



THE MASTER: Master of Ceremonies of Toowoomba's Anzac Day services for many years, Bill Hills OAM is winding back his involvement in the annual commemorative ceremonies. PHOTO: NEV MADSEN

A voice in the darkness steps back into the light

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IN THE darkness of the Dawn Anzac Day service came a voice over the public address system that was not the usual dulcet tones of regular MC Bill Hills.

Too dark to read the program, it was only after dawn that the crowd could see that Peter Devey was at the microphone as master of ceremonies.

"Where's Bill?" was whispered throughout the throng. Was he missing in action, gone AWOL?

However, it was simply a changing of the guard.

While Mr Devey took

charge of the Dawn and Citizens' Commemoration service, Mr Hills was back in the driver's seat for the wreath-laying ceremony.

Still, it was the first time in more than 45 years Mr Hills's voice wasn't the one echoing in the darkness.

"I've been involved in our Anzac Day services since 1969," Mr Hills explained.

"It came about after one service which was a shambles... no organisation, no instructions.

"I said something and someone said 'Alright, why don't you put your money where your mouth is' and I said 'Alright, I will.'"

A group between RSL members, ex-service organisations and the community was formed and with the support of the city council and Australian Defence Force, more organised and structured Anzac Day ceremonies were planned and conducted.

Mr Hills was also supportive of the, at the time, controversial decision to move the Mothers' Memorial to its present site.

"Almost on cue, we'd be in the Dawn Service and a garbage truck would turn up to collect bins," he said.

"Mayor Clive Berghofer said it wasn't good enough,

“I've been involved in our Anzac Day services since 1969.”

it needed to be moved to a more dignified place.”

While stepping back, Mr Hills will remain involved in Toowoomba's Anzac Day services.

"It had to happen sooner or later," he said.

"I'll still be doing the wreath-laying service and helping old diggers with their cabs and jeeps.

"The services must go on and as far as I'm concerned the services must go on as the community wants.

"These are very important moments.”