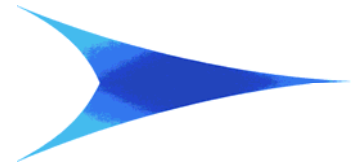


The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community

www.southern-cross-group.org



MEDIA RELEASE

50,000 Americans to Qualify for Australian Citizenship

Major changes to Australian citizenship law will shortly give at least 50,000 US citizens the right to apply for Australian citizenship. The vast majority of those Americans impacted have no idea they will soon have this entitlement.

Most of them are individuals born in the United States in the 1940s, 50s and 60s to an Australian-born war bride mother and a US serviceman father.

These baby boomers did not qualify for Australian citizenship by descent at the time of their birth because of historical sex discrimination in Australian law. The *Australian Citizenship Act 2007*, passed by the Australian Federal Parliament in Canberra on March 1, 2007, and expected to enter into force on July 1, tries to put the past right for these families.

During World War II, almost a million US Marines, GIs and other military personnel passed through Australia during their service in the Pacific Theatre. They spent time in Australia on leave, in training camps and recuperating after being injured. Many formed relationships with local girls, resulting in some 15,000 Australian war brides joining their American husbands in the US at the end of the War.

Next week, on Wednesday April 25, Australia commemorates its war dead in its equivalent of Memorial Day – on what is known as “ANZAC Day”. In an historic gathering on April 24 and 25, over 80 surviving Australian-born war brides will make their way to Washington DC from all corners of the United States, where the Australian Embassy will pay tribute to their courageous spirit. These women, now all in their eighties and nineties, will be accompanied by over 200 spouses, children and grandchildren.

Many of the war brides forfeited their Australian citizenship when they became naturalized US citizens in decades past. The new changes to Australian law will give them the right to apply to resume their Australian citizenship just by showing good character, thereby becoming dual citizens.

Rosemary Smith, originally from Sydney and now 86, will be making the trip to DC from her home in California. She met her husband Bob in 1943 while he was recovering in hospital in Australia after being injured in Buna in New Guinea. His actions earned him the Purple Heart and the Silver Star. They were married in 1944 and she joined him in the US in 1946. “Americans feel close to Australians” she says. She considers herself “a US Aussie”. Resuming her Australian citizenship later this year will make her feel as if she again properly “belongs” in her country of birth.

Betty McElynn from New York will also be making the trip to Washington. She turns 87 this year and is the mother of eight US-born children, seven of whom are still alive and now looking forward to becoming Australian citizens. The family lost one son in another war in which Australia and the US fought side by side, in Vietnam in 1967. Betty’s oldest son Lawrence says he believes the citizenship reforms will “bring the family even closer to their Australian family”. He has twelve first cousins in and around Melbourne. Lawrence’s father was a US Marine who served in Guadalcanal.

Information and Contacts

www.southern-cross-group.org

To interview Australian-born war brides and their children in your area, contact info@southern-cross-group.org.

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About the Southern Cross Group

The Southern Cross Group is an international non-profit volunteer-run advocacy and support organisation for the Australian diaspora. Since its formation in early 2000, the SCG has established a consistent track record of intelligent and timely submissions to Government on a host of Australian expatriate issues. The Group is best known for its work in reforming Australian citizenship law. It has also been active on the issue of expatriate disenfranchisement in the Australian electoral process, and was the driving force behind the establishment of a broad-based dedicated Australian Senate Committee Inquiry into Australian expatriates held in 2003-2005.

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