



COMMUNITY

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LATE MERIT

FORMER Leitchville Primary School student Charlie Hildebrand received his merit certificate from the school's principal last month.

It was an unusual presentation, considering the merit certificate hasn't existed for decades and Charlie left Leitchville primary 85 years ago.

The gesture was initiated by school staff, who in gathering stories for 140th anniversary celebrations in October, found out that he would have received the qualification but left school just before sitting the exam.

"We thought we needed to right that wrong," principal Jim Rinaldi said.

Young Charlie had started school late, and in 1930, aged 10, transferred from Horfield to Leitchville primary, where he was put into a higher class.

After at first struggling a bit, he came to excel in most subjects, to the point that in grade 6 his teacher told him not to put his hand up to answer questions because he knew the answer to too many of them.

After mid-year exams in grade 7, Charlie was told to borrow a book and catch up on geometry, so he could sit the merit exam that year.

In between helping his father on the farm, he studied everything he needed to know for the exam over the holidays.

But when, at the end of them, his father told him he could leave school if he wanted to, he did.

As a young man, he worked hard on his father's farm and the operation he developed with his brother Phil, but dedicated his free time to his mechanical and technical interests.

When he was first called up to WWII as an 18-year-old he had received a farm exemption but when the war reached New Guinea three years later, he signed up.

In Melbourne, he told the army he was interested in radio, and was sent to a trainer who asked him to draw the circuit of a superhead wireless.

"I'd already been doing that sort of work for a long time. I'd sit up until eight or 10 at night studying up on radios and engines," he said.

After training at Melbourne



Leitchville Primary School principal Jim Rinaldi, right, presenting Charlie Hildebrand with the merit certificate he left school too early to qualify for. **Picture — JENNY DENTON**

Tech, he qualified as an instrument mechanic and joined the 35 wireless task section, which was sent to New Guinea.

He went by boat to Lae in New Guinea and was there for 12 months.

"They'd sent us up to New Guinea with equipment that wasn't waterproof and I sat up with another chap soldering all night to replace it."

"When we offloaded at Lae, the war was well and truly on, and they were fighting all around us. We built our wireless transmitting station amongst a big clump of trees so the Japs wouldn't see us. We were just camped out in the bush living on army rations

of bully beef and hard biscuits for three or four months."

After a year in New Guinea, the whole unit returned to Australia and Charlie got word that his brother had arranged his release from the army to go back to the farm.

"I didn't know if I was doing the right thing to come back home. I was important in the army," he said.

Back in Leitchville, Charlie got married, had a house built on Hildebrand Rd, and eventually set up a second milking shed.

For the rest of his working life he made a living as a dairy farmer, but his technical interests remained very much alive.

He regularly helped other farmers with their engines and fixed radios as a hobby.

Around 12 years ago, shortly after his wife died, he had a big clearance sale and sold \$36,000 worth of radio equipment.

"I've got about as much again," he said.

"It's what makes life worthwhile."

Over the years the decision to leave school niggled at the gifted mechanic and radio technician.

He was touched if a little uncomfortable to receive the honorary leaving certificate.

"It embarrassed me a bit. I had tears in my eyes pretty quick," the nonagenarian said.

Weather

Temperatures

Thursday: minimum 18 degrees, maximum 39 degrees.
Friday: 22, 45.
Saturday: 21, 39.
Sunday: 17, 37.

December minimums: lowest 10.6 degrees [3rd], highest 20.6 degrees [13th], average 16.8 degrees [long-term average 15.5 degrees].

Lowest on record: 5.8 degrees [18th, 1966]. Highest on record: 30.9 degrees [26th, 2003].

December maximums: lowest 26.8 degrees [7th], highest 44.0 degrees [27th], average 32.7 degrees [long-term average 31.6 degrees].

Highest on record: 45.6 degrees [31st, 1968]. Lowest on record: 16.2 degrees [5th, 1991].

Rainfall

Month to date: 43.8 [long-term average 26.7mm]. Year to date: 229.6mm. Last year to December 31: 389.2mm. [long-term January average: 27.8]. Highest on record: 180.8mm [1992]. Lowest on record: 0.0mm [1889].

Evaporation

Weekly pan evaporation: 55.4mm



Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

Forecast

Today: Sunny, 18-36
Wednesday: Sunny, 18-36
Thursday: Hot and sunny, 18-39
Friday: Very hot and sunny, 22-45
Saturday: Very hot, late cool change, 21-39
Sunday: Sunny, 17 -37

Daylight

Today sunrise 6.12am
sunset 8.43pm
Wednesday 6.12am, 8.44pm
Thursday 6.13am, 8.44pm
Friday 6.14am, 8.44pm
Saturday 6.15am, 8.44pm

Ultra-violet index

Sun protection recommended from 9:10 am to 5:50 pm, UV Index predicted to reach 13 [Extreme]

Fire danger

Mallee: High (The Shire of Gannawarra is in the Mallee fire district.)
Northern Country: High (The Shire of Loddon is in the Northern Country fire district.)
Fire danger and restrictions information is available from www.cfa.vic.gov.au