

**25TH ANNIVERSARY OF
AUSTRALIAN SERVICE IN
AFGHANISTAN 2001-2021**



**AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL
CANBERRA, ACT**

SUNDAY 11 OCTOBER 2026



Joey Passmore (2020) *Dusk Patrol*, painting. Courtesy of Joey Passmore.

Joey Passmore is an artist and retired soldier who served in Afghanistan as a cavalryman and patrol commander. This image shows a patrol establishing its position on the dasht before last light: a quiet, familiar moment drawn from the artist's own time in country. It is an image that still resonates with him. This scene, with others by Passmore, hold the conflict's contradiction – a landscape of almost serene stillness that could erupt without warning, and the grief that follows when it does.



A message from
HER EXCELLENCY
THE HONOURABLE
MS SAM MOSTYN AC
Governor-General of the
Commonwealth of Australia

As Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief, and daughter of a veteran, I am honoured to welcome all who have gathered to commemorate the 25th anniversary marking the beginning of Australian service in Afghanistan. This national service is the first where we, as a nation, formally commemorate the service and sacrifices of those who deployed to Afghanistan and to the wider Middle East Area of Operations in relation to Afghanistan.

Between 2001 and 2021, more than 35,000 Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel served in operations related to the war in Afghanistan. Other Australians from government and non-government organisations also worked alongside ADF and coalition forces, including Afghan nationals, many of whom now call Australia home.

The conflict in Afghanistan profoundly affected the lives of the Afghan people, as well as the many Australians who served there as part of the international response to instability. Like my fellow Australians, I followed the events in Afghanistan across almost two decades of war. I am proud of all Australians who served with courage, honour and sacrifice to support the people of Afghanistan and in service to our nation.

Today, we pause to remember those who have served our country across land, sea and air, and in military, policing, diplomatic, advisory, humanitarian and support roles. The commitment, professionalism, and resilience they demonstrated are an inspiration to us all.

We remember that this conflict came with a cost. We commemorate those who lost their lives and those who returned from war with physical wounds, psychological and emotional scars, and the enduring effects of war. We also recognise the families, carers, and loved ones whose steadfast support across long periods of separation and uncertainty sustained those who served. Their own sacrifices were often made quietly, beyond public view, and at times the impact has continued long after operations ceased.

Australians who served in Afghanistan can be proud of their contribution. Their service to Australia did not end with their deployment. Many continue to enrich our nation through their leadership, service and contributions to communities across the country and the world.

Today, twenty-five years since Australia's first operation to Afghanistan was launched, on behalf of all Australians, I thank all who contributed to Australia's mission in Afghanistan and those who supported them. We honour your service, recognise your achievements, and remember your sacrifices. Above all, we commit to ensuring that the efforts of all who served, and the memory of those who lost their lives, or returned with significant trauma, will never be forgotten.

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A convoy of vehicles returning from a 'log run' (logistics run) from Patrol Base Wali to Kamp Holland through the Dasht (desert plain), Uruzgan Province, 2009. **Nick Fletcher** – AWM P09831.093





HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

AUSTRALIAN SERVICE IN THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN: 2001–2021

On 11 October 2001, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) established Operation Slipper, its first declared operation for the war in Afghanistan. Between 2001 and 2021, more than 35,000 ADF personnel were deployed to operations in Afghanistan and the wider Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) in support of Afghanistan. Australians from government and non-government organisations also worked alongside ADF and coalition forces and Afghan nationals during this period.

The war aimed to dismantle the al-Qa'ida terrorist network after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States (US), known as 9/11. It developed into a protracted conflict, with the objectives of Australian operations in Afghanistan evolving over almost 20 years. Australian and coalition forces took part in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations, as well as nation-building, reconstruction, and mentoring and training missions.

Australian operations in the war extended beyond the physical borders of Afghanistan and included the wider MEAO. Australia's commitment included personnel from the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), Australian Army and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). They made vital contributions from locations within and outside of Afghanistan. Civilians from government agencies, including the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and non-government organisations also worked throughout this period.

Afghanistan is a country with a rich cultural heritage and significant ethnic, linguistic and social diversity. Sadly, its modern history has been shaped by decades of conflict, foreign intervention and political instability. The Soviet–Afghan War, which began in 1979, contributed to a prolonged period of civil conflict that ultimately led to the rise of the Taliban. By the late 1990s, the Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan and provided sanctuary to al-Qa'ida. International concern about al-Qa'ida intensified following terrorist attacks against US embassies and military personnel overseas.

Many Australians can vividly recall where they were when they first heard news of the coordinated terrorist attacks by al-Qa'ida in the US on 11 September 2001 (9/11). The attacks had a profound impact around the world as almost 3,000 people from more than 80 different countries lost their lives, including 10 Australians.



The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre, New York, US, 11 September 2001 (9/11).

Sara K Schwittek – Reuters

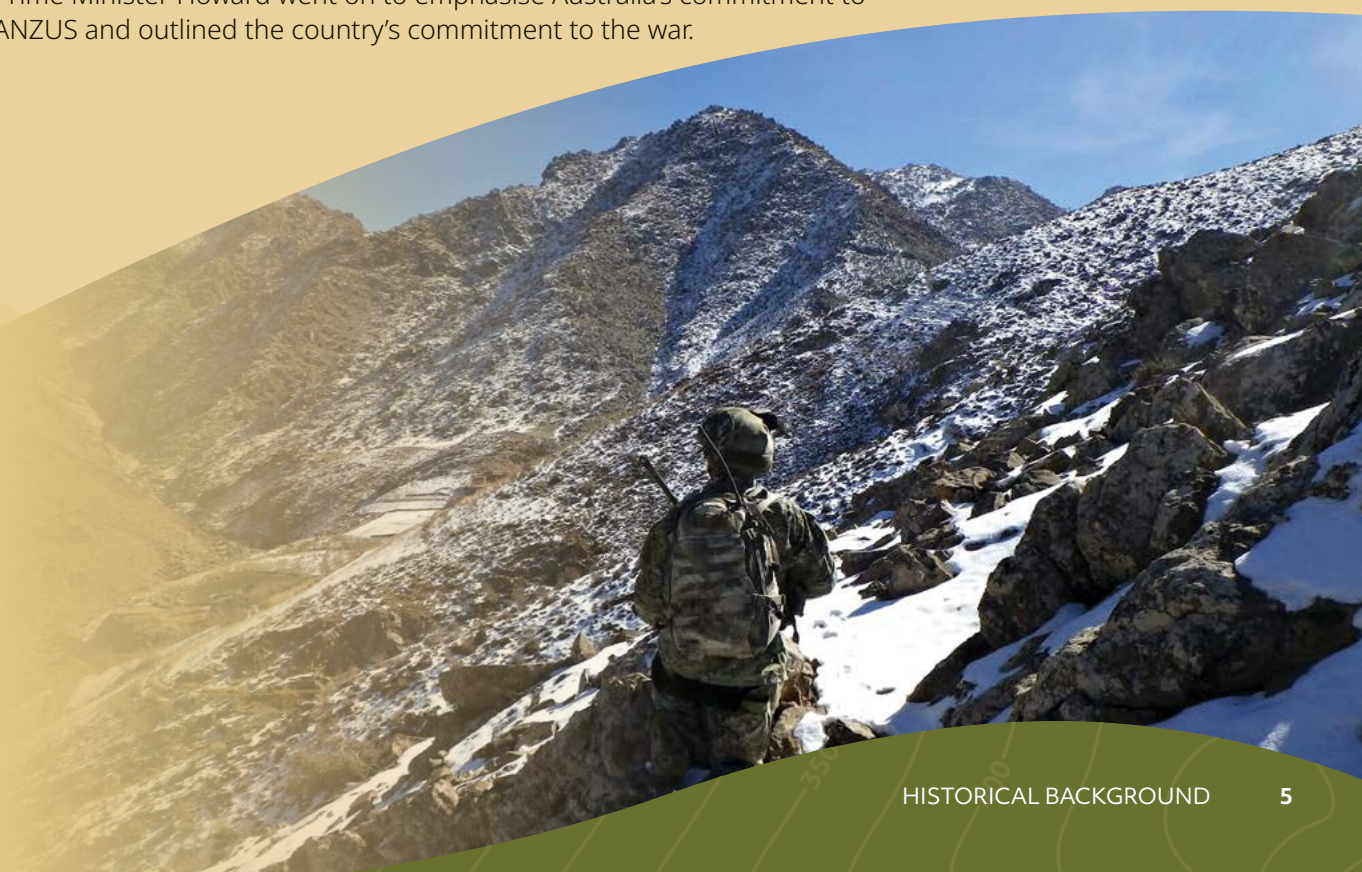
The following day, the United Nations (UN) Security Council condemned the attacks on the US. Shortly thereafter, President George W Bush declared a 'War on Terror', and the US established a coalition of nations united by the common goal of combating the threat of terrorism. On 14 September, Australia invoked the ANZUS Treaty (Australia, New Zealand and the United States Security Treaty), commonly known as ANZUS. This was the first and only time the treaty has been activated.

On 7 October 2001, US forces commenced military operations against the Taliban and al-Qa'ida, invading Afghanistan with support from the Afghan Northern Alliance. The US operation was known as Operation Enduring Freedom. Several other countries began contributing to the military effort, including Australia. On 11 October, at the direction of the Australian Government, the ADF established Operation Slipper. On 25 October, in an address to the Australian Defence Association, Prime Minister John Howard publicly announced the operation. He stated:

If we left this contest only to America, we would be leaving it to them to defend our rights and those of all the other people of the world who have a commitment to freedom and liberty.

Prime Minister Howard went on to emphasise Australia's commitment to ANZUS and outlined the country's commitment to the war.

A Special Operations Task Group member during a patrol in the Uruzgan Mountains, January 2011. **Defence**



ADF deployments under Operation Slipper comprised members of all three military services. Although Afghanistan is a landlocked country, RAN personnel were critical to Australian and coalition operations. HMAS *Anzac* was already on a deployment in the Persian Gulf and was quickly reassigned to Operation Slipper. RAN personnel soon also began providing intelligence and logistics support, then supporting ground forces. For three decades, the RAN has remained in the MEAO with key roles in maritime security, counter-piracy, counter-smuggling and counter-terrorism. A wide range of naval personnel, from technicians and intelligence officers to chefs and medics, were crucial to the overall Australian operation.

The first land force contingent deployed on 22 October 2001, three days before the prime minister's public announcement. The Special Forces Task Group (SFTG) was farewelled by family, friends and political leaders in Perth as it departed to contribute to the US-led International Coalition Against Terrorism. In the weeks and months that followed, SFTG personnel joined and supported coalition forces in a series of patrols, raids, skirmishes and ambushes 'to drive the Taliban and al-Qa'ida forces from their strongholds.'

On 9 November 2001, the first group of RAAF aviators deployed in support of air operations over Afghanistan. Combat air patrols

RAN and US Navy ships at sea during Operation Slipper, May 2002. Clockwise from front: HMAS *Manoora*, USS *Hopper*, HMAS *Canberra*, USS *Hue City*, and HMAS *Newcastle*. Leading Seaman Photographer Tracy Casteleijn - Defence

were conducted around the US airbase on Diego Garcia, a small but strategically important island in the Indian Ocean. Subsequently, a detachment of tankers deployed to Kyrgyzstan. Both deployments included aircrews and ground personnel. The RAAF remained involved in the war at varying levels until the evacuations of Kabul in 2021.

By December 2001, coalition forces had pushed al-Qa'ida and the Taliban out of many cities and villages. That month, the UN formalised a multinational coalition under the name International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). ISAF sought to provide security across the country, begin developing an Afghan security force, and rebuild infrastructure. Between 2001 and 2014, more than 50 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and partner countries contributed to ISAF, including Australia. ADF personnel took part in ISAF operations as part of Operation Slipper, and some were embedded with NATO and coalition headquarters, entities and other units.

Despite operational successes between October and December 2001, there were fears that al-Qa'ida and the Taliban were still at large in Afghanistan, Australian and coalition forces continued to undertake patrols and raids. The high-pressure environment meant that personnel were in a constant state of vigilance, especially as members

A RAAF C-17A
Globemaster III with
flightcrew and (centre) Task
Group 633.2 Air Component
Commander, Middle East Area of
Operations, July 2009. Petty Officer Photographer
Dave Connolly - Defence



of the Taliban and al-Qa'ida dressed like civilians. Identification of armed militants was further complicated by the presence of firearms among the broader Afghan population. Even as the operational objectives continued to evolve during the war, personnel needed to remain constantly alert in the anticipation of potential danger, including in high-intensity combat situations.

The use of mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) was an ever-present threat to the safety of everyone in Afghanistan. IEDs were dangerous, often crudely made, explosives that were first used in Afghanistan during the Soviet–Afghan War. IEDs and mines were used with devastating consequences in the war in Afghanistan. While the threat was well known to those serving in Afghanistan, Australians back home began to understand the danger in early 2002. In February, news outlets reported that a vehicle carrying five Australian personnel struck a suspected anti-vehicle mine near Kandahar. Sergeant Andrew Russell, Special Air Service Regiment, died as a result of the explosion. He was the first of many Australians to lose their lives from serving in this war.

The Special Operations Task Group Memorial at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, originally erected at Camp Russell, Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan.
AWM REL48377



After 12 months, the Taliban and al-Qa'ida appeared to have been largely defeated in Afghanistan. In late November 2002, it was announced that the third rotation of the SFTG would begin its withdrawal from Afghanistan. Minister for Defence Robert Hill noted that 'the focus of the operations had moved towards supporting the reconstruction of Afghanistan'. In addition, the US began turning its attention to planning a conflict in nearby Iraq.

Australian Army engineers with their Explosion Detection Dogs, Tarin Kowt, February 2012.
Corporal Raymond Vance – Defence

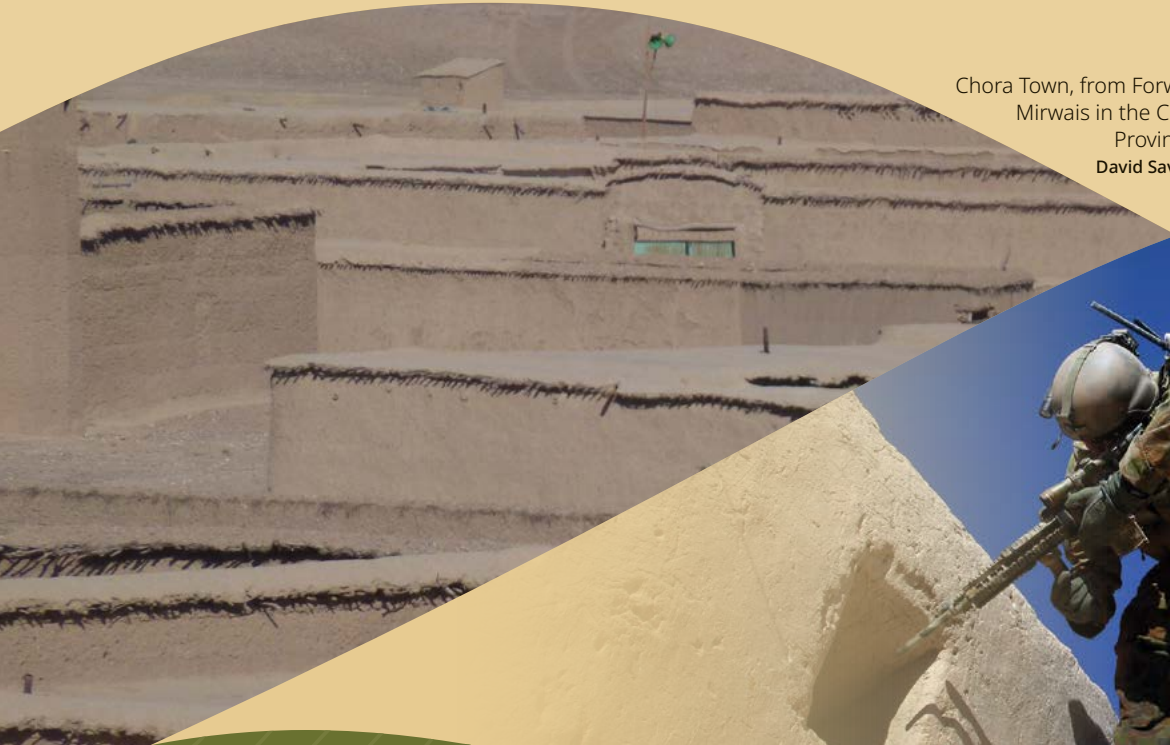
Further to coalition forces, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Between April 2003 and August 2005, Australians contributed to UNAMA through Operation Palate (April 2003 to July 2004) and then Operation Palate II (from June 2005 to March 2017). Army personnel were assigned to both UNAMA and the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA).



In 2005, the ADF renewed its military commitment to Afghanistan with the deployment of another SFTG rotation in response to the resurgent Taliban. The first contingent included personnel from Special Operations Command, logistics support and, later, an army aviation detachment.

Although Australians had been deployed to Afghanistan since 2001, newly arriving personnel continued to be amazed by the country's diversity. Those on the ground were struck by the expansive desert and snow-capped mountains. Others remarked on Kabul's buzzing energy. Many on deployment sought to better understand local communities, customs and cultures. With help from interpreters and other locally engaged staff, Australians deepened their understanding of Afghanistan. Locally employed Afghan nationals did far more than translate words for Australian and other coalition forces. They provided a more nuanced understanding of local culture and knowledge. This afforded Australians insight into how the Taliban gained a stronghold in the country and contributed to personnel performing their roles more effectively.

Australian service in Afghanistan continued in this new phase. Searches and engagements often took place in and around brick and mud-walled compounds that were home to civilian families, including women and children, but which could also shelter enemy fighters. These spaces were notoriously difficult to fight in, and coalition forces had to navigate these complexities with great care. Female personnel were to become particularly important in these circumstances because



Chora Town, from Forward Operating Base
Mirwais in the Chora Valley, Uruzgan
Province, December 2011.
David Savage – private collection



An Australian soldier
during a search of
a village at Musazai,
Uruzgan Province,
December 2010.
Angela Wylie – Fairfax
Photos FXJ42863

they could interact with local women and children and enter segregated spaces where male personnel were not welcome.

Alongside combat operations was a growing focus on reconstruction. The Australian Reconstruction Task Force (ARTF) was deployed in September 2006 as part of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Uruzgan, based outside Tarin Kowt (also spelt Tarin Kot or Tarinkot). Members of the ADF and Australians from government and non-government organisations undertook humanitarian-based projects. This included building government facilities and improving road and agricultural infrastructure. Infantry and other troops patrolled during construction, providing a level of protection in hostile environments.

Mentoring also became increasingly important in ADF deployments. From early 2009, Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) were embedded in the Afghan National Army to train and mentor Afghan forces. For many Australians, working collaboratively with Afghan forces was a highlight of their service.

Mentoring extended across levels that included senior leadership and across government and non-government agencies responsible for security, regional development and governance. Between 2008 and 2010, members of the AFP deployed under their own mentoring operations to train Afghan police. Female ADF and AFP personnel made significant contributions to mentoring through culturally sensitive engagement with Afghan women.

An Australian soldier serving with Mentoring Task Force 3 plays with an Afghan girl in the Chora Valley, Uruzgan Province. September 2011.
Able Seaman Imagery Specialist Jo Dilozenzo – Defence



A wide range of other military and non-military elements were integral to the war in Afghanistan. While relatively unknown to many civilians in Australia, naval personnel contributed to land-based operations in addition to the maritime patrols in the MEAO. RAN clearance divers were deployed alongside their Army colleagues specialising in disposing of munitions and making roads safer by disarming IEDs. Navy medics also joined teams treating the wounded. The cross-service and inter-coalition medical teams worked together to ensure those wounded received rapid response and medical care. In some instances, evacuations from the battlefield took no more than 15 minutes.

RAAF mobile control and reporting personnel played a crucial role in managing an increasingly busy military and civilian airspace over Afghanistan. Units also contributed to intelligence to inform coalition objectives. Such work used crewed and remotely piloted aircraft for monitoring and surveillance. Airfield defence guards contributed to force protection in and around the Tarin Kowt base. RAAF responsibilities extended to logistical support and aeromedical evacuations, working with other ADF personnel to airlift supplies and personnel.

Representatives of the Salvation Army Red Shield Defence Services, Red Cross and Everyman's Welfare Service contributed to the mission within Afghanistan and the wider MEAO. ADF personnel appreciated the recreational and support services they provided on bases.

Australian Army engineers and a RAN clearance diver with the Explosive Ordnance Demolition Troop, Mentoring Task Force 4, Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan Province, April 2012. Before them is a selection of seized weapons and ordnance. **Corporal Mark Doran – Defence**

ADF personnel were also embedded with (or seconded to) other coalition-led missions, such as New Zealand's Operation Ariki, Canada's Operation Athena, Britain's Operation Herrick and the US's Operation Enduring Freedom.

Australia's 'whole-of-government' approach was essential to its mission in Afghanistan. Civilians from DFAT, including AusAID, and other agencies engaged directly with Afghan government officials, provincial and district leaders, tribal elders and village communities.

Thousands of Australians served on one or more rotations to operations that formed part of the war in Afghanistan. Australians from the ADF, other government bodies and non-government agencies contended with the dangers associated with insurgent warfare and broader overseas deployment. Imminent dangers posed by IEDs and 'green on blue' incidents (attacks carried out by members of, or people wearing the uniform of, the Afghan National Army or Afghan police) contributed to the need for everyone in Afghanistan to remain vigilant and aware of their surroundings. Such attacks, as well as combat and accidents, including helicopter crashes, claimed the lives of Australians serving in Afghanistan.

Personal risks to safety extended to Australian civilians who, at times, left coalition bases unarmed to engage directly with local groups in potentially dangerous environments. This often-overlooked work helped build trust and cooperation with local communities and created the conditions to pursue security, development and governance objectives.

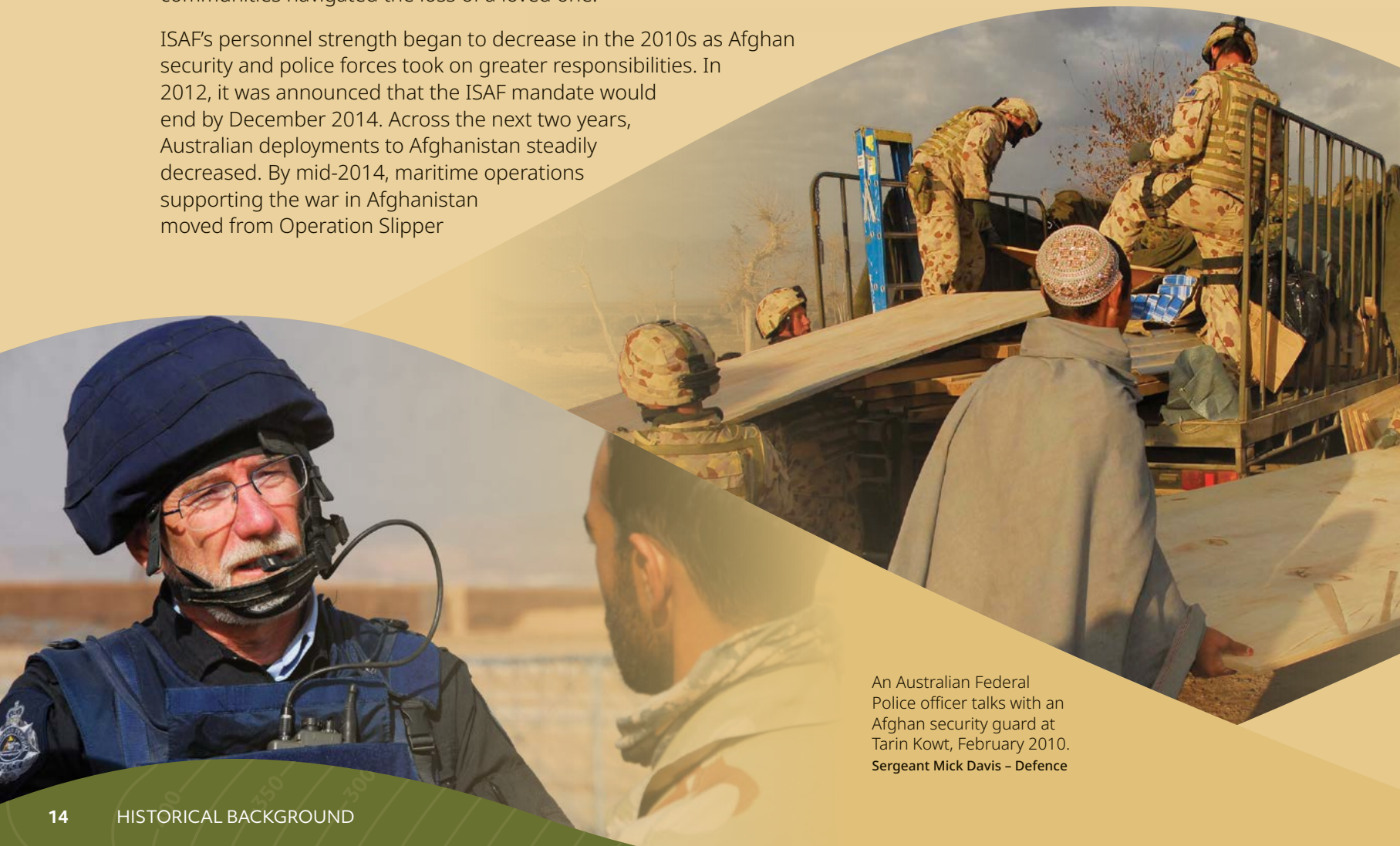


An Australian medical officer (right) and medical assistant working on a patient in a 'resus' (resuscitation) bay at Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan Province. **Sergeant Neil Ruskin – Defence**

Amid such dangers, veterans recalled stories of courageous and even heroic acts by Australians who went above and beyond to protect their mates, their military colleagues and the Afghan people. Some actions have formally been recognised by awards such as the Victoria Cross for Australia and the Medal for Gallantry. However, without having served in Afghanistan, it is difficult for Australians to truly understand the dedication and sacrifices of our veterans. Only those deployed were privy to the continued courage, selflessness and commitment of their fellow Australians.

Families of veterans faced many challenges. Although personnel could stay in touch through emails, phone calls and later video calls, such communication could not abate the worry felt by those back home. Families eagerly anticipated the reunion, giving them an end date to their separation. For some, this long-awaited moment did not eventuate, as families and communities navigated the loss of a loved one.

ISAF's personnel strength began to decrease in the 2010s as Afghan security and police forces took on greater responsibilities. In 2012, it was announced that the ISAF mandate would end by December 2014. Across the next two years, Australian deployments to Afghanistan steadily decreased. By mid-2014, maritime operations supporting the war in Afghanistan moved from Operation Slipper



An Australian Federal Police officer talks with an Afghan security guard at Tarin Kowt, February 2010.
Sergeant Mick Davis – Defence

to the new Operation Manitou. Logistical support for Afghanistan operating out of the MEAO was subsumed into the new Operation Accordion. Both supported ongoing conflicts in the region, including Afghanistan. The ISAF mandate, which had been under NATO leadership since August 2003, concluded in December 2014. With this, Australia's Operation Slipper was officially complete.

Despite the conclusion of Operation Slipper and the official end of the multinational ISAF, war and conflict continued in Afghanistan. At the Afghan Government's request, NATO established the Resolute Support Mission (RSM). Unlike ISAF, the RSM was officially a non-combat mission. The objectives of the newly formed coalition focused on providing support, training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and national institutions that were still engaged in the war against the Taliban. At its peak, the mission involved more than 39 nations continuing their mentoring and humanitarian support in Afghanistan.

Between 2015 and 2021, Australians continued to deploy to operations in and around Afghanistan. Australia established Operation Highroad to contribute to the RSM. Alongside Highroad, RAN, Army and RAAF personnel continued to serve in supporting missions under Operations Manitou, Accordion and Augury. A small number of Australians continued to support UNAMA through Operation Palate II until 2017. UNAMA, with its longstanding mission to assist the people of Afghanistan, was not tied to ISAF's completion or the establishment of the RSM.

Soldiers of the 1st Reconstruction Task Force and Afghan locals unload equipment and stores for use in repairing a mosque in Uruzgan Province, December 2006.
Corporal Ricky Fuller – Defence



Soldiers of the Special Forces Task Group operate a Surveillance Reconnaissance Vehicle during a joint Australian-Afghan patrol, September 2005.
Captain Alan Green – Defence



Operations after 2015 focused on strengthening Afghan forces so that the country could maintain its own defence and security. Afghans accepted personal risks by working alongside coalition forces. Local expertise proved an important part of non-combatant missions, and culturally informed collaboration had positive personal and professional outcomes. Many Australians remarked on the local hospitality. Even after deployment, some fondly reflected on how sharing a cup of tea was the cornerstone to a strong working relationship with local forces.

As part of these operations, Australians took on a variety of roles, including mentoring, operational planning, intelligence, logistics and medical support. Australians deployed after 2015 continued to face threats like those experienced by earlier coalition forces. This included countering persistent insurgent and terrorist organisations. As such, mentoring teams were supported by the Quick Reaction Force (QRF), dubbed the 'Guardian Angels' because of their ability to operate effectively in high-intensity and life-threatening situations.

Australian officers, Afghan interpreter and Afghan officer
at a breakfast meeting while planning a patrol,
Uruzgan Province, November 2011.

Penny Stephens – Fairfax Photos
FXB63884



The number of Australian personnel involved in RSM operations peaked in 2019. In February 2020, the US and the Taliban began to undertake peace talks that negotiated the withdrawal of RSM forces.

The global COVID-19 pandemic declared in early 2020 added complexities to the final years of operations in Afghanistan or in support of those operations. Support elements faced new pandemic-related challenges, including fewer available resources for those in-country. Despite limited respite, those remaining in Afghanistan demonstrated resilience and tenacity while working throughout the uncertainty of the pandemic.

An Australian Army officer serving with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) under Operation Palate II, November 2014. **Flight Lieutenant Michael Moroney – Defence**

Diplomatic negotiations between the US Government and the Taliban led to a conditional timeline for foreign forces to exit the region. These efforts culminated in a US–Taliban deal in 2020, which stipulated the withdrawal of all foreign coalition troops from Afghanistan by 2021. On 15 April 2021, after almost two decades of war and conflict, then Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that the remaining ADF members deployed under Operation Highroad would return home. Some ADF personnel who were deployed under Operations Manitou, Accordion and Augury remained in the MEAO. Although not specifically deployed to Afghanistan, they were prepared to respond if needed.



US-Australian Female Engagement Team share a meal and talk with Afghan policewomen in Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan Province, August 2011. **Able Seaman Imagery Specialist Jo Dilozenzo – Defence**

Coalition forces requested assistance from Australians deployed under Operation Accordion in August 2021. On 15 August 2021, the Taliban declared victory and the war ended. That month, as the Taliban neared and eventually took over Kabul, large numbers of Afghans, including many civilians, rushed to the Hamid Karzai International Airport. In response, the US initiated and led Operation Allies Refuge, a multinational non-combatant evacuation operation, commonly referred to as the 'Kabul airlift'. It sought to evacuate approved foreign and Afghan nationals, and particularly those who had worked with coalition forces. It included evacuation contributions from several coalition countries, including Australia.

At short notice, RAAF personnel and the Army's Ready Combat Team deployed under Operation Accordion, and with Australian civilians from DFAT and the Department of Home Affairs they worked together to evacuate Australian citizens and foreign nationals from the airport in Kabul. Between 18 and 26 August, those involved in the whole-of-government operation evacuated some 4,100 people across 32 evacuation flights. The difficulty of the mission was exacerbated by an overcrowded airspace and the mountainous terrain around Kabul.

The US-led evacuation operation had ceased by the end of August 2021. The airlift was a dangerous and distressing time for people in Afghanistan. It was also a difficult period for people in other parts of the world, especially those with personal connections to Afghanistan. The decision to evacuate, and the events that followed, caused division within Australia's veteran community. To date, the Kabul airlift remains one of the largest humanitarian airlift operations in Australian military history.

A member of the Ready Combat Team on security detail at Karzai International Airport during the Kabul airlift, August 2021.
Sergeant Glen McCarthy – Defence



The RSM mandate was terminated in early September 2021. With this, Australian service in operations related to Afghanistan soon came to an official end. While the airlift was still underway, the Taliban had captured Kabul and proceeded to secure the city. They regained complete control of the country.

Two decades of war in Afghanistan left a profound and lasting legacy. It is estimated that the war claimed the lives of some 176,000 people between 2001 and 2021. This includes 47 ADF personnel currently named on the Australian War Memorial's Roll of Honour.

Statistics, however, do little to reflect the true cost of war, nor the indelible mark on the Afghan people, Australian and coalition veterans, and families of veterans. We remember all who lost their lives during or as a result of the war in Afghanistan. We also acknowledge the physical and psychological effects that may remain.

The war continues to impact and shape the lives of the people of Afghanistan today. IEDs and landmines scattered across the country continue to threaten the safety of people and hinder agricultural and other economic activity. Afghan people continue to be displaced, separated from their homes, families and communities. Many Afghan nationals have been forced to flee their country as refugees. According to the UN, women and girls represent some 80 per cent of those displaced, while those still within Afghanistan are excluded 'from shaping their own futures and that of their country.' Despite the Taliban restricting their basic rights and fundamental freedoms, women and girls continue to navigate and resist tightening constraints.

For many Australian and coalition personnel, the conflict in Afghanistan did not end after their deployment. Some returned for multiple rotations. Some sustained physical and psychological injuries on operations. Such injuries, which included amputations, loss of sight, paralysis and traumatic brain injuries, often had immediate and long-term effects for those who served. Incidents, particularly those that resulted in harm, can have ongoing impacts for

A RAAF member inspects drawings by Afghan children displayed at the Evacuation Handling Centre at a base in the Middle East Area of Operations. **Sergeant Glen McCarthy** – Defence



people who were part of or witnessed them. Many veterans have emphasised that support from fellow veterans, family, friends, and loved ones has helped them navigate the enduring legacy of service.

The war began 25 years ago, and it remains within the living memory of most Australians. This includes those who served on operations, their families, those who witnessed Australia's involvement from home and overseas, and members of the Australian-Afghan community. The history of Australia's involvement in Afghanistan continues to be shaped today because the experiences and perspectives of those directly connected to the conflict are still being told.

Reflections on service in Afghanistan have prompted wider conversations about Australia's involvement in war and the nature of service. For veterans of Afghanistan and their families, their stories help the Australian community understand what they experienced and the impact it had on them. This may involve direct conversations about their experience or the indirect influence they may have through their community engagement. Afghanistan veterans continue to serve our nation in many ways, through their leadership, professionalism and contributions to their local communities.

Reflection, by Cass Brooker, painted in 2020, is a study in reflection of operational service juxtaposed against the underlying, hidden emotions of soldiers just getting on with their duties in wartime, not seen on the surface nor understood at the time, and which emerge later on in the quiet of peacetime.

Reflection (May 2020), Cass Brooker, oil on card, 51 x 126cm. Courtesy of Cass Brooker



A strength of the veteran community is their willingness to contribute to the discussion around health and wellbeing, with messaging such as 'it ain't weak to speak'. Shared stories, studies and official reports have helped reshape the formal and informal support available to the veteran community and also support efforts to build understanding of the importance of health and wellbeing in the broader community.

As with all wars and conflicts, a public conversation about the war in Afghanistan will include an attempt to understand the complex and challenging aspects of military operations. In March 2016, a formal inquiry was launched into allegations of misconduct and possible crimes by some who served. The inquiry reviewed thousands of documents and images and interviewed more than 400 witnesses over four years. The investigation culminated in an official report, known as the Brereton Report. The outcome and associated legal process for those alleged to have been involved are ongoing. Australia's involvement in Afghanistan remains a significant chapter in our nation's military history. More than 35,000 ADF personnel, alongside Australians from other government and non-government agencies, served in operations to support Afghanistan. Over two decades, Australians served alongside coalition partners in a complex conflict that affected the lives of those who served, their families and loved ones, the Afghan people, and communities connected to the war.

The legacy of Australia's involvement continues to evolve. Recognising this chapter in Australian history requires acknowledging the commitment of those who served, while also reflecting on the conflict's challenges and impacts. We recognise and honour the service of all those who served in Afghanistan and the wider MEAO in support of Afghanistan. We acknowledge the commitment and sacrifices of veterans and families of veterans.

A ramp ceremony
for two soldiers
who lost their lives
in Afghanistan,
Lieutenant Marcus
Case and Lance
Corporal Andrew
Jones, Tullamarine
Airport, Melbourne,
June 2006.
Fairfax Photos FXT26363



An Australian Army CH-47D Chinook en route from Qalat to Forward
Operating Base Baylough in Zabul Province, March 2007.
Sean Hobbs – AWM P05730.454





ORDER OF SERVICE

ORDER OF SERVICE

The music for the service is provided by: The Band of the Royal Military College

Master of Ceremonies: Colonel Scott Clingan, Australian Army

PLAYING OF THE DIDGERIDOO

The didgeridoo is played by a member of the Australian Defence Force

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Mr Matt Anderson PSM
Director, Australian War Memorial

**CATAFALQUE PARTY
IS MOUNTED**

Members of Australia’s Federation Guard and the Australian Federal Police

COMMEMORATIVE ADDRESS

Her Excellency The Honourable Sam Mostyn AC
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

NATIONAL REFLECTION

The Honourable Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister of Australia

FIRST READING

MUSICAL PIECE

SECOND READING

THIRD READING

An Australian soldier from Mentoring Task Force 3 (MTF-3) congratulates an Afghan National Army soldier on a job done well during basic first aid training at Tarin Kowt, Uruzgun Province, August 2011.
Able Seaman Imagery Specialist
Jo Diloranzo – Defence



PRAYER OF COMMEMORATION

OFFICIAL WREATH LAYING

ODE OF REMEMBRANCE

LAST POST

ONE MINUTE OF SILENCE

ROUSE

Chaplain

Official representatives to lay wreaths

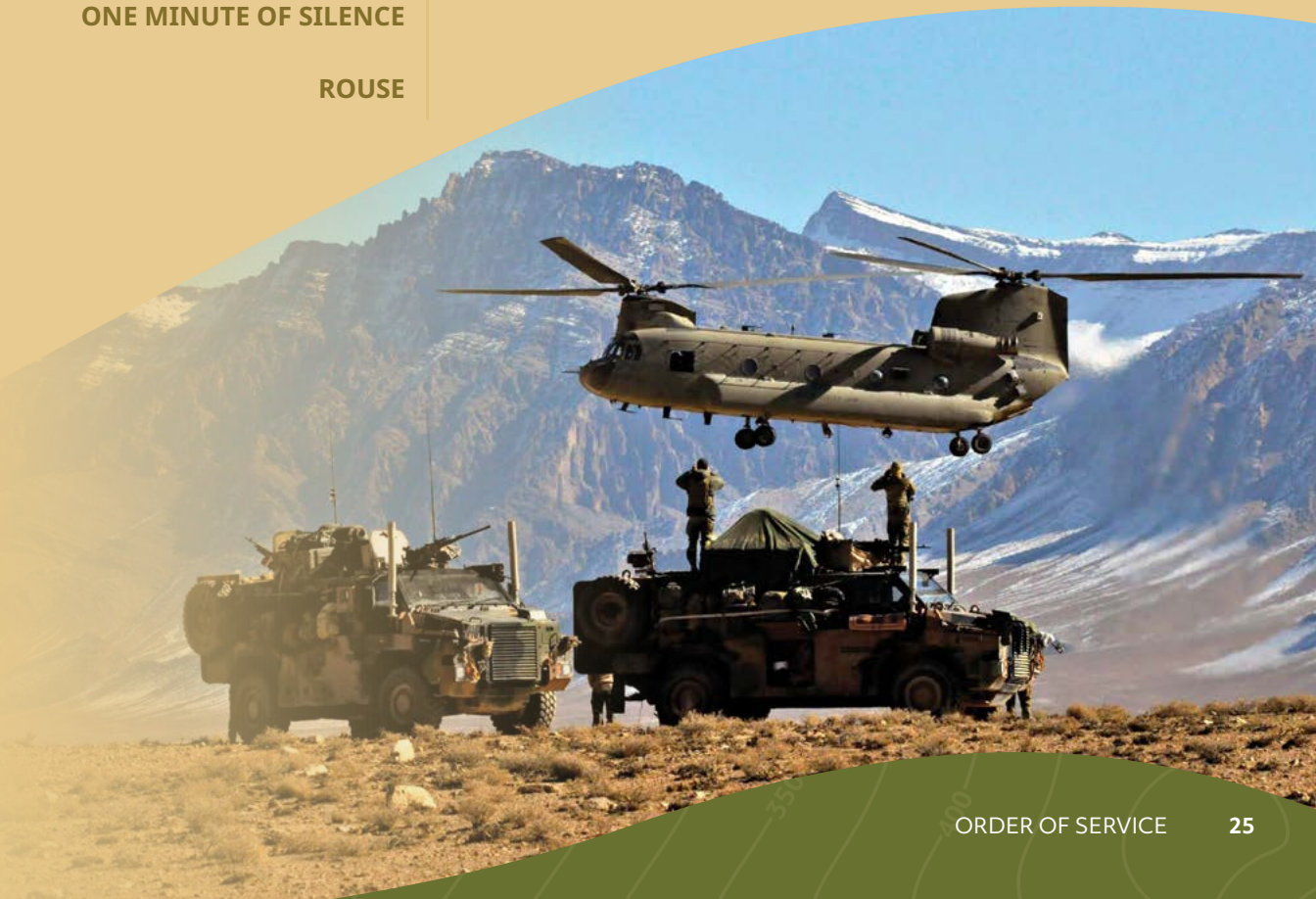
They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eyes, steady and aglow,
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.

Response: *We will remember them.*

All: *Lest we forget.*

Members of the Special Operations Task Group wait to be resupplied by Chinook helicopter during a patrol, Uruzgan Province, January 2011.
Defence



**NATIONAL ANTHEM
OF AUSTRALIA**

*Australians all let us rejoice,
For we are one and free;
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in nature's gifts
Of beauty rich and rare;
In history's page, let every stage
Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.*

FINAL BLESSING

Chaplain

**CATAFALQUE PARTY
IS DISMOUNTED**

**Members of Australia's Federation Guard and
the Australian Federal Police**

PUBLIC WREATH LAYING

Members of the public are invited to lay floral tributes.
Attendees not laying wreaths are asked to remain seated.

CONCLUSION OF SERVICE

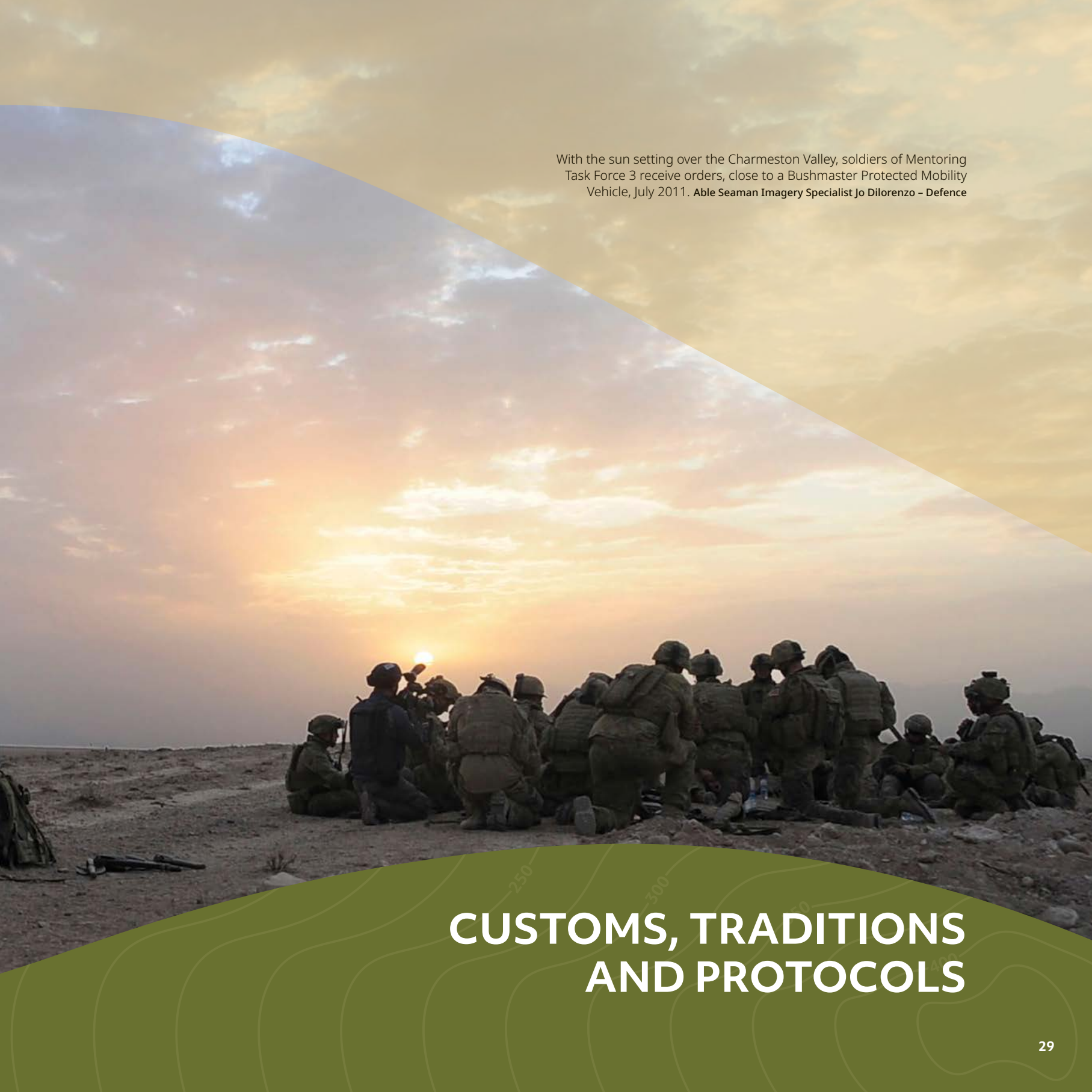
RAN Fleet Air Arm members and other crew of HMAS *Melbourne* prepare for a flying exercise using a S-70B Seahawk helicopter, following departure for Australia at the end of an Operation Slipper deployment, March 2014. **Able Seaman Imagery Specialist Nicolas Gonzalez – Defence.**



Soldiers of the Royal Australian and Electrical Engineers (RAEME) serving with Force Support Element 2 Workshop at Camp Baker, Kandahar, under Operation Highroad, March 2015.
Corporal David Cotton – Defence







With the sun setting over the Charmeston Valley, soldiers of Mentoring Task Force 3 receive orders, close to a Bushmaster Protected Mobility Vehicle, July 2011. Able Seaman Imagery Specialist Jo Dilozenzo – Defence

CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS AND PROTOCOLS

CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS AND PROTOCOLS

PLAYING OF THE DIDGERIDOO

The didgeridoo (or as it is known by the Traditional Custodians of the Yolngu clans of north-east Arnhem Land, the 'yidaki'), is not traditionally played in Ngunnawal or Wiradjuri country. However, it is played here today with the permission of the Ngunnawal people to acknowledge and pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

CATAFALQUE PARTY

Historically, a catafalque was a support for a coffin, but it has come to represent a remembrance stone or a tomb. A Catafalque Party was originally appointed to guard a coffin from theft or desecration. Now it performs a ceremonial role, honouring the dead.

FLAG PROTOCOLS

Flags are important symbols of all nations, and of those who have fought and died for those nations, and as such should be treated with respect at all times. They should not be subjected to indignity or displayed in a position or size inferior to any other flag.

They should always be flown aloft and free and should not be allowed to fall or lie upon the ground. Please note that 'flag draping' (i.e. wearing the flag as a cape or cloak), allowing the flag to touch the ground, or defacing the flag by writing on it, may be considered disrespectful acts and are discouraged at this service. When a flag is raised or lowered, or when it is carried past in a parade or review, all present should face the flag, remove headwear and refrain from talking. Service personnel in uniform are to salute.

LAST POST

The *Last Post* is a bugle call which signals the end of the day. It became incorporated into funeral and memorial services as a final farewell and symbolises that the duty of the dead is over and they can rest in peace.

Attendees should stand, remove headwear and refrain from talking during the playing of the *Last Post*. Service personnel in uniform are to salute.



Two generations of service: father (centre) with Force Communication Unit in the MEAO, son with Mentoring Task Force 4 based out of Tarin Kowt, and daughter with the RAAF's Heron UAS (unmanned aircraft system) detachment at Kandahar. Taken at Al Minhad Air Base, United Arab Emirates, January 2012.
Defence

ODE OF REMEMBRANCE

Many ceremonies of remembrance include a recitation of the Ode. It is the fourth stanza of *For the Fallen*, a poem written by Laurence Binyon (1869–1943) in 1914. It can also include the third stanza. The Ode has been recited in ceremonies since 1919.

Attendees should stand, remove headwear and refrain from talking during the reciting of the Ode.

ONE MINUTE OF SILENCE

The practice of observing one minute of silence originated soon after the First World War and provides an opportunity for quiet reflection on the sacrifice of those who served and lost their lives.

Attendees should stand, remove headwear and refrain from talking during the period of silence.

ROUSE

After the one minute of silence, flags are raised from half-mast to the masthead as the *Rouse* is sounded. Traditionally the *Rouse* called soldiers' spirits to arise, ready to fight for another day. Today it is associated with the *Last Post* at all military funerals, and at services of dedication and remembrance.

Note: The Navy *Reveille* bugle call is different to that played by Army and Air Force. Navy does not play *Rouse* and only plays *Reveille*.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

Attendees should stand facing the flags, remove headwear and refrain from talking during the playing of the national anthem. Service personnel in uniform are to salute.



Green on Blue: The betrayal of trust, Robert (Rob) Douma, July 2018, charcoal on Snowdon archival paper. Winner of the 2018 Napier Waller Art Prize.

Rob Douma – held by AWM as AWM2018.1052.1

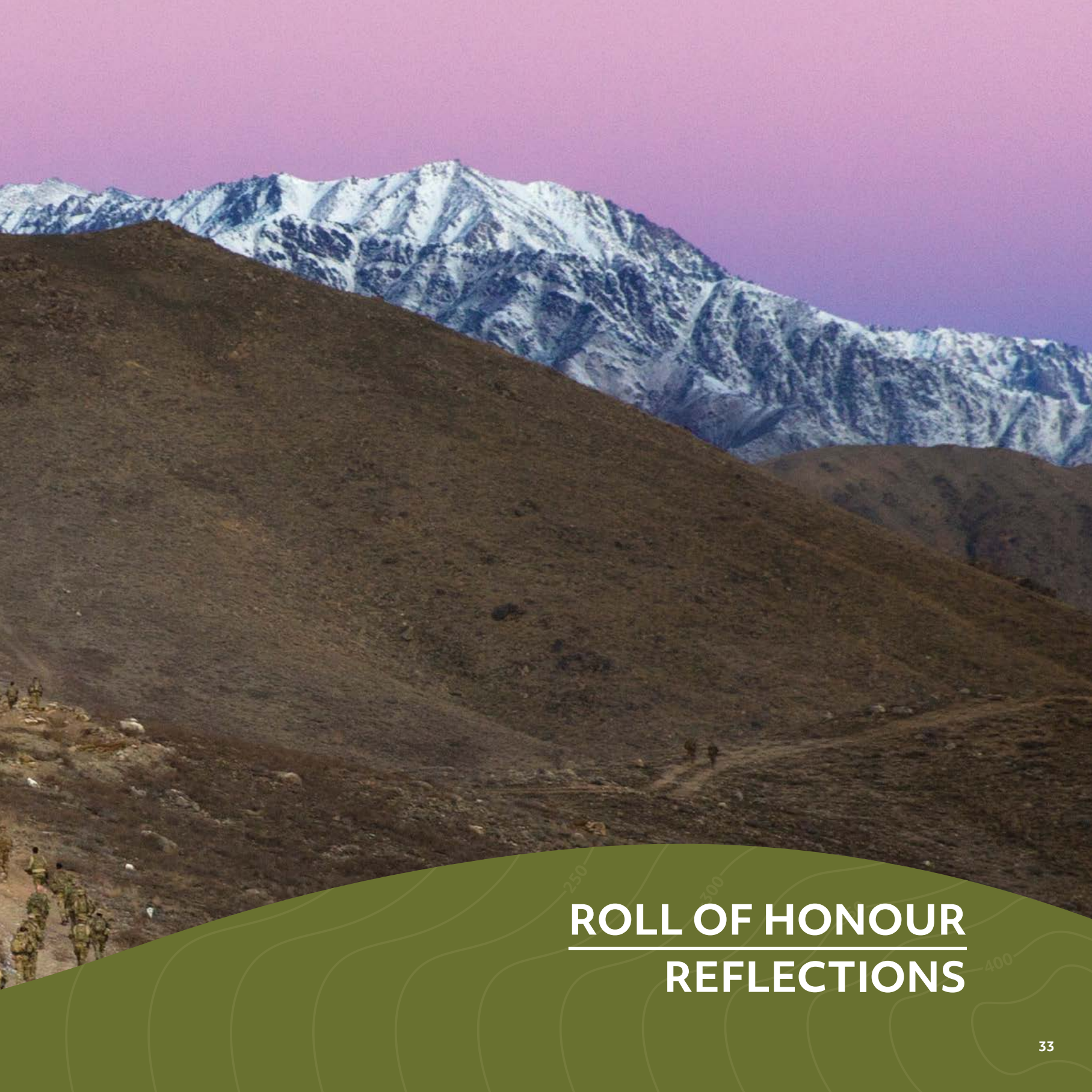
Members of the Special Operations Task Group escape the heat after an operation. June 2011.

Defence



Christmas Eve 2015. Australian, British, Danish and New Zealand personnel hike Charandaz peak, Qargha. Corporal Oliver Carter - Defence





ROLL OF HONOUR REFLECTIONS

ROLL OF HONOUR

The Australian War Memorial's Roll of Honour commemorates Australian Defence Force members who lost their lives as a result of service in Afghanistan. We remember the Australians who lost their lives during or as a result of their service and acknowledge the physical and mental impacts that service has had on many of our veterans and their families.

Aplin, Timothy James	Jenkins, Shaun Peter	Pearce, David Ronald
Atkinson, Richard Edward	Jones, Andrew Gordon	Perry, Andrew John
Baird, Cameron Stewart	Kirby, Grant Walter	Poate, Robert Hugh Frederick
Bewes, Nathan John	Lambert, Matthew Christopher	Ranaudo, Benjamin James
Birt, Ashley Craig	Langley, Todd Matthew	Robinson, Rowan Jaie
Brown, Jason Thomas	Larcombe, Jamie Ronald	Russell, Andrew Robert
Case, Marcus Sean	Locke, Matthew Raymond	Sher, Gregory Michael
Chidgey, Todd John	MacKinney, Jared William	Smith, Darren James
Chuck, Benjamin Adam	Marks, Jason Paul	Smith, Scott James
Dale, Tomas James	Martin, James Thomas	Till, Brett Ian
Diddams, Blaine Flower	McCarthy, Sean Patrick	Tonkin, Matthew Neil Hardy
Duffy, Bryce Robert	McDonald, Mervyn John	Turner, Alexander Julian
Fussell, Michael Kenneth Housdan	McKay, Paul John	Wood, Brett Mathew
Galagher, Nathanael John Aubrey	Milosevic, Stjepan	Wood, David Michael
Gavin, Luke Nathan	Moerland, Jacob Daniel	Worsley, Luke James
Hopkins, Mathew Ricky Andrew	Palmer, Scott Travis	

‘Sometimes my job is difficult
but I have good reasons to do it.
Making the world a safer place for
others is one reason. I think we are very
lucky in Australia, we are safe and can live
our lives as we wish.’

The last letter by Corporal Cameron Baird VC MG, sent in June 2013 to schoolboy Campbell Byrd. Corporal Baird, 4RAR (Commando), was killed in action on 22 June 2013. He received the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross for Australia, with the award citation, ‘For the most conspicuous acts of valour, extreme devotion to duty and ultimate self-sacrifice at Ghawchak village, Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, as a Commando Team Commander in Special Operations Task Group on Operation Slipper.’

REFLECTION ON SERVICE IN AFGHANISTAN



Australian Army chaplains serving with units based at Tarin Kowt pose near the entrance to the base's Ghan Chapel, November 2011.

Able Seaman Imagery Specialist Jo Dileo - Defence

Serving as an Army Chaplain in Afghanistan in 2011 and again in 2013 was both a privilege and a profound responsibility. My role was to accompany Australian service personnel through the challenges and realities of operational service, and to stand alongside them in moments of hardship, loss and hope.

Twenty-five years after Australia first deployed to Afghanistan, what remains most vividly with me are not places or events, but people. I remember the courage, professionalism and mateship of those who served. I remember the dedication of doctors, nurses and medics who worked tirelessly to preserve life. I remember quiet conversations, prayers shared in difficult circumstances, and the extraordinary resilience of service personnel and their families.

One memory stands apart. In 2013, I witnessed family members of Australians killed in Afghanistan gather at Tarin Kowt and place poppies beside the names of their loved ones on a memorial wall. Their determination that none be forgotten, their dignity in grief, and their enduring love left a lasting impression on all who were present.

As we commemorate the 25th Anniversary of Australian Service in Afghanistan, I honour those who served, remember those who did not return, and acknowledge the families who carried the burden alongside them. Their service, sacrifice and resilience remain an enduring part of our national story, and of all that abides with me.

**Chaplain John Sanderson,
Australian Army**

I was honoured to serve with a RAAF detachment to Kandahar, Afghanistan, 2011/12 alongside a dedicated team of servicewomen and men. A deployment like that is impossible to truly imagine through movies or books. There is an unnamed energy that lives in every soul with boots on the ground – a constant hum of fear, courage and uncertainty about what will happen next. At times it was easy to block out the rockets and explosions. But when those mental walls came down, they ripped away pieces of my naive innocence. Working as a team in such harsh conditions was both a massive lifeline and an intense challenge. Whether we were on a mission for 18 hours straight or sharing TGI Friday Brownies, we were being forged together under the pressure of war, even when the pieces didn't always fit. Our training kept us moving forward, driven by a shared belief in the vital support we were providing. When I returned home, the war followed me. Every bulky jacket looked like a possible PBIED [person-borne improvised explosive device]. Every dropped tool clattering on the floor sounded like a rocket. With each passing helo triggering a split reality, leaving me unsure if I was safe in my own home, or back in the dusty wildlands of the Arghandab River Valley at the feet of mountains larger than anything in Australia. Those days made me tough. Today I look for peace wherever I can find it – in birdsong or the swaying of a tree. Afghanistan changed me forever.

**Amanda Heartsong, served as an Intelligence Analyst (Geospatial),
RAAF, Afghanistan, 2011 to 2012**

My experience of Australia's involvement in Afghanistan began in the immediate aftermath of September 11. During Operation SLIPPER Rotation One, I deployed in HMAS Kanimbla as Officer in Charge of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal detachment and as a boarding officer. It was a time when the world had changed rapidly, and the Navy was part of Australia's response to a new and uncertain conflict.

In 2009, I deployed to Afghanistan, based in Kabul, as Chief of Counter-IED Exploitation. Our task was to understand and combat the bomb makers who posed such a devastating threat. We investigated horrific post-blast scenes, searching for evidence that could explain what had happened, prevent future attacks and, where possible, provide answers and closure to the families of those who had been lost.

I returned in 2016 as Chief of International Engagement at Headquarters Resolute Support, working alongside Afghan and coalition partners to rebuild and strengthen the Afghan National Army.

Then, as an Australian Defence Attaché in the Middle East, I supported the 2021 evacuation from Kabul as this long and difficult chapter drew to a close. There was a powerful sense of coming full circle. My involvement had begun in the immediate aftermath of September 11 and ended as Australia helped bring people to safety during the final days of our longest war.

That book-ending of two decades of service is something I will always reflect upon. Afghanistan changed all who served there, and its legacy will remain with us. I am proud of the contribution of the Royal Australian Navy and of all Australians who served with professionalism, courage and commitment throughout that long and complex conflict.

Captain Doug Griffiths OAM, RAN (Retired)

Members of HMAS *Manoora*'s boarding party while searching a vessel for illegally transported cargo or oil in the Persian Gulf, April 2002.

Defence



Afghanistan shattered the simplicity of soldiering. I saw good soldiers maimed and killed, and carry the burden of the decisions that contributed to those outcomes. As commandos, we hunted insurgents, disrupted their drug networks and protected our mates, while civilians and families at home bore consequences far beyond the battlefield. Afghanistan taught me that leadership in war is measured not only by what you do, but by what you are willing to carry.

A Commando

Southern Afghanistan, 2012.
Private collection

The War on Terror started for me on 9/11. I was in DFAT's Middle East and Africa Branch in Canberra, and for the next quarter century, I've mostly worked in conflict, post-conflict or counter-terrorism roles. The Afghanistan part included Kandahar and Tarin Kowt through 2013, the Australian Embassy in Kabul for 2015–2018, NATO HQ in Kabul from 2018–19 and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan from 2019–21. A fair bit of that was moving 'outside the wire'; all of it was unarmed.

What's my key take-away being a 'civvie' on an Operation? The ANZAC spirit is real – we behave differently to how other countries' militaries and civilians interact. Army, Navy, Airforce, AFP, Other Government Agencies, Private Security Guards, Local Staff, Interpreters; it didn't matter. If you see an ANF on someone's shoulder or ID pouch, regardless of uniform or even if they aren't in a uniform at all, that flag says you aren't strangers anymore: you're friends who haven't yet got to know each other. Not just any friend, but a friend you'd literally die to keep safe, and you know that they'd do the same for you.

Those friends are now friends for life, connected irrevocably by that experience – with our own jargon, jokes and dark humour. There's a sadness we share: a longing, a regret and a nostalgia. War is a dreadful thing. But like putting out a bushfire or going into floodwater, we'd all do it again, so you can read this, safe at home in Australia.

Rohan Titus, DFAT representative, including Kandahar, Uruzgan Provincial Reconstruction Team, NATO Resolute Support Headquarters, First Secretary (Political) at the Australian Embassy in Kabul, and also UNAMA Chief of Political Affairs

I deployed to Afghanistan with the Australian Federal Police in October 2010. By then I had already spent more than a decade in policing, including service in a police tactical group and multiple previous overseas deployments to the Solomon Islands. Even so, Afghanistan was unlike anything I had experienced.

That difference became apparent almost immediately. Flying into Kandahar, the scale of the airfield, the military aircraft from numerous nations and the tactical descent into theatre made it very clear that this was not conventional policing.

My role in Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan Province was to help train members of the Afghan National Police. Alongside AFP colleagues, and coalition partners, we delivered training in weapons handling, fire and movement, close-quarter battle, crime scene preservation, evidence collection and leadership. It was police work, but conducted in a very different environment and with very different risks.

Although our training mission was conducted "inside the wire", the conflict was never far away. Rockets, small-arms fire, explosions outside the base, fast jets overhead and helicopters bringing wounded personnel into the hospital were part of the background to daily life.

Looking back after 27 years in law enforcement, what stays with me most is not the noise or the danger, but the professionalism of the people around me. I developed an enduring respect for Australian and coalition military personnel and formed friendships that have lasted well beyond the deployment. Afghanistan broadened my understanding of service and remains one of the most significant experiences of my AFP career.

**Acting Commander Dean Chidgey
AFP Defence and Aviation Command**

In 2019, I attended an evening at the Australian Embassy in Kabul marking fifty years of diplomatic relations between Australia and Afghanistan. In a beautiful Kabuli garden, with roses in bloom, I listened to the young women of the Zohra Orchestra play. As an Afghan Australian, I felt deeply at home: for that evening, my two homes came together in one garden.

Yet hope and fear hung in the air that evening. The United States–Taliban talks were underway, and Afghan women feared our rights were being negotiated. Later, targeted killings of women journalists, judges, prosecutors, human rights defenders, civil society activists, politicians and security personnel sharply intensified. The ‘peace’ being sold to Afghans did not feel like peace. It demanded compromise from those who had most to lose.

Then Australia closed its Kabul embassy, more than two months before the city fell. For me, that closure warned of the uncertainty ahead.

Twenty years had changed Afghanistan. Millions of girls entered classrooms. Women became ministers, parliamentarians, judges, diplomats, journalists, artists and members of the security forces. These gains were never gifts. Afghans built them through courage, labour and sacrifice, alongside Australians who served and those who never returned.

The Taliban’s brutal rule has since expelled women and girls from education, employment and public life. But one gain cannot be erased: a generation of Afghan women knows freedom, has exercised it and continues to fight for it. Afghanistan’s lesson is firm: women’s rights cannot be invoked to justify war, then negotiated away for an exit. Peace without equality and inclusion is not peace.

Dr Farkhondeh Akbari, Research Fellow, Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

Untitled
[at the ramp
ceremony for Sapper
Jamie Larcombe],
Joey Passmore,
2011, drawing.
Courtesy of the
artist, Joey Passmore
– also held by AWM as
AWM2019.1163.3



RAMP CEREMONY

*Like men of Alexander, we form,
this line of silent tribute.
Like men of Alexander, we mourn,
this soldier, resolute.*

*High, above the dust, carry him,
on Kevlar shield.
Blinded by the sun, our tears,
now mark this battlefield.*

*To grieving drumbeat, we march,
between saluting ranks.
At Herculean wings, we pause,
one touch, our parting thanks.*

*Ramp up and bear him gently away,
for Periclean tributes and bewildered next of kin.
While we, who shared his crowded hour,
whisper his name within.*

Copyright SL Smith, 2 September 2012

DEFENCE IMAGES

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A photograph titled 'Band of Brothers', showing members of Mentoring Team Bravo, Mentoring Task Force 2, January 2011.

Corporal Christopher Dickson – Defence



Australian Government
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Australian War Memorial

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