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Lieutenant - Commander Wor. Bro. LEON VERDI GOLDSWORTHY
G.C., D.S.C., G.M., RANVR.
(1909-1994)

Leon Goldsworthy was born in Broken Hill, NSW on 19 January 1909, the son of Alfred Thomas Goldsworthy and Eva Jane Riggs.

He received his education at Kapunda High School in South Australia and the Adelaide School of Mines and the University of Adelaide where he studied engineering.

He moved to Western Australia at the age of 21 and, on November 1939, he married Maud E Rutherford. They had a daughter, Pamela.

Goldsworthy was a small man, just 5ft 5in (165 cm) tall, but with a tough, wiry frame as a result of gymnastics and wrestling. The little toe from each foot was missing.

He tried to enlist in the Royal Australian Navy in 1940 but was rejected because of his small stature.

He was later requested to re-apply and, on 24 March 1941, he was commissioned a Sub-Lieutenant in the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve.

He arrived in England some two months later about the time the German battleship *Bismarck* was sunk in the North Atlantic.

He was posted to the Rendering Mines Safe Section of HMS *Vernon* after he had read a notice which stated:

Aussies get into the mining business.

'Goldie', his pre-war nickname, said after the war:

"I volunteered for a brief mine disarmament course, hardly realising what was ahead."

His engineering training gave him some advantage in dealing with the intricate design of German mines and booby traps. Prior to the invasion of Europe on D-Day, 6 June 1944, his operational territory was between Portsmouth and Bexhill, near Hastings in East Sussex.

His wartime nickname was 'Ficky', derived from his reputation as 'Mr Fixit'.

On 17 September 1943, working with another Australian, C J Cliff, Goldsworthy removed a two year old mine from the Coal Barge Wharf at Southhampton.

On 7 October 1943, a similar task was performed at Tate and Lyle's Wharf at Silvertown on the River Thames.

For this and other similar assignments, Leon Goldsworthy was awarded the George Medal gazetted on 18 April 1944.

He was Mentioned in Despatches in August 1944 for 'great courage and undaunted devotion to duty' and the George Cross was awarded to him for his skill and courage during a series of recoveries on 12 June 1943 and 10 April 1944 which led to the recovery of four German ground mines, three magnetic mines and one acoustic mine.

On 13 August 1943, using the special diving suit which MOULD had been instrumental in developing, he made safe a German ground mine underwater off Sheerness. Being the second time this weapon had been rendered safe underwater it was a particularly hazardous operation, with no escape for Lieutenant Goldsworthy should the fuse start.

On 10 April 1944, Goldie dealt with a dangerous acoustic mine near Milford Haven (Wales), successfully extracting the fuse and primer, later removing the whole mine intact. During that operation he struck his head on the foot of a ladder while under water and ricked his back while trying to get clear.

The award of Lieutenant Goldsworthy's George Cross was published in the *London Gazette* dated 19 September 1944.

He was wounded on another occasion when a German parachute mine and aluminium case exploded prematurely and several foreign metal objects (shrapnel) had to be removed from his back.

The Distinguished Service Cross was awarded in January 1945 for 'gallantry and distinguished service in mine clearance', with particular reference to his stripping of the first German "K" Type mine in fifty feet (15 metres) of water at Cherbourg when the harbour was being hurriedly cleared before the Allied invasion of Europe following the invasion of Normandy. "P" Parties as they became known, were in effect human minesweepers for the clearance of the harbours, rivers and canals of Europe after the invasion.

Late in 1944 Goldsworthy was transferred to the Pacific theatre for a tour of duty with the United States Navy's Mobile Explosive Investigation Unit, which involved an entirely new standard of training and identification as the Japanese weapons bore no resemblance to those of the Germans. His work involved neutralising of Japanese mines and booby traps following the American Invasion of the Philippines and similar tasks in support of the various Australian landings in the Borneo area.

For a man initially rejected as being physically unfit for the navy, Goldie finished the war as the most highly decorated man in it's history, the acknowledged underwater mine disposal expert in Europe, the conqueror of over one hundred weapons in European waters and about thirty in the Pacific.

His war over, he returned to London where he was invested with the George Cross and the Distinguished Service Cross by Most Wor Bro His Majesty King George VI.



Lieutenant Commander Leon Goldsworthy

He retired from the Navy with the rank of Lieutenant Commander and returned to Perth, Western Australia where he resumed civilian life and, in 1963, became Production Manager for Rainbow Neon Pty Ltd, later to become Neon Signs (A'sia) Ltd. He was also an enthusiastic golfer.

Leon's first wife, Maud had died and, in 1968 he married Georgette Johnston.

The *West Australian* for 25 April 1989 reported:

There are times - like to day - when Leon "Goldie" Goldsworthy remembers the years he was a mere heartbeat away from death.

Australia's most highly decorated ex-naval man will also recall his mates as he leads his fellow servicemen along St George's Terrace on the ANZAC Day March.

"I look forward to the annual reunion, of meeting old friends, and seeing who is left," he said. "I might not be able to make it next year."

"Some people were afraid to die in those times, others didn't give a blooming hoot," he said. Which category did he fall into? He wouldn't say - especially not today.

He had some close calls. Once, he was blown up under water. His spine was injured and he suffered blackouts until an operation stopped the problem. Someone suggested he should have been awarded a Victoria Cross but the VC is only awarded for action in the face of an enemy. Someone else said they could have painted Hitler's face on one of the mines.



Lieutenant Commander Goldsworthy was featured on one of the four Australian stamps issued on 10 August 1995 to honour outstanding war service by Australians.

Bro Leon Goldsworthy was made a mason on 17 November 1931 in Duke of York Lodge No 132, Grand Lodge of Western Australia. He was passed a Fellowcraft on 16 August 1932 and raised a Master Mason on 10 October 1932.

He served as Charity Steward in 1934, Steward in 1935, Tyler in 1936, Chaplain in 1937-38, Inner Guard in 1939 and Treasurer in 1940.

After the war, he began as Junior Deacon in 1946 and was installed as Master of the Lodge on 10 July 1950. In 1956, he was appointed Deputy Grand Pursuivant of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia. He was Director of Ceremonies from 1957 to 1960. He called off on 11 November 1968.

Leon Goldsworthy died on 7 August 1994 at the age of 85.

He was one of only 8 people in the world to have been awarded both the George Cross and the George Medal. He was Australia's most decorated Naval Officer of the Second World War.

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