

## Senate Estimates October 2023 – Opening Statement

On 2 August this year, we unveiled the first sculpture honouring an individual servicewoman or nurse in the grounds of the Memorial. The sculpture, dedicated to Lieutenant Colonel Vivian Bullwinkel was commissioned in 2019 and created by Dr Charles Robb. Lieutenant Bullwinkel was an extraordinary person, and we are proud to have this iconic work sit alongside only 3 other sculptures dedicated to individuals.

John Schumann attended our Last Post Ceremony on 18 August to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formal end to the Vietnam War, playing a moving rendition of his Vietnam tribute song “Only 19”. This was an emotional and fitting end to a day of commemorations honouring our Vietnam veterans. We held off Development work impacting the entry to the Vietnam galleries until after this significant anniversary to make sure all visitors could come to the Memorial to understand their experiences, and for the veterans to see their story told.

The work has now commenced and while the entry to the Malaya, Korea and Vietnam galleries has changed and certainly isn’t our usual polished presentation, importantly, the gallery remains open.

In other scheduled changes to galleries, over 300 items were removed from the Modern Conflicts and Peacekeeping galleries in order to assess and conserve them for potential future exhibitions.

Some of these objects will appear in our new gallery spaces, in 2025.

The Development project overall is progressing on schedule. We are looking forward to our first major milestone of using the new Parade Ground on Anzac Day next year. While the Dawn Service is anticipated to be in the same temporary location as the past few years, in the sculpture garden, the veterans march will be the first event held on the new Parade Ground. I cannot think of a more fitting launch.

We have just installed 32 “super-T” beams to form the floor/ceiling of the new Anzac Hall. These beams weigh 64 tons each, and allow us to span the large space without column supports underneath. This will allow us to maximise the gallery space in Lower Anzac Hall. This installation represents a significant milestone of the build.

As I have said in previous hearings, I cannot overstate the challenge it is to undertake a development of this ambition while remaining open to the public. It is the daily changes to logistics, the road closures and constant retraining for fire evacuation routes that test our staff.

However, every day, every visitor, every veteran who comes here reminds me just how important it is that we continue.

Our priority is to make the National Collection accessible for commemoration and understanding and to make sure we operate this large scale project safely for our staff, visitors and construction workers.

And despite the challenges, we continue to receive outstanding feedback from our visitors. We have received a “Best of the Best” rating from TripAdvisor again this year, which puts us in the top 1 percent of all destinations worldwide, and were recently ranked in the Top 10 of free tourist attractions world-wide.

This list was based on TripAdvisor reviews and was featured in Timeout magazine.

Each of these small successes, based on feedback from our visitors inspires us to keep adapting, keep problem solving and keep building.