



# REMEMBRANCE DAY

**ff** The veteran community needs more than the current piecemeal approach  
Editorial Page 24

## Heroes' lack of support a joke

**EXCLUSIVE**

**GEOFF CHAMBERS & DANIEL MEERS**

AS thousands of veterans battle homelessness, broken homes and drug addiction, a senior Liberal Party minister has described the federal government's response as "laughable".

State Housing Minister Brad Hazzard yesterday ordered his department to locate Diggers in public accommodation and offer them additional support.

Mr Hazzard said the federal Department of Veterans Affairs was attempting to "flick-pass" serious issues, including homelessness and suicide rates.

"I'm disturbed to think that the ADF and the federal government might think that this was only an individual state or territory issue. It is not — that's laughable. It is time that we took this extremely seriously," Mr Hazzard said.

RSL LifeCare Homes for Heroes manager and former UK Royal Marine commando Adrian Talbot runs the country's only dedicated homeless accommodation for recent veterans.

The centre, which houses 53 veterans and relies on non-government funding, receives four inquiries a week and has four people on its waiting list.

"The federal government aren't providing any financial support; they're saying it is at a state level," Mr Talbot said. "We're hoping to get in front of the right individuals to find out if there's any financial support they can offer to the program."

The Daily Telegraph today launches its **Homes for Heroes** campaign, supporting a push to keep our brave veterans off the streets. A 2009 Homeless Veterans Survey listed 3000 as being without a home. It's estimated the federal government would need just \$60 million to house our homeless heroes. About \$700 million is expected to be spent rehoming Syrian refugees.



Mr Talbot said while the centre had many success stories, they've also experienced suicides: "It's tragic. We're pretty close to these situations."

Soldier On CEO John Bale backed The Daily Telegraph's campaign and said there remained a "significant gap" in services for returned veterans.

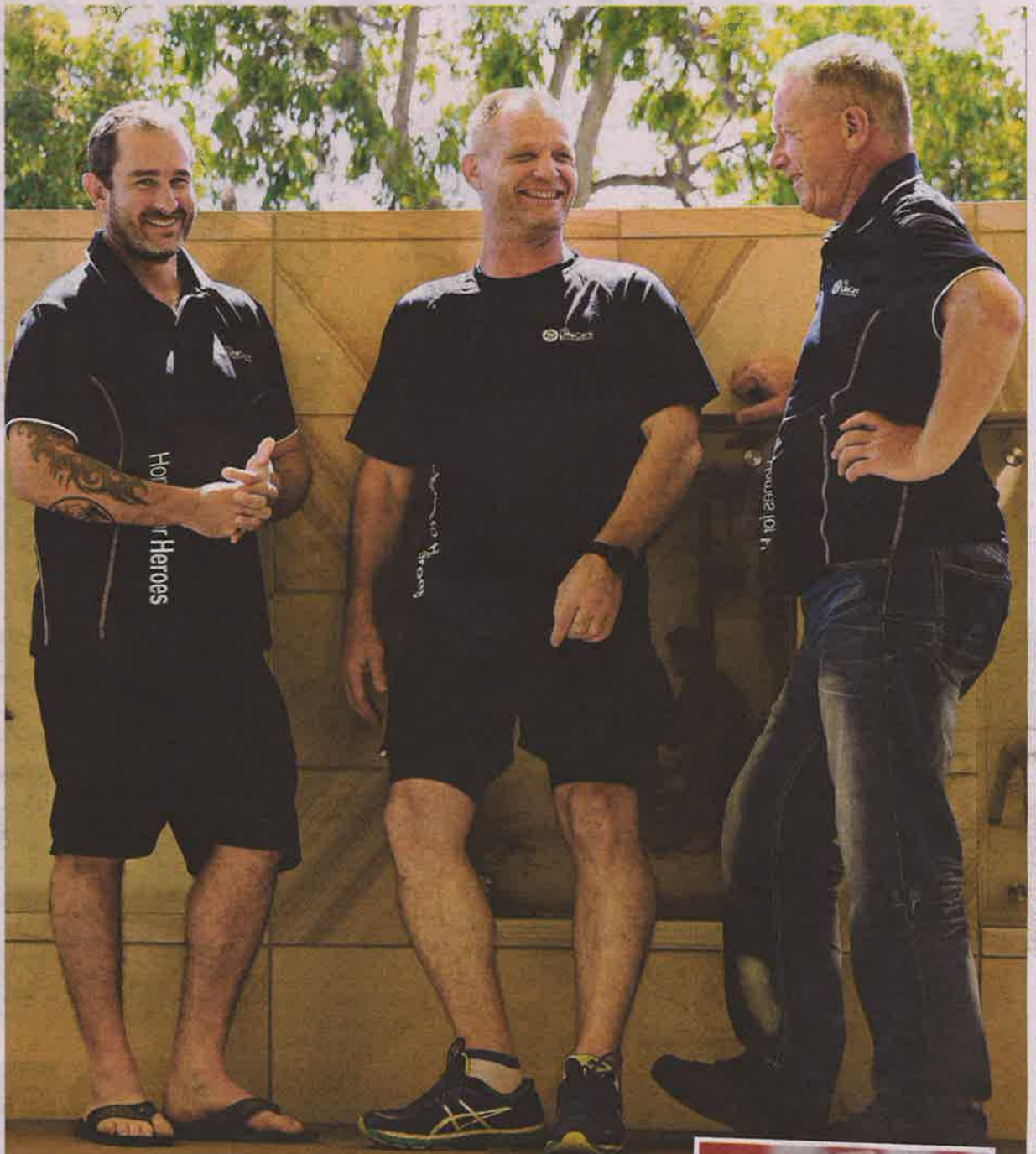
A spokesman for Veterans Affairs Minister Stuart Robert, who is travelling to Europe and Turkey for Remembrance Day events, refused to commit funding to finding homes for troops.

"In 2013-14, the government spent around \$182 million to support the mental health needs of veterans and their families," Mr Robert's spokesman said.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten said homeless Diggers "deserve so much better than this".

"This is a problem that Australia should not have," he said.

**WORLD WAR I AND THE ROAD TO PEACE HISTORY PAGE 56**



Michael Le Serve with fellow RSL LifeCare residents Garry Davies (left) and Gary Norman, and (inset) in uniform. Picture Sam Rutty

## Help gives Diggers a shelter from pain

**DOUG CONWAY**

MICHAEL Le Serve says he would "probably be dead" if not for the RSL's Homes for Heroes program.

The Army veteran, diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder after serving in a UN peacekeeping mission to Namibia, went through years of alcohol abuse, divorce and losing his job and home, a sadly familiar tale for many veterans.

Mr Le Serve was one of the first veterans to be offered shelter under

the RSL LifeCare centre's Homes For Heroes program.

He had no job, no money and his new wife was pregnant and living in the Philippines. Now his wife and two-year-old daughter live with him, and his sons from his first marriage, aged 21 and 12, are doing well at university and high school.

"I was at that point in my life where I was thinking about giving up," Mr Le Serve, from Port Kembla, said. "Without Homes For Heroes I don't know where I would be."

"I would probably be dead. Or



maybe in jail. Something not good, that's for sure."

The 46-year-old considers himself one of the lucky ones, as an estimated 3000 vets sleep rough every night, many suffering PTSD.

"I'm still fighting my own demons. But I feel guilty that they're out there, and I'm in here," he said.



Mick Dennis.

## Aussie hero who defied Japanese dies, aged 96

**IAN McPHERAN**

AUSTRALIA has lost a WWII hero with the death of former Commando and Z Special Unit operative Edgar "Mick" Dennis.

Mr Dennis, who died on Monday aged 96, was awarded the Military Medal for courage under

fire after an ill-fated mission codenamed Operation Copper on Muschu island off the north coast of New Guinea in April, 1945.

Seven of his Z Special Unit comrades died during the mission (four drowned and three captured and executed) but Mr Dennis evaded capture and ran amok.

The champion swimmer and

wrestler from Clovelly killed up to 20 Japanese soldiers before paddling a timber plank through shark-infested waters to the mainland and making his way back to Australian lines, taking out more enemy along the way.

With typical modesty Mick Dennis fobbed off his actions: "I don't think it's born in you, it's not

drilled into you, it is just something that happens on the spur of the moment. You know what you are going to do and you do it."

His exploits are recorded in the book *The Guns of Muschu*.

The service for Mick Dennis will take place at Eastern Suburbs Crematorium at 2pm on Wednesday, November 18.



Mick Dennis in 1945.