

Globetrotter Bruce set for next trip at 90

by Lacey Burley

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Killarney identity's had 'half a dozen lives' built on hard work and being lucky.

Turning 90 has not slowed down Killarney grazier Bruce Mackenzie. He celebrated his 90th birthday on August 1 and saw it as the perfect time to reflect on his amazing life.



He takes pride in still holding his driver's licence and has been on the road for 78 years. When he was 12, he drove around the Killarney district posting bills of coming events at his family's cinema. "We put the blinds down when we went past the police station", he said smiling.

Despite retiring in 1980, Mr Mackenzie is still hard at work operating his family beef cattle property 'Gravel Creek' which they bought 44 years ago. He often works along fencing, bulldozing weeds and tracks, checking water, doing cattle work and other jobs. "I go up in the morning and the afternoons" he said. "We've just bought another bull so we've got to keep working".

Mr Mackenzie said that he had been lucky to experience the world. "I've lived about half a dozen lives", he said. These include flying with Charles Kingford Smith in Sydney as a boy and active service in New Guinea in World War II, which sparked his love of aircraft. He served in the army for four years.

"I escorted all the Japanese prisoners of war out of the war", he said. "Then I came home and during World War II on Christmas Day 1944, we were surfing at Tallebudgera Creek and I trod on stingray and it spiked me through the foot. Being in the army, they looked after me and I spent 11 weeks in hospital. I nearly lost my leg, but once I got my boot back on it was back to the jungle. My foot was pigmented black for five years because of the poison." "That was a close shave. I've had 16 close shaves in my life"

Mr Mackenzie loves to travel and rode camels in Egypt and toured Greece in February. Since 1962, he has been on 14 overseas trips to Europe, the USA, China, the Middle East and Cambodia and has seen Sri Lanka, India's Taj Mahal and Rio de Janeiro.

Throughout his amazing life he has also been touched by tragedy. His eldest daughter died from breast cancer and his wife passed away in his arms 11 years ago. His name may be familiar to Southern Downs locals as he operated Killarney's Mackenzie' Emporium—a former family grocery, drapery and ironmongery business for 45 years with his family.

Mr Mackenzie doesn't plan on slowing down anytime soon and is hoping to make his 15th overseas trip at the end of the year. "I've been invited to Hong Kong for Christmas as my daughter lives there. I'm lucky to be as well as I am"

Recalling Jungle Warfare

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In August 2008 Bruce Mackenzie left his Killarney home to attend a memorial plaque dedication ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Although the AIF 7th Battalion comprised 600 soldiers at war's end some 64 years, Mr Mackenzie is one of only 60 still alive and only six able to attend the Canberra event.

The reunion included an outdoor service, tour of the war memorial and dusk closing ceremony attend by Hon Bruce Scott, MP Member for Maranoa.

With a rectangular red and brown colour patch known as 'mud over blood', the 7th Battalion's involvement in World War II included service in Darwin at the time it was bombed, before Bruce Mackenzie joined them in April 1944 for jungle training in Queensland and active service in New Guinea.

On Bougainville Island, some 35 soldiers from the 7th Battalion were killed towards the end of the World War II during active combat. Harsh conditions on Bougainville's Numa Numa Trail are not recognised as widely as those on the Kokoda Trail. "With mud, heat, snakes, skin disorders, basic food, dysentery and dengue fever from the vicious mosquito plague, I hope no-one has to endure the conditions we faced in the future", Mr Mackenzie said.

Bruce was a signaller who corresponded by chance with a Tasmanian nurse who later became his wife in Killarney. He was one of the first to escort Japanese POWs from the jungle.

"At war's end the silence was uncanny" he said. Four years of war service war service cannot be all bad when it has enabled me to maintain lifelong contacts and adopt a variety of skills to deal with adversity".

