

Gravener Family submission to

The Independent and Peaceful Australia Network People's inquiry. 2021

WE MUST NEVER FORGET AND WE MUST NEVER REPEAT.

The Gravener family has a long history of wartime service in the defence of Australia and other countries including during World War 1 (WW1) on the poppy fields of the Western Front; World War 2 (WW2) in the Middle East, Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Asia Pacific. Both our parents were then engaged in the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) in Japan through to the Korean War at the "Battle of Kapyong" and a short tour of duty in Vietnam.

Our Great Uncle Lance Corporal Edward Ernest Ford was Killed in action on the fields of Flanders on the 03/01/1917 104 years ago leaving behind his devastated mother, sisters, fiancé and his only son orphaned at 12 years of age In Triabunna Tasmania. The social and economic impact of his death in a small country town was devastating. He was a shopkeeper, a sportsman and local counsellor who was well respected throughout the district. His family struggled to maintain their homes and forever grieved that he would never come home. Edward is buried in France at the Bonjean Military Cemetery at Armentieres. **Lest We Forget.**



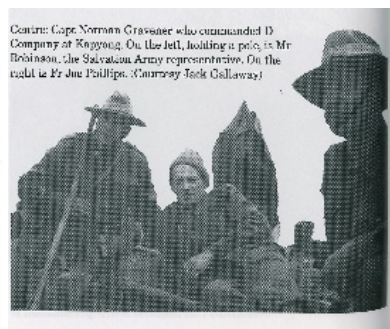
Our Father William Norman Gravener, was a career soldier, starting in New Zealand and serving from 1938 – 1974 In the Australian Army Infantry. A decorated soldier serving in WW2 in the 2/8th division in the Middle East, Palestine, Egypt, Greece, Crete, Papua New Guinea, Burma, and India. He was then part of the (BCOF) British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Kure Japan, as well as D Company commander at the "Battle of Kapyong" on the 25th April 1951 (70 years ago), in the Korean conflict. During the war he served with 3RAR "Old Faithful" under the USA led United Nations forces which honoured the Australian soldiers the Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation.



Our Father earned the 1939-45 Star, the Africa Star, the Pacific star with a Burma clasp, the Defence Medal, the War Medal, he Australia Service medal, he Korean medal, the United Nations Service medal, the Presidential Distinguished Unit citation, Infantry Combat Badge and Returned from Active Service badge. He also was awarded the Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) on the 10th June 1961 "In recognition of his valuable service". "As staff officer at the directorate of Infantry,

Army Headquarters he bore the responsibility in development of new weapons and equipment for the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. He carried out this task with the same devotion that he has displayed in his previous long service, often with great personal inconvenience.”

Our Father went on to serve as a career soldier in many post war times training future soldiers, including writing the first army Commando manual, teaching his craft and imparting his firsthand knowledge of war in all its facets, the good and ugly. He was a formidable warrior of war.



Our Mother Myra Gwendoline Connolly was a Lieutenant in the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps serving from 1945 – 1947 which included active service in Australia, and Japan under the BCOF prior to and during the Korean conflict. She was awarded the 1939-45 War Medal.

Our Mother talked of witnessing horrific physical and psychological impacts on soldiers of the Korean War. She described injuries that would be lifelong and life ending. She described the need to clear out whole wards often, to create space for incoming newly injured soldiers being treated in corridors overflowing with severely injured or dying men. Mum sadly recalled the story of an Australian soldier suffering a spinal injury and the only way to treat him until he died was to place him in a bath of ice.

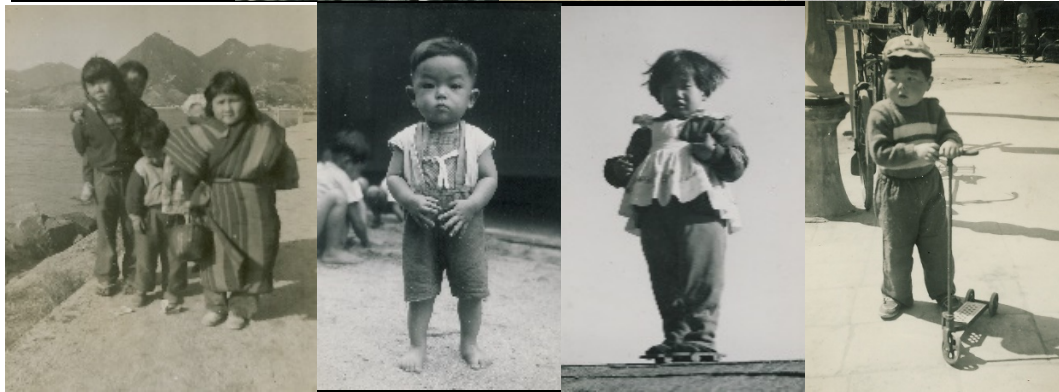


Our Parents married in Japan in January 1952, a happy pause for them, returning to Australia soon after carrying images and memories from war burnt into their very beings.



What they had seen firsthand and what they learned and witnessed with the aftermath and ongoing devastation of the Atomic bombs that annihilated Hiroshima and Nagasaki killing hundreds of thousands and maiming even more was unimaginable. The total annihilation of two cities and surrounding countryside vaporising countless innocent men, women and children, young and old going about their daily life was an inhumane act. Even with what our parents experienced and witnessed, not even they could envisage the devastating ongoing physical, emotional, psychological intergenerational impacts to the Japanese people. War by the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction is barbaric and will never create World peace when such weapons sole aim is to kill. They are not deterrents they breed the terrorists of the future.

We must Never forget and we must Never repeat.



The injuries of torn and mutilated soldiers and civilian people burned into their whole beings is unimaginable. Our father told us of his horrific memories in Korea when friendly US fire dropped napalm, from an American Corsair aircraft, on his unit literally melted the skin off his men maiming and killing them right in front of his eyes. He didn't tell us much but we remember the nightmares he suffered all our lives, which determined how he spent his life after service. Our Father was a strict man but very fair and compassionate man becoming immersed in the St Vincent De Paul Society, serving his Church, attending mass daily and assisting in Parish activities. There was not one night that Dad, Mum and us bemoaning children wouldn't be on our knees after dinner before bed saying the rosary praying for World Peace.

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Our Father was the 4th child of 24 children. 5 of his brothers and 1 sister also served during war years with varying experiences. One brother came back from WW2 never to be the same. Suffering shell shock (PTSD) and many other war related illnesses and injuries. He and others in his family struggled with these long-term issues until the day they died. Dad's siblings were among the fortunate to all come back. So many other families never saw their loved ones again and couldn't even attend their funerals. A simple telegram told them that someone had been killed or was missing in action never to be seen again.



Our Mother and Father spent much time visiting their army and nursing friends throughout their lives. Their friends included many magnificent people (Australian Heroes) such as **Vivienne Bullwinkle** an Australian Nurse the sole survivor of a massacre by the Japanese on Bangka Island. Despite being shot and enduring the inhumane horrors of being a Prisoner of War she went on to serve in nursing circles making huge contributions to the professionalisation of nursing throughout Australia and was the Matron of Fairfield Infectious diseases hospital. Our parents Best Man at their wedding was **Ben O'Dowd** a highly decorated soldier who was the A company commander at Kapyong and after retiring from the army headed the Victorian Emergency Response Department including heading the cyclone Tracey response in Darwin. **Reg Saunders** the first Aboriginal soldier to become an officer commanding C Company at Kapyong. **Cate Hewins** another highly decorated army Nurse worked as a nurse for over 30 years. She was the Nurse on duty at the West Gate Bridge collapse and continued to serve her veteran friends by visiting them in their homes, hospitals, nursing homes and RSL functions. She never missed ANZAC day Marches right to her mid 90's before she died. She often led those marches representing women Nurses of War.

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We, the children of our courageous parents witnessed the comradery that all their returned family and friends had. The respect they held for each other demonstrated to us the unique understanding of what they had each witnessed and experienced. They NEVER once glorified war. Not once. Many suffered PTSD, alcoholism, mental illness and many other ailments permanent injuries sustained from those times, they were all of the same opinion and belief that war should never happen again, EVER. They used to say war was NEVER the answer and it NEVER fixed anything. If we forget their stories of war we are doomed to repeat the history and the deeds that come with it. We heard just a handful of their stories regarding the costs and consequences of war on the enemy and their often innocent families and friends!

Our Father led by example spending his retirement years caring and assisting refugee families from war torn El Salvador, Vietnam, Cambodia and other places. He helped them integrate into Australian society and offered them food, clothing and housing. He mowed their lawns, painted and prepared their houses, took them for appointments to doctors, assisting them to get jobs and settle in community. So many of these people became his friends. They had great respect for him. He never said it openly but maybe, just maybe he was trying to make amends for those war years and show a better way of compassion and tolerance.

The effects of war service never left our Father and weighed on his mind constantly. During his dying days fighting cancer, he would recall vivid memories of the "Battle of Kapyong" and the sea of bodies all around him. He would say we fired our guns constantly sometimes all night while wave after wave after wave of Chinese soldiers kept coming at them and we just killed them while their bodies piled up on the steep hillside below their strategic dugout. They may have 'halted the North Koreans and Chinese' from advancing across the 38th parallel and taking South Korea a short distance away however the unresolved conflict that continues to today oppresses and imparts pain on innocent people as they long to hold their families separated by a fenced corridor of land that divides the North from the South today. The violence of war and its weapons will never create peace when they aim to kill. Our Father put forward compelling arguments for Australia not to enter another war, to his mates, colleagues and community leaders, particularly when Australia followed America into the Vietnam War. He was clear it will not fix their problems and innocents will die. He trained young soldiers who served in Vietnam and who never came back.

He spent the greater part of his young life in a war related profession. But he was the first to stand up and tell politicians point blank that war must be avoided. Dad was very outspoken about the “arms industry” and he often spoke of the ongoing Israel Palestine conflict and the relentless wars in Africa.

His lasting legacy on all of his children was social justice with the need to spend more on the vulnerable vs military and arms spending. His last years were about working toward creating a peaceful world without the threat of war.

We believe that our father and his friends would have expected that their efforts and ordeals and the sacrifices of those who freely gave their lives in world wars and conflicts on foreign soil, would have led to and aligned with the ideals of an Independent and Peaceful Australia, or IPAN, who advocate for an Australia free of foreign military bases and free of interventions by other foreign governments, corporations or vested interests. The arms industry, seeks to exert undue influence in shaping Australia’s foreign and defence policies in a manner that diminishes Australia's Independence and freedom. We believe that would absolutely be Dads stance. That is what he taught us with his actions leading us toward a tolerant and peaceful world.

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In the mid-1950s, the British tested seven nuclear bombs at Maralinga in the south-west Australian outback. The land and homes of Aboriginal people was chosen over other areas. British lands would never have been considered. The combined force of the weapons doubled that of the bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima in WW2. **The lesson was not learned!** Traditional Owners around Maralinga spoke about a black mist of radioactive dust over their communities following the explosions. The plight of the First Nations people was hidden. They lost homes, whole families became ill and eventually died of different diseases. The Aboriginal communities say many locals involved in the clean-up operation also got sick. It’s known as the "sick land" where plants won't grow and even birds and kangaroos haven’t returned. **When will we learn!**

A US Alliance should not mean that Australia follows blindly into US led wars. Nor be accepting of the lies and fearmongering that drove Australia into so many conflicts on foreign soils particularly in more recent times. We want the Independent and Peaceful Australia that Dad and his mates fought for. This means that we must acknowledge the consequences and costs of Australia’s involvement in past wars, including the frontier wars of Australia and the current and future US Alliance conflicts. Australia must learn to be compelled to prevent that from happening again.

We call for a less militarised Australasia Pacific region, with less foreign influence into our policies as we seek to maintain Australia’s right to govern independently as a responsible global leader.

Australia needs to be a leader of responsible world policies and must sign and ratify the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which came into legal effect in January 2021. Australia’s future must not be dependent on the industry of death and destruction.

We reject the major parties of Australia’s support of a new “defence export strategy” which sets out a policy and strategy that will place Australia as one of the world’s top 10 weapons exporters within the next decade. We are truly alarmed that the \$575 billion of our taxpayer dollars being spent in defence and the arms industry will be spent in this country over the next decade alone! Following

America in the arms race and gloating about working toward being in the top ten arms producers in the world beggar's belief and defies the wishes of those who fought the wars before us and that were supposed to end all wars finding a peaceful way forward.

Have we forgotten and are we repeating?

As former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser acknowledged later in his life, *"... Australia made a major strategic error and betrayed its national interest by not showing strategic independence from the United States after the fall of the Soviet Union."* He warned that *"Australia needs to be careful not to follow the US into another war, which could potentially be in the Pacific and involve China."*

(Malcolm Fraser AC CH, urges an end to Australian-US alliance, May 2014.)

This foreign driven defence strategy will cause death and destruction across the world, will continue to see the millions of refugee's flood to our shores, the human and economic cost to these people with the loss of their homes, communities, lands and countries will be enormous and felt throughout the whole World.

We believe that if Australia goes forward with this foreign influenced strategy that the consequences of the wars facilitated will breed hatred not peace and will make Australia a target at home and beyond our borders.

We expect that the Australian taxpayer's money be better spent on healthcare; education; providing a living income for everyone inclusive of the unemployed and others dependent on and excluded from social security, including people seeking asylum. We need to address issues such as rising youth unemployment, poverty and lack of training. Community infrastructure and services such as public housing; care of the aged and vulnerable in our society must be tackled. We working toward preventing the need for people to becoming refugees from their own countries due to corporations providing arms in foreign countries. Their business in aiding and abetting the arms industry supporting wars across the world for their own selfish greed with no regard to the human costs of the wars they pedal merely sustains an industry that is self-perpetuating and starves the work of peace and growth. Foreign Aid should be quadrupled in assisting those underdeveloped countries find their own ways out of poverty and in taking the disparity between men and women access to life giving education. The list is endless for a fairer and greater distribution of Australia's wealth provided by our toil which provides the taxes.

We do not want our economy to flourish off the back of business' and jobs that create death and destruction. Instead Australia needs to place its future into protecting the environment, sustainable clean business and a peaceful world.

Why are so many countries continuing to spend trillions of dollars a year on defence and tools of war? We are convinced that military conflicts, arms industries and corporations who rely on the intrinsic relationship of powerful fossil fuel industries in every way, influence and infiltrate governments' decision makers profoundly. These distractions sabotage the discourse from the science of climate change and environmental destruction, to fuel Weapons of War while polluting the earth toward extinction. The damage caused by war and these amoral industries continues mass deforestation, environmental degradation and poisoning of water supplies and agricultural soils. These Industries take no responsibility for mass movements of human beings trying desperately to

find a safe space on our one Earth. We must move from a militarised mindset and invest our resources into a sustainable and life-giving future for all. A spiralling self-serving repetition of history for the sake of the fossil fuel industries perverted selfishness and own gains with no regard to the damage they do must be stopped at all costs.

Our family, along with so many others suffered immeasurably to prevent the insidiousness of industries of mass destruction. Our future, Australia's future must be a better world relying on renewables and a sustainable world that respects the environment for future generations. It must find peace by peace filled means otherwise the violence will continue and perpetuate hate and further violence.

Our family believe that this is why our wartime family, friends and parents gave their lives for, fought for and prayed for Peace Not War. NEVER again!

