



COMMANDO

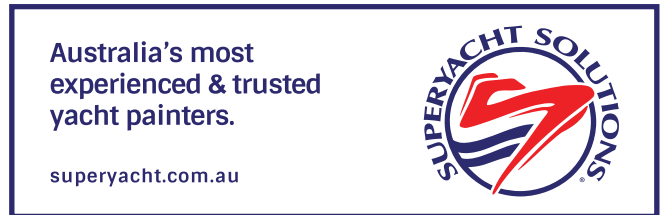
THE MAGAZINE OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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The Australian Commando Association's membership consists of Servicemen and women who served with World War II Independent Companies, Commando Squadrons and Regiments, all elements of Special Operations Australia (also known as the Allied Intelligence Bureau), 1 and 2 Commando Companies, 301 and 126 Signal Squadron, 1st Commando Regiment, 4 RAR (Commando) and the 2nd Commando Regiment. The Association also consists of Associate members who have served in units that support Commando units in time of war and peace and Social members whose direct family member was either Killed in Action, Died in Service or Killed in Training or a member of the ACA who has passed.

DISCLAIMER: Opinions expressed within this publication are those of the authors, and are not necessarily those of the Editor, Publisher, Committee Members or Members of our Association. We welcome any input as long as it is not offensive or abusive but if any member has a problem with a printed article we would like to be informed in order that the author may be contacted. We do encourage your opinion.

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Deadline for next edition (Edition 26, 2026)

THURSDAY, 26th NOVEMBER 2026

All news on members and interesting articles
 accepted.

(Subject to editor's approval.)

Doug Knight



FRONT COVER: Australian Defence Force candidate vying to become a Special Forces Operator or Combat Controller participate in the 2026 Special Forces Selection Course, completing arduous activities designed to assess their physical endurance, mental resilience, cognitive capacity and character.

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to Edition #025 August 2026 of **COMMANDO** – The Magazine of the Australian Commando Association. Unfortunately, my attempts to hand over the reins of being Editor have not come to fruition as my proposed replacement Pete Richards, ex 4 RAR (Cdo) and 2nd Commando Regiment has had to withdraw due to recent changes in family circumstances.

There are continuing to be developments of significance both for the magazine, ex service Special Forces Associations and for Australian military history and we will do our best to ensure that relevant material is included in future editions.

This Edition

There is a very detailed article on the development of M Special Unit another relatively unknown element of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) during World War II who specialised in coast watching and later transitioned into offensive operations with strong support from local indigenous volunteers. There is also an interesting article by the same author regarding the conglomeration of secret agencies located in Brisbane during World War Two.

Magazine Distribution

There have been some ongoing adjustments to a distribution process including electronic distribution via email. If you are experiencing difficulties with receiving your electronic or hard copy (for those eligible) in the first instance, contact to your ACA State Branch Secretary or to the Magazine Editor with relevant detail.

For those members that use the website to download a digital copy of the magazine as previously advised it is now restricted to financial members through the Members Only portal of the ACA website.

New Articles

The Editorial Committee has noted that, apart from several recent publications by former members of 1st and 2nd Commando Regiments, SOER and SASR, very little has been written by unit members about operations in East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. However, many have taken the opportunity to express their knowledge and experience in podcasts which provide a rich source of information. I have approached a number of the larger podcasters and sought permission to use the podcasts as the basis for articles on those individuals relevant to our readership. A number have approved and supported this initiative, and I am

awaiting several responses. I have chosen the first article to Warren Officer Class 2 Nick Hill, formerly of the 2nd Commando Regiment.

I never met Nick whilst he and I were serving in SOCOMD and met Nick later when he was the President of ACA Queensland and also later when he took on the role of Editor for this magazine. Initially our interaction was challenging due to our differing service history and experience but over a few reds and many stories we became good friends and collaborators on a number of projects relevant to Commando veterans. Sadly, he passed away three years ago doing what he loved most after soldering and that was motorcycling, but unfortunately his intended book will probably never be written. So, I've gathered numerous podcasts and published material and with a bit of editorial license from mate hopefully tell his story. I would welcome any feedback not only on the article but also on this concept. For those ex-SOCOMD members who have made podcasts and are still living we will of course consult with them and seek their concurrence prior to any publication of their stories.

Book Reviews

In this edition we look at 'Outside the Wire' by Andy White. Harry was a long serving member of the British Army and migrated to Australia and subsequently joined SASR. The book has only recently been released and I purchased an early copy and read it within several days. It is an easy book to read and very insightful into the operations of SASR and Commandos and provides very meaningful observations regarding the current legal actions against former members of SASR. This book should be required reading for all SOCOMD personnel, particular SASR and Commandos particularly those in leadership and training roles.

Professional development

In our ongoing pursuit of items for professional development for inclusion in this magazine I recommend the following articles to anyone interested in special operations command, education and training.

1. Meaning, Myth, and Force Design in U.S. Special Operations

The debate over the future of U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) has increasingly become a debate about its past. Critics argue that decades of counter-terrorism, security force assistance, and persistent global engagement have pulled the Special Forces Regiment away from its unconventional warfare



roots. Defenders contend those same missions demonstrate its continued strategic relevance. Both perspectives ask whether Special Forces has remained faithful to its origins.

That is an understandable question. But it is also an incomplete one. Military organizations evolve as political priorities, strategic environments, and institutional incentives change. The more useful question is not whether Special Forces remained unchanged, but how sustained strategic demand reshaped what the institution came to value.

A thought provoking read that is just as applicable to Australia as it is to the US and can be found at <https://www.irregularwarfare.org/meaning-myth-and-force-design-in-u-s-special-operations/>

2. **The training and operational deployment of part-time Army personnel (Army Reservists) in Australia** is a topic that many are happy to comment on, but only few have the knowledge and experience to provide meaningful argument. The US army addresses their employment of part-time Army and National Guard personnel in a very different way and maintain a very strong acknowledgement of unit history as the following article from US SOF Weekly Brief dated August 31, 2026, details.



Painting by Mort Kunstler was commissioned by the National Guard Bureau.

US Indiana Rangers Receive Presidential Unit Citation. Company D (Ranger), 151st Infantry Regiment of the Indiana Army National Guard was recognized by dignitaries in a recent ceremony for their service during the Vietnam War. Company D was a ground manoeuvre unit that served intact in Vietnam.

The unit was deployed to South Vietnam from December 1968 to November 1969. They conducted long-range reconnaissance patrols (LRRPs) in enemy territory. Members of the unit were awarded 19 Silver Stars, 175 Bronze Stars, and over 100 Purple Hearts.

Six members of the unit were killed in action. Surviving members of the unit gathered on August 29, 2026, for a ceremony to receive the Presidential Unit Citation.

3. **United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School have recently upgraded the PSYWAR Course.** The Psychological

Operations Qualification Course at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School marks a significant milestone in Army transformation. The new integrated training model ensures that Army psychological operations and information operations professionals across the Total Army share a common baseline of skills and strategic understanding required to counter these evolving non kinetic threats on the battlefield. Having done the previous course in the early 1990s I found it very insightful during my SF service and operational deployments and further details can be found at https://www.army.mil/article-amp/294924/new-psywar_course_strengthens_guard_capabilities

Welfare

The subject of traumatic brain injury and blast exposure as well as moral injury are gaining a lot more coverage both overseas and within Australia particularly with inside the Department of Veterans Affairs and Defence. An interesting DVA article has been included to provide an update and following that article there is a reprint of a US medical paper on 'Repeated Blast Exposure Appears to Increase Brain Aneurysms in U.S. Special Operations Forces' which may be of interest to many readers.

I trust that you will find this edition both informative and educational and when finished with your hard copy share it with a friend or mate; if you are reading the magazine online forward it to a mate so that he or she can also be informed.

The Editorial Committee would appreciate any feedback on the style, content, or delivery of this magazine.

Doug Knight

Commando 4 Life

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Australian Commando Association Inc



Post War Associations





Australian Commando Association National Vice President's Report

I have heard it said once in a while that the National Committee of the Australian Commando Association (ACA) "doesn't seem to do much."

I am in a position however to tell you what we actually do, and you as ACA members can make up your own minds about whether it is enough... or not!

But before we get into that, let's look at the structure of the various Australian Commando past member bodies which in the end is relevant to how we operate today!

I know Victoria started with the 2 Cdo Association back in the mid 1980's and I assume that NSW / 1 Cdo Coy Association had a similar birthday. Queensland, Western Australia and the ACT branches came much later with Tasmanian and South Australian former Commandos opting to run informal but cohesive social groups still to this day.

126 Sig Sqn had its own Victorian based association for a number of years before it combined with 2 Commando Association.

I have been "informed" many times that the State Associations are not junior branches of the National Commando Association and truthfully, I have no issue with that. I try to explain the National Committee's focus as being "up and out" leaving the day to day running of membership, welfare and social activities to those who know their regional environments and members far better than anyone else. The States do that and they do it very well.

The National body does not have a membership base and National office holders even have to be members of one of the State bodies. It does not hold functions, nor does it collect membership fees from anyone.

The only source of funds for the National body is an annual levy on the States to cover both a more economic national Public Liability Insurance cover and the ACA website.

So.... Here are just a few of the activities the National body has carried out?

- Attempted to prevent the loss of the Green Beret in 1 Cdo Regt after 70 years.
- Worked with the National SAS Assoc regarding the pervading assumption that all our soldiers are guilty of everything they have been accused of following the Brereton Report and the media's reporting of the same.

- Argued that the Government's proposed 20 year cut off for reviewing bravery awards would have precluded Teddy Sheean VC and Richard Norden VC from being recognised.
- Worked with the new President of the VIC ACA, to alert anyone who'll listen, that the proposed Government sell off of Defence properties will potentially endanger some significant military monuments all over the country.
- The National President, being a King's Counsel, has supported some members with legal advice.
- Worked with a new charity looking to prevent PTSD in the military and first responders especially Australian Commandos, including a successful meeting with a Govt Minister and his staff.
- Working with the President of the VIC ACA to alert DVA and Government that new DVA legislation still requires a CMF/Ares member to complete a day of CFTS to be eligible for DVA benefits
- Worked with VIC ACA to provide a letter of support for the retention by the local council of "The Chalet" in Park Orchards, Victoria as the "Chalet" was the WW II home of the Heavy Wireless Group followed by the Allied Intelligence Bureau School of Eastern Interpreters

Finally, the five elected officers of the National ACA Committee have a collective service history of more than 200 years and so do have some experience and networks in a range of service-related areas including the Federal Government.

If you have an issue relevant to your Commando service, work with your State Committee initially and if and where appropriate, get them to refer it to the National Committee.

I assure you we will do all we can to resolve the matter.

Regards

MAJ Steve Pilmore OAM RFD (Ret'd)
National Vice President



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

August 2026

RECENT ACTIVITIES

The ACA-Q has continued with the Social Gatherings either to the South, North or Central Brisbane for members in the different locations. Our catchups are always an enjoyable event, where we gather with family members for a lunch or afternoon tea. A major commemorative event on our yearly calendar, Op RIMAU and Commando Day, was conducted in July with a moving service followed by lunch for those who wished to attend.

June Social Gathering

The ACA-Q June social gathering and luncheon was held on Sunday 14 June at the Redlands RSL. Our Vice President Rob King and long-time association stalwart and life member John Butler are members of the Redlands RSL and so this has become one of our catchup locations. As usual family members were in attendance.



Members and families of the ACA-Q enjoying lunch at the Redlands RSL.

Due to the consistent lobbying from John Butler, the Redlands RSL has recently agreed to allow for more Commando memorabilia to be put on show in its display cabinets. Rob and John are also presenting a brief on the history of the Australian Commandos at the RSL in September, so this will be another opportunity for association members to come together.

Op RIMAU and Commando Day

Each year the ACA-Q hold a service commemorating Operation RIMAU, the planned attack on

Japanese ship-ping in Singapore Harbour during WW2 which commenced in September 1944. Op RIMAU was a follow up to the successful Operation JAYWICK, however the operatives conducting Op RIMAU were compromised in the early stages of the operation, resulting in the death or capture of all of the raiding party. Those captured were subsequently executed on 7th July 1944. There is anecdotal evidence that Op RIMAU was successful in sinking some shipping in Singapore and this is currently being investigated.

The ACA-Q hold the event as close to 7th July as possible and this year it was held on Sunday 12 July on the back deck of the HMAS Diamantina at the QLD Maritime Museum once again. The service also commemorates the Independent Companies/Commando Squadrons from WW2 and the Post WW2 evolution of the Australian Commando to the present day.

The HMAS Diamantina itself is a great setting for the service, being an Australian built frigate which undertook several bombardments of the Japanese forces in support of Australian troops in the Pacific campaign. She also embarked several Japanese Army and Naval officers in September 1945 for passage to Torokina for the official surrender of their forces in the Solomons, as well as having the official Japanese surrender of Nauru conducted on the Quarter Deck.



HMAS Diamantina, taking the surrender of Japanese forces (left) and today at the QLD Maritime Museum (right).

The service was well run, including the support from the Pipes and Drums, National Serviceman's Memorial Band (Nasho Band) and Rev. Dr. Peter Devenish-Mearns (Padre). A thank you to all of the association members involved in the planning, coordination and conduct of the service. Lunch at the nearby Ship Inn was also well attended.





Graham Gough (previous Vice President of the ACA-Q) giving one of the briefs for the service.



Robert Kilsby (ASASA-Q), Doug Baird OAM, Pete Askew (ACA-Q) and Rob King (Vice President ACA-Q) in front of the Association banner.



Pipes and Drums, National Serviceman's Memorial Band (Nasho Band) who always support the ACA-Q on the day.

Mark Stanieg

President

Australian Commando Association QLD (ACA-Q)



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ACA QLD Vice Patron, Doug Baird, OAM after laying a wreath for the families of all fallen Commandos.





AUSTRALIAN COMMANDO ASSOCIATION NSW

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

ACA (NSW) Report ~ 25th August 2026

Current Membership

Full Members: 223 (5 Unfinancial)
Assoc' Members: 8 (0 Unfinancial)

Recent Activities

- 29th May – Attended and laid a wreath on behalf of The Australian Commando Association at WO2 Muddle SASR's funeral at Holsworthy Chapel.
- 17th July – Committee Meeting held via "Teams".
- 21st August – Duties of Secretary handed over from Bruce Poulter to Laurence Gray.
- 16th Aug – Authorize use of ACA's insignia to enable John Leslie's name and Cdo service to be placed on Coffs Harbour Council's Wall of Remembrance.

Future Activities

- 29th Aug – Notification to members and attendance at, The Australian War Memorial's Last Post Ceremony for L/Cpl Mervyn McDonald 2nd Cdo Regt.
- 27th Aug – Unscheduled Committee Meeting held via "Teams" to discuss DVA Presumptive Liability issues.
- 25th Sep – Committee Meeting
- On going - Liaison with Vic, Qld and ACT branches regarding the Quad-State Joint Working Arrangements for Website Platform & Heritage Archive.

Peter McCaffrey
President
ACANSW



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It is a genuine honour to write to you for the first time as President of the Australian Commando Association (Victoria) — and a daunting one, given who I am following. Doug Knight led this Association with steadiness and good humour, and since handing over he has been generous with his time and his counsel. I am extremely grateful for it and don't worry — Doug isn't going anywhere in the near or long-term future.

AROUND THE TRAPS

Rifle Shoot — the Long Barrel Cup 31 May 2026

The Long Barrel Cup took us to the SSAA Eagle Park Range at Little River for the contest against the SASR Association. A big field, a cold sky, and — it must be said — the SAS pipping us at the post once again. We are becoming practised at gracious congratulations.



Don Bergman
on the bench.

The Long Barrel Cup goes to the
SASR Association.

Eagle Park Range, Little River. A big turnout, and a fixture that is fast becoming a favourite.

The photograph that matters is the one on the left. Don Bergman, an evergreen shooter, on the bench at the end of his ninety-seventh year, setting an example to young and old alike. Magnificent effort, Don and Happy Birthday for 20 July 2026! Beyond the result it was a first-rate day among good comrades, and fast becoming a favourite with everyone who turns up.

Archery — the Robin Hood Shield

Sunday 12 July took us to the Yarra Valley Archery Park at Launching Place for the Commando / SAS / Royal Marines Tri Archery Comp, shot for the Robin Hood Shield. It is called the Tri comp, we were told, because ASASAV were going to try and wrest the shield from the firm grip of the Commandos. Well. They tried, and the shield went with them. Congratulations — we intend to have it back.



On the line.

The Robin Hood Shield finds a new home —
for now.

Launching Place, 12 July. Over twenty turned out, and the all-weather shed and the hot chocolate did the rest.

Over twenty of us turned out, a fine number for a mid-winter Sunday, and it was the sort of day where the scoring matters rather less than the company. Real thanks to Rob Osborne, who organised it, and to the crew at the venue, who looked after a mixed field of veterans, families and beginners with great patience. Lunch afterwards at the Launching Place Home Hotel finished it off properly.

Annual Luncheon

Our first Annual Luncheon fell on Sunday 2 August, and we could hardly have asked for a better guest speaker. Darren Stendt enlisted in 1995, serving with 8/9 RAR and later 5/6 RVR, deployed to East Timor in 2002, and commissioned into the RAANC in 2003. Iraq followed in 2005; then 2 Commando Company as unit nursing officer, and Afghanistan in 2008 with 1 Commando Company on Rotation 8. Later came Pacific Partnership work across Vietnam and Cambodia, the multinational response at typhoon-struck Tacloban, and a return to Iraq in 2019 as medical advisor to the Special Operations Advisory Group. He discharged in 2023, works now as a paramedic, and has recently been recognised for bravery by the Royal Humane Society.

He spoke on life as an enabler, and gave us a clear-eyed view of operational reality from a man who has been at the sharpest end of battlefield medicine. His account of the treatment of the late Private Greg Sher, killed in Uruzgan in January 2009, was heart-rending and, for me, the standout among a great many memorable things said that afternoon. Our thanks to Darren, and to all who came along. A terrific day.

KESWICK: A MEMORIAL WORTH FIGHTING FOR

At Keswick Barracks in Adelaide stands a memorial to the South Australians who served, and died, with



Australia's Independent Companies, Commando Squadrons and the M and Z Special Units — bronze plaques carrying 666 names, set on marble boulders and concrete plinths. Its lineage runs to the modern commando community. It is ours, and it is in trouble on two fronts.



The Commando and Special Operations Memorial at Keswick — 666 names, and very few memorials like it anywhere in the country.

One: the ground it stands on

Keswick passed to State ownership in 2023 under an AUKUS-related land swap. It is now held by Renewal SA, earmarked for housing, and master-planning is underway right now — the moment every feature on a site has its future decided. Memorials recognised early are moved with dignity; those raised late are cleared as obstacles. No second bite.

We are not alone out there. The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam memorial shares the ground, and on its Vale panel is Major Peter Badcoe VC — the man the surrounding electoral district of Badcoe is named for. That one tends to land when you put it to people. Two Signals memorials stand there too, and a Lone Pine that, being alive, cannot simply be lifted and re-set. All were raised by units now largely gone, and have survived only by sitting inside a working barracks. As Defence walks out, nobody is left to speak for them.

Two: the memorial itself

Quite apart from the redevelopment, the memorial is deteriorating on three fronts at once: biological attack on the bronzes, surface-film failure on the etched tablets, and a water problem driving both. The names are going illegible. So we have had a formal Memorial Condition Report prepared — engineering assessment, conservator's opinion, then trade works under direction. It is now the condition baseline, and doubles as the dilapidation record if relocation to the Torrens Parade Ground proceeds.

The trip to Adelaide

On 15 July I met, in person, with the Hon Nick Champion MP and the South Australian Veterans' Advisory Council. The reception in both was solid. Veterans SA now has the condition report, and Kat Pisani — a serving Reserve Major — carries Keswick for us day to day. I have also set out what ACAV will carry

itself: the baselines and the grant applications. That leaves Veterans SA only what they alone can give — a steer through government, an introduction, a letter of support.

Now the honest part. These are early indications, not commitments. Good will is not a funded outcome, and the memorial will not conserve itself. It will only come good if we keep the pressure on — lodging the Saluting Their Service applications, holding Veterans SA to the introductions offered, and extending the same standard to the AATTV memorial. If it works, South Australia becomes the template.

Five faces

It is easy for this to become a planning argument. So we put five real men to five of those 666 names and placed the paper before the Minister. Private Reuben Linton, a shearer from Streaky Bay, killed near Salamaua in 1943 at twenty-six, with no grave anywhere on earth. Corporal Lex Noonan, lost with the Montevideo Maru in 1942. Lieutenant Bruno Reymond of RIMAU — of its twenty-three, none came home.

And two who did. Trooper Allan Bynoe, a jockey shot through the stomach and lung in New Guinea, who could never ride again and so made himself a successful trainer in Adelaide. And Dr Joe Whitehouse of Z Special Unit, who went in behind Japanese lines on MAGPIE and PLATYPUS.



Cpl Lex Noonan



Tpr Allan Bynoe

Two of the five. Noonan has no grave but the sea; Bynoe came home and trained racehorses from his backyard.

Three of those five have no grave anywhere in the world. For their families, the stone at Keswick is the only place their name stands.

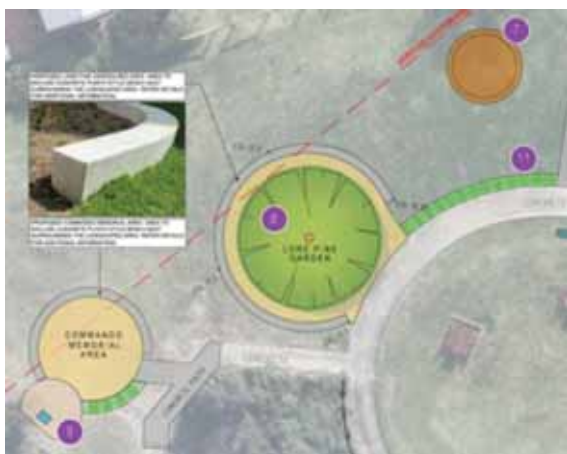
QUEENSCLIFF: THE RIP MEMORIAL

Closer to home, and a good news story. On 17 February 1960, seventy-odd commandos set out from Queenscliff on a night amphibious exercise against Point Nepean. The weather turned without warning, craft were swamped in the Rip, and three men did not come back — Warrant Officer George "Taffy" Drakopoulos and Private Roger Wood of 2 Commando Company, whose body was never recovered, and Private Eddie Meyer of 41 Amphibious Transport Platoon, RAASC, who was driving the Duck. A memorial to



them was raised at Shortlands Bluff in 2000, and we have gathered there every February since.

The Borough of Queenscliff is now redeveloping the Bullring precinct at Shortlands Bluff, and the memorial had to be found a new home within it. I am pleased to report that it has been — and a very good one. The design gives the Commando Memorial its own dedicated area with concrete plinth bench seating around a landscaped setting, sitting alongside a new Lone Pine garden, with coastal rosemary planted behind and a new fence between the memorial and the vegetation.



The draft design for Shortlands Bluff: the Commando Memorial Area at lower left, with the new Lone Pine garden alongside. Borough of Queenscliff/ HEC — concept only.

Where things stand: the kiosk has been demolished and construction should start around September or October. A Heritage Victoria exemption is in hand, since the footprint is not being altered, and we are still waiting on DEECA approval for the memorial area, with our letter of support to follow. We are also waiting on the Queenscliff RSL to ratify the plans, though no difficulty is expected. The Borough will clean the rock and the plaque, and has offered to let us know when the rock is moved so we can be there to see it placed properly — and take photographs for the historical collection. They have no objection to interpretive signage and are willing to oversee and fund it, provided it matches what is already there; the wording, and whether it carries an image, is ours to decide. Expected completion is December or January, in good time for the ceremony in February 2027.

None of that happened by itself. Rob Osborne has carried this with the Borough and the authorities from beginning to end, patiently and without fuss, and has delivered everything we could have hoped for and rather more. The result is a proper place to gather each February in memory of Drakopoulos, Wood and Meyer, which is exactly as it should be. Thank you, Rob — an extraordinary effort.

VETERANS' AFFAIRS, WELFARE AND ADVOCACY

RSL Victoria — a referral pathway for members

We have finalised a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding with RSL Victoria. In plain terms: it opens a referral pathway so members reach RSL Victoria's accredited compensation advocates at no cost, while ACAV keeps its own welfare response through the W528 Patriotic Fund. Nothing given away, a door opened.

This connects to a point raised firmly at the national meeting: consistent messaging across the states, so members are not paying fee-charging operators for advocacy they can get, accredited, for nothing. If you are ever quoted a fee for a claim, ring us first.

The VETS Act transition

The VETS Act transition timeline and what it means for members has been a running item nationally, along with liaison between the national body and other ex-service organisations on presumptive liability reform. We have issued a member information pack and continue to engage with DVA in support of our Members.

AND THE REST

- Website. Redevelopment is underway and a grant application to support it is in progress. Nationally, ACA-ACT is taking the lead on web development, so we will make sure our work sits alongside theirs.
- Commemorative pack. The bereavement tribute pack for families of deceased members is being designed — a folded card carrying the Association's tribute, a hand-signed parchment note, a provenance card and a regimental plaque.
- National meeting. I attended on your behalf. Beyond the items above, Keswick and its broader implications were discussed, as was the coordination of welfare and advocacy between state divisions and the national bodies.

CONSTITUTION REFORM

The committee has begun work on reform of the Association's constitution.

As to how: this will not be a single document tabled one evening and voted on the next. We expect to work through several builds, testing each against what the Association needs with the final document being voted on in May 2027 at the Annual General Meeting.

A constitution is what you live with for twenty years, and with the advice of Marc Preston and the efforts of the Committee, we intend to deliver a document that will underpin the ACAV for the next decade.

There is work ahead, but the Association is in sound health and the committee willing. My door is open to any member with a concern, an idea, or an offer of help.

Lest we forget.

Stephen Carter
President, ACA (Victoria)
Strike Swiftly



FATHER OF COMMANDO HERO HELPS SAWTELL RSL CELEBRATE A MAJOR ANNIVERSARY

By Martin Blandy, ACA NSW Member
Secretary & Treasurer, Sawtell RSL Sub-Branch

Photographs courtesy of Martin Blandy.

The Sawtell RSL Sub-Branch recently turned 80 and we celebrated this milestone event with a formal dinner at the RSL Club on the evening of Saturday, the 29th August 2026.

The Sub-Branch currently has two (2) long-term ACA NSW members, Peter Pool and me.



Photo 1: Doug BAIRD OAM; Pat MAGANN, Sub-Branch President; Martin BLANDY, Sub-Branch Secretary; Pat CONAGHAN MP, Member for Cowper

The Sub-Branch is proof that **'From little things, big things grow'** as we started out meeting in our historic picture theatre (still standing) until Diggers Hall was built in 1949 and used until 1957 (also still standing) when the current RSL Club (now occupying 9 blocks of land) was built.

With only ten weeks to plan this event, we needed a powerful guest speaker and I called my good friend, Doug BAIRD OAM, the father of Cameron Stewart Baird VC MG (07/06/1981 – 22/06/2013), who served with great distinction in our 2nd Commando Regiment and is one of only two Australians to be awarded the Victoria Cross **and** the Medal for Gallantry (2007), to assist. When I rang him, Doug didn't hesitate for a nano-second, such is the measure of the man.

"Give me a child until he is 7 and I will show you the man." — Aristotle

This famous quote emphasizes that the experiences, education, and guidance a child receives in the first seven years strongly influence the adult they become.

When you look at Douglas Lindsay Baird OAM, it is easy to understand how his son grew into the man he became as his father had him for almost three (3) times that period before he left home at 18 to join the Army. While Cam was a son any father would have been

proud to have – Doug is a father any son would be equally as proud of.

In his prime, Doug graced the football fields as a formidable player with Carlton Football Club in the Victorian Football League (VFL) leaving an indelible mark. His coach was none other than the great Ron Barassi and Doug played alongside household names, Alex Jesaulenko, Jonn Nichols and Robert Wall (Best Man at Doug's wedding) to name a few. He also played an impressive 130 games for the Cooeee Football Club, in Tasmania including pivotal roles in the 1978 and 1982 premiership sides and was also captain/coach of Ulverstone Football Club 1983/84 before returning to Melbourne. This extraordinary feat speaks not only to his skill on the field but also to his enduring commitment to excellence.

Doug has travelled the length and breadth of this country as an ambassador for Cam's Cause and other veteran's organisations.

Doug was awarded an Order of Australia in 2019 for service to veterans and their families. He is currently:

- Patron of the Victoria Cross Trust England
- Vice Patron, Australian Bravery Association
- Ambassador, Commando Association Queensland
- Vice Ambassador T.P.I Victoria
- Ambassador for ANZAC and Yellow Ribbon Australia

Doug drove down from the Gold Coast and stayed with me in my home, the former Sawtell Fire Station, which is next door to the original Diggers Hall.

He brought with him many items, including items never before seen in public.

We wanted to have displays of posters and other memorabilia and I contacted the Australian War Memorial ("AWM") for assistance. They were keen to assist and searched the collection, sending me a copy of the original *Order of the Day* by the then Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General David Lindsay Morrison AO, announcing the posthumous award of the *Victoria Cross* to Cam and a copy of what is believed to be his last-ever letter written to a school student, probably still in the course of the post when he was killed.

We had many items on display, including the RAAF tactical map used by (as he later became) Wing Commander William Norton 'Robbie' Robertson DFC, a RAAF 9 Squadron *'Spin Wing'* Pilot in Vietnam who flew 1,965 missions in one year in support of the 1st Australian Task Force, including many supporting SAS operations. In peacetime, Robbie was heavily involved



with Special Forces and was a great mate of Peter Pool.

The ceremony kicked off with our Piper, Vince Cooper, leading our combined cadets and distinguished guests into the auditorium. We smuggled the cadets up the back stairs and hid them in a dining room while our Piper circulated in mufti. Doug Baird went in and spoke to cadets at length, including posing with them for official photos by service group and combined group. He spent time showing and letting them handle two (2) of his most valuable possessions.

Our decision to keep the Piper and Cadets involvement a secret paid off and they received great ovation. In honour of former Commando WO2 Ken 'Bluey' Curran, we did a 'Pay the Piper' ceremony, but with Chivas Regal whisky rather than port, Bluey's preferred payment. RAAF 'Sandpit' veteran, Tony DeFelice, explained and conducted the payment to considerable applause.



Photo 2: Piper leading the Cadets and Distinguished Guests around the auditorium.

One of our official guests was Pat Conaghan MP, the federal member for our electorate (Cowper). Pat is a great friend of the Sub-Branch (even though based 150 km away) and was heavily involved in having the arbitrary 2020 decision to revoke the *Meritorious Unit Citation* from 3,500 Special Forces members, overturned.

Doug's presentation was very well received and included numerous PowerPoint photographs that he explained. As a typical Aussie, he broke protocol at his first meeting with Queen Elizabeth II by complimenting Her Majesty on how lovely she looked, bringing a wry smile from Her Majesty and a chuckle from a lady waiting to be received.



Photo 3: Items Doug Baird had on display.

The original VC is on loan to the AWM. The VC replica is an official replica made by Hancock's Jewelers in London and has a Certificate of Authenticity. Hancock's opened in 1849 and have made every single Victoria Cross since inception of the award in 1846. Queen Elizabeth II told Doug to go down to Hancock's and collect the replica, which she had arranged for him. The Gold Stamp is an ounce of pure gold and is the only one of its kind in the World.



Photo 3: The Gold Stamp

In the image of Doug with Guy Burton, Managing Director of Hancock's, Doug can be seen holding a small ingot and a leather-bound book. That book is 168 years old and records the details of every recipient of the Victoria Cross recipient. The ingot was used to make the next batch of Victoria Crosses. The Victoria Cross is **not** struck – they are sand cast in groups of four (4) and then hand finished. Consequently, no two VC's are the same, they are all unique.



Photo 5: Official Replica VC and Certificate of Authenticity.

Another image depicts the last remaining piece of the *Cascabel* of the cannon. It is kept under lock and key at a military base and only brought out of the strongroom by armed guards when a piece is needed. It is thought there is enough left to make another 100 Victoria Crosses.

Doug is a polished orator and had everyone in stitches when he told them that in the official ADF photograph of Cam Baird wearing the MG, he is wearing only shorts and thongs below. I thought Doug

was about to be trampled when he invited people to handle the VC replica and the Gold Stamp.

In keeping with the solemnity of the occasion, we had a single table for the fallen and even had heritage beer provided by the Zig Zag Brewery, near Lithgow. In 1946, the brewery was one of only two (2) NSW Breweries left standing in country NSW and supplied ALL their beer to the NSW RSL Branch. I had it before and it is a lovely beer.

Doug Baird made our 80th Anniversary a truly memorable occasion.

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THE MAIL

By C. Henson

The Independent Howl¹

August 1941



*If you go down to the wharf near here
and far off hear a wail,*

*It's just our call to ships arriving,
"Have you brought our mail?"*

*We're happy here from morn' til night, but now and then we —
and fight, and then we ask the "Man in Grey",*

"Sarge, what about our mail?"

We'll do our bit in this here War,

We'll fight with tooth and nail,

I'm Sure our War cry ought to be, "Where the Hell's our ruddy mail?"

They say our good ship's weather bound, By stormy sea and gale,

They should have brought a submarine,

To bring our blooming mail.

And when the fight for right is won,

And off to home we sail,

You'll hear me say to mother dear,

"Is there any mail?"

¹The Independent Howl was a news sheet issued to troops at Kavieng to keep them abreast of world and local events and included contributions from the men.



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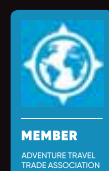
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24TH APRIL - 3RD MAY 2027
4TH - 11TH SEPTEMBER 2027

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They Alone Did Not Surrender - The Heroes of Sparrow Force

By WO2 Thomas Vallas, OIC of the Veterans Engagement and History program within DCP-TL

Describe a rugged mountainous pilgrimage following in the footsteps of Australia's World War II heroes, and the Kokoda trek comes to mind. However, there's another in our region: the La Rende! Trek by Maddog Adventures. This new expedition pays homage to our many Timor veterans – from WWII to today.

La Rende! is a 100 km hike following the footsteps of WWII Sparrow Force soldiers who were deployed to Portuguese Timor in 1942 to defend it against Japanese invasion. Sparrow Force comprised Australia's first Commandos trained in guerrilla warfare: the 2/2 Independent Company. It was instrumental in protecting the Malay Barrier and delaying Japanese troops from advancing to the Battle of Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea. The tale of Sparrow Force is one of mateship, fortitude and ingenuity.

Forced from Portuguese Timor's capital, Dili, after the initial Japanese invasion and a Battle for Dili Aerodrome, the 2/2 Independent Company retreated into the dense mountains. From here they used the rugged terrain to their advantage to harass and ambush the enemy. Isolated, and without the means to communicate or organise resupply with Australia, these operations relied heavily on the support of the Timorese people - named the Kriadu. These volunteer Timorese helpers were instrumental to the Commandos' success. Kriadu formed remarkable friendships with the Australian troops, providing an essential lifeline by supplying food and shelter, carrying heavy equipment, and acting as guides and trackers.

After ten months of successfully evading and disrupting the enemy using guerrilla tactics, Sparrow Force withdrew to Australia to regroup in preparation for future operations in New Guinea, sadly leaving their Kriadu friends behind.

The La Rende! Trek by Maddog Adventures delves into the extraordinary history of Sparrow Force, giving insight into their heroic actions while exploring the interesting culture and stunning scenery of this country familiar now to thousands of Australian troops.

Members from the Defence Cooperation Program - Timor-Leste (DCP-TL) and Army Battle Lab recently completed the full length of the trail, traversing rugged ridgelines and steep mountains, summiting Timor's tallest mountain at 2,967m, through Portuguese-era coffee plantations, and crossing flowing rivers to finish at the breathtaking Mota Dokomali waterfall.

They visited Hatolia to discover how La Rende! got its name. Colonel Doi, a Japanese Commander, ordered Australian honorary consul David Ross to find the hidden Commandos and pass on a demand to surrender. Knowing the atrocities conducted by the Japanese in Dili after their



invasion, Independent Company Commander MAJ Alec Spence responded: "Surrender? Surrender be fu*ked!". La Rende! gets its name from this altercation, with the Tetun translation for "No Surrender!" being "La Rende!"

It was also in Hatolia that Maddog Adventures' Sam Maddock uncovered the WWII history. "I was reccing hike programs for Australian schools," he explains. "As I travelled through Hatolia, I realised there was a deep layer of military history: both from WW2 and Indonesian occupation," he said. He started literally knocking on huts and walking village to village asking for elders to tell their stories. Sam then began documenting the fascinating stories that make up today's trek.

The tour commences at Bazartete exploring the weapon pits of B Platoon's defensive position. During contact with the enemy, two Australians were killed, and numerous injured, including PTE Alan Hollow, who was shot in the face, losing the lower part of his jaw. A Kriadu helped PTE Hollow to the admin area for treatment by the platoon medic, PTE Allen Luby, who, with minimal medical supplies, saved his life by tying arteries and controlling the bleeding.

With the assistance of the Kriadu, B Platoon retreated by carrying their wounded on stretchers on an arduous 41 km, 6-day hike through mountainous terrain with little food or water, whilst under constant threat from the enemy. The trail PTE Hollow was carried along is the same trail La Rende! follows.

"Throughout the trek I thought about the challenges and sacrifices made by these brave individuals; knowing they walked the same trail under gruelling circumstances was truly humbling. There is a lesson in resilience and determination to be learnt from B Platoon's actions," said CPL Cameron Turner from DCP-TL. PTE Hollow survived his injuries and remained in Timor for three months until he was evacuated. The young Kriadu, who saved his life, stayed by his side until he departed Timor.

"Besides the historical significance of the trek, I really enjoyed engaging with the Timorese people, who are authentic and loyal. Even though they have little to offer, there is no hidden agenda when they invite others to rest in their homes or share meals with them. They are naturally good-willed people with an intrinsic desire to care for others. It is easy to see how the Commandos formed such strong bonds with them," says WO2 Annelies Vallas from the Army Battle Lab.

Those wishing to read more about Sparrow Force are encouraged to access the 2/2 Commando Association of Australia website. Visit

<https://maddogadventures.com.au/adventures/la-rende-trek/> to book your place on this historic trek.



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Fire and Rescue (1 day)

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SIGNIFICANT COMMANDO DATES

MAY to SEPTEMBER

MAY

May 1941

No 1 Australian Independent Company was raised and trained at Wilsons Promontory Victoria, the home and birthplace of the Australian Commando. 2021 marks the 80th Anniversary of the Australian Commando. Happy birthday to all former and current Australian Commandos.

May 1942

No. 6 & No.7 Ind Coy's were formed at Wilsons Promontory, Victoria.

17 May 1942

Inter-Allied Services Department (ISD) is formed in Melbourne, Victoria.

May 1943

53 men of 2/3rd Cav Commando Squadron conducts an attack on Ambush Knoll in New Guinea against the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and takes the position. The IJA attempts several counter attacks over several days but are repelled each time.

07 May 1943

M Special Unit is raised and became the Surveillance unit of SRD. Consequently, all Coast watcher units eventually came under command M Special Unit.

29 May 1943

2/7th Independent Company conducts combat operations in Bena Bena, New Guinea as part of Bena Force.

3 May 1945

2/4th Commando Squadron is involved in one of the last campaigns of WW2 when it landed on Tarakan Island and took part in the Borneo campaign. In the coming days and weeks, the 2/4th Cdo Sqn saw extensive service during the liberation of Tarakan, suffering heavy casualties with four officers and fifty-two other ranks being killed or wounded in this time.

8 May 1945

The War in Europe ends with the total surrender of Germany and becomes known as Victory in Europe Day (VE Day).

11 May 1945

2/9th & 2/10th Cav Commando Squadrons land at Dove Bay, Wewak and established the beachhead. The landing also included 2/3 Machine Gun Bn, plus a Battery of 75mm, manned by 2/1 Tank Attack Regt.

13 - 19 May 1945

2/10th Cav Cdo Sqn is surrounded by Japanese troops in the Wewak area, repelling numerous attacks.

6 May 1969

WO2 Ray Simpson, DCM is awarded the Victoria Cross for Valour in South Vietnam. Ray was attached to AATTV from 1 Commando Company.

25 May 2006

Alpha Commando Company, 4 RAR (Commando) deploys to Timor Leste to help secure the country as a result of the unrest in the country. The Coy secures the Air Point Disembarkation/Departure and enable the ADF to make entry into the country.

JUNE

01 June 1942

ISD begins training of Operatives for deployment to Timor at School, Wilsons Promontory, Victoria.

29 June 1942

2/5th Independent Company launched a raid on a Japanese aerodrome at Salamaua, New Guinea, the first Allied attack on Japanese land forces anywhere.

05 June 1945

2/10th Cav Commando Squadron in action against Japanese bunker system south of the main Australian position in Mandi during the Aitape - Wewak Campaign.

25 June 1955

1 Commando Company (Sydney) first parade at Victoria Barracks, NSW.

June - July 2000

Elements of Bravo Commando Company, 4 RAR (Commando) deploys to the Solomon Islands as part of Operation PLUM BOB, to help withdrawal of Australian Nationals from the troubled Island.

10 - 14 June 2010

Alpha Commando Company, 2nd Commando Regiment engages heavy insurgent numbers during the Battle of Eastern Shah Wali Kot, Afghanistan. This battle is later awarded the Battle Honour Eastern Shah Wali Kat, which is the first battle honour to be awarded to an Australian Commando unit and Australian Special Forces.

19 June 2009

4 RAR (Commando) was renamed the 2nd Commando Regiment at Tobruk Lines, Holsworthy Barracks NSW.

22 June 2013

CPL Cameron Stuart Baird, MG was killed in action and later posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross (VC) for Valour, whilst serving as a Section Commander with Bravo Company, 2nd Commando Regiment in Afghanistan.



Significant Commando Dates

(Continued from previous page)

JULY

July 1942

2/8th Independent Company (Double White) was raised at Wilsons Promontory, Victoria.

1 July 1942

133 men of No. 1 Independent Company drowned when the MV Montevideo Maru sank after being torpedoed by USS Sturgeon off the northern coast of the Philippines.

17 July 1942

Four operatives of ISD land in Portuguese Timor as part of Operation LIZARD from the MV Kuru. They linked up with Sparrow Force sometime later in Mape. This is the first Operation by ISD later renamed the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) the cover name for Special Operations Australia (SOA) during WW2.

22 July 1943

The 2/8th Cav Commando Squadron sailed for Lea, New Guinea via Milne Bay on board the SS Ormiston.

1 July 1945

2/3rd & 2/5th Cav Commando Squadrons landed on Green Beach in Balikpapan.

7 July 1945

The 10 remaining SRD members of Operation RIMAU are executed in Singapore.

July to August 1945

2/6th Cavalry (Commando) Regiment in action defending Bandi Plantation during the Aitape - Wewak Campaign.

7 July 1955

2 Commando Company (Melbourne) was raised at Albert Park Barracks, Melbourne VIC.

27 July 1955

The Commandant Royal Marines grants approval for 1 and 2 CMF Commando Companies to wear the Green Beret once they had met the same physical requirements and competency tests as UK Army Commandos who supported the RM Commando Brigade.

14 July 1956

CAPT George Cardy of 1 Commando Company is presented the first Australian Green Commando Beret on an Australian Commando. Unit personnel from both companies who undertook Commando training in the UK were awarded Royal Marine Green Beret upon the completion of their training and assessment.

22 July 2002

Tactical Assault Group – East (TAG-E) (C Cdo Coy), 4 RAR (Commando) deemed 'Operational' and is the Federal Government's force of choice for a resolution to a Domestic Counter Terrorism Incidents in Australia.

AUGUST

2 August 1942

2/6th Independent Company deploys to New Guinea on board MS Tasman.

3 August 1942

ISD/SRD training moves to the 'House on the Hill' in Fairview, Cairns. It was also known as Z Experimental Station (ZES).

August 1943

2/4th Cav Commando Squadron lands in Milne Bay, New Guinea

2/5th Independent Company reforms as the 2/5th Cavalry (Commando) Squadron (Cdo Sqn) of the 2/7th Cavalry Commando Regiment encamps at Wongabel on the Atherton Tablelands after returning from New Guinea.

6 August 1945

At 0815 Japanese Standard Time, the Atomic Bomb "Little Boy" is dropped from USAAF B-29 Super fortress (Enola Gay) on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, killing over 66,000 people.

9 August 1945

The Atomic Bomb "Fat Man" is dropped from USAAF B-29 Superfortress (Bocks' Car) on the Japanese city of Nagasaki, killing approx. 40,000 people.

15 August 1945

Offensive action against Japan ends and is commonly known as Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day). However, SRD and some other Army units were conducting mopping up operations against Japanese troops in Borneo until late September 1945. These Japanese troops did not believe the war had ended until the Japanese Emperor made a public announcement.

August to September 2005

Alpha Commando Company, 4 RAR (Commando) deploys to Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan as part of Special Forces Task Group (SFTG) Rotation I.



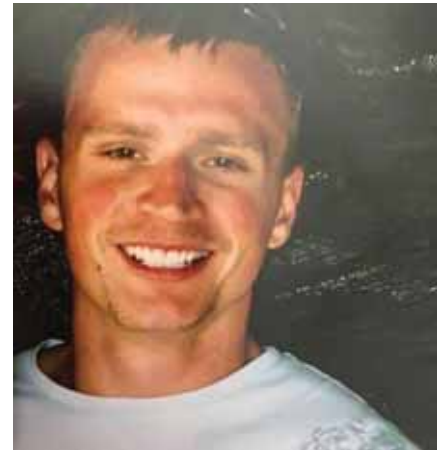
COMMANDOS FOR LIFE ~ MAY to SEPTEMBER



01 July 2014
LCPL Todd Chidgey
 Alpha Company
 2nd Commando Regiment
 Died of Wounds
 Kabul Province, Afghanistan



04 July 2011
SGT Todd Langley
 Charlie Company
 2nd Commando Regiment
 Killed in Action
 Helmand Province, Afghanistan



15 July 2017
SGT Ian Turner
 Bravo Company
 2nd Commando Regiment
 Died in Service in
 Sydney, New South Wales



16 July 2014
SGT Gary Francis
 Operational Support Company
 2nd Commando Regiment
 Killed in Training
 Mount Cook, New Zealand



27 August 2017
WO2 Mick Craig, CSM
 2nd Commando Regiment
 Attached to 1st Commando Regt.
 Died in Service
 Swansea, New South Wales



25 September 1983
PTE Sean Ryan
 1 Company
 1st Commando Regiment
 Died in Training
 Holsworthy, New South Wales



30 August 2012
LCPL Mervyn McDonald & PTE Nathan Gallagher
 Alpha Company, 2nd Commando Regiment
 Killed in Action
 Helmand Province, Afghanistan



22 September 1966
SGT Daniel Lorkin
 2 Commando Company
 Killed in Training
 Melbourne, Victoria



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“M” Special Unit – what was it ?

By “Noah Little” – a former unit member, with an interest in military history

Introduction

One challenge in writing this article on M Special Unit¹ is that it was hard to decide whether to make this article about the “Coastwatchers” or about M Special Unit itself. One is not the same as the other. We have sought to steer a middle path, focussing on M Special Unit, but also, as we must, describing the organisations, principally but not solely the Coastwatchers, to which the members of M Special Unit and others, were attached.

M Special Unit has been described, rightly, as one of the forerunners of today’s Australian Special Forces community. Much of what has been and continues to be said about it however is confused, incomplete and sometimes just plain wrong. To take the “Wikipedia” description for example:

“M Special Unit was a joint Allied special reconnaissance (special operations capable) unit, part of the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD), in the South West Pacific theatre of the Second World War. A joint Australian, New Zealand, Dutch and British military intelligence unit, it saw action in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands”²

This contains, to our reckoning, four errors of fact and three only partly true assertions. In this article, we’ll endeavour to set out our reasons for this statement.

Please bear with us as we step through this.

Cast of Characters

We’ll go briefly over the cast of characters as appearing in this tale and set out a brief timeline.

The Coastwatchers

The Coast Watching Organisation was first proposed by the RAN in 1913, revived in 1919 and formally established in 1926.³ This network of expatriate local officials and other civilians covered the maritime approaches to Australia and the islands in and around Papua, New Guinea, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate and the (Anglo-French) Condominium of the New Hebrides.⁴ The RAN took advantage of the time from the declaration of war in Europe in September 1939 to undertake a more intensive development of the existing Coastwatcher system. Thus when war in the Pacific started in late 1941 the Coastwatchers were one of the few means by

which Australian and Allied authorities had eyes and ears on the ground to monitor the Japanese advance through the islands in 1942 and 1943.

Initially the wartime Coastwatchers were known by the codeword FERDINAND – named after a cartoon bull character who “sat under a tree and just smelled the flowers. It was meant as a reminder to the Coastwatchers that it was not their duty to fight and so draw attention to themselves, but to sit circumspectly and unobtrusively, gathering information”.⁵ This would change.

Allied Intelligence Bureau and the NEA Section

In mid 1942, under the newly created, American-led South West Pacific Area (SWPA) Command, the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB) was set up. The AIB was under an Australian Controller, and its task was to co-ordinate and control (with varying degrees of success) the various “special organisations” that had sprung up in Australia in a matter of months prior to that. AIB was reorganised a few times during the war. For the purposes of this article however we’ll use the almost final form emerging out of the April 1943 reorganisation, with two functional and two geographical component parts as follows:⁶

- Special Operations Australia (SOA – cover name Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD)). SOA was essentially a rebadging of the original Inter-Allied Services Department (ISD) set up in early 1942. It was led by British officers from the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Its mandate was to foster resistance in enemy-held areas and to harass the enemy.
- Secret Intelligence Australia (SIA), which was a branch of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) in Australia. Its aim was to collect intelligence in support of British national aims and SWPA’s priorities.
- the North Eastern Area (NEA) Section, which comprised the former Coastwatching Organisation, and was still under the same RAN leadership.⁷

⁵E Feldt, *The Coastwatchers*, Penguin Books, 1946, p 95 (Feldt). Internal RAN discussion of his manuscript in late 1944 disputed some of the detail and thought that it was very much focused on Feldt’s own achievements and discounted the contributions of others. See NAA: B3476, 49, Item 410697, Lieut Commander EA Feldt – Coastwatching, (NAA 410697). The book also contains some references that could today be described as “culturally insensitive”.

⁶When initially established, the AIB included a group of Americans working on the Philippines. GHQ gradually withdrew responsibility for the Philippines out of AIB and in the end simply managed it direct from GHQ SWPA. The Australian military propaganda organisation the Far Eastern Liaison Office (FELO) was in AIB, then out and then half-in again by the end of the war.

⁷“North East” seems to be the American term, “North Eastern” the Australian term.

¹Documents of the time are inconsistent when referring to this unit’s initial, some use M alone, others use “M”. For simplicity, we’ll stick to M alone.

²Wikipedia, *M Special Unit*, accessed 9 May 2026. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M_Special_Unit.

³J Pfennigwerth, ‘Missing Pieces - The Intelligence Jigsaw and RAN Operations 1939-71’, *Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs* No. 25, The Sea Power Centre – Australia (SPC-A), 2008, p 16.

⁴Now called Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.



- the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Section – this was staffed by NEFIS-III, the SI/SO Branch of the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Services (NEFIS), which was formed in Australia in 1942. NEFIS-III's aims were to collect intelligence on the NEI in support of Dutch national and SWPA priorities; and to maintain Dutch equity in the reconquest of the NEI.



Figure 1 - COL Caleb Roberts⁹ (L) the first Controller of the AIB. BRIG Kenneth Wills⁹ (R) (an early photo), the second Controller.

NEA

With the establishment of the AIB, the RAN Coastwatchers became the North Eastern Area section of the AIB. The Coastwatcher AO - "the North Eastern Area" – covered in the (Allied) SWPA Command Papua, New Guinea and part of the Solomon Islands. It also included the remainder of the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides - these latter two locations were the responsibility of the separate (American) South Pacific Area Command (SOPAC).¹⁰ This jurisdictional problem was solved by having the Supervising Intelligence Officer (SIO, the RAN officer in charge of this organisation) be responsible to AIB for those parts of his AO under SWPA's authority and to the Australian Director Naval Intelligence (DNI) for that part of his AO in SOPAC. The bloody battles by the US Marines on Guadalcanal, for example, successfully supported by NEA, were not in SWPA, they were in SOPAC. "These divisions of authority were not strictly adhered to, but were juggled, when necessary, as all operational control was centred (on the) SIO. As success crowned our efforts, no one raised academic questions of control for their own sake", as Feldt later wrote.¹¹

⁹G-2, GHQ Far East Command, *Operations of the Allied Intelligence Bureau, GHQ SWPA, Volume IV, Intelligence Series*, 1948 (AIB Vol IV).

⁹SA History Hub, Sir Kenneth Wills, accessed 13 May 2026. <https://sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au/people/sir-kenneth-wills-kbe-mc/>

¹⁰To be precise, American ADM Nimitz exercised overall command of the Pacific Ocean Areas (POA) Command, which consisted of the North Pacific Command, the Central Pacific Command and the South Pacific Command. He also directly commanded the Central Pacific Command and delegated command of the North and South Pacific to other subordinates.

¹¹Feldt, p 94.



Figure 2 - Note the key battlegrounds in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate were split between SWPA Command and South Pacific Command. Note also that the NEI island of Sumatra was in the AO of the neighbouring South East Asia Command.

Within a short time after the initial Japanese onslaught, many of the Coastwatchers had been killed or displaced and those that remained were in peril. To regularise their position, by April 1942 RAN status – and in at least one case RAAF status - was granted for those still behind enemy lines. As will be noted below the role of NEA morphed over the course of the war from passive intelligence collection to direct action against the enemy.

Throughout the war, the Coastwatchers and later the NEA Section of the AIB remained under RAN leadership – LCDR Eric Feldt was SIO until April 1943 and from then CDR James McManus until the end of the war.



Figure 3 - LCDR Eric Feldt (L), the first SIO of NEA and CDR James McManus (R), the second.¹²

M Special Unit

To meet the changing field conditions and the increase in numbers required for NEA, increasingly

¹²Both photos from AIB Vol IV.



Army personnel were called on. Just as badging civilians as RAN members on the early days of the Coastwatchers had not been without challenges, the same applied to bringing in Australian Military Forces (AMF, i.e. Army) members.

To digress for a moment to the subject of ISD/SOA and how it accommodated members posted to it:

- AMF members of SOA were “posted to Z Special Unit which was an Australian Unit formed as the holding unit for AMF personnel”,
- RAN and RAAF members were held against separate establishments within their organisations and were detached to SOA.
- British personnel were held against a number of separate British War Establishments.¹³

Feldt noted in his book that in early 1943, “special arrangements were made for the administration of Army personnel in FERDINAND”. There was “discontent” amongst the Army members in that “promotions could only be made in the unit in which an officer or man served. Those in FERDINAND were seconded from their own units and there was no means of promoting the deserving, so that they lost seniority as against those that had not been seconded. To overcome the difficulty a separate Army Unit, ‘M’ unit, was formed to which all Army personnel were transferred. But the Army took nearly 6 months to promulgate the first promotions, having its own forest of red tape to pass through.”¹⁴ The creation of M Special Unit was therefore for administrative efficiency of managing AMF members.

We also find mention of M Special Unit in the Official History of SOA, in which certain administrative arrangements for the re-badging of ISD into the new SOA were recorded. It was noted inter alia that:

“It was intended under the new arrangements that Z Special Unit be retained by AIB for administrative convenience, SOA making use of its facilities if desired. However, it was subsequently decided that the unit be transferred to (SOA), and that a similar holding unit – M Special Unit – be created for AIB”.¹⁵

M Special Unit was therefore raised in April 1943, to carry AMF personnel assigned for duty in the AIB¹⁶, including NEA.

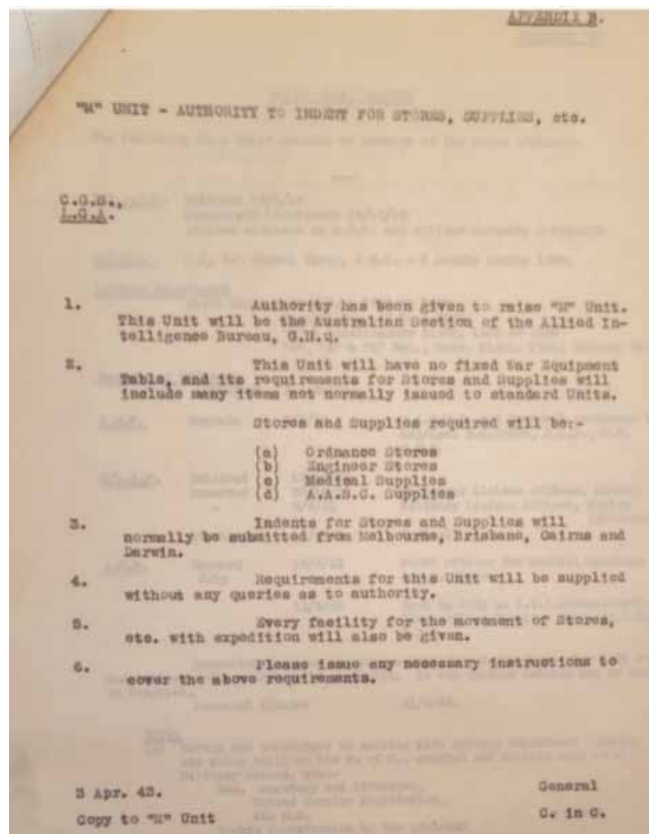


Figure 4 - A copy of the authority for raising “M” Unit, dated 3 April 1943.¹⁷

In its initial draft on 7 May 1943, M Special Unit took in around 150 AMF members from a variety of sources, including Z Special Unit, the Australian New Guinea Administration Unit (ANGAU), No1. Australian Independent Coy and the 1st Commando Training Battalion.¹⁸

As in SOA, RAN personnel in NEA were held against RAN establishments. One former RAN member, “Dixie” Lee, noted:

“If you look up my record, there’s nothing; it says I spent the rest of the war from ‘43 to ‘46 in the naval depot, but I wasn’t there, I was in the Coastwatchers”.¹⁹

Likewise, the RAAF held their members in NEA according to their own service mechanisms. In illustration of this we can see that in February 1945, AIB foreshadowed putting to “RAAF a proposal for forming

¹³NAA: A3269, O7/A, Item 235324, The Official History of the Operations and Administration of Special Operations - Australia (SOA), also known as the Inter-Allied Services Department (ISD) and Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD)] Volume 1 - Organisation - copy no 1 for Director, Military Intelligence (DMI), Headquarters (HQ), Australian Military Forces (AMF), Melbourne, p 36. (SOA Vol 1).

¹⁴Feldt, p 216.

¹⁵SOA Vol 1, p 28.

¹⁶This author has added the words AMF to the excerpt from Smith, as Smith later on at the same page notes that RAN or RAAF personnel were not listed in M Special Unit Routine Orders.

¹⁷AWM 3DRL/6643 2/64

¹⁸NAA: B6390, M Special Unit - M Aust Special Unit AIF, Item number 30260528, M Special Unit - M Aust Special Unit AIF, pp 276-292. (NAA 30260528)

¹⁹Australian War Memorial (AWM), C Hunter, *It was so secret they didn't allow any of what we did to get out*, 9 Aug 2020, accessed 3 Jan 2025. <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/second-world-war-veteran-dixie-lee>. Having said that, Lee’s file does have added pencil annotations, made apparently after discharge, giving locations and dates of service from September 1943 to September 1945 with “AIB”. See A6770, LEE R G. Item 5398701, LEE RONALD GEORGE: Service Number - 24856 : Date of birth - 04 Jul 1924: Place of birth - ULVERSTONE TAS: Place of enlistment - MELBOURNE : Next of Kin - LEE HILDA NAA. By his own account he served with the Coastwatchers in the New Hebrides, Guadalcanal, Treasury Islands, Bougainville and New Guinea mainland.



a holding unit for RAAF personnel attached to AIB – similar to M and Z Special Units”.²⁰ This proposal did not go ahead.

M Special Unit was not just NEA

Even in wartime, there was a thriving “HR” industry within AIB and other Australian HQ. Often arcane and incomplete minutiae on file from 80 years ago however offer some fascinating insights. On files held in the Australian War Memorial (AWM), there is a flurry of AIB paperwork on personnel ceiling strengths, monthly staff returns and the like. Some of the paperwork is explicit and refers to AMF personnel (i.e. M Special Unit) and some is a little unclear in that it may refer to combined numbers of AMF, RAN, RAAF, civilians and foreign military personnel. There is in addition a lot of to-ing and fro-ing re ceilings, actual strengths and reconciliation of discrepancies, over different time periods.

We can see that in February 1945, for example, M Special Unit personnel were allotted not just to NEA. They were also allotted to AIB (Fwd HQ (Hollandia and later Morotai) and Rear HQ (Brisbane) and other elements) and to Secret Intelligence Australia (SIA). This made a total establishment ceiling at that time for M Special Unit, across all of the AIB, of 72 officers and 381 SNCO/OR, making a total of 453.²¹

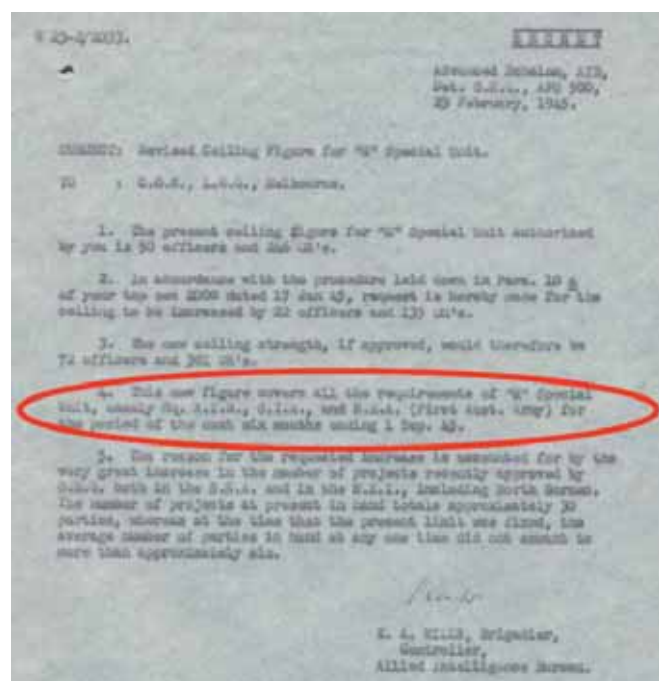


Figure 5 - M Special Unit covers members in HQ AIB, SIA and NEA

The papers note specifically that for SIA in February 1945, the M Special Unit ceiling was 62 men.²²

²⁰AWM 54 423/9/39 Pt 3, AIB Staffing, 'RAAF Personnel', 15 February 1945, Note from BRIG K A Wills, Controller AIB to all sections of AIB, to named Directors of SIA, SOA, NEA and to FELO, (AWM 54 423/9/39 Pt 3).

²¹AWM 54 423/9/39 Pt 3, p 44.

²²AWM 54 423/9/39 Pt 3, p 32.

Early August 1945²³ figures show that in NEA there a total of 312 staff, comprising:

- AMF (including one AWAS, i.e. M Special Unit) – 172 (about 55% of the total)
- RAN (including 4 WRANS) - 125
- RAAF - 14
- US Army – 1

Of the 68 NEA staff actually in the field, the presence of Army members was slightly lower (about 53%), compared to their representation in the organisation as a whole.

The papers are however not explicit on the breakdown of M Special Unit members across all of AIB. Based however off the 453 men ceiling figure, we could extrapolate (very) roughly that, by the end of the war, the spread of M Special Unit members across all of AIB was something like:

- 38% of them were in NEA (using the actual early August 1945 NEA total strength)
- 14% in SIA (based off the February 1945 ceiling for SIA)
- 48% in AIB HQ and other AIB establishments (this figure is based on the balance)

The April 1943 reorganisation of the AIB and the formation of M Special Unit had implications for AMF members working with the Dutch. Just as Z Special Unit members working on NEA projects were subsequently transferred to M Special Unit, the same applied to Z Special Unit members working for the Dutch, in the new stand-alone NEI Section of the AIB:

- Five AMF members – until then held against Z Special Unit – had been working with the Dutch on operations, planned when the Dutch were still with ISD. Perhaps even unknown to these members, while still in the field, they were transferred from Z Special Unit to M Special Unit on 7 May 1943. By this time however these five Australians were all either dead or soon to die – in action or as POWs. As of that date, they were involved in two operations in the eastern islands of the NEI, along with a cast of other Dutch, Indonesian, Danish and British members, some of them civilians. These operations were: WALNUT II (February-August 1943, involving on the Australian side NX 130227 CPT C R Sheldon,²⁴ VX 90387 LT R W Feetum and VX 80269 SGT J McCandlish); and WALNUT III (July 1943, VX 86704 SGT J R Plumridge and VX 35092 SGT J H Dahlberg).
- One other Australian NX 143314 SGT L G Siffleet was deployed to New Guinea on the Dutch Operation WHITING. WHITING was the only ISD operation in New Guinea that was not

²³NAA: B3476, 174B, Item 436101, Ferdinand Party - Plans and Operation - Disposition and Personnel, p 24. (NAA 436101)

²⁴Prior to the formation of M Special Unit, Sheldon had also deployed with ISD (i.e. as a member of Z Special Unit) on the Dutch Operation WALNUT I in July-August 1942.



handed over to NEA in December 1942 as its objective was Dutch New Guinea, not Australian New Guinea. Under the new arrangements following the April 1943 reorganisation however Siffleet, while still in the field, was also transferred from Z Special Unit to M Special Unit on 7 May 1943.

- Another Australian officer VX 87080 LT G G M van Arcken who had deployed on what was essentially a joint ISD/Dutch activity, Operation MACKEREL (Java, August-September 1942), was also transferred from Z Special Unit to M Special Unit on 7 May 1943.²⁵ His Australian service records are not explicit, but it appears that after he had finished working with the Dutch under ISD the year before, he simply transferred across to the new NEI Section. According to records held in the Dutch Archives, he was working with NEFIS apparently as a staff officer in Australia until November 1944, when he was posted out of M Special Unit. He left service in early 1945 on health grounds.

The first five above and van Arcken are however shown in the DVA WW2 Nominal Roll as last being in Z Special Unit, while Siffleet is noted as last belonging to M Special Unit. The WALNUT and WHITING operations are officially recorded in the SOA post war history²⁶ and all are noted as SOA casualties²⁷ (except Plumridge, presumably an oversight?).

Did M Special Unit have an operational role?

There were two CO's of M Special Unit:

- LTCOL Stanley S Caporn: In World War I, Caporn had served in the 1st AIF in Infantry and Signals, as an OR and later Officer. He reenlisted in 1940, served in India as a liaison officer for almost a year in 1940/1941 and returned to Australia on health grounds. In May 1942, he became 2-i-c of Z Special Unit, responsible for Administration and Personnel in the newly created ISD. With the reorganisation of AIB, he became CO of M Special Unit from 5 April 1943 to 31 Jan 1945.²⁸



²⁵Van Arcken was originally Dutch and was born in Batavia (now Jakarta) in the NEI.

²⁶NAA: A3269, O8/A, Item 235327, The Official History of the Operations and Administration of Special Operations - Australia [(SOA), also known as the Inter-Allied Services Department (ISD) and Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) Volume 2 - Operations - copy no 1 [for Director, Military Intelligence (DMI), Headquarters (HQ), Australian Military Forces (AMF), Melbourne]

²⁷SOA Vol 1

²⁸NAA: B884, V148136, Item 6274963, CAPORN STANLEY SIBB: Service Number - V148136: Date of birth - 14 Nov 1893: Place of birth - SEMAPHORE SA: Place of enlistment - Unknown: Next of Kin - CAPORN ANNIE. (NAA 6274963).



Figure 6 - Stanley Caporn on re-enlistment in 1940. After service in India, he went to ISD (as a member of Z Special Unit) and later became the first CO of M Special Unit.²⁹

- LTCOL Edwin P Hill: he became CO on 26 February 1945.³⁰ He was a World War I veteran, with service in Egypt, Gallipoli and the UK. On discharge from the AIF in 1916, he was for a time around 1916 a Patrol Officer in New Guinea. He later joined the British Army and served in Palestine and Syria until 1920. From 1921 to 1925 he served in the British Borneo civil service. He rejoined in 1940 and until his appointment to M Special Unit, he served in Australia. He relinquished his position as CO on 22 Aug 1945, just after the end of the war, to take up a posting with the British Borneo Civil Administration Unit (BBCAU) until 1946.³¹



Figure 7 - LTCOL Edwin P Hill³²

A third CO was nominated to succeed Hill – LTCOL Roy J Harvey – but although he was briefly posted to M Special Unit in August 1945, he appears to have not

²⁹NAA 6274963.

³⁰NAA 775371, p 234.

³¹NAA: B883, NX137582, Item 5636958, HILL EDWIN PRITCHARD : Service Number - NX137582 : Date of birth - 19 Jun 1896 : Place of birth - MOUNT BARKER SA : Place of enlistment - NSW : Next of Kin - HILL WYNIFRED. And NAA: B2455, HILL E P, Item 3011862, Hill Edwin Pritchard : SERN 1041 : POB Blakiston SA : POE Adelaide SA :NOK B Hill John H.

³²Tamworth Historical Society, Hill Collection, accessed 13 May 2026. <https://www.tamworthhistoricalsocietynsw.org/hill-collection/>



actually taken up this appointment. He went on the retirement list in September 1945.³³

Thus, the two CO's of M Special Unit were essentially "older" long-serving officers. Reverting briefly back to M's "sister unit" – Z Special Unit – its CO's were likewise a succession of senior Australian ISD/SOA administrative staff officers,³⁴ whose jobs it was to look after administrative/personnel issues for the AMF members. The CO's of M Special Unit had no operational responsibilities – in either planning or execution – nor did they lead the organisations to which the Unit's members were detached.

M Special Unit itself was not an operational entity and in the authoritative accounts of the war-time operations of NEA there is no mention of M Special Unit:

- LCDR Feldt who was SIO from its inception until mid 1943 wrote in October 1943 a detailed SECRET account of "Coastwatching in the NE Area" without mentioning M Special Unit.³⁵
- Feldt's successor, CDR J C McManus wrote in November 1945 a SECRET account on "North Eastern Area Operations" from April 1943 to the end of the war, and made no mention, with the exception of discussion of the M Special Unit Battalion³⁶ of which more later.
- The post-war American history of American G-2 (intelligence staff) activities in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA), including a separate volume on the administrative and operational history of the various components of the AIB, likewise made no mention.³⁷
- A "popular" account of AIB operations written by a former senior US Army officer in the AIB appeared in a book in 1958 and made no mention of M Special Unit.³⁸

M Special Unit was disbanded on 3 December 1945,³⁹ as part of the disbandment of the various other Australian parts of the AIB on conclusion of the war.

³³NAA: B883, SX1453, Item 6656631, HARVEY ROY JEFFREY : Service Number - SX1453 : Date of birth - 17 Apr 1910 : Place of birth - ADELAIDE SA : Place of enlistment - ADELAIDE SA : Next of Kin - HARVEY KATHLEEN. And NAA 30260528, pp 14, 19, 20.

³⁴SOA Vol 1, pp 38, 39.

³⁵NAA 410697.

³⁶NAA: B3476, 66B, Item 410718, Report by Commander VC McManus RAN - North Eastern Area Operations - List of Personnel serving and information on communications [contains two copies of the report one of which is missing appendices J - Summary of more important intelligence signals received from parties; K - Nominal List of personnel served in NEA section and L map of NE area which is outsized] (NAA 410718).

³⁷AIB Vol IV.

³⁸A Ind, *Spy Ring Pacific*, Weidenfield and Nicolson, London, 1958. This is necessarily a very "American" view of the work of AIB and its component parts. He describes the work of the "Coastwatchers" but makes no mention of M Special Unit (or of NEA, by name, for that matter). He mentions SOA and SRD, without mentioning Z Special Unit. He coyly refers to SIA as a "pedigreed" British organisation, with an "antecedental line" going back to the "sixteenth century", with communications "direct to Number 10 Downing Street."

³⁹Smith, *The Soldiers of M Special Unit*, p 7.

Thus, it can be said that M Special Unit was an "administrative feature" of AIB HQ and three of the operational organisations under its co-ordination – NEA, SIA and NEI Section. The real organisations that did the actual fighting, air- and coast-watching and spying were NEA, SIA and NEI – not M Special Unit. Even then M Special Unit was not the totality of either AIB HQ or those three organisations – members from other Australian or foreign services contributed to the overall success of those organisations' work. The contribution of the members of M Special Unit cannot be differentiated or disentangled from the contribution of others in those other parts of the AIB.

Was M Special Unit "secret"?

While M Special Unit was not publicly discussed during the war, it was hardly secret within the AMF at that time. Countless hundreds – or thousands – of orderly room clerks, communicators, logisticians, administrators and "HR" types had access to the personnel records and other paperwork involved in moving people or equipment from A to B. Postings, pay, punishments, promotions and gongs were attributed to a soldier as a member of that unit. Like Z Special Unit was for ISD/SOA, M Special Unit was therefore the UNCLAS official face of various parts of the AIB.

What was secret during the war was:

- The existence of AIB, of which M Special Unit was an essential administrative feature
- The existence of NEA and SIA and the tactical details of their work.

Within a year of the end of the war however, only a little would be left to the imagination:

- A press release issued by the American GHQ AFPAC (Army Forces Pacific – essentially the short-lived successor to GHQ SWPA) on 13 September 1945 in Manila expounded over 10 foolscap pages on the activities of parts of the "Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB)" during the war including on the feats of the "agents of the North-east Area Section, or 'NEA' of AIB" in New Guinea and the Solomons.⁴⁰ SIA, it should be noted, was however not mentioned in that release. Nor was M Special Unit.
- Feldt's book of 1946 lifted the lid on most aspects of NEA's war in the Pacific and NEI. M Special Unit was referred to, obliquely as "'M' Unit", only once in this book.
- Hansard reports discussion of AIB in Parliament in July 1946, noting its roles of obtaining information on the enemy in the South-West Pacific Area, sabotage, destruction of morale

⁴⁰AWM 432/9/39 Pt 4, Correspondence, Instructions, Statements and reports from M Special Unit in connection with its operations as a unit of Allied Intelligence Bureau, part 4 of 5 parts, May to Sept 1945.



and encouraging resistance by the local peoples. No mention of M Special Unit though.⁴¹

The expiry in 1975 of the 30-year secrecy rule enabled the start of the release of files relating to many secret wartime activities. In 1980 the first reunions of M and Z Special Units members began to be held and in 1981 the government began releasing to the National Archives of Australia documents relating to these activities.

We have therefore the odd situation wherein the existence of the hitherto secret AIB and an outline – and sometimes details – of its activities became public knowledge soon after the war, but not that of the essentially UNCLAS M Special Unit.

We propose below to briefly outline the roles of the organisations to which M Special Unit members were attached.

What did AIB HQ and other establishments do?

AIB HQ by virtue of its name controlled the activities of the various operational components under it, managed upwards to GHQ SWPA and with Australian authorities and managed the support for parties in the field. To do this it needed to be close to GHQ yet also have a footprint in the rear areas.

During the course of the war, AIB HQ started off in Melbourne briefly in July 1942 as did GHQ, then moved its Forward HQ to Brisbane, when GHQ moved there. It closed its Melbourne Rear HQ in August 1942. In January 1945 a Forward HQ moved to Hollandia (in NEI), following GHQ, and leaving a Rear HQ in Brisbane. In April 1945, Forward HQ moved with GHQ to Morotai (in NEI also) where the Forward HQ remained until September 1945 when it rejoined the Rear HQ in Brisbane.^{42 43}

Under the 1943 reorganisation, AIB took over SOA's Darwin Luger Maintenance Section (LMS), a staging and administrative base.⁴⁴



⁴¹NAA: A571, 1946/2511, Item 134232, Secret Service No. 4 Account. [Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB), Far Eastern Liaison Office (FELO), Inter-Allied Service Department (IASD), Luger Maintenance Station (LMS), Special Operations Australia (SOA), Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD), M and Z Special Units, SIS Australian Section, p 38. (NAA 134232)

⁴²AIB Vol IV, pp 7, 12, 99.

⁴³AIB HQ did not follow GHQ SWPA when GHQ moved to the Philippines in October 1944.

⁴⁴AIB Vol IV, p 37.



Figure 8 - LMS at East Arm, Darwin. Formerly run by SOA, it was taken over by AIB in mid 1943.⁴⁵ SOA did however develop a separate smaller area for themselves across the water at Peak Hill.

AIB also took over SOA's old HQ at "Airlie" in Domain Rd, South Yarra, Melbourne, using it as a stores base.⁴⁶ Finally AIB took over the former SOA training base Z Experimental Station (ZES) in Cairns. While ZES was now primarily in the hands of the NEI (i.e. Dutch) Section of the AIB, AIB proper maintained a small stores depot there.⁴⁷

AIB had two staging/stores' camps in Brisbane – starting in late 1942 it made use of the Queensland Lawn Tennis Association premises on Milton Rd, which became Milton Camp, and later also used Camp Tasman at Indooroopilly.⁴⁸

In June 1943 an AIB training camp, principally for NEA was established at Tabragalba in Queensland.⁴⁹

AIB, including many Army (i.e. M Special Unit) members, thus had a substantial footprint inside Australia.



⁴⁵A Dias, *Former Z Special Unit commando asks for secret base at East Arm to be preserved*, ABC, 17 Feb 2015, accessed: 24 Aug 2015. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-17/former-commando-asks-historic-z-special-unit-site-be-preserved/6130198>

⁴⁶NAA 134232, p 73.

⁴⁷AIB Vol IV, p 37.

⁴⁸AIB Vol IV, pp 18, 19.

⁴⁹AIB Vol IV, p 42; NAA 410718, p 4. GR McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide, The Australian Army 1939-1945*, Volume 2, Big Sky Publishing, 2028, p 2.513. It's not explicit whether the Tabragalba camp was under AIB HQ or directly under NEA.



What did SIA do?

So, what did SIA, to which up to 62 M Special Unit members were potentially seconded, do?



Figure 9 - CAPT Roy Kendall RNR – Director of SIA for most of the war. A British Naval officer attached to SIS, his father was born in Australia. After the war he settled in Australia and was a Senator for Queensland in the Federal Parliament from 1950-1965.⁵⁰

The best (and quite opaque) overall description of SIA is in the American post-war SWPA Intelligence history. In a nutshell, as already noted, SIA was essentially a British organisation, described as:

“a closely guarded secret organisation procuring its own personnel and responsible solely to (its Director) who in turn answerable to London Headquarters”. “It was charged with the collection of information (on) the enemy and his activities ‘through special means and channels’”.⁵¹

The history notes that SIA carried out 15 operations into the NEI, British Borneo and Cocos Island and by the end of the war there were 5 parties still operating in the NEI.⁵² One public, “non-technical” account of their activities was: their “radio monitors (were) copying highly revealing cryptograms from spy operators under the very noses of the Japanese in Java.”⁵³

Most of the parties comprised “native” personnel, but some did include British/Australian members. It’s not explicitly stated, but perhaps most of the Australians were in communications or other support roles.⁵⁴

⁵⁰The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate, Kendall, Roy (1899-1972), accessed 13 May 2026. <https://biography.senate.gov.au/kendall-roy/>

⁵¹AIB Vol IV, p 8.

⁵²AIB Vol IV, Appendix 19.

⁵³Ind, *Spy Ring Pacific*, p 11.

⁵⁴See NAA: B6390 SE ASIA COMMUNICATIONS UNIT AMF COMPONENT, Item 30268882, Routine Orders Part 2 - South East Asia Communications Unit Australian Military Forces Component, p 2 (NAA 30268882) for some glimpses of M Special Unit staff in and out of SIA’s base at Caboolture.

SIA had a number of admin/training establishments in Australia – HQ in Brisbane, a training base at Caboolture, Queensland (the so-called SE Asia Communications Unit - SEACU), a forward base at Snake Bay (on Melville Island, Northern Territory) and a training base at Lindeman Island (Queensland).

Given that the M Special Unit linkage to SIA is perhaps not well known, we offer in additional support of this statement two unit members whose names are recorded: on the SEACU ROs;⁵⁵ on the Summary of SIA operations;⁵⁶ and in their AIF files as being posted to M Special Unit.⁵⁷ They were VX 80683 CAPT W. J Chater (Operation LONDON – Java, Christmas Island, Cocos Island) and VX 90490 LT K.C Gillett⁵⁸ (Operation P4D – Serua in the eastern islands of the NEI).

What did NEI do?

The Dutch, initially as part of ISD and then as the stand-alone NEI Section of AIB carried out 36 operations into that part of the NEI lying within SWPA’s AO.⁵⁹ Operations fell into the categories of intelligence collection or “showing the flag” (this latter category in particular in areas which were essentially “no-man’s land” or which were only lightly controlled by the Japanese). Australian personnel (from Z and later M Special Units) only played a part in 5 of those operations, as noted above, and only in 1942/43. Dutch operations over the course of the war had a high failure rate.



⁵⁵NAA 30268882, p 2.

⁵⁶AIB Vol IV, Appendix 19.

⁵⁷NAA: B883, VX 80683, Item 6070571, CHATER WILFRED JOHN : Service Number – VX 80683 : Date of birth - 06 Jan 1908 : Place of birth - SINGAPORE : Place of enlistment - CAULFIELD VIC : Next of Kin - CHATER ROBERT.

⁵⁸NAA: B883, VX 90490, Item 6047946, GILLET KENNETH CHARLES: Service Number – VX 90490: Date of birth - 08 Feb 1913 : Place of birth - LONDON ENGLAND: Place of enlistment - ROYAL PARK VIC: Next of Kin - GILLET CHARLES.

⁵⁹J J Nortier, *Acties in de Archipel*, T Wever BV, Franeker, 1985, pp 326-328. Operations into Sumatra in the AO of the British-led South East Asia Command (SEAC) were carried out by the joint Anglo-Dutch Country Section (ADCS) of SOE’s India Mission. In SEAC the Dutch equivalent of NEFIS-III was the Korps Insulinde (KI).



Aug 45	Intelligence and informants obtained
May 44	Information re. Japanese escape routes obtained
	Party captured
	Party captured
	No contact after landing
	No contact after landing
	Party captured
Aug 43	Party captured
Oct 43	General military intelligence gained
Mar 44	Local intelligence
Apr 44	Some intelligence gained; part of party lost
Aug 45	General intelligence
Jul 42	Party captured; some information prior to capture
	Party captured, believed executed
	Party captured, believed executed

Figure 10 - A rather glum excerpt on the results of NEI operations, from the American post-war history of AIB.⁶⁰

Of the 7 AMF members, participating as members of M Special Unit, 6 perished. Given the relatively small role played by M Special Unit members in the NEI Section of the AIB, we don't propose to go into further detail on Dutch operations.

What did NEA do?

We come now to the most substantial part of the contributions made by members of M Special Unit (and others).

We don't propose to delve in detail into the operational activities of NEA, they are already covered in great detail elsewhere. In summary:

After recovering from devastating blows in the initial Japanese thrust in early/mid 1942, Coast-watchers/NEA morphed from an essentially civilian-staffed, part-time outfit into a trained, militarily capable organisation. It eventually replaced coverage of lost areas, it provided invaluable support to US operations in Guadalcanal in 1942-1943 and in New Britain in late 1943, particularly in terms of early warning of Japanese air attacks. As the Japanese lost air and sea superiority, "coast" and "air" watching became less important. NEA then began to focus on raising native forces to work under Australian direction. NEA operations were often long-term – the longest being a year and a half (albeit with staff rotations in most cases). Its achievements in taking the fight to the enemy in New Britain and Bougainville were remarkable.

The single best compact compilation of the activities of NEA is as per the American Far East Command post war history of AIB, with their proviso that as this was pieced together a few years after the war and from that Command's HQ which was then in Japan, there may be some inaccuracies or omissions. The bottom line however is that, according to this record, NEA conducted 66 operations north of Australia, in an arc from the New Hebrides in the east

to Dutch New Guinea in the west.⁶¹ We instead however propose to focus on only some key aspects of its operations.

M Special Unit Battalion was unique

In early 1944 GHQ decided to reinforce NEA parties operating in New Britain with a force of 250 New Guinea locals who had been undergoing training at the NEA camp in Tabragalba, Queensland.⁶² A group of 50 such men would be allocated to each of 5 NEA parties in the field in New Britain and these parties, led by Australian NCOs. The first 100 of them were inserted into the AO by submarine and surface craft in February/March 1944.⁶³ The old paradigm of the essentially civilian expat Coastwatcher, adorned with honorary RAN rank, laying low and unobtrusively reporting on shipping and air movements was a thing of the past. It had by now been well and truly supplemented or indeed replaced by hard-hitting Australian military (*i.e.* members of M Special Unit), leading bands of well trained and equipped guerrillas against the Japanese.



Figure 11 - Members of M Special Unit Battalion on parade in New Britain in January 1945.⁶⁴

As a manifestation of the role of NEA in raising and leading guerrilla forces in New Guinea, LHQ approved the raising of the M Special Unit Battalion, manned by New Guinea locals, but led by Australians, in February 1945. "The strength of the Battalion was limited to 750 men all of whom were given a regimental number prefixed by the letter R. The reason behind the raising of this battalion was the desire to legalise the use of the guerrillas as well as simplify the paying and equipping of the force. The limitation of the force to

⁶⁰AIB Vol IV, Appendix 19.

⁶¹AIB Vol IV, Appendix 19.

⁶²Training for locals from New Guinea and the islands had started at Tabragalba in June 1943. NAA: B3476, 1550, Item 410687, AIB [Allied Intelligence Bureau] Personnel - General (2).

⁶³NAA 410718, p 9.

⁶⁴AWM, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C78285>.



750 NCOs and ORs produced a problem as party leaders had by this time recruited some 1,500 natives. This was solved by enlisting the best types in the battalion and calling the remainder carriers or partisans, these latter were paid and equipped by AIB, payment being made mainly in trade. These partisans at the cessation of hostilities numbered approximately 2000".⁶⁵ By the end of hostilities, in terms of tactical successes, it was estimated that NEA forces had killed 5,414 enemy, wounded 1,492 and captured 74. NEA had rescued 75 POW, 321 airmen (mostly USAF), 280 naval personnel (mostly USN⁶⁶) and 450 missionaries and sundry civilians/locals.⁶⁷

NEA-led guerrilla forces in Bougainville in early 1945 killed more enemy than the combined 3rd and 11th Australian Divisions did in that campaign.



Figure 12 - A mixed group of NEA members (Army, RAN, RAAF) with local fighters on Bougainville in 1944.

The battalion was disbanded in October 1945, "all natives having been paid off and returned to their villages".⁶⁹

This was a unique example of Australians (almost entirely members of M Special Unit) raising, training and directing a guerrilla force, as a formal unit under Australian command.

NEA operated outside of its original AO

As already noted, NEA's original AO was Australian waters, Papua, New Guinea, Solomon Islands and New Hebrides. In 1944 however it operated on a number of occasions outside of that AO, in the NEI in the Dutch part of the island of New Guinea.

The "Harris Party" – amongst one other Australian⁷⁰ and two Dutch NEI Section parties - was deployed in March 1944 to conduct reconnaissance in the hinterland of Hollandia, in Dutch New Guinea in advance of Operation RECKLESS, the US Army landing there in April 1944. The insertion of the party went badly and within a day or so of landing all members were killed, executed, captured, missing or scattered. NEA had also deployed a team to a Dutch camp in the remote interior of Dutch New Guinea to provide communications support for these parties. In theory these Hollandia activities should have been the job of SOA, but perhaps for military/coalition political reasons or simply staff/resource availability, NEA was called on to support.

That same year NEA also provided communications/liaison/report distribution support in 4 other locations in Dutch New Guinea – Hollandia, Biak, Noemfoor, Sansapor – and on Morotai at AIB Forward HQ.⁷¹

Joint and international character

Throughout the war, NEA was led by Australian Naval officers, under the coordination of an Allied body, the AIB, which was in fact led by Australian Army officers succeeding each other, under the Allied (but essentially American) GHQ SWPA. Despite the complex command and control arrangements and a few Allied personnel attached, the staffing of NEA was clearly Australian.

Of the more than 400 members of NEA who deployed overseas over the course of the war about 40% were RAN, about 40% were Army (i.e. M Special Unit) and remaining 20% or so were a mixture of RNZN, RAAF, USMC/US Army, Amalgamated Wireless Australia (AWA), British Solomon Islands Defence Force (BSIDF) and civilians.⁷² By the end of the war NEA also ran a guerrilla force/network of between 2,000 and 3,000 local inhabitants from the New Guinea mainland and islands.

Conclusion

We know of 11 members of M Special Unit who died while serving in NEA Section of the AIB.⁷³ Six deceased or soon to be deceased AMF members who had been working with the Dutch in ISD and then in the NEI Section of the AIB were transferred while still in the field, to M Special Unit from Z Special Unit in May 1943. We know of no deaths of AMF members serving

⁶⁵NAA 410718, p 12. Another account at NAA 436101, p 24 put the figure of "natives" at 3,100 - consisting of: 49 "at bases in training"; 701 "Permanent Party personnel" (Presumably M Special Unit Bn); and 2,350 "casuals (carriers etc)".

⁶⁶Including at Kolombangara in the Solomon Islands in August 1943 a USN officer, who later became the 35th President of the United States, John F Kennedy.

⁶⁷NAA 410718, p 13.

⁶⁸NAA 410718, p 13.

⁶⁹NAA 410718, p 15.

⁷⁰"O" Party from the Far Eastern Liaison office (FELO).

⁷¹The locations, composition and tasks of NEA field parties, including communications bases, can be found in NAA: B3476, 148 PART 1, Item 509465, North Eastern Area Status Reports - Coastwatching

⁷²Figures drawn from Feldt's listing of those who deployed at Feldt pp 387-408. Feldt noted that these tables may not be complete.

⁷³See casualty noted at Feldt, pp 387-408 and Smith, pp 15-40. Two other AMF members died on coastwatching operations before the formation of M Special Unit – P496 SGT W A H Butteris and P444 WO2 G A Obst. There were also 19 other coastwatching dead or missing, mainly RAN, but also including RAAF, BSIDF and civilians.



in SIA.⁷⁴ Thus there was a total of 17 M Special Unit deaths as a result of enemy action.

So, to revert to the original description of M Special Unit:

“M Special Unit was a joint Allied special reconnaissance (special operations capable) unit, part of the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD), in the South West Pacific theatre of the Second World War. A joint Australian, New Zealand, Dutch and British military intelligence unit, it saw action in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands”⁷⁵

We won't go into a forensic dissection of the above excerpt, except to say that the root causes of its misleading nature are: conflating M Special Unit with the Coastwatchers – they were overlapping, but not “congruent”; and stating that M Special Unit was part of SRD – it was not, and its equivalent in SRD/SOA was Z Special Unit. From there stem the misapprehensions: stating that M Special Unit was a joint entity – it was not, it was Australian; assuming M Special Unit was an operational entity - it was not, it was an administrative holding unit; omitting the role of M Special Unit members in NEA raising a trained guerrilla force; and omitting M Special Unit members' presence in AIB HQ and establishments, SIA and a handful of men in NEI Section.

It is possible that the AMF members who did serve in the AIB, as members of M Special Unit, for reasons of convenience or operational security, took that posting at face value and simply came to consider their work as being that of M Special Unit, rather than AIB, NEA or SIA. We suspect too that M Special Unit was managed more cohesively than the hodgepodge of other establishments that other members of the AIB – RAN, RAAF, civilians etc – were held against.

After the war M Special Unit members who worked with SIA were probably more reluctant to talk of their experiences, given the secrecy surrounding the ongoing activities of the parent organisation SIS. Of the 7 AMF members (that we know of) who were transferred to M Special Unit to work with the Dutch, 6 did not survive the war and the seventh presumably just got on with life. Hence the reason why M Special Unit has come to be considered short hand for the Coastwatchers.

The men – and the handful of women - who were members of M Special Unit and took part in operations in the near Pacific and South East Asia achieved some truly remarkable feats. But to characterise those achievements as being those of M Special Unit alone risks unwittingly excluding many Australian and foreign servicemen/servicewomen who served alongside that unit's members in the same capacities. It also misattributes those successes to the wrong organisation.

⁷⁴Two RANVR members perished on SIA Operation M2 in Sarawak in early 1943, but they would anyway not be counted in M Special Unit statistics.

⁷⁵Wikipedia, *M Special Unit*, accessed 9 May 2026. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M_Special_Unit





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Around the Units

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Headquarters Special Operations Command



Australian Government
Defence



It is with great sadness Defence can confirm the death of Special Air Service Regiment soldier Warrant Officer Class Two Lachlan Muddle during a parachute training accident on the evening of 11 May 2026.

At this time, our main priority is to support Warrant Officer Class Two Muddle's family. Our thoughts are with them, his friends and the Regiment as they grieve his loss. We request that the privacy of Defence members and families is respected at this time.

The Australian Defence Force has temporarily paused all parachuting training.



July. Veterans, families, coalition partners and members of the Australian community gathered at the Australian War Memorial to mark the 20th anniversary of Operation NILE. The commemoration reflected on

the operation conducted from 9 to 10 July 2006 and honoured the commitment, sacrifice and enduring bonds of those who served. It also provided an opportunity for veterans and families to reconnect, ensuring this significant chapter in Australia's military history continues to be recognised and remembered. Learn more and watch the event here: <https://www.awm.gov.au/da-nile-anniversary>

Operation NILE, also known as Direct Action Nile, was a high-risk special operations raid conducted from **9 to 10 July 2006** in the **Chora Valley**, north of Tarin Kowt in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan. The mission targeted a senior Taliban leadership cell and disrupted a planned insurgent resurgence.

Launched under Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST, the operation aimed to clear insurgent strongholds ahead of a major coalition offensive. What began as a night-time heliborne raid developed into one of the most intense close-quarters engagements of the campaign.

- **Forces involved:** The multinational coalition included Canada's Joint Task Force 2, Australia's Delta Commando Company, 4 RAR (Commando), and Afghan National Security Forces.
- **Air support:** The force was supported by Australian CH-47D Chinook helicopters, Dutch Apache helicopters and United States assets, including AC-130H gunships, MQ-1 Predator aircraft and a B-1B Lancer bomber.
- **The engagement:** Coalition troops fought through an intense running battle against heavily armed Taliban insurgents in darkness.

The bravery displayed during the engagement resulted in **15 gallantry and distinguished service awards** for Australian personnel, including a Star of Gallantry and five Medals for Gallantry.

On 10 July 2026, the Australian War Memorial, in partnership with the University of New South Wales and the Commando Welfare Trust, hosted a special event to mark the raid's 20th anniversary. The event brought veterans and families together and shared unclassified details of the mission publicly for the first time.

A video about the operation is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtGSgxWePFA&t=2208s>





ADF School of Special Operations

Reinforcement selection and training continued at the ADF School of Special Operations.



June. Candidates seeking selection as Special Forces operators and combat controllers completed the Special Forces Selection Course, which tested them under sustained physical and mental pressure, uncertainty and fatigue.

Candidates were required to manage discomfort, self-doubt and external stress while continuing to make sound decisions.



Early morning PT.



The conclusion of another demanding selection activity.



July. Trainees conduct close combat training.



Training to survive and operate in the maritime environment.





1st Commando Regiment

May. Joint training builds capability and strengthens relationships. Members of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force Long Range Reconnaissance Unit and Australia's 1st Commando Regiment trained together in Victoria during Exercise OLGETA WARRIOR.



Practising building-clearance drills.



Indoor and outdoor range practices.



Conducting a joint activity at the Puckapunyal training area.



A Special Warfare operator from 1st Commando Regiment during joint training.

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A specialist weapons operator and members of the Long-Range Reconnaissance Unit during joint training.

August. 1st Commando Regiment hosted His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, Crown Prince and Senior Minister at the Prime Minister's Office of Brunei Darussalam.

During the visit to Holsworthy Barracks, His Royal Highness met Australian Special Operations Command personnel, observed close-quarters battle demonstrations and viewed advanced training capabilities within the Special Forces Training Facility.

The visit highlighted the relationship between the Australian Defence Force and the Royal Brunei Armed Forces, and the training cooperation that underpins the enduring defence partnership.

Australian and Bruneian special forces regularly train together through the LEOPARD series of engagements. In September, personnel from Brunei's Rejimen Pasukan Khas will return to Holsworthy for Exercise DUSK LEOPARD 26, continuing to strengthen relationships, interoperability and shared understanding.



His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah using simulation equipment.



His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah speaking with SOCAUST Major General Garth Gould CSC DSM.



Major General Garth Gould CSC DSM presents His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah with a commemorative book marking 30 years of relations between Australian and Bruneian special forces. The book was produced by 1st Commando Regiment.



2nd Commando Regiment

April-May. Exercise NEMESIS TYPHOON was a domestic counter-terrorism training activity conducted by the Australian Defence Force across Melbourne and Port Phillip Bay during April and May 2026

In addition to the domestic counter-terrorism other participating units and personnel included 16th Aviation Brigade who provided qualified pilots, aircrew and ground crew and Support staff who rehearsed high-readiness response procedures. During the exercise elements from 1st Commando Regiment conducted tactical insertions.



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Special Operations Engineer Regiment



ADF Parachuting School



August. Medics from the Special Operations Engineer Regiment trained to provide patient care in complex, high-risk environments and ground crew and Support staff.



August. The Red Berets display team from the Australian Defence Force Parachuting School performed at the Pacific Airshow on the Gold Coast.

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RIFLE N



LEON WRIGHT RECALLS HIS FATHER'S WAR HEROICS AT TARAKAN

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Association of Australia*

It's often said war never leaves those who participated in it and sadly that often rings true for their families too. I for one can bear witness to the validity of that statement. After waging a successful guerilla campaign against the Japanese on Timor Island during World War Two, the 2nd and 2/4th Independent Companies were returned to Australia and consequently disbanded, then quickly reformed when a Japanese invasion of our country looked imminent.

My father, Trooper Leslie Thomas Wright VX123028, volunteered for the 2/4th Indepen-

dent Company, later to be renamed 2/4th Commando Squadron. The reformed Independent Companies trained heavily in jungle warfare, as they were originally going to be deployed across northern Australia to fight a guerilla campaign against the Japanese if they landed on our shores. As it turned out they were stopped in New Guinea, so the Independent Companies were posted there to join the fight.

On September 3, 1943 dad, along with the other 2/4th commandos, were attacked by Japanese torpedo dive-bombers off Red Beach just east of



O.28442



Lae, New Guinea. The convoy of LSTs (landing ship tanks) were part of the first opposed amphibious operations by Australian troops since the landing of our forces at Anzac Cove during the Great War. Dad said they could see the torpedos heading straight for them and all on board winced, readying themselves for inevitable impact. Luckily for the LST he was on, the torpedo narrowly missed but sadly was a direct hit on LST471, killing 34 of the 2/4th commandos and wounding many others.

The horrors of this incident surfaced many times down the years and I can vividly recall as a teenager, being woken in the middle of the night by dad screaming in his sleep. Poor mum bore the brunt of it, including the time he had her by the throat thinking the Japanese had wire around his neck. She had to forcibly kick him off, not something a woman in her advanced years should have to do. Then came the time he'd a bad

reaction to anaesthetic. In the morning the doctor asked how he was, to which dad replied "Okay." "Thank goodness," said the doctor, "you had us all dodging bullets last night!"

Such incidents were numerous but we laughed them off as what else could you do? Of course there were some we couldn't laugh off, like the death of his good mate George Marchant. George was Section 9 forward scout and numerous times dad got him out of dangerous situations. Yet the one time he wasn't there to back him up George was killed in an ambush and the news hit dad like a mallet.

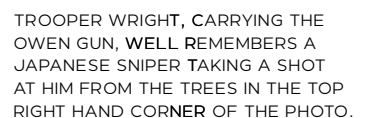
Some time around November 1944, Sniper's Rifle No.28442 was issued to Trooper Wright, a conversion from an older NI Mk.III receiver as they produced the most accurate shooting. Going by the photo of dad's rifle it was a high-mount version and, looking at his order book, it was booked out as a telescope. Yet according to Ian Skennerton's book *The Lee Enfield*, the high-

TROOPER WRIGHT'S SERVICE MEDALS AND COLOUR PATCHES; MEMBERS OF THE 2/4TH COMMANDO SQUADRON ON THEIR WAY TO SNAG'S CREEK.

MAIN: TROOPER L.T. WRIGHT CLEANING HIS RIFLE AFTER A RAIN SQUALL PASSED OVER THE LST EN ROUTE TO SADAU ISLAND.



Dad was sniper of C troop, 9th Section and it was his job to take care of any enemy sniper who had the forward scouts pinned down. With the Japanese having nowhere to retreat, he was called up on numerous occasions and, on one of those, volunteered to be the forward scout on a search and destroy patrol. Ambushed by the enemy and with a bullet through his shirt sleeve and another through his hair, Trooper Wright eventually realised volunteering for the job wasn't the best idea he'd ever had.



TROOPER WRIGHT'S ORDER BOOK SHOWING THE ISSUING OF THE SNIPER'S RIFLE AND SCOPE.

NAVAL SENIOR CHAPLAIN JASON WRIGHT VIEWING THE AUSTRALIAN FLAG WITH HIS GRANDFATHER. THE FLAG WAS RAISED BY COMMANDOS ON SADAU ISLAND AND TARAKAN, BORNEO; TROOPER WRIGHT'S INITIALS APPEAR ON THE FEDERATION STAR OF THE BLUE ENSIGN.

[illegible]

told me: "There's no way you'd be sitting there like that looking for Japanese snipers," and was adamant the caption be changed.

So an appointment was made with a curator at the War Memorial, who quite rightly wanted to know how dad knew the caption was wrong. She was taken aback when he told her he was there and the rifle was his, and even more so when he produced his order book with the rifle noted, proving the gun was his. The War Memorial was unable to change the caption as it was a propaganda photo, though the curator assured us a note would be made on the back.

Some years ago I took a phone call from a lady whose father had served with mine in the Commandos. Her dad had passed away and, on sorting through his things, she came across a Japanese flag. She asked if I wanted it as she believed dad was the last surviving member of the 2/4th Commando Squadron.

It duly arrived and turned out to be a flag taken during the Battle of Tarakan. Along with other members of the Squadron dad had signed it, with his signature appearing under No.9 Section in the right-hand top corner. I showed it to dad who recognised it immediately and, as he ran his hand over every signature, smiled and said: "That certainly has come a long way."

Dad died on October 4, 2021 aged 97, a good innings after what he'd been through. What very few people knew was he carried a small photo in his wallet and had done so since the end of the war. It was a tattered picture of him flanked by two mates, George Marchant and Tony Kayes. He survived the war but sadly George and Tony were killed on Tarakan.

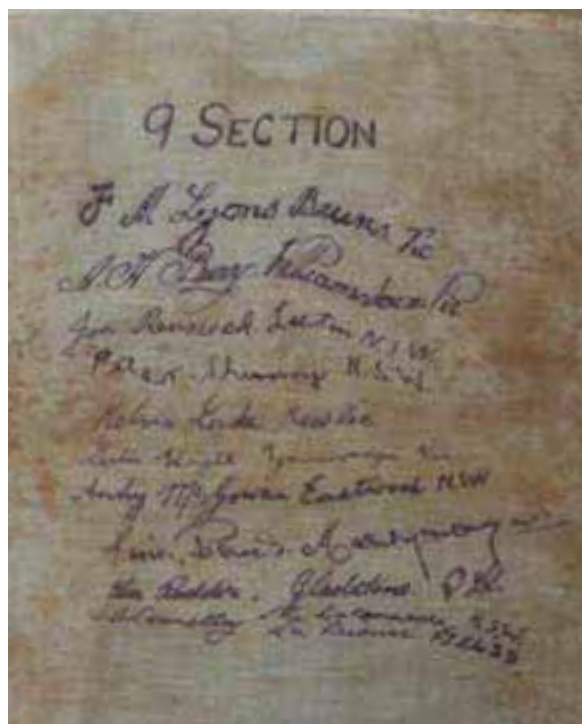
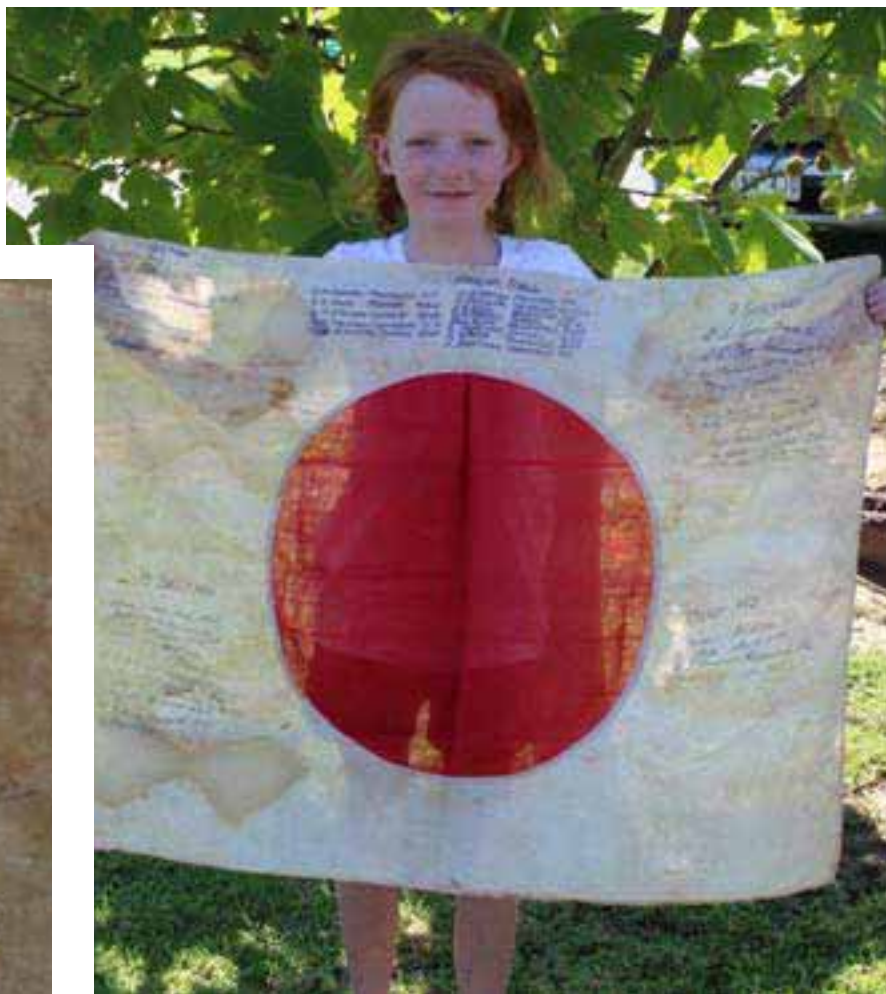
On the day of his funeral I rang the undertakers and asked them not to close dad's coffin until I'd been down. When I arrived I was greeted by the funeral director and told her what I wanted to do and, if it was against regulations, suggested she looked away. Being a small country town, I knew the lady who just smiled and helped me put that photo in his pocket.

I'd just one more thing to do to keep my word, so sent an email to the War Memorial to ask if they'd be interested in acquiring that Japanese flag. Indeed they were but wanted to check its authenticity and the signatures. I sent a number of photos and eventually they asked if I could bring the flag up or even post it, so my wife and I planned a road trip.

She chose to wait in the car as she knew what I intended to ask in return for the flag. With white-gloved hands and camera at the ready, they happily accepted the flag after I'd signed the relevant paperwork. With pleasantries over I said: "Now it's time for the argument!" "Oh we love an argument," said one of the curators. I replied: "You have a photo taken during the Tarakan Campaign. My dad said the caption's wrong and I'd like it changed." ●

TROOPER WRIGHT'S GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER WITH THE FLAG SHE TOOK TO SCHOOL FOR 'SHOW AND TELL' ON THEIR ANZAC DAY COMMEMORATION.

TROOPER WRIGHT'S SIGNATURE AND HOME TOWN APPEAR UNDER THE NO.9 SECTION ON THE JAPANESE FLAG.



Blood and Beret

A Victoria Cross-winning great-great-uncle, a grandfather sworn to atomic secrecy, and a twenty-five-year Army career that helped shape Australia's modern commando capability — the story of Warrant Officer Class Two Nick Hill, 2 Commando Regiment.

Drawn from Hill's recorded interviews and supplemented by the Australian War Memorial, the Australian Commando Association, the Zero Limits Podcast and his family obituary.

By Doug Knight

A BLOODLINE BUILT ON SECRETS AND VALOUR

When Nick Hill was growing up, “Mad Harry” wasn’t a name spoken much around the family table. It was only later, after his brother went digging through the family tree, that they discovered a direct line to Lieutenant Colonel Henry “Harry” Murray, VC, CMG, DSO and Bar, DCM — his mother’s great-uncle, and by most reckonings the most highly decorated Allied infantry soldier of the First World War.

Murray’s story, as Nick tells it, has the shape of legend: a Tasmanian-born woodcutter working the timber country of southwest Western Australia when war broke out in 1914, who enlisted with the 16th Battalion and came ashore at Gallipoli on the afternoon of Anzac Day, 1915. He fought there as part of a machine-gun crew, was wounded, and was decorated for his actions in the campaign’s opening days. On the Western Front he rose from private to lieutenant colonel, commanding a company at Mouquet Farm during the Battle of Pozières and later winning his Victoria Cross in northwest France in 1917, followed by a Bar to his Distinguished Service Order for a defensive stand so determined that his corps commander, General Birdwood, told him that if he’d simply held the line a little longer, he’d have been recommending him for a second VC instead.

“I’ve walked the ground he fought on,” Nick says. “Bullecourt in particular — when you stand there and look at how flat and open it is and think about the head height, they’d have been at crossing it, you just shake your head. Being a veteran myself, having some idea what they went through, you just go: how did anyone survive that?”

Murray’s First AIF service ended in 1920. He settled on grazing properties in Queensland, enlisted again during the Second World War, commanded the 26th Battalion in

North Queensland until August 1942, and retired from the Army in early 1944. He died in 1966, having never met his great-great-nephew.

Hill’s connection to that history runs on both sides of his family. His maternal grandfather was a nuclear physicist who served on the Manhattan Project during the Second World War and later took part in Britain’s atomic testing program at Maralinga and the rocket program at Woomera. Much of that service remains, in Nick’s words, redacted — pieced together not from official paperwork but from what filtered down through the family. He remembers his mother describing a man who would be collected from home in the middle of the night by military police in an unmarked black car, disappear for months, then reappear the same way. He was never permitted to speak about what he had done. Late in life, according to family, he carried a heavy weight of guilt over his part in it — something that would likely be recognised today as post-traumatic stress — and he died of a heart attack in 1966, the same year Harry Murray died. His widow spent years campaigning for his wartime nuclear service to be formally recognised, a fight that fed into Australia’s atomic veterans’ entitlements in the early 1980s.

“It’s one of those things — if you don’t talk about it, it bottles up and festers, and eventually it comes to a head.”

ALL I EVER WANTED TO BE

Given that inheritance, it is perhaps unsurprising that Nick knew from his earliest memories that he wanted to be a soldier — despite his mother’s reluctance, coloured, he suspects, by watching what secrecy and service had done to her own father. He tried on other careers during work experience at school, carpentry among them, “to appease her,” he says, “but I always knew I was going to be a soldier. That’s all I ever wanted to do.”

He joined the Army Reserve at seventeen, following his older brother, who tried to talk him out of it — “join the reserves first, get a taste of it” — before leaving the reserves himself just as Nick was joining up. Nick took the advice underneath the warning rather than the warning itself: he served almost continuously with the reserves before deciding, in his own words, that if he



Figure 1: Major Henry William Murray VC, 13th Battalion. Australian War Memorial, H00009; copyright expired (public domain).



didn't give the full-time army a go, he'd regret it for the rest of his life. He enlisted in 1989, and, as he puts it, "never looked back."



Figure 2: Private Nick Hill during his Infantry Corps training at Singleton. Source: Google.

BUTTERWORTH, 1993

Nick's first overseas deployment came in October 1993, when he was twenty-one and posted with Delta Company, 5/7 RAR, to the Malaysian air base at Butterworth — a posting so central to the battalion's culture in that era, he says, that "if you hadn't done Butterworth, you hadn't served, as far as anyone was concerned." His company was replacing one that had lost five soldiers in a truck accident that September; the mood among the returning men was heavy.

His memories of arriving are visceral: the wall of heat and humidity as the aircraft doors opened, the smell of monsoon drains filling with stagnant water, a disorienting first encounter with the call to prayer at four in the morning. "I'd never been out of Australia," he says. "Just to get out there and experience different cultures — it was amazing." It nearly ended in disaster: Nick contracted dengue fever, watched his blood-platelet count crash while doctors struggled to diagnose him, and lost twelve kilograms in two weeks. "They call it the bone-crushing disease," he says. "It's horrendous. I remember my mates having to carry me out of bed because I couldn't straighten my legs."

LEARNING THE BRITS' WAY

After Malaysia, Nick's company — recently crowned Champion Company — earned a posting to the United Kingdom on Exercise North Star Southern Cross, an

exchange that saw them living alongside the 1st Battalion, King's Own Scottish Borderers, at Dregghorn Barracks outside Edinburgh. Working out thick Scottish accents delivering weapons lessons was, he says, one of the hardest parts of the posting — but the highlight was standing the Edinburgh Castle Guard for several days, the first Australians ever to do so. "People would walk up going, 'I thought there was supposed to be Scotsmen on the gate,'" he remembers. "It was a really good experience — representing your country on an international stage."

VOLUNTEERING FOR THE UNKNOWN

In 1997, 4 RAR — Nick's light infantry battalion — was re-rolled into a full-time commando battalion, Australia's first standing commando capability since the Second World War. The following year, selection was opened to the whole of the army for the first time, and Nick put up his hand.

He chose commandos over the SAS deliberately. "Recon really didn't appeal to me — sitting around watching people for weeks on end," he says. "I'd rather be walking in, kicking somebody's door in, doing the job, and walking out and going home. That appealed to me a lot more."

"I'd rather be walking in, kicking somebody's door in, doing the job, and walking out and going home."

By his account, roughly 140 men started that first open selection course; only around forty made it through selection itself, and by the time the survivors had finished the full cycle of commando basic training, parachute, roping and amphibious courses, about twenty marched into the unit as qualified commandos in October 1998 — a process that had taken some seven months in total. Two women were among those who started.

The hardest single test, he says, was the thirty-kilometre "clicker" — a forced march against the clock near the end of selection, after days without proper food or sleep. At five foot nine and around eighty kilograms, Nick had never marched that distance at that pace carrying that much weight; he kept up with his much taller "hoochie mate" by running much of it, and finished in four hours and twenty-two minutes, comfortably inside the unwritten four-and-a-half-hour cutoff. "I just couldn't believe I did it that quick," he says. "That was the hardest thing I've ever done, physically, by far."

He is unsentimental about what selection means. "It's harder to keep your beret than to earn it," he says — a saying, he explains, that reflects how much more there is to learn once the basic qualification is done, and how constant the pressure to perform remains. "There's always somebody else who's going to come and take your position if you don't."



A DEBT OF HONOUR

Nick's early years as a commando — posted to 7 Platoon, Bravo Company, 4th Battalion, whose motto, Hook in, dated to the unit's Vietnam-era history — were dense with short, sharp tasks: an observer role alongside 3 SAS Squadron ahead of the 1999 East Timor intervention; the planning for Operation PLUM BOB, the evacuation of Australians from the Solomon Islands in 2000, considered the first operational deployment of a full commando company since the Second World War; and finally, in 2001, deployment to East Timor itself, as part of a battalion built around two commando companies and two light infantry companies.

For Nick, Timor carried a weight beyond the operation itself. During the Second World War, No. 2 and No. 4 Australian Independent companies had fought a guerrilla campaign across the island, sheltered, fed and guided at every turn by local Timorese — a debt, in Nick's words, that Australia has owed ever since. His company was based at Bobonaro, in the mountains — the same village that had served as company headquarters for No.2 Independent Company nearly sixty years earlier. Using an old photograph from a history of that unit, Nick and his men spent a day tracking down the exact spot it had been taken from, on a ridge overlooking a distinctive flat-topped mountain, and photographed it again to send back to the 2/2nds veterans' association¹.

"We were the first commandos back in Timor since World War Two," he says. "Going into the villages, some of the old men remembered — they'd come out of the woodwork to shake our hands once they realised who we were."

"Being able to show them we were back, that we hadn't forgotten what they did for us — that was probably the biggest thing I took out of that whole deployment."

He was still at Bobonaro on 11 September 2001, off shift and asleep, when one of his teammates burst in shouting that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. He watched the second aircraft strike live, standing in the forward operating base's television room. "Somebody's in a world of trouble now," he remembers thinking, "and this has just started a war." American Marine Corps helicopters were soon overhead, ferrying personnel out of the region, and within Nick's own unit, the ground began shifting almost immediately.

¹Following their evacuation from Timor in December 1942, the unit was reorganized and officially restyled into the Second AIF numerical serialization as the 2/2nd Independent Company when reforming at Canungra, Queensland, in early 1943.

RAISING TAG EAST

That shift produced the next defining chapter of Nick's career. In the aftermath of September 11, the Australian government decided the country needed a second tactical assault group — a dedicated east-coast counter-terrorism capability to sit alongside the SAS-run TAG West, rather than relying on a single unit rotating between counter-terrorism duty and deployments to Afghanistan.

In early 2002, Nick was one of roughly forty commando-qualified soldiers sent to Perth for the first advanced close-quarter battle course run for the new unit.

Only around thirteen to fifteen of them finished — nine commandos and six navy clearance divers, by his account — after what he describes as an unrelenting six-day week of shooting, gasmask runs and room-combat drills, "saturated in your own sweat" from six in the morning to eleven at night. "I lost about ten kilos doing that course," he says. "It was phenomenal — crazy, crazy — but I absolutely loved it."

The SAS instructors, he says, gave the new arrivals no quarter, determined to protect a counter-terrorism standard the regiment had guarded since 1981. Nick bears them no grudge for it; he counts the course among the most valuable training he ever received from men who, once satisfied the newcomers had met the mark, became generous teachers in return. Tactical Assault Group East went operational on 22 July 2002, with Nick qualified as a method-of-entry, or breaching, operator — call sign X-ray 13. Those who were there at the start, borrowing an American naval term, have since become known within the regiment as its "plank holders."

IRAQ, AND THE LONG CLIMB TO PLATOON SERGEANT

In 2005, Nick deployed to Iraq as part of the Australian Army Training Team's fourth rotation, working with an Iraqi brigade at Samawah in the British-administered south — the first Australian training team since Vietnam to conduct combat operations outside the wire alongside the forces it was training. He remembers the heat above all: flying in via Kuwait's Camp Virginia, then into a country he describes as "dead flat — sand-coloured buildings, black asphalt, and hot, hot, hot," working alongside British paratroopers and light dragoons on the mission.

He returned from Iraq at the end of 2005 and was promoted to platoon sergeant, eventually taking charge, in late 2006, of the land assault platoon within Tactical Assault Group East — the first commando, rather than SAS trooper, to hold that role.

His team commanders included Brett Wood, later decorated for gallantry in Afghanistan, whom Nick had gone through selection alongside in 1998. "It was a massive honour," Nick says of the posting. "Some of the best things I ever did in my career were on that team."



BILLION-DOLLAR BRAVO

Nick's most detailed publicly documented Afghanistan tour came from July 2011 to February 2012, when he deployed as company sergeant major of Bravo Commando Company Group with Special Operations Task Group Rotation XVI. The published Zero Limits episode notes state that the company conducted more than eighty combat operations across Uruzgan, Zabul, Kandahar and Helmand provinces, more than ninety per cent of them helicopter-borne.



Figure 3: Nick Hill during his deployment to Afghanistan.
Source: Wikipedia.

Many were counter-narcotics missions aimed at the intersection of criminal and Taliban networks, undertaken with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration's Foreign-deployed Advisory and Support Teams. The same account estimated that the rotation destroyed heroin with a United States street value of about \$1 billion, producing the company nickname "Billion Dollar Bravo". These operational totals and the valuation derive from Nick's podcast account and its published show notes rather than a released Defence after-action report.

Later in his career, as company sergeant major and then as the regiment's training warrant officer, Nick took on a task nobody had asked him to do rewriting the commando trade model from private through to warrant officer, on the grounds that the army's standard infantry career courses had little bearing on the specialist supervisory skills a commando section commander or platoon sergeant actually needed. "You don't do it because you get paid," he says. "You do it because you love it." Much of what he drafted, he understands, was eventually adopted.

THE LINDT CAFÉ QUESTION

Nick is careful, when asked, to frame his view of the

2014 Lindt Café siege in Sydney as personal opinion rather than inside knowledge — he was not on the response, though a sergeant he had served alongside was, at the time, the tactical assault group's company sergeant major. But it is a subject he has thought about closely: years earlier, as a platoon sergeant preparing security for APEC, his own team had conducted a tactical site survey of the café itself, and he happened to be standing in a television studio across the road, discussing the building's bullet-resistant glass, not long before the siege began.

"My personal opinion, and a lot of people have said the same thing, is that it came down to a turf issue," he says of the decision not to deploy the tactical assault group. "You had a world-class counter-terrorism capability forty-five minutes away, and it wasn't used to resolve the incident — that's mind-blowing to me." He is quick to credit the police tactical operators who ultimately responded. "They did the best they could with what they had, and they saved a lot of lives," he says. "But they're not doing counterterrorism as their full-time job, the way we were."

LEARNING TO LIVE A DIFFERENT LIFE

Nick retired in 2014 after twenty-five years' service, seventeen of them in special forces. What followed, he says candidly, was two or three difficult years of feeling lost. "I'd spent my life doing what I did, and everybody knew me — that's Nick, he's the commando," he says. "Then you leave, and it's like you're cut off. You're fumbling around trying to work out who you are now."

Two things pulled him through. The first was writing — a memoir he was still working on at the time of his death, drawn partly from conversations with old friends about incidents and deployments he had never put into words before. He described the process as unexpectedly healing, forcing him to confront chapters involving the deaths of men he served with. A psychiatrist's question stayed with him: could he go back and change a single one of those deaths? He couldn't, of course — and the advice that followed reframed how he carried that grief.

"Mourn them when you need to mourn them, but you can't live in the past."

Nick took that literally: honouring the men he lost while remaining present for the ones still here, particularly through his continued involvement with the Commando Association.

The second was a genuine change of life. With his partner, Nick bought a bed and breakfast in rural France — a decision partly forced along by Brexit, he says — a handful of kilometres from the Western Front battlefields of the First World War and not far from sites from the Second. He ran it largely as a donation-based retreat for veterans and their families, up to six at a



time, with no expectation of profit. “I’m not there to make money out of it,” he says. “I’m there to give guys an opportunity to get away — sit in a tiny little village in France, and if they want to talk, we can talk. If not, put your boots up.”



Figure 4: Nick visiting the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge, Scotland after his retirement.
Source: Instagram

It was, in his own words, an attempt to give away something he was lucky enough to stumble into. “I want to live a different life,” he says. “I want to do something completely different, and I want other people who are in a similar boat to be able to do it too, without it costing them a fortune.” Between running the B&B, riding motorcycles with a circle of veteran friends from around the world, and finishing his book, he had settled into a version of the role he always seemed suited to — not out front any longer, but still, unmistakably, looking after his people.

A LIFE CUT SHORT

Nicholas David Nick died on 15 July 2023, aged fifty-one, while riding his motorcycle. Born in Melbourne on 26 March 1972, he was remembered by his family as a devoted husband, father, grandfather, son and brother, as well as a soldier. He was survived by his wife



Figure 5: Nick in his US Motorcycle club ‘The Infidels’ where he was an ‘Original Infidel’ and was known as ‘Sar Major’, ‘Hilly’, ‘Aussie Nick’.
Source Wikipedia

Cheryl, his three sons, two grandsons, his mother and his siblings.

The Australian Commando Association’s memorial rolls record his twenty-five-year Army career, his role in establishing Tactical Assault Group East and his Afghanistan service as company sergeant major of Bravo Commando Company Group. Its tribute also preserves the broader legacy that runs through Nick’s own interviews: helping 2 Commando Regiment develop a distinct trade model, passing hard-won knowledge to younger commandos, and helping veterans rediscover a life beyond service.



Figure 6: Warrant Officer Class Two Nick Hill, 2 Commando Regiment. Photograph published with the Hill family obituary, Dignity Memorial, 2023.

Editorial note: This profile is based principally on Nick Hill’s interviews with Adam Bloom (True Blue History), Damian Porter (Straight Talk – Mind and Muscle) and Matty Morris (Zero Limits Podcast). Quotations have been lightly edited for length and clarity. Operational numbers attributed to Nick Hill remain personal recollection unless separately identified as official records.

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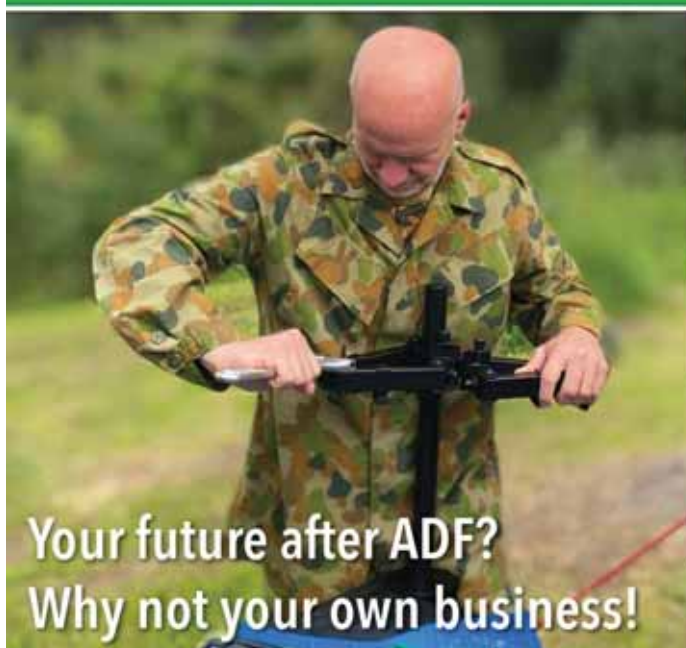
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BOOK REVIEW

OUTSIDE THE WIRE - ON THE FRONT LINE WITH THE SAS IN AUSTRALIA'S WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

by Andy White

From raw recruit to elite SASR operator, this is the gripping account of a soldier forged on the front line in Afghanistan—only to return home and face betrayal from the senior leaders he had trusted.

'I've had more than my share of close calls. Truth is, it's f*cking thrilling. But the fear can hit just as hard, especially when you see mates wounded or killed. Or civilians caught in the crossfire – people who had nothing to do with the fight but still paid the price.'

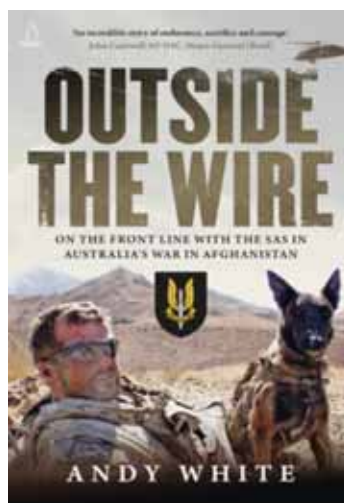
At the height of Australia's war in Afghanistan, Andy White spent two years in Tarin Kot with the Australian SAS, where the tempo was relentless and the stakes unforgiving. *Outside the Wire* brings readers inside that world with vivid accounts of combat, leadership, courage, mistakes and the dark humour that helped soldiers endure the pressure of daily operations.

White takes readers beyond the headlines and into the planning rooms, patrol bases and shifting battlefields where missions were shaped, adapted and executed alongside Uruzgan's warlords. He also examines how decisions made far from the front line—strategic, political and institutional—shaped the way the SASR, the 2nd Commando Regiment and the Special Operations Engineer Regiment fought Australia's longest war.

Part memoir, part battlefield account and part reckoning, *Outside the Wire* is a rare insider's view of SASR operations from one of Australia's most experienced soldiers.

Endorsements

'An incredible story of endurance, sacrifice and courage.' John Cantwell AO DSC, Major General (Retd)



'An expert, unflinching account of the SASR in Afghanistan, a powerful story that needed to be told.' Wayne Weeks CSM, former Regimental Sergeant Major, SASR

'Andy's book exudes a rare authenticity and a genuine cry from the heart to all those who the system has failed.' Nick Kaldas AO APM, Chair, Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

'A raw insight into the 21st-century warfighting experience of the Australian SASR.' Major Vando DSM, SASR SQN Commander (Retd)

'*Outside the Wire* is authentic, powerful, and needed.' Brigadier Dan Fortune DSC and Bar (SASR Retd)

'Far more than an engrossing read; it is a sophisticated demonstration of how tactical decisions made in the dust and chaos of operations can reverberate with strategic, national consequences.' Major Brett Sangster, 2CDO (Retd)

oOo





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Brisbane's "Special Street"

By "Noah Little" – a former unit member, with an interest in military history

The leafy inner southeastern suburbs of Melbourne were during World War 2, and indeed for many decades after, a centre of intelligence and Special Operations (SO). "Airlie" at 260 Domain Rd, South Yarra, for example, is well known as the one-time HQ of the British SOE-inspired Inter-Allied Services Department (ISD), which later became Special Operations Australia (SOA).

A little less well known is however the presence of those same agencies in Brisbane. In mid 1942 the (American-led) Allied GHQ SWPA (South West Pacific Area), under GEN Douglas MacArthur, moved from Melbourne to Brisbane to be closer to the SWPA areas of operation. Based in Brisbane were a multiplicity of American, Australian, British and Dutch military formations, as well as the SO/SI (Special Operations/Secret Intelligence) and other intelligence/security organisations from those Allied nations.

Remarkably, and even a little less well known, all the main such organisations were conveniently located in the Brisbane CBD, west-east¹ along a 700 m stretch of Queen St, in prime real estate in prestigious and modern buildings. The author, who recently had the chance to travel to Brisbane, took that opportunity to see what remained of those key locations. We could, perhaps call Queen St the "Street of Spies and Saboteurs" or, a little less colourfully, Brisbane's "Special Street."



Figure 1 - "Brisbane's "Special Street": 1 – SOA, 33 Queen St; 2 – AGS, 115 Queen St; 3 – AIB HQ & NEA, 171 Queen St; 4 – GHQ SWPA, 229 Queen St; 5 – NEFIS, 334-338 Queen St; 6 – SIA, 160 Bowen Terrace.

¹Actually southwest to northeast, but let's stick with west-east for simplicity's sake.

SOA

At the western extremity, SOA's Brisbane Directorate was located in the Bank of New South Wales building at 33 Queen St. As noted above, SOA was an essentially British-led organisation, and it was co-ordinated to varying degrees by the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB). AIB was led in succession by two Australian military officers but was directly subordinate to the (American) SWPA chief of intelligence ACS-G2 SWPA BRIG Charles Willoughby. For what SOA did, think, for example, the "commando-like" Operations JAYWICK and RIMAU, as well as SEMUT and AGAS with local guerrillas in British and Dutch Borneo.

Despite lurid suggestions on Google AI, this office was there principally for liaison with GHQ SWPA (for most of the time located only a little further down Queen St) and the local Dutch SO/SI staff, as well as administration for SOA officers passing through Brisbane.² Towards the end of the war, the office handled the movements of around 400 SOA members a month.



Figure 2 - The location of SOA's former office in the Bank of New South Wales Building. It is at the western end of the Queen St Mall.

This building which housed the one-time SOA office is remarkably well preserved and appears to be a cleaner and modern version of the war-time building.

²SOA HQ had a number of permutations, remaining in Melbourne and subsequently establishing Forward HQs in Hollandia and Morotai, both of which were in re-occupied Netherlands East Indies (NEI, now Indonesia).





Figure 3 - The letterhead never lies. "Services Reconnaissance Department" (SRD) was the cover name for SOA.

Allied Geographical Service (AGS)

AGS was not part of the AIB, but was similarly responsible to the SWPA intelligence chief, the (American) BRIG Willoughby. Its Brisbane office was at 115 Queen St, in the Brisbane Permanent Building. The AGS had been formed to address the critical lack of mapping and other imagery in the SWPA. By the end of the war AGS had produced 193,000 copies of around 270 handbooks, studies and special reports, drawing on secret, other official and all-source reporting.³



Figure 4 - A photo of 115 Queen St from 1934.⁴ AGS was located here during the war.



Figure 5 - The war-time look of the AGS's home is still recognisable today.

AIB HQ and NEA Section

Proceeding further east, at 171 Queen St in what was then "Heindorff House", was AIB HQ. When AIB established a Forward HQ in Hollandia and Morotai, a Rear HQ remained here. AIB "controlled" with increasing degrees of success the activities of the four organisations under its purview – SOA; (the British) Secret Intelligence Australia (SIA); the (Dutch) Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Section; and the (Australian) North Eastern Area (NEA) Section.

Also in this building was the HQ of the AIB's NEA Section (i.e. what the original RAN "Coastwatchers" had morphed into). NEA operated mainly in the Pacific Islands to our north and northeast, collecting intelligence ("coastwatching"), but also in the later stages of the war running a guerrilla army there.

Starting in mid 1942, American SO/SI operations into the Philippines were managed out of the AIB, but by September 1944, this function had been entirely moved over to the direct control of GHQ SWPA.

There's not much, if anything, to be seen of the original "Heindorff House" and to the untutored observer it appears just a glitzy-fronted complex of boutique stores and offices fronting into the Queen St Mall.



Figure 6 - Heindorff House in 1950. Its war-time look would have been similar.⁵



Figure 7 - Today, there's no hint of the deeds that took place in this old AIB HQ building during World War 2.

Ray Becker, a war-time RAAF member, in a 2004 post-war interview recounted his experience of turning up to Heindorff House to report for duty with the AIB "coastwatchers":

³B Foot and B Wojtkowski, *Preserving History: Digitisation of Allied Geographical Section, South-West Pacific Area, Terrain Study Collection*, Monash University Library 2013.

⁴Rueben RE Bowd, *A Basis for Victory: The Allied Geographical Section 1942-1946*, The Australian National University, 2005.

⁵JW East, *Queen Street, 1901-1941 A Catalogue of Buildings Erected in Brisbane's Main Thoroughfare from Federation to the Second World War*, https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/data/UQ_f9549cb/queen_street_1901-1941_history.pdf, accessed 7 Aug 2026



"So I went into Heindorff House, and I asked the lift man, I said, 'Is there any army, navy or air force here?' They don't give you any papers or anything. He said, 'I don't think so mate.' And I said, 'I was told to come here, I forget what floor but they told me to come here.' 'Hop in,' he said, 'I think it's the fourth.' So, he took me to fourth and knocked on the door and one of the WRANS came in and here is this naval officer standing at the desk and I went to salute him and he said, 'You don't salute in this unit.' I thought this is nice. He said, 'Sit down take a seat Mr Becker.' God help me".⁶



Figure 8 - This was the strange unit, with a lot of RAN types and apparently no saluting, that Ray Becker marched into, at Heindorff House, Queen St. The Supervising Intelligence Officer (SIO) was the title of the RAN officer heading NEA Section.

CO "M" Special Unit who was responsible for personnel and administrative matters for all AMF members in the AIB had his normal office in this building also.⁷

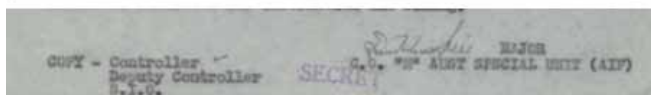
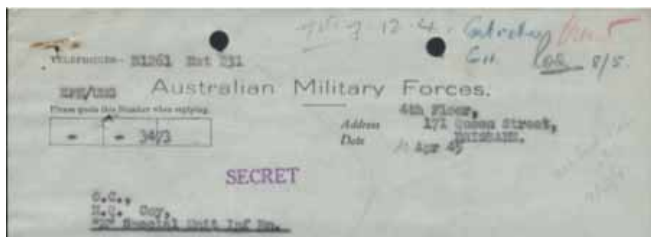


Figure 9 - Letterhead and signature block of an official memo re the raising of "M" Special Unit Battalion, from CO "M" Special Unit, with address 171 Queen St, Brisbane. (With copies to the Controller and Deputy Controller (of AIB) and to the SIO (of NEA Section of AIB.))

GHQ SWPA

Moving further east, at 229 Queen St (on the corner of Queen and Edward Sts) we have the AMP Building. In this building – which at the time was one of the largest and most modern edifices in the CBD – was established GHQ SWPA in mid 1942. A Rear HQ remained here when Forward HQs were later

established. GEN MacArthur's office was on the 8th Floor and is part of the modern-day "MacArthur Museum".

SWPA's chief of intelligence BRIG Willoughby who was responsible for AIB, plus all the other GHQ intelligence organisations in the SWPA theatre also had his office here.

By September 1944, American SO/SI operations into the Philippines were managed directly by GHQ SWPA, including from a Forward GHQ SWPA in the NEI and later the Philippines itself.

The building is well preserved in its outward original form and is clearly signposted as the former World War 2 HQ.



Figure 10 - GHQ SWPA at 229 Queen St retains its former glory. GEN MacArthur's old office is part of a museum on the 8th floor. It is at the eastern end of the Queen St Mall.



Figure 11 - A replica of MacArthur's desk. Note the state of the art phone, in-tray and radio. In the basement of this building however was a "Sigsaly" terminal enabling (genuine) state of the art secure voice communication with the only 11 other Sigsaly terminals world-wide.

⁶Australians at War Film Archive, Raymon Becker (Ray), 20 Jan 2004, <http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1353>, accessed 6 Aug 2026

⁷With the exception of SOA, whose AMF members were the responsibility of CO "Z" Special Unit.



NEI Section

At the eastern extremity of this stretch of Queen St, was the New Zealand Insurance Building at 334-338 Queen St. Here were housed staff of the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS), members of whose Branch III (SO/SI) formed the AIB's NEI Section.⁸ Even with the establishment of the Dutch civilian/military HQ at Camp Columbia in mid 1944, NEFIS continued to use the Queen St premises. NEFIS worked at various times with all the other component parts of the AIB, focussing on the NEI.



Figure 12 - A1909 photo of 334 Queen St⁹. The building would have looked essentially similar to this during the war.



Figure 13 - A modern glass, steel and concrete structure stands at 334 Queen St today and the backstory of the Dutch and the New Zealand Insurance Company building from World War 2 is essentially erased.

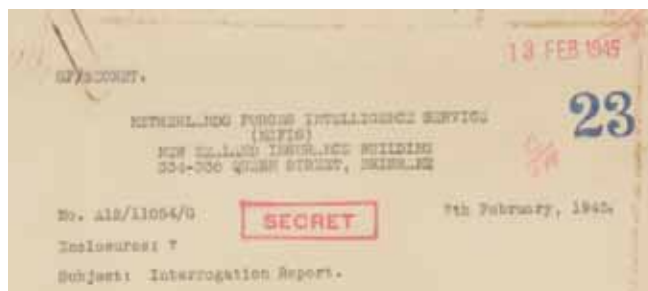


Figure 14 - The letterhead from the NEFIS office.

We could (and perhaps should) end the Queen St story here. To encompass the fourth and final component part of the AIB however, we'll stretch the story a little, for completeness sake, another 1 km to the east to Bowen Terrace in New Farm, a suburb adjacent to the CBD.

SIA

At 160 Bowen Terrace in New Farm, on the corner of Harcourt St, was "Craigroyston". During World War 2 this building rejoiced in the cover of being an "Officer Training School" but was actually the HQ of SIA, which was the Australia branch of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). Although it was generally co-ordinated by the AIB, it essentially worked to its own priorities, co-operating closely with NEFIS on intelligence collection in the NEI.

The site is elevated and overlooks to the west to the Brisbane River, the Story Bridge and where its wartime colleagues would have been in the CBD. To the casual observer's eye, the war-time site has disappeared and today it is a shadow of its former self, comprising what appears to be a post-war low-budget apartment complex. Part of what appears to be some original brickwork is visible on the Bowen Terrace frontage.



Figure 15 - One of the few photographs of "Craigroyston" from around its time during World War 2.¹⁰ Bowen Terrace at the top.

⁸See Camp Columbia, <https://campcolumbia.com.au/heritage-park-camp-columbia/buildings-and-facilities-during-the-dutch-period/>, accessed 7 Aug 2026, for details of the Dutch in Brisbane

⁹Old Brisbane Album, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10225-870148839012&set=pcb.4591280434251296>, accessed 7 Aug 2026

¹⁰"CRAIGROYSTON", 160 BOWEN TERRACE, BRISBANE, HQ FOR AIB'S SECTION B, SECRET INTELLIGENCE AUSTRALIA (SIA), Ozatwar, <https://ozatwar.com/ozatwar/craigroyston.htm>, accessed 7 Aug 2026





Figure 16 - Not much to see of the old "Craigroyston" today, taken from Bowen Terrace. The pale brick buildings are post-war, but the red brick wall at the front (facing onto Bowen Terrace) may be original.

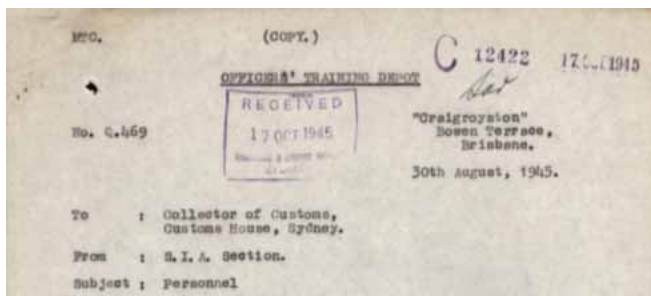


Figure 17 - A rare example of the letterhead from "Craigroyston"

The rest of Queensland

Since Queensland was that part of Australia which was closest to the SWPA area of operations and had reasonable existing infrastructure, it is no wonder that it became the centre of gravity for the Allied military/naval/air buildup – including the Australian Commandos, Allied SO/SI and organisations and other intelligence/security organisations. The greater Brisbane area, outside of the CBD, likewise had a wide variety of such outfits,¹¹ but none of those locations rivalled the concentration in downtown Brisbane's "Special Street".

¹¹These included – the Central Bureau (the SWPA sigint organisation) in Ascot; the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service (ATIS, which inter alia interrogated Japanese POWs) in Indooroopilly; the Far Eastern Liaison Office (FELO, the Australian military propaganda organisation) located in Indooroopilly; the AIB Staging Camp in Milton; and the Dutch military/civilian HQ at Camp Columbia in Wacol.

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Leo William Walsh

Leo passed away peacefully at home on 8 Aug 2026. A lot of older commandos would remember Leo as he was an instructor at PTS, cadre at 1 Commando Coy and long-term member of SASR and RAR

Leo's funeral was held on Thursday 20 August 2026 at Mt Thompson Crematorium, East Chapel, 329 Nursery Road, Holland Park at 11 a.m.

The service was streamed live for anyone who is unable to attend in person.

The Association wishes to thank Kim Dwyer, the wife of Leo Walsh, for the information and send our deepest sympathies to Kim, her family and Leo's veteran mates.

ARMY SERVICE

Service number: 214436

Category of service:

- Citizen Military Forces — 06 August 1960 to 20 December 1961
- Australian Regular Army — 21 December 1961 to 28 February 1980
- Army Reserve — 23 November 1982 to 16 June 2001
- Employment: Rifleman, Assistant Instructor, Assistant Administration
- Rank on discharge: Warrant Officer Class Two

Postings:

- 1 Battalion, Royal Queensland Regiment — 06 August 1960
- 2 Battalion, Royal New South Wales Regiment — 08 June 1961
- 1 Recruit Training Battalion — 21 December 1961
- Infantry Centre — 10 May 1962
- 2 Battalion, Royal Australia Regiment — 07 September 1962
- 1 Special Air Service Company, Royal Australia Regiment — 20 May 1964
- Special Air Service Regiment — 04 September 1964
- 1 Special Air Service Squadron — 10 February 1965
- Special Air Service Regiment — 24 August 1965
- 3 Special Air Service Squadron — 27 May 1966
- 6 Battalion, Royal Australia Regiment — 15 November 1966
- Jungle Training Centre — 16 May 1970
- 1 Commando Company — 17 July 1972
- 6 Battalion, Royal Australia Regiment — 24 March 1975
- Parachute Training School — 10 January 1977
- Un-Allotted List 1 Military District — 15 November 1979



- 1 Training Group — 23 November 1982
- Queensland University Regiment — 09 July 1988
- Headquarters 1 Military District — 03 May 1993
- Defence Centre – Brisbane — 02 March 1994
- Army History Unit — 12 May 1998

Operational Service/Deployment:

- Malaya — 28 May 1963 to 02 July 1963
- Borneo — 26 February 1965 to 05 August 1965
- Vietnam — 15 June 1966 to 14 June 1967
- Vietnam — 07 May 1969 to 16 May 1970
- Attachments: 2/14 Light Horse Regiment, Queensland Mounted Infantry — 12 September 2000 to Date not recorded

Honours and Awards:

- Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp 'VIETNAM' 'MALAYSIA' and 'THAI MALAY'
- General Service Medal 1962 with Clasp 'BORNEO'
- Vietnam Medal
- Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp 'SE ASIA'
- Defence Force Service Medal and First Clasp
- Reserve Force Medal
- National Medal
- Australian Defence Medal
- Pingat Jasa Malaysia
- Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
- Chief of Army Commendation
- Returned from Active Service Badge
- Infantry Combat Badge



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY service

Service number: R/49576

Category of service: Royal Australian Navy

- Date of enlistment: 19 June 1953
- Date of discharge: 24 April 1959
- Employment: Able Seaman
- Rank on discharge: Able Seaman

Postings:

- HMAS Cerberus — 19 June 1953
- HMAS Australia — 10 February 1954
- HMAS Kuttatubul to (HMAS Hawkesbury) — 02 June 1954
- HMAS Tobruk — 01 September 1955
- HMAS Watson — 04 January 1957
- HMAS Harman — 05 January 1957
- HMAS Penguin — 07 February 1957
- HMAS Watson — 14 February 1957

- HMAS Quadrant — 27 March 1957
- HMAS Voyager — 17 April 1957
- HMAS Watson — 18 April 1957
- HMAS Queensborough — 12 August 1957
- HMAS Watson — 09 January 1959
- HMAS Quickmatch — 11 February 1959
- HMAS Watson — 20 February 1959
- HMAS Quickmatch — 26 February 1959
- HMAS Watson — 28 February 1959
- Shore — 24 April 1959

Honours and Awards:

- Clasp 'MALAYA' to the Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75
- Naval General Service Medal 1962 with Clasp 'MALAYA'
- Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasps 'FESR' 'PNG'



COMMANDO WELFARE TRUST

Chairman's Update

11 June 2026

Support for the repurposing of surplus Defence sites as veteran housing

The Commando Welfare Trust unequivocally supports Mrs Gina Rinehart's proposal that surplus Defence sites earmarked for divestment be repurposed as housing for veterans.

As the main charity supporting SOCOMD soldiers, veterans and families on the east coast, we see this problem first hand.

Housing instability remains one of the most significant challenges facing the veteran community.

These sites are already built and already owned by government, which makes repurposing them a practical and low cost way to make a direct and lasting difference.

We believe this is the best solution available to get 6000 homeless veterans off our streets.

We are proud to be associated with an Australian who has done so much for

the veteran community and for the country more broadly.

Thank you, Mrs Rinehart, for bringing this proposal forward and for your continued commitment to the men and women who have served.



Moral injury: why it matters for veterans and families

Reprinted from Vet Affairs Vol 42 No. number 2 August 2026

When people think about the impacts of military service, they often think of physical injury or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, some experiences can also leave a different kind of wound, sometimes described as “moral injury” (MI).

MI can happen when a person is involved in, witnesses, or is affected by events that go deeply against their values and sense of what is right. For veterans, this may arise in combat, training, leadership situations, or other high-pressure environments. It can also affect families, who may continue to see the emotional and relationship impacts long after service has ended.

DVA's current working definition of MI is:

Moral Injury is a trauma-related syndrome affecting serving members, veterans and their families, caused by the physical, psychological, social and/or spiritual impact of grievous transgressions, violations, or betrayal of deeply held moral beliefs and/or ethical standards, that disrupt one's understanding of right and wrong, or sense of goodness of oneself, others or institutions.

A helpful way to understand moral injury is to start with what researchers call a “potentially morally injurious event”. In plain language, this is an experience that feels like a serious breach of a person's moral code. This may include doing something, or feeling unable to stop something from happening, that goes against deeply held personal beliefs. It can also include witnessing cruelty or injustice, or feeling betrayed by trusted leaders, peers, or institutions.

MI events or incidents are referred to as transgressions, and so someone can be a perpetrator, a witness, or a victim of transgressions. What often makes these experiences so distressing is that it is not only the event itself, but it's also the way it can affect a person's sense of self, trust in others, and view of the world.

The effects of moral injury can be wide-ranging, depending on the intensity and severity of the MI and the subsequent impacts on the person involved. A person may experience guilt, shame, anger, grief, disappointment, or a deep loss of trust in themselves, others, or institutions. Some people withdraw from relationships, struggle with self-worth, or feel that life has lost meaning and purpose.

A person may experience guilt, shame, anger, grief, disappointment, or a deep loss of trust in themselves, others, or institutions.

These types of experiences that shake our beliefs, identity, or sense of meaning can affect emotional wellbeing, connection with others, family life and day-to-day functioning. This is what we mean when we talk about the spiritual impact of MI. For some people, there may also be a religious impact, particularly if the experience has



Associate Professor
Jon Lane
Chief Psychiatrist
Department of Veterans'
Affairs

shaken their belief in God, or their faith construct, or understanding of self.

Moral injury can sit alongside PTSD, depression, anxiety, or grief, but it is not the same thing. PTSD is often linked to fear and danger, while moral injury is more closely related to guilt, shame, betrayal and loss of trust. A person may continue to think not only about what happened, but what it means about them, other people, or the institutions around them. This is important because support may need to focus not only on reducing distress, but also on rebuilding trust, connection, identity and a sense of purpose.

This is especially relevant for veterans and families of veterans. Military service can involve situations where loyalty, responsibility, safety and survival are in tension, and where there may be no easy choices. Some veterans

may carry distress related to actions they took, actions they could not prevent, or betrayals they experienced.

Families may notice withdrawal, anger, numbness, relationship strain, self-blame, or a loss of connection with community, faith, or identity. Understanding moral injury can help make sense of these reactions and support a more compassionate response at home and in services.

MI is not recognised as a formal disorder at this stage though. It has been recognised as something that impacts a person's mental health and functioning, and is described as a condition, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, or fibromyalgia. In other words, even though it isn't a formal diagnosis per se, it is absolutely recognised as an important target for intervention.

In fact, MI and its impacts were recognised by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, which recommended that *Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs should work collaboratively to develop an agreed approach to minimising the negative impacts of moral injury, including the risk of suicide and suicidality for serving and ex-serving members (Recommendation 78).*

DVA and Defence are working jointly to respond to this recommendation.

The positive message is that moral injury can be recognised and support is available through Open Arms for veterans and families of veterans, and especially through the chaplains working with both Open Arms and Defence.

Recovery may take time, but with the right care, people can rebuild trust, connection, self-respect, and meaning. Support may include chaplains, counsellors, psychologists and other trusted professionals. For veterans and families of veterans, having language to describe moral injury can be an important first step. It can help people feel understood, reduce isolation, and open the way to healing and recovery.





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Repeated Blast Exposure Appears to Increase Brain Aneurysms in U.S. Special Operations Forces

Reprinted courtesy of US Medicine and US SOF News

BOSTON — In U.S. Special Operations Forces personnel, greater repeated blast exposure is associated with a higher prevalence of intracranial aneurysms, according to a recent study. An intracranial aneurysm is a weak, bulging area in a blood vessel wall in the brain, often described as balloon-like. While many remain asymptomatic until discovered or ruptured, a burst aneurysm causes a life-threatening hemorrhage that requires immediate medical emergency care.

The retrospective study published in the journal *Radiology* determined the prevalence of structural brain MRI abnormalities in Special Operations Forces personnel and examined their association with cumulative blast exposure. This was quantified using the generalized blast exposure value.¹

U.S. Special Operations Forces, which include the Green Berets, 75th Ranger Regiment, Navy SEALs and the Marine Forces Special Operations Command, among others, are elite, highly trained military units

designed for covert, high-risk and time-sensitive missions beyond the capability of conventional forces. They also are a uniquely high-risk population for brain injury because of frequent exposure to both low- and high-level blasts during combat operations and tactical training. Unlike single-event traumatic brain injuries, these exposures are often repetitive, subclinical and cumulative, which raises concerns about potential long-term neurologic effects that conventional diagnostic criteria might not capture.

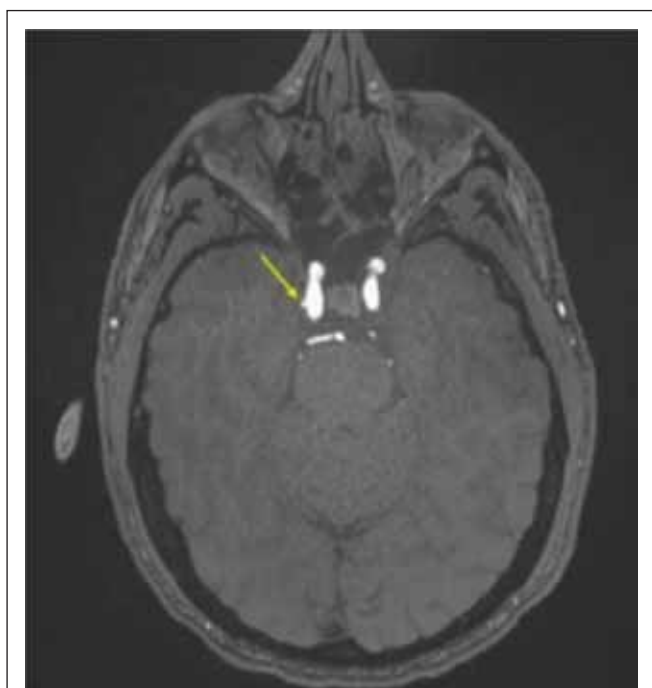
MRI is typically used to evaluate traumatic brain injuries, but interpreting structural brain abnormalities in military populations is challenging because of high prevalence of nonspecific lesions observed in both patients with traumatic brain injuries and non-injured controls. That can complicate efforts to distinguish injury-specific markers from incidental findings.

Structural abnormalities, including vascular lesions, are most prevalent in Special Operations Forces, and the study investigated whether any of these findings correlate with cumulative blast exposure as quantified by generalized blast exposure value. This information could improve clinical interpretation of routine MRI in blast-exposed military personnel and inform future screening strategies, the study authors suggested.

The study authors are affiliated with Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston; University of Genoa in Genoa, Italy; University of Regensburg Medical Center in Regensburg, Germany; Home Base Program, Massachusetts General Hospital in Charlestown, MA; and Home Base Program & Harvard Medical School in Boston.

"This study is the first to examine the relationship between cumulative blast exposure and structural brain MRI findings in a large group of U.S. Special Operations Forces," said lead author Sara De Giorgi, MD, radiologist and postdoctoral research fellow in neuroradiology at Massachusetts General Hospital, in a press release by the Radiological Society of North America. "We found that intracranial aneurysms were more common in individuals with higher blast exposure."

In the study, 564 Special Operations Forces personnel (mean age 43 years old, 563 total men) were evaluated in the Comprehensive Brain Health and Trauma Program. All participants underwent 3T brain MRI with time-of-flight MR angiography (MRA). Imaging findings were extracted from structured

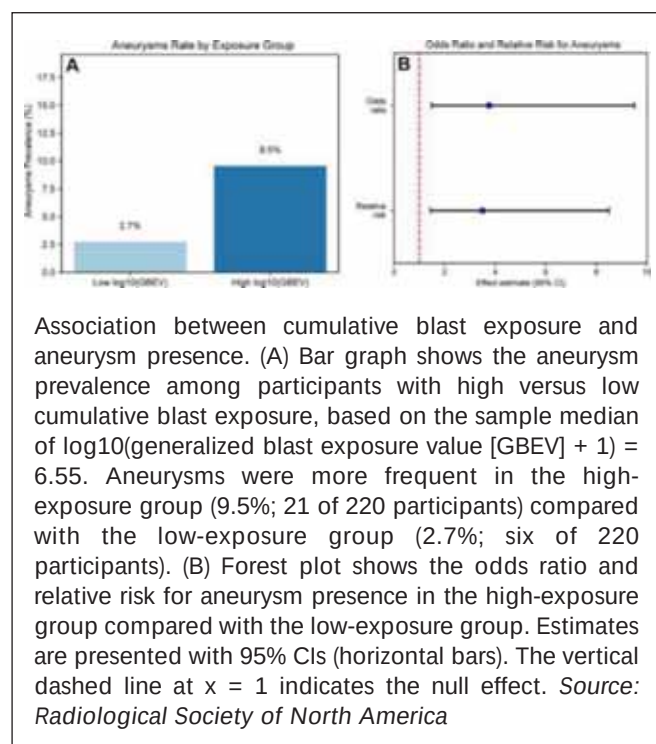


Representative axial time-of-flight MR angiography image in a 39-year-old male participant shows a laterally projecting intracranial aneurysm (arrow) originating from the right cavernous segment of the internal carotid artery. Source: Radiological Society of North America.

¹De Giorgi S, Diociai A, Khalid RN, Strotzer QD, Degn P, Rand KE, Gabali S, Hirschberg RE, Sorg SF, Lev MH, Gupta R. Brain MRI Analysis of Cumulative Blast Exposure and Intracranial Aneurysms in Special Operations Forces. *Radiology*. 2026 Apr;319(1):e252415. doi: 10.1148/radiol.252415. PMID: 41979463.



neuroradiology reports. Blast exposure was quantified using the generalized blast exposure value, a numerical score that measures the cumulative impact of repeatedIn the study, 564 Special Operations Forces personnel (mean age 43 years old, 563 total men) were evaluated in the Comprehensive Brain Health and Trauma Program. All participants underwent 3T brain MRI with time-of-flight MR angiography (MRA). Imaging findings were extracted from structured neuroradiology reports. Blast exposure was quantified using the generalized blast exposure value, a numerical score that measures the cumulative impact of repeated MRI abnormalities with cumulative blast exposure in a population where MRI findings are often nonspecific and challenging to interpret, the press release explained.



The study's most prevalent MRI finding was white matter hyperintensities (215 of 564 participants, 38.1%), followed by intracranial aneurysms (33 of 564 participants, 5.9%). Among all MRI findings, only intracranial aneurysms were associated with cumulative blast exposure. No association was observed for other structural abnormalities, including white matter hyperintensities, the investigators pointed out.

The researchers found that aneurysm prevalence was greater in the high-exposure group (21 of 220 participants, 9.5%) compared to the low-exposure group (6 of 220 participants, 2.7%), the press release reported.

"Intracranial aneurysms were three times more common in highly exposed personnel," De Giorgi said in the press release. "Even after accounting for other health factors such as age and blood pressure,

the association remained significant. These findings suggest that repeated blast exposure may leave a measurable vascular signature in the brain."

Special Operations Forces personnel have a vastly different injury pattern compared to civilian trauma. These servicemembers can face years of low-level blast exposure from shockwaves that pass through the brain with no external injury visible, which can leave lasting effects that are only now being detected with advanced imaging, De Giorgi explained.

The study's results suggested a possible long-term vascular effect of repeated low-level blast exposure during years of service, which can be observed with routine MRI scans. The authors recommended that screening MRAs may be warranted in this population of servicemembers.

In an editorial on subclinical repetitive head trauma, the editorial authors discussed the findings of this Radiology study on repeated blast exposure. They noted the study found that almost 40% of aneurysms originated from the cavernous segment of the internal carotid artery, which is unexpected, yet mechanistically plausible. The involvement of the cavernous internal carotid artery was theorized to be due to repetitive blast exposure contributing to focal vascular remodeling in segments under high strain.²

Typically, traumatic intracranial aneurysms are the result of a single impact injury, but this study's findings suggest that repetitive subclinical blast exposure may result in chronic cerebrovascular injury different from those observed in conventional trauma registries. The study provides a valuable addition to efforts to create normative data benchmarks for military personnel, according to the editorial writers.

Limitations of the study included lack of longitudinal follow-up of these aneurysms, which were mostly small, and the unexplored clinical implications of their extradural location. However, the editorial writers acknowledged this study adds immense value to understanding the changes in the cerebrovascular compliance in response to chronic repetitive blast exposure.

While the study adjusted for age, body mass index, systolic and diastolic blood pressure and total cholesterol, future analyses should include additional parameters such as modifiable lifestyle factors for aneurysm development (e.g., smoking, coffee consumption, sleep and physical activity), the editorial writers recommended.

²Maralani PJ, Pai V. Subclinical Repetitive Head Trauma: A Potential New Risk Factor for Brain Aneurysms. Radiology. 2026 Apr;319(1):e260599. doi: 10.1148/radiol.260599. PMID: 41979456.





RSL
Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

7 May 2026

For Immediate Release

RSL AUSTRALIA CALLS ON FEDERAL BUDGET TO FIX VETERAN HEALTHCARE INEQUALITY

The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL) is calling on the Federal Government to urgently address the growing disparity in veterans' specialist healthcare payments in the 2026–27 Federal Budget, warning that outdated Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) fee settings are causing wait times of up to nine months for specialist appointments and deterring practitioners from treating veterans.

RSL Australia National President, Peter Tinley AM, says the RSL's 2026–27 Pre-Budget Submission outlined practical, targeted measures to ensure the momentum generated by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide translates into real and lasting outcomes for veterans and their families.

"Fair access to healthcare is not too much to ask. Our veterans and their families have sacrificed much in the service of our nation. But many are putting off seeing a doctor or accessing other health services because of increasing out-of-pocket costs and bureaucratic red tape," Mr Tinley said.

Mr Tinley said the RSL has consistently warned that the growing barriers veterans and their families face in accessing timely healthcare, is exacerbated by a widening gap between inadequate DVA fees and the actual cost of services.

"This must be urgently addressed. The issue has been raised by the RSL on numerous occasions, including as one of five key policy asks presented to all parties and candidates contesting the most recent federal election and subsequently in our Pre-Budget submission.

"Despite some improvements in past Budgets, the current DVA fee schedule for medical services does not reflect contemporary healthcare costs and does not match that paid under the NDIS and other government programs.

"The widening gap between DVA fee payments and the actual cost of service provision is an increasing disincentive for healthcare providers to treat veterans. The issue is particularly problematic for psychiatrists and physiotherapists, many of whom have told us they are limiting their offerings to veterans because of the gap in DVA payments," Mr Tinley said.

Practitioners in psychiatry, psychology and physiotherapy have reported that DVA fees do not meet market rates. The Royal Commission made clear that the effectiveness of veterans' healthcare is limited by these outdated fees, with peak professional healthcare groups reporting that some practitioners have ceased or limited treatment of DVA patients.

Evidence from RSL members shows many veterans struggle to access necessary primary and specialist care, further exacerbating their health issues and burdening families. The barriers to veterans accessing healthcare are longstanding, having been identified in successive reports and inquiries including the Royal Commission.

"The situation is critical, with more clinicians predicted to cease treating DVA patients if funding does not increase. The barriers to obtaining services are particularly acute for the 45 per cent of veterans who live outside major metropolitan areas, intensifying the difficulty of accessing specialist care and services in rural and regional communities."

Mr Tinley said it was incumbent on the Government to address these disparities as a matter of high priority to improve health outcomes for veterans and their families.

"This is an unacceptable situation that demands an urgent uplift of the DVA fee schedule in the forthcoming Budget to at least align with the NDIS rate framework," Mr Tinley said.

The RSL's 2026–27 Pre-Budget Submission is available at www.rslaustalia.org/submissions



From Service to Small Business: Why Military Personnel Are Turning to Donuts

For many current and former Australian Defence Force personnel, the transition to civilian life — or even balancing service with a side venture — comes with one big question:

What's next?

For a growing number, the answer is coming from an unexpected place — a hot, fresh donut.

Australian-owned, multi-award-winning brand **OMG! Decadent Donuts** is gaining traction within the military community, offering a flexible, low-risk pathway into small business ownership — backed by a strong sense of purpose, community, and support.

A Business Opportunity Designed for Transition

To further support this pathway, OMG! Decadent Donuts has introduced a **\$5,000 Business Development Grant**, aimed at helping current and former military personnel take the leap into business ownership.

The grant is designed to reduce upfront costs and provide additional marketing and business support, making it easier to establish and grow a new venture.

With more than 80 independent business owners operating across Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, the model has already proven successful for people from a wide range of backgrounds — including those with military, police and emergency services experience.

"From when we started in Brisbane in 2018, our mission has been to make business ownership accessible for everyday Australians," says co-founder and Director Diane O'Reilly. "Our businesses are low cost, low risk and simple to run. The \$5000 grant is



one more way we're helping people take that first step towards independence — with full support behind them."

Whilst there are already about 80 independent business owners in regions across Australia, this still leaves about 100 opportunities with buy in costs for an OMG! Donut business starting at just over \$50,000, which is turn-key ready.

At first glance, a donut business might seem worlds apart from military life. But the alignment becomes clear when you look at the skills involved.

Military personnel are trained to:

- Operate under pressure
- Follow systems and processes
- Work independently and as part of a team
- Engage with diverse communities
- Demonstrate resilience, discipline and

adaptability

These are the same qualities that underpin a successful OMG! business.

Operating under a licensed model rather than a traditional franchise, OMG! gives owners the freedom to run their business their way — while still benefiting from structured systems and ongoing support.

For many in the military, that balance of structure and autonomy feels both familiar and refreshing.

A Business That Fits Around Life

One of the biggest challenges for those in service is finding a career or business that works around other commitments.

OMG! offers a flexible model that can be scaled up or down — making it suitable as a side venture or a full-time business.

Nic, together with her partner, runs an OMG! business in Townsville as a side-venture to her military



service and finds it provides both balance and creativity. Nic has served in the military for 30 years, currently at Lavarack Barracks.

"Our OMG! business gives me something completely different to focus on outside of barracks life," she says "It's fun, it's positive, and it's something our family has been able to build at our own pace."

Life After Service: Finding Balance, Purpose and Camaraderie

For those transitioning out of the military, the shift to civilian life can be significant.

Chris, who now runs an OMG! business in Coffs Harbour with his wife, says the business has provided something invaluable — time.

"After years in the military, I was looking for something that still challenged me but gave me more control over my time," he explains. "OMG! has given me that — I can earn a great income and still be present for my family."

Beyond flexibility, many owners highlight the sense of purpose the business provides.

"You're out in the community, meeting people, and seeing the impact you have — especially for those who can finally enjoy a treat," Chris says. "Let's face it — donuts just make people happy."

OMG! Decadent Donuts has built its reputation on inclusivity.

Every product is:

- Gluten-free and also free from the other most common allergens of dairy, wheat, yeast, nuts, eggs and sulphites
- Made from 100% natural ingredients with nothing artificial.

For customers who are often excluded from traditional treats — including those with coeliac disease, allergies, or dietary requirements based on faith or beliefs— this creates something more meaningful than a simple donut.

For business owners, it creates a sense of purpose.

You're not just selling donuts — you're creating moments of inclusion and joy.

One of the strongest parallels between military life and the OMG! network is the sense of camaraderie.

Business owners support each other, share ideas, and celebrate wins together. There is a strong mentorship culture, and importantly, a shared philosophy:



You're in business for yourself, but not by yourself.

For those used to working in tight-knit teams, this makes the transition into business ownership far less daunting.

A Legacy of Giving Back

There is also a deeper historical connection.

World Donut Day — celebrated on the first Friday of June —

was established by The Salvation Army to honour the "Donut Lassies" who served donuts to soldiers during World War I.



That legacy of service and support continues today, with many OMG! business owners actively engaging in community fundraising and local initiatives on World Donut Day and many other days. At times of natural disasters, you'll often find OMG! Donuts offering donuts to first line responders and their local community.

A New Path Forward

Whether still serving, transitioning, or retired, military personnel are increasingly seeking opportunities that offer:

- Flexibility
- Financial potential
- Work-life balance
- Ongoing purpose

OMG! Decadent Donuts delivers all of these — along with something unexpected:

Enjoyment.

As Nic puts it:

"At the end of the day, you're serving something that makes people smile. That's a pretty great feeling."

Applications Now Open

Applications for the **\$5,000 OMG! Business Development Grant** are now open and available for past and present members of military until **30 December 2027**.

For those ready to explore a new direction, the transition from military service to business ownership may not require starting from scratch.

Sometimes, it simply means applying existing skills in a new way.

And occasionally...**it comes with a dusting of sugar.**



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The Positive Relationship between Sport and Physical Activity and PTSD

Exercise has a positive clinical effect on depressive symptoms and may be as effective as psychological or pharmaceutical therapies for some individuals with PTSD.

Rosebaum *et al*, 2014 suggests Physical activity/exercise is a highly effective method in reducing symptoms of depression and for people experiencing other mental health disorders.

Evidence demonstrates that an appropriate exercise intervention can achieve significant benefits to symptoms, depression, anxiety and stress, changes in body shape and sedentary time associated with PTSD, and non-significant trends for sleep quality improvement according to Rosenbaum, 2013.

The associated symptoms and the improvements may be related to psychosocial benefits of the intervention, rather than functional capacity, but there is also a strong empirical (observational) link between improvements in functional capacity and psychological status according to the author, 2016.

People with PTSD are four times as likely to have type 2 diabetes (Lukaschek *et al*, 2013) and rates of overweight and obesity are as high as 92%.

To add to these statistics, sufferers of PTSD are shown to be less physically active due to a number of factors including pain, dysfunctional and general lack of desire or both, according Boscarino *et al*, 2004.

Adding some form of regular physical activity can have a significant effect on a sufferer of PTSD. It's important to note, the type of activity doesn't matter, what matters is that the person is moving and also having fun doing it.

If you would like to become physically active again and help to combat some of your PTSD related symptoms then please consult your GP and discuss your options for referral to another health care professional (exercise physiologist or physiotherapist) for help with your other associated or co-morbid conditions ie lower back pain, arthritis and or obesity.





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Leaving the ADF



At some point in their career, all ADF members will leave the military and transition to civilian life. It's a significant decision that can involve your family. Planning early will make sure you're informed and ready to enter the next phase of your life.

You must complete your transition with ADF Transition Support Services so you understand the process, your administrative requirements, and the support available to you. We encourage you to involve your family throughout your transition experience.

Transition support network

Transitioning to civilian life is a shared responsibility. When you decide to leave the ADF you should engage with your family, your Unit, and ADF Transition Support Services.

Your Unit can speak to you about the transition process and connect you with your local ADF Transition Centre. Your Centre will introduce you to a Transition Support Officer who will help you and your family through the transition process and:

- provide you with an individual transition plan
- offer career coaching during your transition and up to 12 months afterwards
- help you meet your administrative requirements
- help you leave with all documentation like service, medical, and training records
- facilitate connections to Defence and government support services

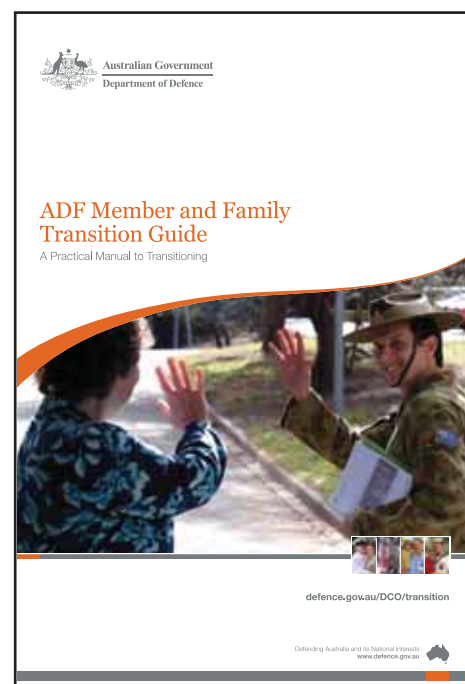
ADF Transition Seminar

You and your family can attend an ADF Transition Seminar at any time during your ADF career to help you prepare for your transition. Seminars are held

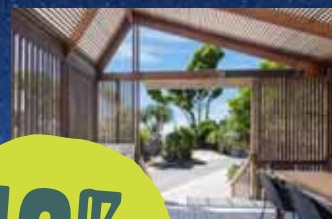
nationally throughout the year. You'll receive information from Defence and other organisations on topics like finance and superannuation, health, relocating, employment, and ex-service organisation support.

ADF Member and Family Transition Guide

The ADF Member and Family Transition Guide – A Practical Manual to Transitioning contains detailed information on the transition process for ADF members. The Guide includes information on support services and administrative requirements. It includes checklists to help you navigate transition process.



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#1 Thing ADF Candidates Do to Block Their Own Career Transition

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...When it comes to job interviews, Navy, Army and Air Force candidates just don't see shades of grey. Ask any of the thousands of Defence members I've coached over the years and you'll almost always get the same response.

The answer to one simple question is a major reason why military professionals struggle to transition quickly and effectively.

So here's the 64,000 dollar question...

'Do you have **EXPOSURE** to....(DESIRED SKILL)'?

When we hear that little gem of a question our military training kicks into gear. In fact, the preferred answer to this common question is:

'Oh no... **I couldn't claim to be an EXPERT** in that...I'd be lying.'

After so long collecting the Queen's coin and working in an environment where integrity is paramount...**we self-impose a rule** that we need to be considered a Subject Matter Expert before we can stake a claim to even having 'exposure'.

Civilians aren't normally burdened by any such impediment: You can almost picture the worst offenders sitting across from the interviewer explaining, *'I've got a friend who knows someone that can spell that word...so I've had some exposure.'* Sure, I'm exaggerating...but not by much if the latest research into resume fraud is to be believed.

So, we have two groups of candidates (military and civilian), each at different ends of the spectrum (black and white). The big question now is **'How do we get ADF folks to start seeing shades of gray and move them closer toward the other end of the spectrum whilst still holding true to their values.'**



Nuance is the key

The answer lies in our willingness to accept that it's okay to be 'less than an expert'...and that we do indeed have exposure to a great many skills that we can talk about in an honest fashion. It's simple. If you are an expert, then claim expertise. If you are not, then just claim whatever level of skill you possess. Here are a few suggestions for claiming different levels of capability:

- I do have an awareness of...
- I've had exposure to...
- I'm okay at...
- I'm good at...
- I'm very good at...
- I'm competent at...

Think about the reality of the situation. Even a soldier who graduated Kapooka yesterday has exposure to leading teams, since they can't graduate without being assessed as a supervisor even for a short period. So rather than say *'I'm not a supervisor'* that sailor could say *'I've had some exposure to supervising teams in a training environment for specific work activities.'*

Similarly, a Sergeant might be slow to claim expertise in human resources (perhaps due to an ADF understanding of what a civilian views as HR) but when prompted they typically agree that they have **exposure** to specific HR skillsets such as coaching, mentoring, training, counselling and leadership development.

At the end of the day saying that *'I've had some exposure to XYZ'* could be validated by the fact that you've seen it done, maybe assisted once, and can read the policy if needed.

Opportunity helps those that help themselves

If you want to give your Defence transition the best possible chance of success, then you need to start seeing shades of grey. 'Exposure' is your new best friend.

Stop being your own worst enemy. Never claim what you don't have, but always claim what you do have...to the degree that you have it!

David Penman is a Certified Professional Resume Writer, ex-Commando and one of Australia's leading ADF career transition experts. Call 1300 112 114 to enquire about NJN's ADF resume services.

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Defence Personnel Primed to Thrive In Franchising

Kerry Miles, Director, FranchiseED

While entering the world of franchising may not be top of mind for most Australian Defence Force personnel planning a transition to civilian life, it is a career path that presents many synergies and can play to your proven strengths.

The battleground of franchising requires strict adherence to systems and procedures, hard work, dedication, leadership and teamwork to achieve the shared mission of business success.

This makes those leaving the Australian Defence Force perfect candidates to conquer the challenge of franchising when returning to civilian life. The structure of a franchise system provides franchisees with the ability to work to set policies and procedures while at the same time allowing the independence to lead, inspire and develop their own teams to achieve shared goals.

These are all concepts very familiar to those who have train and served in the Australian Defence Force, and ones that make you suited to forging your own path to business success in franchising. Indeed, the transition from defence to the franchise sector can be a 'win win' situation for franchisors and franchisees alike.

Franchise businesses are actively seeking out high quality and committed candidates as franchisees, while you may be targeting a new autonomous career where you are calling the shots and putting your considerable skills to good use.

Where others may fail, those trained in the Australian Defence Force bring an appetite for hard work, a hunger for success, the proven ability to lead teams and the discipline to adhere to set systems to survive and thrive in the world of franchising.

Your life experiences and skills sets could be highly suited and transferrable to owning and operating your own franchise business, of which there are countless options to choose from. Everything from fitness franchises, food franchises, home improvement franchises and everything in between are available. It all depends on what you love doing and where you see yourself thriving.

There are over 1200 franchise systems operating in Australia, from the world's biggest consumer brands to local success stories and up-and-coming franchisors providing just about every product or service imaginable. Within these systems, there are nearly 100,000 franchise units in Australia, which are local and usually individually owned and operated businesses.

The opportunities are endless in franchising and whatever path is chosen, it is one in which the owner-operator is in charge and driving their own destiny, with the security of a set plan of attack and supporting systems for long-term sustainable success.

As former Australian Defence Force personnel are



comfortable with following systems and procedures in order to successfully complete a mission, you are therefore very well equipped to deal with the challenges of franchising and make a new owner-operator business work.

While having the right skills set, experience and attitude is a competitive advantage in franchising, they do not alone guarantee success. Just like in the Australian Defence Force, preparation is the key to setting the course for victory.

Knowledge is power and nowhere more so than in the world of franchising where new franchisees are taking the ultimate leap of faith into owning and operating their own business.

Thoroughly researching the sector, the options that are available and are best suited to each individual circumstance, and fully understanding and managing the financial and lifestyle expectations and demands, should be the starting point in any franchising journey. I cannot emphasise this point enough. While there are considerable opportunities in franchising, you need to work out which one is right for you and to ensure the franchise you choose is both ethical and sustainable.

While a franchise provides a set structure to follow, compared to buying an independent business, this in itself is no guarantee of success. Seeking out quality information and resources on franchising in order to make informed choices, and exploring the reality of being a franchisee, is the logical starting point for any former Australian Defence Force personnel considering their future career options.

If you are wanting to educate yourself about franchising, there's a lot of free information at www.franchise-ed.org.au.

If you are looking at buying a franchise and would like to understand how FranchiseED can help you, book a free 15-minute conversation with Kerry at <https://calendly.com/kerry-franchise-ed/meeting-with-kerry-miles-1>

About the Author:

Kerry is at the forefront of understanding what it takes to create thriving franchises with a comprehensive perspective encompassing both the franchisor and franchisee. Shifting from 5 years owning a business within the franchise sector, to more than 10 years heading up Griffith University's Franchise Centre as General and Business Manager Kerry's work is unique and driven by maintaining an independent perspective. Her clients include prospective franchisees, large and small franchise organisations and not-for-profits looking to scale up their operations. For more information visit www.franchise-ed.org.au. You can connect with her via LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/in/kerry-miles-franchiseed/





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Am I eligible?

The Heart Health Program is open to all ex-ADF service members with operational or peacekeeping service and those covered under the ADF firefighter scheme.

How do I register?

For more information, to register for a group program, or participate as an individual, contact the people at Corporate Health Management on **1300 246 262**, or visit **<https://www.veteranshearthealth.com.au>**

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