

SHARP AS KNIVES

I'm sure every soldier who has ever served believes their unit, at the time they served, was the best in the Australian Defence Force.

Anybody who has read any of my yarns from earlier editions will know I've always been happy to take the piss out of myself whenever I had the misfortune of treading on my dick or to tell it how it was when things didn't go to plan.

But, among the faux pas more suited to *M.A.S.H.* or *The Odd Angry Shot*, there were also moments of pure gold.

In 1992 Charlie Coy 1RAR did a tour of duty at RAAF Base Butterworth in Malaysia and was tasked with representing the Army during the 50th anniversary of the fall of Singapore commemorations.

The trip was my first overseas with the military.

With highlights such as meeting Sir Weary Dunlop, cutting down trees with Mag 58s during live-fire contact drills in the jungle (you gotta miss the days before OH&S) and killing more than a few brain cells with cheap Thai whiskey, the trip was absolutely awesome.

One of the less significant events was finding a particular military shop in Singapore that was free of gimmicks and full of many interesting practical items not available in Australia.

After a bit of browsing around the shop I ended up in front of the knife cabinet and finally convinced myself I needed a good field knife.

With a bit of guidance from our resident knife guru, Polly, I hesitantly handed over what amounted to almost a week's wages and walked out the door with an AI Mar Sere SOF IV combat knife.

The knife itself is very unassuming, not overly big and with none of the added bullshit some knife designers throw on to catch the eye of wankers. It is a quality tool that was always in arms reach while in Somalia and would remain a part of my belt kit for the rest of my military and contracting careers.

At this point, if you think I'm leading into tales of creeping up and dispatching Somali gunmen in the dead of night with my trusty combat knife, then I'm happy to disappoint.

Stories of that nature are extremely rare in military history and really only exist in the realm of fantasy or Hollywood action movies.

Although doubling as a weapon of last resort, my knife spent its operational life cutting hootchie cord, removing flexi cuffs and opening ration boxes. Not very glamorous, but true.

The point is that although my particular AI Mar knife led a humble life, I've always believed it has epitomised the 1st Battalion of the late '80s and early '90s and, what's more, perfectly reflects the qualities of the 1RAR Battle Group of Operation Solace in Somalia – not particularly pretty or glamorous, not over-sized and cumbersome, a weapon, yes, but more rightly a versatile, quality tool, free of gimmicks or spit and polish – oh, and of course, sharp. Very sharp.

It's nice to believe your unit was the best at a given time – but I must say, it's far better to know it as fact

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