

## VALE GEOFF PETERS (C 20): 1927 - 2015

Much of the early information and the photos in this article are taken from Bob Cruise's 2009 book 'A History of Racewalking in South Australia'.

When Geoff Peters (C 20) died on the evening of Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2015, we lost yet another of our links with the early days of the Australian Centurions.

Geoff, born 31 January 1927, was one of our oldest Centurions and one of our keenest. He was South Australia's third centurion, coming chronologically after Jack Webber (C 2) and Tim Thompson (C 6), and Australia's twentieth one but more of that later. Let's start at the beginning.

Geoff and his wife Pat were actively involved in athletics for over 60 years until retiring only a few years ago. He was considered at the time to be the longest serving registered athlete and official in South Australia and Pat the longest serving ladies official – Geoff for 66 years and Pat for 64 years. Their involvement commenced well before the amalgamation of the men's and women's associations and well before the 1956 Olympics.

Both were instrumental in organising the interstate meets in alternate years between Western Districts Club and Brunswick Athletics Club in Victoria and their home was host to many interstate guests over many years.

Geoff and Pat were married for over 60 years and have four daughters. Both are life members of Western Districts Club, the South Australian Masters Association and Athletics S.A. Further, Pat recently received an order of Australia Medal for her contribution to sport.

Geoff started walking in 1942 when aged 15. He competed in a multitude of events over the years, initially in the throwing and walking competitions and the popular handicap mile runs at Adelaide Oval during breaks in the football matches. Like most men of his age, his sporting career was interrupted by the Second World War and he enlisted and served out his time like everyone else.

Once the War had finished, he returned to civilian life and restarted his stalled athletics career. He was Club Captain for many years at Western Districts and won the State hammer throw in 1950. Geoff eventually moved to distance and endurance events, running a marathon in 1956 and taking part in the Western Districts 1959 Adelaide – Port Pirie Relay event. He had success in the walks over a long period, one of his many medals being runner up in the State 50km walk in 1966. Geoff recalls with a smile the many times he and Bill Starr (long serving South Australian Walking Club President) enjoyed copious amounts of ginger beer following their race walking efforts in the sixties.



*Australian Veteran's 5,000m, Adelaide 1986*

**Geoff (number 5542) competing in the Australian Veterans 5000m track championship in Adelaide in 1986. Note he is competing bare foot!**

One of his many rivals and mates on the walking track was Jack Webber (C 2) and Geoff was a key player in Jack's record setting 1979 walk from Melbourne to Adelaide. Jack set off from Melbourne on Wednesday 15 August 1979 and reached Adelaide on Saturday August 25, setting a new walk record of 10 days 2 hours 30 mins. Jack regarded this as perhaps his greatest achievement and Geoff was there the whole way. He had taken two weeks off work and accompanied Jack on a bicycle for the full 10 days, attending to all his needs during the walking day and providing massages each night.

A year later, Geoff was back to help Jack in another record breaking performance which saw him create a world record (Guinness Book of Records) in an unforgettable performance around the Adelaide Harriers track, covering a staggering 1062.25 miles (4269 laps) in 38 days 2 hrs 30 mins, an average of more than 27 miles per day - at the age of 66!

Jack and Geoff had it all planned out. Jack would at 9 AM each day, walking a marathon a day for 38 days to complete his 1000 mile target. If he had any time up his sleeve, he would continue on to finish his endurance event just as Geoff started his own Centurion attempt on Saturday 6 September 1980.

Jack had chosen the old cinders track at the Adelaide Harriers in preference to the tartan track at Kensington for Geoff's 1980 Centurion attempt and he had been training Geoff for the big effort. In fact, Geoff had walked many miles with Jack during his marathon performance and this set him up for his own successful Centurion attempt. The race started at midday on the Saturday and Geoff walked honestly to get in with some 25 minutes to spare to become Australian Centurion Number 20 – his final time being **23:34:10**.

From then on, Geoff was an enthusiastic member of our elite club, always on the lookout for prospective new members and regularly coming over to Melbourne to watch our Coburg event.



**Another medal for Geoff – this time a bronze in the 1987 South Australian 5000m track walk championship.  
From left to right: Don Dohnt (starter) Col Hainsworth (2<sup>nd</sup>) Don Cox (1<sup>st</sup>) and Geoff**

Geoff and Pat were still involved as officials with the South Australian Athletics Association and the South Australian Masters Association up till only recently and they helped run the weekly Masters walking competitions. One of the most pleasant things about attending any athletics meeting in Adelaide was the almost certainty that I would be able to say hello to Geoff as he officiated or spectated.



**Geoff helping out at the South Australian Masters a few years ago – an ever present worker for the club**

We pass onto Pat and her family our deepest sympathies on the passing of such a great man.

Tim Erickson  
Tuesday 24 February 2015