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# RAAV Ravings



## Sebastopol resident George Prolongeau believed to be oldest Ambulance Officer in Victoria

While many things have changed dramatically since the 1950s, few have undergone as complete a transformation as the ambulance service.

Just two months out from his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, Sebastopol resident George Prolongeau has seen more developments in the industry than anyone in the state.

An ambulance officer up until 1977, the 99-year-old was formally inducted as a life member of the Retired Ambulance Association at a ceremony last December. He is believed to be the oldest surviving ambulance officer in Victoria.

For Mr Prolongeau, it was a stint in the army during World War Two which gave rise to a lifelong career.

"We were poor when we were young and I had no secondary education," Mr Prolongeau said of his early life in Sebastopol. "I worked in the family gold mine and on farms before getting the

call-up to the army, and being a Christian man I asked to go into a non-combatative unit."

Mr Prolongeau served in New Guinea and Bougainville in the kitchen and in the field ambulance, experiencing the brutality of war but also gaining valuable skills.

Following the war he joined the Ambulance Service in 1952, where he slowly worked his way to the position of Ballarat station officer.

In contrast to the highly skilled and educated paramedics who operate ambulances today, Mr Prolongeau said ambulance officers in his era relied on the medical expertise of doctors and nurses. Mr Prolongeau himself was only required to have advanced first aid skills when first entering the service.

"When I was first working at

the hospital we had one ambulance, and the yard men handled that," Mr Prolongeau said. "They would have to pick up a nurse to go with them to do the medical side of things because they weren't medical men."

Despite being just weeks away from the enviable 100 club, Mr Prolongeau remarkably is unable to claim the mantle of oldest in his family. His 102-year-old sister Muriel still lives independently in Wendouree.

Mr Prolongeau put his longevity down to being a "health fanatic", and not over-indulging.

*Article courtesy of the Ballarat Courier*

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