

THE RSL VIRTUAL WAR MEMORIAL

Background

This site is unique in its ambition, scope and reach. There are other similar sites, but none as 'joined up' particularly through memorial infrastructure.

It complements and will interact with others sites such as the Australian War Memorial and National Archive of Australia sites.

The RSL Virtual War Memorial (RSLVWM) has the capacity to present a web page for every service man and woman who has gone in harm's way in the country's name since the Boer War.

The task will be ongoing - it is an ambitious one. The system architecture and the data model is extremely robust and comprehensively structured.

The RSLVWM tells a community story via the RSL's "*Tributes of Honour*" database compiled by Will and Jacqui Clough of Riverton, SA between 2002-07. Comprising more than 1700 South Australian and Northern Territory war memorials and more than 48,000 names from all conflicts that appear more than 100,000 times, it was a remarkable undertaking for which a debt of gratitude is owed by the people of SA and the NT.

Memorials associate people with the communities from whence they came. The names thereon became the 'baseline' for whom we seek a match to a record in order to turn the 'name' into a 'person'. This site puts a life behind the names inscribed on memorials that we walk past every day.

Every 'person' has a web page – and we want to put a story on every page.

It retrieves and cross-matches data from official sources such as the AWM, National Archive and resources such as the RSL's own Membership records.

It invites contributions of private records, artifacts and images.

It will connect those names with key places, organisations and events to add context to the story.

Every year, lots of research is done on our men and women involved in making our military history. Most of it ends up in short-run publications or on a CD, and maybe even on a web site somewhere.

The Virtual War Memorial is both a repository and a resource for students, family, researchers, teachers, historians, genealogists and communities. It is the research project that will never end, as we strive to make stories as complete as we can.

Contemporary veterans will have the opportunity to tell their story first-hand. We have witnessed a lot of interest in this facet of the site. It complements RSL objectives in veteran welfare by providing an audience for men and women who have historically 'not talked about' their experiences.

We plan to create "Virtual Memorials" to provide a digital home for those people not recorded on physical memorials. An example of this is the RAAF Memorials complex in Adelaide. It has no names physically inscribed - rather it commemorates units. However, using the structure of the underlying data model, we are able to digitally assign people to the units in which they served and they are thus connected via their unit to the Memorial, creating a truly "Virtual" memorial.

Exciting developments such as 'augmented reality' are also to be included in the offering. Enabled though mobile devices, this feature will provide relevant streaming digital content triggered by geo-spatial proximity to 'live' memorials.

We have a comprehensive development plan which is ultimately a function of resourcing. We are striving to make this site the best it can be.

Get on board and tell those stories!

Steve Larkins
RSLVWM Project Director
April 2013