



Media statement

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Hitting his centenary and celebrating a life well lived

A born and bred West Australian and a true stalwart of Perth's western suburbs last Tuesday celebrated his 100th birthday, surrounded by family and friends who agree that their father, grandfather and great-grandfather has enjoyed a truly full and rich life.

Dr Basil Balme, a Scotch collegian in Perth and head boy who enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy in 1942, puts his innings of '100 not out' to maintaining an intellectual curiosity in all aspects of life.

Basil graduated from Scotch College in 1940, where he had been awarded a Coombe Scholarship, and then spent a year at the University of Western Australia where he began a science degree. However, his studies were interrupted by World War II, initially being inducted on the ship, the HMAS Leeuwin.

"As I had a background in high school physics, I'd earlier transferred to Melbourne where I commenced a course in radar technology," Dr Balme recalls, who, at the time, was following in his father's footsteps, who'd fought in France during the First World War.

"At that time, ships were being equipped with radar for the first time and most of the officers were not aware of its applications. At the end of the course, which I remember as comprehensive and testing, I joined the corvette HMAS Cowra as its radio mechanic and it soon became clear to the captain and other officers that they had a new weapon which enabled them to establish their position rapidly and to maintain their contact with convoys. So I held a "strong hand" on the ship and was treated well during my seagoing career.

"I was primarily involved in convoy duties, escorting other ships throughout the Mediterranean and England," adds Dr Balme, who lost three of his closest school friends when they were killed during Air Force training manoeuvres.

"For several months I was on board with Philip Mountbatten, who would later become Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and I remember having several conversations with him. One of the most vivid memories I have was our involvement in the sinking of a Japanese submarine after we dropped bombs. We had to accept what we were instructed to do."

After the war, Dr Balme returned to the University of Western Australia, after gaining a three-year scholarship to St George's College, where he finished his degree in oil geology, and from there won a

Fulbright scholarship to New York University. His ensuing career saw him travel widely and work on every continent except Antarctica.

In London during 1949, he married his sweetheart Helen Cook, a country girl from Dumbleyung in WA, who was working in London at the Natural History Museum. On their return from the UK, the couple purchased a house in Agett Rd, Claremont, then built a home in Queen St, Claremont where they lived until 2008.

During their marriage, the couple went on to have three children - Stephen, Jane and Mary - and now Basil has five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Sadly, Helen passed away in 2008.

Mercy Place Mont Clare Service Manager, Dorothy Wijangco-Garcia, said everyone at the Claremont-based aged care home was keen to congratulate Basil on reaching his 'century not out'.

"It's not every day that we honour 100th birthdays at Mont Clare, so 13 June was an important day for all of us as we helped celebrate Basil's wonderful day," she said.

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