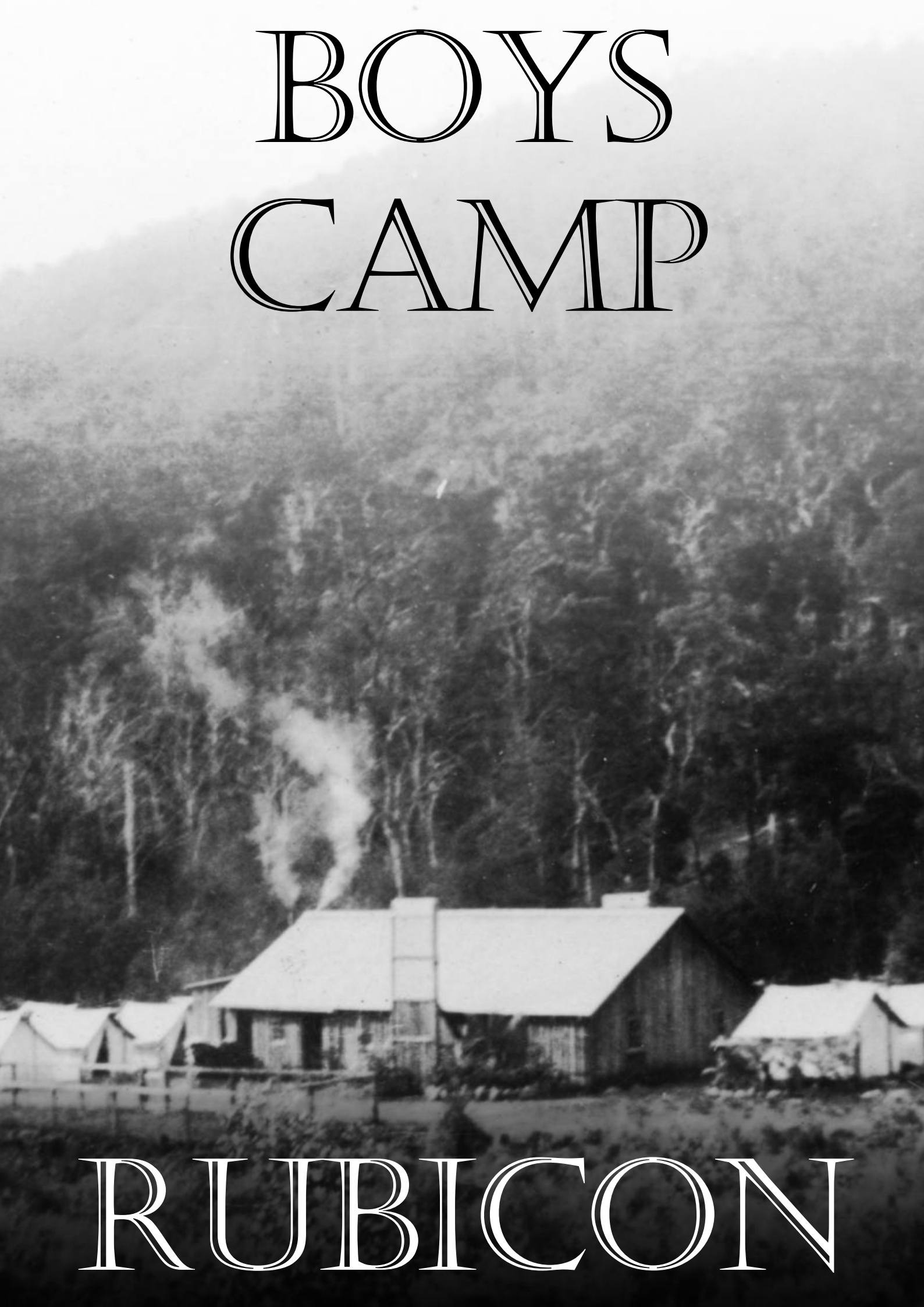


# BOYS CAMP



# RUBICON



**HERITAGE  
LOCATION  
SERIES**

---

# **RUBICON BOYS CAMP**

---

## **CONTRIBUTORS**

---

National Library Australia

Hovenden Family  
Hugh & Julie Duncan  
Allan Layton  
Leisa Lees  
Kathie Maynes  
John & Maureen Norbury  
Rex Tate  
David & Debbie Hibbert

---

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

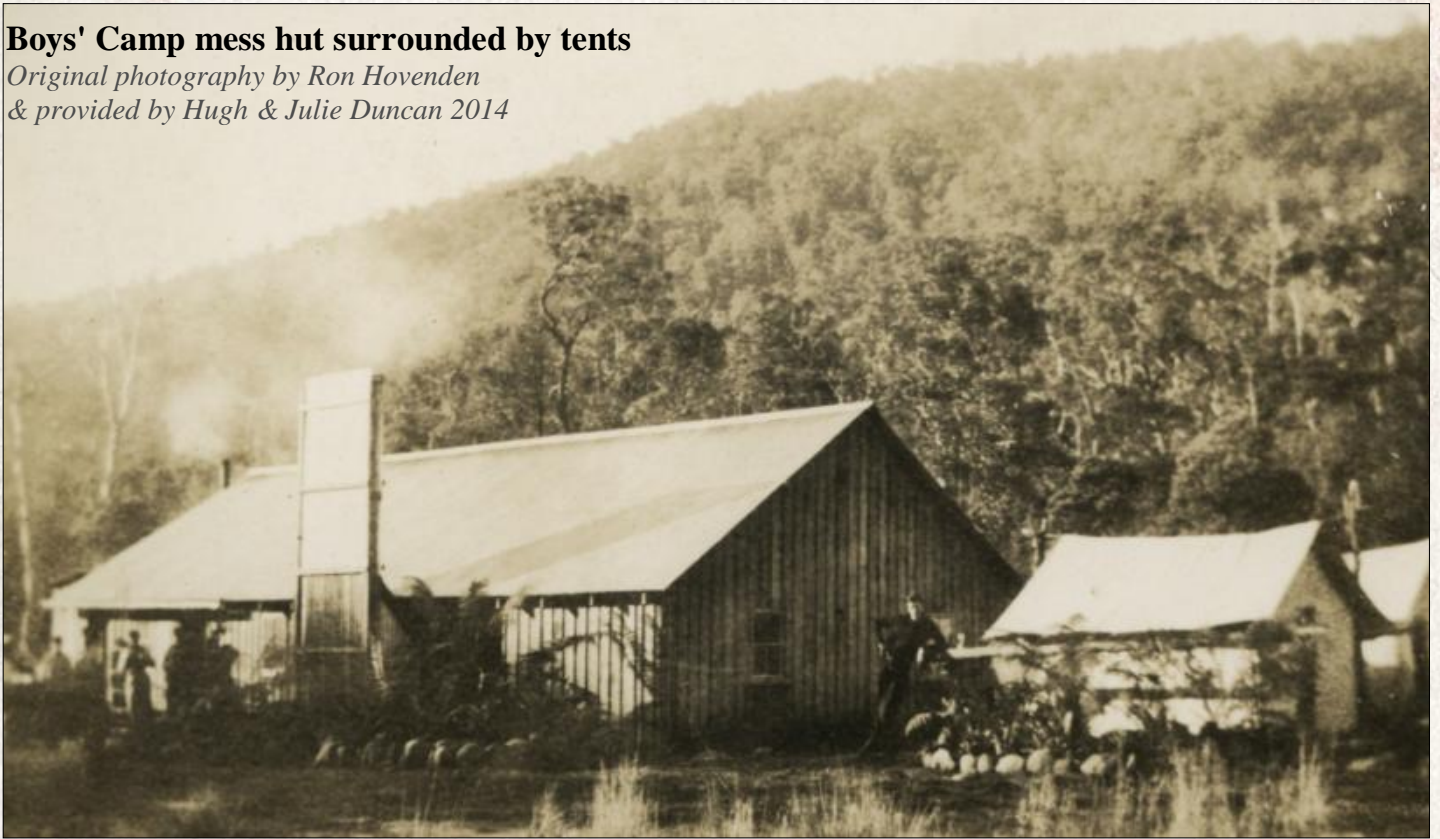
## HISTORY

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Unemployed Boys' Camp</b>
<b>Location:</b>	Rubicon
<b>Opened:</b>	Circa 1934
<b>Closed:</b>	Mid 1940s
<b>Purpose:</b>	A camp for unemployed boys

The Rubicon Boys' Camp was one of a number of camps set up in Victoria by the Forest Commission for young boys to experience life and work with other boys in a bush setting.

### Boys' Camp mess hut surrounded by tents

*Original photography by Ron Hovenden  
& provided by Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*



It is thought that the site was originally used as the Rubicon Forest Pound, where straying stock and horses were kept until claimed. It was likely a paddock and possibly a small structure at this time.

Around June 1927, The Argus reported how unemployed men were being used to create fire breaks at Rubicon. It is possible that their camp was at the site of what later became the Boys' Camp, but this has not been confirmed. Around 1933 (during the Great Depression) a camp for boys was set up at Noojee. This was seen as a success and resulted in a number of new camps being established, including one north of Bairnsdale at the Grampians, Macedon, Anglesea and Rubicon.



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## HISTORY

It is thought that the Boys' Camp was used as a place to take young men and give them a year or two of work in the bush where they could develop greater life skills and abilities.

It is not known when the Rubicon Camp ended, though it was likely after the Great Depression (1929-1939) had ended (mid 1940s). An article in the Argus Newspaper 7 January 1943 reported on how boys were cutting wood at camps including Rubicon. By the mid 1950s, the area was being operated as the Forest Commission Work Camp. A small water pipe took water from further up the water race-line, providing water for showers, taps and cooking etc.

By the mid 1970s, the area was deserted with just a semi-open shed remaining. It is possible that this was the remains of the large Mess Hall used during the time of the Boys' Camp, though this has not been confirmed. The shed was fitted out with chicken-wire shelving all around. They would bring in eucalypt branches to dry on the shelves and drop their seeds. It is thought that the seeds were then collected from sheets of hessian that had been laid underneath. Today the process is more scientific, and carried out under climate-controlled conditions.

By around the time of the 1980s, the area was being used as a very basic informal camping ground. Kendalls and Tin Hut areas were also being used for camping by this time. *(The name Kendall's Camp Area was suggested to Forest Commission by Rubicon local Bill Musgrove, as the Kendalls were the last family to have lived there before giving up the lease.)*

However, the Boys' Camp was always known as just that by the Rubicon and Lower Rubicon community. Some people from outside the area, mistakenly referred to it as Boys' Town - presumably not knowing the full history and probably confusing it with an American movie from 1938 of that name!

From the late 1970s onwards, both Kendall's and Boys' Camp areas started to get more attention from Forest Authorities. This included being occasionally slashed and cleared. The camping areas were officially named and sign-posted, fire pits and drop toilets were installed. The Boys' Camp toilet - being close to the river - has a large buried storage tank to hold the waste. This is periodically pumped out and taken to Alexandra for treatment by Goulburn Valley Water. Walking tracks were also constructed joining the two camps together.

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## HISTORY

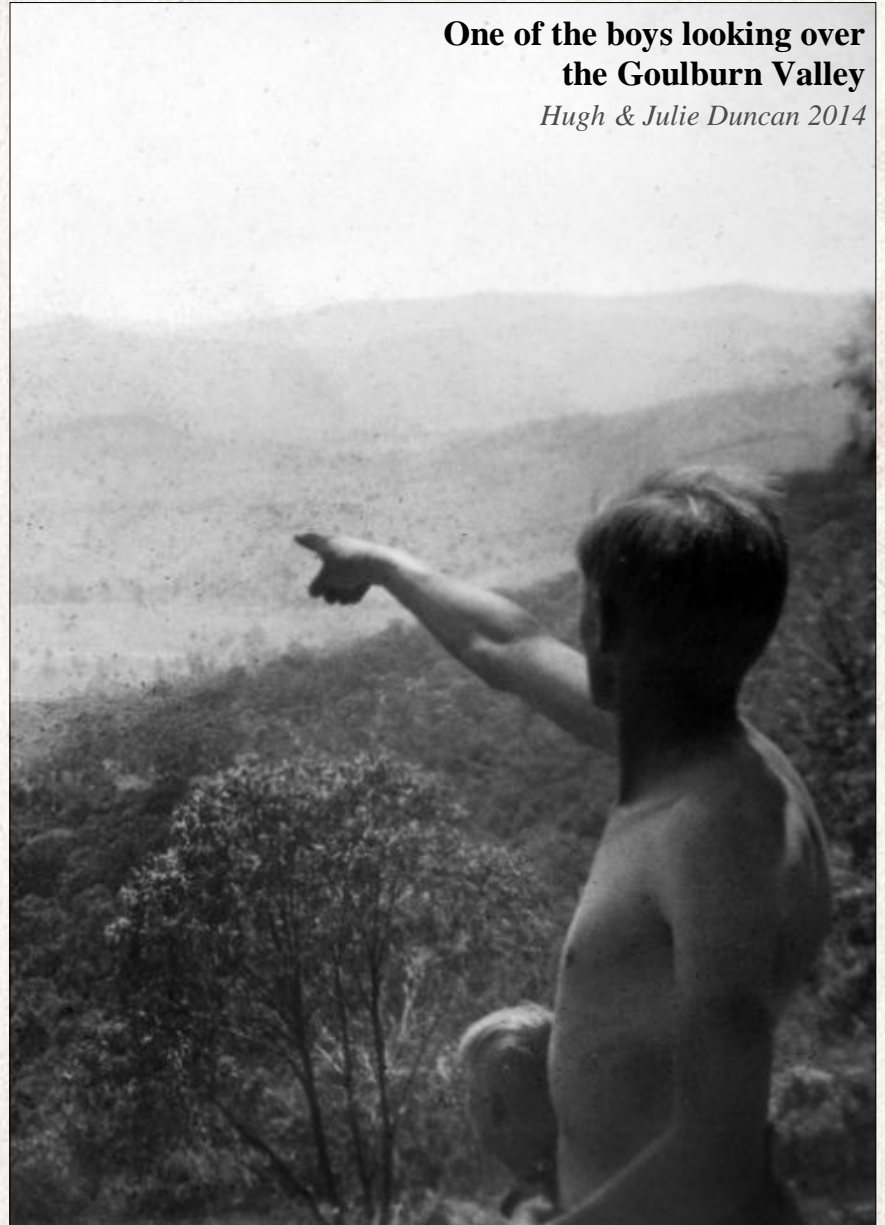
The name Boys' Camp disappeared for a short period, as Forest Authorities renamed the camp 'Kendall's B', with the Kendall's Camp becoming 'Kendall's A'. The decision was never popular and was confusing to many. In more recent years the names (and signposts) were restored back to Kendall's Camp and Boys' Camp.

In 2013-2014 further works were done to lift the quality of the camping areas along the Rubicon River between Lower Rubicon and Rubicon (Tin Hut). This included work at the Boys' Camp Ground.

Further information or corrections to the information in this factsheet is welcomed.

**One of the boys looking over  
the Goulburn Valley**

*Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## RON OF RUBICON



On 8 August 2014, Hugh and Julie Duncan allowed Artworkz to scan and process a photo album and book belonging to the family of Ronald (Ron) Hovenden. The book 'Ron of Rubicon' was written by Ron's friend Jack Draper in 1947, following Ron's death during World War II.

Ron was affectionately known by Rubicon, Eildon and Alexandra locals as 'Ron of Rubicon'. The album had a number of images taken by Ron at the Boys' Camp in 1935 and 1936. These images adorn this factsheet and stand as a testimony to a man who once visited our area for a short time, and made an impression on many. The Album was passed onto Hugh and Julie by Ron's brother (then aged 82) around 2004.

Ron was born third son of five children to parents Robert Hovenden and Cecilia (nee Parker) 17 May 1909, Mossel Bay Western Cape, South Africa. He was raised in Melbourne and developed strong Christian beliefs as a young boy. In 1935 he was employed as the Supervisor of boys at the Boys' Forestry Camp at Rubicon for unemployed boys. He performed this role until 1936. During this time he made possible the first Church and Sunday School at the isolated spot. He moved on and became the President of the Student Christian Movement at Teachers' College in 1937. He later moved to Korumburra before joining the military and leaving for the war a few days after his final Australian diary entry (3 April 1941).

Private Ronald (Ron) Selwyn Hovenden was captured by the Japanese in March 1943 and died aged 31 of malaria and malnutrition, at the notorious 80 Kilo Prisoner of War Camp at South Burma, Thailand 25 August 1943. His headstone plaque reads: "VX50187 PRIVATE, R.S. HOVENDEN, 2/2 PIONEER BATTALION, 25th AUGUST 1943 AGE 31 - FOR GOD - FOR HOME - FOR COUNTRY".

During his time in Rubicon, it is believed that he started the first Church and Sunday School ever held in that remote area.

This factsheet is only possible thanks to the Hovenden family allowing us to use his album and book for historical educational purposes.

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## RON OF RUBICON

### Ron of Rubicon.

(Contributed).

Many people in the Alexandra district will remember with affection a young man who lived amongst us for about two years during 1935/6 and 7. The death in 1943 in a prison camp in Burma was reported in 1944, and from his brother, recently returned P.O.W., comes the story of how he kept the faith.

His name was Ronald Selwyn Hovenden, but he will be always remembered by the sobriquet he liked best—"Ron of Rubicon." He came as Secretary and Welfare Officer to the Unemployed Boys' Camp established by the Forestry Commission in the Rubicon forest. He had suffered discouragement during the depression, for after qualifying in various branches of Applied Art he was unable to find a job. The Boys' Camp offered little scope for his artistic talent; but proved to be one of those tough assignments which either make or break a man. Conspicuous in any company by reason of his spontaneous friendliness and bubbling gaiety he possessed nevertheless a character of staunch uprightness, and his shining Christian faith permeated all his activities.

Each Sunday evening the rough mess hut became a House of Worship. Undaunted by the lack of proper atmosphere, Ron carried on, week after week conducting Divine Service, leading the singing of the hymns—sometimes with his mouth organ,—praying and preaching. He had an undeniable gift of telling a story, and his telling of the Gospel stories will be long remembered by those who were privileged to hear him. One of his greatest delights was the Sunday School which he began at Rubicon. Sitting on petrol cans under the gum trees on Sunday mornings, a little group of enthralled children could be seen gathered round Ron. In his spare time, he rode his bicycle for miles round the district, once travelling as far as Yarek to take the Church service in the minister's absence. In the Yarek Presbyterian Church can be seen a sample of his artistic work in the beautifully illuminated text above the pulpit. It was at Rubicon that he seemed to find himself and to realise that his gift for teaching could be combined with his dexterity in Manual Arts, for he sought and gained admission to the Teachers' Training College in 1937, and from there he went to Korumburra High School as Manual Arts teacher. He returned each year subsequently to his beloved Rubicon during the school holidays until he enlisted in the A.I.F.

He was in the Syrian campaign with the 2/2 Pioneers, and realised one of his life's ambitions in following in the Footsteps of the Master in Palestine. Wherever he was his first thoughts were for the welfare of others, never sparing himself. When the 2/2 Pioneers Battalion were taken by the Japanese in Java, Ron and his brother Bern were among them. From his brother we learn that through all the difficulties, pain and hardship, Ron not only spent himself in rendering all possible spiritual cheer to his comrades—conducting services, reading burial services—but he was never heard to utter a word in bitterness or hate against his captors. As long as he had strength he kept up his work, and even when he was too weak to get about, he remained bright and cheery. His death, from malaria and other causes, means a great loss to us all, and our sympathy goes out to his parents and brothers and sister. The words quoted by his brother seemed singularly appropriate to Ron—"He has achieved success who lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children; who has left the world a better place than he found it."

[Note.—A book entitled "Ron of Rubicon," written by a friend of his, Jack Draper, is in preparation and will be available early this year. It will contain many photographs, quotations from letters and reproductions of sketches. It is sure to be of great interest, especially to those who knew Ron.]

Alexandra & Yea Standard  
Friday 25 January 1946  
Courtesy National Library Australia



### IN MEMORIAM

#### Roll of Honour-On Active Service

**HOVENDEN**.-In loving memory of VX60187. Pte. Donald **Hovenden**, who died while prisoner of war in South Burma on August 25, 1943. (Inserted by parents and family.)

**HOVENDEN**.-Ron S. In loving memory of Ron, of **Rubicon** and Korumburra, our happy friend and great Christian Youth leader. -Lest we forget. (M. Humphrey.)

Melbourne Argus  
25 August 1945  
Courtesy National Library Australia



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

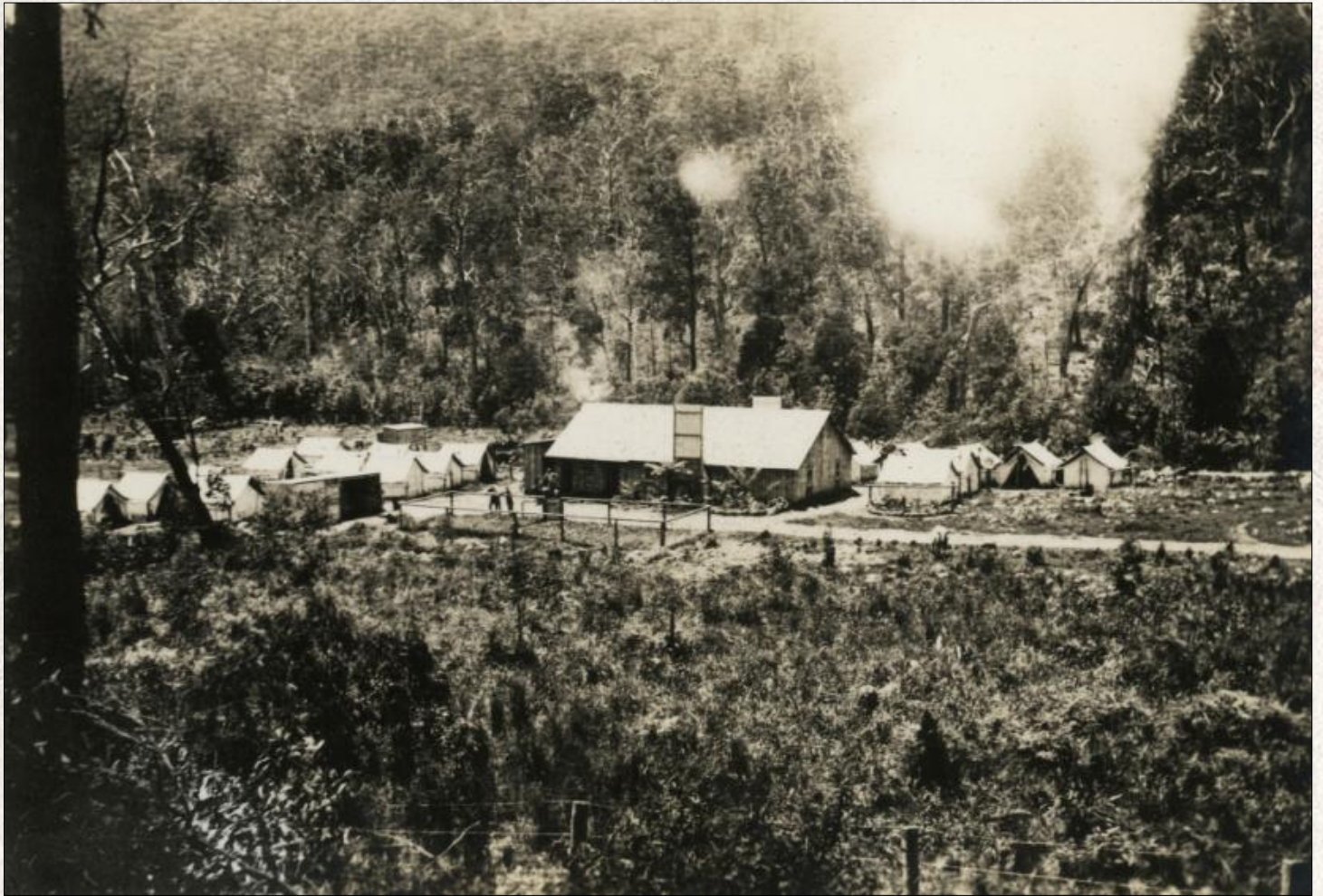
## TIMELINE

- 1927** Men were being used at Rubicon to create firebreaks. (Alexandra & Yea Standard).
- Mid 1930s** The Boys' Camp began around the time of the start of the Great Depression.
- 20 December 1935** The christening of the new locomotive (the first diesel one built in Australia and successfully used at Rubicon for a few weeks before the christening) was celebrated in the mess hut of the Boys' Camp. Around 60 people were in attendance.
- 1935-1936** 'Ron of Rubicon' Ron Hovenden attended the Boys' Camp as 'Supervisor of Boys'.
- 7 January 1943** A report in The Melbourne Argus highlighted how schoolboys at camps (including Rubicon) had cut 1,800 tons of wood in the first three weeks and that it was projected that this would increase to 4,000 - 5,000 tons before the camps ended.
- 25 August 1943** Private Ronald Hovenden (Ron of Rubicon) died as a prisoner of war in South Burma 25 August 1943. He was buried in the 80 Kilo Camp with all military honours possible.
- Circa 1950** The forest workers' camp closed. This camp had taken over the site previously - at a time unknown.
- 11 August 2014** Artworkz first published this factsheet.
- 10 February 2016** A photo of the Boys Camp was positively identified in the John Norbury collection.



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The Boys' Camp located at Rubicon circa 1935. The area is now a camping area called  
The Boys' Camp Ground.**

*Photograph courtesy John & Maureen Norbury 2014  
Photographer Charlie Norbury*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The Boys' Camp located at Rubicon circa 1935.  
The area is now a camping ground called The Boys' Camp Ground.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The Boys' Camp  
located at Rubicon.  
The area is now a  
camping area called  
The Boys' Camp  
Ground.**

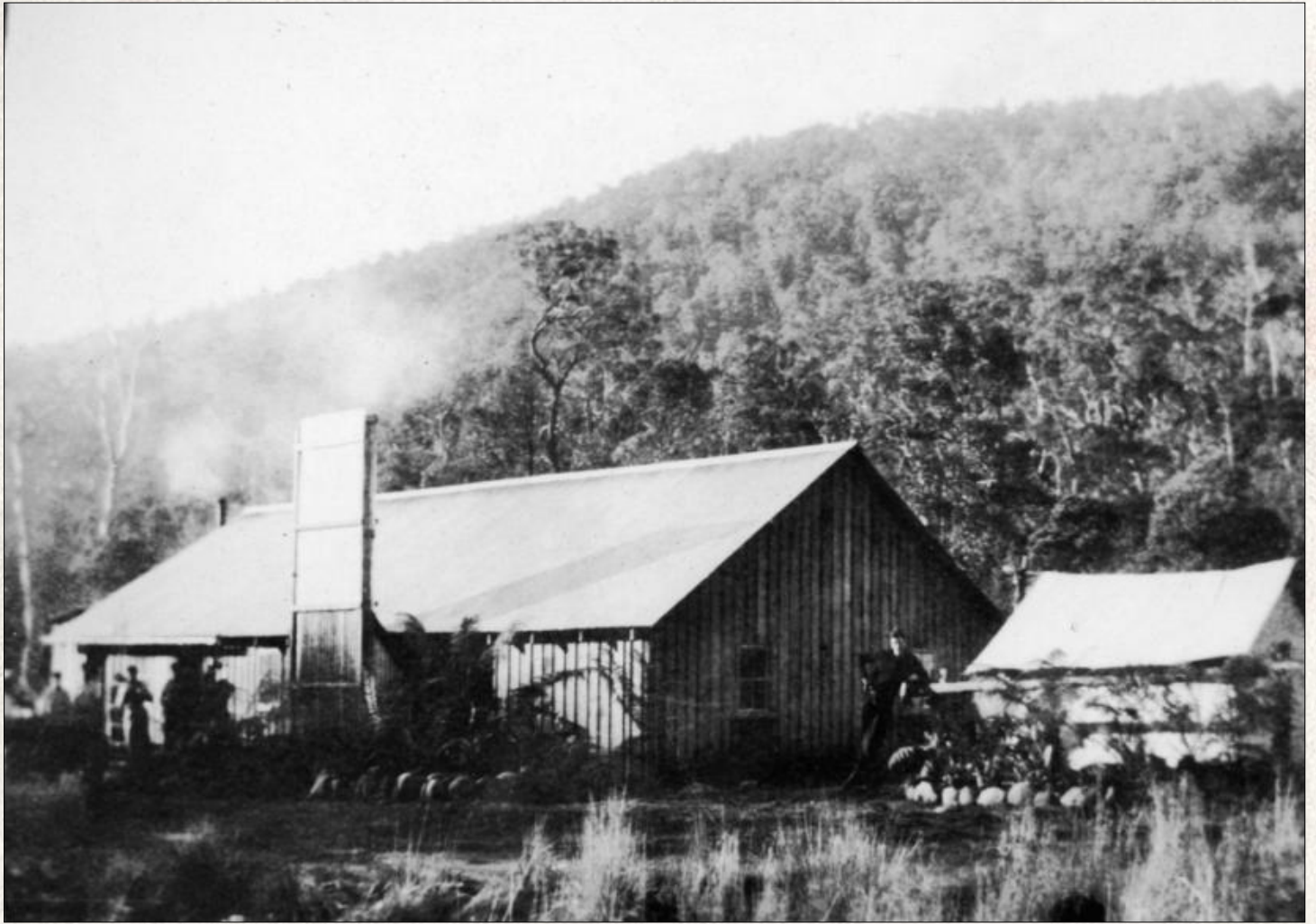
*(Top) Courtesy Hugh &  
Julie Duncan 2014*

*(Bottom) The Boys  
Camp Area 2014*



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The Boys' Camp located at Rubicon.  
The area is now a camping ground called The Boys' Camp Ground.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Ron of Rubicon - Ron Hovenden (left) and local identity, Rubicon Forester Herb FitzRoy (right) at the Boys' Camp mess hall, Rubicon.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Boys' Camp cook Jack Jackson**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The first gang a merry lot**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The full gang ready for work**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The lads in camp when Ron Hovenden left and Herb FitzRoy is standing on the far left.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**As evening fell over the Goulburn**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Timber Tramway**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Creating a fire break - hot work**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Boys from the Boys' Camp at the base of Rubicon Falls circa 1935**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Simmons family**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Men's Camp, 1,700 ft above the Boys' Camp**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The Chairman, Inspector and Herb FitzRoy (right)**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*



# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Rubicon Sunday School established by Ron Hovenden circa 1935.  
Ron Hovenden was credited with establishing the first Church and Sunday School  
at Rubicon. Ron Hovenden standing at rear.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**The first Sunday School enrolment circa 1935.  
Ron Hovenden was credited with establishing the first Church and Sunday School at Rubicon.  
Ron Hovenden standing at rear right.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Rubicon Bush Sunday School circa 1935. Ron Hovenden standing at rear.**

**From the book - Ron of Rubicon (download a copy later in this factsheet) .**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Rubicon Sunday School established by Ron Hovenden circa 1935.  
Ron was credited with establishing the first Church and Sunday School at Rubicon.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Having a drink in the Boys' Camp mess hall**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Also in the photo album was the above photo.**

**The Lady Rubicon, ready for launching at Eildon. Built by Frank Aplin, Engineer-in-charge of the Rubicon Hydro Scheme, and Alec Boyne.**

**It was one of the first boats launched on Sugarloaf Weir.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Also in the photo album was the above photo.**

**Thornton Presbyterian Church circa 1935.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**Mess hut at the Rubicon Boys' Camp on the christening of the locomotive circa 1935.**

**This was the christening of the first diesel locomotive ever built in Australia and used at Rubicon. (See next page). Sixty people were reported as being in attendance at the christening. (*Alexandra & Yea Standard*, 20 December 1935).**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*

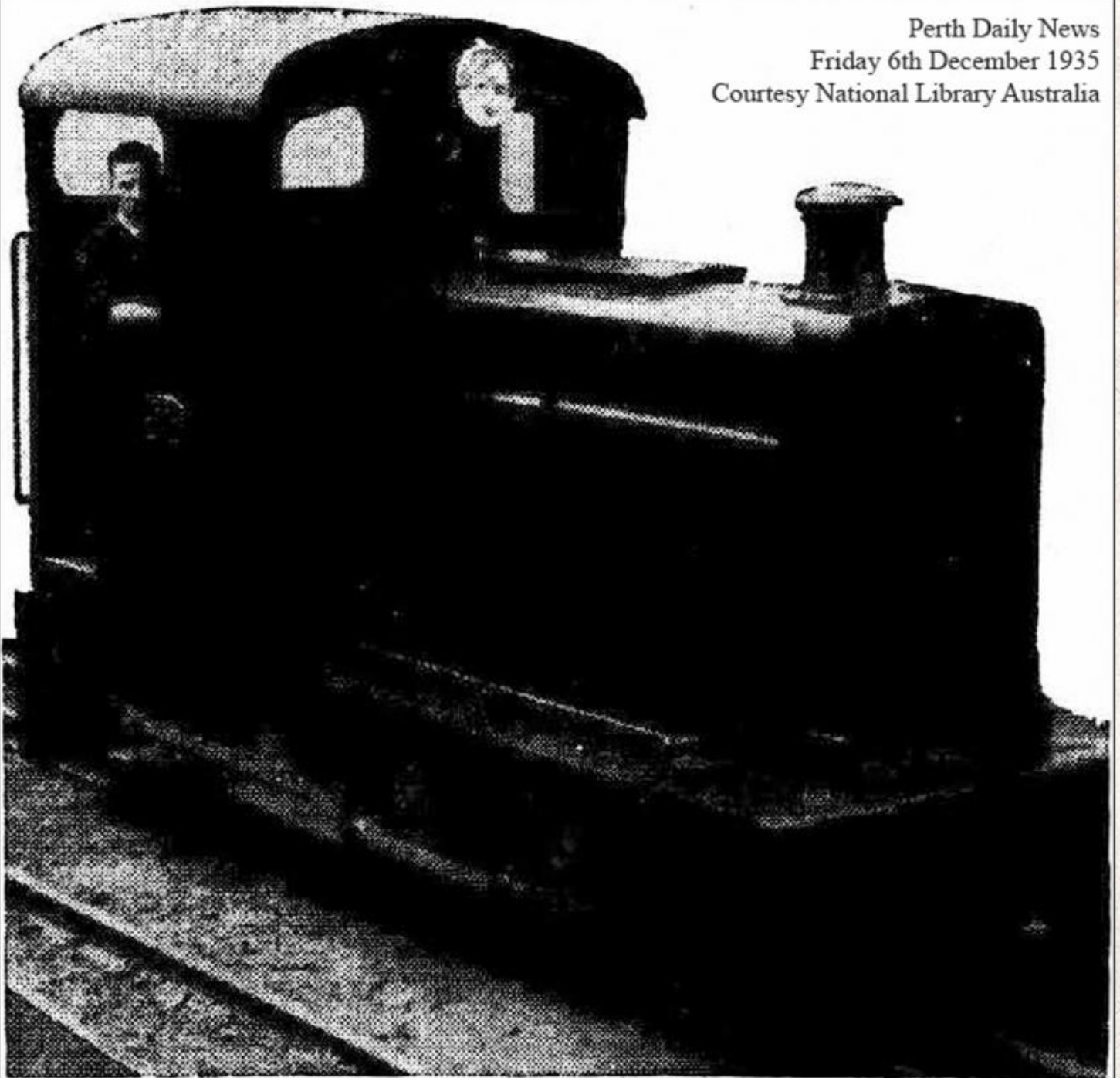


# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## DIESEL LOCO CHRISTENING 1935

### AUSTRALIAN-BUILT DIESEL LOCOMOTIVE

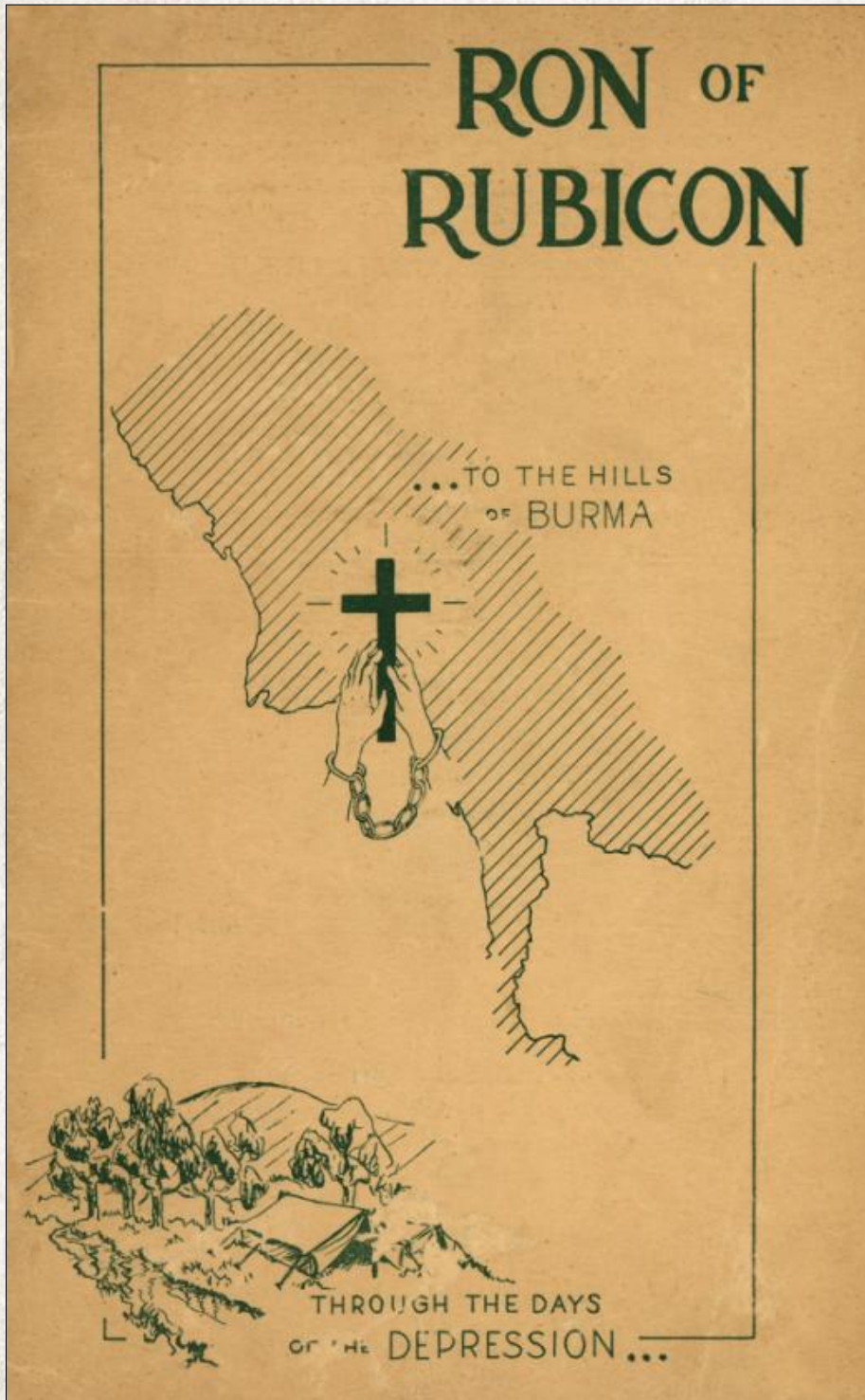
Perth Daily News  
Friday 6th December 1935  
Courtesy National Library Australia



**THE FIRST DIESEL LOCOMOTIVE** built in Australia has been made by Kelly and Lewis, engineers, of Springvale, Victoria. It will be used for timber haulage between Marysville and Alexandra. It is of 72 h.p., weighs 10 tons, and has four forward gears and four reverse. It cost about £3000.

# HISTORIC FACTSHEET

## BOOK - RON OF RUBICON



**Ron of Rubicon book - through the days of the depression - to the hills of Burma.**

*Courtesy Hugh & Julie Duncan 2014*



*Artworkz*

*Serving the Community*