



# COMMANDO

THE MAGAZINE OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMANDO ASSOCIATION



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**FACEBOOK:** Australian Commando Association

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Mrs Marilou Carceller

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, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Commando Company's, 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment, 4 RAR Commando & the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 13, 2022):

**MONDAY, 14<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2022**

All news on members and interesting articles accepted.  
(Subject to editors' approval.)

Stephen Carter



On behalf of members of the Commando Community we pay tribute to and thank Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for her extraordinary service and unfailing dedication to the people of Australia, the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.

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## A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

**M**y warmest greetings to all. Welcome to the 12<sup>th</sup> 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.

### Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The cover of this Edition is dedicated to an extraordinary individual – Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. I believe that Dr Matt Collins AM KC, President of the Australian Bar Association statement is a powerful and poignant tribute to the Monarch. “Her majesty served the people of Australia, the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth with unfailing dignity, compassion, intelligence, and grace over seven remarkable decades.”

On her twenty-first birthday, 21 April 1947, Princess Elizabeth made an enduring commitment to the peoples of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth, “I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong.”

The passing of Her Majesty will undoubtedly reignite the debate about the shape Australia's Constitutional governance, and I hope that debate can be held with civility and careful consideration. Regardless of your position on the matter, we can be thankful that Her Majesty fulfilled her commitment of devoted service over her long life.

### Articles

I would like to thank the authors of articles included in this this Edition. Put simply, without their effort,

COMMANDO would come to a “grinding halt”. A prospect that none of us wish to consider. But a real prospect in the absence of content.

I wish to thank the Members who have drafted the Vales for the time and care in celebrating the lives of our Comrades.

I met Des Lambley briefly some months ago and asked him for an article given his PhD topic. His article regarding Lieutenant Frank Sharp, a WWI Australian Officer court martial at Tidworth on 15 June 1917, charged with being absent without leave following his evacuation to England on 30 March 1917 for treatment for a gunshot wound to the head is a rich read and I thank him for the contribution.

Also, my thanks to Luke Gosling OAM, MP for the article on Australian patrol officers known as “Kiaps”.



June 3, 1978, Queen Elizabeth II salutes during the Trooping the Colour.





On reading the article I was reminded of a remarkable character I met in the late 1970's at West Australia Secondary Teachers College, Mike Dabbs. Mike was a long serving "Kiap" and returned to Australia for health reasons incurred in service. I hope that Mike and his colleagues receive the recognition and care they deserve after years of dedicated service.

### Selection & Reinforcement

On behalf of the Commando Community, I congratulate the successful graduates of the 2021/22 Selection and Reinforcement cycle.

As we all appreciate, the most critical aspect of the Selection process is "putting yourself forward" and I wish to congratulate every candidate for the "true grit" in attempting the course.

We can be confident that the next generation of Commandos will be a formidable force. As "when the country is in danger, the military's mission is to wreak

destruction upon the enemy. It's a harsh and bloody business, but that's what the military's for. As George Orwell pointed out, people sleep peacefully in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf." (Greiner R. The New York Times, April 1993)


Once again, my thanks to the contributors to this Edition and my congratulations to the next generation of Commandos. We can take inspiration from the life of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Sir John Monash enduring philosophy "...equip yourself for life, not solely for your own benefit but for the benefit of the whole community."

Stephen Carter

Editor - Commando Magazine

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## From MAJ Steve Pilmore OAM RFD (Ret'd) Vice President ~ Australian Commando Association Former Trust Welfare Officer ~ Commando Welfare Trust

I can inform you that I have all but concluded my handover of the role of Trust Executive Officer of the Commando Welfare Trust (CWT) to MAJ Paul Dunbavin OAM and I can say that the Trust is in good hands.

The Trust has also had some changes in the ranks of Patrons – former Special Operations Commander, MAJGEN Tim McOwan remains a CWT Patron but sadly I have to report that Patron Peter Harvie passed away in June 2022 having served previously as an inaugural Trustees of the CWT. Peter served in 2 Commando Company back in the late 1950s.

Recently also we have been advised that Dr Brendan Nelson AO, will be leaving his role with Boeing in Australia and will move to London in January 2023 to become President of Boeing International and a member of the company's leadership executive council.

Both "Harvs" and Dr Brendan will be missed immensely.

The CWT is in the early stages of a joint venture with Wandering Warriors providing advice and guidance to those transitioning from full time service to "civvie street" by way of an information course conducted over five days. In addition, where the Dept of Defence will not pick up any fees for courses that a former member may need for his next career, the Trust will look at funding that course.

Whilst this is a new initiative from the CWT the traditional levels of support have been maintained. The CWT has since the start supported nearly 100 beneficiaries and currently supports 38 children of school age from families of a SOCOMD member killed on operations or died in service, children of current serving members as well as injured members - serving, in transition or discharged.

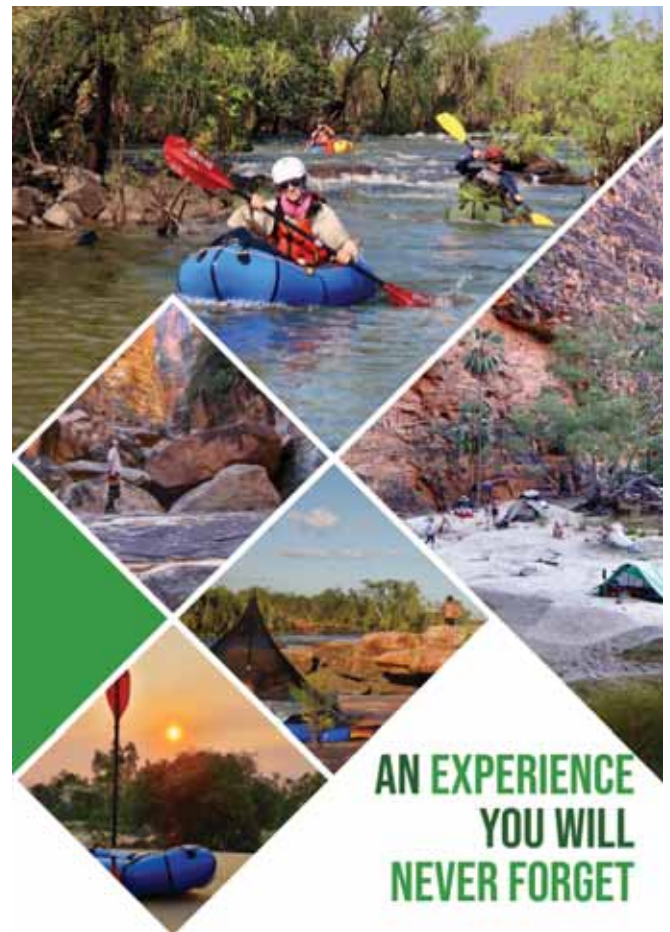
The CWT just over 10 years ago received a grant of \$8.0m from the Federal Government – an amount that will never be spent. That asset now sits at just under \$11.0m and the Trust has however since its inception earned / received more than \$7.0m in dividends or donations, and over \$4.5m has been distributed to beneficiaries.

The Trust has the assets and the intent to provide support to all members of all units of SOCOMD (less the SASR).

The Trust however doesn't have the reach to get out and keep contact with all members especially those who have transitioned and that's where you all as members of the Australian Commando Association can provide valuable assistance. Keep your networks operating and inform your State/Territory Committees

if you identify a former member in need of assistance – they will contact the Commando Welfare Trust and you will have done the right thing by your mate and his family!

Steve Pilmore  
Ambassador  
Commando Welfare Trust



## EXPEDITION DATES

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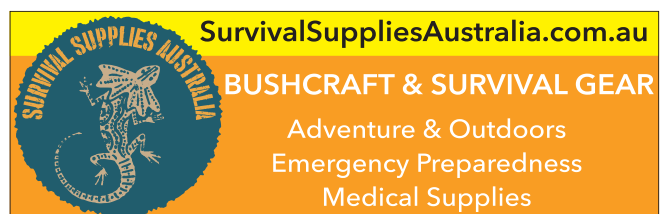


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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

**G**reetings members and friends of the Association.

Our deepest sympathies are shared with the Royal Family at this time after the recent passing of our longest serving monarch Queen Elizabeth the Second. Most of us reading this magazine may have known no other head of state in their lifetime. The ceremony and traditions that come with any military service were proudly on display as the mourning and funeral for Her Majesty took place over the mid weeks of September. Having donned a uniform and pledged allegiance to the Queen in 1996, as my father had also done in 1952, I feel proud to have worn the Queen's crown during my service. The Queen is dead, long live the King!

The Queensland membership remains strong and has welcomed new members since my last report. We have started up a regular breakfast meet-up once a month, it serves as a general catch up, but we also discuss business and upcoming events. The venue is The Summit Café at Mt Coot-tha in Brisbane's west. The views from the lookout's café reach out over the city and out to the bay. The reservation is from 8.30am on a Sunday morning with the dates being flexible. The coffee and food are excellent, the service is usually quick and the prices reasonable. Jeff McClean rode his mountain bike up the hill while my wife Jenni and I combined the catch up with a ride of our classic Norton motorcycles. Please join us along with your family if you are able. The next catch up will be possibly November and announced by email.



Left my wife Jenni's red 1962 Norton Dominator 650ss, with my silver 1968 Norton Atlas 750cc.

The social team of Richard and Jeff with assistance from Mark, is currently negotiating with the Sporting Shooters Association management at Ripley rifle range and are hoping to get our shooting competition against the SAS Association up and running in mid to late October. Due to ever changing rules regarding safety of the staff and participants, (Belmont SSAA is now one round only regardless of magazine capacity, including clay targets) and the overall image the range wishes to portray to the public, (that all firers are under strict control) we are no longer allowed to run our "own" competition, but rather join in a competition that is already formatted, approved and conducted by the SSAA range officers. What this possibly means is we will individually sign up for one of the organised shoots, but we will then tally up our own scores and award trophies etc. and congratulate winners at a future time. With this change there may be less ability to have family groups attend as in the past, and we could be limited to one unlicensed "Form 53 trainee" per licensed shooter attending. The committee has scheduled a phone meeting to discuss the way forward this coming Friday and by the time of publication there should be a solid plan in place.

This year we will be commemorating Remembrance Day (Friday November 11<sup>th</sup>) with a wreath laying at the Cenotaph in Brisbane, followed by lunch at the Grand Central Hotel opposite 285 Ann St. This is always a good opportunity to meet up with other members and other associations including SASR Qld, PNGVR and RLI Associations. I look forward to seeing you there, further details to follow.



Brisbane Cenotaph





Just a reminder that we still have limited stock of "Operation Jaywick 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary" Walnut Muscat wine bottles, Commando Association plaques which can have you service details on an engraved plate added, and Commando Association polo shirts available in every colour, as long as it's black!

Enquiries can be forwarded to Queensland Association via "ask us a question" on the website or directly to my email below.

I thank you all for your continued support of this great association.

Regards,

**Graham Gough**

President ACA Queensland  
acaqld.president@gmail.com



**From My Private Collection**

## The Nissan Patrol SPV



*2<sup>nd</sup> CDO REGT stock photo open source.*

As many of you may know I am bit of a collector of militaria and have an ongoing interest in military history. From my collection today is probably the largest single item I have, and I'd say it's the heaviest at 2800kg!

My actual Nissan Patrol "Special Purpose Vehicle" was used in counter terrorism training by SASR from 1997, and later found its way across to "Tactical Assault Goup East" in the early 2000's. Many members of the unit will be familiar with these "Black Role" vehicles around the Holsworthy Barracks and especially familiar with them in number at the local Gloria Jean's coffee shop.

After providing many years of faithful service to the SF groups both East and West, they were replaced with a more modern and powerful Lexus V8 version with updated racks and bars, and in 2012 were sold through auction to the public. Many were immediately stripped down of all the roll cage and bar work by dealers, as they mostly had very low kilometres, (most averaging 10 to 30 thousand) and still are a very sturdy reliable 4WD.

I was lucky to get this complete unaltered vehicle in Brisbane back in 2016, for what I thought was a good price, with just under 50,000 km on it. I have used it on display during an earlier Op Rimau ceremony at the Queensland Maritime Museum, and at the opening of Adam Quinn's "3 Gun Tactical" gun shop.



*Maritime Museum display with early TAG-E mannequin.*



*On Display at Adam Quinn's, along with your strully and a TAG-E mannequin.*

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**Goughy**





# Recognition of Long-Term ACAVIC Supporters

Doug Knight

On a cold but sunny morning in late September 2022, three members of the Australian Commando Association Victoria Committee met with two long-time supporters of the Association and major contributors to the annual Anzac Day lunch raffle.

It had taken months to coordinate numerous personal calendars to enable Mr. Rob Sinclair the owner of E&S Trading and Mrs. Jacqui Howard, General Manager, Commercial Sales and Marketing, Bosch Australia to be present, with the ACAVIC Team, in the same space.

Rob's family, and his father Robert (Bob), who started E&S Trading many decades ago, have been very strong supporters of the Association though their original association with Dick Pelling. Bob had met Dick, a 1960s member of 2 Commando Company and now Committee member, when Dick joined the Powerhouse Water Polo Club and coincidentally also taught at Sandringham Secondary College with Bob's wife. Bob, and now his son Rob, have provided the Association with either a significant electrical appliance prize, or a substantial voucher, for the Anzac Day raffle, for which the current, and former, Associations and members are greatly appreciative.

The affiliation between ACAVIC and Jacqui Howard is much closer to home as Jacqui is the eldest daughter of ACAVIC Secretary, Glenn MacDonald and her

employer Bosch Australia has also been a very long-term supporter of ACA with the provision of electronic goods, garden and lawn products, or power tools for the Anzac Day raffle.

Again, the Association extends its significant thanks to Bosch Australia for the generous support over many years.



*ACAVIC President Doug Knight presenting the ACA plaque to Jacqui Howard.*



*ACAVIC President Doug Knight presenting the ACA plaque to Rob Sinclair.*



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### Private Emergency Response Industry ...

Thankfully, most governing bodies value training in this area and none more so than the **RII30719 Certificate III in Emergency Response and Rescue Course** and **PUA30619 Certificate III in Public Safety (Firefighting and Emergency Operations)**. It's an important accreditation that provides students with the opportunity to understand and practice core processes of emergency response and rescue within the mining / resources environment. Other industry sectors including Australian Defence Force (ADF) and maritime also engage private Emergency Service Officers (ESO's). Furthermore, students will gain an excellent insight into how to operate safely in the industry.

### An Exciting Career In One Of The Most Rewarding Jobs On The Planet ...

As a qualified ESO, job opportunities within the army, air force bases, mines, oil and gas facilities, power stations and many other industry sectors can open up. Many ESO's work generally a 2 week on 2 week off roster either fly-in fly-out or drive-in drive-out. On most contracts, food, accommodation and all equipment are supplied as part of your role. The salary package is very generous meaning you can set yourself up in this emergency services industry working only half the year. That means more time you're your family and friends and chasing other adventures or even have another job or start a business for additional revenue.

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# Commando Memorial Service held at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance

12:30 ~ Sunday 25 September 2022

25<sup>th</sup> September was a glorious spring day for this year's memorial service, the sun shining and warm and, without a wind, made it easier for the banner party which included Peter Campion, John (Pops) Bennett, Jack Ripa, and Neville Telfer.

Under the watchful eye of parade master Rob Osborne, the parade, this year rather scant in numbers, marched off to the tune of Waltzing Matilda, coming to a halt before the eternal flame, where Association Secretary Glenn (Macca) MacDonald laid a wreath. The parade reformed and continued on to the Commando Memorial Tree, where the Banner Party and the Victoria Police Protective Services Shrine Guard took up position around the Commando Memorial Cairn.

With members seated and some standing, Association Secretary Macca, as MC, proceeded to introduce the Shrine Life Governor Peter Whitelaw, who coincidentally has a son who served for some years in 1 Commando Company.

Peter welcomed those present and wished them a good service.

Macca delivered the address outlining the history of the Victorian Associations over the years:

**WWII** - the WW2 Commando Association (Victoria) was established in April 1946, with other state and territory Associations also beginning

around this time. This Association also embraced members of 'M' and 'Z' units.

Soon after, in 1948, the Double Diamond newsletter was first published, and in November 1964 the national Australian Commando Memorial was dedicated at Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory. The first pilgrimage to the Commando memorial plaque in the Shrine gardens was held in September 1973.

In September 1974 a meeting to discuss the formation of a Victorian "Z" Special Association was held. In October the first official meeting of the "Z" Special Unit Association (Victoria) was held at Duckboard House, Melbourne

The separate WWII State Commando Associations saw the need to form a national body to better represent the interests of its members with the DVA, RSL and government bodies and in 1983 the WW2 national body, the Australian Commando Association, was formed to represent all states, territories and other Commando Associations, with designated state branches.

In 1987 the WW2 Association and post-WW2 2 Commando Associations signed a Memorandum of Affiliation in recognition of their mutual friendship and support.

*(Continued on page 13)*



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In November 1997 the Victorian 'Z' Special Association unanimously passed a "Motion of Voluntary Winding Up" and ceased as an organisation. It continued on an informal basis under the auspices of the WW2 Commando Association (Victoria).

In 2010 the WW2 Commando Association (Victoria) made the sad but unanimous decision to disband.

**Post WWII** - The Association representing Victorian Members began as 2 Commando Association (formed March 1983), later re-naming as 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment Association Victoria (2005), then Australian Commando Association Victoria (2011)

Following the formation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment with its HQ based in Sydney, a meeting of 2 Commando Association in December 2005 voted that it become the 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment Association Victoria Incorporated.

Following the WW2 Association's decision in March 2010 to disband, a formal handover meeting between the office bearers of the two Associations was held in June 2010. All current WW2 members at that time were given full membership of the post-WW2 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment Association Victoria.

The current organization, the Australian Commando Association, was formed as a national body in December 2011 with various state and territory branches. It represents those who have served in



WW2 Commando Units, M and Z Special units, post-WW2 Commando Units and all support units and sub-units.

The Memorial Service was then conducted including the laying of a poppy by all present.

At Service conclusion Macca thanked the Shrine staff for another excellently organised Day, and stood down the Shrine Guard. He invited those in attendance to visit the Shrine for afternoon tea (including ANZAC biscuits and dare I say, lamingtons)

**Richard Pelling**

oOo



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# Dogs and Commandos Friends for Life

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## Foreword by LTCOL John Davidson (rtd)

The following is a very brief extract of a significant scientific research paper that has recently been published in an international journal on psychological trauma. The principal author, Dr David Graham, is himself a former employee of the Department of Defence working as a lead scientist for the Defence Science and Technology Organisation as it was then known. I was fortunate to be teamed with David when we completed our Operations Analysis Course in uniform many years ago. This provides David with a unique insight into the impact of PTSD and has for him become a life's challenge to support Veterans.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a syndrome of stress reactions that can develop after either direct or indirect exposure to a traumatic event. These reactions are categorised within four symptom clusters: intrusive symptoms including nightmares and flashbacks, avoidance symptoms, negative changes in thoughts and mood, and heightened arousal. In addition, these symptoms must be present for at least one month and must cause psychological, social, or functional impairment.

The outcome however is widely variable, and depends upon genetic factors, history of prior exposure, and psychical injuries sustained at the time of the trauma. Indeed, Kilpatrick and colleagues have estimated that up to 90% of US adults have experienced a traumatic event as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) 5<sup>th</sup> edition, but considerably fewer people will develop PTSD in their lifetime. It is worth noting that there has been no significant change in prevalence of PTSD with the transition from DSM IV to DSM 5.

The lifetime prevalence of PTSD varies between countries, but is seen in approximately 5-10% of the population. The prevalence of PTSD differs among subpopulations, particularly those exposed to significant risk of trauma. The 12-month prevalence among military personnel is between 5-10%, however significantly higher rates of 17.7-24.9% have been reported among military personnel who have left active duty. The 12-month prevalence rate among first responders does not significantly vary across regions and is approximately 10%. Ambulance officers were the most likely to develop PTSD compared with fire fighters and police officers. Prevalence rates among corrections

officers are less studied, but the 12-month prevalence is likely to be similar to rates among first responders.

There are a number of treatments available for PTSD, many of which involve an exposure component. These include both psychological and pharmacological therapies. Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) and trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) are both widely used and equally effective. Most pharmacological therapies lack evidence; but fluoxetine, paroxetine, and venlafaxine have shown some efficacy, and there is evidence for the use of adjunctive risperidone as well as prazosin for nightmares. Complementary therapies include the use of creative arts, but the evidence is limited.

In recent years, the use of dogs as adjunctive therapy for a variety of psychiatric conditions has received widespread attention. Service dogs differ from companion dogs in that they are working dogs that are trained to respond to a particular condition and are permitted to enter public space. Companion dogs, on the other hand, are non-working dogs.

Studies have found that animal companions can reduce the effects of anxiety, depression, and loneliness, as well as improving physical health. Animal companionship helps to provide a sense of normalcy, improve behavioural activation and self-esteem, and provide a sense of belonging and companionship, as well as a sense of calm and distraction. The exact physiological mechanism is unknown. Following a positive interaction, both humans and dogs experience increases in beta-endorphin, oxytocin, prolactin, beta-phenylethylamine, and dopamine, and humans experience a decrease in cortisol. Indeed, oxytocin levels appear to be positively correlated with the strength of the human-dog bond perceived within the gaze, which may reflect a closer attachment.

A 2018 systematic review of the use of dogs was limited to veterans who have a diagnosis of PTSD and to service dogs. Though there were a number of anecdotal reports of positive welfare experiences, there was no strong evidence that service dogs were an effective treatment for PTSD. However, there are no systematic reviews on other populations. The evidence among non-veteran populations is unknown, particularly those who also have a significant risk of exposure to trauma, such as first responders and corrections officers.





Additionally, current research focuses largely on service dogs, not companion dogs or dogs broadly defined.

This aim of this review was to explore the emerging role of dogs in the treatment of PTSD without restriction on population or type of dog. A systematic search was conducted using multiple specialist and generalist databases. Articles targeted were those examining the effects of dogs in the treatment of PTSD. Inclusion criteria were peer review, that the participants had a formal diagnosis of PTSD, and that the experimental treatment involved a dog. There were no restrictions on subpopulation, exact type or role of dog, or country or language of publication. Sixteen papers met the inclusion criteria. All of the included studies examined veterans. Throughout the included studies, the majority of the included population were male, young (less than 45 years old), and had served either in Iraq or Afghanistan. Of the studies from the United States, a small cluster focused on post 9/11 veterans.

Our systematic review demonstrates the paucity of research examining dogs as an adjunctive therapy in PTSD. Importantly, our study additionally highlights the dearth of research examining dogs as an adjunctive therapy in non-veteran PTSD populations.

Overall, the consensus from the included papers indicates that the use of a canine is a beneficial adjunct to standard therapy for PTSD among veterans. However, there is limited generalisability of the results to other populations with PTSD, including first responders and corrections officers. The evidence generally consisted of observational or non-randomised studies using self-reported measures. Our findings therefore reinforce the findings of the 2018 literature review of veterans, which concluded that there was no strong evidence that service dogs were an effective treatment for veterans with PTSD, other than anecdotal reports of positive welfare experience.

Significant challenges were also associated with the process of acquiring a dog and the act of caring for another being. Therefore a dog may not be suitable for everyone who has PTSD. Inversely, some studies have described concerns about the welfare of the dogs themselves, when paired with veterans with persistent or severe symptomatology.

One study sought to investigate whether the way the dog is trained has an impact on PTSD symptoms and dog behaviour. However, the results for this study were inconclusive and further research is required to optimise this treatment modality for both patients and the dogs. Prior research suggests that the relationship formed between a service dog and its owner is more important than the training level of the dog in how much comfort and companionship is provided by the animal.

Finally, participants in these studies were exclusively volunteers, who felt ready to have a dog. While necessary to the wellbeing of the veterans and the dogs, this brings a further significant selection bias. As such the

results observed could only be generalised to veterans with PTSD whose current degree of illness, insight, and openness to experience would allow for a voluntary and meaningful engagement with a service dog. Relatedly, albeit somewhat conversely, the concern that participants would inflate their symptoms at baseline on the checklist in order to increase their chances of acquiring a dog was also raised in multiple studies and would also present a possible source of measurement bias.

The evidence to date on the use of service dogs demonstrates promising effects of service dogs as an adjunct to standard therapy. Multiple studies outline that service dogs should not replace pharmacological and psychotherapy interventions, but instead have a good additive effect on those therapies. There are a number of benefits described in the studies, but these are not without challenges. Appropriate meta-analysis is currently not feasible as the methods and results were widely heterogeneous between studies. The lack of rigorous study designs and the lack of randomisation yields important biases, which in turn impacts the validity of results. Moreover, the focus on the veteran population limits the generalisability of results. The current literature at best raises the hypothesis of the efficacy of service dogs as an adjunct to conventional therapy. More research is needed in this area with well-designed randomised trials, particularly among non-veteran populations.

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# A Brief History of Diving as an Offensive Capability for Australian Army Commandos since 1955

by Doug Knight



## Aim

To provide a brief history of subsurface diving operations within the post-World War II Australian Special Operations community which commenced with the establishment of 1 and 2 Commando Companies in 1955.

Unfortunately, the official files pertaining to the background and raising of the Commando Companies is still classified SECRET in the National Archives and the Australian War Memorial. There has been very little written about diving within the Australian Army, however there is enough other supporting documentation and resources available from National Archives, Defence Public relations, Association magazines, interviews with former commandos and historical collections to provide sufficient information to produce this background paper.

## Background

### WW2 Independent and Commando Companies/Squadrons

During World War II subsurface diving operations or training to support these missions was not undertaken

by personnel from the Independent, later renamed Commando Companies and Squadrons.

### WW2 Diving Training for Australian Special Operations Personnel

However, elements of Special Operations Australian (SOA)<sup>1</sup> did conduct subsurface diving operations as part of the preparation for use of Motorised Submersible Canoes (MSC), commonly referred to as 'the Sleeping Beauty' and other submersibles as detailed later. The MSC was planned to be used as the final insertion, targeting and extraction craft for Operation RIMAU but following a compromise on insertion the MSC's were scuttled<sup>2</sup> and the operation continued using Folboats<sup>3</sup>.



Photo 1. Motorised Submersible Canoes (MSC), commonly referred to as 'the Sleeping Beauty'  
Source: AWM

The MSC was not the only submersible craft that was operated by SOA as there were a small number of Welfreighters and Welman midget submarines made available from the United Kingdom, however none of these craft were used operationally by SOA, although many operatives were trained in diving operations in preparation for the use of these mini submersibles<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>The cover name was the Australian Intelligence Bureau with one of the operational organisations known as the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD).

<sup>2</sup>The existence and use of MSC at the time was still a closely guarded secret and was scuttled to avoid their captured by the Japanese.

<sup>3</sup>The Heroes of RIMAU, Lynette Ramsay Silver, p145

<sup>4</sup>Australian Submarines: A History, Michael White.







Photo 2. The Welfreighter Welman on a transport carriage.  
Source: AWM



Photo 3. A Welfreighter in transit from Perth to Darwin  
Source: AWM



Photo 4. A Welman on a transport carriage.  
Source: AWM

There were however numerous Royal Australian Navy personnel serving with the Royal Navy who served in the X Craft mini submarines during World War II including several involved in the attack on the German cruiser Tirpitz in March 1944. Also, on 31 July 1945 Lieutenant Max Shean RANVR in XE4 successfully cut the submarine cables between Singapore and Saigon, off Cap St Jacques in Vung Tau province, near the mouth of the Mekong River". One of his two divers was another Australian, SBLT Kenneth M. Briggs RANVR. For this operation Shean received a second DSO, and the US Bronze Star, while Briggs was awarded the DSC.

WW2 Diving operations for SOA operatives was conducted at the Special Boat School (SBS) also known as the Careening Bay Centre (CBC) which was located on Garden Island, Western Australia. It was manned by personnel drawn from the Royal Navy, Royal Australian Navy, British Army and 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF.



Photo 5. Preparation for diver training  
Source: NAA



Photo 6. Preparation for a diver training for MSC crew training.  
Source: NAA



Photo 7. MSC crew training in WA.  
Source: NAA

### Other WW2 Allied Special Operations Diving in the SEAC/SWPA

There were numerous Allied special operations units and organisations in the Southeast Asia and South West Pacific theatres that utilised subsurface and diving techniques to undertake the full spectrum of



offensive operations including:

- a. beach and hinterland reconnaissance
- b. underwater demolitions and sabotage
- c. insertion and extraction of specialist raiding forces

#### **United Kingdom**

- SOE Force 136
- Combined Operations Pilotage Parties
- Special Boat Service (SBS)

#### **USA**

- Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT)
- Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Maritime Unit

#### **1955 Resurrecting Australian Special Operations capabilities**

The concept of raising a Special Operations capability within the Australian Government and Australian Armed Forces commenced in the late 1940s and into the early 1950s in response to the increase in regional instability and the growing development of nationalist and revolutionary movements, mainly Communist, in nearby regional countries. This interest was actively supported by the United Kingdom who were still a significant regional colonial power and who had also been actively encouraging Australia to set up a security service and intelligence agency similar in role and function as the UK Security Service (MI5) and Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). This recommendation was accepted with the establishment of the Australian Security intelligence Organisation (ASIO) in 1949 and later by the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) in 1952.

Much of the documentation pertaining to the creation of the Special Operations capability within the Australian Government and selected areas in the Australian Armed Forces are still classified. It is not the intent to cover them further, except to say that this resulted in the creation a Special Operations capability within Defence and later the Department of External Affairs, later Foreign Affairs and Trade.

#### **1 and 2 Commando Companies**

Within the Australian Armed Forces elements at that time, the only identified military component was the establishment of 1 and 2 Commando Companies on 16 September 1954 when the Military Board issued the authority to raise two Citizen Military Force (CMF) Commando Companies under administrative command of Eastern and Southern command respectively, but under direct command of Army Headquarters.

1 Commando Company in Sydney and 2 Commando Company in Melbourne both would both be commanded by Regular Army officers and a small number of Regular Army would form the training and administrative cadre.

In early February 1955 1 and 2 Commando Companies were formally established with a strength for the Commando Companies was to be 265 all ranks,

consisting of one major, five captains (three of them platoon commanders), six sergeants and 241 other ranks. This establishment was very similar to the Independent Companies of World War II, which had had an establishment of 17 officers and 256 other ranks.

1 Commando Company was raised in New South Wales on 24 February 1955; however, the Officer Commanding, Major William Harold (Mac) Grant decided that the official birthday would be their first parade on 25 June 1955. Major Grant was a World War 2 Commando veteran having served in the 2/5<sup>th</sup> and 2/12<sup>th</sup> Commando Squadrons.

2 Commando Company (2 Cdo Coy) was raised in Victoria on 24 February 1955 under the command of Major Peter Seddon and first paraded on 7 July 1955. Seddon was appointed for only 12 months with his successor to be Major Jack Anderson, who later died during the last week of the basic commando course with the Royal Marines in the UK. Major Anderson was replaced by Major John Hutcheson who then completed a later Commando course before taking up his appointment as OC 2 Cdo Coy.

In October 1955, Majors Grant (1 Cdo Coy) and Anderson (2 Cdo Coy), along with two Warrant Officers Ernie Tarr (1 Cdo Coy) and Ron Smith (2 Cdo Coy), travelled to the UK to train with the Royal Marine Commandos. Tarr and Smith undertook 12 months of training, including small craft handling and diving with the Special Boat Service, to become qualified instructors.

Also, in October 1955 two Royal Marine NCO instructors arrived in Australia, one of whom was from the Special Boat Squadron (SBS) whose primary task was to conduct small craft handling and diving operations training. The other conducted roping and climbing training and an introduction to mountain warfare.

Major Grant<sup>5</sup> later stated that External Affairs<sup>6</sup> and Defence planning staff convinced the government to form the Commando Companies with the role "of conducting clandestine operations, similar to those mounted by Special Operations Australia and also those of the Independent companies /Commando Squadrons during WW2. It was envisaged that by raising units capable of performing such a dual role, a pool of trained manpower would be available to be "farmed off" as necessary to a Special Operations organisation while the remainder would be used in more conventional commando operations."

<sup>5</sup>Mac Grant was later to join External Affairs in 1960 with his initial position being the head of the Special Operations section. Sourced from Interview in History of the Naval and Military Club by J. Billett.

<sup>6</sup>The predecessor of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.





## Commando Role and Training

To support the creation of these new Commando units Army Headquarters Training Instruction No 5/55<sup>7</sup> was issued early in 1955 stating that the "ultimate training aim was to produce a group or party approximate size one officer and 10 other ranks, each member of whom, besides being a thoroughly trained rifleman, is a qualified parachutists and small boat operator, and possesses one school from the following.

- First aid
- Wireless telegraphy (WT) operation
- Motor Transport (MT) operation
- Demolitions
- Underwater operations
- Cliff scaling"

Over the years the role and tasks of the Companies varied little and with the creation of the Headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment there was some tweaking and changing of terminology but essentially the role of unconventional warfare/guerrilla warfare was retained. Whereas within SASR at that time one of their tasks was to provide personal for guerrilla warfare. In the late 90s the roles and tasks of the Regiment changed but this is outside the scope of this article.

In the early 1980s an additional task was included for the 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment of 'Clandestine insertion of nominated specialist into enemy areas. Provision of selected personnel to assist in the organisation of escape and evasion's networks<sup>8</sup>.

## Commando Doctrine and Training

At the time of the creation of the CMF Commando Companies there was little in the way of doctrine and training as much of the WW2 training material, particularly that which related to Special Operations, was to remain highly classified for 30 years as well as all Independent Company/Commando Squadron personnel and Special Operations operatives having been sworn to secrecy for three decades under the secrecy provisions of the Crimes Act.

There were many Australian Commandos who following the cessation of hostilities in 1945 subsequently joined the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) in Japan and then the Australian Regular Army when it was created in September 1947. There were at least three World War II commandos who served in the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV)<sup>9</sup>.

A number of these World War II veterans were foundation members of both Commando Companies in both CMF and ARA roles. It is unknown whether any

personnel from Special Operations Australia/Allied Intelligence Bureau remained in full time army service however there were a number who continued to serve in the CMF for several decades<sup>10</sup>. There were also numerous personnel who joined the newly created Australian Intelligence organisations and agencies<sup>11</sup>.

After WW2 most UK Army Commando units were disbanded, leaving only the Royal Marines with 3 Commando Brigade. Having sent the newly appointed Officers Commanding and two senior Warrant Officer instructors from the two Commando Companies to United Kingdom to undertake specialist training with the Royal Marines, it logically followed that initial Commando doctrine and training standards were those of the Royal Marine Commandos. The primary doctrine and training publications that were provided to Australia were as follows.

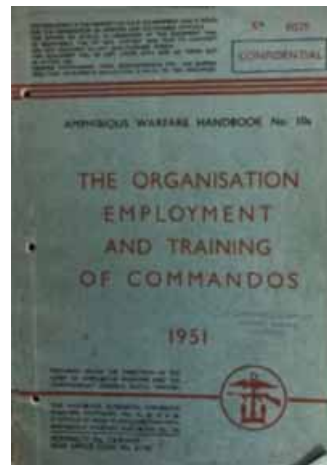


Photo 8. UK War Office - Amphibious Warfare Handbook No.10a-The Organisation Employment and Training of Commandos 1951.  
Source: ACA Vic Historical Collection

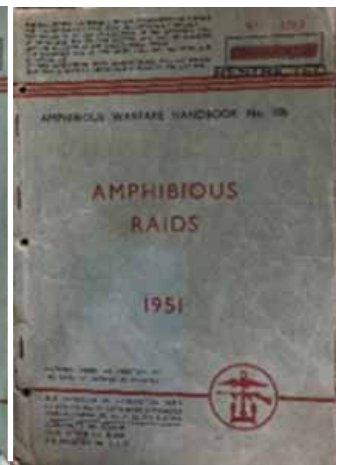


Photo 9. UK War Office - Amphibious Warfare Handbook No.10b -Amphibious raids 1951.  
Source: ACA Vic Historical Collection



Photo 10. UK War Office Amphibious Warfare Handbook No.2 C (2) all Communications for Beach and Build up in a Small-Scale Assault Force 1951  
Source: ACA Vic Historical Collection

<sup>7</sup>AHQ Army Training Instruction No 5/55 Commando Company R AUST INF contained within Military Board Instructions dated 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1955

<sup>8</sup>Australian Army, Unit History-2 Commando Company(R755-6-1) 19<sup>th</sup> of April 1988.

<sup>9</sup><https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C316837>

<sup>10</sup>Mainly in Intelligence roles.

<sup>11</sup>Personal interaction with these people in my civilian role in Defence.



## 1955 Royal Marine Commando Training Team

In October 1955 following the successful completion of the basic Commando Training Course<sup>12</sup> in United Kingdom conducted by 45 Royal Marine Commando and attended by the initial Australian Commando Company OC's and several NCOs, two Royal Marine SNCO instructors were attached to the Australian Army with one located at each of the Commando Companies in Sydney and Melbourne. Sergeant Mike McDermott was a Mountain Leader Class I (ML1) a roping, climbing and mountain warfare instructor from 45 Commando with the other being Sergeant Len Holmes, a small craft handling, diving supervisor (air and O<sup>2</sup>) and Swimmer Canoeist instructor (SC1) from the Special Boat Squadron.



Photo 11. Sergeants Mike McDermott and Len Holmes in late 1955.  
Source: ACA Vic Historical Collection



Photo 12. Major Mac Grant (OC 1 Cdo Coy) and Sergeant Len Holmes (Special Boat Service, Royal Marines) in Sydney  
Source: AWM

## Commando qualifications

In addition to the basic requirements of being a qualified parachutist and small boat handler there were additional requirements for Commando qualifications and training, and these were specified in Army Training Instruction (ATI 2-8) Annexes which referred to qualifications for Special Duties.

As small craft handling and small-scale amphibious raiding were included in the qualification requirements for Swimmer Canoeists it is appropriate to include these within this consideration of subsurface training and operations.

The Army Training Instruction (ATI 2-8) Annexes covering subsurface and amphibious operations are as follows.

## Swimmer Canoeist (SC) qualifications

- a. To qualify as a SC Class 3 a member must:
  - i. successfully complete a 14-day Small-scale Amphibious Raiding course or a 14-day Canoeist course,
  - ii. successfully complete a 14-day Swimmer<sup>13</sup> Course, and
  - iii. successfully complete six days swimmer canoeist supplementary training to include navigation.
- b. To qualify as a SC Class 2 a member must:
  - i. successfully complete a 14-day SC 2 course,
  - ii. instruct on a 14-day Swimmer course (SC 3)
  - iii. instruct on a 14-day Canoeist course (SC 3)
  - iv. instruct on six days swimmer canoeist supplementary training (SC 3).
- c. To qualify as a SC Class 1 a SC 2 must:
  - i. successfully complete a 14-day unit Diving Supervisors Course
  - ii. instruct on an SC 2 course
  - iii. successfully passed a written examination in diving procedure and regulations.

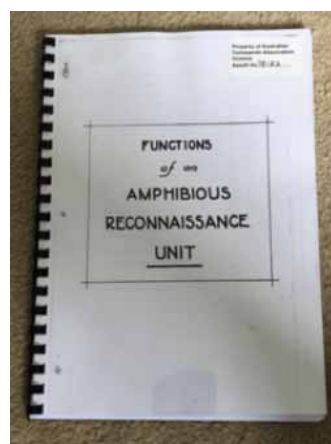


Photo 13. Special Boat Squadron training precis 'Functions of an Amphibious Reconnaissance Unit.'

Source: ACA Vic Historical Collection

<sup>12</sup>This was the shorter (10-12 week) Commando Course conducted for Royal Navy and Army personnel posted to the Commando Brigade. The Royal Marines 'long' Commando Course (9-12 months) included Recruit and Infantry training.

<sup>13</sup>The early term of Frogman and Swimmer was later to change in Army to Shallow Water Diver (all SWD) being qualified to dive to 100 feet on air.





These qualifications and terminology were sourced from the Special Boat Squadron of the Royal Marines (RM) as initial Australian Army and Royal Marine senior NCOs were trained there and all initial documentation and doctrine was also sourced from SBS and RM. The Australian Swimmer Canoeist qualification and training had been modularised to enable delivery on a part-time basis to meet the CMF Commando required standards and training time availability.

The main diving reference was RAN ABR 155 'Diving' which was supplemented for Commando divers by civilian texts particularly regarding diving physiology and local diving sites and conditions and the tactical aspects were derived from the SBS pamphlet 'Functions of an Amphibious Reconnaissance Unit'.

### Commando Small Craft Handling and Small-Scale Amphibious Raids

Despite the Commando Companies having only been recently established in mid-1955 in January 1956, the first Small-Scale Amphibious Raiding Course was conducted with the two Royal Marine instructors as well as Major John Slim (22 SAS) based on SBS skills included four days of canoe training, using World War II Folboats, and was followed with demolitions and raid planning and the conduct of several exercise raids. The course was conducted at Gan Gan, NSW several kilometres away from the former World War 2 amphibious training site at HMAS Assault and was attended by personnel from both Companies.



Photo 14. January 1956 Small Craft course at Gan Gan, NSW:  
Source: ACA Vic Historical Collection

By August 1956 Australian commandos and British submariners were conducting joint exercises during the Small Craft and Small-Scale Amphibious Raids courses and there was to be another two Small-Scale Amphibious Raids completed by the end of 1956 and attended by personnel from both Commando Companies.



Photo 15. 956 Small Craft course at Nelson Bay, NSW:  
From left, Sgt Len Holmes  
British SBS, Geoff Crabtree,  
Roman Stuczynski  
(2 Commando Coy) and  
Captain John Slim British  
22 SAS.

Source: ACA Vic Historical  
Collection

### Ongoing Small Craft Handler Courses and Continuation Training

Following the initial training and qualification of Assistant Instructor and Instructors, both Regular Army and CMF, each Commando Company was subsequently to undertake at least one 14–16-day Small Craft Handler's Course per training year to satisfy the basic Commando skills requirements. The usual course panel was 24 to 30, dependent upon the availability of canoes<sup>14</sup> and powered inflatable craft.

By the late 1960s with the greatly increased water operations skills development in SASR it was usual that the Water Operations Warrant Officer instructor position in each of the Commando Companies was filled with a suitably qualified SASR SNO<sup>15</sup>. This practice continued well into the 1990s.

The Small Craft Handling course varied little over the next three decades with the first 5 to 6 days focused on the basics of navigation, seamanship and the use of the in-service canoe mainly the Klepper Aerius Mark 13 and culminating in a 30 nautical mile open sea paddle. The remainder of the course was spent on the use of powered inflatable craft and the tactical aspects of using these craft for insertion and extraction tasks. Also, when available familiarisation training with submarines and patrol boats would all also be undertaken.

Small craft particularly canoes and the Zodiac 10-man inflatable raiding craft were used extensively throughout Commando training and exercises within both companies and in the case of 2 Cdo Coy was also utilised for additional tasks including.

- a. Defence Assistance to the Civil Community particularly during floods as neither of the local Engineer or Infantry units had quantities of inflatables available to render civil assistance.

<sup>14</sup>A company holding of canoes was usually 12 to 14 and intercompany loans were frequent to enable courses to be conducted. Usually there was sufficient inflatable craft and outboard motors to conduct courses without intercompany loans.

<sup>15</sup>There were also instances when CMF personnel performed these duties, and all the ARA cadre positions were filled by suitably qualified personnel both CMF and ARA.

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- b. The conduct of adventurous training for the Army Apprentices School and Officer Cadet School Portsea.
- c. Assistance with equipment and training personnel to support specialised training in other Army and State Police units within the Victorian area.
- d. Assistance with Special Operations training conducted in Victoria and New South Wales.

### Submarine training

Having completed the initial small craft handling training working with submarines to conduct Special Operations was included in the activities conducted on the Small-Scale Amphibious Raids course in 1956. At that time there were 3 British submarines known as the 4<sup>th</sup> Submarine Squadron, Royal Navy based in Sydney Harbour. 4<sup>th</sup> Submarine Squadron, Royal Navy that was comprised of "T" class submarines. The Squadron was disbanded on 10 January 1969 when the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Submarine Squadron comprising HMAS OTWAY (S57) and HMAS OXLEY was founded.

Submarine familiarisation training and the use of submarines for insertion and extraction during training and exercises continued well into the early 1990s utilising the RAN Oberon class submarines. with the doctrine being RN SMP14 Special Operations from Submarines which had been modified over time and later included in 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment Water Operations SOP's.

Up until the creation of SASR TAG and introduction of the Collins class submarines Commandos and the crew of the Oberon class submarines maintained and developed further the UK doctrine for Special Operations from Submarines.



Photo 16. 1980 Periscope photo of Commando parachute insertion into the sea for rendezvous with submarine HMAS OTOMA.  
Source. T. Carter Collection



Photo 17. 1980 periscope photos of commandos in the water awaiting surfacing of submarines for recovery.

Source. T. Carter Collection

The two Commando Companies maintained continual proficiency in this area as on an annual basis unit personnel provided water operations support to the various Defence courses.



Photo 18. 1980 periscope photo of Army Sharkcat safety craft and Zodiac inflatable.

Source. T. Carter Collection

Unfortunately, with the introduction of the Collins class submarine in 1996 the 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment was no longer able to undertake sub familiarisation training.

### Commando Diving

In 1956 1 and 2 Commando Company were issued with 2 sets of Siebe Gorman manufactured Clearance Diver Breathing Apparatus (CDBA). The sets were banned by the Director of Medical Services, Army despite representation for the use of such equipment for undetectable ship attack. The reason for this is not known however there must have been significant discussion of equipment was subsequently used later during Commando diving courses.

The first recorded Commando Diving course was conducted in May 1957 at 2 Commando Company and called the 1/57 Frogman Course with eight unit personnel qualified. The course was conducted by the Australian SBS qualified personnel from the Ripponlea depot close to Port Phillip Bay. Equipment used was





the Siebe-Gorman Universal Clearance Diver Breathing Apparatus (CDBA) which the RAN had adopted in 1955 and loaned to the unit to conduct training. Wetsuits were not issued, and diving was conducted in navy blue boiler suits with thick (waterlogged) woollen submariners' jumpers' underneath to retain the heat.



Photo 19. Trainee commando diver in CDBA.  
Source: ACA Vic Historical Collection



Photo 20. 2 Commando Company frogman in training at HMAS Cerberus Victoria. Wearing be versatile boiler suits and CDBA closed diving sets in 1957.

The first Diving Course conducted at 1 Commando Company in Sydney was in December 1957 and used nearby Chowder Bay, below Georges Heights where preliminary training was conducted in a nearby netted harbour pool in Clifton Gardens. The course used Closed Diver Breathing Apparatus (CDBA) on loan from the nearby Navy Diving School. Prior to the commencement of course there was an effort by Army Headquarters to Major Grant the OC to cancel the course as ostensibly the 'oxygen diving equipment did not have Army approval'. Major Grant's response was 'that he would resign his commission before he would

cancel the course and the course went ahead with grudging approval<sup>16</sup>.



Photo 21. 1/57 Diving Course at 1 Commando Company.  
Source: ACA Historical Collection

In 1957/8 both Commando Companies were issued with Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA) manufactured by Porpoise, an Australian company<sup>17</sup>.



Photo 21. A diver with CABA being released from a Folboat during training in Sydney Harbour circa 1960.  
Source: ACA Historical Collection

In 1965 during the Shallow Water Diving Course conducted by 2 Commando Company at HMAS Cerberus, Flinders Naval Depot was the last where Close Circuit Breathing Apparatus (CCBA) was used in training Sergeant Reid<sup>18</sup> recalls that the Company held approximately 20 CCBA units and supporting equipment to conduct courses and continuation training. He understood that the CCBA courses were discontinued due to political issues within Army and wider community due to the safety record closed circuit oxygen diving sets.

<sup>16</sup>Authors draft of Strike Swiftly p.36

<sup>17</sup>The Porpoise 2<sup>nd</sup> stage regulator was used on the Surface Supply (SSBA) and Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA) until the late 1970s. This apparatus was not of high quality and was frequently the cause of water aspiration amongst divers. It was replaced by the US Divers Company 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stage regulators. Around 2003, U.S. Divers Company was renamed Aqua Lung America.

<sup>18</sup>Telephone conversation of 26 May 2022.



Also, during that year during Navy Week in Melbourne a demonstration of ship attack was undertaken by Sergeant Dave Waterston of 2 Commando Company using CCBA. This was the last known use of that equipment within the unit and all equipment return to the Stores Depot and replaced with Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA) and Surface Supply Breathing Apparatus (known to civilian divers as Hookah).

In 1965 during the Shallow Water Diving (SWD) course conducted at 1 Commando Company by W02 Danny McClements included an introduction to O2 training was conducted with RAN Clearance Divers equipment on loan from the RAN Clearance divers at Rushcutters Bay, NSW<sup>19</sup>.



Photo 20. Commando divers in Sydney in early 1960's with Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA) with Porpoise 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage demand valves and first-generation wet suits.  
Source. ACA Vic Historical Collection

### Annual Commando SWD Courses

To maintain sufficient qualified SWD personnel both 1 and 2 Commando Companies were usually scheduled to conduct one SWD course per training year in which to qualify SWD, SWD Instructors and Diving Supervising Officers. At that time 1 and 2 Commando Companies were designated as Army Schools for the conduct of Shallow Water Diving along with SASR. These Commando SWD courses were also open to other corps personnel i.e., RAAC, RAE and RAEME who required SWD for training and operational reconnaissance and vehicle recovery tasking.

<sup>19</sup>Telecon 13 February 2022 with former Corporal Zed Frazer, 1 Commando Company, SASR, HQ 1<sup>st</sup> Cdo Regt.



Photo 22. Commando divers in Melbourne in early 1960's with Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA) with Porpoise 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage demand valves and first-generation wet suits.  
Source. ACA Vic Historical Collection



Photo 23. 1/77 SWD course conducted by 1 Commando Company with new twin 88 cubic foot tanks and Fenzy Buoyancy Compensators.  
Source: Authors collection.

Within 2 Commando Company in the period 1970 to 1982 the SWD courses were usually run midyear, which was the coldest time of the year, and though training SWD in harsh climatic conditions it also resulted in significant student withdrawals due to adverse medical conditions. In 1983 with the change of unit Diving Supervising Officer the focus was changed to improve the quality and quantity of SWD and that familiarity with harsh climatic conditions could be undertaken through unit continuation training during winter and not in the initial training phase. This resulted in a significant increase in numbers of personnel who successfully completed the SWD course. Whereas in the early period it was not unusual to have a 50% or less pass rate.







Photo 24. 1/82 SWD utilising HMVS Cerberus at BlackRock, Victoria as a diving platform and training site.  
Source: Authors collection



Photo 25. 1/82 SWD undertaking 20-30m dives outside of Port Phillip heads.  
Source: Authors Collection

### 1983 SWD Conversion Course

In 1983 the 2 Commando Company, Unit Diving Supervising Officer<sup>20</sup> submitted a proposal to the Officer Commanding (OC) to conduct a part-time Shallow Water Diving course. At the time there was a critical shortage of qualified SWD, and many unit members were qualified recreational Scuba divers, and the proposal was to undertake initial Trade Testing of basic diving skills and theoretical knowledge by Unit DSO and then undertake military specific training on equipment, diving procedures and tactical employment. The concept was approved by the OC but was not conducted due to training commitments, shortages of man days<sup>21</sup> and a change in the OC's policy regarding the attendance of only Green Beret qualified personnel. This limited the attendance to only Special Forces personnel as previously being designated as an Army School for SWD, courses were open to other corps personnel i.e., RAAC, RAE and RAEME who also required SWD for training an operational tasking.

In 1984 the SWD Conversion course was approved and conducted course was required as there was a shortage of qualified SWD within the unit, due to

postings and discharges and there was a slight increase in Army Reserve training man days.

### Aim

The aim of the SWD Conversion Course was as follows:

- To convert civilian qualified SCUBA divers to Army Shallow Water Divers (SWD).
- To conduct pre-course swim test and familiarisation training for personal nominated to attend the 1/84 SWD Course being conducted at 1 Commando Company.
- To identifying coach potential SWD instructors.
- To provide SWD continuation training for qualified 'in date' SWD, and
- To reassess, 'out of date' SWD and where necessary update these personnel.

### Eligibility to Attend

Personnel nominated to attend the course must meet the following criteria:

- Be Green Beret qualified and serving in 1<sup>st</sup> Cdo Regt.
- Possess a recognised civilian diving qualification (Sea Card).
- To have successfully completed 1<sup>st</sup> Cdo Regt Physical Training Tests within the previous 3 months.
- To have completed the Army pre-course swim tests.
- To have successfully undergone the pre-course Army medical and dental examination, and
- Be recommended by their Officer Commanding for diver training.

### Conduct of Training

The course was conducted in two phases:

- Phase 1.** 1 Dec - 16 Jan 87. Pre course home study and completion of pre course swim tests, medical and dental examinations and pre course theory examination.
- Phase 2.** 16 - 26 Jan 87. Instruction in Shallow Water Diving in accordance with the stated aims and objectives for an Army SWD course. The course was conducted over a 10-day period comprising, 2 weekends, 1 public holiday and 5 weekdays (morning and evenings). Members were released to attend their civilian employment during the hours of 0730 to 1730 Mon to Fri was several other SWD students, not required by their civilian employers, who undertake maintenance and administrative tasks in preparation for training.
- Panel size and success.** The course panel size was 17 included that then CQMS (ARA) with six instructional staff included two Diving Supervising Officers and one Assault Swimmer, Class 1 on Attachment from the SW Det.<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup>Captain D. Knight

<sup>21</sup>Mandays was the term used for Army Reserve Training Day Salaries (ARTDS).

<sup>22</sup>Assault Swimmer Class I was the SASR equivalent of the Royal Marine Commando Swimmer Canoeist Grade 1 qualification. This instructor was from the Swan Island Detachment of HQ 1 Cdo Regt.



All students qualified as SWD and all SWD training requirements, particularly diving time, deep dives, free ascents etc, were met.



Photo 26. 1982 DSO briefing on underwater recovery and lifting at the Defence Science and Technology Science test tank during 1/82 SWD course.

Source: Authors Collection

## 2 Cdo Coy Unit Diving Continuation Training

Following the completion of this course a unit diving continuation training program was implemented wherein there were 2 additional parade nights per month one being for continuation diving and the other for maintenance of equipment and further specialised Swimmer Canoeist training i.e., beach reconnaissance, ship attack, photography, tactics etc. This was complemented by several training weekends per year, usually conducted jointly with the local RAN Reserve diving team (Team 6) and there were also numerous diving adventure training activities conducted over public holiday periods. A six-month 2 Cdo Coy SWD Continuation Program was implemented. This formal unit training was also supplemented with unit divers conducting group diving activities using commercial organisations.



Photo 27. 1986 Diver civilian continuation training at Jervis Bay.

Source: Author

In mid-1986 there was joint diving continuation training with 1 and 2 Commando Companies along with some parachute qualified Clearance Divers from Team One who participated in a 3-day tactical diving

continuation training that centred on a load follow of two Zodiac inflatables and crew and divers will undertake a night ship attack using limpets on HMAS Melbourne was located adjacent to Taronga Park Zoo and awaiting disposal having been decommissioned from the RAN.

The exercise involved in daylight rehearsal load follow were unfortunately one of the load follow canopies failed to open resulting in the loss of a Zodiac, two 40 hp outboard motors and four sets of diving equipment and weapons. The cause of the malfunction was concluded as being a rigger error.

Despite this incident later that day a night load follow insertion and transit of approximately 10 nautical miles was undertaken and then an unmarked swimmer ship attack was successfully conducted. The diving depths were kept to less than 10 m to simulate diving on oxygen.



Photo 28. 1986 1 and 2 Coy SWD undertaking a rehearsal dive for a night ship attack on HMAS Melbourne off Bradley's Head, Sydney.

Source: Authors collection



Photo 29 1986 1 and 2 Coy SWD undertaking a day light rehearsal dive for a night ship attack on HMAS Melbourne off Bradley's Head, Sydney.

Source: Authors collection

Unit diving continuation training continued in both Companies until 1992 when HQ 1 Cdo Regt advised that SWD was no longer a Commando skill and that all equipment and training materials were to be transferred to the newly established Army Diving School.





## Diving in SASR

In the early 1960s SASR had no dedicated diver training instructors and SASR staff were initially trained by qualified personnel from 1 and 2 Commando Companies, under the steely gaze of Warrant Officer Class 2 Ray Hinde<sup>23</sup>, who also trained several 2 Commando Company members to instructor level, including David Waterston, Dan Lorkin and Bruce Parker (Regular Army and part-time CMF personnel). Similarly personnel from 1 Commando Company had qualified as instructors and Supervising Officers. The development of diving skills has undertaken significant change since then.

SASR maintains a diving capability within the water operations troop in each of the operational squadrons and a diver training capacity within Training Squadron.

## Diving in Army since 1992

Following the cessation of diving within the 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment the Army Diving School was established in collocated at the RAN Diving School at HMAS Penguin which trained working divers for RAAC, RAE, RAEME personnel in subsurface operations utilising Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus and in using underwater working tools including welding, cutting, demolitions etc. There was no tactical aspects or offensive diving capabilities taught

In mid-2019 the Army and Navy Diving Schools were combined and in October the Minister for Defence congratulated 13 Army graduates from the Australian Defence Force Diving School's first tri-service diver course<sup>24</sup>. The current three-week course content is very similar to the 2-week Commando Shallow Water Divers Course except that the Commando course was continuous, no weekend breaks, using a 0600 hrs until 2000 hrs training day and the inclusion of post course continuation training which also included enhanced training on beach reconnaissance, photography, underwater demolitions, sub surface raiding and ship attack.



Photo 30. Unit shoulder patch of the ADF diving School.

Source: <https://colourpatch.com.au/product/australian-defence-force-diving-school-navy/>

## ADF 's Offensive Diving capabilities

Within the Australian Army the only unit that provides the capability to undertake offensive subsurface operations is SASR and with a limited capacity due to the small number of subsurface operators in the two operational squadrons.

Within the RAN over the past two decades there has been a significant increase in the capabilities of Navy clearance divers, including their inclusion within Tactical Assault Group East. The public detail of clearance divers' tasks are.

- a. **Expeditionary Reconnaissance and Clearance (ERC).** ERC delivers overt and clandestine mine counter measures diving in shallow water and littoral environments. This encompasses reconnaissance, rapid environmental assessment and mine /obstruction location, identification and clearance where required. ERC missions include diving on oxygen and mixed gas closed and semi closed rebreathers and the employment of specialist reconnaissance equipment in the littoral environment.
- b. **Underwater Damage Repair (UDR)** UDR missions include diving on surface-supplied and self-contained air equipment, primarily for rapid deployment to conduct emergency ship repairs. UDR also assists in repair and maintenance of ships' underwater fittings, underwater survey, repair and salvage. These missions can involve the use of underwater electric, explosive-power, hydraulic and pneumatic tools for major repairs and salvage operation and provide a suite of skills and equipment that can be applied in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief scenarios.
- c. **Maritime Explosive Ordnance Disposal (MEOD).** MEOD missions include the rendering safe and disposal of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), Military Ordnance and obstructions in the maritime environment, including on land; wharves; ships internals and hulls; and underwater installations. These missions can involve the use of Remote Positioning Vehicles (RPV), Portable X-Ray devices, bomb suits, high powered disruptors, and various diving sets and underwater tools.
- d. **Tactical Assault Group (East) (TAG (E))** CDs are employed in Special Forces roles at the TAG (E). TAG (E) is part of 2 Commando Regiment. TAG (E) maintains a short notice capability to conduct special military operations, using a variety of specialist skill sets that include the extensive use of small arms<sup>25</sup>.

Given the above public information it appears that the full spectrum of subsurface operations is not within

<sup>23</sup>Qualified in UK with SBS prior to his Commando posting.

<sup>24</sup><https://www.contactairlandandsea.com/2019/10/28/adf-diver-training-now-tri-service/>

<sup>25</sup><https://www.navy.gov.au/about/organisation/clearance-diving-teams>



the current skill sets of Clearance Divers and given the small numbers currently within the RAN and the difficulty being experienced in recruiting suitable personnel it is unlikely that expanding their roles to include offensive subsurface operations would be a better option than inclusion and expansion within Army.

### Diving in Overseas Army Special Forces units

Within Western democratic countries it is hard to find an Army Special Forces unit that does not have a capability for subsurface operations for reconnaissance, offensive operations, recovery and a myriad of other tasks.

In the United Kingdom in addition to the Special Boat Service of the Royal Marines comprises four active squadrons and a reserve unit. 22 SAS also maintains subsurface capabilities within their squadrons.

Within the US Special Operations community in addition to the U.S. Navy Seal Teams each of the Army Special Forces Groups maintains a subsurface capability within each Group and Battalion.

In the case of France in addition to the four French Naval Commando units each of their Special Operations Command and most Foreign Legion units maintain an offensive subsurface capability.

Clearly in 1955 senior Army commanders identified a need for subsurface capabilities and this was initially embedded in the CMF Commando Companies who maintained and developed the skill for over four decades on a part-time basis.

### The Future

The justification for ceasing the sub surface capability within Commandos, but retaining within SASR is unknown, however given regional geography in the Australian Area of Operations and the current increasing level of regional instability and increased threat it is now time to reconsider including subsurface capabilities within the Commando skill set for both regiments.

### Army Special Operations Diver Qualification Badges

Unlike overseas Army Special Operations units at no time has the Australian Army had a Diver or Diving Supervising Officer qualification badge as has the UK Armed Forces and those of many other countries.



Photo 31. Current UK Army qualification badge for Shallow Water Diver  
Source:

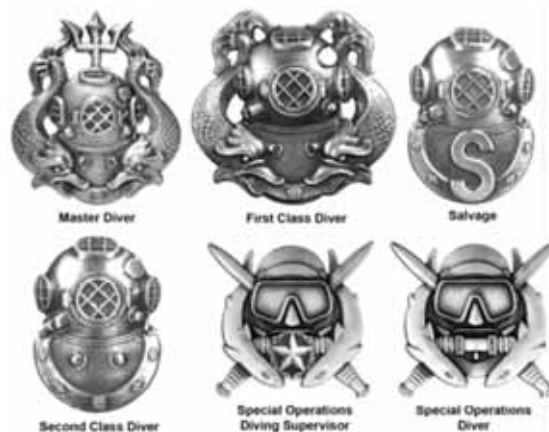


Photo 32. US Army Special Operations diving qualifications  
Source Wikipedia

### Author

The author served 17 years with 2 Commando Company and later Headquarters, 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment (1 Cdo Regt) and then was the first Regimental Training Officer followed by four years in Headquarters, Special Forces undertaking project work at the SO2 and SO1 level on Counterterrorism Contingency Plans.

He initially qualified as a Shallow Water Diver in 1977 with 1 Commando Company and then following five SWD courses qualified as a Diving Supervising Officer (DSO)

In addition to instructing and DSO duties he also participated in the following.

- a. Conducted monthly unit continuation training for qualified divers from Melbourne based units, excepting those months in which diving related courses were being conducted. Beach reconnaissance and subsurface attacks were frequently included in unit continuation training activities<sup>26</sup>.
- c. Conducted numerous diving activities under the auspices of Adventurous Training for non-qualified personnel from Victorian based Army units.
- d. Provided 'on call' specialist knowledge on watercraft and diving equipment to Headquarters Logistic Command, based in Melbourne.
- e. Participated in parachute load following and subsurface attacks on shipping and port facilities in Gladstone Harbour during exercise K82 and a subsurface attack on HMAS Melbourne in Sydney Harbour in 1986/7 and many similar activities during unit/regimental training and exercises.
- f. During the 1980s and 90s assisted the RAN Clearance Diver with numerous underwater UXO clearances in Victoria<sup>27</sup>.
- g. Participated in recovery searches of human remains and Army weapons and equipment following accidents<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>26</sup>This was frequently conducted jointly with the local RAN Reserve- Diving Team 6.

<sup>27</sup>At the time there was only one Clearance Diver position in Victoria posted to HMAS Cerberus.

<sup>28</sup>Some of these activities were in support of Victoria Police Search and Rescue who at the time have limited diving personnel.





# The forgotten Australian patrol officers

By Luke Gosling

There is a good chance you may have never heard of the Australian patrol officers known as “Kiaps” who provided services such as security and administration to Papua New Guineans over decades.

And the likely reason is that the Kiaps were not given even an obscure corner of our collective Australian story to occupy.

Kiaps were Australian government officials who patrolled Papua New Guinea's remote regions from 1878 to 1978.

They helped administer rural Papua as an Australian territory inherited from Great Britain, and New Guinea as a League of Nations mandate and then a United Nations trust territory.

Theirs was a dangerous job.

The Kiaps' mortality rate was high – four times that of Australians serving in the Vietnam War.

Of the 2,000 Kiaps who served, 88 died from violence, disease, aircraft crashes, volcanic eruptions, and executions by the Japanese during WWII.

But they received no recognition.

The Australian government didn't even repatriate their remains. Their families had to organise that themselves, and then only if they could afford it.

It was not until 2013 that Jason Clare as then Home Affairs Minister awarded the Kiaps the Police Overseas

Service Medal, 35 years after the last Kiap came home.

But the 300 remaining Kiaps alive today want recognition for their fallen comrades, not themselves.

Too long left in the shadows of our collective memory, the Kiaps who did not return deserve recognition too.

Papua New Guinean leaders have recognised the Kiaps' contribution to their country's development.

These included the Bougainvillean politician and diplomat Dr Alexis Sarei, and former prime ministers Sir Julius Chan and Sir Michael Somare, who invited some Kiaps to stay after independence.

“I have always appreciated your ever-ready helping hand,” Dr. Sarei said in his tribute to the Kiaps.

“I will always remember you ... with great respect ... on behalf of the Government [of Papua New Guinea], the people and myself, thank you.”

It's time Australia also said thank you.

One way to show the Kiaps the nation's gratitude would be to build a memorial in Canberra commemorating those who died during their service.

The majority of surviving Kiaps support this initiative and ask for nothing extravagant or expensive, only a nook of the national imagination for their mates.

**Luke Gosling OAM MP is the Federal Member for Solomon, representing Darwin and Palmerston in Canberra. He served in the ADF for 13 years.**

**The Federal Labor Government has committed \$9 million to Invictus Australia for the Dusseldorf Games in 2023, and to support their community work.**

**LUKE GOSLING**  
MP FOR SOLOMON  
DARWIN + PALMERSTON

Authorised by L. Gosling, ALP VIC, 30/06/2024. Photo: RT 08/04



# Free 12 Month Health and Fitness Program

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[www.veteranshearthealth.com.au/eligibility](http://www.veteranshearthealth.com.au/eligibility)



## Am I eligible?

Started over 20 years ago for those returned from Vietnam, the Heart Health Program is free and open to all veterans with operational service, peacekeepers and those covered under the ADF firefighters scheme who have not previously participated in the Heart Health Program before.



## Program Exercise Resource - Exercise how you like to

The program can provide an exercise resource to help participants to exercise the way they like to or provide an opportunity to try something that's different than the usual.



## Registering Your Interest

Registering your interest or checking eligibility is easy.

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## Heart Health Team - DVA Heart Health Program

Program proudly delivered on behalf of the DVA by:  
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# King Charles III Military Service

By Stephen Carter - Editor

Following in the footsteps of his father, grandfather and two great-grandfathers, the current British Monarch served an extensive career in the military. It spanned across the Royal Air Force (RAF), the Royal Navy and the Army – King Charles III even received commando training with the Royal Marines.

In 1974, King Charles III attended the All Arms Commando Course at the Commando Training Centre

Royal Marines, Lympstone Devon. The intense 13-week course is open to any of the UK's service members and overseas exchange personnel. The training includes amphibious assault drills, cliff assault drills, helicopter drills, and a week-long final exercise known as "Test Week." Graduates of the AACC earn the right to wear the coveted green beret and the Commando Dagger on their uniform.



Images: Bournemouth News & Picture Service (BNPS)



King Charles III is a qualified sailor, pilot, parachutist and commando.

On June 11, 1977, as the Prince of Wales, Charles was appointed as Colonel in Chief of the Parachute Regiment. While he had conducted a parachute drop during his pilot training, the Regiment's new Colonel in Chief was not a qualified parachutist. Charles reportedly felt that he could not "look them in the eye" or wear their prestigious red beret and Para Wings unless he completed the training himself. "I felt I should lead from the front or at least be able to do some of the things that one expects others to do for the country," he told his biographer, Jonathan Dimbleby.

In 1978, Charles attended Parachute Course 841a at RAF Prize Norton and earned his red beret and Para Wings.

(Miguel Ortiz,  
<https://www.wearethemighty.com/author/miguelortiz/> September 14, 2022)



# #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.

## Nuance is the key

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

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

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# 2 COMMANDO COMPANY RESCUES LOCALS FROM FLOODS

25 years ago – real life training for the 1974 amphibious course

This forensic account of the valuable, and possibly life-saving, work of the 1974 amphibious course students and the other 2 Commando Company personnel was posted on the Association web page by an unknown colleague.

No doubt all the participants were rated above average at the conclusion of their course!



The photo caption from the newspaper the next day read: "Maribyrnong today . . . and soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commando Force (sic) operate a rescue ferry service along flooded Raleigh Rd."

By anonymous

I was at the Anglers Hotel today having a beer with another ex-member and remembered the unit's involvement in the 1974 Maribyrnong River in flood on 16 May 1974. We thought this should be recorded somewhere, so here goes!

The 1974 flood was the second largest on the Maribyrnong River, and occurred on 15 and 16 May when 110 mm of rain fell on the catchment over a 48 hour period, with 70 mm falling in 17 hours.

Approximately 385 hectares of land between the Maribyrnong Township and Dynon Road Bridge were inundated by floodwaters. About 120 houses and 50 commercial and industrial premises were flooded.

Emergency services and members of 2 Commando Company evacuated large numbers of people from the Maribyrnong Township.

At the time a small craft course was being conducted at the Williamstown base. A call was received from Southern Command shortly after midnight ordering us to assist with the evacuation.

The students were woken and four trucks were loaded (two with Gemini inflatables, one with engines and fuel and a fourth with students and instructors (one instructor was in a police car). Two police cars escorted the convoy at high speed (at up to 90 kmh) to Maribyrnong Road.

Boats were launched around 3.00am in front of the RSL and tasked with evacuating houses along Chifley Drive, Van Ness Avenue and surrounding streets. In places the water was well over 2 metres deep.

Submerged objects, mainly cars, hampered operations. By 5.00 pm shear pins and propellers were in short supply and the police had lost their boat when

they attempted to come alongside the top of the bridge near the Anglers Hotel.

There was a shop near Walter Street that had stocks of shear pins and propellers so the police assisted us to enter the shop and obtain the spares required to keep all Geminis operating.

By sunrise all houses had been evacuated and the waters were receding rapidly. The students and instructors had evacuated a large number of people. At least two were found in their beds unaware that their house was flooding. No records were taken on the total numbers evacuated by army boats but it was later estimated as 70 to 80 people.

By mid morning the involvement of 2 Commando concluded and we returned to Williamstown and resumed the small craft course.

From 'Commando' Volume 10 No. 75, September 2009, page 33.



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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

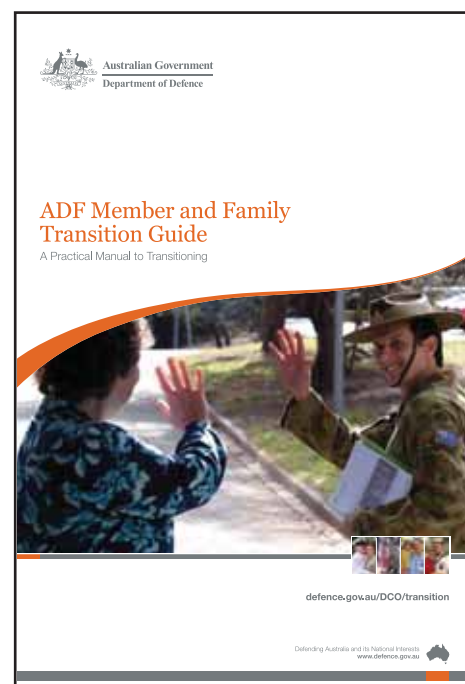
### ADF Transition Seminar

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.





# The Positive Relationship between Holidays/Physical Activity and PTSD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# A BERET CAST IN BRONZE

## Jamieson Township honours the Green Beret

The bronze casting of a Green Beret recently placed on the Gerrans Reserve memorial rock at picturesque Jamieson, on the edge of the Great Dividing Range in North East Victoria, symbolizes many things.

It pays homage to a former distinguished WW2 and post-WW2 Commando soldier who rests nearby. It is a tribute to members of the local community who served their country in war. And it is also an example of the generosity and efforts of the local volunteer blacksmithing group who do such valuable community work.

Jamieson is a small country town with a big heart.

A plaque at Matthews Reserve on the Avenue of Honour on the Mansfield - Woods Point Road commemorates the World War One servicemen who attended the Jamieson Primary School. The annual Remembrance Day services are held there.

A separate memorial rock at Gerrans Reserve acknowledges the local people who have served in all conflicts. The simple rock memorial was a relatively recent addition in 1986. Its plaque reads, "Dedicated to the memory of those residents of Jamieson and district who served in the Defence Forces of Australia". It is the focus of the annual Anzac Day services held in the Reserve.

There was a move to replace the existing 'humble' memorial rock, but the weight of local opinion said "No - it belongs to the community as it is". But consideration was given to improving its presence. One of the leading proponents for upgrading the rock was local 'hobby' blacksmith Craig Eury. Craig and his friends conduct blacksmithing demonstrations to raise funds for town projects – upgrading the memorial rock was one such task.



*Before the beret. The rock in Gerrans Park is the focus of Anzac Day services at Jamieson.*



*The beret and blacksmith team.  
From left, Craig Eury, Doug Tarrant, Brad Reeves proudly holding the Green Beret, Phil Henderson and Jess Bolwell.*

The question was, "What to place on the Rock?" to enhance its character.

Looking for something 'small and subtle' that did not overshadow the modest rock memorial, Craig tried to think of something other than the classic and widely used Digger's slouch hat.

Craig knew 2 Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment men Corporal L and Brad Reeve, who both lived nearby in Mansfield and often visited Jamieson. Recently retired after 30 years service, Brad suggested the classic Australian Commando Green Beret, with its significance for those who qualify to wear it.

Craig put the idea to the Anzac Day Committee who gave it the thumbs up. He then went about getting a beret to make the mould for the casting.

Brad generously provided a new Commando Green Beret and Jess Bolwell used it as a 'sacrificial' beret, fashioning it to the correct shape to then use as the casting mould. The blacksmith group provided the costs of the other materials and foundry work.

With an eye for detail that is reflected in his work Craig used his blacksmith skills to produce the beret





with its classic 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment 'Strike Swiftly' badge.

Friend and bronze artwork craftsman Phil Mune was a valuable support. Earlier he had shared his knowledge of the fine details of the craft with Craig and the fund-raising amateur 'blacksmiths' and he provided his professional foundry for the final pour of the Green Beret.

The beret was placed on the memorial in January 2022. It was during this time in conversations with Brad that those involved became aware of the earlier proximity of a distinguished Commando veteran, Brigadier Mac Grant. He had a home near Kevington, on the banks of the Goulburn River, only 15 kilometres south of Jamieson along the winding Woods Point Road. Mac and his wife Joan spent much time there in their second home, enjoying fishing and long summer breaks after retirement.

In WW2 Mac served in New Guinea in the 2/5 Independent Company, then with 2/12 Commando Squadron in the North Borneo campaign and the liberation of Sarawak.

Post-WW2 in early 1955, as Major Grant, he was appointed to raise and command 1 Commando Company in Sydney, remaining in command until 1959, during which time he did specialist commando training with the Royal Marines in the UK and was attached to 21 SAS Regt in what is now West Malaysia.

Mac and the inaugural Melbourne-based commander of 2 Commando Company, Major Peter Seddon, arranged the design of the 'boomerang and dagger' badge with its Strike Swiftly motto that adorns the coveted Green Beret.

In retirement Mac had been the Honorary Colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment and was a life patron of the Australian Commando Association.

Mac died in mid-2013 aged 90. Brad attended the service when Mac's ashes were interred alongside those of his wife Joan and son Peter, marked by plaques under his favourite tree at their former home in Kevington.

The presence of the beret on the memorial became more fitting with the knowledge of Brigadier Grant's Commando history, both WW2 and post-WW2, and his final physical presence nearby.

Fittingly, next year Brad Reeve will give the Anzac Day address at the Rock in Gerrans Park.

*Jamieson resident Chris Badrock is married to Rosie, the sister of Frank Read, a distinguished early member (1956-1963) of 2 Commando Company. Frank, who has lived in Queensland for many years, passed the news of the Rock on to his early 2 Commando comrades in Victoria.*

*Background information courtesy of Chris Badrock, Craig Eury and Brad Reeve.*

Barry Higgins

oOo



The bronze beret fixed firmly to the rock, showing the classic boomerang and dagger 'Strike Swiftly' badge.

Photos courtesy Chris Badrock and Craig Eury.



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# Sir & Son on the Mooseburg Express

Des Lambley

As the First World War began, many males saw an opportunity to improve their lives or participate in what they thought was a grand adventure tour. In that era, some were altruistically patriotic. Apart from volunteering to help defend democracy and the Empire, they learned new skills or those they had learned while training part-time in the citizen forces. Some thought it was an escape from boredom. Some parents saw that the military would make men out of them. Other parents regarded the allotments sent home sustaining them in their old age. Other men were granted deferral because they were carers or men in protected industries. Policies were introduced to allow some to be deferred because brothers were serving. There were men with previous military experience with the British military and involvement in the Boer Wars. For some, the army was in their blood.

During recent research, Lieutenant Frank Sharp was found to have been court martialled in England during the First World War. Apart from focusing on military crime by officers, the rest of Sharp's story deserves to be told. Some of the court martialled officers from the First World War re-enlisted when the Second World War began. Lieutenant Frank Sharp MC MID was one of them. Frank was a 20-year-old single man whose civilian occupation was as a mechanical engineer. He had joined the Citizen Military Force in a Special Service appointment with the Artillery. He enlisted on 12 February 1915 (with Army Number 55) and embarked from Australia on 13 June 1915 as a Sergeant, and served with "A" Squadron of 12 Light Horse (Dismounted) at Gallipoli from August until December. He was promoted to Second Lieutenant on 27 March 1916 in Egypt, transferred to the 4<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery, moved to France on 9 June, and was promoted to Lieutenant in August.

Sharp received a gunshot to his head on 30 March 1917 and was evacuated to England for treatment. While there, he was brought before a court martial at Tidworth on 15 June 1917, charged with being absent without leave for not reporting for four days. He rejoined his unit in France on 30 July 1917.

Lieutenant Sharp was wounded in action again at Peronne on 2 September 1918 with severe shot wounds to his back and right thigh. He was evacuated to England. A Military Cross was awarded to him on 12 February 1919 for, *'As forward observation officer during the attack on and capture of a village, he maintained connection with battery headquarters with great skill and devotion to duty, in spite of heavy enemy shell fire. One of his party having been very severely wounded, he dressed his wounds with much*

*care under the heavy fire, and having found and mended the break in the wire – which the man was repairing when wounded – carried him to a place of comparative safety and then returned to his duty. He displayed throughout a disregard of his own safety worthy of the highest praise'.*

Lieutenant Sharp was granted non-military educational leave from 13 January to 23 February 1919 to attend a Polytechnic for a course in mechanical engineering. On the second day of this leave, he married Elsie Kathleen Starmer. They returned to Australia on a family ship, and Sharp's commission was terminated on 4 May 1920.

When WW2 began, Sharp enlisted on 22 July 1940 (NX60017) as a Lieutenant with the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division. The 11<sup>th</sup> Battery of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment was allocated to support the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Motor Brigade at Mechili in North Africa. They were co-located with regimental headquarters, where they were heavily engaged over three days in early April 1941. German armoured forces surrounded the town, and the Brigade attempted to break out for a withdrawal back to Tobruk, but the Regiment lost 91 men captured as well as four killed and seven wounded. Lieutenant Sharp and his son, Gunner Keith W. Sharp (QX10358), who served in the same unit, were two of the 91 prisoners taken by the Germans. The prisoners were moved to Internment Camp 78PM (Prigione di Guerra), a POW camp near the town of Sulmona in the Abruzzo region in central Italy. Lieutenant Sharp was Mentioned in Despatches for his efforts while there. *'In September 1943, as the Italian government neared collapse, the inmates of Sulmona heard rumours that the evacuation of the camp was imminent. They awoke one morning to discover that their guards had deserted. On 14 September, German troops arrived to escort the prisoners northwards to captivity in Germany, but not before hundreds of them had escaped into the hills'.*

The German Army rounded up many escapees, including Sharp and his son. An incredible family story followed, and it is appropriate to be re-told here. It connects two wars and a father who had served in the First World War and then served in the same unit with his son in the Second World War. Keith Sharp and his father jumped off the 'Moosburg Express' taking them from Bologna to Germany. After much hiding, walking and being cared for by Italian families, they escaped across the Alps into Switzerland. From there, they were able to return to Australia in 1943. After the war, Frank Sharp was promoted to Captain and went on to serve with the British in North Borneo Civil Reconstruction Team.





**Figure 1 (right).** Lieutenant Frank Sharp MC MID enlisted for the Second World War.



Motivation prompting AIF officers to absent themselves without leave during the First World War was most commonly linked to the environment in which they were working and pitted against their physical health and mental strengths. Such stresses accumulated proportional to the nature and time they were exposed to the battlefield. Data indicates fewer absences while the officers were working on the Front Line. Still, temptations prevailed when an opportunity presented itself in the rear areas where the men were much less inhibited. Some were purposely foolish, others were led astray, or they chose to breach discipline for personal reasons despite the consequences. With a lot of populist hindsight from a modern era, so many of these seemingly trivial offences might be forgiven, or justifiable.

*Bill Rudd's 'Anzac POW freemen in Europe' takes over this endearing story from here, verbatim.<sup>1</sup>*

**'QX10358 Gnr Keith W. Sharp 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Anti-Tank Rgt CAMP 75, Bologna, 8 September, 1943.**

8 September started as an ordinary day in the life of the 3,000 odd POWs in the above camp, we all knew that the news was good with alleged rumours of allied landings all over the Italian coastline, but little did we realise that what we had so long awaited was about to eventuate - the Italians were about to sign the Armistice with the Allies shortly. We believed we would be able to return to our own countries. Throughout the day we continued with our usual routine which had become dreadfully monotonous with months of weary repetition, when suddenly as we were finishing off the day's work one of our number rushed in with the news - "Italy has capitulated". Imagine the faces of those present? It couldn't be true - just another buzz - which were plentiful. But we soon had the news verified. In no time we were discussing home and began packing our meagre belongings. In co-operation with the Italian camp commander, our officers took over our camp, but the Italians maintained guard. No one was allowed to

leave camp and the Italian commander assured us that we would be protected until we were taken over by our troops. We had our doubts about this arrangement for we knew of the presence of German troops in the district and couldn't see them retiring from Italy and leaving us behind, especially as 45% of the camp consisted of officers. Emergency arrangements were therefore made and all the wire at the rear of the camp was cut and a signal agreed upon for a mass escape if it became necessary. Dad and I didn't feel real happy about the set-up and tried to get away but were ordered by the CO (British) to remain in camp. The Italians again assured us that there were no Germans in the area and promised to protect us fully if any did show up. We all turned in fully clothed and with a small pack of emergency rations near us and attempted to get some sleep.



"At about 5 in the morning the alarm sounded and we were told that the Germans had taken over the main gate, this started a general stampede for the rear of the camp and the cut wire. Here we were met with a burst of machine gun fire and a few grenades and although a few of us got out, most of us were herded back into the barbed wire enclosure. Only one chap was killed in the panic which was rather amazing.

"We were packed in the barbed wire enclosure pretty tightly and surrounded by machine gun detachments of a pretty trigger-happy bunch of Jerries. I personally felt that we were in for a mass murder and from the remarks of the others they were of the same opinion, however nothing happened of that nature and after the Germans had sorted out the wounded and found a few chaps that had hidden in drains and in the ceilings etc. we were returned to our huts and told to behave ourselves.

"Unfortunately for the Italians that had promised to "protect" us, they also became POWs. We still had control of a Red Cross store and it had a good supply of food in it, so we carried on more or less normally under the new management. On the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> we received orders to prepare to move and rumour had it that we were going to the Kiwi camp at Modena, about 20 miles away, we were told that the Jerries were

<sup>1</sup>Australian War Memorial, [www.awm.gov.au/collection/LIB100042984](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/LIB100042984), Accessed 3 October 2017.



going to make a line at Bologna and that we were just being moved back a little (actually it was over a year later before the Allies arrived at Bologna). My father and I intended to stick together as far as possible with the idea of getting away at the first possibility and with this object in view I obtained the Brigadier's permission to go as an officer. We split up all the Red Cross stores and destroyed all surplus food and clothing.

"Various officers and men hid in ceilings and drains and all types of impossible places, but knowing the German versatility with grenades when looking for strays we decided against this – actually we found out later that very few got away in this manner. We left for Bologna in motor trucks and were packed in like sardines and as we had a canvas cover over us to keep us out of view, things were very oppressive and one chap passed out in our truck. When we arrived at Modena we went immediately to the railway station and our worst fears were realised - we were off to Germany. After being herded into cattle trucks by a trigger-happy bunch of young Nazis we had a guard put over us and remained in the siding for the night. There were about 30 to a cattle truck and only some of us could lie down to sleep and as everybody was fed up and miserable about the morrow, it was a most uncomfortable night and little rest was had. The train had about 950 officers and 250 ORs, and after every third cattle truck there was a flat platform manned with machine guns on top of this there was one or two soldiers to each truck in a box affair at the end.

"We pulled out of Modena at about twelve the next day and headed North. Our truck had a few generations of cattle manure coating the floor and on lifting this we discovered that the wooden planks were fairly rotten in a couple of places. Somebody produced a short iron bar from somewhere and a party went to work to raise a plank or two. The train stopped frequently and often the Germans had a look in and so we had to be wary. The Italians proved very friendly at a couple of these stops men managed to get out. A couple of instances stand out. At one place a guard walked past an open door whilst we were being allowed to have some fresh air, he had a red flag in his hand, common to all railway guards, one of our fellows just grabbed the flag and walked down the line out of sight, the other chap saw some Italians unloading some cases of apples from a goods train pulled up next to us at one of the stops we had, he just joined the party and unloaded apples instead of going to Germany. We met both these chaps later in Switzerland.

It took until dark to prize the plank out of our truck and we then had an aperture large enough for one to get through. An officer crawled through under the truck and undid the sliding doors. Unfortunately the train then stopped and the Germans had an inspection but didn't look inside our truck, although they made the remark "the fools inside don't realise the door is unlocked". They locked it again on us, we proceeded,

and the door opener had to do his job again. With the door open and no interruption from our confident guards, we drew lots to jump. Dad and I were ninth on the list. There was quite a bit of discord between those willing to get away and those not. Eventually while proceeding slowly up a hill, Dad and I jumped after dropping a pack of food. This was about four o'clock in the morning and we were in the vicinity of La Viss, just outside of Trento. This proved to be a lucky area for us as the Germans had shot up the Trento Division and quite a lot of civilians in the area and the Italians were definitely pro-Allied at least temporarily.

"We met up with Lt Hubble and Lt Douty and one OR and we decided to head for the mountains which we could see not far off. However after crossing a few fields we came across a river where Hubble and Douty left us and headed for a bridge whilst first light was coming. Dad and I decided to hide in a corn field and so get the lie of the land. Later in the morning we noticed three men and a boy creeping along the river bank and were surprised to see that two of them were British officers and had also escaped from the train. The other two (?) were Italians and proved very valuable, especially the boy who risked his life to assist us. The Italian that Dad had learnt in the camp was very handy as he was the only one that could speak to the Italians and from them we learned that the area was swarming with Germans especially the river area, and the bridge was well-guarded, lucky for us that we hadn't attempted to cross it. Owing to the risk of discovery we decided to hide until dusk when the Italians promised to come back and help us - with or without Germans we didn't know. The two British officers wouldn't wait and left us to cross the river and a little later we presumed that they were seen and probably caught for there was quite a disturbance about half a mile from where we were hiding.

"The two Italians returned at dusk and told us the Germans had just visited their farmhouse after food supplies. However they had salvaged enough to be able to bring us some which we quickly devoured. They also brought with them a pair of boots, for we had to destroy a pair of ours to get some money we had hidden between the soles. The lad then escorted us over the bridge and through the village. I wasn't too happy about this for both Dad and I were in battle dress and we walked right past a body of Germans outside their billets - one chap was busy cleaning his Tommy gun - I had an itchy feeling in the back until we rounded the next corner. All went well until we arrived at a steep pass which went straight up the mountain. Here the lad left us and told us to go ahead and he would meet us at the top in the morning with food and probably clothes and instructions on where to go and whom to contact. He was able to travel on the mountain railway which was heavily guarded. We proceeded up the rugged path in the dark and in the valley of the Brenner Pass below we could see the lights of the German convoys streaming South.





"We kept going ahead slowly and feeling our way as best we could when suddenly behind us we heard somebody hurrying up the path. We had been told that this path was never used and so we immediately thought the worst but were very surprised when a chap in battle dress appeared out of the gloom - British soldiers on the loose seemed to be getting a common occurrence. This fellow was very run down and appeared very shaken and slightly hysterical.

He said we were going in the wrong direction, which we also had a similar feeling about, and that we should go down to the bottom and start up again. However we were too far up and too tired and decided to keep on going up. The fellow cleared out and left us soon after and we didn't see him again. Here a remarkable thing happened when you consider the circumstances for as we wended our way up, we heard the bushes rustle just in front of us. We stopped and listened and the murmuring of voices we could hear sounded very English, so we called and got a very Australian reply for the rustle in the bushes proved to be to be Bob Donnan, Lt McDonald and a Canadian pilot who had been in the next truck to us and had escaped 20 miles further down the line. They listened to our story about the Italian kid who was helping Dad and I as they had no fixed plan they decided to join us.

We decided that Dad and I would go ahead and make the contact, and Mac and Bob would join us later, so Dad and I went on and left the others. We were now very high up in the mountains and it was getting freezing cold and we could hardly keep going from lack of sleep. We lay down beneath the bushes and tried to rest but it had started to drizzle and if we stopped we started to get cramp and what with the cold, the cramps, the nervous excitement and hunger, we had just about had it.

"At first light we picked out a landmark that the Italian lad had mentioned and right on time he contacted us and gave us directions and instructions of possible contacts. I managed to get hold of an old Italian suit and so discard the battle dress, however I must have been quite a sight for the trousers would only reach half way down my shins. We said goodbye to the boy and the five of us headed for Andola. We decided to string out so that if we ran into trouble the others would be able to get away. After about an hour we tried to have a sleep in the morning sun but we just couldn't settle down and rest, so we pushed on to Andola. Dad and I arrived at this village and met some very decent people who fed us all and gave us further directions and contacts. They also wanted us to stay and join the Resistance but it didn't appeal to us at that stage. The people at Andola told us to follow the mountain tracks that were marked in red paint (the rocks lining the paths had a splash of red paint on them every few hundred yards and were used by alpinists and were paths that would lead to a definite destination and not just wild tracks).

"We were told that there was an alpine hut up in the Alps at Malga Spora where we could get food and water and rest. It was fairly late when we started up the mountain and the path proved very narrow and treacherous. At about 11.30 we had to stop as we were absolutely exhausted and could not carry on.

"We arranged to sleep in shifts and a fire was lit so that we could keep warm and we had no cover except the things we wore which were somewhat the worse for wear. After a short sleep we made an early move at first light next morning (15 September) and after about an hour arrived at a deserted hut about 3/4 mile further on we came upon Malga Spora which much to our disgust was also deserted so we missed out on the food and water just when it would have done us the most good. We pushed on after a short spell and found a mountain stream a little further on. (We carried water all through the trip, but never completely ran out of it owing to the abundance of mountain streams but we found if we drank too much it made you sick in the stomach and giddy.) The trail ahead proved very difficult and slippery and was also very narrow with a sheer drop on one side, it continued like this for about an hour and a half until we crossed the summit. There we had another setback for in front of us was a series of even higher peaks that had to be crossed. We pushed slowly ahead right on the top of the world (10,000 feet according to map) and the going was pretty rough, we had a short rest but had to push on as everybody was falling asleep in the light air. At about two in the afternoon we began to descend, we came to a burnt out barracks and also three separate tracks without a sign of our now famous "red paint sign".

"After some argument we decided to keep straight ahead but we were getting worried as it was getting late and none of us were in any condition to spend another night in the Alps. At about five in the afternoon the path improved and descended much steeper and shortly we saw a house in the distance which we headed for.

"Dad and I went ahead to contact whoever might be there and as we rounded a turn in the track we came upon a small settlement - the Refuge Tuckett - an abandoned alpine lodge - we also came face to face with a glacier which was the first I have ever seen. We waited for the others to catch up with us as according to the prior Italian instructions we must be on the wrong track, however we decided to go straight on down, just then we were hailed by three people further up the mountain and we got a bit of a start as we didn't expect anybody to appear from the rear, but we received more than a start when the three turned out to be Lt Sandy Mair, Lt Bob Jones and Lt Eggleston - 3 Australian officers we had last seen on the train. They had been put on our trail by the Italian that had helped us the day before. We all went down the mountain with Dad and myself in the lead. Just on dusk we arrived at a house on the mountainside and found a woman who was alone. She received a bad fright at the sight of the



two of us but we explained that we were British POWs and asked her for assistance. She asked us to wait until her husband returned and she was sure he would help us. We called the others down and when the husband arrived he offered us accommodation but no food as the Germans had commandeered the lot. (These people were in a very bad way for food, it was just the start of winter and it is customary to have the store room full at this time of the year, to carry them over the winter months, they had two children to feed and expressed the hope that the Allies would arrive quickly.) The Italians had some oiled potatoes to eat for supper and we had some biscuits we carried. The husband and wife were drinking hot water as that was all they had but we managed to rake together enough tea leaves to provide everybody a cup of tea, the first the Italian couple had had for years. After the meal the husband went out to see if he could arrange for a guide to help us on our way in the morning. There are always mountain guides available in these areas to cater for the alpine climbers who climb these crags for a hobby (in peace time).

"No guides were free to help us however as the Germans had thought of the aid they could give, and they had been visited by the Germans and warned off. We discovered from our host and a map he gave us that we had taken the wrong path earlier and we should have come down in the valley pre-ceding the one we were now in. We also learned however that that valley was heavily covered by Germans and Fascists, so our mistake was lucky.

"16 September.

"Our host guided us down on our way early in the morning and left us at the foot of the range and told us the direction to take. We had to beg for food at two or three places and run the risk of being recaptured. One of these people was an ex-American immigrant who gave us an excellent lunch and told us we were to contact another ex-Yank. We lost Sandy Mair, Bob Jones, and Lt Eggleston during the afternoon but kept on going. At dusk we arrived at the other Iti-Yank who proved to be quite a character. He claimed to be an ex-bootlegger and looked the part. He fed us and gave us a bed each and wanted us to stay with him in the mountains until the war was ended. This we declined however.

"17 September

"A guide got us out of bed at 3 in the morning and we proceeded up the valley arriving at the foot of another mountain at about 6.30 when the guide left us. Here we ran into some locals who on seeing us burst into tears for no apparent reason, they then dug up some potatoes from a field and gave them to us. Sandy Mair, Jones and Eggleston also caught up with us again after being guided by those we had passed. We proceeded in our usual manner except Dad and I brought up in the rear as Dad wasn't feeling the best.

This next part of the trip proved to be the worst of the journey. It was terribly steep and dangerous and we proceeded a few yards at a time. At this rate we arrived at Madrona (a peak) at about noon thinking the worst was over. After a cup of tea which an old woman gave us - she was employed carrying barbed wire on her back down the mountainside in 100lb packs, a load that we couldn't even lift - we kept on going with the conditions becoming even worse, we had great difficulty in breathing and suffered from mountain sickness and were generally pretty done in. Dad and I were the last to reach the top and found ourselves in the middle of a glacier, this was a bit of a shock as we didn't know which way to turn but luck was still with us and we saw in the distance a man who appeared to be digging in the middle of this glacier. Lt Eggleston also had had previous experience with glaciers pre-war.

"We made our way slowly towards this character on the glacier and this ice was very slippery and treacherous and we skidded and slid all over the place. When we arrived at the spot the man was working on we found that he was digging up old shell cases from World War 1 and taking the driving band off them for salvage for the war effort, but not for the Allies - we were on an old Austrian-Italian battlefield. The Italian agreed to help us over the glacier and we went ahead in some places on hands and knees the next turn for we had no means of rescuing seemed to take ages as we skirted a few crevices and one slip really meant death for we had no means of rescue, one or two had close shaves, but luckily we all made it. I said every prayer I knew in that crossing about fifty times over. It was all downhill now and still very dangerous although we were again on solid earth for the track was steep and narrow and we were all very tired. However providence was with us again for we met another Italian who took us down and directed us to a house for the night. There were German patrols about and we had to go warily. A lad took us to a shed where we slept in the hay.

"18 September.

"At daybreak we skirted Ponte de Legno - an operational centre for German patrols - by making our way through thickly wooded and rough mountain country. We arrived at a first class road on the other side of the previous named town and owing to our condition and experiences of the previous day and general weariness we decided to travel by road for the first time since I escaped. We broke up into groups as was the custom and Dad and I dropped behind. The road became very steep and it started to rain. We met three English officers who had also been on our train on this road and began to marvel at the smallness of this world for this was the fourth time we had met escaped POW and the Italians had told us we were the only ones in the district. The others all went ahead and Dad and I reached the summit about six hours later. It was now pouring with rain and as there was absolutely no shelter here we continued on our way down the





road. Later in the afternoon Dad and I came across a very respectable looking building named the "Bruno Mussolini Refuge for Alpinists" and as we now considered ourselves fair alpinists we decided to use it.

"After breaking in, it proved to be a very nice place, clubroom and kitchen downstairs - cupboards were bare - and bedrooms upstairs. My father had a rest while I kept a lookout for any unwelcome guests. We continued on our way much refreshed but still in the rain and arrived at St. Caterina at dusk. We could tell by the scared appearance of the villagers that the others were close handy and a lad guided us to the Inn. The owner was an Alpini Major and was very frightened as he had just received a notice from the Germans telling him and Italians in general that amongst other things they would be shot for harbouring escaped POWs. However after a meal and then we would have to go. After the meal however, we were finally allowed to sleep until 3 o'clock in the morning.

"We continued on our way in the moonlight and headed towards Bormio which we had been told was a German HQ as the town was on the main road between Geramo and the Brenner Pass, so we would have to get around it in the half light if possible and as this town was on the fork of two rivers we would have to be careful in choosing the track to enable to cross the river. My father and I went off on our own as the group could not agree on the direction to travel. We passed the main road and railway line and then over the bridge towards the valley. We ran into a church congregation at this point as it was Sunday morning, so we took a side track into the hills and so continued on our way from a height but with the main road in view. At about 8 o'clock we saw the others below on the road and so we knew that all had passed Bormio safely. We continued on this track all the morning and as we knew we were approaching the frontier we looked around for a likely character to try and help us. We came across a chap who told us he would guide us to the Swiss border for Five Pound Egyptian which we gave him. He told us that his business was smuggling articles across the border and certainly looked a real cut-throat.

"He lead us to within five miles of the frontier and then disappeared after giving us instructions in how to cross. At three in the afternoon we came in sight of a small brick building and saw flags flying from the top and as our guide had warned that there was a frontier post on the border. We decided to hide in the rocks until after dark. At about five o'clock we could hear movement in the rocks near us and so we decided to skirt the building and try and cross into Switzerland. We wended our way through various gullies when suddenly two soldiers jumped up in front of us and covered us with rifles. They were in greenish-grey uniforms and a scuttlebox type of steel helmet which we mistook in the dusk for German.

"They were Swiss however, and told us they had been watching us all afternoon. After producing our

paybook and proving we were British soldiers they escorted us to their guard post and safety.

"The distance we travelled was about 120 kilometres as the crow flies over the Dolomite mountains and it took us seven days. My father and I crossed at Bernina Pass but the others of our party crossed further up the valley the following day. Lt Hubble and Lt Douty the two officers we saw on our first day out of the train finished on one of the glaciers so we have been told. We could never have made good our escape without the Italian people with whom we came into contact who did their best to help at every opportunity with guides etc. and who fed us from their meagre supplies while they themselves went hungry with the certainty of death from the Germans if they were discovered aiding us."

**Keith Sharp**

Switzerland Sept 1943'

**The author:** Des Lambley is a PhD student at the University of New England.

His topic: 'An Analysis of Military Criminality by Australian Officers in the First World War'.



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# A TOUGH RUN FOR A SPECIAL FORCES MEMBER

*In accordance with Australian military Protected Identity protocols the name of a Special Forces serving member may not be used. She is referred to as Signaller C, Sig C, throughout the article.*

A member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Command Regiment recently participated in an extreme endurance race that would blow your mind. After months of exhausting training Signaller C competed in the Tor 330 - Tor De Geants - an extreme endurance foot race over the Italian Alps. The race title translates as 'Tour of Giants' in the local dialect where the event is run.



*They're off. The start of the 350 km Tor De Geants – 'Tour of Giants' - in the shadow of the Italian Alps with a field of 1000 starters.*

The ultra-distance race is an annual event in the North West of Italy, held in September and circumnavigating the Alpine peaks surrounding the Aosta Valley. The course follows along the high paths of the Valley, through the Gran Paradiso National Park and the Mont Avic Regional Park.

Acceptance to compete in the race is by pre-selection, then a ballot, to limit the field to 1000 runners. Sig C was surprised to be accepted at her first attempt, although she had run a "short" ultramarathon (250 km) in the Atlas Mountains in Morocco a couple of years earlier.

The course is approximately 350 kilometres in length and has a total climb and descent from start to finish of 24,000 metres.

The race starts and finishes in the picturesque Italian village of Courmayeur with an elevation of 1225 above sea level, with the 1000 runners lining up to a staggered start line. 10.00 am was the start time for runners with an international reputation in these events with a 12.00 noon start for the other half of the field, which included Sig C.

The format of the race is an accrued time system. There are time check points at various intervals and major support check stations spaced at around 50 km intervals. Runners have to complete the extreme trail

course under the cut-off time of 150 hours. Total time from the start to the finish is the runner's accrued time, including rest, food and sleep breaks. Her father Steve, a former 2 Commando Company soldier, was her support team, with vehicle access to the support stations.

The gruelling course started in Courmayeur and immediately went straight into a 3000 m climb over a distance of about 9 km, with a similar descent. With the temperature at 23 degrees Celsius the runners knew the job was ahead of them.

This set the pattern for the rest of the race - 17 peaks were summited at an average height of 2900 m above sea level.



*On a high! Sig C reaches the 3300 metre summit of Mount Loson along the way to the finish line.*

With a total 24000 m climbed and descended over these peaks it certainly was an incredible race, through passes and narrow trails, sometimes as narrow as one third of a metre wide. With an extreme exposure on one side, it is not for the faint hearted.

As the terrain and the weather is extreme some of the compulsory equipment that must be carried by all athletes included a mobile phone, back up batteries for the head torch and crampons for icy conditions - 30 cm of snow fell on a pass on the last night of the race.



*Winners are grinners. Sig C and her support team, her father Steve, proudly display the Australian flag after the race. Sig C was the first Australian to finish.*



Sig C completed the gruelling 350 km course in 109 hrs 51 mins – just over four-and-a-half days. Of the 1000 runners who started the race, 596 finished, with Sig C finishing in 103<sup>rd</sup> place overall. She was the ninth fastest female to finish, and was third in her category. Of the nine Aussies who started, five finished, with Sig C being the first Aussie across the line.

Congratulations Sig C on an outstanding achievement, in a tough race that was studded with top ranked international trail runners.

Sig C enlisted in 301 Signals Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Regiment, in 2000. She soon completed her SF Signaller courses and the Basic Parachute Course.

In 2005 Sig C was recognised with the RA SIGS Anzac award as the best signaller in Victoria. Earlier that year she received glowing recognition from the Commander Joint Logistics Command for her efforts in the Melbourne Command Centre during the ADF's Operation Sumatra Assist that provided humanitarian aid to the island following the Indian Ocean tsunami.

After her deployment to Afghanistan in 2011-12, she then successfully completed the SF Advanced Infantry Training Course and the SF Entry Testing at 2 Commando Regiment.



Celebrating her RA Signals Anzac award. Sig C with her father Steve and Michael Kerry at the 2005 Commando Association Victoria annual dinner.  
Photos supplied.

Following SF helicopter insertion/extraction training Sig C has deployed to Brunei and Papua New Guinea as an SF signaller in the field.

Her father Steve served with distinction in 2 Commando Company from 1967 to 1971.

oOo

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# Remembrance Day ~ 11 November 2022

AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN  
AND IN THE MORNING...

We will remember Them.



Helen Kirton, Bomana War Cemetery, Port Moresby. 2009.

## LEST WE FORGET

## REMEMBRANCE DAY 2022

### Courage, Sacrifice, Endurance and the True Cost of 'Service to Nation'

#### Remembering the Wheeler family from Narrabri NSW

Article by: John Thurgar and Ian McPhedran

Growing up in the Hunter Valley in the 1950's on a farm, I still can clearly remember the conversations the shearers, roustabouts, classers and babbling brooks would engage in when not on the boards during smoko in the sheds about WW1. I was a kid working as a lounge-about and I was privileged to hear the candid comments by the WW1 veterans explaining what it was really like to be: 'at Gallipoli, Fromelles, Passchendaele, and on the Somme. The WW2 veterans would counter with tales of hardship on 'the Track' or on the Northern Beaches of TPNG. I think above anything else, it was through listening to these 'hard men' that inspired me to join up myself.

During my lifetime I visited all the key places and battlefields that these men mentioned, from the Salisbury Plains, to Belgium, France, Greece, Crete, Palestine, Egypt, Singapore, Borneo, PNG, and Darwin.

I had my own stint of operational service – which pails if one compares it what these men had been through.

In my twilight years I have time to reflect. One such reflection is upon the four pillars at the WW2 War Memorial placed at Isuarava on the Kokoda Track. Each pillar has one word engraved into it. These words collectively encapsulate the battle for the Kokoda Track. The four words are - 'Courage, Sacrifice, Mateship and Endurance'.

Whilst these words, taken literally, are ascribed to service personnel, I believe that, in reality they also rightfully belong to the families of service personnel. For the families, are the ones who bear witness to, and suffer the consequences most, of their family members service to nation for the rest of their lives.

On Remembrance Day 2022, I ask you to pause and remember a most remarkable Australian family and in particular one woman, Helen Kirton, who passed away last month aged 103 years and 10 months. Helen's story and that of her family's belief in country, demonstrate a lifetime of courage, sacrifice, endurance and the true cost of 'service to Nation'.

Helen's father, Harold Charles Fearon Wheeler, was born in May 1883. Harold had been admitted as a

*(Continued on page 49)*



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solicitor in 1905 having gained second class Honours in English from the University of Sydney in 1902. He joined in partnership with a friend to form the firm of Ryan and Wheeler, solicitors, Kiama, NSW.

Harold Wheeler married Thelma Edith Garrard, youngest daughter of Mrs. Garrard, at Mossman in Sydney on 27 May 1913. In 1916 the family moved to Narrabri, about 500km NNW of Sydney, where Harold practiced as a solicitor after purchasing the practice of Dale and Wilson Solicitors in that town.

Mrs. Helen Kirton (nee Wheeler) was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1917 in Narrabri NSW, the fourth of five-Wheeler children. Right up to her passing, she had a remarkably clear memory of her early family life and especially of her beloved brothers, Bill and Jim. Bill was the eldest and Jim the younger brother.

Bill (Lieut. William Garrard Wheeler DSC MID RAN) had joined the Royal Australian Navy as a cadet Midshipman at the age of 13 on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1929. He completed training at the RANC in 1936 and was appointed Acting Sub Lieutenant and loaned to the RN for sea training. He returned to Australia for a short period before returning on loan to the RN prior to the outbreak of WW2 as a Lieutenant. He was a specialist Torpedo Officer on British warships.

Lieut. Wheeler served in HMS *Afridi*. *Afridi* was briefly involved enforcing the arms blockade on the combatants in the Spanish Civil War. The ship returned home shortly after the start of the Second World War and was assigned convoy escort duties. She played an active role in the Norwegian Campaign of April-May 1940, escorting convoys to and from Norway. *Afridi* took part in the operations at Namsos. (Namsos is a town and the administrative centre of Namsos municipality in Trøndelag county, Norway. It is located on the north side of the mouth of the river Namsen, where it flows into Namsenfjorden). *Afridi* was sunk by German dive bombers on 3 May as she was escorting the evacuation convoy after the failure of the Namsos Campaign.

Lieut. Wheeler took a prominent part in rescuing the wounded from the burning ship, and was eventually picked up by another destroyer, and taken to Scarpa Flow, whence he made his way to London. For his services at Namsos, Lieut. Wheeler was Mentioned in Dispatches – *for courage and devotion to duty*.

Bill then joined the British warship HMS *Cossack* in the Mediterranean Sea and later deployed to the Atlantic in search of the mighty German Battleship *Bismarck*. *Cossack*, ran down the *Bismarck* in Narvik fiord, was one of the first of a British flotilla which made contact with the German battleship. Bill, as Torpedo Officer, was responsible for laying and firing a torpedo which hit the *Bismarck*'s rudder, thus severely impairing her steerage which allowed the heavy cruisers to sink the *Bismarck*.

On 23 October 1941, *Cossack* was escorting a convoy from Gibraltar to the UK when she was struck

by a single torpedo fired by the German submarine-563. She was taken in tow by a tug from Gibraltar on 25 October, but the weather worsened, and the tow was slipped on 26 October. *Cossack* sank in the Atlantic west of Gibraltar on 27 October 1941. 159 of her crew were lost including Bill. His remains rest with his shipmates and were never recovered. On Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1943, His Excellency the Governor General, Lord Gowrie, held an Investiture Ceremony at Admiralty House, Sydney, in the course of which he presented to Mr. Harold Wheeler, of Narrabri, the Distinguished Service Cross awarded to his late son, Lieut. W. G. Wheeler, DSC, RAN.

An excerpt from Narrabri's *The North Western Courier* on Thursday the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1943 reads:

*His Excellency said, "By command of His Majesty the King, I present you with the Distinguished Service Cross awarded to your son, Lieut. William Garrard Wheeler, of the Royal Australian Navy, for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. I congratulate you upon the honour so well and worthily earned by your son, and I offer you my condolences upon the great loss you have suffered in the death of so gallant and distinguished an officer."*

Helen's younger brother, Jim Wheeler, had joined the 6<sup>th</sup> Division of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Imperial Force in October 1939 and he departed for the Middle East in January 1940 with the 2/1<sup>st</sup> Field Regiment RAA, (2 Battery), arriving in Palestine the following month. Helen clearly recalled seeing her brother off in Sydney on board a troop ship bound for North Africa.

At Helwan, in September 1940, the regiment was re-rolled once again as a field regiment, and re-equipped. The following month, the 6<sup>th</sup> Division began large scale exercises in preparation for its commitment to the Western Desert campaign. In January 1941, the Australians went into action against the Italians for the first time, attacking Bardia. He stayed in touch with his family by letter and she remembered one in which he told them about the taking of Italian prisoners.

The regiment remained in the Middle East until February 1942 when the 6<sup>th</sup> Division was recalled back to Australia in response to the growing threat posed by Japan's entry into the war.

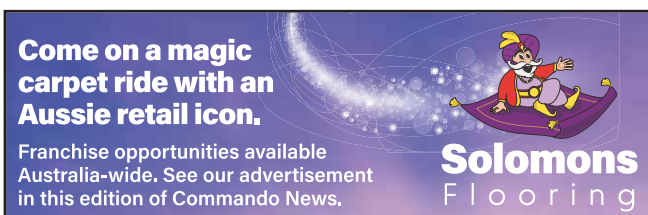
Jim returned from the Middle East with the 6<sup>th</sup> Division in August 1942, and he was granted two weeks leave before being deployed to New Guinea and the desperate Kokoda campaign. He took his leave time in Sydney where he was able to spend time with Helen and her baby son Derek, who was his god son.

Their parents came down from Narrabri to see him and Jim also used the down time to catch up with a good friend of Helen's from university called Bet, of whom he was very fond. 'I think they wanted to get married, but I mean he was so young, he was just 20 when he joined up and he was just 23 when he was killed. So, it was very short,' Helen said.

The siblings saw a lot of each other, but she could see that Jim's focus was on Bet. (Cont'd on page 51)



## Franchise Opportunities





'I think he spent all the time he could with her, but I did certainly saw him many times. I can remember going over to Manly and sitting on the beach with him.'

The 2/1 Field Regiment was reconstituted upon returning to Australia. It was soon deployed north to face the Japanese threat in PNG. They were assigned to the defence of Port Moresby. But in November, detached elements were assigned to support the US 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division's attack on Buna, Gona and Sanananda.

Whilst in Port Moresby, the regiment began exploring the option of 'breaking the guns down' so that they could be loaded into Dakota DC 3 aircraft and air transported right to the front. Further, they experimented in consultation with the Engineers how to construct corduroy airstrips, well forward of other support troops in order to bring effective artillery support where it was needed most, that is, to the front line. Such a concept was new and experimental, and it worked. Major Black was to form 'Blackforce' of which Jim and LT Daniels were assigned as a two-man Forward Observation Team.

In November 1942 *Blackforce* was deployed to Sanananda. In one day, the field guns were landed at Doburdura airstrip, and the Forward Observation Team were attached to the US 126<sup>th</sup> Regiment in the attack on Sanananda Mission.

The 126<sup>th</sup> Regiment was a National Guard unit and were untried. They had no battle experience and found the atrocious conditions most difficult and unsettling. The ground surrounding Sanananda was an enormous swamp, with small islands of land just above the water table. It was nigh on impossible to dig-in, to seek shelter from hostile fire. The Japanese had filled empty 44-gallon drums with sand and laid timber beams across the top as reinforcing and then covered the whole show with packed down soil then camouflaged the bunkers. They had a significant advantage to say the least.

Any ground above the water table was considered key terrain. The fork in the road to Sanananda and Gona became known as Huggins Roadblock. It was key terrain.

Jim and LT Daniels moved to join the US force occupying the roadblock on the Sanananda Track consisted of infantry troops of the 126<sup>th</sup> Regiment and their Regimental Anti-tank Company, under command of Captain John Shirley.

The forward Japanese positions had been enveloped on both sides of Huggins Roadblock but not isolated by the Allies. They remained strong on the key terrain at Huggins and just to its North. For the Japanese the situation was dire and for the Allies it was desperate given the terrible conditions in which they found themselves.

The 126<sup>th</sup> Regiment needed to hold Huggins, and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1942 they lost the central position after a Japanese surprise attack. Captain Shirley killed, and the US infantry were rattled. When

the Japanese attack commenced two important events took place on that day. The first was that Captain Meredith 'Hug' Huggins had just moved onto the position with a resupply party and he took command when Captain Shirley was killed by a sniper. The second was that LT Daniels saw the dilemma and steadied the men around him and ordered and led a bayonet charge counterattack. He took Jim's .303 and fixed bayonet. He inspired those around him to 'go forward'. Jim operated the wireless set calling in artillery support. Just as the position was recaptured, Jim saw LT Daniels falter, struck by a snipers' bullet and about to be set upon by Japanese infantrymen with bayonets. Jim immediately ran forward to his friends' aid. He died trying to save his mate. Both men died at Huggins Roadblock. Captain Huggins gave high praise to both men and buried their bodies on the side of the track along with his own men.

Jim was reported as Killed in action on December 1, 1942, at Huggins Road Block on New Guinea's north coast during the battle for Sanananda. The battle of Sanananda cost Australian forces some 1400 casualties including 600 killed or missing.

Helen has a vivid memory of the day she heard the terrible news that Jim too was missing in action and presumed killed (1 December 1942). At that time, she was living in Mildura on the Murray River with son Derek, and it took her several days to get home to her parents in Narrabri by bus and by train.

Mr and Mrs. Wheeler never stopped mourning the loss of their only two sons and she is convinced that the stress of their deaths contributed to her father Harold's early passing on the 25 August 1945, more likely from a broken heart than anything else. The fact that neither boy's body had been found also played a part.

Helen's mother Thelma lived until she was 89 and while the family never really spoke about the terrible loss, she does remember her mother in her later years saying that she was glad that her boys had 'done the right thing.'

'She felt it was the right thing to go off to war even if you got killed. I think she was very philosophical, but she was also, I'm sure, utterly devastated because she was terribly fond of us all and a very good mother.'

Jim and Helen were the family's youngest children and the nearest in age and were very close growing up in their small, isolated country community. At age 12 Helen was sent to boarding school at SCEGGS in Moss Vale in southern NSW and afterwards she studied for an Arts Degree at the University of Sydney.

After leaving his boarding school, The Armidale School (TAS), Jim joined the Bank of NSW as a clerk and was posted to the country town of Mungindi on the NSW-Queensland border not far from his hometown of Narrabri.

When war broke out in 1939, he joined the army and Helen continued working with the book publisher the Bookstall Company in Sydney. After a whirlwind wartime romance, she married her first husband,

*(Continued on page 53)*





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Spitfire pilot Peter Birch, who survived the war, and the couple went on to have four children, Derek, Ric, Nicola and Michelle.

During this time Helen and her baby Derek were living in an old mansion close to the harbour at Darling Point while her husband Peter was away at war. He was at home on leave in May 1942 when on the night of the 31<sup>st</sup> three Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour to attack shipping around Garden Island.

'I remember that night cleaning my teeth and saying to Peter, "God, the floor is moving!"' she said. 'He said, "Oh it's Garden Island, they're doing something. There's a fearful racket going on".'

'Of course, the subs had got in and they were shooting at them, but we went to bed just thinking it was a 'wild-night' at Garden Island. We had to read about it in the paper next day to say the subs had got in and of course the [USS] *Chicago* was one they were after, but they missed that, and they got the *Kuttatubul*.'

The heavy cruiser USS *Chicago* was the primary target of the raid, but the Japanese torpedoes missed her and instead sunk the depot vessel HMAS *Kuttatubul* killing 21 sailors.

Helen also remembered Sydney being shelled late on the night of June 8, 1942, when the Japanese submarine the *I-24* fired 10 shells at the city from a distance of some 14km out to sea.

'We must have got an air raid warning I think because Peter, who'd been in the thing in London said, "Well I think it probably is". There was another couple staying there and a woman on her own and he said, "I think probably under the stairs is the safest place," so he herded us all under the stairs and the shells went over us and landed at Bondi somewhere. No one was killed but there was a certain amount of damage and then the all-clear went and we got out.'

As the years passed Helen became convinced that the remains of her beloved little brother would never be found. Apart from one or two leads by historians or researchers over the years, there was barely a clue as to the whereabouts of the remains of Lance Sergeant Jim Wheeler.

It was a very long journey for Lance Sergeant Jim Wheeler to his final resting place at the Bomana War Cemetery on the outskirts of Port Moresby on December 1, 2009 – the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death.

It was a local man called Nathaniel Joseph, from the village of Kupro Hembro, who uncovered three sets of human remains whilst clearing the jungle to build a new garden near Huggins Roadblock in 1996. Mr Joseph handed the remains to a visiting RAAF officer who was posted to the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby in 1997. It was these unidentified remains that, due to a bureaucratic mix up, were kept with others deep in the High Commission building for the next decade.

When Army History Unit was notified of the remains being located within the High Commission in 2008,

they conducted an historical document record search and arranged for forensic examination of the remains. Two sets were identified as Americans from the 126<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and returned to the United States while the third set was found to be Australian but was unable to be initially identified.

Then one day in 2009 Helen received a phone call she will never forget from Army History Unit Senior Investigator John Thurgar who told her that he was positive that they had found Jim's remains.

'He said, "I'll be in touch but don't say anything yet". So, I immediately rang Derek and rang Michelle in Perth and I said, "Don't say any more".'

'Of course, I was absolutely amazed. Then, they came down to see us with John and the Padre who was a nice chap, they came down one day to see us and tell us how they had identified Jim and that they were going to arrange a ceremonial military funeral in Bomana War Cemetery and they asked if we would like to go up for the service.'

Helen Kirton was 92 years old when she travelled to Papua New Guinea in November 2009 to finally witness her brother being laid to rest and to place a flower on his grave.

The Bomana War Cemetery is a beautifully manicured, lush green military burial ground planted with large tropical trees and framed by the foothills of the Owen Stanley Mountain Range and the Kokoda track beyond. The Commonwealth War Cemetery is the final resting place for 3821 Commonwealth soldiers including 3108 known and 239 unknown Australians killed during the New Guinea campaign.

Despite the oppressive heat and humidity, Mrs. Kirton gave an eloquent eulogy on the day of Jim's burial speaking with a deep love about her brother and their early years together. She also gave thanks on behalf of her family to everyone involved in the recovery and identification of her brother including the relatives of Nathaniel Joseph and the Army History Unit investigators who finally solved the mystery of the remains in the High Commission vault.

'Jim would have been 90 at the end of August but I can't imagine him as an old man, white-haired and wrinkly like me, so for me he will be forever young,' she said.

Mrs. Kirton recalled the carefree days of her childhood with him in Narrabri where they could ride their pushbikes anywhere, they wanted and swim in the river.

'There were no swimming pools then and we weren't allowed to dive because of hidden rocks or logs. We always had lots of pets, dogs, cats, a fox cub and even a wallaby that disgraced himself when he hopped into church to say hello to the minister and hopped out again. Jim's main interest was always sport and he excelled at them all although I don't recall his academic record.'

Every year the family travelled to Sydney by car for a summer holiday on Manly beach and the children spent their time swimming and surfing and buying fish

(Continued on page 55)





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and chips for sixpence. 'Jim was a good surfer, but he had to look after me because brothers looked after their sisters. I hope they still do' she said.

Before departing for New Guinea Jim Wheeler had told his sister that even though he had served in the iconic battles at Bardia, Tobruk and Benghazi, soldiering was mostly about boredom.

'He wrote to us about a great celebration when news came through that Derek had been born,' she recalled.

In New Guinea the troops spent a lot of time digging holes and placing camouflage netting across them. That was a coincidence because his mother had spent most of the war stitching together camouflage nets for the troops. Jim told her 'That they worked very well.'

Mrs. Kirton finished her eulogy with a quote from Governor General Field Marshal Sir William Slim. In 1953 at Bomana, he had paid a great tribute to the Australian troops in New Guinea whose victory, he said, gave great heart to the British fighting in Burma.

*"Eight years ago, in the hills of Kohima where so many of their comrades lay on the field they had won, the second British Division set up a great stone," he said. 'On it they carved this inscription [from British poet John Maxwell Edmonds] which I give you as a thought to carry away this day, "When you go home tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow we gave our today".'*

Helen passed away peacefully on the 14 October 2021, at Bunyip VIC.

On Remembrance Day 2022, I again ask you to pause and remember this most remarkable Australian family whose belief in country, demonstrate a lifetime of courage, sacrifice, endurance and the true cost of 'service to Nation'.

May the Wheeler family all now rest in Peace. You are not forgotten.



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# VALE ~ S112371, SX30756 ARTHUR WILLIAM TREVENA

## 2/10<sup>th</sup> Commando Squadron

27<sup>th</sup> January 1925 - 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021

In November 1944 official war artist Ivor Hele spent a week with the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Commando Squadron at Aitape and he considered it one of his most productive trips. The scenes he shared on patrol, in his words, "were brutal", and later, when working on the sequence of paintings he described them as "too grim for exhibition".

The Aitape-Wewak campaign was one of the final campaigns of the Pacific Theatre of World War II, between November 1944 and the end of the war in August 1945.

Arthur William Trevena, known as Bill, was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1925 at Kings Park, Adelaide. Bill's father died when he was young so his mother moved with Bill to Adelaide, where, after he left school he was employed as a tank maker. He moved to Clarkson's Glass to become a glazier before enlisting for WW2 and as many did he put his age up to enlist. Bill served from 16<sup>th</sup> February 1943 to 29<sup>th</sup> July 1946.

Known also to his fellow Commandos as Bill, he began his military service on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1942 enlisting at the Recruit Reception Depot at Bradbury, South Australia and first served in Aitape PNG.

Bill then went on to postings at 3 Training Battalion 19<sup>th</sup> February 1943; 3 Australian Infantry Training Battalion 30<sup>th</sup> April 1943; 32 Australian Infantry Training Battalion 20<sup>th</sup> September 1943; 2 Australian Infantry Special Group 9<sup>th</sup> October 1943; 32 Australian Infantry Training Battalion 19<sup>th</sup> November 1943; 1 Australian Training Centre (Jungle Warfare) 10<sup>th</sup> January 1944; 1 Australian Cavalry (Commando) Training Squadron 17<sup>th</sup> January 1944; 2/6 Australian Cavalry (Commando) Regiment 1<sup>st</sup> March 1944; 2/10 Australian Commando Squadron 27<sup>th</sup> December 1944; 4 Australian Infantry Battalion 1<sup>st</sup> November 1945; New Guinea Details Depot Rabaul 4<sup>th</sup> January 1946; 37/52 Australian Infantry Battalion 16<sup>th</sup> January 1946; 4 Military District Recruit Receptions and then the General Details Depot 20<sup>th</sup> May 1946.

Bill's Operational Service/Deployment was to New Guinea 14<sup>th</sup> October 1944 to 16<sup>th</sup> May 1946 and his Attachments were to Headquarters, 4 Infantry Brigade 12<sup>th</sup> March 1946 to 25<sup>th</sup> April 1946. He was discharged with the rank of Lance Corporal.

For his service Bill was awarded the 1939-45 Star, Pacific Star, War Medal 1939-45, Australia Service Medal 1939-45, Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp PNG and the Returned from Active Service Badge.

With the war over Bill returned to his former job with

Clarksons Glass in Adelaide. He boarded with the Skipworth family at Challa Gardens, and this is where he met Rhonda Skipworth. Love blossomed and they married on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1948.

With a war service loan Bill and Rhonda purchased a house and land package in Woodville Gardens where Bill took some time off from Hartley Glass to help his in-laws with a grocery round business, delivering all types of household items to the residents of surrounding areas. This continued until the advent of supermarkets and malls killed off the need for home deliveries, so he returned to glazing at Hartley Glass until his retirement.

Bill and Rhonda had a son, Darryl, who attended the Northern Woodville Youth Club and over the years Bill became heavily involved with the club and helped restructure the club into the Northern Woodville Youth Association, where he became the backbone of the club, teaching gymnastics, organising netball, playing volleyball, setting up equipment, doing hire bookings for the hall – and cleaning up after everyone. He was respected and adored by all who knew him as Mr T.

Through the club he became a representative to South Australia Youth Clubs for many years, earning him both life memberships and awards.

Bill was a keen golfer and a member of the Westwood Ho golf club.

Bill and Rhonda loved caravanning and travelled Australia extensively over many years.

After his beloved wife Rhonda passed away in June 2005, Bill continued to live in Woodville gardens until 2008 when he moved to Streaky Bay to be near his son and granddaughter. Bill still gave his time, even into his eighties, to help children in gymnastics after school in the local gym.

Bill took up indoor bowling which gave him a lot of pleasure in his later life.

He was an active member of the Streaky Bay RSL holding the position of president and vice president in his later years.

Bill was a kind, generous man and highly regarded and respected by all who met him, a true gentleman to the end.

In a private ceremony at Tractor Beach Bill's ashes were spread to be reunited with his wife Rhonda's ashes on the 16<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of her passing.

The ACA extended their condolences to the Daryl and the Trevena family.

oOo



Arthur Trevena, known as Bill, proudly wore his beret with the Rising Sun badge.



Bill in later years at the Streaky Bay RSL. Photos supplied.





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