated with the Campbelltown Library Local Studies Team to learn to record their interviews in high-quality formats. Their work is now part of the Campbelltown Library Oral History Collection.

The St Patrick's College community is exceptionally proud of the students in the History Club. Their volunteer efforts and extracurricular projects not only enhance their own learning but also bring history to life for the community. The school congratulates the girls on their recent awards and on the incredible historical archive they have created in honour of the men and women who have served our country in war and peace.

ENDS

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