

Arthur Leonard Steward

I am telling the story of my Father and his contributions to the war efforts of WW2.

Arthur Leonard Steward
Born 21st November 1886
Offton Village (near Ipswich) Suffolk, England
Died 19th July 1965 – Buried Denmark Cemetery

Len Steward as he was known, served in the British Army in WW1 joining on 2nd January 1918 after several rejections as medically unfit – he had flat feet!! His service number, 350512, and he was a lorry driver in the Royal Army Service Corps. He served in France, after the Armistice remaining there attached to the Graves Registration Unit for a further 12 months. Finally discharged on 17th December 1919.

In 1924 he migrated to Western Australia with the Group Settlement Scheme bringing his wife Annabella Marion, daughters Doris (12), Minna (10) and son Len (6) to take up land in Denmark.

It is well documented the hard times these Group Settlers endured and it was no real surprise that in 1937 my father suffered an aneurism and with leaking heart valves was given six months to live. The farm had to be abandoned and residence as an invalid pensioner continued in the Denmark township.

With care he picked up his new life managing to survive the doctors predictions and start to contribute to his community within his capabilities. Having witnessed war at it's worst in 1918, when WW2 commenced he followed the progress on radio and in newspapers. His family, living in London, gave first hand reports in their regular letters.

As the war progressed and the Australian civilian population became more involved with the threat of possible invasion he did his best to assist. Although never naturalised he was fiercely Australian and felt bad that he could not do more than help locally. This he did with great dedication.

On his death I discovered some notes he had written giving a few details of his involvement in the war effort in Denmark. I will quote from these notes:

"I was the second enlisted member in the V.A.O.C. (Volunteer Air Observers Corps) in Denmark but had to resign on account of V.D.C. (Volunteer Defence Corps) work which developed to a full time job.

I was Orderly Room Clerk, E Company, 6 Battalion, V.D.C. Denmark, from April 1942 to disbandment at the end of 1945. I was allowed to wear the uniform, being only an Honorary as unable to make the medical grade. It was the late Col. Robinson who made it possible for the uniform to be worn by a non-attested and medically examined member. This I believe was very rare for a civilian person to wear military clothing. I had found it very embarrassing to be the only one in civvies having the feeling that all eyes were on me when it was necessary to accompany staff members to many parts of the Denmark and Walpole Districts. I enjoyed every minute of the experience and it certainly helped to restore my health.

It's a true saying, give a man nothing to do and he dies.

During my term with the V.D.C., I was entrusted with knowing all the military movements in the District. When a part of the Mobile Armoured Units passed through I was approached by several asking where from, where to, but remained completely silent. On another occasion I was involved in the recovery and despatch of several bales of raw rubber washed up on the coast from a shipwreck.

I was the Hon. Secretary of the local Liquid Fuel Committee for Denmark for a period in the latter half of WW2. I was also very interested and worked for the local branch of the Red Cross from September 1939 to early 1946. Assisted the Area Officer in the call-up of all men up to the age of 45. My job was to assist in the laboratory.

For three years as Pro Tem Secretary for the Sub Branch of the R.S.L.

During the war I had the most amazing of odd jobs. Repainting number plates for motor vehicles and even cutting the plates from any odd flat iron that could be found. This was for the local Road Board (at this period all vehicle licensing was done by local authorities).

One of the hardest tasks was to flatten all aluminium ware handed in to further the war effort. The fine set of 5 saucepans I left to last. It did take an effort to wrench off the handles and flatten them with a hammer.

Assisted W. J. Morgan (Road Board Secretary) with the collection of waster rubber and in the 'Old Iron Drive' in the District.

With Mr Holyock (Post Master) assisted with the first issue of ration books.

Hon. Secretary Sub Committee of D.W.A.C. (District War Agricultural Committee)."

End of quote.

Copies of letters from V.D.C. and D.W.A.C. are enclosed.

Following on from the end of the war and the subsequent disbandment of all these war-time volunteer activities my father continued his community involvement.

He was for several years Secretary and Treasurer of the Denmark Agricultural and Horticultural Society, actively involved with the R.S.L and collected subscriptions in the street for the St John Ambulance plus many other civic duties of which I have no record.

I am very proud of my father's contribution to the town of Denmark, to Western Australia and able to record this for posterity.

For him Australia was his country and he did all he could within his capabilities to make it a better place for his descendants to live.

Written by his youngest son – John Charles Carter Steward.
Born 22nd March 1926, Denmark WA.

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

Correspondents will greatly facilitate the transaction of their business by:
 Confining each letter to one subject.
 Writing on one side only of the paper.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,

ASW/49.

PERTH, 15th February, 1946.

In replying please quote

MR. A.L. STEWARD,
DENMARK.

Dear Sir,

Your period of service as a local Committee member attached to a District War Agricultural Committee will terminate when that Committee is disbanded on the 28th February and I wish to express my appreciation of the assistance which you have been to the D.W.A.C. organisation during the difficult period of the war years.

The successful work of District Committees would not have been possible in many cases without the assistance and co-operation of the local Committees appointed by and attached to District Committees, and the efforts of you and other local Committeemen have rendered a substantial contribution to the success of the D.W.A.C. organisation.

As Executive Officer of the Committees, I appreciate the amount of work and inconvenience involved in acting as a member of a local Committee and I would, therefore, appreciate your receiving this letter as an acknowledgment by the Department of Agriculture of the part which you have played in maintaining our agricultural production under trying circumstances.

Yours faithfully,

A. S. Field

EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
DISTRICT WAR AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEES.

Headquarters } B 3056
Western Command } B 3140
 } B 3143 (7 lines)
 } B 3171 (5 lines)

For Branches and Drill Halls
see Department of Army in
Telephone Directory.

ABD/AS

AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES—WESTERN COMMAND

Please quote this Number when replying

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AREA OFFICE,
KATANNING

.Y..MAR '46

MR A.L. STEWARD,
STRICKLAND Street,
DENMARK

Dear Sir,

Many thanks for your letter of 6 MARCH and your offer to give help. I'll hang on to that extra set of equipment for the time being and there is always the chance you may be able to discover who handed it in. I expect soon to receive a schedule of VDC equipment outstanding when we may be able to check up on everybody in the district.

I am enclosing some stamps to help reimburse you for postages incurred.

Yours sincerely,

A.B. Dinnie Lieut
(A.B. DINNIE)
AREA OFFICER 16.

Mr. A. L. Steward.
V.D.C.
DENMARK.

VOLUNTEER DEFENCE CORPS.
6 Battalion.

P.O. Box 54
KATANNING. W.A.

14/10/43.

Dear Mr. Steward,

Advice has been received from Major Chappell that although we did all possible to see that your enlistment went through Army has disallowed this because of your medical classification

In view of your faithful Orderly Room service H.Q. Bn and No 5 Group were hopeful that you would be enrolled.

Please beleive that all possible was done on your behalf.

Copy sent to
No 5 Group)
C.O. "E" Coy } for information.

John Pearson
.....Lieut. Adj
For Commander 6 Bn V.D.C.