



Salvationist Warren Stoodley is on the roster to play the Last Post at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. He sees the job as part of his service to God. Photos: Shairon Paterson



A simple yet special ministry

Warren Stoodley will tell you there's nothing memorable about his musical ability, however **BILL SIMPSON** finds out how the Canberra Salvationist is using his gifts to honour God at the Australian War Memorial

At 5pm Canberra time every day, staff at the Australian War Memorial in the national capital invite visitors to witness a closing ceremony.

Sometimes, hundreds of people observe the event as they exit the memorial. The ceremony is not dependent on the number of people, though. It occurs irrespective of a crowd or the weather.

The ceremony is a centuries-old military tradition.

As the building closes for the day, visitors are encouraged to gather in front of the Pool of Remembrance near the memorial's entrance.

"Welcome to the Australian War Memorial's closing ceremony," a staff member announces. "This evening will feature the Last Post – a traditional bugle call [if the player is a bugler]." If the player is a piper, they play a lament.

"Where 'reveille' signals the start of a soldier's day," the announcer continues, "the Last Post signals its end [hence the closing ceremony each day]."

The ceremony's origins, the announcer explains, date from a 17th century British army ritual, known as "tattoo".

During battle, a duty officer at the end of each day would check that all sentry posts were manned and round up any off-duty soldiers, packing them off to their beds or billets. The duty officer would be accompanied by one or more musicians.

The musicians would play a "first post"

when the duty officer started his rounds. Another bugle call was sounded when the party completed its rounds – or its "last post".

This "last post" signalled that the night sentries were alert at their posts and gave one last warning to any soldiers still not in their billets that it was time to retire for the evening.

"The Last Post has since been incorporated into funeral and memorial services as a final farewell and signifies that the duty of the dead is over and they can now rest in peace," the memorial staff member explains.

"I invite you all to stand as we present the Last Post, which will be performed this evening by [player's name]."

Twice a month, the player is Warren Stoodley, Corps Sergeant-Major and bandsman at the Canberra City Oasis Corps.

Dressed in his Salvation Army uniform, Warren has played at the memorial's closing ceremony on a regular basis for almost four years.

It's part of his ministry as a Salvation Army soldier.

Close relationship

Originally, a Canberra-based military band provided the players. When the continuous program stretched the band's resources, the museum management put out a public appeal for players.

"Historically, The Salvation Army and the Australian Army have a very close relationship. I was talking with staff at the memorial when



Warren and his wife Beth moved to Canberra, from Sydney, almost 40 years ago.

Photos: Shairon Paterson

our corps band played at an open day and they asked if I would be interested. I thought it was something I could do, so I auditioned and was selected as part of a roster of musicians,” Warren says.

“I’ve enjoyed it. The Salvation Army uniform was never an issue because they preferred players in uniform, anyway. It’s a witness, but it also introduces me to Salvation Army people in the crowd. The uniform is respected and provides its own opportunity

“There’s nothing special about my standard of playing. I’m just doing a job that’s special.”

for discussion. There’s an expectation about people who wear The Salvation Army uniform.

“So, I always want to look and play my best. The way I see it, anything we do we do as a service to the Lord. Even our jobs are a service to the Lord. They’re not done to bring credit to ourselves.”

Warren and his wife, Beth, have lived in Canberra for 37 years. They moved from Sydney, where they attended Auburn Corps.

Warren was a draughtsman before semi-retiring to work as a part-time surveyor’s assistant.

Ironically, appearing on his own in front of a crowd is the opposite of the Warren Stoodley personality. Warren is a quiet man, preferring the sidelines to the spotlight. Enticing him to talk about himself for this article was not easy.

“I’m just not an up-front person,” he confirms. “There’s nothing special about my standard of playing. I’m just doing a job that’s special, I suppose.

“I see it more as doing something meaningful for people who have been visiting the memorial. What they have seen at the memorial during their visit is special. At the end of a day, that can be quite emotional for many people. The closing ceremony provides a moment of reflection.

“Lots of people say the closing ceremony is very moving for them. After I play, I move through the crowd. Many people whisper ‘thank you’. That sort of reaction makes it special for me.”

Has he made any mistakes in his playing before a crowd at a crucial stage of the memorial’s day? “Not yet,” he says. “It’s not a difficult piece of music to play. I’m grateful for the opportunity.”



Bill Simpson is Editor-at-Large for Pipeline and supplements.