

A WAR SOUVENIR



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I'm sure most veterans come home with some memento of their time away on duty. It may be a belt buckle, a 50 cal cartridge case or a treasured can of ham and lima beans. Sometimes it's a fairly anti-social souvenir. A few months ago a Sydney golf clubhouse was evacuated when a World War II grenade had to be detonated in situ in a house in the adjacent suburb. In my case,

I have my dog tags, complete with folding can opener, my sweat rag and a water bottle. However my most treasured item is a shell dressing.



There were two types of wound dressing issued for use in the field. Each soldier carried at least one First Field Dressing, the size of a cigarette packet. It contained a sterile gauze pad in a waterproof cover which which could be torn open and applied to a wound, by the soldier himself or by a mate or medic. The dressing cover had fabric ties to hold the dressing in place.

Medics also carried a stock of Shell Dressings. These were larger (14x8x5cm) versions of the Field Dressing, to be used on more extensive wounds. They took up a fair measure of space in my back pack.

Of note is their origin - the British War Office - and date of manufacture, April 1915, a noteworthy month and year in Australian military history. Despite the fact that they were half a century old when being used in Vietnam they were perfectly serviceable and central to the care of hundreds of diggers in that long war.