

Media Release – 18 February 2021

TRIBUTE TO PASSIONATE CHAMPION OF SUBMARINES

Australia's submarine community has lost one of its most passionate champions with the passing of Mrs Gundula Holbrook at the grand age of 106 and the Submarine Institute of Australia (SIA) wishes to acknowledge her many achievements.

Mrs Holbrook, who lived in Austria, was a very generous benefactor to the Holbrook Submarine Museum in the town of Holbrook in southern New South Wales, which includes the former Oberon-class submarine Otway.

SIA President, Mark Sander said: "The town of Holbrook is named after Mrs Holbrook's late husband, Commander Norman Holbrook VC – who was the first submariner to be awarded Britain's highest decoration for valour (the Victoria Cross) – and Gundula Holbrook was a justified proud promoter of the bravery he showed commanding his submarine HMS B11 through a minefield in World War 1.

"In doing so, she became a strong advocate of submarines in Australia. The evidence of this was what happened at the ceremony to erect the fin of submarine Otway in Holbrook in 1996.

"After it became apparent that the fin was too small a feature for the area where it was located and she became aware that the cost of having submarine Otway's entire superstructure in Holbrook was beyond the budget of the local council, she immediately wrote a cheque to fund what has become one of the most unique historical submarine projects in Australia and an integral part of Holbrook Submarine Museum."

HMAS Otway entered service in 1968, it was decommissioned in 1994 and was formally dedicated as a submarine memorial in Holbrook in 1997.

Mr Sander said: "For many years, travellers along the Hume Highway who stop at Holbrook, have been able to see the submarine – including physically touching it and climbing on it – and visit the museum, which has been a vitally important way of educating Australians about submarines and our rich submarine history.

"It is fitting that visitors to the Holbrook Submarine Museum can watch a video message projected as a hologram from Mrs Holbrook, who was made an honorary citizen of Holbrook, where she explains how her husband dived his submarine, HMS B11, under several rows of mines in the Dardanelles off Turkey during World War 1 and how a small town in Australia came to be named after him.

"Australia's submarine community has lost a dedicated and passionate supporter.

"The SIA pays tribute to Mrs Gundula Holbrook."

The original name of Holbrook was Ten Mile Creek, but in 1876, the officially gazetted name of the town was Germanton, in reference to German sheep farmer who became the licensee of the Woolpack Inn (the first building in Ten Mile Creek).

However, World War 1 was the motivation for the reference to Germany to be removed, in favour of renaming the town.

The choices for the new name were:

- Asquith – Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1908;
- Jellico (Admiral) – Commander of the British Grand Fleet;
- Kitchener (Field Marshall) – War hero and Secretary of State for War; and
- Holbrook.

On the 20 September 1915, the Shire Clerk of Holbrook Shire Council wrote to Commander Holbrook advise him of the renaming of the town in memory of his valiant deeds in the Dardanelles.

“Mrs Holbrook said being recognised by a small community on the other side of the world was probably one of the proudest days of her husband’s life,” Mr Sander said.

“Any Australian who hasn’t been to Holbrook to learn first-hand about one of the most unique and significant chapters in Australian military history is strongly encouraged to visit the town, including submarine Otway and the Holbrook Submarine Museum.”

Further information:

Hamish Arthur
MCM Strategic Communications
+61 406 510 083

SIA Ref: 21/REL/0218

The Submarine Institute of Australia (www.submarineinstitute.com) is the premier organisation for promotion of informed discussion and research in the fields of submarine operations, engineering, history and commercial sub-sea engineering, otherwise known as submarine matters.

