



Red Poppy Film Festival

TOM PEPIATT'S "MY HUSBAND THE CHILD SOLDIER" HAS WON THE COVETED FRANK VAN NORTON AWARD FOR BEST FILM AT THE RED POPPY FILM FESTIVAL

Red Poppy Awards Jury President Michael Petroni announced *My Husband The Child Soldier* from the UK as the winner of the prestigious *Frank Van Norton Award for **Best Film** among a cluster of Red Poppy Awards. Two Australian films were awarded with the **Best Short Film** Award going to Dylan Nicholls for his moving documentary *Bringing His Spirit Home* and the **Best Animated Film** award went to Mark Russel Bernard for *New Life*.

The coveted Red Poppy Awards, titled after the war poem 'In Flanders Field', written during the First World War by Canadian physician Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, saw films from across Europe, the USA and Australia in competition across the 3-day festival.

The Festival, which has been held since 2016, is dedicated to films made by veterans and filmmakers who explore the experiences of war, service, and their profound effects on individuals, families, and communities.

This year it is coinciding with the 125th Anniversary of the Australian Army and the Royal Australian Navy and will acknowledge service and sacrifice while supporting the Veterans Film Foundation's mission to promote storytelling around military service and to advance meaningful post-service employment pathways for Australian veterans within the arts and film industry through the Screen Warrior program.

The Gala Awards night at the Art Gallery of NSW was attended by leaders in the Defence Forces and Veterans community with a Black-Tie cocktail celebration following the trophy presentations and screenings, to acknowledge the outstanding finalist entries from around the world.

The Red Poppy Awards received submissions from across the world resulting in a selection of films from France, Belgium, Italy, UK, USA and Australia to be screened over the weekend, March 7 & 8. Tickets for veterans and their families are free with daily combined

session of features, documentaries and shorts which will culminate in the closing night feature film *Lee* starring Kate Winslet.

Chairman of the Veterans Film Foundation, Warwick Young, both a veteran and award-winning filmmaker, said by showcasing films by and about veterans, the festival challenges assumptions and invites audiences to engage with the human realities of service and transition.

“Film has a unique ability to create empathy, and that’s what Red Poppy Film Festival is about — helping audiences better understand the lived experiences of veterans through powerful storytelling.” he said.

The move in 2026 to the Art Gallery of NSW also sees the program support a veteran art exhibition.

BEST FILM

My Husband the Child Soldier is a Documentary Feature from the United Kingdom directed and produced by Tom Peppiatt. In Cambodia, former Khmer Rouge child soldier Aki Ra and his wife Hout help communities reclaim their land by undertaking the potentially lethal task of clearing unexploded landmines left over from years of war. Along the way they adopt unwanted kids whose childhoods and limbs have been destroyed by landmines and open a war museum that soon becomes world famous. Aki Ra fights to break free of shadows cast by his role in the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime and rebuild his shattered family. But in a country grappling to come to terms with its history, the past always has a way of catching up.

BEST SHORT FILM

Bringing His Spirit Home is a 14-minute Documentary Short by Australian Director/Writer Dylan Nicholls. Gomeri man, Peter Milliken, travels to France to visit the grave of his great-uncle, an Aboriginal WWI soldier. He performs a traditional ceremony to bring his spirit back home to his family and Country.

BEST ANIMATED FILM

New Life, a 3 minute Animation by Australian Director Mark Russel Bernard. Life following a young person navigating the hardships of war and personal adversity. Having experienced more hurt than love, the protagonist learns to cope by looking away rather than confronting the pain – a new life is what’s needed to change this perspective.

The Red Poppy Festival weekend:

Two sessions on Saturday, March 7 feature the films [Decoding Jean: Secrets of WWII](#), [The Gift of a Second Wind](#) and [The Sessions: I’m Good](#) at 6pm and from 8.30pm [Peace Wilderness Man](#), [Cassino: Then and Now](#) and [The Comfort Dogs of Uganda](#).

On Sunday, March 8 a short film showcase at 6.30pm will screen Signalman, Long Tan, [Decoding Jean: Secrets of WWII](#), New Life, [The Comfort Dogs of Uganda](#), [Wet Soil](#), [Sound of the Somme](#) and [Bringing His Spirit Home](#).

Closing the Festival on Sunday evening at the 8.30pm screening will be New Life followed by the award-winning film [Lee](#) , starring Kate Winslet as WWII Vogue war correspondent.

Media [images](#) and [trailers](#) available or contact for Kits. Festival Trailer [here](#). Tickets available [here](#). Red Poppy Awards images [here](#).

Media Contact: Carolyn Grant | 0407898727 | carolyng@avviso.com.au

VFF Chair: Warwick Young warwick@veteransfilmfoundation.org.au + 61 409500566

Winners were selected by the Jury panel of Michael Petroni, Warwick Young and Marty Murphy.

**Private Frank Van Norton was a veteran of the US Army in WW2 and is the late father of the Veterans Film Festival leading patron Kay Van Norton Poche.*

Private Frank Van Norton was born in 1925 and passed in 2012. He landed in France on 8 June 1944, two days after the main D-Day landings. During the Allied advance through France he was shot in the back by the enemy while repairing communication lines. Wounded, he continued to repair the wiring until communication was restored to his Unit. For that action he was awarded a silver star and the Purple Heart. After the war Frank continued his service to others in the community all his life.

About Veterans Film Festival

The Veterans Film Festival aims to be Australia's premier international film festival devoted to screening films about, for and by veterans.

Through the new Screen Warriors program, the Veterans Film Festival will provide skills training, placement opportunities, scholarships as well as project development within the screen industry. By these means, it will broaden the diversity and inclusiveness of the Australian screen industry, whilst simultaneously supporting and improving the lives of veterans and their families.

Their Excellencies General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia and Mrs Linda Hurley are VFF Patrons.

