



ADF members walk through an IED-identification lane at Al Minhad Air Base during RSO&I. Pic Petty Officer Ollie Garside

AFGHANISTAN

IT'S NOT OVER YET

WORDS ADF AND BRIAN HARTIGAN

Insider attack

For those who need reminding that our troops still face danger on a daily basis came the news on 26 October of yet another insider attack – where our troops became a target for the Afghan troops they are assigned to train.

On this latest occasion (the fifth such incident involving Australians) an Afghan National Security Force member opened fire on Australian and New Zealand Defence Force personnel following a meeting in the Qargha region of northern Afghanistan.

According to ADF press releases put out the next day, one Aussie soldier “sustained minor fragmentation wounds” in the attack with one Kiwi “wounded”.

While the wounds themselves were actually minor – evidenced by the fact that the Aussie returned to work the next day – the ADF press releases failed to mention the significant fact that one Aussie had actually been shot in the chest, saved only by his body armour.

According to New Zealand’s Chief of Defence Lieutenant General Rhys Jones it was that bullet to the chest breaking up on impact with the body armour that created the shrapnel.

“It was the Afghani that fired first. Fired three rounds. One standing, then dropped to his knees and fired two more rounds,” Lieutenant General Jones said during a ‘media doorstep’.

“Only one bullet that we’re aware of, hit. “Initial assessment is that it’s some of the shrapnel as the bullet hit the chest of the Australian, and with the body armour, the bullet disintegrated.”

“Some of the shrapnel went into the arm of the Australian soldier that was hit, another part went into the foot [of the New Zealand soldier].”

Lieutenant General Jones went on to explain that after firing the three rounds, the Afghani soldier stood up again and began to advance, and looked as though he was intent on continuing to shoot.

“So it was the correct drill then from the third person – the second Australian – to shoot back at him.”

There was some confusion initially as to the Afghan soldier’s fate, with New Zealand authorities initially reporting he had been killed.

However, a subsequent release from the ADF clarified that the attacker had been badly wounded at the scene, evacuated to hospital for treatment, and later died of his wounds.

Many Australians had already lost interest in Afghanistan, or more likely had already assumed it was all over long before Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced the official end in late October.

Australia’s acting Chief of Defence Force Air Marshal Mark Binskin praised the prompt response of the Australian force-protection personnel at the meeting.

“From initial reporting, it would appear that our soldiers reacted promptly and professionally, potentially saving other ISAF or Afghan personnel from sustaining wounds – or worse,” Air Marshal Binskin said.

“It is impossible to completely remove the threat of insider attacks, but the actions of the ADF force-protection soldiers demonstrate that our training and force-protection techniques are appropriate and prepared to respond, when incidents such as this occur.

“Australian and New Zealand soldiers are highly professional and it is good news that no serious injuries were sustained in this attack.”

RSO&I in the MEAO

When Australian Defence Force members first enter the Middle East Area of Operations, they go through a short refresher course called Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration – or, because it’s the military where everything is abbreviated or acronym’d, simply called “R, S, O and I” and spelt RSO&I – to ensure they are fully prepared to start their deployment.

Now, obviously, this refresher course has been conducted throughout the ADF’s involvement in the Middle East, including for troops heading to Iraq as well as Afghanistan, but Defence has been a bit shy in talking about it – until now.

But now, with Iraq finished and our commitment in Afghanistan drawing down and Defence PR running out of ideas on

what to talk about, they give us a little taste and a handful of photos on this topic, which I found both fascinating and a little confronting when I experienced it first hand.

That’s right – as a reporter for CONTACT visiting our troops in the MEAO, I have experienced RSO&I three times.

And, one thing I can tell you for sure is that the last time I went through, it was a vastly different experience to the first two, which were several years earlier.

My last experience of RSO&I was much more confronting and ‘real’, with simulated-but-serious IED-awareness training and even more realistic first aid training added on.

And, the first-aid training in particular, was delivered by some seriously serious ex-military dudes who were both professional and passionate in the extreme. Big ‘hats off’ to those guys.

Anyway, the three-day RSO&I course is held at Al Minhad Air Base (AMAB) in

IT WAS THE AFGHANI THAT FIRED FIRST. FIRED THREE ROUNDS. ONE STANDING, THEN DROPPED TO HIS KNEES AND FIRED TWO MORE ROUNDS,” LIEUTENANT GENERAL RHYSS JONES SAID DURING A ‘MEDIA DOORSTOP’.



ADF members practice ‘Care of the Battle Casualty’ training during RSO&I. Pic Petty Officer Ollie Garside