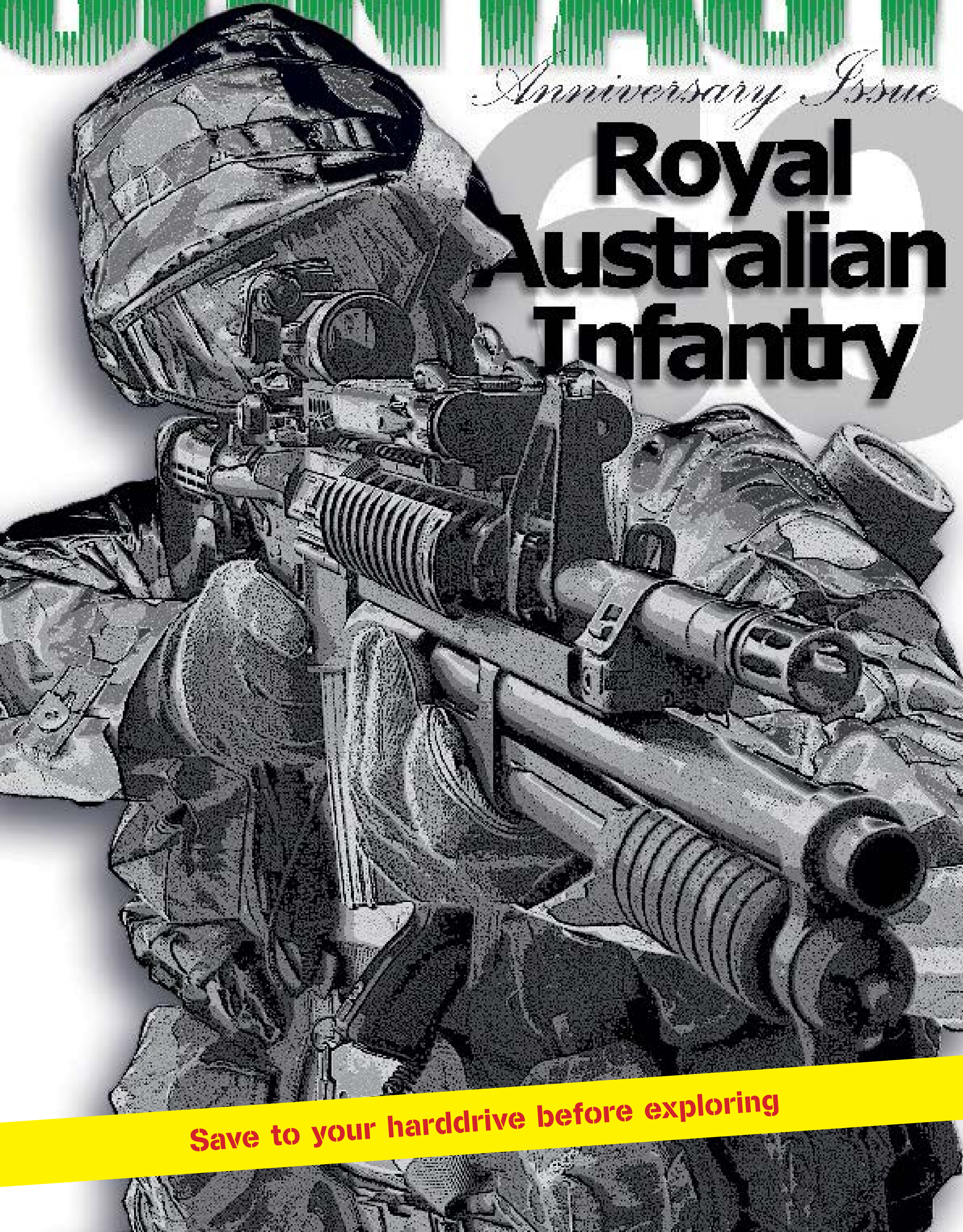
CONTACT

Anniversary Issue

60

Royal Australian Infantry



Save to your harddrive before exploring

Prayer of the Royal Australian Regiment

O God, we, who have served in the Royal Australian Regiment, consecrate ourselves to you by giving ourselves, body and spirit to your service and to the service of our fellow man.

Cleanse from us everything that could mar this service.

Grant that we may live our lives that all times we put our Duty First.

Help us to think wisely, to speak rightly, to resolve bravely, to act kindly and to live purely.

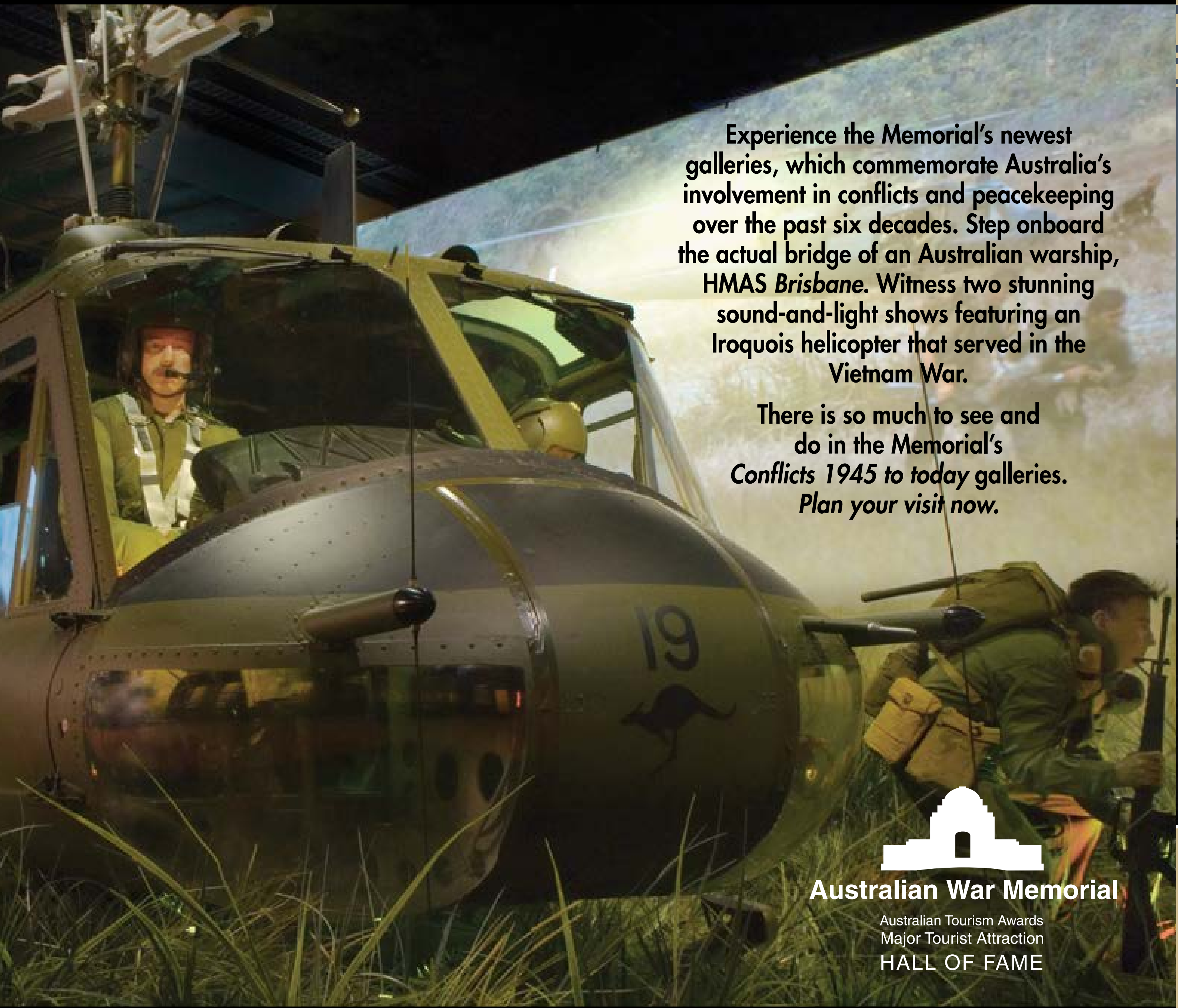
Give us the courage to defend the cause of justice, freedom, truth and the right to liberty.

This we ask through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

CONFLICTS 1945 to TODAY

Vietnam Confrontation Korea Malaya Peacekeeping Afghanistan Iraq



Experience the Memorial's newest galleries, which commemorate Australia's involvement in conflicts and peacekeeping over the past six decades. Step onboard the actual bridge of an Australian warship, HMAS *Brisbane*. Witness two stunning sound-and-light shows featuring an Iroquois helicopter that served in the Vietnam War.

There is so much to see and do in the Memorial's *Conflicts 1945 to today* galleries. *Plan your visit now.*

Australian War Memorial
Australian Tourism Awards
Major Tourist Attraction
HALL OF FAME

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL CANBERRA

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EXPERIENCE
THE ANZAC LEGEND

Shell Green cemetery (John Lafferty, 2007)

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HALL OF FAME

A Foreword by

His Excellency
Major General Michael Jeffery
AC CVO MC (RETD)

Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

for the Royal Australian Infantry 60th Anniversary issue of CONTACT

The Australian infantryman has played a magnificent role in the defence of our country and its interests since the arrival of the first European settlers. He has gained recognition as one of the best combat soldiers in the world. He has proven himself on the battlefields of Europe, North Africa and the Pacific during the World Wars and subsequently in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam. More recently the Australian infantryman has proven his adaptability on peacekeeping and enforcement operations in Somalia, Rwanda, East Timor and the Solomon Islands. Importantly today we have soldiers proving themselves in complex, three-block style conflict in both Iraq and Afghanistan, involving some heavy fighting against determined foes.

To quote Field Marshal Earl Wavell, 'Let us be clear about three facts. First, all battles and all wars are won in the end by the infantryman. Secondly, the infantryman always bears the brunt. His casualties are heavier; he suffers greater extremes of discomfort and fatigue than the other arms. Thirdly, the art of the infantry is less stereotyped and far harder to acquire in modern war than that of any other arm. The infantryman has to use initiative and intelligence in almost every step he moves, every action he takes on the battlefield'.

As Field Marshal Wavell noted, the life of an infantryman is particularly arduous and demanding, whether it is in barracks, on exercise or on deployment. It takes an incredible variety of skills and qualities of character to make a good infantryman – courage, determination, teamwork, a sense of duty and loyalty.

Although tough in combat, the Australian infantryman has a reputation for humour and compassion. It is that sense of humour that has served us so well in the villages of Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, East Timor and the Solomon Islands, to the towns of Iraq and Afghanistan. Our soldiers enjoy popular support because of their ability to meet with and interact with the locals, for the respect we show to civilian populations, to enemy wounded, POW and their dead.

It is about spirit, that special something that defines a battalion, its ethos, its character. It is something that makes the battalion a family of brothers – bound together by pride, tradition and a special bond of mateship peculiar to our Corps. Or in the words of Jo Gullet:

'An effective battalion, in being ready to fight, implies a state of mind – I am not sure it is not a state of grace. It implies a giving and a taking, a sharing of almost everything – possessions, comfort, affection, trust, confidence, interest. It implies a certain restriction, and at the same time a certain enriching and widening of the human spirit. It implies doing a hundred things together – marching to the band, marching all night long, being hungry, thirsty, exhausted, filthy – being near but never quite mutinous. It involves not the weakening but the deferment of other bonds and interests, the acceptance that life and home are now with the battalion. In the end, it is possible to say "the battalion thinks" or "the battalion feels" and this is not an exaggeration.'

Being a good soldier in a battalion doesn't happen by chance. The Recruit Training Centre at Kapooka, the School of Infantry at Singleton, the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, the Battle School at Tully and the Royal Military College, Duntroon, have all played key roles in our Corps' development. Further, prior to operational deployments, our battalions have been magnificently prepared.

The infantryman of today has to be a very flexible operator. He can be involved in a hostage situation in the morning, a hearts-and-minds activity an hour later and a conventional battle that afternoon. He has to be ready for deployment anywhere in the world at very short notice.

I'm sure that you would agree that the future in our region, and in other areas of the world, remains uncertain and volatile. In meeting those uncertainties, the infantryman of today can reasonably anticipate that the ADF will continue to be involved in providing much the same support to what can be termed its three main security objectives. First; dealing with the continuing threat of global terrorism. Second; responding to law and order – and institutional-breakdown-type crises closer to home, such as in East Timor and the Solomon Islands. And, third; operating at the higher end of the war-fighting spectrum as part of coalition or United Nations forces – for example the two Gulf wars and Afghanistan.

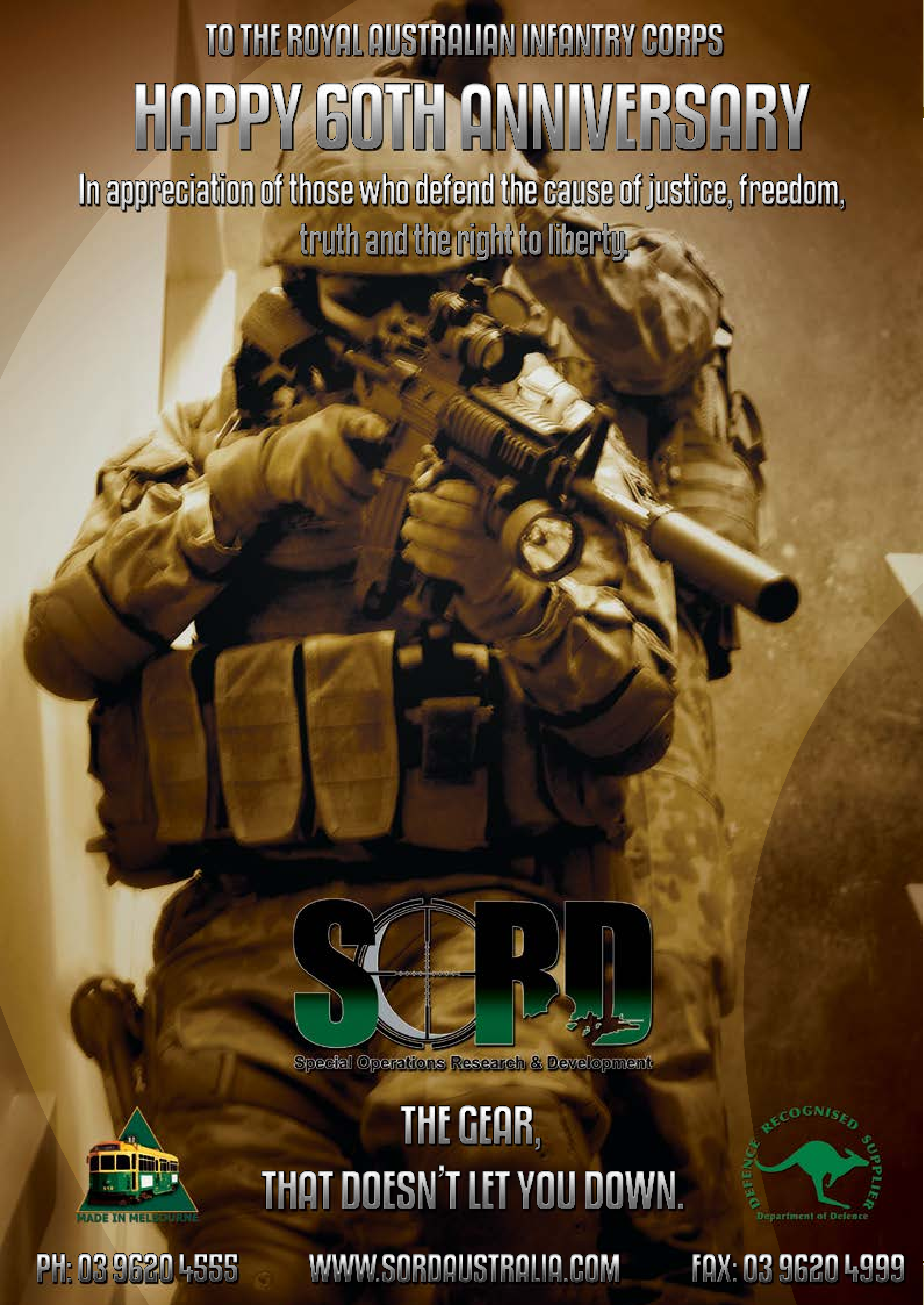
It is currently a very exciting time in the ADF and in particular the infantry. Today's soldiers will be ably supported by the M1 Abrams tank, unmanned aerial vehicles and the Tiger armed reconnaissance helicopter. However, regardless of the huge advances in technology in recent years, it is still the well-trained, disciplined infantryman who will close with the enemy, seize and hold ground and repel attack by day or night, regardless of season, weather or terrain.

As I end my time as Commander-in-Chief, and after 53 years closely associated with the Infantry Corps, I look back with pride, humility and gratitude in having had the privilege of being so closely associated with the finest soldiers in the world. On behalf of the nation, I thank those fine infantrymen who have served Australia proudly and I wish those of you still serving every success and good fortune as you carry on the great traditions of our Corps.

I know that this infantry edition of CONTACT will be enjoyed by former and current-serving Australian infantrymen and I hope it will also give families, friends and other members of the community an insight into this distinguished group of men who have given so much to our nation.

Michael Jeffery

(Michael Jeffery)



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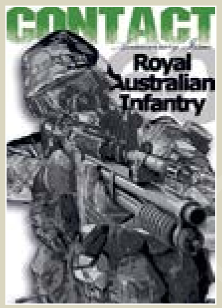
CONTACT
AIR, LAND & SEA



60th Anniversary RA Inf & RAR
Special Issue

Cover photo: Member 4RAR (Cdo) by Private Ben Peardon

Digitally altered by CONTACT

Editor Brian Hartigan
editor@militarycontact.com
ph: 0408 496 664

Art Director Tony Kelly
tkelly57@tpg.com.au

Advertising Manager Viviene Long
advertising@militarycontact.com
phone: 0401 863 425
fax: (02) 6241 0634

Subscriptions and Business Manager Rosie Hartigan
subscriptions@militarycontact.com
phone: (02) 6241 0634

Contributors Jonathon Morison, Shane Van Duren, AJ Shinner, Mark Moloney, Clive Swaysland, Colin Adamson, Adam Rankin, Noel Selway, Al Green, Tony Blake

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It is with great pleasure that I, on behalf of Contact Publishing, present this extra special, one-off, Infantry-only issue of CONTACT, to coincide with the 60th Anniversary of the Royal Australian Infantry Corps and the Royal Australian Regiment.

While I am confident that most of you will enjoy this publication and many of you will treasure it as a unique souvenir of this important milestone, I am also afraid that there will be critics – 'you didn't cover this unit, or that aspect' – and they will be right, of course.

But, I am not an historian, or even an academic. I am an Army-trained editor and a soldier and, as such, I have gathered together what I believe to be an informative, entertaining and ultimately educational collection of stories, titbits and fillers that eloquently and admirably fulfil the goal I set out to achieve. And that, of course, was, as always, to shine a light on the oft-times shy and retiring, self-effacing Aussie soldier – specifically, in this case, the infantryman.

As a soldier (RAEME and AAPRS, not Infantry), I have always had a keen and professional interest in the activities and history of the Australian Army. I always felt I 'knew' what was what, and I 'knew' what an infantryman was.

I was surprised to discover, however, that I really didn't know as much as I thought I did and was very happy to be educated.

Putting this publication together really has been an education and an inspiration. Meeting new people, hearing their stories and being humbled by them has been a pleasure. I take this opportunity to thank them all collectively and publically.

I also acknowledge the input and support of (now former) Governor-General Major General Michael Jeffery, himself a highly experienced infantryman of long years' service, recently retired. We wish him well.

As an interesting aside – during my research, I came across an article in the ARMY Newspaper of 22 March 1962 (a year before I was born) reporting a record set by SAS men. Reporting that they marched some 130 miles (209km) in patrol order in 55.5 hours, the accompanying photo showed one Lieutenant Mike Jeffery leading his men through the night.

I would also like to thank those of you who have purchased this special issue, not only for supporting the Australian infantryman and CONTACT, but also for the $1 from your purchase we will donate on your behalf to Legacy. We are very hopeful of collecting many such dollars to pool together for a substantial cheque to be presented mid next year.

On behalf of Contact Publishing, I wish all Australian infantrymen, past and present, a happy anniversary. And for every present and future Australian infantryman I wish safe soldiering.

Brian Hartigan
Managing Editor

SHORT-LIVED FORCE

Soldiers from 6RAR 'deplane at the rush' from Royal Air Force Wessex helicopters during an air-assault demonstration in Singapore in 1973.

The Aussie battalion was, at that time, part of the 28th ANZUK Brigade based in Singapore.

28 ANZUK Brigade was a relatively short-lived organisation put together from the armed forces of Australian, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (hence the acronym in its name) under a five-power defence agreement with those countries as well as Singapore and Malaysia.

ANZUK comprised naval, air and ground forces and had about 7500 members plus about 4750 locally employed civilian support staff.

It was raised in 1971 primarily as a deterrent to threats on Malaysia and Singapore. However, shortly after the force was fully established, orders for its disbandment were issued. It was finally wound up in 1975.

News extracts from...

ARMY

THE SOLDIERS' NEWSPAPER

5 November 1959

ARMY CONSIDERS NEW AUTOMATIC WEAPONS

Lighter more effective section support weapons for infantrymen are now being considered by the Australian Army.

They include the American M60, the Belgian FN MAG58 (British modified) and the Canadian FN C2, heavy-barrelled automatic rifle.

The three weapons are all of 7.62mm calibre, the standard NATO size.

General purpose machine guns, the M60 and MAG58, are weapons developed to meet the requirement for sustained fire to replace existing light and medium machine guns.

US Army has adopted the M60 to replace its well known .30 calibre Browning machine gun while the MAG58 has been produced by the Fabrique Nationale Co of Belgium for the British Army.

Both guns have a number of similar features – gas-operation,

Below 25lbs

Use of air cooling and light-weight alloys in construction in both weapons enable the weight to be kept below 25lbs.

Both guns are fitted with bi
or may be attached to lightw
tripods.

Either could well replace
.303 Bren light machine
and the heavy, cumbersome
Vickers medium machine gu
in service.

A simple illustration of t
vance in design is seen w
is realised that both the M
MAG58 together are light
the present tripod of the
MMG alone.

The Canadian 7.62mm
barrelled FN is almost iden
construction with the FN ri
which the Australian Army i
equipped.

Main difference is that
rel, a longer m

and a folding bipod which enables it to be used in a light machine gun role.

The two general purpose ma-
extensive tri

12 May 1966

Another city will farewell men for SVN

Queensland-based soldiers of the Australian Force, Viet Nam, will march through Brisbane streets in a farewell parade on Saturday May 21 – before they move overseas.

The Governor of Queensland, Sir Alan Mansfield, will take the salute.

Taking part will be about 700 officers and men of 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment led by the C.O., Lt-Col. Colin Townsend.

Accompanying 6RAR will be a 19-man detachment of the 161st Independent Reconnaissance Flight which will serve as part of the Australian Force.

The Battalion was f
Enoggera,
Regular
up to

ining
entre
ining

17 March 1966

1RAR COMES HOME IN EARLY JUNE OUR MEN IN SVN TO NUMBER 4350

UNITS POSTED TO TASK FORCE

"They are decisions of great responsibility and we have not taken them lightly. Australia cannot stand aside from the struggle to resist the aggressive thrust of Communism in Asia and to ensure conditions in which stability can be achieved. Our own national security demands this course." – The Prime Minister, Mr. Holt.

The decision to replace the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, in Viet Nam with a self-contained Australian Task Force under Australian command, was announced by the Prime Minister, Mr. Holt, in Federal Parliament last week.

Mr. Holt said the decision would enlarge our contribution to a total of some 4500 men- in effect, a trebling of the current strength of our military forces there.

"The Task Force would contain, in addition to its Headquarters two infantry battalions, a Special Air Service squadron and a substantial force of combat and logistic support units.

"The Task Force would need close helicopter support and, for this purpose we are incorporating with it, a flight of eight RAAF Iroquois helicopters.

"Provision of the flight of Caribou aircraft and of the team of 100 Army advisers will be continued.

"The Australian Task Force which we will be sending to Viet Nam in the middle of the year will contain two Army battalions, the 5th and 6th Battalions, The Royal Australian Regiment, each of which will contain a proportion of fully trained and ... Servicemen, as will all future substantial Australian Army units deployed overseas in any theatre.

"That proportion may vary to some extent from unit to unit, but it will be a continuing feature.

"The normal tour of duty in Viet Nam of personnel in the Task Force will be 12 months.

Mr. Holt said: "I pay tribute also Mr. Speaker to the contributions made by Australian forces in the area. Since 1962 we have had military advisers with the South Viet Namese forces. These are highly trained and dedicated men, who at great risk and in some cases casualty to themselves have stood beside their South Viet Namese counterparts in the field.

"Since 1964, a flight of RAAF Caribou aircraft has been used in a great variety of ways for general transport purposes and to bring supplies quickly to meet emergency needs.

"Last year Australia committed the First Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment to Viet Nam which was subsequently expanded to a Battalion Group.

"The Battalion has to great effect and purpose been conducting operations from its base at Bien Hoa, and has earned praise and respect from our South Viet Namese and American allies.

"Vice-President Humphrey made particular reference during his visit here to the high value placed on the Australian contingent both in their role as fighting men and their conduct generally amongst the Viet Namese people."

22 March 1962

SAS MEN SHATTER MARCHING RECORD

Fourteen Special Air Servicemen trudged their way into the Army's record books last week.

They clipped more than six hours from the 61¾-hour record for the 130-mile trek from Bathurst to Ingleburn Infantry Centre, New South Wales.

The previous record – reported in ARMY last May – was held by 504th Air Support Signals Unit.

Last week under Lt. Mike Jeffery of Applecross, Western Australia, 20 members of the 1st Special Air Service Company set a blistering pace out of Bathurst, heading for a record.

Laden with full b
35 lbs. a man, they
vehicles – a water tr
and a first aid vehicle

Their time for the
During their marath
four hours on the road
sleeping and eating.

The pace was too ho
20 marchers, who droppe
and blistered feet.

Nine miles from Inglebu
joined by a platoon of troo
Centre…as a morale booste

The guard was turned
they trudged through the g

12 January 1961

BATTALION PASSES STIFF TEST

More than 700 officers and men from 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, stationed at Enoggera Qld., have just completed a six-day exercise they classify as one of their toughest for some time.

With emphasis on the new pentropic concept the exercise was designed to:

Practise pentropic rifle companies in mobile operations under conditions approximating those in South East Asia

Practise Battalion HQs and the administrative echelon in operational deployment

Test the fitness of the Battalion as a whole

During their six-day exercise the battalion carried out:-

A 120-mile tactical advance by motor transport

12 miles of fighting advance through savannah, secondary jungle, swamp and sandhills

A tactical river crossing across 50 yards of deep water

A 12-mile pursuit march down to the coast to a new concentration area

The exercise, held in the Cooloola Swamp and Noosa River area, was highlighted by "C" Company's tactical crossing of the Noosa River.

DAWN CROSSING

A dawn crossing by Zodiac reconnaissance boats put "C" across the river well before they were sighted by the enemy.

Pioneer Platoon hastily erected a pontoon bridge across which "B" streamed in support of "C" Company.

To accompaniment of "sound effects" the heavily laden soldiers of "B" Company took the bridge crossing at speed.

A day of driving cold rain not only tested the physical stamina of the Battalion but also their spirits as well.

Members of the Battalion who had served in Malaya counted it as one of the worst days they experienced during the exercise.

FLYING COLOURS

Commanding Officer of the 3rd, Col. W. Morrow, said after the six-day exercise "These boys are fit and well"

"They have done everything asked of them-as a test of the pentropical setup and as a test of stamina they came through with flying colours."

COLOUR PARADE

WORDS BRIAN HARTIGAN PIC BILL CUNNEEN

As with most customs and traditions in the Army today, Colours have no real value in themselves – yet they are the battalion's most treasured asset.

As a symbol they are beyond intrinsic value – they are the very embodiment of a battalion's spirit.

As such, a battalion's Colours are sacred. They are in fact consecrated and must be accorded dignity and protection as a sacred treasure.

Like most of our customs and traditions, the origins of the Colours can be traced back through the ages. As early as 5000 years ago, Egyptian armies rallied around a flag. Through medieval times, a commander's colours marked his place on the battlefield and served to keep his regiment together as a cohesive unit.

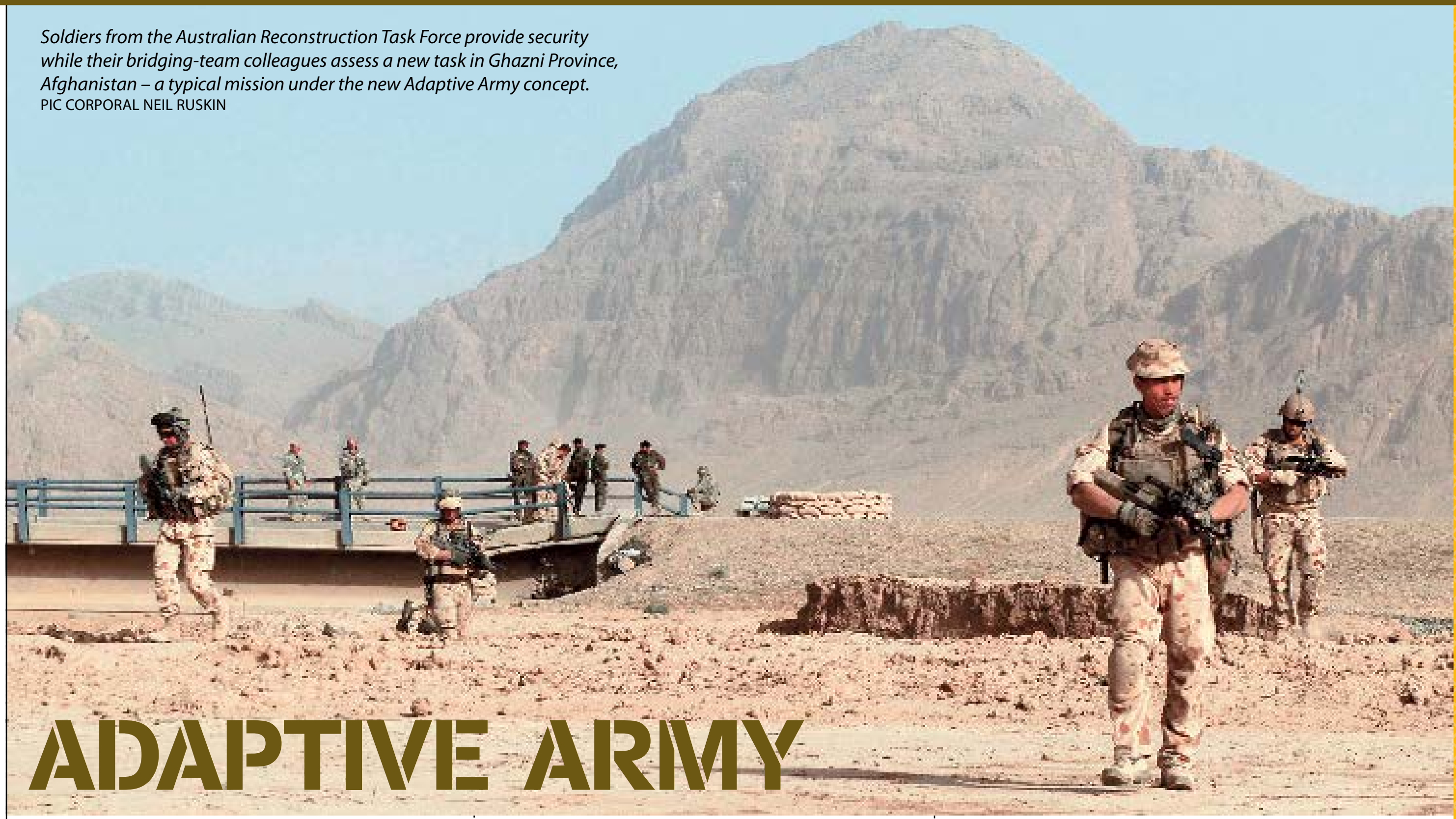
In times when noblemen had their own professional armies to protect their lands, it was in the individual soldier's best interest to know where his Colours and therefore his commander were, for it was there he got paid.

Victory in battle was often measured by the number of guns and Colours captured from the enemy. Therefore protecting one's own Colours became very important. The junior officers assigned to carry the Colours in battle suffered great losses. As one ensign was killed, another stepped up to take his place and carry on. Colour sergeants were assigned to protect the Colours and the ensigns carrying them. The Colours were to be protected to the death.

The practice of actually carrying the Colours in battle ceased about the mid 1800s, and so the Colours themselves became a ceremonial symbol of the battalion's bravery, emblazoned as they were with a record of the battalion's history and honour in battle.

Today, in the Australian Army, only the battalions of infantry regiments and the Corps of Staff Cadets carry Colours. In fact, they carry two – the Queen's (or King's) Colour and the Regimental Colour.

In 1998, the Queen's and Regimental Colours from all nine original Royal Australian Regiment battalions were paraded together for the first and only time at the Australian War Memorial to mark the 50th Anniversary of the regiment.



Soldiers from the Australian Reconstruction Task Force provide security while their bridging-team colleagues assess a new task in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan – a typical mission under the new Adaptive Army concept.
PIC CORPORAL NEIL RUSKIN

ADAPTIVE ARMY

Chief of Army Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie announced in August a restructuring of the Australian Army's higher command and control structures.

He said that rapid improvements in the ability of soldiers, units and headquarters to share information through the use of modern technology had challenged our traditional approaches to command and control.

"Duplication of functions at different headquarters and the multiple layers of headquarters has often slowed the passage of information within Army and affected our capacity to adapt and respond to changes in the security environment," Lieutenant General Gillespie said.

"As operational tempo has increased over the past few years, the development and implementation of more effective and efficient structures and processes has become necessary."

Under the new structure, there will be three commands directly answering to the Chief of Army – Headquarters 1st Division, Forces Command and Special Operations Command.

Starting early in 2009, HQ 1 Div will be responsible for high-level collective training of force elements ready for operations. Forces Command will be primarily responsible for generating force elements and ensuring that they are at a standard of training and equipping ready to be handed over to HQ 1 Div. Special Operations Command will maintain its current mission and functions. Land Headquarters as exists today will be dis-established under the restructure, with many of its functions and personnel absorbed into the new Forces Command.

The implementation of the new Army structures will be phased in over the coming years, with the transition to be complete by early 2011.

General Gillespie said it was his aim to build on the very sound foundation his predecessor, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy had provided, to continue improving the ability of the Army to provide first-class people and units when and where our nation required them.

"We will continue the development of a hardened, networked, adaptive – and above all – ready Army," he said.

COLOURS AND STRIPES

Customs and traditions, pomp and pageantry are very important in the life of any military unit – and right at the top of the list of important things in the life of an infantry battalion are its Colours and its mascot.

For 5RAR, both came together on 5 June when the battalion celebrated its new lease on life by accepting a new stand of Colours on a public parade in Darwin attended by none other than the unit mascot – Private Sabre, the Tiger.

After presenting 5RAR with its new Colours, Northern Territory Administrator Tom Pauling said that like regimental colours, a mascot was also important to the identity of a battalion and a tiger was a perfect mascot for 5RAR.

"It is a symbol of strength and unity, it can hunt individually or as a team and will defend itself and its young with courage and energy," he said.

"As I stand here today I can clearly see the strength and identity 'The Tiger Battalion' proudly displays.

"Your colours and your mascot will continue to reinforce and support your commitment as they have for the past forty years."

■ Having enlisted as a private in 2003, Sabre was promoted to corporal on 10 August – the issue of how to pin extra stripes on a full-grown Bengal Tiger causing some concern for his commanding officer!

In the end, metal stripes and a shiny new name tag were placed on the (outside) bars of the 5RAR mascot's cage.

Sabre is the third tiger enlisted as a mascot in 5RAR.

Soldiers from an Australian Reconstruction Task Force mortar section wait for orders to fire on a Taliban position following a rocket attack on the Australian position. The RTF is now regularly operating outside its main base at Tarin Kowt, pushing in to areas of strategic significance to the Taliban.
PIC CORPORAL NEIL RUSKIN

AUSSIES GET TALIBAN COMMANDERS

A senior provincial Taliban extremist commander was killed in a Special Operations Task Group (SOTG) operation on 12 August.

The target was a known IED facilitator and had recently equipped several suicide bombers who had struck civilian and security facilities in Oruzgan.

Mullah Akhtar Mohammed and his armed protection party were observed by SOTG troops in a remote area of Oruzgan Province. After satisfying themselves that they had the right target, the SOTG patrol called for an airstrike and maintained observation until the job was complete.

Conducted in daylight, making concealment of the patrol difficult, the mission occurred in an extremely remote area of the province.

This action came hot on the heals of a separate patrol that ended in the live capture of another senior Taliban commander.

Mullah Bari Ghul, the Taliban's 'Shadow Governor' for Oruzgan province, was the key facilitator in the provision of equipment, money and foreign fighters to extremist operations.

"Finding one man intent on remaining hidden within a province measuring more than 22,500sq/km is no easy feat," Defence spokesman Brigadier Brian Dawson said.

"Conducting an operation to capture him without loss of life is even more difficult, and the success of this operation speaks volumes for the inherent capability within the SOTG.

NEWS IN BRIEF

LAST MIA FOUND

An Australian investigation team believed on 30 August that it had found the grave of the last Australian soldier unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

Private David Fisher, SASR, was a member of a patrol that had to be 'hot extracted' from an area of southern Vietnam in 1969 but fell 30m from a rope below the helicopter.

He was lost in thick jungle and, despite an extensive search of the area soon after, no trace of him was ever found.

Detailed research work including interviews with locals and Vietnamese veterans earlier this year led to a possible burial site in the Cam My region.

A full archaeological dig eventually unearthed an identification tag inscribed with Private Fisher's details as well as a small quantity of bones.

INDONESIA GOES RUSSIAN

Indonesia is set to buy Russian BMP-3F infantry fighting vehicles, the Russian Ambassador to Jakarta is reported to have announced in August.

The $40 million deal should see the delivery of 20 BMP-3Fs in 2010 to replace PT-76 vehicles currently in service.

BMP-3F is designed for water ops, with improved buoyancy, and with greater fire accuracy. It can endure continuous amphibious operation for up to seven hours.

LONG TAN HEROES HONOURED

The government announced in August that changes recommended by an independent review committee into military awards following the Battle of Long Tan would be recognised.

Key decisions, approved were:

> Harry Smith, Commander D Company 6RAR, to receive the Star of Gallantry.

> Platoon commanders Dave Sabben and Geoff Kendall to receive the Medal for Gallantry.

> The strength of D Company 6RAR in Vietnam on 18 August 1966 to receive approval to wear the former Republic of Vietnam's Gallantry Cross with Palm Unit Citation Emblem.

Defence Parliamentary Secretary Mike Kelly said implementation of the recommendations would properly recognise the individual and collective gallantry of these men, provide an equitable mix of awards for the battle and confer considerable honour on all the men of D Company 6RAR who fought in the Battle of Long Tan.

MODIFIED M14 REQUIRED

Jane's Defence reports that the US Army has requested funds to buy modified 7.62mm M14 rifles to meet urgent operational needs.

Quoting Department of Defense sources, Jane's web site says units in theatre want an infantry weapon that can engage targets at longer ranges than the standard 5.56mm Colt M4 carbine and M16 rifle.

Without additional funding, units in the fight would not receive the long-range engagement capability they urgently need. The infantry rifle squad does not have an integrated 800m-capable weapon, it said.

The M14 was phased out of service in the 1960s as a standard-issue rifle, but it has seen limited return as a designated marksman rifle in recent conflicts.

NEW US INFANTRY RADIO

The US Army is planning to equip its troops with a wearable radio that can carry voice and data signals and transmit the GPS location of the wearer further than current devices.

Made by General Dynamics, the SFF-C(V)1 Handheld 'rifleman's radio' is a less-expensive variant of some current radios.

It will use a high-bandwidth waveform to transmit voice and data as well as location information so that a soldier's position will show up on vehicle-mounted blue-force tracking displays.

The radio will be part of the Army's ground soldier ensemble, a sub-set of the Land Warrior suite.

Commemoration Events

On 23 November 2008, the Royal Australian Regiment marks its 60th Anniversary of service to the nation.

A series of events has been planned to take place in Sydney with the aim of bringing as many past and present members of the Corps together as possible to mark the occasion in style.

Infantry members who served in Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, Rwanda and Somalia, will mix with those who went to Timor, Solomon Islands, Iraq, Afghanistan and other theatres in recent years.

The focus of the official commemoration events will be a Service and Parade of Colours at Victoria Barracks Sydney, on Sunday 23 November 2008, starting at 4pm sharp.

Before that, however, a rededication service will be held at the RAR Memorial, Regimental Square in Sydney's CBD, starting at 1pm on Saturday 22 November.

On Friday 21 November a major Regimental Dinner will be held at Darling Harbour.

All activities have the backing and support of the Regiment and the Army.

The Colours of all RAR battalions, accompanied by a Colour Party, are expected on parade on Sunday, making this event in particular a very special occasion.

Contact and Information

- All former and serving members of the RAR are requested to contact their Battalion or State RAR Associations in order to book their attendance at the November RAR Commemoration Dinner and Parade in Sydney.
- Updates will be published on www.rarnsw.org.au
- Associations interested in further information about the commemoration events are requested to contact the RAR Commemorations Committee at: RARCommittee60@gmail.com

Who is organising the commemorations?

- The RAR 60th Commemorations Committee is working through the RAR NSW Association.

What Can You Do?

- All RAR members who wish to be part of the November commemorations must go through the 'booking' process to reserve a place at the Regimental Dinner and at the main parade.
- Associations are requested to finalise numbers with the Commemorations Committee as early as possible, at the above email address.
- Part of this booking process will involve an option to pre-order the only memorabilia product for the commemorations – a high-quality decanter of port.

Information supplied by RAR 60th Commemorations Committee

FRIDAY 21 NOVEMBER

Regimental Dinner

Bayside Grand Hall, Darling Harbour

Members are requested to contact their RAR Association to book.

Dress for males is suit/jacket, tie and medals (miniature).

SATURDAY 22 NOVEMBER

Memorial Service

1pm start

At the RAR Memorial, Regimental Square, off George Street (near Martin Place) to remember those who have been killed on active service or died in training with the RAR.

It is expected that the various State-based RAR Associations will hold their own unofficial reunions on Saturday evening.

SUNDAY 23 NOVEMBER

Service and Parade of Colours

4pm sharp

The parade, at Victoria Barracks, Paddington, will start at 4pm sharp. All attendees are requested to plan their day and timings so as to pass through security and be seated by 3.30pm.

All Battalion Colours of the Regiment, from 1RAR to 9RAR, will be present.

Governor-General Quentin Bryce has confirmed her attendance and is expected to circulate among veterans after the parade.

This event has solid Army support and will be an iconic day.

in the beginning

Until 1950 the Defence Act precluded the raising of full-time or 'standing' infantry, armour or cavalry units in Australia. In fact, when the Darwin Mobile Force was raised in 1939, 'infantry' soldiers were actually enlisted as artillerymen – even using the ranks of gunner and bombardier.

Legislation also prevented any soldier from serving overseas unless he specifically volunteered to do so. For this reason, after the outbreak of each of the World Wars, an Australian Imperial Force was raised on a volunteer basis for overseas service.

The perceived threat of Japanese invasion in 1942 did see Australian militia used overseas, but these were sent to carefully defined areas that were mostly Australian territories in Papua and New Guinea.

Australia fought the Second World War with three armies – the Permanent Military Forces (PMF), the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and the militia – each with its own conditions of service.

While most soldiers who had fought during the war simply wished to be sent home as soon as the fighting stopped, there was still a clear need for full-time soldiers to carry on with the occupation of Japan, supervision of surrendered Japanese forces, holding of Borneo and the Dutch East Indies until British and Dutch forces could take over, and returning military equipment to Australia from various theatres around the world.

Planning for a post-war army had actually begun as early as 1944 and, at least within Army ranks, there was a clear assumption that a regular field-force of all arms would be required.

Three regular infantry battalions – the 65th, 66th and 67th Battalions – were drawn together from the ranks of the 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions and sent, with other arms and services, to Japan, as the 34th Brigade, which arrived in February 1946.

Because they were to serve overseas, all members of the 34th Brigade had to be members of the AIF, or willing to transfer to the AIF. Interestingly, this deployment was still covered under provisions of war-time legislation that effectively remained in force until 1952.

Back in Australia, however, the wartime system of administering the Army had reverted to the peacetime system, with a military board exercising control. High on the priorities list for this board was the raising of a regular army with a field-force element.

Although the brigade in Japan was legally part of the AIF and covered under war-time legislation, authorities in Australia began talking of it in terms of it already being the new regular force. The 'Interim Army' was a term bandied about as a convenient descriptor when discussing administrative matters in relation to the boys in Japan.

In February 1946 recruiting for the 'interim forces' began, with an initial two-year voluntary enlistment period. The Interim Army was officially created in May 1946 but the legislation was officially back-dated to October 1945.

By February 1947, all volunteers wishing to continue their service had been transferred to the Interim Army, and the AIF was officially disbanded in June 1947.

In August 1947 the Military Board suggested the Defence Act should be amended so that the PMF became the Regular Army with an initial enlistment period of six years. The minister agreed in September 1947, although the changes were not legislated for several years. In November 1947 the Board directed that the term Australian Regular Army should be used from then on, except for certain legal purposes.

By 1948, most other contributing countries had withdrawn their forces from Japan, leaving 34th Brigade to represent the armies of the Commonwealth. In November 1948 the Australian battalions were redesignated 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the Australian Regiment.

In December all but 3AR (which was destined for Korea) were withdrawn from Japan. On arrival in Australia, 34th Brigade was redesignated 1st Brigade and its units dispersed around New South Wales and Victoria.

For the first time in its short history, Australia had a full-time infantry brigade during peacetime.

Soldiers of D Coy 2RAR demolish defences following the Korean ceasefire, at Majon'ni, Korea, 29 July 1953.

In March 1949 the Australian Regiment was granted the prefix Royal – the Royal Australian Regiment was born – thus making it harder for a subsequent government to disband the regular infantry force.

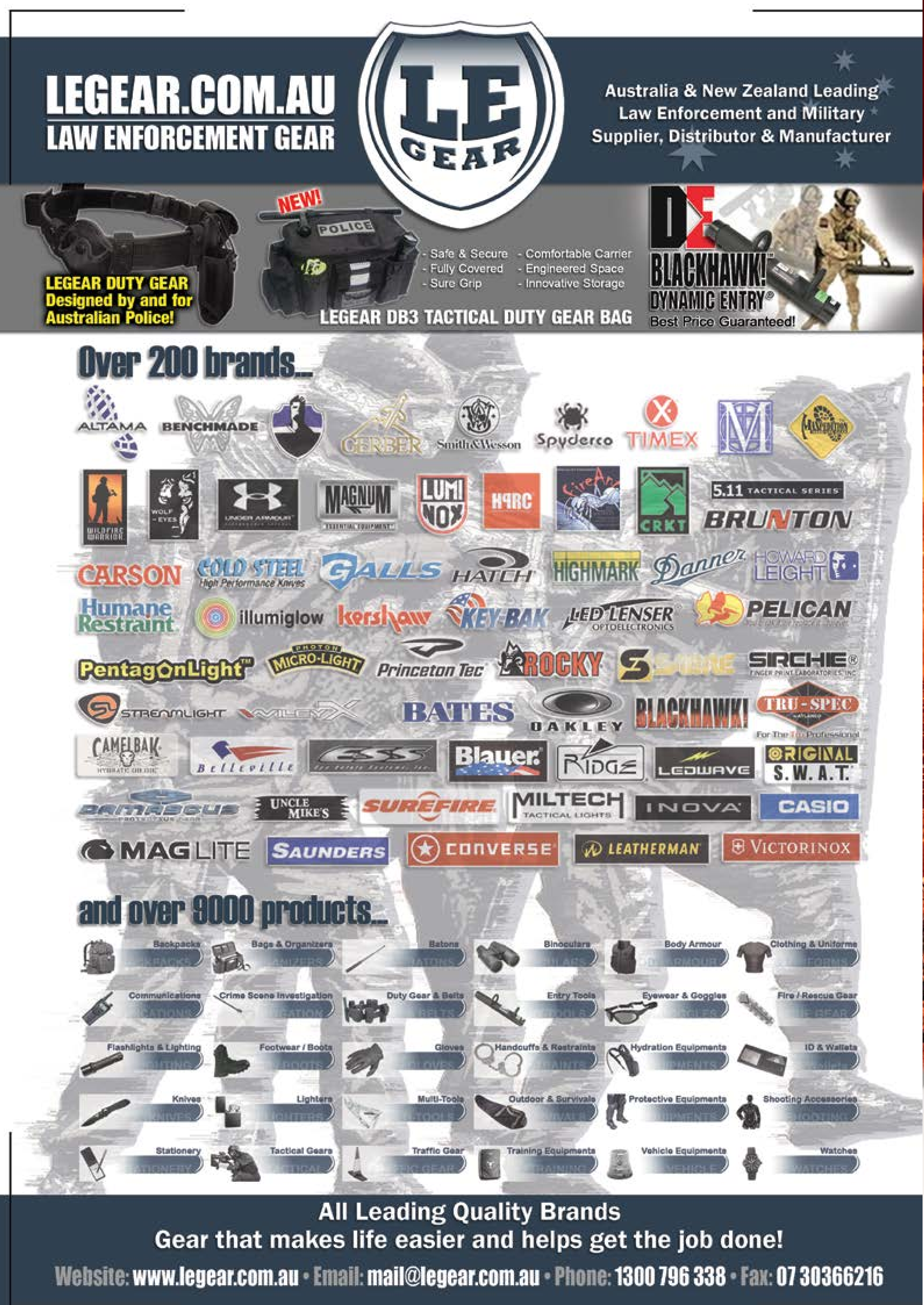
On 1 January 1950 the Defence Act was finally amended to permit regular armoured and infantry units to be raised and maintained in peacetime.

On 25 June, the government announced that an Australian military contingent would join the UN forces in Korea and 3RAR was warned for active service on 2 August. Under existing regulations however, all members of the battalion had to formally re-volunteer for service in Korea even though they had volunteered to serve overseas in Japan. This point was not lost on the government and, in September 1950, it announced that all future enlistees could be required to serve anywhere and currently serving members would be invited to sign an undertaking for such service.

> **On 1 January 1950 the Defence Act was finally amended to permit regular armoured and infantry units to be raised and maintained in peacetime.**

On 14 August 1952 the Interim Army was formally disbanded and all its personnel transferred to the Australian Regular Army or the Regular Army Special Reserve.

So, although it has not always been the case, Australia today has an all-corps army – including full-time infantry battalions – standing ready to commit to unrestricted service anywhere in the world and at very short notice.



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DUTY FIRST

MORE THAN A MOTTO

Above and right: Private Jonathon Morison on patrol in Afghanistan

WHAT KEEPS A TEAM TOGETHER DESPITE THE HARDSHIPS OF OPERATIONS AND THE WORRIES OF THE HOME FRONT?

WORDS PRIVATE JONATHON MORISON, 6RAR
PICS CORPORAL RICKY FULLER

When I received my skippy badge after finishing infantry IET at Singleton, I read its motto, "Duty First". I heard the duty-first call from angry sergeants dispelling whingeing-digger syndrome or at army history lectures but, at that time, I really didn't grasp or appreciate it. Even though I respected the badge's significance, the history behind it and the corps it represents, I felt I hadn't done enough to understand the real sacrifices its motto engenders.

But that was then and this is now.

I have seen what 'duty first' is all about.

I am not going to call them a platoon or even sections, for that would not do justice to the qualities that have developed over 15 months of training and operations together. I will simply call them a team, for they have all the qualities a winning team has – mateship, respect, motivation, professionalism, compassion, humour, unity and toughness – physical and mental.

I am writing about 'the team' because I am proud of them, not because they have done anything extraordinary, but because they did their job and did it well.

When the majority came together in September 2005, little did they know they wouldn't be home until May 2007.

This is not an exaggeration – it's a sign of the times, a reflection of how busy the Australian Defence Force is. These days, soldiers can expect to be away from home for extended periods on training or on operations. 6RAR has been in three different operational theatres in the past 12 months alone. This on top of running IET (initial employment training) courses for new recruits back home.

These long stints away from home can cause individuals many problems and sometimes these can affect the running of a team. In our team we had individuals suffer marriage break ups, miss the birth of children, miss the first year of a child's life and have loved ones fall ill. Back home, wives and girlfriends coped with the dread of the unknown, giving birth and looking after the house, finances and children – in one case, three young kids and the birth of a fourth.

With all this going on, and the team living out of each others pockets for 15 months and working in a dangerous operational theatre, you might expect something to snap.

Well, it didn't.

The team stuck together through every challenge. Whatever the task, simple or demanding, they produced the goods every time.

'Duty first' is not just a motto, it's a tool for survival. It teaches you to rely on your training, your mates, your leaders and, most importantly, yourself. 'Duty first' teaches you to hold strong, to go on and go further to achieve your goals. It doesn't matter if you're a recruit in training or on patrol in a foreign land, 'duty first' will help overcome individual and team obstacles.

As mentioned, individuals had problems back home. Unfortunately this comes with the job. Personal problems were discussed, resolved, or just had to wait until the mission was complete. It's a harsh reality that people in the ADF face. But team unity, mateship and professionalism help them through.

What also helped were the positives and the goals they achieved. Among them – the first infantry platoon to come under engineer command since Vietnam and the first infantry call sign to conduct patrols in Afghanistan.

Also remarkable was that, of a team comprising 30 men, not one permanent injury was suffered nor a whole day lost through injury or illness.

The team was a critical part of 1RTF's (Reconstruction Task Force) success. They performed to a high standard, both as a team and individually – and always put duty first.

Now that the team is heading home to their battalion and families, individuals will head in different directions, seeking new challenges. Some will return to civilian life, some will be posted or promoted and the rest will go back to D Coy.

Most importantly, though, they will return to families and friends, who, in most cases, have weathered their own storms while their soldiers have been away, serving Australia.

With permission ARMY newspaper

1st Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment – 1RAR

Raised	12 October 1945
Battalion colour	Garter Blue (BCC 132)
Battalion nickname/s	Pony Soldiers; Big Blue One; First To Go
Battalion march	Waltzing Matilda
Current home	Lavarack Barracks, Townsville, Queensland
Mascot Shetland pony	"Septimus"
Future role	Remain light infantry in Townsville

Formation

The 34th Australian Infantry Brigade was formed in 1945 and consisted of three battalions, designated the 65th, 66th and 67th Australian Infantry Battalions. Personnel from the 65th Battalion, later redesignated 1st Battalion, were drawn from elements of 7th Division.

Japan 1946–48

The battalion's first service was in Japan where it carried out guard duty at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, among other places, and played a great deal of sport and conducted training.

On 22 November 1948, the battalion, still known as 65th Aust Inf Bn, held its final parade in Japan before sailing for Sydney, and moved into lines at Ingleburn.

Before the end of November the unit was redesignated 1st Battalion, Australian Regiment. Its name was again changed in January 1949 to 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment – 1RAR – following the granting of King George VI's royal assent to the formation of the Royal Australian Regiment.

Korea 1952–53

After a farewell march through Sydney, 1RAR sailed for Japan on 18 March 1952. After training and preparation it moved to Korea where it underwent further training before moving into the line on 19 June.

During the nine months 1RAR spent in Korea, 34 members were killed and 107 wounded. But the battalion added a distinguished chapter to its brief history as a regular unit.

On return to Australia, the battalion was housed at Enoggera.

Korea 1954–56

1RAR returned to Korea on 31 March 1954.

The Korean War having ended, the battalion spent its time digging and improving the 'Kansas' defensive line, training, building a new camp, parades and sport.

The battalion returned to Brisbane in April 1956.

Malaya 1959–61

On 20 September 1959, 1RAR embarked for Malaya via Singapore, beginning operations on 16 November on the Thai/Malay border area in Perak. Access to this area of deep jungle was obtained by helicopter, boat and on foot. Patrolling was tough and demanding during the 18-month deployment, but the enemy remained elusive throughout.

The battalion left Penang for Sydney on 29 October 1961.

At Gallipoli Barracks, Holsworthy, the battalion rapidly built up to pentropic strength (a new five-battlegroup divisional structure), bringing its numbers to more than 1300.

The pentropic experiment didn't last long and 1RAR was split to add a fifth battalion to the order of battle on 1 March 1965.

Vietnam 1965–66

Warned in March 1965 for service in South Vietnam, 1RAR was concentrated at the Bien Hoa air base by early June and placed under command of the 173rd US Airborne Brigade in defence of the base. This period saw intensive training with helicopters and APCs, as well as patrolling with the US troops.

On 25 June, the battalion carried out the first of many successful operations against the Viet Cong and afterwards, in conjunction with the remainder of the brigade, conducted operations in notorious VC areas.

The battalion lost 23 KIA and 130 wounded during this year.

Vietnam 1968–69

After vigorous training and exercising, 1RAR, including 130 members who had deployed on the previous tour, returned to Vietnam in April 1968.

On 3 May, after two short operations, Pegasus and Blaxland, the unit commenced Operation Toan Thang which included the now-famous battle at FSB Coral.

This second tour saw the loss of 31 KIA and 165 WIA.

The battalion returned home and marched through Sydney on 28 February 1969.

A move to its current home in Townsville, and normal training and exercising occupied the battalion over the next period.

In May 1987, B Coy, 1RAR, was flown to Norfolk Island and embarked on HMAS Tobruk for possible operations in Fiji, but were not needed.

On 4 July 1990, 1RAR was presented the US Meritorious Unit Commendation in recognition of outstanding service in Vietnam.

Somalia 1993

In January 1993, after a short period of pre-deployment training, 1RAR was deployed to Somalia.

On 17 February, the battalion had the first of 11 contacts with Somali gunmen. These, in conjunction with cordon and search operations and some 1100 foot patrols, resulted in seven gunmen KIA, four WIA and 70 Somalis handed to the Auxiliary Security Forces.

The battalion handed its responsibilities to a French element of the United Nations force and returned to Australia on 22 May.

East Timor 2000-2001

On 25 October 2000, 1RAR Group took over the role of the Australian Battalion of UNTAET from 6RAR. The 1RAR Group, comprising 15 elements, included an average of 1062 personnel, 29 armoured fighting vehicles, 238 B-vehicles, 40 C-vehicles and four Black Hawk helicopters.

The group's mission was to provide security to the people of East Timor so that civil infrastructure and government systems could be re-established under the guidance of the UN.

This tour resulted in one militia KIA and one friendly WIA.

East Timor 2003

1RAR deployed on its second tour of East Timor in May 2003, taking over from 5/7RAR.

Solomon Islands 2004-2005

On Christmas Eve 2004, following the shooting death of Australian Protective Service Officer Adam Dunning, 1RAR was ordered to deploy a Ready Company Group, based on battalion HQ and A Coy. This was achieved within 18 hours.

Calm was quickly restored to the Solomon Islands, and the soldiers returned to Australia in late January 2005.

2005-today

Since 2005, 1RAR has deployed soldiers to missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, East Timor, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

Rededicated

PICS LEADING SEAMAN PHILLIP CULLINAN

The 5th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment rededicated itself to its original Queen's and Regimental Colours this year during a ceremony rich in military tradition – while training in near-desert conditions in preparation for deployment overseas.

In a ceremony at Cultana Field Training Area, South Australia, on 14 April 2008, the 'Tiger Battalion' rededicated itself to the Colours that were originally consecrated on 29 October 1967 and subsequently 'laid up' at the Soldiers' Chapel, Kapooka, following the battalion's linking with 7RAR.

Despite the bush setting, the sunset ceremony in April was conducted with all the pomp, pageantry and dignity befitting such an important and historic occasion.

Army pipers played Scotland the Brave as the entire Battle Group – comprising several combat teams equipped with APCs, ASLAVs and Bushmasters – assembled in parade formation.

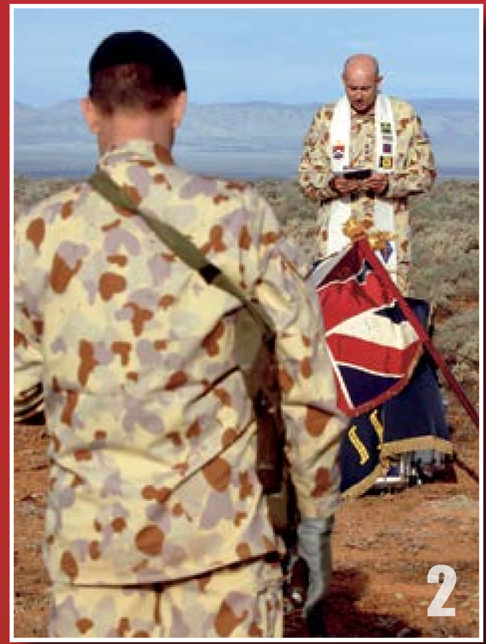
Chaplain Morgan Batt received the Colours and placed them on drums, ceremonially arranged to represent a church altar, before leading the CO and 450 assembled members in reciting the 5RAR Colours Rededication Prayer.

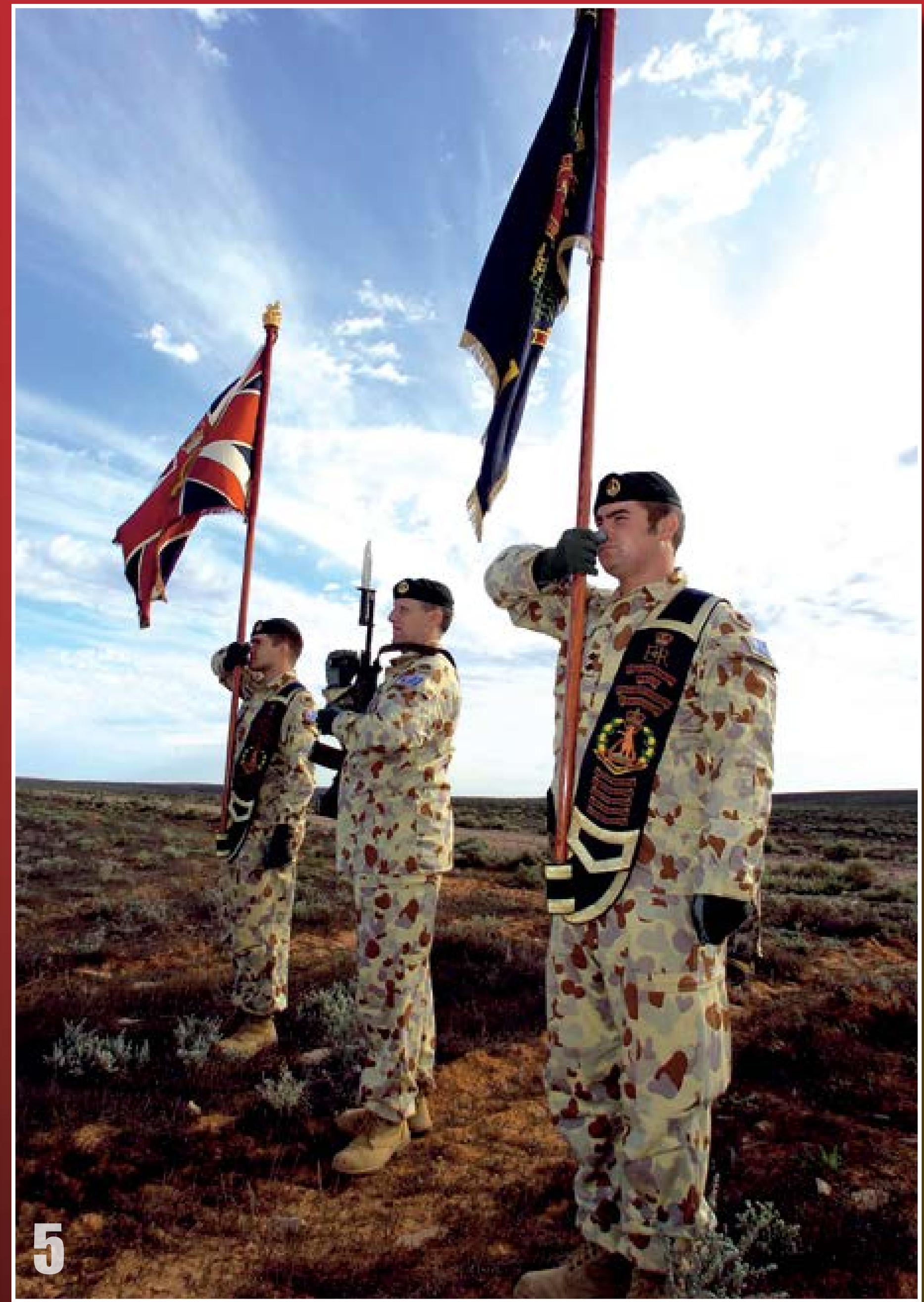
The Tiger Battalion became the first unit in Australian Army history to rededicate itself to its original Colours.

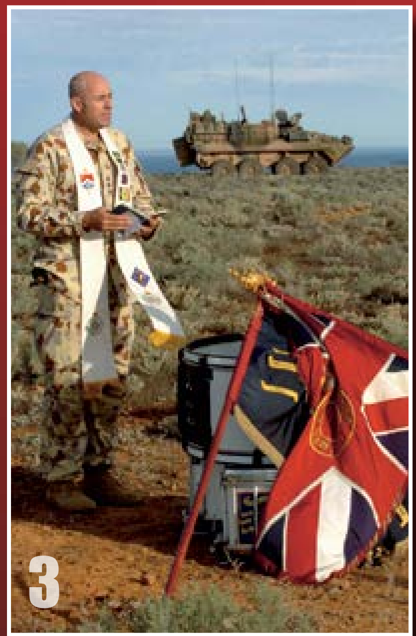
Since then, however, the Battalion was presented new Colours on a parade in Darwin on 5 June, with the original colours again 'laid up' at Kapooka, in the care of the chaplains there.

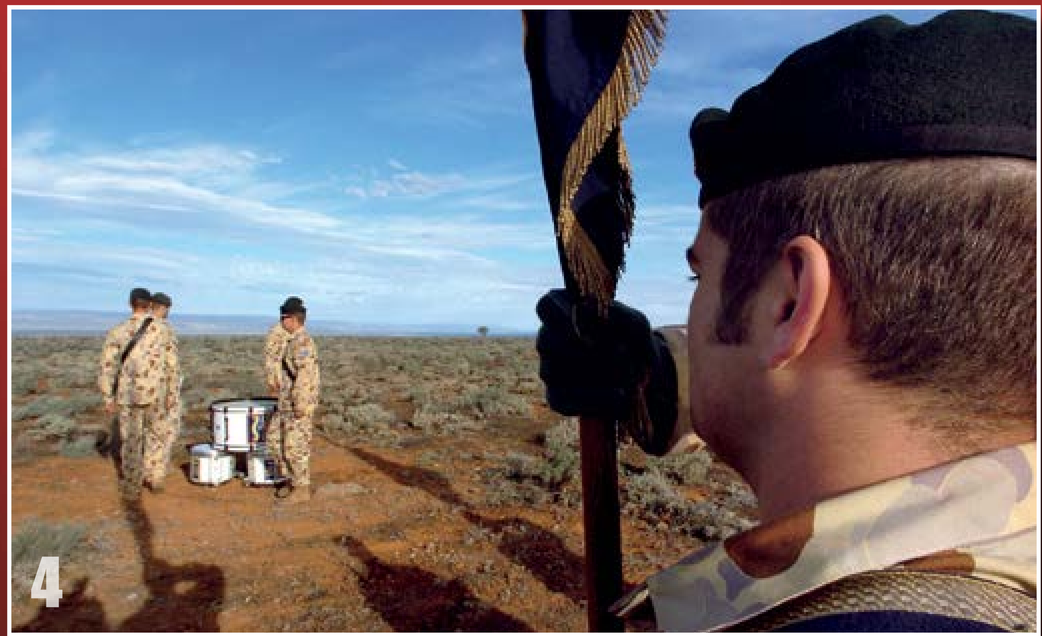
A Battalion's Colours represent all that has made the unit great. They embody the loyalty and spirit of the battalion to which they belong and are a tangible yet symbolic representation of the unit's history.

Once they have been consecrated Colours cannot be unconsecrated – hence the need to lay them up with dignity in a sacred place, such as the chapel at Kapooka.









1. Lieutenant Scott Stort presents the Colours.
2. Chaplain Morgan Batt conducts the 5RAR Colours Rededication Prayer.
3. Chaplain Morgan Batt conducts the 5RAR Colours Rededication Prayer.
4. Lieutenant Scott Stort presents the Colours while the Pipes and Drums dismantle the drums.
5. (from right) Lieutenant Scott Stort, Warrant Officer Class 2 Craig Lees and Lieutenant Joel Waterhouse present the Colours.
6. An M113 APC carries the 5RAR Colours.
7. Members of 5RAR Pipes and Drums prepare to arrange the drums as an alter.
8. Chaplain Morgan Batt receives the Colours.

2nd Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment: 2RAR

Raised	12 October 1945 1 February 1995
Battalion colour	Black (BCC 220)
Battalion nickname	Second to none
Battalion march	Ringo, and Back in Black
Current home	Lavarack Barracks, Townsville, Queensland
Future role	Remain light infantry in Townsville

Formation

In 1945, three battalions – 65th, 66th and 67th Australian Infantry Battalions – were raised from divisions stationed in New Guinea at the end of WWII. The 66th Battalion, later redesignated 2nd Battalion, was one of these and was sent, with the other two, to Japan.

2RAR returned to Puckapunyal, Victoria, in 1948. When the Korean War began in 1950, some 2RAR members volunteered for service with 3RAR and 1RAR as these two battalions headed off to a new war.

Korea 1953-1954

The battalion was brought back to strength before it too deployed to Korea in March 1953, replacing 1RAR.

2RAR was primarily used to patrol the no-man's land to the north of the UN lines, where the work was monotonous and dangerous, with many casualties caused by mines.

On 9-10 July 1953, 2RAR with 3RAR were tasked to hold the line to the west of the Samichon River. 2RAR was on the left forward position of a hill commonly referred to as the 'Hook'.

On the night of 24 July 1953, Chinese forces attacked 2RAR and a US Marine Regiment in consecutive waves, with heavy artillery and mortar support. 2RAR held firm until, two days later, the Chinese abandoned the attack after losing about 3000 dead, while 2RAR had lost just five killed and 24 wounded – and earned the Battle Honour 'Samichon'. The armistice was declared the following evening.

After the armistice, 2RAR was occupied by training and patrolling duties until it returned to Australia in April 1954.

Malaya 1955–1957

2RAR arrived in Malaya on 19 October 1955 but didn't commence operations until January 1956 because the Australian government hadn't yet approved its involvement.

When operations did start, with lengthy search and track patrols through thick jungle that lasted days or even weeks at a time, they yielded little result.

On 22 June, a five-man patrol was ambushed and, following an intense fire-fight involving follow-up forces, three Aussies lay dead and three wounded.

In all, 14 members of 2RAR were killed before the battalion went home on 15 October 1957.

Malay 1961–1963

2RAR was the first battalion to serve two tours of Malaya when it joined the commonwealth Independent Infantry Brigade Group at Terendak in October 1961 and conducted jungle operations on the Thailand/Malaysia border, without any losses, until its return to Australia in August 1963.

Vietnam 1967–1968

2RAR embarked for operations in Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam on 19 May 1967.

During this tour, two companies of New Zealand infantry were placed under its command to form 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion, which took part in 23 operations in Phuoc Tuy and Bien Hoa Provinces, and maintained constant patrols and ambushes throughout their AO.

The battalion's most successful operation was 'Coburg', which coincided with the launch of the Tet Offensive. The number of contacts with the enemy rose sharply and heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy.

On this first tour the ANZAC Battalion lost 28 soldiers KIA. 2RAR was relieved on 1 June 1968.

Vietnam 1970–1971

On 15 May 1970, 2RAR officially relieved 6RAR and resumed the title of ANZAC Battalion with New Zealanders again under command.

In a successful 12 months of operations, the unit killed 110 enemy troops and captured 23 for the loss of 13 of their own KIA.

In 1973, government rationalisation saw 2RAR linked with 4RAR to form 2/4RAR. They were delinked on 1 February 1995.

Troops from 2RAR, deployed to Rwanda as part of the Australian Medical Support Force for UNAMIR II, witnessed the infamous and traumatic Kibeho massacre in 1995.

2nd/4th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment: 2/4RAR

Raised	15 August 1973
Battalion colour	Black (BCC 220) and Scarlet (BCC209)
Battalion march	Ringobrackie
Delinked	1 February 1995

With the cessation of National Service and rationalisation of the Army, 2RAR and 4RAR were linked to form 2/4RAR on 15 August 1973. Over the next 20 years, the battalion enjoyed training in a peacetime army and achieved many successes in military-skills and sporting competitions.

The battalion was placed on operational readiness in 1987 and 1990, prepared to evacuate Australian citizens from Pacific-region countries experiencing civil unrest, but were not used.

From 1990 to 1993 many individual soldiers from 2/4RAR served with the UN in Cambodia. In 1993, 54 soldiers from the battalion were detached to 1RAR for service in Somalia.

In May 1993, 2/4RAR was tasked to provide a rifle platoon for Operation Gemini in Cambodia.

In August 1994, 114 members of the battalion deployed to Rwanda as part of the Australian Medical Support Force for UNAMIR II. During this deployment, the government decided to delink the two battalions, which occurred on a parade at Lavarack Barracks, Townsville, at 1500hrs on 1 February 1995.

3rd Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment – 3RAR

Raised	20 October 1945
Battalion colour	Rifle green (BCC 27)
Battalion nickname	Old Faithful
Battalion march	Our Director, and Highland Laddie
Current home	Holsworthy, Sydney
Future role	Redesignated light infantry, move to Townsville (abandon parachute-insertion capability)

Formation

In 1945, three battalions – 65th, 66th and 67th Australian Infantry Battalions – were raised from divisions stationed in New Guinea at the end of WWII. The 67th Battalion, later redesignated 3rd Battalion, was one of these and was sent to Japan, arriving at Kure on 21 February 1946.

The battalion served at Kahachi, Okayama, Haramuri, Kure, Hiro and Tokyo on duties that included screening returning Japanese soldiers, destroying arms caches, guarding important infrastructure and suppressing race riots.

Korea 1950–1954

In 1950, 3RAR was still in Japan when it was committed to South Korea and, after strengthening and training, landed in Pusan on 28 September. It would remain in Korea until after the conflict (although its soldiers were rotated and replaced on an individual basis).

The battalion saw action early and was engaged in fighting on an almost daily basis throughout October. However, a Chinese offensive in November 1950 caused all UN forces to withdraw, during which, 3RAR conducted patrols and destroyed bridges to slow the Chinese advance.

In January 1951, 3RAR moved north as part of a counter-offensive, engaging the enemy several times through to April. This eventually brought the battalion to the Kapyong Valley, north east of Seoul where, on 24 April, the Chinese attacked in waves. 3RAR held firm, however, and on ANZAC Day, the exhausted Chinese abandoned the attack. 3RAR was awarded a US Presidential Citation for its role in this battle.

On 7 October 1951, 3RAR notched up another Battle Honour at Maryang-San.

From then until the ceasefire in July 1953, 3RAR was mainly occupied in patrolling no-man's land between the opposing trench-lines along the 38th Parallel before returning to Australia in November 1954.

It is interesting to note that, as a battalion, 3RAR did not set foot in Australia for the first nine years of its existence.

Malaya 1957–1959

3RAR arrived in Malaya in September 1957 and was based at Minden Barracks in the east. The battalion rarely spent much time there, however, mainly being deployed on operations through the jungle that lasted days or even weeks at a time.

In January 1958, the battalion joined Operation Ginger, aimed at disrupting enemy food supplies. Ginger covered an estimated 3100 square kilometres, searching for fewer than 200 enemy. Patrols proved monotonous, frustrating and largely fruitless. The operation was ultimately successful, however, and when it ended in April 1959, the area was declared safe.

3RAR also took part in 'major war training' throughout March to September before being withdrawn from the country in October 1959, having lost four men killed and 14 wounded.

Malaya and Borneo 1963–1965

3RAR's second tour of Malaya began in July 1963, initially at Terendak near Malacca, but later moved to the Thailand-Malaya border where it successfully uncovered many terrorist camps and apprehended illegal immigrants and smugglers.

In October 1964, 3RAR was called into action against Indonesian troops who had landed near Camp Terendak. More than 50 of these were captured without loss.

During March 1965, 3RAR moved again in response to a new flare-up of hostilities, this time in Sarawak, near the capital Kuching. This operation lasted five months.

In all, this second tour saw the loss of three Australian troops and a friendly tracker.

The battalion returned to Australia over August and September 1965.

Vietnam 1967–1968

3RAR arrived at Nui Dat, Phuoc Tuy Province in December 1967 – its first operation against the Viet Cong coinciding with the start of the Tet Offensive.

After this, the battalion was employed mainly on mine-clearing, counter-mortar and anti-rocket tasks as well as on reconnaissance missions.

On 26 and 28 May 1968 while the battalion was in a defensive position, 3RAR fought off two determined attacks by large numbers of North Vietnamese Army regulars at FSPB Balmoral.

Vietnam 1971

The battalion's main focus at the start of this second tour was to prevent enemy infiltration and attacks around the Zuyen Moc District north of Nui Dat. During these operations, 3RAR fought a number of all-day bunker actions against mainly regular-force enemy.

On 6 June, the battalion located a large bunker system occupied by 3rd Battalion, 33rd North Vietnamese Regiment and was locked in to a two-day action. After the battle, which also involved artillery, armour and helicopter-gunship support, 47 bunkers were counted.

3RAR's second tour coincided with the end of all Australian support for the war and the battalion came home in October 1971, having lost four soldiers killed in action.

East Timor

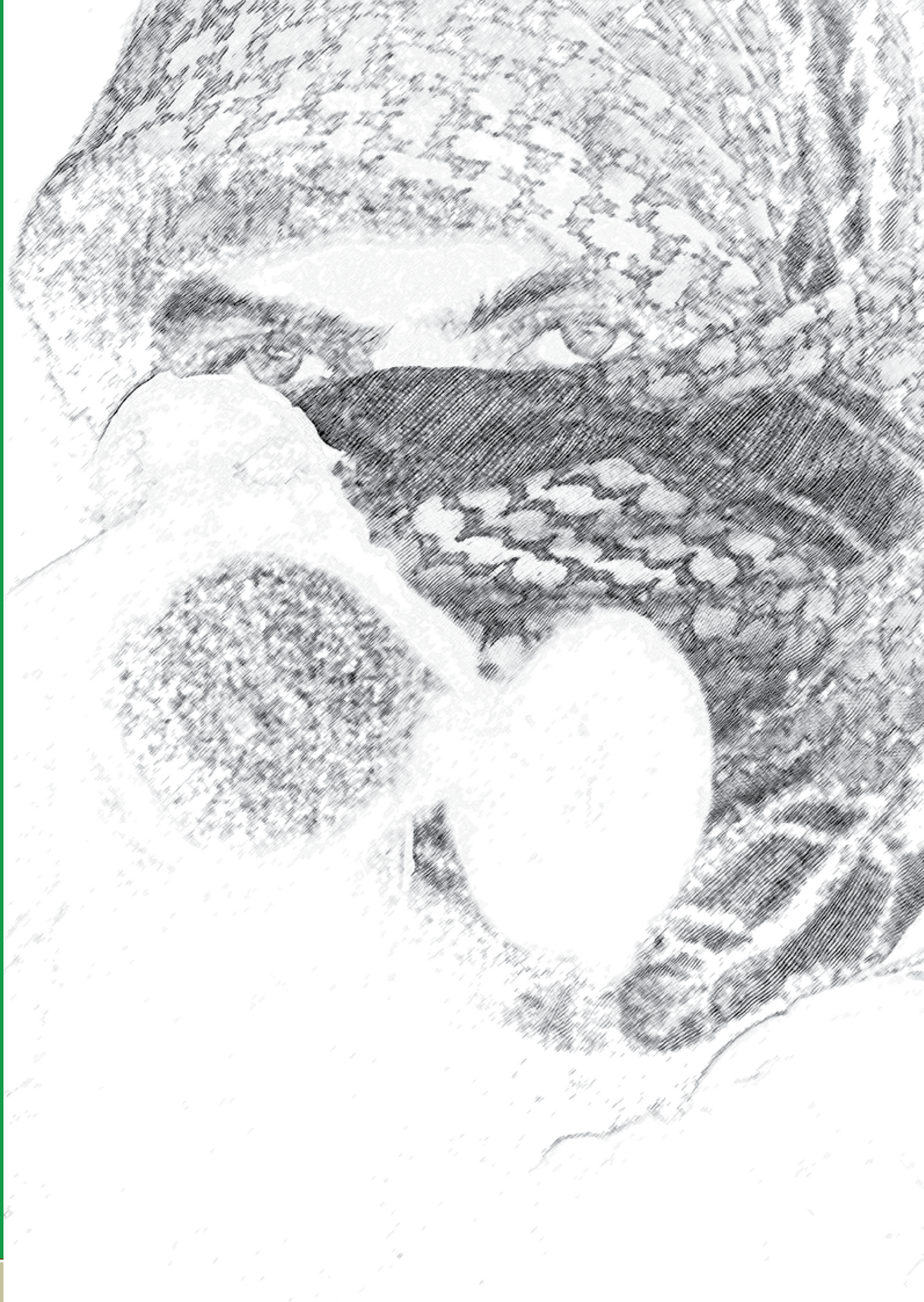
3RAR played a spearhead role with the Australian-led International Force East Timor in September 1999, first securing Dili and then the landlocked Oecussi enclave. It came home from this first mission in February 2000.

The battalion served a second six-month tour, this time under UN control, in 2002.

In May 2006, 3RAR again deployed on another Australian-led mission – Operation Astute – to the country now called Timor-Leste.

In February 2007, 3RAR's on-line company group was deployed at short notice when fresh trouble broke out in the small country. This company was replaced in June.

3RAR has also deployed various-sized groups to the Solomon Islands and Iraq in recent years – both of these marred by the accidental death of one soldier on each operation.



Pic Corporal Neil Ruskin

Corporal Gaunt and Private Shane Van Duren on Exercise Trisetia in Indonesia – just six months before 3RAR faced off against Indonesian soldiers in East Timor.

Map of East Timor signed by Private Shan Van Duren and his section comrades.

WE COULDN'T SAY WHERE WE WERE OR WHAT WE WERE DOING OR WHERE WE THOUGHT WE MIGHT BE GOING

[MORE ARSE THAN CLASS]

TIMOR AND BEYOND

When things went bad in East Timor in 1999, Australia was ready to react. Given the scale of the operation, the reaction was relatively swift – though, listening to the media, who wanted everything done 'yesterday', one might be forgiven for thinking otherwise.

One has to remember that nothing on this scale had been attempted by the Australian Defence Force since Vietnam. We also went in as an Australian-led multinational force –although we had UN sanction, it was not a UN mission – which was also a unique experience for what was essentially a peacetime defence force depleted by ever-tightening annual budgets. The Army in particular was the poor cousin at the budget table at that time. None of this big-picture stuff meant much to the guys on the ground, however. They, as usual, were the mushrooms – kept in the dark and fed bullshit.

As a rifleman with 3RAR, Shane Van Duren was one of the soldiers on the bottom rung of the ladder, expected to hit the ground running, but with little solid info on what was actually going on. But then, for he and his colleagues, that was nothing new.

WORDS SHANE VAN DUREN AND BRIAN HARTIGAN
PICS VAN DUREN COLLECTION

Before INTERFET – International Force East Timor – came Operation Spitfire, the prepositioning of forces in Australia's north, ready for the push across the Timor Sea to who-knew-what.

Shane Van Duren takes up the story…

"We hadn't deployed for a very long time. No one knew what the fuck was going on.

About half way through Op Spitfire, anyone who was married was told they could have one, monitored conversation with their wives while our lieutenant sat beside us and listened. We couldn't say where we were or what we were doing or where we thought we might be going.

Our wives had a better idea than we did anyway, just from watching the news.

We had other ways of letting the girls know where we were, of course – you only had to use your bankcard at the post office and they knew exactly where you were.

We weren't allowed to wear our uniforms around the place, or anything that could identify who we were or what unit we were from. It was all pretty hush hush – but, of course, we didn't give a shit.

We trained during the day and went to the movies or something at night. Someone organised stuff to keep us occupied, but we really had no idea what was going on.

It seemed to us that the commanders were so far out of their depth – one minute we were going, then we weren't, then we were going with batons and shields, next minute we were going to leave our weapons on the C130 and only pull them out if shots were exchanged because, technically, we weren't allowed to have them.

There were all kinds of changes to the situation, and various ways to try and get around every change. I don't know where the changes were coming from – politicians or military command or where. I don't know who was making the decisions – or [after a laugh] who was trying to counter those decisions, but our situation changed so often there was no point trying to worry about it anymore. 'We'll just go when we go' was the attitude.

It went on for about a month – actually just short of earning the Australian Service Medal by about a day, I think.

Anyway, we eventually landed in Dili. It wasn't until we actually got there that we started working with other services – even other corps. The first time I ever rode on an ASLAV was in Timor.

'Nice body armour you guys have', I said to them. 'It'd be nice if we had it outside the carrier too!'

We had the old Vietnam-era stuff. Before we ended Operation Spitfire, the Chief of Defence came to visit us and asked how we felt and what we thought about operations.

'Sir, when are we going to see some of the modern equipment coming into the system – particularly the new ballistic body armour and boots?' I asked him. He actually had no idea we didn't have it already, but, he said, 'I'll make sure we get that to you before you land' – which gave us the first real indication we were actually going!

They did get us the American stuff – about two weeks after we had landed – just after we were sure we weren't going to get shot!

Before we went in, we were told we could be engaged by up to two battalions of Indonesians – in fact, we were told a lot of things before we went in, little of which proved correct.

There were a lot of Indonesians in the area who, I think, were prepared to go toe-to-toe with us – at least that was the impression I got when they were pointing guns at me. But I think they also had it in the back of their minds that there was an American Marines' ship off the coast. The Marines never got involved because it didn't escalate, but I think it probably didn't escalate because they were there.

I am aware now that Marines were there, but I wasn't at the time. We were walking around like we were king shit. We even walked into an Indonesian battalion position like we owned the place. We were like, 'yeah, shoot us and see what happens'.

It was all bluff, of course. We weren't really that confident, and we probably would have been slaughtered. We didn't even have a grenade between us and, with only 120 rounds each, hell, that wasn't even enough for every Indonesian if we got them first time every shot. It's kinda funny looking back on it – but I still get this stress rash.

When we took out the first night patrol, we went to an Indonesian position.

We had night vision – in fact that was a great advantage that saved our arses time and time again. The fact that we could see at night and aim at night, and that they were scared of the night, really gave us an ability to actively patrol and own the night.

We did most of our work at night and we were lucky to get four hours sleep because of it. We rotated from ready-reaction, to guard, to patrolling and back to ready reaction. It was during ready reaction when we slept – unless we got reacted, which happened a lot.

Anyway, when we landed in Dili we patrolled up to the UNAMET compound and secured that. We went through that Indonesian position. And then we came back through the same position just to be cocky! And, as we walked past the sentry, we said 'selamat malam' – good evening. He didn't know who the fuck it was – it was pitch black for him. But he had all these little red laser dots on the back of his head.

As we were coming back through their position, there were a whole lot of them coming out of a building at the top of the position, wearing a combination of Indonesian uniforms and civilian clothes, and they were carrying SSD1s – standard-issue Indonesian rifles – but not all of them were in full uniform.

Our section commander put us out into extended line in case there was a contact. We were within 100m when they started yelling and fanning out and pointing their weapons and went to 'instant'.

I was number one scout. I jumped into a drainage ditch – not the smartest place to be, looking back on it, being a perfect fire-lane and all – and my plan was to take out the street light that we were passing under at that particular moment, to give us the Ninox advantage.

But, our platoon commander decided to run, which was probably a good idea, and we all followed. We were flat out running like a bunch of scaredie cats, but it worked – none of us got shot.

WE DID MOST OF OUR WORK AT NIGHT AND WE WERE LUCKY TO GET FOUR HOURS SLEEP BECAUSE OF IT

B Company 3RAR 10 August 1998 – Private Shane Van Duren far right, rear rank

We probably had a responsibility to challenge them, though. They were either a bunch of Indonesians dressed as militia or militia coming out of an Indonesian barracks – either way, they were suss.

I heard about a lot of other standoffs with other sections, too.

On one patrol, they had a bunch of Indonesians pointing weapons at them over a wall. There was a LAV with the Aussies, but it backed off when it had a rocket pointed at it. The infantry had an interpreter with them, but that wasn't working out very well either. The Indonesians went to instant. It was quite tense until the Aussies gave the Indonesian commander a look through a Ninox, and he could see that each of his men had a laser dot on his forehead. That was enough to diffuse the situation!

And that's how close we came to war with Indonesia.

A lot of shit like that happened. We were lucky – very lucky. But it was definitely more arse than class.

A few weeks later, I had a couple of rounds pass close to me at a vehicle check point – I think it was in Maliana. We weren't even wearing helmets or anything by this stage.

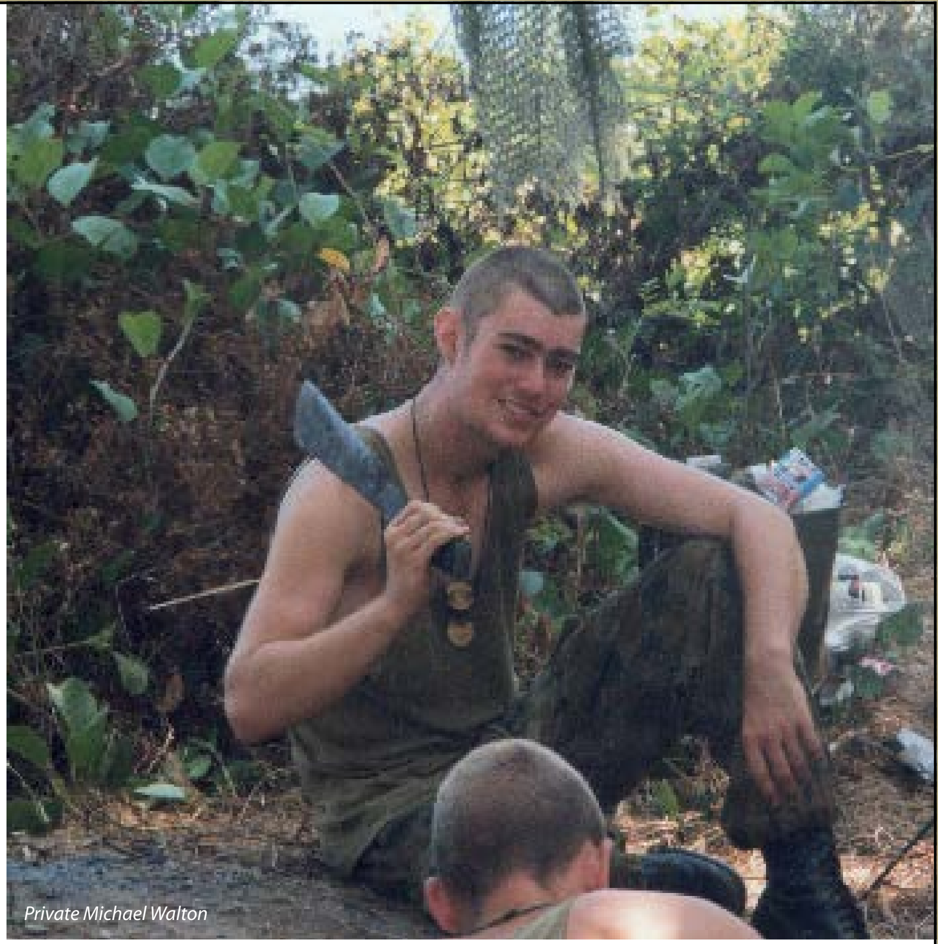
There was a porno magazine in the gun pit, so I was 'reading'. Then this guy on top of a hill – way outside the effective range of his weapon – fired in our general direction, within a couple of metres of us. I thought, 'fucking arsehole' – the first time I'm alone, there's a porno in the pit, and he couldn't even wait a couple of minutes!

I just lay down and called in a compass bearing on him. I heard on the radio that a couple of other guys called in bearings too, so we got a pretty good triangulation on him, and they also had a heading on which way he was leaving.

I heard a single shot, probably from one of our snipers, and I thought, 'Yeah! Interrupt me, would you?'

Our snipers didn't get too many opportunities, but they did get a few – and a few that weren't authorised. One of our snipers certainly told me he took out a couple of militia, but he never got cleared.

We eventually moved to Oecussi. We landed by chopper at Passabe and secured the airfield and then patrolled out to our respective areas.


Private Michael Walton

Our section went to a small little village about as far away from headquarters as anybody could get.

There was no one there.

We took it seriously at first, but then we started sleeping in the huts and stuff. It was great. We made our own mango wine and walked around in sarongs. It really was Lord of the Flies up there.

Eventually a few people came back – mostly kids – orphans.

They were good people. We'd come back from patrol and there'd be mangoes and coconuts and other fruit left outside our huts for us.

The school had been run down but we ran maths classes in it anyway. We also had one guy who could speak Bahassa – so he ran English classes. That wasn't so much initiative as boredom, but that was the Australian way. We were there and we did our best for those kids.

There was one kid kept hanging around me. I think his dad fell on him – that's how he didn't get shot. I felt sorry for the kid.

OUR SNIPERS DIDN'T GET TOO MANY OPPORTUNITIES, BUT THEY DID GET A FEW – AND A FEW THAT WEREN'T AUTHORISED

A few houses got burned down when we were there and we'd go patrol and secure the area, but the militia generally left us alone. We had the guns and carried ourselves well. Big ugly guys with guns usually get left alone. We deliberately tried to look angry anyway, which wasn't hard for us infantry. Treat people like shit for long enough and angry comes naturally.

But Timor generally was a nice place and the people were lovely, peace-loving people. It was an easy place to police.

Actually, my grandfather was over in that area in the '40s. He was a funny old coot – in one mail delivery he sent me a big tub of Bundaberg sugar! I thought he must be going crazy or something. Then he sent me a big tub of dried apricots! What the hell? But then, in a letter delivered a few days later, he sent me the recipe for jungle juice using sugar and apricots!

He was about the only person I could talk to when I came home. He understood. He told me not to stress – he said he copped a hard time when he got home, from the WWI vets, who probably copped a hard time from the Boer War vets. He gave a hard time to the Vietnam vets – everyone forgot the Korean vets – and, he said, you'll probably cop a hard time too. But, he said, in time they'll find a thing common for your generation and in the end you'll get looked after, so just persevere.

That advice has got me through to where I am today.

There have been times where I've found it hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Timor was not a war that was thought of as being hard combat, but people forget that a couple of guys did get shot in Timor and a couple died. And others killed themselves when they got home.

I've been asked do I ever regret joining the Army in the first place? That's a complex question with no easy answer.

Would my life be better if I stayed a civilian and got civilian qualifications – yes, I'd probably be working in a much more comfortable position earning a lot more money. But here I am, 34 and studying my first year at university – something I probably should have done when I was in my 20s. But when I was in my 20s I was at the School of Infantry learning to be an assault pioneer.

'What the fuck is that?' people ask me.

On the other hand, it would be very hard for me to look some of those little kids in Timor in the eyes and say 'you weren't worth it'. I couldn't do that. Even though my own wife and son left me when I was over there – they had everything they needed – a nice little house in the suburbs, looked after, school. That little kid in Timor, the one whose dead father lying on top of him saved his life – I couldn't say it wasn't worth my own sacrifice for that little kid.

You know, all people are good people if they're treated well and they have the things they need to survive. Desperation is the cause of most evil. People are generally happy just to live, farm, eat with their family, enjoy their children. Timor was no different – they just never had the opportunity.

Coming home, after seeing what we saw over there, was probably the hardest part. A lot of veterans say that when they get back to shopping malls and that kind of thing, they don't feel comfortable – they've lost a sense of belonging. Being in a shopping mall, which is basically the essence of capitalism, really takes veterans aback. But when you've been in a war zone, where the people have nothing and live a very basic existence, the fundamentals of human life are really put in perspective.

When the chips are down, that's when human nature is at its most powerful, so, coming back to a capitalist society is very confronting. Some people never get used to that.

I spoke to a guy the other day who said he never felt comfortable in Australia since Timor. Now he's in Iraq as a mercenary and he feels at home there.

The psyche is a very complex thing. It could be that that guy is only comfortable in an insecure situation. In fact, many of us infantry types feel like our purpose in life is to bring security to places that are insecure.

Here, in Australia, in today's society, I'm a swinging dick with nothing to do. I don't serve a purpose. I don't feel comfortable here because I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

I can't really change jobs that easily. Nor can I change my mindset that easily.

I've been trained by very powerful training establishments that have been developed over hundred of years – over the course of human history.

Military training is a very refined art, and they teach us to think a certain way and behave a certain way, to look a certain way and to do certain things – instinctively. Commanders need troops who are predictable.

We are also conditioned not to shoot unless we or someone we are meant to protect is in immediate danger. We are conditioned to use minimum force – something many police would do well to learn, because I think Australian's deserve the same kind of treatment we, as soldiers, afford foreigners.

Yes, I think we are conditioned – or brainwashed – but we are conditioned to be good and to treat people well – things that don't come naturally to many people.

We are conditioned to treat injured people in priority of how badly they are injured, regardless of whether they are your own soldiers or they are enemy. We are brainwashed to be solid professionals.

I think a lot of people have a perception that I have been 'brainwashed' and that I can't think for myself, that I'm just a dumb grunt. Unfortunately, that runs right through the society I live in – and it's not fair.

The irony of it is, when I was in the French Foreign Legion, if I walked into a room, an old person would give up his chair out of respect for a Legionnaire. That would never happen to an Australian soldier.

In fact, walking home on Anzac Day one year, a bunch of young guys wanted to bash me just because I was wearing a uniform.

Yes, I joined the French Foreign Legion and worked with Russian, German, Belgian, English and others from a lot of different backgrounds – even Mujahidin. But, I'm proud to say that, in Australia, I worked with probably the most professional military in the world.

The whole time I was in the Legion they told us we had to obey the customs de la gere – the rules of war – and the conventions international, but they never once trained us in what those customs or conventions were. Australia, on the other hand, taught us what they were and regularly exercised us in how to apply them.

In the Royal Australian Infantry Corps, I worked with good men whose hearts were generally in the right place. Sure, there were some thugs – there will always be some thugs – but, in Australia, we have a majority of good men, conditioned to act that way.

The Legion, on the other hand, was full of thugs with very few good men.

In Timor, the people cried when we left. They begged us to stay. They didn't want another army to police their country.

Who would you rather maintain security in your country? Would you rather American soldiers come to your country to enforce peace or would you rather Australian soldiers? It sure as hell wouldn't be the French Foreign Legion, though – I can assure you of that.

As a soldier, I feel you get very little respect here in Australia, except maybe on Anzac Day.

There's very little 'Oh, you are an Australian soldier – you are a professional – we'd like to have you in our organisation'.

Many of us can prove that we are capable and intelligent. For example, I'm doing a degree in political science here at the Australian National University and got a credit on my last essay. I'm studying – I'm learning – I'm capable.

If I tell people I'm doing a degree at ANU, I get respect, automatically. But if I tell them I was a rifleman in an infantry battalion, a lot of people just shut off or walk away.

At the end of the day, though, there's no denying we generally do a good job and, yes, sometimes it's more arse than class – but until we lose, you can't say we fucked up.

Sure, we've had our arses kicked a few times, but we're still speaking English, aren't we?

Sorry, what was the question again!? he says with a laugh.

IN TIMOR, THE PEOPLE CRIED WHEN WE LEFT. THEY BEGGED US TO STAY. THEY DIDN'T WANT ANOTHER ARMY TO POLICE THEIR COUNTRY


Privates Gartt, Sepulveda and Van Duren on R&R in Dili

PEOPLE FORGET THAT A COUPLE OF GUYS DID GET SHOT IN TIMOR AND A COUPLE DIED. AND OTHERS KILLED THEMSELVES WHEN THEY GOT HOME

5 of 1997/98 Basic Parachute Course – Private Shane Van Duren standing 12 from left.

4th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment: 4RAR

Raised	1 February 1964 1 February 1995
Battalion colour	Scarlet (BCC 209)
Battalion nickname	The Fighting Fourth
Battalion march	Inverbrackie
Current home	Holsworthy, Sydney
Future role	Commando, Sydney

Formation

On 18 January 1952, a Royal Australian Regiment Depot was raised as a training unit to prepare soldiers for Korea. The depot was renamed 4RAR in March because approval had been given to raise a battalion, not a depot. In March 1960, this unit was incorporated into the School of Infantry as Depot Company.

The 4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment was officially raised on 1 February 1964, becoming the first regular battalion raised on Australian soil.

Malaya 1965–1967

In October 1965, 4RAR joined 28 Commonwealth Independent Brigade Group at Terendak Camp in Malaysia but was soon placed on short-notice to move to Sarawak and was ever-alert to the possibility of Indonesian incursions across the Malacca Straits.

In April 1966, the battalion was deployed to the Bau District.

Documents captured by C Company on 15 June, during a contact with Indonesian forces, proved significant to operations in Sarawak and on the political scene in the closing stages of the campaign.

An important aspect of the battalion's Borneo tour was a hearts-and-minds campaign that provided aid in the form of construction, supply, employment and medical treatment to local villages.

At the end of hostilities in early September 1966, bases occupied by 4RAR were handed over to 3rd Royal Malay Regiment and the Aussies relocated to Malacca where the battalion continued to participate as part of the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve. During this time the percentage of National Servicemen in the battalion increased as regular soldiers were brought home to prepare for Vietnam.

By October 1967, 4RAR was back in Australia.

Vietnam 1968–1969

On 13 May 1968, an advance party from 4RAR moved by air to South Vietnam followed by the battalion main, aboard HMAS Sydney. They took over from 2RAR on 21 June at the 1st Australian Task Force Base, Nui Dat, Phuoc Tuy Province.

Two Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment companies, V (Victor) and W (Whisky), joined the battalion, which then became 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion.

During its year-long tour in South Vietnam, 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Bn completed 11 major operations and five operations of company size.

4RAR returned to Australia in May 1969.

Vietnam 1971–1972

The battalion's advance party departed Australia on 30 April 1971 for the unit's second tour of Vietnam. The main body, including 141 men from the first tour, arrived on 22 May, and were again augmented by New Zealanders.

After a week of training and settling in, 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion moved to the bush for the next seven months, during which they conducted nine operations against their main targets, 274 Viet Cong (VC) Regiment and the 33rd Regiment (North Vietnamese).

On 18 August 1971, Prime Minister Billy McMahon announced the withdrawal of Australian troops by Christmas. 4RAR main came home in December, but Delta Company stayed at Vung Tau until 13 March 1972.

During this tour, 4RAR/NZ(ANZAC) lost eight soldiers killed in action.

4RAR was linked with 2RAR on 15 August 1973 to form 2/4RAR.

During 2/4RAR's deployment to Rwanda on Operation Tamar in 1994, the government decided to delink the battalions. This was done on 1 February 1995, by which time a small project team had begun the complicated and tedious task of raising a new battalion from scratch.

Initially, manning was approved for 69 full-time and 103 general-reserve soldiers in the first year, building to three ARA rifle companies and one GRes rifle company by 1998.

4RAR (Cdo)

In 1996, it was decided to designate the battalion a special-forces unit and, on 1 February 1997, it was re-rolled 4RAR (Cdo), at which time regular members were given an opportunity to undertake special-forces training or elect for posting to other units. No GRes positions existed in the new structure and reserve members either discharged or were posted.

Almost three years of intense training and development followed, until the battalion was eventually capable of effective service in support of the Sydney Olympics.

Elements of 4RAR (Cdo) have since served in Iraq and continue to serve in Afghanistan.

Under the proposed structure of the Australian Army into the future, 4RAR (Cdo) will be the only infantry battalion to maintain a parachute-insertion capability.

Private James Keys and Corporal Mal Grey, D Company 2RAR, 'hold the line' on exercise in Tully. Pic Sergeant Al Green 1998

High Standards

Shane Van Duren saw service as part of the International Force East Timor as a rifleman in 3RAR, and later joined the French Foreign Legion.

During a lengthy interview for another story in this special issue, I felt some of Shane's insights on infantry life were too good to cull, yet didn't quite fit into the flow of that other story – *'More arse than class; Timor and beyond'.*

Here, therefore, is what Shane Van Duren sees as the essence of service and the high standards maintained by the Royal Australian Infantry Corps.

WORDS SHANE VAN DUREN AND BRIAN HARTIGAN **PICS** ADF

When you went to East Timor, was there a sense of 'this is the real thing' as opposed to just training?

"I don't think anyone ever treats soldiering as anything other than the real thing. It's always the real thing – we are not doing it on a chess board or in an office.

When you jump out of a plane in Shoalwater Bay, the ground is just as hard as it is in Timor or anywhere else. When you fall over, you fall over. Breaking a leg is never not a painful experience – no matter where you do it.

There's a very fine line between pleasure and pain. You work this hard and you get the job done and everyone looks good. But, you work just a little bit harder and you go down with heat stroke and you have a bag shoved in your arm. Flirting with that line is the level we always work to, regardless of whether you are in Australia or overseas.

Going down with heat was probably the biggest threat in Timor. Wearing body armour and carrying all that gear in 30 degrees and high humidity, we were more concerned with hydrating than we were with getting shot.

When it happens, you eventually get back up – it's not good for your brain of course – but you do recover and get on with it.

That's the standard we work to, and I don't think we'll ever go below that. From the day I joined – well, actually, Kapooka wasn't that hard – but Singleton certainly was. I had mates go down in Singleton, cerebral fluid coming out their eyes, their ears, their noses – but, after they recovered, they just got on with soldiering again.

They went down with heat stroke because that is how hard a man can work before he dies – and that's the standard we maintain – that's the standard that wins.

So to say that Timor was the 'real thing' and training isn't, is just way off track. That's how we train.

The Vietnam vets who trained us worked to that standard and maintained it all through peacetime – because that's the standard. Anything less is not acceptable. It's certainly not the standard in most government offices or civilian workplaces – but it's the standard in the infantry.

That's why the Veterans' Entitlement Act used to cover service both in Australia and overseas, in training or on operations. But now, all those soldiers who maintain that standard all through peacetime are not being looked after.

A good friend of mine went down with heat. When he was a young lad, he used to be under-12 chess champion of England – represented his country in chess. So there's no denying he had aptitude. But after he went down with heat that day, he was medically discharged from the Army with ADHD, and has never settled down since. I get emails from him from the jungles of Africa where he's training rebels, or from other parts of the world where he just bounces around, not able to settle down.

If he discharged before 1994 he would have been covered by the Veterans' Entitlement Act and got a medical gold card and be looked after. But because he discharged in 1997, he's not entitled to anything.

I HAD MATES GO DOWN IN SINGLETON, CEREBRAL FLUID COMING OUT THEIR EYES, THEIR EARS, THEIR NOSES – BUT, AFTER THEY RECOVERED, THEY JUST GOT ON WITH SOLDIERING

God knows what will happen to him. I might find him in the gutter one day – but hopefully not.

One thing I can say about him, though, is that he knows the standard and still works to it. He works hard.

I could not say I worked any harder in Timor than I ever did in Australia just because Timor was 'the real thing' – it is always the real thing, especially for infantry.

You know, I nearly died at Singleton. We were set up for an ambush at night and the temperature suddenly dropped to minus 7.

You lie there and you get to that point where it's so cold you feel like your fingers and your toes and then your whole body is being crushed in a vice. Then you get to that point where you're shivering uncontrollably. Then that goes away and you drift off to sleep.

I woke up, with the rest of my section, wrapped in space blankets being worked on by medics around a fire.

We were screwed that night – the whole section – until someone decided to come and get us.

But, during the ambush, no one got up and said 'Oh, this is too cold for an ambush'. That's the standard.

The standard is – you work to the point where either you die or the system steps in and doesn't let you die. It happens quite regularly. That's the standard."

Privates Mick Holececk and Craig Mercer, D Company 2RAR, take the lead under load in Tully. Pic Corporal Darren Hilder 1998

Having worked that hard for however many years, did 'the system' look after you?

"I think 'the system' in Australia could do more to repatriate people after they do this kind of work.

After 1945, legislation came into parliament that basically said, if two people are going for a civil-service job, and one is a veteran and all else is equal, you must give the job to the veteran. I think they realised that if you put people to work and used their skills it would be better all 'round. And let's face it, that was an era when a lot of stuff got done in Australia. Remember, these were motivated and skilled people with very high standards. They knew what hard work was and they worked damn hard.

The main regret I have is that I haven't been utilised after my military career.

Being here at uni keeps my mind active and gives my life a sense of purpose. It's important that I feel I have a use, or a future use, to society other than being a 'grunt'.

'Grunt' is an American term that I don't like and gets associated with my generation of infantry and, frankly, I think it underestimates our ability.

A lot of good blokes I know are working in tyre shops and the like. With their skills, I can't fathom why. And it's not their fault – society just doesn't recognise these people for who they are or what they can do. I think there's very little respect in Australia generally for soldiers – and less so for former soldiers.

Privates Corde Wilkes and Matt Thorpe, D Company 2RAR, in deep in Tully. Pic Corporal Darren Hilder 1998

THE MAIN REGRET I HAVE IS THAT I HAVEN'T BEEN UTILISED AFTER MY MILITARY CAREER

Many of us can prove that we are capable and intelligent. NSW University just offered a mate of mine an honours degree, for example. If he tells anyone he has an honours degree from Uni NSW, they'll automatically respect him. But if he says he used to be a rifleman in an infantry battalion, they're not going to respect him as being intelligent. But he's got the same mind now as he had then."

Why did you join the army in the first place?

"My initial motivation in joining the Army was to serve – it certainly wasn't to make money. My family runs a business that probably paid more in tax last year than I made in my whole career in the Army. I could have stayed in that line of work and done quite well.

I think any young man with red blood in his veins likes adventure, and the Army certainly advertises itself as adventurous. I think that that adventure appealed to me, and the fact that that adventure could be beneficial and have a strong sense of purpose for my nation and for other countries was a bonus.

I could have become a policeman if all I wanted was to carry a gun, have adventure and serve my nation. But the Army offered a little more. I wanted to do things for people in countries that didn't have the stability and security that we take for granted. That's where you can really make a difference to humanity. I think that's why Brad Pitt and others go to Africa and build houses for people. Little things like that make a big difference to the global community. And if everybody did just a little bit in the course of their lives, then the world would be a better place."

So, you joined the Army to serve your country?

"To serve? I'm not really the serving type. I don't like being told what to do generally. I don't think anyone does. It's not a natural thing. I didn't want to be told what to do at every minute of the day and be micromanaged like a sardine. I wanted to be a professional and do my job to the best of my ability. I didn't want to be treated like a lemming, as the Army can sometimes do – in fact, the Air Force calls the Army a bunch of lemmings, and it's probably true sometimes.

It wasn't about serving or being subordinate. It was about doing and achieving things that I could be proud of in old age.

Young people today have great opportunities to join the Army, go to Iraq or Afghanistan or somewhere else and make a difference that will be put down in history and remembered. You can choose to be a part of it or not.

The war in Iraq will never be forgotten. Afghanistan will never be forgotten. As individuals we will all be forgotten, but the things we do in life will not. That is history, and you can either participate in it or read about it.

I chose to participate.

You can call that 'service' if you like, but that might indicate that I was subordinate. A few of my commanders might not agree with that. I was a little shit!

But I did my bit, I think I did a good job and I'm proud of what I achieved, even if it did cost me a lot."

5th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment – 5RAR

Raised	1 March 1965 3 December 2006
Battalion colour	Gold (BCC 114)
Battalion nickname	Tiger Battalion, The Tigers
Mascot	Sumatran Tiger "Sabre"
Battalion march	Dominique
Current home	Robertson Barracks, NT
Future role	Mechanised, Robertson Barracks, NT

Formation

The 5th Battalion was formed on 1 March 1965 around officers and men drawn from 1RAR.

Just eight years later it was linked with 7RAR to form 5/7RAR on 3 December 1973, but again delinked on 3 December 2006.

5RAR was the first battalion to be formed with a majority of National Servicemen and its deployment to Vietnam in 1966 marked the first time in Australian history that non volunteers were sent overseas to fight.

Vietnam 1966–1967

Early in 1966, the government announced that 5RAR would serve in South Vietnam.

After an intensive training period, including jungle training at Canungra, 5RAR marched through Sydney on 21 April 1966, and departed by air and on HMAS Sydney for South Vietnam.

After landing at Vung Tau Beach, in-country training preceded the first operation, Hardihood, which began on 24 May and saw 5RAR clearing and securing Australian's base for the following years, at Nui Dat.

During this first tour of active service, 5RAR participated in 31 operations. Nine cordon and search operations were also conducted by the battalion in villages in Phuoc Tuy Province, with the battalion developing techniques in this type of operation that were accepted and used throughout the army.

An additional seven operations of company size were undertaken with 6RAR.

The battalion suffered 25 killed and 79 wounded on this first tour.

The battalion handed the camp over to 7RAR before returning to a tumultuous welcome in Sydney on 12 March 1967 and, eight months later, began preparations for a second tour.

Vietnam 1969–1970

With just 80 members left from the first tour, 5RAR virtually re-formed and spent all of 1968 training at Holsworthy, Tianjara, Gospers, Singleton, Canungra and Shoalwater Bay, before departing on 24 January 1969.

The face of war had changed since the first tour, with the battalion this time facing protracted and large-scale battles with North Vietnamese and Viet Cong enemy entrenched in bunkers. More than 10,000 bunkers were located and destroyed during the year – about 2000 of which were occupied by an enemy armed with rocket propelled grenades, claymores and AK47 automatic rifles. The battalion also suffered more than 100 casualties to mines.

Twenty-five soldiers were killed and 250 wounded on this second tour.

The Battalion once again was warmly welcomed home on a march through Sydney on 12 March 1970.

Mascot

In March 1967, to coincide with the battalion's return from Vietnam, Taronga Zoo presented a Sumatran tiger cub to the battalion to serve as its mascot. He was named Quintus and enlisted into the battalion, eventually rising to the rank of warrant officer class two.

While Quintus lives at Taronga Zoo, in Sydney, the battalion could borrow a similar cub of manageable age to present on parade during major ceremonial occasions.

The current 5RAR tiger is called Sabre and lives at Crocodylus Park in Darwin. Sabre was on parade when the battalion received its new Colours on 5 June 2008.

5th/7th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment: 5/7RAR

Raised	3 December 1973
Battalion colour	Gold (BCC 114) & Maroon (BCC 39)
Battalion march	Dominaise
Delinked	3 December 2006

5/7RAR was formed on 3 December 1973 at Holsworthy Barracks in Sydney by combining the 5th and 7th Battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment.

In January 1975, the battalion deployed to Darwin to help with the clean-up following Cyclone Tracy.

Between 1976 and 1978, 5/7RAR trialled a mechanised infantry organisation using M113 armoured personnel carriers. However, while the trial was a success, only one company was actually mechanised, the role moving around the companies on a 12-month rotation until the battalion was fully mechanised in 1984.

In 1999, 5/7RAR relocated from Holsworthy to Darwin and later the same year made its first operational deployment, contributing to INTERFET. During this deployment, INTERFET transitioned to a UN mission, and 5/7RAR became the first 'AUSBATT' of UNTAET.

After a seven-month tour, the battalion returned to Australia in April 2000. It returned to serve a second tour in East Timor between October 2002 and May 2003, though this time in a light-infantry role.

5/7RAR's final deployments were to Iraq and Afghanistan, sending company-sized groups or smaller to Baghdad, Tallil and Tarin Kowt.

On 3 December 2006, 5/7RAR was formally delinked to re-form the 5th and 7th Battalions, both of which will be mechanised – 5RAR remaining in Darwin while 7RAR will eventually move to Adelaide when new facilities are built.

Pic Sergeant Troy Rogers

BREAD and BUTTER

WORDS AJ SHINNER PICS ADF AND SHINNER COLLECTION

The author on guard during an aid task.

It's been said that you can sail past it, fly or drive over it, but the ground will never belong to you until an infantryman stands firm and digs a hole in it.

While respecting the other services and supporting corps, I must say I believe this statement is true and that even in the most non-conventional situations this is still and will probably always be the case.

But I'm also a firm believer in Mr Murphy, whose holy laws of combat don't always shine down in favour of the lowly infantryman.

After two solid years of close-country and jungle-warfare training with the 1st Battalion, I probably should have expected that we were going to be deployed to the desert in northern Africa – thanks Murphy.

From day one in country we did it all – humanitarian missions, defended water points, protected convoys, manned vehicle check points, kicked in some doors and yes, even dug a few holes.

Somalia in 1993 could never be considered a conventional old-school infantry operation, but like so many times before, the adaptable Aussie Digger put on his boots and learnt on the run.

While no strangers to low-level ops and humanitarian training, the only thing that we were truly prepared for and masters of was patrolling.

I personally felt we were never more in control of the ground than when we were on the streets of Baidoa getting our GP boots dirty.

Even more so while 'down town' lurking in the shadows and darkness at 3am and, quite frankly, we wouldn't have wanted it any other way.


The author geared up for patrol.


Cav support.


Flatley, Billy and Meehan outside a house they assaulted.

Although we took to the urban patrolling tasks in Baidoa – or, more correctly, in AO Falcon – like fish to water, the first few night patrols were a tad surreal.

While patrolling on the main streets and market places before 1am or so, we were surprised to find throngs of people still moving about, conducting business and socialising, most of them relatively unconcerned by our presence or passing.

It's easy to appreciate, after spending even the shortest time in Somalia, that many people living in hot arid countries prefer to move about on the streets later in the day and at night to avoid the oppressive heat.

One of the compromises we were forced to make while moving through these crowded areas came after the realisation that certain section weapons were instantly limited to the point of being virtually unusable.


Axel takes 5 during a cordon and search.

As gunner, I voiced my concerns to our section commander, Mac, about not being able to deploy my Minimi effectively while being boxed in by civilians.

It was made very clear to us before deploying that regardless of red or yellow cards, all contacts resulting in casualties or fatalities would be investigated fully and charges would be made if negligence or wrong-doings were discovered.

Letting rip a three-round burst in a crowded market place was never going to be justifiable and was definitely not going to win anybody's hearts or minds.

Opting for personal protection during these parts of the patrols, I ended up slinging the Minimi across my chest while carrying the Browning pistol and a torch in my off hand.

With Polly and his night-vision scope out in front of the section, followed by Gus and his goggles, we'd sift through the crowds and weed out any likely candidates for a random search.

On queue, I would then move to one side and illuminate the suspect with the torch as the rest of the section went into all-around defence and covered us as the boys carried out a quick search.

Of course, we were warned pre-deployment, that we were going to see a lot of weapons on the streets and it was stressed that not all of the people carrying weapons would be bad guys. We were told to be prepared for it, not to freak out and instinctively fire when seeing a weapon, to stick to the rules of engagement and not to fire unless fired upon and blah blah blah blah.

The fact is that nothing can prepare you for that first time – or second time for that matter – that you see the barrel of an AK47 being raised towards you at close range.

As a 17-year-old tourist in Sri Lanka I had taken a photo of a Naval Commando on a street corner in Colombo, which unfortunately resulted in me looking cross eyed at an AK foresight no more than half a metre from my face as he screamed, "No pictures please, thank you sir!" Suffice to say, the undies I was wearing that day ended up in the bin.

Six years later, on one of our first night patrols in Baidoa, this time thankfully armed to the teeth, we were moving out of the crowded market area heading east on the main road.

I was about to re-holster my pistol and start patrolling with the Minimi again when Gus stopped in front of me and looked into the blackness of an open compound doorway.

In a very animated comical way, he proceeded to bob his head from side to side like a pigeon, as you do when you're wearing the crappy earlier generation night-vision goggles and can't see shit through the fuzzy green snow storm.

He then turned to me and whispered, "There's two guys sitting against the wall in there, zap them with the torch and check them out mate."

Gus moved to the other side of the opening, I moved up to the doorway, aimed the torch with my left hand and my pistol with the other and hit the switch.

For a split second the two locals seated not more than 5 metres away on a bench looked like Roos in a headlight, eyes as big as dinner plates with jaws open.

The next second the AK47 and SKS assault rifles they had resting on their laps were being raised towards me.

"WEAPON!" I dropped the torch which turned off as I released the button and, in a practised motion, brought both hands together, swiped the pistol's safety and pulled the trigger as I dove painfully onto the ground on top of the Minimi still slung across my chest.

As Murphy's Law of Combat dictates, the safety stuck and the Browning 9mm pistol sat quietly in my hands and, for what seemed like an eternity, I lay totally exposed in the doorway.

THE NEXT SECOND THE AK47 AND SKS ASSAULT RIFLES THEY HAD RESTING ON THEIR LAPS WERE BEING RAISED TOWARDS ME

My brain was screaming as I tried to carry out the immediate-action drill on the pistol while digging in with my eyelids.

Cocking my head to one side I tried to use my peripheral vision to scan the darkness, suddenly aware that the next thing I should be seeing was the twin muzzle flashes of the assault rifles being fired at me from point-blank range.

In reality, only a few seconds passed as Smurf scrambled onto some rubbish to cover over the 6-foot wall as the section trampled over me in the doorway and burst into the compound.

As the last pair of boots passed over my back I tried to mentally stop the flow of adrenalin which was flooding my system and I joined the section in securing the two men and the warehouse compound.

Now shaking and full to the brim with adrenalin, I let rip a string of obscenities and abuse at the two males as Rock and Abs patted them down.

I was furious that the pistol's safety had stuck, totally pissed off that the incident had been a near fatal fuck up, ecstatic to still be alive, but completely embarrassed that I had ended up rolling around on the ground while the section did the deed.

In retrospect, if the pistol had worked and by some miracle I had actually hit my intended targets – which is highly unlikely – would it have been seen by the green machine as a lawful act of self-defence?

Buggered if I know, but thankfully there were no muzzle flashes or cracks of automatic fire. In their wisdom, the two locals, who turned out to be legitimate security guards, had thrown their rifles down as soon as they heard me scream in English.

For the second time after a close encounter with an AK, I changed my jocks, chalked it all up as a learning experience and never again, while deployed, used the safety on the pistol.

While night patrolling in AO Falcon, which was the eastern end of town, the three sections of Call Sign 3-2 were housed in walled NGO compounds close to each other and each in turn rotated through patrolling, gun pickets and sleeping.

A section would finish each patrol by dropping their night-vision goggles, radios or any other shared items off to the next section, pass on any relevant intelligence and then head back off down the road to find their farter sacks. With the wisdom of hindsight, it's absurd to think that we were forced to juggle the most basic pieces of kit used by well-equipped modern armies.

Randomly, Mac, our section commander, would pick a guy to stay in the compound to man a radio and ensure our gear didn't get knocked off while the rest of the section kitted up and headed out into the darkness.

Although not as tactically productive as the earlier or last patrols of the night, the graveyard shift around 0300hrs was my favourite.

During these times, when the streets were clear of people, we could not only move around quickly and quietly, but we could also pop in and out of the labyrinth of alleyways without being easily monitored by the clansmen and their lookouts – a nice way to earn our bread and butter.

One very dark, moonless night, we were near to completing one of these tension-

filled graveyard-shift patrols when a torch popped on about 20 or 30 metres ahead, on the side of the road, about 3 or 4 metres off the ground.

Gus and Polly instinctively trained their weapons onto the torch and slowly went down onto their knees.

Expecting the worst, I moved a metre to my left to clear Gus and lowered the Minimi slightly, clicked off the safety and adopted the textbook standing position for night firing.

Although we must have been at the maximum range of illumination of what appeared to be a hand-held torch, it never wavered and stayed firmly fixed on Gus and myself.

Then I became aware of a strange noise from the direction of the torch and it suddenly hit me that something was incredibly wrong.

As stealthy as the patrol had been, the fact that there had been no moon meant that, as a group, we were dependent on Mac and his map to pin-point our exact location and steer us home.

Head and Axel chat with kids.

Day-patrol through a marketplace.

3-2 Bravo patrol a back alley.

Although we had regularly passed known landmarks at various times during the patrol, at the point of encountering the torch I didn't have a clue where we were, how far we were from home, or how close we were to friendly forces.

After hearing a louder click from up ahead and knowing Polly to my left in the dark and Gus at my feet to my right would be taking up trigger pressures, I took a massive punt and called out "Australia".

A muffled "Shit" could be heard and the torch went out.

We moved up and practically bumped into the familiar shape of an APC that was parked outside the compound housing our Company HQ.

With the light of a dodgy, issued torch and no moonlight to adequately use the night-vision goggles, the APC commander had only just been able to make out that we were armed men and taking up hostile firing positions.

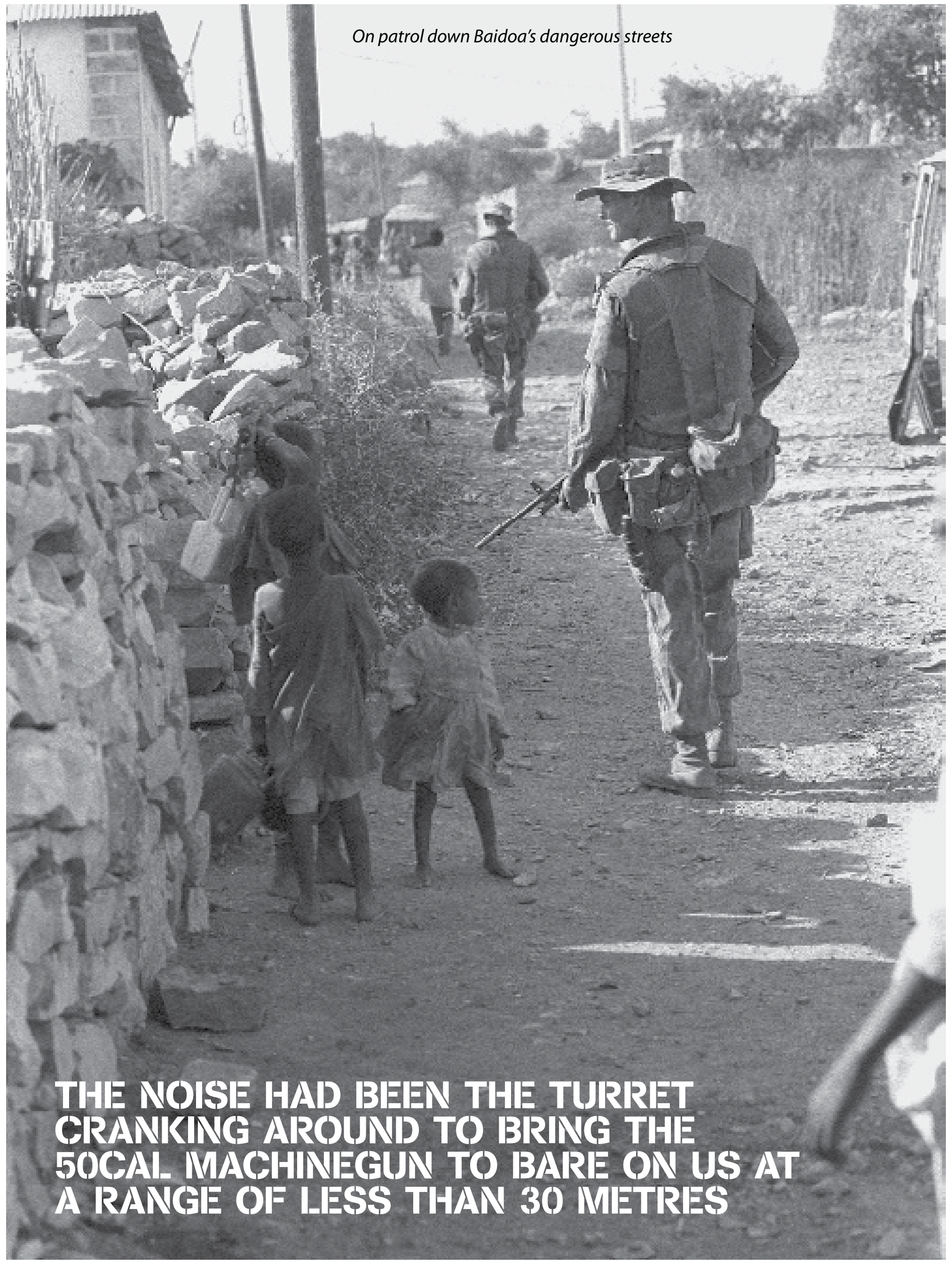
The noise had been the turret cranking around to bring the 50cal machinegun to bare on us at a range of less than 30 metres.

In our defence, on many occasions we were forced to operate without a GPS and, armed with only the crudest of maps, night navigation generally sucked and needed your full attention – even more so on a moonless night in the maze that was Baidoa's back streets.

I guess Mac had misjudged our position short by a few hundred metres and had not yet radioed ahead warning Coy HQ we were passing by.

I will be honest and say I had been rattled by the incident and made the effort the next day to find the person who had been in the APC turret.

Disturbingly, the Cav guy confirmed that we had scared the shit out of him and he was indeed bringing the 50cal to bear on what he thought was a group of bandits.



On patrol down Baidoa's dangerous streets

After a short conversation and a forced laugh, he looked me square in the eyes and confessed he had been very close to pulling the trigger.

The most memorable incidents from 3-2's night patrolling, and indeed the more interesting of all our contacts in Somalia, were undoubtedly the two involving 3-2 Charlie and what we all christened 'Billy's Contacts'.

Named after 3-2 Charlie's section commander, the two contacts in question occurred in 'Murder Alley' near the main marketplace, and both in the early hours of the morning.

The first of the two patrols was conducted from our tent at the airfield and was intended to cover the western end of town.

3-2 Charlie would leave via the front gate, head up towards the centre of town and pass down through the main market area, then pass along some of the southern back streets and back across the south bridge over the dry river bed and home.

Unknown to me because I was sound asleep and snoring my head off, Steve, 3-2 Charlie's lead scout had started to throw his guts up only hours before they were supposed to depart on task.

After finally convincing Steve that he wasn't well enough to go on patrol, Billy and Lively, 3-2 Charlie's 2IC, had a quick powwow and put Flatley in the lead-scout's position, and headed off into the night.

About 45 minutes later I was semi-conscious, laying on my cot, when the night was shattered by an intense fire-fight off in the distance.

Along with several other guys, I sat bolt upright. Knowing it must have been Billy's patrol, we quickly started gearing up and listened as the firing increased.

After the initial contact, where it was virtually impossible to pick out individual weapons firing, there was a short silence then several long bursts from a Minimi followed by the louder thumps from what we guessed was an APC's 50cal, before there was finally silence.

It wasn't until I was pretty much ready to run out the door that it dawned on me that 3-2 wasn't the designated QRF and we were forced to stand and listen helplessly at the open end of the 11 x 11 tent.

It wasn't until Billy's section started filtering back into the tent after being dropped at the Coy HQ by APC that we understood what had transpired.

While patrolling along the infamous Murder Alley, Flatley had heard a weapon being cocked in a doorway in front of him and called out a warning.

The unseen gunman replied by firing a burst which hit Flatley's rifle, hand and night-vision goggles.

The section then put in covering fire so the scouts could move back to safety.

Day, the section radioman, was moving across the road to a new firing position and was hit in the shoulder. With his left arm starting to stiffen, Day called in a contact report along with his own casevac request.

As Billy got sorted and started withdrawing the section to the main road, Liveley and Blakey, with the section Minimi, laid down several bursts towards a few of the more bolder Somalis who were attempting to continue the fight.

During the fighting withdrawal, Day was continually on the radio vectoring in the APCs, which had started their race to the contact location as soon as the first rounds had been fired.

Hearing the APCs approach, Day guided them in the last few hundred metres and 3-2 Charlie loaded up.

After the section hit the ramp, the lead APC commander fired a few rounds from the 50cal to discourage several armed Somalis who had pursued 3-2 Charlie to the extraction point. Unwilling to take on the heavier-calibre weapon, the bandits melted away into the darkness.

After a record-breaking run back to the airfield, it was confirmed at the RAP that Day had a clean entry and exit wound in the soft tissue of his left shoulder and Flatley, by some miracle, only had a chip out of his right hand.

The next morning we all inspected Flatley's rifle and goggles and were gobsmacked at how lucky he had been. Along with the three rounds that had destroyed his rifle and goggles, another round had passed through the blousing of his trousers above his left boot!

Call it Karma or whatever, but Steve was definitely not destined to go on that patrol and I'm convinced he would not still be walking this Earth if he did.

A day or two later the rest of 3-2 were moved into town to an NGO compound while 3-2 Charlie, Billy's section, stayed at the airfield to do a night patrol from there.

Later in our deployment this compound would become infamous for the 'Toga Party' that was held by several NGO groups. The hype built for several days about this party and we were disgusted to see vast amounts of money spent shipping in lobsters, steaks, beer and spirits from Kenya.

Actually, they probably deserved the distraction but, I think at the time, we were simply pissed that we weren't invited, although, at the very least, it was rather entertaining.

I can't help but smile remembering a group of us hearing a couple becoming very amorous and loud, enticing us to a side window where we watched the proceedings which ended in a female participant being left tied to a bed!

Anyway…… that's another story.

So, just a few days after the platoon's first major contact, Billy's section again geared up, left the tent, and headed out the front


Flatley displays the damage after the first of 'Billy's contacts'.


LAAW damage on a roof after missing the door.

gate at the same time of night, on the same patrol route.

I vividly remember lying out in the open, on my cot, stunned to see the sky light up seconds before the thunder of the initial contact reached us.

As the first exchange of gunfire started to die, only about a kilometre away there was another flash in the sky and an ominous boom.

I heard someone in the darkness yell RGP, as we all scrambled for gear and weapons while Sarge screamed his tits off about mates dying due to our lack of professionalism and speed.

This time we were the QRF and it somehow felt very right to be running towards the APCs to go help our mates who were deeply involved in another major shitfight.

The drive took only minutes, but in that time a million pictures flashed through our heads about what we'd see when the ramps came down.

We had definitely heard one anti-armour weapon detonate, or at least a grenade, which we knew no one in Charlie Coy carried. We were expecting the worst.

When the ramps did come down we all carried out our drills and found cover, only to find the party very much over.

Steve would explain later that as they had cautiously come up to the same spot as the first contact, several locals had started shouting at them from doorways.

After a shouted warning back from Steve that they were Australians, the yelling increased, and an automatic burst from an AK erupted from a building at an intersection to their front.

After going to ground in the same spot for a second time in the space of only a few days, 3-2 Charlie was not keen to do the Harold Holt.

This time, the section laid down heavy fire and Billy directed Meehan to fire his 66mm LAAW [light anti-armour weapon] at the door of the building.

The crack-boom of the LAAW's rocket had abruptly ended the firefight but, from only 30 or so metres away, Meehan had missed the door. For some reason the rocket had veered off and hit the edge of the corrugated-tin roof, sending sparks and debris out across the street.

After missing the door with the LAAW, and the opportunity for a quick, dynamic building entry was lost, Billy took stock of the situation, opted for safety and waited for us to arrive.

While waiting for the familiar noise of our approaching APCs in the ensuing silence that followed the 66 blast, an eerie light started emanating from the building's windows. It turns out that the contact had happened at such close range that our tracer rounds were only igniting and whizzing around the floor after the rounds had been spent, bouncing off internal walls, passing through the door, walls and windows.

After we were all on the ground and Billy brought the Boss up to speed, he ordered 3-2 Alpha up.

From my vantage point, covering down the road, I watched as Tom and his boys kicked the door in. There was a pregnant pause and then a loud, "Check this shit out".

The rest of 3-2 Alpha filed in, followed by the Boss and Sarge.

J Conway would comment later on how surreal it was finding four wounded locals laying on the floor inside.

Comically, the four were all lying on the floor in a row, rigidly at attention, their eyes wide open, covered in a fine white dust that had fallen from the ceiling when the 66's rocket had impacted.

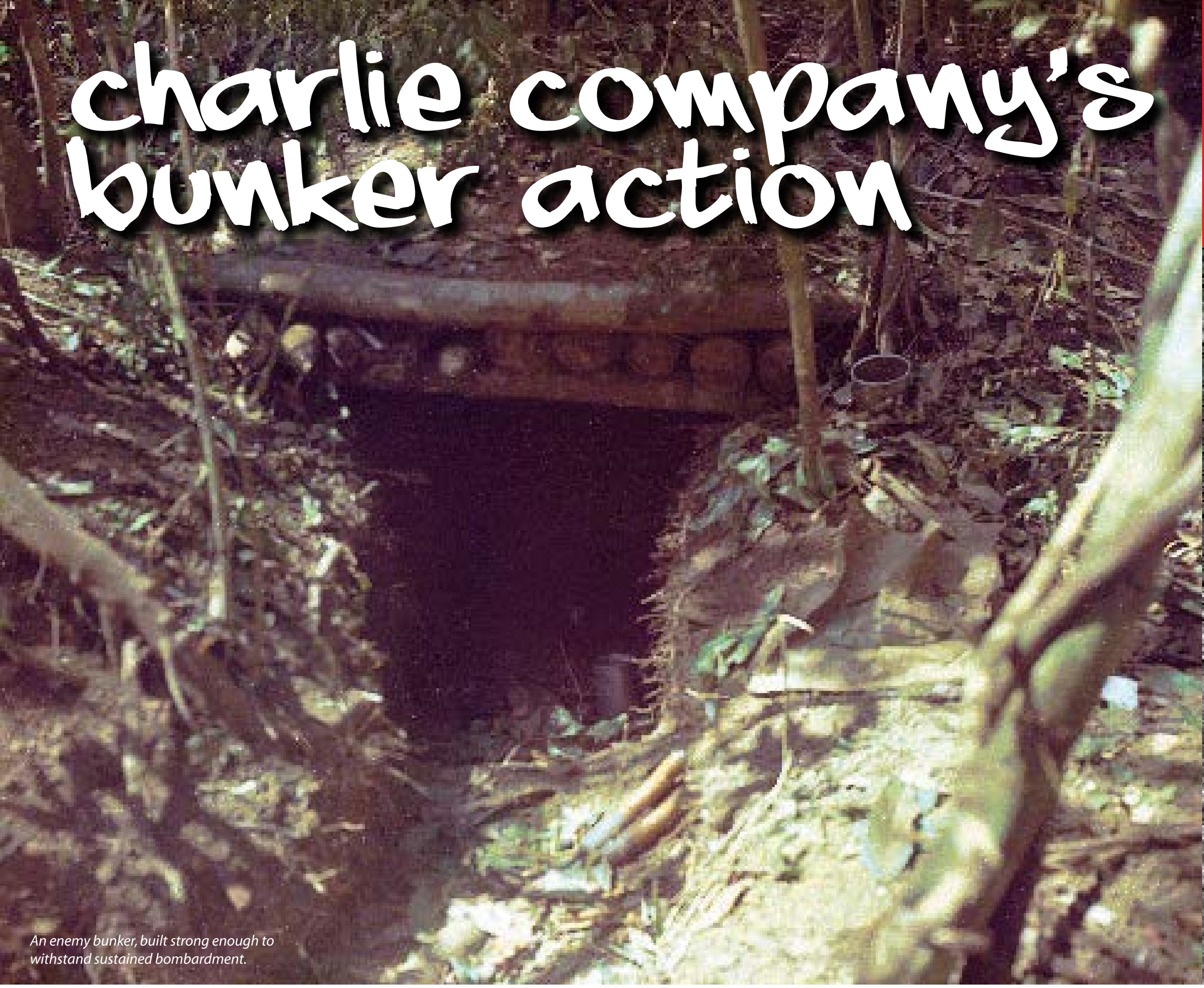
As they lay there, weapons neatly stacked off to one side, each man held his ID up, ready for inspection.

Only in Somalia.

This story is the fourth from AJ Shinner, then a private with 1RAR, and the 20th in an ongoing series of personal recollections from Operation Solace in Somalia – the first 16 instalments provided by Lance Corporal Wayne Cooper, a crew commander in a 3/4 Cav Regt APC. AJ Shinner's recollections from Somalia will continue to run in CONTACT Air Land & Sea for the foreseeable future.


Abs outside a clan meetingplace.

charlie company's bunker action



An enemy bunker, built strong enough to withstand sustained bombardment.

"probably one of the most brilliant actions ever fought by an australian rifle company"

Left: A small cache of captured equipment.
Below: Ken Wood, Brian Doctor, Pepe Turra, Eric Tickner, Colin Knox and Peter Hope.

Long Tan, Coral and Balmoral are names synonymous with Australian bravery and, in many cases, represent the full extent of general knowledge of Australia's involvement in Vietnam.

However, during January and February 1968, Australian regular and national service soldiers fought another battle that could easily have gone down in the annals of history as one of the greatest engagements of the war, were it not overshadowed by the bigger picture of the first Tet Offensive.

WORDS BRIAN HARTIGAN PICS ADF AND MOLONEY COLLECTION

Operation Coburg was another in a long series of Australian search-and-destroy missions designed primarily to protect the American base at Bien Hoa.

Three Australian infantry battalions – 2RAR, 3RAR and 7RAR – were involved in Operation Coburg and all three saw heavy and prolonged fighting over the course of the operation from 24 January to 1 March 1968.

2RAR and 7RAR were inserted to their respective areas of operation by helicopter from their base at Nui Dat, 7RAR inserted into the western area called AO Ayre, a six-by-11 kilometre patch of Bien Hoa Provence. Charlie Company, however, was detached from 7RAR and was made responsible for the defence of Fire Support Base Harrison until it was relieved by C Company 3RAR on 29 January and then designated the reserve company for the Australian Task Force. C Company 7RAR conducted its own patrols whilst located at Fire Support Base Harrison and was later given its own area of operations while acting as the task force reserve company.

Unknown to the Australians at the time, the enemy was already moving in large numbers to position for an attack on the American bases at Long Binh, Bien Hoa and Saigon where Tan Son Nhut airport was the primary target.

Fighting between 7RAR and a heavily armed and well-motivated enemy, including some units from North Vietnamese regiments, started almost immediately after insertion and continued throughout the day. Battalion headquarters was pinned down and was forced to dig in on the side of a hill – a tactically precarious and uncomfortable position in the eyes of its commander.

Other companies encountered varying numbers of enemy while patrolling, and fierce but fleeting battles ensued – the enemy putting up a good fight where necessary, but preferring to simply flow around the Australian 'obstacle' on his relentless march towards his greater objectives where possible.

For several days, every platoon in every company saw action. In one encounter lasting two-and-a-half hours on 29 January, 2 Platoon, A Company almost literally bumped into the enemy, opening fire at a range of four metres, killing four in the first exchange. The enemy retaliated with rockets and heavy fire, wounding the platoon commander, signaller and medic.

On the morning of 5 February, however, the detached C Company walked into the most serious fight of all.

It started routinely enough. While conducting another patrol outside FSB Harrison, the lead scout of the forward section of 8 Platoon, Clive Swaysland heard a noise he didn't like.

"The muffled sound of chopping alerted me. I called a halt and signalled the section commander forward," he says.

Section Commander Corporal Graham Griffiths and Platoon Commander Lieutenant Mark Moloney went forward to assess the situation and make a report to Company Commander Major Graeme Chapman who ordered a more detailed reconnaissance of the area.

Private Swaysland took a small group down the hillside and followed a well-worn track trough a dry creek and up an embankment. The chopping noise recommenced – but this time much closer.

"Suddenly I saw him through the trees and urgently signalled 'enemy'.

"As the section deployed silently on each side of the track, a Vietcong soldier came into view. He was armed with an AK-47 assault rifle and was walking almost nonchalantly towards us along the track.

"When he was just metres away, our machine-gunner killed him."

Following this initial burst, the Australians came under heavy return fire that forced their withdrawal.

A further reconnaissance was ordered and Clive Swaysland, Leon Fitsimmons and Lance Corporal 'Massa' Clarke were sent out in the direction of the enemy.

Clarke, an Aborigine and a legend in the Army having served in WWII and every Australian conflict since, was a brilliant tracker and bushman and led the small group with such skill they got almost to within touching distance of the enemy without being seen.

"We had stumbled onto a hornets' nest – though we didn't know there were quite so many of them there at the time – four companies of what turned out to be the elite 274 Regiment on standby for the battle of Saigon," Swaysland says.

"They were occupying a huge and brilliantly constructed, fortified bunker system and were armed with light and heavy machineguns, recoilless rifles, cannons, RPG7 rockets, AK-47s and just about every conceivable variety of hand grenade."

Platoon Commander 8 Platoon, Lieutenant Mark Moloney explains that at that time, 7RAR and C Company in particular was at little better than half strength because of R&R, R&C and rear details and because, being almost at the end of its tour, it generally lost out on reinforcements to the other battalions.

"When you talk about numbers, we probably had six men to a section instead of 10. So we were basically three machinegun and scout groups as opposed to a full fighting platoon," he says.

"I think that's not uncharacteristic of a whole lot of platoons at the latter part of their tour.

"So, when people talk about a platoon they usually think it's a full fighting thing – but it wasn't in our case. And when you start taking heavy casualties, the numbers game becomes even more difficult."

Regardless of the manpower odds, however, the Aussies had a job to do and were not keen to back down from a fight. So, plans for an attack on the camp were formulated.

With Kevin Lewis' 9 Platoon on the right flank, Moloney's 8 Platoon on the left, and 7 Platoon taking up a defensive position in the rear, Charlie Company, 7RAR attacked. 9 Platoon, augmented by Company HQ and a machinegun group from 8 Platoon, was to make the first assault.

As they neared the objective, the lead machine-gunner of 9 Platoon saw the first enemy raise his head above a parapet, and opened fire.

Fire from the Vietcong bunkers roared in response.

"We went to ground and began to return fire immediately," Clive Swaysland says.

This attack was not successful and a withdrawal occurred.

Clive Swaysland continues, "George Turner, the gunner who had initiated the contact, was hit in the leg early on, and yelled out for a medic.

"I watched the company medic run through a hail of fire, then crawl the last bit to get to George. I have no idea how he wasn't killed right then and there."

After putting a makeshift litter together, Swaysland helped carry the injured Turner rearward, away from the fight. Passing through the 7 Platoon position he saw Corporal Peter Dowling cradling a dead comrade.

Turner was winched out by an RAAF chopper – which stayed in the hover while also taking heavy ground fire. This evacuation was organised by the Company 2IC, Captain Colin Titmarsh.

Following the initial engagement, which lasted about 20 minutes, the company pulled back from the fight to allow for a heavy work-over by artillery and air-support elements. It was becoming clearer that the size of the enemy encampment and the numbers within it were much greater than first thought.

Supporting the Aussies were a range of assets including US 155mm guns, Australian artillery batteries using 105mm guns, helicopter gunships and fast jets, including Australian Canberra bombers. All were employed.

In the mid afternoon, after the bombardment had stopped, 9 Platoon again advanced on the camp to conduct a reconnaissance. They again came under heavy fire, withdrew and the bombardment recommenced. Artillery continued pounding the enemy position throughout the night.

On this, the first day of the battle, one Australian was killed and three wounded.

The next day was spent reconnoitring the enemy position. Observations of the enemy's demeanour suggested that the severe and sustained bombardments had had little effect, indicating that his bunker systems were substantial.

Artillery bombardment continued throughout the second night. Clive Swaysland recalls the next morning's activity.

"We moved to attack again, this time coming in from the opposite direction of our previous assaults.

"We advanced in extended line (line abreast), with me on the extreme left flank and Corporal Graham Griffiths next in line. Because the undergrowth was so thick, however, me and Griffiths lost sight of the others, but decided to press on at the same pace, trusting that the line would also continue moving at the same pace."

It wasn't to be, however, and the pair were the first to emerge from the jungle. In front of them, in plain sight, were enemy bunkers – but no sign of enemy.

There was a deathly silence.

Swaysland and Griffiths, acting as one and without saying anything to each other, attacked the nearest bunker and occupied it. There was no one in it – though latter-day legend says otherwise!

When the rest of the platoon emerged from the jungle, a wall of fire met them as other bunkers roared into action. The Aussies returned fire with everything they had – with Swaysland and Griffiths caught in the middle.

From this precarious position, caught in the crossfire between the two sides, Swaysland and Griffiths managed to silence the two bunkers closest to them with rifle fire and grenades and were also able to direct Australian fire on to other bunkers otherwise concealed from the main Australian force.

Then, Clive Swaysland says, he and Griffiths were almost left behind when their colleagues withdrew in the face of the first wall of fire.

"From where I was, I could see that the camp was very professionally laid out. The bunkers were well constructed and they all had well-marked fire lanes.

"If Griffo and I were going to get out with the others, I could see we'd have to cross over several of those lanes.

"I yelled out to a mate on the other side, 'Do you think we can get across there?' and he yelled back that he didn't think we would make it.

Below: Ted Lewis takes time out for a brew.

Mortars, artillery and aerial assault helped save the day.

Lieutenant Mark Moloney sifts through captured documents.

Sentry duty in thick jungle.

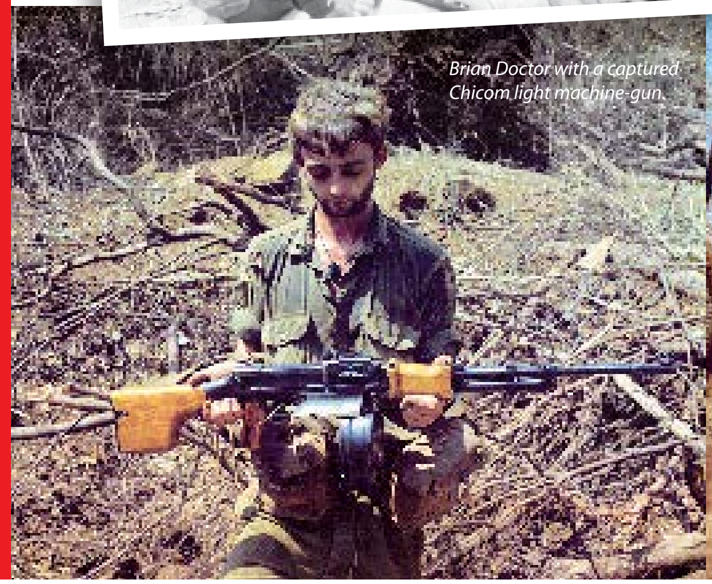
When the rest of the platoon emerged from the jungle, a wall of fire met them as other bunkers roared into action. The Aussies returned fire with everything they had - with Swaysland and Griffiths caught in the middle!

Eric Tickner, Thomas Hunt, Ken Wood and Peter Hope

"seven air strikes were made in all, two of them with napalm within 100 metres of us, as well as almost continuous fire from helicopter gunships.

Charlie Company's lines

Caption????



Brian Doctor with a captured Chicom light machine-gun.

A resupply chopper flies over jungle shattered by heavy artillery.

"But, there was no way I was staying there – so we leopard-crawled all the way out – and got away with it.

"We didn't know it then – thank God – but that was just the beginning of seven hours of fierce fighting."

Over the next seven hours, the fighting was indeed fierce. Disaster almost beset the Australians as the enemy proved very determined.

Early in the ensuing battle, forward elements of the Australian assault were all-but outflanked and receiving fire from three sides.

Throughout the day, artillery and air support was called on to the position at ever-closer ranges to the Australians.

At one point, as the enemy were observed to be massing for a counter strike, fast jets were ordered to drop their loads on the smoke thrown by the Australians – no more than 10 metres away.

Swaysland recalls, "The ground shook as the planes attacked. Shrapnel was screaming through the air and the noise of the aircraft climbing steeply away after strafing and firing their rockets was deafening. It was an experience both horrifying and sublime.

"Seven air strikes were made in all, two of them with napalm within 100 metres of us, as well as almost continuous fire from helicopter gunships.

"Unlike earlier air strikes, these did temporarily halt the Vietcong impetus and the small respite gave us the chance to turn defence into attack.

"With the choice to kill or be killed, we fought as if possessed."

These latter assaults were supplemented by mortars, as a section of mortars had been relocated to support the company following its return to battalion control.

Swaysland recalls seeing platoon commander Lieutenant Mark Moloney repeatedly charging at bunkers with M-72 rockets, exposing himself to enemy fire with every charge and, although eventually badly wounded, did not leave the field until the battle was over.

"Anthony Hughes and Bert Baayens, whose machinegun would have been white hot by this stage, stayed at their post until they were both badly wounded and their weapon was destroyed when a bullet lodged in it.

"Machine-gunners Ross De Gray and Ken Woods and their number twos never waivered under a non-stop barrage from the Vietcong.

"Johnny Sargent, the 8 Platoon signaller, fell seriously wounded with his radio blasted off his back.

"Massa Clarke and Graham Steele fell wounded near Fitzsimmons and me – but neither of us were touched.

"Artillery signaller Mike Williams was seriously wounded in the head but refused to leave his position and continued to call in artillery until he blacked out.

"Jim Baty, 9 Platoon's section commander, somehow dragged two of his men back through the fire to the choppers.

"I have nothing but admiration for our medics and those helicopter pilots – Australian and American – who held firm under serious ground fire to get our wounded boys out."

The platoon suffered nine casualties in all, six requiring eventual evacuation to Australia.

I don't know what drives men on like that, Mark Moloney says.

"I'm hesitant to say it's one thing or another.

"I have to remember that within my platoon there were a number of Brits who migrated and joined 3 and 4RAR – so I can't say it's particularly an Australian characteristic as opposed to simply a characteristic of fine soldiers.

"Regular soldiers accepted it was their duty and they just got on with it, while the National Servicemen – well, you couldn't distinguish between them in many ways. They just accepted that they had to do it and they did it magnificently.

"I think the Australian method of operating was certainly different to the Americans and we just stuck by our belief in the way we needed to operate.

"The soldiers were magnificent in that. Nothing more could be asked of them.

"Despite the numbers, they never refused – they just kept coming. That was the way we operated."

In all, 15 Australians were wounded on this third day of battle while, much to the surprise and disbelief of 7 Platoon who were held back in reserve and swept through for the final clearance, none were killed. However, over the course of the whole three-day engagement, two Australians were killed and 32 wounded, while others, "suddenly imploded with battle fatigue and had to be taken from the field," Clive Swaysland says.

This engagement, for all its ferocity and despite considerable bravery shown by all – 'above-and-beyond' by quite a few – has largely gone unnoticed and unremarked in the grand scheme of things. In 1968 the Vietnam War was becoming unpopular in both Australia and the United States and our politicians were distancing themselves from it.

Or, whether the low Australian casualty statistics kept this action out of media spotlights or whether it was simply overshadowed by the sheer size and ultimate significance of the 'Tet Offensive', the 'Battle of Bien Hoa' (otherwise simply referred to as 'C Company's bunker action') has largely been missed by all but the keenest historian.

For those involved, however, this battle cannot be forgotten.

"At the end of it all, I have the greatest pride in those soldiers and what they achieved under extreme circumstances," Mark Moloney says.

"There's not been a lot written about their actions – though it isn't hidden either – it's just that, well, we won and we didn't lose anybody [in the final battle] – which I can tell you was a real miracle.

"Of course there was a certain amount of skill involved, otherwise we wouldn't have been there.

"Luck – I'm not sure. We were trying to make the pace ourselves, attacking not defending and he was certainly dug in, intending to stay. And we were certainly outnumbered.

"Devine intervention – who knows?

"I guess there was a bit of all of the above involved, plus professionalism, determination, courage and leadership."

Mark Moloney says the actual engagement was also remarkable for the fact that the Australians employed artillery and air support down to well below what is recommended as normal safe distances, despite an earlier experience where the platoon suffered casualties when using artillery at reduced safety distances.

"The supporting gunners, mortar numbers and pilots need praise for their efforts too. These were the things that saved us," he says.

"The final airstrike, which also contained napalm, probably had a lot to do with it – but, while that caused considerable damage, I think it was just our sheer persistence that eventually enabled us to get in."

Commanding officer 7RAR Lieutenant Colonel Eric Smith later described C Company's bunker action as, "Probably one of the most brilliant actions ever fought by an Australian rifle company".

A fraction of the stores captured in the bunker system.

6th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment: 6RAR

Raised	6 June 1965
Battalion colour	Khaki (BCC 72)
Battalion march	Spirit of Youth (for brass), and The Crusaders
Current home	Enoggera, Brisbane
Future role	Light Infantry, Brisbane

Formation

6RAR was raised in Brisbane on 6 June 1965 around a nucleus of officers and men mainly drawn from 2RAR and augmented in September by a large draft of National Servicemen.

Vietnam 1966–1967

After an intensive period of training, the new battalion flew from Amberley, by Qantas 707s, for South Vietnam in May 1966 arriving in time to celebrate its first birthday at Vung Tau before moving forward to join 5RAR at Nui Dat.

Between June and August 1966, 6RAR conducted two major operations – Enoggera and Hobart – accounting for 36 enemy casualties and the destruction of several camp installations and caches.

Operation Hobart also saw the battalion come in contact with the enemy provincial Mobile Battalion D445 which was subsequently met and defeated at Long Tan.

A mortar and recoilless rifle attack on the Task Force area opened operation Smithfield on the night of 16-17 August 1966.

B Company was initially dispatched to clear the area to the east of the Task Force base with D Company taking over on the 18th.

D Company made contact with the enemy and were soon under attack from three sides, the battle raging through the night in mist and heavy rain. D Company held its ground with heroism and grim determination until the remainder of the battalion, mounted in armoured personnel carriers, deployed in support. On arrival, they hit the flank of a battalion-sized force that was forming up to assault the rear of D Company. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy, who was forced from the battlefield.

For its actions, D Company was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation and the Battle Honour Long Tan was added to the battalion's colours. Eighteen Aussies gave their lives in this single battle while another 19 were killed through the tour, which ended in June 1967.

The battalion celebrated its second birthday at sea aboard HMAS Sydney during its return to a new home in Townsville.

Vietnam 1969–1970

6RAR embarked on HMAS Sydney for its second tour of duty in South Vietnam in May 1969, to relieve 4RAR.

In Vietnam, the battalion was augmented by two New Zealand rifle companies, two sections of mortars and two assault pioneer sections, and renamed 6RAR/NZ (ANZAC) Battalion.

During this tour, 15 battalion operations were conducted.

As an indication of the success of the tour, the enemy suffered 260 dead, 64 confirmed wounded and 54 captured as a result of battalion operations, with 480 assorted weapons and 13 tonnes of rice also denting the enemy's resources.

The Aussies also commemorated the third anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan on the original battle ground, where a large cross was erected.

6RAR lost 24 killed and 148 wounded on this second tour.

Singapore 1971–1973

By the end of August 1971, 6RAR established itself in Selarang Barracks, Singapore, joining the 1st Battalion the Royal New Zealand Regiment and 1st Battalion the Royal Highland Fusiliers as part of the 28th ANZUK Brigade based at Sembawang Garrison.

Until its departure, the battalion was involved in a number of tri-national exercises up to brigade level.

A change in government back home saw the battalion group withdrawn from Singapore in December 1973, after which it returned to new lines back at Enoggera Barracks, Brisbane.

Upon its return to Brisbane, 6RAR was almost immediately committed to aiding the Brisbane community during and after major floods on Australia Day.

After settling in, 6RAR resumed training for conventional warfare at battalion and company level.

In 1982, 6RAR provided significant support to the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane, providing driver support, ceremonial activities (including flag party at the closing ceremony), range parties and general administrative support.

In January 1989, 6RAR became the first unit in the Australian Army to be issued with the new F88 Austeyr service rifle.

In March the same year, 6RAR deployed for exercises in California, becoming the first full battalion to leave Australia since its own return from Singapore in 1973.

In April 1990, 6RAR became the first unit in the Australian Army to be issued with the F89 Minimi Light Support Weapon.

In February 1992 the battalion was re-rolled as a motorised battalion. In the same year, following the introduction of the Ready Reserve (RRes) Scheme, it was converted to an RRes motorised battalion and, as such, was structured with three part-time rifle companies (A, B and C) and one full-time RRes rifle company (D).

On 9 February 1997, the RRes Scheme was terminated by the government and the battalion was selected to trial the new 'A21 Motorised Battalion' concept, adopting this new structure on 1 July – the change seeing traditional supporting arms (armour, artillery, engineers, signals and intelligence) embedded within and under command of the infantry unit.

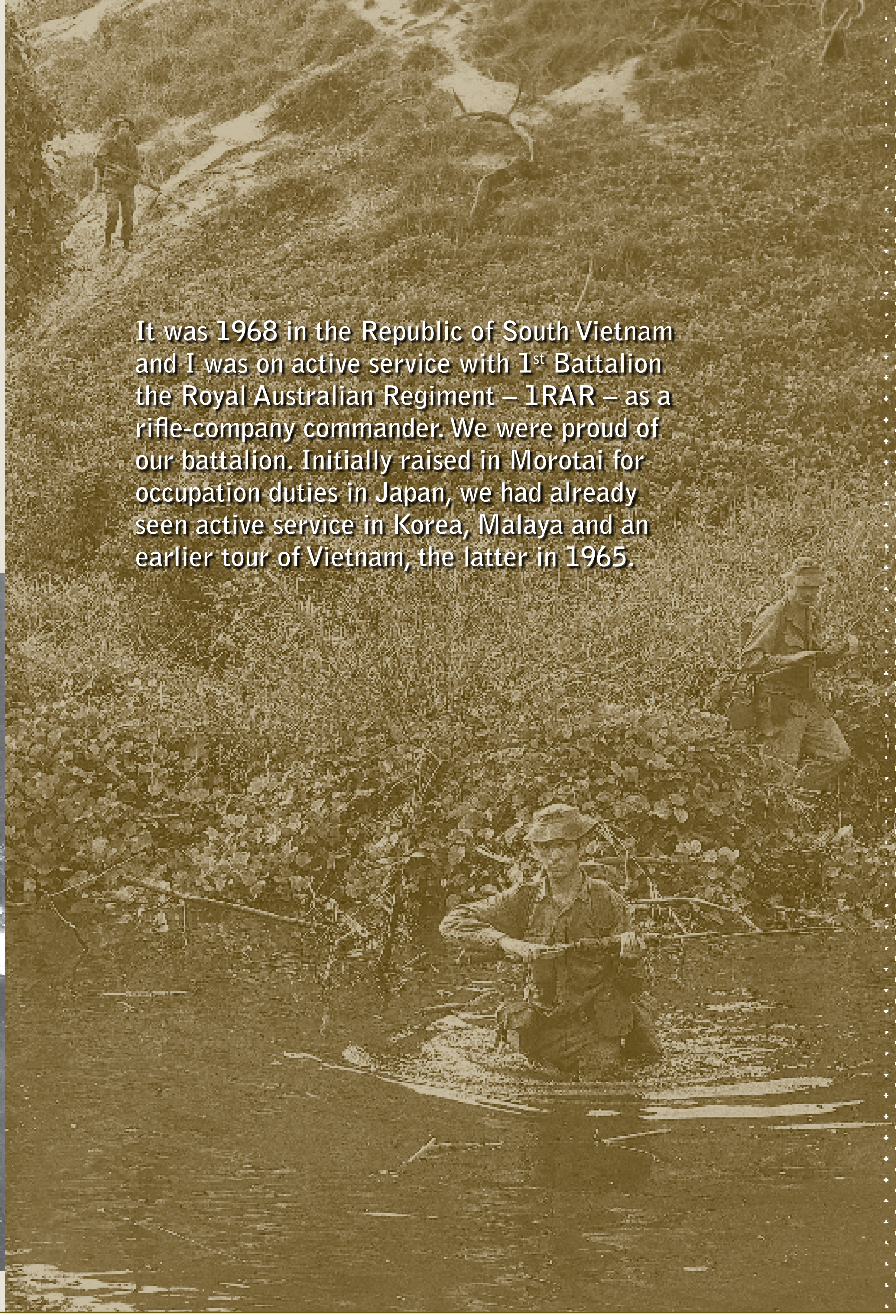
In 2000, 6RAR disbanded the motorised battalion structure and commenced training for active service in East Timor as a regular light-infantry battalion. It was brought up to full strength with an injection of up to 400 regular and reserve soldiers within a three-week block. 6RAR Battalion Group deployed to East Timor, where it assisted in the evacuation of UN and NGO personnel from Atambua in West Timor and undertook an intensive range of Civil Military Liaison operations throughout its tour.

Pic Corporal Gary Ramage

A DIFFERENT TIME DIFFERENT PLACE

WORDS COLIN ADAMSON PICS AWM AND ADF

1RAR aboard HMAS Sydney enroute to Vietnam



It was 1968 in the Republic of South Vietnam and I was on active service with 1st Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment – 1RAR – as a rifle-company commander. We were proud of our battalion. Initially raised in Morotai for occupation duties in Japan, we had already seen active service in Korea, Malaya and an earlier tour of Vietnam, the latter in 1965.

ANZAC DAY

Our battalion was, in many respects, like a large family – I had known and served with my sergeant major on and off for 15 years and knew many others as well. Half of our soldiers were national servicemen – all of them good young men who came with us willingly, worked hard and bonded as mates as only infantry soldiers can. We were very pleased with them, and their grandfathers would have liked them for what they were too.

My advance party had arrived at Nui Dat around mid March, settled in and been on several interesting operations into Baria with 7RAR, who we were relieving. With the main body in place, we commenced zeroing our weapons, attended intelligence briefings and kept up a constant patrol programme outside the wire.

Our company lines were in the old rubber plantation of Ap An Phu, just beside the south-western tip of Luscombe Field. Not much to look at, the accommodation was pretty basic. Heavy green canvas tents raised on long poles surrounded by walls of head-high sandbags and floored with duckboards. There was also a cookhouse, canteen and Q store constructed of 6-ply on cement bases and my command post, which looked a bit like a communal grave. In the dry, the red dust permeated everything in the place and it was mostly a pleasure to get out on operations.

A week of this and then it was a 24-hour trip through rice paddies and low scrub to the west with a troop of APCs, to test our skills in navigation and to firm up our drills.

A few days later, the whole battalion assembled for a dry-run operation – a helicopter ride to the abandoned rubber plantation of Binh Ba, patrol through it ("we don't think Charlie is there") and then back to the Dat. Not quite the real thing, but exciting enough.

No side doors on the choppers, feet resting on the skids and the thwack thwack of the rotors at 4000 feet is a real adrenalin rush, and jumping out at the other end (have the pilots put me down in the right spot?) can be a questionable activity.

Several days later the orders came, the briefings swung into action, the maps were unrolled and the rations and ammunition we were to carry were topped up.

To me it seemed pretty straight forward, nothing difficult or complicated but something to be welcomed – at last we were to put into practice what we had been trained to do for years.

Very simply, this was the plan – to our west were two small mountain ranges separated by what was known as the Old French Road. They were not terribly high and generally ran north-south. There was good cover, some water and they were not all that far from a number of population centres.

We knew that Charlie was there, perhaps not permanently, but there was a chance we might just surprise him. It was the Chau Duc Company, C41 – old friends of the regiment you might say!

And then the reality sank in. The task force commander had decided we would move off at first light on 24 April. A minor blow, bordering on disbelief. No dawn service, no remembrance of our fallen comrades, no gunfire breakfast and no traditional activities.

Off we went, bouncing, skeetering, slewing and heaving. Hot, noisy and oily – stifling, too – inside an APC with radios blaring. Cramped, too, with all spare space taken up by water, ammunition and food. And very little idea where I was!

But I did have faith in the cavalry and they dropped us off at a gravel pit at the southern end of the Nui Dinhs, which, incidentally, was surmounted by a huge statue of Christ that could rival the one at Rio de Janeiro.

The going was difficult. We called it elephant grass – 3 to 4 metres high and closely packed, retaining the heat and humidity, and insect life of all descriptions. Visibility was down to a metre. The scouts were working with compass and machete, and I fear we were most un-military.

Quite clearly we had been set down at the correct place, easily recognisable and a good departure point for our main objective. Terrain difficulties, however, had been much underestimated and we probably made little more than 150 to 200 metres in the first hour.

For flank protection, I sent Bob Sutton's 2 Platoon up on to the slopes 300 metres away where the grass wasn't quite as high, but the steepness did not make for easy going either.

But, move forward we did, and by late afternoon we were out of the elephant grass, where the going was easier and the air marginally cooler.

We located a fine defensive position and, quite nearby was an ideal spot for a helicopter landing point. This seemingly easy jaunt had not been achieved without cost. There were several soldiers suffering from heat exhaustion to be evacuated and we were already badly in need of water resupply.

Throughout this, Jack Cramp, my sergeant-major, was an absolute tower – cajoling, wheedling, pleading, demanding, he stirred life into all around him, and order prevailed.

The night passed uneventfully. We stood-to the next morning before first light then moved on, with Sergeant Bob Moore's 1 Platoon astride the Old French Road and the remainder of the company high up on the slopes – all moving slowly north, searching the watercourses and hoping to flush the Chau Ducs down towards Bob, where he would gather them up.

Flush them out we did, but with little success. We saw them, exchanged shots and lost them again. All very disappointing to us who were looking for quick results. But in my mind, I knew we would eventually wear them down.

Mid afternoon and the slope became too steep for us to handle, so we moved down to join Bob and journey more tactically up the 'road'. Again we exchanged fire without result, still learning I know, but most disappointing.

So, Anzac Day 1968 came to an end for us with little to report except mounting frustration. The following day was much the same. Slowly we moved north, searching as we went, treading softly and warily and exchanging the odd angry shot. We were still evacuating a few soldiers with heat exhaustion along the way, and this worried me quite badly.

Then, on 27 April, it was all vindicated. Neil Weekes' 3 Platoon had a successful contact and we found two large camps. Almost at the same time, C Company found another camp and then D Company located an administrative centre large enough for 300 men.

WE SAW THEM, EXCHANGED SHOTS AND LOST THEM AGAIN. ALL VERY DISAPPOINTING TO US WHO WERE LOOKING FOR QUICK RESULTS

Three weeks and two small but very successful operations later, our battalion was sitting astride the North Vietnamese Army's main supply route into Saigon, pitted against the NVA 141 and 265 Regiments, together with the VC Dong Nai Regiment. Here, for more than three weeks, we fought them to a standstill and added 'CORAL' to our Regimental Battle Honours.

TO WATTLE AND BEYOND

It seemed that another offensive against Saigon was in the making. 3RAR was already in War Zone D, and it was fairly certain we were to join them.

As a preliminary move, my A Company was to protect the fire support base named Wattle, some 30km north of Nui Dat, while the other three companies were to carry out search operations under its protection.

We loaded up around 0500, moved to Kangaroo Pad and took off about 0615. Already the weather was on the sticky side so it was a mild pleasure to be floating along at 6000 or 7000 feet. I spent the journey checking progress against my map, which proved fairly simple at height, as the rubber plantations, roads and fire trails were well marked.

On this one occasion we had sufficient Hueys to move the whole company, and the platoons moved smoothly to their locations. I left Bill Raggatt, my 2IC, to tidy up and moved off into the rubber with my batman George Arncliffe for a pre-planned meeting with the SAS. In the event, they found me, advised all was well and vanished again into the shadows. I never saw them again.

By the time I was back with my HQ, the standing patrols were out, guides were positioned to direct the companies to their locations and the guns (102 Battery) were being dropped into place by the Chinooks.

We were there for barely three days and our searches failed to reveal much, although D Company was credited with discovering several sets of women's bras and knickers!

The battalion, minus my company, together with 102 Battery, flew out for FSB Anderson. My company was to follow in a troop of APCs, making an overnight stop at Blackhorse, a US base commanded by the son of General George S Patton.

Blackhorse was less than welcoming in appearance. It contained a large number of 4-ply prefab huts and smelt of burning toilet cans. A matter of greater concern to me was the huge radio mast in the centre with a blinking red light at the apex, presenting a wonderful aiming mark for Charlies' mortars.

The US troopers looked after us like lost brothers. They fed us, gave us beer and shared their uniforms. After that we forgave their sin of patrolling on top of APCs flying Confederate flags and banging away on guitars.

We got away first thing next morning and made good speed, until, out of the blue, three Hueys descended on us. Out jumped three or four MPs from each, armed to the very teeth, and all with a most disagreeable demeanour about them. It seemed that a number of captured AK47s and a tool box were missing from Blackhorse.

I agreed our APCs could be searched and, in short order, the bits were uncovered. There was little doubt that the APC crews had had a busy night! I gave them all the edge of my tongue, starting with the troop commander before we saddled up.

I advised BHQ of the matter and copped a blast for my lack of troop control!

By about 1400 we were put down at the foot of a ridge leading uphill to the north-east. Movement here was reasonably easy. The scrub was fairly thick but had no bamboo or the local version of 'wait-a-while'. My main concern was to locate a bit of dirt to lay out my ambushes.

We struck pay dirt! We halted about 20m short of a well-worn track with apparently recent foot prints on it.

I decided 2 Platoon would move forward to the track and lay two ambushes, one towards the north-west, the other south-east. The remainder of the company would move forward with the two platoons to harbour in the rear, but constantly ready to assist with a section each.

ON THIS ONE OCCASION WE HAD SUFFICIENT HUEYS TO MOVE THE WHOLE COMPANY, AND THE PLATOONS MOVED SMOOTHLY TO THEIR LOCATIONS

I advised BHQ of my plan and went off around the traps to see how matters progressed. The troops were all keen to hear of the ambushes set, and we all crossed fingers. Another mild blast came over the radio. I was not on the winning side today!

The night passed without event and I woke about 0530. The radio net was quiet. Dawn was showing and a few birds were around. There were minor shuffling sounds as the troops readied for stand-to.

Shortly before 0600 I ordered clearing patrols out, and not more than 60 seconds later, BANG BANG BANG came the sound of Claymores and an M60. I was sick at heart for I could only imagine that we had shot up our own patrol. I kept on at Jack Cramp about how dreadful I felt.

Jack said, "have a brew and you'll feel better"!

Then came the calls – a small team of Charlie had sauntered down the track right into the teeth of the north-western ambush and it was all over. We could hear a few of them bashing about through the scrub and calling to each other, but I ordered all to sit fast until we had good light.

Eventually, a 1 Platoon section went off for 200m and came back with several bags of documents, cash, weapons and equipment items. All told, a most satisfactory few hours.

We cleaned up, ate, re-established the ambushes and I ordered a 25 per cent stand-to until further notice. Some time later, three already-wounded fellows walked into our ambush again and were disposed of. This produced a Tokarev pistol, bags of documents, watches, gold teeth, cash and hammocks made from US parachute silk.

Then came a radio message for me. "Come and talk with the task-force commander and the battalion CO." I was not in the good books. I had not informed TFHQ as to my APC progress. I had abandoned my helipad. And, I had not gone to the nominated grid reference.

I offered the Tokarev but it was refused. The cash was requested but I had already spread it among my troops as souvenirs. My troops had the hammocks too, as well as a few cooking pots.

I was ordered back to the bush and instructed to keep the ambushes in place.

The following morning we were instructed to retrace our steps – APCs would meet me where we had been dropped off, to ferry us to Anderson.

The battalion was fully concentrated by my arrival and CO's orders were set down for the next morning.

Essentially, we were to move again – this time to establish FSPB Coral some 15km north of the Dong Nai. From here, three companies were to establish ambushes to the north, while the other was to clear the road to the south. The enemy situation report led us to believe that Charlie was on the way out of Saigon and heavily demoralised.

AWM: THU_68_0419_VN

JOINING THE BIG LEAGUE

Our fly-in was delayed for hours because, unknown to us at the time, the US 1st Division was engaged in a massive fire-fight west of FSB Coral. We were held up until close to last light on 12 May. Other complications included landing at the wrong spot, 3RAR's security being out of position and Battalion HQ deciding to stay with the guns and mortars for the night.

So, off we set – about 1500 metres I recall, and roughly north, with D Company well to our west and B Company off to our east.

Then they struck! At 0200-0300 the next morning the sky was alight with flares and green tracer, with sundry loud noises from mortars, rockets and bugles. The battalion net was alive, supplemented by mortars and D Company. The arty net was calling for fire. Spooky was up there, and gunships were joining in as well.

B Company was taking fire – D Company was under RPG attack and accepting casualties – the mortars were being over-run – the guns were firing over open sights – the anti-tank platoon was firing splintex and its tracker dogs were cowering in their pits.

Sitting fat and happy, my company was on the qui vive and unnoticed as the NVA tried to slip around us, while we inflicted an unknown number of casualties on them. They did not stay to continue the argument.

Early in the morning we were all directed to return to Coral.

No sooner had my company commenced to move than we started taking overs from D Company as it went in with the bayonet on an entrenched enemy. We were stinking hot, hugging the dirt and praying that it would all soon end.

Fortunately, Mal Meadow's 1 Platoon was leading and managed to shake itself loose. I directed Mal to continue at best speed, search out the OPSO for instructions and be ready to guide us in to a good position.

Too late! By the time we arrived, B Company had settled down to a nice and tidy closed-up defensive position, forcing me into a stretched-out three-up nightmare with company headquarters providing depth and my support section of three preparing for the counter-attack role!

The platoons themselves, of course, were three sections up with their headquarters also providing depth. Far to my left was C Company. Up on a small ridge and in the shade of rubber trees, its right hand flank could look down on me, 400 metres away.

Taking my sig, Bluey McIntyre, I went over to say hello, pointed out my positions and arranged for a couple of M60s to be placed on fixed lines to cover the gap.

On the way back, I dropped in on a troop of APCs stuck behind bunds and sorted out the gap with them as well.

In the meantime, Bob Sutton, OC 2 Platoon, had taken out a standing patrol to our front and a load of star pickets and wire had arrived. It was a pitifully small amount, but we did the best we could by stretching it pretty tight. Neil's 3 Platoon, for example, had a single roll of concertina to cover his entire front.

Privates Paul Slattery and Neville Riddock and Warrant Officer Class Two Jack Cramp

Digging in to soft and sandy loam was a continuing task, with occasional interruptions as Charlie probed for our boundaries and defences. One of my M60s finished off a fellow up a tree some 300 metres to the north.

As dark approached, the standing patrols came in and we stood-to. My command post was dug, but without overhead protection. We attempted to make it light-proof with ponchos.

Radio traffic was fairly heavy, but nothing overly important, so by 2200 I decided to give it away. The radio watch roster was set and instructions given.

Sleep did not come easy as my mind was alive with questions I could not answer. I was sure that Charlie would come again. There was just too much activity out there for it to be otherwise.

As it turned out, we had a respite that night and spent the 14th strengthening our defences somewhat and continued with standing patrols.

Stand-to that night brought about further problems. Shorty Thirkle and Frank Maton were both struck down by heavy-calibre machine-gun fire, leaving Neil's 7 Section on the vital flank next to the gap without its two NCOs.

The 15th passed without major incident. A pitiful amount of defence stores arrived again and was quickly used. Our standing patrols kept Charlie at arm's length.

He hadn't forgotten us of course. We were sitting across his main supply route and his only choices were to go around us and have us in his rear, or to dislodge us completely. Logic told me we would see him in some force.

About 0200 on the 16th he came with satchel charges and bangalore torpedoes, blowing my wire. Mortars and RPGs were falling heavily on Neil's left-hand section and causing further casualties. I was on my feet and ran for the CP, tripped over a roll of wire, got up and was knocked flat again by a nearby explosion. Nothing big about it, but 25 years later, pieces of metal were still coming out of my back.

Only a couple in Neil's section were still standing and I told him to withdraw them. This, of course, left the gap even wider. By this time, Charlie was also visiting the whole of my front and spilling over to B Company. Our mortars and the cav troop began to put fire into the gap and the guns were dropping rounds into likely form-up points. My M60s were covering the front and C Company was assisting as planned.

For the time being, the assault had stalled somewhat, though Charlie was still in a couple of my weapon pits. I told Neil to counter-attack and this he did with much efficiency.

Then a heavy fire team of three gunships arrived and began to cover my front with mini-guns and 40mm grenades. Being warned of their task, we did our best to assist

them by lighting blocks of hexamine in our dixies. This worked quite well as none of their fire seemed to fall inside the remnants of our wire.

Bob's and Mal's platoons were having their share of exertion as well. Bob's wire was breached by bangalores, but his position was not penetrated.

On my right flank, Mal was taking RPG fire without assault but then there was a whooooosh like an express train and an 8-inch shell from Tan Yuen exploded some 10 metres in front of him. Then a second round arrived about the same distance in front of the junction between 2 and 3 Platoons. Troops were deafened, tons of dirt was flung into the air and an M60 was snatched out of a gunner's hands and tossed quite a distance. Small fires started everywhere and the stink of explosives was choking. It was good to have such accurate close support!!!

In the meantime, the gunships were having their own battle. Charlie had set up a 12.7mm heavy machine gun and green tracers were going skywards while the Hueys were driving down the track with mini-guns blazing. This seemed to put the HMG out of action, but one of the Hueys was also damaged and all three diverted to Bien Hoa.

Then came the grand finale. Completely without notice, a trio of F100 Super Sabres bore down on us from the north at about 50 feet. I saw their underbellies and wings reflect the fires and I saw the barrels of napalm dropping no more than 50 metres to our front! The explosions were deafening, not to mention the banshee scream of jet engines so close to us.

And that was it. By 0530 it was all over and Charlie had gone.

As the sun came up we were all a bit shaken. The air stunk of explosives, kerosene and dirt – and not a bird was seen or heard. The silence collapsed around us as we cleaned up, paid respects to our comrades and began to talk among ourselves.

John Harmes gave me a mug of tea and I thanked him. My CQ, Frank Dean, arrived with supplies and took our casualties back to the A echelon. Gino Terranova, my medic, went off to replenish platoon stocks and the sergeants came in for a few words with CSM Jack Cramp.

I went forward to my platoons and had a few words with the troops. They were all in good form and excited about the night's events.

We had a shave and cleared our front, leaving standing patrols for early warning.

Something like 20 attackers were found within Neil's platoon location, another two in front of Bob's and there was a large number in Mal's shell hole as well.

Charlie came back again a few more times but it was all a bit half hearted.

We patrolled in strength and sought him out. C Company found him one day and bloodied his nose.

For a further two weeks we commanded the battlefield before being recalled to Phuoc Tuy, where Charlie had been taking advantage of our absence.

So, we started all over again.

REGIONAL FORCE SURVEILLANCE UNITS

In the early 1980s, the Army began to pay more attention to the northern regions of the nation and eventually raised Regional Force Surveillance Units, based on a squadron/troop structure, in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, and north Queensland. RFSUs were created with the aim of filling a gap in the ground surveillance capability of Australia's northern defence.

It was recognised that a force operating in this austere environment would require special knowledge and skills that regular forces do not readily possess and so, a key feature of the RFSU concept was the valuable contribution that Indigenous people could make to the Defence of Australia, as they did during WWII.

Many Indigenous communities are located in remote areas or close to remote vital assets and, as such, can provide invaluable local knowledge to RFSU patrols operating right across the north and west of the continent.

For a number of reasons, the Pilbara Regt has been less active in the employment of Indigenous people, however NORFORCE and 51FNQR boast a high percentage of Indigenous members – 25 to 35 per cent and 45 to 58 per cent respectively. The RFSUs have the highest Indigenous representation of any other ADF organisation, and possibly any other Australian Government agency outside of ATSIC.

It is now well accepted that many Indigenous people, and indeed non-Indigenous people living in remote Australia are not able to meet the strict criteria for enlistment and service in the wider ADF. Literacy, numeracy and health standards preclude many from meeting these stringent requirements. However, to follow these standards rigorously would deny the RFSUs access to a large portion of a sparse recruiting base, effectively negating the original concept.

This was recognised as a key issue in the formation of the RFSUs and was overcome by the creation of a Regional Force Surveillance List or RFSL (sometimes referred to as the special list). Under this concept, commanding officers are allowed to waive specific enlistment criteria to enlist, appoint and promote personnel for employment as ECN304 Patrolman, or as part of a Local Observer Element (LOE) network.

Regular or full-time personnel posted to RFSUs need not necessarily have previous experience in working with Indigenous people, but do undergo a period of induction training and are instructed in the local customs, traditions and history of the Indigenous members of the battalion.

NORFORCE

NORFORCE traces its history back to the formation of the 2nd/1st North Australia Observer Unit (2/1NAOU – affectionately known as the Nackaroos) on 11 May 1942.

While 2/1NAOU was disbanded after the war, later governments recognised the value of the cocept and, on 1 July 1981, North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE) was officially raised as the first of three Regional Force Surveillance Units. Using the nucleus of the Darwin-based 7th Independent Rifle Company, the General Reserve strength was expanded and additional Australian Regular Army staff were included.

NORFORCE was specifically raised to meet the requirements for surveillance and reconnaissance in the north and north-west of Australia and the regiment continues to play a key role in the development of the whole RFSU concept.

NORFORCE is a unique organisation for many reasons. It has the largest area of operations of any military unit in the world today – covering an area of operation of about 1.8 million square kilometres that encompasses the entire Northern Territory plus the Kimberley region of Western Australia – and is permanently assigned to a Joint Commander for ongoing surveillance operations in northern Australia.

The unit relies heavily on the commitment and local knowledge of the population of northern Australia to fulfil its role. It has a high proportion of Aboriginal soldiers whose talents are fully used.

NORFORCE is well-equipped to undertake its tasks, which differ little whether the nation is at peace or at war. The regiment continues to develop in terms of the acquisition of new equipment and facilities and, consequently, is continually enhancing its capabilities.

NORFORCE continues to enjoy great support from the local population from which it draws its soldiers.

In 2006, the regiment celebrated its 25th anniversary and was presented with its first stand of unit Colours at that time.

THE PILBARA REGIMENT

The Pilbara Regiment evolved out of the 5th Independent Rifle Company, which was raised on 26 January 1982. The first soldiers were enlisted into the unit at Tom Price and Newman in March 1982. At that time, the company headquarters comprised five Regular members who formed initially at Campbell Barracks, Swanbourne, in Perth, then moved to Port Hedland in December 1982.

The unit remained an Independent Rifle Company until 26 January 1985 when it was converted to a Regional Force Surveillance Unit to provide a reconnaissance and surveillance capability in the Pilbara region of Western Australia – and so became The Pilbara Regiment.

The unit badge depicts an emu over crossed .303 rifles with the Sturt's Desert Pea forming the surround, sitting on a scroll bearing the unit motto MINTU WANTA – Always Alert. This is the first Aboriginal motto to appear on an Australian Army badge.

The Pilbara Regiment is an Army Reserve unit with a larger-than-usual cadre of Regular Army personnel.

The Pilbara Regiment still encounters many of the problems that faced the original 2/1NAOU – distance, terrain, isolation, climate and sparse population in the region. The difficult environment is hard on personnel and equipment, demanding innovation and initiative among all ranks.

In 1993, the unit's headquarters moved from Port Hedland to a purpose-built building in Karratha. The Pilbara Regiment has depots at Port Hedland, Tom Price, Newman, Karratha, Pannawonica, Exmouth, Carnarvon and Perth.

A Pilbara Regiment patrolman is a confident and self-assured soldier, competent in survival, first aid, communications, and driving skills. He must be fit and have the endurance to withstand extreme temperatures, averaging well above 40 degrees, often peaking at 50 degrees in summer, and plummeting to single figures at night during winter months.

A patrolman is self-sufficient and must be capable of working in small groups, often relying on local knowledge to assist his survival, and could be called on to operate for protracted periods without conventional resupply.

Patrols are trained in joint operations with Air Force and Navy elements and can be inserted and extracted by a variety of assets.

A patrolman is self-sufficient and must be capable of working in small groups, often relying on local knowledge to assist his survival

PICS GUNNER SHANNON JOYCE - 2006 NORFORCE PATROL

RFSUS

A patrol's aim is to observe the enemy without being detected themselves, generally acting only in an information-gathering capacity.

The patrolman must complete an induction/recruit course and a patrolman's course to achieve initial qualifications. Progressive training available to enhance his abilities or further his career could include driver, patrol medic, signaller, water operations, survival, tracking and leadership courses.

provide information about unusual activities in their area.

The unit conducts land-based and littoral surveillance and reconnaissance in support of national security operations across a massive area of responsibility, from Cardwell (south of Cairns), to the Northern Territory border and all points in between, including the Torres Strait, Cape York and the gulf country – some 640,000 square kilometres.

51FNQR

51FNQR today plays an important role in the security of Australia by conducting surveillance companies at Weipa, Thursday Island and Mount Isa

On 1 October 1985, the 51st Independent Rifle Company, the Royal Queensland Regiment, was re-organised as the Royal Force Surveillance Unit in north Queensland and renamed the 51st Battalion Far North Queensland Regiment.

51FNQR's origins can be traced to 1916 when the battalion was raised, as part of the 1st Australian Imperial Force, from veterans of the Dardanelles' campaign. The battalion also served with distinction in WWII during the Pacific campaign.

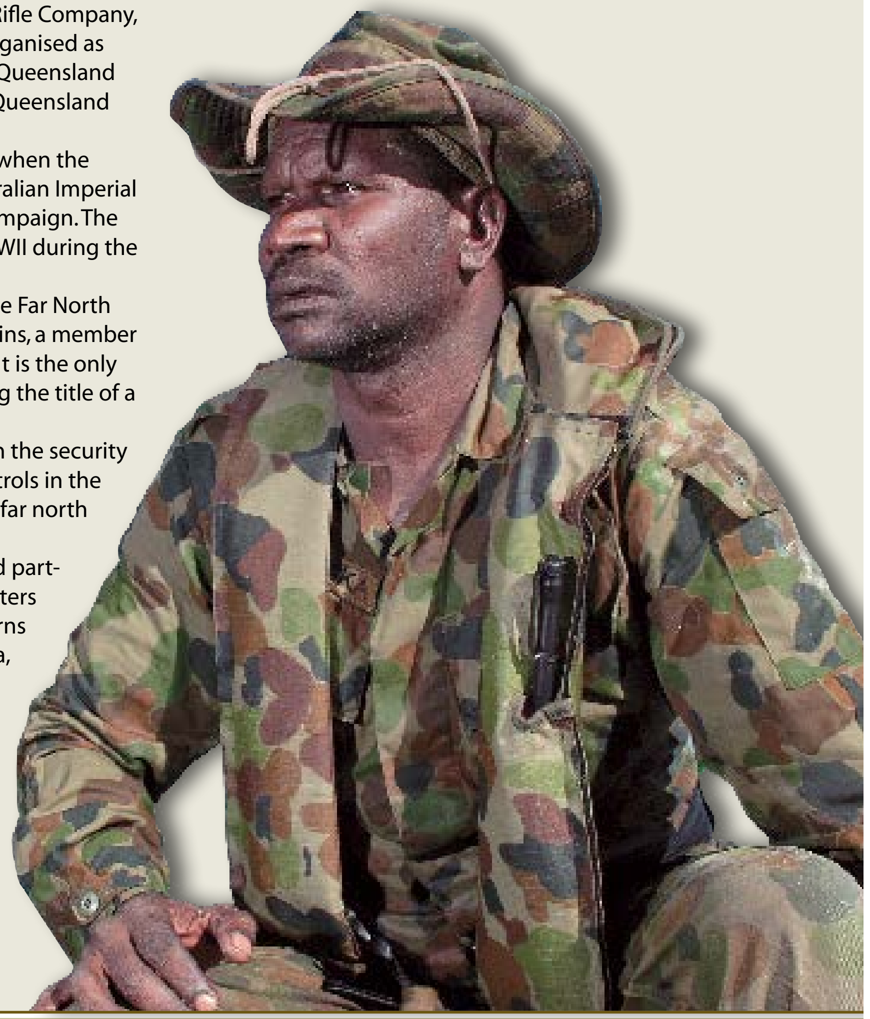
The unit has, as its regimental march, 'The Far North Queensland Regiment' written by Allen Rains, a member of the battalion band, at Merauke in 1943. It is the only march written especially for and containing the title of a unit in the Australian Army.

51FNQR today plays an important role in the security of Australia by conducting surveillance patrols in the sparsely populated and remote regions of far north Queensland.

The battalion is made up of full-time and part-time members with its battalion headquarters and a surveillance company located in Cairns and other surveillance companies at Weipa, Thursday Island and Mount Isa.

It has more than 500 members including approximately 60 full-time personnel.

In conducting its activities, 51FNQR draws on soldiers and civil support and uses the knowledge of local Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, who



7th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment – 7RAR

Raised	1 September 1965 3 December 2006
Battalion colour	Maroon (BCC 39)
Battalion nicknames	The Pig Battalion, The Pigs, Porky's People
Mascot	"Willy" the pig
Battalion march	Australaise (for brass), and Cock 'o the North
Current home	Robertson Barracks, Darwin
Future role	Mechanised Infantry, Adelaide

Formation

7RAR was raised at Puckapunyal, Victoria on 1 September 1965 as a part of the Australian Army's build up for the Vietnam War with its first members coming mainly from 3RAR and the second intake of National Servicemen in 1965. 7RAR was eventually linked with 5RAR to form 5/7RAR in December 1973. The colours and traditions of both battalions were proudly maintained by 5/7RAR in Darwin until both were delinked, to reform the two original battalions, on 3 December 2006.

Vietnam 1967–1968

After an intensive period of individual, company and battalion training, the unit was ready for war by June 1966. At this time, the battalion provided 100 reinforcements for units in Vietnam and a fresh training cycle began.

During the winter of 1966, companies phased through Jungle Training Centre, Canungra and the battalion took part in 'Barra Winga', Australia's largest peace-time exercise to that time, at Shoalwater Bay in Queensland.

By early 1967, final exercises and administrative preparations for active service were all-but complete and the battalion was deployed in April, on board HMAS Sydney, to relieve 5RAR at Ap An Phu.

During the following 12 months, the unit was engaged in 30 battalion-sized or larger operations, had many contacts with the enemy and fought six major engagements.

The battalion's first operational tour culminated with Operation Coburg in February/March 1968 when the enemy's Tet Offensive threatened the Bien Hoa complex.

Immediately before leaving Vietnam in April 1968, a combined church service was held on the task force air strip to commemorate the memory of 16 members killed during the tour.

Vietnam 1970–1971

During February 1970, the battalion returned to Vietnam for its second tour of duty, the advance party departing by air on the 10th followed by the main body on the 16th.

From time of arrival until relieved by 3RAR 12 months later, 7RAR was engaged almost continuously on operations. During this second tour of duty, it is estimated that the battalion accounted for 150 enemy, while another 16 of the battalion's own soldiers were killed in action.

The Battalion returned to its home base in Finschhafen Lines, Holsworthy, during March 1971.

After leave and reorganisation 7RAR commenced a cycle of training and exercises as well as offering support to other units.

The final parade for 7RAR before linking with the 5th Battalion, held on 24 November 1973 at Finschhafen Lines, Holsworthy, was reviewed by colonel E.H. Smith, the battalion's first commanding officer.

7RAR was linked with 5RAR at Tobruk Lines, Holsworthy, on 3 December 1973.

Exactly 28 years later, 7RAR was again returned to the order of battle when the 5th and 7th Battalions were delinked. At the time, members of the battalion who were deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan were proudly photographed flying the 7RAR flag.

Both battalions will remain mechanised, equipped with the upgraded M113 AS4 APCs and variants. While 5RAR will remain in Darwin, the 7th Battalion will move to Adelaide after new accommodation, currently under construction, is complete.

5th/7th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment: 5/7RAR

Raised	3 December 1973
Battalion colour	Gold (BCC 114) & Maroon (BCC 39)
Battalion march	Dominaise
Delinked	3 December 2006

5/7RAR was formed on 3 December 1973 at Holsworthy Barracks in Sydney by combining the 5th and 7th Battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment.

Between 1976 and 1978, 5/7RAR trialled a mechanised infantry organisation using M113 armoured personnel carriers. However, while the trial was a success, only one company was actually mechanised, the role moving around the companies on a 12-month rotation until the battalion was eventually fully mechanised in 1984.

In 1999, 5/7RAR relocated from Holsworthy to Darwin and later the same year made its first operational deployment, contributing to INTERFET. During this deployment, INTERFET transitioned to a UN mission, and 5/7RAR became the first 'AUSBATT' of UNTAET.

After a seven-month tour, the battalion returned to Australia in April 2000. It returned to serve a second tour in East Timor between October 2002 and May 2003, though this time in a light-infantry role.

5/7RAR's final deployments were to Iraq and Afghanistan, sending company-sized groups or smaller to Baghdad, Tallil and Tarin Kowt.

On 3 December 2006, 5/7RAR was formally delinked to re-form the 5th and 7th Battalions.

Pic Brian Hartigan

Main: 2RAR await a lift.
Left: The author displays captured 'weapons'.

'The Maggots' enjoy R&R – the author third from the right, seated.

SECOND CHANCES

WORDS ADAM RANKIN PICS RANKIN COLLECTION & ADF

MAGGOTS HOLD THE LINE

East Timor was only my second ever 'real' callout. The first happened in 1998. Operation Brancard saw the mighty 12 Platoon – 'The Dirty Dozen' – D Coy, 2RAR, deploy to RAAF Base Darwin, with elements of 4 Field Battery, ready to conduct a services-assisted evacuation of Australian citizens from Indonesia. Like so many previous callouts for the longer-serving members of the platoon, Op Brancard resulted in the Dirty Dozen returning to Townsville when the weekend was over and the RAAF had returned to work. We had no stories to tell from that first outing other than of sneaking into town in PT gear for some beers in downtown Darwin (yes Brady, I knew where you were!).

Tense moments during an exchange of fire

Maggot on radio picket

A break from the rain

Wanton destruction at Baucau

Afternoon siesta

IT WAS AN AMAZING FEELING LIFTING OFF FROM KOMORO AIRFIELD, TACTICALLY LOADED INTO AN S70 BLACKHAWK, WITH ALL OF A COMPANY SPREAD ACROSS A FLEET OF THE HELICOPTERS, FLYING OUT TO SEA AND LOOKING BACK AT DILI ABLAZE

So, when 2RAR went into lockdown in September 1999 for a battalion callout, I thought it might be Op Brancard revisited. Then the media coverage really started to intensify. Coverage of the failing UNAMET (United Nations Mission in East Timor) and the escalating violence, particularly in Dili, looked serious. Suddenly, there was a real feeling that the whole battalion might actually be going somewhere.

Trouble was, 1RAR was the on-line battalion for another 36-48 hours, so, if the balloon went up, we were sure they would go before we did.

As time passed and preparations for deployment continued, there were plenty of rumours flying around about which battalion would actually get to deploy should the word be given. It goes without saying, we wanted it!

News stories depicted a worsening situation in Timor, including footage of unarmed Australian Defence Force and Australian Federal Police members dragging people over razor wire into their compound for protection, before even they were forced to evacuate, leaving many East Timorese behind to an uncertain fate.

There was a genuine and building sense of anticipation that a significant deployment was in the wind – one that would involve not just a battalion group, but a significant portion of the brigade and probably support assets from the Navy and the RAAF as well.

As a junior platoon commander, my sense of anticipation was accompanied by a real sense of uncertainty – has the training we developed and delivered been good enough for the platoon – were we ready, not just to fight, but to deliver the best indirect-fire support to the rest of the battalion we possibly could – had the endless administrative checks conducted by platoon and company staff been enough to allow the soldiers to go overseas for an unknown period without worrying about their families' welfare and wellbeing back in Australia?

The gravity of the situation became even weightier when commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Mick Slater spoke to all his young officers, me included, in the officers mess. He explained what he required of us before departing and while we were on deployment. One task he gave us, which has really stuck in my mind ever since, was to prepare a draft letter to a soldier's family, telling them their son had been killed on operations. The once excited 'subbies' were suddenly quiet and a few knowing glances were exchanged between us – 'we are going, and it might not be good'.

We knew that the biggest threat that lay ahead of us was the first 72 hours in country, when we were still establishing a foothold. Respite would be at a premium and mistakes that could endanger lives would be more likely. This is why we had trained so hard on countless exercises up to this point. What those exercises had told us, however, was that even in familiar country, with an 'acting' opposing force, accidents do happen and people do make mistakes.

As the time for handover of the on-line-battalion responsibilities from 1RAR to 2RAR drew closer, it was becoming more and more apparent that an Australian Force would be deploying to East Timor to help restore law and order in the vacuum being left by the departing Indonesian authorities. In preparation, orders had been given for a deployment and the order of battle had been finalised. It looked like 2RAR might indeed be going – including some lucky 1RAR soldiers that we needed to get our battalion up to full strength. We would, however, have to leave behind a handful of soldiers that were not yet old enough to deploy. They must have been heartbroken but, as it has turned out, they've had plenty of opportunities to deploy since, to many different theatres around the world.

Finally we got the word, 2RAR was deploying on operations!!!

We were issued our orders for opening fire (OFOF) and rules of engagement (ROE) cards and flew to Darwin.

I thought I had carried some heavy packs before, but this was ridiculous. We had to help each other to stand up and sit down and, if you fell over, you had to take your pack off and sit it upright before trying to regain your feet.

We had packed our mortar tubes in trunks for transport to Darwin but, we were told, we would have to unpack them there and carry them onto the plane – yet more weight to carry.

We spent about four hours waiting in Darwin for the next plane to take us to Dili. It was a surreal feeling to be watching footage of Dili burning and scenes of locals fleeing, with the Indonesian military appearing to stand by doing nothing. Then there was some footage of Major General Cosgrove, the divisional commander, and elements of the SAS getting off a plane at Komoro Airfield to conduct a handover with Indonesian authorities.

This was the last TV I saw until I returned to Australia at the start of 2000.

When we finally got onto the plane in Darwin, I thought – this is it, I am going on operations.

I really didn't expect to find people shooting at us when we got off the plane, but how wrong I was. When Mortar Platoon hit the tarmac, we were met by a Support Company guide and were taken to an area where we were to spend the night, before moving out first thing in the morning on a task yet to be issued.

Halfway across to the area, though, we heard our first gunshot. Following the lead of the people around us, we acted like it was normal and no cause for concern – after all, there was no significant opposing force and no intelligence predicting an attack on the airport. Our Support Company guide simply turned to me and said, "Just another fuckin' UD, boss. There have been heaps." Unauthorised discharges were to be a real issue on this deployment. Great, I thought, come on operations only to get shot by some idiot who only learnt how to use his personal weapon in Darwin before he got on the plane.

Once we made it to our overnighting area, we went into a defensive harbour, received defence-plan orders and got some rest. We would be moving out the next morning to a destination unknown at this stage.

When morning arrived, I was sent to an orders group at BHQ (battalion headquarters). Mortar Platoon would be attached to Alpha Company as an extra rifle platoon for an air-mobile operation to Baucau airfield in the east of the country.

This airfield was important to the ongoing success of INTERFET, as it was the only airfield rated to handle the larger aircraft that would be required to move more and more equipment and supplies to East Timor before the shipping supply lines could be established.

It was an amazing feeling lifting off from Komoro Airfield, tactically loaded into an S70 Blackhawk, with all of A Company spread across a fleet of the helicopters, flying out to sea and looking back at Dili ablaze. If this is what Dili looks like, we all wondered, what awaits us at Baucau?

When we landed, what we were confronted with was a snapshot of the mentality of those who had previously governed the East Timorese people. The Indonesian troops had just finished a wrecking rampage that left a fleet of UN Land Rover Discovery's totally destroyed and the airport control tower infrastructure severely damaged. But, what really stuck in mine and my soldiers' minds was finding a helpless, scrawny dog, with its tail ripped off, hung and left to die. We couldn't just leave the poor thing there, so Corporal Davo took it upon himself to rescue it. Since 2RAR Mortar Platoon are known as the 'Maggots', our new mascot was duly christened Maggot.

Our Ninox night-vision equipment was relatively new to us at this point and the time we spent around the airfield was used to better refine its use and understand its capabilities. This was a great piece of equipment that really did turn night into day for us.

We spent a few days around that airfield and patrolled its 'lunar landscape'. Then, one day, out of the blue, a C130 landed and we saw the majority of A Coy climb aboard. I thought this was pretty strange because I had not been told that anyone would be going anywhere. And, there were no troops getting off the plane to replace the ones leaving. I went across to where CHQ (company headquarters) had been, to find only the signals detachment left there with some scant details about a plane that would be landing at some time later that day to pick the rest of us up and we better be ready to get on it. Thanks Major 'Dick' – nothing like keeping us informed.

I just hoped the water we had left would last for the unknown duration we might be left here, because there was none to be won locally that we didn't suspect the Indonesians had contaminated.


Vehicle check point


Maggot takes a rest


Maggot plays chess


On patrol with APC support

Eventually, elements of 3RAR's mortar platoon arrived in ASLAVs to maintain the INTERFET presence in Baucau, and a RAAF C130 landed to take us back to Komoro in Dili.

So, we all got on the plane – Maggot included – to return to Dili and await new orders.

We were no more than about five hours back at Dili when orders for a battalion deployment to the border came through. 2RAR would deploy by air and road to secure the Balibo region – and this time, the Maggots were taking and deploying our tubes. We were to be allocated a position behind an old fort that would serve as BHQ for several months to come.

By this stage, Maggot was a seasoned air traveller – he didn't vomit in Davo's shirt this time! Davo stowed him there to avoid the ire of zealous loadmasters.

On the trip to Balibo and on arrival, the thing that struck us all was the fact there appeared to be no one at all left in the town nor in the smaller villages we flew over on the way in. Everyone was gone. This really was a strange sensation, especially for anyone who has travelled in an Asian country before, where there are always people everywhere, especially children. We hoped that this situation would soon change and the people would return now that the Aussies had arrived.

Setting up the mortar line proved difficult. The ground consisted of loose rocks covering loose rocks over a bed of loose rocks. So, we prepared the base as if we were on mud or sand, and managed to do this in reasonably good time. Shortly after, we had the remainder of our ammunition dropped off at our position – the Maggots were ready for whatever lay ahead.

Patrols were now starting to get to areas where communications were proving difficult. RSO (regimental signals officer) Jim had his work cut out coming up with a communications plan that would serve the battalion across the diverse, mostly mountainous nature of our area of operations. The terrain also made the MFCs (mobile fire controllers) earn their keep when they went out on patrol with the rifle companies.

After a number of days manning the mortar line, and watching Yoni do 100 push-ups, followed by 99 push-ups, followed by 98 push-ups and so on down to one, it was decided that the mortars would not be required after all. So, the 'line' was no longer and we became a rifle platoon once again.

It worked out that we would be used as an extra rifle platoon as required by various companies of the battalion. Platoon headquarters, headed up by Captain Dick, ably assisted by Chev and Duke, provided an extra communications relay when the battalion patrol master could be convinced that BHQ had enough people to man the CP at night without them.

One of the first tasks we received as a rifle platoon was to go into an area where the SAS had very recently had a contact near Aidabasala. It was an area that intel suggested had been a stronghold for the militia and, given its proximity to the border, an easy route of egress along the adjacent river bed and, the fact that this area had more people who had remained behind than any other area we had been to so far, we thought they were probably right.

To provide sufficient coverage in Aidabasala itself, we established section posts in the three naturally occurring sections of the village, with PHQ and the middle section occupying the school, which would later be the site of a grenade attack on Australian troops.

Despite the sense of unease in the town, we sited our positions such that we were still afforded the best force protection possible, while still maintaining a friendly presence for better interaction and integration. The school offered good visibility when anyone approached, especially at night with the night vision equipment.

After spending a number of days in the village and conducting numerous patrols of the area, the locals began to trust us more and more and we had a real sense that we were providing them the assurance they needed to start getting things back to normal and possibly spread the word to others that it was safe to return. The Maggots would spend a lot of time in various villages during the deployment but none quite had the same feeling of unease as Aidabasala and, as such, we made sure the patrolling was aggressive enough to deter attacks. When I returned to Aidabasala in my second deployment to Timor in 2001 the feeling of unease was no longer there and the village had a completely different character.

During the next two months, leading up to Christmas, Mortar Platoon was kept very busy with very little time for rest between patrols. We would return to Balibo for a night to re-supply, have a shower if we were lucky, maybe a fresh feed, receive orders and deploy again with the next rifle company the next day.

Mail was also starting to filter through and it was so good to get news from home. We were also able to make a five-minute phone call from time to time, which was fantastic, yet hard at the same time because five minutes usually raced by and left so many things unsaid.

Usually, during my 'rest' nights in Balibo, the company XO, Captain Paul would take the opportunity to stick me in the battalion CP (command post) for a shift, so he could have a rest. He thought that was fair because I was the 'lucky' one out patrolling and not stuck at BHQ! It was, however, a good opportunity to catch up on battalion news, and work out where my mates were from the marks on the battle map. And, to sit in a real chair for a bit!

Then, just before Christmas, Support Company was told we would be getting a rotation through the Dili R&R Centre, where we would get a beer ration and a chance to have a real shower. The boys were over the moon and couldn't wait.

When we returned to Dili, we couldn't believe the changes that had occurred in such a short time. There were so many different forces there from around the world, making up INTERFET. Many local people had returned to Dili and the city was starting to bustle again. So much so, little kids were trying to sell us pirated DVDs.


A lift arrives

Our time in the Dili R&R centre drew to a close, but not without incident – I won't go into that here, though.

My time in Timor was also drawing to a close as I had been informed that my scheduled posting order for the start of 2000 would still take effect, and I had to hand over the duties of the mortar line officer to Lieutenant Jim, who was coming from A Company.

All in all, my first deployment had given me great exposure as a young officer to the workings of a battalion group on deployment, whether we operated in the role of mortar platoon or as an additional rifle platoon. I also saw the various company headquarters in action. It was very clear to me that some people had great difficulty adapting their barracks leadership styles, honed over years of never deploying, to the field. Others, on the other hand, had wonderfully adaptive leadership styles that could get the most out of their men regardless of the situation presented to them.

For me it was definitely a positive, life-changing experience that allowed me to understand, first hand, the devastation that an unstable government or a breakdown in the rule of law can cause. It exposed me to some shocking things that occurred on a collective level that I never thought could be possible in modern society. But, it also showed me the true nature of the human spirit in the individual.

The East Timorese are a beautiful race of people who have not been given a chance to stand on their own two feet for a long time, and they continue to face an uphill battle for the opportunities the rest of us take for granted.

After this first deployment, I learnt how to speak their native language, Tetum, and returned as a member of the 4RAR Battalion Group in 2001, during the UN-supervised elections. But that's another story.

Adam Rankin was an infantry officer who served with 2RAR and 4RAR from 1997 to 2002, and on other non-corps postings until he left the Army in 2006. He served on two deployments in East Timor.

Royal Australian Infantry Corps (RA Inf)

The Royal Australian Infantry Corps is the parent corps for all infantry elements of the Australian Army.

It currently consists of eight full-time battalions in the Royal Australian Regiment, seven reserve regiments, seven university regiments (also reserve), three Regional Force Surveillance Units, The School of Infantry and the Special Air Service Regiment.

Not all units are fully manned, however. In the full-time force, initiatives commenced by the Howard Government and continued by the Rudd Government have seen two new battalions raised – or, more accurately, an old battalion split to re-establish two older battalions – that will take several years to build back up to full strength.

Recruiting issues across the board also see many reserve units struggling to maintain numbers, although the issue of recruitment seems to be having less impact on infantry as it does in other areas, especially technical trades and other specialities.

Officially raised in November 1948 as the country's first standing infantry capability, the Royal Australian Infantry Corps celebrates its 60th Anniversary in 2008.

Australian Regular Army (ARA)	1RAR
	2RAR
	3RAR
	4RAR (Cdo)*
	5RAR
	6RAR
	7RAR
	8/9RAR
Army Reserve	Royal Queensland Regiment (RQR)
	Royal New South Wales Regiment (RNSWR)
	Royal Victoria Regiment (RVR)
	Royal Tasmania Regiment (RTR)
	Royal South Australia Regiment (RSAR)
	Royal Western Australia Regiment (RWAR)
	Sydney University Regiment (SUR)
	Melbourne University Regiment (MUR)
	Queensland University Regiment (QUR)
	Adelaide University Regiment (AUR)
	Western Australia University Regiment (WAUR)
	University of New South Wales Regiment (UNSWR)
	Monash University Regiment (MONUR)
Regional Force Surveillance Units (RFSU)	51st Battalion Far North Queensland Regiment (51FNQR)
	The Pilbara Regiment (Pilbara Regt)
	North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE)
Special Forces (SF)	Special Air Service Regiment (SASR or SAS)
	*4th Battalion (Commando) the Royal Australian Regiment
	1st Commando Regiment (1 Cdo Regt) (a reserve unit)
School of Infantry	School of Inf

BARDIA BARRACKS

BATTLE WING

THE INGLEBURN CONNECTION

WORDS NOEL SELWAY PICS AWM

Situated on the heavily trafficked Campbelltown Road, Bardia Barracks welcomed soldiers arriving from Kapooka, Bonegilla, Bandiana and, occasionally, from as far afield as Puckapunyal to do their Infantry Corps training. Departing, often on the same busses, were back-squaded soldiers – including one or two 'professional back-squaders' making sure they never got posted anywhere except out of the Army – returning to those places for more training.

This was 1969 and the Infantry Centre was churning them out for Vietnam.

At the time, the Infantry Centre consisted of Battle Wing where new basic-trained soldiers learnt the craft of the infantryman, and Reinforcement Wing, where half the accommodation was tents and, which despatched those further-trained infantrymen for other destinations, chiefly to units in South Vietnam.

AATTV was also there, occupying the sergeants' lines and, down the back, were the dog handlers and the kennels.

For those of us who were staff at the centre, our work routine was a seven-day fortnight – two days on, two off, two on, two off then three on and three off. This meant that, on occasion, because of the turnover of personnel in the place and the type of training that went on, it was always possible that the people you saw on a Monday, the first day of your cycle, were gone when you returned on Friday, either on exercise, posting, discharge or some other reason – and there were plenty of reasons.

As a cook in the Battle Wing kitchen, I had the pleasure of working with a variety of Army-trained cooks which, for me, was a bit of a challenge having been a civvie-trained cook and having had to reach different standards as a tradesman.

One of my tasks was to assist in the training of these new cooks in bulk cooking and working to a meal schedule all out of sync with what could be taken as being a 'normal' meal routine. Hot boxes for those going to the range or on local exercises; early meals for those on military funeral duty; cut lunches for those being posted out; late meals for those who had business with the Base Ordnance Depot and weren't able to return at their proper meal time. And on it went.

Most of the trainees (and there were trainee butchers and bakers as well as cooks) were OK, although occasionally there were one or two who didn't know a great deal about hygiene and were eventually posted out for training elsewhere.

The messes at Battle Wing were capable of accommodating about 120 at a time although I don't recall if I ever saw any of them completely full. There were four such messes off the Battle Wing kitchen. A detail of diggers came on duty well before the mealtime and set the tables. Occasional conversations with these diggers highlighted their backgrounds, which were generally very un-warlike. But they had a general lack of offence at being called up.

I never had my number drawn in the ballot, but there was no 'feeling lucky' that I missed out. As it turned out, I was as much a part of their life at Infantry Centre as they were of mine.

Generally, after morning tea with its obligatory rock cakes or slab cake, most of us took a breather, although the butchers worked a straight shift like the bakers.

This was usually the time of day the stores trucks arrived from the RAASC Platoon down the road or from over at Moorebank.

During this interval, visits around the lines were common because there was always someone you knew passing through – that was the nature of National Service.

There were a couple of key activities at Infantry Centre that always kept you interested. One was the march-out parades at the end of a platoon's training, which were really interesting because, as a rule, most of the soldiers were merely marching out of one end of the camp and entering the other at Reinforcement Wing. These parades were generally to the accompaniment of the barking tracker dogs.

Then there were the aircraft-embarking and disembarking drills on dummy Hercules and Caribou as well as an Iroquois. Unit sports such as football and cricket matches on the Oval or golf of a Wednesday kept them occupied as well – and worked up their appetites.

The Duty WO1 at the centre held a weekly parade which was always well attended by diggers. This was when he took young Nasho officers on to the bullring for an hour's drill and the diggers loved to watch him give the

THE DIGGERS LOVED TO WATCH HIM GIVE THE OFFICERS SOME OF WHAT THE OFFICER HAD BEEN GIVING THE DIGGERS FOR THE PAST WEEK

officers some of what the officers had been giving the diggers for the past week.

Sometimes there was the exotic as well. Pakistani engineers occupied the lines nearest the Campbelltown Road, as there was insufficient room to accommodate them over at the School of Military Engineering. Although the rest of the camp didn't have much to do with them, the kitchen got occasional visits from their officers delivering special dietary requirements even though they were rationed at SME.

Across the road from the main gate was the Chowne Club. This famous club owed its existence to the Australian Services Canteen Organisation and was the empire of a daily duty lance corporal. It was here that, on payday, quite a number of young diggers learned the perils of the evil drink. Needless to say, there were plenty of fights and the cells were in regular use. On one occasion, one very large inmate decided he'd had enough of being locked up and took leave by reaching out of the window grill and snapping the lock off the door. He made a run for it but didn't get too far. But it took nearly everyone in the guardhouse to hold him down until they could get him back in the cell. It was quite a commotion.

One of the outstanding things about the military staff at the Infantry Centre was their age. The junior officers were generally 'Scheyville Nashos' while their seniors were old campaigners, some dating from the Second World War. It was the same for the senior NCOs as well. It wasn't uncommon

IT WASN'T UNCOMMON TO SEE KOREAN WAR AS WELL AS LONG SERVICE RIBBONS ON THE CHESTS OF A GOOD NUMBER OF THOSE GUYS, ESPECIALLY OVER AT AATTV

to see Korean War as well as Long Service ribbons on the chests of a good number of those guys, especially over at AATTV.

During my time at Infantry Centre, the guards were armed with pick handles. On asking about this I was told that there had been a spate of bashings over the previous 12 months and pick handles seemed a more sensible defensive weapon than an unloaded rifle.

Half way through each course the diggers were given local leave, which was often preceded by an early evening BBQ. When they lined up at the door of the mess for breakfast after one of these passes, it wasn't unusual to find diggers comparing tattoos acquired the night before. In one instance it was the back of an eagle across the back of one digger while another had the front of the eagle across his chest!

Christmas in camp was a depressing time for everyone, I think. It was my first Christmas as a married man and I had already been landed with catering for my in-laws Christmas party, even though I couldn't attend!

The WO Caterer insisted we would have 500 for Christmas luncheon, so the kitchen got to work preparing for that number, knowing full well from the grapevine that there would be wholesale leave granted.

The recreation hall was the venue, so everything had to be man-handled over there straight after breakfast and set up on long tables. It all looked pretty good, but, it goes without saying that not only was there no sign of the WO Caterer, but of the 500 blokes catered for, no more than 50 turned up.

Interesting thing, though – not a word was said about it in the New Year. No one asked where all the food and drink had gone. No one cared. But my rellies had a great banquet in 1969! Trouble is, I've been stuck with catering the family's Christmas ever since!

I didn't know it then but, I was there for just about the last days of the old barracks. After conscription ended, the Infantry Centre shifted to Singleton and Bardia Barracks was relegated to housing various reserve units until it finally closed in 1999.

CONTACT
AIR, LAND & SEA

From the staff at CONTACT magazine...

we wish all Australian infantrymen, past present and future,
long life, health, happiness and safe soldering.

CONTACT

8th/9th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment: 8/9RAR

Raised	31 October 1973 31 October 2007
Battalion colour	Slate Grey (BCC 154) and Beech Brown (BCC 69)
Battalion march	The Brown and Grey Lanyard (official), Black Bear (unofficial)
Current home	Enoggera, Brisbane
Future role	Light Infantry, Brisbane

Formation

8/9RAR was formed on 31 October 1973 by linking the 8th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment and the 9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment.

Throughout its history, 8/9RAR was based at Enoggera Barracks in Brisbane and formed part of the 6th Brigade.

In 1992, the battalion was designated a Ready Reserve unit under a scheme where soldiers were posted to the battalion for a 12-month full-time period followed by four years part-time service. The Ready Reserve Scheme was abolished by the incoming Howard Government in 1996.

8/9RAR never deployed on operational service as a battalion in its own right, but was the proud custodian of the customs, traditions and history of both the 8th and the 9th Battalions.

8/9RAR was disbanded on 18 June 1997 but was re-raised on 31 October 2007, with a very small core of staff, and tasked to be ready for possible operational deployment by 2010.

The new 8th/9th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment is destined to be a traditional light-infantry unit.

8RAR

On 8 August 1966, an inauguration parade was held for the 8th Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment, which included 150 former members of 1RAR among the new battalion's founding members.

Early in 1967, 8RAR was warned for service with the British Army's Far Eastern Land Forces and battalion training for this role was completed before 8RAR's first birthday, with celebrations limited to a post-exercise party in the Rockhampton training area.

A farewell parade was held at Enoggera on 1 September 1967 before the battalion moved to Malaysia between 24 August and 6 November 1967, by sea and air.

On 16 October, the battalion came under command 28 Independent Infantry Brigade Group, the commander reviewing the Aussies at Canberra Lines, Terendak Garrison on 24 November.

Colonel Commandant of the Regiment Lieutenant General Sir Reginald Pollard presented 8RAR with its Queen's and Regimental Colours at Terendak on 25 September 1968 – the first time this happend overseas for an Australian battalion.

The battalion returned to Australia in April and May 1969 and soon after conducted intensive training in preparation for service in Vietnam, to where it deployed in November for a one-year tour of duty with 1ATF.

During this tour, the battalion suffered 18 soldiers killed in action.

8RAR returned to Enoggera in November 1970.

9RAR

The youngest of all the Australian battalions, 9RAR was raised at Keswick Barracks, Adelaide on 13 November 1967 with a total strength of 10. In less than six months it was at full strength and by November 1968, the battalion celebrated it first birthday aboard HMAS Sydney on its way to Vietnam.

The battalion started work in earnest on 10 December 1968 and, during its tour, carried out 11 major operations, each of about a month in duration, as well as several other shorter activities through Phuoc Tuy, Long Khanh, Bien Hoa and Binh Tuy provinces.

The battalion had many heavy contacts with the enemy during its tour of duty, suffering the loss of 35 members killed and more than 150 wounded in action.

On 28 November 1969, 9RAR departed South Vietnam to return to Adelaide where it received a rousing reception.

The 8th Battalion and the 9th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment were linked to form 8/9RAR on 31 October 1973.

The battalion was disbanded on 18 June 1997, but officially reraised on 31 October 2007 by then Chief of Army Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, a former commander of the battalion, who presented the new 8/9RAR with its Colours.

TAKING THE GREEN ZONE

WORDS CAPTAIN AL GREEN PICS ADF

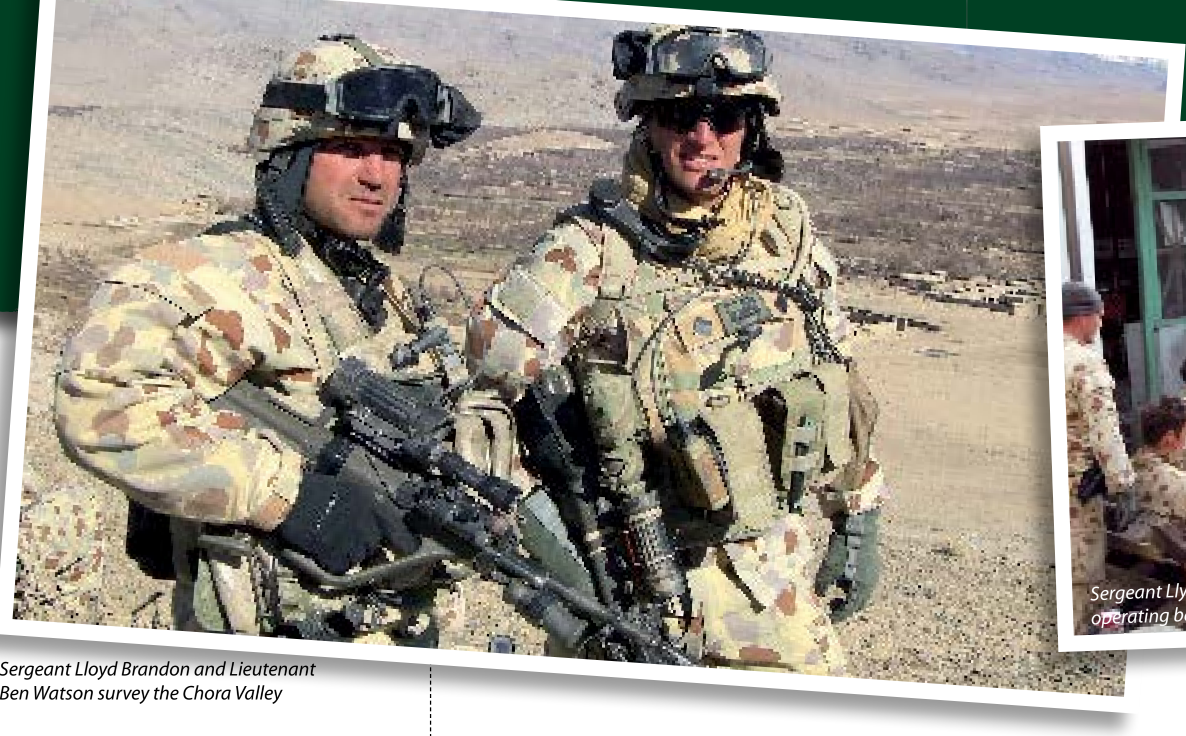
Private Travis Nicholson, 2RAR Mortar Platoon, prepares for night firing as Afghan National Police conduct evening prayers - Pic Corporal Hamish Paterson

It's early spring 2008, close to the Baluchi Pass in southern Afghanistan. Australian infantry, providing security to engineers building a patrol base, are out of their pits and moving. 7 Platoon, Charlie Company, 2RAR – the Unforgiven – are on patrol. Only days ago, Charlie Company backed by cavalry, bushmasters and mortars, fought the enemy to a standstill here in a series of defensive actions that saw the entire battle group dig in. 9 Platoon – the Bad Tourists – took the brunt of the first attack and 7 Platoon repelled the final assault. The Taliban extremists had, as the official account said, 'rolled the dice and lost'.

Today, Lieutenant Ben Watson is pushing his troops hard before they pull out and return to Australia after a tough six-month rotation. They patrolled last night, they patrolled this morning, they'll patrol again tonight – and they're patrolling now.

In denying enemy the initiative and freedom of movement, they're doing what Australians have done on defensive operations since WWI – dominating the operating environment.

For the Unforgiven, that's nothing new. They spent the winter securing the high reaches of the Chora Valley through the harshest conditions in living memory, according to the locals, while the Taliban extremists laid low, enabling the Aussie engineers and locals to build Forward Operating Base Locke, right in the face of an enemy reluctant to fight.



Sergeant Lloyd Brandon and Lieutenant Ben Watson survey the Chora Valley

Sergeant Llyod Brandon addresses soldiers at a forward operating base - Pic Corporal Hamish Paterson

FLEXIBILITY IS A BIG PLUS AND AUSSIE PATROLS CAN OPERATE EITHER UNSEEN OR WITH DELIBERATELY HIGH VISIBILITY

Today, the almond trees are in blossom and, under the warm spring sunshine, the soldiers are relaxed yet alert. Multiple patrols through the area have helped strengthen relationships. The locals are familiar and relaxed with the troops, impressed when the diggers call them by name and practice the local Pashtu language. And the kids are giving cheek as they dance around the soldier's feet.

Later that day, there's a Shura or local meeting, where elders are shown respect and asked for their opinions, asked to voice their needs. It's evidence of Australians demonstrating their competitive advantage over the Taliban extremists – consultation over intimidation. What every single Australian on the ground here knows, is that the consultation is backed up by the ability to fight and win, if required.

Australian protected reconstruction is making real progress. The evidence speaks for itself.

In the past 12 months, Australians have driven a wedge into Taliban extremists' operations in the Baluchi and Chora Valleys – both former strongholds.

The catalyst for change began near the mouth of the Baluchi Valley in August last year when a massive battle broke out and resulted in the combined arms of the Dutch and Australian contingents checking the 'swarm' tactics of a large force of Taliban extremists. Although they probably didn't realise it at the time, and the world's media remained sceptical, the insurgents' days of dominating the Baluchi and Chora valleys were numbered.

A NATO force, centred on British Ghurkhas, drove the Taliban out before winter set in, on an operation called Spin Ghar, in October 2007. The pessimistically held view then was that the Taliban would be back stronger than ever with the spring.

However, the fact that Taliban extremists were not able to re-establish was largely thanks to the Australian tactic of rapid construction of a series of patrol bases, protected by active infantry patrolling.

What's remarkable about this is that, given the impact, Australian infantry have operated in incredibly small numbers. Australia's Reconstruction Task Force (RTF) infantry component has never mounted to more than a company of around a 100 men, backed by indirect fire, bushmasters, engineers and cavalry.

At time of writing, it is August – six months after my patrol with the Unforgiven. Infantry-led patrols by 3RAR now dominate the once impenetrable Baluchi Valley. This has forced the enemy, when they do risk contact, to do so from beyond the effective limits of their weapon systems.

Corporal Jarred 'Bingo' Bingham and Private Damien Brown conduct night routine - Pic Corporal Hamish Paterson

Flexibility is a big plus and Aussie patrols can operate either unseen or with deliberately high visibility, to work as a deterrent to the enemy or as a confidence builder for local populations and security forces. The enemy is also kept off balance by other assets, such as mortars, targeting possible enemy positions on the ridges.

Sniper Corporal Shane Brown explained that even elements that would usually remain invisible on a conventional battlefield can change their role to meet a tactical aim in insurgency operations.

"At times, we create an overt presence, designed to put the enemy off coming near our forces, in line with our mission as security for the RTF," he said.

Equally, the infantry can remain unseen to achieve the same end, particularly, as 2RAR's Lieutenant Tex Burton observed, when dominating night operations.

"We were able to manoeuvre ourselves in the pitch black with just about zero illumination to secure our lines of communication, and so, not allow the Taliban forces to advance on our defensive positions," he said.

The strategy employed by the Australian Reconstruction Task Force reflects their grasp of what exactly characterises key terrain in Oruzgan Province.

Revolving around fertile river valleys, known as the green zones, it is no coincidence that key terrain for the Aussies is where populations are centred. In a counter insurgency, the 'human terrain' is what matters, and this is where the infantry operate.

A wide river-irrigated zone known as the Dorafshan leads into the narrow Baluchi Valley, which in turn joins the Chora Valley. In the past, this river was dominated and transited by the Taliban – it is also one of the purported routes of the fabled Silk Road.

The river valley system also marks the location of some of the Australian Army's most heroic actions in the modern era. It was on a ridge above the Chora Valley, for example, that SAS Sergeant Matthew Locke won his Medal for Gallantry in 2006 when Taliban made repeated attempts by day and night to overrun and surround his position.

Two years on and the evidence indicates the Australian strategy of patrol-base development, coupled with active patrolling by infantry, has displaced the Taliban, forcing their estrangement from local populations – as Lieutenant Andrew Wegener observed.

"Through constant engagement, listening and acting on local needs, we develop a rapport that makes the Taliban the outsiders, rather than us," he said.

Consistent feedback confirms this, indicating Taliban in the area are having problems maintaining credibility and cohesion, with infighting and blame for failures that has led to a breakdown in morale.

The Australians have proven the Taliban extremists are not the united and invincible force as sometimes portrayed by the media and by the enemy's own information operations.

"They have just as many difficulties staying onside with local populations as anyone else," Officer Commanding the Security Task Group (STG) with RTF-3 Major Michael Bassingthwaighte said.

It's a significant advance. In the past, Taliban have simply reinfiltrated areas cleared during counterinsurgency operations. Again, the evidence indicates that, in the Green Zone, the clear hold-and-build strategy has proven successful.

These areas are of key strategic importance. Yet the remarkable thing is that these results have been achieved without vast numbers of infantry.

Adaptation to an evolving operating environment has seen a change in structure in the Australian force. This includes mentoring teams embedded with the Afghan Army to assist it to steadily take responsibility for security.

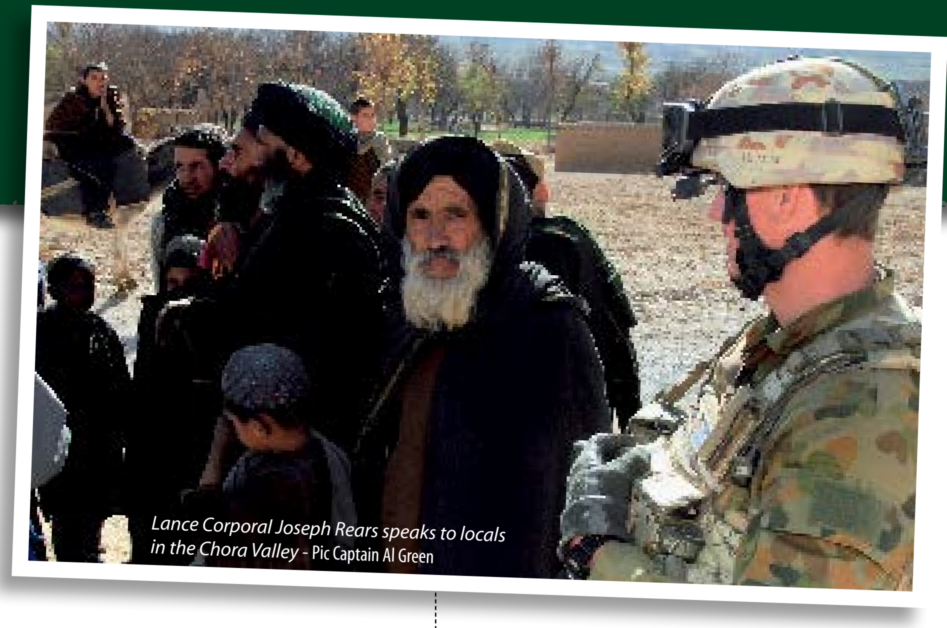
Enhanced security will also create

Spring is in the air as Aussie soldiers patrol in Oruzgan Province - Pic Captain Al Green

Lieutenant Ben Watson and a Dutch colleague confer with Afghan National Army soldiers before a patrol

US Army Specialist Richard Reed shares a meal with Corporal Hagar Quirke - Pic Corporal Hamish Paterson

“EVEN IN DEFENCE, BY ACTIVE PATROLLING AND SURVEILLANCE, WE STILL DOMINATED OUR AREA OF OPERATIONS”



Lance Corporal Joseph Rears speaks to locals in the Chora Valley - Pic Captain Al Green

conditions that will allow aid agencies to operate in the region with reduced risk. Until now these agencies have been reluctant to operate in Oruzgan, but AusAid is one of the first to venture into the area to work closely with the RTF.

The complexity of counterinsurgency operations in this highly sensitive operating environment means skill, judgement and communication ability is critically important to every soldier charged with providing security.

So what makes the Australian infantry soldier suitable for this complex environment that can see the soldier as a combat fighter one minute or peacemaker the next? How has a relatively small infantry component within the battle group helped transform security in the Dorafshan, Baluchi and Chora Valleys?

The military aspects are fairly straight forward. For Major Michael Bassingthwaighte, the combined-arms approach is the best way to achieve the mission.

“The infantry, as a vital part of that approach, is key in seeking out, closing with and engaging the enemy in terrain that is not suitable for any other arms.

“So, the advantage we had and the approach we took with the Security Task Group, was using the elements of the task group for what was best suited to their strengths.”

The infantry under Major Bassingthwaighte’s command operated, dismounted, in the Green Zone where the terrain was extremely complex in both an urban sense and a close-terrain sense, almost to jungle thickness in places, and with those engagement limits.

Cavalry provided fire support and screening operations over large areas and engineers enabled mounted mobility as well as key search capabilities in the exploitation of caches identified by the infantry patrol.

“Additionally, fire support provided by the joint terminal attack controllers and joint forward observers from artillery, and the mortars from infantry, helped us make best use of the combined-arms effect,” he said.

“So, by maximising our strengths and minimising our weaknesses within the combat team construct, we created an advantage over the enemy on the battlefield.”

Major Bassingthwaighte said that every encounter with the enemy reinforced the value of doctrine.

“Doctrine works. Sometimes what’s forgotten is that doctrine, developed over many years of operational experience. What we found was that, more often than not, established doctrine was reinforced during operations in Afghanistan.”

Examples he cited included establishing defence-in-depth to protect worksites – going as far as to dig in armoured vehicles for protection against rocket-propelled grenades.

“In the Dorashan area, we had the whole combat team dug-in in area defence, which was something I don’t think the Australian Army has done in quite a while.

“Even in defence, by active patrolling and surveillance, we still dominated our area of operations.”

While the soldiers of Charlie Company trained effectively within a combined-arms construct before leaving Australia, they also worked hard on basic soldiering skills. To hone them, Major Bassingthwaighte took his company to the jungles of North Queensland. While this may seem a strange choice of location for training in preparation for Afghanistan, it turned out to be ideal grounding for what lay ahead.

“Company training in the jungle at Tully really got the soldiers thinking about developing basic skills, working as a section in that close environment”, Major Bassingthwaighte said.

“A lot of people think of key terrain in a battle as large features – but what Tully really teaches is that it’s the micro terrain that really counts in a firefight.

“What the infantry brings to the battlefield is the ability to control that micro-terrain and take the enemy on in his own environment.”

Added to their tactical prowess, junior commanders had another advantage that gave them the flexibility to deal with complex operations – that of mission command.

Lieutenant Tex Burton credits this approach to aiding his platoon’s development, particularly at the junior-leader level.

“The best thing about leading a platoon in Afghanistan was the freedom of action I was given by my company commander, passing those freedoms to the corporals and watching them grow as junior leaders while developing their own soldiers into better operators all ‘round,” he said.

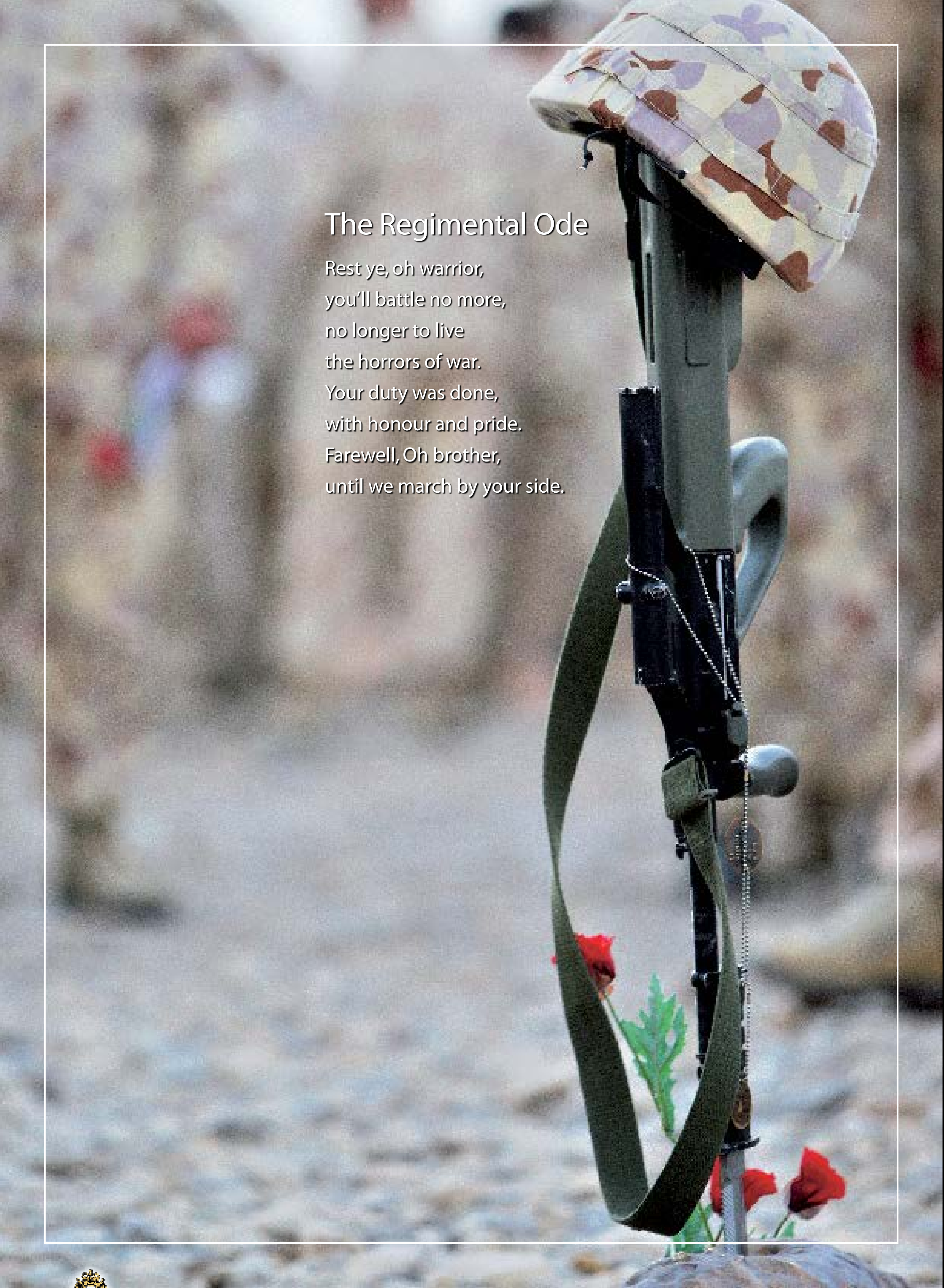
The soldiers’ innate ability to adapt to rapidly evolving operating environments also points to strong individual character traits. To capture this in words I return to the notes I scribbled while on patrol with the Unforgiven on that perfect day last spring near the mouth of the Baluchi Pass.

Bravery is almost an irrelevance to them – it’s assumed, just as putting a mate’s welfare before their own is assumed. Speaking to the soldiers themselves they don’t seem to see their actions as particularly remarkable. Rounds hitting the dirt around them, cutting through uniforms and smashing into packs are events shrugged off or talked about as a matter of fact. So, too, are stories of endurance in temperature extremes that drive the Taliban to retreat while the diggers persevere, giving them the psychological edge and impressing a local population not easily impressed.

They are also undeterred by observers from afar who say the war is lost. The soldiers trust their mates, respect their competence, know they do their own job well and the locals are better off for it.

The diggers know better than anybody that security operations are not an end in themselves, but necessary to set the conditions for progress, to allow the aid agencies to return, for locals to work on projects unhindered, for health services to function and kids to get an education. They are, therefore, easily able to adapt from a battle focus a couple of days ago to today’s patrol with its focus on building relationships. Their inherent fairness is their guide. In that context, the war is already being won.

Privates Damien Kent and Adam Langford provide protection for engineers - Pic Captain Al Green



The Regimental Ode

Rest ye, oh warrior,
you'll battle no more,
no longer to live
the horrors of war.
Your duty was done,
with honour and pride.
Farewell, Oh brother,
until we march by your side.

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