

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 51 FNQR 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 ATSC.

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 RFLS (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.



PICS GUNNER SHANNON JOYCE - 2006 NORFORCE PATROL



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 concept 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.

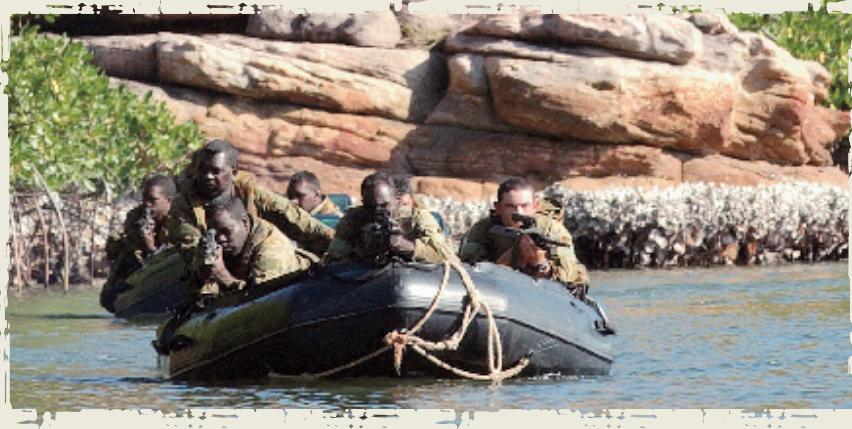
In 1993, the unit's headquarters moved from Port Hedland to a purpose-built building in Karratha. The Pilbara Regiment has depots at Port Hedland, Tom Price, Newman, Karratha, Pannawonica, Exmouth, Carnarvon and Perth.

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.

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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

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

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