

Pipers' tune produced a surprise result

BAGPIPES have played a crucial role in solving the 30-year-old mystery disappearance of a priceless Distinguished Conduct Medal found at a rubbish tip.

An amazing series of events led to the DCM – second only to the Victoria Cross in military award hierarchy – finding its way safely back to the family of the original recipient, now deceased.

The medal was found to belong to Corporal Lawrence Robert Willans (WX 1488) of the 2/11 Infantry Battalion.

The recent hand-over was due to diligent inter-branch detective work by members of two sub-branches of the RSL – in Kalgoorlie and Northam.

The series of events started when Northam resident Bill Colthart, a former Kalgoorlie publican, was visiting the local tip and discovered the medal – complete with original ribbon and Mentioned In Dispatches clasp – in refuse.

“It was more than 30 years ago,” Bill recalled. “I took it home and cleaned it up, meaning to do something about it later.” But running a pub in Kalgoorlie distracted Bill, and the item lay forgotten in a draw through several relocations over the years.

Fast-forward to present-day Northam, and the retirement activities of local resident and RSL member, Jim Simcock. A player of the bagpipes, he became friends with Bill, who played officially for RSL functions. As they say, the rest is history: relaxing after a joint session on their bagpipes, the pair got to talking about their experiences and Bill – still not aware of the medal’s special significance – brought out his ‘souvenir’.

Jim, who has a few medals of his own, immediately recognising its intrinsic value. Guided by the name engraved on the medal’s edge, he did a “bit of sleuthing” and made contact with the Kalgoorlie sub-branch of the RSL. He was soon advised that the descendant daughter of the owner would be very grateful to have her father’s medal returned.

And so the medal was wrapped carefully and posted to the Kalgoorlie Sub-branch – but not before the boys bid a last farewell with a tune ...

Further information:

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