

# the bounce

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## Pilgrimage to Tobruk honours a fallen father

RON BARASSI

**W**hen the crowd stands silently during this round to honour the servicemen and women who gave their lives for our country, I will be thinking of a special Rat of Tobruk who died more than 70 years ago.

My dad Ron Barassi snr died of wounds at Tobruk in Libya on July 31, 1941. He was only 27; just 10 months earlier he had been wearing his No. 31 jumper in Melbourne's 1940 Grand Final win over Richmond.

I first visited my father's grave in the Tobruk War Cemetery with my wife Cheryl in 1984. Late last month, my son Ronald James Barassi, who was named after his grandfather, joined me.

My only memory of Dad was when I was five. He was wearing his soldier's uniform and we walked hand-in-hand in a forest near our home in Guilford, about 130km north-west of Melbourne.

Following a minute's silence for Dad at the Melbourne-Collingwood match a few weeks after his death, *The Sporting Globe* wrote: "Ron Barassi came from the country an unheralded country lad, and made a name in our national game for his sportsmanship as well as his ability. He departs a man honoured by his peers and those who cheer."

It is recorded that Dad was the first VFL player to be killed in »



**SILENT TRIBUTE:** A Melbourne scarf and team and family photos adorn Corporal Ron Barassi's headstone; (top) Ron Barassi and his son Ron jnr pay tribute and (right) Barassi stands beneath The Cross of Sacrifice at the Tobruk War Cemetery.

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Dad was the first player to be killed in World War II

RON BARASSI



action in World War II. The Grand Final edition of the 1941 *Football Record* wrote this tribute: "Today when we are all enjoying another Grand Final, is a fitting occasion in which to pay tribute to the memory of Ron Barassi, the Melbourne rover, the first league player to pay the great sacrifice in this war."

Three other Melbourne players – Harold Ball, Syd Anderson and Keith 'Bluey' Truscott – were also mortally wounded in World War II. All are recognised to this day by Melbourne with trophies presented in their honour at the annual best and fairest night.

Before the 1941 Melbourne-Essendon Grand Final, the club produced a written document in the rooms declaring support for myself and my mother Elza for life.

The pledge read: "Let it be known that the undersigned members of the Melbourne Football Club Coterie desire to place on record their appreciation of the sterling worth on and off the field of your late husband, Ron, who died of wounds at Tobruk in North Africa, on July 31st, 1941, while serving his country. His passing has been a great grief to his fellow players in the Club, to Officials, to the Coterie and to onlookers who enjoyed his brilliant and fair play, which to a considerable degree helped our club to win two successive premierships."

There have been 155 VFL footballers killed in war. The first were Essendon's Charles Moore and Fitzroy's Stanley Reid in 1901 in the Boer War in South Africa. Both played on opposing sides in the 1898 Grand Final.

We have Kevin Sheedy to thank in helping to establish the now traditional Anzac Day blockbuster between Essendon and Collingwood. This annual contest is a great way for all AFL fans to help pay their respect to those servicemen and women who died in the line of duty in wars from Africa to Afghanistan.

As 90,000 bow their heads in the circle of grandstands and listen to the bugle call, let's hope we focus on ridding the world of war, and forever ensure those we honour have not died in vain. [R](#)

[RON BARASSI RECENTLY RETURNED TO HIS FATHER'S GRAVE IN LIBYA AS PART OF A 60 MINUTES INTERVIEW THAT WILL AIR THIS SUNDAY \(APRIL 29\) ON THE NINE NETWORK.](#)



## Fond memories of Vietnam's Lord Mayor's Oval

MICHAEL LOVETT

**M**any Australian tourists would be familiar with Vung Tau, often described as one of the most beautiful cities in Vietnam.

Located on the coast of southern Vietnam, Vung Tau boasts pristine

beaches, a world-class golf course, resorts and even a theme park. It's a different place to the one thousands of Australian soldiers knew when Vung Tau was home to Australian army support units during the Vietnam War.

Despite the hardship the Australians faced, in rare moments of downtime they wanted to continue the trappings – and traditions – of home.

A game of cards, with an ample supply of beer, was a popular pastime, as were makeshift golf courses and impromptu cricket matches.

However, Australian Football was not high on the agenda, certainly not in any organised form, until one digger found himself in trouble with his commanding officer. »

**FOOTBALL BATTLEFIELDS:** Australian units in action in Vung Tau (top), 2AOD diggers celebrate their win in the 1968 semi-final (middle), and the crowd at the Grand Final in the same year.

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The standard of football was very high

STAN MIDDLETON,  
VIETNAM VETERAN

Private John Heaney, a National Service conscript, from 1 Transport Platoon RAASC (Royal Australian Army Service Corps), ran foul of his CO. Private Heaney was given two choices: organise a game of Australian Football or face detention and other penalties.

"He thought about it for a second and chose the first option," said Stan Middleton, now the Vietnam Football League's official historian and himself a returned Vietnam veteran.

Private Heaney and others found a soccer ground that became fondly known as the 'Lord Mayor's Oval' and the first organised game was played in late 1966, using 14-a-side teams (there were no half-forward or half-back flanks).

A full-scale competition between various Australian units based in Vung Tau was established in 1967 and ran through to 1971. Two premierships seasons were played in most years with the RAAF and 5 Company RAASC winning the inaugural flags in 1967.

The following year, both premierships were won by 2AOD (2nd Advanced Ordnance Depot) and in 1969 the first premiership went to 17 Construction Squadron (engineers). Legend has it their preliminary final opponents, 2AOD, ignored their captain's instructions to abstain the night before.

In the second season of 1969, 2AOD returned to the winners' list, but not before a fierce battle against 17 Construction Squadron. Former Geelong star Wayne Closter was captain of the 2AOD team, but was taken out at the opening bounce by a tough indigenous player, Glenn James. Yes, the same man who later umpired two VFL Grand Finals.

However, Closter recovered and booted five goals in a rampaging last quarter to steer 2AOD home. 2AOD won another premiership in 1970 and it triumphed again in the only Grand Final in 1971, under former Essendon utility and later Dandenong and Williamstown (VFA) star Bill Thompson. Ex-Bomber Greg Perry played in the 110 Signals team that year.

"The standard of football was very high," Middleton said.

"The competition was fierce and the rivalry between units was intense. But now we are all mates and every Anzac Day members of the 1967-68 teams meet after we march and go to the MCG together in the AFL Members."

Today, Lord Mayor's Oval is a greyhound track, but for many men now in their 60s and 70s, it is a field of fond football memories. **R**

**CHAMPIONS OF THE VFL:** 2AOD players after winning the 1968 Vietnam Football League Grand Final.



NEWS FROM ROUND FOUR

# Hiccup can't stop Cats

» Geelong's unfurling of its 2011 flag was nearly thrown into chaos when a power outage affected the western side of Simonds Stadium last Sunday.

The outage threatened the start of the game, with thousands of patrons unable to enter the ground between 11.30am and 12.10pm as the ticket barcode scanning system failed.

Eventually patrons were allowed to enter after attendants began manually checking tickets, but long queues remained until near the start of the game.

Ex-Cats Cameron Ling, Darren Milburn, Cameron Mooney and Brad Ottens completed a lap of honour before the game.

» Sydney Swans forward Gary Rohan will miss the rest of the year after breaking his right leg against North Melbourne; Port Adelaide forward Robbie Gray is out for the season after a serious right knee injury sustained against Collingwood, and Carlton tagger Andrew Carrazzo is expected to be sidelined for up to eight weeks with a shoulder injury suffered against Essendon. **R**

MILESTONES ROUND 5



**304 GAMES**  
(NEW CLUB RECORD)  
**Adam Goodes**  
Sydney Swans

**300 GAMES**  
**Simon Black**  
Brisbane Lions

**AFL 200 CLUB**  
**Dane Swan**  
Collingwood

**200 GAMES**  
**David Wojcinski**  
Geelong

**150 GAMES**  
**Brad Sewell**  
Hawthorn

**100 GAMES**  
**Cheynee Stiller**  
Brisbane Lions  
**Clint Bartram**  
Melbourne

**50 GAMES**  
**Jack Anthony**  
Fremantle  
**Taylor Walker**  
Adelaide  
**Chris Yarran**  
Carlton  
**Ty Vickery**  
Richmond

The list includes those not necessarily selected but on the verge of milestones.

Full time.



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