

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: SX25230 (S57109)
Name: Michael Richard O'CONNELL
Nickname: Mick



Medals and Decorations

1939 - 45 Star

Pacific Star

Defence Medal

War Medal 1939 - 45

Australian Service Medal 1939 - 45

Rank: Trooper/Gunner

Service: Army

Enlisted: 31 Dec 1941

Discharged: 12 Jan 1946

Mick was born on 14 Nov 1917 at North Adelaide to Michael O'Connell and Florence O'Connell (nee Paul, a well known name in Tumby Bay). There were 5 children in the family but 2 died in infancy, leaving 3 boys. His dad worked in the railways in Adelaide, but the family then moved to Martindale Hall to work for the Mortlock family and then to Coffin Bay. In 1929 the family moved to Tumby Bay to work at Yalluna Station (also Mortlock's).

Mick started school at Coffin Bay and then transferred to Tumby Bay when the family moved. He left school at Grade 7 and took employ in the Tumby Bay Post Office until he was 16 years old, then took on "wheat lumping" – a job that would develop any lad! After that he was employed by the Port Lincoln Council and later by the Tumby Bay Council; he remained in this employ until he enlisted.

In 1937 he met Sylvia Winckel, a Port Neill girl, who worked in the Tumby Bay Hotel – there were a total of 8 girls working at the hotel at this time. Mick would come over of an evening and help Sylvia dry the dishes. From this, romance blossomed and the couple was married on 3 Mar 1939 – just as well there were no dish washing machines in those days! They rented their uncle's house out near the silos. There were 3 children in the family, 2 girls and a boy.

On 31 Dec 1941 he enlisted in the Army (Citizen Military Forces) in Adelaide. He transferred to the AIF and was posted to Puckapunyal (Vic) initially to 9th Australian Motor Company on 18 Jul 1942 and then transferred to 2/4th Australian Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery on 10 Oct 1942 and was posted to Gympie with the rank of Gunner. He undertook training here for several months before embarking for

New Guinea. His unit was then equipped with 25 pounder guns and was one of the few airmobile artillery units in New Guinea . They fought along the Kokoda Track at Nadzab, at Dumpu and along the coast to Lae.

His unit then returned to Australia before embarking on the “*General Anderson*” for Morotai where he undertook training for amphibious landings. On 1 Jul 1945 he embarked on a Landing Craft Motorised, for the amphibious assault landing at Balikpapan (Borneo). On 14 Aug 1945 the Japanese surrendered and the rush was on to return home.

In 1946 he took his discharge from the Army and returned to Tumby to find that his wife had moved from the house near the silos and bought a house in Church Street; this became the family home.

He worked in the PMG for a few years before being employed by Ron Carter Transport as a driver; he remained in this job until the sale of the business. He then returned to the Tumby Bay Council and worked with the Council until his sudden death at work in 1964.

He was a keen sportsman, having played both football and cricket for Tumby Bay. He was a life member of the Tumby Bay Football Club and President of the Cricket Club. He also played table tennis, billiards and darts and was secretary of the Tumby Bay Turf Racing Club for several years. His interest in rifle shooting and hunting almost cost him his life when a shot gun discharged accidentally, severely wounding him in the right arm.

Mick was the first person to have his cortege leave from the “new” RSL building after his funeral service. He is buried in the Tumby Bay Cemetery.

He was President and a stalwart of the Tumby Bay Sub Branch of the RSL.

