

# Des' new passions

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## Digger takes up painting and writing

by LYNNE KINSEY

DES Shinkfield's war experiences have become the basis of his new-found passion for story writing.

Mr Shinkfield, of North Ringwood, is a regular entrant in the veteran community story writing and art competition.

He first entered in 1993 — albeit not of his own choosing.

A friend bought one of Mr Shinkfield's paintings of the *HMAS Australia* and entered it in the competition. The work received an honorable mention.

"I was encouraged by that and have entered every year since," the 73-year-old said.

Over the years he has received several honorable mentions and a first prize in 1994 for an oil painting. This year he will enter two paintings and a short story called *My First Ship*.

Mr Shinkfield's love of art began in 1986.

His first painting was sold in the Ringwood Rotary art exhibition and "that set me off".

"I don't really enter into many shows because there's so much competition. It's just a hobby for me. I still regard myself as an amateur painter."

He describes his artworks, many of which hang in his home gallery and studio, as "his friends".

But painting has taken a back seat for the time being, with Mr Shinkfield now concentrating on writing.

He has written his memoirs for his family and hopes to publish a book, titled *You have no choice?* which looks at choices people have and the question of responsibility.

During the war, Mr Shinkfield was a sub-lieutenant on the *HMAS Australia*. He signed up when he was 17, serving on the *Bundaberg* before joining the *Australia*.

"I always had a boyhood ambition to join the navy. I tried to join when I was 13, but I missed out."

Mr Shinkfield recently completed a series of paintings of the *Australia*, which he hopes to donate to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. The six paintings depict the ship's bombing by kamikazes during the Battle of the Philippines.

The ship was bombed once in the Leyte campaign on October 21, 1944, where the captain was killed, and five times in the January 1945 Lingayen campaign.

"We were the first ship to be hit by a kamikaze, which is something that people don't seem to know," Mr Shinkfield said. "During one



**Painting passion:** Des Shinkfield has been painting since 1986. Picture: COLIN STUCKEY.

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strike) I was very lucky because the plane came straight for the bridge — it came so close I could have touched it with my hand.

"The bomb never went off so we were very lucky."

A total of 74 people were killed in the two campaigns and 120 wounded, including Mr Shinkfield's brother, Maurice, who was shot in the neck.

"The scenes are still very clear to me. It's the loss of life that brings back memories of fellows that I served with and how ghastly war is.

"But there was a job to be done — it's part of service life and when you join the navy, there's always a risk."

Mr Shinkfield said about 2000 Japanese pilots gave their lives as kamikazes.

Mr Shinkfield left the navy in October 1945 and worked as a teacher in Bangladesh and Australia, retiring in 1983.



**War years:** Des Shinkfield as a midshipman.

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