

Charles Owen RILEY
WX 29475 Trooper
2/3 Australian Commando Squadron
World War II

Charles Owen RILEY

Charles Owen Riley was a resident of Watermans Bay, and the North Beach Memorial precinct is located within the Charles Riley Memorial Reserve. This is his story and why the Reserve was named in his honour.



North Beach memorial Precinct

Charles Owen Riley was born on 2 March 1923 in Perth and was the son of Charles Lawrence Riley.

Charles Lawrence ‘Tom’ Riley

The son of Archbishop C.O.L. Riley, he arrived in Australia with the family in 1895. He took Holy Orders in 1912 at Caius College Cambridge and obtained a MA, LLB and later D Theology in Australia. He was a junior Chaplain in Palestine during WWI at the time his Father was Chaplain General. On his return to Perth he served in several parish positions, including North Perth.



During WWII he was senior chaplain and then became the Chaplain General of the AIF from 1942 until 1957. He was awarded the OBE (1920) and CBE (1942). He was the fourth Bishop of Bendigo in Victoria and died 1 April 1971.

Charles Owen Riley

Charles enlisted in the CMF - 10th Light Horse in October 1941 while working on his Uncle's farm, "Quanagana", Moora. Prior to that he served 3 years in the Cadets while at Geelong Grammar, and 2 years at Hale School. On 8 July 1942 as a 19 year old he joined the Australian Military Forces and was assigned to the 2/3 Commando Squadron.



He was discharged on 5 August 1946. Having served in South East Asia, Balikpapan, Borneo and New Guinea.

The Battle of Balikpapan was concluding stage of Operation Oboe, the campaign to liberate Japanese held British and Dutch Borneo. The landings took place on 1 July 1945. He was also Rabaul and New Guinea for over 12 months.

The Kalgoorlie Miner 4 September 1954

Perth, Sept. 3, 1954

TAXI DRIVER DROWNED IN HEROIC RESCUE BID

Son of the Bishop Of Bendigo - a 30-year-old man was drowned at Waterman's Bay yesterday afternoon when he took a line to a dinghy in trouble in heavy surf about 200 yards offshore.

The dinghy, manned by two men, had gone out to pick up three girls carried out to sea in the heavy undertow. The drowned man was Charles Riley, a taxi driver, of Lennard street, Waterman's Bay. He was a son of the Bishop of Bendigo, the Right Rev. C. L. Riley, who is well known in this State, and a brother of the Rev. W. Riley, of Applecross.

Volunteers ran out the line until Mr. Riley reached the dinghy. He then signalled to be pulled in but while this was being done the line became entangled in a weed bank. He was unconscious when pulled ashore.

The three girls - Doreen Gilbert, (19), of West Perth, Careen Brown (21), of Inglewood, and Lorraine Shrite, (17), of Inglewood—were staying at a Churches of Christ girls' holiday camp at Waterman's Bay. They went swimming about 3 p.m. and were carried out beyond the heavy breakers.

Albert Walkington, of Ida Street, Bassendean, an organiser of the camp, swam out to the girls and stayed with them for about 30 minutes until help arrived.

Meanwhile, Percy Hertel of Elsie street, Waterman's Bay, had seen the girls' plight. He and Sam Whitley a 68 year-old resident, who figured in a drowning rescue a month ago, took out Mr Hertel's 12 ft. dinghy. Mr. Whitley pulled two of the almost exhausted girls into the dinghy. The third girl had drifted on to a reef and was wading ashore.

Mr. Walkington clung to the back of the boat and Mr Riley, who had reached it with the line clung to the prow. "Charley swam up to the boat joking with us," Mr. Hertel said afterwards. "But after he had given the signal to be pulled in, he lost hold of the boat and disappeared about 30 yards from us."

The dinghy was now only 50 yards from shore. Then an oar broke and a huge wave swamped the dinghy throwing its occupants into the water. An unidentified woman swam out to the two girls and brought them ashore. The three men stayed with the boat and refused to go in when Allan Wells (20) also of Waterman's Bay swam out with the line Mr. Riley had used.

Eventually the dinghy drifted on to the reef and the three dragged it to shore. All were exhausted and slightly shocked but revived in their homes without medical attention.

The three girls, who had also suffered slight shock, were put to bed.

Dramatic efforts to bring more help to the people in the water were just too late. Johnny Alvo, a professional fisherman, sped from Scarborough with an outboard dinghy on a utility. In Perth, the Secretary of the North Beach Surf 'Life Saving Club, Mr. E. J. Richardson, heard the story and rushed to the beach in a taxi with two club members, Ron Westwood and Rodney Spencer. They were too late.

When Mr. Riley's plight became known men in a nearby hotel raced to the beach in cars and trucks. About 12 of them attempted to revive Mr. Riley on the surf club's resuscitation rocker without success. A St. John ambulance driver administered oxygen on the beach, still without effect. The driver rushed him to the Royal Perth Hospital, where he was certified dead.

Mr. Riley's wife and two young children were on holiday in the south-west when the drowning occurred.

The sacrifice made by Charles Owen Riley is remembered by the Reserve on the corner of North Beach Road and Kitchener Street that carries his name, and it was first dedicated to him by his Father, Bishop C. L. Riley on Saturday 23rd August 1958.