

Veterans Support Centre CONTACT FRONT



August 2025

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



Details of this image on pg 3

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CONTENTS

Pgs 5	The addictive side of sport
Pgs 6, 7	25 years since the Korea War, Battle of Binh Ba, Vietnam commemorated
Pgs 8 - 9	Support those who support VSC
Pgs 10 - 13	Australian Peacekeepers in East Timor 1999 - 2013
Pgs 14, 15	Falklands War 1982
Pgs 16, 17	Wartime aircraft found
Pgs 18, 19	Putin's "Ghost ships"
Pgs 20-23	Operation Babylift 1975
Pgs 24,25	Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association Ltd
Pgs 26, 27	Battle of the best - RAAC and White Ensign raised over 2 Cape class patrol boats
Pg 29	Reports
Pg 30, 31	The Coldstream Guards, UK
Pgs 32, 33	Ben Roberts-Smith; Simon, ship's cat and his legacy
Pgs 34, 35	Prepare for Talisman Sabre The Originals - NZ Special Forces
Pgs 36, 37	2nd Cavalry Regiment, Afghanistan
Pgs 38, 39	Chuckle pages (maybe offensive language)

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From the Editor's Desk

Front cover - A member of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), part of Operation Astute, patrols the streets of Dili, East Timor, 2006. Australian peacekeepers were part of the International Stabilisation Force (ISF) in East Timor from 2006 to 2013.

Photo by Glenn Campbell. AWM 2021.746.6 ALSO - see article pages 12 - 15

Hello again,

National Peacekeepers' Day - On 14 September each year, we observe National Peacekeepers Day. It's the anniversary of the day Australia became the world's first peacekeepers to deploy into the field, in the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia) in 1947. It's a day to recognise the important work of those who have served, and continue to serve, in the name of global peace.

I have a few 'different' articles this issue, I hope that you find it interesting reading about the wartime aircraft crash sites found underwater near Port Moresby and the underwater destruction of important cables under the sea by President Putin's ships. I have gone back to my British origins and included an article on the Falklands War and one about the Coldstream Guards. New Zealand forces are included with their participation in Talisman Sabre and a brief look at their SAS.

You also may remember the article about animals and their bravery and comfort to those in wars (in August 2024 issue). I found a recent article about Simon, a Navy ship's cat and I hope you read page 33, an article I found that continues his story. I have no writer or source but I do believe that the story itself is worth reading. Pg 33.

I have included a short article about the on-going case for/against Ben Roberts Smith NOT to discuss his story but to print Gina Rinehart's comments. He was found complicit in war crimes **on the balance of probabilities**, in a civil court. That is not a guilty verdict as in a criminal court. Our opinions may vary but I think we all agree that members of the ADF are so under-valued by the general public (*until they need help*) and can be seen by many as just useful in disaster recovery. I have copied a statement by Gina Rinehart made to Newsmax for your consideration of her views. I fully agree that our Defence Forces have a low status in the eyes of the general public and agree with this part of her statement - **"This relentless attack (on a member of the ADF) hasn't made the country better, as some journalists like to imply, it's just weakened our Defence Force"**. (article pg 35)

Also, again, the use of the f word on the joke page. I have had a number of compliments (thank you) and just a couple of complaints about the word - so I will carry on as many of you ask me to but IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE LANGUAGE ON THE JOKE PAGE - DON'T READ IT, it is included in the original joke - just skip the last 2 pages!

I hope you enjoy the this issue, Ed

The Veterans Support Centre, is there for you. Company and a meal on Thursdays, help with getting claims through the DVA system (no cost to you) - contact the office and come and talk to the Advocates (there is no cost to you at all).

ALL veterans are supported by the Veterans Support Centre. Contact us if you need help or advice, information, a cuppa with like-minded folk - phone (leave a message if no answer and we will get back to you), email or pop in during open hours (Tues, Wednesday, Thurs 1030 - 1330). All at NO cost to you.

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. The language used is for adults. If you are

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..



Jill Opie, Editor

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HELLO from our ever-prepared President

Having watched the rains and the flooding recently, our sensible President decided that the only way to get around (or was it a round of golf?) was to brave his way to the golf club and put up with the weather, wet golf course, mud etc etc, and we are lucky enough to have a Contact Front mole who sneaked a picture of him for us all to see!!



Hope the 19th hole was worth it Boss!

Source - a total secret and well done the photographer

June 2025 - 75 years since the Korean War

To mark the 75th anniversary of Australian service in the Korean War, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) will hold a National Commemorative Service at the Australian National Korean War Memorial in Canberra on 25 June 2025. More than 18,000 Australians served during the Korean War and post-armistice ceasefire monitoring. 340 Australians lost their lives, more than 1,200 were wounded, and 30 were taken prisoner. Of those who lost their lives, 42 have no known grave. Another 16 Australians died serving in South Korea with the ceasefire monitoring force in 1953-57, and 11 died serving in Japan with base units of British Commonwealth Forces Korea.

This anniversary provides the opportunity to honour and remember the service of all Australian men and women who served in the Korean War, and the sacrifice of their families.

The **Korean War** (25 June 1950 – 27 July 1953) was an armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula fought between North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea; DPRK) and South Korea (Republic of Korea; ROK) and their allies. North Korea was supported by China and the Soviet Union, while South Korea was supported by the United Nations Command (UNC) led by the United States. The conflict was one of the first major proxy wars of the Cold War. Fighting ended in 1953 with an armistice but no peace treaty, leading to the ongoing Korean conflict.

After the end of World War II in 1945, Korea, which had been a Japanese colony for 35 years, was divided by the Soviet Union and the United States into two occupation zones at the 38th parallel, with plans for a future independent state. Due to political disagreements and influence from their backers, the zones formed their governments in 1948. North Korea was led by Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang, and South Korea by Syngman Rhee in Seoul; both claimed to be the sole legitimate government of all of Korea and engaged in border clashes as internal unrest was fomented by communist groups in the south. On 25 June 1950, the Korean People's Army (KPA), equipped and trained by the Soviets, launched an invasion of the south. In the absence of the Soviet Union's representative, the UN Security Council denounced the attack and recommended member states to repel the invasion. UN forces comprised 21 countries, with the United States providing around 90% of military personnel.

Seoul was captured by the KPA on 28 June, and by early August, the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) and its allies were nearly defeated, holding onto only the Pusan Perimeter in the peninsula's southeast. On 15 September, UN forces landed at Inchon near Seoul, cutting off KPA troops and supply lines. UN forces broke out from the perimeter on 18 September, re-captured Seoul, and invaded North Korea in October, capturing Pyongyang and advancing towards the Yalu River—the border with China. On 19 October, the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (PVA) crossed the Yalu and entered the war on the side of the North. UN forces retreated from North Korea in December, following the PVA's first and second offensive. Communist forces captured Seoul again in January 1951 before losing it to a UN counter-offensive two months later. After an abortive Chinese spring offensive, UN forces retook territory roughly up to the 38th parallel. Armistice negotiations began in July 1951, but dragged on as the fighting became a war of attrition and the North suffered heavy damage from U.S. bombing.

Combat ended on 27 July 1953 with the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement, which allowed the exchange of prisoners and created a four-kilometre-wide (2+1⁄2-mile) Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) along the frontline, with a Joint Security Area at Panmunjom. The conflict caused more than one million military deaths and an estimated two to three million civilian deaths. Alleged war crimes include the mass killing of suspected communists by Seoul and the mass killing of alleged reactionaries by Pyongyang. North Korea became one of the most heavily bombed countries in history, and virtually all of Korea's major cities were destroyed. No peace treaty has been signed, making the war a frozen conflict.



HMAS Sydney's flight deck in a Korean snow storm



General James van Fleet, commander of the 8th US Army, inspects members of the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment



Men from the Royal Australian Regiment, June 1953

Battle of Binh Ba, Vietnam commemorated

Soldiers and officers of 5/7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (5/7RAR), commemorated the Battle of Binh Ba with a parade at Robertson Barracks in Darwin on June 18. Underneath the sweltering Darwin sun, soldiers marched in order as two armed reconnaissance helicopters flew low in formation overhead, while veterans of the 5RAR Association watched on. They were commemorating one of the fiercest engagements of the Vietnam War 56 years ago.

Over two relentless days, July 6-8, 1969, in Phuoc Tuy Province, 5RAR – alongside their brothers from the 6th Battalion – encountered a well-entrenched enemy force.

Master of ceremonies and Adjutant of 5/7RAR, Captain Jarrad Dekuyer, said he was proud to take part in the commemoration. “I’ve served in 5RAR and now 5/7RAR, and having the responsibility to carry on the legacy and speak in front of the veterans present was an honour,” Captain Dekuyer said. “They’re grateful to feel welcomed and to see that their service is still being recognised by people whose parents probably weren’t even born when they served.”

Captain Dekuyer said the soldiers within the unit often talked about the historical events of the Tiger Battalion and reflect on why they serve. “They’re hoping to have the same bonds over 50 years later like the soldiers and officers from 5RAR in front of them today. For them, it’s something they aspire to, when they see the veterans,” he said. “They’re hoping to have the same bonds over 50 years later like the soldiers and officers from 5RAR in front of them today.”

CO 5/7RAR Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Grogan said the day was important for the battalion’s history and through the amalgamation with 7th Battalion. “It’s actually a week after we traditionally commemorate the Battle of Binh Ba, but with the battalion being out field, we had to defer it,” he said. “We held our veterans event yesterday, which gave us a chance to welcome our extended family.”

A memorial event was held on June 17 to remember Barry Ryan, 5RAR platoon commander who served with the battalion during Vietnam.

“The service was poignant,” Lieutenant Colonel Grogan said. “The words that were spoken about Barry Ryan highlighted not only his courage, but the care for his soldiers under his command. It was a true testament to his character and that, 56 years later, he is still remembered in this way.”

After the formalities, the annual Jason Charles Memorial football game was played – soldiers versus officers and senior non-commissioned officers – **which the soldiers won by more than 100 points.**



Soldiers of the 5th/7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, on parade with Army reconnaissance helicopters from 1st Aviation Regiment during the Battle of Binh Ba commemoration service held in Darwin.



Veterans of 5/7 RAR observe the Battle of Binh Ba parade



Left- Commander 1st Brigade Brigadier Doug Pashley addresses the parade;
Centre - Lt Col Hugh Grogan (left) and Brig Pashley inspect the troops;
Right - Soldiers from 5/7 RAR play (and win) during an Aussie Rules football match after the commemoration parade

Sources - defence web - article by Capt Nicholas Marquis; photos by Cpl Madhur Chitnis & Pte Oscar Hanson

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Australian peacekeepers in East Timor from 1999 to 2013

When East Timor experienced a humanitarian and security crisis in 1999, Australia led a multinational peacekeeping force in response. The International Force East Timor (INTERFET) and several United Nations (UN)-led missions assisted the country as it achieved independence, and established itself as an independent and democratic country. Australia's deployment of troops to East Timor in 1999 was the largest since the Vietnam War.

Australia's involvement in East Timor, from 1999 to the end of 2012 was instrumental in that nation gaining independence. The International Force East Timor (INTERFET), deployed from 1999 to 2000, remains Australia's largest peacekeeping mission to date, and the largest overseas military deployment since the Vietnam War. Furthermore, it was the first time Australia had led a major international coalition.

[**'Official Histories - Iraq, Afghanistan & East Timor', Australian War Memorial**]

Independence and unrest in East Timor

East Timor (now Timor-Leste), is situated on the island of Timor, approximately 700 km north-west of Darwin. It was declared a Portuguese colony in 1702. East Timor remained under Portuguese rule until 28 November 1975, when a political party called the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) declared the country's independence.

Nine days after the declaration of independence, Indonesia started to incorporate East Timor. This began decades of violence and conflict between separatist groups and the Indonesian military.

Dili massacre

On 12 November 1991, Indonesian troops opened fire on hundreds of unarmed, pro-independence protestors at the Santa Cruz cemetery in the capital, Dili. They killed up to 200 East Timorese civilians. After the massacre, international activists organised in solidarity with the East Timorese. The international community increased its scrutiny of the Indonesian government. Over the next few years, the independence movement gained momentum.

United Nations Assistance Mission to East Timor (UNAMET)

The UN established UNAMET on 11 June 1999. The mission's role was to organise and conduct a ballot for a public referendum on whether East Timor should have autonomy under Indonesia, or independence. The Australian operation was codenamed Operation Faber. The operation included 45 military personnel. They conducted military liaison with the Indonesian Armed Forces.

The Australian Federal Police deployed 50 personnel to serve with UNAMET from June 1999. The roles of civilian police in UNAMET were to: advise the Indonesian police in the course of their duties; escort ballot boxes after the vote.

We didn't know how many would actually turn up for the actual polling... As I was driving, the head lights of the Land Rover went across the top, there was over two thousand people all sleeping in the basketball court and the wrecked buildings of the school... They didn't know ... who we were until they saw the UN on the side of the vehicle and they just drowned us out with cheers. It was the most moving sight I could ever imagine... These people... had come there during the night because they knew that on polling day if they left their village, and some of them had 12 kilometres to walk over mountain foot pads, they knew the militia would get them on the way there. So to be safe that they actually were there to vote, in the safety of numbers, they all piled onto the place during the night and slept there overnight in freezing conditions.

The ballot was conducted on 30 August 1999. With 78.5% of East Timorese people voting against autonomy under Indonesia, this paved the way for the country to move towards independence. The UN withdrew the first UNAMET mission in mid-September 1999.

The significance of the AFP [Australian Federal Police] contribution to UNAMET was universally applauded. Ultimately, the AFP members of UNAMET were awarded the Australian Group Bravery Citation. The then Justice Minister, Amanda Vanstone, officially highlighted the pivotal role played by the AFP as among the first people deployed into Timor-Leste. "It was in fact, only the unarmed civilian police, mostly Australian, and led by an Australian, who refused to give up when others were ready to leave East Timor. They stood between armed militia and the defenceless people of East Timor. Without that group and their willingness, or determination, to hold on in a desperate and dangerous situation, the United Nations may have in fact withdrawn," Ms Vanstone said.

[**AFP Platypus Magazine, April 2013, p. 8**]

Right - An informal portrait of the Chief of the Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove. Cosgrove commanded the Australian-led multinational force INTERFET for 5 months in 1999 and 2000. Photographed in Iraq by David Dare Parker, 24 April 2003. AWM P04102.044



Australian peacekeepers in East Timor from 1999 to 2013

The East Timorese crisis of 1999

In response to the vote for independence, pro-Indonesia militia groups began attacking civilians. They centred the violence on Dili, but it spread throughout the country. About 1,400 civilians died, and around 500,000 people were displaced from their homes. Entire towns were destroyed. About half of the population left the territory, some by force.

The scale and ferocity of the violence shocked the world. Widespread public anger put pressure on the governments of Australia, Portugal, the US and others to help with the crisis. On 12 September 1999, **US President Bill Clinton announced:** *The Indonesian military has aided and abetted militia violence in East Timor, in violation of the commitment of its leaders to the international community. This has allowed the militias to murder innocent people, to send thousands fleeing for their lives, to attack the United Nations compound. The United States has suspended all military cooperation, assistance, and sales to Indonesia... The Indonesian Government and military must not only stop what they are doing but reverse course. They must halt the violence not just in Dili but throughout the nation. They must permit humanitarian assistance and let the U.N. mission do its job... We are ready to support an effort led by Australia to mobilize a multinational force to help to bring security to East Timor under U.N. auspice... the eyes of the world are on that tiny place and on those poor innocent, suffering people.* [William Clinton, Remarks to American and Asian Business Leaders in Auckland]

Indonesian President BJ Habibie announced on 12 September 1999 that the country would withdraw from East Timor and allow peacekeepers to enter. Even as the troops withdrew, they murdered dozens of unarmed civilians.

The International Force East Timor (INTERFET)

The port [in East Timor] was like a scene from Hades. There were piles of what appeared to be burning rags and belongings, there was human excrement on the ground, families crying, people clearly disturbed and frightened. [Lieutenant Colonel Tim McOwan, Australian Special Air Service Regiment, Australian War Memorial]

On 15 September 1999, the UN Security Council authorised the formation of a multinational force known as INTERFET. It was headed by Australia, with a mission to: restore peace and security in East Timor; protect and support UNAMET in carrying out its tasks; facilitate humanitarian assistance operations.

INTERFET began landing in East Timor on 20 September 1999 with the agreement of the Indonesian Government. By November 1999, 22 nations had contributed to INTERFET, including the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada.

The Australian operations were known as Operation Stabilise and Operation Warden. The Australian Government sent about 5,500 service people to East Timor as part of its contribution to INTERFET. This was the largest deployment of Australian troops since the Vietnam War. Major General Sir Peter Cosgrove commanded the multinational force for 5 months until February 2000.

Australians from the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR), New Zealanders from the New Zealand Special Air Service (NZSAS) and a troop from the British Special Boat Service (SBS) formed Response Force (RESPFOR). They conducted vehicle patrols into Dili and secured the port before the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR) and other forces arrived.

About 10 AFP members who had been with the first UNAMET mission returned to East Timor with INTERFET under the UNAMET banner. They carried out monitoring and advisory duties. They would later transition to the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), the transition mission, when it was established in October 1999.



Australian Defence Force troops patrol the streets of Dili during Operation Astute to stabilise East Timor after an increase in violence and civic disturbance in the lead-up to the 2007 presidential election. Australian peacekeepers were part of the International Stabilisation Force (ISF) in East Timor from 2006 to 2013. Photo by Glenn Campbell. AWM 2021

contd
next page

Australian peacekeepers in East Timor from 1999 to 2013

Securing East Timor

Australians in East Timor were confronted by distressing scenes of violence, murder and destruction. Cosgrove used an 'oil spot' approach. This meant forces would secure key areas and influence surrounding areas from there, then move on quickly by helicopter. They secured Dili by the end of September 1999. From there, they moved to secure the western areas, including Balibo, Batugade and Maliana.

The SAS patrols went a bit further out... we followed them out and we were doing a bunch of joint patrolling with them. And then it started to happen that people started to return. And they'd all been hiding... in the hills... Over the afternoon, we went from nobody to thousands and thousands of people.

And I remember we came off of patrol and they were all congregating at the church and we went down and there was so much emotion from them and they were so thankful... I remember just having my hand shook for hours as we were there and just an amazing experience. And then we started unloading food and so forth.

[INTERFET veteran Lieutenant Colonel David McCammon, Anzac Portal]

At the beginning of its operations, INTERFET airdropped supplies of food and medicine. They protected convoys carrying aid workers, making sure supplies got to the East Timorese people.

The mission secured East Timor, and placed a defensive line on the western border with Indonesia. Australian and New Zealand infantry strengthened this area. The mission cemented Darwin as a vital logistical and defensive base. It also tested the capability limits of the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) from 2000 to 2002

The UN established UNTAET on 25 October 1999. UNTAET directly administered East Timor, including: providing a peacekeeping force to maintain law and order; coordinating relief assistance to the East Timorese providing emergency repairs to infrastructure; creating structures for sustainable governance and law assisting in the drafting of a new constitution; conducting elections.

The Australians became involved from February 2000, in what was known as Operation Tanager. It comprised 7,500 ADF personnel. Australia contributed an Infantry Battalion Group force to the western border region (Sector West) of East Timor. Their role was to prevent insurgency operations by the pro-Indonesia Aitarak Militia forces. Australia also contributed a Communications Management Team. It provided services in: telecommunications; data; communications infrastructure; installations and management.

Logistical units were provided under the command of the Australian National Command Element. The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste achieved formal independence on 20 May 2002.

United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISET) from 2002 to 2005

When Timor-Leste became internationally recognised as an independent state, the UN established UNMISET. The mission provided assistance to the new government. This included law enforcement, and internal and external security. It helped develop the new Timor-Leste police service.

The Australian operation was codenamed Operation Citadel. It comprised 3,200 ADF personnel. Their functions included: staffing headquarters; managing logistics; engineering; military liaison tasks.

An Australian Army colonel also filled the deputy force commander position within the UN Peacekeeping Force Headquarters (PFK HQ).

United Nations Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL) from 2005 to 2006

The UN established UNOTIL to continue to support the development of critical state institutions. Sixteen ADF personnel were involved in Operation Chiron. This was the ADF's regional Defence Cooperation Program (DCP). Personnel performed liaison and monitoring functions.

International Stabilisation Force (ISF) in Timor-Leste from 2006 to 2013

In 2006, Timor-Leste experienced a domestic security crisis, which included widespread violence and civil unrest. Elements of the military sparked the unrest by protesting poor conditions and discrimination between soldiers from the country's east and west. The military body responsible for the defence of Timor-Leste, the Forças de Defesa de Timor Leste dismissed almost half of the force after the protests. Violence grew throughout the country, leading to widespread unrest.

Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Portugal intervened through the Australian-led International Stabilisation Force (ISF). The international operation, codenamed Operation Astute, was led by the ADF under Brigadier Michael Slater. Initial tasks were to: assist in the evacuation of foreigners; restore stability and confine conflict to secured areas; locate and assess weapons; assist in communication between conflicting groups.

The operation comprised approximately 1,800 ADF personnel and supported ongoing peace and stability in Timor-Leste. By the time the deployment ended, at around the 10th anniversary of independence, Timor-Leste had grown its economy and strengthened its institutions.

Australian peacekeepers in East Timor from 1999 to 2013

United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) from 2006 to 2012

The UN established UNMIT on 25 August 2006. It was created to: support the government in consolidating stability; enhance a culture of democratic governance; facilitate political dialogue among Timorese stakeholders. The Australian operation, codenamed Operation Tower, comprised 4 ADF personnel and 50 police at any one time.

Returning home

The last Australian troops from the ISF returned home from Timor-Leste on 27 March 2013. However, a small team of Australians remained to provide training for Timor Leste's defence force. War artist Wendy Sharpe recalled the East Timorese response to Australian troops in 1999: *In September when the INTERFET troops came in... the local people got bits of... charcoal from their burnt out houses and wrote messages all over this wall to say thank you to INTERFET. And it's really one of the most moving things you ever saw... On this wall it says, 'Thank you very much INTERFET my darling, thank you military Australia, I love you military Australia'... It's just this outpouring of thank you... One of the things that struck me when I first arrived in Dili was the way all the people were smiling and waving... They were just so glad... it just made them feel so good that our people had come in to help them.* [Wendy Sharpe, interviewed for the Australians at War Film Archive]

Five Australians died during peace operations in East Timor. Four were defence personnel, and their names are recorded with other members of the Australian armed forces on our national Roll of Honour. One was a member of the AFP.

In January 2000, Lance Corporal Russell Eisenhuth died while serving with INTERFET.

In August 2000, Corporal Stuart Jones, 2 Cavalry Regiment, Royal Australian Armoured Corps (RAAC), died while serving with UNTAET.

In November 2007, Australian Private Ashley Baker died while serving with the ISF.

In September 2011, Craftsman Beau Pridue died while serving with ISF.

In February 2012, Sergeant Brett Kinloch of the AFP died while serving with UNMIT.



Left above - Australian peacekeeper; Right above - Australian soldiers unload fresh water from an Army Blackhawk Helicopter.



Left - Two East Timorese women beside a slogan that shows local support for the assistance of INTERFET, and reads 'WE LOVE INTERFET. THANKS FOR YOUR SECURITY'. Australian peacekeepers were part of the INTERFET in East Timor from 1999 to 2000. Photo by John Immig,

Sources - May 2024; DVA page, ANZAC Portal; Australian War Museum; DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2024), Australian peacekeepers in East Timor from 1999 to 2013, DVA Anzac Portal, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/peacekeeping/summaries/east-timor-1999-2013>; photos above top L from Defence Australia, and R from RSL Queensland and photo below by John Immig

The Falkland Islands War - 1982

On the 2 April 1982, Argentine forces invaded the British overseas territory of the Falkland Islands, sparking one of the largest major conflicts since WW2. Lasting 74 days, the conflict was the first military action since the Second World War that utilised all elements of the Armed Forces.

255 British personnel lost their lives defending the Falklands, of whom 86 were Royal Navy, 124 Army, 27 Royal Marines, six Merchant Navy, four Royal Fleet Auxiliary and eight Hong Kong sailors. Seven ships were also lost to enemy action and nine aircraft shot down.

Contested lands

Sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and its territorial dependencies, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, had long been challenged. Argentina claimed that the land, which they call the Islas Malvinas, belonged to them because of its natural proximity to the South American mainland. They also asserted that it was rightfully inherited from the Spanish Crown in the 1800s. Britain's claim rested on the idea of self-determination, and that the people who inhabited the island wished to be governed by Britain.

Invasion

On 2 April 1982 Argentinian forces invaded the Falklands Islands. The British were vastly outnumbered, 600 Argentine Commandos to 57 Royal Marines, and forced to surrender.

Task Force sets sail

The British response to this attack was swift. On 5 April 1982 the first ships, including HMS Hermes and HMS Invincible, set sail towards the Falklands. In total, the task force was comprised of 127 ships carrying a reinforced 3 Commando Brigade with 2nd and 3rd Battalions, the Parachute Regiment attached, along with other units including a reinforced troop from The Blues and Royals.

Operation Black Buck

On 2 May 1982 the British task force reached the Falkland Islands. The RAF launched their opening attack on Port Stanley airport using Vulcan bombers covering 8,000 miles. These became known as the Black Buck Raids and were the longest-ranged bombing raids in history at this time.

Huge losses incurred

Casualties from both sides were to follow. On 4 May HMS Sheffield became the first British warship lost in action since WW2 when it was hit by an Exocet missile, leading to the death of 20 crew members.

Two days previously British submarine, HMS Conqueror, had torpedoed and sank the Argentine vessel, ARA General Belgrano, leading to the death of 323 Argentine sailors.

Reinforcements

It was agreed that an extra army brigade should be made available as soon as possible. On 12 May, the 5th infantry brigade, composed of the Gurkhas, Scots Guards, Welsh Guards and their supporting elements sailed aboard the requisitioned Queen Elizabeth II ocean liner. Altogether, 30,000 sailors, marines, soldiers, airmen and merchant mariners took part in the conflict.



Following victory at Goose Green, British forces began their battle for Stanley, the islands' capital.

Above - Following victory at Goose Green, British forces began their battle for Stanley, the island's capital



Above - Image by Royal Marine photographer Petty Officer Peter Holdgate shows Corporal Peter Robinson 'yomping' to Port Stanley with a Union flag fixed to his radio antenna.



Above - Landing craft, Royal Navy, in San Carlos Water; Right - May 1982, Operation Black Buck, the RAF opening attack on Port Stanley airport using Vulcan bombers covering 8,000 miles, the longest ranged bombing in history at this time.



The Falkland Islands War - 1982

Reclaiming the Falklands

On 21 May 1982, the units of 3 Commando Brigade successfully executed landings in San Carlos Water. These landings were almost unopposed but the Royal Navy continued to suffer from Argentine air attacks in what became known as the Battle of San Carlos. Three Royal Navy ships, the HMS Ardent, HMS Antelope and HMS Coventry, were sunk in the space of four days, with 42 crew members lost in total.

Goose Green

Attention then turned to Goose Green, where the first and longest land battle of the campaign would be fought. During the 14-hour battle, 690 British Paratroopers faced 1,100 of the Argentine army and air force, who were scattered across a nearly featureless and windswept terrain. Eighteen British Paratroopers were killed, including Colonel 'H' Jones, who led the battalion and was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his service. On the Argentine side, 55 were killed and 961 were captured.

Final push towards victory

Following victory at Goose Green, British forces began their battle for Stanley, the islands' capital. On 11 June, a series of attacks were launched on the high ground west of Stanley. Mount Harriet, Mount Longdon and Two Sisters were all captured from Argentine forces by the next morning. As part of the second phase of attacks, Mount Tumbledown, Mount William and Wireless Ridge were captured on the night of 13-14 June.

Surrender

With Stanley surrounded, Argentine forces surrendered on the evening of 14 June 1982, with the Royal Marines of 40 Commando raising the British flag on West Falkland to mark the end of the conflict.

The aftermath

After the capture of Stanley, other operations continued to take place which fully secured British victory, leading to the surrender of Argentine troops in West Falkland and in the South Sandwich Islands and Southern Thule. The repatriation of Argentinian prisoners of war soon begun, with 10,250 prisoners returned to Argentina by 20 June. British troops were finally able to make their way home, with huge crowds gathering in Portsmouth and Southampton to welcome them back. britishlegion.org.uk

June 1982, a series of attacks were launched on the high ground west of Stanley. Mount Harriet, Mount Longdon and Two Sisters were all captured from Argentine forces by the morning. During the 14 hour battle, 690 Paratroopers face 1,100 Argentine army and air force, who were scattered across a nearly featureless and windswept terrain. Right - steel helmets abandoned by Argentine armed forces after surrendering at Goose Green.



With Stanley surrounded, Argentine forces surrendered on the evening of 14 June 1982, with the Royal Marines of 40 Commando raising the British flag on West Falkland to mark the end of the conflict.



Above left - With Stanley surrounded, Argentine forces surrendered 14 June 1982, with the Royal Marines of 40 Commando raising the British flag on West Falkland to mark the end of the conflict
Above right - Troop ship SS Canberra returning to Southampton



A grave on the Falkland Islands marking those who fell in the conflict

The true cost of war - Ed

Sources - Imperial War Museum web; britishlegion.org.uk; Office of Veteran Affairs UK; helpforheroes.org.uk

Wartime Aircraft - Beaufort A9-186 - found - Port Moresby

Eight decades after aviators Warrant Officer Russell Henry Grigg (navigator) and Warrant Officer Clement Batstone Wiggins (pilot) paid the ultimate sacrifice during the Second World War, they were honoured at a committal service at Bomana War Cemetery in Port Moresby.

The discovery of the Beaufort A9-186 wreckage in late 2020, and the subsequent positive identification of two Royal Australian Air Force aviators from No 100 Squadron who failed to return from a wartime mission in 1943, was made possible through the collaboration of the Australian and Papua New Guinean governments. Air Force also thanks Dr Andrew Forrest from the Minderoo Foundation, whose dive team discovered A9-186 when searching for his uncle, who was lost while piloting a similar RAAF Beaufort aircraft.

Following a ramp ceremony in Australia – where their remains had been brought for identification – a RAAF bearer party escorted the remains of Warrant Officers Grigg and Wiggins to Port Moresby on board a Hercules aircraft.



Left - the two crew members
Right - 4 RAAF 100 Sqn Beaufort Bombers head for Wewak North New Guinea in 1945

Family representatives joined Deputy Chief of Air Force Air Vice Marshal Harvey Reynolds and Australian and Papua New Guinean dignitaries at the committal service presided by Air Force chaplain La'Mont Ferreira. It concluded with a military farewell including live rifle volleys, The Last Post and a minute's silence.

Air Force has positively identified a 100 Squadron World War 2 Beaufort aircraft (A9-186), first reported missing in 1943 along with its four crew members. The aircraft was recently discovered after a challenging mission in the waters south of Gasmata, Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Robert Chipman confirmed the identification of the crash site, which was discovered in 2020. The discovery was made by an Ocean Ecology Pty Ltd dive team working for Dr Andrew Forrest as part of an ongoing search for his uncle, Flying Officer David Forrest, who was lost during a mission to Gasmata while piloting a similar RAAF 100 Squadron Beaufort.

In February 2022, Dr Forrest's team returned to the crash site to identify the aircraft. Two members of the RAAF Directorate of Historical Unrecovered War Casualties (HUWC) accompanied them to provide historical aviation expertise and support. The A9-186 wreck site is located in 43 metres of water, which meant identifying the remains of the aircraft after 79 years took considerable time, effort and teamwork.

Specialist divers worked on an aircraft that was extensively damaged by fire and covered in layers of sediment and marine growth. 'They had their entire lives ahead of them yet were prepared to risk it all to defend our country and our way of life.' The aircraft identity plate and cockpit lever, which were recovered from the site, will be returned to Australia under a permit granted by the PNG National Museum and Art Gallery.

Air Marshal Chipman said small amounts of bone material recovered during the identification mission were analysed by anthropologists and DNA specialists. "The RAAF's HUWC team collated the evidence and a Defence Identification Board identified the remains as those of Warrant Officer Clement Batstone Wiggins and Warrant Officer Russell Henry Grigg," Air Marshal Chipman said. "Unfortunately, it's with a heavy heart we can confirm that no remains of the other two crew members, Flight Sergeant Albert Beckett and Flight Sergeant Gordon Lewis Hamilton, were recovered. "We will continue to strive to find, recover and identify our missing service personnel as part of our commitment to honouring their service and sacrifice for our nation."

Dr Forrest said the sacrifices those young men and women made must never be forgotten. "They had their entire lives ahead of them yet were prepared to risk it all to defend our country and our way of life," he said.

Air Marshal Chipman said that no further recovery is planned for the "challenging" crash site. "A memorial service for the families of all four crew is being planned for April 26 at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland," he said. "Thank you to all those involved in this significant mission. It is especially heart-warming for the families of the four aviators involved to finally know what happened and learn of their final resting place."

Wartime Aircraft - Japanese Zero - found - Port Moresby



Located in a sheltered bay at the foot of Mt Wangore, an iconic aircraft discovered in 2000 by local fishermen lies on a volatile bed of brown silt at 15-17m.

Produced in August 1942, the Japanese Zero fighter was part of Airgroup 204, which left Rabaul on 27 December, 1943, as the US 1st Marine Division was disembarking at Cape Gloucester on the south-west tip of New Britain.

Because of a technical problem, pilot Tomi Haru Honda landed in shallow water near the Willaumez peninsula. The Zero lacks any markings but remains intact.

Grey encrusting sponges wrap the fuselage like a shroud. Standing erect, one of the propeller blades carries conspicuous red sponges, with three clusters of bubble coral at its base.



Top - Divers descend close to the wreck of Japanese Zero fighter plane;

Below left - Divers on the Japanese Zero wreck;

Below right - Located in a sheltered bay at the foot of Mt Wangore, an iconic aircraft discovered in 2000 by local fishermen lies on a volatile bed of brown silt at 15 -17 metres.

Bottom - A striking white anemone complete with pink skunk anemonefish has made its home behind the open cockpit. Freddie points out the machine-gun at the tip of the left wing as painted sweetlips sneak about, curious about the day's visitors



Source - Febrina liveaboard led by Captain Alan Raabe and photos by Pierre Constant; Divenet magazine, diveplanit.com; also dived by Advocate, VSC

Inside the mission to stop Putin's 'ghost ships' wreaking havoc on the seas

On Christmas Day last year, Finland and Estonia got an unwanted shock. A power line that ran along the seabed between the two countries was damaged, slashing electricity flow by two thirds. The next day, Finnish police boarded and seized a ship carrying Russian oil bound for Turkey on suspicion of cutting the line along with four nearby internet cables. The Cook Islands-registered ship, named the Eagle S, was later found to have dragged its anchor along the ocean floor for more than 100 kilometres.

European Union leaders labelled it sabotage and levelled blame at Russia's so-called "shadow fleet" or "ghost ships" which Moscow uses to avoid Western sanctions imposed on its cargo exports. The incident has sprung NATO allies into action, with joint forces from 11 member nations signing up to tackle sabotage at sea. The ABC gained rare access to the mission and headed out with Dutch and Belgian crews on the Baltic Sea off the coast of Lithuania — a former Soviet country that is now a key Western ally.

Taking off from London before dawn, it took two flights and all day to reach the small port city of Klaipeda where we met the convoy. Undersea cables are a vital part of global infrastructure, carrying electricity and data between countries and continents. There are hundreds of them around the world. Commander Erik Kockx has been charged with overseeing this operation in the Baltic Sea. "There have been some incidents with pipelines and cables. We are here to prevent that from happening again," he told the ABC. "The consequences of cutting an underwater sea cable, first of all, it's very expensive to repair it, secondly if it's an energy or data cable, you cut people off from energy or information."

Since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his country's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Finland and Sweden joined NATO, making Russia the only country bordering the Baltic Sea without membership of the security alliance. Since then, multiple cables have been cut or damaged. "Anybody who has any intentions of inflicting damage or harm to any infrastructure in the Baltic Sea region should be aware that it will be observed, it will be monitored, it will be reported, and it will not remain without consequence," Commander Kockx said.

Russia's second-largest city and port of St Petersburg is the country's main access point to the Baltic Sea's critical shipping corridor. Further south and wedged between Lithuania and Poland, is the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, which also hosts strategic port capacity but more crucially is home to a large military build-up of Kremlin forces.

The NATO missions are designed to be a deterrent, with a bigger military presence on the surface and eyes underwater inspecting for sabotage. Small underwater drones, remotely operated vehicles and divers are being sent down to build a map of the seabed.

Merte Peeters is the commanding officer of the Dutch ship, the Snellius, which is the lead vessel in the mission. "I think it's a two-legged solution, one we show people who basically aren't paying attention sailing around the Baltic, hey someone's looking at you, you are being noticed," he said. "And to the other countries in the vicinity you show that we are present."

Most of the accusations of sabotage involve a ship dragging its anchor along the seabed for long distances, in some cases hundreds of kilometres. Two lines were severed within 24 hours of each other in the month before the Christmas Day incident. The Arelion cable between the Swedish island of Gotland and Lithuania was severed and then the C-Lion 1 cable was damaged between the Finnish capital, Helsinki, and the German port of Rostock. A Chinese ship, the Yi Peng 3, is suspected of dragging its anchor over both the cables in a separate act of Russian sabotage.



Left - The HNLMS Snellius is an important part of the NATO missions. Centre (top) - Commander Erik Kockx scans the Baltic Sea during the mission. (below) - Commanding Officer Merte Peeters says the mission has multiple objectives. Right - Divers have been mapping the seabed in a bid to pinpoint where the cables were cut.

Source - ABC News; All pictures by ABC News: Ed Lawrence

Inside the mission to stop Putin's 'ghost ships' wreaking havoc on the seas

In October 2023, another Chinese ship, the Newnew Polar Bear, was identified as the main suspect for rupturing a gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia. The Chinese government admitted the ship was at fault but rejected the suggestion it was intentional. "If I would drop my anchor for this vessel, I would notice, of course," Commanding Officer Peeters said. The Yi Peng 3 and the Eagle S are both suspected Russian ghost ships which have become a pivotal tool in Moscow continuing oil exports in defiance of Western sanctions.

By mid-2024, this clandestine armada was responsible for shipping more than 70 per cent of Russia's oil and its by-products. The European Union last month slapped more sanctions on the covert ships and increased the number of banned vessels to 342, although some experts predict the fleet consists of more than 700. Continuing oil exports through undercover means has been critical to keeping Russia's economy afloat and funding its war efforts in Ukraine.

Some estimates predict Moscow has spent more than \$15 billion building up the fleet, which are often old and rundown ships, which sail without insurance and flags, allowing them to evade detection and sanctions. They also "go dark" by disabling their tracking transponders, making it difficult for authorities to follow their movements. The Kremlin has repeatedly denied the use of shadow ships and rejected claims it was responsible for damaging undersea cables in the Baltic.

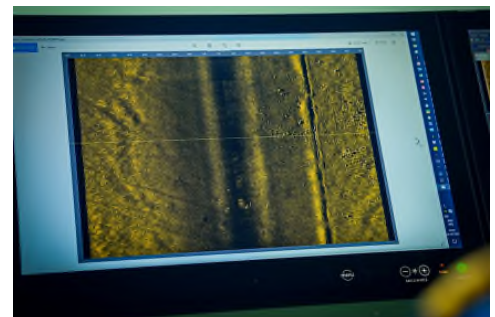
With investigations ongoing, NATO isn't keen to point fingers or inflame tensions but some countries in the region including Estonia, Finland and Germany, have blamed Russia's shadow fleet. But what started as covert shipments to prop up an ailing economy has morphed into a so-called "hybrid war" or "shadow conflict", which are actions taken to destabilise democracies and cause chaos and fear.

On another vessel in the NATO mission, Commanding Officer of Belgian ship, Lobelia, Gill Priem tells the ABC his crew have adapted to battle this new type of conflict. "NATO has to adapt to the evolving geopolitical situation in the world," he said. "Since the increased presence of NATO in this region ... we did not have any accidents occurring in this particular region."

The alleged acts of sabotage fall short of all-out military action but force countries to react and beef up security measures. While the mission until now has been focused on protecting the hundreds of kilometres of critical cables crisscrossing the seabed, Russia last month upped the stakes. When a suspected Russian shadow ship, named the Jaguar, and under sanction by British authorities, entered Estonian waters, the navy attempted to stop it. The crew on board refused and then the Estonian warship was then met with a Russian fighter jet, which flew into NATO airspace for close to a minute.

"They entered the NATO airspace, this is serious," Lithuania's Foreign Minister Kestutis Budrys told the ABC. "They escalated in the military way, from now on, we cannot say that it is civilian activities. "They were showing their intent to use this force." It was the first time Russia has shown support for an alleged shadow ship. "This reckless use of hundreds of vessels for the purpose to fuel the war machine of Russia, it put us in an explosive mix, and we have to control all of it," he said. "We see how one authoritarian regime wants to avoid the sanctions and is just exploiting all the weak parts of it."

The minister, who's been highly critical of the West's response to Russian aggression, has no doubt of Moscow's intentions in the region. "Russia is preparing itself for long-term confrontation and conflict with the West," he said. "If we are weak, if we are not resilient and if we are not resolute, it means we are increasing the opportunities for Russia to use the capabilities for their intent." Intent and sabotage combined make an explosive mix which is sparking fears of a broader European conflict.



Left - As part of the mission, mines were detonated in the Baltic Sea. Centre (top) Commanding Officer Gill Priem is part of Belgium's contribution to the mission. Centre (below) Lithuania's Foreign Minister Kęstutis Budrys has raised the alarm about Russian aggression. Right - Undersea cables are a vital part of the global power and communications infrastructure. All pictures by ABC News: Ed Lawrence

OPERATION BABYLIFT 1975

In 1975, hundreds of babies came to Australia in shoeboxes. Suanne was one. Thousands of Vietnamese children were evacuated from Vietnam in the final weeks of the Vietnam War as part of 'Operation Babylift'. On its 50th anniversary, Australian adoptees reflect on their past and the legacy of the mission. A three-year-old girl stands barefoot on the scorching tarmac of Tan Son Nhut Airport in Saigon. She is wearing a nappy, and a Red Cross tag hangs from her tiny wrist.

It's April 1975. Panic had gripped southern Vietnam as the country braced for an end to two decades of protracted conflict: the Vietnam War. Western troops had fully withdrawn from active combat two years prior, and Ho Chi Minh's forces — representing North Vietnam — were days away from taking the southern capital of Saigon (modern-day Ho Chi Minh City). Tens of thousands were scrambling to leave the country. Amid the chaos, a mission was underway to evacuate thousands of children. It was known as 'Operation Babylift'. Among them was Suanne Prager. She's the little girl pictured standing on the tarmac, immortalised in this photo.

Prager is one of around 3,000 children airlifted out of Vietnam in April 1975 and one of the 281 destined for a new life, a new family and a new world in Australia. "I feel for that little baby that went through so much," Prager tells SBS News. Prager's not sure whether her faint memory of a giant plane engine is real. But she imagines how her three-year-old self might have felt making the journey. "[Thinking of] my Vietnamese home, the reasons I was given up. The handballing from homes to orphanages, to embassies, to who knows what ... [to the] hospital in Australia and then to our adopted home," she says. "I feel for that little person at the end of that journey because I know I was just deeply traumatised by that point".

When Prager arrived in Australia, she was malnourished and weighed just 7.7kg. Her teeth were rotten and most had to be pulled out in surgery, she says. But after a few weeks in hospital, she went home with her new family in Adelaide, who later helped her to piece together her early years in Vietnam, and her journey to Australia. "We imagined, my [adoptive] mum imagined, that no one had meant to get separated by war from their child."

A daughter's search

While thousands of children were orphaned by the war, many were given up for adoption. Prager wanted to know which was her story. After several years of painstakingly searching for her Vietnamese family, Prager returned to Ho Chi Minh City in 2007, where she found and met her biological mother. "She looked at the scar under my left eye and squeezed my cheeks, and she said: 'I just know you are my daughter,'" Prager recalls. It was an overwhelming moment for the pair, who had been separated by distance, time, culture and language.

"In the photos and footage of me [taken during the reunion], I'm just smiling. I'm filled with joy because over the years I had cried myself to sleep wondering if I would ever know my origins, my Vietnamese mother ... just to know what she went through." Prager's biological mother died earlier this year, but their reunion helped her to understand her beginnings. "I was born in 1971 to an American serviceman father. According to what my Vietnamese mum said, that endangered possibly me, possibly the whole family," Prager explains. "By April 1975, I think her mother [Prager's maternal grandmother] in particular and even her siblings were really pressuring her to give me up."

'Shoeboxes ... that's how we came'

The US-spearheaded Operation Babylift and took around 2,000 children, with most of the rest of the children going to Europe. But the mission started with tragedy. Its first baby lift flight crashed on 4 April 1975, just outside the Saigon airbase. According to the US Defense Intelligence Agency, the crash killed 139 people, including 78 children and 35 US personnel.

Hope Lynch was meant to be one of the children bound for the US. While she doesn't know if she was meant to be on that fateful flight, she was deemed too sick for the long journey. "I had pneumonia, salmonella, osteomyelitis; they thought that my right arm may have been paralysed and withered," Lynch tells SBS News. At just three months old, she was placed on a plane to Sydney instead, along with the smallest children who were transported in makeshift cribs made of cardboard boxes. "I've seen photos and I've been told that I was also in a shoebox. Lots of tiny shoeboxes all in a row, that's how we came."

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Left to right - Suanne was one of around 3,000 Vietnamese children airlifted out of Saigon towards the end of the Vietnam War. (Ian Frame, SBS); Hope Lynch at three months old when she had just arrived in hospital in Australia; The first Australian babylift flight preparing for takeoff at Tan Son Nhut airport, 4 April 1975; (Geoff Rose, AWM); Suanne Prager meeting RAAF Flight Lieutenant Ian Frame, with the photo of pilots feeding babies on the tarmac behind them.

OPERATION BABYLIFT 1975

In Vietnam, she'd been nicknamed Hy Vong – Vietnamese for 'hope'. Her adoptive Australian family wanted to keep it. Like Prager's Australian family in Wollongong, NSW, they too helped Lynch to piece together the story of her first few months, through fragmented accounts. "Just before the fall of Saigon, there was a group of nurses in a van that would go around the Mekong Delta, knowing there were people that were going to possibly put their children there in the hope that they would be found and taken to an orphanage," Lynch says. "I believe that's what happened to me."

Lynch never felt compelled to find out whether her biological parents were still alive, saying it would be like "trying to find a needle in a haystack. I didn't really start thinking about it until I had children of my own. The thought of my birth mother giving me up and how heartbreaking that would be," she says. So awful and so gut-wrenching to give up your child like that. I wonder, is she still alive? Does she think about me at all? I hope so.

Reunions taking flight

The second babylift flights to Australia (the first flights were on 4 April) took off on 17 April 1975. The photograph of Prager was taken that day by Royal Australian Air Force Flight Lieutenant Ian Frame as he and fellow pilots cared for babies on the tarmac. Twenty-five years later, Frame and Prager were reunited. "It was just really, really exciting to meet someone who had brought me to Australia," Prager says of the reunion. Working alongside Frame that day was Flight Lieutenant Hugh Howell. "I was in Vietnam with the C-130, 37th squadron," Howell tells SBS News. "We were deployed up there right at the beginning of April, primarily flying relief flights between Saigon and an island called Phu Quoc. We were flying rice into the strip there." For 50 years, Howell preserved his pilot's logbook, which shows the babylift flight from Saigon to Bangkok recorded on 17 April. "I do recall that on the day of the babylift, we arrived quite early in the morning. The aim was to try and get off early while it was still cool," he recalls.

"The buses with nurses and nuns arrived at maybe 6 o'clock in the morning. The nuns had the children all dressed up in pullovers. They must have thought it was going to be cold on the flight when it was actually going to be exactly the opposite." As the temperature rose on the tarmac, the young pilots suddenly found themselves caring for the babies. "We were told we couldn't take off until the other aircraft arrived from Bangkok with the doctors and the nurses on board. We had to convince the nuns to take [the children's] clothing off and cool the kids down and keep them well hydrated. "So, we ended up shoving bottles of water into them, and that's when that picture that you've seen was taken."

Howell says the crew was eventually able to load babies into the plane – a C-130 Hercules. "The babies who were in cardboard boxes – we didn't have the centre seating up in the aircraft – so we put them in a line of boxes down the centre of the aircraft. I think they were sort of side-by-side, and then we just put a cargo strap over the top to hold them in," he says. "The aeroplane itself was very hot inside. It's very, very noisy in the back of a C-130. These children would never have seen anything like this ... heading off to a new world." But their mission was also struck by tragedy. "The really sad thing is that once we got airborne, we were the last flight out. One of the children, an eight-month-old baby, actually passed away," Howell says. "We were a bit annoyed, as the feeling was with the crew that had we been able to get away earlier in the morning, maybe that child would have survived, but we don't know."

Despite the loss, Howell says he is proud of the part he played. "I think Qantas got the credit more than us," he jokes, referring to the commercial flights that transported the children on their final leg to Australia. But we did our job and we're proud of doing that part. "I think we should be very proud of the fact that we as a country looked after these children, and it was Australian nurses that were instrumental in making this happen."

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Left to right - Flight Lieutenant Hugh Howell (centre) caring for children ahead of Operation Babylift; All hands to the bottles. Flight Lieutenant Ian Frame, Flight Lieutenant Hugh Howell and Flying Officer Ian Scott at Tan Son Nhut airfield on 17 April 1975. AWM; Babies in cardboard boxes on one of the commercial flights to the United States. Robert Stinnett; RAAF Flight Lieutenant Hugh Howell (second from the right) in Vietnam

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Uncovering origin stories

Just a few months ago, Howell was also reunited with another babylift adoptee, Dominic Golding. "That was very emotional. I loved it. That was absolutely great," he says. Golding, who grew up in Mount Gambier in regional South Australia, is now a disability advocate living in Canberra. Though he doesn't remember the flight — he was just four months old at the time — Golding carries a constant reminder of it: a tattoo he got during a trip to Vietnam for his first adoptee reunion.

"One night in the hotel room, I decided to draw my tattoo, which is just the [year] 75 and the aircraft," he says. "I took it to a local tattoo shop in Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City, and a whole bunch of adoptees came with me, and they all decided to get the same tattoo as well."

He also uncovered his origins through documents, stories, and trips to Vietnam. "I was apparently found outside a burning building in Cholon, which is the Chinese district or Chinatown of Saigon. Hence why I've got a hearing loss," Dominic says. "I was placed in a temple. That's where the doctors found me, and then I was placed into World Vision for evacuation."

A complex legacy

Reflecting on Operation Babylift, Lynch says she's grateful to those who brought her to Australia. "I'd love to meet them. It was a massive thing to do," she says. All those children that went onto those planes and came not just to Australia but to America and to Europe. It kind of blows your mind that it happened. Prager says she's also deeply thankful for Operation Babylift, but recognises her experience differs from some adoptees. Sadly, many of them had identification tags removed during their flights to Australia, which made it difficult for authorities to figure out which baby belonged to which family.

"I think war leaves so many legacies. My experiences, thousands of Vietnamese war orphans around the world, we share some similar experiences, some completely different," Prager says. For Golding, who has researched Operation Babylift extensively, the motivations behind the mission are complex.

He says while there was a humanitarian aspect to the mission — the notion of 'saving' children, particularly those fathered by American soldiers who may have been targeted by Ho Chi Minh's government — a mass inter-country adoption was always going to be fraught. "Adoption has always been part of that kind of Cold War response to dealing with communism. I don't necessarily agree, but some would argue that adoption is a form of warfare, that you were moving children out of countries," he says.

Challenges with racism, identity and belonging are also common experiences for inter-country adoptees.

Dr Indigo Willing is also a Vietnamese adoptee: She arrived in Australia before Operation Babylift in 1972. She is the founder of Adopted Vietnamese International, which she set up to create a community for adoptees.

The struggle to connect with Vietnamese culture is something Lynch has experienced firsthand. "In 2019, I took my family [to Vietnam] and I didn't know how I was going to feel. When I got there, I didn't feel that pull that I thought I would," she says.

"I think I'm just too Aussie. I think because I've had such a great family, my mum and dad, my upbringing. I just didn't feel like that was my home anymore. And I felt a bit sad about that ... but Australia is my home." Golding says he hasn't struggled to connect with his Vietnamese roots, but faced racism and ableism when he was growing up.

"I'm a person with disabilities as well as being Vietnamese, so I struggled a lot in terms of integrating," he says. "But me personally, I'm incredibly bogan," he says with a laugh. "But also having gone back to Vietnam a number of times, I very much identify with being Vietnamese."

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Left to Right - Hugh Howell and Dominic Golding reunited fifty years after Operation Babylift; Dominic Golding's tattoo commemorating 'Operation Babylift'; Dominic Golding believes he was discovered as a baby outside a bombed building in Saigon.

OPERATION BABYLIFT 1975

Dr Indigo Willing has spent decades researching inter-country adoption. "We're making our own family," Willing says. "Even though we don't know each other, the adoption story and experience really bond us. We really are piecing [our past] together from the kindness of strangers and from the haziness of people's memories."

Willing became the first inter-country adoptee to do a master's thesis on adoption from Vietnam, and her research and advocacy have helped those in the adoptee community. "Some of the findings that really were quite sad [are] the isolation and loneliness that a lot of the Vietnamese adoptees felt growing up," she says. "Not knowing other Vietnamese people, then this double blow when they did find Vietnamese people that they didn't connect [with] because they didn't know the language or the culture. [It's] sort of like a double loneliness."

The struggle to connect with Vietnamese culture is something Lynch has experienced firsthand. "In 2019, I took my family [to Vietnam] and I didn't know how I was going to feel. When I got there, I didn't feel that pull that I thought I would," she says. "I think I'm just too Aussie. I think because I've had such a great family, my mum and dad, my upbringing. I just didn't feel like that was my home anymore. And I felt a bit sad about that ... but Australia is my home."

Golding says he hasn't struggled to connect with his Vietnamese roots, but faced racism and ableism when he was growing up. "I'm a person with disabilities as well as being Vietnamese, so I struggled a lot in terms of integrating," he says. "But me personally, I'm incredibly bogan," he says with a laugh. "But also having gone back to Vietnam a number of times, I very much identify with being Vietnamese."

Fifty years on, Operation Babylift has left a complex legacy — one that Willing wants more people to recognise. "We can't frame this as a simple act of humanitarian rescue or a story of rags to riches. It's not a fairytale," she says. "It's a typical migrant journey with complications and a lot of unrecognised trauma ... that there weren't resources for when we were growing up. There's the typical story of being left on doorsteps ... [but also] reports [children] were taken from orphanages in the final days [of the war] without parents knowing about it. It was a very, very messy time and very hazy."

For the 30th anniversary, SBS aired 'Operation Babylift', a documentary produced by Vietnamese refugee Dai Le — now the independent federal MP for Fowler in western Sydney. At seven years old, she fled Vietnam with her family in April 1975 and spent four years in refugee camps in the Philippines and Hong Kong before settling in Australia. As a producer and journalist, she became fascinated by the stories of Babylift adoptees.

"This group of young people or adoptees left Vietnam around the same time that I did, but they had another layer of trauma," Le says. "A lot of them were half Vietnamese: 'Amerasian' — either black Americans or white — and they came to Australia at the time of the 'White Australia' policy and [were] adopted into families that were predominantly white Anglo-Australians. As they reached their teenage years, they went through this traumatic period of identity crisis."

War orphans and adoptees, Le says, are an important part of the story of the Vietnam War and Vietnamese migration in Australia, which shouldn't be forgotten.

"I hope that on this 50-year anniversary of the fall of Saigon, that we will not forget the airlift of the orphans," she says. "Every year when we mark April 30th, the Operation Babylift adoptees were never part of that story, and they need to be brought into that story. They need to be acknowledged. They were part of the history of the war in Vietnam, and they are part of our Australian community now. They should not be left out."



Left to right - Dr Willing has her baby passport from when she was adopted in 1972; RAAF pilot Flight Lieutenant Ian Frame carrying a baby ahead of the evacuation flight on 17 April 1975; Many babies were sick and in the chaos surrounding the mission, many didn't have identity documents: Dr Willing

Sources - SBS News , ARTICLE BY ALEXANDRA JONES, April 2025; Other sources as listed in article

Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association Ltd

Australians have been involved in the following peacekeeping operations:

- Indonesia (1947–51)
- Kashmir (1950–85)
- Korea (1953–1957)
- Israel – under Operation Paladin (1956–present)
- Congo (1960–61)
- West New Guinea (1962–63)
- Yemen (1963)
- Cyprus (1964–present)
- India/Pakistan Border (1965–66)
- Sinai – under Operation Mazurka (1976–79; 1982–86; 1993–present)
- Israel/Syria Border (1974)
- Lebanon (1978)
- Zimbabwe (1979–80)
- Uganda (1982–84)
- Iran (1988–90)
- Thailand/Cambodia Border (1989–93)
- Namibia – under UNTAG (1989–90)
- Afghanistan (1989–93) – under the United Nations Mine Clearance Training Team (UNMCTT)
- Iraqi Kurdistan – under Operation Habitat (1991)
- Iraq (1991–99)
- Western Sahara (1991–94)
- Cambodia – under UNTAC (1991–93)
- Somalia – under Operation Solace (1992–95)
- Yugoslavia (1992)
- Rwanda (1994–95)
- Mozambique (1994–2002)
- Bougainville (1994; 1997–2003)
- Haiti (1994–95)
- Guatemala (1997)
- Yugoslavia (1997–present)
- Kosovo (1999–present)
- East Timor – under INTERFET, UNTAET, UNMISET, Operation Tower and Operation Astute (1999–2013)
- Solomon Islands – under RAMSI (2000–13)
- Ethiopia/Eritrea (2000–present)
- Sierra Leone (2000–03)
- Sudan – under UNMIS and Operation Azure (2005–11)
- Darfur – under Operation Hedgerow (2007–present)
- South Sudan – under UNMISS and Operation Aslan (2011–present)



Left - Local civilian UN liaison assistant Eddy on patrol with UN United Nations unarmed Military Observer Michael Chapman (Australian Army) in the hills of south Lebanon

Right - Australian military observers, Major Bradley Richards, Captain Michael Pavone and Captain Michael Annett, speak to another man beside the Shatt-Al-Arab waterway in Khorramshahr, Iran, 1989. Australians served in the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) from 1988 to 1990. Photograph by Michael Coyne.



Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association Ltd

29 May, marks the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. It is a day established by the United Nations (UN) to pay tribute to the unwavering professionalism, profound dedication, and exceptional courage of all men and women serving in UN peacekeeping operations worldwide.

While the international community unites on 29 May, Australia also observes its own National Peacekeepers' Day on 14 September. This date holds particular national significance, as it commemorates the anniversary of Australia becoming the world's first nation to deploy peacekeepers into the field. UN Peacekeepers stand in the space between conflict and calm.

Since 1947, Australians have been part of that mission. They have protected the vulnerable, supported transitions from war to peace, and stood firm in unstable terrain.

On this International Day of UN Peacekeepers, we pay tribute to all its peacekeepers - military personnel from the Army, Navy, and Air Force, officers of the Australian Federal Police and state police services, and dedicated civilians. Their collective professionalism, courage, dedication, and, for some, their ultimate sacrifice, in the often thankless and perilous pursuit of international peace and security, warrant our deepest respect and enduring gratitude. Their efforts, often in distant lands and difficult circumstances, have helped to save lives, alleviate suffering, and build pathways to more stable futures for countless individuals.

As we honour their service, we particularly remember the 86 Australians who have died during peacekeeping missions, who lost their lives in the service of peace, and we acknowledge the many more who returned with injuries, both visible and invisible. Their legacy is one of selfless commitment to a more peaceful world, a legacy that Australia must continue to cherish and uphold.

Lest We Forget.

Rod Hutchings, Executive Committee,
Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker
Veterans' Association Ltd

Right - Australian soldiers in a
M-113 armoured personnel
carrier during a peacekeeping
deployment to East Timor in
2002 - source - wikipedia



Tributes to those who serve



Source - Womens Veteran Network Australia; APPVA Assn Ltd; Wikipedia; defence.gov.au site; Australian War Memorial; anzac portal, dva.

Battle of the best returns with a bang

The Royal Australian Armoured Corp's Coral-Balmoral Cup was bigger than ever this year, boasting more crews and international participants. Hosted and run by the School of Armour (SOARMD) at Puckapunyal, the event seeks out the best tank and cavalry crews in a tough six-day competition between the Australian Army and the United States military.

Commanding Officer SOARMD Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Cimbaljevic said the competition went beyond bragging rights, signifying the pursuit of excellence at every level. "Coral-Balmoral Cup provides a tangible benchmarking assessment against the best crews in the US Marine Corps and US Army to understand where we can improve in the delivery of our mounted combat individual training, as part of the Land Domain Training System," Lieutenant Colonel Cimbaljevic said.

The challenge traces its name back to Australia's most costly and protracted series of battles in defence of Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral during the Vietnam War. "It takes a unit's culture of promoting excellence at the small team level (the crew) to improve overall unit readiness and effectiveness," Lieutenant Colonel Cimbaljevic said. "Moreover, the Coral-Balmoral Cup promotes friendly competition (will to win), improves interoperability and fosters our enduring mateship with the US military at the tactical and practical level."

Master Sergeant Mitchell Cross, of the 1st Armoured Division – US Army, said both nations pushed themselves and their teams to the limits. "In preparation for the competition, our crew got an opportunity to train to a new level of physical and tactical excellence," Master Sergeant Cross said. "The relationships, respect and trust that built over three short weeks is amazing. I came away with an appreciation for Australian Army as a fighting organisation and I'm glad we had the opportunity to compete in the Coral-Balmoral competition. The level of proficiency among the Australian crews was incredible. It's a testament to tough, realistic training."

For the visiting US teams, preparing for the competition involved spending a week training on vehicles, Australian weapons qualifications and lessons on tabulated data.

'The level of proficiency among the Australian crews was incredible. It's a testament to tough, realistic training.'

The competition involved a range of activities that included tactical field craft, force-on-force actions and live-fire manoeuvre.

Warrant Officer Class Two (WO2) Beau St Leone, of SOARMD, said the competition offered the ideal training ground for all crews. "Although a competition, all the facets of modern warfare were tested," WO2 St Leone said. "The crews' ability to shoot, move and communicate as an effective team on battlefield was priority. This competition not only identifies the top-performing AFV [armoured fighting vehicle] crews from across the US and Australia but identifies any shortfalls in our training."

Sergeant Dody Martinelli, of the US 1st Light Armoured Reconnaissance Battalion, said it was a great experience. "I had a hell of a time competing against all the teams, and an even better time building professional and personnel camaraderie with the guys," Sergeant Martinelli said. "The true value of the Coral-Balmoral competition lies in the relationships and partnerships forged during this event. I hope that this event leads to further innovative collaborations between our great nations. We look forward to hosting Australian teams in the Sullivan Cup, Bushmaster Challenge and Gainey Cup in the near future."

The awards were:

- Best cavalry crew – 2nd Cavalry Regiment.
 - Best tank crew – 2nd Cavalry Regiment (Eagle 1).
 - Best tank gunnery crew – 2nd Cavalry Regiment (Eagle 1).
- Best cavalry gunnery crew – School of Armour.



Source - Defence website, story by Capt N Coles and Capt C Gibson

White Ensign welcome to the fleet

As the Australian White Ensign was raised for the first time over His Majesty's Australian ships *Cape Schanck* and *Cape Solander*, age-old naval tradition symbolised the Royal Australian Navy's commitment to the future of defence capabilities.

Under perfect Darwin conditions, the ceremony gave the two evolved Cape-class patrol boats (eCCPB) the designation of HMAS, officially recognising their status as commissioned warships in the Royal Australian Navy.

Commander Surface Force Commodore Terence Morrison said the commissioning of the eCCPBs celebrated the work already conducted by the crews, and provided Navy with increased operational capability and greater mission flexibility. "This commissioning is the symbolic recognition of *Cape Schanck* and *Cape Solander*'s integral role in Navy's commitment to supporting the long-term aims of the National Defence Strategy and the Government's decisions in response to the 2024 Surface Combatant Fleet Review," Commodore Morrison said.

"These ships represent a significant step in strengthening Australia's maritime security and enhancing our national defence capabilities. Congratulations to the crews and continue to serve Navy, your family and the communities who call *Cape Schanck* and *Cape Solander* home in the spirit of your mottoes of Persist and Pioneer, and welcome to Navy's fleet – a fleet that is focused, lethal and ready."

"These ships represent a significant step in strengthening Australia's maritime security and enhancing our national defence capabilities."

The ships have been operating as Australian Defence Vessels (ADV), and will continue to uphold the full spectrum of patrol boat operations, including border, resources and fisheries protection, customs and drug law enforcement operations, and international engagement.

Commanding Officer *Cape Schanck* Lieutenant Commander Christopher Wardle said that it was an honour for him and his crew to bring the ship into the next chapter of service.

"Noting our role in protecting Australia's borders and our national interests, I believe it is fitting that we take our place as a warship within the RAN Fleet," Lieutenant Commander Wardle said. "*Cape Schanck* is named for a prominent cape in Victoria, close to HMAS *Cerberus*, which is renowned for having one of Australia's oldest lighthouses. Like our namesake, I believe *Cape Schanck* will be a beacon in the dark for those in need and, like our motto, I believe the ship and her crew will persist in the pursuit of Navy's mission for many years to come."

HMA ships *Cape Schanck* and *Cape Solander* join four other eCCPBs that were commissioned together in December 2024.



Left -Leading Seaman Teagan Hankins raises the Australian White Ensign for the first time on board newly commissioned HMAS *Cape Schanck* during a ceremony at HMAS Coonawarra, Darwin

Right - Ships' company of HMA ships *Cape Schanck* and *Cape Solander* line the upper decks during their commissioning ceremony



Source - Defence website, story by Lt Commander Ben Robson; images by Petty Office Leo Baumgartner

REPORTS

Membership Officer
Trevor Morrow



Membership Officer's Report - August 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 30 July we have 46 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



**No report
available**

Treasurer
Peter Dorman

SEE YOUR COPY OF "THE VIETNAM VETERANS NEWSLETTER" OR TALK TO STAFF AT VETERANS SUPPORT CENTRE OFFICE

Order direct from www.vvfragranville.org then select "SHOP" or ask us and we will be happy to help

Merchandise



All proceeds from the sale of goods, including raffle tickets, go toward the funding of scholarships for veterans' children and grandchildren

VSC have a limited stock of hats, bumper stickers, stubby holders



Please see staff at the Office every Thursday from 10:30 – 13:00

Thank you to our members, advertisers and supporters for their continuing support of our Veterans Support Centre

REPORTS

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

JULY 2025

I will start this report with a bit of sadness, two of our long time members have passed away, Len Wagner and George Mulder. May they rest in peace. Our condolences to their families and friends. Another member who you should know is Reg O'Brien who would greet all who walked through the front door in Cameron Street with "you know it is my birthday today" which was met with the reply 'Happy Birthday Reg'. The same thing would happen the following week, "it is my birthday today" the reply being "wasn't it your birthday last week" and he would reply "yes but I am having another one today". Reg has not been in the best of health. I am in contact with the family and will keep you all up to date.

In all the years being associated with the Hastings VV the amount of different people I have met and still do, make it a wonderful world. Chris Davies warned me early in the years gone by.

You may not be aware of assistance Veterans can obtain through DVA with a referral from their treating doctor. Mobility aids, equipment and modifications are available through the rehabilitation programme known as RAP. It is a hard slog to deal with DVA and other departments at times. If in doubt and you have any issues with regard to assistance, please contact the office and I am sure we can assist you.

A new printer has been purchased for the office which will enable the newsletter to continue being printed. The old one has printed its last piece of paper, not a bad run for approximately ten years. No new parts were available to repair the unit so the decision was made to purchase a new one. I think it started to break down when our Editor started printing bawdy jokes. The new printer was purchased from donations from our members and your membership renewals for which we receive a percentage from Head Office. Many thanks to all for your support.

We are in a very fortunate position at present with the support we receive from the RSL Sub-Branch as well as the Club Limited itself for reducing our costly overheads which allows us with our limited funds to purchase office items as required. As I have said before, this is due to members' donations.

Please keep us informed of members' health.

Is it just me or is everybody feeling the cold this winter? It is bloody cold. They just don't make warm clothes these days like they used to. Stay warm.

Cheers, Bill Wagner

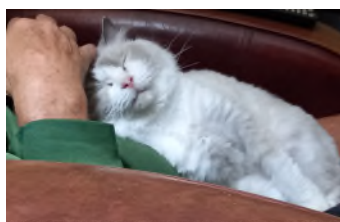


**President
Bill Wagner**

Compensation Advocates' Report

Not exactly a report but we are keeping very busy with new and existing claims. DVA is changing to a new system soon and all claims will be dealt with under the one process. We hope that a smoother process will mean less of the (sometimes very long) delays and speedier decisions for claims.

Our appointments on Tuesdays at the Veterans Centre continue and it is necessary to book in by calling the office - 02 6581 5230 on Tues, Wed or Thurs when the office is manned OR make contact by email at Vets614@gmail.com



**Compensation Advocate
Mike Opie and furry friend**



**Compensation Advocate
Glen Peterson**

The Coldstream Guards - British soldiers



Above & below - Mortar Platoon



Above and below - Support Company



Right- OP
INTERFLEX
(training to
recruits
from the
Armed
Forces of
Ukraine



Above - NBC training



Left - a
live fire
exercise

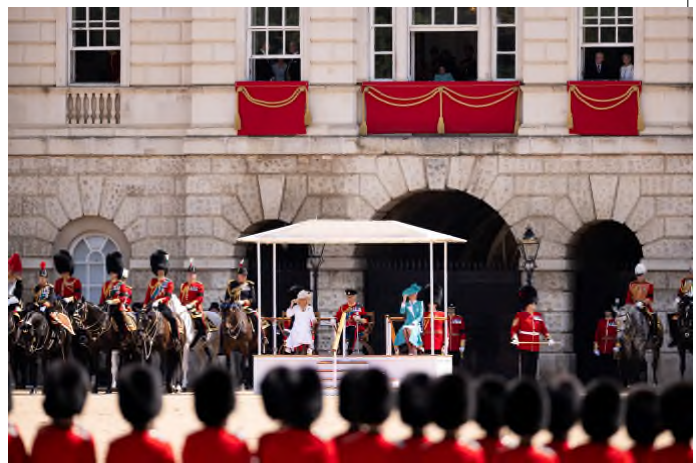
The Coldstream Guards at the King's birthday parade - June 2025

An unforgettable moment for the Coldstream Guards. His Majesty The King has presented New Colours to the Coldstream Guards during a moving ceremony at Windsor Castle — honouring 375 years of loyal service.

The sacred flags, rich with history and battle honours, was proudly trooped at The King's Birthday Parade in London. This tradition reflects the sacrifice and excellence of generations past and present.



Left - flypast by RAF Red Arrows team



Source - both pages - Coldstream Guards web pages; fb page Royal Guards;

Australian War Memorial to further change display commemorating Ben Roberts-Smith's Victoria Cross medal

Gina Rinehart has accused the Channel 9 owned Sydney Morning Herald and Age of weakening the country in their determination to get Ben Roberts-Smith.

Mrs Rinehart said in a statement, "The decision regarding Ben Roberts-Smith seems to be taken by some in the Chanel 9 group as something they can gloat about, but really, when Australia is already struggling with declining defence numbers, and our defence personnel numbers are inadequate, can we really gloat about this? This relentless attack hasn't made the country better, as some journalists like to imply, it's just weakened our Defence Force".

She added, "Many patriotic Australians ask, is it fair that this brave and patriotic man who risked his life on overseas missions which he was sent on by our government, is under such attack".

Newsmax Australia, May 19 2025

The Australian War Memorial has confirmed it will make further changes to its display commemorating Ben Roberts-Smith's Victoria Cross, first changed when he was found complicit in war crimes on the balance of probabilities. The Australian special forces veteran failed a Federal Court appeal to his defamation case against Nine Newspapers, prompting the war memorial to update the display again.

Australian War Memorial chairman Kim Beazley has confirmed the display will be altered again, but could not provide any further detail about how or when. The Australian War Memorial has confirmed it will make changes to its display commemorating Ben Roberts-Smith's Victoria Cross medal, in light of the Federal Court ruling. The full Federal Court in Sydney dismissed the Australian special forces veteran's appeal against his long-running defamation case against Nine Newspapers on Friday.

Mr Roberts-Smith had tried to sue three newspapers over a series of articles published in 2018 detailing allegations of war crimes in Afghanistan, bullying, and domestic violence against a woman in Canberra. In 2023, a Federal Court judge in Sydney found Mr Roberts-Smith complicit in war crimes on the balance of probabilities. The justices who dismissed his appeal ordered him to pay costs, which were estimated to have cost more than \$25 million. Following the dismissal, Mr Roberts-Smith said he would "immediately" seek a challenge to the decision in the High Court, reiterating his ongoing denial of what he described as "egregious, spiteful allegations".

The Australian War Memorial added information to a plaque commemorating Mr Roberts-Smith's Victoria Cross medal late in 2023 to reflect the Federal Court's findings earlier that year. The revised text panel, which remains on display at the war memorial, reads in part: ***"In June 2023 a Federal Court judge determined that there was "substantial truth" to the allegations that Roberts-Smith had been involved and complicit in unlawful killings in Afghanistan. Roberts-Smith has appealed this decision. Roberts-Smith has not been charged with any offence under criminal law."***

In a statement to the ABC, Australian War Memorial chairman Kim Beazley confirmed the display would be altered again, but could not provide any further detail about how or when. "We're looking at it but there will be alterations," Mr Beazley said. "They will obviously reflect the change in circumstances that result from a decision and the fact that other decisions are being made or are yet to be made."

An Australian War Memorial spokesperson said the collection of items relating to Mr Roberts-Smith remained in the memorial's galleries, "displayed with context of the case and the interpretive panel will continue to be updated accordingly," The Australian War Memorial has also removed two portraits of Mr Roberts-Smith from display as part of its \$500 million development, which is expected to be completed in 2028.

The pieces are among a collection of more than 300 items that have been taken off display as part of planned gallery works. "The memorial will display thousands of new objects in an expanded Peacekeeping and Middle East galleries in the new Anzac Hall," the AWM said in 2023. It's unclear whether the portraits of Mr Roberts-Smith will feature in the new exhibition space when it opens.



Left - one of the two portraits which has been removed
Right - Ben R-S at the new display
Both images from AAP - Alan Porritt

Sources - article by Rosie King; Newsmax Australia; Four Corners AWM prog.; AWM; AAP: Alan Porritt

Simon, the ship's cat and his legacy

This day, he comes to this grave and nobody knows who taught him to do this. I've worked maintenance at this cemetery for eleven years now. I've seen it all—grieving families, folks talking to stones, some even dancing between the headstones when they think no one's watching.

But nothing gets me like him. The yellow Lab with the purple vest. Every November 28th, right around noon, he shows up. Alone. Calm. Walks straight through the south gate, past rows of graves like he memorized the layout years ago, and stops at Simon's. The headstone's old—navy-style, dedicated to a heroic ship's cat, of all things. "Awarded the Dickin Medal," it says. But this dog doesn't read, obviously. He just sits. For hours. Sometimes he places a small wreath, sometimes just a note in a plastic sleeve, clutched gently in his mouth. Never chews it. Never plays. Just drops it like he knows the weight of what's inside.



Last year, I got curious. Waited until he left, then walked over and opened the note. There were only two lines. "Still keeping your promise. Until the last of us is gone." No name. No explanation.

But the weirdest part? This year, he came wearing a new vest. One I'd never seen before. Different patch. Different colour. So I looked it up. Turns out that unit was disbanded in 1974. That's when the goosebumps really hit. 1974. That's before any of the dogs I'd ever seen could've been born. How could he know? How could he keep a promise made before his time?

I decided that this year, I wouldn't just watch. I'd follow him. See where he came from. Maybe get some answers. The yellow Lab, which I started calling "Goldie," arrived precisely at noon. He looked around, a gentle, almost knowing glance, and then started his steady walk to Simon's grave. I kept a good distance, not wanting to spook him. He stopped at the grave, as always, and sat. This time, he had a small, intricately woven rope wreath. He laid it down, his tail giving a single, slow wag. Then, he just sat, his gaze fixed on the headstone.

After about an hour, he stood up, turned, and started walking back the way he came. I followed, keeping my distance. He walked out the south gate, down a quiet residential street, and stopped at a small, well-kept house with a white picket fence. He went through a small dog door in the back fence. I waited a few minutes, then walked up to the front door and rang the bell. An elderly woman, her face etched with gentle lines, answered the door. "Can I help you, young man?" she asked. "Yes, ma'am," I said. "I'm from the cemetery. I've been seeing your dog, Goldie, visit a grave every year." Her eyes softened. "Ah, you've seen him," she said, a small smile playing on her lips. "That's Goldie. He's a special boy." "He visits Simon's grave," I said. "The ship's cat. But I don't understand. The note he left last year... and that vest he wore this year. It doesn't make sense."

She invited me in, and we sat in her cozy living room. "Goldie," she began, "wasn't always my dog. He belonged to my son, Liam. Liam was in the Navy, stationed on a ship in the 70s. He told me about Simon, the ship's cat. Simon was more than just a cat; he was a legend. He saved lives, comforted the crew, and was a hero. Liam loved him. But Liam... he passed away a few years ago," she said, her voice trembling slightly. "He was very young. He always told Goldie stories about Simon, and he told him to keep visiting Simon's grave every year, to remember. Goldie was always his shadow."

"But the unit... 1974..." I said, still confused. "Liam's unit was disbanded in 1974, yes. But they had a promise," she continued. "A promise to remember Simon, to honor his memory. They swore that as long as one of them remained, they would visit Simon's grave. Goldie is the last of them, in a way." "How does he know to go?" I asked. "Liam trained him, even before he passed. He made sure Goldie knew the way, and the date. He left notes, maps, and even recordings. Goldie is very smart, and very loyal." "He wears different vests," I said.

"Yes," she said. "Each vest represents a different year, a different memory. Liam made them, each with a different unit patch. The one he wore this year was the last one, the one from Liam's own unit. It was the final promise."

I was stunned. A dog, keeping a promise made by a man he loved, a promise to a cat who was a hero. It was a story of loyalty, love, and remembrance. As I left her house, I looked back at Goldie, now resting peacefully by the window. He looked up at me, his eyes filled with a quiet understanding.

The life lesson here is about the power of loyalty and the enduring nature of promises. It's about how love and memory can transcend time and even species. It's about how a simple act of remembrance can carry so much weight, so much meaning. Goldie taught me that loyalty isn't just a word; it's an action, a commitment. It's about keeping your word, even when no one else is watching, even when the person you promised is gone. And it taught me that stories, even the strangest ones, can hold the most profound truths.

Remember the promises you make, cherish the memories you hold, and never underestimate the power of a loyal heart. Goldie's journey, year after year, shows that even in the face of loss, love and promises can endure.

The source is unknown but ties to an article in August 2024 Contact Front about animal heroes of war

Exercise Talisman Sabre - June 2025

RNZAF building up for major combat exercise in Australia

In the build-up to the high-tempo international warfighting Exercise Talisman Sabre in Australia next month (June 2025) the Royal New Zealand Air Force's (RNZAF) NH90 helicopters and crews have been working on live-firing and formation flight skills.

13 June, 2025 - Priorities for No. 3 Squadron were to ensure its crews were qualified on gunnery skills and experienced with low-level formation flying.

"We went back to basics working on flying larger formations in the low-level environment than we do day-to-day, ending with adding tactical overlays," NH90 pilot Flight Lieutenant Rob Kenyon said. It was a busy week, which was reflective of how it would look during Talisman Sabre and the training worked well, he said.

The gunnery training took place at night as well as during the day, to highlight the different challenges of shooting without daylight. "At night there's obviously restricted vision and crew members needed to use night vision goggles. It's also been two years since we've done that gunnery qualification training, so it was challenging and beneficial for the planners from that perspective."

Talisman Sabre was designed as a conflict scenario exercise, so it was imperative to build up those skills, FLTLT Kenyon said. "We need to be a combat-capable unit for if the government ever calls on us to work in that warfighting environment. The big thing with Talisman Sabre is the multi-national force integration. When we get to Australia, the work will be the same, but on a much bigger scale."

For helicopter loadmaster Corporal Sam Swift the training was a chance for her to gain currency in the weapons and formation flying skills. "We did day and night practise, firing from a hover, firing from a departing hover, doing a fly past while firing and firing while approaching a hover. Now we're qualified on the MAG 58 machine gun."

The training took place at the weapons range at Raumai, north of RNZAF Base Ohakea.

"It's great for contributing to our operational effectiveness as a squadron because battlefield support is one of our outputs."

CPL Swift also took part in the three-ship formation flying training in preparation for the multi-national helicopter formations that will take place in Australia. "Doing a formation of more than two aircraft is really beneficial for us to build in those skills of working together in a formation and having that awareness of other aircraft around us. It builds in that complexity of how we manoeuvre in the space."

No. 3 Squadron crews will be working alongside the Royal Australian Air Force's Chinook fleet, she said. "I'm really excited. This will be my first big international exercise and it'll be my first time going on Talisman Sabre. Battlefield operations and battlefield support is what I really wanted to do and what I enjoy the most in our job," CPL Swift said.

In total, more than 680 New Zealand Defence Force personnel will deploy on the exercise and work alongside more than 30,000 military personnel and platforms from 19 nations. Included in the RNZAF's contribution to the exercise will be three NH90 helicopters a P-8A Poseidon and a number of supporting ground and air units.

Talisman Sabre will incorporate joint training scenarios including amphibious landings, maritime identification and interception, air operations, live-fire exercises, and logistics support across a vast training area, including in Australia's Northern Territory and Queensland, and in the Coral Sea.



Left - In preparation for the exercise, close to 35 New Zealand Army vehicles, including Light Armoured Vehicles (NZLAV) and the new Bushmaster protected mobility vehicles, along with 150 personnel, boarded HMNZS Canterbury, ready for the transit to Queensland.

Right - Live-fire from an NH90 helicopter

Source - nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre

"The Originals" - New Zealand Special Forces



The **1st New Zealand Special Air Service Regiment**, abbreviated as **1 NZSAS Regt**, is the special forces unit of the New Zealand Army, closely modelled on the British Special Air Service (SAS). It was formed on 7 July 1955. It traces its origins to the Second World War and the famous Long Range Desert Group that New Zealanders served with.

The New Zealand Government states that NZSAS is the "premier combat unit of the New Zealand Defence Force" and it has been operationally deployed to locations including the Pacific region, Afghanistan, and the jungles of South-East Asia. Individual members of the NZSAS have received honours and awards, most notably the Victoria Cross for New Zealand awarded to Corporal Willie Apiata. In 2004, the unit was awarded the United States Presidential Unit Citation for its contribution in Afghanistan.

The NZSAS was accorded regimental status in 2013. It has the responsibility of conducting counter-terrorism and overseas special operations and performing the disposal of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive hazards for military and civilian authorities.

70 years of NZSAS - New Zealand's most elite unit 'The Originals' were raised and trained in the shadows of Ruapehu in 1955 - the first squadron of New Zealand Special Air Service (NZSAS) soldiers.

From its humble beginnings the NZSAS has grown to become a full Regiment that gives the Government of the day a range of high-readiness, highly effective military options. It remains among the handful of Tier One Special Forces in the world.

"From the jungles of South East Asia and the Pacific, to the deserts, mountains and alleyways of the Middle East and beyond. At our borders, on our waters and all across the motu- our people have always stood ready for New Zealand, and always will be. Whenever we're called upon, whatever the task, our members are always ready to protect New Zealand, its people and its interests. We look forward to another 70 years pursuing excellence." ~ Commanding Officer, 1st New Zealand Special Air Service Regiment.

When the unit was established in 1955, approval was given for members to wear a maroon beret. The maroon beret was chosen as it was the then colour of the British Special Air Service beret. However, the British changed their beret colour to ecru (sandy coloured) in late 1957, the same colour as had been worn by the SAS during the early stages of World War II. On 19 December 1985, approval was granted by the (then) New Zealand chief of general staff, Major General John Mace, who had previously deployed to Malaya with the original NZSAS Squadron, for the NZSAS to switch from maroon to the sandy-coloured beret worn by other Commonwealth Special Air Service units. A parade was held on 21 March 1986 to formally hand the new beret over to the unit. To show the close association between the NZSAS and the British Special Air Service, members of NZSAS are authorised to wear black rank on all orders of dress except mess dress and to wear black web belts whenever web belts are ordered to be worn.



Sources - nzdf.mil.nz; fb; Wikipedia; images same sources

2nd Cavalry Regiment welcomes its second tank squadron

The Australian Army has consolidated its heavy armour capabilities in Townsville, in a significant move to bolster operational readiness and align with the National Defence Strategy. This underpinned the formal establishment of D Squadron within the 2nd Cavalry Regiment (2 CAV) on January 20, a milestone for the Royal Australian Armoured Corps.



On April 23, 2 CAV officially welcomed its second tank squadron at the T4 Raising Ceremony, signifying the first time in the corps' history that a regiment has two tank and cavalry squadrons positioned in the same location. Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Josh Higgins explained that this transformation rounded out the order of battle that had been developing overtime. "This places us as one of the first pieces on the chess board in the 3rd Brigade's armoured realisation," Lieutenant Colonel Higgins said. "We now have 36 of the world's best tanks, complementing the combat reconnaissance vehicle capability we have." For the soldiers and officers of the regiment, their commitment to raising the new squadron will set up future successes. 'The other squadrons in the unit represent the eyes and ears, and now finally we have the talons of the bird of prey.'

Officer Commanding D Squadron, Major Jodie McCart, expressed a sense of pride. "I'm incredibly privileged and honoured to raise the squadron with the men and women behind me, and bring this new platform into service," Major McCart said. "It is a huge responsibility to get it right because of the legacy it will leave, for not only me and the people that we are doing this with, but also to make sure we set up the brigade, in good order."

The ceremony showcased the regiment's capabilities, featuring a logistic resupply operation that was interrupted by a simulated attack, demonstrating the effective response from combat units in coordination with the main battle tanks.

Lieutenant Colonel Higgins likened the regiment to its mascot, 'Courage', symbolising strength and vigilance. "Our unit mascot is the wedge-tailed eagle, a bird of prey," he said. "The other squadrons in the unit represent the eyes and ears, and now finally we have the talons of the bird of prey."

D Squadron is postured to undertake further progression training throughout 2025 in preparation for its role within the Army's armoured amphibious brigade.



Top - Cpl James Foschi of 2nd Cavalry Regiment, brings Courage, the wedge-tailed eagle off parade at Lavarack Barracks; - Photo by Pte Jessica Gray

Left - Personnel use an Australian Army M1A2 Abrams from 2nd Cavalry Regt to provide security during the D Sqn raising ceremony - Photo by Cpl Riley Blennerhassett Right - The 2nd Cavalry Regiment welcomes its second tank squadron at Lavarack Barracks. - Photo by Pte Jessica Gray
Article by Capt Brittany Evans

The Abrams M1A2 System Enhancement Package Version 3 (SEPV3) is highly lethal, survivable, networked, and manoeuvrable. Its protection, accurate and lethal fire, cross-terrain mobility and situational awareness cannot be delivered by any other platform. The M1A2 SEPV3 is outwardly similar to the M1A1 in appearance. The improvement is most noticeable internally, with the redesign taking advantage of newer technology.

The M1A2 SEPV3 features advancement in technology, including improved armour, communications, reliability, sustainment and fuel efficiency. The M1A2 SEPV3 main battle tanks offer a high degree of transportability, and can support littoral operations from either the Landing Craft-Medium or Landing Craft-Heavy, or be deployed on a Royal Australian Air Force C-17 aircraft.



Sources - main article - defence.gov.au;
Abrams info panel and image above - army.gov.au

Australia's involvement in the war in Afghanistan

After the 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, Australia committed to military action. Australia's main objective was to support the US-led coalition's efforts to combat terrorism and help stabilise and reconstruct Afghanistan.

The ADF deployed a contingent of personnel on 1 October 2001 from all 3 of its services (Navy, Army and Air Force). The Australian contingent formed part of the International Security Assistance Force, a multinational mission in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014. These operations aimed to help stabilise Afghanistan and combat terrorism by preventing the country from becoming a training ground for terrorist organisations, such as al Qaeda.

Australians served in the International Coalition against Terrorism, a military operation in Afghanistan that included:

Operation Slipper from 1 October 2001 to 31 December 2014

Operation Palate from 18 April 2003 to 5 July 2004

Operation Palate II from 27 June 2005 to 1 January 2017.

Initially, Australia deployed special forces units, including the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR), to participate in counterterrorism operations and help local Afghan forces. Over time, the Australian contingent expanded to include infantry units, engineers, aviation assets and other support personnel.

Australian forces were mainly stationed in Uruzgan province, where they worked alongside other Coalition forces to disrupt Taliban operations, build the capacity of Afghan security forces, and support development projects. The Australian contingent aimed to enhance security, governance and development in Uruzgan to create conditions for sustainable stability.

ADF personnel also served in Operation Highroad from 2015 to 2021. This operation supported the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. The Australians worked alongside the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces as they built their own defence, security and counterterrorism forces.

Withdrawal from Afghanistan

After more than 10 years of deployments to Afghanistan, Australia gradually reduced its military presence in Afghanistan. In 2013, Australian troops transitioned from combat to advisory and training roles. They focused on mentoring the Afghan National Army's 4th Brigade.

Australia ended its military contribution to the war under Operation Slipper on 31 December 2014. This meant Australians were no longer involved in combat operations. From 2015 to 2021, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces were mainly responsible for fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

By 2020, most ADF personnel had been withdrawn from Afghanistan, marking the end of Australia's military involvement in the conflict. However, some personnel remained until 2021. They continued to support Afghanistan through diplomatic and development efforts, with a focus on humanitarian aid, capacity building and promoting women's rights and education.

The War in Afghanistan significantly impacted Australia's military and broader society, leading to discussions and assessments of the country's foreign policy, defence strategy and lessons learned from the conflict. As with the Gulf War and the Iraq War, many veterans continue to suffer as a result of their service in Afghanistan.

Above - anzacportal.dva

On 11 July 2021, the Minister for Defence confirmed the final withdrawal of Australian Defence Force personnel from Afghanistan, marking the end of a 20-year chapter in our military history. Since 2001, more than 39,000 ADF personnel served across the Middle East region. The nation solemnly remembers the 41 Australian lives lost during the campaign, and we continue to honour those who live with the lasting physical and psychological wounds of war. We also acknowledge, with deep sorrow, the veterans who tragically took their own lives after returning home.

Women Veterans Network Australia honours the extraordinary courage, commitment, and sacrifice of every ADF member who served in the Middle East from 2001 to 2021 especially the women who served with strength, resilience, and dedication across all roles and ranks.

To the men and women who stood on the front lines in defence of our nation and the global fight against terrorism, we see you, we thank you, and we will not forget your service.

Article in italics - WVNA



Left - ADF personnel from Task Group Afghanistan prepare to board a Royal Australian Air Force C-17A Globemaster III aircraft flown by 36 Squadron, departing Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul – 15 June 2021.
WVNA, right- source unknown



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

CHUCKLE PAGES



LIFE BEFORE THE COMPUTER 📠 🖨️

Memory was something you lost with age 🧠
An application was for employment 📄
A program was a TV show 📺
A cursor used profanity 🗨️
A keyboard was a piano 🎹
A web was a spider's home 🕸️
A virus was the flu 🦠
A CD was a bank account 💰
A hard drive was a long road trip 🚗
A mouse pad was where a mouse lived 🐭
And if you had a 3½ inch floppy...
you just hoped nobody found out 🤔 🙄



Genuine photo from
Amsterdam, by a Navy vet



Sources - pinterest, carl memes, Dave thank you, jokesforfree.com.au; Valhalla web; shipmates reunited

CHUCKLE PAGES

CAUTION - GROWN UP
LANGUAGE, MILITARY HUMOUR



MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

This is not the best example I've seen.

fitKitchen.com



Suppose you were an idiot. Suppose you were a member of government. But then I repeat myself. (Mark Twain)
Talk is cheap, except when the government does it. (Anon)



Sundays are peaceful because the most evil people are at church 😊



WE ALL LIVE
IN A YELLOW SUBMARINE...



SHUT THE FUCK UP CARL..



IF YOU'RE GOING TO FUCK UP...



Call with wife
Me: "Babe I'm at Lowe's what type of ceiling fan did you want for living room?"
Wife: "I don't care pick what you think looks good"
Me: "ok you sure?"
Wife: "it's a fan you can't screw that up"

The new fan:



Vietnam Veterans Peacekeepers & Peacemakers Association Inc.

HASTINGS MANNING MACLEAY
SUB-BRANCH
VVPAA Inc, PO Box 5330
Port Macquarie 2444

Phone: 6581 5230

E-mail: Vets614@gmail.com

website - www.veteranssupport.org.au



An affiliated Sub-Branch of the
Vietnam Veterans Federation of
Australia

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1030 TO 1330

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Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial, Anzac Parade, Canberra
Source - Honesthistory.net