

Veterans Support Centre



1st Edition February 2021

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

2020, a year to be remembered for all the wrong reasons

I don't know who did this but I love it!



Such a special year needed a Logo

2021 new hopes and dreams, safe and happy times for all, this is what we can wish for



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There are NO COSTS to access the services such as Pensions, Welfare and advice provided by Veterans Support Centre, Port Macquarie

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Mental health - Who do I contact if I, or someone I know, needs help now?

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<small>The DVA Mental Health Support</small> All Hours Support Line <small>The Right Support Right Now</small> 1800 628 036 <small>Call from outside and within Australia</small> 1800 628 036	 kidshelpLine <small>Anytime Any Reason</small> 1800 551 800	SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE 1300 659 467
1800RESPECT <small>NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT, DOMESTIC FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNSELLING SERVICE</small> 1800 737 732	 Lifeline 13 11 14	 <small>Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs</small>

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Kempsey District Hospital.....	6561 2600
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DVA Media Releases and Ministerial Speeches

A large number of DVA Media Releases and other publications are available for your information.

A copy of the full text and other less topical releases may be obtained by visiting

<http://minister.dva.gov.au/media.releases.htm>

You can also subscribe to receive all releases to your computer

or Email a request to us at hmmvppaa@bigpond.com

or Phone us on **6581 5230**

or visit our office at **Veterans Support Centre** if you require assistance

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Hello,

I would like to wish you a Happy New Year and I know that we all hope for a much better year than 2020. It sometimes takes bad things to make us appreciate what we have and this wonderful country has done so well in it's dealings with covid. Our huge land size and small population, our leaders who made the tough decisions and our own efforts to look out for each other have made the outcome here so much better than almost every other country.

I live in a country that has a fair justice system and one of the finest Defence Forces in the world and I have been proud to have been closely linked to all things military for much of my life. If someone does the wrong thing, there is a system that has to prove beyond doubt that they did the wrong thing and then it allocates a fair punishment.

The following comments are my personal opinions and are NOT necessarily the opinions of VPPAA and this Branch or of its members.

Many of us have followed the treatment of soldiers within the SAS Regiment after the media spread news of alleged wrong doings and many of us are outraged at the way they have been treated. This includes waiting **4 years** for an investigation, "trial by media", and an apparent lack of defence of the individuals from within Defence and its leaders. Now, 2 Squadron has been disbanded and soldiers have been put onto administrative action and face a very long wait for justice to be done. **Innocent until proven guilty** seems a long way from these soldiers and their futures. Punishment, yes, if found guilty, but not until then. The public should continue to have confidence in their defence personnel until the alleged few bad apples can be treated in a just and fair way.

The other issue was the removal of the service awards from every soldier who served in that theatre. The confirmation from the Chief of Army came just hours after a retired SAS Commander called the Chief of the Defence Force's move to strip all commandos and special forces officers of their meritorious service awards "un-Australian". Thanks to veterans like Retired Special Forces Commander Heston Russell well over 65,000 people signed a petition on his "Voice of a Veteran" site, many others voiced their outrage in so many ways to leave awards alone. After a bit of bluster that has now been actioned. Thousands of soldiers have served in Afghanistan and **IF and only if**, a few are found guilty, punishment should be for them and them alone.

I'll end my personal comments with the heartbreak of a father who said that "They'll have to dig my son up to get his medal" - his son was buried with full military honours. This disgraceful treatment of soldiers hurts them, their families and friends, the reputation of our fine fighting forces, all veterans and the veteran community and also those soldiers who are still innocent of any crime until proven otherwise. I heard one veteran say that it was like reliving all the hurt from when our soldiers returned from Vietnam and were so badly treated (and still suffer to this day).

Jill Opie, Editor



Jill Opie, Editor

Don't forget to renew your membership now for 2021, see back of the address label or contact this Branch



Kuga the Special Operations Military Working Dog

Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) Special Operations military working dog 'Kuga' was awarded the prestigious Dickin Medal following his extraordinary courage and dedication during a Special Operations Task Group patrol on 26 August 2011 in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan.

The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) Dickin Medal is often colloquially referred to as the 'Victoria Cross for Animals'.

Kuga was nominated for the Dickin Medal after he alerted his handler to an enemy presence ahead and was released to investigate. Kuga crossed a river and exposed an enemy ambush position, drawing small-arms and heavy machine-gun fire. Despite being wounded, Kuga continued to engage the enemy until being recalled by his handler. Kuga was shot five times, suffered a broken leg and several fragmentary wounds during the action. Kuga survived and was medically evacuated.

Kuga was a Belgian Malinois, and served with SASR as a special operations military working dog from 2008 to 2012. Kuga died in Australia in July 2012, most likely due to the stress and extensive physical trauma associated with his wounds.

The PDSA Dickin Medal was created in 1943 to honour the work of animals in war. It is awarded to animals showing conspicuous gallantry or devotion to duty while serving or associated with any branch of the Commonwealth armed services or civil defence units.



Australian Army special operations soldier Sergeant 'J' with his military working dog 'Kuga' on a Special Operations Task Group patrol in Afghanistan.



Source - Dept of Defence website



Honours and Awards

Special Operations Task Group – Afghanistan



More than 500 Special Operations Task Group personnel were recognised with individual honours and awards between 2001 and 2014. This included the *Victoria Cross for Australia* (VC), which is the pre-eminent award for acts of bravery in wartime and Australia's highest honour. For more information visit [defence.gov.au /events/vc/](http://defence.gov.au/events/vc/)

Three Australian Army soldiers from the Special Operations Task Group were awarded the *Victoria Cross for Australia*.

2009

Trooper Mark
Donaldson VC Special
Air Service Regiment

Trooper Mark Donaldson VC was awarded the VC for the *“most conspicuous acts of gallantry in action of great peril in Afghanistan”* during a combined Afghan, US and Australian partnered patrol in September 2008. Trooper Mark Donaldson became the first Australian to be awarded the VC since the Vietnam War.

2011

Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith VC
MG Special Air Service Regiment

Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith VC MG was awarded the VC in 2011 for the *“most conspicuous gallantry in action of great peril”* during a helicopter assault into Tizak, Kandahar province, in June 2010.

2014

Corporal Cameron Baird VC MG
2nd Commando Regiment

Corporal Cameron Baird VC MG was posthumously awarded the VC in 2014 for the *“most conspicuous acts of valour, extreme devotion to duty and ultimate self-sacrifice”* as a commando team leader during a patrol in Ghawchak village, Uruzgan province, on 22 June 2013.

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One fact sheet is **IS45 - Partner Service Pension** and tells of when a partner may be eligible for a pension income based on your qualifying service. It is income and asset tested for those on low income.

If you need help accessing DVA's website, call the VSC for help



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

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



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Shop 8, 100 Ocean Drive, Lighthouse Plaza Port Macquarie

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Shop 3-5, 88 Bold St Haven Plaza Corner of Bold St & Tunis St, Laurieton

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General Business– Your Office



Our office is open weekdays - phone or call in 10am - 2pm

Committee Meetings:

Second Thursday every month held at Unit 22, 35 Merrigal Road, Port Macquarie, immediately following the Luncheon Clean up. However the Committee may determine an alternative location and day from time to time.

Annual General Meeting Minutes and Financial Statements are available at the office.

Thank you:

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

Contributions Welcome:

Please send any letters, stories, questions, comments, poems, jokes, photos etc to The Editor, Contact Front, PO Box 5330, Port Macquarie NSW 2444. All such submissions are subject to copyright laws, may be edited and remain the property of VPPAA Sub-Branch unless otherwise agreed. All submissions received will be considered for publication, but will not necessarily be accepted. No correspondence regarding acceptance or otherwise will be entered into.

Take a break



THURSDAYS - ON AGAIN

Join us on Thursday mornings from about 10am for an informal get together. Find out what’s happening with veteran’s issues, catch up with old and new friends or just have a chat over a cup of coffee or tea.

These informal mornings are followed by **OUR FAMOUS \$5 LUNCH**

HELP SUPPORT US to keep a candle in the window burning, to help someone just like you, as we have helped so many in the past.

PLEASE if you go into hospital, ring us or have someone ring us and let us know.

Even though we do a ring around at least 3 times a year, we have members go into hospital and we don’t know. Even if it is an out of town hospitalisation like Sydney we can organise a visit.



Listen to Community Radio 2 WAY FM 103.9 every Wednesday morning 9am to 10.30am for our weekly "Contact Front" program, keeping you entertained and up-to-date.

Port Macquarie Soldier On veteran having fun running the “Contact Front” radio show - Paul Davey - left

Dunny Issues

By George "Pills" Parker, 110 Sig Sqn, South Vietnam (3 Dec 1968 - 10 Dec 1969)



110 Sig Sqn Sgt Mess Dunny with a View (left side). Note the pisser phone in use! Sgt Mess (right side).

Well if you were standing outside of the 110 Sig Sqn, Sgts Mess at 1ALSG, Vung Tau, early 1969, then you would of heard me brief the unit Sig Blowfly, who was a thick as a piece of chalk. I told him that the dunny needed a good slow burn out and explained to him the ingredients, 1 in 4, that is, one measure of petrol (or range fuel) and four measures of diesel, and yes he got the ingredients vice/versa. The eruption was a dream for an avid photographer as Sig Blowfly returned an hour later after a good soaking in shit!

He was always wary when lighting the dunnies, and he threw a match at the dunny hole from the door and no ignition, he got closer and threw another match in, and still no ignition, and then he stood over the hole and dropped the next match in and the ingredients began to ignite, and the dunny began to shudder.

Sig Blowfly came screaming out of the door of the dunny, like a startled gazelle, with look of fear on his face. For three seconds the dunny shuddered and rocked and rolled, and Sig Blowfly was running on the spot, the power cables to the dunny began writher like a snake, the dunny floor began to lift and shudder like a 6.8 earthquake —and WHOOSH, the whole contents of the hole splattered everywhere and the top of the dunny seat chased Sig Blowfly away from the exploding installation. We had to get the 1ALSG fire truck out to hose the dunny remains down.



110 Sig Sqn six seater dunny under re-contruction in 1ALSG, Vung Tau, 1969

The ORs dunny also had drama about the same time, as the same Sig Blowfly blew it up a couple of times. They had it replaced with a new 12 seater, which was only held down by concrete nails. Over that short period of time with the sea breezes, the frame became loose. Six blokes were enjoying their morning tea hard hits, when a great gust of wind came along, and the whole dunny roof and frame 'blasted off' like at Cape Canaveral and ended up down in the gully near the MPs.

Reproduced with permission from the Webmaster pronto.au104.org/110Sigs/110-story8.html



V H W
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 2020



Above -Some of the veterans listening to Amber

Above - Amber from Open Arms spoke of her own experiences and of how 'Open Arms' can help veterans of all conflicts

Below - Compensation Advocate, Open Arms, Soldier On, veterans chatting



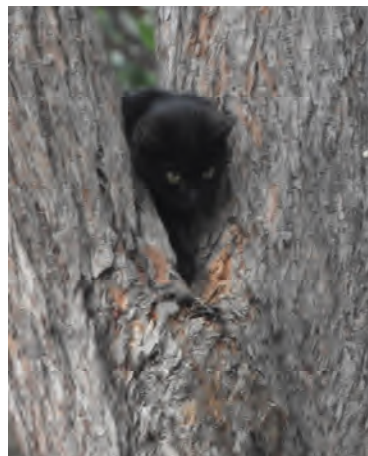
Above - Bill (left) starts to prepare lunch for the Veterans Health Week gathering, helped by a mate

Right - enjoying their meal

Our day was funded by a DVA grant and veterans from VSC, Soldier On and Open Arms enjoyed getting together for a meal, talk and company.



3 pics below - Entertainment was provided by our local branch of SES who came to rescue a cat stuck in a tree just outside our Centre. Cat safely returned to earth!





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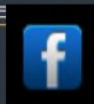
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Scott Morrison and Angus Campbell at odds over Afghanistan war crimes report recommendation

By Insiders host David Speers 29 Nov 2020



It's not often we see the Prime Minister and the Chief of Defence at odds, but the Brereton Report detailing allegations of Australian war crimes in Afghanistan has exposed a public rift between the two and it's already pretty clear who will win the argument.

General Angus Campbell won mostly praise for his handling of this bombshell report released 10 days ago. As Chief of Army, he was the one who commissioned the inquiry four years ago and now as Defence Chief, General Campbell accepted the findings and recommendations with the seriousness and gravity they deserved.

In one of the darkest moments for the Australian Defence Force, the General is seen by both sides of politics to have responded well. Mostly, anyway.

Then came the reaction

On one matter, there was immediate controversy: the decision to strip a group citation for the special forces in Afghanistan. It was hardly the most significant recommendation of the report; a unit citation is not a war medal and stripping it is hardly akin to what might be in store for those who committed war crimes.

But it was by far the most sensitive recommendation, given the number of troops affected and the signal sent to the broader veteran community. When he released the report, General Campbell was clear.

"I have accepted the Inspector-General's recommendation," he said in his opening remarks to a nationally televised press conference, "and will again write to the Governor-General, requesting he revoke the Meritorious Unit Citation awarded to Special Operations Task Group rotations serving in Afghanistan between 2007 and 2013."

It was presented as a final decision. The Chief of Defence had spoken. No ifs, no buts. A deployment marred by 39 alleged war crimes could hardly be considered "meritorious" any longer. The group citation was being revoked.

Then came the reaction, from the public, the veteran's community and inevitably, the politicians. Some of those who served honourably in Afghanistan and did nothing wrong wondered why they were being punished. The furious father of one commando killed in action said the citation would have to be collected "from his gravestone".

On one matter, there was immediate controversy: the decision to strip a group citation for the special forces in Afghanistan. (Supplied: Department of Defence) An online petition to "save" the unit citation received more than 40,000 signatures at last count. Labor MP Luke Gosling, himself a former commando, suggested it would be "cruel" to strip the honour from 3,000 personnel, the overwhelming majority of whom served with distinction. Within the Government, a similar view formed.

'Decisions haven't been made yet'

While the citation may not have been issued to the special forces if we knew then what we know now about events in Afghanistan, most agreed the idea of revoking it was crazy and at the end of the day, impossible to implement.

Veterans Affairs Minister Darren Chester, who initially supported the CDF's decision, noted calls to the Open Arms support line for veterans had doubled in the space of a week.

The reckoning for alleged crimes is about to begin

The Prime Minister was asked by Ben Fordham on 2GB why thousands were being punished for the "sins of a couple of dozen". His response made it clear he was uncomfortable with General Campbell's position. "Decisions haven't been made yet on these things", he suggested, "so let's see how each step unfolds". Morrison went on to say he was "very sensitive to the issues ... as is the Defence Minister".

It's worth a reminder at this point that both the Prime Minister and Defence Minister were happy to leave the initial response to the damning war crimes report to General Campbell. They took the view it was better for Defence to be seen to be dealing with its own mess and fixing internal problems. Neither Morrison nor Linda Reynolds have even seen the unredacted version of the Brereton Report. As Morrison said on Friday: "We haven't seen, nor do we wish to have provided to us, the detailed report, which includes the names of individuals. That, we think, would compromise the process. That is something for the ADF to address internally."

Ultimately, someone must decide

The unredacted version of the report contains more than just names. It includes, among other things, details of the alleged atrocities. The Chief of Defence has read this full version, the Prime Minister has not. And yet it's the Prime Minister who's now overriding the CDF.

Morrison has a finely tuned political radar and could well be right in detecting where community sentiment lies on this issue. Nonetheless, he's put General Campbell in an awkward position by suggesting it's still up in the air.

On Friday, the Chief of Army, Rick Burr, stood by General Campbell's position.

"I support the recommendation in the [Brereton] report," he said, "which is that if we knew then what we know now, the unit would not have been put forward for a Meritorious Citation."

The executive director of the Australia Defence Association Neil James similarly points out while there have previously been proposals to rescind honours for "subsequent dishonourable behaviour", in this case it's a question of "whether the honour was deserved in the first place". James suggests it's "better to let passions cool", rather than make snap decisions in the wake of this report.

Ultimately though, someone must decide. The worst outcome would be leaving it to the Governor General (himself a former chief of defence) to choose between conflicting advice from General Campbell and the Prime Minister. To avoid that, it appears Defence has decided to blink.

Asked if General Campbell is still going to write to the Governor-General recommending the citation be revoked, a spokesperson for Defence told the ABC in a written statement, "Defence is preparing a comprehensive implementation plan to action the Inspector-General's recommendations", and "final decisions on this advice will be a matter for Government."

Pressure from veterans, the public and most importantly Defence's political masters has undoubtedly had an impact.

Decoding the language of Defence Media, it appears General Campbell's declaration 10 days ago that he would write to the Governor-General is now in doubt.

Pressure from veterans, the public and most importantly Defence's political masters has undoubtedly had an impact. It now seems most unlikely the citation will be revoked.

Instead, the special forces deployment to Afghanistan will continue to be regarded as "meritorious", despite the 39 alleged war crimes.



Pressure from veterans, the public and most importantly Defence's political masters has undoubtedly had an impact



Sources - David Speers - article as host of Insiders, Photos - Department of defence and AAP: Paul Miller)

'No accountability' in higher echelons over handling of alleged ADF crimes 27/11/2020

Former speaker of the house **Bronwyn Bishop** says she is appalled there is no accountability in higher echelons for the way in which ADF personnel are being treated and handled over alleged war crimes in Afghanistan. It comes after Chief of Army Lieutenant General Rick Burr confirmed 13 individuals have been issued administrative action notices in relation to alleged war crimes in Afghanistan after accepting all the recommendations of the Brereton report. "Just think about it, what happened is there were rumours, there were stories that were going around," **Ms Bishop told Sky News host Gary Hardgrave**. "Generals who were over in Afghanistan who said 'oh maybe I should have paid attention, but I didn't'. "And then it comes back to Australia and a sociologist is appointed to look into the rumours." Ms Bishop says there is a "mechanism in place which should have been used then and there". "But instead of that they pick a Supreme Court judge ... he went to Afghanistan and he asked for witnesses to come forward to testify or tell stories or lies or whatever against our soldiers," she said. "What sort of organisation have we got now running our defence forces?"

Source - Sky news, Gary Hardgrave

Meritorious award revocation a 'knee-jerk reaction'



The Australian Defence Force's commitment to operations in Afghanistan came at a significant cost with 41 soldiers killed and 262 wounded-in-action.

The Special Operations Task Group – Afghanistan suffered 21 soldiers killed between 2001 and 2014.

Roll of Honour factsheet www.army.gov.au

Retired Special Forces Commander Heston Russell says the decision to strip meritorious service awards from thousands of personnel is "disgusting".

The confirmation from the Chief of Army came just hours after a retired SAS Commander called the Chief of the Defence Force's move to strip all commandos and special forces officers of their meritorious service awards "un-Australian".

Heston Russell, who deployed to Afghanistan four times with both Australian and American special forces task groups, strongly criticised General Angus Campbell's "knee-jerk" decision to remove the prestigious award from thousands of special forces personnel.

"The fact that it's taken the Chief of the Defence Force six days to personally review the report when he received it behind closed doors from Major General Brereton, to then decide that six years worth of special forces rotations are no longer meritorious in operations, is absolutely disgusting," he said.

Major Russell, who is petitioning the Governor-General about the decision, said the stripping of the awards would further isolate veterans already dealing with "loss of purpose, loss of identity".

"Removing that component from the uniform may simply appear to be a material impact, but the emotional and mental impact in what is being portrayed to me in messages every day by veterans is collateral damage that the Government is not taking into account and is really harming people," he said.

Major Russell said that the inquiry and the subsequent stripping of the service awards had already had a significant impact on the mental health of veterans.

"The veteran community has been going through the largest mental health crisis in our history, with over 600 veterans having committed suicide since 2001, since we started the war in Afghanistan, and thousands more suffering from mental health injuries and scars," he said.

"These conversations at the moment are not only poorly placed, they're irresponsible."

The Voice of a Veteran petition asking the Governor-General not to strip the meritorious group citation from all special forces personnel has already attracted over 55,000 signatures.

Major Russell said that the stripping of the awards was detracting from the actual investigation and the Brereton report's findings.

"The families of the fallen are suffering the most from this," he said.

"Those who have fallen and all those families of those who have fallen at the moment, in a very public way, are being forced to feel those scars torn open by the trauma of not being contacted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, not being contacted by the Department of Defence, having the memory of their fallen heroes being dragged through this inquiry."

Source - ABC News: Jana Black and Heston's site Voice of a Veteran (next page)

The presumption of guilt before a fair trial and judgement ? Someone tell the Minister please—Ed



Defence Minister Linda Reynolds says accountability is crucial to learn from the 'grave failings'. (*Department of Defence*)

The Government has declared it will pursue those responsible for the "appalling" behaviour of Australian special forces soldiers in Afghanistan, including the murder of civilians.

Quote from the report - By political reporter Jack Snape, ABC

Statement by Heston Russell - Founder of Voice of a Veteran

I am not an alarmist by nature; but I am a proud Australian Veteran with 16 years of service including combat in Afghanistan. It was insulting enough to suffer the Chief of the Defence Force threatening to write to the Governor General to remove the Meritorious Unit Citation from every Special Operations soldier who had served in Afghanistan between April 2007 & December 2013. This threat has done untold psychological and emotional damage to veterans and their families, those living and deceased. It has inevitably led to a heightened instance of suicide or the contemplation of such a final act within our Veteran community.

I have expressed publicly, on the behalf of Veterans, my anger and anguish at such a callous response to the Brereton report which the Prime Minister acknowledged he had not read. This threat has opened old wounds in a way that Politicians, Defence hierarchy & civilians may not understand. However, it is now clear that this threat had been contemplated months before the release of the Brereton Report. The Letters Patent providing for the award of the Meritorious Unit Citation, not to individuals but to a Unit, were issued by Her Majesty the Queen on the 15th of January 1991, they were countersigned by Prime Minister Hawke.

Those Letters Patent did not provide any powers to revoke the Citation from a Unit - namely any Special Operations Task Group, or Task Force 66. That will be transparent in the documents attached to this release.

It now transpires that the response by General Campbell to the Report via the threat to write the Governor General was not spontaneous. Sadly, the Prime Minister appears complicit in all of this because, well before the release of the report, and presumably anyone's ability to read it, changes were made to the Letters Patent, dated July 13, 2020. The Brereton Report was released on November 19, 2020. That is five months after the Prime Minister's changes to the Letters Patent giving powers to the Governor General to revoke the Citation from an entire Unit, not the revoking of the right to wear, but the total revocation of the Citation, innocent and guilty alike. And this extreme change, without any public announcement, without any public debate, without any public scrutiny, and I presume without any endorsement from the parliament of Australia has been countersigned by the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison - five months before the release of the Report. In other words, the psychological, emotional and traumatic damage to Australia's service men and women had been planned months in advance of the Report's release, a report that is now still to be investigated and tested. I have said before, that this goes to the very heart of our Constitutional and Democratic rights - the Constitutional obligation to the proper defence of the nation has been seriously compromised by the threat to the morale of those serving, those who have served, and those a government would hope to recruit to serve.

The simple threat to our Democratic fabric derives from the denial of the presumption of innocence by so called credible information that has not been tested in a court of law.

I hereby call upon the Prime Minister to explain his actions to change the Letters Patent months prior to the release of the Brereton Report.

To explain what recommendations were provided to him and by whom, and to produce these documents for review. I call upon all parliamentarians, as our elected representatives, to challenge why these actions were allowed to occur. How and without any accompanying plans or actions to support our Veterans and their families who have been gravely impacted by the actions of our Prime Minister and his senior Defence leaders.

I further demand, on behalf of all Veterans, an apology from the Prime Minister, the Minister for Defence, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Chief of the Defence Force, and the Chief of Army, for the reckless and calculated damage that has been done.

The over 65,000 Australians that have joined our petition to "Maintain the Memory of the Meritorious Many" at voiceofaveteran.org deserve a response. I suspect that millions others, if they knew of the background to all of this, would feel similarly.

Heston Russell

Disbanded in disgrace for a crime not proven, no trial and meant to punish every single Special Operations member and ruin their proud reputation - Ed see below

"Profound betrayal": War crimes report refers Australian soldiers to police over Afghan murders, SAS unit disbanded - CDF Angus Campbell's report concludes among other things -

The Special Air Service second squadron has been ordered disbanded following a damning report. Angus Campbell told reporters the Chief of Army Rick Burr had advised the Special Air Service Regiment on Thursday the second squadron had been "struck off the Army order of battle".

"Not because it was the only squadron involved in these issues, but because it was at a time one of the squadrons involved in the allegations made," he said. **Daily Independent News 19 Nov 2020**

Move to scrap SAS squadron delayed after Diggers' outrage

The axing of a special forces unit at the centre of war crimes allegations has been delayed, but not cancelled, according to the Defence Minister.

A plan to disband a special forces squadron at the centre of war crimes allegations has been delayed. It comes after The Daily Telegraph reported special forces soldiers planned a mass walkout over the decision.

Defence Chief Angus Campbell said the 2 Squadron Special Air Service Regiment would be axed after the release of the damning Afghan war crimes report, which found evidence of 39 murders of Afghan civilians and prisoners by Australian special forces.

But a Defence statement on Sunday said he had requested the plan be delayed.

"In light of sensitivities related to the inquiry, the Chief of the Defence Force has requested the Chief of Army delay the activity until the implementation plan for the inquiry is fully developed," it read.

Defence Chief Angus Campbell has delayed a plan to disband an SAS squadron at the centre of war crimes allegations.

Defence Minister Linda Reynolds said the disbanding had been delayed but not cancelled. "My understanding from the Chief of Defence Force is that it will proceed for the reasons that the Chief of Army and the Chief of Defence Force have said," she confirmed to reporters. "Given the gravity of the circumstances that have led to that, I fully support it."

A "farewell" parade to commemorate the end of the squadron was scheduled for Tuesday but has been postponed.

More than 60 current or reservist SAS members were in "absolute uproar" and had threatened to quit over the decision, according to The Daily Telegraph.

More than 60 soldiers threatened a walkout over the plan.

Labor Defence spokesman Richard Marles conceded the decision had sparked anger but said the report's recommendations should be implemented.

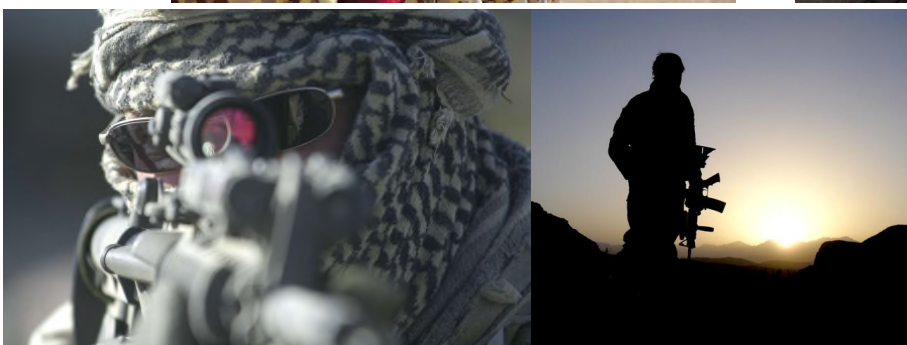
He warned Defence needed to be given space to work through its findings during "a very painful period". "The material that was dealt with by the Brereton report was as difficult as anything we've seen for our Defence Force," he said. "This is painful for many, many people serving in our Defence forces, but it's really important that we face up to the terrible allegations that are contained within it."

General Campbell said up to 3000 soldiers would be stripped of a collective award but has since walked back the claim. "That's what this investigation did. It's really important at the end of the day that the recommendations contained in the Brereton report are ultimately implemented."

Senator Reynolds also confirmed last week the government had expressed concern over General Campbell's plan to revoke a meritorious unit citation, a move that could affect up to 3000 veterans.

General Campbell said last month he would request soldiers who served in Afghanistan at the time of the alleged murders be stripped of the decoration. He said the collective award was no longer sustainable given the number of allegations levelled in the Brereton report.

But he has since bowed to public pressure, confirming no final decision has been made.



Sources -

Finn McHugh NCA news wire,
December 7, 2020;
[news.com.au](https://www.news.com.au);

News Limited

Photos Top & far left - Dept of Defence;
Left Mick Tsikas

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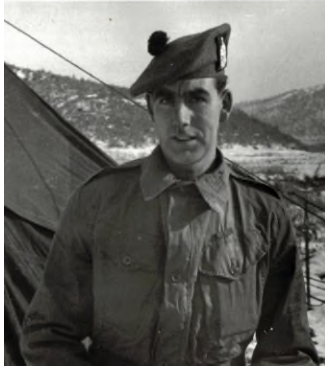


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I want to say Thank You to Darren of Arranbee Framers for the absolutely top class work that they did with my Father's medals and Bevan Boy recognition, I was moved to see his picture and medals and awards so well displayed. The smaller arrangement for my Uncle and his items was also superbly put together. If you have treasures of any sort that you want to preserve, I would wholeheartedly recommend Arranbee Framing. Jill

That time a British soldier held back 6,000 enemy troops with beer bottles

There's probably no greater argument in favour of issuing bottled beer to troops in combat than the story of William Speakman.



William Speakman in Korea, 1951



HRH The Duke of York meets Chelsea Pensioner Bill Speakman, VC. (Duke of York photo)



Speakman's medals, which he donated to South Korea in 2015

In 1951, the 24-year-old Speakman volunteered for service in the Korean War.

He initially joined the Black Watch Royal Highland Regiment, but was attached to the 1st Battalion of the King's Own Scottish Borderers during his time in Korea.

By 1951, the war had turned on the UN troops fighting in the peninsula. After near annihilation along the Korea-China border, Communist forces were bolstered when China entered the war for North Korea. Later that year, William Speakman and his unit were somewhere along the 38th parallel – the new front – on a freezing cold, shell-pocked hill along the Imjin River. It was known as Hill 317.

On Nov. 4, 1951, Speakman's unit was suddenly pummeled by intense Chinese artillery and a tide of overwhelming human wave attacks.

What happened next earned William Speakman the nickname "Beer Bottle VC."

Speakman, a junior enlisted infantryman acting without orders, led a series of counter charges to prevent his position from being overrun. He and six other men from the King's Own fought an estimated 6,000 oncoming Chinese infantry troops. Speakman himself began to hurl as many grenades at the Chinese waves as he could, even after suffering multiple wounds.

He ran to and from a supply tent 10 times over the course of four continuous hours to replenish his grenade supply.

"It was hand-to-hand; there was no time to pull back the bolt of the rifle," he told the Telegraph. "It was November, the ground was hard, so grenades bounced and did damage."

His cache of grenades didn't last forever, of course. When he exhausted his unit's explosives supply, he turned to any other material he could find to throw at the enemy horde, which included rocks and a steady supply of empty beer bottles. He and his six buddies were able to hold off the Communist onslaught long enough for the KOSB to withdraw safely.

"I enjoyed it, actually, it's what I joined up to do," Speakman said in an interview with the Royal British Legion. I volunteered for Korea and joined the KOSB... we did what you're trained to do as a soldier. We fought that night and did what we had to."

Speakman remembered Queen Elizabeth II presenting him with the Victoria Cross for his actions on Hill 317.

"When I got it, the king was alive," Speakman said. "But he was very ill. He awarded me the VC but he died. So I was the queen's first VC... I think she was nervous. And I was very nervous."

Only four VCs were awarded during the Korean War and Speakman is the only living Victoria Cross recipient from that war. Though Speakman went on to serve until 1967 and fought in other conflicts in places like Italy and Borneo, he wants his ashes to be scattered in the Korean DMZ. "When I die, this is where I want to be. Nowhere else," he told the Wall Street Journal.

Source - Blake Stillwell, The Wall Street Journal, Posted On May 13, 2020

A pilot ejects from his plane and watches it fly itself



Sometimes in life, things go incredibly wrong. And other times, they just go incredibly weird. 1st Lt. Gary Foust was preparing for the first scenario during a test flight in 1970, when his fighter jet began an uncontrollable flat spin. After struggling to regain control of the F-106 interceptor jet for a few moments, he did the smart thing and pressed the eject button 8,000 feet above the ground.

Or ... he thought it was the smart thing. Once his chute deployed and buoyed him up in the air, Foust looked down towards the ground, expecting his plane to light up like the Fourth of July upon impact. What he saw instead was his plane cruising along, as if the spin had never happened and it was being piloted by a very casual, aircraft-savvy ghost.

One of Foust's wingmen, Maj. Jim Lowe reportedly shouted over the radio "Gary, you better get back in it!" But Gary could not get back in. All he could do was watch with wonder as his plane flew itself in a straight line before landing gently in a snow-covered wheat field.

When police arrived on the scene, the F-106's engine was still running. Wary of whatever had possessed this thing, the Air Force suggest the cops wait until the plane ran out of fuel, rather than attempt shutting it off. It took a while.

When the plane finally breathed its last it was collected and repaired by the Air Force and eventually returned to active service. Freaky.

The time Japan deployed a new battleship and flooded Nagasaki



There's no flooding, just go about your business...

The saying "bigger is better" is traditionally an American mantra, but the Japanese Navy tried it on for size in 1940, and the results were pretty hilarious.

Not yet at war with the United States, Japan still wanted to assert military dominance. The plan? Build the biggest battleship it had ever commissioned, and call it the *Musashi*.

Now, Japan understood that an incredibly large battleship would not be impressive unless it was also outfitted with incredibly large weapons. To remedy this, the Japanese Navy decked out the *Musashi* with the best of the best. Amongst the weapons on board were cannons that could fire 18-inch shells over 26 miles and 9x450 mm guns — stats that were impressive for any military at the time.

What Japan did not take into account, apparently, was how much this thing would weigh. When the Japanese Navy joyously deployed the ship into the sea, the mammoth watercraft displaced so much water (63,000 tons) it caused a four foot high tidal wave, flooding the riverbank homes of Nagasaki and totally killing the mood.

The *Musashi's* wake capsized nearly all of the ships in the surrounding harbor, and did some serious damage to the shops and houses closest to the water's edge. Frightened citizens rushed into the streets as water poured through their doors, completely bewildered by the source of the flooding.

They were quickly urged back inside their water-sogged homes by the Imperial Navy, which was too embarrassed to tell the people of Nagasaki what had actually gone down. It makes you wonder what they *did* blame it on...

Story 24 - Getting rid of them Flies

By Ian (Bluey) Granland

One of my jobs at our 104 Sig Sqn Task Force Unit was to clean out the toilets, urinals and showers each day - someone had to do it and the army had a trade of 'General Duties', whose tasks were really to turn their hand at anything regarding maintenance.

The toilets (WC's) consisted of a 2 meter trench dug to about 1.5 meters topped with a concrete slab and three to four metal WC pans encased at equal distances. They were enclosed by a green painted shed constructed of a timber frame with corrugated iron, walls and roof.

The pans had metal seats and lids with a large peach tins bolted to each lid and filled with concrete in an attempt to form a seal. It never worked.

There were no walls in these toilets and it was not uncommon to see four guys sitting side by side reading or talking whilst having their daily crap. Week old newspapers adorned the floor which provided ample reading material. It is amazing how war breaks down the veil of modesty.

It was here on my second day in country that I felt the effects of the local US 83rd Artillery Battery, located about 500 meters away. When they fired off their ordnance, the ground would reverberate sending shock waves and if someone was using the toilets, it ever so slightly lifted their rear end from the seat.



Each troop had one of these toilet sheds with another at the sergeants' lines and a further small unit for the officers. The front side of each facilities, where the occupants faced when seated, was only a half wall with fly screen material making up the top section giving the user the opportunity of a view, in our particular troop's case of the Eagle Farm chopper pad.

The pits never filled but relied on an organic process to keep the faeces level low, the same principal as used in many outback toilets.

Urinals known as 'pissaphones' were a different matter altogether.

There were four of us in my section with normally three to do these daily cleaning tasks which for the most part didn't take long, a quick sweep, replace the toilet rolls and every now and then tip some disinfectant or the like into the pit to keep a reasonable odour. Care had to be taken not to introduce too much toxic material which could upset the bacteria equilibrium.

We were always being asked to **"get rid of the 'shit flies' out of the dunnies"**.

'Shit flies' were small insects which lived in the pit and, we believed (or we used to tell everyone) because it was dark and they had poor eyesight it caused them to continually crash into users' bums when they entered into **"their world of the shit fly"**. Perhaps **they** were trying to tell us something?

They didn't do any damage, but continual contact with the rear end was quite annoying.

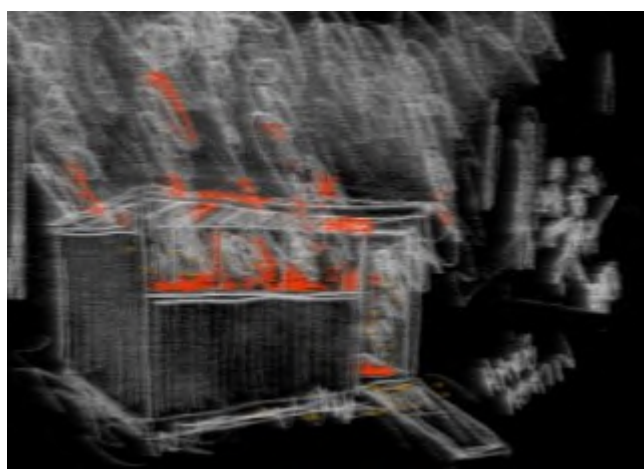
We tried fogging. In short, a portable smoke machine powered by a four stroke engine, which we would fill with insecticide, start the motor and insert the pipe through an open WC lid.

Whilst recommended, this was a Band-Aid solution and had minimal effect on those annoying little creatures.

When the complaints became so continuous, one of the guys came up with a brilliant idea! Why not pour in some petrol, ignite it and bingo, no more shit flies - well for a while, however we thought we'd better take some precautions.

The petrol was obtained and carefully tipped into each of the four pans (which directly led into the pit).

Knowing there might be a bit of a bang, we obtained extra weights for the toilet lids and then the question remained as to who was going to fire up our project. Some buckets of water were placed strategically at the entrance should they be needed.



The lance corporal at the time grabbed some newspaper, lit the end, entered the room, lifted the nearest seat and thrust down the ignited paper, then took off.

Kerbaaaang ! The building shook, the ground shook and we all looked at each other in utter apprehension. Heads popped out of the tents adjacent to the toilets with cries of anguish from the shift workers. *“Had someone been fragged? Had someone let off a live one? Had, had had.....???”*

Slowly the door to the toilet was opened. Yes, we had killed the shit flies alright but in the process had caused such a mess it created a whole day's work for the three of us. The inside walls of the 10 x 4 shed were littered with toilet paper, and shit

One of the worst results of the cleaning process was that we had no mains pressure water to hose down the place. It was all bucket and cloth and in some cases, brushes. *“Never again”* we told each other and when someone mentioned the shit flies we simply said *“Suffer”*.

The exercise, whilst a genuine attempt to reduce the irritation for the diggers was a complete flop, and worst still, we became the butt of the units jokes for weeks to follow.

By Ian (Bluey) Granland

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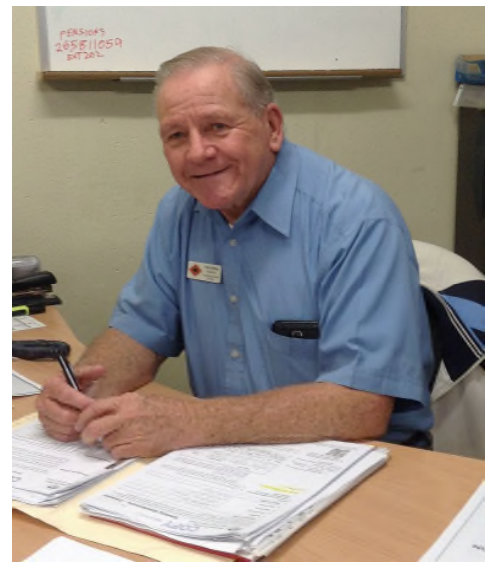
REPORTS



**Compensation Advocate
Mike Opie**

Veterans Welfare continues to be a high priority and I am happy report some good outcomes in the past quarter. Appointments are available most Tuesdays and I urge anyone with an issue to ring in and make one so that we can try and work out some solution.

Peter Millen, Welfare Officer's Report



**Welfare Officer
Peter Millen**

Working with DVA can be at times rewarding and at times frustrating due to the high level of documentation that is required to support a claim. Whilst the staff at DVA are willing to assist as far as they can, if you need further help I am happy to talk to you. I can assist with the paperwork, deal with DVA on your behalf and I am the proverbial dog-with-a-bone, I don't easily let go. Call and make an appointment to talk things through and I will see what help I can offer.

Compensation Advocate's Report, Mike Opie



**Membership Officer
Trevor Morrow**

As the new year starts, I urge you to renew your membership at your local Branch. Payments this way mean that a portion of your membership stays at the Branch to help with our costs. New membership cards are now here and will be forwarded to you on renewal.

There are currently over 100 members and Thank you to those who have already renewed.

Membership Report

Trevor Morrow



**Lyn Handcock
Assistant Secretary**

**Volunteer
Jan Hawkins**



PRESIDENT'S REPORT – 5 DECEMBER 2020

The report to follow is related to my thoughts and I will understand if the Committee members may not be in agreement but I feel it is my duty as President of the Vietnam Veterans at Port Macquarie to voice my opinion.

The SAS soldiers who may lose their citations and awards, as far as I am concerned, is a joke. They were only following orders from those in charge, it would have sounded something like this "Do as you are told or lose all chances of advancement in this man's army". Very familiar even to Vietnam Veterans.

These awards should be stripped all the way down the ladder starting at the top. Again, it is quite apparent that the baggy arses again get shafted.

The problem as I see it, if the Afghan civilians that were killed (their words) get compensation, do our soldiers get compensation for their families also? (All part of the job description).

As you are aware, a lot of the families of servicemen go to multi-cultural schools. How are they going to handle the abuse and taunts? Like the Vietnam Veterans (called "child killers"). Starts all over again.

I could put more on paper, but it might be best to leave it at that.

We have our Pension and Welfare Team who are working extremely well with an influx of younger veterans and senior veterans making appointments. There could be an influx of younger veterans requiring help owing to the circumstances at the moment. If we can help these younger veterans with their problems, we may be able to prevent suicides.

There are a lot of comments from civilians who have no idea as to the effects of army life or the decisions that flow from the top to the bottom.

The meeting with Mayor Pinson (about our office location) went very well. The Mayor was unaware of the problems arising around the running of our office as well as being unaware of the cost of running the office and no understanding that the staff are all volunteers. The Mayor understands that there is no grant assistance from Government Departments for office rental costs and has taken this on board. She has taken this on board and will have discussions with her members regarding our situation. Present also at the meeting was Jodie from Soldier On, Amber from Open Arms who both explained their situation and problems that have arisen concerning their organisations. At the meeting we were assured that if we wish to have another meeting with the Mayor it would not be a problem. Further discussion will be in the New Year but at the moment it sounds promising that she might be able to assist.

An invitation to the Mayor to attend our office on a Thursday in the New Year for a barbecue lunch, which I am pleased to say was accepted.

Mr William Wagner
President



President - Bill Wagner

TREASURER'S REPORT

The first half of this financial year has passed with little fuss. It has been business as usual as far as we can with covid restrictions.

I wish you all a Happy New Year and a healthy one too.

Peter Dorman
Treasurer



Treasurer
Peter Dorman

Soldiers complain that conditions, neglect during Melbourne coronavirus deployment took toll on mental health

There have been multiple reports from soldiers about how they struggled while in Victoria helping with the coronavirus second wave but the Defence Department says employees have been looked after.

(Unsplash: Louis Blythe)

Australian soldiers are accusing their hierarchy of not properly looking after their mental health during and after their deployment to Melbourne to help with the state's COVID-19 response.

Soldier says rules confining Defence Force personnel to hotel rooms has negatively affected their mental health

He says Defence members were not given post deployment mental health screening

Defence says mental health support was provided and a survey is being carried out to determine follow up needs

A soldier has told the ABC he and colleagues were virtually confined to Melbourne hotel rooms for months, in between carrying out duties including accompanying ambulance crews to car crashes.

He said many have been deeply affected by the confinement.

The soldier was among hundreds deployed to Melbourne between June and October from bases in Townsville, Darwin, Adelaide and Brisbane.

He said during deployments of up to three months, they were only allowed to leave their hotel rooms while carrying out duties including home quarantine checks.

The ABC is not identifying the soldier because he is not allowed to speak to the media without approval.

"It was insane. It was the most shithouse experience I've ever had," he said.

"It was nuts driving all day, during the daylight hours, and then you were back in the hotel room, not seeing the sun."

The soldier said he and colleagues went weeks without rest days, lost weight, and many couldn't pass physical fitness tests when they returned to barracks.

He said while off duty, their only exercise option for the first month was in the hotel's underground car park, in a few spaces each.



Left - Soldiers were supplied peas and rice for breakfast

Right - Meals such as this one were not adequate for ADF staff but they were prevented from leaving their hotel to buy their own food.



Later, they were allowed an hour of exercise in a small park, but often the allotted exercise times clashed with times on duty.

"There was a sense we couldn't hack it," he said.

"A lot of fellas were having a hell of a hard time. We were in borderline isolation all that time."

The soldier said being supplied "second rate, minimal" food, including peas and rice for breakfast, and not being able to leave the hotels to buy alternative food, was morale-sapping.

He said the experience was worse than an overseas deployment, particularly for soldiers backing up ambulance crews.

"The fellas on the ambulance task went to suicides, heart attacks, houses where a bloke's bashing his missus," he said.

"They saw more traumatic things than they did on other deployments.

"Then they were locked in their rooms for weeks on end.

"And now we've come back we didn't do the Post Operational Psychological Screening," he said.

The moderator of an online veterans' mental health forum told the ABC multiple soldiers have reported the same experience.

He doesn't want to be identified because he receives information from serving personnel.

Department of Defence says soldiers were looked after

Asked to respond, the Defence Department provided a statement saying the personnel had access to mental health support including for critical incidents during the deployment.

Source - Exclusive by Jane Bardon for PM, ABC News

No-one can deny the enormous help and assistance provided by our troops when we need help

"As with all Victorians during the lockdown ... ADF members ... were required to adhere to directives concerning exercise periods," the Department said.

"A welfare system was established that included regular welfare checks and a buddy system."

It said the soldiers would get mental health screening, and the Department would conduct an anonymous survey to determine "what they found stressful and how they coped".

"A Post Operational Psychological Screening is conducted between three and six months following deployment ... [or] earlier if a member requests it," the Department said.

"Defence has designed a deployment experiences survey ... to identify risks associated with Operation COVID Assist, which can then inform ... longer-term, follow-up care responses."

The soldier who spoke to the ABC said Defence Force members are reluctant to admit they need mental health support because they fear it will affect their careers.

Veteran community members have to look out for each other

The President of the independent Defence Welfare Association, Kel Ryan, said that was a common concern.

"It is a common factor in military life that individuals tend not to report injuries or particular mental health issues that they perceive would be detrimental to their future promotion, to their future positions," he said.

"So what we have to do is to ensure there is a system by which individuals are not disadvantaged because they report these issues."



The Williamstown Koala Feed Community Project is on track to deliver more trees to safeguard native koalas.

With the original goal of planting 5000 trees representing one for every uniformed and staff member who serves and works at RAAF Base Williamstown, Air Force and civilian volunteers are set to well exceed this goal which will provide more feed-stock for Port Stephen's Koala Rescue Service. **Dept of Defence**



Above - Soldiers who assisted with ambulance crews in Victoria were impacted greatly by what they experienced. *(Supplied: ADF)*



Australian Army soldiers from the 3rd Combat Service Support Battalion, based in Townsville, arrive in Melbourne to support Victoria Police on Operation COVID Assist. **Photo credit: Leading Seaman Kieran Dempsey**



Left - Navy members are contributing to the ADF's operation to support the Government's response to COVID-19. **Dept of Defence**

He said everyone in the Defence Force and veteran community should look carefully for signs of mental stress in friends and colleagues, and offer help.

"It is common that individuals try to hide these things, and it really behoves their mates, to really notice changes in the individual's mental state," he said.

"We all have to play a part. It's called mateship, it's called looking after each other, and that's what we have to do, that's what we should be doing."

The defence force veterans' charity Mates4Mates has expanded its independent telehealth services during the pandemic and is about to open a Darwin centre.

Its CEO, Troy Watson, said it had recently experienced a surge in demand.

"Compared to this time last year, we are seeing about a 30 per cent increase in access to our services since that time," he said.

"Obviously the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on individuals and the family unit, and people being dislocated from others, and being unable to access services, have had a significant impact this year."

Source - Department of Defence websites Dec 2020

The Green Thing

In the line at the store, the cashier told an older woman that she should bring her own grocery bags because plastic bags weren't good for the environment. The woman apologized to him and explained, "We didn't have the green thing back in my day." The clerk responded, "That's our problem today. Your generation did not care enough to save our environment."

He was right – our generation didn't have the green thing in its day.

Back then, we returned milk bottles, soft drink bottles and beer bottles to the shop. The shop sent them back to the factory to be washed and sterilized and refilled, so it could use the same bottles over and over. So they really were recycled.

We walked up stairs, because we didn't have an escalator in every store and office building. We walked to the grocery store and didn't climb into a 300-horsepower machine every time we had to go two blocks.

But she was right. We didn't have the green thing in our day.

Back then, we washed the baby's napkins because we didn't have the throw-away kind. We dried clothes on a line, not in an energy gobbling machine burning up 240 volts – wind and solar power really did dry the clothes. Kids got hand-me-down clothes from their brothers or sisters, not always brand-new clothing.

But that old lady is right; we didn't have the green thing back in our day.

Back then, we had one TV, or radio, in the house – not a TV in every room. And the TV had a small screen the size of a handkerchief (remember them?), not a screen the size of the state of New South Wales. They did not waste energy on standby. In the kitchen, we blended and stirred by hand because we didn't have electric machines to do everything for us. When we packaged a fragile item to send in the mail, we used a wadded up old newspaper to cushion it, not Styrofoam or plastic bubble wrap.

Back then, we didn't fire up an engine and burn petrol just to cut the lawn. We used a push mower that ran on human power. We exercised by working so hard we didn't need to go to a health club to run on treadmills that operate on electricity.

But she's right; we didn't have the green thing back then.

We drank from a tap when we were thirsty instead of using a cup or a plastic bottle every time we had a drink of water. We refilled writing pens with ink instead of buying a new pen, and we replaced the razor blades in a razor instead of throwing away the whole razor just because the blade got dull.

But we didn't have the green thing back then.

Back then, people took the tram or a bus and kids rode their bikes to school or walked instead of turning their mums into a 24-hour taxi service. No central heating to heat empty spaces. We had one electrical outlet in a room, not an entire bank of sockets to power a dozen appliances. And we didn't need a computerized gadget to receive a signal beamed from satellites 2,000 miles out in space in order to find the nearest takeaway!

But isn't it sad the current generation laments how wasteful we old folks were just because we didn't have the green thing back then?

Please forward this on to another selfish old person who needs a lesson in conservation from a smartass young person.

Source – Peter Dorman, origin unknown



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Port Macquarie HASTINGS GROUP

The Partners of Veterans PMQ Hastings Group meet for Lunch at 12.30pm onwards on the Third Wednesday of each month

Partners of Veterans from all conflicts are always welcome.

For any further information contact
Tineke Dalton on 6586 3461

What Australian soldiers ate for Christmas in WWI

Source - This article was published in 2018 as a joint document by Museums Victoria and University of Melbourne.

Authors - Heather Merle Benbow, Senior lecturer in German and European Studies, University of Melbourne

Deborah Tout-Smith, Senior Curator, Society & Technology Department, Museums Victoria

We have just concluded four years of commemoration of the centenary of the first world war and, although the guns fell silent in November 1918, by Christmas many Australians were still separated from their loved ones. For Australians serving overseas in WWI, celebrations such as Christmas were particularly difficult, a reminder that the war had laid waste to their routines and taken them away from their families. We can see from historical documents that every effort was made to reproduce the form and content of a traditional Christmas meal, whether that be on board a ship, in the mess or even in the trenches

On active service

Maintaining the traditions of Christmas could be logistically difficult. It was often simply a slightly larger amount of food than the normal rations, with additional treats, such as the half pound of Christmas pudding that Major-General John Monash procured for every man in his Third Division in 1917. Alcohol was a welcome addition.

Christmas hampers and billies sent from home provided particular joy to those lucky enough to receive them. Some, however, experienced Christmas dinners like that of Private John Chugg of 1st Light Horse Field Ambulance, who complained “it was a miserable Xmas” in Egypt in 1914: “boiled beef unpeeled potatoes and tea without milk... [and] no mail or anything to cheer us”.

Sapper Alfred Galbraith described Christmas day in Ismailia Camp, Egypt, in December 1915 in a letter to his family. Each man chipped in to purchase a turkey and chickens more like humming birds, soft drinks and a few biscuits. The chickens were dealt out 1 between 5 men and some of them would not feed one let alone 5 men, the one we got we tossed up to see who would get it & I won but I half it with my pal & then the two of us went & bought some biscuits & some tin fruit.

Alf is depicted in a photo of the dinner, sitting awkwardly on canvas at the end of a row of soldiers, mess tins in front of each and an occasional bottle, likely of beer. Alf’s Christmas letter concludes nostalgically “Dear Australia the land of my Birth which we will all be glad to see again ... it will be a glorious day if I live to see it out ... ” It was to be his last Christmas.

A special meal could have the effect of making the war recede, if briefly, for the soldiers who partook of it. This is the impression gleaned from the menu for the 1917 Christmas dinner at the “A” Mess of the 3rd Australian Divisional Headquarters in France, led by Monash. The hand-drawn menu features bucolic sketches of rural French life, and a list of dishes in a mix of French and English, signalling the prestige of the officers’ dinner. The 10 courses included *hors d’oeuvres* (olives and “*Tomato au Lobster*”), *potage* (“*Crème de Giblet*”), *poisson*, *entrée* (chicken), *viands* (pork and ham), legumes, sweets (three choices) and a cheese tart, ending with wine and coffee.



AIF troops celebrating Christmas at Ismailia Camp, Egypt, in December 1915. Museums Victoria



Women distribute Christmas billies to men in Cairo, Egypt, December 1915. AWM

Christmas in transit

The voyage to active overseas service was a mixture of excitement, trepidation and monotony. Food service broke the boredom of long days at sea. On board the SS Suffolk on Christmas day 1915 diners were treated to a multi-course dinner, opening with olives, mock turtle soup and salmon cutlets in anchovy sauce. The next course featured iced asparagus, beef fillets with mushrooms and prawns in aspic, before the food became even more serious, with four types of meat, baked and boiled potatoes, and beans.

Four desserts followed, including plum pudding with both hard and brandy sauces. Like many special occasion menus of the war, diners signed their names on the back.

Après la guerre

The desire to be “home by Christmas” had been widely expressed from the very first year of the Great War, yet when the armistice finally came in 1918, Australians on active service still had a long journey ahead of them and faced another Christmas away from home.

In 1918, the 2nd Australian pioneers officers’ Christmas dinner took place “somewhere in France”, featuring a menu entirely in French save for the words “plum pudding” and “God Save the King”. Two half pages of the menu were dedicated to “Autographs”.

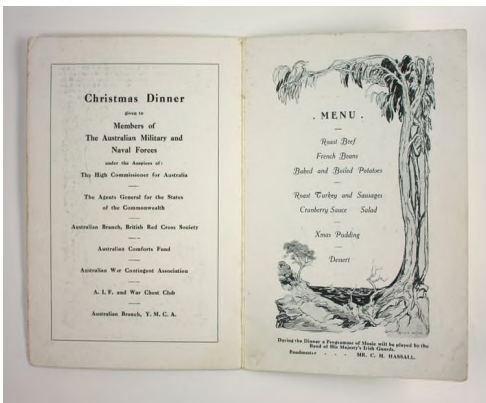
The souvenir menu card from the 13th Australian Field Ambulance 2nd anniversary dinner, held on Christmas Day 1918 in the Palace of Justice, Dinant-Sur-Meuse, Belgium likewise has a page for autographs. The festive menu features an extensive list of desserts.

The menu served to the 13th Australian Field Ambulance on Christmas Day 1918. Museums Victoria collection, donated by John Lord

Christmas dinner in 1919 saw Australians who had served in Europe returning home on the SS Königin Luise, a German ship allocated to Britain as part of war reparations. A menu saved by Sergeant Tom Robinson Lydster bears no references to the war.

A wreath of holly frames an eclectic menu including “*Fillet of Sole au Vin Blanc, Asperges au Beurre Fondu*” but also “Lamb cutlets, Tomato sauce, Roast Sirlion of Beef”. The Christmas element is provided by “Plum Pudding, Brandy Sauce, Mince Pies”. More than a year after the end of the war, some surviving Australians were yet to celebrate Christmas on home soil.

Christmas traditions for Australian soldiers, nurses and medics helped maintain cultural normalcy during overseas service. Yet Christmas on active service could be a time of significant stress, a reminder of loved ones far away and of fallen friends. Unfortunately, for those who returned to Australia, forever changed by their experiences, Christmas was not always what they remembered or had imagined.



Left - The menu served at an AIF Christmas Dinner in 1916. Museums Victoria collection, donated by Jean Bourke



Right - Members of the 4th Australian Field Ambulance at Christmas in Lemnos in 1915. Australian War Memorial



Left - The menu served to the 13th Australian Field Ambulance on Christmas Day 1918. Museums Victoria collection, donated by John Lord

VETERANS

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104 Signal Squadron National Reunion 2021

55th Anniversary Reunion

Reunion Overview

The 104 Signal Squadron National Reunion 2021 is being hosted at the Twin Towns Services Club and Resort on the Gold Coast 20th to 22nd July 2021 celebrating the units service in South Vietnam and 55 years of serving the nation. Twin Towns Clubs + Resorts, (Wharf St, Tweed Heads, NSW)

This reunion is for 104 Signal Squadron past and present members, their families plus veterans who supported the squadron, drank with a squadron member or would have liked to have been a squadron member.

Also welcome are the younger 104 Sig Sqn veterans who served in the **Solomon Islands, Timor, Iraq, Afghanistan** and **Peacekeeping missions** plus other members of the **1st Combat Signal Regiment**. Its your time - please attend! Widows and family members of deceased 104 Signal Squadron members most welcome.

Note: This is the last National Reunion for the current committee members - We are getting too old for the task. Volunteers for any future reunions?

Reunion Program

20th July 2021 (Tuesday)

Register from 10am to 4pm at Visions Function Room (Twin Towns Services Club) and renew old friendships. Bar closes at 4pm to allow room to be prepared for the Meet and Greet function later in the evening. Meet and Greet function (finger food) from 6pm in Visions Function Room (Twin Towns Service Club).

21st July 2021 (Wednesday)

Renew old friends during the day and/or check out the Gold Cost.

Dinner function (three course meal) in the Showroom (Twin Towns Services Club) from 6:30pm. Function Bar open at 6pm for pre dinner drinks. Guest speaker, etc.

22nd July 2021 (Thursday)

10:30am service at the Tweed Heads Coolangatta RSL Sub Branch War Memorial which is adjacent to the Twin Towns Club in Chris Cunningham Park. Medals should be worn. There will be an opportunity for reunion attendees to lay a wreath during the service.

Farewell lunch function (two course meal) in the Showroom (Twin Towns Service Club) from 12pm. Function Bar open at 11am for friendship drinks. Volunteers for new committee, etc, etc.

Reunion Admin

Limit of attendance: This this reunion is limited to 350 attendees because of the venue.

Function Cost: \$180 per head

Reunion Polo Shirts: \$40

Time Zones: All timings are Queensland times but daylight saving will not be operating in NSW - so what is the big deal!

Reunion Dress Code: Minimum dress for all functions as per the Twin Towns Service Club rules. Neat, casual and closed shoes. Stubbies, singlets and thongs will not quite meet the standard. We love you but Twin Towns will not let you into the functions!

Reunion Flyer: Reunion details. Please send/post to mates not good on the computer thing:

Reunion Committee 2021

Denis Hare Ph: 07-54387512 Mob: 0419-334535

Don Sutherland Ph: 07-32698298

Peter Thorne Ph: 07-32854823 Mob: 0409-633353

John Bertini Ph: 07-33971058 Mob: 0429-491460

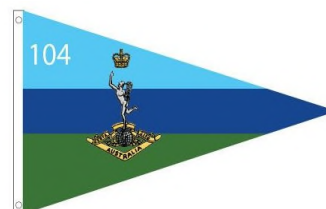
Ian Haycock Mob: 0409-635350

See Reunion Web Site at <http://2021.au104.org>

Reunion Email: reunion@au104.org

All Correspondence

104 Sig Sqn National Reunion 2021, PO Box 115, Glass House Mountains, Queensland, 4518



104 Signal Squadron National Reunion 2021

Reunion on the Gold Coast, Twin Towns Clubs + Resorts, (Wharf St, Tweend Heads, NSW)

REGISTRATION

REUNION FUNCTIONS (20th to 22nd July 2021 (Tuesday to Thursday)

\$180 per person (three functions) Note: No registrations at the reunion

NAMES

Key Contact Name 1: _____

Address 1: _____

Address 2: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Postcode: _____

Phone: _____ Mobile: _____

Email Address: _____

Name 2: _____

Name 3: _____

Name 4: _____

Note: Names required for name tags, etc. Please advise any special arrangements - wheelchair access, diet, memorabilia presentation, etc in the comment field on page 2.

REUNION SHIRTS Note: Not available after 14 June 2021

Shirt sizes available are: S, M, L, XL, 2XL, 3XL, 4XL and 5XL

Warning: You are larger than you think!

Number of Polo Shirts at \$40 each: _____

Pole Shirt Size 1: _____ Pole Shirt Size 2: _____ Pole Shirt Size 3: _____ Pole Shirt Size 4: _____

TOTAL (Functions \$180 each and Shirts \$40 each) \$ _____

Print and send cheque or money order with SAE made out to '104 Signal Squadron Reunion' to

104 Sig Sqn National Reunion 2021

PO Box 115

Glasshouse Mountains Qld 4518

Note: Payment also can be made by direct deposit to Suncorp Bank (This is best option for committee)

BSB Number: 484-799

Account Number: 015090717

Reference: Surname

Reunion Website: <http://2021.au104.org> Email: reunion@au104.org

Member's Purchase



Order Form for Merchandise with Logo^{GCI}Mar12

Please complete and send with cheque or Money Order for the total amount payable to:

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 Email: hmvvppaa@bigpond.com

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Phone:		Email:	Date:
Qty	Item/Product (size*)	Unit Price (\$)	Total (\$)
*Sizes: Small (S), Medium (M), Large (L), Extra Large (XL), Extra, Extra Large (XXXXL) We will contact you when your merchandise is ready for collection.		TOTAL AMOUNT DUE [All prices include GST Freight & Handling]	
		Receipt Number	Date

Various Vietnam caps
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Mid blue shirt \$35
 Poly cotton short sleeve
 Model—Peter Millen



Navy Polo \$35
 Navy Polo with pocket \$40
 Navy Cap \$17.50
 One size fits all
 Model: Barry Lynch



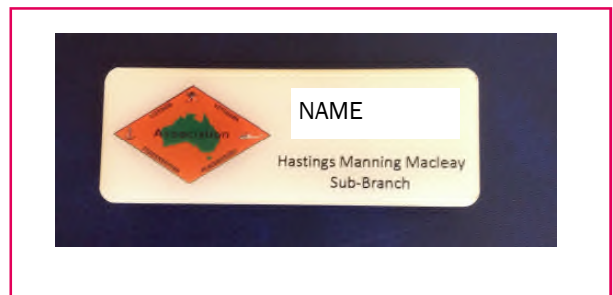
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Thank you to our members, advertisers and supporters for their continuing support of our Veterans Support Centre

For ALL my non military FRIENDS out there, this may or may not help you understand me. -

I am a Veteran

I left home as a teenager for an unknown adventure.

I loved our country enough to defend it and protect it with my own life.

I said goodbye to friends and family and everything i knew.

I learned the basics and then I scattered in the wind to the far corners of the Earth.

I found new friends and new family.

We became brothers and sisters regardless of colour, race or creed.

I had plenty of good times, and plenty of bad times.

I didn't get enough sleep.

I drank too much.

I picked up both good and bad habits.

I worked hard and played harder.

I experienced the happiness of mail call and the sadness of missing important events.

I didn't know when, or even if, we were ever going to see home again.

I grew up fast, and yet somehow, i never grew up at all.

I fought for our freedom, as well as the freedom of others.

I dealt with physical warfare, and dealt with psychological warfare.

I have seen and experienced and dealt with things that we can't fully describe or explain, as not all of our sacrifices were physical.

I participated in time honoured ceremonies and rituals with each other, strengthening our bonds and camaraderie.

I relied on my mates to get our job done and sometimes to survive it at all.

I have dealt with victories and tragedies.

I have celebrated and mourned.

I have lost a few along the way.

I have told amazing and hilarious stories of my exploits and adventures.

In defence we share an unspoken bond with each other, that most people don't experience, and few will understand.

We speak highly of our own branch of service, and poke fun at the other branches.

We know however, that, if needed, we will be there for our brothers and sisters and stand together as one, in a heartbeat.

Being a Veteran is something that had to be earned, and it can never be taken away.

It has no monetary value, but at the same time it is a priceless gift.

People see a Veteran and then thank them for their service.

When we see each other, we give that little upwards head nod, or a slight smile, knowing that we have shared and experienced things that most people have not.

So, from myself to the rest of the veterans out there, I commend and thank you for all that you have done and sacrificed for your country.

Try to remember the good times and forget the bad times.

Share your stories.

But most importantly, stand tall and proud, for you have earned the right to be called a Veteran

Source - Women Veterans Network Australia - WVNA

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We are so fed up of hearing the word COVID but these are the last few jokes I have, enjoy them as we look forward to a better year in 2021



There is a spike in Covid cases because there's a spike in testing.

If we had more IQ tests, there would be a spike in morons, too.

**Dear Lord,
Please don't let Brussel Sprouts be a part of the cure of Covid-19 Virus.**



Above - I have added this picture as my personal plea, your Compensation Advocate absolutely loves these green veg but this would be a bad outcome for me as I hate the smell of them cooking (let's not even mention the after effects!)



DURING THE MIDDLE AGES THEY CELEBRATED THE END OF THE PLAGUE WITH WINE AND ORGIES DOES ANYONE KNOW IF THEY HAVE ANYTHING LIKE THAT PLANNED WHEN THIS ONE ENDS?

(ASKING FOR A FRIEND)

Be good to your spouse, Remember, right now they could poison you and it would be counted as a covid death.

And just like that Uncle Mike was never asked to Babysit again.



Are you involved in any dangerous sports?



Well, sometimes I disagree with my wife.



Your husband is suffering from a very severe stress disorder. If you don't do the following he will surely die. Each morning fix him a healthy breakfast. Be pleasant at all times. For lunch make him a nutritious meal. For dinner prepare an especially nice meal. No chores. No nagging. Oh yes, and make love several times a week. Do this for the next year and he'll regain his health completely!



What did the doctor say?



You're going to die!

Why cat racing never took off.



Camping:

Where you spend a small fortune to live like a homeless person.



Source - jokes supplied by Peter Dorman from various sources, thanks Peter

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We operate a Veterans Support Centre located at Unit 22, 35 Merrigal Road, Port Macquarie, on the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales.



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

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If you require clarification of arrangements, phone (02) 6581 5230 or (02) 6581 5509 Monday to Friday 10am to 2 pm, or call in to Unit 22, 35 Merrigal Road, Port Macquarie. You may be asked to leave a message, and then we will contact you with a view to resolving your query.

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