

ISSUE 74

CONTACT

AIR LAND & SEA

JUNE 2022

The Australian military magazine



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Issue 74 – June 2022

CONTACT
AIR, LAND & SEA



SOUTHERN JACKAROO

Lance Corporal
Brendan Bond, 6RAR
Photo by Corporal
Cedar Barnes, USMC
Starts page 54

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

Advertising **Anna Ambrose**
ph: 0488 549 838
advertising@militarycontact.com

Business Manager **Rosie Hartigan**
accounts@militarycontact.com

Art/Design **Brian Hartigan**

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appropriate.

The war in Ukraine features in this magazine, because Australia 'got involved' in our own small way, sending Bushmasters, APCs, artillery and more – and because good photos and info were available.

But there's more to it than that. Russia's invasion of Ukraine – and Ukraine's stoicism in fighting back – seems to resonate more deeply with many Australians – indeed, many people in 'the Western World'.

So what is it that resonates so viscerally about this war? Why is it so different in our heads, in our hearts, in our very souls, to any other war – of which there have been many since the 'war to end all wars'.

WAR IN EUROPE – perhaps that's the headline – that's the threat – that's the collective memory that scares us so deeply.

Little more than and little less than 100 years ago, one little spark set off a powder keg in Europe that set off the wildfires we now call WWI and WWII.

In the years since, WWII has been the stuff of nightmares and of countless fictional plots in books and movies.

Surely, with WAR IN EUROPE again in the headlines, our worst nightmares could so easily burst into reality and fill the pages of our future history books.

I fervently hope that the 'powers that be' in Europe and across the globe can contain this spark this time.

But it's a very fine line. On the one hand, we cannot stand idly by while freedom-loving innocents are violated. We cannot stand idly by and allow any country, led by one single madman, to expand his influence by force.

And, yet, on the other hand, we cannot use direct force ourselves, lest that very friction light the proverbial powder keg we fear so deeply.

And right we are to fear it.

Aside from madman-led Russia's nuclear arsenal, lighting that powder keg in Europe could – and would surely – light the fuse on so many other pressure cookers around the world – China's designs on Taipei and the South China Sea – and the western Pacific – with 'The Quad' ready to push back. Madman-led North Korea, with its southern neighbour more than adequately backed to react.

It wouldn't take much. WWII could so easily erupt.

And, we ARE NOT prepared for those consequences. Proof being our recent and ongoing experience with pandemic – health and economic systems incapable of weathering a real crisis. Our insatiable addiction for 'cheap' consumables produced by the very country we fear the most.

We barely got away with it this time – and seem to have learnt little by way of preparation or preparedness for the next test, IMHO.

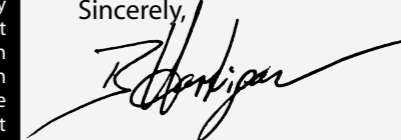
"How fireproof is your disaster plan?" is a good advertising line here in Australia.

How fireproof is our collective disaster plan should that European powder keg ignite? That's the stuff of nightmares – or should be.

And that's why "WAR IN EUROPE" resonates so deeply, even for those of us too young to remember the last time – or the time before that.

Let us pray that history does not repeat itself – as we live in the fear that history so often repeats.

Sincerely,



Brian Hartigan,
Managing Editor

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A camouflage-patterned backpack is the central focus, surrounded by various outdoor and survival gear. The gear includes a green water bottle, a tube of toothpaste, a box of Silva Field, a small stove, a green box, a coiled cable, and a small light. The items are laid out on a concrete floor with yellow and black hazard stripes.

TONGA ASSIST



Water water everywhere...

Australian Army soldiers from 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, deliver water tanks, under ominous skies, to Kotu Island, Tonga, during Operation Tonga Assist 2022.

See CONTACT's coverage of Op Tonga Assist 2022 [here](#).

STALWART 'OPEN FOR BUSINESS'



HMAS Stalwart completes her first replenishment at sea with HMAS Parramatta. Photo by Leading Seaman Leo Baumgartner

HMAS Stalwart recently conducted its first replenishment at sea after being commissioned into the Royal Australian Navy.

Stalwart is the second of the RAN's Supply-class auxiliary oiler replenishment ships, which have the primary role of providing logistics replenishment to naval combat units at sea.

HMAS Parramatta was her receiving ship.

Commanding Officer HMAS Stalwart Commander Steve McCracken said the evolution signalled that Stalwart was 'open for business'.

"There's been a lot of hard work and training leading up to this point and the entire ship's company is incredibly proud of what we have achieved," Commander McCracken said.

"Today, we have successfully proved a number of vital systems that all come together in performing a replenishment at sea, from ship-handling to the actual transfer of supplies, and it's a credit to all involved that the evolution went so well."

Conducting a replenishment at sea was just one of many tasks the ship

had to complete as part of its progress towards operational capability and integration into the fleet.

"Since commissioning, we have undergone a number of sea trials and training that test and evaluate the entire range of systems used to keep a ship at sea and at the top of its game," Commander McCracken said.

"I'm pleased to report that Stalwart has risen to each of these challenges in admirable fashion and I thank my ship's company for all their hard work over the past few months."

Stalwart – and her sister, HMAS Supply – are much more capable than previous support ships, being equipped with a combat management system that improves the sharing of information with other ADF and allied assets and allows them to integrate more fully in a task group, both Australian and international.

They can also increase joint-force endurance by providing fuel, water, food, parts and dry cargo.

HMAS Stalwart was commissioned on 13 November last year and is based at Fleet Base West, Rockingham, Western Australia.

MARINE RWS

Electro Optic Systems (EOS) marked the official Australian launch of its R400 Marine remote weapon station at a special event at the INDO PACIFIC 2022 International Maritime Exposition.

The government announced the same day it planned to supply the R400-M remote weapon station as Government Furnished Equipment for Army's Land 8710-1 Littoral Manoeuvre Vessel – Medium.

The marine RWS, which is currently in production for a major overseas customer, differs from the company's range of Land R400s only through the inclusion of high-quality sub-components and finishes that comply with all requirements, regulations and test standards of the maritime environment.

CEO EOS Defence Systems (Australia) Matt Jones said the company was proud the R400-M had been selected for Land 8710-1.

"The R400-M, the latest version of the operationally proven R400 RWS family, offers customers the firepower and specialist ammunition natures possible for weapons up to and including 30mm cannon, but in the weight and form factor of competitors' machine-gun systems," he said.

Photo supplied



UNMISS LIFT

A Royal Australian Air Force C-17A Globemaster transported Vietnam People's Army personnel, equipment and medical supplies to and from Juba, South Sudan, in April and May 2022.

President Nguyen Xuân Phúc attended a farewell ceremony in honour of the aircraft's departure from Hanoi – the fourth time Australia has provided strategic airlift to Vietnam's UNMISS operation since 2018.

CAPE CLASS ADVs

Evolved Cape-class patrol boat Cape Otway was accepted by the Royal Australian Navy in March, with the second in the class undergoing sea trials.

Then Defence Minister Peter Dutton said the acceptance of Cape Otway was a significant milestone in the overall contract, under which Austal Ships will deliver five more of the vessels to the Royal Australian Navy.

Cape Otway and the five further patrol boats to follow her into Navy service have an evolved capability on the two Cape-class boats already operated by RAN and eight with Australian Border Force – enhancements made after in-service experience with the older boats.

Defence said that, to coincide with the acceptance of the first ECCPB, Chief of Navy Vice Admiral Mike Noonan revealed the names of the six new vessels – however, Defence neglected to pass on the

names – though CONTACT has since learned they will be called Peron, Naturaliste, Capricorn, Woolamai and Pillar.

CONTACT also understands that the evolved Cape-class boats will not carry royal commissions, as the patrol boats they are replacing do/did. In other words, they will

be known as Australian Defence Vessels, prefixed as ADV Cape Otway etc – not HMAS.

Meanwhile, Armidale-class patrol boat HMAS Maitland has completed her service to the nation and was decommissioned at her home port of Darwin on April 28, to be followed in June by HMAS Ararat.



ADV Cape Otway. Photo courtesy Austal

40 YEARS IN SINAI

The Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) on the Sinai Peninsula marked 40 years of peacekeeping in April with a multi-national parade.

Personnel representing seven nations marched on the parade ground in Egypt, using their own drills to the beat of Fijian snare drums.

Established in 1982 to oversee the terms of a treaty between Egypt and Israel, 19 countries contribute troops (about 1200, including 27 Aussies), aircraft, equipment and money to the mission.

MARINER RESCUE

A Royal Australian Navy helicopter safely evacuated an unwell merchant mariner from a bulk carrier about 200 nautical miles off Victoria's east coast on May 2.

Distance and limited daylight prevented a civilian medevac, so the Australian Maritime Safety Authority requested assistance from nearby HMAS Parramatta.

Her MH-60R Seahawk winched the patient from the ship and took him to a waiting ambulance in Merimbula.

TF COVID-19 ENDS

After more than two years on the front line of Australia's response to the global pandemic, the Defence COVID-19 Task Force was officially disestablished on 29 April 2022.

Set up in March 2020 the task force provided a single point from which Defence could rally and support the national pandemic response.

RAAF AIR SHOW

RAAF has announced an 'Ipswich Amberley Air Tattoo' to be held over the weekend 29 and 30 October 2022, with Australia's largest air-force base opening its gates to the public for the first time since 2008.

Ticketing and other information will be released later in the year.

RC EXTENDED

Chair of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide says a 12-month extension of the inquiry was vital to thoroughly investigate the complex factors that contribute to veteran deaths by suicide.

An interim report, including recommendations for immediate action, will be handed down in August, as scheduled, but the final report is not now expected until June 2024.

The next public hearings will be held in Townsville, starting 20 June.

AAFC NEW WINGS

The Australian Air Force Cadets recently took delivery of four new Diamond DA40 NG aircraft, bringing the total fleet to 12.

The aircraft are core to the Elementary Flying Training School and are currently based at RAAF Bases Amberley, Richmond and Point Cook.

Planning has commenced to establish a fourth centre for cadet flying at RAAF Base Pearce within two years.

AAFC currently operates 11 DG1000S gliders as well in addition to the 12-strong powered flying fleet.

Meanwhile: ADF is seeking adult volunteers – with or without military experience – to lead and inspire young people as part of the Navy, Army and Air Force cadets.



US Air Force photo

MQ-9B CANCELLED

The project to acquire up to 12 MQ-9B SkyGuardian armed drones has been cancelled.

In a statement, Defence said the cancellation was a government decision.

The statement suggested a greater focus on 'grey-zone challenges', including the possibility of high-intensity conflict and domestic crises – requiring longer-range strike weapons, cyber capabilities and area denial systems to hold adversary forces further from Australia and protect infrastructure at risk.

HEADS UP



Photo supplied

SMART WEAPONS

A smart rail system that transforms rifles into real-time data nodes linking soldiers in the battlefield with tactical leaders and commanders is being trialled by NIOA.

The Australian-owned prime has linked with T-Worx to investigate application of its Intelligent-Rail® (I-Rail®) technology for ADF use.

T-Worx developed the I-Rail under US Army funding and guidance, and it was selected by NATO as the basis for the NATO-powered Rail STANAG 4740/AEP-90.

I-Rail provides the war fighter with a fully integrated sensor platform with a single source of power and connectivity between weapon ancillaries including sensors.

It captures information from sensors on the weapon to create a data package which can include radio communication, video feed, ammunition usage and location information.

NIOA says I-Rail will be a key technology enabler for ADF arms-upgrading programs.

SOVEREIGN MISSILES

The Morrison government advanced its \$1 billion weapons program in April by announcing Raytheon Australia and Lockheed Martin Australia as partners in the Sovereign Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise.

Then Defence Minister Peter Dutton said three Australian-based companies – The Australian Missile Corporation, The Sovereign Missile Alliance and Aurecon Advisory – would support the prime contractors as sovereign industry partners of the enterprise.

"Australia's strategic environment is becoming more complex and challenging – the Indo-Pacific now sits at the epicentre of global strategic competition," Mr Dutton said.

"It is imperative that we work closely with like-minded countries and industry partners to develop a more capable military force to defend Australia.

"Raytheon Australia and Lockheed Martin Australia along with their US-based parent companies, are the largest suppliers of guided weapons to Defence.

"We will be working with them to rapidly increase our ability to maintain and manufacture guided weapons and their components in Australia.

"We know we need to work closely with our partners to bolster our self-reliance and this is another major step in delivering that sovereign capability here in Australia."

The announcement was made at the official opening of a new \$96 million state-of-the-art maintenance facility for Navy guided weapons at Orchard Hills in Western Sydney.

"This facility is just one example of the infrastructure that will need to be delivered in coming years to support our sovereign guided weapons ecosystem in Australia," Mr Dutton said.

"We are building new facilities and infrastructure to ensure we get the maximum lethal capability from our current missile stocks today and we are partnering with two of the world's foremost missile-makers to build our own manufacturing base in Australia in the future."

HMAS Sydney fires an Evolved Sea Sparrow. Photo by Matt Skirde

BAE BUYS BSIMS



Australian M1A1 main battle tanks in the VBS virtual environment. Bohemia Interactive Simulations

BAE Systems announced the acquisition of Bohemia Interactive Simulations (BISim) for about \$200 million.

Bohemia Interactive Simulations (BISim) was founded in Australia in 2001 and is now a global software company at the forefront of simulation training solutions for defence and civilian organisations.

It employs more than 300 people in six countries and has more than 50 national defence organisations signed up to use its game-based products to train personnel.

BAE Systems and BISim began working together in 2019 on the US Marine Corps War Gaming and

Analysis Center contract, and later as part of the BAE Systems Joint All Domain Operations System of Systems research and development project.

BAE Systems President and CEO Tom Arseneault said BISim joined BAE Systems brought global software development and advanced military simulation and training solutions to the company's growing digital portfolio.

"With this acquisition, we are even better positioned to meet our customers' evolving needs in the rapidly growing market for global military training and next-generation virtual systems.

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35 FIREWALL

A Royal Australian Air Force F-35A Lightning II at the Central Coast Airshow at Warnervale, New South Wales (14-15 May 2022).



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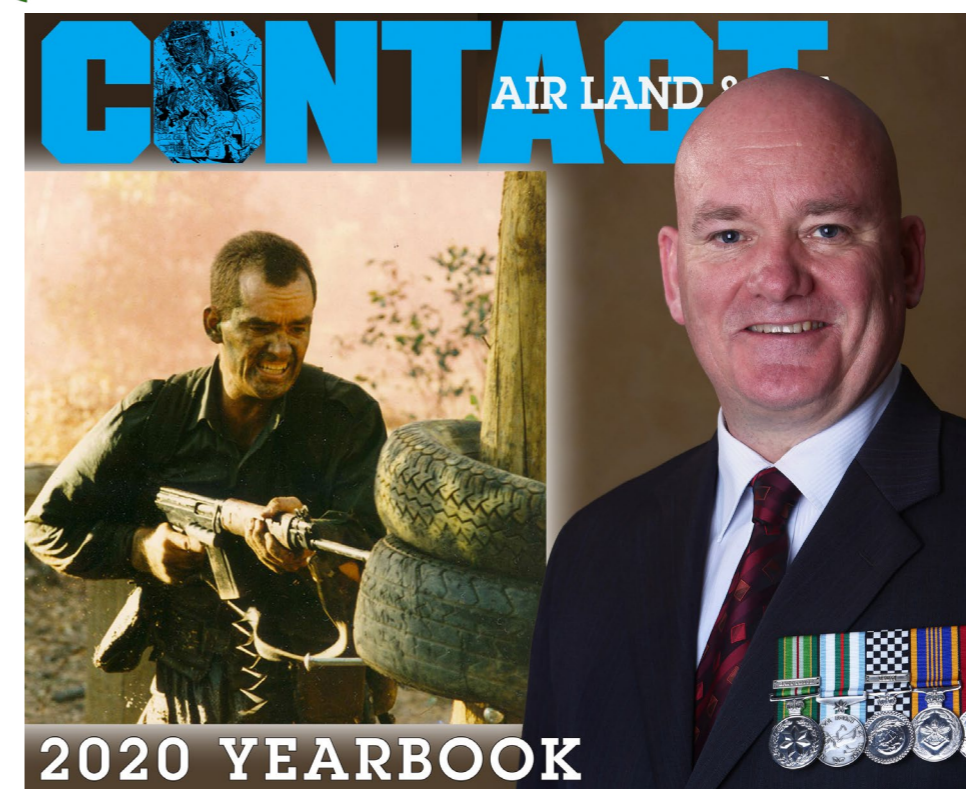




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This example shows CONTACT Editor Brian Hartigan at Kapooka in 1990, and on ANZAC Day 30 years later

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DEFENCE AID TO THE CIVIL COMMUNITY

After torrential rain caused devastating flooding across south-east Queensland, the ADF was quick to answer the call, despatching personnel, helicopters and other equipment as requested by State authorities as early as 25 February.

As rain continued to fall and northern NSW was also heavily impacted by flood waters, ADF support again soon followed.

Initial support focused on rescue and recovery activities, with ADF aviation crews and capabilities on standby to support emergency services.

A P-8A Poseidon was deployed to provide aerial reconnaissance and mapping of flood-affected areas, while Army and Navy helicopter crews worked around the clock to rescue distressed people stranded atop the roofs of houses and cars.

On February 26, aircrew searched for and located three men who had last been seen hours earlier in Woolshed Creek, Queensland, after setting off in a dinghy to help their neighbours.

After being located in trees near their overturned vessel they were winched into the helicopter and safely transported to RAAF Base Amberley.

This was but one of many rescue stories, with the ADF rescuing a total of 113 people during the search-and-rescue phase.

As requests from the Queensland and NSW governments increased, so too did the deployment of ADF personnel.

In a matter of days, almost 2000 soldiers, sailors and aviators had deployed on Operation Flood Assist.

Defence quickly embedded extra personnel in emergency operations centres and regional disaster-planning centres in Queensland and NSW, which allowed the ADF to rapidly mobilise troops where most needed, as the situation evolved.

On the ground, troops were sandbagging, door-knocking, delivering food, medicine and fresh drinking water.

Remote communities unable to be reached on the ground had critical supplies dropped to them from the air.

Heavy plant equipment started rolling into the worst-hit areas of Lismore, the Northern Rivers region and Brisbane to assist with tasks that other vehicles could not reach.

Navy clearance divers put their training into practice surveying damage and clearing obstructions in the murky Brisbane River and Moreton Bay.

Speaking at one of his daily press briefings, Commander of Operation Flood Assist Major General David Thomae assured the public that the ADF was happy to use its assets to help fellow Australians in their time of need.

"Please know that the ADF, in support of State governments, SES and emergency services, are doing what we can to get out to those in need as quickly and as safely as we can," Major General Thomae said.

"I acknowledge the work being done by the SES and volunteer organisations, who are working tirelessly to support their communities in very difficult conditions.

"Defence will continue to ramp up support as water levels recede and access improves for us to get our people and equipment into those locations that need help."

At its peak, Operation Flood Assist 2022 had deployed more than 6000 Defence personnel to support the operation, including more than 1200 in Queensland and 4800 in NSW.



Australian soldiers from 7 Brigade arrive at a property in Woodburn, New South Wales, after being dropped off by a Republic of Singapore Air Force CH-47F Chinook helicopter to assist with flood relief efforts. Photo by Corporal Nicole Dorrett.



Australian soldiers from 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, assist with clean-up operations in Brisbane.

MIXED EMOTIONS IN LISMORE

By WO2 Max Bree

Bobcats scooped up destroyed stock from an electrical supply store and moved back-and-forth, emptying the waste into an Army dump truck on the main street in Lismore.

A nearby Army backhoe collected waste from mounds of destroyed mattresses and furniture piled in front of people's homes.

Cars covered inside and out with the same dried mud that coats plants in people's front yards, are a reminder of how high the floodwaters reached.

In this section of town, a team of 15 sappers from 6 Engineer Support Regiment teamed up with civilians to clear the streets.

The previous day, sappers cleared about 35 tonnes of debris with their plant equipment and two Army MAN HX77 dump-variant trucks.

With the arrival of civilian-contracted bobcats and trucks, site foreman Lance Corporal Anthony Curtin said more waste was being cleared each day.

"We've got guys spotting, so as soon as a truck rolls up, it gets loaded, then it'll head out to the dump," Lance Corporal Curtin said.

Drones were being used to assess the amount of work ahead, while time allocated for each job depended on the type of material to be cleared.

Smells on the street varied from rotting damp to food waste – usually accompanied by flies.

"The worst was a pizza shop we cleared out, because of all the cheese, but the guys powered through," Lance Corporal Curtin said.

The sappers arrived in Lismore to be confronted with people's belongings on the street and locals in tears.

They found cars on their roofs, a skip bin that had been lifted by floodwater over a six-foot fence and a coolroom propped at a steep angle by a piece of timber that washed underneath.

"It's hard to take. Everyone's life is basically on the street in front of their houses," Lance Corporal Curtin said.

"We're grabbing their whole life, putting it into a dump truck and it's gone.

"There's a lot of good and bad emotions, but the impact we've had has lifted people's spirits and they feel relieved."

SAPPHIRES TO THE RESCUE



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Australian soldiers from 7 Brigade assist residents of Ray Myers Road in Imbil, Queensland, to repair the flood-damaged road to their homes. Photo by Corporal Julia Whitwell.

By Flight Lieutenant Tanya Carter

Soldiers from Brisbane's 7th Brigade answered a resident's call for help in Imbil, Queensland, after a week of torrential rainfall had ravaged the main entrance to her property, cutting her off from the world.

Other stranded locals had used a fire trail to navigate around flood-affected roads, after a large section of their street was washed out by floodwaters.

A 70-strong detachment of combat engineers and infantrymen worked through extreme heat and humidity, filling sandbags and trekking wheelbarrow loads of rock and aggregate through muddy trails.

6RAR rifleman Private John Wadey said he and his mates were glad to provide disaster relief to the Gympie community.

"I personally think it's great to come out to help," Private Wadey said.

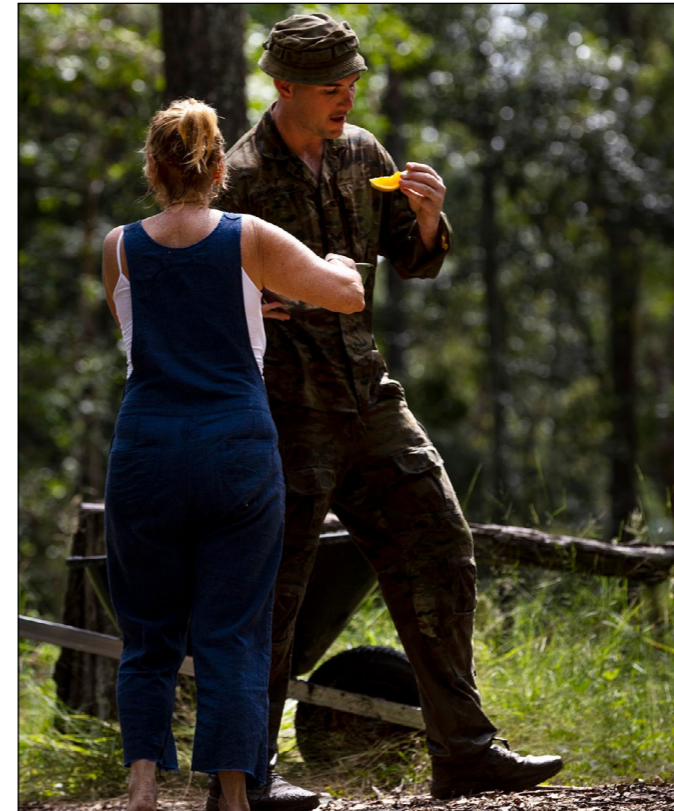
"We've got family friends up here in Gympie and I've been coming here all my life.

"To be able to give back to a community that's essentially a second home is really good."

Works included reinforcing an access bridge and restoring property accesses.

Humbled by the assistance provided by the ADF, Bernard Gosset and other locals arrived early one Sunday morning to surprise the troops with a fresh batch of donuts and hot sausage rolls to show their appreciation.

"On behalf of the whole community, we are very appreciative of your work here, thank you," Mr Gosset said to the troops.



STUFF OF LEGEND



Australian Army and Republic of Fiji Military Forces soldiers work together to rebuild an Upper Wilsons Creek access road.
Photos by Corporal Sagi Biderman.



SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

BY CAPTAIN ANNIE RICHARDSON

Australian and Fijian soldiers worked side-by-side – again – during Operation Flood Assist 2022, in northern New South Wales

Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) personnel had intended to spend three months in Australia this year on Exercise Coral Warrior, but the significant flooding and resultant devastation saw our Pacific neighbours volunteer their initial energies to help Australian communities clean up.

The Fijians spent their first full day in Australia with 8th/9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, and 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment soldiers rebuilding an access road in Upper Wilsons Creek where a significant landslide had cut off access along the main route in and out of the small community, 60km north of Lismore.

2nd Combat Engineer Regiment platoon commander Lieutenant Brett Bennett said the Fijian soldiers were a welcome and easily integrated part of his task unit.

"The Fijian combat engineers have complementary skills and fit in easily," Lieutenant Bennett said.

"Australians and Fijians are working side by side on the tools, and sharing planning for the effort."

Using local fallen trees and supplies from a community of volunteers, the team was successful in creating approximately 200 metres of usable road, enabling the Upper Wilsons Creek community to regain access to Byron Bay.

"The effort today really demonstrated the partnership of our two countries," Lieutenant Bennett said.

"Time and time again, the Fijians have shown up for us in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, bushfires and floods. It's great to know Fiji is here to assist us when we need them."

The Fiji Military Forces contingent assisted on Operation Flood Assist from 17 to 24 March, before commencing their planned military training.

REMARKABLE RESCUE

BY MAJOR JESSE ROBILIARD

Two people swept away by a landslide in a remote area of the Northern Rivers were saved by local paramedics and Army Reservists from the 41st Battalion, the Royal New South Wales Regiment (41RNSWR).

With Lismore still reeling from record floods, local reservists from 41RNSWR were door knocking to see if residents needed assistance when their afternoon changed dramatically.

Sergeant Joshua Scott said his team got a call around 5pm, to move to the helicopter landing zone for a pickup.

"We were told to carry 24 hours of rations and camping gear to stay out that night," Sergeant Scott said.

"We were picked up by an MRH-90 Taipan and flown out to the mountains behind Mullumbimby."

Five reservists from 41RNSWR were on board the chopper tasked to find two people swept away by a landslide, according to locals checking on their neighbours.

"As we flew in, we realised the chopper wasn't going to be able to land, and the crew started pulling out the winching gear," Sergeant Scott said.

With the team from 41RNSWR safely winched from the hovering Taipan, they were met by paramedics, who briefed them on the situation.

They moved quickly to the site, where one patient was already pulled out, and assisted the paramedics to get the elderly woman onto a civilian rescue helicopter.

Lieutenant Ben Fischer says the male patient was a much more complicated scenario.

"He was buried up to his neck," Lieutenant Fischer said.

"They were in their house when the landslide occurred – mud, trees and branches were all around him.

"A local used a chainsaw to cut some wood to use as a lever, it was as if the man had a wall on him and some dirt."

Of concern to the paramedics was the as-yet unknown extent or nature of the man's injuries.

Lieutenant Fischer said the reservists and paramedics carefully extracted the patient.

"We removed the dirt, we cut the branches, we were then able to free his upper body," Lieutenant Fischer said.

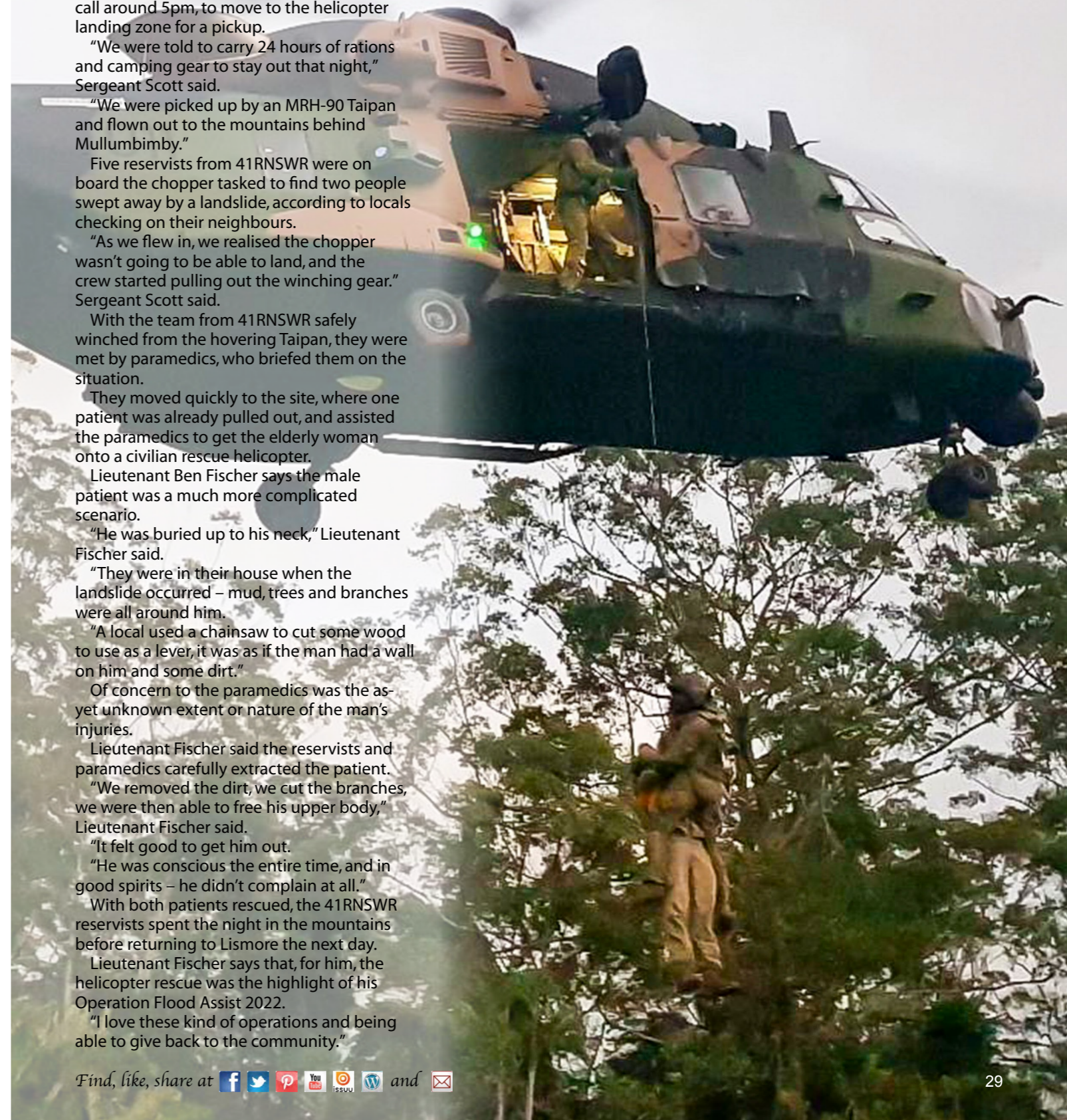
"It felt good to get him out.

"He was conscious the entire time, and in good spirits – he didn't complain at all."

With both patients rescued, the 41RNSWR reservists spent the night in the mountains before returning to Lismore the next day.

Lieutenant Fischer says that, for him, the helicopter rescue was the highlight of his Operation Flood Assist 2022.

"I love these kind of operations and being able to give back to the community."





Australian soldiers with Bushmaster protected mobility vehicles stand by to conduct evacuation tasks with SES in Lismore, New South Wales. Photo by Corporal Jonathan Goedhart.

UNSTOPPABLE

BY WO2 MAX BREE

As floods decimated Lismore, the town mayor stood beside a highway, which became a river bank, and watched soldiers of the 41st Battalion, Royal NSW Regiment (41RNSWR), pull people from boats and take them to safety.

While rapidly rising flood waters caught residents by surprise, Mayor Steve Krieg had a front-row seat to the battalion's first response on 1 March, as they assisted 200 civilian boats with 4000 rescues.

"They rescued everyone from aged-care residents to a six-month-old baby," Mr Krieg said.

"I spoke to a mum who was standing on the handrail of her stairs, clinging to her gutter with her children, trying to get rescued.

"41RNSWR came through, picked them up and took them to safety.

"Those are images that will live with me forever."

About half the town's 30,000 residents live more than 10 metres above sea level, but many were forced

onto roofs when waters reached a record-breaking 14.37 metres.

Nine days later, Mr Krieg visited 41RNSWR's Lismore depot to commend the efforts of their soldiers.

"The town of Lismore did everything right for a flood event, but this event was bigger than a flood – it broke all records," Mr Krieg said.

"We needed help, and it is such a blessing to see so many Defence Force personnel here.

"Your actions literally kept Australian citizens alive.

"I just can't say thank you enough – 41RNSWR are amazing."

Commander Operation Flood Assist Joint Task Force Major General David Thomae said the more he talked to soldiers, the more stories he heard that are unbelievable.

"You couldn't write this as a movie script," Major General Thomae said.

"They've literally ripped iron off roofs to rescue people from cavities.

"Nine days later they've only just started to slow down."



ABOVE & OPPOSITE: Soldiers from 6RAR assist residents to move flood-damaged belongings from homes in St Lucia, Brisbane. **RIGHT:** Anna McKenzie receives medical attention from 6RAR medic Corporal Sebastian Evans. Photos by Corporal Nicole Dorrett.

FALLEN ANGEL

BY LIEUTENANT NIC HAWKINS

Working on cleanup tasks in Brisbane suburbs, Australian Army medics also rendered medical assistance to residents and volunteers assisting with the flood-relief effort.

Wading through almost a metre of water, mud and silt to access underground car parks and storage lockers, residents and soldiers grappled with unseen hazards.

At one point, retiree Mrs Anna McKenzie fell and injured her leg while working alongside soldiers.

She required immediate medical attention, and Army medics did not hesitate to treat the injury.

"The Army medic came to my rescue and cleaned and patched up the wound on my leg – it was a real mess," Mrs Mackenzie said.

"He was so courteous and professional."

Mrs Mackenzie's husband served as a doctor in the Navy for many years.

"He used to tell me about times like this, when he and his colleagues would work hard to help others in their time of need to feel safe and get them back on their feet," she said.

"I felt very important while the young corporal attended to me."

Corporal Sebastian Evans, 6RAR, said this was a very different experience for him and his fellow infantrymen, helping the residents of St Lucia get back into their homes.



"We feel privileged to be here, especially when I found out later that Mrs McKenzie's husband also served in the ADF," Corporal Evans said.

"It was particularly rewarding to be able to help patch her up."

Mrs McKenzie was appreciative of Corporal Evans' efforts, but also for 6RAR assisting with the clean-up.

"Seeing the soldiers arrive, walking towards us in double file, gloves and backpacks on, was such a reassuring image, one I will keep with me for a long time," she said.

"The sense of relief it gave all of us – the residents have talked about it a lot these past days.

"It was a huge emotional boost.

"I'm so proud of them and very grateful."



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WAR IN EUROPE

“These photographs must be seen by the whole world without taking your eyes off them, because this is direct evidence of crimes committed by the Russian occupation forces in Mariupol. The whole civilized world must see the conditions in which the wounded, crippled defenders of Mariupol are – and act!”

Ukraine's Azov Brigade, Mariupol, via Twitter



ABOVE: Bob Reck, father of Team Australian competitor and Royal Australian Navy sailor Leading Seaman Chris Reck, shows support for Ukraine at Invictus Games 2020 in The Hague [April 2022]. Photo by Tina Langridge.

BACKGROUND: The Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol smoulders. Photo by Azov-Mariupol.

WAR IN EUROPE

RUSSIA INVADES UKRAINE

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has continued to harbour significant resentment against Ukraine, the country it still thought of as a critical part of 'Mother Russia'.

Russian President Vladimir Putin spared no effort to promote an historical narrative that Ukrainians and Russians constituted 'one nation'.

Having declared independence in 1991, Ukraine had chosen a completely different path – an independent path of democratic development, reform and European integration.

However, Putin fervently wished to reassemble the countries of the former Soviet Union and reverse what he called the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century".

With Ukraine getting closer to joining NATO, Russia considered the conquest of Ukraine as vital to the restoration of its so-called 'Historical Russia'.

Putin's ultimate goal was to 'right the wrongs', as he saw them, of the fall of the USSR in the Cold War, 30 years ago.

And so, after months of military buildup on Ukraine's borders, and months of denying he had plans to invade, Russian forces finally crossed the line on 24 February 2022.

But Putin's ambitions fell well short, as the performance of his own forces failed to live up to everyone's expectations and Ukraine's defenders pushed back with the zeal of a fight for something greater than self.

As the invaders were pushed back to smaller – all be they strategically significant – regions in the east of the country, President Volodymyr Zelenskyi stood defiant and pledged that next year's Eurovision Song Contest would be held in the still-Russian-occupied Mariupol.

Ukraine's steadfastness in the face of invasion from its giant neighbour must be admired and applauded – but not because of any 'David v Goliath' sentimentality.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyi believes that, if Russia secured its desired occupation of Ukraine, Putin would seek to reconstitute the entire, wider, historic, European security architecture, at huge cost to the West.

And the West certainly seemed to agree – delivering unprecedented external support to Ukraine, in the form of weapons, humanitarian aid and money. Everything that could be sent to Ukraine was sent – except aircraft and people.

While Ukraine was not yet a member of NATO – and likely never will, following an offer to that effect from President Zelenskyi – the West feared widening the conflict outside Ukraine's borders, and sought to dance a very fine line between assisting a potentially important ally and not poking the great Russian bear too hard.

Fear of Russia's nuclear arsenal demanded constraint, yet the abhorrence of a potential 21st Century genocide in Europe was just as great.



Destruction in the Kyiv region. Photos courtesy President Volodymyr Zelensky's office

WAR IN EUROPE

TIMELINES OF A TRAGEDY

Nightmares of Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel

From war.ukraine.ua

Before the sun rose on 24 February, people in the Kyiv region woke to the thundering sounds of Russian artillery and missile strikes. Ukraine was under attack.

Suburban towns outside Kyiv, home to the city's commuters, flower gardens and picturesque parks, became the front line of Russia's bloody advance on the Ukrainian capital. A nightmare filled with burning homes and civilians executed in the streets had begun.

Ukraine asserts that responsibility for the unspeakable crimes about to unfold lies on the shoulders of every Russian soldier, every

commanding officer, and every representative of the Russian authorities who, through action or inaction, would make this a reality.

The airport in the city of Hostomel – population 17,000 – was one of Russia's primary targets, as capturing it would allow effective air raids on Kyiv. Irpin – population 70,000 – Bucha – population 37,000 – and smaller nearby towns were chosen by Russia as ideal targets to encircle the capital and to be used as Russian military staging grounds.

From 24 February to 1 April, many towns and villages in the Kyiv region were under attack or occupation by Russian troops. Only at the beginning of April, Ukrainian forces would be able to liberate the region and discover the full extent of the terrible war crimes perpetrated by Russian soldiers.

TIMELINE:

24 February

Ukrainian forces defend Hostomel airport from Russian invaders. Ukrainian anti-aircraft systems shoot down three enemy helicopters. A Ukrainian tactical group defends the town from Russian paratroopers.

25 February

The battle for Hostomel rages on. Russian artillery shells the area. Ukrainian armed forces defeat a column of Russian armored vehicles.

26 February

Ukrainian armed forces stop the Russian advance toward the capital near Bucha, inflicting losses on the enemy. Russian troops are still trying to capture Hostomel. Individual groups of Russian soldiers slip into Kyiv – gunfights erupt on the streets. Enemy reconnaissance teams are eventually destroyed – Kyiv is freed of invading ground troops.

However, the Hostomel area is still mercilessly bombarded by Russian artillery and missile attacks.

Defence Minister Reznikov Oleksiy's wife is killed by Russian shelling. He sits by his wounded daughter's bedside all day. "God forbid anyone has to live through this. We used to live a completely normal life. My wife and I worked, the kids went to school. Now innocent people are dying. Ukraine needs help," Minister Oleksiy said.

27-28 February

Massive numbers of Russian ground forces, stretched north through the Kyiv region, attempt to advance toward the capital. Irpin is held and defended by the Ukrainian armed forces.

Russian artillery shelling and airstrikes continue in the region, damaging infrastructure and killing civilians. Some locals are able to flee or are evacuated, but thousands remain in their homes, hiding in basements and shelters as the bombs rain down.

Destruction in the Kyiv region. Photos courtesy President Volodymyr Zelensky's office.

WAR IN EUROPE

1 March

The first reports of marauding and robberies start to appear from Bucha and Hostomel, now occupied by Russian invaders. Communication remains difficult due to intense fighting and shelling in the region.

2 March

Columns of Russian tanks, armoured personnel carriers, and soldiers continue advancing, and occupying more towns in the region. Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel and Borodianka remain among the most dangerous areas for civilians due to continued Russian shelling and ground fighting.

Hostomel airport is liberated by the Ukrainian army. The city remains embattled.

3 March

Ukrainian forces temporarily retake Bucha, establishing the supply of humanitarian aid and evacuating civilians. Six trucks of food are delivered to Bucha and Irpin. 1500 women and children are evacuated to safer areas. Thousands of locals remain, because of logistical difficulties and bombing by Russian artillery, airstrikes, tanks and mortars.

5 March

Russian forces blow up railroad tracks in Irpin, attempting to prevent the evacuation of civilians. Ukrainian soldiers are forced to evacuate people via buses. Priority is given to the most vulnerable.

6 March

Russian troops intensify violence against civilians, opening fire on vehicles trying to flee Irpin. Shells hit infrastructure, leaving the city without heat. Bucha and Hostomel are occupied. Ukrainian authorities try to negotiate a safe evacuation, demanding that the invading forces not target refugees.

"They couldn't break down the door, so they threw a grenade down the stairs," Mykola from Bucha said. His friend Leonid was torn apart by the explosion. Next day, Russian soldiers told him he had 20 minutes to "clean up". Mykola gathered parts of his friend's body into a bag and dug what would be his third grave.

7 March

Because of intensified Russian shelling, Irpin has been without electricity, water and heat for nearly

three days. Russian occupiers forbid local residents to leave their homes. Reports continue of violence and marauding by Russian forces. Communication from residents in areas north of Kyiv remains scarce, as Russian soldiers confiscate phones at checkpoints and rob people in their homes.

Humanitarian aid is blocked.

Stan, a coder, spoke of his failed attempt at leaving Irpin "...right beside us there's a small, red car, all shot up, with the word "children" written on it. The body of a woman lies on the steering wheel. Civilian dead bodies on the sidewalk... the occupiers forbade filming the victims, took people's phones, and this was a direct order "from up high". They purposefully turned off electricity and communications and then said: "where's the evidence?"

9 March

Ukrainian authorities organise another evacuation corridor from Bucha and Hostomel. Only especially vulnerable citizens are allowed on board due to limited space – women, children and the elderly. Russian occupiers block 50 buses filled with

17-21 March

Kyiv sends humanitarian aid to Bucha, Hostomel and neighbouring villages – food, water, medicine and other supplies. It is impossible to distribute aid to locals on a larger scale because of the ongoing attacks and marauding by Russian soldiers. The towns are in a state of humanitarian crisis. They remained without electricity, water or heat.

By this point, a total of 4750 people have been evacuated from areas under attack.

23 March

The armed forces of Ukraine move to counterattack the Russian army encircling Irpin, Bucha, and Hostomel. This is a breaking point in the bloody stalemate. Ukraine is finally able to attempt to liberate its cities from enemy occupation, as Russian forces are failing due to poor logistics and chaotic command.

Eyewitness reports start coming in from people who managed to escape Bucha. They speak of horrible war crimes committed by Russian soldiers – robberies, rape, executions.



Soldiers search for mines in the Kyiv region, after the Russian were pushed back. Photo courtesy President Volodymyr Zelensky's office.

refugees, not allowing them to leave Bucha or Hostomel.

After the liberation of Bucha, residents will report many men aged 16 to 60 executed by Russians to prevent resistance. Coroner Serhiy Kaplishny said, "On a single day, I picked up about 30 bodies — 13 of whom were men whose hands had been tied and who had been shot in the head at close range."

11 March

Russian forces continue using Bucha as a base of operations, terrorising local residents and marauding supplies. An attempt is made by the Russian army to push toward Kyiv once again, but it is repelled by Ukrainian troops.

Antonina Pomazanko said her daughter was shot by Russian soldiers as they entered Bucha. She was not able to fully bury her. "I buried her a bit in the night. There was so much shelling, I didn't know what to do."

12 March

The Russian occupying army continues to hold Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel. More Russian armored vehicles and ground troops pile into the area, contested areas shelled by Russian artillery – apartment buildings, private homes and civilian infrastructure all targeted.

Humanitarian supplies are sent from Kyiv to all towns in the region, but the Russians continue to aggressively prevent any evacuation from Irpin. About 1000 people are successfully evacuated from Bucha under heavy Russian fire. Only 600 manage to escape from Hostomel.

Most locals remain in hellish conditions, evicted from their homes by Russian soldiers, forced to live in basements or sheds, with no access to food, water or heat, unable to bury the bodies of murdered family members.

Bucha resident Olena said "Getting water — shot, cooking outside on a fire — shot, running down a street — shot. The Russians became more brutal in the final days."

25 March

Bucha and Irpin are awarded the status of hero-cities by the President of Ukraine – the same status awarded to Kyiv and Odesa during WWII, for their heroic defence against the Nazis.

Vitaly Sinadin, a 45-year-old sculptor from Bucha, said "I was tied to a metal pole for two days. [The Russians] beat me, asking, "Where are the Ukrainian soldiers?" and "Who in town is in the Territorial Defense Force?"

28 March

The armed forces of Ukraine liberate Irpin, pushing out the Russian occupiers. Battles around the city had been raging since the start of Russia's invasion.

1 April

After more than a month of fierce battles in the Kyiv region, Russian occupying forces retreat and the Ukrainian Army is able to liberate the city of Bucha and render aid to local residents.

3 April

Irpin is now fully under the control of the Ukrainian armed forces, but local authorities ask refugees

WAR IN EUROPE

not to return until Ukrainian troops have removed mines and boobytraps spread by retreating Russian troops on roads and in residential areas – even in private homes, next to infants' cots.

Oleksandr Markushyn, mayor of Irpin, said "... the Russian occupiers split families, they took the men and left the women and children... the ones they didn't like – they shot. A child died, many men died. The cruelest and most inhumane part was when they rode over bodies with tanks... we had to use shovels to peel the bodies off the asphalt."

4 April

President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi visits Bucha to see first hand the devastation and war crimes committed by the Russian army during its occupation. He speaks with local residents and says, "What's currently happening in Ukraine is the calculated genocide of the Ukrainian people."

5 April

Ukrainian armed forces and emergency services of the Kyiv region continue to provide humanitarian and medical aid to residents of Bucha, Irpin and

Hostomel. Irpin has started to conduct repairs to some of its damaged infrastructure.

Ukrainian authorities begin conducting investigations and gather evidence of hundreds of war crimes committed by Russian occupying forces – murder, theft, robbery, rape and more. 410 bodies were recovered on streets, sidewalks and in mass graves in Bucha alone. Evidence of sexual assault against women and children further highlights the inhuman nature of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Eyewitness accounts and physical evidence tell of deliberate executions and the needless killing of civilians out of wanton cruelty and greed. Damage to the city is immense.

Communications consultant and Ukrainian media volunteer Ivan Shovkoplias said this was a breach of not only international and Ukrainian laws but of the very boundaries of humanity and civilisation.

"The perpetrators of these crimes – from the ones who committed them physically, to those who gave the orders or allowed them through inaction, must be punished to the full extent of the law," he said.

THE TRAGEDY OF MARIUPOL

By Anna Murlykina

Chief Editor of 0629.com.ua, the website of Mariupol

At about 5am on 24 February, the Russian army began its devastating bombardment of Mariupol. Defenders of the city, the Azov Brigade, said the bombs were not targeted at military infrastructure alone, as Putin claimed. In reality, Russia started shelling residential areas of Mariupol almost immediately.

In the first hours of the invasion, the Russian army destroyed eight private houses and hit 12 high-rise buildings with Grad missiles in the Skhidny residential area. In those first few hours 33 people were wounded. These were not military targets, they were peaceful civilians sleeping in their homes in Mariupol and the nearby village of Talakivka.

Ukraine's strong resistance and defense of Mariupol likely surprised the invading Russian forces. For almost a week Russia's attempted advances were consistently pushed back by Ukrainian troops, after which, the Russian army

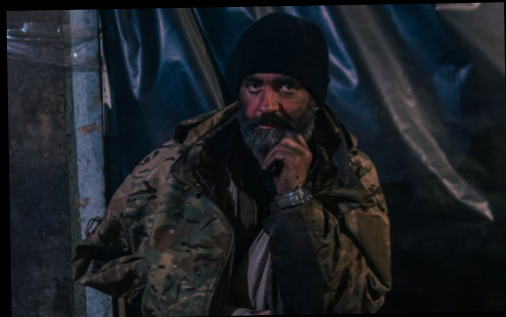
began to deploy a scorched-earth policy of total destruction in an attempt to subdue the city.

On 1 March, Russian forces completed their encirclement of Mariupol. At the same time, they began to deliberately destroy the city's infrastructure. Food warehouses were targeted firstly, to limit people's access to vital supplies.

Just before the invasion, city authorities had started to stockpile contingency foodstuffs, stored at two places – on the territory of the municipal enterprise 'Komunalnyk' and at the Mariupol Central Market. On 1 March, these warehouses were specifically and accurately targeted by Russian troops and completely destroyed.

On 2 March, all 15 electrical-cable entry points into the city were targeted, leaving Mariupol without power. Without electricity, the city's boiler houses stopped working, leaving citizens without heat in freezing weather conditions.

The same day, Russian troops bombed the main drinking-water supply channel and then the auxiliary supply, cutting off water to the entire city.



First 8 photos – wounded Ukrainian soldiers in the basement of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol – 9. A clearly-marked medical centre, bombed – 10. 11. Death on the streets of Mariupol – 12. A slain Russian soldier. Photos by Azov-Mariupol.

WAR IN EUROPE

In their attempts to further punish and subdue Mariupol's citizens, the Russian army targeted the main fire department to prevent emergency workers from protecting properties.

And finally, during this one, long, hellish day, the Russians bombed a primary gas pipeline, leaving Mariupol and other nearby cities, including Berdiansk, without gas for cooking or heating.

On 2 March, Russian forces also began systematically targeting and destroying the city's mobile communication towers, preventing citizens from communicating with one another or with the Ukrainian authorities.

Thus, the cruel and inhuman blockade of Mariupol began. Russia implemented a strategy of total suppression and destruction of Mariupol's civilian population deliberately and cynically. They created a humanitarian catastrophe, leaving the city without water, heat, light and phone connection, while at the same time blocking all routes for humanitarian aid to get to residents in need.

Before the Russian invasion, half a million people lived in Mariupol. It was one of the 10 largest cities in Ukraine. Since the beginning of the war, before Russian forces were able to complete their blockade of the city, about 100,000 inhabitants managed to flee. Those who were not able or willing to leave found themselves in a situation that can only be described as a hellish nightmare filled with suffering, death and destruction.

Mariupol resident Kateryna Ilchenko said "We stayed in the city because we believed in its defense capability. We believed in it so much that we considered everyone who left Mariupol to be traitors. But we were wrong. Nobody had imagined what started later. We saw the war in 2014. But what is happening now is not just war, it is destruction. The destruction of the civilian population. There were no military headquarters, bases of the Armed forces et cetera in our house – ordinary yard of high-rise buildings. But the missiles hit my house. And worst of all were the airstrikes. This horror is indescribable. It is impossible to hear

such a sound. It paralyses your will. You realise that you have to save your child and you realise that you are powerless."

On 2 March, it became clear that the remaining residents in Mariupol needed to be evacuated immediately. The issue of evacuation was raised repeatedly during talks between Ukrainian and Russian negotiators, but the Russian side refused to provide humanitarian corridors.

On 6 March, an agreement was finally reached for a ceasefire and a route for evacuees to leave the city, however, it was short lived. Oleksandr G and Oksana I, both from Mariupol, witnessed Russia's cruel attack on their civilian convoy on their way out of the city. At the moment the column started moving, Russian troops opened fire with multiple-launch rocket systems (called 'Grad', meaning hailstones) on the civilian vehicles.

On 9 March, Russian warplanes began a concerted bombing campaign against the city. Before this, Grad rockets had been a primary source of destruction, but now, heavy bombs and missiles

Nadezhda P and her daughter survived the attack and bore witness to the (at least 300) innocent civilians who died in the bombing.

There were no soldiers in the theater – but there were many, many children. Citizens taking shelter there had even written in large letters on the pavement outside, the Russian word ДЕТИ – CHILDREN – in a vain attempt to deter Russian pilots.

On the same day, 16 March, Russian warplanes bombed the military hospital No. 61. Next door was a public swimming pool, where about 600 people were taking shelter. One bomb hit this makeshift shelter too, killing an unknown number of people.

On 19 March, an explosion erupted at an art school in the Livoberezhnyi district of Mariupol where 400 women and children were hiding. A Russian warplane dropped one of its heavy bombs. The death toll is still unknown.

Reports of such atrocities often sound like mere statistics. But each number reflects so much more – lives destroyed, homes and businesses blown apart, bright and peaceful futures cut short.

*A wounded Ukrainian soldier in the basement of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol.
Photo by Azov-Mariupol*



rained down from Russian fighter jets, causing complete destruction to already battered buildings and blocks of flats. Buildings that somehow remained standing were no more than shells, gutted by fire.

On that day, Russia targeted a technical university and the Mariupol City Maternity Hospital. Images from these bombings were seen around the world. Russia's leadership claimed their soldiers had targeted the hospital because it was used as a base for so-called "Ukrainian Nazis".

The harrowing pictures spoke for themselves – this was no military base and the victims were not soldiers, they were the most vulnerable people imaginable – heavily pregnant women, and unborn and newly born babies.

Three adults and one child died instantly, another woman died the next day from her wounds, along with her unborn baby.

After the bombing, several surviving maternity-hospital patients were evacuated to the central Drama Theater building, which was serving as a temporary bomb shelter for more than 1000 citizens. At least three women with infants were taken there on 9 March, but were not housed in the basement because it was cold and damp, which could harm their newborn babies' health. They were put in more comfortable rooms – actors' dressing rooms located on the right wing of the building.

On 16 March, a Russian warplane dropped a massive bomb directly onto the right wing of the theatre, killing everyone sheltering on that side.

The desire to hide these terrible crimes is one of the reasons Russian troops are blockading the city in every possible way. They believe this tragedy and all their crimes can be buried there.

Fortunately, thanks to the heroic actions of journalists, refugees and the Ukrainian military, the evidence is emerging.

Mariupol resident, Andriy Voloshin, cannot be calm when he hears the official death toll in Mariupol. "5000 dead? That's not what it is! In the basement where I was hiding 50 Mariupol residents died after the bomb hit. Immediately! And how many such bombs have been falling? How many such basements are there?"

Mariupol resident Kateryna Ilchenko said "People don't know what to do with corpses, so they just stack them on their balconies. Hundreds of balconies that have become a cemetery!"

Hundreds of graves are also in the yards of and on roadsides. Hundreds of bodies remain in destroyed buildings, crushed by slabs and bricks. There are several mass graves in which hundreds of unidentified bodies are buried.

We will only know the true scale of this tragedy once Ukraine has liberated Mariupol and pushed out the Russian occupiers. Today, thousands of Mariupol residents are looking for their relatives, friends and loved ones. But sooner or later, their corpses on the roadsides, balconies and in mass graves will begin to regain their names.

Then, the dark abyss of this tragedy will be opened for all to see and to seek justice.

WAR IN EUROPE

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on 1 March that Australia would provide significant military assistance and emergency humanitarian support to help the people of Ukraine.

The following day, a Royal Australian Air Force C-17A Globemaster departed RAAF Base Richmond for Europe, 'carrying critical military equipment' [identified by CONTACT as "clothing, special purpose" – and confirmed by another reporter as 'socks and mittens'] and medical supplies.

"Australia will provide around \$70 million in lethal military assistance to support the defence of Ukraine, including missiles and weapons," the PM said.

"We will also provide a range of non-lethal military equipment and medical supplies in response to a specific request from the Ukrainian government.

"Our contributions will complement actions taken by partners such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, the European Union and other European nations – each of which we welcome.

"We will work with and through our partners and allies to supplement the already substantial support from the international community.

"Australia will also commit immediate humanitarian assistance of an initial \$35 million to help meet the urgent needs of the Ukrainian people.

"Our lethal and non-lethal military assistance, along with our humanitarian funding, are in addition to the significant sanctions we have already imposed on Russia."

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed Australia's Parliament via video link on 31 March.

During his speech he asked Australia to send even more aid, specifically requesting Australian-built Bushmaster protected mobility vehicles.

The following day, 1 April, Prime Minister Morrison confirmed that \$25 million in further military support would be sent to Ukraine, including the requested Bushmasters.

"We're not just sending our prayers, we're sending our guns, we're sending our munitions, we're

sending our humanitarian aid, we're sending body armour, and we're going to be sending our armoured vehicles – our Bushmasters – as well.

Fourteen of the 20 Bushmasters initially supplied to Ukraine from Australia were equipped with remote weapon stations, while four were decked out as ambulance variants. All were fitted with radios, GPS and additional bolt-on armour.

The 20 vehicles were painted olive green to suit the intended operating environment [and, presumably, to dis-identify them as Australian – though a small kangaroo silhouette was added, beside a Ukrainian flag and the words "United with Ukraine" on both sides of each vehicle].

In late April, the Australian government announced it would send six M777 155mm lightweight towed howitzers and ammunition to Europe for on-forwarding to Ukraine.

"This \$26.7 million in new support for Ukraine takes Australia's total contribution to Ukraine to more than \$225 million," Mr Morrison said.

The six guns were taken by truck from 1st Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, at Gallipoli Barracks in Brisbane to be despatched from RAAF Base Amberley. This was a significant contribution in so far as the Australia Army only had 54 guns to start with – now down to 48.

Shortly before the Australian federal election on 21 May [which saw the Prime Minister and his party ousted from government], Mr Morrison announced a further shipment of an additional 20 Bushmasters, plus 14 M113 armoured personnel carriers, plus 60 pallets of medical supplies donated by Australian citizens, along with three pallets of radiation-monitoring equipment and protective equipment – taking Australia's total contribution to date to more than \$285 million.

Given that Australia's military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine had bi-partisan support in parliament, the change of government, sworn in on 23 May, should have little affect on Australia's ongoing commitment to 'Stand with Ukraine'.



Australian Bushmasters and artillery are prepared for airlift to Europe to support Ukraine's defence against the Russian invasion.

Major Roger Brennan



Leading Aircraftwoman Kate Czerny



Corporal Jesse Kane



Leading Aircraftwoman Kate Czerny



Leading Aircraftwoman Emma Schwenke

WAR IN EUROPE

New Zealand also displayed strong support for Ukraine following Russia's invasion, initially supporting international sanctions, then sending tangible military support in the form of about 50 personnel to assist with logistics, intelligence and planning.

A Royal New Zealand Air Force C-130 Hercules – under Operation Tieke – departed New Zealand for Europe on 13 April to assist with the shipment of weapons and aid to Ukraine.

Later, on 23 May, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced that a New Zealand Army artillery training team of up to 30 personnel would deploy to the UK to help train Ukrainian military personnel in operating L119 105mm light field guns.

Among the first deployment group were alternative flying crews, maintenance technicians, and two air load teams.

The Hercules was slated to be based in the UK, flying between third countries in Europe, picking up donated military aid and transporting the cargo to

destinations from where the stores could be taken by land into Ukraine.

However, no New Zealand personnel would be entering Ukraine.

The movement of donated military aid around Europe was being coordinated by an international coordination centre in Stuttgart, Germany, in which at least eight New Zealand personnel were also embedded.

NZDF intelligence staff were also deployed to the United Kingdom early in the piece, with liaison officers also detached to the UK Permanent Joint Headquarters and a NATO headquarters in Belgium.

New Zealand-based open-source intelligence capability was also being used to take advantage of time-zone differences between New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Prime Minister Ardern said the artillery-training support was requested in May and would be in place through June and July.

Minister of Defence Peeni Henare said the New Zealand government was acting on a call for help with training, which would enable members of the Ukrainian armed forces to operate L119 light field guns as they continued to defend their country against attacks by Russian forces.

"We are also providing approximately 40 gun sights to Ukraine, along with a small quantity of ammunition for training purposes," he said.

Foreign Affairs Minister Nanaia Mahuta said Aotearoa New Zealand continued to work closely with a range of international partners to support Ukraine, including the military support outlined, as well as humanitarian assistance and efforts to ensure accountability for human rights violations.

"New Zealand has also donated approximately \$15.7 million to purchase military equipment for Ukraine, commercial satellite access for Ukrainian defence intelligence, and has rolled out sanctions targeting those associated with Russia's invasion," Mrs Mahuta said.



LEFT TO RIGHT: An NZDF air-load-team member prepares pallets to be carried on a C-130 Hercules, in Germany – Royal New Zealand Air Force C-130 Hercules pilots on a Ukrainian weapons-supply mission over Europe – pallets of weapons and/or ammo await loading on to a Royal New Zealand Air Force Hercules at a German air base. NZDF photos.



Australian Army soldier Sergeant Rana Chandan from the 1st/15th Royal New South Wales Lancers operates a Ghost Robotics quadruped robot using a novel brain-computer interface during a demonstration at Majura Training Area, Canberra. Researchers at the University of Technology Sydney and Army's Robotic & Autonomous Implementation & Coordination Office (RICO) teamed up to demonstrate a brain-to-robot interface on 11 May 2022. Sergeant Rana had a selection of commands projected onto his augmented reality lens, which, when sighted, resulted in brainwaves that were interpreted and sent as commands to the robot. This allowed the operator to maintain weapon readiness or use their hands for other tasks. The purpose of the demonstration was to explore the potential of this technology for use in a tactical environment.



BRAIN GAMES

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You must send the Commonwealth Ombudsman either a report of your abuse by midnight 30 June 2022, or an email stating your intent to report the abuse – email DefenceForce.Ombudsman@Ombudsman.gov.au by midnight 30 June 2022 AEST. Your email notification of intent to report will enable you to report up until midnight 30 June 2023.

For full details of the scheme and the forms to use for reporting, go to the ombudsman.gov.au website.

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3RAR Firepower DEMO



MAG 58 machine gun



M113AS4

PHOTOS BY CORPORAL DANIEL SALLAI

Soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment's Support Company, conducted firepower demonstrations for junior commanders of the battalion in February.

Demonstrations occurred by day and by night at the Townsville Field Training Area.

Weapons showcased included 81mm mortar mounted in M113AS4 armoured personnel carriers, 84mm Carl Gustav medium direct fire-support weapon, MAG 58 sustained-fire machine gun and .50cal heavy machine gun.

3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment – 3RAR – is a mechanised-infantry battalion based in Kapyong Lines, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville, north Queensland, as part of the Army's 3rd Brigade.

3RAR was the Army's only parachute battalion from 1984 until 2011.

In 2012, the battalion moved from Sydney to Townsville and took on a light-infantry construct, until it was upgraded to mechanised infantry in 2018.

3RAR was formed in 1945 and has Battle Honours from Korea, Vietnam, East Timor and Iraq.



.50cal heavy machine gun



84mm mortar in M113AS4



SOUTHERN JACKAROO

HUNDREDS OF AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS, TROOPS FROM THE JAPAN GROUND SELF DEFENCE FORCE AND US MARINES PARTICIPATED IN THIS MAJOR ANNUAL WARGHTING EXERCISE AT SHOALWATER BAY TRAINING AREA IN MAY 2022

ABOVE: United States Marine Corps Lance Corporal Jefferson Candelario, Australian Army Lance Corporal Kobi Rogers and Japan Ground Self Defense Force Leading Private Kento Yamaguchi on a makeshift range at Shoalwater Bay Training Area.

RIGHT: An Australian Army soldier from 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, runs through building-clearance drills with a Japan Ground Self-Defense Force soldier during Exercise Southern Jackaroo 2022.

Photos by Corporal Dustin Anderson.





OPPOSITE: A US marine helps a 'wounded' Aussie soldier off the battlefield as part of Exercise Southern Jackaroo.

ABOVE: A US marine 'casualty' is treated by Australian Army medics.

LEFT: A US Marine Corps radio operator and joint terminal attack controller call in an MV-22 Osprey for a long-range casualty evacuation.

Photos by Corporal Cedar Barnes, MRF-D.

Exercise Southern Jackaroo is an annual trilateral training activity designed to enhance warfighting interoperability, strengthen international relationships and improve combat readiness.

Commander of Australia's 7th Brigade Brigadier Michael Say said the combined-arms activity would feature infantry live-fire and tank integration.

"Exercise Southern Jackaroo is a great example of how our regional partners integrate with Australian forces to conduct realistic combat-team training for combat operations," Brigadier Say said.

"Our combined capability to coordinate ground forces demonstrates adaptability and interoperability that can be applied to warfighting operations or disaster relief."

Commanding Officer Marine Rotational Force Darwin (MRF-D) Colonel Christopher Steele said Southern Jackaroo would build on past activities and enhance collective strength.

"MRF-D is excited to continue the outstanding tradition of Southern Jackaroo alongside our trusted Australian and Japanese allies," Colonel Steele said.



"We are looking forward to enhancing our combined interoperability and developing our relationships."

JGSDF Training Unit Commander Lieutenant Colonel Ryozo Asano said it was a great honour to have the opportunity to participate in a trilateral exercise between Japan, the United States and Australia.

"Considering the current world situation, the trilateral military exercise is very significant, and it is very useful for improving the capability of units and all soldiers," Lieutenant Colonel Asano said.

Exercise Southern Jackaroo featured about 400 soldiers from the Australian Army, 190 marines from MRF-D and 70 soldiers from the JGSDF.

ABOVE: US Marine Corps Lance Corporal Fabian Vega protects an Australian soldier scanning for mines.

RIGHT: JGSDF Leading Private Takehiro Arakawa on patrol.

ABOVE RIGHT: An unnamed Japan Ground Self Defense Force soldier lays down fire during Exercise Southern Jackaroo at Shoalwater Bay Training Area.

Photos by Corporal Dustin Anderson



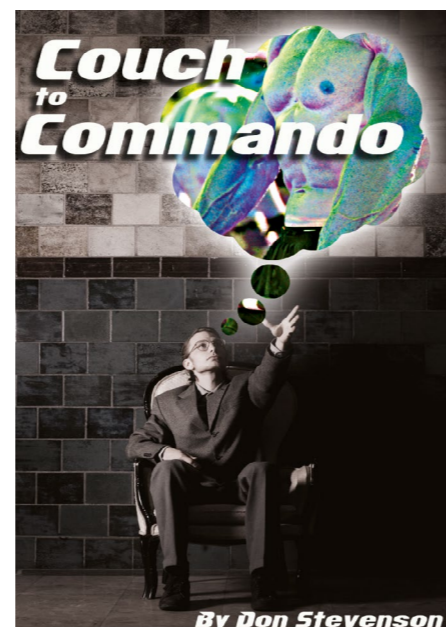
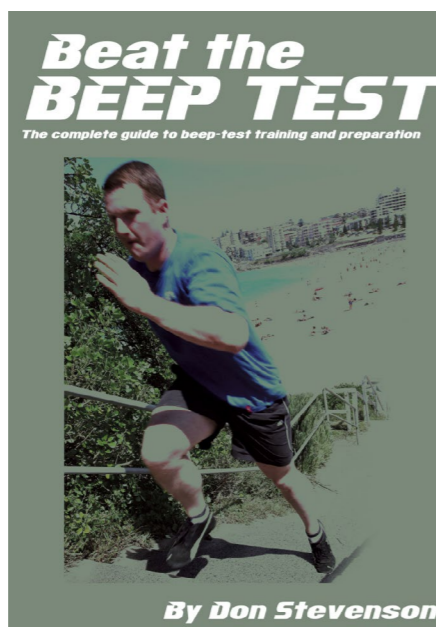
Exercise Southern Jackaroo is part of a series of warfighter training activities involving the ADF, MRF-D and other international partners each year. Marine Rotational Force-Darwin is a contingent of US Marines and their equipment that rotates annually through Australia's Northern Territory during the dry season. MRF-D has grown in size and complexity since the first rotation of 200 marines through Darwin in 2012, with around 2200 marines deployed this year.

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16th Aviation Brigade
flexing its muscles



Vigilant Scimitar

PREVIOUS PAGE: Australian soldiers from the 4th Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, prepare an M777 Howitzer for air lift by a CH-47F Chinook from 5th Aviation Regiment.

BELOW: A CH-47F Chinook from 5th Aviation Regiment.

RIGHT: A soldier from 5th Aviation Regiment marshals an MRH90 Taipan.

BOTTOM: Australian Army MRH90 Taipan and CH-47F Chinook helicopters from 5th Aviation Regiment at their forward arming and refuelling point in Charters Towers.

Photos by Corporal Jarrod McAneney



Elements of the Australian Defence Force conducted Exercise Vigilant Scimitar 2022 over 12 days in mid May.

VS22 was a medium-scale military field-training exercise, involving a wide range of tactical flying activities, with coincidental ground opportunities, across north Queensland.

Exercise Vigilant Scimitar practiced flying operations using Tiger armed reconnaissance helicopters, CH-47F Chinook heavy lift helicopters and MRH-90 Taipan general-purpose helicopters in collective warfighting scenarios coordinated by elements of Army's 1st Division.

Other Army elements of 3rd Brigade, 7th Brigade and 17th Sustainment Brigade as well as Royal

Australian Air Force and other contributing force elements supported the 16th Aviation Brigade-led exercise.

16th Aviation Brigade is part of Army Aviation Command and includes Army's three flying regiments – 1st Aviation Regiment from Darwin, 5th Aviation Regiment from Townsville and 6th Aviation Regiment from Sydney.

Aviation assets on Exercise Vigilant Scimitar operated from Charters Towers Aerodrome, where flying operations included rotary and fixed-wing aircraft, as well as unmanned aerial systems.

While Exercise Vigilant Scimitar was an aviation-based exercise, support elements also benefited from their participation.



WO2 Nathan Corradetti, 109th Battery, 4th Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, said the exercise was a good opportunity for his unit.

"We get the opportunity to train in a different mode of entry into an area of operations in order to provide support to manoeuvre forces on the ground," WO2 Corradetti said.

"The M777A2 is traditionally a towed artillery system, but it is a light 155mm howitzer, so it is also optioned for air mobile operations.

"This is something we do on a regular basis as part of the regiment, and each battery generally gets this opportunity each year to give it a go."

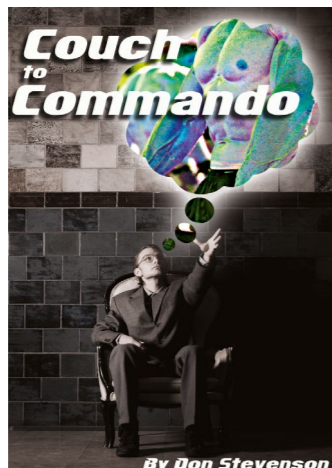
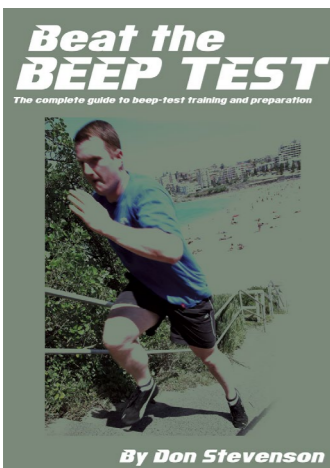
Royal Australian Air Force air traffic control personnel provided a control-tower service for Charters Towers Aerodrome to safely integrate military and civilian flying operations – and RAAF airfield defence guards also played their part, for base security.

RIGHT: RAAF Air Defence Guard Leading Aircraftman Seisay Edward, No.3 Security Forces Squadron, provides security during Exercise Vigilant Scimitar as an ARH Tiger flies overhead at the Charters Towers Aerodrome.
Photos by Corporal Jarrod McAneney



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Septimus STRIKE



Private Bailey Davy-Elevsen, supported by Private d'Artagnan Robinson, prepare to fire a Mark 47 lightweight automatic grenade launcher



The aiming sight of a Mark 47 lightweight automatic grenade launcher, on target

PHOTOS BY SERGEANT ANDREW SLEEMAN

Australian Army Soldiers from The 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, conducted Exercise Septimus Strike at Townsville Field Training Area in May.

During the exercise, soldiers and officers paused to view a firepower capability demonstration during which the Direct Fire Support Weapons Platoon fired a Mark 47 lightweight automatic grenade launcher, 84mm Carl Gustav and FGM-148 Javelin missile.

The exercise focused on certifying A and C Company, 1RAR, to 'ATL 3B' which sets conditions for the conduct of the Sea Series of amphibious exercises.

Sea Series is a set of three progressively bigger annual exercises designed to hone and certify Australia's Amphibious Forces.

The first, Sea Horizon, is a planning exercise in preparation for the subsequent Sea Explorer and Sea Raider exercises.

During Exercise Sea Explorer, hundreds of soldiers, sailors and aviators aboard amphibious ships practice beach landings of soldiers, vehicles and equipment.

Exercise Sea Raider switches focus to tactics and possible integration with allied forces.



Private Valen Richardson prepares to fire an 84mm Carl Gustav



Private d'Artagnan Robinson fires an FGM-148 Javelin

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OF KINDRED SPIRIT BUT WARS APART

MATRON SARAH DE MESTRE RRC SISTER MARGARET DE MESTRE AUSTRALIAN ARMY NURSING SERVICE

Sarah entered the world on 8 February 1877, to Andre and Augusta De Mestre. The De Mestre family were stalwarts in the Shoalhaven, which centred on the rich farming area of Terara, on the outskirts of Nowra, NSW.

A bright girl, Sarah was educated in the local area, but, from an early age, knew what she wanted to do with her life – nursing¹.

With her schooling complete, Sarah moved to Sydney and, on 10 February 1901, reported to Prince Alfred Hospital where she would commence her nursing training.

On completion, she remained on the staff at the hospital until late 1912, when she secured the position of Matron of Armidale Hospital.

Work in the bush provided a range of opportunities and experiences, not found within the confines of city hospitals¹.

With the onset of the First World War, the Australian and New Zealand governments quickly raised a special force assigned to capture the German outposts in New Guinea and across the islands of the lower central Pacific with the main German base at Rabaul the prize. The force – dubbed the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF) – needed to be recruited, equipped and

ready to sail at the earliest opportunity. Training would be conducted when and where possible, including en route.

To support the troops, the Royal Australian Navy was tasked to source a suitable commercial ship and convert her in mere weeks to become a hospital ship with a capacity for 300 patients. The navy chose the Adelaide Steamship Company's passenger steamer *Grantala*, to be leased at a cost of 1450 pounds per month. The civilian crew would remain with the ship and the Navy would supplement with specialist service personnel².

Seeking the opportunity to serve abroad, Sarah resigned her position and made her way to Sydney to offer her services to king and country. After careful consideration, she was appointed as Matron of *Grantala* and would be supported by six nursing sisters.

Information was not forthcoming from military sources, so Sarah needed to second guess the requirements. The nursing staff were required to purchase their own uniforms, but with little knowledge of destination or duration, Sarah advised her girls to take uniforms for both hot and cold climates. They agreed that white uniforms were best, as they could be boiled clean, and, as they were under naval control, white seemed somewhat

As with any army, doctors, nurses, medics and hospital staff work tirelessly in the care of wounded, sick and injured – on and off the battlefield.

appropriate. Both Matron and sisters were not military, but to assist in administration, they were issued with naval rating serial numbers, 4839 to 4845 respectively. This further added to the general confusion³. The command-and-control structure aboard ship was also disjointed as, although being deemed Matron, Sarah only had direct control over the six-nursing staff, while the male sick-bay attendants were controlled by a warrant officer, who took his orders from the Principal Medical Officer⁴ (PMO).

Grantala sailed from Sydney on 30 August 1914 and headed north. She called into Townsville to stock up on water and provisions before pushing on to Rabaul, where she arrived on 13 September. Almost immediately tenders started to arrive alongside, ferrying wounded from ashore. Sarah and her nursing staff went to work, ensuring their patients received the very best care possible. The initial numbers of wounded were 20 to 30, mostly suffering minor gunshot wounds. In the ensuing days, the French cruiser *Montcalm* arrived and off loaded additional wounded.

On 4 October 1914, the *Grantala*, in company with other ships, was ordered to sail to Suva, Fiji, and await orders. This positioned them in a more advanced area and best placed to support the allied naval group trying to hunt down and destroy the German East Asia Squadron. Their stay in Suva would last nine weeks⁵.

With a significant naval action expected, the crew and medical component on *Grantala* set about honing and re-honing their skills and procedures, especially in the acceptance of casualties from lifeboats and, even then, tying off alongside damaged ships of the line. For Sarah and her supporting nursing sisters, the opportunity to participate in this type of training was important as it may prove invaluable in the future.

Little did they know, but far off to the east in the Atlantic Ocean near the Falkland Islands, the British were locked

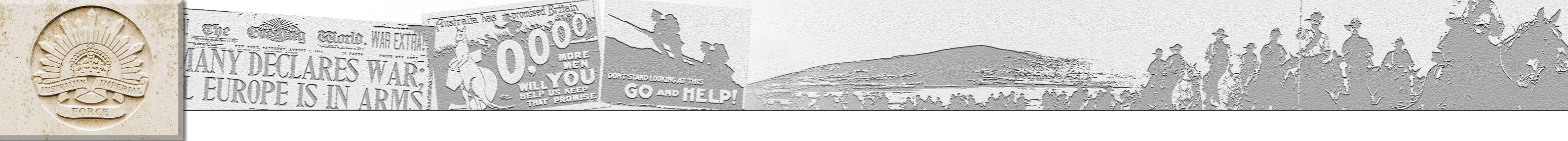
in battle with the German East Asia Squadron as it tried to escape from the Pacific and back to Germany². It was a decisive victory for the British.

With the Pacific now relatively secure, elements of the Australian forces, including *Grantala* were ordered home. The nursing staff felt somewhat deflated as they sailed south as, instead of battle wounds to contend with, it was mainly illnesses from accompanying ships that provided the majority of patients⁴. Their duty done, Sarah and her staff were formally stood down with thanks, just before Christmas 1914.

Sarah returned to Prince Alfred Hospital as a relieving sister and, where time permitted, she would return to the Shoalhaven to visit family, now living at Greenwell Point. Still craving to serve overseas, Sarah, now 38, enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service on 26 April 1915⁶.

As the casualties from Gallipoli started to rise, additional nursing staff were urgently required to bolster the AANS members already deployed in Egypt. Allocated as a reinforcement to the 3rd Australian General Hospital, Sister Sarah De Mestre and a draft of 80 fellow nursing staff, boarded the SS *Mooltan* on 15 May 1915⁸ and sailed to the Middle East.

Dispatched to the forward component of the 3rd AGH, based on Lemnos Island, Sarah and the other sisters and nurses immediately went to work. While their living conditions were spartan and hours long and arduous, their dedication and professionalism shone through. It was extremely intense during the August offensive when casualties from Lone Pine, The Nek, Chunuk Bair and Hill 60 were staggering. To the dedicated nursing staff, nationalities of the casualties were irrelevant as patient welfare was always first and foremost. In their dedication to keep their patients alive, sometimes the nurses won and sadly, sometimes they lost – but they never wavered.



Sister Sarah De Mestre, left, and her niece Sister Margaret De Mestre, Australian Army Nursing Service – of kindred spirit, but wars apart.

Images courtesy of the Virtual War Memorial.

Following the withdrawal from Gallipoli, the troops either staged through Lemnos or sailed straight through to Egypt, but, for the medical staff, their work continued. A reallocation of nursing sisters was required and Sarah was dispatched back to Egypt, where she undertook duty in Cairo.

But as the AIF was growing and preparing to deploy to France, the medical support would need to follow and, on 4 July 1916, elements of 3AGH, including Sarah, embarked for England⁶.

Established at Brighton, the staff of 3AGH started work on treating casualties from the battlefields of Fromelles and the Somme, who had been evacuated from field hospitals to England for longer periods of rehabilitation or specialist treatment.

December brought what was to be the coldest winter to sweep across Europe for 40 years. The frontline troops suffered terribly in squalid, stinking mud and sometimes-freezing thigh-deep water in the trenches. It also brought to the forefront a terrible debilitating injury – trench foot. Many troops, on both sides, simply never recovered or, worse still, lost feet and limbs to frostbite and amputation. Sarah and other members of the nursing staff would spend hours massaging soldiers' black and swollen feet with whale oil in an attempt to stimulate circulation to the extremities. Their efforts were sometimes rewarded but sadly, in many cases, they weren't, and amputation was inevitable.

As the winter of 1916/17 began to thaw, the strategic attitudes on the Western Front changed dramatically with the German forces withdrawing to strong, fortified defensive positions and the allied commanders deciding

the best way to attack and overcome the defenders. For the medical and nursing staff of the allied nations, the arithmetic was simple – more and more allied casualties! Hence in April 1917, Sarah headed across the channel to France where she was appointed as the second in charge of the No 2 AGH at Abbeville on the banks of the river Somme⁷.

At various points over the ensuing war years, it was decided to bolster the forward medical facilities, and thus, volunteers were called from the base and general hospitals to reinforce casualty clearing stations⁸ (CCS) closer to the front lines. On every occasion, one of the first to volunteer was Sarah De Mestre, who was repeatedly allocated to the 46th CCS⁷.

The nature of the CSSs, tactically placed at key transportation hubs, made them 'unintentional' targets to German air and artillery forces, intent on destroying the vital hubs. Bombs and artillery rounds would impact in close proximity and often pepper tents, sandbags and shelters of the CSS.

Also, the casualty clearing stations were one of the first treatment centres for gas casualties evacuated from the front lines. The challenge facing the medical and nursing staff, was that the gas was residual in the woollen tunics of the wounded from which gas fumes would be emitted, thus contaminating confined spaces and treatment areas. Surgical masks provided minimal protection to the airways, with nothing to protect the eyes and facial skin of the nurses.

Sarah De Mestre's dedication and devotion to duty was recognised with her award to The Royal Red Cross (second class), as part of the New Years Honour's list 1918. This

would be later conferred personally upon Sister De Mestre by His Majesty the King at Buckingham Palace.

In April-May 1918, a new threat to the allied forces occurred with the launch of 'Operation Michael' by the Germans – their final attempt to split the allied forces and cut the British Army off from the channel ports. They had at their disposal 70 plus fresh divisions, now freed from duty on the Eastern Front following the collapse of the Russian army.

The main German objective in the Australian sector was the capture of the vital rail terminus of Amiens. But the Australian forces were digging in for a fight and the last notion in their minds, was defeat or retreat.

Unfortunately, Sarah was now back with the 3rd AGH in Abbeville, France, and was in a direct line of march for the advancing German troops.

As casualties began to mount, the hospital basically reverted to a huge casualty clearing station, as casualties arrived straight from the battlefield with only their first field dressing⁹ in place on the wounds. Facilities and resources were stretched to breaking point but the staff pushed through. At one point 24 nurses cared for 1800 wounded and severely wounded patients¹⁰.

Gradually the tide of battle turned and, as the allied armies gained the upper hand, they began to push the Germans further and further back, and, in November 1918, the 'war to end all wars' finally spluttered to an end.

As the casualties were cycled home, the requirement for our nurses to remain in England lessened. But the world was in the grip of a new and deadly illness that would take millions upon millions of lives across the globe – the Spanish influenza. It would cut a swath through all segments of population, civilian, soldier, sailor, wounded or fit – and even our devoted nurses, trying to help stem the tide by working increased hours with little or no rest and putting patient before self.

Sarah De Mestre eventually received her travel orders and, on 24 May 1919, boarded the transport Ormonde bound for Australia.

Her appointment with the AIF was terminated on 3 October 1919⁶.

Sarah returned to the familiar surrounds of Prince Alfred Hospital but, following a period of illness in 1929, she resigned and went on to establish a rest centre in Sydney's northern suburbs.

Little did Sarah realise that she had a protege in the wings, her young niece.

Margaret De Mestre was born in Bellingen, NSW, in November 1915, the eldest of four girls and two boys, to James and Alice De Mestre¹¹.

From a young age, she was intent on following in her aunt Sarah's footsteps and become a nurse. In 1935 and commensurate with her family tradition, Margaret presented herself at Prince Alfred Hospital, to commence her nurses training. Following her graduation, Margaret

undertook additional training to further improve her professional skills, knowledge and capabilities. Correspondence between herself and her aunt would have been both compelling and supportive in nature, as only a trusted mentor could provide.

With the onset of the Second World War, Margaret was keen to also serve as Sarah had served, and enlisted in the 2nd AIF as a staff nurse, on 9 August 1940. Posted to the 2nd/1st Australian Hospital Ship Manunda¹¹, she completed a number of sailings to and from the Middle East, to retrieve the wounded and sick from the Mediterranean and Middle East campaigns.

Whilst the Manunda was undergoing a refit in late 1941, Margaret was seconded for duty at the 113th Australian General Hospital in the Sydney suburb of Concord¹¹. It was here that Margaret was able to treat not only the current veterans, but those from the First World War under the care of the Repatriation Department¹². Many of the old Diggers would certainly have remember her aunt from the old days.

Margaret's promotion to Sister came on 1 December¹¹.

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the Pacific was in turmoil and, with Manunda's refit complete, her crew and nursing staff returned to the ship and made her ready for war¹¹.

Thursday, 19 February 1942 and the Manunda lay at anchor in Darwin Harbour. As per the requirements of the Geneva Convention, Manunda was dressed in her distinctive Red Cross livery and was one of 65 allied warships and merchant vessels, occupying the port. Although a tempting target for any adversary, high command believed that no one would have the audacity to attack mainland Australia.

Little did the allied commanders know that their enemy counterparts, were giving their final briefings for an attack of devastating magnitude against the sleepy Darwin.

At 0956 hours, 188 carrier-based aircraft belonging to the same carrier battle group that had devastated the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour a mere two months before, could see Darwin through the scattered clouds. Looking to his left and right, the commander of the air armada gave the hand signal to his flanking squadrons to attack.

As the low hum of approaching aircraft and the hundreds of black dots appeared in the Darwin skies, the land-based air-raid sirens began to wail, closely followed by the alarm bells and whistles of the ships occupying the harbour.

The crew and medical staff of Manunda were well drilled in their action stations and especially in preparations to receive the wounded that would surely come from an attack of this magnitude. Margaret De Mestre headed straight to her ward, located on 'C Deck', donned her helmet and started to make sure they were ready to accept casualties when required.

Swooping in, the seasoned Japanese pilots located their designated targets and bore home their attack. As



Sister De Mestre was adjacent to an open door when the bomb hit and took the full impact

munitions found their mark, crew members were forced to abandon ships – but committing to the water was by no means committing to safety, as it was ablaze with fuel oil, beyond which were the sharks and crocodiles, ever-ready to feast.

Ship after ship was hit and, ashore, prime civilian and military targets were singled out. The Post Office suffered a direct hit, so as to sever communication links to the south. The RAAF Airfield came in for special treatment, as it was flush with a mixture of Australian and American aircraft, either fresh from patrol or awaiting repair or maintenance.

Members of all branches of the armed services threw up whatever defence they could, even if it was token. Anti-aircraft units both light and medium, machine guns and rifles were fired at the elusive targets, while armaments on the naval vessels and armed merchantmen, also fought desperately to save their ships.

Manunda was hit with shrapnel from a near miss, which peppered the deck, plates and superstructure. A second screamed down, narrowly missing the bridge but detonating in the vicinity of the B and C Deck wards.

Sister De Mestre was adjacent to an open door when the bomb hit and took the full impact of the blast. Bomb fragments did terrible damage to her body, but she was not killed outright – but there was little hope of survival. Sadly, she passed away within two hours, becoming the first AANS member to be killed in action on Australian soil.

For the crew and remaining medical staff, mourning the dead would have to wait, as they needed to get the fires under control and the wounded coming aboard from the blazing ships and being fished out of the harbour suffering

burns and the effects of fuel oil, needed to come first and foremost.

As the carrier planes broke contact and started to head away from Darwin, a fresh wail of air-raid sirens signalled a second wave – this time land-based bombers intent on destroying Darwin's airstrip, aircraft and facilities.

By nightfall, the toll was eight ships sunk and many others damaged, 243 people killed, 350 wounded and a still-contested number missing.

When time allowed, the crew of Manunda took stock of their situation – 12 members of the complement, including Sister De Mestre, were dead and a significant number wounded.

That night the body of Sister Margaret De Mestre was committed to the depths of Darwin Harbour¹³ – but her name is recorded to the missing on the walls of the Adelaide River War Cemetery, in the Northern Territory.

For Sarah De Mestre, the news of the loss of her dear niece Margaret would have been devastating, yet the pride immense in the fact that Margaret had died in the line of duty and had given so much to her profession as a nursing sister, would have surely lessened the grief significantly.

Sarah De Mestre lived the remainder of her life without marrying but, to the nursing community, she was an inspiration of pride, duty and commitment. She passed away in Burwood, NSW, on 23 April 1961, aged 84.

Author's note: I would like to offer my sincere thanks to local historian and friend Robyn Florance, for her pride and passion in preserving the history of the Shoalhaven area and those who have shaped its history.



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Notes:

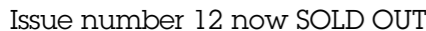
- 1 Our ANZAC Girls and Sarah De Mestre, An Inspiration – Robyn Florance
- 2 Royal Australian Navy webpage – Hospital Ship Grantala
- 3 4839 Matron Sarah de Mestre, 4840 Sister Florence Mc Millan, 4841 Sister Stella Colless, 4842 Sister Rachael Clouston, 4843 Sister Constance Neale, 4844 Sister Bertha Burtinshaw, 4845 Sister Rosa Kirkcaldie
- 4 Guns and Brooches-Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf – Jan Bassett. Oxford Press 1992
- 5 Official History of Australia at War 1914 – 1918, Vol IX – AW Jose
- 6 National Archives of Australia: B2455, WWI Service Records, Sarah Melanie De Mestre

- 7 AWM 8 26/67/3-3 Australian General Hospital and Reinforcements (May 15-April 16)
- 8 Casualty Clearing Stations were small functioning hospitals generally located at railheads or similar transport hubs in forward areas. The mission was to provide emergency treatment and to move casualties back to more permanent facilities such as stationary and general hospitals.
- 9 A first aid dressing carried by every soldier, contained in a generally water-proof package with a sterile multi-layer gauze pad, supported by two long gauze ties to aid in wound dressing.

- 10 The annals of commitment, courage and professionalism by our nurses are far better depicted in various publications rather than I can present here. I compel you, the reader, to explore these writings to gain the true essence. These include 'Nightingales in the Mud' and 'Guns and Brooches', to name but two.
- 11 National Archives of Australia, B883 Second Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers – NX70211 Margaret Augusta De Mestre
- 12 Current Department of Veterans Affairs
- 13 A8231 War Graves Registration Card De Mestre, Margaret Augusta

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