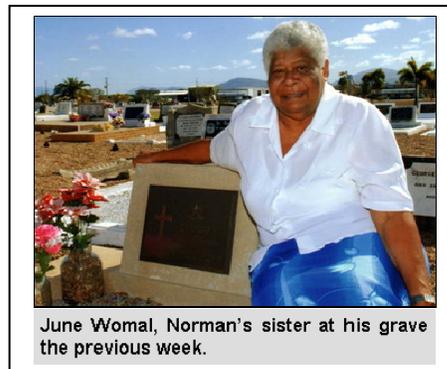


PRESENTATION TO NORMAN WOMAL'S FAMILY

On the 31st August, the Womal family of Bowen in Nth Qld received with great honour replica medals of their brother and uncle Cpl Norman James Womal. SA RAR Association member Mike Dennis made the trip from Adelaide to present the mounted set of medals, citation and photograph to Norman's family, it gave them a sense of closure. Now 43 years after his death, the family can stand with great pride on ANZAC DAY with his medals.

The Womal family would like to thank Mike Dennis for the presentation of the display, Bowen RSL branch president Brian Schwartz for his help on this special day, RSL's State Branch Chief Executive Officer Chris McHugh and Northern District President Ewan Cameron for attending. There was a large contingent of Vietnam Veterans in attendance and this gave the family a great sense of pride in Norman. Last but not least, on behalf of myself and the Womal family, I would like send a special thank you to Michael Von Berg and Jock Letford for organising the medals and the display for us, and for the speeches they gave which were absolutely beautiful in how they both spoke of Norman.



June Womal, Norman's sister at his grave the previous week.

Louisa Forbes nee-Womal

TIME TO CELEBRATE

NEW MEDALS KEEP NORM'S MEMORY ALIVE

MORE than 100 people gathered at the Cenotaph last Monday morning to help keep alive the memory of Bowen's Vietnam War hero Norman Womal.

A special presentation of replicas of Corporal Womal's service medals, encased with a photo and copy of the citation for his posthumously awarded Mentioned in Dispatches, was made to the family. The medals can now be worn by a family member on ANZAC Day in Bowen.



Norman's family, (rear) June (Sister), Luke (nephew), Kevin (Brother), Steve (nephew), (front) Shirley (sister-in-law), Edenn and Kleo (great nieces).

"I believe today is not a day of sadness but a day of celebration," Steve Womal, the son of Norman's sister June, told the gathering around the Bowen Cenotaph. Steve made the trip from Brisbane to accept the medals on behalf of the family. "I was only five months old when my uncle Norman was killed in Vietnam," he said. "Mum has a photo of Norman in full uniform at home, and I must say he does cut a fine figure."

Mr Womal said his earliest recollections concerning his uncle were at Bowen Anzac Dawn services, where the family would place a wreath at the Cenotaph.

He especially thanked his Melbourne cousin Louisa Forbes, after her quest to learn more about their uncle led to the special day for the family this week.

With the whereabouts of Corporal Womal's original service medals unknown, Monday's presentation brought with it a sense of closure.

Corporal Womal was 28 when he died, on October 17, 1966. "Born and bred" in Bowen, he was employed as a meat worker at the Bowen Freezing Works after leaving school, before joining the army at 21.

On that fateful day in Vietnam Corporal Womal was taking part in Operation Queanbeyan in mountainous country near the Australia Task Force Base of Nui Dat, as a member of Anti-tank Platoon of 5th Battalion RAR. They came under fire from snipers in limestone caves and he was shot in the throat.

"Corporal Womal was mortally wounded by a sniper who had obviously concentrated on him because

he was controlling his section by voice and hand signals,” the citation said. “From the position where he fell, Corporal Womal continued to control the covering fire of his section machine gun. Corporal Womal propped himself up on one elbow in an exposed position to indicate by voice to his platoon commander the exact location of the enemy.” He died later as he was about to be evacuated by helicopter.

SA RAR Association elder Colonel Mike Dennis made the trip from Adelaide to present the medal collection and citation to Norman’s family.

Corporal Womal’s platoon commander Michael von Berg MC and fellow soldier Jock Letford (both ex-5RAR), paid for the Presentation unit out of their own funds. A letter from the pair was read out to the gathering by Bowen RSL branch president Brian Schwartz. The pair wrote they were delighted to discover that Corporal Womal’s niece was keen to know more about her uncle and the circumstances to his fatal wounding.

“Nobody who knew Norm well, or who was at that battle in which Norm lost his life, has ever had a chance to openly say to his immediate family how terribly sorry we were in losing Norm,” they wrote.

“But more importantly, what a brave, unselfish and wonderful individual and NCO Norm was, both as a leader and to lead.”

Mr von Berg said when he took over Anti Tank Platoon of 5RAR in Vietnam, Corporal Womal was “my best NCO by far, and although he knew me as a digger before being commissioned, he was always respectful and loyal. Norm’s loss was felt throughout the battalion because of his popularity as a soldier and as an individual and character.”

Mr von Berg and Mr Letford wrote: “Hopefully, Norm’s immediate family will now be able to keep Norm’s memory alive every Anzac Day by wearing Norm’s medals with dignity and pride. Norm was a great mate and a superb soldier who brought great credit to the community and his family.”



Cpl Norman J Womal

The ceremony was attended by a large contingent of Vietnam War veterans, as well as veterans from earlier and later actions, as well as members of the community.

Also present were the RSL’s State branch chief executive officer Chris McHugh and Northern District president Ewan Cameron. Former Bowen Anzac Day parade marshal Gordon Barrett was back in town to be master of ceremonies. The Salvation Army’s Wes Bust played the Last Post to mark the end of the ceremony.

A large section of the gathering then adjourned to the Denison Hotel for drinks and snacks.

With thanks to Charles Cepulis and the “Bowen Independent”.



SA RAR Association’s Colonel Mike Dennis points out to Norman Womal’s sister June, and her sister-in-law Shirley, the significance of the various service medals in the collection.

Tiger Tales Editor’s Note: On 20 April of this year Louisa posted on the 5RAR Association website Guestbook, “I was just curious about the regiment my deceased uncle served in, as I was born after his passing away I’m always interested in knowing anything about him and seeing photo’s of him.”

Ted Harrison, our Webmaster referred the posting to Michael von Berg, who contacted Louisa several times. The culmination of this communication was the Presentation Ceremony in Bowen in late August and a family being given closure for a loved one after 43 years.

This also illustrates the importance of our website and the excellent work that Ted does in designing and maintaining it. In my opinion, it is by far the outstanding military association website in Australia, if not the world.