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THE MAGAZINE OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMANDO ASSOCIATION

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The Australian Commando Association's membership consists of Servicemen & women who have served with WW2 Independent Companies, Commando Squadrons & Regiments, "M" and "Z" Special units, 1st & 2nd Commando Company's, 1st Commando Regiment, 4 RAR Commando & the 2nd Commando Regiment. The Association also consists of Associate Members who have served in units who directly supported Commando units in time of war and peace and Social members who's direct family member was either Killed In Action, Died In Service or Killed in Training or a member of the ACA who has passed.

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

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Deadline for next edition (Edition 12, 2022):
MONDAY, 26th SEPTEMBER 2022
All news on members and interesting articles accepted.
(Subject to editors' approval.)
Stephen Carter



Front Cover: Australian Defence Force special operations force trainees from the ADF School of Special Operations commando amphibious operations course conduct a parachute load-follow training activity from a Royal Australian Air Force C-130J Hercules aircraft into the waters off Manly, Sydney, NSW.
Source: <https://images.defence.gov.au/assets/s20213089>



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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

My warmest greetings to all. Welcome to the 11th Edition of **COMMANDO** – *The Magazine of the Australian Commando Association*.

The Australian Commando Association exists to foster and perpetuate ties of comradeship amongst past and serving members of the Australian Commando and Special Force units and like-minded associations.

COMMANDO – *The Magazine of the Australian Commando Association* is a key communication channel that is designed to keep our members well informed and to foster the Commando esprit de corps which we have all enjoyed in our various times of service. I can only reiterate that the success of the Magazine is reliant on articles generated by our State Associations and members. I want to thank those who have made the effort to put “pen to paper” as every article advances our collective understanding of the rich history which is Commando.

There are several special achievements that I wish to acknowledge on behalf of all our Members.

Keith Wolahan



In Edition 8 of **COMMANDO** Keith fondly recalled a session conducted by Hans Fler leading to a very telling question “What now Wolahan?”.

As many of our Members know, Keith has been sworn in as the Federal Member for Menzies in *(Continued next page)*

The Royal Commission into Defence & Veteran Suicide is coming to the Territory in October.

If you want free and confidential legal advice before sending in a written submission or giving private or public in-person evidence, contact the Defence & Veterans Legal Service on freecall 1800 33 1800.

LUKE GOSLING
MP FOR SOLOMON

Authorised by L. Gosling, 3/266 Trower Road, Casuarina NT 0810



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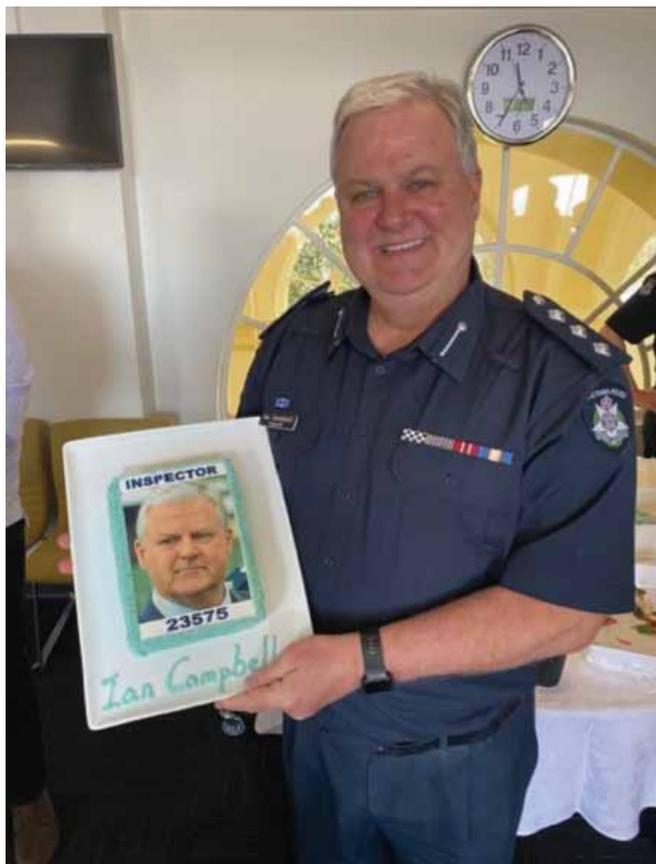


Australia's 47th Parliament. So, the very telling question has been answered in part and I am confident that Keith will continue to be driven by his reflections on Hans. "I'm sure that Hans would insist we don't hide, don't rest and continue to move forward doing our best".



On behalf of the Commando community, I wish Keith and his family the very best for his career and most importantly his commitment to service.

Ian Campbell



I had the enormous privilege of attending Ian's retirement celebration following forty years of service with Victoria Police.

Following in his father's footsteps Sergeant Lloyd Campbell, MID Z Special Unit, Ian served with 2 Company in the 1980's. Over his many years of service, Ian was a Special Operations Group (SOG)

operator, the Officer in Charge of the SOG and the Tactical Commander for Operation 'Trapani' - a Joint Organised Crime Task Force (AFP, VicPol, ABF, ACIC) investigation into the attempted import of approximately 180 kilos of cocaine. The investigation lead to the seizure of the old Japanese whaling boat Kaiyo Maru by 2 Regiments Tactical Assault Group some 1300 kms south-east of Tasmania.

Once again, we thank Ian for his commitment and service over the years.

Stephen Carter
 Editor - Commando Magazine
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

14 July 2022

RECENT ACTIVITIES

2022 Annual General Meeting

The AGM was conducted at Waverley RSL and was attended by 33 Association members and all annual reports were provided. The Committee was re-elected for a further 12-month period and currently there are 244 members. The meeting was followed by a very convivial lunch.

21 May - 301/126 Signal Squadron Reunion

More than 60 former members of 301 and 126 Signal Squadrons met at Waverley RSL for an afternoon reunion. A number of attendees had come from interstate to attend and catch up with old mates including the recently retired MAJGEN Marcus Thompson AM PhD, down from Canberra.



Group Photo of the attendees.
Source: Tony Corkhill



Some old and bolds.
L-R George Bird, Al Seymour, Justin Lott & Richard Coates
Source: Tony Corkhill

Also attending the reunion were Mavis and Bruce O'Connor, OAM, who made the trip down from Berowra Waters in NSW. Bruce joined 2 Commando Company on 14th September 1961 as a Private and retired on 29 September 1999 having risen through the ranks to Company Sergeant Major and was then commissioned and continued to serve in 2 Commando Company and Headquarters, 1st Commando Regiment. In 1999 Bruce was awarded his Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) all for meritorious service to the Australian Army while serving with the 1st Commando Regiment.

The Vice-President of Australian Commando Association, Major (retired) Steve Pilmore OAM RFD, presented an Association plaque to Bruce and Mavis in recognition of their long-standing service of both to the Association. Bruce served as ACA Treasurer for many years and having Mavis as his right hand was excellent as she was then a practising accountant who throughout Bruce's military career has been actively involved in assisting the various Commando Associations with financial guidance.

Bruce is standing down as the Treasurer of the Australian Commando Association-National Executive, and has been succeeded by Major Dave Wonson, a former member of 126 Signals Squadron and now recently retired ADF Officer.



Steve Pilmore presents Mavis & Bruce O'Connor with an engraved ACA Plaque.
Source: Author



Mavis and Bruce O'Connor, OAM proudly displaying their Australian Commando Association plaque.
Source: Author

To mark the event and to commemorate the history of Commando signallers, a commemorative numbered medallion was struck, displaying the units' naming history on the front and on the rear is displayed a Morse key from a Wireless Set A510 which was used by unit members throughout 1960's to the mid 1970's when, with the wind down of the Vietnam conflict, the AN-PRC 64 set became available. However, most operators preferred the A510 morse key. The rear of the medallion also features a modern signaller in the background. (Cont'd on page 7)



Front view



Rear view

Source: Author



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A very successful auction was conducted for Special Forces Communicator statuette, with the commemorative medallion number 126 fitted into the base. Anyone interested in obtaining either of these items should go to the Association sales site at:

<https://www.commando.org.au/shop>. For bulk quantities at discounted prices please contact: acavic.sales@gmail.com.



Special Forces Communicator.
Source: Platatac

<https://www.commando.org.au/shop?page=1>

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

Sat 6 August ACAV Annual Dinner – the Annual Association Dinner will be conducted at a new venue being the Amora Hotel Riverwalk Melbourne, 649 Bridge Rd, Richmond, VIC 3121. The guest speaker will be the Officer Commanding 2 Company, 1st Commando Regiment. The function commences at 6:45 pm.

Sun 25 Sep – Shrine Memorial Service. This annual activity will take place at 1230 at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance, followed by afternoon tea in the Shrine.

16 Oct 2022 – Annual Pistol Shoot with ASASA. Arrangements are currently underway to finalise this activity and we have been notified by the Yarra Pistol Club at Lysterfield that the range facility had been significantly improved with new equipment and facilities. It is hoped that ACA will retain the Trophy last won by them in 2019.

11 Nov 2022 – Remembrance Day Ceremony at the former Repatriation Hospital Heidelberg now part of the Austin Hospital, commencing at 10.50 am.

20 Nov 2022 – Commando Memorial Service - Tidal River. The annual commemoration activity will take place on Sunday the 20th at 12:45, and it is expected that some Association members will be joining with the Foster RSL on the Sat night prior (19/11/22) to participate in the RSL Annual Dinner. We are currently awaiting details of this from Foster RSL.

Dec TBC - end of year Xmas function with 2 Coy.

HISTORICAL COLLECTION GRANT WITH MUSEUMS (VICTORIA)

This grant has now been completed and the remaining funds from the grant were utilised to purchase quantities of storage boxes and display materials. The cataloguing of items within the collection is ongoing and full legal and security reasons our holdings of restricted items and weapons has been included in the database but is not available for public viewing.

To view the updates, go to <https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/australian-commando-association-victoria>.

There have been several recent donations of World War II items to the Historical Collection, with one being donated by Ian Hamilton, the son of Ron Hamilton a former member of 2/6th Commando Squadron and long-time member and official of the M & Z Commando Association- Victoria. The items donated include a Japanese unit silk flag 76x68 cm (shown below) with the four large Japanese characters are a slogan/motto, translated meaning "protecting our destiny forever". The smaller Japanese writing around the red sun in the centre is the names of members and the English names written in the corners of the flag are members of 2/6th Commando Squadron were presumably involved with the capture of the flag.



Donated Japanese battle flag.
Source: Author

Also donated by Ian was a collection of World War II Japanese occupation currency for the Netherlands East Indies and Borneo regions.

In addition, there was a significant collection of World War II Independent Company/Commando Squadron post war lapel badges (of most but not all the Commando companies/squadrons) and a small quantity of M&Z Commando Association car stickers.

These were the remaining stock when the M&Z Commando Association closed and have been handed over to ACA Vic and limited numbers are available through the website store.

<https://www.commando.org.au/shop?page=1>

(Cont'd on page 9)





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Some of the Japanese occupation currency for the Netherlands East Indies
Source: Author

A second donation to the Historical Collection was from Ian Johnson, the son of Keith Johnson a former member of 2/10th Commando Squadron and long-time member and official of the M & Z Commando Association Victoria. The items donated include a significant collection of VHS tapes of Association Reunions in the 1980s and 90s, several large photo albums of World War II activities and post war Association functions. These items will be digitised and entered into the collection and will be accessible through the website.

2020 Victorian Veterans' Council Grant

This project has been completed with videos and transcripts of the WW2 Special Operations oral history interviews now being available under the history section of the Association website.

The digitisation of post WW2 M& Z Victoria association magazine 'Double Diamonds' has been partially completed as only 85 of the 250 editions were readily available and are currently being uploaded onto the website. Actions are underway to digitise the remaining Victorian Branch magazines and some recently acquired New South Wales branch magazines will also be digitised and uploaded onto the Association website in the future.

Tidal River Walking Track Open Space Development - Update

The administrative processes regarding the creation of the walking track are underway with Parks Victoria and contractors and it is expected that works will commence in early 2023 when the cultural heritage aspects have been finalised. It is expected that the track will be completed in the latter part of 2023. Consultations are currently underway with Parks Victoria regarding the naming of five benches which are to be located at strategic viewpoints along the walk. ACAVIC is seeking to have these named after World War II and recent Afghanistan Commandos, who were Victorian based and who were killed in action.

WELFARE

ACAVIC continues to liaise and attend regular meetings with the Victorian Veterans Council, Legacy, RSL and DVA networks to promote ACAVIC's objectives/expectations and support requirements in the very crowded Welfare & Advocacy arena. There have been numerous requests for support from former members in the preparation and submissions to DVA for acceptance of liability for injuries sustained whilst in service. Many of these have been successful for former CMF/ARes members who are receiving surgical interventions and ongoing medical support for their injuries.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

A cool sunny day on 10 July 2022 greeted the attendees arriving at the Queensland Maritime Museum for this years Operation RIMAU and Special Forces commemoration ceremony held on the quarter deck of the HMAS Diamantina. On this commemoration we were joined by numerous members of the Australian SAS Association Queensland (ASASA-Q)

In late September 1944 Operation RIMAU was the second Allied Special Operations attack on Japanese shipping in Singapore Harbour, carried out by operatives, mainly Australian, from the Allied Intelligence Bureau (Z Special Unit) using Australian built Hoehn military MKIII Folboats. It was a follow-up to the successful Operation JAYWICK which had taken place in September 1943 and Operation RIMAU was again led by Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Lyon of the Gordon Highlanders, British Army.



Some members of the Band.
 Source ACA Q



Route of Operation RIMAU
 Source ACA Q

Thanks must go to the Queensland National Service Pipes and Drums (QNSP&D) for an outstanding pre-event concert with sixteen members in attendance under the direction of band master Dennis Deering. Eight pipers and eight drummers created a brilliant and yet sombre atmosphere which those attending, and those watching from the Goodwill Bridge respectfully appreciated. The Queensland Commando Association donated some funds to the QNSP&D band to help with the future purchase of new ergonomic drum halters.



Lieutenant Colonel Simons
 Source ACA Q



Lieutenant Colonel Zoltan Simons (Ret'd) laid the wreath on behalf of the ASASA-Q as many of our normal visitors were on their Christmas in July weekend.

Jack Thurgar travelled up from NSW to represent the ACA National and had a great catch up with Zoltan, who was his former Platoon Commander during the Vietnam war.



Jeff Mackay and family
Source ACA Q

Mr Graeme Mackay laid the wreath for M&Z Special, and in honour of his late father Jack, a RANR member of Z Special Unit¹ who was a long serving ACAQ President and Committee member. We were also very happy to see Mrs Bev Ellis in attendance and as usual looking fit as ever, making the trip down from Bribie Island.



LT COL John Davidson Qld Secretary and
Wayne Campbell ASASA-Q
Source ACA Q

Approximately forty members and their families enjoyed the ceremony with in attendance. The beautiful flower wreaths were once again provided by Deanna at the Enoggera florist.



The wreaths.
Source ACA Q

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¹Jack was involved with training Operation JAYWICK operatives at Refuge Bay Camp X.



SIGNIFICANT COMMANDO DATES

JULY to SEPTEMBER

JULY

July 1942

2/8th Independent Company (Ind Coy) the Double Whites was raised at Wilsons Promontory, Victoria. The 2/8th Ind Coy is the last Ind Coy to be raised during WW2.

1 July 1942

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

17 July 1942

Four operatives of ISD are landed in Portuguese Timor as part of Operation Lizard from the MV Kuru. They RV with Sparrow Force sometime later in Mape. This is the first Operation by ISD later SRD (Z Special Unit) during WW2.

22 July 1943

The 2/8th (Cav) Commando Squadron (later just Commando Squadron (Cdo Sqn)), sailed for Lea, New Guinea via Milne Bay on board the SS Ormiston.

1 July 1945

2/3rd & 2/5th Cdo Sqn's landed on Green Beach in Balikpapan.

7 July 1945

The 10 remaining Z Special Unit members of Operation Rimau Are Executed in Singapore.

July to August 1945

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

7 July 1955

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

27 July 1955

The Commandant Royal Marines grants approval for Australian Commandos to wear the Sherwood Green Beret once they were deemed Commando Qualified.

14 July 1956

CAPT George Cardy of 1 Commando Company is presented the first Sherwood Green Commando Beret to an Australian Commando. .

22 July 2002

Tactical Assault Group – East (TAG-E) (Charlie Commando Company (CCC)), 4 RAR Commando is now 'Operational' and is the Federal Governments Force of Choice for a resolution to a Domestic Counter Terrorism Incidents in Australia.

09/10 July 2006

A Platoon from Delta Commando Company (DCC), 4 RAR Commando are surrounded and fighting heavy insurgent numbers whilst providing the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) for a Canadian Special Operation Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) unit in the Chora Valley of Urazghan Province, Afghanistan during what was known as Operation Nile. During the Operation, three USAF SOC AC-130 'Spectre' Gunships went 'Winchester' (empty of ammunition) whilst supporting the Operation. This Operation occurred to set the conditions for a wider Multi-National Coalition effort that was part of the Combined Joint Task Force – Afghanistan, Operation Mountain Thrust. Miraculously not one of the Commandos was Killed or Seriously Wounded during the heavy fighting.

AUGUST

2 August 1942

2/6th Ind Coy deploys to New Guinea on board MS Tasman.

August 1943

2/4th Cdo Sqn lands in Milne Bay, New Guinea

2/5th Ind Coy reforms as the 2/5th Cdo Sqn of the 2/7th Cav Commando Regiment at Wongabel on the Atherton Tablelands after returning from New Guinea.

3 August 1942

Z Special Unit training is moved to the house on the hill in Fairview, Cairns. Also known as Z Experimental Station (ZES).

(Continued on page 15)



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Significant Commando Dates

AUGUST (cont'd)

6 August 1945

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

9 August 1945

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

15 August 1945

Offensive action against Japan ends and is commonly known as Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day), later known as Victory in the Pacific Day (VP Day).

August/September 2005

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

SEPTEMBER

September 1942

Camp Z at Refuge Bay, NSW was established. From here the Z Special Unit operators selected for Operation Jaywick began their training. Some of the Z Special unit members departed from Camp Z onboard the MV Krait for Cairns on 18 January 1943.

23/24 September 1942

2nd/4th Independent Company lands on the beach just west of the village of Betano, Portugese Timor from HMAS Voyager to replace the 2nd/2nd Independent Company. HMAS Voyager becomes aground and both Independent Company's begin to fight against the Japanese.

2 September 1943

14 members of Z Special Unit depart Exmouth aboard the MV Krait the first raid into Singapore Harbour.

19/20 September 1943

2/6th Cdo Sqn in action during the battle of Kaiapit, New Guinea.

24 September 1943

After a relatively uneventful voyage, *Krait* arrived off Singapore. That night, six men left the boat and paddled 50 kilometres to establish a forward base in a cave on a small island near the harbour.

26/27 September 1943

Six members of Z Special Unit led by LTCOL Lyons conduct raids using three folboats and carrying limpet mines on Japanese Shipping in Singapore Harbour as part of Operation Jaywick. In the resulting explosions, the limpet mines allegedly sank or seriously damaged seven Japanese ships, comprising over 39,000 tons between them. The six Z Special operatives waited until the commotion over the attack had subsided and then returned to the MV Krait which they reached on 2 October 1943.

4 September 1944

2/4th Cdo Sqn landed at Lae during the Salamaua-Lae campaign. This was the first Australian amphibious landing since Gallipoli in 1915.

11 September 1944

23 men of Z Special Unit depart Garden Island in WA aboard HMS Porpoise as part of Operation Rimau, the second raid on Singapore Harbour.

2 September 1945

Japan formally signs the instrument of surrender onboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Harbour, ending WW2, thus ending the combat operations and the beginning of the demobilisation and eventual disbandment of the Commando Squadrons & Regiments and M & Z Special units. Japanese formal surrenders continued until 22 Feb 1946.

11 September 2001

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Commando Parachuting Returns to Avalon, Victoria

Sourced from Army News and additional editing by D. Knight

Australian Army soldiers from the historic Williamstown-based 2 Company, 1st Commando Regiment, made a spectacular return to parachute training in Victoria by jumping into fields near Avalon Airport during Exercise Star Leopard on the weekend 20/21 November 2021. They last jumped at Avalon in 1997.

Dozens of Army Commandos and other Special Operations forces soldiers jumped from a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) C-130J Hercules tactical airlift aircraft just after dawn.



*Commandos conduct final checks on each other's kit before parachuting into fields near Avalon Airport.
Source: Department of Defence*

Warrant Officer Class Two (WO2) M said it was the first time since 1997 that the Company has conducted parachute continuation training in Victoria. "Everybody is thrilled to be back in training again after such a challenging year," WO2 M said.

"Typically, we travel to Sydney to do our annual parachute training, so we're grateful the weather held off this weekend and we could get everybody through the training."

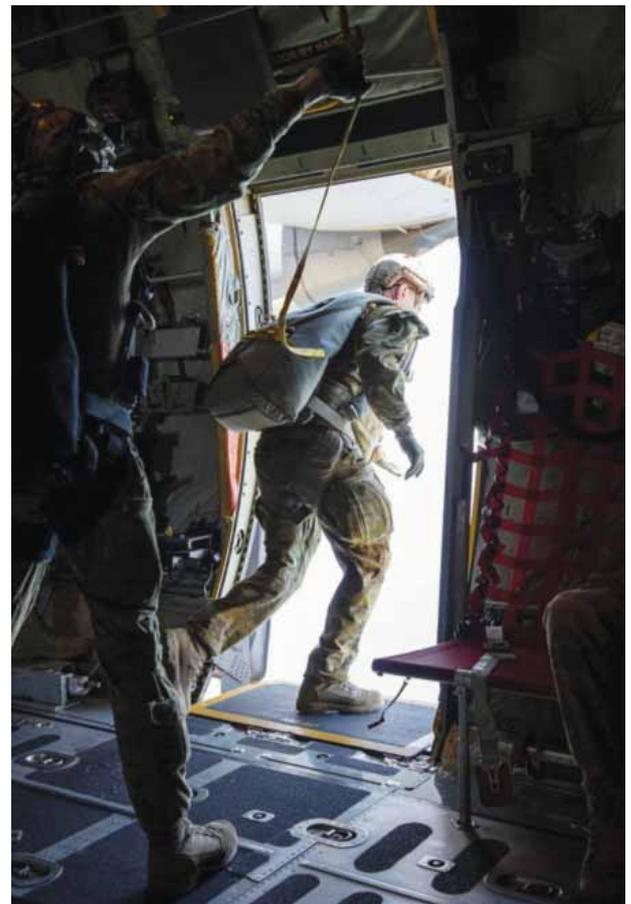


*Commandos board a Royal Australian Air Force C-130J Hercules aircraft at RAAF Base Williams, Point Cook, Melbourne, to conduct parachute continuation training.
Source: Department of Defence*

The Company conducted military static-line, military free-fall and ram air parachute static-line (RAPSL) jumps at Avalon and RAAF Base Point Cook.



Commando Dispatcher conducts final checks on-board C-130J Hercules aircraft as they prepare to RAPSL parachute into fields near Avalon Airport.



Commando undertaking a door exit from a C-130J Hercules aircraft to RAPSL parachute into fields near Avalon Airport.

As a 30-year veteran of the 2 Company, Sergeant C, who works for the Victorian Government full-time and



the Army Reserve part-time, enjoyed being back in the air again. "I love jumping and will always get up there as many times as I can," she said. "I joined the Company when I was 17 because my dad was in the Air Force and I was fascinated by military service and the opportunities that it presented, like jumping out of an aircraft, shooting and other activities."



Commando using static line parachute after a door exit from a C-130J Hercules into fields near Avalon Airport.

Earlier in the year, the 2 Company personnel travelled to the Grampians for a weekend of special forces climbing and rappelling training.

Afghanistan and Iraq veteran Sergeant B worked to add parachute training in the Geelong region to the 2 Company's regular schedule. "The weekend proved we could do the training in Victoria, and Avalon and Point Cook were great sites and very convenient for the team," Sergeant B said. "We're already looking to conduct more parachute training in the region next year."



A Commando waits at the Drop Zone rendezvous for his fellow team members.
Source: Defence Department

After jumping from the RAAF C-130J Hercules aircraft, the Commandos didn't have a lot of time to take in the spectacular views of the You Yang's, Port Phillip or the Werribee Plains before landing in fields adjacent to the Avalon Airport. Many of the Commando's on Exercise Star Leopard are part of the Army Reserve and combine their civilian jobs with

challenging and rewarding part-time roles in Army to serve the Australian community.



A Commando from 2 Company undertaking a freefall exit at 3000m over Avalon airfield.
Source: Department of Defence

2 Commando Company (it was never officially the 2nd Commando Company) was established in 1955 as one of two independent Commando Companies established to maintain the Army's unconventional warfare skills and techniques learned by Australian Commandos and personnel from Special Operations Australia (cover name Allied Intelligence Bureau) during World War 2.

1st Commando Regiment was formally raised on 01 February 1981 and 1 and 2 Commando Companies were absorbed into the new unit, along with 126 Signal Squadron (Special Forces). 126 Signal Squadron was later transferred to 4 RAR (Commando) in 1997 and 301 Signal Squadron was re-raised and embedded within the 1st Commando Regiment. The Regiment is home to the Australian Defence Force's Special Warfare capability and is responsible for developing Special Warfare doctrine, delivering training, and maintaining the Special Warfare capability. 1st Commando Regiment is an Australian Army special forces combat unit providing the Australian Government with unique special operations capabilities in support of the national interest.

Personnel from the 1st Commando Regiment regularly conduct training activities in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere across the Asia-Pacific region, and many have seen operational service in Afghanistan, Iraq, Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands in recent years.



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Ambassador's Accolade

By Jim Burrowes, OAM

I was recently privileged, together with fellow Coastwatcher Dixie Lee, to spend time with the new US Ambassador to Australia, Ambassador Caroline Kennedy, daughter of US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

This event took place as part of a commemoration held at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra on 27 July 2022 to recognize the rescue of the young Lt. Kennedy by Australian and Solomon Islander Coastwatchers in World War II. Dixie and I joined the commemoration by video call from the US Consulate in Melbourne. Dixie was represented in Canberra by his daughter, Eve Ash, and I was represented in Canberra by my son Tom.

The report that follows was written by ABC News reporter Craig Allen and offers a compelling account of the day and the history it commemorated. The photos below include those published with the article but also one made available to me later by the US Embassy and another from my own files.

US ambassador to Australia Caroline Kennedy visits War Memorial to learn more about elite team that helped rescue JFK during WWII

Craig Allen, ABC News 28 Jul 2022



Ambassador Caroline Kennedy.
Source: ABC News

When a Japanese destroyer rammed a US patrol boat during World War II, it came perilously close to snuffing out an American political dynasty.

On August 2, 1943, the patrol torpedo boat PT-109 was on the hunt for enemy shipping in Solomon Islands, when it was rammed in the dead of night by a Japanese destroyer. At the helm of the PT-109 was a young Lieutenant, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, US Navy who would go on to become president of the United States.

His bravery in guiding his surviving injured crewmates to safety has become American folklore.

But it took years before the true story of the

Australian link to JFK's rescue became known.



John F. Kennedy (far right) and crewmen of the PT-109 in the Solomon Islands.
Source: JFK Library

Now the late president's daughter, Caroline Kennedy, the newly installed US ambassador to Australia, has heard first-hand details of her famous father's lucky escape, on a tour of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Among the items the memorial holds in its archival collection are the papers of Lieutenant Reg Evans, DSC, RANVR an Australian who spotted the wreckage of JFK's boat and reported its location to base immediately.

Before her tour of the War Memorial yesterday, Ms Kennedy spoke with the last two survivors of the secretive Australian Coastwatch unit, to which Lieutenant Evans belonged, who collectively earned fame for their role in mounting a rescue party for JFK and his crew.



Ambassador Kennedy flanked by Eve Ash & Tom Burrowes with Coastwatchers Dixie Lee (left) and Jim Burrowes on the video call.
Source: US Embassy

"It was a great honour to meet two Australian Coastwatchers, who played an essential role in keeping the region secure during World War II," Ms Kennedy said.



I owe personal gratitude to an Australian Coastwatcher and two Solomon Islander scouts who saved my father's life.

"These men represent the best of their generation and are an amazing example of the bonds of the US-Australia alliance."



Caroline Kennedy being shown documents from the Australian War Memorial relating to the rescue of her father, JFK.
Source. Australian War Memorial

The Coastwatchers were positioned deep inside enemy lines, to gather intelligence and help rescue allied fighters.

Years after the war, then-president Kennedy acknowledged the Australians' role in his survival, when he hosted Lieutenant Evans at the White House.



Australian Coastwatcher A.R. "Reg" Evans visits John F Kennedy in the United States in 1961.
Source. JF Kennedy Library

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Meeting with Kennedy brings history to life

Today, there are only two of the original 400 Coastwatchers still alive, both aged well into their 90s. James 'Jim' Burrowes and Ronald 'Dixie' Lee now live in Melbourne and could not make it to Canberra to meet Ms Kennedy in person. Instead, two of their children came to lay wreaths alongside Ms Kennedy at the War Memorial.



Ambassador Kennedy laid a wreath with Eve Ash, daughter of Ronald 'Dixie' Lee, and Tom Burrowes, son of James Burrowes, at the Australian War Memorial.
Source. Australian War Memorial

Mr Lee's daughter, Eve Ash, said meeting Ms Kennedy brought decades of family history to life. "It has personalised history from 80 years ago, to today, and just brought it to life with a very personal touch," Ms Ash said. Ms Ash said Ms Kennedy's earlier video call with both her father and Mr Burrowes had been "a lot of fun". "They seemed to be very cavalier, both of them, about being behind enemy lines and surrounded by the enemy, the Japanese, and yet they seemed to thrive in it," Ms Ash said.



Ronald 'Dixie' Lee now lives in Melbourne but met with Ambassador Kennedy via video call.
Source: Dixie Lee & Australian War Memorial

Mr Burrowes' son, Tom Burrowes, said his father's highly secretive Coastwatch role took him deep into enemy territory, although his war experience was slightly out of the ordinary. "In my father's case, he never actually engaged the enemy because the idea was to spy and not be caught."





James Burrowes was an Australian Coastwatcher during WWII – positioned deep behind enemy lines in New Britain, to gather intelligence and help rescue allied fighters.
Source: Jim Burrowes & Australian War Memorial

The story of the PT-109 crew's dramatic survival and rescue has been immortalised by Hollywood in the 1963 movie PT 109, was released just five months before JFK was assassinated.



Dixie Lee (left) & Jim Burrowes are both life members of the Australian Commando Association.
Source: ACA Vic Historical Collection

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The brothers who went to war and a veteran's glider landing on 'D'- Day

This is not meant to be a factual account of the 'D' Day landings but a brief narrative about three of my family members who went to war. However, as an introduction, it's necessary to explain how a letter "Pat Turner's story" came into my possession, which I will address further down the track.

I had a desire for some years, to make a pilgrimage to the WW2 sites of the 'D'-Day Normandy landings - Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword - and to include a visit to the Bure village (France) where my uncle, Walter Pelling, my Dad's brother, had been KIA during the battle of the Bulge.

The 6th June 2015 was the 71st Anniversary of 'D'-Day which coincided with my plan to visit the Normandy beaches, although very important and interesting the beaches were, a main feature of this article is of the letter from Pat Turner, a Para of the Oxford and Bucks, the visit to Pegasus Bridge, and my visit to Bure village.

The itinerary was organised by a good friend in the UK who knew of a competent Battlefield tour leader, 'John', a man well experienced in all aspects of the 'D' Day landings, and as it transpired John turned out to be a very knowledgeable guide, who gave excellent accounts on each of the Beach landings which, as we know was at a terrible cost for the allied forces.

From the beginning everything went wrong at Omaha. Special "DD" tanks, amphibious [Sherman tanks](#) fitted with flotation screens that were supposed to support the 116th Regiment, sank in the choppy waters of the English Channel. Only 2 of the 29 launched made it to the beach. With the exception of Company A, no unit of the 116th landed where it was planned. Strong winds and tidal currents carried the [landing craft](#) from right to left. The 16th Regiment on the east half of the beach did not fare much better, landing in a state of confusion with units badly intermingled.

The methods used to land men and equipment had been planned well in advance of 'D' Day and some of their remains, the concrete fortifications and defences can still be seen on the beaches today, and are a must see by anyone who has an interest in the landings. They were excellent aids to John's graphic descriptions of the landings, which included the 'Harbour elements and their code names: **Mulberry**, was the codename for all the various different structures that would create the artificial harbours. There were two harbours, Mulberry "A" and Mulberry "B". The term **Mulberry "B"** was defined as, "An artificial harbour, built in England and towed to the British beaches at Arromanches. **Corncobs** and **Gooseberries** (break-

water ships), **Corncobs** were ships that crossed the [English Channel](#), either under their own steam or towed, and were then [scuttled](#) to act as breakwaters and create sheltered water at the five landing beaches. Once in position the **Corncobs** created the sheltered waters known as **Gooseberries**.

Phoenixes, were reinforced concrete caissons constructed by civil engineering contractors around the coast of Britain, collected and sunk at [Dungeness](#) in Kent and Pagham in West Sussex prior to 'D'-Day. There were six different sizes of caisson. Each unit was towed to Normandy by two [tugs](#) at around three knots. The caissons were initially sunk ready for 'D'-Day and then engineers refloated and "resurrected" them, hence the name.

Bombardons. The **Bombardons** were large 200 ft by 25 ft cross-shaped floating breakwaters fabricated in steel that were anchored outside the main breakwaters that consisted of **Gooseberries**, and **Phoenixes**, 24 **bombardon** units, attached to one another with hemp ropes, would create a 1 mile (1.6 km) breakwater. During the storms at the end of June 1944 some **Bombardons** broke up and sank while others parted their anchors and drifted down onto the harbours, possibly causing more damage to the harbours than the storm itself.

The dock piers were code named **Whales**, these piers were the floating roadways that connected the "Spud" pier heads to the land, the roadways were made from innovative torsionally flexible bridging units that had a span of 80 feet, mounted on pontoon units of either steel or concrete called "Beetles". After the war many of the "Whale" bridge spans from Arromanches were used to repair bombed bridges in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Such units are still visible, such as a bridge over the Noireau river in Normandy, [Meuse River](#) in Vacherauville ([Meuse](#)), and a bridge over the [Moselle River](#). A Whale span from Mulberry B that was reused after the war at [Pont-HYPERLINK](#) "<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pont-Farcy>" **Farcy** was saved from destruction in 2008 by Les Amis du Pont Bailey, a group of English and French volunteers. Seeking a permanent home for the Whale span the group gifted it to the Imperial War Museum, and it was returned to England in July 2015. After conservation work the span now features as part of the Land Warfare exhibition at [Imperial War Museum HYPERLINK](#) "https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_War_Museum_Duxford" **Duxford**.

Beetles, were pontoons that supported the Whale piers. They were moored in position using wires



attached to "Kite" anchors. October 2018 five Kite anchors were recovered from the bed of the Solent off Woodside Beach, which had been an assembly area for Whale tows prior to 'D' Day. The anchors were taken to Mary Rose Archaeological Services in Portsmouth for conservation treatment.

Spud Piers. The pier heads or landing wharves at which ships were unloaded consisted of a pontoon with four legs that rested on the sea bed to anchor the pontoon, yet allowed it to float up and down freely with the tide.

The lives lost during the landings were enormous, at Omaha beach alone over 2,000 men were killed and 3,000 wounded and three quarters of equipment had been lost. It was good timing for our tour group for, as we arrived at 'Gold' beach a Lancaster Bomber flew over us at a very low level along the beach; it raised the hairs on the back of the neck.

From the beaches we moved on to Pegasus Bridge, a site I was especially looking forward to visiting, having read The Pegasus Diaries by Major John Howard D.S.M, who led a [glider-borne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glider-borne) assault in six, 28 man Horsa Gliders that [captured the Caen canal and](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_the_Caen_canal_and_Orne_river_bridges)

[HYPERLINK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_the_Caen_canal_and_Orne_river_bridges)
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"https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_the_Caen_canal_and_Orne_river_bridges" river bridges on 6 June 1944, as part of Operation Overlord, it's a scene that has been preserved for posterity.

The Bridge spans the Caen River and is adjacent to the river Orne about 500 metres to the east at Ranville and was vitally important to the success of the 'D' Day landings, my visit didn't disappoint.

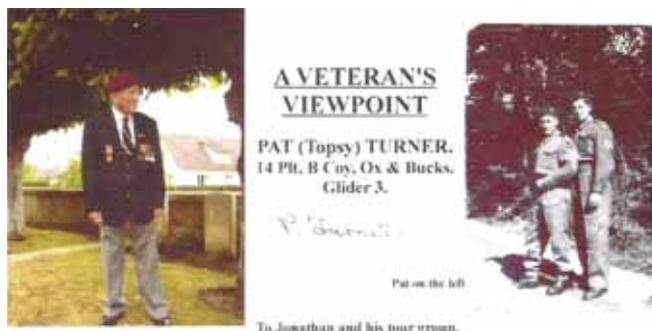
It was at Caen where my Father had been captured and made a POW by the Germans. Dad, a stretcher bearer, had gone searching for the wounded and was captured with some other medics also searching for casualties, so he wasn't alone; they made their way on foot guarded by the Germans to Paris, where they were then loaded on to trains with other POWs and trained to camp Stalag 1V B, near the village of Lamsdorf, Germany where it held over a 1,000 POWs. I remember him telling me that he wasn't badly treated by his captors, with the exception of the lack of food, which all the POWs suffered from, that and of the dreadful cold.

The famous Pegasus Bridge originally called Benouville Bridge named after the nearby village later changed to Pegasus Bridge in honour of the Operation. The bridge was, along with the nearby Ranville Bridge over the Orne River another road crossing, later renamed Horsa Bridge the objective of members of D Company, 2nd Airborne Battalion [Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxfordshire_and_Buckinghamshire_Light_Infantry), a glider-borne force who were part of the [6th Air](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/6th_Airlanding_Brigade_(United_Kingdom))

[HYPERLINK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/6th_Airlanding_Brigade_(United_Kingdom)) landing Brigade of the 6th Airborne Division during [Operation Tonga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Tonga), in the opening minutes of the [Allied invasion of Normandy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_invasion_of_Normandy). D Company 2nd Battalion under the command of [Major John Howard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_John_Howard), was to land close by the bridges in six [Airspeed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airspeed) [HYPERLINK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horsa)

["https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airspeed_Horsa"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airspeed_Horsa) Horsa gliders and, in a *coup-de-main* operation, take both intact, and hold them until relieved by the main British invasion forces. The successful capture of the bridges played an important role in limiting the effectiveness of a German counter-attack in the aftermath of the Normandy invasion.

John, our Guide received this letter from Pat (Topsy) Turner, a member of 14 Platoon Company of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, Glider 3 who described his experience at Pegasus Bridge in his letter to John.



"To John, and the tour group".

I would like to thank you for taking an interest in the action at Pegasus Bridge on the night of 'D'-Day.

Until recently I never really understood how important this operation was to the overall success of the invasion, and I doubt whether many of the other soldiers realised either. We had our orders, we had been superbly trained, and when the time came, in common with thousands of others, we just did what was expected of us.

I am taking this opportunity to make the point that it is nothing, I repeat, nothing like a film. When the action starts, as it did here just after midnight, it was pitchblack with just the occasional glint of light off the water and the vaguest of vague outlines of buildings, trees, and of course the bridge.

After the first flare went up from the German side, there commenced an intense period of guns being fired, stun and mills grenades going off and lots and lots of noise, shouting and shadowy forms running about. The scene was lit eerily by the flicker of the muzzle flashes and possibly by the distant explosions of our own planes bombing Caen 6 km away to the West although to be honest I can't remember that exactly as I tended to be a bit busy at the time! Think of a crowd fitfully and intermittently lit up at a fireworks display and you have part of the picture.

We had left Tarrant Rushton airfield in Dorset that evening and after an hour-and-a-half our pilots had



cast off from the towing bombers over the coast and we, in number 3 glider headed for the canal bridge following the other 2 gliders at one minute intervals, not that you could see them it was all done with watches and dead reckoning. We became very quiet in the glider as we approached the landing which was a basically controlled crash at about 100 MPH as we were heavily overloaded. I was typical of the other 28 men in our glider, my normal weight was ten-and-a-half stone but with the extra ammunition I was carrying, I weighed in at seventeen-and-a-half stone that night".

"Just as we were about to land the order was given to 'Link arms' which we did, at the same time raising our feet from the floor. There was a huge crunching and cracking sound as the glider floor collapsed and the wing broke off, truth to tell I don't remember anymore until I found myself with the others, outside the wreck of the glider with all the noise and commotion around us.

The Sappers with us were given priority to look for the demolition explosives that were supposed to be on the bridge and when they announced 'All clear', the rest of us gave them a cheer and strange as it may seem, a round of applause. I later noticed a body in the water of the swamp we had landed alongside, and like everyone else assumed it was a German, but it turned out to be my mate and No 1 to my No 2 on the Bren Gun, Fred Greenhalg, possibly the first man to die on 'D'-Day. It turned out he'd been thrown out of our Glider when it split apart on landing and drowned in the adjacent swamp. After beating off several German counter attacks we were relieved later in the morning by the troops coming up from the beaches where they had landed earlier, and I'm not ashamed to admit it, that quite a few of us were emotionally upset

by the relief from the tension and the knowledge that we had 'done' it'.

In summary, I can only say that for me and I suspect many others, it was a night of confusion, intense feelings and stress but because of the superb training, we made fewer mistakes than the enemy thereby enabling the battle to be brought to a successful conclusion". *Fini*

Twenty-one of the 850 gliders carrying infantrymen were wrecked in the landings. Of the roughly 4,000 men who participated in the initial airborne assault phase of Operation Overlord, 10 percent became casualties, either killed or badly injured. Overlord's success or failure depended on the seaborne landings and the German response.

The scene at Pegasus was busy on the day of our visit due to the fact it was the 70th anniversary and there were many visitors and the veterans wearing their Para Berets and blazers medalled and looking smart, and receiving handshakes and hugs from the locals and tourists it was a moving sight.

I approached one of the many Para Veterans there, and asked him where I should start looking for the Para's memorial who were killed at Bure and he explained that there was a Church at Bure which had a memorial for the 61, but said there were actually 68 in total members of the 13th Lancashire Battalion Para Regt that had been killed, and it was visited each year by the Para veterans to pay respects to their "fallen" comrades.

We moved on to the village of Sainte-Mère-Église where the effigy of Parachutist Private John Steel can be seen hanging from one of the pinnacles of the church tower, with many tourists gathered around taking pictures of such an unusual sight. On the night of John Steel's hang up, the town square was well lit and filled with German soldiers and villagers, when two planeloads of paratroopers from the 1st and 2nd Battalions [505th Parachute Infantry Regiment](#), were dropped in error directly over the village. The paratroopers were easy targets, and Steele was one of the few not killed. He was wounded in the foot by a burst of flak. His parachute caught in one of the pinnacles of the church tower, leaving him hanging on the side of the church. Steele hung there limply for two hours, pretending to be dead, before the Germans took him prisoner.

It was here that I met Veteran Para member, George, from Manchester. I asked George if he had been part of the Glider landings, and he replied: "Yes I took part, and my job on landing was to search under the bridges for possible charges", and he said "You know what? "There was nothing there, the Germans hadn't placed any".

At this point I left my group and met up with my wife, Sandy, and two friends for the 6-hour drive to Bure, where we found the Church and the Para Memorial to the 61 officers and men of the 13th (Lancashire) Battalion Parachute Regt killed between

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the 3rd and the 5th January 1945, which included Walter, my Dad's brother, who had been killed on the first day of the battle. The 13th Battalion had been tasked to capture the village of Bure, which it accomplished after a costly three-day battle. Those killed were given temporary burials in a field at Bure before being moved to a final resting place at Hotton Cemetery in Belgium. It was another 6-hour drive away to visit Walters Memorial Headstone.

Most of the soldiers buried at Hotton war cemetery died in the operations to hold and drive back the Germans. Of the 667 war burials, 340 are soldiers, 325 airmen and 1 war correspondent. 527 are British, 88 Canadian, 41 Australian, 10 New Zealand and 1 Polish soldier. There is also one Belgian soldier who fought with the 53rd Welsh Division.

In a strange twist of fate, it was reported that a third brother, George also serving in the same unit as Walter, was at Bure but Walter and George did not meet, perhaps not knowing the other was there (George returned home not knowing of Walters death).

Being aware of what happened to my family members without relating much of their stories, I feel saddened to think of the questions I would ask them now about their experiences, but sadly the opportunity is gone and now in the past.



Albert Pelling



Walter Pelling



George Pelling



Jack Pelling



Sainte-Mère-Église Church & Hanging para John Steel



Memorial at Bure Village France

Book of Remembrance contained in the Church at Bure.



Hotton war cemetery Belgium for those killed at the Battle of Bure and the Bulge.

An article below appeared in the Lambeth Free Press 16th February 1945

In a house in Hurst Street, Herne Hill, lives two proud parents who can justly say that their family are pulling their weight for the war effort. They are Mr. and Mrs Arthur Pelling, a well-known and popular couple in the neighbourhood.

Last week a "Free Press and Borough News" reporter visited their home and saw Mr. Pelling, a native of the borough for over 60 years. He told the story of his family, a story that was saddened with the knowledge of the recent death of their son Walter, in France.

Adventurous Spirit

"Walter" Mr. Pelling said "was always a devil-may-care lad. Full of life and love of adventure, he wanted to be in when it started, and he was too. He would have been 23 next month. He enlisted in April 1939 in the Hampshire Regiment, but, on the outbreak of war his adventurous spirit got the better of him and he joined the ranks of the "suicide squad" whose job it was to ferry troops across the Channel and return with refugees. It was a dangerous job that he loved.

Became a Paratrooper

In 1940 he was transferred into the Royal Artillery and served on a Searchlight Battery during the "Battle of Britain." Then followed 2½ years duty in Nigeria, West Africa. On his return to this country Walter volunteered for the Army Air Corps as a paratrooper and last year went with the 6th Airborne Division in France. It was during the Ardennes battle that Walter made the supreme sacrifice."

Perhaps the tragic circumstances of his death and his own "heroic" personality are most appropriately outlined in a letter from Walter's commanding officer to Roxina, his young wife. After offering his sympathy on behalf of all ranks, he writes:- Gallant Husband "The action in which he was killed will go down in history as amongst the most gallant ever fought. The Battalion attacked and stormed into the village of Bure against a very superior enemy force, still not withstanding most determined desperate and continuous enemy counter attacks with infantry, tanks and artillery, this village was charged and held. "Your husband among his comrades was a Hero among Heroes. We are so proud of his memory and we will never forget him." A message of condolence was also received from H.M. the King. He was indeed a fighting Pelling.

P.O.W. in Germany

Speaking proudly of his sons in the services, Mr Pelling next spoke of Albert. 30 years old Albert or "Bert" as he was usually called, enlisted in the Wiltshire Regiment 1941. After serving in this country he took part in the invasion of France on D-Day as a stretcher bearer. On August 4th he was taken prisoner. He is at present time in a German P.O.W. Camp. He is married with three children.

They never met

"George" Mr Pelling said, has spent seven months in India. He enlisted in the Oxford & Bucks Regt two days before war broke out. When he returned to this country from India, his Regiment was made into a Glider battalion. This was at the end of 1941. George, like my son Walter took part in the Ardennes battle around Bure with the 6th AIRBORNE Division, but they never met. As far as we know George is still out there.

4th Brother

A 4th brother, Jack, was invalided out in 1943 after serving 2 years in the army and spent some months in the R.A.M.C.

oOo



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Leaving the ADF



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

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

Transition support network

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

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

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

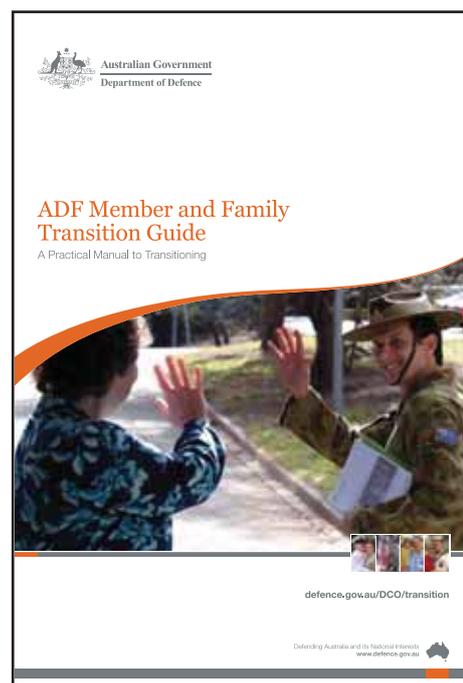
ADF Transition Seminar

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

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

ADF Member and Family Transition Guide

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



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SHERYL'S STORY

TWO GENERATIONS OF SERVICE

126 Signals veteran is a proud mother

When more than 1500 people turned out to pay their respects to Australia's Diggers at this year's Anzac Day ceremonies in Traralgon, there was a special meaning for former 126 Commando Signals member Sheryl English. For many years Sheryl has lead the local Air Force cadets as they marched to the town's cenotaph. But this year was different.

The Latrobe Valley Express reported, "Proud military mum Sheryl English was able to take part in the march with both of her adult Air Force sons, for the first time since they were cadets. Ms English was formerly an army Morse code operator with the 126 Commando Signal Squadron before moving back to regional Victoria to raise her family and train cadets in Traralgon."

"Her son Terrance English is now a military doctor in the 1 Expeditionary Health Squadron, while Steven had served as a pilot flying C130 Hercules in Iraq and Afghanistan".

Steven was also a PC9 pilot in the 'Roulettes' RAAF aerobatic display team – one of Sheryl's highlights was when Steven and his Roulette team flew over a recent Anzac Day march in Melbourne when Sheryl was marching with the Commando Association. Steven is currently Chief Flying Instructor at the Central Flying School.

Sheryl said, "I'm so proud of my boys. I couldn't be prouder to see them come through cadets and go into

the careers they've chosen and be good at what they do. The military is like a second family, they have your back and they still have it today. When my sons wanted to join the cadets I said - 'go for it'."

A Flight Sergeant in the Latrobe Valley's 426 Squadron Australian Air Force Cadets, Sheryl is the Squadron's admin officer, executive instructor, safety coordinator, firearms coordinator and range control officer – and is an instructor to the many keen Air Force cadets she teaches and mentors.

After moving to regional Victoria her three boys, Steven, Terrance and Michael, joined the Air Force Cadets. Steven had wanted to fly since childhood and joined the Cadets as soon as he was old enough. Sheryl, as a good mother, joined the parent's committee. When her SF background was revealed she was quickly recruited as a senior cadet officer. Sadly Michael died in car accident 15 years ago.

Life in 126 Signals Squadron

At the beginning, when teenager Sheryl Stewart transferred into 126 Signals Squadron in 1971 a senior NCO (of course) gruffly told her, "We don't have females in the Unit".

Sheryl said, "1971 was the great year that I went from 3 WRAAC Coy to 126 Signals, still aged 17, the only woman transferring in".

She said it was "very intimidating, with most of the males seeming to object to having females in the Unit. The girls there were great, though - Sgt Margaret Dark, Sue Hamilton and Irene Lovell."

Earlier, when her father suggested it was time for her to leave school, Sheryl's thoughts were to undertake nursing. As a sign of the times, even in the 1970s, when she spoke of an interest in joining the Army, he told her "No way", which made her determined to do just that. Consequently she enlisted in 3WRAAC at age 17. Women could not enlist directly into Units but did basic recruit training and specialist training in the WRAAC before posting to other Units.

126 Sigs sounded an interesting posting and Sheryl says it was the best thing she did – with great experiences, travel, learning new skills and making life-long friends. Living in Wandin-Yallock and initially too young to drive required great dedication and staying power for Sheryl to travel by public transport from Lilydale to South Melbourne, as well as needing family help between the station and home.

Then based at South Melbourne in the Albert Park precinct, the Commando Sigs were relocated to Watsonia in 1973. In later years Sheryl was present with her son Terrance, then aged about ten, when Princess Anne, the 126 Unit patron, formally closed it down



After the march. Flight Sergeant Sheryl English with her RAAF sons Terrance and Steven at the Traralgon cenotaph on Anzac Day this year.



when it was redesignated and relocated to NSW – possibly Holsworthy.

Sheryl said “The training was interesting and different. My only regret would be that I could not parachute, but doing the unarmed combat made up for it I suppose. (I have) never been so bruised but the training was invigorating; I have since had the opportunity to use my skills to save myself - thanks to Sgt Joyce and Sgt Hammond.”

“In 1973 we left for Western Australia on Operation Appian Way, my first time in a C130 Hercules. I made out my will the night before. We were all seated in the plane and it seemed forever that the engines were running, so I assumed it was a good take off; then someone had us all stand up and march off. All I could see was the person in front of me. I was frantic because I did not have a parachute on and I thought we were flying and being put out at great height. To my relief when we got to the doorway we were still on the ground and due to mechanical failure of some sort we had to board another Hercules. It was an adventurous trip.”

“The girls, Kris (later to marry 2 Cdo Coy legend Keith Hughes), Ann, Robyn, Marion, Irene and myself, were staying at Karakatta Barracks, home of 22 Construction as I remember, but we worked at Swanbourne Barracks, home of the SAS. The work was great; the friends we made were just as good, and life-long ones at that. We made up a scrapbook for the guys at Parabadoo, with a section for each person, to cheer up their days.



A sassy teenage Sheryl Stewart does a uniform check before parade.

If I recall, after this trip we all had to do Morse training again as they could identify our idiosyncrasies. Others could tell who was sending Morse by the way they did it. (But at times it was comforting to know who was on the other end.)”

“The next year we went to WA again, to yet more fun. This time we were at Lancelin, where our water supply was stolen, so we got somewhat smelly . . . We kept on the move, with little sleep. I walked into a tent one night and found the barrel of a rifle in my stomach!”

“The sound of tanks will always be with me; you cannot seem to know their direction. I slept on the front bonnet of a Land Rover one night wrapped around the spare tyre, so the tanks would not run over me. And the Mackies would fly over and we would have to get out our rifles and shoot at them.”

“We enjoyed being at Swan Island, with the radio shack sending out Morse, while at times the radio would be on and ‘The Lion Sleeps Tonight’ would echo across the water as we were fishing off the jetty. On weeknights in their own time I enjoyed teaching Morse to the newer members who were having trouble grasping it.”

A strong community contribution

After moving to the Latrobe Valley Sheryl continued her service in different ways. During the 2009 bushfires she used her communication skills as a member of the local disaster centre communications team. Sheryl wrote, “Gee it is bad down here. The town of Callignee is gone, and half of Traralgon South, which I see when



Sheryl hard at work during the 1970s.



I look out my window . . . the death toll for this area is eleven”.

Sheryl was later awarded a National Emergency Medal in recognition of her work as Municipal Emergency Resource Officer (MERO) for the Latrobe City during the Black Saturday bushfire crisis.

During the February 2014 Victorian fires, Sheryl again carried out those duties, at both the Moe and Traralgon relief centres, and then at the Hazelwood Open Cut where the fire threatened Victoria's power supplies, getting by on about four hours sleep a night across the main crisis period.

More recently Sheryl was awarded the prestigious Australia Day Medallion, in recognition of her defence force service and for her service to the community in emergency management and with the Red Cross

Sheryl's defence service since discharging from 126 Sig Sqn included her long service with the Air Cadets, within her own squadron and assisting other squadrons, and managing Air Cadet exchanges within Victoria, Australia-wide, and internationally, to Turkey, Hong Kong and China.

Sheryl recently did a tour of the 1950s atomic bomb



Old friends meet. Former 126 Signals members Lindsay Lorrain, Sheryl English and Ted Walsh catch up at the 2007 Association annual dinner. Photos supplied.

testing area in the Maralinga aboriginal community, conducted by the local indigenous group. She tells a graphic story of the horrific physical and health damage done to both military and local people who were exposed to the atomic radiation and its severe health ramifications down through the generations – and the cover up that followed.

Sheryl regularly meets up with a number of local Cdo Regt and 126-301 Sigs former members over coffee at the Traralgon RSL where she is a committee member. And she was delighted to recently welcome a new grandson, named in memory of her lost son Michael.

Sheryl recently commented, “The friendships formed back then (in 126 Sigs) are just as current today - we can pick up after ten, 20, even 30 years like it was yesterday. Some unfortunately are not with us anymore, but their memory lives on. One such great friend would be Paul Taylor; he was a character-and-a-half and it would not seem right that he not have a mention.”

“I never realised until recently the importance of the work we did - it took me by surprise, but Defence is in my blood and I seem unable to stay away from it”, Sheryl concluded.

oOo



NITE BEAMS

The Nite Beams Road Commander was the vision of our founder Mike "Tonto" Alexander. After studying the existing road flares available on the market, Alexander realized they were inadequate. Alexander talked with law enforcement, towing industry SOF and police fire departments while developing The Road Commander. Alexander stated, "I knew I could create a product that would address all of the shortcomings of existing flares on the market and create a much safer environment for anyone working in traffic. I wanted to save lives and prevent accidents."

Each Road Commander package (available in 1, 3, or 5 packs) includes a USB charging cord and a metal base tripod for each flare and a carrying case. Road Commander 5 Pack saves for itself after only 10 hours of investigation of using Orion Road Flares. Most importantly, the Road Commander will SAVE LIVES and prevent secondary crashes by warning drivers to MOVE OVER well in advance of existing crash scenes.

ROAD COMMANDER Features/Advantages

- Visible up to 1 mile each direction with LEDs, on both sides of the Road Commander.
- Waterproof, durable, military grade, high impact casing.
- Can be used in chemical or flammable (oil) environment.
- USB rechargeable with back-up solar panel.
- Continuously flashing for over 24 hours for longer recoveries and crash investigations.
- Single color mode settings: Red, Green, Amber, Blue, and White.
- Dual color settings: Amber/Blue, Amber/White, Amber/Green, Red/Blue.
- Road Commander casing base is magnetic and can be attached to vehicle or other metal surfaces.
- Can be placed on road or on magnetic tripod which adds 12" of height above ground level.
- Tripod legs can fit inside the holes on top of an orange cone, and flares can then be set on magnetic base.
- Nite Beams Road Commanders will be a huge money saving over single use Orion road flares, are not flammable, and provide the highest visibility of any road flare on the market.

COMPARISON

Hockey Puck Style Flares

These flares vary in price depending on the size, quality, quantity and whether they have a battery or rechargeable power supply. They sit flush with the roadway making it difficult for motorists to see them until it's too late. The low profile of these flares render them useless during snowy or any low visibility conditions.

Orion 30 Minute Road Flares (60 year old technology)

Due to the cost and limited performance time of these traditional flares, a 10 hour investigation could cost up to \$400, with each additional hour costing \$40. These single use flares have a very low visibility and cannot be used near chemicals or flammable liquids, due to being a fire hazard.

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"I am a crash reconstructionist in north central Indiana. I used five Road Commander lights on a crash scene to mark a high traveled roadway and they worked phenomenally. These lights are extremely bright and visible in the day and night. We were on scene for several hours and all 5 lights worked the entire time. I also had officers from assisting agencies on scene who, after witnessing how well these worked have now planned to purchase their own set of Road Commanders. These freed up patrol cars/officers, which would have normally had to sit and direct traffic."

House Officer PE 163, Crash Reconstruction, Indiana Police Dept.

"We used the Road Commanders last week. They were great! They moved 90% of the traffic over without a patrol car on a crash site on Interstate-94."

Det. Mike Brown, District Commander, Michigan State Police

"The 'Road Commander' LED flares produced by Nite Beams has dramatically improved the safety & visibility of our officers in the field. I put these in the hands of our officers, and they immediately deploy them on crashes, both day or night, on over 10 miles of freeway that runs through our community. What I did not expect, is these have been a force multiplier when having to shut down roads. A five pack of 'Road Commander' flares can take the place of a patrol car to block a road and improve the efficiency of resources in the field."

Ryan Gaston, Deputy Chief of Police, Auburn Hills Police Dept., Auburn Hills, MI

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Ben Jones, Trooper, Indiana State Police

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

By Next Job Now, ADF Career Transition Experts – 1300 112 114

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Opportunity helps those that help themselves

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

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

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

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Vale Darwin local Tony Maia

By Luke Gosling OAM MP

We have a long military history with Timor-Leste from WW2 that continues through to the current day with the Defence Co-operation Program in Dili and the ongoing 1st Brigade relationship that has seen 1CER and other elements deploying as part of the annual Exercise Hari'i Hamutuk with the Timor-Leste Armed Forces (F-FDTL) and other Defence Forces.

In 1942, war came to Darwin and the island of Timor simultaneously on the 19/20th Feb. That is one of the reasons you will always see the Timor-Leste Consul to Darwin and often F-FDTL members at our Bombing of Darwin ceremony at the Darwin Cenotaph.

About 20 years ago, in the years after INTERFET, I made a film for Channel 9 about this long military history with Timor-Leste, including the support of the local Timorese to the 2/2nd Independent (Commando) Company, the 2/4th Company and later our 'Z Special' operatives. Just Search 'Debt of Honour' on Youtube to watch the film.

Part of our WW2 story is a Timorese Australian that passed away recently in Darwin, Mr Antonio (Tony) Maia. He was a young man when he was hiding and protecting commandos from the Japanese in the villages of Eastern Timor-Leste. During a contact with the Japanese he was shot several times but he survived.



His extended family suffered at least 7 deaths and his wife Veronica's family suffered many more killed during the WW2. So you can imagine that when war came again to East Timor in 1975, Tony fought and did his best to safeguard his family and get them to safety. This was a very dangerous time and the family was separated for a while but Tony got them all out via Australia and West Timor. As refugees, with the assistance of The Red Cross, they got to safety in Portugal where the family of 6 was finally reunited in 1977.

In 1985 the family migrated from Portugal to Australia and Tony and his wife Veronica and their children made Darwin home. Tony worked as an upholsterer and they brought up their family. In this photo Tony is catching up with one of the Australian 2/2nd Commandos John 'Paddy' Keneally.



Tony lived well into his nineties and was living in the Darwin suburb of Karama with Veronica and other family members. His son Vergial told me that Tony wanted his family to know how close they came to being killed in the war and how fragile life can be, so it's important that we are grateful and that we hold dear our values of standing up for one another, helping our neighbours in Timor-Leste and upholding the rights and obligations of being a citizen of our beloved country, Australia.



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ONE OF THE FEW LEFT STANDING

CORPORAL VF512389 ELIZABETH MACKENZIE nee DRUMMOND Headquarters Special Operations Australia/Allied Intelligence Bureau

A family biography edited by Doug Knight

This is the story of Elizabeth Mackenzie, a young 17-year-old who unknowingly entered the wartime Australian Special Operations community where she met many of the operatives who were later to lose their lives on operations, particularly Operation RIMAU. There she also met the love of her life, Sergeant Gilbert Mackenzie whom she subsequently married and with him enjoyed a lifetime of happiness. Along with 'Gil' she continually engaged with the ex-service Commando community until Gilbert's death in June 2010 and continues to be a regular at Commando Association functions.



*Elizabeth Noel Drummond
before enlistment.
Source: Mackenzie Collection*

at the Law Courts, situated near the Post Office, so it was quite pleasant for her to take a stroll there on occasions.

One of the main streets of Bendigo is Pall Mall, apparently named after Pall Mall in London. Elizabeth had typed a letter, addressed to the local Pall Mall, but had omitted writing 'Bendigo' on the envelope. One day her boss presented her with the unopened envelope "Return to sender" - it had been to England and back, address unknown!

Her starting wage would have been about three pounds ten shillings (\$7) a week.

World War 11 had broken out in September 1939, and there was a call, not only for able-bodied males to go into the three services, Army, Navy and Air Force, but females were also being recruited. As the months went by Elizabeth became more and more unsettled, wanting to join one of the services and this she eventually did on 10 August 1943 when she joined the AWAS (Australian Women's Army Service).

Her mother was brokenhearted at the thought of Elizabeth leaving home and not knowing if she would be posted outside Australian shores. However, this did not happen.

When Elizabeth applied to join the Army on 14 July 1943, she reported to the Recruiting Office at Camp Pell¹ in Melbourne where she had her medical and then on 15 July 1943 she was Trade Tested². Another girl from Bendigo whom she knew also joined at the same time so at least she had a mate. They were both leaving home for the first time and going into the unknown. On 10 August 1943, Eliza-



*Elizabeth on entry into the
Australian Army.
Source: Elizabeth Mackenzie*



*Left: Elizabeth with
Dixie Lee, a former
Coastwatcher and
the Chief of the
Defence Force,
Lieutenant General
Angus Campbell
AO, DSC at the
2019 ACAVIC
Operation RIMAU
Dinner.
Source: Author's
collection*

Following the completion of a commercial course at the Bendigo Business College Elizabeth applied for and was fortunate to gain a position as a legal stenographer with the legal firm of Luke, Murphy, Don and Monotti. She enjoyed her work and had a good rapport with her fellow workers.

Most correspondence was dictated to her and she wrote it in shorthand before typing it. There was a variety of work to be typed such as Contracts and Wills, with the latter always interesting to read. Any typographical errors had to be initialled by the solicitor and Elizabeth was often one of the witnesses to the finished documents. Sometimes documents had to be stamped

¹Located at Royal Park Melbourne adjacent to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

²A test of competency with a particular skill or trade.



beth and her friend reported to Camp Pell and were taken into the Army.

Elizabeth is a little vague as to what happened during the first few days. Uniforms were supplied and comprised one khaki jacket and skirt, khaki cotton shirts with detachable collars. She remembers having her collars laundered at a Chinese Laundry for three pence (3d, 2c) per collar and they were as stiff as a board. Also issued was a khaki tie, which was always worn, natural-coloured stockings and brown lace-up shoes. During summer a skirt, shirt and tie were standard dress. A "great coat" (a heavy over coat), was issued for the colder days. One never ventured out of doors without wearing the khaki felt hat which completed the uniform. Also during this time at Camp Pell all the necessary paperwork was prepared for entry into the AWAS.

Elizabeth and her newly recruited female friends were sent to Darley, 8 kilometres outside of Bacchus Marsh, 60 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, to do their recruit training. They were shown the fundamentals of Army procedures, drilled every day and marched for miles getting fit.

They were housed in corrugated iron huts, about 20 to each hut. It took Elizabeth a while to settle in, sleeping with so many in the same area especially when some girls were snorers! Each group took pride and joy competing against the others in being chosen as the tidiest hut. They had a special way of making their beds to get the corners neat and crisp, no wrinkles to be shown with the bedclothes. They had a locker and small cupboard beside their beds for personal gear.



Members of the Australian Women's Army Services (AWAS) at the Darley Military Camp in August 1943.

Courtesy of the Bacchus Marsh and District Historical Society Inc. Collection.

Food was certainly different from home cooking, and they adjusted as the days went by and after the outside exercises and fresh air, they usually had a good appetite when mealtime came around. They completed gas drill learning the different gases that could be used in warfare. They were issued with gas masks but when the course concluded thankfully the masks were returned to stores.

To signify they were recruits a white band was worn on each epaulette of their uniforms, which were later replaced with metal AWAS badges. When they were posted to their respective units, they were then issued

with colour patches worn on the top of each sleeve. On their hats they wore the Australian Army badge.

They had Church Parade each Sunday and Elizabeth recalls one of the girls saying that her mother had recently died, and the mother's favourite hymn had been 'Once in Royal David City'. This hymn happened to be sung that Sunday and suddenly Elizabeth had tears rolling down her cheeks. She believed that after hearing the sad story and feeling a little homesick caused such emotion.

One of the Drill NCOs went to school with one of Elizabeth's sisters and she knew Elizabeth and as she was one of the tallest girls in their group she inevitably picked on Elizabeth to be "marker" when drilling. They had forward marching, left wheel, right wheel, about turn, and one day Elizabeth did an about turn and came face to face with the girl behind her - quite embarrassing really! They were warned that if their hat blew off on no account were they to break ranks to retrieve it. Needless to say, on many days, hats needed to be retrieved when drill had finished.

Near the end of the course, they had a sport's day and Elizabeth was one of the fastest runners in the group although she has no recollection of the results.

She became friendly with one of the girls in her hut who asked Elizabeth if she would like to go with her to visit her family in Ballarat, many miles away from Darley. Elizabeth went with her as they had a day's leave, probably the first in recruit training. Elizabeth doesn't recall how they got to Ballarat, it may have been by the milk truck, however they eventually arrived and spent the day with her family. As the day wore on the worrying thing was how to get back to camp by midnight. They had been warned if they were not back by 2400 hrs they would be AWL (Absent Without Leave) and charged. In the end they were driven back to camp by the girl's family with the promise that the girls would try and send some petrol coupons to help the family out with the fuel they had used to return the girls to camp. Elizabeth remembers very clearly it was 5 past midnight when they reported in, and they were warned not to venture so far in future, and they never did; one big fright was enough for her.

Their civilian job training determined where they were posted after their recruit course. On 25 September 1943 Elizabeth was sent to Army HQs at Victoria Barracks in St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Passes were issued to all personnel and these passes had to be shown when entering the barracks.

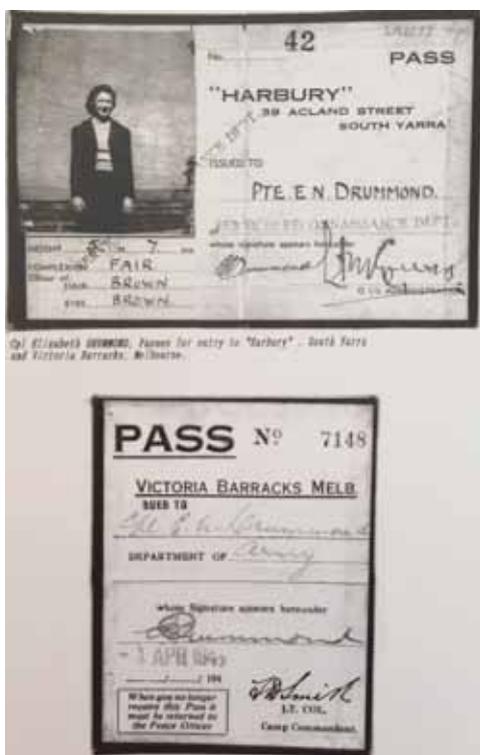
On 26 September 1943, Elizabeth was instructed to report to 39 Acland Street, South Yarra, a large double storied grey rough-cast cement house with an attic room. This dwelling was headquarters of a clandestine organisation called the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD). As Elizabeth was part of the AMF (Australian Military Forces), she was posted to Z Special Unit for purposes of administration and was attached to SRD where she worked. "Harbury" was the name of the house. Each person working there was issued with



a security access pass which had a photo of the bearer, stamped Services Reconnaissance Department and endorsed by the Officer in Charge, as well as the signature of the bearer.



Harbury the wartime Headquarters of the SRD.
Source. Author's collection



Elizabeth's security passes to Victoria Barracks and Harbury House.
Source. Elizabeth Mackenzie

Australian and Allied personnel from Army, Navy and Air Force were attached to SRD for special duties, but they retained their own service number and unit for administrative purposes. Civilians were also employed by SRD which was controlled by SOA (Special Operations Australia). SRD was known only to the Prime Minister and General Blamey CIC (Commander in Chief) Australian Army. Australian Army personnel were posted to Z Special Unit for administration while being attached to SRD.

On the ground floor at Harbury was the receptionist's desk and the switchboard was situated near the main entrance. The Orderly Room, Cipher and Intelligence offices occupied the remaining rooms.

Upstairs were the Director and Senior Officers' rooms and Directorate of Planning.

Elizabeth worked in the large Orderly Room and when entering through double glass doors from the foyer her desk was visible along the rear wall facing the entrance, so she was able to see all movements in the vicinity of the vestibule.

Elizabeth settled in quite well to her new surroundings; in the beginning each day was a challenge learning the running of her duties. Sometimes she relieved on the switchboard while the operator was at lunch. The administration work in the Orderly Room consisted of correspondence, making out Movement Orders for personnel, Leave Passes, Sick Passes and keeping files on each member attached to SRD.

Service personnel were each issued with a pay book to record cash payments, fines, forfeitures and other debits, earnings, and other credits. Elizabeth started off with 3 shillings and 10 pence (38c) per day as a Private and when promoted to the rank of Corporal, received seven shillings (70c) per day. She made an allotment to her mother of three shillings (30c) per day which her mother banked for her. One shilling and six pence (15c) per day was credited by the Army as Deferred Pay and when discharged was paid in bulk to the Service person.

In some cases, medical records such as vaccinations and blood grouping, training courses such as anti-gas training and Next of Kin details were also kept in the Pay Book; however, there was another book not quite as large as the Pay Book, which was called Soldier's Record of Service Book, with Clothing Issues, Leave and Next of Kin entered.

Elizabeth was allowed to live out - some Service personnel had to live in barracks and her first accommodation was at an old home at Armadale called "Flete" which had lovely gardens surrounding it. Several other service women were billeted there. After some time, she left this place and went to another establishment at Elwood near the beach. This building, called "Fortuna", would have been a sea-side hotel in pre-war days and had several floors. Meals were provided but she had to do her laundry and she doesn't remember how much a week she paid in rent, but it would be interesting to know.

During the war, food and clothing were in short supply and coupons were issued so one needed to be careful not to waste them. There were also coupons for petrol. Elizabeth recalls that each person was entitled to ¼ pound (250 gm) of butter per week but is unsure if cheese required coupons.

Service personnel were all issued with what were nicknamed "meat tickets" - two fibre discs with blood group, name and religion stamped on them, usually threaded with a fine cord or strip of leather and they were worn around the neck to identify the person should he or she be killed. One was left on the body, the other sent to Service Records.





Sergeant Gilbert Mackenzie's 'meat' tickets'.
Source: Elizabeth Mackenzie

Across the road from Harbury, trams ran into the city and Elizabeth often took a trip at lunch time and walked around the city and Yarra River.

Around this time Sergeant Gilbert Mackenzie had then been asked to go to the Parachute Training School at Richmond, NSW, to qualify as a parachutist. He and his mate Captain Sam Carey qualified on 27 September 1943, and each were issued with Parachute Wings to be worn on their right sleeve and a maroon beret, the latter synonymous with being a parachutist.

After he had finished the parachute course Sergeant Mackenzie again reported to Harbury and found a new "face" in the Orderly Room - Elizabeth. It so happened he would be working upstairs in the Planning Section so there was the chance of meeting her again. One day he invited Elizabeth to go out with him which she accepted. They got along quite well and sometimes had their lunch together in the nearby Treasury Gardens beside the water and bird life, a pretty spot. One day she remembers being engrossed in conversation with Gilbert, when a black swan came up from the water and took the sandwich out of her hand.

Their friendship grew and there were times when Gilbert 'chummed' her to Kangaroo Flat when they had leave, weekends mostly. Sometimes they were able to get a ride to Kangaroo Flat in the "Herald" newspaper van. This was quite an event as in those days some vehicles were run on charcoal - petrol was rationed - and as the papers were delivered every day charcoal was the alternative fuel. Halfway, at Kyneton, they had to stop to clean out the charcoal ash then restock the burner. They used to give the driver two ounces of Havelock cigarette tobacco that was also rationed but they were able to purchase it from the canteen at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne.

To start with Elizabeth knew Gilbert as Mac and so this name has stayed in the family. She eventually got to call him by his correct name of Gilbert but mainly Gil.

Periodically, Gilbert was sent on special assignments, some for short periods others extended and

Elizabeth always looked forward to his safe return.

At the end of 1944 Gilbert was sent to OCTU (Officer Cadet Training Unit) at Seymour, Victoria, and qualified as a Lieutenant. After OCTU officers were posted to other units from which they had reported, however, Gilbert was returned to Z Special Unit which made Elizabeth very happy.

Gilbert continued parachuting in different areas and sometimes Elizabeth received a telegram after a jump to let her know it had been successful. In those days only one jump a day was permitted. There were times when he landed heavily, depending on how gusty the wind was. Water jumps were made, and these took place at Fraser Island off the Queensland coast, into Lake McKenzie.

They had some very nice outings together. One evening they were invited to a live show with an English Officer Lt-Col. Jeb Finlay and friend and had seats in one of the "boxes" in the Tivoli theatre. They were exclusive seats protruding from the side walls near the stage, like a balcony, so they were VIPs for the evening.

Another memorable outing was to the Melbourne Cup in 1945 when Bluebird won. As the horses raced passed the winning post Gilbert lifted Elizabeth so that she could see the winner and he only saw her back. Elizabeth considered him to be a real officer and gentleman!

The war in Europe ended when Germany capitulated on 7 May 1945 and after the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, resulting in great devastation and loss of life, the Japanese surrendered on 2 September 1945. Australian troops then commenced their return home from war areas around the world.

On Thursday 8 November 1945, Z Special Unit held a Victory Dance at "Earls Court", St. Kilda Esplanade, Melbourne. Gilbert invited Elizabeth to be his partner and it was a very happy evening.



Elizabeth's invitation to the Victory dance on 8th of November 1945
Source: Elizabeth Mackenzie

³Then Director of Military Intelligence (DMI).



The Headquarters was wound up gradually and the Official History records were handed over to Brigadier Bazil Finlay, (DMI)³ in March 1946 by Lieutenant Gilbert Mackenzie.

Gilbert arranged for Elizabeth be transferred to the Australian Army Cartographic Company (mapping) at Bendigo. Being young and single she had low discharge points - points were calculated on length of service and the number of dependants - so she had to stay in the Army for at least another 6-9 months. She was able to live at home with her mother at Kangaroo Flat and rode her bike to the Cartographic Company each day. The Company was stationed at "Fortuna", a massive but impressive mansion in Bendigo that had been built by George Lansell, a millionaire who had made his money from gold mining. He was also a generous man and made many donations, one being the War Memorial he built near the Bendigo Fountain at the entrance to the city. The Memorial is a smaller replica of the War Memorial in London.

Fortuna had large gardens and a man-made lake. The house was large, and its fireplaces had surrounds made of marble that had been imported from Italy. There were false bookcases made specifically to hide valuables.

Australia was the recipient of many prisoners of war captured overseas, the bulk of whom were Italian. At Fortuna, several Italian POWs lived in huts within the grounds and tended the gardens. They were "trusted"

POW's and wore maroon-coloured outfits. They were very friendly, and Elizabeth thought some may have lived in the area pre-war days.

Elizabeth remembered one POW had made a ship that fitted inside a bottle - quite a masterpiece. He offered it to her for one pound, a lot of money then, so she didn't take it and since regretted that she did not buy it as a "keepsake". She wondered later if any of those POWs were still alive and were allowed to live in Australia after the war.

Gilbert and Elizabeth became engaged on her 21st birthday, 7 December 1945, and celebrated with a family party at Kangaroo Flat. Gilbert returned home to his parents Jane and Gilbert Mackenzie in Sydney in March 1946 and was discharged on 4 September 1946. He made numerous trips to see Elizabeth at Kangaroo Flat, but it was a long time for them to be parted between visits.

Elizabeth was eventually discharged on 19 September 1946 and with her mother celebrated by having a lovely holiday on a Pioneer coach tour to Gippsland, past Lakes Entrance, as far as Orbost, having an enjoyable time with a good crowd of coach travellers. She then had to settle back into "Civvy" street and was re-engaged by Neal and Woodward Solicitors, where she worked until she married Gilbert on 25 October 1947 - starting another era in her life.

oOo



Elizabeth and Gilbert on their wedding day.
Source. Mackenzie collection

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Eve-of-Battle Speech

Colonel Timothy Thomas Collins OBE

This article has been submitted by Major Brian Liddy, RFD, a long serving Army member who also served in 2 Commando Company. Brian's reasons in submitting this is whilst the Royal Irish Regiment was not a special forces unit, the CO speaks of duty, professionalism, courage, national and unit pride, a sense of purpose and importantly integrity and moral authority. Necessary qualities in all our ADF personnel. To Brian the message reinforces the lessons and professionalism of all those military instructors, both ARA and Army Reserve, who influenced him over my military service including, that impressive team in 2 Commando Company Coy over the period 1969-71. These messages are still relevant today to all members of Special Operations Command and the wider ADF.

As Lieutenant Colonel (commanding the 1st Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment of the British Army, Tim Collins gave a rousing eve-of-battle speech to his troops in Kuwait on Wednesday 19 March 2003. What is not publicly well-known is that Tim Collins had completed three postings with UK SAS and UK Special Forces and numerous operational tours.

The 2003 speech was extemporised, and was recorded in shorthand by a single journalist, Sarah Oliver. No recording or film of the speech exists, Collins told the BBC.



Lieutenant Colonel Collins delivering the speech in Kuwait prior to the invasion of Iraq.

Source: <https://www.royal-irish.com/stories/lieutenant-colonel-tim-collins-eve-of-battle-speech>

Speech excerpt

We go to Iraq to liberate not to conquer. We will not fly our flags in their country. We are entering Iraq to free a people and the only flag which will be flown in that ancient land is their own. Show respect for them.

There are some who are alive at this moment who will not be alive shortly. Those who do not wish to go on that journey, we will not send. As for the others I expect you to rock their world. Wipe them out if that

is what they choose. But if you are ferocious in battle remember to be magnanimous in victory.

Iraq is steeped in history. It is the site of the Garden of Eden, of the Great Flood and the birthplace of Abraham. Tread lightly there. You will see things that no man could pay to see and you will have to go a long way to find a more decent, generous and upright people than the Iraqis. You will be embarrassed by their hospitality even though they have nothing. Don't treat them as refugees for they are in their own country. Their children will be poor, in years to come they will know that the light of liberation in their lives was brought by you.

If there are casualties of war then remember that when they woke up and got dressed in the morning they did not plan to die this day. Allow them dignity in death. Bury them properly and mark their graves.

It is my foremost intention to bring every single one of you out alive but there may be people among us who will not see the end of this campaign. We will put them in their sleeping bags and send them back. There will be no time for sorrow.

The enemy should be in no doubt that we are his nemesis and that we are bringing about his rightful destruction. There are many regional commanders who have stains on their souls and they are stoking the fires of hell for Saddam. He and his forces will be destroyed by this coalition for what they have done. As they die they will know their deeds have brought them to this place. Show them no pity.

It is a big step to take another human life. It is not to be done lightly. I know of men who have taken life needlessly in other conflicts, I can assure you they live with the Mark of Cain upon them. If someone surrenders to you then remember they have that right in international law and ensure that one day they go home to their family.

The ones who wish to fight, well, we aim to please.

If you harm the regiment or its history by over-enthusiasm in killing or in cowardice, know it is your family who will suffer. You will be shunned unless your conduct is of the highest for your deeds will follow you down through history. We will bring shame on neither our uniform or our nation.

[Regarding the use by Saddam of chemical or biological weapons] It is not a question of if; it's a question of when. We know he has already devolved the decision to lower commanders, and that means he has already taken the decision himself. If we survive the first strike we will survive the attack.

As for ourselves, let's bring everyone home and leave Iraq a better place for us having been there.

Our business now is north.





Colonel Tim Collins who commanded the 1st Battalion of the Royal Irish in Iraq, stands with his wife Caroline at Buckingham Palace, London, after receiving an OBE from the Prince of Wales. An army investigation last September cleared Col Collins, 43, of allegedly mistreating Iraqi prisoners of war.

Source: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-colonel-tim-collins-who-commanded-the-1st-battalion-of-the-royal-irish-107529062.html>

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Commando Training 1958 style

A memorable account and mostly accurate for a person just-off-the-street.

By Brian, a cadet Journalist, member of transition Platoon

This is an account of the second training weekend of 4a Section, Transition Platoon of 1 Commando Company conducted over the weekend 15-16 November 1958 held at Broken Ridge, in what is now the lower reaches of the Holsworthy Training Area.

Saturday, 15 November 1958

Ivan Kelly was first to arrive per medium of his brother's car and spent some hours inspecting the portion of heavy scrub that was to be the scene of blood, sweat and tears for the next two days. Brian arrived at the prescribed time at Liverpool Station and there waited for the Department of Defence to furnish two elderly buses for the trip to Broken Ridge and our bivouac site. Bruce Horsfield arrived in a flurry of agitation some 35 seconds before the departure of the transport. The buses left much to be desired in the way of speed and comfort. And after an infinitely long and bumpy ride over a torturous route through mountainous country Bruce and Brian arrived by truck. Thoughtfully provided after the road become too rough for the bus.

Ivan had long since arrived and was thus comfortably changed into greens and a full water bottle. The parade took some time, about 45 minutes, thus putting the time into the vicinity of 11.00 am. We were informed that at this parade that we would no longer be regarded as 4a Section but as "Sari Bare" Section¹. and then we were herded off to a lesson on the Bren LMG, by a Corporal who knew less about it than did Ivan, who answered all the Corporal's questions 'with an air of considerable intelligence' Questions regarding the stripping order, immediate actions when the weapon jammed and so on.

This lesson being concluded we were assigned to another Corporal who gave us a period of dismounted drill. The section was put to work doling out Transition company's rations for the weekend. ("No Snaffling" to quote one Lt. Norris). After lunch we had a period on "sighting the rifle", followed by two periods of field craft. I might mention that the Corporal was a sadist and insisted running us long distances with dire penal-

ties of push-ups for tardiness. On being marched back we were left to our own devices until 7.00 pm when we were herded off to the pictures at Casula. The Corporal in our truck was most entertaining. The films consisted of the Green Beret, and Commando, which would have been more enjoyable had the night been a trifle earlier as we departed for our camp at something to 11.00 pm. About two miles from our bivouac site, we had the pleasant surprise of being turfed out of the truck and informed that we would march home. I remember we whistled as we marched into camp. That was about 11.45 pm.

We opened a tin of pears on arrival, the water shortage being acute and built a fire of scrub blaze dimensions. We went to bed soon after and slept off the exhaustion until something like 5.00 am.

Sunday, 16 November 1958

On wakening Ivan, Bruce and I took a stroll down to the river. (The lack of water had by this reduced our tongues to the size and consistency of a football boot). The river, according to the experts, was "just through there, down the hill a bit", and it was. Only the "bit" was about 3 miles and the "hill" a near vertical gorge which swept into the valley below and contained the creek somewhere in its depths.

We slithered and scraped down the incline, and after a hasty clean up and drink, filled our water bottles and commenced the ascent back to camp. It seemed a very long way and we reached the camp practically crawling, (all the time making shrill blubbery noises that indicated the condition of our lungs).

We were just in time to have breakfast, hand in our blankets and parade for rifle inspection. This was not a success as the majority of the rifles were covered in dust. The examining officer esteemed us accordingly.

We then paraded and were combined with another Section for the day's training. We first had a session of drill followed by great event of the day, the battle swim. The section lugged the Zodiac and gear down to the creek and then proceeded to drown ourselves with monotonous regularity, or at least some of the Section did. Bruce and Ivan distinguished themselves by saving no less than 7 or 8 individuals from near drowning, including yours truly.

This delightful event over, we then crawled back to camp to have lunch. The next event was "experience with the rifle", which we found consisted of firing 20 or so rounds into the surrounding scrub. To get to the range we found it consisted of a march of some distance and when we arrived, we had salt pills pressed into our hot little paws and taken on a speed march

¹A battle honour on the colours of the then 1st Battalion (Commando) Royal NSW Regiment all. In 1957, it was decided to expand the 1st Commando Company as a full battalion named the 1st Infantry Battalion (Commando), City of Sydney's Own Regiment. When the CMF was reorganised in 1960 along the Pentropic division concept, this unit was once more reduced to company size, forming No. 1 Commando Company (The City of Sydney Company), 1st Battalion, Royal New South Wales Regiment until 1971 when it reverted to 1 Commando Company and later subsumed into the 1st Commando Regiment in 1981.



with not so much as a few minutes rest. This one was almost the last known section on my part, although Bruce and Ivan seemed to do it with little effort.

This was the last event of bivouac two, and after a parade we were left to our own devices



Bruce Horsfield and Ivan Kelly at an ACA NSW annual church parade in 2014.
Source: Ivan Kelly

Postscript

Bivouac 2 November 1958 was the last time Brian was seen as he never returned to 1 Commando Company continues Commando training. Bruce and Ivan to continue serving and later qualified for the coveted Green Beret. They remained close friends for many years and Bruce sadly passed away on the 13th July 2018. May he rest in peace.

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HMAS Assault WWII Combined



Operations Directorate Establishment Port Stephens NSW

By Dennis J Weatherall JP TM AFAITT(L) LSM – Volunteer Researcher at the RAN Historical Society

HMAS Assault, also known as the Amphibious Training Centre to American personnel, was a Combined Operations establishment for training Allied personnel in all aspects of amphibious warfare. It also provided operational and logistics support to amphibious units of the Royal Australian Navy. During its short three-year commission (September 1942 to August 1945) more than 22,000 including RAN Beach Commandos and members of the 2/7th and 2/9th Cavalry (Commando) Regiments undertook amphibious training which was essential for the successful repulsion of Japanese forces from the Pacific Islands. This paper provides insight into its establishment, roles, challenges confronted and personnel who played a significant role in contributing to victory in the Pacific.



Shoal Bay, Port Stephens

In 1942 Australian Forces were heavily committed to the War against Germany and its Allies in Europe then in its third year. As in WWI, RAN units were under the command of the Admiralty and employed against Italy in the Mediterranean and elsewhere. The Japanese had entered the war in Australia's own area of interest with the invasion of South East Asian countries and the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Following the rapid Japanese conquest by the Japanese of Malaya and the "Fall of Fortress Singapore" on 15th February, Australia found itself threatened for the first time since British settlement. The subsequent Japanese advance through the Dutch East Indies and islands in the South-West Pacific basin brought WWII to the Australian mainland on 19 February 1942 with the bombing of Darwin.

However, by early 1942, the Allies were already planning for the invasion of Europe and had successfully established a "Combined Operations Command". Australian planners then urged the Australian Government to seek British assistance with information and

expertise to establish a similar Australian Directorate. This was essential if Japanese forces were to be repelled from the Pacific Islands. Fortuitously service by many Australians in all three British Services meant there was a pool of experienced Australian available to return home with a small number of British Officers for the task of establishing an indigenous amphibious capability.

The officers seconded to establish an Australian "Combined Operations Base" were Commander T. W. Cook RAN (ex CO HMS *Tormentor* UK Combined Operations School), Lieutenant Colonel M. Hope – Royal Artillery, Lieutenant Colonel T. K. Walker – Royal Marines, Wing Commander A.M. Murdoch – RAAF, Lieutenant Commander H. George – RANVR, and Lieutenant D. Richardson – RANVR. All had "Combined Operations" experience and understood the importance of an amphibious capability to push the Japanese out of New Guinea, Borneo, Bougainville and occupied islands between Australia and Japan.

In June 1942, the Defence planners made a strong recommendation for the formation of the Australian "Combined Operations Directorate" to be set up in Melbourne. On 5 June 1942 the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, Captain Frank Getting RAN, Commander (CMDR) Cook, and Lieutenant Colonel (LTCOL) Hope met with General Macarthur's Brigadier (BRIG) Chamberlain in General Macarthur's Headquarters, then located in Melbourne. They were informed that any such "Combined Operations" in Australia would come under the command of Macarthur. There was agreement on an immediate start to train three Divisions – one Australian and two American – in amphibious warfare. The RAN was also to produce one third of the total number of crews required and provide all naval means (craft and crews) for soldiers undergoing training.





Location of former HMAS Assault at Port Stephens, New South Wales

An immediate task for CMDR Cook and LTCOL Hope was to find a suitable location to establish the training base. They took to the air and eventually decided that Fly Point in Port Stephens, NSW as an ideal location. A ground inspection confirmed the decision. Then followed the construction from scratch of a shore base in the scrub country away from prying eyes. Training for all facets of amphibious operations (sea, land the air) could be conducted in the immediate vicinity. From a security perspective, Port Stephens being a small fishing village with little other activity in the area, the location was ideal.



HMAS Westralia in her first wartime role as an armed merchant cruiser. Source: RAN Historical Society

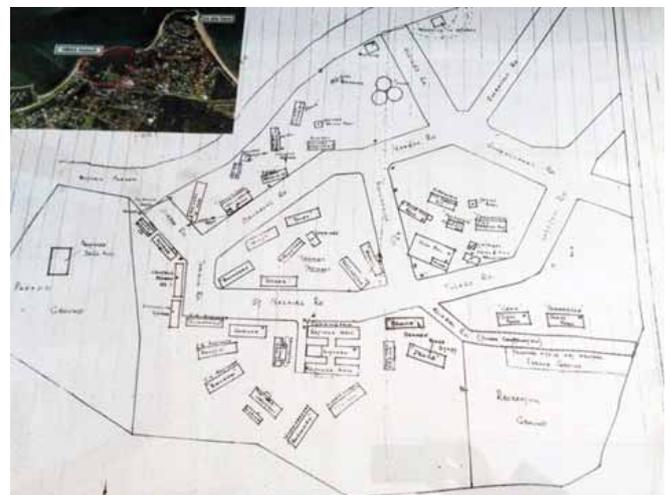
No time was lost awaiting the building of the base. The Auxiliary Merchant Cruiser HMAS Westralia¹ was loaned as an accommodation vessel from 21 August 1942 and on 1 September 1942 HMAS Assault was commissioned in Westralia with 24 Officers and 280 Seamen Trainees. HMAS Westralia was then desig-

¹HMAS Westralia (F95/C61) was an auxiliary cruiser of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). Built by Scottish shipbuilder Harland and Wolff and completed in 1929, Westralia was operated by the Huddart Parker company until 1939, when she was requisitioned for service with the RAN as an Armed Merchant Cruiser (AMC). Fitted with guns and commissioned in early 1940, Westralia was initially used to escort convoys in the Pacific and Indian oceans. In 1943, Westralia was converted into a Landing Ship, Infantry (LSI). The ship was used to transport units of the United States Army and United States Marine Corps, and took part in numerous amphibious landings. After being used to repatriate personnel at the end of the war, Westralia was decommissioned in 1946.

nated as a Landing Ship Infantry when she arrived in Port Stephens on 3 September 1942.

It was hoped at the time that Westralia's sister ships HMA Ships Manoora² and Kanimbla would also be made available as Landing Ships Infantry (LSI's) and fitted out with landing craft. Provision was made in planning for these ships to be made available and Flinders Naval Depot made aware of the requirement for trained ratings as they finished their basic training. The Naval Board was supportive and the training pipeline to HMAS Assault commenced.

At the same time, the requirement for landing craft was presented to the Naval Board. It was recommended that these be built locally as they could not be delivered off-the-shelf. Until purpose-built craft were available, training was undertaken in nine motor boats requisitioned from civilian sources. These were referred to by the sailors as the "Hollywood Fleet". Folding-boats were provided by the Army.



The base was designed from ground up with layout the first consideration. Accommodation for all personnel, moorings, piers, slipways, maintenance facilities all had to be built in a virgin bushland setting 125 miles north of Sydney.

On 1 October 1943, one year after commissioning ashore it was reported that 100 Officers, 100 Coxswains, 453 Boat Crews, 250 Stokers, 40 Landing Craft Signalmen and 120 Naval Beach Party Commandos had been trained. As it took until 10 December 1942 to complete all buildings the majority many trainees and staff were accommodated in HMAS Westralia for the first three months. Some 90 officers and men were

²HMAS Manoora was an ocean liner that served in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) during World War II. She was built in Scotland in 1935 for the Cairns to Fremantle coastal passenger run for the Adelaide Steamship Company. She was requisitioned by the RAN for naval service in 1939. Manoora was initially converted into an armed merchant cruiser (AMC), operating primarily in Australian, New Guinea, and Pacific waters, with deployments to Singapore and the Bay of Bengal. In 1942, the ship was converted into the RAN's first landing ship, infantry (LSI). After extensive training, Manoora was involved in most of the Allied amphibious operations in the Pacific during 1944 and 1945. After the war's end, the ship was used to transport occupation forces and refugees until 1947, when she was decommissioned from naval service and returned to the Adelaide Steamship Company.



transferred to a Queensland Army Camp at Toorbul following their training. They were then used to train soldiers in certain phases of amphibious warfare. This camp was later taken over by the American Forces and the Australians reposted to *Assault*.

The roles of HMAS *Assault* were to train.

1. Officers and ratings for boat crews,
2. Naval Commandos for beach parties,
3. Combined Operations signal teams, both Naval and Army with spares posted to the LSI vessels,
4. Act as a base for LSI's arranging transport, victualing, spares and repairs,
5. Designated Commanding Naval Officers to also be Naval Officer in Command of a post.

By 1 October 1943 all three LSIs had been supplied with *Assault* trained Officers and Boat Crews, along with Beach Commandos, with a factor of 25% spare trained personnel.

On 1 October 1943 HMAS *Assault* commenced a new phase in its evolution. With its training role mature and sufficient personnel trained to commence amphibious landings to re-take Japanese occupied territory the new role was logistics support. This involved:

1. operating as a store's depot supplying spare parts for the landing craft carried on the LSI's,
2. operating as a pool depot for a reserve of trained combined operations personnel, and
3. assisting with the base's trained boat crews in training US soldiers passing through the Amphibious Training Centre (ATC).

The ATC was the American organisation responsible for training assault troops and to which HMAS *Assault* was responsible. Some 22,000 men from various services received amphibious training including 2,000 Australians. The remainder were all US Servicemen.

As expected, trainees who had completed their training at *Assault* had to wait for postings to the LSI's and in some cases, subject to their wait time, had to be brought back for various refresher courses. This oc-

curred when such trained personnel had returned to their previous establishments to awaiting a billet on an LSI. As the *Assault* expanded and more accommodation became available trained personnel were kept onboard *Assault* and kept in training until posted to sea.

In the early stages of developing HMAS *Assault*, there was a shortage of actual landing craft until the locally built Australian craft were delivered. This shortage made training in craft handling difficult. Until December 1942, only two LCAs (Landing Craft Assault) were actually operational at the base and the requisition civilian craft (nothing like an LCA) were used in conjunction with the two LCAs. Although not ideal, training continued with what was available. Whilst allowing crews to experience handling twin screw boats, these civilian craft couldn't replicate running ashore and beaching craft in all conditions of weather and sea states.



HMAS ASSAULT – Beach Landing Exercise

Source. AWM image

On 14 December 1942 sufficient American landing craft arrived for the USN Advanced Landing Craft Base, the name of the American base at Port Stephens. Following delivery of these craft training in all conditions could be undertaken. The Port was an excellent location as within the immediate area and along the coast were steep and shallow, sandy beaches, with or without surf, rock, mud and mangrove areas, all in close proximity to the base.

On 10 January 1943 the Australian-built Landing Craft Assault (LCA) started to arrive. This allowed *Assault* to return five requisitioned craft to Sydney for deployment to



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other urgent tasks. On 20 March 1943 19 American landing craft were handed over to Assault control by the American Landing Force Equipment Depot (LFED). Finally, there was sufficient craft of various types to provide instruction and gain experience.

In addition to the LSIs, HMAS *Westralia* and *Manoora*, HMAS *Assault* had on its warrant list several other vessels. These were.

- HMAS *Ping Wo*, a tender for the transportation of water and stores for the LSIs. She was also used as a training ship. *Ping Wo* was an ex Chinese River Steamer of 2,000 tons.
- HMAS *Gumleaf*, an ex-Seine Trawler, 55 ft OA used for escort, patrol and salvage duties.
- HMA Ships *Flying Cloud* and *Kweena*, both Auxiliary Patrol Vessels',
- A variety of landing craft:
 1. LST – Landing ship tank x 1 (US)
 2. LCI – Landing craft infantry x 12 (US)
 3. LCT – Landing craft tank x 4 (US)
 4. LCM – Landing craft mechanised x 7 (US), 4 loaned to "Assault"
 5. APC – Auxiliary patrol craft x 2 (US)
 6. LCV – Landing craft vehicle x 67 (US), 14 loaned to "Assault"
 7. LCP – Landing craft personnel x 15 (US), 1 loaned to "Assault"
 8. LCS – Landing craft support x 7 (US)
 9. LCA – Landing craft assault x 9 (AU)
 10. Motor boats x 4 (AU), of which 38 were under "Assault's" control
 11. Three boat ramps for slipping, scraping and painting

The buildings ashore in HMAS *Assault* consisted of 67 structures. These were classified as "C" series-type unlined, galvanised iron huts. They were located 800 yards from the landing craft moorings and general pier area. They were described as hot in summer and freezing in winter, but this was nothing new in time of war!



HMAS ASSAULT – St Nazaire Road Dining Hall and Galley.
Source. AWM image

The base was originally designed for 500 officers and men, but as many as 870 were housed, of which 70 were officers and 800 other ranks. As in the British counterpart establishments, roads were named after successful operations and buildings named after military personnel who had achieved success in Combined Operations to date in WWII.

A jetty to suit naval requirements was constructed using as its basis, an existing jetty on requisitioned land. It was altered and extended considerably to reach out 510 feet with a width of 12 feet, and at the end an L-shaped return of 162 feet which formed a boat compound. The outer perimeter of the jetty was enclosed with planking set 3" apart to act as a break-water. The pier had a depth of 7 feet alongside at low water and could handle 5-ton loads with fuelling points located along its length.

Unfortunately, by late 1943 slipping facilities for the repair and painting of boats were found lacking. This was overcome by the employment of naval divers and by the end of the year the initial work started by civilian contractors was completed. The result was a working slipway and boat shed. Prior to completion, boats had to be slipped at Tea Gardens, some 3 miles distance, and only when the facilities there were available.

The Assault boat shed was 112 feet long x 30 feet wide, set up with a winch to haul boats, along with machinery for general maintenance. The slipway had a capacity of 25 tons, but the depth of water limited the size of the vessel that could be slipped. At high water, it was reported only 4 feet 6 inches at the water end, and only 2 feet 6 inches at the shore side. It meant that only boats with an average draft of 3 feet 6 inches could be slipped, and only at high water. The solution would be to extend the slipway another 40 feet at the water end. However, no record could be found of this ever being done.

The slipway came with three cradles which allowed three boats to be lifted out of the water at any one time for maintenance.

Located nearby was the Engineers' Work Shop, a building of 114 feet in length and width of 42 feet. It was well equipped with; lathes, milling machines, drills, shaping machines, a 60-ton hydraulic press, valve grinder, bench drills, punch shears and an electric welding unit.

One of the biggest problems for the base was spare parts for the overhaul of the landing craft engines, as these were mainly of US origin. Lack of the smallest part could keep a craft alongside for weeks and impact practical craft ship handling exercises.

HMAS *Assault* was well-located with quite a pleasant temperate climate. However, summer heat could make it more sub-tropical. Unlike bases situated in far Northern Queensland, there was little in the way of environmentally induced illness. The base had a capable hospital which treated mainly casualties from vigorous activities. On 24 May 1943 casualties from a PBY-Consolidated *Catalina* that crashed into Port

(Cont'd on page 51)



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Stephens were treated on base. Post WWII the base hospital became the Port Stephens civilian hospital.

Men came and trained, then left. The base had ample sporting facilities available to keep the trainees amused, swimming, surfing, fishing, along with cricket in summer and football in the winter months. In 1943, the *Assault* rugby team won the First Grade Newcastle League.

Like all bases in war time, religious observances were conducted by Navy Chaplains and the YMCA and Australian Comforts Fund people ran the recreation, with regular parties and entertainment.

The entire concept of establishing HMAS *Assault* was to train Australian and American sailors and soldiers in the art of amphibious warfare, and to get the Army conditioned to working with the Navy, and vice-versa. When the American Training Group was established the two facilities were combined and designated the ATC – Amphibious Training Centre. This took place in February 1943 under the overall command of the Commander South West Pacific Force, Rear Admiral Daniel E Barbey USN, who answered directly to General Macarthur.



HMAS Ping Wo
Source. RAN Historical Society

This brought all such training in Australia under American command. From this time until training concluded US Marines, RAN sailors and US Army personnel served together on base.



HMAS ASSAULT: Beach launching in surf conditions work party returning to HMAS Westralia
Source. AWM Image

Training at HMAS *Assault* was, to say the least, intense. It covered every conceivable aspect of amphibious landing operations to face the enemy on inhospitable landing sites. RAN sailors took part in all the courses, from assaulting beaches to coxswaining landing craft and other vessels of opportunity, not only to meet the enemy face on, but to learn clandestine skills for infiltrating enemy lines. The specially selected naval beach commandos were instructed in all makes and models of weapons and explosives, as well as hand-to-hand unarmed combat.

Lieutenant Donald Davidson RANVR was the chief instructor in hand-to-hand combat. No-one knew from where he originated but at war's end those he trained knew where he'd been. He was training officer for those selected to be "Special Service Beach Commandos" and sailed on MV *Krait*, the Japanese fishing boat captured before Singapore surrendered. It was known as the "fishing boat that went to war"! LEUT Davidson was 2IC to Major Ivan Lyons in MV *Krait* during Operation JAYWICK in 1943. Before this Davidson had established the Fraser Commando School based on Fraser Island, Queensland. He was later a member of the ill-fated 'RIMAU' raid on Japanese shipping in Singapore. LEUT Davison was severely wounded in this operation and holed up on Tapai Island and to avoid becoming a prisoner and

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tortured he took his 'last resort' cyanide tablet carried by all operatives. Major Lyons died in a fire fight on Soren Island, it's said whilst holding off over one hundred Japanese soldiers.



HMAS ASSAULT: Air Force Ground Support exercise.
Source. AWM Image

Many HMAS Assault trainees went to various postings in the three LSIs. There they operated their landing craft in operations to expel Japanese forces from conquered territory. Some were employed in Special Operations with Lyons and Davidson; others were posted to US Military Small Ships and even wore US Army uniform. They served on these small vessels throughout the South West Pacific theatre as far as Japan until the end of hostilities.



HMAS ASSAULT: Bringing the equipment of war ashore in exercise mode.
Source. RAN Historical Society

In early March 1944, training at Assault ceased. It had served its purpose well. On 4 August 1944 the base was designated to "care and maintenance" and manning was reduced to just one officer and twenty-four other rates.

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One of the ship's assault landing craft, viewed from the aft gun platform of HMAS Westralia, as it swung aboard during the movement of the 2/24 Infantry Battalion troops, Morotai, 18 April 1945.
Source. RAN Historical Society

After the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on Monday 6 August 1945 and three days later the second A-Bomb on Nagasaki the Japanese surrendered and so ended WWII when General MacArthur signed the surrender in Tokyo Bay onboard USS *Missouri* on Sunday 2 September 1945.

On 7 August 1945 HMAS Assault was decommissioned but not abandoned – it was transferred to the Royal Navy and used as the shore depot for the British Pacific Fleet, known also as the "Phantom Fleet".

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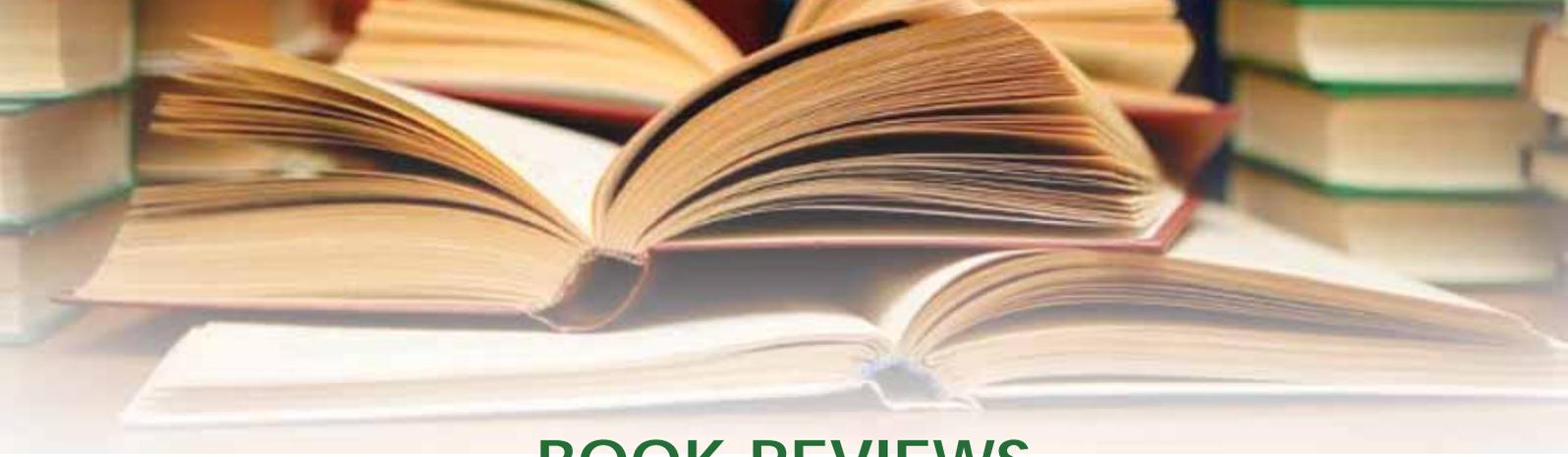
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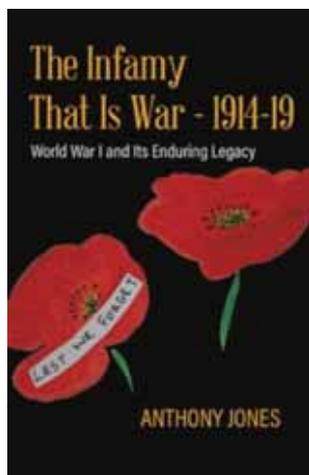


BOOK REVIEWS

Over the past three decades there have been many books authored by former members of the Australian Special Operations Forces community. For the foreseeable future in each edition of the *Commando* magazine there will be book review included authored which is of relevance to Australian military history.

BOOK DESCRIPTION

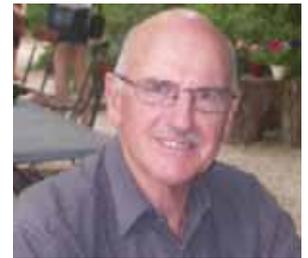
The Franco-German War of 1870-71 had far-reaching consequences. It established both the German Empire and the French Third Republic and set in train the alliances that had formed when Germany first declared war on Russia in August 1914. The monarchies of all four of the great powers, Britain, Russia, Austro-Hungary, and Germany, were either unprepared for leadership, too old or irrational and easily manipulated by a small coterie of military advisers. All failed to provide the resolution, direction, or coordination of their respective foreign policies. They were little more than spectators as the world "slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war."



By the end of the war, four major imperial powers—the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires, no longer existed. It reduced the other colonial powers of Italy, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Belgium in influence. It set in motion the restructuring of the political order in other parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East. It was in effect a historical full stop. It marked the definitive end of the Victorian era and the advent of a new age of uncertainty. Australia, pre-War, was regarded as one of the most progressive and innovative countries on earth. Post-War, with the death of 62,000 of its finest and the wounding of 140,000 more, Australia became timid, tentative, and inward-looking – a broken nation.

AUTHOR

The author is a retired schoolteacher with an interest in military history and previously served as a Sergeant in 2 Commando Company between 1969 to 1975 at Fort Gellibrand, Victoria.



The book is available in most bookshops and online as print on demand or E-Book from Amazon books and Booktopia.

All royalties obtained from the sale of 'The Infamy That is War' during the financial year 2022/2023 will be donated to the Commando Welfare Fund (W528).

BOOK REVIEW

The Infamy that is War. Reviewed by Dr Stewart Dickinson.

This academic work describes the situation in Europe before the start of hostilities in 1914. It continues in chapter form to chronologically document the salient stages of the war and their geopolitical ramifications. The recording of the events leading up to and including the war itself has been meticulously researched and presented. Many of the leading players in the conflict are portrayed and their motives discussed. The writer, whilst acknowledging the various combatants, gives an Australian perspective of the conflict and humorous anecdotes add to the richness of the dialogue. This authoritative documentation of World War I and its aftermath concludes with a prelude to World War II and reinforces the notion of the futility of war.





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

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

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

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

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

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

Knowledge is power and nowhere more so than in the



world of franchising where new franchisees are taking the ultimate leap of faith into owning and operating their own business.

Thoroughly researching the sector, the options that are available and are best suited to each individual circumstance, and fully understanding and managing the financial and lifestyle expectations and demands, should be the starting point in any franchising journey. I cannot emphasise this point enough. While there are considerable opportunities in franchising, you need to

work out which one is right for you and to ensure the franchise you choose is both ethical and sustainable.

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

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

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

About the Author:

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



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