

ISSUE 67



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THE AUSTRALIAN MILITARY MAGAZINE



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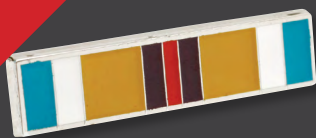
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Issue 67 – September 2020

CONTACT

AIR, LAND & SEA



PEER ON PEER 2RAR BEACH PATROL

Photo by Corporal
Tristan Kennedy
Starts page 50

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appropriate.

Lucky I don't have any hair ;-) As I put the finishing touches on this magazine, there's a lot going on in the background that might cause me to tear it out.

Actually, I am exaggerating just a wee bit, I guess, maybe.

While everything seems to be on track as far as I know, I can't help but worry, especially when two major projects are scheduled to hit major milestones about the same time.

The first, of course, is this magazine, due to be published on Tuesday 1 September 2020. And that *will* happen, come hell or high water. I've never missed a publication date yet, and I don't intend to start with issue 67.

The main reason I'm so committed to deadlines in publishing is because I know for sure and certain that if I let it slip just once, then it will be easier to let it slip the next time and the time after that. So, I'm obsessively determined not to let it slip that first time, lest the spell be broken.

The second major project is starting on Monday 31 August – yes, the day *before* publication date. On that day I hope to be picking up the keys to a very special building – to start a whole new very special project.

You can read more about this on page 18, but essentially, I'm launching a new Veteran HELP Centre in Kiama, NSW, where I live.

Although to say this project is *starting* on 31 August isn't even nearly accurate. I've been all-but consumed by this project for about three months now – since the last publication date – planning, negotiating, preparing, dreaming, scheming, sweating and swearing ;-) – and [making a flash new sign](#) to stamp my mark on the new place.

In case you are wondering what this has to do with CONTACT – or if this is going to take me away from CONTACT – rest easy.

In fact, a very key aspect of this new project is all about CONTACT. A key focus of the Veteran HELP Centre will be, derived from the HELP acronym – Learning and Participation – learning writing, photography, web design and social-media management, and participating in content creation, which can then be published on the various CONTACT platforms.

Make, learn, repeat is my philosophy. By participating in the creative process, you will learn. And, when you create, CONTACT already has the outlets to actually publish your masterpiece. *AND*, more content means more attention – more attention means more participation – and the whole thing grows, in a self-perpetuating cycle.

That's my theory. That's my mantra.

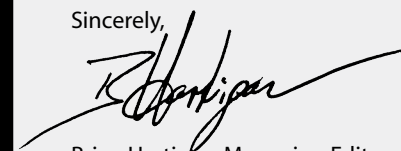
Build it and they will come is another good one. And now I have an actual building to attract people to come, learn and participate in together.

That building is a blank canvas at the moment, so I am also looking for ideas – and furniture ;-)

If you live within cooee of Kiama, NSW – and even if you don't – please get in touch, and drop in any time. But, at least for now – bring your own chair ;-)

And keep an eye on our developing story [here](#).

Sincerely,



Brian Hartigan, Managing Editor

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JAVELIN

Direct Fire Support Weapons Platoon soldiers from 3RAR fire a Javelin anti-tank missile during Exercise Long Khanh at the Townsville Field Training Area.

KHANH DO



HEADS UP



Australian soldiers from Combat Training Centre are joined by Mule (rear) and Ghostrobotics (right) unmanned ground vehicles, as well as a Black Hornet nano UAV in a display of human-machine teaming. Photo by Corporal Sebastian Beurich.

ROBO INVESTMENT

Army is increasing its experimentation, prototyping and exploration of autonomous vehicles and emerging technologies with a \$12.2 million boost in Australian-industry contracts

Minister for Defence Linda Reynolds said the development of robotic and autonomous systems was central to meeting Australia's future operational challenges, including combat and other operations.

"These technologies are 'disruptive technologies' that provide marked advantages on the modern battlefield by bolstering ADF capability while protecting Australian personnel," Minister Reynolds said.

Contracts will be delivered over the next three years and include:

- \$7.7 million contract with BAE Systems Australia to convert 16 M113AS4 APCs into optionally crewed combat vehicles, increasing the OCCV fleet to 20 vehicles, and support experimentation over two years. Conversions will be conducted in South Australia by BAE and in regional Victoria by Defence's Joint Logistic Unit – Victoria.
- \$3.5 million contract with the Institute for Intelligent Research and Innovation (IIRI) at Deakin University for the expansion of Army's leader-follower vehicle technology prototyping.

- \$135,000 contract with QinetiQ to assess the value of converting a Bushmaster to hybrid-electric drive.
- \$897,000 contract with EPE for small wheeled robots to experiment with human and machine teaming in reconnaissance roles.

Minister for Defence Industry Melissa Price said the investment would boost robotic and autonomous vehicle studies and help to build opportunities for local defence companies.

"These are exciting times for developing world-class, cutting-edge technology right here in Australia," Minister Price said.

"We are investing \$12 million to boost Defence's experience and understanding of new and emerging technologies in partnership with Australian industry and academia. Investments like these ensure both Defence and Australian industry are well positioned to further develop and take advantage of these state-of-the-art technologies."

Army's Robotic & Autonomous Systems Implementation & Coordination Office (RICO) was launched in March 2020 to explore, coordinate and develop concepts for disruptive technology in pursuit of its Robotic and Autonomous Systems Strategy, published in 2018.

HOMEGROWN SUPER PILOTS

No. 82 Wing Training Flight (82TF) at RAAF Base Amberley is trialing delivery of aircrew operational conversion training in the Super Hornet aircraft in Australia.

Operational conversion training had been conducted with United States Navy since 2015.

Commanding officer 82TF and 82 Wing XO Wing Commander Trevor Andrews said the launch of the trial was an important milestone for Air Combat Group.

"This program will enable No. 82 Wing to provide enduring aircrew training for the entire capability spectrum required for the F/A-18F," Wing Commander Andrews, said.



STORMBREAKER

Raytheon has flown StormBreaker® from an F/A-18 Super Hornet – the second type to carry the weapon.

Program director Cristy Stagg said StormBreaker was the only weapon that could hit moving targets in bad weather or if dust or smoke masked the area.

"Pilots will be able to use poor visibility to their advantage when StormBreaker integration is complete," he said.

The glide bomb features a tri-mode seeker that uses infrared and millimeter-wave radar in normal mode, then semi-active laser or GPS to hit moving targets.

Carrying a 48kg warhead, the bomb can engage moving targets up to 72km away from release point – or static targets at 110km.

F-15E Eagle was the first platform to add StormBreaker. It will also be integrated on the F-35 JSF.

TG TAJI END OF MISSION

Australia ended its training mission at Taji Military Complex in Iraq mid year, bringing the major training mission to a close after more than five years and 10 Australian and New Zealand troop rotations.

Since 2015, the allies trained more than 47,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces through the joint Australia-New Zealand Building Partner Capacity Program.

Australia's support at Taji enabled the Iraqi Security Forces to increase its capacity to deliver its own training and conduct independent operations.

New Zealand withdrew its troops from Taji three months earlier.

Minister for Defence Linda Reynolds commended the ADF for its contribution to TG Taji.



"The ADF has been at the very forefront of the work at Taji," Minister Reynold's said.

"Last year, I saw first hand the incredible contribution our personnel have made at Taji, and had the opportunity to thank them for their significant efforts.

"The increased capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces means our training mission has reached a logical and natural conclusion."

In November 2019, the Iraqi School of Infantry was the first Coalition facility to declare full independent operating capability.

FILE PHOTO (July 2018): Australian and Iraqi soldiers wave to the crew of an Iraqi Army helicopter after a training mission at Taji Military Complex, Iraq. Photo by Corporal David Said.



1000+ HRS ON CLOCK

The first Australian F-35A to roll off Lockheed Martin's Texas production line in 2014 has completed 1000 flying hours in Arizona.

RAAF pilot Flight Lieutenant Adrian Herenda was at the controls of A35-001 as it clocked over the milestone.

PHALANX UPGRADE

Royal Australian Navy's latest upgrade of the Mark 15 Phalanx close-in weapon system (CIWS) has reached initial operating capability.

The new Block 1B Baseline 2 Phalanx system was installed into HMAS Sydney – Australia's newest and most potent warship.

BENALLA BOOST

Defence has signed a new 10-year agreement with Thales Australia for the continued management and operation of Australia's munition factories in Benalla, Victoria, and Mulwala, New South Wales.

The \$1.1 billion agreement provides surety of supply of key munitions and components for the ADF.

NIOA Munitions also signed a new 10-year contract for co-tenancy at Benalla.

Australian-owned NIOA is now the largest supplier of non-guided munitions to the Australian Defence Force.

NIOA WINS LAND159

Queensland-HQ'd NIOA has won the first stage of the LAND 159 Lethality Systems Project that will replace and modernise 26 weapons systems used by the ADF.

Under this initial \$7 million contract, NIOA will test and evaluate weapon systems for Defence as the prospective sole supplier.

INTEL MERGER

Defence has merged its intelligence capabilities under a new Defence Intelligence Group (DIG) to better support ADF operations and take advantage of emerging tech.

DIG will include the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO), Australian Geospatial-Intelligence Organisation (AGO) and critical intelligence components from across the ADF Defence Department.

Lieutenant General Gavan Reynolds is the first Chief of Defence Intelligence.

MORE EF88

The government ordered an additional 8500 Australian-made EF88 (enhanced F88) rifles in July, additional to the 30,000 already ordered.

This purchase will enable increased access to the EF88 across the full- and part-time ADF, especially Army's 2nd Division.

The rifles will be made by Thales in Lithgow, NSW.

251 RWS

Defence will buy 251 remote weapon stations for Army's Bushmaster and Hawkei protected mobility vehicles from Canberra-based Electro Optic Systems – EOS.



The Rheinmetall Boxer CRV, left, with the in-service Australian Light Armoured Vehicle (ASLAV) it will replace.

\$25MILLION CAMERA

Tectonica Australia has won a \$25 million contract to provide sophisticated cameras to boost safety for the Army's Boxer armoured vehicles.

The Local Situational Awareness System will provide vehicle operators with improved situational awareness by day and night.

The company and the government are hopeful of potential opportunities in the world Boxer fleet.

HEADS UP



and SERGEANT BERT

101-year-old-WWII Rat of Tobruk Sergeant Bert Le-Merton – on a mission.

Bert Le-Merton was a 26-year-old mortarman in Borneo on Wednesday 15 August 1945 when news that the war was over came through.

Exactly 75 years later, on Saturday 15 August 2020, 101-year-old Sergeant Bert set out on a new mission in the name of service to today's ANZACs.

Bert officially started his fundraising walk on VP Day and has until March to finish.

But, at time of writing, he is way ahead of schedule – about a third

of the journey complete and more than five times his original dollar target met – all in the name of Soldier On, the modern-day veterans' charity.

Bert attributes his longevity to his philosophy – 'just keep walking around the block'.

If you want to see our very own fair dinkum Aussie walking legend beat 'that other guy' in Pommyland, please pop over to the [March On with Bert](#) fundraising page to lend your support to a very worthy cause.

MRF-D OUT OF QUARANTINE

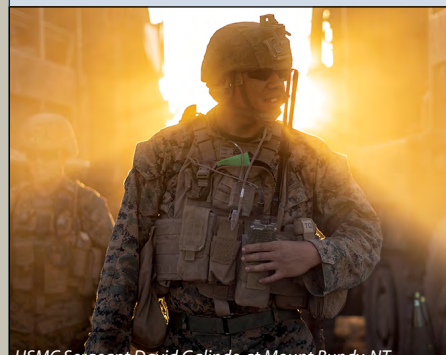
More than 1000 US Marines had to complete 14 days COVID-19 quarantine in the Northern Territory before this year's Marine Rotational Force – Darwin (MRF-D) could begin training.

The discharge of the final group of personnel from quarantine in early August demonstrated the effectiveness of the testing and monitoring regime established with the Northern Territory government, Defence Minister Linda Reynolds said.

"With one positive result captured at initial entry and no further infections, the successful management of the arrival of the US Marines reflects the efforts and planning by the ADF, the NT government and MRF-D," she said.

US Marines are now undertaking a modified training program at various Defence training facilities around the greater Darwin area, including Mount Bunde and Kangaroo Flats.

This year's program will culminate with Exercise Koolendong, running from early to mid-September.



USMC Sergeant David Galindo at Mount Bundy, NT
USMC photo by Corporal Sarah Marshall

INVICTUS 2020ne

New dates for Invictus Games in The Hague have been finalised, with the deferred 2020 games cleverly rebranded – Invictus Games 2020ne.

Postponed by COVID-19, the 2020 Games are now scheduled for 29 May to 5 June 2021.

Chairman of Invictus Games The Hague 2020ne Mart de Kruif said he had received heartwarming support from all partners and suppliers who did not have to think long about a possible restart and extended their support by another year.

DAMN BLAST

A small team of ADF personnel in the Middle East deployed to Beirut on 5 August to help the Australian embassy with communications and medical support – followed by an emergency stores flight on 14 August.

Aid-mission co-pilot Flying Officer David Campbell said it was rewarding being able to help deliver aid to Lebanon' after the port-side blast on 4 August.

"On approach into Beirut, it was obvious to the crew looking

out the window the immediate blast area was pretty devastated, including the surrounds up to 4 or 5 kilometres away," Flying Officer Campbell said.

"Given the number of people who were displaced by the blast, the priority was getting blankets and a mixture of logistical supplies and construction supplies into the country, so they can start to rebuild.

"For us, that was a very fulfilling mission."



A RAAF C-130J pilot observes the Beirut blast site. Photo by Corporal Tristan Kennedy.

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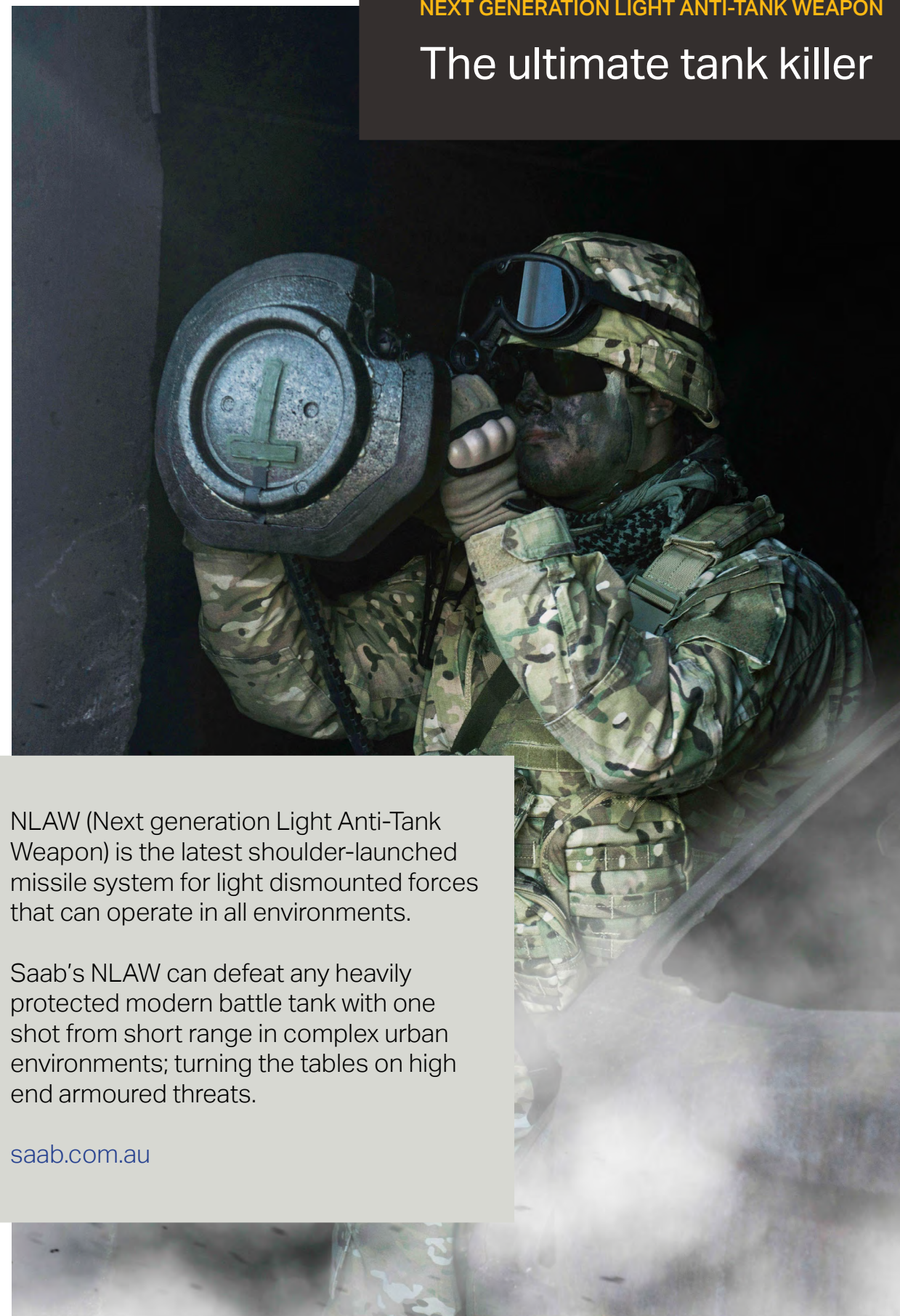
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A C-130J Hercules from No. 37 Squadron in transit to a designated parachute drop zone during Exercise Havoc Drop conducted near RAAF Base Wagga, NSW.

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BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

Kiama, NSW, is most famous for its Blowhole and, to a slightly lesser extent, as the home of CONTACT magazine – and, the small, vibrant, coastal tourist town 90 minutes south of Sydney is about to get a new feature that will hopefully resonate with CONTACT fans and military veterans generally.

In partnership with Soldier On, CONTACT is opening a new Veteran H.E.L.P. Centre in the very heart of Kiama's tourist strip – in the old Kiama Ambulance Station.

The Veteran H.E.L.P. Centre is the brainchild of yours truly – CONTACT editor Brian Hartigan, a former Army sergeant and veteran dealing with my own physical- and mental-health injuries.

H.E.L.P. is a Soldier On acronym meaning **H**ealth and wellbeing services, **E**mployment support,

Learning opportunities, and **P**articipation programs, which I have embraced to describe our new joint-venture in my adopted home town.

As a veteran myself, I had this dream – some would call it a pipe dream – to open some kind of veteran drop-in centre, for nearly two years, but had to shelve the idea when it reached a 'put-up-or-shut-up' level of discussions with fellow veterans.

Then, out of the blue, Soldier On came along, seemingly open to ideas, and a marriage made in heaven very quickly emerged.

Less than three months later, the Kiama Veteran H.E.L.P. Centre is set to open in the very heart of Kiama, thanks to a lease through council on a portion of the former Kiama Ambulance Station – another dream come true.

I have to pinch myself every time I think about it – not only do I get to open the for-veterans-by-veterans help centre I've been dreaming about, but it's going to be opened in quite literally the number one building on my if-you-don't-ask-you'll-never-know list.

I already feel the weight of prestige that location and that building, in the heart of my community, is already bringing to this venture.

But first things first. I already have a core group of volunteers ready, willing and able to help me on day one to scrub floors, paint walls and generally spruce the place up, ready for action.

And, when we're ready for action – which will be a matter of days – I plan to use my years of experience as a military journalist to full advantage

to benefit the centre and for the veterans I hope to attract as participants.

I want to pass on years of accumulated experience to others, in terms of writing, photography, web design, social-media management and so on, to give veterans an artistic outlet and a soft-skills boost – which is very much in line with the E and L and P in Soldier On's H.E.L.P.

I also want to help and encourage others to feel comfortable telling their own stories, not just through writing, but also podcasting, blogging, YouTube videos and so on – which is very much in line with CONTACT's established and respected 'media empire'.

But it's not all be about me or what I want. I also want to know what others would like to achieve



VETERAN H.E.L.P. CENTRE

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME...

through this opportunity, in this building – and in the next building.

I've said all along, the building we first secure will shape the things we can do in it, and the activities and programs we develop and aspire to in this first space will shape the size and type of building we hope to move to as our forever home.

But, for now, the old Kiama Ambulance Station on the middle of main street is a brilliant blank canvas – with two 'offices' and a lock-up garage big enough for a fleet of ambulances.

Sadly, though, because of building-code restrictions, we cannot use the building for 'hard' skills such as woodworking, metalworking etc.

But we can use it for the 'soft' skills I mentioned earlier – and as a base for activities such as kayaking for example, with the nearest sea access just 150m from our back door.

I am a veteran opening this centre for myself and for other veterans, on a build-it-and-they-will-come philosophy and I know what facilities and activities I'd like to incorporate – but I really want to hear what other veterans want to see happen here too.

You can send me your ideas via editor@militarycontact.com or comments on Facebook etc.

Or better yet, pop in and say g'day, tell me your ideas in person – and help me build this thing.

SIGN OF THE TIMES



If you're a hoarder like me, you will have a piece of wood lying around your shed, maybe getting in the way, but always whispering to you – "I'll come in handy for a nice job one day".

Then suddenly, donkey's years later, a real nice and important job comes to mind – and you know exactly where that piece of wood lies waiting for its day to shine.

Well that was me six weeks ago, pulling a nice piece of wood out of its hidey-hole and prepping it to make this sign.

But, all didn't go to plan and I had to scrap the first effort and start again.

Luckily the plank was long enough for the double shot.

MAKE LEARN REPEAT

A key part of the Veteran HELP Centre is learning about social media and audience building etc – and a big part of that is YouTube.

Make, learn, repeat is a key to success on any social platform, especially YouTube.

So, I have been making a lot of YouTube videos over the years – mainly for personal fun – but also putting *make, learn, repeat* into practice – and, documenting the journey of the Veteran HELP Centre before the doors even open.


Keep up with the latest videos [here](#).

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GUNNERS COURSE

Photos by
Trooper Jonathan Goedhart

Australian soldiers from the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry) conduct the final live fire component of an Australian Light Armoured Vehicle Gunners Course at Wide Bay Training Area, Queensland, in June.

The ASLAV Gunners Course was the first major live-fire training activity for 2/14LHR (QMI) as COVID-19 restrictions began to ease.

The course saw soldiers trained on the suite of weaponry the armoured vehicles can be equipped with – including its 25mm chaingun (below), 7.62mm machineguns and a new remote weapons station (recently purchased to equip the new Boxer infantry fighting vehicle) fitted with .50cal machinegun (right).



Trooper Wesley O'Regan (left) and Corporal Matthew McQuillan in convoy at Wide Bay Training Area.



NEW NORMAL

COVID-19



As the 2019/20 bushfire season was winding down and we all thought our annus horribilis was on the improve, along came a little thing – the smallest of things – to turn the very fabric of modern society on its head.

COVID-19 spread across the world with the pace and ferocity of a good old Aussie bushfire, upsetting the very fabric of society. From international and domestic border closures and compulsory quarantining, to brawls over toilet paper in supermarket aisles, civilised society seemed on the brink of collapse.

Even ANZAC Day was cancelled – or so we thought, until some bright spark suggested an alternative that turned out pretty damn good on the day. And, our 'new normal' settled into its own rhythm and life as we knew it just a few months ago now seemed a distant memory.

This crisis is far from over, however – and probably won't be until we get a vaccine – which means it could literally be years before we get back to what we once thought was normal.

So for now, as a military magazine, all we can do is report on what happened in the first few months of this global crisis, from an Australian perspective – from our own perspective, which has

been hamstrung by all kinds of lockdowns, including personal travel – and including Defence information dissemination.

I won't bang on about Defence's 'information vacuum' and how Operation COVID-19 Assist starkly contrasts with Op Bushfire Assist 19-20 from a PR perspective, except to say the two couldn't be more different – blanket coverage across the bushfire effort, compared to smothering any real substance in COVID-19 coverage with a blanket.

But, what little info Defence did issue (or was allowed to issue) was enough for us to scrape together this report without leaving the confines of our self-isolation.

*16 Regiment Royal Australian Artillery
Gunner Daniel Smith, South Australian Police
Constable Bret Sellar, Gunner Brent Winen,
SA Police Brevet Sergeant Adam Kuchel
and Gunner Zac Isemonger at a state border
vehicle checkpoint, near Renmark, South
Australia, during Operation COVID-19 Assist.
Photo by Leading Aircraftwoman
Jacqueline Forrester.*

Right: Troopers Clive Fletcher and Kenneth Fitzgerald, 10th Light Horse, assist WA Police with mandatory quarantine arrangements at a Perth hotel. Photo by Leading Seaman Ronnie Baitoff.

Bottom left: Able Seaman Greg Hallet and Petty Officer Jasmine Marsland assist travelers going into quarantine at the Sofitel Wentworth Hotel, Sydney. Photo by Petty Officer Justin Brown.

Bottom right: Leading Aircraftwoman Eryn Shipp and Leading Aircraftman Sean Bista deliver a bag to a guest undergoing quarantine at the Intercontinental, Sydney. Photo by David Said.

Defence established a COVID-19 taskforce led by Lieutenant General John Frewen in mid March, which saw a peak of just over 4000 ADF personnel deployed on an amazing range of tasks.

Prominent among them – and later controversial for Victoria’s resistance – was quarantine compliance checks.

Minister for Defence Linda Reynolds said the ADF would provide mainly logistics support for state and territory police as they enforced mandatory quarantine and isolation measures.

“In New South Wales, more than 30 ADF personnel deployed to Sydney Airport to support state police, with at least another 40 supporting the quarantine of six separate hotels,” Minister Reynolds said of the initial deployments, which were to ramp up much further.

“In Queensland, around a dozen ADF personnel deployed to Brisbane Airport and Cairns Airport to support state police.

“Another dozen personnel are supporting the quarantine of a hotel in Cairns.

“Fifty ADF personnel have been approved to deploy in Western Australia to support quarantine measures for new arrivals.

“A small number have already supported the movement of baggage from Fremantle to Perth Airport and Rottnest Island Ferry Terminal.”

She said the ADF was working with other state and territory authorities to determine their support requirements and stand ready to provide that support at short notice – the first indications of Victoria’s pushback against having ‘troops in any public-facing roles’.

As it turned out, most Australians welcomed and even demanded to see their troops deployed in this crisis, just as they did in the preceding bushfires.

But it could have been different – it could have been as Victoria feared.

Even Lieutenant General Frewen felt a need to issue a statement pleading with Aussies to support their troops.



His plea came in the wake of ill-informed and largely ignorant, hysterical, negative and potentially dangerous social media suggestions that the ADF’s involvement in compulsory isolation of people returning from overseas was ‘proof’ that Australia was under martial law.

“In light of the Prime Minister’s significant announcement, I wanted to provide some reassurance to the Australian Defence Force and the wider community,” Lieutenant General Frewen said.

“For more than 100 years, our military has been defending Australia and protecting Australians.

“We most recently saw this over summer, when thousands of regular and reserve personnel mobilised in a matter of days to help their fellow Australians in bushfire-affected areas.





Private Kyle Jones assists NSW Police at a New South Wales/Victoria border crossing.
Photo by Petty Officer Jake Badior.

"We are now answering the call again to help save lives and protect livelihoods during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"ADF has been providing planning, logistics and contact-tracing support to the whole-of-government response.

"When requested, we will assist the states and territories in two ways – by supporting mandatory quarantine arrangements for air arrivals into Australia and by checking self-isolation orders are being followed in homes and residences."

He reiterated earlier lines that the ADF did not have law-enforcement powers but were assisting civilian agencies as they undertook their important work.

"When you see Defence personnel at airports or on the streets, remember, they are part of the communities they are trying to help – they are answering the call, as Defence has done for more than a century.

"I have every confidence the ADF will serve you well. Please support them as they support you."

One very tangible and ultimately rewarding support task was that of Australian Army engineers deployed to medical face-mask manufacturer Med-Con in regional Victoria to help increase production of medical face masks when national stockpiles of that very crucial item were shamefully inadequate, and foreign suppliers were either unable to keep up with world demand – or unwilling to ship overseas in the face of their own domestic demands.

This Army callout was one of the early signs of a new federal-government talk-up of sovereign-industry capacity.

Minister for Defence Reynolds said the Army team at Med-Con, which was comprised of highly qualified engineering maintenance specialists from the Army Logistic Training Centre and the Joint Logistics Unit – Victoria, filled a short-term staffing gap while the company sought to recruit and train new people.



Above: Soldiers from 8/9RAR assist NSW Police at a border control point in Mulwala, west of Albury – one of several Murray River crossings that required around-the-clock manning. Photo by Corporal David Cotton.

"This is a good example of the kind of exceptional circumstances that Defence Aid to the Civil Community (DACC) rules are designed to cover," she said.

Minister for Industry, Science and Technology Karen Andrews said that from helping them to access new equipment to providing staff, the Army was doing what it could to enable companies such as Med-Con to ramp up production and boost domestic capacity.

"There's a lot of fear in the community at the moment but Australians should know that work is happening to help us best respond to this unfolding crisis," Minister Andrews said.

"This is important work, but it's also essential we get it right – this equipment needs to be produced to the highest standards."

With logistics staff on hand, Med-Con ramped up production from its two serviceable mask-making machines to full capacity – and with Army



engineers on hand, they rebuilt a broken machine and got it back in service in a third of the time they had anticipated.

Not only that – as the engineers made spare parts to fix the broken machine and learned how it worked and how it was made, they produced a technical data package to permit the manufacture of more machines.

Head of CASG's Land Systems Division Major General Andrew Bottrell said this was a monumental task that included the use of computer aided design tools, 3D scanners and old-school instruments, and at its peak saw seven volunteers working 12-hour days, seven days a week.

"In all, more than 1300 models of the required components were created in under 19 days and had it not been for the technical mastery of our Land Engineering Agency, Special Operations Logistics Squadron and Joint Logistics team, this task would surely not have been completed," he said.



The complete data package to have the machines built was handed over to Med-Con on 27 March and, after further due diligence and consideration of the potential size and timeline of the pandemic, Med-Con decided to commission further new machines and now with a total of 10, currently running 24/7, producing millions of facemasks every week.

Which was very fortuitous, as the Victorian government found itself in the midst of a dreaded 'second wave' of community transmission and mandated the wearing of facemasks in public.

While we have no desire to comment on the rights and wrongs of what happened in Victoria, it is a matter of fact that Defence Minister Reynolds announced three times that large numbers of ADF were being sent to Victoria – only to see those numbers never reflected in official Defence updates.

It is also a fact that Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews told a Federal Government Committee in

August that he did "not believe Australian Defence Force support was offered to help run Victoria's hotel quarantine scheme".

Defence Minister Linda Reynolds came out swinging in response.

"Victorian authorities consistently advised Defence officials that its assistance was not required for any "public facing roles" in Victoria.

"On 28 March 2020, Victorian authorities advised that Victoria was not seeking ADF assistance with mandatory quarantine arrangements," a position Minister Reynolds said was reaffirmed to ADF officials by Victorian authorities more than once.

As things got worse in Victoria, however, the police commissioner in charge of Victoria's emergency response to COVID-19 made a request on 24 June for 850 ADF personnel to assist with hotel quarantine compliance – but was forced to formally withdrawn the request 24 hours later – about which Premier Andrews said the request was not made



Above left: Sergeant Steven Davidson and Bob Neighbour repair a medical mask machine at Med-Con. Photo by Corporal Sagi Biderman.

Top right: Leading Aircraftwoman Georgia Smith, No. 1 Expeditionary Health Squadron, takes a nose swab at the Melbourne Showgrounds. Photo by Leading Aircraftman John Solomon.

Centre right: Army Lieutenant Mia Parsons, 1st Close Health Battalion, takes a swab in Shepparton, Victoria. Photo by Private Dustin Anderson.

Bottom right: Navy Lieutenant Sophie Cunningham, Navy HQ Tasmania, accounts for COVID-19 testing equipment at a community testing site in Melbourne. Photo by Leading Aircraftman John Solomon.

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Right: An Australian Army soldier and New South Wales Police plan quarantine compliance checks in Sydney. Photo by Corporal Chris Beerens.

Bottom left: Royal Australian Navy personnel disembark a RAAF C-17A Globemaster at Avalon Airport to support Victorian authorities. Photo by Leading Seaman Craig Walton.

Bottom right: ADF personnel from Adelaide, South Australia, disembark a RAAF C-130J Hercules at Melbourne Jet Base. Photo by Leading Aircraftman John Solomon.

by a properly authorised member of the Victorian government.

I guess history, formal inquiries and the court of public opinion will ultimately judge Victoria's performance.

Another shining example of whole-of-government and Defence Aid to the Civil Community working well was demonstrated in Tasmania when 50 members of the ADF and seven AUSMAT (Australian Medical Assistance Team) health professionals deployed within hours of callout to run two co-located hospitals hit by a COVID-19 outbreak among staff.

Once in location, the team – which included ADF doctors, nurses, a pharmacist, a radiographer, an environmental health officer and a small group of general support personnel – reopened and operated the facility's emergency department, providing essential health services to more than 400 patients while hospital staff were quarantined for two weeks.

Minister for Defence Linda Reynolds said Defence prioritised the request following notification from Emergency Management Australia, as part of the National Coordination Mechanism.

"The temporary closure of the North West Regional Hospital and its emergency department would deprive the community of much-needed medical assistance at a crucial time," Minister Reynolds said.

"The deployment of Defence medical practitioners will ensure critical services are maintained."

Minister for Health Greg Hunt said the rapid deployment was further evidence of Australia's world-class health system in action and the scalable nature of the Australian government's response to COVID-19.

"AUSMAT is one of a few World Health Organization globally verified Type-2 Emergency Medical Teams in the world," Minister Hunt said.

Minister Reynolds said this was the first time the ADF had been called on to help operate a domestic hospital.



"Within just a matter of hours of being tasked, the team was heading to Tasmania to assist.

"For more than two weeks, they provided support to the people of north-west Tasmania, including enhanced infection control, primary care, acute resuscitation, minor procedures and consulting care.

"Just like we saw through Operation Bushfire Assist, the ADF's support under Operation COVID-19 Assist is a testament to the professionalism of the ADF."

A formal handover process back to NWRH staff began online and was followed by two days of physical induction on 28/29 April before the emergency team flew home on a RAAF Hercules.

Even while providing all this community support – and continuing current operations overseas – Defence was also affected by the virus, picking up more than 80 confirmed infections of its own.



Four Royal Australian Navy warships joined another 18 ships, one submarine, multiple aircraft and 5300 personnel from nine other nations for all-at-sea Exercise Rim of the Pacific off Hawaii in August.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Chung-Hoon conducts a replenishment at sea with Australian oiler HMAS Sirius during RIMPAC 2020. US Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Devin M. Langer.

RIMPAC 2020 ALL AT SEA



Top left: Able Seaman Jett Mitchell at the gun-director platform for a live missile firing on HMAS Arunta. Photo by Leading Seaman Ernesto Sanchez.
 Above: Seaman Bodhi Greenham fires an F89 Minimi at a 'killer tomato' surface target from HMAS Arunta. Photo by Leading Seaman Ernesto Sanchez.
 Above right: Leading Seaman Zachery Philp on board HMAS Stuart. Photo by Leading Seaman Christopher Szumlanski.
 Below: Lieutenant Commander Leonard Woodman from HMAS Arunta, conducts a safety check of the fuel-receiver bell mouth during replenishment at sea with USNS Henry J Kaiser. Photo by Leading Seaman Ernesto Sanchez.
 Opposite: HMAS Arunta fires an SM-2 missile. Photo by Leading Seaman Ernesto Sanchez.



MORE THAN 50 MILLION LITRES OF FUEL BURNED

RIMPAC ran from 17 to 31 August and was conducted as an at-sea-only event because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commander of the Australian Contingent Captain Phillipa Hay said RIMPAC was the pinnacle of high-end military exercises.

"RIMPAC is a real test of Australia's maritime military capability, from warfighting exercises to missile firings," she said.

"It provides complex and challenging training in a multinational environment, perfect for strengthening interoperability with our regional partners and allies."

This year's exercise included participants from Brunei, Canada, France, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore and, of course, the United States.

Participating forces exercised a wide range of capabilities, such as anti-submarine warfare, maritime intercept operations, and live-fire training events.

HMA Ships Hobart, Stuart, Arunta and Sirius, which had recently been part of a regional deployment through South-East Asia, took full advantage of RIMPAC.

Hobart, Stuart and Arunta all had opportunities to fire missiles – Arunta being the first Australian frigate to complete the Anzac Midlife Capability Assurance Program (AMCAP) upgrade to do so since her upgrade.

HMAS Sirius played a big part too, helping to distribute more than 50 million litres of fuel during the two-week exercise.

Commanding officer of Arunta Commander Troy Duggan said the firing demonstrated the lethality of the upgraded Anzac-class frigate and its world-class Australian systems.

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AUSSIE WOMAN COMMANDS TASK FORCE 1

"This is the first time an AMCAP frigate has participated in RIMPAC, and demonstrates the capability of the new phased array radar suite as an integrated sensor for the combat system," Commander Duggan said.

Completed in 2019, the upgrade provides the Anzac-class frigates the first CEAFAR2-L long-range phased-array air search radar.

This world-leading radar technology was designed and built in Australia to provide long-range situational awareness to the ship and allied units.

Missile firings were conducted on the Pacific Missile Range Facility off Hawaii.

The range used remote-controlled drones to simulate missile attack profiles against Arunta, and the ship engaged them with surface-to-air missiles.

Commander Duggan said the ship's company had trained extensively for the event.

"These sorts of complex warfighting exercises with multinational partners demonstrate that the Royal Australian Navy is able to operate seamlessly with other highly advanced navies in our region," he said.

HMAS Hobart also become the first of Australia's Hobart-class air warfare destroyers to conduct a missile launch during RIMPAC, cementing its title as the most sophisticated and lethal warship ever operated by the RAN.

Commanding Officer Hobart Commander Ryan Gaskin said the missile firing proved the ship was ready to fight and win at sea as part of a joint force.

HMAS Hobart carries a range of weapons systems, including a Mk41 vertical-launch missile system containing SM-2 and Evolved Sea Sparrow missiles, a Mk 45 5-inch gun, Phalanx close-in weapons system, two 25mm Typhoon guns, and MU90 and Mk54 light-weight torpedoes.



Opposite: HMAS Sirius leads USS Rafael Peralta and HMAS Stuart. Photo by Leading Seaman Christopher Szumlanski.

Above: Petty Officer Luke Ireland reboards HMAS Arunta after boarding party training. Photo by Leading Seaman Ernesto Sanchez.

Top right: Captain Phillipa Hay on the bridge of HMAS Hobart. Photo by Leading Seaman Ernesto Sanchez.

Above right: HMAS Stuart crewmembers conduct boarding-party training on a rigid-hulled inflatable boat. Photo by Leading Seaman Christopher Szumlanski.

Below: HMA Ships Sirius and Stuart sail in company with RSS Supreme, KDB Daruleshan and USS Rafael Peralta. Photo by Leading Seaman Christopher Szumlanski.





Australia's impact on RIMPAC 2020 extended to more than just our ships and missiles, as Royal Australian Navy Captain Phillipa Hay became the first non-US military woman to command a task force in the 49-year history of Exercise Rim of the Pacific.

Captain Hay also commanded more than 2500 sailors and officers across 11 warships from Australia, Canada, France, Japan, the Philippines and the USA.

The only other woman to command a taskforce on RIMPAC was now-retired US Vice Admiral Nora Tyson in 2016.

While acknowledging the honour of being the first Australian woman to command a task force, Captain Hay said her focus was on representing the men and women of the Royal Australian Navy and leading her force.

"RIMPAC is a test of Australia's maritime military capability, from warfighting exercises to the missile firings," she said.

"It provides complex and challenging training in a multinational environment, perfect for strengthening interoperability with our regional partners and allies.

"I am proud to be part of an Australian force which, with our partners and allies, can continue to train and operate in these challenging times.

"It demonstrates our collective grit and resilience."

Captain Hay has always been a trailblazer.

At age 10, she sailed around the world with her family.

In 1993, she joined the RAN and was selected for an exchange with the US Navy in USS John Young in the Middle East.

She was the first Australian female to qualify as a ship's diver and first female to serve in the Australian Minor War Vessel Sea Training Group.

Last year Captain Hay also became the inaugural task group commander of Australia's regional engagement mission in the South West Pacific.

She said she had found her niche in the RAN, which affords its people the room to succeed regardless of gender, sexuality or religion.

"In the Royal Australian Navy, there are no limitations," Captain Hay said.

"We pride ourselves on richness of diversity and being a reflection of the Australian community.

"I look around and see only proud sailors and officers serving the Navy and Australia.

"I hope my journey serves as an inspiration to all who wish to serve."

Captain Hay said her success was driven by a desire to contribute to the harmony and stability of the region and know that her children would benefit and enjoy a peaceful life.

For that reason, she said she was proud to participate in RIMPAC alongside like-minded nations.

"International naval cooperation ensures maritime security and stability," she said.

"The global maritime environment is too large and complex for any one nation to safeguard.

"RIMPAC helps participants foster and sustain the cooperative relationships that are critical to ensuring the safety of our seas' security."

HMAS Hobart.
Photo by Leading Seaman Christopher Szumlanski.



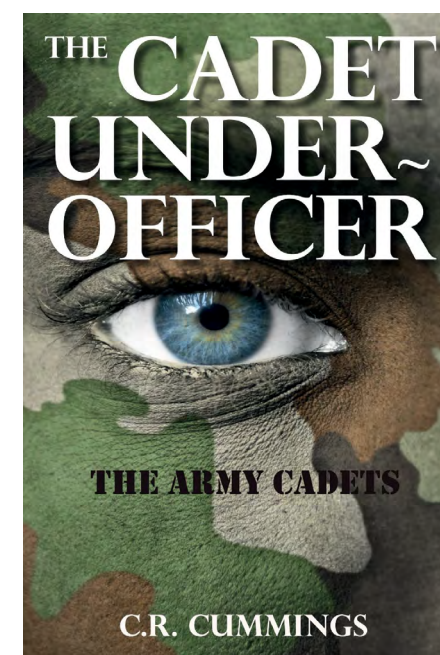
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by Christopher Cummings

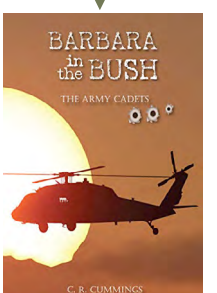
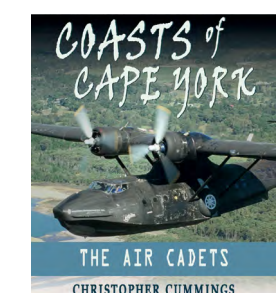
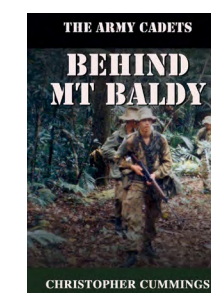
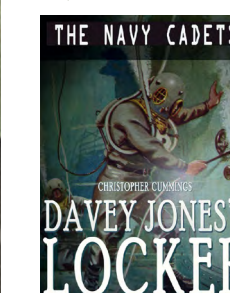


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PACIFIC PRESENCE



An E-7A Wedgetail from No. 2 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, leads three F/A-18A Hornets from No. 77 Squadron and an EA-18G Growler from No. 6 Squadron over a Royal Australian Navy task group consisting of (from top) HMA Ships Arunta, Canberra, Sirius, Hobart and Stuart during a Regional Presence Deployment in the Phillipine Sea in July 2020.

PACIFIC

PRESENCE



HMA Ships Canberra, Hobart and Stuart in Guam, where sailors were not allowed shore leave because of COVID-19 protocols. Photo by Leading Seaman Christopher Szumlanski.



RAAF F/A-18A Hornet A21-002 departs on an air-sea integration mission from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. Photo by Sergeant Guy Young.



WITH TENSIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND AMERICA, AUSTRALIA, HONG KONG, TAIWAN, JAPAN AND OTHERS ON A VERY TETCHY FOOTING, AUSTRALIA, JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES CONDUCTED A NAVAL PASSAGE IN THE PHILIPPINE SEA IN JULY

Main photo from left: HMAS Hobart, HMAS Arunta, USS Mustin, HMAS Canberra, USS Ronald Reagan, HMAS Sirius, USS Antietam, JS Teruzuki and HMAS Stuart steam in formation, with a range of US aircraft overhead. US Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jason Tarleton.



With HMA Ships Canberra, Hobart, Stuart, Arunta and Sirius taking part, the activity included replenishment-at-sea, aviation-operations, maritime-manoeuve and communications drills.

Commander of the Australian Joint Task Group Commodore Michael Harris said the opportunity to work alongside Japan and the US was invaluable.

"Maintaining security and safety at sea requires navies to be able to cooperate seamlessly," Commodore Harris said.

"The combined activities between our navies demonstrates a high degree of interoperability and capability between Australia, Japan and the US."

Commander of Japan's Escort Division 4 Captain Sakano Yusuke said strengthening cooperation with the US Navy and Royal Australian Navy was vitally important for Japan and contributed to a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

"The experience in this exercise will give us tactical and operational advantages and make our friendships stronger, in addition to our regular joint exercises with both like-minded navies," Captain Sakano said.

Commanding Officer USS Antietam Captain Russ Caldwell said the US Navy routinely exercised with regional partners, showing their shared commitment to regional stability and a free and open Indo-Pacific.

"The relationships we've developed enable us to meet at sea and immediately operate at an advanced level," Captain Caldwell said.

"This highlights the enduring nature of our alliances with Japan and Australia.

"The United States is fortunate to routinely operate alongside its allies across the Indo-Pacific and coordinated operations like these reinforce our mutual commitment to international maritime norms and promoting regional stability."

More than 150 RAAF personnel along with strike, surveillance and transport aircraft from RAAF Bases

Amberley and Williamtown deployed to Guam to join the naval exercises.

A C-17 Globemaster, E-7A Wedgetail, EA-18G Growler electronic warfare attack fighter and six F/A-18A fighter jets, flew to Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, assisted by two KC-30A multi-role tanker transports that supported the transit with in-air refuelling – including between each other.

The air exercises also included Guam-based US Air Force fighters and bombers – including the mighty B-1B – and the full carrier based suite of aircraft from the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier.

Minister for Defence Linda Reynolds said training of integrated air and sea forces was an important progression in the joint-force capability.

"Some of our most advanced capabilities including the EA-18G Growler and the guided missile destroyer HMAS Hobart [integrated] in a combined air and sea environment," Minister Reynolds said.

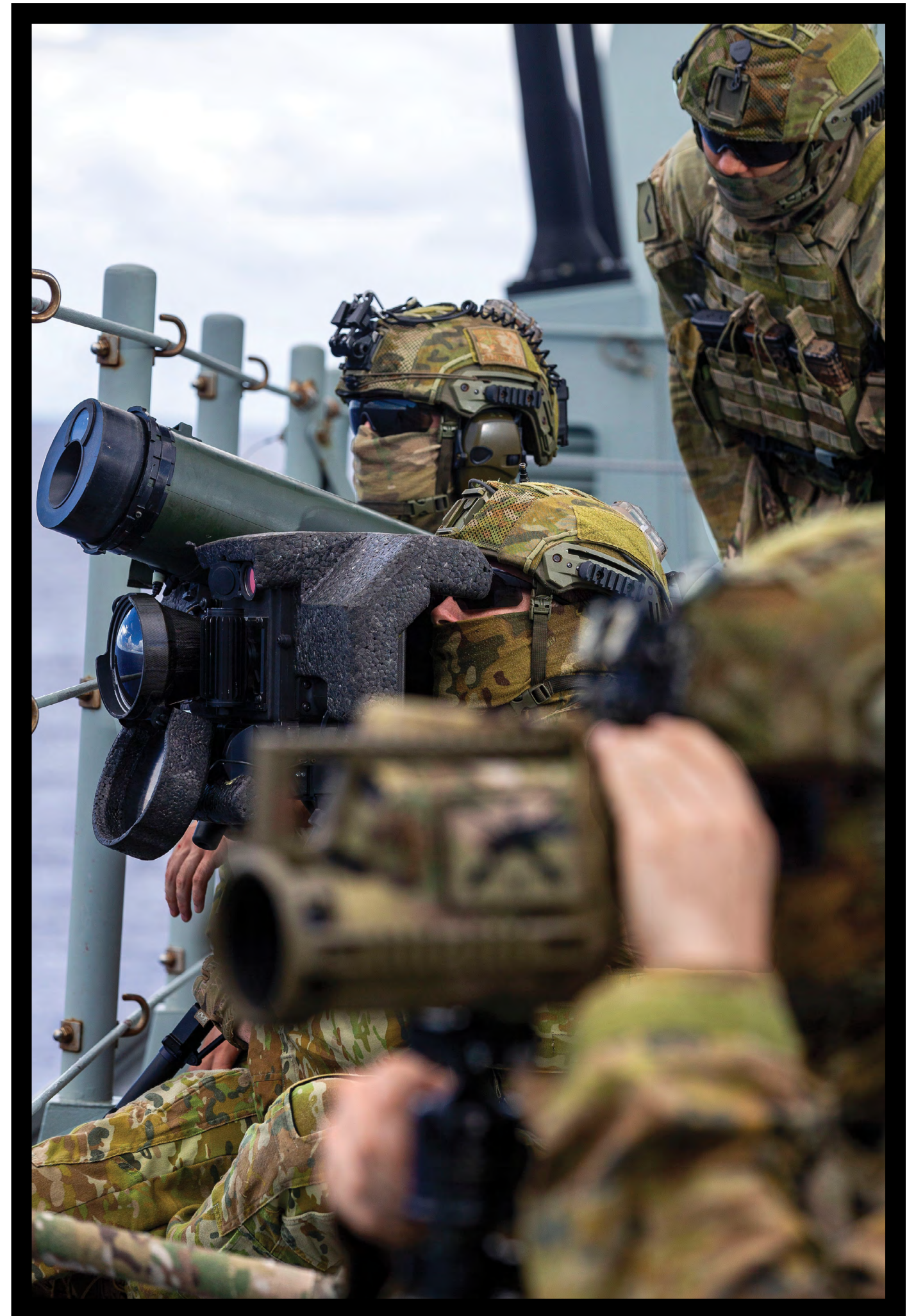
"This deployment demonstrated Defence as a capable force, with an ability to conduct complex and extended deployments at sea and in the air organically and with our regional partners.

"Exercising as a joint force across air and sea allows the Navy and Air Force to understand each other's warfighting activities, to fight better in the maritime environment, make decisions quickly and fully employ their forces across multiple domains."

The trilateral passage concluded – with only minor and professional interactions with Chinese assets – in late July with some ships heading home and the rest proceeding to Hawaii for an at-sea-only RIMPAC 2020.

ABOVE: A 6 Squadron EA-18G Growler pilot inspects his aircraft before a mission out of Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. Photo by Sergeant Guy Young.

RIGHT: Private Samuel Williams, 2RAR, mans a Javelin missile launcher during a force protection exercise on HMAS Canberra. Photo by Leading Seaman Kieren Whiteley.



A BEACH LANDING SCENARIO HELPS 2RAR FOCUS AND HONE ITS RECONNAISSANCE AND SURVEILLANCE SKILLS PRIVATE JACOB JOSEPH REPORTS



PHOTOS BY CORPORAL TRISTAN KENNEDY

Private Bryce Thomason-Wylie sat on a muddy hill and looked down on a stretch of beach, watching as a black shape bob towards land.

The soft patter of idle engines echoed from small inflatable boats as they waited to collect an enemy patrol hidden somewhere around the Cowley Beach Training Area.

It was part of 2RAR B Coy's free-play training scenario and the first time reconnaissance patrols went head-to-head since 2RAR restructured to two pre-landing forces – PLF-Alpha and Bravo in 2019.

From July 20 to 24, patrols from 22 Platoon attempted to mark a beach landing site secretly for notional ground forces, while 21 Platoon observed them from a concealed position on land.

"We'd been sitting in an observation post for four days," Private Thomason-Wylie said.

"There was no activity before we saw the boats.

"It had been raining non-stop and maintaining focus was a challenge.

"Usually we train in a scenario where the enemy is out in the open.

"It's good to train against another reconnaissance patrol that is trying to stay hidden as much as we are."

Patrol Commander Corporal Jonathan Williams said the activity was only possible because planned major exercises were cancelled because of the global pandemic.

"We were going to go on exercise Croix du Sud in New Caledonia this year," Corporal Williams said.

"Instead, we've used the training time as an

opportunity to focus on our core skills – and activities like this give soldiers a realistic feel for the job.

"If there are other reconnaissance patrols out there using specialist equipment, such as spotting scopes and thermal imaging, there's a real risk of compromise."

As well as a realistic experience, Private Thomason-Wylie said pride was on the line as the two platoons went head to head.



Above: Corporal Patrick Mortimore, a 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, section commander, scans the shoreline during a riverine insertion at the Cowley Beach Training Area, Queensland.

Right: Unnamed 2RAR reconnaissance soldiers approach the beach by Zodiac.

Bottom: Private Arlen Treston covers the beach with a silenced F89 Minimi machine gun during a reconnaissance-patrol extraction at the Cowley Beach.

Previous page: Private Arlen Treston scans the shoreline during a riverine insertion at Cowley Beach.

Please not: These photos by Corporal Tristan Kennedy are from a training activity in November 2019, while he refers to a similar activity in July 2020.

"No one in the company wants to get a reputation as the patrol that was compromised and failed the mission," he said.

"Everyone was on the ball as we didn't know where the enemy was or if they were actively seeking us out."

Officer commanding B Company Major Jack Bolton said the activity exposed soldiers to the complexities of a non-scripted battlespace.

"In Defence we talk a lot about being prepared to fight against a 'near-peer' enemy, but we want to be ready to fight a peer enemy too," he said.

"With peer-on-peer free-play activities, we can provide soldiers and junior commanders with a sense of what they're going to face in a contemporary battlespace."

With the expansion of the battalion to two pre-landing force elements, peer-on-peer training helped develop the reputation of reconnaissance units, according to Major Bolton.

"We've got to adapt to raising three extra reconnaissance platoons and increase the basic level of skills and knowledge of all of our reconnaissance-qualified soldiers so we have that subject-matter expertise across all four platoons in the unit," he said.

"These exercises help us to quickly focus on reconnaissance and surveillance skills as a primary training objective to try and speed up that learning loop."

Story courtesy ARMY newspaper



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OUT OF THE BLUE BOLT

Urban training is considered a challenging way to prepare for modern operations and the latest Regimental Officer Basic Course at the School of Infantry experienced this at the next level using cutting-edge Blue Bolt non-lethal ammunition.

Lieutenant Ethan Strunks said non-lethal training ammunition (NLTA) provided realistic training with many advantages.

"This gives us the opportunity to fight force-on-force, rather than just against targets," Lieutenant Strunks said.

"What blanks can't simulate, like taking a casualty in the battlefield, NLTA can."

Commandant of the Combined Arms Training Centre Colonel David McCammon said the implementation of realistic and challenging training was the right way to prepare future leaders.

"CATC is focused on delivering training that strengthens a soldier's combat mindset," Colonel McCammon said.

"While the training is tough, it mirrors the demands of leading soldiers on a battlefield.

"Training such as this ensures that our soldiers are ready to fight and win the land battle, now and under the demands of future warfare."

Working in partnership with Army Headquarters, School of Infantry has been able to qualify around 90 personnel who can now cross-pollinate into battalions and build an instructor base.

Further test and evaluation trials are scheduled in September and, based on their success, will then be rolled out across Army.

Army officers during a Blue Bolt non-lethal training ammunition serial on the infantry Regimental Officer Basic Course at the Singleton Military Area. Photo by Sergeant Ray Vance. Story by Major Carrie Robards.





LONG KHANH

On 24 August 2020, the rolling hills of Townsville Field Training Area were awash with action as Exercise Long Khanh – a combined-arms live-fire attack – brought together infantry, artillery, armoured, engineering, air, logistics, medical and communications elements on the one battlefield. Led by 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, the live-fire exercise was the culmination of a series of increasingly complex training activities to ensure 3rd Brigade is at a high level of readiness to respond to a range of contingencies and to recover capability as a result of limited operations during the peak of the COVID 19 restrictions. Combined-arms live-fire training is essential for 3 Bde troops and their commanders as they develop their skills individually and collectively in preparing for all possible scenarios, from high-level warfighting to peacekeeping and humanitarian or civil assistance.

RIGHT: Flight Lieutenant Ebrahim Tabandeh, an Air Control Liaison Officer with the 3 Bde, controls the airspace for the combined-arms attack during Exercise Long Khanh.

Photos by WO2 Neil Ruskin and Corporal Daniel Strutt.



The first RFSG vehicle comes ashore at Norwegian Bay. Three Australian Border Force photos digitally combined by CONTACT.

PILBARA PATROL

Assets from the Australian Border Force, Army's Pilbara Regiment and the RAAF, with support from the Department of Home Affairs, Australian Federal Police and WA Police, conducted a unique patrol activity in Western Australia's north in July.

Under the umbrella of Operation Resolute, the activity ran for two weeks and focused on the Exmouth-Coral Bay area and adjacent western shipping routes, more than 1000km north of Perth.

Soldiers from The Pilbara Regiment deployed from regional towns to assist in the surveillance effort, with their local knowledge proving invaluable in the protection of country.

Overt operational activities included a beach landing of a Regional Force Surveillance Group patrol aboard an LCM-8 landing craft at Norwegian Bay, 60km north of Coral Bay.

The landing also represented the first operational use of small commercial off-the-shelf unmanned aircraft systems by the RFSG, with imagery of areas of interest captured remotely by operators in a concealed location.

Variant 2 vessel Kimberley Coast from ABF Regional Command WA ensured ABF officers provided maritime law enforcement throughout the operation.

Air surveillance support was provided by a RAAF P-8A Poseidon.

Commander Maritime Border Command (MBC) Rear Admiral Lee Goddard said the deployment was a clear demonstration of the whole-of-government commitment to detect and deter criminal activity along Australia's vast coastline.

"These activities are part of our enduring surveillance and response programme," Rear Admiral Goddard said.

"Criminals and other threat actors are adept at identifying and exploiting weaknesses in maritime borders for their own nefarious ends.

"But the combined efforts of Maritime Border Command and partner agencies are equal to the task through our surveillance, patrol and response capabilities, combating illegal activity and threats to Australia's border.

"Whether it be the movement of illicit drugs, illegal maritime arrivals or illegal foreign fishing, MBC is committed to protecting Australia's maritime environment and defending our borders."

Australia has a comprehensive maritime surveillance and response capability delivered through Maritime Border Command, a multi-agency taskforce within the Australian Border Force.

GOFF! THEOSE KIWIS



Posted on the New Zealand Army Facebook page on 28 June 2020 – shortly after the ‘Russian bounty on American soldiers’ story broke ;-)

“The New Zealand Army has been a member of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in Sinai, Egypt since its inception on 25 April 1982.

As part of this longstanding peacekeeping mission, we provide a transport section to operate and drive vehicles as required by the force, as well as providing a training and advisory team.

Additionally, the contingent provides personnel for staff appointments within the Force and Contingent Headquarters.

The contingent is involved in a wide range of MFO activities, from the soldier level

within the Force logistics organisation to involvement in key staff roles and functions in the Force Headquarters.

In December 2019, Major General Evan Williams took up the role of Force Commander for the Multinational Force and Observers – leading around 1150 military personnel from 13 countries over his three-year tenure in the role.”

Those comical Kiwis, never shy of a laugh, rolled out the 14-year-old photo above when the ‘Russian bounty’ story broke, just for shits and giggles.



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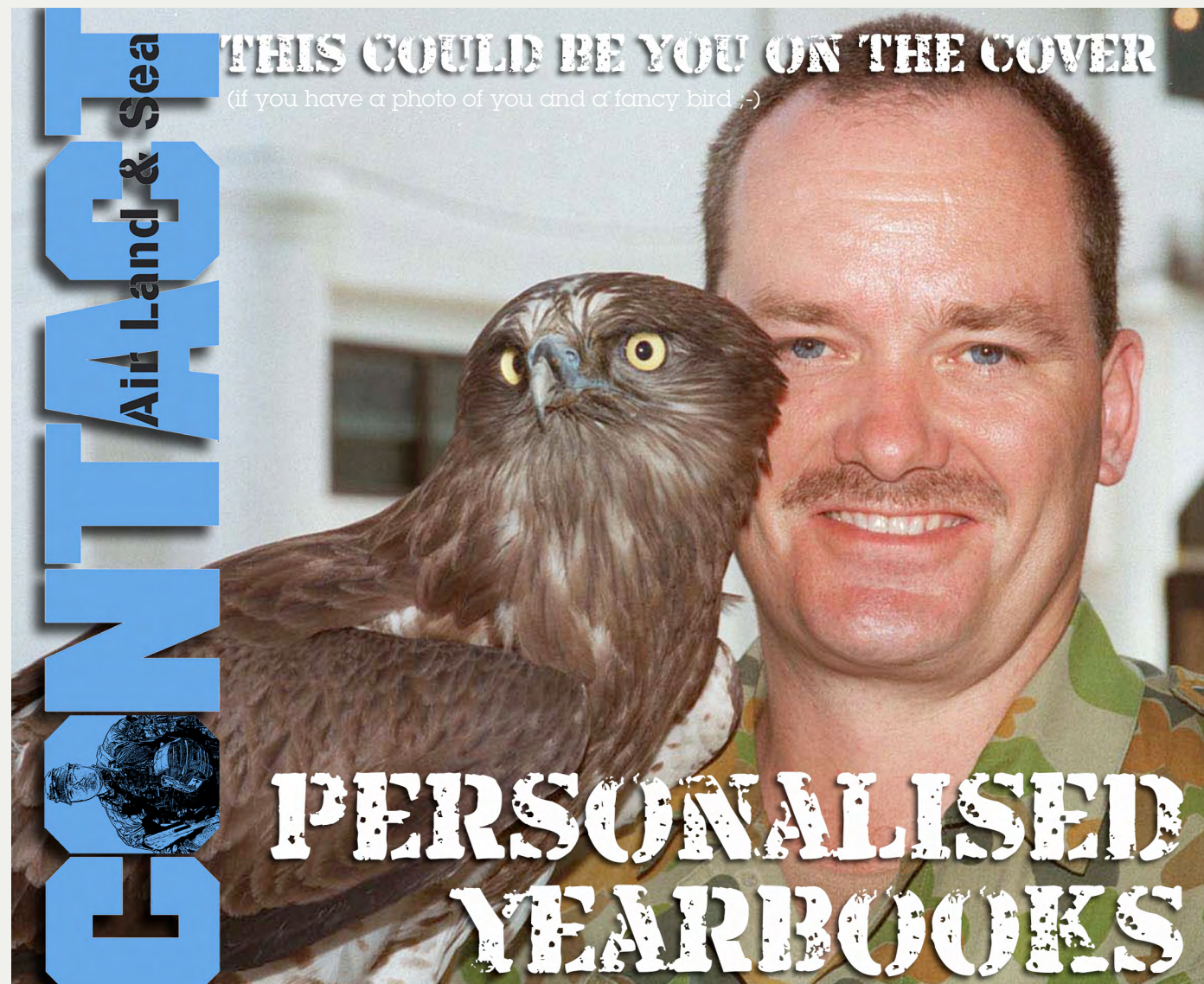
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SHEEAN VC BEYOND DOUBT

Her Majesty The Queen approved the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross for Australia to Ordinary Seaman Edward 'Teddy' Sheean on 12 August 2020 – just two days after the Governor General asked her – and 78 years after he earned it.

The Victoria Cross is the highest military award for bravery in the face of an enemy.

On 1 December 1942, HMAS Armidale came under aerial bombardment and torpedo attack from Japanese aircraft.

The ship was badly damaged and the crew was ordered to abandon ship.

As the enemy continued to fire upon the ship and his shipmates already in the water, 18-year-old Ordinary Seaman Sheean chose not to abandon ship as ordered and returned to the aft anti-aircraft gun.

Despite being wounded twice, he strapped himself into the gun's shoulder mounts and harness and commenced firing at the enemy, shooting down one aircraft and possibly damaging others while attempting to disrupt and distract the enemy from strafing and killing his defenceless shipmates in the water.

Despite severe and possibly fatal wounds, Sheean continued firing the gun even as the ship slipped beneath the waves, dragging him with it to his grave.

Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean deliberately sacrificed his own life trying to save his shipmates.

Of the 149 people on board the ship that day, 100 were lost, with many of the survivors attributing their survival to Sheean.



EDITOR'S NOTE:

I have long supported the campaign to award the VC to Teddy Sheean – and I wholeheartedly congratulate all those who campaigned for it over many years.

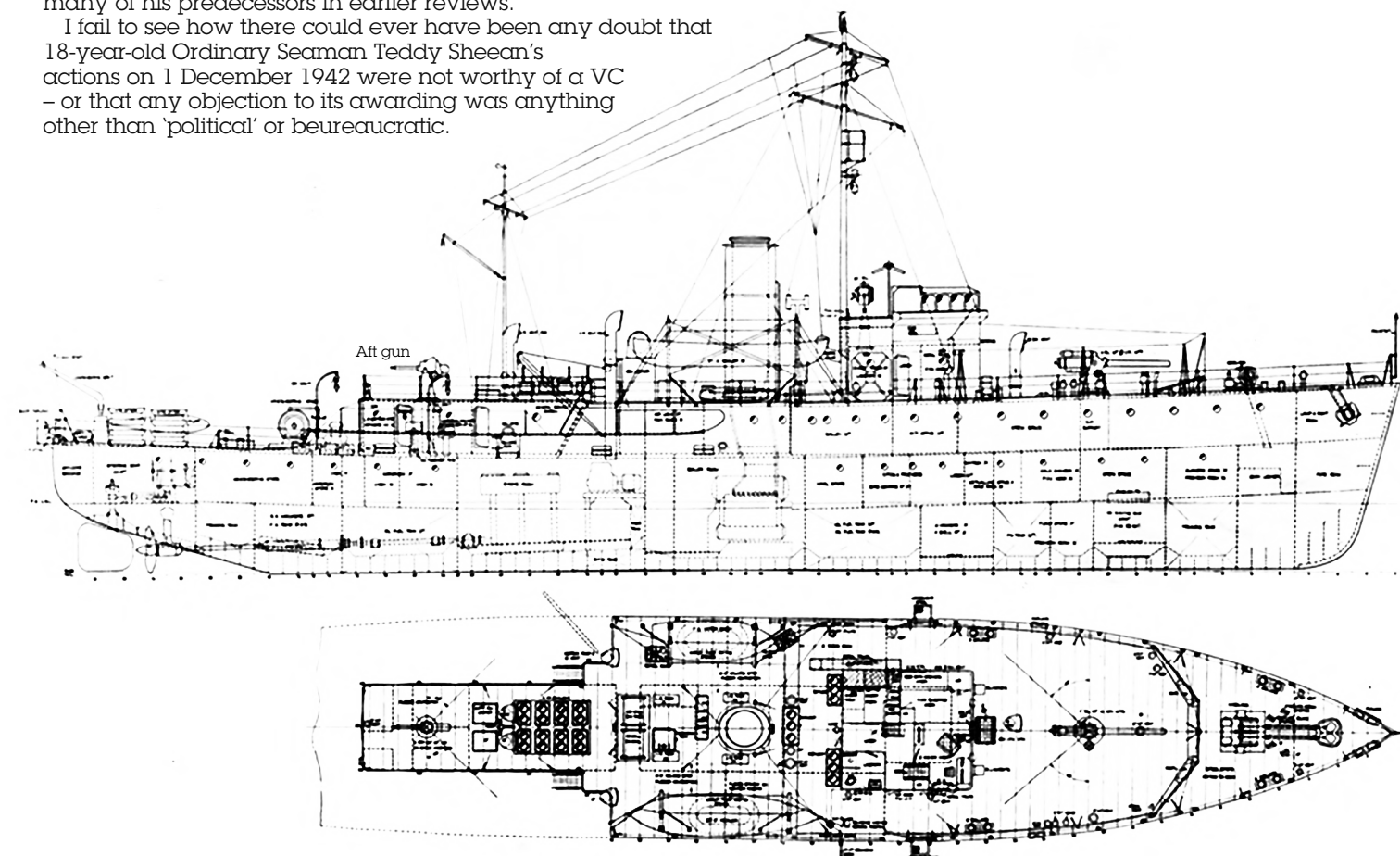
However, I can't help but read a certain hypocrisy into Defence's headline statement after the award was approved that "Teddy Sheean's bravery and sacrifice has long been recognised and honoured by Defence and the Royal Australian Navy".

While I know they recognised and honoured Sheean by naming a submarine after him etc – they also vigorously campaigned against this award for 50 years or more.

Not three months before the award was eventually endorsed by the Queen, the same Royal Australian Navy issued a public statement rejecting the unanimous recommendation of the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal.

Furthermore, the current Chief of Navy was the number one objector during the most recent review's hearings – as were many of his predecessors in earlier reviews.

I fail to see how there could ever have been any doubt that 18-year-old Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean's actions on 1 December 1942 were not worthy of a VC – or that any objection to its awarding was anything other than 'political' or bureaucratic.



The diaries and papers of SIR JOHN MONASH

free online at Trove

At 4am on 20 December 1915, Sir John Monash wrote in his diary about the withdrawal of troops from Gallipoli.

The last hours on Gallipoli were tense [and] exciting in the extreme. About 9 my last patrol came in [and] reported that they could plainly hear the Turks digging [and] putting out wire, on Hackney Wick [and] Green Knoll two points at which my lines have been pushed very close to theirs. – This meant that so far they suspected nothing. – The last hours passed most wearily. Every crack of a rifle, every burst of rifle fire, every bomb explosion might have been the beginning of a general attack all along the line. By 10 o'clock our final numbers had been reduced to 170 in the Brigade, ie 600 in the whole N.Z [and] A. Division [and] about 1500 in the whole Army Corps – spread along a front of over 8 miles. This meant that if at any point along this great line the Turks had discovered the withdrawal of the garrison [and] if only a few of our men had given way [and] allowed our lines to be penetrated, the whole of this last 1500 would have had a very hard fight of it [and] many would have left their bones in Gallipoli.

Monash continued this diary entry outlining the final withdrawal that commenced at 1:35am, and how at 1:55am the last man had left the foremost position, 'leaving only the automatic devices working'.

He indicated that the other brigades and divisions were 'similarly timed according to their distance from the embarking piers'.

Down dozens of little gullies leading back from the front lines, came little groups of 6 to a dozen men, the last (in every case an officer) closing the gully with a previously prepared frame of barbed wire, or lighting a fuse which an hour later would fire a mine, which would wreck a sap or a tunnel by which the enemy could follow. All these little columns of men kept joining up, like so many rivulets which flow into the main stream [and] so at last they coalesced into four continuous lines, one from the S., two from the E [and] one (that is ours) from the N. [There was no check, no] halting, no haste or running, just a steady silent tramp in single file, without lights or smoking – [and] every yard brought us nearer to safety.

One thing that is clear from this diary entry is the depth of planning that went into the withdrawal of troops from Gallipoli.

Monash alludes to the 'prescribed pace' of the marching lines, and how the sound of marching feet had been 'deadened by laying a floor of sandbags'.

He also describes how, once everyone was loaded into the motor barges, 'there was a short pause to make sure that no one had been left on shore'.

These observations are so vivid, the reader is almost transported to the beaches of Gallipoli.

The diary that Sir John Monash kept at Gallipoli, as well as other correspondence, documents and letters from his time as an Australian military commander during World War I and beyond, are now available to read

John Monash



John Monash

online on Trove, for free, thanks to the National Library of Australia's Treasured Voices program.

The program is seeing the extensive personal papers of Sir John Monash – equating to nearly 300 boxes of archival material held in approximately 60 metres of shelving – being digitised.

Highlights are Monash's handwritten and transcribed diary entries and letters, providing candid impressions and insightful commentary on people, places and events.

Director-General of the National Library of Australia Marie-Louise Ayres said Sir John Monash was undoubtedly one of Australia's most renowned leaders, and the importance of these documents could not be understated.

"Sir John Monash was a meticulous record keeper, and his papers reveal the lives of his contemporaries, as well as the era, through eye-witness accounts of significant events as they unfolded," Dr Ayres said.

Among those contemporaries was Private Simpson and his donkey, who are discussed in a letter to HQ dated 20 May 1915.

I desire to bring under special notice, for favor of transmission to the proper authority, the case of Private Simpson, stated to belong to C. Section of the 3rd Field Ambulance. This man has been working in this valley since April 26th, in collecting the wounded, and carrying them to the dressing stations.

He had a small donkey which he used to carry all cases unable to walk.

Private Simpson and his little beast earned the admiration of everyone at the upper end of the valley. They worked all day and night throughout the whole period since landing, and the help rendered to the wounded was invaluable.

Simpson knew no fear, and moved unconcernedly amid shrapnel and rifle fire, steadily carrying out his self-imposed task day by day, and he frequently earned the applause of the personnel for his many fearless rescues of wounded men from areas

subject to rifle and shrapnel fire.

Simpson and his donkey were yesterday killed by a shrapnel shell, and enquiry then elicited that he belonged to none of the A.M.C. units with this Brigade, but had become separated from his own unit, and had carried on his perilous work on his own initiative.

The tales of other people or soldiers who may have remained largely anonymous are also documented in Monash's personal papers.

All through the collection, Monash's mastermind for planning is evident. One of his most outstanding victories during the war was the Battle of Hamel – in his own words,

a brilliant success. No fighting operation that the Corps has ever undertaken has been more brilliantly, cleanly and perfectly carried through, without the slightest hitch.

From the letter written by a young John explaining his reasons for skipping military drills to study, to the correspondence, writings and official documents of Major General Monash, this collection has as much colour and character as it has profound research value.

Dr Ayres said this collection also provided context around Monash's many professional successes, while still offering an insight into lesser-known aspects of his personal life.

Beyond Monash's own life and achievements, the collection also supports research into wider contexts – revealing life in Melbourne before and after the First World War, Australian politics, the experience of European migrants in Australia, early 20th century industry and innovations in engineering.

The papers of Sir John Monash are now available for all Australians, and those around the world, to view online via [Trove](#).

The digitisation of this material was made possible by the support of the Australian government – helping the National Library to provide free access to unique collections such as this for all Australians.

Guns being taken off before the evacuation, Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey, 1915. Photo by David Izatt nla.cat-vn2258857 National Library of Australia





JUST SOLDIERS

BY MAJOR DARRYL KELLY

SPLINTER

GEORGE HODGETTS PALMER MM 13TH LIGHT HORSE REGIMENT

George was born on 13 July 1890 in the tiny Victorian town of Joel Joel¹. He was a bright lad and did well at school, where he gained his Elementary Certificate². Work on the family farm didn't allow too much time for sport but when it did George relished kicking a footy and lashing out on a cricket pitch. He was also a prolific reader and loved all facets of literature, especially poetry².

Given his tall, lean and sinewy build, which was honed by his years of working the land, he went by the nickname 'Splinter'.

Young Splinter Palmer enjoyed his childhood and adolescence. His parents were simple country folk and provided a strong family life for George and his brothers.

The local dance was a highlight on Splinter's social calendar. He and his brothers would climb into their best clothes, shine their battered boots and grease down their hair, all in the hope of wooing a girl. Although George was seen as a good catch by the local girls, his heart was set on a young city lass from Hampton – Nellie Ponton.

Nellie's parents and the Palmers were old friends and they would often visit the Palmer farm. During these visits Splinter and Nellie would keep regular company. Picnics, listening to the gramophone in the parlour, buggy rides and strolls across the paddocks would fill the afternoons, when his work was done².

It was August 1914 and, as the boys rode into town, they found it abuzz with excitement.

"What's all the fuss mate?" one of the lads asked.

"It's the war. We're at bloody war with Germany!" the man replied.

The boys looked at each other and Splinter broke the ice by saying, "I supposed we'd better buy the paper then, eh!"

As they sat around the dining room table their father read the news out loud. They learnt of the German advances across France and Belgium, of

Britain's ignored ultimatum to withdraw or else, and of the inevitable declaration – WAR.

"Well what are we going to do?" Fred asked.

"Well, with Ernie still away in New Zealand and the young bloke here still in school³, we'd better get the farm into shape, then join up!" Splinter replied.

The boys worked hard through the spring to get things up to speed. Also, the family received news that the eldest brother Ernie had enlisted in the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces.

"The bludgers goin' Kiwi on us!" Fred joked.

The boys had Christmas at home. Then, in early January, they headed off to enlist.

A competent horseman, Splinter chose to go into the Light Horse and was sworn in on 11 January 1915¹. The new 13th Light Horse Regiment was to be formed at Broadmeadows on the outskirts of Melbourne and new recruits were in high demand.

The regiment went about sorting itself out with squadrons and troops being formed, with Splinter allocated to B Squadron. Uniform and equipment issues were a priority and allocation of mounts a necessity. Soon, both man and horse developed a strong bond with both dependant on the other.

Then, the long-awaited news arrived, ordering the regiment to make preparations for embarkation.

The men read with interest of the landings at Gallipoli. They learnt of the scrub, the gullies and the heroic efforts of their infantry cousins. They also read of the casualties and scoured the growing lists that appeared almost daily, looking for and hoping not to see familiar names of friends and family. Sadly – all too often – they did find them.

For the troopers, their determination and training now took on a new and significant importance. They felt sure that once a breakthrough of the enemy lines occurred, the Light Horse would be used to exploit the break and gallop all the way to Constantinople⁴. For the men of the 13th, getting to the front and getting into the fight meant everything.



On the battlefield, communications are everything. If your first means of getting the message through fails, then you get it through by any means necessary.

Trooper George 'Splinter' Palmer did just that!

Finally, they arrived in Egypt and man and horse alike were pleased to have firm and steady ground under their feet before the seven-hour train journey to the Light Horse camp at Abbassia⁷.

Once leave was granted, the local merchants were all too obliging, producing a series of distinctive yet unofficial badges for the various units. For the 13th, the badge was a depiction of the number 13 with devil and pitchfork. Dubbed 'The Dancing Devil,' the badge was a most prized possession among the men.

In early September, the regiment got the word to move. At the port of Alexandria they boarded the troopship Magnetic bound for the island of Mudros. The journey was not without incident though, when the Magnetic was required to take on survivors of the AIF's 6th Brigade from the troopship Southland⁷, which had been torpedoed by a lurking German U boat. For the remainder of the journey, eyes were a little sharper on deck, looking for tell-tale signs of torpedos.

After a brief lay over in Mudros Harbour, the 13th again set sail, and landed at ANZAC Cove at 0130 hours on 11 September 1915. The men sheltered in a nearby gully, but sleep was near impossible because of the excitement of rifle and shell fire in the distance and the trepidation that every sound could be a Turk trying to sneak in to cut your throat.

Over the ensuing months, Splinter and his mates took their turn in the firing line. They soon became accustomed to the routine of two days in reserve, two days in the forward trenches and two days on fatigue parties. What they knew best was that nowhere was safe on the peninsula. If you weren't

Just before sailing, the regiment held an open day and family and friends flocked to the camp to say their last goodbyes. Nellie and the Palmer family were on hand. As Splinter and Nellie shared final moments together, they promised to write regularly.

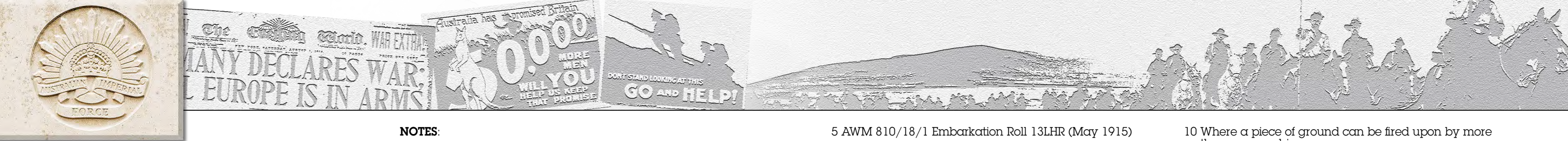
"I guess this makes us sweethearts?" the young trooper said.

Fighting back tears, all Nellie could do was nod.

Splinter made his way up the gangway of the troopship Persic and, as he and his mates lined the rail, they cheered and waved to the throngs of well-wishers who lined the dock. As the Persic made its way down the harbour, the sounds of bands and the cheering of crowds faded. It was the 28th day of May 1915⁵ and the men of the 13th were off to war.

The regiment was shocked when, on 16 June, they lost the first soldier – a trooper who had succumbed to pneumonia and was buried at sea in a moving and poignant ceremony⁶.

But, there was still plenty to do on the month-long journey to the other side of the world. Care of the horses was the main priority and every day the troops would feed, groom and nurture their beloved charges. They would even spend time massaging the horse's legs, to alleviate the pressure caused by constant standing in narrow stalls.



NOTES:

- 1 National Archives of Australia: B2445, WWI Service Records, 395, Palmer, George
- 2 Palmer-family interview, Mrs Joan Bell/Darryl Kelly, Oct '02
- 3 13-year-old James being the youngest
- 4 Modern-day Istanbul

- 5 AWM 810/18/1 Embarkation Roll 13LHR (May 1915)
- 6 442 Tpr W.H. Smith of Waitchie VIC, aged 30
- 7 My Corps Cavalry, A history of the 13th Light Horse Regiment 1915-1918. LTCOL Douglas Hunter 1999
- 8 Furphy is Australian military slang for a rumour
- 9 Popular Australian term for a Turkish Soldier

- 10 Where a piece of ground can be fired upon by more than one machine gun
- 11 Bean, CEW, The Official History of Australia in the War 1914-1918, Volume III, the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1936
- 12 AWM 28, Recommendation Files for Honours and Awards, AIF, 1914-1918 War

being shot at, you were being bombed – if it wasn't the bombs it was the shelling – if it wasn't the shells it was the flies and disease. Splinter had a simple outlook – when your time is up, then that's it!

About six weeks after their arrival, the weather took a turn for the worse, and this was soon followed by additional sickness. November brought storms, torrential rains, then snow, all pushing conditions and endurance to the limits. The Turks added to their issues, hitting the troopers with a savage artillery barrage as they manned the forward trenches of Lone Pine.

Rumours of a potential evacuation were running rampant. Many believed it to be a mindless Furphy⁸. But something must have been afoot, as the 13th was moved to an exposed feature dubbed Thompson's Lookout. Here the regiment sat out the rest of the ANZAC campaign⁷, as the Furphy of evacuation proved to be true and, on 19 December 1915, it was their turn to leave.

In complete and utter silence and following both specially selected guides and a white line of flour running along the corners of the trench and track, the men of 13th Light Horse Regiment made their way to ANZAC Cove and the awaiting barges.

Splinter climbed the cargo net leading to the deck of the warship. Swinging his leg over the rail, he looked back at the darkened shoreline. A Turkish artillery round burst in the air throwing a yellowish glow over the now-deserted hill-lines and trenches.

"A bastard of a place!" he said to himself as he turned and followed his mates below deck.

The regiment first moved to Mudros and then Lemnos Island where they enjoyed Christmas and New Year. Christmas bellies full of festive treats and mail from home went a long way to raising morale. Splinter read and re-read the letters from Nellie until he thought he would wear out the words.

In early January 1916, the 13th returned to Egypt and travelled by train to their new camp at Tel el Kebir, where they reunited with their beloved horses.

The 13th was allocated some patrolling tasks across the Suez Canal and into the Sinai desert. Splinter found this boring and craved to be back in action again, as he felt the desert campaign would become a veritable backwater.

There was news of expansion of the AIF to form a nucleus of a new 4th and 5th Divisions, complete with new specialist units. Once established and consolidated, four infantry divisions would deploy to France and have a crack at the German Army. Also, the 13th Light Horse was to be broken up piece meal with A Squadron being allocated to the 2nd Division, while B and C Squadrons would

be allocated to the 4th and 5th Divisions, as corps cavalry.

Fearing he might miss out on the 'real war', Splinter volunteered to transfer to the new 4th Pioneer Battalion forming at nearby Serapeum.

Great news spread through the ranks when in July 1916 the plan to disperse the 13th Light Horse was scrapped and the regiment would reform. On hearing the news Splinter requested and was granted permission to return to the regiment with no detriment¹.

To Splinter, the war in France was real 'first-grade stuff'. On arrival in France the troopers were issued with steel helmets and gas respirators. But, more importantly, he felt they were now pitted against the real enemy – the German Army – although he held the greatest admiration for old 'Johnny Turk'⁹.

The regiment's first real action was around the Pozieres battlefield. They were tasked with traffic control and rapid delivery of vital messages between commands and the forward areas. It was at Pozieres that the Light Horsemen found that if there was ever a place on the planet that could be called hell, then Pozieres was it! Splinter and his mates were called upon to do the near impossible on a daily basis and, living up to the task, they did it and did it well. Unfortunately, success came at a terrible cost to both man and horse.

Following Pozieres, the regiment was moved north to Flanders where it remained for about six weeks before again returning to the Somme⁷.

In late September 1916, Splinter ended up in hospital for a few weeks when he broke his arm after taking a fall from his horse¹.

Following his return to the unit, Splinter Palmer was chosen for an unusual assignment. All those with farming experience were tasked to assist the French women and old men with harvesting the summer crops. With so many Frenchmen serving at the front, the vital crops needed by all would surely spoil with the onset of winter. The work was hard but pleasant and would have certainly attracted some additional benefits for some of the Diggers.

The regiment suffered through the winter of 1916-17, reputedly the worst in 50 years. Knee-deep mud, driving rain and snow took its toll on men and horses alike. The misery in the eyes of the men told it all. For the horses, it was especially demanding, with many falling victim to the quagmire of putrid, water-filled shell holes.

Just before the spring of 1917, the regiment was to go into action around the provincial town of Bapaume, where they would play a vital part in capturing the town. The dispatch riders did a

great job in keeping the units in communication with each other across a broad frontage, while others manned vital junction points, scouted out beyond the front lines and assisted in maintaining the flanks. They also ferried streams of prisoners to the rear. Most of all they were able to harass the enemy's rear guard as the main force withdrew.

Upon capturing the town, the allied units rushed in to secure their prize. Headquarters was set up in the town hall and all was going well – until, suddenly, a delayed-action mine exploded in the hall. A large number of casualties resulted and unfortunately a number of the 13th Regiment were among those killed and wounded.

As they refitted for the next action, the regiment learnt that the Germans were withdrawing to prepared positions. The 13th was again tasked to perform forward reconnaissance and maintain contact with the German rear guard. Remaining focussed on their assigned mission, elements of the 13th were able to see first-hand the expanse of the German fortifications. The officer looked carefully through his binoculars and sighed. As he handed the glasses to Splinter he asked – "What do you make of that mate?"

Splinter was astounded as he saw hundreds of Germans falling back in organised fashion to occupy prepared, well-constructed positions, behind belts of barbed wire, in some places hundreds of metres in depth. Strategically placed pillboxes, bristling with machine guns with interlocking arcs¹⁰, peppered the area.

"Looks like we'll be in for a bit of a stoush, sir!"

This was to be the first attempt by allied forces to breach the seemingly impregnable Hindenburg Line in the area of Bullecourt.

Splinter Palmer was hospitalised a number of times with recurring bouts of scabies, which was a curse to the fighting man – a never-ending battle against lice and incessant scratching.

In November 1917, Splinter was lucky enough to pick up a 'Blighty'¹¹ leave. A quick stop at the AIF HQ in Horseferry Road to pick up some back pay and a fresh uniform, then across the road for a decent feed, and off to see the sights of London. But the week flew by all too quickly.

September 1918 and the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps were in action, rolling up outposts of the now breached Hindenburg Line. Splinter was attached as a dispatch rider to the headquarters of the 8th Brigade, which was operating around the French village of Nauroy.

It was the night of 29/30 September when he was tasked to carry an urgent dispatch forward to one

of the battalion headquarters. Galloping through the darkness, he concentrated hard on dodging the deep craters that littered the battlefield. Suddenly, he heard the screech of incoming artillery. He put his head down flat against his horse's neck and dug his spurs deep into the animal's ribs. As the shells exploded around him, he urged his mount forward, intent on getting out of the impact area.

Then it happened – a blinding flash and he found himself and the horse sailing through the air. Splinter slammed head first into the ground with the jolt ripping the helmet from his head. Dazed and disoriented, he scurried to the relative safety of a nearby shell hole and took stock of his situation.

He felt around his body – there seemed to be no blood or broken bones, but a ripper of a headache. He was able to find his helmet and the dispatch wallet was still strapped to his side. He crawled out to where his horse lay gasping. It was a hopeless case, as iron shrapnell from the bursting round was embedded deep into the animal's body. Splinter Palmer took out his pistol, cocked it and placed the barrel against the horse's head, closed his eyes and squeezed the trigger. Regaining his bearings, he set off on foot towards the front line.

"Halt – who goes there?" a sentry challenged.

"Urgent message for HQ!" Palmer replied.

"Right, advance one and be recognised!" the voice replied and Splinter was ushered into the dugout.

"Message from brigade, sir!"

The CO scanned the document carefully then looked at his map.

"Right, understood – good work trooper!"

Splinter made his way back to Brigade HQ on foot. On arriving, he sat on some sandbags, completely exhausted. A medic checked him over.

"Geez mate, you've taken a knock and a half! Better get you to the aid station before you keel over!"

Then the call went out – "Galloper?"

Splinter Palmer looked about. The others had all become casualties and he realised that he was the only one left.

"Sorry doc, I've got a job!" the trooper said.

"Don't be a bloody fool, you could pass out at any minute – and I tell you what, you won't wake up!" the medic said curtly.

"You all right trooper?" the commander asked.

"Yeah, right as rain, sir!" Palmer replied clutching the table to stop from falling.

"Right, get this off to the 29th Battalion. They're to the south west of Bellicourt along this road here!"¹¹ Splinter glanced at the map and nodded.

"I'll need another horse first, sir!"

"Right, you'll find one outside. If not, take mine!"



Palmer mounted, turned the horse around and spurred it into action. He made his way along the track, then turned across the cratered remains of a field. He could see an enemy barrage underway in the distance but he would worry about that when and if the time came.

Galloping forward, he noticed a dim light swaying in the distance, flagging him down.

"Where do you think you're off to mate?" an MP asked.

"South west of Bellicourt. I've got an urgent message for 29th Battalion HQ!" Palmer replied.

"Not this way you're not. Germans are giving the front a pounding and all traffic is ceased!"

Jumping from the saddle, Splinter grabbed the rifle from the saddle bucket.

"What are you doin'?" the MP corporal asked.

"Like I said mate – urgent message for the battalion. Look after the horse for me!"

With that, Splinter advanced on foot with rifle in hand. The artillery barrage peppering the area was the heaviest he'd seen since Pozieres. As he sprang from shell hole to shell hole, he felt like he was playing leapfrog with the devil himself.

Finally, he came across a line of walking wounded, heading to the rear.

"Where's the 29th HQ?" Palmer asked.

One of the soldiers cocked his head over his shoulder – "Back there, about 150 yards!"

This was to be Splinters last action of the war. He had another leave in London and was there for the announcement of the Armistice. He was then hospitalised with the dreaded influenza, which would go on to cost so many lives. He also learnt that, for his actions of 29/30 September, he was to be awarded the Military Medal for a fine example of courage and devotion to duty.

In January 1919, Trooper George 'Splinter' Palmer MM, boarded a troopship bound for home and family. The six-week journey gave him plenty of time to decompress and focus his thoughts on the future. Nellie had been wonderful in the time he'd been away, sending regular letters and parcels, and he hoped she would accept his proposal for marriage.

Following his return, the Palmer family went from strength to strength with all four boys returning from the war. Even young James, now 19, got himself to France just before the armistice.

Splinter's health was a concern, causing him to be discharged 'medically unfit'. He was to suffer regular bouts of bronchitis and pneumonia right up to his death.

He and Nellie did marry, on 28 February 1920, and the union, which would last for the next 55

years, produced eight children. They also applied for a War Services Home Grant in 1923.

The Palmers went into business for themselves, buying a modest grocery shop, but the 'Great Depression' hit hard and they were forced to close up shop.

Being a veteran, Splinter was able to secure a temporary position with the Post Master General's Department. As fate would have it, he would remain in the position until he retired decades later, aged 60. In retirement, he was an active member of the 13th Light Horse Association and the RSL. With the onset of the Second World War, they would have two sons serve.

George 'Splinter' Palmer MM passed away from renal failure at the Repatriation Hospital, Heidelberg, on 15 March 1975.



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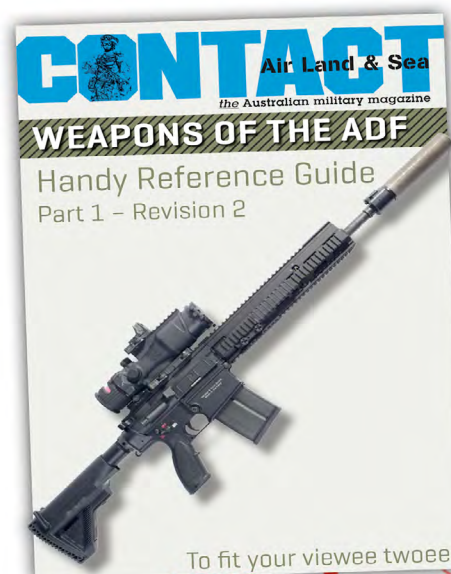
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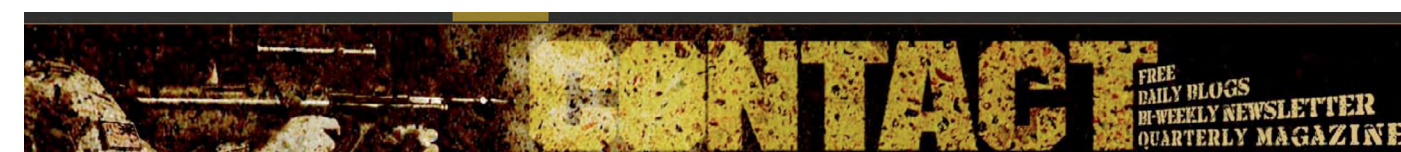
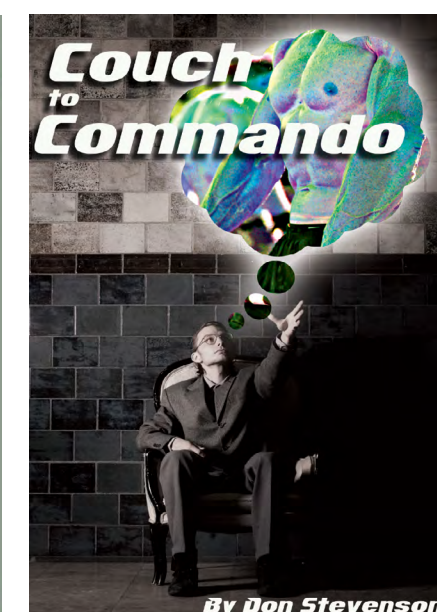
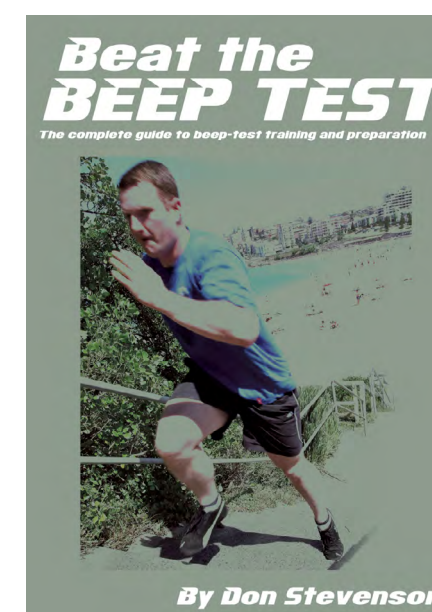
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HMA Ships Stuart (main photo, far left, far right), Arunta (second and third from right) and Hobart (second from left) fire their 5 inch guns, and HMAS Hobart firing an SM-2 missile during Exercise Rim of the Pacific – RIMPAC – 2020 off Hawaii.







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