

# Veterans Support Centre

## CONTACT FRONT



## May 2025

**Vietnam Veterans Peacekeepers & Peacemakers Association (NSW)**  
**Hastings Manning Macleay Branch Inc.**



Stunning photograph by DAVID WHITTAKER, ANZAC Day 2024 at the Australian War Memorial,  
[awm.gov.au](http://awm.gov.au)

*There are NO COSTS to access the services such as Pensions, Welfare and advice provided by Veterans Support Centre,  
Hastings Manning Macleay Branch VVPPAA Inc  
At Wauchope Wellbeing Centre, located within the Wauchope Club Ltd (upstairs)*

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## VETERANS SUPPORT CENTRE

No change to the support and assistance that we offer free of cost to ALL veterans

## VETERANS SUPPORT CENTRE

Cnr Young & Cameron Streets, Wauchope

Veterans Support Centre, Hastings Manning Macleay Branch VPPAA Inc  
At Wauchope Wellbeing Centre, located within the Wauchope Club Ltd (upstairs)

Email: Vets614@gmail.com.au

Advocate/Pension contact - email to vetpensions@gmail.com

OFFICE IS MANNED ON TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY 1030 TO 1330  
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Phone answered/checked each day, if unanswered leave a message & your number

Website: [www.veteranssupport.org.au](http://www.veteranssupport.org.au)

**TUESDAY** general enquiries, appointments with the Compensation Advocate, company and a brew

**WEDNESDAY** general enquires, company and a brew

**THURSDAY** general enquiries, Thursday Lunches as before, 1200 'til finished,  
( order your meals in Bistro and gather upstairs for a yarn )

Thank you: To all donors, supporters and advertisers: Your continued support has helped us to keep our doors open for veterans, serving and ex-serving personnel who need our help. Members are encouraged to support businesses whose advertisements appear in this newsletter.

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(all volunteers)**

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## From the Editor's Desk

Hello again,

I start this editorial by saying a huge Thank You on behalf of the President and all veterans to the Masonic Lodge, Port Macquarie and their Headquarters for their very generous donation to the Veterans Support Centre. The Brothers, many of whom are veterans, have a very supportive attitude to all Brothers and Mike and I were proud to be invited into their Lodge. Thank you too to the ladies that made a tasty lunch for us all and it was good to talk to you.

My second important task is to apologise to Pavy's Glass of Port Macquarie. I missed their advert from the February issue of Contact Front and I am very sorry that happened. Pavy's Glass have been an advertiser and supporter of VSC for a long time now and I have reinstated their missing advert on pg 10.

Now, ANZAC or Anzac, that depends, many varied opinions. I have used both in this issue and hope that you will agree the term rather than the acronym or proper noun is what matters. The meaning of Anzac Day today includes the remembrance of all Australians killed in military operations.

I hope that you find the cover page striking, the photograph by David Whittaker, at the Australian War Memorial on ANZAC Day 2024, is very moving and I wanted to share it with all of our amazing veterans and also the friends and family members who may read this Contact Front either as a hard copy or on our website.

Also thank you to the veterans who complimented the article about the Derbyshire Yeomanry. I am proud of my father and his many years of service and his encouragement to me during my Army years. Also my grandfather's service in World War 1 who never fully recovered, my younger brother who served many years and did 2 tours in Iraq and especially my wonderful husband who, after a lifetime of service, now gives back so much to veterans needing help after their service.

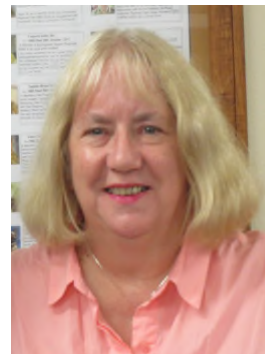
As we commemorate ANZAC Day, pages 28, 29 may be of interest, information about the Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne and the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. We must not forget.

I have included in this issue articles on the British SAS and the Australian SASR (pgs 30, 31). If this article reminds you of the Brereton Report, it should also prompt the fact that we still await the outcome of that. UK SAS soldiers are now saying "No" to being put in a situation where the use of deadly force is no longer supported or defended by the senior members of the Forces or the government, leaving the soldier personally open to law suits. The British SAS is low on numbers and recruiting is becoming difficult. Australia may now be going the same way and this may affect any future active service.

Thank you to those members who have renewed their membership, if that is not you it would help VSC to keep supporting our veterans and help to keep you in touch via Contact Front.

**As always, look after yourself** and the Veterans Support Centre is here to help in any way we can, just phone or email or call in on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and Thursdays between 1030 and 1330 or call in on Thursdays to say hello and maybe join a few friendly vets for lunch in the bistro.

Take care of yourself and those that matter to you, Jill



**Jill Opie, Editor**

We have a website - [www.veteranssupport.org.au](http://www.veteranssupport.org.au)

**Don't forget - Chuckle pages are just meant to make you chuckle, finish off the magazine with a smile. They are, as is this magazine, for adult consumption and aimed at military/veteran humour. Please feel free to ignore them.**

The opinions expressed above are mine alone and may not be the opinions of Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia, VVPPAA Inc, or contributors to Contact Front and its readers.

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The WPPAA is dedicated to the welfare of all Veterans, Peacekeepers and Peacemakers, ex-service and serving personnel and their families. If you, or someone you know, is ill and you suspect the illness may be a result of military service, please do not hesitate to consult one of our trained volunteers.

**We are here to help you and there is no cost associated with our services.**



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## **RSL NSW and that Veterans Support Fund offer**

### **President's Request**

**PLEASE read this document below - it details a NSW RSL plan to take control of donations made to VPPAA NSW Headquarters and remove the way our HQ can use the funds (our funds essentially). NSW RSL have a poor track record with this type of arrangement.**

**AND**

**RSL HQ wishes to remove all signage along the Kokoda Walk at Concord and replace it with their logo supporting the walk!**

**Mr Bill Wagner**

For a long time, NSW RSL sub branches have been sending their members to our Granville headquarters for help with their disability pension claims.

In return, NSW RSL sub branches have been making donations to our Granville office to support our work in looking after vulnerable veterans and their families.

This arrangement has worked well for some 40 years.

Recently, however, NSW RSL headquarters has decided a change was needed and established a "Veterans' Support Fund (VSF)". Granville was invited to participate in the scheme back in October 2023.

Now the sub branches must give those donations to a pool controlled by NSW RSL headquarters. The sub branches label their donations showing where they want them to go.

Seems an unnecessary step, but as long as the donations get to the desired recipient, no harm done.

But here's the catch.

Granville must sign a contract with NSW RSL headquarters with conditions that are intrusive and unacceptable. For instance, it would give NSW RSL headquarters the right to audit our Granville operation any time they chose and force us to favourably advertise the RSL as the preferred sponsor of its works.

Sounds loonie doesn't it. The donations system worked well for everyone for 40 years, now NSW RSL headquarters wants to push its way in, and control it by imposing onerous conditions on the recipient

They have tried the same game with other organisations such as Australian Veterans' Children Assistance Trust (AVCAT), who, like ourselves, have negotiated the contract in good faith, and have had to reject it, with the result 10 students missed out on receiving scholarships. The Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway has also found itself tangled with the impasse. It is sad that they too, have not received funds due to the onerous agreement imposed.

We too shall reject the contract if reasonable changes are not made. Nothing more has been heard from RSL NSW since November 2024. That makes three organisations that we know of, including us, that have not signed the RSL NSW VSF agreement. There may be others.

Sadly, we were unaware initially of this NSW RSL headquarter two-clever-by-half intervention and assumed the amount donated by the RSL sub branches specifically for Granville, a sum of \$164,000, would be sent to us without conditions. Believing this we engaged an additional paid Advocate. Now we must work out a way to pay for this addition without the newly restricted NSW RSL sub branch donations.

How could it come to this.

## The First ANZAC Day

### **1916: First Anzac Day commemorations**

On 25 April 1915 Australian troops landed at Gallipoli in Turkey. On the first anniversary of the landing, Anzac Day was observed around Australia and wherever Australian soldiers were posted. Australians have commemorated the day ever since.

#### ***Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April 1916:***

Australia's great heart is throbbing today as it has never throbbed before. For April 25 – 'Anzac Day' – is a day that will live in our hearts and in our history as long as Australia lasts.

#### **25 April 1915: landing at Gallipoli**

On 25 April 1915, 16,000 soldiers of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) landed at what is now called Anzac Cove on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey. Around 2,000 of them were killed or wounded that day. Two weeks later, various Australian newspapers published a flattering account of the landing by the British war correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett. Many Australians, then and now, saw the landing and the Australians' deeds as a rite of passage for their fledgling country. This view of Gallipoli was fostered by Charles Bean, the official Australian war correspondent and later official historian.



**Men, women and children line the streets in Brisbane to watch the procession of the 41st Battalion on Anzac Day, 1916**



**A lifeboat, carrying men of the Australian 1st Divisional Signal Company, being towed towards Anzac Cove, 1915**

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#### **Fundraising days**

In 1914 various organisations formed in Australia to raise funds for Australian troops and for European civilians affected by the war. In mid-1915 many of them began to organise fundraising days that combined patriotic displays with carnivals. The South Australian Government decided to turn the upcoming Labour Day on 13 October into a fundraising day. At that time Labour Day was a public holiday characterised by pageantry and celebration. In 1915 organisers decided that it would be called Anzac Day.

**Anzac Day badge , 1916**



By the end of December 1915 all allied forces had been evacuated from Gallipoli. It was clear that the campaign had been a complete failure. A total of 8,709 Australians had been killed, as had 2,779 New Zealanders and tens of thousands of British and French troops. Many more Turks had died defending their homeland. Many of those who survived Gallipoli were sent to the Western Front.

However, many Australians still felt that the Gallipoli landing had been an event of enormous national significance that needed to be marked in some way. Organising committees formed spontaneously in each state. The federal government recognised Gallipoli's symbolic importance. It also hoped that commemorating the campaign might improve enlistment numbers, which were starting to decline. In 1916 the Acting Prime Minister, Minister for Defence George Pearce, officially named 25 April as Anzac Day, though it was not yet a public holiday.

## The First ANZAC Day

### **Observing Anzac Day in Australia**

All states marked the occasion of Anzac Day with a commemorative service, after which new enlistees and Gallipoli veterans marched down the streets of their town or city. In many towns, a lunch was provided for veterans. Most states held festivities of some kind in the afternoon or evening.

However, in Queensland, Anzac Day 1916 was organised by the influential Anzac Day Commemoration Committee. They ensured the day revolved entirely around commemoration. The committee forbade fundraising as that would involve a festive element that they felt was inappropriate.

By contrast Victorian organisers focused on fundraising through pageantry and celebration.

In New South Wales, opinion was divided. For example, the Lord Mayor of Sydney was criticised by the families of the dead for spending £1,000 on decorative lighting for public buildings. On the other hand, returned servicemen urged the state government to make the day a festive one as they felt that was what their fallen comrades would have wanted.

### **First Anzac commemorations overseas**

In London in 1916 around 2,000 sombre Anzacs marched through the streets, cheered on by enthusiastic Britons, before attending a commemorative service at Westminster Abbey.

Troops stationed in Egypt held services for their fallen comrades. Brigadier (later General Sir) John Monash explained in a letter to his wife that after the service the morning was spent playing cricket and other games. In the afternoon the troops took part in 'a great Aquatic Carnival', followed by a skit about the landing and band concerts.

Australian and New Zealand troops marching down Whitehall to Westminster Abbey in London, Anzac Day, 1916



A soft cover booklet for the first Anzac Day 1916

### **Anzac Day since 1916**

Anzac Day has been observed every year since 1916. By the 1920s Anzac Day ceremonies were being held throughout Australia. In 1927 for the first time, every state observed some form of formal public holiday on Anzac Day.

By the mid-1930s all the rituals we now associate with the day – dawn vigils, marches, two minutes' silence, memorial services, wreath laying ceremonies and reunions – had been firmly established as part of Anzac Day culture. These rituals were disseminated by the man who devised most of them, Canon David Garland, a military chaplain and the energetic secretary of Queensland's Anzac Day Commemoration Committee. Though an Anglican, he sought to make the services ecumenical, and therefore accessible to all Australians.

Later Anzac Day also served to commemorate the lives of Australians who died in the Second World War, and all subsequent military and peacekeeping operations in which Australia has been involved.

### **Anzac Day popularity wanes**

From the 1960s to the 1980s the popularity of Anzac Day diminished. Fewer people seemed to think armed conflict was worthy of commemoration. Many felt that Anzac Day was in the firm grip of the Returned Services League (RSL), an organisation viewed as out of touch with the general population. It was also seen as an excuse for many men to get drunk and play two-up, which was only legal on Anzac Day. This behaviour was satirised in Alan Seymour's 1958 play, *The One Day of the Year*.

Since the 1980s commemorative activities on Gallipoli itself have become more common. In 1990, to mark the 75th anniversary of the campaign, Prime Minister Bob Hawke went to Gallipoli on Anzac Day, accompanied by a group of aged Gallipoli veterans. He was the first prime minister to do so. In 2007 Indigenous communities began organising Anzac Day marches to remember fallen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers.

### **Anzac Day today**

Though Anzac Day has regained much of its original status, many people feel that Australia's unofficial national day revolves around an unnecessary battle in which thousands were killed in defence of British – rather than Australian – interests. Others who have lost family members in war see it as an important way to honour their memory.

Source - National Museum Australia

## **Tale of a sniper rifle has double-barrelled ending**

Two Australian soldiers were killed and two wounded by sniper fire in the rice fields of Vietnam in January 1966.

During the contact, an injured but determined enemy sniper left a 200-metre blood trail as he crawled to reach an underground tunnel. Borrowing an Owen Gun with its stock removed from a medic, Sapper (retd) Alan Christie from 3 Field Troop volunteered to pursue and followed in complete darkness. "I could hear him ahead of me and assumed he could hear me," Mr Christie said.

He pressed on, encountering vegetation contaminated with phosphorus deliberately left every few metres by the sniper to hinder his pursuit.

Moving forward another 40 or 50 metres, Mr Christie came across the sniper's rifle in a "beautiful" leather case. "I could see he was losing a lot of blood and would soon bleed out," he said.

After 15 minutes of pursuit and no longer hearing the sniper's retreat, Mr Christie took the rifle and turned back, mindful that venturing further might force another sapper to come after him.

"I returned to the surface and to make sure the engineers retained the rifle, I vandalised it by carving 3 Field Troop (3 FD TP) on the butt with my bayonet," he said.

This took place during the joint US-Australian Operation Crimp. 'When the infantry couldn't find where the bullets came from, they called on the engineers.'

The 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), along with their attached sappers, were tasked with acting as a blocking force while two other battalions in the brigade would push the enemy towards them.

The 3 Field Troop commander, Captain Sandy MacGregor, now Colonel (retd), said that's not what happened, but instead 1RAR encountered the tunnels immediately. "When the infantry couldn't find where the bullets came from, they called on the engineers," Colonel MacGregor said.

What they discovered became known as the Cu Chi tunnels – an underground network from which the enemy fired through concealed holes, covering an area where 1RAR had initially planned to land but changed course at the last moment.

"First, we blew tear gas into the tunnels to get the enemy out," Colonel MacGregor said.

They followed with smoke grenades to expose other entrances to the tunnel complex, but the effort revealed little.

Before sending more sappers down, there was an attempt to blow the smoke and tear gas out of the tunnels.

"Our blokes went in with tear gas masks to search but started passing out. The smoke didn't clear after blowing air down the tunnels. There was not enough oxygen," Colonel MacGregor said. He explained that when someone passed out, another person would have to retrieve them. The tunnels were so tight, you couldn't get someone on the other side. They had to be dragged out, and it was bloody awful," Colonel MacGregor said.

Most of this searching took place on the days after Mr Christie retrieved and claimed the sniper rifle for the engineers.

The captured Russian Mosin-Nagant sniper rifle is the only one of its kind in Army.

Colonel MacGregor spent decades unsuccessfully petitioning for its release to the Royal Australian Engineers.

Recently, there was a compromise.

To honour the history of the 'Tunnel Rats', the Australian Army History Unit borrowed the rifle and commissioned a replica. The replica was crafted at Gaza Ridge Barracks in Bandiana, where the model maker spent hours outside the armoury, meticulously casting resin and perfecting every detail.

The unveiling was held at the Australian Army Museum of Military Engineering (AAMME), Holsworthy, on December 5, 2024, attended by Colonel MacGregor, Mr Christie and more than 200 civilians, veterans and Army personnel, with the replica and the original rifle on display.

It had been 58 years since Colonel MacGregor and Mr Christie last saw the rifle.



## Tale of a sniper rifle has double-barrelled ending



Above - Australian Vietnam War veterans Colonel (Retd) Sandy MacGregor (left) and Sapper (Retd) Alan Christie pose with the captured Russian Mosin-Nagant sniper rifle from Operation Crimp in 1966 and its replica



Above - Australian Army Vietnam War veteran (retired) Alan Christie speaks at the unveiling of the replica Russian Mosin-Nagant sniper rifle at the Australian Army museum of Military Engineering, Hosworthy



The replica Russian Mosin-Nagant sniper rifle on display during its unveiling at the Australian Army museum of Military Engineering, Holsworthy

More than 200 civilians, veterans and Army personnel gather at the unveiling of the replica Russian Mosin-Nagant sniper rifle



Source - defence news web Army, Story and Photos by Sgt Matthew Bickerton





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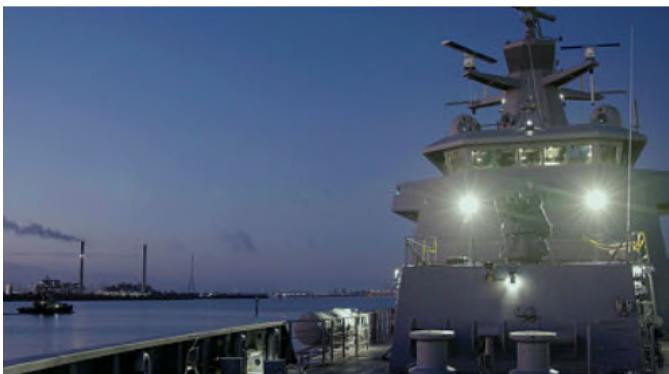
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## First Arafura class Offshore Patrol Vessel delivered



30 January 2025

Defence has accepted the first Arafura class Offshore Patrol Vessel, NUSHIP *Arafura*, for further test and evaluation ahead of delivery to the Royal Australian Navy.

NUSHIP *Arafura* is the first of class vessel delivered under project SEA 1180, built by Luerksen Australia at the Osborne Naval Shipyard in South Australia.

This project will deliver six Arafura class Offshore Patrol Vessels to Navy, with the first two constructed at Osborne. The remaining four vessels are under construction at Henderson in Western Australia.

The Arafura class vessels will be part of a wider Navy Minor War Vessel Fleet supporting civil maritime security and enhanced regional engagement in the Southwest Pacific and maritime Southeast Asia.

Deputy Secretary Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment Jim McDowell said the delivery of the first Arafura class Offshore Patrol Vessel was an important milestone in the Australian Government's investment in Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment.

"The delivery of the first of class vessel to Defence highlights Defence's commitment to working through complex projects to deliver critical capability to our Australian Defence Force, built here in Australia," Mr McDowell said.

NUSHIP *Arafura* will now sail to its homeport at HMAS *Stirling* in Western Australia, before commissioning into the Royal Australian Navy fleet later this year.

Source - defence Navy news pages



## Service above and beyond

***Nine Air Force crew members who risked their lives on a rescue mission for one of the worst aviation peacetime accidents in Air Force history have received commendations for their bravery.***

On August 28, 1972, under hazardous conditions of heavy rain, poor visibility, low fuel and difficult terrain, the crew of two RAAF Iroquois helicopters searched for survivors of a missing RAAF aircraft. A Caribou carrying 25 Papua New Guinea Army Cadets, three RAAF aviators and an Australian Army liaison officer had crashed in thick jungle while en route from Lae to Port Moresby.

After three days of searching, four survivors were sighted attempting to walk to safety in a deep ravine. The crew rescued them, with great difficulty given the conditions, and were directed by the survivors to the crash site. There, the treacherous mission began of lowering crew members into the wreck site to search for more survivors. The helicopters took turns hovering for more than 30 minutes in a down-wind condition, nose-on into a steep slope, in a small hole between and under tree cover.

Ray Morrison, one of the winch operating crewmen, further described what it took to allow the winch cable to reach the ground. "Graham settled into one of the tightest hovers I have ever seen," Mr Morrison said. "We used all the cable available and had to sit the chopper down in the trees with only a couple of feet clearance all round."

Chris Young, one of the other pilots, added: "On the following day when we took the engineers in, I was able to look up through the overhead window at major branches immediately above the main rotor."

Stan Flack, then a flight sergeant ground crew, remembered the mission with a mix of pride and sadness. "I admit that going down into a hole in the jungle at the end of a thin wire just on dark when the wind was gusting and it was raining was a very fast learning curve for me," Mr Flack said. "Looking back after 50 years, I'm proud to have been involved with all the members of both crews. I particularly have great admiration for the captains of both aircraft. Unfortunately in life there are some things that you cannot leave behind. 1972 PNG is one of mine."

While the captains of both Iroquois were awarded well-deserved Air Force Crosses (AFCs) in 1975 for their exceptional flying and captaincy skills, it is only now that all the crew members have been honoured. Tony Lea, the detachment commander, said they were lucky to have a well-balanced, professional and dedicated team. "Even then, as things unfolded during the actual rescue, the augmented crews were stretched to the limits," Mr Lea said. "The superb teamwork displayed that day was the reason for the extraordinary results achieved."



The crew of the A2-487 Iroquois, at a village near Garaina, PNG, seek witnesses to the crash of a RAAF Caribou in August 1972





## Service above and beyond

Each of the crew members received a Chief of Air Force Group Commendation at special ceremonies. In December, Deputy Chief of Air Force Air Vice-Marshal Harvey Reynolds presented six commendations on behalf of Chief of Air Force (CAF) Air Marshal Stephen Chappell.

Ken Tanswell's next of kin were presented with his commendation at RAAF Base Williamtown by Air Commodore Louise DesJardins. Neville Pratt's commendation was presented at his home in Perth by Group Captain Peter Noake. Ray Morrison's presentation was conducted at Hervey Bay by Group Captain Graeme Davies.

At the Canberra ceremony, Air Vice-Marshal Reynolds said the rescue and subsequent recovery was successfully accomplished due to the commitment of all those involved operating as a professional, coordinated and dedicated team. "The bravery and dedication they showed are in keeping with the finest traditions of the Royal Australian Air Force and the Australian Defence Force," he said.

Crew members (all retired) of the 5 Squadron Iroquois presented with a CAF Group Commendation:  
**Iroquois: A2-487** (three survivors rescued)

- Captain: Flying Officer Tony Lea; Co-Pilot: Pilot Officer Michael O'Loghlin.
- Crewmen: Leading Aircraftman Neville Pratt, Leading Aircraftman Ken Tanswell; Observer: Flight Sergeant Stan Flack.

**Iroquois: A2-490** (two survivors rescued)

- Captain: Flying Officer Graham Christian; Co-Pilot: Flying Officer Ron Bishop.
- Crewman: Leading Aircraftman Raymond Morrison; Observer: Flying Officer Chris Young.



From left - Michael O'Loghlin, Ron Bishop, Graham Christian, Stan Flack, Tony Lea, Chris Young after receiving a Chief of Air Force level 3 Group Commendation during a ceremony at 34 Squadron in Canberra  
photos by Aircraftsman Jakob Reid



Ray Morrison receives his Chief of Air Force Commendation for his role in PNG in 1972 from Group Captain Graeme Davis at the Hervey Bay RSL Club



Neville Pratt is presented with his Chief of Air Force Commendation for his role in PNG in 1972 by Group Captain Peter Noake

Source - defence Air Force web page

## China has expanded its presence in Antarctica with its new Qinling base.

### Should Australia be worried?

#### **Late last year a curious video aired on Chinese television.**

It showed a speck of concrete and steel, surrounded by frozen tundra, perched on the rocky coast of Inexpressible Island in the icy Ross Sea, deep inside Antarctica's Southern Ocean.

The video zoomed in to reveal a state-of-the-art building that almost looked like an ice-bound resort, replete with ocean views and Scandi-style timber furniture. Outside, temperatures sat well below minus 40 degrees Celsius while insulated heating systems kept the chill at bay.

The building can accommodate around 80 residents, year round. One of them, Zhun He, noted how small the rooms are.

"This is our summer dormitory. Which is relatively compact," he says dryly, in the online video.

As he speaks, the sound of patriotic music can be heard in the background. It is a giveaway that all is not as at first, it seems.

This is not a fancy Antarctic resort. This is Qinling Station. It is China's fifth Antarctic base, and the third capable of operating 12 months a year.

#### **China's new 'treasure house of resources'**

Wang Wenbin, from the People's Republic of China's ministry of foreign affairs, told a press conference in February that China's new station "will help ... promote peace and sustainable development in Antarctica". Yet with permanent sea, air and land capabilities, enabling China to potentially monitor Australia and New Zealand communications using the Bei Dou navigation network. Qinling Station appears to be more than that.. Not only is Qingling's Antarctic location highly strategic — the frontier to Australia's back door and right next door to a permanent US station, McMurdo — but a 2009 book-length study by the Polar Research Institute of China (PRIC) described the Antarctic as a "global treasure house of resources".

China — which has rushed to invest in Antarctica since the 1980s in an effort to catch up with the West — is keenly aware of Antarctica's importance, as not just an area rich with fish, but also energy.

Staff from China's Qinling Antarctic base.

Qinling Station has access to potentially hundreds of billions of tonnes of natural gas and oil that is believed to lie beneath Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. And it has capacity to become a cornerstone of what many argue is Beijing's increasingly strategic plan to become the world's premier polar power.

Antarctic waters also host hundreds of shipping sea lanes, according to 2018 research by the University of Cambridge, further underscoring why influence in Antarctica is so closely tied to projecting global power.

"There is an increasing number of research stations in Antarctica. On one hand that's a positive development, because it shows an increasing interest in Antarctic science. And nations that want to be involved in Antarctic matters," says Shirley Scott, a professor of international law and international relations at UNSW's Australian Defence Force Academy.

On the other hand, Scott says, China has been transparent in stating that it does not want its activities restricted, particularly its resource related activities in the Antarctic region.

"It has, for example, not been keen on the development of new protected marine areas," she says.

Qinling is the new China's station at the Inexpressible Island (**ABC News: Erwin Renaldi**)



**China's Qinling Station building in Antarctica.**

## China has expanded its presence in Antarctica with its new Qinling base.

### Should Australia be worried?

#### **Australia is concerned**

There is already evidence that China has been sending more than just scientists to Antarctica and Australia's intelligence community is growing concerned.

A source inside the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) noted China's Antarctic bases can serve as platforms for powerful satellites and radar systems.

Australian intelligence agencies are aware that China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel have previously participated in Beijing's Antarctic program without their presence being reported.

This is a breach of the Antarctic Treaty, a groundbreaking legal agreement set up in 1959 that formalised the demilitarisation of the continent, splitting it into different zones and establishing the terms under which nations can operate in Antarctica.

The Antarctic Treaty was originally signed by 12 countries whose scientists had been active in the region in 1957 and 1958. It came into force in 1961 and now has 57 signatory nations, including China.

#### **But is China operating in the spirit of the Treaty?**

In 2008, six PLA personnel were sent to Zhongshan Station to build a high-frequency radar station. These radar stations are powerful enough to block US satellites that pass over southern polar areas.

In 2013, China's Antarctic expedition included a PLA satellite expert who installed new BeiDou-2 GPS systems that utilise advanced global positioning system technology.

Scott says that while the Antarctic Treaty system has been a robust mechanism guaranteeing peace, and Antarctica's demilitarisation, since it was established, a rush on resources by any major country could undermine its purpose. "Antarctica is currently governed by the Antarctic Treaty system but underpinning that system is an agreement to disagree regarding sovereignty claims on the continent," she says.

#### **China is not alone**

However China is not the only country interested in the resources Antarctica has to offer.

"It would be unhelpful to think that it was only China interested in accessing those resources," Scott says.

Global powers have long tussled over dominance in Antarctica. Within a decade of the end of World War II, the United States and what was then the USSR were casting their eyes towards control of the Antarctic continent.

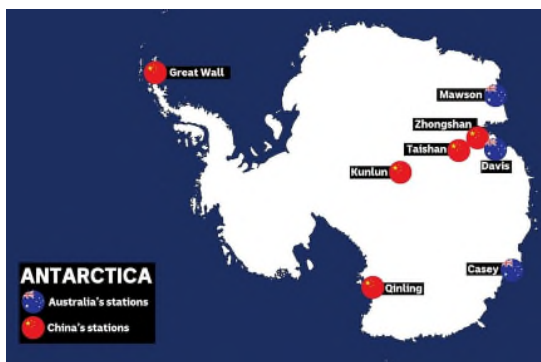
It was a goal that the British already knew would not be easy.

Scott and his team were attempting to match Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen whose party of five became the first to reach the South Pole the previous year, on December 14, 1911.

The deaths of Scott and his team highlighted the dangers of Imperial competition in the name of science, and warned of a deadly side to the peaceful continent.

By 1945, a new era of competition between the USSR and its ideological enemy, the United States, had begun, according to historian Richard Overy in his book *Blood and Ruins*.

China's Polar Research Institute (PRIC) as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were approached as part of this story. Neither responded to requests for comment.



Left- Qinling is the new China's station at the Inexpressible Island (ABC News: Erwin Renaldi)  
Right - An excerpt from the US's 1957 Operations Plan for Antarctica. (ABC News)

Contd next page



## China has expanded its presence in Antarctica with its new Qinling base. Should Australia be worried?

Contd from  
previous page

Declassified US documents dated to the mid-1950s are critical to understanding how the West's approach to Antarctica changed.

As far back as 1957, the US considered Antarctica a potential future battleground. Simply titled 'Operations plan for Antarctica', this document revealed secret plans by the US to beef up permanent scientific bases on the icy continent.

The strategy was to ease access for the US and its allies to Antarctica's natural resources and the bases were considered "essential in terms of the United States national interests".

"Access by the United States with friendly powers to the natural resources of the Antarctic." Permanent US scientific based were there "lest US rights in Antarctica be diminished by the year-round presence of other nations". The US government invested heavily in the region.

The CIA conducted extensive, detailed military geography studies that investigated oceanography, tides, water levels, coastal geography and even an investigation of human survival in Antarctic waters. The work was published in a 133 page CIA study.

It would seem the ground was set for a new phase of nation-state competition in Antarctica.

The 1959 Antarctic Treaty attempted to smooth all that by enshrining Antarctica could be used only for peaceful purposes, freedom of scientific investigation would be maintained and any scientific observations and results would be freely exchanged.

These articles have successfully prevented competition in the Antarctic from spilling into conflict, and have maintained peace on the Antarctic continent even at the height of the Cold War from 1945 to 1991.

### **Why Western spies are worried about China's Antarctica play.**

#### **'A free-for-all jungle'**

Yet, global tensions have never left the frozen continent. Since 2000 the US (and its allies) as well as China have emerged as the globe's grand strategic competitors, with tensions in Taiwan and the South China Sea causing concern.

Dr Phillip Law, a former director of the Australian Antarctic Division, had warned since the 1970s that Antarctica could become a flashpoint. Law argued that if countries don't stick to the rules in Antarctica "it will be a free-for-all jungle". "The big boys with the biggest resources, and the most capital, will just go down there and go for their lives," he said.

China's Polar Research Institute (PRIC) as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were approached as part of this story. Neither responded to requests for comment.



Robert Scott, standing centre in front of the flag, led Britain's ill-fated second expedition to reach the South Pole between 1910 and 1912. (Henry Bowers Public Domain)

Source - ABC News, images marked by source



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## Letters, flowers and photographs left at Australian War Memorial sculpture pay tribute to veterans and their families

"Ten years have passed and the grief and pain is still as new today as it was then."

"I miss your smile, that cheeky glint in your eye, your sense of humour every day."

These words are taken from letters left at the Australian War Memorial's *For Every Drop Shed in Anguish* sculpture.



Australian War Memorial sculpture *For Every Drop Shed in Anguish* contains 18 marble 'droplets' to represent the blood, sweat and tears shed by veterans and their families. (ABC News: Simon Beardsell)

The sculpture, designed to represent the impact of service on families, was officially dedicated a year ago. Since then, it has become a place of tribute and commemoration, with people leaving flowers, photos, medallions and letters to those lost in the sculpture's nooks and crannies.

"It is wonderful to see that it has been taken up as a place of ritual, that people can pay tribute but can have a private moment in a very public space like this," sculpture creator Alex Seton said.

"As an artist, one can hope to make a place and give the gift of a small amount of poetry, but that it gets embraced at all is really gratifying."

Seton had, of course, hoped that his sculpture would become a place of reflection, but hadn't expected people to leave behind such personal items.

"I don't think we'd predicted or anticipated that there would be such personal acts of tribute, very specifically, you know, photographs and even medals," he said, recalling an evening he visited the sculpture during a full moon.

"I saw more tributes put around the work [and it] really hit me in the heart, and it's the first time I actually shed a tear around the work."

Not wanting them to be left to deteriorate, the Australian War Memorial (AWM) decided to preserve some of the items left at the sculpture.

They have since been added to the national collection, held in the memorial's archive.

Sculptor Alex Seton says he was happily surprised to see the sculpture had become a place people could pay personal tribute to veterans. (ABC News: Simon Beardsell)





## Letters, flowers and photographs left at Australian War Memorial sculpture pay tribute to veterans and their families

These sunflowers were left at the base of one of the droplets.  
(Supplied: Ian Roach, Australian War Memorial)



Above - A collection of notes, poppies and tags left in the For Every Drop Shed in Anguish sculpture. (ABC News: Simon Beardsell)

"You can't just leave them there because they're not going to age well and that won't be a good reflection of the intent that they were left with," Anthea Gunn, senior curator of art with the AWM, said.

"But you can't throw them out and you also don't know who left them."

### 'Emotionally impactful' project leaves a legacy

The *For Every Drop Shed in Anguish* sculpture was commissioned by the AWM as a way to honour those who carry the burden of service in unseen ways.

"Veterans and families came to the memorial and said, 'We don't feel like there's a place for us here at the memorial', especially those that had lost someone to suicide," Dr Gunn said.

"It's impacted families for decades ... and the nation hasn't always done a great job of recognising that."

The memorial's Senior Curator of Art, Anthea Gunn, says votive items left at the statue that can be preserved will be added to the national collection and held in the memorial's archive. (ABC News: Simon Beardsell)  
*For Every Drop Shed in Anguish* features 18 marble 'droplets' to represent the blood, sweat and tears shed by veterans and their families.

The sculpture's impact has been far reaching, with visitors regularly walking among the stones and even meditating among the marble droplets.

An image of the sculpture has even been used on the front page of all nine volumes of the findings from the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.

"[We're] seeing those signs that this community [views] this work as representing their experience," Ms Gunn said.

"To see us being able to do that effectively is incredibly satisfying professionally, but also just personally.

"I don't think I've worked on a project that's been more emotionally impactful on me."



Anthea Gunn, senior curator of art with the AWM



Above right - Known as votive items, things like personalised letters and cards to those lost, paper or porcelain poppies, photographs of people in uniform, and service medallions, have been left among the domes. (ABC News: Simon Beardsell)

Source - ABC News Feb 2025, Article by James Vyvner, photos from Simon Beardsell, ABC News; sunflower image by : Ian Roach, Australian War Memorial

**80 YEARS ON - What Happened After the Liberation of Auschwitz**  
**Of the few who survived the Nazi camp complex, a handful returned to ensure the site couldn't be swept away into historical memory**

It was January 1945, and fires burned at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Not at the crematoria where, at the height of the Nazi concentration and extermination camp's operations, an average of 6,000 Jews were gassed and cremated each day—those had been blown up at the command of SS officers preparing the camps' evacuation. This time, the Nazis had set ablaze their prisoners' looted possessions. The fires raged for days.

Once, the sprawling 40-camp complex now known as Auschwitz was characterized by grim record-keeping and brutal order. With chilling efficiency, the architects of the Holocaust orchestrated processes of deportation, detention, experimentation, enslavement and murder. Between 1940 and 1945, approximately 1.1 million Jews, Poles, Roma people, Soviet POWs and others were killed at the Auschwitz camps. Now, as Soviet troops marched westward through occupied Poland, the SS sought to dismantle their killing machine.

The Red Army's arrival meant liberation, the camps' end. But what came after the murders finally stopped?

In the final days of the camp, the commanding SS officers "evacuated" 56,000 prisoners, most of them Jews. Leaving Auschwitz, however, did not mean the end of their ordeal. Instead, the SS ordered their charges into columns and marched them into the miserable winter. At first, the prisoners went on foot, monitored by officers who shot those who fell behind or tried to stay behind. Malnourished and inadequately clothed, the marchers were subject to random massacre. Eventually, they were shipped back toward Germany in open train cars. Up to 15,000 of the former camp inhabitants died on the death march.

"The Nazis wanted to continue to use those tens of thousands of prisoners for forced labor," says Steven Luckert, senior program curator at the Levine Family Institute for Holocaust Education at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and former chief curator of the museum's permanent collection. "Those prisoners got dispersed over all of the remaining camps."

Back at Auschwitz, where by some estimates 9,000 prisoners remained, only a few SS guards maintained their watch. Most of the prisoners were too sick to move. "There was no food, no water, no medical care," says Luckert. "The staff had all gone. The prisoners] were just left behind to die."

Among the last acts of the SS were to set fire to huge piles of camp documents, a last-ditch effort to hide the evidence. "They understood the enormity of the crimes they committed," Luckert says.

A surreal quiet fell on Auschwitz in late January, a period filled with confusion and suffering. Then, Soviet scouts stumbled into Auschwitz-Birkenau. The liberators had not intended to go toward the camp; though Soviet premier Joseph Stalin had heard about its existence in intelligence communications and conversations with other Allied leaders, Red Army commanders had no idea it existed. "It had no military or economic value from a military viewpoint," retired Soviet general Vasily Petrenko, who in 1945 was a colonel who helped liberate the camp, told the AP years later.

The Soviets had liberated Majdanek, a Nazi concentration and extermination camp, in July 1944. There, they found a working camp that had been only partially destroyed during its hasty evacuation. It was the first Allied concentration camp liberation, and in the months to follow, the Allies would encounter many more camps as they squeezed the German army from the West and the East.

As Soviet scouts, then troops, arrived at the Auschwitz complex, bewildered prisoners greeted them with tears and embraces. Anna Polshchikova, a Russian prisoner, later recalled the gruff confusion of the first soldiers. "'And what are you doing here?' they inquired in an unfriendly manner. We were baffled and did not know what to say. We looked wretched and pathetic, so they relented and asked again, in a kinder tone. 'And what is over there?' they said, pointing northwards. 'Also a concentration camp.' 'And beyond that?' 'Also a camp.' 'And beyond the camp?' 'Over there in, the forest, are the crematoria, and beyond the crematoria, we don't know.'"

**ARBEIT MACH FREI  
WORK MAKES ONE FREE**

Auschwitz I, the main camp,  
Poland (1940-1945) Visible  
old Austrian and later Polish  
Army barracks dated before  
1939  
Source - flickr.com





**80 YEARS ON - What Happened After the Liberation of Auschwitz**  
**Of the few who survived the Nazi camp complex, a handful returned to ensure the site couldn't be swept away into historical memory**

The first Soviet troops to arrive moved on toward other targets, but the Red Army soon took over the camps, establishing field hospitals on site. Polish Red Cross workers—volunteer doctors, nurses and paramedics who just months earlier had participated in the Warsaw Uprising—assisted in the recovery too. “The situation was desperate,” recalled Józef Bellert, the physician who organized the group. “We could barely administer the most urgent medical aid.”

As they got to work, they saw body parts strewn around ad hoc cremation pits used after the SS demolished Auschwitz-Birkenau’s crematoria; human excrement and ashes were everywhere. Survivors suffered from malnutrition, bedsores, frostbite, gangrene, typhus, tuberculosis and other ailments. And though the SS had attempted to destroy all evidence of mass murder, they had left massive storerooms filled with shoes, dishes, suitcases, and human hair. “It was chaos,” says Jonathan Huener, a Holocaust historian at the University of Vermont.

Once established, the Red Cross staff and local volunteers responded as best they could to the survivors’ needs, navigating a cacophony of different languages. They diagnosed patients, gave them identification documents and clothing, and sent over 7,000 letters to help the patients locate family and friends around the world. “Some of the sick did not realize that they were now free people,” recalled Tadeusz Kusiński, a Red Cross orderly. At least 500 of the 4,500 patients died, many from re-feeding syndrome or a lack of sanitary facilities.

Those who could leave trickled out on their own or in small groups. “There were fears that the Germans would return, which for us would only mean death,” said Otto Klein, a Jewish adolescent who had survived medical experiments by infamous Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele along with his twin brother, Ferenc. Together with a group of 36 people, most of them twins, the Kleins headed toward Kraków, and eventually out of Poland, on foot. Not everyone chose to go: Others stayed in the camp to help former prisoners, including about 90 former prisoners who gave vital assistance to the Soviet and Red Cross hospitals.

Auschwitz had been liberated, but the war still plodded on, shaping the massive camp complex. The camp was still a prison, this time for thousands of German POWs the Soviets forced to do labor that echoed that of the original Auschwitz prisoners. Along with some Polish people imprisoned for declaring ethnic German status during the war, the German POWs maintained the site, tore apart barracks and dismantled the nearby IG Farben synthetic rubber plant where tens of thousands of prisoners had been forced to work as slave labour. “Some of the barracks were simply dismantled by members of the local population who needed wood,” Huener says. Though the historian in him laments the deconstruction of so much of the camp, he says it was also “understandable in a period of tremendous deprivation and need.”

Over the months that followed the camps’ liberation, many former prisoners returned seeking family members and friends. And a small group of survivors came back to stay.

“The earliest stewards of the site were former prisoners,” explains Huener. In his book *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979*, Huener tells the story of how the site went from operational death camp to memorial. Most of the cadre of men were Polish political prisoners, and none of them had experience with museums or historic preservation. But even during their imprisonments, they had decided Auschwitz should be preserved.

“We did not know if we would survive, but one did speak of a memorial site,” wrote Kazimierz Smoleń, an Auschwitz survivor who later became the memorial site’s director. “One just did not know what form it would take.”



An aerial reconnaissance photo of Auschwitz 1 camp  
Source nizkor.org USHMM photo archives

Cont'd next page

**80 YEARS ON - What Happened After the Liberation of Auschwitz**  
**Of the few who survived the Nazi camp complex, a handful returned to ensure the site couldn't be swept away into historical memory**

Smoleń returned to Auschwitz after the war, drawn back to the camp by his desire to tell the world about the horrors committed there. He later described his return—and his 35-year tenure as the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's director—as “some type of sacrifice; an obligation for having survived.”

For Smoleń and others determined to preserve Auschwitz, the site was both a massive graveyard and essential evidence of Nazi war crimes. But for others, it was a place to continue the plunder. Despite a protective guard, which included former prisoners, looters stole artefacts and searched through ash pits for gold tooth fillings and other valuables. “Gleaners, or as they were called at the time, ‘diggers,’ searched through the ashes of all the Nazi extermination camps in Poland for many years after the war, looking for pieces of jewellery and dental gold overlooked by the Nazis,” write historians Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzinska Gross.

Huener says that there is no comprehensive answer to the question of how many of those early museum workers were Jews, or why they came back to Auschwitz. “Poland was inhospitable to Jews after the war, yet there were tens of thousands who did return to Poland, and tens of thousands who remained.” They did so despite a resurgence of anti-Semitism and violent incidents like the Kielce pogrom, in which 42 Jews were killed by massacred by townspeople who blamed Jews for a local kidnapping. Other Jews who survived Auschwitz fled Poland after being liberated, living in displaced persons camps, scattering into a worldwide diaspora, or emigrating to British Palestine.

The museum staff lived in former SS offices and did everything from groundskeeping to rudimentary preservation work to exhibit design. They staved off looters, acted as impromptu tour guides to the hundreds of thousands of visitors who streamed toward the camp, and tried their best to preserve everything that remained of the camp.

Despite the lack of modern preservation technology and questions about how best to present evidence of years of mass murder, the former prisoners who fought to preserve Auschwitz succeeded. The most notorious of the over 40,000 sites of systematic Nazi atrocities would be passed on to future generations. Other sites would fare differently, depending on the extent of their destruction by the Nazis and the deterioration of time.

When visitors in the 1940s and '50s walked beneath Auschwitz I's iconic “Arbeit Macht Frei” sign and into the camp, they were faced with buildings that looked much as they did during the Holocaust. The museum's directive was to offer historical proof of the Germans' crime—a mostly silent endeavour that left visitors in tears or simply speechless.

The exhibitions have changed over the years, but Auschwitz still inspires speechlessness. Last year, 2.3 million people visited the memorial, where 340 guides offer tours in 20 different languages. Now, Auschwitz has a state-of-the-art preservation laboratory, an extensive archive, and conducts education and outreach around the world. The end of Auschwitz was the beginning of a monumental task of preservation and commemoration that continues to this day.

But for Luckert, it's important not to let the end overshadow the beginning. “Sometimes instead of focusing on the end, we need to look at how it got there,” he says. “What was it that led Nazi Germany to create such a symbol of inhumanity, a place of infamy? In a matter of a few short years, it transformed a sleepy Silesian town into the greatest site of mass killing the world has ever known.” Seventy-five years after the Holocaust, he fears, it would be all too easy to get on the road to Auschwitz again.



Gate of Auschwitz II-Birkenau, German Death Camp, symbol of the Holocaust, viewed from inside the camp. The image shows the rail line and Judenrampe that were in operation Source - wikipedia

Source article - Erin Blakemore, Correspondent, Smithsonian Magazine, January 27, 2020

## Last Truck delivered

The Land 121 medium heavy truck program, which has been running for more than a decade, has delivered its final batch of Rheinmetall MAN military vehicles.

The program has provided the ADF with a diverse range of more than 3500 medium and heavy trucks, 2200 trailers, 1000 modules and 2000 flat-racks, including recovery vehicles and integrated load-handling systems. The trucks come with various modules and configurations to distribute fuel, water and general stores. Director-General Platforms Army Brigadier Colin Bassett said the vehicles provided soldiers greater mobility and, where required, armour.

"The improved armoured protection against blast and small arms weapons effects ensures our soldiers have the best chance at success and returning home to their families," Brigadier Bassett said.

"Since the introduction of this fleet of vehicle, they have been used to great effect to support Australia's regional communities after natural disasters, including Operation Bushfire Assist and the Townsville floods in 2019 and more recently.

"These vehicles have proven their reliability in various environments, and provide the government options to deploy them in a wide range of situations, from warlike situations to humanitarian aid and assistance to the civil community."

Director General Land Vehicle Systems Brigadier John-Paul Ouvrier said the program was completed on time and on budget.

"More than \$650 million has been invested in Australian defence industry whilst delivering the medium heavy capability, with ongoing annual sustainment valued at approximately \$60 million," Brigadier Ouvrier said.

"This investment not only supports the ADF's capabilities but has also provided a boost to Australia's local defence industry."



The delivery of the last trucks in the Land 121 medium heavy vehicle programme are received

An Australian Army HX77 vehicle is secured to a flatbed before being lifted onto a rail wagon. The Land 121 fleet was moved via rail from Adelaide to Darwin. Photo Cpl Shane Kelly



Australian defence industry personnel and Rheinmetall MAN Military Vehicles staff celebrate the delivery of the last trucks in the Land 121 medium heavy vehicle program

Source - author Eamon McCaughan, Defence - Army



## REPORTS

### President 's Report April 2025

Members,

By the time you receive the newsletter Easter will have been done and dusted. I hope during the Easter period you enjoyed the time with family and friends and plenty of chocolate eating.

The Vietnam Veterans Conference that I attended in March was held at Ettalong. Breakfast and lunch were catered for by the Ettalong Vietnam Veterans Branch which now incorporates the Gosford office which has now closed. Thanks to those Branch members that looked after us during this meeting.



**President - Bill Wagner**

During the Conference the majority of the conversation was the concern of falling membership which is affecting all Branches with the possibility of one Branch closing due to the membership of that Branch not wishing to take over the nominated positions. Another issue is the processing of claims by DVA. Although DVA have taken steps with extra staff, it still appears to have not made the processing of claims any quicker. If you know of anyone who is trying to submit their own claims, advise them not to and to use a fully trained Advocate who does not charge for their services. There are a few around who charge for this service which I think is going to become a thing of the future. As far as our office is concerned I think this will be a step in the wrong direction as claim processing will become too clinical.

I have included in my report a printout from Granville about the support it normally receives from RSL. After reading the report I believe this is the thin edge of the wedge to erase the function of the Vietnam Veterans. This is my opinion and my opinion only. I hope I am wrong.

We usually have a representative from DVA to talk at these Conferences. This year the DVA representative was unable to attend and instead there was a representative from Open Arms informing everything that is available to Veterans regarding support for all family members.

The Advocates in our office have a constant workload which includes a large number of service personnel from later conflicts, not just us old blokes. Keep up the good work, thanks to the Advocacy team.

Our Thursday get-togethers are still going to give the gents a safe place to let off steam, fancy trying to save a problem with this lot! Still a great laugh.

The office is going strong and from all reports from the community their work is very much appreciated.

To all members, hope you are keeping well.

Till next time,

**Bill Wagner**



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## REPORTS

Veterans Support Centre AGM is set for Thursday 29th May at 1100 hrs.

All financial members are entitled to attend. Committee positions will become vacant and new nominations taken as well as discussion on our way forward.

*Lunch will be in the Bistro after the meeting for any who wish to gather (pay*

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### Membership Officers Report (MAY 2025)

This is my quarterly report to bring you up to date regarding membership matters for 2025.

Sub-Branch Membership is based on the **Calendar Year**, so membership renewals for 2025 are now due.

As at 12 April we have **42** financial members for this year.

**Note** that for every membership payment of \$30.00 made here at your local sub-branch, **\$12.50 is retained by your sub-branch for local use.**

To those who have continued their membership again for this year, thank you!

Please stay safe and well!



Trevor Morrow

Membership Officer



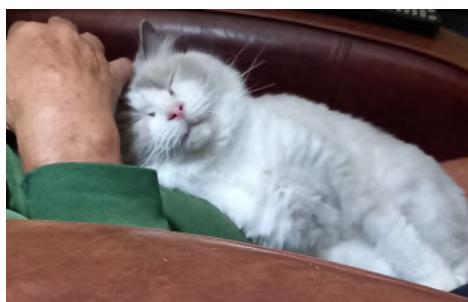
Membership Officer  
Trevor Morrow

### Compensation Advocates Report



Treasurer  
Peter Dorman

No report available



Compensation Advocate  
Mike Opie and furry friend



Compensation  
Advocate  
Glen Peterson

There is no Compensation Advocates Report this issue as they are using all of their time and energy fighting for veterans rights and entitlements.  
Contact them if you want help or advice, details on page 3.

## The Last of The Few

### 'Last Of The Few' pilot celebrates 105th birthday at UK Embassy

The last known Battle of Britain pilot, Group Captain John 'Paddy' Hemingway DFC celebrated his 105<sup>th</sup> birthday at the British Embassy in Dublin Ireland. The event was marked with the unveiling by Ms Elin Burns (Deputy UK Ambassador to Ireland), of portraits reflecting different stages in Gp Capt Hemingway's life, which were painted by British artist Dan Llywelyn Hall.

Representatives from the Royal Air Force and Paddy's family were hosted at the British Embassy.

The last surviving Battle of Britain pilot, John "Paddy" Hemingway, has died, on 17th March 2025, at the age of 105.

Mr Hemingway, who was originally from Dublin, joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) as a teenager before World War Two. At 21, he was a fighter pilot in the Battle of Britain, a three-month period when air force personnel defended the skies against a large-scale assault by the German air force, the Luftwaffe.

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer paid tribute to Mr Hemingway, saying his courage and those of all RAF pilots had "helped end WWII and secure our freedom".

The Prince of Wales also paid tribute, saying that "we owe so much to Paddy and his generation for our freedoms today".

Prince William added that "their bravery and sacrifice will always be remembered".

The Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland Emma Little-Pengelly described Mr Hemingway as "an absolute hero". Speaking in the Northern Ireland Assembly she said: "My goodness when you read his obituary, the things that he experienced." She added that the sacrifices of Mr Hemingway's generation were "absolutely incredible".

Those who fought in the three-and-a-half-month battle came to be known as "The Few" after a speech by the then Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill. "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few," he said of their sacrifices in battle.

In a statement, the RAF said that Mr Hemingway had "passed away peacefully" on Monday.

The pilot's squadron shot down 90 enemy aircraft during an 11-day period in May 1940, and provided fighter cover during the Battle of France. During the war, Gp Capt Hemingway was shot down four times. During dogfights – or one-on-one aerial combats - in August 1940, Mr Hemingway was forced to bail out of his Hurricane single-seat fighter on two occasions, landing in the sea off the coast of Essex and in marshland. The wreckage of his Hurricane was recovered in 2019 with the control column and the gun-button still set to "fire".

In July 1941, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross - awarded to RAF personnel for an act or acts of valour, courage or devotion to duty while flying on active operations. On the way to receive his medal from the King, he was forced to escape from a Blenheim aircraft, which crashed during take-off.

While serving with the 85 Squadron in RAF Hunsdon, Hertfordshire, Mr Hemingway was forced to bail out of his Havoc night fighter at 600ft (183m) due to instrument failure in bad weather. He broke his hand on the tail section and his parachute failed to open, with the chute catching on the branches of a tree.

He was forced to bail out a fourth time while fighting near Ravenna, Italy, when his Spitfire was hit multiple times. He landed in enemy territory, and made contact with Italian citizens, who helped him back to the Allies.



Mr Hemingway at the unveiling by Ms Elin Burns (Deputy UK Ambassador to Ireland), of portraits reflecting different stages in Gp Capt Hemingway's life, which were painted by British artist Dan Llywelyn Hall.



John 'Paddy' Hemingway was the last surviving member of 'The Few'



## The Last of The Few



Speaking to BBC News NI in 2023, Gp Capt Hemingway said he had never looked for fame for being part of "The Few". "I don't think we ever assumed greatness of any form," he said. "We were just fighting a war which we were trained to fight."

Mr Hemingway said that his biggest regret was the loss of friends, in particular that of Richard "Dickie" Lee in August 1940.

The RAF said that Mr Hemingway's passing marked "the end of an era and a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made by those who fought for freedom during World War II". "His courage in the face of overwhelming odds demonstrated his sense of duty and the importance of British resilience."

Mr Hemingway "always had a twinkle in his eyes as he recalled the fun times with colleagues in France and London", the statement said. "This quiet, composed, thoughtful and mischievous individual may not have wanted to be the last of 'The Few', but he embodied the spirit of all those who flew sorties over this green and pleasant land," it added.

Chief of RAF Air Staff Sir Rich Knighton said he had spent time with Mr Hemingway in Dublin earlier this year. "Paddy was an amazing character whose life story embodies all that was and remains great about the Royal Air Force."

### Distinguished Flying Cross



Obverse of the decoration

Type	Military decoration
Awarded for	<i>... exemplary gallantry during active operations against the enemy in the air.</i> <sup>[1]</sup>
Presented by	United Kingdom and <a href="#">Commonwealth</a>
Eligibility	British, Commonwealth, and allied forces
Status	Currently awarded
Established	3 June 1918
Total	To 2017: 22,322 crosses; 1,737 bars



Ribbon: No bars

1918-1919: horizontal alternate white and purple stripes

1919-current: Diagonal alternate white and purple stripes

#### Order of Wear

Next (higher)	<a href="#">Military Cross</a> <sup>[2]</sup>
Next (lower)	<a href="#">Air Force Cross</a> <sup>[2]</sup>
Related	<a href="#">Distinguished Flying Medal</a>

### American Involvement

It was the summer of 1940, and World War II had been raging for nearly a year. Buoyed by his successes on the Continent, Hitler was now planning an invasion of England to seal Europe's fate. Though the United States was still a neutral country, a few Americans decided they couldn't remain on the sidelines. They joined Britain's Royal Air Force to defend the country - with the future of civilization hanging in the balance. The Few tells the dramatic and unforgettable story of these Americans who defied their own country's neutrality laws and risked their very citizenship to fight side-by-side with England's finest pilots. Flying the lethal and elegant Spitfire, they became "knights of the air" who, with minimal training but plenty of guts, duelled the skilled and fearsome aces of Germany's Luftwaffe. By October 1940, they had helped England win the greatest air battle in the history of aviation. Some five years later, at war's end, just one of them would be alive. Winston Churchill once said famously of all those who fought in the Battle of Britain, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." These daring Americans were the few among the "few."

The Few: The American "Knights of the Air" Who Risked Everything to Save Britain in the Summer of 1940,  
6 November 2012  
by Alex Kershaw (Author)

Sources - BBC UK News Northern Ireland by Jessica Lawrence; photos by RAF UK; "American Involvement" item from ebay; Distinguished Flying Cross details from wikipedia



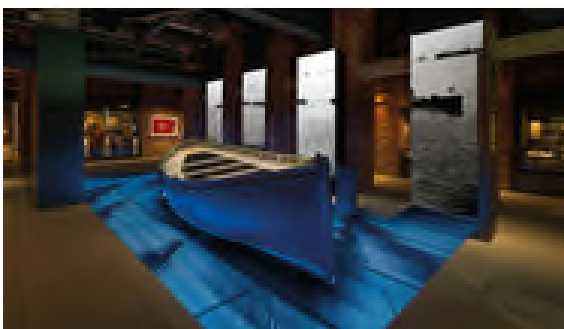
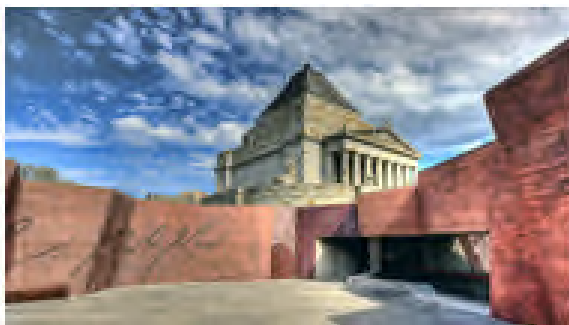
## The Shrine of Remembrance

The **Shrine of Remembrance** (commonly referred to as **The Shrine**) is a war memorial in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, located in Kings Domain on St Kilda Road. It was built to honour the men and women of Victoria who served in World War I, but now functions as a memorial to all Australians who have served in any war. It is a site of annual observances for Anzac Day (25 April) and Remembrance Day (11 November), and is one of the largest war memorials in Australia.

Designed by architects Phillip Hudson and James Wardrop, both World War I veterans, the Shrine is in classical style, based on the Tomb of Mausolus at Halicarnassus and the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. The crowning element at the top of the ziggurat roof references the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates. Built from Tynong granite, the Shrine originally consisted only of the central sanctuary surrounded by the ambulatory. The sanctuary contains the marble Stone of Remembrance, upon which is engraved the words "Greater love hath no man" (John 15:13); once per year, on 11 November at 11 a.m. (Remembrance Day), a ray of sunlight shines through an aperture in the roof to light up the word "Love" in the inscription. Beneath the sanctuary lies the crypt, which contains a bronze statue of a soldier father and son, and panels listing every unit of the Australian Imperial Force.

The Shrine went through a prolonged process of development, which began in 1918 with an initial proposal to build a Victorian memorial. Two committees were formed, the second of which ran a competition for the memorial's design. The winner was announced in 1922. However, opposition to the proposal, led by Keith Murdoch and the *Herald Sun*, forced the governments of the day to rethink the design. A number of alternatives were proposed, the most significant of which was the Anzac Square and cenotaph proposal of 1926. In response, General Sir John Monash used the 1927 Anzac Day march to garner support for the Shrine, and finally won the support of the Victorian government later that year. The foundation stone was laid on 11 November 1927, and the Shrine was officially dedicated on 11 November 1934.

For 90 years, the Victorian Police have stood watch over the Shrine. This month, we mark 90 years of the Victoria Police Shrine Guard. To honour this milestone, a special parade will take place before our Last Post service. (March 2025)



Sources - Wikipedia, visitmelbourne.com, Victoria Police

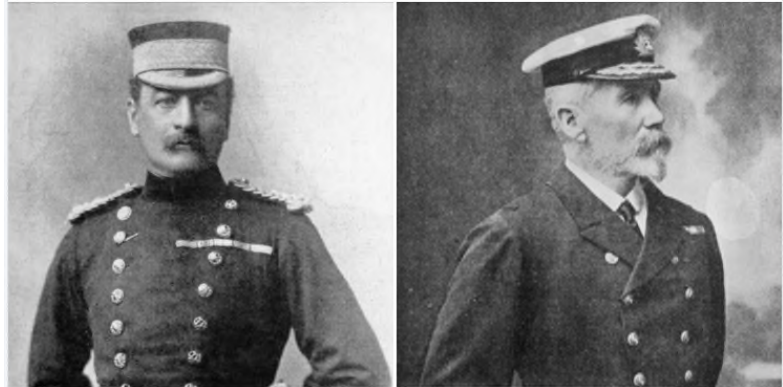
## The Australian War Memorial

2025 marks 124 years of service. With the federation of Australia in 1901, the former colonies united their naval and military forces. The newly created Commonwealth Naval Forces (CNF) and Commonwealth Military Forces (CMF) evolved over time to become our modern Navy and Army. Today, and everyday, we honour the service members—past and present—who have dedicated themselves to war and peacekeeping efforts in our armed forces.

Pictured here are portraits of General Sir Edward Hutton, First Commander in Chief of the Commonwealth Military Forces and Rear Admiral Sir William Rooke Creswell, a senior naval officer and the driving force behind the establishment of the RAN. Images courtesy of the Australian War Memorial

Images courtesy of the Australian War Memorial

1. AWM A03735
2. AWM 106182



The Australian War Memorial is a unique national institution that combines a shrine, a museum, and an archive. It is dedicated to telling the stories of the men and women who have served the nation in war, conflict, and peacekeeping operations, both at home and abroad.

Through a diverse collection of exhibitions, artworks, large technology objects, and personal records, the Memorial plays an important role in shaping how Australia's history and national identity are understood by Australians and international visitors alike.

The daily Last Post Ceremony invites visitors to honour one of the more than 103,000 individuals listed on the Roll of Honour who died as a result of their service. This moving tribute shares their personal story and provides a quiet moment of reflection and acknowledgment of their sacrifice.

A range of guided tours and self-guided tours, including free daily tours which go for 80 minutes, are on offer to help visitors make the most out of their visit.

The Australian War Memorial is the recipient of multiple tourism awards and recognitions, including ranking as the number one attraction in Canberra and as one of the top 10 free tourist attractions in the world for 2023.



The Australian War Memorial is a unique national institution that combines a shrine, a museum, and an archive. It is dedicated to telling the stories of the men and women who have served the nation in war, conflict, and peacekeeping operations, both at home and abroad.

Sources - Australian War Memorial web pages; Item attributed to © Copyright State Government of Victoria, [visitcanberra.com](http://visitcanberra.com)



## SAS soldiers (British)

The **Special Air Service (SAS)** is a special forces unit of the British Army. It was founded as a regiment in 1941 by David Stirling, and in 1950 it was reconstituted as a corps. The unit specialises in a number of roles including counter-terrorism, hostage rescue, direct action and special reconnaissance. Much of the information about the SAS is highly classified, and the unit is not commented on by either the British government or the Ministry of Defence due to the secrecy and sensitivity of its operations.

The corps currently consists of the 22 Special Air Service Regiment, which is the regular component, as well as the 21 Special Air Service Regiment (Artists) (Reserve) and the 23 Special Air Service Regiment (Reserve), which are reserve units, all under the operational command of United Kingdom Special Forces (UKSF). Its sister unit is the Royal Navy's Special Boat Service, which specialises in maritime counter-terrorism. Both units are under the operational control of the Director Special Forces.

The Special Air Service traces its origins to 1941 and the Second World War. It was reformed as part of the Territorial Army in 1947, named the *21st Special Air Service Regiment (Artists Rifles)*. The 22nd Special Air Service Regiment, which is part of the regular army, gained fame and recognition worldwide after its televised rescue of all but two of the hostages held during the 1980 Iranian Embassy siege.



SAS patrol in North Africa  
1943 - Greydynamics



SAS troops having been dropped by  
helicopter into an Afghan valley,  
c2006 (© Crown)



Falkland  
Island War  
1982 -

Left, right  
and below





## **SAS soldiers (British) threaten strike action if deployed to Ukraine - unless guaranteed they will not face future prosecution for lethal force**

SAS soldiers are threatening to go 'on strike' if they are deployed to Ukraine unless they receive assurances they will not face future prosecution for using lethal force.

The rebellion follows a coroner's court ruling that the Special Forces were not justified in using lethal force against four IRA members in a 1992 ambush, and on the back of an ongoing public inquiry into allied extrajudicial killings in Afghanistan.

Four Provisional IRA members were shot dead by British soldiers minutes after they had carried out a gun attack on Coalisland RUC station in February 1992, and on Thursday at Belfast Royal Courts of Justice, a coroner – who had previously ruled the soldiers did not have an honest belief in the necessity of using lethal force – referred the case to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Last night, senior defence sources said the SAS was facing the worst crisis in its history and called for the troops to be given the same legal protection against prosecution afforded to MI6 agents.

A defence source said: 'We need a change in the law to give our Special Forces the full protection of the Crown – otherwise within a decade we will not have the SAS. Why should they go on to the frontline against Putin if this is hanging over them? Morale is through the floor, blokes are leaving and the regiment is suffering. They are being forced to increase recruiting from the wider Army'.

Senior defence sources have said the SAS is facing its worse crisis in its history, as soldiers threaten to go on strike if they are deployed to Ukraine unless they receive assurances they will be immune from prosecution for using lethal force.

Politicians would do well to remember that it is thanks to us and them that people sleep soundly in their beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm.' Another added soldiers feared 'being chased by cash-hungry lawyers'.

Last night, shadow defence secretary James Cartlidge said: 'These reports of discontent among our serving military, fearing being hounded on their return home from action more than any enemy they may face, should be a wake-up call to Labour.'

The Ministry of Defence said it was 'pure speculation' to say who would form part of any UK peacekeeping in Ukraine, adding: 'We are still at the early stages of the process.'



Above - SAS troops entering the windows of the Iranian Embassy, 1980 (© Crown)



Left - SAS in Malayan Emergency 1952/60s

Below - Peter Clancy, Kevin Barry O'Donnell and Sean O'Farrell (pictured left to right) were shot dead by SAS soldiers



Sources - Article by Glen Owen and Brendan Carlin, Wikipedia; Published: MoD site Commonwealth Crown; pictures as captioned ; National Army Museum UK; Imperial War Museum; History of Special Forces, grey-dynamics.com and MoD records - public

## Special Air Service Regiment (Australia)

Between 1966 and 1971 each of three "sabre" squadrons of the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) completed two tours of Vietnam. The SAS was based at Nui Dat where it acted as the "eyes and the ears" of the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) and operated throughout Phuoc Tuy province as well as in Bien Hoa, Long Khanh, and Binh Tuy provinces. SAS personnel were highly trained and their role in Vietnam varied from conducting reconnaissance patrols and observing enemy movement to offensive operations deep in enemy territory. The SAS had the highest "kill" ratio of any Australian unit in Vietnam. The Australian SAS operated closely with the New Zealand SAS and New Zealand SAS soldiers were attached to each Australian squadron.

Australian military advisors had been serving in Vietnam since 1962. In 1965 Australia's contribution to the war increased to an infantry battalion and, the following year, to a self contained task force of two infantry battalions, an SAS squadron, and other support elements.

Flying to Vietnam from the SAS regimental base in Perth, 3 Squadron arrived at Vung Tau via Saigon on 16 June 1966 and moved to Nui Dat the next day. From 20 to 22 June each troop conducted a 24-hour patrol of the area immediately around the base at Nui Dat. The first enemy contact occurred on 25 June when 3 Squadron was fired on by a group of Viet Cong (VC).

By the end of June, as Nui Dat developed and the Australian infantry began patrolling the area around the base, the SAS began patrolling further afield. 3 Squadron's first long-range patrol was to the Nui Dinh hills, seven kilometres west of Nui Dat. In July the SAS began patrolling around Long Tan village, Nui Dat 2, Long Tan, Binh Ba, and other areas. Following the mortar attack on the task force base in the early hours of 17 August, patrols were sent to locate the enemy. However, it remains a matter of conjecture if the SAS discovered the presence of the VC force before D Company, 6RAR during the battle of Long Tan. For the rest of the year and into 1967 the squadron patrolled throughout the province.

The squadron carried out a number of different tasks in addition to jungle patrolling. Personnel went on exchange with American Special Forces, while American personnel joined the Australians. In November the squadron supported 5RAR during Operation Hayman, manning assault boats and patrolling the waterways between Long Son Island and the mainland.

On 15 February 1966 the advance party from 1 Squadron arrived in Vietnam, followed by the rest of the squadron on 2 March. After a handover period, where personnel from 1 Squadron accompanied 3 Squadron on patrol, the latter left Vietnam in the third week of March. During its nine months "in country", 3 Squadron conducted 134 patrols and tried and tested many of the techniques that would be used by later squadrons.

3 Squadron returned to Vietnam for its second tour in February 1969. As with its previous tour the squadron patrolled across Phuoc Tuy province and into Bien Hoa province. Most time though was spent patrolling around the May Tao mountains. These and the other mountains in the north-east of Phuoc Tuy were enemy strongholds. The VC were located in a vast tract of jungle, which could not be isolated, outside the artillery and mortar range of the Australians at Nui Dat. It was the SAS's task to detect and report VC routes and at the start of December, 6RAR/NZ mounted a month-long operation to clear the May Tao mountains. The operation's success was a direct result of information gathered from SAS patrols.

During this tour emphasis was on the SAS's reconnaissance role, rather than ambushing or other tasks. Indeed, the squadron's commander, Major Reginald Beesley, kicked down the "kills boards" erected by other squadrons during earlier tours. "We were not there to kill people but to gain information," he later said.

1 Squadron began arriving at Nui Dat during February 1970 and 3 Squadron left Vietnam for Australia on 18 February.



Above - left to right - An SASR patrol during Operation Coburg, South Vietnam, 1968; SASR soldiers returning to the main Australian base at Nui Dat after a patrol in May 1970; SASR long range patrol vehicle-mounted patrol in Iraq in 2003



## Special Air Service Regiment (Australia)

The **Special Air Service Regiment**, officially abbreviated **SASR** though commonly known as the **SAS**, is a special forces unit of the Australian Army. Formed in 1957 as a company, it was modelled on the British SAS with which it shares the motto, "Who Dares Wins". Expanded to a regiment in August 1964, it is based at Campbell Barracks, in Swanbourne, a suburb of Perth, Western Australia, and is a direct command unit of the Special Operations Command.

The regiment first saw active service in Borneo in 1965 and 1966 during the Indonesian Confrontation, mainly conducting reconnaissance patrols, including secret cross-border operations into Indonesian territory. The regiment's three squadrons were rotated through Vietnam, carrying out tasks included medium-range reconnaissance patrols, observation of enemy troop movements, and long-range offensive operations and ambushing in enemy dominated territory. They also served with US Army Special Forces, and conducted training missions. The SASR squadrons were highly successful, and were known to the Viet Cong as *Ma Rung* or "phantoms of the jungle" due to their stealth.

Following the Sydney Hilton bombing of February 1978, the regiment became responsible for developing a military counter-terrorism response force in August 1979, known as the Tactical Assault Group (TAG). SASR troops have also served in Somalia, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as many other peacekeeping missions. The SASR also provides a counter-terrorist capability, and has been involved in a number of domestic security operations.

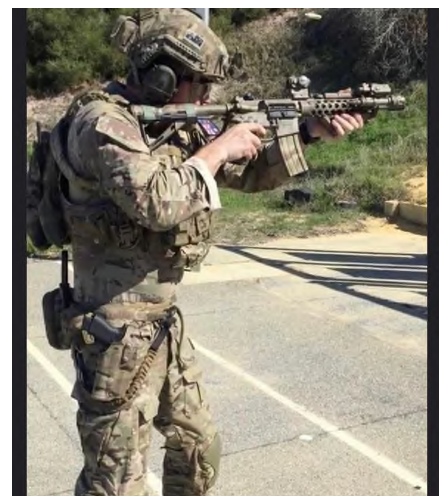
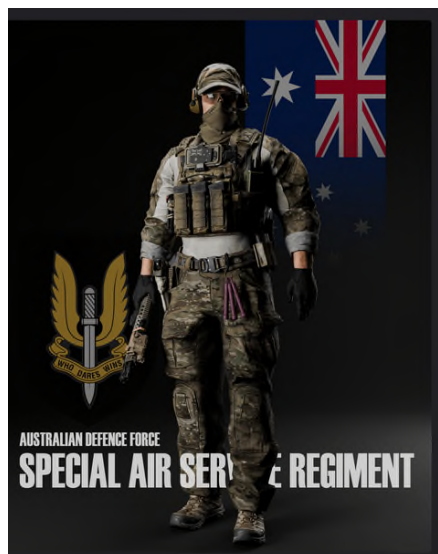
More detail can be found by searching Wikipedia ref SASR



Members of the Queensland SAS Association during the 2007 ANZAC Day march in Brisbane



The Special Air Service Regiment memorial commemorates the members of the unit killed in combat and training exercises



Australian SASR operator with an Australian flag patch on his helmet and left arm

Sources - Australian War Museum; Wikipedia; greydynamics.com; Awm.gov.au

NB - Wikipedia contribution is a shortened version of an 11 page reference article



## **Need a job doing? - Call the experts**

The aftermath of more than 1400mm of rain has devastated communities of Far North Queensland, with part of the Ollera Creek Bridge – a vital passage connecting Townsville and Ingham – falling into floodwater on February 2.

The Bruce Highway is a key route for emergency services and power maintenance teams, as well as food, water and fuel supplies to reach affected communities waiting desperately for resupply. Assets from 3rd Brigade worked with Queensland authorities to deliver a temporary bridge structure, employing an Army Combat Engineer Medium Girder Bridge (MGB) capability.

On February 6, a small team of sappers from 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment (3CER) established the MGB, which reaches around 25m in length allowing heavy vehicles to transit the damaged bridge and continue on route to resupply flood-affected towns with essential stores.

Officer Commanding 25 Support Squadron 3CER Major Liam Clarke discussed the specifications of the bridge and how it could be assembled to provide both tactical capability in the battlespace, or in this case, vital humanitarian aid.

“This is a very capable piece of equipment and can be built with limited tools, limited equipment and mostly muscle power,” Major Clarke said. “The structure itself is made up of slightly more than a hundred pieces in this configuration, and the heaviest pieces weighing around 260 kilograms.”

The team of sappers remained in location, deconstructing a portion of the MGB each afternoon and reconstructing it in the morning to allow emergency repairs to take place on the existing structure overnight. Major Clarke said the temporary structure would enable emergency response efforts to support the local community while repairs were under way.

“We’re placing the MGB over the previous creek bridge to allow emergency traffic on the Bruce Highway and provide relief to the city of Ingham, which has been cut off for several days,” Major Clarke said.

As a part of the Far North Queensland community, often conducting exercises throughout the shire of Hinchinbrook, Major Clarke said it was a privilege for the soldiers to use their unique skills and capability to support the community.

“Knowing what fellow North Queenslanders are going through at the moment is giving the soldiers plenty of motivation to get this job done,” he said. “The soldiers are really proud to be a part of the overall relief effort between the governments and members of the community.”

As emergency services are trickling into isolated parts of north Queensland thanks to a temporary fix to a bridge that collapsed in the flood disaster, truckies are doubling their calls for the Bruce Highway to be upgraded as soon as possible. With a two-kilometre-per-hour speed limit in place, the going is slow on the Ollera Creek Bridge between Townsville and Ingham, but in north Queensland there are few options when the Bruce Highway is cut.



**Left - Federal and state leaders have pledged to “build back Better” ADF Riley Blennerhassett Right - A team from 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment helps assemble a medium girder bridge at Ollera Creek - Captain Brittany Evans (from Defence web pages)**



**Left - ADF crews work to create a link between major population centres; Right - major trucking route was cut off due to flood damage**

**Sources - Article from ABC news, Defence web pages on picture detailed, Will Murray, aerial pic from Ergon Energy**

## Need a job doing? - Call the experts

The community of Hervey Bay has strong Defence connections.

So the sight of Army vehicles rolling in to provide support in the wake of ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred was a familiar and comforting sight for many of the locals.

Working closely alongside emergency service agencies, soldiers from 6th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR), with some local Army reservists attached, got to work door-knocking to check people's welfare, sandbagging properties and clearing obstacles.

Private Gabriel Argent said the community's Defence ties were obvious, with a friend from Kapooka, Richard Azzopardi, living in the coastal community.

Mr Azzopardi said it was great to see the ADF providing support, especially for those who used to serve. "Hervey Bay is home to many veterans, including myself, and it fills us with pride to see the dedicated personnel from 6RAR providing crucial support where it is needed most," he said. "The Fraser Coast community and I extend our sincere gratitude to all serving members of the ADF who have stepped up to assist in the response efforts following the devastating floods on Sunday."

He wasn't the only one with a sense of nostalgia as the protected mobility vehicles drove by.

Private Argent said he and the rest of Alpha Company encountered former ADF personnel throughout the bay area. "I ran into quite a few ex-Defence members," he said. "There were some former warrant officers that were now Rural Fire Service firefighters; and some people from the houses we went to were also veterans. There was even a family that currently had a relative serving in 6RAR, and the family were all ex-Defence, too. Everyone that we spoke to was super happy to see us here. The response was really positive from all the houses that we went to. We even got some photos with the locals after helping them, and that was really awesome to be part of."



Left above - Australian Army officer Lt Andrew Hvejsel, from 6 Battalion, RAR, talks with Queensland SES officers about assisting Hervey Bay residents in the wake of Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred  
Right above - soldiers from 6 Battalion, RAR conduct a welfare check on a local Hervey Bay resident after Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred



Above Left and Right - Soldiers from 6 Battalion, RAR, prepare to head out on a route clearance task in Hervey Bay, Queensland

Source - Defence web pages; Author - Captain Coby Tsaousis; Photos by Private Gabriel Argent, top right photo by Sgt Robert Tang

## China's warships are turning up in unexpected places and alarming US allies.

### Is this the new normal? March 2025

Chinese warships have been circumnavigating Australia's coastline for more than three weeks, passing within 200 miles of Sydney, and staging unprecedented live-fire drills on its doorstep with New Zealand. The exercises, which came without formal notice, have caused deep consternation in both nations. Suddenly, the spectre of China's military power was no longer confined to the distant waters of the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait – where China's territorial aggression has escalated under leader Xi Jinping – but a stark reality unfolding much closer to home.

At the same time, Chinese warships have been sighted near Vietnam and Taiwan, part of a show of Chinese naval strength in the Pacific region that regularly rattles US allies. China was unapologetic and insisted it complied with international law, with state media suggesting Western countries should get used to Chinese warships in nearby waters.

In the past, Washington's partners have found comfort in their firm ties with the US, but that was before Donald Trump's explosive meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and the US leader's subsequent order to halt aid to Ukraine as it battles Russia's invasion. The bust-up in the Oval Office served to sharpen anxieties in capitals across the Pacific: If the US is willing to turn its back on Ukraine – effectively rewarding Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggression in Europe – would it do the same in Asia when faced with a belligerent Beijing? Trump's embrace of Russia and his cold shoulder to Europe – driven by a transactional approach that Singapore's defence minister likened to a "landlord seeking rent" – has heightened trepidation in the Indo-Pacific region, where many nations look to the US to keep Chinese aggression in check.

"It does raise issues as to whether the US will be committed to regional security. And even if the US remains committed, what will the Trump administration ask in return?" said Collin Koh, research fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore. Experts say it's a fair question from allies who've long relied on the US to provide security assurances, enabling them to limit their own defence spending.

Now might be the time, they add, for American partners, like Australia and New Zealand, to re-examine budgets and tighten regional alliances with other countries that could find themselves exposed as Trump pursues his "America first" mantra.

#### **'Test of resolve'**

The urgency of that aim was highlighted by China's latest flexing of its military muscle. "It's a test of resolve, for sure," said Drew Thompson, a senior fellow at RSIS in Singapore, of China's military drills. "China (is) carving out a sphere of influence in the Pacific to test to see if countries in the region are going to resist it."

Australia has made sure the world is aware of China's movements in international waters in the South Pacific, issuing daily location updates from trailing Australian Navy ships and spy planes.

Defence Minister Richard Marles said the data would be analysed to determine exactly what China was doing and what message it was intending to send.

China's ambassador to Australia, Xiao Qian, maintained that China posed no threat to Australia while signalling that more warship visits should be expected. "As a major power in this region...it is normal for China to send their vessels to different parts of the region to conduct various kinds of activities," Xiao told Australia's public broadcaster the ABC.

Across the Pacific in Washington, Trump was sending his own message to US partners in Europe that they needed to step up military spending in defence of Ukraine. Before his fractious meeting with Zelensky, Trump had intended to sign a mineral resources deal with the Ukrainian leader so that the US could recoup some of the cost of its aid to Ukraine since Russia's invasion. But the signing ceremony was abandoned, with Trump telling Zelensky on his social platform Truth Social to "come back when he is ready for Peace." By subsequently cutting off military aid to Ukraine, Trump was seeking to force rich European nations to shoulder more of the load, say experts. "He believes they have all been free riding off the United States for half a century," said Peter Dean, the director of foreign policy and defence at the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney.

The move seemed to reap rewards when on Tuesday the European Union unveiled a plan to allow member states to borrow €150 billion (\$158 billion) to boost their defence spending and "massively step up" their military support for Kyiv.

Dean says Trump wants a deal for peace in Ukraine; however, he's ignoring Zelensky's concerns about the longevity of that peace without measures to keep Putin in check. "It seems to be that (Trump) almost wants peace at any price, rather than a peace that is fair and equitable, or a peace that you keep," he said. "The question is, what does the deal look like? And that's what everyone's worried about. How much is he willing to trade away?"

As Trump upends the transatlantic alliance – a pillar of Western security for decades – his administration has signalled that the US should wrap up conflicts elsewhere to focus on deterring China in the Pacific. The urgency of that aim was highlighted by China's latest flexing of its military muscle.



## **China's warships are turning up in unexpected places and alarming US allies. Is this the new normal? March 2025**

The urgency of that aim was highlighted by China's latest flexing of its military muscle. "It's a test of resolve, for sure," said Drew Thompson, a senior fellow at RSIS in Singapore, of China's military drills. "China (is) carving out a sphere of influence in the Pacific to test to see if countries in the region are going to resist it."

### **AUKUS: What's that?**

Even before Trump's clash with Zelensky, the presence of Chinese warships on its southern coast had turned Australia's attention to AUKUS, its multibillion-dollar security deal with the US and the United Kingdom. Concerns had flared about whether the deal could withstand the whims of Trump's White House when a British reporter asked the US president if he and his UK counterpart had spoken about AUKUS. "What does that mean?" Trump replied. The incident was later brushed off by Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent as an issue of accents. "I think we're going to have to limit the questions to Americans he can understand," he said. Dean, from the University of Sydney, said it's no bad thing that Trump wasn't across the acronym because the deal already has the fulsome support of his closest advisers.

That support was cemented by Australia's first down payment of \$500 million to bolster America's submarine production, with the agreement that some nuclear-powered subs will be sold to Australia to boost its military capability in the Indo-Pacific. It's the kind of deal Trump will want to focus on in the future, Dean said. "He's looking to make money for the United States, and he's looking to do better deals. And AUKUS is a bit of an exemplar deal for them," Dean said. "For the Europeans, I wouldn't underestimate Donald Trump looking at this and going, if the Australians can do this, why can't you?"

### **'No tolerance for free riders'**

Elsewhere across the Pacific, US allies appeared unsettled by the extraordinary scenes in the Oval Office. Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba struck a cautious tone on Monday, insisting he had "no intention of taking sides" when asked about the Trump-Zelensky clash. Yet, he vowed to do his utmost to "maintain US involvement and promote unity" among the Group of Seven nations – hinting at growing disquiet over the fracturing of the Western alliance. "Today's Ukraine could be tomorrow's East Asia," he added. "We must also consider steadily increasing our deterrent power to prevent war." Japan, which has territorial disputes with China in the East China Sea, has raised concern about increasing Chinese military maneuvers in its nearby waters. Last year, a Chinese aircraft carrier entered Japan's contiguous waters for the first time.

South Korea, another US ally in East Asia, declined to comment on the meeting between Trump and Zelensky but said it was closely monitoring US suspension of military aid to Ukraine. Trump has repeatedly called on allies like South Korea to pay more for US troops stationed on their territory. In a speech to Congress on Wednesday, he once again made a veiled threat while referencing what he called unfair tariffs South Korea places on US goods – something Seoul denies. "We give so much help militarily and in so many other ways to South Korea. But that's what happened, this is happening by friend and foe," Trump said.

In Taiwan, the self-governing democracy China has vowed to one day absorb, Defense Minister Wellington Koo tried to reassure confidence despite what he described as "rapid and bizarre changes" in the international landscape. "I think the United States won't retreat from the Indo-Pacific region, because this is its core interests," he told reporters in a briefing Tuesday, citing shared interests with Washington in economic development, geopolitics and US military security. But Koo also nodded to Trump's "America first" stance. "In international politics, we also deeply realize that we can't just talk about values and not talk about interests. Of course, the United States must value its own national interests," he added.

Experts say the US has become frustrated at having to shoulder the weight of other countries who fail to contribute to their own defense. "The Trump administration has made clear its lack of tolerance. It's had no tolerance for free riders," said Thompson, from RSIS in Singapore. "I think the countries that get that message clearest and fastest are the ones that are going to be the good partners of the United States, because it's not like the US is abandoning allies. What the US is doing is prioritizing its most capable ones," Thompson said.



**Left - HMAS Stuart monitors People's Liberation Army-Navy Fuchi-class (right) and Renhai-class cruiser Zunyi as they conduct replenishment at sea off the coast of Western Australia. - LSIS Ernesto Sanchez/Royal Australian Navy**

**Right - The People's Liberation Army-Navy Fuchi-class replenishment vessel Weishanhu off the coast of Australia - ADF/Royal Australian Navy**



**Source - Analysis by Hillary Whiteman and Nectar Gan, CNN  
CNN's Wayne Chang, Yoonjung Seo and Yumi Asada contributed reporting**



These pages may contain jokes that have adult language, are sexist, ageist or JUST funny - enjoy a chuckle or just skip these pages.

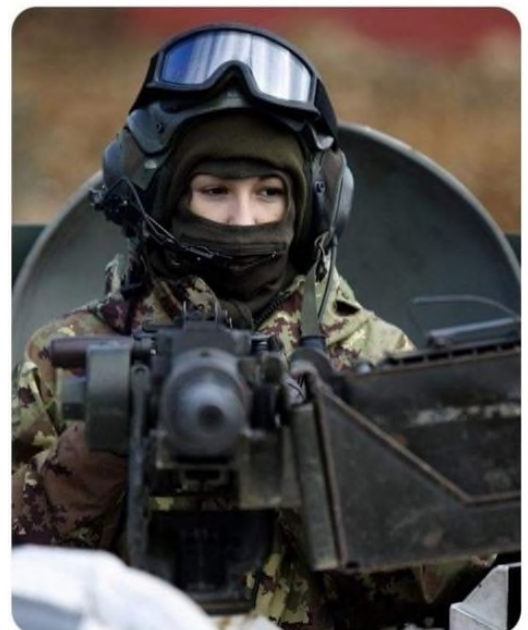
## CHUCKLE PAGES



when you try to put the cereal bag back in the box



Him: "What are you doing?"  
Her: "Just sitting here in a tank top."  
Him: "Send me a pic."  
Her:



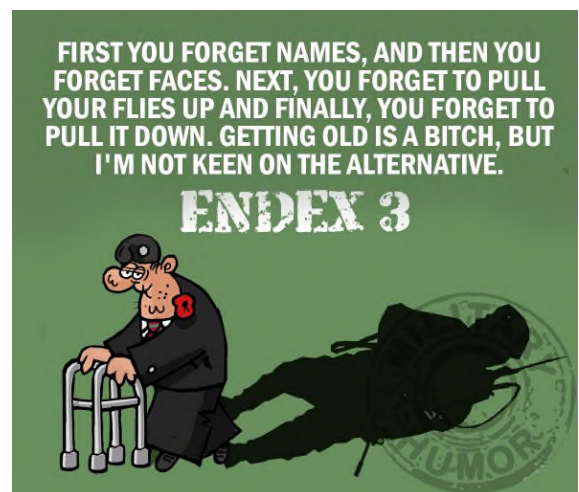


**Buys dog \$80 dog bed.**

**Dog decides to sleep in a laundry basket.**

## CHUCKLE PAGES

CAUTION - GROWN UP  
LANGUAGE, MILITARY HUMOUR



Sources - Cartoons/jokes from - EndEx; militaryhumor.com; frank.com.uk; pinterest; shipmates united uk; Endex.com and submitted by veterans, thank you



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Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial, Anzac Parade, Canberra  
Source - [Honesthistory.net](http://Honesthistory.net)