RED DESERT DREAMINGS

LEAH LAWLER TALKS WITH TLP ABOUT VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

BILL SOWRY

GWEN CHERNE

MICHAEL BRIDGER

DAVID FREE AND THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN BARBEQUE

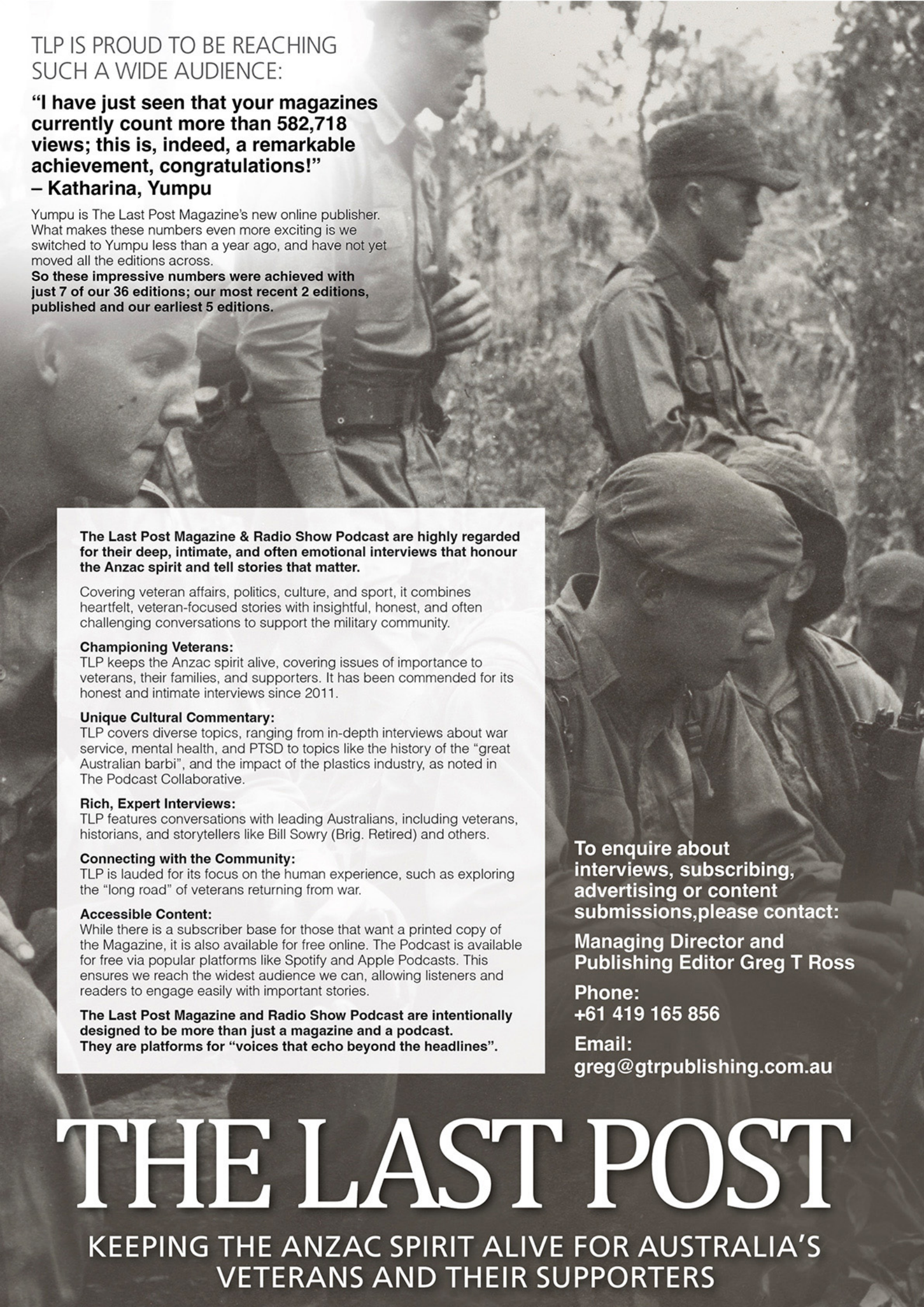
BEIJING TO SHANGHAI

VISITING PARAGUAY'S TRAGIC BATTLEFIELDS

ISSUE 37

THE LAST POST

KEEPING THE ANZAC SPIRIT ALIVE FOR AUSTRALIA'S VETERANS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS



TLP IS PROUD TO BE REACHING SUCH A WIDE AUDIENCE:

"I have just seen that your magazines currently count more than 582,718 views; this is, indeed, a remarkable achievement, congratulations!"
– Katharina, Yumpu

Yumpu is The Last Post Magazine's new online publisher. What makes these numbers even more exciting is we switched to Yumpu less than a year ago, and have not yet moved all the editions across.
So these impressive numbers were achieved with just 7 of our 36 editions; our most recent 2 editions, published and our earliest 5 editions.

The Last Post Magazine & Radio Show Podcast are highly regarded for their deep, intimate, and often emotional interviews that honour the Anzac spirit and tell stories that matter.

Covering veteran affairs, politics, culture, and sport, it combines heartfelt, veteran-focused stories with insightful, honest, and often challenging conversations to support the military community.

Championing Veterans:
TLP keeps the Anzac spirit alive, covering issues of importance to veterans, their families, and supporters. It has been commended for its honest and intimate interviews since 2011.

Unique Cultural Commentary:
TLP covers diverse topics, ranging from in-depth interviews about war service, mental health, and PTSD to topics like the history of the "great Australian barbi", and the impact of the plastics industry, as noted in The Podcast Collaborative.

Rich, Expert Interviews:
TLP features conversations with leading Australians, including veterans, historians, and storytellers like Bill Sowry (Brig. Retired) and others.

Connecting with the Community:
TLP is lauded for its focus on the human experience, such as exploring the "long road" of veterans returning from war.

Accessible Content:
While there is a subscriber base for those that want a printed copy of the Magazine, it is also available for free online. The Podcast is available for free via popular platforms like Spotify and Apple Podcasts. This ensures we reach the widest audience we can, allowing listeners and readers to engage easily with important stories.

The Last Post Magazine and Radio Show Podcast are intentionally designed to be more than just a magazine and a podcast. They are platforms for "voices that echo beyond the headlines".

To enquire about interviews, subscribing, advertising or content submissions,please contact:

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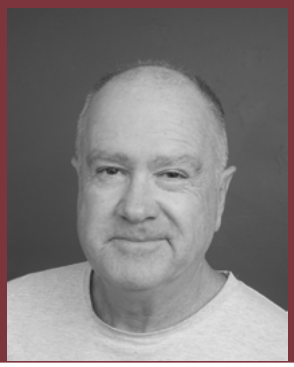
THE LAST POST

KEEPING THE ANZAC SPIRIT ALIVE FOR AUSTRALIA'S VETERANS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS



GREG T ROSS
Diary of an independent publisher

The idea of producing an indigenous-focused edition of The Last Post first came to me after ,meetings with indigenous business leaders Peter Radoll and SCS and SCSi's Scott McCartney. As we discussed the idea, the idea grew. It would include a look at successful indigenous examples across a whole genre of different occupations and expertise.

That was around seven months ago and the discussions gave birth to what we have put together for this, the 2026 Anzac Day edition.

From examples of art to architecture and sport, we hope this gives you an idea of what is being produced across the country.

For this edition too, we have the continuing of support from people that have been with The Last Post for a long time. We have new partners too, allowing TLP to get news and entertainment out to our veterans and beyond, reflecting a history of Australia as well as a look at contemporary issues.

In this issue we feature a conversation with David Free about the great Australian barbi, a look at the story of Dr Laura Fowler-Hope, we look at the prevalence of elder abuse, have chats with Bill Sowry, Michael Bridger, Andy Fermo from Invisible Injuries and, in a continuing of the Inspirational Australian Women series, we speak with the amazing Gwen Cherne AM. From the AFL, we have a look at legendary indigenous player, Paddy Ryder.

The Beach Boys remain acknowledged as one of the great musical groups to emerge in the early 60's. From Little Deuce Coupe to Good Vibrations to Sloop John B and Surfs Up, they took the world by storm with their surfing sound and brilliant harmonies. In this edition, we speak with co-founder of the group, Al Jardine about the start of it all in 1961, in Hawthorne, California, his friendship with Brian Wilson and The Beatles, surfing without a leg-rope, and of touring again, to honour the sound of The Beach Boys with the Pet Sounds Band.

An historic edition of The Last Post. Flip through it, put it down and pick it up again and again and help us start the celebration of the first fifteen years of this amazing magazine.

Greg T Ross

#thelastpostmagazine
#diaryofanindependentpublisher

ON THE COVERS:

Front Cover:
This work was created by renowned Aboriginal artist Yannima Pikarli Tommy Watson, a proud Pitjantjatjarra man (c1935-2017).
The work is titled Ngayuku Ngura (My Country).

Back Cover:
This work was created by Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula, a proud Luritja/Walpiri man (c1925-2001). Johnny was one of a small group of Aboriginal elders who was part of the founding of the Western Desert Art Movement at Papunya, NT in the early 1970's. This work is titled Water Dreaming.

These works are part of THE WINWARD COLLECTION, and are available for viewing/purchase online or at the Port Melbourne gallery of RED DESERT DREAMINGS,
www.reddesertdreamings.com.au

foreword

Peter Tinley AM

National President Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL)

On my first ANZAC Day as National President of RSL Australia, I will begin where every one of us begins on the twenty-fifth of April, in silence, before the dawn, thinking of the ones who didn't come home.

We owe them so much. The League exists because a generation of Australians decided that remembrance was not enough on its own; that those who served, and the families who served alongside them, deserved an organisation that would stand with them for life. More than a century later, that promise is still ours to keep.

And it is a promise with two halves.

The first half is the one the nation sees most clearly on Anzac Day. Around 580,000 Australians alive today have worn the uniform. The overwhelming majority are thriving. They run businesses, lead teams, raise families, coach juniors, sit on councils, mentor apprentices, design the systems that keep the lights on and the ships at sea. When the uniform comes off, the capability doesn't. Discipline, judgement under pressure, the instinct to look after the person on your left and your right don't expire on discharge. They are, quite literally, sovereign capability. At a moment when our nation is asking hard questions about resilience, industry and self-reliance, veterans are not a cohort to be managed. We are an asset to be backed.

The second half is the one we must never let the first half obscure. While the overwhelming number of veterans thrive, there are some who struggle - with injury, with loss, even with the silence that comes after service. The Royal Commission told us truths we already knew in our bones, and it placed on all of us a duty to act. The RSL's first duty is, and will always be, to the most vulnerable among us and to the families carrying the weight when a loved one cannot. That is non-negotiable.

Both halves are true at once. A modern RSL has to hold them together and champion the contribution of the many while never looking away from the need of the few. That is the work of the year ahead: the Veteran Wellbeing Agency, the reforms flowing from the Royal Commission, and a League that is contemporary, inclusive and unafraid to change.

To every veteran reading this, thriving or struggling, in uniform or long since out, card-carrying member or not, you are seen. You are still serving; in ways the nation is only beginning to understand. And the RSL is still here, shoulder to shoulder with you, as it has been for more than a hundred Anzac Days, and as it will be for every one that follows.

Lest we forget.

RSL Australia

A small package from home.

A simple way to say thank your for their service.

When Australians are deployed overseas on military operations, they serve far from home, family, and the everyday comforts we take for granted.

A $25 donation helps RSL Australia send a care package filled with treats and a personal message of appreciation to a deployed service member.

It's a simple but meaningful way to recognise their service and sacrifice.

Donate today and show your appreciation for our ADF personnel serving overseas

www.rslaustralia.org/donate-afof

Don’t Just Say Thanks – Send It

Imagine it’s Christmas.
You’re far from home, and it doesn’t really feel like Christmas.

You’re on your first operational deployment. You’re proud to wear the uniform and serve your country… but you miss your family, your friends, your home—and the traditions and trimmings of a great Aussie Christmas.

For Australian Defence Force personnel deployed overseas, days like Christmas and Anzac Day can be some of the hardest. These are the times when the distance feels greatest.

That’s where the RSL’s Australian Forces Overseas Fund (AFOF) makes a real difference.

Established in 1966 during the Vietnam War, the Fund was created to provide comfort, support, and a connection to home for Australians serving overseas. Today, that mission continues. Twice a year, care packages are sent to deployed personnel, timed to arrive for Anzac Day and Christmas.

Each package is more than just a box of treats—it’s a reminder that their service is seen, valued, and appreciated by Australians at home.

Inside the care package are familiar snacks and a letter of appreciation, with a simple but powerful message:

We’re thinking of you. We are grateful for your service. Please come home safely.

Support from everyday Australians makes this possible.

Through donations received year-round, RSL Australia brings together a community of support. Donors can also leave personal messages, which are shared with deployed personnel via a dedicated ‘Supporters’ page—accessible through a QR code included in the letter in each package. It’s a direct line of encouragement from home.

For Miquela Riley, the gesture meant everything.

Deployed on peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, she recalls:

“It was such a humbling experience, knowing that Aussies a million miles away took the time to think of me.”

Behind each delivery is a dedicated group of volunteers. Around 400 packages are assembled twice a year at Randwick Barracks in Sydney, where RSL volunteers come together over two days to carefully pack each box.

And the impact is deeply felt.

One deployed member wrote:

“Thank you for your amazing Anzac Day care packages… our whole team really appreciates your kind words and support. We feel very proud to be wearing these uniforms and doing the jobs that we do for our country.”

These packages don’t just lift morale, they strengthen the connection between those who serve and the people of Australia who appreciate their service.

The RSL is proud to continue this tradition on behalf of a grateful nation—but it can’t do it without your support.

This is your chance to make a difference.

Donate today to the Australian Forces Overseas Fund and help deliver a piece of home to our service men and women actively protecting our national interests overseas.

www.rslaustralia.org/donate-afof


Nibble Nobby's Nuts!
Allen's
Jelly Beans
mini OREO
Original
Tiny Teddy
Mentos
Minties


RETURNED · SERVICES LEAGUE AUSTRALIA
CARE PACKAGES

The Last Post Story

Through bloodlines, The Last Post magazine started at Gallipoli. Its acorn then fought with the 2/10th in Milne Bay, Buna and Balikpapan and trekked the Kokoda in WW2. By the late-sixties, The Last Post magazine was ready to be born.

Raymond Thorsby Ross, who had fought in PNG and the son of Joseph Thorsby Ross, who had fought at Gallipoli, leased a small office in George Street, Sydney. Raymond had decided that a small magazine, designed to help RSLs and their members, should be introduced in New South Wales. To do this he would need advertising to help pay printing and distribution costs. Daily, Raymond would take the train from suburban Chatswood to the city and phone local businesses and sporting clubs, asking for their support. This ex-digger and RSL member worked long hours to get each edition out and was effectively the magazine's editor, graphic designer and distributor.

In 1974, Raymond and his partner moved to Scarborough in suburban Perth and continued The Last Post in Western Australia until his death in 1983.

Twenty-eight years later, Raymond's son and Joseph's grandson, Gregory Thorsby Ross brought his father's magazine back to life. Greg had lived with his father as a 15-year old, when he started working as a copy-boy and cadet journalist at The Sydney Morning Herald. The teenager became a first-hand observer of the early days of the ex-servicemen and women's publication. By 2011 he had put everything in place to re-introduce The Last Post to a public in desperate need of a modern, quality magazine to assist the veteran community. Only this time it would be a national. And this time, it would be for all Australians.

With this humble background, and from a history steeped in the Anzac tradition, the new national TLP was born and is now respected and read by not only Australian veterans but the wider global community.

Featuring profiles on contemporary and historical veteran issues as well as honourable Australians, organisations, institutions and companies, TLP has matured to be Australia's most recognised independent online and print veteran magazine.

Acclaimed for its quality and journalism The Last Post is unlike any veteran's magazine seen before.

The reason?

It speaks to all Australians as a reminder that the legacy of the Anzac Spirit is relevant to us all.

With editor Greg T Ross' up-close interviews with famous Australians, stunning layout and production and input from great writers covering relevant topics in history, music, arts, entertainment, sport, travel, gardening, this magazine is so well received by a wide audience that reaches far beyond the veteran community.

Pte Raymond Thorsby Ross, founder of the original The Last Post, left, during his time with the 2/10th in Papua New Guinea during WW2.

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HEALTH

TRAVEL

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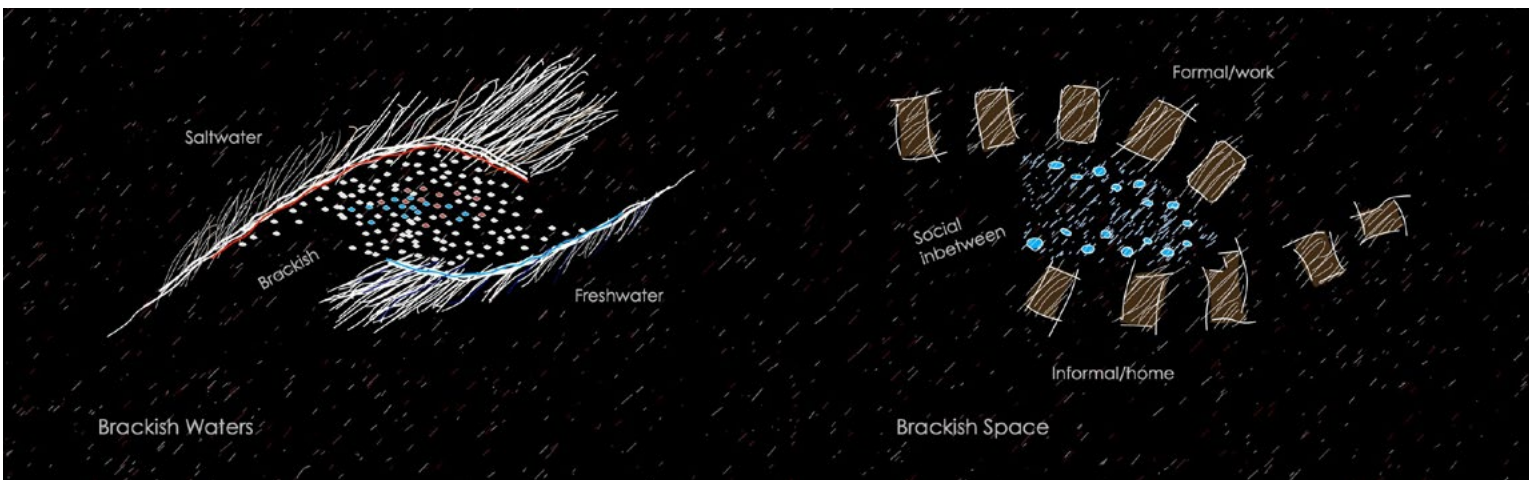
facebook.com/thelastpostmagazine

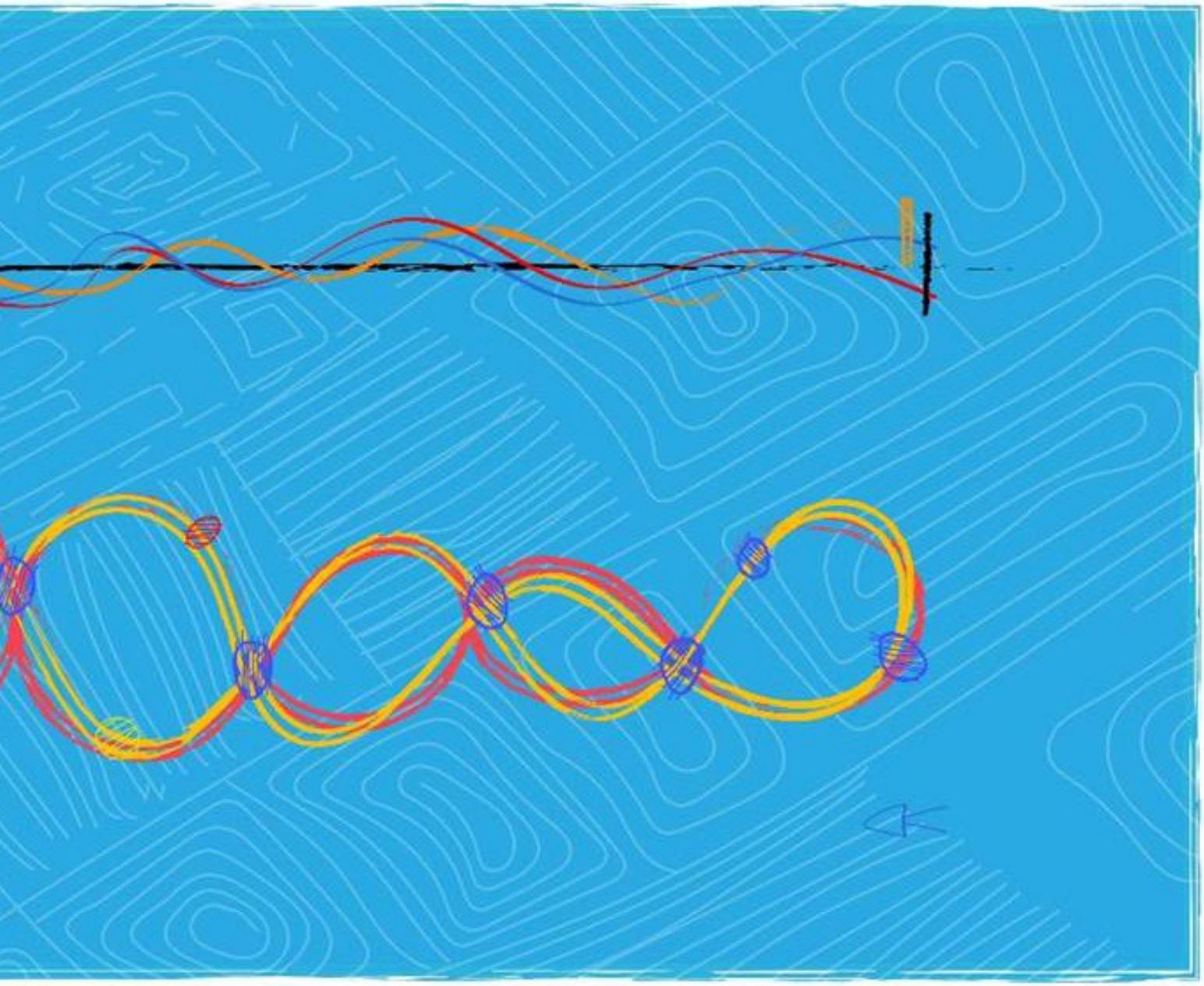
gregtross.bsky.social

The Last Post Magazine has been praised nationally and internationally since it was launched in 2011 and is designed by Kirstie Wyatt from Wyatt Creative. Kirstie is a freelance graphic and web designer and can enhance your marketing to get the results you want in your business.

CRAIG KERSLAKE
WIRADJURI ARCHITECT



Brackish Space – Aboriginal Spatial Explorations.



Artwork by Craig Kerslake – Wiradjuri architect – Explaining kinship generations.

The world is realizing that the original Custodians of our lands hold many answers as to how we view ourselves within the landscape and with each other. This most definitely informs the making of our built environment and most of all our identity.

As a Wiradjuri Architect, Craig draws upon his cultural heritage, community and knowledge of what Aboriginal people refer to as “Country”. Within a team setting, he brings this forth with spirited innovation to inform spatial design and architectural form with unique expression that finds resonance with all Australians. His cultural overlays often draw design thinking to the unexpected and provide positive outcomes focused on Aboriginal centred qualities, spatial unity and scales of social engagement.

Often this is achieved through a uniquely enriching process Craig refers to as “Designing From Country” where design narratives come from the Aboriginal understanding of Country. With cultural engagement with Aboriginal community members and Elders, clients are taken “Back to Country” on an experiential journey. By following traditional cultural practices, overlaid with architectural thinking, clients feel welcomed to the landscape, and often find their understanding and perspectives transformed. The experience is both grounding and many say they find strong bonds and a sense of connection to “place” and identity in the process. Beyond this, an often restructured brief is gained, informed by ideas of “Belonging to Country”

“It is our collective human fascination with our continual relationship with the natural world. Ultimately landscapes ground us and bring us back to who we really are.“

Craig Kerslake
Wiradjuri Architect
Managing Director Nguluway DesignInc

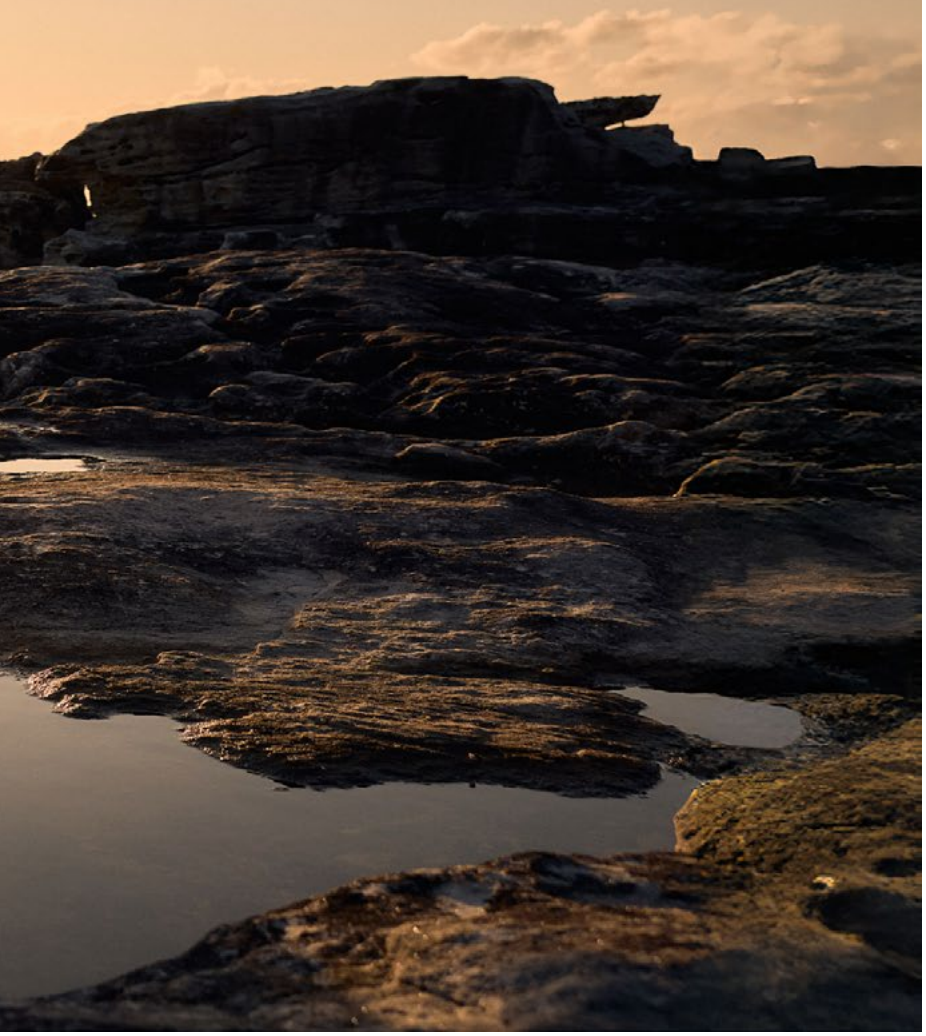
Dancer Donta Whitham.
Photographer: Daniel Boud.

To find out more about this show and purchase tickets please go to **bangarra.com.au**

Bangarra threads generations together in powerful new triple bill, Sheltering

Touring Nationally in 2026.

Three stories of Country. One message of hope.



Beneath the constellation of its creative and cultural legacy, Australia's leading Indigenous performing arts company, Bangarra Dance Theatre, will present a program of three powerful works: Keeping Grounded, Brown Boys, and Sheoak, which honour Bangarra's past while looking to the future. Sheltering will tour nationally from May to July 2026.

An intergenerational thread connects this bold triple bill, drawing deeply from First Nations perspectives, and offering a profound journey into the intricate bonds between people and place. Rooted in Indigenous knowledge, the concept of shelter is reimagined as a sacred, transformative space: a haven of protection, connection, and the sharing of stories across generations.

Keeping Grounded, choreographed by Indjalandji-Dhidhanu and Alyewarre woman Glory Tuohy-Daniell, is a poignant exploration on our energetic connection to the earth and ancestral land. Born out of Dance Clan 2023 and reimagined for a new stage, this piece explores the challenges of staying culturally and physically grounded in a world increasingly shaped by technological advancement.

Brown Boys is a groundbreaking film directed by Daniel Mateo and Cass Mortimer Eipper. Visually poetic and deeply personal, it delves into the experiences of young Indigenous men, exploring identity, belonging, and cultural connection. Inspired by Mateo's own poetry, the film intimately portrays his journey as a Gamilaroi and Tongan man—blending dance, narrative, and cinematic artistry. This work was first presented in Dance Clan 2024.

Sheoak, choreographed by Mirning woman and Bangarra Dance Theatre artistic director and co-CEO, Frances Rings, with music by Munaldjali and Nunukul man and renowned composer David Page, is a deeply affecting work exploring themes of resilience, connection to country, and cultural identity. The work, which premiered in 2015 as part of the double-bill Lore under Munaldjali and Nunukul man Stephen Page's artistic direction, draws inspiration from the sheoak tree—a powerful symbol in Indigenous Australian culture known for its strength, adaptability, and deep meaning.

Together, these three works engage with vital First Nations social and cultural issues, reminding us of the spirit at the heart of Indigenous worldviews and the enduring connections between people, land, and spirit.

"Sheltering draws deeply from First Nations perspectives, exploring the intricate bonds between people and place through the symbolic sheltering branches of a tree.

"Intergenerational storytelling is an important part of my artistic vision for Bangarra. In Sheltering, we see the different perspectives and styles of how Bangarra choreographers from past and present create work. Each is unique and reflects not only different eras of Bangarra's 36-year legacy, but new forms, technologies, innovations, and new media that offers wider platforms for storytelling and expression.

"In commissioning fresh voices, Bangarra cultivates continuity between tradition and innovation, memory and emergence". – Frances Rings, co-CEO and artistic director of Bangarra.

Wolfram

Bunya's latest film is Warwick Thornton's Wolfram.

1930s Australia, the colonial frontier. When two swaggering outlaws roll into town to strike it rich in the mines, they unleash a wave of cruelty that shatters the community's fragile balance and leads three irrepressible kids to break free from their white masters – as they set off across the sweet country of central Australia in search of a safe home.

Wolfram – Zhang and Pansy on cart.
Photo: Dylan River.

Footprints Forever Proud

Dedicated to all our heroes;
Our Anzac's…

Slouch crumpled under foot,
a mire of blood and fear,
damn endless noise of steel,
our demons all so near.

Constant buzzing bees,
all whirling deadly sting,
splattering our lost Eden,
yet still the corpses sing.

Bathed sea of deep red blood,
brass shells upon the shore,
our tarnished shiny minds,
this sweet yet salty war.

Our world of khaki brown,
our brothers in the earth,
as though a field of me,
of death it's only birth.

We only shared a meal,
a word and lust for home,
no borders to be held,
for we let our true loves roam.

Our rising sun of glory,
our flag a shredded star,
we Anzac's held together,
we killed our own memoir.

Light horsemen's umbra night-mares,
their gait was armed by bolt,
one rifle stock their fetlock,
fourth apocalypse revolt

We raised our souls from hell,
we struggled through our test,
our greatest feat to challenge,
we lived and died our best.

Two boots of neat oil leather,
filth squelches muddy track,
beg surrender dirty earth,
twice told no turning back.

Brothers and sisters many,
we march upright and loud,
we fought through true existence,
footprints forever proud.

ROLF DE JAGER


LIFE, DEATH AND HOPE
AN EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF AUSTRALIAN POWs, IN THEIR OWN WORDS
UNDER A BAMBOO SKY
A WILDBEAR ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCTION
DIRECTED BY SERGE OU EDITED BY CHRIS BAMFORD & SERGE OU EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MICHAEL TEAR
PRODUCERS CAROLINE DOUGLAS & NEIL PIGOT DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GEOFF ELLIS
FINANCED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE ACT GOVERNMENT AND SCREEN CANBERRA
THE RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA AND
THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SALUTING THEIR SERVICE COMMEMORATIVE GRANTS PROGRAM
SUPPORTED BY THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL
wildbear entertainment
SCREEN CANBERRA
RSL Australia
Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs
ABCG FILM

In the heart of the night

It may have come from the heart of the night ,
under a full moon,
but to an observer these old men were Poco but they were not old.
They gathered to celebrate their togetherness and youthfulness against separation and a note of coolness for when I spoke with Rusty it was the coolest.
Low down marijuana hick. Low down 1968 Buffalo Springfield hick.
So Poco like.
A girl I was seeing, we were driving along the Nevada desert and Rusty was hitching and we picked him up and went to a Fleetwood Mac concert.
Years later, I spoke with Rusty and in 1976 on a back-farm on Phillip Island,
we would gather with hippie chicks
and local surfers
and Shirley and play Poco and reveal surprises.
In the end,
it was Ben Rothenberg and Rusty the virtuoso and front man back man and Richie and harmonies that became the adjustments to the love that I experienced. Goddamn it,
in the cool falling rain, there ain't nothing like Poco.

GREG T ROSS


WEST
NEVADA
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Michael G. Jones pays tribute on new single ‘they do us proud’

The opening verse of new heartfelt Australian single, ‘They Do Us Proud’ laments: “I’ll tell you something you don’t want to hear, I have to share my greatest fear, when he enlisted and swore to serve, we were living in a different world”.

On ‘They Do Us Proud’, Australian country music singer-songwriter Michael G. Jones made an impressive return to the radio airwaves on Friday 17th April, 2026.

The song pays tribute to the men and women who bravely serve in the defence forces who are tasked with protecting their countries’ security and interests in times of global unrest and conflict.

What makes this song even more poignant, is the fact that Jones’ own son serves in the military.

Jones explains: “Watching the news recently about wars in multiple places across the world, it reminded me of when my son informed me a few years ago that he was being posted to Afghanistan. He is in the RAAF and served a tour of duty in Kandahar”.

He continues: “When he gave me the news, my immediate reaction was feeling my heart rate rise and feeling sick in my stomach”

Jones adds: “Seeing the escalation of fighting in various countries recently, I started getting the idea for this song. I hope it is viewed as a song of hope, sensitivity, love and pride - not only for my son, but for all of those brave people who are serving our country”.

‘They Do Us Proud’ was recorded and produced by Taxiride guitarist-songwriter Tim Wild at his home studio in Melbourne. The track was mixed and mastered by David Carr and Tim Wild at Rangemaster Studios in The Patch Victoria.

Musicians include Tim Wild (Guitar, bass, keyboards & backing vocals), Matiss Schubert (Fiddle, mandolin, button accordion & tin whistle) and Carolyn Oates (Drums).

Michael’s previous single releases: ‘Hello World’, ‘Irish Dawn’ and ‘Hearts Of Joy’ all enjoyed widespread airplay support across the country.

They Do Us Proud was released in April 2026, and is available from Amrap and all digital platforms.
Michael will perform a gig at the Brisbane Anywhere Festival, 3:30pm 17th May, 2026
Tickets available here: **anywhere.is/event/michaelgjones**

Stability

I walk along the avenue –
singing that hit by Flock of Seagulls.
Where I'm walking isn't an avenue,
it's a parade,
and there are no seagulls.
But the line 'I never thought I'd meet a girl like you'
is perfectly true.
It happened in a place far from here,
after my life was determinedly uprooted.
I was beginning to wonder if my bet was going to
pay off,
when the longshot – you,
came in.
Inner peace and …
stability.
That's the word, I thought,
gazing up at the Norfolk pine
planted 1890.

JEREMY ROBERTS

Al Jardine. Photo by Spud.

We all know the Beach Boys. We grew up with them and their beautiful music.

Al Jardine and the Pet Sounds Band are touring Australia in June, to the great delight of the Australian public!

The Last Post speaks with Al Jardine.

SURF'S UP!

thelastpostmagazine.com/the-last-post-radio-show-podcast

Greg T Ross: Hi Al, and welcome to The Last Post.

Al Jardine: Wow. Thanks for having me. It's a pleasure listening to that, your wonderful accent.

GTR: Well, I hope I don't sound too much like Paul Hogan, but, for you, it must seem a long way from Hawthorne, California.

AJ: Oh, it does. Oh, boy. Those are many years of joy and happiness making all those records. The truth is, it seems just like yesterday. It's all gone by pretty quickly. But we're reinventing ourselves now. We're called the Pet Sounds Band. It kind of harkens to that era of music. But we don't forget doing all those wonderful hits. So we have a nice blend of we're celebrating Pet Sounds, of course, 60th anniversary. But we're also doing all those hits that led us into that direction. So we have kind of an era. We have eras that we do on the show, you know, from the cars, the surf, the girls and all that, and then into the more sophisticated things.

GTR: Yeah, and didn't you grow as a group? You were rivalled there with the Beatles for a while too. And some of that, I guess the Beach Boys reflected what the Beatles did because the Beach Boys weren't content on staying the same and more on that in just a moment. But you've had your own journey, Al, too, but you'll always be obviously remembered as an integral part of the Beach Boys. Some of your singing was absolutely great too, with the group. But the groundbreaking sound that occurred, it was just amazing. It's like the world had been waiting for the Beach Boys, but no one really knew until you turned up. How did it happen?

AJ: Well, we were a family of sorts. I'm the only unrelated one, actually. Early on, Brian and I were schoolmates, you know, in high school and in college, and we were destined to literally bump into each other on campus in our second year of college. And I said, Brian, we've got to start a group. We've got to do a little something here. We're classmates. And then he said, absolutely. He said, let's go. It was very quick. A very quick decision was made. And right in the middle of our little campus, and we went into the music room and started writing music and singing our favourite songs. And Dennis Wilson, his little brother, came up with an idea for a surfing song. And then so it just evolved from that simple little concept of celebrating the surfing craze. And we actually invented the lyrics for the first songs that were ever written about surfing, as far as I know. And Dennis knew all the surfing spots. So he was able to fill in a lot of lyrics for us.

GTR: So actually, look, before we started, Spud told me that actually you've got a couple of surfing stories regarding your time with Dennis. What happened there?

AJ: With regard to Dennis, well, the first time I ever got on a surfboard, in a place we call Manhattan Beach, I crashed into the bottom of the ocean with my head. Boy, you've got to be careful if you don't catch it right. They call it pearling. I pearled.

GTR: That sounds like me.

AJ: But then I also took my board out alone on a big day, you know, one of those monster wave days. And I went out alone to the end of the pier in Manhattan Beach and lost my board right away. And I thought, oh, that's

okay. I'll just swim down there and get it. I forgot the pier was about 150 yards long, and the board was already on shore. Because in those days, you had the big boards. You don't have these little guys that you can tie to your ankle. And I almost drowned. I was at the last breath. And thank God I felt sand under my feet, and I was okay.

GTR: Well, actually, I was saying to Spud also, it reminds me of an incident that I happened to happen with in Margaret River. It was before leg ropes. And I came off, and my board ended up about half a kilometre away. I swam to get it, and by the time I got to it, Al, that was the end of the day for me. I wasn't interested in doing anything else.

AJ: Half a kilometre, holy cow. Well, good for you. Good for you.

GTR: We're talking about the surf, I guess, and the nature of the Beach Boys' music. It brought to the world a joyous sound. I guess, once again, comparing to the Beatles, but there was an infectious sound about the Beach Boys that America had been waiting for. It was after the Kennedy assassination, and it was really, I suppose, the beginning of what we became known as the music scene of the 60s, and a lot of that was started in America by the Beach Boys' sound. Did you get the feeling, Al Jardine, from the beginning that you were on to something special?

AJ: Oh, yeah. Oh, no doubt. Brian's voice is so beautiful. You know, when you hear, when I used to listen to him sing in the high school assemblies, we'd have little groups, I'd go, boy, that's somebody I would really like to sing with. He sounds like one of those angelic Capitol Records groups, like the Four Preps, or a group that did 26 Miles Across the Sea, that kind of sound, you know. And sure enough, sure enough, we got our chance to do it.

GTR: Well, coming from a fan's point of view, and I know that a lot of listeners will be in a similar age group and be able to relate to this, but hearing your music in Australia, because, of course, Australia is a very surf-orientated country itself. It's like a big California in many ways. We related to that very much. One of the great songs, too, Al, of course, was, well, there's so many, but let's just take a look at starters for Sloop John B. Was that your idea? What happened there?

AJ: Oh, yeah, that was a departure from our normal work. You know, we were always doing original things, and I had always envisioned doing that song for many years because the Kingston Trio were my favourite harmony group up until the Beach Boys. In fact, we kind of took over for the Kingston Trio as they aged a little bit. And Sloop John B. was one of their best songs, so I thought, why can't we do a folk song? So I invented a few extra chords and played them for Brian, and he loved it. Well, at first, he was a little sceptical because he was more of a jazz guy, and more jazzy chords and interesting permutations, but this is a straightforward, beautiful folk song, and then he turned it into a Beach Boys song. As a producer, Brian was wonderful, and he literally, well, he and I together reinvented Sloop John B. And it's going to be highlighted in our 60th anniversary of Pet Sounds. There's going to be a three CD set. I don't know, maybe not

Al Jardine currently tours with The Pet Sounds Band and in addition to performing all of the big classic Beach Boys hits like "California Girls," "Good Vibrations," "Wouldn't It Be Nice," "God Only Knows," "Help Me Rhonda," "Sloop John B," "Fun, Fun, Fun" and "Surfin' USA," they perform songs from The Beach Boys' '70's albums The Beach Boys Love You & 15 Big Ones, which have just been re-released in the new Beach Boys box set We Gotta Groove: The Brother Studio Years, now available from Universal Music: **thebeachboysofficial.komi.io**

The Pet Sounds Band are Brian Wilson's former touring band and are the same musicians who performed The Beach Boys' masterpiece Pet Sounds in its entirety for many years. Their music director is Darian Sahanaja, who was primarily responsible for helping Brian release Brian Wilson Presents SMiLE in 2004. The band also includes Matt Jardine, Al's eldest son, who has received rave reviews for his beautiful vocals on classics like "Good Vibrations," God Only Knows," "Don't Worry Baby," "Surf's Up" and more!

The Pet Sounds Band currently includes:

Rob Bonfiglio: guitar
Michael D'Amico: drums
Gary Griffin: keyboards
Matt Jardine: vocals
Bob Lizik: bass
Jim Laspesa: percussion
Darian Sahanaja: keyboards
Debbie Shair: keyboards
Paul Von Mertens: sax
Emeen Zarookian: guitar

For a complete list of tour dates, please visit: www.aljardine.com/shows

Al Jardine & The Pet Sounds Band 2025. Photo courtesy Jeff McEvoy.

a three CD set, but some kind of a version of it as a separate release for the 60th anniversary.

GTR: Yeah, well, how wonderful that will be too, Al, because, of course, I suppose having Brian on board is the brilliance of Brian, the brilliance of the group as a whole. It's a bit like you were, I mean, obviously all individuals, but you did say it wouldn't have happened, I suppose, without this understanding of all understanding of what you're working for.

AJ: Well, we were basically working together because we love to sing. I mean, it's all about the voices. You know, Brian would always say, listen to the voices, listen to the voices, when anybody would ever critique. And he's right, you know, the arrangements are important, the songwriting is even more important, but it's delivering the final product, you know, with a blend like we had is pretty rare. I mean, there aren't many. And Capitol Records had a habit of signing groups, vocal groups like ours. You know, they had so many great vocal groups come out of the Capitol Tower. And we were right in line with that. We gave them exactly what they wanted.

GTR: Well, Al, I guess that sound was something that carried you through the decades and decades. And here we are in 2026. The family connection continues, of course, because is it true that Matt, your son's on with the tour?

AJ: Yeah, he's my Brian Wilson voice. We toured with Brian for 20 years after we stopped touring as The Beach Boys. And he cut his teeth literally on the Beach Boy curriculum. So, yeah, when Brian was not able to hit those big high parts anymore, Matt took over. And he does a beautiful job. I mean, everyone's going to love it. He has a beautiful falsetto voice.

GTR: Well, we can't wait to see that in person live because it's going to be a blessing for so many people here in Australia. I know your tour finishes up in Newcastle. Now, that's a good surf spot, too, so you might have to get the board out again.

AJ: No, I don't think so, I think I'll let you do that. Well, I haven't done that. What I'd like to do is I'd like to go and do a little snorkelling at the beach up north there in Queensland. Yes. What's it called? I don't know. Way up the heck there. Yeah, there's so many beautiful beaches. Near the rainforest there, way up there. Oh, the barrier reef. How's the reef doing?

GTR: Yeah, the reef could be in better shape. Let's put it that way, Al. But it does bounce back and it's always a blessing. I know that, talking of Sloop John B, I know we hired a yacht there for a couple of weeks a few years back and just toured around and met so many wonderful people, but it is a place you obviously you know and you love, but it's a great place to go. Now, at the beginning, at the beginning of The Beach Boys, too, Al, when did you first feel that degree of excitement? I mean, had you been practising for long before you were dragged out onto the road?

AJ: At the very beginning we just gathered around the piano and sang our hearts out. You know, we had to learn how to play. That was one thing we didn't have. None of us really ever played instruments. Fender guitar set us up with a whole bunch of amplifiers, so that helped. But I was a bass player. I was a, what do you call it, acoustic stand-up bass player. But that didn't work for the new music coming out at the time, you know, with electric guitars and electric bass. All those things were electrified, so we had to convert real quickly from like a full group setting to a band setting.

GTR: Looking at the tour of Australia, of course, which starts in June and some wonderful venues you're playing there, too, Al, it starts off at the Sydney Opera House. Have you played at the Opera House before?

AJ: Oh, yeah. We were there back in August 1979. I remember the 70s. We were there. But, geez, that's like 50 years ago. Can you believe that? That's incredible when I think about it. And I don't know. I'm sure we were there. Oh, Brian and I were there at Byron Bay. That's what it was a few years back. I don't know, sometime 10 years, 15 years ago. That was so great. I enjoyed that festival at Byron's Bay.

GTR: The BluesFest, by any chance?

AJ: Yeah, yeah, as a matter of fact. Great. And then we played Sydney, we played the Opera House. We did Perth, Adelaide, all the hot spots. And then this time we're doing it in reverse. We're starting in Sydney, and then we're going to go out and do, well, I guess you got the itinerary there, but we're going to go around Australia. Then we're going to go to Christchurch and Dunedin in New Zealand. Usually it's the other way around. This way we're going to Australia first.

GTR: We're so glad about that. Actually, Perth is very surf orientated. I lived in Perth for a while. Lovely metropolitan beach breaks. And as I was saying to Spud earlier, they're the size waves that suit me, Al, about two foot, two or three foot.

AJ: Yeah, that's enough for me.

GTR: I like that. With the Beach Boys too, an integral part of that was, as I said before, about the changing and presenting listeners with new things all the time. Was that something that, I mean, you did apparently feed off the Beatles and the Beatles fed off you. Of course, Back In The USSR is believed to be a tribute to the Beach Boys. Were you aware of that?

AJ: Yeah. No, not at the time. But I didn't think they sounded like us at all. But I know that he's their high voice. So he liked to do that. I'm reading a book of his called Lyrics. And he explains that it's a great little book about songwriting. And it's really wonderful. And he hasn't mentioned too much about the Beach Boys, but I

Al Jardine 1964.
Photo courtesy Capitol Records.

haven't read it all the way through. But I know that beep, beep, drive my car. That's the other one. Oh, that was the one that sounded most like the Beach Boys. I mean, yeah.

GTR: Oh, isn't that interesting? We we did that book, the Lyrics, the McCartney book a couple of years ago, and I had a look at it. I've got it somewhere in the library. But you're right too, Al. It is a magnificent book. And I guess, yeah, perhaps there was a trade off there for a while. But if Paul McCartney said it sounds like the Beach Boys, then I suppose you'd have to agree. There'd be no arguing, that's for sure too.

AJ: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. He's an amazing, just amazing songwriter. And his lyrics are wonderful. And he and John were a great team.

GTR: Al, some of your favourite Beach Boys songs and some of your favourite Beach Boy moments for listeners, just to let people know.

AJ: Oh, listen to Warmth of the Sun. That's one of those songs that you can't even imagine anybody writing, but we sang it really well. It was, and playing it's a lot of fun too. And that was, we don't ever do it in concert, live though. It's way too hard to do live. I mean, you know what? I shouldn't say that. Maybe I'll challenge the guys to do it now. But it's so beautiful. It's one of my favourites. California Girls. We always do Cal Girls. We always open the show with California Girls. And, you know, it's just so much joy and happiness in that music. It's really hard to find out what not to do. I think we may change it around a little bit. It's, I don't know, Brian left us with a legacy and we're going to try to, you know, continue to do all of that we can.

GTR: And I'll talk to you about Brian in just a moment. But, of course, you speak of the feel-good nature of the Beach Boys. On a personal level, I believe very much that's the case. I was sitting down the other day, summer here in Australia, and I just, something came into mind. I thought, I'm going to put on Wouldn't It Be Nice.

AJ: Oh, that's amazing. Yeah. It took us about six months to do that song.

GTR: Is that right?

AJ: It's ridiculous, yeah.We could never get it right. It was never good enough. So we kept doing it over and over and over again.

And between that and Good Vibrations, they pretty much were simultaneously doing it the same. You know, trade off, go one back to the other, the other. And we're going, Brian, that's good. It's good. It's perfect. No, he'd say, let's do it again. You know, you hear it one way in your head and it's just never the way you hear it. You know what I mean? The perfection of it for him was important. And it's still holding up, though. Everybody loves that one. And Matt Jardine sings the heck out of it. It's his lead. Yeah, it's his lead. And also Good Vibrations. Yeah, he does Carl's leads on Good Vibrations, too. And God Only Knows, come to think of it. Oh, actually, yeah. Yeah, he does the big three.

GTR: Wow, how beautiful. You must be so proud of him.

AJ: Yeah, Brian was so happy to have him on tour because, you know, he could pull those leads off, just like the original. Actually, the sound of Good Vibrations takes you to another place. And that's part of the lyrics. It's unbelievable. I mean, it's one of the great pieces of music of all time.

GTR: But the lyrics themselves, too, Al, really, how did that happen?

AJ: I don't know. It's just Mike and Brian got together and cooked it up one day at the studio. You know, sometimes when you hear the music, you're inspired. It's tough to write a lyric without the music. When you have something to write to, it's not so hard, you know, because you just tap on your memories and whatever the language is of the day, you know, depending on that, you know, where you are and what year it is almost. But yeah, it just flows. It's like Paul would have said, the greater unconscious in the universe kind of comes together, you know. It's a term he used. I just read that the other night. He said, you don't really know where it's going. It's just, it takes you there, though. And that's what the lyric does. I don't know where, but she sends me there. You know, that kind of thing. Beautiful.

GTR: Actually, talking of that too, Al, Paul also said that nothing is original and somehow Brian and Paul both were able to let that in. I think Stevie Wonder feels the same way, that music is out there, but it's just a matter of grabbing it from the universe. The collective consciousness. I think that's how Paul described it.

AJ: Yeah. Like that. Or unconsciousness. I don't know. Well, you have to be conscious, I guess, but the collectiveness of it. Yeah, they were able to extrapolate from all those wonderful people that went before us.

GTR: And Paul also said that God Only Knows was his favourite, was the best pop song he's ever heard.

AJ: That's what he says. Yeah, I'm close to agreeing with him. I would have to say that it's magical. And his arrangements, of course, his production, his singing, his this, his that, you know, he was the whole package.

GTR: Did it give you moments of beauty to be in the studio doing that?

AJ: Oh, yeah. Oh, God, yeah. You should listen to Warmth of the Sun too. I mean, that one will take you to another planet. Musicologists have studied that one. And everyone's, you know, he was our Beethoven Bach of

Al Jardine 2025. Photo courtesy Steven 'Stevo' Rood.

the 20th century. He really was. He loved Bach. Yeah, yeah. He was very, he really did. He was one out of the box, wasn't he? It's funny because I wrote a song called Lady Linda some years ago. There was a big hit in England, but it didn't seem to be translated all over the world. But it was a Bach based melody. Number one in England. It was huge. Because of the lady thing, I guess, lady this, lady that, you know.

GTR: Well, I'm going to listen to Lady Linda.

AJ: That was a Brian Wilson favourite. I have to be, I'm very proud of that. He told me, now listen, he said that, listen to the one, two, three, one, two, three, one. You know, he was explaining to me my own song, which I stole from Johann Sebastian Bach. He got it. No wonder he loved it.

GTR: Talking of love and being family, how would you describe that love translated? Did that make it easier with the Wilson brothers to record and to understand ideas?

AJ: Well, you know, there's, yeah, there's that, because, you know, the harmonies brought us together, obviously. But, you know, Brian and Dennis were always at each other's throats because they were so different. Dennis always wanted to be out surfing and Brian wanted to be out in the studio.

So it was always a, you know, trial and error for us. We had to learn to sing without Dennis for quite a bit.

And so, but there was still a quartet. We still had our quartet going, which was important. But then Dennis came up with his own album and his own material later on. So, you know, he, everybody, you know, family differences always get in the way of it. And then he and Mike were always kind of vying for the girls in the audience. So they were always fighting over the girls. So, you know, it's just like a family.

GTR: Actually, you were talking about perfection and giving the example of Good Vibrations, too, and it reminds me, too, the Little River Band, Graham Goble was apparently after perfection but Glenn Shorrock, they were saying that Glenn Shorrock would record the song and just want to get out of the studio. But Graham Goble would be bringing him back all the time saying, no, no, no, we're doing it again. So, yeah.

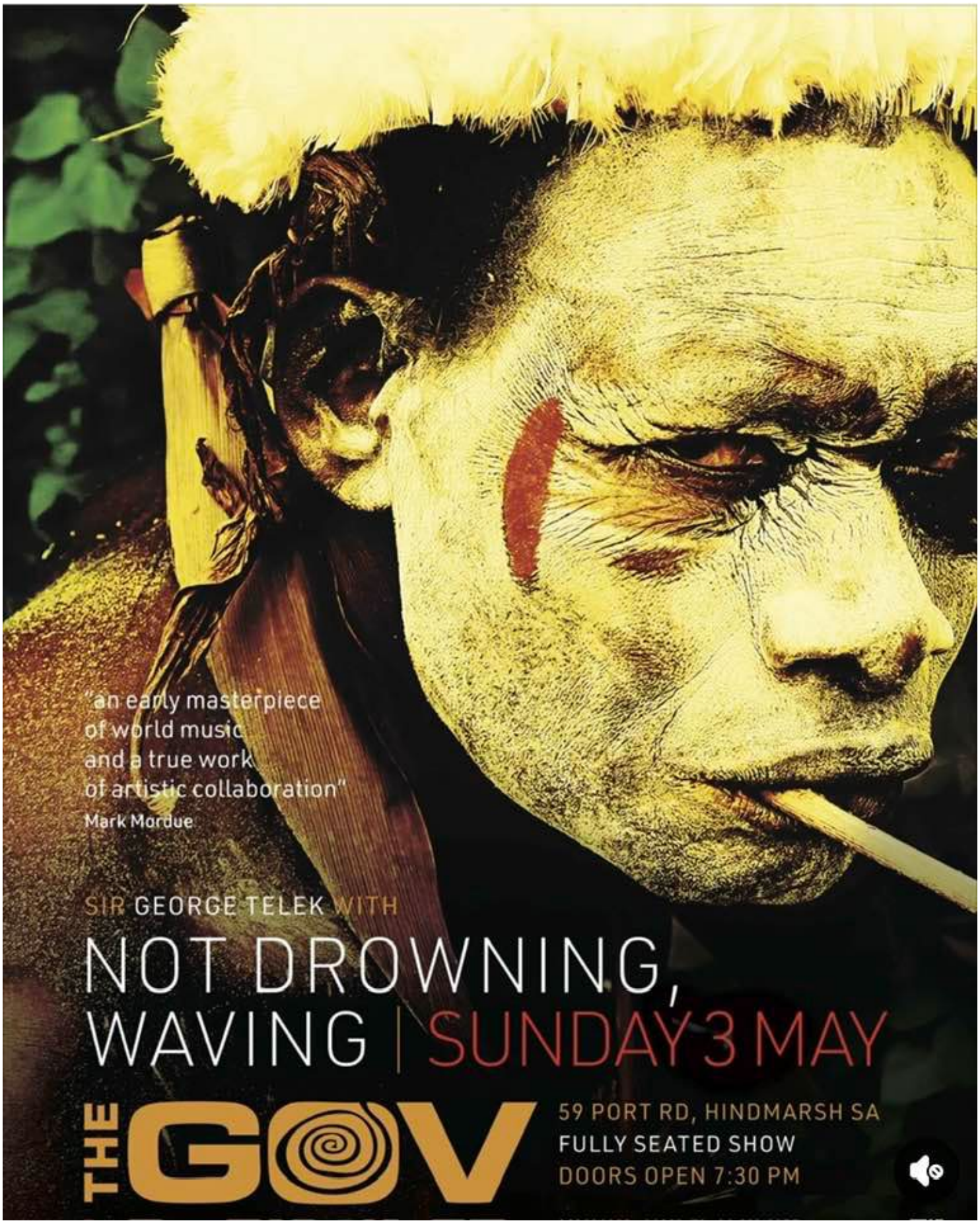
AJ: Yeah. It must be something that exists in all groups, that need for perfection. Sure. Yeah. There's always a spark. Someone has the spark. And then they set the stage and they want it to be right, you know. Yeah, that's true.

GTR: So what are you going to do after the tour? Are you going to have a lay down with a cup of tea or something?

AJ: No, we've got to come back and go to New York in about a week after we get back. We can fly to New York for some shows. So we're going to be kind of busy in July, early July. We've got a lot to do.

GTR: Al Jardine, co-founder of The Beach Boys, it's been an absolute pleasure to speak with you and to share your memories for the people of Australia and to know that you'll be coming out with the Pet Sounds Band in June. We can't wait.

AJ: Oh, man, I've enjoyed it immensely. Thanks for sharing, helping me share my own memories.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Honouring the ANZAC spirit with gratitude and reflection

BY JULES HOHNEN

CSC Defence and Veteran Engagement Consultant

The first Anzac Day was marked on 25 April 1916, exactly one year after Australian and New Zealand troops landed at Gallipoli. That inaugural commemoration brought marches, services, and patriotic gatherings across Australia, New Zealand, and London, honouring those who fought on that day in 1915.

One hundred and ten years later, Anzac Day remains a moment of deep reflection in Australia. When I think about Anzac Day, the word that comes to mind is luck. I feel lucky to have returned home from Afghanistan in 2010, when two soldiers under my command did not. I feel lucky to live in a peaceful country, one that pauses each year to remember those who were not as fortunate.

The Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial now bears more than 103,000 names of people who gave everything in service to our nation. I also feel lucky for the chance to reconnect with the friends I served alongside. Even after almost five years out of the military, those bonds remain strong and constant.

All these years later, the world is still grappling with conflict and communities torn apart by war. That reality only reinforces how fortunate I feel every day to call Australia home.

It also reminds me how important it is for veterans and their families to have the right support around them, whether that be practical, financial, or personal. That's why the Vets Hub exists, to act as a front door to financial wellbeing for Veterans and their families. Through CSC, veterans can get help understanding their superannuation, planning for their financial future, and making confident decisions both during, and long after their service has ended. It's one more way we honour the spirit of Anzac—by looking after the people who have looked after Australia.

Visit CSC's Vets Hub at csc.gov.au/vets-hub

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OUR PURPOSE

SCS Indigenous (Smart Cleaning Solutions Indigenous) unites Indigenous ownership with national capability. Co-founded by Scott McCartney and Nicholas Pastras, and operating in strategic partnership with SCS Group, we deliver premium commercial cleaning and facilities management solutions across Australia, embedding cultural integrity, community focus, and purpose into every aspect of our service.

Leveraging decades of combined experience, our alliance integrates industry-leading expertise, innovative practices, scalable systems, and national infrastructure. Our foundation rests on an unwavering commitment to service excellence, sustainable outcomes, and the empowerment of Indigenous communities through meaningful economic participation.

Our objective is to consistently exceed client expectations through reliable, adaptable, and forward-thinking service delivery, while actively driving measurable social value and local impact.

Our Service Delivery Commitment

Reliability and excellence define our operational approach. SCS Indigenous is committed to delivering superior outcomes through:

- Tailored cleaning and facility management programs designed specifically for each client's unique needs.
- Transparent, proactive communication channels and fully accountable service delivery.
- Robust quality assurance frameworks driven by rigorous standards and continuous improvement methodologies.

Our operational models are engineered to minimise disruption, enhance site efficiency, and deliver consistently exceptional results—ensuring our clients benefit from clean, compliant, safe, and welcoming environments at all times.

SOCIAL IMPACT OBJECTIVES – OUR 'WHY'

Our 'Why' is the driving force behind SCS Indigenous. We are fundamentally committed to generating tangible opportunities that empower Indigenous individuals and communities, with a specific focus on:

• **Empowering Through Employment:** We partner with Indigenous community-controlled organisations, to support Indigenous women rebuilding their lives after experiencing domestic and family violence. We offer flexible, safe, and meaningful employment, providing pathways to independence, confidence, and economic self-determination within a supportive workplace environment.

• **Investing in Future Generations:** We actively invest in the potential of young Indigenous Australians through targeted scholarships, mentorship programs, educational grants, and community leadership initiatives. By removing barriers and fostering talent in diverse fields like sports, arts, and specialised professions, we help individuals realise their aspirations and enrich entire communities.

• **Creating Career Pathways:** In collaboration with Indigenous-led Registered Training Organisations like Yalagan Registered Training and NextGen Pathways, we co-design structured traineeships and employment pathways. These programs equip Indigenous people with nationally recognised qualifications and skills, building sustainable careers within the facilities management sector and strengthening the local workforce.

• **Supporting the Indigenous Business Ecosystem:** Far beyond compliance, SCS Indigenous is dedicated to fostering a thriving and inclusive economy. We actively prioritise and integrate Indigenous-owned suppliers into our procurement strategy and long-term supply chains, cultivating a resilient network that drives mutual prosperity and lasting economic impact.

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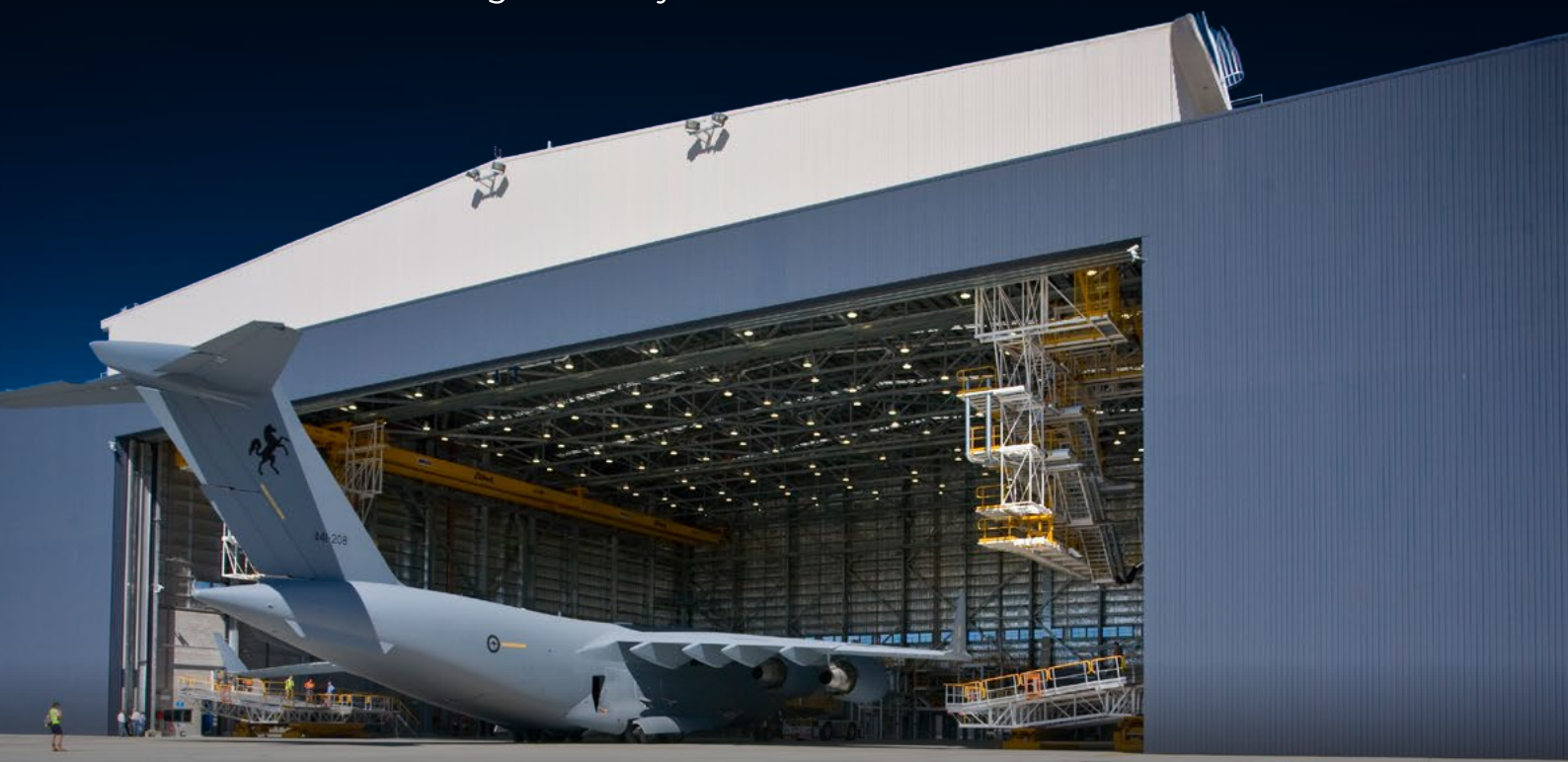

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Elder abuse prevention.
Do we have a PR problem?
Changing the perceptions of ageing.

As we get ready to cohost the Australian Elder Abuse Conference on the Gold Coast in Queensland from July 27 to 29, I have been contemplating the presentation I will make at the event.

Sadly, elder abuse is still a major issue in our society impacting too many older people – last estimates were 1 in 6 older people experience abuse in Australia each year, and it is thought that this figure is underreported.

The majority of perpetrators are children of the older person, and the abuse can take many forms, but financial and psychological abuses are common.

Collectively, organisations, communities and governments have been coming together for some time now to raise awareness of elder abuse and work on prevention strategies – but we have not significantly shifted the needle on this issue.

I think we need to look at it more broadly.

The World Health Organisation notes that Elder Abuse prevention must recognise ageism is significant risk factor and prevalent in around 50% of the population. And 64% of older Australians say they have been affected by ageism in the last 5 years.

I'm not saying that age doesn't have its challenges and losses, but we never hear the other side of the story. The good things. Confidence, time, living in the moment and less care about what other people think. And there is some new research showing that older people can and do improve on cognitive and physical levels over time.

Is it just that ageism is so deeply embedded in society, frequently unseen and therefore underestimated in terms of harm for older people.

How do we build cultural beliefs and practices that value older people; and how do we value our own ageing? How do we get society to think old is good? If we can do this, maybe we can prevent elder abuse before it starts.

The answer may lie in public relations, as a tool and space for creating social discourse, and changing attitudes and cultures. It's been done before.

I'll be joining other professionals and leaders to talk about this and more at the Conference.

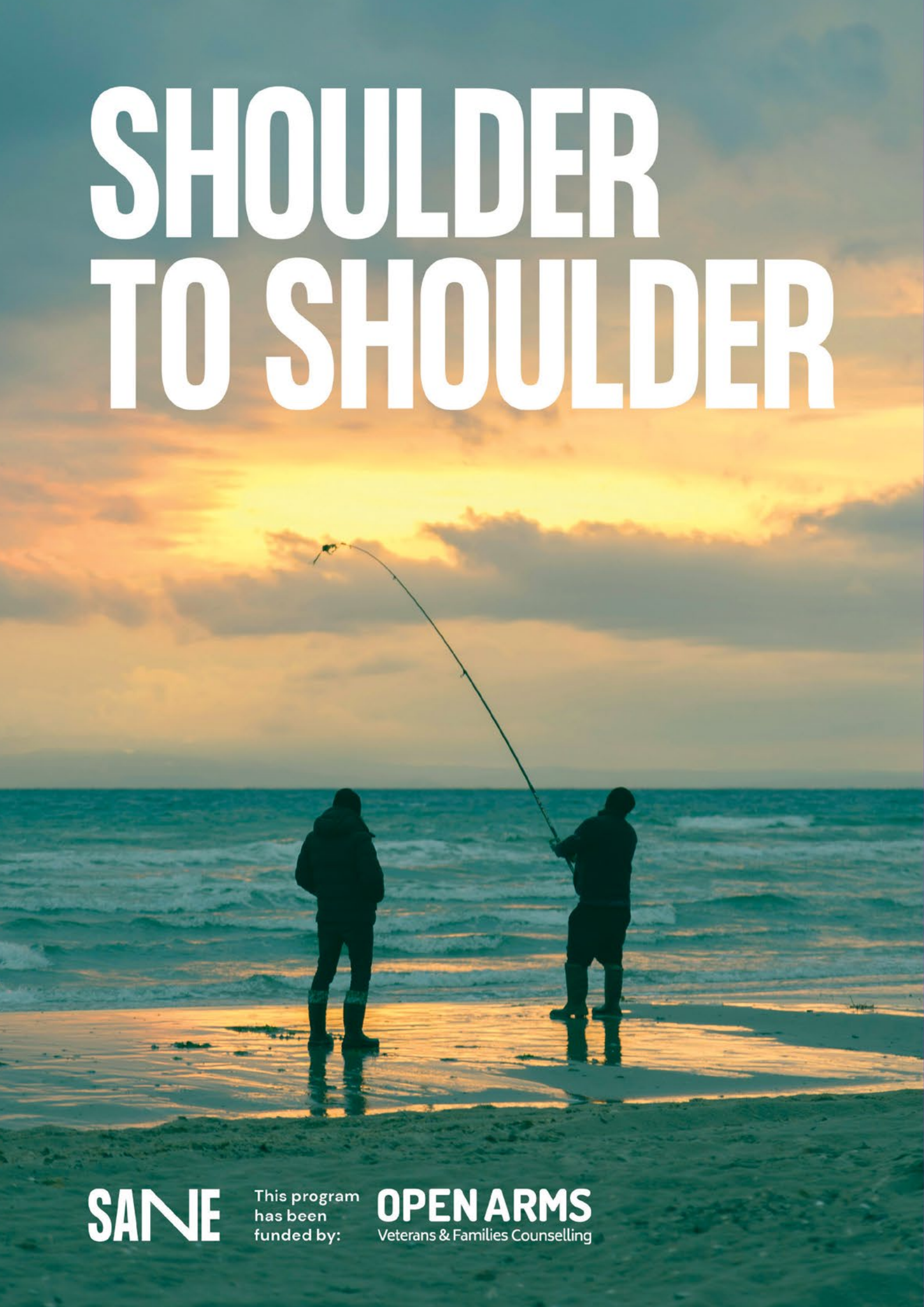
GEOFF ROWE

Geoff Rowe is CEO of ADA Australia, the Queensland member of the Older Persons Advocacy Network. Geoff's career in the human services sector spans 40 years, including senior and executive positions in the Queensland Government, and in the not-for-profit sector. Geoff has a strong interest in social justice, human rights and inclusion.

For more information about the Australian Elder Abuse Conference: Stand Up, Speak Out visit: conference.eaaa.org.au

If you are concerned about elder abuse, call the Aged Care Advocacy Line on 1800 700 600. Available Monday to Friday 8am-8pm and Saturday 10am-4pm.

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER



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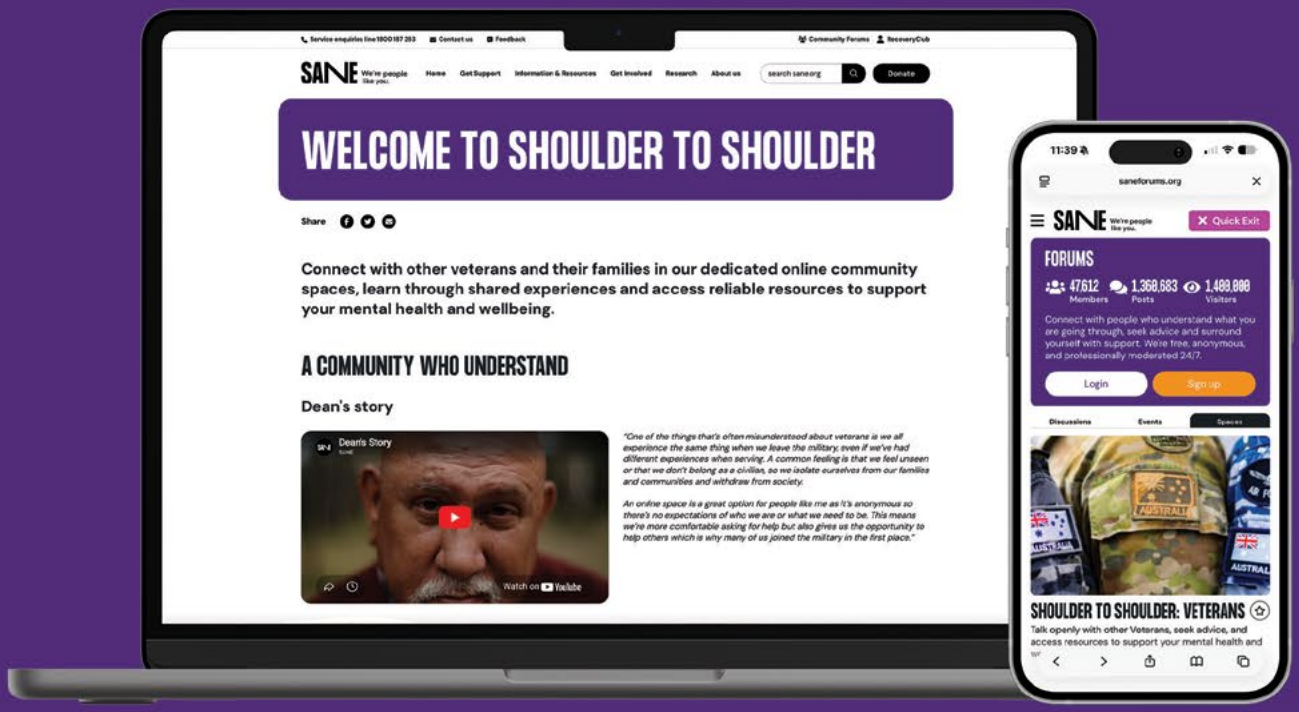

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Deborah's Story

Fourteen years ago, Deborah was a healthy 38-year-old mum of three. Her youngest child was just two years old when she was diagnosed with an incurable form of leukaemia.

With her toddler on her lap, Deborah listened as doctors explained her cancer was aggressive.

"The doctor told me I had five years left to live. I looked down at my little girl and quickly did the maths. She would be seven. My other children would be 10 and 12," she says.

"I was a busy working mother and wife, dreaming of Christmas morning and summer holidays with my family. Now I was a cancer patient. With a terminal diagnosis."

"I didn't know what to do. As a mum, my number one job is to be there for my children. Suddenly I was looking at a future where I couldn't do that."

"I wouldn't even see any of them finish school; let alone watch them fall in love, chase their dreams, maybe even start their own families."

Treatment began almost immediately. Sadly, six months later, it had failed.

Doctors raised the possibility of a bone marrow transplant – an option with serious risks and no guarantees.

But then a chance encounter at a medical conference opened the door to an early-stage clinical trial in London. But to take part, Deborah would have to leave Australia and her children, without knowing whether she would ever return.

Within months after starting the clinical trial (and against all odds) Deborah went into remission. Soon after, doctors could no longer detect any trace of her disease.

She stayed on that trial for years, flying back monthly to collect the medication that kept her cancer at bay, and became a powerful advocate to ensure the treatment was made available to others.

Then Deborah discovered something extraordinary. Some of the crucial early research behind the drug that saved her life had taken place right here in Australia, at WEHI.

Decades earlier, Professor David Vaux - then a WEHI PhD student in the laboratory of Professor Suzanne Cory AC and Professor Jerry Adams - had been working to understand the basic causes of cancer.

Their persistence and discovery lay the foundations for the treatment, later developed by industry partners, that Deborah would one day rely on.

Thirty years of investigation, determination and collaboration turned a fundamental scientific discovery into a medicine in a patient's hand.

Deborah is alive today because people supported medical research long before she ever needed it.

"14 years ago, I was on death's door. Chemo hadn't worked. The cancer had spread right through my body. I was counting down the days."

"I didn't ask for forever. I just wanted enough time to see my kids become adults. Enough time for them to remember me."

"What I could never have imagined was that this drug would completely change my life. In fact, it would save it."

Deborah's children are teenagers and young adults now. Instead of counting the years she might have left, she now looks ahead to graduations, careers – and perhaps one day, grandchildren.

"Today, I am still in remission. My youngest – who was sitting on my lap that fateful day – is now in high school and I just know she has an incredibly bright future ahead of her. I'm so grateful that I'll get to see it."

Breakthroughs don't happen overnight or in isolation. They require years of dedication, cutting-edge technology and collaboration – and they rely on the generosity of supporters.

Your donation today will help us to make the discoveries that will save lives tomorrow. Together, we can change the future of cancer.

Image L-R: Professor Peter Gibbs and Associate Professor Oliver Sieber with Dr Tao Tan. These scientists are leading cutting edge research into new ways to treat bowel cancer.

Can you imagine a world where cancer is just another treatable disease?

We're working on it

WEHI is Australia's leading medical research institute with a 110-year history of world-changing discoveries. Our researchers are tackling cancer from all angles: from understanding the fundamental biology, to developing new and improved diagnoses, treatments and cures.

Tomorrow's medical breakthroughs start with you today.

WEHI
brighter together

To learn more about our current research, or to make a donation, visit:

wehi.edu.au

RSL Be:Well
VETERAN WELLBEING ONLINE

Help improve RSL Be:Well for veterans

ADF veterans are invited to evaluate and give feedback on this online program.

If you are currently serving in, or have left, ADF service and ***haven't yet used*** RSL Queensland's exclusive online program, **RSL Be:Well**, we invite you to take part in an evaluation project.

RSL Be:Well is a **free, self-paced online program** with short, interactive 20-minute modules designed to support veteran health and wellbeing.

Gallipoli Medical Research, in partnership with RSL Queensland, is evaluating **RSL Be:Well** to better understand users' experience and the program's potential benefits for ADF veterans. Your input will help inform how this resource is improved and delivered in the future.

What participation involves:

- a brief initial survey
- up to **30 days to complete three RSL Be:Well modules**
- a post-completion survey
- a one-month follow-up survey

As a thank you for your time, participants will receive a:

- $70 e-voucher following a post-completion survey
- an additional $50 e-voucher after completing the follow-up survey.

Would you like to take part?

Scan the QR code to learn more and register your interest.

Scan here to sign-up

This study was deemed an evaluation activity by the Department of Defence and Veterans' Affairs Human Research Ethics Committee and upholds the principles of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Reference: 670-25). ***If you are currently serving in the ADF, any participation in this study must be undertaken off-duty and in a civilian capacity.*** *Proudly supported by RSL Queensland.*

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Support the National Breast Cancer Foundation and help save thousands of lives each year.

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National Breast Cancer Foundation

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INFUSION THERAPY | ADF & VETERANS

When other treatments haven't worked

ReviveMed delivers evidence-based infusion therapy for treatment-resistant depression, PTSD, and anxiety, with full clinical oversight and no out-of-pocket cost for ADF personnel and veterans.

zed3.com.au

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HOW INFUSION THERAPY IS SUPPORTING VETERANS WITH TREATMENT-RESISTANT DEPRESSION

It's been weeks, months - sometimes years - and nothing seems to shift.

You've tried the medications, done the therapy, and fronted up to the appointments. You've followed the plan, yet the days still feel heavy, or flat, or simply impossible to get through. And at some point, the question arrives, quietly or all at once: if this isn't working, what else is there?

For many veterans and ADF members, that moment is not uncommon. PTSD, anxiety and depression can be stubborn, especially when trauma sits underneath. When standard treatments don't bring meaningful relief, it can strain relationships, work, sleep, and identity. And for some, it can edge toward hopelessness and thoughts that life isn't worth living. That's a confronting place to live; stuck, worn down, and unsure whether anything can improve.

When the Usual Answers Don't Help

Not responding to standard treatments isn't a personal failing. It's something our clinicians are used to treating, and it's often a sign that the next step needs to be different, not that the person needs to try harder.

Treatment-resistant depression is usually defined as depression that hasn't improved after at least two well-delivered, appropriate treatments. Estimates vary, but a commonly cited figure is that around one in three people with depression will experience this kind of poor response at some point.

For veterans and ADF members, it can be even more complex, given the nature of their roles and the significant physical and mental strain this can place on the member. Symptoms rarely arrive alone; sleep disruption, pain, hypervigilance, alcohol use, grief, moral injury, relationship stress and the after-effects of service can stack up. When multiple pressures are running at once, the first-line tools don't always cut through.

Side effects matter too. For some, antidepressants can leave people feeling disconnected from themselves. It's not uncommon to stop medication early; not because someone doesn't want to get well, but because it doesn't feel sustainable.

Conventional treatments help many people. But they don't always reflect how individual mental health can be, especially when trauma is part of their story. Sometimes the turning point is simply this: shifting the focus away from self-blame and toward a different kind of care - one that better fits the individual person.

What a Different Option Can Look Like

One option people are now exploring is infusion-based treatment - delivered in a hospital, carefully monitored, and aimed at those who haven't had relief from the usual approaches.

The compound used in this approach has been used in medicine for decades, particularly in anaesthesia and emergency care. In much smaller doses, research and clinical experience over the past decade have suggested it can have rapid antidepressant effects for some people with treatment-resistant depression, sometimes within hours or days rather than weeks.

In this setting, the medication is given slowly through an intravenous drip in a hospital environment with trained medical staff. The pace and dose are controlled, and the focus is on safety, support, and careful observation throughout. The room is kept calm and quiet. A clinical team stays present, not just to monitor physical wellbeing, but to make the experience feel supported.

For people who haven't been helped by standard therapies, this can offer a different way forward. It isn't a magic fix, and it won't suit everyone, but for some, it can create enough lift to re-engage with the rest of their care and their life.

How It's Delivered (And Who Supports You)

In Canberra and Adelaide, this kind of care is delivered through Zed3's ReviveMed program for veterans and ADF personnel living with treatment-resistant mental health conditions. The point of the model is simple: try something different in a medically supported environment, and integrated with the rest of a person's treatment and existing treating team.

Zed3 has offered infusion treatment since 2017, in a hospital setting designed for close monitoring and follow-up. It's delivered as a team effort: psychiatrists, anaesthetists, nurses and care-coordination staff working together, with clear roles and shared oversight. That structure makes it possible to tailor treatment to the individual, while keeping a close eye on safety, response, and what happens after the initial series of sessions. Importantly, this doesn't replace a person's usual supports. It sits alongside their GP, psychiatrist and broader care team.

Access & Cost

For eligible veterans, treatment through ReviveMed may be funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), which can mean no out-of-pocket costs. Eligibility and pathways differ, so it's worth confirming what applies to your circumstances.

If you're wondering whether this could be relevant for you or someone you care about, start with your GP, psychiatrist or treating team. Ask directly about options for treatment-resistant conditions and whether a referral to ReviveMed for infusion-based treatment makes sense.

And if you're in the thick of it right now, if things feel unsafe or you're having thoughts of suicide, reach out immediately to someone who can help: your local emergency department, 000, or a trusted support service. You don't have to carry it alone while you work out the next step.

If you would like more information on our program, please reach out to our supportive team on (02) 6109 8830, email info@zed3.com.au or visit our website zed3.com.au

Sources

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Nemeroff C. B. (2007). Prevalence and management of treatment-resistant depression. The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 68 Suppl 8, 17–25.

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BEYOND REMEMBRANCE:
Supporting veterans through trauma

ANZAC Day is a time of honour and remembrance. But for some veterans, it can also be a time when emotional distress becomes more apparent.

As a clinical psychologist and founder of Conscious Mind Centre, I work with people living with trauma, including veterans navigating PTSD, complex trauma and the long shadow service can leave behind. As someone from a military family, with a brother currently serving, this is personal for me too.

Trauma does not always end when service ends, sometimes it's the end that becomes the beginning. For some Veterans, commemorative moments like ANZAC Day can bring memories, hypervigilance, grief or distress back to the surface.

The numbers reflect that reality. Around one in six ex-serving ADF personnel experience PTSD each year, more than three times the rate in the wider Australian community.*

That is why support matters.

Veterans deserve access to trauma-informed care that is responsive, evidence-based and tailored to the individual. That includes established psychological therapies, alongside emerging Medicine-Assisted Treatments delivered within tightly regulated clinical frameworks for those with treatment-resistant PTSD.

Veterans also deserve systems that do not make recovery harder.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide made clear that when support systems are too complex, inconsistent or difficult to navigate, they can add to distress rather than reduce it. That must change.

There is growing recognition that innovation has a role to play in trauma care. In 2023, Australia became the first country in the world to allow authorised psychiatrists, under strict regulation, to prescribe MDMA-assisted therapy for treatment-resistant PTSD.

This is not a replacement for established therapies. Nor is it a magic cure.

But for those who have exhausted conventional options, the existence of a regulated pathway matters. It expands what is possible.

At its core, this is about ensuring veterans have access to the full spectrum of care, from proven therapies to emerging treatments, delivered with compassion, rigour and respect.

ANZAC Day asks us to remember those who have served.

But honouring service should also mean backing better care, supporting innovation, and ensuring veterans can access the support they need to heal.

Because remembrance matters.

But so does recovery.

Shai Hipperson, Founder, Conscious Mind Centre
Phone: (07) 5616 2119 Website: consciousmindcentre.com.au

When service leaves a mark, the right care matters

Specialised mental health care for veterans and first responders

Private, single bedrooms support recovery at Avive

Why choose Avive?

Built for veterans: Programs designed specifically for military-related trauma
Structured recovery: Clear pathway to assist recovery
Real clinical depth: Psychiatrists, psychologists and multidisciplinary care
Purpose-built hospitals: Private rooms, calm environments, thoughtful care
Continuity of care: Step-up, step-down and long-term follow-up

MRTRP: Avive's flagship veteran program

A structured, DVA-approved pathway for PTSD recovery

- Intensive trauma-focused treatment
- Evidence-based gold-standard therapies
- Veteran-only cohorts
- Supported by individual therapy as part of the program
- Designed for real-world outcomes
- Includes partner/significant other sessions, designed to improve relationships
- Anger management skills

Not just support. A plan forward.

Inpatient care	Day programs
Circuit-breaker support when things escalate	Structured therapy while living at home
Psychiatrist-led care	Ongoing recovery and relapse prevention
Private rooms with ensuites	Flexible, step-down or stand-alone

Who Avive's Military-Related Trauma Recovery Program (MRTRP) is for:

- Veterans living with PTSD or trauma-related conditions
- Those needing more than standard outpatient care
- Individuals ready for structured, focused recovery

You don't have to wait.

Delaying care can make recovery harder. The right support, at the right time changes outcomes.

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Access support for veterans at Avive

'Their stories echo through generations – lest we forget.'

NEVER FORGOTTEN VOL. 2

Honouring our Veterans From Vietnam to Afghanistan

Dave Morgan

— INTERVIEW —

BILL SOWRY

thelastpostmagazine.com/the-last-post-radio-show-podcast

Greg T Ross: It's my great pleasure today to be speaking with Brigadier Retired, Bill Sowry AMCSC. 36 years as a career army officer. And of course, Bill's got a diverse portfolio, he's done a lot of things, and we're going to go through a few of those today. Thanks for joining us, Bill.

Bill Sowry: Thanks very much, Greg. It's great to be here, of course.

GTR: Yes. Your brother Brendan, a friend of mine, recommended you to me and told me you're an interesting chap. Delving through the research, found that to be confirmed. There's so much you've done. Look, we'll talk about your career in the Army shortly, but I mean, let's go back, shall we, to 2016 to start off with. 14,000 pushups, 14,000 pushups for the Fred Hollows Foundation, I think it was, Bill. And you were coached there, or you had Supeter Cosgrove and a few other people there with you doing that. Sir Peter Cosgrove obviously was the governor general at the time. How did you manage 14,000 pushups?

BS: Same way you eat an elephant, I guess. A little bit of a time. The way I'd structured it was to ... And it was obviously for a good purpose. I was doing it for the Fred Hollows Foundation. And it was a repeat of a similar activity. I'd done it a couple of years before when I was based in London. But this time around, it was in support of Fred Hollows and it was tied to the Tour de France. So it was four pushups for every kilometer of the Tour de France. So every day it was anywhere between 500 to 1100 pushups that I'd typically do mostly over my lunch break. After a while, I got pretty good, so I could crack out about a thousand in an hour over my lunch break and just have somebody record it and watch me as I did that and trying to raise money for a good cause.

GTR: Yeah, well, you did well. It's available on YouTube if anyone wants to have a look at it. And I saw the weather was a bit challenging in itself. So hats off to you for that. And look, how important is the Fred Hollows Foundation? I mean, obviously you were driven to do it. Why was that?

BS: Well, I think I did see something about Fred Hollows, but I know you often talk on the show about people in transition, and I was in transition at the time. I'd retired in early April. And as part of my thinking about transition, there's time for self, there was time for family. I put this in as a section of time for giving back, if you like, and trying to help somebody else because I had the opportunity and the time to do something like this before I actually went out and looked at serious job hunting. So that was the thinking behind it. And I think I saw a blurb on Fred Hollows, $25 saves, can save a set of the sight of a person. So I set myself a target and of around $10,000. And if I work my math, it was something like 400 people could get their sight back if I got 10,000. I got slightly better than that. I think I raised about 12.5,000 that time. And it was much harder in Australia in a small town like Canberra as compared to when I was doing it in London on a, if you like, a slightly international cause. And I'd raised almost $100,000 in that activity. Well,

GTR: Actually, I'll talk to you about London shortly because that itself is a beautiful thing you did there too. But I'm looking at fitness and I'm thinking, well, I too do pushups sometimes during my lunch break, but 20 does me.

BS: Just comes with practice, I think. I'm not sure my shoulders will ever recover, but anyhow, it was a good cause.

GTR: Yeah. And your time in the Army must have felt there surely, Bill of the fitness.

BS: Oh, look, I think we all try to stay fit. I was never a runner, but I could lift heavy weights, as they say. So I think it suited my fatigue.

GTR: Yeah, that's right. Well, geez, hats off to you for doing that too. 12 and a half thousand dollars, I think you said, which was magnificent and helping a lot of people through the Fred Hollows Foundation. Okay, so let's go back to London. It's 2015, and there's a whole lot attached to this story too, which we'll go into, that involves India, involves a whole lot of things there too. But I think you launched pushups for Fateh, was it, who was a young Indian man with spina bifida, but there was an attachment there, wasn't there, Bill? Can you tell us about that?

BS: Yes. Fatheh was the son of a classmate of mine. In 1994, 95, I had the good fortune of being posted to India, to the Indian Defence Services Staff College. So I spent a year with the Indian Army, and as part of the program, they allocated a host officer. Mohit Whig, Major Mhit Whig became my host officer, and his family and my family became good friends. We both shared the experience of having our first children in that year. And as all things must come to an end, as we finish the year, we wished each other well, set our goodbyes and with the hope that sometime in the future when I brought back my daughter to India to see where she was born, we'd be able to meet up. Sadly, about a year and a half after Staff College finished, I got a letter from his wife, Tina, to say that he'd been killed by terrorists in Layla Dark in Northwest India, and not long after Fateh had been born, and Fateh was born with spina bifida. So, for the subsequent period, whilst we maintained sporadic contact, we lost contact with what Tina and the children were doing. And in 2014, she did a reach out to me via Facebook and just said, "What can I do to get some better medical training or rehabilitation training for Fateh so he could live more independently?" And that's when I said, "Let me have a

think and I'll see what I can do. " And it really boiled down to how does a middle-aged man who can't sing, can't dance, do something that can attract some attention and raise interest in raising money for the type of cause I was doing. And I settled on pushups and pushups for Fateh, otherwise known as the Puff Challenge was sort of born. And, like the Fred Hollows, four pushups for the Tour de France plus a few extra every day. So I think I did about 15.5 thousand that time. And I guess I learned a lot about the necessary self-promotion that you have to do to sustain interest via social media to get people willing to donate. And by good circumstance, as much as anything else, we managed to get onto NDTV, which is one of the Indian TV stations and the Hindustan Times. They did a film clip from a reporter in London. It actually got a very good coverage. I think we were the eight or ninth most red news item in India that particular day. So that put that into Indian context. I think we reached about 20 million people plus, and of course it raised a great deal of money in the process. And we were very lucky that we had people giving to us everything from Indian billionaires to very humble people from India who would give us one or $2, which was all they could spare. But it didn't matter whether you were great or humble. Everybody was really very, very generous and they could see the goodness in the cause, if you like.

GTR: What did it teach you or what did it confirm to you about the human race, some people in the human race?

BS: Well, the generosity of spirit. I guess at a personal level, it was probably the first major fundraising activity I've done. It was solely me doing it. And I think the thing I learned most was the value of giving. In doing something like that, you actually get a lot more in return than you do by pumping out a few pushups each day, that your faith in humanity is restored. The willingness of people to support what you're doing is reinforced. Yeah, there was a lot of positivity out of it, and it just reinforced in me there still remains a lot of good people out there who are interested in doing good and not doing harm.

GTR: Yeah. So I'm reminded of that almost every day through the radio podcast and the magazine too, and that confirms it too. I love the phrase, you get a lot more in return, and that is so, so true. It's wonderful to hear you say that. Whereabouts in London was it done?

BS: Well, as you've probably seen the film clips, the Australian High Commission is based on the strand in London, and there was a gymnasium in the base of the Waldorf Hotel just around the corner, which I was a member. So every lunchtime when I had a lunchtime, I did it there. But on weekends, my son begrudgingly gave me his time and his GoPro and would film me doing pushups around London. If I was an event in a night, I would get somebody at the event to

Bill Sowry doing his push ups as Acting chief of Australian Army, Gen Gus McLachlan keeps count.

... We'd record it. I'd do a quick 50 out of my total of the day, get them to give a quick message like Peter Cosgrove did in support of Fred Hollows or the Puff Challenge. And look, that was the wonderful thing, the great and the good. Tony Abbott did the same thing as Peter Gosgrove here in Australia. And I had the Chief of the British Army and the Chief of the UK Defence Force do the same for me in the UK. And it was just being a little bit bold. I remember being at a NATO conference in the South of England in a pub, having a pub meal one night, and I literally just got up, stood up, recognized there were a lot of ex-military, told them what I was doing. I said, "What if I filmed while I did 50 pushups?" Immediately, a number of the people at the tables jumped off and they hit me on the floor as well and joined me in the 50 pushups. We took a hat around the people at the bar and the bar staff gave us all their tips. So I filmed when and where I could around the UK and around other parts of Europe where I was traveling at the time because work progressed, there was no stopping in that. Wonderful. It was 22 days straight, bar one rest day, I think, in the Tour de France. And yeah, that's how it was.

GTR: Oh, that's so marvelous to hear that story too. I tell you what, Bill, it just paints a lovely picture. And particularly in the pub being joined by all those people doing the pushups, that's wonderful. And it must have helped Tina and the family and Fateh too. I mean, that's an amazing thing. I've seen a photo of you and Major Mohit Whig. You both look very happy in each other's company. Were you good mates?

BS: Yes, we were. Yeah, yeah. No, he was a very capable soldier, very, very capable soldier. His dad had commanded the, I think it was the Fifth Gurkhas regiment during the war with Pakistan in 65 and was quite famous in the Indian Army. And Mohit had joined the same regiment, but he was a very fun-loving, affable sort of guy, but a very capable soldier at the same time. And it was just tragic when you hear one of your good friends is blown up by a ID very unexpectedly.

GTR: He looks like a happy man. If you read faces through photos, he looks like a happy man and an affable chap. What was India like for you?

Governor General Sir Peter Cosrove keeping count of Bill's push ups.

BS: Oh, I was speaking to one of the new Indian students at the war college today, and I was saying to him, had a profound experience. I'd had the good fortune of previously serving in Pakistan as a humanitarian deminer. And then a year or two later, I went to India, but I was pretty newly wet. My wife and I were only a bit over 18 months into our marriage and when we left for India and we had our first daughter there. So it was a very formative experience. And people ask what was it like? And I always say that you can take a person out of the subcontinent, but you can't take the subcontinent out of the person. India is such a contrast to the way we live in Australia. It smells, it's religions, it's food, everything. The numbers of people that you see on a daily basis, the sense of personal space, and some can find it quite confronting

because the personal space is much closer. And you do, for me, as we had our morning tea every morning, getting used to the cultural habits of holding hands for grown men, which I had experienced in other parts of the world. So it wasn't necessarily unfamiliar. I wasn't confronted by it. But for those that had newly experienced it, as some of my other European colleagues, they go sort of going, "What's this about? " And we sort of were saying, "Don't worry, they just like you. " Oh,

GTR: No, lovely. Yeah,

BS: No, it was a profound experience. I still maintain contact with my Indian friends now, and hopefully I'll go back one day.

GTR: Yes. Look, well said too, Bill. And you talk about the smells, the food, the culture, the lack of personal space compared to Australia, of course, but it is that food. And when the Indians come to Australia or anywhere they go around the world, they do bring that culture with them and bless them for that because it's a wonderful contribution to mankind and also it stops life being a little boring because the food and the colors are beautiful. So yeah, wonderful. Now, look, I was going to say, East Timor, Operation Astute, that was something ... Now, I think that was back in about 2006 or something, if I'm right. But what was that about? If you could tell listeners your time there in East Timor and how many troops did you have and all that sort of thing?

BS: Right. Well, it was 2009 for me.

GTR: All right.

BS:If you recall, there'd been an attempt on Dr. Jose Ramos Horta, who was the...

GTR: President

BS: At the time, an attempt on his life. And at that stage in 2006, we brought back our peacekeeping force into Timor. And I was the task force commander for one of those rotations in 2009. And at that particular time, I guess the directive was to ... We were transitioning from peace support, if you like, to capacity building, looking to the future, helping the people of Timor, recognizing the threats have dissipated. There's less need for carrying weapons on the street. And so very much my focus there was setting that type of imagery, bringing the threat posture down, speaking with hands and not the barrel of a gun, if you like, and trying to make people have confidence in the country that they'll be okay, issues that do erupt can be resolved peacefully through consultation by the party's concern, and that's the way we did it. And in parallel to that, we did a lot of work to, I guess, help the FFDDL, which is their defense force, look at the other things they could do. So by nature, I'm a civil engineer and come from an engineering background. So we started doing collaborative works with them, doing, if you like, public works, hospital clinics, roads, sporting facilities, maternity houses, those types of works which contribute to health outcomes, contribute to the economy. We did some disaster relief activities, so they become more self-sufficient in looking after themselves when these events occur. And again, it was another one of those very formative experiences working with Timorese leadership, which I had great admiration for because universally to the key leaders of Xanana Gusmao, Taur Matan Ruak, who headed up the Defence Force, President Horta had been fighting the good battle since the early 70s, and had gone through the crisis of 1999, 2000, and were still positively committed to leading the country into better times. And I had the good fortune of going back to Timor late last year and caught up with Xanana Gusmao very briefly at a couple of events that we were at. And progress is positively moving forward. It's still slow because they're still building their economy. They had a very low base to start from, but there's lots of international investment going into the place. There's positive improvement, but pieces prevailed. You've got all the issues of a young state, but more importantly, democracy has prevailed and they've demonstrated through multiple elections that they can make it work.

GTR: I was going to ask you too, I mean, how are the people of East Timor different? How would you describe the people? And did they win your confidence or did you win their confidence easily?

BS: Oh, that's a difficult question. Look, I would describe them as a very gentle people, notwithstanding the crisis that occurred. Very religious. I found them a lyric folk in that, if you like, one of the things I enjoyed most, and I'm not necessarily a great religious person, but as a matter of, I guess, self-reflection and the ability to engage the people, I went to church every Sunday that I was in Timor. And the most beautiful part about it was listening to them sing, not listening to me sing, but listening to them. I didn't want to spoil the harmonies, but they were great in that respect. They had to rebuild their public service. They were rebuilding their judiciary, their legal frameworks. They had to adopt, they were rebooting, if you like, Portuguese as one of the principal languages of East Timor, and they literally did that. They stopped the schools for four months. They brought out a bunch of teachers from Portugal. They got everybody in the civil service and the schools to learn how to teach Portuguese, and then they started teaching Portuguese. And indeed, when I went back, this is now almost 16 years on, the level of Portuguese being used universally, I think the general understanding has gone considerably higher than it was back in 2009. So look, they're enthusiastic. I was involved over there with the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and that's why I was going back to reboot the Duke of Edinburgh Award in Timor Leste. So it gave me the opportunity to meet lots of new, young, vibrant, young Timorese, self-initiating in activities like improving gender awareness in sport and athletics, in handicrafts and craft making in high schools, simply want to improving themselves. And I think when I was in Timor, 40% of the population in 2016 or 2009 was under the age of 25, and I think it's 65% of the countries under the age of

35 now. So the future of the country is the people and realistically the youth, there's lots of talent there. It's for countries like Australia and others to not to give them a handout, but a hand up and help them realize their potential and provide opportunities and things like guest worker schemes, relationships with training institutions in Australia to upskill and provide industry into Timor. I'm a great fan of doing what we can to help one of our closest and realistically our most loyal neighbors. When you go back to what they did and what they suffered on our behalf in World War II, we do owe them.

GTR: Yeah. Yeah. I feel the same way, Bill, and hold great compassion for the East Timorese and Timor-Leste. Just as a point of fact, I was in radio around the time that this occurred, 1999, 2000, and there was an ad asking for radio personnel to man the radio stations in East Timor during the rebuilding and everything. So I applied and I didn't get the job, but I was wanting to be there. So thanks for that description of the people too. And just another point too, Bill, it's so serendipitous in the fact that you talked about church because like you, I'm not traditionally religious, I wouldn't imagine so. And yet I'd been to Fiji a number of times and had befriended a family and a local village, beautiful people. I went there on a Sunday to the church. There was no windows. They had gaps obviously where windows would be, but there was no glass. It was very warm tropical feel. They had a pastor had come back from America to spread the word, and they were talking in local language. I didn't understand what they were saying, and then they sang and it was beautiful.

BS: Yeah, look, I'd agree with you. I had my first overseas deployment as a young troop commander was into Tonga, and the Polynesian, Melanesian sense of song is phenomenal. And obviously the religiosity of the South Pacific is much greater than perhaps contemporary Australia, and it does play such a profound importance when you travel around those islands, because I've been to Tonga previously served in the Solomon Islands and worked in PNG before going to Timor. So I guess I've spent a bit of time in the patch and you recognize how important it is to understand how important it is to them so that you can engage people in a way that's empathetic and with respect.

GTR: What an interesting conversation we're having. You're right. The South Pacific is, there's something magical about it, and it's just interesting to hear you describe it that way too so articulately and passionately. Other countries, of course, you've been to, I mean, tell us about your time as defence attache in London. What was that like?

BS: Well, it was, again, one of those profound experiences where you get the opportunity to live in a city like London. And it is one of those cities, if you can't find excitement in London, you're probably dead, but it was a great place. But I guess from a military perspective, it was pre-AUKUS, pre that arrangement, but nonetheless, our historical ties were strong. We'd really just recently come out of the fight in Afghanistan, issues were going on in Syria, so there was an operational bent to it, and of course it coincided with the lead up to the hundred years of Anzac. So there was quite a significant ceremonial side, and right in the middle of it, of course, we did the recovery operation for MH-17 when it was shot down by the Russians over Ukraine. That was July 2014.

GTR: Yeah, I mean, I remember it well, not the date, but I'm just thinking because time flies by so quickly, it was 12 years ago, nearly 12 years ago. You seem very much like to me like a man that absorbs the cultural differences and the highlights of each country you've been to. Did you get a chance to get out in the British countryside and meet people that ...

BS: We did. Yeah. We had a range of activities. A lot of it was prompted by some of the ceremonial work that we did. There's a great little village in the West country called Sutton Veny and Sutton Veny was the location of one of the Australian general hospitals during the First World War. And I think there's about 130 or so Australians buried in Sutton Vaney in their churchyard there, Commonwealth War Graves, beautifully maintained. Each year we would do a church service following the Anzac Service. We'd go out to Sutton Veny and later in the year, the Australian High Commission cricket team would go out and play the parishioners from Sutton Veny and keeping this bond. And it was just remarkable that they still felt passionate that so many Australians lay in their churchyard as a contribution or a recognition of their sacrifice. And very tragically, a large number of those were results of the Spanish flu and died either in the last stages of the war or in the aftermath in the early months from November 2018 into the early months of 1919 when the Spanish influenza was at its worst.

GTR: Clearly that would've been an extraordinary experience. And as you say, to go there and see the graves there alongside the church, I guess in country. England is an amazing thing. There's so many beautiful parts to that too. Now, exercise Arcade Fusion, can you tell us about that too, because was that involved with NATO?

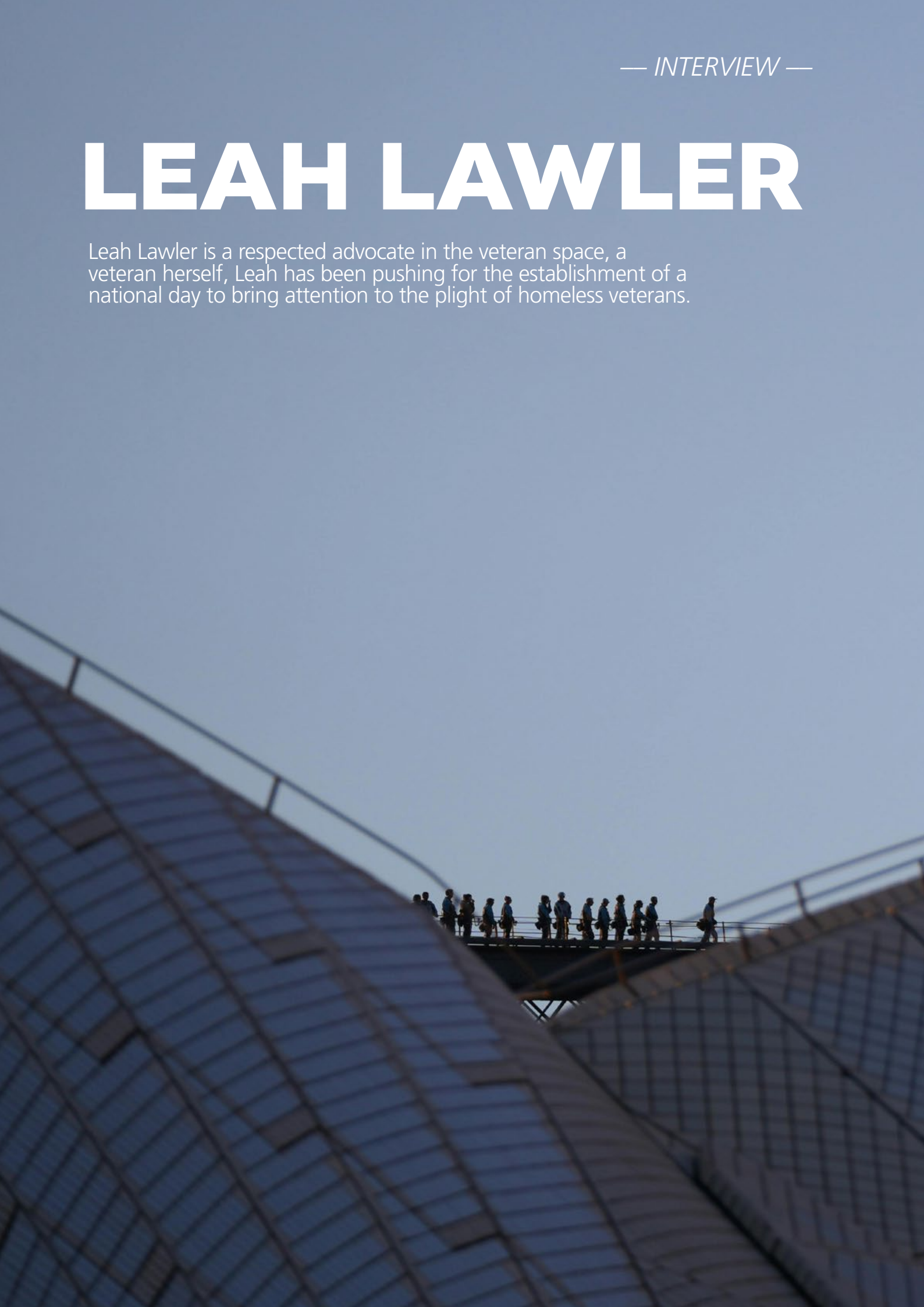
BS: Yeah, you really have trolled the internet. Yes, that's a NATO command and control activity to make sure that they ... I don't know if they still call it Arcade Fusion, but they bring all the NATO partners together just to practice to ensure that they can do what they're expected to do and mobilize their forces, command what is quite a complex multinational force, getting it speaking coherently and doing what it's supposed to do. And if I go back to our opening commentary, it was soldiers of many nations from Arcade Fusion who joined me on the ground pumping out pushups. So it was doubly benefit. It was professionally rewarding. And from the purpose of my fundraising, it was monetarily rewarding at the same time.

GTR: That amazing stuff. Well, I tell you what, Bill Sowry, AM, CSC, 36 years, a career army officer here with The Last Post, it's been an absolute pleasure. I've really enjoyed this conversation. And look, you're a man of many interests. You've visited many countries. You're the pushup king. And I love the fact that you are aware that you get a lot more in return. That's just a beautiful saying. Thanks so much. And if you ever think of something else you'd like to tell listeners, get in contact, please. Thanks for being here, Bill.

BS: Not a problem, Greg. Look, thanks very much for the opportunity, I wasn't expecting it,. It's been an enjoyable chat. And look, I hope your readers enjoyed whatever I could say.

LEAH LAWLER

Leah Lawler is a respected advocate in the veteran space, a veteran herself, Leah has been pushing for the establishment of a national day to bring attention to the plight of homeless veterans.



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To support this important initiave, please go to **change.org** and sign the petition to 'Recognise May 19 as a National Veteran Homelessness Awareness Day'.

Greg T Ross: It's my great pleasure today to be sitting down with Leah Lawler. Leah's currently doing a degree in counseling at Edith Cowan University. Leah is also a long-term advocate and of service to the veteran community. And we're here today to speak about a proposed National Day Against Veterans Homelessness. And Leah's been a longtime worker in that area too. Leah, hello, how are you, and welcome.

Leah Lawler: Hello, Greg. A great pleasure to be here. You really are a national treasure. Thank you for being here, Greg.

GTR: Yeah. Well, thank you, Leah, for being likewise. It's been a pleasure knowing you over the years and seeing your work, and I continue to be impressed. Now, Leah, we spoke at the beginning about, I guess, focusing on this campaign to have May the 19th registered as the National Day Against Veteran Homelessness. Why May 19th?

LL: Well, Greg, May 19th was actually a collaborative date way back a decade ago when I met like- minded people in VOTSA and Veterans 360s. So it was just something that came up and then I created a visual. We just had it as a flagship every now and then for the year, but it wasn't really seriously pushed. So I've sat with that since then. And it's just come to me to reconfigure it and now push it forward as a real thing. So I say it's a collaborative and joint effort, even though I'm pushing it forward.

GTR: And you're doing a good job there too, of course. And we'll be focusing on veteran homelessness in the coming Anzac Day edition. I guess it's a complex social issue. We'll talk about the figures a bit later, but they're frightening enough. But how do you break down the causes, the reasons, the likely cures without getting lost in a bit of a maze?

LL: Yes, Greg, it is a maze. And there's many intersecting and vulnerable points, so it's full of complexities. So what you need to do really is what many wonderful people are already doing, and that is to break it into small and attainable goals, which is what the Veteran Homeless Awareness Day or VHAD is that I call it for ease, is aiming to do. So it's an awareness day and it's a campaign calling for May 19 to be formally recognized as a National Awareness Day because it's purpose to keep veteran homelessness visible, create a clear point of public accountability and support stronger connection between veterans and the services designed to help them. It's not a charity campaign or a performance, Greg. It's a right space visibility mechanism that makes the issue harder to ignore. It's easier to measure and easier to respond to. So an awareness day doesn't end homelessness, but it could change the conditions that allow it to persist quietly because visibility is what turns concern into action.

GTR: I guess maybe that's the reason that there have been people stumbling over in the past. And I mean, you've spoken about this in the sense of making these small obtainable goals and bringing awareness. As you say, it's not going to end homelessness, but it will bring awareness to bring those figures down because I don't know, there are different figures floating around, but I think there was a consensus done recently, anything from 1,500 homeless veterans to 5,800. And that's a large disparity, those numbers, obviously, but the core of that being that these are worrying figures.

LL: Well, they are worrying and figures and they're not actually reducing, which is the problem. And that's why my call to action is that it's not too late to actually do something together in a better way. So I mean, just briefly, my role in this is I'm an ex- service member and a long-term advocate in this space. So VHAD didn't come out of nowhere. It grew over years of working alongside other advocates and listening to lived experience and watching the same patterns show up in the data, which you've rightly mentioned. The data is quite frightening and the last consensus actually showed more accurate numbers. So I've shaped it and took it forward, but it's very much rooted, like I said, in collaboration and shared concern about what we're seeing currently. And I wanted to be part of a solution in a practical way, and not by speaking for anyone, but offering a framework, a simple reoccurring mechanism that creates collective responsibility and can give people a tangible way to engage each year So a shared reference point because people want to help.

GTR: Well, look, of course, as an ex- service member too, in a prime position to observe and hopefully enact, and as you say, it's never too late. I mean, why would it be too late? Correct me if I'm wrong, Leah, but I did hear the figures that a veteran is around three times more likely to be homeless than someone from the general community.

LL: Yes, that is correct. They are overrepresented now. So the data that's coming out of the two different support data I'm using for this campaign is out of the trenches and Give Me Shelter, Leave No Veteran Behind. And they are currently showing almost at 6,000, but also we don't really know the accurate numbers, but we've got very clever

researchers out there collecting data that tells us things that we will never know.

GTR: Look, I know that, of course, the veteran community reflects the general community in a more focused and macro way, I would imagine. So this affects all of the community. We have seen the homeless figures generally speaking, and we know that that's a bad thing in itself, and that does tend to be increasing from my observations. So the veteran community, obviously we're in a position now to focus on the veteran community. By bringing the veteran community homelessness down, you're also bringing the general homelessness down.

LL: Well, yes, and it is. Let me address these two things because these are very important tensions I want to acknowledge first up. So first, I want to acknowledge the tension that can arise when talking about any homelessness. And let's be clear, any type of homelessness Greg is devastating, and there are many pathways into it. So these experience can't be approached through a universal one size fit all lens. This campaign does not rank homelessness or elevate one group above others. Well, so what it recognizes is that homelessness is experienced differently across cohorts and universal approaches can miss those cohort specific risks and needs. I've chosen to focus on veterans due to my own lived experience in the Australian Defense Force. It's where I'm informed and where I can act responsibly. So I want to be very clear about that, Greg, upfront, that this campaign isn't suggesting veteran homelessness is more important than any other form of homelessness because they're all important. This work is more about precision, not division. And when we understand pathways more clearly, responses can prove to everyone, Greg.

GTR: And I think one of the things that we've been focused on is to help in transition. The easier the transition is, the less likely there is to be worrying figures, particularly when we speak about homelessness. I suppose too, Leah, it's a general demeanor of the veteran community. I mean, there is a culture of self-reliance and have believed shame and a stigma attached to that. Is this a roadblock or what's your feelings on that?

LL: Well, it is a roadblock for sure. And like I said, there's so many complexities, but we do know that obviously transition out of the Australian Defense Force is a vulnerable point, especially around identity and other various social issues. So really it's not an easy ... Nobody can say it's this, this or this. However, we do know transition is a vulnerable predicted point where systems can fail to meet or recognize people's needs at that time. And then obviously transition goes over a long period of time. So it's not just something that happens immediately. It happens over a longer period of time. So things might not start looking wonky until a little bit later, and then other adversities may rise.

GTR: Yeah, so true. And I guess the more we speak about transition too, Leah, the more likely we are to enact the understanding for veterans to know that there are places to go to, there are people to speak with if there are some difficulties in transition. And I guess it's more about making sure that people know that it is a subject that we can talk about because we're all heading in the same direction to make this a process that lowers these figures. For those in power, keeping these issues at the forefront of the minds of those in power with the chance to drive change, that's an important thing too. Who do you hope to reach with those people in power?

LL: Yes and no. I have put it in front of Western Australia RSL at this point. They're sitting with it. I've been asking for if they were interested in supporting. So I'm just seeing that sit there. I've obviously reached out to various different areas and just allowing people to think about it because these kind of things are not something that can be done quickly. They need to be well-thought-out to see if this is even workable. Also, this campaign, it's different. This is not about me. It's not about anyone else speaking for veterans. It's about creating space for lived experience and amplifying voices that are too often unheard. So the campaign aims to center veterans' voices. So we need to listen to them where lived experiences prioritize over commentary, particularly commentary for those who haven't actually experienced homelessness. I haven't. So it's about supporting veterans to define their own needs rather than having those needs assumed or interpreted for them. So it aims to create these conditions by proposing a recurring date on the public calendar and like a shared moment that encourages listening and reflection and accountability. And the shift matters because when services are informed by their lived experience, responses can be shaped with more care, dignity, and relevance. So really, Greg, this is about dignity, empowerment, and self-determination. It's a human rights lens and not a charity lens. So I guess it's about exposing this campaign more, letting people speak, not just people in power because the power comes from people speaking from behind the lines, so to speak.

GTR: Well, look, I mean, us speaking about this is empowering in itself. I get a lot of energy from speaking with you about these matters because I know that this will lead to a good outcome eventually. It may not be immediately, but we want something done. The sooner, the better,

obviously. And I guess too, you spoke about homelessness and your not having been homeless and likewise here. I mean, but the fine line that a lot of people, a lot of Australians now find themselves in financially, a lot of people may only be one bad decision away from homelessness.

LL: Yes, that is true. And that's often been talked about that we are so close and we're not that far removed really. It just takes a few bad things to happen. And we realize that life can change very quickly.

GTR: Yes, I know. I have spoken to a few people that have experienced homelessness and the general feeling from them is, how did this happen to me? It's so far removed from their life plans initially, and yet it had provided them with shock and surprise when it happened. We spoke about people in power that are able to do something. The federal government's investing $30 million through the Veterans Acute Housing Program. What's your feelings on that?

LL: Everything matters. Everything matters, and we need more than one thing. We need many things. So again, it's about visibility, and this campaign is just one spoke in the wheel of many things that need to be put in place to put supports up. Something is better than nothing.

GTR: True enough. And it does maintain awareness, and that will trickle down, obviously, that's right, and hopefully grouping more like-minded people together. Are there contact details for you?

LL: I think there's just a ... So if you were able to, Greg, go, please read, sign and share on change.org, the actual campaign recognized May 19 as a National Veteran Homeless Awareness Day..

GTR: So Leah, I mean, the figures are disturbing. We know that there's people enacting change. The federal government, as we just said, is putting $30 million into this, but we need to do something in regards to your campaign and why does it matter so much?

LL: Well, Greg, this campaign exists to draw attention to veteran homelessness, which is, as we've said, rising rather than falling. So the data is telling us that veterans are overrepresented in homelessness and existing services are for varying reasons, not connecting early enough. So when I began advocating a decade ago, the numbers were approximated at around 3,000, as you kind of alluded to, and now it's 6,000 now in a decade. So these rising trends are signaling systemic failure rather than individual fault. And you were talking about stigma. Well, this is because people think it's a personal fault. So my question is, how is it we are more aware than ever of homelessness in veteran communities, yet the numbers keep growing, but these numbers cannot be ignored. And they raise serious questions about whether risk is being identified, as we said, and responded to early enough. So particularly around, as we stated, the transition from service to civilian life, which can be a vulnerable point, and that's why visibility and early connection matter. So Greg, we often ask, why are they homeless? But from a rights frame, the better question is, how did we let this happen? And the important thing is we still have a chance to respond differently. So Veteran Homeless Awareness Day is one way of doing that by making the issue visible and recurable. Because as you know, Greg's silence isn't neutral. It allows systems to go and examined and the shame and stigma can delay help seeking as it can be experienced as an individual fault. And furthermore, when people are in survival mode, which is really important and their physiological needs like safety and shelter are not met, individuals, they struggle to navigate services. They're trying to survive. And going to the rights-based framework, Greg, Australia has ratified human rights commitments, recognizing housing as a right. Therefore, veterans' needs are in fact unmet rights, not personal shortcomings. And it's not just a social issue, but it's a health issue now.

GTR: Actually, that's right. And of course, the human rights element comes into it when you mention the right for housing and through the general community and the veteran community too, obviously a human right that needs to be addressed if we're to call ourselves a first world nation. The campaign, Leah, I guess in relation to the prosperity or the likelihood of change, what's your feelings on that and how do people get involved?

LL: Well, that is a great question because what's the point of the campaign really? And so it's better than nothing. It doesn't cost anything. It's not a solution, as we said, but the visibility is a mechanism. So its purpose is to keep veteran homelessness visible because as we know, it keeps disappearing and that's what my work does is to keep trying to keep it visible along with other many wonderful people.

So it will change. This is what I would hope it would change, Greg. As a national day is practical, not symbolic. What it can change is this. It can refrain this issue from charity to justice. It can create a recurring mode of visibility and accountability. It makes the issue harder to ignore, but easier to track over time and easier for people to know where to connect, both veterans and their wider communities. It can also assist in exposing gaps in services in each state. As data is suggesting, there are limited specialist service from veterans experiencing homelessness, which of course can make navigation harder, particularly without clear visible pathways. So it becomes too hard. It's not being allowed to get to the people that need it the most. So it also has the potential that visibility can help shift the narrative away from shame and personal failure and toward understanding vulnerability as part of transition away from the Australian Defence Forces. It centre's around lived experience and amplifies veterans' voices. This shift matters, Greg, because it has the potential to encourage earlier help-seeking, which is number one. Families and peers may recognize warning signs sooner before they become crisis point. It could push for policy reform and mobilize cross-sector action. The campaign can also give public compassion or direction, as you were asking. People care. We know this. The challenge is often knowing where to begin, and a national day can act as a conduit helping connect people to existing services and complimenting the wonderful work organizations are already doing. It exposes gaps in Australian human rights commitments. And when an issue has a day, it becomes harder to ignore and easier for communities to organize around. So ultimately, Greg, Veteran Homeless Awareness Day creates a protected platform for lived experience as a recurring moment of public accountability, so responsibility doesn't quietly disappear.

GTR: We're speaking with veterans advocate Leah Lawler about the move to make May 19th, the national day for veterans homelessness to recognize it, to bring awareness to it. And as you said so rightfully too, Leah, it's not shame and it's not a personal failure, and people must be brought to the attention of that so that we can make inroads into the issue. Now, how do people get involved? Where do they go to sign onto this?

LL: Greg, thank you for asking. If at this stage, and it is only on change.org, so if you were to read, sign and share on change.org, you'll find it under the heading, Recognize May 19th as a National Veteran Homelessness Awareness Day. It's the only Australian one for homeless veterans, so it's pretty easy to find. And that's how people can help, is just help expose it and I'll await the RSL and see how we go from here.

GTR: Yeah. Well, strength to you on that too, Leah. And knowing you as I do, you won't be satisfied until we've achieved this. You're doing some wonderful stuff. Go to change.org share and sign or sign and share and get that organized too.

If these issues have raised any concerns for you, go to Open Arms or give them a call on 1800 011 046 DVA on 1800 838 372. RSL LifeCare is 1800 326 989 and linked to home veterans. They're available 24/7 also on 1800 326 989. Leah Lawler, as always, a great pleasure speaking with you. Your energy and commitment is a shining light to Australia, and we thank you so much for being here.

LL: You so much, Greg. I'm honored to chat about such an important matter..

— INTERVIEW —

ANDY FERMO

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Greg T Ross: Today it's my great pleasure to be with Andy Fermo, founder and project lead at Invisible Injuries. Andy is a veteran himself, a husband, post-traumatic stress recoverer, which is what we're here to talk about and the work that he does with invisible injuries. Welcome, Andy. How are you?

Andy Fermo: I'm very well. Thank you, Greg. And thanks for the invite and opportunity to share my story.

GTR: It's a great pleasure Andy, because you've got such an inspirational story to tell unf great worth to veterans and beyond that too, the general community. You enlisted in the regular army in 2001, I believe. What was your role there?

AF: Yeah, my role originally was I'd signed up in Signals Corps, I joined up with the Royal Australian Signals Corps as an electronic warfare operator. But before then, I actually had signed up as a geek as part-time. And when I went to Kapooka, I enjoyed my time there so much and the lifestyle that was gaining as I became a soldier through that process and changed over to be electronic warfare operator in the Signals Corps.

GTR: Yeah, I mean, it drags you in the Army lifestyle, and certainly you've experienced that in many ways. Where did you go? You had a few posts there too, Andy. Tell us about the journey.

AF: Yeah. Well, when you sign up, like every recruit, we went to Kapooka. They'd changed the format for a little bit there. I think it was maybe about eight weeks. I did the recruit training in Kapooka and then there's a couple of different places for signals to go. And once you've graduated as your bare minimum soldier, you go off to your initial employment training. And the first stop for me was at McLeod or Greensboro in Watsonia in Melbourne for the School of Signals. And that's where we did our basic signaler course and some other bits there to deal with it, to be able to learn the retail and radio procedures. And then we were waiting there for a little while before we got posted to Cabarlah , which is in Queensland. So just inland in Toowoomba or just north of Towomba. And that's where the electronic warfare wing of the military, it's co-ed, so it's tri-service. And I spent the rest of my IETs in Cabarlah. There's two sections to that posting where there was a unclass phase. And then with that job for electronic warfare, we were required to have a top secret clearance. So after the vetting process went through, which took a significant amount of time, given the circumstances of that period just after the nine eleven Twin Towers and the other locations. So that was the start of that campaign in the next 20 years. So after being vetted, we went to the classified phase to do that component of our training.

GTR: I believe you qualified as a commando too, Andy.

AF: Yes, I did. So after being qualified as an EW operator, I got posted to Seven Sig, which was there as well. So there was a couple of different postings that you can have. And then I wanted to be in a tactical unit to shoot the guns and run around the bush and all that good stuff as a young soldier. And so I spent some time in the ManPac unit at Seven Signals Regiment where we were in small teams embedded in. And then because Teamwall was still going on, we were attached to quite a few different organizations like 3RAR and also 2CAV on other things so that we were really being embedded into the different units, which is something really being done. and then the posting cycle came through, and I loved that side of things. I was really more about the war fighting and that sort of thing as opposed to the strategic role and being posted down to DSD, now ASD, Australian Signals Directorate in Canberra. That didn't have as much interest to me at

that time. And in 2006, I got posted into two commando regimen. It was for RAR commando then, and we were there posted into create a new capability for electronic warfare to build on the unit, having the special forces capabilities, as well as the tag capabilities. So we posted in 2006, and then it was almost like a baptism of fire. So within a few weeks of being posted into the unit, one of the sections that 126 Squadron was posted down along with Tag East to support the anti-terrorism wing of the operations for the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

GTR: Yeah, that must've been something for you. That's quite incredible in itself. But we move on to, I guess, a really crucial part of your life story too, Andy, is that you were then deployed, and in fact, you had two deployments, but we'll talk about that in a moment. You were then deployed to Afghanistan. Now, you can tell us a bit about the first tour, but it was really the second tour when things happened. But tell us a little about that deployment to Afghanistan, how you heard the news and how you prepared.

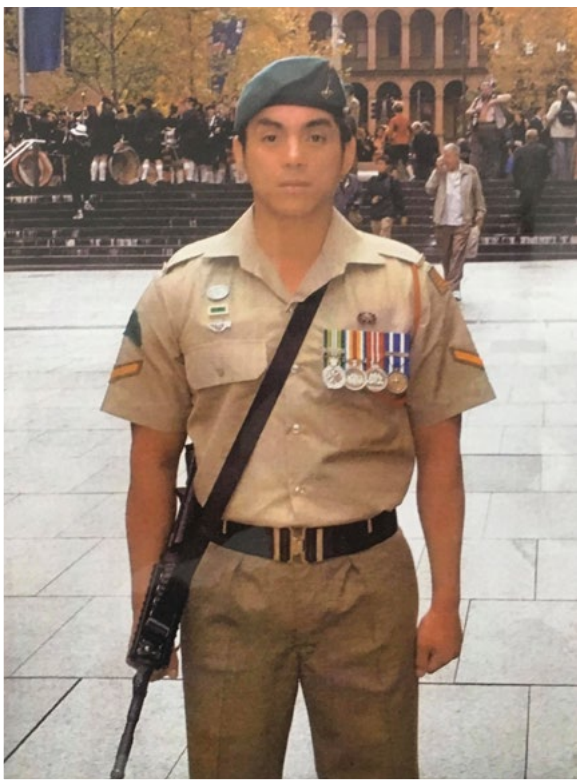
AF: After being with Melbourne, I pretty much signed on to become qualified. It was just mesmerizing to me, and we were a new capability, and I wanted to be able to get some street cred, as they say, within the unit, and then for our capability as well. So I put my hand up, and then I got qualified, and it all happened in quick succession, Greg. So I got qualified, did the Rio cycle for Commandos and then was selected. And then straight from there, we'd finished our Rio cycle, and then the mandate came to say that we were being posted or being deployed to Afghanistan. And that was a big bit of elation there from my part because we'd just gone through that difficult and arduous process of being selected and then continuing with our commando training, which is all the other bits after you get selected to become a qualified commando. So we just wanted to make sure there was a respected role anyway going in with the boys. And there was a little bit of a hiatus when we had this news. So there had been three rotations before, but they'd been interspersed. And so that was the last one, rotation three. And then there was a big hiatus for a couple of years, I believe. I can't remember the timeframe now, but it would've at least been 18 months, nearly two years between that deployment. And then so the name, there'd been some significant time, and then rotation four, which was our rotation, Alpha Company, was the first batch of soldiers in a bigger force to be deployed to Afghanistan in 2007. And when I-

GTR: Yeah, what was that first tour like, Andy? How did you feel? It must have been a real eye-opener for you.

AF: Oh, absolutely. It was a big eyeopener. And being really green in many aspects in terms of having just being qualified, we were a new role that was really proving our worth amongst the commando companies.

GTR: How long did that deployment last for, and were there any exceptional circumstances? I mean, there must have been, but if you just let us know about what that whole experience was like for you.

AF: Yeah, I think the first experience from the second was a bit different. With the first one being green, I think one of the big things with going over was that we didn't know what to expect or the expectation was we were still going in there with an open mind. I think you kind of had these fantasies that it's going to be like the movies and all that sort of thing. And I think one of the biggest things after all that training that we went in, we were with an advanced body of people. I was selected to be a team leader amongst, and so we went in as a forward party to set up. So when I went over, we had all this equipment that we were still bringing over, all this stuff in a big C-17 aircraft, and we were there also being that we were the manning for making sure the security of all that gear was there, going over on the plane. And one thing, Greg, that really hit me in the face is as we came in, we could bank it down and all I could see was the big yarmers or the mountains and the snowcapped mountains, and then we'd be banking around and then coming in pretty quickly. It was a quick descent. It was almost like these evasive maneuvers in a big plane to get down into the valley. But one thing for me after being on the plane for some time, and this was summer, mind you, in the middle of summer in Afghanistan, we'd landed on the tarmac and the first thing that I remember was when the ramp came down, it just smacked me in the face, the heat. And that's what I remember. And I was like, oh my God, all right, now this is for real. We're here now. But I think one of the other sort of juxtaposing things with having that, you'd see these moves, you go, "Oh, we're going to be under fire and all this stuff." It was actually surprisingly quiet because it was in the middle of the day and because it was so hot, you don't want to be out in the middle of the day in Afghanistan. It would be somewhere shaded or somewhere cool. And it was just this almost false sense of security that we had with it being so quiet. And I remember the person that met us there off the plane to show us to where we were going to be staying. He said, "Oh, don't let this fool you boys.This is a false



sense of security now at being quiet." And I think that was one of the big memorable moments that we were there. It's like, "We're finally here." That excitement, the elation, the trepidation and all these other words that I could use to describe those feelings, but we were there and then all of a sudden it's a bit quiet. So it was kind of like this thing, "What's happening?" But we spent the next few weeks, we were there, I think maybe two or three weeks before the rest of the party, the main body came. So when you asked before, I think it was about a three and a half month rotation deployment, maybe a little bit longer, and then a few weeks either side to set up and then also handover for those parties with our respective counterparts, especially during the handover. So it was a little bit longer, less than six months, but more than four. So it was still a significant amount of time to be away from the family and our friends and all of our loved ones back at home.

GTR: Indeed, indeed it is Andy too. And I guess after returning to Australia after that first deployment, Andy, coming back to Australia, were you eager to get back? Did it take you ... What happened? What was your feelings?

AF: My feelings coming back is, yeah, I was excited to come back. I was relieved to have survived. And I think we did see some action in that first rotation. However, because it was our first time back in a while, the enemy hadn't really had that time to be able to figure out everything with us first. We were in contact quite a fair bit at the time. We were outside the wire for the majority of our time there as well. But coming home, I was excited to come home to see my girlfriend at the time. I was away from the family, so it was going to be a few months to be able to see my family after leave. But to be honest with you, after that first one, Greg, it was pretty much the tempo only picked up from there, and I think I didn't even get leave. In both instances, I didn't really get leave straight away. So where most people would come back from leave, it was come home and then bang straight into either, I think it was a recruiting drive that we went on for a special forces tour, trying to get more people in from the other signals units for selection. And then I finally had a bit of a break. And then that break was when I got to decompress. And that was something to look forward to upon coming home because I'd been planning to go to Europe. So it was a bit of a solo tour, but meet up with some friends, some civilian friends that were over there doing the Ibitha and Austria thing. So from the heat to the cold. And so I was meeting them in wintertime.

GTR: And of course, how long was it before you left for the second tour? Because we'll talk about the second tour. And how long did you have back in Australia and touring around Europe?

AF: So between that sort of time, the second tour, I did went around Europe, but as soon as I got back, it was pretty much the rotations for the companies went in at the time that we started our spin-up cycle for our next tour essentially. So there was not really too much break for us. And then it was the lead-up cycle to start training for. And then by that stage, it was maybe a year. So it was 2007 and then 2009. So just say it would've been just between 12 and 18 months between the cycles. So there was four other rotations in between hours and then the lead-up. So during that time in between, there was all the touring. And then I did a Langs course down in Melbourne again. So I spent some more time down there at the School of Languages Learning Pashto, which was the language in one of the languages in Afghanistan. As my job working with interpreters and also listening in on enemy communications, it was really important to at least have the basics and then to communicate with the people that I needed to deal with at that basic level, as well as more importantly is hearing the keywords that we needed to provide force protection when we were on the job. And I think one of those keywords that some of the audience may be familiar with is in Arabic, in all those languages. That's the big one. So I think that was what we trained our ears predominantly to be able to listen out for as much as keywords within what the enemy was saying on the radio communications. So I think that's where we were.

GTR: Yeah, because of course, Andy, on that second tour, it's something that you refer to as the trauma triangle that occurred. Now, why did you call it the trauma triangle? And what actually happened, if you could tell listeners? It sounds pretty horrific, but if you could tell listeners.

AF: Yeah, I call it the trauma triangle because there was three significantly traumatic incidences that occurred earlier on our second trip. And then this was with Bravo Company at the time. So I changed from Alpha to Bravo and went over with Rotation nine and ...

For the rest of Andy's amazing story, visit The Last Post Radio Show, episode:
'Invisible Injuries, to story of veteran Andy Fermo offeriing hope to others' published 6 April, 2026.
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— INTERVIEW —

Gwen Cherne

thelastpostmagazine.com/the-last-post-radio-show-podcast

Greg T Ross: Gwen Cherne AM is a member of the Order of Australia, an advocate, mother, widow, a woman who doesn't want to be seen as a war widow, but a light of hope. Gwen's background is Invictus Games Sydney Ambassador 2018. Gwen was the first ever veteran family advocate, she was on the Council of Australian War Memorial 2019, the inaugural member for the Council for Women and Families United, served on the board of the Australian War Widow New South Wales chapter, Ambassador for the Commando Welfare Trust and Gotcha for Life, a board member at the Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation. Gwen, if I've missed out anything, let me know, but welcome. You continue to do a lot. How are you?

Gwen Cherne: I'm great. Thanks for having me, Greg. It's a real pleasure. It's always really lovely to hear all the things that you've done when you don't sort of keep track of them all the time and remember all the beautiful moments you have along the way. I think the only thing I'd add to your list is I'm still on the National Suicide Prevention Office Advisory Board.

GTR: Aha. Yes. Well, very, very relevant to our discussion today, of course. And thank you for putting that into context too. We'll talk about that a bit later, but there's a lot to cover. I'd like people to get to know Gwen a bit better to possibly Gwen through. I mean, you were born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. What was life like for you as a child?

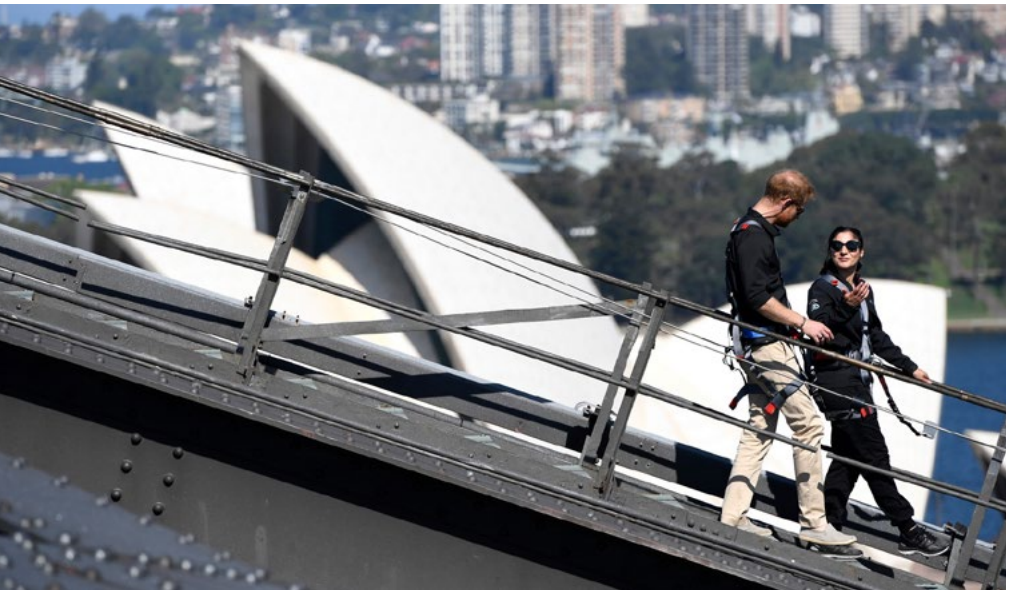
GC: It was actually probably fairly similar to life here in the '80s. Quiet, suburbia, family life was hectic. My parents were very, very driven and forced us to be driven in sport and whatnot, but lived a couple of streets over from my grandparents, was in the street riding my bike and playing hockey. Not field hockey, ice hockey, but on the street with my brothers. Our ponds would freeze over. We'd get a foot or two of snow every couple of weeks and winter. So those sorts of things were very different than being here in Australia. But it was challenging with my dad who had PTSD and moral injury from his time in Vietnam. But for all intents and purposes, it was a fairly, what I thought, normal childhood.

GTR: It sounds in many ways quite amazingly, remarkably happy. And at the same time, detailing your father's battle with the post-traumatic stress after his service in Vietnam. You went to uni too, Gwen. What were you doing at uni? What was your main interest there?

GC: So I actually triped all over the United States. I've lived in seven states and five countries, including Australia. But I moved my family to Florida to go to high school so I could competitively train with ice skating coaches. Then I went to Boston when I was 13. Then I went to Boston for university and studied psychology. I spent summers in Seattle and Cleveland. I moved to LA after uni to work at a youth crisis center and teach ice hockey and figure skating, and moved to New York and DC later on in my life as well.

GTR: Yeah. Well, that's quite a coverage of the states of the United States. There's probably little you haven't seen in America too, but I think it was in New York, and pull me up if I'm wrong here, Gwen, but you established a school for the disadvantaged. You'd been driven for some time, obviously, with your youth. What made you want to start a school for disadvantaged children?

GC: So I spent almost two years in Chile working at a children's center with the Jesuits, and they're a fairly liberal sect of the Catholic church. And they're really focused on option for the poor and making sure that you're living a life of service. And they instilled that in me because they were the ones who ran the university, Boston College, that I got my undergrad at. And then when I was with them in Chile, I got quite unwell, flew home, got my health back, and then got a call to move to



New York and help one of them, one of the Jesuits who was back in the United States, start a school for kids from low income families. So I went and did a feasibility study. I figured out where in Brooklyn it needed to be. I helped create the board of directors, but it was for children between year five and year eight who were reading when they came in at year five at the first grade reading level.

And a third of the children in their neighborhoods were being incarcerated and not finishing school. And we were like, "Something's wrong. We've got to fix this. " And they were unable to get into any of the Jesuit high schools, which had been created in New York City in the '70s and '60s for immigrant children. So for them to totally move away from that, they're going, they can't survive in our schools. So we went and established that middle school to help get them up to the standard that needed to and could be able to succeed in those high schools. And now 92% of those kids finish with a four-year degree.

GTR: That's some achievement. And I guess, identifying the need for service with the children, the disadvantaged children from a migrant background often, and doing a marvelous job there. There's something quite remarkable in, I guess, your tendency to drive yourself towards service. You were watching, again, pull me up if I'm wrong here, but it was the movie Hotel Rwanda and you were moved by the plight of the disadvantaged. I think it was displaced, Rwandan people. What did you do after seeing that movie?

GC: So I went to get my master's degree in international development, project management. So it's sort of an MBA for the nonprofit sector and government. And so I did that master's degree with a focus in international policy and then went to Afghanistan. Another student from the uni had gone over to Afghanistan in between her two years and didn't come back and asked me to come help her with the Afghan Women's Network project she was working on.

So I got myself on a plane, bought my own plane ticket, showed up in a war zone and was really hoping that she'd be there waiting for me.

GTR: Actually, your time in Kabula, I mean, you weren't actually living under the protection of a compound or anything, were you?

GC: No, not that time. There were two different periods that I was there where we didn't have proper security. And then the last time I was there, I actually had quite a bit of security, but still living outside the wire in town with security.

GTR: So you had a chance, I guess, too, Gwen, to witness and to involve yourself in the life of the Afghan people.

GC: That was still some of the work I'm the most proud of. And I remember people asking me why I wanted to go or why I was doing that. And I didn't have any children at the time. I knew it was a risk that I was taking, but it was worth taking. And I remember my final interview in 2008 when I just finished my master's degree for a program management role in Kandahar. And she said, "Why do you want to go? " And I said, "Because no one else will." And at that time, no one wanted to go. It wasn't sexy. It was scary. Only the military really were there except for a handful of development workers and it was really an opportunity to go and be young and dumb and really make a difference in the world.

GTR: I mean, at that time of your life, you were often given or driven to do such things. And I think you ... Did you go to the markets there? Did you involve yourself in the daily activities?

GC: Absolutely. So it was actually really fun. We drove ourselves around in Kabul in an SUV. We then later on at the next time, or that time as well, we walked around markets and were quite involved with Afghan families and whatnot. It progressively got less and less, but we drove with a couple of beat up old pickup trucks and some very willing and lovely Afghan men who knew the terrain very well, knew the country very well, that we trusted with our lives and drove from Kabul all the way. It's a 24-hour drive all the way up to Bamyan. We visited there with the New Zealanders. We saw where the Buddhist had been destroyed and actually got to see the countryside. And they took us on a tourist visit and all sorts of things that you would never imagine you would do if you were in a war zone.

GTR: Yeah. So you're seeing the real part of Afghanistan and the Buddha head being demolished and everything else. That must have been extraordinarily confronting too. The advantages of being able to do that. I mean, I think, was it the first night that you're in Kabul that you were reminded that you were indeed a fairway from home? What happened there? There was a buffalo or something.

GC: Yeah. So it was Ed. It was the very first night of Eid or had it ended. I'm not exactly certain which. You'll have to forgive my memory. Quite a few years, almost 20 years ago now. And I had woken up, went out under my balcony, which for all intents and purposes was probably not lies, but did, and saw our neighbor, sorry, trigger warning, slip the throat of this buffalo and gut it right in front of me. And I went, "Oh my God, that is not something that I'm used to. See. I didn't grow up on a farm. My mom did. This isn't something you do in your backyard in the US or in Australia typically."

GTR: No, no, no, not at all. Not in my backyard, no.

GC: And then they cut up the meat and were throwing ... Crowds were forming outside of their home. And I was asking what's happening. And I started seeing them throw the meat

over the wall to people who had gathered, obviously, who couldn't afford their own or were neighbors and wanted it and had come to get their own share.

GTR: It must have been a combination of exciting and confronting.

GC: I don't think my father who was back in the United States or I really slept for the three years that I was there. I always said, you sleep with one eye open, you're hypervigilant, you hear things that you wouldn't normally hear. You're always ready to go to a safe room if you're living in a home, which I was lucky enough to. The third time I was there for where you could be safe if there were explosions or gunfire and things like that at night, which happened frequently.

GTR: Incredible stuff. I think it was 2018, you took on the role with a contractor for USAID. Was that right?

GC: So I did. I became a program manager in Kandahar, as I had mentioned before with that interview, and was posted in a house outside the wire just down the street from Wally Garzai and traveled around in up armored vehicles and was doing an enormous amount of work in Urzgan and Zable at the time. So I would go to the CAF base in Kandahar where all the military were, fly to Kabul, then fly to Irzgan, spend several days there, if not a week or so, and then fly back. And you always had to go in and out of Kabul to do that kind of work.

GTR: Did you feel at the time that you were part of something that was achieving goals? Was it something that you could put markers on? Did you feel satisfied that you were achieving something?

GC: Absolutely. Still to this day, no matter ... It was a lot of money was going through our program. We were the flagship stabilization project for USAID all over the nation. And we built parts of the ring road. We built massive structures for government. We built schools. We worked on youth education programs and women's programs that allowed ... When we built wells, for example, in Afghanistan, it was great. People had access to safe water, but the women lost the journey to and from the safe water watering holes where they would talk to each other and convene and have safety and be able to share medication or stories or just get a break from their lives. And so we were creating safe spaces for these women to come back together. Not always the most effective, but it depends on what your measurement is that women congregating and having safety to share stories and actual education about their lives and their children and their health, well, that to me was my marker for success in that.

Not whether or not they were getting paid the amount, which the US government obviously wanted and they were technically, but that wasn't ... There was always, what is the second and third order of effect? What is it what we're really trying to get at here? And how can we make a difference in more than just one way? And then we left a hole on the governor's compound in Uruzgan because some brilliant person decided we should put a bank on his compound and have access to the governor's compound, and we could never get it built. And no matter how many times I went there and tried, there was heaps of corruption. It was very frustrating. And no matter what we did, they always got around it and it never got built. But I think the last thing I would add in terms of the good work, knowing what's come of Afghanistan is we worked every day with professionals.

And one of the things that I know we instilled is an ability to do program management, to use computer systems successfully and professionally at a high level. We used their skills with community development and engagement and their abilities and then highlighted some of the ways they needed to work with internationals. So we gave this generation of Afghans an enormous amount of skills they can't take away. So no matter what state the country is in at the moment, you can't take away the good that we did. And there were thousands, tens of thousands of people who benefited directly from our engagements there.

GTR: I was about to raise that point and you've actually raised, I suppose the seeds that you and others working with you planted and nurtured can't be undone.

GC: No. And those people are, whether they're in Afghanistan fighting, which I know the few who I'm aware of that were on my team that may or may not still be there, would be fighting every day to teach their children to read, including their girls, would give their wives the support they need. And the other ones are living all over the world, contributing beautifully to society.

GTR: The education section of that too is of so much importance. And I guess once you give people a taste for education, it is the most important thing in our hopes for equality, our hopes for a nonviolent future all lay with education. And once again, you can't undo that. I mean, the Afghan women's soccer team and the Afghan cricket team, women's and men have relocated overseas away from Afghanistan and continue applying their trade brilliantly. And that's an example, will not be tied down once they've learnt that there is another way. And the world takes its hat off to you and people like you that have worked in these areas.

GC: I think I learned more from them than they from me, just about when you would say something like, "We need to get this done for tomorrow," they'd say God willing. And you're like, "No, no, it actually needs to get done tomorrow."

And yet the older I get, the more I learn, the more I experience I have. I often hear that little voice in my head like, "God willing, because who knows what's going to happen tomorrow?" And when you live in a place that has

been in upheaval for so long, you do learn that as well. So it's teaching that it was also that working with individuals beyond the trauma of, yes, I realized that the world could technically fall apart tomorrow in every way, but we'll still plan for it and we'll still execute and we'll still move forward. And it was a learning journey both ways.

GTR: My mother used to say the same thing, although she wasn't religious, but she'd use a term similar to that. And people, I think, can sometimes misinterpret that as being a bit willy-nilly. But the more time we spend on the planet, we do understand that things can come totally left of centre or wherever direction it may come from that upset your plans as opposed to people that say the self-empowering gurus that say, "Just tell yourself you'll do it, you'll do it, it'll happen." Yeah, it may happen, but there'll be detours along the way.

GC: Yes. And my mom always used to say, "What makes God laugh? Make a plan." I think she put it more eloquently than that, but that is best laid plans. You can work and you should. And I don't discount the self motivated, get things done and be in the world in the most positive way and all of those things. Prepare, prepare, prepare, and then be ready for the worst.

GTR: Yes, it will be done, but there will be things along the way that come that are unexpected, don't freak out at them. Exactly. It was your third trip, I think, in Kabul that you were met by Sergeant Peter Cafe, who was then part of a security team. Do you remember your reaction to seeing Pete on that day?

GC: I mean, I'm blushing right now, yes. I do. And he made me feel safe and cared for and listened to and secure in a place that was growing in the conflict and uncertainty. And he was funny. He was the typical Australian larrikan and yeah, I'll never forget first meeting him.

GTR: Did he have a VB logo on or sort of?

GC: He did. on very, very short shorts. And I was not used to those having grown up in the US where they were wearing basketball shorts down to their knees.

GTR: And Pete was with the second commando regimen, I think, and also, or commando regiment, sorry, and the third RAR had taken time out of the military to be a private security contractor, but I guess, how did things go there? You told me your feelings when you first met Pete, you fell in love or what happened there?

GC: Oh, look, I think it was, for all intents and purposes, he was incredibly professional and I was very much like deer in headlights. Okay, what do I need to do? This is all new to me. I'm getting a security briefing. They practically picked me up and carried me into this very secure compound, very different than what I had been doing previously.

And so I was learning very high profile, lots of money, lots of funding, lots of must meet goals and all of these things while I was there. So I was very focused on that.

I think the next day or two, it was very quick after I arrived. I went down to Kandahar and was down there for several weeks, but like I said, I had flown in and out of Kabul. And the person who was in charge of my security detail and the operations and my movements was Pete. So I had to interact with him. We came fast friends. He was dating one of my really good friends at the time. We were all fond of him. We called him Special Forces Pete and he went bent over backwards to make sure our mail was there so that our morale was really high. He made sure that birthday cakes were delivered on time and whether they were ice cream cakes, whatever ridiculous requests someone had, he found the place to get it, got it, and made sure it was there to help support people and make them feel like they could easily do their jobs.

GTR: He was the do it man. He just did it. Isn't that incredible too? And he was the one

GC: You called when you were nervous or you were like, "Should I really get on the road today?" Or, "Is this the right decision? Or can you possibly..." I know this is a ridiculous request, can you? He did everything and he made people feel safe. And at times when the other people would let their hair down on the project, he was the one you knew was always sober. So if there was a problem, you knew you could call Pete.

GTR: We were speaking about your meeting with Pete. You did return to Australia with Pete and married, but Pete reenlisted. Why did he reenlist, do you think?

GC: Well, we had planned on moving to the United States. We put our house on the market in Victoria, which we had gone and visited because that's where his son was. And we were frequently going back and forth to there when we came in and out of Afghanistan. But we had decided to make the shift to the United States. And then we ran into, had dinner with a very good mate of his, Nick Hill, who asked us to come to a family day. So we go to the family day the next day before we flew out. And I heard him talk to Craig Short, who was CO at the time, and he said, "It's just that job. You want to jump out of bed and go to work every day." And I was in the middle of a conversation, overheard that, which if you knew my hearing, you would know that that's crazy.

And I turned up my heels and I said, "Then why are we moving to the US?" And he was like, "You'd make a terrible military wife." And I was like, "Why?" He goes, "Because you don't follow directions ever." Months later, he moved ... So we got married and we flew back to the States. He considered it a little bit longer, made a decision, flew back here in September, and by December he was reenlisted. And I flew back back in January and shortly after that started a job with the Australian Civil Military Center in Canberra.

GTR: So you were living in Canberra?

GC: No, we were living in Sydney, but because my skills at the time were rare, because we didn't actually have that many people in Afghanistan who weren't just going back to Afghanistan or who could do that work, my skills were needed here in Australia.

GTR: Was it 2016? I think Pete was sent to Iraq. How did you feel about that?

GC: Look, I had been used to it. He'd gone to Afghanistan in 2012 when Emily was born, and he was in Iraq in 2016 when my son was one. And I had Tom, our eldest in the house, and Pete and Emily and Lachlan had just arrived really. And then I felt fine about it. The kids weren't actually coping very well. Emily was walking around with her hands and fists and wouldn't stop. So she would brush her teeth with her hands and fists, and she would pick up a mug with hands and fists because she was so distraught that her dad was gone. So it was very challenging. And then Pete had a stroke in May.

GTR: Yeah, that's right. Well, did that come out of the blue? I mean, was there any warning signs?

GC: No. Well, look, the only warning signs I would say were, and I'd had a conversation with one of someone in his unit and I said, "Look, he's really, really tired. And you know that if a tired Pete does not end well for anyone, and he wasn't getting enough sleep, he was working his tail off and he wasn't actually doing very well emotionally." And I got a phone call one night after I put the kids early to bed and he'd had a stroke and they were considering whether they had to take a chance on what kind of a stroke it was. And if it was an obstruction, this injection would clear it. And if it was a bleed, it would kill him. And there was a third of a chance that he would

GTR: Die.

GC: Jeez. And she said, "And he's told me I have to call you before I give him the injection so you know.

GTR: " Wow. I mean, I'm gobsmacked listening to that now, Gwen.

GC: Well, and that's completely out of defence protocol, but I think that was basically, Pete knew me, knew I wanted to be informed and knew what kind of relationship. So the doctor was on the phone with me, hung up and gave him the injection.

GTR: Geez, what a time. Actually, you speak about being tired and perhaps

overworking. It's interesting, some people may say that they don't need a great degree of sleep, and that is true for some people.

GC: Sleep, it's the most important thing in the world, Greg. We need to rest and reset. And there's some really amazing veterans out there doing great work in sleep and breathwork and all of these things. And you don't realize how much you are hamstringing yourself every day by not sleeping well. And after there was a time in my life where I trained myself to sleep in 2017, and I sleep very well every night and have ever since. I get in bed, not even 10 minutes later, every night I'm asleep and I sleep through almost every night. I'm lucky. It's a lot of meditation. It's a lot of how our nighttime routines, it's actually making sure you're eating well and exercising and getting the brain stimulus and getting sun. It's all the basic things that we take for granted and are boring. They're not marketing worthy, but those are the things we need to do to actually take care of...

GTR: Of ourselves. I mean, sleep is important. It's one of those things that we can't do without and make sure ... I was going to say something profound then Gwen but I forgot what it was. I'm just going to move on the next. Pete took his own life nine months after the stroke, I think. Was that right?

GC: That is correct.

GTR: And did you see that coming?

GC: Look, yes, we did. And it was hard to hear that it was a surprise for everyone else, especially close mates in the military.

GTR: Because he'd steeled up, hadn't he?

GC: He had a facade. He had a mask that he wore to work. He was super professional. He was extremely high performing. And even if he was a curmudgeon and a grumpy old man, that was him. And that was like, oh, Pete's just, that's who he is and he's super professional. He's a great mentor. He's an excellent leader.

GTR: People may look at that, Gwen, and say that professionalism and reflection of ... They may say, "Gee, I wish I was like that.

GC: " Yeah. Well-

GTR: But all the time.

GC: And there's always something behind it, right?

GTR: Yes, yes.

GC: He mentored, he ran mental health first aid training for his unit. He was one of the few who brought it back from the UK to defence and started running them here. He was very committed to being a good leader. We saw the impact of what that was at home and it was not sustainable. And every time we would argue, he would threaten. And so it became this real living nightmare of, how do I tell people? What do I do? And back then, mental health, family domestic violence, suicidality were all, don't tell anyone. You have to whisper it. You can't share it. If you want help, you have to go through open arms and hope to hell they don't share anything with defence because you'll lose your access to weapons. You'll lose your rank. You won't be in the army anymore. And that has changed significantly for most people.

GTR: Suicide is a strange thing to talk about. There's a lot of people that do it. The idea is to reduce that number, obviously, but there's so many different avenues of suicide. I know that my uncle, an intelligent, funny, gregarious man, he took his own life when he was about 82, Gwen. And we don't know if he'd been diagnosed with an illness or whatever. He didn't let onto anyone. But see, he had a front too. He would always be telling jokes and happy. And yet behind his facade was obviously a deep thinker who ... Well, he obviously wasn't happy at that time that he did it, but you can't tell, can you?

GC: Oh, look, I think my son said, "You'll see all the signs and you won't believe it or you won't know, It won't make a difference." And that was really eye-opening to me because I was really just trying to hold onto him every day and go, "If we can just get to the sunlight, if we can just get to the morning, we'll be okay. If we can just get you back to work after a long weekend, we'll be okay." And yeah, it's a complicated ... I talk about it all the time and it's still complicated. I've had people describe it as a choice. I don't believe it's a choice. I believe it is something that can happen and can be systematic and planned out. And I also believe it can happen within minutes.

GTR: Yes.

GC: I'm having a bad day. I'm emotionally dysregulated and I've had enough and I can't deal with this and there's got to be a way out. And that's the only one I see. And you're just completely emotionally dysregulated. And I can say that because I struggle from time to time over the course of my life with suicidality.

GTR: God, I do remember my wife died of pancreatic cancer in 2017. She was 59. I'm so

GC: Sorry.

GTR: Yeah. That's

GC: Very young.

Yeah, I know, Gwen. And I'd been a carer for eight months, Wendy. And when Wendy died, I initially felt relief and everyone said that you deserve to feel that way because of what we'd been through. But then three or four months later, I went to a very dark place. And when you say it can be done in an instant, I would guess that's true too, Gwen. So I mean, you became an advocate for veterans going through similar things. And so you're dealing with this every day, aren't you?

Look, to your point, I call it relief grief because you grieve and you have all these mixed emotions, but you also feel this relief of not living that personal struggle, hell, nightmare, whatever you want to call it, whatever it is for you any longer. It's new, it's different. It's your own, it's a new nightmare, if you will, or a new struggle. But yeah, it started out as defence really trying to understand what happened because it came as such a surprise to so many in his unit and his command. They were like, "Why him? What are you talking about? This is crazy, Gwen. Did we even know him?" I'm like, "Yes, you knew him very well."

GTR: Was this- Actually, I was going to say, Gwen, this is reflected in a lot of suicide cases too. I would imagine I've not been involved in any directly, but you hear people, it's almost like a broken record, people that thought they knew the person would say, "No, no, we knew such and such. He or she wouldn't have committed suicide."

GC: Yep. Well, and for Pete, for me afterward, it was one, reassuring them that they did know him, that this was real and trying to help them understand what we need to be doing with families and how we need to not make this a big red buzzer or a big red flag or catastrophic. If a family comes to command and says, "My partner is struggling. He's not telling you. He's succeeding at work and falling apart at home. This is no longer sustainable."

And what I realized because of my work was I had leaders in defence that were actually interested in what I had to say because they knew me. And two, I was speaking for a community that all of their partners had protected identities. So they couldn't go out and talk about the struggles they were having. They couldn't make themselves known in the public. And so they had asked me to go and do this. Well, some of them did. And I felt an obligation to actually ... People were listening. They were asking what had happened. They were asking about what was going on in the unit that they didn't understand from a family perspective. So I just started talking and then all these people started contacting me with their stories and all these veterans started asking for help and support. And every time I talk to them and say, "What about your family?" They'd look at me like I had three heads. Like, "Why haven't you brought your family on this journey? I don't want to worry them." Oh, no. They're not worried already.

GTR: Oh, no. No. See, that's right. Isn't that incredible? Actually, you've just reminded me too, you just reminded me, that a lot of these people, you probably get this strikingly in your face all the time too. The ones that are going through this difficulty see

probably work as an escape because they know that there, they will have this facade, but there's no facade at home.

GC: Absolutely. 100%. You can keep going at work. And when I would work with ... So I've done this work for nine years now, and I would tell people eventually you've got to take care of yourself. Eventually, this high tempo lifestyle you're living in defence, especially in the special forces where you're at the tip of the spear where you're traveling all the time, where you're living on a two-hour recall and you can only go in certain places, all of this stuff is going to take its toll. I'm good, Gwen. Years later, wow, I was really struggling. And it's like it's news to them. And I'm just going, "Well, I'm glad you finally caught up. I'm really sorry that you're experiencing this, but now you're seeing what I was saying nine and 10 years ago about families and the struggle and what you're experiencing and how important taking care of yourself is.

GTR: " Look, I enjoy conversations where you delve into the human mind. I'm really enjoying this conversation, Gwen. And I think, well, I mean, the toll of Afghanistan for starters, I think there was what, 41 died. There was around 260 wounded and 500 took their own lives since 2001. Is that right?

GC: I can't quote those numbers. I'm really sorry and don't want to be inaccurate on them.

GTR: Yeah, that's right.That's right. No, that's fine. I will take your

GC: Numbers at the moment.

GTR: And I guess that's why the Royal Commission was so important. I did go to one sitting of that in Adelaide, but the point being here, I suppose, Gwen, is that it takes a toll not only on the veteran community, but the whole community.

GC: I would find it hard to find a family who hasn't experienced suicide, that doesn't also experience mental health struggles, depression, deep, complicated grief, suicide intent, if not plans, if not just general suicidality and struggles with networks and friends and being in the world again, given the pain that it causes. And they say every suicide touches 130 people. In defence, it is much greater than that. Your units are bigger than that than the people you served with before and the way that they're easily able to access that Information and those networks. So you're dealing every time there is a suicide in defence, thousands are impacted.

GTR: Yeah. Also, Gwen, your point is so right. I mean, the impact on the civilian life before service, the people that knew him or her before service, and primarily it is males that we're talking about, and then the people in service. So it's almost double, I guess, the normal people that would be affected. That's a lot of people to be affected with one suicide. And the veterans are good at leadership,

I suppose, but then civilian, can they find that sense of service and purpose outside in civilian life?

GC: So two things. Our female veterans are much more likely to attempt and die by suicide than the rest of the population. It's a much higher percentage.

GTR: The female veterans, Gwen?

GC: Then-

GTR: Oh, apologies.

GC: So because we have more male veterans, the number's higher in percentages and you're looking at a much higher percentage of female veterans compared to the rest of the female.

GTR: We'll let you finish that in just a moment. But my thoughts there, and you're going to hit me over the head with this, but this might seem a typical male response, but my thoughts were women are stronger. No, really. I just thought women are stronger and they have-

GC: Well, on that, we also experience a significant amount of trauma and the numbers around one in four with sexual violence or assault, family domestic violence, sometimes affecting 42% of our, not sometimes affect 42% of our transitioning families, that's male and female veterans who experience that. So they're not only experiencing that trauma in service, they're also experiencing sexual violence in service in significant rights that the Royal Commission has a number of recommendations about. So these are all things that can play a part. And I always talk about the layers. And once it's the straw that breaks the camel's back, yes, they could be strong. I wouldn't say they're stronger. I know a hell of a lot of strong men in my life, but they also eventually sometimes can end up suiciding

because of the trauma they've experienced and not getting the help and support they need.

GTR: I think, look, I'm willing to admit my own failings and...So is enough attention being paid to the female position?

GC: Look, the Department of Veterans Affairs has worked on women veterans strategy, and they're working with defence and DVA to have them engage and actually support putting some goalposts in and actually starting to reduce the imbalance of power to change the way that we look at women, veterans' health, wellbeing, things like all of our DVA claims, their statements of principles are actually based on men's bodies and experiences in the world. So they don't apply to women. It's all these sorts of things that need to be done and looked at. And there's a lot of work being done in that space now, which is excellent. And there's an enormous amount of really strong, very vocal, very active women veterans in our community who are leading the way in all of this work.

GTR: From my point of view here is that I've always working with women and et cetera, a great deal of respect from my side, because I mean, what else do you do? I just can't put myself under the position of someone who would take ... I don't know, take advantage is not the right word, but sexually assault or try and misdemeanor a woman. I mean, I just don't understand it myself. And that's another one of my failings. Perhaps I will understand at some stage, I don't understand it.

GC: Look, I think it's complicated and when we don't-

GTR: Does the army give men a feeling that they're able to do this or some men at least? Not all, of course. It's...

GC: A command and control environment, and you're always going to have risks in a command and control environment where you're ... Even little things like you have people who you give orders to and then you go home and have to take that hat off. This is not your...and everyone follows your orders at home. But at the same time, we all have a responsibility as mothers to teach our children to self-regulate, to regulate ourselves as fathers, to teach our men and boys what good looks like and to teach our girls what to accept and our actions directly affect what they bring into their lives later on. So I go back to parents, all of us need parenting programs. All of us need help on anger management and sleep and self-regulation and meditation and breathing. There isn't enough work you could do on yourself to be a higher individual who's got well-grounded, really good in the world, and also able to affirm our children with firm, clear boundaries that are loving and deal with all the mental health pressures that are going on in the world. We all need help to navigate what we're doing and no one's above it. So let's dig in and do that work and not act like we're hard done by, or we should be ashamed, or put the shame away and get to work. No, that's right. I know it sounds really simple

GTR: It doesn't surprise me at all. I know that you spoke about the education facet of this, which is of ultra importance too. I do know that Mom had four sons. We were taught to respect women, so we did. And not a difficult thing- So the point being obviously the education is so important. Pete's legacy and your ongoing work, are you a different person in some respects to what you were prior to Pete's death?

GC: Oh, in every way. Even with that living nightmare, you still are on one side of a curtain. When you lose someone in a tragic way, you then understand grief and loss in a way that is hard to access. I lost my grandparents. I've lost mates in Afghanistan. I have lost an enormous amount of people in my life and nothing rocked my soul or taught me about grief in the way that losing my partner did, nor feeling the relief or the grief or the failure or the responsibility of ... And I still feel that nine years on, all of it.

GTR: Your honesty's amazing and no wonder you're in great demand as a keynote speaker because it stimulates me to so many thoughts of things that may not seem directly connected to our subject matter, but it's a discussion on life itself and the understanding of grief and loss, which you so rightfully pointed to in your own journey there too. What's next for you?

GC: Oh, look, what's next? I am helping blend a family again.

GTR: Three children?

GC: So I married Pete's younger cousin, not my cousin, his cousin. His and he has three beautiful children and his youngest who's just turned 13, moved in with us recently. And I've taken a break being triggered every day, helping veterans and families with problem solving and how does this fit in your issue and our system failure, how do we fix that for at the systems level and how do we make sure you're attended to and cared for in the immediate term took a toll on me.

It was nine years of me running hard to help families and make sure families were in the conversation instead of impedimentia, instead of baggage, instead of something we didn't talk about and it was a dirty word. And that work was personal every single day for nine years.

So I've taken the last six months off. I'm getting our beautiful daughter blended into our family and settled at school and to getting some board jobs, doing some ambassador roles, some public speaking, and taking a course, figuring out what's next for me, trying to figure out how much I want to challenge myself, how much I want to be in the service provider care sector, or if I want to shift completely and do defense industry and what that would bring, or business, banks, and what I could bring to those sectors that I haven't explored previously.

GTR: Well, look, knowing you through this interview chat, it will be something amazing. There's no doubt about that. Thank you for sharing your life with us too, Gwen. And you've come a long way from Cleveland, Ohio and playing in the streets as a child. I tell you what, and you travel within America and seeing Hotel Rwanda, all these things put you together to be the person you are now and obviously being married to Pete and now with your new relationship, which is a beautiful thing.

If this episode's raised any concerns, you can ring Lifeline on 13 11 14, or Open Arms for Veterans and Their Families on 180 0011 046. Gwen Scherny AM, it's been a magnificent conversation on the radio show, and thank you so much for joining us.

GC: My absolute pleasure, Greg. Thanks for having me, and thanks for a beautiful conversation. I'm glad it took the twists and turns. It did.

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Women Veterans and the Transition Journey: Service Beyond the Uniform

BY DR KATE ROBINSON, VICE CHAIR, WOMEN VETERANS AUSTRALIA

For many veterans, the transition from military to civilian life is a defining chapter, one that brings both opportunity and challenge. For women veterans, this transition can be uniquely complex, shaped by service experiences that are often under-recognised and by support systems that have not always kept pace with their growing presence in the Australian Defence Force.

Women have served Australia with distinction across generations, from nursing roles in the World Wars to combat, leadership, and specialist positions in modern operations. Yet despite this long and proud history, their stories have too often remained in the margins. As a result, the transition experience for women veterans is not only about adjusting to civilian life; it is also about being seen, understood, and supported in ways that reflect their service.

One of the most significant challenges women veterans face during transition is identity. Military service provides a strong sense of purpose, structure, and belonging. When that uniform comes off, many veterans, regardless of gender, experience a loss of identity. However, for women, this can be compounded by a lack of visibility in veteran narratives. The stereotypical image of a veteran as male can leave women feeling excluded from the very community they belong to. This can delay help-seeking behaviour and contribute to feelings of isolation.

Employment is another key area where the transition experience can diverge. Women veterans often bring exceptional leadership, adaptability, and problem-solving skills to the civilian workforce. However, translating military experience into civilian language can be difficult, particularly in industries that may not fully understand or value Defence experience. Additionally, women may face gender biases that persist across broader society, impacting hiring opportunities and career progression. Tailored employment support that recognises both military skills and gender-specific challenges is essential to bridging this gap.

Health and well-being are also critical considerations. While much attention has rightly been given to physical and mental health conditions among veterans, women may experience these differently. For example, experiences of military sexual trauma, gender-based discrimination, or service-related health issues specific to women can influence both the transition process and long-term well-being. Access to gender-sensitive healthcare and veteran services is vital, yet not always consistently available or well understood.

The findings and ongoing work of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide have underscored the complexity of transition and the critical need for tailored, person-centred support. The Commission has highlighted systemic gaps in how veterans are supported as they leave service, including the importance of early intervention, continuity of care, and improved coordination between Defence and civilian systems. Importantly, it has also drawn attention to the distinct experiences of women, reinforcing that a one-size-fits-all approach to transition is insufficient.

Family dynamics can further shape the transition journey. Women veterans are often primary caregivers or play significant roles within their families. Balancing the demands of transition, such as job searching, retraining, or managing health, with family responsibilities can be particularly challenging. For some, the transition may coincide with a partner's ongoing service, adding another layer of complexity. Support systems that take a holistic view of the veteran, including their family context, are critical in ensuring sustainable outcomes.

Organisations such as Women Veterans Australia are playing a vital role in addressing these gaps. By advocating for recognition, providing peer support, and amplifying the voices of women who have served, they are helping to reshape the transition landscape. Their work highlights the importance of connection, ensuring that women veterans have access to networks where their experiences are understood and valued. These organisations also contribute to policy discussions, ensuring that lived experience informs the development of more inclusive and effective support systems.

Recognition also plays a powerful role in transition, and initiatives that elevate the stories of women in service are essential. Programs such as the ANZAC Day Schools' Awards play an important role in shaping community understanding of military service among younger generations. The 2026 theme, Women in Service, is particularly significant, offering an opportunity to highlight the contributions, leadership, and sacrifices of women across Australia's military history. By embedding these narratives in education and commemoration, we not only honour service but also strengthen identity and belonging for current and former women veterans.

The role of leadership, both within veteran organisations and across government and industry, cannot be overstated. Embedding gender-informed approaches into transition programs, employment initiatives, and healthcare services is not simply a matter of equity; it is a matter of effectiveness. The insights emerging from the Royal Commission, alongside the advocacy of organisations like Women Veterans Australia, provide a clear roadmap for reform, one that places the veteran, in all their diversity, at the centre of policy and practice.

Transition is not a single event but a process that unfolds over time. For women veterans, this process may involve navigating additional barriers, but it is also marked by resilience, strength, and a continued commitment to service, albeit in new forms. Many women go on to make significant contributions in their communities, workplaces, and families, drawing on the skills and values developed during their military careers.

As we look to the future, the evolving profile of the veteran community must be matched by equally progressive support systems. This includes listening to women veterans, investing in research, and ensuring that policies and programs are informed by lived experience.

Ultimately, supporting women veterans in transition is about more than addressing challenges; it is about recognising potential. It is about ensuring that those who have served their country are equipped, empowered, and acknowledged as they continue their journey beyond the uniform.

Their service does not end with the transition. In many ways, it is just the beginning of a new chapter, one that deserves our full support and recognition.

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The Great, Australian Barbi... that wasn't so great

We take a trip back and continue on to contemporary times with writer, author David Free as we talk about the history of the great Australian barbeque and it's reflection of culture at a time.

Greg T Ross: David Free, welcome to The Last Post. Good to speak again. How are you?

David Free: I'm fine, Greg. Good to catch up again.

GTR: Always good to speak, David. Particularly when we're speaking about a subject that's of interest to so many people. Today we'll be speaking about the Great Australian Barbecue and how that's changed over the years. But also then we're morphing into a bit of story on cookbooks.

DF: Yeah, that's right. There are two topics that I've written about for the Herald recently the Sydney Morning Herald and yeah, it's one of those things I write about a lot of aspects of our culture for the newspapers and when I was given the assignment of writing about cookbooks. I started to think about all the departments of our culture and It's always debatable about what has improved and what has gone downhill over the years? if you would, if you were to claim that Australian literature or film or TV was is better now than it was in the 1970s or 80s, you'd get a bit of a debate and I think people would have different perspectives and because the Things are not objective. It's always difficult to say for sure whether things have gone downhill But when I think about food culture, I think that is the one department of our culture where everybody would surely agree that things are much better now than they were in the 70s and 80s when I was growing up we've had a an explosion of influences and and multicultural techniques and then ingredients and yes in I don't think it's just a matter of opinion. I think food culture today is in a much healthier state than it was Even 10 or 20 years ago, let alone 40.

GTR: Well totally agreed David and I do remember as a child a young child in the 60's. I mean there was only Chinese restaurants from my memory and it was wow, what an event that was to go to a Chinese restaurant and that was the cultural I guess that was the beginning of the cultural Influences that that became more widespread in the 70s, 80s and 90s. And I guess too David, what better way to start off if you don't mind, we'll be talking about the cookbooks a bit later on but what better way to start off than a look at the great Australian Barbie that wasn't so great at the time.

David Free

DF: Yeah, that's right. I wrote about that last summer because and it struck me that most of the best food that I ate over summer was barbecued food and in the old days when you heard the word barbecue It connoted a lot of things but great food was not really one of them but yeah, I mean in the days when you and I were growing up, the technology of barbecues was incredibly primitive for a start. You basically had an open fire under a steel hot plate and It's rather hard to cook perfect steaks under those conditions but let alone the quality of meat that you were getting in those days in the 1970s There was sort of one or two varieties of sausages if you were lucky when you bought a steak to put on the barbecue. It's not what we would think of as a state today. It was a sort of a terribly chewy

GTR: Well indeed you're correct too David and I mean how things have progressed remarkably well in the barbecue scene and geez, I think I'm probably about 10 years older than you, but I do remember barbecues in mid-60s and I was at a barbecue in Sydney when the night that Harold Holt went missing. I do remember we'd been to Bondi and I was terribly sunburned Mom and Dad took us around to visit friends and the primary recollection aside from the news of Harold Holt's disappearance, was flies and beer I mean, it's just bottles of beer. There was no… it was no boutique stuff. It was just bottles of the local beer and flies and very basic. I suppose the women would make the salad which was probably a saving grace

DF: Well, I find that hilarious when I think back to the barbecues of the 1970s when I was growing up the blokes the dads never handled the cooking duties at home It was the mothers who knew how to cook things properly, but when it came time for the barbie, it was always the blokes who got to handle the tongs and they didn't always know what they were doing. I mean my memory of the hot plates in those days was that they were, they were about knee-high generally speaking if they went to it.

Yeah, and you'd have an open fire raging underneath them and the Dads would be there flipping the meat Incessantly whether it needed to be flipped or not because that was really the only move that they had. It would tend to be very black by the time you got to eat it. Actually, it's funny because I do have a brother, a younger brother too David who's name's David But he um, whenever he visits he's, he's the barbecue king. That's his mind anyhow, and he takes over. You know, pass me this, pass me that he's got the tongs and that's I mean that's the sole purpose of his visit one would imagine is to take over the barbie.

DF: And what kind of a job does he do with the meat?

GTR: Well, he likes to think he's pretty good. Disturbingly, quite good. He's always got a new marinade, should make a movie about it, but yeah, you're right two things were fairly I guess basic in those days Did that reflect the culture that we were stuck in at the time do you think?

DF: Well, I think it did. I mean one thing that I think of when I when I think back to what people, the mothers who were cooking at home in that era. The amount, the number of ingredients that were available to you was very minimal so the ability to sort of create flavour and I mean as you said the marinades, I think in the 1970s when I was first, when I was a kid and I was going to the family barbecues marination had not yet come into its own. I think the first time I remember a marinade happening might have been the honey soy combination.

GTR: Oh, yes but as you say the It tended to be the mothers who would prepare the salads and because they knew what they were doing, the salads were actually far more creative than the salads, which could often hide the charcoal.

DF: Well, that's it. Yeah. Yeah my one of my dominant memories, we used to have steak sandwiches and the steaks was so Impenetrable that you're the first like, the steak would come away in your teeth and you'd be left to holding two slices of wet bread. But you know as I say, we have the luxury today of a far better range of quality ingredients You know if you want to barbecue a steak today you can get a prime steak and you can barbecue it on a gas barbecue you can regulate the heat and you can get a great result. But if you've got open flames roaring under a steel hot plate, just you know, even as a steak chef we struggle to get quality results under those condition.

GTR: We'll be moving on to cookbooks shortly but David, with the barbies, there are as you say, now magnificent examples of some sumptuous food. When did when did things start changing?

DF: Well, I can only go on what my impression is. I know when I published this article in the Herald, some readers

sort of pushed back on my impression of when things started to improve. And it certainly depended on the area that you lived in to what sort of ingredients you could source. But my impression is that the 1990s was when things really started to take off. I started becoming interested in home cooking in the 1990s, and I remember when I first became interested probably in the early 90s. You would get an Asian cookbook and it would call for ingredients like lemongrass or lime leaves and these simply weren't available in the big supermarkets in those days.

So I remember, it was probably about the mid- 90s when suddenly you started to find ingredients like fresh lemongrass in in the big Coles and Woolworths supermarkets because the demand for these things was growing because we were getting all of these wonderful Asian cookbooks that were being published. No doubt people who lived in In more populated areas than I did, no doubt the supermarkets were better stocked but where I grew up it took a little while for these things to catch on.

GTR: I do, If my memory serves me correctly, and that's probably a bit of a question mark itself, but I do think ss you say, prior to the 90s when you wanted to cook something spicy, I do remember there was a lot of preference for Asian flavored marinades, etc, we would have to source out an Asian supermarket because the main supermarkets just did not have that stuff. I remember the great campaign too, in the 80s when of course Paul Hogan, well, he said shrimp, but they're really prawns I suppose crustacean You didn't have much experience of that yourself. I certainly we didn't up until that stage

DF: I'm glad to hear you say that because when that ad appeared it was 1984 and and Hoges was sort of pitching Australia to America, you know. The phrase was come on and throw another shrimp on the barbie. When I saw that ad, that was literally the first time I'd ever seen anybody putting a prawn on a barbecue. Now maybe I was going to the wrong kind of barbecues, maybe because we grew up a long way from the coast. That was just not the done thing. But certainly, up until the mid 80s to me, barbecue denoted steak and sausages and that was it.

GTR: Yeah, that's exactly right and I do…yeah, that was a dedication I guess to the barbie which was attached to the Australian culture too. I do remember it raining heavily in Melbourne one day and my brother, not to be deterred, he got the umbrella out and put the umbrella over the barbie so that the fire wouldn't go out.

DF: I mean the other thing that That struck me when I was looking into this is how lacks the fire restrictions were in those days. When you look at a fire danger sign from the 1960s and 70s it starts off at nil and it goes up to extreme. Now of course, nowadays the lowest setting is moderate and it goes up to catastrophic But in those days, I vividly remember having barbecues in public parks where the kids would go off collect the sticks and the wood and the fathers would get this big open raging fire going under the barbecue And nobody would turn a hair, you know, and sometimes they'd even throw a bit of kerosene on the flames to get it really going.

GTR: That's right, that's right, hah. Look David, I suppose if we dig deep for just a moment to the human psyche…what is it about the fire and the food? That that is…seems so primeval for us?

DF: Well, it's primitive isn't it? Yeah Maybe that's an unconscious thing, but it does take us back to the earliest days of cookery where You had an open fire and you threw on a bit of I don't know, buffalo or kangaroo or whatever and Yeah, it is that that may be why you had this sort of sexist tendency for the blokes to say, you know, get out of the way. It's barbie time. There's open flames. I'm over there.

GTR: It must have been very amusing to my mother and to the women to see these guys who never handled the cookery at home take over when it was barbecue time…and they had their own aprons, too.

DF: Yeah, they did too.

GTR: I mean I even had the pleasure of having an apron presented to me for a birthday present once and it was with my name on it. Hah. But I think that cultural thing, it does tie in deep and you spoke to about the family and that was a big part of what I suppose when you say the kids collecting the sticks and everything else. You're a food lover yourself and you do cook some magnificent stuff What's on the barbie for you if we're gonna have a barbie this weekend? What are you gonna do?

DF: Well the last barbie I attended actually the cooking was done by somebody else, but I was happy to eat it, it was a bit of marinated swordfish actually and it was cooked on a hibachi grill, you know, so all of these some new forms of barbecue that are available now I also had, I don't know if this qualifies as a barbecue, but it a pizza cooked in one of those new outdoor Pizza ovens. Again, it wasn't cooked by me. It was cooked by somebody else but yeah, that was excellent and every bit as good as a professional pizza cooked in a wood-fired oven.

GTR: Well, actually that yeah, that that allows another avenue of cultural exchange if you like with the pizzas becoming part of the Australian barbecue experience

DF: Yeah, it's just I mean, it's a summery thing largely but to be outside to be sitting outside and having the cooking going on outside near the table or In the case of a hibachi grill, it's on the table between you so it becomes very communal and you can watch the food cooking Yes, so it's a completely different experience for it from the very rudimentary Fear that we were being served in the 1970s and 80s when we had a barbie I mean, I still love the barbie, but you know, most of the flavour was provided by the tomato sauce. Let's face it the only condiment allowed. I think it would be very offensive if you've started pouring tomato sauce on top of that marinated swordfish or something like that.

GTR: That's right. Yeah nowadays. Nowadays. It's more likely to be no tomato sauce allowed, isn't it?

DF: Yeah, that's right The flavour is already there ideally.

GTR: I did just recall, it must've been in the early 60's. I was a young child and Dad had…we were transferred up to Port Pirie, which was near the Flinders Ranges. So there became a tendency, on weekends, to get the portable barbie and it was a very small, very rudimentary little thing let me tell you, put it in the boot and we drive the 20-25 minutes to the Flinders Ranges and beautiful memories of hot days Dry red dirt river beds that weren't rivers because of the drought and so we'd pitch the portable barbie In amongst the bush and when you spoke about the fire danger in the fire warning, these days that wouldn't be allowed but it was just such a beautiful experience

DF: Absolutely, not. Yeah, that would have been with was that a gas barbecue?

GTR: Oh, I can't remember. I think it must have been Yes, I think it was.

DF: it's funny, they're building a new public park across from where I live and you know in the old days they would have equipped these with little knee-high brick barbecues with steel hot plates or perhaps open grills, but now there's the big nice public gas barbecue or that's available for all to use.

GTR: Yes actually, a lot of the time too, when you go to holiday parks the first thing you do is check out the barbie.

DF: That's right. Yeah, you check out the facilities. Yes, and it's always these days, you know, it's It tends to be very high-tech and very, you know, you can cook some really decent stuff on those barbecues because you can control the heat. There was really no way of doing that when you had an open fire And you'd have to let it die down a bit. But you know, that was about it.

GTR: And here we are in Australia, 2026. We do have some amazingly cultural diversity in our foods and what we eat. We'll have to come around to your place for a barbie soon. Thanks for taking us on a journey back and to where we are now with the great Australian barbi. Hah.

DF: Thanks Greg.

DR LAURA FOWLER-HOPE:

South Australia's First Female Medical Graduate and Her Wartime Journey to a Serbian Prison

In 1891, when Dr Laura Fowler walked across the stage at Adelaide University to receive her medical degree, she made history. She was the first woman to graduate in medicine in South Australia—an achievement reflecting the colony's unusually progressive spirit. Just three years later, South Australia would become the first place in the world to grant women both the vote and the right to stand for parliament.

Yet when World War I erupted in 1914, those doors of opportunity slammed shut. The Australian Army made its position brutally clear: "Women doctors need not apply." Laura Fowler-Hope's response to this rejection would take her from Adelaide's comfortable society to the battlefields of Serbia, from hospital wards to a prisoner-of-war camp in Hungary, and ultimately she would be decorated by a foreign government for her service.

A Pioneer's Beginning

Laura Margaret Fowler was born in 1868 at Mitcham, Adelaide, the daughter of Scottish Baptist parents whose views on education were unusually liberal for their time. Her father, George Swan Fowler, a grocer, and her mother, Janet, believed their daughters deserved the same intellectual opportunities as their sons. Laura was educated privately in Adelaide, England, and Germany—an extensive education that prepared her for university study at a time when few women pursued higher education.

Slender, blue-eyed, and composed, she was remembered by contemporaries for a quiet authority that concealed a lively sense of humour. She remained especially close to her brother James, signing her letters to him "Your little sister Smiler."

In 1887, Laura became the first female to enrol in medicine at the University of Adelaide. Four years later, her graduation was applauded by Chancellor Sir Samuel Way and celebrated by women's suffrage advocates as proof of women's intellectual capabilities. The achievement was no accident of geography—it reflected South Australia's distinctive willingness to challenge Victorian-era conventions about women's roles.

Early Medical Career and the Call to Mission

After graduation, Dr Fowler secured a position as resident medical officer at the Adelaide Children's Hospital. The hospital board agreed cautiously that "the spirit of the rules of the Hospital will not be violated by the appointment of a lady." She performed her duties with such diligence and ability that her application to join the local branch of the British Medical Association became "the immediate cause" of admission for women to that professional body.

Yet Laura's ambitions extended beyond Adelaide's medical establishment. Influenced by Reverend Silas Mead's missionary fervour, she experienced what she described as a spiritual "call." She persuaded her fiancé, Dr Charles Henry Standish Hope, to accompany her to India as a medical missionary. They married on 4 July 1893 at Wootton Lea, the Fowler family estate at Glen Osmond, and sailed for Bengal as self-supporting medical missionaries.

For over two decades, the Hopes dedicated themselves to this work. From dawn, "Dr Memsahib"—as Laura became known—treated queues of patients at various mission hospitals and visited women in their zenanas, often cycling between villages wearing her pith helmet. She and Charles learned Bengali and Hindi, treated epidemic diseases including typhoid, cholera and malaria, and established reputations as skilled and compassionate physicians.

In 1902, both studied at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, demonstrating their commitment to continuous professional development.

War and Rejection

When war erupted in Europe in 1914, the Hopes were in England. Like many medical professionals, they immediately offered their services to the military. The British War Office initially refused to consider female doctors. The Australian Army was even more explicit in its rejection.

Laura was not alone in being formally excluded from military medical service. Of the approximately 129 women doctors practising in Australia at the time, at least fifteen would eventually serve in European war zones—but only by serving with Allied forces or with independent medical units like the Scottish Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service.

Founded by Elsie Inglis after her own rejection by the British Army, the Scottish Women's Hospitals were staffed, equipped, and administered entirely by women. When Inglis offered their services to the Royal Army Medical Corps, she was told to "go home and sit still." France and Serbia, facing catastrophic casualties, responded very differently. Desperate for medical support, both nations welcomed the SWH units.

Serbia: Into the Battle Zone

In 1915, Laura and Charles joined the Scottish Women's Hospitals and were deployed to Serbia. The Balkan campaign was brutal. Serbia faced invasion from Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Bulgaria simultaneously. Medical facilities were overwhelmed, supply lines fragile, sanitation primitive.

Laura directed a medical unit treating wounded Serbian soldiers. The work was relentless—compound fractures, septic wounds, amputations performed under primitive conditions. Water for surgery was boiled on oil stoves. Sanitation was rudimentary. Surgery was often performed during bombardments of surrounding areas.

The Scottish Women's Hospitals rapidly proved their worth. Despite initial scepticism, their surgeons and physicians demonstrated technical skill, endurance, and calm under fire equal to any military unit.

But military success eluded the Serbian forces. In November 1915, Serbia was overrun by Austria-Hungarian troops. Medical units faced a terrible choice: evacuate or risk capture. The Hopes, along with other SWH personnel, found themselves in the path of the advancing army.

Capture and Captivity

In November 1915, Serbian resistance collapsed. Medical units faced an impossible choice: evacuate and abandon patients, or remain and risk capture.

When capture came, it came swiftly. Laura and Charles were seized by Austria-Hungarian forces and transported to Hungary under conditions that stripped away any pretence of civilised warfare. They were packed into cattle trucks and taken to prisoner-of-war camps.

Laura's correspondence suggests she was sustained by discipline, faith, and mutual care. Charles was "often poorly", and Laura bore responsibility as both doctor and wife. After diplomatic negotiations and prisoner exchanges, their release came.

By 1916, Laura and Charles reached England, physically weakened and emotionally marked, but alive.

Laura and Charles recuperated briefly, then made a decision that speaks volumes about their character: they returned to their mission work. The war had not diminished their sense of calling. If anything, the experience of treating wounded soldiers and enduring imprisonment had deepened their commitment to service.

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT:
Dr Laura Fowler-Hope in uniform of the Scottish Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service.
WW1 Serbian recruiting poster.
Kaisar Hind Gold Medal (First Class).

Recognition and Return

In 1918, both Laura and Charles were awarded the Serbian Samaritan Cross in recognition of their medical service and their suffering as prisoners of war. The decoration acknowledged what the Australian Army had refused to recognise: that they were capable, committed medical professionals who had served with distinction under the most demanding circumstances.

This pattern—foreign recognition where Australian official acknowledgement was absent—characterises the experience of most Australian women doctors who served during World War I. Dr Phoebe Chapple, another South Australian medical graduate, would become the only female doctor to receive the Military Medal for 'gallantry and devotion to duty' during WWI. Dr Agnes Bennett and Dr Lilian Cooper served with a SWH unit in Macedonia and received multiple foreign decorations.

Yet when C.E.W. Bean compiled Australia's official war history, he omitted the contributions of female doctors entirely. Their service with Allied forces, their foreign decorations, their documented medical achievements—none of this warranted inclusion in the national narrative of Australian participation in the Great War.

After the War: Continued Service

Laura continued practising into the late 1920s. From 1929 until retirement, the Hopes served at Pubna. Shortly before leaving India permanently in 1934, Laura was awarded the Kaisar-i-Hind medal for public service.

Back in Adelaide, she lived quietly at Erindale, gardening and, during the Second World War, knitting for soldiers—a contribution that must have felt painfully modest to someone who had once led surgical units under fire. After Charles died in 1942, she lived with her niece.

Dr Laura Margaret Fowler-Hope died on 14 September 1952 in North Adelaide, aged 84. She was buried in Mitcham cemetery. She left no children—her legacy would be measured differently.

Reflections on Service and Recognition
Reflections on Service and Erasure

Laura's story exposes a persistent contradiction. How could a society progressive enough to enfranchise women, simultaneously deny them the right to serve their country professionally in war?

Progress, as her life demonstrates, is uneven. Legislative change does not automatically transform institutional culture. The right to vote and the right to serve proved to be separate battles.

Laura and her contemporaries—including Dr Phoebe Chapple, Dr Agnes Bennett, Dr Lilian Cooper and Dr Mary de Garis—proved the capabilities of Australian women doctors beyond question. They operated under bombardment, ran field hospitals, endured captivity, and upheld professional standards under the harshest conditions imaginable. They were decorated by foreign governments—and erased at home.

Doors Opened, Doors Yet to Open

The Australian Defence Force did not formally commission a female medical officer until 1943, nearly three decades after Laura's service in Serbia.

The stories of the women that paved future opportunities deserve to be part of our national narrative—not as footnotes or curiosities, but as central chapters in the history of Australian military medicine and women's professional advancement.

Laura Fowler-Hope's journey from Adelaide to Serbia, from surgical wards to a prison camp, from rejection by her own army to decoration by foreign governments, illuminates both how long the journey to equality has been, but also how far we have come.

Dr Laura Fowler-Hope's story—and those of her colleagues—deserves to be told, remembered, and honoured as an integral part of Australian military and medical history

DR. SUSAN J. NEUHAUS

This article draws on research from "Not For Glory: A Century of Service by Medical Women to the Australian Army and its Allies" and archival sources. Dr Laura Fowler-Hope's story represents one of at least fifteen Australian women doctors who served in European theatres during World War I, most of whom have been overlooked in official Australian war histories.

Dr Susan J Neuhaus AM CSC FRACS FAICD is a surgeon, former Colonel in the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps, author of "Not For Glory" and "The Surgeon of Royaumont" (HarperCollins 2025), and member of the Australian War Memorial Council. She served in S-E Asia and Afghanistan and is dedicated to preserving the stories of Australian women's wartime medical contributions.

VERSATILE GROUP

Honouring Our Veterans

“We respectfully commemorate ANZAC Day, honouring the service and sacrifice of all Australian and New Zealand servicemen and women, past and present.”

Michael Bridger,
Head of Defence and Infrastructure

MICHAEL BRIDGER

thelastpostmagazine.com/the-last-post-radio-show-podcast

Greg T Ross: It's my great pleasure to introduce Michael Bridger. And a heads up, we have spoken before only that time it was live and I think it was a yacht club from memory, Michael, head of defense and infrastructure at Versatile Construction. How are you, Michael? Welcome.

Michael Bridger: Yeah, look, Greg, fantastic, mate. A couple of days out from Anzac Day and getting ready for the big day.

GTR: Yeah. And what a day too. I mean, you are heavily involved as head of defense in infrastructure. I do know you're in America recently as a part of your job there. What does your role actually entail for listeners and readers?

MB: Okay. So my role is I've been with the Versatile Group for 12 months now. I've been in and out of defence roles for certain companies over the last 20 or so years, Greg. My role now is to grow the defence and infrastructure business for the Versatile Group, establish our name in the marketplace stronger than it has been, attract the right people into our team, which we've done a great job of over the last 12 months, and forming relationships across the globe with other construction partners that are like- minded.

GTR: And certainly in today's environment, internationally speaking too, we'll get onto the fact that Versatile's an Australian-owned and operated company in just a moment. But Michael Bridger, head of defence and infrastructure at Versatile, how important is that international connection and those meetings regularly?

MB: Look, it's vital. The defence spend in Australia is around for infrastructure. I'm talking infrastructure projects, so like headquarter buildings, runways, whatnot, accommodation for our service men and ladies. So there's around four billion budget annually for those projects. When you take into account the US in the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia, it's upwards of a trillion dollars over the next five years. So growing into that larger market where there is a big call from not only the Americans, the Asian Development Bank have projects that we're looking at, the World Bank, the New Zealand Defense Force and New Zealand, their arm of DFAT have a number of projects in the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia coming up, and they're all crying out for reliable contractors.

GTR: Well, I mean, yes, it's a complex situation for sure, but the Asia-Pacific area too, as well as the US and Europe there. And there is attention obviously needed in all those areas. Look, Versatile was started, I guess, back in 1974, I think it was, Michael, and it was Australian-owned and controlled. How important is that and how does it enact? I mean, does it make accountability easier? Does it make on the ground stuff? How's that fact help?

MB: The Australian owner controlled, from my perspective and from the ADF's perspective in Australia, the Commonwealth's perspective, it's vital. It's probably the most important factor. A, it's Australian and B, it's controlled. Decisions are controlled in Australia. So if defence come to us with an urgent requirement, we can make a call on the spot. I just have to ring the managing director or the chairman, get a yes or a no. It doesn't have to go to a board in New York or anything. There's no papers written. So responses are instantaneous. So we're very quick and agile. And the way the world is at the moment, Greg, quick and agile is the key.

GTR: Well, sadly how true, and of course it does keep us on our toes, that's for sure. And that does enact an advantage for Versatile Group. Obviously, Michael, I guess you've got a lot of the support projects that you enable through a lot of areas, development, construction, engineering, all that sort of stuff. You've got capital allowing you to do that. What sort of projects do you get involved with?

MB: So I am mainly involved with defence and infrastructure, so government works. The company itself has a large array of projects from out at Sydney Airport. We've been working nonstop at Sydney Airport for the last 10 years. There's a number of residential commercial developments up and down the east coast of Australia. We've just opened an office in Perth for some residential and commercial. That's probably the main arteries for the business is residential and commercial. Starting in 74, as you mentioned, our chairman, Marco Fard, his father started the business as a tile in and stone business out in Western Sydney. Anyway, grew and grew. Marco took it over. Cut a long story short, he teamed up with our managing director and one of his lifetime friends to form the Versatile Group a handful of years ago. And it has grown exponentially into a company now that has eight businesses under it, as you mentioned, turnover of around $4 billion, 250 staff where we have offices up and down the East coast of Australia, Townsville, Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, and we're in Perth. They've got the Marcos situated in Dubai, and we are opening an office in Hawaii and exploring offices in Manila and China.

GTR: Well, it's already a worldwide organization indeed. And I guess too, how important for you too, Michael Bridger, long-term outcomes? I mean, it may be easy to grab at straws for some people, but I know Versatile with the way that they've enacted their philosophy and policies seem more intent on long-term outcomes. How important and intelligent is that in reference to our future?

MB: It's vital in long-term relationships. So the Versatile group, other than say my section of the business doesn't really tender for work, the work that they receive is on a return basis and on recommendations. Obviously, if you're working for the Commonwealth, you must tender, and that's where the defence and infrastructure business comes in and our education business.

But long-term relationships, delivering a project that the client actually wants and is satisfied with, accountability, quality, assurance of cost, timing, these comments are easy to say, but they're harder to deliver. And look, the Versatile group is one of the few currently that's financially viable contractors in Australia. There are a number of contractors in Australia that are operating, and maybe they shouldn't be, but we'll leave that there. We are very liquid with our finances and very trusted in the marketplace. We are the largest self-performing contractor in Australia, and what that means is it's easy to say the largest because there aren't many. Self-performing contractor means that we do everything. So we have all the trades, we have all the equipment, we have a fit-out company, we have an engineering company. There aren't many contractors in Australia that operate like that anymore. They pass the risk down the line. They like to sell the risk to their subcontractors. We don't have a lot of subcontractors. We do most of our work, not all, most of our work in- house.

GTR: I know that you were recently over in America, United States of America. What was that all about?

MB: So there was a NAVFAC, they call it NAFAC. It's a Navy-Pacific arm of the US defense spend. So believe it or not, they had a conference just outside of Washington DC in Rockville, Maryland. It's where the head office of Marriott is. And I stayed in a little Marriott hotel, just a basic one. And wow, you could tell it was where their head office was. The service was exceptional, which is very unusual over there.

But look, it was to try and establish more better relationships from the US perspective with their contracting base and their engineering base within the US. They are a little concerned about the speed at which their contractors and engineers are delivering projects in the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia. It was to tell them that, look, everything's on the table. Come up with ideas. We want to help you to help us. We need new partners. And I went over there to try and establish some new relationships with some US contractors and engineering companies to really partner with them, subcontract into those US entities that are known to the NAVFAC, to the US military, and assist them in the Indo-Pacific.

GTR: So important too, those connections and the partnering too with the entities around the world. What else is on the table? I know you travel a lot, but it's not only the US that you visit. Let us know a bit more about that.

MB: Yeah, look, I'm off to the US again in a couple of weeks to formalize those relationships that we've managed to form with some contractors over the last 12 months. So we'll formalize those with some business opportunities over the next 12 months, which is exciting. I'm off to Darwin next week for the Northern Australia Defence. They call it, it's not a conference, but it is a conference. It's an update from the ADF on what's happening in Northern Australia over the next 12 months, where their spend is. The US will be there. The Singaporeans will be there. It'll be a who's who of who wants to work in Northern Australia for the ADF. So I'll be there for three or four days. Late May, I'm off to Fiji for the Asian Development Bank update for the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia for projects over the next 12 months. And look, looking past that, Greg, I think I'll need to sleep.

GTR: How important is the focus on Northern Australia at the moment?

MB: Oh, look, it's all about Northern Australia. So the concentration for the ADF is above the tropic of Capricorn. That's where the big money is, not including AUKUS, but runway extensions, upgrading of forward operating bases in Northern Australia and the US participating in some of those regions, it's quite large.

GTR: Well, indeed, I can understand that too. Fiji, is that likewise? I mean, that obviously is a very important area too.

MB: Fiji is very important. There's a couple of ADF projects that we're looking at later this year to try and assist the ADF in delivering those projects. We're also the Versatile group have also teamed up with a Fiji and contractor, and we've been shortlisted for the Fiji airport, the Nadi Airport redevelopment. We're currently working on a tender package for that. Fiji is important. The Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, and there's islands out there, Greg, that you probably would never have heard of that the US in particular are spending a truckload of money on.

GTR: And I guess too, with the constant reminder of China's interest in the South Pacific and the Pacific Islands too, of importance at least to get a balance or an appearance of some balance in the area.

MB: Well, look, I think the tide has changed on that. Well, I hope the tide has changed on that. Everyone that I seem to speak to has had a dealing with the Chinese, and some have liked it and some haven't. And most of the people or the groups that I've spoken to are looking for an alternative.

GTR: I guess the development there at Nandi Airport in Fiji, would that likely increase the ability of allied forces to access Fiji?

MB: No, it's not a defence project. No, no, it's got nothing to do with defence. There's a number of US projects happening in areas close to Fiji, which will assist the travel of large aircraft to and from.

GTR: Look, it's been an absolute pleasure, Michael. Your insights and updates on what Versatile is doing around the world is important....Now, rumour has it that you're a rRosters fan, and I know that the Dragons and the Roosters up there in Sydney have a traditional match on Anzac Day, and we might as well speak about Anzac Day because it's coming up very quickly. What are your plans for that day?

MB: Oh, look, we'll be up early. My wife and daughter and I, if I can get the daughter out of bed, we'll be up early, hopefully into the Cenotaph at Martin Place on Saturday morning, probably come home, have a bit of a rest up, Greg, after a very early start, and then walk down to the stadium for the Anzac Day game, which we attend every year. Mad Rooster supporting family. We've been fortunate enough to win the last number of games. But with the Dragons sacking their coach, on Monday, I'm a little concerned that the players may come out with a different attitude, but yes, I remain hopeful that it'll be a Rooster's victory. Look, it is a great day. Out at the stadium on Anzac Day, the league do it very well. The Defence Force assists. I don't know anyone that has not been to an Anzac Day game that says it's the best game of the year except for the grand final.

GTR: That's fantastic too. And I tell you what, you have a bit of a history there. Correct me if I'm wrong, but when we do the predictions for the NRL football in each round, you did suggest that the Dragons coach may be showing the door, and sure enough that happened. Have you got inside wording on that?

MB: No, no, I've got no inside word there, but mate, 11 losses in a row, and I think if they lose to the Roosters on Saturday, it will be the most losses that either ... Because it's a combined club, St. George and Illawarra. It's two clubs combined. And I think St. George have been in the competition since the '30s. I could be wrong, but I apologize, but they've been in the comp for a long while. 12 losses will be the most in a row for any of those clubs.

GTR: Yes. Well, enjoy the day, Michael. Bridget, of course, a very important day, for commemorative, for our veterans and the Australian public. Perhaps the most important commemorative day in Australia. Enjoy the day. Hopefully the Roosters will get up and have a win.

And well, thank you very much for being with us here, Michael Bridger, head of Defence and Infrastructure at Versatile Construction. Some very interesting and important topics that we've covered here today, Michael.

MB: Thank you, Greg. And look, it's a pleasure and anytime, mate. Happy to jump on and do whatever you need. I know you do a lot for the service, men and women and charities, and I'd just like to finish up and say, and I hope everyone has a great Anzac Day and enjoys it.

RESOLUTE READY

One Stop , One Call , One Life

Digital platform connecting military, first responders, families, communities to support.

ANZAC Day is a time of reflection, gratitude, and unity. It represents the enduring spirit of resilience, mateship, and sacrifice that continues to define Australia and New Zealand.

At Resolute Ready, we honour those who have served and continue to serve, those who fallen, and those who live each day with the visible and invisible impacts of service. Their courage has protected our freedoms, and their stories must always be remembered.

We also pause to remember those who lost their lives to the invisible wounds they carried after their service. We honour those who have died by suicide as a result of service impact and stand in support of the families and loved ones who continue to live with that loss. Their stories matter, their lives matter, and they are not forgotten.

Service, however, does not happen in isolation. It extends beyond the individual into families, homes, and communities. The families of military personnel and first responders carry a profound and often unseen responsibility. They navigate the uncertainty of deployments, support loved ones through transition and trauma, and frequently place their own wellbeing aside to care for others. Partners hold families together through challenging times, children grow with resilience shaped by absence, and loved ones often become carers and advocates. Their strength is quiet but powerful, and it is an essential part of the ANZAC legacy.

At Resolute Ready, we recognise that supporting the individual means supporting the entire family. Our mission, “One Stop. One Call. One Life,” is brought to life through our digital platform, the Resolute Ready Virtual Hub. This platform is designed to provide accessible, confidential, and immediate support, connecting individuals and families to trusted services, early intervention pathways, and critical mental health resources when they are needed most. As an Australian registered charity with DGR status, we are proud to support those who serve and their families, with a growing global footprint across 30 countries and over 100,000 resources accessed through our platform. This reflects both the need and our unwavering commitment to ensuring that no one has to ask alone, “Where do I go to get help?”

If you or someone you know needs support, you can access the Resolute Ready Virtual Hub here: https://resoluteready.com/hub/. This digital platform exists to ensure that no one feels alone in their journey and that help is always within reach, no matter where you are.

This ANZAC Day, whether you attend a dawn service, lay a wreath, or simply take a quiet moment to reflect, we encourage you to consider not only the sacrifices made, but also the families who continue to walk alongside that service every day. Their contribution is enduring, and their strength deserves recognition.

As we move forward, Resolute Ready remains focused on expanding support for families, strengthening partnerships, and advocating for better access to services for those impacted by service-related trauma. Our commitment is to stand beside every individual and every family, ensuring they are seen, supported, and empowered.

ANZAC Day reminds us that service is not just a moment in time, but a lifelong journey that touches many. Today, we remember. Every day, we support.

To help us continue this vital work and maintain our website and operational services, donations are warmly welcomed and greatly appreciated.

With gratitude and respect ,
Lidia Faranda Hall (Founder & CEO) and the Resolute Ready Family.

View on mobile

MEANDERING MON

That Festival Feeling...

This year, the Byron Bay Bluesfest was cancelled just weeks before it was due to begin. I'd been attending for 25 of its 35 years. It was a permanent fixture on my Easter calendar.

Friends often called me "hardcore" because, in all that time, I'd only missed one day out of the five consecutive days.

Before I ever went, people would tell me, "You'd love it, you've got to go." They were right. From my first festival, I never looked back.

The acts I've seen over the years have been extraordinary. Tom Jones, at 83, still crooning Sex Bomb. Patti Smith, spitting on stage as she delivered her raw, poetic punk rock. Trombone Shorty and the Blind Boys of Alabama stepping off stage to perform among the crowd. Mavis Staples joining Bonnie Raitt, and in another year, Susan Tedeschi sharing the stage. Renee Geyer, unpredictable as ever, once spent nearly as much time berating her band as she did singing. The crowd roaring "No Way Get Fucked, Fuck Off" with The Angels. KC & The Sunshine Band drawing a packed crowd at 3pm. And local talents like Karise Eden and Taj Farrant in their early days. Karise looking terrified back then, though now she absolutely owns the stage.

Beyond the music, the memories with friends are what made it truly special. Year after year we complained about the toilets, the food, the drinks, and the near impossible task of navigating through a maze of chairs and prams to reach the dancing area in front of the stage. The weather was unpredictable; more than once we trudged through mud between marquees. And yet, we always came back.

Half the fun was the journey, packing into transit buses to and from the venue. There'd be singing, recaps of favourite performances, and friends doing their best to keep each other upright after a long day & night.

Even after this year's cancellation, the spirit of the festival lived on. Local pubs and clubs across Byron Bay, & even into nearby Brunswick Heads, kept the music alive.

It reminded me of Blues on Broadbeach, which has been running for over two decades. There, live music spills out across restaurants, bars, and outdoor stages, with Surf Parade transformed into a pedestrian hub with a stage in the centre. Most of it is free, aside from a few headline acts.

The same inclusive spirit can be found at the Tamworth Country Music Festival. Despite its name, it's far more diverse than just country music and has been going strong since 1973.

Adelaide also stands out, especially in March, when the city becomes one long festival. The Fringe Festival, running since 1960, brings together an eclectic mix of music, comedy, dance, and performance art. WOMADelaide is another must offering music from all corners of the globe. Set in the beautiful Botanic Gardens, the atmosphere is vibrant and welcoming, attracting a wonderfully diverse crowd.

Western Australia hosts its own Fringe festival, showcasing a broad spectrum of creative arts. Then in winter, there's Dark Mofo at MONA in Hobart, bold, immersive, and completely unique. Come August, the Mundi Mundi Festival in Broken Hill celebrates Australian music in a distinctly outback setting.

Australians certainly can't claim they don't love a festival. As for me, I'll keep supporting as many as I can. I love the atmosphere, the diversity, and the shared joy of live performance.

May we always continue to support live music and the arts, they are such an essential part of who we are.

BY MONIQUE MARCH

CHINA
Beijing to Shanghai

In a world gone mad I questioned the wisdom of this latest international trip, from the safety of home in Tasmania where world affairs seem not to threaten. Will it ever be any better though? Nobody can answer this in 2026 with any accuracy, so in the spirit of "life is to be lived" we caught a plane to Beijing, the northern capital of China with guarded optimism and curiosity. My longest flight yet, over ten hours to Shanghai and three more to Beijing with East China Airlines, who fed us often and well.

There are over 24 million people living and working in Beijing which is more than the entire population of Australia. This fact hit home from the minute we arrived. High rise apartments were crammed together as far as the eye could see in every direction - like Cuisinaire rods. (Remember them?) No grass, trees or flowers dare to grow except for those in allocated government parks, of which there were few. This visage for me was shocking, even grotesque. The culture shock was massive!

People here did not speak English anywhere and we felt like exhibits in a zoo with people staring incessantly and taking our photos!

Westerners in Beijing are called "Bignose" and we seemed truly fascinating to the locals. I have to admit that having red hair didn't help.

The name of the city changed from Peking in 1979 so of course Peking duck was high on my agenda to try in Beijing, and it didn't disappoint - duck pancake foodgasm! It was a hoot watching Reggie the robots (as we named them) bustling around the hotels doing whatever it is that hotel robots do. It felt surreal catching lifts with a Reggie who seemed to emanate an almost sentient presence, standing quietly with pilot lights winking at us.

There is no internet, Facebook or Google allowed in China and the government controls absolutely everything here. Your passport must be carried on your person in order to engage in any activities, sightseeing, transport, clubs, even shopping in Beijing. Cameras are literally everywhere with a two minute police response if you wave your arms at them. This is why China is so safe to visit - to be charged with any crime here (including littering) means that you cannot borrow from a bank, your children cannot attend government schools and your black mark stays in the system forever. It is an obvious trade off for those who live here (but who would ever want to exist under such scrutiny?) I guess the Chinese are born to it.

People who are wealthy live in the Beijing high rise apartments, rarely cook and work very long hours. People with less money travel in from the provinces daily which can take 4-5 hours, eat in their cars or on the train and manage insane schedules.

I was told that during the pandemic the people of Beijing city were actually locked inside their apartments for over 6 months, with government officials delivering their daily needs for food, drink and medication each morning. That really boggles my mind. Signs of regimentation are everywhere, there is no litter, there are no billboard or advertising signs (except on actual storefronts) no sirens, no shouting, no outdoor music and the roads are eerily quiet due to the prevalence of electric vehicles here. Children are always accompanied by adults, often grandparents and it's hard to spot a teenager anywhere. There are literally no homeless people either in Beijing or Shanghai, which shocked me especially due to the size of the respective populations. Sifting through "propaganda speak" it seems that cameras report any odd behaviour or vagrancy and this is instantly pounced upon, not with arrests but the assignation of government "social workers" whose role is to identify and rectify the problem. Some of these

folk are returned to family (who must take responsibility) or taken to mental health services. Those without money or a job are given money and work and a home is found for them. Often this is in different town or city however. I found this truly astonishing and want to know more. My Western thinking grappled with it during the entire trip - why can we not do this?

Our first trip of the tour was to Tienanman Square. We were not allowed to enter the gates due to an unannounced meeting of district officials meeting there on the day. Useless to feel disappointed - it's China.

We then headed to the Forbidden City, the former seat of the Emperors during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The architecture was amazing there and also at the historic Palace Museum in the City grounds. Crowd sizes were insane wherever we went in China and queues for entry to anything went for miles. Luckily we rarely needed a restroom at these places. I had already grown to hate Chinese squat toilets which were everywhere. Most of these have no doors and none supply paper. (On a visit to China it is imperative to pack tissues and hand sanitiser.) The worst thing of all though, was that paper cannot be flushed - after use it is thrown into an open rubbish bin in the cubicle. I found this revolting, but the entire situation led to much laughter with other Western women on our trip. The water is not drinkable in China - a must to remember as there are no signs regarding this in English.

Our next adventure was to the Great Wall of China, one of the 7 wonders of the world and a UNESCO treasure. We visited the Juyongguan section, which once served as a fortress to protect Beijing's northern gateway. A truly breathtaking feat of human endeavour, it is hard to imagine climbing to the very top, much less building it! It was bitterly cold and wet, the uneven steps slippery and quite dangerous but we were proud of the distance we achieved. Of course there were crowds of people there too and in Chinese culture it is acceptable and common to push, so that was another real hazard to contend with. A once in a lifetime experience, which will become a treasured memory of our visit to this country.

Jade is a celebrated stone in China given properties of luck and fortune so we attended an amazing Jade exhibition and then headed off to the Summer Palace, which was originally an imperial retreat on Kunming Lake to learn more about the lives of the emperors throughout history. We visited a Chinese health centre for some reflexology and foot massage which was a blessing as the amount of walking done here was really hard on the feet.

Next on the list was a visit to the Temple of Heaven, Beijing's most sacred imperial temple (also UNESCO listed) where hundreds of locals practiced t'ai chi, danced and walked around with pet birds. I admit to being a bit fazed by the crowds at this temple so we didn't stay long, but got to view the amazing architecture of the place.

For a complete change of pace, literally - we took the bullet train to Suzhou. (Wuxi.) It caterpaulted at over 300kmph but was a really smooth ride and people were able to walk through to the dining cars where alcohol was served. The journey took over 5 hours but it was a highlight of my whole trip. I love trains.

At Suzhou we visited the Lingering Garden which was truly beautiful. A walk on grass around the waters of the lake for a few hours was just what I needed after the constant crowds and the hustle of the big city. People walked dogs there and at Lihu Lake and fished, and there is free camping available - I loved being there. Interestingly, most dogs wore little shoes so mud doesn't get walked into the high rise apartments where they live with their owners. After this

we visited a large silk factory where the most gorgeous Chinese silk products are made. As in all places in China there is a “hard sell” always in progress but by this time we had learned to skirt around them with our stash of yuan intact. By the way, the exchange rate was really good here and I could certainly see why so many people visit China specifically to shop for high end products and of course the latest technology. I just wanted to absorb the culture and see as much as possible in the allotted time. I always travel only with hand luggage to make life easier, so shopping was out for me. Anyway, I digress.

Our next destination was to explore the historic Shan Tan street, the “Venice of the East” set along the many canals the city is known for.

A freshwater pearl farm was explored next, by Taihou Lake, where generations have cultivated this world class product, including the gorgeous lavender pearls only found here. They were just too hard to resist, but at least didn’t take up too much room!

The next city we ventured to was Hangzhou. It is known as “Paradise on Earth” and is quite beautiful. Such a relief that it wasn’t full of high rise towers! Whilst there we went into the rolling hillsides to sample Dragon Well tea, which is world renowned for its health and anti oxidant qualities. It was delicious. (This from a hardened coffee drinker!) It is well worth a visit to this lovely place.

Our next stop was the metropolis of Shanghai. I found it much different to Beijing, with a more international flavour and thankfully some English was spoken. (Often only through Google translate, but the will was there.) This city is where the most exciting technology is developed and exported from China to the world. It has an aura of innovation and positivity lacking in Beijing, but both cities have the awful high rise apartment living in common. We stayed the longest time in Shanghai and enjoyed it immensely.

Another China highlight for me was a night cruise on the Huangpu River. Boats leave from the Bund, the hub of the city’s restaurants and shopping malls at the harbour and the dazzling lights are like nothing I have ever seen before. On the west side, the old city skylines with the Gallery of World Architecture is stunning and on the east side Lujiazui Financial and Trade zone with the newest skyscrapers lit up in incredible patterns and colours was truly phenomenal. I will never forget this experience. Shanghai is home to 26 million people, the largest city I have ever visited and although our hotel was “central” it took 45 minutes by didi (taxi) to get to the Bund. It is huge!

We ate delicious food in Shanghai, indeed all throughout our journey, including dumplings and hot pot and duck but the amount of walking involved meant that we were always hungry so stir fries, noodles and fried rice snacks were very welcome too. Food cafes and restaurants operate 24 hrs a day so we didn’t feel tied to schedules for meals when busy exploring. Hotel breakfasts were veritable feasts and mostly included in the price of accommodation (hotels also had proper toilets.)

Our very last activity was to attend a multi million dollar acrobatic show ERA, in an auditorium in the centre of Shanghai. It combined traditional Chinese acrobatic arts with ultra modern technology, a constant collision between past and future. This is exactly how I see China itself and was a perfect end to our adventure.

As we left this fascinating country for the long haul flights home I looked forward to the trees and lawns and bush in Tasmania, the animals and the open spaces and the softness and friendliness of the Australian people.

And I swore I would never complain about waiting in a queue again!

Thank you China, and Farewell.

National Anzac Centre

Perched above the sweeping coastline of King George Sound, the National Anzac Centre stands as one of Australia's most powerful cultural and commemorative experiences.

IN 1914, MORE THAN 41,000 AUSTRALIANS AND NEW ZEALANDERS DEPARTED ALBANY, BOUND FOR THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

The National Anzac Centre is Australia's foremost museum dedicated to honouring the ANZACs of the First World War.

NATIONAL ANZAC CENTRE

NATIONALANZACCENTRE.COM.AU

67 Forts Road, Albany, Western Australia

Open daily 9am - 5pm

Located within Albany Heritage Park, the Centre overlooks the very waters where tens of thousands of Australian and New Zealand troops departed for the First World War. Albany holds a unique place in the ANZAC story, as the final point of departure for more than 41,000 service men and women heading into conflict.

What sets the National Anzac Centre apart is its deeply personal approach to storytelling. Rather than presenting history from a distance, the Centre invites visitors to follow the journeys of real individuals—from enlistment, through their wartime experiences, and beyond. This immersive format transforms a visit into something far more meaningful, creating a genuine emotional connection to those who served.

Since opening in 2014, the Centre has earned a strong reputation as an award-winning, nationally significant tourism and cultural asset. Visitors are not simply observers; they are participants, walking in the footsteps of the ANZACs and gaining a deeper understanding of their sacrifice and service.

A visit to the National Anzac Centre also opens the door to exploring the wider Albany Heritage Park, including the historic Princess Royal Fortress, offering a broader perspective on Albany's military history.

Tickets can be easily booked online, making it simple to plan a visit to this remarkable and moving destination—one that continues to honour the legacy of the ANZACs for generations to come.

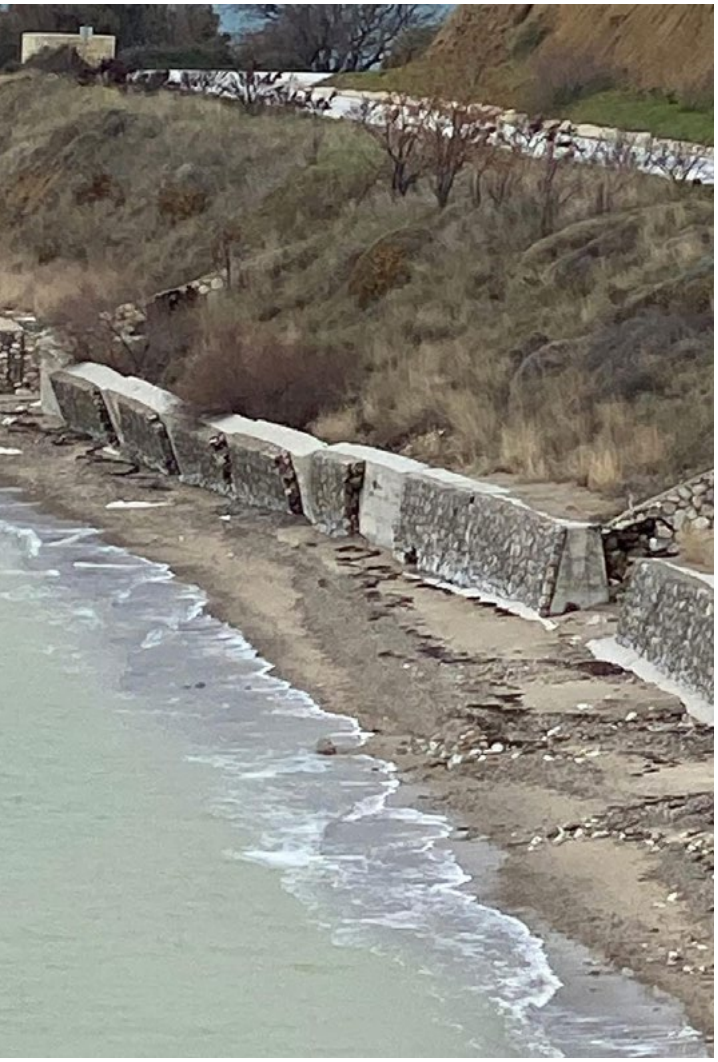
Sacred Ground, Shifting Earth:

Gallipoli storms highlight the battle against time and the elements on historic battlefields worldwide.

If you have ever watched the sun rise over Anzac Cove at Gallipoli or stood beneath the Menin Gate as the bugles sound the Last Post, you will understand why these places matter — and why preserving them is one of the great challenges of our time.

From the windswept ridges of Gallipoli to the rolling farmland, medieval spires and cobbled market squares of Flanders, the sites where the Anzac legend was forged are in a quiet struggle against time, weather and the steady footfall of those who come to remember.

BY MAT McLACHLAN



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:
Storm damage to CWGC cemeteries in Gallipoli. Photo:Bill Sellars, Gallipoli Historian.
The Last Post under the Menin Gate.
The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ypres after full restoration ahead of its centenary in 2027.
Talbot House.

Across the world's significant historic battlefields, the work of remembrance never ends. Severe storms that have lashed the Gallipoli peninsula over recent weeks have caused significant damage to several of the battlefield's most visited sites. At V Beach, where British troops were cut down in their hundreds attempting to land from the converted collier River Clyde on 25 April 1915, the sandstone walls of the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery have split and sagged, and the steps leading up from the beach have been torn as if by some giant hand. The seawall below has been undermined and chunks of earth gouged out, leaving the cemetery's foundations exposed to the elements. Further north, along the road that winds above Anzac Cove, sections of the coast have slumped into the sea.

Although Anzac Day services have not been affected, the damage is a reminder that preserving the ground that holds our memories is never finished, never settled, and can never be taken for granted.

It highlights the question: how do we balance the visitation these places so richly deserve, with the need to preserve them?

It's not a new problem. When the Duke of Wellington returned to the field of Waterloo in 1827, he found that the Dutch had built the Lion Mound, a vast conical hill of earth topped with an iron lion, raised as a monument to the Prince of Orange. The soil to build it had been gouged from the battlefield itself, including the ridge of Mont St Jean, the ground that Wellington's infantry had defended. "They have ruined my battlefield!" he is said to have exclaimed.

When the British returned to Gallipoli in 1918 and began the enormous task of building permanent cemeteries, the Australian engineer Cyril Hughes famously located missing graves by poking a metal rod into the ground to feel whether the earth was soft or firm. Every path he cleared, every access road he graded, was a small trade-off: a little of the battlefield lost so that a lot of it could be reached and remembered.

The same trade-offs are still being made today. In 2005, parts of the coastal road winding to Anzac Cove in Gallipoli were widened to handle the increasing visitor numbers attending the Anzac Day dawn service. The project was controversial at the time for exposing human remains.

More visitors means more infrastructure, and finding the right balance between the two is a challenge that never goes away.

The Western Front throws up the same dilemmas. The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ypres — a triumphal arch spanning the road along which hundreds of thousands of British and Commonwealth soldiers marched toward the front lines — has just emerged from a long and deeply sensitive restoration. Its 54,000 name panels have been conserved, the iconic lion sculpture atop the monument restored, and the vaulted ceiling of the Hall of Memory fully repainted. It is a challenging monument to maintain — simultaneously a sacred war memorial, a working road archway in a bustling medieval city, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. And yet every evening at 8pm, the traffic stops, a crowd gathers, and one of the most moving experiences in Europe unfolds — as buglers sound the Last Post beneath the great arch.

A short drive west in Poperinghe, Talbot House — the 'Everyman's Club' founded by Queensland-born Tubby Clayton in December 1915 as a haven of rest and sanctuary for soldiers behind the lines — still stands as a remarkable living museum, yet also faces preservation battles, with water damage to its historic chapel and an ageing roof.

A few kilometres north, the preserved trench system known as Yorkshire Trench sits in the middle of a light industrial estate, hemmed in by warehouses — surviving only because a group of local enthusiasts fought for it when the bulldozers arrived. And on the outskirts of Ypres, the construction of a golf course uncovered the remains of soldiers who had lain undisturbed beneath the future fairways since 1917. **On the old battlefields, almost any turn of the spade can turn up a story.**

The challenge extends beyond the WWI battlefields. In Normandy, coastal erosion continues to gnaw at the bluffs and beaches where Allied forces landed on 6 June 1944, threatening the ground that changed the course of history. And in Vietnam, a replica Long Tan Cross stands quietly among the rubber trees where 18 Australians were killed in August 1966 during our most costly engagement of the Vietnam War — the original, gifted to Australia by the Vietnamese Government in 2017, now rests permanently at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

None of this is an argument for keeping people away. Quite the opposite. Battlefields that aren't visited become battlefields that are forgotten, and forgotten battlefields become car parks and housing estates.

The damage at V Beach should be taken as a prompt for action. It reminds us that the balance between access and preservation is delicate and ongoing.

Lest we forget is the easy part. Preserving the ground that holds those memories is harder.

Mat McLachlan has been escorting Australians around the world's great battlefields for more than two decades.

He is a battlefield historian, lifetime member of the Last Post Association and a supporter of Talbot House. Mat is the author of Walking with the Anzacs, Gallipoli: The Battlefield Guide, The Cowra Breakout and Krithia.

His company, Mat McLachlan Battlefield Tours, runs guided tours to Gallipoli, the Western Front, Waterloo, Normandy, Arnhem and Vietnam, and has recently launched a series of luxury river cruises that explore the key battlefields of Europe.

www.battlefields.com.au

Exploring Paraguay's tragic battlefields

Many years ago, when I first travelled to South America, my introductory reading was the largely forgotten epic historical novel, 'Brazil' by Errol Lincoln Uys. Within its vast narrative, three chapters in particular haunted me over my subsequent years of travelling throughout South America: they recounted Brazil and its neighbours' harrowing and genocidal war with Paraguay, conflict most interesting and a war with many modern parallels.

Thirty years on, I finally took the opportunity of laying the ghost at rest, exploring these obscure and little-visited battlefields. In the process I discovered a war that foretold o20th Centrury Wars, another side to the standard histories and an enigmatic country that I now wish I had visited years ago.

Few might accurately place Paraguay at the heart of South America, bordered by Bolivia, Brazil and Argentina. If Paraguay is associated with any war, it is as a bolt hole for Nazis, not the bitter riverine and land war of 1864 to 1870 during which eighty percent of the population lost their lives to bullet, disease and starvation, a grim record for any war, anywhere.

This was a war at the crossroads of military history. Paraguay fought it largely with homemade arms and cannon that a Napoleonic soldier would have recognised. The opposition fought it with new weapons that would dominate the battlefields of the next 50 years – breech-loading rifles, observation balloons, iron clad warships and modern cannon. It's key campaign, the forcing of the forts at Humaniata on the Parana river was similar to the forcing of the Drdenelles,. It was a war of incomparable resilience, reminiscent of today's Ukraine, trench warfare comparable to the Great War, its key a campaign not unlike the Dardenelles.

Latin American history is not at the forefront of Anglo-Saxon minds. Victoria had no 'little wars' on the continent to attract wider interest, although tactical defeats of the mighty 19th century British navy are remembered in Buenos Aires and Columbia's Cartegena, and Britain once invaded and spent a few years occupying part of what was to become Haiti. Even amongst military historians, few readily know of the significant role played by mercenaries from Wellinton's armies in Simon Bolivar's wars of independence.

It comes as a surprise to discover the extensive cast of British adventurers, engineers and traders who found themselves caught up in the Paraguay and Triple Alliance War, not to mention the intriguing, Ireland born Eliza Lynch, consort to the Paraguayan Dictator Solano Lopez, mother of his six children, and one of the most exotic and controversial women of the century.

The absence of British visitors is not then surprising, but Paraguay sees few tourists even from neighbouring countries. In those that opposed Paraguay - the Triple Alliance of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay - it is almost a case of 'don't mention the war' though many cities have road names relating to the conflict and its participants. You can count on one hand the number who visit the actual battlefields. An excellent private museum on the battlefield at Paso de Patia gets fewer than twenty foreign visitors each year. Perhaps in today's climate it is better not to examine too closely a genocidal war where an indigenous Guarani population of half a million were all but eradicated by an invading army of 'freed' slaves.

Four Stages of War

The war had four distinct stages. In 1866 Paraguay invaded its neighbours to secure control of the three-thousand-mile-long Paraná river, the country's only access to the sea. Despite being militarily stronger, it was disastrously routed on land and river, and they retreated to their strategic southern border, where the Paraguay River converges with the Paraná. Just over two years of Western Front style trench warfare ensued until the Triple Alliance broke through the mighty riverbank defences at Humaita, opening the way to Asuncion.

Through 1868 and '69, Lopez's ragtag and barefoot army fought a magnificent 'backs to the wall' campaign winning several tactical engagements, despite being out-numbered and out-gunned, until most of the decimated, retreating civilian army was massacred in the hilltop eastern town of Piribebuy. The escaping remnant faced the murderous French/Brazilian Count d'Eu at Acosta Nu. The Brazilians know this as the Battle of Campo Grande. To the Paraguayns it is the 'Battle of Los Niños', the Children's Battle, where nine-year-old 'soldiers' painted beards on their faces to appear older to the advancing Brazilian enemy. It did not help them.

The capital, Asuncion, was occupied and sacked, but Lopez refused to capitulate. Relentlessly pursued, with barely a handful of compatriots, he made his final stand in early 1870 three-hundred and fifty kilometres to the north in the Cerro Cora foothills, where he and his 15-year-old son, 'General' Pancho, were tracked down and killed. Eliza Lynch, who was controversially beside her lover throughout the war, buried both him and her son with her own hands. Herself spared, she was exiled with Lopez's surviving children to Europe.

'I die with my country' were reputedly Lopez's last prophetic words. Paraguay was left devastated, denuded of its men, its once thriving

economy wrecked and large tracts of its land ceded to the victors. To the victors the spoils. And also, the narrative. Lopez was painted as the mad dictator who led his country to ruin and deserving of his ignominious fate. He was cynically rehabilitated by Paraguay's 1970s dictator, Alfred Strossner, who in the process commissioned scores of statues and commemorative plaques. Eliza Lynch was even disinterred from her Paris resting place at Père Lachaise Cemetery and returned to Paraguay for reburial.

The country has never really recovered from this tragic episode. It remains as one of the least developed South American countries. There was no Marshall Plan, Donald Trump, or Board of Peace to pump billions into its reconstruction. It never had the allure that Brazil and Argentina had for new immigrants to settle and rebuild, and the country was plunged into another population-denuding war against Bolivia in the 1930s. Strossner's thirty-five-year mid-20th century dictatorship reenforced its isolation.

Ironically, its bloody history, complex geography, and under-development now appeal to tourists looking for something different.

Following the Front Lines

Fortunately for the visiting battlefield tourist, with the conflict spread over such a huge distance, the core actions of the war all took place along the riverbanks south of Asuncion, and in the 'cordilleras' to the east. Even then, visiting this part of the conflict involves a tour of approximately six hundred miles, visiting remote, mosquito-infested marshland and finding one's way through the low hills to the west of Asuncion.

This is effectively 'virgin territory'. There are no guidebooks, no beaten paths to follow. No commercial tours are offered. English is not widely spoken. You'll look in vain for a Holt's Map and are forced to rely on Google maps to guide you along dirt roads and land flat as a billiard table, prone to either extensive flooding or bush fires, with long stretches of empty, sub-tropical forests between a few under-developed villages and towns. Fortunately, internet connections are reliably strong. Most of the time.

During my twelve-day, six-hundred-mile tour of the main battle sites, I discovered dozens of unexpected monuments and statues, preserved trenches and fortifications, slept beside the spectral remains of Humaita's iconic ruined church, found bullets and buttons on the largely undisturbed battlefields of Tuyutí and Curupayty, and encountered some unique artifact collections curated by devoted local enthusiasts. I had never seen a Congreve rocket or a Whitworth shell before. I took an evocative boat ride on the mighty Paraná, marvelling at the teeming riverbank life. I toured South America's first iron foundry, explored the skeletal remains of its first steam train network, and saw the last of Lopez's once mighty river fleet—all these originally built in Britain and operated by British engineers throughout he war.

Asuncion was a surprise of its own, not least Lopez's pink palace and the city's fabulous, if dilapidated railway station, both built by a builder called Charles Taylor from Chelsea.

Despite suffering the vagaries of the local hospitality industry, being bitten by mosquitos so big you could ride them, and collecting war wounds struggling through the thorny esteros, it was without doubt the most exhilarating battlefield tour of the many I have taken from Gallipoli to Natal. The best part was meeting nobody on any of the battlefields. Nobody other than the half a million ghosts eerily given voice by the ever-present screeching birds.

En route, I had also met a collection of unbelievably generous and hospitable people amongst the cowboys, 'indígenas', and sons of European settlers that comprise today's Paraguay.

But perhaps more importantly, I discovered another side to the standard history, one which often neglects the story of a motley crew of British characters who supported Lopez almost to the end. And far from loathing the memory of the man who led his country back into the stone ages, Lopez and his controversial consort Eliza Lynch have been rehabilitated, now revered with Lopez's remains housed in Asuncion's Parthenon for Heros and Eliza's among the mini mansions of the city's Recoleta cemetery.

Those who might want to discover for themselves what remains of the tragic episode in Paraguay's history should take note; simply getting to Paraguay is an adventure in itself. You cannot fly directly from outside the continent but must route via Brazil or Argentina. Rio de Janeiro is the obvious international gateway choice as a stop-over allows a visit to the National Museum where an impressive array of war artefacts and paintings provides the perfect introduction to the conflict.

Once in Asuncion you need to hire a car, a four-wheel drive. At least 50% of the driving is on unmade roads. A section on the National Route 4 to Humaita and Paso de Patria was so deeply rutted that the slightest rain would make it almost impassable. The same was true of sections of the roads leading to Ybycui National Park and the La Rosada Iron foundry.

Breaking down or getting stuck could be a nightmare, there is so little traffic. Driving the one hundred and twenty kilometres east from Humaita to the Jesuit Misiones area of Ayolas, another memorable aspect of Paraguayan history, we encountered just a dozen

vehicles, and four of those local tractors. There was no shortage of cattle though. Finding overnight accommodation can be more challenging than locating battlefields, which are usually signposted, especially outside Asuncion. Hotels in Pilar or Isle Bonita are basic but clean, friendly, and excellent value at about fifteen pounds a night. Outside the main towns, lodging mainly serves fishermen or hikers, but with rooms offering showers and breakfast of chipa and coffee or the ubiquitous yerba mate.

I found it helped alleviate the relative discomfort imagining myself as a modern day Richard Burton, the Victorian explorer and early visitor to the Paraguay War. Paraguay checks off the essential elements of a battlefield tour; it is a fascinating story, rich in characters and controversies. You can smell the cordite, walk the terrain, pick up some authentic souvenirs, make surprising discoveries, enjoy the wider cultural landscape, food and traditions. It is incredibly cheap once you get there, though you must be prepared to 'rough it' in terms of accommodation. For those seeking unique bragging rights, a Paraguayan battlefield tour promises an unforgettable adventure.

Though safe it is not for the fainthearted, yet it perfectly encapsulates the spirit of 'soft-adventure' tourism. Read Uys's 'Brazil' and Joseph Conrad's 'Nostromo' to whet the appetite, then visit soon — before paved roads arrive, the silence of the battlefields fades, and the resting dead are disturbed by more than just cattle.

BRUCE CHERRY

Dr Bruce Cherry is a military historian and battlefield tour guide, leading tours since the 1980s.

GOLDFIELDS
WAR MUSEUM

City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder Goldfields War Museum & Local History Archives

Kalgoorlie-Boulder is a city well known for the pride it places on its unique and fascinating history.

From exciting origins as a prospector's paradise the twin towns of Kalgoorlie and Boulder grew rapidly into a thriving early 20th Century metropolis.

Endowed with the region's pioneering spirit and with the riches of the Golden Mile at its disposal, the Municipality of Boulder completed its magnificent town hall in June 1908. The elegant Edwardian building features a grand ballroom, stately council chambers and the opulent Goatcher Curtain. It's no wonder that visitors often say they feel like they've stepped back in time!

Nestled comfortably inside the building's old public library is the Goldfields War Museum. The newly redeveloped museum (opened in March 2019) brings together an intriguing collection of artefacts, documents, military equipment and uniforms to present captivating and heartbreaking stories of Goldfields men and women fighting in the armed forces and on the home front.

The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder's Local History Archives occupies the former civic offices of the Boulder Town Hall. A wealth of exceptional records and an on-site archivist can help researchers (and the simply curious) to uncover all aspects of local history and family connections to the Goldfields region.

Possibly the best way to experience the Boulder Town Hall is on a guided tour, taking place every Tuesday and Thursday at 10:30am. Tours of the neighbouring Kalgoorlie Town Hall are also held on Monday and Wednesday at 10:30am.

The Boulder Town Hall Heritage Site is open Monday to Friday, 10:00am to 4:00pm and Saturday from 9:00am to 1:00pm.

For more information on the facilities, opening hours and tours, please contact:

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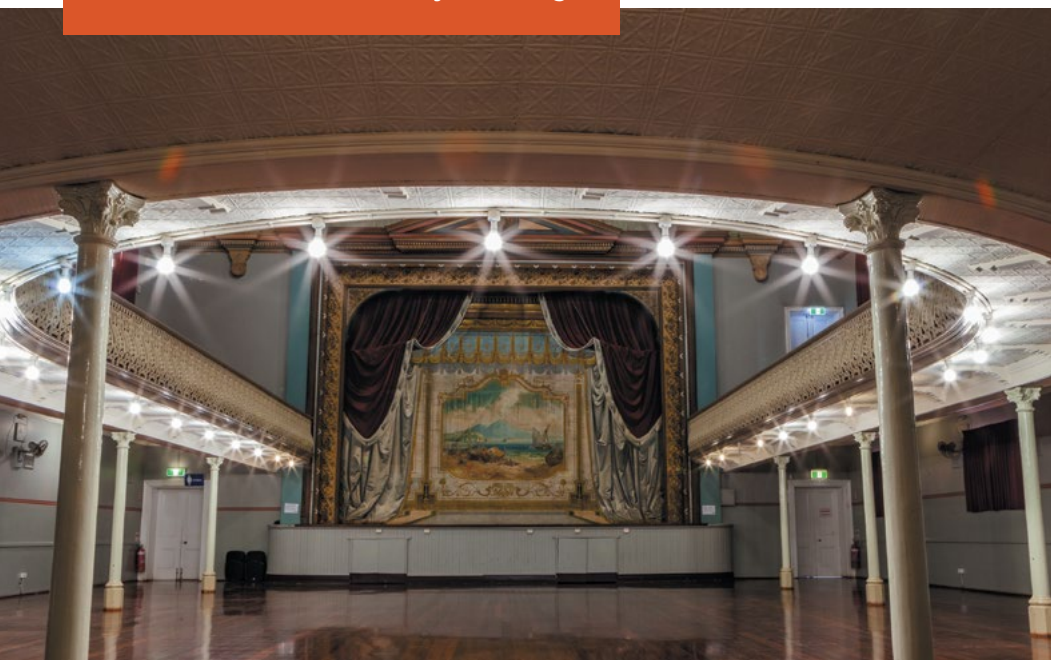
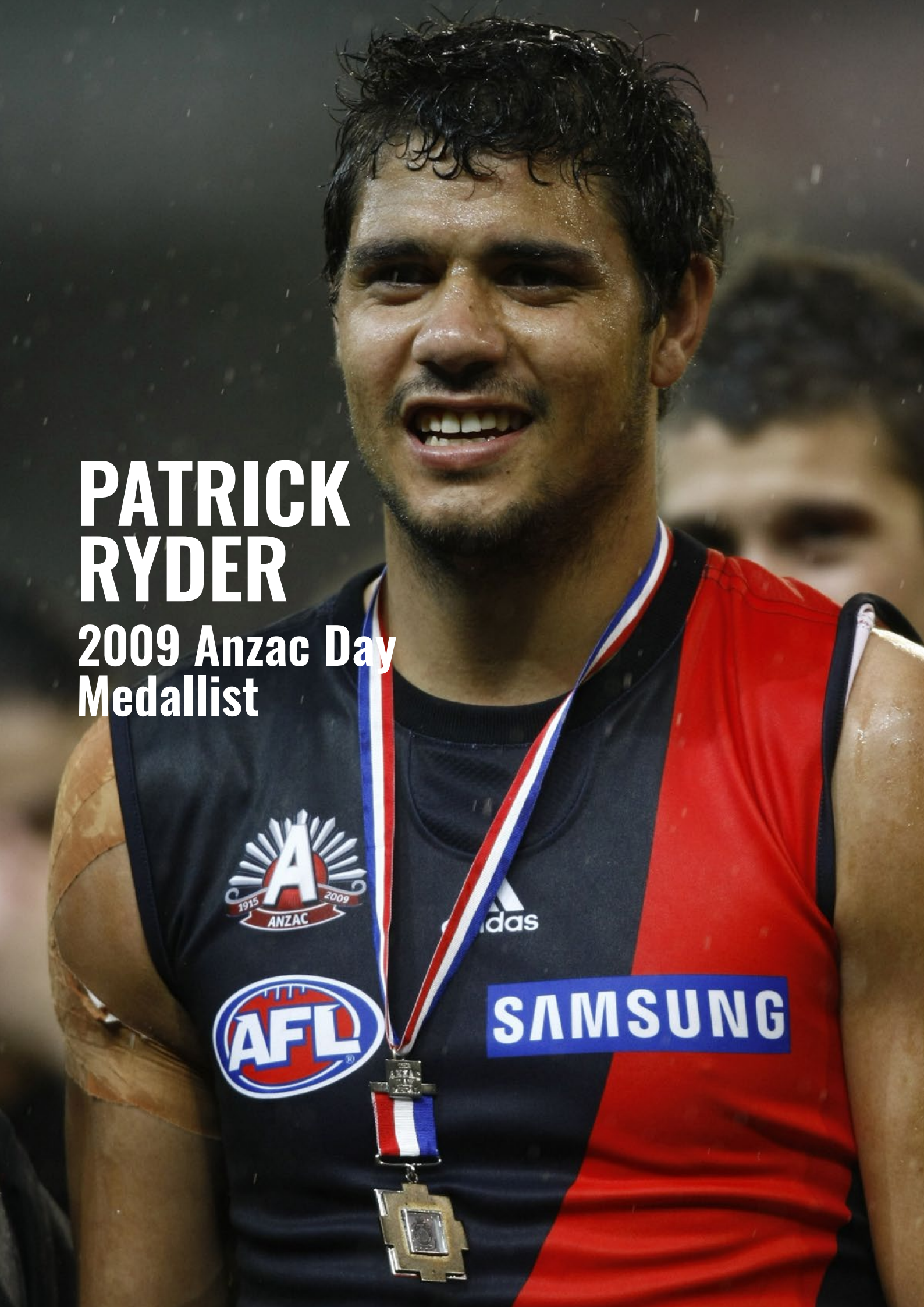


City of Kalgoorlie Boulder


PATRICK
RYDER
2009 Anzac Day
Medallist
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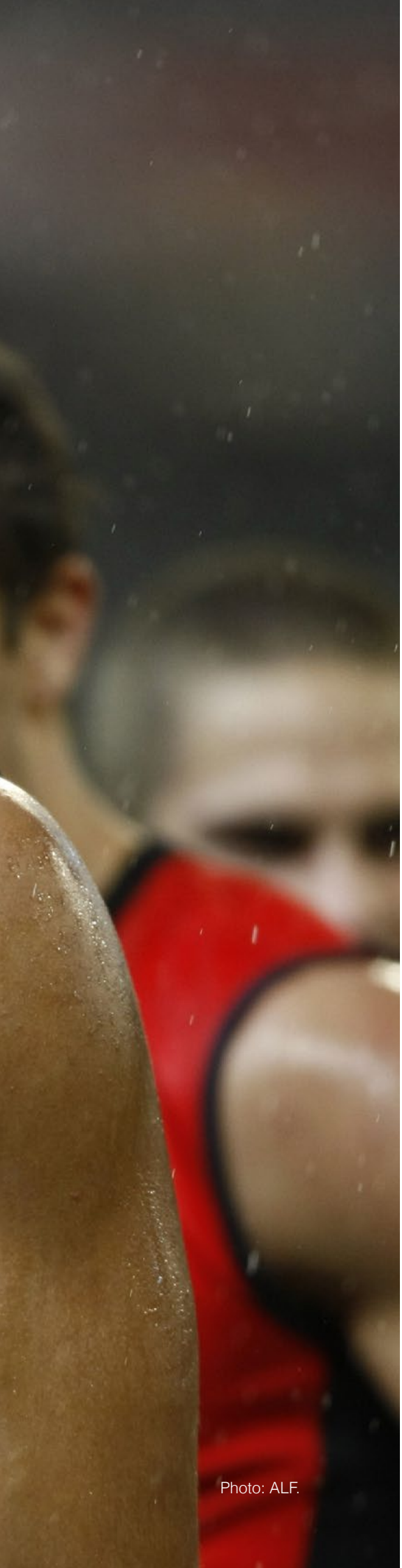

Photo: ALF.

To win one of the major awards in the AFL competition, you have to either be adjudged the best (Norm Smith Medal / Brownlow Medal) or you have to out-performed everybody else to be the most prolific (leading goalkicker for the Coleman Medal).

But there's one award in AFL competition that's valued incredibly highly by players, and speaks to the qualities we like to see in our finest - qualities we want and expect in our leaders.

To win the Anzac Day medal, as a player on the MCG when Essendon meets Collingwood in front of a usual crowd of 90,000 plus on our most sacred day of the year, asks a player to exemplify the Anzac Spirt - skill, courage, self-sacrifice, teamwork and fair play.

A football game can never be equated to the sacrifices made by our service men and women, but in a sporting sense a player is asked to fulfill a role for their team that can be pivotal in winning the match, and not just focus on trying to be the best, or kicking the most goals.

The MCG Anzac Day game has been a fixture on the AFL calendar now for more than three decades and the performance of the last indigenous winner of the Anzac Day medal, back in 2009, still lives large in memory as one of the finest displays for a medal-winner.

At just 21 years of age, Patrick Ryder won his Anzac Day medal when he was thrust into a role he'd never really filled, asked to do his best for a beleaguered team hit by injury, and did so well that he not only played a key role in a surprise Essendon victory, but was awarded the medal.

IN just the 57th match of an eventual 281-game that would earn him AFL Life Membership, Ryder was a young forward doing occasional stints in the ruck as a back-up as he learned his craft. The ruck is where the big men crash and bash and while Ryder had height on his side, he was still very slight in the early stages of his career.

Lead ruckman David Hille, fresh off winning the Essendon best and fairest, went down early in the game with a serious knee injury that would cost him a year on the sidelines and Bombers' coach Matthew Knights had nowhere to look, other than the spindly youngster in the forwards.

Ryder rose incredibly to occasion, winning 16 possessions and 27 hit outs but throwing himself constantly into the fray with 13 tackles, showing courage over and over again in circumstances where he could be excused for thinking about self-protection.

Knights, in the aftermath of the win, said the effort was deserving of the highest praise.

"Out of a difficult situation came an opportunity for a young man to realise that he had to take the game by the scruff of the neck," Knight said.

"What the team has been crying out for is for him to take the game on. He's such a quiet young man that we've found it difficult to get that out of him, but I think the moment and the day forced it out of him.

"Now that he's got that belief, I think he should be able to take it a bit further."

Take it further indeed he did. This day, on the biggest stage, would kick-start Ryder's career to the extent he would be both a club best and fairest winner and All Australian player later with Port Adelaide, as well a leader in the indigenous player community.

In persistent rain, he had to compete over and over again and Knights said he considered several times in the coaching box whether he should give the young man a rest, knowing it would require even more under-sized team mates in Scott Lucas or Nathan Lovett-Murray to try and compete against the Collingwood big man pair of Josh Fraser and Leigh Brown.

Fraser had been Victoria's lead ruckman the year before while Brown was a powerful man, even as a part-timer.

The spirit required to win an Anzac Day medal shone through all day, as Essendon would eventually steal a memorable win by five points with a late goal by another youngster in David Zaharakis, playing only his fourth league game.

"It was thrown up by the assistant coaches early in the game to give Patrick a chop out with Nathan Lovett-Murray or even Scott Lucas," Knights said.

"But he was going so beautifully that I wasn't that keen to change. I said 'no way, we'll just keep pushing and pushing with him'.

With the young Ryder now tasked with leading the ruck for the rest of the season, Essendon would qualify for finals but could not compete in week one with the Adelaide Crows in Adelaide, and were knocked out of premiership contention.

But, on a wet and wild day in Melbourne early in the season, a young player was thrown in at the deep end and would find it within himself to produce a performance never seen before, and step into a fine career at the elite level.

Strengthening veteran health and wellbeing through sport

Invictus Australia encourages veterans and their families to engage with their communities through sport. Whether at a grassroots level or on the international stage, we leverage the power of sport to proactively foster health and aid in recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration.

We bring together sporting, community and veteran organisations to break down barriers to sport participation. We promote the physical, social and emotional benefits of sport, and shine a light on the unique needs of younger veterans, particularly those experiencing challenges associated with their service or when making the transitioning from military to civilian life. Our team is on the ground and active in local communities, working hard to make a difference.

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Aboriginal & Contemporary Art Specialists

In honour of the courageous ANZACS who fought for and defended this country we present Paddy Fordham Wainburranga's World War 2 (above). Paddy's depiction of our brave Diggers serves as a poignant reminder of their sacrifice and of the debt we owe.

Lest We Forget

THE WINWARD COLLECTION of Aboriginal & Contemporary art is available for viewing and sale online and from our gallery in Port Melbourne

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