

Kokoda survivor and dairy king

Gordon Samuel Pickhaver

Soldier, dairy industry identity, service club president

Born: February 12, 1918; Adelaide

Died: June 14, 2009; Adelaide

WITH the passing of Gordon Pickhaver, South Australia lost one of its last-remaining army survivors of the Kokoda Track.

He joined the 216th Field Ambulance Corps at its formation at Wayville in May, 1940.

Part of the AIF's 7th division, the unit served in the Middle East and Papua New Guinea. Until his death, he was unit secretary and responsible for organising unit activities.

He organised reunions, notably its 50th anniversary, a commemorative plaque at Woodside, the inclusion of the unit on the plaque commemorating the medical units that served in World War II and unit memorabilia in the Defence Museum at Keswick.

Gordon was born at Clapham when it was a rural area. The family had a large block of land. His father was a marine engineer but Gordon, his two brothers and two sisters pursued horticultural and agricultural activities. He developed a keen interest in horticulture, dairying and most things farming which ultimately led to his career.

Although clearly intelligent, his schooling at Mitcham was hampered by severe dyslexia.

He then went to Thebarton Boys Technical School and transferred to the new Urrbrae Agricultural College where he was a foundation student. He graduated in 1934.

In later years he addressed Urrbrae students about "the early years".

After graduation he was employed as an assistant to the school's handyman and then as a junior assistant to the head gardener at Government House. Next, Gordon obtained



employment in the dairy branch of Farmers Union. He learnt the rudiments of butter and cheesemaking and, with the exception of his war service, served for 40 years in the dairy industry. In late 1939 he graduated from Hawkesbury Agricultural College, Richmond, NSW in Dairy Technology (Hons).

In 1948, he joined the SA Department of Agriculture as milk products officer and for the next 30 years worked in every dairy factory in the state specialising in cheese making. He was a regular judge in butter and cheese at the Royal Show and was principal dairy officer on his retirement in 1978.

The 1970s had rapid change in the dairying industry and, in particular, cheesemaking.

After WWII there were more than 30 cheese factories in SA producing 16 varieties

of cheese. By the 1980s almost all had closed their doors and dairying in SA became essentially a "bulk milk" industry.

Gordon believed cheesemakers and cheese factory managers were a unique group of men and part of a SA rural history which had virtually disappeared during his life.

So as a retirement project he wrote a history of cheesemaking in SA: *People, Places and Cheese in South Australia 1842 - 1984*.

In retirement, Gordon pursued interests related to the sea. He undertook navigation courses in England, joined the local coast-guard as a volunteer and became involved with the ketch Falie.

He co-authored a book about Falie and enjoyed the time he spent in Holland researching its building.

In 1979, following his retirement, he moved to Hahndorf where he bought a small property and raised cashmere goats and geese.

He took an interest in local affairs, joining the town's bowling, golf and Lions clubs and was elected a member of the Mt Barker District Council.

A decade later, he moved to Adelaide and joined the Adelaide Light Lions Club later serving as president.

In 1990 he joined the City of Adelaide Lions Club where he was actively involved in many fundraising efforts, particularly the Lions Christmas cake sales.

In 1995-96 as club president his special project was planting a rose garden at Brougham Place, in addition to regular projects such as sponsoring the South Australian and Young South Australian of the year.

In 1944, he married Beryl Marion Rebecca Skuce, who died in 1994.

Gordon Pickhaver is survived by five children, Mark, Jane, Greig (HG Nelson), Anne and Mary plus seven grandchildren.

Mark Pickhaver