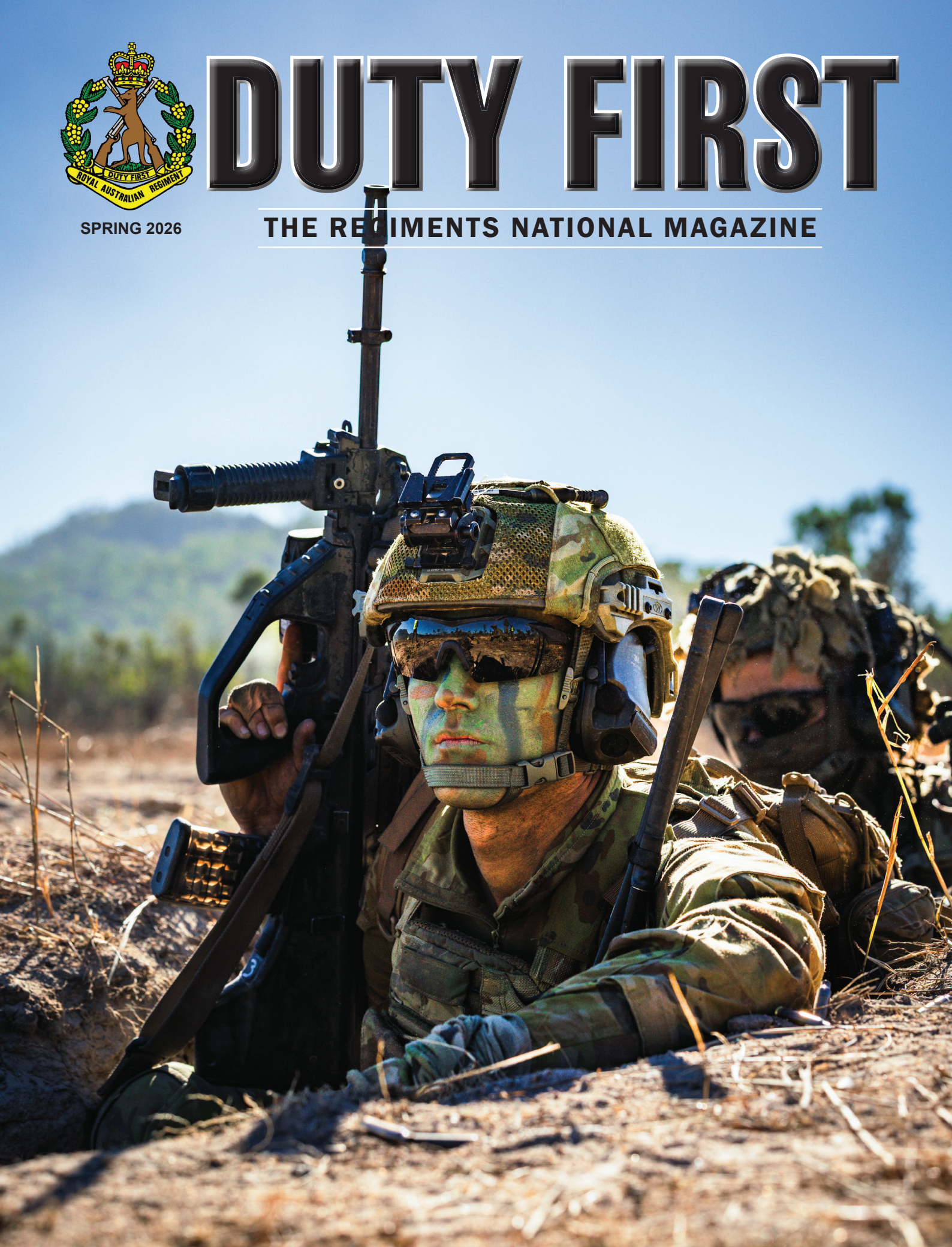
DUTY FIRST

SPRING 2026

THE REGIMENTS NATIONAL MAGAZINE



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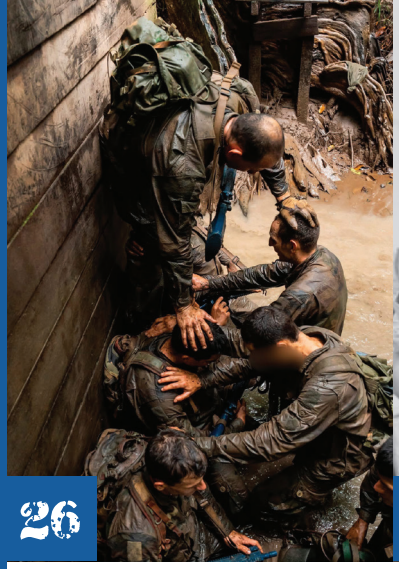
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Duty First MAGAZINE

SPRING 2026

NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE MILITARY COMMUNITY, VETERANS AND FAMILIES.

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Cover: Soldiers from the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment conduct a live-fire activity supported by soldiers from the 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment during Exercise Diamond Dagger 2026 at Shoalwater Bay Training Area, Queensland. *Defence image.*



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Editorial contributions are always welcome: Battalion news, reunion notices, history, opinions.

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FROM THE HEAD SHED



It is both a privilege and a profound honour to write my first message as Chairman of the Royal Australian Regiment Corporation.

I do so not only as someone who had the fortune to serve in our Regiment, but also as the son of a soldier who marched these ranks before me. Like so many families connected to The Royal Australian Regiment, ours has been shaped by a tradition of service that spans generations. That shared experience has reinforced my belief that the true soul of any institution is found not in its buildings, its history books, or its symbols, but in the stories of its people.

This is especially true of The Royal Australian Regiment.

Our Regiment's history is woven from the experiences of generations of Australians who answered the nation's call.

Recently, we have commemorated the stories of those who served in Korea. In the weeks ahead, we will reflect on the experience of those who fought in Vietnam, and later this year we will mark the 25th anniversary of Australian service in Afghanistan.

These are more than historical milestones. They are stories of courage in adversity, mateship under pressure, professionalism in action, and initiative in the face of uncertainty. They remind us of the values that have defined our Regiment throughout its history and continue to inspire those who serve today.

Every soldier has a story. Together, those stories form the living history of the Royal Australian Regiment.

As we approach the Commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Australian service in the Afghanistan War, I encourage all serving and former members of the Regiment to participate in these important events. Our soldiers, sailors and aviators served with dignity and resilience amidst the complex campaign fabric that was Afghanistan.

Significantly, many followed their duty by embarking on distinguished and dignified service to society in a variety of fields. Whether you attend a local service, reconnect with former comrades, support commemorative activities, or simply share your experiences with family and friends, your story matters. By telling our stories, we ensure that the soul of our Regiment is understood by future generations and remembered by our nation.

The Royal Australian Regiment Association has an important role in preserving these stories, supporting our members, and strengthening the enduring bonds that unite all who have worn the Regiment's badge. I look forward to working with our members across Australia as we continue to build an Association that honours our past while remaining relevant and responsive to the needs of today's and tomorrow's soldiers.

Indeed, during the next six months we will witness significant developments in the framework that supports the needs of our veterans. These include the 1st July 2026 implementation of the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Bill, the establishment of the Veteran and Family Wellbeing Taskforce Agency within the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and the formation of the independent National Peak Body to unify and coordinate the veteran support sector from the end of this year. It will be important for our Association to gather lived experience stories from members regarding these developments.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the outstanding leadership of Michael Von Berg during his tenure as Chairman of our Corporation. Michael has served with distinction and has been an unwavering and courageous advocate for the men and women of the Royal Australian Regiment. In particular, he has provided wise advice to the Department of Veterans' Affairs as an influential member of the Ex-Service Organisation Round Table meetings. He also pioneered the establishment of the Institute of Veterans' Advocacy. He leaves a wonderful legacy. On behalf of our members, I thank him for his commitment, his integrity, and his dedication to our Regimental family.

I am humbled by the opportunity to serve as your President and look forward to working together to ensure that the Royal Australian Regiment Corporation continues to uphold the proud traditions of our Regiment while supporting all who have served under its colours.

Stuart Smith AO, DSC
Chairman

FROM THE HEAD OF CORPS



It is my privilege to welcome you to another edition of Duty First. Once again, this publication captures the spirit of our Corps telling the story of our regiments, our soldiers, and our shared profession. It reflects who we are: a Corps grounded in history, defined by service, and focused firmly on the future. Across these pages you will see the strength of our Regiment stories of excellence from across the Royal Australian Regiment. These are the stories that reinforce our identity: professional soldiers committed to each other, to our mission, and to the nation we serve. But while Duty First rightly honours our past and recognises our people today, it must also help us look forward.

Shaping the Future – The Infantry Plan

Recently, the Chief of Army endorsed the Infantry Plan, an important milestone for the Corps. This is not simply another document. It is a clear articulation of how the Infantry must think, adapt, and prepare to ensure we remain relevant, credible, and ready for the challenges ahead. At its core, the Infantry Plan is about preparing the Corps for the reality of future war. It recognises that while the character of warfare is evolving—through the rapid advancement of technology, sensors, and autonomous systems, the nature of war remains unchanged. It is, and will remain, a violent and human contest of wills. For the Infantry, that truth is fundamental. No matter how advanced our tools become, it is still the infantry soldier who closes with the enemy, seizes ground, and holds it.

Relevance in a Changing Strategic Environment

The strategic environment confronting Australia is becoming more complex and more dangerous. The Indo-Pacific, our region is defined by geography that favours the Infantry: littoral zones, dense jungle, urban terrain, and dispersed island chains. These environments limit technology, constrain manoeuvre, and demand resilient, adaptable soldiers. The Infantry Plan sets out how we must respond. It demands that we evolve into a force that can operate dispersed yet connected; that can integrate technology without becoming dependent on it; and that can fight and win in conditions where uncertainty, isolation, and hardship are the norm. It reinforces that our Corps must be ready not at some point in the future, but now.

Continuity and Change

There is a powerful continuity that runs through the Infantry Plan. It recognises that while much is changing, the foundations of our profession endure. Field craft, physical robustness, discipline, and leadership will remain as important in 2030 as they have been in every conflict our Corps has fought. At the same time, we must embrace change. Modernisation is not optional, it is a professional obligation. The integration of drones, robotics, sensors, and advanced communications will change how we fight. Small teams will carry greater responsibility. Junior leaders will be required to make decisions in increasingly complex and contested environments. This is not a departure from who we are, it is an evolution of it.

Our People – The Enduring Advantage

Above all else, the Infantry Plan reinforces a simple truth: our people remain our greatest strength. Our soldiers are our asymmetric advantage, physically robust, mentally resilient, and capable of disciplined initiative in the most demanding circumstances. It is this human edge that will ensure our relevance into the future. Technology will enhance our capability, but it will never replace the judgement, courage, and determination of the Australian infantry soldier.

A Corps Ready for the Future

As you read this edition of Duty First, I encourage you to reflect on both where we have come from and where we are going. Our history demonstrates that the Royal Australian Infantry Corps has always adapted when required. From the jungles of the Pacific, to the mountains of Afghanistan, our soldiers have evolved to meet the demands of each generation of warfare. The Infantry Plan ensures we continue that tradition. It provides the intellectual foundation to guide our development, to shape our training, and to prepare our people for the challenges ahead. It is now up to all of us—leaders and soldiers alike—to bring it to life.

Conclusion

This edition of Duty First is a reminder that we are part of something enduring. We are custodians of a proud history, but more importantly, we are responsible for preparing the Corps for the future. The Infantry must remain ready to face the nation's adversaries, credible, capable, and confident in our ability to fight and win. That responsibility sits with each of us.

Duty First.

Brigadier David McCammon, DSM and Bar,
Head of Corps Infantry

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Our intent is for everyone who has served in the Battalion, no matter what era, job or corps, to have an association to call their own, catch up with their mates and to look out for each other.



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FROM THE COLONEL COMMANDANT



Congratulations to Head of Corps, Brigadier Dave McCammon AM, DSM and Bar on his appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the Military Division, in The King's Birthday 2026 Honours List, for exceptional performance of duties as Commander 3rd Brigade and Commander Australian Army Cadets.

Brigadier McCammon's career reflects sustained excellence in command, operational leadership, strategic influence, and enduring contributions to Army capability and youth development. His distinguished service is in keeping with the highest traditions of the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force..

The *National RAR System*

Through our *National Royal Australian Regiment* (*RAR*) *System*, we enable others to achieve their personal, professional and cultural potential through the combined efforts of serving members, veterans, families, community, and supporters of the RAR. The *National RAR System* combines hard work and service with interconnectedness, interdependencies, and integration by, with, and through leaders of the RAR National Memorial Walk, RAR National Association, Australian Army Infantry Museum, our thirteen RAR Battalion Associations (1 RAR, 2 RAR, 3 RAR, 4 RAR, 5 RAR, 6 RAR, 7 RAR, 8 RAR, 9 RAR National, 9 RAR (Queensland), 2/4 RAR, 5/7 RAR, and 8/9 RAR), the RAR Foundation, serving RAR soldiers and leaders in the School of Infantry, our six RAR battalions, 2nd Division and Special Forces infantry units, and the wider-Australian Defence Force (ADF). Our *RAR System* creates a ready, proactive, unified, supportive and collegiate team and teammates.

Visit to 6 RAR and 8/9 RAR: 26 June 2026

Many thanks to Commanding Officer (CO) 6 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel Emlyn Mordike, Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) 6 RAR, Warrant Officer Class 1 Des McCoy, CO 8/9 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew (Andy) Raven, and RSM 8/9 David Nicholas, for hosting my visit to their Battalions on Friday 26 June 2026.

Both 6 RAR and 8/9 RAR alternate as 7th Brigade's Ready Battalion Group, a high-readiness combined arms force, rapidly deployable for crisis response, and the Follow-on Battalion Group which provides the necessary operational depth, relieving or reinforcing the lead group to sustain momentum in prolonged or complex operations.

6 RAR's main effort is building its light infantry-enabled motorised capability, based on the Bushmaster Protected Mobility Vehicle (PMV-M) supported by skills in Tactical Air Land Operations (TALO) and small boat tactics. The CO, RSM and 6 RAR leadership teams are also focused, across the battalion, on leader development, weapon proficiency, and forthcoming deployments.

The CO, RSM and leadership teams of 8/9 RAR are also focused, across the battalion, on leader development and weapons proficiency, as well as uncrewed air system (UAS) employment, counter-UAS capabilities, forthcoming deployments, and long-range surveillance and strike.

Across 6 RAR and 8/9 RAR it is impressive to see both battalions well led, motivated, capable and ready. Both units are leading and achieving in the best spirits of *Duty First.*

Visit to 1 RAR, 2 RAR and 3 RAR: 24 July 2026

Many thanks to COs and RSMs of 1 RAR, 2 RAR, and 3 RAR for inviting me, and Head of Corps, Brigadier Dave McCammon, to attend the *King's Battalions' Combatives Tournament* in Townsville on Friday 24 July 2026. We are grateful to CO 2 RAR, LTCOL Luke Holloway and RSM 2 RAR, WO1 Charles Allan for hosting both me and Head of Corps at the event.

2 RAR led the inter-battalion *Combatives Tournament* at the Lavarack Barracks Area Gym. The tournament employed a dual-meet format with teams of combatants competing in individual matches, with the aim of crowning a champion battalion for 2026.

The combatants applied techniques employing the best aspects from the Australian Defence Forces approved combat sports of *Brazilian Jiu Jitsu*, *Judo*, and *Freestyle Wrestling* while applying the principles of the *Army Combatives Program* (ACP).

2 RAR are the *King's Battalions' Combatives Tournament* Champions for 2026.

The RAR Foundation

A reminder that your *RAR Foundation Charity* (*The Foundation*) has four, tax-deductible, Donor Categories:

1. Donor (any amount).
2. Life Governor ($500)

3. Benefactor ($1000)
4. National Benefactor ($20,000)

You can donate here: https://rarfoundation.org.au/

On 31 May 2025, the *RAR Foundation Board* approved *The Foundation Strategy 2025-29 – supporting those who support others: where no alternate assistance is available*. The goals and tasks of *The Foundation Strategy 2025-2029*, include:

- Enhance the value of *The Foundation* to our donors, stakeholders and partners.
- Adapt *The Foundation* initiatives to optimise benefits to RAR soldiers, leaders and their families.

Summarising the character of the RAR, *The Foundation Strategy 2025-2029* identifies the following five unique attributes of our Regiment:

1. When Australia asks, the RAR completes the task.
2. When Australia needs protection, the RAR places Duty First.
3. When Australia faces uncertainty, the RAR is decisive.
4. When Australia commits, the RAR steadfastly serves.
5. When Australia sees complexity, the RAR simplifies.

RAR anniversaries in May – August 2026:

Recognising the service of our soldiers and leaders, every year provides essential anniversaries, milestones and commemorations for our storied Royal Australian Regiment. The following are key anniversaries, milestones and commemorations, that have occurred, between May and August in the history of the RAR:

1. **75 years: US Presidential Citation (26 June 1951):** Awarded to **3 RAR** for their gallantry and determination at Kapyong, recognising their exceptional service.

2. **65 years**: **Rotation in Malaya:** 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (**1 RAR**) was replaced by 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (**2 RAR)** in Malaya in **1961**, with 2 RAR beginning their tour during the escalating "*Confrontation*" era against Indonesia.

3. **60 years**: 4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, **4 RAR operations in Borneo**, **April – August 1966**.

4. **60 years:** 8th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (**8 RAR) raised**, from **1 RAR**, **July 1966**.

5. **55 years: Battle of Long Khanh (06–07 June 1971)** fighting saw **3 RAR** attack a heavily fortified communist base camp in Long Khanh Province, while Centurion tanks providing close support crushed many bunkers and their occupants.

6. **20 years: May 2006, 3 RAR** led a composite ***Battle Group Faithful*** in **Timor Leste** which had descended into violence between Army and Police political factions fuelled by ethnic divisions and public discontent. **6 RAR assumed this task from 3 RAR and led Timor Leste Battle Group Rotation I (TLBG 1)(ANZAC) from 19 September 2006 until April 2007**.

7. **20 years**: **May – December 2006, 2 RAR led Overwatch Battle Group – West Rotation 1 (OBG-W - I)** in **southern Iraq**.

8. **15 years: 5 RAR (October 2010 – June 2011)** deployed to **Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan** as **Battle Group Headquarters and Combat Teams of Mentoring Task Force Two (MTF-2)**.

9. **15 years**: **2 RAR (June 2011 – February 2012),** deployed to **Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan as Battle Group Headquarters and Combat Teams of Mentoring Task Force Three (MTF-3)**.

10. **5 years**: **1 RAR** soldiers assisted in the **Afghanistan evacuation from Kabul** in **August 2021**, working with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to extract Australian nationals.

Thank you for your selflessness, service and support to the RAR.

Duty First,

Colonel Commandant, Royal Australian Regiment
Major General Chris Field DSC, AM, CSC (Retd)



DECORATED ARMY LEADER DAVE MCCAMMON AWARDED ORDER OF AUSTRALIA

Former 3rd Brigade Commander Brigadier Dave McCammon has been appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the King's Birthday Honours, recognising his distinguished military career and contribution to the wider community.

The former Commander of the 3rd Brigade was honoured for his service to the Australian Army, his leadership within the Townsville community and his current role as Commander of the Australian Army Cadets.

Brigadier McCammon served in the Army for more than 25 years, including leading Townsville-based 3rd Brigade from late 2022 until the end of 2024. During his tenure, he oversaw Australia's ready combat brigade while also strengthening the relationship between Defence and the North Queensland community.

Throughout his career, Brigadier McCammon deployed on operations to East Timor, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East, bringing significant operational experience to the role.

While commanding in Townsville, he placed strong emphasis on operational preparedness, supporting soldiers and maintaining close links with the local community.

Speaking to Evan Morgan of the *Townsville Bulletin*, Brigadier McCammon described Townsville as the nation's premier "Garrison City" and said commanding 3rd Brigade was "the best job in the army".

"There's no doubt about the relationship that exists between the services, the Army in particular, and the people of Townsville – it isn't matched anywhere else in the country," Brigadier McCammon told the *Townsville Bulletin*.

"When you serve up there, you feel that support in everything you do and the relationships are so powerful and so strong and you feel like the community's got your back.

"Equally, I think the community feels that Lavarack Barracks has got their back and a lot of that was built on decades before me.

"Townsville is an Army city," he said.

"I always believed building relationships between Defence and the Townsville community make both stronger."

Among the initiatives introduced during his time in North Queensland was the establishment of Run Army in Townsville, making the city only the second Australian location to host the event after Brisbane. The event supports veterans and first responders while encouraging health and resilience in the community.



"We turned on this amazing event that I think is now the largest running event in Townsville," Brigadier McCammon told the *Townsville Bulletin*.

He also worked closely with the North Queensland Toyota Cowboys to strengthen ties between Defence and the local sporting community. This included the development of Defence-themed jerseys recognising the heritage of 3rd Brigade and its "First Ashore" motto.

Under Brigadier McCammon's leadership, soldiers from Lavarack Barracks increased their involvement in commemorative ceremonies, charity initiatives and community engagement activities throughout the region.

His operational service included commanding Australia's first Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team in Afghanistan's Chora Valley, for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. He later served in Iraq as Commanding Officer of the 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, overseeing Australian training missions for Iraqi security forces.

Brigadier McCammon has also received international recognition for his service, including the United States Bronze Star and the US Army Commendation Medal.



Dave McCammon serving as Reviewing Officer for the 2026 ANZAC Memorial Service and Ceremonial Parade at Knox Grammar School this past weekend.

Now serving as Commander of the Australian Army Cadets, he oversees programs supporting more than 22,000 cadets and volunteers across Australia, with a continued focus on leadership and resilience.

Reflecting on the recognition, Brigadier McCammon told Evan Morgan of the *Townsville Bulletin* the award also acknowledged the people he had served alongside throughout his career.

“This recognition really belongs to the people I’ve had the privilege to serve with over many years,” he said.

“I’m named as the recipient. I think it’s a great acknowledgment of all the people that I’ve worked with and in the 3rd Brigade and its worthy recognition for Townsville as a whole.

“As I prepare to finish my time in the Army, I’m looking forward to continuing to give back to the community in new ways.”

Brigadier McCammon is expected to conclude his Army service later this year.



David McCammon, congratulates Townsville Army cadet Arabella Duncan after her promotion to the rank of Cadet Warrant Officer 2 following a unit linking parade at Lavarack Barracks, Townsville, September 2025. Defence images

CONGRATULATIONS TO BRIG DAVID MCCAMMON DSM AND BAR

Congratulations to David McCammon on his appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the recent King's Birthday Honours.

Since his time as Commanding Officer of the 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (7RAR), David has been a steadfast supporter of our Regimental Association. As Head of Corps and as a one-star Brigadier, he has led with distinction at every operational level of command within the Corps.

His leadership was particularly evident during 7RAR's deployment to Afghanistan. As recorded by Rhys Crawley, Australia's official historian for Afghanistan:

“Much of the OMLT’s success was due to the high standards expected by Major McCammon, who led by example, accepted risk to achieve the mission, and continually pushed and enabled his soldiers to do their best. The first OMLT was a subunit known then, and since, for its esprit de corps, aggressive infantry tactics, and deliberately seeking out and closing with the enemy.”

Most recently, as Commander of Cadets, David increased participation by 10 per cent in just 12 months. He also broadened opportunities for cadets through the introduction of The Duke of Edinburgh Award and by exposing them to the complex skills and technologies required to operate drones in a modern military environment.

David has been a pleasure to work with, and it has been rewarding to watch him develop through a wide range of appointments and postings. His exceptional service has previously been recognised through the award of two Distinguished Service Medals (DSM) for operational service. His appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia is fitting recognition of his outstanding contribution to the Corps, the Regiment, the Army, and the nation.

Sadly, David is now separating from the Army. While his departure will be a significant loss to the Service, it will be felt most keenly by the many officers and soldiers with whom he has served. We wish David, Annaliese, and their children every success, happiness, and fulfilment in the years ahead.

Duty First.

Mike von Berg MC OAM
President



Australian Government
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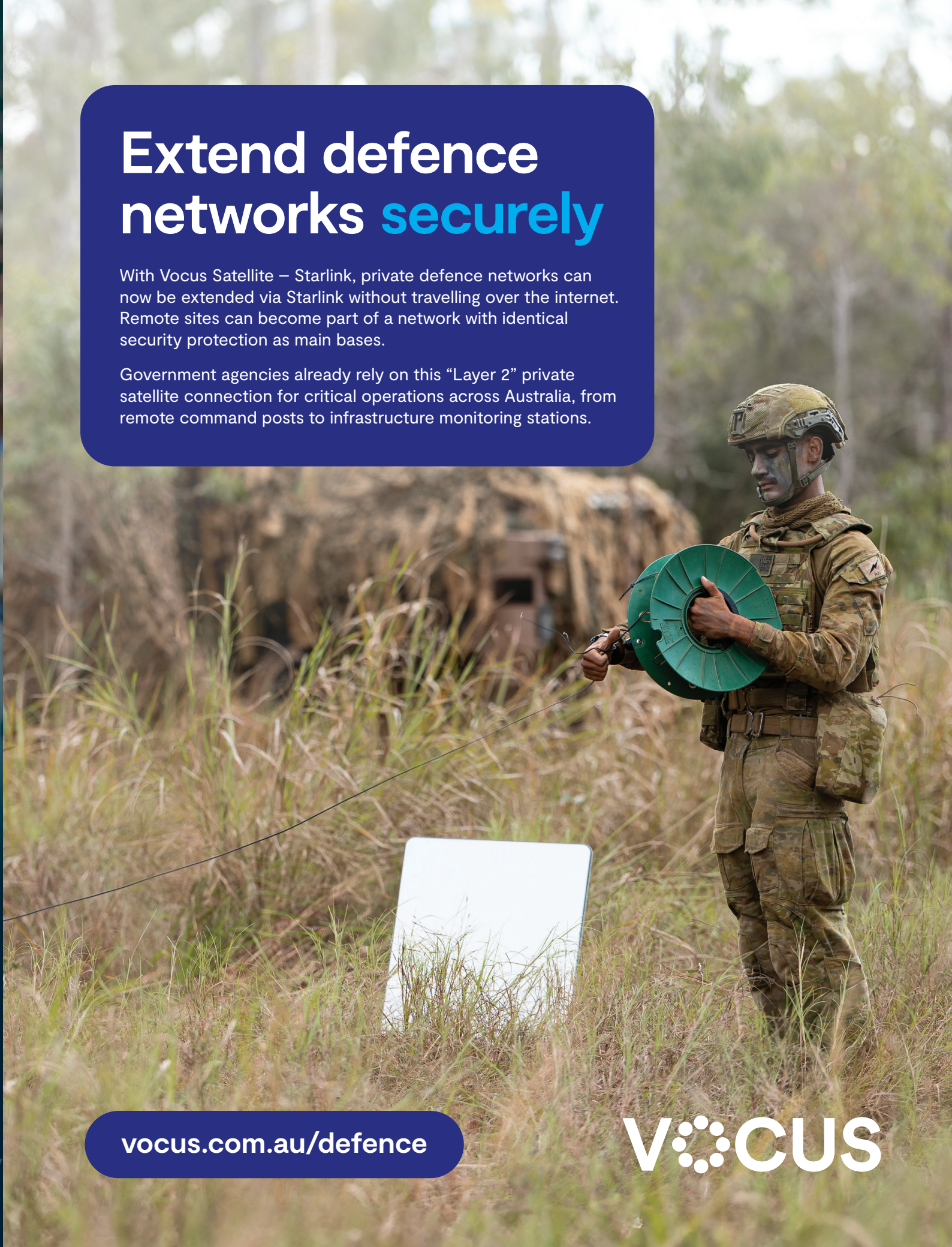
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5/7 RAR

On Drones: Tuning Tactics for Contemporary Tools

Major Nicholas Alexandrou
Officer Commanding A Company, 5/7 RAR

The Enduring Role of Infantry

The role of the Royal Australian Infantry is to seek out and close with the enemy, to kill or capture them, to seize and hold ground, and to repel attack, by day or night, regardless of season, weather, or terrain.

Since 1901, Australia's dismounted infantrymen have shared much the same wartime job description, with only minor variations. As most civilians know, the following characteristics have applied for more than a century:

1. Infantry walk around, carrying a rifle and other (heavy) equipment.
2. Infantry operations are dangerous; our enemies have formidable long-range weapons.
3. Military aircraft exist and threaten Infantry.

Our role is unchanged. Our tactics remain in a constant state of evolution.

Historically, Australian infantrymen are no strangers to aerial threats. Observation balloons, aeroplanes, helicopters, and drones have threatened infantry operations during a diverse array of wars across the world. Recent drone developments have seen old countermeasures revived and new ones pioneered.

Despite this, the pervasiveness and effectiveness of drones in contemporary conflicts has shocked many armies, including our own.

So what has changed?



Fought on 25 Oct 1415, the battle of Agincourt saw Henry V's outnumbered English army destroy a French mounted assault. This victory inspired the Shakespearian phrase 'Band of Brothers'.

Main image: Two sacrificial Jaeger uncrewed ground vehicles, each loaded with 50 kilograms of high explosives, are detonated during a simulated attack on an enemy position during Exercise Black Prince III at Cultana Training Area.

Opposite: A BG ANZAC soldier operates the Jaeger Uncrewed Ground Vehicle during Exercise Black Prince III at Cultana Training Area. Defence images



21st Century Agincourt

Across the world, armies are coming to terms with small attack drones. Professional combat officers lament the First Person View (FPV) attack drone just as knights lamented English longbowmen. Proud warriors in armour and helmets are, in 2026, flinging themselves away from their steeds because of a cheap and nasty ranged weapon. The 1415 slaughter of France's finest knights did not trigger the English Army to trade in cavalry capability for more longbows, rather, revision of tactics enables mounted assaults to this day. Romantic notions and any twinge of dishonour we may feel should be overridden for the same reason cavalrymen eventually acquiesced to a battlefield dominated by machine guns.

The unrelenting threat of death—once reserved largely for the trench-bound infantryman—now affects all soldiers. Understandably, non-infantry spurn the austere wartime conditions of the infantryman, but emergent drone capabilities are dragging everyone else down to our repugnant level. Increasingly, there is no sanctuary in the rear echelon, no safety in numbers, and no platform immune to persistent surveillance and attack. The maligned "pogue" no longer enjoys luxuries unburdened by death's spectre.

Send not to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Enough poetry. What about the tactics?

Old Fundamentals, New Tools

Drones equipped with thermal cameras are remarkably effective and have enhanced patrolling speed and thoroughness, but the fundamentals of dismounted patrolling remain unchanged. Developing standard operating procedures certainly requires modification of established processes, but we make a concerted effort to avoid reinventing the wheel. Duplicating effort wastes the only resource that can never be resupplied: time.

Concealing vehicles, command posts, and defensive positions has become a pressing challenge for armies across the world. By comparison, RAS-enabled infantry patrols remain relatively difficult to detect, exceptionally lethal, and less tempting a target for an enemy who would often rather expend exquisite munitions against tanks, artillery, or command nodes.

Where previous generations would segregate roles, the RAS-enabled infantry platoon streamlines the process known as the kill chain. Surveillance sensors can rapidly cue reconnaissance drones to positively identify the location and disposition of valuable targets. Faster than ever before, the lowest tactical echelon can neutralise those targets.

Building Army's Drone Combat System

Various exercises have demonstrated the effectiveness of this relatively new system. For the United States Army, Exercise COMBINED RESOLVE exposed significant vulnerabilities in conventional tactics. Less than 50 men, – a leadership team, four reconnaissance crews, two strike crews, an electronic warfare crew, and two bomber crews – a platoon-sized force effectively paralysed a U.S. Armoured Brigade, destroying more than 100 pieces of equipment in under 48 hours.

An essential step towards formalising and growing our nascent drone capability is qualification. Personnel from 5/7 RAR have trained on drone courses delivered by experts at the Land Combat College (LCC), who have pioneered a continuum of exportable courses. These courses produce qualified strike teams capable of tactically employing a range of offensive drones within the emerging Drone Combat System.

Army's challenge is to swiftly test, acquire, and proliferate robotics and autonomous systems so that we can build an effective Drone Combat System across the force.

Battlegroup ANZAC and Experimentation

The 1st Armoured Regiment (1 AR) serves as Army's combat experimentation unit and contends with that challenge daily. Alongside other units from the 1st Brigade, 5/7 RAR provided a contingent of officers and soldiers to 1 AR, forming Battlegroup ANZAC. This team's purpose is to test and train with emerging RAS capabilities.

The value of this approach is simple: soldiers get hands-on experience with new technology and know firsthand what works well and what requires further development. Their reports are essential for decision-makers seeking to terminate inadequate projects or provide funding for the acquisition and proliferation of cutting-edge equipment across Army.

During May, BG ANZAC tested numerous drones: some optimised for reconnaissance, others for attack, and some capable of performing multiple roles. We tested platforms able to bomb foes and resupply friends. While it would be imprudent to discuss the exact capabilities of each system, Alpha Company soldiers have seen enough to appreciate their potential contribution to future operations.

Our reports will, funding permitting, contribute to Army's acquisition of systems that could make Australian infantry extraordinarily potent against enemy High Pay-Off Targets.

BG ANZAC is currently deployed to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, United States. Attached to the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division, BG ANZAC is screening the advance of 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team. Responding to lessons emerging from exercises such as COMBINED RESOLVE, American formations continue adapting their tactics to account for the growing effectiveness of drone-enabled forces.

We look forward to the abundance of lessons that will undoubtedly emerge from our deployment to the NTC.

During August, we will redeploy to the Townsville Field Training Area to oppose the 1st (Australian) Division on



BG ANZAC soldiers flying a First Person View uncrewed aerial vehicle, at Cultana Training Area during Exercise Black Prince III.





A BG ANZAC soldier operates the Callisto 50 heavy-lift uncrewed aerial system carrying a load of ammunition, during a resupply drill, at Cultana Training Area during Exercise Black Prince III. Above right: A drone operated by a 5/7 RAR soldier, conducts low-level manoeuvres during the Modify & Operate Attack Drone (FPV) Course at Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria.

Exercise POZIÈRES RUN. This activity will provide one of the Australian Army's first opportunities to observe drone tactics employed at scale. More importantly, it will allow us to apply and refine the lessons drawn from this year's experimentation with the Drone Combat System.

The Tiger Battalion beyond 2027

When one considers our order of battle, the chart bears a striking resemblance to that of the Tiger Battalion of 1965, including its posted strength. While not quite a Pentropic battalion composed of regulars and national servicemen, today's Tiger Battalion is home to more than 700 light infantrymen optimised for wartime service within Australia's primary area of military interest.

Jungle warfare throughout the archipelagos to our north remains a daunting prospect. It is an environment that will almost certainly demand departures from many of the drone tactics currently being refined in the forests, fields, and urban sprawl of continental Europe.

Like our forebears, stealth, discipline, and aggressive patrolling remain essential fundamentals practised by our soldiers every day. Every available resource is directed towards degrading a vast, shrewd, and lethal adversary.

We are the privileged custodians of a proud tradition of jungle warfare, continually adapting to an evolving and capable threat within an increasingly complex strategic environment.

Like the Tiger Battalion that came before us, we are preparing for a future battlefield characterised by uncertainty and rapid technological change. Drones, robotics, and autonomous systems will undoubtedly shape



Private Michael Blokland, Alpha Company, 5/7 RAR operates a drone using First Person View goggles during the Modify & Operate Attack Drone Course at Puckapunyal Military Area, Vic.

how future battles are fought. Yet technology alone will never be decisive.

The fundamentals endure.

A soldier must still endure hardship. A patrol must still move unseen. Junior leaders must still make sound decisions under pressure. Infantry must still close with the enemy.

Our role remains unchanged.

Our responsibility is to master the technologies that will allow us to fulfil that role on tomorrow's battlefield.

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RE-ESTABLISHING AUSTRALIA'S PLACE ON THE WORLD STAGE:

THE ASA AT THE 2026 INTERNATIONAL SNIPER COMPETITION

If you ever want to see grown adults willingly sign up for a week of sleep deprivation, physical punishment, mental gymnastics, and ballistic heartbreak, head to Fort Benning for the 2027 International Sniper Competition (ISC).

The ISC is where the world's best gather to prove they can still function after three hours of sleep, two energy drinks, and a target array designed by someone who definitely needs a hug.

This year, Australia wasn't competing, but we were back in the mix. The Army Sniper Association – Australia Ltd (ASA) was invited to attend by our counterparts at the Army Sniper Association (USA), and the timing could not have been better.

Australia's ISC History: A capable past, an inconsistent presence

Australia has stepped onto the ISC stage four times in its 25-year history:

- 2011 – The 2nd Commando Regiment made our debut.
- 2016 – 1 RAR finished 25th, and 2 RAR finished 39th of 42.
- 2018 – 2 RAR returned and finished 15th of 30, a strong mid-field result.
- 2023 – A short-notice team from the School of Infantry finished 25th of 35.



Greg Robertson presents ASA (USA) Vice President Andrew Rindfleisch with an Australian Army Sniper Pair statue inscription with the words "Brothers of the Bolt"

These results tell a clear story: Australia's performance is not a reflection of our soldiers' skill, but of how rarely we test ourselves against our peers. When we don't compete, we don't benchmark — and when we don't benchmark, we don't improve. The ISC exposes strengths and weaknesses with a clarity no domestic training activity can match. It highlights gaps in training, tactics, and procedures, and it rewards nations that commit to showing up consistently.

If we avoid that environment, the only remaining place to validate our capability is on operations — and that is the worst possible time to discover a flaw. Regular attendance allows our snipers to continually assess our TTPs, compare ourselves to the world's best, and keep the capability moving forward.

A Capability Uplift Arrives - and the perfect time to test it

2026 marks a major step forward for the Australian Army sniper capability, with NIOA delivering the LAND 300 Lethality sniper systems. This is a generational uplift: new rifles, new optics, new ballistic performance, and new expectations.

Which raises an obvious question:

What better place to test our new equipment than alongside the world's best?

The ISC is the ultimate stress test. It reveals ergonomic issues, integration challenges, and performance characteristics that only emerge under fatigue, pressure, and competition. If Australia wants to field a world-class sniper system, benchmarking it internationally is not optional — it's essential.

Why the ASA went to Benning

The ASA travelled to Georgia with three clear objectives:

- Promote the ASA (Australia) and establish our presence internationally.
- Advocate for the Australian Army's return as a consistent competitor.
- Collect contemporary insights — from SOPs and TTPs to equipment



Above: CPL Paul Kovacs and CPL Justin Georgelin from the Army SOI compete at the 2023 ISC. Below: SGT Joseph Hollis, CPL Paul Kovacs and CPL Justin Georgelin from the Army SOI compete at the 2023 ISC.



trends and lessons from recent conflicts.

- Throughout the week, the ASA was invited to observe events, assist with stands, and speak during Knowledge Sharing Day. These weren't spectator privileges — they were signs that Australia still has a respected place in the global sniper community.

Inside the competition

The ISC is exactly what you'd expect from a competition designed by snipers, for snipers: long days, short nights, and no room for error. Events replicate the realities of modern conflict — rapid target transitions, complex communication drills, problem-solving under fatigue, and fieldcraft that demands discipline and precision.

What stands out most is the culture. Teams share lessons openly, compare approaches, and discuss capability development without ego. The competition is fierce, but the community is collaborative.

And the message to Australia was unmistakable: you belong here.

What we took home

Rebuilding international relationships

The visit strengthened ties with ASA (USA), the US Army Sniper School, and multiple partner nations — relationships that underpin future cooperation and capability development.

A clear appetite for Team Australia

Organisers and partner nations were clear: they want Australia back on the line. That sentiment was underscored by an invitation for Australian snipers to join US National Guard teams for pre-competition training in the lead-up to the 2027 event.

Contemporary lessons for today's soldiers

From equipment trends to training methodologies, the insights gathered will directly benefit Australian snipers preparing for the next decade.

A defined role for the ASA

The ASA is well positioned to manage the relationships, coordination, and continuity required to keep Australia engaged internationally.

Where we go from here

The path forward is clear: Australia must return to the ISC as a consistent, annual competitor.

Not for trophies. Not for prestige. But because professional mastery demands it. Because interoperability matters. Because capability must be tested, not assumed. And because the arrival of the LAND 300 Lethality systems gives us a rare opportunity to benchmark our new capability against the world.

The ASA has already submitted a formal proposal to the School of Infantry Sniper Team and the Army - International Engagements, offering to coordinate participation, secure corporate funding, and support team preparation.

From 2027 onward, the ASA stands ready to help establish Team Australia as a recurring competitor — not an occasional visitor.



CPL Ben Swancutt and CPL Matthew Hawker of 1RAR zero their rifles during the 2016 ISC. Credit Markeith Horace





L to R: CPL Justin Georgelin, SGT Joseph Hollis, CPL Paul Kovacs; Team Australia's photo for the 2023 ISC.

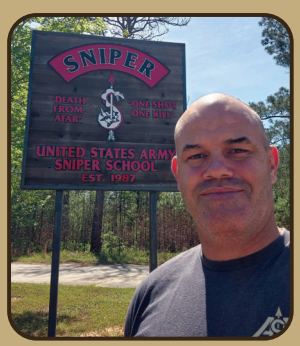
Left: CPL Ben Swancutt and CPL Matthew Hawker of 1RAR during the stalk phase of the 2016 ISC. Credit: Patrick A. Albright

A Call to Arms

Australia's sniper community is ready. The international community is ready. The ASA is ready. It's time for Australia to step back onto the world stage — not as observers, but as competitors.

Those who want to contribute can do so through:

- ASA Membership – sniper.org.au/membership
- Corporate sponsorship or Team Australia support – admin@sniper.org.au
- Engagement or discussion on the proposal – president@sniper.org.au



About the Author

Greg Robertson is a former Senior Sniper Instructor with the 2nd Commando Regiment and a Sniper Supervisor with the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. Over a 25-year military career, he served in key sniper leadership roles and completed multiple combat deployments to Afghanistan as a sniper with the Special Operations Task Group. He is the founder of the Army Sniper Association – Australia Ltd, where he continues to support the enhancement of the Australian Army's sniper capability and the psychosocial wellbeing of veteran Australian Army snipers.

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JAGUAR BREVET

INSIDE THE BRUTAL JAGUAR COURSE AN 1 RAR SOLDIER SURVIVED TO EARN COVETED AWARD

The platoon commander from 1RAR was one of 30 soldiers from 16 countries in French Guiana in March tackling the French Foreign Legion's elite Jaguar course – one of the toughest jungle warfare training programs in the world.

A total of 25 finished the course – but only 17 passed to receive the coveted Jaguar Brevet punched into the chest of the worthy recipient at the final parade by a three star general.

The eight week course is run by the French Foreign Legion to train French lieutenants and sergeants to lead soldiers in jungle environments.

When Lieutenant Campbell received his Jaguar Brevet on the parade ground in French Guiana in early April he became just the second ADF soldier to claim the award with Sergeant Matthew Reid receiving the honour in 2024.

At a loose end after graduating from high school, the lieutenant joined the army in 2021, graduated from Duntroon in 2024 and his first posting was to 1RAR last year – and he loves the army.

"I'm so happy that I made that decision to join because I love my job here," the Lieutenant said.

He had previously seen a social media video on the Jaguar course and thought it was 'cool' but still a foreign concept until he was tapped on the shoulder by his battalion CO to attempt the course himself.

To help prepare he picked the brains of Sergeant Reid.

"He was really helpful in providing me insights and some small tips and tricks. But largely I just did heaps of running, pack marching, body weight exercises, things that I knew were going to happen on the course. I also just started learning as many knots as I could."

Lt Campbell arrived in Cayenne, the French Guiana capital, in February having only learned a few words of French – as all instructions on the course are given in that language.

"The entire course is taught in French, and it's very unforgiving in its assessments. You'll be assessed the same as every other candidate," he said.

"I was very fortunate in that one of the French officers in my section spoke very good English. So he would often help me translate after the instruction was given, once our time for assessments had begun, that was very kind of him."

The first week was acclimation, the issue of kits and an introduction and then the next seven weeks were in the jungle with a series of increasingly complex exercises.



Lieutenant Campbell. Defence images

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE AGAINST NATURE



"The entire course is taught in French, and it's very unforgiving in its assessments. You'll be assessed the same as every other candidate,"

"The mud, during high tide, reaches your arm pits and you can't move. You're given 3 hours to complete the course"

"You become exceptionally well versed in your knots, your fire-making, and building shelters and sourcing water, to survive

Sergeant Matthew Reid

After the introduction the next phase was two weeks of aguerrissement, or war training and hardening.

“It’s during this phase that you are taught all of the basic survival skills individually, and you’ll then essentially continue to repeat them and be assessed upon your trainability in picking up those skills as the fatigue starts to build,” he said.

One of those initial tasks found the lieutenant up to his armpits in mud and wondering why he was there.

“You are essentially carrying a stretcher (in a team), which is made up of a small log with a really heavy log tied to the log and you carry the log through this 400m mud course.

“The mud, during high tide, reaches your arm pits and you can’t move. You’re given 3 hours to complete the course. We probably reached at most 300m which is common from what I’ve heard.”

During this phase he also had to search for his own food.

“You’re on limited rations for about four or so days and you’re hunting for animals as part of your training. That includes hunting for Caiman (crocodiles) at night on kayaks with a 12-caliber shotgun, and setting up fish traps and making fishing poles with limited resources.”

The next three weeks was the combat tactics phase.

“Towards the start, you are taught many of the skills individually, including many combat tactic skills, but also many foundational offensive tactic skills, but also they begin to expose you to different insertion platforms, such as boats and helicopters.”

The final two week of the course was putting all the skills learned so far into a ten day a two week full mission profile under significant fatigue

The lieutenant led his section in the final exercise, on the former prison island of St Joseph, part of the prison complex portrayed in the 1973 film Papillon.

“We conducted a seizure of the island clearing through this old prison fortification from the 1800s that was used for convicts, which was quite cool and very different,” Lt Campbell said.

“I was fortunate enough to have the amazing yet difficult experience of commanding a section on the culminating mission being the seizure of St Joseph Island by night.”

Having finished the gruelling eight weeks of training the participants returned to the capital – not knowing until just before the final parade if they had passed the course and would receive the Jaguar Brevet.

“In the 24 hours or so prior, you’re removed from the activity and you commence the refit of your kits, cleaning things and handing back stores.

“But throughout that period you face a lot of doubt, and there’s a lot of uncertainty because, especially as a non-French speaker, you spent eight weeks receiving neutral and negative feedback, most of which you don’t even understand. So, you have no idea how you’ve really performed.

“But the elation is all the more great at the end. You’re brought into the commander’s office just before the parade and you’re told you passed or you failed.

“Soon after you go into parade and it’s attended by three-star general who will then present some of the members that parade with their covered Jaguar Brevet in the method of punching it into your chest.”

The lieutenant said one of the highlights of the course was learning the survival skills.

“It’s something that I don’t think is appreciated enough in Australia, but that they take exceptional pride in and that they are very good at surviving in the jungle for extended periods of time with little to no equipment.

“You learn so many different types of flora that you can use for flotation, for drinking, for shelter, for fires, and for eating their fruit, and whether you can eat it raw.



Trainees complete an obstacle course Piste Jaguar during the French Foreign Legion's elite jungle warfare Jaguar Course in French Guinana.

“You become exceptionally well versed in your knots, your fire-making, and building shelters and sourcing water, which essentially allows you to go from nothing to continue to survive in the jungle.

“But also we gained great familiarity and exposure with different insertion platforms that we don’t often get exposed to here.”

Having proudly received his coveted Jaguar Brevet, Lt Campbell wants to impart his hard-won knowledge to soldiers under his command.

“I feel very confident in surviving and thriving in those environments. But I’m mostly just keen to try and impart some skills on my soldiers so that they can become the best jungle warriors and do everything they can to survive and get to the fight in best condition possible.”

Evan Morgan
Townsville Bulletin

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HONOURING THOSE WHO SERVED IN AFGHANISTAN 25 YEARS ON

On Sunday 11 October 2026, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) will deliver a national commemorative service at the Australian War Memorial to commemorate and honour all Australians who served in Afghanistan, the families who supported them and coalition allies they served alongside.

From 2001, more than 35,000 Australians served in Afghanistan and the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) in relation to Afghanistan. In response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, Australian forces contributed to a multinational attempt to bring security to Afghanistan, stabilise the wider region, and defeat terrorist activity.

For more than two decades, Australians have also contributed reconstruction efforts focused on creating safe conditions for democratic governance, mentoring and training, and humanitarian aid.

We remember the Australians who lost their lives during or as a result of their service and acknowledge the physical and mental impacts that service has had on many of our veterans and their families.

On 11 October, we invite veterans, families of veterans and community members to come together and attend the national commemorative service in Canberra. The service will be broadcast live on ABC iView for those unable to attend in person.

In preparation for this commemoration, DVA is looking to share the stories and experiences of veterans of the Afghanistan War and help appropriately acknowledge their service. Veterans interested in sharing their story are invited to contact the DVA Communications team at communications@dva.gov.au by Tuesday 8 September 2026.

Whether you're attending the national service in Canberra, watching at home, or taking part in local community commemorative activities, we encourage you to reflect on the service and sacrifices of Afghanistan veterans in a way that is personal to you.

A unique way you can share in the commemorative spirit is through a personal reflection to the Wall of Remembrance. The 'Wall' is an evolving, community-led tribute where all Australians can share a contemplation or memory of a loved one connected to the ADF. As the 25th anniversary of Australian service in Afghanistan approaches, we invite you to share a tribute, please visit: www.dva.gov.au/wall-of-remembrance

The RAR Corporation Representative on the consultative committee MAJGEN Stuart Smith AO, DSC (Retd) and the Royal Australian Regiment representative is BRIG David McCammon AM, DSM with bar.

For more information about the national commemorative service, including accessibility and transport options, and to register your attendance (for free), please visit www.dva.gov.au/Afghanistan-anniversary.



Mr Kahlil Fegan DSC, AM offered that,

"Our experience in Afghanistan had a profound impact on a generation of service personnel and their families and we will reflect on this experience for the rest of our lives. This commemoration gives us an opportunity to reflect on what we did, why we did it, and what we take forward from it today."

Mr Stuart Smith AO, DSC, offered that,

"This Service provides a unique opportunity to tell our Afghanistan story: one which personified quiet resilience, selfless courage and dignified humility. We should also acknowledge that, following dedicated service to nation, a great number of Afghanistan campaign veterans have gone on to make distinguished and meaningful contributions to society"

BRIG David McCammon AM, DSM and Bar, offered that,

"For many Australians who served, Afghanistan was a defining period of their lives. It was a complex campaign fought across two decades by successive generations of servicemen and women, each carrying the burden of service in a conflict that tested their professionalism, resilience and character"

Mr Chris Tilley, reflects on,

"A particular moment has stayed with me: While on patrol, we came across an older man in plain clothes sitting atop a mud-and-concrete tower. He had a long beard and an AK rifle and was watching the streets below from his elevated position. Not knowing whether he was friend or foe, I had my mate cover me as I climbed up to meet him. We shook hands, and he offered me tea. Sitting together, we watched the streets below. We couldn't communicate effectively with words, yet we shared a quiet moment of humanity, each of us keeping our rifles close at hand. After a short while, my patrol moved on. With his hand over his heart and a slight bow, he bade me farewell. To this day, I still don't know whether he was friend or enemy. Perhaps he was a Taliban lookout. Perhaps he was an Afghan police officer in plain clothes. I never found out. It was one of many encounters like that—brief moments of shared humanity in a brutal land, and a reminder of the ambiguity and complexity that defined service in Afghanistan."



AS9 HUNTSMAN:

Building Australia's Warfighting Edge



The Australian Army officially brought its first protected mobile fires battery into service during a recent parade at Lavarack Barracks, Townsville, marking the introduction of the AS9 Huntsman self-propelled howitzer capability to 3 Bde.

Soldiers from 106 Bty, 4 Regt RAA, recently completed Australia's inaugural AS9 operator training at the School of Artillery in Puckapunyal, Victoria, before returning to Townsville to form the new battery.

Cmdr 1 Div Maj-Gen Ash Collingburn said the parade marked one of the most significant advances in Army's artillery capability in generations.

"This is not simply about new equipment. It is about warfighting advantage and making our soldiers more lethal, more mobile and more survivable on the battlefield," Maj-Gen Collingburn said.

"Readiness comes from training, mastery and the confidence to employ our capabilities as part of the combined arms team."

The AS9 is a tracked 155mm self-propelled howitzer, supported by the AS10 armoured ammunition resupply vehicle.

The parade followed the delivery of six AS9s and one AS10 to 106 Bty.

CO of the regiment LTCOL Simon Frewin said bringing the capability into service was a significant milestone for 4 Regt and the soldiers of 106 Bty.

"I couldn't be prouder of the men and women of 106 Battery, who have worked incredibly hard to introduce this capability into service," LTCOL Frewin said.

"They are now ready to take the AS9 and AS10 into the field, build their collective proficiency and demonstrate what protected mobile fires can deliver for 3rd Brigade."

Several different armoured vehicles stand on a parade ground.

Armoured manoeuvre vehicles from 106 Bty, 4 Regt RAA, stand in parade formation during the parade at Lavarack Barracks.

The battery will now transition from individual qualification to collective training during Exercise Pozieres Run, where soldiers will begin integrating the capability into brigade operations.

Battery guide, 106 Bty, Sgt Dale Chivers said soldiers were eager to apply the skills developed during four months of training.

"The training was time well spent, and the soldiers are chomping at the bit to get these platforms into the field and put them through their paces. We can come into action in about 30 seconds, fire our missions and move quickly. That improves our survivability on the battlefield and allows us to keep pace with the brigade." SGT Chivers said.

Australia's protected mobile fires capability will comprise 30 AS9s and 15 AS10s. The regiment will continue developing the tactics, techniques and procedures needed to integrate the capability into brigade and divisional operations as it works towards full operational capability in 2028.

Capt Andrew Page

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OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

The nature of warfare is immutable – a brutal contest of wills. The character of warfare, however, is forever evolving, and we too must evolve or become obsolete. History is replete with military catastrophes where one force failed to embrace the evolving character of war. Our geostrategic environment is rapidly changing, and our Army has responded and adapted to meet this evolution. We are in a period of profound and unprecedented change for our interwar Army. Reorganisations, mergers, redefined roles, and adopting new and emerging technologies are just some changes in response to Army's contribution to the National Defence Strategy.

Few are unaffected by change. But with change, comes resistance. Resistance is a natural reaction to change, but it can have dire consequences if resistance remains unchecked. Due to the Army's rigid hierarchical structures and summary consequences, apparent successful change is often artificial, creating a false consensus that recipients are fully entrenched in the change. But, if you dive beneath the waves, you may find deep resentment, social discord, or even cynicism thwarting absolute change. Consequently, we must understand resistance and promote methods to navigate, cultivate and overcome resistance to change.

Why do we resist change?

Resistance is a natural phenomenon and reaction to change. Generally speaking, resistance occurs because it threatens the way people make sense of their environment, calling into question their values and rationality (Sottolano, 2000). Or, it threatens the status quo, or increases fear and anxiety of real or imagined consequences (Hannan & Freeman, 1984; Morris & Raben, 1995). More commonly, resistance may take form due to distrust or resentment to those leading change, or when they have a different understanding or assessment of the situation (Coghlan, 1997; Morris & Raben, 1995).



Failure to clearly define the problem and strategic purpose behind a change initiative may incite resistance. Whatever the cause or motivation, it is important to understand that those resisting change believe that they are resisting for the right reasons, not necessarily because they have an aversion towards authority. It is through this lens that change recipients create a second-order reality that is aloof from the change initiative and first order reality (Levy, 1986).

Background conversations

Jeffrey Ford et al. (2002) propose that resistance is not found 'in the individual' but in the co-constructed reality in which individuals operate and is enacted through social interactions. Within this view, participants cannot know any 'true' reality independent of themselves, meaning that 'different people in different positions at different moments live in different realities' (Shotter, 1993, p. 17). Simply put, our background conversations and interactions co-construct an independent reality built upon to form

a different reality with every new interaction.

In co-constructed realities, the more conversations that support, are attached to, or are in some way associated with a particular conversation, the more 'pull' there is to keep that conversation in place and the more apparent support there is for that conversation (Ford et al., 2002). Much of what people know about their world comes from conversations passed on by others, rather than from direct experience (Ford et al., 2002). When individuals have experienced change – either directly or vicariously through conversations – they bring these stories or experiences from the past into the present change initiative.



Effectively, it is the past being made the present. And, when you combine these factors into background conversations, we unconsciously objectify them to make these stories as real as the furniture in the office.

Consequently, change recipients believe resistance is necessary to promote their view and have a voice against the change initiative that, in their reality, is flawed or not in the best interests of the team or organisation. With a grounding on how resistance manifests and pervades our conversations to generate a socially constructed reality, we can explore some practical ways to overcome this natural phenomenon.

How to Overcome Resistance to Change

Dialogic v Monologic Communication

Change leaders must not underestimate the power and influence of their dialogue when communicating change. Monologic, or Cartesian style of communication, is based on a singular treatment that pushes for a dominant view of how change should proceed (Jabri & Jabri, 2022). And, whilst we consider our organisation a unidirectional institution that communicates top-down, this approach fails to engender buy-in as change recipients may not appreciate the strategic purpose for change.

On the contrary, dialogic, or relational communication, creates multiple channels to allow change to include varying viewpoints, as it relies on rolling out multiple sources of narratives and experiences (Jabri & Jabri, 2022). Dialogism influences buy-in, as it creates a sense of purpose for recipients who are included in the problem and ultimate change. Additionally, dialogism is less likely to face resistance when compared to a monologic communicator who failed to solicit buy-in on the premise that their view is absolute.

Importantly, change recipients will respond more to the way a change leader communicates change, not to the change initiative itself. When communicating change, change leaders subconsciously co-construct a recipient's reality by infecting and reinfecting with every new interaction. As such, how you communicate (recursive – glass half-empty vice versa discursive – glass half-full) will largely influence the voice narrative and the attitude towards the change initiative. Therefore, change leaders often influence the socially constructed reality more than the change recipients do.

Stop Blaming Resistance and Engage it

Stop blaming resistance. Rather, engage it as a valuable resource to drive change. Leaders should never presume resistance is a unilateral phenomenon that is only happening 'over there, in those resisting', and that change would succeed if not for the irrational and self-serving actions of those blocking or deflecting the change.

This simple conviction fails to acknowledge what is a two-sided story and obviates it as a possible contribution to defining and implementing a proposed change (Ford 2010). All stakeholders are invariably a cog in the wheel, and we must engage resistance rather than disparage it.

When you engage resistance, you bring assumptions, decisions, and conclusions to the forefront for examination and you open up deeper,



Australian Army soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment compete in the 3rd Brigade tug of war competition at Lavarack Barracks on 18 November 2021. Defence images

more meaningful dialogue that may not otherwise be available (Ford & Ford, 2010). Engaging resistance through dialogism opens possibilities for all stakeholders to confirm the strategic objectives, and the purpose behind the change and even refine the change plan.

Often, this can be a more powerful tool than say, change recipients apathetically getting on with the job. A Cartesian approach will always be resident in the military, but we must be judicious and engage resistance when faced with attitudinal and cultural resistance. Resistance is feedback, and failure to engage resistance robs change leaders of a powerful lever to improve upon and implement the change initiative.

Close the past

Background conversations bring history and the background into the present utterance by responding to, reaccentuating, and reworking past conversations while anticipating and shaping subsequent ones (Ford et al., 2002). These conversations are often fuelled and kept alive by former change that was poorly messaged, led, and executed. Change recipients hyper-focus on stories of past failures, which slowly work themselves into background discussions on the present change initiative until they are objectified within their socially constructed reality.

These backgrounds are constituted by past responses to success and failure, and it can be said that the incomplete past has defined the future (Ford et al., 2002). Until the past is closed, recipients cannot envisage a future where the change initiative is positive or attainable.

Ford and Ford (1995) state that conversations for closure give recipients an opportunity to be acknowledged for what they have done and not done, to recognise the expectations that have and have not been fulfilled, and to discover and express their commitments for the future. By engaging in open dialogue and examining past failures and unpleasant experiences – including those during the current initiative – you allow recipients to air their grievances.

Doing so explores why a change initiative went wrong, and what actions could have removed barriers and enhanced that experience. Consequently, you inadvertently identify potential pitfalls, unforeseen barriers, and a viable pathway forward. Accordingly, equilibrium is restored and together you co-construct a new second-order reality while maintaining the first-order reality – that is, the change is happening, but the implications of the change are viewed differently (Hannan & Freeman, 1984). The new background contains possibilities, opportunities, and problems that differ from those that existed before the conversation for closure and that provide new openings for future change.

Final thought

Resistance to change is inevitable. How a leader or organisation deals with resistance will define the degree of success or failure. In the military, leaders should never assume a change initiative is being received without cultural discord or attitudinal resentment. Change leaders must actively listen to the background conversations that are shaping and reshaping the change narrative, and with that, the socially constructed reality that is often far removed from the factual reality.

To reduce the depth of resistance, leaders are urged to deliver the change initiative in a dialogic, relational mode that communicates the strategic purposes and engenders buy-in by making recipients part of the problem and solution. Do not blame resistance; rather, engage it as a valuable source of feedback to identify potential pitfalls or unforeseen barriers.

And, finally, close the past to empower participants to recognise new possibilities and opportunities. By implementing these practical methods, your change experience will be less encumbered with turbulence, apprehension, and resistance; resulting in a team and unit with an improved culture, and one that is agile and receptive to future change.

***David Nicholas** is currently appointed as Regimental Sergeant Major of the 31st/42nd Battalion, The Royal Queensland Regiment in Townsville. Previous postings include all three Royal Australian Regiment battalions in the 3rd Brigade, the Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Moore, Georgia, United States; and he has instructed at the 1st Recruit Training Battalion and Warrant Officer and Non-Commissioned Officer Academy.*

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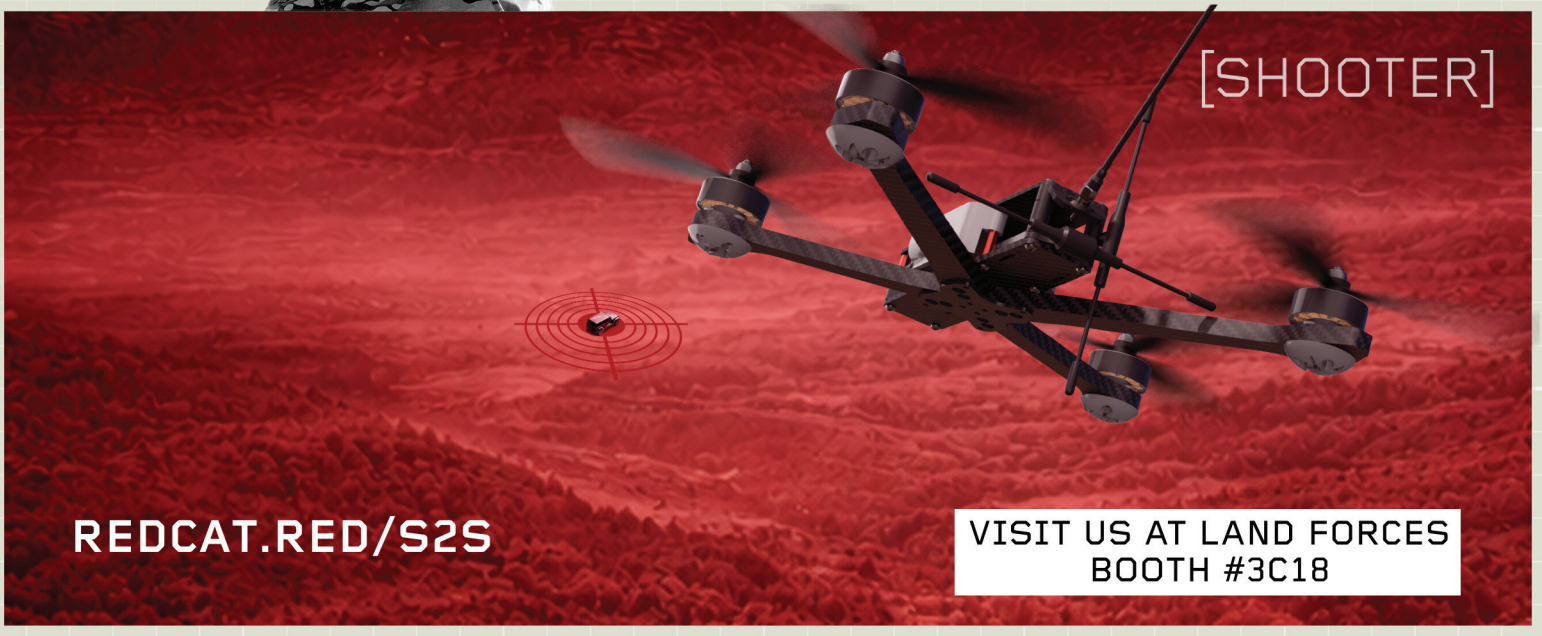




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Australia's last Kokoda veteran Reginald James Chard dies aged 102

In 1942, 18-year-old Reg Chard left his job as an apprentice baker and enlisted in the Army.

"We had 2½ months' training, mostly marching. My feet were as flat as the back verandah but they put me in the infantry. We would march for days on end and then soak our feet in Condy's crystals. My feet became as hard as nails and I never had a problem with them. That's one good thing the Army did for me."

"To see if we were fit for service, they had us walk the 50 miles from Greta to Lemon Tree Passage and back again with just one bottle of water. A doctor rode beside us. He deemed us all fit for overseas' service and that night we took a train from Greta to Roma Street in Brisbane. The next night we travelled from Brisbane to Townsville."

"They kitted us out with a pair of boots, pair of socks, pair of khaki shorts, khaki shirt, gators, tin hat, felt hat, rifle, bayonet, 200 rounds of ammunition, 24 hand grenades, pen knife, tin of wax Vesta matches, and two bandages. The bandages were too small for anything bigger than a cigarette burn. That's what we went away with."



"We boarded a ship in Townsville. We weren't told where we were going. Two songs played on the ship's radio as we sailed towards the open seas, 'Red Sails in the Sunset' and 'Harbour Lights'. This was the last music we heard for a long time."

The ship was headed for Port Moresby. "We were given three days to acclimatise to the unbearable heat and from then on we slept on the ground with no tents and no beds."

From there Reg was sent to help build an airstrip at Milne Bay in south-east New Guinea. The Australians worked alongside the Americans knocking down coconut trees and laying down 45-gallon petrol drums and steel mesh to reinforce the ground.

While Reg was working on the airstrip, the Japanese sent over a Zero fighter. It fired its machine guns and killed a few people, but the main purpose was to count how many men were at Milne Bay. The reinforcements were yet to arrive; 4,000 men would come by ship at night and head straight into the jungle.

Reg was sent back to Port Moresby by ship, then by road to Ower's Corner. "We were aiming to rejoin the battalion up in the mountains. The terrain was very steep. From there everything had to be carried."

"When we stopped that night, we came across a man with boots but no socks, an old felt hat and a khaki shirt. It turned out to be General Tubby Allen. He had been up in the mountains where his men were cut to pieces, he was looking for reinforcements. He said, 'I'll take this half'."

Reg took to the mountains with the 2/33rd Battalion but only got as far as Eora Creek when he was struck down with malaria. "Everyone who had been at Milne Bay got malaria."

Reg cannot remember being taken out of the jungle. "They put the stretchers of the unconscious patients under the beds. I woke up and saw the wire frame of the bed above me. There were no mattresses just army blankets. I was hanging onto the wire afraid; I thought I was a POW. The nursing sister went to fetch two orderlies and they lifted me onto the bed."

While he doesn't remember leaving the jungle, Reg does remember being nursed by Sister Ruth Campbell. She nursed him for 14 days and then he was sent back up into the mountains. "Unless you had no arms and legs, they kept sending you back up."

Reg went back into the jungle. "You just jumped in with whoever you found. No one knew which Battalion you were in. We were pushing the Japanese back at Kokoda. At Imita Ridge we couldn't retreat any further. From there it was only 1½ days to Port Moresby, if they made it to Moresby we would have been wiped out."

"But at Imita Ridge the Japanese retreated. We thought they had run out of supplies and gone back to get

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Reg and his wife Betty

reinforcements, but they had moved their resources to Bougainville and the Solomon Islands where the Americans were."

"We struck trouble at Sanananda where the Japanese had a beachhead. I was with two chaps, Dick Kayess and Alan Davidson. The three of us were from the same part of Sydney. Dick said that if we got through this that he would marry his girlfriend and I should be his best man. He took one step forward and got a sniper bullet through the brain, then Alan got a bullet in the temple. We lost 1,634 men at Sanananda between December 7 and January 22."

The infantry needed support. "The Americans got a Destroyer to sit out to sea and blast away till there was nothing left of the Japanese beachhead. On January 22, we got out of there."

"But I had no idea how I got out of there. I went down with malaria and scrub typhus and fell unconscious. They took me to the field hospital and gave me quinine three times a day for 14 days. After 14 days you either wake up or you're dead. I was pretty lucky."

"I was to return to Australia on the *Katoomba*, a ship for the walking wounded, but I couldn't walk. Sister Campbell told me she would get me home. I was helped onto the ship by a man with one arm on one side, and a man with one leg on the other side."

"I asked Sister Campbell why she kept coming back to help me. She told me I reminded her of her younger brother who was in the Middle East."

"The *Katoomba* landed in Townsville and off went all the Queenslanders. At 5pm we left for Sydney and we arrived at around 4am. We went right up the harbour to Glebe Island to a hospital train and ambulances."

"They took us to Concord Hospital. I had five brothers and four sisters, and Betty my girlfriend. They all came to see me. My youngest brother said, 'he talks like Reg but he doesn't look like him.' I was only 6 stone 5, I was 10 stone 9 when I went away."

After the hospital, Reg was in a convalescent camp for three weeks and then he went back to the unit. "I was sent back to the Showground then I got the train to Alligator Creek in Townsville, but I collapsed again with malaria and they sent me straight back home. I was no use to them."

The baker Reg worked for before the war offered to take him back. "I had skin rashes that would flare up and I had terrible scabs on my legs. I had to wear shorts. If I wore long trousers the rashes would reappear. I said if they saw my legs, no one would want to buy from him."

On October 6, 1945 Reg married Betty. Reg got a job in an iron foundry working a blast furnace. His shifts finished early, so he got a second job loading trucks. Then when he was 21, Reg started a trucking business with his brother-in-law. He spent 38 years driving trucks, but he could have been a baker if it hadn't been for the war.

RSL Australia said Chard devoted his later years to honouring the sacrifice of his fellow soldiers, becoming an "irreplaceable" presence at the memorial.

Education Minister Jason Clare paid tribute to Chard, describing him as a "dear friend".

"After losing the love of his life, Betty, Reg volunteered as a guide for school groups at the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway in Concord, helping keep the legacy of his generation's service and sacrifice alive," Mr Clare said.

A spokesperson for the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway, where Pte Chard was "one of the central characters", said he was devoted to ensuring "his generation's courage and sacrifice in WWII would be honoured always".

"Well done Reg — a life of service comes to an end but your legacy is all around us at the Walkway. RIP," they said.

Lest We Forget



Australian soldiers on the Kokoda Track during the New Guinea campaign in World War II. AWM

FROM KUDU TO THE CAIRNGORMS



5/7 RAR's Wandering Roos take on the Scottish Highlands at the Cateran Yomp

Each year the British Army Benevolent Fund hosts the 'Cateran Yomp'. The Yomp, as it is affectionately known, is a 54 mile (86 km) endurance march through the Scottish Highlands designed to raise money for British veterans and their families. This year's event, held on 06 June—coinciding with the 57th anniversary of the Battle of Binh Ba—drew participants from across the world. The event itself draws on a Royal Marines tradition, where the location and distance were used as a training milestone. Approximately 1000 civilian and military participants took part, from a multitude of different countries. The 'classic' approach to the event is to compete in a team of at least four, with all members required to successfully complete the course together and finish in under 24 hours to qualify for a gold medallion.

5/7 RAR's team was led by CPL Ben Worsfold, and included PTEs Hein Aung, Zander Nash, Jason Wulff, Connor Schmidt; LCPL Roly Williams, and the Padre. The team was exceptionally well supported by CPL Fleur Tolman from the 1st Health Battalion (1 HB), who acted as medic, chief cheerer and general counsellor. After an 8-hour vehicle transit, the team arrived at the event 'hub' in Blairgowrie on the afternoon of 05 June, registered, partook in the pre-event pasta party, and got their heads down in preparation for an early start and a long day on 06 June.

H-hour was 0700 hours and saw the 'Wandering Roos' depart the start line in the last wave of walkers. What followed was a 'delightful dawdle' through the foothills of the Cairngorm Mountains in mild and, at times, drizzly weather. The scenery was spectacular and the volunteers at the various checkpoints hospitable and generous. In fact, the food was so good at some of the checkpoints it was often a real effort to keep walking. One particular culinary highlight was the provision of ice cream cones at an unofficial stop. There were, however, plenty of tough





kilometres of walking between feeds. The team was aided by the extended hours of daylight and did not have to switch to head torches until after 2200 hours.

Like all of these endurance events, everyone in the team went through highs and lows at various times, with one particular low for most being a few kilometres of very marshy walking beside a loch, combined with a serious headwind and increasing rain. More than one of us was in the hurt-locker at the 'silver checkpoint', which was a bit daunting with 30 km still to go. The team pulled together exceptionally well and was resolute in its determination that everyone would finish. People paired off with their allocated battle buddies and coaxed one another through the night. In the early hours of 07 June the patrol made it back to Blairgowrie after about 110,000 steps, in a respectable time of 19 hours 30 minutes.

Overall, the event was a great experience for everyone and an excellent way to mark the completion of the KUDU rotation.

The Wandering Roos
Photos credited to @cateran_yomp on Instagram



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

to honour RAR Soldier



PRIVATE GILLSON

On 18 November 2026 the Australian War Memorial will honour Private Peter Raymond Gillson at its daily Last Post Ceremony. Private Gillson was one of two RAR soldiers whose bodies were not able to be recovered from Vietnam until Operation Aussies Home repatriated them to Australia in 2007. Lance Corporal Richard Parker and Private Peter Gillson of 1RAR both died on 8 November 1965 at the Battle of Gang Toi in Vietnam as part of Operation Hump. The following is a condensed version of a tribute to the men recorded in the Virtual War Memorial and from other sources.

1 Platoon, A Company encountered a heavily fortified bunker system at Gang Toi in the Bien Hoa Province and were hit by heavy machine gun fire and grenades from Viet Cong in the bunker system. A fire ensued which engulfed the company but most managed to crawl to safety while returning fire.

The exception was Lance Corporal Richard Parker who fell into the bunker system where he was subject to further fire from the Viet Cong. He did not respond to the rest of the platoon as they withdrew, and they were forced to leave him behind.

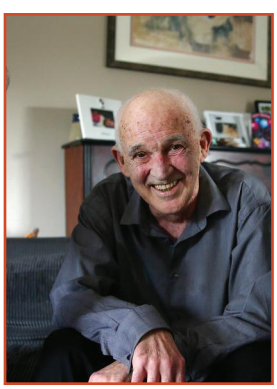
3 Platoon advanced towards the bunkers but one of their number, Private Peter Gillson was shot as he became entangled in tree roots. Two Viet Cong rushed forward to take his high-value machine gun, but Gillson, still alive, "managed to kill them both before collapsing himself". A final, defiant act.

During the ensuing fighting three attempts were made to recover Private Gillson most notably by Sergeant Colin Fawcett who was awarded a Military Medal for outstanding courage for his actions attempting to rescue Private Gillson. Despite not being able to find a pulse he attempted to extract Private Gillson from the tree roots while under heavy fire until he was left with no choice but to pull back.

A Company was ordered to withdraw at dusk, leaving Gillson and Lance Corporal "Tiny" Parker behind. Lance Corporal "Tiny" Parker and Private Gillson became the first two of six Australian MIAs in Vietnam.

Fast forward to the early 2000s and a group of volunteer Vietnam veterans led by Jim Bourke returned to the jungle as part of Operation Aussies Home. Using his initiative and resources, Bourke did thousands of hours of research, lobbied politicians and bureaucrats, and, when that failed, led a privately funded team to try to locate the six ADF personnel left in Vietnam (the two RAR soldiers, two Canberra Bomber pilots, an SASR Trooper and a Medic), In 2006, Queensland businessman and mining magnate Paul Darrouzet supported the mission by donating $40,000 said “You sometimes wonder, ‘Would I be good enough to go over the top?, then you hear about six blokes who were good enough and who died in the fight in Vietnam, and their government said ‘too hard’, and left them there for almost 40 years.”

Dismissing official maps, the Operation Aussies Home team trusted their own memories. When they finally found remains in an old weapons pit, Trevor Hagan, one of the veterans recalled, "I said to them…that’s long enough, I’m bringing you home."



James Bourke AM, MG

On day three of the excavation, the dog tags of both men, along with artefacts such as Zippo lighters and hutchie cord, were uncovered, adding to the hope that these were indeed the remains of Gillson and Parker. A



Home at last: The 42-year promise

forensic test confirmed that Private Peter Raymond Gillson and Lance Corporal Richard Harold John Parker had finally been found, 42 years after they had fallen. They had been buried by Viet Cong soldiers in an old weapons pit.

On the 6th June 2007, carried atop the shoulders of the men who fought alongside them, Parker and Gillson returned to Australian soil once again, a cathartic moment for the families they left behind. Parker was buried in Canberra and Gillson in Melbourne.

The photo left is from 2007 tells a story that spans 42 years. This is Lorraine Easton, standing over the casket of her husband, Private Peter Raymond Gillson. Beside her is their son, 2nd Lieutenant (now Captain) Robert Gillson, an officer in his father's army, grieving for the father he never met. At his father's funeral in Melbourne, Robert was one of the coffin bearers, bringing his father to his final rest.

This wasn't just a funeral. It was the final act of a battle that, for the men who fought it, never ended. It was a direct link between a young widow in 1965 and the son who followed his father's path.

A powerful lesson in mateship, enduring loyalty, and a promise finally kept.

Thank you for your service, Lance Corporal Richard Parker and Private Peter Gillson. May you rest in peace.

You can read more about James Bourke's *Fight for the Forgtotten Six* in the Spring 2025 issue. Link here.

All Royal Australian Regiment veterans are invited to attend the Australian War Memorial Last Post Ceremony at 1630 on 18 November 2026, where the Presidents of all the State and Battalion RAR Associations will join the RARA National Board to honour Private Peter Raymond Gillson.

Lest we forget.



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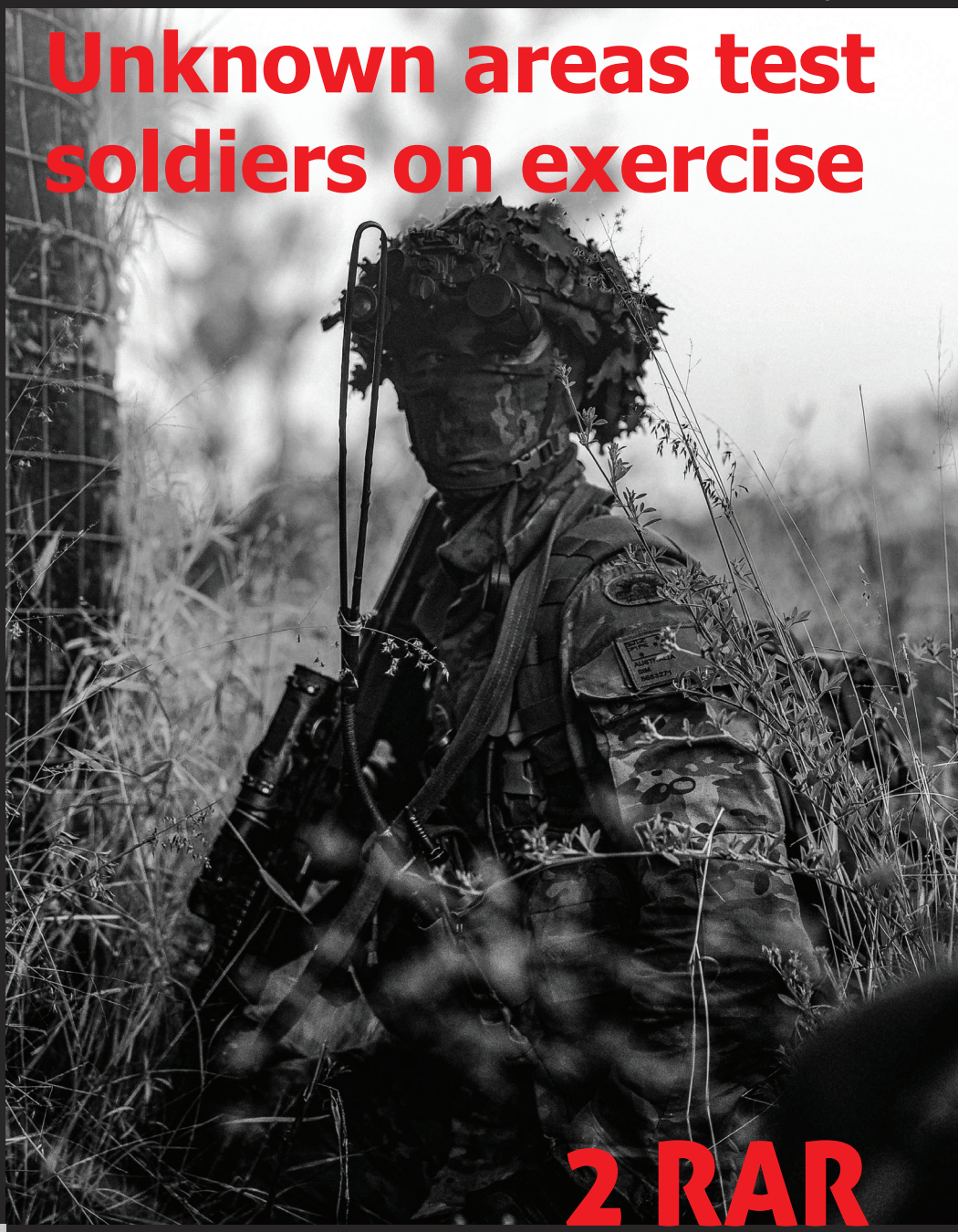


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Unknown areas test soldiers on exercise



2 RAR

Personnel from 2nd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR), tested themselves across scenarios and locations in Queensland as part of Exercise Black Cutlass.

Enemy parties established positions and were tasked with concealing and protecting high-value targets at Cowley Beach Training Area, the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), Cape Cleveland and Townsville Field Training Area.

Elements of 2RAR inserted into the area as the joint pre-landing force via small boats off HMAS Choules at Cape Cleveland and Cowley Beach, and observed enemy positions for several days before launching raids to secure the high-value targets.

Operations officer Major Thomas Grawich said challenges included interoperability with the Royal Australian Navy and countering drone threats.

“Company commanders had to react to what the other company commander was doing,” he said.

“Lift considerations had to be carefully planned to enable flexibility.

“Both commanders had to consider the threat of drones while achieving their missions.”

Some soldiers were challenged by new terrain and having to navigate a blend of beach, dense bushland and steep features.



Officer in Command of Admin Company Major Luke Hanna said it was a great opportunity for the soldiers to experience something new, in an area they were not accustomed to.

“Training around Cape Cleveland and AIMS does a few things. It’s a new training environment, which is unfamiliar for our soldiers and junior leaders,” he said.

“They’re working in unfamiliar terrain that they don’t know like the back of their hand like they may at Townsville Field Training Area.

“It’s a good experience working around some non-Defence training areas that are urbanised and have civilians, which adds a level of realism we might not always get in a Defence training area.”

Captain Cody Tsaousis

Defence images.

Japanese training at Darwin offers more combined-force value than Townsville

Japan's decision to train again in Townsville makes operational sense. Still, it exposes a deeper strategic problem in how Australia is shaping its northern defence posture.

The choice aligns with Japan's immediate training needs. Yet it falls short of delivering the broader deterrence, joint integration, and economic effects that Australia requires. Canberra should use this moment to rebalance effort towards Darwin and, working with Japan, build a forward, integrated presence there.

Japan has decided to send elements of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force to again conduct training activities in Townsville in mid-2026 as part of Exercise Southern Jackaroo and associated combined-arms activities.

No serious planner disputes Townsville's advantages. The Australian Army's mass sits there. Logistics, sustainment, aviation and workforce systems already operate at scale. Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force units can integrate quickly and achieve training outcomes with minimal friction. Efficiency matters when readiness timelines compress.

Strategy cannot always default to efficiency. Deterrence depends on where capability is located, not just how easily it can be trained. China doesn't assess Australia's posture by counting exercises in established garrisons. Beijing assesses whether forces, including those of Australia's friends and allies, operate persistently in forward locations that shape the strategic geography of the Indo-Pacific.

Exercises generate noise. Persistent presence generates a signal. Integrated presence in forward geography generates deterrent weight.

Townsville enables land integration of Japanese and Australian forces. Darwin enables joint and combined integration across air, land and maritime domains in a forward operating environment. Darwin's proximity to Southeast Asian sea lanes, northern approaches and contested maritime space reduces warning time, increases operational relevance and strengthens escalation signalling. Those factors shape adversary decision-making in ways that rear-area training locations cannot.

Framing the issue as Darwin versus Townsville misses the point. Australia needs both. Townsville will remain the Australian Army's primary manoeuvre hub. Darwin offers a different function: a forward node for multi-national presence, sustainment and multi-domain integration. Strategy demands complementary roles, not duplication.

The current decision reflects a broader pattern. Australia continues to default to locations with existing institutional mass rather than building the systems required in strategically critical geographies. Ease becomes the constraint. Ease becomes the decision. That is not a strategy.

If Darwin cannot host a combined presence at scale, that reflects a policy failure, not a justification for avoiding it.

Opportunity cost sits at the centre of the current approach. A modest but persistent Japanese presence in Darwin, combined with the United States Force Posture Initiatives, would have created a layered multi-national footprint in northern Australia. That footprint would deliver three reinforcing effects.

First, deterrence. Forward presence signals intent and capability in ways episodic exercises cannot. Second, jointness. Darwin provides the environment to integrate air, land, maritime and sustainment systems under realistic operational conditions. Third, economic security. Continuous activity by partners creates a demand signal that justifies infrastructure, attracts workforce and unlocks private investment.

Economic effects do not flow from short rotations. They flow from sustained presence. Demand drives infrastructure. Infrastructure attracts labour. Labour enables industry. Industry reinforces national resilience. The posture of Australia and its partners should be designed to trigger that system, not sit outside it.

Energy demonstrates what alignment looks like. The Inpex energy-resources investment in northern Australia stands as the centrepiece of the Australia–Japan relationship. It reflects a long-term commitment, integrated planning, and shared strategic interests. Defence posture should reinforce that model. It should align presence, infrastructure and economic activity into a single system.

Northern Queensland already carries a heavy training burden. Singaporean rotations and the concentration of Australia's frontline land forces create density in both physical space and institutional attention. Additional rotations increase throughput but do not necessarily



increase strategic effect. Concentration also introduces risk: reduced resilience, predictable patterns and limited manoeuvre diversity. Distribution across the north would deliver greater flexibility and strategic depth.

Japan's decision aligns with its needs. Australia's responsibility extends further. Canberra should shape the environment in which partners' decisions are made. That requires deliberate action.

The government should work with Japan to establish a persistent rotational presence in Darwin within the next two training cycles. Scale matters less than continuity. A company-level presence, sustained over time, would build familiarity, justify infrastructure and strengthen signalling.

Defence posture should align with economic and industrial policy. Investment in ports, fuel storage, logistics, housing and workforce capacity in Darwin should be accelerated and tied directly to the requirements of partners that should be present there. Fragmented development will not deliver strategic effect.

Northern Australia should be treated as a system. Townsville, Darwin and other nodes should have clearly defined and complementary roles, supported by coordinated investment and governance. Policy must move beyond announcements to orchestration.

Presence of Australia's partners should be used to crowd in private capital. Defence demand can anchor investment in logistics, energy and sustainment. That requires clear signals, long-term commitment and regulatory speed.

Deterrence rarely offers proof to the adversary. Signals to it accumulate through consistent choices about where partners train, operate and invest. Australia should ensure those choices reinforce the strategic weight of its north.

John Coyne is director of ASPI's National Security Programs.

Japanese soldiers conducting urban clearance in the Townsville Field Training Area in 2025.
Defence image

REVIVAL OF AUSTRALIAN MILITARY HISTORY:



New Kokoda Mk1 rifle shown off in firing tests

Australian firearms manufacturer Owen Guns has shown off firing tests for a new Kokoda Mk1 centrefire rifle, in a possible revival of Australian military history.

The new Kokoda Mk1 rifle, using 9mm ammunition and 15-shot magazines, represents a revival of the Australian Army's Owen machine carbine used from 1942 to its retirement in 1971.

The original Owen gun, invented by Wollongong resident Evelyn Owen in 1938, was used as the only entirely Australian-designed and constructed service submachine gun of World War II.

Although the design was summarily dismissed by the Australian Army in July 1938, it was later reassessed with the support of Lysaght Port Kembla and underwent successful production of more than 45,000 copies for use by soldiers fighting in Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Firearms designer Ron Owen said the new 32-inch and 4.6kg rifle is expected to be marketed as a category B lever release/bolt action centrefire rifle, with longer or shorter barrels depending on legislation.



Australia. 27 May 1965. Owen machine guns are stowed in racks on board HMAS Sydney by Naval Airmen A. B. Guilk of Tarragindi, Qld (left), and Private W. A. Cooper of Seven Hills, NSW. Private Cooper is a member of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), which was raised at Balikpapan, Borneo, in 1945, and fought in Korea and Malaya. AWM



A prototype version of the Kokoda Mk1 was fired across 100 metres in an underground testing tunnel. When the rifle returns into battery, to fire the next shot the button/lever is first pushed, which disengages a separate sear. Then this release allows the trigger to be pressed to release the firing mechanism. So it does not work automatically or semi-automatically, Owen said.

He said the rifle is designed to be incredibly rugged in all conditions.

The rifle is expected to enter production in the following months, with all parts made in Queensland.

Owen has previously campaigned for Australia to produce defence equipment domestically.

"We've got the ability (to make firearms and defence equipment) and we've always had the ability," he said.

"We've got the will, the imagination and skills to make anything. What we turned out in World War II shows what is possible.

"But of course, it's hard to achieve anything because of all the Government and police restrictions that we have.

"Australia could have its own firearms within six months if it wanted. We could turn ourselves into Switzerland, armed to the teeth and no one would want to take us on, but it's up to them (political parties).

"You can almost put money on firearm supply being interrupted during the event of a war. As soon as someone pushes the button in the straits of Java (Sunda Strait, Indonesia); we'll get nothing."

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What your hunting calibre says about you

by Billy Allen

In the Australian hunting scene, few topics generate as much friendly debate as the choice of rifle calibre. Around the campfire after a long day in the bush – whether chasing sambar in the Victorian highlands, fallow deer in the south or pigs across the warmer states – the conversation inevitably circles back to cartridges. Everyone has an opinion, and the good-natured ribbing flows as freely as the drinks.

While we all know the best calibre is the one that puts meat in the freezer and smiles on faces, certain patterns emerge. Each popular hunting round seems to attract a distinct type of shooter. With tongue firmly in cheek and no offence intended, here is a light-hearted look at what your chosen calibre might reveal about you.

The .222 Remington Owner

The .222 Remington is the baby boomer's answer to the .223. It is a classic, mild-mannered cartridge from an era when things were simpler and ammunition lasted longer. Many owners hand-loaded a few hundred rounds back in the 1960s and are still working through the same batch today. They are wonderfully thrifty souls who see no reason to upgrade when their old loads still group beautifully at sensible ranges.



These hunters develop a genuine appreciation for tracking. Their lighter bullets often produce minimal exit wounds, so they hone their skills following subtle signs through the scrub rather than relying on dramatic blood trails. Most are balding with quiet dignity, and they possess an inexhaustible supply of grandfatherly humour. 'Pull my finger' remains a reliable ice-breaker with the grandchildren, and a well-timed fart joke can still bring the house down.

At camp, they nurse a rum and coke with actual ice cubes, convinced this small flourish elevates the drink to something rather sophisticated. They view anyone under 30 with a mixture of bemusement and mild alarm, often muttering that the younger generation moves too fast and lacks proper respect for tradition. Their rifles are usually well-cared-for classics, and they speak fondly of the days when a hunter needed little more than a good bolt-action and a pocket full of handloads.

The .270 Winchester Owner



You will never need to ask a .270 Winchester owner what calibre he is carrying. He will tell you – usually within the first few minutes of meeting – complete with enthusiastic comparisons to other rounds. These passionate advocates tend to have a smaller but loyal circle of friends, largely because any gathering risks being steered back to the undeniable virtues of the .270.

They enjoy their beer poured into a glass, served properly cold. This small ritual sets them apart from the stubby-drinking crowd and feels just a touch more refined. They are quick to point out that with 150-grain bullets or lighter, their calibre keeps pace with the mighty .30-06, and they can quote ballistic tables to prove it.

Jack O'Connor, the legendary American shooting writer, is their hero. Many discovered the .270 through his evocative tales of sheep hunting in wild country. There is often a moment of quiet deflation, however, when they learn that O'Connor actually used the .30-06 almost as often, if not more. Still, the .270 remains their talisman: flat-shooting, manageable in recoil, and perfectly suited to deer and lighter game across Australia's varied landscapes.

The .308 Winchester Owner



The .308 shooter is the practical, everyman of the hunting world. He drinks his beer straight from the can, warm or cold – it makes little difference. Practicality rules here. You will find him with substantial stockpiles of ammunition stored neatly in green military-surplus cans, alongside an impressive collection of tinned baked beans. He is the silent prepper of the hunting camp, quietly ready for anything.

At night he is often the first to nod off by the fire, content after a solid day's hunting. He rises early, not because of any disciplined alarm clock routine, but because an enlarged prostate demands attention. Once awake, sleep proves elusive, so he simply pulls on his boots and heads out while the rest of the camp snores on. The .308 suits him perfectly: reliable, versatile and powerful enough for pigs and deer without unnecessary drama. It is the cartridge of the no-fuss hunter who values function over flash.

The .30-06 Springfield Owner



The .30-06 is the plain Jane of hunting calibres, and its owners wear that description as a badge of honour. They drink their beer cold from the stubby, straightforward and unpretentious. This is arguably the most versatile calibre in Australia, capable of handling everything from small game to large deer and even the occasional tough customer with the right load.

Many work in government roles and can tell you, to the exact day, how long remains until retirement. They start the morning with instant coffee – white with two sugars – and approach life with steady, organised calm. Their rifles usually have three carefully developed handloads, and they know precisely where each hits in relation to the zero. One for close-range brush, one for open country, and one for when things get serious.

The .30-06 owner understands balance. The cartridge has been doing the job reliably for generations, and there is quiet satisfaction in that continuity. It will take any animal on the continent when the shot is right, and its owner would not have it any other way.

The .300 Winchester Magnum Owner



The .300 Win Mag owner likes things big. He drives a large four-wheel drive, usually fitted with a four-inch lift kit and plenty of aftermarket accessories. His favourite drink is rum and coke straight from the can – mixing properly feels like unnecessary effort. Many work FIFO rosters in mining or resources,

and quite a few sport a neck tattoo featuring a majestic sambar stag.

Zeroing the rifle is a serious undertaking. Three shots would suffice for most, but these lads happily send 40 rounds downrange just to be certain. They carry a little extra weight around the middle these days and have developed a resonant snore that echoes through camp. Remarkably, they wake refreshed each morning, blissfully unaware of the dark looks from the .30-06 and .270 owners who spent the night wide awake.

The .300 delivers the thump they crave for big-bodied sambar or determined pigs. It is overkill for many situations, but that is rather the point.

The .243 Winchester Shooter



To the .243 shooter, the .270 looks like a big gun. These hunters often received their rifle as a thoughtful gift from a family member, and they treasure it accordingly. They mix their own rum and coke with care and tend to slip away early from the campfire, keen to be up well before first light.

Many are smokers, and they use the drifting cigarette smoke to read the wind with quiet expertise. They are excellent trackers, patient and observant, able to piece together a sparse blood trail where others might give up. You will usually spot them wearing an old, well-worn John Deere cap acquired 15 years ago when they bought a ride-on mower. It has seen more hunting seasons than most people's Sunday clothes.

Zeroing the rifle is a serious undertaking. Three shots would suffice for most, but these lads happily send 40 rounds downrange just to be certain.

The .243 is precise and mild in recoil, ideal for smaller deer species and foxes. Its owners are often the most dedicated early risers in camp, slipping out into the pre-dawn stillness with quiet determination.

The 6.5 Creedmoor Owner (also known as the 6.5 Man Bun)



The 6.5 Creedmoor shooter is the modern face of long-range enthusiasm. He usually sports longer hair and a flat-brimmed baseball cap. On the way to work he stops for an almond-milk latte, enjoyed from the driver's seat of a late-model BMW.

He has probably never taken a shot past 200 yards on live game, yet he speaks with complete confidence about having the ability to drop a deer at 500 yards 'any day he chooses.' His scope is enormous – often exceeding 20x magnification and weighing nearly as much as the rifle itself. At camp he sips fancy vodka mixers that taste suspiciously like fairy floss. The .243 shooter has been known to edge quietly further around the fire to avoid an extended conversation about ballistic coefficients.

In quieter moments, he works on Sudoku puzzles in the amenities block. The easy puzzles are completed neatly; the hard ones are abandoned halfway with several optimistic but incorrect entries. The 6.5 Creedmoor appeals to those who love precision and modern technology, even if actual field results sometimes lag behind the theory.

In the end, these are all affectionate stereotypes. The truth is that every hunter around the fire shares the same core pleasures: the smell of the bush at dawn, the satisfaction of a well-placed shot, and the simple joy of time spent with good companions. The calibre debates will continue long into the night, but they are part of what makes Australian hunting such a rich and entertaining pursuit.

Whatever you choose to chamber, may your shots be true, your campfires warm, and your stories worth retelling.

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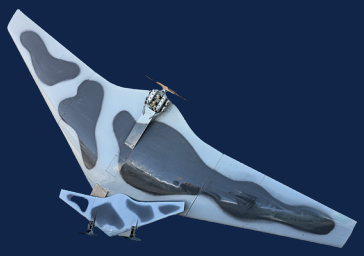
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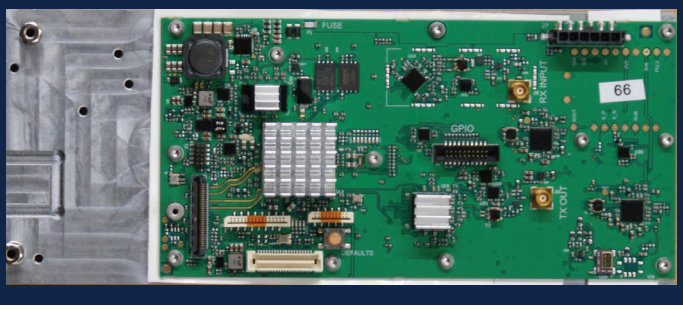
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DIAMOND DAGGER A TEAM EFFORT

8/9 RAR

As artillery pounded enemy positions, engineers carved lanes through obstacles, and infantry soldiers pushed relentlessly towards a trench line, supported by cavalry and direct-fire support weapons.

These demanding conditions formed the backdrop to Exercise Diamond Dagger, a complex combined-arms live-fire exercise undertaken by Army's 7th Brigade throughout May and June.

Commander 7th Brigade Brigadier Jennifer Harris said all the teams had built up live-fire proficiency from small teams in their core trades throughout the year.

"Exercise Diamond Dagger brings those smaller teams together, demonstrating and practising potent combined-arms warfighting effects at a larger scale," Brigadier Harris said.

"I am particularly excited to be out this year with our Republic of Fiji Military Forces' Daimani Company, currently integrated with 8/9 RAR [8th/9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment]."

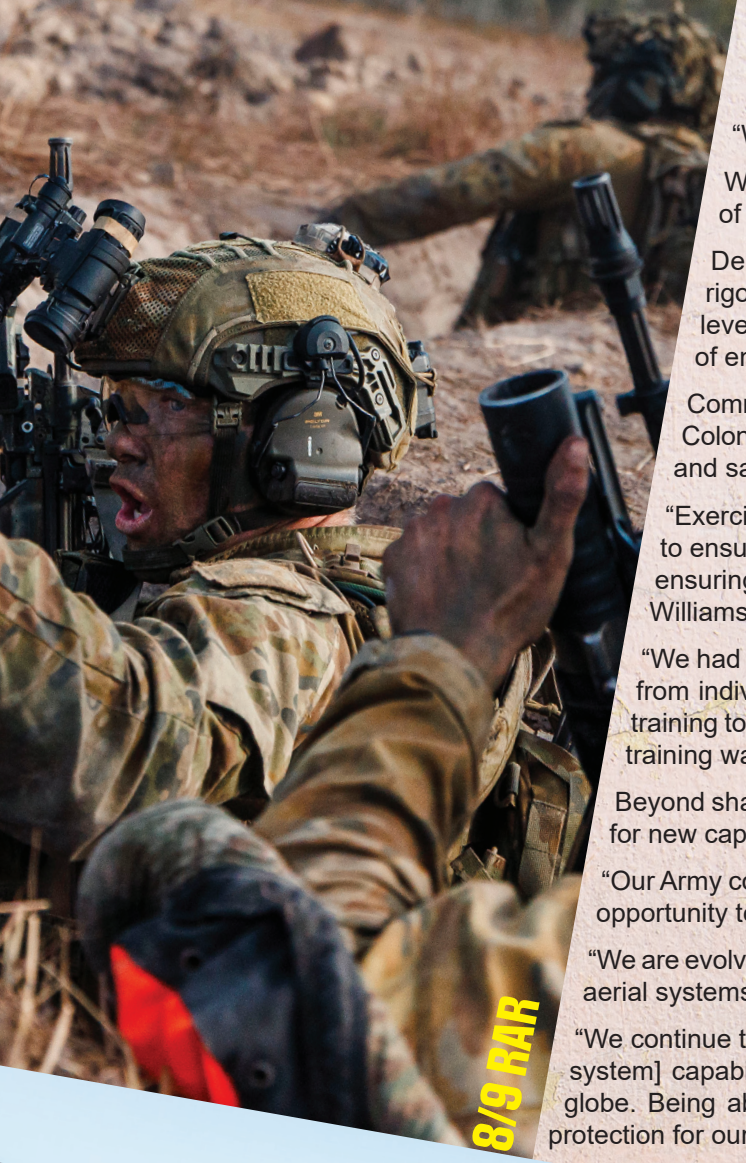
Designed to prepare soldiers for the realities of combat, the live-fire exercise placed participants under high levels of stress while operating in the noise, confusion and pressure of a simulated battlefield.



"7th Brigade is Army's ready brigade. We are responsible for generating those ready forces that must be able to deploy at a moment's notice, anywhere in the world,"

Brigadier Harris said.

"Diamond Dagger helps us assure the forces that are currently ready, whilst simultaneously preparing the next group who will take over later in the year.



"We are always ready to respond should the order come."

We are evolving how we operate in multiple areas, through the use of unmanned aerial systems at the tactical level.'

Delivering training at this scale required significant planning and rigorous safety measures. The exercise took training to the company level, with combat teams of up to 150 personnel supported by a range of enablers.

Commanding Officer 1st Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, Lieutenant Colonel Max Williams served as director of practice, overseeing planning and safety considerations.

"Exercise Diamond Dagger involved a comprehensive safety architecture to ensure that we could get after the sort of training priorities essential to ensuring the brigade remains as ready as possible," Lieutenant Colonel Williams said.

"We had to ensure we were maximising the training value across all levels, from individual to combat-team level. It required deliberate progression of training to ensure that by the time we executed in a large team environment, training was safe and as effective as possible."

Beyond sharpening warfighting skills, the exercise was also a proving ground for new capabilities and evolving tactics.

"Our Army continues to adapt in stride, and this exercise provided an excellent opportunity to test and demonstrate new capabilities," Brigadier Harris said.

"We are evolving how we operate in multiple areas, through the use of unmanned aerial systems at the tactical level.

"We continue to integrate the recently introduced counter UAS [uncrewed aerial system] capability delivered by Land 156, leveraging lessons from around the globe. Being able to integrate that at multiple levels enhances the warfighting protection for our forces."

Major Simon Hampson

Defence images



7TH BRIGADE

Vietnam Veteran John O'Halloran given Medal for Gallantry in Perth

Vietnam veteran John O'Halloran has received Australia's third-highest military honour, the Medal of Gallantry, at a ceremony at Government House in Perth.

Mr O'Halloran was 21 when he led a fixed bayonet charge against a Vietcong jungle stronghold during Operation Bribie, almost 60 years ago. WA Governor Chris Dawson said Mr O'Halloran, as a second lieutenant, led his platoon in a "fierce firefight, outnumbered against a dangerous and well-armed foe in the jungle of Vietnam".

"John gave the last order in our storied military history for an Australian body of soldiers facing overwhelming odds to fix their bayonets and charge forward, on foot, under fire," Mr Dawson said.

"In John's own words: 'We landed at half past three in the afternoon, by four o'clock I had six dead and 12 wounded.'"

Mr Dawson said Mr O'Halloran's men became the most decorated Australian platoon to serve in Vietnam.

He was given a standing ovation after receiving his medal.

Mr O'Halloran, originally from Tamworth but now living in Perth, said the recognition was "tremendous".

"I'm very honoured, and the family will be very honoured, but it's a shame my diggers didn't get it too, because they were magnificent," Mr O'Halloran said.

Dark day

According to the Australian Government's Anzac Portal, Operation Bribie was "one of Australia's worst days in South Vietnam", with eight men killed and 27 wounded.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL CUN/66/0759/VN

Vietnam. 1966-09-02. Second Lieutenant John O'Halloran of "B" Company, the 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR), wet and muddy after returning from Operation Darlinghurst, gulps down a mug of steaming tea. AWM



John O'Halloran receives the Medal for Gallantry from Chris Dawson. https://govhouse.wa.gov.au

Hastily planned and organised, the operation was an attempt to destroy Communist forces that had attacked the village of Lang Phuoc Hai on February 17, 1967.

Australian forces were ordered to cut off the enemy's withdrawal routes, and they expected to encounter small groups of soldiers heading back to jungle bases.

They were transported to the battlefield in helicopters before entering the jungle on foot, but what the Australians thought was just an enemy camp was in fact much more heavily armed.

The Australians had travelled less than 200 metres before coming under machine gun and sniper fire.

Bayonet charge

The Royal Australian Regiment's 5 Platoon, Bravo Company, 6th Battalion, commanded by Mr O'Halloran, was ordered to try and destroy a machine gun position.

He told his men to fix bayonets and they rose and charged, but came under machine gun fire almost immediately.

Armoured personnel carriers attempted to extricate the wounded, but they also came under heavy fire before they were eventually able to retreat.

For his bravery, Mr O'Halloran received a Mention in Despatches, and was last year awarded the Medal for Gallantry, which he received in Perth on Tuesday afternoon 5th May 2026

The Medal of Gallantry is Australia's third-highest military honour, behind the Victoria Cross and the Star of Gallantry.

Just 70 other Australians have been awarded the honour since its creation in 1991.

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Farewell Address on the Change of Command of the Chief of the Australian Army

Lieutenant General SA Stuart AO DSC, 41st Chief of Army

Blamey Square, 8 Jul 26

It has been the privilege of a lifetime to have been an Australian soldier.

I have one final duty and one overwhelming emotion today, and that is gratitude.

'Lest we forget' is our individual and our collective promise, and so it is fitting to commence expressing my gratitude by honouring the memory of our fallen - the nearly 82,000 soldiers whose names are cast without embellishment, save for a poppy, in the silent bronze panels that gird the soul of the Australian War Memorial.

It is of course personal. Each of them had a family, loved ones, and mates. Today is personal for me too, and I remember those soldiers and Navy Seals, from Australia and the United States of America, abroad and at home, at the hands of an enemy and in service of all natures – who fell on my watch.

I acknowledge the burden of grief and the sense of loss that weighs on the hearts of their families and their loved ones.

My thoughts and prayers remain with you - always.

I am grateful for the more than 4,000 soldiers who as we gather here today are deployed or stood to, abroad and at home, today and tonight. I thank their families for their service.

The late Brigadier George Lyon Mansford reminded us that:

"*the oath to serve our country did not include a contract for normal luxury, and comforts enjoyed within our society. On the contrary it implied hardships, loyalty and devotion to duty, regardless of your rank*."

In these few sentences, George captures the essence of service and indeed, the essence of soldiering.

Through his quintessential combination of candour and compassion, and his deep love of country, his fellow Australians and brothers and sisters in arms, he helped us to see ourselves, our duty and the inescapably visceral nature of our profession.

Theodore Reed, or TR, Fehrenbach was elegantly blunt in his account of soldiering, remarking:

"*you may fly over land forever, you may bomb it, atomize it, and wipe it clean of life - but if you desire to defend it, protect it, and keep it for civilization, you must do this on the ground … by putting your soldiers in the mud*."

Put simply, the ultimate expression of national will and resolve is to place our soldiers on the ground and in harm's way.

I am grateful for the wisdom of these two men, borne equally of personal experience and scholarship.

I am most grateful for the service of all those soldiers who wear our uniform today.

I am grateful for the way in which you have embraced our purpose:

For building and maintaining trust: trust in our teams, with our joint teammates, with our fellow Australians - whom we exist to serve - trust with our government, and trust with our allies and partners.

I am grateful for the way you have built our readiness to 'fight tonight' and comprehensively re-wiring our army to ensure our relevance and our survival among tomorrow's challenges.

I am grateful for your thrift and stewardship of the precious resources with which our nation entrusts us.

And I am grateful to you for adding your voice to telling our story.



Australian Army Chief of Army Lieutenant General Simon Stuart AO, DSC, salutes during the Anzac Day ceremony at the Korean National War Memorial, Republic of Korea. April 2026



Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Simon Stuart, talks with Pilbara Regiment soldiers from 1st Squadron at Port Hedland, Western Australia 2024. Defence images

The story of the Australian Army, the story of 125 years of service as a national institution, as a profession and as a fighting force.

In short, I am grateful for your devotion and endeavour every day to creating a future Army that is worthy of our past.

I am grateful for the privilege of being an Australian soldier.

I am grateful for the privilege of having led my fellow Australians and soldiers.

And I am grateful indeed for the privilege of having led and commanded our Army.

And I am most grateful for the privilege of having done so, in good company - in your company.

You are among the ablest of soldiers.

In adversity and among our failures and our triumphs, you have been magnificent, you have been indefatigable, you have been of good heart and of sound character.

I am grateful to have served among your number and to have enjoyed your trust and your fellowship.

These are the treasures of service, those that cannot be bought or bestowed or indeed taken from us - they can only be earned and they are ours for a lifetime.

As I draw my final remarks to a close, please forgive my indulgence.

I extend my gratitude to all of you here today:

To the Excellences gathered - you honour us.

To Ms Megan Quinn - our Secretary, Godspeed.

To Admiral Johnston our Chief of Defence Force (CDF) and to Belinda - thank you for your leadership, stewardship and friendship, we wish you fair winds and following seas.

To Vice Admiral Mark Hammond, our next CDF and to Jodi - our friends - every blessing.

To my fellow Chiefs and senior leaders - my sincere thanks for your friendship and support.

To the indefatigable team that is Army Headquarters - my eternal admiration.

To the team in the Office of the Chief of Army (OCA) - a personal debt of gratitude.

To those on parade today, our next generation of junior leaders – and to the hardest working band in the country, the band of the Royal Military College, Duntroon – you are our future and I am so very proud of you.

To former Chiefs of our Army here with us - I am grateful for the inheritance

To our 42nd Chief - General Susan and Mark, and our 13th Regimental Sergeant Major – Army (RSM-A), Warrant Officer (WO) Brad Doyle and to Liza - we are so very proud of you – we are so very confident in you - go well!

To our dear friends:

- To Aunty Lorraine and Dave.
- To General Rose and Warrant Officer Dave, our kiwi sister and brother.
- To General Rick and Bron Burr.
- To my battle buddy, the 12th RSM-A WO Kim Felmingham and Jeff.
- To all of our old friends and new - dear friends all of you.

We treasure the times we have had together and we treasure today's precious moments with you.

To my sisters Dee and Anna, and my brother Tim - always there, we love you.

To our children Evy and Charlie - we are proud of the good people you have become and I thank you for your service - both voluntary and involuntary - all your lives. Love.

And finally to my darling Katy:

You are my north star.

Your counsel, love, patience, steel, devotion, constance and deep humility have been my example every day we have had together all these years.

I am so very much looking forward to our next adventure.

… till China & Africa meet and the salmon sing in the street

To you all. Duty first! — Godspeed & good soldiering!

41 out.

Lieutenant General Simon Andrew Stuart, AO, DSC is a retired senior officer of the Australian Army who served as the Chief of Army from July 2022 to July 2026. He was commissioned into the Royal Australian Infantry Corps from the Royal Military College, Duntroon in 1990. He commanded the 8th/9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2008–10), Joint Task Force 631 (2010) and Combined Team Uruzgan (2012–13), and deployed to East Timor as part of Operations Warden, Tanager and Astute and to Afghanistan and the Sinai Peninsula. He was Force Commander, Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai from 2017 to 2019, and Head Land Capability from 2020 to 2022.

8/9 RAR

Australian and Fijian Soldiers Clear New Ground: 8/9 RAR and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces in Exercise Diamond Dagger

As artillery rounds thundered across the training area and infantry advanced through a maze of obstacles towards enemy trench systems, soldiers from the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and the 8th/9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (8/9 RAR) strengthened a partnership built on shared professionalism, trust and combat readiness during Exercise Diamond Dagger.

Conducted throughout May and June as part of 7th Brigade's training cycle, Exercise Diamond Dagger brought together combined-arms elements in a demanding live-fire environment designed to prepare soldiers for the realities of modern warfare.

The RFMF Daimani Company, embedded within 8/9 RAR, undertook a deliberate and progressive training program leading into the exercise. The contingent first completed training that culminated in achieving Army Training Level (ATL) 2 Section Live Fire certification before progressing to platoon-level blank-fire manoeuvre activities designed to build confidence, cohesion and collective proficiency.



A Soldier from the RFMF Daimani Company takes up a firing position during a manoeuvre exercise

This progression laid the foundation for increasingly complex training serials during Diamond Dagger. Operating alongside soldiers from 8/9 RAR, the Fijian contingent successfully achieved ATL 3 Platoon Live Fire certification during a trench-clearance activity before participating in ATL 5 Combat Team Live Fire trench-clearance operations.

The achievement represented a significant milestone for the integrated force, demonstrating both the effectiveness of the partnership between the two militaries and the professionalism of the soldiers involved.

Supported by a range of battlefield operating systems, combat teams integrated infantry manoeuvre with direct-fire support weapons, artillery effects and Protected Mobility Vehicle-Medium (PMV-M) Bushmaster support to conduct realistic offensive operations. The integration of fire support, manoeuvre and protected mobility enabled soldiers to rehearse the coordination required in contemporary combat environments.

Exercise Diamond Dagger formed part of 7th Brigade's broader mission to generate and assure combat-ready forces. Commander 7th Brigade, Brigadier Jennifer Harris, said the exercise brought together teams that had spent the year developing live-fire proficiency within their respective trades.

"Exercise Diamond Dagger brings those smaller teams together, demonstrating and practising potent combined-arms warfighting effects at a larger scale," Brigadier Harris said. She also welcomed the opportunity to train alongside the integrated RFMF contingent, highlighting the importance of regional partnerships and interoperability.

Designed to expose soldiers to realistic levels of stress and battlefield complexity, the exercise challenged participants to operate effectively amid noise, confusion and rapidly evolving tactical situations. Infantry, engineers, artillery and supporting combat elements were required

Above: 8/9 RAR Diggers take a well-earned rest. Below conducting an assault during a danger close live-fire activity.



to synchronise their actions while maintaining both safety and combat effectiveness. The exercise also provided an opportunity to employ emerging capabilities, including tactical unmanned aerial systems and counter-unmanned aerial system technologies, reflecting the Australian Army's continued adaptation to the evolving character of warfare.

For the soldiers of 8/9 RAR and the RFMF Daimani Company however, the most significant outcome was the successful execution of live-fire combined-arms operations as a single, integrated team. By progressing through increasingly demanding training serials and ultimately conducting combat team trench-clearance operations under live-fire conditions, the integrated force demonstrated not only tactical proficiency and combat readiness, but also the enduring value of strong regional military partnerships.

As Exercise Diamond Dagger concluded, soldiers departed with enhanced warfighting skills, greater confidence in combined-arms operations and a deeper appreciation of what can be achieved through realistic training, mutual trust and the ability to fight and win together.

Lieutenant Oliver Cooke



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Private Malakai Williams from Direct Fire Support Weapons Platoon, 5/7 RAR, fires a Carl-Gustaf 84mm recoilless rifle.

5/7 RAR

EXERCISE PREDATORS WALK

Personnel from Army's 1st Brigade and the United States Marine Corps rehearsed combined arms operations across the Northern Territory during Exercise Predators Walk.

The first in a series of brigade-level training activities, the exercise, held from May 18 to June 12, showcased the cooperation and interoperability between the two.

In a key activity at Dundee Beach, soldiers from the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment (1CER) and engineers from the US Marine Rotational Force – Darwin (MRF-D) constructed and refined a corduroy road.

Lieutenant Georg Lange, of 1CER, said the experience strengthened technical skills and teamwork.

"We've rehearsed different points of entry operations, expedient timber road construction techniques and conducted route remediation works, but more importantly we've built trust. That's what makes combined operations effective," Lieutenant Lange said.

US combat engineer Staff Sergeant Jeremiah Pitzer said the experience had been rewarding.

"We're all out here working together towards the same goal sharpening our skills. The environment here is tough, but that's what makes this training so valuable and realistic," Staff Sergeant Pitzer said.

At Mount Bundey Training Area, gunners of the 8th/12th Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery (8/12 Regt RAA) and MRF-D Fury Battery provided fire support coordination and sensor integration for lethal effects across a dispersed battlespace.

Bombardier Tristan Williams, of 8/12 Regt RAA, said the exercise allowed the refinement of skills in coordinating fires in a combined environment.

"It's about building a shared understanding so when it

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An Australian Army soldier from Bravo Company, 5/7 RAR, jumps into a trench through green smoke during a combined arms live-fire assault on a trench system. Defence images

matters, we can deliver accurate and timely fire support," Bombardier Williams said.

Meanwhile, infantry soldiers from the 5th/7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (5/7RAR), executed dismounted offensive and defensive operations and live-fire training serials, focusing on small-team tactics and procedures, battlefield shooting, combat fitness and night fighting.

'We've built trust. That's what makes combined operations effective.'

Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Ash Zimmerlie said the purpose was to bring together the specialist components of the combined arms fighting system to produce a whole battlefield effect greater than the sum of its parts.

"For the battalion, this activity focused on rehearsing the light infantry team's unique contribution – close combat and dismounted lethality," Lieutenant Colonel Zimmerlie said.

Battlefield clearance team commander Lieutenant Carmen Saftenberger, of B Company 5/7RAR, said urban assault training sharpened their effectiveness.

"Operating in this realistic training environment gives us a different perspective on how to approach problems," Lieutenant Saftenberger said.

"It's challenging, but it makes us a better, more capable team."

Commander 1st Brigade, Brigadier Rob Haertsch, said the exercise marked an important step in the brigade's training progression.

"Exercise Predators Walk rehearses the brigade's readiness through tough training whilst at the same time reinforcing the shared commitment between Australia and the United States to regional peace and security through shared interests," Brigadier Haertsch said.

"By integrating across all skill sets with our MRF-D partners, the activity has delivered realistic, mission-focused training that reflects the demands of the security environment."

The focus for 1st Brigade now shifts to July.

"We will take the lessons learned from this activity into execution for our next key rehearsal, Exercise Predators Run, where we will advance in complexity and scale," Brigadier Haertsch said.

By Major Sarah Kelly

KING of the hill



PTE Ethan Takac and PTE Miranda Hamilton, the quickest male and female runners to summit Enoggera Hill during 7th Brigade's 'King of the Hill' endurance challenge. Defence images.

A new champion has been crowned at Gallipoli Barracks following the annual 7th Brigade King of the Hill challenge.

Private Ethan Takac, of 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR) completed the roughly three-and-a-half kilometres to the top of the 284-metre-high Enoggera Hill in a time of 18 minutes 20 seconds.

"It was pretty tough. It never gets any easier," PTE Takac said, whose training included running between 70 and 90 kilometres each week.

"I hit a personal best on Tuesday for five kilometres, so I was feeling pretty strong. I tried to get out in front from the start and then just hoped for the best," he said.

Private Miranda Hamilton, also of 6RAR, was the fastest woman up the winding track, crossing the finish line in a time of 22 minutes 16 seconds, winning two years in a row.

"I was pretty keen to keep the winning streak alive," she said at the finish line.

"You have to stay humble up the hill. I stuck to my own race pace, let a few of the guys burn out then slowly overtook them."

8th/9th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (8/9RAR) took unit bragging rights at the awards presentation on the summit.

'Mastering the hill is a great opportunity to test the brigade's overall endurance and a good gauge to see where we are as we prepare to undertake upcoming brigade and division warfighting activities.'

About 1500 personnel from the brigade took part, with many wearing unit colours and mascot costumes for the event.

8/9RAR Regimental Sergeant Major, Warrant Officer Class One Dave Nicholas, said the race played a key role in promoting unit esprit de corps and fostering competition within the brigade.

"It brings a lot of bragging rights because, this hill, it really tests your mental fortitude and physical endurance, which are essential qualities for a combat soldier," Warrant Officer Class One Nicholas said.

"It's about pushing yourself past your limits, and this hill is unrelenting; you can't hide from it, it exposes everybody's weakness."

Warrant Officer Class One Nicholas said the King of the Hill event had been testing soldiers' mettle for the past 20 years.



"They've been coming up here for a very long time. This mountain looms large over Gallipoli Barracks and getting up it, surviving it, has become a rite of passage," he said.

Commander 7th Brigade, Brigadier Jennifer Harris, said she was thrilled with the individual and unit effort.

"It's a great event. It's a big hill, and it requires members to dig deep and, when necessary, to help their mates," Brigadier Harris said.

Captain Tadek Markowski

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LOCK AND LOAD

Finding the Fight Within

How a former world champion boxer is helping veterans rediscover purpose after service.

Leaving the Australian Defence Force is one of the biggest transitions many soldiers will ever face. For years, life has revolved around structure, teamwork and a clear mission. Then, almost overnight, the uniform comes off and the routine that has shaped everyday life disappears.

For former Royal Australian Engineers Warrant Officer Class One Justin Jones, that transition has been far from straightforward.

After 21 years of service, including deployments to the Solomon Islands, Afghanistan and Timor-Leste, Jones admits that even five years after leaving the Army, his transition is still a work in progress.

"I feel that I still haven't completed my transition,"* he says.

"I miss the challenges and teamwork that comes when chasing that common goal. Like many soldiers, I lost a sense of purpose and belonging. It has taken many years, and a lot of assistance, to accept and adapt to life outside the military."

Although he remained close to many of his Army mates, Jones found himself withdrawing from social situations and, like many veterans, turned to alcohol as a way of coping.

"For a long time, I used alcohol to cope, which only suppressed my issues."

Today, however, his life looks very different—and he credits much of that change to an unexpected opportunity offered by former multiple World Champion Boxer Les Sherrington.

More than boxing

Sherrington is well known in Australian boxing circles, but helping men rebuild their lives wasn't part of any grand plan.

"Honestly, it crept up on me," he says.

"I've trained hundreds of men over the years, and you notice the same thing over and over—a fella turns up carrying something, and after a while of hard training alongside others, he carries himself differently."

"I never set out to 'help men'. I just worked out the boxing was never really the point. The point was what it did to them."



former ADF member and Thailand camp participant



> **You can always pick the ones who've served- they turn up early, work hard and don't whinge.**
> *Les Sherrington*

former multiple World Champbion Boxer Les Sherrington

That realisation eventually evolved into Lock & Load Retreats, which Sherrington co-founded with businessman Dave Harms. The retreats aren't veteran-specific, but Defence members continue to find their way there.

Harms believes there's a simple reason why.

"We didn't set out to build something for veterans, but they keep finding us—and it makes sense."

"Leaving Defence strips away the exact things that keep a man steady: the structure, the team, the mission. We put those back, without anyone having to talk about it."

Unlike organisations such as Open Arms, Soldier On or Mates4Mates, Lock & Load doesn't offer clinical support. Instead, it focuses on challenge, routine and shared experiences—using boxing and physical training as the vehicle rather than the destination.

A familiar environment

For Jones, the opportunity came after Sherrington, aware of his struggles through mutual friends in Townsville, invited him to join one of the Thailand programs.

"I'd always wanted to have a professional fight," Jones recalls.

"Les told me he'd be with me the entire time if I wasn't comfortable."

Arriving in Thailand, Jones quickly discovered that his own idea of being fit and Sherrington's expectations were worlds apart.

"Within the first ten days I realised my standard of fitness and Les's standards were miles apart," he laughs.

"I'm grateful he pushed me harder than I ever thought possible for someone my age."

The Thailand program isn't simply a boxing camp. Participants complete two demanding training sessions each day, combined with recovery through ice baths and breathwork, while also experiencing Thai culture away from the gym.

"Some have a fight at the end and some don't—that's entirely up to them," says Sherrington.

"Either way, ten or eleven blokes arrive as strangers and leave like family."

Finding the team again

For Jones, the biggest breakthrough came surprisingly early.

"Day three was a game changer," he says.

"I felt comfortable with the team. Everyone shared similar aspirations and suddenly it felt like I was on another military adventure with a group of people I'd never met."

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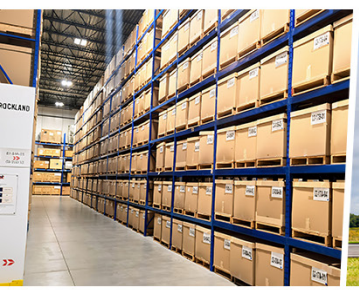
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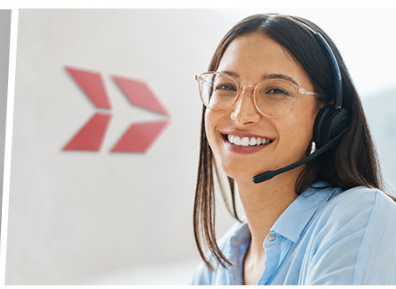
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"We created a team environment almost immediately."

The experience had such an impact that Jones returned for a second trip, bringing two former serving mates with him.

Sherrington says that response isn't unusual.

"You can always pick the ones who've served—they turn up early, work hard and don't whinge," he says.

"But a lot of them are quietly at a loose end."

"They had a job that mattered and a team that had their back, and then one day it's gone. What they're after isn't fitness. It's something to train for and good men to do it with."

Purpose through challenge

While boxing sits at the centre of the retreats, both Sherrington and Harms insist the gloves aren't the real attraction.

"Without routine, camaraderie and purpose, a man just drifts," says Sherrington.

"The worst part is it doesn't feel like anything's wrong—it just feels normal."

"Give him a reason to get up, something hard to do and a few good men beside him doing it too, and he sharpens right up. I've seen it too many times for it to be a coincidence."

Harms agrees.



Les Sherrington and Dave Harms

"The two things participants tell us almost every time are that they feel like themselves again, and that they didn't expect the mateship to be the part that stayed with them."

"Most are booking the next one before they've even unpacked."

A better life

For Jones, the benefits extended well beyond Thailand.

"I've built a better relationship with my three sons and I've started casual work and become more active in the community." he says.

"I set my own goals now, which helps me get out of bed. I live a cleaner life and I'm no longer dependent on alcohol. I've replaced those habits with art and physical training."

"Les and this experience have set me up for recovery and a better quality of life as I continue my journey."

For Sherrington, stories like Justin's define success.

"It's not the six-pack or the fight," he says.

"It's a man's wife pulling me aside months later saying he's different at home—more patient with the kids, more himself."

"That's the one that gets me."

Looking ahead, neither Sherrington nor Harms is interested in building a corporate empire.

"I'd just like to be able to say yes to more of the good blokes who need it," says Sherrington.

Harms shares a similar vision.

"If we look back in five years and we've helped a few thousand good men get themselves back, that'll do me."

For many veterans, the end of military service can feel like the end of purpose. Programs such as Lock & Load suggest that perhaps purpose



isn't something that's lost at all—it simply needs a new mission.

For more information about Lock & Load Retreats, visit **https://www.lockloadretreats.com/**

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THE 6 RAR PARACHUTE COMPANY GROUP

Of the early 1980's by Patrick Cullinan

'Parachuting with weapons and equipment by day and night is not for the timid'.

Introduction

It was the first significant-sized parachute drop by the Australian Army since World War 2 (WW2). In September 1974, 64 soldiers from 6RAR jumped into the Shoalwater Bay Training Area (SWBTA) to seize an airhead at the Glen, as part of Exercise Strikemaster, a battalion exercise with emphasis on mobility. Some 31 years earlier, on 5 September 1943 during WW2, four officers and 30 soldiers of 2/4 Fd Regt, RAA (as part of a larger US Army Parachute Regiment) jumped into the Markham Valley in New Guinea. Some 31 years later in 1974, this jump by the 6RAR parachutists was a memorable start to 6RAR later building up a Parachute Company Group (Prcht Coy Gp) capability that occurred in the early 1980's centred around 6RAR D Coy.

Capturing history some 40 years plus after the event, in this case, the 6RAR Prcht Coy Gp of the early 1980's was always going to be challenging even for a past 6RAR OpsO in 1981 and then OC D Coy 6RAR in 1982. This is also because some of the key players involved with parachuting in 6RAR at the time have since passed; LTCOL Tony Hammett, LTCOL Andy Mattay, MAJ George Mansford, MAJ David Christie, CAPT Dick Arnell and WO2 Bruno Flematti, DCM. That said, I am deeply appreciative of those mainly 6RAR veterans and others who willingly provided information and anecdotes to help me capture an important part of 6RAR's history.

This article primarily focuses on the 6 RAR Prcht Coy Gp of the early 1980's, with preliminary comment on parachuting in general, the 1st Australian Parachute Battalion that existed during WW2 from 1943 to 1946 and later, some comment on the 3 RAR Parachute Battalion that took up the parachute role after 6 RAR from 1983 to 2011.



AUSTRALIAN ARMY
THE SOLDIERS' NEWSPAPER
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On the green light they jumped into history

WHEN 64 soldiers from the Enoggera-based 6RAR jumped onto an airstrip in the Shoalwater Bay training area, near Rockhampton, recently, they jumped into history.

This was the first time ever that an Australian infantry battalion has used soldiers as paratroops.

The Diggers were taking part in Exercise STRIKEMASTER, a battalion group exercise with emphasis on mobility.

The paratroops jumped into the area to secure the airstrip before the move forward by the rest of the Battalion and supporting troops.

When the strip was secured the remaining soldiers were flown in from Rockhampton by *Iroquois* helicopters and *Caribou* aircraft or brought forward by APCs from B Sqn., 4 Cav. Regt.

Before the Diggers made their jump, a team of pathfinders from the Army Parachute School, Williamtown, free-fell from 2247 metres from a *Caribou* aircraft to mark out a dropping zone for the main body.

FLASHBACK: It was 31 years ago, in September, that another non-Special Forces group was used in a paratroop role.

In 1943, four officers and 30 soldiers of 2/4 Fd. Regt., RAA, 7 Div., made their historic jump into the Markham Valley in New Guinea.

They made a successful jump, with only one casualty — a gunner suffered a broken shoulder — when some of the paratroops landed in trees.

The gunners jumped with the 503rd Parachute Regiment, U.S. Army, which later became an infantry element of 173rd Airborne Brigade.

It was with 173rd Airborne Brigade that 1RAR served during the early stages of the Vietnam conflict.

Historical segment extracted from a "Australia in the War 1939-45, Army, The New Guinea Offensive."

Infantrymen jumped into history.

Why Parachuting?

Two factors that influenced Australia having its own parachute capability during WW2 was firstly the rapid development of a new means of warfare; airborne operations involving paratroopers dropped behind enemy lines and secondly, the threat of invasion from Japan could also have been a factor.

During WW2, impressive developments occurred on both the Allied and Axis sides in the development of military parachuting and the formation of parachute units and formations up to

divisional level. Airborne operations were a new means of warfare that enabled units to be inserted behind enemy lines via parachute and glider borne troops to seize key points and disrupt the enemy in his rear. They had to be highly trained and led by competent aggressive leaders. That said, there were limitations such as how long a parachute force could survive after insertion before being resupplied, reinforced or relieved by advancing ground forces. Other questions arose such as whether to drop onto the enemy target with the consequences of heavy casualties as occurred to the German Fallschirmjager at Crete, or insert some km from the target and be prepared to fight all the way to the target, as occurred with the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem. Regardless, planning an airborne operation is a very complex affair. In WW2, there were numerous successes and failures in airborne operations on both sides.

Secondly, the rapid advance of the Japanese in 1941-42 seriously threatened Australia and her interests and the possibility of invasion was real. Key turning points included the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941 (Pearl Harbour), the fall of Singapore in February 1942 resulting in the capture of thousands of Australian soldiers, and direct air raids on the Australian mainland. In February 1942, some 188 Japanese warplanes bombed Darwin killing at least 235 people. In late May 1942, three Japanese submarines attacked Sydney Harbour and other submarines shelled Sydney's eastern suburbs and Newcastle. Japanese forces pushed towards New Guinea, leading to fierce battles along the Kokoda Track. Australia lay open to potential invasion. In 1942, the threat of invasion by Japan was very real.

1st Australian Parachute Battalion

In Australia's case, the initiative to establish a parachute force came from the Australian High Command and the United States South West Pacific Command, then based in Australia, when the Japanese in the early 1940's were poised to invade New Guinea, which was an external territory of Australia at the time. Additionally, LTGEN Leslie Morshead, GOC II Australian Corps believed that a parachute capability would be an essential element in ground force operations in the Pacific area.

After much planning, including recruitment, on 3 November 1942 the Parachute Training Unit was raised in Laverton, followed by the formation of A Company of what was to become the 1st Australian Parachute Battalion at Richmond. The build-up of the capability continued with the formation of the battalion on 15 August 1943, together with the creation of a Mobile Prcht Trg Unit administered by RAAF Richmond. The general perception of members at the time was that they were being prepared for a job. Typical of parachute units back then and also today was innovation. One member put into practice the use of coloured parachutes – red for ammunition, blue for medical supplies and so forth (that innovation if used would later have been helpful at Arnhem).

The Parachute Battalion had reached full strength by Jan 1944, and by May it was ready for deployment, having competently undertaken extensive training, including parachute exercises observed by senior officers. Battalion members, several of whom had already served in various theatres of the war, expected and wanted to be para-dropped into the war to support the Allied effort.

On 15 August 1945, news came of Japan's surrender. In J.B. Dunn's book *Eagles Alighting* mention is made of the frustration felt by the battalion's members at not having undertaken an operation. For two years, they had trained to peak performance and had maintained their enthusiasm believing for so long that they would be used in action but had been disappointed time and time again. They were not used as a parachute force in WW2. J.B Dunn further comments that the paratrooper veterans mourn the death of nearly 2,500 POWs at Sandakan and Ranau, and will never know how many could have been saved if the battalion had been used to rescue the prisoners. *Eagles Alighting* ends on a bitter note; 'The men of Sandakan and Ranau died because they did not have the priority to give them life.'

The only Australian combat parachute jump by an Australian force element in WW2 was mentioned in the first paragraph above. Working alongside the US 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment, elements of the 2/4th Field Regt RAA jumped into the Markham Valley on 5 Sep 1943 with dismantled "short" 25-pounder guns. Having received only a few days of rapid paratrooper training (as distinct from the two years of parachute training undertaken by the 1st Australian Parachute Battalion), they successfully landed safely in tall kunai grass and assembled their guns to provide critical fire support for the capture of Nadzab Airfield and the subsequent Allied drive on Lae.

Parachuting before 6RAR

Prior to parachuting occurring in 6RAR, there were occurrences of military parachuting occurring elsewhere in Australia. On 23 Oct 1951, an Airborne Platoon in the RAR was formed at Williamtown, NSW was just one of a number. Terry Duffy, OC of the Rigger Platoon in Williamtown in 1972-73, said the Rigger Trade started in about 1967. Before that, he said that the RAAF used to pack all parachutes. He also commented that in 1968, Airborne Platoon was put on standby to jump into Nauru to clear the airfield, and were very disappointed when the jump was cancelled. This cancellation of the Airborne Platoon task did show that whether you had a Prcht Coy or Prcht Bn, a much smaller force could be deployed depending on the situation.

Other examples of parachuting included the SAS Company undertaking some parachute drops on exercises. In 1969, 3 SAS Squadron undertook an operational parachute drop in South Vietnam, inserting several patrols on the same DZ, before

moving to their respective patrol areas. LT (later BRIG) Chris Roberts participated in that drop carrying a full load of ammunition, five days water, seven days rations, batteries etc., as did other patrol members, commenting "that the weight on our shoulders were such that we have never been so glad to exit an aircraft".

In David Horner's book *Duty First*, mention is made of a major seminar held at the Infantry Centre at the end of 1973. There battalion commanders argued strongly for the Royal Australian Regiment to acquire a limited airborne capability. The Infantry Directorate and within it, LTCOL Tony Hammett in particular, were likewise convinced. As an aside, CO 9RAR LTCOL Essex-Clark from 1971 to 1973 sent his newly arrived subalterns on parachute courses so that they 'would not be lacking in courage'.

In 6RAR, there were two periods of unit or sub-unit level parachuting, firstly undertaken unofficially from early 1974 to mid-1975 and secondly, an officially sanctioned capability from the beginning of 1980 until Dec 1983. That said, it is important to note that during these periods, 6RAR continued as a normal infantry battalion undertaking individual, collective and unit level training and directed activities.

The start of parachuting in 6RAR.



LTCOL Tony Hammett

On 29 March 1974, LTCOL Tony Hammett assumed command of 6RAR. It was early in his reign as CO 6RAR that he made the decision to raise a parachute company in 6RAR. MAJ George Mansford (later BRIG) as Hammett's Operations Officer was given the task of organising it. In *The Spirit of Australia*, Mansford comments; "Parachuting was far from a priority in our Army which was still catching its breath from a marathon run in Vietnam…there was of course the big question. How do you get a Company of infantry, parachute-trained when there was no official authority to do so…fortunately, the parachute School was run by Harry Smith of Long Tan fame."

George Mansford further comments that 6RAR officers and soldiers, not panelled on parachute courses, were sent to PTS at the start of parachute courses. These 'illegals' as they were called, filled vacancies on parachute courses that became apparent on day one. One of the 'illegals' was LT Richard Greville who undertook the basic parachute course in 1974 as did I. As Mansford further comments; 'In a short while, there was a smattering of parachute wings on the weekly Battalion parade.'

Richard Greville remembers that our ninth jump on our basic parachute course was a simultaneous double door exit, in which he was involved in a collision. Recalling the incident he said 'A soldier going out the opposite door of the C130 hesitated and then panicked and steered into me. He came in through my risers. At lunch that day I was sitting next to Harry Smith and he said to me "Greville, were you involved in that collision on the DZ this morning?" And I said " Yes Sir" and he said, "Were you on the top or the bottom?" (Richard was at the bottom, the fellow soldier's canopy collapsed onto Richard's canopy, both now descending under one canopy. Richard had pulled himself up to get himself level with the soldier, spoke to him explaining that both of them and both pairs of feet have to land together. Soon after getting level, the second parachute started to re-inflate, and shortly after, both landed as one and safely). Harry Smith then explained to me (Richard) exactly what happened and how lucky we were. He also told me that two SAS soldiers had been killed in a very similar incident quite recently'. (Harry Smith was referring to the tragic deaths of LT Charles Eiler on 12 August 1969 and SGT John Grafton on 24 August 1969. Both had also collided while undertaking simultaneous double door exits from a C130). I think Richard Greville's calm and quick-thinking actions in a crisis probably saved two lives on that day, the soldier's and his.

In September 1974, some six months after Tony Hammett had become CO, some 64 soldiers from 6RAR jumped into the SWBTA as part of Exercise Strikemaster (see Photo 1) where 6RAR practised open warfare using APCs. Before the jump, a pathfinder team from PTS Williamtown, free-fell from approximately 2,250 metres from a RAAF Caribou to mark out a DZ for the main body.

Throughout 1974, 6RAR resumed collective training for conventional warfare. The battalion continued to train at company and battalion level until March 1975 when it was deployed to Darwin to assist in the clean-up after Cyclone Tracy. In his 16 Months as CO, Tony Hammett had laid the foundation for parachuting in 6RAR, or so he thought! He had suggested to his replacement, LTCOL Peter Stokes who had qualified as a parachutist 15 years earlier that he should undertake a parachute continuation course.

Temporary halt to Parachuting in 6RAR

Before assuming command of 6RAR on 30 July 1975, Peter Stokes flew to Brisbane to meet BRIG Weir, the 6 Task Force Commander at Enoggera. While there, Peter Stokes mentioned to BRIG Weir, a great bloke as he said, that he intended to undertake a parachute continuation course at PTS. As Peter commented; the BRIG exploded, "don't even mention it… there is to be no more parachuting in 6RAR while I am Brigade Commander". He went on to say that the parachute company was unapproved, several soldiers had qualified without having first been approved to attend a course and there had been an exercise in late 1974 where a Battery Commander had broken a leg from parachuting. As Peter Stokes commented, "I would have to think of something else…"

LTCOL Mick Harris, MC took over as CO from LTCOL Stokes on 23 January 1978. He explained to me that parachuting in 6RAR was not a major issue at the time. Some individuals undertook parachute continuation training as happened elsewhere. He went on to say that following Vietnam, there was a growing focus on Defence of Australia and in Army's case, Land Warfare, but not parachuting. Mick Harris said that as the CO he was committed to strengthening 6RAR into becoming a better straight Infantry Battalion.

Parachute Role given to 6RAR in 1980

LTCOL Andy Mattay assumed command of 6RAR on 12 December 1979. Early in 1980, he was directed by HQ 6 TF to raise a parachute company group based on an infantry rifle company. It would be centred around 6RAR Delta Company (of earlier 6RAR D Coy Long Tan fame). At the time, OC D Coy was MAJ David Christie. Apart from his natural leadership style, David was a highly skilled parachutist. He was a parachute jump instructor (PJI), freefall instructor (FFI) and was high altitude low opening (HALO) qualified. He quickly built-up Delta Coy as a competent parachute force. At the same time, other personnel in 6RAR became parachute qualified. As LTCOL Mattay's OPSO, I always found Dave Christie most helpful. Dave would go out of his way to answer questions, make suggestions and so forth. In early 1980, the parachute role in 6RAR was now officially operating under the name, the 6RAR Parachute Company Group (6RAR Prcht Coy Gp).

In outline, the group comprised a Battalion HQ element of CO, OPSO, Comms, Int elements and clerks, and Delta Coy comprising CHQ, 10, 11 and 12 Platoons. Rounding out the group were a 6RAR Medical det, 139 Sig Sqn det, an Aslt Pnr det and a det from 2/3 FER Wksp were part of the group, and in 1982, a pathfinder team of six personnel was created. Additionally, A Coy 6RAR had to have a platoon parachute qualified to augment the Prcht Coy Gp if required. OC A Coy was MAJ Gary Stone. He was an excellent OC and he efficiently had his platoon parachute qualified and ready to play their part when required and without fuss.

All members of the Prcht Coy Group had to be parachute qualified. Additionally, skilled members e.g. signallers needed a back up person with the same same skills on standby in case of injury before deployment. To maintain a Prcht Coy Gp capability, you almost needed a duplicate Coy equivalent in reserve to ensure the Prcht Coy Gp could undertake a task at short notice if directed. That said, the Prcht Coy Group could be tailored to the task, e.g. jumping with more or less Carl Gustaf weapons depending on the type of opposition envisaged.

Exercise Distant Bridge, Tasmania



Distant Bridge Personnel

By 1981, the 6 RAR Prcht Coy Gp had reached its target strength of 180 qualified parachutists, and was set to be tested. This occurred on Exercise Distant Bridge on 10 April 1981 when the group conducted its first full scale deployment near Ross in Tasmania. At the time it was the largest Australian paratrooper drop since WW2. commencing with a pathfinder team parachuted into the vicinity of the DZ prior to the main drop.

Distant Bridge was designed to test a Coy Gp in the methods and techniques to deploy men, equipment and vehicles by parachute over long distances followed by a three-day exercise over a distance of 80km to test soldiers physical fitness and endurance. As part of the 6RAR Prcht Coy Gp that deployed were 12 Sappers and craftmens from 2 Fd Engr Regt and four signalmen from 139 Signal Sqn. The 'enemy' group for the Exercise was supplied from a section of Airborne Platoon based at Williamtown, and by Army Reserve soldiers from Tasmania.

On 10 April 1981, CO 6RAR LTCOL Andy Mattay commanding the 6RAR Prcht Coy Gp and attachments all parachuted onto a DZ near the town of Ross in Tasmania as the start of Ex Distant Bridge. All 162 parachutists moved in four RAAF C130 aircraft - two flying 1500km from RAAF Amberley, and two flying from RAAF Richmond. The four aircraft married up prior to the parachute drop and undertook tactical flying at 500 feet through valleys of Tasmania to the drop zone.

I remember the order coming an hour or so out from the target to stand-up, put-on equipment and prepare to jump. Some of the troops carried M60's, Carl Gustafs, radios etc. There was no room to move on the aircraft and Despatchers were climbing over troops just to check everyone was fitted correctly and so forth. A loaded landrover and trailer was also dropped by cargo parachute. Approaching the DZ, I witnessed a couple of parachutists vomit then jump. With all the drama over the five-hour flight, everyone was self-disciplined and every man exited the aircraft.

On the DZ, the Prcht Coy Gp rallied as per the plan. Some challenges occurred, but overall the landing went well. BHQ set up communications as quickly as it could and began monitoring as Delta Coy split from it and moved away separately in platoons on a three-day exercise over some 80km crossing over many farm fences, some electrified. Some later titled the Exercise; 'A fence too far'.



Exercise Distant Bridge Painting (from a photo of the Distant Bridge parachute drop) presented to 6RAR by the CO LTCOL Andy Mattay.

Exercise Distant Bridge was a very successful exercise demonstrating that 6RAR could competently undertake a parachute company group deployment over a long distance, self-contained, followed by an arduous three-day activity immediately upon landing.

There were numerous anecdotes from Distant Bridge. Following the descent, Neil Farmer of 11 Platoon commented that after patrolling outside of Oatland, TAS, the platoon harboured up at night at one end of a deserted rest park. The platoon was hidden by the high grass and darkness. One by one, the soldiers would refill their water bottles at a nearby tap on the edge of the rest park. Seeing one lone soldier at the tap who from an observer would appear to be alone, a car full of hoons pulled up, got out and looked like they were intent on causing trouble to the lone soldier at the tap. As the hoons headed directly towards the soldier, and got nearer, without any orders, the platoon rose to their feet as one with their weapons pointed in the direction of the hoons. The surprised hoons shrieked in fright. Neil commented, 'you have never seen anyone jump back in their car and disappear so quickly'. The platoon resumed their previous positions and the soldier kept filling his water bottles. It was a case of 'all for one, and one for all'.

Several other parachuting activities took place in 1981 too numerous to mention in this article, one of which was the parachute descent on 19 Oct 1981 into the Glen in SWBTA as part of Ex Kangaroo 81.

In late 1981, I went from being OPSO 6RAR to OC D Coy. Dave Christie had left the Company in great shape which was a bonus for me. My Company 2IC was CAPT Dick Arnell and my CSM was WO2 Bruno Flematti DCM, both Vietnam veterans and both very focused on professionally looking after the soldiers. On taking over, I remember telling D Coy that I was honoured to be the new OC and that one overriding requirement of us being a parachute company was that each member had to para-jump when ordered to do so to remain in the company and that that message applied equally to every company member including myself. We are all in this together.

CAPT Arnell produced Prcht Coy Gp SOPs in 1982 which was a most helpful contribution. At different times, he arranged for members from the 1944 Arnhem parachute drop, Red Beret International, and some Long Tan veterans to visit the company. Our parachutes and equipment were laid out for the Arnhem veterans to view. I overheard one commenting to another that our equipment looked pretty similar to what they jumped with back in WW2. I remember chatting with one of them who was very talkative and seemed knowledgeable on parachute matters providing plenty of free advice. Just out of interest after much chatting, I asked him how many jumps he had undertaken in his life. He replied, 'one'.

In Jan 1982, LTCOL Peter Langford took over as CO. A Vietnam veteran, he put a lot of effort into maintaining and enhancing 6RAR's professionalism. Regarding parachuting, he recently told me that before becoming CO, he knew that 6RAR would lose the parachute role and so did not push parachuting too highly. To his credit, in March 1982, he undertook a basic parachute course and at the time did not broadcast the fact that 6RAR would lose its parachute capability, as that would have been bad for D Coy's morale. Accordingly, the company continued training as normal. I'm glad he took that stance. We all, particularly the soldiers, must believe in the training being undertaken.

D Coy Pathfinder Team



6RAR D Coy Pathfinder / Recon Team 1981-1983. Standing L to R. PTE Dave Warren, PTE Tony Downing, PTE 'Redeye' Hazelman.Front row Seated L to R. PTE Steve Kruse, CPL Bob Davis, PTE Ken Gibb.

On previous exercises, pathfinder teams tasked to mark DZs had been provided by other units including PTS and 1 Cdo Coy. While they did the job competently, I believed that it was

preferable for the Prcht Coy Gp to have its own internal pathfinder team where a close relationship was built and an understanding of each other's needs and requirements. To this end, a Pathfinder team under Cpl Bob Davis was formed in late 1981.

Exercise Bounty Hunter Narrabri, NSW.

On 15 March 1982, D Coy 6RAR conducted an operational training descent into a DZ in the Narrabri area in NSW. D Coy was augmented by a detachment from 139 Sig Sqn and a section from 7 Fd Engr Sqn. The exercise, to seize and hold an airfield against a platoon strength enemy for 24 hours involved the dropping of 152 paratroopers, one Land Rover and trailer and six door bundles from four C-130 Hercules aircraft. A Pathfinder team was provided by freefall 24 hours before the main force drop.

As OC D Coy, it was very satisfying being in charge of this Exercise. I recall issuing orders at night out of a hangar at RAAF Amberley, and then getting the soldiers to come outside the hanger to observe the C130 Hercules undertaking preparations, and the two RAAF RF-111C about to take off to photograph the DZ and target areas. Now about midnight, RAAF Amberley was alive. The RF-111C had advised that they had a return time with photo development of just under two hours, enough time to use the photos for final briefings to the Coy prior to all boarding the C130 aircraft for the tactical jump over DZ Narrabri. Coy members watched as the two RF-111C with lights on roared down the airstrip at great speed. It was all very exciting for all.

Dan Fortune, an 18-year-old PTE at the time was just back from a basic parachute course. He said that Bounty Hunter was such a formative experience for him. He had just completed ground training for Bounty Hunter and had been part of the build-up for the Exercise. He remembered the briefings, orders and battle procedure and the exposure to tactical intelligence. Seeing the RAAF and Army integration and others, Dan said that he saw 'Joint' for the first time. He went on to mention that being exposed to the operational level in the ADF was to see something bigger than yourself, a real sense of purpose, great for esprit de corps, a wonderful start to his career.

D Coy Adventure Training.

After Bounty Hunter, in mid-1982, D Coy undertook a week to 10 days of adventurous training comprising freefall parachuting from 2,500 metres and scuba diving to a depth of 22 metres at Byron Bay NSW, snow survival training and a 50 km ski trek at Mt Kosciusko NSW, and bush walking and navigation exercises in the Lamington National Park, Qld. D Coy soldiers led the various activities. The adventure training was overseen and assisted by two qualified ski instructors, a mountain leader instructor from SASR, four current and former PJI's and two qualified scuba-diving instructors and a pilot. These activities were later covered in a full-page story in the Army Newspaper.



PTE Brian Corby, D Coy 6RAR parts company with the aircraft to make his own way to earth. The despatcher in the photo is Mr Marty Miller while the Chief Instructor with the Golden Beach Skydiving Club, Mr Ron Llewellyn (ex 6RAR) pilots the aircraft.

This Adventure Training activity involved three static line jumps followed by several freefall jumps.

I have always recognised the value of well-planned and demanding Adventurous Training and believe that where possible, it should be part of annual training programs rather than being treated as an after-thought.

Reaching the Top – three of the many 6RAR D Coy stars;

PTE Shane Caughey a PTE in 6RAR D Coy in 1981-83. In 1983 Shane attended OCS Portsea and on graduation was posted to 2/4 RAR and deployed on several United Nations (UN) Missions, including to Iran in 1989-90 and to Jerusalem in 2001-02. In 2004, Shane was appointed CO 6RAR. As CO 6RAR he commanded WESTBATT as part of the UN Mission of Support in East Timor. Further service included Dept of PM, various senior appointments in Defence, deployment to Afghanistan in 2011 and COMD 3 BDE. Shane retired as **MAJGEN Shane Caughey AM, CSC**.



PTE Ben McDevitt a PTE in 6RAR D Coy in 1981-83. In 1983, Ben joined the Australian Federal Police (AFP). For the next 35 years, Ben rose through AFP ranks and held senior appointments. In 2002 he was involved with response to the Bali bombing. Later Ben commanded the RAMSI Mission being awarded the Cross of Solomon Islands for leadership and featured in the ABC Australian Story 'Friends in Need'. He was QLD State Manager of the Australian Crime Commission. Ben was also CEO CrimTrac Agency to 2011, CEO of the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Agency 2014 to 2017. Ben has held CEO and Assistant Commissioner AFP appointments. He retired as **Ben McDevitt AM, APM**.





PTE Dan Fortune, a PTE in 6RAR D Coy in 1981-82. (Photo shows teenager Dan undertaking D Coy freefall adventure training). After D Coy, Dan went to 6RAR Recon Platoon prior to SASR selection and then RMC Duntroon. He served in Bosnia, Iraq and East Timor. Dan was also involved with Domestic CT Service for Sydney Olympics. Later Dan undertook multiple deployments to Afghanistan. After 42 years' service, he retired as **BRIG Dan Fortune, DSC and Bar**.

Star performances. Brilliant. Well done guys.


THE SUNDAY MAIL (BRISBANE). OCTOBER 31, 1982

Big drop

GOING DOWN — MEMBERS OF THE PARACHUTE COMPANY OF 6 ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT FORM AN ALMOST STRAIGHT LINE AS THEY CONTINUE THEIR TRAINING OVER SOUTH-EASTERN QUEENSLAND LAST WEEK. THEY LOOK LIKE SEED PODS AS THEY FLOAT TO THE GROUND FROM THEIR CARIBOU JUMP PLANE.

In Sep 1982, I was posted to the Commonwealth Training Team, Uganda (CMTTU). My replacement as the new OC D Coy 6RAR was MAJ Keith Jobson. Keith continued the maintenance of parachuting skills within the Prcht Coy Gp as depicted in the photo (titled 'Big Drop'. He also involved the pathfinders commanded by CPL Bob Davis in laying out DZ's by day and night and other tasks as required.

One of the more memorable undertakings by D Coy 6RAR in early 1983 was a night jump out of Amberley followed by the normal rallying on the DZ and a 60km approach march. All who parachuted on that day completed the 60km march. There were no dropouts and significant money was also raised for charity.

Peter Stammers who took over as CSM D Coy 6RAR in Sep 1982, after returning from CMTTU, wrote an excellent article titled 'Combining Charity with Training – 6RAR Parachute Company Group' that was published in the winter edition of *Duty First*. It well complements this article and contains some great photos of D Coy soldiers. Peter later became RSM 6RAR and retired from the army as MAJ Peter Stammers, CSM.

The 6RAR Prcht Coy Gp parachute wings below, was mainly designed by CAPT Dick Arnell but was never approved. (one ex-soldier later told me that he has a tattoo of it on his arm).





D Coy 6RAR paraphernalia and 6RAR D Coy Parachute Wings (not approved)

Exercises such as Distant Bridge, Bounty Hunter and others demonstrated that the 6RAR Prcht Coy Gp could competently undertake parachute company group deployments over a long distance, self-contained, followed by an arduous multi-days activity immediately upon landing. I may be biased, but the D Coy soldiers were the best. Although laden down with M60 machine guns, Carl Gustafs, radios and jumping by day and night, never once did a qualified D Coy soldier or officer refuse to jump during the existence of the 6 RAR Prcht Coy Gp 1980 to 1983.

3 RAR assumes Parachute role

On 1 December 1983, the parachute role transferred from 6RAR to 3 RAR. Prior to losing the role, about 100 men from D Coy 6RAR made one last free fall and static line jump into a DZ at Mt Walker about 20 km north-west of Amberley. Following this, several parachute qualified 6RAR officers and soldiers were posted to 3RAR, and a quantity of parachute equipment was transferred from 6RAR to 3RAR.

The 3RAR Parachute Battalion Group incorporated various other groups all of whom had to be parachute qualified. During its time as a Parachute Battalion, 3RAR was ably supported by a wide range of units from the 1st and 3rd Brigades, the Parachute Training School and 176th Air Dispatch Squadron.

3RAR also has a very proud history. The battalion very competently took on the Prcht Bn role and their story is a great but separate story to 6RAR. More information particularly higher-level decisions made in relation to Army's airborne capability, can be found in David Horner's book; *Duty First*.

In 2011, the parachute capability transferred from Army Forces Command to Special Operations Command. CA, LTGEN Morrison commented at the time that 3RAR now faces many new challenges including the move to Townsville,



6RAR Museum, parachute display mainly set up by Scott Hill ex 6RAR and a PJI.

deployment to Afghanistan and playing its part in Army's future. He went onto say that "the parachute capability has been important part of the ADF's contingency force since its inception, and will continue to be so into the future," He further said at the time that the transfer of the parachute capability to Special Operations Command means that the ADF maintains a robust and flexible entry capability while ensuring that Army is better able to meet the challenges of the future.

Conclusion

From the outset, I know that the parachutists from the 1st Australian Parachute Battalion, the 6RAR Prcht Gp and the 3RAR Prcht Bn were equally dedicated to building an airborne capability as best they could and I believe they were equally courageous in that all three groups would not have hesitated to have parachuted on order into a war zone. Parachuting by its nature carries a risk of injury or death to all participants. All paratroopers know this. As mentioned, paratrooping in the army is not a pastime for the timid.

Airborne forces need to be highly trained and led by competent aggressive leaders. Paratroopers are very robust and will jump on order. Planning an airborne operation is a very complex affair.

The 6RAR Prcht Coy Gp of 1980 to 1983 proved that they could competently undertake parachute deployment over long distances, self-contained, followed by an arduous multi-day activity immediately upon landing.

The RAAF and other supporting units were an essential part of all parachute activities. They always showed themselves to be very professional and when engaged, very helpful. Their efforts continue to be much appreciated.

Finally, a note of interest on Arnhem.

Arnhem commemorative parachutes

These red parachutes refer to special red-and-black 'poppy' canopies used in tributes honouring the historic WW2 Battle of Arnhem. The poppy parachutes were a meaningful tribute to the courage and sacrifice of those who served at Arnhem in 1944. The photo below shows three of eight parachutes, each parachute representing a decade of remembrance of the Battle of Arnhem that in 2024 had occurred 80 years earlier. Many a heroic paratrooper has gone before us. Lest we forget.

Patrick Cullinan SC, OAM.

Graduated RMC Duntroon with a BA Mil into Infantry. Served in 5RAR and 5/7RAR, then SASR as Climbing Tp Comd. UNMOGIP (Kashmir) followed. Led Himalayan expedition with SAS. 1980 to 1982 posted to 6RAR and served both as OPSO then OC D Coy 6RAR. CMTTU (Uganda) followed. Led Broad Peak expedition in 1986. Awarded a Star of Courage for a rescue. OPSO 1 CDO REGT then climbed Everest in 1988, a team success without Sherpa help above BC. Awarded an OAM. Posted as 2IC SASR, then promoted LTCOL. Numerous SF and Defence appointments followed. Author of *White Sherpas*. Now retired and living in Canberra with Sharon. Currently President, Canberra City Lions Club. Volunteers wanted, contact patrick.cullinan@yahoo.com.au



Arnhem commemorative red parachutes.

Ultimate Aussie adventure: Rafting the Franklin River



Victor warned me, very loudly, but it was too late. “Get down!” was his shout, but I was a split-second too slow. It had taken the waters of the Franklin River millions of years to carve away some of that huge rock, so I – or, more accurately, my back – had no hope of budging the thing. So, I hit it, at considerable speed, and as I lay face-first in the raft struggling to breathe, I could only thank my portable floatation device (PFD) for me not copping anything worse than a huge winding. It was a not so subtle demonstration of the power of the Franklin River.

A dream begins

I spent my childhood mucking around in canoes on the slow-moving rivers and creeks of south coast NSW. The whitewater of Australia’s big rivers seemed a world away and it took a child’s vivid imagination to compensate for the placid character of our local waterways.

I first discovered the Franklin River in the early ’80s. Like many others, my knowledge came courtesy of the numerous news stories centred around the potential damming of one of Australia’s last wild rivers. I was in high school but can still recall the television footage showing the flotilla of protestors’ rafts, kayaks and canoes, cluttering up the Franklin’s lower sections. My interest was also piqued by Peter Dombrovskis’ famous photo of Island Bend and old reel film of the Franklin’s epic rapids.

Eventually, passion and enthusiasm (with a bit of help from a political party and the High Court) triumphed over energy and money. The Franklin River would not be dammed. More importantly – for my 13-year-old self, at least – a paddling dream stayed alive.

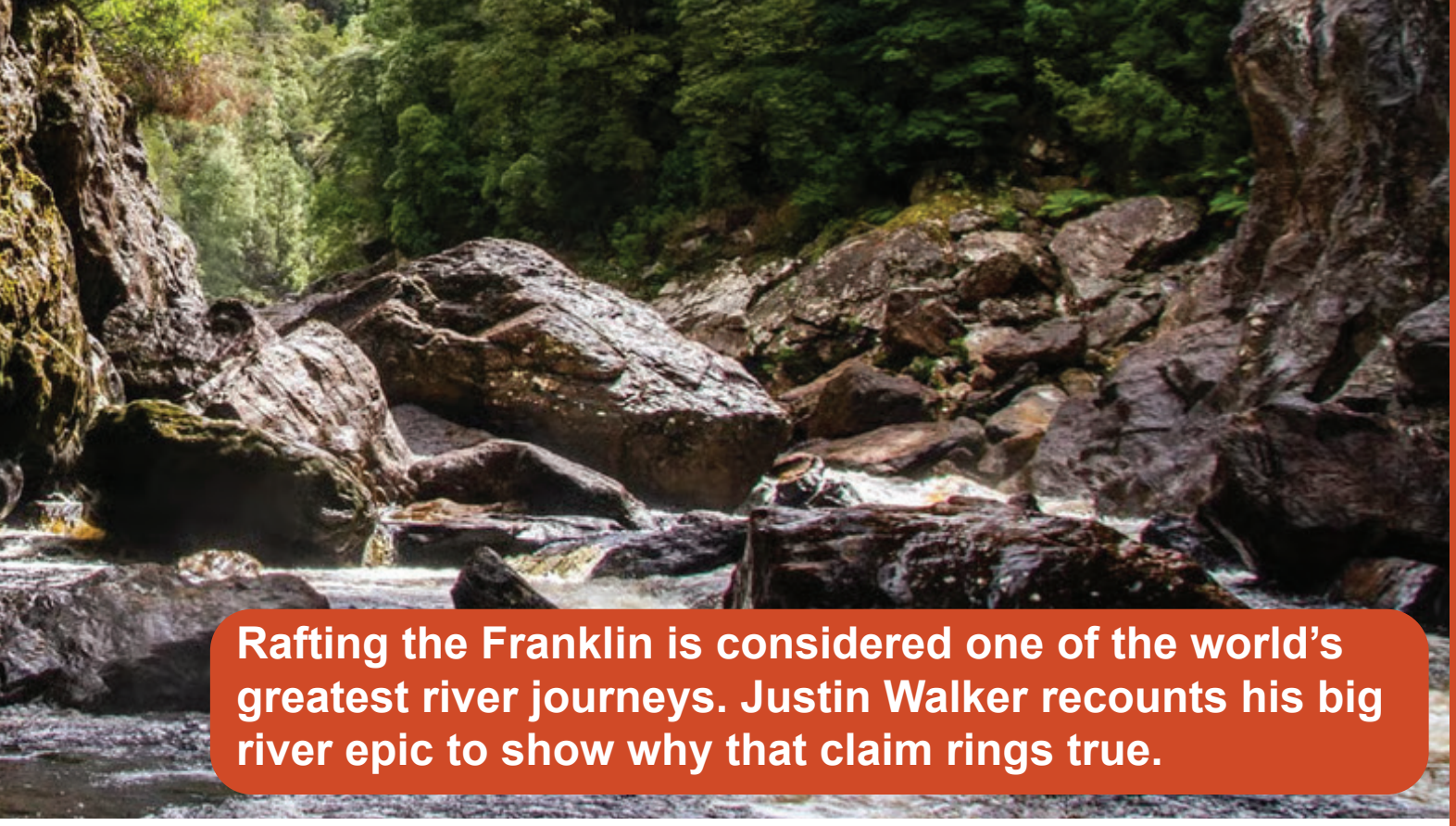
The wild side of the Franklin River

More than thirty years is a long time to wait. But, as the next nine days were about to prove, the rewards for great patience can be immense. Satisfaction was the governing emotion as I helped pack a pair of bright yellow World Expeditions rafts, moored on the rocky banks of the Collingwood River, in advance of setting off on a guided journey with World Expeditions, to fulfil that dream. Guides Oscar, Victor and Dan were directing our group of seven paddlers (Rob and Saffron, Peter, Dave and Gina, Phil and myself) as we loaded the two rafts and divvied ourselves into two rafting crews. We’d have a guide in each raft, plus a third guide would act as a forward scout in a kayak.

The weather was perfect, and the river was calling. Or the Collingwood River, at least – we had about an hour or so of paddling this waterway before we reached the confluence



The rafts are capable of carrying up to around 700kg of cargo, so there’s no need to skimp on camp site luxuries – or food!



Rafting the Franklin is considered one of the world's greatest river journeys. Justin Walker recounts his big river epic to show why that claim rings true.

with the Franklin. The introduction was gentle, with the river at an average flow-height – perfect for paddle-stroke and rafting tuition.

We soon mastered the commands of "back paddle", "forward" and most importantly, "get down". What we hadn't mastered was the negotiation of some of the trickier, shallow rapids we encountered very early on. These required much pushing and shoving from Oscar, our guide (I was in a raft with Rob, Saffron and Dave), along with the crew shifting our weight from side to side, as we tried to shift the raft off the rocks – not an easy task considering its size and weight.

These incredibly bright, yellow watercraft were the marine equivalent of a Land Rover 4WD – able to take a surprisingly heavy load of crew and equipment (esky, food boxes, sleeping gear, cooking gear, etc., all secured with tie-downs). Victor estimated each raft weighed, all up, about 700kg. It wasn't hard to believe. With five adults on board, plus all the equipment, it was amazing that these things could move at all. But they did and when surfing down some of the faster rapids – Sticks and Stones was a standout – the rafts reached impressive speeds. This meant paddle strokes, and paddlers' positions, had to be adjusted very quickly for a successful run.

More than just paddling

One of the Franklin River's many attractions is its camp sites and, even on the first day, I was seriously impressed. Angel Rain Cavern was our aptly named first camp site – we slept on air mats, perched in a cliff under a large overhang, while the river flowed below.

We left Angel Rain Cavern early the next morning, but 10 minutes later we were back on land at our first big portage. The Log Jam was a series of massive logs shoved up against a series of huge boulders, with no way through. The guides tackled this portage; us punters sat perched on a slippery rock face. Water teemed over us from an overhang and rushed through a series of man-sized gaps between the logs below us.

Once the guides had dragged and dropped each raft over the huge logs, we had to tightrope walk along a log then lower ourselves (mainly falling ungainly) into our raft. At that point, it looked like we'd have a fairly easy time, watching the guides portage any difficult sections, while we kept out of the way. A foolish assumption, as it turned out.



Aptly named, The Log Jam is one of the more challenging portages on the early sections of the Franklin, requiring a mix of balance and strength, plus always paying attention to the guide's instructions.

After a series of shallow rapids, some flat water, and pauses to admire big, beautiful Huon pine trees, we reached Nasty Notch and the grunt work started. Manhandling the rafts over a series of rock ledges, even when emptied of rafters, was no easy task. The rocks underfoot were slippery (although you'd never know it, watching the guides dance lightly over them) and the rotund sides of a raft don't make the best handholds, but it is amazing how fear aids concentration. The portage was hard but fun. We managed to get the rafts – and ourselves – to the other side, incident-free, and felt a satisfying sense of achievement.

From here we paddled through a large pool before putting all our rafting skills to the test in Descension Gorge, a series of Class 3 rapids. It was high-adrenaline stuff that ended in the Irenabyss, a large, calm, open section of water and our camp site for the night. As the main camp site was taken, we had to settle for a smaller site on the opposite bank, but our open-air kitchen was right down by the river.

In the Franklin River's shadow

Over the next couple of days, we settled into a familiar routine: wake up, breakfast, pack up, inflate rafts, pack rafts, don helmets and PFDs, start paddling to the next beautiful campsite. Victor and Oscar alternated daily between paddling the kayak or guiding our raft. Rob, Saffron and I had confidently dubbed our raft "The Unsinkable", on account of Peter and Phil taking some unplanned dips out of Dan's raft.



The Beach campsite. A slice of tranquillity along a wild waterway.

Our campsite at The Beach was beautiful and only matched by that day's paddling. With no portaging, plenty of sunshine, a mix of awesome rapids and tranquil sections, we were starting to feel a million miles from civilisation and enjoying every second. We were moving closer to the Great Ravine, the Franklin River's narrowest section, with towering cliffs either side. But there were still big rapids to negotiate before we reached Coruscades, the entry point to the ravine. This was where I copped the winding from hell. Our 700kg raft turned into a waterborne spinning top after we misjudged a rock's location. We whipped around amazingly fast and I fell face-first in the raft, swallowing a bit more of the Franklin on the raft floor. It all happened super quick but, thankfully I only ended up a bit sore and was okay to keep paddling.



Oscar, one of the guides, tackles the Class 4 Coruscades in a kayak.

Soon after, we stopped to see a small riverside waterfall and then stopped, rather more abruptly, at the head of The Churn, a Class 6 monster series of rapids. Here the guides used ropes to lower the rafts down. We rejoined them to run the Class 4 Coruscades – which were brilliant fun – and then watched Oscar tackle the whitewater in the kayak. The camp site at Coruscades was a welcome sight. From here, the Great Ravine beckoned.

An increasingly narrow world

Portages are one of the less fun aspects of river-running, as I was reminded when our day started with the toughest portage so far – from our camp site over a slippery, steep and narrow track to the bottom of the Coruscades rapid. We dragged, carried and swore at the eskies and other heavy pieces of equipment. It took a couple of hours to get it all done, then finally we were paddling. Well, for a short while, anyway.

It was a big day for portaging, and we repeated the morning's procedure several times as we negotiated Sidewinder and then Thunderrush, where Rob, Peter, Phil and I helped drag the two rafts over huge boulders and into a fast-boiling rapid, where we got to do the "Wild Thing". It really was like a kid's adventure dream come true. Dan and his raft were first to do the dance. A slipknot secured the raft to a sunken log, the crew jumped in and, while being buffeted by the power of the rapid, unhitched the knot and shot out at speed into the river's main channel. It was brilliant. Our raft also had Victor and his kayak on board. The extra weight and imbalance dragged the raft's rear left corner down, threatening to capsize us before Oscar could release the rope. I am sure the crew's screams had nothing to do with Oscar completing the uncoupling at record speed.

Rafting through the Great Ravine was like travelling through mythical lands: the knife-edge ridges and steep cliff walls were shrouded in mist and that atmosphere, plus some of the trip's largest rapids, etched it in my memory as the best day on the river.

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The Overlord G2 (formerly Arc Light*) tactical glasses are built to support those who serve. Designed with military-grade Z87.1+ high-velocity ballistic protection, they pair advanced lens technology with adjustable nose pads.
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AVAILABLE IN: Black Frame or Tan Frame



The Cauldron is one of the Franklin's most dangerous rapids and necessitates an hour-long portage of the rafts.

The Franklin was at its wildest at The Cauldron. The guides (with Rob assisting) had to portage this rapid, which is one of the river's most dangerous. The last person to die on the Franklin drowned here after being trapped under the rocks. The two gear-laden rafts were inched through the pounding rapids, around huge boulders, then went into freefall over a rapid so tall it could be more accurately described as a waterfall. It was incredible to watch from the high bank on the opposite side of the river. The rafts – and the guides – were dwarfed by the immensity of the river; it was powerful stuff.

Later that day, on our way to Rafter's Basin camp site, we passed through The Biscuit, the remnants of an ancient wall the river had broken through. The two ends, minus the middle section, really did look like a half-eaten bicky. Interestingly, The Biscuit was also earmarked as a potential location for a dam wall; the hydro dam plans included using the sidewalls to form the basis of the dam wall.

The reality of an iconic image

It was just a photograph. But it was a photograph that brought home to everyday Australians what was at risk.



Rock Island Bend, the location of the iconic image 'Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend', by Peter Dombrovskis, which was instrumental in the campaign to stop the Franklin being dammed.

'Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend', by Peter Dombrovskis, ran in The Age newspaper as a double-page colour spread (colour spreads in newspapers were exceedingly rare in the early '80s). It appeared during the campaign to save the Franklin and has since been cited as one of its most influential moments. In the photo, Rock Island is shrouded in mist, with the Franklin's waters swirling smoothly by. It's a beautiful image that captures the essence of the river. This made it a powerful tool for the anti-dam campaigners, who were desperate to ensure every Australian realised what the Franklin River represented – something rare, wild and free.

We reached Rock Island Bend on our second day in the Great Ravine. Bright sunshine gave us a totally different view of this location. It was still spectacular, but possessed a harder, wilder edge than the softly lit Dombrovskis image. We loitered here for a while, ambling up to explore a nearby waterfall, then jumped back in the rafts and passed The Pig Trough before arriving at the Franklin's longest runnable rapids – Newland Cascades – and our camp site of the same name.

The rapids were an epic event, only outdone by the camp site and a brilliant lunch of sushi (suddenly, those heavy





Camp sites along the river varied each night, from the compact ones nestled on a hill-side, to the natural amphitheatre afforded by an immense overhanging rock shelf.



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eskies didn't seem quite so bad). We had our own choice of camp sites spread over a huge rock platform, sheltered by a massive overhang. My chosen digs (a perfectly sized slab of rock) provided me with a 180-degree view of the river below. Each night's camp had been different to the last – but all were equally memorable. However, snuggling down in my sleeping bag, listening to the roar of the Cascades from my lofty, open-air perch was my ultimate "night out".

Slowly, slowly on the Franklin River

Rafts are designed to go over rapids, but when it comes to long distances, of flat water, it's a different story. And, on our last two days, that's exactly what we found.

As we moved out of the Great Ravine, the tall cliffs on either side shrank, the river widened and maintaining forward momentum became a lot harder. Some sections of river were dead flat and we also copped the odd headwind, so our progress was slow. We explored Aboriginal caves along the way and, on our last night in the wild, camped at yet another beautiful location: a sandy beachhead on a bend in the river.

Our last day was even slower, as we portaged the gnarly Big Falls before continuing downriver to the opening of a slot canyon, which our guides dubbed "The Lost World". Once again, the moniker was apt. Scrambling through the canyon's entrance led us to an emerald-green wonder world, with everything covered in lustrous moss. We explored up the canyon for quite a way, splashing through deeper water and sidling along narrow, smooth-walled niches, before coming out higher up on drier land. It was spectacular, a brilliant sign-off.



Victor pauses at the gateway to The Lost World, a slot canyon of ever-changing shades of green that branches off the Franklin River. It is an absolute must-explore.

From The Lost World, we soon reached the confluence of the Franklin and Gordon rivers. The Gordon was running fast, so we rafted-up the two rafts, Oscar threw some Bob Marley on our raft's cassette player and we flailed away into a headwind that wasn't quite strong enough to match our paddle strokes and the rivers' flow.

That last hour was, besides the perfectly suited tones of Bob, spent in near-silence. It seemed like everyone was trying to retain as much of the exhilarating experience we'd had over the 125km and eight days on the river as they could. The Jetty, our final camp, was empty when we arrived, but its steel-bound frame and national parks info board seemed like modern-day intrusions after our immersion in pure wilderness.

The Franklin River dream flows to an end

I waited a bloody long time to fulfil my dream of paddling the Franklin. For once, a dream was surpassed by the awesome reality, thanks to the river, the rapids, the landscape, the history and the all-encompassing sense of pure, unspoiled wilderness. It's amazing to think this remains only thanks to a passionate, never-say-die group of people who believed the Franklin was worth fighting for.



One of our marine workhorses at rest after another epic day on one of the world's greatest river journeys.

When Victor first mentioned that drinking from the river over the course of the trip would, in effect, transform you into the Franklin, I laughed – but his words also fostered a dreamy hope. At least, if some sense of the Franklin was retained inside me, it might tide me over until the next time I run the river. And there will be a next time…

Justin Walker
Editor
Australian Geographic Adventure

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South Australia Veterans Court Marks a Milestone for the Veteran Community

From 3 August 2026, South Australia became the first state in Australia to establish a dedicated Veterans Court. This landmark initiative has been made possible through a collaborative partnership between the Elizabeth Magistrates Court, Defence Kidz, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), and the Department for Correctional Services (DCS).

The South Australian Veterans Court (SAVC) is a specialist sentencing court that supports veterans involved in the criminal justice system by connecting them with treatment, rehabilitation, and support services.

Operating within the Magistrates Court of South Australia at Elizabeth, SAVC recognises that some veterans may experience service-related challenges that contribute to offending behaviour. The Court provides an opportunity for eligible veterans to address these underlying issues while their matters progress through the court system.

Participants work with a network of support services, including DCS Veteran Services, DVA, Open Arms, veteran family support organisations, and other community-based providers. Together, these services help veterans access practical assistance, mental health support, treatment programs, and community connections.

Eligible veterans who have pleaded guilty and are willing to engage in rehabilitation and support services may be considered for participation. The Court regularly reviews participants' progress and may take engagement and rehabilitation outcomes into account during sentencing.

The South Australian Veterans Court reflects a collaborative approach between the justice system, government agencies, and veteran support organisations, with the shared goal of improving outcomes for veterans, their families, and the wider community.

For more information about the South Australian Veterans Court, veterans can speak with their legal representative, contact the Magistrates Court of South Australia, or visit the Courts Administration Authority website:
https://www.courts.sa.gov.au/

Service in the ADF reflects a commitment to sacrifice in the service of others. By addressing the underlying causes of offending and connecting veterans with appropriate services, the Court seeks to improve rehabilitation outcomes and reduce future offending.

The establishment of the South Australia Veterans Court (SAVC) marks a significant milestone for the veteran community. It is also a proud achievement for Royal Australian Regiment Corporation (RARC) Director and Senior Advisor for Veterans at the South Australian Department for Correctional Services (DCS), Chris Tilley, and for the RARC as a whole.

In 2022, the DCS launched its Veteran Services Pilot Program as part of the *DCS Veteran Staff, Prisoners and Offenders Strategy and Action Plan 2021–2025*. The initiative was developed in response to several incarcerated former RAR members and the recognition that, with the right support, veterans involved in the justice system have the potential to continue making positive contributions to the community.

The RARC played a critical role in the program's development, advocating for the concept during its formative stages and continuing to provide a vital communication platform between the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), the Australian Government, and the broader veteran community.

By 2025, the first DCS Veteran Strategy had concluded, supported by DVA's Prison Support Officer. The initiative had also attracted interest from several other state correctional services, which are now actively exploring and developing similar programs for justice-involved veterans.

As of 3 August this year, that work reaches another landmark with the launch of Australia's first Veterans Court. The South Australia Veterans Court builds upon the DCS Veteran Services Program by collaboratively integrating veteran identification, service verification, and tailored support within the court process.

A common question is, *"Why should veterans receive special treatment?"* The answer is that this is not about preferential treatment—it's about recognising service and providing appropriate support. Every veteran has made a conscious decision to serve something greater than themselves. By helping veterans maintain those values and successfully reintegrate into the community, we create better outcomes not only for them but for society as a whole.

Reflecting on the journey, Chris Tilley said:

"This has been a long road paved by many more people than I can mention. However, I'd particularly like to acknowledge Ian Campbell (former 2RAR/NZ NZAC Bn. Vietnam), who first set me on this path; Hayley Boswell from Defence Kidz; Michael Von Berg from the RARC; the DVA team we've worked alongside; the Magistrates who recognised the benefits this initiative brings to the community; and, most importantly, the veterans who continue to serve our community in so many ways. "Service doesn't stop at discharge."

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KINDERGARTEN - YEAR 12

PAW PATROL BRINGS CALM TO UNITS



Gunner Gabriel Nicolas petting Facility Dog Quinley from 1st Regiment Royal Australian Artillery at Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera. Defence images.

In a unit known for guns, grit and high-tempo training, one of the most recognisable faces around the 1st Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery (1 Regt RAA) is a black labrador named Quinley.

Quinley is part of a 12-month Defence trial supporting chaplaincy and welfare engagement across the Joint Military Police Unit (JMPU) and 1 Regt RAA in Brisbane.

Quinley began life in the Guide Dogs Queensland program and is among the 40-50 per cent of dogs that are redirected into alternative work.

Now nearly three years old, and still owned by Guide Dogs Queensland, Quinley is housed by Flight Sergeant Darren Monopoli, of JMPU Brisbane.

Quinley quietly moves alongside 1 Regt RAA Chaplain Joanna Colgan as she goes about her day.

“The point of a facility dog is that people relax,” Chaplain Colgan said.

“They sit down, start patting him, and before long they’re talking without really thinking about it. He takes the edge off straight away.”

That is where Quinley spends most of his time; not in formal offices, but in the in-between moments of unit life, welfare conversations, informal check-ins and quiet chats.

Chaplain Colgan said the change in environment was immediate.

“People open up more. They talk more and if I walk through the unit without him, I’m asked straight away where he is. They notice,” she said.

'Quinley is a success story. He is emotionally aware. He reads people and he responds to the environment he is in.'



The trial is part of a broader partnership between Defence and Guide Dogs Queensland exploring alternative pathways for dogs that may not become guide dogs, but still have strong capabilities suited to other working roles.

For Guide Dogs Queensland dog supply and training manager Carolyn Rose, Quinley represents exactly what the program aims to achieve.

“We have to be honest when a dog isn’t right for guide dog work,” Ms Rose said. “But that does not mean the end of their working life.

“Quinley is a success story. He is emotionally aware. He reads people and he responds to the environment he is in. While those traits may not suit guide dog work, they are exactly what is needed in a wellbeing role.”

She said the outcome was based on early training.

“The puppy-raising program exposes them to everything – people, places, noise and movement. That is what makes them adaptable. Labradors in particular are very people-focused and they tend to stay that way,” Ms Rose said.

Flight Sergeant Monopoli said Quinley adapted to Defence life quickly.

“From the start, he just fit,” he said. “He has been really effective with our social worker and welfare teams. You can see people settle quicker and conversations start easier. He changes the tone of the room.”

Captain Elisha Crowther

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CADETS RETURN TO THE BLUE MOUNTAINS AS NEW UNIT LAUNCHES AT WENTWORTH FALLS

A new chapter in the Blue Mountains' military and community history is about to begin, with the formation of the 228 Army Cadet Unit (ACU) Blue Mountains, based in Wentworth Falls at Blue Mountains Grammar School (BMGS).

The new unit, which commenced parading on 23 July, will be the only Army Cadet Unit in the Blue Mountains area and will welcome young people from across the region, not just students of BMGS.

For the Unit, the launch also represents a reconnection with the School's history. BMGS hosted an Army Cadet Unit during the 1940s and 1950s, with photographs from the School archives showing cadets participating in drills, camps and ceremonial activities. The 214 ACU also paraded in Katoomba before closing in the early 2000s.

As preparations continue for the launch, 228 ACU Blue Mountains and BMGS hope former cadets, family members and local historians may be able to help build a richer picture of this important part of the region's history by sharing memories, photographs and stories relating to previous cadet activities in the Mountains.



Deputy Principal Mr Owen Laffin said the School was delighted to support the establishment of the new unit.

"Army Cadets offer valuable opportunities for young people to develop leadership, teamwork, resilience and confidence," Mr Laffin said.

"While the unit will be located at BMGS, it is intended to serve young people from across the Blue Mountains. We are pleased to support an organisation that provides such positive experiences and opportunities for growth."

Officer Commanding Major (AAC) Simon Manwaring said the new unit would provide young people with opportunities for personal growth, adventure and service while fostering strong community connections.

"The Army Cadet motto is 'A rising generation under a rising sun', and that speaks beautifully to what Cadets can offer young people," Major Manwaring said.

"Through the Army values of service, courage, respect, integrity and excellence, cadets learn practical skills, build confidence and develop a strong sense of responsibility to each other and their community."

The unit is open to boys and girls aged 12 to 18 and will parade weekly on Thursday evenings from 1800 to 2100 (6:00pm to 9:00pm in civilian time!).

Community members with photographs, memorabilia or stories relating to Army Cadets in the Blue Mountains are encouraged to contact Blue Mountains Grammar School at bluemountainsgrammarschool@bmgs.nsw.edu.au or on (02) 4757 9000.

For information about joining the 228 Army Cadet Unit Blue Mountains, visit armycadets.gov.au



JCU and Army Cadets forge education partnership



JCU Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Simon Biggs with Commander of the Australian Army Cadets, Brigadier David McCammon AM DSM and Bar. JCU

James Cook University (JCU) and the Australian Army Cadets have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) recognising the leadership and skills Cadets develop through their training.

Under the agreement, Cadets will receive entry adjustments that add points to their ATAR or equivalent admission rank, along with access to leadership opportunities when they begin studying at JCU.

JCU Vice-Chancellor Professor Simon Biggs said the partnership would encourage more Cadets to pursue higher education.

"Cadets demonstrate teamwork, perseverance and self-discipline, and many come from North Queensland," Professor Biggs said.

"We want to support more Cadets to study at JCU because we know they will make a valuable contribution to our university."

Commander Australian Army Cadets, Brigadier David McCammon AM, DSM and Bar, said the agreement reflected a shared commitment to developing young Australians.

"JCU is a highly respected institution with strong Defence links, particularly with the Australian Army," Brigadier McCammon said.

The opportunities created through this partnership demonstrate a genuine investment in young people and their future."

JCU and the Australian Army have a long-standing relationship through research, teaching, flexible study pathways and recognition of military qualifications. The university also delivers language training to Townsville's 3rd Brigade and joins the brigade each year in the "Battle of the Icons" sporting competition.

The MoU was signed at JCU on 27 July.

Townsville Grammar Army Cadets return after 48 years



Commander of the Australian Cadets Brigadier Dave McCammon inspects the new unit. Townsville Grammar FaceBook

Townsville Grammar School has re-established its Army Cadet unit after a 48-year break, holding its inaugural parade on the school's original parade ground.

The school first raised a cadet unit in 1907, making the return a significant milestone in its long military tradition.

Year 10 student Harrison Holmes, a Cadet Corporal with the new 153 Army Cadet Unit, said the program had special meaning.

"To have a cadet unit here at school means a lot because of the history we've had with the Army and the previous cadet unit," he said.

Principal Connor Barrett said reinstating the unit marked an exciting chapter for the school.

"We're delighted to see it become a reality and thank the Australian Army Cadets for partnering with us to establish 153 Army Cadet Unit," he said.

Commander Australian Army Cadets, Brigadier Dave McCammon AM, DSM and Bar, said Townsville Grammar's strong Army heritage and shared values made it an ideal partner.

Shadow Minister for Defence Industry and Defence Personnel Phil Thompson, who attended the parade, encouraged more schools to establish cadet units. "Cadets teach young people lifelong skills that help them grow into productive members of society," he said.

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Match Fit for War: Army Training Evolves for a More Demanding Future

The Australian Army is preparing for a more complex and dangerous strategic environment by reshaping how it trains its soldiers and leaders, with Chief of Army Lieutenant General Simon Stuart declaring that recruits must be "match fit for war" before they enter the force.

Speaking at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra late June, Lieutenant General Stuart outlined the findings of a comprehensive review of the Army profession, commissioned in 2024. Central to the review is a commitment to remove what he described as "arbitrary time restrictions" on training courses and ensure soldiers and officers receive the time and investment necessary to master their profession.

The changes mark a significant shift in Army's approach to preparing its people for modern warfare.

"We are expecting Australians to make the significant transition from citizen to soldier too quickly and without sufficient investment," LTGEN Stuart said.

The current recruit training course, which transforms civilians into soldiers, is 13 weeks long. Under the new approach, the course will continue to expand in both length and depth. Similarly, officer training at the Royal Military College – Duntroon will increase by approximately one-third following a successful trial.

"The foundations we're building are not strong enough yet to bear the full weight of our profession," LTGEN Stuart said.

"I've directed that these courses are to be as long as they need to be in order to build the right foundations for a profession that is match fit for war."

The Chief of Army emphasised that the decision is not a return to previous training models, but rather recognition that modern soldiers and junior leaders require greater investment in leadership, decision-making and military skills before entering the operational force.

"It is recognition that our junior leaders need a greater investment of time in the foundations of military command and leadership if they are to fulfil their obligation and their duty to our mission and to those whom they are privileged to lead," he said.

As LTGEN Stuart handed over command to Chief of Joint Capabilities Lieutenant General Susan Coylein July, the reforms are likely to shape Army training for years to come.

Building Combat-Capable Soldiers

The rationale behind the changes is evident at the School of Infantry in Singleton, New South Wales, where soldiers undertake the demanding 17-week Rifleman Course before joining a battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment.

The course is designed to transform newly graduated soldiers from Kapooka into capable infantry riflemen able to operate effectively in combat environments.

Private Hudson Sanders is one of those soldiers.

Fresh from completing the course, he reflected on how dramatically he had changed during the training.

"I look at myself from week one when I started here, going from more of a held back, scared, unknown environment," he said.

"My confidence, belief in myself and my own ability has improved tenfold from what it was, and that's just what the course does for you."

The training begins with an intensive individual skills phase covering navigation, communications, combatives and weapons qualifications. Soldiers learn to operate a wide range of weapon systems, from pistols to the MAG58 general service machine gun.

A particularly memorable component for many trainees is the explosives phase, where they learn to employ grenades, recoilless rifles and Claymore mines.

According to Depot Company instructor Lieutenant Tyson Hancox, every aspect of the course is designed to prepare soldiers for the realities of combat.

"This is done through testing and enhancing their physical resilience, working and fighting in small teams to generate safe, lethal and effective infantry soldiers," Lieutenant Hancox said.



"A good infantry soldier displays Defence values, thrives in a small-team environment, is willing to learn and perfect their craft, and possesses high levels of moral, physical and mental resilience."

As the course progresses, trainees move into the operational phase, learning the core skills of infantry combat. This includes patrolling, constructing and defending positions, live-fire manoeuvre, urban operations and close-quarter combat.

Importantly, instructors are not simply teaching procedures; they are developing thinking soldiers.

"We want to create thinking soldiers, able to apply everything we have taught them and understand why we're teaching them," Lieutenant Hancox said.

"It makes everyone's life easier if, even at the lowest level, soldiers are asking, 'What needs to happen next? What can I start doing?' rather than just facing out on the gun waiting to be told."

The Final Test

The culmination of months of training comes during Exercise HardCorps, the final assessment that tests every skill soldiers have learned under conditions of fatigue, uncertainty and pressure.

For Private Ryan Doyle, the exercise represented the moment where training and reality began to merge.

Just before midnight, he prepared his equipment and waited in darkness for the mission to begin.

"I was more excited than anything, to be honest," he said.

"We didn't quite know what was in store, they didn't really give us a brief, so I was in anticipation of what was coming."

The exercise quickly intensified as the platoon moved through the darkness carrying heavy packs and stores. An enemy ambush forced the section into action, engaging targets while simultaneously treating and evacuating a wounded soldier.

After applying tactical combat casualty care, the section carried the casualty on a stretcher through difficult terrain.

"We had just come off 10 days of digging defensive positions, so my grip was quite gone," Private Doyle recalled.

"I wasn't expecting that."

SCHOOL OF INFANTRY





The scenario tested not only physical endurance but also the ability to think and act under pressure. It drew upon every skill developed throughout the course, from weapons handling and navigation to teamwork and leadership.

During the previous 17 weeks, Private Doyle had learned to operate multiple weapon systems, employ explosives, conduct close-quarter battle drills, construct defensive positions and patrol through challenging terrain.

Now, Exercise HardCorps demanded he bring all those skills together.

The exercise continued through urban operations, obstacle courses and bayonet assault lanes before culminating in a live-fire shoot on the 25-metre range.

Only after successfully completing the assessment could soldiers claim the coveted Skippy Badge – the symbol that marks a qualified infantry rifleman.

Earning the Badge

For both Private Doyle and Private Sanders, receiving the Skippy Badge represented far more than completing a course. It signified entry into one of Army's most demanding combat professions.

After the final assessment, the atmosphere changed instantly.

The determined focus of the previous hours gave way to smiles, laughter and a sense of achievement as soldiers prepared for the presentation ceremony.

Holding the badge in his hands, Private Doyle reflected on why he had joined the Army.

"I wanted a challenge and to do things that you don't get to do as an ordinary person," he said.

"The equipment you use, the lifestyle, it stood out to me."

For Private Sanders, qualification also meant a posting to the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), a unit with personal significance.

"My father served for six years at 1RAR," he said. "It's really exciting not only for me but also my family, which makes it even more important to me to be serving at the Big Blue One."

Both soldiers now begin the next phase of their careers, joining operational battalions where they will continue to develop their skills and contribute to Army capability.

"I'm looking forward to learning what it's like to be a soldier," Private Doyle said.

"We've completed this training and now we move on to learn and develop more."

Investing in Readiness

The experiences of soldiers like Privates Sanders and Doyle highlight the reason behind Army's decision to invest more time in foundational training.

As Australia's strategic environment becomes increasingly uncertain, the Army is placing greater emphasis on preparing soldiers and leaders for the realities of modern warfare before they reach operational units.

Lieutenant General Stuart's reforms recognise that combat effectiveness cannot be rushed. Building resilience, leadership, tactical competence and professional mastery requires time, repetition and experience.

The message from Army's leadership is clear: future soldiers must arrive at their units not simply trained, but truly prepared.

In an era where readiness may determine success on the battlefield, Army is ensuring its people are not merely fit for service, but match fit for war.

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342916 Pte Michael Damien Poole, 5th Battalion RAR

KIA 21 February 1967

Story delivered 21 May 2013

Speech transcript

Today, we remember and pay tribute to Private Michael Damien Poole.

Mick Poole was a member of the 5th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. The battalion arrived in Vietnam in 1966 and as part of the 1st Australian Task Force was stationed at Nui Dat in the Phuoc Tuy province. In late February 1967 they began Operation Renmark, a search-and-destroy operation to remove Viet Cong strongholds from the Long Hai Hills. The roads and approaches into this area had been extensively mined and booby-trapped by the Viet Cong and, although subjected to artillery fire and air strikes, had not seen an infantry operation against it since June 1966.

Armoured personnel carriers took Australian troops through the dangerous area, where they identified camps, ammunition dumps, food stores, tunnels, and mines of the enemy. On the early afternoon of the 21st of February B Company was changing to a new search area to the south. The official history describes them rumbling along “in a long line of APCs beside a track in the foothills, two kilometres from the sea”1 when suddenly a huge explosion hurled the



Private (Pte) Michael Poole, 5 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. AWM

lead carrier, in which Mick Poole was riding, into a backwards somersault. It had hit an enemy mine on the track.

Captain Tony White, the medical officer of 5RAR described the scene:

Ten metres away the APC lay on its side. Its back door had been blown off and nearby lay what at first glance seemed to be a pile of discarded uniforms, blackened and dusty. Getting closer I realised that the heap was composed of dead and wounded soldiers. In amongst the carnage, I came across the body of Mick Poole. He had just turned 20 and was a favourite with village kids because of his cheeky good humour. He played the tenor horn in the battalion band. On patrol, bandsmen acted as stretcher-bearers and provided first aid. I caught up with the B company medic, and three more stretcher-bearers, all dazed and wounded but getting on with tackling what lay at hand.

Seven Australian soldiers died in the incident and 28 were wounded, two of whom later died of their wounds. Mick Poole was just twenty years old.

Many years after the event, Private Ross Wood from 5RAR recalled this terrible incident:

There was a lot of sadness as we all knew our mates who had been hit, and the deathly silence in the company position as that last Iroquois with the bodies on board flew slowly [away]... seemed to last forever.

Mick Poole‘s name is listed on the Roll of Honour on my left, along with around more than 500 others from the Vietnam War.

This is but one of the many stories of courage and sacrifice told here at the Australian War Memorial. We now remember Private Michael Damien Poole, and all of those Australians who have given their lives in service of our nation.

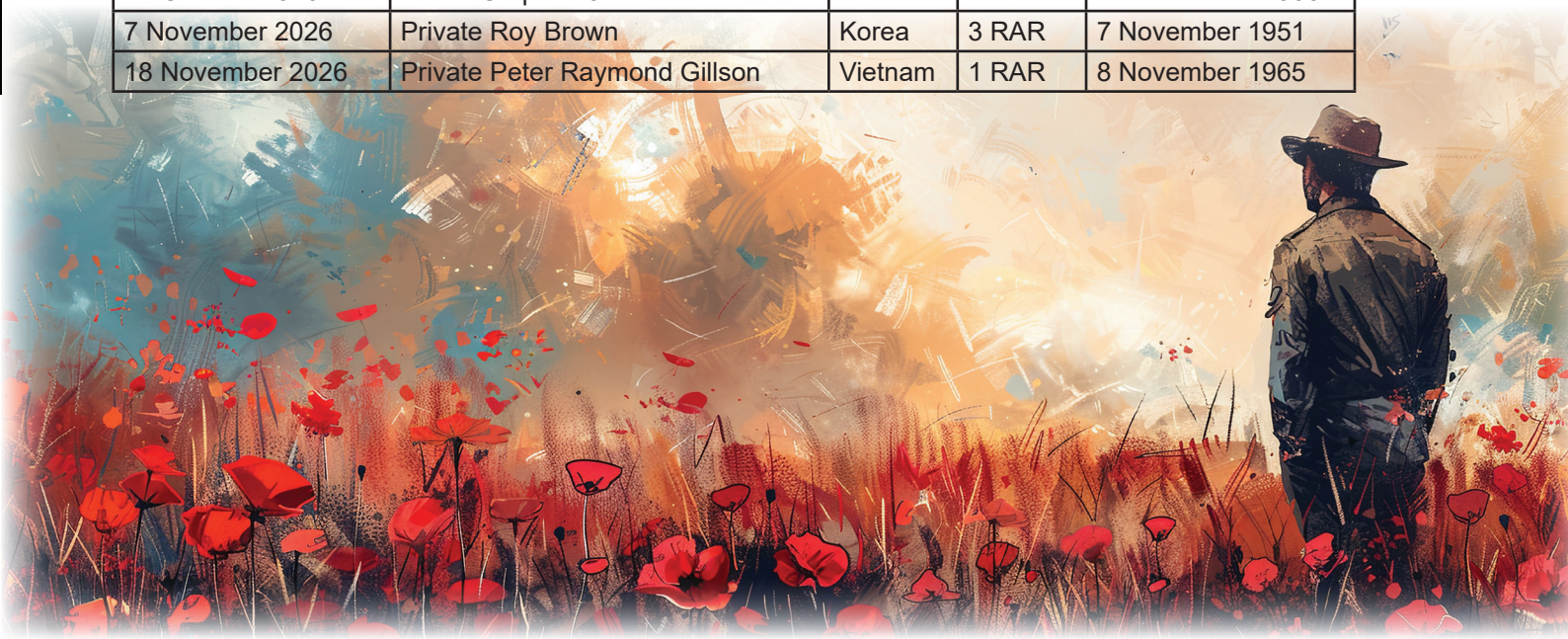
Michael Kelly
Historian, Military History Section

https://www.awm.gov.au

www.youtube.com/@AWMLastPost

UPCOMING LAST POST CEREMONIES OF RAR SOLDIERS

Date of Ceremony	Name and Rank	Conflict	Unit	Date of Death
21 September 2026	Private Brian Charles Beilken	Vietnam	4 RAR	21 September 1971
5 October 2026	Lance Corporal William John Yeo	Korea	3 RAR	6 October 1951
12 October 2026	Private Gordon Knight	Vietnam	6 RAR	9 July 1966
21 October 2026	Lance Corporal John Milton Rands	Vietnam	1 RAR	12 December 1966
7 November 2026	Private Roy Brown	Korea	3 RAR	7 November 1951
18 November 2026	Private Peter Raymond Gillson	Vietnam	1 RAR	8 November 1965



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1RAR

TRAINING CLOSE TO THE LINE



When you are dropping mortars in support of your mates, it's essential that all your drills remain consistent under pressure.

So, when mortar platoons from across Army gathered for a live-fire danger-close activity, it was the subtle differences in the teams that interested Sergeant Kurtis Sharman.

The long-time mortarman from 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), noticed that despite everyone learning the same drills, each platoon had its own quirks.

"It was interesting to see the minutiae in differences. It could be as mundane as which side they place their bombs to which side they drop down after they fire," Sergeant Sharman said.

"I'd have a yarn to these guys from across Australia to ask 'why do you do that?' and it was good to learn and share knowledge from all the different platoons."

The mortarmen concentration aimed to re-certify all mortar platoons across Army to conduct danger-close fire missions as part of regular training.

Danger-close refers to fire missions with friendly call signs inside 600 metres, with a safety distance of 90 metres on operations and 300 metres in training.

This type of fire is used to support troops in close contact. An historical example is the Battle of Long Tan.

Each battalion progressed through basic mortar drills and technical fire missions, assessed by the School of Artillery Mortar Wing, which links shooting and fire planning.

'It was interesting to see the minutiae in differences. It could be as mundane as which side they place their bombs to which side they drop down after they fire.'

The danger-close serials were carried out by pre-firing coordinates, then moving the mobile fire controllers into position to call in the fire mission.

It was the first danger-close mission for Private Brendan Walsh, a number two mortarman from 1RAR, who said despite the heightened intensity of a danger-close mission, drills remained the same.

"Obviously, we want to make sure we're as accurate as possible because we don't want to be hitting our own guys," he said.

"We put sandbags on the legs of the mortars, but apart from that, it'll be the same as a normal mission."

As a number two, Private Walsh is responsible for dropping the bombs down the tube, as well as confirming the number one's input firing data.

He joined mortars for the culture and the important role they play for infantry battalions as their organic indirect fire support.

Sergeant Sharman said being able to run danger-close missions as part of regular training benefits not only the mortar teams but the rest of the unit.

"If our company's doing a live-fire assault, soldiers from across the battalion will actually be able to see the bombs fall and the effect [they have] on the ground," he said.

"It will make actions like an all-arms call for fire make a lot more sense to newer soldiers."

Corporal Michael Rogers

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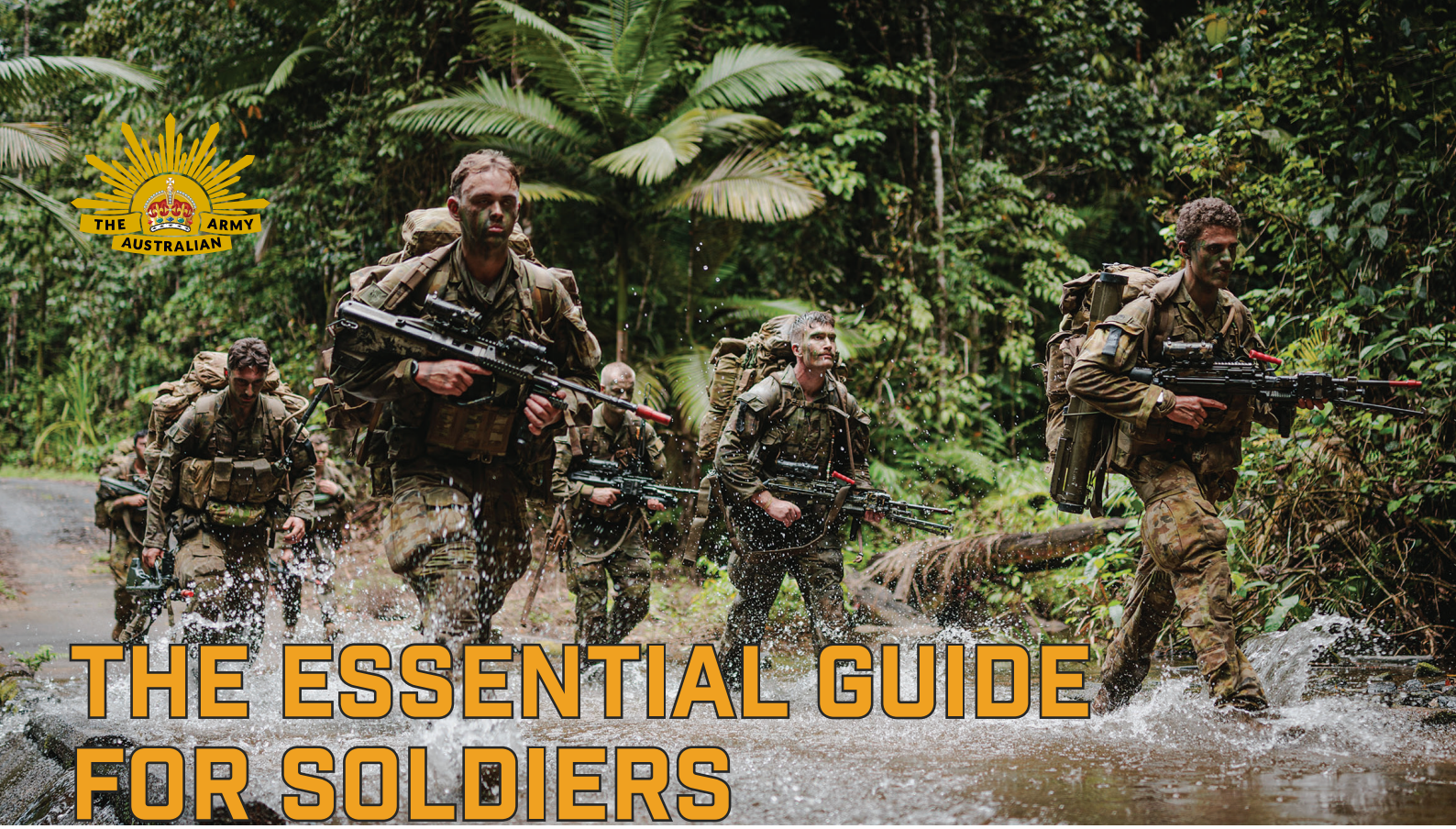




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THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR SOLDIERS

Fear, fatigue, trauma and killing sit at the heart of *The Soldier* – Army's new publication.

Deputy Chief of Army Major General Chris Smith said the handbook was created to restore a clear understanding of Army's purpose and prepare soldiers for future conflict.

"The next war the Army might have to fight could be considerably more difficult than the last," Major General Smith said.

The handbook took more than a year to produce and was tested across Army before being refined through feedback to help soldiers better understand the realities of military service and warfare.

Every new recruit at Kapooka will receive a personal copy of the handbook on day one.

Major General Smith said the handbook would form the basis of discussions on topics including fear, fatigue, killing and the psychological demands of combat.

"It should remind officers and soldiers of the seriousness of the purpose of the Army, which is defence of the nation and the seriousness of what it takes to do that," he said.

The publication draws heavily on examples from Australia's military history, including Gallipoli, Kokoda, Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan.

Major General Smith said while the character of war continued to evolve through new technology, the human realities of fear, violence, death and destruction remained unchanged.

"The requirement to seize and hold ground and therefore to kill is the central idea of war, and that never goes away," he said.

However, understanding war was only part of the reason for the handbook's creation.

The publication was shaped by lessons from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and the need to better prepare soldiers for war's realities.

"It was in response to the Royal Commission and reflecting on the high rate of psychological injury that came out of our last war," Major General Smith said.

'It should remind officers and soldiers of the seriousness of the purpose of the Army, which is defence of the nation and the seriousness of what it takes to do that.'

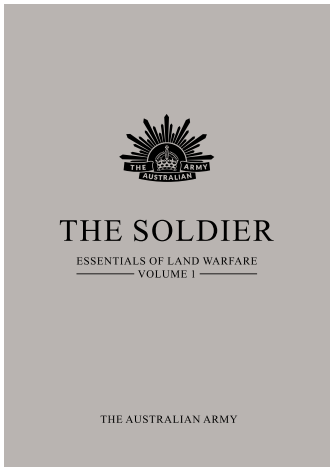
The handbook also reinforces Army's "once a soldier, always a soldier" philosophy, recognising that service identity, purpose and belonging continue long after the uniform is taken off.

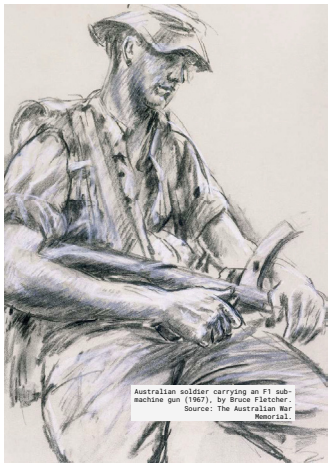
"There's a recognition that the loss of belonging, the loss of identity and the loss of purpose when someone leaves the Army is one of the biggest challenges," Major General Smith said.

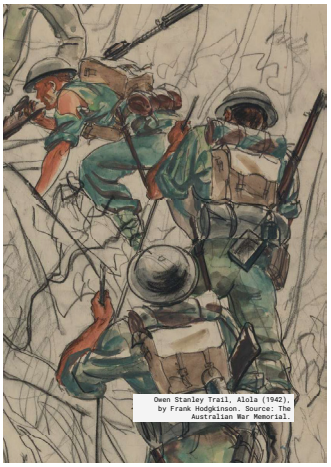
The concept was designed to help soldiers maintain that sense of identity throughout their transition from military to civilian life.

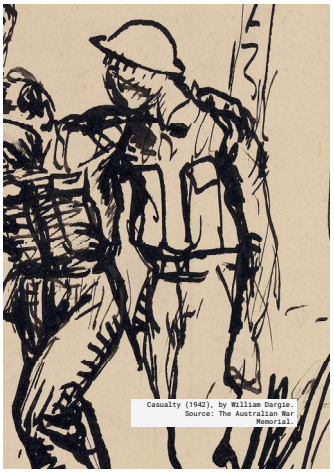
"From day one when you join the Army, you're already on the path to transition," Major General Smith said.

The idea for the handbook had been on his mind since he was a young officer.




Australian soldier carrying an F1 sub-machine gun (1967), by Bruce Fletcher. Source: The Australian War Memorial.


Owen Stanley Trail, Alola (1942), by Frank Hodgkinson. Source: The Australian War Memorial.


Casualty (1942), by William Dargie. Source: The Australian War Memorial.

While many of the handbook's themes reflected his own views on soldiering, the publication was the result of consultation and development across Army.

"A lot of the hard work for producing *The Soldier* was done by Colonel Pip Cleary, and she deserves a lot of the credit for it," Major General Smith said.

The handbook is the first release in Army's 13-volume Essentials of Land Warfare series, with further publications expected later this year.

Future volumes will explore topics including the realities of war, leadership in battle, risk in battle, and conditioning the mind, body and spirit for combat.

The series will build on the ideas introduced in *The Soldier* and examine them in greater depth, with a focus on improving performance in war and battle.

Major General Smith said the publication ultimately sought to reinforce proven ideas that had guided soldiers throughout history.

"For example, the essence of the soldier's ethos is the idea that ultimately the only thing completely in a soldier's control is their attitude or response to any circumstance," he said.

The Soldier is available on the Australian Army website and can be accessed at The Essentials of Land Warfare | Australian Army

Corporal Luke Bellman

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The Passing of Another 2RAR Korean War Warrior

47538 Lt Col Patrick Oliver Forbes MC ED (rtd)

Born Sydney 1930 Died Adelaide 2026

Patrick Forbes (call me Pat) was born in Paddington, Sydney on the 16th of May 1930. When Pat was born his father, Brigadier Alexander Forbes MVO MC, was posted to Victoria Barracks, Sydney, hence Pats birthplace, Paddington. The family moved to the North Shore of Sydney where Pat attended Knox Grammar School. The family then moved to Adelaide due to his father's posting as Commander of Army in SA and NT, where Pat boarded at St Peters College in his final school years. Pat, like all good future infantry officers, was a rugby fanatic, and stopped playing at 36 years of age. The family, on Brigadier Forbes retirement adopted Adelaide and South Australia as their home. Pat was also very competent in cricket and tennis, and his school grades meant an engineering degree at Adelaide University, where at the end of the first year he switched to Economics. In 1948 the Adelaide University Regiment was established and with his brother Jim Forbes MC (future Minister of the Army), was appointed as the 2IC of the Battalion, Pat joined as a part of that strong family military connection.

In 1951, the Army with the expansion of the war in Korea, and Australia's involvement, were desperately short of young officers, so they established a short commission course over 12 weeks to train potential officers from WW2 and others who had the right background which included Pat. He was commissioned in late 1951 with a permanent commission. After further Corps training at Puckapunyal he joined 2RAR in Korea.



2025 ANZAC Day Commemoration March Adelaide – 2 RARA-SA: L to R: Alan Pickering / Les Rieter / the late Mick Hollow's son / Peter Grabb / Scott Jeffrey / Michael Lessing / Mal Allen / John Mathwin / Front: Senior 2 RARA-SA Officer Lt Colonel Patrick Forbes MC (Ret'd) who was pushed in his wheelchair by his two sons.

Pat was awarded the MC for his actions leading up to and including the "Samichon" (The Hook) Korea as the Assault Pioneer Platoon Commander. On the night of 24 July 1953, the Chinese forces attacked 2RAR and the 7th Regiment, US Marines. The attack was launched in consecutive human wave attacks, over the nights 24 and 25 July, supported by heavy artillery and mortar fire during the daylight hours. Pat and his platoon under this enemy fire were continually repairing defended bunkers and fighting pits that were damaged by enemy fire and at night with others defending the position. 2RAR held firm during these attacks, with support from the 16th Field Regiment RNZ Artillery and Royal Tank Regiment. On the morning of the 26th of July, the Chinese abandoned the attack, with 3000 Chinese KIA from Mao Tse Sungs own Regiment laying dead in front of The Hook, (Samichon River) with an estimated 7000 wounded. Pat's citation is all too brief, except it sites courage, zeal and efficiency, in what was a major engagement by 2RAR.

After the Armistice, Pat at the beginning of 1954, was posted as an Instructor to the Commonwealth Division Battle School at Haramora, near Higashi in Japan. At that time the Armistice was not expected to hold, and Australians were in Korea for two and a half years after the Armistice. Pat was then posted as a member of The Permanent Court Martial in Tokyo for about four weeks, before returning to Australia at the end of 1954. Pat at this time had to consider his future and his career in the Army and sadly because he felt that his progress would be somewhat restricted because he was not a Duntroon graduate, Pat opted to end his career in the regular Army and rejoined the CMF Adelaide University Regiment, which he eventually commanded as CO in the early 60's.

Pat met Janet, his charming wife in Sydney and they were married for almost 70 years. Four children, Anthony, Richard, Jonathon and Angus and seven grandchildren followed. Pat held senior management positions in Adelaide from 1962 to 1970, and in 1970 decided to apply for and join the Department of Trade and Industry. This resulted in Pat being appointed Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong,



L-R Col Gordon Hurford AM (Retd), Secretary 2RAR / Brig Laurie Lewis AM (Retd), Patron RAR (SA) / Lt Col Michael Bassingthwaighte DSM, CO 2RAR holding the 61 years old `Sparrow' / Lt Col Patrick Forbes MC (Retd), donor of `Sparrow' / Maj Leo Van De Kamp (Retd), President 2 RARA.



Ex 2RAR blokes - L to R - Major Russell Scutchings (OPSO 10/27 RSAR), 90 year old Lt Colonel Patrick Forbes MC (Ret'd) who served at "the Hook" (Samichon) Korea and WO1 John Craig (RSM 10/27 RSAR) walking down the Adelaide Rifles Pathway to the Torrens Parade Ground after attending the Samichon Day Observance at the 2RAR Memorial, Pathway of Honour, Adelaide on Friday 24th July, 2020.

Hamburg, Germany; Port Moresby, PNG; Belgrade, Serbia; and Auckland, NZ. Pat retired from the Department in 1990 as the State Manager of "Austrade". These varied and interesting postings were accompanied by Janet and her piano, where both Pat and Janet were avid music lovers, and the piano was a linkage to home in Adelaide.

The tributes and kind words received by ex-members of the Department of Trade and industry that Pat worked with over many years are a testament as to the character, integrity, empathy and leadership that Pat displayed in his over twenty years in the Department. One quote from Don Hess who served with Pat in Belgrade, Serbia, says it all. *"My fondest memory of Pat, however, was not in the office. I will always remember how he and his wonderful wife Janet took me under their wing and helped me navigate the shoals of my first posting. They made me feel like a part of their family. That's how the whole office felt. Tears were shed when Pats posting came to an end. And tears will be shed again with his passing"*

Pat not wishing to sit around much, was appointed as a lecturer at the University of South Australia in the Business Faculty, lecturing in International Marketing. He operated in this capacity for about ten years which included many overseas trips with students for more practical experiences in the subject matter.

After permanent retirement, Pat was heavily involved in Legacy and an active member of The Royal Australian Regiment Association (SA) and his beloved 2RAR Association. Many a day "shaking the tin" outside the Adelaide Railway Station for Legacy and his regular round of golf weekly at The Royal Adelaide Golf Club. He and Janet did many trips to NSW and Victoria to see friends and overseas to see sons living in London and Africa as well as old friends from his Trade Commission days.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Pat for about 25 years and you will go a long way to find a more kind, astute, humble and generous individual. He and Janet were "the epiphany of grace and charm" in all their dealings with the veteran community. Pat chose to have a private family funeral, and a wake, to be announced soon, will be held at The Naval and Military Club, Adelaide.



L to R: Margaret Beard wife of the late Colonel Don "Doc" Beard AM, the "Diggers Doctor", Lt Colonel Partick Forbes MC and outgoing DVA Deputy Commissioner for SA, Janice Silby

Pat is a classic example of getting on with life after service and through his many exciting adventures around the globe proving that not all soldiers are damaged. If anything Pats life is an example as to the benefit of soldiering and bringing that lived experience into the corporate workplace. The many wonderful tributes from Pats work colleagues is an example of how highly he was regarded for his leadership and management skills.

A race well run Pat. Sincere condolences to the family and farewell from The Regimental Family.

Your Duty is Done

Michael von Berg MC OAM
President



PADRE'S Corner

" Go… in peace…Hold fast to that which is Good… " A Peaceful Warrior Ethos

Every ANZAC and Remembrance Day service we attend, concludes with this timeless Blessing taken from the words of St Paul in the 1st century to the missionaries he was sending out to bring Good News to a troubled world. The full text follows later in this article, but it is just as relevant to us today as we try to negotiate a troubled world where violence, conflict and adversarial anger and frustration keeps people in a state of distress, anger and frustration. Even within our veteran community , many social media posts are polarised, aggressive and spiteful. Some veterans are perplexed as to what was right or wrong about actions of some on overseas operations.

In my previous article I reflected upon the moral courage, the moral injury and the moral healing of Major John White DSC, whose traumatic experiences and betrayal in Vietnam in 1968 were to negatively impact him and his family for the majority of his life. Only recently, he gained insight into moral injury and its healing, and was able to restore a positive and life giving perspective through integrity in restorative action, forgiveness, letting go ,and helping others from a heart of "***Goodness***".

It was fascinating that in his final days he was still able to encourage other veterans with simple but powerful words of advice: ***to have the courage to change; to practice kindness and gratitude; to be kind ; to forgive yourself , to forgive others and to offer forgiveness, and leave a legacy of goodwill in the world.***

I learned many things in 48 years in uniform, but one thing the military didn't teach us was how to care for ourselves**,** how to live holistically healthily, and how to manage our anxieties, disappointments, shame and guilt. There was plenty of warrior ethos promoted , but less emphasis on "Goodness". For the last 11 years, a team of veterans explored how we could prevent veteran suicide and restore a thriving life. We called ourselves Veterans Care,Association (VCA) and have been sharing those things on 39 "Awakening" residential programs, we have conducted on the Gold Coast and in Timor.

Participants on these programs rejoice that they have discovered they can find peace and renewed identity and purpose. They can move into Post Traumatic "Growth ", and move from isolation to be embraced in a tribe of caring people with a vision and purpose to be life givers to those in need. They can laugh and cry and have fun with people who understand them. They can embrace the goodness in themselves and become "Peaceful Warriors".

In our most recent June program ,several former special forces soldiers and others with extensive operational service shared how they had now been able to rise up and find new insights into what is RIGHT, and life giving ,and wholesome. They spoke of resetting their "moral compass", embracing a new identity, and forgiveness of themselves and others. They committed to moving from years of darkness into the light, and keen to help others do the same.

Most clinical interventions require us to dig up and share again, all the negativity and trauma of our past . VCA don't do any of that. We start with gratitude for the present moment, and work towards a day by day plan to restore love and joy and hope into our





lives and the lives of others today and have fun doing so. We explore what values we consider vital to healthy living. It's a positive psychology model and the 1200 participants we've had will tell you it works ! We "rewire" our brains through neuroplasticity - and let go of past hurts and focussing on what is "Good " and wholesome for us.

We all can choose each day to be focussed on a world in chaos, unjust treatment by our government, and conflict and adversarial behaviour in our veteran communities, OR to refocus on the positives we have, intentionally embrace holistic healthy living , and equip ourselves to be carers and mentors for those struggling in darkness.

As John White DSC reminded us we need the courage to change , and move forward with Goodness in our hearts .

So, may you now embrace this Blessing and :

Go forth into the world in peace.
Be of good courage.

Hold fast that which is good.
Render to no one evil for evil,

But Overcome evil with Good.
Strengthen the fainthearted.

Support the weak.
Help the afflicted.

Show love to everyone.
Love and serve all in need,

and may the blessing of almighty God, be among you,

and remain with you always.
Amen.

1 Thessalonians 5

May God bless you,
your Padre,
Gary Stone OAM



New Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency Opens

Australia has taken a significant step towards improving support for veterans and their families with the establishment of the Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency, which officially commenced operations on 1 July 2026.

The agency delivers on Recommendation 87 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, following the Australian Government's commitment of $78 million over four years, with ongoing annual funding of $7.5 million.

Developed through extensive consultation and co-design with veterans, families, ex-service organisations (ESOs) and wellbeing providers, the agency has been created to make it easier for veterans and their families to access support through a more connected, coordinated and people-centred system.

A Better Way to Access Support

Rather than replacing existing services, the agency will act as a central point of access, helping veterans and families navigate the wide range of wellbeing services already available. Its role is to strengthen connections between organisations and ensure people can find the right support more easily.

From day one, veterans and families can access:

- A dedicated wellbeing website providing trusted information.
- A searchable national service directory allowing users to locate support by postcode or region.
- A dedicated helpline offering guidance and referrals.
- Supported navigation services that complement existing Defence and Joint Transition Authority arrangements.
- Coordinated assistance for veterans and families with more complex needs, particularly during transition from military service.
- An embedded evaluation capability to ensure the agency continues to improve based on evidence and community feedback.



The agency has adopted a "no wrong door" approach, ensuring people are connected to the most appropriate services regardless of where they first seek help. It will not duplicate specialist services such as mental health treatment, family and domestic violence support, rehabilitation or emergency response, but will instead connect individuals with the organisations best placed to assist.

Supporting Veterans Through Transition

Initially, the agency will focus on veterans and families who are most vulnerable during their transition from the ADF, particularly those experiencing complex or involuntary separation.

This approach reflects the findings of the Royal Commission, which identified transition as one of the highest-risk periods for veterans, with increased challenges relating to mental health, relationships, employment and suicide risk.

As capability expands, the agency's services will broaden to meet the evolving needs of the wider veteran and family community.

Working Alongside Community Organisations

The agency will work closely with Veterans' and Families' Hubs, ESOs, community wellbeing providers and local support organisations to strengthen the overall wellbeing network.

Veterans' and Families' Hubs will continue to provide welcoming, face-to-face support within local communities, while the agency's new national service directory will help veterans and families quickly identify appropriate local services.

By improving collaboration across the sector, the agency aims to reduce fragmentation and create a more seamless experience for those seeking assistance.

Brendan Cox Appointed Inaugural Chief Executive

Leading the new agency is Brendan Cox, whose appointment as inaugural Chief Executive was announced by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs.

A veteran with 28 years of Army service, Brendan enlisted in 1988 and served operationally in Bosnia, East Timor and Afghanistan before being medically discharged. His own transition from military service provides firsthand un-



Brendan Cox

derstanding of the challenges many veterans face.

Brendan has since become a respected advocate within the veteran community. He previously served as Chief Executive Officer of Legacy Brisbane and is a Director of the Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation, supporting research into veteran health and mental wellbeing.

In 2022 he was awarded a prestigious Winston Churchill Fellowship, travelling internationally to study best-practice models supporting families caring for veterans with psychological and physical injuries. His research reinforced the importance of holistic, family-focused care and a collaborative system where support services work together rather than in isolation.

As Chief Executive, Brendan will lead the development of a connected model of care centred on veterans and their families.

"When a Defence member joins the ADF, the family also serves the country."

His vision is to integrate existing support networks, strengthen partnerships with ESOs and Veterans' and Families' Hubs, and ensure families receive recognition and support alongside veterans.

Looking Ahead

The Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency represents a significant reform in Australia's approach to veteran wellbeing.

By focusing on prevention, early intervention, supported transition and coordinated care, the agency aims to create a simpler, more connected system that recognises the important role families play in the wellbeing of those who have served.

The agency will continue to evolve through ongoing consultation, evaluation and engagement with the veteran community as it builds capability over the coming years.

https://www.veteranwellbeing.gov.au/



What's wrong with national service?

Maybe it's time we also asked what citizens owe Australia

by James Burns

What's wrong with National Service? Nothing.

It's the name that's the problem…

Mention 'National Service' to anyone over fifty and you'll receive exactly the same reaction. Vietnam. Birthday ballots. Young men desperately hoping their number never came up. Political leaders who seemed more interested in pleasing Washington than listening to Australians.

Poorly trained conscripts being sent into an unpopular war…

For many Australians, National Service is remembered not as nation building, but as political failure wearing camouflage.

Understandably so.

But what if we've been throwing away a good idea because of one disastrous execution?

My son is eighteen. He wanted to join the Australian Defence Force, like his Father, Uncle and other Family before him. He wasn't pushed. He wasn't persuaded. He wanted to serve.

He wanted to sign that unwritten contract every serviceman and woman understands:

'Dear Australia. Do with me what you will.'

Unfortunately, circumstances beyond his control meant he was medically unsuitable for military service. That was disappointing. Not only for him but for me as a Veteran. I knew the adventures and fun he was about to embark on and now unfortunately misses out on.



But it also made me ask a question. Why is military service the only recognised form of national service? Surely defending a nation isn't limited to carrying a rifle.

A hospital orderly serves Australia. A teacher's aide serves Australia. A volunteer firefighter serves Australia. A park ranger serves Australia. An aged-care worker serves Australia. The young woman helping Indigenous communities in Arnhem Land is serving Australia just as surely as the sailor patrolling the Timor Sea.

One protects the nation from enemies.

The other strengthens the nation from within.

Both matter.

Perhaps it's time we stopped thinking about National Service as military conscription and started thinking about it as civic duty.

Imagine every Australian leaving school knowing that before university, before apprenticeships, before careers, they would spend two years contributing to the country that raised them.

Not marching through jungles. Building Australia. Working in hospitals. Helping disability services.

Supporting remote Indigenous communities. Assisting emergency services. Restoring national parks. Maintaining local infrastructure. Helping councils. Supporting schools. Working alongside aged-care providers. Learning how Australia actually functions.

The military would still play a role, but not because everyone needs to become a soldier. Because nobody organises people better than the Australian Defence Force.

Anyone who has spent time around the military knows that discipline, punctuality, accountability and teamwork are not optional extras. They're habits.

Not Navy. Not Army. Not Air Force.

A National Service Corps.

Its mission would not be preparing Australians for war.

Its mission would be preparing Australians for citizenship.

The discipline would remain. The uniforms would remain. The expectations would remain. The objective would change. Instead of producing infantrymen, we'd produce capable adults.

Of course there would be incentives.

Pay them properly. Provide accommodation. Feed them well. Complete two years of service and your HECS debt disappears. Maybe. Want to study medicine? Excellent. Spend your national service working in hospitals before entering university. By the time you become a doctor you'll understand how hospitals actually function, not simply from the operating theatre but from the laundry, wards, administration and patient transport.

The same applies to nursing. Radiography. Allied health. Engineering. Construction. Teaching. Imagine future teachers spending two years working in classrooms before they ever stand in front of one. Perhaps then we'd begin treating teachers as they deserve to be treated. Not as an expense. As the architects of the Commonwealth.

If teachers shape every profession that follows, why aren't they among our highest-paid professionals?

Why shouldn't teaching degrees be fully funded?

Why shouldn't our best students compete fiercely for teaching places?

If education is truly our future, our schools should be our finest public buildings, not afterthoughts squeezed into state budgets.

National Service becomes the bridge between education and adulthood.

Not a punishment. Not forced labour. A finishing school for citizenship. Naturally there will be objections.

Some will call it authoritarian. Others will compare it to conscription. Someone, inevitably, will invoke slavery before the ink has dried. The same criticisms greet almost every idea requiring citizens to place obligations alongside rights.

Yet we've somehow accepted that 18-year-olds can borrow hundreds of thousands of dollars, vote for governments, drink themselves unconscious and sign mortgage contracts. But asking them to contribute two years to the nation that educated them, fed them, clothed them, invested in them?

Apparently, that's outrageous.

Countries with compulsory national service, whether military or civilian, often report stronger civic participation, lower youth unemployment, and higher levels of social cohesion than many comparable nations. Their systems differ substantially, and outcomes depend on culture and implementation, but they demonstrate that structured national service can be more than simply preparing for war.

Australia doesn't need to copy another country's model. We should build one that suits us. One that strengthens regional Australia. One that fills chronic workforce shortages. One that develops practical skills. One that creates friendships across class, postcode and politics. One that reminds us that citizenship is more than possessing an Australian passport. It means belonging to something larger than yourself.

Perhaps some people will discover that their calling is in that National Service Corps.

Perhaps they'll stay.

Perhaps they'll spend their lives serving Australians.

There is no shame in that.

There is honour in every honest job that strengthens the country.

The ANZAC spirit was never really about war. It was about service. About putting the nation ahead of yourself. About the quiet understanding that if everyone carries a little of the burden, no one carries it alone.

Perhaps that's the lesson we've forgotten.

We've spent decades arguing about what Australia owes its citizens. Maybe it's time we also asked what citizens owe Australia. Because nations aren't built by governments. They're built by people who decide they're worth building. I wonder do we have any leaders left with the ability to build this Nation again, the ones we have seem content presiding over a ruin of ashes and the tears of our forebears.

Article first appeared in Spectator Australia, reprinted with permission.

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Battlefield Remnants WW2 Australian Boots

A comment made by a trekker, on a recent trip over the Kokoda Track has prompted me to elaborate on an issue that is rarely even considered - let alone written about.

by Gary Traynor

It concerns footwear or more specifically; boots worn by Australian troops over the Kokoda Track and in later "jungle" campaigns. Whilst, at face value - it may not seem an interesting prospect to discuss footwear; it is probably one of the most prominent items that any modern day 'Kokoda Trekker' will ponder over. The questions that niggle in the back of one's mind prior to departure. Such as "Have I chosen the right boots?"....."Have they been broken in sufficiently" and the big question...."Will they give me blisters??" may come back to haunt you as the trekker begins that climb up Imita Ridge or up to Isurava from Kokoda. Well, in 1942.....there was no such luxury as 'choice' and any questions posed to the quartermaster regarding his boots at the clothing store no doubt resulted in a colourful "soldier's" response.

In July, 2008 we were at the Jap Ladder Campsite (between Ofi Creek and Nauro), looking at a piece of rusty metal with protruding nails. For all intents and purposes it looked like a "horse shoe". However judging by the size of this item, my trekker came to the conclusion that the 'horse' must have had an extremely small hoof to fit a shoe of this size. Just short of a Shetland pony, what animal would fit a 'horse shoe' this small?

The item of course was NOT a horse shoe !!! Rather it was the heel plate from an Australian issue service boot. Being an avid preserver of Australian Militaria, I had seen



Australian 'heel' plate found at Jap Ladder Camp - July 2008

countless of these items over the years.....the only difference being - mine were all still attached to their boot. Indeed in 1942, I dare say that the soldier who was wearing these boots at the time - did not even realise that the plate had come off his heel. Add exhaustion, injury or sickness and I would say that his care factor was minimised even further.

When a country mobilises for war, the whole industrial might of that nation goes into full swing. Production at all levels is doubled and sometimes even tripled - when compared to peacetime output. You only have to consider how many people enlisted to form the 5 Australian Divisions during the First War (the AIF) - and 4 Divisions during the Second War (Second AIF). Plus, during World War Two - we had the unique situation of placing a "Militia" army also into the field. Each and every one of these men needed to be 'kitted out' and this meant boots. Hundreds of thousands of them.

It always frustrates me - when other collectors or backyard historians claim that leather goods made for the Army all had to be "this colour" or argue blind that "this or that is wrong". The fact of the matter is; one single Government factory simply cannot produce sufficient goods on its own - to equip an entire army in a specified period of time. Especially when a pledge is made - to supply a certain number of troops, to support the Mother Country at the soonest opportunity. It is quite correct to say that the Government had a certain "standard" or "pattern" so as to make their items of kit conform to a standard uniform. However, to accommodate such large orders, the Government simply out sourced its demand for items to civilian manufacturers - so long as their product COMPLIED with the standard and passed an inspector's examination. Henceforth, boots for Military service had a certain appearance but may have varied slightly from one manufacturer to another. Civilian companies commissioned to produce Military footwear included Blundstone, W.Peatt, J.J. Whyte, Rossiters Ltd and Slatters; just to name a few.

In the First World War, historian Charles Bean described the footwear of the First AIF, simply as being like a "workman's boot". Volume 1 of the Official History of World War 1 (Page 63), states that the boots were as pliable as civilian boots and far stouter. It was also said that in France, countless favours were obtained in exchange for Australian boots, such were their popularity amongst English troops. This basic design with only minor modifications (i.e. number of eyelets etc) was in military service prior to 1914 and remained so, up until 1941. The boot upper merely consisted of two (2) pieces of leather stitched together (a toe section and the main 'body' of the boot) with a third piece stitched over the heel - as reinforcing to the back of the boot. There was no toe cap, subsequently the boot had a 'soft toe' appearance. All of this, stitched onto a full leather sole may - or may not - have been completed with a metal heel plate. This is clearly illustrated by these two boots produced by different manufacturers. Those made by 'W.Peatt' in 1940 have the metal 'horse shoe' and nailed sole whilst the other pair; made by 'J.J. Whyte' in 1941 have a clean sole, completely devoid of metalwork.

The pattern for Australian military boots was altered after 1941. The main difference being a "toe cap" which was incorporated into the manufacturing process. This resulted in a line of double stitching being evident on the 'upper toe' of the boot and it is easy to discern the difference between the two designs. Again, variations between manufacturers could result in some items displaying metal heel or toe plates and others having just a plain, leather sole. Certainly, there are some variations in the colour - from light tan (London Tan) to brown. Some manufacturers altered the design of the heel plate, so that the plate was complete around its perimeter or circumference - and not open at one end, like a 'horse shoe'. A major variation however was the addition of brass "Jungle Cleats" which were added to improve grip in muddy conditions. A lesson no doubt learnt from experience gained on the Kokoda Track.

In the harsh jungle climate, leather boots and shoelaces rotted. Socks simply disintegrated (it was not uncommon for diggers to cut the sleeves of their woollen jumpers to use as substitute socks) and footwear could remain on one's feet for up to two weeks at a time. Laurie Howson of the 39th Battalion once commented "The days go on. You are trying to survive, shirt torn, arse out of your pants. Some days you carry your boots because there's no skin on your feet."





Two different types of Australian WW1 style boots - note the boots on the left are completely devoid of any metalwork

During the Australian withdrawal, the 2/14th reached the supply base at Myola late on the night of the 3rd and early hours of the 4thSeptember, 1942. Exhaustion had set in and most simply dropped straight off to sleep in their cold, sodden clothes. In Peter Brune's "Those Ragged Bloody Heroes" he details how they woke into a 'Promised Land' with all of the luxuries that they had not seen for some time. The torn and mud stained clothes were removed in favour of fresh, clean uniforms. Boots and socks were cut away and in many cases the rotten skin simply came off with them. The men's feet were exposed to the fresh air and the unit chiropodist (Corporal Clark), set about the task of paring away the rotten tissue and smoothing out the wrinkles. Few passed up the opportunity to replace their boots at Myola, prior to destroying the remaining stores when the area was evacuated.





Photo on the left shows the difference in the manufacture of the ‚toe caps' NOTE the stitching across the toe. Photo on the right illustrates the brass "Jungle Cleats" and altered design of the Heel Plate

Lieutenant Hugh Dalby, M.C. (previously from the 2/27th and transferred to the 39th) stated "My condition, feet wise had deteriorated because by boots had worn out. I had pulpy feet: like crevices; ridges a quarter of an inch thick. You were soaking wet all the time. White puffy skin just started to peel off."

So how does all of this relate to me as a trekker on the Kokoda Track? Well one merely has to compare our modern apparel with that of a soldier in 1942. Consider the condition of the track on the 'Golden Staircase' of Imita Ridge- or the 3500 odd timber steps cut into the 'ascent' towards Ioribaiwa by Australian Engineers. If you can imagine, wearing boots with a flat leather sole. Make those boots soaking wet and then negotiate uneven steps. Add 20 to 30 kilos worth of kit, a reduction in concentration levels due to a poor diet and exhaustion and then place your leather sole on the slimey timber. One can only imagine how many 'bloodied shins' were the result. Or clamber down the muddy slopes towards Menari, with a Battalion of men in front of you - and see just how much grip our 1941 boots gave us in the tortuous conditions. In modern times, we can certainly 'experience' the rigorous terrain of the Kokoda Track. However, we can never fully appreciate just what it was like for a digger in 1942 - no matter how hard we try.

There is an old saying - that you should never judge a person until you have walked a mile in their shoes. Well, the more I learn about the men of this era....and the type of equipment made available to do what was expected of them (which was built for war use - not for the comfort of the wearer) I judge their efforts to be nothing short of 'extraordinary'. When we think of the words inscribed on the Isurava Memorial - then without a single doubt in the world, these men definitely put the "E" back into the word "Endurance".

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DADS ARMY

History of the National Memorial Walk

The Royal Australian Regiment's National Memorial Walk is a 'living" memorial to commemorate those RAR soldiers who died while serving overseas on operational service with The Regiment. Its motto is “Keeping the Spirit Alive”.

Many of the Regiment’s known dead are buried overseas in Japan and Korea. Some remain missing in action presumed dead in Korea.

The Walk which is located within Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera, Brisbane Qld provides a place of solace and focus within Australia for the commemoration of the service and sacrifices made by our men.

It has become a special place for RAR current serving and past serving persons and their families and friends of The Royal Australian Regiment to visit.

To commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Regiment’s formation, The Royal Australian Regiment Association built the National Memorial Walk and Contemplation Building at Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera, Queensland, from funds provided by public donation, assistance from the Federal and Queensland Governments, Brisbane City Council, the RAR Foundation and RAR State and Unit Associations’ members.

The inscription on the entrance stones at both the north and south entrances to the Walk says:

“In Australia they will remember me. Here is their spirit, in the land they loved. And here we guard the record which they themselves made.” – G.E.W. Bean, Official War Historian.

And here we, the RAR National Association accept responsibility on behalf of The Royal Australian Regiment to maintain our National Memorial Walk as the showpiece and home of The Regimental Spirit.”





The National Memorial Walk comprises three areas:
The Contemplation Building, provides a place for contemplation and remembrance and commemorative services for community remembrance activities on ANZAC Day, Remembrance Day, anniversaries of Battle Honours, Campaigns, Unit birthdays and re-unions. It displays the Honour Board that records the names of those who died in service overseas. On its forecourt, are a number of RAR Battalion Plaques that record the names of those persons from other Australian and other Nations’ Services who while supporting that Unit were killed in action. At the base of the flagpole, is a plaque that commemorates those who died while training in Australia. An information kiosk (touch screen) allows visitors to locate the individual's memorial plaque and tree.

The Walk - The Memorial Garden. The Walk consists of an avenue 700 meters long flanked by more than 1000 native Australian trees. It is divided into the RAR’s operational theatre areas (Japan, Korea, Malaya, Malaysia – Sarawak, Vietnam, Somalia, The Solomons, East Timor/ Timor Leste, Iraq and Afghanistan) in which the memorial plaques/trees are located. At the base of selected trees is an individual plaque bearing the name and details of each of the 706 members of the Regiment who died on overseas service.

The Recreational Area (Diggers’ Rest). It is the social gathering point for many activities. Within this area are the Regiment’s Battle Honour Gardens and a memorial to our Infantry war dogs.

HISTORY

The NMW concept originated with WO1 Mick Servos OAM, a Korean War veteran, who after visiting Australian soldiers’







gravesites in Korea decided to organise a memorial tree grove at Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera, home to most RAR units that served in Korea.

A NMW Building Committee was formed and in 1996 work commenced on Army approved land with funds provided by public donation, assistance from the Federal and Queensland Governments, Brisbane City Council, RAR State and Unit Association members and the Defence community.

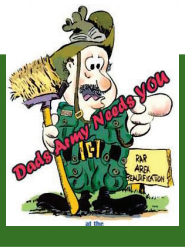
Plantings began on 9th November 1996 with almost 1000 trees planted by members of The RAR Association Queensland, RAR Battalion Associations and their wives and families. The trees donated by the Brisbane City Council were chosen with advice from Greening Australia and planted in operational areas to represent similar landscapes in those operational theatres.

In November 1997 the then Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon. Tim Fischer (a member of The Regiment and veteran of the Vietnam War) unveiled a plaque to represent the official opening of the NMW.

The Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia, His Excellency Sir William Deane AC KBE, dedicated the NMW on 22 November 1998 as part of The Regiment's 50th Anniversary.

The Memorial has been continuously maintained by a dedicated group of RAR Association volunteers called Dads' Army. They also provide escorts to the visitors who come from Australia and overseas come to reflect in its quiet, leafy surrounds.

When in Brisbane visit the Walk.
Contact Greg Decker 0417 464 251 to arrange an escorted welcome.
Keeping the Spirit Alive.





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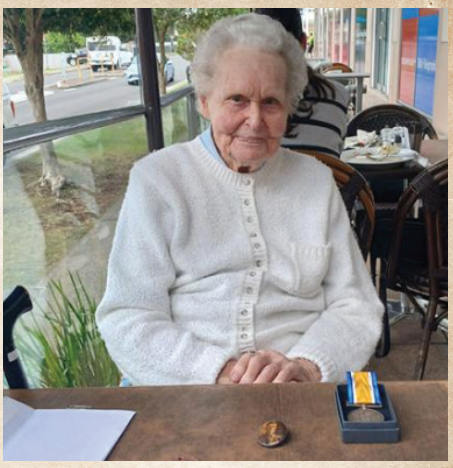
Please phone 3857 9915 or email enrolments@padua.qld.edu.au & let our Enrolments Registrar know that you are a Defence family.

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70 YEARS FRANCISCAN







A long-lost medal returned

During Christmas 2024, Warrant Officer Class Two (WO2) Mark Phillips was visiting family in Sydney when a conversation about military service prompted his father to retrieve an old watch case.

Inside were three World War I campaign medals. Two belonged to WO2 Phillips' great-uncle, 'Wild' Bill Knuckey, but the third was engraved with an unfamiliar name: Private Bert Hobday.

"My father didn't realise that service medals have the recipient's name and service number stamped on the bottom edge," WO2 Phillips said.

"My grandfather had received them after Knuckey's death in 1953, and they were handed to my father when my grandfather died in 1967. So they had been in the family's possession for over 70 years."

Until that moment, WO2 Phillips had been unaware there was a history of military service within his family beyond his own, yet it was the medal bearing an unfamiliar name that captured his attention.

"I love solving puzzles," he said. "And I think medals are important in recognising people's service and wanted to try to return this medal to the family."

WO2 Phillips knew World War I service records had been digitised through the National Archives of Australia (NAA).

An NAA search for Private Hobday revealed he had served overseas with the 13th Battalion, spent time as a prisoner of war in Germany, and at one stage had even been sentenced to 90 days of hard labour in Cairo for theft.

Determined to reunite the medal with its rightful family, WO2 Phillips began searching for surviving relatives. He combed through the Defence Image Gallery and the Defence Corporate Directory, followed leads and made inquiries, but kept hitting dead ends.

"I'd almost given up," he said.

"But his service record contained his date of death, so I went to the National Library in Canberra and looked up the Sydney Morning Herald death notice to see if there were any family names that might provide some clues to find a living relative. The obituary suggested he may have lived in Berowra."

Further online searches eventually led WO2 Phillips to a Berowra history page, maintained by Hornsby Shire Councillor Nathan Tilbury.

A phone call with Councillor Tilbury before Anzac Day this year confirmed not only that Private Hobday was a former resident of Berowra, but that his 96-year-old daughter, Shirley Collins (née Hobday), was alive and well.

After purchasing a new ribbon and presentation box, WO2 Phillips and his father drove to Berowra on May 16 to return the medal to Shirley.

WO2 Phillips also arranged for Private Hobday's service records to be printed in A3 format after receiving high-resolution copies from the NAA.

Mrs Collins expressed gratitude for WO2 Phillips' determination in tracking her down and returning her father's medal.

"I am just so happy that someone cared enough to ensure the medal was returned to the Hobday family," she said.

WO2 Phillips said it was lovely meeting Shirley.

"She shared many colourful stories about her father and his life," he said.

WO2 Phillips was surprised to learn that, despite Private Hobday's expressed dislike for senior officers, he went on to marry a general's niece after returning to Australia.

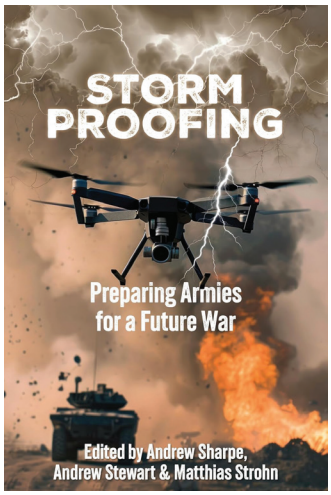
As for how Private Hobday's medal found its way into the Phillips family's possession, that mystery remains unsolved. But for WO2 Phillips, the experience has highlighted the benefit of exploring family history.

"I'd encourage everyone to look up their relatives through NAA," he said.

"You never know what stories you might uncover."

The National Archives of Australia has a RecordSearch function available to the public on its website.

BOOK REVIEWS



STORM PROOFING: PREPARING ARMIES FOR A FUTURE WAR

Andrew Sharpe, Andrew Stewart & Matthias Strohn (Editors)

Helion & Company, Warwick (UK), 2025

The cover of *Storm Proofing* connotes a 21st century battlefield with an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, or drone as we more commonly call them, menacing an armoured vehicle. The subtitle underscores the book's intent well, with chapter titles including Artificial Intelligence (AI) among other technology impacts on modern conventional warfare. This book is a most thought-provoking collation of perspectives on how armies need to prepare for future wars given the advancing technology now to hand.

Western nations in particular, still reeling from the effects of COVID and the distraction from international discord this century, are in danger of not being prepared as their governments grapple with competing demands upon their national assets. This book provides perspectives on how this crucial posit – the use of armed force to protect the nation-state under such distractions - might be addressed before it is too late.

The authors are a group of Western military/academic professionals, centred on but not exclusive to the Brith Army. *Storm Proofing* is the product of the British Army's Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research (CHACR), an organisation whose mission statement is stated on the flyleaf. The editors include the Chair of CHACR, and all three present chapters. The credentials of the remaining contributors are provided at the front of the book. These make impressive reading, lending credibility to their contributor-ship. It is most helpful to refer to this section before each chapter.

After a first chapter on *Storm Proofing* and what that means in the Land Domain, one finds chapters which address different but complimentary topics. This is not a flowing work that builds on the previous chapter, rather a series of self-contained works that, when read in their entirety, contribute to the overall intent of the book. Chapters include historical analyses of generalship in past major wars, the level of formation that might be the best one at which command and decision making in the past might have, or might not have, best worked, across several European-based wars. This sets the context for how future armies might be led under the changed conditions of the 21st century.

Other chapters address how analysis of intelligence, planning and command in high headquarters worked in the past and how it might best work now in the future. The impact of known technological enhancements is also covered. The role humans will have at the front all the way through to the highest operational and strategic levels is well presented. So too is the human element – how does one train to be able to use such technology and the extent to which it might take over from humans. Since this book was written, it has been reported that an entire ground attack carried out only by machines unaccompanied by humans has been carried out in Ukraine. Could total automation actually become a reality given the pace of change? This book says no, but see what you think.

Increasing the phenomenon known as 'combat power' is also addressed. The seminal message in the book is not one so much of how to best prepare for large scale 21st century war. Rather the book encourages Western forces to do so given the clear signals unfolding from what is now happening, especially during the War in Ukraine and the 2026 Middle East conflict.

Varying writing styles and areas of expertise mean that some chapters are readily absorbed while others are more intense. This is the case for both the concepts covered and the readability level. Chapters on technology tend to be harder to digest if one does not have some background in those fields. Those dealing with history and the human element in war make for easier reading. The reader may find it productive to re-read some chapters.

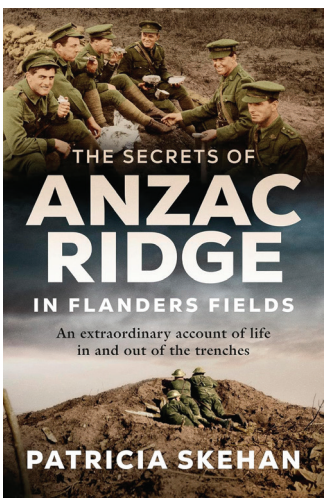
Storm Proofing does not read like a novel or history book; indeed its sequence is not crucial to the book's intent. Citing the 21st century experience with COVID and other international tensions they note Western nations' governments understandable prioritisation of national assets - recovery through economic and political effort at the expense of defence needs. This contest has

weakened, in their view, most if not all Western nations, more so than potential enemies which through their totalitarian nature have continued the development of mass and capability of their armed forces with a focus on total warfare. With most Western military effort this century being counter-insurgency operations in nature, this may have emasculated preparations for conventional war fighting. Hence the analogy of a 'storm' coming and the need to 'proof' bye well prepared for it.

Technology alone is not the answer. The human element of warfare will remain critical. However technology has made a fundamental difference and the West must integrate all elements in its preparations for future wars. To this end, the book presents a possibly unique collection of inputs into what is seen as a need for major change in impetus, and quickly at that. The presentation of these expert perspectives on the direction of warfighting preparations is balanced and informative. Footnotes and references are well presented.

This book seems to be primarily of greatest value to military planners and force developers, and also generalists with an interest in the impact of 21st century technology on warfare. The lay reader is less likely to find great benefit from *Storm Proofing*, but then again, it is not primarily aimed at a popular readership. I found some chapters hard to read but careful review makes for being much better informed. And in this manner, *Storm Proofing* serves us well. It is certainly different to what our generation considered during 20th century deployments.

Reviewer: LTCOL Russell Linwood, ASM (Retd)



THE SECRETS OF ANZAC RIDGE: IN FLANDERS FIELDS

Patricia Skehan

Hachette Australia, 2025

The *Secrets of Anzac Ridge i*s a wide-ranging commentary on World War 1, primarily from an Australian perspective. Patricia Skehan presents an eclectic story of many facets of life in and out of the Western Front trenches in France and Belgium. Using short linking commentary, she draws substantially on other peoples' writings - the prime ones being the diary of a soldier (Gunner Jim Armitage), Sir John Monsh's diaries/papers, a couple of other interesting characters and newspaper articles of the time. These interweave a discourse which presents in an unusual manner from the typical war history.

Patricia is a military historian with a particular interest in the Western Front and she writes from a personal interest perspective. Additional to extensive public speaking engagements and radio presentations, she uses diaries, personal papers and old newspaper sources, primarily through Trove. These supplement military history publications as the prime source of evidence in the book. She is internationally travelled, during which time further research on topics other than military history has also been carried out.

The title of this book leads one to presuppose that it is primarily about fighting in Flanders with a focus on a feature known as Anzac Ridge. The Flanders battlefields were on both sides of the Franco-Belgian border depending on what year one is talking about over the period 1915-1918. Anzac Ridge is in Belgium not far from Ypres, and a small town called Steenwerck is in France. These two locations feature in the book, however a very sizeable portion it has little to do with that area. Much of it addresses general war concepts ranging from enlistment and training through to the end of the war and what happens in between. Much of the book deals with 1916-18 battles fought around Amiens and then the Allied offensive that broke the Hindenburg Line in 1918, bringing the war to an end. Those portions have little to do with Anzac Ridge itself.

A common factor is Armitage's diaries and Monash's references; both of them were in Flanders and then France, one a young gunner and the other a divisional and then corps commander. Armitage lived to 100 years of age and kept a detailed diary on the Western Front, and it is perhaps his experiences after he left Flanders, along with Monash's papers, that compelled the author to devote part of the book covering 1918 there.

One might be forgiven for wondering whether this interesting but diverse content is accurately served by the title. Book promotion also indicates that 'secrets' are revealed from Armitage's diary and Monash's writings and some other individual sources. I am not convinced that is the case from the events covered; perhaps the author considered some matters identified during research as 'secrets' but other military historians might not agree.

There are good, compassionate sections where the human face of tragedy in war is well presented through the technique of linking of brief commentary and lengthy quoted passages. These lend themselves to informative discussion of what it might have been like as told through the diaries and newspaper publications of the time.

Chapter names provide sound guidance through the vestiges of war generally, and the research findings about

the key players and places specifically. Each addresses a theme or issue, several tragic. Some are very short and don't need to be read sequentially. A general timeline of the battle is provided as an aid to the lay reader; again, other historians would dispute some of the names and dates eg Battle of Hellfire Corner, 1915-1918. Centrally positioned imagery provides a degree of visual support and includes Armitage, courtesy of family. Endnotes provide source data and demonstrate an in-depth cross-spread of source material.

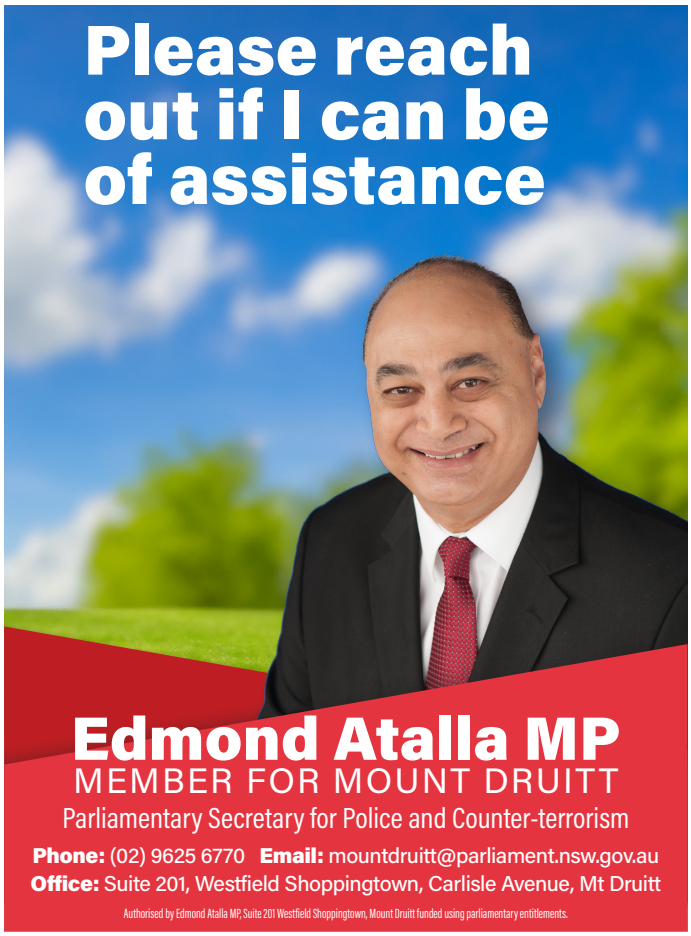
Overall, the book is presented with enthusiasm and nicely packaged around personalities identified during research, with some good investigative and deduction skills. Its sub-title 'An extraordinary account of life in and out of the trenches World War1' might have been the better selection as the prime name as the book in my opinion does not really serve '*The Secrets of Anzac Ridge: In Flanders Fields'.* The latter is at best a portion of the book because the link between Armitage, Monash and the town of Steenwerck. An interesting and passionate work that should appeal to the general reader.

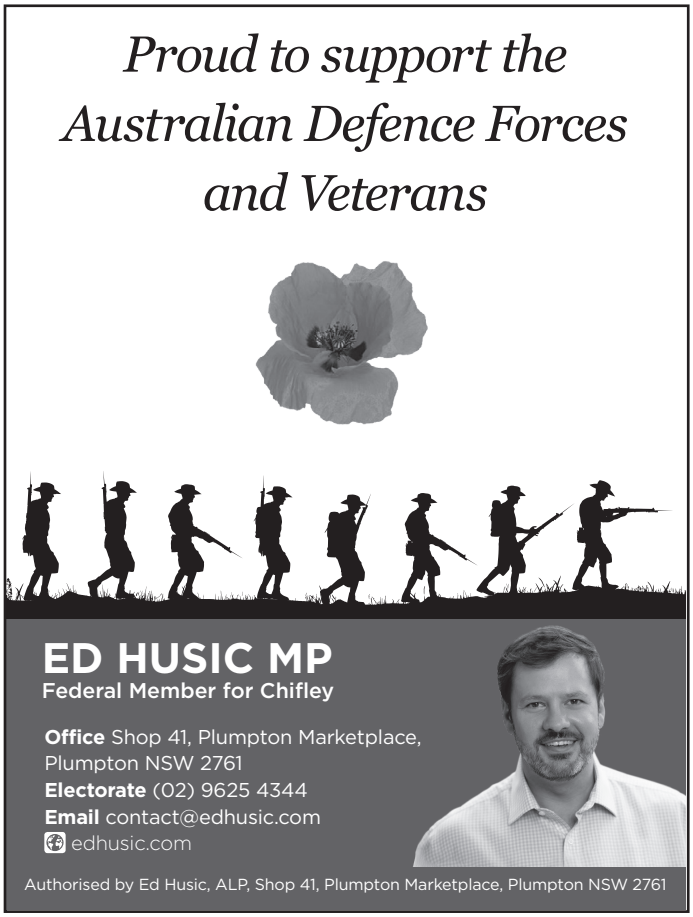
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Drones open up a new world of training

It started with a warning shout – "Drone" – slicing through the morning stillness. Within seconds, soldiers dived for cover as a tiny machine swept overhead, capturing every movement.

At the Army School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering's (ASEME) latest field training exercise (FTX), drones aren't just props. They are the threat, the teacher and the future of warfare.

During the FTX in late March at Puckapunyal Military Area, soldiers bedded in basic soldier skills, with the addition of what officer commanding the activity Major Dominic Buchan referred to as "the three-dimensional battle space".

"We have drones fly over our position in both a friendly and an enemy context to allow the trainees to respond tactically," Major Buchan said.

"Now they have to understand what they look like traversing across the terrain, what they look like in the defence, and consider their cover, concealment and movement. It's a stark contrast to be seen running to a hide versus staying still in whatever location they may be."



Corporal Henry Laurie controls a drone whilst concealed. Defence images

This realism in training was made possible through interoperability between ASEME and the School of Armour (SoARMD), which provided drones, pilots and two M113AS4 armoured personnel carriers firing .50 calibre blanks for battlefield noise simulation.

Come the second FTX later this year, SoARMD will again have enabled ASEME by running soldiers through the defence remote pilot licence course, enabling ASEME to pilot drones. Communication and Surveillance Wing sergeant major Sergeant Chris Gagliardi said the relationship between the schools created opportunities for them to flex and test their skills.

"The surveillance aspect of what these lads do is their bread and butter," Sergeant Gagliardi said.

"For them, it's helping them flesh out their own [tactics, techniques and procedures] TTPs and [standard operating procedures] SOPs, while helping another school achieve their training goals."

'If the Ukraine war has taught us anything, it is that drones aren't going anywhere.'

Sergeant Gagliardi said introducing drones to soldiers as soon as possible was paramount in remaining current on a transparent and increasingly lethal battlefield.

"If the Ukraine war has taught us anything, it is that drones aren't going anywhere," he said.



Corporal Henry Laurie catches a drone at Puckapunyal Military Area.

"We're seeing the proliferation of them more and more throughout the South-East Asia region as well.

"Having that drone awareness instilled into trainees at Kapooka and initial employment training level sets the foundation skills they'll need to survive future battle spaces."

Major Buchan said trainees would learn how to fix, operate and sustain drones.

"As a soldier, they need to learn how to respond to them as an enemy threat, and use them as a friendly tool. The tradesperson will see all aspects of the life of the drone, including repair, replacement and its use in battle," he said.

With two days of drone harassment across the activity, the trainees marched out of Puckapunyal enlightened, their eyes reflexively scanning the sky.

Craftsman Aashere Manoj said the humming of a drone overhead was alarming.

"My heart rate goes up, I kind of just zone in, get that tunnel vision sort of thing," he said. "You run to your pit and get ready. It's a whole new world."

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VETERANS RETAIN DEFENCE BASE ACCESS AFTER TRANSITION

Veterans transitioning to civilian life can now continue accessing Defence bases for up to two years under the new Veteran Defence Common Access Card (DCAC) program, introduced in response to Recommendation 82 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

The first recipient, David Humphry, who served 50 years in the ADF, said maintaining access to Defence bases would help veterans stay connected during the often-challenging transition to civilian life.

“Transitioning from service can be difficult after a long career where your identity, routine and social networks are closely tied to the ADF,” Mr Humphry said.

“Having access to the sergeants‘ mess and social events helps maintain those important connections and avoids the ‚cold door‘ effect many veterans experience after leaving service.”

Director General Estate Service Delivery Brigadier Gabrielle Follett said the initiative would help veterans maintain existing Defence social networks and reflected Defence‘s commitment to delivering a more people-centred transition experience.

Director General Joint Transition Authority Commodore Belinda Greenwood said continued access to Defence bases would reduce isolation, provide a sense of continuity and support veterans‘ long-term wellbeing.

The program was successfully trialled between November 2025 and April 2026 in Townsville and the Albury-Wodonga Military Area, with strong interest extending beyond the pilot locations, demonstrating demand for the initiative.

segservicedelivery.esdaccesscontrol@defence.gov.au



David Humphry receives his Veteran Defence Common Access Card from Squadron Leader Lancelot Monteiro, alongside Flying Officer Reece Jansen, left, and Warrant Officer Wayne Wilson, right. Defence image

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DFRDB UPDATE – JUNE 2026

We have taken two significant steps this month to escalate long-standing concerns about ADF superannuation and the Government’s continued inaction.

Letter to Chief of Personnel

First, we wrote to Lieutenant General Natasha Fox, Chief of Personnel, outlining CPERS’ responsibility to ensure that ADF conditions of service, including superannuation, remain fair, fit for purpose, and aligned with the unique risks of military life. The letter highlighted that:

- systemic flaws across all ADF schemes have persisted since 1948,
- CPERS has a duty to advise government when conditions of service no longer match what members were promised, and
- the Senate Committee’s four recommendations on fairness, indexation, definitions of spouse/dependant, and MSBS rollover rights remain unaddressed.

We asked CPERS to raise this directly with Minister Marles and to push for overdue action.

Letter to Mr Phil Thompson OAM MP

Second, we wrote to Mr Phil Thompson OAM MP, commending his advocacy and urging him to press the Government to schedule parliamentary debate on the Senate Committee’s report. We stressed that:

- 90 days have passed with no Government response,
- veterans deserve clarity on who is responsible for military superannuation policy, and
- modest, fair reforms should not be blocked by bureaucratic inertia or cost arguments, especially with the Future Fund in place.

Both letters reinforce the same message: after decades of inquiries and unimplemented recommendations, veterans cannot be expected to wait any longer.

We will continue driving this issue at the highest levels and keep you informed as responses are received.

Kind regards,

Jim Hislop OAM
President

Memorial plaque unveiled for Private Ronald Field (1 RAR)

The life and sacrifice of Private Ronald ‚Ronnie' Field have been commemorated with the unveiling of a memorial plaque at the Ronald Field Pedestrian Bridge in Hazelbrook.

Family members, veterans and Blue Mountains Mayor Mark Greenhill attended the ceremony, which honoured the former 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) soldier.

Born in Blacktown and raised in the Blue Mountains, Private Field was killed by sniper fire on 9 October 1965 while serving as his section's forward scout in Vietnam's Iron Triangle. He was 22.

Initially buried in Terendek, Malaysia, his remains were repatriated to Australia in 2016 as part of Operation Bring Them Home.

Mayor Greenhill said the plaque would ensure Private Field's story remained part of the region's history.

"The plaque honours a young local man who served his country with courage and paid the ultimate sacrifice," he said.



Gary Field (Ronald Field's brother), Mayor Mark Greenhill, Mrs Dianne Field (Ronald Field's widow), Deputy Mayor Romola Hollywood. www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au

"This memorial preserves Ronnie Field's legacy and provides a place for the community to reflect on the service and sacrifice of all Australians who served in Vietnam."

More than 60,000 Australians served in the Vietnam War, with 521 killed and more than 3,000 wounded.



BUSHMASTER GLOBAL SUCCESS

The Bushmaster protected mobility vehicle remains one of Australia's most successful Defence exports, with growing international demand for its proven capability.

At the Eurosatory 2026 defence exhibition in Paris, Thales Australia unveiled the next-generation Bushmaster 5.6, or 'Mulga' utility model, marking the latest evolution of the battle-proven vehicle.

Defence's Head of Land Systems, Major General Jason Blain, said the Bushmaster had been a vital ADF capability for two decades.

"The Bushmaster has saved the lives of many Australians on operations," Major General Blain said.

"My experience commanding a Bushmaster battalion in Afghanistan showed just how critical this capability is. Not one Australian has died in a Bushmaster on operations, which is a testament to its design, Australian manufacturing and Defence industry ingenuity."

The vehicle has also proven highly effective in Ukraine, and the Australian Government recently announced a further Bushmaster export to the Netherlands.

BECOMING A LITTORAL SOLDIER

Plug into Battle Lab's "Becoming a Littoral Soldier" podcast series - four short episodes on how to operate effectively in maritime and coastal environments.

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Link in comments or scan the QR code to listen.



Arm in arm, veterans fight the fear

The sun had barely climbed over the granite ridges of Beechworth Gorge when veterans and serving soldiers began their steady descent into cold rock pools, cascading waterfalls and narrow drops.

What looked like any other abseiling tourist group was something far more meaningful: Exercise Second Watch, a growing partnership between the Army Logistic Training Centre (ALTC) and the Wodonga RSL, designed to reconnect those who've served through challenge, camaraderie and the kind of shared experience that lingers long after the uniform comes off.

Veteran Kain Neale left Defence 15 years ago, initially having no contact with Defence or the RSL. It's these experiences, he said, that reconnect him – with himself and the veteran community.

"As someone with PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], there can be a lot going on in your head," Mr Neale said.

"But when you're doing this kind of stuff, your brain gets pretty quiet and it's more task-oriented, so you're more in the moment.

"Being in the ADF is a lifestyle and when you leave that lifestyle it can be very isolating, so it's great to reconnect."

ALTC Human Factors Training Team Officer Commanding Major James Brundish said resilience training is a critical factor in the success of Exercise Second Watch – offering veterans the familiar thrill of adventurous activities they experienced in service alongside other current and ex-serving veterans.

"Resilient activities are designed to put people outside the comfort zone," Major Brundish said.

"We want to expose people to activities they wouldn't usually do, get them to do something that will inspire just a little bit of stress, a little bit of fear, but then provide a great deal of accomplishment at the end of it."

'I'm not afraid to admit I got a little teary because I am super proud of what we achieved.'

The Exercise Second Watch concept was conceived a year ago by Major Brundish and brought to life with Wodonga RSL Operations Manager Stacey Bernadin.

After the pilot program proved a raving success in October last year, this second serial will be but one of many in 2026.

"We're going to take advantage of our region's beautiful weather systems and seasons," Major Brundish said.

"So we're going to do some rock climbing as it starts to cool down, then we're going to go into some snow, then as it starts to warm up again, we're going to do some water activities and then we're going to culminate with a camping activity towards the end of the year."



To help the program gather pace, Ms Bernadin said Wodonga RSL had submitted an application to the Department of Veterans' Affairs' Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program by Wodonga RSL scale up Exercise Second Watch across Victoria.

Regardless of the outcome of the grant, 21 serving and ex-serving veterans left the Beechworth Gorge beaming with pride on March 22, having fought the fear and arm in arm, accomplished something great. For Major Brundish and Ms Bernadin, however, their satisfaction surpassed the thrill of abseiling.

"I'm not afraid to admit I got a little teary because I am super proud of what we achieved," Ms Bernadin said.

"To be part of this, not only the team that organised it but to actually partake as well – if you could bottle the feeling and if I could spread it around I would. That's the aim from the ALTC team and the Wodonga RSL – to bottle it and spread it around because there's nothing else like this on offer to the veteran community. I feel immense pride to work alongside veterans and current serving members. It's what it's all about."

Captain Krysten Clifton

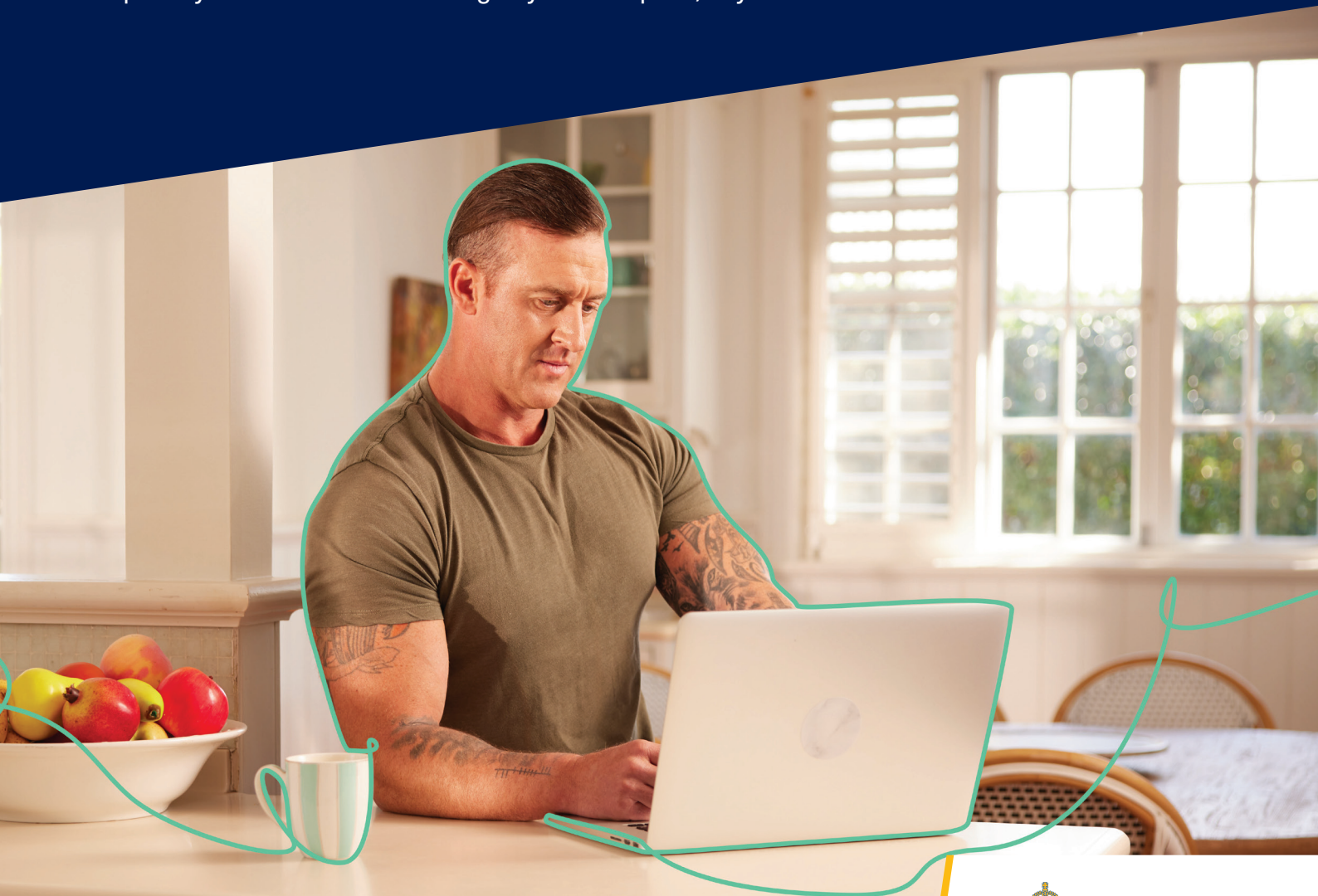
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Once-in-a-century reforms for veterans

As of 1st July Australia's veteran support landscape underwent its most significant reform in generations, explains Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel, the honourable Matt Keogh MP.

The rate of veteran suicide is a national tragedy and it is why this government has been working quickly to act on recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

Central to this task was to simplify and harmonise the veteran compensation and rehabilitation system.

Anyone who has engaged with the veteran compensation system knows that it can feel complex and challenging to navigate, particularly when people are seeking support at a vulnerable point in their lives.

This is the result of decades of piecemeal change and fringe reform built on top of a century of consolidated veterans' entitlements legislation.

Right now, veteran claims for benefits and support are assessed under three different pieces of legislation depending on the time someone served and the nature of their service. Sometimes a veteran has to make claims under all three systems.

This complexity has contributed to delays, inconsistent processing, uncertain outcomes and claims backlogs, with the royal commission dubbing this "a contributing factor to suicidality".

This finding underscores the importance of continuing to simplify how support is accessed, so the system works with veterans – not against them.

And it is why reform could not wait.

After extensive consultation, the new system, an enhanced Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA), will come into effect on 1 July and will be the single ongoing legislative basis for entitlements.

The Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA) and Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988 (DRCA) will close to new claims on 30 June.

This will allow for all new claims for compensation to be made under the single scheme from 1 July, enabling veterans and families of veterans to access the support they need and deserve, faster.

It will also provide clearer, fairer and more consistent compensation outcomes. Importantly, anyone who is already receiving benefits will continue to do so at least the same level. Nobody is left worse off by these changes.

Indeed, various entitlements will be enhanced, while allowances and other payments will be standardised from 1 July.

This will see claims advocates able to better support veterans and improve claims processing times.

This is the biggest reform to Australia's veteran support system in more than a century – and it has been shaped by those who use it.

It's about removing complexity and reducing stress.

Another major change which came into effect on 1 July is the establishment of the new Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency, another key recommendation of the royal commission.

The Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency is about simplifying the wellbeing system for veterans and families of veterans, making the system easier to navigate and better connected, prioritising prevention and early support.

The agency is also the result of consultation with the veteran community and will have a renewed focus on successful transition from military to civilian life, community connection and improving wellbeing outcomes.

At its core, the agency will help connect veterans and families to the wellbeing services they need and reduce the fragmentation in the veteran support system.

The implementation of these two critical royal commission recommendations on 1 July underline the significant progress the government has made in responding to the royal commission.

By the end of this year, we expect two thirds of the royal commission's recommendations will be implemented.

But there is more work to do and we are determined to keep the momentum going.

To date, the government has provided over $2 billion in funding to support initiatives in response to the royal commission, one of the most significant investments in veteran wellbeing in Australia's history.

This is having a real impact.

The Albanese government's reforms are about ensuring that those who have served our country receive the care, dignity and support they deserve.

And they demonstrate our ongoing commitment to build a veteran support system that is simpler, more responsive and focused on keeping veterans well, for life.

Matt Keogh is a Labor Member of the Australian House of Representatives for Burt (WA) and is currently serving as Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel in the Albanese government. He is a former lawyer and industrial relations specialist with a background in employment and workplace law before entering federal politics.

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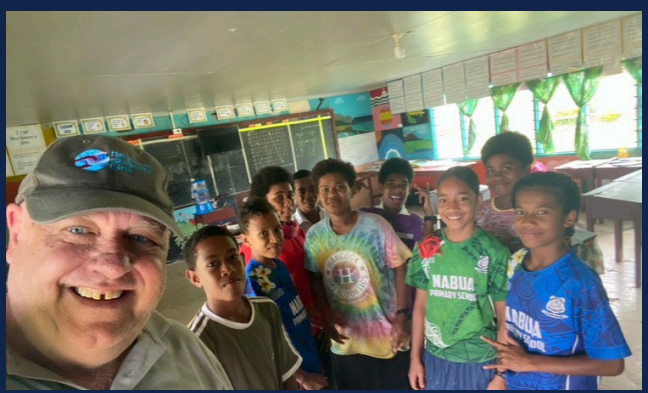
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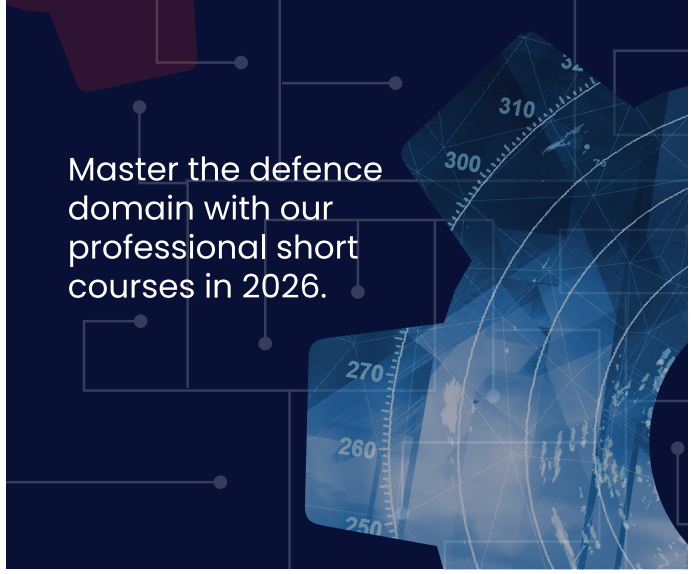
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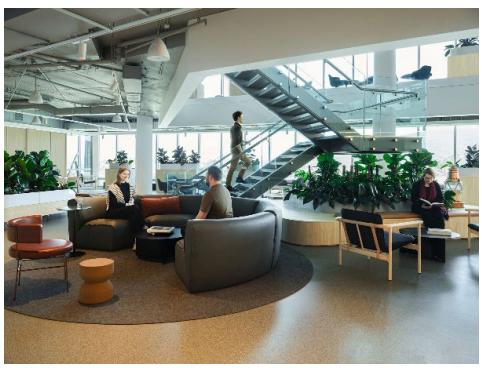
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BACK WHERE HE BELONGS





Despite the rain and cold, leading a section of infantry through the scrub makes Private Michael Staszak feel at home.

The section commander for Exercise Menin Blade brought a wealth of experience to the role, despite his rank.

Private Staszak's history with 2nd/17th Battalion, Royal New South Wales Regiment, extends back to his childhood in the 1970s.

His father and mother served with the unit, so he spent many school holidays at the D Company barracks in Blacktown.

His father, mortar platoon Sergeant Stefan Staszak, and mother, company clerk Sergeant Robyne Staszak, served with the unit for more than 20 years.

Both died while still serving, and were buried with a military funeral, with 2nd/17th lanyards laid in their coffins.

Private Staszak recalls being paid to mow the lawns on base all those years ago and helping to conduct armoury checks with the duty sergeant.

"I grew up around SLRs [self-loading rifles] and greens, and was using the SLRs and wearing greens when I joined 2nd/17th as a reservist at 17," he said.

'It feels like I've come home, like I've come full circle, back where I should be.'

Not long after enlisting, Private Staszak transferred to full time, and spent 10 years as a rifleman at 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, before discharging in the late 1990s.

He moved back to New South Wales and spent time as a mountaineering guide, paramedic and firefighter and is currently working as a carpenter in Blackheath.

Mid-way through 2025 he rejoined the Army at age 54 as a reservist at the place where it all began.

"I'm dead centre between Blacktown and Bathurst depots, but I go to Blacktown because of the family history there," Private Staszak said.

This history is on display at D Company. A champion soldier trophy, awarded annually until it ran out of plaque space, is named after his mother. His father's name adorns a tug-of-war championship trophy.

Back in the field for Exercise Menin Blade, Private Staszak said he was proud to be leading his section through attacks, ambushes and company assaults.

"If I'm perfectly honest, I love being back in the Army," he said.

"It feels like I've come home, like I've come full circle, back where I should be."

Corporal Michael Rogers
Defence images



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